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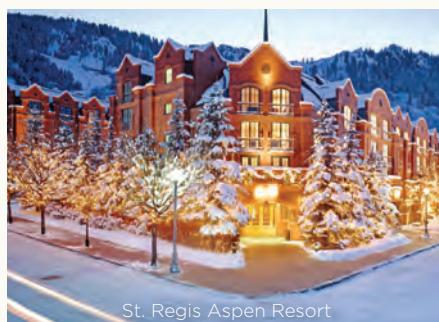
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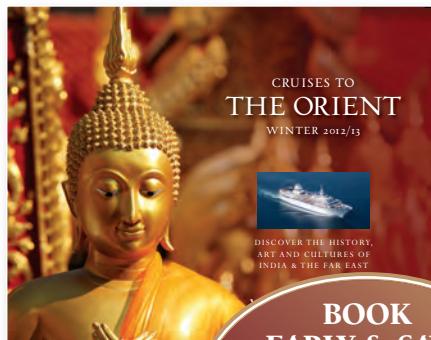
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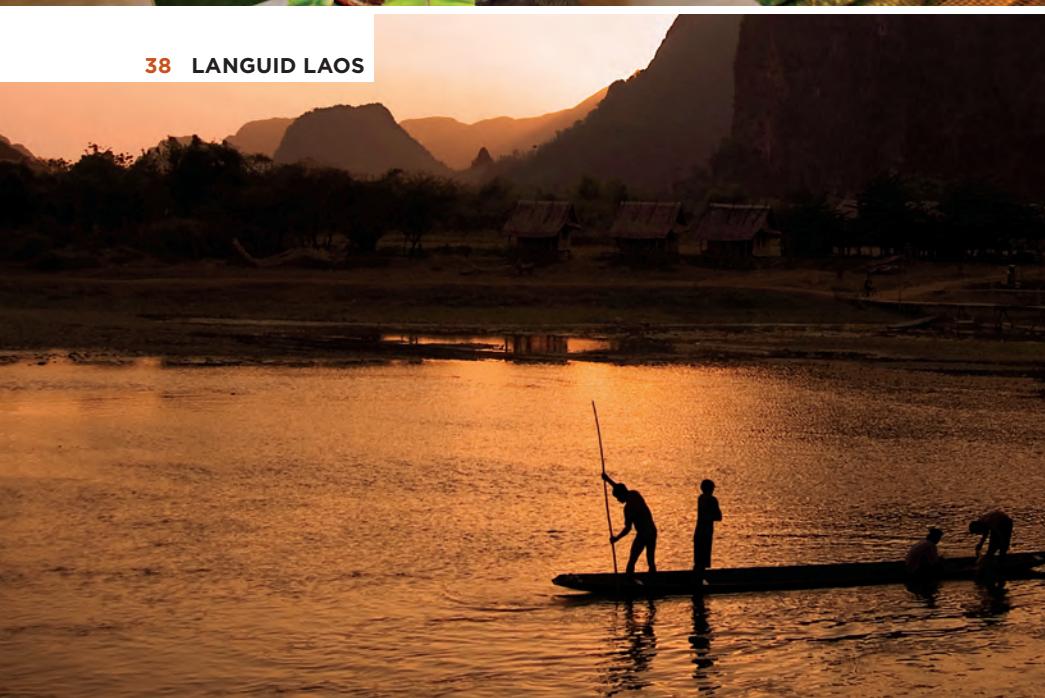
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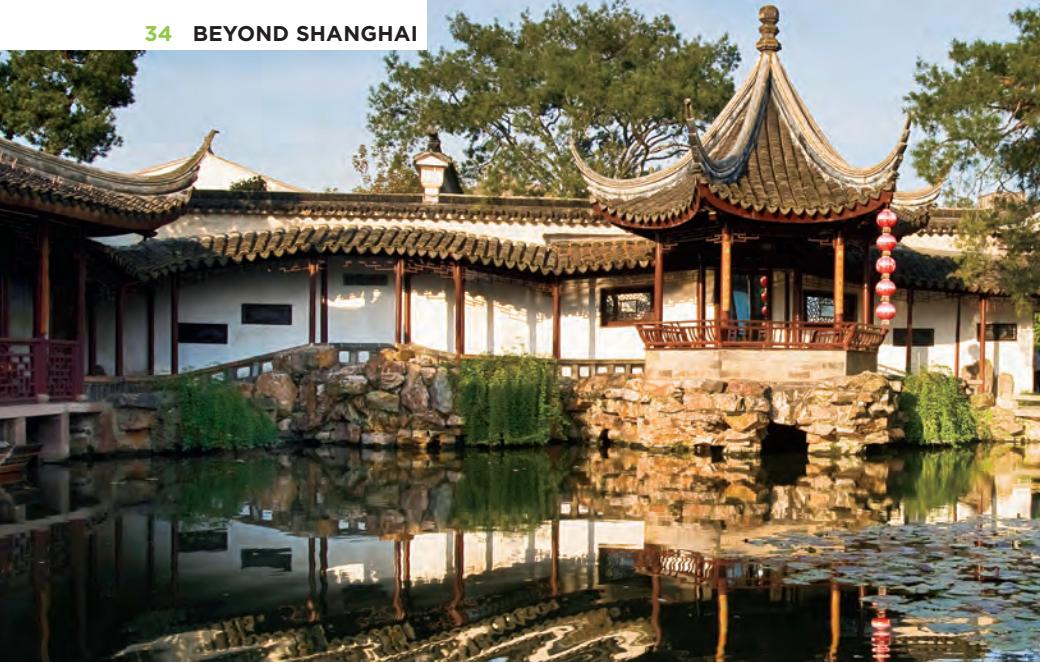
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INSPIRING TRAVELS

Before we interviewed Dave Lingwood for our *The Last Word* column, I wanted to ensure that he (and his three friends who make up *The Buried Life*, a project about accomplishing everything you want to do before you die) fit the 'spiritual bill.' Given our exotic Far East destinations and holistic wellness theme, it would seem out of place to have a group of four Canadian party kids giving the issue its key parting sentiments. I was pleasantly surprised. No doubt this foursome is having a good time – they are, after all, still in their early twenties – but the twist is that they are helping others achieve their goals along the way. Traveling to universities and bookstores across North America, the four young men speak to people of all ages, inspiring them to dream big dreams and even assisting them in accomplishing what they may have previously thought impossible.

The idea of paying it forward (or as Dave puts it, "paying it back") was a fittingly inspirational way to close an issue featuring destinations that are the seat of spirituality, karma and in some cases, benevolence. We are hungry for the particular kind of lasting inspiration, happiness and overall wellness that Western culture often seems incapable of providing. And increasingly, we're

searching for it in our travels. Wellness vacations have grown popular with people travelling to such locations as India and Southeast Asia for in-depth yoga and meditation classes or even short-term residences with Buddhist monks. We take a look at this trend in *Roads to Health* on page 44. We also uncover the many health benefits of soaking in Japanese hot springs (page 26) and find relaxation in the Buddhist-steeped culture of Laos (page 38).

On the adventure side of things – because wellness includes a sense of fun too – we visit the Phi Phi Islands (page 50), find five luxurious, eco-friendly 'glamping' experiences (page 68) and explore Shanghai and its surrounding cities and towns (page 34). Plus, foodies won't want to miss our round-up of dining experiences, from high-end Hong Kong restaurants (page 62) to Singapore's delicious 'hawker' stands (page 64).

If you've always dreamed of visiting the Far East, we hope this issue inspires you to make that dream come true.

Federica Maraboli, Editor-in-Chief
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Diversions



COOL POOLS: SWIMMING IN STYLE

When travelling, a swimming pool is much more than a place to get wet; it's a scene – and a place to be seen. These pools have made a splash on a global scale.

San Alfonso del Mar, Chile The motto of this pool could easily be 'Go big or go home.' At 1,000 metres long, this is the world's largest saltwater pool and features man-made sandy beaches. Take a sailboat out for a cruise, or swim at night inside a pyramid with a sandy beach and heated water to chase away potential chills.

The Quincy, Singapore Peek-a-boo! The epitome of hip and high-tech, a portion of this glass-enclosed pool juts out from the 12th floor, looming above the din and bustle of the Orchard district below. Changing LED lights illuminate the pool deck and cast a colourful glow.

Golden Nugget, Las Vegas How much pool do you get for \$30 million? In this case, **The Tank** features a three-storey water-slide, 15 swanky cabanas, waterfalls and a giant shark tank in the middle. It provides the illusion that you're swimming right next to these predators – with no risk of being nibbled on.

Standard Hotel, Los Angeles The chic rooftop pool area attracts A-listers and wannabes because of its amazing views of Sunset Boulevard. The skyscrapers of LA are front and centre and the iconic Hollywood sign glimmers in the distance.

LUXURY ON THE FLY: THE WORLD'S MOST OPULENT AIRPORTS

Not just conduits to get from point A to point B, these global terminals stand out from the rest for their wealth of top-notch amenities.

Incheon International Airport, South Korea With a casino, spa, golf course, skating rink, seven indoor gardens and the Museum of Korean Culture, you'll likely welcome a flight delay just so you can wander around, play and shop big names like Gucci, Hermès and Burberry. Get a bird's-eye view of takeoffs and landings from the relaxing 4th-floor terrace.

Singapore Changi Airport Its calming environment, thanks to the myriad gardens showcasing cacti, orchids and koi ponds, includes private rest areas that have been voted 'best in the world' for sleeping. On the fun side, you'll find everything from interactive art classes, movie theatres and an arcade to the **Xbox Kinect Room**, where you can experience sports gaming that uses body movements, voice and facial expressions to play virtual beach volleyball, Ping-Pong, soccer and more.

Munich International Airport, Germany Drop by **Airbräu**, the airport's onsite brewery – this is Germany, after all – for a pint at the indoor beer garden or take a tour with a certified brewmaster. Shop for a new car at the Audi showroom in Terminal 2 on your way to the **Fit & Fly Spa**, where

you can get a day pass (for about \$40) to use the pool, sauna and Jacuzzi. There is plenty of shopping, too, making this facility feel more like a mall than an airport.

GET INTO THE SPIRIT: A FRESH SPIN ON THE ART OF ZEN

It seems women have discovered the soothing rhythms of sport fishing and have taken to hooking their own bait. **The West Coast Fishing Club** on British Columbia's **Langara Island** is a remote getaway that offers plenty of luxury (wine tastings, gourmet meals and Jacuzzis) for the ultimate experience in salmon and halibut fishing.

Take a hands-on approach with the ancient craft of weaving at a workshop in **Guatemala**, where indigenous women from villages such as **San Antonia Aguas Caliente** share the skills that have been passed down from generation to generation. The repetitive motion and gorgeous surroundings impart a feeling of serenity.

Other spirituality seekers have found solace among wildlife. In the **Republic of Congo's Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park**, observing western lowland gorillas in the rainforest is the activity of choice. This involves hiking, trekking and travelling by pirogue to get to the remote habitat of these primates.

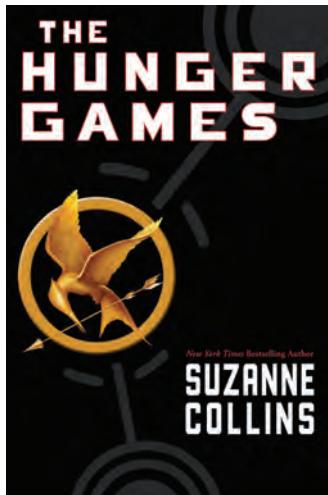


LITERARY ESCAPES

Required Reading

1 THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY
Suzanne Collins
(Scholastic Inc., \$19.99)

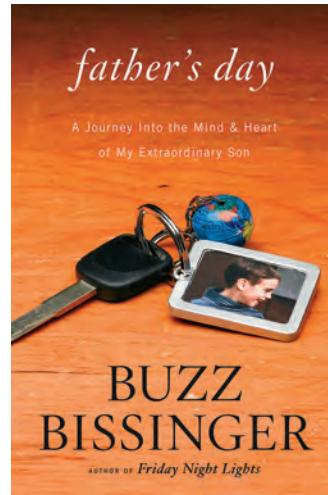
With the movie just released, you'd have to be living in a cave to not have heard of *The Hunger Games*. The first in a trilogy of books by Suzanne Collins takes readers into the post-apocalyptic world of Panem - what used to be called North America. A less than benevolent government rules from the Capitol, surrounded by 12 districts. Obedience is maintained by forcing one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 from each district to participate in a gladiator-like survival game, where only one contestant can remain standing. Written initially for young adults, this series has, in the parlance of the web, gone viral, with novelists like Stephen King singing its praises. *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* comprise the second and third volumes of what is this year's page-turning equivalent of the *Millennium* series.



1

2 FATHER'S DAY: A JOURNEY INTO THE MIND & HEART OF MY EXTRAORDINARY SON
Buzz Bissinger
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$29.95, hardcover)

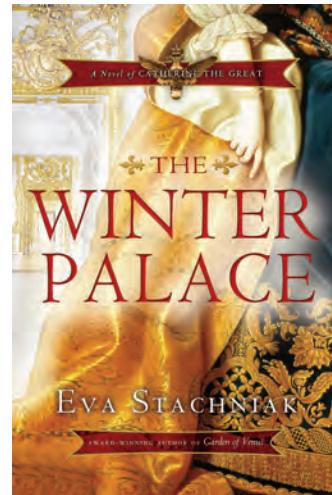
Pulitzer Prize-winning Buzz Bissinger, best known for his *New York Times* bestseller *Friday Night Lights* (which was made into a hit TV series and film), pens a very personal and beautiful story in his memoir *Father's Day*. He is father to Gerry and Zach, his twin sons who were born prematurely, the latter with learning disabilities (and certain remarkable attributes) due to oxygen deprivation at birth. At 24 years of age, Zach remains a mystery to his father. With the intention of trying to better understand the complex inner workings of his son, Bissinger takes Zach on a cross-country road trip that is at once heartbreakingly, enlightening and awe-inspiring. In it, we all learn an invaluable lesson: character transcends intellect and patience is the key to unlocking the multiple doors to reach it.



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3 THE WINTER PALACE
Eva Stachniak
(Doubleday Canada, \$24.95)

Award-winning Toronto-based writer Eva Stachniak's brilliant portrayal of life in the Russian royal court made her historically based novel, *The Winter Palace*, number one on the *Globe and Mail's* bestseller list. Our guide through the spy holes and hidden passages of the drafty old palace is Barbara, a clever maid-turned-spy who forms a secret alliance with a young German princess named Sophia. It is Sophia who will eventually become the powerful Russian ruler we all know as Catherine the Great. Her ascent to the throne is fraught with enough intrigue, espionage and seduction to make even the Tudors blush! Stachniak writes with well-researched authority, elegance and sumptuous attention to detail; you'll think it's you peeping through the palace keyholes!



