



The Travel Society Magazine
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Travel Scoop

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Harrogate in Bloom
The Ring Road of Iceland
Some Italian Tips
South to Calabria - Italy's Toe

TravelScoop

The Travel Society Magazine

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A typical street scene in Tuscany (Sampson)

editor's letter ...

By now any of you who were involved with the demise of Jetsgo will know the score. I do hope not too many of you were adversely affected. Perhaps there's a valuable lesson here, at least for those who live in Ontario, Québec or B.C. who booked flights through a travel agent. For those travellers, compensation will be forthcoming (eventually) via the Compensation Funds in place in those provinces. Jetsgo's news has prompted the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies (ACTA) to again call for a National Traveller Protection programme.

As I write this in Toronto, the start of Spring is just a few days away. It's hard to believe as we still have snow on the ground, but one of our readers in Victoria has just e-mailed me to report on her beautiful magnolia tree. So there's hope for us all!

This issue continues its focus on European destinations and concludes its two-part 'Focus on Italy' feature. Italy is high on the list of most people's travel wish list and I hope that, armed with *TravelScoop's* articles and book reviews over the past year or so, you'll be able to have some wonderful independent travels throughout that beautiful and art-rich country. Next month we'll be looking at a less-heard-of, but increasingly popular, European destination: Croatia. There will also be some tips on Wales and the start of our annual spring 'let's look at Canada' features. Then, for your height of summer reading, we'll be bringing you some more adventurous destinations: the Silk Road, Myanmar (Burma) and India among them.

Before I close, a quick reminder that the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is urging tourists to return to countries that were affected by last year's tsunami. For information check their website www.pata.org.

I hope you like our new-paper look! I hope you see your daffodils soon! And I wish you *bon voyage* on your Spring



Vejer: A Wonderful Place to Pause in Spain

The recent story on Seville in *TravelScoop* reminded me of our favourite overnight accommodation in Andalucia. Last spring we rented a car and were travelling from the Algarve through Spain to Gibraltar, visiting some of the wonderful hill towns along the Costa de la Luz. There are fewer tourists in this area and the Spanish culture with Moorish influences prevails. The towns, known as Pueblos Blancos, are hilltop fortified villages built by the Moors.

On this trip, we chose to by-pass Jerez and Cadiz, continuing southwards toward Vejer de la Frontera, about 50 km from La Linnea, the border town for Gibraltar. We drove from the rolling agricultural plains up a winding mountainous road to the old section of Vejer, not sure what awaited us. The route brought us out into a sunny village square with a colourful mosaic tiled fountain in its centre. It was mid-afternoon and local residents were out enjoying the sun in front of sidewalk canteens.

There is a strong Moorish influence in this town. Apparently, until a few years ago the women wore veils

here. The houses are whitewashed and the lanes form twisting pathways with stairs travelling up and down the hillside. Right on the square was a small hotel with a garden and restaurant on the street below. This was to be our lodging for the night.

The Casa del Califa is a charming spot. It has been created over the years from three adjoining buildings, all with a history that dates back through the centuries. The original well from the 12th century is in the garden. Rooms, hallways and staircases meander throughout the establishment. Great care has been taken in décor. Many times one can round a corner to find a cozy nook, or open room, furnished with thick woollen rugs and wall hangings in the Moorish style. Some ceilings and doorways are narrow or low, stairways are to be taken with caution and cobblestones abound.

Our room, with en suite bath, was reached via a flowered courtyard. More steps down took us to a walled garden where a lavish buffet breakfast and lunches were served. Dinner was in an adjoining dining room, hollowed out of the rock foundations, part of the original building, which is said to have belonged to an early Moorish ruler of the area. After a wonderful candlelit dinner we took our coffee to the rooftop patio. In

daylight hours one can see not only the surrounding town clinging to the hillside, but also the plains below that reach out the coast. While in Vejer we took time to walk through the town visiting the fortress and enjoying the floral displays in small patios and in window boxes along the way.

We thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. It is a destination worthy of a side trip. The rooms vary in price from €48 (€1 = C\$1.60) for a double bedded room in off season to €62 in high season. Twin bedded rooms are larger and about €10 more expensive. All rooms have baths and each is individually decorated with guest comfort in mind. Some have glorious views from windows or patios.

To see more, visit website www.vejer.com/califa or contact the hotel at Plaza de España 16 Vejer de la Frontera, Cádiz 11.150, España, tel: [011 34] 956 44 77 30 (English spoken), fax: 956 45 16 25, e-mail: hotel@vejer.com

Jane Mallory
Kingston, ON

Some Czech Memories

Just a short note to let all at *TravelScoop* know how you help me decide where to go next! In April 2003 we read the article by J. Helen Parkyn about spring in the Czech Republic and my daughter and I decided we would try it. It was fabulous! We stayed five days in Prague at the Betlem Hotel located on a quaint and quiet square and surrounded by cobbled streets with all the major sites close by. Double rooms are available here at €125, but we treated ourselves to a suite for €137 (about C\$220) with a great breakfast in the ancient cellar. (Enter all properties mentioned in this letter in your search engine and you will find them listed on a variety of sites.) As well



The Casa del Califa (Mallory)

as seeing all the famous Prague attractions we attended the State Opera where we saw a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, also a concert at the Rodolfinum concert hall.

We then rented a car and decided to travel wherever our fancy took us. Our first destination was Karlovy Vary, a spa town, where we stayed at the beautiful Richmond Hotel for three nights: CZK2,500 (approx. C\$137) per room per night with a massage each day! On the road again, we saw a sign that said Macocka (stepmother) Chalet in the Moravian Karsts national park and decided to have a look. We were amazed at the lovely chalet property and even more amazed at the price of CZK230 (C\$12.60) per person in two bunk beds with a huge, very private, shared shower room. The Chalet overlooks the Macocka Abysee – over 138 meters deep and awesome. Dinner here included wine and Viennese coffee for CZK298 (C\$16) for two. We stayed for three days: rode the cable car down to the fabulous caves and – the most exciting part – took a boat ride on the subterranean Punkva River. This is a fascinating 25 minute ride, with every minute filled with something new to see, which the boat's driver points out.

The open-air ethnographic muse-

um known as Prerov nad Labem, a reconstruction of life in the 17th and 18th centuries, was next on our itinerary. We really enjoyed this stirring of our imaginations.

We visited many other places, but they have been written about in *TravelScoop* before. All I would like to add is that each thing, each day, was all we could possibly have wished for and we urge other readers to include the Czech Republic in their travel plans.

Mary Ann Polacek
Chatham, ON

An Alternative to Cruise Ship Shore Excursions

If you enjoy cruising but, like us, have tired of the expense and sameness of the shore excursions offered, here is a simple-to-implement alternative we have been using on our cruises. As a caveat, do not read on if you love the scuba diving and snorkelling trips, soaking up the sun on beaches, taking trips with rock music (and 'free' rum drinks with little umbrellas) on party boats, or if you are inflicted by the "s" gene (shopping). But, if you are still active, and have different interests, some

variation of our pattern may suit you.

Prior to the cruise, use a search engine to locate the web-site for the Chamber of Commerce for each port you will visit. Explore each site, print out details of the Chamber location, the cruise ship dock, and look for evidence of a self-guided walking tour of the area. We also check into our main interests: botanic gardens, museums, galleries and classical music. Upon arrival at the dock, we walk off to the Chamber office – not to be confused with a dock-side Tourist Information desk which is often a thinly-disguised front for tour operators and tourist shops. When we arrive at the Chamber office, we ask for any map they might have for a self-guided walking tour, and we confirm details of any attractions that fit our interests. We ask about taxis to botanic gardens, museums or galleries that might be too far distant to walk, about opening hours and admission charges. We also ask the helpful staff if there are any events that day that might fit into our schedule – this often produces pleasant surprises that "make our day". Then, with the good information from the local experts, we sit nearby and plan our morning (or afternoon) and away we go.

On a recent cruise in the Bahamas and Eastern Caribbean we used this technique, and had some wonderful walks with colourful and entertaining

The Travel Society website

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consequences. In Nassau it was the opening of the Supreme Court complete with a procession of bewigged judges in red and black robes accompanied by the Police Brass Band. What a work-out this was for our new digital camera!

Because of a late arrival in San Juan (Puerto Rico), we missed the opening hours of the small museum which is a tribute to Pablo Casals, but in Charlotte Amalie (St. Thomas), we had to choose between a taxi ride to St. Peter Great House and Garden, and the nature walk at the top of the nearby Sky Tram. We selected the latter, and enjoyed the somewhat commercial but entertaining bird show, as well as the views from the nature walk.

Another highlight was a backstreets walk through Tortola (British Virgin Islands) to the small but beautifully presented Botanic Garden where we were two of only eight visitors that morning, so the Garden was peaceful as well as colourful.

Finally, in Key West, armed with a very effective brochure, we took the Pelican Path which guided us past all of the historic homes of this charming town. There was the option of paying an admission fee to enter several of the homes (including Hemingway's), but the crowds of guided-tour groups from the cruise ships discouraged us and we continued walking, and photographing. It was also "race day" in Key West, and we were able to watch as approximately 400 sailboats left the marinas and headed off-shore – raising colourful spinnakers as they went – ready for the final race of a week long series.

This strategy will not cost an arm and a leg and, if you wish, you can arrive back on your cruise ship for a late lunch, leaving time in the afternoon to relax in an almost empty ship while most other passengers are still ashore shopping or completing their shore excursions. Our plan will not appeal to all, but it certainly suits our style and interests.

*Les & Pat Dickason
Nanaimo, BC*

Speaking English in Spain

In your last edition you asked for input concerning "Englishtown"; the facility that immerses Spanish participants in a week's worth of English conversation with free room and board for the English-speaking volunteers. I had the good fortune of being able to co-ordinate a week volunteering with this programme before embarking on a tour of Andalusia in the Fall of 2004. I admit to being somewhat concerned, beforehand, that it would be challenging to converse with a group of Spaniards morning, noon and night for a solid week. Needless to say, they too felt anxiety for their English immersion exercises. Not to worry, we all coalesced through the variety offered within the programme itself and the personalities involved.

