

How to stay in a monastery in Italy or Spain ... see p. 19

TravelScoop

The Newsmagazine
for Members of
The Travel Society

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Time to Dream of a Greek Island!

by Ann Wallace

November is here! Arguably the dreariest month of the year! What better time to dream of spring-time on a flower-strewn island in the Aegean Sea?

When my travels took me to Greece late in April, early in May this year it was my first visit to that country. Of course I was eager to explore Athens, but I also wished, as so many do, to visit a Greek island. Many people plan itineraries that include several of the islands, but with time at a premium I decided to concentrate on just one. But which one? There had been



The Monastery Chozoviotissa towers above the coast (Wallace)

several articles on the islands in *TravelScoop* over the years and so I consulted them. A sentence in Dean Feltham's report (June, 2000) caught my eye ... and my imagination: "Amorgos is a 'get away from it all' kind of place and tourism has not yet hit in a big way." It sounded perfect.

I was soon to discover that Amorgos in the spring-time fulfilled all my dreams of a Greek island. The

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The Newsmagazine for Members of
The Travel Society

Editor

Ann Wallace
ann@thetravelsociety.com

Contributors

Nancy MacDonald
Jane Mallory
John & Doreen Berg
Sheila Hamilton &
Duncan Campbell

Publisher

Nigel D Raincock
nigel@thetravelsociety.com

Administrator

Debbie Philip
debbie@thetravelsociety.com

Graphic Design

Yong Park
yong@thetravelsociety.com

Circulation Manager

Matt Oliver
matt@thetravelsociety.com

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Travel Scoop Inc.

218 - 1033 Bay Street,

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Tel: 416 926 0111 Fax: 416 926 0222

e-mail: brit@thetravelsociety.com

web-site: www.thetravelsociety.com

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November 2003

Vol. 21, No. 9

From your Editor's desk...



A word in this letter about our website, as I have the feeling that most of our readers are online these days. I hope you are using the password (indicated each month above your address label on the back page of *TravelScoop*) to visit our site regularly. We have many links that I hope are useful to you (a currency converter, for example), but why I am especially urging you to log on is because on the site you can see in full colour the black-and-white photographs that appear in *TravelScoop*. We are also adding more photographs to the on-site stories so you can get an even better idea of what's in store for you if you travel to one of the destinations we feature.

I have been prompted to remind you of this because the photographs of the carpets in the streets of Antigua Guatemala which appeared in our October issue are vividly coloured and the black-and-white photos just do not do this remarkable and beautiful event justice. So, please log on to www.thetravelsociety.com and take a look. (And, seeing how that site name has fallen on the page, I'd like to point out that hyphenated line-breaks are not part of web addresses.) I'm a little proud of my Antigua photos, but not as proud as the creators of the *alfombras* should be!

We have a real mixed bag of destinations for you this month. I hope you plan to visit Greece and Amorgos when your spring travels take you to Europe. But please don't go in the winter because the friends I made while there told me it gets very chilly. I was skeptical, but apparently a sprinkling of snow fell on Amorgos last winter.

Let's hope most of us are spared the white stuff for a little longer yet. I wish you all a happy Fall and look forward to writing to you again in December.

coming in *December*

- *Korea*

- *Tikal, Guatemala*

- *The Most Beautiful Drives in the USA*

Update Items

Jetsgo has devised a weekly on-line marketplace offering flights at deeply discounted rates. They have called the scheme “**Loonie Sundays**” as they say they “will be offering hundreds of seats for \$1 and thousands of other discounted fares across [the] network”. Loonie Sundays begin at 12 a.m. Sunday morning and end at 11.59 p.m. But ... it is important to remember these times are Mountain Time, so shoppers must log on accordingly for the best bargains. Reservations must be made at www.jetsgo.net and regular taxes and surcharges apply. The tickets are eligible for Jetsmiles. Jetsgo flies to 11 Canadian destinations (Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Charlottetown, Halifax, Sydney and St. John’s Nfld) as well as New York (Newark), Las Vegas, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, St. Petersburg and Fort Myers. Good luck and please let *TravelScoop* know how you get on!

I know many of you who live in southern Ontario have discovered that invaluable guide to driving south entitled *Along Interstate 75* by Canadian Dave Hunter. But what of those who drive south on the I-95? Well, we have good news for you. There’s now a similar guide – written by Canadians Sandra Phillips and Stan Posner – entitled *Drive I-95*. Both guides give clear maps, exit-by-exit information and so much interesting information and useful tips that, as all the authors say, it makes the drive seem like a vacation! For a peek, log on to www.drivei95.com where you can order the book. Or you can find it at book stores across Canada or order by phone at 1 888 GUIDE95. The price is \$29.95.

This Month’s Winning Scoop

Now that summer has gone, some of you may be planning next year’s travels in Europe. I don’t think Hungary has been mentioned in our pages for many years, so read on as Nancy MacDonald tells of some of the pleasures awaiting you in the capital and be tempted to include it in your itinerary.

Budapest Emerging

by Nancy MacDonald

A warm welcome awaits you in Budapest. Hungarian communism collapsed in 1990 and reintegration into Europe is proceeding, but the beauty and spirit of this city are evident now.

A free light and sound show along the riverside promenade at night falls is the best introduction. The Danube (Duna) River divides the original Buda from the Pest, but the Chain Bridge (Dzscheny Lanchid), lit up like a string of pearls, unites the town. From the Pest side you can see the lights of the cable car climbing Buda Hill, while to its left the huge Royal Palace complex is floodlit. To the right, the Matthias Church spires and the Fisherman’s Bastion look-out towers continue this light show on Castle Hill. As you stroll or enjoy dinner, the pianists, violinists and bands of the terrace restaurants accompany the spectacle. No wonder the Marriot, Intercontinental and Hyatt Hotels are situated here, where you are welcome to enjoy the Buchwald-style chairs set out for the enjoyment of all. There are also good views from the river tour boats.

An excellent alternative to a hotel is available from the Information Offices located in the tourist area. For a 4- to 6-night stay, apartments are available at a far cheaper rate than hotels. Or

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.

you could give yourself a treat and stay atop Buda Hill in the Budapest Hilton, completed in 1976 but incorporating a Dominican Church. An economical alternative is the hotel in the Hungarian Cultural Foundation – Kulturinnov – directly across the road (Hotel Kulturinnov, 1014 Budapest, Szentharomsag ter 6, tel: 011 36 1 375 1886, e-mail: mka3hotel@dbassoc.hu). The entrance foyer offers tickets for concerts held here and the Art Nouveau staircase leads to the second floor reception desk for the 16 rooms. I paid €9 (about C\$106. € = approx. C\$1.53) for a double room here with breakfast and taxes included.

Back to the sightseeing. While on Castle Hill, visit the Royal Palace, now restored after WWII damage. Wings here house the National Galleries, the Modern History Museum and the modern art of the Ludwig Collection which includes Picassos, Jasper Johns and a Yoko Ono table and chairs. I especially enjoyed the view from the balcony of the Ludwig restaurant.

Fine weather draws many to Margaret Island (Margitsziget) situated in the Danube. In the Middle Ages it was a royal hunting reserve and during the Turkish occupation was the site of a harem. Now all can enjoy the shady walks, the swimming pool, tennis stadium, open air theatre and gardens.

Another fine-weather destination is the City Park where the great statues are impressive. The Museum of Fine Art guards one side of Heroes' Square; it has

often been renovated in order to better display art rather than just its grand architecture. And if your necks become sore from looking up at all the buildings that will constantly amaze you, the Szechenyi Thermal Baths will soothe you. I enjoyed an excellent lunch at Robinsons Restaurant Café which occupies pods out on the lake here.

You can return to the downtown area via the smallest subway line, that claims fame as the first in Europe ... built in 1886. The line (yellow) has two cars with 16 seats each and the white and maroon tiles and ornate wooden booths of the stations are alone



Statue of a little boy on the promenade in front of the Royal Palace (MacDonald)

worth the trip. Two other metro lines and numerous buses and trams serve the city well. A 7-day travel card for all transportation costs about C\$15 and operates on an honour system, with numerous inspectors.

