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TRAVELLER



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SARDINIA



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Get ready to get going

Writing this editorial feels strange. Not just because the world has been strange for some time now, but because for the first time, Ian Wilson, our founder, chairman and publisher of *Traveller* won't be reading it. He read the last one, in proof form, and that was the last chat we had, when he phoned to talk about it. He passed away just days after, and never got to see our last issue, *Traveller's* 50th. He wrote a piece to mark that, and poignantly ended it with his intention that the company would stay a family run affair. And so it will, with his son Mark Wilson now our chairman. That continuity is something to value, particularly in these seemingly rudderless times.

That said, there seems to be a way to navigate now, via vaccines and circuitous routes, back to the rest of the world. While writing a tribute to Ian for this issue, I was reminded of his resilience and his endless curiosity about distant and different shores. I say shores as he was a dedicated surfer, but actually he believed in travel with or without his surfboard. He'd have had plenty to say about each destination featured in these pages, I'm sure he visited them all.

Our featured guest is Hilary Bradt, someone who has also been pretty much everywhere, as co-founder of Bradt Travel Guides, but also as someone with wide interests including art and nature, and she says "Abroad" is the only way to indulge those to the full." Bradt have long championed new writers through an annual competition, and the latest winner is featured in these pages. Anita King's piece about Damascus, is about more than Damascus, an elegy of sorts. We feature another elegy too, for Hong Kong, written as powerfully and poignantly as ever by Fergal Keane.

Alongside the elegies are the celebrations of cities and countries that await, tantalisingly within reach once again. We can reach them in certain style, as seen in our pieces on the new routes available on the Venice Simpson Orient Express – Venice to Amsterdam is one alluring one. As is riding the waves on the exhilarating expeditionary cruises offered by Swan Hellenic, which in the future will feature exclusive itineraries exploring the Russian Arctic and Papua New Guinea.

These are great ways to go, but the thing is to go. A few weeks ago I needed to book a Covid test for my daughter speedily. Half an hour later, we were



Amy Sohanpaul
on the green lights
ahead



handed the result, and on the top of the page it read 'Fit to Fly'. The potential of those three words. We weren't flying anywhere at all, but the very idea made me feel uplifted all the same, thinking of the excitement to come when we can.

During the first lockdown, as far as work allowed, I avoided all travelogues, television series set in places I love, because it was painful to want to be there without the ability to do so. During this latest phase, it has been the opposite, devouring every single travel book and film I can find. Writing about Italy this issue was a pleasure, knowing it's just when, and while not right now, soon. It's a country I went to so regularly and religiously that any year without a return felt incomplete. Now instead of longing, I'm planning, and the anticipation is sweet.

Likewise, I thought writing about my stay in New Orleans before the pause button was pressed on travel might be frustrating, but not at all. It reminded me of how much I couldn't do while there and how much I want to revisit to find out more, never taking it for granted again that anywhere is accessible at any time. Tennessee Williams, who captured its cadences so well, famously said: "America has only three cities. New York, San Francisco and New Orleans. Everywhere else is Cleveland."

Yes, and no. Everywhere else has potential for fun. Some places more than others, for sure. As much as returns to Italy and New Orleans call, this issue has added to the list and to the allure of the new. Mauritius, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, rising out of the blue waters in a profusion of greenery and a food culture as diverse as that of New Orleans. Belize beckons too, as blue and green and lush as Mauritius, with a history as rich.

We also have the contrasting attractions of Greenland, where the Northern Lights are easily spotted from a snowy landscape, and the shifting sands of Oman. Both extremes have captured the hearts of explorers ever since exploration was a thing. Pretty much a forever thing, paused, but soon to be resumed.

The human instinct to move, to seek, to discover can be put on hold, held at bay, but only for so long. It's a tide that will always find its way.

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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Sir Christopher Ondaatje CBE OC is chairman of the Ondaatje Foundation and author of ten books, including *Sindh Revisited* and *Journey to the Source of the Nile*.

Sir Michael Palin CBE FRGS is the world's favourite television traveller and a member of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

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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



HILARY BRADT

is the co-founder of Bradt Travel Guides, a lecturer, sculptor and an award-winning writer. Her latest book is *A Connemara Journey*.

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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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TISHANI DOSHI

is a Welsh-Gujarati poet, novelist and dancer based on the coast of Tamil Nadu. Her latest poetry collection is *A God at the Door*.

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TIM MACKINTOSH-SMITH

is an Arabist, historian, traveller and occasional organist based in San'a. He pays tribute to his friend and fellow voyager Bruce Wannell.

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JONATHAN & ANGELA SCOTT

are renowned wildlife photographers and documentary makers based in Kenya. In this issue they walk with elephants in Africa.

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YASMIN KHAN

is a bestselling author and broadcaster who is passionate about sharing people's stories through food. Her latest book is *Ripe Figs*.

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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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OANA ARISTIDE

is an economist-turned novelist and hotelier. She was born in Transylvania, raised in Sweden and lives between Syros and London.

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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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ALEXANDER ROBINSON

has won numerous photography and writing awards. He is an expert on Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries and Southeast Asia.

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ANITA KING

has travelled the world as an anti-counterfeiting lawyer. She is the winner of the Bradt New Travel Writer of the Year, with her piece on Damascus.

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PIERRE THOMAS

is the Director of Operations at Swan Hellenic, a role he is passionate about in five languages.

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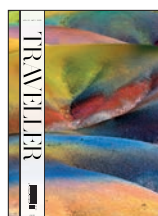
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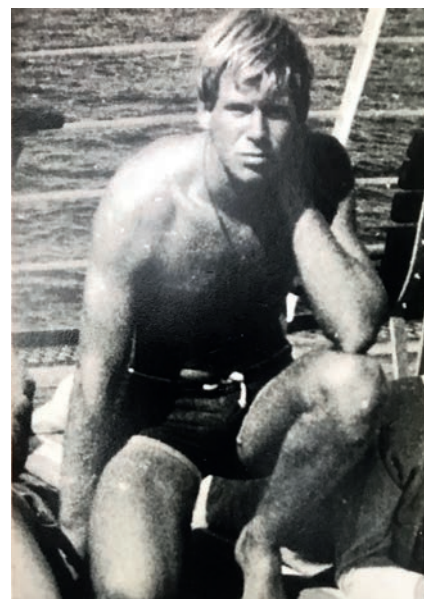
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Dr. Ian Wilson – In Memorium

A CELEBRATION AND REMEMBRANCE OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF **DR. IAN WILSON**, FOUNDER OF WEXAS AND PUBLISHER OF TRAVELLER; WORDS BY **AMY SOHANPAUL**.

Dr. Ian Wilson, founder and chairman of Wexas, passed away on Friday 20th November 2020, just after his 77th birthday, following a cancer diagnosis and sudden complications from resulting surgery.

Given Ian's indomitable spirit, recent medical assessments were for him, when we last spoke, summarily dismissed, surmountable details. In his optimism, penned to pragmatism, there never was a problem he couldn't overcome, in the knowledge that he'd seen them all before, and was rarely defeated. Not in his twenties, not in his seventies. That takes a certain amount of confidence. To be fair, that confidence needed talent and will to give it impetus.

Ian had impetus enough. To abandon a gilt-edged, secure and predictable future for an uncertain toss of the dice on founding a travel company,

is testament to his maverick genius. Shortly after graduating from Oxford, Ian was set on a trajectory of London glamour, an account executive in advertising, destined for life of assured ease. Yet, out of some stubbornness and an acknowledgement of the appeal of a wider world, he founded Wexas Travel in the early Seventies, on the basis of a bet. One summer evening, he set his fellow lodger Richard a challenge: that if he started a travel club, it would be more successful than the student travel operation Richard had started at Oxford and was still running.

Ian's germ of an idea grew into a thriving and distinguished company, with an honorary board of members that represented the great and good in exploration, including Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Colonel John Blashford-Snell, Sir Wilfred Thesiger, Sir Michael Palin and many others. He sent tens of thousands

of people on their way to discover the world, and invented the idea of annual travel insurance in 1982 – a common concept now but he was years ahead of the competition. He made it easier for every other traveller, because he believed discovery, exploration, and time spent somewhere else, were important. He was an original, a pioneer. He was absolute in his ideals; for him, travel was an experience, as opposed to a week or two away. He never, ever, believed he was wrong about that principle.

This attitude of invincible conviction, against the odds, propelled his fledgling company into a successful business, and his magazine *Traveller* into a fine publication. It fuelled many of the friendly arguments we had over the years, he as publisher and I as editor. We were both impassioned about every page and prepared to endlessly argue the last word, each photograph. Most of the debates were held over his vast desk, as he *sotto voce* insisted upon what he thought was right, and we batted ideas back and forth, *Traveller* table tennis. His talent as a linguist and his obsession for detail often took articles that were already good to a more polished place. Ian didn't need to care as much as he did, but the point was that he did, because he was as proud of the magazine as he was of the company he founded. He could

have insisted on the magazine being a commercial brochure – he insisted on the very opposite.

His instinct was to buck the trend, despite his commercial convictions and seemingly conventional lifestyle. He'd been living in Chelsea for over 40 years and was Chairman of a notable company for 50, so on the surface, seemingly establishment.

Except Ian wasn't. He was a part of it, but apart from it, a true loner. Perhaps this was because it was always so. He was born in Edinburgh, and thereafter had a here and there life – a childhood in England, where he was considered a Scot, years labelled a Pom in New Zealand, where he took his first degree before returning as a perceived Kiwi to take his masters at Oxford.

This made Ian something of an iconoclast, and the most extraordinary hippy – in that he really was – he never

followed the crowd that refused to follow the crowd. His son Mark told me that when everyone else around Ian was heading to Woodstock, Ian decided to head for California and some surf instead. Mark and his sister Jackie expected Ian to surf on forever, they thought he would be doing it even if he had to attach a Zimmer frame to his surfboard. He picked up that surfboard in 1963 and carried it everywhere he went, every year.

He went to islands beyond far-flung decades ago, many of which are still so, and was proud to have visited over 130 countries in his lifetime. There was hardly an article I ran where he didn't say – "Ah, I went there years ago". The only exception and place was an account on surfing in Antarctica.

Ian also pushed boundaries as an author, delving into the identity of Shakespeare's mysterious dark lady, published as the novel *Black Jenny* and later on, compiling

the idiosyncratic *Little Dictionary of Big Words*. He graduated with a first class Honours Masters Degree in French from Auckland University and a doctorate in French political philosophy from Brasenose College, Oxford. He held numerous other accolades, but I will always remember him for his kindness when most needed, his insistence on perfection on the pages of *Traveller*, and despite his privileged position, an intuitive understanding of how the world turned. On the surface, we could not have been more disparate in our backgrounds, but in many of our editorial instincts we were similar, and his grace and wisdom allowed many thoughts, debates, ideas, and directions to flourish. I will always be grateful for his ability to see beyond the surface, and over horizons.

He is survived by his three children – Mark, Jackie and Thomas – and three grandchildren, Otto, Elska, and most recently Rainer, born just weeks ago.





THE YUKON

The wilderness is always close by

It's been 125 years since gold was first discovered in the Yukon, the spark that led to 100,000 prospectors making their intrepid journey across the northwest Canadian wilds. Fortunately, today's route to the Klondike region is far easier, and this alluring area continues to capture the imagination of travellers the world over.

Take the chance to experience one of the last great gold rushes while connecting with the region's deep-rooted First Nations cultures and majestic natural world. Here, the history is everywhere. You can touch it without even trying, but scratch beneath the surface and your time in the Klondike will be richer still.

Perhaps you'll begin in the historic, waterfront town of Whitehorse, before driving the Klondike Highway, the Dempster Highway or Top of the World Highway to reach sweeping viewpoints and magnificent national parks. Or, if you'd prefer to meet a grizzled old prospector rather than an actual grizzly, then head to Dawson City for a true taste of gold rush heritage. Just remember, no matter which route you choose, like everywhere in the Yukon, the wilderness is always close by.



LATEST NEWS FROM OUR HONORARY PRESIDENTS

SACRED NATURE –
A NEW JOURNEY

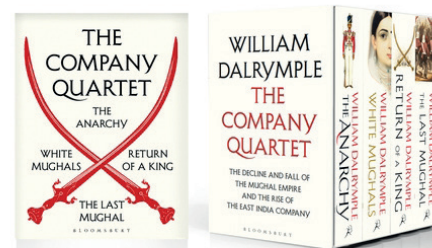
We're looking forward to the publication later this year of the second volume of *Sacred Nature*, by Jonathan and Angela Scott. If the first is

anything to go by, it will be a work of great beauty, filled with extraordinary photography and profound insight into the importance of nature and wildlife in this world. The first book centred around the Mara-Serengeti, where the Scotts have spent much of the past forty years, somewhere they see as 'The Last Place On Earth'. The second volume takes the spirit of the first, but applies it to the whole planet; to our savannas, forests, deserts, mountains, oceans and polar regions.

This is part of the philosophy the Scotts have always lived by and through their writing and photography, championed. As Jonathan says, "We want to stir

the imagination and rouse people to action on behalf of the natural world. This is an urgent mission. The sudden and profound damage wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic on human health and economies is a harrowing yet timely reminder of that fact, along with melting ice caps and glaciers, raging bush fires, floods and droughts all amplified or precipitated by the climate crisis. Planet Earth was not made for us, we do not own it, it belongs to all of life."

For publication updates for Sacred Nature: Volume 2, and to join the Scotts on their journey, see www.bigcatpeople.com

EMPIRE
BUILDING

June sees the publication of *The Company Quartet* by William Dalrymple, bringing together the four titles in his much

acclaimed series about the Mughal Empire. *The Anarchy*, *White Mughals*, *Return of a King* and *The Last Mughal* chronicle the days of the Mughal Empire and the rise of the East India Company in extraordinary and engaging detail. It's a compelling collection, spanning over two hundred years of tumultuous colonial history, covert political machinations and bloody resistance.

***The Company Quartet* by William Dalrymple, will be published by Bloomsbury**

AN OUTSTANDING AWARD

Wexas presidents Colin Thubron and Michael Palin joined many other travel greats in praising one of the most admired writers in the genre, Dervla Murphy, as she was awarded the Outstanding Contribution to Travel Writing Award by Stanfords. Both Thubron and Palin have been past recipients of the award, and were unstinting in their praise.

Colin Thubron commented: "It would be easier to say where she hasn't been than where she has. The list is endless, and all described in books which are

wonderfully unpretentious, shinningly honest... with humour waiting for you. The style in other words, is the woman."

In his tribute to Dervla, Michael Palin said: "You've been a great inspiration to many travel writers. I think what you have is this mixture of honesty combined with fearlessness. You'll ask anybody anything and they will open up to you."

A true original, Dervla set off on a bicycle from Ireland to India decades ago, and hasn't stopped wandering and writing since. Her spirit is indomitably, her enthusiasm unflagging and

infectious, her writing endlessly giving. Her books are now published by Eland, who have long been champions of great travel writing.







A view from above

Made up of 16 idyllic islands in the southern

Indian Ocean, Mauritius offers everything you could wish for from a luxury beach break. But beyond the endless white sands and swaying palms, it's also a rich melting pot of influences, from African and Indian to Chinese, French and British, all coming together to create a unique combination of cultures and delicious cuisine. The lush interior is carpeted in sugar cane, with dramatic mountains erupting from the endless green.