The volunteers ranged in age from their 20's to some, like myself, in their 70's. The Spanish folk were in their 30's to early 50's as one might expect of a programme aimed at management personnel. It was indeed a wonderful week listening to these men and women make progress although, as we laughingly exclaimed, "We all now speak Spanglish!"

I chose to participate in the Englishtown located at Gredos, where the accommodation was excellent. The school is located in a hotel, part of the Izan chain, situated in the middle of the countryside about three hours' drive from Madrid, where most of the volunteers had spent at least a night before the week commenced. We were hosted to a get-together social in Madrid the evening before we were bused out to Gredos. The programme did not have a lot of participants when I was there in the off season, which meant that many of us enjoyed rooms to ourselves ... mine had a gorgeous view over rolling hills towards the mountains with small villages seen in the distance.

The room itself was well equipped with a comfortable bed, T.V., ample closet space and a modern bathroom

complete with bidet. Also on the property was a newly-constructed gym complete with workout equipment as well as a swimming pool, hot tub and steam room. There were also tennis courts available. At the time I was there the meals left something to be desired, but I understand that the chef was fired after we left and repeat volunteers told me that usually the food is very enjoyable ... we certainly enjoyed the wine that was served! We were encouraged not to allow cliques to form, so at each meal we made a concerted effort to make sure that there was an equal number of 'Anglos' and Spaniards seated at each table. A sheet was posted each morning in the reception area informing us who we were paired with. Then it was up to us to decide what we would do. One would see couples perched on rocky walls in the sun, strolling down the country lanes or choosing to stay in the attractive reception area where there was plenty of comfortable seating. The bar was always open so one could get any kind of beverage – alcoholic or otherwise – whenever one wished. There was a variety of programmes: everything from one to one conversations, group discussions, skits, games and telephone 'chats'. From time to time the Spaniards were also expected to present three-minute talks. One evening was decreed "Party Night" and another day we walked or drove into the nearest village where we were given an historical tour with the Spaniards acting as interpreters for us.

I wouldn't think twice about going back and volunteering again should the opportunity present itself. It was a great experience. That website again: www.vaughanvillage.com.

*Mary Goulding
Victoria, BC*

*Visit our website
www.thetravelsociety.com
where you can see
full-colour photos*



Harrogate in Bloom

story and photos by Ann Wallace

There's a town in the north of England whose inhabitants are besotted with flowers. Blooms tumble from every old-fashioned lamp-post, burst from myriad window boxes and spring in glorious profusion in city parks and squares and every private garden. Known as 'England's Floral Town', this beautiful place is **Harrogate**, an elegant, affluent and charming destination that provides a wonderful base for exploring the county of Yorkshire.

Surrounded by the breathtaking **Yorkshire Dales and Moors**, this region offers enough historic towns and attractions to keep a visitor busy for a year or more. Here in North Yorkshire stand abbeys, halls, castles and cathedrals; museums and stately homes; moors, valleys and dales; ancient steam railway routes; unique crafts and shopping opportunities and so much more. Base yourself in Harrogate and all these delights are accessible ... but first you'll have to drag yourself away from Harrogate itself. And that's not easy because every corner of Harrogate is a delight!

First of all, its list of floral accolades: voted gold medal

winner of the **Britain in Bloom** contest in 2003, Harrogate went on to win the **Entente Florale – Europe in Bloom** international competition the following year. And you can be sure they will be competing again this year! It's easy to see why Harrogate wins such prestigious floral awards. From the beautifully landscaped **Valley Gardens** in the centre of town, to the famous 200 acres of lawns and magnificent trees known as '**The Stray**', to every nook and cranny, both public and private, it's obvious this town is crazy about gardens. Harrogate is also home to major spring and autumn garden and flower shows. A mile walk through the pine woods of Valley Gardens will bring you to 58-acre **Harlow Carr**, one of England's four **Royal Horticultural Society Gardens**, where visitors can enjoy the unique streamside garden, a woodland arboretum, ornamental gardens and many other appealing visitor attractions such as the largest gardening bookshop in the north of England, a Museum of Gardening and a branch of Harrogate's famous Betty's Tea House for wonderful al fresco lunches. (These Gardens are generally handicapped accessible, and full details can be found on their website listed below.)

Of course this gracious and prosperous town offers far more than gardens. Its cosmopolitan charm and elegant architecture owes much to its heritage as a fashionable Victorian spa. Home to Europe's strongest sulphur well, housed in the **1842 Royal Pump Room**, which is now a museum, European royalty and other wealthy visitors flocked for generations to Harrogate to 'take the cure'. Today, Harrogate offers a beautifully-restored **Turkish Baths & Health Spa**, the finest such historical building in Britain. Here visitors can spend a few hours enjoying the three hot rooms, plunge pool, rest room and Winter Garden Lounge amidst the Moorish design of Islamic arches and screens, vibrant glazed brickwork walls, painted ceilings and terrazzo floors. Use of the Baths costs £12.00 (£1 = C\$2.30) per visit, £8.50 on Tuesdays, fine towels are provided. There's also a Health Spa here offering an extensive menu of treatments and therapies (details at the website below). I didn't indulge (next visit!), but the friendly staff allowed me to peek at the fabulous architecture, of which they are so very proud.

Today many other reasons bring visitors to Harrogate, but considering the town's history it should come as no surprise to find here hotels ranging from the majestic to the quaint. In addition, there's the charming **Mercer Art Gallery** and a variety of performances at the splendid **Harrogate International Centre** and the **Harrogate Theatre** for arts lovers, tempting shops to delight any shopaholic, international restaurants



Betty's famous Tea Rooms and their Saturday-morning line-up!



to please any gourmet and a warm Yorkshire welcome everywhere.

Betty's Tea Rooms, located at the top of Montpellier Hill above the Valley Gardens, is an institution here. I'd heard about it but wasn't to experience it because of the long line-ups already in place when I passed by on a Saturday morning in September! Renowned for serving the most expensive cup of tea in England, as well as delectable pastries, lunches and main meals (from 9 – 9) those of you with more time than I will have to join the line-up and report back to *TravelScoop!* Instead, I was off to scout out a selection of places to stay and these are listed below.

Delightful though Harrogate is, visitors will also be keen to explore the surrounding region. And what a wonderful region it is! A day trip from Harrogate can take you to West Yorkshire and the village of Haworth where the humble home of the Brontë family is an ever-popular attraction. This drive will take you through part of Nidderdale and over Ilkley Moor. The **Nidderdale** area on the Yorkshire Dales has been named an **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, one of 41 such landscapes in England and Wales to be so designated by the government for their special qualities. Beyond lies the vast **Yorkshire Dales National Park**. And easily reached from Harrogate are the towns of **Ripon** and **Knaresborough** which join Harrogate to form one of

England's most renowned floral areas. Not only are these towns themselves a delight, but the surrounding countryside offers wonderful opportunities for walking, hiking and canoeing.

Knaresborough, less than five miles due east of Harrogate, rises in spectacular fashion above the River Nidd's limestone gorge. With its lovely river, impressive viaduct,

cliff-hugging houses and quaint streets it's not-to-be-missed. And it is claimed that Mother Shipton's Cave and Petrifying Well here is England's oldest attraction. About ten miles due north of Harrogate stands **Ripon**, home of magnificent Ripon Cathedral (AD672) which is one of Yorkshire's finest treasures. But that's only one of the many attractions of this ancient town that offers a lively market, rippling canals, the popular Prison & Police Museum and nearby Norton Conyers, the inspiration for Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Just four miles from Ripon lies another not-to-be-missed destination: the World Heritage

Site of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Water Garden. Plan to spend time here in this splendid 800-acre site with its many gardens, lakes, deer park, ruins and historic buildings; you will be impressed.

Time is always my enemy and I was only able to pay fleeting visits to these areas surrounding Harrogate. But I'm convinced that for a well-rounded vacation of spectacular hill and moorland scenery combined with historical sites and glorious gardens this region must be hard to beat. I grew up in the south of England and rarely headed north. Now I have just some idea of all that I missed, and will plan to return to the north of England again soon. If you go ... I'm sure you'll enjoy.

Transportation

I reached North Yorkshire by flying directly to **Manchester** with **Air Transat**. As I've stated in the pages of TS before, I believe Air Transat's recently enhanced **Club Class** offers the best deal across the Atlantic. It's a fraction of the cost of other airlines' Business Class yet offers spacious seating in an exclusive cabin, a choice of four meals, wines and other free bar service, enhanced baggage allowance and more. And their no-charge open-jaws policy means you can fly into one airport and leave from another. This can be just in Britain (you can choose from Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, London and Exeter ... and Dublin or Shannon in Ireland), or the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and/or Greece. Manchester is conveniently located for many great destinations in Britain, and is an easy 55 mile-drive via motorway from Harrogate. If you decide to visit Harrogate but do not wish to drive, the entire area is well served by public train and bus links, with excursion buses also available to a variety of Yorkshire attractions such as famous Harewood House. Harrogate itself can be explored on foot and its train station is right in the centre of town. The websites listed below have lots of transportation information. A warning: the roads in and out of Harrogate can be very busy, especially if there are shows (such as the famous flower show, held in April and September each year) and festivals happening in the surrounding areas. Leave early or give yourself plenty of time to reach your out-of-Harrogate destinations.

Accommodation

As mentioned, Harrogate has a long history of welcoming visitors. Evidence of this is immediately apparent to visitors, as they can't miss the plethora of hotels and inns in this town.

