

The Travel Society

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Magazine



**Antarctic Expeditions
Rajasthan, India
Along the Silk Road
Discovering Hamilton, Ontario**

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Gentoo penguin with chick (van der Veen)

editor's letter ...

Here is our summer double issue. For your fine-weather reading we have included some far-away and exotic destinations. 'Chill out' and think about visiting Antarctica on an expedition ship as 'summer' comes to the frozen continent in our winter months. Our intrepid contributors Judy and Ted van der Veen answer all your questions about such trips. Then there's a story on Rajasthan, India (a destination that is offered by The Travel Society) and three countries on the exotic Silk Road. Finally, Hamilton in Ontario may not fit into the 'exotic' category, but it does contain many delightful surprises for a getaway, whether you live in Ontario or are visiting.

Now a few statistics that may interest you. In a recent survey conducted by VISA International on the impact of December's terrible tsunami on tourism in the region, it was revealed that it had the least impact on Canadian travellers. Among Canadian travellers, 69% claimed it had no impact, followed by the French (65%), and Germans and Australians (both 60%). Amongst some of the people polled, the tsunami actually had a positive influence on Asian travel. This is "a reflection of altruistic sentiments and a show of support for local communities, especially among Canadian, British, Swedish and Australian travellers."

Turning to travel in Canada, a study just conducted by Scotiabank among 1,509 adults, has just revealed that a record number of us - 43% in fact - plan to take a summer vacation here in Canada. Perhaps you are among them. I certainly am, as next week I depart on a much-looked-forward-to trip to a province I haven't visited before: Nova Scotia. I'll tell you all about it in a future issue!

So ... happy summer to you all, and safe and exciting travels ... wherever they may take you.



We usually avoid publishing spa stories in *The Travel Society* magazine ... if spas are your thing there are plenty of articles elsewhere and even whole magazines devoted to them. However, in many European countries, whole cities have risen because of the 'healing waters' and a visit to the Gellert seems an essential part of a stay in Budapest.

The Spa's the Thing ... in Budapest

The bright, young tour guide showing our group around Budapest planted the seed of my spa experience. "People have been taking the healing waters here for centuries", she chirped. "No visit to Budapest is complete without experiencing our famous spas." And there one was... across the green Liberty Bridge over the Danube between Buda and Pest we could see the ornate building housing the famed Gellert Hotel and Spa.

A day or two later when my three friends and I had parted with our tour group and settled into Hotel Kulturinnov (a TS recommendation in the November '03 issue), I polled my fellow travellers. None of them was keen, but I was convinced that 'taking the waters' was something a visit to Budapest should include, so I set off on a solo walk from our location on Castle Hill, down to the Danube and followed the river a kilometre or two to the Gellert, an imposing grey stone, art nouveau structure built in 1918 on a site where hot



The Gellert spa

springs have supplied curative baths for almost 2,000 years.

Inside I lined up at a wicket for general admissionabout €3 (just under C\$20). Another wicket was for patrons coming with a doctor's prescription for special treatments. Prescriptions from doctors outside Hungary will be accepted, so if you feel that a camoline steam bath, a salt-vapor inhalation or a hot mud pack or something even more exotic, would help you, consult your physician before leaving home.

As for me, I made my way, bathing suit in hand to the women's hot pool. If I hadn't brought a bathing suit, I'd have been supplied with an apron. I was assigned a lockable dressing room, a package of shower gel and pointed toward a shower room. From there, I entered a vast tiled room with two pools, one at 36° Celsius and one at 38°. In each pool, a stone lion's head spills hot water over weary backs and limbs. Woman of all sizes, ages and style of bathing suit, or no swim suit at all, relaxed in the warm steamy atmosphere, then showered and dipped into a cold pool. (If you have arranged for a massage ... now is the time you will have it.) Back on my riverside walk, I followed the Danube back to the funicular which would lift me without exertion back to Castle Hill and my three skeptical friends. I felt great!

The famous Hotel Gellert which houses the spa was a favourite of Otto von Hapsburg, son of Hungary's last emperor. Now part of a chain, it was renovated in 1998 adding air-conditioning and restoring room decor to the original Jugendstil style. Besides the ornate thermal baths, there's an outdoor pool with a wave machine. The spa is free to hotel guests. www.hotels-in-budapest-hungary.com/danubiushotelgellert.php and for a complete list of Budapest's spas visit www.budapestinfo.org/majorspas.html. Please don't miss a visit to the Gellert if you are visiting Budapest. You won't regret it!

*Barbara Bagnell
Toronto, ON*

More on Wales

We enjoyed reading Editor Ann's account of her visit to Wales as we make regular trips to this delightful part of the world. We returned last October to stay in a timeshare property at Laugharne (pronounced Larn), famous for being the home of the poet Dylan Thomas. It's situated on the south coast of Wales just south west of Carmarthen. We had a large, three-bedroom bungalow up on a hill with lovely views down the Taf Estuary. Dylan Thomas' boat house home beside the water and his garage farther up the hill, which he used as a study, were within a few minutes' walk. Laugharne itself is a pleasant little town with several pubs, a grocery store and craft shops. Delightful dinners can be enjoyed at a little village restaurant called The Stable Door.

The countryside was absolutely beautiful in October, with soft mists and gentle sunshine highlighting the lush green fields dotted with sheep, the fall beech trees glowing golden and everything looking so fresh.

We visited the National Botanical Garden of Wales (which Ann missed) and, although at that time of year there weren't many flowers, it was full of interest. The original owner of the property was Sir William Paxton, the famous garden designer. Here he built a double wall around one part of the property consisting of a stone wall separated by about 20 feet from an inner brick wall, thereby creating a sort of microclimate to protect his more exotic and fragile plants. There is also an old ice-

Writers are rewarded for sharing!

The Travel Society 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!

house, now home to a population of bats, and the Great Glasshouse, which is a vast glass dome with sodded grass growing halfway up the sides. This is filled with wonderful plants from Chile, South Africa, Australia and the Mediterranean. I actually liked these gardens better than the much-acclaimed Eden Project in Cornwall.

There are many interesting places to visit within a short drive of Laugharne, including Carmarthen itself where Bishop Robert Farrar was burnt after refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to the Catholic Mary Tudor. In fact, history and castles abound in these parts. Then there are churches with fascinating stories: St. David's Cathedral at St. David's with its effigies of knights with Welsh dragons carved on their armoured chests; Tenby where the fascinating Tudor Merchant's House is a must-see and marvellous Pembroke Castle (seniors' admission £2 and a guide book another £2 ... both well worth the outlay) steeped in Welsh and Tudor history. Fishguard, a bit farther up the coast, is famous for being the site of the last invasion of Britain by the French. This thoroughly mismanaged affair involved a group of Welsh women in their traditional tall hats and red shawls and armed with pitchforks, led by Jemima the Great, rounding up the invaders! The Gower

Peninsular is also nearby and a visit to Worms Head to walk along the fine windy cliffs will clear your head ready for the next bout of history.

There is such a lot to see in this part of the world with plenty of atmospheric pubs to enjoy, Welsh food specialities to try (such as caul - a kind of soup) and Welshcakes.

*Carrie Toomey
Kingston, ON*

(There's an interesting account of the Battle of Fishguard at www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/Wales-History/Fishguard.htm - Ed.)

Budget Airlines in Asia

In late January, as I sat at Singapore's Changi Airport looking at the arrival/departure boards, I realized that there are quite a number of small carriers in South East Asia. Possibly they offer some good discounts, I thought, and promised myself that I would check out their websites as soon as possible.

Among the budget carriers I noticed were AirAsia, Jetstar Asia, Tiger Airways and Valuair. All have informative websites giving routes, prices, and booking on line facilities. Valuair (from Singapore) offered flights to Phuket, Bangkok, Hong

Kong, Jakarta and Perth, Australia. Jetstar Asia flew from Singapore to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Manila, and Taipei. Tiger Airways flies from Singapore to Bangkok, Macau, Manila and Vietnam (the only one). Finally, the large Air Asia flies out of the new Kuala Lumpur airport to many Malaysian cities as well as destinations like Bali, Jakarta, Manila, Macau, Xiaman (China) and Singapore.

Recently, I checked out some of the good Air Asia specials from Kuala Lumpur International Airport to Bali: about C\$110 dollars return for a 3-hour flight. Some regular national carriers were quoting about US\$350 dollars for this flight. I booked my flight a week ahead on-line from Mexico. I am happy to report that my flight to Bali on a modern Boeing jet was pleasant. Seats are not assigned, but there were enough for all. Elderly and families with children board first. Food and drinks were an extra cost, but reasonably priced. So if you are thinking of travelling around Asia, do check out the specials of some of these budget carriers. You will be as surprised as I was.

The websites are www.airasia.com, www.tigerairways.com www.valuair.com.sg and www.jetstarasia.com

*Archie Bower
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An Antarctic Expedition

story & photos by Ted and Judy van der Veen

In June 2004, readers enjoyed Carrie Toomey's interesting article on seeing Antarctica from a large cruise ship. We are sure many noticed her reference to "smaller expedition ships" that "can land people under strict rules" and thought "What about that? It sounds really exciting!" We were already planning our January 2005 trip on one of those expedition boats and here, we hope, is the answer all your questions regarding such Antarctic expeditions.

How big are these boats? What are they like?

