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SUMMER 2011

THE EXOTICS ISSUE

India's Grand Palaces

The New Mumbai

Safaris with Style

Insider's New Zealand

LUXURY CRUISING

The Way to See Asia Now

PLUS

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- 5 nights Moorea, InterContinental Moorea Resort & Spa
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- Dinner daily in Bora Bora
- Roundtrip Ferry Transfers Tahiti/Moorea
- Roundtrip Transfers Airport/Hotel/Wharf
- Flower lei on Arrival

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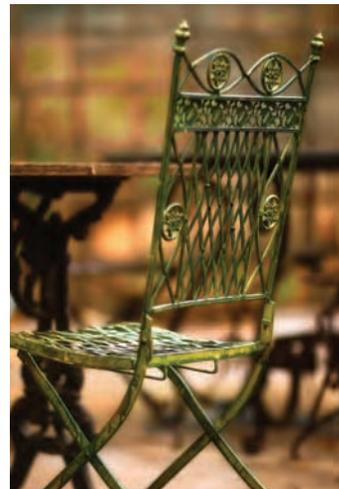
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* Price and savings listed in Canadian dollars. Rates are for cruise/tour on Treasures of Prague, the Rhine & Main itinerary in a category 3 stateroom on *River Ambassador*. Rates do not include port charges of C\$112 per person, taxes, and government fees; air additional. Rate does not include the Ensemble C\$100 Savings. Subject to availability. Hotel subject to change. Capacity controlled. Other restrictions may apply. Uniworld reserves the right to withdraw or change offers at any time. For complete details on all promotions, general information, and terms and conditions applicable to all Uniworld trips, visit uniworldcruises.ca.

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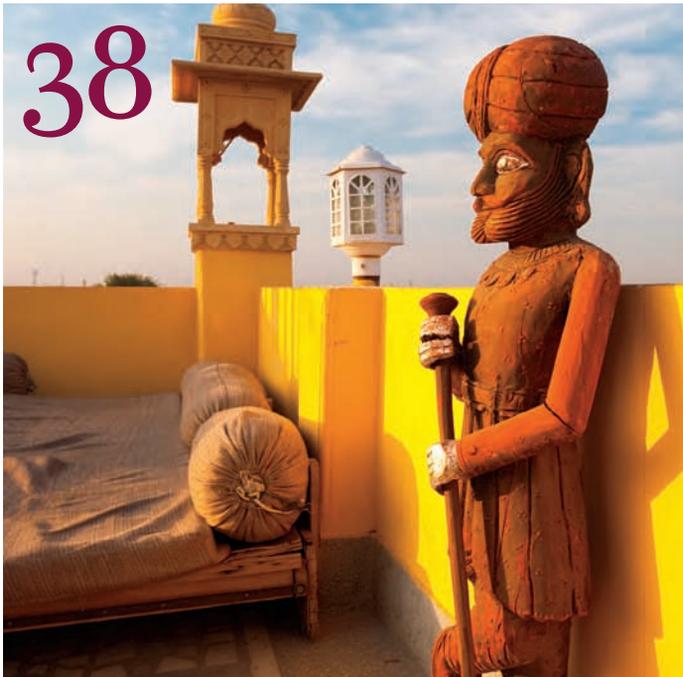
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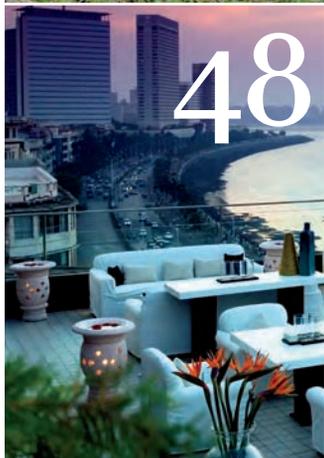
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Sarah B. Hood explores the culture of food, fashion, urban life, the environment and the arts with passion and curiosity. Her articles have appeared in dozens of periodicals including the *National Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Living*, *Toronto Life*, *Canadian Business* and numerous culinary industry publications. One of her favourite travel destinations is her own city; with Howard Akler, she co-authored the book *Toronto, The Unknown City*, and she is a contributor to both the *Berlitz Pocket Guide Toronto* and the *Insight City Guide Toronto*. When she isn't documenting her personal adventures with food on her blog, Toronto Tasting Notes, Sarah enjoys making her own award-winning jams and jellies. Her latest book, *We Sure Can! How Jams and Pickles Are Reviving the Lure and Lore of Local Food*, will be released this summer.



Toronto resident **Beverley Ann D'Cruz** grew up in Mumbai, India before moving to Ottawa to study journalism. Bitten by the travel bug, she went to Dubai to work as an editor of a food and lifestyle magazine. Since then, her insatiable appetite for culinary trends and traditions has taken her on journeys to Colombo, Havana, Athens, Venice and Frankfurt. She has interviewed Michelin-starred chefs like Pierre Gagnaire and Gary Rhodes and has also written about culinary-related travel for Emirates Airlines' in-flight magazine *Open Skies* and *4Men* magazine. Beverley explores her passion for food and its relation to health and nutrition in her blog. When not seeking the next culinary delight in the city or cooking for friends, Beverley can be found jogging in a futile attempt to work off the calories from all the extra helpings of dessert – and she makes no apologies for it.



Remy Scalza is an independent writer and photographer whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Washington Post* and other publications around the world. He has lived in Spain, Australia, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and the United States but never encountered a city as stunning – or as damp – as his current home in Vancouver. Remy's stories focus on exploring overlooked destinations from unexpected angles. He has written on topics ranging from gaucho culture in South America to shopping malls in Kuwait. "If there's a thread running through my work, it's a love of international places and an obsession with living in other cultures, other languages and other people's lives – then putting that into words and pictures," he explains.

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Help wanted

To say the least, it has been a turbulent time for many people around the world. We witnessed the catastrophic power of Mother Nature on New Zealand and Japan. With growing concern we followed newscasts from the Middle East, keeping our fingers crossed that political turmoil would be resolved.

Global disasters and political unrest such as these remind us of just how fragile our world can be and, also, how important it is to help those in need. Although many of us donate to various NGOs – and some even volunteer their time and energy – what many developing countries need most is a viable economy, and they rely heavily on tourism dollars to achieve this. As the fourth-largest global industry, tourism can and does bring in much needed funds to help develop or maintain infrastructure, promote peace and stability, create jobs and even protect the environment and cultural heritage of a destination. And it goes without saying that tourism must be carefully developed, and all the participants and stakeholders need to work in harmony to successfully achieve their goals.

As much as we've heard the term 'responsible tourism' in recent years, never has it taken on as much meaning or importance. I recently returned from Africa, where I visited several Maasai villages and learned a little



about this semi-nomadic tribe. It was fascinating to see such ancient traditions and customs juxtaposed with modern-day conveniences, and witness the effect that education is beginning to have. Perhaps best of all, it was heart-warming to receive countless smiles, which there are big – and genuine.

You can read about my safari in **Kenya** (page 44) as well as a host of other destinations in this Exotics-themed issue. We take you to the remote island of **Papua New Guinea**, where time seems to stand still (page 34), show you some of **India's** grand palaces that have been turned into heritage hotels (page 38) and suggest some great itineraries for luxury cruising in **Asia** (page 40). You'll get an insider's look at **New Zealand** (page 30), discover 10 of the top luxury islands in tropical paradise (page 52) and find out why **Mumbai** is booming (page 48).

Don't miss our Worldly Delights section, featuring a tantalizing line up of articles, from **Tasmania's** artisanal cider, cheeses and leatherwood honey to **Southeast Asia's** cooking schools and **Dubai's** cuisine. We promise it will tempt you to travel – and inspire you to relive your experiences back home.

Travel well. **▼**

FEDERICA MARABOLI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
editor@ensembletravel.ca

THE CAPTIVATING GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS



Consisting of 13 large and hundreds of small islands in the Pacific Ocean off the western coast of South America, the Galápagos Islands, a region of Ecuador, are home to some of the world's most fascinating animal life. From Quito, Ecuador, fly to San Cristobal Island, then board your luxury yacht and cruise from island to island, encountering giant tortoises, penguins, sea lions, lizards, and a whole host of diverse bird species. As you explore these remarkable volcanic isles firsthand, you'll discover first-hand the wildlife that inspired Charles Darwin.



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Diversions

Innovations and celebrations

Luxe to the max spas

Pampering takes on a new sparkle as top international spas up their luxury quotient:

Palm Herbal Retreat Spa, Bangkok. Borrowing a beauty secret from Chinese royalty, this urban spa uses crushed pearls to gently exfoliate the skin in a body scrub.



CHI Spa, Shangri-la, Beijing. The collagen component in caviar helps plump up and hydrate the skin in this deluxe two-hour facial.

Four Seasons Macau. Semi-precious stones are placed on the key chakra points to clear energy paths before your body is buffed and smoothed with crushed diamonds and micronized iron in this signature treatment.

Eco-mania: Experience Mother Nature at her best

Add these ways to enjoy the great outdoors to your wish list:

Heli-picnic in **Queenstown, New Zealand.** No restaurant in the world can match the view from 1.5 kilometres above sea level. A helicopter drops you off and sets up a picnic on a mountaintop. Crack open the champagne and savour every bite.

Inn on the Lake, Yukon. Watch the dazzling display of the Northern Lights from the warmth of your outdoor Jacuzzi. There's no show more spectacular.

Get a little wild and go on safari in **Kenya.** Enjoy the splendour of nature by day on game drives, hot air balloon rides or guided bush walks to catch a glimpse of elephants, wildebeest, zebras, giraffes and, if you're lucky, the shy and elusive leopard. At night, fall asleep under the stars to the sounds of nocturnal wildlife.

Suite talk

Hotel perks for the luxury-minded traveller:

For the ultimate bath, get your bubbly from the bath sommelier at the **Fairmont Chicago.**

A personal butler is all yours with your suite at **The Pinnacle in Cape Town, South Africa.** He or she will fetch you that chocolate bar you've been craving at 3:00 a.m., or press your jeans. Rates per night start at \$325.

At the **W Hong Kong,** call up its **Whatever/Whenever®** service to arrange, well, whatever, whenever you want it (as long as it's legal). Want a custom-tailored suit for your stay? A helicopter ride to the casinos in Macau? It's just a phone call away.

Decadent dining

While some travellers are quite happy with cheap eats, others seek the rare and ridiculously expensive.

If you think hamburgers are a great way to stretch your budget, the **Wall Street Burger Shoppe** in **New York** may not be for you. It serves a burger made with Kobe beef and topped with foie gras, truffles and gold leaf. The price for such decadence? It's a whopper at \$175.

A sidecar is normally not a very expensive cocktail, but when it's served at **The Bar Hemingway** at the **Ritz in Paris,** it rings in at \$515. Blame it on the cognac. The bartenders there use precious pours from rare bottles of the **1830 Ritz Reserve.** Whiskey sippers around the world can take out a second mortgage for some vintages, such as a 36-year-old Kinclath (\$415 for a two-ounce shot at StripSteak in Las Vegas), or a bottle of Bruichladdich circa 1970 that will set you back about \$2,000.

Even ice cream isn't immune to high price tags. **Serendipity 3** in **New York** offers the **Golden Opulence Sundae** (48 hours' notice required). For \$1,000, it comes with Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream covered in edible gold leaf, rare varieties of chocolate, candied fruit from Paris and caviar – all served in a Baccarat crystal goblet. You get to keep the goblet, but you'll have to give back the 18K gold spoon provided to eat the creation.



Packing List

New and notable

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Now you can have your gloss and feel good about it too, with **Revolution Organics'** healthy vitamin- and antioxidant-enriched lip glosses. No more chemical-laden or petroleum-based gunk – this formulation is 100% natural and 85% organic. A proudly made-in-Canada product, the organic aloe vera and olive oil in each gloss soothe and soften as organic beeswax protects the skin. And best of all, you've got a bevy of mineral-based shades from which to choose, including the golden rose Integrity, a sure-to-be hit for summer 2011. \$27.95 per tube, available online at www.lilou-organics.com/Brands/Revolution-Organics-c82.



Body Food

Made fresh daily in Ontario, **Body Food** is an all-natural skin care line perfect for any jet-setter. The aromatherapy lemongrass scrub can be used instead of soap for its cleansing, exfoliating and moisturizing properties. The essential oils are uplifting, soothing and rejuvenating – the perfect thing after a long haul. Follow up with the lavender dry oil, made with luxurious oils of avocado, apricot kernel and jojoba, to leave skin glowing. Use daily, especially after spending time in the sun, to help heal sun-damaged skin, extend a tan and prevent peeling. Gentle enough for children. Lemongrass Scrub (250 g) \$30 and Lavender Lush body oil (250 ml) \$40. For more information or to order online, go to www.bodyfood.ca.



Chew-worthy

Anyone looking for a sweet chew that's naturally delicious and sugar-free just found both peace of mind and piece of gum with **pür** gum. Free of aspartame (the synthetic sweetener linked to headaches, dizziness and vomiting/nausea), GMOs and artificial colours or flavours, pür gum delivers a refreshing burst in three flavours: pomegranate mint, spearmint or peppermint. Swiss-made and vegan-friendly, this gum is sweetened with natural xylitol, which is known to aid digestion and prevent tooth decay. Suitable for diabetics and pregnant women alike. \$1.49 per packet. For retailers near you or to order online, go to www.pur-gum.com.



Singing in the Rain

Who knows about summer showers better than the British? That could help explain their enduring fondness for **Fulton** umbrellas, the same company with a Royal Warrant to Her Majesty The Queen. Made to last with super-durable aluminum and fibreglass frames, these sturdy yet whimsical umbrellas will brighten even the most unexpected summer shower. \$25 to \$35 each, available at Raindrops (www.raindropsto.com) on the concourse level of the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, or call toll free 1-866-901-RAIN.

Facial Rejuvenation

Toronto's **Body Blitz** water spa's **Replenishing Face Moisturizer** features the much-lauded Renovage™ anti-aging ingredient which increases the lifespan of cells, thereby reducing visible signs of aging. This ultra-moisturizing, lightweight cream also packs a natural punch with jojoba oil, organic argan oil, olive oil, aloe vera, shea butter and provitamin B3 and vitamin A. Sun-lovers can rejoice because Renovage™ has been clinically proven to reduce the appearance of sun spots, large pores and skin redness while enhancing the skin's overall firmness, tone and elasticity. \$45 for a 60 ml jar, available online at bodyblitzspa.com.



Trends: Style Notes



Scent of a Travelling Woman

Isabelle Michaud bottles memories. The **Quebec**-based creator studied perfumery at **ISIPCA**, the **Institut Supérieur** in **France**, and has created a line of perfumes to reflect the well-travelled woman's journeys. **Eau Fraîche** is as crisply lemony and green as a summer in **Grasse**; the floral, fruity **Dupont Circle** is named for the historic **Washington** district; and **Aviation Club**, an elixir of wood, amber, coffee, tobacco and leather, is evocative of a late-night poker game in **Paris**. The latest is **Ipanema Posto Nove**, named for the **Rio de Janeiro** beach, and it smells of orchid, violet, patchouli and cedarwood (\$95 for 50 ml at monsillage.com).



Shop Like an Editor

"Have fun and strut your style with confidence," says *Fashion Television* broadcast journo and iconic Canadian style maven **Jeanne Beker**. "This spring is all about ease, attitude and diversity." True to her edict, her namesake, affordable **EDIT by Jeanne Beker** line offers several building-block basics in **ponte**, a non-wrinkle fabric perfect for travel. Because who knows better what women need if not a globe-trotting fashionista? Start with the little black dress – a flattering seamed sheath that for spring also comes in scarlet – and build with leggings and jackets. But the most ingenious piece in the spring collection? A convertible trench coat that offers three looks: a belted classic trench à la Burberry that has a removable yoke and sleeves to create a sleeveless vest or dress, and a cropped bolero (\$69–\$250, now also in plus sizes 14–22, exclusive to *The Bay*).



Lasting Influence

Madame Grès' fluid jersey gowns and draped evening dresses were worn by Norma Shearer, Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. The **Madame Grès: Couture at Work** retrospective has just opened at the **Musée Bourdelle** in **Paris** (until July 24, bourdelle.paris.fr) and the 80 dresses, dozens of photographs and hundreds of sketches on display explore and reveal just how deeply the sculptural fashion designer (real name: Germaine Émilie Krebs) influenced designers from Yves Saint Laurent and Jean Paul Gaultier to Azzedine Alaïa and Haider Ackermann. Closer to home, **The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier** opens on June 17 at the **Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**.

PHOTO CREDIT:
HENRY CLARKE/GALLIERA/ADAGP, PARIS 2010

Trends: Style Notes



Put a Lid on It

Louis Garneau-type safety toppers are practical, but often anything but stylish. On the heels of this country's craze for upright Dutch bicycles, Danish company **Yakkay** has come up with a solution: a plain helmet with an array of changeable cap covers that come in fashion-minded fabrics like army green velvet, gold corduroy, herringbone tweed and black oilcloth (\$175 each with cap cover, at Rain City Bikes and U the Life Accessory Store in Vancouver, Bike Bike in Calgary, Red Bike in Edmonton, Curbside Cycle in Toronto, Montreal's Le Yeti Boutique Plein Air and The Halifax Bike Gallery (onthe-fourth.com)).

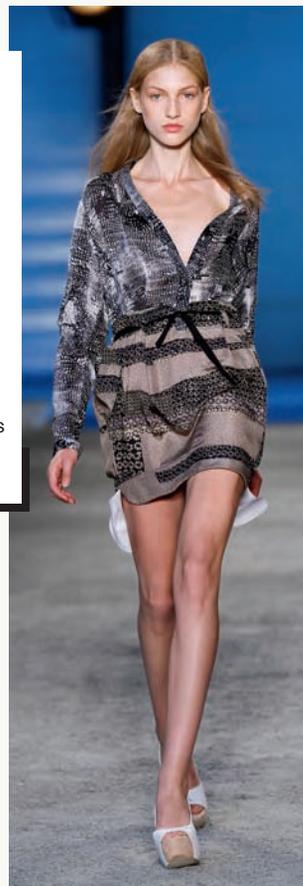


Garden Party

Ossie Clark is a legend of 1970s fashion, known for creating hippie-boho printed caftans and dresses that are highly collectible today. But it was Clark's wife, the textile designer **Celia Birtwell**, who designed those memorable romantic prints. She's now getting her due with archive prints adorning everyday collections, from greeting cards and fabric to practical but pretty gardening gloves (\$19.99–\$39.99 at retailers across Canada).

Out of Africa

After a tough couple of years due to delivery and manufacturing problems, **U2's Bono** and his wife **Ali Hewson** have rebooted their six-year-old **EDUN** label. This time, the sustainable and ethically minded contemporary fashion label is helmed by edgy Irish-born, Paris-based designer **Sharon Wauchob** as creative director, and it shows: each piece has a thoughtfully designed print, detail or cut, with a slightly distressed feel as though it's been worn and cherished for years (\$225–\$495 at [Holt Renfrew](http://HoltRenfrew.com)).



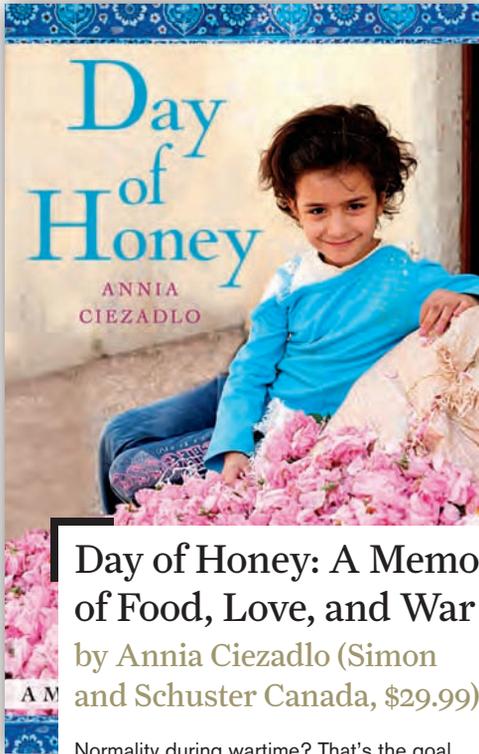
Sofa, So Chic

Thien and **My Ta Trung** are the brother and sister design team behind **Domison**, a Montreal-based design firm that offers accessible high style at affordable prices. They've expanded their low-slung **Euro sofa**, accessories and chair line from the original Montreal showroom on **Saint-Laurent** to a second store in **Toronto's St. Lawrence Market** neighbourhood (domison.com), where you can find stacks of their now-iconic itsy-bitsy spider chair, the **Tarantula**.



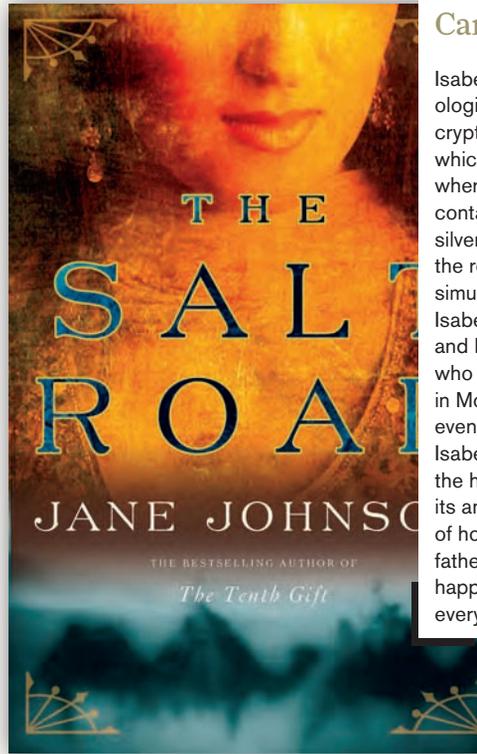
Required Reading

Enchanting escapes



Day of Honey: A Memoir of Food, Love, and War
by Annia Ciezadlo (Simon and Schuster Canada, \$29.99)

Normality during wartime? That's the goal of almost anyone who has had to live through a war and come out the other side more resilient, stronger and wiser. It's also what journalist and foreign correspondent Annia Ciezadlo discovered firsthand after marrying a Lebanese-born, American-raised journalist and finding herself in the war-torn Middle East after 9/11. Finding community, even through something as simple as breaking bread together, becomes the bond that glues together Ciezadlo's new family and friends from Baghdad to Beirut.



