

Special cruise offers for Veterans ... see p. 19

TravelScoop

*The Newsmagazine
for Members of
The Travel Society*

Vol. 21, No.7 September 2003

A Toast to Toronto

by Ann Wallace

During the ten years that I have been editor of *TravelScoop* many Canadian stories have appeared on our front page, but never one on Toronto. I know ... if we live elsewhere we like to criticize it, if we live here we tend to take it for granted. But, as we all know, it has had a hard time recently with the SARS pandemic and our hearts go out to all those who have worked so hard, who have been ill themselves or who have worried about loved ones, and especially to those who have been bereaved.

Of course it's no secret that tourism in Toronto has also suffered. So I thought the timing might be right,

if you don't live close, for me to try to persuade you to pay us a visit in this lovely fall season or in the months ahead. If you do live close, I hope you find something you hadn't heard of before in this random list of some of my *personal* Toronto favourites; some old, some new and some hidden away.

... continued on page 6



The second best view of Toronto - after the CN Tower - is from Toronto Islands (Wallace)

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TravelScoop

The Newsmagazine for Members of
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September 2003

Vol. 21, No. 7

From your Editor's desk...



We were proof-reading when the lights went out in Toronto! And in lots of other places too! I had, just a few days earlier, sent an e-mail message to my friends and colleagues alerting them to the fact that Mars is so close to Earth at the moment. Several of them have now replied to me thanking me for turning the lights out so they could see the red planet more brightly!

But, of course, the black-out wasn't a joke. It is to be hoped better power delivery systems will ensue, combined with a heightened awareness on the power of power on the part of the public. We spent the week-end worried about what we would find in our office on Monday morning and breathed a sigh of relief when we discovered our computer and phone systems had not been seriously affected. I hope those of you involved also came through the event unscathed.

Just some news of an editorial change. In the last issue we promised you a story on Laos. Then Cec Cook's account of her learning vacation in Spain arrived on my desk. Since these vacations are scheduled for February, we thought we shouldn't delay bringing you news of them. So the Laos story has been re-scheduled and will now appear next month. If any of you would like the information sooner, please send me a message and I can e-mail the text to you.

coming in *October*

- *Guatemala*

- *Havana, Cuba*

- *Laos, a Budget Traveller's Dream*

Update Items

Newly opened in Canada is a tourism office for the **Philippines** and a website designed for Canadian travellers too. The Philippine Department of Tourism is located at 151 Bloor Street West, Suite 1120, Toronto, ON M5S 1S4, tel: 416 924 3569, fax: 416 924 8013, info@wowphilippines.ca, www.wowphilippines.ca

And there's a newly-named and up-dated website for **New Zealand**. Log on to www.newzealand.com (formerly www.purenz.com) for excellent information and some wonderful images.

Off to Europe with 'open' plans? Log on to www.auctionweekend-breaks.co.uk, where you can bid for luxury breaks in **Britain** and **continental Europe** at greatly reduced prices. The website's literature claims that winning bids on the week-end breaks were, on average, 57% of the retail value. And apparently these breaks can be taken whenever you want ... they are not last-minute offers. *If any readers try this service we'd love to hear about it at TS – Ed.*

There's an annual culinary festival called "Food of the Gods" coming up in **Oaxaca, Mexico**, 4-11 October. A U.S.-based company called Travel 360 has been offering packages to this event for 7 years now. Tom Cotter of 360 tells us "this event just gets better and better". He can be reached at 1 800 241 5429, e-mail: tom@travel360.com, www.travel360.com

This Month's Winning Scoop

Home Exchanging Experience

by Ken Harrison

As requested in your Jul/Aug issue, I'd like to tell of our experience with house exchanges. We joined HomeLink International (their Canadian headquarters are here in North Vancouver) in 1995 and arranged a multiple exchange in 1996 with five other homeowners in the UK. This was in the days before e-mail was common, so nearly all of it was done by snail mail. Today it must be a far quicker and easier task.

During a six month period, we went to each of the homes for a month at a time, with anything from a day to a week between each one. Each of the couples travelled here to our home, again with a break between visitors ranging from as short as three hours to as much as a week. We were able to do this because a neighbour came in to clean and check between visitors, but she advised us that she almost never had to do anything, and that the house seemed to get cleaner after each visitor!

In each case we exchanged cars as well, leaving our car at a private lot near the airport where we had pre-arranged multiple drops and pick-ups. Each couple was provided with a valet ride to and from the airport itself, and we finally picked the car up at the private lot upon our return.

One couple with whom we exchanged, although residents of England, also 'gave' us their cottage in the Dordogne Valley of France, complete with their car to drive from Manchester to south-

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 CD.

ern France and return.

We had not one single negative experience with the venture. It was the only way we could possibly have afforded such a long trip. Our costs, over the costs of staying at home, were the airfares and the fact that all consumables in England cost double what they cost in Canada. But there was almost no necessary other cost.

We have not made another exchange since then, but only because we have not found the time to arrange one. But we have friends who make at least one exchange per year.

We do get, I guess, an average of one request a week from potential exchangers all over Europe and the UK, Canada, USA, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, etc.. It had not occurred to me that we might get more than others because of the popularity of Vancouver as a destination, but this is possible.

We enthusiastically recommend this form of vacation accommodation, and would be happy to go into more detail or answer any questions, should you want any more information. Our e-dress is KenHarrison11@cs.com

*Ken Harrison
North Vancouver, BC*

HomeLink International is located at 1707 Platt Crescent, North Vancouver, BC V7J 1X9, tel: 604 987 3262, www.homelink.org Full details regarding membership benefits, procedures, fees and listing deadlines are clearly given on the above website, where visitors may also request hard-copy information. The company has been offering a home-exchange service since 1953 and claims to be the world's largest such service – Ed.

Your Scoops

Thinking of Florida? St. Pete motel cuts prices for Canadians

Canadian ex-patriate Steve Kibort and his family love to welcome Canucks to their modest, but immaculate, property with special rates. That property is the Lamara Motel in St. Pete Beach, the sand-rimmed peninsula next door to Tampa and St. Petersburg.

Already offering a seventh day free on a six-day stay, the Kiborts are chopping another 10% for Canadians who book a week-long package 10 days in advance. That's a seven-night rate from US\$270 or \$38.50 per night (approx.. C\$337.50 or C\$48.25). The offer runs to December 15.

The Lamara offers eight efficiency apartments and eight double rooms along with a heated swimming pool, a pretty garden and a short stroll to the beach. They describe themselves accurately as offering "the hospitality of a B&B with the privacy and amenities of a motel". Already a favourite with many Canadians, the management helps break the ice with a Friday night barbeque and a Sunday morning pancake breakfast. There are also special deals on Dixieland jazz cruises and dinner/dance cruises aboard the paddle wheeler *Starlite Princess*.

All the details can be found at the property's excellent web site www.lamara.com or call Steve or Rella Kibort at 1 800 211 5108.

*Isobel Warren
Newmarket, ON*

Celtic Colours International Festival, Cape Breton Island, NS

If you like rich autumn foliage and lively Celtic music, the Seventh Annual Celtic Colours International Festival, due to take place this year 10-18 October, will delight you. This is a popular event, so be sure to check that there are tickets available for your selections before you head to Cape Breton Island. There are some daytime concerts and workshops, and many simultaneous evening concerts at various locations around Cape Breton Island. On our last trip to this festival we decided to golf during the day and go to concerts in the evening. There are sufficient evening venues that you can decide where to stay based on what you want to hear, or decide what to attend based on where you are staying. There are wonderful performers from the Island, the rest of Canada, and other countries. Check the festival website for current information www.celtic-colours.com or call 1 877 285 2321 for details.

In spite of living in the centre of Canada, we have had the opportunity of travelling about seven times to the Maritimes over the last nine years. We have always had a great time, even when typical Maritime weather brought us cool days or rain. In October 2001, on a warm sunny day, we golfed at the Bell Bay Golf Club in Baddeck. It was magical as we were the only golfers out on the course and the many views of the Bras d'Or Lakes seemed to be there for our exclusive enjoyment.

If you prefer not to golf, there are many other activities to fill your days, such as shopping for

folk art, water colours, and other pieces. You can also visit Fortress Louisbourg, the Gaelic College at St. Ann's, the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Park and the Glenora Inn and Distillery in Glenville. And, if you have never driven the Cabot Trail, you must save some time for that outing.

