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TRAVELLER



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Welcome to The Seychelles Islands



Image: Chris Close. Vallée de Mai, Praslin

An archipelago of idyllic islands, some framed by granite outcrops, others by magnificent coral gardens, the Seychelles is one of the world's true paradises. Made up of 115 islands, it offers the very best in palm-fringed luxury, where white-sand beaches are framed by topaz-blue seas and kaleidoscopic reefs play host to a staggering array of marine life, from colourful clownfish to magnificent whale sharks. Remote, untouched and uncommercialised, it's among the few places left on Earth where you can truly get away from it all. What's more, it's easily accessible, served by twice-weekly British Airways flights from London Heathrow.

But, there's far more to this island nation than just its beaches. Indeed, as you look beyond the sands you'll find everything from world-class

diving and snorkelling to superb sailing, fishing and kayaking. Then, away from those bath-tub-warm waters, the likes of golf and horseback riding make for truly memorable days out amid verdant landscapes. Hiking, too, is a wonderful way to get off the beaten track, with a network of well-marked trails bringing you between forested mountains and those famously gorgeous coastlines.

It's all knitted together by ultra-scenic island hopping trips, whether by catamaran ferry, short flights or even helicopter rides. Whatever you choose, you'll soon find a remote, lost-island paradise of your very own.



Image: Chris Close. Giant Tortoise Curieuse Island

Are we nearly there yet?

This was not how the year was meant to unfold, made more poignant from a work point of view, as Wexas and thus *Traveller* reached the remarkable achievement of their 50th anniversary. I think longingly now, caught like a fly in the amber of another lockdown, of what were once very normal events, which now seem unreal. An evening with publishers *Lonely Planet*, on a terrace watching stars shine above St Paul's. It was to celebrate the launch of two fabulous books, one a guide to the universe, created in collaboration with NASA, a gorgeous study of galaxies. The other, *Dark Skies*, a practical guide to the best stargazing destinations around the world.

The next was a gathering at the London Transport Museum to celebrate the annual Stanford's Travel Writing Awards. The venue was packed with attendees from every corner of the world. We stood happily oblivious to the lockdown that lay ahead, crammed shoulder to shoulder to applaud winners of categories representing the best of travel writing and photography. The winner of the *Travel Book of the Year* was Robert Macfarlane, for *Underland*, an extraordinary exploration of the secret and surreal worlds that hum beneath our feet.

Those two events paid homage to the skies above us, and the buried destinations below us, a topsy-turvy summing up of what has become a topsy-turvy world. Two articles in this issue sum that up (in a good way). Both authors have won the Bradt Award for new travel writing and we're delighted to feature them. Celia Dillow writes about Lapland, a landscape above our latitude, dusted with snow, while Kirstin Zhang writes about Africa and a lower latitude, all red earth saturated with sunshine – thematic opposites. As are Antarctica, exquisitely captured in pictures, penguins and words by Jonathan and Angela Scott; and Zanzibar, depicted by Nick Maes, an island suspended in heady tropical heat, as languid as a lion in fierce afternoon sun.

In fact, the entire issue is a collection of contrasting and compelling pleasures. The classical beauty of Athens, a sun soaked Italian coastline, escapism in Vietnam. There are also culinary and cultural diversions in Japan and Vancouver, one east, one west, but both destinations disciples of the



Amy Sohanpaul counts down the days to destinations ahead



fine art of dining. It's a rich assortment, a reminder of what lies beyond, all places we could have visited over the last century. Wexas has helped travellers to visit them for half of that. I've been lucky enough to feature them in *Traveller* for a quarter of that. This feels like privilege, and always has been, just more acutely realised now.

It has been frustrating this year, to watch or read anything travel-related, without the freedom to head for somewhere tempting. How easy it was for so long, to take a train, the Orient Express, or any other, from here to Venice, views all the way. The strangeness of how, for now, it's nigh on impossible to touch down somewhere entirely exotic. There is an African sky stretched over savannahs south of us, soft beaches on fringes of far away places stretching down to our shared seas.

Never has travel felt like such a strident call. In its absence, we realise its significance. Like so many of us, I'm impatient to interact with the rest of the world again. We all have a wish list to explore as soon as we can set forth once more. Italy is the country I am counting down the days to seeing again. I'll be on the first flight I can to find a square to unfurl in as the sun goes down, where swallows swoop and there is convivial chatter all around. Then south to Africa, to see flamingoes tint a lake pink and acacia trees pierce the skies. As sweet as all these things have been in the past, they're going to feel sweeter still.

As soon as we have an all-clear – which with the news of a vaccine on its way might be relatively soon – the world will still be there for those of us longing to revisit it. We all have our particular places, where arrival feels like home away from home or excitingly and essentially quite other. Turn to page 12 where our founder and publisher Dr Ian Wilson shares a little of Wexas as it was 50 years ago. They say the world is a book, and those who don't travel haven't turned the first page.

The late, great poet Seamus Heaney also said:

If we can winter this one out,
We can summer anywhere.

TRAVELLER

Traveller is Britain's original magazine for intelligent travel. Since 1970 it has reported on the real experience of travelling the world, and many of today's leading explorers and adventurers are on the Editorial Board.

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Dr Christopher Roads MA PHD FRGS is an expert in the use and history of firearms and former Deputy Director of the Imperial War Museum.

Jonathan Scott is a leading wildlife photographer and presenter of the BBC's *Big Cat Diary*. He is patron of a number of wildlife conservation societies.

John Simpson CBE is the BBC's World Affairs Editor and has reported from 120 countries during his 40 years with the BBC.

Colin Thubron CBE FRGS FRSL is Britain's most distinguished travel writer, author of award-winning books on Asia and Russia.

Sir Crispin Tickell CCMG KCVO is an eminent environmentalist, leader of the Climate Institute of Washington and Green College Centre.

Every issue we seek out today's most distinguished and interesting travellers to contribute to the magazine

THE PEOPLE BEHIND OUR STORIES



WILLIAM BOYD

Is an acclaimed novelist, famous for works such as *Brazzaville Beach*. His fiction has taken him around the world, but his latest book *Trio* is set in the uk.

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JUSTINE HARDY

Is a widely respected author and documentary maker. She is also a trauma psychotherapist and the founder of Healing Kashmir.

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GUY EVERTON

Itchy-footed English teacher Guy Everton is now based in Vietnam having gradually moved eastward via Mile End and Plovdiv.

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NICK MAES

Nick Maes travels in search of good stories, landing in tricky situations more often than not. He has a safe stay in Zanzibar this time.

SEE PAGE 42



FERGAL KEANE

Is a senior on air Editor with BBC News. He is famous for his compassionate coverage of conflict-affected communities, from Rwanda to Ulster.

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JONATHAN & ANGELA SCOTT

Are renowned wildlife photographers and documentary makers based in Kenya. In this issue they take us to the icy reaches of Antarctica.

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FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI

Is a freelance photographer born and living in Florence, who travels worldwide on assignments for major magazines.

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SIMON URWIN

Is a tv executive turned travel photographer and writer, who has shot in over 75 countries from Antarctica to Afghanistan.

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KIRSTIN ZHANG

Writes accomplished short fiction and is the winner of the Bradt New Writer of the Year 2020. Read her winning entry on Uganda.

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LUKE WALWYN

Has been an illustrator for over 30 years, expertly translating words into singular, dramatic images. He sees his art as a way to travel when he can't.

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CELIA DILLOW

Is a teacher and talented travel writer. She writes here about her adventures in the Arctic Circle.

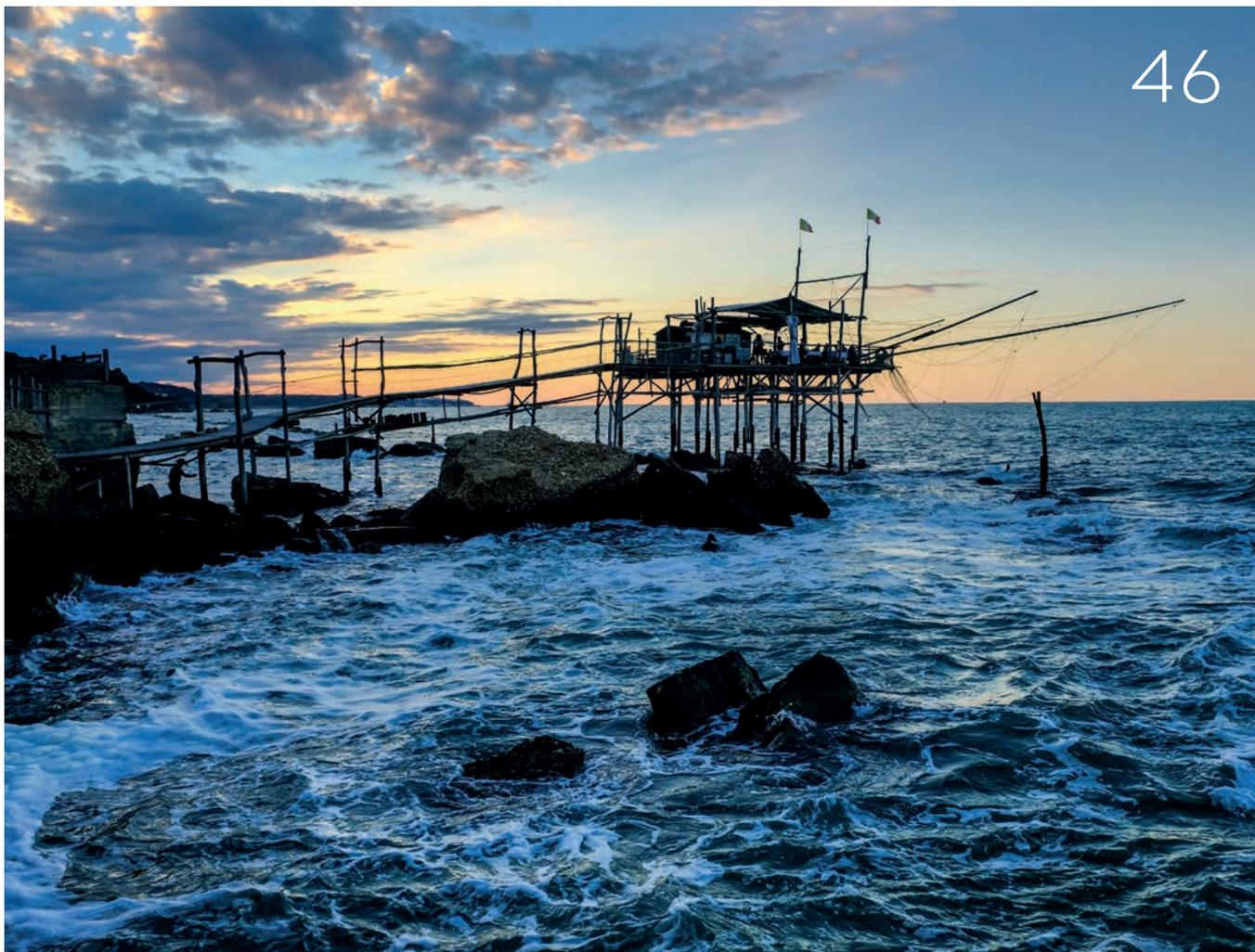
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STEWART MCPHERSON

Is an award-winning author and television presenter. In this issue, he tells us about his latest project following in Charles Darwin's wake.

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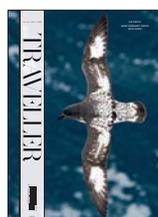
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Cape Petrel,
Antarctica by
Jonathan and
Angela Scott

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by Francesco
Lastrucci;
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2021 EXPLORER AWARDS

There's still time to apply for next year's SES

Explorer Awards. Colonel John Blashford-Snell founded the Scientific Exploration Society in 1969, and has been a tireless advocate ever since for expeditions that focus on discovery, research and conservation in remote parts of the world. There are numerous categories, but all applicants are required to share the values of grit, curiosity, integrity and leadership that John Blashford-Snell has exemplified while 'pioneering with purpose' over the years.

For more information visit ses-explore.org/explorer-awards

LATEST NEWS FROM OUR HONORARY PRESIDENTS

SHIPPING FORECAST

Honorary president Stewart McPherson is already well known

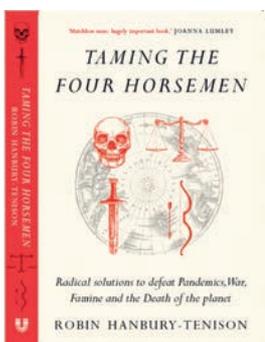
as a champion for conservation. He's taking his mission to a new level – and to the waves in a stunning tall ship to spread the word further. His aim is to follow the journey Charles Darwin made in *The Beagle*, stopping at the same 50 ports where Darwin made landfall. Along the way, the goal is to meet, train and empower the world's top young conservationists.

"We don't care about their grades or university educations," he told *Traveller*. "We want people with the raw spark and energy to go out there and change the world. They might have planted a thousand trees around a village to stop soil erosion, or dedicated themselves to protecting a single species. We're looking for that burning passion for the environment, to protect it, to make things better."

The lucky few will be invited on board at each port to join what McPherson calls "the world's most exciting classroom" to take part in projects and activities. Each member of the group of four will be tasked with spreading what they learn to another million people, spearheading a swell of movement with the aim of inspiring the next generation of conservationists, to become the future Darwin, or David Attenborough or Jane Goodall. The project has been ten years in the making, and McPherson's hope is that its ripple effect will have an impact for decades to come.

For more information visit darwinzoo.com

RIDE FORTH



One of the most prescient and pertinent books

published this year comes from Robin Hanbury-Tenison. *Taming the Four Horsemen* takes its title from the *Book of Revelation*, in which the four horsemen of the apocalypse represent pestilence, war, famine and death. Robin has taken epic journeys of exploration over the decades, many on horseback, and has campaigned ceaselessly to protect rainforests and tribal peoples. Now 83, he has gathered enough evidence and a great deal of wisdom to create this clear reflection on the threats to our planet and its civilisations. This is no depressing, dry tome – with

trademark vigour and can-do attitude, Robin argues how science can be the answer to many of the problems we face. The historical facts he weaves in add depth and texture to what is not just an important work, but also a riveting and galvanising one.

Taming the Four Horsemen by Robin Hanbury-Tenison
Unbound, PBK, £9.99

TRAVELS OF A LIFETIME

Michael Palin has been revisiting his

legendary television travel adventures – from around the world. He says that when he was growing up, he always 'dreamt of travel and adventure. And one day that dream came true.' He set the tone for all television travelogues to follow. These recollections are as absorbing this time round – around the world, across the Sahara, from pole to pole.

