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Himalayan Mountain Adventures
A Trip to Mexico
Barbados' Wild Atlantic Coast

TravelScoop

The Travel Society Magazine

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November 2004

Vol. 22, No. 9

contents

Readers' Letters

Humber Valley	3
Hidden Gems in Paris	4
Eyam - The Plague Village of England's Derbyshire	4

Destinations

Himalayan Mountain Adventures	6
A Trip to Mexico	12
Barbados' Wild Atlantic Coast	17



News

Travel Digest

19

Where is this?
Find out next month!



Dance of the black hat, bhutan

editor's letter ...

The main article in this month's edition is rather longer than usual, but here at *TravelScoop* we thought that a destination that ranks very high amongst the world's wonders deserves a little more space! It's a two-country - Bhutan and Nepal - story set in one spectacular region - the Himalayas. Author J. Helen Parkyn is obviously an avid trekker who long dreamed of this, the world's greatest trekking paradise. If you would like to visit this region but doubt your hiking ability, I urge you to check out the websites given in the article, for there's a surprisingly wide range of organized tours to this region. It is obviously a paradise for nature lovers for it is estimated that Nepal, which occupies only 0.1% of the earth, is home to 8% of the world's population of birds, 4% of the planet's mammals, 11 of the world's 15 major butterfly families and 2% of all the flowering plants in the world, including more than 600 indigenous plant families and 319 species of orchids. Sounds wonderful.

Our other main story is on Mexico. I was especially pleased to receive this submission because author Rod Paterson and his wife Anne had followed in my footsteps after reading some long-ago articles of mine, finding more places than I as they went. And then, obviously comfortable travelling by bus through this country, they explored further ... going on to Oaxaca - a destination I have yet to visit in a country that I love.

And for a quick winter getaway? Frequent subscribers Ted and Judy van der Veen give some 'away from the crowds' tips for popular Barbados.

One more point. As Somerset Maugham once wrote regarding mistakes in print, "there is generally no lack of persons prepared to point them out." *Mea culpa*. In this job, I really must remember that the country Colombia is spelled with an 'o' and not a 'u'. Sorry!



Earlier this year we published Editor Ann's story on visiting St. John's, Newfoundland, in winter. It seems she isn't alone in enjoying the special atmosphere of this province in our coldest season. Now Judi Lees tells about her outdoor adventures near Corner Brook.

Humber Valley is an All-Season Centre

"Well, God bless your cotton socks," beams the woman in the small gift store at Humber Valley. I've just mentioned that I'm from BC's west coast and how much I'm enjoying skiing in Newfoundland. In her way, she is letting me know how pleased she is that a west coast skier has had a fun day on her mountain. I grin and enjoy the moment. Her down-home response is part of what I'm loving about a visit to this far-from-home island.

Yes, I'm overjoyed that I extended a business stay in St. John's in early March to see this recreational belt in western Newfoundland near Corner Brook. On this day skiing on Marble Mountain, it was easy to see why it has been lauded as some of the best skiing east of the Rockies. For one thing, it's steep, a surprising 1700-foot vertical drop, and for another, it boasts ego snow – that wondrous dry powder that is like skiing on a cloud. And lastly, there's no such thing as a line-up and everyone is friendly.

Another day, three of us and a guide did a snowshoe shuffle along a marked trail along the Lower Humber River. It was a silent, scenic journey through birch and spruce trees above the rushing river with a touch of magic: as the afternoon sun sunk low, we spotted a moose on the opposite shoreline. It trotted swiftly, looking regal as its reflection floated in the river. Truly, a winter postcard moment.

Of course, this region that boasts skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, cat skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and ice fishing in win-

ter, also offers myriad reasons to visit in warm weather: fishing, canoeing, kayaking, hiking, birding, golf and visiting historic sites on leisurely driving routes draw many tourists here. For example, The Viking Trail along route 430 leads to Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, of magnificent glacial-carved fjords. Arguably, one of Canada's most astounding slices of wilderness – you can hike some 100 kilometres, be amazed by the wildlife and wildflowers and take a boat cruise beside the dramatic shoreline.

Humber Valley offers all-season accommodations that are varied and interesting. The lovely **Strawberry Hill Resort** is country elegant with rooms in the manor house – also lovely lounges and dining room – and eight modern chalets. Former Prime Minister Trudeau as well as Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip have stayed so you know you are in for luxury. (Rates in the manor house start at \$130; the chalets sleep six and rates start at \$200).

Humber Valley Resort is a new development where high-end chalets are tucked into the trees above the Lower Humber River. The 2000-square-foot, homes have three to five bedrooms and are on large, private lots. They are being sold, mostly to off-shore owners, and then they become part of a rental pool. Perfect for several couples or a large family, rental prices are \$350 per night for a three bedroom. The new 7200-yard, forested championship golf course is another bonus as is the resort's proximity to some of the country's best salmon fishing.

Also in this region are a sprinkling of charming small inns and B&Bs. **River House Inn**, close to Marble Mountain, has six guest rooms, restaurant and bar and rates begin at \$75. **Adams House B&B**, a country home located just east of Corner Brook, is rich in antiques and rates begin at \$110. They have packages with full itineraries to see the area. **Sugar Hill Inn** is located in Gros Morne National Park. Its six rooms and one cottage range from a romantic haven – king size bed and

jacuzzi tub for two – to an economical cottage. Rates from \$76.

In Corner Brook, the largest town in the region with a population of 24,000, the **Glynmill Inn** has 81 guest rooms that include six suites. This Tudor-style hotel has an old-world charm, convention facilities, pub and restaurant, as well as a surprise in the basement: the Wine Cellar is now a candlelit, intimate restaurant where the locals go for special occasions. Room rates begin around \$100.

Serviced by Air Canada Jazz from St. John's and other major eastern cities, Newfoundland's Humber Valley is an unsung destination. If you go, whatever season you choose, prepare not only to enjoy, but to be impressed.

Strawberry Hill, P.O. Box 2200, Little Rapids, NL A2H 2N2, tel: 1 877 434 0066, e-mail: shill@strawberryhill.net, www.strawberryhill.net
Humber Valley Resort, P.O. Box 370 Humber Valley, NL A0L 1K0, tel: 1 888 4 HUMBER, www.humbervalley.com

River House Inn, 10 Marble Drive, Little Rapids, NL A2H 6E6, tel: 1 877 639 5818, e-mail: riverhouse-inn@nf.sympatico.ca

Adams House B&B, P.O. Box 283, Corner Brook NL A2H 6C9 (located at 4 Roberts Drive, Little Rapids), tel: 1 888 279 0064, e-mail: info@adamsbandb.com, www.adamsbandb.com

Sugar Hill Inn, P.O. Box 100, Norris Point, NL A0K 3V0, tel: 1 888 299 2147, e-mail: info@sugarhillinn.nf.ca, www.sugarhillinn.nf.ca

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Judi Lees

Halfmoon Bay, BC

Marble Mountain ski region has a great website: www.skimarble.com with 360° views of the base of the mountain, the slopes, the summit, the base lodge as well as details of a variety of well-priced packages from Toronto and points east – Ed.

Paris in the fall or winter? Well, why not? If you're going for museums, shopping and food the chilly months are great. Here Gillian Sloan, who lives in Sydney Australia and receives *TravelScoop* from her Toronto-based mother Dorothy, gives a few of her favourite tips.

Hidden Gems in Paris

If you've been to Paris before and 'done' the major sites and attractions, here's my list for your second visit.

Sightseeing

Musée Jacquemart-Andre. A palatial home given to the State complete with artefacts *in situ* rather than a home where art and artefacts have been brought in.

Musée Cluny. A mediaeval collection containing the famous 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestry series.

Arc de Triomphe. Who wants to climb the 284 steps in the summer heat? It's pleasant and great exercise on a bright winter's day and the reward is that famous view!

Pont d'Alma. Now, sadly, known as Diana's bridge. From there walk through the local market (on Wednesdays) to Trocadero and **Palais Gallien** which has a costume retrospective.

Shopping

BHV Department Store. Worth a trip to the basement to see the hardware.

The Abbey Bookshop (29 rue de la Parcheminerie, in a cobblestone laneway Metro St Michel/Cluny). A Canadian-owned bookstore. Why

would you go to Paris to visit a Canadian bookshop? Because Brian Spense is a charming host and may serve you coffee with maple syrup, and to wonder how he finds a book among the estimated 30,000 books in such a tiny space.

Entrée des Fournisseurs (8 rue des Francs Bourgeois). The shop stands back from the road beyond a courtyard. It stocks ribbons and buttons and is fascinating to see. On the same street are gardens featured by Picasso.

Parallele Shoes (2 rue des Francs Bourgeois near the corner of the Place des Vosges) Simple shoes – 6 colours and 6 styles in each colour!

Vane – b (74 rue de Rennes near M. Saint Suplice). They sell great suits only: jackets, skirts and pants. No searching through racks here ... you choose your style and size and an assistant disappears downstairs and bring the items to you.

Restaurant

I am always wary of recommending restaurants as their appeal can change so easily, but these popular establishments have been consistent each time we have visited over several years. Even the waitresses are always the same ladies – cheerful and bustling.

Le Relais de l'Entrecote - two restaurants under the same family management for the last 50 years (20 rue Saint-Benoit, 50 m from Saint-Germain-des-Près Station and 15 rue Marbeuf). Simple food, great cooking, few choices, fantastic value, no reservations. Their main feature is

Writers are rewarded for sharing!

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salad with walnuts, steak and *pommes frites*. (If you like medium rare ask for *au point*.) Choose their house wine. You are given a very adequate serving of steak and *frites*, and then the second half of your steak – and yet more *frites* – are brought out to you piping hot. Definitely our favourite!

Gillian Sloan
Sydney, Australia

Eyam - The Plague Village of England's Derbyshire

"Ring a ring of rosies, A pocketful of posies, Aa-tishoo ... aa-tishoo, We all fall down."

In 1665 George Viccars, a village tailor in Eyam, Derbyshire, ordered a box of cloth from London. It was not an uncommon thing for a tailor to do. Five days later George was dead, and within a matter of months so were 260 of the village's 350 inhabitants.

Over 300 years later this tranquil English village is now a tourist attrac-

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tion which owes its notoriety to George's purchase, fleas and the children's rhyme. Yes, bubonic plague-infested fleas were housed in George's cloth and Eyam, located in this lovely corner of England known as the Peak District, is now startlingly known as 'The Plague Village'.