Most of the smaller expedition boats were built in Finland in the 1970s as Russian research ships. They are leased, complete with Russian crew, to several tour companies in various countries. The Russian captains have considerable experience in sailing in ice conditions. Most of the ships have strengthened steel hulls (6 inches or more) but are not classified as icebreakers. The ideal choice for an Antarctic adventure is one of several ships that carry a maximum of fifty passengers. Why? Because that is the maximum number of people who are allowed ashore at one time, and so everyone can spend the allotted time on land with no waiting for the others to come back on board. The ships are all equipped with several Zodiacs for shore landings and bay cruises. Our ship was the *Professor Multanovskiy* under the guidance of Captain Sergey Nesterov. He is not only a competent ship's master, but also a charming man who wants his passengers to have the best experience possible. The bridge

is normally open to visitors, and members of the crew are very obliging, quick to spot wildlife, happy to point out our route on the charts. There are binoculars lying about for anyone who has left theirs in their cabin. The cabins are more than adequate; some have two lower berths, some bunks, and all have ample storage space. The berths on levels 4 and 5 have private bathroom facilities; those on level 3 have wash basins, but shared toilets and showers. There are enough of each that sharing is not a problem, and as there is more stability on level 3, should the seas get a bit rough, you might prefer to be on this level. There is daily cabin service; beds are made up, then turned down in the evening (with a chocolate on the pillow!), towels changed whenever you leave them on the floor, and beds changed every three days. There is also a sauna for passengers' use.

What about the food?

Plentiful and delicious. The head chef was Austrian-born





and trained. The menus changed daily; not a single dish was ever repeated. Breakfast was buffet style, with a choice of fruit juices, fruit, cereals (hot and cold), cheese and cold cuts, bacon/sausage and eggs. Coffee and a selection of teas, regular and herbal, were available round the clock, as was a fruit basket. (Although the quality of the coffee was the one complaint of all coffee drinkers!) On mornings where we had a very early landing, there would be drinks and pastries beforehand, then full breakfast after we returned to ship. Lunch and dinner were both 4-course meals, a salad or appetizer plate, freshly made soup, a choice of main course, and dessert. Each evening the menu for the following day was posted and we were asked to check off our choice of main dish; there were always three choices for dinner, one fish/seafood, one meat, one vegetarian, and either two or three choices for lunch. About four o'clock or after the return from our activity, afternoon tea was put out; this might include freshly baked cookies or pastries as well as fruit. Twice we had an on-deck barbeque when we were visiting one of the Antarctic stations; the personnel from the station would be invited to join us. The dining room holds everybody at one sitting and passengers sit where they like; all in our group used this as an opportunity to get to know the others. The bar in the lounge was open late-afternoon and evening. This is where we met every day before dinner for a recap and briefing for the next day. One can run up a tab for on-board expenses such as drinks and laundry, then pay by credit card at the end.

Must you be extremely fit to go on such an expedition?

Reasonable physical fitness is all that is required; you must be mobile and able to climb the gangway and to step in and out of the Zodiacs, even in rough waters. There will always be at least two staff or crew to help you and to advise just when and where to step. All will be wet landings, with water rarely deeper than about a foot, but the rocks may be slippery. Many of the birds and animals will be on the rocky beaches, but sometimes the best sightings require what can be a fairly steep climb, perhaps in muddy or slippery conditions. One always has the option of staying on the shore, or indeed of staying on the ship, should the outing appear too arduous. Most often, all five Zodiacs (10-12 people each) were used so there was no waiting to go ashore. When we landed, the departure time of the last Zodiac would be announced. However, as soon as there were 5-6 people who wanted to return to the ship, one of the Zodiac drivers would oblige. No need to stay on the shore if you feel cold, wet, tired or just not up to it.

Who goes on these trips? Are they all young outdoors types? Will we be too old?

Hardly! As these trips are not inexpensive, you are not likely to find young backpackers. The ages of our group of 48 ranged from early-30s to mid-70s. We have friends aged 80+ who have enjoyed an Antarctic expedition. There were single people as well as couples, several people traveling alone or with a friend because a spouse was not interested/gets seasick/only likes the tropics/and so on. More than ten nationalities were represented, from New Zealand to Norway, Canada to South Africa, California to Austria, and others in between. What we all shared was an interest in the outdoors, in flora and fauna, in the history of polar exploration. Participants tended to be well travelled and well prepared; photography was a major interest to most. While for most of us this was a "once in a lifetime" experience, there were a few people who had been in the High Arctic or Antarctica before; indeed, one man was on his third Antarctic trip.

How do you prepare? What documentation is provided?

Right after we booked, we received a 30-page booklet, "Preparing for your polar journey", with all the nitty-gritty, travel documents required, health and medical information, information about the ships and the expedition staff, clothing and packing requirements and allowances, insurance details, etc. In addition, we got an "Antarctic Primer", 145 pages of background reading, with chapters on guidance for visitors, physical and biological environments, wildlife, explorers and scientists, descriptions of the places that may be visited, recommended further readings, and wildlife checklists. During our trip, one of the staff had the duty of writing a logbook that will be printed and sent to each of us at the end of the season. Each evening we received a printed outline of the following day's plans and pertinent information/maps/charts.

Who will be the expedition leader and staff?

Whoever they are, they will be qualified and experienced in Antarctic travel and tourism. Our expedition leader, Anna Sutcliffe, is a naturalist and lecturer in the UK whose speciality is sea-birds. Our ornithology and marine biology expert, Frank Todd, has been coming to Antarctica every year since 1972; he has received several honours for his work in establishing breeding penguin colonies in places such as San Diego and for his books, journal articles and wildlife photography. The field biologist and natural historian was American. This was also the first Antarctic trip for a young biologist from Victoria, BC, who works with killer whales and whale-watching there in our summer; while his main job was to drive one of the Zodiacs, he also gave a lecture on orcas. The ships are not equipped to deal with serious medical conditions, but the doctor (an American on our trip) will distribute anti-nausea medication, painkillers, decongestants, anti-biotics, etc., as required. The hotel manager was from the Falkland Islands. She and the Argentine bartender were also qualified Zodiac drivers.

What will the weather be like? Will I need special gear?

Maybe, but bear in mind most trips do not even reach the Antarctic Circle; their main thrust is the Antarctic Peninsula. The expedition we chose was almost three weeks in length, a circular route highlighting the Falklands and South Georgia Island as well as the Peninsula. The tourist season here runs from November to early March; it is summer. Yes, there is some ice and snow, but the climate is maritime. There will be nothing like the extremes Canadians know in the winter. We were extremely fortunate in that we did not experience any really rough seas or intemperate weather. The coldest daytime temperature we had was about +3° C; in Ushuaia and the Falklands it was 13-14°. But it can be colder, wetter, and rougher: better to bring too much than too little. Dress in layers. Do have extra socks, gloves, scarves and hats. Take long underwear or track pants, as well as waterproof outer trousers. Water- and wind-resistant should be key words in wardrobe planning. If you are shopping, look for thin new-age materials that “wick” (carry perspiration away from your body) and dry quickly; there is nothing worse than to be stuck in thick, wet wool or cotton fleece that takes forever to dry. Many expedition companies provide parkas and boots; if yours does not, then high rubber boots and a good parka are needed (and can be rented in Ushuaia.) While there is a laundry service on board, costs can quickly mount up. For day-to-day washing of your “smalls” and for drying those mitts and socks, we suggest you take a short length of cord to string across your room and a few clothes pegs for convenience.

What happens all day? What can we expect to see? Where will we go?

The big attraction is wildlife: penguins, albatross, seals, seabirds, all of various sorts, also icebergs. We saw literally hundreds of thousands of penguins, adults and chicks:



Magellanic, Rockhopper, King, Gentoo, Adelie, Macaroni. Also several types of seals: Fur, Weddell, Crabeater, Leopard. Whales included orcas and humpbacks. Amongst the seabirds: several sorts of albatross, petrels, skuas, caracaras, and numerous smaller species. In the course of our 18 days at sea, we had over twenty landings or Zodiac tours. The maximum number of landings in one day was four, although two was the norm. As is usual in wildlife preserves, the rule is not to approach the animals by more than five meters. But, as always, the rules have not been explained to the animals. Penguins are notoriously curious creatures, so if you stay put for a while in their vicinity, chances are that one or more will come over to see who you are and what that thing (camera) is, hanging around your neck.

We also visited several research stations (British, Argentine) where one could send postcards from the “ends of the earth” and talk with the scientists stationed there. On the days when there were few or no landings, there were lectures (with slide shows) by the staff in the lecture room and/or videos on the Antarctic. We were privileged in that one of our group, a gentleman from Scotland, was the son of the geologist on the 1916 Shackleton expedition. He gave two presentations on this ill-fated expedition whose members spent several weeks frozen in the ice, then stranded on wild Elephant Island. Sir Ernest Shackleton and two companions effected a rescue by crossing the seas to South Georgia Island in a lifeboat, then walking over the mountains to one of the whaling stations for rescue. On South Georgia we visited Shackleton’s grave where we had a wee dram to toast the memory of “The Boss”, then enjoyed a

look around the small museum. At Elephant Island the seas were quite rough, but the captain held the ship steady for a good quarter of an hour so that we could see the narrow rocky beach where the Shackleton crew had faced potential disaster in 1916. There was an extensive on-board library of official Antarctica materials as well as general books left by previous travellers.