Le Morne Brabant peninsula is a spectacular landmark at the extreme southwestern tip of the main island, an hour's drive from the bustling capital Port Louis. The eponymous basaltic mountain rises 556 metres above sea level, drawing intrepid hikers from all over the world to its many caves and overhangs on the steep slopes. The mountain is named after a Dutch ship that ran aground here in December 1783.

Le Morne's famous 'underwater waterfall' is an optical illusion caused by sand flowing from the ocean shelf into a 4,000 metre-deep abyss. Only visible from the air, this amazing vision can be witnessed and photographed for yourself on a seaplane tour over the lagoon. (You don't have to tell your friends you saw it here first, as you casually share your holiday snaps...)

Those azure waters are perfect for snorkelling, and local guides will take you by boat to flourishing coral reefs where you can swim above incredible marine flora and fauna. After a day's adventuring, or lazing on the pristine sands, cocktails at sunset are an essential part of the daily routine. The Blue Marlin restaurant at the Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa serves elegant dinners of lip-smackingly fresh seafood accompanied by the gentle lapping of waves hitting the shore. Paradise indeed.

A Traveller's Life

HILARY BRADT TELLS US ABOUT HER MANY JOURNEYS AND ADVENTURES

Hilary Bradt co-founded Bradt

Travel Guides in 1974. She is also an award-winning writer and an in-demand lecturer, most often sharing her insights on Madagascar. Her involvement and charity work on the island have earned her the honour of Officier de l'Orde of Madagascar – the Malagasy equivalent of an OBE. She was awarded an MBE here, in 2008, for her services to the travel industry, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the British Guild of Travel Writers. Hilary is the author of several guidebooks and travelogues. Her most recent book – *A Connemara Journey* – looks back at an early adventure, bringing back memories of travelling through western Ireland with two beloved ponies.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALISE YOU HAD THE TRAVEL BUG?

It probably helped that I didn't go abroad until I was 16, and that I hated every minute of my first trip to visit a penfriend in Germany. So when I first travelled overseas independently, to Greece in 1961, I was absolutely ready to find the world a wonderful place. And it was.

WHY IS TRAVEL SO IMPORTANT?

It's easy to be glib about travel – that it broadens the mind and so on. Actually I have huge respect for people who tell me, usually apologetically, that they have no desire to travel. Good for them! My thirty or so years as a tour leader provided plenty of examples of people who had no interest in travel but did it anyway, to accompany their spouse

or perhaps to have something to boast about at dinner parties. Seriously! So for some people travel narrows the mind. As a none-too-tolerant leader, my favourite client was usually someone travelling in the developing world for the first time and loving the novelty of the experience, mind wide-open for whatever the country chose to throw at them and willing to engage with the local people in a non-judgemental way. Indeed, it's the people aspect that is so important: the realisation that there is far more in the peopled world that unites us than divides us, and that the kindness of strangers is a universal phenomenon.

For me it's important because I'm fortunate enough to have wide interests, particularly art and nature in all their manifestations, and 'Abroad' is the only way to indulge these to the full.

WHERE HAVE YOU MOST FELT AT HOME?

I'm not sure that 'at home' is really the experience I should be seeking out. But I know what you mean – it's that sigh of recognition when an utterly different place feels familiar because of multiple visits. I think perhaps Cuzco fits the bill. In the 1980s and 90s I went every year to lead tours and treks so the place really did feel like a second home – I even welcomed the whiff of stale urine which was the trademark of Cuzco in those days! I was thinking the other day of an elderly woman in the Cuzco market whose speciality was *picarones* – delicious rings of fried batter served with honey. Each year she would recognise me with a brief smile and eye contact, and start pouring the batter into her pan. It felt like visiting an auntie.

WHAT IS THE STRANGEST EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD WHILE TRAVELLING?

There have been a lot, but perhaps baking a chocolate cake for a bunch



of students under house-arrest in southern Chile during the first tense months of the Pinochet regime in 1974. I can't remember how we came to be staying with them in their hostel but this was a good way of repaying their hospitality.

WHERE HAVEN'T YOU BEEN BUT DREAM OF VISITING?

I've seen very little of Asia and always love exploring the natural world in a new continent. I'd really like to get to Sarawak for its unusual and appealing wildlife.

WHERE WOULD YOU NEVER REVISIT, AND WHY?

Everywhere should be given a second chance...

WHO WOULD YOU SHARE YOUR DESERT ISLAND WITH?

A young Charles Darwin, if he could be resurrected, because of his wonderful sense of curiosity. If it needs to be a living person, then I think Paul Simons who writes *Weather Eye* in *The Times*, because he knows so many interesting things about all aspects of the weather! One thing I can be sure that any desert island would have is weather.

COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR TRAVELS IN...

Lesotho

I lived in South Africa for nearly two years in the mid 1970s, when the country was still under apartheid. In 1976 my husband and I set out from Cape Town to travel to Cairo, hitchhiking and by public transport, taking the most interesting route we could find. This took us across the mountainous kingdom of Lesotho which is completely surrounded by South Africa. We hitchhiked and walked across the whole country, meeting and talking to Africans for the first time, and once staying with a village chief whose



gracious hospitality is lodged in my memory. The contrast with our experiences in Cape Town made it especially memorable.

Peru

This was the country that launched Bradt Guides so has to be included. And a country I know really well but never cease to find amazing. I've been to Machu Picchu around 25 times but have never failed to feel that thrill when the ruins first come into view. I never tire of admiring the craftsmanship of the Incas and their predecessors or the enduring culture of the indigenous people who live in the highlands.

Madagascar

I first visited the island with my husband George in 1976 when travelling up through Africa. It was a diversion I was determined to make ever since attending a talk by a zoologist on the wildlife. Madagascar has shaped my career. I became 'an expert' on the country and its wildlife, only because it was off the radar of even the most adventurous tourists, so I was able to lead tours there throughout the 80s and 90s and write books and articles about it. Until the emergence of proper

naturalists and people like Daniel Austin, my guidebook co-author, who knows a heck of a lot more than I do.

North Korea

I love going to countries that are designated our enemy so have always wanted to go to North Korea (I was instrumental in ensuring that we published the first guidebook to the country). It is absolutely fascinating and an eye-opener. I found the North Koreans friendly, smiley and funny. Yes, of course our visit (with Regent Holidays) was strictly controlled but even the boredom was interesting.

WHERE WILL YOU VISIT FIRST, WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO TRAVEL AGAIN?

I'm walking part of the Robert Louis Stevenson Trail in the Cevennes with some friends in September and am hoping to get to the Falkland Islands at the tail end of the year or early 2022.



A Connemara Journey: A thousand miles on horseback through western Ireland, is published by Bradt Guides.



The sound of a loud whip crack carries through the air. Moments later I hear a series of great booms, like cannon fire. The rumbling, creaking and shattering noises grow louder until the source of the tumult becomes apparent from a lookout: a great stream of bergs and ice shards issuing forth from Sermeq Kujalleq, the most productive glacier in the northern hemisphere, which produces more than 30 billion tonnes of ice each year, more than any other glacier outside Antarctica.

I stand in the dazzling Greenlandic sunlight, watching the restless expanse of ice as it grinds and jostles its way past the Nakkavik viewpoint en route to Disko Bay. “Nakkavik translates as ‘the place to fall’”, says a local man named Peter, who stops to chat. “In times past this is where the elderly Inuit are said to have taken their lives during food shortages to save the younger members of

Go With The Floe

words & pictures
Simon Urwin

the community. You can see why they came here. Nobody could ever survive in that icefjord.”

Come the late afternoon a knifing wind blows in and I head for home along a raised wooden walkway; on either side the turf, lichen and moss, long-freed from the harsh blanket of winter, are covered in snow of a

different kind: the white gossamer flowers of arctic cottongrass, known locally as ukaliusaq, which means “resembling a rabbit”.

The path leads me back to Ilulissat, the third largest town in Greenland; its 5,000 inhabitants outnumbered, until only very recently, by the local population of sledge huskies. I walk the length of the main street with its sweeping views across Disko Bay, where colossal bergs, some over 1,000 metres high, pile up in its frigid waters after their journey down the Ilulissat icefjord from Sermeq Kujalleq.

I reach the Hotel Arctic, my base for this short weekend break 250km above the Arctic Circle. Stylish in a Nordic-minimalist fashion, it proudly declares itself to be the “most northerly four-star” in the world. I drop my day-pack in one of the aluminium igloo rooms below the main building then head to its fine restaurant

that offers a menu of variously pickled, heather-smoked or flame-grilled wild ingredients – including musk ox, ptarmigan and halibut.

The next morning – a term used loosely, since day and night are indistinguishable in the Greenlandic summer – I wander back into Ilulissat on a loop that takes in the 18th Century Zion Church, the largest man-made structure in Greenland at the time it was built, and the Knud Rasmussen Museum, dedicated to the polar explorer and Ilulissat's most famous son. The town's modest attractions cannot compete with the high drama of its frozen landscapes though, and later that evening I jump aboard a small fishing boat to get a closer look.

"Let's go iceberg-spotting", cries the captain, a ruddy-faced Greenlander named Kristian, as we pull out from the harbour, the town's rainbow-coloured houses slowly shrinking

behind us on the shoreline. "Ilulissat means 'icebergs' in the local language. And you are in the best place in the Arctic to see them."

Cpt. Kristian is soon manoeuvring the boat between fragments of ice, from medium-sized 'bergy bits' to the larger 'growlers' that are the size of a grand piano. As we head even farther out into Disko Bay icebergs hundreds of metres high begin to tower over us. We keep a safe distance to avoid the roll of a berg or a crash of falling ice that could set a wave in motion and swamp our tiny vessel.

The captain switches off the engine in a clear stretch of deep water. I stand on deck with some other hardy souls, all of us buried in our hats and scarves, as an extraordinary sculpture gallery floats by on the port and starboard sides. We see one berg the shape and size of a small aircraft carrier; another is like a cathedral with disjointed spires

that looks as if it's been carved by the hand of Henry Moore. The reflections here in the evening light are mind-bending and disorienting – at times the whole world appears to be folding in on itself along the horizon line.

Later, and quite beautifully, the midnight sun comes and goes. The sky swirls with shades of pink and crimson, painting the surfaces of the ice with a delicate, pastel light. And then, in the early hours, the reverie is broken as the engine starts up again and we thread our way back through the ice to harbour.

"I like to think that the icebergs are a metaphor for life", says Cpt. Kristian, rather philosophically. "Where is each one headed? Nobody can really tell. What will become of them? Nobody knows. They are on their own uncertain journeys, carried on the currents and the winds. Just like the rest of us."



Hope in a Pink Meringue

words
A. King

I am greedy. I want to go back to Damascus, but I want to go back as it was before the war, before our screens were filled with its anguish, and before the tormented numbness of old men and young women shattered my sleep. Had I passed some of them in the tiled courtyards and arched alleyways in that long ago time? And what had become of Amira?

I always wanted to go to Syria. I had grown up with tales of the Old Man of the Mountain, of rich libraries and intricate carpets, looted or burned by marauding Crusaders. An uncle with a love of history and theatrics in equal measure had returned from travels to Syria with slides of mountain forts, where, he declared with a flourish, Salah al-Din had triumphed over the heretics. My uncle's tales were recounted over the whirring of a slide projector, accompanied by the occasional brandishing of a carved dagger; all of which left us children with goosebumps and a fair few nightmares.

But in the end, it was not a carefully planned and researched trip with guides and pre-booked hotels, nor a notebook with my uncle's contacts. Rather, the decision to go to Syria that November was a bit random, and we left almost as soon as the visas arrived. We would fly into Damascus and back from Aleppo, and make our way in between the two cities by whatever means seemed best. Not our usual way of travelling to intrepid destinations, but we were bereft and depleted,

and longed to be overwhelmed by something other than sorrow.

The source of this morbid state of heart and mind? The sweetest baby in all the world, with a dainty mole beside her left nostril, and soft brown hair flecked with gold. She had been our daughter briefly, and then she was no more. In our grief, we doubted we could ever again put ourselves through anything that could leave us so utterly hollowed out.

16th November 2007 is the date I would choose, if I could return. It was our third day in Damascus. We had spent the afternoon wandering through the Al-Hamidiyah Souq inside the old walled city, after eavesdropping briefly on a guide at the imposing Temple of Jupiter. In that moment, though, I could not have been less interested in any pile of stones, Roman or otherwise.

The Souq, however, drew me in. Slowly, I became immersed in the colours of glass lanterns and sugar-coated sweets, and in air thick with the aroma of perfume, green herbs and ground spices. It was Friday, and there was a celebratory vibe, an exuberant chattering cacophony. Young women in short skirts, with arms linked, sashayed between older women in embroidered abayyas and black gloves, while toddlers darted between their fathers' legs and mothers' skirts.

Our destination was Bakdash – one of the few recommendations we had

jotted down before our hasty departure. “The very best ice cream in the Arab world”, a Syrian friend in London had insisted, her voice infused with nostalgia. “They pound it by hand, and roll it in layers of the freshest pistachio”. So of course, we said we would go.

And there, framed by the wooden doorway of Bakdash, was Amira, in a candy-floss-coloured pink dress like a gigantic, cascading, meringue. Pearl-like beads were scattered over the already overloaded hemline. White patent shoes with pale pink butterflies, and white glittery tights, completed the confection. A large silver badge pinned to her front, with the number 5, announced the occasion. When I saw her, she had just caught sight of herself in the gleaming glass doors and pirouetted in delight, her brown hair with gold flecks dancing in ringlets around the most kissable dimples.

I stood. Transfixed, remembering... and imagining. Amira threw her head back and, unexpectedly, our eyes met. To my own surprise, I reached out my hand. With a giggle, she reached back. Her fingers were sticky. Maybe that dress really was made of candy floss....

I felt tears starting to fill my eyes. I blinked them back, but she had noticed and looked suddenly bewildered. Before I could speak, though, a voice called out her name. As I watched, she turned to join the gathering birthday guests. She did not look back.

Amira will now be 18 years old. My daughter, born a year later, is 12. Her hair is darker than Amira's; and even at age 5, she would never have countenanced pink lace. Sometimes, though, when she smiles, there are faint dimples. In those moments, I find myself thinking of Amira, wondering where she is, and, always, sending her silent thanks for the hope she so unexpectedly offered me that day.





Belize Beckons Blue

words & pictures
Alexander Robinson





It wasn't claustrophobia that I was

feeling. The cavern was large. And there was natural light – spilling in from the cave mouth, through the tangled vines and leaves, casting a green hue over the rock walls.

No, this rush of blood, this water in the mouth, this tingle of anxiety was another feeling. It was a feeling I'd forgotten. A memory from childhood rushed into my conscience, vivid as a strobe flash. I was in the corridor of an ancient, ruined house in Sussex with my friend Nick. We'd always wanted to sneak into the abandoned building. And now we were exploring. In the late afternoon, the low sunbeams were filled with dust motes. It was so silent we could hear our footfalls on the bare floorboards. Then suddenly we became frightened – that intuitive clarity of childhood that told us something was coming. We rushed into a room, hid in an old wardrobe, stilling our breaths. Then came the footsteps down the creaking corridor, into the room, right up to the wardrobe... Where they stopped. For an age we waited. Then we ran. "We're not meant to be here!" Nick shouted.

Now the river water was higher – nearly up to my waist.