Although the nursery rhyme we know as 'Ring around a rosie' conjures up a bucolic mental image of daisy-strewn fields, warm sunny days and laughing, dancing children, its origin in Eyam was nothing short of macabre. 'Ring a ring a rosies' describes the dreaded tell-tale circles of rose-coloured rashes the plague inflicted on its victims and posies were the nose-gays of herbs and flowers people carried in an attempt to ward off the deadly disease. 'Aa-tishoo, aa-tishoo' were the sneezes, one of the main symptoms of the disease; and all fall down was, of course, the end.

In an heroic effort to contain the plague, villagers voluntarily quarantined themselves by agreeing to remain within the confines of a stone boundary built around the village. Food was left for them at various pre-arranged locations, and the money to pay for it, according to parish records, was put into the water of the wells situated at either end of the town, to be collected by villagers from surrounding hamlets.

To commemorate the important role of these two village wells during the plague, Wakes Week is held annually at the end of August. In memory of the self-sacrifice made by the villagers, the 'Town Head' and 'Town End' wells are blessed, and 'dressed' with pictures created with thousands of flower petals and natural materials. In fact, these charming, rather unique floral tributes, have given rise to the now-popular Derbyshire art of 'well dressing'.

But let's go back for a moment to the disastrous year of the plague. Given the limited medical knowledge and resources of the time the question was, how on earth was one to guard against the pestilence? An ancient remedy advises: "Eat marigold flow-

ers daily, as a sallad, with oil and vinegar; or the tops of rue with bread and butter every morning; or infuse Rue, Sage, Mint, Rosemary, Wormwood, of each a handful, in two quarts of the sharpest vinegar, over warm embers for eight days. Then strain it through a flannel, and add half an ounce of camphire, dissolved in three ounces of rectified spirits of wine. With this wash the Loins, Face and Mouth, and snuff a little up the nose when you go abroad. Smell to a sponge dipt therein, when you approach infected persons or places." If the marigold potion failed, the next best recommended remedy was: "Pluck the tail feathers from a pigeon, set the tail on the sore, and the venome will be drawn out." If you couldn't bag a pigeon, a chicken was considered a suitable substitute, and as an added precaution the advisory was issued: "All should studiously avoid dancing, running, leaping about and lechery." It seems to me, all that would be a foregone conclusion!

It is not clear if this ghoulish origin of *Ring around a rosie* is accurate. But the tale is still told in Eyam and their parish church of St. Lawrence houses a display of the town's history and documents the courage of the inhabitants who nursed the sufferers in the quaint stone homes now known as the Plague Cottages on Church Street.

Relaxing in the brilliantly flower-decked Eyam town square I found it almost impossible to imagine the pall of terror which must have hung over the Plague Village so long ago. A local resident armed with a basket of fragrant fresh-baked bread stopped to pass the time of day and asked if I'd still be there on Saturday. "Saturdays are Carnival Days," she said. "That's when the open-air Sheep Roast takes place at the old spit over on Church Street ... if you long for oat cakes and mutton fat, you'll get none better." I was tempted to ask if the marigold concoction was still on the menu!

Eyam's tale is only one of many fascinating stories attached to the historically-rich, and often overlooked, British Midlands. Because I have family in the area, I missed the opportuni-

ty to visit any of the B&B's in the charming villages dotted across Derbyshire, and neighbouring Staffordshire. However, the excellent website www.cressbrook.co.uk covers the area, with an interesting selection of lodgings (hotels, B&B's, self-catering cottages etc.), together with their histories, and current prices. From almost any point in this area fine walks or drives bring you to charming villages with intriguing histories. Surfing www.derbyshireuk.net will encourage you to plan to explore the Celtic roots of the region, or spend a few hours wandering through country houses such as Chatsworth, home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. The gardens and fountains here alone are worth a visit. Yes, more than just a children's nursery rhyme will touch your heart in the middle of England.

Eyam is located on highway A263, an attractive 40 km drive southeast of Manchester Airport, which is served by Air Transat from Toronto with regular, scheduled flights.

*Ursula Maxwell-Lewis
Burnaby, BC*

There will be another story on exploring the Midlands and north of England in TravelScoop soon. – Ed.

Reader to Reader

I will be travelling to Europe in July of next year with my wife and daughter and am wondering if any readers could give some advice on travel in the Milan area of Italy and thoughts on driving in that region? We plan to travel from Munich to Milan for a few days and would welcome any recommendations on a half-way point to stay between those two cities, and as well places to stay in Milan itself, or perhaps in the nearby the Lake district. If the latter is the case, we could day trips in to Milan. Thank you!

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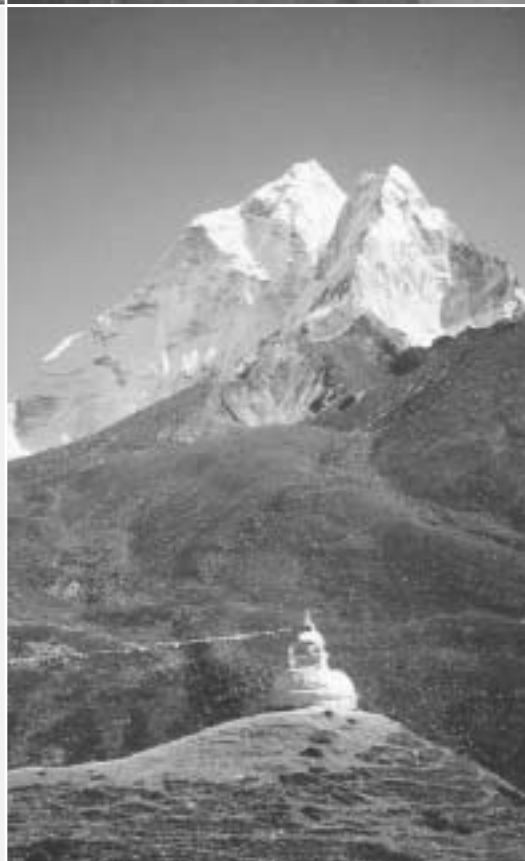
Himalayan Mountain Adventures

story and photos by J. Helen Parkyn



Have you ever dreamed of trekking in the Himalayas? It had long been a dream of mine, and last October/November it became a reality when I took a five week trip to the two mountain Kingdoms of Bhutan and Nepal. Since my return I have been reflecting on the two very different experiences. Bhutan brings to mind the mythical kingdom of Shangri-la with rice-terraced valleys, gentle smiling people and colourful festivals. Nepal, for me, was the classic high, snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas up close and personal.

Bhutan is still relatively untouched as few outsiders travel there. The population is just over 700,000 and the land area measures about 150 km north to south and 300 km east/west. The land is mostly mountainous, with forests covering 70% of them. I was joining a group of 12 organized by Bhutan Travel for a 13-day Festival Tour plus three days of trekking. Bhutan is expensive to visit, costing \$200 (all prices US) per day minimum regardless of



the tour you choose. Our 13-day tour therefore cost \$2,600 and the following three-day trek a little more per day as we did not have the four people that constitutes a usual group, only three.

To reach Bhutan I flew by United Airlines from Vancouver via Seattle and Japan to Bangkok and then Druk Airline, the national carrier of Bhutan, to Paro. I used Aeroplan points to reach Bangkok and then paid \$570 for two single legs by Druk Air, Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan and then Bhutan to Nepal. In Bangkok I stayed the night at the Rama Gardens Hotel where bed and breakfast cost \$39 including shuttle to and from the airport. In retrospect, I probably should have stayed two nights in Bangkok as I arrived late and had to leave the hotel at 4 a.m. to catch the plane at 6.50 a.m., giving me little time to recover from the long flight. I met up with the rest of the group at the Druk check-in desk where Bhutan Travel had arranged for our tickets to be held.

We landed at Paro, the only airport, in one of the only two small jet planes Druk Air owns. Our guide, Sonam, and two drivers met us at the airport. We were to travel throughout in two vans with seven seats in each. Visa formalities were easy as Bhutan Travel had prearranged this for us. Paro is a valley of rice fields at an altitude of about 7000 plus feet and a population of 2000 or so. It is the only land anywhere near the capital of Bhutan with land suitable for an airport. The valley is overlooked by the Dzong, which is a white-decorated monastic building that shares the space with the regional administration. We stayed here at a comfortable hotel with private baths built with western visitors in mind. Food in tourist hotels was adapted for us as the locals eat very hot-chili spiced food. We spent the first afternoon looking at the town and visiting the Dzong, and the best part of the next day hiking up to the spectacular Tigers Nest Monastery, which is perched up on the cliffs at close to 10,000 ft.

We quickly became aware of how few visitors this country sees. If you ask people if you can take their photo, nearly everyone says a shy "Yes." There were no requests for money, pens, or candy as you find in Nepal and many countries. As a matter of fact, we were asked never to give anything to children as they then tend to skip school to hang out where visitors go. All gifts should go directly to a school or charity. The result is I have terrific people pictures from Bhutan and far less from Nepal.

After two nights in Paro we drove about two hours to Thimpu, the capital, population 47,000. We spent just one night there before continuing our journey on over the Dochla Pass at about 10,000 ft. It takes about four hours with a meal stop to cover the 77 km winding up and down road. We calculated 450 curves/corners per 30 km on average, on a mostly one-way road with much road repair needed or in progress. This is certainly no country for those inclined to motion sickness! The lovely Punakha valley, like Paro, is covered in rice terraces. In the late afternoon we visited the beautiful white-decorated Dzong situated at the junction of

two rivers and walked through the rice fields to visit the temple of the Divine Madman known for his fertility blessings.

We stayed overnight at the Y T Guesthouse, again with private baths. Dinner that night was a fairly typical tourist buffet: a mild vegetable soup, beef stew with rice and noodles, beans and onions, potatoes in a cream sauce and, for dessert, apples in a light custard. A dish of hot cheese with chilies was available for those who liked the local fare — four of our group often ate this. The next day we headed to the large Wanduephodrang Monastery for the Tshechu festival. This festival commemorates the deeds of Guru Rimpoche, the powerful mystic who brought Tibetan Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century.

