

The Travel Society

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Magazine



Return to Argentina
Mexico's Magical Towns
Montserrat
Namibia: An Exotic Land

www.thetravelsociety.com

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September 2006 Vol. 24, No. 7

contents

Readers' Letters

Spring on the French Riviera	3
AC vs. WestJet	4
Agent or Internet?	4
Lascaux Replicated	5

Destinations

Return to Argentina	6
Mexico's Magical Towns	10
Ten Reasons to Visit Montserrat	14
Namibia - an Exotic Land	15

News

Travel Digest	18
Airline News	20



View from the
Vieux-Château
Cemetery
(Macdonald)

editor's letter ...

Oh dear, such a lot has happened since I last wrote to you at the end of June. The war in the Middle East dominated our news for weeks and then, just as hostilities drew to a tenuous conclusion, news of foiled terrorist attacks in Britain reached our ears. We are sad for all the victims of the former, while the latter has meant changes to our packing regime, especially if the UK is in your plans. New rules and restrictions seem to change daily and we think the best advice we can give is to check with your airline before departure. In addition, here are a few useful sites: www.monitor.airsecurity.com, www.flightstats.com/go/Home/home.do, www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca, www.tc.gc.ca, www.tsa.gov or call 1 888 294 2202. The website for the news from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is also useful. The entries are quite brief, but there are many links to other articles and official websites which add depth to any story you may be following. Information here during the recent airport crisis was excellent. (If you wish you can also have the BBC news programme delivered daily - at any time you choose - into your computer. Click on <e-mail services> at the bottom of the home page of www.news.bbc.co.uk.)

Now to some encouraging news. The International Airline Passengers Association (IAPA), with offices in the UK, USA and Asia, reports that a recent survey of frequent travellers has revealed that most believe the introduction of cell phones on aircraft will be "disruptive, anti-social and possibly even dangerous." A sampling of comments from those polled include: "If possible I will not use airlines which permit cell phones" and "Nobody is nearly as important as they think they are! Continuing to prohibit their use inflight is fine with me."

And, finally, a good statistic: international tourism was up 4.5% in the first four months of 2006, according to the UN World Tourism Organization. So ... whether at home or away, near or far, let's keep travelling!



Two more accolades for the South of France ... not that we are surprised!

Spring on the French Riviera

I too have delighted in a spring visit to the South of France (see Apartment Living on the Riviera, July/August 2006), choosing one of the country's 120 "Cities of Art and History" – Menton. Walking is definitely a highlight. There are two coastal beach areas with the one to the west leading to Monaco, as mentioned in Barbara Bagnell's article. This passes the Palais Carnoles, once the summer residence of the Princes Grimaldi of Monaco. Now it houses the Musée des Beaux-Arts with its collection of older paintings and temporary exhibits. The surrounding park features the mammoth lemon trees celebrated in the Lemon Festival Parade at the end of February.

Another walk leads to the east and to the Italian border. It is lined with cafés, beaches and a boat basin. I would recommend climbing up to the Vieux-Château cemetery with its exceptional views of the yellow ochre homes and tile roofs of the old town and the Esplanade (see cover photo). Follow the Boulevard de Garavan west, continuing to marvel at the views, to the Parc du Pian where 530 olive trees, perhaps 1,000 years old, line the terraces.

My art appreciation now includes Jean Cocteau, an artist and poet, who also loved Menton. He was involved in the restoration of the Bastion, a small fort circa 1636 (although he died before the work was completed in 1963). It is now used to exhibit his work, drawings, pastels and mosaics of pebbles. He also decorated all the walls of the Wedding Hall in the city hall.

Tarte au citron is a speciality hereabouts. Try the pastry shop, La Cigale, near the waterfront casino for this treat. Among the many excellent restaurants here I especially enjoyed the Moroccan Restaurant Le Darkoum at 23, Rue St. Michel where

a belly dancer added to the exotic atmosphere.

If you decide not to rent an apartment, here are some hotels I can recommend:

Hotel Le Dauphin (3 star), 28 ave. Général de Gaulle, 06500 Menton, (near the Palais Carnoles, a 15 minute walk along the water to the centre of town), €60 - €70 (€1 = approx. C\$1.44), tel: [011 33] 4 93 35 76 37, fax: 4 93 35 31 74.

Hotel Moderne (2 star), 1 Cours George V, 06500 Menton, (2 blocks from the water, balconies, near centre and 3 blocks to railway station), from €55. Tel: 4 93 57 20 02, fax: 4 93 35 71 87.

Hotel Royal Westminster (3 star), 1510 Promenade du Soleil, 06500 Menton, from €77. Tel: 4 93 28 69 69, fax: 4 92 10 12 30

While in the South of France a visit to Nice may be on your itinerary as the charms of Old Nice are well known. A treat for me this time was an elegant lunch with a view of the hills and the bay from the unbeatable La Terrasse Restaurant in Le Boscolo Hotel Plaza at 12, Av. De Verdun. Telephone (0)4 93 16 75 75. I am endeavouring to duplicate their Nicoise Salad (€16) at home: green leaves and pepper slivers topped with anchovies, perfect hard-boiled eggs, peeled tomatoes, deep-fried zucchini blossoms, a slice of spinach and pine nut omelet and seared tuna slices. Rolls and olive stick bread were accompanied with gourmet olive oil and a half bottle of Sancerre wine (€21) was the perfect accompaniment.

I stayed for a night near Nice Airport and was thrilled I had time to discover Park Phoenix and its fabulous plants, parrots, walks and aquarium. The small lake with fountains here reflects the beautiful white architecture of the Musée des Arts Asiatique. I also highly recommend a visit to this presentation of the many diverse cultures of the Orient where the English audio guide is excellent. Enjoy!

*Nancy MacDonald
Toronto, ON*

All Agree – Spring in the South of France is Wonderful!

We certainly agree with Barbara Bagnell's enthusiastic comments about Pierre & Vacances apartments. Let me briefly tell of our experiences. We arrived in Nice in mid-February a few years ago and headed down the road to our first apartment in Aix-en-Provence. Mimosas were in bloom everywhere and straight away we agreed: France in February is simply delightful!

Our P&V apartment for the first two weeks was right in the busy commercial area but a short block off the main road. It was more than ample with separate, good-sized bedroom, bathroom, living room, dining area, kitchen "behind the folding doors" and a good sized balcony. There was a large grocery supermarket around the corner and wonderful markets not far away.

We savoured our two weeks there with side trips to Mont St Gregoire, Cezanne haunts, Roman remains, Avignon and beautiful perched villages. Marseilles was only a short drive to the south.

Our second two weeks were spent in the Beausoleil Palace Josephine Apartments. These lovely modern apartments are on the street bordering France and Monaco and overlook a great market designed by Eiffel. It was great to peek over the balcony and decide on our fresh fruit and veggies for the day while the interior of the market offered countless culinary pleasures. In addition, there were several specialty food shops right below us as well as a general grocery store.

Our apartment had a large bedroom, sitting room and dinette with TV, bathroom and kitchen. All was clean and nicely decorated and there was car parking beneath in both of these locations. Yes, Monaco proved to be a great location for walking and side trips to local attractions with trains and buses to wherever one

would like to go. It is an elegant reflection of the art deco era and there is lots to see and do.

Early spring hovers in the South of France in February and March and it is not only a beautiful time to visit the region but it is economical as well.

*Marg and Bill Lynn
Lachine, PQ*

AC vs. WestJet

My first flight on Transcanada Airlines, as Air Canada used to be called, was in 1956. I am still a frequent traveller on Air Canada, for both business and personal reasons (eight round trips so far this year), and have noted a sad deterioration in their on-board service in recent months.

The announcement by WestJet that they are arranging for “pay” lounges to be opened to their passengers in various Canadian cities is indeed good news. It has made me consider transferring my domestic travel to WestJet, once lounges are open in Calgary and Toronto.

I doubt that I am alone in my unhappiness over Air Canada’s deteriorating on-board service. If WestJet make a few changes, they might attract a significant number of Air Canada’s Business Class passengers because of WestJet’s excellent cabin

service.

Perhaps WestJet would consider helping frequent flyers by setting up a plan similar to Air Canada’s Aeroplan Elite, which not only provides free lounge access, but also priority check-in, boarding and seat selection.

In my experience, most Business Class travellers want the extra seat width and leg room, rather than airline food. If WestJet maintain their policy of not providing free meals, but put several rows of more comfortable seats at the front of each plane, it is my guess that WestJet would take a significant amount of business travel away from Air Canada.

*H. A. Sherman
Calgary, AB*

What do other readers think? I agree with Mr. Sherman. I believe that most travellers would cite extra space and comfort on board as their main reason for choosing up-graded flights, with the availability of a lounge welcome by some, especially for those travellers who have to make connections (sometimes quite long) in major airports such as Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto. If these factors are offered for a relatively small surcharge I believe the plan is popular. In fact, I’ve seen it’s popular on transatlantic flights such as those offered by Air Transat and Zoom where the up-grade choice means more space and comfort on board,

plus priority check-in and boarding, bigger luggage allowance, somewhat up-graded meals and ‘free’ drinks, wine and headsets (but no lounge). The fancy meals and wines in the large carrier’s business class hardly seem to warrant the thousands of dollars charged. Sensible people limit their alcohol intake on flights these days and surely most of us can do without vintage wines for a few hours (and in any case, a gin is a gin is a gin!). As Mr Sherman suggests, if WestJet could offer lounges (even if on a pay-to-use basis) in our major airports and an up-graded cabin on board, that would probably suit the needs of many Canadian passengers – Ed.

Agent or Internet?

I read with great interest Dee McPherson’s article ‘Glimpses of Australia’ in the latest *The Travel Society Magazine*. There is always so much to be learnt from our fellow travellers. In my personal index I have *TravelScoop* listings dating back to 1991 and it is my first source of reference for new journeys. In 1995 I found myself owner of a small niche market retail travel agency and I now view the information from contributors as pure gold because there is a real person behind the story – not a commercial voice.

In reading Dee’s article I noted that, on two occasions, the group had had

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difficulty finding accommodation in busy tourist areas at the height of the tourist season. In Sydney the hotel they had chosen, while economical, is poorly located for those wishing to use the ferries, trains and buses based in the CBD [Central Business District] I consider the location of a hotel is very important, especially in a large city, because of the time, energy and expense involved moving to and from your area of interest. That information is seldom in the internet blurb. And we all tend to feel that, having chosen the particular time to travel to a destination, based on weather, availability of specials and attractive advertising, we will be the only ones there. School holidays with local families travelling, festivals and major sporting events must all be factored into the equation.

I felt a tinge of sadness that they had not consulted one of the highly qualified Premium Agents certified by Tourism Australia for their knowledge about the country whose names can be accessed from www.australia.com. Which is preferable when planning a trip – using an agent or the internet? Or a combination ?

