

The Travel Society Magazine  
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# Travel Scoop

Vol. 23, No. 1 January 2005



**Toujours Provence**  
**We're Cooking - in Provence!**  
**River Cruising in Russia**

# TravelScoop

The Travel Society Magazine

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January 2005

Vol. 23, No. 1

## contents

### Readers' Letters

Few Tips for Ecuador and Peru	3
Those Scottish Islands Without a Car!	4
More Accolades for Piemonte	4
Carcassonne, France	4

### Destinations

Toujours Provence	6
We're Cooking - in Provence!	10
River Cruising in Russia	13



Where is this?

Find out next month!

### News

Travel Digest	18
Health Matters	19



One of the many charming stores in old San Juan, Puerto Rico

## editor's letter ...

A big 'hello' to all our readers in this, our first issue of the year. We hope you enjoyed happy end-of-year holidays, whether you stayed at home or ventured afar.

We start the new year, as we usually tend to do, with lots of ideas and recommendations for Europe, bearing in mind that spring and fall are the ideal times to travel there if you are not restricted to high summer travels. Over the next few months we'll be taking you all over Italy; into France, Spain, Iceland and Croatia, on a cruise down some rivers of Russia and on a train trip around Eastern Europe. In the United Kingdom we've found a fabulous B&B in the Welsh countryside and discovered that Harrogate in Yorkshire is central to so much (as well as being gold medal winner of the *Europe in Bloom* competition). Then, with summer in mind, we'll move on to some Canadian destinations and, looking further ahead, to some more exotic locales such as Myanmar (Burma) and down the Silk Road.

Whether you follow our tips on an independent adventure, join us on a Travel Society trip or merely enjoy our magazine, we look forward to sharing our journeys with you this year and hope you will keep in touch with your stories and your letters.

Before I sign off ... the much-publicized malaria outbreak in the Dominican Republic has sounded some alarm bells and some travel clinics have requested us to remind our readers that it is wise to consult them before departing on a tropical trip. It is also your travel agents' responsibility to warn you of any adverse conditions in a region you may be considering. Remember your medications and have good travel insurance and you'll travel with peace of mind.

All the very best for 2005!



## Few Tips for Ecuador and Peru

For those of you planning to travel to Ecuador and Peru – whether independently or under the umbrella of a tour – I'd like to pass on a few tips. We were with a tour but, prior to joining our group, we spent three extra days in Quito, Ecuador, in a wonderful property called Café Cultura.

As you leave the airport in Quito, you'll see a booth with a lady arranging taxis and directing new arrivals. You will need to pay just US\$5 to get a taxi to Café Cultura. It is an old colonial house where the staff is very helpful and the food so good that I had to write home about it (and to *TravelScoop*!). They have four rotating chefs and guests rarely miss the evening meal. There are three fireplaces throughout the public rooms which are lit every evening. It all makes for a very cosy, magical atmosphere. They have an excellent website which captures the property perfectly – [www.cafecultural.com](http://www.cafecultural.com) – and their email address is [info@cafecultura.com](mailto:info@cafecultura.com). Double rooms in 2005 will be just US\$79 double, with suites from \$89. A few years ago Café Cultura was nominated 'One of the 50 Best Budget Hotels in the World' by the British newspaper *The Independent* and it has been mentioned by *Condé Nast Traveler* as 'one of the three reasons to visit Ecuador'. Well-deserved accolades indeed!

A 'must do' in Quito is a city tour. We had an excellent guide – Richard – who was recommended by Café Cultura. He has an excellent knowledge of English and the history of his country. We visited the north and south part of the city, the old town and went to Mitad del Mundo, the centre of the earth. We learned that roses are one of Ecuador's main exports - they are spectacular and most of the hotels show them off. And flower lovers shouldn't miss a stroll down Avenida Amazonas, where the hibiscus bushes are espe-

cially abundant and splendid.

Another 'must' is a visit the Guayasamin Museum. Oswaldo Guayasamin, an artist himself, was an Ecuadorian who donated his great collection of Inca artefacts and many colonial and contemporary art works to the people of Ecuador. Now his family are keeping his legacy alive in this house-museum. The staff at your hotel will help you find your way ... the museum is easy to get to via tram and then taxi (US\$2.00) which takes you up the final very steep road. This museum is located in the affluent part of Quito and it was easy to walk back down the hill and continue walking to get a feel for the city.

If you visit Peru, do not miss Cuzco. It is an absolutely charming city and one of Peru's greatest treasures. There is an excellent hacienda-style hotel just a block from the main square: Hostal San Isidro Labrador, at Saphi no. 440, Cuzco, tel: (011 51) 226 241, fax: 221 591. They have no direct e-mail address but you can view this property and make reservations by logging on to [www.aracari.com/peruhotels/San\\_Isidro\\_Labrador\\_Cusco.shtml](http://www.aracari.com/peruhotels/San_Isidro_Labrador_Cusco.shtml). We heard about it from a mother and son from Bogota, Colombia. We were all having lunch in the same restaurant and got into a conversation about accommodation. A friend of theirs has just been to Cuzco and stayed there, reporting that it was a great find and mentions lovely white fluffy towels. The cost is US\$45 per night, dbl, but lower rates can be negotiated in low season she paid or for longer stays.

The cathedral in Cuzco, full of gold and silver is a 'must see', as is the Inca Museum, and do take a walk along the street called Triunfo to the side of the cathedral where all the artists exhibit their work. You will need to have the local currency – *soles* – in Peru. Put aside a few to purchase a silver Inca Cross or pendant, they are simply beautiful and make great gifts. Alpaca and Incan textiles are available in artisan

markets, as well as highly sophisticated boutiques. They too are gorgeous. The best way to recognize a garment that is 100% alpaca is to feel its softness ... it should not feel at all rough. Also take a good look at the paintings.

While in Cuzco here's a restaurant tip: try the Novotel for dinner where the food is excellent and the cost very reasonable. The Novotel (part of the Accor hotel group) is an historical address here. Built around an early 16<sup>th</sup> century house of the conquistador Pizarro epoch, this hotel presents an exceptional style of colonial architecture. It is located in the heart of the archaeological centre. In the main square, Pucara is also a very popular restaurant.

There are also all sorts of activities you can arrange while in Cuzco: white water rafting, hiking, and other excursions. And, of course, you are within easy reach of Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Incas. The train takes four hours and you can stay in Aguas Calientes, the town just below Machu Picchu. From there the a bus ride to Machu Picchu takes about 15 minutes. Try and get the first bus in the morning ... it is a magical sight!

Some practicalities for Machu Micchu: remember you will need sun block, sun glasses and a cap/hat. In early October we experienced cool mornings and needed an extra layer of clothes, but by noon it was warm enough for T shirts. The altitude can cause headaches and sleepless nights but the pharmacies have the necessary medication which you can buy



over the counter. Be prepared for an afternoon downpour – a plastic poncho is all you need. And above of all, please remember to be generous to the gentle people you will encounter here.

*Georgette Jones  
Vancouver, BC*

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## **Those Scottish Islands Without a Car!**

The article on the Western Isles of Scotland by Helen Parsons in the July/August 2004 issue of *TravelScoop* reminded me of the tour I took with a friend about ten years ago, after I had stopped driving. We had discovered a company – Classique Hebridean Islands Tours – which is a company that specializes in small-coach tours of the remote Scottish Highlands and Islands.

Then, in 2001, friends of mine took a tour of Scotland with them and found the value still excellent. They reported that they stayed for three or four nights in a hotel whose posted tariffs they could not have considered independently!

So ... anyone who prefers not to drive can still see all the scenery and historical sites that Helen Parsons mentioned. The buses are small and

comfortable and some are ‘classics’, dating back to 1949, but they have been renovated and re-designed to make them more comfortable than the originals. The drivers wait at each site, and I remembered we even walked across Machair to see the seals basking on the beach.

Classique Tours are located at 8 Underwood Road, Paisley (Glasgow Airport), Scotland PA3 1TD, tel: [011 44] 141 889 4050, fax: 141 848 7616, [www.classiquetours.co.uk](http://www.classiquetours.co.uk). The company can arrange accommodation at special rates in Glasgow (6 miles from Glasgow Airport) or the town of Paisley (1.5 miles from Glasgow Airport) and the website states that surcharges are not normally made for single rooms. Travellers may also like to make a note of the fact that there is fast and frequent train and express coach service between Glasgow and Edinburgh; this journey takes about an hour. Enjoy!