The Festivals in Bhutan are religious events for the local people who attend in large numbers. They include dances performed by monks wearing elaborate costumes and masks. They whirl and leap around the courtyards accompanied by noise from alpine horns, drums, gongs, oboe-like *gyalings* and conch shells. The audience is as interesting as the dancers! They arrive wearing their very best national dress: women clad in brightly-coloured, long wrap skirts with blouses, silk jackets and what appears to be all the jewellery they own. These festivals are family events, with picnics carried in woven bamboo baskets. As well as the religious part of the event, there is an entertainment segment carried out by clowns, who move among the crowds doing comical – and sometimes vulgar – things that provoke a good deal of laughter.

We then drove back over the Dochla Pass for another festival day in Thimpu. Here we were thrilled by one of the region's most powerful and spectacular dances, the Dance of the Black Hats. In this dance the monks assume the appearance of yogis with the power of killing and recreating life. They destroy the agents of evil and purify the ground with their footsteps dressed in long, brocade robes and tall black hats and beating drums while they dance.

While in Thimpu we had time to do some local sightseeing. We visited the market, which



Cool shades in Bhutan

had some souvenir stands as well as the ubiquitous local fruits and vegetables. We also visited an interesting Textile Museum and a Folk Heritage Museum located in a recreated 19th century, traditional Bhutanese home. On our way back from a view point above the city we paused to be introduced to a *takin* in an enclosure. This bizarre-looking animal is unique and unrelated to any other known species, although its closest relative is the arctic musk-ox. It looks as though it has been assembled from a variety of zoological sources and is the national animal of Bhutan.

The next day it was back over the Dochla Pass for a third time and then on eastwards beyond Punakha to the Bumthang Valley, a route which takes one over an 11,000 ft. pass with much twisting and turning. This valley is higher, and at about 9000 ft. is above the rice-growing line. The farming here is mostly buckwheat, apples and dairy cattle. En route we made a detour into a side valley and stayed the night at a traditional guest house. Before 1960 these guest houses, designed for visitors on foot or horse, were all that existed in the country. We experienced very hard beds, minimal lighting, heat in the living room only from a wood/dung stove, and shared plumbing. But it prepared me for some of the higher mountain lodges that we would stay at in Nepal. Otherwise all our hotels in Bhutan had private baths, even if they did not always have hot water and the electricity cut out twice in Bumthang. Our lodge in Bumthang served typical tourist meals, for example breakfasts consisted of porridge, omelets, toast and jam. There was also time there for our hosts to do laundry for guests in their outdoor washtub.

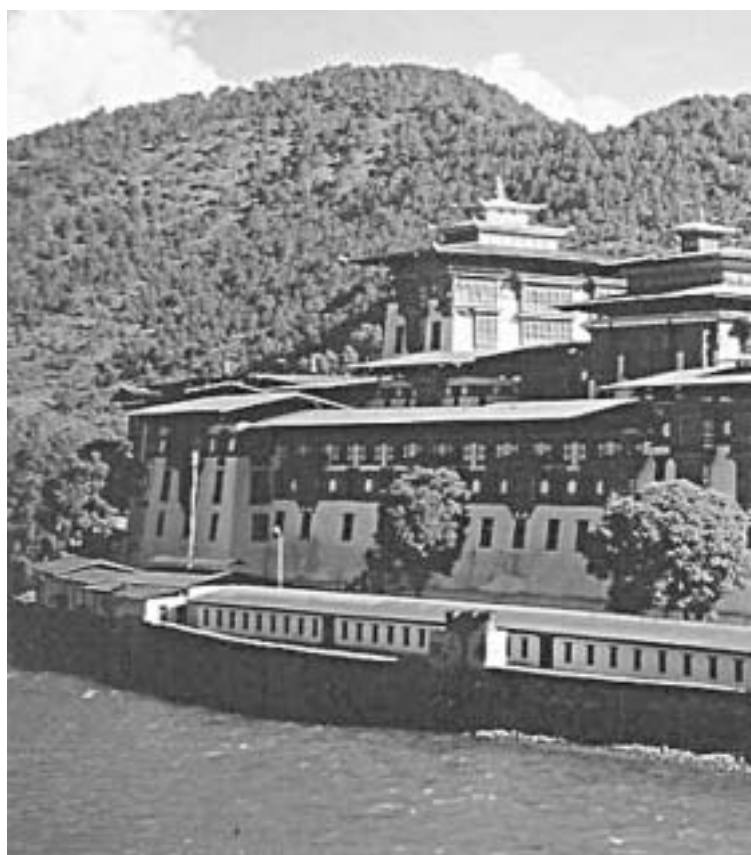
We were supposed to attend a rural festival for one of the two days in this area, however this festival was postponed due to the death of the King's grandmother at 94 and the elaborate plans for her cremation in a nearby temple. We met one of the men in charge of the arrangements and he showed us her cremation tower with a large upper area like a decorated pot where she sits as the fire burns below. At that time, students, soldiers, artists, monks and locals were all preparing the site. She is carried embalmed from Thimpu over the mountains to this particular temple in Bumthang, as all royalty are cremated here. After cremation her ashes are thrown in the river below. As an alternative to the missed festival, a not-too-strenuous day hike was planned as a change from the driving, but a grey drizzly day put paid to that plan as well. Fortunately there is plenty of sightseeing to do here. We visited temples, a water mill, a cheese factory developed with Swiss help, watched the local sport of archery and sampled local butter tea in a farm house while sitting on carpets on the floor of the farmers' combined altar/guest room. Butter tea is made of tea, butter, boiling water and salt: definitely an acquired taste!

On our way back to Panakha we stopped at a handicraft store where locally-woven carpets, colourful masks, *thankas* (religious wall hangings of special significance in this area), local costumes, cards etc., could be purchased. Lunch was a picnic at a major roadside *chorten*, or shrine, built in Nepalese style with the painted eyes on four sides. Our picnic here consisted of cheese sandwiches, two potatoes, two

hard boiled eggs, an apple and apple juice. There was an old man who lives at and maintains this *chorten* who was grateful to our guide for the leftovers.

Back in Punakha the next day we woke to sunshine. We went further up the Punakha valley to walk through the rice terraces to the Khamsum Yuelley Chorten. This beautiful *chorten*, with multiple pagoda style layers, is on a ridge about a one hour walk from our vehicles. This *chorten* is new and consecrated to world peace. The decorations were painted in traditional style and we were able to climb up inside three storeys to an outside walkway for great views. We then returned to Thimpu for some souvenir shopping. Some of the group went to the studio of a famous *thanka* painter, some to the post office tourist section for great stamps, some back to the market and others just wandered around town. We were amused by the sole traffic intersection with a point duty police man. Our guide told us they had tried modern traffic lights here but the people did not like this innovation so they were taken down and the policeman restored.

On our return to Paro we had an extra day to visit the Haa valley to the west. This day trip required, as usual, a journey over a high pass – the Chalela – and another winding road. We were blessed with fine weather at the top and obtained beautiful views of Chomolhari (the Sacred Mountain of the Goddess). We walked along the open ridge



and enjoyed a picnic lunch before dropping into the valley where we noticed a large army camp that housed the Indian Army. The Haa valley is close to the Tibet border and India keeps troops here to help protect the area and keep an eye on the Chinese to the north.

After the 13-day festival/sightseeing tour with the group of 12 (seven Americans and five Canadians), I had planned to go on a three-day trek before travelling on to Nepal. Unfortunately I caught a bad cold on the day before we were due to set off (it had been going around the whole group), so I decided to stay behind in Paro to recover for the 14 day trek in Nepal. Actually it turned out to be a good option as I had some interesting experiences that would be unlikely with a group. First, I had time to visit the Paro museum and walk about the rice paddies photographing all stages of harvesting. Then I met one of the two local doctors by chance and had tea with her, learning about health care in Bhutan. She had obtained her medical training in Rangoon. Finally on the last day, when my cold was much improved, I was invited into a small primary school and not only enjoyed watching the children learn "Dorchi has a dog and Dachen has a cat" from their English reader, but also had an interesting visit with the head teacher. I shall be sending her the address of V.S.O and C.U.S.O as she would like to get an overseas teacher into the school. They teach mainly in English in Bhuta as it would be too expensive to translate all their text-

books and many Bhutanese go to India for higher education where English is still a common language.

Bhutan is a delightful and safe country to visit with friendly people. If you fancy going, make sure that your visit is long enough to get at least as far as the Punakha valley. And the inclusion of a festival or two will definitely enhance your trip. Remember ... you'll use a large amount of film. Supplies of both print and slide film can be bought in Thimpu, but could be limited elsewhere.

After 16 days in Bhutan, I flew to Kathmandu in Nepal, enjoying wonderful views of Kachenjunga, Lotse and Everest on the way. It is important to get a seat on the right side of the plane for this flight.

This part of my trip had been arranged by Elsie, a hike leader of the Skyline Hiking Club based in Alberta, with whom I spend a week backcountry hiking in the Rockies each year. (Skyline Hikers, P.O. Box 3814, Spruce Grove, AB T7X 3B1, tel: 403 289 6272, e-mail: skyhiker@telusplanet.net) This 14-day Everest trek cost \$980 (again all prices US) which included lodges, porters, a guide or *sirdar*, food and domestic airfare to and from Luckla. In addition I paid a total of \$126 for five nights in Kathmandu plus the airport transfers.

I arrived in Kathmandu and was met at the airport by a representative of Himalayan Ecological Trekking, the local company that was making all the arrangements for our group. I was taken to the four star Kathmandu hotel, the Annapurna, and had the rest of the day to do laundry, relax by the pool and shop for supplies I still needed for the trek such as more film. The Annapurna has western-style rooms with private bath and TV, an outdoor pool and large buffet breakfasts were included. I was joined by another group member that day and we had a local guided tour arranged for the next day. Elsie and the rest of the group would not arrive until late the next day as they were in the Annapurna area on another shorter trek.