I have only touched on all the sites to see in Budapest. Relief sculptures and mosaics of tile and gold abound. And there are statues everywhere, some as recent as the one of Shakespeare unveiled in April 2003 on the river promenade, while the Hungarian

Academy of Arts and Letters has huge statues of Galileo, Newton and Descartes. And don't miss the colossal dome, 96 metres high, that almost didn't dominate Saint Steven's Basilica. The designer, J. Hild, died soon after it was started in 1851 and the next architect, Mikos Ybl, noticed cracks and closed the site. Eight days later, the dome collapsed. Ybl also died before the Basilica's final completion in 1906.

The extravagant architecture of Budapest is reflected in the ornate desserts found here. On Vorosmarty Terrace, in the heart of the tourist district, stands the famous Gerauds' Confectioners.

Restaurants are abundant on Vaci pedestrian street leading to the market and you will, indeed, find Hungarian goulash on the menu of all traditional restaurants. And while speaking of food I should mention Gundels Restaurant, which enjoys fame as Hungary's finest dining establishment. The Central Market Hall displays meats, cheeses, baseball-sized radishes and – in spring – the white asparagus is abundant. On a fine day I'd

recommend another ride on that little yellow metro to the Franz Liszt Music Academy Street, near the splendid Opera building, for outdoor dining with atmosphere. You will probably hear some practising, if not an actual concert.

My visit took place in May this year. Everyone told me the Fall is as delightful, but I understand summers are hot. I encourage all to visit and enjoy this vibrant, beautiful city of Budapest as it advances to a major destination but before too many tourists spoil it. 🇵

Your Scoops

More on Home Exchanging

Regarding the recent exchange of information in TS on home exchanging, I'm happy to add a few words. I've been exchanging homes since 1973; for 26 years in Montreal, and four years in Dartmouth, NS. Back in '73 there was no Canadian home exchange club so I joined an American one. When HomeLink International started up in Vancouver, I joined it and dropped the American club. If I really want an exchange in a certain city and am not flexible about dates, I'll also join Intervac for a year.

I've found most people who want to visit Canada list Toronto or Vancouver unless they're French-speaking, in which case they want Montreal. When I lived in Montreal, I did not necessarily want to spend my vacation in a French-speaking country, so I learnt to 'market' Montreal for an English-speaking audience.

Since moving to Nova Scotia, I get 10 - 12 requests a year, all from the U.S. or Canada. No one outside North America seems to have heard of Halifax/Dartmouth so I really have to do a sales job to get a European exchange. I've found that the key has been to work a year ahead (I'm now working on a 2005 exchange) and not to expect an exchange in capital cities (people in London, England, for example, get hundreds of requests every year).

Until last year, my experiences have all been very positive.

(In 2002 I had an exchange in Liverpool, England, which did turn out well due mainly to the utter disorganization of the Liverpoolian homeowners.)

Of course there are some 'does' and 'don'ts', most of which are set out on the various clubs' websites. I think the two most important ones are: to describe your home/neighbourhood as accurately as possible, warts and all, so that there are no surprises; and to stick to agreed dates, bearing in mind that the other people may already have bought their plane tickets, etc.

Most clubs allow people to list second homes/cottages for rent. Using this option in 1988, I rented a tiny 'bedsit' in Central London and have rented it almost every year since. Imagine, a flat in Bloomsbury for £10 a night!

Over the years I've exchanged homes in the U.S., Australia, Belgium, Portugal, and many times in England. For me it's the only way to spend a vacation. You usually meet the neighbours and the relatives. You shop in the local stores, ride the buses, live like a local and save lots of money. It's great.

*Margot Walker
Dartmouth, NS*

Accommodation in Britain

Our favourite places to stay in Great Britain are rented through the Landmark Trust, which is a "charity that rescues worthwhile buildings and promotes the enjoyment of such places, mainly by letting them for holidays". This is in the introduction of their extensive handbook which gives detailed descriptions, floor plans, pictures and prices of all

their properties. You need the handbook as the web site does not really have enough information to make decisions. The handbook is quite wonderful reading in its own right.

We have stayed in ten Landmarks (as they are known) and have thoroughly enjoyed every one. Sometimes we have had family travelling with us, at other times we have stayed in two-person properties. My husband says he likes Crownhill Fort near Plymouth the best. I just can't decide. Cloth Fair in London with our kids one Christmas was great; the Grammar School in Yorkshire made a wonderful base for seeing the countryside and doing some walking, while the Steward's House in Oxford gave a week's membership in the Oxford Union with the chance to take part in all their activities and listen to the debate of the week.

We find that staying in self-catering properties makes a vacation affordable, and I even like shopping and cooking in new and different places. To give an idea of cost, the price for a week in early summer 2003 for Crownhill Fort, which sleeps eight, was £793 (approx. C\$1,750), while the Grammar School, which sleeps four, is £442 (approx. C\$975). The Landmark Trust web site is www.landmarktrust.co.uk and the Handbook can be ordered from them. They have an office in Vermont which handles North American orders.

We also have the National Trust properties catalogue. I feel I know it really well as it is great fun to browse through, but on reviewing our trips over the years I discovered that, while we have visited many, many NT historic properties,

we have actually only stayed in one ... a cottage called Townplace in Cadgwith, Cornwall. It was wonderful. It was located close to a tiny fishing village on the coast and close to a footpath where we saw a number of long-distance walkers. NT properties are fully equipped and very comfortable and, as you can see on the web www.nationaltrust.org.uk, are quite reasonable, especially out of season.

A final note. We recently used a company called London Guest Suites to organize the rental of an apartment on the South Bank in London. It was a large, loft-type suite with one bedroom and very modern décor in an old warehouse called Playhouse Court. From there we walked almost everywhere: to the Globe Theatre, the National Theatre, the Royal Festival Hall, the Tate Modern, the London Eye and more! This company offers properties all over London and in Paris. The prices are quoted in US dollars and our week in May cost US\$1,095. All our negotiations were done by e-mail and we found the company excellent to deal with. We plan to use them again. Their web site is www.londonguestsuites.com and it is easy to use with lots of pictures, descriptions and prices.

*Penney Place
Ottawa, ON*

We Forgot to Mention a Drinking Story!

While Editor Ann is correct when she describes (Jul/Aug issue) Bavaria's Rothenburg as an historic jewel, she omitted to mention Rothenburg's greatest historic

festival ... the annual re-enactment of the "Meistertrunk" (Masterdraught). In 1631, during the Thirty Years War, this Protestant town was captured by Catholic forces. The conquerors decreed that if one of the councilors could drain a six-pint tankard in one draught no harm would come to the inhabitants and no further damage would be inflicted on the town. The mayor himself took up the challenge, succeeded and saved the town. Now every year, at Whitsun (the seventh Sunday after Easter), hundreds of Rothenburgers dress up in costumes of the period and re-enact this event. Fun times if you can be there then! In addition, the memory of the formidable mayor is kept alive – every hour, on the hour – when a door opens beside the clock on the City Hall and the 'mayor' can be seen draining the tankard!

*Barbara Redlich
North York, ON*

Plan a stop in Georgia

As an addition to my article on Florida (*see this issue, p. 10 – Ed.*) I would also like to mention the Okefenokee Swamp Park in Georgia. For Canadians travelling south by car it is a worthwhile side trip affording an opportunity to experience this area's natural environment. Covering 1600 acres, the park offers a variety of exhibits and tours through the swamp and bayous. For those of us who remember Walt Kelly's *Pogo* comic strip, this is the territory where the comedic possum and his friends lived. For people of naturalist bent, it is a chance to get "up close and personal" with

alligators and other examples of the local fauna and flora.

Entrance to the park and interpretive centre is easiest from Waycross GA. The park is south of the town off Hwy#1 and #23. This has been a conservation area for more than 50 years, yet I have heard few travellers mention it. A train tour, butterfly gardens, boardwalks and paths throughout give visitors access to different areas of interest. Guided boat tours are available for a chance to pass deeper into the park's wetlands. Historic buildings show the way of life in earlier times. Picnic tables are available and this would be a great place to take time for such a meal as there is a great deal to see and do. We enjoyed our visit so much we hope to return here.

