

THE WEXAS TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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traveller



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DISHING UP THE WORLD

THIS LATEST ISSUE HAS

involved some especially pleasurable research. I had to eat some very good food – it would have been remiss of me not to – at The Providores restaurant. It's a fine showcase for the extraordinary dishes created by our lead guest, Peter Gordon, and the eclectic menu I was choosing from was full of ingredients from every corner of every continent.

Just reading through the list of dishes on offer felt like a journey and some dishes were almost itineraries in themselves, such as 'spiced dahl, stuffed tempura inari pocket, aubergine, spinach, yellowbean ginger dressing' – or India, Japan, China. This is fusion cooking, as introduced to London by New Zealand-born Peter Gordon, an art of cooking heavily influenced by his extensive travels. It appears that travel, as well as broadening the mind, expands the palate.

Peter's first trip – the classic backpacker's odyssey through South East Asia – did both. "I learnt as much about life in my first three and a half months backpacking through South East Asia as I had in my first twenty years. Everything, everyday, was a revelation. And so much of what I experienced was through the food, through sharing it."

"I met and talked to people as a result. I taught some people in Bali how to make hamburgers in exchange for them showing me how they prepared sucking pig, which included draining the blood and cooking it with rice."



Amy Sohanpaul
on the tastes
of travel



IT APPEARS THAT TRAVEL, AS WELL AS BROADENING THE MIND, EXPANDS THE PALATE

This particular instance may not have been a fair trade, but food has always been a fundamental social exchange, and an expression of shared humanity. The Ukrainian priest whom Fergal Keane meets in this issue exemplifies this, presenting his choice apricots to the author, as his country fills up with chaos.

Less poignantly, but still significantly, food is one of the great joys of travel. If people are what they eat, countries can be discovered through what they cook. A country's ingredients reflect its physical geography, its trading history, its social customs, its religious beliefs. I'm not sure you could experience a country fully without eating what the locals eat. It doesn't have to be an extreme option – *Apfelstrudel* in Austria is never going to hurt, except perhaps in the wallet, though Freddie Reynolds manages to avoid it altogether in his piece on Innsbruck.

Hong Kong, however, captured so evocatively by Dave Ward in this issue's picture story, would be unthinkable without its sizzling street food. And surely a trip to Swedish Lapland would be incomplete without cooking reindeer meat over an open fire, as Alex Stewart does in his piece about the fun to be had in a cold climate?

With or without food, there's fun to be had everywhere, whatever the weather. Jonathan and Angie Scott find it in the watery wonderland that is the Okavango Delta in Botswana, a country they have returned to time and time again, mesmerised by the beauty and the beasts of the

Delta. Alexander Robinson heads to Costa Rica, the only country in the world where more trees are planted each year than chopped down, to find out how the country is benefiting from tourism and to spot wildlife along the fabulous forest trails he follows.

In another, far older forest, Australia's Daintree, Rupert Isaacson has a different mission altogether, seeking a shaman to heal his autistic son. It's clear from his piece that the surroundings themselves have a part to play too, their dense lushness soothing the whole family. Kate Eshelby finds a different kind of lushness high in the hills of Sri Lanka, amidst tea plantations and faded colonial mansions.

The hills and mountains in Bulgaria, which I write about in these pages, could not be more of a contrast, stern and snow-covered on my visit. Yet it was an unexpectedly rich destination, in culture, in landscape, and in its fertile valleys. The food was simple but delicious, based on seasonal and local ingredients, as it always has been out of necessity. Many of the meals bore resemblance, as you'd expect, to better-known dishes in neighbouring Greece, and entertainingly, many an argument raged about which country did it better.

Had Peter Gordon been there, he'd have been able to defuse the debates, simply by pointing out that as it happens, all food is fusion. As he says, "almost all of today's national cuisines have developed as a direct result of an absorption and reinvention of foreign influences – historical fusion."



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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Editorial enquiries can be emailed to traveller@fifthfloorpublishing.com
Tel 020 7838 5998



WEXAS TRAVEL
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WEXAS enquiries
Tel 020 7589 3315
Email mship@wexas.com
Web www.wexas.com

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Advertising Dave Warne
Tel 020 7838 5818 Email david.warne@wexas.com

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

THE PEOPLE BEHIND OUR STORIES



PETER GORDON is a New Zealand-born chef, restaurateur and writer often credited as the godfather of fusion cuisine. His restaurants are Bellota and The Sugar Club in Auckland, and The Providores and Kopapa in London. He talks to Amy Sohanpaul about his travels and his distinctive approach to cooking.
SEE PAGE 18



CHRIS STEWART was the original drummer in Genesis, playing (uncredited) on their first two singles. He was asked to leave the band at age 17, and subsequently became an itinerant sheep-shearer. Based at El Valero, his farm in southern Spain for 25 years, he tells us which other places on earth have transformed him.
SEE PAGE 90



JONATHAN AND ANGELA SCOTT are award-winning photographers and authors based in Nairobi and the Masai Mara. Jonathan is known to TV viewers for his many BBC wildlife documentaries. In this issue they celebrate the beauty (and the beasts) of Botswana's Okavango Delta.
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NATASHA KUMAR's diverse paintings and prints reconcile her Indian roots and British upbringing with a combination of vivid colour and artistic precision. Her RASA collection featured in this issue is inspired by the Mughal architecture of Rajasthan.
SEE PAGE 60



RUPERT ISAACSON was born in London and now lives in Austin, Texas. He is best known for his book *The Horse Boy*, about a journey to Mongolia to help heal his autistic son Rowan. He meets a shaman in the Daintree, Queensland.
SEE PAGE 44



FREDDIE REYNOLDS is a writer, and co-editor of *Renegade*, the alternative travel magazine. He is currently travelling through Europe, mostly on foot, and in this issue reports from Innsbruck.
SEE PAGE 22



KATE ESHELBY loves nothing more than poring over atlases plotting her next adventure. She specialises in Africa, but has written and photographed from over half the world's countries. We find her in Sri Lanka.
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DAVE WARD is an accomplished and widely travelled photographer, as well as Digital Content Editor at WEXAS. He has spent time in New Zealand, South America, Southeast Asia, India and Nepal, and in this issue shows us street life, Hong Kong style.
SEE PAGE 14



ALEX ROBINSON is an award-winning travel writer and photographer, a specialist in Latin American and Southeast Asia and the author of Bradt and Footprint guides to Brazil, Belize, Bahia and London – with kids. He reports from Costa Rica.
SEE PAGE 54



MELANIE BROWN is a New Zealand-born wine expert who has worked in the London restaurant scene for over ten years. She established The New Zealand Cellar in 2014 to support the best producers and winemakers in the country and to supply the UK with a greater variety of NZ wines.
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ALEX STEWART has been writing about trekking and outdoor pursuits for more than a decade, producing guides to the Alps, New Zealand, Peru and Kilimanjaro for Trailblazer, Bradt and Cicerone among others. Here he travels to Swedish Lapland for a winter adventure.
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On the cover: Detail from a chapel fresco, Bulgaria, by Amy Sohanpaul.

On these pages (clockwise from left): Botswana by Jonathan and Angela Scott. Sri Lanka by Kate Eshelby. Hong Kong by Dave Ward. Bulgaria by Amy Sohanpaul. Swedish Lapland by Fredrik Broman.

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DREAM ON...

OMAN'S 3,000-KILOMETRE

coastline ranges from wide, sandy beaches to rocky outcrops, natural bays and harbours, lagoons and a scattering of offshore islands. The small fishing village of Yiti, which sprang up where Wadi Aday feeds into the sea, lies 25 km southeast of Muscat. While the village itself is sleepy and not in itself a draw, the neighbouring beach is a lure for a growing number of campers and day trippers from the capital. Visitors invariably linger till sunset, when the normally capuccino-coloured sand burns vivid red. The inland route from Muscat to Yiti is carved through rugged mountains, and beyond this point the Gulf Coast road leads further south, along to the turtle-nesting beaches of Ras Al Jinz.

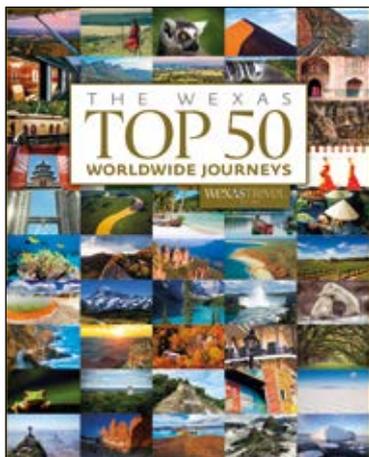
There's more to Oman than dreamy beaches. Inland, the stars burn especially bright over the vast dunes of Wahiba Sands, the perfect place to camp for a night or two. The mountain villages, like Jebel Akhdar, are unspoilt, and the high peak of Jebel Shams has staggering views over the 1000-metre-deep Wadi Nakhr Gorge. The mountain valley of Wadi Bani Awf is spectacular too, as is the majestic Nakhal Fort, built in 630 and used for the next thousand years to defend its precious oasis from attacks by enemy tribes.

But perhaps the most surprising turn visitors can take in this arid country is a trip to the post-monsoon tropical paradise of Salalah in the far south near the Yemeni border, where frankincense and fruit trees fill the mountainsides and the green abundance makes you doubt your bearings.





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WEXAS TRAVEL's top experts have put their heads together to bring you a definitive collection of fabulous holidays around the world. Whether you're dreaming of the perfect African beach-and-safari trip, exploring the mesmerising mountain peaks and temples of Bhutan, taking a ride through the National Parks of California, Nevada and Arizona, or combining rainforests, beaches, reefs and billabongs down under, *The WEXAS Top 50 Worldwide Journeys* is filled with tantalising escapes anywhere you ever imagined you might travel. The proposed itineraries are endlessly adaptable and extendable, giving you a choice of holiday ideas – and lingering memories – to last a lifetime.



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NOTICEBOARD



Heston Blumenthal returns for Margaret River Gourmet Escape 2014

Stellar line-up announced for the annual taste-off

More than 30 of the world's best chefs, including Rick Stein, Peter Gilmore (Quay, Sydney) and Frank Camorra (MoVida, Melbourne and Sydney), will don their whites alongside Heston Blumenthal to celebrate Western Australia's renowned restaurants, winemakers, artisanal producers and spectacular natural scenery in the annual Margaret River Gourmet Escape from 21 to 23 November 2014.

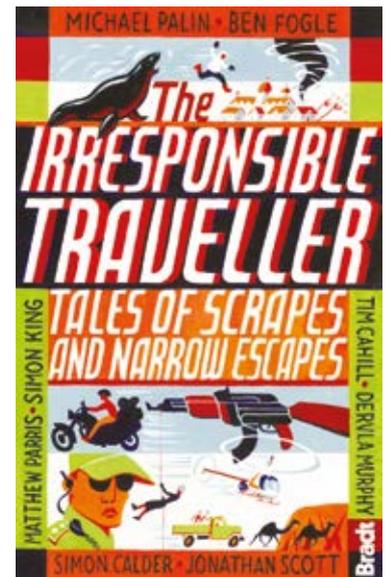
This year's line-up, announced to the media in partnership with WEXAS at London's Mandarin Oriental, is the event's most exciting and high-profile to date, and the festival has swiftly become an essential stop on every foodie's calendar. Other names heading for the Gourmet Village at Leeuwin Estate Winery include Massimo Bottura (Osteria Francescana, Modena), Guillaume Brahimi (Guillaume, Sydney and Bistro Guillaume, Melbourne and Perth), George Calombaris (The Press Club, Melbourne), Hadleigh Troy (Restaurant Amusé, Perth) and Matt Stone (Greenhouse, Perth and Silo, Melbourne). Blumenthal, who is returning for a second successive year, said, "I don't think there is any other food event on the planet like this," and WEXAS MD Steve Allen commented, "I'm delighted that WEXAS TRAVEL has been chosen to be the exclusive UK travel partner for this November's Gourmet Escape."

WEXAS TRAVEL has exclusive itineraries available for the festival from £1,995 per person including international flights, accommodation, car hire and tickets to all key events. The 2013 festival was an enormous success, and this year's event is sure to sell out swiftly. Call any WEXAS TRAVEL Australia specialist on **020 7838 5985** who will be happy to tailor-make your perfect holiday to Western Australia to coincide with the festival.



Unlikely escapades

Published to mark Bradt's 40th anniversary, *The Irresponsible Traveller* is a light but edgy collection of travellers' tales celebrating the type of offbeat experiences that have helped establish Bradt as a favourite with adventurous travellers. Among the memorable stories are contributions by WEXAS TRAVEL Honorary Presidents Michael Palin, on camel-mustering in the outback, and Jonathan and Angela Scott, on surviving tropical diseases, while former *Traveller* editor (and current contributing editor) Jonathan Lorie gets drenched and spooked on Offa's Dyke. One of the most striking stories is of a terrifying encounter faced by *Traveller*



regular Alex Robinson. He tells a tale tight with tension, of being held up at gunpoint on a lonely road in Brazil. Fortunately he lived to tell it (and write a rather more relaxed piece on Costa Rica for this issue).

The Irresponsible Traveller is published by Bradt Travel Guides in paperback, priced £10.99. The book is available at a 50% discount at www.bradtguides.com until the end of September. This offer is extended exclusively to WEXAS members to 31 October, so you can trial a copy before buying as a gift for friends – simply enter the discount code WEXAS at the checkout.



In pictures: Surf & turf where the vines meet the sea – chefs and guests gather at the 2013 Margaret River Gourmet Escape festival.

EVENTS

Mondrian and his Studios/Nasreen Mohamedi

To 5 October

An intriguing dual show of abstract art at Tate Liverpool that reveals exciting and unexpected links between the stark, bold lines of the Dutch modern master and Mohamedi's lyrical paintings, her subversion of the modernist grid and detailed drawings of suspended diagonal lines, triangles and spheres.

www.tate.org.uk

The Traveller's Film Club

Thursday 9 October and Thursday 13 November

Waterstones Piccadilly and Eland present screenings of films about great travel writers of the twentieth century. Adventurer and author Benedict Allen introduces his BBC documentary following in the footsteps of Patrick Leigh Fermor, and Middle East scholar and writer Peter Clark presents original footage and two spliced documentaries about Wilfred Thesiger.

www.waterstones.com/waterstonesweb/events/

Primrose: Early Colour Photography in Russia

To 19 October

Part of the UK-Russia Year of Culture, this Photographers' Gallery London exhibition examines the development of colour technology and the social transformations that altered the role of photography in Russian society from the 1860s to the 1970s. Includes work by Pyotr

Pavlov, Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Boris Mikhailov and many others.

www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Pangaea: New Art from African and Latin America

To 2 November

Still time to catch this gorgeous exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery as featured in our last issue, bringing together the work of 16 contemporary artists and their diverse cultures and creative practices. Visit by 28 September to also see *Abstract America Today*, an exciting range of work celebrating the legacy of abstraction.

www.saatchigallery.com

Joan Fontcuberta: Stranger Than Fiction

To 9 November

The Media Space gallery at the Science Museum hosts Fontcuberta's first major UK exhibition, in which six independent narratives use the storytelling capabilities of photographic imagery to create a reality that is convincing, mischievous and compelling, with strange species and landscapes at the centre of it all.

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

Disobedient Objects

To 1 February

From suffragette teapots to protest robots, this striking v&a exhibition examines the powerful role of objects in movements for



© JOAN FONTCUBERTA

social change around the world, and demonstrates how political activism drives a wealth of ingenuity and collective creativity that defy standard definitions of art and design.

www.vam.ac.uk

Festival Ile-de-France

7 September to 13 October

The annual festival marks the end of the summer with concerts spread all over Paris and the local region, at venues selected for their beauty and cultural significance. You can visit chateaux, private mansions, barns and gardens to listen to classical, jazz, spiritual, folk and modern music.

www.festival-idf.fr

Ming: 50 Years that Changed China

18 September to 5 January

Exquisite porcelain, gold, jewellery, furniture, paintings, sculptures and textiles from museums across China and the rest of the world make up this fascinating British Museum exhibition about

IN FOCUS...

MULTIPLIED 2014

"Now in its fifth edition, *Multiplied* has a particularly international feel this year, bringing together some of the most influential galleries from across the world, representing countries including South Africa, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Spain and the USA. Taking place at Christie's South Kensington, the fair showcases print, digital art and multiples, artists' books and photographs by some of the world's most exciting contemporary artists including UK creatives Sir Peter Blake, Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas, international stars like Siah Armajani (Iran), Daido Moriyama (Japan) and Mai-Thu Perret (Switzerland), as well as emerging talent from London's leading art universities."

Murray Macaulay, Director
www.multipliedartfair.com

17 TO 20 OCTOBER

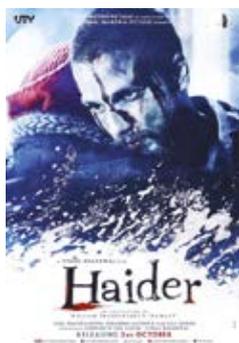


ON RELEASE

**Human Capital**

Italian neo-noir directed by Paolo Virzi and starring Valeria Golina and Tribeca Film Festival Best Actress winner Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, based on the American novel by Stephen Amidon. The destinies of two families are irrevocably bound together when a cyclist is hit by a jeep in this singular true-life story about love, class, ambition and the value of human life.

UK release 26 September.

**Haider**

Adaptation of *Hamlet* that transfers the political intrigue and sexual conflicts of the original play to present-day Kashmir. This is the third in director Visal Bhardwaj's Shakespeare trilogy after *Maqbool* (2003) and *Omkara* (2006), based on *Macbeth* and *Othello* respectively, and stars sultry Bollywood superstars Shahid Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor as the pained prince and his existentially challenging love interest.

UK release 2 October.

**Sacro gra**

The first documentary to win a Golden Lion, the top prize at the Venice International Film Festival, Gianfranco Rosi's film, inspired by Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, depicts assorted lives along the Grande Raccordo Anulare, the ring-road highway that encircles Rome. This self-contained world repeats and reinvents itself daily and is populated by a memorable cast of oddball characters.

UK release 7 November.

Opposite page:
Orogenesis: Watkins,
2004 from the
'Orogenesis' series
by Joan Fontcuberta

Chinese artists from a specific time in the Ming Dynasty, who were encouraged to absorb global influences.

www.britishmuseum.org

Roman Ostia: Ancient Ruins, Modern Art

24 September to 21 December
Bringing together marbles, mosaics and antiquities from the archaeological site of Ostia near Rome, with the work of modern Italian artists Umberto Mastroianni and Ettore De Conciliis, this exhibition at the Esoterick Colleection in London reflects on the enduring nature and constantly changing character of human creativity.

www.esoterickcollection.com

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2014

23 October to 30 August 2015
The Natural History Museum welcomes charismatic animal portraits, dramatic landscapes and provocative photojournalism, showcasing 100 award-winning images from the 50th WPP.

www.nhm.ac.uk

Winter Festival

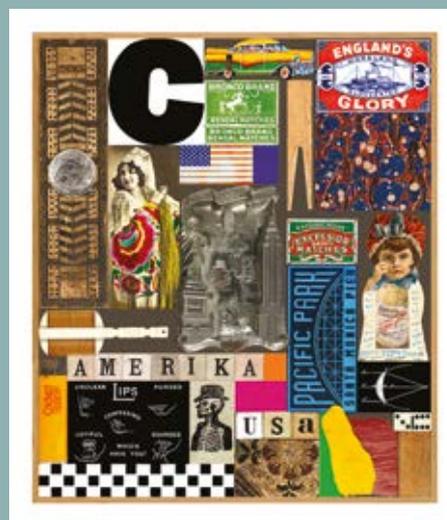
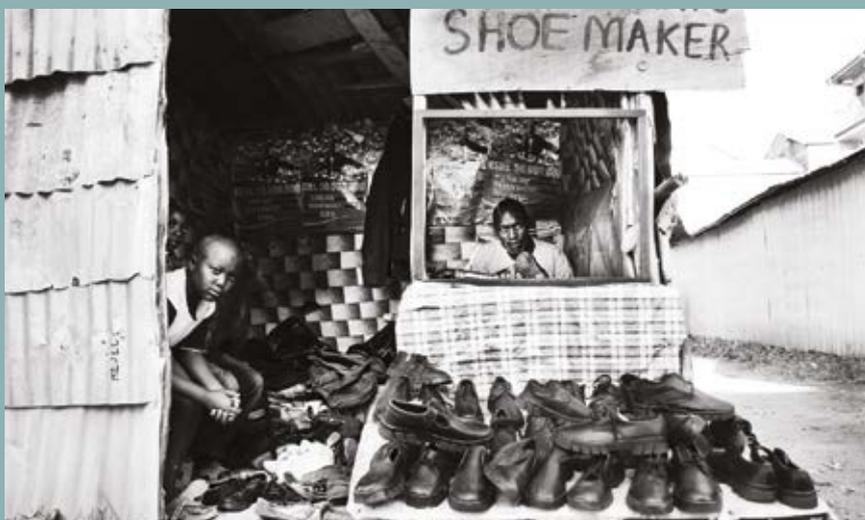
November to January
The Southbank Centre's annual jamboree celebrates all things festive, featuring Christmas markets, special installations and spectacular shows including the returning *Slava's Snowshow*, with breathtaking visual effects for family audiences that see the Royal Festival Hall engulfed in a blizzard.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Below (left to right):
Ambra Vernuccio,
Fundi Wa Viatu, the Shoemaker, Umoja, Nairobi, 2013.
Courtesy of Kamba Fine Art

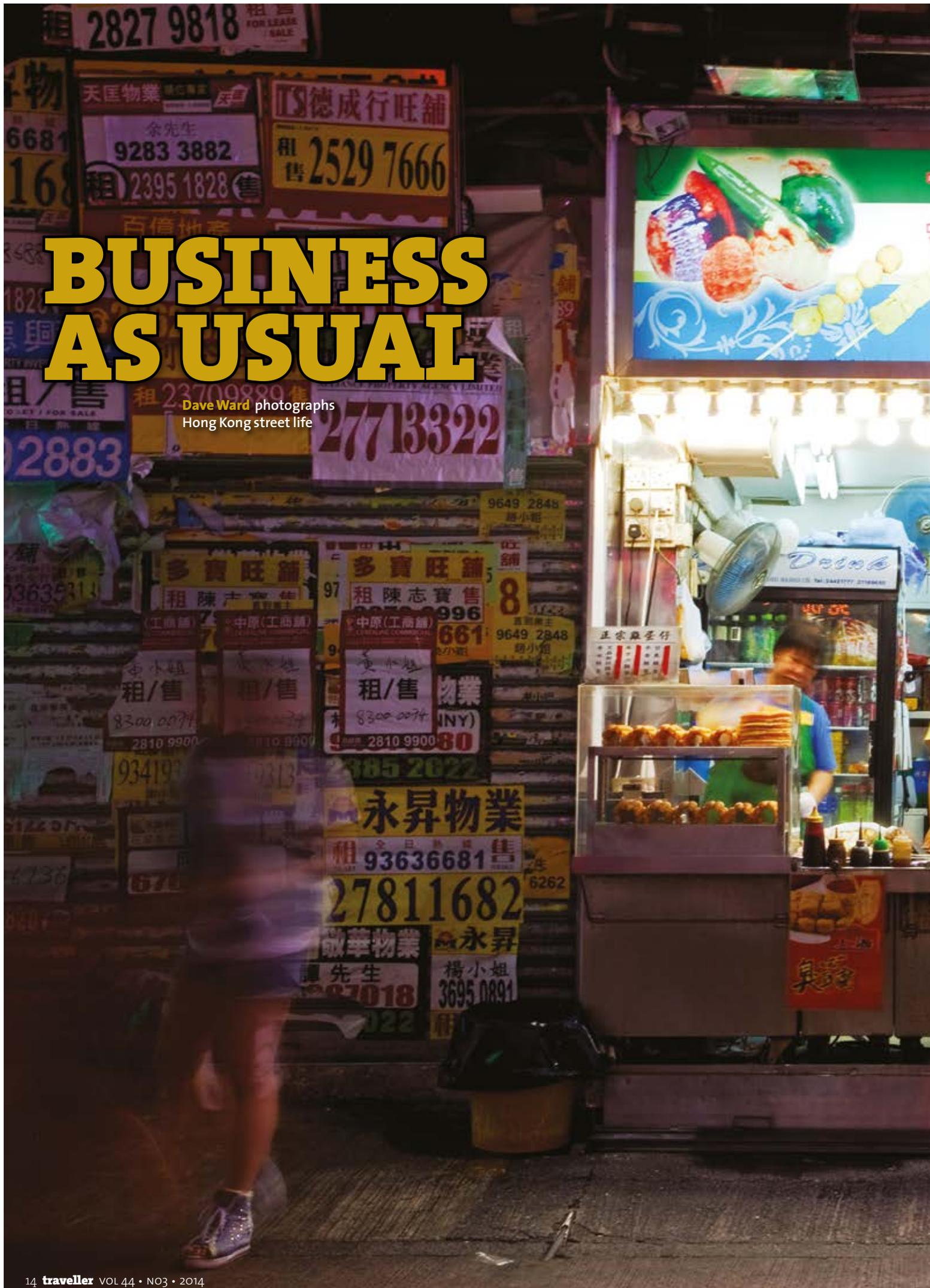
Phyllis Galembo,
Les Indiens, Jacmel, Haiti, 2005.
Courtesy of Galerie Alex Daniels, Reflex Amsterdam and Phyllis Galembo

Sir Peter Blake, *USA Series - Pacific Park*, 2014. Courtesy of CCA Galleries



BUSINESS AS USUAL

Dave Ward photographs
Hong Kong street life



真美味

Chun Mei Mei

西洋菜街60號地下5號舖

招聘女工



FIRST-TIME VISITORS TO HONG KONG CAN BE overawed by its soaring skyscrapers and glitzy high-rises, but at street level beneath the dramatic skyline lies a never-ending maze of bustling markets on a far more human scale. The former trading post of 'Fragrant Harbour' has long been transformed into a dynamic international business centre, but street life maintains a local flavour even as hawkers trade ersatz designer fashions and the latest electrical gadgets alongside sizzling foodstuffs and other daily necessities. 