Our tour the following day was to cover many of the local highlights. We had a car and driver plus guide for a cost of \$70 for the day including lunch. The first stop was the Durbar or old temple square of Patan. As well as a variety of temples, there is an old royal palace with a statue of a goddess standing on a turtle and fine carved wooden windows. There are also sunken areas with water spouts that serve as communal wash areas and a variety of street life to be seen in nearby alleys. The next stop was Boudhanath, where the square is dominated by the largest *stupa* (or shrine) in Nepal. There is a road around it, but we also climbed up and circled around closer to the eyes that stare out on four sides. After lunch we moved on to Pashupatinath, a holy site dedicated to Shiva on the banks of the sacred but polluted river Bagmati. This is a holy cremation site, as the waters flow to the revered Ganges. Two people were being cremated as we visited. Our final stop of the day was Swayambhunath, commonly known as the monkey temple. 365 steps lead up to the top and monkeys scaveng-



Punakha Dzong, Bhutan



ing for food will be seen on the way. As well as the temples on top, there is a fine view over Kathmandu. By now it was 4.30 p.m. and we thought we'd had enough sites and sights for one day. We ate dinner that evening in a Chinese restaurant. Here in Kathmandu most international eating options are possible.

On 18 October, a total of 21 of us (11 tour participants, plus Elsie, plus our Nepalese leader and eight porters) set off on the 14-day trek to Kala Pattar. This is a trekking peak at over 18,000 ft. reached by following the Everest approach route. We flew to Luckla in a Canadian Twin Otter plane that had been chartered for the group. We landed uphill at 7.15 a.m. on Luckla's sloped runway and headed for a lodge for a second breakfast (we'd had to get up at 4.45 a.m!). We then set out and walked for nearly three hours to Phakding where we would stay the first night. We had a glimpse of snow capped peaks at Luckla, but most of the first day was along the Dudh Kashi River. We walked through villages and saw quite a bit of cultivation at these altitudes. Luckla is just below 10,000 ft. and Phakding a bit lower. Our first night was at a typical lodge and couldn't be described as luxurious. Rooms had hard wooden beds with thin mattresses and no other furniture. There was a loose cover over the mattress and a pillow, but we had all brought our own sleeping bags and pillow cover. The rooms had very thin walls so ear plugs were a must. Toilets were privies with holes in the ground outside and we always supplied our own toilet paper though this essential commodity could be bought at any lodge on the trail if anyone ran short. There was a shower stall outside and hot water could be ordered to fill the bucket on top of the shower stall. We had lunch on arrival: spaghetti with shredded vegetables and cheese which tasted very good. Drinks were a choice of hot lemon, tea with milk or mint tea which came to the table in thermoses. All are usually sweetened unless ordered otherwise. Meals are

served in the main living room of the lodge, which often in the evening would be heated by a wood/dried-dung stove. After lunch the first day, many in the group had a nap to make up for the early start, but others walked about the village or read. Dinner was a rather tasteless soup, followed by flat bread stuffed with veggies and fried potatoes. Most of us were ready for bed around 8 p.m.

The next morning we set off at 7.45 after a breakfast of porridge, toast and jam. We continued up the Dudh Kashi river crossing from side to side five times over narrow suspension bridges. En route we met many porters, other trekkers and trains of *dzokio* (half yak and half cow) going up or down. It was important not to get stuck on a swinging bridge when the *dzokio* crossed as they have long sharp horns! Some of the porters' loads looked excessive and their footwear was often very poor but our trek company was very responsible in that they limited our baggage weight to 11 kg each and they ensured each porter had decent footwear plus hat, gloves and jacket. We had an early lunch of vegetable noodle soup, cookies and tea. We then came to the first major climb of the trip, zigzagging up about 1800 ft to Namche Bazaar, taking a very short detour half way up for our first glimpse of Everest. We had started in sunshine but the clouds descended on us by the time we arrived mid-afternoon. This is a common weather pattern at this time of the year. We stayed at the famous Base of Everest Lodge which was fancier than all the others, with twin rooms, private bathrooms with flush toilet, shower and sink and – sometimes – hot water. As they have hydro electricity here the lodge has a drying machine, so overnight laundry service was available.

The next day we had a day to explore the area and acclimatize. We started with a short uphill climb to the ridge above Namche where the local museum is located. There we were thrilled to have a fine clear view of what we had been so looking forward to: Everest and nearby Lotse. No need to tell you considerable time was taken with solo and group picture!. Then it was in to the museum, which gave good information about the landscape and flora of the area.

Most of us then took another climb up to Everest View



Young monks with prayer flags

Lodge. The very rich take helicopters to this Lodge and rush to their rooms with oxygen, thus avoiding all the walking and acclimatization! From this hotel we descended a little to Khumjung for lunch and to visit the school developed by Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust. There is a bust statue of Sir Edmund outside the row of huts that comprise the school. Our return to Namche offered few views as the afternoon clouds had again descended. However, as we walked through the streets of Namche we were interested to see many shops selling all types of outdoor gear with famous brand names such as North Face and Patagonia. The gear is very cheap, e.g \$15 to \$20 for a Gortex jacket, however if anyone believes they are really brand name, I am sure I can find a bit of sage brush desert to sell them! I did, however, buy a light fleece sweater as I was finding two light ones more useful than one heavy one. Each day the temperatures warmed during the day and lighter removable layers were the most useful.

The next day we set off for Tenboche, a monastery set on a ridge at 12,665 ft. with spectacular views, including fabulous and famous sunrises and sunsets. This ridge is the destination for those with no more than seven or eight days to trek in this region. Our hike started with a long traverse with great mountain views all the way. Ana Dablan was becoming increasingly dominant and is a great peak to photograph. We descended to Punki Tenga for lunch of noodle soup and fries before a long ascent to the top of the ridge. On the way we saw many of the lovely bluebell-shaped gentians and also a few *tahr*, which is a local, wild goat-like animal. We arrived at about 2.15 p.m. in plenty of time to get to the monastery for 3 p.m. when there is a service open to visitors. We stood or sat in silence for an hour listening to the chanting of the mantras, the drums, cymbals and both long and short horns. Afterwards we had a chance to look about the inside of the temple area and take a few photos, which is strictly forbidden during the service itself. After our dinner of rice, vegetables and fruit cocktail we played cards until about 9 p.m. and then I went to bed as I wanted to get up early.

I managed to rise at 5.30 a.m. as I wanted to climb the ridge above the lodge and monastery area for the famous sunrise views, because clouds late the previous day had blocked the sunset views. The group was on the trail by 8 a.m. but we stopped shortly thereafter at a spring where the porters filtered water for us. This water filtering was done once or twice a day throughout the trip. After a short descent to Debuche we crossed another suspension bridge and hiked up the side of a river valley with breathtaking views of Ama Dablan all the way. Trailside photographs as well as scenery are always plentiful in this region: a porter with a load of lumber, a yak train passing, a woman carrying leaves for compost etc. We reached our destination of Pheriche early afternoon and, as we were to be here two nights to acclimatize, again it was a chance to relax and get some laundry done. There is no electricity here so the lodge staff relied on

drying our clothes outside in the cold wind on our layover day while we all made use of their shower 'room', which consists of a porter carrying a bucket of hot water to a hole in the roof of the shower room for each of us in turn. Dinner tonight was a welcome large helping of spaghetti with tomato sauce. Tonight the large living room of the lodge was full of people from many different countries. A group from Prague insisted on singing rather longer than most of us appreciated as their voices would not win them any vocal prizes! But it was all good fun.

Our hike the next day was over the ridge behind Pheriche to Dingboche for lunch and back again. On our return to Pheriche we went to the Mountain Clinic for a presentation on all forms of altitude sickness given by one of the two volunteer American doctors based there and each of us had our oxygen saturation checked. This village, at 14,043 ft. is where anyone not acclimatizing well should stay longer or plan to descend. Headaches, loss of appetite and insomnia are all early signs of altitude problems. Our group was thrilled to learn we were all doing well, so we were enthusiastic to be up at 6 the next morning to carry on uphill.

We awoke to snow on the ground and low clouds but we carried bravely on, though as we walked through some summer yak pastures and on up through rocky terrain, visibility deteriorated. When we reached one of the two Everest Memorials the snow was starting again. The memorial cairns included one for Scott Fischer who was among the many who died on Everest in 1996. We reached Lobuche, at 16,464 ft in time for a lunch of a vegetable sherpa stew, prawn chips and a hot orange drink. The eco-lodge we were to stay in was surprisingly good with spacious twin rooms, clothes hooks, mirrors and basins of hot water. The snow continued and we were very relieved we were not tenting. The next morning there was over eight inches of snow and it was still coming down. Going up further would not be possible today as the trail crosses two rock-strewn moraines and the footing would be very dangerous. The locals estimated that trekkers would have to sit and wait at least two days for the weather to clear. We did not have that kind of time, as Lobuche was our last stop before the ascent of Kala Pattar.



Thimpu festival

We were very disappointed not to have the high views of Everest that we had so been looking forward to, but of course the weather was beyond our control. Instead we decided to descend and use our spare day to see more of the Sherpa villages below. With difficulty and much help from our porters we struggled back down over the snowy, slippery trail to Pheriche. The next day the weather was very mixed with intermittent rain and hail and, late in the day, a little sun as we descended again. We detoured off the main trail to visit a monastery at upper Pangboche before spending the night at Debuche where we hung our wet clothes to dry over the woodstove in the living room and enjoyed our pizza and apple pie dinner.

The next day the skies cleared and we retraced our route back through Tengboche and Phunki Tenga towards Namche, but turned off to stay the night in Khumjung at the Hidden Village Lodge. On arrival some of us headed to the renowned local bakery/café to enjoy some delicious chocolate or apple Danish and banana rolls. Later that day, four of us, who were current or retired health care workers, went with Elsie to visit the hospital in Kunde, a nearby village. This was the first hospital built by Sir Edmund and the Himalayan Trust in 1964. It is staffed by two doctors and support staff. One of the doctors is a volunteer Canadian and the other is the first Sherpa doctor in the area. We had a guided tour from the Sherpa doctor, seeing their two clinic rooms and in-patient areas. As we visualize an emergency in Canada and calling an ambulance to get to the hospital, we remember that in this area the only way to the hospital, if you cannot walk, is in a basket on a porter's back. We saw a person being carried this way down from Lobuche, likely suffering from severe altitude sickness in the form of cerebral or pulmonary edema. We also learnt that most evacuations of more serious problems to Kathmandu have to go down the trail to the airport at Luckla the same way. Helicopter evacuation is too expensive for the Himalayan Trust to fund, although well-insured tourists may go out that way.

