

The Travel Society

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Magazine



Exploring Switzerland
Focus on Italy

www.thetravelsociety.com

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Readers' Letters

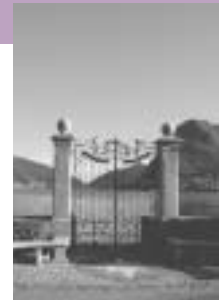
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A view from
Lugano, Switzerland
(Wallace)

editor's letter ...

A happy New Year to everyone. I'm sure I say this every January, but I wish you a year of exciting and safe travels. This, our first issue of 2007, largely covers destinations in Europe with French villa recommendations and stories on Italy and Switzerland. One of our members - Peter Brooke - travelled from Germany into northern Italy, on to Venice and thence south to Rome, camping all the way. Our other story, from Mary Ann Polacek, takes readers from Rome on a circuitous route up to Venice, staying in some lovely hotels. Our aim is not to make you giddy but to help you plan similar trips if Italy is in your plans. I, too, have been in Italy recently. A visit to Rome was the special request of my 91-year-old mother. I'll tell you about it in our next issue. And then, of course, there's beautiful Switzerland, where I lived for over two years in the mid-sixties. It's always so wonderful to return.



In case Europe is not tempting you this year, do not worry. In coming issues we have stories on Viet Nam, Kenya, Tanzania (including Zanzibar), Canada, of course, and lots more.

It's always been a good tip ... if you are a frequent visitor to the UK and have the time, adding on another trip to Europe or the countries surrounding the Mediterranean is usually a well-priced way to go. Beware, however, of the additional costs that can turn your apparent bargain into something pretty expensive. Enter Britain's Trading Standards Institute (TSI), who want the government to clamp down on firms that post misleading prices on their internet sites. "Travel firms are adding the word 'from' - as in 'Lanzarote, from £75' - and then think it is acceptable to fail to offer any holidays which even come close to that magical figure, once must-pay supplements are added in," said the TSI's lead officer on travel, Bruce Treloar. So take care when making reservations via Britain, and we'll try to keep an eye on this issue and see where it leads.

Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO)

We have visited France four times, renting a total of eight houses or apartments by the week. We have found this to be a great, and usually inexpensive, way to explore and get to know the country. We take day trips, but always have a 'home' to come back to each evening for our evening meal and to relax. During the day we explore small villages and towns and often visit the small markets there to purchase wonderful vegetables, fruit, cheese, meat and bread; in fact most of our food for the day or week.

In the past, we have found our accommodations by word of mouth or by advertisements in *The Globe and Mail* and articles in *The Travel Society Magazine*. But this year we found an apartment and a villa by searching the internet. Searching the net for accommodations can be an overwhelming task ... there are so many choices and so many commercials dominating the pages. But this year we discovered a site called Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO) – www.vrbo.com – where we found two excellent rentals in France. So this letter is both a recommendation for the site itself and for the houses we found.

VRBO covers the entire globe – about 63,000 locations – and at first sight might be a bit overwhelming. But it is also sorted by country and then by area. Most rental units are adequately described with plenty of pictures, prices, dates of availability and contact information. With so many listings, those not well described can be passed over quickly.

For our first two weeks we rented a villa in La Bastide d'Engras, which is about 12 km from Uzès in the Languedoc-Roussillon region about 45 minutes' drive from Avignon. This was an excellent choice and the best rental we have had. The house is new, exceptionally well furnished and fully equipped

with all the modern appliances expected by North Americans. One enters into a large living room with the kitchen close by. Stairs lead to two en suite bedrooms, both beautifully furnished with Provençal-style drapes, bed covers and robes. The beds have good mattresses and crisp, hand-ironed linens. There's a covered patio on two sides of the house and we ate most of our meals outside. There's also a pool and covered parking for the car. Multi-language satellite TV and radio is available. The hosts, Mary and Philip Congdon, were originally from England so not only speak English, of course, but also perfect French. They live in a separate house on the property and were available to answer our questions and help with touring enquiries. They have thought of everything the tenants might need: all cooking utensils, dishes, barbecue and even a cooler chest and ice packs for picnics.

The nearest town, St. Quinton La Poterie, has a weekly market and a small supermarket, while Uzès has all services as well as a large weekly market. Uzès is an interesting town which includes the Duchy of Uzès (a series of buildings dominating the centre of the town) which is well worth a visit. We also enjoyed several other small towns in the region, such as the beautiful medieval

town of Argueze (where the Auberge Sarresine is a wonderful restaurant) and the photographic Roque sur Ceze. So many regions of France, including the wine areas of the Rhone valley, Pont du Gard, Avignon, the Mediterranean and, via autoroutes, tourist sites farther afield are easily accessible from here. Details: www.vrbo.com/56283, Philip & Mary Congdon, Terres de la Font, La Bastide d'Engras 30330, France. Rental rates are £340-£800 per week (as we go to print £1 = C\$2.27) depending on the season, with special long-term rates offered in the winter.

Our other holiday home was an apartment in a large house near Ventabren, 15 km from Aix en Provence. It consists of a large living-dining area (only French TV available), bedroom, modern bathroom and fully-equipped kitchen (including washer and dryer and dish washer). In addition, there is a large patio area for al fresco dining overlooking an olive grove and the hills to the south. The large pool is just steps away and we enjoyed a daily swim to cool off after our full days of touring. Mme. Garcia, the landlady, does not speak English, but with our small amount of French we were able to get by. We certainly understood when she invited us to help ourselves to figs, nectarines, grapes and basil from her garden! She also gave us a bottle of olive oil pressed from olives



above: Moun Pantai, Ventabren

right: Villa in La Bastide d'Engras (H. Gaudet)



harvested from her garden and she also made us a compote of quince and apples from fruit in her orchard, warning us as she did so that quince cannot be eaten raw.

There is a large grocery store about 3 km away and all other services are available in Aix. Staying here gives easy access to Nice, Marseille, Avignon and other sites in Provence. And Aix is home to the famous Les Deux Garçons restaurant ... a must-visit dining experience! Details: www.vrbo.com/23720, Mme. Eulalie Garcia, Moun Pantai, Collect de Bourret, Ventabren 13122, France. Rental rates are between €50 and €50 per week (€ = C\$1.53). I should just add, however, that banks in England and France are charging horrendous fees and taking weeks to clear money orders or bank drafts from Canada and even though my bank assured me that they are the same as cash, the people we rented from had trouble cashing them. I'd advise wiring funds instead, though even then the banks charge a fee to receive the money! However, in spite of that little problem, planning and enjoying a self-catering vacation in France was, once again, a rewarding and fun experience.

Hugh Gaudet
Calgary, AB

Here in the pages of TTS we often publish specific vacation rental recommendations with, of course, vacationers in mind. But if you've ever thought about a vacation property a) of your own, and b) as a source of income, you may be interested in a book lengthily entitled *How to Rent Vacation Properties by Owner: The Complete Guide to Buy, Manage, Furnish, Rent, Maintain and Advertise your Vacation Rental Investment*. The book is by American Christine Hrib Karpinski's and is largely aimed at Americans (though we learn from her bio that she owns two Nova Scotia Duck Trolling Retrievers!), with its list of State Sales Tax Offices and other formal information on financing, mortgages etc. However, there is a great deal of information to encourage and help others who may be considering this form of vacationing/investing, with chapters on Effective Advertising, Rental Photos, Writing a Good Description, Taking Reservations,

Maintenance, Furnishings and Supplies, Solving Problems, Forms and so on. And Canada's Learning Annexes in Toronto and Vancouver are recommended as good places to take a short course on website design. (Referring to owning and renting out your own property without an agent, the author states, "The Internet has changed everything.") The book also gives a list of sites where holiday-home owners can exchange their properties and, if you decide to remain a rentee rather than a renter, there's a long list of rental websites for you to explore, including the www.vrbo.com site mentioned by Hugh Gaudet here. The book is published by Kinney Pollack Press at US\$26.00. It can be ordered on line at www.howtorentbyowner.com, a website that also contains a lot of information on the subject as well as details of – presumably – a similar book by Ms Karpinski entitled *Profit from your Vacation Home Dream - Ed.*

The Travel Society website

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You can renew your subscription on-line too!

Car Rental Woes

A Toronto couple, members of TTS, have written to us with the following news. As their claim against the car rental company is on-going, they requested that, at this stage, neither their names nor that of the rental company be made public. But they are anxious to share the news and we will keep you up-dated with the results – if any – of the complaint. Here's the story ...

A couple of TTS members recently ran into a problem in the UK when renting a car. They had prepaid for the car from a major international rental agency. On a Saturday morning they arrived at the rental office, located in a provincial town west of London, to find the office staffed by one man. He accepted their confirmed booking, but when they explained that their Royal Bank credit card covered the damage/loss insurance he refuted this and refused to rent the car without the company's insurance. The administration office to which he reported was closed for the weekend. After much discussion the couple had no choice but to sign for the insurance, which was more than double the rental fee, which they did on the understanding that this file would be reviewed by the district office.

When they returned the car they discovered the review had not taken place. Upon their return home to Canada, subsequent correspondence between the travel agent and the car rental company secured a 50% rebate of the insurance charge, for what the rental company called "the sake of goodwill". Negotiations are still ongoing concerning the remaining 50%. The charges were considerable: \$475.00 for the car rental and \$982 for the unwanted insurance, making a total of \$1,457 for a two-week rental. This was for a Ford Focus, not a limousine!