*Jane Mallory
Kingston, ON*

Reader to Reader

We have received a message from Pam Deliyannides stating that she has been having trouble finding travel insurance due to her husband's age, pre-existing condition and a recent change in medication. She goes on, "I would be interested in hearing of the experiences of others in obtaining travel insurance under these circumstances."

I'm sure there are many other readers who would be interested in this information, so if you have some news please e-mail ann@thetravelsociety.com and I will publish the information in a future edition. Many thanks – Ed.

continued from page 1

weather was gentle, the seas were sparkling (though cool), the scenery was superb, the wildflowers were abundant and the locals had their picture-postcard blue and white villages to themselves as there were few tourists. My days there felt as though I were living in a Greek-island movie! Which is interesting, because one of the island's claims to fame – at least in modern times – is that it was the source of inspiration for filmmaker Luc Besson's movie *The Big Blue*, and the film's opening scenes were shot there. In fact, Luc Besson grew up in the Greek islands, where, before he became involved with films, he was a scuba diving instructor, as were his parents. He loved Amorgos, the wildest of the Cyclades and home to an ancient monastery that, early in his film career, Besson vowed to include in one of his movies. And speaking of movies, this island may also stir memories in those of you old enough to remember *The Guns of Navarone* (as I am!).

Yes, Amorgos is just as one imagines an unspoiled Greek island should be. Its population of about 2,000 (and declining as many of its young people wish to leave for brighter lights) is involved in growing olives for oil, grapes for wine and almonds. There is also a renewed interest in its traditional herbal remedies that use the island's fragrant sage, lemon verbena, rosemary and other herbs. In fact, the island is named after the flax plant 'amorgos' which was used in ancient times to provide the purple dye for the clothes of emperors. Stone walls divide the fields, donkeys are still used for transportation and load-carrying while sheep, goats and cows are kept for farmers' self-sustenance and to supply the charming small tourism properties and the local *tavernas*.

Everyone I spoke with agreed that the spring is the best time to visit the island. This is when the hillsides and gardens are ablaze with colour and it is the finest season for enjoying the island's many hiking trails, for

the scarcity of trees here results in sunny trails (too hot in summer) with glorious views in all directions.

A charming, fully-illustrated guidebook *Amorgos: History and Sightseeing* is available all over the island while *A Travelogue of Amorgos* is a detailed guide to all the walking and hiking trails on the island that are of historical and cultural interest. Although the island lacks great ruins, it has an interesting history and archaeological work is ongoing, with many fascinating discoveries and the unearthing of usual artefacts, some of which can be seen in the island's Archaeological Museum in the village of Chora, and many more of which have

found their way to major museums in Athens and elsewhere in the world. In fact, early signs of organized life on the island date from the end of the 4th millennium B.C., the end of the Neolithic age, and important excavations can be observed during a fine hike in the hills above the bay of Katapola. Such a site may be of great interest to historians and archaeologists, but for most visitors the historical highlight of Amorgos is the incredibly photogenic Byzantine Monastery of Virgin Mary Chozoviotissa, dated 1088 and spectacularly built into the cliff 300 metres above the ocean. Only the façade of this structure is man-made, the rest of the building utilizes



Customers watch as village children gather to dance at the Pagali taverna in the village of Langada (Wallace)

the steep cliff (a visit to www.amorgos.ws/chozoviotissa.html will give you an idea of what's in store). Visitors are welcome inside (women must have their arms covered, but robes are offered to those inappropriately attired) where the monks will offer you sweet wine and honeyed candies. Though this is undoubtedly the outstanding historical site of Amorgos, there are many other monasteries, churches and chapels on the island which the locals will delight in showing you.

And there are many other highlights. I've already mentioned the flowers and the fine hikes. And then there are the villages ... all charming, all comprised of

whitewashed houses with blue trim, cobbled streets and village squares, intriguing alleyways and flights of steps and tiny stores. And then there are the *tavernas*, offering local wines, luscious salads, Greek specialities from farm and ocean, fine coffee and honey-dripping desserts. Add a vine-covered patio, perhaps a glorious view, maybe a beautiful shy child watching you and you'll think you are in heaven! Festivals are an important part of life for the people of Amorgos, whether it be the celebration of Easter or merely moving a small icon in a musical procession from one church to another. Villages also celebrate the making of certain delicacies to eat and then, of course, there's the wine harvest in the fall.

While Amorgos is a quiet, laid-back destination, visitors will find quite a lot of accommodation options, but don't expect any high-rise hotels or sprawling resorts. In the Aegiali region I discovered three very different properties (contact details at the end). I stayed in the delightful Aegialis Hotel, located in a stunning hill-side location overlooking the harbour, the ocean, the beach, the little village, the distant hills and its own large swimming pool. All the rooms have patios and splendid views, the rooms are arranged over a series of multi-level terraces, all traditional blue and white, all bedecked with flowers. It's a family-run property and very relaxed, with its game-filled lounge and lovely patio where you are welcome to enjoy your drinks and meals. Arrive here after your long voyage and you really will think you are in paradise ... I certainly did. If you go, say "Hi" to Irene and Nikitas (Giannakopoulos) and their children Stamatis and Kalliovi for me!

If you'd rather be at beach level, the Lakki Village Studios and Apartments may fit the bill for you. It's also owned by members of the Giannakopoulos family and guests are welcome to use the facilities at both properties. It's a relaxed complex beside the

sandy/broken-shell beach facing the sunset beneath the Aegialis Hotel. A good choice for those with children. The property's *taverna* is open all day and guests here can spread out under the trees over the wide patio.

If village life is more to your liking you'll enjoy the Pagali Agritourist Hotel in the charming village of Langada with its fabulous views of Aegiali Bay from its vine-covered *taverna* terrace. Even if you don't stay here, please enjoy a lunch here during your island explorations. Their cuisine, using locally-caught fish, village goat meat and cheeses, oil made from olives grown in the surrounding fields and, of course, local wines, is delicious. And although you will welcome the peace



The dancing children and the musicians take a rest (Wallace)

here, be prepared for the arrival of some local musicians and dancers! There are several wonderful hikes from this village into the surrounding hills, or visitors can walk about two kilometres through olive groves to the beach.

Visitors will learn that Amorgos was once proud home to some magnificent and influential cities. But its important geographical position in the Aegean and its fine harbours resulted in a long, long history involving wars, battles, sea raids, rivalries, pirates, gangs of brigands, enslavement, disputes, disruptions and foreign domination. Today, all this is hard to believe. The island appears as though nothing could disturb its quietude and calm, except, perhaps, for a little fiddle playing, some dancing local children or when some feast of Dionysus rolls around! Today's island inhabitants are shy but charming and welcoming and their guests all come in peace and with peace on their minds. If this sounds like your kind of island, make Amorgos part of your Greek itinerary.

Some details ...

- First of all, I would like to mention that Greece has a highly-developed tourism infrastructure. One of your first impressions of Athens is that it is full of trav-

el agencies and tour operators (especially around Syntagma Square in the centre of the city). I would be surprised to find an agent who did not speak English! Arrive in Athens and you will be beguiled and overwhelmed by the choices offered: day trips in and around Athens, overnight or longer trips to a variety of other destinations, including the islands, together with passages on high-speed catamarans or liner-like **ferries** or even cruises on relatively small yachts. In fact, Greek ferry details would fill a book. There are over 2,000 islands and dozens of shipping companies. The website www.greekferries.gr/domestic.htm will give you some idea of the range of choice, but admits to not being comprehensive and, without prior knowledge, seems to be a difficult site to negotiate. However, I am confident in stating that as long as you are travelling out of high season and do not wish to transport a vehicle, getting a **ferry passage to Amorgos** once you are in Greece will not present any problems. I travelled on the modern Blue Star Ferries, choosing to sail overnight on my journey out and during the day on the return trip, when I enjoyed the scenery as the ferry stopped at a variety of other islands. Passage takes about 8 hours and the fares are reasonably inexpensive: I paid €22 (approx. C\$34) one way for the day-time trip, less for the overnight passage, though a variety of cabins are available on the latter

for a surcharge. The ferry – *Dhmitroula* - was large and modern, with a restaurant, cafeteria, bar and shops. Announcements were made in Greek and English. There are two stops on Amorgos: Katapola and Aegiali. Inter-island boats connect Amorgos to the rest of the Cyclades. There is no airport on Amorgos, but there are daily ferries to Naxos and seasonal connections to Myconos, both of which have airports.