As we had gained an extra day by our turn around at Lobuche, three of us set out the next day on a day hike up a side valley to Thamo while the remainder of the group decided to take the day off and returned by the direct route to Namche. Four of the party had succumbed to food poisoning the previous night and were not feeling too well. We were pleased with our choice. On the way we stopped in a village to watch dancers celebrating a local festival. We enjoyed this trail and would have liked to have more time to go all the way up to the Thame Monastery. On my arrival back in Namche, I found a note waiting for me from a friend from my home town. She was staying nearby and invited me to her lodge for tea. Remarkably, she is in her late seventies and was spending 23 days trekking alone apart from the services of a porter/guide and taking in the Mani Rimdu festival at Tenboche monastery. She had previously trekked in the area two years before and loved it.


Our return over two days back to the airport at Luckla

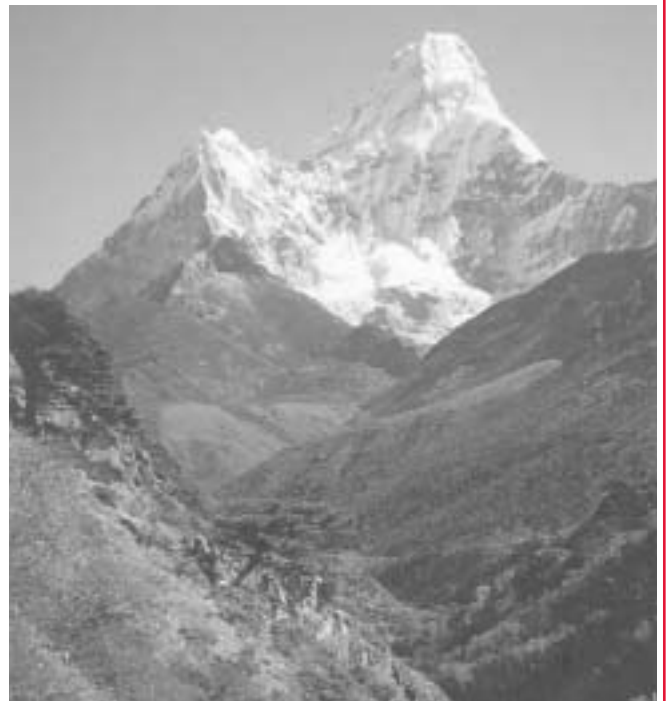
was uneventful except for the food poisoning which left some members feeling like washed out dishrags. For some it was Cipro and Gastrolyte for breakfast. The final night there was a celebration with our trekking crew with local music and dancing, but unfortunately I missed this as the food poisoning caught up with me that night. At least I had not had to trek feeling under the weather.

I wrapped up my trip with two days of sightseeing and shopping in Kathmandu and a visit to an interesting old temple city called Bhaktapur, before the long flight home via Bangkok again. Some of the group went to Chitwan on the lowlands of Nepal where riding elephants and looking for tigers (very rarely seen) is the attraction.

Overall I thought the two parts of my wonderful Himalayan adventure were splendid contrasts. With the festivals and culture of Bhutan and the high-mountain trek in Nepal it was all I could have dreamed of as a travel adventure. I am already looking forward to going back to the area and trekking again. Spring and fall are the best times to visit, thus avoiding the monsoon season and the extreme cold and snow of winter. The Kala Pattar trek in Nepal can be arranged through many adventure tour companies as well as the company we used.

Bhutan Travel's helpful Marie Brown can be reached in New York State by calling 1 800 950 9908, e-mail: bhutantravel@earthlink.net or visit www.bhutantravel.com

Himalayan Ecological Trekking Ltd. can be reached by writing to P.O. Box 10413, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal, e-mail tibetet@mos.com.np or visit www.himalayanecological.com for details of their tours of the Himalayan countries. 



Ama Dablan, Nepal



A Trip to Mexico

story and photos by Rod Paterson

We wondered, “Where can we go, as winter sets in, that would be both interesting and fairly warm?” For some ideas we browsed through back copies of *Travel Scoop*. Several articles on Mexico by our editor Ann caught our attention (1991 and 2001) and so we decided to give it a try. To our delight we were to discover her enthusiasm was fully justified! We had a wonderful trip. The weather was fine, everything went very smoothly and it was also very reasonable in cost. The following is an abbreviated account of our travels and some of the more interesting places we visited.

After a very early departure from Ottawa we arrived in Mexico City at about 1.00 p.m., where we had lunch at a pleasant restaurant on the upper floor of the airport terminal. A taxi then took across town to the bus station and soon we were on a bus bound for Taxco and a spectacular ride on a road that winds up through the hills. Upon arrival in Taxco we squeezed ourselves and our luggage into a VW Beetle taxi and experienced a hair-raising ride up narrow, cobbled streets with several hairpin bends to our hotel. This turned out to be a real oasis in the centre of the city (accommodation details at the end). The rooms at the Posada San Javier are fairly small and basic. However, the setting is idyllic – all set around a lush tropical garden with a small swimming pool. The breakfast room/restaurant is on an upper level and you have to go outside and up the street a few yards to reach it. The rooftop patio there has a wonderful panorama of the city.

Taxco is a delightful place, set on the sides of a steep hill with houses jumbled all over and narrow streets

between, all very old-world Spanish. On the main square is the Santa Prisca church – an incredible baroque building which is well worth a visit. The Cultural Centre on the plaza houses an attractive museum/art gallery. On our first morning there we discovered a huge parade in progress – a celebration of youth – with decorated cars, trucks and floats with children on them throwing candies to the crowd. It was very colourful and a great introduction to the festive atmosphere of Mexico's old cities. Just down from the plaza is a huge market where you can find all sorts of things: food, clothing, shoes, fabric and local crafts. One large section comprises shops selling silverware. We were most impressed by the selection of silver products here and in other stores. The quality is generally high but they are by no means cheap.

We spent two nights in Taxco. On our second day we took a minibus (combi) out to Las Grutas (the Grottoes), a ride of about an hour through spectacular countryside. There is a large building near the entrance containing a variety of restaurants and stores – not high-class but casual and fun. The little bus returns every hour and the driver will tell you where to wait. The grottoes themselves were spectacular – in fact, some of the finest we have ever seen – with huge caverns and impressive formations. Visitors are taken through (for about 2 km) in groups with a guide. This is a well-organized National Park and a popular place with



*Sculpture of an eagle warrior in the Museum of the Templo Mayor
- Mexico City*

locals as well as tourists.

Then it was back on the bus to Mexico City, where we'd planned to stay for six nights. Our hotel – Casa Gonzalez – was a real gem. Comprised of four old homes containing 35 en suite rooms, the property stands on a quiet leafy street close to the Zona Rosa and offers a lovely little garden for relaxation after a day of sightseeing. All meals are offered here and there's also a wide choice of restaurants nearby. There also a 24-hour internet café. The charming and multilingual host, Jorge Ortiz, provided invaluable help and advice.

Close by, near the 'Angel' monument on Reforma, you can buy tickets for the double-decker tourist bus. For a flat price you can climb on and off these all day. They run an extensive route around the city and we used them to visit several sites on our first day, ending up with a full tour to help get our bearings.

On this first day we visited the Palacio de Bellas Artes (more later), went to the top of the Latin American Tower for a fabulous 360° view of the city and visited the cathedral – a gloriously ornate building on the Zocalo, the city's huge central plaza. We wandered in Alameda Park and visited the Diego Rivera Museum, a smallish museum where you can view the fascinating mural *Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda*, featuring a huge cast of characters. Later, we stopped off in pleasant Chapultepec Park to wander around.

With the odd exception, we carried our own picnic lunches. In most places in Mexico there is a plaza or park where you can sit and relax and watch the colourful world around you. Also, except on the first day, we used a combination of buses (peseros) and the Metro to get around Mexico City. We found they were all very efficient and inexpensive.

On another day we went back to the Zocalo and spent time both in the Palacio Nacional and in the Department of Public Education, a few blocks away. These two buildings house a wonderful collection of Diego Rivera murals, all set in open galleries around courtyards. They depict much of the history of Mexico, scenes of early and contemporary life in the country and some extraordinary works of political criticism and protest; altogether a fascinating display. Don't miss them!

Also adjacent to the Zocalo is the Templo Mayor – the excavated remains of the temple of Tenochtitlan which was the ancient predecessor of the present city. Associated with this is a fine, modern museum which contains many intriguing sculptures, including the impressive Moon Goddess stone. There is also a large model of the original city, which was an important centre even prior to the time of the Spanish invasion.

One day we went, of course, to the renowned Museum of Anthropology. This is quickly reached by bus (pesero) along Reforma. We were most impressed by the building and by the displays, which are not only extraordinarily interesting but also very well presented. In fact, throughout Mexico we were impressed by the quality of the museum

displays. They are modern, informative, intelligently done and most have English signage.

From the museum we walked through the park to the Castillo de Chapultepec, set on a hill with fine views across the city. Here we were admitted free, as seniors! This is a grand and imposing building with many rooms furnished as they were when it was the residence of Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlotta. On the roof level we were amazed to find a beautiful formal garden.

On another day we took the Metro to Coyoacan, a prosperous and attractive community in the south of the city and home to the Frida Kahlo Museum. If you have been to see the film *Frida* you will have seen this vivid blue house and its colourful interior. It is set up as it was when Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera lived there and contains a small gallery of Frida's paintings. It was well worth the visit. The central plaza of Coyoacan is shaded by trees and is a great spot for lunch. It is a fair walk from the Viveros metro station to the museum but it's worth doing as you pass many lovely old houses/mansions. A quicker way to return is to take one of the frequent peseros which go to one or other of the nearby Metro stations.

We took one excursion day out of Mexico City to Los Piramides, the old city of Teotihuacan. This is almost indescribable and an absolute 'must'; it's certainly not hard to believe that this was one of the largest – and most mysterious – cities in the ancient world. (It was also featured in the film *Frida*.) With the Metro and a short bus ride it took about an hour to get there. The site, set in a wide valley, is still being excavated. The site covers a large area and there is much to see and do, including climbing the Sun and/or Moon pyramids if you so wish. The day was hot and the site is exposed, with very little shade (save for some large cacti), so we were very pleased to take a midday lunch break at a delightful restaurant (La Gruta) just outside the East Gate. It is in a cool grotto and very attractive – a real find (see Lonely Planet for directions). Fortunately you can get a bus back to the city from the north end of the site, near the Moon Pyramid, and so do not have to walk all the way back to the entrance gate.