The Salt Road
by Jane Johnson (Doubleday Canada, \$29.95)

Isabelle's estranged archaeologist father leaves her a cryptic note upon his death, which leads her to the attic, where she discovers a box containing a mysterious silver amulet. From there, the reader is taken on two simultaneous journeys: Isabelle's in London, England and Mariata's, a nomad who wanders the Sahara in Morocco. Their worlds eventually collide when Isabelle decides to follow the history of the amulet to its ancestral home in search of how it came to be in her father's possession. What happens next changes everyone's lives forever.



Bistecca Italian Steak House - The Book
by Christopher Mark and Andrew Sun (Dining Concepts Ltd., available at Bistecca in Hong Kong only)

On your next trip to Hong Kong, make a stop at Lan Kwai Fong, the unlikely home to one of Asia's most lauded Italian eateries, Bistecca Italian Steak House. Modelled after an old-school butcher shop, the restaurant's loyal patrons now have one more reason to rejoice: the publication of the Bistecca book. Part cookbook and part memoir, this beautifully photographed coffee table book captures the colour, verve and *dolce vita* quality of this non-traditional Italian restaurant. And for carnivores, there's no shortage of recipes to prepare *bistecca* (beef steak) and other proteins *à la Italiana*.

Cruise News

New ship, no tip!



New Vietnam, Cambodia and Mekong River Cruise with Uniworld

Uniworld will be chartering a new boutique river cruise ship in 2012 built exclusively for cruising the Mekong and Tonle rivers. The new ship, *River Saigon*, will have a 60-passenger capacity, ideal for exploring the floating villages, local markets and fabled temples, including the impressive ruins of the temple complexes at Angkor Wat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Deluxe riverview staterooms will feature French doors and an outside sitting area, allowing for beautiful views of the river, and the common areas will include a spacious sun deck with comfortable lounge chairs and seating areas and a full-service bar. The new **Timeless Wonders of Vietnam, Cambodia & the Mekong** is a 14-night cruise and tour that operates between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Vietnam and includes Cambodia's Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Angkor Wat.

Crystal to Go All-Inclusive in 2012

Effective spring 2012, the award-winning *Crystal Symphony* and *Crystal Serenity* ships will include complimentary fine wines and premium spirits, open bar service in all lounges and pre-paid gratuities for housekeeping, bar and diningroom staff. The complimentary gratuity also includes penthouse butler service as well as service in all of Crystal's fine specialty restaurants and sushi bar. The new benefits begin with each ship's first transatlantic cruise next year: *Crystal Symphony's Beyond the Sea* sailing from Miami to Lisbon on March 19, 2012 and *Crystal Serenity's New World to Norway* voyage from New York to London on May 8, 2012.



Travel File

Ensemble® Hotel and Resort Collection



Nirvana Among Balinese Banyans at Uma Ubud

On the fringe of the artists' enclave of **Ubud**, overlooking the **Tjampuhan Valley** and the **River Oos**, you'll find the easy elegance of **Uma Ubud**. Nestled next to rice paddies backed by coconut palms,

this property envelops travellers in local culture and the feeling of being a world away from everyone and everything – when in fact you're a 20-minute walk from Ubud. Uncluttered interiors and a smattering of 'rural homes' with narrow paths leading between rooms, suites

and tropical gardens are the hallmarks of this resort. Carved wooden Balinese panels open to let in the stunning views and fresh floral scents of the forest. Choose from suites, rooms with infinity edge pools and private courtyards, all of which include fine Egyptian cotton linens, complimentary high-speed Internet access, luxury bathroom amenities and a yoga mat, should you feel like striking a pose.

At the resort's gracious restaurant **Kemiri** – which means 'candlelit' – you'll find Australian chef **Amanda Gale** preparing delicately spiced Indonesian cuisine with a nod to neighbouring countries' dishes such as Chinese wok-fried specialties. Farm and ocean-fresh fare comprise Kemiri's cuisine, enjoyed beside a waterfall-fed pond; it's a perfect way to unwind. And so is a **Javanese Royal Lulur Bath** at the resort's spa, where weary bodies can get an Indonesian massage and aromatic spice body scrub, followed by the application of cooling yogurt and a flower-filled bath! Just the thing to indulge in after a guided walk through the rice paddies or a morning yoga session.

Streamlined Jet-Setting at The Mira Hong Kong

In the heart of **Hong Kong's** bustling shopping district, an oasis of urban cool and modernity awaits you at **The Mira Hong Kong**. Every detail has been considered and designed for the jet-lagged traveller who wants to be treated like a jet-setter. Design your own stay by selecting from red, green, silver or purple-hued rooms to match your personality and preference. Each room features designer furnishings, innovative technology and five-star service. Whether travelling for business or pleasure, each room has WiFi Internet access and a Sony entertainment centre that includes a state-of-the-art 500 GB personal computer with a 40-inch screen, wireless keyboard and Bose sound system. If you need a flash drive or Blu-ray DVD, it's yours with the stroke of a key.

When it comes to unwinding, the cutting-edge skincare and body treatments created by French luxury cosmetologist **Anne Semonin** are just what the doctor ordered. London beauty house **Elemental Herbology's** seasonal skin treatments are



also available. And when it's time to savour what Hong Kong has to offer for dinner, you might want to start with the hotel's own Michelin-rated restaurant **Cuisine Cuisine at The Mira** (2 stars), **Whisk** and **Yamm**. **Cuisine Cuisine** offers upscale Cantonese, **Whisk** is a gastro-journey

through Europe with a French accent and **Yamm** serves Japanese and international buffet classics. There are also stylish coffee and cocktail bars plus the fifth-floor **Terrace Garden Lounge** if you're looking for an *al fresco* dining experience under a starry Hong Kong night.

City Snap Guide: Portland

Mary Luz Mejia



'America's Greenest City' and one of the 'World's Most Successful Cities' are just two of the titles **Portland** has graciously accepted over the years without making too much of a fuss. This northwestern Oregon metropolis, which sits near the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, is an outdoor lover's paradise with a food and artisanal craft distillery scene to complement well-exercised appetites. But it's the spate of cultural riches this city modestly houses that continues to delight the tourists who feel they've stumbled upon their own Portlandia (if you've watched the IFC series created by *Saturday Night Live* cast member Fred Armisen, you'll know what I mean).

Portland potables

American-crafted eau de vies? You bet your fermented fruit! In 1985, **Clear Creek Distillery's** founder Steve McCarthy led the charge using his family's **Hood River** orchard's fruit to make a signature Portland eau de vie. More recently, eight new distilleries have opened around the city, helping spawn the **Great American Distillers' Festival** every October. More than 40 spirits are sampled, with a bartenders' competition and spirit appreciation seminars held for every thirsty traveller. Watch for award-winning **Bendistillery** vodka and gin!

Free and green!

The first Thursday of every month in **Northwest Portland (Old Town and the Pearl District)** offers up a cultural freebie that sees locals and visitors alike descend on shops that turn into artistic salons for the night, as well as bona fide galleries, for a jolt of art. Don't miss the **PDX** and **Elizabeth Leach** galleries or the **Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA)** for cutting-edge mixed media, photography and sculpture. If you favour shopping over the aesthetic, head across the **Willamette River** to **SuperVegan**, the world's first vegan mall (SE Stark and 12th Ave.) where hip clothing, cookies, cakes and even body art all proudly boast vegan and green-friendly cred. This is definitely an 'only in Portland' experience.

Top of the charts

This is a town that likes its music varied and indie, and it's where local gal Courtney Love (of Hole fame) met the late Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain. Today, **The Dandy Warhols**, **Modest Mouse**, **Everclear** and **The Decemberists** are some of the bands that make Portland home. And if you remember the late '50s/early '60s blockbuster *Louie Louie*, you'll be interested to know that the city's **Paul Revere & the Raiders** as well as **The Kingsmen** both covered the tune to frenzied fame. You might catch a big local act at the **Crystal Ballroom**, featuring its floating dance floor, at the **Doug Fir Lounge** or the intimate **Mississippi Studios** – your chance to say "I saw (insert name of band) first!"

Pop culture

The Simpsons creator and Portland native **Matt Groening** literally drew upon his hometown and family to create Springfield and the cartoon's namesake animated family. Other creative types inspired by the city include filmmaker **Gus Van Sant** (*Good Will Hunting*) and cartoonist/illustrator **Dan Steffan** (*Heavy Metal* and other magazines). Maybe it's nearby **Oaks Park**, an old-school midway – one of the oldest continually operating amusement parks in the U.S. – that keeps locals young at heart. The park's Ferris wheel and charming roller rink are open year-round; happy skaters glide to the melodies of an old Wurlitzer pipe organ!

GET AWAY

A 30-minute drive from downtown Portland puts you in what some call 'the Burgundy of America,' aka the **Willamette Valley** wine country – one of the premier wine-producing areas in the world. The valley sits at the same latitude as France's Burgundy region and there are more than 200 wineries to choose from, many of them producing the state's signature **Pinot Noir** wines. While the film *Sideways* extolled Pinot Noir's virtues, the state's **Pinot Gris** is quickly catching up in popularity. Head south from the city on the **Pacific Highway** and you'll find **Rex Hill Vineyards** in **Newberg** – the entrance to wine country. Sample both versions of Pinot as well as **Chardonnay**, **Riesling** and **Merlot**. Keep going to **Dundee**, where you'll find organic vineyard **Sokol Blosser** and **Argyle Winery**, which pours sparkling varieties in a historic tasting room. And you've just begun!



Make a Difference with Trails of Indochina

The appeal of **Cambodia** lies in its unspoiled nature and unique historical and cultural edge. Mystery and intrigue abound in this country, and are particularly apparent at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Angkor Wat, one of Southeast Asia's most significant archaeological sites. Cambodia is a truly inspired and culturally harmonious destination, rich in opportunities to combine philanthropy with soft adventure or ecotourism.

Our exclusive On Location partner, **Trails of Indochina**, offers unique and thoughtfully prepared itineraries – providing a host of authentic experiences and connections to the culture. Take part

in a memorable one-day excursion and help make an impact on the lives of a Cambodian family in **Siem Reap**. Running water is scarce and local people often have to travel long distances for their drinking water. Engage in a hands-on activity with local workers to help build a water filter that will allow rain or lake water to be treated to a drinkable standard. You will have the opportunity to enjoy lunch with a member of the staff, who will tell you more about the surrounding villages and the problems encountered by local communities. Afterwards, stroll through villages and discover how the people have learned to live with the lack of such basic amenities as electricity and running water. ▀

Sat. 8:12 a.m.
Made it over the ridge.

Sat. 3:43 p.m.
Headed down the trail.

Sat. 8:28 p.m.
Rode under the open sky.

Sat. 9:07 p.m.
Got away from it all.



Clear your mind in Texas. To plan your Texas adventure, please contact your Ensemble Travel® Group agency. Packages are available through Air Canada Vacations with daily non-stop flights from Toronto, Montreal & Calgary. For more information or your free Texas State Travel Guide, Accommodations Guide and Texas Map visit TravelTex.com.



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CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
VisitDallas.com

FORT WORTH
CITY OF COWBOYS AND CULTURE
FortWorth.com

HOUSTON
VisitHouston.com
VisitHoustonTexas.com

SAN ANTONIO
DEEP IN THE HEART
VisitSanAntonio.com



Dining for Dummies

Avoiding a fork full of faux pas as you dine your way round the world

Mario Stojanac

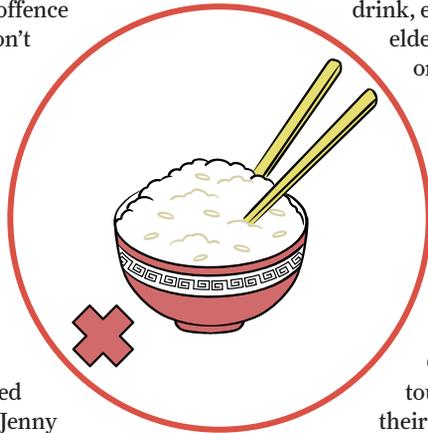
DINING CUSTOMS AND TABLE MANNERS: they're not exactly words that will cause sleepless nights, but should you choose to ignore them, you may soon be wishing you could disappear under a sticky blanket in your rice pudding. Whether trying to avoid a recreation of the flying snail scene from the movie *Pretty Woman* here in North America, or clumsily bludgeoning a scones at high tea in **London**, things can get even more complicated if you find yourself dining halfway around the globe in an unfamiliar culture.

While many Westerners have become accustomed to using chopsticks thanks to the popularity of Asian restaurants around the world, whether we use them correctly is altogether another matter. Don't think you're an expert in **Japanese** dining simply because you eat sushi once a week – Japan's dining rituals are intricate and numerous. Even though, as a guest in their country, you'll be treated graciously and let off the hook for most *faux pas*, it will serve you well to learn as much Japanese etiquette as possible. For example, slurping noises while eating noodles is actually considered a good thing and is a sign that you are enjoying the meal. However, burping during or after the meal is considered bad manners, just as it is in North America. In fine

dining establishments, go easy on the beer or sake as it's considered in poor taste to get noticeably drunk during a meal. Do offer to pour your guests' drinks, because in Japan it is customary to refill others' glasses instead of your own. Even if you love wasabi, don't add so much to your soy sauce that it turns into a paste: it will signal an offence to the sushi chef. And don't point, play with or wave your chopsticks in the air. At the end of your meal place them in front of you with the tips to the left.

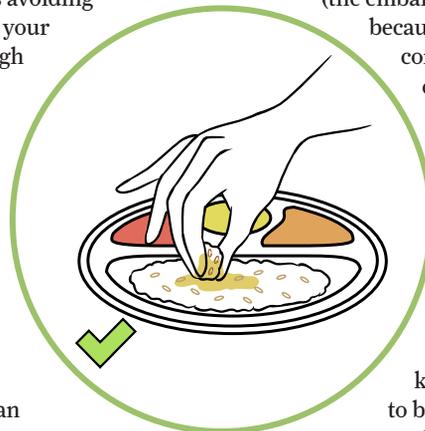
Speaking of chopsticks, one of the biggest no-no's happens when diners stand them in their rice. According to China-based blogger and food expert Jenny Gao, they resemble grave markers and are hence bad luck; not exactly the ice-breaker you'd like to be remembered for at dinner. There are other subtle mannerisms that one should follow in China, such as not asking for rice during a meal, because you're basically telling your host that you're not satisfied and need a little something to fill the gap. In China, meals are served in stages and you'll get your rice – at the end of the meal. My favourite is the light tapping of the knuckles of the first and middle fingers on the table when you are served tea by a waiter. Easily misconstrued by Westerners as a sign of impatience, this gesture symbolizes kneeling as a sign of thanks, a much more graceful way of doing so than expressing it verbally, especially if you happen to have your mouth full at the time.

In India, another culturally rich culinary powerhouse, hands are the most convenient eating utensil – and not just for some sort of naan sandwich. According to Indian cook Ronica Sajani, in southern India “they eat a rather liquid form of rice and *sambhar* with their hands, licking their fingers as the final flourish.” The cardinal rule here is that you only use your right hand to place food into your mouth – otherwise you're doing far too much sharing for your dining companions' liking, as the left hand is used to reach for dishes and pass items across the table. Sajani recalls that in her mother's North Indian family it was considered poor manners to place more than two fingers of your eating hand into your mouth – consider that the next time you go claw-handed into your movie popcorn!



Korean tradition very much focuses on respecting your elders; serving them first, waiting for them to lift their chopsticks and, once you start eating, not sprinting for the finish line. Slow and steady does it, at a pace in keeping with grandpa and grandma. It is interesting to note that it is rude to turn down an alcoholic drink, especially from an elder (really officer, I was only being respectful!). Back in Europe, where many North Americans may feel more comfortable with the rules of the table, it is perhaps this false sense of familiarity that induces the Gallic stink-eye as tourists saw through their steak frites or spaghetti with the gusto of a master cellist. There is a fair amount of commonality in the table manners and customs throughout southern Europe. For instance, when seated at a dinner table, you should never keep your hands in your lap, whether during or between courses. Your hands should always be above-board, so to speak. We can only imagine the historical reasons for this.

Another common *faux pas* is biting into your bread – whether in **Spain, Italy** or **France**. It is considered proper to tear off a small piece of bread with your hands, thus avoiding an uncouth display of your canines ripping through a crusty dinner roll. When you have finished a course (and in particular when you are dining at someone's house, where fresh plates may not follow each course), it is also quite acceptable to take a piece of bread and clean up any sauces left on your plate. This should be done as elegantly as possible though; the best way is to use your fork to push the bread around your plate – with a gentle wipe as opposed to a Swiffer-style mopping up of leftover sauce. Should you not be provided with a bread plate, the common rule in southern Europe is that the bread rests on the tablecloth, never on your dinner plate.



As much as there are similarities throughout Europe, there are also some individually quirky idiosyncracies. In Italy, a cappuccino is considered a morning-only drink and should never be taken following a meal, when the milk will hinder digestion. Ordering a cappuccino after 11:00 a.m. will only confirm your tourist status and have locals mumbling about *i stranieri*. If, for some reason, you want to frustrate your waiter in Italy a little more, ask for some balsamic vinegar with your olive oil and bread – that's a Californian innovation and will guarantee you a few head shakes. And asking for a sprinkle of *parmigiano* with your *pasta alla vongole* (clams) or *frutti di mari* (seafood) will likely ensure a disdainful stare-down. Any self-respecting Italian restaurant will refuse to give you cheese with your seafood pasta – it's simply not done.

As a sign of hospitality in **Greece**, it is customary for the host to pick up the entire restaurant tab – and often fight for the pleasure of doing so. If you are invited out to one of these meals, offer to pay (and be prepared to pay for the table) but be accepting of the generosity. To ask for a separate bill is seen as poor etiquette, and colloquially known in Greece as ‘going German’ – the equivalent to our ‘going Dutch.’

There is also the awkward group dining moment that is recognized throughout the world: what to do with the last morsel on a shared plate. In Spain this is even given a name – *la verguena* (the embarrassment), presumably because nobody really feels comfortable staking that claim. The solution is also a global one: offer it to everyone at the table, wait for the chorus of refusals and then help yourself, seeing as you broached this delicate subject, and be comfortable in the knowledge that it is better to be embarrassed on a full stomach than on an empty one.

After all, you've just taken part in a cultural event that is rooted in respect, sharing and the enjoyment of food in the company of friends. *Bon voyage* and *bon appétit!* 🍴

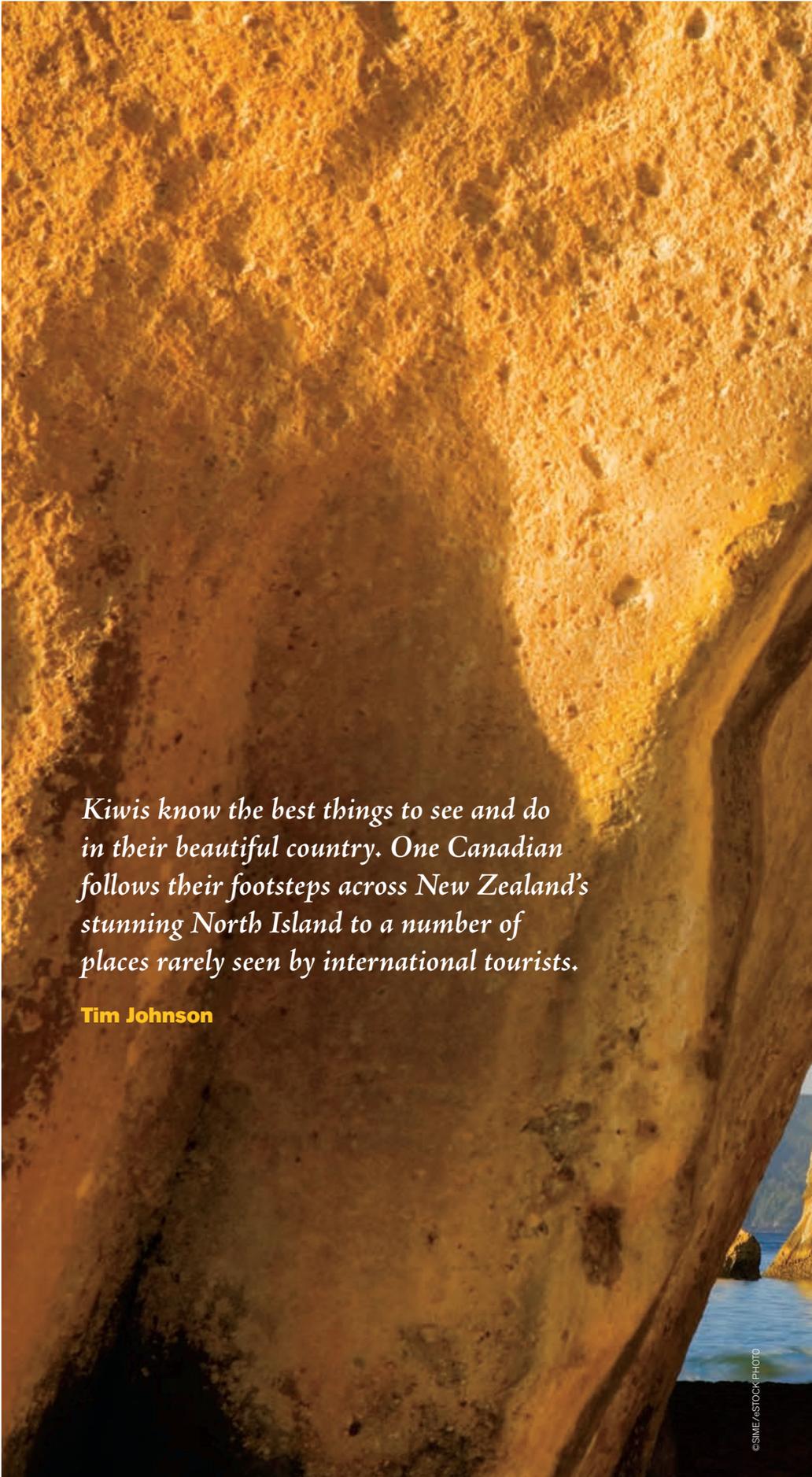
IT'S A LOVELY NOVEMBER spring evening in **Napier**, a light, warm breeze dancing across the aquamarine waters of **Hawke Bay**, and I am surrounded by **New Zealanders**, or **Kiwis**. They have gathered here to celebrate a restaurant opening, a chic sort of place in **Ahuriri**, a former harbour wasteland of drab warehouses that's been converted into the hottest neighbourhood in town. Invited by a friend, I take the opportunity to share with them my quest, now almost complete, and gauge their reaction to it. I tell them that I came to **New Zealand's North Island** to travel around it as the **Kiwis** do – spurning tourist traps, steering clear of any sort of place that might attract tour buses, and instead retracing the steps of those who live here, doing what *they* might do in their beautiful country on a long weekend or a week-long vacation.