*Phyllis Probyn Buxton  
Morin Heights, PQ*

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## **MORE ACCOLADES FOR PIEMONTE**

While planning our six-week European adventure last year (which

included Alsace, Gascony, Tuscany and Umbria), we added a few days to spend in Paris on our way home. However, the *TravelScoop* article “The Road Less Travelled...In Italy” (Feb/March, 2004) on Piemonte was so tempting that we decided to skip Paris and spend time in Piemonte instead. We were not disappointed and thought we’d drop you a line to tell you a little about our experiences!

October was the ideal time to be in Piemonte because it was wine harvest and festival time, with truffle festivals being held in many towns and, except for the weekends, there were few tourists.

The vineyards sweep down one lovely hill and up the next in what seem to be unending vistas, punctuated by trucks loaded with freshly-picked fruit lining up to deposit their treasures at the wineries. The red wines like Barola, Barbera, Barbaresco, Dolcetto, Nebbiolo and others, as well as the white Moscato, entice the wine fancier throughout the area and from around the world. Wineries are located in many towns and in the vineyards themselves and most welcome visitors every day. One of the larger ones we visited was Marchesi di Barolo in Barolo. What a delight to have been hosted by very knowledgeable hostesses and taste exceptional wines from Reidel glasses. We couldn’t leave without a purchase!

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# **The Travel Society website**

**How to visit *The Travel Society* website [www.travelsociety.com](http://www.travelsociety.com)**

Our website is fully operational. We always want to improve it and welcome your input.

**To access the site the password will be up-dated monthly and will appear on the back page of your *TravelScoop* within the address box.**

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hills across from the town; Osteria Arco, a slow food restaurant in Alba; Trattoria della Posta in Montforte d'Alba and Antico Corona da Recervere in Cervere.

Piemonte is certainly not lacking in scenery. Looking over the valleys toward the

the entire property are very tastefully furnished and decorated. She was especially anxious to show us her precious wine cellar from the 18<sup>th</sup> century containing over 2000 bottles of local wines. Breakfasts were exceptional. Tel: [011 39] 0141 855 410, e-mail: [info@albergocastiglione.com](mailto:info@albergocastiglione.com), [www.albergocastiglione.com](http://www.albergocastiglione.com)

Your article mentioned reaching the Piemonte region easily from Turin, which is accurate. But it can also be reached, via the super highways, from Nice in about four hours and in about five hours from Florence. So one can combine a stay in Piemonte with a holiday in Tuscany or from the south of France.

Thank you, *TravelScoop*, for pointing us to Piemonte and a memorable vacation.

*Pat & Hugh Gaudet  
Calgary, AB*

### *The Wine Spectator*

has recently given the 2000 Barolo wines a perfect 100 score!

The sellers and buyers of truffles at the markets intrigued us. The rare white truffles are priced like fine jewellery so each seller, often the truffer himself, has a small jeweller's scale to make sure that he gets an accurate price. Would you believe €40 for an edible gem not much bigger than your thumb? On the buyers' side they felt, pinched and sniffed each gem before making a purchase. The market in Alba is one of the largest in the area and, as well as truffles, a variety of other tempting foods were for sale.

Nearly every town and village has at least one excellent restaurant so we were able to enjoy local cuisine every day. How do all these wonderful chefs find their way to such small towns? We weren't just among tourists in these places – the locals were dining too. Since it was truffle festival time we treated ourselves to truffles. "Forget the cost", we thought, "we can't get a dish featuring fresh truffles, prepared by a master chef, at home, can we?" Among many fine establishments we would highly recommend Ristorante Belvedere in La Morra both for its fine food and wonderful views of the vineyards on the

Alps on a sunny morning is breathtaking. Ancient, unspoiled villages featuring a building, castle, and/or church noteworthy for its architecture, history or art cap each hilltop. We couldn't begin to visit them all but really enjoyed Barolo for its wineries and fabled castle, La Morra for its panoramic views over the valleys, Barbaresco for its wineries and views of the Alps over the surrounding vineyards, Cherasco for its pretty square and magnificent commemorative arch. The larger town – Asti, Alba and Bra – have many fine squares, interesting public buildings and centuries-old rows of houses.

We stayed at Albergo Castiglione in Castiglione Tinella, just 25 km east of Alba, one of the hotels mentioned in the *TravelScoop* article and again were delighted with it. We had scarcely stopped our car in the hotel's parking area when the proprietor, Claudia Saracco, came out to greet us and help us with our luggage. Throughout our stay she and her staff were most helpful, offering advice on touring, restaurants, wineries and everything else to make our holiday there memorable. Claudia, who speaks quite good English, was justly proud of the effort she put into every detail in her hotel, a former noble dwelling. Our room and

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*If southern France is in your plans this year (perhaps after reading our articles on Provence!) you may have time to include a visit to the Languedoc region of south-western France as well. Here our intrepid traveller in France - Judy van der Veen - shares a wonderful discovery.*

## **Carcassonne, France**

"To approach Carcassonne for the first time is to dream with your eyes open." The most complete walled city in France, this medieval cité stands on a hillside overlooking the Aude Valley and the modern town. Its crenellated towers and walls are intact, its cathedral austere, its narrow streets made for roaming. In summer the tourist crowds descend, but in early May or late October, the city is relatively quiet. During our visit last year, we discovered a charming self-catering B&B in a quiet corner within the city walls. Above her shop and private apartment, Madame Nicole Cordonnier-Trucco has opened up two lovely rooms, each with a tiny kitchenette where guests prepare their

own breakfast. But the makings are there for you: tea, coffee, milk, juice, jam, butter, eggs, and rusks. For fresh bread, the boulangerie is less than five minutes away. Each room has a small terrace overlooking the city. The smaller room, with double bed, rents for €42-52 per night according to the season. The toilet and shower are down the hall. The larger room costs slightly more for two people. It has a full en suite bathroom, and beds for four - one double and two singles. This room is ideal for a family. For four people, the rates are from €52-68. Be sure to ask for a pass that allows you free parking in the private hotel parking lot just outside the city walls. You will need to have a bag light enough to carry to the B&B as tourist cars are not allowed within the city walls. The sign says simply Chambres d'Hôtes Guesthouse, and the address is 8, Place du Grand Puits, 11000 Carcassonne, France, tel/fax (011 33) 04 68 25 16 67. Payment is by cash only. Nearby there are many restaurants to suit all budgets; the local specialty is the famous cassoulet, a casserole of white beans, duck, sausage and herbs. The old city is very small, and nothing is more than a few minutes' walk away.

This is a wonderful spot for a family to visit. I can just imagine how thrilling children would find this city, especially boys in that difficult 7-10 year range who think history is so boring. Here their imaginations can run riot, with knights in shining armour, daring rescues, battle scenes. Girls too can be damsels in distress, wicked witches, or leaders of secret campaigns. While Carcassonne may appear a fairy tale castle, the reality is much grimmer. The quote above is from *The Perfect Heresy* by Canadian author, Stephen O'Shea (published in 2000 by Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., Vancouver.) It is the story of the early 13th century crusade against the Cathars, a dissident, pacifist Christian sect that embraced poverty and tolerance and granted equality to women. In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, Cathars were heretics, and

the atrocities of the crusade to eliminate them were the precursor of the Inquisition. History buffs will learn a great deal from this book.

Back on site, there are several spots where one can access the moat. To walk on the city walls requires a ticket for a very informative tour of the feudal castle. Be sure to walk or drive uphill from the main entrance for a marvellous view across the vineyards; the modern town is in the valley on the other side of the Aude River and so from this vantage point is lost to view. Carcassonne lies almost in the foothills of the Pyrenees, deep in the Languedoc region of south-western France, about 100 km from the Spanish border and less than an hour's drive from the Mediterranean. Visit [www.carcassonne-tourisme.com](http://www.carcassonne-tourisme.com) for detailed information, maps, brochures, and lists of special events. (Click on the Union Jack for the English language version.)

*Judy van der Veen  
Campbellford, ON*

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*'Culture-vultures' love Vienna – and Austria – in all seasons, and 2005 will be a special year as the country prepares to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of Mozart in 2006. For tourist information on Vienna visit [www.vienna.info](http://www.vienna.info) and for Salzburg [www.salzburg.info](http://www.salzburg.info) And now TravelScoop subscribers and frequent contributors Gayle and Dean Feltham have a tip of their own on Vienna for us ...*

## **A 'Find' in Vienna, Austria**

My wife Gayle and I recently returned to Canada after six nights in Vienna, part of a trip that included two nights in Venice and a 17-day cruise aboard the *Star Princess* from Venice with ports of call at Civitavecchia (Rome), Naples (Isle of

Capri), Cannes, Barcelona, Cadiz (Seville), Lisbon, Azores, and then across the Atlantic to Fort Lauderdale.