 **Previous spread:** A late-night snack stall offers a welcome break from shopping in Mongkok, Kowloon. **Clockwise from above:** Alleyway bookstall in the heart of Kowloon. Shan Tung Street, Mongkok. Seafood stall at Tai O fishing village, Lantau Island. The Ladies' Market in Mongkok. Street food is a key part of the Hong Kong market experience. The packed streets of Hong Kong are dominated by colourful signs advertising local businesses and international brands.





Tasting the World

Peter Gordon talks to Amy Sohanpaul about mixing up international cuisines



CRAB AND COCONUT LAKSA, a bream and pink peppercorn dumpling, soba noodles, a soft-boiled quail's egg, crispy shallots, coriander. It's pretty much the world in a bowl, set steaming in front of me at a table at The Providores Restaurant in London's Marylebone High Street.

I'd been here a couple of weeks previously, to interview Peter Gordon, the man behind the menu, the chef widely credited for introducing the concept of fusion cuisine to the country, in the mid-90s, when his stirring caused a real stir, bringing entirely unexpected ingredients together to create something quite new, or to enhance something quite old.

It was a sensation at the time, served up at The Sugar Club in Notting Hill on All Saints Road, "one of the most heavily policed

“
I'D BUY ALL THESE INGREDIENTS, NOT KNOWING WHAT THEY WERE, GO HOME, EXPERIMENT, COOK DINNER FOR MY FLATMATES

roads in Europe at the time," according to Peter, "with three crack dens located within one block of the restaurant." This didn't deter foodies, celebrities and critics from flocking there, to sample the innovative fare on offer.

Fusion cooking is a common thing now, as Peter says, "Everyone does it – I don't feel special anymore!" He's sending himself up, finding humour in the statement because when he first started serving his dishes, most people were wowed, but a celebrity chef or two who shall remain nameless took broad swipes at the concept, dubbing it 'confusion' food.

And it has to be said, in lesser hands it has the potential to be just that, a messy melange. It takes finesse, imagination and flair to take such far-flung ingredients and combine them in a way that persuades palates that they were meant to be together, and Peter excels in the art.

That he cooks at all could be seen as surprising, given an early experience that might easily have put him off cooking for life. "I was seven, and helping dad in the kitchen. He was deep-frying fish and oysters in dripping. I stood on a wobbly stool to take a closer look, fell off – and unfortunately grabbed the deep-fryer and tipped it all over my head." The resultant burns kept him off school for a year, in hospital for months, but couldn't keep him out of the kitchen, far from it. "In fact I have a macabre love of deep-fried foods."

His interest in cooking aged seven was already too well entrenched to be deflected by an accident. "Mum loves to tell the story how she came in one afternoon, when I was four, and found me clipping recipes out of *Woman's Weekly* and putting them into a scrapbook." As a teenager, he would save pocket money to buy equipment and ingredients.

Still, although the family ate well – incredibly well, given the surfeit of local meat (the carcasses stored in the garage from the rafters, every bit used, the fat rendered for dripping), fresh vegetables (Peter and his siblings each had their own plot in the garden and grew what they liked) and seafood (caught and hauled in early morning before school), it was simple fare. The traditional meat-and-two-veg backdrop, not the obvious foundation for a man whose culinary language is now international, as expressed in dishes such as roast yoghurt-marinated pigeon on seeded potato quinoa rösti and roast cauliflower with *umeshu* plum relish.

The transformation from traditional to experimental cooking began in Australia. Peter arrived in Melbourne aged 18. “It was Melbourne, with its mixed population, people from Greece, Italy, Morocco, Turkey and Vietnam, that improved my palate and improved my food-shopping abilities – a much underrated skill! And in those days in Melbourne, even on apprentice wages, you could afford to eat out all the time. So I learnt that spaghetti didn’t come out of a can in tomato sauce. It was the first time I tried a cappuccino, or an avocado, the first time I tried olive oil, the first time I had a Thai meal, or a Szechuan meal... I’d never had an Indian meal, I had Moroccan food for the first time. I found it all so exciting.”

The restaurants he worked in were creating classic European dishes, though Peter loved working in them, for the training. But on the whole they were “Very Steak Diane, stuffed grapefruits... and I’m sure there was a duck in orange sauce.”

It was out-of-hours that Peter began creating his now distinctive unconventional dishes, heading to the Thai, Vietnamese, Greek or Italian areas of town, visiting their restaurants, and then their food shops. “I’d buy all these ingredients, not knowing what they were, go home, experiment, cook dinner for my flatmates with feta, or couscous, or something in a bottle from a Thai shop that turned out to be fish sauce...”

If Melbourne was an adventure and influenced his cooking, his subsequent backpacking trip was even more significant. “I decided I needed to work in

London eventually, and go there after visiting Bali and India.” He ended up seeing most of Southeast Asia, soaking up every influence along the way, inevitably mixing them up in the end.

Peter tried the *laksa asam* in Penang, spicy and sour; and then *laksa lemak* in Singapore, coconut-based and quite different. “Mine wasn’t like the originals, really. I’d use a different kind of noodle, not vermicelli or rice noodles but udon, because I like



soba noodles, then I wanted the sour from Penang, the coconut from the Singapore *laksa*... I wanted both, so played until I’d found the balance, pile everything up in a heated bowl, add the boiling broth and break a quail’s egg into it.”

The result, now one of his signature dishes, is what I devour in The Providores, followed by smoked Dutch eel, samphire, sesame and seaweed salad, chilli *furikake*, *ponzo* tapioca. It turns out to be beyond delicious, and I think back to our interview, when I asked him why some chefs were so sniffy about fusion cooking when he started out, and why a few still are.

“It’s strange,” he says. “Because really, every cuisine is fusion food to an extent. If the addition of a few foreign ingredients makes it inauthentic, or wrong somehow, then no cuisine would have developed as we know it now. Take Italian food – polenta is made from maize, which comes

from Mexico, tomatoes come from South America, basil is Indian... There’s nothing wrong with combinations of the above. Or any really, as long as the flavours work together. A very famous London chef, [who shall also remain unnamed], told me he thought it was a ridiculous concept. And I pointed out that on his menu he was serving a quite common pairing – foie gras with mango. Hey dude. Seriously? Mangoes don’t grow in France. Come on.”

Then he starts enthusing about a new creation, which typifies everything he’s about. “It’s crab linguine – served in a *dashi* beurre blanc, so turning a Japanese *dashi* stock into the staple beurre blanc, served with a saffron linguine, tapioca marinated in a lobster bisque, add pine nuts, and parmesan.”

It really shouldn’t work, like so much on the menu, but I’m willing to bet it does. And hoping it’s on the menu next time round.



Peter Gordon’s restaurants are The Providores and Tapa Room and Kopapa in London, and The Sugar Club and Belotta in Auckland. His cookbooks include *World in My Kitchen*, *Fusion: A Culinary Journey* and *Peter Gordon Everyday*.

SCATTERED BENEATH THE APRICOT TREES

THE ROAD EAST RAN THROUGH EMPTIED

suburbs, past shuttered businesses, silent apartment blocks and deserted lanes. It seemed only the old remained. In the clinic the previous evening – I had gone with a sprained ankle – the doctor told me: “The young have fled, the children have been taken away. Anybody who can go is leaving.” So much departure leaves a vacuum and it was filled now by thuggish men in camouflage who roared around the streets in clapped-out cars. The revolution of the outsiders, the no-hopers, the men of no property had narrowed into its final hopeless phase: a desolate city waiting for a last stand.

There could be surprises in Donetsk. One hot morning, just before the general exodus began, I walked along the banks of the Kalmius River and watched sunbathers and fishermen enjoying the stillness. A grandmother hummed a folk song to a baby in her arms. Two old men played chess. Within a few days I was downtown watching the white minibuses fill with refugees: a young couple embracing, she leaving for Russia while he stayed to fight, a mother with her hand pressed against the glass of the van window while her teenage son sat inside in tears. A current of fear ran through the city as shells fell in the suburbs.

That night we had dinner on the balcony of our hotel. A car full of militia drew up, escorting a fat man in civilian clothes and his much younger female companion. While they dined, the militia lounged outside. Suddenly two carloads of other militia appeared. These looked tougher and better armed. They surrounded the fat man’s bodyguards, disarmed them, added a few kicks and clouts for good measure, and forced them to stand with hands held against their heads. It was a humiliation. The fat man was called down to intervene. He could only smile and plead ingratiatingly for his men to be freed.

“What is going on?” I asked a local journalist. He explained that the tougher militia were from the Vostok battalion, the most feared of the gunmen in eastern Ukraine, and had been establishing their superiority over the others, a motley local crew. It ended with handshakes, the superiority of the Vostok men established.

But back to the journey east. By now we had travelled this road so many times that the militia on the checkpoints had come to know us. They asked for news of the war. We had to be careful. Telling men they were most likely doomed would not be wise. So we hedged our bets. *The Ukrainians were advancing, but who knows what would happen. War was a funny thing, it could change from day to day.* They always waved us through. The landscape of the east is beguiling, a patchwork of mine dumps and corn and sunflower fields, and rivers where anglers still waited



BBC Special Correspondent Fergal Keane returns from eastern Ukraine, where he saw the best and worst of a country at war



WHILE THEY DINED, THE MILITIA LOUNGED OUTSIDE. SUDDENLY TWO CARLOADS OF OTHER MILITIA APPEARED. THESE LOOKED TOUGHER AND BETTER ARMED

patiently for carp to bite despite the approaching rumble of artillery.

For long stretches nobody appeared. The golden corn waved in the breeze, destined to rot while the farmers waited in distant cities or fingered the triggers of their guns on roadblocks. Everywhere there was abundance. In the lanes of the villages, orange fruit lay scattered beneath the apricot trees.

Father Oleg owned some trees. They stood opposite his church near the village of Grabovo. A bear of a man



Illustration by
Luke Walwyn

physically, but with a gentle soul and the warmest of hearts, he reached into the branches to pluck the plumpest of fruit for us. These he presented with a smile. Earlier that day, he had led a memorial service for the victims of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, and he was now preoccupied with what the world thought of his people. "We are good people. We are not bad people," he said. It echoed the refrain of the old women who had said prayers for the dead near the crash site.

"What we like is to work. Always we have worked," the priest said. "What has happened is a tragedy, but we want the world to know us as kind people. Can you tell them that, please?"

Back in Donetsk that night, we listened to the shelling creep closer to the city. A militia tank raced past our hotel. The unease which had driven so many civilians to flee the city had now spread to the journalists. No sane person would trust the militia to behave in an honourable way, once the Ukrainian army entered the city. What then? Hostage-taking, being used as human shields? And so we decided to take a break, to watch from a safer distance until we knew how the story would unravel.

Leaving in the twilight was not a good idea. The militia were jumpy. Some were already drunk. At the last checkpoint, they fired in the air as we drove through. I was glad to be out: but some day, I promised myself, I would return here as a traveller. And I would go to Grabovo and find Father Oleg and thank him for his gift of decency in a desolate time.





AUSTRIAN HARVEST

Freddie Reynolds follows some fruit through Innsbruck. Pictures by the author

MY FIRST EVENING IN

Innsbruck I walked across the River Inn, headed northwest and up a slope (of course). The sun was ready to go, struggling though gathering clouds, as I looked for a view back over the city. The mountains all around, vast and pressing, seemed to grow and bubble like thunder clouds, and as I came to a particularly steep section, I watched as, quite silently, smoothly and with some speed, a small purple plum rolled around a sharp bend ahead of me, appearing suddenly and alone as if panicked. Soon it was next to me, taking racing lines and hopping drains, and then gone, rolling on down towards the river, which raged with milky meltwater – an excellent place for a hitching plum – 100 metres or more below.



Shaking *Toy Story* visions from my mind, I pushed uphill a bit further, round the bend and found the plum tree, a few sad fellow rollers squashed on the tarmac around its trunk. It seemed about right, this early and obvious realisation of ‘up’ and then more suddenly ‘down’: the rapid downward tumble towards the water, the victims at the top. And, I wondered, how can a city grow – physically, culturally, mentally – with these great mountain barriers around it, where everything rolls downhill?

Next morning (after getting lost that first evening somewhere near the bottom of the same hill, in a bar full of chain-smoking moustaches looking serious over espressos, an old Austrian drama on the tv in one corner,

a shining cigarette machine and a calendar – wrong month – for the local ‘World’s Most Exclusive Gentleman’s Club’ in the other) I walked south from my hostel, through the Hofgarten where two men in blazers – one eating a sandwich, the other smoking a cigarette – puzzled over an outdoor chess set, and then along the raging, plum-carrying inn to the Markthalle. A long, low factory-like building selling bunches of flowers and multi-coloured vegetables and exceptional cappuccino (“Ein kaffe mit milch, bitte.” “Only Italian coffee here!” “Well, yes. One of those...”), it is a centre of town, of sorts, Innsbruck having grown up around a market established over 800 years ago. Today this market still attracts buyers – predominately

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**I WONDERED,
HOW CAN A
CITY GROW
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AROUND IT?**

holidaymakers – and is a charming and calm place to start the day and hide from the rain, which was now collapsing from last night’s assembling clouds.

Outside, tourists walked around with translucent macs. But the younger locals (Innsbruck is not short on bearded hipsters and big-shoed skate kids, here for ski runs, then mountain bike trails, followed by university, with students comprising a fifth of Innsbruck’s population) shunned hoods and got wet. I joined the throngs through the Old Town, with its thick stone porticos and window frames, squat arches, yellow- and red-washed walls and pretty frescoes – some faded and ghostly, others new or updated and storybook-vibrant – but got bored of jumping through queues of people waiting for high-



Previous pages: (clockwise from left) The north bank. The Stadtmuseum. Antique shop behind the Triumphpforte. **Clockwise from left:** Lundhaus Platz, big on the city's skate scene. One of Innsbruck's magnificent doorways on the edge of the Old town. Student festival posters.

figure, oil painting on wooden board of a log cabin in Springtime Alps, box of rings dated 1893–1953...

Innsbruck is a city that has had to keep an eye on the sky – its history is peppered with destructive avalanches, and the weather is, well, Alpine – and it's a city which has had to change, too: groups were painting giant white swastikas on the Nordkette mountains overlooking the city sometime before the Anschluss, the same white paint used to paint 'Juden!' on shop fronts. And in the Stadtmuseum you can see a photograph of Hitler visiting in 1938, his right shoe in focus, the rest a demonic blur.

Each step I took, it seemed the city's personality and the plum were perhaps abiding by a similar



priced *apfelstrudel*, so decided to wander south.

Out of the Old Town, through the Triumphpforte and into the new, there's a sense of something dynamic, fresh, quite at odds with the plum's predictable trajectory, and indeed at odds, too, with the celebration of largely pre-twentieth-century history (as wonderful as it is, and really, it is) at the centre.

Here there are contemporary art galleries hidden in garages, and numerous design studios – one of which, on Mentlgasse, is so hidden between a circus of five-storey flats that I had to stop half a dozen people to ask directions. There are skate shops where you can justify using the word 'rad', and 'live jazz' bars packed with all ages,

the walls decorated with John and Yoko posters, or old hardbacks, or exhibition flyers or local artworks for sale, playing music just a little too loud and drinking drinks just a little too readily.

And among this youthful hubbub, there's also a ready sense of calm, of a city taking its own time, signposted most prominently by the tiny antique shops, some with wonderful opening hours, like '16hr–18hr Montag'. I stopped outside the window of one for some time, noting down the gems through the gritty iron-framed window: old pistols, brown-bladed pocket knives, large metal keys hung next to greasy wooden crucifixes, ivory theatre binoculars, thumb-size wooden carving of a faceless



EACH STEP I TOOK, IT SEEMED THE CITY'S PERSONALITY AND THE PLUM WERE ABIDING BY A SIMILAR SCIENCE

science, fruiting at the top and then tumbling back to the bottom of the valley, people sharing ideas and stories quickly over beers or coffees in multiple bars and cafés before they got swept away by the rushing Inn.

So it's not a city that looks in on itself, but one that looks and goes out with great gusto: just tick off the walking ropes/North Face jackets/climbing shoes, the custom-made ski shops and map shops (one of which I spent far too long in, dreaming over contours, river crossings, visiting mountain huts with my fingertips, and pestering a delightful shopkeeper for a lift to Swartz the next day). The ideas come down and, through art or academia or simple conversations over coffee – an archetypal Austrian pastime – they send them out again, alongside that bobbing plum. 

WHEN TO GO

Innsbruck and its imposing mountains are a striking short-haul, short-stay destination for winter skiing and summer hiking. Snowfall is usually reliable from December to April and some years it may come early or stay a little later. The best ski bargains can be had in March and April. With barely a pause for spring, summer starts in May, when day-time is generally bright and sunny through to the end of August, though nights can still be chilly.

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways fly direct from Gatwick to Innsbruck five times a week from December to April. Easyjet operate flights from Gatwick, Bristol and Liverpool over the winter months and in August and September.

WHERE TO STAY

BEST WESTERN PLUS GOLDENER ADLER

ADLER The Goldener Adler ('Golden Eagle') is a centrally located 4-star hotel in the pedestrian zone of Innsbruck Old Town, within easy walking distance of sights including the Golden Roof, the Imperial Palace and Imperial Church. Knowledgeable and friendly staff are on hand to assist with excursions.

HOTEL KAPPELLER In close proximity to Schloss Ambras, the Tyrolean State Museum and Maximilian I's Armoury (Zeughaus), this popular stopover's best rooms have large windows and balconies with superb views over the Alps that will inspire you to climb above the city.

GRAND HOTEL EUROPA Established in 1869, this 5-star residence effortlessly melds tradition and modernity, combining modern Italian design and Tyrolean cosiness with award-winning seasonal cuisine. Centrally located opposite the main station, the hotel saw a smart refurbish in 2010. You may want to skip your morning meal one day to savour the inventive delights of the nearby Breakfast Club.

HOTEL MAXIMILIAN A

comfortable and central 4-star boutique hotel in easy reach of the main sights, close to the river, the fashion outlets of Marktgraben and the excellent dining options on the edge of the Old Town.

INTO INNSBRUCK
GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE



(1529–95), set in a landscaped park and housing the oldest preserved *Kunst und Wunderkammer* (chamber of art and curiosities) and the Habsburgs' portrait gallery featuring works by Velázquez, Rubens and other Gothic artists. Other landmarks include the City Tower, St Anne's Tower, Maximilian I's Imperial Palace and the Imperial Church, where his mortal remains are contained in a vast cenotaph ringed by immense bronze statues representing the Emperor's ancestors.

Innsbruck's main Christmas Markets are in or within easy walking distance of the main square, and winter sports are generously catered for with nine designated areas for alpine skiing, snowboarding and cross-country skiing, as well as tobogganing, ice skating, alpine-style curling and a bobsleigh run. Partway up the slopes is a contemporary architectural landmark, the Bergisel Ski Jump, boldly designed by Zaha Hadid and the venue for international ski jumping and snowboarding events each January and February. Another modern wonder is Swarovski Crystal Worlds in Wattens, 15 kilometres from Innsbruck, a spacious park on the site of the original Swarovski factory.

IN A WORD

Topfen
(Austrian-German)
A semi-sweet cottage cheese; Nonsense ('Das ist ein Topfen')

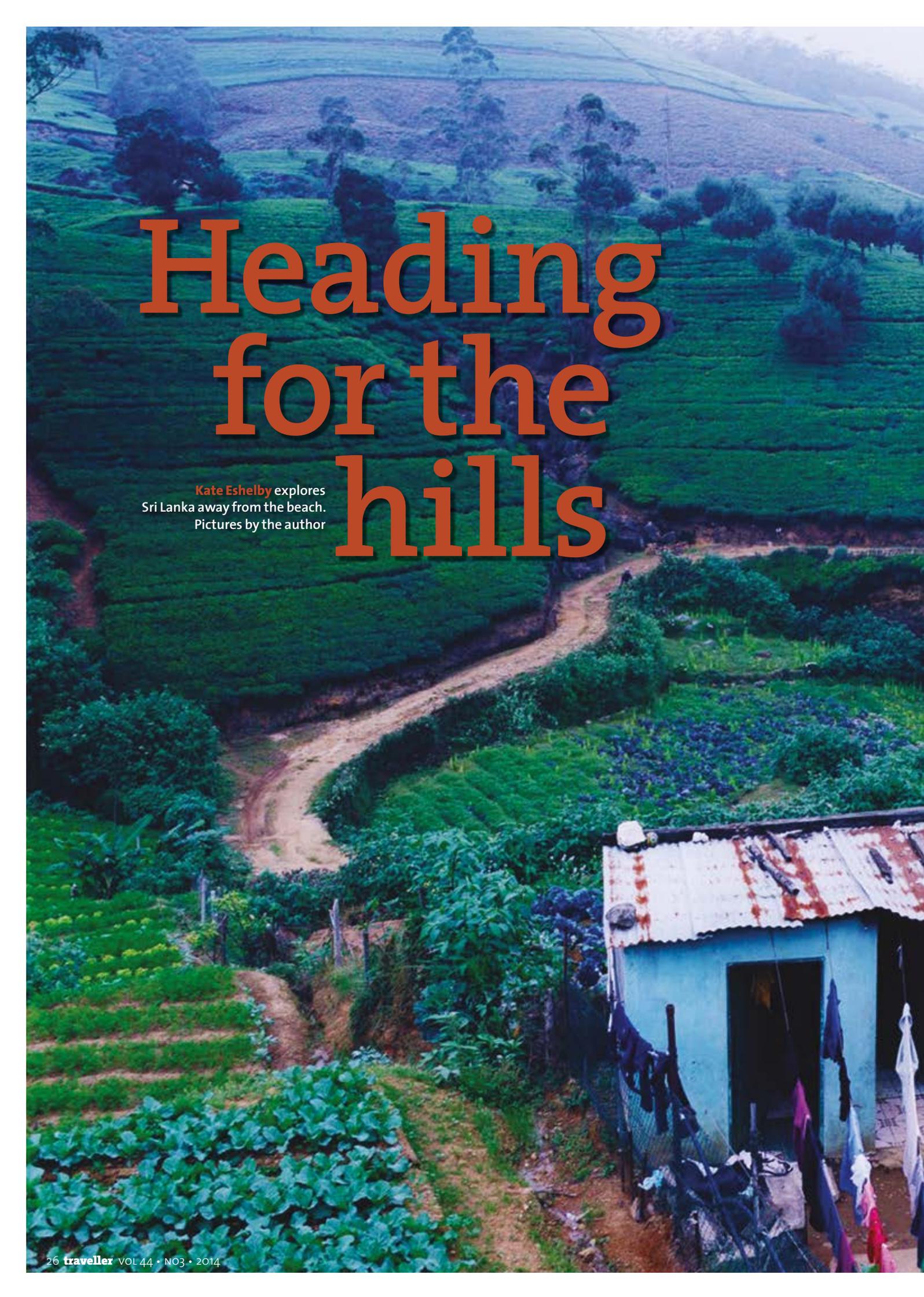
Word by Adam Jacot de Boinod, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

As the provincial capital of the Tyrol since the early fifteenth century, Innsbruck Old Town and the neighbouring parkland retain many characterful buildings that have survived into the modern era, including the city's most famous and charismatic manmade landmark, the Goldenes Dachl (Golden Roof) – a three-storey balcony decorated with 3,000 fire-gilded copper tiles built in 1500 and attached to a former imperial residence in the main square. Schloss Ambras is the Renaissance-style castle of Archduke Ferdinand II



 A three-night winter break at the Goldener Adler, including city tours, ski pass and a visit to the fairytale Romanesque Revival Neuschwanstein Castle across the German border, is priced from £459 per person. **WEXAS TRAVEL EUROPE specialist Anna Kunz** (left) will be happy to discuss your plans. Please call **020 7838 5901**, or for more ideas visit **www.wexas.com/holidays/europe/austria**



Heading for the hills

Kate Eshelby explores
Sri Lanka away from the beach.
Pictures by the author





A LONG, SNAKING LINE

of people, many dressed in white, wait to offer swathes of exquisitely prepared food and flowers to a tooth. Yes, a solitary molar, kept in a golden casket. It's only 6 am and yet they keep coming. Because this is no ordinary tooth: it's Buddha's sacred one.

The perfume of incense, among lotus, jasmine and lily flowers, is pungent. Orange flashes as monks walk past, huge elephant tusks guard the entrance to where the tooth sits and there is thunderous drumming. The sound of a hypnotic *pungi* heightens the atmosphere, which pulsates with anticipation.