Just what activities will take place depends to a great degree on weather and ice conditions; serendipity often comes into play. One perfect day, after a Zodiac tour on a sea as smooth as glass, and as we were steaming towards a British research station, a last-minute decision was made to launch the Zodiacs because there seemed to be an unusually great number of humpback and killer whales in one area. This is when the people on one Zodiac had the great good fortune to meet "Lucky" – a gentoo penguin who was being chased by the orcas as a potential snack and who sought shelter by leaping into one of the Zodiacs and staying for about ten minutes. Even our experienced marine biologist was overcome by this "unprecedented" event. And as one person video-taped the adventure, we were all able to see it close-up back on the ship. One of the highlights of a trip to the Antarctic Peninsula is considered to be the passage through the very narrow, steep-walled Lemaire Channel; however, solidly packed ice prevented us from passing this way, but our view toward the channel just after sunrise was magnificent. A fellow passenger described the impact of smaller chunks of ice against the hull as "sailing through a bowl of Rice Krispies: snap, crackle, pop." One of the most dreaded parts of an Antarctic tour is usually the crossing of the Drake Passage, where the Atlantic and Pacific meet, and amongst the roughest waters on the earth. Our crossing was so smooth that we had a bonus landing at a seldom-visited Chilean research station on an island several hours off Cape Horn. The only town visited was Stanley in the Falklands; the only other people we met were at the research stations. For the statisticians, we sailed over 3,500 nautical miles (60 to 293 per day), and we were as far north as 51°+ (Falklands), as far south as 64°+, as far east as 35°+ (South Georgia) and as far west as 68°+.

Who? Where? When? How? Details, details, details...

There are several companies that run Antarctic expeditions from November to March. The usual run is 10-12 days, allowing 5-6 days on the peninsula after crossing the Drake Passage. We were happy that we had chosen the longer 20-day cruise with several landings in the Falklands and South Georgia Island, visits to research stations in the South Orkneys and South Shetlands, and several landings on the peninsula and neighbouring islands. The circular route also takes advantage of the sea currents, reducing the chances of rough seas. On the plane home we talked to several people who had taken the shorter cruise and who were very disappointed. Some had experienced only two landings, none had been able to go through the Lemaire Channel, several had spent a lot of time waiting as there were too many passengers



on their boat for all to go ashore at once. We, on the other hand, were extremely satisfied with all that we were able to see and do; anything that had to be crossed off the list was more than compensated for by an unexpected surprise. Whichever company you choose, be sure that they adhere to the Antarctic Protocol regarding the environmental protection of the continent.

We travelled with **Quark Expeditions**, specialists in Polar Travel (the Arctic, including the North Pole, in our summer, the Antarctic in the southern summer.) They have offices in both the United States and England. The toll-free number in North America is 1 800 356 5699 or check them out at www.quarkexpeditions.com. They are represented by several agencies. We booked through **ElderTreks**, tel: 1 800 741 7956, www.eldertreks.com. A great advantage to booking with them is their currency exchange policy; while the trip is priced in US\$, they guarantee you the better exchange rate of the day you book and the day you make final payment. This can mean a considerable saving. And, of course, you are covered by Canadian travel legislation. Polar travel is always expensive, but we felt it was definitely worth the extra money to do the longer trip. You can expect the Classic Antarctic cruise (10-12 days, Ushuaia to the Peninsula) to cost from US\$4,500, twin accommodation, or the 20-day Explorers' Cruise (ours) from US\$8,500, not including flights to and from South America. We flew Air Canada to Buenos Aires, then Aerolineas Argentinas to Ushuaia. Prices include one night in a hotel in Ushuaia prior to departure. Pre- or post-cruise extensions to sites such as Iguazu Falls can be added on. An expedition that is very exciting, and now we can truly say that we have visited "all" continents.

Judy and Ted van der Veenlive in Campbellville, ON

Camels, Cows and Curry: Travels in Rajasthan

story and photos by Anne Hofland



India seems to hold a special allure for travellers – it exudes exoticism, and beckons with the promise of adventure, colour and history.

In spite of having travelled to over 40 countries independently, my travel companion and I were nervous about doing so in India. We ruled out joining an organized tour, but wanted to do some advance booking to minimize the “hassle factor” we had been warned about. Also, we wanted the flexibility to select our daily activities in each location depending on our mood and what we encountered.

Looking back in past issues of *TravelScoop*, I came upon an article on India which recommended the services of Sheikh Nazir of Explore Culture and Tours in New Delhi. So I contacted Nazir by e-mail. We e-mailed back and forth several times over a period of months, before all of our plans were finalized. Working together, we ended up with an itin-

erary of 23 days, visiting Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Bharatpur, Jaipur, Pushkar, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, and then flying home from Bombay. Two American friends ended up joining us, so we made arrangements for a group of four. Nazir arranged for pick-up at the airport, a car and driver for two days in Delhi plus another for ten days around Rajasthan, booked our domestic flight from Udaipur to Bombay more cheaply than we could do on-line, and booked train tickets for the overnight train from Jodhpur to Jaisalmer. He also suggested hotel accommodation, some of which he booked for us and some I booked independently by internet or phone. All of Nazir’s arrangements worked out very well, and I also can highly recommend his services. He can be contacted at 205 Amrit Chambers, 2nd Floor, 76-77 Scindia House, Janpath, New Delhi, telephone [011 91] 11 335 8711, e-mail: shnazir@nde.vsnl.net.in or check out the

company's website at www.exploreculturetours.com.

We arrived in Delhi after 20 hours of travel. Delhi is an assault on the senses, and even before you leave the airport you have to deal with the air pollution, the traffic and the noise. So it was wonderful to have a smiling face from Nazir's office meet us at the airport and negotiate us through the maelstrom to a waiting car and hotel room. We met Nazir and his staff the next morning to go over the arrangements and pay for his services. But in Indian fashion, discussing business was "not possible" until we had partaken in special tea from Nazir's native Kashmir.

For the next two days we were chauffeured around Delhi. Highlights were the Qutb Minar complex (India's equivalent of the leaning tower of Pisa, except more spectacular and pre-dating it by a few centuries) and a rickshaw ride through the Chandni Chowk marketplace. We enjoyed an evening stroll along the Rajpath to see the stately illuminated colonial buildings, as it offered a welcome respite from the constant blaring of horns and crush of traffic. We ended our walk at the India Gate. It is the gathering place of residents young and old in the cool of the evening, and its carnival-like atmosphere gave us a great glimpse into a slice of Delhi life.

Before leaving Delhi, we were invited to Nazir's home for dinner with his family to celebrate Eid. Also invited were a German couple who are clients and friends of Nazir's, and who travel to a different part of India every year. We enjoyed drinks on the rooftop terrace, and a spread of wonderful spicy Indian dishes prepared for us by Nazir's wife. The family's hospitality was most gracious, and the evening thoroughly enjoyable.

The next day we set out for Agra. We met our driver for the next 10 days, the trusty Khan, who maneuvered our sleek new air-conditioned Toyota Qualis SUV through the chaotic traffic with great skill. Throughout our trip, there were only two driving rules that we could ascertain, the first that size did matter, so you always had to yield to a larger vehicle, and the second that you were obligated to honk your horn to warn someone if you were going to pass. Other than that, it was pretty much a giant game of chicken on the roads. But the amazing thing is that we never saw a single accident happen while we were there.

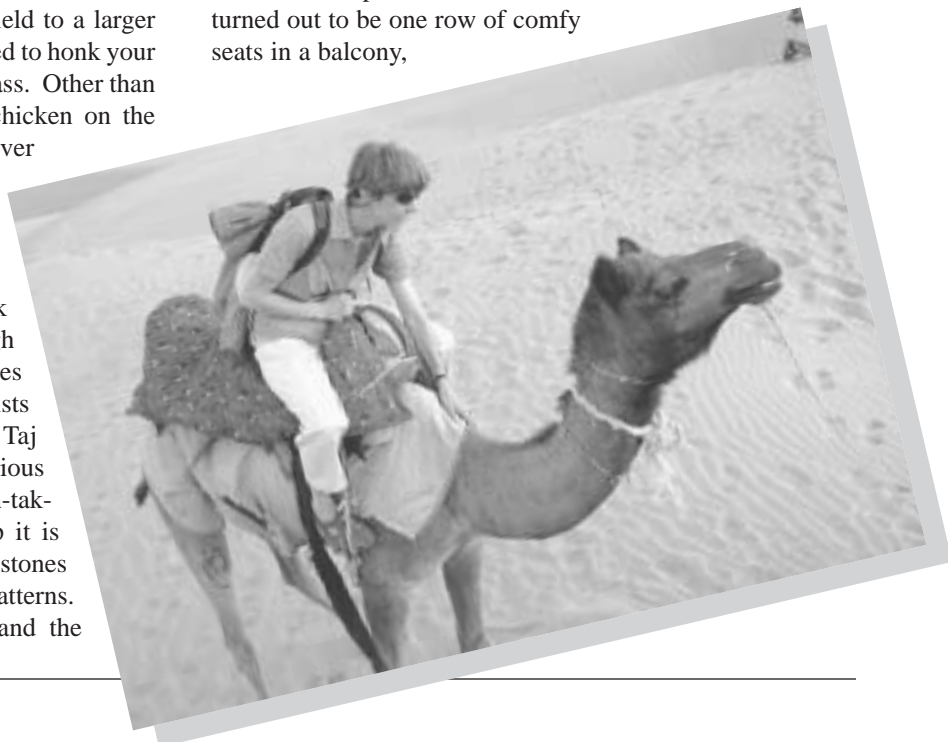
We were up very early the next day in order to arrive at the Taj Mahal before sunrise. The site opens at 6:00, and after a walk through the quiet streets and a very thorough security search, we made our way past the gates and took a seat with the hushed group of tourists waiting for the sunrise. Gradually the Taj revealed itself in all its glory, and what a glorious monument to love it is. From afar it is breath-taking in its architectural beauty, and close up it is equally beautiful, with inlaid semi-precious stones set into the marble in magnificent floral patterns. We spent hours wandering about the Taj and the

grounds, glad then that we were not on one of the organized tours that was hurrying its people through. On our departure at 9 a.m. there was a huge lineup of people waiting to get in, and the streets were now thronged with aggressive merchants and traffic, so we realized it was well worth getting up to arrive early.

