


# The Travel Society

Vol. 23, No. 5 June 2005

*Magazine*



**Remembrance Day – In Flanders Fields  
Fascinating, Exotic Myanmar (Burma)  
Eastern Europe by Train  
Hostelling International**

*[www.thetravelsociety.com](http://www.thetravelsociety.com)*

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**The Travel Society Magazine** (ISSN#0822-9228) is an independent, consumer magazine published in Canada ten times a year. Although extreme care is taken to ensure the accuracy of material herein, **The Travel Society** does not assume any liability for errors or omissions, for changes in fares or schedules, or for readers' decisions based on the opinions of the editor or writers. Readers are advised to confirm all information prior to booking.

### Rates for CANADA (incl. GST):

1 year - \$ 49.00

2 years - \$ 95.00

3 years - \$ 140.00

USA: 1 year - \$ 80.00 (incl. postage)

World: 1 year - \$ 80.00 (incl. postage)

### Back issues:

1 issue - \$ 5.00    3 issues - \$ 10.00

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada. M5S 3A5

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**Postmaster:** Please send address corrections to the above address.

Printed in Canada. GST Reg # R135785962

Publications Mail Agreement:

# 40063904 & # 09925

Customer # 2289997

Mail preference: From time to time, we make our membership list available to specific reputable companies and organizations whose products and/or services we believe will be of interest to you. If you do not want your name to be made available, please enclose your mailing label and initial here.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP) and the Canadian Magazine Fund of the Department of Canada Heritage toward our mailing and project costs.

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*"Brooding Soldier"  
Canadian monument,  
St. Julien  
(van der Veen)*

## editor's letter ...

Some cross-border news that I think I'll pop in my letter this month. First of all, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced that Canadians visiting the U.S. will have to have passports by the end of 2006 (apparently only 31% of Canadians now have passports, though I imagine all our readers have them).

Now you may decide not to visit the U.S., but also on the table is the requirement that Canadians transiting the U.S. by air will need passports by the end of the year, though this latter decision hasn't been finalized. (And, as you have probably read elsewhere, Americans will also be required to carry passports in order to re-enter the U.S., a law that will probably have a negative impact on our own tourism industry.)

Travel agents report in the trade magazines that destinations such as the U.S., Mexico and the Dominican Republic, which do not require Canadians to have passports, are often chosen – especially by families or groups of travelling friends – purely because of the passport-not-necessary rule, so it will be interesting to see if travel to the U.S. is adversely affected if and when this new legislation is passed.

Another cross-border matter is the proposed installation at some U.S. airports of controversial X-ray machines that will give airport screeners a clear picture of what's under passengers' clothes – whether weapons or just bare skin. Screeners plan to test the "backscatter" machines at several U.S. airports, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) says. They are also being tested at London's Heathrow. The machines are considered a breakthrough in scanning technology but have been labelled "a virtual strip search" by the American Civil Liberties Union. The debate will, I am sure, continue, but in the meantime ... you have been warned.

Happy and safe travels now that summer is well and truly on its way



## More on Cruise Shore Excursions

We found Les and Pat Dickason's letter in the April 2005 edition to be right on the mark. We have found cruising a relaxing way to visit new countries; your hotel room literally moves with you each night from one country to another, but we have also found shore excursions a big challenge. After missing so much by not planning in advance (time in port is normally short), we approach the matter slightly differently from Les and Pat, which might also be of interest to readers.

**Travel books.** We start by consulting travel books on the ports we will be visiting. We like Fodors, which highlights the main sites and provides excellent walking tours and Eye Witness, which contains excellent layouts for sites. In addition, they have a publication entitled *Cruise Guide to Europe and the Mediterranean*. We understand that Douglas Ward, the leading author on rating cruise ships (Berlitz, *Ocean Cruising & Cruise Ships 2005*) is working on several cruise port editions. (We are following up at [www.amazon.ca/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/701-0418438-4833905](http://www.amazon.ca/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/701-0418438-4833905)). Frommers has also just issued *Cruises & Ports of Call 2005* which we have not yet read.

**Ship excursions.** From the cruise ship websites we download the shore excursions offered and sometimes compare with other cruise lines. This gives us a list of highlights and, more important, the time required to do trips. If you are going to rent a car while in port double check with the agency on traffic and times to go from one point to another ... the ship will not wait for you if you are late (we have had some close calls where traffic jams caused delays and in one case had to abandon the car on the pier!).

**Cruise chat lines.** You can glean a lot of good information from the

various cruise chat lines on the web, in particular as to ships' shore excursions and value. Our favourites are [www.cruise-critic.com](http://www.cruise-critic.com) and [www.cruise-mates.com](http://www.cruise-mates.com). We also use Google to search for destination information.

**Tourist offices & cruise ships.** We contact Canadian/US tourist offices for the countries we will be visiting to collect the critical "on your own" information: street map, transportation from the cruise ship to the city (sometimes 1.5 hrs. away, i.e. Rome, Florence) plus transportation within the city, in particular hop-on-and-off, and finally the whereabouts of the local tourist office. We also check with the cruise line on where their ship docks. We found information provided on board is hit and miss.

**Our trip binder.** The last step is to put together a programme for each port. We do sometimes use the cruise ship's excursions if their prices are competitive or they have arranged a special tour (i.e. on *Princess*, in Vienna, we had a private night tour to St. Mark's Basilica ... a most memorable event).

The advantage of the above is we hit the gang plank organized which allows us to cover a lot of ground in the short time available. When we do our own trip we usually come back with memorable experiences that could not be accomplished through the ship's shore excursions. But it does all take a bit of time. To speed things up, we wonder if, as *TravelScoop* readers, we might pool our experiences. We have information and a list of web sites and experiences for the following ports – just drop us an e-mail identifying ports of interest and we will respond. We can offer port information on: St. John's, Antigua; Oranjestad, Aruba; Tortola, BVI; Willemstad, Curacao; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Basseterre, St. Kitts; Castries, St. Lucia; St. Croix & St. Thomas, USVI; Ponta Delgada, Azores; Civitavecchia (Rome), Naples & Venice; Monte Carlo; Lisbon; Barcelona & Cadiz; and the French Polynesian Islands.

And we would be most interested to

receive your experiences and web sites for Alaska, Benghazi, Casablanca, Tripoli, Tunis, Bonifacio, Corfu, Dubrovnik, Gibraltar, Livorno, Portofino, Marseilles and Malta. Hope to hear from some of you ... thanks so much!

Dean & Gayle Feltham  
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## A Place for all Seasons

I would like to share our discovery of a 'lodge for all seasons' in Wells Gray Park in the interior of British Columbia. Wells Gray is B.C.'s fourth largest provincial park with 1.3 million acres of wilderness, including numerous waterfalls. The two most visited are Helmcken (third highest in North America) and Dawson, a mini Niagara at 90 metres across. Both are easily accessible by a short walk from the road. But there are miles and miles of good hiking trails (many of which are groomed for cross country in the winter) throughout the park which bring you to many beautiful sites. The rivers and lakes also offer great canoeing.

We have visited here several times over the years, most recently at Christmas 2004. The lodge has recently been purchased by an English family – Linda and Andrew Nelson and their daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and James Gardiner – who forsook the urban delights of London to come to the Canadian wilderness in August last year. They bought the largest lodge in the area (just outside

### Writers are rewarded for sharing!

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

the park gates), Helmcken Falls Lodge with 21 rooms. We stayed in one of the four-bedroom log chalets – our family filled all the rooms – and we ate delicious meals at the lodge. It was the ultimate carefree holiday ... no cooking or cleaning, just having fun cross-country skiing and playing board games. The lodge does not have television which meant cards or Trivial Pursuit instead of computer games. We could also have snow shod, or gone out on a dog sled. There was a foot of fresh powdery snow, and we were far from the glitz of a major ski hill. A moose cow and calf grazed contently in a near by pasture. In the non-winter months there are lots of opportunities to see black bear. We have also seen deer and coyotes and lots of grouse with their young over the years.

In the summer they offer horse-back riding as well as hiking and canoeing, and there is a good nine hole golf course which adjoins the lodge property. And the food is excellent. Dan, a chef who had most recently worked at Lake Louise, served up excellent meals three times a day, and packed huge box lunches for those who couldn't bear to come back mid day. The lodge is located 36 km from Clearwater, B.C., and Clearwater is about one hour and 40 minutes north of Kamloops. It is

also on the CNR line, and the lodge offers rail packages from Vancouver.

For information tel: 250 674 3657, fax: 250 674 2971, e-mail: [info@helmckenfalls.com](mailto:info@helmckenfalls.com), [www.helmckenfalls.com](http://www.helmckenfalls.com) Enjoy!

*Heather & Brendan Allen  
Powell River, BC*

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## An Address in Ucluelet

I would like to tell readers that my wife and I recently had a wonderful stay at the Ocean Dreams B&B, situated on Little Beach Cove on the Pacific shore in Ucluelet. We found it tastefully decorated and the view from the room we had (the Lighthouse Suite) was wonderful, with an island nearby and the ocean beyond. Our hosts, Frank and Sandy Corlazzoli, were more than helpful on all there was to enjoy in their area. Their web-site: [www3.telus.net/ocean-dreams/](http://www3.telus.net/ocean-dreams/) gives all the information, or they can be contacted at 1214 Peninsula Road, Ucluelet, BC V0R 3A0, tel: 1 866 726 4248.

This property offers two suites with open views of the Pacific Ocean and Little Beach, private entrances, full private bathroom, queen size sleigh beds with down duvets, fire-

places, TV, dining area, small refrigerator, microwave oven, dishes and cutlery. Also provided in room are baskets of coffee, tea and hot chocolate. And you can enjoy breakfast in comfort in your own dining area as your hosts deliver a hearty, full continental breakfast right to your suite (milk, juice, cereal, cereal bars, oatmeal, fresh fruit platter, yoghurt, freshly-made muffins or pancakes, breads, bagels, homemade jams, etc.).