"The tooth was brought hidden in the hair of a princess, from India to Sri Lanka," our driver Sajith explains. "This is one of our holiest sites, and the tooth is brought out three times daily."

Previous spread: Nuwara Eliya.

Above: View from World's End.

Opposite, clockwise from top: Highland Hindu temple and priest. Small town in the Central Highlands. Road-side temple.

We're by the lake at Kandy's Temple of the Sacred Tooth, on the tropical island of Sri Lanka – which we want to experience away from the beach. Kandy is a noisy, busy city, yet surrounded by iridescent green hills. It's part of central Sri Lanka, which is a mountain massif brimming with highland jungles and tea plantations.

When Kandy's *tuk tuks* and traffic become too much, you can escape to the Botanical Gardens that skirt the city. Outstretched avenues of towering palms shelter squabbling fruit bats. We ramble off the paths into endless groves of trees, enjoying their shade and delicious breezes. Big-leaf mahogany, satinwood, kapok and sandbox trees mingle together – with lovers hidden behind almost every one, their limbs entwined among the giant buttress roots, sitting in quiet conversation.

We are staying high above the city, escaping via a steep rural road, encircled by tropical forest. Ellerton is a traditional colonial

bungalow on a former tea estate, with the chime of grandfather clocks, birds singing outside the windows and homemade banana cake for tea. It's run as if you are staying in someone's home.

African tulip trees, heliconia and mango trees fill the surrounding garden. Precipitous forest plunges below, framed by mountains. A natural funnel into the valley overflows with gold as the sun sinks and we hear the sound of temple drumming.

From here we travel by train to Ella. It's a six-hour journey from Gampola station, built in 1870. I entertain myself by admiring the signal box, complete with numerous original controls, while the train is typically late.

The train finally chugs in, resplendently old and characterful. The track runs on high land, so it feels like we are soaring through the treetops as we look down, birds-eye view, on temples and tea plantations. Most of the doors and windows are flung open. I sit



in one of the doorways, the wind pulling my hair, watching the train hurry through the scenery, a plume of smoke billowing at the front.

Ella is just a night's stopover, breaking our journey before we head on to Yala National Park. We arrive after dark but instantly sense the bonhomie of a trekking



haven. There are similarities to Kathmandu with its low-key, backpacker cafes. Yala is our only foray into lowland Sri Lanka, and we join Leopard Safaris. “Here we have the world’s highest density of leopards,” the owner Noel says proudly.

Our visit is restricted to what is known as Yala Block 1, because the rest of the park is off-limits to the general public. We have to share all our leopard sightings with a gang of other jeeps, all revving their engines. “The problem is there are no limits to the number of tourists who can enter the park,” Noel says. In one day, however, we have seven leopard sightings. The best comes when one walks right past our vehicle, its magnificently patterned coat in full swagger.

The park has many other birds and animals too. We see lots of elephants, monkeys with old-man eyebrows, mugger crocodiles (one ravaging some storks) and spotted deer. Water buffalo wallow, land monitors bask on termite mounds, junglefowl – the national bird – strut past, and dazzling golden oriole birds dance by.

We swim in the blissfully cool Manik River and enjoy some beautiful scenery: from the

sudden breathtaking appearance of the Indian Ocean to giant rocky outcrops and lakes cloaked with water lilies, presided over by painted storks perching on the silhouettes of dead trees. Back at the camp, we eat buffalo curd (a traditional dish) with maple syrup, hoppers (like pancakes) and coconut rotis.

But soon we head back into the green mountains. Driving along Sri Lanka’s populated coast, where the majority of visitors go, seems like just an endless stream of shops, with roads built tragically close to the beaches. Yet once you climb away from the shore, you leave it all behind. Here it’s quiet, with rushing waterfalls, small villages and trees so tall they look like they’re on stilts.

One morning we go to Horton Plains, the only national park in Sri Lanka where you are allowed to walk. Arriving early, we pass whirls of mist delicately suspended between the mountain tips of Haputale Gap. The park has grassland, where samba deer graze among lipstick red rhododendron trees; and also cloud forest, where white lichen hangs from the trees like old men’s beards.

“Most of Sri Lanka’s cloud forests have disappeared, due to deforestation for tea and rubber,” Sajith says. “But this is the country’s largest remaining one.” After a couple of hours’ walking, we reach World’s End, a 870-metre perpendicular cliff, beyond which immense views reach far into the distance. We can see Udawalale National Park, where hundreds of elephants wander, and expanses of lakes and rice paddies, all laced with cloud, hang ghostlike above.

Another day we visit Poonagalla, a tea estate since 1925. The British first introduced tea to Sri Lanka and now much of the Central Highlands are tumbling plantations. In the early morning the pickers arrive with their *bindis* and golden nose-rings, carrying hand-woven baskets on their heads. “They are Tamils, brought to Sri Lanka from India to work on the plantations,” Sajith says.

Before the pickers begin, I watch a poignant moment as they all bend down and pray to the leaves of their first bush. “This is their livelihood, so the plants are sacred to them,” Sajith explains.

On our final day we visit the Buduruwagala rock carvings, cloistered in a forest clearing. These impressive figures – seven in total – are raised from the rock and soar 16 metres in height, with Buddha grandiose in the centre. You reach them by meandering past a string of lakes bounteous with pelicans and vivid peacocks in trees. I gawp as I first catch a glimpse of them through the trees: hewn from rock in the tenth century, they still retain exceptionally chiselled features.

From here we drive to our last destination, Pussellawa. We pass the former hill station of Nuwara Eliya: an atmospheric town and Sri Lanka’s highest. Here every type of vegetable appears to grow, diving in rows down the hills, among colourful rickety houses with roses blooming everywhere. They are sold along the roadside, their radiant hues accentuated against the pale mist slipping down the tea plantations.

This tranquil image symbolises Sri Lanka: an easy place to travel, and a country learning about peace after three decades of civil war.

“

ONCE YOU CLIMB AWAY FROM THE SHORE, YOU LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND. HERE ARE WATERFALLS, SMALL VILLAGES AND TREES SO TALL THEY MIGHT BE ON STILTS

Above: Hellbode tea estate, Pussellawa



WHEN TO GO

Sri Lanka is a year-round holiday destination, but you need to know which coast to visit in any given month, depending on two distinct monsoon seasons. Southwest Sri Lanka's dry season runs from December to March, the north-east has drier weather from May to September. December to mid-April is generally peak time for visitors, but travelling just outside this period pretty much guarantees great weather with fewer crowds.

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways fly three times a week from Gatwick to Colombo via Male in the Maldives. Sri Lankan Airlines fly daily from Heathrow. Emirates have several flights a day with connections via Dubai from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow.

WHERE TO STAY

TINTAGEL COLOMBO This chic hotel on Colombo's elite Paradise Road offers ten spacious suites with outstanding dining options.

THE WALLAWWA A stunningly restored 200-year-old manor house close to Colombo airport and the beaches and markets of Negombo, set within five acres of tropical landscaped gardens.

THE KANDY HOUSE A carefully renovated colonial-era property converted into a rural boutique hotel, with just 9 rooms and surrounded by cultural sites and outstanding scenery.

HERITANCE KANDALAMA

This super-stylish 5-star hotel overlooking the rock fortress of Sigiriya is a minimalist gem.

JETWING VIL UYANA A delightful private lodge in the heart of the Cultural Triangle, on its own wetland nature reserve among reed beds and paddy fields.

CEYLON TEA TRAILS, HATTON

Luxury lodge in the Central Highlands spread across four colonial-era plantation bungalows, connected by a series of walking trails in a lush landscape.

JETWING YALA Picturesque beach-side and wildlife dwellings close to Yala National Park.

ULAGALLA RESORT,

ANURADHAPURA Luxury hotel with a 150-year-old mansion at its centre and 20 private ecologically-built chalets across 58 acres, featuring two large reservoirs.

SEEING SRI LANKA
GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE



a forested plain. Nearby Dambulla is home to Sri Lanka's most impressive cave temple, containing statues of Buddha and Hindu gods dating back to the twelfth century. A little further east lies the former capital Polonnaruwa, with its array of ancient temples.

Kandy is a bustling town surrounded by hills and home to the famous Sacred Temple of the Tooth, as well as beautifully carved houses and palaces that survived the ravages of three waves of Portuguese invasion. The tea plantations and hill stations of Hatton and Nuwara Eliya, by contrast, maintain a nineteenth-century British colonial presence.

Minneriya National Park, in the central northeast, is a great ecotourism destination, with elephants, sambar deer, leopards and an astonishing array of birdlife. Yala in the southeast, with wild sloth bear and water buffalo, is Sri Lanka's most visited National Park.

At the southwestern tip of the island, on either side of Galle, lie the beaches of Tangalle, Beruwala, Mirissa, Bentota, Unawatuna and Wadduwa, which offer chic boutique hotels, gentle sandbars, coral reefs and a choice of watersport adventures or pampered retreats just a short hop from Colombo and the flight home.

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

Sri Lanka's attractions include the spectacular rock fortress of Sigiriya, the centuries-old temple ruins of Polonnaruwa, the picturesque lakeside town of Kandy, the tea plantations of Hatton, wonderful wildlife viewing spots including Minneriya and Yala National Parks, and golden sand beaches.

Sigiriya ('Lion Rock'), built by a local king in the fifth century in present-day Central Province, is an astonishing feat of engineering, featuring moats, ramparts and water gardens built on the summit of a sheer rock 200 metres above

IN A WORD

Kadadat
(Sinhala)
Possessing only half of your original teeth

Word by Adam Jacot de Boinod, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*



A 12-day tailor-made tour of Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Dambulla, Minneriya and Yala National Parks, the Central Highlands and Galle is priced from £2,395 per person including flights and accommodation. Please call **WEXAS TRAVEL Southeast Asia specialist Krishna Ghosh** (left) on **020 7838 5968** to discuss your travel plans, or for more ideas visit **www.wexas.com/holidays/asia/sri-lanka**



WILD

Jonathan Scott is spellbound by the Okavango Delta.
Pictures by Jonathan and Angela Scott

SPOTS



“

I WOKE EACH MORNING TO THE ACHINGLY BEAUTIFUL CRY OF FISH EAGLES PATROLLING THEIR TERRITORIES

THE OKAVANGO DELTA IN BOTSWANA, RECENTLY listed as UNESCO's thousandth World Heritage Site, is rightly judged the jewel of the Kalahari. More remote and inaccessible than the Mara-Serengeti, Africa's last remaining wetland wilderness is a patchwork of palm-fringed islands set amidst ribbons of blue and green tongues of clear water flowing over yellow desert sands – very different from the East African savannahs with their broad sweeping plains and scattered acacia trees. The Okavango's unique character makes it one of my favourite places in Africa, a watery wonderland to be savoured by boat and by land. Seen at first light, the crystal waters sparkle like a carpet of diamonds as herds of *lechwe* bound through the shallows; or morphs into a turbulent lake of silver and white spume as an army of 500 buffalo ploughs a path through the Delta towards fresh grazing.

My first taste of the Okavango's beguiling nature was while living on a houseboat called the *Sitatunga*, named after the rare marsh antelope that lives at high densities in the Okavango. I had the good fortune to spend time in the company of legendary wildlife film-makers Tim and June Liversedge, having recently completed an overland journey through Africa. Back then in the mid-1970s, the Liversedges hosted small groups of wealthy clients on the houseboat, which provided an ideal platform for viewing wildlife in terrain often shrouded by a four- to five-metre blanket of papyrus. I woke each morning to the achingly beautiful cry of fish eagles patrolling their territories along the network of tributaries that weave their way through the Delta like the intricate patterns of blood vessels on the backs of elephants' ears.

I was mesmerised by the beauty of the Delta and by Tim's skills as a wildlife photographer and artist. He inspired me to believe that I too could translate my dream of 'doing something with wildlife' into a reality – and eventually a career. I marvelled at the skill and balance of the local fishermen as they poled their way through the maze of watery trails,





standing tall in their traditional flat-bottomed dug-out *makoro* canoes. Each *makoro* was hewn by hand from the entire trunk of one of a select handful of trees – among them the sausage tree with its crimson flowers and broad limbs so loved by leopards as a comfortable daytime resting place. A *makoro* can glide in just a few centimetres of water, making it the perfect platform from which to ford the flooded grasslands and sedge swamps – and providing just the right perspective for eye-catching photography. From low down you suddenly realise just how huge a three-ton hippo really is, and the sheer speed with which a four-metre crocodile can launch itself off a sandy bank in an explosive lunge after prey. Today *makoros* are made from fibreglass to help conserve the Delta's precious indigenous trees.

My wife Angie and I have returned to Botswana on many occasions and love the combination of 'wet' and 'dry' tented camps, allowing us to savour just the right mix of time on the water with adventures in open four-wheel-drive vehicles designed to cross the deepest channels. Being Big Cat specialists, it was inevitable we would include Duba Plains in our travels to the Okavango. Duba has built its reputation on the back of titanic battles between prides of lions and the resident herds of buffalo that roam their island home. Battles between these two ancient adversaries can be brutal and bloody affairs – for both buffalo and lions. On one of our safaris to Duba, we witnessed an old lioness being tossed high in the sky as she attempted to single out a cow from among the herd. It was a miracle she escaped with only a flesh wound to her leg. But the Okavango is a place of great charm and beauty too, with herds of elephants, giraffe and antelope aplenty.

“

DUBA HAS BUILT ITS REPUTATION ON THE BACK OF TITANIC BATTLES BETWEEN PRIDES OF LIONS AND THE RESIDENT HERDS OF BUFFALO







And with over 400 species of birdlife, it's perfect for twitchers too.

When I first visited the Okavango, you were allowed to go out at night and chug slowly along the fringes of the papyrus in a speedboat, marvelling at the sight of half a dozen bee-eaters huddled together for warmth on a single drooping reed stem as radiant as a string of emeralds. Sometimes we would pinpoint the tell-tale red-eye shine of a Pel's fishing owl, a tall buff-orange predator that perches close to the water's edge watching for the ripples of its prey before plunging into the water feet-first with talons outstretched to

snag a fish or freshwater crab from the shallows. Most ornithologists can only dream of seeing one of these striking birds or hearing their haunting call echoing through the darkness. Here in the Okavango they are common.

Spending time on the *Sitatunga* all those years ago was a glorious introduction to what it could be like to live in the bush in Africa. To suddenly find myself in one of the planet's greatest wildlife paradises seemed almost too good to be true. Little did I realise that this was only the beginning of my love affair with Africa and its wild places.



WHEN TO GO

Winter months (June to early September) are dry, clear and sunny. Daytime temperatures are in the low 20s, but nights can be chilly. This is the best season to see wildlife. Summer is wet and humid, with temperatures reaching well into the 30s. The end of summer (February to early March) is great for birdwatching, but don't expect to see much game.

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways, South African Airways and Virgin Atlantic offer flights to Johannesburg, and onwards to Botswana (Gaborone, Maun or Kasane) with either Air Botswana or South African Airlink.

WHERE TO STAY

SAVUTE UNDER CANVAS, CHOBE NATIONAL PARK This is a high-quality tented camp in a game-rich park. Camps move every five or six days, ensuring game drives always explore a new area. All the sites are located near watering holes, creating ideal bases to observe wildlife activity.

NXABEGA OKAVANGO TENTED CAMP Meaning 'place of the giraffe', Nxabega camp is situated in the centre of the Okavango Delta, offering a wildlife experience between the lagoons and channels of the Delta and its floodplains.

KUDUM DELTA LODGE Situated on an island in the southeastern part of the Delta. Nine safari tents are split-level among the lush forest, and a hide above the bedroom can be transformed at night for a sleep-out under the stars.

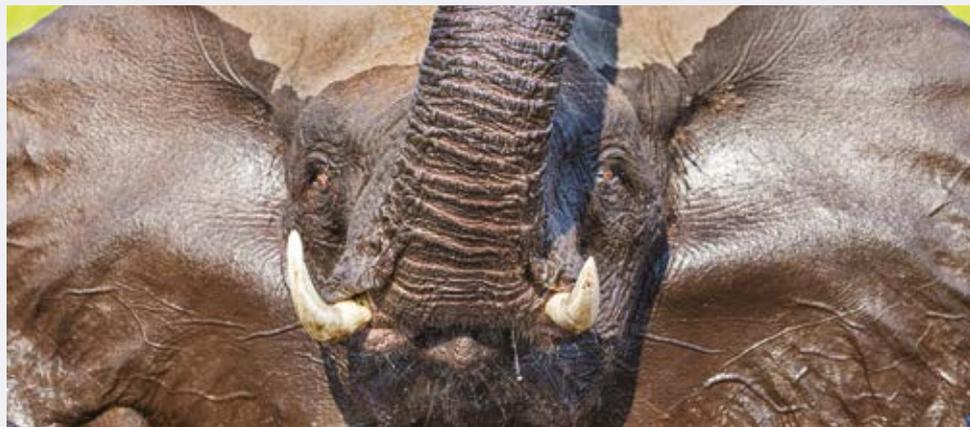
SAVUTI CAMP, LINYANTI This camp of seven tented rooms by the Savute Channel is in prime position to witness the abundant game that congregates alongside.

ZAMBEZI QUEEN Plying the banks of the great Chobe River, the *Zambezi Queen* offers world-class sophistication in one of the most remote locations on earth. Its 14 elegant suites each feature a private balcony offering unobstructed game viewing.

KALAHARI PLAINS CAMP A fabulous camp set in the heart of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Wildlife viewing is excellent, with herds of antelopes attracting all the major predators. Communal amenities include a lovely pool and a deck with views across the surrounding plains.

CHOBE AND OKAVANGO

GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE



The Makgadikgadi Pans are the dried bed of a super-lake that covered much of the country in the distant past. Today spectacular salt pans stretch as far as the eye can see, transformed during the rainy season into a watery oasis attracting birds and wildlife.

The vast Kalahari Desert covers most of the country, and is home to the last remaining San Bushmen. In the sacred Tsodilo Hills you can see 4,000 rock paintings daubed on cliffs by their ancestors.

The banks of the Chobe have one of the densest populations of elephant on the continent, and the surrounding bush is home to buffalo, leopard, lion, antelope and abundant birdlife. A sunset cruise along the Chobe is an atmospheric way to view crocodile, hippo, gazelle, giraffe and other plains game. The spectacular Victoria Falls on the border of neighbouring Zambia and Zimbabwe are within easy reach of Chobe.

During the dry season, the permanent waters of the Kwando and Linyanti Rivers are important migration points for buffalo, elephant, wildebeest and zebra. In the best conditions you may also see waterbuck, reedbuck, impala, kudu, the rare and shy sitatunga (marshbuck) – as well as hyena, cheetah, jackal, serval and caracal.

IN A WORD

Tsitlana (Setswana)
To make a wry face after eating or drinking something nasty

Word by Adam Jacot de Boindot, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

Most of Botswana is an untouched wilderness, and wildlife viewing here is amongst the best in Africa. The Okavango Delta, 'the river that never finds the sea', is the world's largest inland delta. Rising in central Africa as a result of seasonal floods, the Okavango ultimately dissipates into the Kalahari sands. When the waters are high, you can paddle a *makoro* canoe through the maze of waterways and islands to get close to the animals. The Moremi Game Reserve within the Delta is one of Africa's great, pristine wild spaces.



A 10-day luxury safari taking in Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta, with all-inclusive stays on three of our favourite &Beyond lodges, is priced from £3,495 to £5,495 per person. **WEXAS TRAVEL Africa specialist Alison Nicolle** (left) has first-hand knowledge of the region and will be happy to create your perfect Botswana safari. Please call **020 7838 5815**, or for more ideas visit www.wexas.com/holidays/africa/botswana





COLD COMFORTS

Alex Stewart steers his way into Swedish Lapland

“DON'T FORGET TO WRAP UP, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE.”

We spend our lives trying to avoid the cold, get out of it, insulate ourselves from it. Cold has a bad rap. It's associated with stares, shoulders and shivers. Cold is callous, unfriendly, emotionless. Revenge is best served this way; death has an icy chill; corpses are cold. In contrast, warm is welcome, hot is good. Food, weather, holidays, bodies, sex...who wants to be cold?

It's no choice at all, except for a few contrary folk. Yet the cold lands of the north have a harsh but clear allure, they give us goosepimples and present a new way of considering cold. These regions have more winter, more snow, more frozen sea and more ice-covered, glittering emptiness than anywhere else. Which is how I came to find myself in Luleå, in Swedish Lapland, in the depths of winter.

Luleå lies just south of the Arctic Circle, on a peninsula sticking out into the Gulf of Bothnia. Here, they get cold. Proper cold. Temperatures can reach minus 45°C. It's not unusual for half a metre of snow to fall overnight. In Lapland, when they say it's cold, it's not just a bit parky. But in this extraordinary environment, life continues unabated.

Driving out of town, we crossed the Luleå River, which was frozen solid. The ice can be a metre thick. The day was blue and white, the shadows purple and pink. The air sparkled with diamond-dust of fine ice. Quickly we came to Brändön Lodge on the shore of the Gulf, which at this time of year is also frozen. Out in the Gulf are 1,300 small islands and skerries, now temporarily connected.

At the lodge we met Patrik, a weathered Swede who was once a champion mogul skier but who now leads expeditions on the pack ice to explore the largely uninhabited outposts. His clothes reflect the practicalities of the region. From his belt hung two knives and a wooden cup, known as a *guksi* – Sami symbols but also practical. The smaller knife is for eating, the larger he told us is for fighting bears – so never gets used. The cup, carved from a birch burl, is for drinking coffee and water melted from snow.

First up was a lesson on how to get dressed. Bit by bit we layered underclothes, overalls, enormous boots, balaclavas, silk inner gloves and huge mittens on string, like in infant school. Then we got our snowmobiles, which are essentially motorbikes on skis with heated handlebars. There are no gears; keep the accelerator cranked and they can hit 110 kph in no time. About as easy to steer as a shopping trolley, but far more inclined to tip over, these high-powered machines are spectacular fun.

After a brief introduction, we eased onto the frozen sea. I dabbled the throttle so the skis bit. “Stay in my tracks,” shouted Patrik, “If I put my hand in the air slow down and prepare to stop.” Then he was gone, his machine bucking forward. For Swedes, snowmobiles are just a necessary form of winter transport. Everyone up here has one. Locals drive with a hell-for-sealskin nonchalance.

The noise and vibration were immense as we accelerated towards the horizon like a brace of buzzsaws ripping across the infinite sheet of ice. You shouldn't really enjoy this sport with its noise, acrid exhaust fumes and hooligan potential for speed. But I did.



I found myself grinning as we gunned the engines and scudded across the sea before returning to shore and chicaning up a narrow track between snow-heaped trees.

The next morning we set off in single file to explore the outer reaches of the Gulf. The land and sky were almost the same pale hue. There was no horizon. For a while we seemed to be ascending through clouds. The coast is spectacular – the scenery revealed as vast and harsh, the sea held in parentheses by the ice. It is an epic landscape, one of sagas, of solemn grandeur.

Having driven over the sea for some time, slaloming between islands now connected to the land, we stopped. Further out, boulders of wind-scarred ice were held, freeze-framed in the frozen ocean. Across the hard dunes of ice, the humpback rubble of the sea, we gazed at the landscape stretching towards Finland. The ice shifts with changes in wind direction. Sometimes the pack-ice sheets move up over the shallow shoals and create rugged ridges. Other times, patches of open water appear, with seals lying out on bergs.

We got off our machines. The world was suddenly still and silent. South of the Arctic Circle, there are no sounds. The silence sifted in our ears as we crunched, heavy-booted, through the snow. Patrik watched our awakening as we adjusted to his remote world. He explained, “We use snowmobiles to get out to the wilderness, and then we stop so you can appreciate the emptiness and the peace. Once you're out here, you can walk, ski, whatever.”



“

**THE LAND
AND SKY
ALMOST
THE SAME
PALE HUE, IT
IS AN EPIC
LANDSCAPE
OF SAGAS
AND SOLEMN
GRANDEUR**

Previous page:
Pack ice adventure
on the Gulf of
Bothnia (Photo by
Fredrik Broman).

**These pages
(clockwise from
top left):** Husky
sledding from
Aurora Safari Camp.
Snowy landscape,
Swedish Lapland.

During the rest of my time in the region, I crossed off a bunch of whatevers. In between staying at traditional Swedish lodges, the Tree Hotel and Aurora Safari Camp, I stumbled about on snowshoes, cooked reindeer meat over an open fire on the edge of a frozen lake, tried ice fishing but baulked at ice-hole swimming, drove reindeer and rode on a husky sled.

The huskies were the synthesis of all the snow pursuits I tried, like snowmobiles but even better. Full of energy, the purebreed Siberian huskies were calmed and controlled by their musher, Richard, who had an implicit understanding of life in the pack. Unleashed, the dogs leapt forward and dashed between the trees. Their barking and baying instantly died as they panted and pulled.

As we came out of the forest onto the open expanse of a frozen lake, silence once again shrouded us. There was just the muffled sound of the sleigh swishing through the soft snow, the occasional scrape as its ice brake was jammed down to slow our progress, and the soft thrum of 40 pads cantering hard across the emptiness.