There is a range of accommodations available as well as a number of camping parks, so there is sure to be somewhere to suit your budget. Check www.explorenovascotia.com for information on accommodations and golf courses.

*Judy Little,
Kenora, ON*

First you shop. Then you ski.

Excuses for visiting Quebec's beautiful Eastern Townships are easy to find – ski, fish, swim, dine, spa – but one of the best is shopping for antiques. South of Montreal toward the Vermont border, antique shops of every style abound. And fall is an ideal tour time. The autumn leaves are glorious and two major antique shows are scheduled, one in **Lac Brome** (24-26 October) and the other in **Eastman** (31 October – 2 November).

The shops themselves are fascinating, both for their specialties and for their owners. From centuries-old Quebec and French furniture to quality reproductions, from pioneer utensils to Victorian china, from great-grandma's bloomers to great-granddad's folk art to contemporary artisanía – each is different.

Here are a few of my favourites. Textiles are treasured at **Antiquites Rosalie** in **Eastman** where Gisele and Yves Duclos mix century-old hand-hooked rugs, traditional quilts and embroideries with weathered folk art, vintage hats, china, jewellery and furniture. But ask to see Gisele's treasury of aprons, nighties and bloomers, delicately lace-edged, beribboned and embroidered, dating back more than a century.

Quality restoration is the specialty at **La Belle Gueule de Bois** near **Magog**, Michel Freniere trains and oversees a 15-person restoration team, replicating a damaged leg or cornice, removing 10 layers of paint to reveal the original paint, precisely matching colour and finish. Michel offers a money-back guarantee – in fact he welcomes returned merchandise because, as he explains, with antique prices rising some 20% per year, "if everything I've sold to date came back, I'd be a rich man."

At **Le Vieux Presbytere** in **Eastman**, actually the rectory of a long-departed 1880 church, proprietors Jean-Jacques and Anne Dinand preside over a collection of fine old armoires, early Quebec pine and long-ago tools and household items.

Both genuine antiques and reproductions share space at **Camlen** in **Knowlton**. Their Latvian pine pieces, surprisingly similar to Quebec designs, are hand-somely built and very affordable.

And some of the 'shops' are, in fact, barns. **Antiquites Magog-Orford** barn is bursting with everything from cream separators to ox yokes, armoires to gleaming cook stoves, stuffed groundhogs to claw-foot tubs. A sprawling two-storey barn in **Omerville, Guyon**

Antiquites, is packed with Quebec armoires and chests, chairs and tables, lovely dishes and glassware, old tools, utensils and curios. A barn of a different type is **Les Tresors de la Grange**, a non-profit art centre in **Magog**. owner Francoise Lavoie tells hair-raising tales of evicting squirrels and pigeons to reclaim the 130-year-old structure. Now she offers contemporary art, quilting and other textiles, woodworking, pottery and confections. And speaking of art, don't miss **Galerie Jeannine Blais** on **North Hatley's** main street, specializing in naïve art, a joyful panorama of colour and detail, more polished than primitive ... "not a style but a way of seeing," owner Jeannine Blais explained. "It may be expressionist, impressionist, very sophisticated or very simple."

At **Raveau Marcil**, in an old general store in **Massawippi**, the specialty is lampshades. But no ordinary lampshades. Former fashion designer Serge Raveau designs them to complement their bases – an ornate samovar or plump brass tea kettle, a delicate Wedgwood vase or beloved candlestick, even a folk art turkey! Though the shop is packed with glass, china, silver and curios, "we are not antique dealers," said partner Simon Marcil, "We simply sell beautiful things."

So do they all.

*Isobel Warren
Newmarket, ON*

*The Eastern Townships' tourist guide, from **Tourisme Canton-de-l'Est** (1 800 355 5755 or www.east-erntownships.cc) provides lots more information on this delightful region..*

continued from page 1

Most exciting new/old place

A confusing title, but it refers to 'Toronto's New Centre for Arts, Culture and Entertainment' known as the Distillery Historic District, newly renovated into a pedestrian-only 'village' of restaurants, gift shops and innovative art galleries which opened to the public in May this year. It's all located in and around the old Gooderham & Worts Distillery Buildings, which date from 1832 and are said to be the best-preserved collection of Victorian industrial architecture in North America. You'll find it at the foot of Parliament Street. Today the site is also the largest restoration project in Canada and still a work in progress. If you've seen the movie *Chicago* you'll recognize it as the setting for the prison. There's a selection of restaurants and Blazac's Coffee Bar (said by many to be the best brew in Toronto) is a great place to relax with a cappuccino, a snack and a friend. And speaking of brewing, yes there's a brewery here, with tours and the beers on sale in the restaurants. Tours of the whole district are, in fact, available and there's a Visitor Centre. Already it's hopping with visitors, live performances, shows and festivals. For an idea of what's awaiting you visit at www.thedistillerydistrict.com

Hard to miss old/new place!

It's also hard to believe the CN Tower will soon be 30 years old. The finishing touches were being added when I arrived to live in Toronto in 1974 and so I remember all the excitement and publicity surrounding it then. Love it or hate it, it's impossible to miss! When I have overseas visitors it's still the place on the top of their wish list. You'll hear all the statistics when you go, but I have an important tip for you. With a price tag of around \$32 per person for the 'Total Tower

Experience' it's not a cheap outing. But a reservation in the revolving **Restaurant 360** allows you a 'free' ride to the top, where you can put that admission charge towards your dinner. Unlike when this restaurant opened, the food today is excellent and there's a great deal of pride in the sommeliers and "the world's highest wine cellar". A wonderful place for visitors to Toronto, especially if there's a spectacular sunset and something special to celebrate. In fact it has won many awards and been voted by various magazines as "the best place to impress out-of-towners" as well as "the most romantic restaurant in Toronto"! Reservations essential at 416 362 5411, www.cntower.ca. And as you enjoy the view out over Lake Ontario you'll see,

far beneath you, the Toronto Islands ...



Ronni's No. 10 Fourth Street B&B (Wallace)

My Favourite Hidden Spot (and Most Unusual Place to Stay in Toronto)

I love the **T o r o n t o Islands**. (It may surprise you to know there are 13 of them.) They aren't exactly hidden, but it's amazing how under-uti-

lized they are. I know Torontonians who have never even been over there! However, you will see crowds on the ferries on summer week-ends, but don't let that fool you. Yes, Centre Island can get busy, but if you head east to **Ward's Island**, or west to **Hanlan's Point**, especially during the week, you'll be amazed that such quiet places exist so close to the city. Ferries leave from the bottom of Bay Street, just steps from public transit, the trip over takes about 10 minutes, the view is great and the cost for the round-trip is \$6 or \$3.50 for those 65+, cash only. The Ward's Island area is my favourite because that's where the unique island cottages are to be found. But what I really want to tell you here is that you can stay in a cottage on Ward's Island, a unique enclave just a spectacular ferry-ride from downtown Toronto.

There are, in fact, three year-round B&B's there, just two or three minutes' walk from the ferry dock. Miriam McFarlane, your host at **The Toronto Island Bed & Breakfast & Bikes** (tel: 416 203 0935) will love to tell you the history of her home, which is the oldest house on Ward's Island. It's renovated now, but still quaint and homey, with prices for the small rooms of \$58 single, \$65 queen and \$75 twin (end-to-end beds under the eaves) with shared bathroom, though there is an alternative bathroom downstairs, together with mini kitchen facilities for guests. The cottage *almost* faces the beach. And then there are the two **Fourth Street Bed and Breakfasts, No. 10** and **No. 22**, owned by sisters Ronni Bates and Julie Bates respectively.

Julie's cottage is also very relaxed and homey ... last time I saw her she was wandering around barefoot and in a wet T-shirt after a quick swim off the nearby Ward's Island beach. She offers one queen room with an additional single bed for \$80 per night (tel: 416 203 0771).

Ronni's B&B (No. 10), while it has retained its original cottage look, boasts an interior that has been exquisitely renovated and can definitely be described as "designer cool". Here the two en suite rooms cost \$100 per night (tel: 416 203 7551). Off season and long-term rates are available at all these properties and all have bicycles for you.

The city ferries run until quite late at night, but if you stay on the islands and wish to stay out in the city even later your B&B hosts will tell you about the water taxi service.