There are properties with names such as The Majestic, Grants, The Old Swan,

The Ruskin, Rudding Park and dozens of smaller inns and B&B's. **The Majestic**, tel: [country code 011 44, Harrogate code 1432] 700 300, www.paramount-hotels.co.uk, is, as its name implies, an immense hotel, Victorian in architecture, towering over 12 acres of landscaped gardens with a history of entertaining the famous and infamous. Nearby **Grants**, tel: 560 666, www.grantshotel-harrogate.com, is a pretty property set in a series of charming row houses on Swan Road. Also on Swan Road is **The Old Swan**, tel: 500 055, www.oldswan-hotel.com, an ivy-clad local institution famous as the retreat of Agatha Christie when she 'disappeared' in 1926. Another popular Swan Road property is the homey 7-room **Ruskin**, tel: 502 045, www.ruskinhotel.co.uk, while a few miles out of town stands the prestigious **Rudding Park**, tel: 844 884, www.ruddingpark.com, a five-star property with all amenities including golf course and splendid views over the Yorkshire countryside. My choice? Without hesitation I would recommend the lovely B&B set in a gracious town-house known as **Britannia Lodge**. Also on Swan Road, this property stands in a residential area of – you guessed – beautiful gardens, just steps from all that Harrogate has to offer. Here you can be sure of a



Britannia Lodge and adjacent Valley Gardens

warm welcome from owners Nigel and Julia Macdonald, a beautifully decorated en-suite room (one of three, or choose the Garden Apartment) and a delicious, full English breakfast. It's a 'fresh-flowers kind of place' and absolutely delightful. Rates around £75 per room, including full breakfast. It's located at 16 Swan Road, Harrogate, N. Yorkshire, HG1 2SA, tel: 508 482, fax: 526 840, www.brit-lodge.co.uk.

For a longer, and more economical stay, I am also confident in recommending **Harrogate Holiday Cottages**, a booking agency that offers accommodation from apartments in town to cottages in the Dales which would be ideal. Visit www.harrogateholidays.co.uk for photographs, information and to request a brochure, or call 523 333. I didn't use their services, but it's a good website and owner Alison Hartwell responded immediately and in a very friendly manner when I e-mailed her with a query.

Many B&B, farm and self-catering options in the countryside are also listed in some of the tourism websites listed below.

Books

My constant companion when travelling in Britain is always an Alastair Sawday guide. Whenever we plan a trip we always ask each other, "Where does Sawday recommend?" Our most-used volume is *British Bed and Breakfast*, but there are other volumes in the series: *British Places to Stay for Garden Lovers*, the guide entitled *London* and also a volume of *British Hotels Inns & Other Places*. Mr Sawday has now spread his wings and written 'Special Places to Stay' guides for other countries: France, Ireland, Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Spain. He also has an excellent website where his properties and books are listed (and can be ordered ... the British B&B guide is £14.99 plus postage etc.). Or these guides can easily be found at good book-stores all over Britain. Each property is illustrated with a colour photo, the guide is easy to follow and the writing is elegant. Each entry makes you *really* want to visit! Check it all out at www.specialplacetostay.com

More Information

The office of **VisitBritain** in Toronto does not carry regional guides, though it does have a brochure on England's North Country which can be requested on line at www.visitbritain.com/ca or by calling 1 888 VISITUK.

Detailed information on the **Harrogate** region can be obtained by placing a quick call to 1423 537300 or e-mailing enjoy@harrogate.gov.uk. The official website is www.harrogate.gov.uk/enjoy, but many additional sites can be found by entering 'Harrogate Tourism' in your search engine. In addition, www.yorkshiredales.org and www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk will give you a good idea of all the pleasure that awaits you in this region.

Once in Harrogate, the **Tourist Information Centre** is located in the Royal Baths on Crescent Road, opposite the Convention Centre.

Information on **Harlow Carr Gardens** can be found at www.rhs.org.uk/WhatsOn/gardens/harlowcarr/index.asp

Turkish Baths & Health Spa: www.harrogate.gov.uk/turkishbaths or call 1423 556746 when you arrive.

Fountains Abbey: www.fountainsabbey.org.uk/

Haworth and the Brontës: www.haworth.yorks.com/

All these attraction websites have opening hours, admission charges, maps and more.

Note

The next issue of *TravelScoop* will bring you some ideas for travelling in Wales. It would be easy to plan a driving itinerary that included both Wales and Yorkshire, by using Air Transat's open-jaws policy ... Birmingham (which gives fairly easy access to Wales, or Exeter for a West Country tour that could also include Wales), a cross-country drive through some splendid scenery to or from Yorkshire, plus flights in or out of Manchester airport. Or, if you'd like your travels to

t a k e



More gardens and gracious architecture in Harrogate

you further north,

Touring the Ring Road of Iceland

Photo and story by Jennifer Helen Parkyn

Gullfoss waterfalls

We've gone crazy for Iceland! Interest in this country is on the rise in many fields, not only tourism, as Iceland sets a fine environmental model and also features "among the world's best" in terms of literacy, health, culture and income. In our February/March issue we brought you details of an Eldertreks tour. Now TravelScoop subscriber Jennifer Parkyn tells us how to explore Iceland independently ... and far more cheaply.

It's no secret ... Iceland is expensive. But, if exploring this country of waterfalls, geysers, glaciers, volcanic activity and teeming birdlife appeals, consider travelling independently as a friend and I did last year. It certainly helps to keep costs down. We did quite a bit of planning; we considered what level of accommodation we needed and we were prepared to so some self-catering, all of which helped. We flew via Icelandic Air from England (London's Heathrow), as our 11 days in Iceland were part of longer European holiday, but Iceland Express from Stansted Airport (northeast of London) would have been cheaper. We had pre-arranged a rental car for 11 days with Hertz obtaining a rate – \$776 (all prices Canadian dollars) – that would have been impossible to get once on the island. It turned out to be a terrific bargain, for we met two ladies who were spending more to get around the island by public bus! The car, a Toyota Yars, had a very small trunk, but we were told not to worry about the suitcase in view on the back seat for theft is rare in Iceland. In fact, it is one of the safest places anywhere to visit. We were to discover that gas is around \$2 a litre, so we were glad to have a small, fuel-efficient car. Visitors are advised not to drive in the remote interior and certainly not without a 4-wheel drive vehicle. However, such excursions are not necessary as there's more than enough to see on and close to the country's famous ring road, which we used to circle the island in an anti-clockwise direction.

Leaving the airport mid afternoon we drove towards Reykjavik but stopped short of the city as we had decided to leave it to the end. At nearby **Hafnafjordur** we had booked a B&B via the internet. (I will mention here that both in the planning stage and throughout our trip we used the Lonely Planet guide *Iceland 2004*. This is an essential reference for independent travellers; most other guides only treat the country superficially. All our accommodation is listed in that guide, so I have not given contact details here.) Our B&B – the Helguhus – gave us a small twin room with shared bathroom for \$130 including breakfast; quite reasonable by local standards. There was a kitchen for guest use, but we were not yet organized for self catering. We went to a local restaurant that night and had 'fish 'n chips' for \$30 each. However it is worth noting that tax

and tips are always included. Later we walked around the town and remarked, of course, that it was still daylight when we went to bed around 10.30 p.m. A black mask to block out the light may be useful for some.

The next day we went to a supermarket to prepare for self-catering breakfasts, picnic lunches and some dinners. Everywhere, including guesthouses and stores, took credit cards. Prices in the supermarket are about two to three times what we are used to in Canada. The day was sunny, 20° C, and we took advantage of this fine weather by touring what is known as the golden circle, which includes **Geysir** and the **Gulfoss**, whose wonderful two-stage waterfalls have a permanent rainbow. Between Geysir and Gulfoss we drove 16 km of dirt road as a short cut. These dirt roads were fine for cars, but if you are self-driving be sure to get a map which shows which roads are for cars and which for four wheel drive. We re-joined the ring road near **Hella**, where it is flat, but then turned east to Skogar where there are dramatic cliffs with waterfalls tumbling over them. In **Skogar** we stayed at an Edda Hotel. These Edda properties are boarding schools that are turned into hostels in the summer. We had a comfortable twin-bedded room with shared facilities and had the 2-course set dinner in the hotel restaurant for about \$30 each. Next morning we obtained a pot of hot water from the staff and made our own breakfast in our room. Edda hotels are not really set up to self cater, but \$15 to 18 per person per day can be saved by doing your own breakfast.

We spent some time in the morning visiting the Skogar Folk Museum and Museum of Transport and Communication before driving out to some cliffs near **Vik** to view puffins and other seabirds. The road up to the headland was rough but just drivable in a car. From Vik we continued east to **Kirkjubaejarklauster** across a wasteland of black sand that was the outwash of an unseen glacier. However at this time of year there was a fine display of wild lupines brightening the landscape. On arrival the helpful tourist office found us a self-catering chalet 8 km east of town where we were very comfortable with a sitting/eating area, kitchenette (two hotplates, microwave and fridge) bath and two bedrooms for about \$140 total.

The next day dawned fine with sunshine, quite a strong wind and a high of 12°. We drove east for an hour to renowned **Skafatell National Park**. We visited the park centre, which has some good displays, and then walked through the wild flowers up to **Swartifoss Falls** and its viewpoint. We enjoyed our picnic lunch here before driving on to **Jokulsarlon**, where we stopped and climbed up the bank to see the lagoon filled with icebergs. The main centre was a bit further on with a café and boat excursions into the lagoon. Beside the channel leading from the lagoon to the sea we spotted a seal, two harlequin ducks and many swooping arctic terns. Arriving at our next stop, **Hofn**, at about 4 p.m. we found a guesthouse near the marina and obtained a twin room with sink (and satellite TV) for \$132. We shopped for supplies at the 11-11 supermarket and had an excellent supper at the Kaffi Hornid.