3

STYLE NOTES

Trends

1 IN THE PINK

Designers like Marc Jacobs and Michael Kors built empires on their must-have accessories and accessible diffusion lines. They're in for some competition from **Rachel Roy**, whose affordable (the average item costs \$100) and chic Rachel Roy line has grown in the past year and for this summer offers major bang for the buck. High-style items at low-ball prices include colour-blocked handbags and totes, and sunshine-yellow killer heels. It helps that dresses pull double-duty so you can pack twice as much. The **Nella**, in drawstring draped fuchsia, can be worn as a tunic over leggings on the plane and later as a sexy mini-dress for cocktails. Just add flat sandals. (rachelroy.com)

2 CHECK, MATE

Moon menswear creative director **Jordin Mimran**'s pick of the season is the

label's casual, lightweight 100% cotton multi-check shirt (\$49, exclusively at The Bay). Canadian designer **Philip Sparks**, who just opened his own boutique in downtown Toronto's trendy Ossington neighbourhood, is checking it twice, for both him and her. For men, it comes as a natty lightweight tartan jacket with vintage-inspired three-button styling and for her, a forties-inspired tartan retro day dress (\$595, philipsparks.com).

3 LACED-UP LUXURY

Vancouver designer **Erin Templeton** has revived her signature **Roamin** sandal, a Capri-style thong sandal with a leather sole and a selection of three vintage laces in different colours that wind and tie around the ankle. The look recalls a gamine Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*, but the laces also mean the sandals can be conveniently slung

over the shoulder or around your neck in a pinch – for those times when walking barefoot in the sand beckons. (\$135, erintempleton.com)

4 DESTINATION: EVERYWHERE

There are a lot of boring black suitcases out there, and that red ribbon you tied to the handle of yours isn't fooling anyone. **Atlantic**'s new *trompe l'oeil* **Globe Trotter** hardside collection recalls the steamer trunks of yesteryear with brightly coloured vintage luggage labels. The 360° four-wheel spinner system helps you move around easily, ensuring you'll be through customs and immigration while everyone else on your flight is still figuring out whose basic black model is whose. Expandable rolling suitcases in 20", 24" or 28" models, \$120 to \$160; atlanticluggage.com for retailers.



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STYLE NOTES

Trends



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1 MULTI-TASKING MASTER

François Nars spends much of his time at his remote French Polynesian island retreat. For his latest innovative creation, **Pure Radiant Tinted Moisturizer**, the beauty guru didn't have to look far for inspiration. The ingredients include 100% naturally derived fragrances of peony, rose water and violet indigenous to the South Pacific region, and galaxaura, one of the tint's active ingredients, which is derived from a mineral-rich algae that grows in tidal zones and lagoons (it offers vitamins A and E and beta-carotene, and adds anti-aging properties). Nars believes less is more where makeup is concerned; the serum-like super-sheer formula is translucent (unlike foundation), and offers a boost of healthy glow to natural skin. Bonus: it comes in nine skin-matching shades. (\$49 from NARS at Holt Renfrew, The Bay and Sephora, and online at narscosmetics.ca).

2 HOTEL AT HOME

"Clients like to recreate the feeling of commercial spaces – the places they travel to, like resorts and boutique hotels – at home," explains Andrew Bockner, co-owner with brother Richard, of **Andrew Richard Designs**. The company is already well known for its memorable poolside and outdoor spaces for top destinations around the world, and has now expanded to include residential offerings for both city homes and rural retreats. The look of collections such as **Cabo** and **Madison** is luxurious, with curtained pavilions and plush daybeds for poolside, and chaises, club chairs and lounge sectionals for entertainment areas. Some mix teak with stainless steel, a nod to the mid-century modern revival of *Mad Men*, and all the woven furniture comes in an array of colours from rich browns to lush greens and white (from \$575, available at the ARD showroom in Toronto and at andrewricharddesigns.com).

3 LONDON CALLING

Think campfire sweatshirts instead of cozy red mittens. **North Star**, the venerable 1970s brand that was featured in the classic Bill Murray summer comedy *Meatballs*, is relaunching this summer and vintage styling is on **HBC**'s mind, too. HBC is once again the official 2012 Canadian summer Olympics team replica apparel supplier, and we predict that the hottest items will be the retro patches and badges, embroidered with beavers and other Canadian motifs that can be traded. They say the collection of jean jackets, track jackets and windbreakers, in evergreen and heather grey, was inspired by classic varsity styling such as the Canadian team uniforms of the 1976 Olympics. We think it's Canuck summer camp, all grown up. (At The Bay and Zellers stores until September; online at hbc.com).

TRAVEL COMPANIONS

Packing List

1 GREAT SKIN IS IN

Eschew those over-filled toiletries bags with the help of American skincare line **Philosophy**, which offers a three-step skin care essentials routine for normal, oily, combination or dry skin. Start with **Purity**, an all-in-one cleanser, make-up remover, toner and hydrator. Follow up with the **Help Me** retinol night treatment to wake up to the best skin possible and finish with your daily moisturizer, **Hope in a Jar**. Unscented, formulated by scientists and medical professionals, these three products are all you need for refreshed, travel-ready skin! \$85, available at select **Bay** and **Shoppers Drug Mart** locations across Canada.

2 LOVING THE LOVE, CHLOÉ

The feminine, pretty and refillable *flacon* that houses **Love, Chloé** fragrance is as fashionable as it is practical. A dainty chain links the lid to the rose-gold purse-size bottle, a great feature for travel. The delicate fragrance conjures up the beautiful scent of rouges, talcs and face powders from a by-gone era with notes of heliotropine,

iris, hyacinth and soft musk. *Très chic!* 3 x 10 ml purse spray (\$82), available at select **Bay** and **Holt Renfrew** stores across Canada.

3 GET YOUR GLOW ON!

Canadian-made and developed, **BrightenUp!** by **Vasanti Cosmetics** combines the power of papaya enzymes, dermatologist-grade micro-crystals and hydrating aloe to dramatically brighten and improve your skin's texture. All skin types can use this paraben- and sulphate-free exfoliator/cleanser/rejuvenator to reveal brighter, softer, younger-looking skin. Just make sure you wear a good sunblock post-treatment to protect your buffed, beautiful skin this summer! \$34 for 120 ml, available online at vasanticosmetics.com.

4 CULTIVATING KARMA

Clothes that pull double-duty are a traveller's best friend. Enter **Karma**, a Canadian apparel company that has re-defined activewear by creating pieces that are functional and sexy - both on and off the mat. Gathered cuffs on the **Asanas** mid-rise crop pant roll up to

reveal a different colour or print and transition easily from yoga to daywear (\$64), and the 100% merino wool **Eleanor** sweater (\$88) makes a striking statement whether you're doing sun salutations or standing at the bar. Even better, everything is produced in North America, which supports local economies. Now that has to earn good karma. Available at select stores. karmawear.com

5 MULTI-PURPOSE WONDER OIL

100% all-natural **Essence of Argan** oil, or 'liquid gold' as it's called in Morocco, is making a big splash among discerning clients across North America. Cold-pressed to ensure top quality, this oil has always been highly prized for its anti-aging and natural healing properties. Use it to dramatically decrease or eliminate acne, wrinkles, sun spots, dry scalp and even diaper rash. Extracted from the argan tree, whose kernels contain high concentrations of vitamin E, essential fatty acids, antioxidants and other healing properties. \$44.99 for 15 ml, available online at essenceofargan.com.



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NEW VOYAGES FOCUS ON FAR EAST HISTORY

Cruise News

In 1889 Rudyard Kipling wrote that "**Burma** will be quite unlike any land you know about," and this is still true today. Burma, or **Myanmar** as it is now called, is a country where time seems to have come to a standstill, with incredible landscapes, breathtaking architecture, Buddhist temples, warm, friendly people and a rich colonial past. Lucky for us, **Voyages to Antiquity**, the niche small ship cruise line, has expanded its 2012-2013 collection to include a **Far East** program that features 15 new itineraries focused on **Southeast Asia** and **India**, including two voyages to Myanmar that will set sail in November.

Whether you're a professional historian or an amateur culture buff, you'll enjoy the new itineraries which, similar to the company's cruises in the Mediterranean, will feature in-depth explorations of the history, culture, art and mysteries of the classical civilizations of India and Southeast Asia. Aboard the premium-class **Aegean Odyssey**, a small ship that accommodates a maximum of 350 passengers, you'll navigate the great rivers of Southeast Asia and dock in the heart of **Ho Chi Minh City**, **Yangon** (formerly **Rangoon**) and **Bangkok**. Special highlights include shore excursions on all sailings, pre- and post-cruise hotel stays in **Hong Kong**, Bangkok and **Mumbai**, as well as overnight excursions to India's **Golden Triangle** and **Cambodia's Angkor Wat**.



Burma and the Malay Peninsula is a 17-day cruise-tour that sets sail from **Colombo**, **Sri Lanka**, moving close to the trade routes along the **Andaman Islands** and up the **Yangon River** before docking in the heart of Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar. Steeped in Buddhism, Myanmar welcomes visitors with such iconic landmarks as the magnificent **Shwedagon pagoda**, its 320-foot-high stupa covered in gold. Continue on to **Phuket** and explore the **Phi Phi Islands**; **Penang**'s street

markets and 19th-century merchant houses; **Malacca**, a World Heritage Site, with its unique architecture influenced by the Portuguese, Dutch and British; and finally **Singapore**, one of Asia's great modern cities. From US\$4,295.

Singapore and Burma is a similar 16-day itinerary but departs from Singapore and includes **Kuala Lumpur**, **Malaysia**'s modern capital and home of the **Petronas Towers**, among the world's tallest buildings. Expert lecturers including military historians, acclaimed journalists and PhDs are an integral part of each voyage, and they provide ongoing information and details throughout the journey. Optional excursions include the unforgettable ruins of the ancient city of **Bagan** in the Mandalay region of **Myanmar**, where the famous Buddhist monastery of **Mahagandayon** is located in the town of **Amarapura**. From US\$3,995.

Cruises include all pre- and post-voyage hotel stays, shore excursions, meals, most drinks and a full enrichment program unparalleled in the cruise industry.



TRAVEL FILE

Ensemble® Hotel & Resort Collection



RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE PHULAY BAY, THAILAND

When Ritz-Carlton opened its doors at the lush, beautiful resort of **Phulay Bay** back in 2009, it didn't just welcome its first group of guests – it ushered in a brand new era for the Ritz-Carlton brand. Phulay Bay is the first **Ritz-Carlton Reserve**, a concept that combines the best elements of a full-scale resort with the special touches of a boutique Ritz-Carlton hotel, to create one private, full-service property. Following the success of Phulay Bay, the hotelier has planned Reserves for **Costa Rica**, the **Turks and Caicos** and the **United Arab Emirates**, with the next one scheduled to open later this year in **Puerto Rico**. All Reserves will be set in an exotic location, have fewer than 110 rooms and place a strong emphasis on privacy and individual service, featuring authentic décor and experiences that reflect the culture and environment that surround them.

All of this is certainly true at Phulay Bay. Set on the warm, aquamarine waters of the **Andaman Sea** near **Krabi** in southern **Thailand**, the luxury Reserve features just 54 private villas ranging in size from 1,184 square feet for the **Ocean Pavilion** up to almost 6,500 square feet of combined indoor and outdoor space for the palatial **Royal Villa**, nestled into carefully manicured grounds (Ritz-Carlton spent \$30 million on the gardens alone, which were selected by an independent body as the best in Thailand).

Guests arrive at the welcome pagoda by walking across a stepping-stone path set into a placid pond, and are introduced to their personal butler. All room categories feature a dedicated butler, who is responsible for everything from transporting guests around the property to taking care of scheduling concerns (whether this means arranging a meditation session with local Buddhist monks, a hike in the surrounding

lush rainforest, or a long-tail boat trip out to the islands and dramatic limestone karsts that can be seen from the beach) to pretty much anything else a guest could wish for. All butlers are Thai, providing guests with first-hand exposure to Thailand's world-famous level of gracious hospitality.

When you get to your villa, you may just be tempted to stay there for the duration of your vacation. The creation of Thai architect Lek Bunnag, the villas are designed to deliver an 'oversized' experience: massive teak doors, giant walk-in closets, dual-head rain showers (plus, in many cases, outdoor bathtubs, showers and even private swimming pools) and enormous beds. They also feature one-of-a-kind artwork, such as hand-painted doors in the Lanna tradition, a storytelling art form from northern Thailand.



But you really should venture out, even if it's just to sample the Reserve's other offerings. Get a Thai massage at the **ESPA** spa – and make sure to arrive early for your treatment to spend a little time in the vitality pool, which opens onto the surrounding jungle. You can also schedule some seaside yoga, take a dip in the infinity pool, shop for handcrafted items at the boutique, or dine on seafood, continental or Thai cuisine at one of the five-star restaurants. Then, let your butler drive you back to your villa, where you can experience the pleasure of an outdoor shower before climbing into your massive bed for the best night's sleep you might ever have.

SEOUL

City Snap Guide

Diane Slawitch

Seoul, South Korea's 600-year-old capital, is a technologically advanced global powerhouse undergoing an architectural transformation. Named **World Design Capital** for 2010, the city's new landmarks include the eco-friendly **City Hall**, the **Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park** (a new fashion hub), the **Kring Gumho Culture complex** and the beautiful new walking paths and bridges of the **Cheonggyecheon stream**. Yet the modern co-exists with the old in this vibrant city – home to bustling street markets, tantalizing cuisine and centuries-old royal palaces that are all worth exploring.

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Get a bird's-eye view of the capital's architectural renaissance from the **N Seoul Tower** observatory on the summit of Namsan. Then venture back in time to one of Seoul's five royal palaces. The largest, **Changdeokgung**, was built in the early 15th century and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A highlight of this palace is its **Secret Garden**, with pavilions, ponds and wooded areas covering 31 hectares. Some of South Korea's top museums are in Seoul, including the **Leeum Samsung Museum of Art**, the **National Museum of Korea** and the **Seoul Museum of Art**.