"That's it. I'm not meant to be here. Something is watching," I thought. But this time I couldn't run. Naz the guide was in front, leading our small group deeper into the ACM caves, the light was darkening. I became acutely aware of my senses. Like a fox with ears alert. I looked into every shadow. We reached a bend. And now the light was almost gone. Naz, pointed upwards with his torch. A rope led to a ledge about 2 metres above my head.

"We go through there," he said.

I had a lump in my throat. I was terrified. But somehow I managed to haul myself up, squeeze over the ledge and through a gap as wide as a wardrobe door.



I was in a crystal cavern which sparkled in the torchlight. Flowstones coated the walls, like waterfalls frozen in time. The bulky almost human shapes of stalactites and stalagmites stood like guards in the shadows beyond. I looked down. Shards of ancient Mayan pottery lay submerged in the ancient crystal flow of the cave floor. And there was something next to them – the source of my fear and panic – a skeleton. A human skull

“Ask for permission,” said Naz, sensing my rising panic.

“For permission?”

“Yes, for permission to be here. This is a sacred site.”

I closed my eyes, did what he said. And suddenly the feeling lifted.

Once again Belize had overwhelmed me.

This tiny sliver of Central America is barely as big as Wales. Yet it has such presence. Such magnitude: waterfall-dripping mountains and rainforests wild enough for jaguars; rivers winding through crocodile-filled swamps bigger than the Everglades, thousands of coral islands and atolls scattered like thrown pebbles across a turquoise Caribbean sea. And Mayan ruins where there are so few visitors you still feel a spectral presence.

I began my journey with another adrenaline rush: at the Blue Hole a vast iris-like fissure in the Central American Barrier reef. Entering the water all I

could see at first was a frightening immensity of blue. Sunlight beamed into the limits of my vision towards the edge of my imagination where real or imagined distant dark grey shapes loomed, far below. Then at the edge of my vision I caught a flicker, a flash of silver, and turned, startled to see the torpedo silhouette of a huge barracuda, which vanished whip-quick with a flick of tail. And in the deep the grey shape became real – a shark. And there was another. Stay calm, I thought, they’re not dangerous. And I swam steadily and deliberately towards the edge of the Blue Hole and out into clear shallow water.

The panic faded as I drifted over coral gardens where clown fish played in the anemones and stingrays glided over sand. For an hour I was lost in the intricate



the bends in the long New River. Lined with fields and then gallery forest, the landscape gets wilder and wilder as the journey progresses. Finally the launch enters a vast crocodile-filled lake, mirror-calm, shimmering under the sun and surrounded by marshland where herons and egrets stride through wet, flower-filled meadows.

It was late afternoon when we arrived – and the sun was golden over the forest. I climbed the rough-hewn steps from the jetty, to the main plaza, where ancient buildings were covered in strange jaguar masks and a boa constrictor slithered into the leaves. Then I reached the tallest pyramid of them all – the massive High Temple. Constructed in 100 BC, it's one of the tallest Mayan structures in Belize.

Once again, my heart was in my mouth as I climbed the vertiginous steps clinging to a chain and trying not to look down. Higher and higher I went, until I could see the treetops next to me, and I emerged, panting and adrenaline-filled on a narrow platform.

And my adrenaline rush subsided like a retreating wave. Once again all that remained was calm and I was transfixed. The flaming ball of the sun sank over forest that stretched as far as I could see, into distant Guatemala. The New River was a ribbon of gold, a flock of snowy egrets flying over its surface like drifting petals. The air was thick with oxygen and the smell of forest. And all I could hear was birdsong – tanagers trilling in the treetops, a flock of parrots cawing, the rat-a-tat of a woodpecker in a mahogany tree.

And I realised at the caves, in the Blue Hole in Belize, it wasn't fear that I'd felt at all. It was awe – the sense of sheer wonder at the mystical presence of life itself. It was as if I had stepped back in time – to a moment with the Earth as pristine as fabled landscape, when human beings were tiny next to the vastness of forests and oceans and the world was a kaleidoscope of life.

living beauty: the big barrel sponges and wispy tendril-like soft corals, the moray eels hidden under crevices, a slowly swimming turtle surfacing for air. When I finally pulled myself, panting back into the boat I was exhilarated, alive, and alone with just a handful of fellow snorkellers in an expanse of ocean and sky.

In the Sittee river estuary my heart leapt when I saw manatees for the first time, grazing eel grass in the shallows. And further upstream my sharp-eyed guide pointed out capuchin monkeys picking fruit from the trees next to the water and kingfishers in the branches. He slowed the boat as we went round a bend in the river, pointing to what I thought was a fallen tree. It was an immense crocodile basking on a mudflat. We returned in twilight as bats flitted over the mangroves and

hundreds of sea birds settled to roost. And when I reached my beachside hotel, the tables were laid out on the sand under the stars, and the air was fragrant with sea spray, sizzling fish and frangipani.

I'd saved the Belize's Mayan sites for my last few days: the eerie caves at Actun Tunichil Muknal where I'd sensed a presence, the pyramids at Xunantunich where toucans settled in the trees as I sat on the temple steps, and last of all – Lamanai.

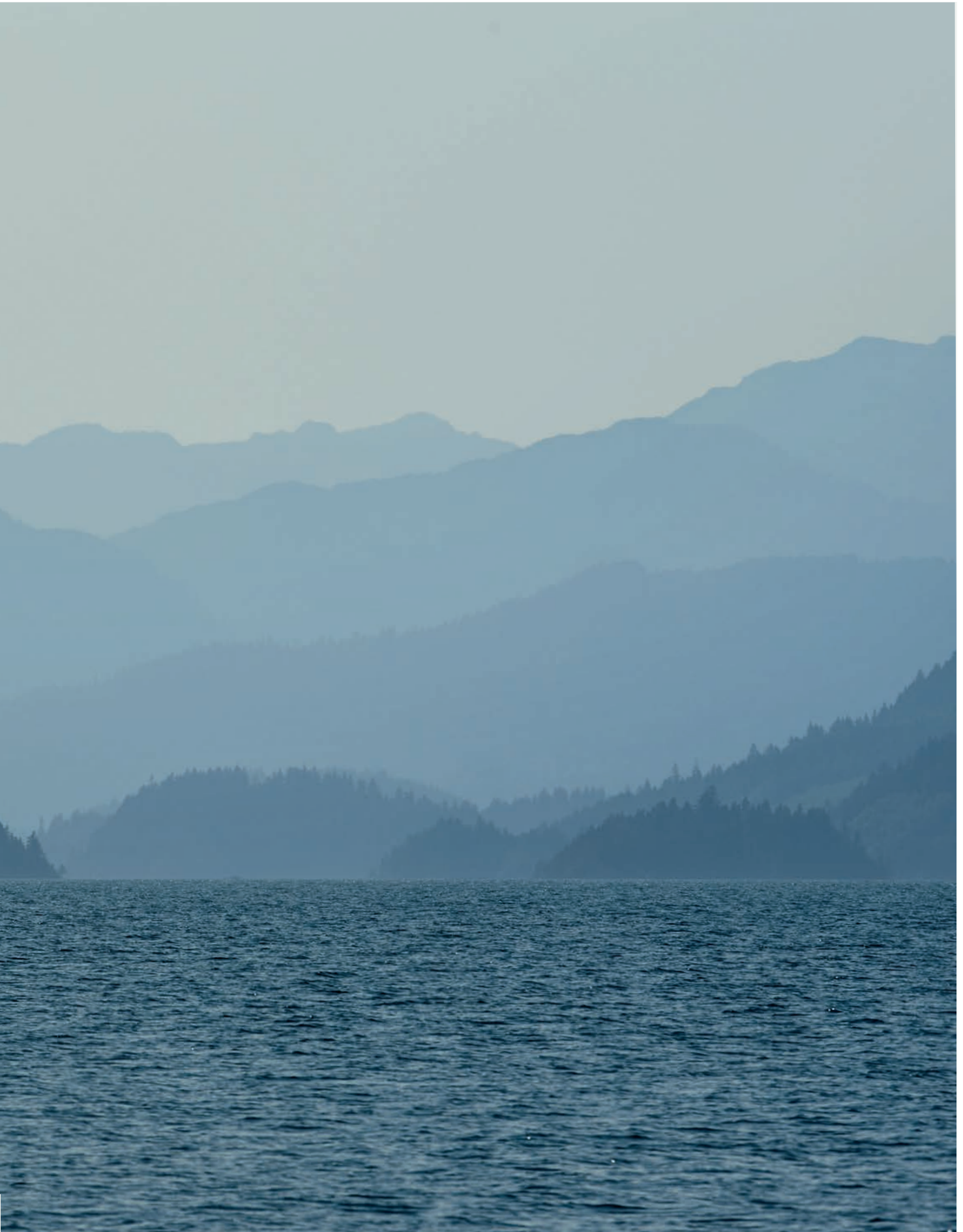
Belize's most spectacular Mayan ruins sit in an expanse of tropical wetlands and misty rainforest which runs green to every distant horizon. But it's not just the setting that makes these forest temples spectacular. It's the journey there. Launches wind around



Islands of Beauty

SIMON URWIN EXPLORES A CANADIAN ARCHIPELAGO

pictures
by the author





“According to local legend, a raven dropped a black pebble into the Pacific Ocean and so created the archipelago of Haida Gwaii”, says guide Jessie Lay while readying our Zodiac for launch at the end of a boatslip.

“Then, on one of the 200 islands, the raven spotted a large clamshell on a beach”, she continues. “The bird looked inside and saw human beings hiding in fear, so it prised the shell open and set them free. They were the first people on earth, and they were Haida.”

On a low throttle, Lay slowly edges us out into Cumsheewa Inlet, its steely-blue waters swirling with an early morning mist. “Whatever the origin story, what’s true is that the Haida people have been here for at least 14,000 years”, she says. “And they’ve long been known amongst the First Nations of Canada for their skills as totem pole carvers and canoe builders, also for being fearless seafarers. It’s why they are often referred to as the Vikings of North America.”

Lay opens up the engine and we set sail, skirting along the inlet’s rocky shoreline that is forested almost to the water’s edge with great stands of hemlock, spruce and red cedar. From the boat, the debris of old industries – logging, mining and fishing – can occasionally be seen rusting away in the shadows, slowly suffocating under a blanket of liverwort, moss and lichen.

“Haida Gwaii is now a protected wilderness area, but for centuries people came to ransack its natural resources”, says Lay. “It began as early as the 1700s when the first European ships arrived in search of sea otter pelts. The outsiders didn’t just have an impact on the environment though; they brought Western diseases like smallpox and tuberculosis that swept through the islands like wildfire. The original population of 10,000 Haida fell to less than 600, leaving more than a hundred villages deserted across the archipelago.”

Lay shuts off the engine and we slowly drift onto the shingle beach below one of them: Skedans on Louise Island. Where a proud row of 27 longhouses once stood, there now exists only their deep foundations that resemble shallow graves. Many of the village’s totem poles have been felled by fierce winter storms. One, marked with 13 rings, still stands but leans at a drunken angle. “Each ring represents a different potlatch, a gift-giving feast in Haida culture”, says Lay. “It could be held to celebrate a wedding or in memory of an elder. Historically, the host would provide food for all those who attended, also gifts such as candlefish or canoes. The rings indicate that there were 13 significant events during this village’s lifetime.”

We depart the sombre scene and head south to spend the night on a float lodge anchored within the stillness of Crescent Inlet. From the deck I spend hours watching by the waters as the sun sets. First, a bloom of fried egg jellyfish floats by. Then, after dark, clouds of bioluminescent algae produce their flashes of electric-blue light, like a kind of aquatic Aurora Borealis.

Next morning, Lay and I depart for Gwaii Haanas – ‘Islands of Beauty’ in the Haida language – a national park reserve that





covers almost 15% of the archipelago's south, and the only place in Canada to be protected in its entirety from sea floor to mountain peak.

To get there we must venture out into the Hecate Strait, a wild and perilous stretch of water that shares its name with the Greek goddess of witchcraft. Today, mercifully there are no storms or swells to contend with; instead we are met with a marine fog so thick it dims the bright sunlight to near darkness. It slows our progress, but by afternoon we eventually drop anchor at SGang Gwaay, a village site on Anthony Island, home to the largest collection of totem poles in Haida Gwaii.

We wade ashore and follow a trail through patches of giant skunk cabbage – a favourite meal of the local bears that devour it to cure constipation after months of hibernation. Eventually the pathway reaches a bay where a regiment of mortuary poles stand staring out to sea.

Bleached to the colour of bones, they are carved with all kinds of wild-eyed creatures, both real and supernatural. Lay tells me that the top of each pole would have once held the boxed remains of a highly-regarded villager. "It was believed that in time their soul merged with the tree, and once the earth reclaimed the pole, the soul was free to continue on their journey", she explains.

One totem, featuring a grizzly bear, stands apart from the main cluster. As we approach it, the wind ripples through the trees and there's a palpable sense of a presence, as if we are being watched. "There's a story about a Japanese photographer who came here. He felt something in the ether which stopped him from taking a picture of it", says Lay. "Not long afterwards he was travelling in Russia and was killed and eaten by a grizzly. It was as if he had experienced a kind of premonition at SGang Gwaay; he saw his destiny."

As the light begins to fade, we continue onwards, rounding the southernmost tip of Gwaii Haanas



to reach journey's end in the serene Rose Harbour, its mirror glass waters broken by the rusting hulks of a once-prosperous whaling station.

"It was active between 1909 and 1943", says Goetz Hanisch, the harbour's only full-time resident. "More than 2,000 sperm, blue, and humpback whales were slaughtered here, then processed for meat, lamp oil and margarine."

Hanisch invites me to see the wooden house he built beside the station's ruins. "It might seem like a surprising place to put down roots, but Mother Nature brought me here", he explains. "As a child growing up in Germany I had these visions of trees, mountains and water. I happened to come to Haida Gwaii by chance as a traveller and realised that this was the place that I'd seen in my dreams. I then set about looking for the right place to live. I wanted somewhere remote with no road

access and I found Rose Harbour. The nearest road is at least 120 kilometres away; it's probably the most isolated spot in British Columbia."

Hanisch leads me to his garden, a riot of perfume and colour, where roses, lilies and honeysuckle flourish amongst the gooseberry bushes and grapevines. "I've fulfilled my dream of living self-sufficiently in the heart of nature", he says. "I catch all my own fish, the ducks provide me with eggs, and I've even learned how to grow figs and lemons in the cold, rainy climate."

What Hanisch is most proud of though, is that his garden has attracted a wealth of wildlife back to Rose Harbour. "The deer have returned; there are more birds and insects than ever before too. It shows that the human footprint can sometimes be a good thing. I've slowly overturned the legacy of the past. The animals know they can trust me; they sense that I'm different to the whalers. So what was once a place of death, is now bursting with life."

Arabian Sands

The Empty Quarter, or Rub al-Khali in Arabic, is the world's largest sand desert, an unimaginably vast region of flats and dunes that covers a quarter of a million square miles and extends into four countries: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and the south western corner of Oman.

To put the size of this immense sand sea in context, the Empty Quarter is 40,000 square miles greater than the area of mainland France; it also contains half as much sand as the Sahara despite being just a fifteenth of its size.

Here, the desert is defined by its vast stretches of unbroken sand, as well as by the star-shaped dunes that elegantly spread their fingers on its fringes. Uniquely, they are created by the hot winds that blow in from all points of the compass, resulting in dunes that grow upwards rather than sideways, some of them reaching more than 200 metres in height.