Your hosts will also be able to tell you all you need to know about the islands, including the location of the nearby **Rectory Café**, where you can eat in the little garden overlooking the lake or inside with the changing art exhibition/sale. They offer a selection of sand-

wiches, salads and "mains", the most expensive of which is \$16 for steak (cash only, not licensed). If you're over for the day and wish to eat here, just keep walking along the path past the sail boats and you'll soon come to the café. It's open year round, in summer 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. Out of season it may be wise to call ahead for their hours: 416 203 2152. More details about the islands, the B&B's and the café can be found at www.torontoisland.org, with the B&B's listed under 'Toronto Island Community'.

In addition to the islands, you can also discover a "different world" atmosphere if you cycle out on the **Leslie Street Spit**, abundant with wild flowers and birds all summer. Out there, as well as many swans,

the ubiquitous Canada goose and (too many) gulls and cormorants, you may spy egrets, kingfishers, herons or even a fine Eastern Kingbird.

Best Place to Stay if You're Handicapped

Stop! Don't skip this section just because you're hale and hearty! I hope it doesn't happen to you,

but an unexpected operation or accident can pop you into a wheelchair or onto crutches and spoil your ski vacation plans. No need to stay home, however. Come to Toronto for some entertainment treats and stay in the **InterContinental Toronto Centre** (until recently the Crowne Plaza). I've chosen this property for this section not only because it meets – in fact exceeds – the handicapped accessibility guidelines with specially-designed handicapped rooms boasting enormous bathrooms, but also because of its perfect location. It stands just a block or so (or less) from **Union Station**, the **CN Tower**, the **Skydome**, **Roy Thompson Symphony Hall**, the **Glenn Gould Studio**, the **National Film Board** (for individual screenings of your choice from over 50 years of award-winning documentaries), the **Princess of Wales** and the **Royal**



The Toronto Island Bed & Breakfast And Bikes (Wallace)

Alexandra Theatres (mostly used for blockbuster musicals these days) and a wide choice of eating establishments. And for an additional special treat while you're here, you could enjoy the excellent food and fancy atmosphere at the hotel's new signature restaurant **Azure** after pampering yourself in the hotel's welcoming, natural-light-filled Victoria Spa or taking a dip in their pool. It should also be mentioned that this property prides itself on having been the recipient of several environmental and community awards. For reservations call 1 800 422 7969.

Best Theatre Offerings

The **Soulpepper** company is quite wonderful. At present their five plays per season are only presented during the summer months, but this may change when they move to their new and permanent home in the Distillery District (see above) in the spring of 2005. Please don't visit in the summer without catching one of their plays. Box office tel: 416 973 4000, www.soulpepper.com

Best Place to See a Movie

No secret this ... it's very popular. It's the group of 12 Cineplex Odeon theatres in the **Manulife Centre**. Why? Because they are located in a smart shopping mall where you can line up for your tickets in the warmth (or coolth), enjoy a drink or a meal before or after the show, or browse amongst the thousands of books offered in Indigo. Show details and times in the local press.

'Most fun' Shopping District

I'm not really a keen shopper, but I do enjoy browsing along the section of Queen Street known as **Queen West West**, which means west of Bathurst Street. Here 'fancy' rubs shoulders with 'funky' in the clothes arena: **Wenches and Rogues** at No. 610 Queen West sells great Canadian-designed clothes for women with a rather 'off-the-wall' choice for men; and **Heel Boy** at No. 682, is my favourite shoe store, offering a wide

range of shoes for women of all ages and a small men's selection. Also on the street you'll find some cool bars, unusual gifts stores, little neighbourhood grocery stores and lots of ethnic restaurants (try trendy **Irie Food Joint** for a warm welcome and a great selection of inexpensive Caribbean dishes ... No. 745, tel: 416 366 4743). And if you feel you didn't look good in any of the clothes you tried on, you can pop into the headquarters of Toronto's master baker – **Dufflet** – and find solace in a chocolate gâteau! (Dufflet Pastries (and café), at No. 787, tel: 416 484 9080.)

Favourite Bookstore

My comment about shopping does not apply to books! I'm addicted! I can't walk past a book store! And I think one of the city's best is **Nicholas Hoare** at 45 Front Street East, tel: 416 777 2665, where books reach the ceiling, many selections are temptingly shelved facing out and there are sofas for relaxing and a real fire on chilly days. But before I invest in new books, I always check my favourite **second-hand bookstore** – **Eliot's** – located dangerously near my office at 584

Yonge Street, tel: 416 925 0268. Oh dear, so many books ... so little time.

Favourite Restaurants

Oh, how to choose ... when there are so many great places to eat here? Locals have their own favourites, of course, and visitors to Toronto will soon realize the wide variety of restaurants here, from Thai and Chinese (all over, plus Chinatown of course), to Italian (lots on College Street) and Greek (Danforth Avenue). None of this is surprising if you remember it is estimated that Toronto is home to over 70 nationalities. But back to my favourites ... the three I find myself using most often (which isn't all *that* often as I love to cook) are **Bar Mercurio** and **Starfish** and (when I do pop out of the office for lunch) **Café Volo**. I love **Mercurio's** (opposite the Bata Shoe Museum at 270



Ward's Island Beach, Toronto (Wallace)

Bloor Street West, tel: 416 960 3877) because of the warm welcome I always receive from Joe Mercurio even if he hasn't seen me for months! And also because this restaurant reminds me of smart/casual/urban Italy. Share a pizza or a selection of antipasto dishes here before the pasta of your choice. **Starfish** (100 Adelaide Street East, tel: 416 366 7827) is small yet quite expensive, so it's where I head only when I want to spoil myself a little. There's nothing quite like enjoying a martini or glass of crisp wine at the bar here, watching Patrick McMurray open his wide choice of oysters. And Toronto has reason to be proud of Patrick. He is the World Champion Oyster Shucker. I kid you not! If you're not an oyster fan, don't worry for there are plenty of other choices for you to enjoy, even steak/*frites*. And close to my office, and so pleasant for lunch on the patio for some interesting people-watching or just to relax in a quiet corner with a drink and a book in winter, is **Café Volo**, surprisingly tasteful for this somewhat tacky section of Yonge Street (No. 587, three blocks south of Bloor, and almost opposite Eliot's Bookstore, tel. 416 928 0008). Volo's Ralph offers excellent pizzas, soups, sandwiches and salads.

The Most Famous Day Trip from Toronto

It's probably safe to say that every visitor to Toronto also wants to go to **Niagara Falls** (a drive of about 1½ hours). After my own first exciting visit, I used to sigh during my early years in Toronto because a veritable flood of family and friends descended upon me every summer and, of course, they all wanted to see the Falls. But I now realize that the whole **Niagara Peninsula** offers so much more. **Niagara-on-the-Lake** is almost too, too cute but if you've never been it's certainly worth a look; the **Shaw Theatre Festival** is an outstanding destination here and there are many fine hotels and B&B's. And on the way to NOTL from the Falls you'll enjoy a very beautiful drive down the Niagara Parkway, with plenty of places to picnic if the weather is co-operative, and lots of side roads leading to now-famous wineries, wine festivals and restaurants. But speaking of weather, winter is one of my favourite times to view the Falls themselves. On a bright winter day, with the surrounding trees glistening with frozen mist and the river heaving with ice floes, they really are spectacular. No less so at night, when this unique winter wonderland is illuminated by 21, 30-inch Zenon lights. Winter is also a great time to visit the delightful, summery **Butterfly Conservatory**

on the Parkway (open year round 9:00 – 6:00, \$8.50) and to take an exciting ride over the icy whirlpool in the **Spanish Aero Car**. So please don't think of the Niagara region as only a summer destination. Lots of information at www.tourismniagara.com, www.niagaraparks.com, www.NiagaraFallsHotels.com (and at www.accessibleniagara.com for travellers with disabilities) while the Shaw Festival brochure is an excellent resource for all that Niagara-on-the-Lake offers, including accommodation: 1 800 511 SHAW or the excellent website www.shawfest.com. Or investigate NOTL's many fine hotels, which include the **Prince of Wales Hotel**, **Queen's Landing** and the **Oban Inn**, at www.vintageinns.com or by calling 1 888 669 5566.

While the above sites and sights are, of course, well known, I'd like to tell of a hidden gem in the Niagara region. It's the **River Brink Gallery** at Queenston, midway between the Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. This gallery showcases the art collection of Samuel Weir (1898-1981) who focused on collecting art that revealed some of the history of Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries, with emphasis on the Niagara Peninsula, including early paintings of the Falls. The collection contains works by Canadians such as Cornelius Kreighoff, Paul Kane, Tom Thomson and members of the Group of Seven, together with international arts such as Mary Cassatt and Augustus John. The gallery is open Wednesday through Sunday (10:00 – 5:00) from Victoria Day to Thanksgiving, admission \$5, \$4 for seniors. More details by calling 905 262 4510 or visit www.riverbrink.org.