Through the internet Gayle arranged a most enjoyable six-night stay in Vienna at Edith's B&B, in the "Baroque" Suite, with king-size bed and ensuite bathroom for a total of €450 (€ = about C\$1.60) which for Vienna was extremely good value. Their website shows the Viennese-style furnished rooms we were using. The suite consisted of a large room divided into two parts by furniture, with a double bed on the main floor and a king-size bed in the loft. Access to the loft was via a steep spiral staircase.


The European breakfast consisted of rolls, jams, cold cuts, cheese, a vegetable platter, juices and tea/coffee. One may also store one's own food and drinks in the kitchen.

The property is located in a 4-storey, older Viennese building. Access is via an internal spiral marble stair case (with a statute of course) but there is an old-style elevator which we used to transport our luggage. It is extremely well located in District #1, which is the historical centre of the city, containing the majority of 'must sees'. It is in safe and comfortable walking distance of the Hofburg Palace and St. Stephen's Cathedral. It's also a short walk to U4 (the underground subway station Schottenring) and an even closer walk to the tram line.

Staying here was a unique and delightful Viennese experience. We would go again. The details: Edith's B&B, Börse Platz 3/2, 1010, Wien, Austria (Frau Edith B. Molnar), tel/fax: (011 43) 1 533 6877, [www.urlaub-quartiere.at/molnar/index.htm](http://www.urlaub-quartiere.at/molnar/index.htm)

If any readers are planning a trip to Vienna or Venice, or a cruise to the ports we visited, please feel free to contact us and we can forward on by e-mail (all 90 pages!) our detailed notes, the information we collected and our information sources.

*Gayle and Dean Feltham  
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# Toujours Provence

story and photos by Ted and Judy van der Veen

**L**ong before Peter Mayle wrote his celebrated *A Year in Provence* and its sequels, Provence was a favoured destination. Within a very small region centred on the Bouches du Rhône there are a great many attractions for history lovers, nature lovers, hikers, cyclists – and we have found the ideal spot from which to enjoy them. The *Mas de Bazarde* is an 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse that has been converted into self-catering apartments by British owners Mike and Cynthia Grayson who live on-site. There are two 2-bedroom apartments, one 1-bedroom and one 3-bedroom. Each has its own terrace area with patio table and chairs, full kitchen and lounge, toilet and shower. There is a washing machine at your disposal for a small fee, and a wine *cave* with reasonably-priced local wines under their own label. Golf and tennis are available close by and the Graysons are keen walkers, happy to share their knowledge of the local trails. There is an attractive in-ground swimming pool on the property, barbecues for guest use, and a bouledrome. Never played boules?

Well, now is the time to learn. On Mondays, once the weather warms up, Mike and Cynthia offer their guests a Provençal lunch or dinner barbecue, followed by a game of boules. Most guests are among the uninitiated, but certainly a good time is had by all. Our hosts act as scorekeeper and referee, although it is stretching it to say that they maintain a sense of decorum!

“So where is this gem?” do we hear you ask. On the outskirts of the village of **Orgon**, about half an hour’s drive south of **Avignon** and the TGV train station, less than an hour north of the **Marseille** Airport, and across the Durance River from **Cavaillon**, the nearest town to shop for supplies. A look at the map might lead you to believe that you will be surrounded by autoroutes, train lines and flight paths, but we can assure you that it is indeed a quiet spot. The Graysons are welcoming hosts who will go out of their way to accommodate you.

Just a few minutes’ walk away is an excellent restaurant, *Le Côté Jardin*, with 3-course menus from €18 (€ = approx. C\$1.60) for that special dinner. Ten minutes’ walk to the south of town is a *gare routier*, or truckstop, named

*Bellevue* but known to most English-speaking visitors as *Hotlips* (wait till you see it!), the very one that Peter Mayle describes. This is a very different experience from eating in a truck stop in North America, and excellent value for money. For €12 here you will have a 4-course meal, plus wine, including a self-service buffet appetizer bar (definitely not a salad bar!). The daily special is exceptional value, the almond trout is fresh and delicious, and the salad option instead of rice or fries a very nice choice.

To view the delightful *Mas de Bazarde* accommodation, go to [www.masdebazarde.com](http://www.masdebazarde.com) where you will see the four apartments and local attractions, and find a link to their e-mail. You may also write to Mas de Bazarde, Quartier de Bazarde, 13660 Orgon, Provence, France, tel: 011 33 04.90.73.009.73 (CHECK THIS) or fax 04.90.73.08.95. As most of their clientele are from the UK, they will accept payment in either euros or pounds sterling. In 2005, the rate for

the 1-bedroom apartment in the low season (March, April and the first three weeks of May) is €10, increasing to €40 for mid-season (end of May, June and September) and rising to €70 for July and August. The property is closed in the winter. Rental week runs from Saturday to Saturday. Electricity, gas, final cleaning and bed linen is included in the rental, but you need to take your own towels or invest in some in France. (You might take a small container of dish detergent as well.) Witness to the popularity of this location, we met one couple who had been coming for eight years. This is a favourite spot for cyclists; in fact, some of the guests had only bicycles for transport, although most also had a car to so that they could get further afield for their daily excursions.

What did we do while we were here? All of these spots are within an hour's drive from the **Mas de Bazarde**. Often two or three



may be combined in one day's outing. To the north lies **Avignon** with its celebrated bridge ("*Sur le pont d'Avignon, on y danse,...*") and the Palais des Papes, home to the popes of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.. Further north is the town of **Orange** with a Roman triumphal arch and the most complete Roman Theatre still extant in all Europe. You can detour through the **Chateaufort-du-Pape** wine region en route for a little wine purchasing. To the northeast is the **Luberon** district. One can easily visit

**L'Ile-sur-la-Sorgue** with its antique dealers and Sunday antique market, a small town surrounded by water and with several waterwheels on show. Red-hued **Roussillon** is known for its Ochre Cliffs walk. The hilltop village of **Gordes** is a picturesque town popular with visitors, and just below the town, at the end of a long, winding and very narrow road, is the **Villages des**

**Bories**, reconstructed drystone houses (no mortar) such as were lived in from prehistoric times until the nineteenth century. The small crossroads village of **Coستellet** has an interesting lavender museum. The Fontaine de Vacluse and the Abbaye de Sénanque are nearby. Not far away is the Abbaye de Silvacane, considered the purest of the three Cistercian abbeys, built about 1275, the Chateau d'Ansouis and its perched village, and

the Chateau de Lourmarin. **Aix-en-Provence** with its many attractions, including sites of importance in the life of the painter Cézanne, lies to the southeast.

Then, of course, further south right on the Mediterranean is the city of **Marseille**, with its old port, its cafés and restaurants, its museums and churches. It's a very cosmopolitan city (but don't say that to a Parisian!) Heading west now from **Orgon**, one of the furthest attractions will undoubtedly be the Pont du Gard, that 1st century engineering marvel of the Romans, part of a 50-km long aqueduct that carried water from the Eure River to the city of **Nîmes**. There has been a whole slew of attractions built in this area in recent years, but access to the bridge itself is still free. **Nîmes** and **Arles** both have important Roman ruins. Much closer to



home (Orgon), one must visit Les Baux-de-Provence, with its *Ville Morte*, medieval citadel, 10<sup>th</sup> century chapel and Renaissance palaces perched on a rocky spur like an eagle's nest. You will need a couple of hours to tour the ruins, and it is "the spot" from which to watch the sunset. The village also gave its name to bauxite, the base metal for aluminum. This is a popular tourist spot and the coaches start arriving early, but it seems that most visitors spend their time in the village itself with only a cursory glance at the citadel. Don't be put off by the apparent crowds as you arrive, as the vast ruins themselves do not seem crowded. Just a few kilometers from **Les Baux** is **Saint-Rémy-de-Provence**, a charming town best known as the locale for many of Van Gogh's paintings.

As you drive towards **Saint-Rémy** from **Les Baux**, you will pass a Roman Triumphal Arch and a 60-ft high Mausoleum. Stop to admire them, tour the Roman ruins of **Glanum** if you are interested in archeology, but most importantly, watch for the **Van Gogh trail**. On the right, across from the Roman monuments, is the Asylum of St. Paul where Van Gogh was hospitalized for a year. Beginning at the main road you will see reproductions of about fourteen Van Gogh paintings, positioned at the spot where he sat to paint them. To see them all, you must follow the road that



passes in front of the asylum and leads down to the town; this is parallel to the main road.