SEOUL FOOD

Sure, this is the home of some very fine *kimchi*, *bulgogi* and *bibimbap*. But Seoul also has a bevy of talented chefs who are influencing Korean cuisine, both locally and internationally. From notably creative chef **Choi Hyun Seok** – renowned for his molecular cuisine – comes dishes like charcoal-grilled lobster in a four-textured rose juice at **Elbon the Table** (elbon.co.kr). Michelin three-starred chef **Pierre Gagnaire** (pierregagnaire.co.kr) gives classic French cuisine a Korean twist at his eponymous Seoul outpost, while **Yim Jung Sik** serves Korean fare with New York flair – like Five Senses Pork Belly, served sour, crunchy, spicy, soft and sweet – at **JungSikDang** (jungsik.kr). Check out seouleats.com for the best places to nosh, from streetside stalls to fine dining.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

A visit to **Namdaemun Market** should rank high on any to-do list. With more than 1,250 shops, it can't be beat for selection; deals can be had on anything from clothing, housewares and electronics to jewellery and fabrics. Also worth a trip is the **Itaewon Market**, where you'll find tailored suits and Korean antiques alongside hip bars and restaurants. If your wallet is a bit (okay, a lot) fatter, head to the opulent **Shinsegae Department Store**, an emporium of designer clothes and exquisite food, and enjoy a civilized rest atop the peaceful roof gardens.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

South Korea's high standard of doctors and healthcare facilities, combined with reasonable prices, have put it on the map for medical tourism. Holistic traditional Asian medicine remains a trump card, though, and wellness facilities such as **Chaum** aim to optimize well-being by combining Asian, Western and alternative medicine. Nestled in a mountain village is the wellness resort of **Chorakdang**, which offers a variety of programs and medical treatments specially designed for foreigners and where the vistas alone will help to ease the stresses of a North American lifestyle. Need a remedy? Find it at **Gyeong-dong Shijang**, the biggest Asian medicine market in South Korea, with more than 1,000 shops selling an array of medicinal roots, leaves, herbs and more.



In Hot Water

Sure, Jacuzzis are nice. But travellers are going farther afield for a good soak in naturally therapeutic hot springs, discovering secrets that the Japanese have known for years.





CARMEN JENNER



Even the most common *onsen* contains small amounts of radical carbon, salt and other minerals. Hot springs and salt springs are known for their unique benefits (salt springs have a high concentration of minerals and salts) and while considered a perfect remedy for jet lag, hot springs also have many therapeutic benefits. Carbonated *onsens* are said to ease heart conditions, blood circulation disorders and neurological disorders, while springs containing sodium chloride offer relief from painful joints, arthritis and rheumatism. Iron springs are identified by their red water and offer relief from painful joints, menopausal discomforts and chronic skin conditions. Although the scent of rotten eggs can be distracting, soaking in sulphur springs is said to prevent hardening of the arteries. Springs containing radium lower blood pressure and are good for digestive disorders and rheumatism. And while they may sound better suited to a James Bond movie, acid *onsens* are indigenous to Japan and, thanks to a high concentration of hydrogen ions, are good for chronic skin conditions and diabetes – but they should be avoided if you have sensitive skin.

In some cultures, floating naked with strangers would probably land you in hot water. In **Japan** it quite literally does. Even if your visit is fleeting, a layover at **Narita Airport** (approximately one hour from **Tokyo**) ideally locates you for a rendezvous with the perfect remedy for fatigue, jet lag and countless other ailments.

The Japanese have been enjoying hot springs for more than 2,000 years and when Buddhism came to Japan in the 6th century, monks set up temples with lodgings for road-weary pilgrims, often at sites with hot springs. The Edo Period (1603–1867) ushered in the construction of highways and eventually a railway system, leading to more frequent trips by merchants, affluent families and leisure travellers. This travel boom saw the opening of *ryokans* (inns) with *onsens* (hot springs), many of which are still welcoming tourists looking for relaxation...and remedies.

In the Chiba Prefecture, about 45 minutes from the Narita Airport, the **Yachiyo Yamato No Yu onsen** overlooks **Lake Inba** with views of **Mount Fuji** shimmering in the distance. Eight open-air baths provide an exhilarating outdoor experience while floor-to-ceiling windows flood the main indoor bath with natural light, where the spring-fed water is full of nutrients believed to cure nervous tension and muscle pain, and help heal cuts, burns and more. Or splurge on an individual room with private bath and conclude your treatment in the radiant bath, a chair designed to maintain heat at 1 to 1.5 degrees above your body temperature.

Itako Hotel (1-10-7 Ayame, Itako-shi, Ibaraki Prefecture), located in the heart of Itako City along the **Soyokaze River** (or the **River of the 12 Bridges**), features a main bath that offers views of **Mount Tsukuba** and **Lake Kasumigaura**. Many of the traditional Japanese-style rooms command river views and in June the adjacent iris garden is in full bloom – and heaving with snap-happy bridal parties. Be sure to visit the pretty canal town of **Katori**, in **Sawara**, especially during the festival seasons in spring, summer and autumn, when the town comes alive with floats.





On Mount Tsukuba, one of Japan's famous two mountains, known for its twin peaks (believed to represent male and female, bestowing marital harmony), is **Tsukuba Grand Hotel**, with an open-air hot spring and a view of the **Kanto Plain**. The waters are highly alkaline and are known to help with nerve pain, aching muscles and joints, and reducing fatigue. In this region is **Kashima**, one of the biggest ports in the world and well worth a visit if only for the view from the observation tower, although a boat excursion on the *Eureka* is an interesting experience. Stop in at **Meiji Jingu**, one of Japan's most popular shrines. Inside the entrance, you'll find a beautiful forested park with walking paths, areas for quiet contemplation or prayer and even a place for an *emu* – a wooden plate inscribed with your wishes for good fortune, left at the shrine in hopes of being fulfilled.

The small island of **Shikinejima**, which is part of the **Izu Seven Islands**, is renowned for its *onsens* and beaches. On the southern part of the island is **Ashitsuki Onsen**,

which is refilled by the sea at high tide. It has a high iron content and is known for its miraculous healing powers, and was used by wounded soldiers during the Second World War. Bathing is mixed-gender and in this instance, swimsuits are mandatory. Nearby is **Jinata Onsen**, reached by a trek through a gorge; its remoteness ensures almost complete seclusion. Novelty bathers may opt for **Yunessun Spa Resort**, where there's a bath for all tastes: sake, green tea, coffee, wine or noodles – though not potable, of course.

Japan's site on the volcanic belt causes havoc and heartache, but Mother Nature at least makes some compensation with her gift of hot springs. The tradition of immersing oneself in hot waters shows no sign of diminishing and is more popular than ever with the influx of tourists to Japan's shores. Dipping your toe into an unknown culture can be an exhilarating experience for the uninitiated and all the goodness gushing from within the Earth's core is sure to leave an impression – as sure as your jet lag floats away.

The Rules of Hot Springing

Public bathing is a quintessentially Japanese tradition, but before you can relax there are protocols to follow. These are rules not to be broken – or you might be asked to leave, and given you'll be as naked as the day you were born, this is an outcome best avoided.

- If you're staying at a *ryokan*, you'll be given a robe to wear to the baths, worn with the left side wrapped over the right and tied with an *obi* (sash), which is to be left in your locker with your belongings.
- Yes, you're going to be naked; however, the sexes are generally segregated. This is not an exercise in sexuality and vanity, but one of relaxation and contemplation.
- An *onsen* is for soaking, not washing. The more you lather up and scrub every crevice in the shower beforehand, the more acceptable you will be. All soap must be thoroughly rinsed off before entering an *onsen*.
- You'll be given a hand towel, which is to be placed on the ground near where you'll be bathing. You may use the towel to dab the sweat off your brow, but it's never to enter the water.
- Anything apart from your pristine body entering the water is considered unclean, including hair (to be worn up) jewellery, clothing and soap. Tattoos are associated with gangsters, so if you are inked it's best to mention it before entering, while you're still dressed.
- Making small talk with strangers is considered suspicious behaviour.
- And the most important rule of all: relax!



Sarah Treleaven



THE *Butler* DID IT

I DIDN'T REALLY NOTICE just how attached I had become to my butler until I got home, picked up the phone and realized there was no one at the other end who would bring me a shrimp cocktail, chocolate milkshake or chilled bottle of Champagne. I had just returned with my boyfriend from a 19-day luxury Silversea cruise of New Zealand and Australia, and though I was happy to see the dog, I missed being at sea. Most of all, I missed our butler, Arvind, who seemed to work 24 hours a day but somehow always appeared, in his impeccably pressed dinner jacket, to be both well-rested and up for a wide spectrum of idle chit-chat, from the best items on the room service menu to the latest news from his young son in Goa.

He wasn't my first butler, though. Over the years, fancy properties have been offering more and more services, and it's not uncommon to have a butler assigned to your care, whether you're in a villa in St. Barts or cruising along the Amazon. As luxury properties strive to differentiate themselves – and sometimes struggle to convince potential customers that their \$500-a-night room is worth the cash – they are developing additional – quirky and niche – features. Want someone to help you plan a memorable engagement, mix a signature cocktail or get the perfect tan? There's now a butler for that.

In May, while visiting the gorgeous One&Only Palmilla in Los Cabos, Mexico, I had a coterie of three butlers – each more handsome and attentive than the last. While staying at The Hongta Hotel in Shanghai (formerly the St. Regis) with my mother, the property arranged for Isaac, a tall, bespectacled teen (who looked as if he had just graduated from a *The Remains of the Day* training program) to squire us around town. And at the Ritz-Carlton South Beach, I had the privilege of acquainting myself with its 'tanning butler,' a hunky and bronzed twenty-something accounting student who trolls the pool and beach area and offers to apply lotion to those hard-to-reach areas.

At five-star properties around the globe, butlers are doing very specific things for very pampered people.

And now there's a new and growing category of highly specialized butlers. At five-star properties around the globe, butlers are doing very specific things for very pampered people. At the **Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne**, there's a 'constellation concierge' to guide guests through the starry skies (and organize a special Italian-themed 'moonrise dinner' every full moon), as well as a tequilier to help educate guests about the differences between Blanco, Reposado and Añejo. The **Four Seasons Hotel Chicago** has a 'martini man' willing to shake cocktails during a private happy hour in your room, an 'ice cream man' toting frozen treats and a 'hot chocolate doc' to cater to your sweet tooth during the colder months. There's also a 'bedtime stories butler' – but sadly, he's only on call to read to children. And at the **Mandarin Oriental Barcelona**, there's a butler who will arrange a private viewing of the latest collection of Manolo Blahniks.

And lest you think that it's enough to just get down on one knee, there are plenty of hotel programs to tell you you're wrong. Romance and proposals merit a separate category of butlers and concierges. **Banyan Tree Mayakoba** near Cancún, Mexico has a full-time 'romance manager' and offers an extensive range of services, from tame to racy. The resort is fully stocked with romantic aids, including chocolate body sauce, black satin sheets, blindfolds, belly dancer and mariachi costumes (if role-playing is your thing), aphrodisiac cocktails and a library full of sex books, including Tantra guides. At your behest, the 'romance manager' will sneak in while you're at dinner and fill your room with lit candles and rose petals. And at **Mandarin Oriental Miami**, an 'engagement concierge' plans everything from finger foods ideal for sharing, keepsake Baccarat crystal Champagne flutes and candles lined up in the sand that spell out the big question.

According to Karen Weiner Escalera, President and Chief Strategist of KWE Partners in Miami, the increase in specialty butler services reflects the needs of more mature travellers, who have already hit any number of the world's major tourist destinations and are now on their second or third tours. "So when they return to places such as **Paris**, **Tokyo**, **London** or **Berlin**, they often want to pursue a specific passion or interest, from art and food to painting and fashion," says Escalera. "A single concierge cannot possibly be an expert in all subjects, so hotels are meeting the need with specialty concierges who are well versed in a particular niche interest. And in some cases, hotels come up with offbeat ideas for butler services that not only serve a specific interest but also are highly effective at generating publicity."

Our butler at The Hongta Hotel was introduced to us as a modern art enthusiast – which is just what we were in the mood for after almost a month of light hiking, shopping for cheap textiles and eating stir-fried yak. Even though he was only a rental, I liked the idea of having a butler – particularly in a foreign city. He was like a mix between a very helpful kid brother and a tour guide. He took us to **No. 50 Moganshan Road**, or **M50**, the city's network of high-design warehouses divided up into fancy new galleries. We spent the day wandering amid colourful sculptures, video installations and endless representations of Chairman Mao; all the while, Isaac cheerfully answered our questions and provided us with fun facts.

On our Silversea cruise aboard the grand **Silver Shadow**, we became similarly dependent on Arvind's daily delivery of afternoon canapés. He made us dinner reservations and arranged for a fantastic five-course meal when we mentioned that we were in the mood for Indian food. Our suite was always immaculate. Even though he didn't have a catchy title and his specialty was being more of a generalist, it's amazing how quickly he became indispensable to us.





STUMP THE *Butler*

On a ship like *Silver Shadow*, where the service is impeccable and everyone wants to help, it can be tough to identify the precise division of labour. If your room is out of those delicate Belgian chocolates, for example, is that a matter for the butler, room service, the reception desk, guest relations or that nice guy with a tray whom I always see standing around in the hallway? We decided to err on the side of caution and just call our butler for every need that popped into our heads. In the name of research, here is a sample of our requests:

- Q** We brought two Brompton folding bikes that were damaged in transit. **Can we get someone to fix them?**
- A** Yes! The butler had a bike mechanic at our suite in less than 30 minutes.
- Q** Technically, the kitchen is closed but we are feeling peckish. **Can we get a club sandwich while lounging by the pool?**
- A** Yes! The poolside bartender tracked down our butler who arrived 20 minutes later with a stacked sandwich, crusts cut off, and a side of potato chips.
- Q** We missed the Peking duck at lunch because we were riding around in Wellington ton. **Can we get it for dinner?**
- A** No! The butler called the chef and he had already disposed of the duck. But he did come back to us with the chef's recommendations for that evening's meal.
- Q** At the risk of sounding overly precious, **can we get a better bottle of Scotch in our mini-bar?**
- A** Yes! It took 24 hours but our Johnny Walker Red was replaced with a single malt.
- Q** If I give you the recipe, **can you get someone in the kitchen to make my mom's cookies?**
- A** No! Our butler very politely took the recipe and a plate of six cookies appeared approximately 20 hours later. They were quite good, but they were not the same as my mom's.

Score: Butler 3; Guests 2.



Shanghai and Beyond

MICHAEL DEFREITAS

“ NOTHING AND NO ONE CAN DESTROY THE CHINESE PEOPLE. THEY ARE RELENTLESS SURVIVORS. THEY ARE THE OLDEST CIVILIZED PEOPLE ON EARTH. THEIR CIVILIZATION PASSES THROUGH PHASES BUT ITS BASIC CHARACTERISTICS REMAIN THE SAME. THEY YIELD, THEY BEND TO THE WIND, BUT THEY NEVER BREAK. ”

Pearl Buck – *The Good Earth*

SHANGHAI – CITY ON THE SEA

Our Yangtze River Delta adventure started with a blur – literally. Zipping from the airport to downtown Shanghai at 431 kilometres per hour on the world's fastest Maglev train seemed a most appropriate way to enter China's largest, hippest and fastest-growing city. Once a backwater fishing village and seaport at the mouth of the Yangtze River, Shanghai rose to prominence through the 19th century after the First Opium War. Today, it's China's most open city and a showpiece of the country's booming economic prosperity. China's late leader, Deng Xiaoping, summed it up nicely when discussing the city: "If China is a dragon, then Shanghai is its head."