When the couple talked to the Royal Bank representative about this problem she assured them they were completely covered by their credit

card. She printed out all the details of the credit card agreement and coverage and suggested that when renting a car in the future this document always be carried with them. It spells out quite clearly what is covered, and this can be shown to any rental agency representative who challenges a verbal decline of insurance.

Gabrielle Roy

Thank you, *TTS Magazine*, for making the Gabrielle Roy House Museum one of your Winnipeg highlights last month. I'm a lover of small Canadian museums, literary figures and books, especially the works of Gabrielle Roy which, I have to admit, I can only read in English. Now you've persuaded me to move Winnipeg higher on my travel wish list!

However, the main purpose of dropping you this line is to point out something that other Canadians may not have noticed. Most days, most of us probably 'touch' a phrase written by Gabrielle Roy. The quotation is "Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" or "Nous connaîtrions-nous seulement un peu nous memes, sans les arts?" Any guesses? Well, it's printed on the reverse side of our twenty-dollar bill, along with the annotation "Gabrielle Roy (1909-1983)" You'll probably need your glasses, but take a look ... it's there!

*Audrey Barnes
Toronto, ON*

Hiking Holidays

Walking in the countryside gives one a very special feel for a country. Big cities have their own individual sights and sounds but it is in the historic little towns and villages, in the wineries and farmyards, the local pubs or bistros that one meets the "real" people. It's 12 years now since I found out about Comfortable Hiking Holidays, where the hiking may not always be comfortable but the accommodation certainly

is! Since then I've been to Malta, Crete, Madeira, the UK (Yorkshire and North Wales), Costa Rica, the Channel Islands (Guernsey, Jersey and Sark), all the Hawaiian Islands, Corfu, Newfoundland and, most recently, France. Can you tell I love islands? Yes I do, especially islands in the sun! I've loved every one and made friends for life with people I've met who share my interests: travelling, music, theatre etc.

Over 20 years ago Ron Baylis, having led hikes in different countries for many years, decided to turn his avocation into a business so that others could enjoy his passion as cheaply as possible while getting the most in value for their money. Then two years ago he sold the business to a young family: Maddalena Molino, her husband Robert Eschenasi, and her brother Davide Molino, who have continued in much the same fashion

Accommodation is in small-town three-star hotels, and walks are arranged for day, usually about 14-18 km. in length, with one day at leisure each week to relax by the pool or to go to any other places one might wish to visit in the vicinity. I should emphasize also that no-one need do all the walks as arranged. You might plan to visit another site in the area or just to spend more time in the town. Each evening the walk for the following day is described in some detail and anyone in reasonably good physical health can enjoy them all. The groups are usually kept to a maximum of 24, in some cases less. Obviously, at some times of the year there are a lot of older people travelling but in my experience there has always been a good mix of ages, from a 12-year old (unusual as children are not encouraged or catered to in any way, but allowed as she was travelling with her mother and her grandmother) up to a very vital 80-year old. For further information tel: 416 445 2628, e-mail: info@letshike.com, www.letshike.com

*Vivien Feirson
Toronto, ON*



The PostBus in the Verzasca Valley

EXPLORING SWITZERLAND

story and photos by Ann Wallace

I was invited! And I was thrilled! It was to be a very special summer for Switzerland. Their beloved PostBus network was celebrating its one hundredth anniversary and, as I specialize in writing for independent travellers, I was to be a member of the small Canadian delegation destined to join travel journalists from all over the world in celebrating this event. Yes, I sure was thrilled.

In order to fully appreciate Switzerland's superb public transportation system, which includes the 100-year-old PostBus network, delegates were invited to choose from a variety of destinations throughout Switzerland where they would meet in smaller groups and then explore their chosen destination by PostBus and on foot. After a couple of days, all participants would then take buses again and convene in

Interlaken for Switzerland's most famous celebration – the Unspunnen Festival. For me the destination within Switzerland was an easy choice. Many years ago I had lived in Geneva and from there had travelled east, west and north through this beautiful country. But I had never been to the south and I well remembered the glowing reports from others that have been published in this magazine. And, yes, a group was invited to Ticino. I filled out the forms as quickly as I could and was rewarded with my first choice!

As my following story is merely a sampling of what can be enjoyed once you are in possession of a Swiss Travel Pass, first let me give you some information about the pass itself. Everyone knows that Switzerland's scenery is spectacular, so letting someone else do the driving – someone experienced on those mountainous roads – is a good idea.

And it's probably accurate to say that the Swiss Travel System, which includes trains, buses, boats, cable cars and funiculars, is the best in the world. There are two main categories of pass: the Swiss Pass and the Swiss Flexi Pass. The former is ideal for those who like to keep 'on the go', as it offers unlimited usage for 4, 8, 15, 22 days or 1 month on trains, PostBuses and boats, including the transportation systems of 37 Swiss cities, and a 50% discount on cable cars and on those mountain-top trains not included in the pass system. Holders of this Pass can also enjoy 'free' admission to over 400 museums in Switzerland; such as the Swiss Open-Air Museum in Ballenberg (see below), the new Paul Klee Centre in Berm, romantic Chillon Castle on Lake Geneva and hundreds more.

The alternative arrangement is the Flexi Pass, which would be ideal for those who plan to pause in various locations during their travels, to rest or to hike or to rent a bike at one of the 80 train stations that offer this service, for with this pass you purchase a variety of days – 3, 4, 5, 6 or 8 within one month, not consecutive – on which you wish to travel. You merely activate your pass on the days you choose to move on, and if you wish to make minor excursions on your 'in-between' days you receive a 50% discount on those journeys too. Bicycles rented at one station may be left at another, and a limited number of bicycles can be carried on each PostBus too. There are also Family Cards whereby children travel free, discounts for youths up to 26 and discounts when two or more people travel together. The Pass also brings further discounts via the systems partners: local tours and some hotel groups. And for those who prefer a pre-arranged tour package with accommodation included, those are available too. Your pass comes with a map that shows you that all of Switzerland is yours to discover and the *Discover Switzerland by Train, Bus and Boat* booklet marks the especially scenic routes and gives excursion ideas. And you can add another country to your list of those visited by taking the train into the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein (about which there will be a story in next month's issue). All details about purchasing your pass given below.

A little history of the PostBus may also interest you. Today the PostBuses are a fleet of over 2,000 modern coach-style vehicles (or modern mini-buses on some quiet routes) but, of course, it wasn't always so. The service began in 1906 with three horse-drawn carriages and by 1913, at the peak of the horse-drawn carriage era, more than 2,500 animals were towing 2,231 carriages and 1,059 sleds through Switzerland. The service was originally designed merely to deliver the mail (or post) and when the service was motorized it met with lots of antagonism. Gradually, however, the service was accepted

as a good idea and people started to hitch rides. Routes were formed through the high passes which helped to increase tourism. Today the bright yellow coaches serve a route network of 10,363 km, about three times that of the Swiss Railways, and carry over 102 million passengers a year, from Switzerland's major cities to the smallest alpine villages. Drivers are specially trained for alpine roads in varying conditions, using the first three notes from Rossini's Overture to *William Tell* to announce their presence on blind corners. Three quarters of those passengers use the service regularly, travelling to work or school or to shop, while the remaining quarter includes locals and tourists using the service for excursions and leisure trips. While the PostBus obviously provides a daily service for locals, it is perhaps more well known outside Switzerland for its famous 'reservations needed' tourist routes. These include the Palm Express from St. Moritz via the Engadine lakes to Lugano; the Napoleon Route from Domodossola to Saas-Fee via the 2,006 metre-high Simplon Pass; the Julier Route Express from Chur to St. Moritz and several other spectacular routes. There's even the classic Four-Pass Tour which, in one day and without changing buses, takes travellers over the Grimsel, Nufenen, Gotthard and Susten passes with a lunch stop in Airolo.

The brochure we were given on our anniversary trip opens with the words: "For 100 years the yellow PostBus coaches have travelled through Switzerland, to the farthest corners of the deepest valleys and through some of the most breathtaking landscapes. For 100 years it has been bringing guests to their holiday destinations, transporting tired hikers back to their villages, commuters safely to workplaces and

pupils punctually to school and back. For 100 years the triple-tone horn has been heard in treacherous bends, and all this time it has never failed to excite children with its unique



above: View from Monte Bre

right: Lugano shore and Monte Bre



melodic ring. PostBus is a way of life and a cherished part of Swiss transportation history.”

Now that I hope I've persuaded you to explore Switzerland via their travel system, let me tell you how it all worked for me on my week-long visit. I arrived in Zurich late in August via a SWISS flight from Montreal that had been very pleasant: punctual of course, with nice food and gracious service. Zurich Airport was gleaming bright, my bag arrived quickly and before I knew it I was on the escalator and descending to the Zurich Airport rail station beneath, my Swiss Travel System pass in hand. Zurich Airport Station to Zurich Main Station is a ride of about ten minutes, with a further ten minutes' wait at Zurich Main before my onward train to Lugano departed. I was a little concerned I wouldn't have time in Zurich to find the right platform and train, but I needn't have worried. All departing trains were clearly listed in Zurich and at all the other stations I passed through on this trip. And once underway, approaching stations are clearly announced in German, French and English and also in Italian where appropriate.