Michael Palin: Travels of a Lifetime available on BBC iPlayer now



The Glorious Light

words & picture
Simon Urwin

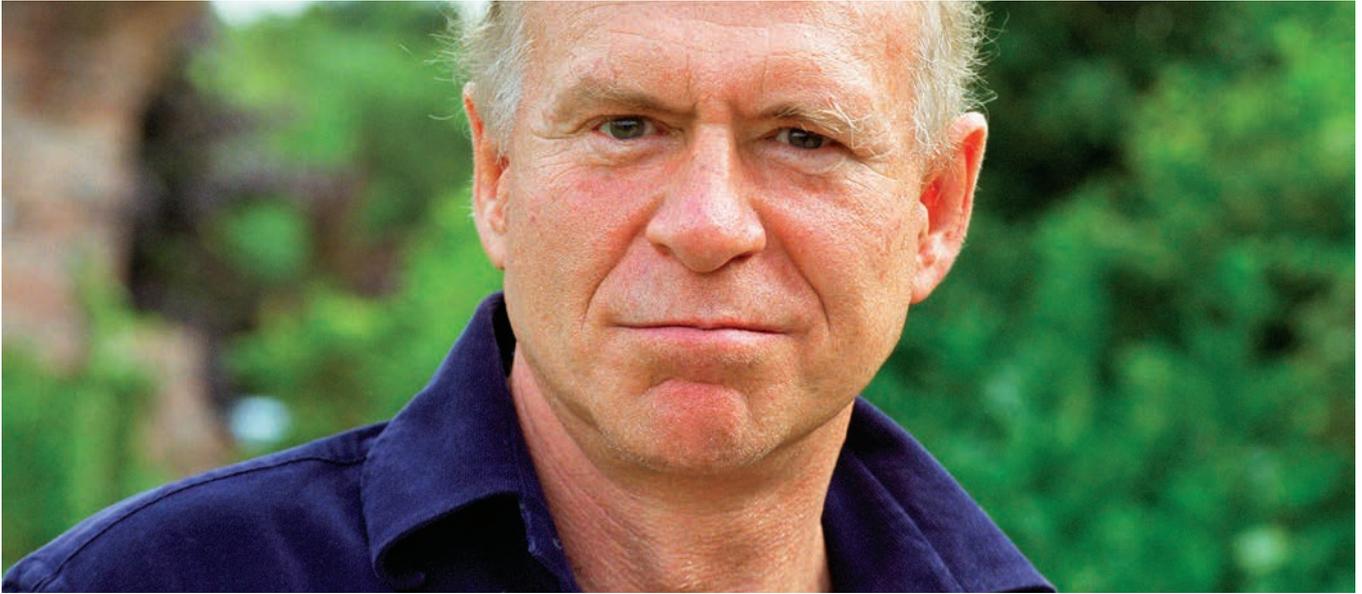
“A common misconception is that the Great Pyramid is a tomb”, says Egyptologist and guide Samir Abbass as we circle the base of the colossal stone structure together. “In fact, it was built to be a kind of conduit – through which the soul of the mummified Pharaoh Khufu could ascend to Heaven and be unified with the Sun God Ra. It was more like a resurrection machine than a resting place.”

A building of quite bewildering magnitude, the Great Pyramid dates back 4,500 years and towers 481 feet above the Giza plateau. It’s made up of 2.5 million stone blocks, many weighing between 1.5 and 15 tonnes each, others as much as 80 tonnes. “The construction work is often reported inaccurately as having been done by armies of slaves”, Abbass continues, “but the builders were actually highly skilled craftsmen. They were around 25,000 in number and were well paid, well fed, and even got medical care if they were injured. Far from being enslaved, they had what they thought was a dream job. They believed that by serving the Pharaoh – who was a god in their eyes – it set them on the path to heaven.”

The vast teams of craftsmen took more than 20 years to complete their masterpiece, which originally featured a golden capstone on the apex and highly polished limestone across all four sides. “They reflected the sunlight so powerfully that the Ancient Egyptians called the pyramid ‘*Ikhet*’, meaning Glorious Light”, Abbass explains. “For the Pharaohs it was important to have monuments with the ability to astonish in order to remind their subjects of their superhuman power and divinity.”

A powerful earthquake in the 14th century loosened many of the outer casing stones, which were removed to build mosques in nearby Cairo, so what visitors see today is the underlying core of the only wonder of the ancient world still standing. “It’s incredible to think that the pyramid represents a mere 50 to 60 years of Ancient Egyptian history”, says Abbass. “There are 3,000 years more of their extraordinary achievements: the invention of paper, clocks and calendars; the development of cultivation, irrigation, medical surgery, even the concept of a police force. What you see here in Giza is immense, but it’s just a snapshot; a brief moment in time in the story of one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known.”





Wexas Fiftieth Anniversary

A LOOK AT THE PAST BY FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN **DR IAN WILSON**

Wexas started as the result of a bet.

Richard was a fellow lodger in the house that I lived in in 1970 and one summer evening in the small back garden I bet Richard that if I started a travel club, it would be more successful than the student travel operation he had run at Oxford and was still running.

The World Universities Expeditionary Association (WUNEXAS) was born, to become in 1972 the World Expeditionary Association (WEXAS) as I set about attracting all-comers as members, not just students and teachers. I soon won my bet, though to be fair to Richard he did pass on to me some of his contacts in the travel trade that allowed me to buy charter flight and scheduled air tickets at attractive rates and sell them on, while putting some of the margin aside to help pay for student expeditions.

We acquired 1,200 members in our first year and had 3,000 by the second, including several hundred schools when we started to offer corporate membership. A student membership cost £1.25, an adult membership £1.75

and a corporate membership £5. That was not a lot even by the standards of the time. After a launch by direct mail to student unions on 1st October 1970, it was only a matter of time before I would give up my day job at J Walter Thompson and become self-employed.

From summer 1970 until May 1971 I had been working 90 hours a week doing two jobs, working in advertising while preparing Wexas for launch and running the new enterprise alongside Alex, my future wife. I was the chairman (and still am) and Alex was the General Secretary, a position she held until 1972, when we both realized that it was not helping our relationship to be living and working together. Alex quit and in 1974 we got married.

Meanwhile Richard had given up his own travel enterprise and trained to become a British Airways pilot. Knowing what he was like behind the wheel of a car, that worried me a few years later when we met on a flight from Bologna to London. He was co-pilot and I joined him briefly on the flight deck. The flight made it

safely and I was able to inform Richard that I had won our bet.

There were many landmarks for Wexas over the years. In 1975 we launched our *Discoverers* brochure, our first foray into selling tours. There were four destinations: Nepal (trekking), Greenland (husky sledging), Kenya (safari) and Austria (skiing). There had to be an outdoor challenge. At the same time we continued to sell air tickets, increasingly scheduled tickets rather than charter flights. The most popular destinations in those days were Nairobi, followed by Tehran and Jeddah.

Kathmandu was a favourite with trekkers, while Iceland attracted school expeditions. Fares were cheap. A ticket to New York could cost a Wexas member as little as £56 return, while a flight to Australia might sell for £320 return. The airlines, though, were not always top of the line. I recall Ariana Afghan, Egyptair, Aeroflot, Ghana Airways, Air Zimbabwe, Middle East Airlines, Syrian Arab Airways, Nigerian Airways, East African Airways, Icelandic Airlines, Luxair, Iraqi

Airways, Pakistan International Airways, British Caledonian and several others about which a book could be written.

One Saturday in 1972 Wexas ran a display ad in *The Telegraph* announcing 'the lowest reliable discount scheduled airfares'. This was novel. Small two-line ads had appeared in *The Times* from the Sixties, advertising charter flights and discount seats on scheduled flights, mostly on Third World carriers. There was no free-for-all in airfares in those days and our move in running a display advertisement was a daring one. But it was cold direct mail that was the mainstay of our marketing from the beginning, although in the Seventies we ran full page ads in weekend colour supplements, some with the endorsement of one of our new honorary presidents, Chay Blyth, then a household name in the world of adventure.

By then we had other honorary presidents. The first was General Sir John Hackett, to be followed over the years by Lord Hunt, Sir Wally Herbert, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Colonel John Blashford-Snell, Sir Wilfred Thesiger, Sir Michael Palin, John Simpson and many others.

People sometimes called Wexas 'the upmarket people's bucket shop' in those far-off days. But gradually we were selling more tours and less pure air travel, at first as agents for other companies and then as tour operators in our own right.

A first came in 1982. We had always sold single trip travel insurance, as every other travel company did. I had an idea one day while walking to the office. Why not sell year-round travel insurance that would cover any number of trips in a year for a fixed premium? Our insurance brokers then and now, Campbell Irvine, were sceptical but said they would put it to the underwriters at Lloyds. Companies with representatives travelling overseas could already get blanket annual cover for their staff, but no such insurance was available for the general public.

A Lloyds underwriter took up the challenge. The premium was £75 for a year's cover with a limit of 90 days per trip, and there was no limit on the number of trips in a year, including skiing. The scheme took off and annual cover has been a feature of the Wexas travel insurance package ever since. It was three years before others caught on and announced annual travel insurance, which is now a mainstay of the travel and insurance industries.

By then Wexas was the largest cold direct mail travel advertiser in the UK, doing mailshots of up to half a million at a time to build membership numbers and sell tours and flights. Instead of giving awards to expeditions each year (over 200 in the first twenty years), we now gave a sum to the Royal Geographical Society each year to make awards on our behalf. A few years ago that policy changed with the formation of the Wexas Travel Foundation, which now gives grants from funds raised by staff and our travel clients, matched each year by the company.

The Foundation, itself a charity, works through supporting the work of carefully chosen charities. It has, for example, helped rebuild schools in Nepal after the disastrous earthquake there, it has helped to buy rainforest in Brazil to protect it from deforestation and it has contributed to the building of a school in KwaZulu Natal.

In 1990 Wexas celebrated its twentieth anniversary at the Royal Geographical Society. I gave a speech and my daughter Jackie, helped by honorary president Sir Hereward Wake, cut a cake with a sword produced for the occasion by Colonel John Blashford-Snell, one of Wexas' most loyal supporters over its lifetime, along with Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

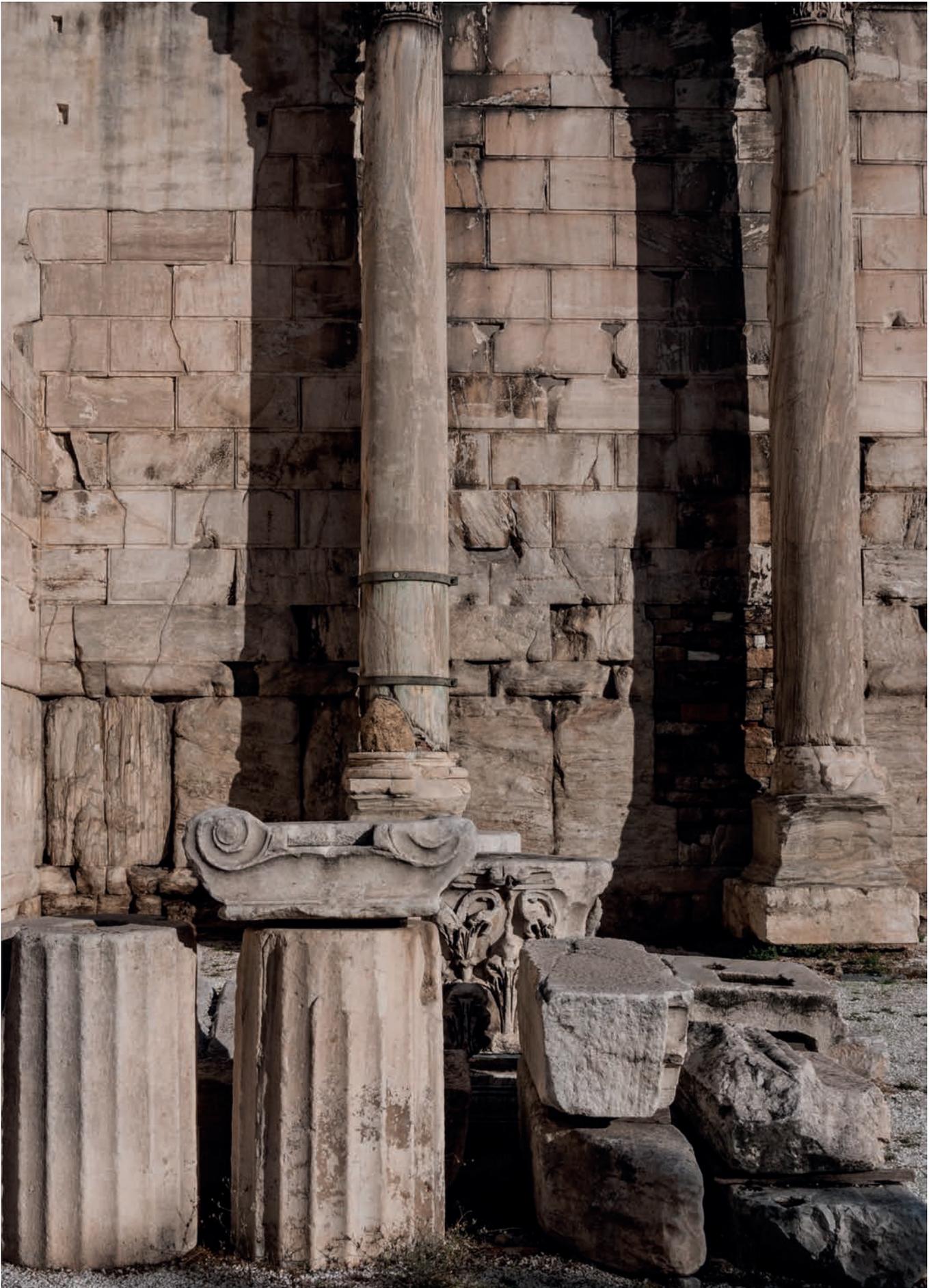
Wexas has always been an organisation in evolution. It started as an association and was incorporated as a company in 1982.

In that year it branched into corporate travel with a new class of membership called Platinum membership, aimed at companies. Over the years this side of Wexas, now called Wexas Travel Management, has grown to the point where it matches the leisure side of the company in turnover and handles the travel arrangements of many well-known businesses.

Wexas itself is the company's flagship brand, but it has successfully launched three other leisure brands in recent years: The Luxury Cruise Company, Best Served Scandinavia and The Luxury Holiday Company.

The company focus has shifted steadfastly to tour operating. It was clear that with so much online competition in the field of selling air tickets, Wexas had to concentrate on marketing to the top ten per cent of the travel market, where service still counted just as much as value for money. Top service is only possible at the highest level by selecting and thoroughly training the best staff, which is why today Wexas is proud to be the holder of a Platinum service award – the very highest level – from Feefo, respected for its independent customer reviews.