Unsurprisingly, the region receives little rainfall – just 1.2 inches a year, while summer temperatures peak at more than 55°C in the shade. Yet, incredibly, life finds a way: there are numerous, well-adapted plants and animals, including the hardy Oryx, a type of antelope that can survive for months on end by drinking the morning dew it finds on desert flora.

The unforgiving conditions mean that the region has escaped any permanent human presence throughout its history; although it has been traversed by merchants and their caravans since time immemorial, and Bedouin tribes have lived around its outer reaches for thousands of years.

Such stark and unpopulated beauty has long fascinated travellers from farther afield, including Lawrence of Arabia and Wilfred Thesiger, the British military officer, explorer and writer. “No man can live this life and emerge unchanged”, wrote Thesiger of the Empty Quarter. “He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad; and he will have within him the yearning to return. For this cruel land can cast a spell which no temperate climate can match.”





Nothing is as it seems

AMY SOHANPAUL IS IN NEW ORLEANS. PICTURES BY SIMON URWIN

Boot Scootin' Rodeo shouts out one bar sign, stars surrounding a Stetson-wearing cutie. Next door, neon palm trees celebrate the Tropical Isle bar. Another door down is Boogie Woogie, adorned with musical motifs and the motto *Laissez Les Bons Temps Rouler*. A ghost looms out of a neighbouring window. This is bright lights Bourbon Street, sort of a cruise liner stranded on land, with its customers making merry. It's named after a French Royal family though, and not the drink. I think of Tennessee Williams who spent so much time here, and wonder what it was like then. Winding through the woozy crowd leads into a different kind of decadence, in the French Quarter just alongside.

The French Quarter is actually seriously sophisticated. It's not just the intricate architecture, beautiful wrought iron balconies festooned with greenery, it's a mood and it's a history. This is where the first opera house in the United States was founded, and the first theatre. Every other post on the street is in the shape of a horse's head, as this is where elegant carriages were tethered and waited while their owners indulged in music, in plays, in fine food and an escape from the surrounding marshes.

New Orleans may be a party town now, but it was a party town way back then, when Plantation Houses abounded along the fertile shores of the Mississippi. Their residents came to town for a good time between harvests, dressed to impress, ready to

let their hair down. It was a mixture of elegant and louche, as it is now.

Old, exceedingly grand houses can still be seen in these streets. The imposing and impressive mansions built quarters 'out back', where the whiffy reality of cooking could be contained, and where the Creoles who did the labour intensive stuff were housed. The 'boys' who carried the dishes into the main house had to whistle all the way, as while whistling they couldn't steal a scrap of supper between back and front of house.

I land as a cyclone is due to hit town. It would have been too crass to mention Katrina otherwise to Candice, who picks me up from the airport, huge hair, dazzling nails, and super curious about snow and the weather in England and starts the conversation with it. "I would love to see proper snow. So you don't get tornadoes or hurricanes in London?"

So I feel I can ask where she was when Katrina hit. "I was sheltering in a hotel with my daughter. She was three then. We ended up rowing away in a hot tub to the bridge by the stadium, where we spent the next week." As well as the impending cyclone, it turns out the other big local news is that a hotel has collapsed. "The concrete was no good, that's the reason. It's shortcuts, dodgy deals. My husband works in construction, and when it rains like it is now, he can't, and he don't get paid." We talk about lighter matters too, and she laughs all the way, saying

she'd love to travel and especially to London but "Girl, I've never been on a plane in my life." We hug as she drops me off, and all is good, but her stories, the about to storm weather, leave me reflective and not excited.

This dissipates the next morning into excitement and the many dimensions of New Orleans. It is not one place on one plane but a Deep South that dissolves into other countries and moods. It's part present but part past, eternally entwined. The Whitney, the hotel I'm based in, used to be a bank, complete with imposing ironwork and all the old teller signs and counters in place. It's seconds away from the streetcars that connect the city, not all called *Desire* but all conjuring up that history in their throb down the streets. It's also a short walk from its grand old trappings into the mutable delights of the city.

The wind has blown the sky into a clear blue morning and even at 10 am there is a tropical party atmosphere at Café Beignet, where music and icing sugar sweeten the air, and palm trees sway next to statues of all the jazz greats. Next to Fats Domino, I meet Gwen who leads me into the surrounding streets and confirms that nothing is as it seems in this town.

"We are nothing like anywhere else in the country. This is why so many Americans holiday here – it is Europe, Africa and America, all in one place." It certainly is a coming together of cultures, and this world and the









afterlife, with ghosts glooming over the balconies and skeletons peeking out everywhere. A sense of the other side is strong in these historic streets. Spirits and old-fashioned voodoo are part of the fabric even now. "At some point," Jean told me, "you might feel someone has touched you, but you won't see them."

What I do see on later walks is a Chewbecca costumed customer chilling beside the old Opera House. A man dressed in a top hat and white tie, tails and all, with a beautiful dog dancing street side. A band in the middle of a crossroad with an audience stopping between shopping and sightseeing and chores to soak it all in. The music never stops. Pretty much every bar has a band, music spills out from open doors everywhere.

As pervasive as the sounds is the smell of the other New Orleans obsession – the food. The cuisine is a mix of

so many cultures, of a complicated history and now often served up with a modern twist. It never strays too far from the rules though, nor from the holy trinity of onions, bell peppers and celery that form the base of all gumbos and every jambalaya. We sample pickled green beans and okra, sample a selection of hot sauces at the Pepper Palace on Chartres Street – ranging from fruity to fiery. There's a very refined lunch at Nola on St Louis Street, including a light take on Louisiana Shrimp and Grits, enjoyed on a typically picturesque balcony. A tavern called Tableau serves up a decadent, delightful cheese platter and the Red Fish Grill all sorts of seafood, as you'd expect, with some outstanding oysters. The most lingering tastes are those of gumbo based on a rich roux, thickened with filé leaves. The tastes are as deep and complex as the past, as sultry as the swamp air. The legendary oysters and shrimps and alligators that make up many a dish come from these swamps.

I don't taste alligator, but I see a snout in the swamp on a kayaking trip deep into the Bayou, and for a silly second hope it won't taste me. Mike, our guide on the trip, assures me I'm not being silly. "Alligators are the top of the chain out here. And they know it." Fleeting frisson aside, we settle into total serenity. This gentle, swishing paddle through deep green water turns out to be the most magical interlude amidst noisy New Orleans days. All is calm, all is bright – the sky a polished blue, streaks of orange on the banks and on tree barks, the dragonflies that flit past are kaleidoscopic. It's cinematic. Turtles sunbathe on mossy boulders, Spanish Moss swathes second-growth cypress trees. We spot bald headed eagles; the woodpeckers are harder to see but easier to hear. Mostly, we can hear our unspoken thoughts as loud and clear as the music that will meet us on our return to the next jazz bar.





In the company of elephants

words & pictures
Jonathan and Angela Scott

It is all too easy to get caught up with 'big cat fever' on safari in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve, a place we think of as our second home. But the Maasai Mara is so much more than its iconic big cats, a corner of Eden reverberating with the honking of hippos snoozing on the muddy banks of the Mara river, the raucous cry of fish eagles competing with the bell-like duetting of tropical *boubous* birds. The variety of landscape and abundance of animal species threatens to overwhelm the senses, from dung beetles and termite colonies, to the heavyweights among the mammals, the hippos, rhinos and elephants.

One of our greatest pleasures while waiting for the Marsh lions to stir from their slumber is to immerse ourselves in the company of elephants. More than 3,000 of these

behemoths roam the Greater Mara, an area of 6,000 sq km that includes the Reserve and surrounding Wildlife Conservancies. There is always something of interest happening: the small calves, pink and hairy, hugging the underside of their mother's belly while struggling to figure out what a trunk is all about; the young bulls suddenly erupting with wild screams or trumpeting at the tops of their voices; blustery youngsters beginning to exercise their awakening power as they transition from adolescence to the ranks of bachelor society, a fluid population of bulls ranging in age from fifteen to sixty and organised into a dominance hierarchy within each population.

There are times when you could reach out and touch these towering, gentle animals as they pass silently alongside our vehicle, and once in a

while one of the cows will stretch out the moistened tip of her trunk to catch our scent, before shaking her great head from side to side, ears flapping with the sound of someone slapping a pair of Wellington boots together.

Elephants exude a quiet dignity and wisdom that needs no elaboration. Among their own kind they undoubtedly enjoy physical contact, whether touching with their trunks or simply leaning against one another. Greetings between elephants involve placing their trunks in each other's mouths, vocalising with excitement and generally running about and flapping their ears. The core of elephant society is a group of related females and their offspring, in the same way that at the heart of every pride of lions is a tightly bonded group of related lionesses.

These family units number from five to twenty individuals, and it is usually possible to pick out the lead cow within each group. The matriarch, as she is known, is always the oldest member of the family, and because an elephant continues to grow through its lifetime she is usually the biggest of the cows. These old females are extraordinary creatures, embodying the wisdom of an ancient sage with the bravery of a gladiator if they feel their family is threatened. Some are immediately recognisable – Flop Ear and Cross Tusks among them – individuals that we look for year after year, uttering a silent vote of thanks each time we find them, shepherding the latest of their calves through the ripe red oat grass. Then one day they are gone, victims of poachers or starvation, their final set of molars

worn through, mourned by their family in a manner that tells us that these sentient beings have a deep attachment to their own kind.

There is a deep sense of poignancy to time spent in the company of elephants. Africa's human population is expected to double over the next few decades and the demand for land is relentless. In the 1980s the continent lost half its elephants – 600,000 animals. The burning of stockpiles of tusks in Nairobi National Park in 1989 prompted a ban on the sale of ivory. While this helped to slow the killing it did not halt it. Today there are estimated to be 415,000 elephants and the slaughter continues with as many as 35,000 animals killed each year. How does one weigh the enormity of these figures against the reality of the life of a single individual?

It is one thing to observe these complex creatures from the safety of a safari vehicle but quite another to stand alongside them, to get to know something of their individual character, to reach up and touch their wrinkled skin and realise how small and frail we are by comparison. We have been fortunate to be able to do that on a number of occasions, including visits to Abu's and Stanley's Camps in Botswana where you can walk with elephants returned to the wild after a life in captivity. Equally memorable were times spent filming *Elephant Diaries* featuring the remarkable story of Dame Daphne Sheldrick and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's orphan elephant rehabilitation programme in Kenya, proving that if we care enough we can make a difference.





An Elegy for Hong Kong

Words by Fergal Keane

The city has so many meanings for me.

It was the place where my first child, Daniel Patrick Keane, was born on a balmy February night in 1996. I will come back to this in a moment. It was also the city where I began my journey towards sobriety. In the rooms of an old colonial building on Borrit Road, high above the city I sat with fellow alcoholics and started to understand that if I was to have any peace of mind in this life, the booze would have to go. I am so grateful to them, scattered wherever they may be, alive or dead, sober or struggling, for the fellowship they gave me. Where is T, my fellow Irishman, who walked with me back to Happy Valley, rejoicing in our newly cleared heads? Happy, sober, safe I hope. Those bright neon streets of 1995 are clear in my mind still. I could, and did, walk them at any hour of the day or night and never felt the slightest worry.

That word safe defined Hong Kong for me. I had come to the city from South Africa, and the terrible genocide in Rwanda, and was still struggling to accept the horrors I had witnessed.

Landing in Hong Kong I had not been impressed. It was night and muggy and the buildings seemed so densely packed that I felt immediately claustrophobic. My first impression was of a place dedicated to money. I was alienated by what I saw as a relentless striving after the material. But I was wrong. There was so much more to the city on the Pearl River delta.

I learned the history of the place, walking through the Happy Valley cemetery, built in 1845, with its colonial graves that recalled an age of ruthless conquest and extraordinary suffering – on the part of colonised and colonisers. In those days Hong Kong was no easy station. Disease abounded. Pirates infested the waters of the South China Sea. I could walk from the great necropolis to the antique sellers of Cat Street and the nearby Man Mo temple where Hong Kongers kept faith with the spirits of their ancestors.

When our son was born at Adventist Hospital I discovered another Hong Kong. This was the place of endlessly

solicitous old ladies who would pause to express their admiration of the beautiful boy, where his arrival among Chinese friends in one of the vast Dim Sum restaurants near our downtown office caused a small riot of joy. There was a goodness in people's hearts that always flourished with the introduction of a small child into the company. Such happy days we knew at Stanley Market, or riding the Star Ferry at night to Kowloon to wander the shops of Tsim Sha Tsui, heading to the islands and New Territories at weekends, wandering for miles on foot because it was the only way to really see the city, however much the humidity sapped your energy.

I look at what is happening to Hong Kong now with despair and disbelief. I did not imagine this destruction of freedom. In those years leading up to the handover of power from Britain to China there were certainly warnings about Beijing's intentions from people like Martin Lee, the lawyer and founding father of Hong Kong's democracy movement, recently convicted for organising an



“unauthorised” march and facing possible imprisonment. But surely China would want to preserve this vital trading city, I thought. It made more sense to tolerate Hong Kong’s atmosphere of freedom than to crack down. How naïve do such hopes seem now.

I did not foresee the age of President Xi. When I arrived in late 1994 there was still a belief that China itself might evolve towards a less autocratic polity. The opposite has happened. The spirit of a noisy, freedom loving Hong Kong is anathema to the iron fisted tendencies of the Chinese Communist Party. Britain has no power to force Beijing to observe the spirit of the agreement that led to the handover

of power. It can only offer visas to some wanting to escape their homeland.

I recall the annual June vigils at Victoria Park to remember the dead of the Tiananmen Massacre. They were always so peaceful, the huge crowds holding candles, a vast spray of light set against the neon expanses of the city beyond. I was aware of being among people who cared passionately for freedom. They were as far from the stereotype of money-obsessed Cantonese as could be imagined. They were the beating heart of this wonderful, beautiful city.

I have a sense of having lived through a poignant epoch: the last days of the

city open to the world, proud of its traditions, giving way to the time when freedom was crushed by a remorselessly advancing power. Will Hong Kong rise again in my lifetime? I wish I could be sure that it would, but all I can see for the foreseeable future is a steady grinding down of opposition with all the force at China’s disposal. There are no comforting words with which to conclude. This is an elegy. It speaks of what is gone.

