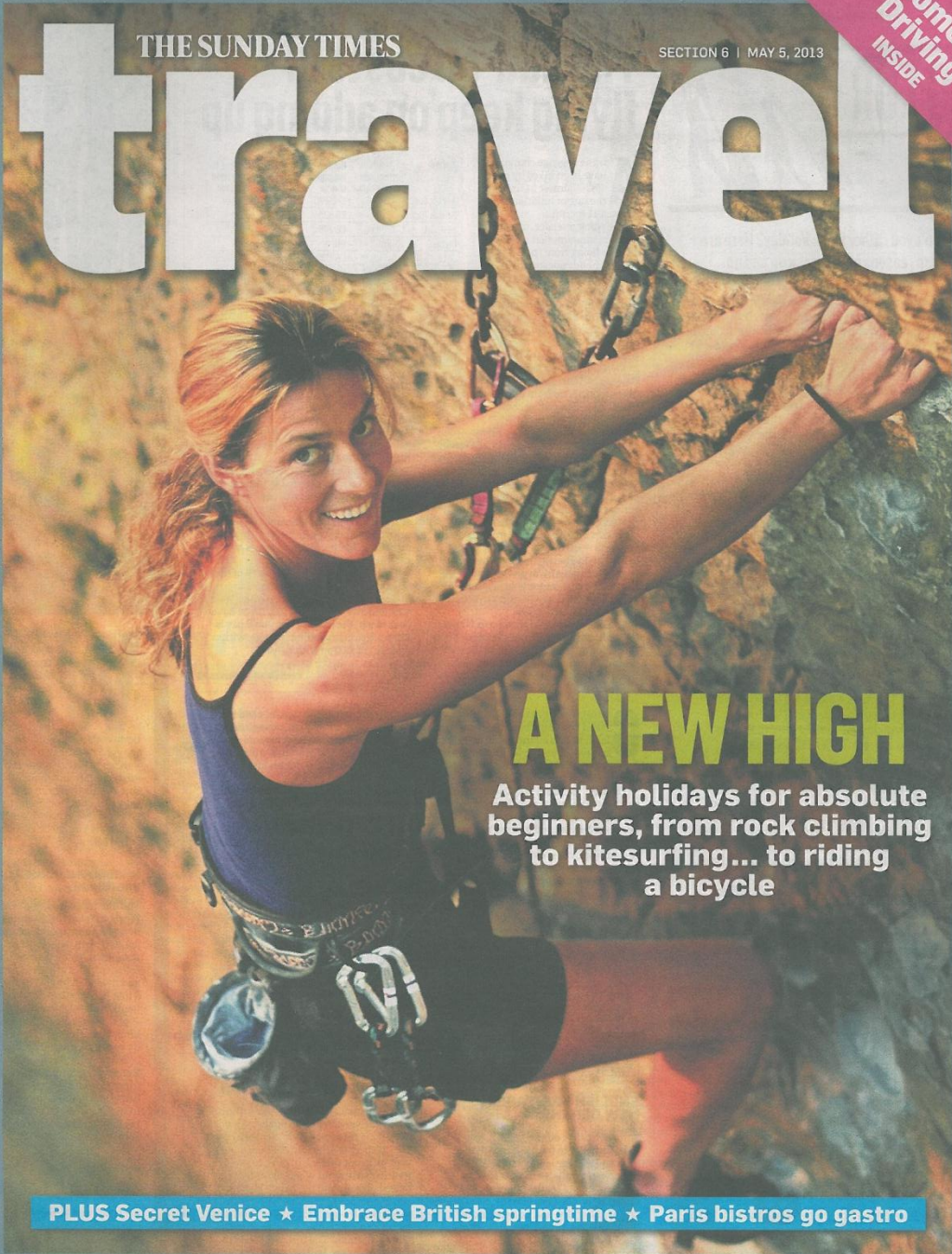


THE SUNDAY TIMES

SECTION 6 | MAY 5, 2013

travel

Home &
Driving
INSIDE



A NEW HIGH

Activity holidays for absolute beginners, from rock climbing to kitesurfing... to riding a bicycle