Good Toronto Guidebooks

The new, comprehensive, Penguin **Time Out Toronto Guide** (\$23.50) was recently launched in town, and the volume's 284 well-organized, illustrated pages attest to the many things there are to see and enjoy in this city.

Moon also have a new guide, **Moon Metro Toronto**; a slim, stylish volume of excellent fold-out maps with keyed information to each map (about \$25). It's the sort of guidebook you have to learn how to use, but it has good, though rather mainstream, information. But there's more substance in the *Time Out* guide.

Final Note

As I explained at the beginning of this article, this is a random and very personal list of some of the places in and around Toronto that I enjoy. Of course, like the guidebooks, I could go on for hundreds of pages and I know as I go to print I'll remember lots of other things

Getting to Know Athens

by Ann Wallace

Who hasn't dreamed of a trip to Greece, with its long summers; its sparkling sea dotted with islands and sailboats and cruise ships; its olive groves and its white-washed villages? But should you make time for Athens, and if so, how much time? Yes, would be my answer ... most definitely ... and at least three or four days, longer if you are a museum enthusiast. I paid my first visit to Greece and its ancient capital late in April this year and here's what I discovered on a day-by-day basis.

I had travelled to Athens from Toronto via Heathrow on British Airways for, as I mentioned in the last issue of *TravelScoop*, a visit to London's British Museum to see the much publicized Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles is very much a part of any Athens experience. My connection was smooth and hassle free ... overnight from Toronto, then the British Airways 8:30 a.m. flight out of Heathrow, plus the two-hour time change, puts you in Athens around 1:00 p.m.

Spring is a wonderful time to visit Greece because of its abundance of wild flowers, and you'll appreciate them straight away, blooming cheerfully in the fields and roadsides around Athens' new, state-of-the-art airport. Fancy the airport may be, but it's quite a distance from town so take the bus which you'll find standing outside Arrivals. This will cost €2.90 (€ = C\$1.56). Don't forget to validate your ticket at the lit-

tle machine on board and, depending on the traffic, the trip will take about half an hour. The bus will put you in Syntagma Square – the heart of the city – and from there you can take a taxi on to your chosen hotel, unless you have deep pockets and have chosen the illustrious Hotel Grande Bretagne, a Starwood property, which is located right on the square itself.

I had arrived without any reservations, with just my trusty *Lonely Planet Athens (condensed)* guide (C\$16.50) in one hand, and my little wheeled suitcase handle in the other. The guidebook had good maps and had shown a number of budget hotels within walking distance of Syntagma Square and I intended to find one. The first property I entered, the Hermes Hotel, quoted me €9 for a single room, far more than the guidebook had indicated, and as the property was dusty due to renovations I declined, hoping I could do better. And, indeed, less than five minutes' walk later, I did! The Metropolis, on a busy street, has a tiny little entrance – just a desk and the elevator door – and the rooms (singles, doubles and triples, all with small en



The Metropolis Hotel, Athens (Wallace)

suite shower rooms) are basic, though spotless. But, for €50 per night I was thrilled, especially when I stepped out onto my tiny balcony. What a location! My balcony overlooked the Athens Cathedral, its little restaurant-patio-lined square with a view over the rooftops right up to the Acropolis ... my very first view

of this great landmark that dominates the city. I was soon to discover this property is right in the trendy Plaka district, with the busy pedestrian Ermou street just two blocks away. The property has no dining room, and thus no breakfast, but there's a popular budget restaurant right next door and a coffee/bake shop just steps away. I was to slip out after waking each morning for a take-out coffee and a snack, returning to enjoy it on my balcony with its world-class view. (All hotel details at the end.)

Once settled, and not wishing to waste any of my three days (nor give in to jet lag), I set off to spend the rest of the afternoon doing a little exploring. I headed back to Syntagma Square, checked out the newly-renovated subway station there that resembles a museum and then watched those famous, bizarrely-clad soldiers with their pom-pom shoes in front of Parliament House. The road beside the National Gardens looked inviting, and soon I found myself in the maze of streets known as Kolonaki – an attractive area of fancy apartments and appealing shops and restaurants. My guide book had given details of an property in this area – the Athenian Inn – apparently once a favourite of writer Lawrence Durrell as well as visiting archaeologists. I found the property without a problem, but it was closed down and there was no indication that it was being renovated. However, all was not lost on my expedition because I found I was just steps away from the Teleferik to the top of Athens' second most prominent spot: Lykavittos Hill. It is possible to walk the steep path to the top (free), but by now I was feeling the effects of a night without sleep, so I forked over €4 and rode to the top for a fabulous view over the sprawling city to Piraeus on the coast and over to the islands beyond. There's a fancy restaurant and a café up there, but both have the



View from my room in the Metropolis Hotel, Athens (Wallace)

reputation for being expensive. Nice for a romantic evening no doubt, but would have been wasted on me ... alone and tired! Instead I ambled back to the hotel, stopping for a *souvlaki* snack en route, and was in bed by 9 p.m., very satisfied with my first afternoon in Athens.

I awoke to the 9 a.m. chimes from the Athens Cathedral outside my window. Had I really slept for 12 hours? Apparently so. I slipped on a dress and schlepped next door for a coffee and snack as described above, enjoying them on my balcony as I planned my day.

First thing on the agenda was to find a couple more properties to recommend to you, and then I had to discover how one gains access to the Acropolis. Yes, it

towers above the city, but how does one get up there? I'd have to find out today.

Soon I was setting out through the Plaka district and then the Anafiotika neighbourhood, right under the Acropolis and full of many tourist shops – some tacky, some very fine – and tavernas.

Yes, it's touristy,

but there are lots of charming corners here with pretty restaurants on patios and terraces. I would return, but first I wanted to see a couple of hotels. So I walked on to the nearby residential Makrigianni district where I visited the mid-range and very nice Hotel Acropolis View. Here receptionist Maria gave me a warm welcome and, while showing me some of their plain but acceptable rooms, expressed the hope that on my next visit to Athens I would stay there. This property is in a quiet and prosperous neighbourhood 'behind' the Acropolis, so to speak, and its balconies and the roof terrace do indeed have a good view up to the Parthenon. There's a breakfast café and a bar in the smart little lobby. A good choice.

If you favour more luxury, this quiet area is also

home to the Divani Acropolis Palace Hotel that offers finely furnished rooms, a pool, business centre and, again, a roof terrace with a view.

Although I wasn't to call in until a day or two had passed, I'll also mention again here Starwood's famous Hotel Grande Bretagne on busy Syntagma Square. Recently restored and very de luxe, this is the kind of historic property that deserves a 'pop in for a drink' even if you don't stay there.

En route to the Hotel Acropolis View I had achieved something else on my list, namely discovering the entrance to the Acropolis and its ruins and museums, just a short walk from the busy Plaka through the touristy Anafiotika area. The ticket costs €12 and is good for six of the major historical sites both on the Acropolis and elsewhere in the city, such as the Roman Agora and the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The Acropolis gates open at 8 a.m. and the woman I spoke to in the ticket booth advised me, in excellent English, to come at that time as the site gets very busy with the arrival of the tour buses around 10:00.

The morning was passing as I completed my walk around the foot of the Acropolis along some gracious, pedestrian-only streets with their fine apartments and then into the Thissio and Psirri districts with their many tavernas

and shops that, it was apparent, appeal to locals and tourists alike. I chose to rest my weary feet on the sidewalk of Taverna Acropolis (on the corner of Panos and Epaminonda streets), adjacent to the railings of the Roman Agora, where I enjoyed a delicious and typical Greek lunch: a 'tasting' platter of local specialities and a carafe of very pleasant Greek wine in a truly historic setting.