When I run my full itinerary by Casey, a friendly bank manager who grew up just around the corner from here, he confirms its Kiwi authenticity, noting that I have included a number of destinations that are off the beaten track, places rarely seen by international tourists. And he approves of what I'm doing. "A trip like this is a great idea," he says with a pleasant North Island lilt. "It really lets you tear the top off a place and explore inside." And that's exactly what I've been doing.

Auckland

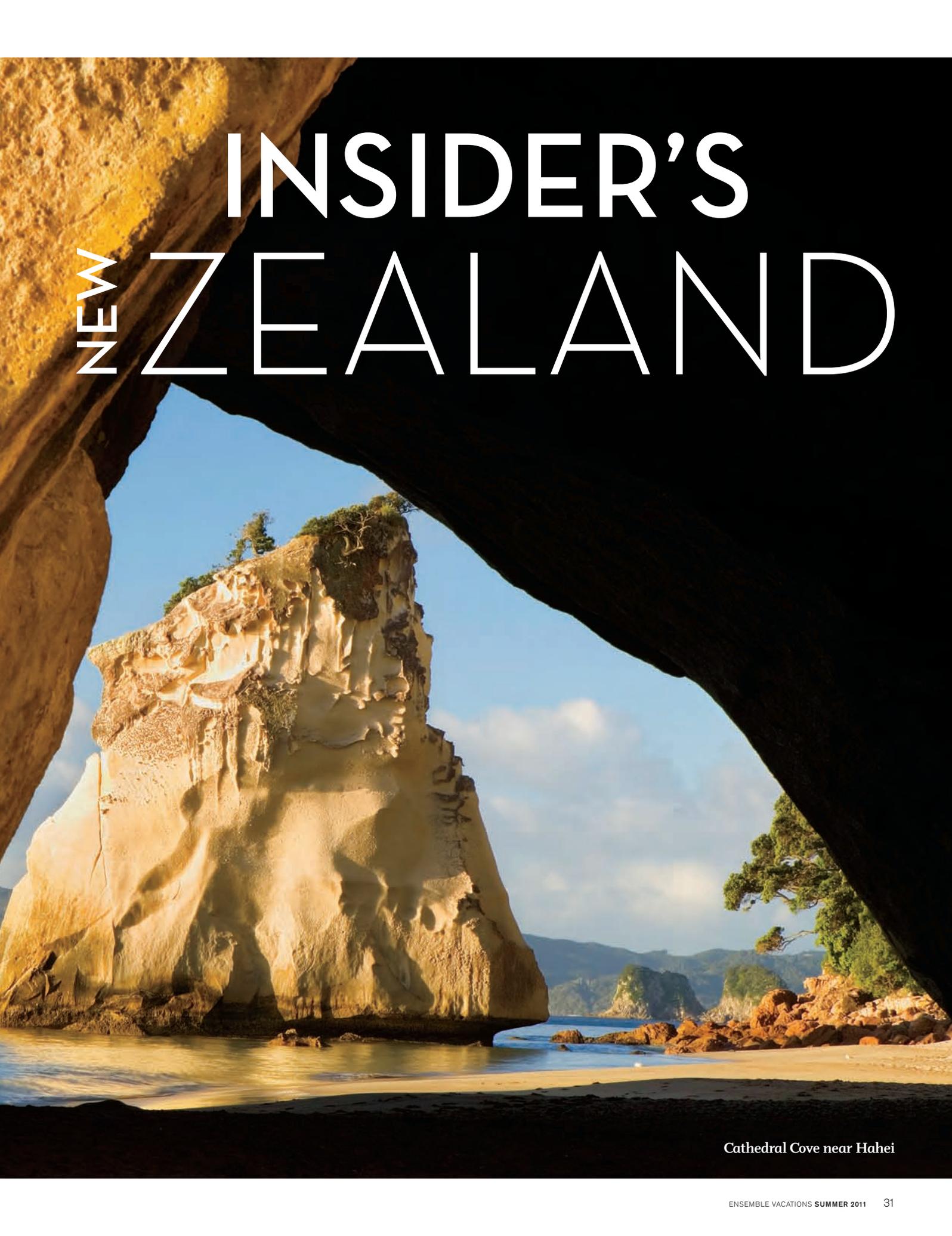
My journey began more than a week earlier, as most New Zealand journeys do, in **Auckland**. Despite the long, long flight, I arrive relatively clear-eyed and happy, courtesy of the fact that I have flown business class on Qantas – a rare indulgence for me – which serves good food, good wine and, most important, seats that convert into comfortable little beds, which means that I got a decent night's sleep high over the **Pacific Ocean**.

While some travellers elect to pass quickly through the nation's largest city, I opt to stay awhile in the **City of Sails**, a name that refers to the hundreds of yachts in its two harbours (**Waitemata** and **Manukau**) – the most per capita in the world. The city looks a little bit like Toronto, with its **Sky Tower** and glassy skyline set along streets with British names like Queen and Wellesley. But the similarities stop there – Auckland enjoys a lovely, temperate **South Pacific** climate, lush rainforest surroundings and beautiful volcanic vistas, things not familiar to the average Torontonionian.



Kiwis know the best things to see and do in their beautiful country. One Canadian follows their footsteps across New Zealand's stunning North Island to a number of places rarely seen by international tourists.

Tim Johnson



INSIDER'S NEW ZEALAND

Cathedral Cove near Hahei

My advisor on this trip will be my friend Victoria, a Kiwi I met while travelling through Mongolia. As she now lives in Japan, her advice, which comes to me electronically, is tinged with a faint hue of homesickness. But at every turn, her directions are bang on.

Her first missive advises me to visit **Waiheke Island**, “if you’d like a slice of paradise in the heart of the city. Great wineries over there – including **Mudbrick**. Well worth paying the dosh for splendid food with excellent views of **Waitemata Harbour**.” And so that’s what I do.

The ferry ride over to Waiheke takes about 45 minutes and once ashore I join a small group for a wine excursion around the island. Waiheke is a **Maori** word for ‘cascading water,’ and the island is a place of great natural beauty – just 20 kilometres long, it still manages to bring together a varied landscape of sharp, green slopes, gushing waterfalls and more than three dozen wineries, most of which feature a small-scale, organic, hand-picked and hand-crafted approach to the art of grape growing and winemaking. We tour a number of these boutique wineries, including **Jurassic Ridge**, which – not surprisingly, given the name – is owned by Lance Blumhardt, a retired geologist and surgeon, and Luciana, his neurophysiologist wife.

Lance, a character with a quick smile who wears a T-shirt featuring a Rorschach ink blot formed out of two opposing outlines of New Zealand, explains that the rocks beneath the fertile soil of Waiheke date back 150 million years to the Jurassic period, some of which he needed to smash through in order to plant the winery’s rows and rows of award-winning Syrah, Pinot Gris and Cabernet Franc, which thrive in this warm, maritime climate. He forms a wry smile when I ask him about any connections between his three diverse careers. “Geology has stones and medicine has gallstones. And between medicine and winemaking? Well, doctors are pretty good at drinking,” he laughs, before proceeding to a serious answer about the importance of understanding chemistry, cleanliness and sterilization in both fields. We finish the tour at Mudbrick where, as Victoria promised, the food and wine are fabulous – and expensive – but the view is indeed priceless. Stretching out across the harbour, the modern spires of downtown Auckland float, like a dream almost forgotten, on the far reaches of the horizon.

On my last day in the city, I do a quintessential Kiwi thing – I jump off something extremely tall. New Zealanders

are famous for their derring-do: It was two Kiwis, after all, who created the first commercial bungee jump on a suspension bridge spanning a deep canyon near the South Island town of **Queenstown**, and wherever you travel across the country, whether bridge or tower, you will find very high structures that offer the opportunity for a thrilling experience. I take part in something called the **SkyJump**, which outfits jumpers in a cheesy flight suit, tethers them to a wire, then casts them from a spot just above the Sky Tower’s observation deck into the heart of downtown Auckland, more than 60 storeys below. Clad in a blue one-piece suit with a yellow lightning bolt across the front, my knees almost buckle as I step to the edge, nothing but thin air between the tips of my toes and the grey, indifferent concrete far below. But I swallow my fear and jump, and once in the air, all I feel is pure adrenaline surging through my veins, the ground rushing toward me, the wind whipping past my ears at 85 kilometres an hour, the red landing target growing larger and larger by the second. I land, unspattered, on my feet, excited for my next adventure in Kiwiland.

The Coromandel Peninsula

It turns out that my next adventure scares me even more than leaping from the tallest structure in the **Southern Hemisphere**. The challenge? Driving on the wrong side of the road.

Exploring the North Island properly requires a trip off the beaten track, and a trip off the beaten track requires a car, and driving a car in New Zealand requires the driver to sit on the right-hand side of the automobile and navigate roadways where everything is completely opposite to what we’re used to in North America. After putting it off as long as possible, dallying around the rental agency for awhile, taking time for a leisurely stroll over to a corner store to buy snacks and water for the trip, then chatting at length with the cashier, I finally slide behind the wheel and turn out onto a busy Auckland street. After making a few embarrassing mistakes – most notably flicking on the windshield wipers each time I wish to indicate a turn – I’m out on the motorway, steadily making my way south, then east, over the jagged spine of the **Coromandel Range**.

My destination is the tiny village of **Hahei**, which comes highly recommended by Victoria. It sits on the rocky, aquamarine shores of the **Coromandel Peninsula**, a dramatic

spit of land popular with vacationing Kiwis that’s usually bypassed by tour buses, which instead lumber south to the geothermal attractions of **Rotorua**. Like a real Kiwi, I rent a ‘*bach*’ (pronounced ‘batch’), New Zealand parlance for a vacation home. From the steps of my place, a three-storey house with views of both the sea and the surrounding hillsides, I explore the adorable town, walk along its stunning, almost-empty beach, then hike down to spectacular **Cathedral Cove**, a hidden inlet that features a hole in the rock shaped like a stained-glass window (which, at high tide, can be explored from inside a kayak).

The Coromandel is a place packed with adventure, and the experiences pile up: I ride over to **Coromandel Town**, a former gold mining boomtown, on the back of a Harley-Davidson with a dude sporting a sweet ZZ Top beard, take a breathtaking helicopter ride that drops me for lunch at **Mercury Bay Estate** winery, relax with a soak and a massage at **The Lost Spring Thermal Pools and Day Spa**, and explore the charms of **Whitianga**, a cute town with a number of attractions.

One evening, I drive about 10 minutes from my *bach* to **Hot Water Beach** where, twice a day at low tide, the sea waters pull back to expose a thin strip of sand that rests atop subterranean hot springs. Admission is free and all you need is a towel, a spade (available for rent at most local stores) and maybe a bottle of wine. Arriving around sunset, I dig myself a homemade hot tub, which quickly fills with the warm soothing water that bubbles up from below, the waves of the South Pacific rolling onto the shore just a few feet away. I lie back in my muddy little abode and watch day fade into night.

Lake Taupo and Napier Beyond

After the Coromandel, I make a bold move – on the advice of Victoria, I skip the tourist magnet of Rotorua. Victoria has advised a visit to **Lake Taupo** instead, where I make a brief stop to ride the thrilling jet boat and enjoy the views of the massive lake, a caldera created by a supervolcanic eruption thousands of years ago, then proceed to Napier, which lies behind a formidable range of mountains, on the broad sweep of Hawke Bay.

“Napier is lovely; it’s the art deco capital of New Zealand,” Victoria tells me. “Hire a bike and cycle between the wineries – there’s just a small fee for

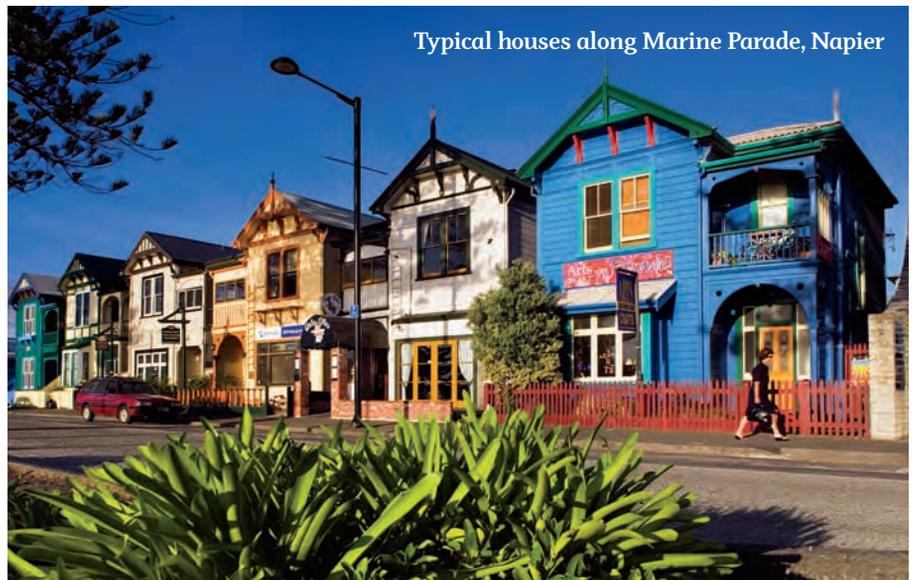
tastings and, best of all, being drunk on a bike isn't an offence in New Zealand." While I don't, in fact, get drunk, I do enjoy the ride with **On Yer Bike Winery Tours**. The route is mostly flat, and the wine is fantastic – I make three stops, the final one at the little red barn of **Salvare Estate**, where I will some very nice Syrah, Viognier and Chardonnay.

Later, I trade my bike for the front seat of a 1939 Packard Six automobile, a car perfectly suited to a tour of Napier's art deco highlights. Graham Holley, an off-duty airline pilot, is my guide. Outfitted in a black fedora, spectator shoes and an authentic 1930s woollen suit, Holley points to the clock on the dash, which is stopped at 10:47, the precise time that a catastrophic earthquake completely changed the face of Napier. The town was devastated, utterly ruined. But within two years, Holley adds, right in the midst of the Great Depression, 160 buildings had been erected, all of them in art deco or Spanish Mission style, and 145 of them remain. It's the most impressive deco collection I've ever seen, and Holley, who was brought up here in the Hawke Bay area, notes that in addition to being beautiful, this place is significant. "Buildings in your hometown are important. A piece of you lives there," he says.

And while I will, unfortunately, probably never live in lovely Napier, I do feel as though I've left a piece of myself there, and in the Coromandel, Taupo and Auckland. When you travel like a local you feel a bit like a local, and the place becomes a little bit like home. But with more beaches. **v**



Cruising the Coromandel



Typical houses along Marine Parade, Napier



The view from Mudbrick Winery

STAY AWHILE

In Auckland, enjoy the five-star Langham Hotel

<http://auckland.langhamhotels.co.nz/>

The Hilton offers excellent lake views and very comfortable rooms in Taupo
www.hilton.com/LakeTaupo

Stay like a rock star at The Dome in Napier
<http://www.thedome.co.nz/>

The Crown Hotel offers ocean views in the heart of chic Ahuriri
<http://www.thecrownnapier.co.nz/>





Anne Gordon steps back in time to explore the unique culture of Papua New Guinea

Land

TELL A NORTH AMERICAN FISHERMAN that he could catch fish with a spider web and he'll scoff at the idea. Then tell him that a rattle made of coconut shell and bamboo is a sure thing for luring sharks and the response will be equally incredulous.

In Papua New Guinea, off the northern coast of Australia, fishermen gather spider webs from the forest at daybreak. Attached to kite tails, the trailing webs are skimmed across the water to lure drummer fish to the surface. Then, tangled in the fine strands, the fish are drawn in.

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© ANNE GORDON

of the Last Frontier

As for luring sharks, David Kirkland, an Australian photographer, has firsthand experience of that dangerous undertaking. Joining whom he thought was a seasoned 'shark caller,' Kirkland paddled out to sea in a flimsy outrigger canoe. His companion lowered a coconut shell and bamboo rattle into the water and shook it. Within minutes a curious shark emerged from the inky depths. At the sight of the monster, the Papuan – obviously a novice – took fright. Tipping the dugout, he unseated Kirkland, who landed foursquare on top of the shark. "I shot off that bloody shark like an Exocet missile" says Kirkland. "My camera equipment sank to the bottom."

In the ocean surrounding Papua New Guinea, divers can expect to see scorpion fish, ghost pipefish, pygmy seahorses swaying beside giant sea fans, eagle rays advancing like an army of predatory space-age birds and sinuous evil-eyed eels peering from cavities in the coral reef. Schools of barracuda swirling in glittering funnels lit by a filtered sun sweep out of the blue, while silvertip sharks cruise by, slow and menacing. From the daintiest sea slug to the gargantuan proportions of a gliding whale shark as it sups on masses of krill each time it opens its mouth, this ocean, with its islands, atolls and coral reefs, is ranked among the world's finest diving destinations.

Exploring the land of Papua New Guinea is equally magical. Western crowned pigeons and birdwing butterflies live alongside jungle wallabies, possums, tree-kangaroos and echidnas which, at mating time, link up into a train of other lovelorn males to pursue a single female, sometimes for four weeks at a time.

Disembarking from a bush plane in the village of **Timbukne**, we six travel-obsessed women were ready for a journey that would cover places that few Westerners have ever seen. We boarded a flat-bottomed riverboat, the *Sepik Spirit*, and began our



exploration of the central part of the Sepik River, which twists and winds for 1,100 kilometres before emptying into the **Bismarck Sea**.

Each morning we boarded a tag-along jet boat to explore villages, meet the people and stock up on Sepik art. Speeding along, engine at full throttle, with hair flying in the wind and a frothy spray jetting skyward on each side of the boat, was a deliciously cool way to travel. Approaching villages, or at the sight of a Papuan paddling a dugout, the jet boat slowed to a crawl. Ever ready for fun, small, naked boys scrambled into tree canopies and dive-bombed us as we passed. A thumbs-up signal and our cheers precipitated an avalanche of rocketing bodies.

Along the river, local women in traditional dress fished from dugouts, luring their prey with no more than string and a baited hook. Smoke spiralled upwards from small fires in the bows of their rough-hewn boats while pancakes made from *sago*, a starchy staple made from palm stems, simmered in frying pans. Piranhas (not the voracious variety) and prawns captured in wicker fish traps were wrapped in banana leaves and steamed.

The stilt villages along the Sepik are home territory to sorcerers, spirits, strange rituals and dark secrets. Their *haus tambarans* (spirit houses) are beautifully crafted. The villagers, whose ancestors have lived here for thousands of years, also have a spectacular art tradition and their masks, hand drums, ancestral figures and shell jewellery are making their way into the Western collectibles market. Headdresses crowned with feathers and decorated with shells and pig tusks are a popular buy. Fantastical *malagan* helmet masks, specifically made for use in ceremonies honouring the dead, can be found in museums around the world.

We visited a 'women's house' (men and women live separately along the Sepik) where young girls, their mothers and grandmothers, bare-breasted but bejewelled in necklaces of shells and gleaming ivory tusks, and wearing grass skirts, danced for us. In the 'men's house' we listened, enthralled, to the beat of a voluminous drum and the haunting primeval music of flutes drifting in the sultry air. Young men of the Iatmul tribe, believing themselves to be the descendants of crocodiles, undergo an initiation ritual that involves having crocodile patterns cut into their bodies with razor-sharp blades. John Fearfull, the captain of the *Sepik Spirit*, is one of the few foreigners ever to be initiated into this tribe.

On a steamy night, as our boat rocked gently against a cane-covered riverbank, Fearfull told us of his initiation ordeal. Following a lengthy period of sleep deprivation and numerous painful



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and frightening rituals – many of which he would not describe because he was sworn to secrecy – hundreds of incisions were made on his body. With the painful ceremony underway, elders beat *garamut* drums made from hollowed-out tree trunks, elaborately carved to resemble totem animals.