The train journey from Zurich to Lugano takes just under three hours; time that passes quickly enjoying the scenery of farms, pastures, mountains and the famed Gotthard Pass before one draws into Lugano station and catches a glimpse of the sparkling lake.

My designated hotel – the Origgio Country Club – is situated about 15 minutes' drive north of Lugano, a trip that can easily be made by the regular PostBus, which stops right outside the hotel grounds. It's a pretty property, with indoor and outdoor swimming pools, gardens and views of the surrounding mountains. Every room has a patio-style balcony and there's a welcoming piano bar and good restaurant. And their buffet breakfast is substantial by European standards: cheese, cold meats, eggs, fresh breads and lots of fruit prepared in different ways. (I have some other accommodation recommendations for you at the end of this article, together with references back to previous editions where TTS members have given their own Ticino information.)

Over the next two days, using the PostBus, I and my small group explored Lugano and the surrounding countryside. The PostBuses are comfortable and very clean, with upholstered seats and unobstructed windows (but no washrooms, although comfort stops are made on long sections)

and it immediately becomes clear that this is an ideal way to explore Switzerland. It also soon became apparent that the Canton of Ticino is quite unlike any other region of Switzerland. In fact, sitting in a restaurant enjoying a platter of salamis followed by a creamy risotto with a jug of local wine, surrounded by animated people chatting in Italian, it was hard to believe I was in Switzerland at all!

It's easy to understand why Lugano is such a popular destination for tourists, though on my late summer visit it seemed to be bustling with locals rather than tourists. Here are good fashion stores, tempting restaurants, little shops full of vegetables or hanging salamis, ice cream parlours and lovely lakeside walks. Of course most tourists wish to take the funicular up to Monte Brè for its spectacular view of town and lake. Jump on a #2 bus marked 'Castagnola', which delivers you to the base station. If you feel energetic you can walk down via the well-marked trail. There's a

large Lugano tourist information centre lakeside where Riva Albertolli meets Palazzo Civico, near the cruise boats. You can't miss it.

My group had been presented with some excursion suggestions using the PostBus. A couple of energetic souls decided to do a strenuous day hike, but most of us chose to explore north to the Valle Verzasca on our first day and then in the opposite direction to the Valle Muggio on the second. Both trips can be undertaken using the PostBus, alighting at one

of the many stops for a hike, coffee or lunch. Speaking of hiking, this is also a popular way to explore Switzerland, nowhere more so than in Ticino, where summer lingers late, many of the mountains are flat-topped and the views are, surely, some of the finest in the world. Almost everywhere one looks in Switzerland one sees hikers, ranging from serious ones with walking sticks and large back-packs heading, perhaps, for mountain trails and huts, to folk just out for a lovely walk in beautiful scenery.

Our first out-of-town destination, north through the Valle Verzasca to the charming village of Sonogno, was a delight. The Ticino River flows for about 29 km through this spectacular valley of craggy peaks; it's both a famous drive and a popular hiking trail. The emerald river flows over smooth boulders and into clear pools, where it is possible to swim, although there are warnings that some are dangerous. We alight at the pretty Roman-style bridge called Ponte dei Salti for a gentle riverside hike ourselves.



A Lugano "salumeri"

Our group has been joined by a guide who tells that September, October and even November is usually fine in Ticino ... comfortable for hiking and good for photography as summer's humidity is over. And this region certainly is a photographer's dream, with its picture-perfect villages and wonderful scenery.

We reach Sonogno at the head of the valley in time for lunch at the well-know Grotto Efra (open April – October), just a short walk from the village centre. But we are so captivated by this charming village with its little laneways and flower-bedecked stone cottages (a style unique to the Ticino region) that it's surprising we reach the restaurant at all! But we do, to enjoy a lunch of fresh local trout and Swiss wine served in traditional ceramic dishes. It's all so delightful. There's a small museum in Sonogno – the Museum of the Verzasca Valley – which is well worth a visit. It reveals something of what life must have been like in this region in the 18th and 19th centuries, when it was isolated, the inhabitants were poor and life was harsh. Today the valley and its villages are charming and welcoming.

PostBuses run regularly through the Verzasca Valley between Lugano (and Locarno) and Sonogno, making this a perfect day trip for the active and not-so-active alike. And if you're a movie fan, or wish to try your hand at bungee jumping as James Bond did here in *Goldeneye*, you'll find this activity available if you alight at the Verzasca Dam.

Our bus excursion next day took us south to the Muggio Valley, where we noticed the scenery is softer than the craggy peaks of the previous day. Again we alighted for a hike, passing through farmlands, chestnut forests and the tiny village of Cabbio, which is home to an interesting open-air village museum: Museo Etnografico della Valle di Muggio ... a lovely spot for a walk, but unfortunately the orientation centre did not have information in English, although it is promised for the future. However, it is clear to all visitors that this village exhibits a lost way of life and if you go you might like to ask if curator Stephen Smith is close by ... Stephen is a Calgarian and now makes the Muggio Valley his home. He loves to show Canadians around!

It was near Cabbio, close to a farm but with no restaurant in sight, that we came across a simple table covered with a prettily embroidered cloth whereon was set some bot-

tlers of wine, water and some disposable 'glasses' with good wishes for a pleasant hike and a request for a small donation. How charming is that? On the subject of food, taverns in Ticino are called *grottoes*; in the past they were indeed 'caves' where locals could gather in most weathers to share some wine and cheese and roast the local chestnuts. Today these restaurants may be popular and lively establishments in the towns or merely a garden attached to a farm in hide-away places where the family members serve the local specialities. These local offerings are wonderful: salami and mortadella, local hard and soft cheeses, soups and risottos, stews with polenta, local peaches marinated in wine and, more often than not, the locally grown Merlot to accompany it all.

Two and half days is nowhere near enough time to explore this justly famous region of Switzerland, but that is the lot of a travel writer! Too soon our group was gathering for our bus trip through the Gotthard and Susten Passes and via Brienz and Ballenberg to Interlaken in central Switzerland. It was to be a full day!

We climbed through scenery fit to illustrate a jig-saw puzzle or a box of Swiss chocolates, passing from the warm valleys, where flower-bedecked chalets look like those Swiss music boxes, into dazzling snow and glaciers and on towards the summit of the dramatic St. Gotthard Pass. This pass is open in summer and fall only, usually June until October; at other times one must make the passage through the tunnel. (In fact the PostBuses cross all of Switzerland's five major alpine passes, usually from late June until the end of September. Once the snow starts to fall again they use the tunnels.) We took a coffee break in the restaurant here before spending all-too-short an hour in the Museo Nazionale del San Gottardo, learning of the struggle to build this pass and of its importance for Swizerland and for Europe. With signage in four languages, the museum tells the story of the St. Gotthard Pass with dioramas, models, weapons, uniforms, documents, brilliant works of art and ancient vehicles. Not only is a passage over the Pass an exciting experience, but a visit to this outstanding museum is also highly recommended.

Brienz is another lovely lakeside town with a regular boat service to Interlaken and over the lake to the château-



style, superbly-situated Grandhotel Giessbach. If the grand, historic hotels of Europe are your style you won't be disappointed there, and to sit and sip a cocktail on the terrace with its beautiful view is a moment to cherish.

Nearby Ballenberg is home to one of Switzerland's finest attractions: the Ballenberg Open-Air Museum. Ballenberg really is a 'must-see' if you are in that region of Switzerland. As its name tells, it is an open-air museum consisting of over 100 original buildings collected from all over the country. Together with 250 animals, historical gardens and pastures they reveal Swiss rural life in bygone days. Longing for that photo of a Swiss cow complete with bell and a mountainous back drop, or hoping to see those fellows wearing their flower-embroidered vests and playing their long alphorns? If so, Ballenberg is for you. You could spend a full day or more here, enjoying one of their three traditional restaurants in between your discoveries, or bring a picnic. Unfortunately we didn't have a full day; we arrived late in the afternoon and this was to be the location where all the groups of delegates converged from their various travels. We did have time to look in some of the buildings and to take photos before we gathered for welcoming speeches, an outdoor dinner and a presentation by PostBus officials which included the entry of an old horse-drawn PostBus. 'Twas a grand evening. Once the festivities were over each group found their designated bus and on we travelled to Interlaken where a welcoming inn and bed awaited us.

It is claimed that Interlaken, in the heart of the Bernese Oberland, became the world's first tourist destination when it was 'discovered' by the British well over a hundred years ago. Today it is a bustling tourist town with a wide variety of hotels, international shops and transportation in all directions, including the famous train trips to those renowned mountains: the Eiger, Munch and Jungfrau. In Interlaken I stayed at the old Hotel Interlaken, located in the quiet end of town with pretty views of parkland and church and also within walking distance of the train station. Today this painted-pink property is part of the Best Western chain, but its history dates back to the 14th century. In more recent times it has welcomed Lord Byron and Felix Mendelssohn. And when in Interlaken, do pop into the very 'ritzy' Victoria Hotel (named for that British queen) to admire the architecture and, perhaps, enjoy a drink ... again there's a terrace with a wonderful view.