Somewhat further afield, to the southwest, is the region known as the **Camargue**. This vast Rhone delta is the flattest land in all of France, 200,000 acres of lagoons and salt-water marshes criss-crossed with canals. "Foodies" will recognize the name as the source of that famous salt. Rich in bird life, it is home to France's "cowboys", white horses and black bulls, and the rallying ground for the Romany, the gypsies, who have gathered here for centuries. A visit to the information centre and the adjoining Parc Ornithologique just north of the picturesque village of **Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer** will provide you with the opportunity to see many birds that you will not likely see from a car window; be sure to take your binoculars and camera. The Camargue is in complete contrast to the rocky hilly landscape of the rest of

... continued on page 20



*by Judy van der Veen*

***Does a short cooking vacation in Provence, France, appeal? If you answer “yes” ... read on. If you answer “no” read on ... because this charming property offers a variety of other interesting learning opportunities or ... if you prefer ... the opportunity to do nothing at all except enjoy good food in a beautiful setting!***

**E**ver wondered how to prepare ratatouille to preserve individual flavours and colours of the vegetables? How to get the smell of garlic off your fingers? How to fillet a fish or de-bone a chicken or a rabbit? Just how much is a “petit peu” of olive oil? How to prepare lemon curd or pastry cream? Exactly what does one do with a vanilla bean? Want to learn all this and more, and have fun while doing so? What about a cooking school in Provence? Read on! Last year we (two couples) recently returned from a great experience with *Monsieur René Bérard, Maître Cuisinier de France* at his award-winning *Passport to Provence* cookery class in La

Cadière d’Azur, about half an hour east of Marseille, near Toulon. With four days of classes, a welcome dinner and five nights’ accommodation and full buffet breakfast at the family-run *Hostellerie Bérard*, this was a not-to-be-missed experience. And it was great value for money as well. I’ll give you a run-down in journal format, and then all the details.

● **Sunday arrival:** We check in mid-afternoon to our rooms in a wonderful, converted 11<sup>th</sup> century convent in the hill-top town of La Cadière d’Azur. We see comfortable beds, ample cupboard space, a full bathtub, luxurious bathrobes and great views over the valley. Later we meet

the other group members and our translator for a pre-dinner drink in the hotel bar, and are briefly introduced to our chef, Monsieur René Bérard. Béatrice, our translator, goes over the programme with us while we enjoy our drinks and a selection of delicious canapés. There are to be four days of classes, each with a different theme and each day we will prepare a full meal, which we will then enjoy together as a late lunch. We will also make some excursions. But on this first night the group proceeds to the dining room for a special 4-course dinner already prepared for us by Chef Bérard. A souvenir menu is ours to keep. Maximum group size is 12, but we have the good fortune to be only six: four Canadians and a couple from New Zealand.

● **Monday, Day 1:** We meet Béatrice in the parking lot after breakfast who shows us the way to *La Bastide des Saveurs*, the country property where the classes are held, a 5-minute drive down into the valley. Along the way we pass vineyards where the vines are just beginning their season's growth (second week of May), fields of artichokes ready for picking, and bright red poppies blooming everywhere. The lane to the Bastide is lined with irises in full bloom.

Upon arrival we are invited to write our names on paper chef's hats and are issued with white aprons. For each of us there is a booklet with the recipes we will be making and we are encouraged to make notes as we go along. After a quick look at the kitchen, Chef René leads us on a tour of the gardens. A team of gardeners is busy planting, roses are already in bloom, perennial rosemary and lavender are growing profusely, a few stalks of asparagus are left for us to cut. We carry a basket of herbs back to the kitchen. We now meet Rashida who will clean up after us all week, keep a fresh supply of clean tasting spoons and cooking pots at the ready, produce ingredients on demand, do some advance cleaning of vegetables, set the table and so on. And we thought we'd have to do all that!

Today's theme is meat, but first we must prepare some appetizers to have with our late-morning break for "un petit verre" – tapenade, redolent with black olives, and croutons. There is also pastry to be made for a tomato tart, and vanilla sauce and pastry cream for dessert today and later in the week. As we get busy with our tasks, we receive valuable tips on food preparation, chopping garlic, caramelizing onions, peeling tomatoes, slicing vegetables, all delivered

with good humour and admonitions to "Regardez. Allez. Encore un peu. Doucement." Finally, we get to the meat. René instructs us on de-boning a saddle of rabbit, saving all the bits for stock, then stuffing them with sun-dried tomatoes and black olives and tying with twine before they are put in the oven. We continue the lesson by de-boning a saddle of lamb that will marinate until Thursday.

Finally it is time for "une petite pause" before we make wafers for our dessert, finish the vegetable preparation, and prepare the sauce for the rabbit. We sit down for our first "made by us" meal at about 2 o'clock. René, Béatrice and Rashida all join us. And are we impressed with ourselves! This afternoon we have an excursion to a honey farm in the neighbourhood. We arrive back at the hotel about 4:30, tired

but exhilarated, and still much too full from lunch to even think about going anywhere else or having dinner. Just before the shops close at 7, we run out for bread, cheese, fruit and a bottle of wine to share later in the now-deserted patio near the pool that in summer time is an open-air restaurant. This is to be our daily routine.

● **Tuesday, Day 2:** An early start this morning as we follow René and Béatrice to the fishing port of Sanary-sur-Mer for a tour of the market, a lesson on buying fish, and a look at all the fresh produce, cheeses and spices for sale. Back at the Bastide, we make anchoïade for today's appetizers. (Who says he doesn't like anchovies?) Then it is garlic-rich aioli to garnish the soup. I'm sure you've guessed that today's theme is fish. We learn to poach fish in milk to be blended with mashed potatoes and baked in the oven. We fillet more fish, using the leftover bits to make a

soup stock. There are vegetables to dice, sauté, and toss in the soup along with herbs and spices. Once the stock has been put through a food mill and strained, we cook the fish and more vegetables in it, and voilà, *Bisque bouille safranée*, or Mediterranean fish soup, served with croutons and aioli.

Today's dessert is fresh fruit sorbet, made in a hotel-sized ice cream maker, so little preparation for us, but what flavour! Another wonderful meal. I decide to walk back to the hotel, and later we head out in the car to visit the neighbouring hill-town, Le Castellet, which we can see from the hotel. While La Cadière is a living, working village, with several shops, a few restaurants and our hotel, Le Castellet is very touristy, with little boutiques, souvenir shops, and



cafés catering to the tour buses that throng here during the day.

● **Wednesday, Day 3:** Today is vegetable day at La Bastide. Eggplant caviar is to be our appetizer. And we prepare tomatoes, onions and zucchini for stuffing with an herbed meat-bread-cheese stuffing. Then lots of slicing as we must prepare “tons” of onions, garlic, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and zucchini for that Provençal specialty everyone knows – ratatouille. But this is ratatouille with a difference, as we do not throw everything together in one pan. The result is that each vegetable retains its colour, flavour and texture. We use the same vegetables to create another vegetable dish known as a “tian” that is baked in the oven. Dessert today is crème brûlée, flavoured with lavender. We all take our turn with the “flame-thrower” to give our dessert its classic burnt-sugar golden glow – a bit of trepidation here, but René reassures us, “N’ayez pas peur.” A very colourful and tasty meal today! Another excursion this afternoon, this time to a wine-producer, where we learn about the production of the Bandol AOC (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée) wines, known for the excellence of their reds and rosés.

● **Thursday, Day 4:** Dessert Day! (What some of us came for!) Lest you think that all we eat today is dessert, I will remind you that on Monday we de-boned and set to marinate some lamb which we roast today with green garlic and a pistachio crust. We also make a cold soup of fresh green peas, which René calls “cappuccino” as he serves it capped with a spoonful of fresh whipped cream. Did I mention that every time we need whipped cream, we exercise our arms whipping it by hand? While there were times when it seemed all we did was chop (onions and garlic and other vegetables), today we spend a lot of time separating and beating eggs. We made the vanilla sauce the other day, but must make more pastry and pastry cream today. Lemon curd for lemon pie is high on the list of priorities – no cornstarch thickener here. And of course we must have a chocolate dessert too, tiny cakes of fondant chocolate filled with brandied cherries and served warm, topped with vanilla sauce. Not to be left out is apple tart – we pre-cook the tart shells, sauté the apple slices, then flambé them with calvados (another exciting moment!), fill the tart shells, top with meringue and pine nuts, then bake until golden. There are also honey-flavoured wafers which we form into a shell to hold cream and fruit.