The next morning we drove 99 km to **Djupivogur**, where a small morning cup of coffee cost \$2.50! We should have taken a flask! Then we continued on around several fiords and over a high pass to **Egilssadir**. Even this main ring road has about 60 km of gravel over the pass, but it's no problem for any car. We had our picnic lunch beside a lake at **Egilssadir** before travelling over another pass to an eastern fiord and the village of **Seydisfjordur**. There we checked into the Hafalden Hostelling International property, booked by internet, where we paid \$100 to have a four-bunk room to ourselves with good communal facilities, including a washing machine. There were views out over the harbour and fiord. As we had arrived at 2 p.m. we had plenty of time to take a two-hour walk in the nearby **Vestdalur Nature Reserve**, enjoying a glen beside a river with many tumbling waterfalls which reminded us of Scotland. We returned to the hostel for tea, laundry, happy hour (with sherry we had brought from London), supper and to swap travel tales with others guests. At bed time we realized we should have brought a sleeping sheet with us, as only comforters and pillows were provided. Incidentally, a full sleeping bag is quite a good budget option for Iceland as most guesthouses have a cheaper "sleeping bag" rate.

Day five out of the Reykjavik area gave us our longest drive, some 300 km or so. After returning to **Egilsstadir**, we headed west, first through a bare grassy plateau, then into a bleak moonscape of stones, rubble and a few grey hills with the wind blowing grey dust. There were long, lonely stretches of road ... we saw a total of eight vehicles in the first hour. 129 km from Egilsstadir we turned north onto a gravel side road to visit the **Dentifoss** falls and an unusual canyon called **Asbygi**. Dentifoss is a powerful falls in a long glacial river canyon, now part of the **Jokulsargjufur National Park**. There is a fine walk from the Park headquarters up on to the outcrop or Eyjan as it is called. From here we drove on route 85 to **Husavik** arriving just after 4 p.m., when we found Guesthouse Baldursbrekku (mentioned in Lonely Planet, but we had not reserved) and obtained two single rooms with breakfast for about \$115 each. This was one of our best stays in Iceland with friendly hosts and an excellent breakfast included at a reasonable price. We had dinner at the Foss Hotel and later wandered through a nearby park onto a lupine-covered hill behind.

Lake Myvatn and **Krafla** geothermal area was on our itinerary next day, together with a stop at **Namafjall**, an area dotted with steaming vents and mud pools. Our drive around Lake Myvatn included a stop at **Dimmuborgir**, the scene of lava jumble created 2000 years ago. There is a variety of walks through the lava with its arches and other formations. At the south end of the lake we had our picnic lunch looking at the lake's pseudocraters. We were lucky we had a windy day to keep the area's notorious midges away. The drive on to **Akureyri** included a stop at a fine twin waterfall known as **Godafoss**. We had arranged by internet to stay at a farmhouse 5km outside the town as we wanted to try all types of accommodation during our tour. We checked into the

Petersborg farm where we had a pleasant corner room. There was the usual self-catering area to make tea and breakfast the next morning. This guesthouse seemed the same as any other property as no farm activity was taking place near the house. We went into **Akureyri** for dinner at Restaurant Bautinn as recommended by our landlady: 100 gm. of Icelandic lamb with roasted potatoes after the soup and salad bar for \$36 each. 200 gm of lamb would have upped the price to \$46! After dinner, between 9 and 10, we spent an hour in the excellent Botanical Gardens in full daylight! This visit was rewarding as Akureyri has a micro climate and it is surprising what grows there so far north.

The next day we awoke to blue skies and sun which was a joy as we were turning north off the ring road onto route 82 to visit **Siglufjordur** on the north coast. The drive was delightful with fine mountain scenery and then through a tunnel to a classic, steep-sided fjord. From 1903 to 1968 Siglufjordur was a major herring centre and it has an interesting museum covering this era. After our picnic lunch at a table provided by the town overlooking the fjord, we continued on to Hosfos, a village with an Emigration Centre showing the migration of Icelandic people to North America, especially to the Minneapolis, Dakota and Winnipeg areas. Our day ended at **Blonduis** at the Gladheimer Guesthouse overlooking the river. Our car had got quite dirty on some of the dirt roads and today we discovered, on looking for a car wash, that many gas stations have free hoses for this purpose.

Our next morning's drive west to the **Snaefellnes Peninsula** was through rather dull, moorland scenery until the north shore of the peninsula is reached. We stopped at **Stykkisholmer** to look around the harbour and modern church. At **Helgafell** we climbed up the hill, never looking back nor speaking, which according to the legends entitled us to three wishes. We next drove through **Berserkjahraun**, the site of one of Iceland's famous sagas. In fact, many visitors to Iceland travel to sites featured in these 12th and 13th century sagas that are a key part of Iceland's heritage. There's even a Saga Museum in Reykjavik. We carried on to near the end of the peninsula to stay at the Guesthouse Gimli in **Hellissandur**. As the only restaurant in town was a smoky pub where everything was fried, we shopped at the small supermarket and bought some frozen Chinese dishes to heat in the guesthouse microwave.

At the end of the **Snaefellnes peninsula** is a towering, snow-covered volcano that can be seen from far away. Verne's fantasy *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* was filmed there. But first we went to **Arnaestapi** to walk the 2.5 km coastal path to **Hellnar** and back. This is a wonderful area for lava towers and arches covered with sea birds and their nests as well as views of the volcano. We completed our circle drive this day, returning to the Reykjavik area; but stopping just short of the city

in the suburb **Mosfellsbaer** to overnight at the Fitjar guesthouse. We liked this spacious, modern guesthouse at \$130 for our twin room, so we chose to stay two nights and daytrip into Reykjavik on our last full day. This last day, like our first one, was fine and warm for Iceland at around 21°. We found free parking in **Reykjavik** by the distinctive Hallgrímskirkja church that dominates the skyline. A ride up their tower lift gives a great view over the city. We then walked around, following Lonely Planet's walking tour, viewing statues, buildings and people out in the parks enjoying the sun.

We enjoyed this interesting trip and found our timing good: nine days to circle the island and one day in Reykjavik, which is quite sufficient. Mid to late June is a good time to visit. We had no difficulty getting accommodation on the six nights we had not pre-booked, something I would not recommend risking in July and August. It's not surprising that tours of Iceland are pricey, so if you don't mind driving yourself an independent tour is certainly something to be considered ... it's a money-saver, as is doing a certain amount of self-catering. To give you some figures: we drove approximately 1,800 km; the entire ring road and side trips from it. We catered our own breakfasts apart from two, all lunches and about half our dinners. Our car cost \$776, accommodation was about \$1,500 and meals, gas and admissions came to \$514. That's a total of \$2,790 or just \$1,395 each. Way to go! *Bon voyage!* 🇮🇸

Note: For those who do not wish to travel the UK-Iceland route, as of March this year Icelandair has resumed flights from New York's JFK International Airport. The airline offers non-stop flights to their hub in Reykjavik, with connections to Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, Germany, Holland and France. Passengers are invited to "Take-A-Break" in Iceland for up to seven nights while on their way to or from Europe at no additional airfare. For further details, call 1 800 223 5500 or [visit www.icelandair.com](http://www.icelandair.com).





Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre

Some Italian Tips

story and photos by Thelma Sampson

In September we spent almost four weeks in Italy: four days in **Rome** and three weeks in rented villas with friends. There were still a lot of tourists around but it was very pleasant, weather- and crowd-wise, compared to the high tourist times.

Our accommodation in Rome was in a convent in the Trastevere area: Casa San Guiseppe. Many convents and monasteries offer accommodations throughout Italy; this one is like a small hotel. We found it very convenient, within walking distance of almost everything ... about half an hour to both the Vatican and the Roman Forum. The Piazza Navonna, Spanish Steps and Tivoli fountain are a bit farther but still walkable (or you can take a bus). The bedrooms, all en-suite, are quite large (a rarity in European cities) and a wonderful buffet breakfast is included. The reservation desk had a helpful staff all of whom spoke English and parking is available. The price for a double room with breakfast was C\$155.00 per night Canadian. Casa San Guiseppe, Vicola Moroni 22, 00153 Roma, tel: [011 39] 6 583 33490, fax 6 583 35754.

It's worth spending time in the Trastevere area itself for there are all kinds of restaurants, many with side-walk seating around the Piazza Santa Marie. This square comes alive at night with artisans selling their wares, mimes and lots of locals enjoying themselves. The area from the convent to the square has shops and even an internet café along the way, and is bright and well lit for walking at night.

Villa Rentals

We rented a car in Rome and drove to our three villas: two weeks in Tuscany and a week in Umbria. There were ten of us for the first two weeks and four for the last week. A rental car is a must for villa stays as you'll want

to tour the small villages and picturesque countryside and, in any case, most properties are a few kilometers outside towns.

Italy has many rental villa companies. We chose the Posarelli Group (www.onestopitaly.com) as they had a large book with good descriptions and pictures. If ordering the book be sure to ask for the pricing catalogue as it is a separate brochure. Bookings for large groups should be done early as these properties fill quickly. We had fun studying the book. All the villas had ample cooking utensils, dishes etc, but they vary in appliances, types of stoves, and fridges. Two of our villas had dish washers. Many of the properties have pools that are usually only open until the end of September. Prices vary by the season; we paid about C\$600.00 per couple per week, in the shoulder season.

Our first large villa in Tuscany, the Villa Avanello (www.villaavanello.com), was near the old walled city of Certaldo. Our apartment (one of four in the complex) was on the second floor of a converted farm house and roomy with six bedrooms, four bathrooms, a huge kitchen/dining room and a separate living room with fireplace. The other apartments were smaller, accommodating 4-6 or 2-4 people. The properties offer lovely views of vineyards and farmland from all the windows and we enjoyed watching the many wild pheasants in the grounds. The old city of Certaldo, perched on the top of a hill above the new city, is worth a visit. A funicular runs about every 20 minutes to the top. There was a fall festival on when we were there so lots of activity.

Our second property, Villa San Marco (www.britaliaplus.com) stood in the middle of an olive grove near Orvieto. This was a 12th-century villa with 15 rooms – some with frescoed ceilings – and a walled garden with lemon trees. There was a large deck overlooking the valley with the city of Orvieto in the distance. The owner provided us with nuts and pomegranates from his garden and took our deposits over glasses of the local wine.

