

A new and special place in Normandy ... see p. 18

Travel Scoop

*The Newsmagazine
for Members of
The Travel Society*

Vol. 21, No. 2 February/March 2003

Where the Mountains Meet the Plains in Southern Colorado

by Ann Wallace



Buckskin Joe Frontier Town (Wallace)

The summer wind ripples the silken grass across the great plains, jagged mountain peaks soar in the distance and the great sand dunes shift once more. An engineer swings up into the cab of his steam engine at the mouth of a deep rocky gorge, an artist bends in concentration over her latest creation, a chef blends and toasts his spices at the start of a busy day, the museum curator casts a critical eye over a new exhibition, a carpenter atop a ladder lovingly works at restoring an elaborate Victorian house, an ecologist works on a paper at the

Mission Wolf rehabilitation refuge, an Hispanic musician strums on his guitar, a group of young actors rehearse their Shakespearean lines in a tiny theatre while members of another group take up their guns and prepare to re-enact the days of old in a reconstructed 'wild west' town or an authentic historic fort. And then there are the words: the Santa Fe Trail, Rio Grande Country, Alamosa, Kit Carson, the Highway of Legends, the Camanche Grasslands, the gold rush,

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TravelScoop

The Newsmagazine for Members of
The Travel Society

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February/March 2003 Vol. 21, No. 2

From your Editor's desk...



Greetings to you all in this, our winter double-issue. When next I write to you April - and Spring - will be fast approaching. But I hope you've either enjoyed winter here in Canada or have been off travelling somewhere equally as wonderful.

There's a mixed bag of information for you in this issue: cruises in the Caribbean and Canada, my story on Southern Colorado where I received such a warm welcome from so many interesting folk, an unusual European destination - Bulgaria - and some thoughts on losing your luggage. Well ... I hope you don't, but you know what I mean!

If you've sent me articles recently and I haven't responded, please forgive me. The end and the beginning of the year is a busy time for us and I look forward to this double issue going to the printer so that I can catch up with some other tasks. To all those of you who have written articles or have contacted me for information of some kind, I will contact you very soon now.

I wish you happy days during the remainder of the winter and look forward to writing to you again in April. In the meantime, you please keep writing to me and so contribute to making all our travels safe and successful.

coming in April

- *Southern Colorado, Part II*

- *Lot of European ideas and tips*

Update Items

Some new brochures have reached our offices that you may like to have to help you make some 2003 vacation decisions:

The *Atlantic Canada Vacation Planner 2003* from **Maxxim Vacations** offers a variety of trips: self-drive packages, customized itineraries and so on. Book before 31 March and you'll receive an early-booking discount of \$50 pp. Call 1 800 567 6666 or www.maxximvacations.com

What a brochure! If you're yearning to hit the trail on horseback you'll love browsing through *Explore the World on & with Hidden Trails 2003*. **Hidden Trails** is a Vancouver-based company that can be reached at 604 323 1141 or 1 888 9 TRAILS or visit www.hiddentrails.com

The new brochure from **St. Lawrence Cruise Lines** is now available, detailing those popular trips on the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers. Call 613 549 8091 or 1 800 267 7868 or visit www.stlawrence-cruiselines.com

Great Explorations – another Vancouver-based company – has announced its 2003 schedule of cycling, walking and paddling trips. Their brochure is small, but comprehensive, and can be yours by calling 1 800 242 1825 or you can visit www.great-explorations.com

If you enjoy journeys by rail, the **Rail Travel Center** has its 2003 catalogues of train tours worldwide ready. For North American tours, request the *Rail Travel Press* while overseas programmes can be found in *The World of Rail Travel Center*. For your copies of these free catalogues call 1 800 458 5394 or visit www.railtravelcenter.com

This Month's Winning Scoop

Finding your Warm, Relaxing Niche in Mexico

by Gundi Jeffrey

There are many wonderful, mysterious places in Mexico that are accessible only by car, preferably a sturdy one. We recently discovered a new one: the enchanting Grutas (grottos) de Tolantongo, with its hot and cold waterfalls, steam caves and spectacular scenery.

In the mountainous state of Hidalgo, about 200 km north of Mexico City, there are many pockets of geothermal water sources. The Tolantongo area, in particular, is a small paradise for people who, like us, love hot springs. It takes a bit of rough driving to find this place, but what a trip – and what a glorious destination at the end!

After you find your way to the typical Mexican town of Ixmiquilpan, on highway 85 half way between Pachuca and Queretaro, you drive about 45 km up a tranquil highway that seems carved out of a moonscape, it's so barren and dry. About half way along, the pavement gives way to well-compacted gravel, where you bear right from the fork to Cardonal. Wonderful canyons intersect the land and the mountainsides seem carved of sheer stone. Eventually, you reach what seems like the end of the world – you are on top of a magnificent mountain range that extends forever into the distance. Down below – way below – is a bright turquoise-blue ribbon of a river winding its way through a very dramatic canyon. A narrow road ahead clings to the side of the mountain that you must now descend, very slowly as there are no guardrails and the curves are tight indeed. A sign of progress in your journey is

Members are Rewarded for Sharing!

TS rewards members for all submissions published.

The Winning Scoop receives a 1-year membership extension.

Your Scoops receive a 3-issue membership extension.

Favourite Places receive a 3-issue membership extension.

Reader Reports receive extensions depending on length.

Submission Guidelines: TS welcomes reader submissions but cannot guarantee they will be used. We reserve the right to edit submissions should they be used. It is very important to include specific travel details: costs, discounts, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, etc., for the benefit of other readers. Submissions can be sent by mail, e-mail: ann@thetravelsociety.com or on diskettes.

the “toll booth” where you pay a small fee for entering, and parking in, this rugged wonderland.

After having negotiated more than 30 hairpin curves, you arrive at what seems to be the bottom, and find yourself at a rustic but charming hotel. It turns out the rooms are built onto the mountain-side overlooking yet more canyonlands and the very blue river already spied from above. Each room has two double beds and a small balcony offering an incredible vista. Food is prepared under a blue tarpaulin by two village women who offer typical dishes of the region. It’s very rustic indeed.

But the main attraction here is the river ... and the waterfall found upstream. The river is warm and fast running, but there are many shallow sections to climb in and let the mineral-laden, tepid water soothe your body. For the more adventurous, there’s a long trail to the waterfall, which has both hot and cold streams. Steps have been carved up the hillside through the water so that you can more easily reach the mouth of a cave under the falls. There you find yourself in a long tunnel of sculpted stalactites and mites, with moderately hot water flowing ankle-height and showering you from spots in the ceiling. If you make your way farther into the murky darkness you’ll encounter small pools, niches, and lots of hot steam. Just find a spot to settle in and meditate while you let nature’s spa do its work. Another, larger cave has a big, warm pool in its chamber and a pounding cascade of thermal water crashing down from a basketball-sized hole in the ceiling 20 feet up. This less contemplative spot is great for a therapeutic working on shoulder kinks and aches.

The mountain walls near the caves are covered by giant ferns, jungle flora and various types of mosses. Birds sing, the plants wave in the breeze and the entire scene is pure enchantment. If cave exploring isn’t your thing, there’s also a large man-made swimming pool filled with the warm river water. You can also hike various trails throughout the intersecting canyons.

The Tolantongo valley was originally inhabited by the Tolteca tribe, which still has many descendants in the area. The hotel – and another smaller one built further up the mountain – is cooperatively owned by the local villagers and run as a community project. They hope to increase tourism and thus bring much-needed money to the village.

The main hotel currently has 27 rooms (more are under construction), while the other one, called El Tobogan, has 10 private cabins. Prices range from US\$35-45 for a room with two double beds and bathroom. Although neither hotel takes reservations, you can call once you are in Mexico (759 723 1351) to find about room availability. If you are without a car you can also enquire about public transportation for there is a bus that goes sporadically from Ixmiquilpan if there is demand for it.

We have been to Tolantongo several times now and plan to return again. The place is magical, relaxing and, for now at least, totally off the beaten path.

Gundi Jeffrey is a TravelScoop subscriber who lives in Mexico. She’s always on the look-out for off-the-beaten-path destinations, which she loves to share with us all.

Your Scoops

Sure to sound appealing during winter is ...

Caribbean Cruising Aboard the *Amazing Grace*

In the December issue of *TravelScoop*, I noticed a brief item regarding Windjammer Barefoot Cruises so I thought I’d take the opportunity to tell readers something about them. My husband and I have taken two trips on the *Amazing Grace*, which is the freighter/passenger ship servicing the other vessels in the group, and we thoroughly enjoyed both experiences. Our first cruise was in the summer of 1991 (my husband was still teaching, hence the timing, though summer is not the best time to visit the Caribbean) and our second was in April/May 1999.

The *Amazing Grace* carries 92 passengers in small cabins, many of which have shared facilities although all cabins have a sink. On our first trip, we booked a cabin with private facilities, but on the second we went for the shared facilities and found that worked very well; we never had to wait. In addition, on the second trip we were in one of the ship’s original cabins, so it was quite a bit larger and more comfortable. In her previous life, the *Grace* was a supply vessel for the North Sea oil platforms, so while she isn’t new she’s sturdy, rides the seas well and is well maintained.