● Amorgos is 33 km in length and never more than 6 km wide. A fine and generally deserted road covers the island. There's a **car rental agency** (Aegialis

Rent-a-Car, Aegiali, Amorgos 84008, Cyclades, tel: [country, plus island, code: 011 30 22850] 73393, fax: 73395, www.amorgos.ws/rentals/aegialis-rent-car.html) just steps from the ferry dock in Aegiali offering compact cars and scooters and I recommend you have wheels for at least a few days while you explore the island. However, there is a bus service between the villages and also a few taxis for those who do not wish to drive.

● The **Aegialis Hotel** needs only the words Aegiali, Amorgos 84008, Cyclades, Greece, added if you plan to drop them a line. Their telephone number is 73393, fax: 73395, e-mail info@aegialis.com, www.amorgos-aegialis.com or click on 'accommodation' on www.amorgos.ws. Full price details are given on the web, but to give you an idea, low season rates (until 15 May) are €66 (approx. C\$101) double B&B, €94 (approx. C\$144) half board.

The mailing address of **Lakki Village** is Lakki Village, Aegiali, Amorgos 84008, Cyclades, tel: 73253, fax 73244, web details at www.amorgos.ws where

you'll find their complete range of prices as the accommodations vary in size.

While the Aegialis Hotel and Lakki Village can be viewed on the Amorgos web site www.amorgos.ws, you won't find the **Pagali Hotel** there. However, they do have a charming, multi-lingual brochure available by con-

tacting Nikos Vassalos at Pagali Hotel, Langada, Aegiali 84008, Cyclades, tel: 73310, fax: 73368.

I flew overnight from Toronto to Heathrow and made an efficient connection on to Athens early in the morning, both flights with **British Airways**, who offer several flights a day to Athens. If you are travelling light, the ferry port of Piraeus can easily be reached by a half-hour subway ride from Athens. There will be stairs to negotiate in the city, but the train becomes a surface one and Piraeus station is adjacent to the harbour with no stairs. Or you can take a taxi. ☺



View from my room at the Aegialis Hotel (Wallace)

Florida from a Different Perspective

(plus some AMTRAK news for Canadians)

by Jane Mallory

This was to be a different visit to Florida, not generated by a desire to see some of the well known tourist sites, but an opportunity to visit areas previously unexplored and unknown to the two of us.

The chance to travel south arose when my sister offered us her Club Intrawest points, good for a week at the San Destin Resort near Panama City. As winter-weary Canadians, my husband and I jumped at the opportunity.

The panhandle of Florida has a well-deserved reputation for miles of beautiful sand beaches and clear warm gulf waters. The area we visited, east of Fort Walton, is known as the Emerald Coast with good reason. The ocean is an amazing turquoise shade and the fine sand is so white that its colour reminded us of snow! Once off the Gulf Coast Highway access to the beach was easy. The Gulf Islands National Seashore stretches from Alabama to Fort Walton. We were just east of this area. As elsewhere in the State, hotels and condominiums are being built throughout the region but there are still miles of shoreline preserved as parkland.

Club Intrawest is known to Canadians as the group that owns recreational properties at Whistler, Mont Tremblant and, more recently, Blue Mountain in Collingwood, Ontario. They have a membership scheme which offers an arrangement whereby one can “trade” earned points (purchased through membership) for time either at their destinations or other resorts worldwide. It works somewhat like a timeshare but has more flexibility. The San Destin location is the latest property constructed by this group. All Intrawest locations have top quality condo/hotel accommodation, with many perks. San Destin, located about one mile from the beach, shares a golf course, village-atmosphere boutiques and restaurants, and nature preserve with other top-of-the-line hotels.



Our neighbouring nature preserve (Mallory)

Our self-catering apartment was truly luxurious and overlooked Horseshoe Bayou on Choctawhatchee Bay. The property next to us was a small island held as a nature preserve. Our hotel had heated outdoor pools and hot tubs which we were able to use despite cool weather.

Within a few miles of this we could find all tourist needs from fresh seafood markets to historic sites and factory outlet shopping. On site we could take a shuttle bus to the beach, borrow bikes or just wander on our own. There were tennis courts and, at the beach, sea kayaks were available for the adventurous. Golfers would be in paradise!

We made most of our meals, but when we decided to go out there was no lack of choice. Our favourite spot was The Crab Shack in Fort Walton. The meals there were fresh and authentic. We especially enjoyed the crab cakes and the tuna cheese dip.

After a week of total relaxation we travelled to Dunedin, just north of Clearwater. Some readers may know this area as the Toronto Blue Jays train here every spring. The revitalized historic downtown and marina are worth a visit. There are several charming B&Bs here as well as a variety of interesting boutiques and restaurants. It manages to maintain a small-town atmosphere. The downtown area has meandering side streets where historic buildings share space with small cottages converted to artists galleries and craft shops. We can recommend Kelly's for lunch. The atmosphere is funky and the menu eclectic. Another popular place we enjoyed was Flannigan's Irish Pub just a bit further

up Main Street. We went there in the evening and enjoyed a delicious meal and folk music. The performer was from Newfoundland. The owner and his wife serve up tasty Irish fare and the atmosphere is welcoming.

The Pinellas Trail is a reclaimed rail line converted to a pedestrian/bike path which runs from Tarpon Springs south to St. Petersburg. We took advantage of this trail, renting bikes from Dunedin and touring to Honeymoon Island, part of the coastal barrier island network. Miles of sandy beach edge the causeway to the island. This was a good location for relaxing and birdwatching.

Apparently dolphins are often spotted in these waters and in warmer months watercraft of all types can be rented here.

Tarpon Springs was another area of interest. The community is known for its Greek heritage and sponge fishing industry. A visit to the docks here is like a mini-

visit to a Mediterranean fishing village. Boutiques, shops full of handicrafts, Greek restaurants and bakeries line the pier. It is also possible to take a harbour cruise, visit the sponge museum or charter a boat for deep sea fishing. Here we sampled the cuisine at Costas Restaurant where the atmosphere and food seemed very authentic.

Our only stop in any larger urban center was a visit to the Aquarium in downtown Tampa. The modern facility is located adjacent to the cruise port and is a wonderful outing for all members of the family. The day we were there we saw many groups ranging in age from babies in strollers to older citizens using walkers. The exhibits cover a broad spectrum and include tanks where visitors can touch sea-life. There is an overall theme of protecting the seashore and native ecosystems. The most astounding area was a floor to ceiling tank forming one huge wall of an auditorium. It was

the model of a coral reef and displayed over 220 species of sea-life. In a show held several times during the day, a diver in wet suit explains the environment from within the tank. Boat tours of the bay can be purchased as part of the museum programme. We spent a half day on the site.

While in Florida, a visit to Apalachicola, just south of Panama City, is also of interest. We found it a charming spot. Slightly off the beaten path, it seems to have been able to maintain its small-town atmosphere and carry on its fishing industry despite the tourist boom surrounding it. It lies at the mouth of a large

river estuary and apparently is a major oystering centre. We can attest to the freshness of the fish and chowder at the local restaurant called the Oyster Hut, just down by the docks.

The rest of our visit to Florida covered territory more familiar to most tourists, but the areas mentioned in this article are

small gems in a region sometimes overwhelmed by commercialism. It is interesting to visit an area with 'new eyes' and discover some fresh and charming features.

Now the AMTRAK information ...

We drove to Florida with family members, but were on our own for our return trip to Canada. This should be easy, we thought ... a one way flight home. Not true. Flights originating from Fort Lauderdale to Canada, either one way or return, were outlandishly expensive ... in excess of C\$1000 per person. We opted for the alternative of Amtrak and paid under C\$800 for the two of us, most meals and sleeper accommodation included.

Information is available on the internet (www.amtrak.com) but I found it easier to talk to a real person when booking (1800 USA RAIL). We booked



View from the Intrawest Property (Mallory)

LAOS ...