Our third villa was in the grounds of the Montegufoni Castle (www.montegufoni.it ...seems to be Italian only, but has many photographs - Ed). This property is owned and run by the Possarelli family and can accommodate many people as there are 23 separate accommodations, for different sized groups. Visitors can also stay in the castle itself. We stayed in one of the converted outbuildings but had use of all the amenities of the castle: pools, restaurant, bar and grounds. This property is near Montespertoli and with easy road access to Florence and Sienna.

Some of the Places we Visited

The **Cinque Terre** is not to be missed, for fantastic views of the villages, sea, birdlife and the great hiking trails.

The five villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore hang on cliffs on the side of the Mediterranean, between Levante and La Spezia. Each village is unique with promenades, piazzas, ancient towers, old churches and even a castle. Most of the villages are vehicle free, with only pedestrian traffic allowed. The cliff areas have been transformed into fertile terraces for vines and

olives by over a thousand years of hard work by the local farmers. The region is a UNESCO Heritage Site. There is a walking path, Via del Amore, from Riomaggiore, the first village, to the last village of Monterosso, that passes through the other villages as well. To hike the entire way takes about 4-5 hours, or you can combine your exploration with the speedy train service. The pass cards, for 1, 3 or 7 days, include unlimited use of all the walking trails, the trains and buses in the villages and, in the summer season, ferry rides between the villages. The card includes a map of the area and time tables for trains, buses and ferries, as well as some information about the villages. We walked the trail between Riomaggiore and Corniglia, about 1½ hours, and took the train to Monterosso. The walks have picnic areas, guard rails and most surfaces are wooden or hard packed gravel, but there are some uneven surfaces, so good walking shoes are required. The trail to the last two villages is the harder part of the walk. The day we were there was beautiful and sunny with gorgeous views around every bend.

There are huge murals painted on the walls of the train stations in Riomaggiore and Vernazza to commemorate the farmers who, over the past thousand years, built with their hands the walls that terrace the hills. There are hotels in all the villages and several days could easily be spent here. We met a couple from Victoria who had done some of the more difficult hikes and were staying in the village of Monterosso for a few days. They said that accommodation out of high season was easy to come by without booking ahead. Monterosso has an old and a new section and is the only village with a beach.

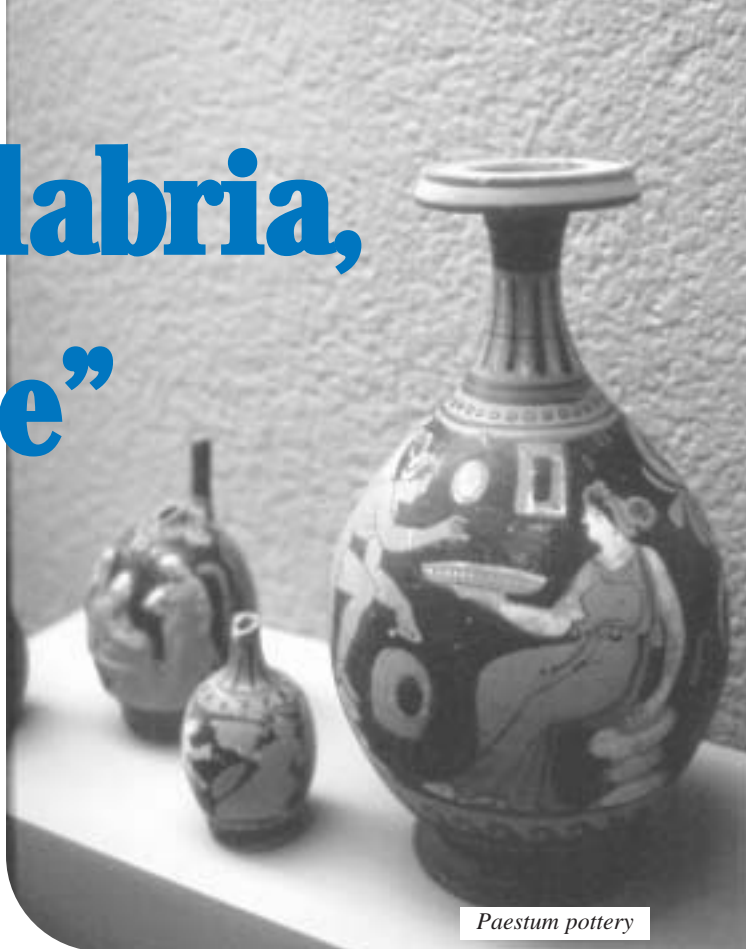
Some of the other regions we explored were the **Chianti wine route** (highway S222), the 50 km between **Florence** and **Sienna**. This area is all rolling hills and valleys of olive groves, vineyards, old market towns, castles and Romanesque churches. The towns of **Geve** and **Radda** in Chianti, east on SS4429, are particularly interesting but so are all the other little villages along the way and on many of the backroads. The tourist offices in this area have lots of information on



Montegufoni Castle

South to Calabria, Italy's "Toe"

Story and photos by Ted and Judy van der Veen



Paestum pottery

Italy has long been a favourite with travellers, but very few seek out the beauties which the extreme south has to offer. Calabria is not a wealthy province, but it has great natural beauty, its people are very friendly and welcoming, its culture is vivid, and its cuisine is based on the sea and locally-grown vegetables. Late October is the ideal time to visit. By then the almost 800 km of white sandy beaches on both the Ionian and Tyrrhenian seas have been deserted by the sun-seeking northern Europeans and summer's heat has been replaced with warm, sunny days and cool nights. Tranquility prevails, and the discerning tourist can find much to do. This is very rugged country; some of the roads are feats of modern engineering, while others, very narrow and winding, poorly sign-posted, make you wonder how anyone ever finds anything! Away from the coast, the remote towns and villages are linked by huge forests of mainly beech trees, now bathed in a golden glow from the fall colours. Calabria was a Greek colony long before the Roman Empire. This was *Magna Graecia* of the 8th century BC, a period of artistic splendour and cultural activity. When the Greeks arrived, they found a local populace whose king was named Italo – and thus the name Italia was born, its usage gradually expanding to become the name of the entire country.

Near the town of **Locri** on the Ionian coast lie the archeological digs of *Locri Epizefiri* containing a 5th centu-

ry BC Ionic temple and a theatre dating from the 4th century BC. There is a small museum on site containing objects found mainly in the 1700 tombs of the three cemeteries that were just outside the old city walls. This was the site of the large Greek city-state that produced the first written code of law in the Hellenic world. In the 7th century AD, the Saracens plundered Locri; the survivors fled inland about 10 km where they founded *Gerace* on a hilltop. Later, the Normans built a castle on this rocky outcrop, the ruins of which tower over the town. Approaching from the sea, one sees how impregnable this site must have appeared to the founding fathers. Be sure to visit the large *Duomo* (Cathedral) begun in 1045 AD, and still the largest church in Calabria. Its style shows the French Romanesque influence of its Norman founders, but the Byzantine custom of the entrance facing west has been maintained. One enters from the Greek crypt that underlies the Norman cathedral. The church itself is quite plain and unadorned; its columns are all different, and the effect is light and soaring. An inscription on the altar in Latin and in Greek recognizes the heritage of this great church. Be sure to visit the Treasury before you leave. Also along the Ionian coast, perhaps fifty kilometers north-east of Locri, is the small town of **Stilo**. High on the hill overlooking the town is an amazingly well-preserved Byzantine church from the 10th century, the *Cattolica of Stilo*. This is quite a tiny chapel with five domes, and inside can be seen faint vestiges of precious Byzantine frescoes. A

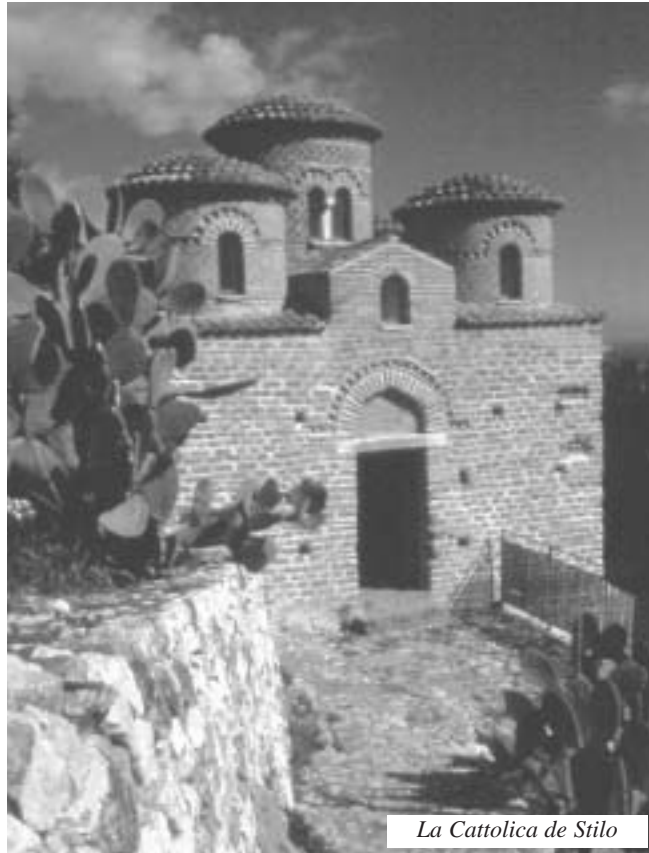
real delight, it is believed to be the best-preserved structure of its kind.