With its modern skyline, yellow cabs and 'business, business, business' motto, Shanghai feels more like New York City. As far as big cities go, it's overwhelmingly impressive, but all that sleekness tends to overshadow its cultural roots, so you'll have to work a bit to discover the city's more traditional distractions. A good place to start is **Chenghuang Miao**, or the City God Temple, within the old walled part of the city. It's a quiet cultural oasis amid all the bustle, steel and glass. Surrounding the temple complex are hundreds of centuries-old shops selling everything from herbal medicines to jade figurines, and a plethora of restaurants serving ample portions of the city's more traditional cuisine, including the perennial Shanghainese favourite, *xiao long bao*, or steamed soup dumplings. The popular and convenient



Lu Bo Lang restaurant within the complex has hosted many world leaders, including Bill Clinton and Fidel Castro, and serves some of the best *xiao long bao* in town.

For a unique juxtaposition of old and new Shanghai we spent a morning on **The Bund**, the city's famous waterfront district on the west bank of the **Huangpu River**. Standing near the railings of the flood-control wall known as the lovers' wall, we marvelled at the century-old architecture lining the promenade and the futuristic **Oriental Pearl Tower** dominating the modern **Pudong** skyline across the river. The promenade is also the spot where hundreds of residents, armed with silk fans, fighting sticks and swords, gather each morning to perform their compelling tai chi exercises.

Although we enjoyed the first few days of our journey in busy and modern Shanghai, our hope was to experience some of the more enduring traditional culture that Pearl Buck described in her books about life in China, so it was the smaller Delta towns beyond that provided our more memorable experiences.

ZHOUZHUANG – VENICE OF THE EAST

The early morning sunlight illuminated the thin wisps of mist that gently swirled over the still waters of Zhouzhuang's Zhongshi Street canal. Our guide, her glistening gold-capped teeth punctuating a warm, broad smile, greeted us as we stepped onto her boat. After we settled into our seats, she effortlessly pushed away from the canal wall and started to row. For an hour this charming lady sculled her Chinese 'gondola' through the old town, past other boats covered in blue awnings, ancient 14th-century arched stone bridges and Taoist temples dating back to the 11th century. Her singsong lilt, contagious smile and obvious civic pride made us feel more like family guests than tourists.

Dubbed the **Venice of the East**, Zhouzhuang is one of those towns that has bent with the winds of change, but hasn't broken with its traditional ways. The old town, with its canals and narrow cobbled streets, remains much as it did hundreds of years ago, in a sort of time warp amid China's modern growth spurt. Each ancient bridge we drifted under resembled a time portal into a different era of the town's layered past. Our boat ride ended all too quickly, but it was only one of the many adventures we enjoyed while exploring China's Yangtze River Delta.



SUZHOU – THE GARDEN CITY

Suzhou is a must-see for its beautiful classical Chinese gardens. The city is one of the oldest in the Delta and once boasted 200 classical gardens, the first of which dated from the 5th century BC, and many of the more than 60 that still remain date from the 11th and 12th centuries. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties the city's classical gardens prompted the popular Chinese saying, "In Heaven there is paradise; on Earth, there is Suzhou." In 1997, UNESCO recognized Suzhou's uniqueness and formally designated its gardens World Heritage Sites.

Created in 1140, the **Master of Nets Garden** is Suzhou's smallest, but arguably its most beautiful and charming. The garden's original architects made brilliant use of the limited space and their remarkable balance of water, plants, rocks and buildings creates the illusion of a much larger area.

At the opposite end of the scale is the **Humble Administrator's Garden**, one of China's most important classical gardens. It's the city's largest and one of the newest (built starting in 1510), but considering it cost a boatload of silver and took 16 years to complete, it's hardly humble. The garden is a beautiful work of art, so plan on spending a day if you want to explore its four distinct sections.

Along with its gardens, Suzhou is also famous for its high-quality silk production and no visit would be complete without touring the **No. 1 Silk Factory**. The four-hour tour takes you through the entire silk-making process, from silkworm to finished cloth. Each silkworm spins its cocoon out of a continuous strand up to almost 1,000 metres long and workers use machines to twist together the strands from four to eight cocoons to form a silk thread. How they find the end of the almost invisible strand of each cocoon is mind-boggling. You can see examples of the city's famous silk products at the **Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute**.

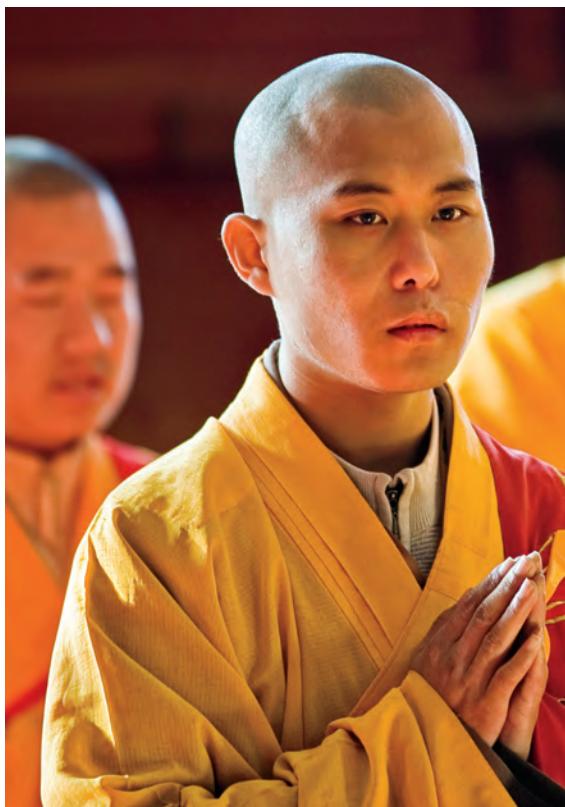
ZHENJIANG – PEARL BUCK'S HOME

Last but not least, we ended our tour with a visit to the childhood home of Pearl Buck. Perched on the banks of the Yangtze, Zhenjiang translates roughly into 'Guarding the Yangtze River.' Besides Buck, the city is famous for its black rice vinegar. The **Zhenjiang Hengshun Vinegar Factory**, China's first, was founded in 1840.

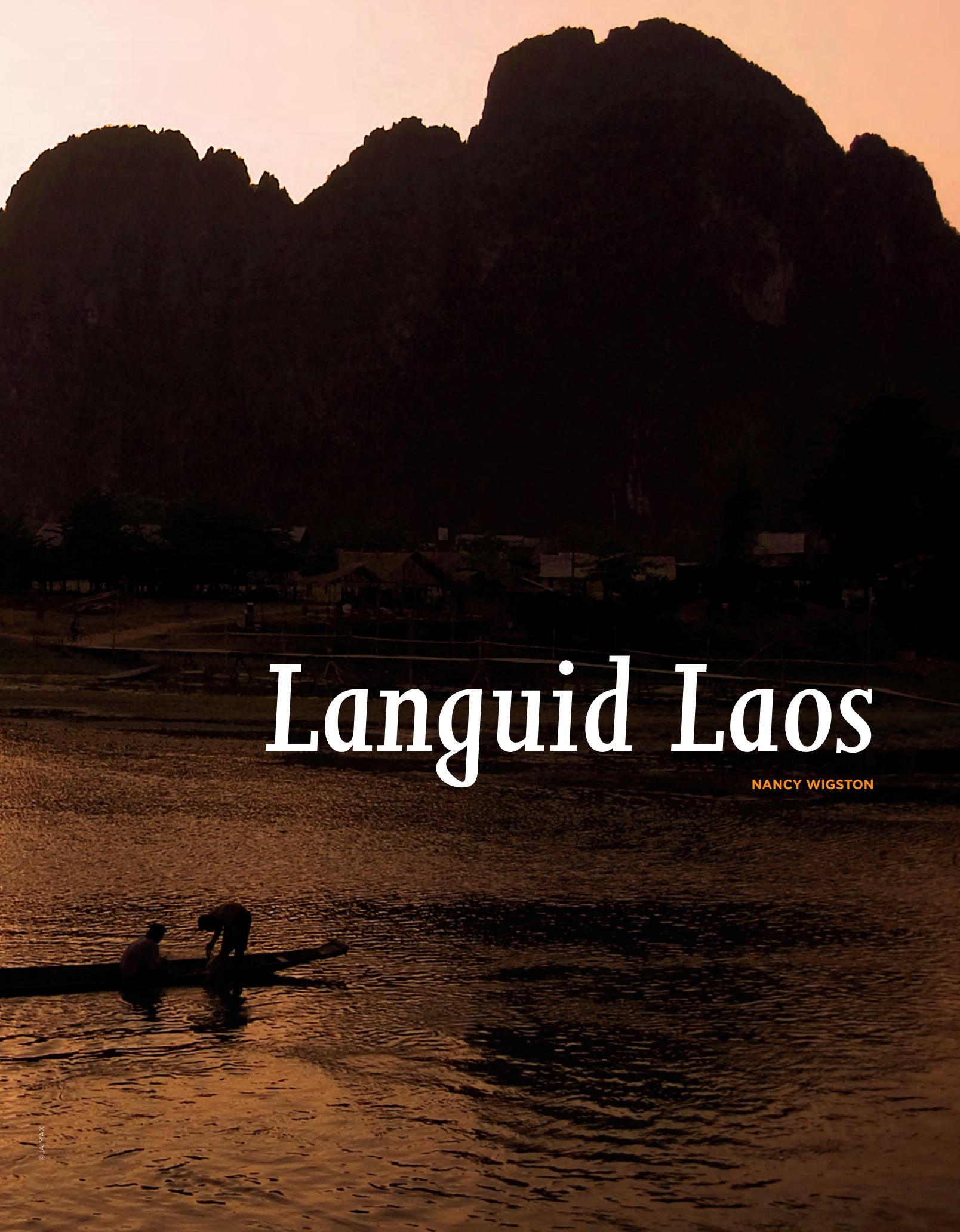
Buck spent her childhood in a house on a hill overlooking Zhenjiang. Chinese was her first language, but her mother also taught her English. It's rumoured that Buck only realized she wasn't Chinese when she was eight – a bit of a stretch given that she had blonde hair. Buck became a prolific writer, eventually winning a Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for her bestselling novel *The Good Earth*, a rich and epic description of peasant life in Zhenjiang. The book was on the bestseller list during 1931 and 1932, and then again in 2004 after Oprah Winfrey picked it for her book club. In 1938, Buck became the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 2008, the Zhenjiang government renovated her old house and declared it the **Pearl S. Buck Museum**, providing visitors a tantalizing look into the life of a Westerner in China. Admission is free and the government took pains to label all the fabulous exhibits in both English and Chinese.

Before leaving Zhenjiang, be sure to spend an afternoon exploring the spectacular **Jinshan Temple**, one of China's most famous Buddhist shrines. The 5th-century structure plays an important role in a number of popular Chinese legends, including the Legend of the White Snake. The panoramic views from the lofty perch atop **Jinshan Mountain** of both the city and the Yangtze are simply stunning.

Beyond Shanghai we experienced the down-to-earth nature of the people of the smaller cities along the Yangtze. It was refreshing to see that despite the dramatic changes sweeping China today, Buck's perceptions still ring true. The oldest civilization on earth has and will continue to pass through many phases, but lucky for us there will always be places where its basic characteristics remain unchanged.







Languid Laos

NANCY WIGSTON

At 5:30 in the morning there's a gentle knock at the door. Dressing in haste, we creep down a teak staircase, flashlights in hand. Velvet darkness cloaks **Luang Prabang**, the ancient capital of the former kingdom of **Laos**. We've risen early to observe *tak bat*, the Buddhist alms-giving ceremony.

As grey skies turn to gold, the first of what will become a stream of saffron-clad men and boys appear, walking barefoot, single file. From Krunxoau Road they make their way toward the historically rich and aesthetically stunning **Wat Xieng Thong**, a temple built in 1560 by King Setthathirath, and a major reason the city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995.

Kneeling by the roadside, believers fill monks' begging bowls with rice and home-cooked dishes. We foreigners gather opposite, showing respect. With the day's nourishment assured, each monk or novice (novices bare one shoulder and wear yellow sashes) returns home to one of the 34 temples in this most spiritual of towns.

Despite a tumultuous 20th century – more bombs were dropped on Laos by the United States during the Vietnam War than on all of Europe during WWII – Luang Prabang, the 14th-century seat of Lao royalty at the confluence of the **Nam Khan** (**Khan River**) and the **Mekong River**, breathes authenticity, just what a growing number of tourists longs to encounter. If you're enamoured of beauty, peace and quiet – with a dash of Lao/European chic – Luang Prabang might just be your dream destination.



©NANCY WIGSTON

Returning to our hotel, we find seats on the terrace overlooking temple gardens above the silvery Mekong. Those green hills opposite are, according to legend, the resting place of two star-crossed lovers, buried side by side by the gods. Fortified by strong Lao coffee, croissants, sweet banana crêpes, dragon fruit, watermelon and papaya, we ponder the conundrum of a socialist state with living Buddhist traditions and a French colonial past. Below us, a fisherman rhythmically casts conical nets into the Mekong (catfish is a local delicacy) while a novice monk pads across the slenderest of bamboo bridges.

This is arguably the best-preserved town in **Southeast Asia**. Much credit is due to its World Heritage status, which forbids high-rises, trucks and tour buses. Not even swimming pools are allowed within the old town, lest monks be offended. Exploring Luang Prabang on foot or bicycle is a breeze. One afternoon, we laughed to see a young bike-riding American, camera in one hand, filming gold and white temple compounds, riots of red and purple bougainvillea, rows of tiny shops and cafés, all the while exclaiming "Wow, wow!" at the wonder of it all.

PHOTOS

1. Tak bat, the alms-giving ceremony
2. Standing Buddha, Wat Sene Soukharam



Mid-town we found the **Royal Palace**, designed by the French and built between 1904 and 1909 by imported Vietnamese workers. Here we imagined the life of the last king, the revered but ineffectual Savang Vatthana. Deposed in 1975 by the Pathét Lao, the king was sent to an internment camp in northern Laos, where he spent the rest of his life. Today, the untouched royal bedrooms seem rather plain, whereas the Coronation Room glows lacquer-red and gold. Palace rooms are filled with many small treasures from the Lao past: bronze drums, ceremonial swords, dancing masks and paintings.

Across the road from the palace we are challenged by the 328 steps leading to the summit of **Mount Phousi**, the hill which dominates the town. Lacy-rooted banyan trees shade our ascent to a 25-metre *chedi* (stupa), **That Chomsi**. Resting, we explore the small sanctuary before descending from west to east down another winding path. A monk seems rapt in meditation; a group of kids plays a game of fortune. Gold-painted Buddhas and colourful statuary greet us at

every turn, some with amusing English signage like the ‘Tuesday Buddha’ reclining after all his hard work.