A BUDGET TRAVELLER'S DREAM (part II)

by John and Doreen Berg

During our travels we thought the best food is to be found in Luang Prabang. Our favourite restaurant was the Restaurant Indochini, 9/7 Thanon Sisavangvong. It serves a wide range of Lao foods as well as international dishes. There's a menu in English and English-speaking servers. The service is excellent and the prices inexpensive ... around \$5.00 (dollar prices are Canadian) per person with a large Beer Lao! Lao cuisine is very similar to Thai, somewhat spicy and most dishes are cooked with fresh ingredients. Our favourites were sweet and sour pork, fish and chicken dishes with sticky rice or noodles. We tended to be rather conservative and avoided the grilled bats! However, now sitting at home, I do wish we had been a bit more adventurous and tried a few of the more exotic Lao dishes. Next time! Also recommended is the Nisha Restaurant serving Indian specialities. You can request "Not too hot"! Other restaurants we tried also offered excellent selections and tasty foods. Yes, Luang Prabang is a gourmet's paradise ... delicious meals for just a few kip. Coffee was generally excellent and full-bodied and French bread was our usual breakfast choice, sometimes with eggs. The number of Lao restaurants that cater to tourists continues to increase, with English menus and English-speaking servers. In Vientiane, if you've had your fill of Asian food, you also have a choice of French restaurants, many of which surround the Fountain Circle area. As mentioned below, we selected the Jua Lao there and found a menu consisting of Lao and French standards. Again English is spoken and it's popular with tourists.

Speaking of language, we should mention that it was not a problem as we visited the popular historical, artistic and cultural areas in the upper regions of the country. English is spoken at most guest houses, guest restaurants and tour offices there. At smaller shops or on buses we used sign language and big smiles. Occasionally we asked our guest house clerk to write

our destination or restaurant name on the back of a hotel card and we would show this to taxi drivers or others to eliminate the language barrier. And we always carried a hotel card for the return journey. Fewer travellers visit the more rural south, so there language may be a problem. But back to Luang Prabang and our travels.

Allow at least three days to sink into Luang Prabang's captivating embrace. The first impression, due to high expectations and rain, was disappointing but slowly the town revealed its secrets as we explored the ancient sites, the market places, the rivers, the countryside and – best of all – interacted with the friendly villagers.

During our stay in Luang Prabang we had checked out the travel options for the five hour trip to Vang Vieng. Travel agents encouraged mini-van travel as the fastest, but this mode is the most expensive (\$15.00) and, in our opinion, most dangerous due to speed and road curves. The local bus is cheapest but the slowest and the most crowded. Eventually we settled on a V.I.P. bus (\$9.20 pp). All the V.I.P. tickets do is guarantee you a seat somewhere on the bus! Based on our experiences of past Asian bus travels, we arrived early to check in and grab a seat near the front to avoid the bouncy rear area. Utilizing our bus-boarding strategy, Doreen boarded the bus and selected two seats while I tended to our tickets and luggage. Thus we managed, for most of the trip, a full seat for each of us! This is a rarity on Asian buses. Our driver maneuvered twisting, turning, ascending and descending Highway 13 with exemplary caution despite the many horror stories we have heard of behind-the-wheel maniacs. En route our first stop was roadside, where all those who needed a comfort break were quick off the bus, with the men out on the road's cliff side and the ladies to the bus's rear, modesty seemingly not a concern. Later there was a food stop and a traditional

toilet. The green jungle scenery, deep valleys, and several Hmong villages along the way makes the trip between Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng worthwhile and should not be missed by taking an evening bus.

After five and a half hours the bus arrived at the Vang Vieng bus station. The first task was to grab our bags and locate a guest house! And this can easily be done on a walking tour as the town is small. Surprisingly VV has excellent accommodation as many guest houses are new with lots of availability. After viewing four or five rooms we settled on room number 10 at the Khamphone Guest house for \$16.00. As it turned out, this family-run establishment was the best guesthouse for comfort and value that we stayed in during our two-month Asian trip.

After the damp, cool weather of the north, the sun and warmth of Vang Vieng was a welcome change. We spent five nights in this tourist location. For us it was an opportunity to develop friend-

ships and experience adventures as we kayaked on the Nam Song, hired a boat to visit two caves, and rented inner tubes to gently float down the Nam Song. Late afternoons found us enjoying a cool drink riverside watching the various river activities that included people bathing, laundering and fishing, while cattle crossed and trucks navigating the shallows. After the spectacular sunsets we'd wander back to town and select a restaurant based not on its menu, but on the restaurant offering the most interesting video! Many a meal was enjoyed as we watched English movies!

For a super kayaking experience find the Paddle Bar Restaurant, Thanon Luang Prabang for an excellent day tour for \$24.00 pp. The tour starts with an American breakfast followed by a ride to the starting point where experienced guides helped novice kayakers get started. First stop is a visit to Elephant Cave

with tubing and crawling inside a second cave, an activity Doreen passed on and I wished I had as my knees became sore from crawling through narrow passageways and I didn't see much with my candle. A barbecue lunch was included and, for the young bloods, a cliff-jumping opportunity is provided. After returning late afternoon we showered and changed to meet back at the Paddle Bar for beer and dinner (yes, included in the price!) and much conversation. It was a super experience, even though we overturned our kayak once and did everything wrong before being rescued and assisted back into our craft. Fortunately the only thing injured was our egos!

Next day, around 9:00 a.m., before it became too hot to enjoy, we rented huge inner tubes and a jumbo took us to a drop-off spot north of Vang Vieng (\$2.50 pp). The requested two-hour float was gentle as the Nam Song River was low and we enjoyed the mountainous scenery and



Monks pose for us in front of Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang (Berg)

a cool beer at a small riverside stop.

Although we didn't do it, there are opportunities to hire bicycles and cross the river over a narrow wooden pedestrian bridge to bike a through a flat valley. Once on the other side there are Hmong villages to visit and caves to explore. Ask at your guest house for directions and a rough map.

Vang Vieng is a nice place to relax and recharge travelling energy, but all too soon the time to continue on to Vientiane arrived. The local bus leaves mid-day and since we prefer to arrive mid-afternoon we elected to travel via mini-van (\$9.60 pp) and leave in the morning. The van was booked from our guest house and pre-arranged for first pickup so we would have our choice of seats. The journey is three to four hours and not that interesting. In Vientiane the van driver stopped across the street from the Syri 2 Guest House

and as it turned out the hotel was a good choice with friendly, helpful staff and a central location so we could easily walk to most sites.

The capital Vientiane is tattered, yet still elegant, with some beautiful colonial buildings. The fountain area has a peculiar charm, as does the riverside where one can relax while sipping a cool drink and enjoying the view over to Thailand on the far bank. We spent three nights in Vientiane which gave ample time to view key sites and make travel arrangements to Thailand.

A two hour *tuk tuk* hire made a visit to Phra Thant Luang, the pre-eminent temple in Laos, easy. The 50 metre golden stupa is worth a visit. On the return trip we stopped at Paluxay. This victory monument was completed in 1968 and dedicated to those Laotians who fought in the War of Independence against the French. Ironically the tall monument is an arch modeled on the Parisian Arc de Triomphe! It's an imposing site and you can climb to the top for a panoramic city view.

Another morning a *tuk tuk* took us to Talaot Sao (the Morning Market). We spent a peaceful few hours browsing in this huge building full of produce, home appliances, jewellery and handicrafts. There were no touts chasing and no hassle to buy once you decided to move on. This is an excellent place to purchase gifts and souvenirs.

On our final day the guest house provided a late 3 p.m. checkout so we again hired a *tuk tuk* to visit Xieng Khuan (Buddha Park) about 24 km outside Vientiane (admission \$12.00 pp). The public park built in 1958 contains concrete sculptures that are bizarre but interesting in their strange grotesque shapes. After wandering about and climbing to the top

of a large pumpkin-shaped concrete structure our driver returned us to the fountain area where we lunched at the Kua Lao, 111 Thanon Samsenthai. The restaurant is housed in a renovated French colonial home and while the menu is pricey (for Laos!), it is varied and popular with tourists. We weren't too adventurous and

ate most dinners at the Kua Lao, costing on average \$12.00 for two with drinks. From our luncheon it was a brief walk to the hotel for a shower before departing for the Laos border. Our *tuk tuk* was waiting and it wasn't long before we exited customs and boarded a bus to cross the Friendship

Bridge on our way to the sunny island beaches of southern Thailand.