For days afterwards the incisions were scrubbed open and packed with mud to cause infection, making the resultant scars more prominent. In Fearfull’s words, “It was a serious commitment for me. I felt strongly about the initiation – I still do – but the cutting and what followed made for the worst pain I have ever felt in my entire life. At one point the elders thought I would bleed to death.”

On all Papua New Guinea islands, dress is a distinguishing factor. In the highlands, attire is often a bunch of leaves hanging from a bark belt to cover the buttocks and a *lap-lap* (a small

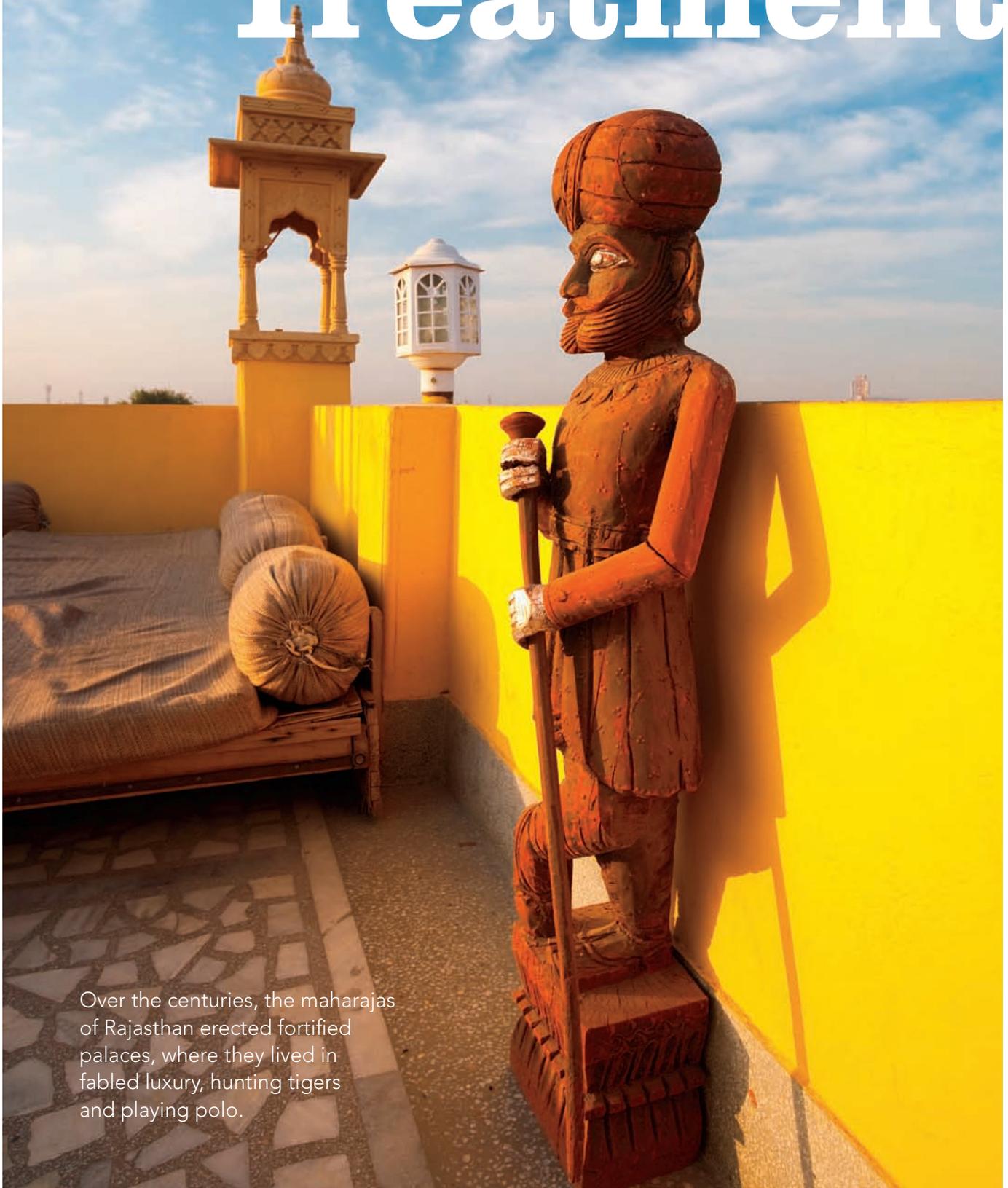
piece of cloth) worn in the front to cover genitalia. A bow with accompanying arrows slung over one shoulder is not just a fashion accessory; it completes the outfit of a modern-day warrior.

Ceremonies and festivals are particularly fascinating. Males, specifically, take on a whole new persona. For them, self-decoration is an art form; an exhibition of culture and a celebration that identifies them with a specific clan. Huli men wear elaborate crescent-shaped wigs similar to a toreador’s hat. Fashioned from their own hair, wigs are trimmed with yellow flowers and crowned with sprays of long, silky bird-of-paradise feathers. Their faces are painted canary yellow. Earrings made from toolbox oddments, necklaces made from seeds and opalescent shells, and a slender twig or two-foot-long feather through a pierced nose add to their adornment.

The mud men from **Goroka**, with their huge mud masks and sharpened bamboo claws on their fingers, are more intimidating. Their bodies are covered with whitish clay. Brandishing clubs and spears during an aggressive dance gives them the appearance of creatures from the underworld.

Attending the **Mount Hagen** festival – or the *Sing Sing* to highlanders – in August is to see Papuans at their most magnificent. Thousands of clansmen travel from each of the islands to gather in this highland capital for three days to celebrate their cultural heritage. Admittedly now a ‘well-known’ tourist event, it was introduced in the 1950s by English missionaries as a way to encourage peace among the various tribes. No small feat in one of the most culturally diverse places on Earth, with more than 800 traditional societies and as many indigenous languages spoken. It would seem the rest of us could learn a thing or two from these ancient peoples. ▣

Royal Treatment



Over the centuries, the maharajas of Rajasthan erected fortified palaces, where they lived in fabled luxury, hunting tigers and playing polo.

JILL SOLNICKI gets a taste of a maharani's life at some of Rajasthan's heritage hotels – and finds she could get used to it.

RAJASTHAN, the 'land of kings,' is also a land of contrasts: dusty deserts and vibrant colour, foods of myriad flavours, modern ways and ancient practices, poverty and wealth. On a driving trip through Rajasthan, India's stunning northwestern desert state, I discovered its treasure trove of 'heritage hotels,' the term used in India to describe the former residences of royalty and nobility. These historic and opulent properties open a unique door to Rajasthan's multi-faceted world.

Over the centuries, the maharajas of Rajasthan erected fortified palaces, where they lived in fabled luxury, hunting tigers and playing polo. But after India's independence from Britain in 1947 they lost their kingdoms and, in turn, their wealth. Some, unable to maintain their homes, converted them into hotels. For travellers, whether from India or other parts of the world, there is no better way to relive Rajasthan's romantic past than to stay at one of these properties.

My first stop was the **Deogarh Mahal**, a magnificent fort that belonged to Mewar nobility. Drums pounded a welcome as my car drove through the gate. A man in uniform opened my door, and as I stepped out, rose petals fluttered down on my head. A porter carried my suitcase through the carved wooden doorway, studded with metal to repel would-be attackers, and large enough to accommodate an elephant. Ahead lay the gold-bedecked palace, its scalloped balconies and onion-shaped turrets gleaming. A winding staircase led to my room, where intricately carved *jali* windows, colourful tiles and lush silks transported me to the fairy-tale past of the old kingdoms.

Already captivated, I set out to explore the courtyard, and discovered its concave stone elephant bed and a pen for monkeys, which were kept to sample royal dinners to detect poison. I came upon beautiful gardens and terraces, and walls hung with old photos of royals riding caparisoned elephants or posing with rifles next to leopards. A framed family tree dated to a 14th-century maharaja.

That night, as musicians played traditional instruments on the terrace

and dancers swirled, I approached an elegant Indian family and was enchanted to learn I was speaking to the princess who oversaw the operations of the hotel.

After chatting, I asked hesitantly what it had been like to lose all this grandeur. She smiled. "You can't live in the past."

But I could, at least for a short while.

After two days exploring the area, I moved on to the medieval village of **Luni**. Outside the walls of 19th-century **Fort Chanwa Luni**, I encountered horses festooned with ribbons being saddled for a group of French riders. Horseback riding is but one of the many activities offered by the hotel. I opted for a jeep safari through the countryside, where ancient traditions prevail. At a pond, a bullock turned a water wheel. A boy tended goats. Women walked down a dirt track, the sun glinting off the metal water bowls they balanced on their heads. We stopped before a baked-mud hut, where a turbaned old man melted a chunk of opium, mixed it with water, and ceremoniously offered to share the drink.

Owned by a direct descendant of **Rao Jodha**, founder and ruler of **Jodhpur** in the 15th century, Fort Chanwa has been immaculately restored to its former glory. Exploring the complex of courtyards and towers, I was thrilled to discover secret passageways to hidden pavilions and rooftop terraces with panoramic views of the **Thar Desert** on the horizon.

My next stop was Jodhpur. Within the maze of the old walled city, craftsmen plied their trades in tiny stalls. The streets were thronged with people, cows, dogs and the occasional goat. But when I walked into the courtyard of **Pal Haveli**, an 18th-century nobleman's mansion, all was serene. I'd been given the former bedroom of the family patriarch. It was exquisite. Beyond the door lay a checkered marble floor, antique furniture, a carved beam ceiling, silk curtains and arches painted in traditional motifs. Grandpa, in turban and jewels, stared sternly out from his photograph above the bed, keeping an eye on the room's occupant.

That evening at **Indique**, the hotel's rooftop restaurant, I savoured creamy, perfectly spiced *murgh masala*. From

my table I admired the 15th-century **Mehrangarh Fort**, looming high on a cliff to my right, the historic clock tower below and, overhead, the full moon's golden orb, which resembled an ornament from the maharaja's treasury I'd seen earlier that day at the museum.

North of Jodhpur, **Bikaner** beckoned, a dusty city on the edge of the Thar Desert. In centuries past camel caravans transported goods to nearby desert kingdoms; today camels remain an indispensable part of life and are regularly seen plodding along the roads, hauling goods. Beyond the city, the parched landscape revealed the **Gajner Palace** – a shimmering oasis of carved red sandstone, green gardens and a lake dotted with migratory birds. At the top of the grand entrance I was welcomed with a necklace of marigolds and a man in white gloves proffered a perfumed linen napkin to soothe my dry skin.

Each heritage hotel has its own splendour and character associated with its location. Gajner Palace, built as a hunting lodge by the maharaja of Bikaner, sits in the midst of a 6,000-acre wildlife preserve. His hunting parties included King George V and Edward VIII. Today's guests, looking for respite, can take a boat ride, wander the landscaped grounds or safari by camel through the preserve, spotting black buck and wild boar.

Off the beaten track in the village of **Alsisar**, the white marble walls of **Alsisar Mahal** – the last and perhaps best stop on my journey – gleamed in the afternoon sun. The majestic palace stood proudly, the only intact remnant of the village's former glory. Along the dirt streets, the much smaller mansions inhabited by wealthy merchants centuries ago lay abandoned, their carved façades crumbling, frescoes fading. It is a stark reminder of what can happen to a legacy if neglected. Thankfully, Rajasthan's heritage hotels have preserved – even revived – their magnificent way of life.

It has been easy to feel like royalty here. Sadly, I would soon have to give it all up. For now, though, I lean back, survey the turrets of my domain and glory in my inner princess. ▣

FEW SUNSETS around the world compare to the surreal moment when the fiery orb slips behind Vietnam's **Ha Long Bay**, creating silhouettes of peaked islands and Vietnamese fishermen paddling determinedly to reach their floating villages before dark.

Enthrancing by night, the visions of life and land in Ha Long Bay are mesmerizing by day. Its opalescent waters are dotted with 3,000 mountainous islands rising from the sea like rocky humps on a dragon's back. Hence the name, **Bay of Descending Dragon**, resonates auspiciously here where – for centuries – the Vietnamese battled for independence. Like generations before them, families eke out peaceful livings in tin-covered boats, clustered in floating villages, albeit with technological innovations like satellite dishes to catch the latest news and movies, and generators to power their computers.

Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) reports that international tour arrivals in Asia increased 11 percent in 2010, and this year the numbers have already surpassed that. For travellers wishing to explore some of the world's authentic indigenous cultures before globalization forever changes them, Vietnam has become *de rigueur* to visit, along with **China, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia**.

People may be spurred by the sentiment that it's time to see the 'real' East before it changes, but one thing is certain: travelling there now is easier than ever. With luxury lines calling at exotic ports, cruising maximizes the number of potential destinations while avoiding the hassles of flying from country to country – and it also means you unpack your luggage only once. Best of all, arriving by ship into Asia's bustling harbours provides an *entrée* into cultures whose people thrive at the water's edge, while exposing the striking contrasts of each region. Sail past Vietnam's riverside villagers washing laundry from the porches of stilt houses, or Thailand's throngs of longboats vying for position near wooden piers; then approach **Shanghai**, where the historic **Bund** and glittering **Pudong** districts shatter your expectations of China; and Singapore's harbour, where the shiny edifices seem sterile compared to everything you've seen before. With cruise ships offering extensive inland excursions – and companies like **Abercrombie & Kent** organizing insightful overland tours deep into territories that were previously difficult

CRUISING ASIA

Toby Saltzman





Arriving by ship into Asia's bustling harbours provides an entrée into cultures whose people thrive at the water's edge, while exposing the striking contrasts of each region.

to access – you can rest assured that you'll discover pristine nature along with cultures off the typically beaten track, and be able to count on comfortable accommodations (on ship or land), satisfying meals and articulate, experienced guides en route.

With all the options available, picking the cruise along the Asia-Pacific coastline that is best for you can be confusing, so it's worth consulting a travel agent who is savvy about Asia. Besides narrowing in on your timing, your preferred style of travel and your port of embarkation (which can be anywhere from Bali to Shanghai to **Hong Kong**), you must navigate through the various cruise lines and consider how long they stop in certain ports of call. For example, spending a night in Hong Kong, Shanghai or **Bangkok** will maximize your experiences. And then there are the seemingly endless options for pre- and post-tour trips to consider, plus essentials like pre-booking private guides or shore excursions along the way.

Having already travelled extensively throughout China, Thailand and Vietnam on previous trips, we chose a pre-cruise tour of Bali. The highlight was a private island tour that showcased the peaceful Balinese people; their culture and creative, hard-working existence driven by mystical observance. En route to the temples and *merus* (shrines), we witnessed a performance of the Barong masked dance and watched artisans create batik fabric and wooden furniture. Returning, we watched incredulously as farmers laboured knee-high in the flooded rice paddies that were tiered into every inch of the hilly terrain and glistened like liquid emeralds in the heavy rain.

Onboard the **Regent Seven Seas Navigator**, we sailed to **Semarang**, where we drove into the mountainous heart of **Java** to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of **Borobudur**. Believed to have been built in 824 AD, this colossal *stupa* (stone temple), which predates the temples of **Angkor Wat** in Cambodia, has 1,300 stone panels depicting the Buddha's life. While climbing the *stupa*, our guide explained our ascent through the 10 levels of spiritual enlightenment.

Later, Singapore's sleek skyline loomed in the silvery mist as we approached the former British colony, founded in 1819 by Sir Thomas Raffles. At the **National Orchid Garden**, we viewed glorious blooms alongside Buddhist initiates who snapped our photos before we enjoyed a lunch at the celebrated **Fairmont Raffles Hotel**.

Nearing Vietnam at dawn, we lingered



on our balcony and watched fishermen navigate bamboo rafts and tin-roofed boats past floating markets and industrial trawlers. Approaching **Nha Rong** pier, we were struck by the commercial activity rising from the war-torn terrain we had witnessed years ago.

Dodging bicycles, motorcycles and cyclos (bicycle-taxis) in **Ho Chi Minh City**, we toured **Reunification Hall**, the **History Museum** full of priceless artifacts, the claustrophobic **Cholon** market and the **Thien Hau Temple**, where smoke billowed from huge spirals of incense suspended from the ceiling. Some guests visited the **American War Crimes Museum** and were revolted by the effects of Agent Orange.

Da Nang posed tough choices. We passed up **Hue**, the 16th-century imperial capital of Vietnam, fashioned after the **Forbidden City of Beijing**, and opted for a visit to **Da Nang** and **Hoi An**.

Da Nang – the ancient centre of the **Champa** kingdom established in 192 AD that ruled Vietnam for 1,000 years – boasts the **Cham Museum**, housing the world's most precious collection of Champa relics and Buddhas. **Hoi An** – the ancient riverside village declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site – exists in a time warp of narrow streets lined with Japanese, Indian, Chinese and Portuguese architecture. Riding back to port, passengers were reminded of the

daily life surrounding them and went silent at the sight of farmers plowing their fields with water buffalo.

In **Ha Long Bay**, we tendered ashore to **Hong Gai** for a trip to **Hanoi**, the capital of Vietnam and former capital of French Indochina. A member of our group, a war veteran, believed he recognized the place where his troops had fallen. The ensuing silence was broken by children gleefully riding water buffalo across our path. **Hanoi** was overwhelming with its **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**, opulent colonial buildings, pretty lakes, traditional pagodas and markets crowded into the 15-century buildings. We were rendered speechless at **Hoa Lo** prison (the notorious 'Hanoi Hilton' POW camp), the formidable statue of Stalin and the propaganda-oriented **Army Museum**. But we were enthralled with the courtyard of the exquisite **Van Mieu Pagoda (Temple of Literature, circa 1070)** dedicated to Confucius.

A couple of sea days later, it was just before midnight when we sailed past the brilliantly illuminated skyscrapers of **Hong Kong** and came to a spectacular halt in **Victoria Harbour**. Flashing laser lights sent a kinetic ruffle through our spirits. Our Asia sailing may have ended but, with the ship overnighting in **Hong Kong**, there was still so much more to see. ▣

With myriad cruise line options, the advantages of exploring Asia as you wish are all yours.

Holland America Line, whose Asia itineraries range from 14 to 36 days, offers a seven-day journey that combines a ride on the legendary **Eastern & Orient Express** train with overland adventures in **Bangkok** and **Singapore**.

Silversea Cruises enhances certain ports of call with exclusive opportunities like a mid-voyage flight from **Ho Chi Minh City** that lands in **Siem Reap** for an excursion to **Cambodia's Angkor Wat** before heading to **Bangkok**, where visitors can see the bejewelled **Grand Palace** and sacred **Emerald Buddha**.

Oceania and Regent Seven Sea Cruises offers a two-day excursion to the former Portuguese colony of **Macau**, dubbed the 'Monte Carlo of the Orient.'

Seabourn's exclusive multi-day excursions include a two-night journey to **Angkor Wat** and a four-day trip to **Chengdu, China** that takes in the **Panda Base**, home of the giant pandas, plus the **Leshan Giant Buddha**, as well as a day in **Hanoi**.

Crystal Cruises overnights in **Bangkok's** port city, **Laem Chabang**, offering overnight excursions to **Bangkok** and the ancient ruins at **Ayutthaya**, the original capital of **Thailand**. Thrilling day trips include helicopter flight-seeing over **Hong Kong** followed by high tea at the **Peninsula Hotel**.

For individualized pre- or post-tours, consider **Abercrombie & Kent (A&K)**, which coordinates **China** tours including **Beijing's** venerable **Forbidden City** – a remnant of the **Ming and Qing** dynasties' imperial past; the **Great Wall**; the ancient excavations at **Xi'an** (revealing more than 8,000 terra cotta warriors, circa 210 BC) as well as scenic sailing to the **Three Gorges** or along **Guilin's Li River** to see the karst peaks and villages.

The new \$33-billion **Beijing-Shanghai bullet train**, scheduled to begin service in mid-June, will cut travel time between the two cities from about 10 hours to less than five. Running at speeds of more than 300 miles per hour, it will have three classes of service plus a dining car.