The atmosphere on board, and on the tall ships in the group, is definitely casual. There was a dress requirement for the Captain’s Dinner: clean T-shirt and shoes! During the 26 days of our last trip

(both our voyages were round trip, although you can choose a one-way voyage) we left from Freeport in the Bahamas and visited Castle Island, Grand Turk, Tortola, Cooper Island, St. Maarten, St. Kitts, Dominica, Bequia and Palm Island en route to the southern end of the trip in Trinidad. On the northbound voyage we visited Grenada, St. Lucia, Iles de Saintes, Nevis, St. Barts, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke and Norman Island Dominican Republic, Great Inagua and Conception before arriving back in Freeport. There was one full day at sea both north and southbound and several of the above destinations were just "beach stops". Other than that, we were in port during the day (usually from about 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) and repositioning at night.

The *Grace's* main function is to provision the tall ships which cruise in various areas of the Caribbean, so during the voyage her passengers get to visit these lovely old sailing ships (but if you think the cabins on the *Grace* are small ... wait till you see the others!). The passengers on the tall ships tend to be younger and there's more of a party atmosphere than on the *Grace*, although those on the latter are known to let their hair down occasionally. On both our trips there were crew members who were quite willing to share their talents on various musical instruments. One of my best memories of our first trip was sitting on deck, watching the sun rise over the sea and listening to our bartender play the flute. It was magical. And one of the best memories from our second trip was sitting on the top deck one night listening to a soft jazz duo

who'd come aboard in Bequia and who were soon joined by Gunther, our Chief Engineer, on his guitar or saxophone. Again, magic.

The food that comes out of the tiny galley is amazing, but don't expect big-cruise-ship fare. Bloody Mary's, fresh-baked pastries, coffee, tea, juice and fruit are available from 6:00 a.m. until full breakfast, which is served between 7:30 and 9:00 a.m. After breakfast everyone gathers for story time, when the Captain outlines the coming day and adds practical local information such as what cab fares to expect if you aren't taking one of the tours offered, plus (most important) what time the ship will be sailing. If the stop for the day is a beach stop, you will be told when lunch will be served on the beach and when to be back on board. Lunch, served buffet style, consisted of various salads with pasta, pizza (very good) or fish. Everything was always tasty. At 5:00 p.m. it's time for rum swizzles and appetizers, followed by dinner which always included a good soup, salad, and a choice of two or three entrees, vegetables and dessert, plus unlimited wine. Dinner was served in two seatings with no reserved places.

If you enjoy seeing beautiful places in the sun and having interesting things to do (but with no pressure to do anything you don't want to), you might like to investigate this trip further. We booked through TravLTips, a freighter travel club based in New York. Fares quoted in the September/October 2002 issue of their magazine are: high season one-way US\$1,475 - \$1,575; round trip \$2,950 - \$3,150. Lower rates are available during "value season". We've also booked other cruises and a freighter trip through TravLTips and had good service. Call 1 800 228 2330 for information.

I'd be happy to respond to e-mails from anyone interested in more information about the *Amazing Grace*, but please indicate 'Amazing Grace' as the subject as I don't open e-mails I'm not expecting. My address is rkronquist@shaw.ca

Rita Kronquist
North Vancouver, B.C.

Some Pitfalls When Using Those Aeroplan Points

I hope that readers who are considering using their Air Canada Aeroplan points on international flights will find the following information useful.

Air Canada, and other airlines, have restrictions on how far ahead you can book a flight. AC is 356 days (yes, three hundred and *fifty six*) from the date of your return flight. Each Star Alliance member has different restrictions, i.e. Air New Zealand 350 days, United 331 days. This may result in the out-bound flights you wanted not being available. We encountered this problem when we first attempted to reserve in September 2002 for a September 2003 departure to Australia via Tahiti using Air Canada to Los Angeles and Air New Zealand for the Los Angeles/Tahiti/Sydney leg. Our return flights were to be in late November, thus we were not able to book until December.

Then, when we attempted to reserve on Air New Zealand to match up with our already-booked cruise reservations in Tahiti, we discovered no seats were available. This in spite of the fact that, when we had first attempted to book the flights in September, we were informed by AC that we would not

encounter any problems at the later reservation date that was forced upon us by their rule.

We also found out that you are now permitted to have only one stop-over on an international flight when you book part of your trip on a Star Alliance carrier, rather than two if you book your total trip on AC. This means if we flew Toronto to Sydney return on AC we could break up the flight and stay over once each way in, say, Vancouver or Honolulu; but since we had to use Air New Zealand to get to Tahiti we were only permitted one stop-over, which in our case had to be Tahiti, and no stop over on the return flight. (Note: for those travellers with a ton of Aeroplan points wishing to plan a round-the-world trip – 200,000 points economy and 300,000 points business – you are permitted 5 stop-overs.)

If you want to change a booking, AC has another hurdle for you. Prior to departure you are permitted to cancel your booking and start again for a fee of \$75 per ticket. After you have commenced your trip, no changes are permitted. We will be testing this rule in our itinerary and will let you know how we do: i.e. in Auckland and Honolulu the flights that we were able to book have longer airport layovers than necessary. There are earlier flights, but when we booked there were no seats available for Aeroplan tickets. We will endeavour to get this changed.

For any readers planning international trips using Aeroplan points, I recommend you retain flexibility on dates and book as early as possible. Also, do your homework prior to making your reservations. We ended up being booked on AC out of Sydney via

Honolulu via Vancouver resulting in a brutal 23½ hour return trip. There is a direct flight from Honolulu to Toronto but there were no Aeroplan seats available. A better route, we discovered later, would have been return via Los Angeles on Air New Zealand

*Dean Feltham
Thornhill, ON*

Edinburgh's Dynamic Earth Centre

Travellers with Scotland in their plans this year may like to consider spending an extra day in Edinburgh to visit a popular 'contemporary' attraction and one of Britain's millennium projects: *Our Dynamic Earth*.

This attraction is located in a white hemispherical dome dramatically situated beneath Arthur's Seat, the extinct volcano that broods over Edinburgh. It is near Holyrood Palace and the site of the new Scottish Parliament and is in part a tribute to Edinburgh's tradition of leadership in geology, science and medicine in the 17th to 19th centuries. It provides a fascinating display of the evolution of the earth, different climate zones, the oceans and the current problems of population pressure and resource shortages.

You begin by joining a group in a dark, multi-media room where you have the experience of a ride in space with great shaking and dropping, the Milky Way exploding around you, our solar system being formed and then the Earth emerging, the only known place in our solar system with water. The second group experience in the dark shows volcanic activity, a dive beneath the sea and the develop-

ment of algae and other plant material. It was hard to believe after we left the media rooms that we had only gone down two storeys, the total height of the building!

For the remainder of your visit you can wander at will, spending as much time as you wish in the areas that interest you and trying the interactive displays that can be enjoyed by both adults and children. I couldn't resist poking my warm finger into the melted holes made by others in a huge iceberg that is in the middle of the domed area representing polar regions. After this we looked around the other exhibits, before arriving at the rain forest to see the tropical storm and the glow worms that come out in the trees after the rain.

Our Dynamic Earth can be reached by walking through the Old Town, or from Holyrood Palace or on city tours that can be picked up near the Waverley Station. We spent about two hours here touring the exhibits and there is also a pleasant restaurant and an interesting gift shop. Admission was £7.95 adults, £4.50 seniors, or there's a reduced entrance fee if you are on a city tour.

*Ruth Dibbs
Ottawa, ON*

Another Wal-Mart Note

I've received a message from someone who read my Wal-Mart information in *TravelScoop* (December 2002, p. 5). She told me that she and her husband, who are RV-ers, often use Wal-Mart when they travel. In Harrisonburg, VA, they even got a complimentary copy of the local newspaper delivered to their door!

*Anne Raymond
Asbestos, PQ*

continued from page 1

South Fork, Cheyenne, El Paso, Custer and Pueblo counties. These are just a few of the many images and echoes that lie in my head, all too ready to be summoned with great pleasure when I think back to my journey through southern Colorado last summer.

In this part of the world you may often find yourself off the well-beaten tourist track, yet as a traveller you have the feeling that you are journeying where some of the world's greatest – and often infamous – travellers have gone before you. Most remain unnamed, yet their legacies linger and perhaps their ghosts still haunt those bright, rustling grasslands or those murky, grimy mines. For here are stories of missionaries and armies, cowboys and Indians, prospectors and fancy women in saloons, hard-working farming and ranching families and the men and women who, for one reason or another, travelled on the Santa Fe Trail and explored the highways and byways of the land that was to become known as Colorado.

I had no idea what to expect when the Action 22 committee, representing 22 counties of southern Colorado, collectively known as Colorado's Frontier, invited me to join a group of journalists on a tour of this area last summer. But I was soon captivated by the sights I saw, by the attractions I enjoyed and by the warm and friendly people who were so very keen to show me all their region had to offer. If you are doing the great road trip around North America, as so many of our readers do, I urge you to include a tour of southern Colorado in your itinerary. Alternatively, you can do as I did and fly to Colorado Springs (or Denver, just 70 miles north) and travel on from there. The circular route I took could fill a week or more with wonderful memories.



Two books added greatly to my enjoyment of this area. Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (widely available in various editions) may not sound like typical holiday reading, but it is set right here in southern Colorado and into neighbouring New Mexico and gives a sense of the area's early history when holy men were sent here from Europe, and the region was (as it still is) a crossroad of cultures. Another book with a strong historical sense of place is a volume I purchased in the small museum gift store entitled *Land of Enchantment: Memoirs of Marian Russell Along the Santa Fe Trail* (published by the University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque). Reading Marian Russell's account of her travels in the mid-19th century, I became even more enchanted with the land I was glimpsing.