Today it is finally warm enough to eat in the garden. Not having had time for a break this morning, we fall upon the appetizers, the leftovers of the other days. Before we sit down, René conducts a short ceremony in which we all receive a diploma signed by him, the usual French accolade, and a photo op with our esteemed instructor. Today we linger long over our meal, delicious “comme toujours”, and the con-

versation alternates from light banter to serious discussion. We are all in agreement that we would not have missed this opportunity for the world, that it has been the best holiday with a focus that any of us has ever had. On Friday morning the group members meet for breakfast, René drops by for a last farewell, and then it is time to leave the Hostellerie Bérard.

The answer to those questions I posed about cooking, you ask? Well, I guess you will simply have to go yourselves! Somehow I don’t think that “Separately. Celery leaves. Sharp knife. Lots.” won’t cut it! But most people know that olive oil, garlic, basil, rosemary and thyme are all key words in the vocabulary of this region and your lessons here will turn them from mere words into magical things.

For general information, visit [www.hotel-berard.com](http://www.hotel-berard.com), clicking on the Union Jack for the English-language edition, then on Cooking Classes. Courses are geared to English-speaking clients who come from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada, as well as the Scandinavian countries and Germany. The aim of the course is to introduce people to the pleasures of Provençal cooking, to develop an appreciation of this regional cuisine. It is not to produce qualified chefs who intend to pursue a career in this field. The emphasis is on enjoyment. While Chef René Bérard will not admit to speaking English, he certainly understands a great deal, especially in the world of cuisine. He always has a translator present to give you the details, but it’s also a good way to brush up your French. The cooking school runs from Sunday night to Friday morning. In May 2004, we paid €1,198 (€1 = about C\$1.60) per person for 5 nights’ accommodation, all breakfasts, welcome dinner, 4 days of cuisine and the food we consumed. We considered it exceptionally good value and we note from the website that the price has not changed for 2005. It does rise to €1,291 in



... continued on page 20

# RIVER CRUISING IN RUSSIA

*story and photos by Heather Allen*

I have become an enthusiastic convert to river cruising. We have taken a number of ocean cruises and enjoyed them all, but they paled in comparison with our May 2004 experience on the Baltic Volga waterway in Russia. River cruising seems to offer the best of all possible worlds, especially when you don't understand the language, or even recognize the alphabet.

We sailed with Viking River Cruises who have boats all over Europe. Our vessel, the *Victor Pakhomov*, was able to accommodate 200 passengers though we were only 150 on this, the first cruise of the season. With two exceptions the crew was all Russian, and the passengers were mostly American, with ten Brits, five Canadians and a few other nationalities ranging from Japanese to Mexican. There was an interesting homogeneity to the passengers. Without exception they were all very interested in the history, cul-





found a young man with our name on a sign as we trailed our luggage out of 'arrivals'. It was quite a long trip into the city and I was amazed at the traffic and the billboards advertising everything from Toyota to Nike. I had been in the city in 1967 when there were only military vehicles, black Mercedes with Politburo officials and buses. Then the only billboards were festooned with hammers and sickles and brave sons and daughters of the revolution looking towards Lenin. What a change.

We arrived at a nondescript five storey building that looked basically abandoned, and packed our suitcases up all five flights of worn stone steps. We were met by our genial host, John, from Leeds, England, who showed us to our clean and comfortable room and made us a cup of tea while he told us everything we needed to know about St. Petersburg.

The B&B was located one block off Nevsky Prospect, St. Petersburg's main street. We had arrived one day before all the celebrations for Victory over Europe Day: 9 May. Here the date is hugely important,



ture, people and politics of Russia. I find on ocean cruises some people come for the ports, some for the shopping, some for the glamour of the ship and the fun of dressing up, some for the cuisine, and others for the gambling. There were fewer such diversions on the *Pakhomov*.

Our standard cabin was very basic, twin beds with a tiny bathroom which managed to contain a showerhead between the toilet and basin, but with a shower curtain it worked just fine. The food was good, but not lavish - we usually had two choices, with an occasional buffet - and there was just one dining room with no assigned seating. The lectures were outstanding - the guest lecturer was a pollster and sometime advisor to President Putin. Every day on the 10 day cruise that there was time (prior to shore excursions) he gave a lecture which traced the development of the extraordinary political developments in Russia in the past decade. As well there were other lectures on the ports given by the guides and on such subjects as the history of the Romanov dynasty.

Our adventure began when we landed in St. Petersburg on 8 May. I had booked a bed and breakfast and true to his word, the innkeeper had sent a car to the airport for us. We

given the horrors of the 900-day Siege of Leningrad during World War 11. Approximately one million people died from shelling, starvation and disease during the blockade. So the following morning there was a big celebration in the main square with marching troops and bands, and thousands of people, all looking well nourished and well dressed and in a festive mood. Later we took a canal boat cruise through the city centre on the majestic river Neva. St. Petersburg is built forty two islands and really is a city of bridges, 600 in all, many elegant 19<sup>th</sup> century spans connecting beautiful mansions with graceful arches over the canals. Amazingly, there are a total of 58 canals and rivers within the boundaries of the city, whose population is four and a half million.

There was a nice restaurant across the street from our little hotel - it had a picture of a smiling friar on the sign, and was below the level of the street. There were booths and tables and an unusual room decorated like a submarine, complete with sailor mannequins in the bunks! The menu was in English as well as Russian, and we had a good meal of chicken kiev and salad, with beer for Brendan and wine for me, for less than \$20.

In the afternoon we bade farewell to John, our innkeep-

er, and took a taxi to the river where the *Victor Pakhomov* was waiting for us to board. The 'cruise' was about to begin although, in fact, we had two more days in St. Petersburg. On the first day the ship's passengers were divided onto five different buses, each with a guide, for a city tour. Our guide, Natasha, had lived all her life in St. Petersburg. We saw the St. Peter and St. Paul fortress where all the czars are buried and the magnificent St. Isaac's cathedral with its gilded dome. There was to be another highlight in the evening, when we attended a ballet performance – *Giselle* – in Catherine the Great's own theatre in the Hermitage Palace. She fancied herself a playwright and so had a theatre built where her plays could be performed. It was a very special treat; to not only see a ballet in Russia, but to sit where the czars had once sat. The theatre was built like a cosy amphitheatre with a lovely hand-painted curtain. When you're Catherine, no expense is spared.

The following day we went to Peterhof, 29 km from the city. Peterhof was Peter the Great's answer to Versailles near Paris. Like Versailles, it has large formal gardens and very ornate rooms. Of the original 4,000 treasures here, half were saved by being transported to Siberia before the Nazis arrived in 1941. The Nazis burned the palace but it has since been restored, using the original plans. I was amazed that the Soviets restored it so carefully since it seems to be a testament to excess. Perhaps as such it is a good teaching tool. The best of the tour really was the last room ... Peter's own study. It was built of carved wood with no gilt in sight, unlike the rest of the palace.

Mention St. Petersburg to almost anyone, and the next words are almost certain to be, 'Did you visit the Hermitage?' The enormous art collection housed in the Hermitage comprises over three million items and amounts to a history of Western European art. The vastness of the place – five main buildings of which the Winter Palace alone has more than 1,000 rooms (and over 100 staircases) – demands a little planning. No matter what your art interest, you are bound to find it here – from prehistoric Russian artefacts to ancient Egyptian treasures to French impressionists and even English landscape painters. The Hermitage's collection really began with Catherine the Great, one of the world's great collectors of art. She made some great deals, too, famously exchanging a portrait of her own good self for 15 Van Dykes from the collection of Sir Robert Walpole, a British prime minister. Nicholas I also greatly enriched the collection which he opened to the public for the first time in 1852. But it was the post-revolutionary period which saw the collection increase three fold as many private collections were seized by the state. The number of paintings is so huge it is impossible to see it all ... it is said you could devote a lifetime to it, and there are 20 times the number of paintings and artifacts stored in the vaults as there are on view. Like many things in Russia, the size is overwhelming.

Our visit to the Hermitage marked the end of our time in St. Petersburg and after dinner that day we began to cruise down the River Neva and entered Lake Ladoga, which stretches 124 miles in length and 75 miles wide into north-

ern Russia. The lake freezes every winter, and is known as the Street of Life since it served as a frozen road during the siege of Leningrad, permitting the transport of some goods into the city and providing a means of escape. There were quite high winds as we crossed the lake and the water broke over the deck. In the morning the temperature had dropped to 1° and there was ice on the deck. This was a huge change, since it had been a scorching 25° degrees when we first landed in St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg is the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska, and throughout our voyage we constantly commented on the long daylight hours; we could easily read a newspaper on deck at 10:30 at night.