Ideally if I travel to a destination with which I am not familiar, I would arrange an initial consultation with a knowledgeable agent, if possible a specialist in that area. Your agent can give you a number of choices within your time and budget. Then research on the net at this stage gives everyone a clearer picture of what is possible

and practical, depending on the interests of the clients. Beware of internet 'red hot specials' Why has this property not sold well? And finally, use the services of the expert agent to make and guarantee the final bookings and to coordinate the entire itinerary – and remember they will be available if there are any unforeseen challenges. Happy travelling!

Dorothy Sloan
Toronto, ON

Vivien Feirson
Toronto, ON.

Lascaux Replicated

Having just returned from six weeks in Europe (mostly in France) and catching up with the TTS magazines, I was delighted to find Thelma Sampson's article about France, especially the part about the Dordogne area where I spent a very pleasant two weeks with Comfortable Hiking Holidays (416 445 2628, www.letsbike.com).

About Lascaux, Thelma is right in that the actual cave, discovered in 1940, had to be closed to the public in 1963, but its exact replica, Lascaux II, was inaugurated in 1983. It stands 200 m from the original cave in exactly the same surroundings. The polychrome paintings were reproduced using the techniques and natural pigments that the cave dwellers used 17,000 years ago and the site is certainly well worth a visit. The caves are at Montignac. They are open from February to

December, every day between April and October but closed Mondays in February, March, November and December.

For more information tel: [011 33] 05 53 51 95 03, contact@semitour.com, www.semitour.com or enter Lascaux Caves in your search engine for lots more sites.

Members are rewarded for sharing!

The TravelSociety rewards members 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!

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or

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Note: If it is possible to include wheelchair-accessible information in your letters and stories I know that would be appreciated by many.

Thanks! - Ed.

Reader to Reader

We are hoping to find one or several places in south western France for a February/March stay ... somewhere to drop anchor for a week or so, explore the area and then move on. Toulouse and Carcassonne sound especially interesting, as well as Perpignan and Biarritz. Finding self catering for two is sometimes tricky so any suggestions would be most appreciated. Thanks if you can help!

Marg Lynn
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NOTES ON OUR RETURN TO ARGENTINA

story and photos by Helen Lane

Icebergs en route to Upsala Glacier

BUENOS AIRES

A chance conversation in Frankfurt airport with a man from Buenos Aires prompted us to make a return trip to Argentina. We had visited in 1986, but only spent time in BA and Iguaza Falls (a sight not to be missed). So back we went!

Argentina, a vast country with incredible diversity and beauty, was an expensive destination when we were first there, and became more so in the 1990's. But since the dramatic fall of the peso in 2001/2002 it has become an affordable and welcoming destination. Our trip began in BA, the capital and largest city in the country. It still retains much of its elegance and vibrancy, despite the need of infrastructure repair. There was some street begging and we were warned to be vigilant as petty crime was still a problem, although we encountered none. New to us was the rejuvenated dockyard area, Puerto Madero, now filled with expensive shops and restaurants. Calle Florida, the long pedestrian street, was as busy as ever and, contrary to rumour, credit cards were readily accepted, though market items tend to be cash only.

Delicious meals and excellent wine were most reasonable and Argentine beef remains amongst the best in the

world. Servings are very large and we often ended up sharing a main course!

We re-acquainted ourselves with the must-see sights – Teatro Colon, Casa Rosada, the Cathedral, and the neighborhoods of San Telmo and La Boca and inched our way across the 26-lane Avenida de Julio Nueve (9th of July). We recommend a city tour to get a good overview before setting out on your own.

We spent one day at a small family owned *estancia* (ranch) about 125 km south of BA near the old colonial city of Chascamus (itself worth a short visit). The Estancia La Horqueta offers a lovely setting on a small lake, swimming pool, delicious barbecue luncheon with wine, horseback riding, and has accommodation available for 8-10 people. Website: www.lahorqueta.com. We enjoyed our day here much more than at the large touristy *estancias*.

Hotel: Posta Carretas: www.postacarretas.com.ar – old, but comfortable and conveniently located between Ave. 9 de Julio and Calle Florida.

Restaurant recommendation: La Chacara close by on Ave. Cordoba for great steak!

NORTH OF BUENOS AIRES

MENDOZA

This 'wine capital' of the country, near the high Andes, is justifiably proud of its parks and tree lined streets. It was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1861 and rebuilt with an excellent plan in mind. Snow melt from the Andes is used for irrigation producing a kind of oasis in the desert-like land. There are some 3000 *bodegas* (wineries) in the area and lots of tours are available. We took a tour which included a visit to an olive grove and small olive oil business.

We also took a tour into the Alta Montana (high mountains), as far as the Chilean border, where on a clear day Mt. Aconcagua – the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere – can be seen. This was a 12 hour/191 km trip – cost C\$19.00 pp. plus lunch.

Hotel: the Aconcagua – www.hotelconcagua.com – comfortable and centrally located.

Favourite restaurant: La Florencia – excellent – located near the Park Hyatt Hotel (a very nice hotel, but expensive of course) which is on the main plaza.

SALTA

This is a laid back, old colonial city with a large native population, near the Bolivian border. The main plaza and two old churches – the Cathedral and the Church of San Francisco – and the Cabildo (city hall) still intact from 1783, and now containing a museum, are the interesting sights to see. Take the cable car up San Bernardo Hill where there is a wonderful view of the city and the nearby mountains. The artisans' market is the place to shop and buy wonderful crafts.

Salta is the base for two outstanding trips one of which is the Tren a las Nubes – the train to the clouds. It departed at 7 in the morning and travels up 4,200 metres, to Polvorilla viaduct, returning to Salta at 22:00 hours. This 15-hour trip on a narrow gage railway stops twice – once near the viaduct and then at San Antonio de los Cobres. In both areas the Indians are waiting to sell their wares, including beautiful woven ponchos. Beware of the altitude when getting off the train ... don't rush to make your first purchase! There are many switchbacks as the train winds its way with scenic views of small villages, flowering cacti (similar to Arizona), and herds of llama, alpaca, and guanaco. (*Note: apparently after a breakdown and serious delay in cold weather, the*

former owner of this train lost his license to operate and the tour was suspended indefinitely. However, on 28 May this year a local Salta newspaper published an article stating that there is a good chance that the train will resume its schedule starting in January 2007. Apparently EcoTren, the potential new owners and future operators of the train tour, issued a press release wherein they confirmed resumption of services on this route. The same corporate group - Tranex, Lesamis and Escopa - operates another famous train tour through Patagonia to Ushuaia, known as the 'train to the end of the world'. The group plans to invest approximately 15 million dollars over a period of four years which includes the construction of a restaurant in San Antonio de Cobres and the acquisition of new trains. The plan is to offer two different types of trips: a deluxe coach and an 'adventure coach' aimed at backpackers - Ed)

The other worthwhile trip from Salta is the Quebreda Humahuaca – a wonderful bus trip through a narrow gorge, gradually rising to 2,940 metres before it reaches the town of Humahuaca. The first stop is the Indian village of Pumamarca, where the early morning sun shines on the Hill of Seven Colours – Cerro de las Siete Colores – a stunning

sight so named because of its rich mineral deposits that display a multi-coloured 'rainbow' in the sun. The trip from Salta is timed to enable visitors to see this sight. There is a large market here situated in the main plaza. Then the bus continues on up the gorge with stops at other points of interest including a much restored *pucara* (fortress). A two-

hour lunch break is arranged at Humahuaca and there is plenty of time to shop at the market at the main plaza or the nearby shops. The sun is very strong at this altitude and remember not to hurry anywhere! The return trip is timed so the sun will be seen shining on the hills called the Painter's Pallet – La Paleta del Pinter – another dramatic sight. We stopped in the city of Jujuy, capital of the province of the same name, and arrived back in Salta realizing we had seen some of the most amazing scenery in the world. This 12-hour trip cost C\$40.00 per person, plus lunch.

Hotel: Salta Hotel: www.hotelsalta.com – an old, centrally-located hotel, not posh but comfortable.

Restaurant: Solar del Convento – nicely appointed, excellent meals and service and very inexpensive. Located across the street from the Salta Hotel.



Ushuaia

CORDOBA

Our last stop north of BA was the city of Cordoba, the country's second largest city and a busy industrial centre with two universities and a young population. It is located in a wide valley with mountains visible in the west. The interesting old city centre is easily seen in a day. There are many side trips available to the nearby sierras, however the time of our visit – November – was not tourist season and this is not a tourist town. To take a visit to the national park would require a car and a guide. So we took a local mini bus (less than \$5) to the attractive little town of Villa General Belgrano which resembles a Bavarian village and indeed has a lot of restaurants serving German food. It has become a bit of a tourist trap. This was the town where the sailors from the German battleship the *Graf Spee*, were interned during WWII. After the war they returned to Germany, but many came back to live in Villa General Belgrano; indeed four of them were still alive when we visited and there is a bar named in their honour called The Speemen. That little bit of history and the lovely scenery made for a worthwhile day.

Hotel: the Windsor – www.windsortower.com – a very nice property near the city centre with a good dining room.

SOUTH OF BUENOS AIRES

BARILOCHE

Beautifully situated on the large Lake Nahuel Huapithis, this town is the centre for one of the country's major ski resorts as well as the largest centre of the Lake District, a gorgeous resort area. Avenida Bustillo runs for 25 km parallel to the lake. Hotels, B&Bs and restaurants line the road and there is frequent bus service costing a peso. At the end of the 25 km is the Lao Lao Hotel, considered to be the best in Argentina. It would be worth a splurge at US\$152.00 per night. Give it a try!

There are many interesting tours to take from Bariloche. One is to the attractive town of San Martin de Los Andes via the Siete Lago (Seven Lakes) and return via a rugged mountain road – a very scenic trip. It is a 12-hour day but at just C\$10.50 pp plus lunch, one to be remembered. Another way to spend a memorable day is the combination boat/bus trip to Porto Blest and Lago Frias which includes an optional one kilometre hike to Los Cantaros Lake via a lovely waterfall – not expensive at C\$31.50 pp (which includes the national parks fee) plus lunch.

For a wonderful view, take the Mt. Otto funicular up to the top (1,406 metres) and have dinner in the revolving restaurant – on a clear day the view is fantastic.

Hotel: La Cascada – www.lacascada.com – a delightful place to stay, overlooking Lago Nahuel Huapi and about 6 km along Ave. Bustillo from the town centre. They even presented a birthday cake to my husband, all be it for breakfast! The hotel dining room is very good.