On a more practical note, National Geographic's *Driving Guides to America: The Rockies* describes a 475 mile loop out of Colorado Springs that covers much of the route that I explored. The guide promises "tremendously varied scenery, from the Great Plains through mountains, valleys and river chasms ... loaded with history, staked with 14,000-foot peaks, and offering many opportunities to view wildlife, the route takes in forts and mansions, museums, immense sand dunes, train rides, gambling towns ...". The National Geographic's route is designed to be covered in four days, so with an itinerary of eight days we were able to include even more sights. If you have even longer, Colorado Tourism has created a sequence of scenic routes that invites the travellers to follow their interests – historic, scenic, recreational – in depth. As I have so much to tell you, I have divided this article into two. First I will describe the shorter circle route west from

Colorado Springs into the mountains and back via the Royal Gorge. In the next issue I will continue my story by taking you from the mining town of Creede in the mountainous south west of the State out onto the plains, with lots of interesting stops along the way. So come with me now as I start to explore a land hitherto unknown to me.

If you fly, Colorado Springs, or nearby Manitou Springs, are ideal places for your first night as both offer a selection of very welcoming B&B's. I was thrilled with the warm welcome I received to my romantic room – the Independence Suite – at the beautifully-restored Holden House 1902 Inn (all details at the end) in a residential area of Colorado Springs, 13 miles from the airport and very close to all the trendy charms of nearby Manitou Springs. Highlights of this area are the unique red rocks in the Garden of the Gods and towering Pikes Peak, whose



Holden House Inn, Colorado Springs (Wallace)

cog railway can lift you to its 14,110 foot summit. The homemade breakfast I enjoyed at the Inn next morning was very fine and set me up well for the day of exploring ahead.

Soon our small group had gathered from their various accommodations and we set out on the 45-mile drive over the Ute Pass to our next destination: the bizarre town of Cripple Creek, once Colorado's greatest gold camp set high in the Rockies in the heart of the Gold Belt. Gold was first found here in 1890 by Bob Womack, a ranch hand, and in the ensuing years the town grew to 50,000 residents and 500 working gold mines. Today it is a strange mixture of history – restored Victorian buildings, the Cripple Creek District Museum, the talented Stage In Time players that perform historical re-enactments all over town under the Olde Towne Productions banner, the Cripple Creek

Players who perform at the restored Butte Opera House, ghost walks, the Old Homestead (a euphemism for the brothel!) Museum, gold mine tours and more – combined with the hollow glitz and glitter of the modern world in the shape of little casinos (limited stake of \$5 maximum is the rule here) hiding behind the Victorian façades in the main street. An unusual place indeed. You can stay in one of the many little casinos that are also hotels, but I would recommend you reserve at the beautifully restored 15-room, historic (1898) Hotel St. Nicholas, originally the local hospital, located a few blocks from the town crowds. Our dinner at the Down Under Steak House in the Midnight Rose Hotel & Casino on the main street was delicious.

Cripple Creek is located close to many of the area's attractions, including the spectacular Royal Gorge, but first our group was to make a detour to the west, through low passes and over wide plains, to visit the Upper Arkansas Valley Region and spend the morning in the little town of Salida. There's lots more history in Salida, a town that sprang up on the Denver & Rio

Grande Railroad. Today Salida is a quiet town proud of its efforts to conserve its past. It's full of intriguing antique stores and tasteful gift stores, while a browse in the Mercantile Museum is interesting. And when it's time for lunch or dinner, head to trendy Dakota's at 122 North F Street for an outstanding meal. Salida is a good base from which to explore the region's many beautiful areas, for it's close to the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area and whitewater rafting on the Arkansas River as well as the San Isabel, Gunnison and Rio Grande National Forests and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

After lunch we headed east towards Cañon City, where anyone will be able to direct you to the Santa Fe Train Depot for the trip on the "most spectacular 12 miles of railroad in America". The Royal Gorge Route Railroad, a portion of the Denver & Rio Grande rail

line, takes passengers – aboard former Canadian National Railway passenger cars, some of them open observation cars – into the steep gorge formed by the fast-flowing Arkansas River, as far as the Royal Gorge Bridge and Park, and then returns to Cañon City. The section of the railroad has an interesting history, for when silver was discovered in nearby Leadville in 1877, the Santa Fe and the Denver & Rio Grande railroads were engaged in savage competition to lay a route through the mighty gorge. The battle



The Royal Gorge Incline Railway

became known as the Royal Gorge War as crews from both companies laid track in different parts of the canyon by day, then by night each crew would dynamite the other's daily progress! When the participants in the fray started to construct forts and hire gunfighters, and after shots were exchanged, the law moved in and the courts eventually awarded the route to the Denver & Rio Grande.

At the end of the trip, man-made wonders take over from nature's, as this is the site of the Royal Gorge Bridge, the Incline Railway and the Aerial Tramway, all of which carry superlatives. The bridge, built in 1929, is the highest suspension bridge in the world and one of the world's outstanding engineering achievements. It spans the Royal Gorge and turbulent Arkansas River at a height of 1,053 ft, its quarter mile length suspended from two 300 ton cables each containing 2,100 strands of wire and together able to support over two million

pounds. Visitors can rise from the train station at the base of the gorge up to the bridge by means of the Incline Railway, which is the world's steepest, while it is claimed the Aerial Tramway across the gorge is the world's longest single-span aerial tramway. Atop the Gorge there's a variety of family attractions and rides, which you will probably decide to miss unless you have children in tow.

But while in this area, there is an attraction that I'm sure you will enjoy. Located eight miles west of Cañon City, and just four miles from the Royal Gorge Bridge, is Buckskin Joe Frontier Town. If you think this town looks familiar you'll be right, for it has featured in 21 major western movies including such classics as *True Grit*, *Cat Ballou* and *The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox*. Although the locals refer to this attraction as a theme park, I prefer to think of it as a restored town, for its 27 structures are original 1860's Colorado buildings and the

place really does give a sense of pioneer life. Students from various acting schools in the region spend their summers here – authentically dressed – leaning against the wagons, sweeping out the saloon, hammering away at coffins or killing each other in mock gun fight shows. It's all rather corny, but very well done and one can't help getting swept up



Aboard the Royal Gorge train approaching the Royal Gorge Bridge (Wallace)

in the atmosphere of the place. You can eat here at the Silver Dollar Saloon, pause to hear some live music and even hit the trail on horseback. Don't forget your camera!



The view from Bandera Bed & Barn (Wallace)

By now I have stayed in a luxurious Victorian mansion in residential Colorado Springs and in the gold rush gambling town of Cripple Creek. Tonight, surrounded by distant hills and able to see the Great Gorge Bridge in the distance, I stay at the Bandera Bed & Barn. Yes, in this country home your horse (or dog) is welcome to stay too! Mike and Carla Bandera will give you a warm welcome (as will their own lively pooches) and if you reserve to stay here the whole lower level of their home will be yours: two bedrooms, bathroom, living area with fireplace and a patio from which to enjoy the magnificent night sky. The property is in a country setting just off Hwy. 50 and close to the attractions I have already mentioned here, plus many more.

In our next issue we'll travel south through more beautiful scenery. There we'll discover the Great Sand Dunes National Monument, some lively little theatres, more mining towns, forts, lots of history, the Santa Fe Trail, the incredible plains and more.

Some tips and details ...

Do not travel in this area in the winter (unless, of course, you are going to Colorado to ski ... but that's another story) for the plains are bitterly cold and many of the attractions are closed. Early summer and fall (just avoiding the high season and school holidays) are the best times to travel here.

Holden House 1902 B&B Inn, 1102 W. Pikes Peak Avenue, Colorado Springs, CO 80904, tel: 719 471 3980, www.bbonline.com/co/holden/ Rates from \$130 (all prices U.S.)

Another fine property I visited in Manitou Springs was

the historic **Red Crags B&B**, where prices are from \$85. The property can be contacted at 719 685 1920 or visit www.redcrags.com

The Hotel St. Nicholas, 303 N. 3rd, P.O. Box 1459, Cripple Creek, CO 80813, tel: 719 689 0856, fax: 719 689 2877, www.cripple-creek.co.us/stnick.html Double rooms here start at \$65.

For details of the forthcoming offerings of **Olde Towne Productions** (A Stage In Time) Living History & Old West Re-enactments in and around Cripple Creek, e-mail daisey_80814@yahoo.com Daisey is so knowledgeable and enthusiastic about her organization she is a pleasure to have as a contact.

I didn't stay there, but in Salida was recommended to the **Century House B&B**, a pretty 4-room Victorian property in the town where rooms start at \$65. For details call 719 539 7064 or visit www.bbonline.com/co/centuryhouse For more information on Salida visit www.nowthisiscolorado.com Advance reservations (recommended at busy times) on the **Royal Gorge** train can be made by calling 303 569 2403 or online at www.royalgorgeroute.com Prices for adults are \$26.95, for children \$16.50.

Buckskin Joe Frontier Town, open May to September, admission \$10. (Their brochure lists a website – www.buckskinjoe.com – but at press time we could not access this.)