As we drifted along the river we saw a number of small villages, many of them seemingly abandoned. There was lots of river traffic, including large freighters carrying petroleum and logs as well as mixed freight. This Volga Baltic waterway, as it is known, is obviously very important for transporting goods.

Though our trip took 10 days and comprised 2,000 kilometres from St. Petersburg to Moscow, it is a tiny part of Russia, a country that spans 11 time zones. We had our first lecture today on board and learned that the 'democratization' of Russia included the abrupt introduction of the free market system and as a result prices leapt thirty times in 1991. There was serious hardship, and still is amongst pensioners, but the young people seem to be doing very well, often working for joint venture companies. Economic growth in Russia is an astonishing 7% a year, and under Putin those living below the poverty line fell from 30% of the population to 20% in just four years.

Though there were no 'Broadway shows' or Las Vegas-style entertainment on the ship, there was always classical music by a pianist in the evening, and often more lively entertainment in the main lounge. One night we had a folk music concert, on another a staff concert and a passenger concert. There was a house band and dancing every evening as well. The tour director, a young Belgian woman, led those who were keen in exercises most mornings.

Soon we were docking in Goritsky, though our destination was really Kirillov, 8 km away. As we made our way to our bus, we walked along a path flanked by souvenir sellers – everything from icons to embroidered cloths to the ubiquitous Russian dolls which cleverly fit into one another. It was a far cry from my trip in 1967 when the only goods for sale were in closely guarded tourist shops (where not even guides were allowed), and market stalls were expressly forbidden. Kirillov was the home of Russia's largest monastery, St. Cyril of White Lake. Built at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, at its peak the monastery housed 200 monks. Closed by the Soviets, it has now reopened with just two monks. The state of religion in Russia is interesting. After being suppressed by the communist regime for 70 years, many churches are now open and holding services and, rather surprisingly, most Russians say they are believers. However, church attendance is still very low with the majority only attending at Easter and Christmas and other special occasions.

Churches constituted another huge difference with my 1967 tour of Russia. Then I entered not one church. When we drove past one in our bus, we were always told that it was closed (or perhaps now a museum) and that no one believed in such superstition anymore. On this trip we saw at least one and sometimes three a day. I had always heard that the Soviets destroyed churches and I am sure they did; but what was amazing to me was how many they had preserved. It was like the czars' palaces. It seems that the deep Russian desire to preserve their history was stronger than ideological passions.

The following day we went to the large city of Yaroslavl. Though we had seen many churches, this was the first one where we saw a Russian Orthodox service at the Church of the Epiphany. It was very dramatic. The priest

is often hidden by a large icon screen from which you can hear the ancient chanting and singing, and then the bearded and sumptuously robed figure suddenly appears with his censer. Still on our tour of churches, we next went to St. Elijah's where the walls and ceiling were completely covered with vibrant frescoes and there was an elaborately carved icon

screen made of linden wood and all gilded. Yaroslavl, not Moscow or St. Petersburg, is the home of Russian theatre, and the residents are justifiably proud of their place in history. The city houses a very large and absolutely charming puppet theatre; the building itself is interesting architecturally. There were displays of life sized puppets from past productions and the lobbies were filled with plants that were flourishing ... reaching up to the many skylights.

We had a chance to see the countryside on a long bus ride (several hours) over some questionable roads to Kostroma. There we shopped in a flourishing farmers' market where our lack of language proved no barrier; if you had roubles and could use hand signals you could buy anything you liked. Oh, and of course we saw another few churches and a monastery. At several of the churches professional opera singers garbed as monks sang both sacred and secular songs for us. We all sat on chairs or stood watching them

as they stood in front of elaborately decorated icon screens in their plain brown robes, their wonderfully rich voices soaring up to the top of the huge old churches. It was very moving.

One of the problems with taking the first cruise of the year is that summer has not really come to the northern reaches yet. We were prevented from seeing the island of Kizhi in the middle of Lake Onega because there was still one meter of ice (thick) around the island. One of the oldest inhabited sites in the country, Kizhi is now protected by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. It is an open-air architectural museum with many wooden structures, including the Church of the Transfiguration which was built without a single nail and has 22 timbered onion domes.

However, we did see Uglich which dates back to the

10th century. Russian history is both rich and bloody but here they outdid themselves in the violence department. After Ivan the Terrible's death in 1584, his wife moved here to Uglich with her one year old son Dmitry. This child was murdered seven years later, probably on the orders of Boris Gudunov. A man asked to see the boy's

necklace and then strangled him with it. Naturally this resulted in a serious uprising with great destruction which began when a bell was rung to begin the insurrection. This so incensed Gudunov that after he brutally put down the rebellion he ordered the 300 kg bell to be publicly 'flogged' and its 'tongue' ripped out before being banished to Siberia. It's back now, none the worse for its punishment. Obviously hard to keep a good bell down! After a century or so, a period of restoration began, and in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries some of the most beautiful Russian churches and monasteries were constructed in Uglich. The town really is an architectural gem, and this was definitely the best place to buy souvenirs ... the quality, variety and price were all outstanding.

We passed through a total of 19 locks during our voyage, but the most beautiful was definitely the Uglich lock. Built between 1935 and 1940 along with a hydroelectric



power station and pressure dam, the Uglich reservoir stretches upstream for 96 miles. Many villages were destroyed in the process, and a famous though tragic symbol of the area is the 230 ft high church tower at Kalyazin which rises out of the Volga, all that is left of the old town of Kalyazin.

As well as lectures on board we had language lessons - the first dealing with the pronunciation of the Cyrillic alphabet. It was more fun that you could imagine, though I have to admit the numbers dropped substantially from the first lesson to the second. Too bad, because during the second lesson we learned how to sing Moscow Nights which we lustily belted out during the passenger 'talent' night. Unlike large cruise ships, where there is lots of semi-professional talent just waiting for a chance to strut their stuff, on this ship we were all definite amateurs, and the programme was thus geared. A large American contingent sang their version of the Volga Boat Song ("We are Americans, touring Russia, spending all our money, to help your economy.") The Brits amusingly explained how easy it is to understand cricket, and the Canucks starred in a melodrama complete with costumes, but no lines since a narrator told the story. It was all great fun.

As we approached Moscow we left the mighty Volga and entered the Moscow canal. The Volga is Europe's greatest river, meandering 2500 miles to the Caspian Sea, draining an area of a million square miles, and linking five oceans and seas with Moscow through its canals. The riverside was green and fertile and dotted with numerous dachas. Perhaps due to too many Russian novels and plays, I always thought of dachas as fairly sumptuous country houses, even mansions. And some are - both old ones and brand new ones belonging to Moscow's new elite. However, the vast majority are tiny, some little more than sheds. But they do afford Muscovites the opportunity to grow a garden. I think the most astonishing fact I learned during our on-board lectures was that a total of 52% of all food consumed in Russia is grown in small garden plots. This in spite of the fact that the majority of Russians live in apartments in large cities!

Our first afternoon in Moscow was spent on a city tour with, of course, more churches. We went to one massive new church which can accommodate 10,000 worshippers and was built in an astounding three years. Not much when you consider the generations that worked on Notre Dame in Paris. This cathedral was completed in 2000, built on the site of a former cathedral which was blown up by the Soviets. It seems they had a penchant for that sort of thing. One advisor to Stalin even suggested that Red Square would look better without St. Basil's. Fortunately Stalin disagreed. St. Basil's (which is the multicoloured onion domed church before which television reporters always stand when they are reporting from Moscow) looks even more amazing in real life. It incorporates every colour and decoration imaginable - like the dream of a crazed architect, or perhaps a dozen of them! Red Square is huge, and looks very benign with hundreds of tourists taking pictures and eating good ice

cream, rather than being filled with the tanks and unsmiling troops of the military parades of the past.

The famous GUM department store is very near Red Square. It has lovely domed skylights and is filled with luxury shops from all over the world, including Chanel perfume and Gucci shoes. I found an ATM machine here, inserted my Powell River Credit Union card, and was rewarded with roubles. It even told me my current balance ... in roubles!

We left Red Square in our bus for the 15 minute trip to the Moscow Circus, encountering rush hour traffic and arriving more than an hour later. There are 11 million people in Moscow, and 2 million of them have cars. The famed Metro carries 9 million passengers a day. The circus, with one exception, was fabulous. It is housed, not in a tent, but in a permanent building, and the acrobatics are unparalleled. The exception was the animal acts which were sad, with the ape obviously cowed and controlled with a chain and collar.