The Cathedral at Salta

NORTHERN PATAGONIA – PUERTO MADRYN

This small city on the Golfo Nuevo has become a cruise ship port of call. Its claim to fame is the abundant wildlife on land and sea. Tours to Peninsula Valdez allow visitors to view sea lions, sea elephants, dolphins, and many species of birds. From September to November, this area is the breeding ground of the Southern Right Whale. However, we chose to visit the large Magellanic Penguin Colony at Punta Tombo. This is a 210-hectare protected area, 100 km south of Porto Madryn. There were penguins all over the place nesting, hatching eggs, and generally waddling around. What a great sight! There were many other sea birds and several Guanaco and Patagonian Hares. The Welsh first landed in this area in 1865 and a large Welsh identity is

maintained. Our tour included an optional full Welsh tea during a visit to the town of Gaimen, and an optional visit to the excellent Museum of Paleontology in the town of Trelew. This tour cost C\$58.50 pp including the parks fee. We had a multi-lingual guide in our 24-person bus.

Hotel: Hosteria Solar de la Costa, www.solardelacosta.com (most of the website is in Spanish, but it's easy to understand), a new, small and lovely hotel, with balconies facing the water about 2 km from the town centre.

Restaurant: Nativo Sur across the street from the hotel on the water.

SOUTH CENTRAL PATAGONIA

The town of El Calafate, on the shores of Lago Argentina, the third largest lake in South America, had a population of some 3,000 people three years ago. It is now 15,000 and growing by leaps and bounds. The big draw here is Glacier National Park, a vast area, and tourism is the big industry. Unemployment is not a problem here!

We arranged to visit Perito Marino Glacier, which at 30 km long, 5 km across, and 60 metres high is an awesome sight. The scenery along the way, with the wild flowers in bloom, made for a beautiful day. This seven-hour day cost

us C\$30.00 pp.

Not to be missed at any cost is the trip to Upsala Glacier and Estancia Cristina. With tour company Upsala Explorer we departed our hotel at 6.45 a.m. for the 50-minute bus trip to Puerto Bandero where we boarded our 75-passenger boat for the trip up one of the arms of Lago Argentina. We spent about three hours awed by the size of the many icebergs and the huge glacier (three times larger than Perito Merino) and the beauty of the landscape. Upon our arrival at Estancia Cristina, we had the choice of a three-kilometre hike up to a pretty waterfall, a four-wheel-drive trip up to view the glacier from above, or relaxation in the old ranch house. My husband chose the latter while I hiked up to the waterfall, a great way to work up an appetite for the wonderful barbecue of lamb, salad, desserts and wine. This was followed by a tour of, and a lecture about, the *estancia*. All the original family owners are now dead and the place is maintained by the Parks Service for tourism purposes. We were returned to our hotel at 20:00 hours, exhausted but happy! The trip cost C\$118 pp, including the barbecue, snacks and beverages on the boat and the national parks fee.

Hotel: Quijote – www.dilos.com/hotel/2181 – comfortable, centrally located, and with a very good dining room.

USHUAIA, TIERRA del FUEGO

This jumping-off point for the Antarctic is a bustling community nestled on the Beagle Channel, with a backdrop of snow-capped mountains. There are many things to see and do. We spent one day visiting the National Park, taking a local minibus (Ebon Ezer) at a cost of C\$10 pp plus the park fee of C\$6 pp. The bus stops along the way for hikers to get off; they are picked up later in the day. We went to the end of the route to park headquarters at Lago Roca, a large lake in a beautiful mountain setting. We had lunch at the restaurant there and walked the lake trail, which ends at the Chilean border, for a couple of hours. It was a very pleasant, unrushed day.

There are boat trips of varying lengths that may be taken on the Beagle Channel. We chose the trip to Estancia Haberton, the oldest ranch in Tierra del Fuego, built in 1886. The boat pauses on its way and passengers can view marine life, birds and penguins on the various rocky islands. Interesting guided tours are given at the ranch and a tea room is open for use. The boat has a very efficient food service and very good food too, available throughout the trip.

The weather is extremely unpredictable in this part of the world. We experienced a snow flake or two, rain, sun, and very strong winds – so strong that at the appointed time, due to the tides, our boat could not leave and two buses were sent from Tierra del Fuego to pick us up. Dress appropriately! This was a very exciting and beautiful full-day trip. Cost C\$65 pp.

Hotel: Villa Brescia – www.villabresciahotel.com.ar – newly-renovated and centrally located.

Restaurants: Volver and Tia Elvita, both down by the

water and both serving very good sea food. Crab casserole anyone?

We returned to **Buenos Aires** and spent our last four days in **Palermo**, a popular suburb of the city, and found time to visit Evita Perron's mausoleum in nearby Recoleta, as well as their lovely shops. Our last day was spent at the popular nearby resort of Tigre where we wandered around the large market and relaxed on boat trip on the Parana River.

Hotel: Malabia – www.malabiahouse.com.ar – a highly recommended B&B with a charming staff and lovely surroundings (take a tour on the web!).

Restaurants: Lomo – excellent – about three blocks from the Malabia House, and Jania – good for lunch.

GENERAL COMMENTS

If we were to do it all over again we would stay longer in the north in the salt area and less in Porto Madryn.

We flew **Air Canada** and **Varig** to and from Argentina and **Aerolinas Argentinas** in Argentina. Our travel agent arranged our inter-Argentine flights and arranged for us to be transported to and from hotels and airports. Because distances are so great, flying is the only way to go unless one has unlimited time.

All of our **internal flights** were from the national airport, commonly known as Aeropark. Departure tax when departing the country at the international airport of Eziza is US\$18 and must be paid in US cash. Check all inter-country flights to see if the cost includes departure tax.

The Argentine **currency** is the Peso. Take US dollars for exchange. Credit cards are accepted in all hotels and most restaurants and most large stores. They are not accepted in the markets. Travellers cheques are a nuisance to try to cash; plan to use your ATM cards. Currency exchange is easier in larger centres: 1 Peso = 37¢ Canadian

Weather: in November when we were there, it was surprisingly warm. In the north it was hot and dry, in BA it was very humid, in Tierra del Fuego it was windy, hot, cold, rainy and snowy!

Accommodation costs: we paid approximately C\$100 per night at the hotels mentioned, with the exception of Bariloche and Palermo, which were about C\$150 per night. All rates included a good-sized buffet breakfast.

Taxis are very inexpensive. For safety reasons, make sure you have your hotel or restaurant order one for you. Always take a taxi at night.

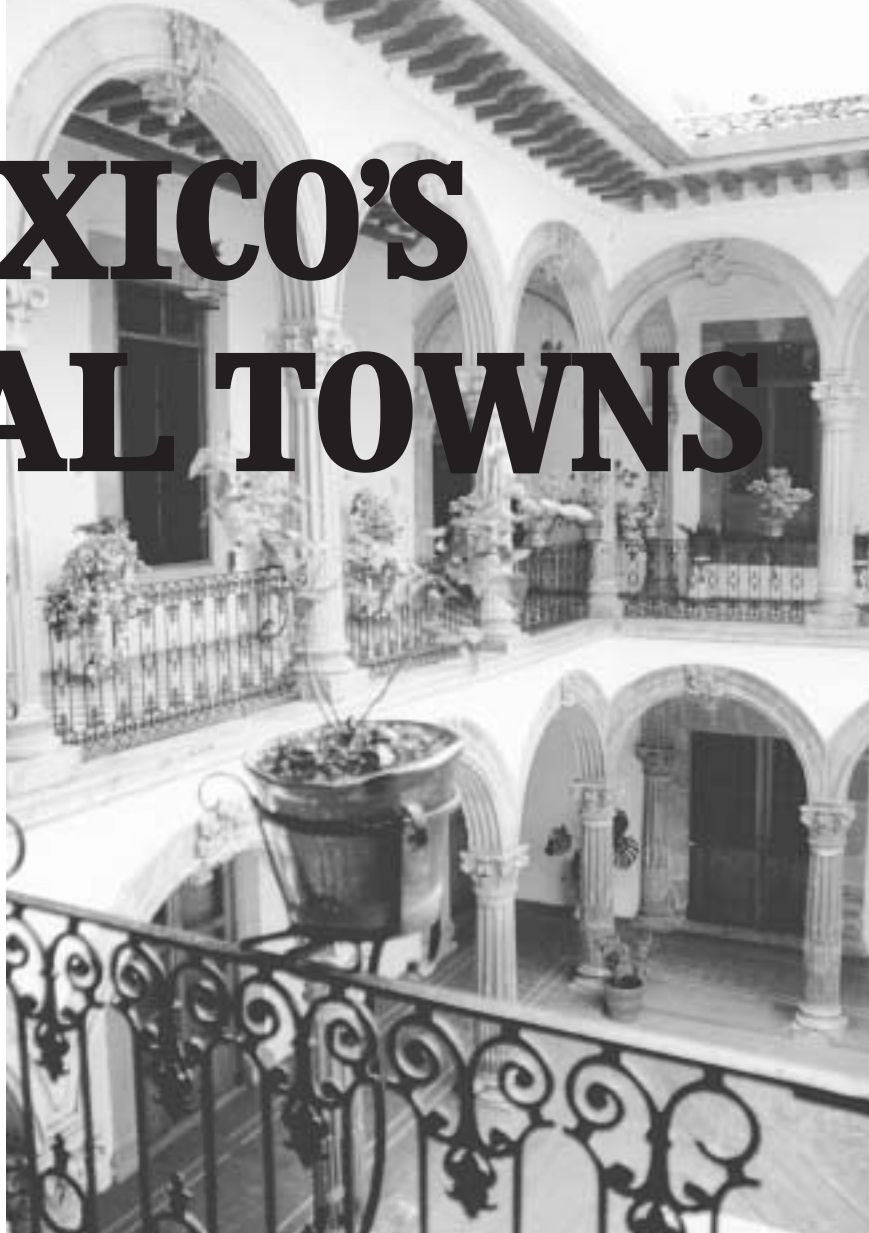
Shopping: leather is still a very good buy in this country. Artisanal crafts are good and made mainly in the Salta area. There are beautifully-made items from Rhodochrosite, commonly known as Inca Rose, a rose coloured semi-precious stone mined in the north.

Reading: we recommend *Footprint Argentina* having always found the Footprint books for South America very informative. 📖

MEXICO'S MAGICAL TOWNS

*compiled by Ann Wallace in association
with the Mexican Tourist Board*

Mexico's tourism sector has launched a Pueblos Magicos programme that plans to help restore and preserve quaint, culturally-rich towns to make them visitor-friendly and to boost tourism. Here's their list of the towns.



An historic home in Patzcuaro (Wallace)

In a land as vast as Mexico, travellers experience a special satisfaction when they stumble upon a hidden gem filled with history and culture. Now, thanks to the *Pueblos Magicos* (Magical Towns) programme, there is an official list of these historic towns – 23 in all – scattered throughout the country's heartland; a list that will help visitors plan their itineraries, be they exploring by car or by Mexico's excellent bus system.