Bandera Bed & Barn, 44784 Highway 50 West, Cañon City, CO 81212, tel: 719 276 2551, mban-dera@msn.com

For additional accommodation, the **Bed & Breakfast Innkeepers of Colorado** have a brochure listing over 140 approved establishments across the state. For a copy of their brochure call 1 800 265 7696 or visit www.innsofcolorado.org

The area covered in these articles is known as the **Colorado Frontier** and they publish a great deal of tourism information, including details of the many and varied driving routes in the area, of which my articles cover only a small part. They can be reached by calling 1 888 779 1799. The general tourism number for the state is 1 800 COLORADO, www.colorado.com And a call to 1 877 PIKES PEAK will bring you information on all that area has to offer. ☺

Part 2 of this Colorado story will appear in the next edition of [TravelScoop](http://TravelScoop.com).

The Road Less Travelled ... to Bulgaria

by Shirley Anne Smyth

A friend and I – in our seventies and sixties respectively – made a trip to Bulgaria in 2002. It was an experiment to see if we could continue our usual custom of travelling and discovering countries on our own, with the compromise of incorporating an organized tour to familiarize ourselves with the high spots before deciding where to travel to on our own. Our Bulgarian hosts showed us great consideration and we received generously-offered assistance from everyone we met.

We flew from our homes in Victoria, BC, to Sofia via Frankfurt and explored Bulgaria for six weeks between 21 May and 4 July. We used *The Rough Guide Bulgaria*, and found it accurate and helpful.

We spent our first week getting to know Sofia. We had booked our hotel – the Slavianska Bessedra at US\$50 – from Canada, but found to our alarm, after our routine investigation of the evacuation procedures, that it was a fire trap with the exits blocked. In addition, our room was tiny with poor facilities and, after noticing the spray programme for cockroaches, we decided to move. This was no problem at all. In fact, next door was a travel agency who had us moved into the four-star Princess Hotel (US\$75) the same day. This was a beautiful place, close to a tram route and almost next door to the bus and train terminals. We stayed here during our Sofia sojourns, storing baggage during our frequent excursions out of the city. We were able to walk to the fascinating outdoor market, to

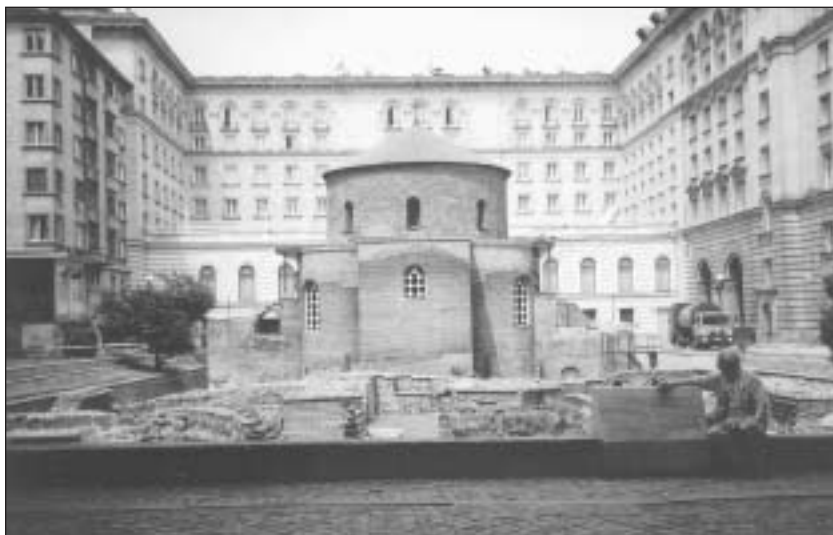
an interesting indoor shopping mall and to the most economical shopping district. At other times we used the streetcars for going to the centre of town or quite often took taxis which abound and are very cheap (but settle on the price before hiring).

'Must sees' in the city: the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, its crypt a museum with a progression of original iconography from earliest Christianity; the National Archaeological Museum on the outskirts of town with its unsurpassed display of Thracian antiquities; the Sofia Archaeological Museum in the centre of

the city and the Presidential Palace, built around an early Christian church. During and after our sight-seeing we discovered good restaurants everywhere we went. Handy to know is the word *pectopaht* for restaurant! We learned the Cyrillic alphabet from the Rough Guide and found it an invaluable

aid to getting around as the Roman alphabet is not common.

Next we spent a week with Adventures Abroad, a Canadian tour company that offered a bus tour covering all the major sites of the country. We crossed major mountain passes, visited ancient cities and fascinating Eastern Orthodox monasteries such as Rila, the oldest in the Balkans. On this tour we enjoyed the company of a wonderful group of North American companions as well as a superb tour guide and Ilko, a Bulgarian law student whose English was fluent. A highlight on the tour was the annual Rose Festival in Kazanlak, where



The Presidential Palace, Sofia, constructed around an ancient church (Smyth)

vast fields of fragrant blooms are harvested amidst dances and revelry which are enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. We were interested to learn here that Bulgaria produces the majority of the rose oil shipped to perfumeries around the world.

The Black Sea coast is saturated with tourists during the summer. It remains a favourite destination of former Eastern Bloc countries, though lots of British and German tourists make their way there too. These tourists rarely venture inland and travel agents and guides were amazed and overjoyed that we were interested in seeing their entire country ... enough to treat us as very special guests. North of Varna we stayed in the Golden Sands resort area, in the Hotel Berlin (US\$50 for a double room, including a humungous breakfast and dinner). True to its name it was full of Germans. From here we joined a Russian group, with a guide who spoke English, for two tours of the area and a great outdoor party where we were made to feel very welcome. The low hotel price here was probably due to the slightly off-season timing, for prices on the Black Sea, where fancy hotels cater to an international clientele, are generally higher than in the rest of Bulgaria.

Our trip to Varna from Sofia by train took seven hours and cost less than C\$20 each, first class. Encouraged by this experience we then travelled by rail to Veliko Tarnovo, a high and ancient capital surrounded by a meandering river. There we explored an extensive fortress with a lovely Sound and Light show in the evening. Our guide became our landlord when he rescued us from an overpriced and unsatisfactory hotel which we had booked sight unseen. His rental apartment had every convenience, plus an unsurpassed view of the city from the heights above the river. It was on the oldest street in the town. On the whole we found prices to be very low. For example, this large, four-room housekeeping apartment was US\$50 per

night, with the added benefit of a landlord/guide who drove us around, showed us all the sights and knew everyone in town. When we wished to travel further afield he arranged all excursion tickets and drove us to the station.

From there we took the train to Russe, on the Rumanian border, and to Tryavna for their carnival. We also travelled to Plovdiv, another 'must see' with its ancient Roman ruins set in the middle of a plain strewn with Thracian mound tombs. Here we dressed up a little for a memorable outdoor presentation of *Aida* (US\$7) in the Roman amphitheatre overlooking the sparkling city lights. Through a local travel agent here we hooked up with a German musical tour group and visited the Troyan Monastery and were the guests

of Bulgaria's most famous trumpet master, dining *al fresco* on a vine-clad terrace in his garden where we met his family. This tour cost a pittance; the travel agent who had arranged our opera tickets suggested this 'tag along' trip to us.

The low prices are not too surprising as the average income in Bulgaria

is around US\$150 per month. But in order to enjoy these bargains one must use local travel agents for bookings and advice. Their business is extremely competitive as they realize a boom in tourism is on its way and they want to get in on it.

Unlike other countries we've visited, we had no regrettable experiences or threatening encounters. As mentioned, everyone was exceptionally helpful and respectful. Young people would stop and enquire if they could help us, and on the trains and taxis conductors and drivers always helped with our luggage. Even old people would help us off the trains, whose steps tend to be rather high. When anyone found out we were travelling all over their country they were overjoyed. In fact, one experienced Sofia travel agent said she had never encountered our kind of traveller! As world travellers, we can sincerely say that this was one



The National Theatre, Sofia, with outdoor cafes in the foreground (Smyth)

Cruising the Fjords of British Columbia

by Marie Heaster

To really understand the word unique, I recommend you take a trip on the *M.V. Aurora Explorer*! Last year, we took a 5-day trip on board and highly recommend it.

This vessel sails out of Menzies Bay near Campbell River on Vancouver Island. It is a 135 foot landing craft with shallow draught and bow ramp. It can run up to a beach or rocky ramp inaccessible to other types of crafts. Its primary job is to carry supplies and equipment to remote logging and fishing camps throughout the Gulf of Georgia and the Johnstone-Queen Charlotte Straits area of the B.C. coast.

At the same time as delivering freight, the crew has mastered the art of catering to passengers. A maximum of 12 passengers are accommodated in three cabins with upper and lower bunks, and three cabins with twin beds. The deck above contains galley and dining/lounge areas, with large windows, so you don't miss a thing, even during meal times. Top deck is the bridge, where passengers are welcome to visit and watch the radar, check out the vessel's route on the charts or enjoy a visit with the skipper. And there are several outside observation decks from which to view and photograph the passing scenery and wildlife. (Take lots of film with you.)