Thus fortified I set out for a destination high on my list: the Benaki Museum. This fabulous collection includes sculptures, paintings, pottery and ceramics, grave stele, jewellery, bronze and silverware, mosaics, ancient books and manuscripts, embroidered pieces, traditional costumes from all over Greece, icons, early maps, precious clothes, furniture, glorious reconstructions of rooms in historic mansions, fascinating watercolours of Athens and other Greek cities through the ages, models of early sailing ships, the diplomas of the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded in 1963 to Giorgos Seferis and in 1979 to Odysseus Elytis and so much

more, all displayed to reveal the development of Hellenism through the ages. My favourite items, among so many beautiful things, were the reconstructed rooms, the magnificent embroidered bridal bed, the small collection of personal items that belonged to Lord Byron (to be found on the third floor in the gallery devoted to depicting Greece's struggle for independence) and – because it is so topical – the 1801 watercolour by Sir William Gell entitled *The removal of the pedimental sculptures from the Parthenon on Elgin's orders*. The Museum is located in the gracious 19th century mansion of the Benakis family, which was donated to the nation, along with all the family's magnificent collections, in 1931. Admission is €6, the Museum is closed on Tuesdays, open at 9:00 every other day, closing at 3:00 p.m. on Sundays and 5:00 p.m. every other day except Thursday when it is open until midnight. There's a pretty terrace restaurant overlooking the National Gardens for lunch, wine and coffee and two small but beautiful gift stores where the beautifully-illustrated *Guide to the Benaki Museum* costs €15. You can see what's in store for you at www.benaki.gr (there's an icon for 'English' almost

hidden bottom right). I was so engrossed in this museum that I was truly surprised when I heard the closing-time bell at 5:00 and wished it were a Thursday so I could stay late into the night. Next time!

I'd read in my guidebook that one of the best places to eat cheaply and well was at the sidewalk cafés at the end of Mitropoleos street, which was the street on which my hotel was located. So, after relaxing for a while, I set out again and soon found myself amongst many exuberant Greeks enjoying one of the sidewalk cafés that had been described. It's not clear, on the crowded street, which tables belong to which restaurant, but the waiters know, of course, and are very efficient. A Greek salad, a hearty *souvlaki* and a glass of wine here cost me €7.50 including tip!

Then it was early to bed as I'd planned to be at the Acropolis gates at the recommended hour of 8 the next morning. A long description of the history of the Acropolis is not necessary here as there are countless books for the serious scholar and good general information in detailed guidebooks. The 'start early' tip is a good one because, yes, the site does become very

My favourite items were the magnificent embroidered bridal bed and the collection of personal items that belonged to Lord Byron.

crowded by mid-morning (and don't forget I was there at the end of April ... not yet high season). You will walk around (no longer *on* or *in*) the Parthenon and take photos, you will admire the view, you will visit the new Acropolis Museum (said to have room for the 'British' marbles) and you will see the two ancient theatres and the Agora. Wear walking shoes and please don't forget your hat as there is little shade up there; water and refreshments are available at the main gate. It's a little climb up from the main gate, but then you can descend gently towards the Agora and exit in the Thissio district which is full of restaurants where you can relax after your visit here ... one of the world's great 'attractions'.

I awoke the following morning knowing I had one full day left in Athens. I walked to see the remains of the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Old Olympic Stadium, not large enough for the opening of the 2004

Olympics but being renovated nonetheless as, I was told, it would be used for some events. I then walked through the modern, business sections of town before finding the

bus that was to take me out of Athens, south along the coast to the bottom of the Greek peninsula to Cape Sounion and its Temple of Poseidon. My guidebook had an 'out and about' section wherein it had stated "The Temple of Poseidon is one of the most spectacular ancient sights in Greece, perched on the craggy cliffs of Cape Sounion, with the Aegean Sea making the perfect backdrop." The book recommended a visit in the late afternoon when the tourist buses have left and one can enjoy the sunset. It had also given the bus station address, although I was later to discover that the bus stopped in Syntagma square too. It's a busy, popular route as it serves the coastal region south of Athens and, I was to discover, it's one of the best drives I have ever enjoyed, especially for the fare of €4.30. You'll



View of Cape Sounion, with the Temple of Poseidon, as seen from the bus (Wallace)

see this trip offered by many tour operators in Athens for around €30, more if lunch in the expensive, and only, restaurant near the Temple is included. Don't do it ... take the bus as I did! You don't need to make a day trip of it ... a mid-afternoon departure is fine (unless you wish to stop on a beach en route), the trip takes over an hour depending on traffic and number of stops, and the scenery really is spectacular: ritzy seaside Athens suburbs reminiscent of Florida or Cape Town with crowded beaches and yacht clubs full of fine yachts gradually thin out and change to fine, deserted coastal areas of cliffs, small villages and inviting beaches. Sit on the right hand side of the bus. And do remember to ask the driver what time the last bus leaves the site – it's usually just after sunset – or you'll have an expensive taxi ride back to town.

I caught the 4 p.m. bus from Athens, which gradually filled with commuters, and enjoyed the late-after-

noon drive immensely. I was at the site with time to enjoy a light supper on the patio of the taverna there before watching the sun set between the 16 still-surviving Doric columns –

out of an original 36 – of the Temple. A spectacular trip ... please don't miss it.

When I arrived back in town it was too early for bed, so as I'd already eaten I decided to saunter along Ermou Street, which was close to my hotel and closed to vehicular traffic, for a little window shopping. However, I was to discover that a lot of shopping goes on after hours here. Merchants set up their wares – CD's, watches, handbags, scarves, etc. – on bed-sheets laid on the sidewalks and pavement. Apparently this is illegal, but scouts with loud whistles watch for the police (there are no cars here, remember) and, if they give the signal, the sellers scoop up their wares in the sheet and disappear into the side streets. Thus it was that I found myself standing alone with an armful of

scarves that I hadn't paid for and no seller anywhere in sight! I didn't know what to do with the merchandise ... if I hid it about my person I'd feel as though I were stealing it, if I didn't (or even if I did and was caught) would I be questioned, or arrested? But the police didn't seem interested in me. They nabbed a merchant up the street and soon my young scarf-woman returned and we finalized our deal.

I thoroughly enjoyed my brief visit to Athens. There are lots of delightful corners, but I can't pretend, overall, that it's a beautiful city. However, there's no questioning the ability of the Acropolis to take one's breath away. It's one of the world's most important monuments and it alone makes Athens quite magical, especially at night when it is floodlit. On my visit in April, spring had sprung and the city felt vibrant with Athenians out in force, at all times of the day and night, enjoying the pavement cafés and the shopping streets. As I mentioned in my brief article last month, the city is undergoing a massive make-over as it prepares for the 2004 Olympics and during my stay, amongst all the cleaning and the construction, I definitely felt a surge of energy and excitement. Whether you go before, during or after the Olympics, I'm sure you'll enjoy this most ancient and modern of cities.

Some details:

All the above city explorations I did on foot as Athens is very compact and all the major sites and sights are within **walking distance** of each other. If you do wish to get across town the **subway** is efficient. I rode it (about 20 minutes ... most of it actually a surface route) to the port of Piraeus for the island ferries (more in my Amorgos story, coming in November) and, as described above, I also took the **bus** to Cape Sounion.

- Travellers who arrive in Athens without plans will find the city full of **travel agencies**, especially in the streets around Syntagma Square. They offer a wide variety of trips to other mainland destinations such as Delphi, Nafplion, and Olympia, packages for the islands or just ferry tickets, as well as overnight cruises on fine yachts.

- There are **ATM's** all over Athens as well as stores and booths selling telephone cards.


- If you find yourself short of reading material, **Librairie Kauffmann** at 28 rue Stadiou is an excellent bookstore with a fine selection in English.

- **Hotel Metropolis**, 46 Mitropoleos Street, 10563 Plaka, Athens, tel/fax: 210 3217469, e-mail:

info@hotelmetropolis.gr, www.hotelmetropolis.gr
basic double rooms with A/C and TV's €60

- The **Hotel Acropolis View**, 10 Webster Str. & Robertou Galli, 117 42 Athens, tel: (country code 011 30) 210 9217303, fax: 210 9230705, e-mail: info@acropolisview.gr, www.acropolisview.gr All rooms air-conditioned with TV and fridge. Double room price €130 including breakfast and taxes.

- **Divani Acropolis Palace Hotel**, 19 25 Parthenonos Str. 117 42 Athens. Enter the name of the property in your internet search engine and you will find lots of sites offering this property at discounted prices.