*Geoff & Fietje Walsh  
Kelowna, BC*

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## River Cruising in the U.S.

If a casual trip on one of the rivers of the U.S.A. appeals, please read on. We had long wanted to experience the Mississippi, and found what we were looking for with Riverbarge Excursion Lines. This New Orleans-based company offers trips on many of the rivers of the U.S. We chose two segments: New Orleans to Memphis and Memphis to St. Louis. While the daily price (before the many discounts offered) seems high, this is misleading as there are almost no extras. Discounts vary from time to time, but range from 10% for two or more consecutive segments to 50% for teachers/retired teachers. All shore excursions are included in the price and

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# The Travel Society website

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

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

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

**You can renew your subscription on-line too!**

there is absolutely no tipping. There's even a laundry where not only are the washers and dryers free, but also detergent, bleach and fabric softener! The only extras are alcohol and purchases in the (small) gift shop. Even then, if you book six months ahead, your account is credited with US\$100 which can be used to settle these purchases. Even transportation from your Destination Landing to your Boarding Landing is included if you require it. Trips are from five to ten days but can be combined to make longer trips.

The *River Explorer* consists of two attached riverbarges driven by a powerful tugboat. The front barge contains the public rooms: lounge, dining room, theatre, library, etc., while the second has two floors of cabins – 99 in total plus the owner's suite. Cabins are spacious and include TV/VCR, fridge, coffee maker and even binoculars for bird watching. Bathrooms have tub/shower combinations and the bath towels are huge. All cabins have the same basic configuration with a choice of twin or queen beds, while the upper deck (Platinum) cabins have a small balcony. This, however, takes space from the room and the door is not screened so, in our opinion, these cabins are not worth the extra cost. There are cabins for the handicapped and everything is wheelchair accessible. On that note, we were impressed with the attention given by the crew to the handicapped. On leaving and returning from shore excursions there was always a young man available to assist with pushing a wheelchair up or down the levees.

Meals are one-sitting, open seating, with buffet breakfasts and lunches and full-service dinners. Food is basic American but well-prepared and, of course, plentiful. There are no afternoon teas or midnight buffets, but two coffee bars and a juice bar are available for self-service 24 hours a day. In addition, there is a huge fridge across the end of the dining room buffet which is kept stocked with sandwiches, yoghurt, juices, milk and other items. These can freely be taken to your cabin fridge and, in addition,

there is a never-ending cookie jar which is constantly replenished. There are two bars with reasonable prices, but you are free to bring liquor aboard for your cabin if you wish. Drinks at happy hour are reduced and there's a varying supply of nibbles each day. For exercise there's a jogging/walking track on the upper deck and there are also two hot tubs. Weather permitting this deck, with its bar, is also the site of happy hour, barbecues and other special events.

We made stops at Baton Rouge, Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, Cape Girardeau and St. Louis. In each case, we were docked right downtown. In fact, in St. Louis, we were actually between the legs of the Arch and had only to walk steps to be at the base for the elevator to the top. There was an orientation session before arrival at each destination and we were provided with maps and vouchers for the sight-seeing options; it was left to the individuals to select their own preferences. At one attraction, where entry was by donation, we were given a voucher stating that the barge company would make the donation in a stated amount. In some locations, where we did not have a voucher but decided we wished to visit and were prepared to pay the admission, when our name tags were noticed we were welcomed as barge passengers and had only to sign our names in order to be admitted. Obviously the cruise company has excellent relationships everywhere and we always received a very warm welcome.

In most locations there was a shuttle service for those who did not wish to walk or where some attractions might be too far to walk. In most cases this shuttle came with a local guide, so this ride could also serve as a sightseeing tour. We liked to ride the entire route, returning later to the sites which had appealed. Everything was well organized and the information provided made it easy to enjoy a maximum number of sights in the time given ... usually a full day. On a tour in Memphis, a gentleman required some prescription medication and a drug

store stop was made; just one example of the attitude that nothing is too much trouble when assisting passengers with their needs.

A note about the name tags with which you are issued. These come in a plastic pouch on a chain to be worn around the neck. As well as your name, they give your home town. It acts as identification, your room key, credit card and, as mentioned, entrance to various attractions. At first it seems a nuisance, but once you become accustomed to having complete strangers regarding your chest intently it is an efficient way to meet people and to get to know their names and home towns quickly.

If there is anything at all to complain about on these cruises it is merely that the evening entertainment is *sometimes* lacking. On some nights we had excellent entertainers, ranging from a full jazz band to a gospel group from a local church, but on other nights there was only an old movie or staff members giving talks about the barge and the river. Not really a problem ... most passengers were quite happy making their own amusements: card or board games, videos from the library, reading or enjoying conversations. Everything was relaxed and casual, including the dress code. There are no dress-up evenings and jackets and ties for men were non-existent. We made good friends, with whom we keep in touch, and we planned to meet up with some of them to do further Riverbarge cruises. We have also recommended these trips to our friends. They are not for everyone, but for those who do not require a dress-up cruise and constant entertainment they are an ideal way to see interesting parts of the U.S. from the water.

For more information contact your travel agent or Riverbarge Excursions Lines at 1 888 282 1945, fax: 1 504 365 000, e-mail [rel@riverbarge.com](mailto:rel@riverbarge.com), [www.riverbarge.com](http://www.riverbarge.com)

Ross & Jill Totton  
Port Coquitlam, BC

# Remembrance Day – In Flanders Fields

story and photos by *Judy van der Veen*

*The month of May, with its many events commemorating World War II and the liberation of The Netherlands, is behind us. But memorial observances will continue, especially – as always – on 11 November. Here Judy van der Veen tells about her visit to Flanders where so many Canadian soldiers were engaged in the theatre of war.*

From the time I started school, I knew that 11 November was an important day in Canadian history. We all wore a poppy and memorized “In Flanders Fields”, written by a Canadian doctor in the trenches. And then L. M. Montgomery’s *Rilla of Ingleside* gave me a romantic image of the war from the homefront. It wasn’t until later that I learned where Flanders was or what a tremendous toll the war had taken on Canada. In November 2004 we were due to be in The Netherlands for a



*Plaque on the Canadian Monument, St. Julien*

family celebration; my proviso for making the trip in such a season was that we should go to Belgium for two days to celebrate the Armistice on the spot. And so, on 10 November we found ourselves driving across Belgium to Ieper (Ypres) in the pouring rain, weather that was familiar to every soldier in that awful war. But by evening, the rain had let up and for the following two days we were blessed with sunshine. Our first stop was the local Tourist Office where we were lucky enough to find a cancellation at a B&B on the outskirts of town just ten minutes’ walk from the main square.

Every evening, all year round, at 8 o’clock, traffic stops at Ieper’s Menin Gate while the Last Post is played. This has happened since 1928, except for an interlude during World War II. While usually very brief, on 10 and 11 November the ceremony is much fuller, with several bands, choirs and speeches. We attended both evenings; the ceremonies were different, as was the crowd, but both were moving and eloquent. Early on the 11<sup>th</sup> we walked from our B&B back to the Menin Gate, then along the city walls to a small war cemetery near the Lille

Gate. We were back at the Menin Gate for the 11:00 a.m. ceremony, for which we then realized the event the evening before had been a dress rehearsal. There were more bands and choirs present, also representatives of the governments of most nations involved in the war, including Canada, as well as representatives of many regiments and local school groups. There was one lone WWI veteran, resplendent in his dress uniform, amongst many WWII veterans. Many in the crowd were older English people on coach excursions to the battlefields. Wreaths were laid, speeches given, familiar songs and

hymns played. However, for me as a Canadian, there was one thing missing, and so, as poppies drifted down from the dome of the Menin Gate, I softly recited "In Flanders Fields". A group of English ladies to whom we had been talking quietly thanked me. The Menin Gate is inscribed with more than 56 thousand names of soldiers whose last resting place is unknown.

A cup of coffee to warm up, then we headed to our car for a tour of the war cemeteries and memorials. Our first stop was the French Cemetery, St. Charles de Potyze; I found it particularly moving as there stood "the crosses row on row" of the poem. Most of the cemeteries are British (including the dead from Canada and other parts of the old Empire); in these, the crosses have been replaced with white stones. Canadian graves are marked with a maple leaf. If known, the name and regiment of the dead soldier are inscribed, but we were stunned by the number of stones marked "Known only to God", sometimes with the soldier's nationality indicated. We stopped at several cemeteries, both large and small. The most impressive has to be Tyne Cot Cemetery, which contains 12,000 graves and a memorial wall inscribed with 35,000 names of men "Missing in Action." We were fortunate enough to arrive here as a male choral group was performing; they sang in English, French and Dutch and took turns reading poems in the same languages, including "In Flanders Fields". Nearby is the town of Passendale where 16,000 Canadians lost their lives. There are two Canadian garden memorials, one at Hill 62, the other at Passendale, and also a Canadian monument, the "Brooding Soldier", near St. Julien. This impressive sculpture was the runner-up in the competition for the Canadian War Monument at Vimy Ridge in France. Nearby is the German Cemetery, Langemark, which is well worth a visit to see the difference in atmosphere and layout. Just outside of Ieper in another direction is Essex Farm, site of the bunker where Colonel John McRae wrote "In Flanders Fields" in 1916 after the death of a friend and fellow soldier.


The day's programme also included services at town churches in the morning, a Poppy Parade which everyone was welcome to join, a carillon concert at noon, and an afternoon concert at the cathedral. There are several museums in and around Ieper that are worth a visit. However, as most of the tour coaches stopped at them and as we were pressed for time, we decided to leave these for another visit, perhaps at another time of year. We would then also visit the Canadian Memorial at Vimy Ridge in France, less than two hours away by car. One cannot help but praise the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which oversees all these sites and the Belgian people who take such wonderful



Tyne Cot Cemetery

care of them. Such is the friendliness of the people that on the 11<sup>th</sup>, in a small restaurant recommended by our hostess, the owner-waitress suggested that we might like to return after the Last Post for the dessert and coffee included with our meal rather than rush or arrive late for the ceremony. We were very glad we did attend the ceremony again, as it was quite different; this time the crowd was younger and included many local people and many young British people on a school trip.