Over the last 50 years I have watched the company transform itself from a student travel club into one of the most highly respected tour operators in the UK. It is perhaps a cliché to say that family-owned and -run businesses are often the best. There are not as many as there used to be, especially in the field of travel. Wexas has no plans to change and I have no plans yet to pass the chairmanship of the company on to my son Mark, who is deputy chairman. I feel confident that Wexas will continue in the future to be a tour operator respected by those who value the old-fashioned ideals of service, product quality and value for money. I hope that by the time we reach our hundredth anniversary in 2070, that will still be the case.



The eternal and the everyday

pictures

Francesco Lastrucci

The Plaka neighbourhood of Athens, clustered around the northern and eastern slopes of the ancient temples of the Acropolis and known as the Neighbourhood of the Gods, has been inhabited without interruption since antiquity.

The narrow, labyrinthine cobbled streets are lined with houses and mansions from the Turkish occupation and the Neoclassical period, interspersed with ancient monuments including the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, erected by the wealthy patron of musical performances at the Theatre of Dionysus; the Roman Agora and its famous Tower of the Winds; and the remains of Hadrian's Library.

The many grand churches of the neighbourhood, masterpieces of Byzantine architecture, stand

among glorious remnants of the Ottoman period including Fetihie and Tzistaraki Mosques, the Turkish Baths (now operating as a museum) and the Muslim Seminary.

The area also houses a multitude of popular museums and galleries, picturesque tavernas, cafes, bars and shops. In particular, the museum dedicated to the Acropolis is truly a must-visit, with carefully curated and conserved treasures, with views of the temples they came from beautifully framed by its immense windows.

Although more commercial than it used to be, and often busy with tourists having a good time, Plaka still retains the feel of a residential neighbourhood. This corner of the vast eternal city continues to resound with historical and cultural interest and convivial charm.

Opposite: Detail of the ruins of Hadrian's Library, near Monastiraki square

Overleaf (clockwise from top left): A typical house in Plaka; View from the A for Athens hotel rooftop of Monastiraki Square, Plaka and the Acropolis; Inside the Stoa of Attalos in the Roman Agora; Street scene in the small square surrounding the Monument of Lysicrates





I lost my breath on Blueberry Hill

words
Kevin Pilley

“Goethe fell in love there!” said our guide pointing down at what she called “The Marriage Meadow.” Below us, students lazed at the riverside by the red sandstone Karl-Theodor Alte Brucke Bridge. “This is Germany’s Cambridge. We have had some very famous great minds come here over the years.” She wasn’t looking at anyone in front of her. “Some very clever people have been educated here. The first two-wheeler bicycle was invented in Heidelberg.”

Having been told by the concierge at my hotel as well as the guidebooks that it would be madness to visit Heidelberg without walking the two-mile *Philosophenweg* (The Philosophers Walk) as the great poets and leading thinkers once did, I set out across the River Neckar and climbed my way up to what one local leaflet described as ‘Europe’s loveliest promenade.’

Less than halfway there, most of the picnic I had packed had been jettisoned to decrease weight load to assist my ascent up the narrow twisting cobbled *Schlangenweg* (Snake Way). Eventually I reached the path running parallel to the river and the famously ‘unsurpassable panoramic views of the Old City and Mannheim.’

It was breathtaking but, at first, for pulmonary rather than aesthetic reasons. It is a hard climb but worth it because Heidelberg is generally regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in Germany. Mark Twain is rarely wrong. That is why he is quoted so much. And you can always trust

Victor Hugo too. He also praised Heidelberg’s charms, presumably after his stitch has disappeared and he had recovered his breath. Heidelberg rewards exertion.

Having got my wind back, I managed to attach myself to a guided tour and heard about the great Renaissance Baroque Hortus Palatinus gardens, ruined when they were used as an artillery base during the Thirty Years War. And learned the city has an Apothecary Museum and an art gallery devoted to the work of local psychiatric patients. I heard about other walks and where to see the best views of the ‘Birthplace of German romanticism’.

If you are fit you can walk on up to *Heiligenberg* or Holy Mount, joining the dragon cave path (*Drachenhöhlenweg*) and head for *Linsenteichhütte*, the lentil pond hut. The easier walk takes in the philosophers garden, Ziegelhausen monastery and Celtic path. There is also an eerie Nazi-era amphitheatre.

A plane droned overhead. The guide droned on in front of us. “We are very warm people. We grow figs. We have one olive tree! Heidelberg can boast a wild population of rose-ringed parakeets!”

Over the other side of the river, there is the *Königstuhl* (King’s Mount) with a restaurant and more fine views and thin air. It is a much easier walk since there is a cable car all the way to the top, Germany’s oldest funicular. “Don’t miss the last one as it’s a ninety-

minute walk back into the Old City!” The guide laughed at herself.

The walking tours begin at the Lions Fountain in University Square and take in the Holy Ghost Church, which once had a wall running through it separating Catholics from Protestants at worship. The *Studentkarzer* (students prison) with its age-old graffiti is next, then the Palatinate Museum which houses the fossilized jawbone of 60,000-year-old Heidelberg man – *Homo Heidelbergensis* – which was unearthed in Mauer in 1907.

The remains are the earliest evidence of human life in Europe. The remains of modern human life can be seen half an hour into the walking tour exploring the *Romantik* atmosphere celebrated in verse and song, sheltered by the *Königstuhl* and *Heiligenberg* mountains.

The town consists of one long narrow street – the *Hauptstrasse*. Other smaller streets intersect it at right angles and run down to the river. Heidelberg Castle dominates the town from the east. Begun in the thirteenth century, it is one of the chief monuments of Germany. The most romantic approach is via *Kurzer Buckel* (Short Hill) or the cobblestoned Castle Lane, which leads through gloomy vaultings and past grey walls into the castle yard.

Otto Henry the Magnanimous (d.1559) built the early Renaissance wing of the castle. The late Renaissance *Friedrichsbau* was added during the reign of Frederick IV. On the west side,



the *Elisabethenbau* is named after his wife, the daughter of James I of Great Britain. A reminder of the opulent court life stands in the castle cellar, a 27' long and 24' high wine barrel, made in 1751 with a 55,000 gallon capacity.

At the end of the seventeenth century the castle was despoiled by the French after Louis XIV's claim to inheritance was rejected and in the 1760s it was struck by lightning and reduced to ruin. It was partially restored at the turn of this century. The fountain in the courtyard is decorated with four granite columns from Charlemagne's palace at Ingelheim.

The river tours up the Neckar Valley, past Neuberg Monastery and Fort Dilsberg are very popular. So should be avoided in peak season.

Close to the Black Forest and German Wine Road, Heidelberg offers gourmet food, regional specialities and fine wines. Zum Roten Ochsen is one

of the best and oldest restaurants. Dating back to 1634, the Zum Seppel – a students' pub – is one of the most atmospheric meeting places in town. Hotel Zum Ritter in the town square was the only building to survive Louis XIV. Cave 54 is the oldest jazz club in Germany.

The famous university was founded in 1386. Over centuries it was established as one of Europe's great centres of learning. Its library with its unique collection of medieval manuscripts, was once kept in Paris and Rome for safekeeping before being returned in 1815. During the Reformation, the university became the stronghold of Protestant learning. It suffered little damage during the war. Many of its original buildings and fraternity houses remain intact.

The university still has 3,000 students. Famous graduates include Bismarck, Bunsen and Brahms. The British writer Somerset Maugham studied medicine

at Heidelberg and might well have sung *Es Gibt Nur Einen Seppel* in the days when Heidelberg was the very symbol of German romance.

"Ours is a feel-good fairytale town," gushed our guide as we returned to a lower altitude. We stopped on the famous Baroque bridge in front of a monkey statue. "This is our *Bruckenaaffe*," we were informed. "It is seventeenth century and hollow-headed. It is meant to bring luck if you put your head in it." There were no takers. Our guide told us the tour was over. But had one more fact and a final piece of speculation to impart.

"Heidelberg means Huckleberry Hill! Here is where Herr Clemens (Mark Twain) got Huckleberry Finn's name. And maybe Fats Domino was inspired to write Blueberry Hill!" Heidelberg may not be as romantic or as homely as it used to be. But it still remains one of the most interesting and beautiful places in Germany.

Travel in Lockdown

Words by Fergal Keane

What happens to a traveller who

cannot travel? For more than thirty years I have moved around the world without questioning my ability to do so. There have been serious impediments from time to time. Countless borders closed because of coups or civil wars; skies shut down because of the ash from an Icelandic volcano; countries sealed off by despotic regimes; a shortage of cash to pay my way.

But usually one cancelled trip was swiftly replaced by another. Even knowing that I could get into my ancient car and drive to Europe was a liberating prospect. I could fantasise about crossing the lowlands of Holland into Germany and beyond that traversing a continent that stretched across mountains, plains and forests, all the way to Russia's Pacific coast. Vladivostok! The magic of that name on the other side of the world.

When I lived in Johannesburg I would often stand in my garden in the northern suburbs and listen to the distant roar of trucks heading up the

Great North Road into the immensity of Africa. They moved through the night towards the border of Zimbabwe, gateway to routes north and east. It was mesmerising, the idea of the land unfolding all the way to the Mediterranean and all the cultures and history that lay between. In those days war, broken roads or no roads at all, were the great inhibitors of vehicular journeys from southern Africa to the gates of Europe. Still, with enough patience and resourcefulness a way could be found.

No longer. The Coronavirus pandemic is the great global prison. As I write – on the cusp of an English winter – the health crisis has shut down the ability to travel even outside of our own neighbourhoods. So, it is within the boundaries of the Thames to the north and the spaces of Barnes Common and Richmond Park to my west that I must confine my roaming. It is a melancholy time, full of foreboding. To quote Louis MacNeice in *Autumn Journal*, that most beautiful of London poems:

*These days are misty, insulated, mute
Like a faded tapestry and the soft pedal
Is down and the yellow leaves are
falling down
And we hardly have the heart to meddle
Any more with personal ethics or
public calls;
People have not recovered from the crisis,
Their faces are far away...*

I am fortunate to live next to a wetland which hosts an array of wildfowl and often wake to the honking of geese and what WB Yeats called the 'bell beat' of Swans' wings overhead. Beyond the wetland is the River Thames where rowers' oars break the water between Putney and Kew Bridge, a stretch of river rich in the formative history of Britain. Not far from where I live Thomas Cromwell roamed as a boy, escaping his abusive father, and his distant relation Oliver commanded the successful defence of London at Turnham Green in 1642.

I have taken possession of a pup – a Labrador/Spaniel cross – named 'Deilo'



after the village of Llandeilo in Wales where he was born and where we drove to collect him in the weeks before the pandemic struck. This lovely fellow is relentlessly cheerful. The crisis has meant that his humans are available constantly and delight in being distracted by canine foolishness. He recently ate my copy of William Styron's memoir of depression *Darkness Visible*. I believe Deilo felt the subject matter was too sombre for his master in these trying times. I fully expect him to discreetly place a copy of some P.G. Wodehouse comic classic by the bed one of these days.

With Deilo I have explored the wonders of Barnes Common. There is

a delightful old graveyard, a classic of London Gothic, overgrown and crumbling, thick with mystery, where lie the remains of Julia Martha Thomas, murdered and chopped to pieces by her maid, Kate Webster in 1879, and the 'Arab Boy' – Youssef Sirrie – who came as a servant from Syria in the mid-19th century and ended up inheriting his employer's estate.

As my physical world has shrunk I have also sought refuge in books, much as I did when I was a child trapped in a dysfunctional home. By my bedside there is a copy of Adam Zamoyski's biography of Napoleon, a stately tome through which I can visit the battlefields

of central Europe, Waterloo and gaze forlornly at the bleak Atlantic from the shores of St Helena.

I am loath to advise others on surviving the pressures of these times. We each of us do the best we can. But I do know that taking one day at a time helps to keep me sane, much as it has kept me clean and sober for more than twenty years. Walk, read, talk to a friend. It gets better. We will emerge from this darkness. The road will open and the journeys will resume.

Fergal Keane is a senior on air Editor with BBC News

Illustration by Luke Walwyn

Crystal Desert

JONATHAN AND ANGELA SCOTT CAPTURE THE FRAGILE BEAUTY OF ANTARCTICA





For much of human history Antarctica was an idea rather than a place, a land beyond reality – not the fertile paradise early explorers hoped for but a frozen desert: the coldest, driest, highest and windiest continent on the planet.

The profusion of Antarctica's wildlife and the grandeur of its scenery glimpsed on a summer's day are unrivalled: an artist's canvas run wild with broad sweeps of whites and blues and greens, icebergs tinged with turquoise, snow of a dazzling brightness amid a swirling ocean of the deepest blue. Add to the mix the spectacle of millions of penguins and seals, creatures with aquiline contours who spend most of their time at sea in the Southern Ocean, venturing onto land only to breed during the brief Antarctic summer when the ice melts around the fringes of the Peninsula – the continent's wiggly tail of bare rock. The sheer volume is overwhelming, with upwards of four million Antarctic fur seals and 20 million breeding pairs of penguins alone.

Adding a pilgrimage to the rugged island of South Georgia is a must if you can afford it. Situated halfway between the southeast coast of Argentina and the Antarctic continent, South Georgia lies within the area known as the Antarctic Convergence – where cold, northward-flowing waters meet the relatively warmer waters of the sub-Antarctic, making it part of the Antarctic realm. You only have to spend a day ashore on South Georgia



to experience its fickle character. The island's ability to transform from blue skies and calm seas to a blizzard of snow and lashing rain makes for treacherous conditions underfoot. But seen on a good day the island's beauty is unforgettable, part Swiss Alps, part Alaska.

Angie and I have enjoyed more than a dozen Antarctic adventures dating back 30 years, including a number of landings on South Georgia. An afternoon out on deck cruising the Antarctic Peninsula and Lemaire Channel, soaking up crisp blue skies and snow-capped mountains reflected on the ocean's glassy surface, or stepping ashore on Salisbury Plains on South Georgia are never-to-be-forgotten moments.

During summer, South Georgia is host to four million Antarctic fur seals and 400,000 southern elephant seals. Smaller colonies of Weddell

and crabeater seals haul out on the rocky beaches while sinuous leopard seals patrol for penguin prey just offshore in the kelp. Taking centre stage are tens of thousands of pairs of king penguins, which clog the bays and coves with their eye-catching presence. Intermingling with the black and white adults are their comically attired chicks, fat as butter in russet down coats, huddling together for warmth and protection in the world's largest creche.

Witnessing this profusion of animal and bird life today, one is mindful of the slaughter that occurred here within living memory. The discovery of South Georgia by James Cook on 17 January 1775 unleashed a gold rush of sealers and whalers. By 1825 around 1.2 million fur seals had been slaughtered to satisfy the hunger for sealskin coats and boots, principally in the UK and China. Whalers soon followed. With the invention of fast, steam-powered

catcher boats and explosive harpoons in the early 1900s, South Georgia became home to whaling stations such as Grytviken and Stromness that targeted the big, fast baleen species, the fin and blue whales. From the opening of Grytviken in 1904 until the time it closed its doors some 60 years later, 175,250 whales were processed. Today it is the whaling stations that are extinct and whales are a common sight around South Georgia again, while both fur and elephant seals have made spectacular recoveries.