The Mexican government is investing in infrastructure in these towns, resulting in visitor-friendly destinations that retain the authentic charm of old Mexico. With improvements to the roads and highways connecting the *Pueblos Magicos* to the tourism hubs and the assurance that the hotels located within the towns offer a high level of comfort and service, travelling to some – or all – of these special

places would make a wonderful itinerary. While the primary focus of *Pueblos Magicos* is to develop cultural tourism, other segments, such as eco tourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism also fall under the programme's canopy.

The *Pueblos Magicos* programme empowers the townspeople, who must initiate and manage the process. With forms to fill out, standards to achieve and agreements with which to comply, it's not easy to achieve *Pueblo Magico* status, but the benefits make the process well worth the effort. Once a town is declared a *Pueblo Magico*, it receives funds to support the modernization of the micro, small and medium regional businesses related to the tourism industry, such as handicraft shops and restaurants. In addition, in order to maintain historical accuracy and co-operate with the beautification efforts, towns participating in the *Pueblos Magicos*

programme must comply with architectural and visual guidelines. The government supports the towns in the restoration of the urban areas to the towns' glory days (which includes the installation of underground wiring to make the streetscapes more attractive).

Here is a complete list of Mexico's current 23 *Pueblos Magicos*, along with their dates of incorporation into the programme:

* **San Cristobal de las Casas, 2003 (Chiapas):** Founded in 1528, the city is a haven for history lovers and home to artisans who create beautiful textile, leather and ceramic handicrafts. A mix of baroque and neoclassical architecture can be seen in the town's churches, museums and cafes. The town's most important celebration takes place in April, when San Cristobal has celebrated the Spring and Peace Festival since the mid-19th century with cultural and sporting events.

* **Parras, 2004 (Coahuila):** Natural springs create this oasis in the middle of the desert graced with acres of vines and walnut, fig and avocado trees. Parras boasts the first winery in the Western Hemisphere, Casa Madero, which has

been producing wine for five centuries.

Another must-see in this quiet town is the 17th century Santo Madero church, built precariously atop a steep hill known as El Sombrerito.

* **Comala, 2002 (Colima):** Comala is set in a beautiful region that

combines the mountains of the Sierra de Manatlan and the great forests of Cerro Grande, all crossed with innumerable rivers. It is against this impressive backdrop that Comala's famous white-washed houses and buildings, built in perfectly straight streets and adorned with intricate iron fixtures, are constructed. The town's legacy of Olmec, Purepecha, Mexican and Spanish cultures is evident in the colourful musical festivals celebrated throughout the year.

* **Dolores Hidalgo, 2002 (Guanajuato):** Dolores Hidalgo became the cradle of Mexico's independence from Spain on 16 September 1810 when Father Miguel Hidalgo rang the parish church bells and urged his parishioners, in the *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores), to overthrow the Spanish government. Today the town commemorates this event with a 10-day celebration that starts on 6 September and culminates with the famous *Grito* on Independence Day. When visiting

Dolores Hidalgo, be sure to indulge in the town's famous ice cream found in the main square, whose exotic flavours include shrimp, cheese and beer, corn, avocado and mole sauce. (*I think I'll have vanilla!*)

* **San Miguel de Allende, 2002 (Guanajuato):** Located in a valley surrounded by hills and forests, four hours from the hustle of Mexico City, this charming colonial town has attracted a large community of Canadian and American expatriates who enjoy this World Heritage Site's beautiful colonial architecture, cobblestone streets and emerging cosmopolitan feel. On 29 September, San Miguel dresses up in more abundant flowers than usual as it prepares for the festivities to honour its patron saint. These include the Xuchil procession ... elaborate displays of flowers, traditional dancers and the *Sanmiguelada*, the 'running of the bulls'.

* **Taxco, 2002 (Guerrero):** Renowned for its abundant silver, this mining town is located 100 miles southwest of Mexico City and is easily accessible via the Cuernavaca airport. Taxco stands at the foot of La Bermeja mountain in the Sierra Madre Range, which provides a landscape that complements the town's 500-year history evident in the colonial Spanish architecture featuring overhanging grilled balconies and red-tiled roofs. Visit Taxco in June to experience the National Silver Fair, an event which brings together international silversmiths,



Taxco (Wallace)

miners and dealers and includes many cultural activities. In Taxco, silver, history and culture are intertwined, and the mix is evident in the jewellery the town's silversmiths create.

* **Real del Monte, 2004 (Hidalgo):** The tallest inhabited rocky peak in Mexico, Real del Monte is located about seven miles and a world away from Mexico City. This mining town celebrates its working-class tradition and the miners who looked for silver during an annual five-day festival that starts on 11 July. Visitors here explore the town's steep labyrinthine streets on foot, pausing to sample the local 'pasties', based on the dish originally brought to Mexico by British miners in the mid-19th century.

* **Huasca de Ocampo, 2001 (Hidalgo):** With its lush mountains, pastel-coloured houses and winding rivers, it's no wonder that Huasca means 'place of joy'. Visit the rocky

outcrops and waterfalls at Prismas Basalticos and marvel at the Piedra en el Aire, a huge boulder precariously perched and seemingly on the verge of falling. On 24 June, the town unites with its visitors to celebrate its saint – San Juan Bautista – in a festival featuring songs, mass, horse shows, dancing, and fireworks. The region is also famous for its pottery.

* **Mazamitla, 2005 (Jalisco):** The picturesque mountain town of Mazamitla, located in the southern region of Jalisco State, 75 miles from Guadalajara, offers visitors delicious cuisine, average temperatures of 66°, and townspeople who are renowned for hospitality. The town is full of natural beauty with its pine trees and cobblestone streets. The nearby forest of Los Cazos is a delight for nature lovers with its streams, El Salto waterfall and *Jardin Encantado* (Enchanted Garden), where a crystal-like stream runs between stone slabs. Adventurous visitors can hike and camp on El Chacal, the municipality's tallest mountain.

* **Tapalpa, 2002 (Jalisco):** Jalisco State offers visitors more than its beautiful coastline; south of Lake Chapala lies a mountainous region ... the most dramatic landscapes in Jalisco. It is here, more than 6,560 feet high and 83 miles from Guadalajara, that the charming town of Tapalpa is located. Just west of Tapalpa is the Salto del Nopal waterfall and El Nopal dam, good for fishing for black bass and tilapia, while to the north lie the impressive geological formations and large boulders known as Las Piedrotas and Los Frailes.

* **Tequila, 2002 (Jalisco):**

The town that gave its name to Mexico's national liquor is located in a green valley 37 miles north of Guadalajara. More than 55% of tequila is produced here within 21 miles of the town. Visitors here can enjoy the National Tequila Fair, which is celebrated during the third week of November. Festivities last almost a month because they merge with the days honouring the Virgin of the Conception and the Virgin of Guadalupe. UNESCO has declared the agave landscape, the distilleries (which were illegal during the Spanish colonial era), the tabernas and the nearby pre-Hispanic archeological site a World Heritage Site, raising the number of such sites in Mexico to 26. The vast Teuchitlan archeological site tells of a culture that influenced the region from 200 to 900 AD, creating terraces for agriculture, housing, temples, ceremonial mounds and ball courts.

* **Tepotzotlan, 2002 (Mexico State):** This town, located just 16 miles north Mexico City and easily accessible via the Queretaro Highway, was one of the first learning centres in New Spain where Jesuits were trained. At the town's heart stands the Church of San Francisco Javier which now houses the National Viceroyalty Museum, displaying art and artifacts from the 300-year-long colonial period. Tepotzotlan is famous for its elaborate Day of the Dead observances, celebrated on 2 November, when the townspeople decorate public buildings with cardboard skulls and skeletons and papier maché creatures and offer deceased friends and relatives candles, bread and flowers in an atmosphere that can only be described as 'party-like'.

* **Valle de Bravo, 2005 (México State):** This is a charming, prosperous mountain village with cobblestone streets, white stucco colonial houses, wrought-iron balconies and red-tiled roofs. It is located 60 miles from Toluca and 90 miles from Mexico City. Visitors to Valle de Bravo can enjoy many activities: from sailing on the lake formed by the Miguel Aleman dam to hang-gliding off the top of Cerro de la Cruz mountain, while history buffs can enjoy exploring the pre-Hispanic ruins at La Peña, just northeast of town, and nature lovers can revel in the beauty of the El Salto and Velo de la Novia waterfalls.

* **Patzcuaro, 2002 (Michoacan):** Located 31 miles from Morelia, Patzcuaro, easily accessible by bus, boasts a beautiful lake with the same name. Decorated with pines, sacred fir and oaks, the fertile land here enjoys a temperate climate. Patzcuaro has a strong

indigenous origin, and the language of the Purepecha people is evident in the marketplace. Visitors will find it difficult to settle on just one souvenir given that Patzcuaro's variety of handicrafts is legendary and features objects made from corn paste, embroidered and woven goods, ceramics, silverwork and wooden furniture.

* **Tlalpujahuá, 2005 (Michoacan):** Circled by pine-covered mountains, Tlalpujahuá is a 90-square mile piece of paradise in eastern Michoacan State. Small white houses with red tile roofs peek from amid the lush vegetation. Tlalpujahuá has evolved from its mining origins into a destination renowned for its beautiful handicrafts such as pottery, basket weaving and feather work. However, Tlalpujahuá's most famous export by far are its glass globe Christmas tree decorations. These hand-decorated globes,



Dolores Hidalgo (Wallace)

produced in local glass factories, are considered the best on the American continent and provide a great source of revenue for the town. Factory tours are available to visitors between February and November.

* **Tepoztlan, 2002 (Morelos):** Tepoztlan is located northeast of Cuernavaca, just 45 miles outside Mexico City. This charming village is known for its beautiful landscape and rich history. One of the town's main attractions is its Franciscan Convent of the Nativity, build at the end of the 16th century and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. When visiting the ex-convent, be sure to stop by the Carlos Pellicer Museum of Pre-Hispanic Art.

* **Mexcaltitan, 2001 (Nayarit):** A unique destination, the small island of Mexcaltitan is located on a lake by the same name. The name means 'House of the Moon' in the Nahuatl language. According to legend, this is the place from which the Aztecs departed on their pilgrimage in search of Tenochtitlan (today's Mexico City), the seat of the great Aztec empire. Visitors can take a boat to the island, which is little more than half a mile wide. After a visit to the local church and museum, most visitors enjoy the island's distinct cuisine which includes shrimp tamales and dumplings filled with minced-shrimp and fresh oysters. The island's must-have culinary delight, however, is the legendary taxihili, a pre-Hispanic dish of shrimp, corn dough and spices.