Reaching the Nam Khan side of the peninsula, we pass balconied French colonial villas freshly painted in hues of ochre and Mediterranean blue. Many have been newly refurbished as guest houses or boutique hotels. At the riverside **Verandah Restaurant**, we pause for drinks (Beerlao is the local tipple), taking in views that stretch to the horizon. On the spot, we decide to hire a car and driver for a 12-kilometre ride to the gleaming white tomb of 19th-century French naturalist and explorer Henri Mouhot (1826–1861), the European whose reports fixed Cambodia’s **Angkor Wat** in the Western imagination. After some quiet moments in the sun-dappled jungle clearing with the young explorer’s tomb – he succumbed to malaria at 35 – we decide on a swim. A short drive takes us to a riverside *ban* (village), where a low-slung boat delivers us to the cool and lovely emerald pool below **Tad Sae Waterfall**.



Kuang Si Waterfall



Indeed, French influence is evident everywhere in Laos: bilingual (French/Lao) street signs, the ubiquitous baguette and, not least, the popular game of *pétanque*, or *boules*. Off-duty policemen enjoy a regular game on a pitch near our hotel. The French love affair with Indochine is clearly an ongoing thing: **Le Banneton** offers first-class croissants, breads and pastries; at **The Blue House**, the lively expat Fabienne ("there was nothing for us in France") extolls the virtues of Lao and Vietnamese silk, while assuring me *talons* (heels) would perfect the look of a silk designer dress, bargain-priced at a million kip (\$123).

Not a *talons* fan, I keep my million, though our French conversation was fun. Luckily, indigenous Lao textiles abound in Luang Prabang province, where weavers honour traditional methods, mostly eschewing chemical dyes. Shops like **Mulberries** and **Ock Pop Tok** design and sell the real thing – some pieces take nine months to weave. And we loved bargaining at the low-key night market, where villagers, among them some of Laos' 49 ethnic minorities, sell their wares. "You're buying *more*?" asked my husband when I turned back, unable to tear myself away from the woven bags at a Hmong (hill tribe) woman's stall. Her elderly neighbour found this hilarious, repeating "You're buying *more*?", then dissolving in gales of laughter. (And yes, I did buy more.)

As recommended by our Swedish host, a sunset cruise on the Mekong is the best of all possible outings. One afternoon the charming and well-informed Mr. Kampong acts as both boat captain and guide. Requesting a stop at a riverside Hmong village, we pass stilted wooden houses with tin roofs, cooking fires and the odd satellite dish, while Mr. Kampong patiently explains both the natural (corn, sesame, chilies, bright green river weed, sweet potato, tamarind, mango, 10 kinds of banana, chickens and water buffalo) and the supernatural (a miniature house for the newly dead and a white cloth ladder to aid the soul in its ascent to the next life). We look around at the village, at an old lady smiling at us while chewing betel nut, at squawking chickens and at women and children bathing in the river. "It's a hardworking life," Mr. Kampong concludes. "But I like it here. And," he adds firmly, "we are very lucky – no crocodiles."

Only one challenge remains after our time in Luang Prabang. How to shake off the seductive languor of this ancient town where two rivers meet? Leaning over our balcony on our last balmy night, we overhear the grateful words of departing guests. "Thank you, we'll be back – and our friends will be coming!" Our thoughts, precisely.

GETTING THERE

Until 1995, **Vientiane** and Luang Prabang were unconnected by road; **Route 13** now links the old and new capitals, but it's no superhighway. Most tourists arrive by plane and purchase visas on arrival. The Mekong remains a vital regional artery.

TALES FOR THE JOURNEY

Canadian Adam Lewis Schroeder's *In the Fabled East* teases out the hold that the exotic East has long exerted on the Western mind. This ribald, adventurous and moving tale is set in pre-war Vietnam and Laos, a "love letter" says Schroeder, to countries that have suffered but that are also "fun to write about – the colours are brighter, the smells more pungent, the air itself more alive with insects and exhaust and talk, talk, talk."

DOING GOOD

Besides running elegant hosteries and restaurants, many foreign and Lao residents engage in charitable work. One morning we helped tutor students in English at **Big Brother Mouse**, a publishing house dedicated to creating books written in Lao and bringing them – sometimes by elephant – to remote villages. Our favourite toddler was delighted with **The Little Elephant That Could**, a Lao version of the classic children's tale. BigBrotherMouse.com

MORE LAOS

Considered the 'new' capital, 449-year-old Vientiane is best enjoyed from a room at **The Settha Palace Hotel**, a dreamily restored 1932 French colonial villa. Vientiane highlights include **Pha That Luang** (Great Sacred Stupa), with its 25-metre spire shimmering gold at sunset; **Patuxi**, a war memorial known as Vientiane's Arc de Triomphe; and the unexpectedly moving **Lao National History Museum**, with photos of Pathet Lao warriors capturing French colonial troops in the jungles of a long-ago war.

A vibrant photograph of a tropical resort. In the foreground, a large, clear blue swimming pool with a grid pattern on the bottom tiles is visible. A wooden deck surrounds the pool, featuring a long wooden sun lounger on the right side. The background is filled with lush green palm trees and tropical foliage, with a traditional-style building featuring a red-tiled roof visible through the leaves.

ROADS TO HEALTH

WELLNESS VACATIONS IN
INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Simona Rabinovitch

©Witthaya/P/BIGSTOCK.COM





Couples' massage, Thailand

© EASTWESTIMAGING/BIGSTOCK.COM



WHEN RESIDENT YOGI Kamal Ranawit raised his arms in the first of this morning's sun salutations, his eyeballs rolled so far back into his head all you could see were the whites of his eyes. Now, that's a complete posture, I thought, giggling to myself. How lucky I felt to be finally practising yoga in **India** as the sun rose behind the ruins of an ancient Shiva temple on the grounds of the luxurious **Oberoi Rajvilas Hotel** in **Jaipur** in the province of **Rajasthan**. As the mountains awoke, brilliant peacocks looked on.

© ZZnet/BIGSTOCK.COM

Considering I've been practising yoga for 10 years and the other two hotel guests in the class were beginners, I found myself craving a more intense experience. But part of yoga is being fully present to what's being offered, and sometimes less is more. So I put my New York reflex on pause and adapted to the energy of the group. As it turned out, I deepened my practice that morning by looking inward and exploring my breath, the bridge between our inner and outer worlds. Kamal approved.

"Western yoga tends to be very body-focused," explained our teacher (also an expert practitioner of an ancient vibrational therapy called Tibetan singing bowls) over pressed ginger tea. "But if you're punishing your body you're not getting relaxed. If you're not getting relaxed, what's the yoga intention? Yoga [also] means breathing exercise, concentration, meditation... Then you can do the yoga. If people are doing it only for the body, they are doing incomplete yoga. You want to relax your body, mind and soul. Otherwise, it's just gymnastics. I say, come and do, then you will come to know what yoga is."

These days, many travellers are doing just that, heading to India, Thailand and other destinations throughout Southeast Asia for wellness-inspired holidays. And you don't have to pull an extended pilgrimage à la *Eat, Pray, Love* to be forever altered by such a trip – be it in the form of a full-on epiphany, improved lifestyle habits or just some blissful memories.

"People are looking for different things in travel experiences and it's taken a healthy direction over the past few years," says Gregg Geoghegan, North American sales and marketing director of Trails of Indochina, a company that works with travel agencies to curate luxury trips to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and Bali. "Not just yoga but massage, spas, religion, meditation, even cooking classes. We're seeing travellers getting into some of the religious culture. Certainly in Thailand, Buddhism is a big thing. You can go to temples and converse with monks; you can even move in with the monks for a three-day stay." As Geoghegan explains, travellers who opt to stay with Buddhist monks do have their own sleeping quarters, but certainly enjoy and learn from the intimate experience.





© GREG ELMS



When I visited Thailand a few years ago, I didn't move in with any monks but was very much affected by their presence. After all, 95 percent of the country is Buddhist and Buddhism's peaceful, gracious and joyful qualities permeate Thai culture. Especially in the smaller villages, I remember how moved I was by the sight of radiant monks, some of whom were handsome young men, wrapped in orange, walking barefoot through villages at sunrise to collect the day's food. There is no shame in this practice; on the contrary, it's considered an honour.

Ajay Ahuja, of Zutshi Travel World Service, works with many North American and European travellers interested in spirituality, yoga and other wellness-related activities. "Spirituality is a buzzword that is big in India today," says the luxury on-location specialist on India, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. "There's a mysticism to this land not found anywhere else. When you're dealing with a culture that's almost 5,000 years old, there is an inherent spirituality in everyday people. Maybe it's the Hindu philosophy of acceptance and karma that makes it all so powerful that Westerners flock to this land to seek it."

In India, he explains, where "each state is a country unto itself and has its own language, culture, food, dress, dance and music," many ashrams run by internationally renowned gurus are located in **South India**. Yet, he says, the **Himalayas** have always been synonymous with spirituality.

For a religious and spiritual centre in **North India**, Ahuja recommends visiting the ancient town of **Rishikesh** situated in the foothills of the Himalayas on the banks of the tranquil **River Ganges**. "Visitors who can afford luxury and opulence will head to the famous five-star **Ananda** in the Himalayas. Boasting excellent spa treatments and facilities, as well as discourses on Vedanta and life, my wife and I have personally enjoyed three short breaks there."

And wherever stressed-out urbanites flock, posh spa treatments follow. "Young, upwardly mobile men and women who are stressed with their daily routines tend to gravitate to spas," Ahuja agrees. "Most five-star hotels have established spas on their premises and combine them with yoga and meditation classes in the mornings and evenings – holistic medicine, so to speak." So great is the

demand that many top hotels partner with famous Swedish spa brands, which locals also enjoy. "In fact, urban hotels offer rejuvenation packages of four days and three nights for younger Indians and foreigners consisting of spa treatments, yoga sessions, massages and meditation classes."

For those of more modest means or who seek a more spartan experience, Ahuja suggests checking out some of the Ayurvedic centres in the southern state of **Kerala**, which he says are quite popular with German, Italian and Swiss travellers. "These centres offer very frugal facilities; in fact, some may not even have electricity or air conditioning, but each offers complete massage and spa treatment packages for a minimum stay of a week or two."

Finally, another big wellness-related travel trend in the region is learning how to cook. According to Geoghegan, 70 to 75 percent of the custom foreign independent tours his agency prepares to Southeast Asia include a cooking class. "You can incorporate a visit to the local market to pick up all the ingredients, have a nice tour of the market with an expert and take the food back to either your home stay or an actual cooking school to prepare a meal."

Another juicy experience to which I can personally attest! While I love to eat, I hate to cook – and definitely don't consider myself talented in that area. I've also been a vegetarian since the age of 12 and am almost vegan. For a semi-vegan like me, Thai and Indian cuisines are veritable orgies of flavour, spice and sustenance. And the *daal! Aloo matar! Bhindi masala!* This was pleasure as I'd never known. My skin glowed, my eyes were clear. My sugar cravings disappeared. I felt so great I wanted to learn how to make these dishes at home. Fortunately, another Oberoi property in **Udaipur** offered cooking classes in the hotel restaurant. "You should learn to cook," proclaimed the chef, as I sautéed, chopped and, joyously, ate. "Good food is both science and art."

He's right. And so, in the name of overall wellness, of which travel, too, is an essential ingredient, consider this ancient Ayurvedic proverb: When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need.

A TALE OF Two Islands

FROM 'THE PERFECT BEACH' TO *THE BEACH*,
THAILAND'S KOH LIPE AND PHI PHI ISLANDS
MAKE THE PERFECT PAIR

TIM JOHNSON





There's something inherently beautiful about a place that makes you take off your shoes and walk in the warm water before you've even checked into your hotel. I was in search of the perfect beach, and I had it on good authority that I was in the right place. After a two-hour motorboat ride from the mainland, I transferred via a floating dock to a long-tail boat, one of those ancient-looking wooden launches that ply the waters between Thailand's green islands. After we putt-putted around a sharp limestone point, the boatman dropped me off at **Sunrise Beach**. With no pier to receive me, I slipped off my shoes and socks and hopped over the side into the **Andaman Sea**. I had indeed arrived.

In many ways, travel to southern **Thailand** is all about the search for perfection, that is, the perfect place to escape the torrid pace of everyday life, to flee the crowds and find a paradise that you can have all to yourself, a place where you can kick off your shoes, sit back and relax. The past several decades have witnessed a marching procession of 'perfect Thai islands,' places pronounced to be the next 'it' relaxation spot – then subsequently overrun by a mob of sun-seekers, clamouring to soak up that perfection. Named among *National Geographic's* Best of the World 2012 and given the title of '**The Perfect Beach**,' **Koh Lipe**, a tiny island that sits in the southern reaches of the Andaman Sea, still maintains an undiscovered feel. And its immediate predecessor on the hit parade, the **Phi Phi Islands** – a place made famous as the shooting location for Leonardo DiCaprio's flick *The Beach* – remain remarkably beautiful and placid, if somewhat more sophisticated.

Soon after my arrival at Koh Lipe, I set about exploring the island, which has no proper roads and little motorized transportation; unless you have a moped, travel from Point A to Point B is undertaken on foot or by long-tail boat. Charmingly, the main thoroughfare that connects Lipe's two main beaches, **Pattaya** and **Sunrise**, is simply called the '**Walking Street**', a rather literal but absolutely correct description. I walked the length of the Walking Street, passing sleepy little businesses – places selling boat tickets or cheap massages – before I arrived at Pattaya, the busier of the two beaches. Most off-the-radar destinations have a certain quirky factor, indications that things like market research have not yet arrived. I see clear evidence of this everywhere on Lipe: official signs (featuring abundant mistranslations) are often



“When I dive in, I’m completely surrounded by coral, as far as I can see, in all directions, an unforgettable underwater world of the strange, the beautiful and the vibrantly colourful.”

hand-written on driftwood and nailed to poles, and some business names are, well, rather odd... for example, Oh My God!, a place where I stop to have lunch and the owner – named Oh – a shirtless, shoeless man with the cut physique of a Muay Thai kickboxer – serves me himself.

I chatted with Carl Wills, a barefoot restaurant manager from a neighbouring resort who first visited the island six years ago and came back two years ago to stay. While things have developed rapidly since his first visit (when there were no paved paths and just a couple of simple bungalows for accommodation), he’s pleased that Lipe, which he notes “has just come on the tourist map,” has not gone the way of some of the party beaches in other parts of Thailand. “Here it’s all families and happy couples,” he says. When I mention to him ‘The Perfect Beach,’ he tells me to go out to the archipelago, a series of uninhabited nearby islands. “Then you’ll see a perfect beach,” he tells me with a smile.

