

DISCOVER

YOUR TRAVEL MAGAZINE
Winter 2012

10

THINGS TO DO IN
BARCELONA

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BAY BLISS**

A must-visit
New Zealand
hideaway

**HIGH
THAI
TEA**

Greek odyssey

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Hidden treasures



There is nothing quite like travelling through an unknown destination, soaking up the culture and stumbling upon hidden treasures.

Now is the perfect time to escape the winter blues and get packing with a last minute bargain. If you're yet to visit Barcelona, we'll tell you about some of this marvellous city's finest Gaudi sites. We'll also take you to a town in Southern India, where the buildings are French colonial to their bootstraps.

Britain continues to celebrate with Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee and the up-and-coming Olympic games. If the excitement starts to overwhelm you, think about a visit to Dorset and uncover authentic England.

Offering beautiful landscapes, Botswana has been at the forefront of the African travel wish list since Alexander McCall Smith wrote about it in *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*.

Follow the myths and legends of Greece as we cruise to Istanbul from Greece, and why not spend afternoon tea with elephants in Thailand?

This issue will take you out of your comfort zone - the world is your oyster, so come and discover another side of it.

Christian Hunter
Chief Executive Officer
Travellers Choice



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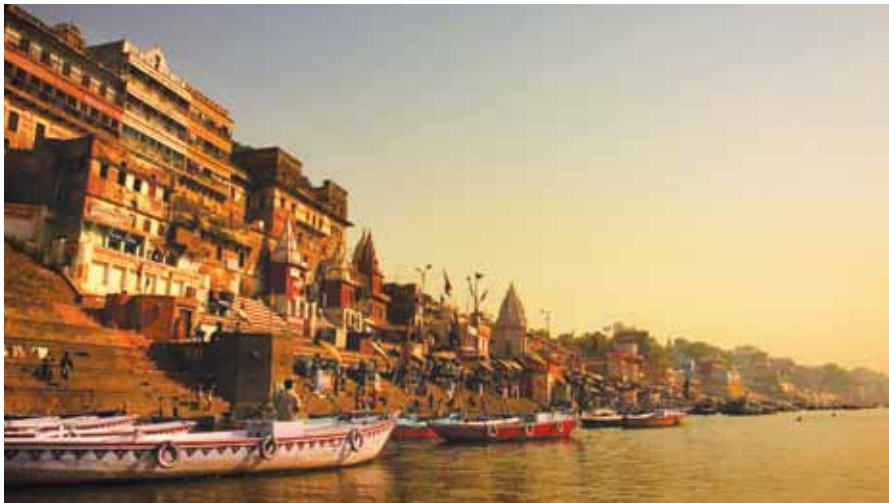
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**Indian quality not comedy**

The characters of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* should have booked their India adventure with Insight Vacations. Judi Dench, Maggie Smith and Bill Nighy and friends were not impressed with the hotel at all.

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There's no better time to book a Trafalgar holiday for a magical European Christmas. Offering great value for money, Trafalgar's new program offers a 36 per cent saving compared to summer.

Choose from Christmas in Paris; an English Christmas;

English Stately Homes at Christmas or Christmas Markets of Austria, Germany & Switzerland.

England offers Christmas traditional Dickensian London and for the European winter wonderland, you'll visit such glories as Neuschwanstein Castle. Book early to save money.

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**TIP**

For men and women, slip-on shoes are the trick for breezing through airport security.

DISCOVER TRAVELLERS CHOICE MAGAZINE

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Mahlab



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Once you have travelled, the voyage never ends, but is played out over and over again in the quietest chambers. The mind can never break off from the journey.

– Pat Conroy

Watching whales

Captain Cook Cruises' Whale Watching cruises operate out of Sydney until 31 October. They take passengers past the Sydney Opera House, Fort Denison, and around the harbour and out through the heads onto the open waters.

Captain Cook Cruises guarantee: if a whale is not sighted during the cruise, passengers cruise again for free!

Whale watching cruises depart daily from Darling Harbour at 9.30am, from Jetty 6 Circular Quay at 10am and from Manly at 10.30am. A Whale watching cruise operates on Saturday and Sunday from Darling Harbour at 1.30pm and from Circular Quay at 2pm.