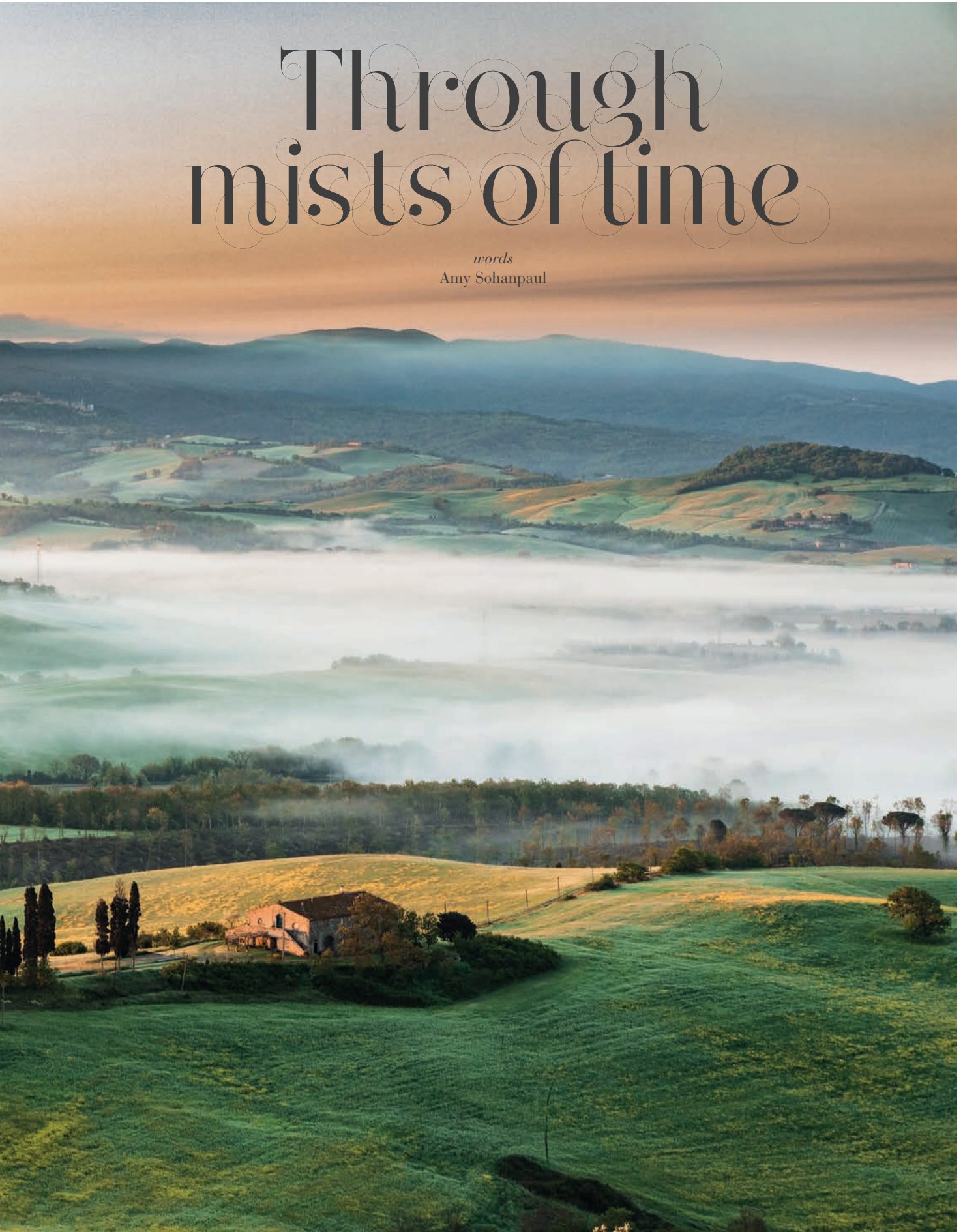
Fergal Keane is a Special Correspondent with BBC News

Illustration by Luke Walwyn



Through mists of time

words
Amy Sohanpaul



The rolling hills and ancient towns

of Tuscany are an almost ridiculously romantic backdrop for a road trip. Fly in to Florence or Pisa, pick up that car, and set off to revel in some spectacular landscapes, hilltop towns, vineyards and some of the best art in Europe.

It's all so much better at the tail-end of summer, when the heat mellows and regular city life returns, with residents back, refreshed from their summer-long siestas at the coast, and the throngs of summer have thinned out, leaving more space for lingering over the treasures to be found in every church and the many museums. Not that these are essential – there's so much to marvel at in the streets, piazzas and countryside.

Right now of course, it's a strange time, and for the first time in a long time, Italy is not crowded. But there is hope that it will, like so many other places, be able to come back to conviviality relatively soon. When it does, no visit to Tuscany can be considered complete without Florence, the region's capital. It's the birthplace of the Renaissance after all, and home to grand Medici villas, the unparalleled artworks of the Uffizi and the majestic Boboli Gardens. All these are 'must-sees' and for good reason, but there are other Florentine specials that are just as enriching. The Bargello, the city's old prison, is now home to other entrapped figures, but these are exquisite sculptures, not least the bronze figure of Mercury by Giambologna. The other enrichments – mostly to the hips – are the backstreet Panini and gelato bars. They fuel the walks – one of the best is a long one up to Piazza Michelangelo, which is a wonderful vantage point from which to gaze over the Duomo burnished by the setting sun, and the changing colours on the hills that surround the city.

In the nearby Vallombrosa Forest, centuries-old trees lead you down to the elegant abbey, the hillsides

around Rufina are home to copious vineyards, while Fiesole, directly overlooking the city, houses remnants of Etruscan walls and a magnificent Roman amphitheatre and lake hidden in the woods.

From here, Siena is a strident call, an unmissable stop while in Tuscany. Once a capital to rival Florence, it remains an attraction to rival Florence, with its own spectacular Duomo. It is the prettiest medieval city, its narrow streets suffused with charm and atmosphere all the way down to the famed Piazza del Campo. Set out like a seashell in pink paving, it might be the loveliest piazza in all of Italy, and that's saying something. It's surrounded by cafés and constant chat, but dominated by the towering Torre del Mangia, worth the climb for the views, and Palazzo Pubblico, built in 1297, which remains what it originally was, Siena's town hall. Some of the medieval rooms are open to the public though, so it's part museum and houses the famous frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, depicting the *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*.

There's something about that message that fuses into wanting to make the most of the here and now in Tuscany, and part of the most is San Gimignano, an essential side-trip whichever way you're going. Spotted from afar, it's exciting, its 13 striking towers silhouetted against the sky. They were built by noble families in the 12th and 13th centuries. Just one is open to the public, with a marvellous view of the countryside from the top. Although San Gimignano is small, it packs a hefty punch, because it's seriously gorgeous, the views are staggering, as is the local Vernaccia, a deceptively light white wine.

There are plenty of vineyards to pause at for a tasting or two in Tuscany, but the hilltop town of Montepulciano is

a worthy destination to sample some superb reds, stored in barrels in caves along the steep slopes. Restaurants along the same inclines provide delicious sustenance, sometimes flecked with truffles.

Continuing southeast beyond Montepulciano, the Val d'Orcia is characterised by row upon row of cypress trees, outlining hilltop hamlets and tracing the roads. Oak forests, olive groves and vineyards dominate the landscape, where you can enjoy a sip or two of fine Brunello in Montalcino or visit the Truffle Museum of San Giovanni d'Asso.

Picturesque Cortona at the eastern extreme of Tuscany is an inviting small town in the mountains between the Valdichiana and the Tiber valley, where two kilometres of walls date back to the fifth century BC and contain narrow cobbled streets and lively Tuscan trattorias.

By way of contrast, the Maremma Regional Park, spreading across the hills of the Uccellina and down to pristine beaches, is home to large herds of wild boar, deer and oxen, and amazing birdlife. White sand beaches and crystal-clear seas continue into Northern Maremma, a mining centre since antiquity, where Le Biancane Nature Reserve is dotted by geothermal phenomena like fumaroles, geysers and springs pumping out steaming waters.

There's also the ancient port of Livorno, founded as a city by the Medicis in 1606, and its network of canals is a minor echo of Venice. The signature snapshot of the city is the black-and-white chequered Mascagni Terrace, with its infinite views across the sea. If there's time left, perhaps head to Pisa, another well-known port, but there's so much more to Tuscany than that leaning tower.



From the heart

Yasmin Khan talks to Mark Reynolds about food to nourish and comfort, and the people she met and ate with on her journeys around Turkey, Greece and Cyprus



Yasmin Khan's love of the Eastern

Mediterranean began with a family holiday to Western Turkey thirty years ago, booked last-minute via Teletext. Arriving on the Aegean coast for the first time, she was awestruck by the turquoise waters and clear blue sky, and how sunny and warm it was – so different from Birmingham, where she was growing up. “But the flavours were more familiar because of my parents’ heritage, and the dishes I remember most are the incredibly succulent, juicy

lamb kebabs, the gorgeous, vibrant salads with lots of parsley and mint and dill, and incredible drinks like hot apple tea or sour cherry juice.”

Setting out to gather contemporary recipes from Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, Yasmin wanted her new book *Ripe Figs* to record how the region has changed through the biggest movement of people since the Second World War, with 5 million refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq and

Iran. “The book is filled with recipes that reflect that migration, whether it’s a spicy red pepper and walnut smash, which is a Syrian dish called Muhammara, or Afghan-spiced pumpkin, sautéed with ginger, garlic and dressed with a lovely mint yoghurt sauce.

“What I wanted to do with the book is to really start a conversation about how in the 21st century can we update our concepts of borders, nations and identity, in order to enable people to move and

live in dignity? Because this is an issue that is only going to escalate. Migration is something our species has always done for its survival, stretching back millennia. We've moved across lands and continents, and I think that is something that gets a little bit lost in current debates around migration, which always seem to describe it as a crisis in some form, when actually migration is just part of what it is to be human."

Yasmin's previous books, *The Saffron Tales* and *Zaitoun*, celebrate the food and culture of Persia and Palestine, and her home cooking has always been a fusion of influences. "I'm of mixed heritage, born and brought up in the UK, but my dad is from Pakistan and my mum's from Iran, so I literally feel like we embodied a medley of cultures in our home, and the kitchen was often where that played out, whether it was putting saffron in our Sunday roast chicken or making a chickpea stew from Pakistan one night, and then an Iranian stew another night."

Asked to pick a go-to main dish for celebrations with family and friends, she plumps for the Iranian stew Fesenjan. "It's made from ground walnuts and pomegranate molasses, cooked down for several hours so it becomes a rich and creamy sauce in which you can poach chicken or duck, or even sautéed aubergine. It's a special dish because it takes a bit of time to make, but is actually very easy to pull together, and is such

a crowd-pleaser. It's a dish that we often serve at the winter solstice in Iran, so it also has cultural significance."

She chose *Ripe Figs* as the title partly because the fig tree is emblematic of the region. "There is a majesty to that

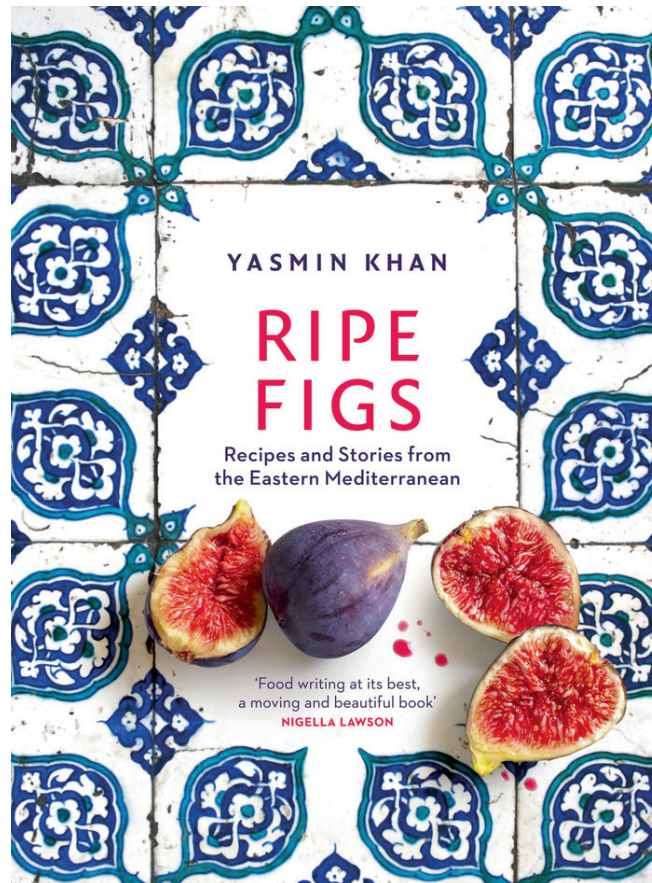
in northern Iran, it reminded me of my grandparents, and my grandfather who would always pick them for us and present them to us for breakfast. They really instilled in me, as I was sitting there in this foreign clime, a sense of comfort and resilience and safety, and

I feel like that was the case for so many of the refugees that I cooked and ate with, and so many of the migrants who had travelled through really perilous conditions. And I guess the title is a reminder of how food can create such comfort and solace through times of hardship, and that is a wonderful thing to acknowledge and celebrate in and of itself."

"A ripe fig needs careful handling. Its soft, waxy skin encases a tender heart that is easily bruised," she writes, echoing her belief that vulnerability should always be met by kindness. "I don't think there's anything more important than being kind, is there? There's an old Jewish proverb I really

love, that says an enemy is just a person whose story you haven't heard yet, and so much of my work is about trying to challenge stereotypes of particular places, or reframe how we see certain groups of people, and the first thing I think we need to do when we're exploring that is to meet people with kindness, and try and understand their stories. I hope my books help people do that."

***Ripe Figs* by Yasmin Khan
Bloomsbury, Hbk, 304pp, £25**



particular tree, and when I think of one I think of mornings in Cyprus where I would pick figs from the tree in the garden where I was staying, and eat them for breakfast still warm from the sun." It also reflects a memory of being in Athens when she was researching the book, shortly after her first of three miscarriages. "There's a lot of personal loss tied up in my experience of putting the book together. But I found great comfort that day in Athens in eating this bowl of figs, because the figs reminded me of my family's farm

Back into the blue

Tim Mackintosh-Smith remembers his good friend Bruce Wannell

Writing about Bruce is like trying to catch and pin an exceedingly rare migrant butterfly – but a butterfly with a huge brain, and an even bigger heart.

The brain revealed itself from the start. ‘Shouldn’t there be a *maddah* on that *alif*, rather than a *hamzah*?’ he said on our first meeting, in 1994, during a war in Yemen. Bruce had turned up out of the blue at my house in Sana’a, made for my library, and pulled a book of Arabic verse off a shelf. ‘Oh... I gathered your subject was Persian,’ I said, a little nonplussed. Bruce had explained that he was on his way from the Persian-speaking lands to England, via Arabia and East Africa. I looked at the text of poem: he was right, of course. ‘I have a little kitchen-Arabic,’ he said, with a sideways smile.

For the next quarter-century, I went in awe of Bruce’s intellectual *batterie de cuisine*, his inexhaustible larder of knowledge. When a book of mine on Arab history came out in the last year of Bruce’s life, his copious notes and queries on it included, for example, the remark that ‘When I was writing for my Kabul students a guide to the history of Islamic calligraphy, the Persian accounts of Nasta’liq I came across talked of a dream of rock-partridges in the mountains, not ducks on a pond.’ Avian anatomy, the story goes, had influenced Nasta’liq letter shapes. Bruce being Bruce – and therefore that almost extinct creature, an authority – his partridges probably have the edge over my ducks.

Even his questions managed somehow to display esoteric knowledge, as well as to seek it. His very last email to me asked: ‘By the way, have you any idea where I could get hold of Sa’diya Gaon’s Arabic translation of the psalms? I’ve heard they are masterly, if medieval.’ As well as joy in Arabic, we shared a love of keyboard music, and the message ended: ‘This evening I was playing with a neighbour the wonderful transcription by F-X Gleichauf for piano duet of Bach’s C minor Passacaglia & Fugue for organ: you probably play the original? Oceanic. Keep well.’ Oceanic; masterly; perhaps, at times, medieval: they are words that could describe Bruce’s brain.