Most people who visit Antarctica will travel there in summer. The thought of experiencing the continent in winter chills the heart. It's a time of bitter darkness, an alien world to humans. Yet this is breeding season for the most remarkable bird on the continent – the emperor penguin. In the summer of 2006 Angie and I made the journey aboard the icebreaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov* to Snow Hill Island in



the Weddell Sea, at times struggling through knee-high snow to reach the emperor rookery of 4,000 breeding pairs. When we arrived, surrounded by a cacophony of penguins trumpeting their individually recognisable greeting calls, we could only stand in silent tribute to the extraordinary tenacity of nature.

Penguins act as indicator species of climate change. With some hundred emperor breeding colonies scattered around the Antarctic continent, in recent times their ability to breed successfully has been hindered in some of these locations by the fast ice melting before the chicks are ready to enter the ocean. Scientists warn that emperors could go extinct by 2100 unless the world delivers on limiting global temperature rises to 1.5° Celsius. If ever there was a case for establishing Antarctica as the planet's first World Park, as envisioned by Greenpeace back in 1987, surely this must be it.





Palace of Pearls

Set back from Doha's Gulf Coast shoreline,

an extraordinary building variously described as a 'pile-up of flying saucers' and a 'spectacular accident with a gigantic crockery cupboard' rises from desert floor: the National Museum of Qatar.

Designed by the award-winning French architect Jean Nouvel, it consists of 539 immense concrete discs that interlock at dramatic and erratic angles; their shape inspired by the desert rose crystal – the intricate, flower-like formation made of gypsum that blooms naturally beneath the country's arid sands.

Inside the museum, which took 18 years to complete, a mile of galleries lead visitors on a journey that details how this tiny nation of nomadic Bedouins and pearl divers became one of the wealthiest on earth, thanks to the discovery of oil and natural gas 50 years ago.

Many of the exhibition pieces, it has to be said, struggle to compare with the extravagant treasure chest they're contained within, except for one: the \$5.5million Pearl Carpet of Baroda, an iconic work of Indian craftsmanship, now part of the museum's permanent collection.

Commissioned in 1865 by the Maharaja of Baroda as a gift to adorn the Prophet's tomb in Medina, the 50 sq. ft. rectangle of deerskin and silk is embroidered with more than a million pearls, and further embellished with swirling patterns of rose-cut diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and rubies.

Said to have taken inspiration from the jewel-encrusted covering for the cenotaph of Shah Jahan's wife in the Taj Mahal, the carpet astonished all those who saw it when it was first revealed. In 1880, George M. Birdwood enthused: "When spread out in the sun it seemed suffused with a general iridescent pearly bloom, as grateful to the eyes as were the exquisite forms of its arabesques." Rarely seen in public since, this beautifully preserved testament to the wealth and splendour of the Mughals has finally found a home capable of matching its magnificent artistry.

A Taste Of Vancouver

Simon Urwin Soaks up Some Canadian Spirit

pictures
Simon Urwin

“The salmon has great spiritual significance for the indigenous people of Canada”, says Darnell Stager, the manager of Salmon n’ Bannock, Vancouver’s foremost restaurant specialising in First Nations cuisine. “It has an incredible, transformative journey: born in freshwater, it travels to live in saltwater, before returning to freshwater to spawn and die. It represents to us the Circle of Life.”

Stager, a member of the Tsimshian Nation, heads to the kitchen and returns moment later with a dish of wild sockeye wrapped in a parcel of sea kelp. The fillet is deliciously meaty while the seaweed adds further marine flavours – both salty and mineral. “The kelp is from the archipelago of Haida Gwaii off the coast”, he tells me. “Their inhabitants – the Haida people – have one of the richest artistic traditions in the country. They are fantastic

woodcarvers, and the produce from their waters is superb too.”

The next course arrives, along with the restaurant’s Nuxalk-born founder, Inez Cook. “This is pemmican, one of our ancestors’ most important foodstuffs”, she says. “In olden times they’d bury pouches of pemmican – dried bison meat – knowing they’d always be able to find food on their journeys. We’ve revived the dish and given it a modern twist, blending the bison with cream cheese and sage-infused berries.” I dip a knife into the swirl of mousse and spread it on freshly toasted bannock bread. It’s wonderfully light with rich and smoky undertones.

“I wanted the menu to be a path to learning about Canada’s native peoples”, Cook explains. “All the dishes are prepared and served by an indigenous team who enjoy sharing their traditions with diners. So here you get great food accompanied by

a history lesson. You’ll learn that there’s more to indigenous people than just the touristy sites: the Stanley Park totem poles or the artefacts in Vancouver’s anthropology museum. You’ll understand that the roots of the First Nations go deep into the soil of this city; that our cultures are ancient, but they are still very much alive.”

For 9,000 years before ‘first contact’ it was the Coast Salish people who inhabited the area now covered by metropolitan Vancouver. European explorers began arriving in the early eighteenth century – initially the Spanish who first charted the spectacular mountain-ringed waters, then colonists from Britain who claimed the land for the Crown. Immigrants from Asia, particularly China, then started crossing the Pacific in the mid-1800s, lured by the West Coast gold rush as well as construction work on the Vancouver terminus of the trans-Canadian railway.





Many of the early Chinese arrivals stayed on, and they now make up the largest ethnic group after the British-descended majority; their community centred on a run-down but lively Chinatown where porters navigate carts of bok choy around the down-and-outs, and the shrill notes of traditional opera spill from open windows.

“The Chinese love to go out and eat and that’s contributed to the energy you find in Vancouver’s food scene”, says Welbert Choi, executive chef at Forage, a restaurant that fuses wild food with fine dining. “I’m originally from Hong Kong and could’ve opened up yet another Cantonese joint, but there are dozens here already. Besides, Vancouver has one of the most beautiful settings in the world. You can see forest, mountains or the ocean at the end of every block. The larder is right on the doorstep and I wanted to reflect that in the menu.”



Lichen, nasturtiums and fiddlehead ferns are just some of the ingredients Choi draws upon to bring the natural world to his diners. “It’s important for me that the whole restaurant team immerse themselves in Mother Nature too”, he says. “Take elderflowers. Every year there’s a window of two weeks to harvest them. We head out together and collect them, then make a fabulous elderflower syrup for our desserts and cocktails. It’s a great way to remind

ourselves how close we are to nature, and to develop a deeper appreciation of where our food comes from.”

To the east of Chinatown is where the next wave of migrants settled throughout the 1900s as Vancouver began to prosper – with enclaves of Greeks, Eastern Europeans and South Asians springing up amongst the canneries and salt companies of what is now known as ‘East Van’. “Much of





the city is quite smart, but this area has always been more gritty, more industrial”, says Adam Chandler, one of Canada’s most avant-garde chocolatiers. “It has an edgy vibe that suits my style”, he adds, before starting up a spray gun to coat a cluster of chocolate mushrooms with edible paint.

“I’m certainly one of the latest in a long line of people who came here because they didn’t fit in elsewhere”, says Chandler, originally from Ontario. “I like to push culinary boundaries and Vancouver is definitely the place to be in Canada if you want to break the rules.” He pauses to fetch a box of brilliantly coloured chocolate balls. I take a bite of one; the crisp shell gives way to a liquid centre beautifully infused with the flavours of Thai green curry.

“Swimming against the tide is a typically Vancouver-y thing to do”, he tells me. “It’s a port city so geographically it’s open to the sea,

open to the outside world. It’s also open to different ways of thinking. It has this really strong independent spirit too. It’s why you find such an exciting craft scene here – be it chocolate, beer or spirits. We all like to do things our own way, and to do them brilliantly.”

Chandler then gives me an address on Granville Island and recommends I visit Masa Shiroki, an artisanal distiller who makes saké with rice he grows in the nearby Fraser Valley, the very first paddy of its kind in the country.

“Some people say I’m messing around with an ancient tradition, but I believe I’m adding new life to it”, says Shiroki, as he welcomes me with a glass of his Fraser Valley junmai saké. “I tweaked the age-old recipe to make it more accessible to the Western palate. It can be paired with all kinds of dishes now, not just sushi and sashimi – but pasta and pizza too.” I take a sip. It’s wonderfully sweet, with subtle

flavours of funghi, followed by the gentlest of after-kicks.

Shiroki, who came to Canada from Japan 50 years ago, points to Vancouver’s artistic community for their role in his revolutionary re-thinking of rice wine. “I feed off their energy”, says the 70-year-old. “Their creativity inspired me to take a different approach and make a success of it. But there’s a much higher purpose to this operation than pure business”, he adds, while topping up my glass.

“I wanted to plant seeds of my Japanese-ness in Canadian ground and leave behind a legacy. I’ve done that by proving that rice can be grown here in British Columbia of all places. Also, in Japan saké is considered sacred and is still offered to the gods in ceremonies. So, by turning my rice into saké, it’s my way of saying: “thank you, Vancouver” for the good life and opportunities that my adopted hometown has given me.”



An Island Escape

GUY EVERTON TAKES TIME OUT IN VIETNAM

Pulling my facemask down to take a drag on a coconut coffee, I look at my girlfriend. “Shall we just go to Côn Đảo?”

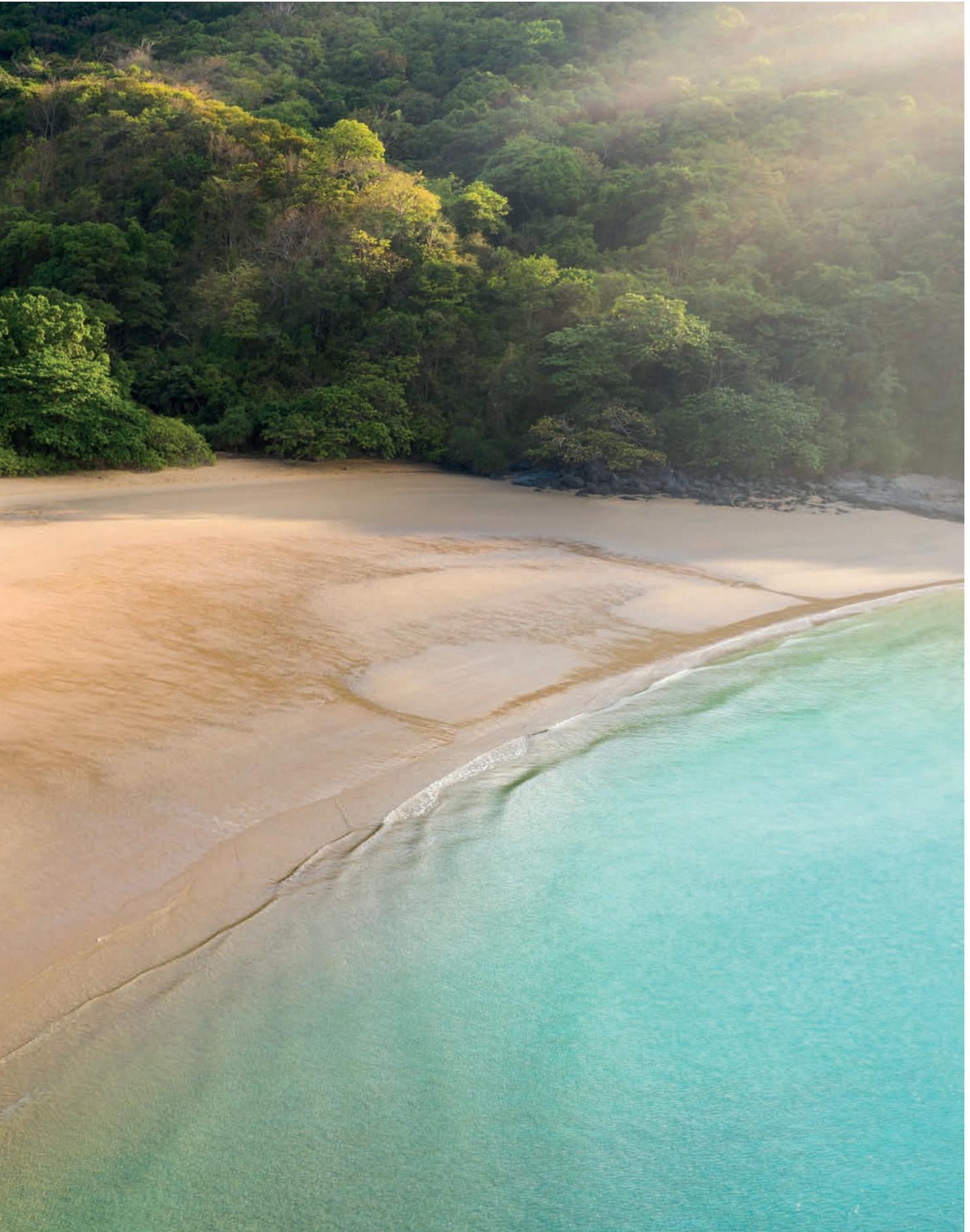
She looks at me. I can tell she’s searching for reasons not to. As the milliseconds flicker by, I know she can’t find any. Her eyes light up. “I’ll message the lady who sells ferry tickets. When the world is collapsing around you, go to Côn Đảo.”

It’s early February, and we have just returned to Saigon from our Tết holiday. Britain has already announced its first Covid cases. Alert to the imminent crisis, the Vietnamese government has closed all schools, but we are teachers, and suddenly we have no work. What we do have, however, is an island escape right on our doorstep. Is it self-indulgent to want a holiday immediately after returning from one? Not in 2020.

Away from the industrial bustle of Vietnam’s southern plain, across just sixty miles of open sea, there is a world of sheer cliffs, hillside jungles and Maldivian waters. It would be our third trip, each peeling back another layer of an archipelago that is so much more than a mere paradise.

We had arrived on our debut visit armed with a tent and an exploratory mindset. The inhabited island, Côn Sơn, is by far the largest, and shaped like a bear in profile. A crescent of mountainous ridge forms the hindlegs, spine and forelegs,





while the neck is flatter, the airport's runway its collar. Then, to the northeast, the crown, jaw and snout rise as hills around a hidden cove. Exploring is easy: there is just one road which snuggles anticlockwise around the coast from the main port by the bear's tail all the way as far as the collar, which is where we spent our first night tucked away at the end of a silent beach. Wild camping isn't strictly allowed in Côn Đảo, but this is Vietnam.

In the middle of that moonlit first night, I was awoken by the sound of motorbikes. A gang of men carrying long implements was buzzing along the tide-compacted sand towards us. So deserted was the beach and the forest behind it, they could only have been coming for us. As they grew closer I identified the implements as rudimentary spears, and felt like Robinson Crusoe.