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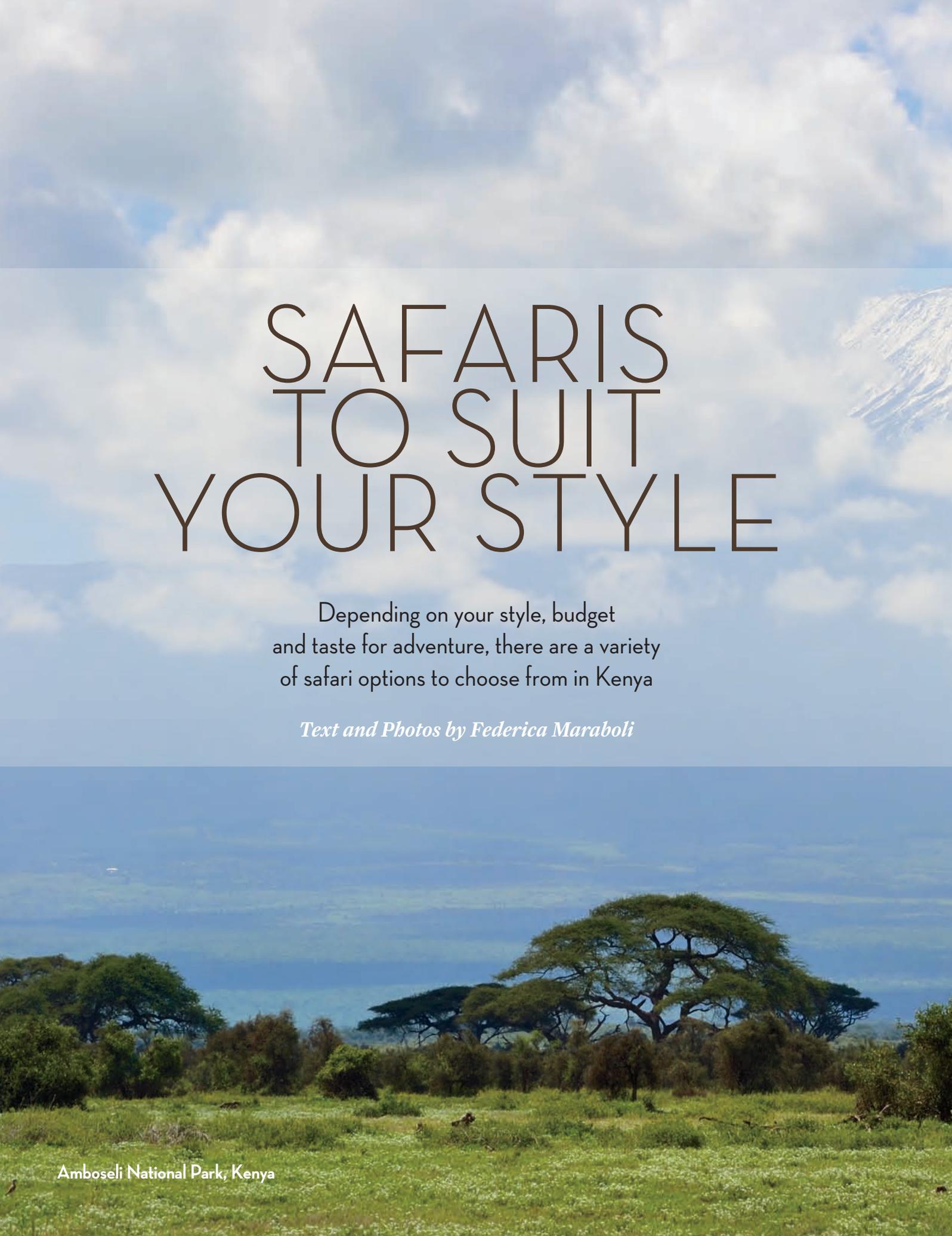
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GLOBUS
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SAFARIS TO SUIT YOUR STYLE

Depending on your style, budget
and taste for adventure, there are a variety
of safari options to choose from in Kenya

Text and Photos by Federica Maraboli

IT WAS STILL EARLY MORNING as we drove around the **Mara**, cameras propped up on the ledge of the land cruiser's convertible roof, the sun reflecting off the golden fields and just beginning to warm our shoulders. Half of our group had risen at 4:00 a.m. for a hot air balloon ride over the national reserve, while the rest of us had opted for a few extra hours of sleep. The silence of our surroundings was broken only by the occasional comment and the intermittent crackle of short wave radio as the drivers talked to each other. Alfred, our safari guide, stood in his seat, binoculars in hand, surveying the landscape with the focus and intensity of an eagle.

This was our third game drive and by now we had become familiar enough with the various animals to distinguish between antelopes, gazelles and impalas; we took turns pointing them out and exchanged fist-bumps when we got it right. We had seen elephants, wildebeest, rhinos (both black and white), giraffes

and, one of my favourites, zebra. But we had already become a little – dare I say it – blasé about these increasingly ‘common’ characters and were eager to see something a little more... savage. Suddenly, our driver picked up speed and veered. Just moments earlier he had exchanged some words in Swahili with another driver and we all sensed a shift of energy. “*Simba?*” we queried, excitedly. Minutes later, we saw another truck parked up ahead and as we slowed down, eagerly peering into the tall grass, we came upon a lioness, panting heavily, while several cubs bounded excitedly around her. Our initial admiration of the cute little cubs turned into gasps as Alfred quietly drew our attention just a few feet away to a lion tucking into fresh kill: a Maasai cow that had wandered into deadly terrain. Repelled yet enthralled, I lifted my camera to focus the beast in my viewfinder when I was almost knocked back by its sudden ferocious growl, so loud and deep I could feel the vibration.

A second lioness, hungrily ripping at the cow, was reminded of her place in the hierarchy: the lionesses make the kill but feed only once the lion has had its fill.

I could not help but feel respect for this powerful carnivore, especially when it lifted its head to fix its intense gaze upon us. Then, without warning, apparently annoyed with its audience, the lion grasped the fresh carcass in its substantial jaws and carried it away to feed in privacy. In the near distance, a jackal was patiently biding its time.

In terms of adventure safari experiences, this one was up there on the thrill meter and perhaps, for some, second only to witnessing the kill itself. But there are many other experiences equally full of impact, inspiration and wonder. From guided walks and fishing in mountain streams to horseback riding, bush breakfasts or ‘sundowner’ cocktails, a safari can be as adventurous – or luxurious – as you like.



SERENA MOUNTAIN LODGE

Perched in the forest canopy of **Mount Kenya**, this 'tree hotel' is a good introduction to game viewing. Comfortable, wood-panelled cabin-style rooms are reminiscent of modest, Northern Ontario cottages, albeit with Kikuyu-style décor. All have private balconies overlooking the watering hole and salt lick, where elephants, deer and water buffalo come to graze. Several observation levels, including a bunker, provide great opportunities to watch the animals in their habitat and get stunning photos. The bunker, accessed via an underground tunnel, allows you a close-up view of the action, complete with scents and sounds. If you haven't seen a specific animal during the day, fill out the provided checklist to be notified should it make an appearance at night, and a staff member will come to wake you. Mind the free-roaming monkeys that can often be found along the balcony ledges. Though generally harmless, they can be a little aggressive, especially if startled. A hot water bottle placed in your bed with the turn-down service is a nice touch.

Adventure Level: Low

Comfort Level: Basic

SAROVA MARA GAME CAMP

The Maasai Mara reserve in Kenya is a natural habitat for the 'Big Five' and by far the best place in the country to view wildlife and birdlife. The **Sarova** camp is situated right in the centre of the migration trail, where more than 1.4 million wildebeest trek from the **Serengeti** plains of **Tanzania** each year. While game drives are most popular, you can also choose guided walking tours, hot air balloon rides (followed by a champagne bush breakfast), bird watching or sport fishing. Standard tents have a permanent shower, washroom and roof, while more private and luxurious club tents also have glass double doors and a tent deck for intimate dining. Make a trip to the **Isokon Maasai village**, just outside the game camp, for a chance to see how this ancient culture – most widely known for its tall people and distinctive traditions – holds on to its semi-nomadic lifestyle in the face of modernization. If you're feeling the need to relax, sit by the pool or pay a visit to the **Tulia** wellness tent. But most of all, listen: I heard a bird here whose song sounded very similar – no joke – to those five musical notes from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Adventure Level: High

Comfort Level: Medium





MOUNT KENYA SAFARI CLUB

Upon arrival at this legendary Fairmont property, men will immediately aspire to wearing F.M. Allen shirts and heartily slapping friends on the back, while women will fantasize about possessing Katherine Hepburn's glamour as they bask in the luxury and elegance of this exclusive property. With its roaming peacocks, spectacular views and walls adorned with leopard and zebra skins, the **Mount Kenya Safari Club** welcomes you to luxurious, relaxing safaris. Founded by movie star William Holden, the Club's members have included many illustrious figures, from actors to royalty, many of whose portraits hang on the walls. That sprinkle of fairy dust has never dissipated and with its fabled location, the property retains a magical air and unending allure.

You can rest on the loungers by the outdoor pool or play a leisurely game of croquet, but other activities will provide more indelible memories. An afternoon horseback ride through the forest reserve's steep trails was a lesson in trust and balance, but my reward was reaching a clearing, where a herd of albino zebra lingered peacefully. Get up close and personal with the resident ostriches, bongos, dik-diks, Colobus monkeys and other residents of the hotel's animal orphanage, where you can also spy the elusive leopard. At night, don't miss the opportunity to enjoy a luxurious bush dinner. A short drive on the dark forest road leads to a secluded clearing, where beautifully dressed tables are illuminated by wrought-iron candelabra and roaring bonfires. Cocktails and wine are served as you dine under the stars on an exquisite selection of fresh seafood, meats, salads and dessert. Few experiences are as romantic, or memorable.

Adventure Level: Medium

Comfort Level: High



AMBOSELI PORINI CAMP

Mount Kilimanjaro peeked through the clouds as our 12-seat single-engine Cessna started its descent. Grasping the armrest while the wind buffeted the tiniest plane I'd ever flown in, I pressed my face to the window trying to locate the landing strip and realized, only when the ground was getting awfully close, that we were going to land in the strikingly red dirt of the 'bush.' An in-flight cocktail would have come in handy, but proved unnecessary as total relaxation was achieved by the time we pulled into the **Amboseli Porini Camp**. Located in the **Selenkay Conservancy**, a 15,000-acre private game reserve, the Porini Camp offers an authentic African safari experience. With just nine large tents run by solar power, each equipped with an ensuite bathroom consisting of a flush toilet and a 'safari' shower, the camp is exclusive and eco-friendly. Warm hospitality is provided by men of the Ilkisonko Maasai tribe, who are both gracious and unobtrusive, delivering fresh juice and coffee or tea to your tent in the morning as a wake-up call before breakfast in the mess tent. Take a nature walk and learn about the flora and fauna from a Maasai guide, who will astound you with his in-depth knowledge. And don't miss the sundowner: sipping cocktails in the middle of the bush as you watch a fiery sun disappear behind the majestic peak of Kilimanjaro. ▣

Adventure Level: Medium to high

Comfort Level: Basic

BOOM TOWN

A long way from the days of old Bombay, bustling Mumbai explodes with a dynamism that must be seen to be believed.

TIM JOHNSON

IT'S STILL EARLY, and the morning haze has just lifted as our little wooden ferry cuts a quiet path through the calm, murky waters of Mumbai Harbour. We're charting a steady course for Elephanta Island and its famous Hindu cave temples, slowly leaving behind the grand colonial façade of the Gateway of India and the great seething city beyond it. With little else to do for the next hour, I sit back, enjoy the warm breezes and chat with Shyamal, my frank, professional guide, who will soon take me through the exquisite carvings of Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha out on Elephanta.

"Mumbai is booming right now. The government opened up the economy in the early 1990s, and we haven't looked back," he tells me, pointing out luxury yachts as we pass them, clear signs of this city's new prosperity. India's economy is simply exploding – Shyamal informs me that foreign reserves have increased 300-fold over the past 20 years, GDP is projected to quadruple in the next decade and, perhaps most telling, the country's six new airlines are setting records with their number of new planes, as they increase the size of their burgeoning fleets at a relentless pace. Mumbai is a very old word, he says, the ancient name for the goddess of the local fishermen and for the past 15 years the official name of this city, India's largest, home to about 20 million people (and perhaps 25 million in the whole metro area). For centuries this place was known as Bombay, a name given to it by the Portuguese and then continued by the British, but now that, just like so much here, is passing away, becoming history.

India's economic and cultural capital is a fascinating place. Home to both Bollywood and the bustling Bombay Stock Exchange, the city boasts an astounding population density of 29,000 people per square kilometre, according to the latest *Lonely Planet* travel guide to India. Busy doesn't even begin to describe it: the streets teem with more than 40,000 black taxis, and commuter trains built for fewer than 2,000 passengers are ridden by more than double that number, who contribute to the more than 2.5 million people who course through the city's main train station every single day.

And Mumbai has never been more fascinating than right now, as traditional, time-honoured elements of Indian society and life persist in the face of incredibly rapid modernization. I see this in living colour after our return to the mainland, as I head to Crawford Market. Crawford – a covered food market that dates back to Victorian days – spills out into the streets, which lead to a series of additional interlocking markets, each with its own speciality: from the massive Mangaldas textile market with its



Admission is free and all you need is a towel, a spade, and maybe a bottle of wine.

©TIRGERS STOCK PHOTO



tiny, crammed passageways and 500 stalls draped in beautiful fabrics, to the **Zaveri Bazaar**, where all of India comes to buy gold and silver, to enclaves where you can buy knock-off iPhones and other high-tech gadgetry. As I press through the crowds, the mayhem of this place swirls around me. Men walk by with multiple boxes of blenders or gutted-out washing machines balanced on their heads, women in vibrant saris carry baskets heaped high with fresh fruit, mopeds honk and push their way through (now ubiquitous, the mopeds are actually a relatively new addition to the city's streetscape, with young people spending their newfound wealth to replace their old bicycles), and cattle wander and sun themselves off to the side, with passersby touching their horns for good luck.

The markets are just north of Mumbai's central **Fort** district, an area that, along with neighbouring **Nariman Point** and **Colaba**, forms the heart of the city's tourist district. Location is important in Mumbai, a place where crazy traffic can turn a simple drive into a two-hour trek. I base myself at the **Oberoi**, an ultra-luxe hotel in Nariman Point that offers easy access to the main sights as well as the shops and cafés of Colaba, plus sweeping views of the beautiful **Queen's Necklace**, a line of twinkling lights along **Marine Drive** that traces the dramatic curve of Mumbai's **Arabian Sea** shoreline.

The next day, Shyamal takes me beyond the Fort district to **Dhobi Ghat**, the world's largest laundromat, a 140-year-old labyrinth of cement stalls filled with soapy water. We watch from an overlook as thousands of shirtless workers (known as *dbobis*) pound the dirt out of Mumbai's dirty laundry, then hang the colourful clean clothes – pink hospital scrubs, radiant white waiter's shirts, rows and rows of blue jeans – on the giant clotheslines strung overhead. Also looming high above the complex is a soaring, brand-new condo building, still under construction, one of several that surround Dhobi Ghat and stand on the former site of the city's textile mills, which are now shuttered and torn down.

Tours here are informal – just show up at the gate and negotiate a price with the first guy who walks by, who then becomes your own personal guide. We follow a mustachioed man who has agreed to do the tour for 200 rupees (less than five dollars) through the warren of stalls, stopping to interact with *dbobis*, watch them work and observe as our guide demonstrates the old-school coal irons which are still very much in use here.

Shyamal tells me, quietly, that there used to be many more of these places, but most have closed down, and even this huge one faces the dual threats of condo encroachment and a rise in washing machine ownership. The workers here have formed a union, and the man tells us that the government has made this an official historic site and earmarked funding to modernize it and keep it going. Exiting near another new development – three new condo buildings – we pay the man and wish him well.

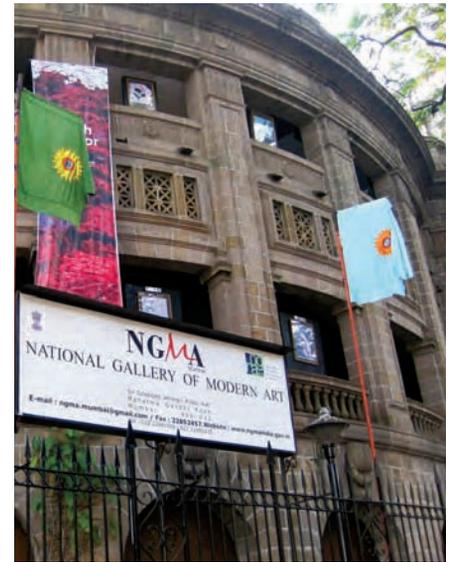
After Shyamal and I part ways, I head to the city's excellent **National Gallery of Modern Art**, which showcases the works of India's greatest contemporary artists, from the still life paintings of **F.N. Souza** to the nudes of **M.F. Husain**. On the top floor, I chat with two older women who now spend their summers in the United States but maintain flats here for the winter, who recall the days of old Bombay,

the Bombay of their childhood. "We had fishing villages and coconut gardens and vegetable fields. It was a beautiful city," one of them tells me, wistfully recalling the lyrics of a 1950s Bollywood song, *Yeh Hai Bumbai Meri Jaan*, or roughly translated, 'Bombay, Love of My Life.' But they agree that, while things have changed, the spirit of the city remains the same. "People live here cheek-by-jowl, everyone together from everywhere. This city has a pulsating heart."

And I feel that heartbeat later in the evening when I visit **Dome**, the only rooftop bar with a view of the Queen's Necklace. I wanted to talk to some young people, the Mumbai of Tomorrow, and knew I'd found them when I saw an attractive couple in their twenties sharing a cushy chair – he, Abmishek, with a stylish pink shirt and rakish half goatee, she, Michelle, in jeans and a sweater cape, both texting on their phones

(and he texting with both hands, one on a BlackBerry, the other on a regular mobile). As club music throbs in the background, they explain that he works for a large media multinational and she owns a café, and their marriage – which wasn't arranged – is a mixed one (he is Hindu, she is Roman Catholic).

I tell them about my earlier conversation, about this love for the Bombay of the past. "We don't know how it was, so we don't miss it. But I enjoy what I am seeing today," says Michelle. "It's now. These are the best days in Mumbai," says Abmishek. "This city has an energy, and people feel that when they come here. Because Mumbai has the capacity to accommodate everyone, in any fashion, at any time, that's the energy that Mumbai has. It has the energy to pull, it has the energy to push, and it has an energy that keeps you going." 📍

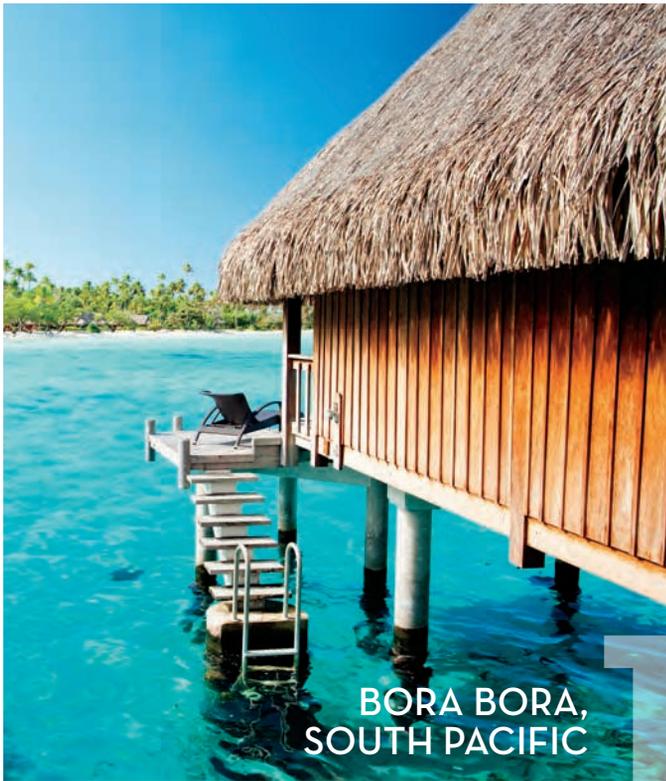


A tropical island scene with a sailboat in the foreground, palm trees, and a large rock formation in the background. The text '10 of the best Luxury Islands' is overlaid on the image.

10 of the best *Luxury Islands*

Our selection of handpicked luxury islands offers something fabulous for every adventurer's taste

BARBARA KINGSTONE



BORA BORA, SOUTH PACIFIC

These two words conjure up several adjectives including exotic, romantic and mysterious. Little wonder that **Bora Bora** is the most famous of the **Society Islands**, which also include **Tahiti** and **Moorea**. With its high concentration of luxury resorts, Bora Bora is certainly a playground for the rich and famous, but there's nothing snooty about it.

Bora Bora is a lover's paradise, consistently one of the top ranked for its spectacular turquoise waters that lap against white sand beaches, the treasured lagoon and the towering volcanic peaks of **Mount Otemanu** and **Mount Pahia**. The easiest way to navigate Bora Bora is by *poti marara* or small boat. Naturally, water sports and activities top the agenda, though overland tours and 4x4 expeditions are also available. The traditional, open-air 'le truck' vehicles are the best way to tour the island, where a guide will reveal any number of surprises: take a hike to the top of a hill and find a huge, ancient petroglyph in the shape of a tortoise that dates back thousands of years, or discover the strange-looking plant that resembles a notched red radish, which when squeezed, produces a liquid that is a fabulous natural hair conditioner.

STAY The eco-friendly **InterContinental Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa** is a *Condé Nast Gold List* property. There's only one way to arrive from the airport – and that's by boat. Stay here for, among other things, the **Deep Ocean Spa's** exquisite balneotherapy and thalassotherapy treatments. (Ask your Ensemble agent about our complimentary Ensemble Exclusive amenity when you book this hotel.)

PLAY Your experience would not be complete without a visit to **Bloody Mary's**, a popular restaurant and bar where shoes are checked at the door... as the floor is covered in soft white sand. The daily catch (except Sundays) is from local fishermen and the nightly entertainment draws many locals and visitors, including famous faces from Kurt Russell to Rod Stewart.



The 15 **Cook Islands** are right in the middle of the **South Pacific Ocean** and probably one of the best-kept secrets in this part of the world, remaining mostly unspoiled by tourism. This "small dot on the map where a fly made a mess" may have a small population but it's made up for by the largesse and friendliness of the residents.

Rarotonga, the youngest of the Cook Islands southern group, is the most popular. Its chief town of **Avarua** is the capital of the Cook Islands. The waters here offer comfortable year-round temperatures of 18° C to 29° C, great visibility and a variety of dive sites including caves, wrecks and reef-drops. Deep-sea game fishing, saltwater fly and light tackle sports fishing are second to none.

Be warned that from mid-Saturday the island closes tighter than the well-known local black pearl-producing *Pinctada Margaritifera* oysters and doesn't re-open until Monday. However, there's a great food market on Saturday mornings in the small town of **Aura**, where you'll find everything from fish to flans and even a Canadian stallkeeper who has lived here for decades and sells great pastries.