While in Mexico City we went to three evening events. We attended a superb performance of Wagner's *Das*

Rheingold and also enjoyed a performance of the *Ballet Folklórico*, offered two days a week, which is a superb, colourful and impressive show. Both of these were in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, a magnificent building and well worth a visit in its own right. (A warning though – it is not air conditioned, so wear light clothes if you are going to a performance there.) The Palacio has a good restaurant if you should feel like a pre- or post-concert meal. On the third occasion we went to the cathedral for a performance called *Voices in the Cathedral*, which we had assumed to be a concert. In fact, it turned out to be an historical pageant featuring the cathedral and its history. We were taken around the great edifice and treated to enactments in full period costume, at times with live musicians. It was beautifully done and again we were thrilled with the experience. However, it was all in Spanish and we missed a lot, as our

understanding of the language is very limited. It is given once or twice a week and tickets can be obtained in the cathedral.

After five days we felt that there was so much more we wanted to see in Mexico City, so we hope to go back again. It is indeed a wonderful city, full of fascinating sights and easy to get around.

But we had planned to move

on to the city of Puebla, an easy two hour bus ride from Mexico City (or directly from the airport if you would like to make this your first stop – Ed.) This was a convenient place to break the journey to Oaxaca. For our two night stay we chose Hotel Palace, a block from the central plaza, where we enjoyed a huge, light and quiet room. We took our breakfasts across the street in the Posada San Pedro, which offered a very good buffet.

Puebla is a prosperous, lively and historic city with numerous fine churches. The zocalo is large and colourful, with many artisan stalls and balloon sellers and often a live band. Not to be missed is the cathedral with its 'cypress' altar in the centre, the 'altar of the kings' at one end, beautifully-carved choir stalls and numerous side chapels. There was a wedding in progress when we visited and the organ music and singing, with the fine acoustics of this great building, were a wonderful experience. Another church worth a visit is the Templo de Santo Domingo. The interi-



Moon Pyramid, Teotihuacan

or is nothing special, with one exception: the baroque Rosario chapel. “Stunning”, or perhaps “overkill” are the only words I think of to describe this golden wonder. We also spent some time in the Museo Amparo; a fine museum with excellent displays of pre-Hispanic art, as well as paintings and some fine furniture. We devoured our picnic lunch in a lovely little public garden behind the convention center, not far from the Artists’ Barrio. It’s a little oasis, resplendent with bougainvillea and home to many birds. (We found this, as well as many other sites mentioned here, thanks to the aforementioned articles by editor Ann.) We saw very few non-Mexican tourists in Puebla, but it is a city well worth visiting.

From Puebla we took the bus to Oaxaca, a four-hour trip through spectacular mountain scenery which was dry but contained many flowers and cacti. Our hotel, Las Golondrinas, was five blocks from the centre. As is common in Mexico, it appeared rather unprepossessing from the outside. Once inside, however, we found it to be very attractive, with the rooms set around three small courtyards, in one of which breakfast was served. Our room was large and comfortable and the hotel staff are happy to arrange local tours which will pick you up at the front door.

Oaxaca is set in a wide valley and is a popular destination for tourists, many of them from Europe. It is a pleasant town for walking and there are a number of good artisan stores, especially AMARO, which is run by the Women’s Cooperative. Again we enjoyed the zocalo with its lively socializing at all times of the day and evening; the cathedral with its fine stained glass windows and the Santo Domingo church with its impressive interior richly decorated with much gold, fine paintings and a superb altarpiece.

Adjacent to the cathedral is the Cultural Centre/Museum which contains superb pre-Hispanic artefacts: sculptures, urns and jewellery of the Zapotecs and Mixtecs, all beautifully displayed. And do pause for a drink in the old Camino Real Hotel nearby which was once a convent.

One day we signed up for the tour of the Ethnobotanical Garden, located within the walls of the Santo Domingo complex. The garden is a public/private venture started in 1998 where the objective is to preserve endangered species and to display a representative collection of native Mexican plants, with emphasis on those with cultural uses. The two-hour

tour, led by an American woman who is participating in the project, was most interesting and informative and we were especially intrigued by the variety of cacti and other succulents. There is not a lot of shade, so wear a good hat.

While in Oaxaca we went on two local tours, both of which I would recommend highly. One was a half-day tour to Monte Alban. This spectacular site is located on a high hill just outside the town and the views alone are worth the trip. This was a Zapotec settlement, began in 500 B.C. which lasted until around 800 A.D., when it was abandoned for unknown reasons. Many of the structures are impressive, including a ball court, an astronomical observatory and a series of fine reliefs. Our guide was very informative and helpful.

Our second tour was a full-day trip to Mitla and Huerve el Agua. Mitla is another Zapotec site – well worth a visit but not as impressive as Monte Alban. Parts of it were destroyed by the Spanish to build a church nearby. We then reached Huerve el Agua (Water Boils) along a winding road through the hills. Another spectacular site with wonderful views of the surrounding country. Here, mineral springs bubble from the ground to create a ‘waterfall’ of crusted salts above a steep cliff and a series of pools where you can bathe if you wish and enjoy the view.

During the return journey we made three short stops: a small mescal factory where this strong drink, similar to tequila, is manufactured from the hearts of the maguey plants; a high-quality (but expensive!) rug weaving centre in Teohihuacan del Valle and, finally, the site of the Thule tree – a huge cypress said to have the greatest girth of any tree in the world and to be over 2000 years old. It is set in a pleasant village with an attractive church close by. This was a fascinating and varied day out and as there were only eight of us on the tour it was all very friendly and easy-going.

Oaxaca is a lovely spot, quiet and relaxed, with fine crafts for sale and friendly people. And there are many interesting places to visit in the surrounding countryside. At the end of our stay in Oaxaca we flew back to Mexico City to connect with our flight home. This avoided the long bus trip back over ground we had already covered but, of course, was significantly more expensive. Here, now, as a few details to help you make a similar trip. We are sure you will enjoy as much as we did!



Clowns entertain in Pueblo's zocalo

Some Details ...

Accommodation

We can recommend all the hotels in which we stayed. They are all listed in the Lonely Planet *Mexico* guide and we made most arrangements by e-mail. Hotel prices were all about US\$60.00 night, with breakfast extra.

Taxco: Hotel Posada San Javier, Estacadas 32, e-mail posadasanjavier@hotmail.com tel: (code: 011 52) 762 622 3177.

Mexico City: Casa Gonzalez, Rio Sena 69, Mexico DF 06500, tel: 55 5514 3302, fax: 55 5511 0702, e-mail: J.Ortiz.Moore@hotmail.com (due to change to casa.gonzalez@prodigy.net.mx soon).

[Editor's note: Mr Ortiz most certainly is helpful. I e-mailed him before publication of this article to confirm his telephone number as the codes for Mexico can be confusing. He sent a charming message by return with lots of details of his property, including current prices which are from \$350 - \$700 pesos per room per night (approx. C\$38 - 76). Single and family rooms are also available. Breakfast, lunch and dinner cost approximately C\$7, \$11 and \$14 respectively. Visa and Mastercard are accepted, but not AmEx. If payment is made in cash there is a discount. Mr Ortiz also added the following valuable advice: "The best way to get to the house is to take an airport taxi. Buy a prepaid ticket at the booth at the luggage pick up area (or to your left after you exit customs). It should be for zone number 4 and at this moment it costs \$142.00 pesos (about C\$15.50). With your ticket, go outside and a dispatcher will assign you to a white and yellow cab. You can tip the driver \$20.00 pesos if you wish. If you have a lot of luggage and do not fit in a regular cab a minivan costs about double the price of a cab."]

Puebla: Hotel Palace, Calle 2 Ote 13, tel: 22 232 2430, e-mail hotpalas@prodigy.net.mx

Oaxaca: Hotel Las Golondrinas, Tinico y Palacios 411, tel: 951 514 3298, e-mail: lasgolon@prodigy.net.mx

Transportation

We were impressed with the fast, efficient intercity buses. In some cases a given route may be served by more than one bus company, so you can shop around for convenient times. First class and *executivo* buses are non-stop and use the four-lane toll roads. Second class buses take the slow route, stopping in towns and villages along the way. In all classes you are allocated reserved seats and baggage is tagged and treated with respect.

I used the internet before leaving to check on bus companies and times, which proved to be worthwhile and for our first trip, on our day of arrival, was reserved by telephone. For all the others, however, we bought tickets at the bus station on arrival in each city.

Guidebooks

We found the Lonely Planet guide *Mexico* to be invaluable. It has excellent information on the bus stations in Mexico City and the bus companies serving each destination. There are good recommendations for restaurants and useful details on getting to specific places. The other essential guide is

the *Michelin Green Guide*, with its information on sights, museums, etc. and helpful advice on getting to some of them.

Taxis

The bus stations in Mexico City have kiosks where you pre-pay for a taxi and give the driver a ticket. Our hotel also arrange for a reliable taxi, who would also pick us up again after a concert.

Clothing

Mexican men rarely wear shorts. Shorts were acceptable in Taxco and Oaxaca (both touristy towns) but I would not recommend wearing them in Mexico City or Puebla.

Language

We took an evening course called 'Spanish for Travellers' at a local high school shortly before going. This was invaluable in many small ways, such as asking directions on the street, buying things and understanding signs. Staff in hotels and restaurants generally had a reasonable grasp of English.

Restaurants

The following are some of the restaurants that we especially enjoyed:

Taxco: *Hosteria El Adobe*, Plazuela de San Juan 13. Excellent food and very helpful staff.

Mexico City: *Fonda El Refugio*, Liverpool 166, in the Zona Rosa.

Café de Tacuba, Tacuba 28, in the Centro Historico area. A large busy place with high ceilings, an old-fashioned atmosphere and good food.

Majestic Hotel - 7th floor terrace, which offers a wonderful view over the Zocalo. Food pretty good, service so-so.

Puebla: *Fonda de Santa Clara*, Calle 3. Good food and a nice family atmosphere.

Oaxaca: *Restaurante El Naranjo*, Trujano 203. Set in an attractive courtyard with good food.

El Sagrario, Valdivieso 120. Very good food and service. Go upstairs.

El Asador Vasco. Has a lovely upstairs balcony overlooking the zocalo and serves excellent seafood. 🍴

Rod Paterson is a TS subscriber who lives in Ottawa, ON.