Then they passed. Dragging their bikes up to the powdery sand where I'd left mine, they turned around and began to wade out to the rocky headland at the end of the bay. Torches flashed, and I understood. Octopus. I don't think its hunting is legal in the archipelago, the entirety of which is a national park. But this is Vietnam.

Fancying a spot of fishing myself – but perhaps more ethical – I drove off to the harbour later on and found

a fisherman who would take us out on his boat. Having arranged it all in pig Vietnamese, the finer details were pretty blurry and I wasn't too surprised when our craft turned around after thirty minutes and chugged back to pick up some other local tourists. I caught several, but they were all tiddlers so I threw them back. Others on board caught the same fish, and they were thrown in a bucket and taken home for tea. I hoped some of their siblings remained to repopulate the reef.

Snorkelling in a bay off Bảy Cảnh Island the next day, I saw the most colourful coral I have ever seen, a carnival of fluorescence and iridescence. And yet Gordon the grizzled South African who runs the dive trips in the islands talked of local fishermen regularly snagging their anchors and ruining the reefs. "They just don't care," he despaired, and I looked at the floor.

We returned to Côn Đảo some months later, but this time left the tent and boots at home. In doing so, I learned that tropical islands can be quite relaxing places. Lazy days beginning in the Infinity Cafe next to our homestay; off to wallow in the sea; back for a bowl of bún riêu and a sugarcane juice in a shaded shack in town; swim; sunset; seafood; cold beer; cocktails. And we still had time for some gentle exploring.





The most appealing beach on the island is found at the bear's armpit, and it's all yours if you are a guest of Six Senses. If not, its inoffensive cabanas and patrolling security can be surveyed from a viewpoint to the south, and the eagle-eyed may even spot a grazing dugong. The cove where we first camped, Đầm Trầu, is perfect for everyone else – it's accessible, never crowded, and great for swimming.

That said and enjoyed, for the real crown jewel, I give you: Nhật Beach, the ultimate desktop screensaver background. Looking west up the bear's hindlegs, the coast road snakes softly downhill in front of you, splitting rough, rugged mountainside to your right from the Slush Puppie sea down below. The water streaks away in shades of energy drink and mouthwash until it meets the hulking peaks of Bà Island, which does a good imitation of Rio's Sugarloaf, and silhouettes magnificently at dusk. At low tide a seductive strip of sand is revealed, and escapees can frolic in the balmy bathwater with the mountains looming all around.

The beach's daily flooding keeps most visitors away until the light fades, when besuited and begowned Vietnamese couples arrive, photographer in tow. Tourism here is a strange thing: for Westerners, the isle is an idyll of secret beaches and jungle hikes; but for the elderly parties of

Vietnamese who comprise the majority, it is a sacred place in their folk religion, home to the ghosts of ancestors who died in horrific conditions in the island's prison between 1861 and 1975.

Shrines are dotted all around the archipelago, even on uninhabited islands, but history's waves crash most violently on the waterfront of Côn Đảo town. Here, incense blesses every passing driver as it wafts across the road from the shrine of schoolgirl Võ Thị Sáu, executed at the prison in 1952. A little down the road is the prison itself, now a chilling museum, and the cluster of venerable French villas and banyan-shaded streets around it house several shops selling bouquets and fruit baskets to be made as offerings. Further down still is Pier 914, so-named because of the number of prisoners who died building it.

Now on our third trip to the archipelago, after a day reprising the island's greatest hits, we sit at a cafe down by that same waterfront watching two female street hawkers trade blows in a screechy din of jabbing fingers, flailing hair and flying facemasks. It's a fight over territory, and I sense trouble in paradise. People are arriving here in increasing numbers from the mainland, chasing opportunity. This is Vietnam, regulations count for little and things change faster than anyone can keep up with. Get to Côn Đảo before it's too late.



Lessons from Lapland

CELIA DILLOW LEARNS FROM A LAND OF LEGENDS

Three things worried me about our trip to Lapland.

What do you do if it is dark all the time? If the land is locked in snow and ice, how do you get out and about? And, is it all about Father Christmas?

Of course, I needn't have worried. The Finnish people are a practical lot. They are obsessed by their relationship with nature and love to be outside. A few metres of snow stops no one. Snow-chains are mandatory after a certain date, which means you can drive on the packed ice, slow down, anticipate hazards and go for it. Homes are snugly heated and cosy with saunas, fires and candles. Clothes are practical. There is one style and that is 'keep warm', five layers seemed to be about right.

Winter lasts for 200 days and it is true that for about 40 of them the sun does not rise above the horizon. However, there are three or four hours of dusky light in the middle of the day and the glow from the snow creates its own blue-gold light. Roads and paths are well lit and, if you want to get out into the forest, you take a head torch and enjoy the glitter of the stars. I thought it might be depressing but when I asked our guides, they said that the midnight sun, at the other end of the year, is much harder to live with. It messes with your sleep. Darkness is an excuse to light another candle and stoke up the fire.

I didn't need to worry about the big man in red either. Officially, he does reside in Lapland. Visit him if you wish but it is not compulsory. It's not all about Christmas,

but there is deep and ancient magic in the snow-forest of Lapland. It is a place of myth and fable, of armoured bears, running wolves and red-harnessed reindeer. Ice-queens ride sleighs with silver bells and ragged, glamorous witches fly their cloud-pines through the curtain of the sky. In Nordic folklore the forest is rich with bear-gods and trolls. Grumpy house elves guard the homesteads and a Yule goat has pride of place in the fabric of winter.

Properly mysterious, it doesn't technically exist, this land of ice and fiery skies. At the extreme edge of Europe between the Arctic Circle and the Arctic Ocean, Lapland includes the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia and is called Sápmi by its indigenous Sámi people who have followed their reindeer across the steppes since the Stone Age.

Much of Lapland is covered by the Taiga, a needleleaf forest of spruce and pine. It is staggeringly beautiful and ideal for outdoors adventures when the dark and the cold add to the unique blend of experience. We snow-shoed through the forest. It's a vigorous activity with a swishy, gentle rhythm and we soon felt confident enough to step off the trails. Immediately we pitched forward, shoulder deep and clamped by the snow. Hampered, then, by our snow-shoes and our embarrassment we clutched at each other and dragged ourselves upright. The quilted landscape was criss-crossed with the tracks of creatures better adapted to moving through the forest than we were.

Arctic hare have snow-shoe feet, and reindeer hooves splay wide to help them on their way. We listened for owls and wondered what other creatures were watching us from their icy strongholds. The winterscape has big charismatic fauna. Wolves hunt through the forest but they keep away from the towns and villages. There are bears in the woods but they hibernate in winter. However, the wolverine is active throughout the year. Not a mythical beast, nor a Hollywood construct, the wolverine is the largest member of the weasel family. Territorial and solitary, he is the size of a big, powerful dog and has a ferocious reputation. If he watched our passage through his kingdom, he kept himself well hidden.

We swished on, past soft, marshmallow domes of snow, masking rocks or bushes – or perhaps a sleeping troll. The packed snow is like a duvet. It makes a protective, hoary layer on the trees and the arched branches reach their arms to the ground. They look like frozen elves.

Eventually, under a fat moon and a shower of shooting stars, we stopped at the lake, lit a fire and drank *glögi*: hot, spiced berry juice. In a land addicted to nature and keen to be outside all year, the government maintains the firepits and keeps them stocked with kindling. Just bring your matches, a mug and a knife. The sound of an engine

broke the silence as a Sámi herder sped by in the half-light, using a snowmobile to keep up with his reindeer. We had seen big groups of them in the forest, foraging and scraping for lichen. They walked sedately, in careful single-file, each one using the footprints of the animal ahead of it. None of them looked as if they would fly away and there were no red noses.

All my pre-trip concerns had been dispelled and I was enchanted by Lapland's wilderness edge, practical spirit and open, welcoming vibe. But there is something about this Christmas-card perfect place that I should have been worried about. There's another darkness in the North, which has nothing to do with the setting sun or the spinning of stories. The snow is receding and the land is blackening. The physics and chemistry of the atmosphere means that the South is encroaching on the North so quickly that the Arctic animals, adapted for brief bright summers and dark winters under a protective blanket of snow, are out of synch with their surroundings. White pelts can't protect them if the snow has retreated. Cached food rots if the ice melts. Spring and autumn, previously settled times of plenty, are wild with storms. Their environment is becoming unpredictable and chaotic. Science tells us this, not faith or belief or storytelling and we need more than magic and wishful thinking to put it right.







An Enchanted Isle

NICK MAES ENJOYS THE MAGIC OF ZANZIBAR

Zanzibar – the name sizzles on the tongue, and feels as evocative and exotic, to my mind, as the most far-flung of destinations. It effortlessly conjures images of deepest Africa and spice traders, Araby, adventure and magic.

Qualities that weren't missed by a famous visitor in the nineteenth century. Dr David Livingstone based himself in Zanzibar before setting out on his final safari calling it "an illusive place where nothing is as it seems." And he's right.

Today Stone Town (Zanzibar's capital) is somewhat larger and very much more geared towards tourism; but it's still possible to experience something of that illusive magic – and capture a sense of how Livingstone might have seen it. A walk in Mji Mkongwe's – the old town's – back streets soon gets you lost in a maze of alleys and twittens. It is disorientating and beguiling.

Ancient Arab merchant houses loom up towards remote tea rooms on their rooftops and jostle for space on the raised pavements. A very few still retain the famous Zanzibari doors, huge monoliths punctured with vast

vicious looking brass studs. This ornamental weaponry was originally designed to repel war elephants, not that there was ever any need for it here. Who on earth could prise a fully caparisoned pachyderm through these twisting lanes? Yet the design of the cramped narrow alleys is purposeful, funnelling what little breeze blows in from the sea into the heart of the town and casting long inky shadows around corners. This is medieval urban airconditioning, and it works a treat.





The heat is mesmeric, inducing a trance-like quality that perfectly suits the exhausted essence of the town. A sound track of scuffling flip-flops, Swahili murmurings and the occasional crowing of an invisible cockerel intensifies the other-worldliness of the place in the midday sun.

It's worth seeking sanctuary at Emerson Spice, a small boutique hotel and restaurant located on Changa Bazaar Street, near the Kiponda mosque. Swish-swashing ceiling fans stir the syrupy air in the dark cool rooms – the perfect antidote to the brightness outside. Upstairs the tearoom looks out across a sea of byzantine rooftops, and, like it's neighbours, just catches the faintest breeze. It's ornamental roof is reminiscent of a Victorian railway station.

Further along Kiponda Street is the Darajani market; it is a wonderful assault on all the senses – and the fish bazaar is no exception.

Glistening tuna and enormous eels vie for space with rays, king fish and entire shoals of fry. It is eye-poppingly fresh, an impossible dream for those marooned at the fish counter in Waitrose on a grey wet day in Blighty. The shambles are just that, raw and visceral, an altar dedicated to spleen, rump and cartilage – and perhaps not for the nervous or those with weak stomachs. Colossal mounds of fruit – depending on the season – sweeten the air and the sacks of spices punctuate it.

The archipelago is famous for its spices, none more so than cloves. This tiny dot on the global map was once the world's largest producer of this pungent number of gums. It is worth travelling to find the farms – on Pemba Island.

Pemba is Zanzibar's quieter, less visited sister. Lush and intensely green this island harks back to a time before Zanzibar revved up its vibrant tourism industry. After the clove harvest farmers dry their precious crop on coconut palm mats by the side of the road. Travelling past is akin to swimming through a Christmas pudding, the aroma is intoxicating, all enveloping and utterly marvellous. But there is another altogether more esoteric export that Pemba is equally famous for in certain circles. Djinn.

Pemba's reputation for being the home to djinn stretches throughout the Indian Ocean and deep into the continent. Travellers make huge international journeys to consult with witch doctors on the island – for their magic is underpinned by the spirit inhabitants. It is a sacred and fertile place, remote and beautiful. And also home to the very last vestige of coastal rainforest on East Africa's flank.

Zanzibar's traditional mode of transport is by boat. Tiny dugout canoes called ngalawa scud between the dozens of islands hereabouts. But they are not for the fainthearted visitor.

Clambering aboard a dhow, however, is. These ancient boats, rigged with lateen sails, creak and majestically splash through preposterously azure seas creating a swelling rhythm and enchantment all of their own. If time allows, what better way to island hop?



The islands are worth making time for. Chapwani, or Grave Island, opposite Stone Town, is populated with all sorts of colonial residents under the elephantine baobab trees. Various sailors and soldiers, ladies of leisure and pith-helmeted masters of commerce make fascinating and enigmatic eternal company.

Chumbe Island is an ecological nirvana. The surrounding pristine waters are home to myriad different coral species and fish. Snorkelling here is dreamy. Kaleidoscopic schools of psychedelically coloured tiddlers murmurate like starlings. The colours are startling.

Life on and under the ocean waves makes for a healthy appetite. Back in Stone Town as dusk suddenly falls and the calls to prayer echo around the streets, the food stalls in Forodhani Gardens set up. Curled octopus legs

and beady-eyed prawns sizzle alongside skinny chicken and beef skewers and scent the warm evening air.

Maasai hawkers vend beaded collars and trinkets, anorexic walking sticks carved with elongated heads and brightly coloured shukas – their traditional robes. And there are any number of tourist stalls purveying Zanzibari souvenirs and mementos – all with an eye to relieving visitors of their US dollars and Tanzanian shillings; and why not? The whole good-natured commercial habitat seems like a human manifestation of the complex underwater biosphere around Chumbe Island, of predator and prey.