Reggio di Calabria, the city right at the tip of Italy's toe and the largest in Calabria, is a very active commercial port. Ferries for **Sicily** also leave from here. The main reason to visit this city is to tour its outstanding *Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia*, the National Archeological Museum. The first and second floors feature exhibits of archeological finds from prehistoric times through the Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Norman periods. The museum's *pièce de résistance*, however, is found in the lower level with other under-water finds. The *Bronzes of Riace* were discovered only in 1972. They are two bronze statues thought to date to the 5th century BC and attributed to both

Phidias and Polyclitus. The vessel that was carrying them was shipwrecked off the Calabrian coast; the destination of these two magnificent statues may have been Delphi. They are each about two meters tall, and, as the guidebooks say, "flaunt physiques that gym enthusiasts would die for." We couldn't help but think of Michelangelo's David. Had he only had the opportunity of seeing these masterpieces, Michelangelo would simply have drooled! Do not under any circumstances miss the Riace Bronzes. If you don't care for archeological museums, skip the rest and head directly for the basement ... but go! As you head north on the Tyrrhenian coast from **Reggio**, in the bend, stop at the lookout near **Scilla**. This was the home of the monster Scylla in

Homer's *Odyssey*. Her sidekick, Charybdis, lived in modern-day **Cariddi**, across the straits on Sicily. While you look from one to the other and imagine the dread of ancient sailors as they approached the lair of these two, you can look out and see today's tall-masted swordfish boats in the Straits.

As you look at a map of southern Italy, you will notice a large "bunion" on the top of the foot, near the toe. This is an agricultural plateau high above the sea. Around its base are several small villages, small hotels and campgrounds, rugged cliffs in spots and lovely beaches in others, particularly toward **Capo Vaticano** at the tip. Its largest town, **Tropea**, is situated on the waterfront at about the mid-point



La Cattolica de Stilo

of the promontory. We stayed for a week here at a timeshare, Villaggio l'Olivara, high atop the cliff overlooking the town. Visible in the distance, some days more clearly than others, is the volcanic island of **Stromboli**. Sea conditions were not right at this time of year, but in summer one can take a day-trip, or an overnight one, to this and other Aeolian Islands. As the road from town to the resort is very steep, we used the resort shuttle to go to town. It is interesting to wander through the rabbit warren of narrow streets of the old town. The caretaker of the Norman-built *Cattedrale* will proudly show you a couple of unexploded American bombs from World War II with a grateful prayer to the Madonna attached to each. A steep staircase leads down to the beach and the path, lined with old fishermen's caves, leading to the church

and Benedictine monastery of *Santa Maria della Isola* (although it is no longer on an island). About 30 km north of **Tropea** is the town of **Pizzo** with a 15th century hilltop castle at the centre of town. Just north of town is the very interesting *Chiesetta di Piedigrotto*, at the bottom of a steep flight of steps leading to the beach. This is a small 17th-century chapel hewn from the rock by shipwrecked Neapolitan sailors in thanks for their rescue, and filled with statues of Biblical and historical figures, also hewn from the rock *in situ*, a fascinating stop.

Nature lovers will find many spots to go for long walks. There are the beaches of course, but inland there are several large national parks. On the narrow roads, every

few kilometers, one sees a picnic table in the dappled shade of beech trees, with a pull-off for the car nearby. In the fall, we saw many people out hunting for mushrooms. Except for the very new Ionian-Tyrrhenian highway, an engineering marvel, with tunnels up to 3 km in length, all the roads that cross the narrow area of the peninsula are winding, very hilly, and very scenic. Several times we set out from **Tropea** to cross to the Ionian side by a different route, then returned by the modern road, or vice-versa.

For RCI members, *Villaggio l'Olivara* is resort #3248, and exchanges seem to be fairly easy to obtain. The resort has a very nice bar and restaurant with a buffet at both breakfast and dinner. Contrary to what RCI will tell you, half-

board is not obligatory ... breakfast is, but not dinner. However, as many of the local restaurants had closed for the season, we did dine at the resort. We were generally pleased with the selection, and the price is certainly very reasonable. The units do have full kitchens if you prefer self-catering. The 2-bedroom units are suitable for a family, but not really for two couples. The smaller bedroom barely has room for the bunk beds it holds but we were happy to use them to spread open our suitcases. There is a swimming pool, although by late October it was very little used. In fact, the sea was warmer than the pool.

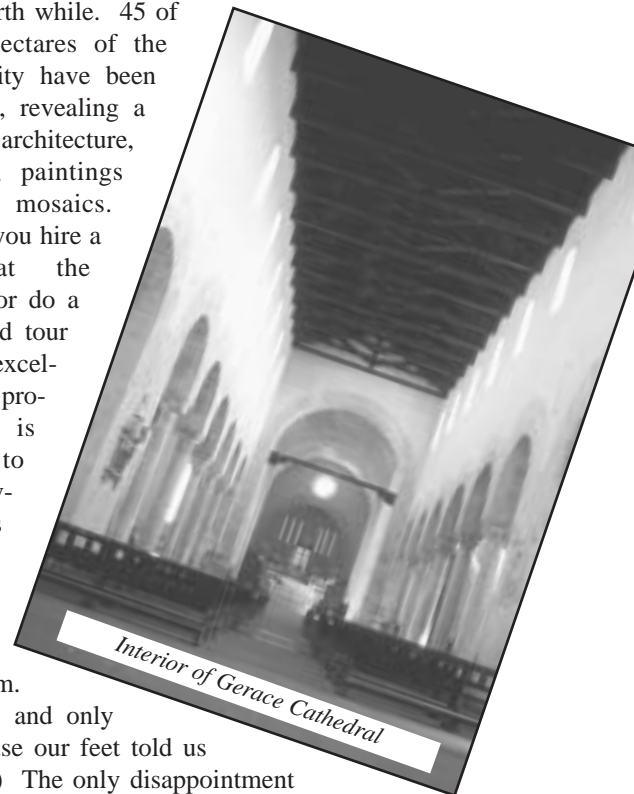
On the Ionian side of the peninsula, we happened upon a fairly new small hotel and restaurant called *Il Gabbiano* in a beach-lined bay in **Copanello Lido**, near **Staletti** on the Bay of Squillace. The exterior wall of our room was curved and overlooked the sea; we left the window ajar and heard the sound of the waves during our waking moments. The restaurant had a very limited menu: pizza or pasta (tomato sauce or seafood) followed by a choice of meat or fish – the meat was veal and the fish swordfish. (In small restaurants in this region, that is often what ‘meat and fish’ mean.) In the off-season, this was a delightful spot, although we can imagine it gets very busy in summer as the small bay contains two other hotels, both closed when we were there. Our room was €58 (about C\$92) a reduced seasonal rate. The address is Via Lido 4, Staletti (CZ), Italy, and the phone number (if you speak some Italian) is [code: 011 39] 961 911343. The hotel is family-run, and while the welcome will be very warm, nobody speaks more than a word or two of English. But they are experts at speaking with smiles and gestures!

While we very much enjoyed our holiday here, it would not be fair to fail to mention how frustrating it is to drive in Italy’s south. We had three, sometimes four, different road maps of Calabria. Countless times, we set out following a sign for our destination, or a town we knew was in the direction of our destination, only to arrive at another town that was not on any of our maps. Then, at the centre of town would be a signpost indicating only other mystery towns! And what appeared to be main roads were sometimes barely one-lane wide, while major roads were not on the maps! But eventually we got where we were going and back again. However, the *autostrada* is a fine road, even though parts of it are still being widened to four lanes – and best of all, from **Salerno** south, the *autostrada* is toll-free. There are often stupendous views from the highway, as well as frequent tunnels. We left **Tropea** on a bright sunny morning, with the intention of ‘making time’ and covering distance – much to our surprise we were in Salerno by lunchtime.

Shortly before **Salerno** is the town of **Eboli**. Here one can turn south-westward towards the sea to the town of **Agropoli** which has several hotels and restaurants opposite the sea wall, as well as an older youth hostel run by a very helpful young couple. The historic town of **Agropoli** is atop a rocky crag jutting out into the sea. A few kilometers north are the remains of another of the city-states of Magna

Graecia, situated near the seaside at the village of **Paestum**. Here there are three magnificent temples, dedicated to Apollo, Athena and Neptune, built in the 7th century BC. Except that they are on an alluvial plain, arriving here is like arriving at the Acropolis for the first time. By around noon, three or four tour coaches have arrived, but until then, you have the place almost to yourself. And the site is so vast that even when the ‘crowd’ is there, it is easy to avoid them. Two of the temples stand side-by-side, the third is separated from them by the Agora, the meeting-place, while behind lie the foundations of the houses that comprised the town. When you have admired the temples to your fill, take a break for coffee or lunch at one of the small cafés lining the road, then be sure to visit the excellent modern museum just across the road which displays objects found at the site. Once again, most of this area was excavated only in the 1970s. The museum is quite new, and in an unusual move for a museum in southern Italy, all the explanatory panels are in English as well as Italian. The lighting is so good that without a tripod Ted was able to take excellent photographs using only natural light. Some of the pieces of pottery are exquisite. Also of great interest are the frescoed walls and covers of several tombs from the necropolis located just outside the town.

Heading north to **Salerno** along the shore, one has the option of turning westward along the stunning **Amalfi Coast**, perhaps visiting **Capri** at the tip off **Sorrento**, then turning north, or of heading overland, to **Pompeii**. Everybody knows the story of the eruption of Vesuvius and the burial of the city of Pompeii in 79 AD and a visit to the archeological site is definitely worth while. 45 of the 66 hectares of the Roman city have been excavated, revealing a wealth of architecture, sculpture, paintings and mosaics. Whether you hire a guide at the entrance or do a self-guided tour with the excellent map provided, it is easy to spend several hours here. (In fact, we were there from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and only left because our feet told us we must!) The only disappointment



Interior of Gerace Cathedral

... continued on page 20

Britain

● If Britain is in your plans, you may like to experience staying in one of a range of houses, cottages and apartments within the grounds of stately or historic houses, landed estates and selected rural locations. A new brochure from **Stately Holiday Homes** shows what it's like to live for a week or two in style. Properties include gatehouses, converted stables, lodges and wings within large main houses, all furnished and equipped to excellent standards. Vacations are available for full weeks throughout the year, or short breaks of three and four days can be taken at most SHH properties at certain times of year. For a copy of the brochure tel: [011 44] 1638 674749 or visit www.stately-holidayhomes.co.uk ... a great site for browsing.