But the brain would have been no more than sounding brass without the heart. Bruce’s heart revealed itself in snatches of kindness, in that constant and famous concern for friends, and in occasional gestures of the most Oriental generosity. Visiting an antique shop in Lincolnshire with him, I happened to admire a large and striking eighteenth-century etching of two girls with a youthful hunter. ‘They must be Venetian,’ Bruce said. ‘Only Venetians have those pointed noses.’ We read the inscription beneath the etching. He was right: the etching was after Piazzetta, a compatriot and contemporary of Canaletto. I left the shop; Bruce lingered. When he finally caught up, he was carrying a big rectangle wrapped in brown paper. ‘The Piazzetta,’ he said. ‘A present for you.’ I made some feeble, fish-gaping protestations; Bruce was, as often, down on his uppers. It made no difference.

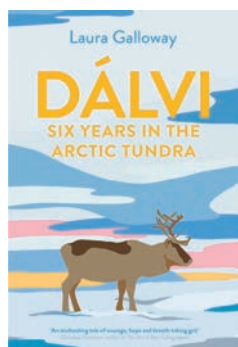
Nothing ever did. Not even protestations, on another Lincolnshire visit, about the temperature of the North Sea. Bruce not only had us foraging in the salt marsh, but skinny-dipping in the freezing German Ocean itself; the latter was probably a first in the annals of our village. The afternoon ended with crabs and samphire on buttered toast. Bruce, the rare – no, the unique – and gorgeous migrant, is perhaps uncatchable, unpinnable; but I sometimes wonder if he was trapped in this age of ours. His truer setting might have been the frame of some pre-modern miniature of gardens and princes and blue-domed skies; or, at the very latest, in a drawing room between the two world wars, with Harold Acton and Robert Byron and glass domes and quails’ eggs. But maybe, just as he made himself at home everywhere, he would have been at home everywhen. Now he has slipped the net of time.

I visited his room after he died. It was a chrysalis-case lined with books and bits and bobs, all precious and protective in his life, abandoned now for the next phase – into the blue beyond. *Antum al-sābiqūn wanahnu al-lāhiqūn*: you went before us, and we will follow on. But we’ll never catch you.



From *Tales from the Life of Bruce Wannell* (various contributors)
Sickle Moon
Books for Eland
Publishing, PBK,
256pp, £15

One word for winter



***Dálvi* by Laura Galloway**
Allen & Unwin, Hbk, 304pp, £14.99
 reviewed by Mark Reynolds

It started with a DNA test. After sending off a kit she received in a gift bag at a conference, New York-based journalist Laura Galloway was intrigued to learn that she shared a portion of genetic coding with

the indigenous Sámi people of the Arctic Circle. For her next break, she planned her first visit to the Arctic, to the Swedish village of Jokkmokk, where a Sámi winter market has been held each February for centuries. A social gathering and a respite

from solitary life on the tundra, Jokkmokk is where people traditionally traded goods, baptised their children or sought out life partners. The village was buzzing with concerts and lectures at the Ájtte museum, handicraft stalls and reindeer races, and Laura was hooked by the stark landscapes and bitter cold that recalled then redoubled the Indiana winters of her childhood. A subsequent affair with a Sámi reindeer herder led her to up sticks and make a home in the sparsely populated town of Kautokeino in Norway's Finnmark. When the boyfriend left six months later she could have returned home, but instead forged a solo existence in the remote community, immersing herself in local culture and relishing a forgotten sense of wonder at the harsh beauty of her surroundings. Her time in the far north also brought reconciliation and peace with traumatic events that had once defined her – the sudden death of her mother when she was three years old, a prickly relationship with her new step-mum, and a lifelong search for a sense of home and belonging. An affecting memoir and a paean to the singular climate and landscape of the Arctic, *Dálvi* (winter in northern Sámi) is a profound exploration of connections lost and found.

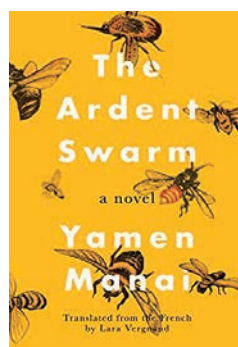
Fiction that takes you there



Whereabouts, the new novel from Pulitzer Prize winner **Jhumpa Lahiri** (Bloomsbury) is a haunting portrait of a lone woman in an unnamed Italian seaside town. As she moves along its pavements, passes over bridges, through shops and pools and bars, transformation awaits. One day at the height of summer, revitalised by the sun's intense warmth, her perspective will change forever. Acclaimed travel writer and

novelist **Paul Theroux's** latest book, ***Under the Wave at Waimea*** (Hamish Hamilton), is a fictional account of a legendary Hawaiian surfer now in his sixties, still revered by young surfers who have followed in his wake, but facing an uncertain future as he hopes to ride out life's latest choppy crest. **Jane Smiley's** ***The Strays of Paris*** (Mantle) is a delightful modern fable about a spirited young racehorse who escapes his stable and accumulates a motley crew of fellow animal vagabonds on the streets of the French capital, where they befriend a young boy in still deeper need of rescue. In **Tessa McWatt's** ***The Snow Line***

(Scribe), four strangers from around the world arrive in the Indian Himalayas for a wedding and take a road trip together to climb a mountain. Taking in the magnificent views, the unlikely companions must find a way to bridge the differences that divide them. ***The Ardent Swarm*** by acclaimed Tunisian author **Yamen Manai** (Amazon Crossing) is a rousing allegory about a country in the aftermath of revolution, following the journey of a rural beekeeper who wakes one morning to find his hives ravaged by a mysterious swarm of vicious hornets. Two reissued classics that catch the eye are **Knut Hamsun's** wild masterpiece ***Mysteries*** (Serpent's Tail Classics), about



the shocking impact of a curious stranger on a Norwegian coastal town; and **Margarita Liberaki's** ***Three Summers*** (Viking/Penguin European Writers), which tracks the lives of three sisters growing up outside Athens before the Second World War as they share and keep secrets, fall in and out of love, and try to understand the bizarre world of adults.

Species

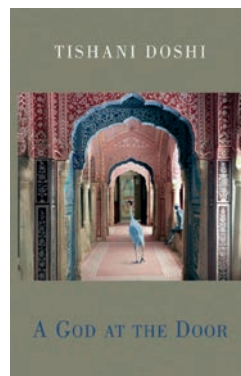
by Tishani Doshi

When it is time, we will herd into the bunker of the earth
to join the lost animals – pig-footed bandicoot, giant sea
snail, woolly mammoth. No sound of chainsaws, only
the soft swish swish of dead forests, pressing our heads
to the lake's floor, a blanket of leaves to make fossils
of our femurs and last suppers. In a million years
they will find and restore us to jungles of kapok.

Their children will rally to stare at ancestors.

Neanderthals in caves with paintings of the gnu
period. Papa homo erectus forever squatting over
the thrill of fire. Their bastard offspring with prairie-size
mandibles, stuttering over the beginnings of speech. And finally,
us – diminutive species of homo, not so wise, with our weak necks
and robo lovers, our cobalt-speckled lungs. Will it be for them
as it was for us, impossible to imagine oceans where there are now
mountains? Will they recognise their own story in the feather-tailed
dinosaur, stepping out of a wave of extinction to tread over blooms
of algae, never once thinking about asteroids or microbial stew?

If we could communicate, would we admit that intergalactic
colonisation was never a sound plan? We should have learned
from the grass, humble in its abundance, offering food and shelter
wherever it spread. Instead, we stamped our feet like gods,
marvelling at the life we made, imagining all of it to be ours.



from *A God at the Door*

Bloodaxe Books, PBK, 120pp, £10.99

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by Elizabeth Kolbert
Bodley Head, Hbk, 256pp, £18.99

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OUTLANDISH

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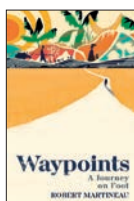


NAPOLEON: A LIFE IN GARDENS AND SHADOWS

by Ruth Scurr
Chatto & Windus, Hbk, 400pp, £30

A revelatory portrait

of Napoleon through his love of nature and gardens, from his childhood olive groves in Corsica, to Paris, Cairo, Rome and Elba, to Waterloo and exile on St Helena.



WAYPOINTS

by Robert Martineau
Jonathan Cape, Hbk, 272pp, £16.99

Walking alone across desert, through

rainforests, over mountains, meeting shamans, priests, historians, archaeologists and kings, Martineau examines the psychology of walking, pilgrimage, solitude and escape.



HOW TO LOVE ANIMALS IN A HUMAN-SHAPED WORLD

by Henry Mance
Jonathan Cape, Hbk, 400pp, £20

A far-reaching, urgent, and thoroughly engaging exploration of our relationship with animals from the acclaimed *FT* writer; a personal quest for a fairer way to live alongside other species.



AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 PLANTS

by Jonathan Drori & Lucille Clerc
Laurence King, Hbk, 216pp, £20

Another beautiful botanical journey from the author and illustrator of *Around the World in 80 Trees*, examining how plants are intricately entwined with our own history, culture and folklore.

Eagles Villas

Halkidiki



Halkidiki, with its emerald green hills and intensely blue waters, is a beguiling, unspoilt peninsula in Northern Greece. Lined with long sandy beaches, it's also a trove of cultural treasures, from archaeological museums to ancient historical sites. The forests shading the slopes of Cholomontas Mountain in velvet green hues are rich in bird and wild life, the tavernas that abound are vibrant with people enjoying local food and fun. Riding, cycling, hiking and sailing are on hand for exploration and adventures.

The perfect place to retreat to is Eagles Villas, an exclusive and picturesque hillside retreat, offering extreme privacy in elegant villas with stunning sea views. The villas vary in size, accommodating 4 to 6 guests, some with private gardens, but all with sea views and private pools. Each is impeccably designed, sophisticated and welcoming, with all the mod-cons you'd expect from a such a high-end property.

It would be so easy and tempting to stay put in your villa, but there is a range of restaurants offering everything from Greek grills, local seafood specialities, and Italian classics to haute cuisine. Excursions, yachting trips, sporting activities and an indulgent spa offer diversions to suit families and friends and all age groups – it's all here for the asking, in a secluded and very spoiling setting.



St Nicolas Bay & Thalassa Villas

Crete



Agios Nikolaos is one of the most charming spots in Crete.

This fishing port is full of fun, with boutique shops, bars and restaurants adding to the pleasures of a lively seafront. The St Nicolas Bay resort is just a mile away, but in a secluded setting right beside a beautiful beach, utterly peaceful and beguiling.

Accommodation here offers plenty of choice, from rooms and suites with sea views, all airy and elegant, almost all with private balconies or terraces to make the most of the sea breeze. Many have outdoor Jacuzzis or private pools, overlooking the brilliant blue sea.



St Nicolas Bay resort also offers a string of frankly stunning spa villas dotted along the shore. These are spacious, ultra-luxurious, complete with private pools and with several places to sunbathe in seclusion while looking over the sea. Each is exquisitely designed, and once installed, guests may choose not to leave at all, as dining is easily arranged – from poolside barbeques, to sundowners and snacks. Should guests wish to venture forth, all the amenities of St Nicolas Bay resort are available, from the pampering Poseidon Spa and seven restaurants to choose from, as well as a host of cultural or sporting activities tailored for families or couples wanting bespoke experiences and excursions.

Elounda Bay Palace

Crete



On the edge of Mirabello Bay, set amidst twenty acres of enchanting garden, this award-winning resort has it all, not least eight different dining options, and a tranquil spa offering holistic and rejuvenating treatments.

Rooms and suites range from ‘Splendid’ as a starting point, to superlative, as a finish with many flourishes. Their standard rooms are high standard, some with mountain views, many overlooking the sea, while family rooms have garden views and bungalows look out across shared pools to the sea. All have outside space, maximising sunbathing in solitude. Their Gold club suites and bungalows are more spacious still, with a mixture of shared and private pools and more of those gorgeous views. At the Platinum level, each suite is outstanding, from the three-bed penthouse to the suites with private pools – the Presidential suite has the additional luxury of being right beside the seaside.

Every level of accommodation offers enough space for comfortable in-room dining, but the restaurant options available are well worth the gastronomic journey. All are expansive, both in spacing and in menu choices. There are casual options on the deck, a splash away from the sea, offering salads, snacks and tapas, and some super-smart formal choices, with the emphasis on the freshest seafood with gentle live music on site. You’ll find enough variety for all tastes.



Elounda Gulf Villas

Crete



Family owned, family-run, Elounda Gulf Villas hits that sweet spot between the stellar services and amenities of a superb hotel and private holiday homes, where seclusion is guaranteed.

The luxury pool villas are the most sought after, with magnificent views, sprawling and soothing living spaces and indulgent rooms and bathrooms. The pools are enticing, on the large side, with shaded areas and comfortable sun loungers.

The suites are cossetting too. Each 1 or 2 bedroom suite features well thought out living and dining areas, beautifully decorated in sleek contemporary style. Bedrooms are elegant, with fine linen and calm shades and the mostly marble en suites are faultless. Some suites have private pools, but all are steps away from the main pool area, which include a Jacuzzi and a children's pool.

Whichever option guests choose – villa or suite – staff go out of their way to provide dedicated personal services, from wine tastings to boat trips. There are yachts and helicopters available if desired, a notable spa, and cultural excursions galore. The dining is acclaimed, with every in-dining option available including breakfast in bed, family lunch or barbeques pool-side or romantic dinners for two. It would be a shame however, not to sample the restaurants on site for their lavish breakfast buffets and sophisticated variations of Cretan and Greek classics.



Once overlooked in favour of Africa's Big-Five big hitters, the rare chance to come face to face with the mighty mountain gorilla, as well as the emergence of some seriously stylish accommodation, have brought Rwanda firmly into the spotlight. And its moniker, the 'Land of a Thousand Hills', only hints at how impressive the landscapes are; misty rainforests roll into green hills and valleys, dotted with villages and quiet, beach-fringed lakes, all set against a backdrop of still-smoking volcanoes. Nowhere is this beauty more apparent than in Rwanda's two most famous national parks – Volcanoes & Nyungwe Forest – and a pair of stunning One&Only lodges that showcase them at their absolute best.

[Volcanoes National Park](#)

Naturally, Rwanda's biggest draw is the chance to meet its mountain gorillas and, following a guided trek into the jungles of Volcanoes National Park, spending an hour in the company of these gentle giants will be the undisputed highlight of your trip. Indeed, you'll be just metres away as you watch mums teach their babies to play and climb while marvelling at the sheer power of a 30-stone silverback. It really is the experience of a lifetime.

But that's not all this fabulous region has to offer. Further excursions might see you seek out troops of rare golden monkeys and hike up jungle-clad volcanic peaks, before retiring to the luxuries of your lodge accommodation. And, the superb One&Only Gorilla's Nest is the pick of the bunch. This stunning sanctuary, nestled at the foot of the Virunga

Mountains, is as spectacular as its surroundings, with chic Forest Lodges scattered among verdant grounds, each furnished in rich patterns, fabrics and textures inspired by traditional Rwandan design. What's more, with private viewing decks and outdoor showers, they offer the chance to fully embrace the outdoors, while cooler nights are countered by roaring fires, thick rugs and huge, super-king-size beds.

Nyungwe Forest National Park

Gorillas and golden monkeys aside, Rwanda is also home to plenty of other great primates. Tucked away in the country's remote southwest corner, Nyungwe is the best-preserved rainforest in central Africa. On jungle hikes and canopy-level walkways, you can expect to spot everything from colobus monkeys to chimpanzees, our closest relatives. Tracking these great apes as they swing from the vines up high is a truly memorable experience.