Come Sunday, pay a visit to the **Cook Islands Christian Church**. You'll be uplifted by the powerful and harmonious voices of the choir as it spontaneously breaks into hymns and prayer. That's if you're bored by the spectacular view from your beach lounge chair.

STAY You won't find any high-rise hotels here – accommodations range from budget hostels to private luxury villas. The Pacific-style, exclusive **Rarotonga Beach Bungalows** offer beachfront access, spacious living areas and best of all, a romantic outdoor shower with no prying eyes. Or splurge and stay at **Te Manava Luxury Villas and Spa**, the Cook Islands' newest private villas, where you can personalize your own luxury experience with its guest service menu.

PLAY Take a not-to-be-missed side trip to the beautiful, triangular-shaped island of **Aitutaki**, where avid snorkellers will find the best waters in the area.



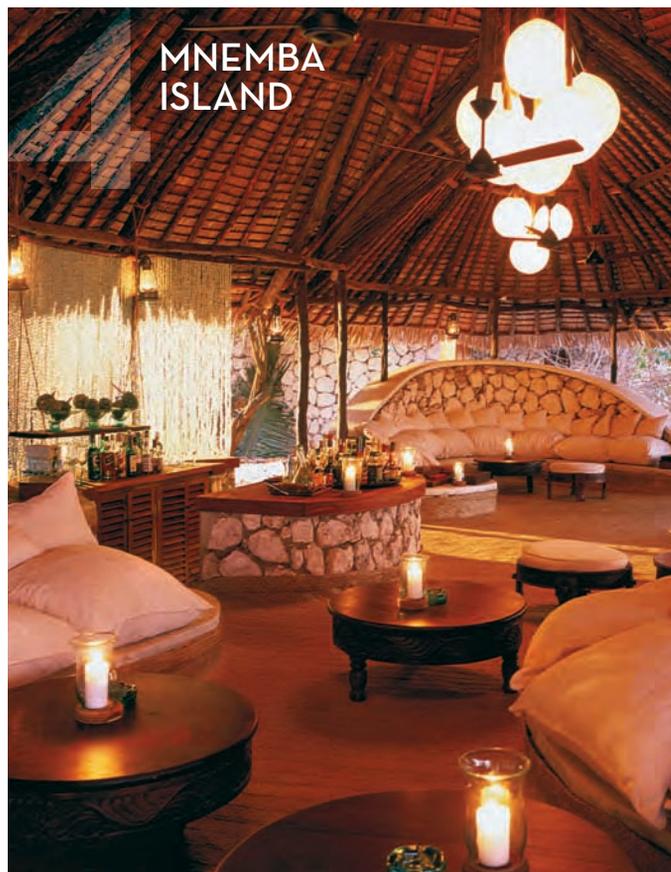
Shhh... don't tell anyone about **Lamu Island**, part of an archipelago in the **Indian Ocean** off the coast of **Kenya**. **Lamu Town**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is believed to be Kenya's oldest town and one of the first Swahili settlements along coastal **East Africa**. The island's history is as astonishing as its beaches.

Only since the 1970s have tourists discovered 14th-century Lamu Town. It remains untouched by mass tourism; there is only one car here – and that belongs to the mayor. Donkeys are the preferred means of transportation and can always be found on the picturesque narrow streets. It's the old-world charm and character of this Islamic town that appeal to many visitors. Men wear full-length *kbanzus* and *kofia* caps while women are completely covered. This dress code isn't expected from tourists but wearing appropriate clothing is encouraged – that means covering the knees and shoulders.

It is quietly said that Princess Caroline of Monaco and her friends have homes on the sandy beaches of **Shela Village**, about three kilometres from Lamu Town. If you seek luxury, privacy, safety, and a slow-paced and casual lifestyle, then Lamu Island is paradise found.

STAY **Peponi Hotel** is a house that grew into 24 individual, chic Swahili-style rooms, all with views of the Indian Ocean. Each room is a perfect escape from the world, but you just may want to sit in the public area that doubles as a meeting place; why not enjoy some good gossip while sipping a must-have house cocktail – the **Old Pal**.

PLAY Snorkelling and scuba diving are expected activities, but the 14th-century **Pwani Mosque** in Lamu Town is an example of the former prosperity of this area. Not to be missed is the excellent museum filled with Swahili artifacts. Take a day trip to **Manda Island** to see the **Takwa** ruins, the remains of an ancient Swahili town, or a trip by *dhow* to check out the archipelago's main attractions and posh island estates.

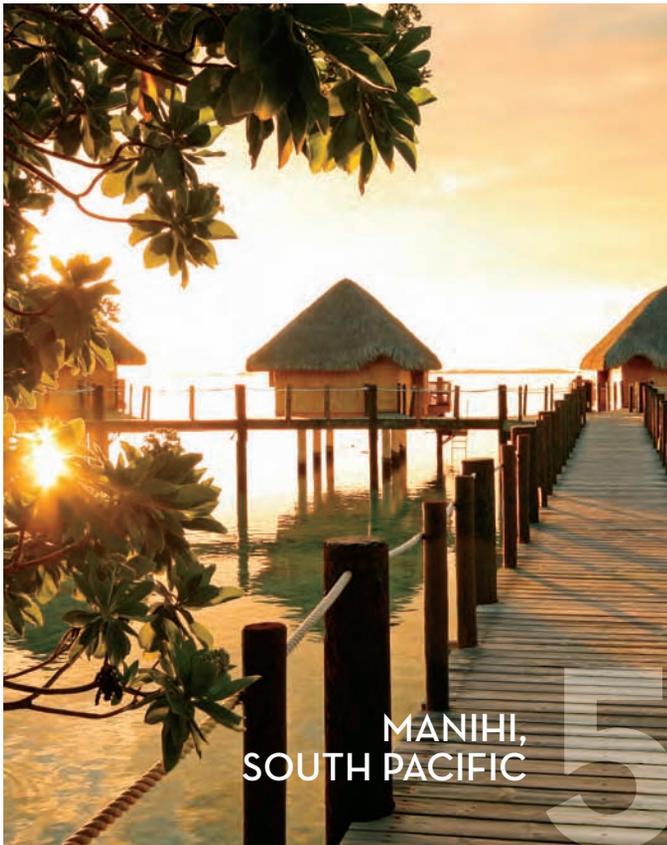


Languid. Unpretentious. Blissful. This **Spice Island** is located on an exclusive coral atoll in the **Indian Ocean** off the northeast coast of **Zanzibar**. Discovered by Arab traders in the 8th century, **Mnemba Island** has become a favourite for the well-heeled (Bill Gates has stayed here) who seek seclusion, romance and the azure ocean that surrounds pristine white sandy beaches. Upon arrival at **Zanzibar International Airport**, a chauffeured car will take you to the boat launch – be prepared to wade knee-deep into the water – and from there you'll sail to the island. There is no other means of transportation.

This 'barefoot luxury' paradise is so very relaxed and stress-free, where you'll wake to the scent of freshly baked coconut bread from the wood stove. Partake in as much (or as little) activity as you desire. Weather permitting – and that's almost always – romantic candlelit dinners are served on the beach: gourmet meals of fresh fruits, meats, seafood and fish that seem to jump from the sea into the frying pan.

STAY **Mnemba Island Lodge's** 10 thatched *bandas* have direct access to the beach and can be described as 'rustic luxury.' Although the island is very sophisticated, all you will need to bring is a carry-on with just the necessities. Forget about footwear since this is a barefoot paradise. As for wardrobe, your personal butler will deliver a dozen freshly laundered sarongs daily.

PLAY Although you may want to while away your days doing nothing at all, snorkelling, scuba diving, kayaking and deep-sea fishing for barracuda, mackerel, kingfish and marlin are available. Or take a traditional wooden *dhow* to explore the surrounding coral reefs.



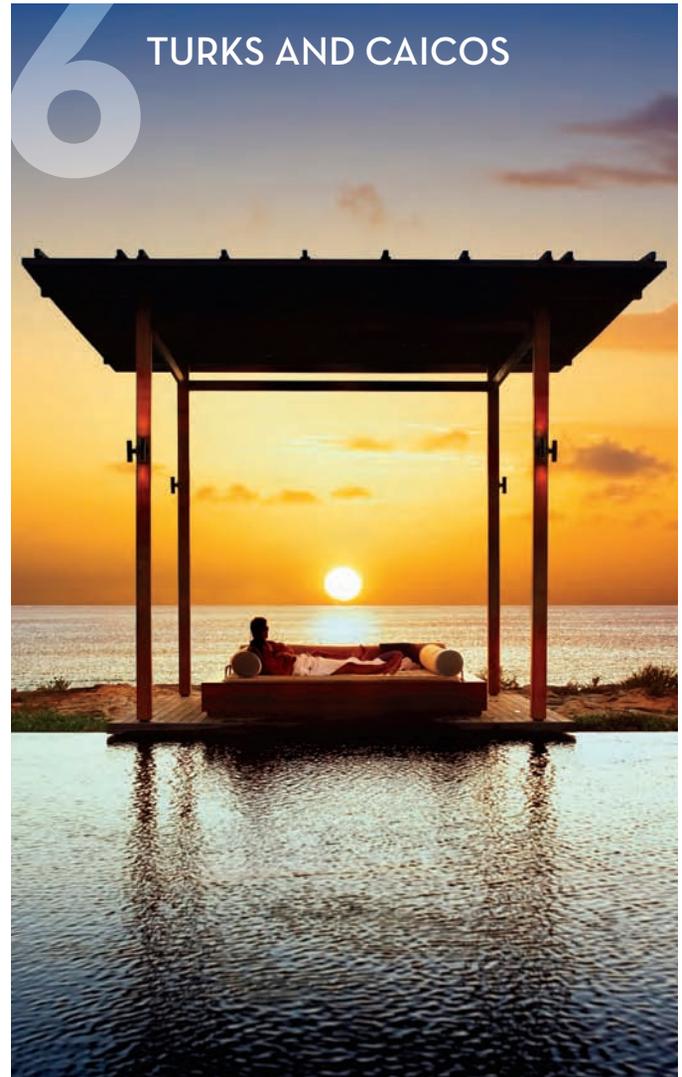
MANIHI,
SOUTH PACIFIC

The French Polynesian islands in the South Pacific are an extraordinary destination, where Paul Gauguin “entered into the truth, into nature.” Right he was. These remote tropical islands are the perfect place to appreciate the isolated treasures of nature. And in Manihi, an atoll in the Tuamotu Archipelago northeast of Tahiti, you’ll find the most impressive of treasures: black pearls. Learning about the local pearl industry is an experience you won’t want to miss. Manihi’s lagoon remains the only water where black pearls can be cultivated because it has remained free of pollution, is rich in plankton and experiences little temperature fluctuation. More than 60 pearl farms produce gems ranging in colour from grey to champagne and aubergine, magenta, bronze, peacock green and deep black. The darker the colour, the higher the price.

With only one resort on the island and a population of a mere 800, any social activity will be centred on your hotel, where chances are you’ll meet some pretty interesting fellow adventurers from around the world.

STAY The luxurious Manihi Pearl Beach Resort has only 22 beach and 19 overwater bungalows, prompting many a guest to consider the idea of permanent residence! A bonus of the overwater bungalows are the glass tables embedded in the floor from which you can feed and admire colourful fish in the coral below. The resort includes two boutiques, Poe Rava Restaurant serving international and Polynesian foods, and the Miki Miki Bar, nestled between the beach and freshwater pool, which has been cleverly surrounded with fine white sand, giving the impression of a very private beach.

PLAY Take a 10-minute speedboat ride to the Takovea pearl farm, book a romantic ‘Motu picnic’ on your own secluded islet or take a sunset cruise.



TURKS AND CAICOS

Once a popular hideout for pirates and twice proposed to become part of Canada, the Turks and Caicos Islands in the northern Caribbean have long been a favourite hangout for Hollywood’s elite but also attract many Canadian visitors. Only a four-hour flight from Toronto to Providenciales, it’s not too far from home and offers all the necessary ingredients one might expect of a perfect island vacation, including a divine climate, calm clear waters and pristine sand beaches. And if development is happening too quickly for you in one place, there’s always another nearby island where you can find more solitude.

STAY The über-luxurious Parrot Cay is still unspoiled, which is a great contrast to some of the pampered divas who come to this stunning resort in Providenciales. A-list celebrities either visit the hotel or have private residences. Bruce Willis and designer Donna Karan have their own villas here and it was the site of Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner’s wedding. Eva Longoria and Tony Parker honeymooned here and, while their marriage sadly didn’t last, the beauty of this place endures.

PLAY The amazing offerings of the hotel’s renowned spa and famed haute cuisine certainly embellish the hotel’s longstanding reputation. However, it’s not just known for the stars; Parrot Cay is renowned worldwide as the perfect 10 for five-star leisure, atmosphere and water activities.

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TURTLE ISLAND, FIJI

From **Nadi**, the 35-minute flight from the private airport in a Beaver float plane to **Turtle Island** is a trip in itself and a fine introduction to one of the most romantic, isolated and exclusive islands, part of the **Yasawa** group, in the **Republic of Fiji**. Surrounded by ancient uninhabited and undeveloped volcanic lagoons, Turtle Island has become the idyllic getaway with a most unusual story. According to the island's owner, an American named Richard Evanson, the untouched 500-acre island was purchased in 1972 for a mere \$500. Over the years, with the help of the islanders, it has become an opportunity, albeit an expensive one, to find your adventurous or private self.

STAY Each of the 14 private and spacious *bures* (huts) features hardwood throughout, and includes an indoor plunge/spa pool and bathrooms with double sinks, showers and loos. Take an early morning walk on one of the 14 sandy beaches or sit on the verandah to watch the most amazing sunrises and sunsets. Little wonder that the film *The Blue Lagoon* was shot here, as were several swimsuit issues for *Sports Illustrated*.

PLAY Total relaxation means the only distractions on the island, apart from the usual watersports, are horseback rides to the top of the small mountain for late-afternoon drinks, hikes along the nearly six-kilometre trail, crab races, saving turtles, listening to the staff sing a *cappella* hymns or visiting the expansive herb and vegetable garden.



KOH SAMUI, THAILAND



What makes this island in the **Gulf of Thailand** more popular than well-known destinations like **Phuket**? In **Koh Samui** it's the fine white sand beaches that stretch for miles, fringed with coconut palms and with a far less hectic ambience. Koh Samui has enough beaches to suit every taste, but certainly the best is **Chaweng**. From your arrival at Koh Samui Airport, which has won awards as one of the most environmentally friendly, you'll find modern existence mixed with tradition and beaches galore. Koh Samui, considered the Asian boutique island, still has echoes of its halcyon days.

STAY New hotels are sprouting up constantly, but **Anantara Lawana Resort & Spa**, with its forested coastline, lush foliage, elegant rooms and splendid pool villas on the beach, wins hands down. And the décor is a great mix of the original Chinese settlers and Thai style. Some rooms have personal butlers.

PLAY For those who aren't sun-worshippers, there's tennis, golf, sailing and biking – or consider renting watercraft to explore the island. But this being **Thailand**, there are great spas offering Thai massage among the treatments, as well as an Eastern holistic health approach for those who are interested in increased wellness. With international restaurants and world-class chefs, it's only logical that there are also Thai cooking classes that can be arranged by the hotel staff. Come evening, get a taste of the nightlife; Koh Samui has discos, nightclubs, pubs and bars.



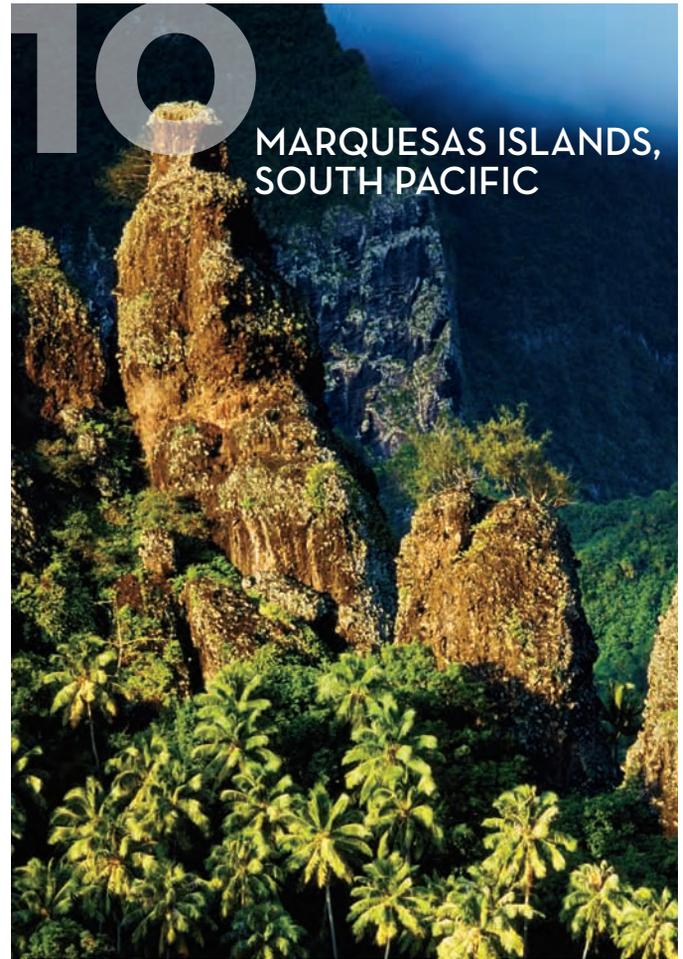
PAPEETE, TAHITI

Imagine early morning, the sun already bright, sitting at an outdoor café on the main strip of **Boulevard Pomare**, sipping a cup of great café au lait and nibbling on the best croissant this side of Paris, all the time staring at the azure water filling up with cruise ships in **Papeete**, the capital of Tahiti. Yes, this island, the largest in **French Polynesia**, is the **Queen of the Pacific**, with a backdrop of majestic mountains.

Get into shopping mode and discover the fine cotton and designs by local designers. There's also the large, busy covered market with some very fine arts and crafts at fair prices. All shops and markets have competition, so don't forget to negotiate. It's enough to make one dizzy, so perhaps another sit-down and cup of coffee may be required afterwards!

STAY Only three kilometres away from the city centre is the **InterContinental Tahiti Resort**, long rated as one of the island's top places to stay. Here you can wander through the quiet 30 acres of lush, colourful gardens, admire the peaceful and deepest blue lagoon and decide which of the two infinity swimming pools to try. Reservations are a must at the extraordinary **Le Lotus Restaurant**, where the menu was masterminded by a three-star Michelin chef.

PLAY Beginners and pros alike will enjoy a round of golf at the **Olivier Bréaud International Golf Course**, located approximately 45 minutes from the hotel. The 18-hole, 6,900 yard long par 72 golf course has become a destination for golfers from around the world and is part of the Australian PGA circuit.



MARQUESAS ISLANDS, SOUTH PACIFIC

If you want to be transported to another world, a mysterious hidden paradise farthest away from any continent, head to the **Marquesas Islands**. The spiral peaks of volcanic mountains, covered by dense, lush foliage, pierce the clouds above the 15 islands, more than half of which remain unpopulated. The natural wonders here are extraordinary: from staggeringly high waterfalls and secluded valleys teeming with exotic flowers like plumeria, bougainvillea, orchids, spider lilies, ylang-ylang and jasmine, to sheer volcanic cliffs and never-to-be-forgotten vistas.

Of the 15 islands, only six are inhabited and the two largest islands, **Nuku Hiva** and **Hiva Oa**, are the ones most visited by tourists. Still, with approximately 9,000 inhabitants and 200 tourists at any given time, you won't exactly have to worry about fighting the crowds, and the welcome is always warm.

STAY The **Keikahanui Nuku Hiva Pearl Lodge** is one of the few five-star hotels on the island of Nuku Hiva. Its bungalows are built entirely from indigenous wood, and panoramic terraces offer spectacular views of the bay and the capital village of **Taiohae** below. Dip into the hotel's infinity pool or walk to the black sand beach just 50 steps below.

PLAY Certainly this island is a haven for hiking, trekking and tours that take you through dense jungles. One highlight is the 1,100-foot **Vaipo** waterfall - just make sure you have insect repellent. The **North Islands** include some well-preserved archaeological sites - **Hikokua** and **Te I'ipoka** among them. The climb to the petroglyphs is steep and slippery but well worth the effort. And one can't leave the island without a meal (read: feast) at **Chez Yvonne**. Opt for curry chicken, fried breadfruit and the local beer, **Hinano**.

©DOUGLAS PEEBLES/ASTOCK PHOTO | ©PETE ATKINSON/GETTY

Worldly Delights: Opening Soon

Mary Luz Mejia

A Taste of Customized Olé!

If you find yourself in one of **Mexico's** most picturesque culinary gems, the city of **Oaxaca**, and feel like some one-on-one culinary face time with chef **Pilar Cabrera Arroyo** (who taught **Rick Bayless** her region's fine fare), you're in luck! She is now offering private cooking classes in her kitted-out home kitchen, where you determine the menu and what technique or area you'd like to focus on. Regional chiles? Mole from scratch? *Si!* Classes range from US\$85 to US\$110 per person (depending on your menu). To reserve, contact info@casadelossabores.com.



Under a Michelin Star

In **La Madeleine-sous-Montreuil** in France's **Pas-de-Calais** region (a two-hour drive from **Paris**) sits the **Patrick Bouchain** (responsible for the Troisgros family's La Colline du Colombier project in Burgundy) and **Loic Julienne** renovated auberge **La Grenouillère**. Here, guests are treated to the whimsical, precise creations of talented chef **Alexandre Gauthier** amid cutting-edge architecture and Michelin-starred cuisine. Visit www.lagrenouillere.fr for more information.