The best part of the Agra Fort was viewing the opulent suite of rooms where Shah Jahan, builder of the Taj Mahal, was imprisoned and spent the last years of his life gazing across the river at his beloved Taj. A gilded cage is still a cage. Another sight in Agra which is often overlooked is the "Baby Taj", the tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah. It is a smaller "knock-off" of the Taj Mahal, but equally ornate and beautiful, and far less crowded.

The next morning we set off for Fatehpur Sikri, the abandoned capital not far from Agra. It was well-preserved and definitely worth visiting. At most sites, we usually just relied on the guidebooks we had with us (Lonely Planet and Frommers), but in this case we hired a guide to show us around, and this was very worthwhile as it was a complex site. There was a religious festival going on, and in the courtyard of the mosque there were many booths set up, selling everything from Indian snack foods to religious offerings, catering to the Indian worshippers rather than the tourists.

Next we travelled to Jaipur, the "pink city". The most interesting sight there was the Jantar Mantar Observatory. It is like a playground of huge scientific instruments for studying astronomy, built by the scientifically curious maharajah Jai Singh. A guide is essential to make sense of this amazing place. Surprisingly, another highlight of our stay in Jaipur was an evening at the largest movie theatre in Asia, the Raj Mandir, to see a Bollywood movie. The theatre itself was worth the visit, with a huge lobby and a seating capacity of 1125. For the equivalent of C\$3 we purchased seats in the top-rated "diamond" section. This turned out to be one row of comfy seats in a balcony,



with little sitting rooms behind to enjoy refreshments at intermission. The movie was all in Hindi, but the plot was interesting and quite easy to follow, the acting was generally good, and there was some fantastic scenery of India.

We took a day trip to nearby Amber to visit its impressive hilltop fort and palace. After having travelled by elephant in Thailand, we were eagerly anticipating the elephant ride up the hill on these plodding but sure-footed animals. Unfortunately our elephant appeared to have respiratory problems. Every few steps he would give a great snort and shower us with a trunkload of elephant mucus. The fort was a labyrinth of passageways and rooms, so complex that without a guide, we got lost and had to be rescued by a French tour group.

We timed our trip to coincide with the famous Pushkar Camel Fair. Pushkar was a very enjoyable little town, in a beautiful setting by a lake surrounded by mountains. It was the first really walkable town we had visited, especially because traffic into the town had been cut off, so we could walk the streets with no fear of being run over by cars (only motorcycles, pushcarts, cows, and the odd overenthusiastic pilgrim). Watching the sun set over the lake while enjoying a drink on the terrace of the Pushkar Palace Hotel was very relaxing. It was great during the day just to wander the fairgrounds, watch the herders with their camels, and take in some of the sights like the moustache competition, the piles of hand-shaped cow dung patties, the vendors with their assorted wares. There were some excellent exhibitions of Rajasthani music and dance at night under the desert stars.

In Jodhpur, the new audio tour of the Mehrengarh fort was excellent. This was the largest and most impressive of the forts we had seen, and the view of the “blue city” from the ramparts of the fort was memorable. Nearby Mangore offers free visits to its public gardens, which have some very interesting Hindu temples, lovely bouganvillea, and many, many monkeys.

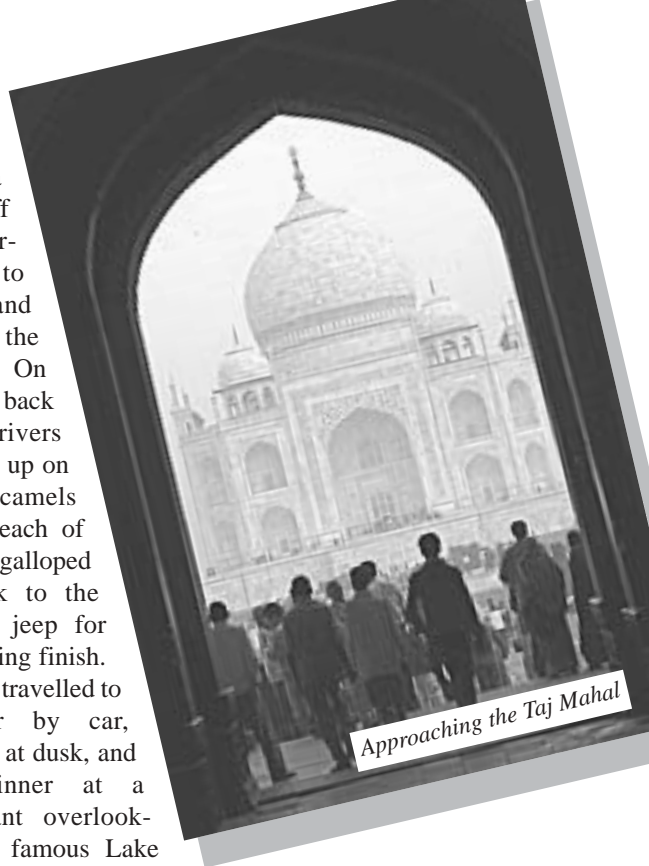
We said goodbye to our car and driver when we arrived in Jodhpur, relying on rickshaws in town and taking the overnight train to Jaisalmer. Our camel ride in Jaisalmer was amazing. There are multi-day safaris offered, but after hearing stories from other travellers about the comfort level of riding a camel, we opted for an hour’s ride. We made arrangements with one of the ubiquitous travel agencies in town for departure around 3:00, an hour’s drive through the desert in a jeep, arriving at Sam Sand Dunes in time for an hour’s camel ride, the sunset, and return to town. All this cost us each 500 rupees (C\$15), including an extra charge for having our own camel each for the whole time. Once the jeep drops you off, you climb onto your camel (mine had the unlikely name of Bubbaloo) and the drivers lead you out into the desert. Although there were lots of other tourists, we soon all spread out, and you really felt as though you were part of a medieval camel caravan. The dunes only cover a small area, maybe a square mile. As we rode further into them, they grew gradually larger in size, and there was less and less vegetation, and more Sahara-like ripples in the

sand. We found a dune off by ourselves to sit and watch the sunset. On the way back the drivers climbed up on the camels behind each of us and galloped us back to the waiting jeep for an exciting finish.

We travelled to Udaipur by car, arriving at dusk, and had dinner at a restaurant overlooking the famous Lake Palace. We could see the lights of the Palace twinkling, and their reflection in the water of the lake, and it was everything we had hoped for. It wasn’t until the morning that we could see that the lake level has dropped so low that the Lake Palace is no longer in the middle of the lake, but just barely on the banks of it. However, we enjoyed the city of Udaipur, its palace, small lanes, interesting shops, and less aggressive merchants.

Cosmopolitan Bombay (Mumbai) was our favourite Indian city, and we all agreed that first-time travellers to India would be wise to start in Bombay rather than Delhi to reduce the culture shock. It is a great city to walk in, with wonderful promenades along the Arabian Sea, wide avenues and parks. It also had niceties that we hadn’t seen elsewhere in India, such as street signs, and stop lights that people actually obey! We enjoyed the trip out to Elephanta Island, not so much for the famous caves there as for the sheer pleasure of the boat ride over. It was wonderful to be out on the water after three weeks of desert and heat, and a great way to end our journey.