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Aussies are cruising like crazy!

The extraordinary growth of the Australian cruise industry has been highlighted in a new report, which reveals the number of Australians taking a cruise holiday surged by a record 34 per cent last year.

This unprecedented growth can be attributed to the broadening range of cruise ships available locally and overseas, as well as an awareness of the great value that cruise holidays offer, with all-inclusive fares.

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GPS, tailored for touring

Scenic Tours has launched its Europe River Cruising Program for 2013 with a number of exciting enhancements that have taken all-inclusive luxury to a new level. Guests now have the option to explore the sights of Europe independently, with a new GPS guided tour system. Guests choose to do a guided tour or replace this with a tailor-made GPS guided experience, or both.

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P&O Cruises launches app

P&O Cruises has launched a new Facebook app designed to help holidaymakers plan a short break at sea with their friends. The Short Breaks Facebook app is available to P&O Cruises' 80,000 Facebook followers, as well as new visitors who 'like' the cruise line's popular page.

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Greek odyssey

Following in the ancient mariners' footsteps of Greece is a joy, especially onboard a traditional clipper.

WORDS BEV MALZARD

IT IS THE STREAMLINED WONDROUS BEAUTY that is to take us in Homer's steps across the sea from Greece to Turkey: the *Star Flyer* is a recreation of a classic clipper. Carrying only 170 passengers with 70 crew to look after us, we took to the luxury of the *Star Flyer* like ducks to the Aegean sea.

We had embarked on our seven-day journey in the port of Piraeus, a 30-minute train trip from Athens. We were sailing from the less than beautiful Greek port and our destination was Istanbul.

As we pulled away from the dock, the port of Piraeus twinkled in the night. We watched the first raising of the voluminous sails, all to the anthemic tune of Vangelis' 'Conquest of Paradise'. The music was played every night and, even though it is a bit kitsch, I was moved by the melody and the fact that I was actually sailing through the Dodecanese where many a myth and man had sailed before.

As the island drew closer we saw the elegant swathe of houses that had crept up the hillsides

The sea was choppy enough to deny the tenders landing on our first stop, Mykonos. So, 'ti ne kanami' (what can we do), we head to Syros - a wonderful surprise and an island not tainted by the mega tourist buzz.

As the island drew closer we saw the elegant swathe of houses that had crept up the hillsides overlooking the harbour. The buildings were a mixture of creamy pastel hues, shining in the bright midday sun. On shore we found a taxi and asked the driver to take us to the 'family beach'. Never on Sunday do the families stay at home. The beach was packed; we swam and then sat in a taverna with a Greek salad, a plate of chips (patatas) and a cold bottle of 'Fix' beer.

Back onboard, we departed the harbour to the aroma of afternoon tea being spread out on the deck.

We began coasting to Kos, the home to Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine. Also in the middle of the island, a bit of a hike from the harbour, is the 'Castro' - the castle of the Knights of Saint John.

At dinner we all tell of our day's exploration and discoveries, the teenagers onboard hang out on deck and our elderly companions enjoy the quiet of the library - all is right with the world onboard the *Star Flyer* tonight.

Next stop Patmos, an island with a dry, harsh landscape with whitewashed houses spotting the hills. 'The Jerusalem of the Aegean', Patmos was home to the apostle Saint John and it's where he wrote the *Book of Revelation*. And with the plethora of fine cafes and bars - where else would you want to write a masterpiece?

The *Star Flyer* is an elegant ship that caters to everyone. There is no casino, glitz or nightclub onboard. But the entertainment is fun - we had a very daggy 'frog race', where participants pulled a string along with a wooden frog that flipped over. Another night, a small group of singers and folkloric dancers came onboard to entertain us with traditional folk songs, music and dancing, and we joined in. Homespun entertainment has a particular, all-inclusive charm.

We continue north to Chios with its Byzantine flavour and arabesque ambience; then to Dikkili (Turkey) to take our



Top: enjoying the local drink of choice at Pergamon, Turkey. Left: a bell tower on the island of Kos, home to Hippocrates.

excursion to the ancient city of Pergamon, the once mighty city on top of a mountain.