Now a paragraph on Interlaken's two-day Unspunnen

Festival, which for centuries has celebrated Swiss folklore and traditions. Since I and my international travel writing colleagues were honoured guests, I feel it is my duty to spread news of this two-day event. But I must point out that this festival only takes place approximately every twelve years. I could sit on the story for eleven years, but ... well ... I'm no longer young and that may not be a good idea! So ... if you're interested in all things Swiss: traditional costumes, Swiss folk music, traditional dancing, Alpine wrestling, stone throwing, alphorn playing, yodelling, flag tossing and so on, plan to be in Interlaken in ... well ... I'm not quite sure. The last festival was scheduled for 2005, but floods in Switzerland caused it to be cancelled in that year and thus it was held in 2006. Anyway, there I was in

Interlaken on a sunny September morn as over 5,000 Swiss from all over their country gathered to show off about 700 different regional costumes, to eat raclette and other specialities, to engage in traditional sports, to drink beer on a terrace, to dance in the streets, to wave flags and just to celebrate their Swiss-ness while the towering Jungfrau mountain glistened in the distance as a backdrop. No need to say it was a quintessentially Swiss day. So ... will the next festival be held in 2017 or 2018? I asked around but it appears it hasn't yet been decided.

But please don't wait for twelve years to visit Switzerland. The three-language little country is an enigma, both hard to define and yet full of clichéd images: glistening mountains, fertile valleys, cows with bells, farmers dressed in embroidered vests with filigree

buttons, flower bedecked chalets and sunflowers in almost every window, accurate clocks and chocolate chocolate chocolate. It's also safe and efficient and has been welcoming travellers for so long with a wide variety of accommodation. Above all, it's one of the most beautiful countries in the world. *And* it's so easy to travel around *everywhere*. With your public transportation pass you can even reach another country to add to your list: the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein. I'll be telling you all about that trip in our next issue.

Some details ...

* For Canadians, Swiss Travel System pass information and purchases can be obtained via your travel agent or www.raileurope.ca or by calling 1 800 361 7245. Other useful websites are www.swisstravelsystem.ch. To help you plan your itinerary, timetable information is available at



Our PostBus approaches the top of the St. Gotthard Pass

www.rail.ch. Most cities are connected by train at least every half an hour, and for PostBus travellers timetables are also given on every bus stop. The PostBus site is www.PostBus.ch. For information on those museums included in your pass visit www.museumspass.ch and for potential cyclists visit www.rail.ch/bicycle. Transportation vehicles are all non-smoking and the trains offer a variety of food services. Trains offer 1st and 2nd class carriages, both clean (of course) and comfortable; 1st is just a little more spacious and with fewer passengers.

* Country code for Switzerland is 011 41

Some accommodation suggestions:

* Hotel **Origlio Country Club**, Origlio (near Lugano), tel: 91 945 4646, fax: 91 945 1031, e-mail: info@hoteloriglio.ch, www.hoteloriglio.ch, rates from CHF138 (CHF1 = C\$0.96).

* **Villa Carona**, a small family hotel in the village of Carona, about 10 minutes from Lugano in the direction of Mont Salvatore. Tel: 91 649 7055, www.villacarona.ch, rates from CHF195.

* **Continental Parkhotel**, right next to the Lugano railway station above the town. A well-known property with a large garden, swimming pool, popular restaurant and lovely views. Tel: 91 966 1112. www.continentalparkhotel.com Rates from CHF180.

* **Hotel Stella Garnie**, a small villa-style property also close to Lugano's station. Tel: 91 966 3370, www.hotel-stella.ch. Prices from CHF150.

* In Brienz: the **Grandhotel Giessbach**, tel: 33 952 2525, www.giessbach.ch Rates from CHF170.

* **Hotel Interlaken**, tel: 33 826 6868, www.interlakenhotel.ch. Rates from CHF135, with packages often featured on the website.

(Note: hotel rates in Switzerland are often reduced for nights following the first night's stay.)

* It's not hard to find **restaurants** anywhere in Switzerland, but they seem especially prolific in Ticino as this whole region is famous for its food. If you should wish for a special treat or have an occasion to celebrate while in Lugano, the lakeside **Arté Restaurant**, with its wonderful views from lofty French windows, is sure to be memorable. It's the kind of restaurant you see in the movies! Reservations at (091) 973 4800, closed Sundays and Mondays.

* **The Open-Air Museum at Ballenberg** is open from mid April to the end of October. If you do not have a Swiss Travel Pass admission costs CHF18 (about C\$17). Their website is www.ballenberg.ch.

* Some **tourist websites** for the regions mentioned above: www.ticino-tourism.ch, www.lugano.ch, www.verzasca-tourism.ch. The Ticino site lists many types of accommodation, including homes to rent in the region. The main Swiss website is www.MySwitzerland.com. The **Swiss Tourist Office** also produces some excellent and attractive brochures to help you plan your travel itinerary. Themed routes include **Art & Architecture, Gastronomy & Wine** and **Luxury & Design**. There are also brochures for **Swiss Cities, Mountains, Snowtime** and **Wellbeing**. All these brochures can be ordered via the above website. The Tourist Office also has a fold-out brochure called **Affordable Hotels**. Complete with a clearly keyed map, this brochure lists 120 hotels, in three price categories: US\$38, \$49 and \$60 pp., dbl., en suite, including breakfast, that would be a great aid in your explorations of Switzerland at a reasonable cost. The brochure gives a toll-free number that travellers can use when in that country to make reservations or, if you have a laptop with you as you travel, you can book on line at www.MySwitzerland.com/affordable. One of the advantages of budget travel in Switzerland is knowing that, though your room may be rustic, it will be spotlessly clean.


* **SWISS International Air Lines** reservations can be made through your agent or at www.swiss.com



Two Swiss gentlemen play alphorns at Ballenberg

SWISS is a member of the Star Alliance.

* Switzerland is a land for **walking and hiking**. It has about 3,500 individual marked trails with a combined length of well over 50,000 km and hikers of all ages are seen at every train station and bus stop. If hiking is a serious interest of yours, you may like to invest in a copy of Lonely Planet's **Walking in Switzerland** guide (348 pages, C\$18.95). This detailed book not only gives description of Swiss walks and hikes – from easy to the long 'stay in an alpine hut' variety – but also describes train journeys, cog railways and cable car routes and gives PostBus 'last times' It also has accommodation suggestions, especially of the budget variety, and contacts for more detailed maps of specific regions. A fascinating book. And, of course, you will easily find more general guidebooks to Switzerland in your favourite series.

* Past articles in *TravelScoop/The Travel Society Magazine* on Ticino can be found in the September 2000 and April 2004 editions. 

Wandering through Italy with our Tent!

story and photos by Peter Brooke

When we were arranging our last summer trip to the UK to visit our numerous relatives, my brother, who currently lives in Holland, suggested coming with him to explore Northern Italy, ending in Rome. So from home we booked EasyJet flights from the UK (Gatwick) to Bonn and return from Rome to Gatwick for C\$165 each, which seemed very reasonable. His suggestion was we camp and, except for one very

wet day when we resorted to a *zimmer* (a B&B) in Germany on the way south, and two thunderstorms, the camping worked out well. But if camping isn't 'your thing' this trip could easily be done in a rental car using B&B's or hotels. It's a great itinerary. Travelling in late August and early September we had mostly nice, warm to hot weather. And as the school holidays were over there was lots of space in campsites, so I imagine the same would apply to hotels and B&B's.

We saw so many beautiful views, ancient towns and impressive old buildings that I'm only going to mention what really sticks in my mind, but be assured, everywhere we went was very worthwhile, and whether your interest is history, art, food or photography I think you will be impressed. We certainly were. This area seems to have had high points during the Roman era and in the 13th century and many of the best sites date from those times.

In Italy our first base was the huge campsite (700 sites)



Prato Del Valli, Padua

at Cisano, on Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake, an easy drive to the lakeside towns of Sirmione, Salo, and Desenzano and a bit longer drive to Verona. Sirmione, built on land jutting out into Lake Garda has a 13th century castle with intact drawbridge. There were still lots of tourists here, but it is a wonderfully quaint town to wander through, with its narrow streets, ancient houses, huge bougainvilleas in bloom and views across

the lake. Desanzano and Salo are both pretty lakefront towns with nice wandering streets for pedestrians only and pleasant waterfront promenades.

An easy drive took us to Verona where we enjoyed an excellent pizza on the Plaza Dei Signori. This plaza is a history lesson all by itself, with an ancient column, towers and a fountain all ringed by various styles of old *palazzo*'s (which seems to be a term applied to many large old buildings, most of which have had varied uses through the centuries). A walk along the river Adige leads to the Castelvecchio (1354) with an Art Museum of Veronese art. The castle guards the entrance to the Pont Scaligero, a medieval brick bridge with crenellated walls and viewing platforms at the top of narrow steps – very photogenic. An adjacent small riverfront park has an intact Roman gateway and the tracks left by ancient wagons in its paving slabs are several inches deep. Verona also has one of the largest intact Roman Amphitheatres, under renovation during our

visit, with the work cleverly covered by tarps painted to match the structure, thus retaining some of the visual appeal of the arches.

We moved on to Montegrotto Terme, our base for Padua and Venice, and found a very nice campsite with few campers, a pool and restaurant. Montegrotto was notable for apparently not wanting visitors to leave. The very clear directional signs to our next destination invariably led to dead ends! After we had backed up several times and tried different approaches, my brother, our driver that day, decided to go the opposite direction to that recommended by the signs and we got out first try! This was the only place we had any serious navigational difficulties.