We would be most willing to share more information on travelling in Laos, as well as in Myanmar and Thailand, at [johndoreenberg@telus.net](mailto: johndoreenberg@telus.net). Laos is definitely a country we would visit again. Go soon ... while it is still undeveloped but with a sense of change coming soon.

Some details ...

- We obtained **tourist information** from the Laos Embassy in Bangkok, located off Thanon Pracha Udit on the north side of the street (look for the Lao flag). Bring your passport and two photos. It's open from 8:00 to 12:00 a.m. Monday to Friday. We obtained our visas in Chiang Mai at the Backpackers Meeting Place (see "Getting there").

- **Guidebooks** we used: Lonely Planet *Laos* and Frommer's *Southeast Asia*.

- **Web sites:** For a country profile go to www.lonelyplanet.com, select Worldguide, then Asia, then Laos. Also, click on Thorn Tree for free sign-up to ask individual questions and receive replies to your e-mail



The excellent-value Khamphone Guesthouse in Vang Vieng (Berg)

address. For health information: www.cdc.gov/travel. (If your home country is a member of the British Commonwealth, you have access to the best **medical facility** in Laos: **The Australian Embassy Clinic in Vientiane**. There is a risk of malaria throughout the country, with the exception of Vientiane.) We used www.planetholiday.com to book on line for hotels at great savings and with excellent service.

- **Getting there:** we flew Japanese Airlines from Vancouver via Tokyo to Bangkok, for \$1,229 pp. and then took the overnight train, 2nd class a/c sleeper to Chiang Mai. Flight from Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang was purchased at Backpackers Meeting Place, Travel Center (B.M.P.), 16/2 Kampaengdin Rd. Chiang Mai, tel: (053) 208822 via Lao Aviation. Flights on Thursdays and Sundays, \$120 pp. Visa for Laos \$36.80.

- **Getting away:** we received excellent service on train and flight reservations from **Lao Air Service Ltd.**, 77 Fa Ngum Road, Watchan, Vientiane, **Laos**, tel: 856 21 21 3372, fax: 856 21 21 5694, e-mail: laoirsvc@laonet.net. The manager, Khamsene Sayavong, spoke excellent English and he arranged for our overnight train tickets from Nong Khai, Thailand (11 hours) to Bangkok (\$30 pp, second class, a/c) and a Thai Airways round-trip flight from Bangkok to Trang, Thailand. The tickets came with typed instructions on procedures to follow to successfully cross into Thailand to meet the train.

Hotels and Guest Houses:

Royal Benja Hotel, 39 Sukhumvit Rd. (Soi 5), **Bangkok 10110, Thailand**, tel: (code: 011 66) 2 6552920-54, fax: 2 655 2959, e-mail: info@royalbenja.th.com, www.royalbenja.th.com. A modern, high-rise hotel, with A/C, minibar, TV, buffet breakfast and pool in a good location, close to the skytrain and Bangkok's trendiest and most infamous night spots. About \$55 dbl. reserved from home at www.planetholiday.com

- **Lai-Thai Guest House**, 111.4-5 Kotchasarn Rd., **Chiang Mai 50100, Thailand**, tel. 53 271725, fax: 53 272724, e-mail: mail@laithai.com, www.laithai.com. We paid about \$22 for a comfortable, quiet room (No. 421) towards the back of the hotel. Cheaper rooms available. The hotel offers A/C, TV's, pool, a tour office and restaurant and is in an excellent location close to the night bazaar.

- **Phoun Sab Guest House**, Thanon Sisavanguong, **Luang Prabang, Laos**, telephone locally at 212975.

Here room No. 27, with attached bathroom, cost us \$11. The property offers a communal sitting area and a restaurant. There's a wide range of accommodation here, including a fancier hotel across the street from Phoun Sab.

- **Khamphone Guest House**, Ban Viengkeo, Uangvieng District, **Vang Vieng, Laos**, tel: 023 511062, e-mail: room 10, \$16 with A/C and en suite bathroom. Close to market and small store, friendly and helpful staff who will help arrange tours.

- **Syri 2 Guest House**, 63/6-7 Setthathirat Road, Vientiane, tel: 021 241345, e-mail syri2@hotmail.com Room No. 303 cost about \$13 with A/C, TV, restaurant, and en suite bathroom. Good service, quiet, within walking distance of many attractions. 📞

*John and Doreen Berg are
TravelScoop members
who live in Powell River, BC*

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**

THE REAL COST OF CRUISING

by Sheila Hamilton & Duncan Campbell

Wow, an advertisement promoting a Mediterranean cruise, for half price, at a show-stopping \$949.50! This particular tour would fly us from Toronto to Spain, then ferry us around the Mediterranean on a cruise ship for one glorious week. Sounds too good to be true, we thought. So we set about calculating what the real costs were. It was an eye-opening exercise and netted us an easy guide for costing future cruises. We hope it's useful for you too.

Bifocals in hand, we followed the asterisk beside the listed price to the microscopic print at the bottom of the ad, which mentioned additional fees, surcharges and taxes. These are the extras that get added about one nanosecond after the trip is booked.

To be fair, we had some idea of what to expect, so this is not intended as a judgement of the fairness, reasonableness or anything else of the cruise industry. But *caveat emptor* still applies — let the buyer beware.

Here's what we found, based on the combined costs in Canadian dollars for the two of us (and please overlook our lack of interest in the pennies):

Initial (advertised) cost of the cruise (\$949.50 each):	\$1,899
Nav Canada charge:	\$ 70
Air Travellers' Security fee:	\$ 48
Skyservice fuel surcharge:	\$ 80
Port charges (Mallorca and four other ports):	\$ 440
Mallorca Airport Departure taxes:	\$ 24
Toronto International Airport Improvement tax:	\$ 21
Airline Insurance fee:	<u>\$ 20</u>
Total Fees, Surcharges & Taxes:	<u><u>\$ 703</u></u>

The fees, surcharges and taxes added 37% to the advertised cost of our cruise. We were told, by the way, that some of the more expensive cruise companies actually include some of these costs in the advertised price, so best to read the fine print. We

also bought travel cancellation insurance for \$184. (Your cost may be different, depending on your ages.) So, when we added all the extras that had popped up so far, we were up to about \$2,800 above the advertised cost of the cruise. And that's *before* we had even left home!

Then there are costs incurred while on the cruise itself. The big one is the price of tours in the ports of call. The four tours we took, three half-day tours and one full day, cost \$530 for both of us. By the way, there are ports where tours can be purchased at dockside for considerably less than on board. For example, in Malta, it was possible to take the same tours as offered on board for about half to two-thirds the on-board cost. All you need to do is get off the ship and look for a booth offering tours. But, what we don't know about is the quality of those tours. If, like us, you're somewhat risk-averse, you may want to stick with the tours offered on-board the ship. But, if you're prepared to risk it, go for it.

And don't forget the tips. While optional, we laid out \$120 for the serving staff in the dining room and our room attendant.

So, what started out at the advertised price of only \$1,899, managed to creep up by leaps and bounds to more than \$3,400. That's more than \$1,500 above the advertised price.

Then there are, of course, other charges you will/can incur on cruises. For most there will be bar service (we're not going to tell you about our bar bill!) and some personal shopping. Then there can be casino charges and costs associated with being pampered in the spa. We haven't included these in this calculation because they are specific to each person.

While this exercise is not rocket science, it's what we needed ... a quick and easy way of estimating the real cost of cruising. So for future reference, we'll add about \$1,500 to the advertised cost, excluding shopping, bar bills and spa charges and not be too surprised when the VISA bill rolls in. And we *will* read the fine print.

Happy travelling and fare thee well!

Sheila Hamilton & Duncan Campbell
are TravelScoop members who live in Toronto.