If you should decide to visit this historic region, we can highly recommend the B&B "Nooit Gedacht" (which my husband Ted tells me means "Never-Imagined") at Ligywijk 129, 8900 Ieper, Belgium, 900 meters from the Menin Gate. Your hosts, Erna and Eddy Tant, will welcome you to their lovely home with its

glass-walled breakfast room and beautiful garden in a very quiet neighbourhood. They both speak English as well as French and Flemish. Ask to see the video (in English) on the rebuilding of the town after the war and their wonderful collection of postcards showing the town before and immediately after the war. The three bedrooms are very nicely furnished, there are two shared baths, and the breakfast buffet is delicious and copious. The price is about €25 (about C\$40) per person, slightly more for single occupancy, cash payment. There is ample parking on the street. Mrs. Tant will gladly provide you with discount coupons for admission to the museums and local attractions and hand-drawn maps showing the various locations. Contact her at the address above, by phone or fax at 011 32 57.20.84.00, or by e-mail at [erna.tant@telenet.be](mailto:erna.tant@telenet.be) or you can check out the rooms at [www.nooit-gedacht.ieper.tk](http://www.nooit-gedacht.ieper.tk) – we know you'll be glad you did. We do suggest you book in advance – don't count on a last minute cancellation as we did! And if you think 2008 would be a good year to visit, some places are already booking for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Armistice Day. For a Canadian viewpoint on the war and sites to visit near Ieper and Vimy, complete with photographs and maps, visit the excellent website "A Canadian's Visit to Vimy Ridge and the First World War Battlefields of Flanders" at [www.interlog.com/~fatjack/vimy/vimy.html](http://www.interlog.com/~fatjack/vimy/vimy.html). It also has links to other sites such as the War Graves Commission. And for further tourist information on this western area of Belgium bordering on France and the North Sea, go to [www.ieper.be](http://www.ieper.be) or [www.toerismewesthoek.be](http://www.toerismewesthoek.be). 

Backroads Touring Co., Ltd., (the British company described regarding a tour of Wales in our last issue) offers a trip to European War sites especially designed for Canadians: *Forging the Nation - Canadians At War in Europe*. Call 011 44 20 8566 or visit [www.backroadstouring.co.uk](http://www.backroadstouring.co.uk) for information - Ed.

# FASCINATING, EXOTIC MYANMAR (Burma)

*story and photos by Randi Nielsen*

**W**hat an unusual and wonderful trip it was! And how smoothly it all went! We were met at each airport by an English-speaking guide and taken to a waiting car with a driver. The guides were all well-educated and knowledgeable about their country; always prompt, efficient and very pleasant. The cars were always clean, comfortable and air conditioned and the drivers were careful. Every hotel was interesting and luxurious.

So, yes, there we were, sitting in the back seat, viewing the fascinating countryside with all our questions being answered. Whenever we saw a photo opportunity we could stop, and when exciting things were happening along the road we could stop and get our guide to interpret for us. This led to wonderful people contact, not to mention an understanding of just what we were looking at in the village markets.

Our tour of Myanmar was organized by our helpful travel agent Gillian of our local Carp Travel agency through the Diethelm Travel Company, whose excellent services made our trip a joy. We had agreed to the tour outline in advance and everything was exceedingly well planned and executed by Diethelm with some flexibility on a daily basis. We live with snow for at least five months of the year so excessive heat and humidity is a concern for us. We felt that finding our own way into cities, organizing accommodation and locating transportation in 35° or more would tax our sense of humour. But, thanks to Carp and Diethelm, we feel our travels were maximized and our pleasure exploring Burma greatly enhanced.

Here are some details of a few of the things we enjoyed.



*Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon*

## Yangon ... formerly Rangoon

We knew that it was going to be hot, but being hit by 38° heat as we got off the plane in Yangon was still a shock. But our air-conditioned car was waiting to take us to our beautiful luxury hotel, the Kandawgyi Palace, on the shores of Kandawgyi Lake with wonderful views of Shwedagon Paya (temple) as well as the royal floating barge, Karaweik Hall. We had the thought that to enjoy the lake, the pool and all the property's amenities might make a very nice day, but our first tour of this historical city was on the cards. Burma has been sealed off from the outside world since 1962 and only recently has it become possible to get a visa for 28 days to travel quite freely. The mix of the ancient, the colonial and the tourist modern is really mind boggling. Driving through the old city centre we were constantly amazed at this mix. It seemed that we were in a time warp. Everywhere were orange-robed Buddhist monks, women with their faces smeared with paste, men in *longhysis* (sarongs), country folk in their tribal dress, bicycles, trishaws, golden-topped temples, and hundreds of monasteries. Religion is of great importance in people's lives here. Every Burmese male is expected to take up residence in a monastery twice in his life and some women choose to take vows, shave their heads, don pink robes and live in monasteries for women.

Worthy of a note is the rather unusual, thick makeup worn by both young and old, male and female Burmese. It is called *thanaka* and is a powder produced from an aromatic tree bark. It is applied in all kinds of artistic forms: stripes, circles, bars and dots. It acts as a makeup and skincare cream. Apparently it is even worn to bed. We were told it leaves the skin beautiful and protects from the sun. I had the temerity to ask our guide if he, in fact, found it beautiful and the answer was a resounding "Yes." My next unvoiced thought was how they would ever know if, in fact, their skin was beautiful!

The Shwedagon Paya rises 98 metres above its base and is covered with about 60 tonnes of pure gold. This is the most sacred Buddhist temple in Myanmar. Our guide thoughtfully took us there in the 'cool' of late afternoon when we could walk through this huge, elaborate complex without burning our feet on the marble. This is a truly awe-inspiring place of worship and the visit was made so much more interesting because our guide, Mau Mau, was an archaeology graduate and able to explain the significance of the ancient religious artifacts, statues and monuments. The old filigree wood carving on the building is quite fantastic.

We would recommend at least half a day at the National Museum. This we did on our own, taking a taxi from the hotel. Its many galleries include Royal Regalia and the huge Lion Throne, ethnic costumes and artifacts, as well as historic and prehistoric periods and natural history. Explanations are in English as well as Burmese.



River scene in Madalay

## Bagan ... a trip back 800 years

We flew on from Yangon to Bagan. Before we left we had been given a detailed description of the inner workings of the airport and, sure enough, as we'd been told, we were met by an efficient man who took us through the airport lickety split, past the long lines and into a comfortable waiting lounge. Giving up one's passport can be disconcerting, but we did, and it worked! We were met in Bagan (formerly called Pagan) by our new guide, Thang, whose command of English was excellent as was his extensive knowledge of Bagan and its temples. He was an archaeologist too, and had worked on some of the temples. Seeing them through his eyes made them all very special and when he realized how keen we were, he told and showed us even more. We stayed at the Thazin Garden Hotel, which was lovely, with a private open porch and palms so lush the rest of the hotel was hidden. The dining room was on the roof top which gave glorious views of the nearby temple and surrounding countryside.

We spent a day driving through fields and villages on dusty roads, passing people on horse back and in ox carts. We climbed up and down into temples of every size. Bagan is an ancient city of 2,300 pagodas and deserted temples, dating from 1057. In 1287, Kublai Khan sacked the city and it was never rebuilt but as we surveyed the hundreds of remaining structures, it did not tax our imagination to envision the splendour that it once was. At the end of the day, we had the opportunity to visit a lacquer workshop and learned all the steps in the making of high quality ware, much of which is sold in Thailand. Compared to what we had seen in Cambodia (and subsequently saw in Vietnam), this lacquer ware is really beautiful and unique and we appreciated the opportunity to talk with the craftsmen and women, with Thang acting as interpreter.

The next morning we rose at dawn to travel through Old and New Bagan by horse carriage watching the world slowly come to life. And at our special request, we also had time for a too-quick visit to the Archaeological Museum before

boarding the *r.v. Pandaw* for our trip on the Irrawaddy River.

Time, now, to say that although we enjoyed wonderful accommodation throughout our trip, we later agreed our favourite was the *r.v. Pandaw*, a river boat and our home for two nights on the Irrawaddy River between Bagan and Mandalay. This vessel is a survivor from colonial days, and has been refitted using traditional craftsmanship and tropical hardwoods. It contains a saloon (the old first-class lounge), an airy dining room, a bar and 16 en suite staterooms all fitted in mahogany and brass. Each opens onto a promenade deck and there is a seating area outside the cabin with rattan chairs where one can sit and watch the exciting river scenes passing by. Dining was much enjoyed; a time when passengers gathered and mingled.

During this mini-cruise we had two trips ashore, each escorted by a personable crew member. Our first was at Pakokku, a busy market town. Trishaws (bicycles with a seat behind) were waiting for us to dock and soon we were off to the bustling market, stopping en route at a cigar 'factory' where women sat on the floor rolling cigars and at a weaving workshop. As we zigzagged our way through the streets, we were passed by an elaborate procession which was a celebration of young boys going to the monastery to begin their studies as Buddhist novices.

Our second shore excursion was a delightful walk from the river to Yandabo, a small pottery village with no road access to the outside world. We were free to wander through the pottery area to watch the loading of massive pots on to barges, to visit the monastery, or meander the quiet, tree-lined lanes through the farms. There we stopped to admire thatched village homes with interesting woven bamboo walls and to catch a glimpse of the daily lives of the people.

We found this little cruise a good opportunity to reflect on all we had seen and learned in Yangon and Bagan while relaxing and seeing more of Burmese life, much of which is only possible from the river. If your travels take you to Myanmar we highly recommend this excursion.