However I explored this frontier land, full of birch trees and lakes that are glorious in summer but better in winter, I realised that, with the right kit and clothes and attitude, the cold wasn't a thing to be avoided. The freezing countries of the north act as a counterpoint to the tropical equator. Warm is slowly winning the war; the cold is in retreat, defeated by popular decision and ceding ground, melting before our eyes. We need to feel it before it's gone.



WHEN TO GO

January to March is the best time to travel for snowy activities and in search of the Northern Lights. In high summer the region basks under the eerie glow of the midnight sun, while autumn sees a riot of colour sweep the land.

HOW TO GET THERE

SAs and Norwegian fly to Luleå via Stockholm from London Heathrow and Gatwick, and other regional airports are served via Copenhagen and Stockholm.

WHERE TO STAY

AURORA SAFARI CAMP A collection of traditional *lavvo* (Sami tents) equipped with comfortable beds and Arctic sleeping bags that draws its inspiration from tented African safari camps. A sauna is close at hand to keep off the chill, and every stay includes a guided walk or snowshoe hike in the forest. Optional excursions include snowmobile safaris across the polar ice pack from here or a sled ride with the purebred Siberian pack from Isdimma Husky Adventures. The camp owner, Fredrik Broman is an excellent nature photographer and hosts classes where you'll learn the skills and techniques for taking great photos in the challenging Arctic conditions along with how to capture the Northern Lights on film.

TREEHOTEL A popular cluster of modernist, minimalist treetop dwellings in a pine forest 60 km south of the Arctic Circle, combining striking architecture with back-to-nature values.

JOPIKGARDEN HOTEL This romantic retreat, on the small island of Hinderson in the Luleå archipelago, is a superb base for exploring the 700 islands or for winter ice adventures.

PINE BAY LODGE This classic Swedish red cottage by the Luleå archipelago features a homely dining and lounge area with a huge open fire, eight en-suite bedrooms and an outside sauna.

ICEHOTEL Deep within the Arctic Circle, this hotel is reborn each winter in a fresh design, sculpted from the ice of the nearby Torne River. Beds and furniture are also made from ice, so you'll be thankful for warming reindeer pelts and expedition-strength sleeping bags in place of crisp linens.

WAY UP NORTH

GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE

**IN A WORD**

Isblink
(Swedish)
The luminous appearance of the horizon caused by reflection from ice

Word by Adam Jacot de Boindot, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

Many of Swedish Lapland's striking hotels are destinations in themselves, and each of our favourites listed opposite are also fabulous places from which to strike out on spectacular Arctic adventures. Snowshoe hiking, husky or reindeer sledding and snowmobile excursions are a must in winter, or you can unleash your inner Jeremy Clarkson with an ice drive in a hulking Volvo with an ice drive in a hulking Volvo around 25 km of frozen racetrack on Lake Ebbenjarka.

On the island of Brändöskär, on the far side of the archipelago, lies

an idyllic fishing village dating back to the seventeenth century, beyond which the Gulf of Bothnia witnesses dramatic drifts of winter sea ice piling up to ten metres high. In summer you can go biking, rock climbing, canoeing or whitewater rafting, or fly-fish for salmon and Arctic char under the midnight sun; while in winter you can combine daytime ice fishing with evening treks on the trail of the magical Northern Lights.

Local Sami tradition identifies eight annual seasons, including *gidá* in April–May, when the ice starts to melt in the south, crystal-clear waters flow, deciduous trees break out into luscious greens and early spring flowers bloom; and August's *tjaktjagiess* at the cusp of summer and autumn, when berries and mushrooms ripen and larders and freezers are filled with the woodland's bounty. Unsurprisingly, winter – or *dálvve* – is the longest season, running from December to March, when ice and snow take a grip, freezing the landscape into stunning formations. This is when the summer hiking trails give way to cross-country skiing from the lakes to the alpine tundra. For some of the best Northern Lights viewing, visit the purpose-built Aurora Sky Station in the Abisko National Park.

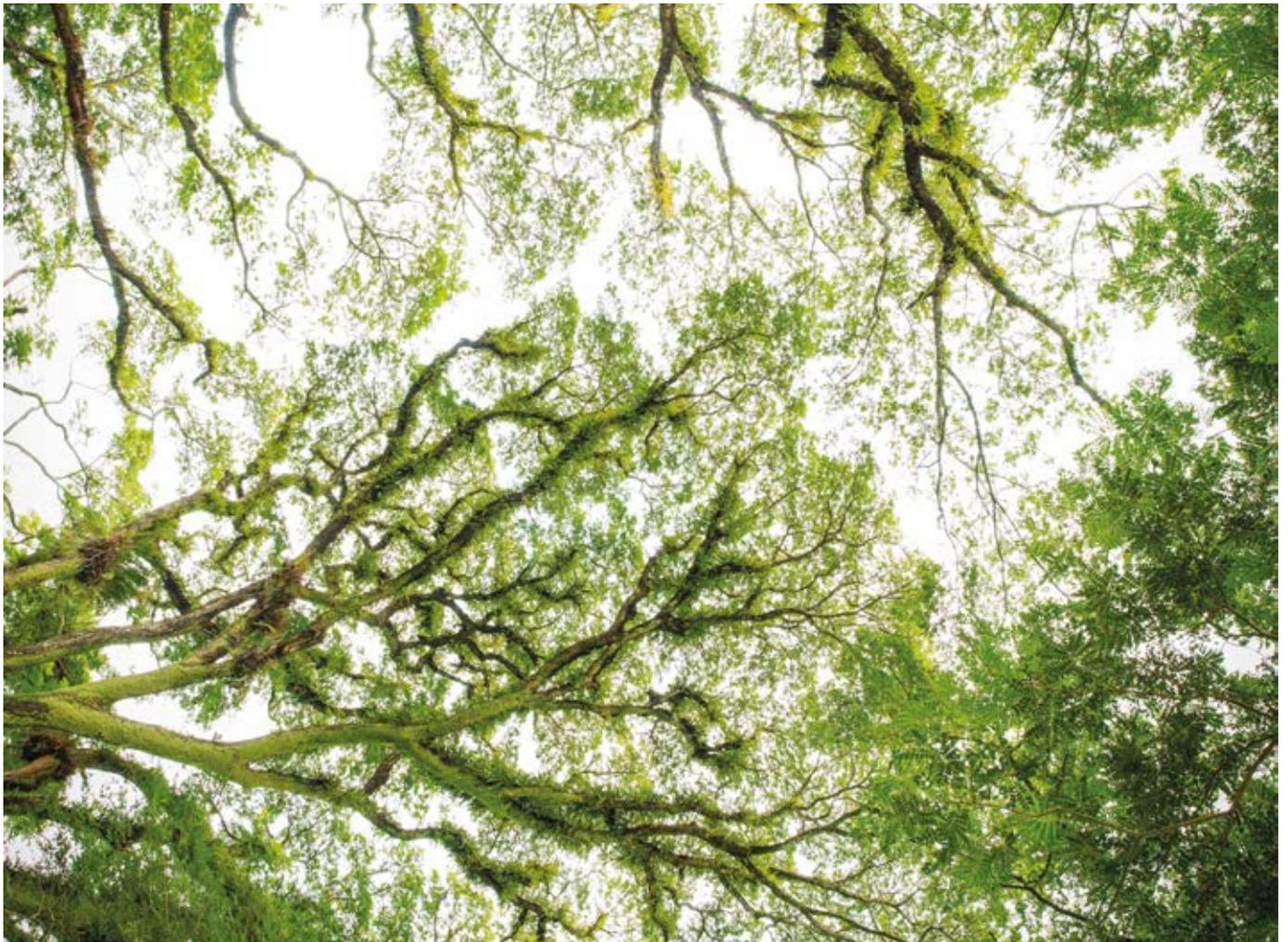


A five-day, fully-inclusive adventure to Swedish Lapland, staying at some of the region's best and most unusual accommodation, is priced from £2,195 per person. **WEXAS TRAVEL Scandinavia specialist Becky Davis** (left) has travelled extensively throughout the region, and is on hand to help you choose your holiday itinerary. Please call **020 7590 0618**, or for more ideas visit **wexas.com/holidays/europe/sweden**



The Oldest Forest in the World

Rupert Isaacson finds
mystery and magic in
Queensland



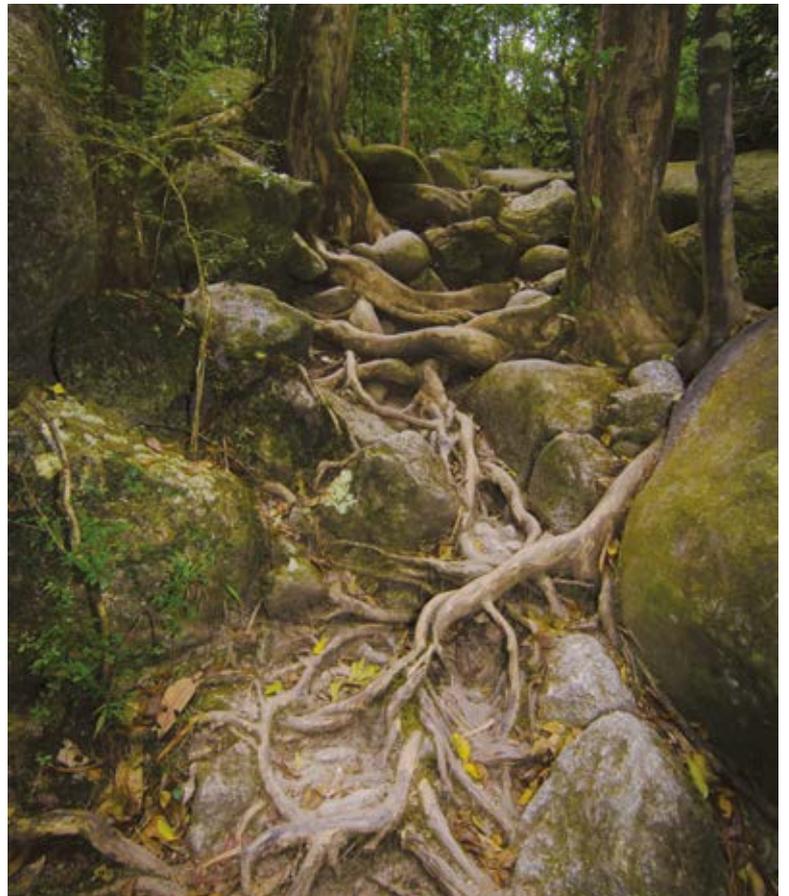
THE SOUND OF RUSHING WATER, the scent of cool deep tropical green: as we breasted the forested bank into the Daintree River Gorge, it was just as the shaman had warned us. A feeling dim but clear, somewhere inside the skull, just behind the eyes, as if you were passing through some kind of vibrational field – the kind of thing you dismiss as completely woo-woo when other people describe it – humbling you into admitting that yes, there it is, and you have absolutely no explanation.

“Do you feel that?” asked Kristin. I nodded but Rowan, our seven-year-old son, was already scrambling down towards the cool, rushing water. “Time to go swimming!”

Stripped to our briefs, we pushed out into water so cold it took the heat from the skin and made you gasp – towards the dark basalt rocks around which the water flowed in wide crystal pools, large dark fish hanging

“

**AUSTRALIA'S
DAINTREE
FOREST, THE
OLDEST IN
THE WORLD,
WAS NOT
MY FIRST
RODEO WHEN
IT COMES
TO BRAIN-
BLOWING
EXPERIENCES**





motionless in the depths despite the force of the current. “Wash yourselves in the sacred pools,” the shaman had told us. “Then come back tomorrow and we can complete the healing.”

It had been a brain-blower, the last two days, even by my standards. I’ve lived with the Bushmen of the Kalahari and seen their healers dancing all night, sometimes bleeding from the nose and mouth, pulling sickness out of people whose ailments later, inexplicably, seemed to vanish. I’ve seen leopards called out of the dark to the fireside for a healer to draw on their power. On the other side of the planet, in far northern Mongolia, where the grassland ocean of the steppe gives way to the taiga, the vast forest that stretches from the North Sea to the Pacific, a shaman of the Tsataan – the reindeer people – had spent three days conducting rituals for my autistic son Rowan: at the end of which, his chronic incontinence and tantrums had, miraculously, melted away.

So Australia’s Daintree, the oldest forest in the world, home to the Kuku Yalanji aboriginals, was not my first rodeo when it comes to brain-blowing experiences. But as Rowan and I swirled in the invigorating waters of this tropical river, I still had to make sense of what we had just witnessed.

The reason we were here was this. My son had been diagnosed with autism in 2004. Because of my journalism and human rights work in the Kalahari, he had also that year met some Bushman healers who I had brought from Botswana to the United Nations and US State Department as part of a delegation protesting their illegal eviction from ancestral lands to make way for diamond mines. Some of the healers on that delegation (who ultimately won their claim) ‘worked’ on Rowan – praying and laying on hands – and to my astonishment, he had lost some of his more obsessive behaviours. That experience, along with my son’s incredible reaction to a horse called Betsy (he became verbal in the saddle



© RUPERT ISAACSON

The lush ancient forest is a perfect backdrop for the spiritual healing ritual conducted by Kuku Yalanji shaman ‘Harold’ (above)

in front of me) had precipitated me and my wife Kristin onto a journey on horseback across Mongolia, from healer to healer, that became a book and film called *The Horse Boy*. Although it did not cure my son, it ameliorated his symptoms massively.

However, the healer of the reindeer people, a man called Ghoste who conducted the last ceremonies in the mountains of southern Siberia, had told me that to ‘confirm’ the healing, I would have to make three more journeys to healers. So the following year I had gone to the Bushmen, whom I knew personally. And now, here in the Daintree of northern Queensland, where Australia’s harsh aridity becomes a riot of lush, dense vegetation, I had tracked down a shaman of the Kuku Yalanji – Wawabutja in his native tongue, or Harold in English. The second of the three healings was now unfolding.

And my brain was blown. On the first of Harold’s three days of healings he had met Rowan



and said in his cheerful Aussie English, "Yeah, shouldn't be a problem." He sat my son down in a chair in hot sunlight in the forest clearing and 'smoked' him – a purification ritual in which the patient is cleansed with the aromatic smoke of smouldering tree bark, before the healing proper begins.

The fact that Rowan – hyper-active and anxious to say the least – had even sat so still for this was amazing and uncharacteristic enough. What followed challenged my and Kristin's sanity.

Outwardly it wasn't much, just Harold running his fingers through the air just above and to the side of Rowan's head, then flicking his fingers into a small ceramic cup. Curious, Kristin and I looked into the cup. It was filling with clear viscous goo, streaked through with bloody matter, right before our eyes: with no obvious source of where this goo was coming from. Harold's arms were bare, his palms open, so there was no sleight of hand. Yet every time he flicked his dry fingers into the cup, it filled a little more. Rowan still sat, unusually calm, until Harold nodded, satisfied, and told us to come back next day.

How had this been possible? My wife, a professor of psychology and a scientist, was forced to conclude: "Sometimes you just have to be comfortable saying 'I don't know.'"

So we went back the next day, and the process was repeated, though the amount of mucus the second day was less, the liquid clearer. And then, as Harold directed, we went swimming in the sacred waters of Mossman Gorge. It would, he said, help the healing process to solidify in my son's body.

Before the third and final part of the healing, we drove from our rainforest lodge out to the warm blue ocean of Cape Tribulation, where we could see surf breaking on the Great Barrier Reef just offshore. Peaceful, feeling the waters swirl around our ankles, the grey sand sugary between our toes, we had given up on attempts to rationalise.

Later, with shafts of afternoon sunlight long and golden across the rainforest clearing, we



looked into the ceramic mug for the third time. There was almost nothing there.

"He'll be right," said Harold, smiling.

"I feel better in my head, I feel happy," chirruped Rowan, leaping off the wooden bench and running off after a bush turkey that was picking its way through the clearing's grasses in search of grubs.

And that was that.

A day later, as we drove southward along the Queensland coast, Rowan's mind was clearer, his speech more logical and complex, than ever before.

Whatever had happened, there in the oldest rainforest in the world, with a shaman of one of the oldest peoples, it had challenged my perception of reality for good. Long may the mysteries of our planet keep us guessing.

Rupert Isaacson's latest book, *The Long Ride Home: The Extraordinary Journey of Healing that Changed a Child's Life* is out now, published by Penguin, price £7.99.



WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit the Daintree is during the dry season from May to September when it is slightly cooler. Part of the 'Wet Tropics' of North Queensland, the rainforest receives vast amounts of rainfall, but usually in torrential downpours that last only a few hours at a time. The rest of the time the sun is strong, highlighting the vibrant forest colours. The air is humid, but cooled by the protective canopy, and for most of the year the temperature fluctuates between about 24 and 30 degrees.

HOW TO GET THERE

The most direct flight for the Daintree is with Cathay Pacific via Hong Kong to Cairns, but a visit to the rainforest can also be included in an assortment of eastern Australia tours starting in Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney or Brisbane.

WHERE TO STAY

SILKY OAKS LODGE The most luxurious lodge in the Daintree in a stunning location on the Mossman Gorge River with beautiful wooden treehouse rooms, an indulgent spa and exquisite open restaurant under the rainforest canopy. Activities include guided hikes, walking trails, kayaking and snorkelling on the river, and indigenous cultural experiences including Dreamtime interpretive walks.

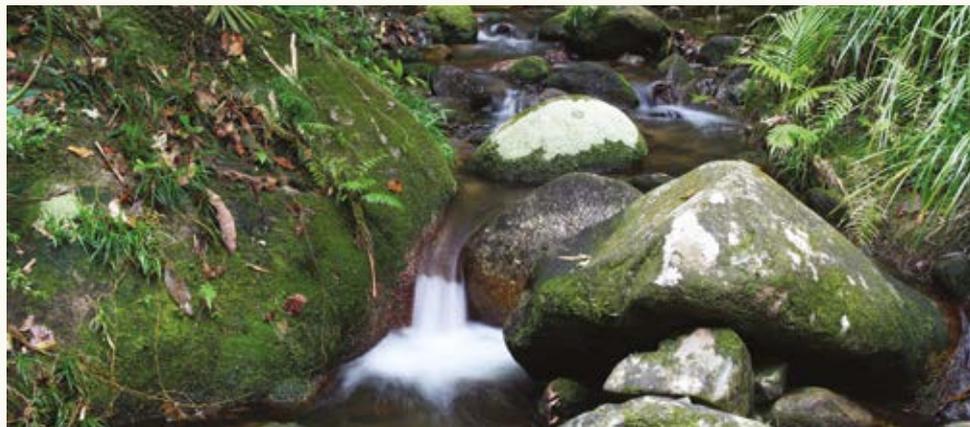
BALI HAI Private 3-bedroom residence housing up to 8 guests in separate thatched burees. A personal chef can be hired for special meals or for the duration of your stay, and every room opens out to the infinity pool with mountain and river views.

DAINTREE ECO LODGE & SPA A more rustic option in a private valley with interesting indigenous experiences combining nature, nurture and culture. Its 15 bayan rooms are set on different levels, so you can experience the rainforest from the floor to the canopy.

DAINTREE WILDERNESS LODGE Situated halfway between the Daintree River and Cape Tribulation in the very heart of the rainforest, this is a more basic option offering great value and access to the region.

PENINSULA BOUTIQUE HOTEL Charming apartment-style accommodation offering (optional) self-catering right on the beachside at Port Douglas, just a 20-minute drive to the Daintree rainforest.

TREAD DAINTILY IN THE DAINTREE
GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE



sugar-cane farms set against a backdrop of the McDonnell Ranges of Daintree National Park, and scenic side roads take visitors off the beaten track to explore lowland hiking trails, scenic lookouts, picnic sites and swimming holes. From the Daintree River ferry crossing the coastal road continues over tidal rivers and creeks and through small settlements to the wilderness areas of Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield Falls deep within the Wet Tropics, where the forest slopes plunge to meet the waters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and fringing reefs almost reach the shore.

The Kuku Yalanji people, one of thousands of Aboriginal Australian tribes, have inhabited the rainforest for over 9,000 years. Mineral explorations, tin mining, logging and the development of a trading route in the nineteenth century severely threatened their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, and large groups from the Daintree Rainforest region were subsequently uprooted to the Mossman Gorge Reserve. In recent years, many efforts have been made to improve the living conditions of the original inhabitants of this land, and visitors have ample opportunities to engage with and appreciate the Kuku Yalanji's fascinating ancient culture.

IN A WORD

Yuyurungul
(Yidiny)
The noise of a snake sliding through the grass

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

The Daintree Rainforest dates back 135 million years, and at 12,000 sq km is the largest continuous area of tropical rainforest on the continent. It is home to 30 per cent of Australia's frog, marsupial and reptile species, 65 per cent of bat and butterfly species and 20 per cent of birdlife (including 13 species found nowhere else in the world) – all within just 0.2 per cent of the landmass of Australia.

The small sugar town of Mossman is the commercial hub of this sparsely populated region. From here the road north passes

Word by Adam Jacot de Boinod, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*



An 18-day tailor-made tour combining Sydney, Hunter Valley, the Blue Mountains, Uluru, The Daintree and the Great Barrier Reef is priced from £3,999 per person including flights and accommodation. **WEXAS TRAVEL Australasia specialist Lucy Skelton** (left) will be happy to discuss your travel plans. Please call **020 7590 0614** or for more ideas, visit **www.wexas.com/australia**

BEHIND THE SCENES

Amy Sohanpaul finds another side to Bulgaria.
Pictures by the author

WE'VE BEEN SPIRALLING IN

snowy confusion around a mountain for hours, in a big car on small roads through thick woods, trying to find a monument so communist colossal it can be seen for miles yet continues to evade us.

We're not supposed to be chasing brutal Soviet architecture, we're in Bulgaria for other, older reasons. To discover a more subtle history, to delve into the cultural richness of a country known in recent years almost exclusively for budget beach and ski breaks, and for the unimaginative yet wildly exaggerated headlines so beloved by tabloids. We're here to drive beyond those shouty alarmist capital letters into the distant civilisation of Thracian times.

"The Thracians," Petar says to me on our first evening in Sofia, over a glass of delicious local flinty white, "were making wine before the Greeks knew it existed."

Whoever invented it, the wine is heady-making, as are the frescoes at the medieval Boyana Church, revealed to us by a guide as eccentric as he is impassioned. "Young lady," he says, handing me an oversized key. "You let us in." And once inside: "Young lady, follow my hand, look my pointer." It's easy to ignore the sniggers at the back as his pointer picks out figures vivid in form and expression. Your eyes lock with theirs and you are long ago.

It feels slightly surreal to go from the solemn gazes of these saints – Nicholas, and in particular the all-seeing eyes of St Ephrem the Syrian – into a chic little fashion boutique belonging to one of Bulgaria's most celebrated designers, Jana Jekova. The colours of the silk dresses here are as dazzling as the pigments



WE STOP TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS AND COME TO A STANDSTILL. THE RIGHT ROAD IS FINALLY IN FRONT OF US, SUBMERGED IN SNOW

in the chapel, but the ambience is quite other, edging on louche. A wildly good-looking girl is dressed and re-dressed like a doll in swishy dresses designed by the owner, and she obligingly swirls and twirls as champagne corks pop one after the other and cigarettes are smoked. A haze results.

It recedes slowly the next morning as we drive into the Valley of the Roses. The mud stretching away on either side is as rich and dark as good chocolate, making this valley fertile enough for two harvests a year. A hawk on a fence-post watches a shepherd who watches his flock. We drive through a small town, spotting geese on a scraggy village green, chickens and skinny cats everywhere, then cars

too. "Is that a Trabant?" asks my friend Warren. "Is what a what?" "That car. It is. They're made from cardboard." A young boy drives by in a horse-drawn cart, his younger brother bouncing in the back alongside sacks of something.

We stop discussing the virtues of horse versus car as we walk up a hill into the Thracian tomb of Kazanlak, and are surrounded by frescoes again. This time they're less intense, but painstaking and exuberant in detail all the same, depicting a couple at a funeral feast, and a parade of horses. We head down the valley, from one Thracian monument to another. "This is also known as the Valley of the Thracian Kings," Petar tells us, "of kings and roses." There's a horse





loitering outside the tomb, inside lies another, interred centuries ago after being ritually sacrificed.

We emerge, blinking, and look towards the mountains that have been a temptation almost all drive long, mountains of myth. King Balkan and his wife Rhodope once angered the gods, who in their wrath turned Balkan into the craggy spikes that bear his name. The Rhodopes are softer, curvier. Petar points out the gilded spires of Shipka Church, near a historic pass where several skirmishes took place during the Russo-Turkish wars. It's a dreamier sight than it should be, so we head for it.

And then we spot another silhouette, sulking against a sullen sky. It looks like a giant flying saucer,

and beckons irrevocably. Reaching it should be straightforward but we change course again and again. We stop under snowflakes, ask for directions, swerve about once more and come to a standstill. The right road is finally in front of us and it's submerged in snow.

"We won't give up now," says Petar as he wrenches the steering wheel and twists the giant car off the road directly onto the slopes of Mount Buzludzha, all the way up and down and over tussocks and dips, almost to the doorstep of what used to be the headquarters of the Communist Party.

It's something of a shrine now, consecrated by vibrant graffiti, a site of pilgrimage for all sorts

Above: The severe, scribbled-upon walls of the former headquarters of Bulgaria's Communist Party.

of people. As the car struggled up the slope, Warren had shown me pictures by photographers who had somehow managed to get behind the barricades of the boarded-up spaceship, and they revealed an interior as impressive in scale as that of the iconic St Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia, where we'd lingered just yesterday, the aching last refrains of the evening mass heightening the drama of the vaulted space.