PLUS Secret Venice ★ Embrace British springtime ★ Paris bistros go gastro



REAL DEALS

This is Marktburg, one of 30-odd castles between Koblenz and Rudesheim, on the Rhine. Some are spooky, some ruined and some owned by princes seeking true love. See them with Scenic Tours (0800 690 8887, scenictours.co.uk), on an eight-day cruise from Amsterdam to Nuremberg, with ample time on dry land for wine and sausages — it could be worst. The price is down £1,050pp to £1,595pp, including flights, meals and drinks and guided tours, departing on November 4.

Need to escape sooner? Holland America Line (0843 374 2300, hollandamerica.com) has cut 75% off its 14-night Jewels of the Baltic cruise, taking in Copenhagen, Tallinn, St Petersburg, Helsinki and Stockholm. It now starts at £789pp.

Wexas Travel (020 7838 5892, wexas.com) has cut 45% off a week at Windjammer Landing in St Lucia. It now costs £2,298pp, room-only, including business-class flights.

Where was I?

Win a three-night break in Copenhagen, with First Hotel Skt Petri and easyJet

You wouldn't send owls to Athens, and neither, more literally, would you send them here, as this city already has a goodly supply. None of which is of interest to Terribly Trendy Friend. Having been reluctantly promised a shopping spree, she is not impressed that we have stopped on the city's outskirts to view a heritage railway. When it opened, it was the first line to be established by an act of parliament. Terribly trendy moans mean we do not linger long, and are soon heading for the city centre. We park near a canal initially built with 91 locks and completed in 1816. "This way to the shops," slavers TTF, pointing northeast and fondly stroking her smartphone. "Heritage first," I counter. What a pair we make, I muse, mindful of an entertainer — one half of a double act (Carson and Kid) — who was born here in 1925. Thus we head north, passing the main station. Built as Wellington station, it was opened by the L&BR in 1846. "Shopping plaza, that way," enthuses TTF. "Town hall, this way," I reply, boldly continuing north. And here it is, one of Britain's largest — complete with fine organ — designed by an architect born in 1821. Opened in 1858, it is the venue for a well-known music competition. "Shops?" whinnies friend. "Just one more piece of architecture..." I respond. "Mahogany, mosaics, marble, ironwork, one of Britain's largest stained-glass roofs... I'm sure you won't be disappointed," I add. "I'm sure I shall," the response. Even so, we meander southeast to find the work of a second architect, born in 1854 and famous for his theatres. "Well?" I ask as we arrive. "Let me at it," replies TTF, diving inside. And I don't think she's referring to the architecture.

Chris Fautley

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the name of the city?
- 2 Who was the first-mentioned architect?

THE PRIZE

The winner and a guest will stay for three nights, B&B, at the five-star First Hotel Skt. Petri, in Copenhagen. This chic, modernist hotel is set amid the boutiques and coffee shops of the Latin quarter, and you can see the city's medieval core from the sunlit lobby. The hotel has a stylish brasserie, and you might also want to book a table at Noma, which is 10 minutes away by taxi and rated one of the two best restaurants in the world. For more about the Skt. Petri, or to book, visit firsthotels.com or call 00 45 33 459100.

Return flights will be with easyJet, which flies to Denmark's buzzing capital from Bristol, Edinburgh, Gatwick, Manchester and Stansted. One-way fares start at £31.49, including taxes. For more details, or to book, visit easyjet.com.

The prize must be taken before December 1, subject to availability and excluding public holidays.

HOW TO ENTER

Only one entry per person, via our website — thesundaytimes.co.uk/wherewasi — by Wednesday. Normal Times Newspapers rules apply. No correspondence will be entered into.