## Mandalay

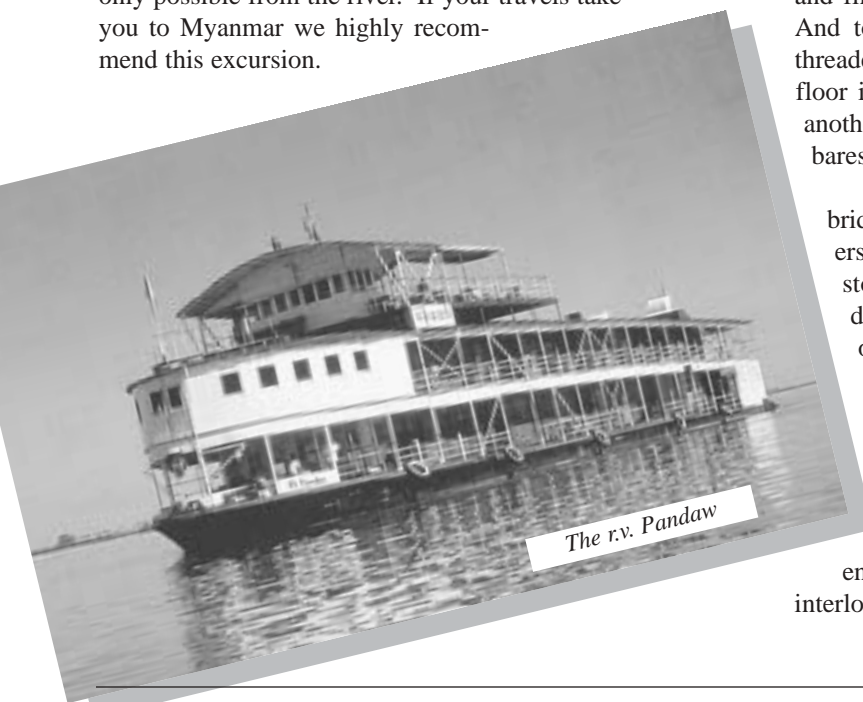
What a difference between Yangon and Mandalay. The streets here are wide and many are tree lined. Many more homes have yards which are surrounded by patterned, woven bamboo walls. We saw far more bicycles being used here, which reduces the pollution considerably and the heat seemed less oppressive. Our hotel, the Sedona, blew our minds! It is situated across from the Mandalay Fort and Palace with its wide moat. I have no idea what our room actually cost because it was included in our prearranged plans but we noticed rack rates start at US\$200 for a superior room (which ours surely was), and rose to US\$700 for the Ambassador Suite and US\$1,200 for the Royal Suite. I'd like to tell you that we happily stay in hostels around the world, but we did manage to keep our composure! (See *Randi's HI story on page 16!* - Ed.)

There is no doubt that having a car, driver and knowledgeable guide allowed us to see more and go farther than we could have by arranging things bit by bit on our own. We did see the important landmarks but knowing that Mandalay is a major craft centre we opted to forgo some of the temples and pagodas in order to experience artisans at work, away from the tourist showrooms.

One place I can still smell, was the woodcarvers "village" within the city. We wandered from home to home watching the magnificent tree stumps being turned into equally magnificent elephants. All in the family played a part in this home industry and we were welcomed by their smiling faces, amused that we should be so interested. The smell of the freshly carved wood was wonderful. No one was selling anything; all their work was on order and we were at ease to look and absorb without any pressure to buy.

We visited some silversmiths too. The work they create by pounding and chiseling has to be seen to be believed. Then there are the monstrous marble carvings, in progress and finished, that line the roads of the stone carvers area. And to actually see the stitching of the gold and silver threaded tapestries created by women sitting grouped on the floor is quite mind boggling! We went from one craft to another; all were of high quality and all created with the barest of equipment. For us, this was very exciting.

To go from all this to walking along a 200-year-old bridge (10 planks wide in some places, less in many others) and entering a quiet village was astonishing. We stopped to watch a fellow climbing barefoot up and down tall sugar palms, hanging pots at the very top in order to catch the sap. Villagers gathered round us to try to understand what we were watching. We also enjoyed the little children lined up to buy homemade popsicles: chipped ice pressed between crude forms, stuck with a piece of bamboo and then slathered with syrup. Then we walked down the shady lanes watching the ordinary activities of families at the end of the day. We were lucky, there were very few interlopers like us and life went on just as if we belonged.



The *r.v. Pandaw*

## Pindaya and Inlé Lake

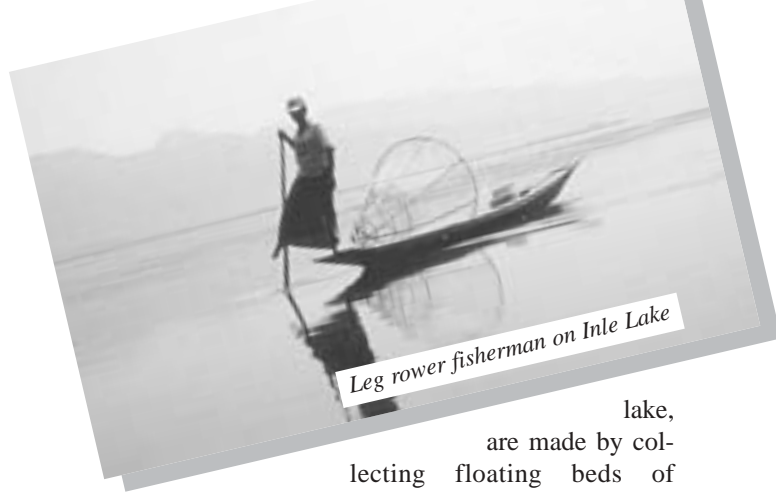
We flew from Mandalay to Heho, a small town seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Here our new guide, a lovely young woman called Soe Soe, with car and driver, were waiting and we were soon on our way to Pindaya, a two-hour drive through gorgeous rolling hills and mountains. Crops had been harvested so we could see miles of rich red soil being turned over by water buffalo and oxen, ready for the next crop. Our immediate destination was the holy Buddhist Pindaya Caves and although we have seen a good many caves and more than a good many Buddhas, we were not prepared for these! This is a sacred place where devotees pray and light candles. People from the surrounding hills arrive in carts and trucks and crowd up the steps on pilgrimage. For centuries, people have been placing statues of all shapes and sizes in every available nook and cranny here. It is estimated that there are 8,000 images and one can see the different sculpture styles as they developed over the ages, from beautiful tiny lacquered ones to huge, glaringly-new gold ones. There is now an elevator up the mountain, but the steps are still used by the pilgrims.

Pindaya is a holy festival city. There was no festival during our visit, but we could just imagine the atmosphere of the celebrations as we walked around the beautiful lake and into the monastery, listening to the tinkling of the bells atop the *stupas*. In the old monastery we spoke with the head priest who had been there 35 years but who had once been a pilot flying helicopters and Spitfires!

Our drive the next day to Inlé Lake was a real treat. Everywhere we were surrounded by mountains and terraced hills. We stopped at many villages and markets, passing the folk with water buffalo, heavily loaded carts and overstuffed trucks. We stopped to talk to a group of women in their tribal dress walking barefoot to the village. We purchased tapes of the local music and Soe Soe explained the interesting fruits and vegetables and what people were eating and what tribe they were from. She could identify them all by the colour of their huge head scarves and the way they wore them, or by their colourful jackets and skirts. Many women also wear the *longhyi*, and I envied their coolness. We didn't think it could get any better than this but it did. We arrived at Inlé Lake.

Our boat for the 15-mile trip was 50 ft. long, 40 ins. wide and drew 2 ft. The locals cram theirs with people and produce and fish nets, but we three sat in this slender boat with the boatman. Living as we do in wilderness lake country, we thought we had died and gone to heaven! Mountains surround the lake which is broad and shallow and home to 70,000 Inthas who have developed a culture all of their own. Fishermen with nets and traps of all sizes row silently everywhere. The Inthas silver, brasswear, pottery and lacquer ware are distinctive products sold all over the country and their hand woven silk *longhyis* are the most beautiful we saw.

We spent the day on the lake, exploring the giant 'gardens'. These amazing plots, floating in the middle of the



Leg rower fisherman on Inlé Lake

lake, are made by collecting floating beds of hyacinths and flotsam which, over about 50 years, decompose into a rich humus. They are secured to the bottom of the lake with bamboo poles, allowing the gardens to float during the rainy season yet not drift away. The market crops are harvested by their owners standing alongside in small boats. We were able to go up and down the channels between the narrow gardens admiring the wide variety of fruit and vegetables: tomatoes, beans, cauliflower, cabbage and melons, to name just a few. Everything everywhere moved by boat. Villages were built on stilts high enough to allow for the rainy season, channels were laid out like streets, factories and monasteries were on stilts. To go to the jewellers one went by boat. We watched the fishermen standing on one foot, rowing with the other while with their hands they threw a net or pushed down a huge, cone-shaped trap. These men row their boats by wrapping one leg around a long oar and we learned they go long distances doing just that. We stopped our boat at a blacksmith's shop, walking up the ramp to watch them making shovels and farm tools and, while we were there, a woman in a canoe came to sell us carvings and jewellery.

Finally the sun was setting and we quietly floated up to the steps of our hotel, the Paradise Inlé Resort, a large complex of stilted cottages laced together with arched bridges. We didn't think it could get better than this...but in a way it did. Very early the next morning I awoke, confused by an unfamiliar sound. Fish were jumping underneath our cottage! What experiences are to be found in Myanmar!

### Some tips:

Your feet must be bare in order to enter temples and monasteries. Wear sandals for these occasions so you can slip them off easily. Shorts and bare arms are not acceptable. Very lightweight cotton clothing can easily be purchased locally.

Our guide explained the airport procedures thoroughly which made the whole experience a breeze. You will be taken care of whether you want it or not, so don't fight it. A fellow will take your bags, and demand (politely but firmly) your tickets and passports. Let him have them. He will take you past the line-up and all the waiting and stamping and officious scrutiny of your papers will be done very quickly. (But still, to be honest, I never took my eyes off him!) Tip



Burmese ladies with temple offerings

guide lays out both sides of the argument; it can be read in its entirety on line at [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) (enter the world 'Myanmar' in the search panel, upper left).\*

If shopping is an important feature of your travels you may like to invest in a copy of *The Treasures and Pleasures of Thailand and Myanmar*, an Impact Guide (US\$21.95, available online from [www.impactpublications.com](http://www.impactpublications.com)). The major part of this book is devoted to Thailand, but it contains a chapter on Myanmar which appears to be useful, with some accommodation and restaurants also listed in addition to markets and shops.