So I did. I hired a long-tail boat and went snorkelling – an unforgettable experience. The reefs around Lipe and its satellites are

protected as part of the Tarutao National Marine Park and contain up to 25 percent of the world’s tropical fish species. When I dive in, I’m completely surrounded by coral, as far as I can see, in all directions, an unforgettable underwater world of the strange, the beautiful and the vibrantly colourful. We pass many completely empty beaches, just strips of white along the green of the shore, and stop for a break at a makeshift beach settlement. “Chao lei” my guide keeps saying, pointing to the tumbledown shelters. Sea gypsies.

After returning to Lipe and spending a few more days on this intrepid island, I decide that I’m ready for a bit more luxury. And so I head to the Phi Phi Islands – the ‘it’ destination that preceded Koh Lipe – a place that has managed to maintain its beauty and charm while adding four-star facilities for the more discerning guest. It takes a bit of effort to get there – several hours on a boat, with one transfer – and I arrive at Zeavola, a luxury seafront resort, ready to relax. Here, I don’t have to shed my flip-flops and jump in the water; a tractor with a passenger trailer fetches me from the long-tail boat.



But first I must take on the ultimate Phi Phi challenge – scaling the **Tonsai Tower**. Tonsai was one of the first rock climbing destinations in Thailand, and climbers from around the world still flock to this dramatic limestone cliff that bookends the beach in front of **Koh Phi Phi Don**'s busy main town. My instructor for this beginner session is named Dee, a small Thai man with a big smile, ropy muscles and the words 'Tonsai Rock' tattooed across his back. As we walk to the cliff, he points to the remnants of walls and foundations of buildings that were washed away eight years ago, the only remaining evidence of the tsunami that devastated the island in 2004. "We started from zero," he says, making an 'O' with his thumb and index finger. I ask him why Phi Phi is a great destination, and he says that, even though it's still fairly remote, you have all the modern conveniences here in a small corner of paradise. "You can even have Wi-Fi on the beach," he says with a smile. And he adds that there's a certain lovely harmony here, with people – Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, sea gypsy – from all over Thailand. "We respect all cultures," he says. "Everyone's the same."

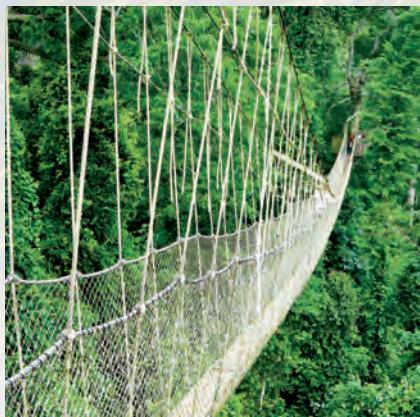
I am anything but an expert rock climber, but Dee carefully shows me the ropes, from safety information to ground training and climbing the route first to demonstrate the handholds. In the end, I didn't conquer the Tower – not even close – but I did complete one of the beginner courses, climbing, with copious amounts of encouragement from Dee, about five storeys up to a spot where I could see both sides of the strip of land below: two blue bays, two white beaches, with the town in the middle.

I finish the day by cooling down on a sunset cruise with a group of mostly Australian travellers. After visiting **Maya Bay** on neighbouring **Koh Phi Phi Lee** (the shooting location for much of *The Beach*), with its breathtaking blue lagoon almost completely surrounded by intimidating cliffs, we settle onto the deserted beach at **Bamboo Island** and watch one of the most perfect sunsets I've ever seen. The big orange sun dips down past a green hump called **Mosquito Island**, casting hues of orange, purple and blue across the horizon and the clouds in front of it. I hear one of the Aussies say to her husband, "I never want to leave. Let's just build a house right here on the beach." And I find myself nodding. I may have just found my own perfect beach.



The Undiscovered Coast

You're sitting on a stool in front of an easel, trying to capture the distant landscape with your paintbrush, but the view stubbornly refuses to hold still. Yesterday, you journeyed across a great desert, powered along by the promise of bratwurst and a frosty mug of fine Bavarian pilsner at the end. A few days from now, you'll be gazing up at the leafy-green canopy of a rainforest, camera at the ready, trying to capture grosbeaks, grey parrots and maybe an ibis in your viewfinder. There will be chimpanzees further on, your guide reminds you, and you'll get to meet them. Where are you? The ports of call – Luderitz, Cotonou, Takoradi – are unfamiliar, but offer tantalizing clues. You're breezing through



the cobalt-blue Atlantic, aboard a private cruise ship, exploring West Africa – the Earth's last great undiscovered coast.

To many travellers, the West African coast represents one of the world's few remaining unexplored frontiers. Tourism has made the national parks and natural wonders of the vast continental interior more accessible to foreign visitors than ever before, and niche tour operators have redoubled their efforts to bring travellers even further off the now well-trodden path. With the exception of South Africa and Namibia – countries that emerged into nationhood with industry and infrastructure largely intact – much of Africa's Atlantic coast is still unfamiliar to the world of leisure travel. But where some see only challenges, a few others see untapped potential. The secret, the thinking goes, is to tackle Africa from an entirely new and unexpected direction: the sea.

Small-ship cruising represents an ideal introductory step for a region just awakening to the economic possibilities of tourism. Trailblazing travellers eager to discover emerging destinations can access ports from a well-appointed ship that doubles as a floating boutique hotel. Visitors can be treated to a variety of locales and diverse experiences conveniently and comfortably without spending days on the



road or dealing with the hassle of internal flights. On Africa's Atlantic coast, travellers can move from cosmopolitan South Africa to bustling Congolese markets to the curious intermingling of Catholicism, Islam and traditional voodoo in Benin in the space of two weeks while having to unpack only once.

"West Africa was practically built for small-ship cruising," says Jeff Russell, Vice

uncovered Coast

President of Innovation at G Adventures, a Toronto-based adventure-travel company. "When we were researching the region for our West Africa Cruise trip, we kept discovering all kinds of amazing experiences all the way up the coast. The biggest struggle from a planning perspective was squeezing them all in."

In April 2013, G Adventures' 132-passenger cruise ship, the M/S Expedition, will depart from its usual Ushuaia-to-Spitsbergen repositioning route and venture up the coast on a unique departure from Cape Town to Dakar. The trip itself – available as either a comprehensive 27-day odyssey or in shorter 18- or 12-day stretches from the Cape to Accra or Accra to Dakar, respectively – features loads of land-based excursions while making the most of your time at sea. Wine tastings guided by a sommelier proficient in South African vintages, painting workshops *en plein air* and an on-ship African film festival are just a few of the options to keep you busy between adventures and on-deck tanning sessions.

As much as leisure travel celebrates the region's desire to move forward, West Africa remains inexorably and profoundly linked to its past. Places like Ouidah, São Tomé Island and Gorée Island ensure the ghosts of yesterday never stray too far from

Natural splendour, vibrant culture and gripping human history are everywhere in West Africa. Sometimes, in order to truly get off the beaten path, you have to go where there are no paths at all and blaze one of your own.

Steve English



memory. On Senegal's Maison des Esclaves, visitors can stand at the Door of No Return, a simple stone passage on the shores of Gorée Island purported to be the portal through which thousands – perhaps millions – departed their homeland as slaves, never to return. The view is both harrowing and impossibly beautiful. Similar, more official monuments dot West Africa's ports, but none can hope to replicate the Door's simplicity and haunting symbolism.

But West Africa's natural beauty, diverse culture and abundant wildlife temper its heavy history. First-timers visiting Namibia's tenné-tinted sands will do a double take when they stumble upon Swakopmund, an idyllic slice of Bavaria

in the desert. Ghana's Kakum National Park, located just inland off the Gulf of Guinea, is a haven for rare and exotic animals like civet cats, pygmy elephants, endangered meerkats and at least 500 varieties of butterfly. In the Bijagós Archipelago, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the Expedition's team of on-board naturalists and guides will help introduce the curious to the region's chimpanzees and marine turtles. Amateur ornithologists can prepare for field days by the handful; on G Adventures' 27-day cruise, birders can spot black-footed penguins – commonly known as jackass penguins for their peculiar donkey-like squawks – at South Africa's Boulder Beach, and a spectacular array of exotic avifauna on the tiny islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.

"There really is something for every stripe of nature lover in West Africa," Russell says. "We wanted to present an accurate picture of West Africa through its nature, culture and history. The Expedition carries its own fleet of Zodiac boats, which help us tap into the unique experiences the region offers that our travellers otherwise wouldn't get to have."

"There are places big ships just can't go," he continues. "And often, those are the places you'll read about later and kick yourself for missing."

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Bon voyage et bon appétit!

NEW AND NOTABLE

Worldly Delights

Mary Luz Mejia

IN CANADA, YOU SAY?

Canadian-based **Sloane Tea Company** takes tea very seriously. Its rare leaves and blends are the products of certified tea sommeliers who use centuries-old artisanal techniques, chosen from hundreds of tea gardens and estates the world over by trained culinary professionals. Even one of France's top perfumeries in Grasse lends the services of its Maître Nez (Head Nose) to the development of Sloane's scented teas. Packaged in elegant tins, with beautiful travel-inspired designs, these exquisite teas, herbal infusions and estate reserve blends are worthy of a rajah but available to every tea lover who appreciates a well-made pot of the best. To order online: sloanetea.com

BACON MADNESS CONTINUES

You've seen it on cupcakes, in high-end chocolates, and now it's available as a jam – yes, bacon is here to stay. Seattle-based chef **Josh Henderson** started making American classics in a vintage Airstream trailer before he got the idea to render quality bacon with spices and onions until he ended up with a 'jam,' since copied by chefs the world over. Called **Skillet Bacon Spread**, this is the ideal accompaniment to sandwiches, a cheese board or a variety of dishes; it's the umami-rich linchpin that will have dinner guests guessing what made your food taste so good! \$19.95 for a 300 g jar, available in Toronto at All The Best Fine Foods (allthebestfinefoods.com) or across Canada at skilletstreetfood.com/shop.php.

NYC MEETS SYDNEY

At the recently opened **Momo Brasserie** in **Sydney, Australia**, owner **Bruce Goldman** has brought the Big Apple deli favourite, made-from-scratch pastrami, to the good people Down Under. Inspired by NYC's Katz's Deli, Goldman and Momo chef **John Casey** have switched up the recipe to appeal to local palates, creating a winner with their less spicy but just as popular pastrami; each batch takes 10 days to prepare. More cumin seeds and less paprika are key to this Aussie version and locals are loving it to the tune of 30 kilograms a week! Pass the Rueben and the napkins! momobrasserie.com.au

BOULUD FOR ALL SEASONS

Trophy diners and celeb chef stalkers take note: chef **Daniel Boulud** will be opening a signature restaurant in **Toronto's Four Seasons Hotel**. The hotel, which is moving to its new location at 60 Yorkville Avenue, will also feature condo units and a ground-floor lounge, with Boulud's restaurant smartly situated above it. Projected opening date is July. And this chef is one busy homme; he's opening a casual-upscale French restaurant in **Montreal's** newly updated **Ritz-Carlton** next year. He's calling that venture **Maison Boulud**. *Ooh la la!*

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Most dining-savvy restaurant-goers will tell you that when there's a jaw-dropping view the food tends to suffer. But that's not the case at **Above & Beyond**, the DestinAsian Luxe List award-winning Hotel ICON's new restaurant, offering breathtaking views of **Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour** from every table. With cuisine that's a modern marriage of traditional Chinese with contemporary techniques and ingredients, it's just the place to get a feel for this vibrant city while dining in a sophisticated, Terence Conran-designed space outfitted with an impressive wine cellar.



THE LADY AND THE TART

Worldly Delights

Mary Luz Mejia



©FUMIO OKADA

This is the story of the little egg tart that could, did and still does. It all began when Englishman Andrew Stow moved to the sleepy village of **Coloane**, at the southern end of **Macau**. It was here, among the pretty pastel Portuguese colonial buildings and narrow cobblestone streets, that the former pharmaceutical chemist and his then-girlfriend set up a modest bakery called **Lord Stow's**. The idea, back in 1989, was to make European-style breads and baked goods that eschewed preservatives and focused on quality. What Stow didn't know - but had always hoped for - was that one day, his take on the ultimate egg tart would put Coloane and his humble little bakery on the 'must-visit' and 'must-eat' list of just about every gastro-tourist on the planet.

While travelling through **China**, my husband and I made a pit stop at this intriguing island with its distinctly Portuguese flavour. We had been staying in **Hong Kong**, a mere 60 kilometres northeast of the island's **Cotai Strip**. After a quick ferry ride across the **Pearl River Delta**, we landed at the newly minted **The Venetian Macao** resort - a thriving addition to this part of the world's gambling epicentre, one that continues to surpass Las Vegas in gambling revenue. Once we explored the expansive resort, which has more floor space than four Empire State Buildings, we made our way into town to savour Macanese delicacies and hunt down those much-coveted tarts.

Although the legendary 'Lord,' as he was nicknamed by locals, passed away a couple of years ago, his sister Eileen had moved to Macau from England to take over business operations and continue her brother's legacy.

Thanks to her, the spirit of Lord Stow (1 Rua da Tassara, lordstow.com) is alive and well in Coloane. I meet Eileen inside a small, pale yellow building. I know I'm at the right place because instantly I'm enveloped in a buttery embrace of freshly baked tarts. It's a typical muggy subtropical day, but no matter, my salivary glands kick into overdrive with each consecutive waft of sweet, baked custard and flaky pastry. Eileen, a pretty blonde with a big smile, welcomes us into the bakery and shows us around the kitchen. We both stare in awe

as local women work with the kind of precision and dexterity that only comes from years of practice. Pastry is fitted into special moulds and what looks like a mini-dam rises above the ridge, filled to just the right level with a very runny custard before baking.

I ask Eileen what Andrew was like. "He was a man who always managed to bring his dreams to life," she says with a smile. She recalls standing in London's Oxford Street in May 1989. "Our noses were pressed against a cake shop window. Among all the fancy cakes were some shrivelled little yellow and brown tarts. 'That's what I want to make in my bakery,' he told me. 'Ugh!' I said, 'Are you mad?' 'No – mine will be much better than that,' Andrew replied. He was absolutely right." And so, in 1989, his subtly sweet, meltingly tender concoction with a brûléed top and a flaky crust, that's part English custard and part Portuguese *pastel de nata*, was born.

And it continues to be a superlative tart. The lineups outside this out-of-the-way bakery are testament to that. Lord Stow's creation is now iconic. In the mid-1990s, visitors coming to Macau from Hong Kong discovered them, buying the tarts by the dozen to take back to their friends. Then, recalls Eileen, the Hong Kong media started writing about them. By 1998, Lord Stow franchised into Hong Kong, causing 'egg tart fever,' and copy-cat shops opened on every other corner. That only fed the frenzy as soon as people learned that the original home of this special little tart was right here in Macau.