Padua (Padova) was easy to park in and not so touristy. The main square with the Prato Del Valli was captivating. This circular lake, more of a canal, lined with statues and crossed by white bridges with pastel houses as a backdrop seemed quintessentially Italian to me. Padova also has huge brick churches looking much newer than their actual dates in the 13th century. Some have renowned frescoes. We tend to explore by wandering around and found many interesting buildings and views in Padova. Our wandering is called "Walking About" in the *Michelin Green Guide* which we always carry when exploring.

Venice was easy to access. We drove across the causeway and parked in the huge (and hugely expensive) municipal parkade for - €1 (€ = C\$1.53) from where it was only a short walk to the water buses. Our 24 hour water-bus passes were €10 each. As Venice is so well known and there is so much information available on it, I won't go into details. But I will just say that the first-class map and information package we bought from Tourist Information in the parkade was a bargain at €2.50 and indispensable while exploring. If you haven't been to Venice, you should go. Even though it is very touristy it's still wonderful and, of course, unique. It has a reputation as expensive, but it isn't if you go as a day visitor and buy a water-bus pass. Reasonably-priced meals are available from many of the cafés. We, in fact, bought sandwiches and ate them on the steps overlooking Piazza San Marco, along with lots of visitors and pigeons.

We then moved onto the hilly areas of central Italy and Umbria. This was as we had imagined: ancient hill towns,

vineyards, unfamiliar trees and hazy views across blue hills. We stopped and camped first at Rimini on the east coast, then moved on as we explored the area and gradually headed for Rome.

The centre of Urbino is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and there is much to see here. Parking was easy, in a big parking lot at the base of the town. An arched spiral walkway leads uphill to the Ducal Palace, an unmistakable destination as it towers over the lower town. Urbino has an excellent museum/gallery and the huge Palace looks most imposing when viewed from the grassy park at the top of the town – a steep climb up narrow streets.

Most of the places we visited had a tourist office of some sort and many had very well-produced coloured guides to their area, sometimes free, sometimes a nominal charge. When we were especially interested in the town we would purchase a more complete guidebook. As an example, the guide to Urbino has 127 pages with hundreds of coloured

pictures, for €6. These local guides, combined with the *Michelin Green Guide – Italy*, was all we needed.

Especially memorable was Gubio, which climbs a hillside and overlooks a small Roman Amphitheatre in the valley below. Its medieval walls and many ancient buildings still exist and there are free elevators to reach the higher parts of town. Enjoying our daily coffee and then lunch in a small café over-



Fancy Italian pastries

looking the Palazzo Dei Consoli and the tiled roofs of the houses, back-dropped by the hills of Umbria, we felt a long way from our home in Canada !

Ah yes, the coffee. It was mostly excellent and we started a new tradition: a morning coffee chased down with an equally excellent *gelato*. Also appealing are the fancy pastries, often made in exotic shapes such as ladybugs or hedgehogs, though with exotic prices to match.

There is a pleasant treed park at the bottom of Gubio, near the parking area and overlooking a building with columns and open sides on its second floor, which looks like a market. This was apparently built by the local wool merchants for stretching cloth. The story says that the addition to the old ground floor was proposed by the wool guild in the 15th century and after "endless controversies" it was eventually built in the 17th century. And I thought the approval for new developments was slow in B.C., but never

two centuries!

Farther south, Perugia was one of the city states ruled by the Etruscans in the 7th to 8th centuries and one gateway in the city walls shows off the massive stone blocks used by the Etruscans in their walls. Adjacent to the gate is the large and attractive 18th century Palazzo Gallenga. The Piazza 4 November is much more imposing than most we saw in the hill towns, with its 13th century 'grand' fountain and towering trees surrounded by elegant palaces and handsome government buildings. The wide street heading away from this Piazza has many cafés and came alive with locals in the early evening, strolling and chatting. Here we bought one of the local eight-inch high meringues, coated with chocolate. Unfortunately they look better than they taste, which is mostly just like sugar and not like an eight-inch chocolate bar!

Near Assisi we stayed at Bastia. Assisi is a well-known destination and the huge 13th century Basilica is spectacular when viewed from the valley. This is another good town for exploring on foot. We particularly liked the fountain in the Piazza Del Comune, and if you get just the right angle your photo of it can include the ancient columns of the 1st century Roman Temple of Minerva, later converted to a church. Two major churches, San Rufino and Santa Chiara, have lovely rose windows. Nearby, the Convent of San Damiano, a pretty Franciscan monastery, gives an impression of austerity combined with elegant design and has an appealing statue of St. Francis feeding birds in the garden.

The area around Assisi we found very interesting and even though the Michelin guide rates places by number of stars, sometimes we liked lower rated towns like Spello, another hill town with excellent views across the Umbrian hills. We visited it twice, as much for pleasure of wandering through the narrow streets and enjoying the views as for the coffee we got at the Café Cavour on the main square. Also close to Assisi, Brevagna has an elegant entrance (with easy parking) across a bridge to a square with large trees. This leads to the Piazza Silvestri that looked to us as if unchanged since medieval times. In the low afternoon sun the paving slabs gleamed and except for one café all the Piazza had was a small fountain, and of course a couple of medieval churches. This was perhaps the most ancient looking area we visited, and it was easy to imagine it in the 13th century.

We ended up in Rome, camping near the beach at Lido Di Ostia. Leaving our car behind, we took a short bus ride

which delivered us to a metro station and then on to the Roman Coliseum in the centre of town. Our transportation day passes were only €2 each. Like Venice, there is much written about Rome so I won't be very detailed, but will say it is packed with wonderful ancient buildings and ruins and is absolutely fascinating. Even the huge modern Vittoriano monument is spectacular. We walked from the Coliseum through the ruins of the Forum (the centre of ancient Rome), past the beautifully-preserved Pantheon (27 B.C.), the Trevi Fountain and eventually to the Spanish steps. At the Trevi we were caught in a huge thunderstorm and it was amazing how quickly the tourists dispersed and how quickly the umbrella salesmen appeared! By the time we reached the Spanish Steps it had stopped raining but the subway station was closed – flooded apparently – so we wandered on to S.

Maria Maggiore, certainly one of the loveliest interiors I have seen in a large church and they don't mind photography. Then it was back to the Metro, which has more graffiti than original paint, and thence to our campsite.

The flight back from Rome to Gatwick went smoothly – EasyJet seems much like a bus company in that it is basic but well organized, with good aircraft and on our two flights we had lots of legroom.

There is so much to see and enjoy in Italy that we didn't try to pack in too much. We prefer to explore in a leisurely way even when the places we visit don't have four stars! This approach works very well in Italy, missing a major attraction can easily be offset by sitting in a café on an ancient Piazza and savouring the moment.

Regarding the camping, we were able to take lightweight camping

gear with us on EasyJet. The campsites were mostly very nice with good facilities, and though expensive at C\$45 - \$65 per night for four people, two tents and the car (each "item" often being subject to its own charge) it's far cheaper than staying in hotels or B&Bs. Sometimes there are assigned sites but often you can set up wherever you want. We always found camping spots convenient to the areas we wanted to explore. Some of the campgrounds are huge, with thousands of spaces, but rarely crowded ... in late August and early September we had many places almost to ourselves; the summer crowds seem to leave after the middle of Aug. Many Italian campsites also rent cabins. This mode of travel may not be for everyone, but we four certainly had a wonderful vacation. 🏕️

Peter Brooke, who lives in BC, has written for TTS several times in the past.



Piazza Del Comune, Assisi

FROM ROME TO VENICE ... WHAT A DRIVE!

by Mary Ann Polacek

We felt so special! Our hotel in Rome had sent a private car to the airport for us. This property turned out to be a hidden jewel! Hotel Mozart is located on Via de Greci, a narrow cobblestone alley. La Luna d'Oro is their lovely restaurant with authentic Italian food where we paid €12 for dinner for two with wine and cappuccino. There's also a roof garden for relaxation and drinks.

As all visitors to Rome do, we visited the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps. We also attended a concert at St. Paul's Anglican Church and caught *La Traviata* at All Saints' Church.

After three days in the Eternal City, we picked up our rental car and drove south to Sorrento, where we parked in the Marina Piccola secure parking garage and took the hydrofoil to the Isle of Capri (€15 each). What beautiful sights surrounded us on this sunny day in May with its 31°C temperature. We had reservations at Hotel La Minerva. Our room did cost €195, but I don't have the words to describe our beautiful 'superior' accommodation. What a treat! It was huge with a sitting area, a terrace with loungers and a table where breakfast was served overlooking the sea.

We set out to explore Monte Tiberio, reached only on foot. There lie the ruins of Villa Jovis, the summer house of Roman Emperor Tiberius. From the 1000 ft. cliff there is an

unforgettable view that stretches from Ischia to Sorrento, Naples and the Li Galli Islands. Sadly the view would have been the last thing seen by some of cruel Tiberius' slaves, as it is said he used to throw these unfortunate people down from this cliff to the sea. There are several little stores nearby for cold drinks and snacks and also an excellent store called Ricci Felice that packed with good bargains. No, not souvenirs, but things such as linen clothing.

From there we walked past the Bilisto Hotel on a very steep path to the wonderful Natural Arch. It's one of the nicest walks on the island. We stopped for lunch at the famous Le Grotelle restaurant where, on a beautiful terrace overlooking the Gulf of Salerno, you can taste the simple traditional food of the island with homemade wine.