Shuck It!

A built-to-last oyster knife designed by the *Guinness Book of World Records* holder for oyster shucking, Canadian **Patrick McMurray**, is now available to oyster lovers. The pistol-grip knife with a 4" blade is, in McMurray's words, 'ergodynamic,' which means you exert less force to open your favourite bivalves. He's also created a shucking board and mesh steel glove for those who want all the accoutrements – just in time for backyard parties! \$30 for the knife, \$45 for the board and \$90 for the glove. Available at www.shuckerpaddy.com.



A La Cucina con Biba

After years of oft-repeated requests, the queen of Italian cuisine, **Biba Caggiano**, has decided to take food lovers back into the kitchen. Fifteen lucky students per class will cook and learn next to Biba herself – one of Italy's finest culinary ambassadors – at her **Sacramento, California** restaurant **Biba**. Students enjoy an informal lunch comprised of their own creations and keep the recipes for each dish (from hand-rolled gnocchi to the perfect risotto) so they can replicate the flavours of Italia at home. Biba Restaurant information: www.biba-restaurant.com. To reserve your spot (US\$125 per person) call Karen at (916) 455-6859.

Toronto Beyond the 'Licious

Every summer and winter, restaurants in **Toronto** create prix fixe menus to entice diners. Recently, savvy restaurateurs have decided to offer new culinary events within the Winterlicious or Summerlicious window. At the Spanish restaurant, **Embrujo Flamenco**, diners were treated to arias from Bizet's *Carmen* performed by strolling opera singers. Sherried onion soup with saffron and bacon-wrapped dates accompanied tales of the beautiful gypsy with a fiery temper. For this summer's special events (July 8–24, 2011), go to http://www.toronto.ca/special_events/summerlicious/post/index.htm.



Worldly Delights: Tasmania

Tasmania's unspoiled landscape offers extraordinary edibles
 Sarah B. Hood



Traditionally, **Australia's** temperate island state of **Tasmania** has been known for its apple, which thrive due to the cooler winters and warm summer months. These apples include tart green Granny Smiths, blushing Jonathans and red-streaked Jonagolds – familiar to North Americans – as well as the lesser known Democrats and Red Fujis. A prime way to sample Tasmania's apple bounty is as hard cider.

Tasmanian pubs increasingly offer ciders on tap; the everyday label is **Mercury**, but those seeking a more artisanal spin should look for **Two Metre Tall**, which produces cider and ale at its own 600-hectare farm in the **Derwent Valley**, just outside Tasmania's capital, **Hobart**. Its **Huon Farmhouse Dry Cider** is made from the old English apple variety known as **Sturmer Pippin** and is brewed in the bottle. The Two Metre Tall Company also brews a pear cider called **Poire**. From October to April, visitors are welcome to attend a series of food and music events at the farm.

Many apple producers have diversified to grow stone fruit and grapes, and over the past 15 years, Tasmania has established itself as a producer of cooler climate wines: in particular Pinot Noirs and champagne-style sparkling wines. These days Hobart and Tasmania's second-largest city, **Launceston**, are surrounded by vineyards. **Wine Tasmania** defines four wine routes: Launceston's **Tamar Valley**, the **Southern wine route** around Hobart, the **East Coast route** around **Bicheno** and the **North West route** around **Devonport**. (The drive from Hobart in the south to Launceston in the north is about two and a half hours via the island's main highway.)

Tasmania's cheese industry is also thriving, thanks to an abundance of dairy cows grazing in pristine fields. **Mersey Valley** cheese is available at every Coles (Tasmania's major supermarket chain) and the well-known **King Island Dairy**, located on a remote island in **Bass Strait** between Tasmania and the Australian mainland, welcomes visitors to its **Fromagerie** tasting room.

Smaller artisanal producers include **Ashgrove Farm Cheese** in **Elizabeth Town**, west of Launceston, where cheesemaking is demonstrated along with samplings and sales of local foods. Its cheddar-style cheeses include **Wild Wasabi**; other flavours include the lovely local lavender and the native pepperberry. **Nick Haddow's Bruny Island Cheese Company** handcrafts soft and hard cow and goat cheeses. Its **Cellar Door** tasting room is open for wine, cheese and fresh-baked breads. It's accessible via ferry from the **Channel Highway** south of Hobart.

Of course, seafood is also a big part of Tasmanian cuisine, especially crayfish (what North Americans would call lobster), abalone and oysters. Owned by an old Tasmanian fishing family, **Mures** is a landmark on the Hobart waterfront and offers its diners a view of fishing boats unloading their catch of the day. Another nearby institution is the unpretentious **Fish Frenzy**, which offers gourmet fish 'n' chips under dockside umbrellas.

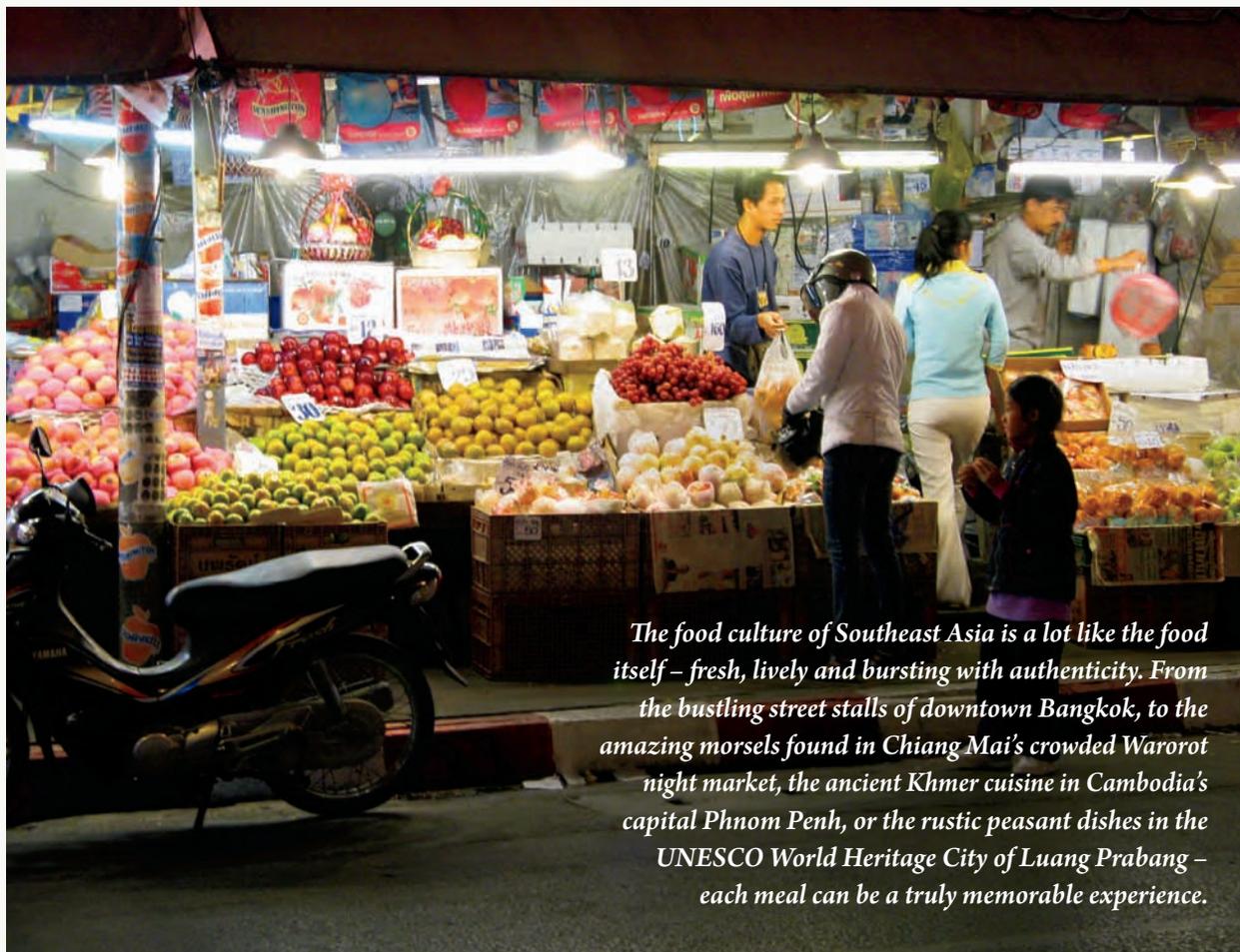
But perhaps the most precious of Tasmania's food products is its honey. Home to untouched temperate rain forests, Tasmania provides a unique environment for bees. In particular, Tasmanian leatherwood honey is internationally renowned as an incomparable delicacy. Made from the pollen of the lovely white flowers of the leatherwood tree, its smooth texture and complex bouquet – redolent of eucalyptus, tea tree and other unexpected flavours – make it unparalleled.

Honey can be found in food boutiques across the island, but **Honey Tasmania** in Launceston assembles a wonderful array from fine producers like **Miellerie** – and tastings are free. It's located on **Quadrant Mall**, which curves off **St. John Street**, a pleasant two-storey retail area of mixed Victorian and modern architecture with a charming illuminated fountain in Launceston's very walkable town centre.

Still unspoiled, Tasmania offers a temperate climate and distinctive terroir that make it a choice find for lovers of simple foods made from the purest of natural ingredients. ▣

Worldly Delights: Southeast Asia

Gettin' schooled in Southeast Asia
Lauren Wilson



The food culture of Southeast Asia is a lot like the food itself – fresh, lively and bursting with authenticity. From the bustling street stalls of downtown Bangkok, to the amazing morsels found in Chiang Mai's crowded Warorot night market, the ancient Khmer cuisine in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh, or the rustic peasant dishes in the UNESCO World Heritage City of Luang Prabang – each meal can be a truly memorable experience.

If the ample supply of regional fare from local markets, street vendors and restaurants doesn't quite scratch your foodie itch, why not connect with a whole host of international food lovers while learning how to replicate these experiences at home by taking a cooking class or two (or three).

Chiang Mai Thai Cookery School

LOCATION: Approximately 750 kilometres northwest of **Bangkok**, **Chiang Mai** is **Thailand's** sweetheart destination as much for its regional cuisine as for its perfectly quaint moated and walled city centre. It absolutely overflows with classic Northern Thai charm and hospitality. The regional cuisine here is distinctly different from the rest of Thailand. You will see

influences from **China** and neighbouring **Laos**, while the cooler climate has led to a preference for heavier dishes like sticky rice instead of steamed, and a penchant for pork in all its incarnations – like fermented sausages (*naem mu*) and crispy fried skin (*khaep mu*) – over the poultry and seafood preferred farther south.

THE SKINNY: Founded by seasoned chef and Thai television personality **Sompon Nabnian**, **Chiang Mai Thai Cookery School** has been teaching food lovers from all over the globe to cook like locals for nearly 20 years. Beginner classes will familiarize you with traditional Thai dishes and ingredients, while the Master level classes are perfect for seasoned cooks who want to

learn from chef Nabnian himself. After a demonstration from the instructor discussing techniques and Thai ingredients (with possible Western substitutions for them), students will spend most of their time working on their own to prepare dishes like *pla goong*, a northeastern-style prawn salad, or *mu hanglay gai*, Chiang Mai curry with pork and vegetables. Finish off the class with a laid-back meal, where you can enjoy the fruits of your labour.

CLASS SIZE: Maximum of 25 people

COST: 1,450 to 3,000 baht (approximately \$50 to \$100) per class

Worldly Delights: Southeast Asia



Tamnak Lao Cooking School

Tamnak Lao Cooking School

LOCATION: After years of war and isolation, Laos opened its doors to the world of tourism in 1989. The country's laid-back approach to life and the renowned warmth of its people have remained intact, despite its fast-growing popularity among the travel cognoscenti. In the former royal capital city of **Luang Prabang**, UNESCO World Heritage protection means you will find no trucks or buses on its streets. It's a city of rich historical significance, where French provincial architecture gives way to ritual monastic processions (*tak bat*) and blushing riverside sunsets, weaving a tapestry unlike anywhere else in Southeast Asia.

The food is simple and rustic – most cooking is still done outdoors over small clay vessels filled with embers. The cuisine includes a wide variety of curries and soups served with rice and noodles, along with smoky and flavourful barbecued meats. Kicking back with family and friends to share a good long meal and a few glasses of *lao lao* (the signature rice whiskey) is a well-loved pastime.

THE SKINNY: Start the day weaving your way through the stalls of **Phosi Market**, where owner **Ruth Borthwick** points out Southeast Asian staples like morning glory and jackfruit alongside a wide variety of treasures that come straight from the Laotian jungle, like wild honey, leafy greens and a large variety of fungi. She will also point out that 'nose-to-tail' eating has been going on here for centuries, as you pass vendors offering fresh cuts of everything from the nose to, well, the tail. Once back at the school, your instructors demonstrate classic Laotian dishes like fried sticky rice noodles with chicken and vegetables (*feu khua*) along with Luang Prabang specialties like *nyam salat*, a salad of tomato, cucumber, salted peanuts, ground pork and hard-boiled eggs, and *jeowbong*, a saucy chili paste used both as a condiment and in place of chilies in a variety of dishes. After the demo, students buddy up to prepare a dish or two that will be shared with the whole class – after all, as Laotians say, "food eaten together always tastes good!"

CLASS SIZE: Maximum of 12 people

COST: Day classes \$30; evening classes \$25.

Frizz Restaurant's Cambodia Cooking Class

LOCATION: While most people make a beeline for the mesmerizing **Angkor** ruins when travelling to **Cambodia**, the country's lively capital, **Phnom Penh**, holds as much history and even more excitement than **Siem Reap**. Crowded local markets, eye-opening museums, gorgeous temples and the experience of day-to-day life in this vibrant city will all give you an understanding of where Cambodia has come from and where it is headed. Khmer cuisine is centuries old and has incorporated influences from France, China, India, Thailand and Vietnam over its long history, while staples like *kroeung*, an herb paste that forms the base of most curries, are unique to Khmer cuisine.

THE SKINNY: As in Laos your day will begin with a tour, where you'll want to stick close to your guide in order to hear over the hustle and bustle of the busy **Kandal Market**. Return to an open-air rooftop classroom for your cooking demo, where you will learn in more detail about the ingredients you just saw at the market. Each dish is prepared individually and from scratch, meaning you get to practise those knife skills, because nothing is prepared for you ahead of time. After some hard work, enjoy such Khmer dishes as *amok*, a coconut-based curry with fish that is steamed in banana leaves, *sayong jayk*, sausages served in the large crimson flowers of a banana tree, or *ngorm krouch tlong*, a refreshing pomelo salad with shrimp.

CLASS SIZE: Maximum of 10 people

COST: \$12.50 (half day); \$20 (full day)



Did Someone Say Street Eats?

Food lovers from all over the world travel to Southeast Asia for the dizzying array of delicious street fare. Do not miss *khanom krok* – creamy bite-sized coconut custards fried street-side for breakfast in Thailand. Street eats become a little more exotic in Cambodia: from skewered barbecued snake to beetles, grasshoppers and anything else that crawls. If you want something a little less adventurous, try *kah-lan*, coconut-flavoured sticky rice mixed with accents like mango, red bean or peanuts, then roasted in bamboo. In Laos locals love *kaipan*, deep-fried seaweed (or to be more precise, riverweed) from the **Nam Khan** or **Mekong** rivers. Enjoy it seasoned with salt, garlic and sesame seeds, and wash it down with a cold Beerlao.

Worldly Delights: Dubai

Think **Dubai** and your first thoughts might be of fast cars and monstrous buildings stretching toward the sky. But before all the glitz and glamour, this emirate was a quiet pearl-fishing village and an important stop along the trade route between **Mesopotamia** and the **Indus Valley**. Today, as an economic centre in the **Middle East**, Dubai boasts a kaleidoscope of an international workforce, which has led to the development of a thriving food scene that's a microcosm of the world's cuisine.

To delve into its trading past, a walk through the serpentine lanes of the spice *souk* (market) is a must. With the aroma of sweet frankincense hanging in the air, vendors beckon you to their generations-old stores. Bulging sacks of Malabar pepper, dried rose petals and boxes of Iranian saffron tempt you as you haggle for the best price. The wide selection of herbs and spices from across the continents is a testament to the Emirate's cosmopolitan population.

Back Road Dining

Tasting the Middle East starts right on the street corners, where you're never far away from a shawarma vendor. Deftly slicing thin slivers of lamb or chicken from a large rotating skewer, hawkers tuck the succulent meat and fries into warmed pita bread slathered with a rich garlic sauce, instantly providing a comforting meal. Paired with the mysterious 'cocktail,' a signature drink made with a blend of fresh fruit like bananas, grapes, kiwis and pomegranates, your taste buds register just one flavour – delicious!

With a large expatriate Indian and Pakistani population, curry is a sort of passion here. And when a craving strikes, most roads lead to **Ravi's in Al Satwa**. Don't let the small, worn-down space put you off; the restaurant is known for fluffy naan, perfectly cooked tandoori chicken and Pakistani specialties like *haleem* – a slow-cooked combination of lentils and meat that's reduced to a rib-sticking stew. The decor is sparse, but it's the butter chicken and meltingly tender kebabs that constantly guarantee a lineup at the door.

Beverley Ann D'Cruz goes global



Michelin Masters

When Michelin-starred **Gordon Ramsay** decided to open his first restaurant outside the U.K., he chose to do so at the **Hilton Dubai Creek** and called it **Verre**. Serving a refined take on European cuisine, the elegant restaurant offers one of the best chef's tables in the region. A nine-course seasonally-inspired menu takes guests through delicacies like braised Bavarian pork belly and halibut with crispy frog's legs – all while viewing the live action in the kitchen, supervised under the watchful eye of executive chef **Scott Price**.

At the **Grosvenor House Dubai**, fellow Brit **Gary Rhodes** presents modern British cuisine at his namesake restaurant, **Rhodes Mezzanine**. Rejuvenated classics like buttered salmon with crushed

new potatoes and foie gras and smoked eel terrine are served amid a magnolia backdrop, keeping the focus rightfully on the food. For dessert, childhood favourites like steamed jam roly-poly and bread and butter pudding leap out from the menu. But it's the warm, flaky scones with clotted cream at the meal's end that will leave you weak in the knees.

Café Culture

Dubai's local café scene has come into its own, proving that excellent food is available outside the five-star realm. For a wholesome meal, grab a seat at the **Lime Tree Café** that champions the locavore approach, on ritzy **Jumeirah Beach Road**. Free-range eggs are used for breakfast specials like eggs

Florentine, and nutritious meals like grilled aubergine and halloumi salad with pomegranate dressing have turned many patrons into regulars. The towering carrot cake crowned with thick cream cheese frosting is legendary in the Emirate and is by itself worth a visit.

At the funky purple-hued **MORE Café**, the eclectic menu offers something to please all palates. The menu gives a nod to all cultures, with everything from South African *bobotie* to *paella* and Dutch *pannekoeken* on offer. If the choices prove daunting, settle for the Anna Mari Se Kiep – a tender chicken breast stuffed with ricotta and tarragon and served with a generous helping of roasted baby potatoes. Simple roast chicken and potatoes couldn't have been done with more panache. Don't forget to save room for the sinful dark chocolate fondant – yum!

Five-Star Service

From the spice *souk* to the **Burj Khalifa**, the world's tallest building, Dubai has come a long way – economically and gastronomically. At **The Palace Hotel's** signature Thai restaurant **Thiptara**, both these worlds come together as patrons are treated to a sweeping view of the Burj Khalifa and the majestic **Dubai Fountain** while they relish authentic favourites like crispy sea bass, chili-flecked crab cakes and roasted duck with tamarind sauce. Kaffir lime leaves and garlic perfume the restaurant, providing a delectable aromatherapy session amid a backdrop that won't soon be forgotten.

No trip to Dubai would be complete without Friday brunch. It's a weekly tradition that the Emirate has turned into a statement of its own. At **Le Meridien Airport Hotel's Yalumba** restaurant, unlimited Bollinger Champagne is served to accompany an international buffet that would defy any royal banquet. Sushi, freshly grilled seafood, charcuterie, roast lamb – one look at the spread and you'll soon realize that you can savour a whirlwind gastronomic tour of the world all on just one plate. ▣



Worldly Delights: Exotic Wine Regions

Margaret Swaine

In 2010 China was the seventh-largest wine-producing country in the world, and number one in terms of expected growth.



Judy Leissner, Grace Vineyard

I had some time to kill at **Fisherman's Cove** in **Chennai, India** so I went to the bar and asked for a glass of white wine. To my delight and surprise, I was offered several choices, all from local wineries. India may be a predominantly non-drinking country, but it's also a land full of contradictions.

Wine has been made in India for almost a thousand years. According to **Neeraj Dubey**, a wine-loving corporate lawyer based in **Delhi**, European travellers brought wine to the courts of the Mughal emperors and helped establish royal vineyards. In the 1600s the British planted vineyards in Surat and Kashmir. In subsequent centuries the vineyards were destroyed but a wine revival began in 1985. While the industry is still in its formative stage, I was told there are now 29 wineries – despite a directive against 'intoxicating drinks' in the constitution of India. **Sula Winery** in **Nashik** (180 kilometres from **Mumbai**) and **Grover Vineyards** in the **Nandi Hills** region (60 kilometres north of **Bangalore**) are among the largest and best known, attracting thousands of visitors a year.

This got me to thinking about other exotic wine regions, and a little research turned up some surprising facts. In 2010 **China** was the seventh-largest wine-producing country in the world, and number one in terms of expected growth. The market for wine in China is growing at double-digit rates per annum and the country clearly has the potential to make good wines. COFCO, China's huge food conglomerate, which produces everything edible and drinkable including the rather ordinary **Great Wall** wines (China's largest producer), has decided to compete with the world's greats.