* **Cuetzalan, 2002 (Puebla):** Cuetzalan is a picturesque colonial town located in the northern mountains of Puebla State, about 120 miles and three hours from Puebla City. Town highlights include the Guadalupe church, the stone-domed San Francisco church and the Municipal Palace. While in town, be sure to shop for the handicrafts native to Cuetzalan: traditional blouses, mats and clothing made on pre-Hispanic looms. For adventure there are rocky pools and waterfalls nearby and the region also has many labyrinth-like caverns for exploring.

* **Real de Catorce, 2001 (San Luis Potosí):** Founded after the discovery of silver in the region, Real de Catorce is situated on one of the highest plateaus in Mexico at an altitude of more than 9,000 feet. Every year on 1 October pilgrims from every corner of Mexico descend on Real de Catorce to honour its patron saint – Francis of Assisi – at the Parish of the Immaculate and to enjoy five days of celebration. An hour's walk from town leads to El Quemado, a sacred native Huichol site. Also worth a visit are the ruins of the old mines, mills and warehouses, situated high above the Ogarrío Tunnel.


* **Izamal, 2002 (Yucatan):** Only 44 miles separate the white buildings of Merida with the yellow of Izamal. All of the town's houses are painted yellow, a modern reminder of the ancient cult of the sun of Izamal's native peoples. The remnants of the indigenous populations are also evident in the archeological remains on which the town is built. On 8 December the celebrations for the Virgin of Izamal begin, featuring processions, dancing, and fairs. With Merida and Cancun both having international

airports, Izamal is easily accessible to visitors and definitely worth a visit.

* **Cosala, 2005 (Sinaloa):** One of the major mining centres of northwestern Mexico during the final decades of the 19th century, Cosala is situated approximately 100 miles from Mazatlan. With beautiful buildings from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, there is perhaps no better city in Sinaloa to enjoy on foot than Cosala. Architectural highlights include the church honouring Santa Ursula which dates from the 18th century, the town hall, the Virgin of Guadalupe chapel and the Luis Perez Meza Passage, an exquisite colonial corner.

* **Alamos, 2005 (Sonora):** Founded in the 17th century, visitors come here to enjoy the colonial architecture of its buildings, 188 of which were declared National Historic Monuments in 2000. There is no better place to learn the history of Mexico's northern-most colonial town than in the Sonora Traditions Museum, located near the town centre. While Alamos maintains an authentic feel, visitors to this charming best-kept secret will not be roughing it: Alamos offers an impressive amount of premium boutique hotels. Visit Alamos in late January to experience the Dr. Alfonso Ortiz Tirado Music Festival, northwestern Mexico's most important event.

* **Bernal, 2006 (Queretaro):** Lying at the foot of the majestic, 1,100 ft. high Peña de Bernal, the world's third largest monolith, Bernal is an enchanting village of artistic wealth and cobblestone streets. Located 37 miles from Santiago de Queretaro, Bernal's municipal government is located in its Castle, a magnificent 19th century building with a hexagonal fortified tower. Also worth visiting is the Church of San Sebastian Martir, completed in 1725. Here locals and visitors love the traditional Bernal candies such as guava toffee and desserts such as brown sugar custard.

Footnote: The World Tourism Organization has recently reported that Mexico has moved up from eighth to seventh place in the 2005 world tourism arrivals rankings, welcoming 21.9 million international visitors. 



At the Tequila Distillery, Tequila (Wallace)

Have you ever been disappointed to see rampant tourism development on some of the beautiful islands of the Caribbean? If so, you might like to consider a visit to Montserrat, the island that hit world news in 1995 when over half of it was devastated by an earthquake. Apart from our Travel Digest section, we don't usually run stories without personal recommendations, but when I received the following information from the Montserrat Tourist Board I found it so interesting I thought I'd share it with you all ... and, of course, I hope to visit myself one day. But if any of you beat me to it, please write and tell us all about it – Ed.

TEN REASONS TO VISIT MONTSERRAT

Montserrat is a time capsule – Montserrat is probably one of the few islands that represent what a true Caribbean holiday used to be like (before massive cruise ships, casinos and hotels took over). Its people are warm and humble and crime is virtually non-existent.

Luxury villa vacations at bed & breakfast prices – Montserrat boasts a number of luxurious villas at rental rates that won't burn a hole in your pocket. Weekly rates for a fully-furnished villa with a pool, full kitchen, garden and all amenities start around \$700 per week.

Fast food chains and traffic jams – we don't think so!

Montserrat has no fast food chain restaurants. Among local delicacies are sumptuous lobster burgers, fried mountain chicken (frog legs) or goat water (like an Irish Stew but with goat meat chunks). You will also find no traffic jams. Montserrat's traffic jams involve about five cars and the occasional goat or donkey!

Everyone's a volcanologist – Montserrat has the highest number of volcanologists per capita in the world. Start a conversation with any resident and you'll find terms like *pyroclastic flows*, *lahars*, *deformation*, *hybrid earthquakes*, *conduit*, *lava chute* and *Teutonic plates* become integrated into the conversation.

Grey snow and multiple Ash Wednesdays – Safely marvel at the magnificent Soufriere Hills Volcano from several vantage points around the island, including St. George's Hill, Richmond Hill and Jack Boy Hill. If lucky, you might get a light dusting of ash, or as the locals call it, "grey snow."

A modern-day Pompeii – You don't have to travel to Italy to see Pompeii; Montserrat's buried capital city, Plymouth, has been compared to a modern-day Pompeii (minus the fossilized bodies). Many buildings have been totally buried by ash and mudflows, but you can still see the rooftops of some

buildings, including the courthouse and the steeple of St. Patrick's Church. The deep-water port and pier in Plymouth now boasts a beach.

Montserrat's free pouring rum shops – Lime the night away in one of the island's many rum shops (*bars*). Don't be surprised when you order a mixed drink to be given the entire bottle for you to pour it for yourself – at no additional cost. Talk to the locals in the bars where stories are told about Sting, Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney, Elton John and other celebrities who frequented Montserrat often in the 1980s to use the famed Air Recording Studio. Make sure and

to try some bush rum (various local herbs steeped in strong, white rum), which locals say will cure any cold and is also very popular with honeymooners. *(Another note: after the volcano, the above-mentioned stars – and many others – gathered in London's vast Royal Albert Hall and staged a Music for Montserrat fund-raising concert before a 'sold-out' audience. The concert is available on DVD, it's great fun and a good addition to your 'party music' library! – Ed.)*



Montserrat offers some delightful accommodation

Dive with bats – Be blown away with Montserrat's diving, as the island's reefs are teeming with underwater life – partly as a result of volcanic activity and Montserrat's small population of 4,700 people. Make sure to go to the bat cave at Rendezvous Bluff to see hundreds of protected fruit bats. With only two dive shops, you will be guaranteed personalized service.

Irish heritage – Originally settled by the Irish, Montserrat boasts a strong Irish heritage. St. Patrick's Day is a national holiday with a week of celebrations, Montserrat style. As soon as you arrive and the Immigration Officer puts a green shamrock stamp in your passport, you will realize that you are in an extraordinary place.

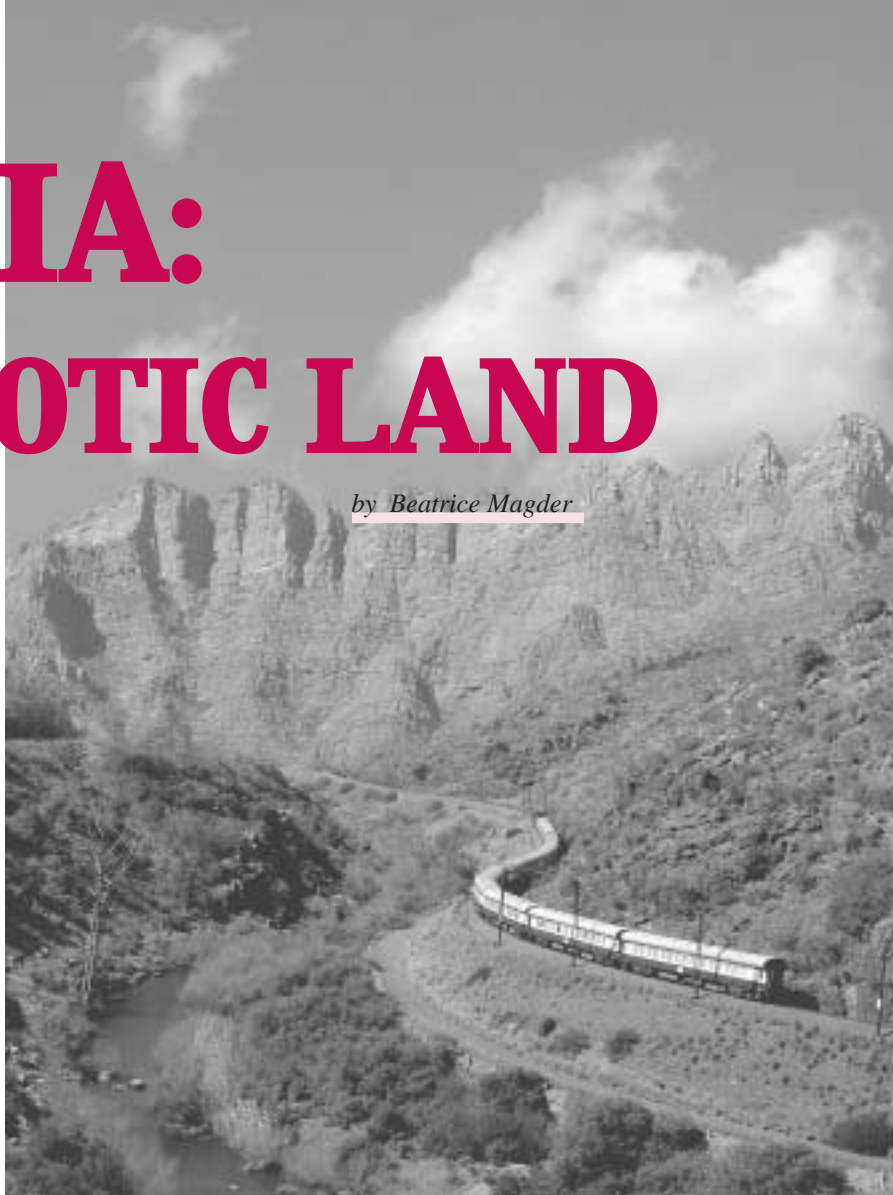
Montserrat is still growing in size – Montserrat is the only part of the British Empire that is still growing (the island is

... continued on page 20

NAMIBIA: AN EXOTIC LAND

by Beatrice Magder

Beatrice Magder starts her article on Namibia with the words "Land that is little known". Well, a recent high-profile Hollywood birth has suddenly thrust Namibia into the spotlight, but it's still safe to say that this country is rarely visited by North Americans. I was fortunate enough to travel in this unique land over 30 years ago – driving and camping – so reading Beatrice's account brought back many happy memories. But no, I certainly didn't travel on this wonderful, luxurious train, and you'll need deep pockets to do so, but it sounds as though it's a wonderful way to go – Ed.