LAST WEEK'S PRIZE

The answers are Hythe and Colin MacInnes. Lucy Carson-Taylor of Broseley, in Shropshire, wins a villa holiday in France for up to seven people, as a guest of Affair Travel and Brittany Ferries.

My hols

John Boyne

He spends every New year abroad and loves the Australian attitude to life, but the best trip is always the journey home



The award-winning Dublin-born novelist John Boyne, 41, has written nine books. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* topped the New York Times bestseller list and was made into a critically acclaimed film. His new book for adults, *This House Is Haunted*, is out now, and his novel for young people, *Stay Where You Are* and *Then Leave*, will be published in October. He lives in Dublin with his partner, Con, and their dog, Zaccy

Every year, my partner and I go away over New Year for a few nights, which I really recommend. It makes for a great start to the year and, if you're staying in Europe, the cold and the snow can be very atmospheric. You also avoid the crowds. One year in Rome, we went to St Peter's Square at midnight and found that we almost had the place to ourselves.

This year we visited Prague, which is one of the best trips I've ever had. It's quite beautiful, especially when it's covered in snow. We visited the castle, Wenceslas Square and the Franz Kafka museum — one of the best museums I've seen — crossed the Charles Bridge and drank a lot of cheap Czech beer in cosy cafes. There's a wonderful old town with curiosity shops and great little bars and restaurants. On New Year's Eve we took a boat ride down the Vltava and saw in 2013 with fireworks on the deck. Very romantic.

Some of the happiest memories of my life are of the trips I went on as a child. Almost every summer we'd go to Kilmuckridge, in Co Wexford, for two weeks and stay in the same rented house. Admittedly, there was usually a bit of a palaver on the day we left, as we could never fit everything into the car. There was no motorway in those days, so we'd stop halfway and have sandwiches and warm lemonade by the roadside.

Kilmuckridge was a small Irish village then, but the beach was enormous and we got this terrific sense of freedom when we were there, running around by the sea and going to the carnivals in Courtown. My two great-aunts, who spoil us children, came too, which made it even more fun.

When I left home, I couldn't afford what you might call "real holidays", so I worked my way around Europe and the States, usually with friends and mostly waiting tables. The trouble was, by the time I finished working, I was too tired to enjoy myself — especially when I'd been on the breakfast shift. I had almost no money, and not being able to eat much, as well as sharing dreadful rooms, wasn't exactly fun.

I'm not a beach or a clubbing person. I like to see the sights, so what I prefer is taking an apartment and staying somewhere for a while. I love walking around a

place, exploring it, getting a sense of how it is and used to be, and letting it speak to me. I guess I'm always looking for stories, too. I love St Petersburg and find the Winter Palace haunting — I even ended up writing a book that's set there. I especially like visiting cathedrals and historic sites, so on my most recent trip to Paris, I spent time in Notre Dame and went to Chartres for a day. I'm not a religious person, but to me old cathedrals are great feats of engineering and I get a tremendous sense of peace when I'm in them. I like sitting there quietly and being left alone with my thoughts.

My favourite city in the world is Sydney, and I've been there many times. I'm not one to sit on Bondi

"The beach was enormous — we got this terrific sense of freedom running around by the sea"

Beach, though. I like taking the ferries, and there are some great walks you can do around the harbour. I've visited lots of places in Australia — I love everything about it and have many friends there, so I try to visit every year. Even when you think the culture of a place is close to your own, it's still distinct. I've been really impressed by the Australian attitude to life. They eat better and they're generally happier — the rest of the world could learn a lot from their positivity. There's a sense of wellbeing that I feel rubs off on me, and I like the idea that when you're enjoying yourself there, a lot of people in the northern hemisphere are asleep.

My Australian friends are jealous of the fact that I live in Dublin, and that it's easy to take weekend breaks to Europe from there. And it's true, but I have to admit, too, that one of my favourite journeys is always the one home. I guess I'm a real Dubliner at heart.

John Boyne talked to Diana Bentley