Our accommodations in India were in hotels that the guide books considered “mid-range” and that our travel agent considered budget. Sheikh Nazir made suggestions for all of the cities on our itinerary, but we thought that some of his suggestions were too expensive, having travelled through southeast Asia staying in comfortable hotels for no more than \$25 a night. For example, we balked at spending \$130 a night to stay in a tent during the Pushkar fair. In these cases I used the Lonely Planet and Fodor’s guidebooks and booked directly with a hotel either by e-mail or by phone. Our hotel rates varied from \$22 a night to \$54 a night, and the comfort level varied from barely passable to



Approaching the Taj Mahal

very comfortable, though not in direct correlation to the price. In fact, our favourite hotel was the cheapest, the Devi Bhawan Guesthouse in Jodhpur at \$22 a night (see highlights below). Other properties which I can recommend were the Mahendra Prakash Hotel on Lake Palace Road in Udaipur, also at \$22 a night. Our room there had a balcony with window seats, a separate living room, and beautiful wooden doors with a brass bolt lock. I booked that hotel by phone from Canada at 011-91-294-2419811. Udai Vilas Hotel outside of Bharatpur was a beautiful spot. Its large rooms had balconies and hardwood floors, and there was a good restaurant. This was the hotel which our travel agent had recommended at \$66 a night including meals. We had booked elsewhere, but found it unacceptable and were able to negotiate a walk-in rate at Udai Vilas of \$45 a night for the room. In Bombay we booked by e-mail at Shelley's Hotel, www.shelleyshotel.com, right on the waterfront just 5 minutes from the Gateway of India. The rooms were large but a little tired, but it had a pleasant sunny breakfast area, and alcoves on each floor where you could sip a drink and look out over the Arabian Sea. The price of \$40 and the location were unbeatable for Bombay. In Jaisalmer our travel agent booked us into the Narayan Niwas Palace, a lovely sandstone hotel. This was our most expensive accommodation at \$54 a night. Other places that were passable but we would not recommend were the Arpit Hotel in Delhi (not particularly clean), the Atithi Hotel in Agra (sterile, not very good value), the Hotel Bissau Palace in Jaipur (a former maharajah's palace, tons of character, lovely grounds but very tired rooms), and the Hotel White House in Pushkar (clean but very small rooms, prices jacked way up for the Pushkar Fair). Several of the hotels had pools, but we did not use them nearly as much as we anticipated, as they were quite cold and often not particularly clean. All the rooms had air conditioning, but we rarely used it as the winter nights in India were comfortably cool and pleasant.

We are all glad that we travelled to India. We each had moments on the trip when we wondered why we were there, when the frustrations of India overcame the allure. We all agreed that even though we had travelled in quite a well-heeled fashion, it was still the hardest travelling any of us had ever done. This from our friends who had trekked in Nepal, travelled and lived in China, and from ourselves who had spent nine months backpacking through southeast Asia and the Pacific rim. Maybe it has something to do with age. Maybe had we done this same trip in our twenties and thirties as opposed to our late forties and fifties, we would have felt differently. However, we are all proud of the fact that we have done it, and have brought back wonderful memories and souvenirs of our trip.

Our Highlights of India:

Sightseeing: number one: seeing the Taj Mahal at dawn and, number two, the camel ride through the Sam Sand Dunes near Jaisalmer

Accommodation: Devi Bhawan Guesthouse, Ratanada

Area, Defence Lab Road in Jodhpur, www.devibhawan.com. This beautiful little guesthouse is centered around a garden, small restaurant area and aviary. It has three types of rooms, all pleasant and nicely furnished — standard at 750 rupees a night (C\$22), garden rooms at 850 rupees and huge suites at 1200 rupees. It was our best value and had the most helpful and friendly staff, including Govinder, the indefatigable 82-year-old who is your cook and waiter in the restaurant.

Transportation: Arranging for the car and driver through Nazir was a godsend. It gave us great flexibility, was very comfortable for four of us, and very economical at approximately C\$75 a day. I would highly recommend this mode of travel in India.

Food: By the end of our time with our driver, we were stopping for lunches at the roadside truck stops called *dhabas*. He always selected them carefully, making sure they were clean, although the bathroom facilities sometimes left a little to be desired. However the food was freshly prepared, tasty and plentiful, and usually cost us about a dollar each for lunch, including drinks. We paid for Khan!

Shopping: Shopping is neither quick nor easy in India, but it is well worth the time and effort. The most popular gifts we brought back were silver jewellery and colourful woven shawls. We also purchased some camel hair rugs in beautiful natural earth tones, as well as hand woven wall hangings and silk fabrics. When you see something you like, buy it then, because you may never see it again. Just be prepared to sit down, have tea, have zillions of items laid out before you until your head spins, and to barter. Of course you will not pay Indian prices, but when you get home and admire your beautiful purchases you won't care.

Things you will appreciate when you get home: Turning on the tap and drinking the water. Blissful quiet, even if you live in the middle of a large city. Walking down a street and not having to dodge holes in the sidewalk, cow patties, garbage, cows, pigs, dogs, motorcycles, overzealous merchants, push carts, rickshaws, cars, and maybe the odd elephant or camel. Driving down a road where everyone drives in their lane, people stop for stoplights and do not honk their horns incessantly. Clean air. Post offices where the clerks don't say, "Sorry. No stamps today!"

Things you will miss about India when you get home: The beautifully coloured clothing of the women. Encountering Hindu wedding processions, complete with the groom on a white horse, fireworks in the street and music blaring from loudspeakers. Balmy evening breezes. The kaleidoscope of life on the street. Indian food (but not for a couple of weeks at least). Rooftop restaurants. The sense of history. How in the span of a few minutes you can see ways of life that span centuries. Post offices where the clerks say, "Sorry. No stamps today!"

Anne Hofland is a Travel Society member who lives in Willowdale, ON

ALONG THE SILK ROAD IN CENTRAL ASIA

story and photo by Beatrice Magder

I had long dreamed of travelling along the Silk Road in Central Asia. The years passed until, one day, I thought “Well, why not?” Why not indeed. It was not difficult to make the arrangements and it turned out to be a most wonderful experience.

The Travel Agency who arranged this trip for me was excellent: Asia Adventures and Study Tours. It is run by Yue Chi. And when you book you can assume that the trip will go since ours did with only four people on it. Unfortunately one got sick and left after Uzbekistan, but the trip continued with the three of us. We were all older women, and all of us have travelled extensively. It was a congenial group, helpful to one another when needed and able to be flexible when needed. Address for Yue Chi is 1515 Bayview Ave., Suite 200, and telephone number is 416 322 6508 and 1 866 564 1226, website: www.asiaadventures.ca

The trip I was on left 26 September for Beijing and two days later we flew to Tashkent, right across the whole of China. Our trip was 21 days and ended in Urumqi in Xinjian, at which time the other two participants flew back to Beijing. I went on to Dunhwang and met Yue and another group of Canadians in Xi’an, then went to Dazu, Chonqing, the Three Gorges, Wuhan and came home from Shanghai. I was away, in total, just over a month.

Our accommodation was in four or five-star hotels almost all of the time. These included places like the Hyatt Regency in Bishkek, Kunlun Hotel in Beijing, Holiday Inn in Kashgar, Ocean hotel in Shanghai and its equivalents in almost all of the other places.

Hotel building is going on like mad everywhere that we visited.

The food was excellent with breakfasts in the hotels always a mixture of local and western food. We often were taken to other hotels or restaurants for evening meals and, usually, large lunches were also provided. Food consisted of lots of rice, as you can imagine, a number of small dishes of vegetables, sometimes some noodles and often a stew of some kind ... this often lamb or, more often, mutton. Tea and other drinks were offered and the food was always plentiful with almost too many dishes from which to choose.

It was a good time of year to go, being at the end of the tourist season. Tourism is a growing phenomenon in that part of the world. All flights were arranged and worked well and on the ground we had a guide for all of the Uzbekistan, one for all of Kyrgyzstan, and one for Xinjiang. We travelled in small vans on the ground with the same driver for each country. Guides’

English was excellent and they were all very helpful in all ways. As you can see, I cannot be anything but positive about all aspects of the trip. We were on the go a lot of the time and it was strenuous. I was a bit exhausted when I arrived home, but it was all worthwhile.

The Silk Road was comprised of several commercial routes that went to and from China, Asia and Europe for hundreds of years. Xi’an (present name) was the beginning and the end of caravan routes carrying not only silk but many other products. For hundreds of years the making of silk was a closely guarded secret in China and was sought after by the upper classes of ancient Rome, India, the Ottoman Empire and



Adding rice to a Xianjing stew!

was exchanged along many market places along the roads.

Several routes were necessary in order to cover the enormous distances and to get through and around mountain chains and deserts as well as all the different climates. Kashkar, in Xinjiang, was an important city where two major routes met before going on further east or west through areas such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia.

A trade route always carries much more than traders. Along the Silk Road also went religions, crafts, cultures, languages, armies and conquerors, political and philosophical concepts, curious people, intrepid travellers and people of many races, nations and ethnic groups. Buddhism and Islam spread all along this part of the world, and settled in parts until the present day.

Marco Polo was one of the most famous travellers coming from Italy and heading to Xi'an, travelling for about 20 years before returning home. He wrote about his adventures and it was in reading these writings, and stories about Marco Polo himself, that the whole region began to intrigue me. I wanted to travel on the Silk Road, at least through Central Asia and China. This trip was a fulfillment of my dream and it was a wonderful and unique trip!

UZBEKISTAN

Well, what is there to say about Uzbekistan? Civilization has flourished there for more than 2500 years; its major cities have incredible architecture going back many centuries. The countryside is beautiful. In spite of its age there are modern cities – new buildings, shops, electricity, restaurants and night life. But off the main streets are old, unpaved poor streets and buildings and many people. Things like the native, colourful *ikad* dress have gone and the women are now dressed in bright print long dresses, while young girls wear tight jeans. Men are mostly in black suits or casual dress but older men are still wearing the more traditional clothing and hats ... the *gaiba*, a four-edged skull cap. In many ways, the things that make the city and the country distinctive are gone or going, especially in the cities. There are many cars and buses in the cities and some along the highways, as well as gas stations. All reflect how modern the country is becoming. But alongside, on the roads there are people still riding donkeys and sitting in carts pulled by donkeys. Occasionally you also see camels.