Travel Digest

Antarctica (and Chile)

No, we don't have news of a new B&B on the great white continent! But we do have news on how you can experience the next total solar eclipse there. If you're an astronomy buff (and have deep pockets too) you may like to know that LanChile is preparing an exclusive chartered flight over Antarctica to view the total solar eclipse of 23 November 2003, considered to be one of the most awe-inspiring spectacles in all of nature. The flight, being prepared for tour operator TravelQuest International and *Sky & Telescope* magazine, will depart from the city of Punta Arenas, Chile and fly over the Antarctica region and the South Pole. The flight will last approximately 13 hours, during which time experts from TravelQuest and *Sky & Telescope* will provide commentary about the Antarctic landscape and the eclipse, which will last 2 minutes, 26 seconds ... 29 seconds longer than is possible from the ground. Viewing seats start at \$5,500 per person in a LanChile Airbus A340. In order to assure the optimum eclipse viewing for everyone on board, the adventure is limited to only 75 observers. Each participant will receive professional-quality video and photography capturing the experience and will enjoy LanChile's renowned culinary and wine menus throughout the adventure.

While in Chile participants will, of course, have the opportunity to select a variety of optional post-excursions. For more

information contact TravelQuest at 1 800 830 1998, e-mail eclipse@tq-international.com, or visit www.tq-international.com/AntarcticaFly/AntarcticaFlyHome.htm. LanChile passengers may accumulate mileage in LanChile's LanPass or any of the OneWorld member frequent flyer programmes. Their website is www.lanchile.com.

Bahamas

With its clear waters and 365 cays strewn across 100 miles of ocean, the Bahamas' glorious **Exuma** chain must be one of the best places in the world to enjoy a kayaking adventure. The archipelago is home to the Exuma Land and Sea Park, the world's first marine preserve where, although strictly controlled by the Bahamas National Trust, several outfitters are allowed to lead small groups on multi-day expeditions within the park. One of those operators is Canadian Ecosummer Expeditions who run two trips within the Exumas: the *Heart of the Exumas*, a one-week trip focusing mainly the park, and *Complete Exumas*, a two-week trip that travels virtually the length of the entire chain ... a 10 mile paddle from Georgetown north to Allan's Cay. (*What an adventure ... what an escape from winter in Canada! Many years ago I sailed extensively through the Exumas and can confirm it is a glorious and largely pristine region – Ed.*) For details call 1 800 465 8884 or visit www.ecosummer.com.

Britain

One of Britain's leading hotel companies – **Thistle** – is offering visitors an up to 50% reduction on its Leisure Breaks until the end of March 2004. Prices start at £29.50 per person, per night double which

includes a full, traditional breakfast. Thistle Leisure Breaks are available at 56 city-centre properties around Britain and at 24 locations in London. There is no minimum stay requirement. For more information call 011 44 870 333 9198, or visit www.thistlehotels.com.

If you've set your heart on a London Christmas, you may also like to consider staying at one of **Red Carnation Hotels'** boutique properties: The Montague on the Gardens in Bloomsbury, the Chesterfield Mayfair or the Rubens at the Palace overlooking the Queen's Mews. Two-night packages for two (with extra nights available from US\$130 per night) are priced from US\$311 at the Montague and Rubens, and US\$336 at the Chesterfield. As well as two nights' accommodation guests will receive a welcome gift, full breakfast, tea for two on one day, a taxi to Trafalgar Square to view the Norwegian Christmas tree and – if you are staying on Christmas Day – a stocking full of seasonal goodies. To view the hotels visit www.redcarnationhotels.com and to book or make enquiries e-mail bookmt@rchmail.com (for the Montague), bookrb@rchmail.com for the Rubens and bookch@rchmail.com (for the Chesterfield) or call toll-free 1 877 955 1515. The above three properties are Red Carnation's 4-star hotels. They also have two 5-star properties in London (the Milestone and "41" Buckingham Palace) which are also offering Christmas packages, these costing from US\$699 which also includes a full dinner and two bottles of wine. Enjoy!

There are so many exhibitions and events happening in London and throughout Britain during the coming months. To find our more call 1 888 VISIT UK. or visit www.visitbritain.com/ca.

Canada

From **Vancouver's North Shore** we've received details of a great-sounding property offering self-catering suites and cottages for a week or more. The owners – Bill and Angel Cozzens, once avid travellers themselves – promise to offer all the comforts of home: wine, fruits, flowers, chocolates and so on. To find out more about a week (or longer) at Alpine Beach call 604 904 2187 or visit www.alpinebeach.com and check them out for a west-coast getaway.

Ontario's beautiful **Muskoka** and **Georgian Bay** – known as 'cottage country' by Ontario's city dwellers – have launched a joint marketing campaign to promote the regions during the fall and winter. For details of all there is to enjoy in these regions, plus packages, B&B's and small properties waiting to welcome guests to this glorious area call 1 800 461 4261, www.discovergeorgianbay.ca and/or 1 800 267 9700, www.muskokaismagic.ca.

Next year's Carnival in **Québec City** will be that event's 50th anniversary. It is scheduled to take place from 30 January – 15 February and lots of events, family accommodation packages etc., are being planned. It's a great event for the [grand]kids! For details call 1 866 4 CARNAVAL or visit www.carnaval.qc.ca

Greece

If our recent articles have prompted you to consider a trip to Greece, you may like to know that Idyll Ltd's Untours have a new Greek 'tour' planned for 2004. Untours provides their 'untourists' with furnished apartments or houses and local staff to assist in all aspects of the stay. For its base in Greece, Untours has chosen the ancient city of Nafplio, whence travellers can explore the mainland and also take day trips to some of the islands. Per person prices for two weeks' accommodation, local transfers and air from New York, Newark or Boston, start at US\$1,419. Land-only prices also available. For more details of this and other Untours vacations call 1 888 868 6871 or visit www.untours.com

U.S.A.

City-lovers may be considering a seasonal getaway to **New York City**. If so, the tourism officials there (NYC & Company) are offering a discount travel programme starting 15 December and running to 31 March 2004. The *Paint the Town* programme offers packages that combine a hotel stay with a Broadway show, dining, cultural and sightseeing options, parting discounts of 'do it yourself' discounts which can be used to create a unique trip. Visit www.nycvisit.com for details, or call 1 800 NYC VISIT. And for assistance finding accommodation in NY, travellers can contact the Peak Season Hotel Hotline, 24/7 at 1 800 846 ROOM or visit the above website.

The **Art Institute of Chicago** is

staging a *Manet and the Sea* exhibition from 20 October to 19 January and the Lenox Suites Hotel has designed a 'Masterpiece Weekend Package' for the event. Double rates, all taxes included, are US\$165 until 13 December and US\$145 after that date. The package includes accommodation in a Queen Studio Suite (with full kitchen), in-suite continental breakfast, two tickets to the art exhibition, gifts and discounts at the Art Institute Gift Shop and more. For more details call 1 877 CHICAGO or visit www.877Chicago.com

For those whose idea of the perfect seasonal getaway is to get far away from cities, **Graham County** in southeastern **Arizona** is waiting to welcome visitors who love the outdoors. They offer historic B&B's, wilderness retreats, star-gazing during a telescope tour on Mt. Graham and over 300 bird species in some of the top bird locations in the U.S. For more details of this unspoiled country call 1 888 837 1841 or visit www.visitgrahamcounty.com

Tour Talk

Signature Vacations has the answer for those of you whose time is limited and who would like a winter vacation in the sun without necessarily lying on the beach. They are offering a range of cultural and soft adventure tours such as a guided motorcoach tour of the Yucatan peninsula, which will include Merida, Campeche and Chichen Itza; or escorted or fly-drive trips (with pre-tested itineraries) in Costa Rica. Departures available from a variety of gateways across Canada with extensions possible if you would like a few days on the beach. Your agent

will have details or visit
www.signaturevacations.com

Thinking about a trip over Christmas? **WestCan Treks** have some special destinations in mind. They suggest spending Christmas Day drifting gently along the Nile in a traditional sailboat and then spending the New Year at the pyramids. Or perhaps, while everyone at home over-indulges, you might like to stay trim hiking in Nepal where you'll spend Christmas Day at 2,000 metres in Annapurna and New Year's Eve in the lakeside town of Pokhara. For details of the *Felucca Journey* and *Nepal Panorama* trips, along with many others, call 1 800 661 7265.