On our final day in Moscow we toured the Kremlin (which just means 'fortress' in Russian, and is the oldest part of the city), including the Armoury which is filled with treasures from the czars. The excesses were almost unimaginable. There were gold goblets and plates, gilded coaches and even a breastplate for the czar's horse embellished with large diamonds and 100 carat emeralds. There is also a fabulous display here of jewel-encrusted Faberge eggs made for the czars, one containing a gold model of the Trans Siberian railway, and another a jewelled model of a ship.

All too soon it was time to go home - after eleven memorable days in the world's largest country that is also one of the most fascinating.

If you go ...

Our B&B in St. Petersburg was the Nevsky Inn, run by John Varga. The address is Nevsky Prospekt 11/2 Flat 19, St. Petersburg. The e-mail address is [info@nevskyinn.ru](mailto:info@nevskyinn.ru), website [www.nevskyinn.ru](http://www.nevskyinn.ru). B&B prices from €45 and airport transfer US\$30. (For those with deep pockets, St. Petersburg offers a wide variety of luxurious, international hotels which can be booked on line or through any travel agency.)

For details of Viking River Cruises visit [www.vikingrivers.com](http://www.vikingrivers.com) and click on 'United States' for information. These cruises can be booked through travel agencies across Canada or via Exclusive Tours in Toronto 1 800 268 1820, e-mail: [info@exclusivetours.ca](mailto:info@exclusivetours.ca). Prices for 2005 are from US\$1,699 for this 'Waterways of the Czars' trip.

### ***Writers are rewarded for sharing!***

*TravelScoop* rewards readers with subscription extensions of varying lengths for all submissions published. So whether you have a letter with a travel tip or a destination to share, please write to us!

## BAHAMAS

Many destinations now offer visitors popular ‘meet-the-people’ programmes, but the Islands of the Bahamas are celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> year of their People-To-People programme this year, so they were probably among the first to pioneer this type of cultural exchange. So if you have the Bahamas in your plans, and would like to discuss medicine, fishing, cooking, music or any other subject you can think of with a local family, visit [www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com) and communicate your interest to the coordinators of the programme. About 1,500 visitors a year meet Bahamian volunteers in this way; they enrich their visit and return home with great stories and photos.

## BRITAIN

Throughout 2005 Britain will be celebrating its relationship with the sea under the banner *SeaBritain 2005*.

Inspiration for these events came from the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, which saw the death of the country’s greatest naval hero, Admiral Lord Nelson. Most events will be taking place in the summer and fall. They include the International Festival of the Sea in Portsmouth (30 June – 3 July); a major exhibition ‘*Nelson and Napoleon*’ at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London (7 July – 13 November); the Trafalgar Flotilla – a historic re-enactment along the River Thames (16 September) and much more. For details visit [www.seabritain2005.com](http://www.seabritain2005.com), where new events are being added weekly. If you would like to take a tour that incorporates some of these events, Heritage Touring fits the bill. They will offer a variety of short breaks that include accommodation, most meals and guide to cover some of the SeaBritain events. Visit [www.heritagetouring.co.uk](http://www.heritagetouring.co.uk) or call (011 44) 1300 321 485 for details. And for brochures, advice and information on the whole of Britain visit [www.visitbritain.com/ca](http://www.visitbritain.com/ca) or call Visit Britain’s office in Canada at 1 888 VISIT UK.

## CANADA

Maxxim Vacations, the Atlantic Canada experts, are now offering 4-day winter ski/getaway packages across Canada. Included in the packages are four nights’ accommodation, four-day car rental and three day lift tickets for the skiers. Destinations include **Mont-Sainte-Anne** and **Mont Tremblant** in Québec; **Banff**, Alberta and **Whistler**, BC. For more information call 1 800 567 6666 or visit [www.maxximvacations.com](http://www.maxximvacations.com)

Their leaflet declares “3 Hot Packages at the Coolest Hotel”. It’s a stay in **Québec’s Ice Hotel**, combined in packages with another night at the Hilton Hotel in **Québec City** (*it has great views ... I’ve stayed there – Ed*) and discounts or gifts from Hudson Bay Company together with complimentary passes to local attractions. But the experi-

ence you are most likely to talk about for a long time after is the stay in the Ice Hotel, which has been created outside Québec City for five years now. Created from 12,000 tons of snow and 400 tons of ice, the hotel contains a chapel, a cinema, hot tubs and fireplaces, and lots of vodka in icy goblets. Try it if you dare! It will certainly provide you with a conversation piece for a long time afterwards. And there are lots of winter activities to be enjoyed in the area. Packages for the two nights (one night Ice Hotel, one night in the city) start at C\$295 and are available Sunday – Thursday. For details call 1 877 505 0423 or 1 800 447 2411 or visit [www.icehotel-canada.com](http://www.icehotel-canada.com)

The new [www.ontariotownandcountry.ca](http://www.ontariotownandcountry.ca) gives travellers planning getaways or day trips in **Ontario** easy access to great travel ideas. On the site visitors can create, save, edit and share their personalized travel itineraries using the web site’s interactive Ontario map and ‘Ideas List’. Best of all, travel ideas are organized according to season, locations or interests, giving users a variety of ways to plan getaways. The site also offers information about and links to heritage inns, historic landmarks, culinary vacations, summer theatre and seasonal celebrations across the province.

## FRANCE

A final word about the country we have extensively covered in this issue. In 2000, France received 3.8 million American tourists. By 2003 that number had dropped to 2.4 million, due in part to the reluctance of Americans to travel overseas in general, and to France in particular. (Remember the *freedom fries* fiasco?!) The Virginia editors of a newsletter – *La Belle France* – designed for American travellers reports that “French hoteliers, restaurateurs and shopkeepers are desperate for the return of the American tourist and are adjusting their prices as a reflection of this. Hotels which generally have firm rates are now adjusting much more drastically, depending on the season and demand.” We’re just reporting what they are saying!

## ITALY

*TravelScoop* has had a long association with Gaynor Powell, owner of the Tuscany villa/apartment/farmhouse rental agency La Bella Toscana. Back in the days when we had advertising in these pages, Gaynor’s ad was a regular, and we know many of our readers enjoyed stays in her properties in the area surrounding San Gimignano and a number wrote of their experiences for us. The next edition of *TravelScoop* will be featuring several Italian regions, but if Tuscany is in your plans you may like to see La Bella Toscana’s offerings. They are all shown on their website: [www.labellatoscana.net](http://www.labellatoscana.net), where you can order their brochure too, or contact Gaynor at Via Solferino 28, 53034 Colle di Val d’Elsa, Siena, Italy, tel: (011 39) 0577 926 768, fax: 0577 999 023, e-mail: [info@labellatoscana.it](mailto:info@labellatoscana.it)

## SOUTH AFRICA

Have you ever thought of travelling in South Africa with a small group of friends ... renting two cars or a mini-bus, perhaps? If so, and if you're prepared to dip a little deeper than usual into your pockets, you may like to check out the website [www.castleonthecorral.com](http://www.castleonthecorral.com) and include Plettenberg Bay (on the Garden Route) in your itinerary. This property rents in its entirety, self-catered but staffed, for groups of eight or less at prices from about C\$1,550 per day. Pricey, yes, but not so bad when divided between eight and although nobody at *TravelScoop* has been fortunate enough to go there, it certainly does look as though it's a memorable place. Do take a peek!

## U.S.A.

A stay on the **Florida** coast need not break the bank. Greater **Fort Lauderdale** has a neat little brochure entitled *Superior Small Lodgings*. Some of the properties are of the plain 'cookie-cutter' variety, but there are many that

look very charming indeed. Lots of them have efficiency units or 1- or 2-bedroom apartments and nearly all quote weekly as well as daily rates. For your copy of the brochure call 1 800 22 SUNNY or log on to [www.sunny.org](http://www.sunny.org) and scroll to the bottom of the home page where you can order the free brochure on line (and, of course, receive lots of other information).

**Alaska's** Iditarod dog sled race is one of the world's most amazing events. If you have always been intrigued by this race and would like to get 'up close' you may like to hear about the Millennium Alaskan Hotel's Iditarod Package. This includes a two-night stay in a Club King Room with room service or restaurant breakfasts, two tickets to the five-course fund-raising dinner and auction at the hotel, transportation to and from the Iditarod Race start in Anchorage on 5 March, access to the race activities at the hotel including the Musher's Champagne Toast and lots more (including airport transfers and shuttle service to downtown Anchorage and to other venues). The hotel is located on the shores of scenic Lake Spennard, used by the

## health matter

As my doctor gave me my flu shot a few weeks ago she said that, after people in the medical profession, the second most likely group of people to catch flu and similar illnesses are air travellers. Therefore it was with great interest that I just learned about a wearable, mini air purifier, designed with air travellers and people who suffer from asthma or allergies in mind. It has just become available in Canada.