Marine Link Tours notes that one should expect "modern and comfortable, but not luxurious" accom-

modation. We've tried the luxury tours and we'd take this one over them any time. True, meals were not served on fine bone china, but who cares, the food is what captured our attention. Maggie, our cook, was fabulous, serving such dinners as black cod, halibut, prawns, sesame chicken and steaks, all accompanied

by fresh vegetables, lots of salads and sauces, generous bottles of wine, and scrumptious desserts. All this after breakfasts of freshly baked cinnamon buns, Belgian waffles, French toast, omelettes, bacon and eggs, followed by lunches of pizzas, taco pies, cold buffet, homemade soups, which in turn were followed by hors d'oeuvres at 4:00 p.m. And freshly-made cookies or muffins, coffee, soft drinks and juice were always available in the lounge (in case we got hungry between meals and needed a snack!). It's a good thing we were able to get off the boat for a walk once in a while to burn off at least a few of the calories.

Meal serving, room care and general passenger attention was provided by

Rhiannon, who, no matter how busy or tired, always had a cheery smile and time to answer questions.

The vessel/freight crew often had long, unbroken days. They were always up early and on the go looking after the vessel and waiting for the right tide to get into a landing to off-load, sometimes as late as 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. Although the four man crew had 'formal'



One of the many waterfalls we saw (Heaster)

titles – Master/Captain, Mate, Engineer, and Deckhand – when it came time to unload or load, all could be found down on the freight deck manoeuvring large rolls of cable, boxes, barrels, running forklifts; operating the crane; driving the truck to move freight trailers, or driving vehicles on or off the vessel. When not working, crew members were available for a chat, to answer questions, join in the joke-telling sessions or discuss the machinery on board or that found on shore. They often guided us to a specific book in the nautical and B.C. coast history library in the lounge which covered the area we were passing through.

Although brochures advertise specific routes for the vessel, they also stress that as a working boat freight dictates the routing and timetable of the vessel. Our trip expanded to extra freight landing sites, so we ended up covering more distance than usual, in fact 483 miles of breathtaking scenery. For those of you with knowledge of the west coast, or those who would like to check on a map, the route included the heads of Bute, Call, Knight and Kingcome Inlets and in, out and around the islands of the Broughton Archipelago. Small charts were provided for each passenger on which to mark the route taken and to record names, places and freight stops.

Each day the Skipper visited us after breakfast to trace out our day's route on charts in the lounge and list 'ports of call'. He also let us know how the schedule was running, where a walk on shore might be anticipated and what sights we might expect to see that day.

Our walks included:

- the remains of the Stanton's house at the head of Knight Inlet (read *Grizzlies in Their Backyard* to find out about this interesting couple and their remarkable lives in an extremely remote area of B.C.
- a long abandoned logging camp, complete with a pair of moss-covered boots on a stump, old buildings and a large steam donkey gradually being 'mossed

over' by Mother Nature.

- Sullivan Bay, where, with no shore land for development, all buildings and houses are on floats, even the 'lawn' barge where residents walk their dogs.
- Yorke Island which had gun emplacements during WWII in case of invasion around the northern tip of Vancouver Island.

Some of the sights enjoyed:

- innumerable waterfalls, most hundreds of feet high, some of which cascade noisily like a giant's shower and others that wind their way down the rock faces to trickle quietly into the inlet.
- dozens of porpoises to port, starboard, forward and astern, moving with effortless ease, gliding and leaping along side the vessel and every once and a while rolling on their sides and looking up at us, as if saying "are you watching ... we're putting on a show for you."
- sea lions basking on the shore and small rocky islands, annoyed with our intrusion on their nap time, and expressing that annoyance rather vocally when we pulled along side to



Approaching one of our ports of call (Heaster)

snap our photos ... what a din!

- a black bear hunting for lunch along the water's edge. Time your vacation right and see grizzlies instead.
- eagles on the nest feeding their young, all types of seabirds, and during our walks, little song birds trilling their music in the hushed quiet of the forest.
- various resorts, most accessible only by yacht or seaplane, and private cabins and houses tucked away from civilization.
- B.C.'s controversial fish farms - fun to watch at feeding time; the phrase "sharks in a feeding frenzy" comes to mind.

All in all it was a most enjoyable trip, thanks to Ron, Ted, Bruce, Kevin, Maggie and Rhiannon and the folks behind the scenes at Marine Link Tours. And

... continued on page 20

From Airport to Courthouse: a Tale of Lost Luggage

by Anne Raymond, Asbestos, QC

A brave November sun is trying its best to pierce the cold morning air as I walk up the steps to the Montreal Courthouse. I wonder if all first-timers to the legal system experience the same queasy feeling I have right now. We ride the elevator in silence, anxious to find the assigned space for our case to be heard. We had been summoned for 9 o'clock but are early, so we take a seat and I reach into my briefcase to re-read the papers I have already read many times.

It all began last January when my husband and I arrived in Zurich, Switzerland, aboard an Air Canada flight. Despite our white hair and aging bones, our annual ski-trip has always been the major event of the winter for us and this year was no exception. We had been looking forward to our month in the French Alps all year. As we waited to claim our luggage, we were in high spirits. However, it soon became all too evident that our ski-bag, containing my brand new skis, my husband's slightly used pair, both sets of poles and my winter boots, was missing.

Passengers with lost baggage wait in line to register their claim with airport personnel. When my turn comes, a pleasant woman fills out the usual forms and asks for the address of our destination. She informs us that, unfortunately, the Three Valleys in France is too far a distance to forward our ski-bag. We should stay overnight in Zurich and pick up our bag next morning at the airport. It would be on the daily flight from Toronto. No prizes for guessing what happened. No bag the next morning. Another wait in line. Another form. This time another employee tracks down our bag on his computer. For some reason it had arrived in Frankfurt and would be on the afternoon flight

from that city ... again we are instructed to wait. But did you guess correctly again? No bag on the Frankfurt flight!

We approach the same agent who advises us to proceed to our destination and he promises that eventually our bag will be found and that it would, indeed, be forwarded to Val Thorens, our destination in France. We were instructed to keep all our receipts for expenses incurred due to the mishap as the airline would refund us in full. We are also advised to make time to meet with an Air Canada representative when we return to Zurich en route home to Canada in order to make this claim. So, we decide to proceed with our journey. We take the train, but unfortunately miss our connecting train to Moutiers and have to spend the night in Geneva. We have now spent two unscheduled nights in city hotels.

The following day of train and bus travel ends on a high note, as we settle in to our accommodations at Val Thorens. On the slopes bright and early next morning with borrowed skis, two happy seniors begin their vacation in earnest. An après-ski check with the Tourist Bureau crowns the perfect day ... our ski-bag has arrived!

With this mishap behind us we thoroughly enjoy our vacation. However, bearing in mind our meeting with an Air Canada representative back in Zurich, we leave for that city one day early and hence incur our third unscheduled night in a city hotel. When we arrive at Zurich Airport the next morning we are told at the AC Counter that the Air Canada representative was "just out for a few minutes". With nothing much else to do we wait patiently until, after an hour and a half had passed, we enquire again. This time a different agent

informs us that the Air Canada office had been closed down two days ago and everyone had gone back to Dorval!

Once home, after numerous unsuccessful attempts over a period of four months to communicate with airline personnel, we finally register our complaint with the Small Claims Court. Now, six months later, the moment of truth was drawing near.

As I sit in the courthouse hallway observing the other people arriving, I wonder who our adversaries will be. During the course of my letters, telephone calls and faxes, only once did I receive a letter from a person who identified herself, and this was after our legal complaint had been filed. At 9 o'clock sharp, the designated door opens and the people file in. I feel my heart beating as I enter and take my seat. The attendees identify themselves as their names are called out and I am relieved to discover that our case is in third place on the morning schedule. The airline is represented by two women.

After listening to the first cases to be heard in court, my confidence returned. Fortunately, we had prepared a chronological list of events. When we presented our case, we put the accent on the misleading information and the communication problems we had run into with Air Canada instead of concentrating our complaint on the lost baggage. Our detailed document proved most helpful to the judge who was able to pinpoint times, dates and events. After presenting our side of the story, the airline people replied that our lodging expenses were not covered by the Warsaw Convention. Under the Convention, the airline is not obligated in any way to reimburse such expenses and the airline had evidence that it did its job in tracking down and forwarding our bag "at considerable expense". We did hold a letter from Air Canada (received after our claim had been registered in Court) that mentioned "As a gesture of goodwill, if a passenger is away from home and his or her baggage is delayed more than 24 hours, Air Canada will contribute towards the cost of interim clothing and toiletry purchases, to a maximum of US\$100.00 when substantiated with original purchase receipts." But there was no mention of lodging and food.

Although AC was not legally obligated towards us, the judge pointed out that we had been given misleading information by the airline representatives, which had led to our various stay-overs in the first place. He then suggested that the four of us leave the courtroom to try and reach a friendly agreement. The airline representatives were understanding and apologized for the way we had been treated. They accepted to negotiate, we rapidly came to terms and the airline agreed to reimburse us the amount we had claimed for the three nights' lodging plus meals.

What had started out merely as an exercise in perseverance, turned out to be a learning experience: I learned about the Canadian Transportation Agency. Travellers can file complaints with this agency regarding unresolved issues similar to ours. Had I been aware of this possibility, I would have preferred going through the CTA instead of taking legal action. But even though we had already filed our complaint with the Small Claims Court, I was advised by the Agency to go ahead with the procedure. If for any reason our court case proved to be unsatisfactory, we could then appeal to the Agency for help. Their website states, "We aim to ensure that Canadian and foreign airlines meet their obligations under the law." For more information, log on to their site at www.cta.gc.ca or call 1 888 222 2592 or 1 800 669 5575. They publish a booklet entitled *Fly Smart* that contains a chapter entitled 'Baggage' commencing on p. 26.