I ask Eileen why the egg tart captured the fancy of locals and visitors alike. She theorizes it's because the Chinese have their dan tart or Chinese egg tart for dim sum, so they were intrigued to hear of this Englishman doing something similar using what Eileen calls "a Portuguese dialect." I reckon that a tart made with this much care, freshly baked and hot from the oven, is something that even non-dessert eaters would pretty much cross the sea to savour.

We buy a half-dozen brûléed beauties and say our goodbyes to Eileen. Much like the tarts, the food of Macau is the result of Portuguese culinary influences intertwined with local ingredients and techniques. And sometimes it's these marriages of necessity, invention and culinary convenience that produce the most astounding creations.



OTHER MACANESE DELIGHTS

Galinha à Africana – butterflied chicken peppered with fiery piri piri chilis served with thick, crunchy chips on the side and usually a crisp, green salad.

Chili Crab – huge crabs served whole in a coconut milk-laced curry and chili sauce, served with stir-fried veggies.

Pork Chop Bun – crispy outside with a tender interior, these freshly baked buns have a pan-fried (or deep-fried) pork chop inside – the local version of a burger but without any of the usual toppings like lettuce or tomato.

Ginger Milk – another popular Macanese dessert – soft pudding with hits of fresh ginger throughout.

SOJU

Worldly Delights



Discover the heart
and Seoul of a time-
honoured Korean
libation.

As interest in Korean cuisine continues to grow, and items like *bulgogi*, *kimchi* and *bibimbap* become ingrained in our culinary vocabulary, **soju** – Korea's native liquor – is quickly gaining ground as a favourite ingredient among mixologists in hip cocktail lounges. It's also a popular beverage in Canadian urban centres, including British Columbia's **Jang Mo Jib** restaurants and almost any Korean restaurant or *noraebang* (karaoke bar) in Toronto's Koreatown.

Often used interchangeably with Japanese sake in cocktail recipes, soju actually has more in common with vodka, but it's a milder and less alcoholic version. Yet worldwide, it outsells vodka and is by far the most popular liquor in Korea, with billions of litres consumed every year. Jinro is the largest producer and exporter, and has been making soju for more than 85 years. Its **Chamisul Fresh** and **Chamisul Original** brands are quadruple-filtered with charcoal made from Korean bamboo for clarity and smoothness. Virtually all brands exported to Canada are decidedly clear, crisp, lightly sweetened and relatively neutral in taste.

Historians believe the Mongols first brought the Persian technique of distilling to **Korea**

Alison Kent

in the 1300s. Soju was originally made from rice and distilled at alcohol contents higher than the current range of 19% to 25%. Both home and commercial soju distillation was refined throughout the centuries until Japanese occupation, followed by severe rice shortages, hampered traditional soju production throughout much of the 1900s. While distilling soju from rice is no longer banned, the trend toward producing it at lower alcohol levels and from ingredients other than or in addition to rice, such as barley, wheat, tapioca and sweet potato, carries on.

Soju is an integral part of Korean culture and drinking it correctly in social or business settings involves certain customs and rituals. The conventional way to enjoy soju is in small glasses and with a selection of snacks, or *anju*. Many a business deal has been made or broken over rounds of soju, for it is a popular belief that only when drinking does one reveal one's true self, and hence is shown worthy of being trusted as a business partner.

Now some rules: your glass must be filled by someone else at the table – resist the urge to replenish your own. By the same token, you are expected to fill your companion's glass, being careful to ensure it is never empty. If pouring for an elder or 'superior' person, hold the bottle with both hands or, if you can manage it, with the bottle in your right hand and your left hand touching your elbow – this recalls the days when the sleeve of the *hanbok* was held back so as to not touch any food. Next, when your glass is being filled, be sure to hold it with both hands, preferably with the glass in your left palm, your right hand cupped underneath, and your head slightly bowed. And as a last point in this heavily abbreviated list, in a continued demonstration of respect, turn away from your elder or anyone of a higher-ranking status as you sip, and use your free hand to hide the glass from view.

Adding to this, many Koreans will say, 'one shot!', meant as a challenge to down the contents of your glass in one gulp. As you can see, traditional soju imbibing requires a delicate balance of etiquette, a solid

understanding of decorum, and perhaps most important, endurance. *Gun bae!*

Whether you've just discovered soju or have been enjoying its nuanced flavours for years, it is definitely a drink to get excited about, as Korean cuisine continues to grow in popularity and soju becomes more readily available throughout Canada.

1. SEOUL SUNSET

Makes: 1 cocktail

1 oz soju
1/2 oz Chambord liqueur
1/2 oz Hendrick's gin
Juice of half a lemon
Garnish: Lemon zest and skewered fresh fruit

Fill cocktail shaker with ice. Add soju, Chambord, gin and lemon juice; shake well. Strain into a martini glass and add garnish.

2. SOJU CAESAR

Makes: 1 cocktail

You can find *kimchi*, Sriracha and BBQ eel sauce in Asian grocery stores.

6 oz Clamato juice
1 oz soju
2 drops Sriracha (hot chili sauce)
2 drops BBQ eel sauce
2 tbsp chopped *kimchi*
1 tsp grated fresh ginger
Ice

Garnish: Cucumber spear, lemon wedge, parsley sprig and hot chili flakes

Fill cocktail shaker with ice. Add juice, soju, Sriracha, BBQ eel sauce, *kimchi* and ginger; shake well. Strain over ice into a highball glass and add garnish.

Cocktail recipes adapted from David Kim, manager at Sushi Moto, Toronto.

Special thanks to Sang Kim for sharing his knowledge and expertise. Sang's third book, *Woody Allen Ate My Kimchi*, will be published in 2013.

**WHERE TO FIND IT:****CHAMISUL FRESH SOJU (JINRO)**

360 ml bottle

BC Liquor Stores: \$9.13

Ontario (LCBO): \$6.40

With soft floral and citrus notes, this soju has hints of pear and a lightly dry, warming finish.

CHAMISUL ORIGINAL SOJU (JINRO)

375 ml bottle

BC Liquor Stores: \$9.62

Quebec (SAQ): \$5.65

Crisp and complex in flavour, this is one of the most popular brands of soju.

CHARM SOJU LIQUOR

360 ml bottle

Ontario (LCBO): \$5.70

With hints of citrus, vanilla and malt, this soju is known for its exceptionally smooth, clean and crisp taste.

CHUM-CHURUM COOL SOJU

360 ml bottle

Ontario (LCBO): \$5.85

Chum-churum means 'like the first time,' likely a reference to its clear-as-water colour and pure, clean flavour.

WHITE SOJU (MUHAK)

360 ml bottle

BC Liquor Stores: \$8.70

Made from pure rice and barley, this clean, crisp soju has hints of honey and light lemon notes.

DINING HONG KONG STYLE

Worldly Delights

Federica Maraboli



I admit there have been many times when the tempting whiff of something grilling at a street stand has made my mouth water. No doubt there are authentic taste experiences to be found at roadside stalls; nonetheless, there is something to be said for dining in style. If you lack an iron stomach or simply prefer your taste experiences served on a tablecloth, read on.

Travellers looking for an upscale dining experience in an exotic, refined setting should make haste to **Asia's** culinary capital, **Hong Kong**. There's still plenty of streetside service for the more adventurous, but you'll also find a cornucopia of very fine dining in some very posh places. In a city with more than 11,000 restaurants and eateries, every gastronome is bound to find a slice of paradise.

And this November, thousands of visitors will descend on the city for the fourth annual **Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival**, an event that is already ranked as one of the top 10 international food and wine festivals by ForbesTraveler.com. The month kicks off with this four-day festival in **West Kowloon**, with the iconic **Victoria Harbour** as its backdrop, where foodies and oenophiles can enjoy an array of international food and wines, alongside spectacular views of towering skyscrapers. At last year's event, nearly 300 booths represented 19 wine-growing countries and regions, including Australia, Chile, Spain, South Africa, Italy, France and the U.S. (for the curious, a handful of Ontario ice wines made the list), as well as local award-winning dishes, Western and Asian cuisines. Themed parties, perhaps featuring sake from various Japanese prefectures, and cultural performances, or events



like wine appreciation classes are held on various nights of the festival. Throughout the month, look for a series of events like the **Lan Kwai Fong Carnival**, food and music in the colonial Stanley district or food- and wine-themed tours.

For those who would rather bypass the crowds and festivities and head straight to the dining room, be sure to check these establishments off your list.

YÈ SHANGHAI

At street level of Kowloon's **Marco Polo Hong Kong Hotel**, ladies line up outside the neighbouring Hermès, Ferragamo and Chanel stores as if there were a fire sale. Push past the queues and make your way inside to **Yè Shanghai**, a 2012 Michelin two-star restaurant that offers a chic oasis of dark woods and private booths, inspired by old Shanghai. The emphasis here is on quality. Yes, there is dim sum, but other star dishes include the spicy Sichuan dandan noodles in peanut sauce with sesame, a perfect balance of heat and flavour, and the tender barbecued pork and pine nut pastry pocket – flaky and full of surprises. Small chairs to hold ladies' purses are placed beside you; a thoughtful gesture, especially if your bag is a Birkin from next door. **6/F, The Marco Polo Hong Kong Hotel, Kowloon**



LOONG TOH YUEN AT HULLETT HOUSE

On the other side of **Canton Road** you'll find the stunning colonial white stucco **Hullett House**, which dates back to 1881 when it was the Marine Police headquarters. Today it's an exquisite boutique hotel with five restaurants and bars including the **Parlour**, **Stable's Grill** and **St. George**, where the kitchen is led by Michelin star chef Philippe Orrico, former protégé of Paris' Pierre Gagnaire. For Saturday brunch or weekday dim sum, cross the quiet courtyard dotted with iron bird cages, to **Loong Toh Yuen Tea Room**, where the highly acclaimed chef Sze Fai presents imaginative, modern Cantonese delights. Surprises come in the form of steamed shrimp dumplings flavoured with rosé Champagne, or the delicious deep-fried shrimp rolls with 'thousand-year-old egg' and mayonnaise sauce. And the glutinous sesame dumplings dipped in yellow bean powder for dessert should come with a warning: highly addictive. **2A Canton Road, Kowloon**

CUISINE CUISINE (IFC)

Although it features cool, blown-glass Belgian chandeliers, warm woods and dramatic floor-to-ceiling curtains meant to add a measure of privacy, the large main room feels a bit like a banquet hall. Better to dine in one of the corner VIP rooms, where the service is attentive yet unobtrusive, and the views of the Kowloon and **Wanchai** skylines dazzle. Executive chef Lee Yuk-Lam, known as the 'private chef of the rich and famous,' delivers a mix of classic and nouvelle Cantonese fare. I have a penchant for crispy Peking duck thanks to my days in London and **Cuisine Cuisine** serves the whole roasted bird, deliciously golden on the outside and moist on the inside, with three different types of pancakes. Other dishes include the perfectly salty-sweet braised bird's nest soup with fresh crab meat (all seafood is delivered fresh daily) and a classic deep-fried chicken in lemon sauce. **3101-3107, podium level 3, IFC mall, Central**

RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL

From its perch atop the **International Commerce Centre**, the **RC Hong Kong** is officially the highest hotel in the world. Elevators whisk you up to the 102nd floor where, once past reception, you'll find the hotel's main restaurants, **Tosca** and **Tin Lung Heen**.



Named after the famous opera, **Tosca** features southern Italian cuisine, while refined Cantonese is on the menu at **Tin Lung Heen**. Both offer unmatched views of the harbour, Hong Kong Island and beyond. Entire walls of the venues and long, futuristic hallways in between are lined with glass displays, showcasing an impressive array of vintages. If you can't get a seat for dinner (apparently tables are booked up to a year in advance), take solace in a cocktail at **OZONE**, Ritz-Carlton's bar located on the 118th floor. The outdoor breeze, the view and the DJ beats will have you feeling on top of the world. **International Commerce Centre, 1 Austin Road West, Kowloon**



HAWKER HEAVEN

Worldly Delights

Tim Johnson

Singapore's very best food can be found on the street.

It's a hot Friday night in **Southeast Asia** and I'm partying like a rock star – **Singapore** style – which means that as I hop from place to place with celebrity photographer Russel Wong and high-wattage chef and blogger Marc Matsumoto, we skip past all of the city state's coolest bars and clubs and head instead to its most delicious hole-in-the-wall eateries. As we race down one of Singapore's ultra-modern expressways in his SUV, the lights of the city all around us, Wong (who has worked with everyone from Michael Jackson to Jackie Chan and the Black Eyed Peas), turns in his seat to tell me about the time that he took 'Tony' on a similar trip. He is referring to Anthony Bourdain. Wong then warns us that the woman who runs the first place we'll visit isn't always in the best mood, but her Cantonese roast duck is more than worth it. "At lunch, people line up around the corner, and she always sells out," he says, adding that I shouldn't be put off by the spartan appearance of the restaurant, which operates under the less-than-salubrious name of **Kay Lee Roast Meat Joint**. "It's never about the atmosphere, it's always about what's on the plate. Here, food is the common denominator, the great equalizer. It's better to have a good meal and sit in an alley by a trash can – even the Prime Minister does it," he explains. "We grew up with that mindset. When we see a tablecloth, we run away so fast it's like we stole something."

A crossroads for all of South and Southeast Asia, Singapore is a delicious melting pot of cultures and cuisines. Here, on an island with more than 2,200 registered restaurants (not including street food and hawker stands, which seem almost innumerable), the standard greeting is not "How are you?" Rather, it's "Have you eaten?" This tiny nation has undergone astonishing economic progress over the past few decades, and the



busy pace of life here has often precluded cooking at home or dallying over a five-course meal. Late work nights often mean citizens opt for a quick trip to the local hawker stand, which has resulted in a flourishing street-food culture. So while Singapore has no shortage of five-star restaurants (and hotels), residents will tell you that the most mouthwatering meals are to be found on the street – or very nearby.

I was here on a pleasurable assignment: locate Singapore's best food, then eat it. And eat it I did, to the point that midway through the week, I wondered whether I would ever be hungry again. I began by eating my way through some of the island's biggest hawker centres, covered markets lined with rows and rows of tiny food stalls that usually specialize in one item. It's street food made safe. While



maintaining their authenticity, these stalls are regularly inspected, and each one proudly displays its passing grade up front. At the **Maxwell Food Centre**, which is engulfed in a wave of suited businesspeople each day at lunch, I enjoyed *ondeh ondeh*, a sweet treat made of glutinous rice flour and covered in coconut, sort of like a Malaysian Timbit, as well as chicken rice, arguably the island's favourite dish, which delivers exactly what it promises (juicy chicken paired with white rice). I also navigated the 350-plus stalls at the **Old Airport Road Hawker Centre** to find a stand selling fruity *rojak* (also known as Singaporean salad, a mix of fresh fruits, fried dough fritters and bean curds, all coated with peanut sauce), a place so popular I literally had to take a number once I got there. I ate amazing curries from a banana leaf in bustling **Little India**, sipped steaming pork rib soup – the broth poured out of a silver teapot – under swirling ceiling fans in a sort of strip mall, and had pork dumplings at the venerable and unpretentious **Kim Choo**, which serves a fusion of Chinese and Malay cuisine known as Nyonya (or Peranakan) food.