Cannakale was the next and last stop before Istanbul - only a day before disembarkation. We had sailed through the Aegean, through the Dodecanese, the Dardanelles, been brushed by warm summer winds and we flew from port to port on the wings of waves. As one of my sailing companions said as we hung over the railing and the *Star Flyer* clipped the waves on a moonlit night: "This is amazing, I feel as if I'm really sailing."

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www.insightvacations.com



Tuck me up in Blanket Bay

This New Zealand lakeside lodge lives up to its enviable reputation, delivering a special experience.

WORDS ALISON PLUMMER

HAVING BLANKET BAY LODGE HIGH ON MY BUCKET list paid off recently, rewarding in ways even my fertile imagination hadn't previously conceived.

For a start, I thought I knew New Zealand's South Island like the back of my hand. So why, then, had I not travelled the fabulous road between Queenstown and Glenorchy before? Obviously the best was being saved until now.

Leaving the bright lights and hotels of Queenstown behind, the road hugs the shoreline of Lake Wakatipu, with stunning views around each corner. Stopping to take photos we worried about being late, but Blanket Bay is a lodge for grown-ups and the staff welcome you as if into their own home. Mind you, missing canapes and pre-dinner drinks here would be as much of a mistake as missing dinner itself.

The lodge sits alone on the lakeside facing the magnificent Humboldt Range, hidden from the road, imposing, built of stone and wood, a welcoming shelter with all the right touches - and fabulous food. The menu changes daily so, while there's no extensive a la carte, you can expect great food.

Executive chef Corey Hume's menu is brilliant and completely in context with the lodge, using locally-sourced ingredients and his own gifted take on flavour and combinations.

In the great outdoors, guests can grab a bike, go horse riding on Wyuna Station, take a heli-tour to Milford Sound, hike a section of the Routeburn Track or join the jetboat ride up the Dart River - an exhilarating way to venture into the Central Otago region. The area is a top location for feature films, think *Lord of The Rings*, and brilliant spa treatments are available at Blanket Bay too.

I'm a seasoned traveller and love new places, but if I had to name somewhere I'd return to it would be Blanket Bay. I'll just close my eyes and dream.

Top: just one of the breathtaking views from Blanket Bay.

FACT FILE

Blanket Bay:
www.blanketbay.com

Eichardt's Hotel:
www.eichardtshotel.co.nz

Fly Air New Zealand:
www.airnewzealand.com.au

Visit:
www.amisfield.co.nz, www.wai.net.nz, www.thebunker.co.nz

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DAY 1: Darwin to Kakadu National Park (247km)

Depart Darwin for Jabiru, located in World Heritage Listed Kakadu National Park. Stop along the way at Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve & Window on the Wetlands Visitor Centre. Overnight at Aurora Kakadu.

DAY 2: Kakadu National Park

This morning enjoy a Yellow Water Cruise from Cooina. The remainder of the day is at leisure. Take the opportunity to see some of the oldest Aboriginal rock art. Overnight at Aurora Kakadu.

DAY 3: Kakadu National Park to Katherine (299km)

Travel towards Pine Creek & onto Katherine, making a leisure stop at Edith Falls (Leliyn). Overnight at All Seasons Katherine.

DAY 4: Katherine

This morning enjoy a spectacular two hour Katherine Gorge cruise. Perhaps visit Mataranka Thermal Pools this afternoon. Overnight at All Seasons Katherine.

DAY 5: Katherine to Litchfield National Park & Lake Bennett (370km)

Drive north & enjoy a full day exploring Litchfield National Park, offering swimming & spectacular waterfalls. Overnight at scenic Lake Bennett Wilderness Resort.

DAY 6: Litchfield National Park to Darwin (113km)

Enjoy more time in Litchfield National Park or relax at Lake Bennett before returning to Darwin.

INCLUDES:

- 5 nights accommodation ■ 6 days Group B car rental with GPS
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- Yellow Water Cruise ■ Nit Nit Dreaming Two Gorge Cultural Cruise

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DAY 1: Cairns to Atherton (148km)

Your journey begins in Cairns the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef & the Daintree. Today's drive takes you to Kuranda & Mareeba, where you can savour the region's coffee. Overnight at Atherton Blue Gum.