I now know that the normal practice of any airline is to forward lost baggage to the traveller's ultimate destination. If, in the future, an airline employee tells me my bag cannot be forwarded, I will know this is debatable. And if I ever encounter similar problems, I'll be sure to again prepare a list of chronological events. I'll also try to remember that when all else fails, perseverance and positive thinking become necessary. In any case, it sure beats tearing your hair out!

It's also wise to know your rights – and the extent of each airline's liability – should your luggage be completely lost. Check the small print and, if you are travelling with baggage whose value exceeds that of the coverage offered, take out additional insurance and/or carry small items of value in your carry-on. 📦

Travel Digest

Australia

If Australia is in your plans, how about treating yourself to a luxurious camping experience on the Great Barrier Reef? P&O Australian Resorts have a new and unique package: the **Wilson Island Experience**. You'll enjoy pre- and post-accommodation at Heron Island and then be taken to Wilson Island (a 40-minute boat ride) where a maximum of 12 guests enjoy access to pristine reef and beach environments while staying in a designer permanent tent site and enjoying The Longhouse – a spacious open central complex with dining, lounge and bar facilities. The wild-life watching and reef snorkeling sound wonderful, as do the sunset pre-dinner drinks and canapés served on the beach, followed by a return to the Longhouse where guests will find the tables set, candles lit and music playing! The 5-night Thursday to Monday package includes accommodation, all meals, wine and beer, activities and transfers to Wilson Island for AUD\$1,690 (about C\$1,525). (The experience is not available in the month of February, when National Parks closes Wilson Island for the seabird nesting season.) World Heritage-listed Heron Island is located on the Great Barrier Reef, 72 km north-east off the coast of Gladstone, central Queensland, 540 km north of Brisbane. Transfer to Heron Island is AUD\$82 each way by launch, or AUD\$274 by helicopter from Gladstone Airport. For information call 1 800 225 9849 or visit www.poresorts.com

Britain

Two accommodation addresses that may be useful as you plan your travels in England. Historic **York's** first boutique B&B hotel has opened in a restored Georgian property at 132 The Mount. This five-bedroom property sounds interesting and rooms are available from £45 per night. For details call 011 44 1904 600 060, www.one3two.co.uk Down in beautiful **Devon**, historic Dartington Hall near Totnes is offering an accommodation package that provides bed and breakfast and a three course meal in their White Hart Restaurant from £49.50 pp. Call 011 44 1803 847 100 or visit www.dartingtonhall.com And if you'd like a longer stay, your fifth night could be free.

Canada

Itching for spring? Celebrate it with Maple Leaf Adventures' 5-day sailing eco-tour in **BC's Gulf Islands**. While the rest of the North is still clothed in a blanket of winter, the Gulf Islands burst with life, from meadows of bright flowers to the exuberant clamour of seals, whales and birds flocking around the millions of spawning herring. In the temperate climate, rare plants flourish, and the fresh spring breezes make for some brisk sailing with generous portions of sunshine. The all-inclusive trip includes gourmet cuisine, sailing on the historic, 92-foot schooner *Maple Leaf*, and shore excursions. Take a turn at the wheel, anchor in scenic coves, and enjoy the camaraderie of 9 guests and 5 crew members for an unforgettable experience. 29 March - 3 April or 4 - 9 April. \$1,550.00 per person. Departure and return point is Sidney, BC. For more informa-

tion call 1 888 599 5323 or www.mapleleafadventures.com

Another nautical idea from BC: the *Brass Bell* is a unique, romantic bed and breakfast on a private yacht, where couples can enjoy the boat all alone! Docked at a quiet, private marina on **Victoria's** beautiful harbour, this vintage 1931 wooden motor yacht was lovingly restored and features glowing woodwork, polished brass and a warm, cozy ambiance. The perfect accommodation for a west coast getaway, the *Brass Bell* is fully equipped with a bathroom, kitchen and a bottle of wine to welcome guests aboard. Breakfast at a local waterfront restaurant and transportation around Victoria's Inner Harbour by ferry is included. Rates from \$165 per night, double. For more information call 250 708 0301 or visit www.brass-bell.net

www.thetravelsociety.com

Our website is now up and fully operational. We will constantly endeavour to improve it and welcome your input. To access the site the password will be up-dated monthly and will appear on the back page of your *TravelScoop* within the address box.

Looking ahead to spring, summer and fall, here's news of nautical adventures in **Ontario**: the Muskoka Fleet is comprised of three historic vessels that offer a variety of short but gracious trips (up to 2 nights) through Ontario's incomparable **Muskoka Lakes**, leaving from historic Gravenhurst, 168 km north of Toronto. Two-night, 3-day cruises in June cost \$490 pp. These short cruises can also be combined with stays in fine resorts in the area. For information call 705 687 6677 or visit www.muskokafleet.com

Chile

For those of you who bemoan spring's arrival because it means the end of ski-ing, have you considered following winter to Chile? Yes, the flight may be expensive, but a ski-ing experience in Portillo (a scenic 2-hour drive from Santiago) sounds very reasonable: 7 nights lodging, four meals a day (the fourth being high-tea), 7 days of lift tickets, daycare and/or après-ski activities for children (and kids stay and ski free) from US\$910 pp. dbl. at the Hotel Portillo (or even less at two of the resorts more affordable lodges). The season commences on 14 June and lots of information can be found at www.skiportillo.com.

Ireland

As we've mentioned in *TravelScoop* before, the **Republic of Ireland** and **Northern Ireland** are now covered by one tourist board: Tourism Ireland. They have just released their *New Ireland Vacation Planner* which is yours for the asking if you call 1 800 223 6470. This publication

covers all regions of Ireland, with excellent maps, self-drive touring ideas and touring routes (including a complete round-island itinerary) and lots of practical information. www.tourismireland.com

France

2004 is still a little ways away, but the year holds special significance for WWII veterans, their families and for the people of **Normandy**, as they remember the 60th anniversary of D-Day. A spectacular new museum – the Caen Memorial and Peace Museum – has been constructed (with input from Canada), and plans are afoot to welcome groups and individuals to tours of the museum and the surrounding areas that played a part in the war. There's an excellent website at www.memorial-caen.fr or e-mail: resa@memorial-caen.fr for more information and accommodation reservations, or call 011 33 231 06 06 44 or 231 06 06 45

Grenada

The lack of direct flights is often an obstacle to Caribbean island vacations. Not so if you live near Toronto and would like to visit the beautiful island of Grenada, for Air Canada Vacations now offers direct weekly flights. Your agent will have details, or tempt yourself by contacting the Grenada Board of Tourism at 416 595 1339 or visit www.grenada-grenadines.com

Holland

Maybe this is the year you will make an excursion you have long promised yourself ... to those famous **Keukenhof Gardens** near Amsterdam for the display

of 7 million spring bulbs. The expected dates this year are 21 March – 18 May. For more information on the gardens at Lisse, and the many other events planned for the Netherlands this year, call 1 888 GO HOLLAND or visit www.holland.com

Mexico

Rio Caliente - that low-key spa just 50 minutes from **Guadalajara** – may be an appealing addition to your Mexican vacation and the prices seem good: from US\$144 per night (single) for room, all meals, exercise programmes, guided hikes etc., or – beginning in March – a 7-night stay for US\$1058 single (US\$880 double) which also includes three spa treatments and a local trip. For a brochure giving full details call 1 800 200 2927, e-mail riocal@aol.com or visit www.riocaliente.com

U.S.A.

Travelling via or near **St. Louis, Missouri**, soon? Plan to stay awhile and take advantage of their "Warm Welcomes, Cool Savings" packages, available until 31 March. They cover many of the city's attractions: theatre, music and dance; sports and history; romantic weekends; family fun and more. For your copy of the savings booklet call 1 800 916 0040 or visit www.explorestlouis.com For example: for US\$219 two of you can stay in a suite at the historic Wyndham Mayfair Hotel, enjoy a cultural event of your choice at the nearby Symphony Hall or Theatre and round out your evening with a champagne dinner (taxes, gratuities and parking all included too). Lots of other hotel specials from the US\$60 range are available.

If you follow *TravelScoop's* tour of Southern Colorado, you may also have **New Mexico** in your plans. The tourism people there have asked us to remind readers that they have over 121,000 square miles of spectacular landscape ... "but if you speed through on the Interstate, you'll miss the essence of our timeless place." Call 1 800 545 2070 or 1 800 733 6396, ex. 751 or visit www.newmexicoscenicbyways.org for details and a map of the state's 24 Scenic Byways, meandering routes that involve travellers in the region's unique history and customs.



A sandstone formation on the Dry Cimarron Scenic Byway, New Mexico (Martin Perea)

Seattle is another U.S. city that is offering winter savings on accommodation, entertainment and restaurants under their "Seattle Super Saver Packages" programme. About 45 well-known downtown Seattle hotels are offering up to 50% off room rates, so the range will be from US\$55-\$175. Information and reservations by calling 1 800 535 7071, or online at www.seattlesupersaver.com Another special offer during March is the city's popular *Dine Around Seattle-25 for \$25* ... a self-explanatory programme at Seattle's 25 top restaurants.

A Few Points About Checked Luggage

It is likely that you have been reading the new security baggage information in the national press and have heeded the warnings.