Anacapri can be reached by bus from Capri in about 20 minutes. Catch it on the main square in Capri and alight at the Piazza Vittoria in Anacapri. From there you can take the Monte Solero chairlift that lifts you high above vineyards and lush gardens. The views are spectacular. We decided to hike down and were glad we'd packed a little picnic of panini and fruit. While in Anacapri take the time to visit the Blue Grotto, where sailors row you through the caves while singing Italian classics. It's all designed for tourists, of course, but the atmosphere inside the cave is really magical.

'Spectacular' and 'fantastic' are the only words I can

think of to describe the Amalfi Coast with its villas and lush gardens and splendid view of the crags in the Sea of Capri. We drove on to see the ruins at Pompei. They are extensive (Ancient Pompei covered 160 acres) but the admission price of €10 includes a detailed map which is easy to follow.

Then we headed north again, through the Apennines Mountains to Subiaco, 33 miles northeast of Rome. This is another beautiful part of the country, with many small villages seemingly clinging to cliffs. We spent a night at a monastery ... the Foresteria del Monastero. From there we visited the Monastery of Santa Scolastic and then hiked for about one kilometre through the woods to the 6th century Monastery San Benedetto. This fabled place is built right into the sides of high cliffs and is well worth a visit. Admission is free and there's a one-hour tour.

On our way to the medieval town of Trevi we stopped at an amazing restaurant called La Spiaggia, located in an old mill on Via Tiburtina at km 51,000. In Trevi, Umbria, we stayed at the antique-filled Hotel Trevi which is situated on the slopes of a steep hill where we paid €80 for a large room and breakfast. Trevi is a lovely, undiscovered place with a maze of winding streets and blind alleys and olive

counter of Consorzio Motocrafti Venesia ... the place to book a water taxi to transfer us to our hotel. The water taxi was a sleek, enclosed motorboat and it brought us to the dock very near to our hotel. This property – Hotel Al Vagon – was located on one of the side canals between the Rialto Bridge and Ca'd'Oro Museum in the heart of the historical centre. It stands in a small square – Campellelo R. Selvatico – from where St. Mark's Square can easily be reached. We paid €103 for a superior double room, no breakfast, but our room had a balcony overlooking a canal with gondolas gliding by. It was superb! Request room #2 if possible!

We filled our days in Venice. We took the ferry to the island of Murano and enjoyed dinner at a restaurant on Campo San Stefano. One evening we took a ride on the Grand Canal on a *vaporetto*. On another day we took a tour of the Grand Canal, plus Guidecca and San Giorgio, the two small islands in the bay across from San Marco Square. It was peaceful there, away from the crowds. Again taking the *vaporetto* we attended a magical *Musica in Maschera* ballet/opera concert in the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista Church (€30 pp) which was superb. A 24-hour, jump-on, jump-off-anywhere, *vaporetto* ticket costs €12.

On another day we took a tour of the Grand Canal, plus Guidecca and San Giorgio,
the two small islands in the bay across from San Marco Square.
It was peaceful there, away from the crowds.

groves abundant on the surrounding hills. We also drove to Assisi to visit the 13th century Basilica di San Francesco, one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the Christian world.

This whole trip had started for my daughter and me at our local LCBO! There we had picked up a leaflet on Castello Vicchiomaggio. If you saw this brochure you'd want to go there too! It was worth the wait and we agreed a stay at this Tuscan castle offers a rare experience. It's a wine estate rather than a hotel and we were given a huge suite for €108. Each day they supply you with everything you need for making your own breakfast, plus a huge fruit basket and three bottles of fine wine. Each day of our stay there we toured the countryside along back roads and also spent a day in Florence.

In Pontremoli, in the heart of historical Lunigiana, we found the beautiful Golf Hotel where we were fortunate to get the last suite for €86, which included breakfast. This is a region rich in castles, medieval villages and enchanting valleys where nature is unspoiled. Here there's art, culture, traditions, fishing, trekking and horseback riding.

From here our hotel manager booked a farm stay for us in the Gargan B&B, a country manor in Levada di Piombino Dese, Padova, a perfect and quiet place 20 km from Venice, which was our final destination.

We drove to Venice airport to drop off our car and picked up the free luggage carts for the walk to the airport

All too soon ... time to go home! The same water taxi picked us up at our hotel and we were off! We had been away three weeks, travelling the byways at a leisurely pace. It is impossible to pick a favourite spot, they were all fantastic and the people were so friendly.

Here are some websites to help you plan a similar trip. All have English sections and photos that illustrate well what's in store for you if you follow in our footsteps!

Hotel Mozart, Rome: www.hotelmozart.com

Hotel La Minerva, Capri: www.laminervacapri.com

Foresteria del Monastero, Subiaco: www.benedettini-subiaco.it

Castello di Vicchiomaggio, Greve: www.vicchiomaggio.it

Golf Hotel, Pontremoli: www.golfhotel.it

Gargan B&B, Levada di Piombino Dese: www.gargan.it

Hotel Al Vagon, Venice: www.hotelalvagon.com

Musica in Maschera: www.musicainmaschera.it or enter *Musica in Maschera* in your search engine for many other sites.

The Italian Government Tourist Office in Toronto: tel. 416 925 4882, www.italiantourism.com 

Mary Ann Polacek is a long-time TTS member who lives in Chatham, Ontario. She tells us that TTS magazine "always inspires me to keep on the move"!

Stopping in Alba, Bologna and Vicenza

by Patricia Roman

Inspired by items in this magazine (“The Road Less Travelled in Italy”, Feb/March 2004 and “More Accolades for Piemonte”, January 2005), we planned a three-week driving trip across northern Italy in May 2006, and would like to recommend three special places to stay along the route from Turin to Venice. We flew SWISS from Montreal to Milan where we rented our car, dropping it in Venice for the flight home, with one-hour efficient connections through Zurich in both directions.

Our first recommendation is Villa la Favorita on a hillside above Alba, a city interesting in itself and central for exploring the beautiful area south of Turin. This welcoming *agriturismo* B&B is special for its atmosphere; it’s an historic country house decorated with great flair and taste, offering four en-suite bedrooms plus several sitting and dining areas, both indoors and out. There’s even a large hot tub on a terrace overlooking the Villa’s vineyards and the city below. It’s special also for its bountiful breakfasts, each day featuring local specialties, always delicious and beautifully presented. But it’s most special for its owner Roberta, who delights in sharing her extensive knowledge and library to help her guests plan days spent tasting wines and grappa, dining superbly always, visiting hilltop castles and ancient churches, all the while negotiating the scenic roads that criss-cross this Barolo and Barbaresco countryside. Roberta made our days! Enjoy her website at www.villalafavorita.it.

After several days in Alba, we continued to Bologna, a city not visited as often as it deserves. It’s full of elegant shops, amazing foods, historic churches, Europe’s oldest university, and mile upon mile of arcaded streets and squares. Our hotel was the Porta San Mamolo, tucked away on a tiny street just inside the road that circles the old city and within walking distance of its sights. A conservatory in the courtyard garden is where an ample breakfast is served, while a neighbourhood restaurant a few doors down the street – Vincolo del Falcone – is convenient for supper. Do, however, try to book a meal at Da Cesari, 8 Via de Carbonesi, for a treat! The hotel’s website is www.hotel-portasanmamolo.it.

After visiting Verona, we stopped in Vicenza (a UNESCO town) at a hotel that was quiet, convenient and a

real bargain at €69 a night. Albergo San Raffaele is high on Monte Barico, a tourist site in itself for its sanctuary and a viewing terrace with a busy restaurant, Antica Biasio. From there you can walk to Villa Valmarana “Al Nani” (don’t miss its Tiepolo frescos!), Palladio’s most famous villa the Rotunda, and downhill under an elegant arcade to the centre of Vicenza, about 1.5 km away. At the hotel there’s a breakfast room, a coffee and drinks bar, a pretty garden, free parking and clean, spartan, air-conditioned rooms with en suite bathrooms. There’s no website, but our e-mail to info@albergosanraffaele.it was answered with an informative brochure by mail. Be sure to visit the amazing Teatro Olimpico (1580-1585) as you stroll Palladio’s streets.

*Patricia and Ted Roman are TTS members
who live in Westmount, PQ*

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!

ann@thetravelsociety.com

or

**218 - 1033 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5S 3A5**

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.

GREEN TRAVEL and SOME NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

by Ann Wallace

Environmental concerns are at the forefront of our news these days and that includes news about travel, especially by air. Airline and travel companies are not ignoring the facts (nor, presumably, the adverse publicity) and many are making suggestions and introducing initiatives in an effort to balance our desire to travel with damage to the environment. These include recommending we take, if possible, longer trips and accepting surcharges for such initiatives as planting trees.

The European Union is going farther. In the next few days the European Commission, the executive body of the EU, is expected to bring out a proposal to include aviation in its emissions trading scheme in an effort to combat global warming. (At present the scheme applies only to ground-based industries such as factories and electricity generating plants.) Each member nation of the EU is allocated a cap on total carbon emissions and companies in turn are allotted quotas. Any company that comes below its quota may sell their unused allowances through a carbon emissions broker, thus providing commercial incentives for companies to cut their emissions.

In Britain, people can also be a part of a similar initiative designed specifically for individuals. A personal carbon offset facility has been devised by an organization called Climate Care whereby passengers use an online calculator on the web site, www.climatecare.org, to determine their share of the amount of carbon dioxide emitted during their flight. They can then convert that to a cash amount that is paid into schemes that combat global warming, such as planting trees or providing low-energy means of heating and lighting. I investigated this scheme and discovered that a return flight Toronto/Heathrow (London) creates 1.58 tonnes of CO₂ per passenger. In the personal emissions trading scheme this would cost the traveller £11.85 (approx. C\$26.75).