Casa Gonzalez, Mexico City

Barbados'

Wild Atlantic Coast

by Judy and Ted van der Veen



Would you really like to get away from it all in Barbados? Those wonderful photo shots in the ads with breakers crashing onto an almost deserted beach? Glenn Murdoch's *Follow the Sun to Barbados* (January 2004) provided important information on touring Barbados on your own and we would like to complement his article with news of our recent 'find' that kept us completely away from the tourist side of the island.

Imagine: the sound of the surf just outside your window overlooking the wild Atlantic coast; solid mahogany furniture made from trees cut on the site, and leaded windows with intricately-shaped beveled glass, not just in the dining room, but also in your bedroom; beaches as far as the eye can see; an 85-acre rain forest just steps away; walks along the old railway bed. Where, you ask? The **Edgewater Inn** at Bathsheba in the Parish of St. Joseph, about mid-point on the Atlantic coast, has several times been selected as "The Best Small Inn in Barbados". The new owners (Dec. 2003) of this 20-room inn are dedicated to the restoration of this enchanting place which has been an inn since 1847, although parts of the building are over 300 years old. Their

website states, "We are located in the least developed and most natural and unspoiled area of the island. This makes our side of the island a welcome treat from Barbados' crowded south and west coasts. No beach "hustlers", no jet skis. Just peace and quiet." We agree. (Unfortunately with the property's recent change of ownership and ensuing restoration and 'up-upgrades', the rates have increased since our visit. However, it's still highly recommended – and watch for on-line specials [*as we go to press there a 7-night package with room, food and car rental from US\$575 pp – Ed.*] and even if you don't stay here it's certainly worth a visit for a meal on the terrace with that great view.) We were delighted with this place, and if you go suggest you spring for one of the best rooms in the house. Room 218 with the "top hotel room view in Barbados" is really a suite, bedroom with king-size bed, two full bathrooms, a separate lounge area, and a large balcony looking north over Cattlewash Beach. Room 221, as large as our combined bedroom-lounge but all in one, has two small balconies facing southward toward the "Soup Bowl", a championship surfing site. Swimming on this coast is not safe; however, ask about the bathing pools that are perfectly safe except at high tide. There is a small swimming pool at the inn. Rooms have a small refrigerator and coffeemaker. Continental breakfast in

the dining room is included in the room rate, full breakfast menu also available; full- and half-board packages can also be arranged. We did have dinner here the night we arrived; service was good and the food nicely prepared. However, we found other restaurants with more varied and regional cuisine for our other meals.

We had only three full days in Barbados. We had arranged taxi pick-up from the airport through the hotel (US\$37 for four adults.) The hotel also arranged a car rental for three days at US\$34.50 per day, a small car, but ample for our needs. We dropped the car at the airport (a tight squeeze with our bags), but could also have left it at the hotel. Here are a few excursions we enjoyed. On our first day, Sunday, we didn't go far. Ten minutes' drive away, up and over the hills, are the **Andromeda Botanical Gardens**, six acres of landscaped gardens featuring both native and imported tropical plants, left to the people of Barbados in 1988 by the founder, Iris Bannochie. (Admission, \$20 BBD. US\$1 = approx. \$2 BBD. Most establishments accept both BBD and US cash.) Using the handouts, we explored both the marked paths. Including a light lunch at the on-site tea-rooms, we spent several hours here.

Returning 'home' via the coastal road, we realized we could have walked here in twenty-five minutes following the old railway bed trail. We stopped for a quick look at the famed **Atlantis Hotel**, founded in 1884. We never did make it back here for a meal, but their lunch buffet is heralded as the best of Bajan cuisine. (The hotel part appears rather run-down, but an acceptable budget alternative.) The road back through Bathsheba runs close to the shore and here we found other restaurants that appealed. We liked our dinner at the **Bajan Surf Bungalow** terrace so much that we went back the next night. Dinner reservations are required. This is a small family-run spot, catering mainly to the surfers who stay here (simple twin or bunk accommodation). Owner-chef Melanie prepares one dinner each day from local fish and produce; ask about the *plat du jour* when you make your reservation, or there are burgers etc., available from the printed lunch menu. We had fresh kingfish with rice pilaf and salad one night; flying fish with breadfruit *coucou* and spiced vegetables the next. Our last night in Barbados we walked next door along the rail trail to the **Round House Restaurant** for flying fish pâté and baked Brie appetizers, blackened fish and garlic shrimp mains, and fresh coconut pie. Another delicious meal. The original section of the Round House was built in the 1820s; while we didn't see them, there are also four bedrooms available here.

Back to our touring. Our second day, we meandered south, following several side roads down to the coast just to wander, visiting **Codrington College**, the oldest Anglican college in the New World, founded in 1743, (suggested donation \$5 BBD) and **St. John's Church**, a classic Gothic church built in 1836. Its churchyard has memorial stones dating back to the mid-1600s. There is a wonderful view over the Atlantic from here. We took the rural road along Hackleton's Cliff to get back.

Our final day was our most adventurous. Heading north along Cattlewash Beach, then inland, we visited the **Morgan Lewis Windmill**, the only operating mill left in Barbados. Built circa 1766, it is being restored by the Barbados National Trust. The \$10 BBD admission fee entitles you to see a video on sugar mills and the restoration of the mill as well as access to the mill itself. The mill actually operates several times a year. Then we were off to the **Barbados Wildlife Reserve** at Farley Hill, St. Peter. The admission charge of \$23 BBD includes the neighbouring **Grenade Hill Signal Station & Educational Forest**, but I must confess we never made it that far. The Wildlife Reserve is completely fenced, allowing the animals to go about their daily lives as though they were in the wild. (Exceptions made for the iguanas and snakes.) The parrot-type birds are in a large walk-through aviary. Walking freely about are tortoises; tiny, shy brocket deer; peacocks; hares; mongoose and agoutis, which resemble rabbits on long pigs' legs! We had been warned that the resident green monkeys usually spend the day away from the reserve, returning around 3 p.m. for feeding. Well, 3 p.m. came and went, and no sign of the monkeys. By 4, we had decided to head home when right in front of us one of the peacocks put on a full display. Of course, he was really trying to catch the eye of the peahen who totally ignored him, but he had our undivided attention. And by the time she had walked off and he had given up, we could hear squeals from the aviary as the parrots announced the arrival of the monkeys! And so, for another half-hour we roamed the trails and watched as several dozen monkeys hopped, skipped and jumped their way through the treetops, scampered along the fences and teased us, one even reaching into a pocket to see if he could find anything. What a thrill!

Our visit to Barbados had been brief, but we left feeling we had really seen the island and developed an appreciation for their history and agricultural traditions. Other than the busy airport, Barbados' tourism development did not affect our visit at all. 🇧🇧

Contact details ...

Edgewater Inn, www.edgewaterinn.com, tel: (code 1 246) 433 9900, fax: -9902.

Round House Inn & Restaurant, www.roundhousebarbados.com, tel: 433 9678, fax: -9079.

Bajan Surf Bungalow, www.bajansurfbungalow.com, tel: 433 9920, fax: -9278.

Atlantis Hotel, www.atlantisbarbados.com, tel: 433 9445, fax: -7180.

Ted and Judy van der Veen are frequent contributors to TravelScoop. When not travelling they call Campbellville, ON, home.

(Editor's note: Some years ago I stopped at the Edgewater Inn for lunch and subsequently mentioned this outstandingly-positioned property in TravelScoop. I heartily agree with Ted and Judy; it's a great place.)

BONAIRE

Here's news of something *really* unique. But for this "first" you need to be a diver. Between 3 December and 27 January the island of Bonaire will stage an underwater art exhibition complete with cashier in scuba gear (obviously!) waiting to punch your admission ticket. No need to take up too much room with details here, but do check it all out at www.40feetunderwater.com

CANADA

If the thought of ski-ing or ice-climbing or any other outdoor winter sport leaves you cold, you may like to consider a winter vacation on a train. Coming is Rocky Mountaineer Railtours' 15th season, with ten getaways of varying lengths in the Canadian Rockies to choose from. Destinations (from Vancouver) include Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper. Prices start from C\$939 for a four-night getaway. Your travel agent will have details, or call 1 800 665 7245 or visit www.rockymountaineer.com

GERMANY

It's hard to believe, but Germany's cities and towns offer a total of about 2,500 Christmas markets which attract around 160 million visitors each year. And now the German National Tourist Office has published a guide to over 100 of these markets, generally those that are among the most famous and easiest to reach for foreign visitors. For this guide, as well as general information on Germany, call 1 877 315 6237 or visit www.cometogermany.com Perhaps a "Christmas on the Danube" or "Magic Advent" cruise appeals? Both these river trips are offered by Canadian tour operator Blue Danube Holidays at prices from C\$1,190 pp dbl. For details of these, together with deluxe coach tours that visit some of the most romantic Christmas markets, see your travel agent or visit www.bluedanubeholidays.com Or perhaps a winter stay in Berlin appeals? Throughout the season there's a variety of discounted hotel rates as well as "WinterMagic" hotel packages: 'Classic', 'Berlin hip' with its admission to six of the city's trendiest nightclubs, or 'Berlin Culture'. Shopping and restaurant discounts are also available. Information at www.wintermagic-berlin.com and there's a calendar of events (music, opera and more) at www.berlin-tourist-information.com

GUYANA

Guyana is one of the world's most pristine eco-tourism destinations. For details of exciting trips to this small English-speaking country nestled between Brazil and

Venezuela designed especially for wildlife enthusiasts contact Tours of Exploration of BC, tel: 1 800 690 7887, www.toursexplore.com.

KOREA

The Korea National Tourism Organization website www.Tour2Korea.com now has an on-line hotel search and price comparison service, along with a contest for all Canadians (except those resident in Quebec) for two trips for two people to Korea. Log on now to enter, for the contest ends on 15 December. It's a great destination! Also new from Korea, is the Korean Travel Card (KTC), a pre-paid electronic travel card that can be used in stores and cultural facilities. It's available at Incheon and Gimpo Airports. Of special interest is the fact that the KTC now provides free travel insurance to international travellers who purchase a card for 200,000 won (approx. C\$220), providing coverage for cancellations, delays, baggage loss, late arrivals and various accidents. And there's lots more on-line help: performance reservations, car rentals, tour packages and even a free consulting services that gives personalized answers concerning flights, accommodations and tours.