DAY 2: Atherton to Undara (237km)

Travel via Malanda to Ravenshoe & stop at Windy Hill. Arrive at Undara Volcanic National Park in time for the Wildlife at Sunset tour. Overnight at Undara Lava Lodge. (BLD)

DAY 3: Undara to Charters Towers (370km)

This morning enjoy breakfast at the ringer camp before your half day Lava Tube tour. From Undara travel via the Lynd Junction then continue on to Charters Towers. Overnight at Park Motel. (B)

DAY 4: Charters Towers to Townsville (135km)

Explore Charters Towers & learn about its gold rush history. Take a leisurely drive east along the Flinders Highway into Townsville. Overnight at Mercure Townsville.

DAY 5: Townsville to Mission Beach (235km)

Depart Townsville & visit Cardwell & Hinchinbrook Island before arriving at Mission Beach. Spend the next two nights at Castaways Resort.

DAY 6: Mission Beach

Enjoy your day at leisure in Mission Beach.

DAY 7: Mission Beach to Cairns (139km)

Depart Mission Beach for Cairns via South Johnstone, before reaching Innisfail.

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- Meals as indicated ■ Wildlife Sunset tour ■ Half day Lava Tube tour

Behind the scenes: Barcelona

Barcelona's spirit is best expressed by one of its favourite sons, Antoni Gaudi, whose architectural legacy includes the Sagrada Familia. This still unfinished, mesmerising cathedral emerges from the ground like a giant cluster of half-melted candles. But Gaudi's mystical creations make up just part of the must-see sites when visiting Barcelona. Here are our top ten picks, to help you on your way.

WORDS **DOMINIC O'GRADY**





1 Sagrada Familia

There are two options for visiting Sagrada Familia. Either buy a ticket for the cathedral only, or spend a few extra euros for a ticket that includes access to the lifts that run to the top of the cathedral spires. The views are magnificent as all of Barcelona's beauty lies before you, offset by the Mediterranean Sea.

Visitors then make their way through a network of passages, with plenty more bird's-eye views enroute. After five minutes or so, you reach the departure point for your journey back to earth.

Be sure to visit late in the day, in the afternoon light the Sagrada Familia becomes something else altogether: a watery, gothic and mystical dreamscape of light and sculpture that is as ethereal as it is unforgettable.

2 Casa Batllo

Gaudi built the nearby Casa Batllo in the early 1900s as a home for a wealthy industrialist, Josep Batllo. The building looks like a weird sea creature: its undulating walls are covered in a mosaic of coloured glass and ceramic discs, while the roof tiles look like a dragon's spine. The interiors are equally imaginative and well worth inspecting. Casa Battlo is open every day of the year.

3 Tapas

Don't even think of leaving Barcelona without trying its tapas. We found Taller de Tapas (at 51 Carrer Catalunya) by accident, and returned several times for its lightly battered sardines, melt-in-the-mouth croquettes and paper-thin slices of jamon. Taller de Tapas has several outlets throughout the city. All enjoy a great reputation. ▶



The building looks like a weird sea creature: its undulating walls covered in a mosaic of coloured glass

4 Seaside Barcelona

Seaside Barcelona has plenty of fish restaurants. The pick of the bunch is a place called El Pescadors, in Poble Nou. We ordered a whole sea bass, which was slow roasted and then brought to the table, where it was filleted in a few deft moves and served with a simple potato gratin.

Ask your waiter for a wine recommendation; most likely a chilled dry white from the Catalan region and you'll discover a match made in heaven.

5 Barri Gotic

Straight lines are anathema in the Barri Gotic, or Gothic quarter. Best to meander through this pedestrian-friendly area without worrying about directions. You'll recognise a landmark eventually. In the meantime, stop for a coffee in one of the many small squares and pause for a while to enjoy a busker playing Spanish guitar.

6 Las Ramblas

Barcelona's most famous street, Las Ramblas, is 'the only street in the world which I wish would never end', said Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca.

Although the cafes and restaurants along Las Ramblas are crowded and touristy, the street life has a raffish charm: street performers, flower sellers, hawkers, charlatans and human statues abound.