It's also home to another boutique gem. Indeed, One&Only Nyungwe House is Rwanda at its most luxurious – a truly stunning base for guided trips into the jungle and ambling treks through the verdant tea plantation on which it's built. Rooms and suites serve up private decks and crackling fires, the restaurant is a showcase for local flavours and the spa is a truly indulgent counterpoint to the likes of community visits and evenings spent stargazing.

One&Only



Highlights of Rwanda in Luxury: Gorillas & Chimpanzees

Experiencing the wilderness and wildlife of Rwanda in spectacular style. After flying to Kigali, the country's vibrant capital, you'll head onwards to Nyungwe Forest where the luxuries of your One&Only lodge await. Over 300 bird species and 85 animal species make their homes in the surrounding jungle, including the most playful of all the primates – the chimpanzee. After two days of exploration, your next stop is Lake Kivu, where you can swim and take a sunset kayak paddle before an overnight stay on its palm-fringed shores. A private transfer will then bring you north to the chic One&Only Gorilla's Nest at the base of the Virunga Mountains. Make unforgettable memories as you encounter gorillas and golden monkeys in the wild, before returning to Kigali for a private city tour.

Prices start from £4,530 pp incl. flights, UK airport lounge access, full-board accommodation, chimpanzee & gorilla permits & tours. For a full itinerary, visit wexas.com/152074.

Your gateway to ancient Greece

From idyllic islands to the wonders of the ancient world, a holiday to Greece offers so much more than sun, sea and sand. And, there can be no better way to experience all that this remarkable country has to offer than with Grecotel's collection of boutique resorts. Perfectly positioned close to some of world's most important historic treasures, they offer the perfect combination of superb service, delicious local food and a full spread of five-star facilities, all in spectacular locations. You might even choose to combine the first two featured properties to create a truly memorable ancient Greece adventure.

Cape Sounio – Athenian Riviera

With a unique location between a verdant nature reserve and the calm, crystalline waters of the Aegean Sea, this stunning hotel offers spectacular views of the Temple of Poseidon – one of the most famous archaeological sites in Europe. Terracotta bungalows blend into the unspoiled landscape, while exclusive villas offer perfectly private hideaways, complete with their own pools and more of those privileged views.



Caramel Boutique Resort – Rethymno, Crete

Close to Rethymno and within easy reach of ancient Knossos, this stylish resort offers old-world romance at its best, oozing retro glamour throughout its gleaming hallways, fabulous terraces and magnificent guestrooms. Suites and villas are all individually decorated and furnished with hand-carved pieces and designer fabrics, recreating the ambience of an island settlement with the elegance and amenities of a modern luxury resort.

Mandola Rosa – Olympia, Peloponnese

Named after the pink almond trees which dot the coastline, this beachfront resort, with its 54 elegant suites and villas, conjures up the romance and charm of a bygone era. The location is magical – nestled in a 500-acre estate with shady woodland and access to a wide, sandy shore, it's the perfect spot for exploring the archaeological wonders of ancient Olympia as well as the Ionian Islands and the myriad attractions of Western Peloponnese.





All aboard for the ultimate in mini-breaks

The world's most famous train has added new routes. Known for its signature services between London and Venice, and its annual haul from Paris to Istanbul and back, the *Venice Simplon-Orient Express* has introduced new journeys taking in Rome, Florence, Geneva, Brussels and Amsterdam.

We have put together enticing itineraries around each of the routes. Here's what to expect when travelling from Rome to London or Venice to Amsterdam:

ROME TO LONDON

Day 1: Depart for Rome

Begin your trip in style with complimentary airport lounge access ahead of your flight to Rome. On arrival, a private driver will deliver you to the Art Deco luxury of the Baglioni Hotel Regina, next to the tranquil retreat of the Borghese Gardens' manicured flowerbeds,

welcoming piazzas and world-class art galleries.

Day 2: The treasures of Ancient Rome

The city is yours to explore, from the ancient wonders of the Colosseum and the grand Baroque flourishes of the Trevi Fountain and Piazza Navona to the Renaissance masterpiece of St Peter's Basilica and the mazy lanes and lively trattorias of Trastevere.

Day 3: The *Venice Simplon-Orient Express*

Boarding the train, you are welcomed with a glass of Prosecco as you set



off through the hills and vineyards of the Tuscan countryside towards Florence. After a short stop, savour a three-course lunch in the dining car as picturesque Swiss villages give way to sweeping meadows and snow-frosted mountains. Pastries are served in your oak-panelled cabin, so you may need a stroll along the train before settling in for the evening's four-course supper and your night on board.

Day 4: Paris to London

Enjoy a sumptuous breakfast in your cabin before pulling into Paris to transfer to the Eurostar for the short journey home.

TOP 10 EXPERIENCES IN *Alberta*

From world-leading festivals to incredible wildlife and landscapes, here are the great reasons why Alberta should be at the top of your travel wish-list.

1. Explore the Alberta Badlands

Step back to the time of the dinosaurs in one of Alberta's hidden wonders – the rugged and spectacular Badlands.

2. Experience winter in Banff

Banff in the winter provides a whole new palette of activities including skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, ice skating, and so much more!

3. Discover incredible scenery in Waterton

The prairies of Alberta meet the peaks of the Rocky Mountains at Waterton Lakes National Park. Hike to discover crystal-clear lakes, thundering waterfalls and rainbow-coloured streams.

4. Go in search of wildlife in Jasper

From bear to elk, wildlife can be found in every corner of Jasper National Park. Indeed, this vast protected area is home to all the mountain species, including elusive wolverines and golden eagles.

5. Feed your inner foodie

Bolstered by top chefs, superb produce and award-winning restaurants, Alberta has become a culinary destination in its own right.

6. Get lost in the dark sky

Enjoy some of the best stargazing in the world with a trip to a Parks Canada Dark-Sky Preserve – a place dedicated to preserving the night sky

7. Visit the Calgary Stampede

Home to one of the world's largest rodeos, this 10-day festival features everything from parades, stage shows and concerts to agricultural competitions, chuckwagon racing and First Nations exhibitions.

8. Uncover a rare gem in Canmore

Worth stepping off the beaten track for, pretty Canmore offers hiking, fishing and wildlife in summer, while in winter attention turns to cross-country skiing and husky sledding.

9. Experience urban renewal in Edmonton

Alberta's capital has come a long way in recent times. Find out what the fuss is about as you contrast its chic shopping with its world-class fringe festival.

10. Take a walk in the sky

Stroll 1,000 feet above the valley floor on the Columbia Icefield Skywalk to glimpse spectacular landscapes from a unique, bird's-eye view.



VENICE TO AMSTERDAM

Day 1: Depart for Venice

Start your holiday with a chauffeured transfer to the airport before taking the short flight to Venice, and settling in at the spectacular, canal-side Baglioni Hotel Luna, moments away from St Mark's Square and Harry's Bar. The inspired creations of Michelin-starred executive chef Alberto Rossetti at the hotel's award-winning Canova Restaurant are impossible to resist.

Day 2: The treasures of Venice

Relax and enjoy an indulgent breakfast at the Caffè Baglioni, before a private walking tour with an expert guide who'll show you the city's treasures and unexplored gems. After queue-jump entry to the Doge's Palace, you have a free afternoon to discover the rest of the city, take a gondola ride among the winding waterways, or learn about Murano's glass-blowing heritage.

Day 3: Across the Alps

Embark on a water taxi transfer to the Venezia Santa Lucia Station where you'll step aboard the iconic *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*. You'll be welcomed with a glass of Prosecco, and enjoy a three-course lunch in the restaurant car as you pass through the rural fields of Northern Italy en route to Austria, the spectacular Brenner Pass and the snow-capped peaks and mountain meadows of central Europe's Alpine ranges into Switzerland. Tuck into a selection of pastries in the comfort of your cabin, or the fineries of one of the train's new Grand Suites, complete with double bed and en-suite bathroom. In the evening, freshen up for a four-course dinner in the elegant dining car, before settling in for the night.

Day 4: Paris to Amsterdam

Enjoy breakfast in your cabin

before a brief stop in Paris, and speed towards Amsterdam on the final leg of your train journey, where your hotel is a short hop from the station and within walking distance of the historic centre of the city. Meander alongside the glistening canals by foot or by bicycle, cross over the clusters of bridges, relax at an al fresco cafe and soak up every drop of culture.

Day 5: Amsterdam

The day is yours to explore worldly wonders in the Rijksmuseum, feast your eyes on the masterpieces of the Van Gogh Museum, pay a visit to Anne Frank House, or amble around Jordaan's captivating galleries, pubs and quirky markets.

Day 6: Amsterdam to UK

Make your way to the airport for your flight back to the UK, where your chauffeur awaits to see you home.



Sustainability at sea

Tradewind Voyages have a unique philosophy: that ocean voyages should be powered by nature. And, their aim is simple. They use sails, rather than engine power, for around 70% of each and every season, creating a true sailing experience. It's a rare opportunity to connect with the natural world, with voyages planned to make the most of the prevailing winds, currents and weather conditions, wherever in the world the ship is positioned.

Life onboard Golden Horizon

With its expansive wooden decks and its stylishly appointed cabins, Golden Horizon – the world's largest sailing ship – is as spectacular as its voyages suggest. Indeed, beyond the sheer romance of the sails and rigging, you'll be treated to a full range of amenities that wouldn't be out of place in a luxury hotel. There's the accommodation itself – elegantly appointed cabins and suites, some with private balconies and all with sea views. Then, there are no fewer than three swimming pools, including a deep dive pool, as well as gym and spa for a spot of pampering between ports. Throw in a library, five bars and two restaurants, and you'll have plenty to occupy your time when you're not out exploring.



Adventures like no other

Perfectly combining a rich sailing heritage with the best in modern luxury, Tradewind Voyages offer the chance to explore the world's oceans aboard a traditional sailing ship. Following the sun, you'll make the most of the winds and currents to discover remote destinations as nature intended, sailing off the beaten track in truly sustainable style.



MAURITIUS, MADAGASCAR & EAST AFRICA

16-DAY OCEAN CRUISE & STAY

This is a rare chance to explore the remote islands of the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Sail in style from Mauritius, where you'll enjoy a 5-star stay, via Reunion to nature-rich Madagascar and volcanic Comoros, joining expert guides who'll shine a light on the rich habitats and unique cultures of these far-flung island idylls. Along the way, you'll be treated to superb full-board dining along with a programme of shore excursions designed to bring each destination to life.

Prices start from £4,965 pp. incl. UK airport lounge access, return flights, transfers, 2 nights pre-cruise stay in Mauritius with breakfast & a 13-day cruise aboard *Golden Horizon* incl. all meals, drinks & shore excursions. For a full itinerary and all inclusions, visit wexas.com/183770.

In fact, the dining is a real highlight, with a range of culinary options focussing on health and sustainability alongside classic favourites and a wide selection of vegan and vegetarian dishes. You're also guaranteed a true taste of each region, with ingredients sourced fresh from local suppliers.

And, there are a host of superb experiences to enjoy onboard, too, with a marina platform geared up for kayaking and snorkelling and a lecture theatre where you'll be treated to expert presentations on the likes of maritime history, geography

and astronomy. You'll also have the opportunity to enjoy optional activities from wine tastings to movie nights under the stars.

Worldwide voyages

From the Mediterranean and Middle East to the Indian Ocean and Indonesia, Tradewind Voyages portfolio is truly world-spanning. But, rather than simply ticking off the highlights, each itinerary is curated with adventure in mind, taking in hidden beaches and ports while showcasing the rich culture of each destination in intimate detail through

a programme of immersive shore excursions. And, there are always days at sea planned in, bringing to life the concept of tall ship sailing. You'll even be encouraged to take the wheel and experience the thrill of helming a ship under full sail.

Inspired? Get in contact with a Wexas cruise specialist on 020 7838 5958 or take advantage the featured itineraries.



SRI LANKA TO KUALA LUMPUR

18-DAY CRUISE & STAY

Discover wildlife-rich national parks, historic towns and unspoilt beaches on this ultimate Asian adventure. You'll set sail from bustling Colombo, calling into remote ports and hidden bays to discover unique cultures and rare wildlife across the islands and coastlines of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. As you explore, you'll enjoy the very best in regional dining paired with inclusive drinks and a series of curated excursions, led by experts in their field.

Prices start from £3,830 pp. incl. UK airport lounge access, return flights, transfers, 4 nights accommodation with breakfast & a 12-day cruise aboard *Golden Horizon* incl. all meals, drinks & shore excursions. For a full itinerary and all inclusions, visit wexas.com/183773.

Sailing Away with Swan Hellenic

Pierre Thomas, Director of Expedition Operations, tells Traveller about exploring the seven seas



WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT EXPEDITION CRUISING?

Expedition cruising allows passengers to explore the most extraordinary places on earth. We also give them the company of like-minded people and renowned experts, who offer eye-opening lectures and are on hand to answer

informal questions and discussions throughout the cruise. So, when they choose Swan Hellenic to 'see what others don't', they can be sure they will do so with the full perspective of real insight into the history, culture, wildlife, flora, geology and geography of the place.

Our curated itineraries combine well- and lesser-known destinations. The aim is to bring our guests to travel

comfortably 'deeper' in the destination – going as far as possible from the beaten path. Antarctica remains popular, but the Pacific Ocean Islands and Russian Far East are also in great demand.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ITINERARIES SPECIAL?

Our itineraries have been carefully developed to minimise days at sea, and we aim to take our guests to see what others don't.

While traditional expedition companies tend to focus on the polar regions, we plan to offer cultural expeditions to all seven continents. In the North, we are working on exclusive itineraries in the Russian Arctic. Other countries on our itineraries include New Zealand, Japan, Papua New Guinea and Canada.

Historically, Swan Hellenic were pioneers, taking guests to places others had only dreamt about. We are meticulous





about every aspect of our cruises – and have been for 70 years. Today, we sail to places unreachable by others, seek immersive experiences, and make discoveries that change the way we see the world.

For me personally, I am still excited by the spectacular and yet relatively unexplored scenery and wildlife of Kamchatka and the Russian Far East. The same can also be said for the areas around the Franz Josef Land archipelago. Another personal favourite is to explore Papua New Guinea along with Raja Ampat & The Philippines but there are so many exciting itineraries to choose from.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY ON BOARD INVOLVE, FOR BOTH YOUR GUESTS AND YOUR STAFF?

The exciting truth is that there is no such thing as a typical day of expedition cruising. The most unexpected encounters with incredible landscapes and wildlife can occur at any time and are so often a highlight!

Guests will however wake to a beautiful breakfast, either cooked or continental during which they can enjoy the view. They will then make their way to our Concierge managed full-service changing room 'Basecamp' to prepare for the day ahead.

The team will brief all guests on the technical aspects of the day before setting off in small groups for whichever activities are available. Likely options include kayaking, expeditions in zodiacs, snorkeling or hiking all aimed at discovering areas of outstanding interest and beauty.

Back on board is always a great chance to exchange stories over lunch. Attendants will take care of all the relevant kit and equipment in Basecamp and the afternoon will vary by destination offering expert lectures or the opportunity of further expeditions or excursions. Destinations will offer quite busy programmes but there is always time to lounge on the extensive decks enjoying seascapes and wildlife. We have a panoramic sauna, a salon, retail opportunities and a library, so plenty of opportunity for a little down time when guests are done exploring their interests for philosophy, poetry or photography with our experts.

The evening will be centred around our elegant but informal dining followed by a piano performance, a chance to play a board game, cards or to enjoy stargazing under crystal clear skies.

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF EXPEDITION OPERATIONS INVOLVE?