Most of the travels in this issue (apart from the flights, of course) have been reasonably environmentally friendly. Peter Brooke and his party camped and were four in a car as they travelled through Italy. My explorations of Switzerland were undertaken entirely by public transportation that, being well used in that country (and, in fact, in most European countries), moves the maximum amount of people in the most efficient way. This led me to think about train travel in Canada and whether the environment was a priority at VIA Rail, so I arranged to meet Catherine Kaloutsky, VIA's Senior Officer of Public Affairs. Here's what I learned.


Yes indeed, VIA Rail Canada takes seriously its mandate to provide environmentally responsible service throughout its 12,500 km network. Although transportation is generally recognized as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with about 50% of GHG emis-

sions in Canada coming from cars, passenger rail transportation is a low contributor, accounting for only 0.03% of Canadian GHG emissions. Rail emissions per passenger are less than 20% that of aircraft and less than half of automobile emissions, and if there is demand additional cars can be added to a passenger train with minimal impact on emissions.

Since 1990, VIA has succeeded in reducing fuel consumption by 25% per passenger kilometer, which reduced GHG emissions by the corporation by 13%. The fuel efficiency improvements at VIA started with modernizing the company's transcontinental equipment in the 1990's and continued with the purchase of 21 cleaner-running locomotives in 2001. Efforts continue, I was told, with a prototype for rebuilding the engines of older locomotives to meet the highest environmental standards. VIA is also converting electrical systems in older LRC cars to the more efficient and long-lasting LED lighting where possible, installing new high-efficiency motors to operate doors and other systems and new microprocessor controls for heating and cooling systems.

But running the trains, Catherine reminded me, takes more than fuel consumption, and she went on to describe the company's "reduce, reuse and recycle" strategies. They have won awards for their linen recovery and recycling programme whereby older uniforms and linens are donated to charitable organizations for reuse; annual reports and timetables are printed on environmentally friendly paper; on-board products – napkins, bathroom and facial tissues – have been changed from 100% virgin paper to 100% recycled paper; new, refillable coffee mugs are sold on board commuter trains and more.

VIA is also proud of its eleven 'Green Teams', volunteer-led groups of employees, located from coast to coast who, in 2005, launched over 40 programmes and initiatives to meet customers' needs in an environmentally sustainable and responsible manner. Their target of 45 such programmes in 2006 has already been surpassed. These 'Green Teams' co-ordinate VIA's participation in such initiatives as Car Free Days, Earth Day celebrations and also invite employees to adopt measures that reduce emissions generated by personal activities.

Seems that, if we possibly can, deciding to travel by train is a good environmental decision. Perhaps 2007 will be the year more of us jump on the rails to Vancouver or Halifax or the many great destinations in between. Summing up, Catherine asked if I would quote Paul Côté, President and CEO on this issue: "We need to act responsibly today by seizing business opportunities that will help shape a better future for our children." Amen. 

- **Air Canada's** direct **Edmonton-London Heathrow** flights are now operating three times weekly on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, increasing to daily service starting 1 April, 2007. The flight departs Edmonton at 6:35 p.m. (or 8:25 on Tuesdays), arriving Heathrow at 10:10 a.m. the next day. Return flights leave Heathrow at 12:35 a.m., arriving Edmonton at 2:45 p.m. in time for connections to Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and Yellowknife.

Another new route of interest is **Air Canada's** non-stop flight from **Calgary to Fort Lauderdale**. Throughout the winter this will be a thrice weekly flight: Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Going south: departure at 10:35 a.m., arrival Florida 5:40 p.m., coming home: departure 6:30 p.m., arrival Calgary 10:20 p.m.

- **Air Canada Vacations** (ACV) passengers can now pre-select seats aboard Air Canada flights, at the time of initial booking, for a cost of \$15 p.p. each way in Economy Class. (The service is free for Executive Class passengers.) Seat selection can be made via ACV's Call Centre at time of booking or by providing credit card details via e-mail at apfax@vacv.com.

- **WestJet** has increased and new routes for winter: starting 8 January and continuing until 28 April passengers can fly non-stop from **Toronto to Fort Lauderdale and Tampa** in

- **Transat Holidays** has launched its *2007-2008 Britain & Europe Preview* brochure that includes more destinations than before with direct flights from **Toronto to Madrid, Rome, Athens and Vienna**. Direct flights to **Barcelona, Valencia and Malaga in Spain** are also available via connectors to **Montreal**. The 24-page *Preview* brochure features an early booking bonus of \$100 for flights, a \$150 bonus for packages to all destinations and for escorted tours in **Ireland, Spain and Italy**, and a \$200 bonus for tour and cruise packages in **Greece**. All of the above apply to products booked before 10 February 2007. Transat Holidays' Package Plus (flight, hotel, breakfast and transfers) is now available in **Madrid, Barcelona, Torremolinos, Salou, Palma de Mallorca and Blanes in Spain**, while visitors to **Italy** can choose Package Plus in **Rome** and on the **Amalfi** coast. As usual, Transat Holidays continues to feature its Package Plus in **London and Paris**, either separately or on the Package Plus-2 Capitals for travellers who'd like to visit both London and Paris. Request the brochure and book

Florida (10 flights to each), and now to **Nassau, Bahamas** (4 flights per week).

- For those thinking ahead to a summer visit to the UK, news that **Air Transat**, on behalf of **Transat Holidays** in Canada and **Canadian Affair** in the UK, will be offering direct flights from Toronto to **London Heathrow** as well as **Gatwick** this year, commencing in May. Additional UK destinations are **Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle**.

- For those busy collecting points and looking ahead, news that the *oneworld* alliance expects to welcome **LAN Argentina** and **LAN Ecuador** to its membership "as early as possible in 2007". Chile-based **LAN Airlines** has been a full member of the alliance since 2000, along with its domestic subsidiary **LAN Express** and Peruvian sister **LAN Peru**. The new additions will mean *oneworld* will have five South American airlines in its group.

- In another corner of the world, **Dragonair** has also announced it will be joining *oneworld* as a result of its recent inclusion in the **Cathay Pacific Group**, meaning that *oneworld* customers will be able to connect through Hong Kong to an extensive network of destinations in the China Mainland, together with other destinations served by Dragonair in the Asia-Pacific region.

tour talk

these vacations through your travel agent.

- **Holiday House** has released its *2007 Greece & the Mediterranean* brochure. The new brochure offers wide range of programmes in **Greece and Egypt** as well as a number of new additions, including eight Island Hopping Holidays that highlight the best of the **Greek Islands**. Each of these itineraries, which vary in length, include two nights in **Athens** with a complimentary city tour and one of the itineraries includes a free car rental in **Crete and Rhodes**. Visit www.holidayhouse.ca for all the details.

- Perhaps you're thinking of a western-style tour in Canada in 2007? **Home On The Range Adventure Tours**, a Calgary-based tour operator, has just launched its updated website at www.homeontherange.ca with details and prices on their variety of western experiences on offer this year: escorted tours, working ranch stays, horseback trips, Aboriginal experiences, fly/drive itineraries and more, both for individuals and groups. Check it out at www.homeontherange.ca or call 1 866 760 8334 for details.

news for garden lovers

10 a.m. to 9 p.m., except Sunday when it closes at 6 p.m. The organizers say late afternoons and evenings are the best time to visit. Tickets - \$18 or less - are available at www.canadablooms.org. The show, while we're still in winter's grip, is worth the trip to Toronto!

Here's just a little space to remind garden lovers to mark 7 - 11 March on their calendars for a trip to Toronto. Those are this year's dates for the spectacular Toronto Flower and Garden Show called *Canada Blooms*, held at the Convention Centre (beside the CN Tower). Times are

- Starting in 2007, the **Eurail Group** will increase its extensive product range with more passes and country combinations for travel in Europe. Eurail's popular **National Passes**, for those who wish to explore a single country in depth, added **Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Portugal** and **'Benelux'** (**Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg**) to their offerings on 1 January, bringing their number of passes to 15 (with **Denmark, Finland, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain** and **Sweden**). The **Eurail Regional Pass**, created three years ago to allow unlimited travel in two bordering countries, will also have more countries on offer. In 2007, travellers will be able to choose **Austria & Hungary** or **Italy & Spain** in addition to the 16 other passes already available. In addition to the Eurail National and Regional Passes, Eurail continues to offer the **Eurail Select Pass**, good for three, four or five bordering countries, as well as the original Eurailpass (renamed **Eurail Global Pass**), covering a total of 18 countries, for people wishing to discover as much of Europe as possible. Details at www.Eurail.com.