To sum up, it is most important to remember to pack film in your carry-on and *not* your checked luggage as the latter now goes through strong x-ray scanners to screen for explosives and these strong scanners can damage your film. Apparently digital cameras will be unaffected.

Of course at some airports the hand-baggage scanner can also harm film, especially if your itinerary means you will be subjected to multiple scans. Try to keep undeveloped rolls to a minimum, carry all film in a plastic bag and request a hand search.

It's unlikely you will be carrying cheese on an international flight (though you may well take some across Canada), but chocolate is a popular gift. These items should also be hand carried as

they have a density similar to plastic explosives and will raise suspicion in your checked bag.

This leaves the decision of whether to lock your checked bag or not. The U.S. Transportation Security Administration is advising travellers not to lock their cases as any suspicious piece of luggage will be opened (by force if necessary) though this directive will surely lead to a series of new questions regarding security and rights.

In Canada, travellers may still lock their bags, but if it is decided a hand check is necessary passengers will be paged and asked to open their bags. Presumably your name can be ascertained via your baggage tag, but it might be advantageous to ensure your cases are clearly labeled with your name (but remember ... don't advertise your absence from home by adding your address). 📄

continued from page 12 ... Bulgaria

of the most beautiful countries we have visited and one of our most carefree holidays.

A few details ...

Hotel Princess, **Sofia**, tel: (country code: 011 359) 2 324 032, fax: 2 931 0068.

A travel agent in **Veliko Tarnovo** is Intertours, tel/fax: 62 621 624, intertours@hotmail.com. Even better, write to Rosenn Petrov at Gurko 70, Veliko Tarnovo, who is most helpful and has some apartments for rent in the oldest, most beautiful part of town. (This city's biggest, 'best' hotel – the Grand – is overpriced for the quality offered.)

The city of **Plovdiv** contains fabulous museum houses dating from the 1800's. A travel agent here is Wandis-GmbH, tel: 32 964 979, fax: 32 964 974, wanditour@m6oxdigsys.bg. While in this location we

stayed at the 5-star Novotel, tel: 32 934 444, fax: 32 934 160, booked through the above travel agent at US\$60 dbl per night. The property has great indoor and outdoor pools.

Our bus tour with **Adventures Abroad** cost C\$1,369 pp, land only, for 8 days. They can be contacted at 604 303 1099 or 1 800 665 3998.

Don't take **Canadian currency** ... it proved to be hard to exchange. **US dollars** or **Euros** are the most convenient. ATMs are available in tourist areas and we found Bulbank the best place to exchange money in Sofia.

Hotels and internet cafés provide access to **e-mail**, with prices ranging from 50 cents an hour to US\$3 for ½ hour in the best hotels. 📧

continued from page 14 ... British Columbia

thanks, of course, to our fellow passengers, mostly retired couples, from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Oregon, whose senses of humour and like interests made the trip so much fun.

So, I've told you some of the pros of the trip. There are, however, two cons I should mention: it wasn't long enough, and it took weeks of concentrated effort to wear off Maggie's cooking!

The details:

There are three different routes available of 3-, 4-, or 5-days' duration, or book one of their mystery tours at the beginning or end of the season. Got a big family or

group? Arrange a "whole vessel charter" or give a gift certificate for an outstanding holiday to someone special. Prices depend on time of year, route and type of sleeping accommodation. For example, per person: a 3-days/3-night trip, in low season, in a standard room, is C\$1,199.00 + GST, while a 5-day/5-night trip, in peak season, in a premium room, is C\$1,945.00 + GST.

For further information contact Marine Link Tours at Box 451, Campbell River, BC V9W 5C1, tel: 250 286 3347, fax 250 286 1149 e-mail: mink@island.net, www.marinelinktours.com 📧

We have a file listing several single travellers who wish to take a Travel Society trip next year. Destinations include: China, Australia, Turkey and Galapagos.

If you would like to share with another member please contact us. We will put you in touch with each other so that you can chat - or meet - and see if you would be compatible.

Call 416 926 2500, ex. 25 or 1 877 926 2500

How about giving a subscription to *TravelScoop* as a gift when birthdays come around this year? Call Debbie and she will arrange it for you without delay.

The Travel Society ~ tours designed for members and their friends.

Galapagos Islands and Ecuador

with options to Kapawi Lodge in the Amazon and Machu Picchu, Peru

14 days departing 18 March, 22 April, 14 October & 4 November 2003

Each tour is limited to 20 people

The Travel Society is proud to be able to offer its members an outstanding trip to some of the world's most spectacular destinations. Who hasn't dreamed of cruising to the Galapagos Islands and seeing wildlife as Darwin witnessed it? Think of the unique adventure you will enjoy, of the stories you will have to tell and the photographs you will take! You will spend a week aboard your first-class 20-passenger ship, taking daily shore excursions to a variety of the islands with experienced naturalists in groups of no more than 10 people per guide.

But of course there's more to Ecuador than the Galapagos. On this tour you will also visit Quito, Calderon (where you'll stay in one of the oldest haciendas in Ecuador) and Cotacachi. You'll travel through spectacular countryside with mountains, lakes and colourful Indian communities ... whose markets you will visit.

The optional extensions to this trip are equally exciting. Spend four nights in the Amazon's premier luxury ecological lodge – the magical paradise know as Kapawi – and experience the river and the rainforest up close. Machu Picchu in Peru is probably also on your wish list and we are offering a 4-day trip there too. You can travel from Quito to Lima and then on to Cuzco for a visit to this breathtaking Lost City of the Incas. We'll take care of all the travel details. All you have to do is marvel and enjoy!

PRICES INCLUDE AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Toronto	\$7,476.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$7,476.00 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$7,797.00 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$7,797.00 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$7,394.00 pp/dbl

GREAT ADD-ONS, INCLUDING AIR:

Kapawi - from all departure points	\$1,680.00 pp/dbl
Machu Picchu -	: Toronto \$1,642.00 pp/dbl
When departing from	: Ottawa, Montreal \$1,642.00 pp/dbl
	: Vancouver, Calgary \$1,547.00 pp/dbl
	: Halifax \$1,694.00 pp/dbl

Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour includes:

- Round-trip air transportation
- All domestic air transportation
- All accommodation
- All meals as per the itinerary
- Admissions to all sites
- Expert Galapagos guides
- Transfers & baggage handling
- Islands Park Entrance Fee (US\$100)

The Kingdom of Thailand

with optional Angkor Wat (Cambodia) pre-tour and Pattaya post-tour extensions

17 days departing 21 April & 20 October 2003

"Thailand is magical." So say the increasing number of travellers who journey to this exotic land, a land of majestic palaces, ornate temples, quaint cities, beautiful landscapes and charming, gentle people. Come with The Travel Society and over 14 memorable days we'll show you bustling Bangkok, the floating market and legendary canals of Damnoen Saduak, the Bridge on the River Kwai at Kanchanaburi, Ayutthaya – Thailand's ancient capital, the cool hills and forests of Chiang Mai with their Hill Tribes and working elephants and so much more. You'll shop for unique items, enjoy a Thai cooking class, witness cultural shows, take river trips, visit museums AND still have plenty of time at leisure to follow your own interests.

However, before your arrival in Thailand, you may like to enjoy a unique experience in Cambodia where you'll visit fascinating Angkor Wat. You'll view the Wats and Terraces at sunset and spend a day among the fascinating temple structures that formed the former capital and religious centre of the Khmer Empire.

And an optional post-tour will take you to relax at Pattaya – known as the Riviera of Thailand, where you can enjoy exquisite tropical gardens, a visit to the Mini Siam miniature display of Thai heritage and a catamaran cruise as well as the inviting beach. This trip is scheduled for Spring and Fall, 2003. Give us a call ... we'll add you to the list of those interested and send a full itinerary and applicable prices.

PRICES INCLUDE AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Toronto	\$3,045.00 pp/dbl
Winnipeg & Montreal	\$3,045.00 pp/dbl
Vancouver & Calgary	\$3,045.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa	\$3,100.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$3,560.00 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$4,095.00 pp/dbl

GREAT ADD-ONS:

Angkor Wat	\$919.00 pp/dbl - plus air
Pattaya	\$839.00 pp/dbl - plus air

Your tour includes:

- Round-trip transpacific and domestic air
- All domestic flights
- Canadian domestic air fares
- Fully escorted by knowledgeable tour guides
- All transfers
- All sightseeing tours, boat trips and fees to parks & sites

Please call **The Travel Society** 1 877 926 2500 x24 or 416 926 2500 x24 for the full details. All our tours are specially priced for *Travel Society* members and are only available at these prices through our office. **TICO** reg #01280649

The Travel Society ~ tours designed for members and their friends.

NEW

Copper Canyon & Guadalajara

9 days departing 14 March & 11 April 2003

We are offering a new 9-day tour to the Copper Canyon, together with a stay in Mexico's wonderful city of Guadalajara. The Copper Canyon is four times larger than the Grand Canyon, and you'll enjoy a journey that is considered by many to be the world's most exciting train trip, with its 87 tunnels, 39 bridges and uncountable spectacular views. You'll meet the people, stay in unique accommodations and explore the present and the past in this astonishing region.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$3,245 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$3,245 pp/dbl
Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Winnipeg	\$3,460 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$600 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra.