So, it takes imagination to think back hundreds of years and to try to see the caravans coming into the caravansarai along the Silk Road. It also takes some thought to visualize the rulers, the Emirs, powerful enough, as late as the early 1800's, to bring about the death of two Englishmen, Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly. These men were foreigners who apparently did not show enough respect for the Emir. The two men were beheaded in the main square in front of the ruler's fort after a long imprisonment in horrible conditions. There was a large crowd there to watch the punishment. It was in that same long period of time that the construction took place of mosques, and

minarets, *madrasahs* (schools), mausoleums, monuments and palaces. The architectural designs, the craftsmanship, the materials used were superb and they have lasted right down to our own time.

Each city's wonderful craftsmen worked somewhat differently: mosaics, painted rectangular squares attached to the walls, painting on plaster and woodworking. Each city had its own shade of blue, its own pattern of flowers and designs, its own use of other colours added on. It was fascinating to see the differences in each city. I had the opportunity to do this in Khiva, Bukhara, Tashkent and Samarkand. Bukhara, Samarkand and other cities are really oases in deserts, with vegetation only apparent close to the cities. A favourite place was Khiva. It is a small walled city and easy to get around and the monuments are fascinating and full of artistic creativity.

We had some great experiences in Uzbekistan. Impressive indeed were the drives through valleys of mountain chains and across deserts, across important rivers, through valleys and cotton fields with mountains in the distance observing everything as you drive from one place to another. The roads themselves were an experience! Some were really terrible. People watching was fantastic. This was Central Asia, quite different from other parts of Asia and certainly very different from any place in Europe. People are distinctive racially, observably different in some of their housing, in the organization of cities and way of life. You are aware that you are in a part of the world where the civilization and cultures go back hundreds of years and people you see and talk to can probably trace their ancestry for many generations. Coming from North America, this had a great deal of meaning for me. I was constantly aware that wherever we went we were in places that have long histories of many invaders, conquerors, rulers, battles, and settlements. I found it awesome!

Where Uzbekistan is going is a good question. Rushtum, our guide, kept telling us that although the government has become independent of Russia and the old Soviet Union, names have changed for high positions but the same people are in power. So many things are really the same as they were. He used to work for Intourist, now he works for an independent tourism company doing much as he did before. Since independence people have lost jobs, health benefits, free education and lots more. The question is whether or not they are really better off.

KYRGYZSTAN

How to summarize it?! For me it was a country of magnificent geography. Beshkek is less ancient than most cities we visited in Uzbekistan and the city has little historical interest, other than the fact that the architecture of the main square is Soviet, which now makes it historical. For example, workers were busy moving a huge sculpture of Lenin to the back of a government building that had faced the main square. It was a surprise to me that it remained standing at all.

This meant, for us as tourists, that there was more to see out of Beshkek in the mountains and the valleys and on up to Issyk-kul, the one big lake in Kyrgyzstan. I found Kyrgyzstan quite different from Uzbekistan although each has experienced similar results under a government that is independent from that of the old Soviet Union. One result is that unemployment is very high since many people were formerly employed by the government. People are struggling. Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country, consisting mostly of the Tien Shan

Mountains and valleys. The beauty of the countryside is hard to describe, enhanced as it is by the steep mountains, their shapes and colours constantly changing as you travel. Lake Issyk-kulis is especially lovely. On one side of it, the mountains come down to the shore while on the north side, which is inhabited, is the region the Silk Road passed. Near the lake there is a huge field of boulders covered with petroglyphs.

Our accommodations included a five-star Hyatt Regency hotel in Beshkek that was decorated with felt wall hangings. We stayed in a resort at Issyk-kul and in an apartment in Naryn which included a typical Kyrgyzstan dinner of rice and lamb pilaf. Both our guide, Elena, and the driver, Sasha, were Russian and the primary language in Kyrgyzstan is Russian, with Kyrgyz as their second language. When we did stop at a school in a small village, however, the language there was Kyrgyz. The majority of people are Kyrgyz and the men wear a distinctive high, felt hat. Wonderful faces! Also interesting were the *yurts* (round tents made of willow branches and felt covering) that we saw everywhere, including some that were summer homes and others that were summer resorts made up of *yurts*. We also went way up in the mountains to a ski resort, where Elena goes skiing.

We visited, in a remote area away from the main highway, a *caravansarai* that was on the Silk Road. There was a yurt nearby for visitors which had felt and other cloth decoration inside with the dome of the yurt showing the frame of willow branches. This dome design is part of the flag of Kyrgyzstan. Like Uzbekistan, great change is taking place in this nation with both countries hurrying towards modern tourism. I am concerned about the undeniable loss of what makes these places unique and wonder how much of their culture and way of life will remain.

XINJIANG UYGAR AUTONOMOUS REGION - KASHGAR AND URUMQUI

Kashgar was known as a "bright pearl" on the Silk Road. Marco Polo wrote of it as a "splendid city". It lies at the meeting place of the southern and northern routes of the Road, making it an important junction for the political, economic and cultural exchanges between ancient China and the western world at that time. It is a very old city and its famous Sunday market has been in existence for centuries.

The approximately nine million Uygur (pronounced Woogar) people make up between 40% and 50% of the pop-

ulation as well Chinese Han and several other large minority groups. Originally Uygur people were nomadic, living in yurts and moving their flocks from lower to higher land as the seasons changed. They still have the small and swift Petrovsky horses, hairy Kashmir goats, yaks and other livestock. This part of Xinjiang also produces many crops including varieties of melons and grapes. Again, since most of the region is mountain and desert, many of the cities are oases. The most famous one of these is Turpan with its ingenious method of digging wells and creating tunnels to create a most effective system of irrigation. This helps create the wonderful vineyards growing primarily raisins.

Kashgar is another city in Central Asia that has many wonderful complexes of buildings with mosques, mausoleums, gardens, halls and other buildings. Again, the designs and decorations are unique. Green seems to be the predominant colour in Kashgar, decorating walls, pillars and even the tombs. Yellow is also used, as found on the enormous Id Kah Mosque. I think that because it was such an important meeting point for merchants and caravans on the Silk Road, the development of crafts is especially extensive in Kashgar. We visited a large centre with different crafts being produced on each floor: musical instruments, distinctive Uygur hats (called *dopes*), jewellery, machines to print cloth, carpets, and knitting machines to make shawls and bedspreads. There are people sewing clothes, especially the local native dress. There were also embroidery and beadwork areas, metal work, wood craft, and pottery.

We spent time roaming the streets full of small, narrow shops. Right outside the entrance to the mosque there were many booksellers selling religious books. Here we watched flat bread (*nan*) being made in a bakery; instruments being constructed, sold and tuned in another shop; wooden and metal tools, knives and kitchen utensils; small machinery and lots more. In one place there were people sitting on little stools helping those who were illiterate write letters or read letters they had received. And always in these places there were many little restaurants selling food and snacks. We also saw many women wearing a kind of knitted, brown cloth covering their heads and faces; some just wearing them as shawls, ready to cover up when necessary.

Unfortunately it rained very heavily the night before we were to visit the famous Sunday market. Streets were flooded and there was mud everywhere. We first went to the animal market and watched cart and truck loads coming in with sheep, cattle and other animals for sale. Walking around, we saw at least one yak, many sheep, goats, donkeys, cattle and even a couple of camels. Also for sale was farm equipment and decorations for donkeys and carts ... usually leather work with bright red tassels decorations. Outside the actual cattle market, food stalls were set up and all kinds of vegetables and fruits were being sold, laid out on cloths on the ground. It was all colourful and mouth watering.

In the afternoon, when the water in the streets had receded, we went to the main market. It is over 4 km long with very narrow aisles where there are hundreds of stalls selling

... continued on page 20

PREPARE TO BE SURPRISED IN ... HAMILTON, ONTARIO

story and photos by Ann Wallace



Rutherford House B&B

“I’m going to Hamilton for the week-end,” I told my family one day in late winter. “Hamilton?!” they echoed (yes, with a question mark and an exclamation point). Living as we do in Toronto, they doubted there were good reasons for leaving the winter offerings of our own city in order to visit nearby ‘Steel Town’.

Well, they are wrong. There are actually many reasons to plan a getaway to Hamilton, or to stop over for a while on that drive round to Niagara or if using increasingly-popular Hamilton International Airport. In fact, the reason for my visit was that a group of travel media members were meeting in Hamilton to see just how much the town has to offer and how the city is undergoing an urban revival.

One is foolish, really, to doubt Hamilton’s interest quota. It is one of Ontario’s oldest cities, so boasts a great deal of history. And where there’s industry there’s always money; apparent in the city’s seven museums, in its fine historic homes that have been beautifully preserved and are now open to visitors, in its trendy shops and restaurants and in its gracious residential areas. Then there’s a newly-opened Hamilton Art Gallery (just having its finishing touches applied when I was there), the Hamilton

Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera Ontario, and the renowned Royal Botanical Gardens in adjacent Burlington ... the only royally-designated gardens in Canada. So come with me on a getaway to surprising ‘Steel Town’.

First of all, we need somewhere to stay for a couple of nights. Well, there’s the downtown Sheraton which offers all the bells and whistles for which this large hotel group is renowned, including – most certainly in Hamilton’s case – a very friendly staff. This hotel is just across the road from Hamilton’s trendy new Art Gallery and the Arts Centre where the symphony and opera can be

found and close to the boutiques and restaurants of Locke Street and the International Village.