On this summit, a different kind of worship took place, no less fervent, and still followers come. We can't see any way in, or of breaking in as the photographers did, so begin on another spiral, on foot this time, around the monster. Everything is grey, or



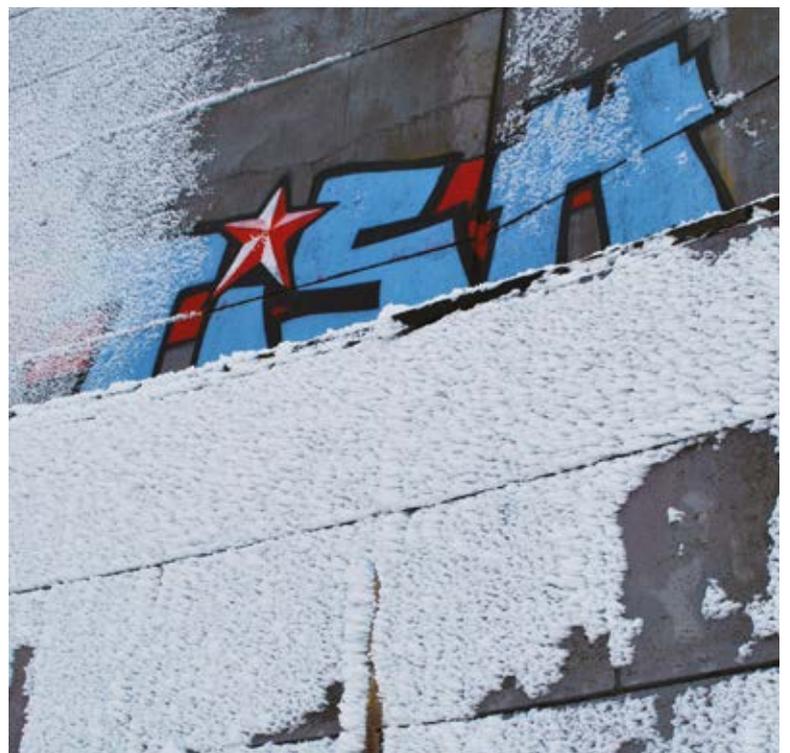


shades of. The sky is pewter, the ground steel, the walls concrete. This near-monochrome enhances the colourful declarations of faith emblazoned on the walls, legacies to ideas lost in time, every bit as evocative as the frescoes in the ancient tombs and the medieval church.

As cold as it is, leaving is unimaginable until I see streaky black ash stark against the snow, a remnant from a burnt-out fire, and start dreaming of a roaring one. Right on cue, I hear Petar revving up the engine and put feet I can no longer feel into some sort of automatic action. Visions of a log fire sustain the long cold drive to our home for the next few nights. It's dark when we wind into the driveway of Villa Gella up in the Rhodopes. The oblivious stars – so many of them – hover frostily. We all but run inside, straight through to the vast living space, and spend some time working out who can sit closest to the fire until the warmth chills us out. There's a fireplace in each of the six bedrooms so we stop worrying and start indulging in the extreme comforts, not least hearty fare, unconsciously organic but decidedly delicious.

In spite of the spoiling luxury, it would be madness not to head out into the mountains again and again. Daybreak reveals a landscape

Interiors and exteriors, past and present (clockwise from above): Icons line the walls of an Orthodox chapel on the site of an Orphic temple. Frescoes from the tombs at Kazanlak. Disparate lettering on the walls of the ex-Communist HQ.



so clichéd in its appeal – fairy tale forest and rolling slopes dusted with snow – that I laugh when I step onto my terrace.

It's harder to laugh later, lodged deep in the Devil's Throat, reached some way beyond a village whose name translates as thunder. The cavern is almost as intimidating as it sounds, almost 'measureless to man', diving down long enough

to suggest hell. The entrance is set in mountainsides so spectacularly sheer they rise in straight lines, up to the sky like a hallelujah – the trees forced to grow sideways out of them. This is the mythological entrance to Hades, where Orpheus travelled to the underworld to search for Eurydice. Inside and very low down, it is eerily beautiful, damp,

slippy, a squeeze in some places, cathedral-sized in others, loud with the sound of rushing water and lined with nooks and crannies gleaming with small dedications to big things – coins and candles left in tribute to love or death or both.

Escape involves a near-vertical series of narrow steps alongside a waterfall that has taken people underground with it as it flows who knows where – people who have never re-emerged, eternally lost, like Eurydice.



Orpheus lingers on in these hills though, where the sound of music has almost always been, after and perhaps even before he played his legendary harp. The next morning, in the village of Shiroka Laka the unbroken musical tradition sounds out as the Kukeri festival, part of Dionysian festivities back in Thracian times, unfolds under a scattering of snowflakes, not ideal for a pagan festival associated with the arrival of spring.

It's also a festival associated with fertility, and an anything-goes attitude fills the streets for hours before and hours after, which is perhaps inevitable when most of the men are dressed in animal skins and sport demonic goats' horns. As well as the hefty, hairy costumes, many are draped with iron bells that weigh a silly amount, to give their ringing enough resonance to drive out the devil of the winter months. As the clamour and dances near an end, the snow speeds down, silencing it all.

It stops as we strike out on a walk from the villa, along and around slopes quilted swan-white and dove-grey, a lightning-blasted tree trunk spiky against the soft snow. A horde of dogs tumbles out of a barn to protest furiously at our trespass, a spindly horse grazes by a car parked randomly on a verge, sheltering a tuft or two of grass. Right in the middle of the gritty greys, the auserity of the white, lies the pink promise of a chapel.

It's like stepping into a treasure chest. The interior is jewel bright, blinding in intensity of colour after the subdued landscape. Icons and their fervent eyes blaze out from the walls, their expressions almost as compelling as the artist responsible for their creation. He tells me he never trained in the art, he taught himself. "Something about this place made me," he says. It's on the site of an ancient Orphic temple, in an area that attracts storms regularly and thunderbolts almost as often.

He seems to expect the sudden silence that has fallen over us like snow. "People feel the power here, even if they don't believe in it. These icons are inspired by the surroundings and their history – they are magnetic, just as the land outside is." This just might be what we were supposed to find, beyond the headlines, beyond the communist colossus we chased so hard.

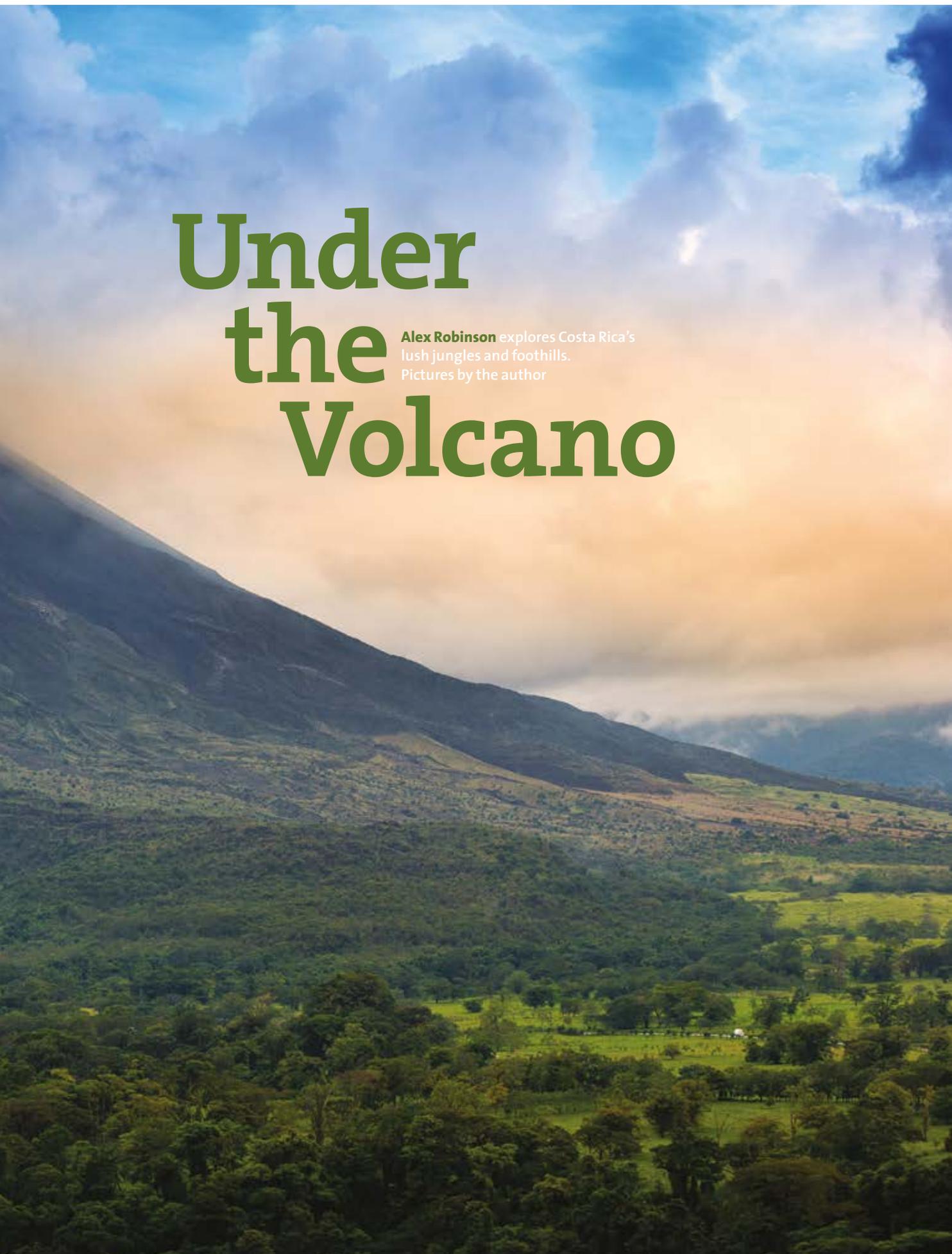
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**ORPHEUS
LINGERS ON
THESE HILLS,
WHERE THE
SOUND OF
MUSIC HAS
ALMOST
ALWAYS BEEN**





Under the Volcano

Alex Robinson explores Costa Rica's lush jungles and foothills. Pictures by the author



BETWEEN THE INTERMITTENT

peals of thunder from Arenal Volcano, I heard the chatter of teeth. Peccary teeth. I could see nothing but dim shapes in the shadows, but my nose filled with their musky, sweaty smell. For a moment I froze in fear. With a bite as strong as a leopard's and a foul temper, peccary are the pigs from hell – attacking like piranha, snapping and chomping at your legs until they force you to the ground. And eat you alive.

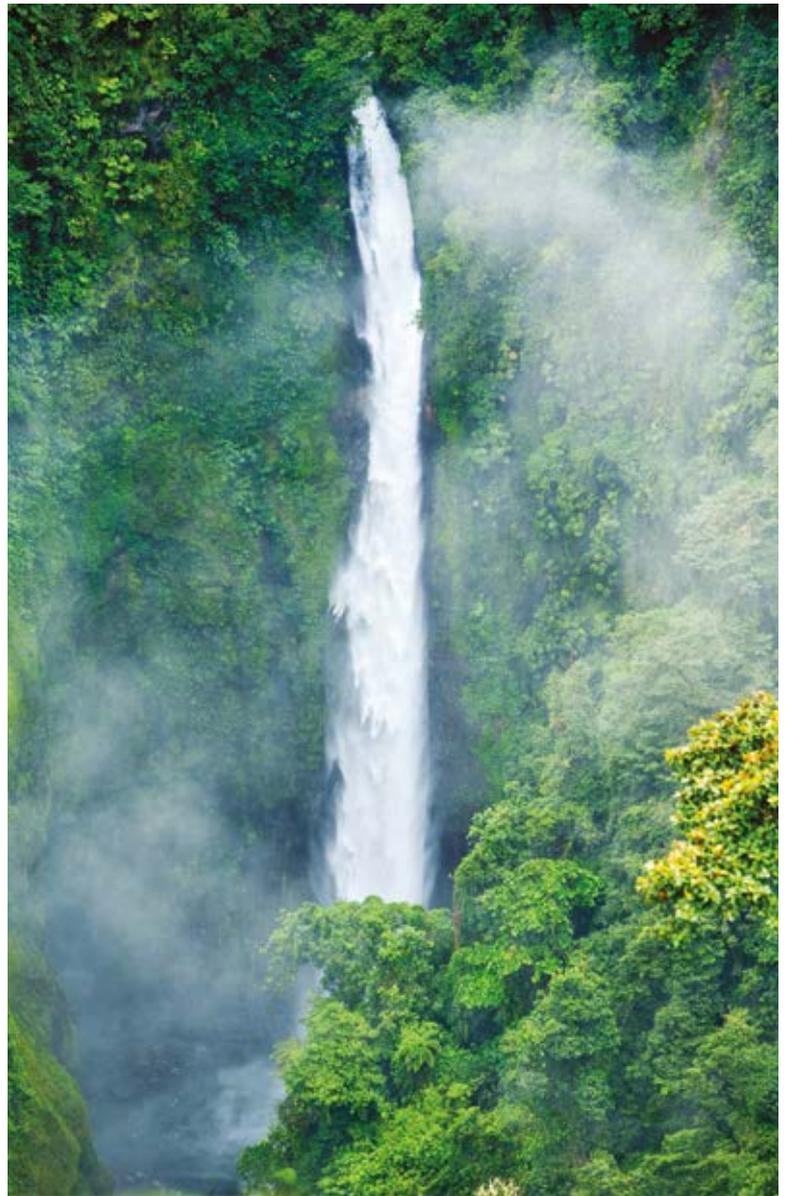
“If you hear peccary, climb a tree,” a Costa Rican friend had told me, “then piss on one of them. Your scent will drive the others to tear it to pieces. When they’ve finished they’ll move away.” I looked around nervously for a suitable tree, but I was surrounded by saplings. My fear melted into blind panic. I ran like a wildman and didn’t stop until I reached the lava field.

It stretched black before me – a jagged tongue of broken rock spreading down from the smoking mountain. I dragged myself up its rocky edge and looked back – and saw nothing, thank God, just the movement of the breeze and the flash of a bright violet hummingbird whipping past and into the forest. The adrenaline was pumping through me. I forced myself to calm down, to steady my shaking hands.

I was in Costa Rica to see the wild, not to be eaten by it. I wanted to find out if I could travel with a



I WAS IN COSTA RICA TO SEE THE WILD, NOT TO BE EATEN BY IT. I WANTED TO FIND OUT IF I COULD TRAVEL WITH A CLEAN, GREEN CONSCIENCE



clean, green conscience, if I could justify polluting the world with my long-haul flight. And with a plethora of rainforest lodges and a conservation-tourism ranking system which is the envy of the world, Costa Rica was perhaps the best place to do so.

I began at Lapa Rios Eco Lodge on the Osa peninsula, in the south of the country – a jungle lodge nestled on an isthmus of virgin rainforest jutting into an impossibly aquamarine Pacific. Until a couple of generations ago, farming and logging was eating into the wild in Osa, then in the 1950s the government opted for ecotourism as a staple of the Costa Rican economy. With the establishment of a nationwide network of protected areas, much of the peninsula became the Corcovado National Park. Poachers literally became

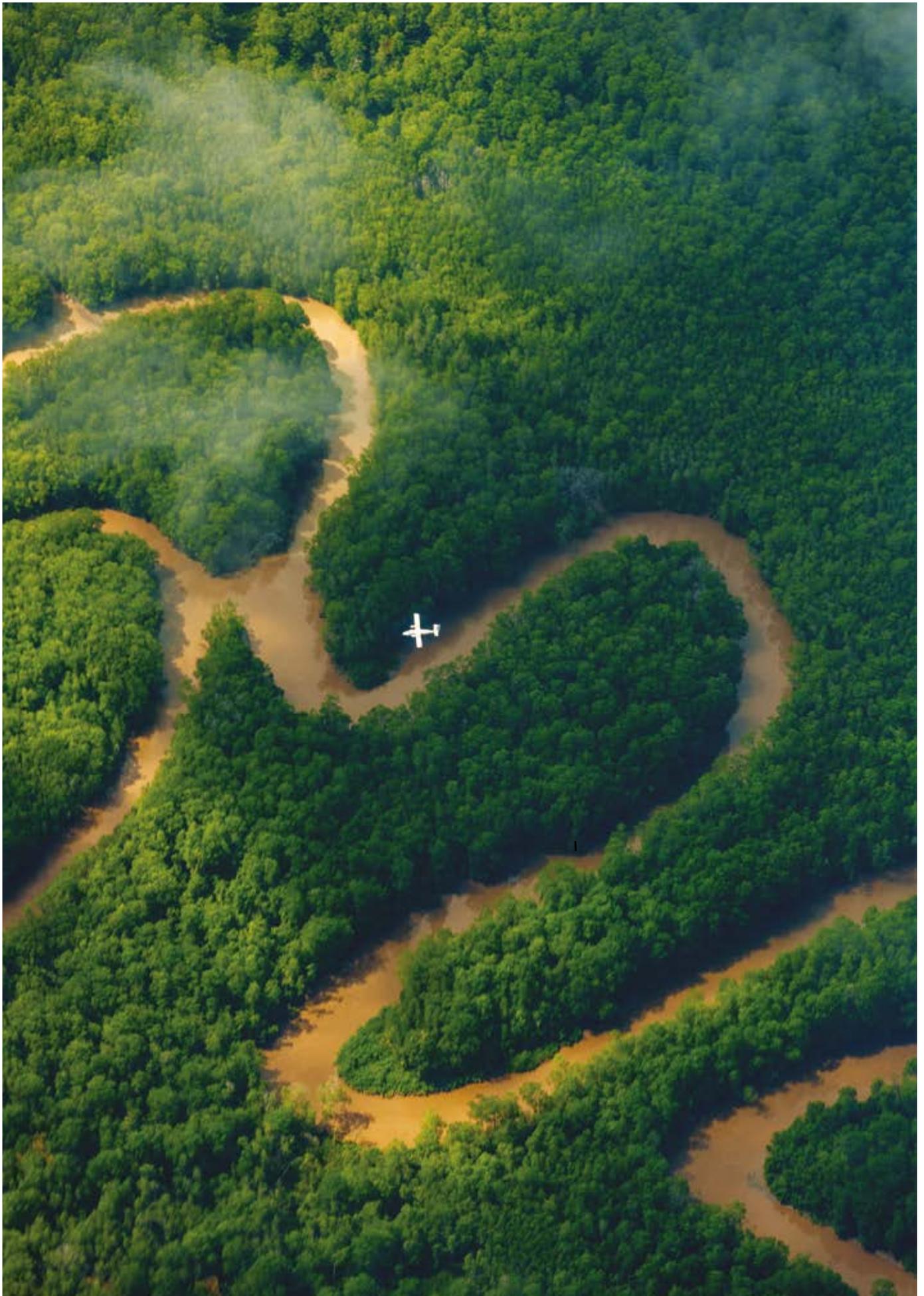
gamekeepers – and my guide Ulises was one of them.

“When I was a small boy, I used to come to these forests to hunt for deer,” he told me as we tramped along a tiny path running along the banks of a rushing stream shaded by mossy trunks dripping with vivid bromeliads. “Now I help tourists to hunt for jaguars and shoot them with cameras.”

There were signs of jaguars everywhere – paw prints in the mud, claw marks in the bark, and at night in the distant forest the echo of their eerie, dog-like bark. But I didn’t see a jaguar at Lapa Rios.

“Seeing a jaguar in the wild is very difficult,” said Ulises. “Only one in a hundred visitors is lucky enough.”

But it didn’t matter to me. Corcovado was stunning, a mottled tapestry of every shade





of green from lemon-and-lime to mossy *Feldgrau* dotted with creamy orchids, cochineal cacti and the brilliant-blue of handkerchief-sized morpho butterflies flitting through the trees. Squirrel monkeys chirruped in the canopy above and tiny manakins roosted on pencil-thin branches, revealing themselves with a flurry of alarmed pips and a blur of startled red and black as they fled at our passing.

And there was more to Lapa Rios than fabulous forest trails. Ulises showed me the local school funded by the lodge, where employees' children received a decent education. And he showed me the pigs fed from kitchen scraps. Their dung heap was covered in plastic hooding, topped by a pipe which led back to the kitchens where stoves were fuelled by this naturally-sourced methane.

From Lapa Rios I travelled north to La Quinta Sarapiquí – another model ecotourism project, set in the country's central lowlands and surrounded by farmland. The owner Leo Jenkins took me aside just after I arrived.

"From England?" he asked. I said yes. "My ancestor was your neighbour," he said mischievously, "he was, you might say, a particularly fertile Welsh sailor."

He beckoned me into the lodge's lovely orchard garden, where we planted a mountain almond tree. Within just a few years, Leo assured me, it would capture more carbon in its wood than my entire journey from doorstep taxi to taxiing plane on the runway in San José. And furthermore, the nuts would feed a critically endangered parrot, the Great Green Macaw.

The same afternoon, Leo showed me some of these magnificent metre-long, brilliant-green birds with their raucous, cackling calls. They partner for life and can live as long as a human. Mountain almonds had been planted in cattle-grazed fields in a series of farms near the lodge, and the macaws were nesting in a hole high up in one tree, cavorting noisily in the branches of another. Without this chain of trees towering over the lowland fields, Leo explained, the macaws would be isolated in patches of

forest and die out. And without ecotourism, Costa Rica's forests would be felled.

As I caught my breath after the peccary chase and let the adrenaline seep out of my veins, I looked east from Arenal. The mountain at my back, I was perched in the folds of its black and grey skirt. Costa Rica stretched before me, a misty carpet of rainforest green, warmed yellow by the early morning light. It's the only country in the world where reforestation exceeds deforestation. Many of those millions of trees in front of me had been planted. Without visitors like me, this tiny piece of tropical America would be farmland. And how many millions of tons of carbon was trapped in those trees, I asked myself, the equivalent of how many flights?

Beyond Costa Rica, from Colombia to Paraguay, forest was burning to prepare land for grazing burger-meat and cattle-feed soya. But here the air was limpid and clear. Rarely have I felt better about flying long-haul.



WHEN TO GO

Costa Rica has just two seasons: winter/wet and summer/dry. Summer, from December to April, is the perfect time to visit the beaches of the Pacific coast. The rainforests are also a little less rainy in summer. In the wet season (May to November), rainfall is intense but brief. Activities such as whitewater rafting and birdwatching are better in the wet season, but others can be tricky, with many road routes impassable.

HOW TO GET THERE

Iberia offers a daily service via Madrid, American Airlines via Miami or Dallas, and United Airlines via Newark or Houston to San José.

WHERE TO STAY

GRANO DE ORO, SAN JOSÉ

Converted from a Victorian mansion on a shady street off San José's main thoroughfare, this hotel is an oasis in the heart of the city. Public spaces are lined with period photographs and original art.

FINCA ROSA BLANCA A luxurious eco-lodge on a coffee plantation in the Central Valley highlands, well placed for the cloud forests and volcanoes of Poás and Braulio Carrillo National Parks.

LAPA RIOS ECO LODGE, OSA

PENINSULA Set in a private nature reserve of 1,000 acres, Lapa Rios is home to monkeys, macaws, toucans and other creatures. The bungalows have spectacular views across the Golfo del Dulce.

LA QUINTA SARAPIQUÍ COUNTRY INN

An excellent eco-lodge, set in what was farmland but is now a tropical garden attracting birds, frogs and butterflies galore.

SELVA VERDE LODGE AND RAIN-FOREST RESERVE

A pioneer of Costa Rican ecotourism, with cosy accommodation set in 500 acres of tropical nature and supporting the wider habitats, wildlife and people of Sarapiquí.

ARENAL KIORO HOTEL Five-star trappings in the foothills of Arenal, with great views of the volcano and lush gardens. Secluded hot-spring baths add to the charms.

PARADOR HOTEL, MANUEL ANTONIO

Still more responsible luxury, just minutes from Manuel Antonio National Park, where the jungle tumbles onto miles of white beaches and clear waters, overlooked by three glorious pools.

ECO TOURS IN COSTA RICA
GETTING THERE, STAYING THERE, BEING THERE



and ringed by mountains. Close to the city is the high crater of Irazú volcano, one of the country's most stirring sights. Arenal in Sarapiquí is one of eight active volcanoes in the country, and nighttime eruptions are spectacular. The thermal springs and mud pools of Volcán Rincón de la Vieja are best explored on horseback or on foot. Trekkers may also scale Cerro Chirripó, the country's highest peak at 3,819 metres.

Wildlife spotters can choose from Santa Rosa National Park in Guanacaste Province in the northwest, which has ten distinct habitats, or Tortuguero National Park's rainforests, beaches, swamps and lagoons. Corcovado National Park on the Osa Peninsula is one of the most biologically diverse places in the world, and one of the last strongholds of the jaguar in Central America, while Manuel Antonio teems with primates including howler monkeys and capuchins.

Playa Conchal in Guanacaste is perhaps Costa Rica's most beautiful beach. The wildest surfing is at Puerto Viejo de Talamanca in Limón Province. Offshore in the Pacific lie San Lucas and Cocos, attractive islands with tropical jungle and excellent beaches. Some of the best dive sites are off Caño Island, accessible from Drake Bay on Osa.