7 Boqueria market

Just off Las Ramblas is the Boqueria market (closed on Sunday). It's energetic and abundant, full of sellers offering flowers, cheese, wine, eggs, bread, fish, fruit and Catalan delicacies. Worth a wander, if only for the visual impact.

8 Placa Reial

Placa Reial, or the Royal Plaza, is a secret Moorish hideaway just a few metres away from the bustle of Las Ramblas. Its palm trees and shaded colonnades offer a window into another time and place. Gaudí designed the street lamps that illuminate this plaza at night, and there's a cool fountain in the middle of it all. A pleasant little escape.

9 City tour – 1940s style

Ever travelled in a motorcycle sidecar? Brightside offers tours of Barcelona in a classic 1940s sidecar. There's room for two, plus a driver, so jump aboard! We arranged to be collected from our hotel in the early evening, and enjoyed a night tour of Barcelona's mediaeval district, the Sagrada Familia, the old port and many other highlights.

10 Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

Montjuic Hill, overlooking Plaza Espanya, is where you'll find the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, or the National Art Museum of Catalonia. Inside, you'll



Left: Gaudí's mesmerising Casa Batllo. Above: his unfinished masterpiece, Sagrada Família.

come across a magnificent collection of Romanesque art and a fine collection of Catalan art from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Get there an hour or so before closing time, then catch the sound and light show that erupts most evenings on the terraces that spill down towards Plaza Espanya. Show times vary throughout the year, so check details with Barcelona Tourism.

For further hints and tips on the beautiful Barcelona, be sure to check the list of helpful websites below.

✓ Contact your Travellers Choice agent




HELPFUL WEBSITES

- Sagrada Família:**
www.sagradafamilia.cat
- Casa Batllo:**
www.casabatllo.es
- El Pescadors:**
www.elpescadors.com
- Boqueria market:**
www.boqueria.info
- Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya:**
www.mnac.cat
- Barcelona Tourism:**
www.barcelonaturisme.com




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Petite France

The passion for all things French continues in a traditional way in Pondicherry.

WORDS SANDIP HOR

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT THE BASTILLE DAY celebrations are like in India, unless you are in former French town Pondicherry, a seafront settlement located 16km south of Chennai in Southern India. On 14 July every year, its 6000 French residents, joined by visiting friends and families from mainland France, rejoice with immense trumpet blasts and revelry on their national day.

The event is a carryover of a tradition that comes from 300 years of French colonialism and reflects the quarter's historical and cultural heritage, the enduring appeal that lures tourists from other parts of India and overseas to experience 'France' in India.

In the distant past this coastal nest was a favourite spot for Europeans to enter the subcontinent for trading. The Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, French and British fought many battles among themselves to lay claim to this tiny piece of land. Ultimately in 1673, the French won power and made it their home.

The event lures tourists from other parts of India and overseas to experience 'France' in India

Filled with sun, sea and sand, the Mediterranean aura of the domain reminded the French of their Riviera. Like towns such as Nice and Cannes back home, this coastal parish turned into a similar style - a mediaeval seaside township which in no time became a hub for French politics, commerce and culture in India.

Separated by a canal, the French divided the city into two parts - Ville Noire or black town for native Indians mostly Tamils, and Ville Blanche or white town designed exclusively for the Europeans. That severance still exists. Ville Noire clogged with traffic, noise and chaos conjures a typical Indian scenario while impressive Ville Blanche retains much of the calm it had under the French. This quarter is



DENNIS JONES

elegantly dotted with 18th century office buildings with large French windows and grand mansions standing inside outsized walled compounds, some overlooking the Bay of Bengal or a leafy park while others flank tidy roads made colourful by bougainvillea.

Strong French influence is observed in the statues of French Governor Dupleix and Joan of Arc; the magnificent edifices such as Hotel de Ville (Town Hall), Raj Nivas, the former French Governor's residence, the grand French Consulate and Alliance Francaise office; historic monuments like Aayi Mandapam, a white cenotaph built by Napoleon III to honour a local courtesan; and the French War Memorial brightly illuminated during Bastille Day celebrations.