Please call for prices from other departure cities

Your tour includes:

- All air transportation on Mexicana
- Canadian domestic air
- 8 nights first class accommodation
- All transfers,
- Meals as per the itinerary
- All train trips and tours as per the itinerary

NEW

Chile, Patagonia and Easter Island

Departing 3 April & 5 September 2003

Come with The Travel Society to one of South America's most popular destinations – Chile. During this 9-day trip you'll spend 5 exciting days touring the historic city of Santiago, visiting some beautiful vineyards and taking excursions to some popular beach destinations. Then you'll fly south to Puerto Montt to discover more history, mingle in the local markets, search out special handicrafts and explore the region's beautiful lakes, waterfalls and rivers.

Add-ons which you won't want to miss are a 5-night trip to Patagonia, romantically called 'South of Silence', where you'll stay in the renowned Termas de Puyuhuapi Hotel & Spa, and/or a 3-night trip to unique Easter Island, where our guides will show you all this incredible destination has to offer.

Departing from: Toronto Ottawa & Montreal

Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Winnipeg \$1,698 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$744 (Sharing can be arranged.)

Great add-ons:

Easter Island	4 days/3 nights	\$894.00 pp/dbl
Patagonia	6 days/5 nights	\$1,794.00 pp/dbl

Canadian domestic & international flights additional
All prices are subject to confirmation
Taxes extra.

Your tour includes:

- First-class accommodation
- All transfers
- Meals as per itinerary
- All tours and boat trips
- Local guides
- Domestic air

Panama Highlights

~ see this beautiful land before it is over-run by "tourists"

Departing 21 March & 11 April 2003

Imagine discovering colourful Panama during the coming February. Come with The Travel Society for 10 exciting days in four different locations. You'll stay at Fort Amador, famous for its views of the Pacific and the entrance to the Panama Canal. Then you'll travel on to a luxurious rainforest resort – the Gamboa – close to the Canal in the heart of the lush Panamanian rainforest. There you'll discover the secrets of the upper forest canopy – its flowers, mammals and splendid birds – on a unique aerial tram ride. A flight to the San Blas Islands is next on the itinerary, described in the October 2000 edition of TravelScoop as "A paradise ... truly special and beautiful." A stay in a resort on the Costa Blanca and a chance of explore Panama City will bring your trip to a close. What an unusual winter getaway!

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$3,480 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$3,480 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$3,564 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$3,564 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$3,580 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,620.0 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra.

Please call for prices from other departure cities

Your tour includes:

- Round-trip international airfares
- Canadian domestic air
- 9 nights' accommodation in 4 different properties
- all land transfers
- flights to San Blas
- all breakfasts
- 4 lunches, 4 dinners
- rainforest aerial tram tour

Costa Rica – "Nature's Museum"

11 days departing 4 & 18 April 2003

Costa Rica is known as Nature's Museum and with good reason. Come for a visit and you'll be impressed by this country that is dedicated to preserving its delicate ecology for all to enjoy and by its warm friendly people who are waiting to show it to you. During your 10-day tour you'll visit historic San Jose, stay in a tropical rain forest at a thermal spa resort; visit a vast jungle preserve; take a river boat trip to watch and photograph the wildlife; soak in the thermal pools of Arenal Paraiso and visit the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. And after all this you'll relax or play on the beach at Guanacaste Also available is a 3-night jungle odyssey post tour extension, an exciting soft-adventure to Tortuguero, the Amazon of Costa Rica.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$2,920 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$2,920 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$2,990 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$2,990 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$3,036 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$464 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra.

Please call for prices from other departure cities

Your tour includes:

- Round-trip international airfares
- Canadian domestic air
- 9 nights' accommodation in 4 different properties
- all land transfers
- flights to San Blas
- all breakfasts
- 4 lunches, 4 dinners
- rainforest aerial tram tour

The Travel Society ~ tours designed for members and their friends.

from \$3,986 for 18 days
(19 days in September & October)

China ... Yangtze Spectacular ~ 18 days!

Come with us on our most popular, unique tour and spend 18 days in China still at an amazingly low price. Reserve now for departures on

6 April, 22 April, 27 May, 9 September, 7 October & 21 October 2003

It is vast, fascinating and mysterious and it has beckoned travellers from the west for centuries. Mention it to avid travellers and they are sure to say, "Yes, I hope to visit China one day." And what would they choose to experience? A **cruise on the mighty Yangtze River (soon to be changed for ever)**; a look at the work-in-progress on the massive **Three Gorges Dam**; a walk on the ancient **Great Wall**; views of charming villages, lush terraced hillsides and magnificent mountain peaks; visits to the great cities of **Shanghai** and **Beijing**; a trip to view one of the world's greatest archaeological finds ... the 6,000 terra-cotta warriors at **Xi'an**; scenes of palaces, pagodas, pavilions and pandas; tastes of Peking duck and Chinese banquets and so much more. So how do you choose? When you decide on The *Travel Society's* tour there's no need to choose because all these highlights are included. Yes, in these remarkable 18 days you'll stay in Beijing; you'll take a 4-day first-class cruise on the Yangtze with many shore excursions; you'll fly to see those centuries-old terra-cotta warriors in Xi'an; you'll visit bustling Chongquin and see its pandas; stay in Hangzhou and travel into the hills covered with tea plantations; explore the exquisite gardens of Suzhou, and visit Nanjing and Wuzhen. And you'll have time to explore spectacular Shanghai. Throughout the trip you'll see magnificent architecture, you'll be entertained at cultural events, you'll join your hosts at a variety of banquets, you'll have time to shop, and you'll marvel at some of the most wonderful scenery on earth, all in the company of English-speaking guides. You'll travel by plane, by luxury bus, cruise ship and river boat. Many of our members have told us it's an experience of a lifetime ... and all at an amazing price!

**So many members have said:
"We don't know how you do such
a first class tour at this price!"**

Your tour costs includes:

- Round-trip transpacific air fares on Japan Airlines
- Chinese domestic airfares
- Canadian domestic airfares
- First-class hotel accommodation
- First-class 4 days/3 nights Yangtze River cruise aboard a deluxe cruise ship
- All transfers
- Daily sightseeing
- Three meals daily
- 2 Western style dinners.
- Special banquets in Hangzhou, Xi'an and Beijing
- Evening cultural shows
- Fully escorted by English/Chinese-speaking tour guide
- English-speaking local guides
- Free day and evening in Beijing & Shanghai

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Vancouver	\$3,986 pp/dbl
Victoria/Nanaimo/Kamloops	\$4,099 pp/dbl
Calgary/Edmonton	\$4,224 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,428 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,392 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,320 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,426 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec City/London	\$4,540 pp/dbl
Thunder Bay/St. John's	\$4,688 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,090 (Sharing can be arranged.)

Taxes and visas extra.

GREAT ADD-ONS:

Hong Kong	4 days/3 nights	\$1,094.00
Tokyo	4 days/3 nights	\$892.00

Prices are subject to confirmation

Our editor, Ann Wallace took the April 2002 China Yangtze trip and her 14-page, illustrated (and honest) account is available. For your copy please send \$5 with your address.

Please call **The Travel Society** 1 877 926 2500 x24 or 416 926 2500 x24 for the full details. All our tours are specially priced for *Travel Society* members and are only available at these prices through our office. **TICO** reg #01280649

The Travel Society ~ tours designed for members and their friends.

NEW DEPARTURES

from \$4,950 for 21 days including all airfares

A Traveller's Turkey

Departing: ~~5 October~~ **4 May & 14 September 2003**

Space limited to 20 people

It is one of the cradles of civilization and one of the most wonderful countries on the planet. Here there are fabled cities, unique landscapes, incomparable historic sites and calm, friendly people who are eager to show that their land is, indeed, both historic and modern.

Ann Wallace, our editor, has travelled extensively in Turkey and always returns claiming it is one of her favourite destinations. So now we have organized a luxurious tour exclusively for Travel Society members. It is due to take place in October 2003 for a maximum of 20 people.

We have combined our extensive knowledge with careful research to ensure you see the very best that Turkey has to offer. You'll stay in first-class historic or very specialized hotels, travel in a 40-seat air-conditioned luxury bus, enjoy cruises on private boats, sample fine food and be entertained by cultural performances. And the itinerary? Magical Istanbul (plenty of time there); Ankara, home of one of the world's finest museums; the unique 'geological poem' called Kapadokya (or Cappadocia); mysterious and lovely ruins such as Aphrodisias, Pergamum and, of course, Ephesus; the fabled and beautiful Aegean coast; the peaceful Princes Isles in the Sea of Marmara and so much more.

Ann says, "This is the most perfect tour of Turkey imaginable; you will have an unforgettable time ... and such a small group, too! Sign up now!"

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$4,950.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,950.00 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$5,195.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton & Calgary	\$5,195.00 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$5,125.00 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$5,125.00 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$455 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes included, visa extra.

Your tour includes:

- Round trip transatlantic and domestic flights with Air Canada
- 20 nights' accommodation
- Most meals as per itinerary
- All domestic transportation
- 40 seat air conditioned luxury bus
- Admission to all sites
- An English-speaking guide/director and a Travel Society host

In order to prepare participants for their visit to this historic land, an annotated reading list will be sent to all applicants and comprehensive tour kits will be sent 30 days before departure.

Please call **The Travel Society** 1 877 926 2500 x24 or 416 926 2500 x24 for the full details. All our tours are specially priced for *Travel Society* members and are only available at these prices through our office.  reg #01280649

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