● New from VisitBritain is a 115-page guide *Britain's Cities* which highlights museums and galleries, historic attractions, shopping and hotspots as well as giving lists of major events. Among the featured locations of **Edinburgh, Cardiff, London, Liverpool, Manchester** and **Belfast** travellers will find advice, places to go, things to see and do along with informative website lists. To obtain your free copy of the guide go to www.visitbritain.com/canadapromotion or call toll-free 1 888 VISIT UK.

● If **London** is in your plans and if you like to get off the beaten path, just a short distance from the towering glass skyscrapers of London's futuristic Canary Wharf, you'll be surprised to find historic pubs surviving from a much earlier age. Some of these time-warp taverns are little changed from the days when the area was the world's largest trading port for sailing ships, attracting pirates and smugglers as well as honest seafarers. A free booklet from Tour East London is an invitation to explore these delightful inns, with their flagstone floors, timber beams and river views, lying within a mile or two of Tower Bridge. The River Thames Path network makes waterside walks easy and enjoyable and, if you tire of walking, the elevated Docklands Light Railway provides a reliable alternative. Among the pubs featured in the 40-page Waterside Restaurants, Bars and Pubs Guide are **The Prospect of Whitby**, London's oldest riverside tavern dating from 1520; **The Grapes**, mentioned by Charles Dickens in his novel *Our Mutual Friend* which has a fish restaurant upstairs; **The Captain Kidd**, named after the naval officer turned pirate who was hanged at Execution Dock nearby in 1701; while from the riverside steps beside the **Town of Ramsgate** pub you can see the post to which the bodies of hanged pirates were chained until three tides had washed over them. As well as Dickens, Samuel Pepys and artists Turner and Whistler were regular visitors to these haunts. This, and many other interesting and unusual London guides, can be ordered by e-mail or viewed an Internet at: www.visiteastlondon.co.uk/pubs.html

Canada

● We've all heard of historic roads, wine routes and similar tourism initiatives. But is this a first? Its Québec's cheese route, entitled '**La Route des Fromages**' Leads to **Québec**. So ... if you're a cheese lover and Québec is in your plans, you'll need a copy of the complete guide to the province's cheese and where you can find them so that you can plan a cheese excursion! The booklet provides information on Québec's 66 cheese manufacturers and craftspeople, the different types of cheese offered, guided tours, cheese tastings and speciality stores. Request your free guide by calling 1 877 BONJOUR or visit www.routedes-fromages.com

And 'foodies' and wine lovers who are in or near **Toronto** 11 – 15 May may like to take part in *Santé*, the Bloor-Yorkville Wine Festival with lots of events such as tastings, restaurant specials, art events, shopping specials and much more. For full information visit www.santewine-festival.net or call 416 928 3553, ex. 27 for a handsome brochure.

Korea

When I (Editor Ann) was in Korea nearly two years ago I visited the 2nd World Ceramic Biennale close to **Seoul**. It's a great event, of interest to artists, art-lovers and shoppers alike with many Canadian artists exhibiting in the competitions and/or taking part in the international workshops. Now plans for the **3rd World Ceramic Biennale** are complete and, if Korea is in your plans, I urge you to visit the exhibitions. Venues span three cities: **Icheon, Gwangju and Yeosu** and the dates are 23 April – 19 June. This Biennale combines ceramic arts, industry and culture in addition to performances, competitions and hands-on experiences. Icheon is Korea's largest ceramics centre with some 250 kilns where wonderful contemporary ceramics are produced. Gwangju is dedicated to preserving royal traditions, while Yeosu is known for ceramics used in daily life, designed by internationally-acclaimed designers. Full details at http://wocef.com/topmenu/english/biennale/biennale_2005.asp or, for general information on Korea, www.tour@korea.com or call 1 800 TOUR KOR or 416 348 9056. Last year Korea enjoyed a 17.2% increase in Canadian visitors over the previous year. We know *TravelScoop-ers* were among them!

Portugal

Offerings from Signature Vacations usually appear in our Tour Talk column, but their new programmes in Portugal are designed for more independent travellers so we've popped this news here. This year, for the first time, Signature will be extending its Portugal programme into summer and, as well as their packages to the **Algarve** region, will be flying into **Lisbon** (with Skyservice).

Flights start from C\$749 round trip (plus taxes), rental cars are available from \$179 per week and six hotels of differing characters will be offered in Lisbon along with a host of excursions priced from \$50. All six hotels in the programme are centrally located and within walking distance of museums, shopping, public transportation and Lisbon's lively nightlife. From mid-April, brochures will be available at travel agencies or information will be on line at www.signaturevacations.com/portugal

● U.S.A

Those Loonie Savers coupons are back for Canadians heading for **Virginia**. These coupons offer 'two-for-one' and 50% discounts on accommodation, attractions, restaurants, golf and more throughout the State. The coupons can be downloaded directly from www.virginia.org/loonie or call 1 800 675 3230. The discounts are valid until 31

● January 2006.

An elegant booklet available from the **Scottsdale (Arizona)** Visitors Bureau entitled *Sonoran Desert Discovery Guide* is sure to tempt you to pay a visit, with its coloured photographs of desert scenery, flora and fauna, art and architecture and its list of information resources (though you might decide to give the recipe for rattlesnake stew a miss!). Request your copy of the guide online at ● www.ExperienceScottsdale.com or call 1 800 805 0471.

Avid birdwatchers may be interested in a package at Papoose Creek Lodge in the **Madison River Valley, Montana**, 40 minutes' drive from Yellowstone National Park. The lodge is involved in many conservation efforts. Birding Packages include accommodation, meals, happy hour, two days of guided birding with a professional ornithologist and more. Packages start at US\$1,450 pp, available May to October. For more information call 1 88

tour talk

Transat Holidays has launched a new *Britain & Europe 2005/2006* brochure offering both air and land products: flights, hotel, packages, car rentals, train passes, day excursions, coach tours and cruises. With flights from Toronto (plus Halifax to Frankfurt and Munich routes) there are 17 European destinations, with **Hamburg, Toulouse and Lyons** added to last year's lineup of destinations in **Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, France and Greece**. Readers may remember TS checked out one of the London hotels (the Montcalm) in the Transat offerings last year and found the package represented amazing value. There are also 'free night' promotions in Paris and London. This year, the 'Introduction to Paris Golden Package' looks especially enticing, with its excursions to major sites interspersed with plenty of free time to explore the city alone. And Air Transat's no-charge open-jaws policy makes it easy to arrive and depart from different destinations. The same applies to car rentals within the same country. (And if, before 30 April, you reserve a Peugeot or Renault for 17 days in France will automatically be eligible to win the rental for any time between 1 May and the end of the year.) Your travel agent will have Transat's brochures, or visit www.transatvacations.com or www.airtransat.com for flight-only information.

For \$1 clients can add an extra day to the beginning or end of a **Whales, Birds & Bergs** package with **Maxxim Vacations**. The deal applies to bookings and travel through 24 June and includes one extra night of accommodation and an additional day of car rental. Whales, Birds & Bergs is a seven-night, self-drive tour through **Newfoundland** priced from \$1,369 pp. The package includes roundtrip airfare to St. John's, seven

nights' accommodation, a seven-day car rental with unlimited kilometres and a Whale Watching Boat Tour. For all other tours, clients who book and pay before April 15 can save \$100 per couple. For more information call 1 800 567 6666 or see www.maxximvacations.com.

If a tour of **Ireland** appeals, visit www.shamrock.org (or call 1 800 SHAMROCK and request the new *Spring/Summer 2005 Offers* booklet) for a variety of new and good-value packages on offer from a range of major Canadian tour operators. Examples of the offerings: Sunquest Vacations' 7-day Ireland B&B self-drive package starts at \$499 pp. dbl. or, if you'd like an escorted tour, there's Royal Irish Tours first class 8-day Kerry Royal tour from \$1,399 pp.dbl (both excluding air). And for more information on the whole island of Ireland you'll like to have the *2005 Ireland Travel Magazine and Vacation Planner*, available by calling 1 800 223 6470 or e-mailing info/ca@tourismireland.com

Here's news of two Canadian companies that you might like to check out if a supported hiking holiday appeals. One is **Comfortable Hiking Holidays** of Toronto, who offer 'scenic hikes and comfortable accommodations' in Madeira, France, Italy, Corfu, Slovenija, Austria, Cuba and Newfoundland as well as short breaks in other Canadian destinations. Details at www.letshike.com or by calling 416 445 2628. The other company is Vancouver's **Great Explorations** who offer walking and cycling trips in Canada, Mexico, Morocco, Turkey, Vietnam & Cambodia, Thailand & Laos, Burma and European destinations. Their information is online at www.great-explorations.com or phone at 1 800 242 1825. Happy hiking!

... *Italian Tips continued from page 14*

local festivals, hours for wine and oil tastings and special things to see.

Orvieto, in Umbria, is perched on a large hill of tufa rock that was completely excavated by the Etruscans into caves. It is said that most dwellings here in the old walled city are connected with a cave in some way. There are even restaurants in some of the caves. The city has done much to prevent the walls from crumbling with a huge restoration project that includes rods burrowed into the hill to anchor the town. We took a tour called Underground Orvieto that took us down into the caves that were used in medieval times in times of siege. The cathedral in Orvieto – the Piazza del Duomo – is enormous and one of the most impressive in Italy. Its colourful façade is sculpted and inlaid with mosaics and stone while inside there are some lovely paintings and a rose window. It should be noted that there doesn't seem to be a building in this part of Italy that doesn't

have wonderful sculptures and paintings. It all becomes a bit overwhelming at times, but it's all very beautiful.