[www.kandawgyipalace.com](http://www.kandawgyipalace.com)

[www.sedonahotels.com.sg](http://www.sedonahotels.com.sg)

CARP Travel: [www.carptravel.com](http://www.carptravel.com)

Diethelm Travel: [www.diethelmttravel.com](http://www.diethelmttravel.com)

Website for the *Pandaw* cruise: [www.pandaw.com](http://www.pandaw.com)

*Randi Nielsen is a TS member living in Dryden, ON*

\* Editor's note: Myanmar is due to take over chairmanship of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2006 and the European Parliament has just called for a boycott of ASEAN in the event this happens, stating that the EU "should not participate in the ASEAN meetings and events should Burma become the chair in 2006 without meeting any of the minimum conditions concerning human rights." EU Commissioner Stavros Dimas told the European Parliament that at present there was as yet no agreed position on the attitude the EU will adopt, adding, "We are encouraging Rangoon to take measures before then to show greater respect for human rights." Let's hope this helps. AW

*The Travel Society is in the process of putting together a trip to Myanmar. If you are interested please give us a call at 1 877 926 2500.* 📞

the man when you are finally in the waiting room. We were sitting comfortably while those afraid to let go of their passports were still standing in line.

While there are a variety of tour companies offering trips to Myanmar, it is of course also possible to travel independently. Here are some useful websites:

[www.myanmar-tourism.com](http://www.myanmar-tourism.com) (click on 'travel tips' for information on climate, money and credit cards, the US\$10 departure tax, admission fees to major sites and so on).

[www.myanmars.net](http://www.myanmars.net) (lots more information, plus maps and relevant books)

[www.myanmar.com](http://www.myanmar.com) and [www.burma-travels.com](http://www.burma-travels.com)

Also invaluable would be the Lonely Planet *Myanmar* guide. This guide gives advice on making your visit directly benefit the Burmese people. Potential travellers should be aware that there are strong arguments both for and against visiting the country in light of the present political situation. The introductory chapter of the Lonely Planet



The devoted wait patiently in Mandalay



*The Charles Bridge from the Old Town Tower, Prague*

# Eastern Europe by Train

*story and photos by Dee Macpherson*

**I**n October, 2004, three friends and I enjoyed a trip to Eastern Europe. We had a great time, and learned many things on our travels – some of which we would like to share with you. The Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary were recently admitted to the European Union, and we thought it would be interesting to include these countries in our itinerary before they became, perhaps, as developed as Western European countries. We travelled for 3½ weeks through six countries – just scratching the surface of each one, although we thoroughly enjoyed our experiences.

We knew from the reading we had done that October was still considered high tourist season, but thought that crowds would be a little thinner. For the most part, I think we were right, although major cities such as Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Munich were still crowded and sometimes accommodation was at a premium. If you are planning a trip

in the fall you might want to book hotels in the larger cities in advance, in order to avoid spending precious time trying to locate accommodation.

Before leaving Canada, we purchased (through a travel agent) an Eastern European Eurail Pass which is valid for 5 days travel within 1 month. The cost was US\$226 per person. Extra days can be purchased at a cost of US\$26 per person per day. The pass is valid in Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic, and was a particularly good value in Austria, where rail costs are higher. Our pass was for 1<sup>st</sup> class travel, and we were happy to have paid the small amount extra for this. (If you do not have a Pass and are

buying individual tickets, 2<sup>nd</sup> class is quite adequate on ICE or EC trains.) This proved to be a very good and economical idea. Although the pass was written up entirely in English and some train personnel were unfamiliar with it, we did not have any difficulty using it. When we travelled on trains requiring reservation, (look for “R” by the train number), we had to go to a ticket agent at the train station, and make a reservation. This usually cost about C\$10 per person and allowed us to have reserved seats on the train. Language was sometimes an issue with these transactions, but we managed quite well through sign language, writing out our request, and a smile. We found travel by train easy, affordable, efficient and for the most part comfortable. But remember that you are often required to put your luggage in the carrier over your head, so it is best to pack light so that this does not become too onerous.

We flew to Munich and immediately hopped on an ICE (Inter-City Express) train via Nuremberg to Prague. (There is a train from the airport to the main train station – Hauptbahnhof – in Munich. Simply walk across the “platz” at the airport, and buy your ticket. You can buy a “family ticket” for up to five persons for C\$13.) In Prague we had reservations booked from home at the Hotel Sanssouci [www.hotelsanssouci.cz](http://www.hotelsanssouci.cz). This small hotel was excellent and we chose it because it had been recommended by Ann Wallace in *TravelScoop*. They will pick you up at the train station for €22 (about C\$35) for four people if you arrange this in advance. It was away from the centre of the city, quiet and easily accessible by public transportation. The operator of the hotel was very helpful in selling bus passes, and providing directions to various sites. A complete breakfast was included in our room price of C\$130. Prague was beautiful, clean and very enjoyable. Public transit was easy to manage and inexpensive. We spent two days exploring the palace area, and the Vischeraad Gardens. We enjoyed great meals at U Radnice (Havlickovo nam 7) and Café Louvre (Narodni 22). A small warning about Prague – at the time of our visit, the crowds in the major tourist areas were surprisingly large. We think if we had gone any earlier in the season, they would have been overwhelming.

From Prague, we were off to Krakow, again by train. This is about a seven hour trip, and a great way to see the countryside. The night before our departure, we shopped at Tesco (a department store) for picnic lunch items (bread, meats, cheese, fruit) to eat on the train. This is a great idea as train food, while available, is not necessarily great. Save your money for a cold beer which can be purchased in the “bar car” for a reasonable price and consumed in your compartment.

In Krakow we were booked into much more basic accommodation (again arranged from home). We paid C\$40 for simple but clean double rooms. The bathroom was small and breakfast was basic (and delivered in a brown bag!), but price and location were great. The Tournet was well situated in Kazimierz, the Jewish Quarter, and we had a wonderful evening and dinner at the Café Ariel (ul Szeroka) close

by. The Rynek Glowny (old town square) is a great place to wander and people watch. A market in the Cloth Hall and a huge Gothic Church dominate the square along with many shops and open-air cafes. Oswiecim (Auschwitz) is near Krakow, and we travelled there by train and walked the site (with many, many others) and learned more about the atrocities of that time.

Upon leaving Krakow we caught a train to Rzeszow, where we stayed overnight in an unsatisfying, but functional hotel that had the aura of an old state-run operation. We rented an Avis car the next day and drove through the countryside to Zamosc, a small town that is a UNESCO World Heritage site, known for its town square. Although car rental was a bit of an extravagance (C\$150 per day) it afforded us an even closer look at the countryside, and an opportunity to stop for photos. In our opinion, it was well worth it. (We did wonder, however, if there might be better deals on car rental, if booked from home.) Driving in Poland was not a problem as they drive on “our” side of the road, and gas was easy to find. Signage and language can be a bit challenging at times, but we managed just fine. We found a great hotel in Zamosc, the Hotel Zamojski [www.orbis.pl](http://www.orbis.pl) at C\$123 for a double room, again including a great breakfast. The drive through the countryside from Rzeszow to Zamosc was beautiful. The fall colours were at their best and the sun was shining. Coming from the prairies, it was interesting to see the small plots of land, often being worked by a single man with a plow and horse. Single cows were tethered on pasture land on almost every farm. It was apple season, and we saw truck loads of apples lined up at processing plants.

After returning our car in Rzeszow we caught another series of trains to Stary Smokovec, Slovakia. Unfortunately it was rainy and the next morning the clouds blocked the Tatras Mountains we had come to see. Luckily, we were able to soothe ourselves in the beautiful Grandhotel Praha [grandpraha@tatry.sk](mailto:grandpraha@tatry.sk). Our double rooms there cost C\$92. This was excellent value for what we considered to be a 4-star hotel. We booked saunas and massages and “made do” with the weather. It was an excellent way to rest and rejuvenate. Unfortunately, we never did see the mountain tops!

Our train trip from Stary Smokovec to Eger, Hungary, through the Slovakian countryside, revealed a country that appeared to be more depressed than either Poland or the Czech Republic. Houses seemed much more dishevelled, and in Kosice (a mid-size city) there seemed to be miles of high density apartment buildings off in the distance, indicating to us that property ownership was rare.

Eger is the centre of Hungary’s wine growing areas. We sampled Bull’s Blood (the local red wine) and enjoyed the sights and streets. The Cathedral is beautiful, and we enjoyed the free noon organ concert there. We stayed at the Senator Haas Hotel [www.hotels.hu/senatorhaz](http://www.hotels.hu/senatorhaz) for C\$96 per night. The hotel is very well-located (just off the square), attractive, and reasonably priced with only 11 rooms. Although the rooms were quiet when we were there, we

thought that they would not be so in high season, when the square would be noisy until late at night.

From Eger we travelled to Budapest. Again a beautiful city with incredible architecture: the Palace, the Parliament Buildings, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Heroes' Square, etc. The atmosphere and architecture in Budapest rivalled that of Vienna and Prague. Budapest wasn't as crowded, however, making our experience there very pleasant. Unfortunately, we had trouble finding accommodation as everything seemed to be booked, so we enlisted the assistance of the Vista Visitor's Centre [www.vista.hu](http://www.vista.hu) in VI Paulay Ede utca 7. They were very helpful in finding us a room at our price range (C\$100), the Mercure Hotel Duna [h2025@accor-hotels.com](mailto:h2025@accor-hotels.com). Although there was no quaintness to the rooms, they were clean and comfortable and the breakfast was excellent. We paid a small fee to Vista to find us the room, but it saved us much time and frustration and we were grateful for the service.