- For those interested in reading more about the on-going debate about Britain's keeping of the **Parthenon marbles**, log onto the excellent website www.uk.digiserve.com/mentor/marbles/ 

Most travellers would agree ... an island visit is a 'must' on any trip to Greece. TravelScoop chose to explore Amorgos, and my story of that lovely isle will appear in the November edition of TravelScoop – Ed

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A Learning Vacation on Spain's Costa de la Lux

by Cec Cook

My husband, Jim, and I spent a wonderful few weeks in a little-known tourist area of Spain in February; little-known, that is, by North Americans ... it has been frequented for a number of years by Europeans. Now we are planning to return in 2004 because Jim has been invited to teach a course in watercolour for the second, two-week session. A former high school teacher and a wood carver as well as a painter, Jim now instructs in carving and painting in Sudbury. His works may be seen on the Internet at www.scarf.ca then click on 'Jim Cook'.

The area in Spain is near Cadíz, on the south western coast south of Portugal and north of Gibraltar. Many Europeans, mainly Germans, have established condos, hotels and private summer homes all along the coast here, and now the British are establishing themselves as well. It is special in that this part of Andalusia has retained its original way of life more than any other part of the country, so old habits and dialects still prevail and the countryside is dotted with those quaint white villages and farms.

We signed up with a British seniors' group by the name of "Colegio de la Tercera Edad" (College of the Third Era) to live in Spain for a month and enjoy a learning experience. The "College" is the spacious and

modern four-star Barrosa Park Hotel, with large rooms, balconies, a dining-room with splendid and enormous buffets, and plenty of recreational facilities. A special delight is being lulled to sleep by the sound of the Atlantic waves crashing on the shore.

The instructors are seniors themselves who are on holiday as well but who give classes on more than a dozen subjects, usually for one and a half hours a day (except watercolour painting which runs for three

hours), four days a week. Wednesdays and weekends are 'free' to take a bus into Chiclana de la Frontera or a little further to Cadíz. And at weekends there is usually an optional tour offered to different towns a short distance away at very reasonable prices. Courses available are Spanish, French, Italian, watercolour



The Barrosa Park Hotel (Cook)

painting, needlecraft, creative writing, music appreciation, bridge, alternative medicine, reflexology, computers (for both beginners and 'improvers'), exercises and others. Two sessions of two weeks each are offered during the month of February. (The company also offers other vacations in different parts of Europe at other times of the year.) Attendance at the courses is optional; no one is under any pressure to attend any classes. It is simply a time of good companionship, conversation and learning just for the fun of it. In addi-

tion, entertainment is provided in the evening by the Barrosa Park Hotel itself. This includes flamenco dancers, guitarists, singers, piano soloists and small dance bands. And the group has a “common room” at its disposal for movies, games, coffee breaks and afternoon tea. At the end of each session a concert is held involving those members who volunteer: singing, dancing, performing skits, reading poetry, telling stories etc. There is also an Internet room where one may keep up with e-mail and surf the net for €1 for 15 minutes.

For my husband it was to be his first time in Spain. I had visited a few years earlier and had fallen totally under its spell. So, after making some investigations and reservations, we found ourselves flying to London’s Heathrow, where we hopped onto a bus that delivered us to our hotel at nearby Luton Airport. There we joined the CTE group and flew from Luton on to Gibraltar. Just the idea of landing on Gibraltar had been an incentive on its own, since the landing strip is a mere half kilometre long, just above sea level and is intersected by a road with, it goes without saying, the vehicles stopped every time a plane uses the runway! The opportunity to land at Gibraltar is generally not accorded to most passengers from North America. “The Rock” is a British possession, heatedly disputed by Spain, and aircraft from any country other than Britain are not allowed to use the airport except in extreme situations.

Small buses met us at the airport and, after clearing customs, we were allowed to enter Spanish territory. The drive to our destination was breathtaking! We followed the coastline, roller-coasting between small villages with white-washed houses, often perched atop a high hill, and gleaming likely newly-washed white sheets in the distance. Church steeples rose into the sky in every direction. This coast is named Costa de la Luz because the light from the water and the village houses is so brilliant. Don’t forget to take your sunglasses! One sight that amazed us was the thousands

of windmills strewn over the hills near the town of Tarifa, said to be one of the windiest areas in the world. Another thing that made an impression on us was the lack of advertising boards. Our driver informed us that in the province of Cadíz no form of public advertising is allowed, with the exception of the 50-foot black form of El Torro, the bull, for one established wine cellar, and the colourful tall shape of a gaucho for another: Tío Pepe Bodega.

Upon arriving at our hotel we discovered that there were five other Canadians on this Spanish adventure: one couple from Ottawa and three women from the Kingston area. All of us had learned of this vacation from the same source: an article in a small but amazingly informative Canadian

magazine by the name of *TravelScoop!* (Thank you for these kind words ... so glad we led you all to such a wonderful experience... initially a ‘scoop’ in our October 2001 edition – Ed.)

Our first day, a Friday, was orientation day and we enjoyed it, especially discovering the wonderful beach with its hard-packed sand on which one can walk for miles in any direction.

That first weekend we enjoyed a tour of the white villages, including the ancient town of Grazalema, centrally located at the highest point of the Andalusian mounts; Arcos de la Frontera, with its long, long climb through town for a most spectacular view; and Ubrique, where we enjoyed a

tapas lunch amidst exuberant and very friendly Spaniards who spoke no English!

Subsequent tours during our four weeks took us on air-conditioned, high-seated buses to Seville, home of one of the world’s largest cathedrals; back to Gibraltar to explore its many caves and meet the unique Barbary Apes that are not apes at all, but monkeys; to Jerez for a wonderful show starring beautiful dancing horses together with a trip through a *bodega* for wine and sherry tasting; to Ronda for its breathtaking view from its “new” bridge, built in 1535; and combined bus and



Arcos de la Frontera, Cadiz (Cook)

walking tours to the Roman ruins that are scattered all over the province.

There was a hardy group that got together two or three times a week for long walking tours around different areas. And there is a world-class golf course, close to the hotel, which was frequented by eager golfers who would congregate in the lobby every morning anxious for the bus to pick them up with all their paraphernalia. The golf club was also a favourite among the hotel guests for lunch, as we were provided with breakfast and dinner only. And there's a shopping area down the street offering a well-stocked supermarket and three restaurants all with a delightful atmosphere for a lazy outdoor lunch, complete with a dish of olives and the ever-present glass or red wine or icy beer.

Tuesday was always a special day for many because it was flea market day in Chiclana and the needlework group would set off jauntily on the local bus for their weekly adventure: seeking new and unusual materials for their classes. The bus fare was a paltry €90 (about C\$1.45). I, along with others, merely went along to seek out a good bargain. All of us usually returned satisfied after searching through the little town with its many shops.

Information on these vacations may be obtained on the Internet at www.ctespain.net, by e-mail: sieras-gold@hotmail.com; or by contacting the company's director, Philip Nash, GO/CTE, 76 Croft Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 9AG, England. In 2004 the prices for the first session (6-20 February) will be £775 (approx. C\$1,717), for the second sessions (20 February – 5 March) £799 (about C\$1,770) and £1,250 (C\$2,769) for the four weeks. These prices include the round-trip airfare from England to continental Europe. For anyone who wishes to travel to Spain independently, a discount of approximately C\$350 applies.

For information on the surrounding area, go to: www.andalucia.com/costa-de-la-lux/cadizprov.htm Barrosa Playa is in Novo Sancti Petri, near Chiclana de la Frontera. For further details you are also welcome to contact me at cookct@unitz.ca Our entire experience in Spain was so rewarding that we love sharing it with everyone! And if you sign up for next year ...

we'll see you there!

But I haven't finished my story, for our vacation did not end there. We had made arrangements to stay in Spain for an extra week and had rented a car through www.carjet.com. It was a 5-door, almost-new Fiat for €99 plus an additional €24 to drop it off at another location. That was under C\$200 ... by far the best price we found.

We set off in the direction of Seville, enjoying the salt pan scenery along the way, then passed Seville and turned west towards the Portuguese border. We stopped for lunch in Sanlucar la Mayor where the waiter at our lunchtime restaurant recommended we take a side road via the coast on our journey to Matalascanas. He was right! The scenery was lovely with many crops growing. In Matalascanas – a much bigger town than we had been anticipating, with winding streets, houses, condos and some of the largest hotels we have ever



El Toruno Hotel

seen – we found a large suite in the Gran Coto Hotel for about C\$120. Later we watched five or six large buses disgorging passengers into the large lobby, seemingly all Spaniards, all talking loudly and gesticulating. Later we joined them all for a buffet in the dining room, which was also the largest we have ever seen! We experi-

enced a little aggravation over tables, but I placated our table companions with Canadian pins and they worked wonders. We even noticed they were wearing them the next day!