The Wein Air Supply Mini-Mate is a pager-sized battery-operated ionic air purifier that can be worn around the neck or clipped to a shirt pocket. It weighs just 1½ oz. It operates on a lithium battery (included) and works by repelling ambient airborne particles as small as .04 microns in size that are associated with influenza, the common cold and the SARS virus. The Mini-Mate generates a high intensity ion stream that creates a respiratory protective zone in front of the wearer's eyes, nose and mouth. It's ideal for any confined indoor space where air is re-circulated such as airplanes, movie theatres, hospitals, offices, public transit or shopping malls.

The lightweight air purifier, which has been featured on U.S. television programmes such as Oprah and NBC Dateline, was developed by Stanley Weinberg, a Canadian-born inventor. Weinberg, through his California-based company. The Mini-Mate has been tested by leading research scientists at UCLA and the Department of Environmental Science at the University of Cincinnati. It was shown to be safe and effective and to substantially reduce the concentrations of harmful and irritating airborne particles. The American research has

been reviewed in Canada by Dr. Gabor Lantos, an Occupational Health Physician, Engineer and Consultant to several Toronto teaching hospitals. He concludes: "the neck-worn air purifier can be of significant benefit in mitigating the risks from common airborne pathogens such as the common cold corona viruses, tuberculosis and Influenza A and B as well as SARS."

The air-purifier is being distributed in Canada by Thornhill-based Jorley Distributing Inc. The device sells for \$149.95 plus shipping and handling. For more information or to order visit [www.airsupply.ca](http://www.airsupply.ca) or call 905 482 936 or 1 866 724 0404.

Are you wary of travelling because of food allergies and other restrictions? If so you will be interested to hear of a company called SelectWisely that has, for some time, offered food translation cards to address the needs of travellers with food allergies or other restrictions. The company has now expanded these food translation card offerings to address the needs of travellers who are lactose intolerant. These cards are designed to help travellers communicate to restaurant staff, food vendors and grocery clerks the specific foods and ingredients they need to avoid. Cards are offered in 12 languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, German, Russian, Polish, two forms of Chinese and two forms of Portuguese as well as English. For more information about this company, their complete range of offerings, card examples and ordering instructions, visit [www.selectwisely.com](http://www.selectwisely.com)

Provence. It's a natural paradise in contrast to a man-made cultural and artistic centre that has passed from the Greeks to the Romans to modern times, and is well worth the extra time to get there.

Most sites in the region for which there is an admission charge provide excellent audio-guides, available in several languages. At each numbered location you key in the number to listen to the description. Many spots will then have a secondary number for further detail or background information. Not only do these allow you to proceed at your own pace, but they also have the decided advantage of making the sites quieter. People are concentrating on listening rather than idle chatter, and there are no guides trying to out-shout each other, no visitors on the fringe of their group saying "What did he/she say?"

Two excellent small guidebooks to take with you are *Provence and the Côte d'Azur* (from the Knopf Mapguide Series) and *Top 10, Provence and the Côte d'Azur* from Eyewitness Guides. The first is a series of fold-out maps, quite detailed, with descriptions of the major sites, eating places, crafts and delicacies. The second is descriptive lists of the 'Top 10' in many categories: places to visit, Roman sites, painters, villages, wines, restaurants, gardens, cultural

events and others, covering the whole of Provence and then for eight specific regions within the larger region. Both are available less than \$15 each and both can easily be carried on your outings.

For additional information on line, visit [www.provenceweb.fr](http://www.provenceweb.fr) or [www.provence-tourism.com](http://www.provence-tourism.com); both sites have links to many others.

*When Judy and Ted van der Veen are not travelling they call Campbellville, Ontario, home.*

In addition to the above vacation in Orgon, Judy and Ted van der Veen enjoyed a five-night stay and four-day cooking course near Toulon. Their story commences on the following page – enjoy!

June and July (and they are closed in August) and "for the person who comes with and does not take part" there's a charge of €17. We investigated other cooking schools in France on the Internet that charge up to double that, without accommodation. We cannot imagine that you could enjoy them more than this one. René Bérard is not only a master of his craft, "un vrai artiste", but he also enjoys meeting people and sharing his love of cooking with them. If cooking is really not your thing, there are other creative holidays offered here: Wine Appreciation, Painting with Watercolours, "Gardens of Provence" tours or Pottery. Or you can simply enjoy a stay here for a few days.

René and Daniele Bérard have owned the Hostellerie Bérard for over 35 years. Under their direction, the small country inn has become a deluxe three-star 40-room hotel. The entire staff works to create a welcoming atmosphere in a pleasant atmosphere. This is truly a family operation: Madame Bérard manages the hotel, René is in charge of the large kitchen staff and restaurant, their daughter is director of marketing, and their son, now training in Italy, has already won acclaim for his creative cuisine.

The dining room overlooks the Bandol vineyards and

serves traditional Provençal cuisine as interpreted by René Bérard. (The *Eyewitness Top 10 Travel Guide* for Provence gives the restaurant the Number 1 rating for the Provençal Coast or Var region, which stretches from Cassis to St.-Raphael.)

There is an outdoor swimming pool on site as well as a sauna and gym. The sea is only twenty minutes away. Such well-known towns as Cassis and Hyères are within easy reach by car. There are walking and cycling trails of varying levels of difficulty in the vicinity, not to mention the excellent wineries and the honey and olive producers that welcome visitors. La Cadière is a designated "Village de Caractère" and "Village Fleuri." The small Office de Tourisme has maps, brochures, and a pamphlet in English describing a discovery walk through this historic town. This is a peaceful, quiet village, with lots of excitement nearby for those times when you want to join the crowds. Check out the Hostellerie website (above), or contact them by telephone at (011 33) 04 94 90 11 43 or fax at (011 33) 04 94 90 01 94, or write to Hostellerie Bérard, 6 rue de Gabriel Péri, 83740 La Cadière d'Azur, France. Bon appétit!

*Visit our website [www.thetravelsociety.com](http://www.thetravelsociety.com) where you can see full-colour photos and renew your subscription on-line*

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 15<sup>th</sup> century temples, before you proceed to the famous medieval city of Jodhpur, home of the massive Mehrangarh 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.



### 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
- Village safari in Jodhpur
- 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	<b>\$6,589.00 pp/dbl</b>
Ottawa & Montreal	
Vancouver	
Calgary	
Halifax	

### GREAT ADD-ONS, INCLUDING AIR:

Kapawi - from all departure points	<b>\$1,680.00 pp/dbl</b>
Machu Picchu -	<b>\$1,996.00 pp/dbl</b>
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
- All meals as per the itinerary
- Admissions to all sites
- Expert Galapagos guides
- Transfers & baggage handling
- Islands Park Entrance Fee (US\$100)

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



## New Tours for 2005

- South Africa - 20 days
- Oriental Spendour - 17 days (Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong and more)
- Japan - 14 days
- South America: Chile, Argentina, Patagonia, Iguazu Falls etc.

Please call for the full itineraries and departure dates

NEW

## Guatemala Grandeur

Departing 11 February 2005

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

**AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:**

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

Single supplement \$525 (Sharing can be arranged.) Plus Taxes.  
Prices are subject to confirmation

Each tour is limited to  
18 people

### Your tour includes:

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

21 days, prices include all airfares

## A Traveller's Turkey

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	\$5,900.00 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$5,975.00 pp/dbl
Montreal	\$5,975.00 pp/dbl	Vancouver	\$6,145.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$6,145.00 pp/dbl	Calgary	\$6,145.00 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$6,145.00 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$6,075.00 pp/dbl

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

Space limited to 20 people  
Fully escorted

### Your tour includes:

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

NEW

## Copper Canyon February, March, April 2005

FULLY ESCORTED

We are offering a new fully escorted 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	\$4,934 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,934 pp/dbl
Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Winnipeg	\$5,294 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$600 (Sharing can be arranged.) Taxes extra.  
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, baggage handling & tips
- Meals as per the itinerary
- All train trips and tours as per the itinerary

FROM \$3,942 FOR 18 DAYS!

## FULLY ESCORTED

*New departures dates:*

*7, 28 April, 15 September. & 20 October. 2005*



**I**t 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 Chongqing 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-

tural 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

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