Land that is little known! Land of vast sands and soaring skies; land of ancient tribes, enthralling animals and exotic birds. But enough waxing poetical, let's begin again by explaining that Namibia took this name after it shook off the shackles of apartheid South Africa. Prior to that it was known as South West Africa. It was a protectorate, first of Germany until World War I, and then it was 'given' to South Africa under a UN mandate, with lists of specific responsibilities. However, the South African Government of the time pretty well ignored this mandate and went ahead establishing white-settlement policies and, later, the concept of apartheid. In 1968, in defiance of the UN, it declared the region a fifth province of South Africa. Soon the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), a liberation organization, resorted to armed conflict to gain independence. After years of conflict, and much bloodshed, an independent Republic of Namibia was finally established in 1990.

If your interest is history, Namibia offers museums,

shrines, architecture and lots of other physical evidence to fill you in on the details above. It is important to keep in mind that Namibia is young and still in process or working out who it is and where it is going. All this adds an additional fascination to this small country, home to at least 11 major ethnic groups and more than 20 languages. Some of these people are nomadic herders and others like the San (who are often called Bushmen) are an ancient group of hunter-gatherers who wander through vast desert areas. As well as their native tongues, many Namibians speak Afrikaans while others speak English or German. Most people are multilingual. Today the country possesses a constitutional and political system based on sound democratic principles, with great regard for the origins, language, culture, religion and political views of all its peoples.

Geographically, Namibia lies, of course, in southwestern Africa with a desolate coastline bordering the Atlantic, part of which is known as the Skeleton Coast, so named because of the many shipwrecks it has seen. Much of the rest of the country is the Namib Desert – one of the oldest

deserts on earth. Other parts are grassland where many African animals roam. Some of these, such as its lions and elephants, have grown used to the rigours of the desert. Throughout the country there are many natural wonders and parks. The jewel among the latter is the vast Etosha National Park. In spite of its aridity, there are grasslands and waterholes where the many animals congregate to drink. As in all game parks, they provide great places for tourists to observe zebras, elephants, giraffes, kudu, eland, gemsbok, oryx, hartebeest, all kinds of antelopes: gemsbok, springboks, impala, klip-springer and the smallest of all – the charming little dik-dik.

Two friends and I made our arrangements for this trip with Goway Travel in Toronto. We flew to Johannesburg and then on to Windhoek, Namibia, where we embarked upon a 'hotel train' for the 16-day Dune Adventure of the Shongololo Express Company. The total cost was about C\$6,000 each. This also included breakfast and dinner on the train and some lunches as well. We were met at the airport in Windhoek and, at the end of our trip, delivered to the airport in Cape Town.

The unique train was our hotel for all the time we were in Namibia. Attached to the end of the train was a flat car carrying a fleet of Mercedes mini-buses and each day the train stopped and we headed out for our adventures by road. Sometimes we returned to the train waiting for us in the same place; other times the train moved and met us somewhere else. Often the train travelled through the night in order to deliver us another part of Namibia.

Our hotel being a train was what we found so appealing about the trip. We embarked, unpacked and this was our home for the next 16 days. There were double and single compartments and, no denying it, space in the compartments was tight. They contained beds, a wash basin that could be covered to serve as a table. There was room under the beds for suitcases, shelves above the beds and, high up, a small safe to deposit valuables. Toilets and showers were at either end of the coach and these were adequate and always clean with hot water.

One did not have to spend time in one's compartment, however. There was a dining coach with two sittings for dinner. All meals had printed menus that often provided further information about where we were. The chef was excellent and food plentiful with wine available, which could be kept from meal to meal if the bottle was not emptied. There was

also a lounge coach with a bar for meetings, relaxation and conversation. Arrangements for next day were posted on a bulletin board. There was also a laundry service, a postal service and the compartments were cleaned each day.

Everything seemed casual, including dress code, but the organization and arrangements were impeccable. Upon arrival on day one at our compartment, there was a folder which provided information about the train and about Namibia and day-by-day information about what was to take place. And it did live up to expectations. Yes, the accommodation was fine, the food excellent, our fellow travellers interesting people and methods of conveying information and organizing our trips were excellent.



The train's lounge car

The guides, most of whom were South African, were the drivers of the mini-buses. They were also exceptionally knowledgeable, often speaking several languages and most helpful in conveying information and answering questions. In addition, it turned out that, when needed, they could change a flat tire quickly and carefully look after the running of the buses.

Although the train was our home, on two different occasions we headed to a tent camp to stay overnight for a particular reason. One occasion was in order to give us lots of time in Etosha National Park to see the animals and the other time it was to get up very early in the desert in order to see the sun rise over the dunes. In each camp, we had very comfortable beds in the tents and lovely dinners and breakfasts out of doors, with tables often set in the sand. It was great!

Etosha National Park needs special comment. It was certainly one of several highlights of the trip. It is huge (about the size of Switzerland) and right in the centre of the park lies an enormous saline pan (about the size of Holland). It has a beauty of its own, although almost desert, because it gleams and shimmers and produces wonderful mirages. Most of the animals come around the edges where there are natural water holes. This is where we often stopped to watch elephants, zebras, springboks and many others coming to drink. It was an endless parade of animals and very exciting to watch them. Were those elephants appearing way over on the horizon? Were those kudu or oryx moving over there? And what were those tall animals moving in a very stately way? Giraffes! Now watch how they have to spread their legs to reach their long necks and heads down to drink. Look at the springboks leaping away to make room for the elephants, both parents and young ones coming up to the

watering hole. What is that enormous, very heavy looking animal? Why, it is a wildebeest! Sometimes you may even be lucky enough to see a black rhino lumbering along. There is room for all of them at the water holes and they all seem to get along just fine, moving to and from the watering places with great dignity. How lucky we were to see this fabulous parade of African animals!

We saw great herds of zebras eating the vegetation, many of the females pregnant. Each zebra has its own design of stripes. On one occasion we drove past a pride of lions. Many times in the heat of the day we saw large groups of springboks enjoying some shade under the trees. And one time we were lucky enough to spot a dik-dik. It is very small and blends entirely into its surrounding brown landscape. Our guides were wonderful in spotting all kinds of animals and birds. On one of our drives in the park, we stopped quickly as two elephants made their way across the road to graze on the opposite bank. What a great opportunity for close up photographs of these enormous beasts, quietly munching on leaves from the trees and, fortunately, ignoring us.

Each day brought with it a special treat of some kind. Sometimes it was seeing animals unexpectedly, another time it was coming upon ostriches spreading their wings nearby, another time viewing spectacular birds, another time stopping to look at fascinating weaver bird nests which are the equivalent, in the bird world, to a huge apartment block as each bird builds its own nest attached to others but with its own opening. And there they all are, hanging from a tree not far from the road!

All of the above refers to our travels in inland Namibia: Etosha, savannah regions, the desert and miles of the sand dunes. At times we could also see mountains in the distance. Along the highways, there are small towns, and most of the roads do lead to Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. Along the coast there are some larger towns and it is in these coastal regions that there is diamond, mineral and rock mining.

And part of the shoreline here is known as the Skeleton Coast, due to the many ships that have been wrecked along this desolate and dangerous coast. Some of these date back to the time of Portuguese explorers and ships of the Dutch East India Company. In the distance we could see greyish rocks, but on getting closer we saw the 'rocks' move and realized that we


were looking at hundreds, maybe thousands, of Cape fur seals. These were frolicking in the water, sitting or sleeping on the shore, some preening themselves, others looking after their seal pups. We were told they are wary because on occasions black-backed jackals come amongst them to capture a seal pup for dinner. This whole area, officially called Cape Cross, is a huge reserve.

Inland from Cape Cross is the southern part of the Namib desert, where travellers soon see the Spitzkoppe, a dramatic, pyramid-shaped mountain which, with its red soil, has an austere beauty. A highlight for me on this trip was the ancient rock paintings to be found there. Nobody knows how old these are but there are many and they clearly show human and animal figures and are something to behold! Who knows what stories they are trying to tell us? What fun it was to pick out the stick figures and to see animals unlike any that we know today. Why were they made? What materials did they use? Who did them? Only one thing is certain, these are relics from an ancient culture.

We spent some time in one of the coastal cities – Swakopmund – where there was a lovely beach and lots of German-inspired architecture. This was a good town for shopping for Namibian souvenirs and a nice place to relax and enjoy a good restaurant.

I could write so much more about this trip, but feel I must stop soon. But one last story will complete our tale of Namibia. During the Second World War, Germans in South West Africa were rounded up and put into camps. Two young geologists, Henna Martin and Herman Kohl, decided to escape this fate by heading out to live in the desert. They set up their own camp in a cave and lived there for about two years, hunting and making do with whatever they could find.

In the end, Herman got sick and they returned to Windhoek where, after a couple of days in jail, they were not charged. Henna Martin wrote a book about their experiences which is available in Namibia and their camp can now be visited. And visit it we did. You must be prepared for quite a long hike but it is well worth a visit and it is a most interesting story of survival in very harsh conditions. Yes, Namibia is an exotic and fascinating land.

The website for the Shongololo Express is www.shongololo.com and Goway Travel, with offices in Toronto and Vancouver, can be contacted at 1 800 387 8850, www.goway.com 



Our mini-buses on the train

BELIZE

Here at TTS we've received information of a lovely-looking 11-cabana resort in Ambergris Caye. Called Tranquility Bay Resort, it offers diving, snorkeling, fishing, caving and sightseeing trips to see birds, baboons, Mayan ruins and more. Double rates are quite high, but the two-bedroom cottages for four at US\$250 in the high season (or US\$200 low season) work out to be quite reasonable if you decide to share with a couple of friends. The property can be viewed at www.tranquilitybayresort.com.