From the Bookshelf

The gift-giving season is fast approaching and, if you have travel-loving friends and relatives, a useful travel guide makes a thoughtful gift.

TS has discovered two unusual volumes that look as though they would make tours of Italy and Spain both fascinating and inexpensive. They are *The Guide to Lodging in Italy's Monasteries* and *The Guide to Lodging in Spain's Monasteries*. Most of the guides' 500 or so pages are devoted to monasteries that offer hospitality to all guests regardless of religion (with just a few pages at the end of each volume listing monasteries for retreats or other spiritual purposes). Each entry contains a black and white photo, full accommodation details, driving directions, outstanding architectural and artistic features, prices and contact details. The prices, many of which include

meals, seem amazing ... many are less than US\$20, some properties just request a donation. Each book contains a sample reservation letter in Italian or Spanish. And the properties aren't only in rural areas ... there are listings for cities such as Rome and Madrid too. The guides were written by American author Eileen Barish. They are published by Anacapa Press of Arizona and can be ordered through your bookstore or by contacting 1 800 496 2665 or visiting www.monasteriesofitaly.com or www.monasteriesofspain.com. The guides are priced at US\$22.95. If any readers or their friends use these guides we would love to hear of their experiences.

Visitors planning a trip to Great Britain and Ireland will surely welcome *The Great British & Irish Bed & Breakfast: Favorite Places to Stay* guide, for leafing through this fully-illustrated-with-colour-photos book is almost as delightful as being there! Travellers can plan to stay in thatched cottages, stately manors, covered chapels or even lighthouses. There are clearly-keyed maps to the properties, organized by county and lots of large photos showing, in many cases, interiors as well as exteriors. The guide is published by Interlink Books, 446 pp., C\$28.95, www.interlink-books.com

And for a beautiful coffee table book, search for *Amazonia: The Land, The Wildlife, The River, The People* ... a gorgeous volume, 160 pp and 150 colour photos, of the Amazon River region. It's published by Firefly Books of Toronto at a surprisingly low \$35.

Tackling Lost Luggage with AEROTAG

Three Montreal airline employees, once baggage handlers and later employees at a call centre for lost luggage, have created a nameless name-tag system which works worldwide. Travellers purchase a package of two strong tags, which display only a website and a serial number. Each time the consumer travels, they register their itinerary online at www.aerotag.com. Should the luggage be lost or misrouted, airport agents can track the owner by logging onto the website and entering the tag number. The package of two tags also comes with matching adhesive tags for inside the luggage. Each tag is re-usable for the life of the suitcase.

Aerotag is private and confidential. The traveller's home address is never revealed. Aerotag displays travel details designed for airline agents/travel consultants to enable them to redirect luggage while travellers are on the road, not to contact owners at home. The manager of Air Canada's Baggage Operations says, "Should a bag arrive at our tracing office equipped with an AEROTAG identification tag, we will definitely use the system. It gives us the proper information needed to locate its owner."

Aerotag packages are currently available in Bentley stores across Canada, and Bay stores should soon be carrying them as well as various travel agencies. The price is \$16.99. See www.aerotag.com for a list of current availability.

continued from page 11


sleeper accommodation overnight from Fort Lauderdale to Washington, then business coach for daytime to Montreal via St. Albans, Vermont. The journey across the border to Montreal was by Amtrak's bus.

The sleeper portion of the trip was excellent. This confirms a previous positive experience of overnight travel on Amtrak from Chicago to New Orleans. When travelling on the overnight trains there is a variety of sleeping accommodation available. On this most recent trip we had sleeper bunks, enclosed in a small room with toilet and sink facilities. There was room for an overnight bag each and the top bunk had a window. During the day the room made up to have facing seats. Included in the sleeper fare were meals in the dining car with any choice from the menu. Food and service were good throughout. We will travel overnight on Amtrak again, in fact we may well take a U.S. trip based on Amtrak travel.

But a word of caution on the daytime trains. The cars are often older and service may be minimal. Check the specific train for facilities before booking. In these times of heightened security, crossing the Canada/U.S. border, either by train or bus, can be

unnerving. Scrutiny is heavy by Customs and Immigration officials from both countries. A passport is a necessity and passengers are often 'de-trained' at the border if there is any reason to question their documents.

Friends of ours, who share our appreciation for Amtrak, have found a way around this problem. They travel by car from Kingston, cross the border and park in a long-term lot adjacent to a Ramada Inn in Syracuse, NY. They can take a shuttle from there to the train station. This parallels what travellers often do at airports. This couple are able to make good connections through New York City for the Eastern Seaboard and south. This arrangement would also be possible from other Canadian cities close to U.S. travel centres.

Amtrak has many good deals for travel throughout the U.S. Some packages include hotel stays, or admissions to local events of interest to tourists. They also offer a Railpass for extended travel over a pre-arranged time period. 

Jane Mallory is a TravelScoop member who lives in Kingston, ON

An Accolade for Air Transat

by Nigel Raincock

I recently made a quick trip to England and, as Ann Wallace had had such good things to say about Air Transat after her trip to Munich earlier this year, I decided to give that airline a try, especially as a Gatwick arrival was more convenient for me.

In spite of Ann's recommendations I set off with some trepidation, thinking "old planes" and "no leg room". I discovered I could not have been more wrong! Air Transat's new Airbus A310's are bright and as airy as a plane can be. Seat pitch was no different from most airlines in the economy section and in the Club class (I up-graded for one journey) I was extremely comfortable. Depending on your destination this up-grade costs between \$150 and \$200 and brings you priority boarding; a large seat in the forward, Club area (just 20 seats); addi-

tional baggage allowance; free drinks and a choice of three up-graded meals. Compared with the business-class cost of scheduled airlines this is a really good deal.

I was also impressed with the short line-ups at check-in, both at Toronto and Gatwick. And as long as you do not need Heathrow for onward connections, you'll find Gatwick is quieter, has convenient and speedy train links to Central London and is the departure airport for so many of the amazingly-priced vacations, especially to continental Europe and North Africa, that use charter airlines and that you'll find advertised in travel agency windows across the U.K.

I will certainly use Air Transat (*sans trépidation*) again!

www.thetravelsociety.com

Our website is 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.

The TravelSociety ~ tours designed for members and their friends.

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

21 days, prices include all airfares

Space limited to 20 people

A Traveller's Turkey *Departing: 1 May & 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
- All 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

28 days, prices include all airfares

Space limited to 20 people

NEW 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:

- Round trip transatlantic and domestic flights with Air Canada
- 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.

NEW

Guatemala Grandeur with an optional add-on to Havana, Cuba

Departing 13 February & 12 March 2004

The Travel Society is thrilled to bring you two special tours of Guatemala. **The first tour**, 17 days, 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.

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.

Prices are subject to confirmation

*Each tour is limited to
18 people*

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

NEW

Guatemala - Holy Week and Havana, Cuba

Departing 3 April 2004

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.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

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

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

Prices are subject to confirmation

*Each tour is limited to
18 people*

Your tour includes:

- Return airfare
- 11 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

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

14 days departing 9 March & 20 April 2004

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

*Each tour is
limited to
20 people*

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)

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.

Go to China now ... before the crowds return!

from \$3,846 for 18 days

New Reduced Pricing!

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

2004 Departures: 11 April, 2 May, 26 September & 17 October

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 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!

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.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Vancouver	\$3,846 pp/dbl
Victoria/Nanaimo/Kamloops	\$3,990 pp/dbl
Calgary/Edmonton	\$4,086 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,326 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,266 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,194 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,266 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec City/London	\$4,386 pp/dbl
Thunder Bay/St. John's	\$4,530 pp/dbl
Single supplement \$1,100 (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

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 time in Beijing & Shanghai

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 2004

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

Departure Dates: 18 February and 20 October 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	\$10,934	pp/dbl
Victoria	\$11,226	pp/dbl
Calgary & Edmonton	\$11,497	pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$11,545	pp/dbl
Toronto	\$11,545	pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$11,545	pp/dbl
Halifax	\$11,629	pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,999 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra
Prices are subject to confirmation

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, 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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