SUGGESTED HIGHLIGHTS

Costa Rica has been at the forefront of ecotourism since the 1980s, supported by a system of National Parks and protected zones that make up almost a quarter of the land area. Few countries boast its range of natural attractions, which include pristine white beaches, lush rainforests, stunning waterfalls, dormant and active volcanoes, and spectacular reefs. Activities range from nature treks and horseback riding to whitewater rafting, scuba diving and sea kayaking.

The capital city of San José is set on a plateau in the Central Valley

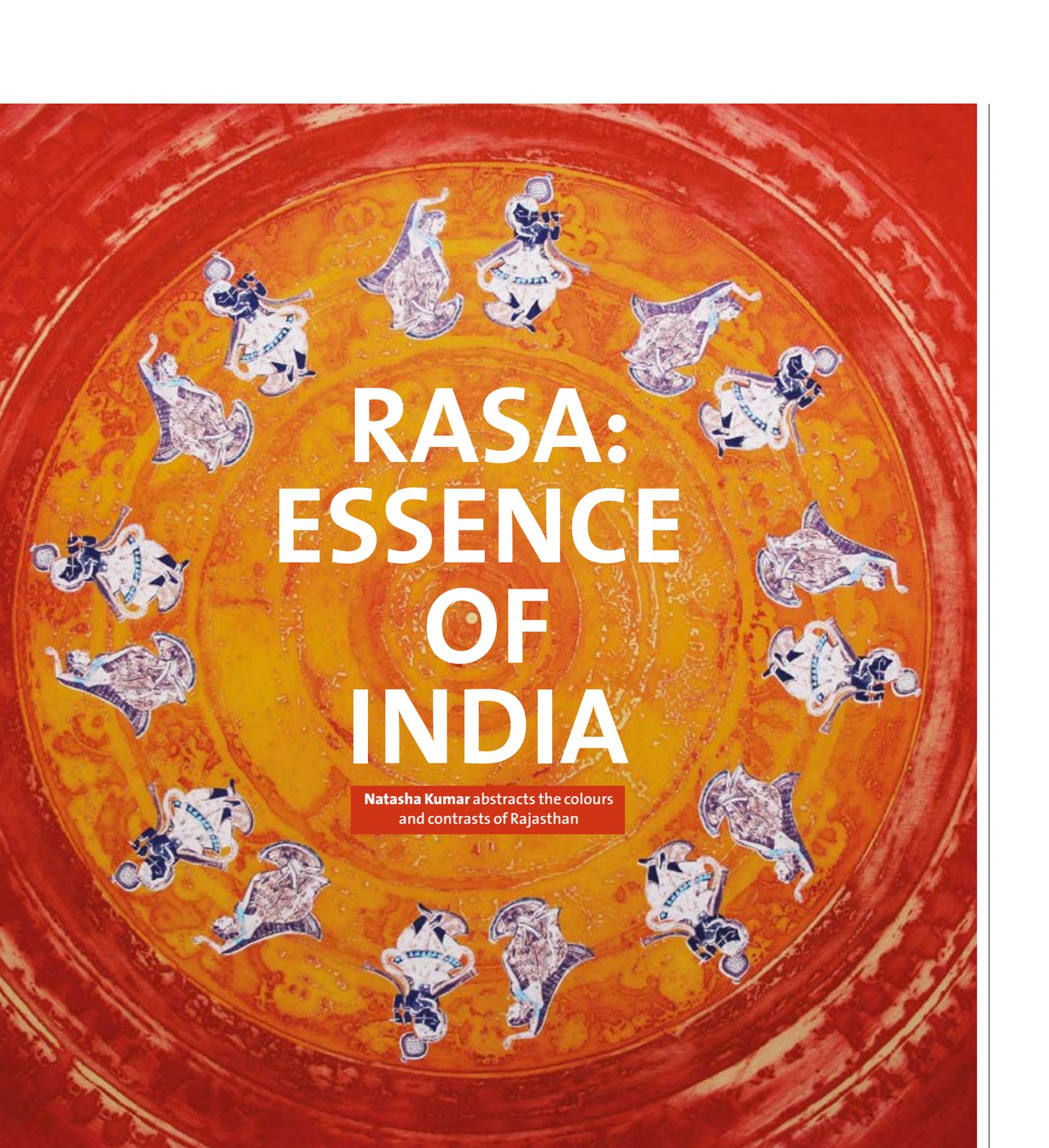
IN A WORD

Agusto
(Central American Spanish)
The cosiness felt when snuggling with a relative

Word by Adam Jacot de Boindot, author of *The Meaning of Tingo*



A 10-day tour of Sarapiquí and the Osa Peninsula is priced from £2,795 to £3,395 per person including return flights, accommodation and tour guides. **WEXAS TRAVEL Central America specialist Rachel Mostyn** (left) will be happy to discuss your Costa Rica travel plans. Please call **020 7838 5918**, or for more ideas visit **www.wexas.com/holidays/central-america/costa-rica**



RASA: ESSENCE OF INDIA

Natasha Kumar abstracts the colours and contrasts of Rajasthan

THE RASA SERIES BEGAN

about ten years ago, when Natasha Kumar first started sketching the *chhatri*, an essential element of North Indian architecture. Often ornate, intricately carved, the *chhatri* rapidly became a central theme in her work.

Clockwise from above:

Rasa Mandala Series VIII, Rasa Sphere Series VIII (detail), Red Rasa (detail), Rasa Sphere Series X.

The elegant symmetry of the pillars, the detailed carving of the base, splashes of raw pigment left behind after a *puja*, all fascinated. To express the moods evoked by the *chhatris* at different times in the day, she took colours and contrasts from everyday Rajasthan life – bold fluorescing pinks and oranges, dark russet and turquoise.

Over time, village street art, *raga* music cycles, and stories from the Hindu pantheon all competed as subject matter for her, until drawing the Royal Chhatris at Bundi, Rajasthan, Natasha looked up and discovered the concentric circles carved on the underside of a *chhatri* dome. And so the *RASA* collection began.

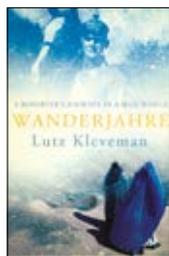


“In Hindi, *rasa* is essence or emotion,” she explains. “For me, the *RASA* collection is a new exploration into this ancient Indian aesthetic. It is also an important stage of my artistic development: figurative representation to abstract sensibility. I feel the collection is not just about visual display but also how individuals respond to it.”

This is *rasa swadana* – literally the tasting of flavour. 

RASA: Essence of India continues at the Southbank Centre to 1 October. Natasha Kumar is participating at the Affordable Art Fair in Battersea from 23 to 26 October.





Wanderjahre: A Reporter's Journey in a Mad World

By Lutz Kleveman

Reviewed by Alex Stewart
Amazon White Glove, pbk, 390pp,
£8.99

Lutz Kleveman was a foreign correspondent for eight turbulent years at the start of the

millennium. In the Balkans, West Africa, Caucasus, Latin America and Southeast Asia he pursued stories and repeatedly proved himself a bold but irresponsible risk-taker who usually worked alone and viewed war as a jolly great game.

Early on in his *wanderjahre*, his wandering years as a roving writer, he confesses to combining the pursuit of a story with the reckless hunt for adventure. None of the wars he encountered provided the desired adrenaline rush for long though and, in between conflicts, he is frustrated and uneasy in modern society.

In a bid to understand the source of his restless attraction to war zones he tries to learn more about his grandfather, a soldier caught behind Russian lines in WWI, who made a circuitous return home and became a high-ranking officer in Hitler's Wehrmacht. Kleveman's discoveries form a backdrop to his contemporary travels and reveal something of why he puts himself into extraordinary jeopardy.

Although he works alone, his love affair with war zones affords an insight into life as part of the hack pack. Some scenes are straight out of *Scoop*, Evelyn Waugh's satire on reporters huddled at a hotel in Addis during the Abyssinian War in the 1930s. Others confirm the image of war reporters as thrill seekers and adrenaline junkies.

Kleveman's own immersive journalism means that, as opposed to observing or reporting without opinion, the alpha male in him is always actively involved in what he hears and sees. He courts trouble, antagonises people he interviews for a reaction and allows his presence to influence events and the story, effectively becoming a "tourist in other people's lives and tragedies."

Many of the experiences are recounted in an unflinching style and the near-escapes, revelations and frank, revealing conversations with powerful, dangerous people tumble over each other with a formidable forward momentum. Warlords, assassins, drug smugglers and trigger-happy teens toting firearms come to life in his terse descriptions while Kleveman continually wrestles with his past and his desire to thrust himself into danger.

The result is a raw and often unattractive look at recent history, both global and personal. Such is the brief encounter with each country though and the strength of Kleveman's personality that you don't learn much about the history and context of each conflict beyond his immediate experience. Ultimately though, these vignettes confirm Churchill's observation that you should, "Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter."



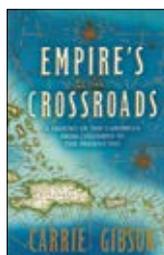
Like a Tramp, Like a Pilgrim: On Foot Across Europe to Rome

By Harry Bucknall

Reviewed by Amy Sohanpaul
Bloomsbury, hbk, 245pp, £16.99

'Just because we're on a pilgrimage doesn't mean it has to be all hair shirts and misery, you know. They had plenty of fun in the Middle Ages

– troubadours, mead, wine every night'. Harry Bucknall is having a not untypical exchange with a pilgrim he meets on the road from St Paul's to St Peter's. He's just confessed to having Black Sabbath on his iPod. It turns out this might not be every pilgrim's soundtrack of choice. But Bucknall is no ordinary pilgrim. He's a maverick on the move, he dances in the woods, he takes a detour from the beaten pilgrim path to go to a glitzy party in Geneva. Not that he has a ball when he gets there – 'I was in a different place both mentally and spiritually' – despite the dancing, this is far from a frivolous account. It's not that kind of undertaking, and every stage of his tramp to Rome involves meaningful encounters not just with place, but with people; not just observations of the now, but vivid vignettes of local history that surprise. Anecdotes and adventures are depicted in lively detail, the stories of those he meets, with genuine empathy. He takes the reader with him every step of the way, no hairshirts required.



Empire's Crossroads

By Carrie Gibson

Reviewed by Mark Reynolds
Macmillan, hbk, 480pp, £25

In this sweeping evocation of life in the islands from their earliest settlement and exploration through the role of religious dispute in pirate raids, the

enforced labour of African workers on European-run sugar plantations, slave rebellions and the struggle for meaningful independence, Carrie Gibson presents a vivid portrait of the realities of the daily grind in what richer nations loosely term paradise. Under more than 500 years of European rule, the displacement of a sparse Amerindian native population and the imposition of bonded workers from distant outposts of British, French, Dutch and Spanish Empire created a creole culture of laidback pride throughout this contradictory and diverse region. It's a mood she captures again and again in stories about tyrants, fortune and pleasure seekers, violence and natural beauty. It is a compelling meditation on the complexities of identity and the random and discriminatory nature of history's connections and crossings, and of a present-day tourism industry that sees 80 per cent of income spirited away from the islands by the international consortia who run luxury resorts – or never leave the bowels of a 5,000-passenger cruise liner:



A PICTORIAL PERSPECTIVE

An invisible line of latitude 66 degrees and 33 minutes north of the Equator, the Arctic Circle intersects eight countries and is home to a rich diversity of people for whom the sun never sets in high summer, nor rises in deepest winter. Over seven years and 11 trips to the Arctic, shooting in 23 cities, towns and remote villages, Cristian Barnett has gathered a unique series of portraits of Arctic people – Gwichin, Saami, Khanti, Nenets, Evenks, Yakuts and Inuit – and distinct natural landscapes. Together they depict thriving modern settlements touched by ancient tradition.

***Life on the Line: People of the Arctic Circle* by Cristian Barnett is published by Polarworld, priced £30. See more at www.lifeontheline.org.uk**



A NOVEL EXPERIENCE

Jason Goodwin's latest book in the much-loved Inspector Yashim series sees the detective and amateur cook dive into the stylish, sensual world of Ottoman Istanbul to investigate the disappearance of a Polish prince. He explains his choice of setting:

"Istanbul is a turnstile between the continents, and has always thrummed to the tensions between tradition and modernity, between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, summer heat and winter ice. Disconnects which make it the perfect place to hide a body. The Baklava Club brings in the docks, and the lakes outside the city walls, as well as more familiar locations like the harem at Topkapi, or Istiklal Caddesi, the old Grande Rue de Pera."

***The Baklava Club* by Jason Goodwin is published by Faber & Faber, priced £12.99**

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...

» If holidays sometimes fill you with dread, Sarah Tucker's *The A to Zen of Travel* (New Generation Publishing, £5.99) is a pocket-sized stress-buster exploring which climates and cultures will best feed your soul.

» Unicorn Press continues to produce striking small hardbacks of modern nature classics. The latest include a centenary edition of Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water* with beautiful watercolour illustrations of otters at play by Mark Adlington; and Rachel Carson's *Under the Sea Wind* (both £14.99), which evokes the behaviours of fish and seabirds in story form.

» Matthew Parker's *Goldeneye: Where Bond Was Born – Ian Fleming's Jamaica* by (Hutchinson, £20.00) is a heady cocktail of anachronistic British imperial values, hedonism and exotic danger of the kind that infused Fleming's novels.

» In chillier climes, David Day's *Flaws in the Ice: In Search of Douglas Mawson* (Scribe, £14.99) re-evaluates one of the heroes of the golden age of Antarctic exploration – with shocking results.

» Deepti Kapoor's *A Bad Character* (Jonathan Cape, £14.99) is a gritty story of female desire set in an underbelly of Delhi awash with violence, rage and corruption.

» Rebecca Seal's *The Islands of Greece: Recipes from Across the Greek Seas* (Hardie Grant Books, £25) collects lovingly created traditional recipes alongside evocative photography by Steven Joyce; Gunnar Gislason and Jody Eddy's *North: The New Nordic Cuisine of Iceland* (Ten Speed Press, £30) celebrates the starkly beautiful foodways and landscapes of the island nation; and James Hoffman's *The World Atlas of Coffee* (Mitchell Beazley, £20), is a delicious postprandial tour of beans and brewing from Bolivia to Zambia.

» *Great Maps* by Jerry Brotton (Dorling-Kindersley, £20) is a gorgeous study of how maps have influenced and reflected our world from medieval *mappae mundi* to Google Earth.

» In *The Marches* (Jonathan Cape, £16.99), Rory Stewart explores the landscape and history of the Anglo-Scottish borders.

» Granta's 'City Secrets' series continues with Robert Khan's *Paris* (£12.99), containing essential tips from the heart of the City of Love.

» Jennifer Eremeeva's *Lenin Lives Next Door* (Small Batch Books, £14.83) knits together vignettes of cross-cultural and expatriate life with sharp observation, historical background and humour.

» And further East, two fascinating studies of China's imperial baggage are David Elmer's *The Emperor Far Away* (Bloomsbury, £20), exploring the restive minorities at China's hinterlands; and Jung Chang's *The Empress Dowager Cixi* (Vintage, £9.99), a compelling biography of the concubine who launched modern China. Finally *Ricky Rouse Has a Gun* by Jörg Tittel and John Aggs (SelfMadeHero, £14.99) is a provocative and darkly funny graphic novel that takes a sideswipe at us-China relations and explores a culture ripe with (pirated) innovation and courageous spirit.



SAUVIGNON AND BEYOND

Melanie Brown, wine buyer at London's The Providores restaurant, gives a taste of her latest Kiwi venture

What inspired you to start The New Zealand Cellar?

Working at the forefront of the hospitality industry for over a decade, it was glaringly obvious that there was a lack of availability of New Zealand's finest wines here in the UK. I wanted to showcase the diversity and quality that New Zealand wines offer on an exciting new platform.



How many wine producers do you currently work with?

Currently we work with 60 producers, each of which carry the ethos we want to acknowledge. We are constantly canvassing the New Zealand market for more top-quality producers to add to our portfolio, with dozens more wines to be added in the coming months.



UK wine drinkers are broadly familiar with Marlborough's signature Sauvignon Blancs. What other varieties and terroirs excel in this region?

It is certainly difficult to go past the world-renowned Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc! But the diverse terroir that Marlborough offers means there are many grapes that thrive here, from interesting examples of Gruner Veltliner to 100% Malbec and also Syrah.

How do the South Island's other wine regions differ?

The differences between Marlborough and the more southerly regions are mainly due to the large range of Alps that run nearly the entire breadth of the island. Canterbury and Waipara enjoy cool climates and long ripening periods which, combined with unique soil profiles, excel in producing aromatic wines. Move further south to Central Otago and Waitaki, home to some of the most southerly vineyards in the world, and you have the most extreme and dramatic climatic conditions but all with relatively free-draining soils. The unique terroir and climate conditions allow Pinot Noir to thrive, and Central Otago is said to be the first region in the world to rival Burgundy.



THE SOUTH ISLAND'S CENTRAL OTAGO IS SAID TO BE THE FIRST REGION IN THE WORLD TO RIVAL BURGUNDY



What are the main features of the North Island's wines?

The North Island offers a much warmer climate with some very exciting boutique producers and unique wines. Gisborne, for instance, produces full and fragrant wines thanks to the long sunshine hours. Much of the North Island basks in the same glory, allowing full-bodied and intensely flavoured wines to excel.

What is the typical profile of a New Zealand Cellar winemaker?

There are many different styles, techniques, cultures and traditions, but I think one of the most significant qualities that shines through is the ability to allow the wine to show a sense of place, to carry the ethos and integrity of the people behind the vineyard.

Which is the largest producer whose wines you carry, and how does the output of the smallest compare?

Our main aim is to support smaller producers, but there is plenty of recognition to be given to larger producers who played an enormous role in the global recognition of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Kim Crawford is one of these larger producers and their SP Spitfire Sauvignon Blanc is one of best examples produced on a larger scale. The output difference is huge compared to, say, Bell Hill whose wine I need to reserve six months in advance as the production is so limited you can barely get your hands on it!

Finally, which New Zealand wines would you pair with:

Fish & Chips Ata Rangi Craighall Chardonnay

Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding Kalex Pinot Noir

Chicken Tikka Masala Seresin Reserve Chardonnay

The Providores' crab and coconut laksa Rippon Gewurztraminer

Pavlova Pegasus Bay Finale



Main image: Framingham Vineyard, Marlborough

Read more about these and other wines, as well as upcoming tastings and events at www.thenewzealandcellar.co.uk



BEST HOTELS OF BUENOS AIRES

LEGADO MÍTICO

Palermo is a leafy neighbourhood in the northeast of Buenos Aires filled with lively cafés, bars, restaurants, parks and gardens. The largest barrio in the city, only a short distance from the main tourist centre of Recoleta, it has a burgeoning reputation as the coolest place to stay. The trendiest part is known as Palermo Soho, where open-air weekend markets on Plaza Serrano and Plaza Armenia offer a dizzying array of fashions, accessories and handicrafts. The barrio's name comes from the still-standing Franciscan abbey of San Benito de Palermo, which is dedicated to Sicily's Benedict the Moor.

Legado Mítico is a delightful boutique hotel (rough translation 'the mythical house') with a slightly madcap design premise: the 11 rooms are individually decorated on a theme of famous Argentinians. This may threaten to lean towards kitsch, yet is tastefully done. Classic and Superior rooms celebrate the lives of the likes of fictional gaucho hero Martín Fierro,

patron of the arts Victoria Ocampos and literary giant Jorge Luis Borges, while the Deluxe rooms are dedicated to Eva Peron, Che Guevara and tango superstar Carlos Gardel.

You'll be so stirred by the lives and myths that surround you, that your visit won't be complete without crossing the nearby parks to explore the Museo Evita, dedicated to the legendary First Lady Eva Peron. The museum was established by her grand-niece, in an elegant mansion that Evita had turned into a shelter for displaced migrant women and children.

The hotel's cosy interior features a long bar/relaxation area, with comfy chairs and a big bookcase lining one wall. The outside patio and rooftop deck are nice al fresco hangouts, and the generous breakfasts are served in a homely lounge. There is no full-service restaurant, but many fabulous dining options are within easy walking range.



SOFITEL

A city landmark since it went up in 1929 as an imposing office tower for shipping magnate Nicolás Mihanovich in Recoleta, overlooking the River Plate on which his steamships once plied their trade, this building was refurbished for Sofitel in 2003, with the addition of a basement pool and gym. The result is a stunning 5-star hotel that combines French style and Argentine tradition. Interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon has captured the building's original Art Nouveau and Art Deco character while adding a modern touch. A striking 600-kilogramme iron and bronze chandelier dominates the impressive marble lobby area. International gourmet restaurant Le Sud, the traditional Café Arroyo and La Bibliothèque bar offer an excellent choice of drinks and dining, and the neighbourhood has the best antique and art shops in the city. The rooms are spacious and elegantly furnished in relaxing tones of ochre and ivory and details of Argentine leather.



STIRRED BY THE LIVES AND MYTHS, YOUR VISIT WON'T BE COMPLETE WITHOUT EXPLORING THE MUSEO EVITA

Clockwise from left:
Alvear Art, Legado Mítico, Sofitel, Casa Sur Art Hotel, Nuss Buenos Aires Soho

NUSS BUENOS AIRES SOHO

Another excellent boutique hotel in Palermo, close to Plaza Serrano, with 22 simple but stylish rooms in a converted convent building, and a superb low-rise rooftop bar with a separate plunge pool area and a pretty central patio.

CASA SUR ART HOTEL

This is a very smart 4-star boutique hotel in Recoleta. Its 36 rooms are nicely decorated in dark browns with lovely wooden flooring. The Bengal restaurant has a great wine selection – and curry too – while the Spa & Fitness Centre offers excellent treatments.

ALVEAR ART

Located in downtown Buenos Aires, this is a 5-star hotel with spacious and elegant rooms and excellent service. The Spa & Fitness Centre and indoor pool at the top of the building have unrivalled panoramic views across the city.





IDLING THROUGH THE ISLANDS

Adam Jacot de Boinod takes a Blue Lagoon cruise around the Yasawas

THERE ARE OVER 300 ISLANDS IN FIJI – OF WHICH about 100 are inhabited – and another 500 or so islets dotted across the seascape. Green-topped mountains typically rise abruptly from the coast, the waters are crystalline, the sand truly white. For once the brochures do not lie and photographs have no need for airbrushing.

A Blue Lagoon cruise makes most sense if tacked onto a visit to Australia or New Zealand, or a wider tour of the Pacific region. It is the perfect holiday within a holiday. For Europeans it's a long, long way, but the pressure is off instantly you land, and the airport and marina are intimately close. Once you are acclimatised, a cruise can be as restful or energetic as you want it to be. You are effortlessly on the move and there is pure beauty in view as magical shores bob gently across your eyeline.

Cruises may not be for everyone, but sailing in these waters is never plain, there's always something to feast upon. The daily itinerary is carefully conceived to ensure each day feels different, and dinner settings and menus are artful and imaginative.

The Yasawa Island group, around 20 in all and volcanic in origin, is deliciously remote, looking out over Bligh Water, named after Captain Cook's first mate. It's also famous as the location for the 1949 and 1980 *Blue Lagoon* films starring Jean Simmons and Brooke Shields. Yet miraculously, despite Hollywood's sporadic intrusion, the islands remain unspoilt and innocent.

The advantage of being bespoke and boutique is that things are small enough to be informal. On Blue

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YOU ARE EFFORTLESSLY ON THE MOVE AND THERE IS PURE BEAUTY IN VIEW AS MAGICAL SHORES BOB GENTLY ACROSS YOUR EYELINE

Adam Jacot de Boinod is the author of *The Meaning of Tingo* and other books about words and their definitions

Lagoon's own private beach on Nanuya Island, the *Fiji Princess* can get so close as to be tied up to a coconut tree. The rotund and jolly captain (with his self-deprecating cry – “The more you eat, the more you float!”) somehow maintained his authority while joining the spontaneous swim ashore as we all decided to cool down.

My fellow passengers were principally couples from the Antipodes, typically in their 50s or over, more likely to be renewing their vows than honeymooners. Relaxed camaraderie peaked in animated conviviality by the last night on the top deck at a farewell barbecue dinner under the stars, the 40 guests on this small boat chatting easily with the friendly staff – for whom English is their first language, taught ahead of their respective Fijian dialects. It makes a real difference that most of the stewards, servers and guides come from the islands and grew up with the villagers we have a chance to meet at Tamasua Bay and Drawaqa Island – respectful meetings far removed from any notion of a ‘human safari’. With natural grace and dignity, staff and villagers do things in ‘Fiji time’ with endearing patience, song and dance.

I met the English teacher at the village school on Drawaqa. Alfred, perspiring beneath his tightly knotted tie, also runs the library, which he told me houses copies of *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* but no art books to show Paul Gauguin's work, surely a more vital connection between European and Oceanic values. The islands' schools are assisted by the inspired Yasawa Trust Foundation, which espouses enlightened principles for marine conservation and sustainable farming and fishing.

I went on a shorter four-night version of the seven-day tour, staying on afterwards at the wonderful Matamanoa, a deluxe resort perfect for honeymooners, with a lovely view over Modriki Island, where Tom Hanks filmed *Castaway*. I then returned to the main island of Viti Levu to take in the breathtaking scents and canopied walkways of the Garden of the Sleeping Giant orchid gardens, established by the late actor Raymond Burr in the foothills of the Nausori Highlands.