U.S.A.

A record-breaking year for hurricanes has given **Florida** a lot of bad press recently, but most primary tourist areas are open for business. For up-to-date information visit www.visitflorida.com or call 1 888 FLA-INFO (352 4636).

The state of **Texas** has announced that its Buckaroo Buck\$ programme is back for a seventh year, offering savings exclusively for Canadians this winter. The booklet includes more than 100 coupons featuring savings of 25 - 50% off accommodations, car rentals, attractions and dining through to 31 March. The biggest savings are on accommodations. For example, at Canyon Lake Ranch Guesthouses in the Texas Hill Country, long-stay guests who book two weeks can stay for two additional weeks for just a buck, a savings of US\$1,800. For your copy of the bilingual coupon book, along with a free *Texas State Travel Guide*, call 1 800 888 TEX or visit www.TravelTex.com

Looking ahead, bird lovers may like to make plans to be in the charming town of Essex, **Connecticut**, 19-20 February next year for the Connecticut River Eagle Festival, a celebration of the return of the endangered bald eagles to their wintering grounds. Presented by the Audubon Society, this event is described as "New England's Premier Eco-Event". It includes a wide variety of activities in pretty Essex and boat tours for views of the birds. For information call 1 800 996 8747 or visit www.ctbound.org

from
\$4,496

India's Golden Triangle

FULLY ESCORTED

20 days departing 14th March & 3rd October 2005

India is one of the world's greatest travel destinations. But unless you're a young backpacker, a tour is the way to go! And The Travel Society is offering the ultimate tour of India's fabled northwestern region, known as The Golden Triangle. This tour will show you the highlights of this fascinating region. You'll spend time in the economic powerhouse of India - Mumbai (once known as Bombay) where you'll drive along Marine Drive, visit the Hanging Gardens, enjoy the Prince of Wales Museum and stroll through Neru Park. On another day you visit St. Thomas Cathedral, the Jain Temple and see the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi as well as take an optional tour to Elephanta caves. Then it's on to Udaipur, the most romantic city in all of Rajasthan, known as the city of lakes. Here there are palaces and temples to visit as well as beautiful gardens with pools, fountains, pagodas and carvings. Mt. Abu-Ranakpur is next on the itinerary, famous for its 15th century temples, before you proceed to the famous medieval city of Jodhpur, home of the massive Mehrangharh Fort and many exquisite palaces. Then how about a camel safari ... sure to bring lots of laughs and some great photographs! Khimsar and Nagaur are next on the itinerary, where there's more sightseeing and lots of leisure time for relaxing, shopping or wandering alone with your camera. Bikaner is next - a royal walled city with a wealth of architectural heritage - where you'll visit Lalgarh Palace Museum, a combination of European luxury and Oriental fantasy and Junagarh Fort, which was started in 1587 and houses 37 palaces, pavilions and temples. You'll then travel on to Mandawa, known for its exquisite frescoes where you'll stay in Castle Mandawa, a unique desert resort. Jaipur - the pink city - is next; a city of beauty famous for its bazaar full of wonderful gifts. Here you can take an elephant-ride excursion to Amer Fort and also see the Palace of the Winds and the stone Observatory. Of course Agra is on the itinerary, for that never-to-be forgotten dawn visit to the Taj Mahal, before you travel on to famous Delhi, the capital of India. Throughout this trip you will stay in first-class hotels, travel in deluxe a/c, fully-equipped coaches and enjoy wonderful meals, banquets and entertainment. Many days will be full, but there's plenty of free time too. Haven't you always wanted to visit India? Make this the year and come with The Travel Society this fall.



where you'll visit Lalgarh Palace Museum, a combination of European luxury and Oriental fantasy and Junagarh Fort, which was started in 1587 and houses 37 palaces, pavilions and temples. You'll then travel on to Mandawa, known for its exquisite frescoes where you'll stay in Castle Mandawa, a unique desert resort. Jaipur - the pink city - is next; a city of beauty famous for its bazaar full of wonderful gifts. Here you can take an elephant-ride excursion to Amer Fort and also see the Palace of the Winds and the stone Observatory. Of course Agra is on the itinerary, for that never-to-be forgotten dawn visit to the Taj Mahal, before you travel on to famous Delhi, the capital of India. Throughout this trip you will stay in first-class hotels, travel in deluxe a/c, fully-equipped coaches and enjoy wonderful meals, banquets and entertainment.

PRICES INCLUDING AIR departing from:

Vancouver	\$4,696 pp/dbl	Toronto	\$4,496 pp/dbl
Victoria	\$4,896 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$4,496 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$4,696 pp/dbl	Montreal	\$4,496 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$4,696 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$4,696 pp/dbl
Saskatoon	\$4,696 pp/dbl	St. John's	\$4,896 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,696 pp/dbl	Single supplement	\$794
Prices are subject to confirmation		Taxes extra	

Your tour includes:

- All international & domestic flights
- Deluxe a/c coach transportation
- State transport taxes
- All meals
- English-speaking guides and escort
- All entrance fees
- Elephant ride
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- Baggage handling

NEW
PRICES

Galapagos Islands and Ecuador

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

14 days departing 18 Jan, 15 Feb, 12 Apr 2005

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	\$6,589.00 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	
Vancouver	
Calgary	
Halifax	

GREAT ADD-ONS, INCLUDING AIR:

Kapawi - from all departure points	\$1,680.00 pp/dbl
Machu Picchu -	\$1,996.00 pp/dbl
When departing from	: Toronto
	: Ottawa, Montreal
	: Vancouver, Calgary
	: Halifax

Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour includes:

- Round-trip air transportation
- All domestic air transportation
- All accommodation
- First class Galapagos cruise
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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

NEW

Guatemala Grandeur

Departing 11 February 2005

Each tour is limited to 18 people

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

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

21 days, prices include all airfares

A Traveller's Turkey

Space limited to 20 people
Fully escorted

Departing: 3 & 24 May, 20 September & 11 October 2005

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. 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	\$5,073.00 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$5,073.00 pp/dbl
Montreal	\$5,073.00 pp/dbl	Vancouver	\$5,324.00 pp/dbl
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Winnipeg	\$5,253.00 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$5,253.00 pp/dbl

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

Your tour includes:

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- All domestic flights
- 20 nights' accommodation
- All meals as per itinerary
- All domestic transportation
- 40 seat air conditioned luxury bus
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- An English-speaking guide/director and a Travel Society host

Please call 1 877 926 2500 or 416 926 2500
for the complete itineraries

NEW

Copper Canyon February, March, April 2005

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

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Toronto	\$3,448 pp/dbl
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Single supplement \$600 (Sharing can be arranged.)
Prices are subject to confirmation

Please call for prices from other departure cities

Your tour includes:

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

FROM \$3,942 FOR 18 DAYS!

FULLY ESCORTED

Departures:

20th March, 10th April, 11th Sept. & 2nd Oct. 2005



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

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

China ... Yangtze Spectacular

... 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 cen-

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!

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Vancouver	\$3,942 pp/dbl
Victoria/Nanaimo/Kamloops	\$4,089 pp/dbl
Calgary/Edmonton	\$4,188 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,434 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,372 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,298 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,372 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec City/London	\$4,495 pp/dbl
Thunder Bay/St. John's	\$4,643 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,200 (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.

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

NEW PRICES
from
\$9,899

Down Under in Australia & New Zealand Cultures, Trains & Wineries 28 Days.

With optional 3-day Fiji extension Departure: 12 March & 10 November 2005

Highlights...

Cairns, Great Barrier Reef, Ayers Rock, Alice Springs, The Ghan, Adelaide, Barossa Wine Valley, Great Ocean Road, Melbourne, Sydney Opera House, Hunter Valley, Queenstown, Milford Sound, Mt. Cook, Christchurch, Tranz-Alpine Express, Wellington, Overland Express Train, Rotorua

Imagine spending almost a month of your life being pampered as you are shown two of the world's very special – and unique – destinations. Come with The Travel Society to Australia and New Zealand and, yes, you will enjoy a luxurious trip and be shown most of the highlights of 'downunder', all at an exceptional price. What would be on your list of highlights for these two countries? Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef in a glass-bottomed boat or with a snorkel; a ride on the spectacular Kuranda Railway; a trip to the Outback, Alice Springs and Ayers Rock; a trip on the legendary Ghan train; wine tasting in the Barossa Valley and Coonawarra; a trip on the Great Ocean Road – one of the world's most famous drives; Melbourne and Canberra; Sydney, with dinner and a performance at the Sydney Opera House; penguins, koalas and kangaroos; New Zealand's handsome city of Queenstown; a cruise on Milford Sound; Mt Cook; New Zealand wine tastings; Christchurch; the Tranz-Alpine Express train ride; the ferry ride to Wellington on the North Island; the Overland Express train to Rotorua; Auckland; the glow-worm-lit Waitomo Caves; Maori villages, songs and dances; kiwi birds and other unique wildlife? Those are the highlights our trip covers, but of course there's lots more to tell you: excellent hotels, gourmet dinners, visits with local families, flight-seeing tours, time for shopping and museums ... in fact 28 days filled with new sights, sounds and friends. It's the Travel Society's 28-day Cultures, Trains and Wineries tour of Australia and New Zealand. And while you're over in that part of the world, why don't you also enjoy a 3-night extension to Fiji where you can take an island tour, explore South Pacific Island culture and relax for a while on the island's sandy beaches beside clear ocean waters.

PRICES INCLUDING AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Toronto	\$9,999 pp/dbl	Calgary	\$ 9,949 pp/dbl
Ottawa	\$9,999 pp/dbl	Edmonton	\$ 9,949 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$10,099 pp/dbl	Victoria	\$10,019pp/dbl
Montreal	\$9,999 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$10,099 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$9,899 pp/dbl	Single supplement \$1,750	

Optional add-on 3-night Fiji \$895 pp/dbl
Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour includes:

- Return trans-Pacific airfare with Qantas
- Domestic air from your gateway
- First-class hotels accommodation throughout
- Luxury a/c touring coaches
- All tain fares
- An experienced tour escort
- Special Travel Society experiences
- Meals as per itinerary
- All transfers with full luggage service
- All sightseeing (with no hidden extras)
- Hotel taxes and Australian and NZ GST.



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