Just like an expedition cruise, no two days are the same.

Primarily there is a great deal of planning and coordinating future itineraries in conjunction with the other Expedition Leaders, the Destination Management Director and our CEO.

Guest lectures are so important to the Swan Hellenic cruise experience. Whether they concern history, culture, wildlife, flora, geology or geography, a lot of time is spent contacting, interviewing and hiring the right individuals to ensure the right expertise and best possible experience for our guests.

It's much the same for our Expedition Leaders with great consideration given to, not only the academic background, but the personality, approachability and willingness to share knowledge.

There are plenty of other logistical tasks around the storage and usage of zodiacs and kayaks, the coordination of shore excursions and the standard operating systems and procedures to ensure the smooth, safe operation of our sailings.

My favourite part, however, is simply representing Swan Hellenic globally. I love to discuss our itineraries with key travel partners like Wexas, and wherever possible, assisting to ensure that those who book with Swan Hellenic, are very well looked after on board.



Pioneers in expedition cruising

Arctic • Antarctica • Russian Far East • Rest of World

As recognised world leaders and pioneers in expedition cruising, Swan Hellenic have been taking clients to the planet's remotest regions for 70 years. It's a unique heritage, showcased across a globe-spanning range of voyages, packed full of authentic, intimate and unforgettable moments. It's all complemented by an onboard air of elegant sophistication across their new fleet of boutique-luxury ships, Think Scandinavian design, complemented by a wealth of superb amenities, from the very latest ice-class technology to state-of-the-art fitness and spa facilities and world-class dining.



Far East Arctic Highlights

20-day expedition cruise & stay

Sail off the beaten track to explore the Arctic wonders of the Russian Far East. It all begins with a journey-breaking stay in Anchorage, Alaska, before a further night in remote Nome where you'll board your boutique expedition ship. You'll then be treated to two weeks of jaw-dropping discoveries as you encounter polar bears and walruses, and get a taste of the indigenous cultures that call this far-flung wilderness home.

Prices start from £15,795 pp incl. flights, two nights pre-cruise stay, two-nights post-cruise stay, all transfers & a 15-day cruise incl. all meals, drinks & excursions.

Special offers from Swan Hellenic

Book by 16th June 2021

- » Save 20% off brochured fares, available on all cruises and cabin types
- » Receive US\$250 per person on-board credit
- » Zero single supplements available on all cruises

Find out more about Swan Hellenic's new ships and the destinations they sail to, as well as the latest prices and special offers, at wexas.com/swan-hellenic.

PRIOR TO JOINING SWAN HELLENIC, YOU ALREADY ENJOYED AN EXCITING CAREER, WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?

There are so many highlights with many more still to come!

I was very fortunate to spend 10 years in the Galapagos Islands as a Naturalist Guide and Expedition Leader working with fantastic teams of people. During this time, I have one particular memory, where I found myself in a zodiac in the middle of a feeding frenzy of Bryde's Whales, Orcas, Blue Footed Boobies, Frigates and Sea Lions. It's such a great example of the exciting and unpredictable nature of expedition travel.

Elsewhere, I have been lucky to swim with Dolphins in the open ocean. I have snorkelled among Hammerhead Sharks on a number of occasions. Back on land, I have crossed the Andes Mountain Range by motorbike, travelling from Peru through Bolivia, Chile and Argentina with incredible landscapes ranging from the Altiplano to the salt flats, desert, and cold wet forests in the Aysen region of the Chilean coast.

Although different destinations, I am delighted that Swan Hellenic will travel down through South America with two sailings on SH Vega late 2022 with 'The Caribbean and North Brazil Discovery' and 'South America East Coast Discovery.'

YOU SPEAK IN FIVE LANGUAGES ABOUT MANY PLACES AND TOPICS. WHICH ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?

My ancestor, Lucien De Puydt worked under the French effort to determine the location for the excavation of the Panama Canal, so this is a topic that I love to discuss with guests. Meanwhile, Cuba is another destination that I have visited many times and try to return to whenever possible.

My early years were spent in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) so it is also very important to me to discuss the challenges faced by the West Coast of Africa.

Fundamentally, I am passionate about sharing experiences with like-minded individuals. With small ships and exciting destinations on the horizon for Swan Hellenic, I'm in the best possible position to do so.

SWAN HELLENIC ARE DUE TO LAUNCH NEW SHIPS SOON – CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THEM?

We are excited to welcome two brand-new, 5-star expedition cruise ships, SH Minerva arriving in November 2021 and SH Vega in April 2022. These ships will accommodate 152 guests in 76 spacious staterooms and suites, the majority with large balconies. Unlike the majority of our competitors, we have chosen the Polar Code 5, a class that allows year-round operation in polar water. This ultimately extends our presence in the polar regions while offering increased safety thanks to a highly reinforced hull and propellers.



There is, in fact a real emphasis on safety and sustainability. We exceed all laws and regulations pertaining to pollution at sea. Our Tier III diesel electric engines reduce harmful emissions with battery power used for quiet, emission-free navigation in port and sensitive wildlife areas. Dynamic positioning systems mean our ships can avoid dropping anchor in fragile environments.

For guests' reassurance, our ships are all built with the latest hygiene technology and standards, including uv sanitised air conditioning, among other features.

From a design standpoint, the ships will feature a modern Scandinavian inspired design, showcasing unobstructed views and generous outside space. The aim was to offer large windows, both in staterooms and public spaces, accessible outside decks for wildlife watching at any location and an elegant yet unobtrusive décor. We wanted the centre of attention to be the outside – the ship is simply a tool to get there.

Our third ship a larger P6 ice-class vessel accommodating 192 guests in the same distinctive comfort and style will be arriving year-end 2022.

WHAT MEMORIES/THOUGHTS WOULD YOU MOST WANT GUESTS ON SWAN HELLENIC CRUISES TO TAKE AWAY WITH THEM?

In essence we want to bring back the spirit of cultural expedition travel. We want to enrich people's lives through travel and satisfy a deep-rooted thirst for knowledge.

After exploring a destination or region with Swan Hellenic, guests will return saying that they not only visited, but understood those destinations, making new friends along the way.

Our onboard expedition team plays such a big part in all of this, and I've no doubt that our experts will help us to achieve our goals through an in-depth understanding of their particular specialty.

Unrivalled space at sea

Introducing Regent Seven Seas Cruises

Discover why Regent Seven Seas Cruises are one of the world's favourite cruise lines, from their world-beating fleet of ultra-luxury ships to their superb programme of voyages, which take all-inclusive cruising to a whole new level.

UNRIVALLED SPACE AT SEA™

On board Regent's fleet of perfectly sized luxury ships, you'll be treated to sprawling suites, a multitude of dining options and spacious social areas with no crowds and no waiting. That's alongside a seriously impressive staff-to-guest ratio of 1:1.5, so you can be assured of the very best in personalised service.

The accommodation is, of course, a highlight. All are suites and all, save a few on Seven Seas Navigator, feature private balconies. Think marble accents, walk-in wardrobes and even private spas in the top categories. The service is also flawless, with the attendants and butlers always on hand to restock your inclusive minibar, request something off-menu or take

your order for the complimentary room service.

However, with such a fantastic array of all-inclusive dining, you won't be eating in your suite too often! There's everything from barista cafés, poolside grills and Italian pizzerias to lobster dinners, steakhouse indulgence and multi-course French delights. It all comes wine paired, with open bars serving up free-flowing champagne.

Then, alongside the lectures and library, evening entertainment includes a casino, cigar-and-cognac club and full-scale theatre. However, if you'd rather keep active, you'll find a jogging track and fully equipped gym. The spas are equally impressive. There's also plenty of innovation, with more than 200 vegan or vegetarian options





to enjoy, including Impossible™ Cheeseburgers and falafel fritters with harissa mayo. Then, in terms of technology, the line is eliminating two million plastic bottles annually with the implementation of Vero still and sparkling water filters – the same used in the world's finest, Michelin-starred restaurants. Even the complimentary WiFi is getting an upgrade, with industry-leading bandwidth across the entire fleet.

IMMERSIVE JOURNEYS

Regent's world-spanning collection of voyages take in six of the seven continents. But, while other cruise operators make do with simply sailing from port to port, Regent's immersive

approach takes things that bit further. So, while you'll be treated to the world's cultural and natural wonders, visiting everything from iconic cities to off-the-beaten-track gems, you'll also have the chance to really get under the skin of a destination.

What's more, a programme of unlimited FREE shore excursions means you can make the most of the places that matter to you, from their unique history, culture and cuisine. And, unlimited really does mean unlimited. In each and every port you visit, you'll be accompanied by expert local guides who'll use their in-depth, insider knowledge to bring each destination to life.

REGENT CHOICE SHORE EXCURSIONS

If all that wasn't enough, those that wish to delve deeper have the option to upgrade to a Regent Choice Shore Excursion. These one-of-a-kind tours take a behind-the-scenes look at the world, be it a unique cultural experience or a gourmet tour, perhaps visiting an esteemed local winery or a leading local restaurant in the company of an acclaimed chef. These unforgettable experiences are available for a small supplement.

Regent
SEVEN SEAS CRUISES



Free Extended Explorations

For bookings made by the end of April, guests will enjoy a FREE pre- and post-cruise land programme on selected 2021/22 Exotic Voyages, plus reduced deposits across all sailings. It's a chance to really make the most of your time away, as you join expert guides for an in-depth appreciation of your cruise's arrival and departure destinations. Alternatively, choose a credit of up to £1,160 per guest or £2,320 per suite.

Here, there & everywhere

Hotelier and novelist **Oana Aristide** reflects on the varied corners of the world that she has called home

SANA'A, YEMEN

My first piece of writing that got any kind of recognition was set in Yemen. Having last been there at the age of four, and largely kept indoors since girl-napping was common, I had thought I had no relevant memories of the place and tried to compensate with research. The internet told me that stained-glass windows are an architectural feature of Sana'a. But guess what? Reading that, I suddenly remembered lying in bed during a mandatory afternoon nap and staring at the kaleidoscope of colours playing on the opposite wall. In online photos, Sana'a's four, five-storey rammed earth houses look like jewel-studded gingerbread. It's so sad that they were bombed, and that all I can remember of them is that ghostly reflection.

TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

I spent most of my childhood in Transylvania, in a town so colourful and picturesque that not even communism had turned it dreary. School was in the medieval citadel, and the forest – full of deer, bears, wolves, lynx and wolverines – started just beyond our balcony. The smells there were intensely seasonal, and the citadel by virtue of its venerable age, and the way its houses sagged at the base, had acquired in our young eyes a sort of 'honorary nature' badge. Most of the kids I knew have left, there being few employment opportunities, but they still have in common a love of old places, old people, and old ways of doing things.

BLEKINGE, SWEDEN

My family being odd, we've had to craft alternative meanings of concepts whose original meanings are perfectly serviceable to most other families. For instance: home is where the mother is, and so home is the south of Sweden. Land of black lakes, red summer houses and the habit of swarming at the merest sight of sun. The place unsettled me when I first arrived, and in hindsight I probably ascribed too much of the distress to our move and too little to the generic difficulties of teenage years. Nowadays Blekinge is where we meet for Christmas, Easter and birthdays, a place reassuring in its calm and orderliness.



Oana Aristide was born in Transylvania, to parents of Romanian, Greek and Yemeni background. After the fall of communism the family emigrated to Sweden. Having previously worked as a macroeconomist, in 2018 she took on the task of converting a heritage villa on Syros into a small hotel (Hotel Aristide, opposite). Her debut novel *Under the Blue* is published by Serpent's Tail.

LONDON

I wanted to dedicate my novel to London, but was talked out of it by my editor. It would have been fitting: I moved there to write and to meet other readers and writers, and only in maybe two-three other places in the world could I so easily have found a like-minded community and accessed top cultural events, or teaching on an endless variety of subjects. To find not one, but two excellent writing groups! The South Bank! I am only worried that the people who make this environment possible, this London bohemian proletariat – creative and working, but not in well-paid City jobs – will soon no longer afford to live there.

SYROS, GREECE

I often get asked how I ended up running a hotel on a Greek island, but there is no obvious answer. Yes, clearly I fell in love with the place – I spent five consecutive summer holidays there, Syros being the first Greek island I visited. It has an urban, cultured vibe, and the architecture is suggestive of a much grander location. In winter, instead of the desertion so common on tourist islands, there are packed bars, festivals and street parties. This suited me. But the fact remains I never dreamt of living on an island, or running a hotel. I suspect the truth is much stranger: there is this place, the beach just beneath the aristocratic Vaporia neighbourhood, that weaves a kind of magic on visitors. The combination of calm, turquoise sea and faded Venetian architecture, the soundtrack of Greek chit-chat: anyone who swims there should be warned they may be forever condemned to return.





SASKATOON

WHERE URBAN VIBRANCY & WILD BEAUTY MEET

A city on the edge of nature, Saskatoon is the perfect mix of natural beauty and urban amenities. Hike along the winding river and then view a selection of the world's largest collection of Picasso linocuts. Snowshoe through forested parks and then eat at an internationally acclaimed restaurant. Spot iconic Canadian wildlife and then feel alive at one of the city's many festivals. From Indigenous history to modern art, prairie-fresh ingredients to contemporary cuisine, mile after mile of riverside trails to storied city streets, you'll make memories and meaningful connections at every turn.

Contrasts & Cultural Connections

Some of Canada's oldest evidence of human existence is found here, alongside a city with an average age of just 36. Be transformed at Wanuskewin, whose lands echo with the thundering hooves of bison and the voices of Indigenous peoples from 6,400 years ago. In the same breath, wrinkle the fabric of time and experience the rich Indigenous culture of today. This juxtaposition – of old and new, natural and imagined, historic and cutting-edge, kindness and grit – is what makes Saskatoon unique.

Let Them Eat Wheat

And more. Way more. With an abundance of independent restaurants, this city has a dining scene to make Gordon Ramsay

jealous. At every corner, you'll find soul-satisfying food, great coffee, and live music. Saskatoon doesn't stop at farm to fork. The agriculture that surrounds the city feeds the demand for food and libations – microbreweries and local distilleries abound. The best part is that you'll never dine alone. Locals love sharing experiences and connecting through the land, the food, the drink, and the celebrations. And, there's always something to celebrate in Saskatoon.

Home to nearly half of the country's farmland, this idyllic province is affectionately known as the "breadbasket of Canada." Much of what is grown on these incredibly fertile lands is exported around the globe, while some is plated up for

amazing local culinary experiences. People have been hunting and gathering on this land for thousands of years, and those roots and traditions are rich in flavour.

Incredible Experiences

With its unending horizons, iconic wildlife and neighbourly locals, Saskatoon is quickly moving from a best-kept secret to a travellers' favourite. And, there are incredible experiences everywhere, from art galleries, distilleries and working farms to wilderness hikes and scenic cruises on the beautiful South Saskatchewan River. Whatever you choose, Saskatoon is open – the space, the land, the skies, the people. Here you can find peace and serenity alongside a thriving culture and vibrant history.

Inspired? Contact a Wexas specialist on **020 7838 5958** to find out more about a holiday to Saskatoon.



Ready. Steady. Go.

Get ready to choose your own adventure as you discover the hidden gems of Saskatchewan. From century-old architecture and first-nations traditions to craft breweries and vibrant cities, this lesser-visited Canadian province hides an abundance of treasures among its vast prairies. It's *the* perfect place for a summer or autumn self-drive.