Vista also booked accommodation for us in Vienna, our next stop, which, unfortunately, didn't turn out as well. The Hotel Amaranthe advertises as a 4-star hotel, but definitely does not deliver. (Interestingly enough, they had a book for comments in the lobby, with several recent comments agreeing with our assessment!) But to console ourselves we had a great time in one of Vienna's Wine Taverns or "Heurigers" in the suburb of Nussdorf. The Taverns offer "sturm" or young wines produced locally, as well as a buffet meal. The Tourist Information office in Vienna can provide directions by tram and bus. The weather in Vienna was cold and windy, and it did not encourage us to take in the many sights, although just walking in the centre of the city allows you to see the Opera House, St. Stephen's Cathedral, and other amazing and buildings. Again, there seemed to be large crowds of tourists.

From Vienna to Salzburg. Conveniently, across the street from the train station we rented a Hertz car (about C\$150 per day) to drive to Hallstatt, (another UNESCO World Heritage Site). The drive into the Austrian alps/countryside was lovely; the fall colours and green hills combined for some picture perfect moments. Hallstatt (population 1150) was great. Once again, the weather conspired so that we could not see the mountains very well, and could not do any hiking nor take the funicular railway to the top of the mountain to see the salt mines. But we thoroughly enjoyed our visit through the town, snapping pictures at every turn. We found accommodation at Pension Hallberg, C\$105 per night for double rooms. Dinner that night was at Zauner's where we dined on

fish caught fresh from the lake on which Hallstatt sits. We wished we could have lingered longer in this quaint and interesting town.

The next day, however, we returned to Salzburg, and were off to Munich for a night and then up to the Romantic Road to Bamberg, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Romantic Road was a trade route during the middle ages, and now remains a 360 km trail connecting old towns and villages. Bamberg, for one, is known for its range of well-preserved architecture as the town was not bombed in WWII. We found accommodation at a Brew House, known as Gastof Fassla [www.faessler.de](http://www.faessler.de) for C\$82. The room was clean and small, but contained everything we needed. Breakfast was basic but suited us just fine. Bamberg is described as a fun town, and it seemed to be. There are nine brew houses in the town, each with its particular speciality. We tried *rauchbier* (smoke beer) and *weissber* (wheat beer) – both of which were excellent.

Then on to Rothenberg ob der Tauber, another picturesque town on the Romantic Road. Our accommodation here was at the Reichs Kuchenmeister, e-mail [hotel@reichskuchenmeister.com](mailto:hotel@reichskuchenmeister.com), which proved to be excellent at C\$130. The breakfast was one of the best we encountered. Rothenberg is a beautiful little town, with gingerbread type houses and lovely window boxes, a neat little town square (on a slant), and an interesting wall surrounding most of the city that you can walk around. The views from the town hall tower and the wall around the city were spectacular on a sunny fall day. Dinner that night was at the Frankisher Tavern. Both Bamberg and Rothenberg are delightful towns, easy to walk around and friendly, but each with its own character.

And then it was back to Munich for a couple of nights before departing for home. We found great accommodation at the Hotel Uhland [info@hotel-uhland.de](mailto:info@hotel-uhland.de) for C\$147, and

good food at the Café Am Beethoven, just a short walk away. The Hotel Uhland is within walking distance of the main train station, on a quiet residential street. We decided to take the trip out to Dachau, and were very glad we did. Unlike Auschwitz, this location was not crowded. The "story" of Dachau is very well presented.

We flew home feeling as though we'd experienced Eastern Europe at a time before it is too touristed, and yet is developed enough to provide comfortable travel. It was a great trip, and one I'm sure anyone would enjoy. 🇺🇸

*Dee Macpherson is a TS member living in Edmonton, AB*



*Our pension in Hallstatt, Austria*

# Hostelling International

## – a Friendly, Fun (and Inexpensive) Way to Travel

*by Randi Nielsen*

**M**y husband and I have been hostelling around the world for many years ... in fact we each have a life membership. “Why do we do it?” you ask. Well, it is inexpensive compared with the cost of hotel rooms in each country. It is a great way to meet with all age groups from all parts of the world, sharing ideas of where to go, how to get tickets, what to avoid and, of course, sharing meals as you cook alongside others (if you wish). HI hostels are safe, consistently meet a set of standards and are always located in a convenient place.

There is an international network of over 5,000 hostels in at least 60 countries. Gone are the days of ‘dorms’, young people only and chores to be done before leaving. Now the age groups are heavily weighted to the over-40’s with retirees very much in evidence. We choose to stay in private double rooms, but there are generally family rooms for four and cheap dorms for those travelling alone. But the private rooms are limited so it is imperative to book these well in advance. (Usually the new hostels limit the dorms to six people, but in Prague this year we were told by two women our age that the dorms held 16.)

Hotelling International (HI) has a distinctive logo – a blue triangle with a white tree and a little white house. If you don’t see that, you are not in an International Hostel and the standards and prices should be checked carefully.

The countries of Europe have wonderful hostels just where you need them. On several occasions, travelling light, we have biked for a month around Denmark’s island of Fyn. Of course, in Denmark everyone bikes and families often use the hostels. We have seen groups arrive in biking clothes and leave for a wedding in tux and gowns!

Portugal also has a wonderful system of HI hostels and our family drove there for six weeks – from top to bottom and everywhere in between – using hostels as our only accommodation. The location of the Lisbon property is very convenient for walking to the city centre and for catching local transportation to all the museums and sights. Note, however, that there are no kitchen facilities

in that hostel.

In the fall of last year we had a huge private room in the St. Petersburg, Russia, hostel (US\$52) and met most interesting people, several from Canada. It was a very old building and was, no doubt, grand in its heyday. The staff here were friendly and very efficient and security was tight. Breakfast was included and the kitchen facilities made it easy to prepare lunches with groceries we had enjoyed buying. From that location we could catch a bus to any destination. As we travelled through the old Soviet Bloc countries we had good experiences in hostels. Not all of them fell under the HI banner, but all offered great accommodation.

In downtown Prague, just minutes from the famous Charles Bridge, in the heart of the old Jewish quarter, we rented a HI room for two (US\$60) and booked two rooftop apartments (US\$100) for friends who were meeting us there. Breakfasts were included. The apartments were wonderful: full kitchens, dining areas and good sized bathrooms and – best of all – several skylights giving fantastic views over the Prague rooftops. Across the street there were luxury hotels as well as little boutique hotels where there wasn’t even a single room for less than US\$300! Having seen our friends enjoy their luxuries, we decided to treat ourselves to a hostel apartment in the Cesky Krumlov hostel. “Wow!” is the best way to describe it! We had a full kitchen, fireplace, a loft with extra beds, furniture upholstered in white, two bathrooms and a view to die for ... all for US\$100.

In London, England, we stayed at the former choir-boys’ school just around the corner from St. Paul’s Cathedral. We were fortunate to have a room with a view of that famous dome and, of course, could catch the bus to anywhere in London. For a change, on another trip to London, we stayed at the Hampstead Heath Hostel and enjoyed exploring that prosperous and picturesque part of the city.

Turning to Canada, did you know that the HI in Ottawa is actually the original jail building and that one floor of cells remains? It is only a hop and a skip to downtown. And there are three hostels in Vancouver. We’ve stayed at the popular Vancouver Downtown

Jericho Beach. And on Vancouver Island recently we stayed at the Tofino property (C\$57.50) which is very lovely. The kitchen was large and spotless, the building is constructed of logs, and the common room and dining room are divided by a fire-place and overlook the ocean.

Friends often ask our top HI choices. They are Banff, Lake Louise and Holland's Amsterdam, with top prize going to Banff. There the separate building of family rooms is wonderful: a huge stone fireplace, lots of comfy furniture, a stainless steel kitchen, restaurant and bar, games room and, of course, spectacular mountain views. We have stayed there especially to go skiing and their ski package is great: lift tickets, a ride to the hill and a substantial breakfast at a cost considerably less than that charged by nearby resorts. A very close second is the Lake Louise HI, where we have stayed during the summer. It's just as comfortable with a huge stone fireplace, reading areas, games room and a large restaurant and bar. And the Vondelpark Stayokay Hostel in Amsterdam is also great. Minutes from the Rijksmuseum, the canals and all the excitement of this wonderful city, this is a state-of-the-art hostel with safety deposit boxes, large lockers for luggage, a restaurant and bar. The breakfast here includes cheeses, bread, milk, juice and more. You must book well in advance

here for even a dormitory bed.

As well as being able to travel farther and longer, thanks to lower accommodation costs and the facilities to makes meals and picnics when required, each hostel offers discounts on local tours, admissions, restaurants and more. All have computers available and we have always found the staff knowledgeable and helpful. No two hostels are alike. Some are historic castles, jails, cabins or downtown properties. Some sleep 300, others 20. Some do not include breakfast, some have bars. It's all easy to check out using their detailed booklets and the internet. But itinerary planning is essential as hostels are very popular and bookings must usually be made well in advance.

The national office of Hostelling International – Canada is located at 205 Catherine Street, Suite 400, Ottawa, ON K2P 1C3, tel: 613 237 7884 or 1 800 663 5777. Copies of the free *Hostels in Canada and Abroad Handbook* are available and can also be ordered online at [www.hihostels.ca](http://www.hihostels.ca) along with membership purchase. Cost for over 18's is C\$35 plus applicable taxes per year, or \$175 plus taxes for a 'friend' or lifetime membership. Reservations at the hostels can also be made on this website. Enjoy your travels!

## airline news

News from **Air Canada**. The airline has simplified its fare structure by offering one-way options and has eliminated its 'Saturday stay, round trip' rule. Also noteworthy is the fact that passengers can now check-in and print their boarding passes from their home or office. With this document you can then proceed directly to security if you have only carry-on baggage, or join the 'Express Baggage Drop-off' line at the airport for the required questions and tagging of your suitcase. Now all you need do is log on to [www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com) to purchase your ticket with your credit card, enter your Aeroplan number and select your seat. Then before your flight you can print out your boarding pass. The web check-in service is available 12 hours before a flight, up to one hour before domestic Canada flight departures and two hours before U.S. and international flight departures. Frequent flyers with Air Canada should also check the web carefully for a range of discount passes on Canadian and transborder routes. These multi-trip air passes are called 'Fly City passes' and the web link appears on the first 'page' of the website.