But the undoubted highlight of the trip was the chance to create my own desert island experience. Like a mad dog or the Englishman I am, I walked the circumference of one island. I had a hat and some water, but underestimated the distance and the heat – nothing that a drop of iodine and tea tree oil couldn't restore. Lesson learned, I swam a full circle around the next. I had the place to myself, accompanied only by myriad reef creatures flitting among the soft coral.

British Colonialism has left its mark in hymn and psalm plaques in the local Methodist churches, as well as in the locals' fluent English. As is my wont, I bought a Fijian-to-English dictionary to browse. *Cobo* – to clap the hands crosswise, so as to make a hollow sound – was something I recognised, having witnessed as part of a ceremonial act. *Tele* – to paint the eyes of a pig with lime to blind it, preventing it from spoiling gardens – thankfully not.

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To book your Fiji holiday including a 3-, 4- or 7-night Blue Lagoon cruise in the Yasawas, call The Luxury Cruise Company on 020 7838 5991.

Over the next eight pages we get the low-down on four delightful destinations – Antarctica, California, Malaysia and Alberta

Welcome aboard

Silversea's intimate expedition cruise ship offers the perfect way to view the ice without the crush



Silversea's purpose-built *Silver Explorer* expedition cruise ship, with berths for up to 132 guests and a crew of 117, has been designed specifically for navigating some of the world's most remote destinations, including both polar regions. Her strengthened hull enables *Silver Explorer* to safely push through ice floes with ease. A fleet of Zodiac boats allows passengers to go ashore at stunning off-the-beaten-track locations, and an expert expedition team provides insight and understanding before, during and after each adventure landing. 



WEXAS TRAVEL consultant **Tim Tan** takes an exhilarating trip to the Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica

Adventures in the forbidding continent

As we round the tip of Tierra del Fuego, with the Falklands still 200 miles ahead, I stand on the bridge of *Silver Explorer* chatting with the expert naturalists and polar historians who will be giving talks, spotting wildlife and leading excursions on our cruise, anticipating the adventures ahead.

On the third morning, we touch shore on New Island, a wildlife and nature reserve where thousands of blue-eyed shags and rockhopper penguins huddle together on the rocks, preening, grooming and basking in the sunshine. We disembark for West Point, accompanied by dolphins playing in our bow waves, and are soon strolling across rolling moorland where majestic black-browed albatrosses nest side-by-side with the feisty rockhoppers.

The next day it's Port Stanley, the



colourful Falkland capital, for a tour of the town and the battlefield sites of the 1982 conflict – which leaves plenty to ponder as we reboard and set sail for South Georgia.

Two days' ploughing on through the great Southern Ocean are interspersed with champagne on deck under clear, sunny skies,



gourmet cuisine, expert lectures on the wildlife, weather and history of the region – and frequent thrills as wildlife is spotted in the immediate waters. Fin whales and humpbacks make several appearances, the former gliding below the surface like stealthy U-boats, the latter leaping from the water so close we can make out the barnacles on their heads. In the skies above, inquisitive blue petrels greet us and wandering albatross tip their wings.

Landing by Zodiac at Salisbury Plain, we stand among the second-largest colony of king penguins in the world. Among the 60,000 mating pairs, hundreds of fur and elephant seals loll on the beach, snorting and bellowing their mating calls. It's a wildlife spectacle on a scale I've never before witnessed, framed by snowy mountains and plains that stretch inland towards the rusting remnants of old whaling stations and Ernest Shackleton's final resting place.

Another two days after leaving South Georgia, we anchor off Elephant Island in brilliant sunshine that lights up towering icebergs in stunning shades of

aquamarine. As we skim the glassy water in our Zodiac, chinstrap penguins march in line along the snowy shoreline.

Reaching the Antarctic Peninsula, a spectacular range of jagged mountains draped in glaciers welcomes us like a beckoning arm. A landing at Brown Bluff allows us to creep in close to Adélie penguins guarding their eggs. Then in the Weddell Sea, Captain Boczek tests *Silver Explorer's* specially strengthened hull to the max as we crash through sea ice for a chance to walk on the ice sheet.

The leopard seal is second only to the killer whale among the predators of Antarctica, so it is with a mixture of fear and excitement that we watch a pair approaching a rookery of gentoo penguins which are playfully jumping off rocks and darting around the bay. The seals swim closer, select a target, then it's over in a flash: one burst of speed prompts another, the penguins scatter, but this time the seals go hungry and slip back below the surface. It was a breathtaking moment that encapsulates the battle for resources and survival on this harsh but spectacular continent.



Day by day

Tim Tan took *Silversea's* 18-day *Explorer's Antarctica* tour, which follows in the snowshoe-clad footsteps of the great Antarctic explorers Amundsen, Byrd, Charcot, Cook, Fiennes, Gerlache, Hillary, Mawson, Ross, Scott, Shackleton, Stromness and Weddell, and presents unsurpassed opportunities for wildlife and nature spotting.

ITINERARY			
		ARRIVE	DEPART
DAY 1	USHUAIA, ARGENTINA		17:00
DAY 2	AT SEA		
DAY 3	NEW ISLAND, FALKLAND ISLANDS	07:30	11:00
	WEST POINT, FALKLAND ISLANDS	15:00	19:00
DAY 4	PORT STANLEY, FALKLAND ISLANDS	08:30	16:00
DAYS 5 TO 6	AT SEA		
DAYS 7 TO 9	CRUISE AND EXPLORE SOUTH GEORGIA & THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS	09:30	19:00
DAYS 10 TO 11	AT SEA		
DAY 12	ELEPHANT ISLAND, SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS	09:30	14:00
DAYS 13 TO 15	CRUISE & EXPLORE THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULAR	05:30	12:00
DAYS 16 TO 17	DRAKE PASSAGE		
DAY 18	USHUAIA, ARGENTINA	08:00	

The Luxury Cruise Company (tlcc) is the specialist division of WEXAS, focusing on expert cruise knowledge and independent advice in the luxury cruise sector, and in creating bespoke cruise holidays by including private tours, pre- and post-cruise land extensions, flights and other tailor-made holiday options. TLCC/WEXAS is the No.1 UK agent for *Silver Explorer* cruises. www.theluxurycruisecompany.com
020 7838 5991



Travel there

HOW TO GET THERE

BA have five daily flights to San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego. Virgin fly once daily to San Francisco and twice daily to Los Angeles. Other options from the UK include United Airlines, American, Delta and Norwegian. There are also countless indirect routes and flights to other points across California.

GETTING AROUND

There are plenty of domestic flights between California's major cities and attractions. Trains and (to a lesser extent) buses can be scenic and relaxing, but for most visitors a rental car is the best way to travel within California, along the vast highways that traverse the interior and hug the coast.



WHERE TO STAY
WEXAS TRAVEL
product manager
Katrin Rummer
recommends...

ARGONAUT, SAN

FRANCISCO This boutique hotel has everything you could wish for – not least a picture-perfect location at the edge of the bay at Fisherman's Wharf.

BEVERLY WILSHIRE, LOS ANGELES A history-rich and sumptuous Beverly Hills hotel near Rodeo Drive (just don't get them started about the Presidential Suite's starring role in *Pretty Woman*).

CASA DEL MAR, SANTA MONICA A beautiful grand hotel right on the ocean with the most amazing lobby bar/celebrity hangout.

LA VALENCIA HOTEL, LA JOLLA Iconic pink hotel in this upmarket San Diego seaside town, featuring beautiful Spanish-inspired architecture.

THE AHWAHNEE, YOSEMITE

NATIONAL PARK A striking mix of Art Deco, Native American, Middle Eastern and Arts & Crafts architecture, with stunning views of Yosemite Falls, the Half Dome and Glacier Point.

THE INN AT FURNACE CREEK, DEATH

VALLEY Elegant desert hideaway surrounded by the dramatic barren peaks of the Panamint Mountains and activities for stargazers, hikers, horse riders and seasonal wildflower enthusiasts.



Scott Gediman, assistant superintendent for public & legislative affairs at Yosemite National Park, and a 24-year veteran of the National Park Service, tells us about his work

Bear necessities

What first inspired you to become a National Parks ranger?

Our family vacationed in Yosemite National Park each year when I was growing up in LA. Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a park ranger in Yosemite. After many visits to Yosemite, university, and periods of work in other national parks, I finally landed my dream job.

I always thought nothing could be better than living in a national park, and working to share with others the wonders of Yosemite. I am truly living my dream.

What are the most popular attractions in Yosemite?

People love to see the waterfalls, the granite formations such as Half Dome and El Capitan, the beauty of Yosemite Valley and the giant sequoias.

What time of year in the park do you like best?

Every season is great in Yosemite

but I particularly love the warm summer weather, which affords the opportunity to hike through great open spaces, to explore the backcountry – and swim in the park's lakes and rivers.

How often have you encountered bears in the park?

I see bears fairly regularly. They are most active in the summer and fall, and can be seen in all areas of the park. I've even seen bears in my front yard!

How much damage was caused to Yosemite by the 2013 Rim Fire, and how has the park since recovered?

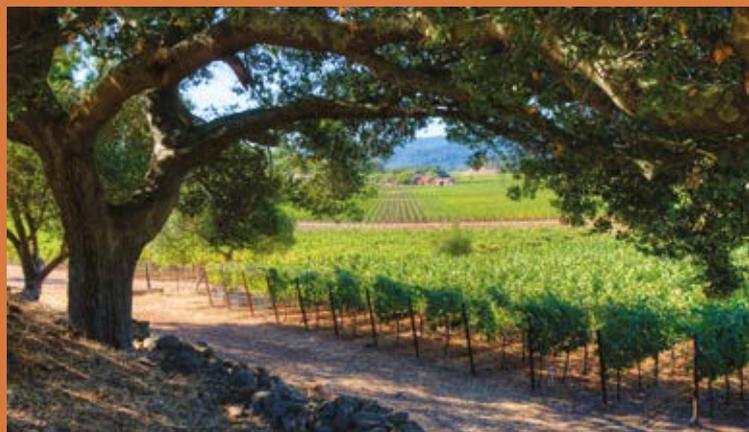
77,183 acres in the park were burned. Since these areas were partially cleared by prescribed and natural fires in the past, the effects were not as severe as they could've been. The park is recovering well, and all affected areas have reopened.

Down in the valley

WEXAS TRAVEL consultant Debbie Mayger shares her tips about Napa's wine country

Contrary to popular belief, the best time to visit Napa is not summer but autumn (September/October), as this is when grapes are harvested

and you can watch all the activity before slaking that pressing thirst. Another great time to visit is spring, when the mustard plants are in full bloom and the





hillsides are zingingly beautiful.

Downtown Napa has lots of brilliant eateries, shops and bars that are easily navigated on foot (handy if you want to include a spot of tasting to help you decide which wineries to include on your itinerary). The River Terrace Inn is a delightful resting place, where river view rooms are well worth the supplement.

There are 400 wineries scattered across Napa's valleys and hillsides. A personal favourite is Domaine Chandon in Yountville, where the good people of Moët have been making traditional *méthode champenoise* sparkling wines since 1973 – the first French bubblemakers to set up in the region. The imposing Castello di Amorosa outside Calistoga has a tour that takes you deep into the bowels of the castle down secret passageways, and sommelier Mary Davidek is on hand to guide you through food and wine

pairings at a rustic Tuscan table. Rutherford Hill was a pioneer in the development of Californian Merlot in conditions that closely match Bordeaux. The winery has a great picnic area, and its caves are the largest in Napa Valley. It can be cold and slippery inside the caves, so bring a sweater and wear flat shoes.

As an alternative to wine, head to Charbay's artisanal family distillery in St Helena, which produces premium brandies, whiskeys, rums and a wide range of tequilas and flavoured vodkas.

Thomas Keller's restaurant The French Laundry in Yountville was judged by TV chef Anthony Bourdain "the best restaurant in the world, period". If you aim to partake of its universally admired three Michelin-starred French-American fusion cuisine, you'll need to reserve a table well ahead of booking your flight.



**DOWNTOWN
NAPA HAS
LOTS OF
BRILLIANT
EATERIES,
SHOPS AND
BARS THAT
ARE EASILY
NAVIGATED
ON FOOT**

What are the main challenges in your job, and for the park as a whole?

Yosemite has about 4 million visitors per year. Although it is great that so many people from all over the world come to the park, it does pose challenges – traffic management, parking, impacts, etc.

We continue to balance visitor use with preservation and have undertaken several projects over the past few years that accommodate both.

Is there ever any conflict between your media and conservation work?

The news media love the park and cover it well. They are respectful of its resources and play a significant role in informing visitors about conservation issues.

How can visitors play an active role in protecting the park?

Above all, by following all park regulations. This includes staying on trails, not feeding wildlife, and treading lightly on the park.

How much contact do you have with Yosemite's sister parks of Huangshan and Jiuzhaigou in China, and Torres del Paine in Chile?

We try to communicate and interact with our sister parks as much as possible. Two of them had representatives in the park last month, and we are planning on sending staff abroad.

The park has an International Affairs Working Group, which I am part of, that works with our sister parks and forges relationships with national parks and protected areas around the world.

What's next for Yosemite?

On 30 June, Yosemite National Park celebrated the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Yosemite Grant, which marked the beginning of the national parks idea – this was the first time an area had been protected for preservation of both the landscape and wildlife and recreation for all the people. Yosemite looks forward to the next 150 years and beyond, and to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016 with a series of special events across the parks network.



Travel there

HOW TO GET THERE

Malaysia Airlines fly twice daily from Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur and onward to all main Malaysian destinations. Emirates fly to KL via Dubai from various UK airports.

GETTING AROUND

Domestic flights are cheap and serve numerous destinations on the peninsula and islands. Long- and short-haul buses are reliable, and hiring a minivan is good for group travel. Boats and ferries travel between the peninsula and the east coast islands, and the rivers of Sabah are negotiated by fast passenger launches and motorised longboats.



WHERE TO STAY
WEXAS TRAVEL
product manager
Lucy Skelton (left)
recommends...

THE BLUE MANSION,

GEORGETOWN Built by a feng shui master for Chinese tycoon Cheong Fatt Tze, this property is steeped in history and artefacts and you can simply enjoy a guided tour or stay in one of the recently renovated rooms.

SERI CHENANG, LANGKAWI Set on the banks of the river near Chenang beach, the six villas have been built to replicate traditional Malay houses, and each comes with its own butler.

JAPAMALA, TIOMAN ISLAND This rustic hideaway offers a choice of wilderness accommodation tucked into the hillside, overlooking the ocean.

VILLA SAMADHI, KUALA LUMPUR Malay-style residence offering an intimate retreat close to the city but away from the hustle and bustle. Ground floor rooms have direct access to the pool.

ABAI JUNGLE LODGE, SABAH (see feature opposite) Built on stilts and only accessible by water, this simple lodge on the Kinabatangan River offers some of the best wildlife experiences in the region. A great place to spot proboscis monkeys, river crocs, all manner of birdlife, wild orangutan and occasional clouded leopard and sun bear. The lodge is basic, with no air-con, but clean and comfortable. 

Malaysian memories

Esther Ward visits Kuala Lumpur, Tioman Island and Penang



Kuala Lumpur is a bustling metropolis where old meets new, from quaint heritage houses to the towering Petronas Twin Towers. Our guide took us on a journey through the city, where we learnt about its colourful history, visiting the national monument and one of the oldest homes in the city. We stayed in two very different hotels during our stay, the first of which was Villa Samadhi, an intimate Malay-style residence on the outskirts of the city. It is the perfect haven for those

wanting to avoid large corporate hotels in favour of more intimate service and interesting food – but not for those who prefer an easy stroll to local restaurants and shops. The hotel owns a fantastic restaurant called Tamarind Springs just a short shuttle ride away. Set amongst lush gardens, the food, views and ambience have won a string of awards.

E&O Residences in the heart of the city offer some of the most spacious, apartment-style

A river runs through it

Amy Chin, Managing Director of the Abai Jungle Lodge, gives a brief insight into Kinabatangan River attractions

How would you sum up the ethos of the lodge?

Before my husband and I set about establishing the lodge, we sat with villagers to discuss the employment opportunities it would bring, and ways in which we could support the local environment and community. Their strong support and two years of study and construction resulted in the launch of the lodge as a new destination on Kinabatangan in 2004, with a dedicated, motivated and knowledgeable staff drawn from the village.

What are the best times of year for wildlife viewing?

March until early November.

Which animals can typically be seen on a river cruise?

Proboscis monkeys, silvered langur, maroon langur, Hose's langur, crocodile, orangutan, elephants and all kinds of birds.

What are the highlights of the night tour?

Fireflies and our Guided Nature Boardwalk behind the lodge.

How frequently have clouded leopard and sun bear been spotted around the lodge?

Only once or twice a year, so guests who have witnessed those rare visitors have been exceptionally lucky.

accommodation in KL at a fraction of the cost of the top hotels. The simple, fresh food of the street-level restaurant attracts locals, giving it a great buzz.

Next stop was Tioman Island, off the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. The flight is an experience in itself. As you come over a headland of rainforest the pilot makes a sharp turn onto a tiny runway behind a sandy beach where the airport building is an open-air wooden hut. We were then whisked away by private boat to the secluded retreat of Japamala. The rustic hillside and jungle rooms are called *sarangs* (nests), and this resort is all about being at one with nature and soaking up the stunning location. The most luxurious option is a two-bedroom, two-storey villa called Penghulu's House (meaning 'the most important person in the village') only steps from the beach and complete with a private pool. The food is very fresh and interesting, whilst the treetop spa is unpretentious and affordable.

For the last part of our journey we headed to Penang, an island connected to the mainland by a toll bridge. Although a thriving manufacturing hub, Penang is steeped in colonial history and heritage. We spent the first few nights at the historic Eastern & Oriental Hotel in Georgetown, a

grand colonial hotel built by the Sarkie brothers, who also built Raffles in Singapore and The Strand in Rangoon. The E&O retains many traditions and afternoon tea is a decadent experience at their exquisite, intimate Room 1885 (named after the year the hotel was established). You can choose to stay in the Heritage Wing, part of the original hotel complete with butler service, or the Victory Annexe, a stylish and successful blend of old and new. Whilst in Georgetown a heritage tour is a must, a highlight of which is the Blue Mansion (also known as the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion) on Leith Street. This is the former home of a Chinese industrialist who went from rags to riches, married eight times and built this elaborate home in the 1880s. The house has been adapted into a boutique hotel, so you can now enjoy an overnight stay.

We headed to the northern coast and stayed at the sister property to the E&O Georgetown, the Lone Pine in Batu Ferringhi. It is the only boutique hotel in the region, combining colonial charm with a fresh contemporary edge. The beach is not quite as idyllic as on some of the neighbouring Malay islands, but it's an ideal spot for a few days' relaxation after touring the Peninsula. 

Wok's what

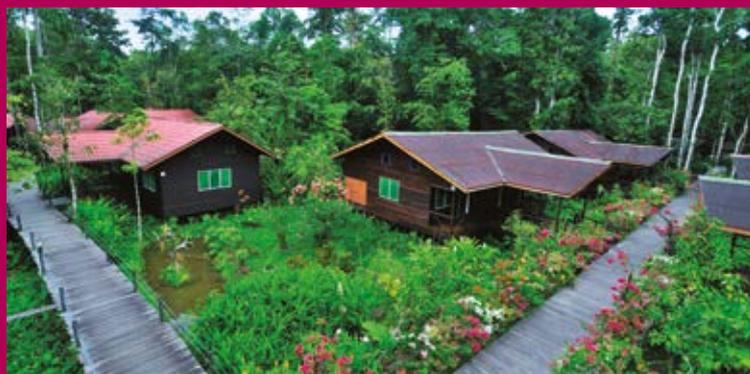
Amy Sohanpaul takes a brief tour of Malaysian cuisine



So many culinary cultures come together in Malaysia that defining the cuisine concisely is a challenge. There are distinct Malay, Chinese, Thai, Indonesian and Indian influences, as well as combinations of all five – and further-flung flavours sneak in too, from the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. Walk down a street in most cities and there will be vendors sizzling individual specialities in pots and woks and grills, filling the air with irresistible aromas.

Despite the myriad influences and ingredients, there is a general balance between hot (spicy), sour, salty and fishy. *Sambal* is a ubiquitous condiment based on chillies, lime juice and fermented shrimp paste. Other key ingredients used in various combinations are lemongrass, lime leaves, dried shrimp paste, palm sugar, coconut, ginger and soy. A spice paste called *rempah* is often the starting point, made by blending chillies and aromatic spices. Given the long coastline, seafood features prominently, either fresh or dried, while rice, noodles and flatbreads are staples served with every meal.

Regional specialities include the fresh river prawns served in Perak and Sabah, and all over Malaysia you'll encounter satay chicken skewers, beef *rendang*, several varieties of *laksa* (noodle soup), *kwey teow* (stir-fried flat rice noodles), meat bone tea (pork ribs simmered in a spicy broth), *nasi dagang* (rice steamed in coconut milk and served with fish curry, hard-boiled eggs and pickles), or fried chicken served with a dipping sauce spiked with Worcestershire sauce. The Malaysian menu can be both bewildering and oddly familiar, but is consistently delicious. 



What opportunities are there for guests to interact with the local community?

There are village walks, a tree-planting project and lunches cooked by villagers.

What other attractions are there within the lodge?

At night, there is wonderful stargazing from all the platforms and seating areas.

What are the restaurant's most popular dishes?

Freshwater prawn and freshwater marble goby (*ikan ubi*) caught by the villagers.

How can guests play their part in helping nature?

Our tree-planting project is a memorable and meaningful way to restore and maintain the surrounding rainforest.

Travel there

HOW TO GET THERE

The Canadian Rockies are accessible from Edmonton or Calgary. Icelandair flies to Edmonton via Keflavik daily from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester and Glasgow and Air Canada flies daily to Edmonton from Heathrow. Air Canada and British Airways fly daily to Calgary from Heathrow and Air Transat flies from Gatwick to Calgary on Wednesdays from November to February.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around in winter is easy due to frequent transfers from either airport to the Rockies. It takes around 4.5 hours from Edmonton to Jasper and around 1.5–2 hours from Calgary to Banff. Frequent transfers also cover Banff-Lake Louise and Jasper. Via Rail operates a train service from Edmonton to Jasper (and onwards to Vancouver) twice a week.



WHERE TO STAY
WEXAS TRAVEL
product manager
Terhi Millar
recommends...

FAIRMONT

MACDONALD, EDMONTON

Celebrating its centenary in 2015, this elegant chateau-style hotel perches high on the bank overlooking the North Saskatchewan River valley.

FAIRMONT JASPER PARK LODGE,

JASPER A 700-acre luxury mountain resort with an impressive collection of cottages, cabins, chalets and suites wrapped around the shores of picturesque Lac Beauvert.

BUFFALO MOUNTAIN LODGE,

BANFF Situated on jagged Tunnel Mountain – known as ‘Sleeping Buffalo’ by local First Nations people. The cosy rooms pay tribute to old-world craftsmanship.

FAIRMONT CHATEAU LAKE LOUISE

A splendid mountain resort surrounded by soaring peaks, the majestic Victoria Glacier and glittering Lake Louise in the heart of Banff National Park.

FAIRMONT PALLISER, CALGARY

Calgary’s premier hotel is a historical landmark, with distinctive accommodation within walking distance of all major attractions.



Jasper forever

Bryan Attree, Director of Business Development at Tourism Jasper, gives us the lowdown on Alberta’s wild mountain park



What are the highlights of the annual Dark Sky Festival?

Every year we strive to bring in the highest quality guest speakers. This year Col. Chris Hadfield is our keynote speaker, and we enticed Jay Ingram back for his second year – he will be working with Col. Hadfield to present our main event. Another great addition to the festival is the Fairmont Symphony Under the Stars and our repeat programmes Beyond the Stars at Lake Annette and the Pyramid Island Starlight Adventure will draw big crowds.

Are the lights dimmed in Jasper during Dark Sky Month, or do visitors have to venture beyond the town for the best viewing experiences?

The official status of Dark Sky Preserve gives Jasper the responsibility of protecting and promoting the nocturnal

environment and clarity of the dark skies. Since our town is not heavily populated, the creation of light pollution is small and a quick drive out of town, ten minutes, allows the best viewing of the stars. Even in someone’s backyard, the light pollution is so minuscule that the experience is far beyond what you would get in a city or a large town.

What is your most memorable stargazing experience?

In 2011, I was working down around the Coral Sea. One night, sailing to the northern part of Australia, I went outside around midnight and soon started to wonder why I couldn’t recognise any of the constellations. After ten minutes of looking around and wondering if I had completely lost my mind, I noticed the Big Dipper and it was upside down! After



Birdlife is also remarkably diverse, with 40 to 50 species identified during the community's annual Christmas bird count.

What are your other favourite winter activities?

So far winter hikes and snowball fights have been at the top of my list, along with cooking.

And what are the most popular attractions in other seasons?

There's a great variety of activities and attractions throughout the year, from rafting and hiking in the summer to ice walks and skiing in the winter. There is something for everyone, from the most active to the most relaxed traveller.

What is your absolute favourite time of the year in Jasper?