BULGARIA

An unusual destination, but why not? A press release from this country states "please visit our beautiful country that is opening its doors to more and more holidaymakers." If you'd like to learn more and would like to rent a villa or apartment, visit www.holidaystobulgaria.com. (*Actually Bulgaria is not a new destination to TTS ... there was an article in the February/March 2003 edition – Ed.*)

CANADA

Some treats in BC. The first is dubbed "An Ornithologist's Dream Come True" ... a trip along the rugged coastline en route to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary via a *Steveston Seabreeze Adventures* bird-watching tour. The sanctuary consists of nearly 300 hectares of managed wetlands, natural marshes and low dikes in the heart of the Fraser River estuary. The most famous resident is the bald eagle, but keep your eyes peeled for sandpipers, red-tailed hawks, peregrine falcons, cormorants, tufted puffins, guillemots and great blue herons. Cost is C\$25 per person available year round. www.seabreezedventures.ca
Or how about joining West Coast Air for a float plane ride and a gourmet dinner? How about treating someone special to this **Vancouver** scenic flight tour followed by dinner at The Cannery Seafood House for a seafood dinner. Priced at C\$189 per person this tour includes a 20-minute floatplane tour, \$50 per person dinner certificate for The Cannery plus limo transfer back to your downtown hotel. www.westcoastair.com

A note now on the eastern coast of our country. *Travel and Leisure Magazine* has named **Cape Breton** the fourth best island to visit in the world, and the number one island to visit in continental United States and Canada. Nearly a million subscribers will see the ranking in the magazine and *Travel and Leisure's* website will direct visitors to www.novascotia.com.

Ontario's Niagara peninsula is beautiful in the fall with its vineyards, fine restaurants and many places to stay. And now your visit can be enhanced with special theatre prices. Take some young people for a treat and if they are between 19 and 29 their ticket at any of the three theatres will cost just \$30. Make your visit on a 'Super Sunday' – marked 'S' on the season calendar – and all others can save

60%. And if you book a Sunday matinee you can add a Sunday evening performance for just \$35. Performances continue until 19 November and there's all the information you require (including B&Bs and other accommodation listings) in the Shaw Festival's excellent brochure: 1 800 511 SHAW, www.shawfest.com

CUBA

How about a special vacation in Cuba this November, a month when the rainy season is over and the climate is comfortable for walking? Join **Comfortable Hiking Holidays**, who promise to show you a side of Cuba that few tourists ever get to experience via, yes, comfortable walks with time to swim en route. "It is only by walking in the countryside and meeting its people that you can get any real understanding of Cuba. They also include city tours of Trinidad, Cienfuegos and Havana, lunch at a coffee plantation and a chance to enjoy Cuba's famous Varadero Beach. This is an all-inclusive holiday, using nice small hotels, with nothing left to pay for but bottled water and tips! Details from Comfortable Hiking Holidays at 416 445 2628, www.letshike.com.

JAPAN

Vancouver-based **Sacred Earth Journeys** has a three-week walking tour of Japan that enables visitors to "savor slowly the bygone age of old Japan." "Temples, Gardens and Spas Walking Tour of Japan" participants will walk along paths "etched by pilgrims over the millennia," says a tour leader. The 4 – 24 November tour focuses on ancient temples, gardens and spas, as well as Japanese ceremonies, cuisine, handicrafts and other traditions. The group will walk in the Menji forest, a Shinto shrine, visit Senso-ji, Tokyo's most sacred temple and shop for silk kimonos in a craft emporium. Another highlight will be taking part in tea ceremonies on a floating pavilion at a former Shogun's residence and in the tea museum in Uji. For more information: 1 877 874 7922 or 604 874 7922.

MEXICO

We've heard of a lovely small property near **Playa del Carmen** (40 miles south of Cancun) that you may like to investigate. It's the 18-room Luna Blue Hotel & Garden, where American owners Tony and Cheri Head "love to point their guests to out-of-the-way places ... hidden gems that allow them to see the Mayan Riviera like a local." The property is furnished in traditional Caribbean style and surrounds a lush garden courtyard. Rates are US\$60 - \$115. For information call [011 52] 984 873 0990, e-mail: info@lunabluehotel.com, www.lunabluehotel.com and please send us a report if you stay there ... it certainly looks delightful and unlike the box-style hotels that are springing up along that Mexican coast.

NEPAL

Knowing we have many keen trekkers amongst our readers, we thought this would be of interest: after 10 years of conflict, there are positive signs of a long-term peaceful solution to the unrest in Nepal – making the coming trekking season the best time in years to head to the Himalaya. The latest developments have seen the King of Nepal stripped of his powers and the reformation of Nepal's Parliament. The army now takes its orders from the Parliament, not the King, and all the parties that were previously involved in conflict have signed a unilateral ceasefire. The trekking season for Nepal runs from September to May and Peregrine Trips has treks to suit all levels of fitness from short hikes in the foothills of the Annapurnas through to summit attempts on the world's best trekking peaks. Any of Peregrine's Nepal trips can be booked through Trek Holidays. For more information click on www.trekholidays.com or call 1 888 456 3522.

SOUTH AFRICA

If South Africa is in your plans, how about extending your visit with a stay in a seafront apartment in **Hermanus**? This pretty town with its lovely beaches, just 90 minutes' drive from **Cape Town**, is known for the "best land-based whale watching in the world" (September and October are the best months) and there's a telescope in the property's lounge to watch the creatures, along with dolphins and seals. And Hermanus is a great starting point for many excursions in the spectacular **Cape Province**. The luxury apartment has beautiful sea views, balcony, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, open-plan kitchen and dining area (complete with all major appliances), linens etc. The owners of the property live in the United Kingdom so their rental rates are quoted in pounds: high season (September to April) £150 per day for 4 people, £100 a day for 2; low season (May to August) £100 per day for 4, £80 for two, minimum

stay 4 nights (£1 = about C\$2.10.) For more information call Pamela van der Berg at [011 44] 1452 503 372 or e-mail her at pammyvan@tesco.net. (If you are planning to take the Travel Society's tour of South Africa, you'll find Cyril Payle is familiar with this property and he can also make any necessary arrangements for you ... ask when you contact us.)

U.S.A.

* If you live in southern Ontario, how about a trip to **Buffalo, New York** (just about 20 minutes from the Niagara region) to see what Canadians are up to there! Yes, three Canadians are leading Buffalo's premier cultural institutions. Torontonians Louis Grachos is spearheading an exciting reinvigoration of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, long-considered one of the finest art museums in the U.S. Kitchener-native Ted Peitzak is overseeing a \$30 million expansion of the Burchfield-Penney Art Center, home to the largest collection of work by acclaimed landscape painter Charles Burchfield. And Winnipeg-born Ken Neufeld is at the helm of Studio Arena Theater, Buffalo's nationally-recognized theatre. For more information on tourism and the many cultural attractions that Buffalo has to offer visit <http://www.gobuffaloniagara.com/>
* **North Carolina** offers many vacation opportunities that can be investigated at www.visitnc.com. One event you might miss on-line, however, is a major exhibition – **Monet in Normandy** – at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, "the grandest showing of Monet works ever to appear in the Southeast and the first exhibition ever to focus solely on the artist's depiction of Normandy." Included in the exhibition are Giverny garden paintings and the famous Rouen Cathedral. The exhibition will run from 15 October – 14 January 2007. Details at www.visitraleigh.com or www.ncartmuseum.org

riding the rails

Rail Europe has released details of new fares for the Eurostar train which links London with Paris and Brussels. On offer now are more options for low fares, greater flexibility in choosing travel time and increased availability of low-priced seats. Previously the lowest fares required travel during non-peak periods and were all non-exchangeable and non-refundable. Now the lowest one-way fares (London-Paris or Brussels) start at C\$108 (standard class, like 2nd class) or C\$192 (1st class), and the lowest roundtrips are C\$117 CAD (standard) and C\$235 (1st class) without restrictions as to day and time of travel. Before, the lowest one-way fares were similar but were restricted to travel on Monday-

Wednesday between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and the roundtrips required a minimum one-night stay. As well, there are now nine roundtrip fares (all with no restrictions) compared to five (with restrictions) offered previously. Many of the roundtrip fares are now exchangeable and partially refundable, while before they were neither. Early booking will also result in passengers getting lower fares and Eurostar tickets can be booked nine months in advance through Rail Europe and, if plans change, most fares are now exchangeable. There are also more one-way fares for pass-holders and seniors. More details at 1 800 361 7245 or www.raileurope.com.

Many **European budget airlines** have come under fire for promoting low lead-in fares on their websites only to have consumers discover the rate they actually pay is considerably higher once a litany of additional charges have been added. New European Union proposals now rule that hidden extras will have to be published.. The new proposals from the EU transport commissioner are designed to permit passengers to realistically compare prices by forcing airlines to include all charges - including airport, wheelchair, baggage fees and fuel surcharges - in the headline price. The new laws are to come into force in the fall of 2007 if they gain approval from the European Union and 25 national governments. Will Canada follow?

If you live in or near Edmonton and have the UK in your plans, you'll be interested to learn that Air Canada will launch non-stop flights between **Edmonton and London (Heathrow)** on 31 October. Flights will operate three times weekly (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays) and move to daily service on 1 April, 2007. Flights have been timed to ensure convenient connections in Edmonton to and from **Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and Yellowknife**. Tickets are now available.

And for Newfoundlanders, **Air Canada** will launch seasonal non-stop service between **St. John's and Heathrow** beginning 6 April, 2007. This service will operate three times weekly on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays in April, increasing to five times a week in May and to daily service from mid-June to September.

British Airways is also to launch a new route to **Heathrow**, this one from **Calgary** starting on 1 December 2006. BA said it will operate five flights each week on a Boeing 777 to the "booming Alberta energy industry centre".

But if you have to travel via **Toronto** and have a long connection, you may like to take advantage of Toronto Airport's **Sheraton Gateway Hotel's** "Stay During the Day" package where, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. travellers can enjoy a double room for \$69. If you

don't wish to take advantage of the Sheraton's famously comfortable beds during this time you can enjoy their indoor swimming pool, sauna and whirlpool. The property also features a fitness centre with massage therapy service, a restaurant and also a bar where light meals are served. For more information visit the special offers page at www.sheraton.com/sheratongatewaytoronto.

Starting this fall, Sunwing will be introducing flights and vacation packages to **Florida**. Departing from **Toronto, Montreal, Québec City and Ottawa**, travellers can choose to visit several cities including: **Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and St. Pete's**. Round-trip air prices will begin at \$99 from Toronto, and packages prices for a seven night holiday including air fare, hotel accommodation and a mid-size car will start at \$299. Travellers will be able to choose from 3, 4, 7, 10 or 14 night packages. Travellers will also have the option to purchase discounted tickets in advance to popular attractions such as Universal Orlando, Sea World Orlando, Busch Gardens (Tampa), Arabian Nights, Medieval Times and Wonder Works. For more information on these – and many other Sunwing packages – visit www.flysunwing.com

News from **WestJet Airlines** continues to be good, with its second-quarter profit soaring 873% over the same period last year in spite of sky-rocking fuel costs. And they are now offering a new service: by going to www.westjet.com between 24 hours to one hour before their domestic flight, guests can check in, select their seat and print their boarding pass. Then at the airport travellers drop off their bags at the self-serve check-in baggage counter.