Next morning we explored the Coto Donana, a nature preserve of vast proportions near the Atlantic shore. It is a favourite destination of millions of migrating birds. There are four-hour tours of this park, but reservations up to one week ahead are necessary so we had to content ourselves with a pleasant 1.5 km walk along a boardwalk with its thatched observation huts to facilitate the watching of the birds in the swamp area.

After a welcome *tapas* and cold beer lunch, we continued on our way to what had been our intended destination originally: El Rocio (which means *the dew*). We knew nothing about this place; it was simply a name on the map on the outskirts of Coto Donana. Little did we know we were heading for the experience of a lifetime! Our approach to the town left us gaping

in wonder! It had no paving of any kind. The streets were of reddish brown sand and there were horse-drawn wagons, carts, carriages and lone riders everywhere, coming from the centre of town and making their way, as we learned later, to a park with a grandstand. There the horses would be stabled, the crowds fed and music and singing would go on far into the night.

A friendly car park attendant warned us that, due to the influx of people in town for the weekend, we would be wise to seek shelter immediately. He directed us to the only hotel in town – El Toruno – near a beautiful white church and beside the Coto Donana. There we found a sparse but spotless room on the main floor for about C\$95 and that night we enjoyed the best meal of

our entire trip at the La Piedra Restaurant. The clerk at the hotel spoke good English and he explained to us that the little town was filled almost every weekend with a thousand or more people. They come in honour of the Virgin of the Dew, a religious pilgrimage that is performed by

many Spaniards from around the country, traditionally by horse and wagon or on foot. It is a time for worship, but also for celebrating. Apparently the really big weekend for the celebration is Pentecost Sunday, or the fiftieth day after Easter. This year it would have been on 8 June. At that time about a million people congregate in the area.

So this, then, was the reason for the hordes of people that we had joined! After dinner we made our way to the church, which was packed with people coming and going, some playing guitars, some singing. We realized a Mass was about to begin, and when it did we turned to see a bride making her way up the aisle. This was to be a Wedding Mass.

Everywhere we turned, impromptu flamenco music, dancing and clapping could be heard. The fall

of night did not bring an end to any of it, only then there was also loud drumming and fireworks going off from time to time. This lasted all night long!

In the morning we heard voices and cars outside our hotel window. I looked out to see vehicles parked and people setting up chairs and tables with cloths, dishes, cutlery etc. Nearby a man was lighting a fire to cook food. We went out to investigate and discovered that a tent city had been set up behind the restaurant and people of all ages were milling about with spontaneous dancing and singing breaking out all around. We then watched as hundreds more people gathered behind a group of men carrying an icon of the Virgin while others beat on long, narrow drums and one man stood behind the group constantly setting off rocket

flares which little boys scrambled to retrieve when the sticks from the flares dropped to the ground. More tables were being set up and feasts were being laid out. Around the church, vendors sold religious souvenirs and pictures; cars and buses were parked willy-nilly and horses

were being ridden back into town ready for another parade later in the day.

Especially coming upon this event so unexpectedly, it had all been quite overwhelming and the memories of it all will remain with us for ever.

The Hotel Toruno is located at Plaza del Acebuchal 22, 21750 El Rocio (Huelva), tel: 011 34 959 44 23 23 (or 44 26 26), fax: 011 34 959 44 23 38. There information on the festival on the web at: www.donquijote.org/culture/spain/fiestas/elrocio.asp And I've just heard that the organizers of the CTE holiday are themselves arranging a tour to El Rocio and the Coto Donana area as part of the activities.



Iglesia de la Virgen del Rocío, El Rocio (Cook)

Cec Cook is a TravelScoop subscriber who lives in Sudbury, ON.

Cruise News

● Calling all Veterans! In 2004 **Continental Waterways**, a European river and canal cruise company, is offering American and Canadian war Veterans cruise reductions of 50% aboard two vessels visiting the D-Day beaches of **Normandy**. Companions will receive a 25% reduction. Two boats will be making this 6-night voyage: the 38-passenger *L'Esprit d'Europe* and the 50-passenger *Anacoluthe*. Veterans who book before the end of 2003 will receive guaranteed cruise dates between March and October next year, which will assure a tribute voyage to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the battle. Guy Bardet, President of Continental Waterways, says "This is our French-based company's gift to those who served their country and supported ours." As well as the beaches of Normandy, and other historic stops, the cruise will include a full-day excursion to **Caen** for a tour of **The Mémorial de Caen**. Also included are **Paris, Barbizon, Giverny, Honfleur** and **Rouen**. Call 1 800 676 6613 or visit www.continentalwaterways.com for full details and think about giving grandfather a "thank you" with the gift of a lifetime!

● Also coming in 2004, a special 43-night steamboat vacation on board the *Delta Queen* that will touch 15 states on nine waterways. The

Delta Queen is an National Historic Landmark vessel belonging to the **Delta Queen Steamboat Company**. The 43-day voyage can be booked in its entirety, or in individual segments (although until 15 September the complete voyage is being offered exclusively to past passengers). The journey will take place from 30 July through 11 September, 2004, making 28 shore stops including eight major port cities: **Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Nashville, Mobile, New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis** and **St. Paul**. The cruise will cover the **Ohio, Cumberland** and **Tennessee rivers**, the **Intracoastal Waterway** and almost the entire length of the **Mississippi River**. The vessel will carry 174 passengers who will be accompanied by authors, historians and entertainers who will portray some of the United States' greatest orators and satirists. For details of this and other riverboat cruises offer by the company call 1 800 543 1949 or visit www.deltaqueen.com

● There are some new offerings from **Maris**, the **Freighter Cruise** people, this fall, including trips from Vancouver to Korea, China and Hong Kong. For details of this and other forthcoming freighter cruises call 1 800 99 MARIS or visit www.freightercruises.com

Airline News

Airlines are rarely out of the news these days. We'll just restrict ourselves to a few facts.

Air Canada is planning a new route from Toronto to Delhi, India, daily, commencing 26 October, departing 5:15 p.m. It will be the first such route since the demise of Canada 3000 and the only non-stop link between North America and India.

Austrian Airlines plans to continue flying to Vienna from eastern Canada through the winter. Flights will leave Montreal every Wednesday and Friday, and from Toronto the flights will depart on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Bus service from Ottawa to Montreal's Dorval (just re-

named Pierre Trudeau Airport, we've heard) can be purchased as part of the ticket.

For those of you with Southeast Asia in your plans, remember that **Malaysia Airlines'** AccessAsia Pass is available until the end of the year, offering 25 cities at prices starting from US\$899. Air Malaysia departs from Los Angeles and Newark, New Jersey. In addition to Asia, travellers may also add cities in Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, South America and Europe to their itineraries.

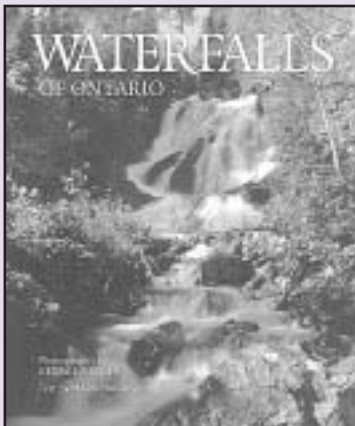
Westjet now belongs to the Air Miles Reward Programme.

continued from page 12 ...

I should have told you about my adopted city and home for nearly 30 years. Already I'm remembering I haven't mentioned the **ravine walks** that are hidden throughout the city (visit www.greentourism.ca to find out how you can obtain their award-winning Green Map of Toronto), nor the markets: **St. Lawrence** (especially **Alex Farms** wonderful, imported and Canadian cheese selection) and funky **Kensington**. And then there's ... but no, I must stop! But not before I urge you to come and enjoy!

For more Toronto tourism information log on to www.torontotourism.com and also check out the site of the new Toronto03 Alliance – www.toront03.com – who have a mandate to help regenerate tourism in post-SARS Toronto with special packages etc. And if you would like to extend your visit with one of a wide variety of packages in Ontario, I recommend you obtain a copy of the *Ontario Backroads and Getaways* brochure, by calling 1 800 ONTARIO, or visiting www.ontariocanadatravel.com. 

Waterfalls!