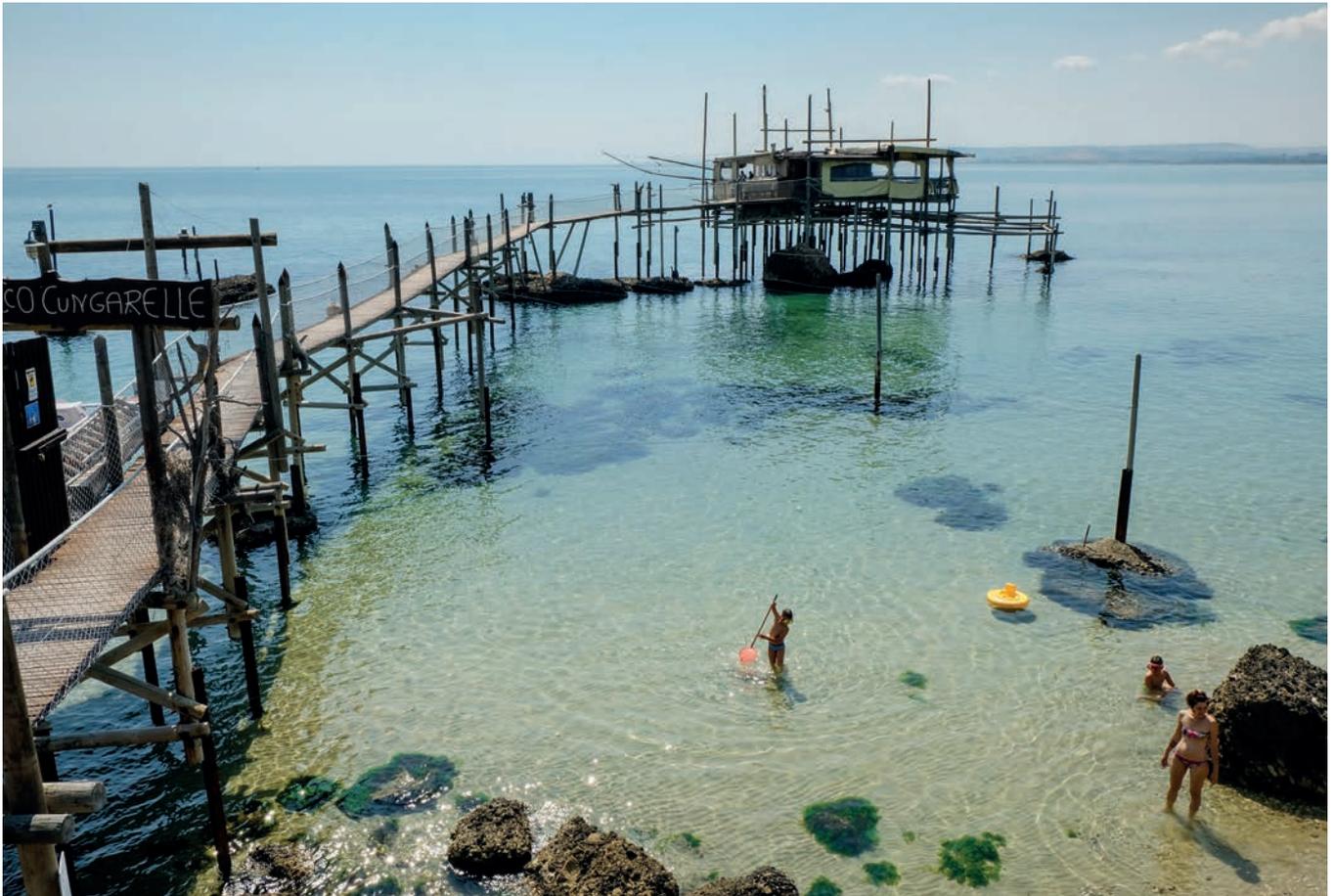
And even though tourism has undoubtedly made a significant impact upon Zanzibar and her nearby islands, this most onomatopoeic of places still retains her essential magic. Nothing is as it seems.





Costa dei Trabocchi

pictures
Francesco Lastrucci



Along 70km of the Adriatic coast from San Vito to Vasto in the Abruzzian province of Chieti, narrow wooden piers snake out from the shore to deeper waters, at the ends of which a complex arrangement of wide fishing nets on poles – likened by the poet Gabriele D’Annunzio in his mournful *Triumph of Death* to ‘a colossal spider’ – intercept passing shoals.

The *trabocchi* are usually manned by a team of four fishermen who lower them via a series of winches, then raise them promptly when the moment comes to secure their catch. The mechanism is reputed to have originated with the Phoenicians, but can be traced back only as far as the 18th century, when it was documented in Gargano in neighbouring Puglia.

Today the *trabocchi* are typically run as seafood restaurants, with a fixed-price, four-course, fresh and delectable menu varying according to the catch of the day, washed down with a glass or two of the characterful local pecorino wine.

Many of the present structures were built in the 1930s by Bernardo, Orlandino, Luigi, Domenico and Tommaso Veri, whose descendants still have a hand in operations in their new dual guise.

Previous page: View from Trabocco Cungarelle, Vasto

Above: Trabocco Cungarelle from the shore

Opposite: Fresh coconut seller, Marina di San Vito

Overleaf (clockwise from top left): Crab fisherman Antonio ‘the pirate’ under the Trabocco Punta Tufano, Rocca San Giovanni; Trabocco Punta Punciosa, Rocca San Giovanni, seen from Cavalluccio beach; Portrait of Rinaldo Veri on the Trabocco Punta Tufano; The bridge connecting Trabocco Cungarelle with the shore







Closer to Home

KIRSTIN ZHANG IS CAUGHT IN A MOMENT
OF AFRICAN HISTORY

I had swum too close to the sun. The day before we'd gone down to Lake Nabugabo at the equator to escape the capital which was still jittery after the explosion of three bombs and nearly eighty dead. Now I lay on a day bed in the deep shadow of a friend's veranda hooked up to a drip. Her bungalow lay within the compound of an international Aids hospital, and one of the doctors had come down and diagnosed heatstroke.

I lay in half sleep, my reverie broken only by the *thwack thwack* of the gardener's machete as he cut down jackfruit, and the regular patrol by one of the compound guards, who strode across the lawn, an AK-47 slung casually over his shoulder. The imminent arrival of General Gaddafi for a meeting of the African Union had heightened the tension. Despite the billboard messages all along the highway between Entebbe airport and Kampala welcoming the African delegations to Uganda, Gaddafi was no friend of the Ugandan president, who was suspicious of the mosques he funded in the northern Ugandan provinces and his vision of a United African presidency. Already rumours swirled that Gaddafi

was complicit in the recent atrocity, that he was trying to destabilise the country as presidential elections loomed.

For a day or two our planned trip to Jinja seemed unlikely. I'd had my heart set on visiting the source of the Nile and the spot where some of Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were scattered. But by the third day the nausea had settled and I could stand. The back seat of my friend's car was filled with cushions and icepacks, and a bucket. Just in case.

Jinja was cooler. Mist crept up the banks of the Nile and swathed the gardens surrounding Gandhi's memorial. Our faces were rain-streaked as we offered our strands of marigolds. Afterwards, we took shelter beneath the town colonnades, which were filled with cafes and fabric shops. In one I was struck by the Birmingham burr of the owner. They were ethnic Indians, they told me, who'd fled in 1973 after Idi Amin's expulsion of the Asian community. They'd travelled first to Tanzania and then on to the UK. A new law now allowed them to reclaim their property, and they'd returned after nearly forty years. Their daughter, Rita,





however, had stayed on in Birmingham. “She’s got a family now, and no longer thinks of this as home.”

And then it happened, as it had throughout this trip. This time it was a word – ‘home’. Previously it had been the smell of green bananas roasting over a roadside fire, the sight of a hillside, the red earth turned over and ready for planting, and the sound at night of fruit bats in the pawpaw tree outside my bedroom window. I felt the deep ache of something lost. I’d grown up in the 1970s in Papua New Guinea, in the wetlands, amongst the abandoned airfields and ammunition dumps of the Pacific War. When we weren’t scavenging for spent cartridges, my best friend Sangeeta Shrivastava and I would lie beneath her parents’ bed reading her father’s *Playboy* magazines, while she told me hair-raising tales of Idi Amin. They too had been refugees from Uganda. But the place where I’d spent my first twelve years was also descending into post-independence turmoil. One Saturday, returning home from swimming lessons, I was told we were leaving. Thirty-five people were dead after demonstrations, and the Prime Minister had declared a state of emergency. That night I left my home, my dog, and my father who was bound to see out his contract. I never had a chance to say goodbye to Sangeeta.

The rain lashed our windscreen as we sped through the Mabira Forest on our way back to Entebbe. We passed

groups of men playing checkers on dripping verandas, goats shivering as they searched for weeds amongst the rubble, and a sign which read ‘You were lost and now you are found’.

By the time we reached the outskirts of the city the sun was blazing, but now we were caught up in the rush hour traffic. As we navigated potholes hidden by surface water, we heard the rotation of helicopter blades, and then, somewhere behind us, sirens.

“Shit,” said our driver Moses, as an armoured car tried to nose ahead of us. It was flying the flags of Libya.

“Gaddafi”, whispered my friend.

There was the horrible sound of metal on metal. An army jeep forced us up onto the sloped embankment. The six tall soldiers kneeling on the back, Kalashnikovs in hand, didn’t even glance our way.

I began to sob.

“Please auntie,” said Moses, “don’t be afraid.”

But how could I explain to him it wasn’t fear that made me weep?



Another Kind of Traveller

Words by Justine Hardy

When rain falls there is a particular quality to it, as though each drop has the capacity to catch our reflection for a moment. Perhaps it will be the first cold touch of it on the curve of your cheek, the back of your hand, your bare back, or foot.

This is the story of a traveller without borders, a raindrop, maybe even in the state of pre-drop, an idea, a wisp, that kind described as horses' tails or curly hooks, outriders of rain to come. There is an old weather proverb, the kind that you hear from someone with a face that seems to have lived for a thousand years, 'Mares' tails and mackerel scales make lofty ships to carry low sails', meaning that those sky threads may be a sign of rain to come.

Clearly, I know very little of meteorology, but this is to have a look at a wanderer that requires no passport, mask, visor or Covid test.

What might it have meant to any of us to know that our ability to move around freely would be pulled in, as walls pressing in around us, stopping us in our tracks? The raindrop, in whatever stage of its existence, and wherever it might be, may have shrugged, in as much as a raindrop does. Back comes that line from the glorious fell walker and Lake District writer, Alfred Wainwright, 'There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing.'

Those clothes that we wear, mentally and physically, are our protection or

indeed exposure to the rain. This traveller may arrive as the fat first drop of late coming and longed for rain on a rice farmer's hot salty back.

He is bent over the dry ground outside his village in Kashmir, this place of water, lakes, and orchards, set between some of the most arid corridors and peaks of the Himalayas. Aksai-Chin's Tibetan Plateau high altitude desert lies to the east, and the ragged Karakoram range of Pakistan to the west. The stream that runs beside the farmer's paddy fields has barely a thread of tired water. His footprints are baked into the mud where the water that fed his fields' irrigation channels once flowed.

These are rice fields on a valley floor that was once part of an ocean bed that was flung up into the skies as part of the youngest, highest and wildest range in the world, when the Indian and Eurasian plates smashed into each other and the Ocean of Tethys learnt to fly.

This embattled and beflowered place surprises some of those who come, though there are few visitors now, and that just does not need to be dwelt on. They do not expect to see paddy fields in a place that they may associate with the hedonism of Sixties swing, clouds of Afghan Black marijuana wafting through crewel-stitched hangings on the houseboats of the lakes. It is work that may have caused the embroiderer to lose their sight long before they should have because they went on with needle and thread as the twilight shrank to nothing.

Those same floating palaces may have connotations of a different kind of sensuality, an ageing man or woman returning to see the place where they were conceived in secret. It might have been a young officer on leave in the valley, tumbling into a love affair with a colonel's wife, a pretty girl, closer to his age than to her husband's. She was perhaps 'Summering' in Srinagar, the valley's capital, while malaria and dengue fever plagued those left in the plains below.

But then it may be a place where a Canadian 'powder monkey', a seeker of extreme skiing, can look wholly incongruous as he shoulders his neon-stickered snowboard amidst the grey, brown and black hybrid gown, both enveloping cloak and coat, the winter outer shell of the locals around him. Perhaps he climbs up into untouched snows that have already buried entire villages. Their roofs could just seem to be snow jumps to him, maybe even built by a keen local skier, the order of the houses somehow creating almost a slalom effect in the higgledy-piggledy of the village's layout. The skier cannot know that they are homes. The altitude has taken hold of most of his brain as he whips up into the air, suspended for a moment, up and above a buried village, just as that first fat drop reflected for a moment the world around before it hit the rice farmer's back.

We return to him, lifting his head from the dry soil, no thought of houseboats, snowboarding, or illicit affairs in other worlds. For him the snows, *sheen*, the



Walwyn

Kashmiri word, is for another time when the melt water fills his stream again and feeds the irrigation channels for his paddy fields.

Now he scans the clouds, the creases around his eyes deepening as he reads the sky with years of experience. He needs to know how iron the grey of the cloud is, and so whether this drop marks the start of a deluge, crashing down onto the dry land, falling too fast and hard to seep into the land in the gentle way that will nourish the soil. He knows too that it is only six years since the valley was subjected to devastating floods, created more by humans, by deforestation, and all the change that he has watched throughout

the steady seasonal cycle of his life, rather than being a natural disaster.

The great river burst its banks destroying whole crops, and so much more, flattening villages, whole sections of Srinagar drowned. Throughout the summer traditional family houses in the capital had their lace-filigreed Juliet balconies crushed and ripped away from their walls. These were old homes jammed together along alleys so narrow that neighbours can whisper their secrets to each other between wooden lattice work that almost kisses across the passageways.

And so, the farmer reaches out his hand, testing the next drop, licking it, warm

and salty from his palm, this traveller without passport, mask, visor or Covid test, because we have yet to have a lunatic Tweet telling us that the virus falls from the sky.

The farmer bends again, waiting for the rain. He knows he will never leave his fields, his village or his valley. He has met with a traveller who has thrown open the world to him, for a moment. He will breathe in the scent of the coming rain and this will be his journey.

Justine Hardy is a writer, trauma psychotherapist and the founder of *Healing Kashmir*

Illustration by Luke Walwyn

Simon Urwin on the beauty of Bento

Japan In A Box

“The bento box has been an important part of Japanese culture for over 900 years”, says personal shopper Kiyoko Kondo as she welcomes me to Tokyo’s glittering Mitsukoshi department store. “There are thousands of different varieties, and the dishes inside them reflect the seasons, the region, and the occasion.”

We enter the vast food hall where exquisitely packaged bento boxes are flying off the shelves. “I think they’re so popular because we have a deeply-rooted culture of *omiyage*, or gifting, in Japan”, she explains. “A bento comes beautifully wrapped, just like a present. So buying one is like giving a gift to yourself, every day of the week.”

I choose a *hinomaru*, or circle-of-the-sun, consisting of a single *umeboshi* plum on a bed of white rice. Resembling the national flag, it’s the simplest of all the bento; its bare minimalism a stark contrast with the elaborate *kaiseki ryori* bento that are traditionally served in Japan’s fine dining establishments.

Later that day, I head to Kikunoi, a restaurant renowned for its spectacular haute cuisine boxes. “It requires ten of us, with over 100 years’ combined cooking experience, to make each *kaiseki*”, chef Kenta Miura explains as he painstakingly decorates some black beans with edible gold leaf.

“Each *kaiseki* must display a mastery of cooking skills: poaching, grilling, steaming

and sashimi cutting”, he says. “We chefs must be coordinated to deliver perfection at the same time – just like an orchestra. The *kaiseki* must also be beautiful, like a garden or a painting. Aesthetics have always been important to the Japanese, especially when it comes to food.”

The origin of the bento box can be traced back to the Kamakura period (12th-14th centuries), when simple packed lunches of cooked rice and pickled vegetables were taken to work in cloth bags. By the Edo period (17th-19th centuries), bamboo boxes had become the containers of choice, and the bento themselves had evolved to become more specialised; first *Makuno-uchi* (between-acts bento) appeared in theatres, followed by *ekiben* (railway station bento) soon afterwards.