Air travellers may like to check this out. www.LoveMySeat.com is a new web site providing reviews for seating on flights from major airlines including United, Delta and American Airlines, British Airways, Continental, Cathay, Singapore, Thai, Lufthansa and Air Canada. With its 'Top 5 Seat Location Finder' travellers can identify the best and worst seats on most aircraft. 

Montserrat ... continued from page 14

a British territory). Pyroclastic and other flows in the Exclusion Zone areas as a result of volcanic activity continue to increase the physical size of the island. Officially, Montserrat is 39 sq. miles but in reality, it's more like 41.

Yes, Montserrat is one of the world's best kept secrets. In addition to the above, the island offers a choice of low-key and luxurious accommodations, deserted dark sand beaches, turquoise waters with spectacular views of lush green mountains, world-class nature trails, a plethora of wildlife and deep-water reef communities and a tranquil atmosphere far from the hustle and bustle of modern life.

It's reminiscent of the way the Caribbean used to be and the 4,700 friendly residents of this "Emerald Isle of the Caribbean" are waiting to welcome you.

For more information on Montserrat and its breathtaking scenery and unspoiled, unpolluted coral and volcanic vistas, visit www.visitmontserrat.com or call [664] 491 2230 or send an e-mail to montserrat@cherylandrewsmarketing.com requesting brochures and tourism information. Potential travellers may like to know that since July 2005 a new airport has been opened on Montserrat with four daily 20-minute flights available on WinAir from the international airport in Antigua. 

22 days from \$5,995

*Limited to 20 Members
A few places left!*

A Traveller's Turkey

Departing: 24 April & 11 September 2007

It is one of the cradles of civilization and one of the most wonderful countries on the planet. Here are fabled cities, unique landscapes, incomparable historic sites and calm, friendly people who are eager to show that their land is, indeed, both historic and modern.

Ann Wallace, our editor, has travelled extensively in Turkey and always returns claiming it is one of her favourite destinations. So now we have organized a luxurious tour of Turkey exclusively for Travel Society members. We have combined our extensive knowledge with careful research to ensure you see the very best that Turkey has to offer. You'll stay in first-class historic or very specialized hotels, travel in a 40-seat air-conditioned luxury bus, enjoy cruises on private boats, sample fine food and be entertained by cultural performances. And the itinerary? Magical Istanbul (plenty of time there); Ankara, home of one of the world's finest museums; the unique 'geological poem' called Kapadokya (or Cappadocia); mysterious and lovely ruins such as Aphrodisias, Pergamum and, of course, Ephesus; the fabled and beautiful Aegean coast; the peaceful Princes Isles in the Sea of Marmara and so much more.

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

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES: 22 Days

Toronto	\$5,995.00 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$6,275.00 pp/dbl
Montreal	\$6,275.00 pp/dbl	Vancouver	\$6,495.00 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$6,395.00 pp/dbl	Calgary	\$6,395.00 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$6,395.00 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$6,395.00 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$455 (Sharing can be arranged.) Prices are subject to confirmation



Your tour includes:

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

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

Copper Canyon and Mexico City

Departing: 6 October, 6 November, 1 December 2006 & 12 January, 9 February, 9 March, 6 April & 4 May 2007

*New
itinerary!*

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

Air-inclusive prices:

Toronto	\$3,760 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$3,830 pp/dbl
Montreal	\$3,760 pp/dbl	Vancouver	\$3,994 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$3,994 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$4,196 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$3,994 pp/dbl		

Single supplement \$798 (Sharing can be arranged.) Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour includes:

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

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



a 19-day tour with Cyril Payle at an incredible price ...

Spectacular South Africa

*No charge
London stopover*

Departure: 1 March & 11 October 2007

Come with The Travel Society to a land of wonder ... on a South African trip unlike any other. Designed especially for our members, this trip takes in all the highlights: Kruger National Park for game watching, the famous Garden Route, the beautiful wine region of Stellenbosch and the sights of incomparable Cape Town, including Cape Point, Chapman's Peak Drive and Robben Island. But on our trip you will do far more. You will tour the Great Escarpment of Eastern Transvaal – a place so beautiful writers run out of adjectives – where you will visit God's Window, the Blyde River Canyon and historical towns like Pilgrims Rest. You'll see Johannesburg and be escorted to Soweto for lunch in a Township house and jazz in a famous nightspot. You'll enter the Kingdom of Swaziland to meet the people and enjoy more game watching. Zululand is also on the itinerary, with its historical sites and unique entertainment traditions. You'll be driven through the Valley of a Thousand Hills to East London and

take the famous Outeniqua Choo-Toe train from Knysna to George. You'll visit the Addo Elephant National Park and traverse the Little Karoo Desert – flanked by great mountain ranges – to see the Cango Caves. You'll travel in a luxury air-conditioned coach, you'll stay in lovely properties ranging from good hotels to charming chalets, you'll enjoy a wide variety of entertainment and you'll enjoy South Africa's delicious cuisine and wines and you'll be escorted all the way by Satour-accredited guides. Here at The Travel Society we know South Africa well ... and we can't imagine a more comprehensive, in-depth and fascinating tour of South Africa.

PRICES INCLUDING AIR AND TAXES departing from:

Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa \$7,315 pp/dbl

Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax \$7,675 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$790.00 (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 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

Small Ship

Galapagos Islands Cruise & Ecuador

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

14 days departing 12 October, 2 November & 7 December 2006,

4 January, 15 February, 8 March & 5 April 2007

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

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

PRICES INCLUDE AIR: Toronto \$5,995.00 pp/dbl

prices are available from all major cities

GREAT ADD-ONS, INCLUDING AIR:

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

Machu Picchu from \$1,996.00 pp/dbl

Prices are subject to confirmation

Your tour includes:

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

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

New itinerary
for 2006 & 2007

China ... Yangtze Spectacular

\$4,145 FOR 18 DAYS!

Departing: 4 October 2006,
4 April & 26 September 2007



Please call for the full itinerary

It is vast, fascinating and mysterious and it has beckoned travellers from the west for centuries. Mention it to avid travellers and they are sure to say, "Yes, I hope to visit China one day." And what would they choose to experience? A cruise on the mighty Yangtze River (now in the process of changing for ever); a look at the work-in-progress on the massive Three Gorges Dam; a walk on the ancient Great Wall; views of charming villages, lush terraced hillsides and magnificent mountain peaks; visits to the great cities of Shanghai and Beijing; a trip to view one of the world's greatest archaeological finds ... the 6,000 terra-cotta warriors at Xi'an; scenes of palaces, pagodas, pavilions and pandas; tastes of Peking duck and Chinese banquets and so much more. So how do you choose? When you decide on The Travel

Society's tour there's no need to choose because all these highlights are included. Yes, in these remarkable 18 days you'll stay in Beijing; you'll take a 4-day first-class cruise on the Yangtze with many shore excursions; you'll fly to see those centuries-old terra-cotta warriors in Xi'an; you'll visit bustling Chongqing and see its pandas; stay in Hangzhou and travel into the hills covered with tea plantations; explore the exquisite gardens of Suzhou, and visit Nanjing and Wuzhen. And you'll have time to explore spectacular Shanghai. Throughout the trip you'll see magnificent architecture, you'll be entertained at cultural events, you'll join your hosts at a variety of banquets, you'll have time to shop, and you'll marvel at some of the most wonderful scenery on earth, all in the company of English-speaking guides. You'll travel by plane, by luxury bus, cruise ship and river boat. Many of our members have told us it's an experience of a lifetime ... and all at an amazing price!

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES:

Departing:	
Vancouver	\$4,145 pp/dbl
Victoria/Nanaimo/Kamloops	\$4,195 pp/dbl
Calgary/Edmonton	\$4,420 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,590 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$4,590 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,490 pp/dbl
Ottawa & Montreal	\$4,490 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec City/London	\$4,850 pp/dbl
St. John's	\$4,850 pp/dbl
Single supplement \$1,195 (Sharing can be arranged.)	
Taxes and visas extra.	

ADD-ON HONG KONG

4 days/3 nights	\$1,288 pp/dbl
Single supplement	\$544

ADD-ON BANGKOK

4 days/3 nights	\$1,185 pp/dbl
Single supplement	\$350

ADD-ON TOKYO

4 days/3 nights	\$1,375 pp/dbl
Single supplement	\$299

ADD-ON KYOTO

4 days/3 nights	\$1,450 pp/dbl
Single supplement	\$325

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

Your tour costs includes:

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

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



**A New
Tour**

India's Golden Triangle

23 days departing 9 October 2006, 19 March & 23 April 2007

**No charge
London
stopover**

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 all the highlights and more, including camel and elephant rides ... guaranteed to give wonderful photographs! You'll start your tour in Mumbai (once known as Bombay) where you'll visit Dhobi Ghat, the Gateway of India, Marine Drive, the Hanging Gardens, Jain Temple and the Prince of Wales Museum. There will be free time also, perhaps for a little shopping, before you fly to Udaipur, home of the Maharna City Palace, the Jagdish Temple, Garden of Maidens and so many other sites. And here you'll dine in the spectacular 250-year-old Lake Palace that seems to float on an island on Lake Pichola.

A drive to Mount Abu, a beautiful hill resort, comes next, followed by fabled Ranakpur, home of the beautiful Ranakpur Temples. Ancient Jodhpur is next on the itinerary, then it's on to the pilgrimage city of Pushkar with its temple dedicated to Lord Brahma. It's in Pushkar that, if you wish, you will take a camel ride into the sand dunes. The famous Pink City - Jaipur - the capital of Rajasthan comes next and you will spend two nights there, with days full of exciting sightseeing and an excursion to the Amber Fort by elephant. Jaipur is also famous for its bazaar full of wonderful gifts ... and of course you'll spend time there.

Agra is the home of the Taj Mahal and so, of course, it's on our itinerary too. You'll have an early night and leave before dawn to watch the beautiful Taj revealed by the rising

sun. Then it's on to Jhansi by the famous Shatabdi Express train - an incredible excursion. You'll be met by your bus there and driven on to Khajuraho, site of the World Heritage Temples - the eternal images of love. Varansi has been requested by many of our members and we've arranged for this destination to come next. You'll never forget your early-morning boat ride on the River Ganges here, nor the narrow by-lanes of this, one of the most ancient living cities. Your last destination is Delhi, reached by air to allow for plenty of time to see the sights and do some last-minute shopping.

Throughout this trip you will stay in first-class hotels; travel in de luxe 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! Twenty-one days! A life-time time of memories! Come with The Travel Society and enjoy the best of Rajasthan with fellow members!



Your tour includes:

- All international flights with British Airways
- Domestic flights
- Deluxe a/c coach transportation
- Shatabdi Train Fare
- State transport taxes
- All taxes
- All meals
- English-speaking guides and escort
- All entrance fees
- Elephant ride and Camel safari
- Baggage handling

**Fully
Escorted**

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES: 23 Days

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