But my favourite meals are consumed while restaurant-hopping with Wong and Matsumoto. When we arrive at the roast meat joint, rather than the expected sour reception, we are in fact treated as family returning from a long journey, with the diminutive owner issuing great bursts of

happy Cantonese commentary and pointing, a huge smile on her face, at press clippings she's taped on the wall of Wong recommending the place. After scarfing down heaping plates of juicy duck while sitting on wobbly stools set right on the sidewalk, we pile back into the SUV and head to **Rochor Original Beancurd**, where we sit at a plastic table in an alley beside a dumpster near cars double-parked up and down the street, all of them here to pick up a cup of this sweet, glutinous dessert. "Tony doesn't like tofu, but he liked this," Wong remarks. "This is the ultimate Singaporean comfort food – you can have it at any time of the day."

We finish our evening at a local ice cream place cleverly called **Udders**, where I succumb to peer pressure and try some ice cream made from durian, the tropical fruit famous for its foul smell, so potent that it's illegal to take on the subway in Singapore. Durian's like nothing I've ever eaten before, an indescribable taste that's indescribably unpleasant, but nonetheless a great way to cap off the night, as it is the ultimate Singaporean taste experience. The same can be said for criss-crossing the island in search of great food, a fact that Wong remarks upon as he drives me back to my hotel. "It's so typical of Singapore," he says, a wry smile on his face. "We won't drive 15 minutes to see our mothers, but we will go half an hour in heavy traffic for a good bowl of noodles."

THE ART OF TEA

Worldly Delights

Federica Maraboli



According to legend, tea drinking was first discovered by the Chinese emperor Shennong some 5,000 years ago when tea leaves from a nearby twig blew into a bowl of boiling water. Upon drinking the brew, Shennong was healed of 72 poisons in his body, which he had acquired by ingesting herbs for medicinal study. Shennong's studies are said to have formed the basis for Traditional Chinese Medicine and he is in fact credited for the well-known pharmacopeia, *The Divine Farmer's Herb-Root Classic*, written thousands of years after his death.

While the health benefits of tea drinking are many, most of us enjoy it simply for pleasure. But for some, tea is also strongly connected to culture and history, as in **Asia** and **Turkey**. In **China** and **Japan**, tea ceremonies – largely influenced by Buddhism – are serious business. The act of brewing, serving and drinking tea can signify anything from simple hospitality to offering an apology to spiritual practice, and at one time denoted social status.

The Chinese tea ceremony is called *cha yi*, or art of tea. Depending on the level of formality and type of tea being used, preparations may vary. Generally, loose-leaf teas, lidded bowls and small cups are used. The process involves varying but specific steps

for rinsing the teapot, cups and tea leaves with hot water before finally steeping and serving the tea.

Japan's *chado* or *chanoyu*, the 'way of tea' ceremony, was influenced by China in ancient times but is considerably different. The procedures, clothing, utensils and gestures used, their arrangement and aesthetic are all part of the artistic expression of life. In this version, *matcha*, or powdered green tea, is whisked to a thin or thick, frothy consistency, depending on the occasion.

In **North America**, we're perhaps more familiar with the British afternoon tea, which today is mostly served at fine hotels (and not to be confused with high tea, as it's often mistakenly referred to). It was traditionally enjoyed by the upper classes between three and five o'clock to tide them over before a fashionably late dinner, and today is accompanied by a selection of scones (with jam and clotted cream), small savoury sandwiches and pastries.

If it all sounds a little too precious, not to worry. No matter how you make your cuppa – with regular tea bags or premium scented tea leaves, in an old mug or fine porcelain – one thing remains the same across the cultures: the act of taking tea is a soothing time out, and one to be savoured and enjoyed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Tea can be paired with cheese. More acidic teas complement a high-fat cheese like *mozzarella di bufala*, while a sweet tea, such as jasmine, helps mute saltier cheese. Try it the next time you have friends over – but there's no milk or sugar allowed.

Although there are hundreds of brands and flavours available today, there are only a few types of tea: black, green, yellow, oolong, white and *pu-erh* (a fermented tea).

White and green teas are unoxidized and, contrary to myth, generally have higher caffeine content than black teas.

While convenient to use, most bagged black teas are blends and generally of lesser quality, containing small particles ('fannings' or 'dusts') of higher-quality loose-leaf teas.

Use boiling water only for black teas. Allow the water to cool slightly before steeping green and white teas; otherwise they will scald and produce a bitter flavour. Always warm the pot or mug beforehand.

Teas are highly absorbent; avoid placing them near fragrant items or spices. Keep away from humidity and store in a dark, dry place.

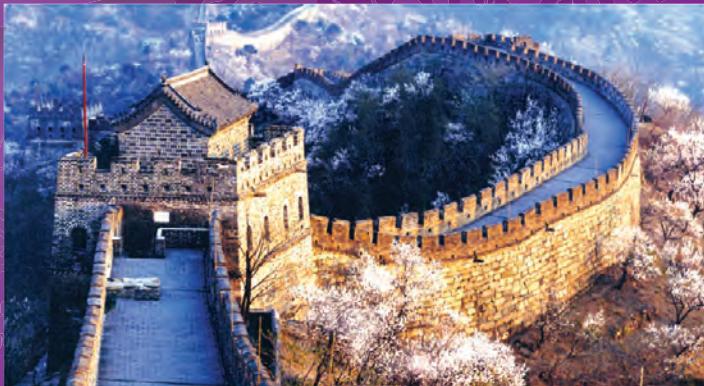
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GLAMPING

Getting back to nature in grand style

Signe Langford

Roughing it used to mean a musty bedroll and a cramped pup tent. One heeded the call of nature in the woods and dinner was a packet of dehydrated noodles by the campfire. This kind of camping is fine for some – and we respect anyone who can spend a week living on the land like this – but for those who believe the great outdoors *can* be improved by a fine wine and a luxurious bed, there's **glamping** ('glamorous camping').

Glamping takes all that's wonderful about camping – nature, peace and quiet, wildlife spotting, fresh air, rest and exercise – and removes all the unpleasant stuff: lack of facilities, leaky tents, lumpy sleeping bags, rehydrated food. Imagine the bliss of nodding off, snuggled in your comfy four-poster bed in the **Australian Outback**, returning to your fully furnished yurt after a thrilling hike in the hills, or being served a gourmet meal at a linen-draped table for two, while the sun sets over the **Okavango**.

We've found five of the most luxurious, exotic and eco-friendly glamping experiences to add to your wish list – all while leaving a minimal footprint on these pristine natural wonders.

THE PHILIPPINES – BLUEWATER SUMILON
Just off the southeastern tip of **Cebu Island**, the white-sand beaches of **Sumilon Island** are caressed by crystal clear waters. This area has been a protected marine sanctuary since 1974, so wildlife is abundant and it's the perfect spot for diving. Large and sturdy tents set up near the lagoon feature twin beds, a mini-bar, lighting, chairs for lounging and a fan to add to the ocean breezes. Washroom facilities are mere steps away.

CAMBODIA – 4 RIVERS FLOATING LODGE
Cambodia has fully recovered from its past political struggles, and a visit to this country is definitely taking the road less travelled. Located in **Tatai**, near the Thai border, **4 Rivers** offers an experience somewhere between camping and staying in a hotel – if that hotel were a floating, luxuriously



appointed tent, boasting a fine-dining restaurant. Being surrounded by spectacular jungles, rivers and wildlife, while relaxing in the lap of luxury, means enjoying the very best of both worlds.

INDIA – BANJAAR TOLA, KANHA NATIONAL PARK

From your tent on the banks of the **Banjaar River** in exotic **India**, catch a glimpse of a tiger moving through the jungle. Pitched on raised platforms, each tent offers panoramic views from a private deck, bamboo floors, flowing saffron fabric walls and eco-sensitive, handcrafted furniture made from naturally fallen trees and driftwood. Sip and dine poolside after a guided nature walk.

BOTSWANA – SANCTUARY BAINES' CAMP, OKAVANGO DELTA

Experience the incredible beauty of the **Moremi Game Reserve** in the Okavango Delta

in style and luxury in one of this intimate camp's five suites. These low-environmental-impact yet opulent accommodations – part tent, part cabin, part four-star suite – are nestled in a grove of trees and papyrus beds. Take a dip in the communal swimming pool or relax on the deck as elephants and lions roam past.

AUSTRALIA – VOYAGES LONGITUDE 131°

Eco-friendly, luxurious tent-suite hybrids dot the ochre earth of World Heritage-listed **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park** in the Australian Outback. Off in the distance, magnificent **Uluru (Ayers Rock)** looms, and steps from your serene hideaway you'll find fine contemporary dining, a 24-hour bar, spa services, a pool and even a library. Sip fabulous Australian wines under a starry night sky or trek on camelback. Special in-room facilities for the physically challenged, including wheelchair access to all areas of the property, are also available.



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CAPE TOWN

Cultural Close-up

Ilona Kauremszky

Ever since soccer mania hit **Cape Town** when it hosted the **2010 FIFA World Cup**, the home of South Africa's parliament has been forever changed by the resulting hoopla. Recently named **World Design Capital 2014**, the city is a fashion incubator, where designers cut their teeth on an array of indigenous themes inspired by the great outdoors, while foodies flock to the many resto upstarts dishing out the wildest mains (think springbok and kudu, both a type of antelope). Around this Garden of Eden (where scientists have discovered 'Eve's footprints,' the fossilized footprints of what they believe to be modern humans' earliest relative), an eco-paradise unfurls. With the dark clouds of apartheid lifted, Cape Town has become über-chic.

WINE APPEAL

It's no wonder a verdant wine route lies between these rolling hills around the **Western Cape**. Drive the famous N1 route – planned to eventually connect Cape Town with Cairo – and discover the exclusive **Stellenbosch** wine region, home to the country's oldest vineyards. Along the banks of the Eerste River in the heart of the Cape Winelands, more than 140 wine estates have put down roots. A fave spot is the **Spier Wine Farm**, an easy 20-minute drive from Cape Town International Airport.

SHOPS

For chic and sustainable, it doesn't get any better than **Long Street**. This stretch of shops has a cool New Orleans French Quarter vibe featuring two-storey storefronts, many adorned with intricate wrought-iron balconies. The historic strip now houses hip boutiques and vegan restaurants sprinkled with antique and African curio shops. Steps away, **Greenmarket Square** is a bustle of activity that starts early in the morning with local artists and craftspeople selling their hand-crafted wares. For those who wish to stay closer to the **Victoria & Alfred Waterfront**, the slick **Victoria Wharf Shopping Centre** smack in the middle boasts designer boutiques along with the eclectic **Red Shed Craft Workshop**, a craft emporium.

NATURAL WONDERS

Ascend the mountain Sir Edmund Hillary once described as one of the world's natural wonders: **Table Mountain**. This trip starts with a dramatic cable car climb 1,087 metres above sea level and opens onto a plant kingdom with more than 1,000 species and peculiar residents like the dassie, a ground-hog-like creature which is actually a distant relative of the elephant, of all things. Basking in a Mediterranean climate with currents from the Indian and Atlantic oceans swirling around this boot-shaped peninsula, Cape Town is the place where



two oceans converge. Despite the tropical climate of the Cape's peninsula, what's surprising is how close this **Mother City** is to the deep freeze of Antarctica – but not when you watch seals bobbing along the pier or observe frolicking jackass penguins on nearby Robben Island.

LOCAL EATS

For a Cape feast, make haste to the luxurious **Conservatory** by the V&A Waterfront for a diverse menu that draws inspiration from the many cultures that have settled here over the past 350 years. On Long Street, there are ample hip restos. Take **Fork**, helmed by chef Jonathan Japha, who has been celebrated in *GQ* magazine, or the grass-ceilinged **Mama Africa** offering spicy kudu, springbok and ostrich mains grilled to perfection.

HERITAGE WALKS

On the outskirts of Cape Town, en route to the famous wine region, day trippers stop by **Langa Township** to mingle with the locals in a hugely memorable journey that showcases music, cuisine and the daily lives of the thousands who call South Africa's oldest township home. On **Robben Island**, now a World Heritage Site, former political prisoners of the notorious maximum security facility where Nelson Mandela was held will guide you around the old prison. Their compelling accounts of life under the most brutal conditions make you wonder how these men bear no grudges and remind us all how fragile our freedom really is.



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DAVE LINGWOOD OF THE BURIED LIFE

The Last Word

Mary Luz Mejia

MEET ONE OF THE FOUR VISIONARIES BEHIND THE BURIED LIFE

Four Victoria, B.C. friends created a project that began with them asking each other, "What if you could do anything? What would you do?" They came up with a bucket list of 100 things they wanted to do before they died - and accomplished nearly all of them. They challenged strangers to do the same, and what started off as a series of YouTube clips founded on this key question has spawned an MTV show and the *New York Times* bestselling book *The Buried Life*. **Dave Lingwood** (below, second from left) comments on their continued journey to "Do epic s#!t and help people!"

Who are you guys?

The Buried Life, named after the Matthew Arnold poem, is a project we created six years ago when we were going through some tough times in our lives. We started brainstorming and came up with the idea of going after 100 things. And for everything we did, we'd help a complete stranger do what he or she wanted to do.

When did you have your "Aha!" moment that pushed this idea beyond what you were doing on YouTube?

Initially we thought this would be a two-week road trip. But near the end of our tour in B.C. we helped a guy get a truck so he could keep his business going, and it was then that we knew we had to continue. Entering a complete stranger's life and being a dramatic force for change was a high we wanted to experience again. Then we started getting a lot of media attention, and in 2009 MTV picked us up and we were able to cross #53 off our list: make a TV show with your friends.

Why is paying it forward so important to you guys?

We like to say "paying it back" instead, because of the tremendous amount of help we've received over the years from people we know - and also from complete strangers. When we started I was 19. Now I'm 25, and we've spent years travelling to universities speaking to 1,000 kids a night. I'd say 50% of

the things kids want to do today is to help others. I think September 11 had a big part in that; it switched people's mindset to think, "OK, let's help each other." We're not angels and we never set out on a mission to preach something. Asking the question of strangers helped us find the answer for ourselves.

You must hear a million excuses why people don't make their dreams come true, but you're living proof that you can! What do you say to these people?

For us it's always about the question; it keeps us grounded. Our book reached #19 on the *New York Times* bestseller list - it's still hard to believe! Excuses are what stop people from taking the first step. Write a list and take the first step because it's not about the end goal, it's about that first step. The second step will follow. Tell people what you want to do because you never know the kinds of contacts you may have in your immediate community. We realized that if you want to do something, you're the only one stopping yourself from doing it.





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