If B&B’s are more your style, I found the perfect one. Just a few blocks from the centre of town, but in a handsome heritage district, stands the Rutherford House B&B. Here Janis and David Topp will give you a warm welcome to their antique- and flower-filled Victorian home with its two en suite king or queen rooms (complete with coffee/tea making facilities) and serve you a delicious breakfast. If you are driving there is off-street parking here, but if you are car-less the property is close to public transportation, including a GO station. And Janis and David will be delighted to tell you everything you need to know to make your visit complete – including favourite restaurants – they love Hamilton and sharing it with visitors.

There is an interesting geographical footprint in the region of Hamilton and neighbouring Burlington, lying as it does at the western extremity of Lake Ontario encircled by the Niagara Escarpment. Its position on the edge of the Carolinian climate zone results in a surprising number of rare birds and plants. And plants are, of course, to be found

in profusion in the glorious Royal Botanical Gardens located on the outskirts of town. The RBG is home to the world's largest lilac collection, a variety of other specialized gardens, four nature sanctuaries and miles of walking trails. There's also a pretty café and a tempting gift shop. Please don't miss it!

Down in the harbour area, lovers of all things nautical will enjoy a visit to HMCS *Haida* Canada's most decorated warship, which is now berthed here. Her popular tours interpret naval life on board. There are also boat tours of the harbour and lake to be enjoyed in the summer months and there's another royal designation here in the form of the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club, established in 1893, where 'yachties' from around the world receive a warm welcome.

For Canadian history buffs there's a great deal to enjoy here. Visit Whitehern Historic House and Garden (a National Historic Site) in the centre of town, and be fascinated by this artifact-packed home which is an outstanding example of an urban estate owned by a wealthy industrialist. It was the "Boston" house in the movie *Anne of Green Gables the Sequel*. Don't miss what claims to be the first rec. room in Canada in the basement nor the splendid pictures showing the growth of Hamilton from around 1840. All is fascinating.

A short drive from town will bring you to the historical 'battlefield' of Stoney Creek where the British fought off an invasion of American troops during the War of 1812. Here stands Battlefield House Museum and Park – another National Historic Site – a 1796 home where, in 1813, the Gage family was held in the cellar as the Battle of Stoney Creek raged above them. Costumed guides lend an atmosphere of reality to this typical pioneer homestead and, when you've had your fill of history, you can enjoy their 32-acre park and the trail leading to the Bruce Trail, Canada's oldest and longest 'foot-path'.

On the other side of town, close to the Botanical Gardens overlooking Burlington Bay and Lake Ontario, stands the pride of Hamilton: magnificent Dundurn Castle (yes, yet another National Historic Site) another artifact-filled stately home with a fascinating past. Forty-room Dundurn was the home of Sir Allan MacNab, one of Canada's first premiers. Here you will again be guided by costumed staff who will bring privileged daily life in mid-19th-century Hamilton to life and tell of the family's connection to Camilla Parker Bowles. 'Below stairs' is especially interesting, where visitors can imagine the lives that the servants passed here. There's an excellent gift store, featuring a good selection of history books, and a popular restaurant for lunch: The Coach House.

Back in town there's lots of year round musical offer-

ings to enjoy, while art-lovers won't want to miss the stunning new Art Gallery of Hamilton, recently renovated with an \$18 million price tag.

And last, but by no means least, we should mention Hamilton International Airport, the fastest growing airport in Canada. At present this facility is home to such airlines as WestJet and CanJet with their cross-Canada links and charter operators such as Sunquest, Transat Holidays and World of Vacations. But as of 18 September this year, HI will also be home to Air Canada who will offer non-stop service from Hamilton to Ottawa and Montreal and connecting service to many Eastern Canada destinations and to Paris, London, Munich and Frankfurt. If you plan to use this airport, do make time for a Hamilton stop-over. I know you won't be disappointed!

Some details ...

Tourism Hamilton publishes a comprehensive Visitor's Guide entitled *Experience Hamilton*. Call 1800 263 8590 for your copy (it contains some money-saving coupons) or www.hamiltonundiscovered.com and www.hamilton.ca. Also, www.hamilton.ca/museums has full details of all the region's Historic Sites and Civic Museums.

The Sheraton Hotel, 116 King Street West, Hamilton, ON L8P 4V3, tel: 905 529 5515, www.sheraton.com/hamilton

Rutherford House B&B, 293 Park Street South, Hamilton, ON L8P 3G5, tel: 905 525 2422, e-mail: david.janis.topp@sympatico.ca, www.bbcanada.com/5198.html

Two other B&B's, these in the countryside surrounding Hamilton, were recommended to me by Tourism Hamilton personnel:

The Duck Tail Inn, 1573 Butter Road W.,

(left) Whitehern Historic House in winter

(below) Dundurn Castle in falling snow



... continued on page 20

BRITAIN

- Heading to London? A day out in nearby **Hampton Court** (accessible by public transport from Central London), where there's not only the famous Palace beside the River Thames but also lots of riverside pubs and pretty rural scenery, is high on many travellers' lists. Now there's something new and unique in Henry VIII's Hampton Court Palace, site of a famous hedge maze which is the oldest maze of its type in the world, dating from around 1700. That something new is ... built-in sound effects. This permanent audio art installation, triggered by the footfall of visitors as they try to find their way out of this superb maze, consists of fragments of ancient music, snatches of laughter, the rustle of silk, whispered conversations, a barking dog and the sound of cymbals. It's sure to *amaze* the children! The maze has easy access for wheelchairs and contains panels explaining its long history. Open daily, admission £3.50 (approx. C\$8), information at www.hrp.org.uk
- Ah yes, the **River Thames**. How many visitors to London realize that once outside the city this waterway becomes a river of exceptional beauty? Now you can explore the river on a variety of short cruises through such famous places as Windsor, Hampton Court and Oxford. Light meals are offered and the boats are handicapped accessible. Details at www.greatriverjourneys.com or by calling [code 011 44] 118 976 1761.
- Thinking of travelling by train in England? There's a new **BritRail England Pass** available only to overseas visitors. It's a good-value, 'go-anywhere' pass with prices starting at €69 (C\$105) for 2 days. Passes can be ordered on line and brochures downloaded at www.BritRail.com
- There are, of course, lots of **exhibitions and festivals** planned for London in the coming months: the new Churchill Museum in Whitehall; the Promenade Concerts at the Albert Hall (15 July – 10 September); the annual Turner Prize competition (always controversial!) at the Tate Britain (18 October – 22 January) and, before that, 'A Picture of Britain' at the same gallery (16 June – 4 September) explores how artists have been inspired by the British landscape; while down at the Maritime Museum in Greenwich there's a major exhibition of Admiral Lord Nelson & Napoléon (7 July – 13 November) to mark the 200th anniversary of the battle at Trafalgar. And speaking of Trafalgar ... take a trip to the famous square, home of the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, St. Martin's in the Fields, Canada House and many other landmarks. Now you'll find the north side of the square closed to traffic, open to pedestrians and the site an open-air café and regular free entertainment. And while on the subject of traffic, if you're renting a car in Britain be warned that there is now an £8 (C\$18) fee for driving into the capital. There are clear signs as you approach the edge of the zone and machines from which you buy your ticket.

- Finally, to close our British section, there's news of a newly-launched e-brochure at www.visitbritain.com/ca. Log on and click on the right-hand e-brochure box.

CANADA

Some last-minute ideas for summer or fall vacations or excursions here in Canada:

- The waters off northern **Vancouver Island** are home to the largest population of orcas in the world. **Kingfisher Wilderness Adventures** offers 3-day sea kayak tours, designed especially for families with children, to witness this, and other wildlife spectacles, with accommodation in a comfortable base camp on Hanson Island. The experience is sure to be a memorable one for children. Prices are around C\$700 per person and full details can be obtained from 1 866 546 4347, www.kingfisher.ca.
 - **The Hills Health & Guest Ranch** near **Williams Lake**, BC, (served by Air Canada daily) provides hiking and riding adventures, winter sports, and a spa and wellness programme, together with spectacular scenery in 20,000 acres. For more details on this get-away-from-it-all destination call 250 791 5225 or visit www.spabc.com.
 - **Ontario's Georgian Bay** is a place like no other, and Killarney is known as the crown jewel of Ontario Parks. Plan a visit to **Killarney Mountain Lodge** and let the local experts show you this region with its hiking, fishing, sailing and paddling excursions, its gourmet food and so much more. And remember this is a spectacular region in the fall. Call 1 800 461 1117, www.killarney.com for details.
 - **Quebec's Charlevoix** region is another area of outstanding natural beauty, recognized as such by its designation as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. For a tempting *Charlevoix Accommodations and Tourist Attractions Guide* call 1 888 777 9853 or visit www.discovercharlevoix.com
- If you prefer outings planned around gallery exhibitions here are a couple of suggestions:**
- About 40 minutes' drive north of Toronto, in a wooded setting, lies the **McMichael Canadian Art Gallery**, "the Spiritual Home of the Group of Seven". This is a great place for an out-of-town excursion, especially this summer when a beautiful exhibition entitled *Homage to Jean Paul Lemieux* has been added to the gallery's permanent collection of 5,500 Canadian works. Visitors can enjoy a picnic in the grounds here, or lunch in the restaurant, or visit the adjacent village of **Kleinburg** which is full of quaint galleries, stores and restaurants. A great day out of Toronto! For details call 1 888 213 1121, www.mcmichael.com. Admission \$15 or less.
 - Summer's big exhibition at the **National Gallery of Canada** in Ottawa (until 5 September) celebrates two of the greatest: *Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and the Renaissance in Florence*. Most of the works have never before been seen in North America. Details at 1 800 319 ARTS or www.national.gallery.ca.