My husband loves waterfalls! It doesn't matter whether they be tiny cascades or thunderous falls like Victoria or Niagara (both of which we have been fortunate to see). I don't know whether our friend and photographer

George Fischer knew this when he sent us a copy of his new book – with text by Mark Harris – entitled *Waterfalls of Ontario*, but needless to say it gave us a great deal of pleasure. So if you, too, are a waterfall lover or know one, especially if you live in Ontario, treat yourself or your friend to a copy of this volume. It would also, I am sure, be welcomed by keen photographers for George includes tips on how to attain the special and unusual effects he achieves.

I am mentioning this book in *TravelScoop* because it is not merely a book of photographs but also a travel guide. As well as photographs of over 80 waterfalls organized into five regions (Algoma, Cottage Country, Golden Horseshoe, Lake Huron and Ottawa Valley), the volume gives detailed driving instructions and map coordinates as well as at-a-glance information including the nearest town or village, size, walking time and trail conditions where appropriate. In this way the book helps others to discover these magical places.

The idea for the book came in the dark days following 11 September, and George and Mark “dedicate this book and the waterfalls it contains to those in need of inner strength and tranquility. We promise you it will be found at these magical places.” And we hope they will consider creating similar volumes for other provinces, so that many more Canadians can discover the solace and strengthening power of moving waters.

A Firefly Book, printed in Canada, 224 pp. soft cover, full colour, C\$29.95.

Ann Wallace

The Travel Society

We have a file listing several single travellers who wish to take a Travel Society tour and wish to share. Destinations include: China, Australia, Turkey and the 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 on the telephone - or meet if convenient - to see if you would like to share.

Call 416 926 2500, ex. 24 or 1 877 926 2500, ex. 24

It's time to go travelling!

There are so many places in the world and there's so little time. Take a look at these new destinations. We have been asked by our members to arrange tours to the following countries. Why don't you join them?

- South Africa, Botswana, Namibia
- India
- Sri Lanka

Please call now and we will send the detailed itineraries for 2004

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

Space limited to 20 people

A Traveller's Turkey

Departing: 4 October 2003, 1 May 2004 & 18 September 2004

It is one of the cradles of civilization and one of the most wonderful countries on the planet. Here 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 of Turkey exclusively for Travel Society members. It is due to take place in September 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 (subject to confirmation) 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

**from \$6,750 for 28 days
including all airfares**

Turkey - An Anatolian Adventure

Departing: 28 August 2004

If you can travel with us for 28 days, you might like to consider our longer tour of Turkey. In addition to all the destinations in 'A Traveller's Turkey' detailed above, this tour also includes a trip to legendary Troy, a tour of the historic battlefields of Gallipoli, a visit to the walled city of Iznik, a drive to Gordion (the home of Alexander's famous knot) and to many other historic sites such as Catal Hoyuk, Xanthus and mysterious Termessos, one of Turkey's most beautiful ruins. The extra time here also means more time on the beautiful coast, where you will enjoy boat trips, picnics and beach time or you may decide to take an overnight *gulet* cruise from Antalya to Kas. This truly is a superlative tour that covers all the highlights of this wonderful land.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES (subject to confirmation) departing from:

Toronto	\$6,750.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$6,850.00 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$7,150.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton & Calgary	\$7,000.00 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$6,950.00 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$6,900.00 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$670 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes included, visa extra.

Your tour includes:

- Return airfare to Turkey
- 27 nights' hotel accommodation
- All meals as per itinerary
- 40 seat air-conditioned luxury bus
- Admission to all sites
- An English-speaking guide and a Travel Society host

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 14 October & 4 November 2003 / March & April 2004

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.

You'll also visit other destinations in Ecuador, and then you can choose to enjoy the exciting optional extensions: to Kapawi - a ecological lodge in the Amazon and/or a visit Machu Picchu in Peru. We'll take care of all the travel details. All you have to do is 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)

NEW

Guatemala and Havana, Cuba

The Travel Society is thrilled to bring you two special tours of Guatemala.

The first tour, 17 days, we've called the first **The Land of Green Lightning** tour, and it covers all the highlights of this colourful land. You'll start your tour in Guatemala City and then travel through the mountains to Chichicastenango, home to one of the world's most intriguing markets. There's another superlative waiting for you at volcano-rimmed Lake Atitlan, often referred to as the world's most beautiful lake. And many people consider Antigua one of the world's most beautiful cities. You'll spend 4 nights there and enjoy unique hotels, restaurants and tours both in the city and beyond. Visits to the Quetzal Biosphere in the highlands, a stay at amazing Tikal and a trip over the border to Honduras to visit the ruins of Copan are also on the itinerary.

The second tour, 12 days, covers the amazing events that take place during **Easter Week in Antigua**, together with excursions into surrounding Guatemala, including a trip to Chichicastenango. A story on this unique event will be featured in the October edition of *TravelScoop* as Editor Ann enjoyed this trip this year. (If you would like to receive a more detailed account of her experience, together with a full-colour photo essay, and her story of the Havana add-on, please send \$5 with your address.) Yes, two days in historic **Havana** end this trip ... a city that every traveller should see. "There's nowhere else quite like it," says Ann.

Departing 13 February & 12 March 2004

Green Lightning Tour

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$4,920.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,995.00 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$4,995.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton & Calgary	\$5,095.00 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$5,145.00 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$525 (Sharing can be arranged.) Plus Taxes.

Your tour includes:

- Return airfare
- 16 nights' hotel accommodation
- All meals as per the itinerary
- Admissions to all sites
- Transportation in a comfortable air-conditioned bus
- The services of a professional bilingual tour director and a Travel Society host

Departing 3 April 2004

Holy Week and Havana

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$4,696.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	TBA
Vancouver	TBA
Edmonton & Calgary	TBA
Halifax	TBA

Single supplement \$370 (Sharing can be arranged.) Plus Taxes.

Your tour includes:

- Return airfare
- 11 nights' hotel accommodation
- All meals as per the itinerary
- Transportation in a comfortable air-conditioned bus
- The services of a professional bilingual tour director and a Travel Society host

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

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

China is safe! Go now ... before the crowds return!

from **\$3,986 for 19 days**

Now booking for 2004

China ... Yangtze Spectacular ~ 19 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

21 October 2003; March, April, September & October 2004

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 (now in the process of changing 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 Chongquing 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!

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	\$1,188.00
Tokyo	4 days/3 nights	\$892.00

Prices are subject to confirmation

Editor, Ann Wallace took the China Yangtze trip and her 14-page, illustrated 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.  reg #01280649

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

Coming to your mailbox soon ... a comprehensive brochure listing
ALL The Travel Society tours available for the rest of 2003 and for 2004

The 25 Day Grand Tour of New Zealand, Australia and Fiji!

Departure Date: October 22, 2003 / February 2004

Highlights...

Auckland, Waitomo Caves, Rotorua, Agrodome sheep demonstration, Te whakarewarewa Thermal Reserve, Rainbow Springs, Milford Sound cruise, Queenstown, Mount Cook, Christchurch, Sydney, Opera House & Harbour cruise, Tropical Cairns, Michaelmas Cay, Outer Barrier Reef cruise, Kuranda rail & Rainforest, Ayers Rock, Alice Springs, The "Ghan" train across the Outback, Adelaide, Melbourne, 3 nights in Fiji

What could be more wonderful than a 25-day grand tour of New Zealand, Australia and Fiji? No matter where you live in Canada, these destinations are a long way to go ... so come with us and see the highlights in one unforgettable vacation. Our itinerary runs to three pages, so what can we tell you here? Look at the list above and you'll realize this trip covers the highlights of the two safe and welcoming "downunder" countries, ending with three nights in the Pacific island paradise that is Fiji.

PRICES INCLUDE AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Vancouver	\$10,357	pp/dbl
Victoria	\$10,499	pp/dbl
Calgary & Edmonton	\$10,610	pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$10,968	pp/dbl
Toronto	\$10,968	pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$10,968	pp/dbl
Halifax	\$11,049	pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,999 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra

Your tour costs includes:

- Fully comprehensive insurance included
- Exclusive special-interest fun themes
- The services of an experienced escort
- First-class hotels throughout
- Luxury touring coaches
- All tips included
- Full luggage service
- Return trans-Pacific airfare with Qantas Airways
- All sightseeing (with no hidden extras)
- Hotel taxes and Australian and NZ GST.
- The Travel Society neck pillow, flight bag, travel wallet, baggage tags
- 3 nights in Fiji

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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___ **2 years** for **\$79.50** - the member rate
(a 16% saving off the regular \$95.00)
___ **1 year** for **\$44.00** - the member rate
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I agree to pay TravelScoop the above amount in accordance with the card issuer agreement.

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