The next morning, I enter the *Ekiben-ya Matsuri* (festival of *ekiben*) store in Tokyo’s central station, where the normally polite Japanese are pushing and shoving each other to purchase an *ekiben* in time to catch their rush-hour trains. From a vast selection of novelty boxes shaped like snowmen, leaping salmon and kabuki theatre masks, I pick one resembling a bullet train, then jump aboard the next service to Kyoto.

There, on a bright, crisp spring day, the plum trees are in full bloom, and friends and families are indulging in the ancient tradition of *hanami*, or blossom-viewing picnics. The bento of choice for such al fresco gatherings is the *kurama*,

which comes dressed in the colours of the season: flamingo-pink prawns, bright salmon sashimi, and rose-coloured, steamed-dough *namafu* flowers.

“Colour is a key part of all bento”, tea mistress Ayako Moriya explains as I take my seat inside a temple teahouse later that afternoon. “For the tea ceremony, the colour of the accompanying *shokado* bento box is as important as the colour of the food inside”, she adds, before placing a red-and-black lacquered box on the matting in front of me. “Many people attend a tea ceremony to either celebrate or commemorate, and these two colours fit both occasions, whether sombre or happy.” She lifts the lid and invites me to eat. “Take one piece at a time, and move around the four compartments in a clockwise direction”, she advises. “This is an important ritual. We take our time to think about the food and the moment we are celebrating, or the person we are saying goodbye to.”

I return to Tokyo a few days later, and make a final stop at O Bento for Kids, a cooking school that teaches *kyrabento* (character bento), a modern-day Japanese phenomenon. “Making the best *kyrabento* is a competitive sport amongst mothers of kindergarten-age children”, says founder Tomomi Mauro, who for over a decade has taught hundreds of housewives how to fashion rice-ball pandas and fish-and-seaweed Little Kitties to fill their children’s lunch boxes.

“The appeal of spending an hour every morning making a bento for your child is simple”, she says. “These creations are widely judged as a reflection of your parenting abilities. So, in a society where much is hidden or unspoken, the *kyrabento* gives mothers a chance to express their feelings, and show just how much they love their children.”



Belmond Villa San Michele

Florence



Perched in the hills of Fiesole, a short hop from Florence, the Belmond Villa San Michele is one of Italy's most prized and storied boutique hotels. The grand facade attributed to Michelangelo, broad terrace and landscaped gardens boast unrivalled vistas over the city.

Built as a monastery in the mid-15th century, Franciscans were housed at the villa until 1808, when Napoleon dissolved monastic orders, dispersed its religious treasures, and adopted the monks' former library as his Florentine headquarters.

Privileged guests can live like an emperor for a day or two in what is now the breathtaking Michelangelo Suite, stretching the length of the facade. Alternatively the Leonardo Suite offers a view over the neighbouring hill where da Vinci tested his famous flying machine.

Between visits to Florence's renowned museums and art galleries, or exploring the wider cultural and culinary pleasures of Tuscany, stroll through the majestic gardens and wooded park, or while away some time by the hilltop pool. Feast on local specialities in the Loggia Restaurant or pick up life-changing tips at the Cookery School. A workout in the panoramic gym is rewarded with stunning views over Florence, while guided hikes or bike rides through the scenic hills are a delight.



Belmond Hotel Cipriani

Venice



This legendary Venetian bolthole was the brainchild of

Giuseppe Cipriani, the founder of Harry's Bar and creator of the Bellini, whose unabashed ambition was to attract the world's glamorous jetset to Casanova's old stomping ground on the island of Giudecca, across the water from Piazza San Marco.

True to his vision, upon opening in 1958 Sophia Loren and Yves Saint Laurent were among the first guests, while illustrious visitors have since included Elizabeth Taylor, President Reagan, Jacques Chirac, Princess Diana, Giorgio Armani, José Carreras, Whoopi Goldberg and Uma Thurman.

Generously appointed rooms blend old-world elegance with contemporary comfort, offering views over the colourful Casanova Gardens and its fragrant pergolas, as well as the magnificent lagoon. The opulent suites have sweeping views of the hotel grounds, including the largest outdoor pool in all of Venice (so proportioned, according to legend, because Giuseppe was thinking in feet while his architect was planning in metres.)

The Oro Restaurant, with its gold-domed ceiling, offers a Michelin-starred tasting menu with refined wine pairings, while the pick of the bars is Cip's Club, suspended over the water and out of time, where you can savour cocktails and fine wines along with delicious local dishes as the sun's last light dapples the lagoon.

Belmond La Residencia

Mallorca



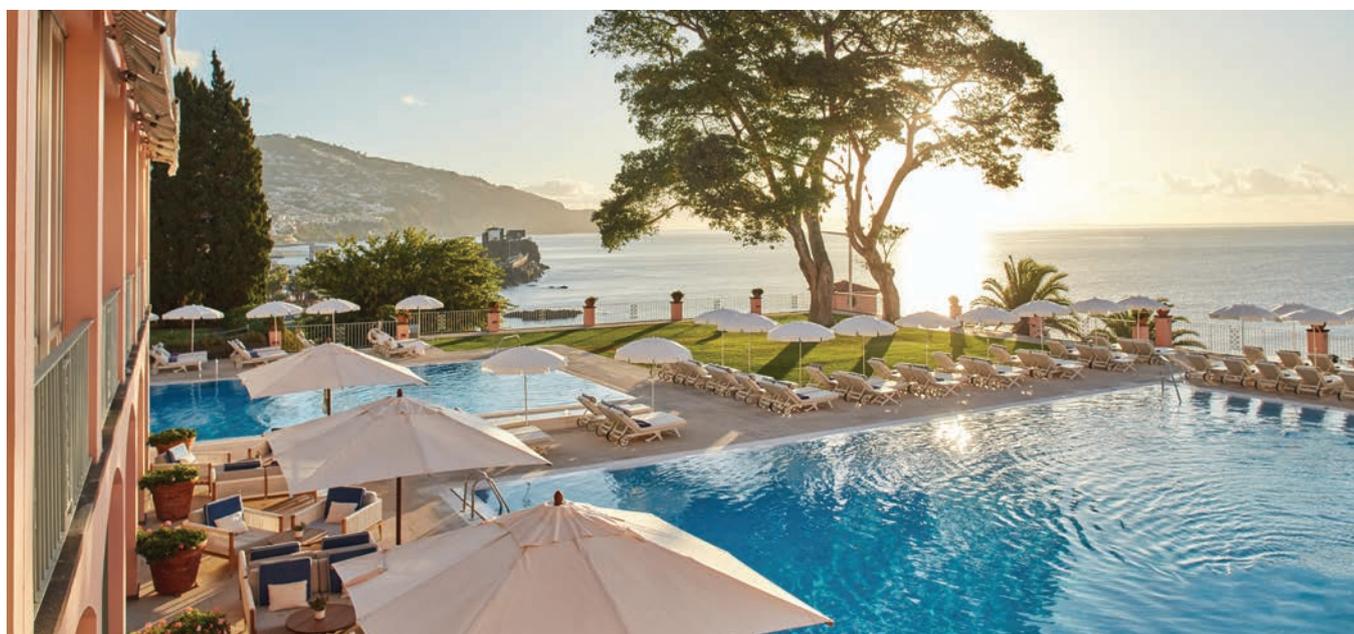
This secluded hideaway among the stone cottages of Deià on Mallorca's tranquil northwest coast, set against the dramatic backdrop of the Tramuntana Mountains, is a historical haven for artists, writers, musicians and poets. The hotel comprises a striking cluster of buildings including 16th-century manors Son Moragues and Son Canals, 18th-century Son Fony, and Son Fony II, a new structure that blends in effortlessly. The atmospheric El Olivo restaurant occupies a medieval olive mill, while the neighbouring watchtower is said to have been built by Cistercian monks. The surrounding dry-stone walls and terracing showcase a local technique first introduced by Arab settlers, and abundant gardens provide fresh flowers for the rooms as well as vegetables, fruits and herbs for the kitchens.

Fresh mountain cheeses, irresistible tapas and a choice helping of Joan Miró's art await at Café Miró, where thirty-three of the Catalan artist's paintings adorn the walls, vying for your attention with spectacular mountain views. Over 800 artworks are on display around the hotel and grounds, including one of Spain's largest sculpture gardens. Individually designed rooms are a model of serenity, with white walls, terracotta floors and large shuttered windows overlooking lush vegetation and the mountains beyond. A self-catering villa with three double bedrooms and maid service is perfect for extended get-togethers at your own pace.



Belmond Reid's Palace

Madeira



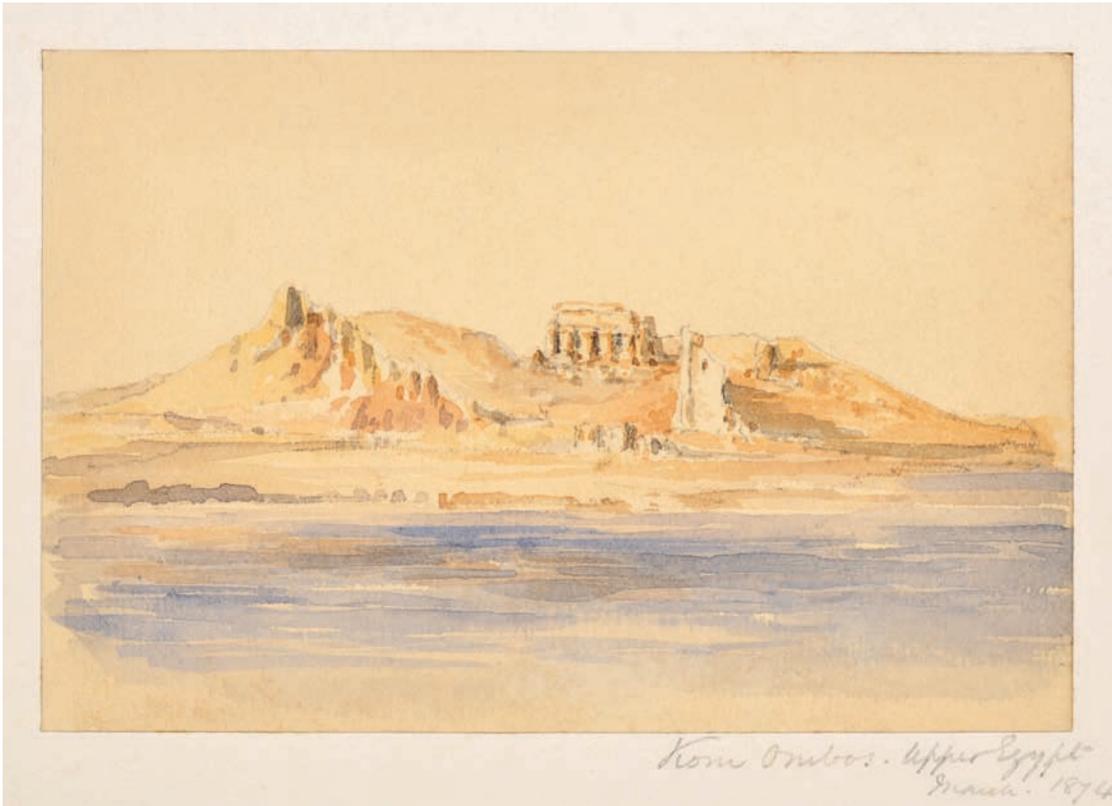
Magnificently situated above picture-perfect Funchal Harbour, surrounded by tropical gardens, Belmond Reid's Palace is an indulgent haven on the bewitching far-flung Portuguese 'Island of Eternal Spring'. The hotel fulfils the vision of William Reid, the son of a Scottish crofter who first arrived in Madeira in 1836 and, having made his first fortune in the wine trade, rented out *quintas* to wealthy invalids escaping mainland Europe's harsh winters. Buying a swathe of land on the rocky promontory known as Salto do Cavalo (Horse's Leap), he ordered tons of rich soil to create the lush gardens that are a resplendent feature of the hotel to this day.

William did not live to see the hotel take shape, but his sons completed the building, opening its doors to guests in 1891. He is celebrated in the Michelin-starred William Restaurant, where stunning plates are offered up together with panoramic views of the Funchal coastline.

Afternoon tea on the terrace is a timeless treat, while the Ristorante Villa Cipriani offers fine Italian cuisine with a nod to the hotel's Venetian cousin. All the exquisitely furnished rooms have their own balcony or patio, providing a luxurious personal oasis from which to explore the ancient forests, volcanic peaks and stunning wilderness trails that snake around the island.







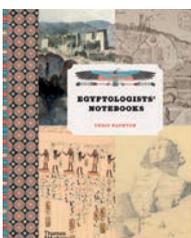
Opposite: Detail of a painting by Rosalind Paget showing the 'exotica' encountered during Hatshepsut's expedition to the land of Punt, as recorded on the walls of her temple at Deir el-Bahari, 1896. Egypt Exploration Society

Left: Amelia Edwards' watercolour sketch of the double temple of Sobek and Haroeris at Kom Ombo, 1874. Peggy Joy Egyptology Library

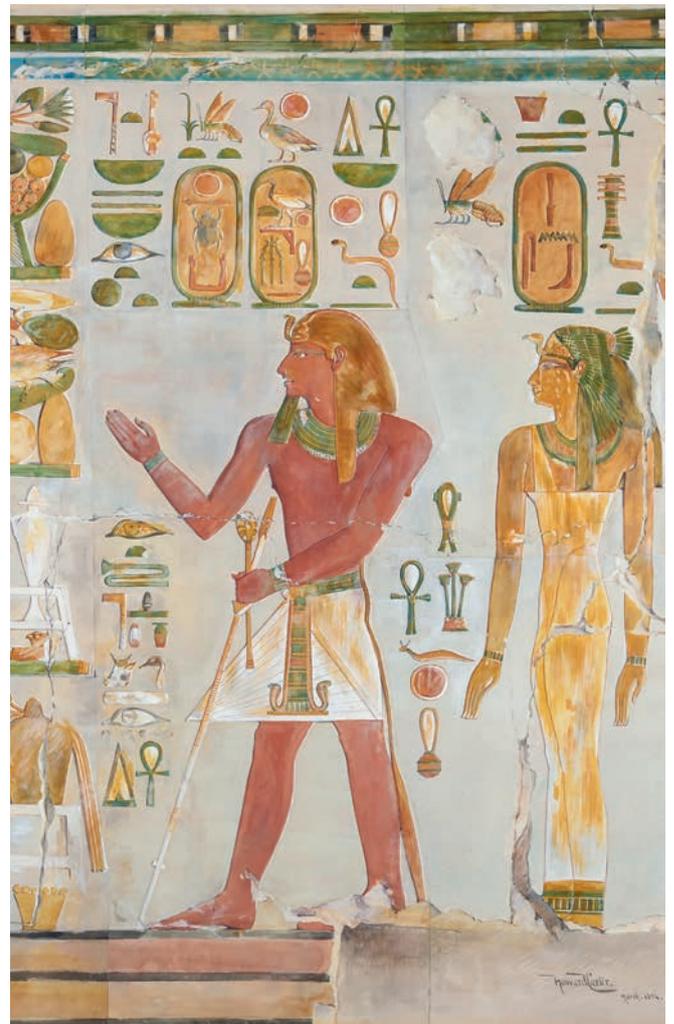
Below: Facsimile by Howard Carter of a scene of Thutmose I and his mother Senseneb making offerings to Anubis at the temple of Hatshepsut, 1893–99. Egypt Exploration Society

Away with the pharaohs

For centuries the ancient ruins of Egypt have provided an endless source of fascination for explorers, antiquarians, treasure hunters, archaeologists and travellers, all entranced by the beauty and majesty of the remains of tombs cut into the natural rock of hillsides, and temples and cities gently consumed by drift sand. The early adventurers were gripped by the urge to capture what they saw in writings, sketches, paintings and photographs. From scholars and expedition leaders to artists and photographers, architects, engineers, local workers and facilitators, *Egyptologists' Notebooks* brings together the work of the many people who contributed to our understanding of the ancient world. Their words and images evoke a rich sense of time and place, transporting us back to a great age of discovery.