COSTA RICA and PANAMA

A little cruise news: **Windjammer Barefoot Cruises** are offering *amazing* values on board their *m.v. Amazing Grace* this summer and into the fall (until 15 October) along the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama. Cruises set sail Sundays at noon and disembark Saturdays at prices from US\$599 (inclusive of all meals, of course). Ports of call include Balboa (the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal), Las Perlas Islands, Islo Coiba, Golfito, Drake's Bay, Quepos and many other National Park and beach destinations. More information by calling 1 800 327 2601 or at www.windjammer.com (Note: Air Canada flies direct from Toronto to San Jose, Costa Rica.)

FRANCE

If France is in your plans and art is in your soul, you may like to participate in ArtRiviera's 5-day guided art tour based in **Nice** and due to take place 11-16 and 25-30 September and 9-14 October. Participants – limited to 14 – will visit Musée Chagall, Renoir's home and garden, Chateau Grimaldi, the Maeght Foundation, Musée Picasso, Nice's Museum of Modern Art and several other galleries. You'll stay in a charming turn-of-the-century hotel in Old Nice, be transported by private minibus, enjoy two gourmet dinners and a lunch (with wine), guide, talks and entrance fees to all museums. Art Riviera Tours is a British company and the land-only price of this tour is €95 or approximately C\$1,800.

HOLLAND

From 17-22 August, Amsterdam will be the stage for one of the biggest maritime events in the world: **SAIL Amsterdam 2005**, a vibrant exhibition of historic ships and nautical heritage. About 20 Tall Ships are expected in Amsterdam harbor, together with 500 historic sailing and motorboats. This unique maritime event is organized once every five years. As well as all the water craft, a range of cultural activities and bands will be performing along the quays. The final day of the event – a Sunday – is the highlight, with an parade of historical ships, followed orchestral performances and the Band of the Royal Marines, while every **SAIL** day ends with spectacular fireworks. Tourism details for the Netherlands at 1 888 GO-HOLLAND or www.holland.com where there's lots of details of the many events and exhibitions scheduled for the Netherlands in the coming months.

IRELAND

The Burren Painting Centre, located in **Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare**, in the west of Ireland, caters to the amateur artist who wishes to paint outdoors with the guidance of a tutor. This year marks the Centre's 32nd season, offering programmes of between 2 and 10 days. The landscape courses

help artists and would-be-artists capture the picturesque Burren landscape, which includes the spectacular Atlantic coast nearby, under expert guidance. The Centre also provides accommodation in O'Neill's Town Home B&B (where non-painters are also welcome to stay). Prices for the courses range from C\$260 - \$1,340 and include accommodation, dinners, painting tuition, presentations, entertainment and transfers where applicable. What a great way to spend part of a vacation in Ireland! For more information call 011 353 65 7074208 or visit www.burrenpaintingcentre.com as well as www.tourismireland.com/can/

SWITZERLAND

It's good to be in the passenger seat while driving through Switzerland's incredible scenery. Two of you travelling? Then why not take a **PostBus Tour** and both enjoy the views through and over the Alps and alpine passes. There are a variety of routes to choose from: perhaps the Ticino Route from Valais to Ticino and onwards over the Gotthard Pass to Andermatt, or the Romantic Route from Andermatt over the three wonderful alpine crossings of Furka, Grimsel and Grosse Scheidegg. Another tour is new ... called "A Tour de Suisse" it covers the country's UNESCO sites such as the Abbey Library of St. Gallen, the St. Johann monastery in Mustair, Monte San Giorgio, the castles of Bellinzona, Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn, the Old Town of Switzerland's capital of Bern and the Biosphere Reserve in the Entlebuch Valley. Prices for the TourBus trips start at 1,280CHF (about C\$1,256) which includes private motor coach transportation, guide, 5 overnights including breakfast and dinner, all additional excursions and admissions, tax and service charges. For more information visit www.postbus.ch and click on Swiss Alps under the bus photo. And there's Swiss tourism information at www.MySwitzerland.com or by calling 1 800 794 7795 where you can request the PostBus brochure.

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anything you can think of, each type of product in its own location. It was so packed it was almost impossible to move along these aisles and the combination of seeing what was for sale and people watching as bargained was fantastic! Great fun and such a wonderful opportunity to see a glimpse of what life is for people in Kashgar, at least when shopping.

One last place to mention is the Xinjing Regional Museum which is being rebuilt so we only saw a small section. But this was fascinating since it dealt with desert archaeological sites where many mummies have been found as well as other artefacts. Some of the mummies are Indo-European and may have been people who died as they travelled along the Silk Road.

Urumqui is a fairly modern city, just a detour north along the Silk Road. From Urumqui we went out into the Gobi Desert. We were in and near the Bogda Mountains of three peaks. We stopped at Turpan, a large oasis, still irrigating in its special way of wells connected by tunnels to furnish plenty of water. From Turpan we went on to the Bezklik Buddhist Grottoes, on a hillside with a marvellous view of the mountains around it. And finally we also visited the ruins of a very old city, Gaochang, enclosed by two walls of sun-dried clay. Not much is left but it is certainly interesting to visit.

And so ended my stay, with my two fellow tourists. It

was an incredible experience for me, a dream fulfilled, and a glimpse into the past and the present of this part of the world. Tourism is not yet a big thing here, and I hope it doesn't get out of hand as it has in other parts of the world. All of Central Asia is very much in transition, politically, economically and especially culturally. As I've already mentioned, I was left wondering what will be kept and what will be lost along the way in the rush to modern society. I had a unique opportunity to look, albeit briefly, into a part of the world different from anything I had ever seen before. I can only try to imagine the endless varieties of ways in which people live, build their lives and relationships, carry through their histories and are now trying to fit into whatever they think is the modern world and its benefits. It is a great struggle and I can only hope that the little guy doesn't lose too much along the way to whatever they think is "progress".

My travels in Asia were not over. From here I continued on along the Silk Road (travelling by air) to Dunhuang and its unbelievable caves, and Xi'an, where the Silk Road started and ended. Lots to see! Lots to learn! Lots to ponder and wonder about while there and for long after my return home!

*Beatrice Magder is a Travel Society member
who lives in Toronto, ON*

Hamilton, continued from page 17

Ancaster, ON L9G 3L1, tel: 905 648 3596,
www.ducktail.net/tourcentre.htm

Cedarbrook Farms, 812 8th Concession Raod W., Puslinch,
ON N0B 2J0, tel: 905 659 1566,
www.cedarbrookfarm.on.ca

Royal Botanical Gardens, open all year except 25
December and 1 January. Tel: 905 527 1158 for information
or visit www.rbg.ca

Hamilton is linked to **Toronto** by **GO train service**.
Airways Transit Service (tel: 905 689 4460, [\[waystransit.com\]\(http://waystransit.com\)\) offers airport ground transportation throughout the region as well as to and from Toronto Airport, while details of Hamilton's **local transportation system** \(passes are available\) can be found at \[www.hamilton.ca/hsr\]\(http://www.hamilton.ca/hsr\) or by calling 905 527 4441. And for a tour of Hamilton to get you oriented take the **Double Decker Bus Company's** two-hour, hop-on-hop-off tour, available all summer, for \\$12 or less. Details at 905 643 4998, \[www.doubledeckerbus.ca\]\(http://www.doubledeckerbus.ca\)](http://www.air-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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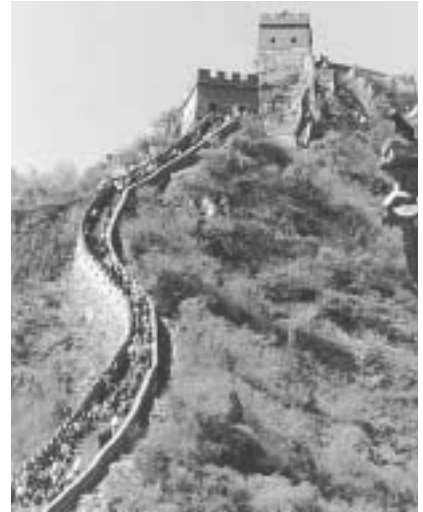
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remarkable 18 days you'll stay in Beijing; you'll take a 4-day first-class cruise on the Yangtze with many shore excursions; you'll fly to see those centuries-old terra-cotta warriors in Xi'an; you'll visit bustling Chongquing and see its pandas; stay 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.

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Your tour costs includes:

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21 days

A Traveller's Turkey

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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!"

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Toronto	\$5,900.00 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$5,975.00 pp/dbl
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- 20 nights' accommodation
- All meals as per itinerary
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- 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: 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:

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Your tour includes:

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- All train trips and tours as per the itinerary
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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

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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
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\$5,135

India's Golden Triangle

FULLY ESCORTED

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



PRICES INCLUDING AIR departing from:

Vancouver	\$5,385 pp/dbl	Toronto	\$5,135 pp/dbl
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FOR SEPTEMBER**

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 nightclub. 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.

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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

From \$2634 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:

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

Prices are subject to confirmation

prices are available from all major cities

Please call for the full itinerary

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

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