- Here at TTS we hope those of you interested in a **Rocky Mountaineer Vacation** this year receive this magazine in time to take advantage of their early booking offer, available until 15 January. If you can book before that date for travel between 1 April and 15 October this year, you will receive a free one-night City "Explore" package in your choice of **Calgary, Halifax, Toronto, Vancouver** or **Victoria** if you reserve a RMV package of five nights or more that includes two days onboard the Rocky Mountaineer train. Those who book packages for eight nights or more that includes the two-day all daylight trip on the Rocky Mountaineer, will

receive a free two-night "Explore Vancouver" package. This offer is valued at up to C\$758 per couple and is available for new bookings only. For more information visit www.rockymountaineer.com. (*We're sorry we couldn't bring you this news earlier – Ed.*)

- **VIA Rail** is offering discounted fares for passengers travelling in sleeper accommodation on two of its tourism trains – the **Vancouver-Jasper-Toronto Canadian** and the **Montreal-Moncton-Halifax Ocean** (*which was the subject of a story in our Feb/March 2006 edition – Ed.*). Until 31 May, Silver & Blue Class fares on the **Canadian**, which takes passengers from the Pacific shores through the Canadian Rockies and across the plains of Northern Ontario, are as follows: a double bedroom for the entire, three-night journey in either direction between Vancouver and Toronto - with one permitted multi-night stopover (i.e. Jasper) is C\$1,234, pp. plus tax. A double bedroom for the overnight journey in either direction between Vancouver and Jasper is available for C\$552, pp. plus tax. Both specials include all meals in the dining car during the journey and exclusive access to the dome car and lounges. Tickets must be purchased at least five days in advance. Aboard the **Ocean**, until 12 June, a deluxe double bedroom for the overnight journey between Montreal and Halifax, in either direction, is available for C\$230, pp. plus tax, when purchased at least five days in advance. Again passengers will enjoy access to the dome car and a special lounge. Visit www.viarail.ca to book these or any trips in the VIA system (complete with rental cars, hotels and activities if required), or call 1 888 VIA RAIL or see your agent.

A smile (or a shudder) for the New Year ...

Life imitates art!

Hot on the heels of the much-publicized movie *Snakes on a Plane* comes this story, which we presume is not an urban (or aviation) legend, since it came to our offices via the daily BBC news on 15 December (and not on April Fool's Day)!

"More than 100 passengers on a Saudi plane were left panic-stricken by the unexpected appearance of furry fellow flyers – dozens of mice. The small rodents – about 80 in total, according to a local newspaper – escaped from the bag of a man travelling on a domestic

flight. An airline official said the aircraft was at 28,000 feet when mice began scurrying around the cabin. Some of the mice fell on passengers' heads, *Al-Hayat* newspaper reports.

The incident occurred on a Saudi Arabian Airlines flight from the capital, Riyadh, to the north-eastern town of Tabuk. The flight landed safely and no explanation was given for the man's live cargo. However, the bag's owner was detained by police investigating how he managed to get the mice onto the plane."

China ... Yangtze Spectacular

New itinerary
for 2007

FROM \$4,145 FOR 18 DAYS! Departing: 4 April & 26 September 2007



It is vast, fascinating and mysterious and it has beckoned travellers from the west for centuries. Mention it to avid travellers and they are sure to say, "Yes, I hope to visit China one day." And what would they choose to experience? **A cruise on the mighty Yangtze River (now in the process of changing for ever);** a look at the work-in-progress on the massive **Three Gorges Dam;** a walk on the ancient **Great Wall;** views of charming villages, lush terraced hillsides and magnificent mountain peaks; visits to the great cities of **Shanghai** and **Beijing;** a trip to view one of the world's greatest archaeological finds ... the 6,000 terra-cotta warriors at **Xi'an;** scenes of palaces, pagodas, pavilions and pandas; tastes of Peking duck and Chinese banquets and so much more. So how do you choose? When you decide on The *Travel Society's* tour there's no need to choose because all these highlights are included. Yes, in these remarkable 18 days you'll stay in Beijing; you'll take a 4-day first-class cruise on the Yangtze with many shore excursions; you'll fly to see those centuries-old terra-cotta warriors in Xi'an; you'll visit bustling Chongquin and see its pandas; stay in Hangzhou and travel into the hills covered with tea plantations; explore the exquisite gardens of Suzhou, and visit Nanjing and Wuzhen. And you'll have time to explore spectacular Shanghai. Throughout the

trip you'll see magnificent architecture, you'll be entertained at cultural events, you'll join your hosts at a variety of banquets, you'll have time to shop, and you'll marvel at some of the most wonderful scenery on earth, all in the company of English-speaking guides. You'll travel by plane, by luxury bus, cruise ship and river boat. Many of our members have told us it's an experience of a lifetime ... and all at an amazing price!

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

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing:

Vancouver	\$4,145 pp/dbl	Victoria	\$4,195 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$4,420 pp/dbl	Edmonton	\$4,420 pp/dbl
Saskatoon/Regina	\$4,590 pp/dbl	Winnipeg	\$4,590 pp/dbl
Toronto	\$4,490 pp/dbl	Ottawa	\$4,490 pp/dbl
Montreal	\$4,490 pp/dbl	St. John's	\$4,850 pp/dbl
Halifax/Quebec	\$4,850 pp/dbl	London	\$4,850 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$1,195 (Sharing can be arranged.)
Taxes and visas extra. Prices are subject to confirmation

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

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

A new tour

CHINA SILK ROAD

Departing: 10 September 2007

Perhaps you are one of the many people who have come with The Travel Society on our China Yangtze Spectacular tour of China? Or perhaps you have always been fascinated by tales of the Silk Road? Whichever the case, we hope you will be thrilled to hear about our new, 20-day Silk Road tour. Come with us from Canada to Beijing, Urumqu, Kashgar, Turpan, Jiayuguan, Dunhuang and Xi'an before ending your tour in Shanghai. Lakes at sunset and mountains at dawn; lush vineyards and spectacular deserts; exotic walled cities and ancient ruins; colourful ethnic minorities, nomads, imams, merchants and saints; Great Bazaars

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing:

Victoria	\$5,490 pp/dbl	Vancouver	\$5,370 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$5,500 pp/dbl	Calgary	\$5,500 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$5,620 pp/dbl	Halifax	\$6,100 pp/dbl
Toronto, Montreal & Ottawa	\$5,670 pp/dbl		

Single supplement \$1,290 Prices are subject to confirmation

selling camels and donkeys, carpets and spices; caravansaries, gardens and pagodas; train trips and cultural shows and, would you believe, the 492 Mogao grottoes known as the Cave of the One-Thousand-Buddhas. All this and more you'll experience on this trip. Call us now for the detailed itinerary and start dreaming of discovering part of the fabled Silk Road of China.

Your tour costs includes:

- Round trip transpacific air on Air Canada
- All domestic air and coach transportation
- All transfers and baggage handling
- 4-star accommodations
- 1 sleeper on overnight train
- 3 meals (except on free days in Beijing & Shanghai)
- Daily sightseeing
- Local English-speaking guides

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

Departures: 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	\$7,680 pp/dbl
Ottawa	\$8,040 pp/dbl
Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax	\$8,040 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$790.00 (sharing can be arranged)

Prices are subject to confirmation

- Pre-tour - Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe ~ 3 days \$1,245 including Air**
- Pre-tour - Victoria Falls and Chobe National Park, Botswana ~ 5 days \$2,456 including Air**
- Post-tour - Namibia & Etosha - Desert Wildlife Experience ~ 4 days \$1,185 including Air**

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

The Grand Tour of Asia

Departing: 2 April 2007

Why fly around Asia when you can take a luxury ship? Our new Grand Tour combines luxurious cruising with 4- and 5-star hotel accommodation in a variety of cities. On this unique 18-night trip you'll spend a total of 6 nights in hotels in the following cities: Kyoto (4-star), Beijing (5-star), Shanghai (5-star) and Hong Kong (5-star). The rest of the trip you'll sleep aboard Holland America's *m.s. Statendam* as

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing:

Toronto, Montreal & Ottawa	\$6,950 pp/dbl
Victoria	\$6,900 pp/dbl
Vancouver	\$6,750 pp/dbl
Edmonton	\$6,900 pp/dbl
Calgary	\$6,900 pp/dbl
Winnipeg	\$7,020 pp/dbl
Halifax	\$7,360 pp/dbl

Single supplement \$2,370 Prices are subject to confirmation

- Upgrade to outside large E Cabin \$590.00 pp/dbl**
- Extra night(s) Hong Kong \$190.00 pp/dbl**

A cruising tour of Japan, China and Hong Kong

she takes you from Kyoto to Nagasaki, Pusan, Dalian and Taipai as well as the above destinations. These unique "trips within your cruise" enable you to spend longer than the single day usually offered by cruise lines in the major cities, in all of which you will enjoy guided tours of the highlights. You then return to your ship to sail on to the next city, finally ending your trip in Hong Kong. And this mode of travel means that interspersed with your busy sightseeing days you'll have 5 days at sea; time to relax or take advantage of all that your cruise ship offers so that you arrive in your next destination refreshed and ready to go! It's a wonderful blend of experiences in a unique trip.

Your tour includes:

- Round trip transpacific air on Air Canada
- All transfers (airport/pier/hotel/sightseeing)
- 4- and 5-star accommodations
- Daily American breakfast
- Daily lunch and dinner onboard *Statendam*
- Meals ashore as per itinerary
- *Statendam* inside K Cabin (upgradeable)
- Local English-speaking guides
- All sightseeing admissions
- All local tours

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.  

22 days from \$5,995

A Traveller's Turkey

Limited to 20 Members

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

Small Ship

Galapagos Islands Cruise & Ecuador

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

14 days departing 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

Copper Canyon and Mexico City

Departing: 9 February, 9 March, 6 April & 4 May 2007

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

New itinerary!

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. **TICO** **ACTA**

Now 23 days

India's Golden Triangle

No charge London stopover

23 days departing 19 March & 23 April 2007



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!

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