Egyptologists' Notebooks
by Chris Naunton
Thames & Hudson, Hbk, 264pp, £32



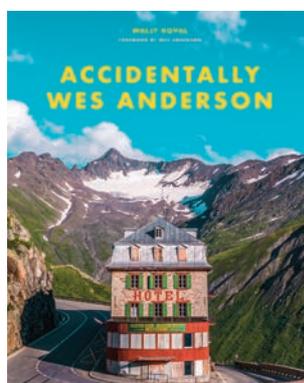




Beyond imagination

The saturated colours, archly symmetrical architecture and hyperreal set-pieces in the films of Wes Anderson have inspired a wildly popular web archive of photographs, with well over a million followers on Instagram. *Accidentally Wes Anderson*, curated by Wally Koval, gathers images from professional and amateur photographers on every continent that capture the filmmaker's singular aesthetic. The resulting book tells the unexpected stories behind over

200 quirky landmarks and previously uncharted gems, providing a unique travel guide that encourages us all to view the world around us with heightened awe and appreciation.



Accidentally Wes Anderson
by Wally Koval

Trapeze, HbK, 368pp, £25
accidentallywesanderson.com



Opposite: Ascensor da Bica, Lisbon, Portugal, c. 1892
© Jack Spicer Adams

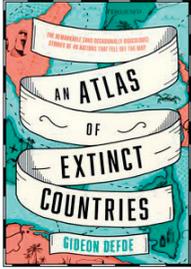
Above: Post Office, Wrangell, Alaska, USA, c. 1937
© Robin Petravic & Catherine Bailey

Left: Amer Fort, Rajasthan, India, c. 1592
© Chris Schalkx

Nations no more

Mark Reynolds reviews *An Atlas of Extinct Countries* by Gideon Defoe

Fourth Estate, Hbk, 304pp, £12.99



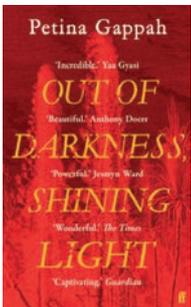
“Countries die. Sometimes it’s murder, sometimes it’s by accident, and sometimes it’s because they were so ludicrous they didn’t deserve to exist in the first place,” writes Gideon Defoe in his introduction. “Often the cause of death is either ‘got too greedy’ or ‘Napoleon turned up’. Now and then they just hold a referendum

and vote themselves out of existence.” This entertaining atlas of nations that fell off the map is a joyously compiled catalogue of chancers, comen, madmen, mistakes, lies and

far-fetched schemes that laid waste the genuine hopes of a nation or exploded the overreaching ambitions of a bombastic megalomaniac. The fabled failed regimes include The Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (1851–64) based in present-day Nanjing, where a feverish would-be civil servant called Hong proclaimed himself the younger brother of Jesus and declared independence from China, instigating a long and bloody civil war; while Italian poet and inveterate self-publicist Gabriele D’Annunzio set up the grandly titled *Impresa di Fiume* (‘The Fiume Endeavour’, 1919–20) in what is now Rijeka, Croatia, before giving it all up on the toss of a coin. A riot of revisionist history and political ambition.

Step into other worlds

Recently published international fiction that will take you to unexpected places

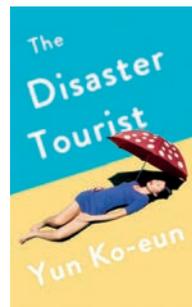


Out of Darkness, Shining Light by Petina Gappah (Faber, £9.99), a long-standing passion project for the Zimbabwean author, relays the story of how David Livingstone’s mortal remains were transported by his African entourage from present-day Zambia to Zanzibar to be shipped safely home. It is joyfully unreliably narrated by two of Livingstone’s real-life companions

– seen-it-all cook Halima, and freed slave and aspiring scribe Jacob Wainwright. *Fracture* by Andrés Neuman (Granta, £14.99) builds an intimate portrait of a survivor of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and his life of breakages and healings in Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Paris, New York and Madrid, told through the voices of the women he has loved and left behind. *The Cat and the City* by Nick Bradley (Atlantic Books, £14.99) is a bountiful ride through the underbelly of Tokyo told through interlinked stories of horror, Sci-Fi, fantasy, detective fiction and manga. In *A Hundred Million Years and a Day* by Jean-Baptiste Andrea (Gallic Books, £10.99) a fifty-something fossil hunter drags two companions on a final trip into the Alps in search of a dinosaur skeleton embedded beneath a glacier. *The Swallowed Man* by Edward Carey (Gallic Books, £14.99), a haunting tale of

fatherly love and the triumph of imagination, picks up a thread in Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio* in which Geppetto is stranded for years inside the belly of a sea beast. *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* by Deepa Anappara (Chatto & Windus, £14.99) sees street kids in an unnamed Indian city turn detective to solve the mystery of their classmates’ disappearances, their everyday perils coloured by TV cop shows and soul-snatching demons. *Latitudes of Longing* by Shubhangi Swarup (riverrun, £16.99) taps into interconnected lives across a fault line running from the Andamans to the Himalayas, informed by the living history of the Earth itself. Booker-shortlisted *Burnt Sugar* by Avni Doshi (Hamish Hamilton, £14.99) is an insightful study of motherhood, family ties, betrayal, failing memory and freedom of expression in Pune and Mumbai. In *If I Had Your Face* by

Frances Cha (Viking, £12.99), four young women develop a bond of sisterhood in a present-day Seoul judged and divided by appearance and wealth. *The Disaster Tourist* by Yun Ko-eun (Serpent’s Tail, £12.99) is a darkly funny eco-thriller about extreme travel, narrated by a Korean holiday planner swept up in a dubious scheme to put a remote island destination on the map.





Green Bee-eater

by Pascale Petit

More precious than all
the gems of Jaipur –
the green bee-eater.

If you see one singing
tree-tree-tree

with his space-black bill
and rufous cap,

his robes
all shades of emerald

like treetops glimpsed
from a plane,

his blue cheeks,
black eye-mask

and the delicate tail streamer
like a plume of smoke –

you might dream
of the forests

that once clothed
our flying planet.

And perhaps his singing
is a spell

to call our forests back –
tree

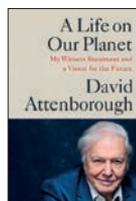
by *tree*

by *tree*.

from *Tiger Girl*

Bloodaxe Books, PBK, £9.95

You might also like...



A LIFE ON OUR PLANET
by David Attenborough
Ebury Press, HBK,
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An evocative memoir
and a compelling call to
action from our best-loved naturalist as
the planet we share faces the do-or-die
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and species extinction.



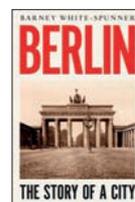
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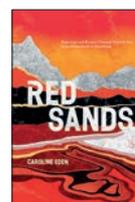
JIKONI by Ravinder Bhogal
Bloomsbury, HBK,
304pp, £26

Jikoni means
'kitchen' in Kiswahili,
a word that captures
Ravinder Bhogal's all-embracing
approach as she deftly combines
the flavours of world cuisine with
evocative stories about people,
place and identity.



VENICE
by Cees Nooteboom
MacLehose Press,
HBK, 240pp, £20

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Berlin* has written a generous, erudite
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Quadrille, HBK,
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and aromas of Central Asia in a recipe
book filled with human stories, forgotten
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Civil wars and still waters

Acclaimed novelist and screenwriter **William Boyd** evokes the landscapes that most shaped him, from the empty beaches, savannah and rainforest of West Africa to the corners of Europe he has called home

GHANA

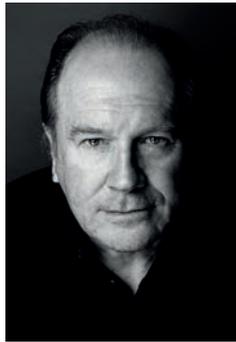
When I was born in Ghana in 1952 it actually wasn't called Ghana – it was then a British colony known as The Gold Coast (independence arrived in 1957). I have strong memories of Ghana and my childhood there seems, in retrospect, a kind of African idyll. We were not far from the coast and spent a lot of time on the huge empty beaches there – particularly Labadi beach near Accra. The breakers rolled in across the Atlantic, and crashed on the unsmirched sand. There was nothing there – no bars, restaurants or hotels, just small villages of fishermen and their families. The landscape around our house was classic savannah where I was free to roam as far as I could wander. Life was good. Or so it seemed. Then in the 1960s political instability meant we had to move.

NIGERIA

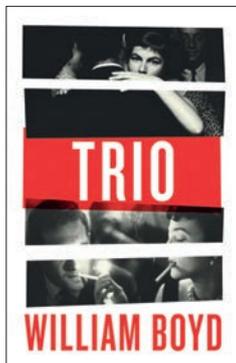
My father was a doctor who ran health clinics in the huge federal University of Ibadan in western Nigeria. No savannah here but tropical rainforest. Nigeria was altogether more fraught and exciting than Ghana. We left political turmoil in Ghana and almost immediately ran into the Nigerian version. I lived through three military coups and a civil war (the Biafran War, 1968–70). All the same, my Nigerian experiences have left more of a mark on me. I was a teenager – my engagement with the sprawling city of Ibadan was close and – despite roadblocks, body searches, the presence of armed soldiers – vivid and compelling. Again, hindsight confirms how extraordinary my African childhood and youth were. There was no racial tension at all in these West African countries – I was free to come and go as I pleased, with absolutely no fear. An incredible privilege.

THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

Once a year our family would return to Scotland on an annual leave of six weeks or so. Our family home was in the Border region, near the town of Peebles. There the gentle landscape flanking



©TREVOR LEIGHTON



William Boyd's novels include *A Good Man in Africa*, *Brazzaville Beach*, *Armadillo* and *Any Human Heart*. His latest, *Trio*, an exploration of identity, desire, artistic ambition and the price of happiness in 1960s London and Brighton, is published by Viking (Hbk, £18.99).

the River Tweed and its wide valley possesses a different kind of beauty from the Highlands or the West Coast. It's a landscape I came to know as intimately as my African ones. In fact, I can precisely identify a stretch of a small river called the Manor Water – near our house – that flowed into the Tweed. I knew about two miles of both banks with an intense familiarity that I've never replicated elsewhere. It's still completely present to my mind's eye – I can revisit it in a moment.

OXFORD

I lived for eight years in Oxford, studying and then teaching at the university, and it was in Oxford that my writing life, in all its dimensions, began – which is why I choose it above London, where I've now lived for nearly four decades. Oxford is a memorable, venerable city. Its reputation and its history can beguile you into thinking it's the centre of the intellectual world. That can be dangerous and seductive – still, it was a very good place to be somewhat impoverished and nurturing dreams of being a writer.

SOUTHWEST FRANCE

The very south of the Dordogne, in Aquitaine, is the other place where I've lived for nearly thirty years. We bought an old farmhouse on the Monbazillac plateau in 1990 and have come to know this small corner of *La France profonde* extremely well. We divide our London life with the stillness and tranquillity of this oak-wooded landscape – *valloné*, as the French describe it. I always feel this part of France marks the boundary between northern and southern Europe. Dense oak woods sit alongside vineyards and fields of sunflowers and maize. It's darkly green and sun-baked at the same time. Atlantic storms keep the vegetation lush. There's nothing burnt-out or rugged about this part of Southwest France. The silence can be remarkable. Good for inspiration.



Summer in the Yukon

The Yukon is Canada's last frontier, an almost unbroken landscape of jagged mountains, rushing rivers, glacier-fed lakes and vast boreal forests, with a history inextricably linked to the 19th-century Klondike Gold Rush. Perfect for a summer road trip, here are its top five highlights:

Whitehorse

This is the entry point for most journeys through the Yukon. But, far from being just a place to stock up on supplies, Whitehorse's riverfront setting hides a wealth of attractions, including the S.S. *Klondike* National Historic Site and a vibrant food scene where you can expect everything from just-caught salmon to bison burgers washed down with locally brewed beer. Arriving at the end of summer? Head out of town for some of the best Northern Lights viewing in North America.

Klondike Highway

The Klondike Highway stretches some 230 miles north from Whitehorse to Dawson City. It passes through some of the Yukon's most impressive scenery, following the Klondike River between soaring mountains and shimmering lakes. It's a chance to follow in the footsteps of the prospectors of old, charting the same route as the 19th-century gold rush while serving up spectacular viewpoints en route.

Dawson City

Dawson City was the very epicentre of the Klondike Gold Rush, a peaceful town that swelled in size to meet the

demands of thousands of hopeful prospectors who came to make their fortunes. While 2021 marks 125 years since the gold rush began, today's town retains a certain grit and character that you might have expected all those years ago. And, of course, there are still plenty of opportunities to visit the goldfields and even to pan for gold yourself. Your newfound wealth notwithstanding, don't miss the chance for a drive along the beautiful Dempster Highway.

Tombstone Territorial Park

With a landscape ranging from small glaciers and alpine lakes to vast forests and treeless tundra, this park is one of the Yukon's most scenic. Wilderness hikes in summer afford sweeping views of wildflower-dotted valleys, while in autumn the park's willow trees change from pretty green to deep gold, like rivers of fire tumbling down the mountainsides. Just 70 miles from Dawson City, off the Dempster Highway, it makes for an easy and rewarding day trip.

Kluane National Park

This 8,500 square mile national park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the crowning glory of the Yukon's natural world. Here, the 5,959m Mount Logan – Canada's highest peak – looks down on giant, glacier-carved valleys home to wild dall sheep and grizzly bears. If walking's your thing, make sure you stay a few days to take in some of the world-class trails.





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