Travellers considering flights within Canada and/or to New York and Florida may like to check out the offerings of **CanJet**. They link Toronto with major cities across Canada plus their U.S. destinations and also offer some flights from Hamilton, Ontario. They have a clear website: [www.canjet.com](http://www.canjet.com).

We haven't checked it, but TS has heard of the website [www.wegolo.com](http://www.wegolo.com) which claims to offer the best fares possible connecting a wide variety of regions in Europe. The website seems easy to navigate. If any readers try this service please report back to us.

And now a warning: If you're travelling in southeast Asia, and Thailand in particular, you should know that **Phuket Air** has been banned from flying to the U.K. due to safety issues.

## B.C.

● Here's an idea if **Vancouver** is in your plans between 2 June and 25 September. It's the **Bard on the Beach** celebration in Vanier Park, against a natural backdrop of sea, sky and mountains. The line up is three of Shakespeare's plays: *As You Like It*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Hamlet* plus Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Performances are Tuesday to Saturday at 8 p.m., Sundays at 7 p.m. Tickets \$16 – 29. Special events include "Bard-B-Q and Fireworks" (a play and BBQ followed by *Celebration of Light* fireworks – 27 & 30 July, 3 & 6 August) and "Celebrating Red & White" (a play plus a wine tasting either before or after the show – 20 August). Full details at [www.bardonthebeach.-org](http://www.bardonthebeach.-org)

● While in Vancouver, don't miss a visit to the **Capilano Suspension Bridge**, named one of the top eight tourist attractions in Canada by *WHERE Magazine* and winner of the National Tourism Excellence Award 2003 and 2004. More than a suspension bridge, this site offers a 650 foot long rainforest canopy walk, First Nations carving demonstrations, salmon lunches at the Logger's Grill or coffee in the Canyon Café. The site is accessible via public transport or take a tour with several city tour operators. Information via 604 985 7474 or [www.capbridge.com](http://www.capbridge.com)

● The Bridge is one of the attractions included in the new **Vancouver Smartvisit Card** available for 2, 3 or 5 days at prices from \$89 which allows unlimited entry to over 40 top attractions in and around the city. Visit [www.seevancouvercard.com](http://www.seevancouvercard.com)

● We've all heard much about cooking schools in France and Italy. But how about taking a European-style culinary vacation in BC's lovely interior? The Joie Farm Cooking School is located in an apple and pear orchard overlooking Lake Okanagan. Farmhouse accommodation is available for these weekend get-aways or 5-day courses. It all sounds wonderful! Information at [www.joie.ca](http://www.joie.ca) or call 1 866 422 5643. And if Okanagan Wine Country appeals, make a note that their Fall Wine Festival (ranked in the top 100 events by the American Bus Association) is due to take place 20 September – 9 October 2005.

● A very nice anthology has just been published by Raincoast Books. It's called *The Vancouver Stories:*

*West Coast Fiction from Canada's Best Writers*. The first page of this book states, "Raincoast gratefully acknowledges the Listel Vancouver Hotel for inspiring and helping conceive this collection. Their ongoing support of the arts in Vancouver is admirable." Well, we've mentioned the lovely Listel on Robson Street before in our pages and if a special stay in the heart of Vancouver is in your plans you'll enjoy this unusual property. It has original art on the walls and packages that include the Museum of Anthropology. They have partnerships with local galleries, nightly jazz in their O'Doul's Restaurant & Bar and they support literacy programmes and the Vancouver International Jazz Festival. And that book? In the Foreword Listel states, "Our dream for this book is that it will give our guests an experience of Vancouver beyond the typical tourist fare, beyond the stuff of ocean and mountain vistas. We want our guests to get a taste of our city's diversity ... to hear the city's finest jazz, taste the Okanagan's finest wines, view



*A cultural event at the Capilano Suspension Bridge site*

the works of our country's most extraordinary artists, all without leaving our hotel! We dedicate this book to the curious traveller." There's a copy in every room of the Listel for you to enjoy! Tel: 1 800 663 5491 or visit [www.listel-vancouver.com](http://www.listel-vancouver.com).

## Ontario

● If you're travelling through Ontario, don't bypass **Sudbury**, a city that has changed much in recent years and that is now home to **Science North**, Northern Ontario's most popular tourist attraction, located on Big Nickel Road. This is a science centre, an IMAX theatre, a butterfly gallery, a motion simulator and a special exhibitions hall that has welcomed over five million visitors since it opened in 1984. If you go, don't miss visiting Enright, a rough-legged hawk who has made the third floor of the Centre her home since suffering a permanent injury to a wing. Check it all out at [www.sciencenorth.ca](http://www.sciencenorth.ca) or call 1 800 461 4898 for information.

● Theatre-lovers are no doubt well aware of the excellent offerings at Ontario's Stratford and Shaw Festivals. But there are a dozen or so smaller theatres throughout Ontario, most in wonderful settings and all

offering interesting plays (including some world premiers) throughout the summer. And there are packages featuring historic inns, fine dinners and visits to nearby historic attractions available too. Details are available on line at [www.ontariotravel.net/jtt](http://www.ontariotravel.net/jtt) Ontario's many travel guides can also be ordered at this site.

● **Toronto** in your plans this summer? Chances are you'll wonder what our pretty Toronto Islands are like. Discover them on a **Mariposa Cruise** whose offerings have been attractively up-graded recently under a new President. There are daily mini-cruises of **Toronto Harbour and Islands**, dinner and Sunday brunch cruises and more. And for those who live close to Toronto and have a special occasion on the horizon – perhaps a wedding reception or a business event – you may like to investigate holding it on one of Mariposa's seven vessels; each is distinctly different and the staff are a great bunch of people! Full details at [www.mariposacruises.com](http://www.mariposacruises.com) or call 416 203 0178.

● And for Ontario travellers, there are lots of money-saving coupons (and advertisements) in the *Attractions Ontario 2005* brochure, available by calling 1 800 ONTARIO. Included are discounts at many Toronto museums and at attractions in various parts of the Province such as zoos, plus dollars off the above-mentioned Mariposa cruises and much more.

## Québec

● **Montréal** is a city that loves its summer festivals and loves to welcome visitors to them. The **Montréal International Jazz Festival** has been named the "World's Largest Jazz Festival" by *Guinness World Records*. That was last year – their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary – and this year promises to be the same, with an enormous line-up of artists and hundreds of concerts in a variety of locations, 350 of them free. The dates of the Festival are 30 June – 10 July. For information, offers, tickets and packages log on to [www.montreal-jaxxfest.com](http://www.montreal-jaxxfest.com) or call 1 888 515 0515.

● **Montreal's Botanical Garden** (recognized as one of the world's finest and largest) and **Insectarium** have lots of exciting programmes and exhibitions this summer and beyond. Full details by calling 514 872 1400 or visiting [www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin](http://www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin) and [.../insectarium](http://.../insectarium).

● Fine art your interest? Plan to see the exhibition of rare Vatican art and objects in the Notre Dame Basilica of Montreal daily between 4 June and 18 September. This will be the only Canadian venue of this exquisite

exhibition, entitled *Saint Peter and the Vatican*. Information by calling 1 800 848 1594, [www.vatican-montreal.ca](http://www.vatican-montreal.ca)

● Or perhaps it's fireworks that thrill you? Head to Montréal's La Ronde for the *L'International des Feux Loto-Québec*, one of the finest such pyrotechnic events in the world. The displays take place at 10 p.m. on Saturdays from 18 June to 9 July and on Wednesdays and Saturdays between 13 & 30 July. Information via 514 397 2000 or [www.internationaldesfeuxloto-quebec.com](http://www.internationaldesfeuxloto-quebec.com)

● If wild spaces and places are more to your liking, check out the exciting offers under the umbrella organization **Le Québec maritime**, which offers year-round trips along both shores of the St. Lawrence River and Gulf, a total of 2,000 miles of coastline. Here travellers will find national parks, lighthouse trails, bird colonies, inns and cottages, French immersion cruises, gourmet food, and much more. For full details call 1 877 266 5687 or visit [www.quebecmaritime.qc.ca](http://www.quebecmaritime.qc.ca) Every experience looks wonderful and there are exciting trips not only in summer but throughout the year.

## Saskatchewan

About a third of Saskatchewan is water – not prairie – and that means lots of secluded beaches and adventures on and around the water. If you've yet to explore this lovely province visit [www.travelsask.com/tab](http://www.travelsask.com/tab) and click on accommodations where you'll find cabins, cottages, lodges and resorts to fit any budget and taste. Or you can call 1 877 237 2273 and request the *2005 Saskatchewan Accommodation Guide*.

Protect yourself and your investment with travel insurance from RBC insurance - Canada's #1 travel insurer

Call The Travel Society for all your travel insurance needs  
416 926 0111 or 1 877 926 2500



**VIA Rail** has a wide variety of tempting train journeys across Canada this summer and beyond. Starting 1 June, VIA will be re-launching its overnight *Easterly Class: A Maritime Leaning Experience* service on its **Montreal-Moncton/Halifax** train the *Ocean*. This trip will celebrate this history-rich region with commentary, activities, a panoramic domed viewing car and many other special features, including a sparkling-wine toast once passengers are aboard. For **Toronto** passengers there's an easy connection for the Montreal departure.

There's also: the *Chaleur*, a coastal tour of the **Gaspé Peninsula** between **Montréal, Percé** and **Gaspé**; the *Hudson Bay*, a 1,700 km 2-night journey from **Winnipeg** to **Churchill**; the *Abitibi and the Saguenay*, offering nature lovers' getaways to **Northern Québec**; the *Bras d'Or* one-day voyage from **Halifax** to **Sydney, Cape Breton Island**; the famous *Skeena* through the **Rockies** and **Northern BC** and, of course, the famous cross-country *Canadian* (named one of the top five "Great Journeys of the World" by *National Geographic*) as well as the popular corridor trains that link points between **Windsor, Ontario** and **Québec City**.