We spent one day touring the Old Etruscan towns of **Pitigliano, Sorano** and **Sovano** in the **Maremma** area of southern Tuscany. These towns almost seem to grow out of the hill they are perched on. They, like Orvieto, are built on craggy hills that are undermined with caves; many seem to be crumbling in places. Sovana is especially pretty, with its two churches that date back to the 9th century, while Pitigliano and Sorana are on high rocky outcrops and the first views of them are striking. We walked the streets of all three towns and found shops with local crafts, great views of the countryside and lots of delicious local wine on sale. Also in the area are Etruscan tombs, old sunken roads, sulphur springs and more. We hope to return to this wonderful area again and continue our explorations ... I know there is so much more to see. 🏰

... *Calabria continued from page 17*

was that Vesuvius was so shrouded in fog and cloud that I am still not really sure it is there! However, friends have told me that should you be there on a clear day, there is nothing finer than to climb to the crater's edge. If you would like to stay in Pompeii, we can recommend the newly-opened hostel, *Casa del Pellegrino*, which is less than 10 minutes' walk from the Archeological Zone, just off the main square. It is located in a recently renovated pilgrim's inn, and has several family and couples rooms with private bath facilities. A few steps away there is a superb restaurant open for dinner only. I didn't note the name of this tiny Osteria with only a handful of tables, but it is on the left as you walk away from the square, only a few metres past the hostel entrance. The hostel address is Casa del Pellegrino, Via Duca D'Aosta 4, 80043 Pompei (NA), Italy, tel/fax: 81 85086 44, e-mail ostellopompei@virgilio.it. Cost was €16 (about C\$26) pp in a family room or, if you're travelling alone on a budget you can opt for the same-sex dorm with

up to 8 beds for €13 or under \$20. A very small breakfast is included, but then you can walk to the square and buy another coffee and a fresher croissant!

The Italian Government Tourist Office in Canada is located at 175 Bloor St. E., Suite 907, South Tower, Toronto, ON M4W 3R8, tel. 416 925 4882, fax 416 925 4799, brochure hotline 416 925 3870. The Calabria Regional Tourist Board can be contacted at Via S. Nicola 8, 88100 Catanzaro, Italy or visit their website at: www.regione.calabria.it. For an all-Italy vacation planner, go to www.italian-tourism.com. For less than \$10 at Chapters, I purchased the *Collins Italian Phrase Book & Dictionary* which includes a food section; I found this handy pocket-sized volume invaluable, especially in restaurants. In the south of Italy, Italians are more likely to have a smattering of German than English, reflecting, I suppose, the source of most of their tourist income. Do not, however, hesitate to visit this lovely region of Italy because you do not speak Italian. We found the peo-

hostelling

HOSTELLING INTERNATIONAL

Those of you planning some extended travels may like to investigate a Hostelling International membership. A new card, and its accompanying kit, is now available and will remain valid until March 31, 2007. Membership in HI costs C\$35 (plus tax) and with it you will have access to 4,500 member hostels around the world where a night's stay averages C\$18-\$22.

To-day's hostels are not the barracks-like dormitories full of young people that many imagine. Classified from 'superior' (often with double rooms and en-suite facilities) to 'rustic' (perhaps a national-park cabin) hostels can range from historic castles, to converted prisons

to docked sailing ships. Some hostels sleep 300 while others sleep only 20. Each hostel promises a different experience, but consistent standards and service.

The membership card gives other advantages: you will save an additional \$4 per night (minimum) in Canadian hostels and benefit from discounts in over 2,500 tourist attractions, restaurants and transportation services. Members can also use their card before travelling to receive a 10% discount on travel books, backpacks, travel accessories and Hostelling International products, sold in their travel shops. Membership, information and reservations available at Hostelling International-Canada's website: www.hihostels.ca

NEW
PRICES

China ... Yangtze Spectacular

\$3,995 FOR 18 DAYS!

Departing 15 September & 20 October 2005



Please call for the full itinerary

It is vast, fascinating and mysterious and it has beckoned travellers from the west for centuries. Mention it to avid travellers and they are sure to say, "Yes, I hope to visit China one day." And what would they choose to experience? **A cruise on the mighty Yangtze River (now in the process of changing for ever);** a look at the work-in-progress on the massive **Three Gorges Dam;** a walk on the ancient **Great Wall;** views of charming villages, lush terraced hillsides and magnificent mountain peaks; visits to the great cities of **Shanghai** and **Beijing;** a trip to view one of the world's greatest archaeological finds ... the 6,000 terra-cotta warriors at **Xi'an;** scenes of palaces, pagodas, pavilions and pandas; tastes of Peking duck and Chinese banquets and so much more. So how do you choose? When you decide on The *Travel Society's* tour there's no need to choose because all these highlights are included. Yes, in these

remarkable 18 days you'll stay in Beijing; you'll take a 4-day first-class cruise on the Yangtze with many shore excursions; you'll fly to see those centuries-old terra-cotta warriors in Xi'an; you'll visit bustling Chongquin and see its pandas; stay in Hangzhou and travel into the hills covered with tea plantations; explore the exquisite gardens of Suzhou, and visit Nanjing and Wuzhen. And you'll have time to explore spectacular Shanghai. Throughout the trip you'll see magnificent architecture, you'll be entertained at cultural events, you'll join your hosts at a variety of banquets, you'll have time to shop, and you'll marvel at some of the most wonderful scenery on earth, all in the company of English-speaking guides. You'll travel by plane, by luxury bus, cruise ship and river boat. Many of our members have told us it's an experience of a lifetime ... and all at an amazing price!

Editor Ann Wallace took the China Yangtze trip and her 14-page, illustrated account is available. For your copy please send \$5 with your address.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES:

Departing:	
Vancouver	\$3,995 pp/dbl
Victoria/Nanaimo/Kamloops	\$4,125 pp/dbl
Calgary/Edmonton	\$4,250 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,250 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,250 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,280 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,280 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec City/London	\$4,440 pp/dbl
St. John's	\$4,440 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,200 (Sharing can be arranged.)
Taxes and visas extra.

ADD-ON HONG KONG

4 days/3 nights \$1,100.00
Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour costs includes:

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

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

\$5,135

India's Golden Triangle

FULLY ESCORTED

20 days departing 3rd October 2005

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



PRICES INCLUDING AIR departing from:

Vancouver	\$5,385 pp/dbl	Toronto	\$5,135 pp/dbl
Victoria	\$5,495 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$5,135 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$5,385 pp/dbl	Montreal	\$5,135 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$5,385 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$5,485 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$5,385 pp/dbl	Single supplement	\$1,178
Prices are subject to confirmation		Taxes extra	

Your tour includes:

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

4 WEEKS
\$5,180

Learning in Mexico

departures throughout April, May and June 2005 for 1, 2 or 3 weeks or 1 month

We invite you to come to Mexico's fascinating Yucatán and to immerse yourself in this region's culture. *You will hardly believe all that this trip includes!* You'll stay in an en-suite room in a home in a gracious, residential area of colonial Mérida, where your English-speaking hosts can help you with your Spanish if you so wish. All the homes have been carefully selected by our colleague in Merida and if you would like a home with a special feature - a swimming pool, for example - we will try to please you. You will enjoy three meals a day with your hosts or away from 'home' when you are on an excursion with us. And, of course, your flights from Canada and airport transfers in Mexico are included too.

Every day - but only if and when you wish - you'll take part in an incredible variety of cultural activities, workshops or excursions. Workshops include cookery lessons, painting and sculpture, music appreciation, Tai Chi and others. Short excursions include theatrical, musical and dance events; a bull fight; museum and gallery visits; sporting events; birdwatching; traditional Mexican evenings and more, while a week-end trip will take you to Cancun and the Mayan Riviera. Again all meals, accommodation and admissions are included. In luxurious coaches you'll visit Campeche and Izamal, the fabled Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza and Uxmal, the Celestial Biosphere and much more.

To add to the experience of this trip you may also choose to take daily Spanish lessons in a pleasant Merida language school. This is the only 'extra' of the trip ... other than that you will rarely open your wallets except to purchase personal items, souvenirs and gifts.

Because Mexicans really know how to enjoy life, you will return to Canada with wonderful tales of all the fun you have had while enjoying your rich learning experience. You will have made new friends and have many wonderful memories. You can choose to go for a week or two, or for a month. On subsequent weeks you may remain with your original hosts or move to enjoy another home and make new friends. This programme has been designed exclusively for The Travel Society ... it is a unique and wonderful experience. Enjoy!

PRICES INCLUDING AIR :

Toronto/ 1 week	\$2,634 pp/dbl	Vancouver 1 week	\$2,889 pp/dbl
Ottawa/ 2 weeks	\$3,483 pp/dbl	2 weeks	\$3,738 pp/dbl
Montreal 3 weeks	\$4,335 pp/dbl	3 weeks	\$4,590 pp/dbl
4 weeks	\$5,180 pp/dbl	4 weeks	\$5,435 pp/dbl

Prices are subject to confirmation

prices are available from all major cities

Your stay includes:

- Round trip international & domestic air fare
- Airport transfers
- Deluxe a/c coach transportation
- Homestay accommodation with English-speaking hosts
- Three meals a day
- English-speaking guides and escorts
- All workshops and activities
- All week-end trips with meals and hotels
- All entrance fees
- All departure taxes and fees

21 days, prices include all airfares

A Traveller's

Departing: 20 September 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 Cappadocia (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:

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.)

Prices are subject to confirmation

Space limited to 20 members

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
- All Taxes

Copper Canyon

Departing 29 April, 20 May and 9 September 2005

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:

Toronto, Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,984 pp/dbl
Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Winnipeg	\$5,294 pp/dbl

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

Prices are subject to confirmation

Please call for prices from other departure cities

FULLY ESCORTED

Your tour includes:

- All air transportation on Mexicana
- Canadian domestic air
- Bilingual escort
- 8 nights first class accommodation
- All transfers, baggage handling & tips
- Meals as per the itinerary
- All train trips and tours as per the itinerary
- All taxes

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

Galapagos Islands and Ecuador

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

14 days departing 26 April, 10 May and 7 June 2005

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- Luxury a/c Mercedes coach
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