At **Chateau Junding**, in **Shandong Province**, they've paired fine winemaking with lifestyle tourism. Shandong is the hot spot when it comes to China's wine scene. Junding is the largest wine resort in Asia offering 'wine lockers' for affluent Chinese. Guests can stay in the 92-room hotel, play a round of golf and wander through cellars and production facilities furnished with the best equipment money can buy. Chateau Junding is also making among the best wines in China from classic French grape varieties. The

Cabernet comes from one of Great Wall's older plots, allowing it to produce a wine of quality and concentration. There are hundreds of wineries in China, most of them small compared to other alcoholic beverage enterprises; the top six wineries contributed 70 per cent of the total.

Grace Vineyard in **Shaanxi**, **Chateau Changyu Afip Global** in **Beijing**, **Huadong-Parry Chateau and Winery** in **Qingdao** (bottlings include an icewine made from Canadian juice) and **Jade Valley Wine & Resort** are among the wineries on the tour circuit for wine lovers. **Gaoyuanyuan Vineyard** boasts Bordeaux-trained **Emma Gao** – one of the few female winemakers in China. She worked for **Torres China** and produces impressive reds. Jade Valley, a winery-cum-hotel-cum-spa designed by one of China's most famous architects, sits near the site of the terracotta warriors.

In **Turkey**, long considered one of the cradles of civilization, there is a wine culture that dates back 8,000 years. **Taner Ogutoglu**, director of Wines of Turkey, says, "Turkey is part of a region where winemaking has a very long history and where it possibly originated by at least 7000 BC."



Turkey is an almost entirely Muslim country and during certain periods of its history wine was prohibited, but luckily the vineyards were not destroyed. Instead, the grapes were used for other purposes. In the late 1980s the growth of tourism substantially boosted wine sales, giving wineries the impetus to invest in the latest technology, develop their programs, expand their vineyards and plant international and local grape varieties to international quality standards. According to Ogutoglu, Turkey now ranks sixth in the world in grape production and last year won 155 medals in wine competitions around the world. However, the five most popular native Turkish grape varieties – **Okuzgozu** ('Bullseye'), **Kalecik Karasi** and **Bogazkere** for reds, and **Narince** and **Emir** for whites – are not well known outside the country, which makes a visit even more compelling.

Closer to home, there are now wineries in almost every state in the **United States** and almost every province in **Canada**. Among the exalted local exotics, **Virginia** now has more than 165 wineries and boasts **Virginia Wine Month** every fall, with dozens of festivals, special tastings and tours across the state throughout the month of October. This began in 1988 as a way to support the state's burgeoning wine business – just 40 wineries at the time – and promote wine travel in Virginia. Virginia now has 16 wine trails statewide, and approximately one million travellers visit a winery while vacationing in Virginia.

Texas has 217 wineries and is the fifth-largest wine-producing state in the United States after **California**, **New York**, **Washington** and **Oregon**. The majority of Texas wineries are small family-owned operations located outside urban areas, and there are eight wine trails across the state. October is also **Texas Wine Month**, an annual celebration of the state's thriving wine industry, with month-long celebrations. The Lone Star State grows an array of grape varieties, and in the coming years wine enthusiasts can expect to enjoy Texas wines made from Italy's Aglianico, Montepulciano and Dolcetto varietals; Spain's Tempranillo and Albariño varietals; as well as southern France's Marsanne, Syrah and Mourvèdre

varietals. This April the Texas Department of Agriculture launches '**Go Texan or Go Thirsty**,' a marketing campaign to promote restaurants that carry Texas wines.

In Canada, **Nova Scotia** is a relatively unknown wine-growing region. Its winery association has plans to increase vineyard acreage in the province from 400 to 1,000 acres and the number of wineries from 12 to 20 by 2020. Located five kilometres from **Wolfville** in **Gaspereau Valley**, **Benjamin Bridge Vineyard's** goal is to be known internationally for its sparkling wines. Since 2002, it has been working with Canadian winery consultant **Peter Gamble** and renowned French Champagne expert **Raphael Brisbois** (of **Piper-Heidsieck** fame), to develop sparkling wines from its own estate-grown grapes with the quality level of *cuvée de prestige* Champagnes. "These wines are cellared for up to eight years in order to develop the complexity of flavours expected of great Champagne," explains **Jean-Benoit Deslauriers**, who joined the team in 2008 as resident winemaker. In November 2010, Benjamin Bridge released its much anticipated inaugural *méthode classique* sparkling wines in Nova Scotia – the **2004 Brut Reserve** (Pinot Noir and Chardonnay blend) and the **2004 Blanc de Noirs** (100% Pinot Noir) – virtually selling out within the first two months. Critical reviews have been glowing. ▣



Worldly Delights: Dinner Clubs

Somewhere between an intimate restaurant dining experience and a personal dinner party sits the increasingly popular communal dinner club experience. From **Auckland** to **Zurich**, there are as many dinner club options as there are imaginative hosts but, in this case, we're talking about excellent home cooks or professional chefs who offer prix fixe dinner parties in their homes or culinary studios and who generally only advertise by word of mouth (or social media). We're not talking about exclusive 'underground' dinner parties that you have to be specially invited to attend and for which you usually end up paying a king's ransom. Instead, I'd like you to join me on some exceptional culinary escapes that make for a deliciously memorable evening in the company of friends, old and new.

In **Buenos Aires**, as in **Spain**, **France** and **Italy**, the *puerta cerrada* (or 'closed door') dinner club experience isn't new. The concept has been around since the 1930s, often under different names and guises – think of the supper clubs of old Hollywood or the U.K. that featured entertainment, pre- and post-meal cocktails were served and you danced the night away. Today's *puerta cerrada*, however, is a cozier affair in which the host determines the menu and the entertainment (if any) and you, the paying guest, agree to show up at an appointed time, bring your own wine and enjoy the evening's offerings.

In this land of carnivores, Argentinean star chef **Diego Felix** crafts spectacular vegetarian, pescatarian or vegan five-course meals at his **Casa Felix** (www.diegofelix.com) *puerta cerrada* in the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of **Chacarita**. Chef Felix's dinner club is listed as one of the very best in the city by top travel magazines, so the 'secret' is out and online reservations are *de rigueur*. But that doesn't stop guests from filling his elegant art deco open-air courtyard, where they are treated to a welcome cocktail, perhaps a kumquat-infused pisco. Guests might start with a mushroom and pumpkin seed empanada, followed by an imaginative garden-fresh salad, an apple mint granita palate cleanser and a main of grilled fish surrounded by a wonderfully

Come to my kitchen: How the dinner club experience is changing the way we dine

Mary Luz Mejia



aromatic broth and vegetables. Five courses run AR\$150 (about \$40 depending on the exchange rate). Diners describe the experience as 'unparalleled' and Felix says that those coming to his place "are searching or looking for a totally different experience. It's my house, not a restaurant – so it's more chill."

Nearby in **Casa SaltShaker** (www.casasaltshaker.com), food writer, trained chef and sommelier **Dan Perlman** and his partner **Henry Tapia** welcome eclectic food lovers around their table for international gourmet fare that's usually themed: highlighting an in-season ingredient, festival or historic event. From Tibetan to Turkish, former New Yorker Perlman isn't shy when it comes to culinary experimentation, much to his guests' delight. "We serve food here that you can't easily find in local restaurants," he explains, adding, "The best thing for me, as a chef, is that I get to do what I want. I can change it from one night to the next."

A five-course menu runs AR\$130 (\$35), or take advantage of Perlman's wine pairings for \$50 including your meal.

Changing it up and pushing culinary boundaries is what drives most chefs. For Italian-born **Massimo Bruno**, his **Massimo Bruno's Italian Supper Club** (www.meetup.com/MassimoBrunosSupperClub) evenings in **Toronto** have given him the opportunity to dig deep into his homeland's culinary history. "I started a supper club to promote Italian food in a really authentic way, the way we eat in Italy: at home, rustic, good, comforting food. I also wanted to learn more about Italian regional cuisine and the Supper Club is taking me on an amazing journey of discovering flavours, traditions and the history of my own country," explains Bruno. These multi-course gustatory feasts are BYO wine and range from \$65 to \$75 per person.

From a tidy whitewashed studio in the east end of Toronto, Bruno's hostess



Andrea greets guests while the chef and his able kitchen assistant whip up family-style regional Italian meals that have you feeling as if *nonna* were lovingly ladling *brodo* into your bowl herself. Born in **Puglia**, Bruno eschews cheffy titles, preferring to call himself a 'home cook' who learned at the feet of "the best chefs in Italy": his mamma, *nonna* and aunts. This home-style cooking informs what Bruno and others call '*la cucina povera*' (or peasant cooking), making good use of humble ingredients to turn the quotidian into the sublime. I've had the good fortune of savouring his beautiful focaccias dotted with olives or sundried tomatoes; perfect pastas tossed with rapini or chili-flecked fava bean purée; tender, salt-crusted sea bream; and the most luscious *limoncello ricotta torta* this side of the Tiber. Flavour abounds at Bruno's supper club as does conviviality and a feeling of goodwill. If you're in Toronto, these bi-monthly dinner events will make your stay here all the more special.

Several blocks north, superb home cook and accomplished actress **Ronica Sajnani** hosts her weekly Indian divans (www.ronicacooks.com) or culinary salons in her picture-perfect Victorian home in **Cabbagetown**. A mutual friend once aptly described Sajnani as "Toronto's best Indian cook without a formal restaurant." He's spot on. Hers is "Indian food with a twist," which means she might infuse a traditional *nimbu pani* with a shot of vodka because, as Sajnani says, "it lends a spirited zing to the dish." Those wishing to replicate her mouthwatering fare at home are advised to request a cooking class with Sajnani, who is a patient and willing teacher – and you'll want to see her deft hands in action.

Guests will likely start in the drawing room, where a variety of authentic Indian savouries are on offer, along with a cool drink. It's a BYO wine environment but worry not – Sajnani can recommend a wine to bring if you're stumped about what to pair with a *dhal* or a *chana masala*. Four or five courses of painstakingly prepared Indian fare will follow (if you're lucky, you'll get to try some of Sajnani's family garam masala blend) for \$50 per person. I still dream about her chicken

biryani in papadum cups with kachumber, raita and homemade Indian pickles. What of copycats who might try to lift her idea? "I actually just concentrate on what I am doing to do it better than anyone else," says Sajnani, adding, "I offer colleagues and guests with a special talent a chance to do what they do, so I hang their paintings, invite them to sing after dinner or start a discussion on a predetermined topic, book or article. It makes for a richer evening."

The opportunity to choose your culinary adventure, in a relaxed, informal setting in which you bring your own wine, thus avoiding restaurant mark-ups, keeps gaining momentum the world over. It won't be long before you see regional Chinese or Sri Lankan dinner clubs popping up, with hungry patrons looking for quality, conviviality and the opportunity to break bread with passionate home cooks and chefs in a setting that says "*mi casa es tu casa*," in more ways than one. ▣

Around the Globe Dinner Clubbing:

HONG KONG

Once Upon A Table

<http://onceuponatablehk.blogspot.com/>

Four home cooks who prepare international fare. **Tip:** elaborate brunches that last well into the day are popular!

BEIJING, CHINA

Gourmet Underground

<http://www.stadlerhome.com/gu/>

Professional American expat

Cara Stadler (who trained with Guy Savoy and Gordon Ramsay) offers a European haute cuisine dining experience in Beijing.

SOUTH DELHI, INDIA

Uparwali Chai

<http://eatanddust.com/category/upar-wali-chai-our-pop-up-tea-parties/>

Indian-nuanced high tea parties complete with chutneys, savoury sandwiches and sublime chai.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Tablenosh

<http://www.tablenosh.blogspot.com/>

Southern American girl in Sydney introduces Aussies to the bold flavours of the South.



"It's my house, not a restaurant – so it's more chill."

Okanagan Valley 2.0

Remy Scalza finds more than wine and white sand



PHOTOS COURTESY OF REMY SCALZA

Inside the general store at **Carmelis**, a family-run farm set in the pine hills high above **Okanagan Lake**, I'm peering into a frosty freezer case, struggling to choose between a rainbow of homemade gelato flavours: fresh peaches and cream, rich dark chocolate, decadent caramel and Technicolor blends of strawberries and blackberries. They all look delicious. There's just one little twist – each creamy creation is made from farm-fresh, 100-percent goat's milk.

Carmelis, which is home to a happy herd of 30 goats, specializes in artisan cheeses – savoury chèvres

and 'goatgonzolas' made for the dozens of high-end restaurants now sprinkled throughout the **Okanagan Valley**. But on the side, Carmelis also dabbles in a bit of Italian-style gelato. And that's lucky for me and the other visitors gathered for a tour on this warm spring afternoon in **Kelowna**, since the gelato turns out to be divine.

Think the Okanagan is just about fruit, wine and white sand? Think again. **British Columbia's** warm-weather playground – a fertile valley of glacial lakes sandwiched between soaring mountain ranges – has officially come of age. The region's culinary scene has at long last caught up with its

prize-winning grapes, thanks to dedicated local farmers and producers like Carmelis and progressive restaurateurs. And lesser-known corners of the valley – including the **Similkameen**, with its rich history of gold mining and epic landscapes – have come into their own, offering visitors even more terrain to explore.

After my initiation into the delights of goat gelato, I cruise down Okanagan Lake along **Highway 97**, past hillsides planted with orchards and vineyards that recede far into the distance. In the desert town of **Osoyoos**, where most visitors end their Okanagan odyssey, I hop on **Highway 3**

and push onward into the Wild West plains and canyons of the nearby **Similkameen Valley**, the newest jewel in the region's crown.

In the historic hamlet of **Keremeos**, lush fields spread gloriously beneath the snow-capped ridges of the **Cascade Range**. Known as the 'fruit stand capital of Canada,' Keremeos was for decades little more than a way station for travellers en route to the Okanagan: a place to fill up the trunk with fresh peaches and berries at dusty roadside stands.

Oh, how times have changed. Keremeos and the nearby old-time gold mining towns of **Cawston** and **Hedley** have undergone a renaissance in recent years. Nearly a dozen wineries have opened here and, with them, boutique hotels, sophisticated restaurants and B&Bs. I stop for a tippie in rustic Cawston. At the **Crowsnest**

Vineyards, a tidy little winery overlooking **Barcelo Canyon** and the high peaks beyond, desert heat during the day and cool evenings make for crisp, aromatic Chardonnays and Rieslings. The wines pair nicely with fresh-baked breads served in the vineyard restaurant, which specializes in authentic bratwursts, schnitzels and other Old World German cuisine.

For lodging in Keremeos, just look up – way up. In the mountains outside of town, at a dizzying altitude of 2,000 metres, is the **Cathedral Lakes Lodge**, the highest full-service hiking and fishing resort in all of Canada. Set amid sparkling alpine lakes, the lodge is accessible only via 4x4 vehicles, which pick up guests at a base camp and deposit them in a mountain paradise with no phones or TVs, and 360-degree views of the surrounding valley.

I round out my rediscovery tour of the Okanagan back in **West Kelowna** with a one-of-a-kind cattle ranch, **Sezmu Meats**. In fine Okanagan fashion, each lucky steer in Sezmu's Angus herd indulges in one litre of B.C. red wine every day. "They moo at one another a little more and seem more relaxed" after drinking, explains owner Janice Ravndahl. The wine is said to impart an extraordinary flavour and texture to the beef, and chefs throughout the Okanagan swear by it. From Cabernet-quaffing cows to German-inspired wineries and goat's milk gelato, the new Okanagan offers plenty of food for thought. Just make sure you come hungry. ▣



Each lucky steer indulges in one litre of B.C. red wine every day

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ADVENTURES IN CULINARY TRAVEL

Cultural Close-up: Jordan

Tim Johnson



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When it comes to the **Middle East**, a region that's (for better or for worse) very much in the spotlight these days, **Jordan** proves to be the exception rather than the rule – a role it has occupied for many years. This small nation of six and a half million, sandwiched between **Iraq, Israel, Saudi Arabia** and **Syria**, has a long legacy of peace and prosperity, a place that is proud yet peace-loving, dynamic yet stable, and both overwhelmingly Muslim and undeniably moderate.

The country is home to a carefully balanced cultural mix of Palestinians (many of whom were displaced from the nearby **West Bank**), native Jordanians, Christian Armenians and free-roaming nomadic Bedouins, who wear a distinctive red-and-white headdress. Thousands of years of history, a progressive, Western-leaning monarchy and a well-travelled, educated populace have produced a society that is as fascinating as it is warm and welcoming to North American visitors. **Amman**, the country's capital, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities, and its ancient wonders are on full display atop soaring **Citadel Hill**, home to the ruins of the 2nd-century **Temple of Hercules** and the **Jordan Archaeological Museum**,

which houses artifacts dating back to the Bronze Age. And the view from up there is something to behold – the city unfolds in a breathtaking panorama across the steep hills that surround the Citadel, tightly packed white and beige buildings clinging to the slopes.

Down below, on the bustling streets of downtown Amman, shoppers pick up day-to-day items on **King Hussein Street** and in the city's colourful open-air market, where vendors call out and even sing the deals of the day to passersby, who stop to scoop up plump, fresh fruit (all of it grown in Jordan) and exotic spices. And while you're downtown, make sure to stop in at unpretentious **Hashem**, one of King Abdullah II's favourite restaurants, which serves an uncomplicated yet delicious menu of falafel, pita and hummus.

Nearby **Rainbow Street**, in the historic **Jabal Amman** neighbourhood, is the city's hippest strip. Alcoholic refreshments can be difficult to find in an Islamic country, but they flow freely here, a sign of Jordan's relatively liberal outlook. **Cantaloupe**, a swish spot with a private elevator, offers great apps and martinis, and you can find open-air dining and Middle Eastern fare at **Old Times Restaurant**,

a few blocks up the street. Also in the area, check out **Books@Café**, where an unassuming English-language bookstore downstairs explodes into a swirling kaleidoscope of psychedelic orange wallpaper and bohemian chandeliers (plus a lovely elevated patio) in the café-cum-bar upstairs.

But no trip to Jordan is complete without a trip out of the capital, into the stunning desert landscapes of the Levant. The country is home to a number of holy sites for Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, including **Mount Nebo**, by Biblical tradition the place of Moses' death; **Mount Hor**, whose peak reputedly hosts the tomb of the Old Testament's Aaron, and **Bethany Beyond the Jordan**, the UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized as the place where John the Baptist baptized Christ.

Just 45 minutes west of Amman lies the **Dead Sea**, the lowest point on Earth, more than 1,300 feet below sea level. It's also one of the saltiest bodies of water (with a salt content more than eight times higher than the ocean), and its mineral-rich mud and water were instrumental in the development of one of the world's first health spas. A number of high-end resorts line its north end. Head to the **Mövenpick**, a lovely spot with palms, pools and cabanas, plus an artificial beach from which you can launch yourself into the sea for a float on the ultra-buoyant blue water – a truly remarkable experience. Then head to the **Zara** spa for a glorious treatment that incorporates the Dead Sea's healing salt and mud.

Don't miss the lost city of **Petra**, an astounding ancient city carved out of the sandstone that dates back to the 6th century BC (and, famously, was featured in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*). Then finish your desert adventures at the **Feynan Ecolodge**, deep in the heart of the mountainous **Dana Biosphere Reserve**. Visit the tent of a Bedouin family to share some tea, then hike in the red-hued hills before returning to the lodge, which is completely off the grid and lit by candles at night. In the middle of the desert, with no artificial light to intrude, the moon and stars are as bright and vivid as your imagination. ▣

THE LAST WORD

What does writing mean to you – what does it give you?

Writing is a gift and a curse... it gives me a sense of both great joy and frustration.

What memories excite you?

Food memories – what I ate, with whom and where – they elicit all the senses.

What's your life's motto?

Follow your passion.

Where is home for you?

In the kitchen and on the road.

Favourite comfort food?

Pasta with pancetta, crème fraîche and Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Guilty indulgence?

Fried chicken and fried oyster po-boys.

What is the quality you most admire in a man?

A grand capacity for joy and the confidence and ability to make me feel safe and at home in the world. And to expertly shuck a dozen oysters.

Who is your favourite cook/chef?

Anyone who cooks a meal for me.

What's your favourite place to write, and why?

By the sea or the exact opposite: I like to write in bustling [French] cafés where there's energy and conversation, the promise of a good baguette, some hot frites and a glass of Provençal rosé...

Who are your real-life heroes/heroines?

The rescue teams who go in right after a disaster.

What do you most value in your friends?

Their comedic timing. And loyalty.

Best thing about you?

I can cook a pretty decent meal from almost nothing.

What is your least favourite thing about yourself?

I'm not fearless enough.

Who would you like to be?

Someone fearless.

Complete the sentence: "If I knew then what I know now, I would..."

...have worried less about the future." **v**



KIM SUNÉE

Best-selling memoirist (*Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love, and the Search for Home*), world traveller, food writer and magazine editor only begin to describe Kim Sunée. Born in South Korea and brought up in New Orleans by her adoptive family, Sunée's journey and work have been featured in *The New York Times*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *People*, *Elle* and *Glamour*. She cooked, ate and lived in Europe for 10 years before returning to the United States, where she worked as a food editor for *Southern Living* and then as founding food editor of *Cottage Living* magazine. From guest judge on the Food Network's *Iron Chef America* to the current food and wine editor of *Organic Gardening* magazine, Sunée continues to make the world her oyster – which also happens to be one of her favourite edibles!



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