VIA offers many specials: a Canrail Pass, a Corridorpass, a North America Rail Pass (linked with Amtrak) and year-round discounts for children, youth, seniors, advance purchases and more. If you haven't been on the train in a while see your travel agent, call 1 888 VIA-RAIL or visit [www.viarail.ca](http://www.viarail.ca) where current promotions and seasonal specials are detailed. We're sure you'll be tempted!

## hotel happenings

Some news from the big hotel chains:

**Fairmont** is offering a variety of family adventure packages in Banff, Jasper and Lake Louise. These packages include sightseeing adventures, fascinating tours of the historic hotels, swimming pools and watersports and more. Details at [www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com).

The **Hilton** family of hotels (Hilton, Doubletree, Embassy Suites, Hampton Inn, Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites) are offering special "Get Going Canada" rates at their properties across the country this summer (until 6 September) with rates from C\$99 provided guests include a Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday in their stay. All "Get Going Canada" guests will also receive a copy of the *Canada's Best Drives* guide which includes 15 self-directed driving excursions from coast to coast. Full details at [www.hiltoncanada.com/getgoingcanada](http://www.hiltoncanada.com/getgoingcanada)

The comprehensive guides to **Best Western Hotels** are useful to have as they have properties in almost every corner of the globe. Did you know they also have some very exclusive properties in Europe and Asia? Log on to [www.best-western.com/premier](http://www.best-western.com/premier) and take a look. Some of the hotels are luxurious and modern, some are equally luxurious and historic. There are dozens of these properties across Europe and some in China, Korea and Thailand.

**Pan Pacific** is offering American Express Cardmembers 50% off rates as well as a complimentary third-night stay when their two-night stay is paid with their AmEx card. This offer is available at most of Pan Pacific's properties until 30 November 2005. Your travel agent will have details, or visit [www.panpacific.com](http://www.panpacific.com)

## A new service from *The Travel Society*

**FIT (Fully Independent Traveller) South America – it's time to go!**  
We are offering our members customized itineraries that can be as long or short as you like. We can arrange the itinerary of your dreams, visiting all or any destination in South America ... Machu Pichu, The Amazon, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, Patagonia, Chile, Argentina, Peru and Brazil (...Costa Rica too). All these arrangements can be made from the comfort of your armchair. And The Travel Society offers extremely competitive pricing.

Call now; we can have you dreaming about the spectacular beauty and excitement of South America and send you on your way to some of the world's most dramatic destinations.

**Please call; 1 877 926 2500 x 24 or 416 926 2500 x 24**

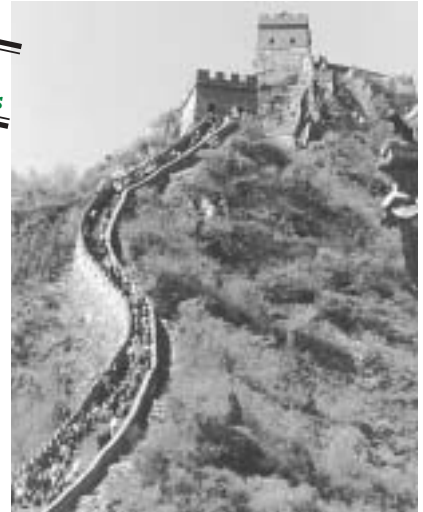
# China ... Yangtze Spectacular

## \$3,995 FOR 18 DAYS!

Departing 15 September & 20 October 2005

March, April, September, October 2006

Space is limited  
on the 2005 tours



Please call for the full itinerary

**I**t is vast, fascinating and mysterious and it has beckoned travellers from the west for centuries. Mention it to avid travellers and they are sure to say, "Yes, I hope to visit China one day." And what would they choose to experience? **A cruise on the mighty Yangtze River (now in the process of changing for ever);** a look at the work-in-progress on the massive **Three Gorges Dam;** a walk on the ancient **Great Wall;** views of charming villages, lush terraced hillsides and magnificent mountain peaks; visits to the great cities of **Shanghai** and **Beijing;** a trip to view one of the world's greatest archaeological finds ... the 6,000 terra-cotta warriors at **Xi'an;** scenes of palaces, pagodas, pavilions and pandas; tastes of Peking duck and Chinese banquets and so much more. So how do you choose? When you decide on The *Travel Society's* tour there's no need to choose because all these highlights are included. Yes, in these

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

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 \$1,288.00  
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.



21 days

# A Traveller's Turkey

Only 6 spaces left  
Fully escorted

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 Kapadokya (or Cappadocia); mysterious and lovely ruins such as Aphrodisias, Pergamum and, of course, Ephesus; the fabled and beautiful Aegean coast; the peaceful Princes Isles in the Sea of Marmara and so much more.

Ann says, "This is the most perfect tour of Turkey imaginable; you will have an unforgettable time ... and such a small group, too! Sign up now!"

## AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES:

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

### 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 and Mexico City

Departing 24 June, 15 July, 9 September and 7 October 2005

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

## Air-inclusive prices:

Toronto, Ottawa & Montreal	\$3,540
Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Winnipeg	\$3,794

Single supplement \$748 (Sharing can be arranged.)

Prices are subject to confirmation

New lower prices!

### Your tour includes:

- All air transportation on Mexicana
- Canadian domestic air
- Bilingual guides
- 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 7 June, 5 July, 6 September and 4 October 2005

New lower prices

The Travel Society is proud to be able to offer its members an outstanding trip to some of the world's most spectacular destinations. Who hasn't dreamed of cruising to the Galapagos Islands and seeing wildlife as Darwin witnessed it? Think of the unique adventure you will enjoy, of the stories you will have to tell and the photographs you will take! You will spend a week aboard your first-class 20-passenger ship, taking daily shore excursions to a variety of the islands with experienced naturalists in groups of no more than 10 people per guide.

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

PRICES INCLUDE AIR: Toronto \$5,895.00 pp/dbl

prices are available from all major cities

## GREAT ADD-ONS, INCLUDING AIR:

Kapawi - from all departure points	\$1,680.00 pp/dbl
Machu Picchu	from \$1,996.00 pp/dbl

Prices are subject to confirmation

### Your tour includes:

- Round-trip international air transportation
- All domestic air transportation
- All accommodation
- First class Galapagos small ship cruise
- All meals as per the itinerary
- Admissions to all sites
- Expert Galapagos guides
- Transfers & baggage handling
- All taxes

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 & March 2006

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



### Your tour includes:

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

### PRICES INCLUDING AIR departing from:

<b>Vancouver</b>	\$5,385 pp/dbl	<b>Toronto</b>	\$5,135 pp/dbl
<b>Edmonton</b>	\$5,385 pp/dbl	<b>Ottawa</b>	\$5,135 pp/dbl
<b>Calgary</b>	\$5,385 pp/dbl	<b>Montreal</b>	\$5,135 pp/dbl
<b>Winnipeg</b>	\$5,385 pp/dbl	<b>Halifax</b>	\$5,485 pp/dbl
Prices are subject to confirmation		Single supplement \$1,178	

4 WEEKS  
\$5,180  
all inclusive

# Long Stays in Mexico

departures throughout June 2005 & Jan, Feb, Mar and Apr 2006 for 1-, 2-, 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!

### SAMPLE PRICES INCLUDING AIR:

<b>Toronto</b> , 1 week	\$2,634 pp/dbl	<b>Vancouver</b> 1 week	\$2,889 pp/dbl
<b>Ottawa</b> 2 weeks	\$3,483 pp/dbl	2 weeks	\$3,738 pp/dbl
<b>or</b> 3 weeks	\$4,335 pp/dbl	3 weeks	\$4,590 pp/dbl
<b>Montreal</b> 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

a NEW 19-day tour...

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Fully Escorted

Spectacular

South Africa

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Come with The Travel Society to a land of wonder ... on a South African trip unlike any other. Designed especially for our members, this trip takes in all the highlights: Kruger National Park for game watching, the famous Garden Route, the beautiful wine region of Stellenbosch and the sights of incomparable Cape Town, including Cape Point, Chapman's Peak Drive and Robben Island. But on our trip you will do far more. You will tour the Great Escarpment of Eastern Transvaal – a place so beautiful writers run out of adjectives – where you will visit God's Window, the Blyde River Canyon and historical towns like Pilgrims Rest. You'll see Johannesburg and be escorted to Soweto for lunch in a Township house and jazz in a famous nightspot. You'll enter the Kingdom of Swaziland to meet the people and enjoy more game watching. Zululand is also on the itinerary, with its historical sites and unique entertainment traditions. You'll be driven through the Valley of a Thousand Hills to East London and take the famous Outeniqua Choo-Ttoe train from Knysna to George. You'll visit the Addo Elephant National Park and traverse the Little Karoo Desert – flanked by great mountain ranges – to see the Cango Caves. You'll travel in a luxury air-conditioned coach, you'll stay in lovely properties ranging from good hotels to charming chalets, you'll enjoy a wide variety of entertainment and you'll enjoy South Africa's delicious cuisine and wines and you'll be escorted all the way by Satour-accredited guides. Here at The Travel Society we know South Africa well ... and we can't imagine a more comprehensive, in-depth and fascinating tour of South Africa.

PRICES INCLUDING AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa \$6,826 pp/dbl

Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax \$7,109 pp/dbl

Single supplement TBA (sharing can be arranged)

Prices are subject to confirmation

**Your tour includes:**

- Return international airfare on British Airways
- First-class accommodation throughout
- Luxury a/c Mercedes coach
- Experienced Satour-accredited tour guides
- Special Travel Society experiences
- All meals breakfast, light lunch and dinner
- All transfers with full luggage service
- All sightseeing fees (with no hidden extras)
- All taxes

Please call for the full itinerary

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