I love the summertime. The town is alive, there is activity all around you and the hiking is wonderful. It is great to hike to some of the lakes to swim and relax.



seeing it my whole life from the opposite perspective, was utterly fascinating and mind-blowing.

What kind of wildlife can be spotted in the winter months?

The most commonly spotted are the ungulates that are present year-round including elk, deer, bighorn sheep and occasional moose. Predators that follow them are often seen on secluded roadways such as the Maligne Road or the Icefields Parkway – these include coyotes, wolves (often from a distance) and sometimes lynx.

How does your current role compare with your time in charge of cruise excursions, and do you miss the open seas?

After ten years at sea I will always miss it, as it was such a large portion of my life. I travelled the world, I met so many great people, I was able to experience the most amazing sights and see culture at ground level. But now it's great to see family when I want, have weekends off and head to work and not have the fear of my office sailing away!

Nights of a billion stars

WEXAS TRAVEL product manager **Terhi Millar** is awed by the twinkling wonders of the Dark Sky Festival in Jasper National Park



Few places on earth can offer the spectacle presented by the night sky in Jasper National Park, one of the largest official Dark Sky Preserves in the world, covering a land mass of over 11,000 km including 1,000 km of trails. Vivid constellations, shooting stars and in the winter months dazzling Northern Lights displays can be seen from vantage points all across the park. Pyramid Island, Maligne Lake and Athabasca Glacier are three outstanding year-round viewing spots, but Jasper's dark skies can be thrillingly experienced from any lakeshore or riverside away from the town.

The biggest celebration of all occurs each October during the Dark Sky Festival, a series of events designed to promote understanding of the skies above us, suitable for everyone from amateur astronomers to hopeless romantics. This year's festival runs from 17 to 26 October, so there's still time to sign up for some serious stargazing.

If this year's festival falls too soon, Western Alberta and the Canadian Rockies have much more to offer during the winter months than standard winter sports destinations. Although rightly famed as a world-class ski destination – a day's lift pass in Marmot Basin, one of the least crowded ski resorts in North America, is not to be missed – the immense snow-covered forests and vast alpine plains create the ultimate winter playground, where dogsledding tours, snowshoe excursions and thrilling helicopter flights show off the beauty, wildlife and spectacular frozen landscapes of Jasper, Lake Louise and Banff. Whether craning your neck into the night sky or watching your step on a half-day hike across the frozen floor of Maligne Canyon, life-changing adventures abound in this astonishing wilderness at its most magical time of the year.

A 7-day Edmonton & Jasper Winter Break is priced at £1,750 including international flights, transfers, accommodation, Maligne Canyon excursion and Marmot Basin lift pass. Call **Patrick Griffin** on **020 7581 5491** to discuss your travel plans, or for more ideas visit www.wexas.com/holidays/north-america/canada

HEALTH & SAFETY

[1] SYRIA

Islamic State (IS) militants and the Syrian government have each committed mass atrocities in Syria; the IS engaging in public executions and chemical weapon attacks, while the government has launched barrel bomb attacks in civilian areas and subjected detainees to systematic torture and sexual assault. Jihadists across the region and fighters from Western countries continue to be drawn into the conflict, which has spilled over into northern Iraq. Three million people have fled across Syria's borders to escape the bloody civil war since early 2012.

[2] WEST AFRICA

The number of deaths from Ebola in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria now stands at over 1,500 – around half of those infected – and the outbreak threatens to spread to neighbouring countries. The WHO says the West Africa outbreak could infect more than 20,000 people, but also notes that recent travel restrictions create food and supply shortages and harm efforts to contain the deadly virus.

[3] UKRAINE

Events in Ukraine are fast moving. Russian forces and pro-Russian groups have established full operational control in Crimea and tensions remain high. Flights in and out of Simferopol airport are subject to disruption, with Ukrainian International Airlines cancelling all flights until late October. Train and bus routes are still operating, though the FCO currently advises against all travel to Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk.

[4] AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan's chronic instability, internal conflict and desperate poverty continues despite the UN-audited summer 2014 elections which, at the time of writing, were still at a stand-off months after the original vote as rival presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani each claimed victory whilst accusing the other of fraud. It is now clear, however that both have rubber-stamped a security agreement that will see us and other foreign forces stay in the country beyond their self-imposed December 2014 deadline; and guarantees a 'national unity'

coalition that will almost certainly ensure the bickering stalemate persists in government.

[5] PAKISTAN

Cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan and cleric Tahir-ul-Khadri continue to lead popular protests against the government of Nawaz Sharif, accusing the regime of corruption and demanding he step down little over a year after his landslide re-election. The protests centring on Islamabad have been generally peaceful, but with the heavy-handed military all too ready to intervene public gatherings are to be avoided. The Afghan border and Kashmir are also prone to militant and military attacks.

[6] THAILAND

In late August 2014, King Bhumibol Adulyadej officially endorsed General Prayuth Chan-ocha as prime minister, three months after the military leader took control of the nation in a bloodless coup. Prayuth will now head an interim government until elections are held in late

TRAVELLERS' HEALTH

IT IS SAID THAT TRAVEL

broadens the mind and loosens the bowels, and tummy troubles continue to be the most common problem for travellers.

Risks can be reduced by following the old adage, 'Cook it, peel it, boil it or forget it.' Before preparing or touching any food, hands should be washed with clean water or sterile wipes. Food should have been freshly cooked and not recurrently heated (which multiplies bugs), nor left out for flies to visit. Unwashed salads and undercooked or raw shellfish and other crustacea are particularly hazardous, as is unpasteurised milk. Ask for sealed bottles or cans of drink (to be sure that they are not contaminated or adulterated), and use a straw if cups and glasses are not clean. Avoid ice, which may introduce bugs. Antibiotic prophylaxis (i.e. taking antibiotics before

MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE

by Dr Nick Beeching and Sister Carolyn Driver of **Liverpool School of Medicine**

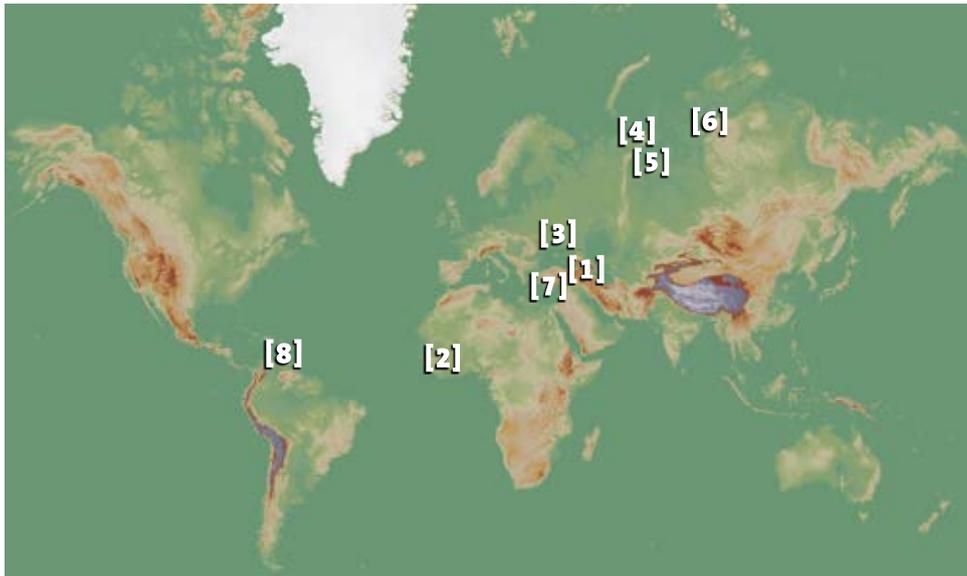
More information about country-specific risks and all these infections can be found at www.nathnac.org or www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

travel to prevent infection) is less commonly advised for most travellers, but may be appropriate for some with pre-existing health problems.

Most cases of tummy trouble can be managed by adequate rehydration with oral fluids, taking regular small sips if nauseated. If there is a lot of bloody diarrhoea, fever or continued illness, medical advice should be sought, especially for small children or those with pre-existing health problems. Dehydration can cause particular problems for people taking water pills (diuretics) or other drugs to control heart failure or high blood pressure. Antibiotics may be prescribed, either as single doses or short courses, typical antibiotics being ciprofloxacin or similar drugs. Because of resistance of local bacteria that cause diarrhoea, this is often replaced by azithromycin in Asia. A new medication, rifaximin, is also available as an alternative (but more expensive) prevention and treatment.

Less commonly recognised is the risk posed by lack of absorption of regular medications, including oral contraceptives and anti-malarial drugs, due to diarrhoea and vomiting. Many medications are not absorbed immediately after being swallowed, so vomiting soon after taking them may reduce their effectiveness. There may be more obvious immediate problems for those taking regular medication to control heart failure, epilepsy or other long-term conditions, or thinning agents to prevent blood clots or strokes.

People who are taking regular medications should discuss a management plan with their doctor before travel, so that they know what to do in the event of tummy troubles, for instance taking an extra dose if vomiting has occurred within three hours of medication, or using alternative contraception methods for those taking oral contraceptives.



ceasefire have failed to take hold on either side. Over 2,000 Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured, versus 67 Israeli deaths at the time of going to press. Over 40 years of occupation have resulted in an entrenched stand-off that is no closer to a resolution.

[8] VENEZUELA Demonstrations against president Nicolas Maduro continue around the country as the economic crisis brings high inflation, widespread crime and a shortage of staple products. In August 2014 the government closed the border with Colombia at night to combat large-scale smuggling of petrol and food that has seen these much-needed and heavily subsidised resources sold at vast profits, with up to 40% of the goods produced in Venezuela ending up on the other side of the border. In another extreme measure rejected by the opposition, Maduro attempted to introduce mandatory fingerprinting in supermarkets to track suspicious shopping patterns.

2015. The ruling junta, calling itself the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), has come under fire internationally for cracking down on dissidents, detaining politicians, journalists, critics and activists, shutting down media outlets and imposing martial law. Meanwhile, Prayuth has staged 'happiness festivals' around Bangkok with the intention of "bringing happiness back to the Thai people." Anti-coup protesters

have responded by organising flash mobs in shopping malls. Protests are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

[7] ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The Israeli military offensive against 'targeted militant sites' has crippled the already creaky infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, and numerous attempts at a

TRAVELLERS' SAFETY

THERE ARE NUMEROUS types of kidnapping, but the most prolific and most likely to affect travellers is 'express kidnapping'. This is due to its fairly simple nature and quick gains for the perpetrators. Express kidnapping involves the relatively short-term and usually opportunistic abduction of victims, during which time they are robbed of their possessions, forced to withdraw cash from ATMs and/or make credit card purchases on the kidnappers' behalf. Typically, express kidnappings are short-lived and do not involve a ransom being demanded. These factors allow the perpetrators to conduct a quick abduction, obtain cash in a short space of time and reduce the opportunity for the authorities to become involved. Express kidnapping gangs tend to operate in groups of

AVOIDABLE ABDUCTION by crisis management assistance company **red24**

two or three and generally work from a vehicle. In terms of the victim profile, criminals choose mostly at random, but tend to be attracted to individuals displaying an indication of wealth. Inebriated individuals also provide them with an easy target, as do tourists, who are often easily identifiable and vulnerable.

As express kidnappings are generally opportunistic in nature, sensible security measures can substantially reduce the risk of falling victim to such a crime:

- » Be aware of your surroundings and keep a low profile. Ideally, do not display overt signs of wealth.
- » Express kidnappings are frequently initiated in the vicinity of ATMs, so only use ATMs that are located in relatively secure environments, such as shopping centres, retail stores, banks and hotel lobbies. Don't use ATMs on the street,

- particularly after dark or in a deserted area.
- » Express kidnappers have also been known to work in conjunction with false taxi drivers or false taxis to entrap unsuspecting victims. Only use official taxis or those from reputable companies.
- » Do not share a ride/fare with a stranger or get into a taxi that has another occupant. There have been cases where the 'stranger' or 'family member' is in cahoots with the driver, and in fact part of the kidnapping gang.
- » Do not hail a taxi off the street. Order one through a reputable source, such as your hotel. If out and about, ensure you have the telephone number of a suitable company, and call a taxi to your location when required.
- » If caught up in a kidnapping situation, comply with your captors, as hesitation or refusal to follow demands frequently results in violence.

GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE



Dave Warne advises early planning when shopping for flights

ONE OF THE QUESTIONS I MOST GET ASKED IS

how to get the best airfare for a particular flight or series of flights. The bad news is that there is no magic formula, but some knowledge of how airlines work can help.

Essentially the price you pay for a seat on an aircraft is determined by the age-old principle of supply and demand. Most seasoned travellers know that there are low and high seasons, but what is less well known is that airlines use sophisticated computer algorithms to determine how many seats to sell at a number of different price levels for every flight.

For peak travel periods – such as Christmas, Easter, school holidays and bank holidays – booking early is essential; the later you book the more the fare is likely to cost – and you may not be able to get seats at all if you leave it too late. Indeed, regular travellers to Australia, South Africa and the Caribbean will know to book their Christmas travel the moment seats go on sale, which for most airlines is usually around 11 months in advance.

Similarly, the airlines that are traditionally referred to as 'low cost carriers' – an increasingly redundant term – tend to plan their schedules around a 'winter' and a 'summer' schedule; knowing when they release their schedules for sale can mean getting in early for more popular dates. Typically Easyjet and Ryanair will release their summer schedule in October for the following 'summer' (i.e. April to September travel dates) but as there is no fixed date the best bet is to sign up for their newsletters and be prepared to act quickly once they advise the sale dates.

For non-peak travel periods airlines still tend to encourage passengers to book early with 'early booking' offers. There are also major airline sales in January and September each year, so these can typically be good times to buy long-haul tickets.

Last-minute cheap offers do become available on some charter routes but scheduled airlines tend to increase prices closer to departure; someone who books at short notice is more often a business traveller or someone who really needs to travel, so the airline can effectively charge a premium.

The actual day of the week – even the time of day – can make a difference too. Business travellers to European destinations often tend to take mid-week early morning departures and often return later the same day, which can push prices up for those flights. Leisure travellers tend to prefer Friday night and weekend flights, so cheaper seats on those flights tend to sell out quickly. So, flying out and back



around lunchtime on midweek flights can often yield lower fares.

Taking an indirect flight with a change of plane en route at good transit airports such as Amsterdam or Dubai can sometimes lead to cheaper fares than those offered by airlines who fly non-stop. However, oil price increases have led to most airlines applying 'fuel surcharges' for each flight sector, and with two flights from origin to destination rather than one the total fuel surcharge will be higher for indirect flights than direct flights, so the difference has narrowed somewhat in recent years.

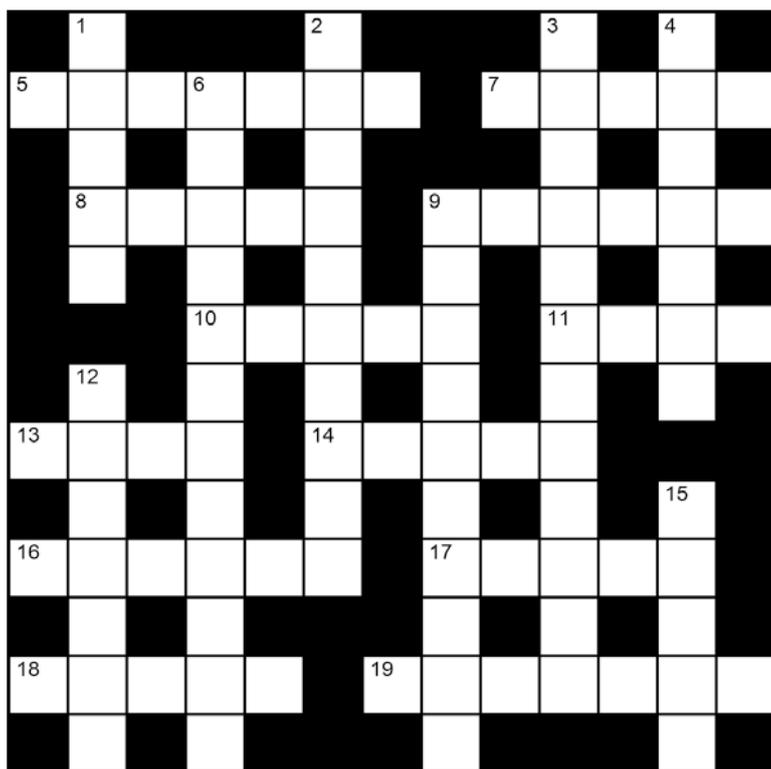
Flexibility definitely comes at a price: the more flexibility you need the higher the fare will be. So, if you can fix your travel dates and dispense with any thoughts of changing your plans later you can qualify for cheaper fares. Note that most cheap fares generally don't allow any changes or refunds so do remember to take out travel insurance at the time to cover unplanned cancellation.

Booking your hotel, tour or car hire arrangements at the same time enables agents such as WEXAS to offer you specially negotiated 'inclusive tour' fares as part of an individually tailored package. Agents are not allowed to advertise these fare levels, but they can work out significantly cheaper than the 'flight only' levels – particularly in the premium cabins – when booked as part of a package.

One assumption that many people have is that the best fares are only available online, but this is generally not true and in practice the technology of even the most advanced websites has limitations. For example, if there are three people travelling and there are only two seats left at a lower price, virtually all internet sites will offer you three seats at the higher price – and you'd simply be none the wiser. However, a good travel consultant will be able to spot this and book two at the lower price and one at the next higher price. As a general rule, the more complex the trip the greater the chance that you will find a better fare by speaking to an experienced travel consultant.

So, whilst there is no magic formula, some knowledge will increase your chances of getting a lower fare, as will investigating the options as far in advance as possible.





ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE'S CROSSWORD

Across 5] Genoa 7] Aeolian 8] Transylvania 10] Napa Valley
13] Copenhagen 16] Johannesburg 18] Far East 19] Hague
Down 1] Central 2] Bell 3] Albany 4] Cadiz 6] Osaka 9] Swamp 11] Land's
12] Belgium 13] Chalet 14] Aruba 15] Coral 17] Ness

CLUES ACROSS

- 5] City in eastern Germany not far from the Czech border (7)
- 7] Like Dover's famous cliffs (5)
- 8] Egypt's Mountain of Moses (5)
- 9] Lebanon's capital (6)
- 10] Major river of Switzerland and France which flows into the Mediterranean (5)
- 11] The _ Cities, how Minneapolis and St Paul are popularly known (4)
- 13] George _, port on the island of Penang (4)
- 14] Sea in which Anglesey lies (5)
- 16] The biggest island in the Mediterranean (6)
- 17] Largest of the Florida Keys (5)
- 18] A notable holy city in Saudi Arabia (5)
- 19] California city where Disneyland is located (7)

CLUES DOWN

- 1] Port city in Brittany (5)
- 2] North America's largest metropolis (6,4)
- 3] 'Garden City' on New Zealand's South Island (12)
- 4] The Pitons can be found on this Caribbean island (2,5)
- 6] Bay city in the USA – site of Nob Hill and Fisherman's Wharf (3,9)
- 9] Home to the BVI's main airport across the bridge from Tortola (4,6)
- 12] It flows through over 400 miles of Italy (2,5)
- 15] Bulgaria's capital city (5)

LAST ISSUE'S WINNER

Congratulations to **Priscilla Baxter** from Wadebridge, Cornwall, who wins a copy of Taschen's *100 Getaways Around the World* edited by Margit J. Meyer.

CROSSWORD PRIZE

This issue we are giving away three copies of Lonely Planet's *The Best Place to Be Today*, each worth £14.99.

The Best Place to Be Today matches up 365 inspiring travel experiences with the ideal day on which to do them, uncovering the world's seasonal secrets from Valencia's Tomatina festival to when to join a pilgrim climb on Sri Lanka's Adam's Peak. Whilst ideas for religious holidays and other events are date specific, for others conditions are determined by lack of crowds, favourable weather or the best chance of an amazing wildlife encounter.

www.lonelyplanet.com/today

For a chance to win, send your completed entry marked 'Traveller crossword' to the Traveller office, Dorset House, Stamford Street, London SE1 9NT by 31 October. The first three entries out of the office pith helmet will be our winners.



From Altaussee to the Alpujarras

CHRIS STEWART IS IN HIS ELEMENT AT EL VALERO,

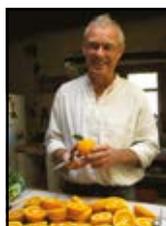
the small farm on the wrong side of the river in the mountains of southern Spain that he's written about so vividly in convivial memoirs from 1999's *Driving Over Lemons* to this year's *Last Days of the Bus Club*. But which other spots have transformed him?

ALTAUSSEE

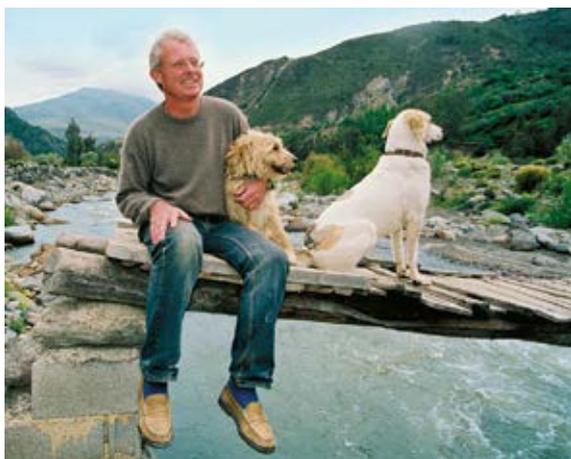
It was in Altaussee in the Salzkammergut region of Austria where the scales of celibacy were lifted from me. I was 15 coming up 16 and, sheltering by the lake in a rainstorm, I finally made it with a girl for the first time. Her name was Margie and we're still friends to this day. It's the most heavenly lake up in the mountains with a little village and a cake shop, and we lived in a student hostel by the lake. My school had sent a contingent of the German Studies class along for three weeks and Margie's school had sent her and her friends along too. We would take a boat out on the lake, which was clear and still with mountains reflected in it. I'll never forget how wonderful it was and I guess that's what got me started on the road to adult life.

INNSBRUCK

I didn't know much about Innsbruck when we arrived there one night in a gaily painted Morris commercial ambulance. I was about 19 and we were driving to India from London. (We never made it, of course – we dislodged a tram from its rails in Zagreb and got thrown into the slammer for the night and the ambulance was more or less knackered so we couldn't go any further.) When I woke up in the morning I saw these great mountains all around the town and after breakfast I just walked and walked up and up, alone into the mountains, until I came out where the pine forest ended and there were rocky and snowy wastes before me and I could sense the silence of the mountains and my own tinyness and the roaring of a distant breeze in the pine trees. That was the beginning



Itinerant sheep shearer-turned-bestselling travel writer Chris Stewart tells us where in the world has most influenced him



of mountains for me, the beginning of what has been a fundamental thing for me in life, to rejoice in that feeling of utter unimportance that being in the mountains or being on the ocean brings.

SEVILLE

If I have a regret in life it's that Seville is not my home town, rather than Granada. I think Granada is great, it's got the Sierra Nevada, it's got the Alhambra, it's a beautiful city, but it could never hold a candle to Seville. It advertises itself as the queen of Spanish cities and indeed it is. It's a big beautiful voluptuous girl, God I love it. I went there when I was 21, trying to learn to play guitar. It was so magical, all one's romantic dreams of a city come to life, with its narrow alleys and jasmine and the smell of black tobacco, garlic and coffee, and the beauty of the girls, and the beauty of the language and just everything – I lost my heart to it in every way. It had the river, and it had bars, it's the first place I started drinking wine. Seville was the foundation of my passion for Spain and all things Spanish.

CHINA

When I came back to England I bought my own flock and the realities of sheep farming took over my life, but the business didn't work for all sorts of reasons. The only thing I seemed to know about was learning languages, so I decided to study the language that was spoken by the most and understood by the fewest outsiders. I bought myself a set of Linguaphone tapes and some books and set to studying Mandarin. Then one day at a party I met Mark Ellingham, who had just started the Rough Guides, and a few weeks later Mark telephoned to ask if I'd like to write for the Rough Guide to China. I was about 30 by then, and I spent six months in China wandering around, hard travelling because the rates for the Rough Guides back in those days were exiguous. But I travelled all over. It was wonderful, this was real travel, the first time I'd been in what was then a Third World country. It was my initiation into travelling and the world. I have China to thank for that.

EL VALERO

Obviously the final one is El Valero, our farm in the Alpujarras in Granada. I was driven there partly by books – I read Gerald Brenan's wonderful *South From Granada* and I just had to go and visit the Alpujarran hills, and as soon as I saw them I knew that's where I wanted to live for the rest of my life. We bought the farm 25 years ago and we've lived there ever since. I am now such a part of this farm that I cannot be taken away from it and remain a whole person. It's my every waking moment, my deepest passion, my wild enjoyment, my crazy dreams, they're all there, on this patch of land on the join of two rivers with its orange trees and its lemons and its olives, and its little stone house and its flock of sheep who graze in the rosemary and thyme above the hill. That's me, that's what I am. That defines me now and will do until the day I die, no two ways about it.



Chris Stewart's *Last Days of the Bus Club*, the *Lemons* trilogy and *Three Ways to Capsize a Boat* are published by Sort Of Books