The French-built churches are also architectural memoirs of

DON'T MISS

The town's architectural showpiece is Matrimandir, a lofty golden metallic sphere where Auroville residents often meditate.

Visit: www.auroville.org



the past. There are several of them, however, Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Notre Dame des Anges, modelled on the Basilica at Lourdes in Southern France, are the ones regularly visited by locals and visitors.

Sightseers trundling through the streets, still named Rue, are amused by the 'Frenchness' of the atmosphere. With curiosity they look at policemen wearing red kepi (cap), overhear 'bonjour' from passers-by who address them as Madame and Monsieur, drink espresso coffee, buy baguettes from tiny bakeries and order les crevettes à l'ail (garlic prawns) at local eateries.

While there is lot to see, there is more to feel in Pondicherry, renamed as Puducherry since 2006. The 'feeling' comes from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, an internationally reputed site of spiritual pilgrimage that was established in 1926 by Aurobindo Ghose, a Cambridge-educated Indian freedom fighter turned yogi, and her disciple, Paris-born Mirra



DENNIS JONES

Alfassa, famously known as The Mother, who arrived in Pondicherry in 1920. People from far and wide flock here to learn yoga and Indian philosophy.

Being part of India now, obviously a blending of cultures is unavoidable. Chai (tea) and chicken curry has infiltrated French kitchens, kurta-pajama has become preferred attire and on festive occasions such as Bastille Day, singing anthems and hoisting flags of both nations is common practice.

Left: Hotel de L'Orient. Above: the streets of Ville Blanche.

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Right royal welcome

It's time to revisit Windsor and say hip hip hooray to Queen Elizabeth II on her anniversary day.

WORDS DANIEL SCOTT

I'VE JUST ARRIVED IN WINDSOR AND AM ambling down a cobbled street at the back of its 11th century castle when I'm nearly knocked over by an elderly man driving a horse and buggy.

I'm about to remonstrate with him when I realise who he is. It's His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, looking fit and relaxed on this early summer day. Prince Phillip soon disappears through a back gate to Windsor castle, but moments later, in the grounds, I spot a lady of smallish stature riding a horse. I'll be blown; it's the actual Queen, enjoying the seclusion of her favourite residence during hectic diamond jubilee celebrations.

When I lived in London in the early 2000s, Windsor was my favourite out-of-town escape. There was nowhere more beguiling than its peaceful riverside and it was where I always brought visiting family, who loved its multi-layered history.

Entering Windsor Castle for the 11am Changing of the Guard, I am so close to the ceremony that I can see sweat running down the necks of the heavily uniformed soldiers. Inside the castle, I get a further sense of the pomp associated with royal life in the state rooms, where lavish banquets are held for visiting dignitaries.

Beyond the castle, Windsor has more than 10 significant historical sights, including the Church Street house where Charles II kept his mistress Nell Gwynne and the Christopher Wren designed Guildhall, where Prince Charles married Camilla.

On the other side of Windsor Bridge is Eton College, a school founded in 1440, where prime ministers including David Cameron, and princes, among them William and Harry, were educated. Walking around



Windsor Castle: the Changing of the Guard takes place every day of the year.

its grounds I encounter young boys destined for big roles in Britain's future, dressed in bow ties and other apparel that belongs firmly in its past. Such anachronisms fit these riverside towns like a royal glove.

For me, the main pleasures of visiting Windsor revolve around the River Thames. After an alfresco lunch at a waterside pub, I take a boat ride upriver and then a walk along the towpath. It doesn't take long to get into open countryside where my only company is a few haughty swans, gliding along the Thames.

I walk back through Windsor Great Park, a huge deer park dating back to the 13th century, and find my way to the Long Walk, a tree-lined avenue leading up to the castle.

When I reach the castle gates, a crowd is gathering. Moments later, a fleet of sparkling limousines begins purring by, en route for Ascot. The car is carrying Prince Andrew, his daughters Beatrice and Eugenie, and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall.

In one day in this elegant riverside town I've encountered more royals than in a lifetime prior. Now, as another Bentley rolls by, giving me a second sighting of the Queen, I'm sure Her Majesty is offering me a personal welcome to Windsor with her most regal wave.

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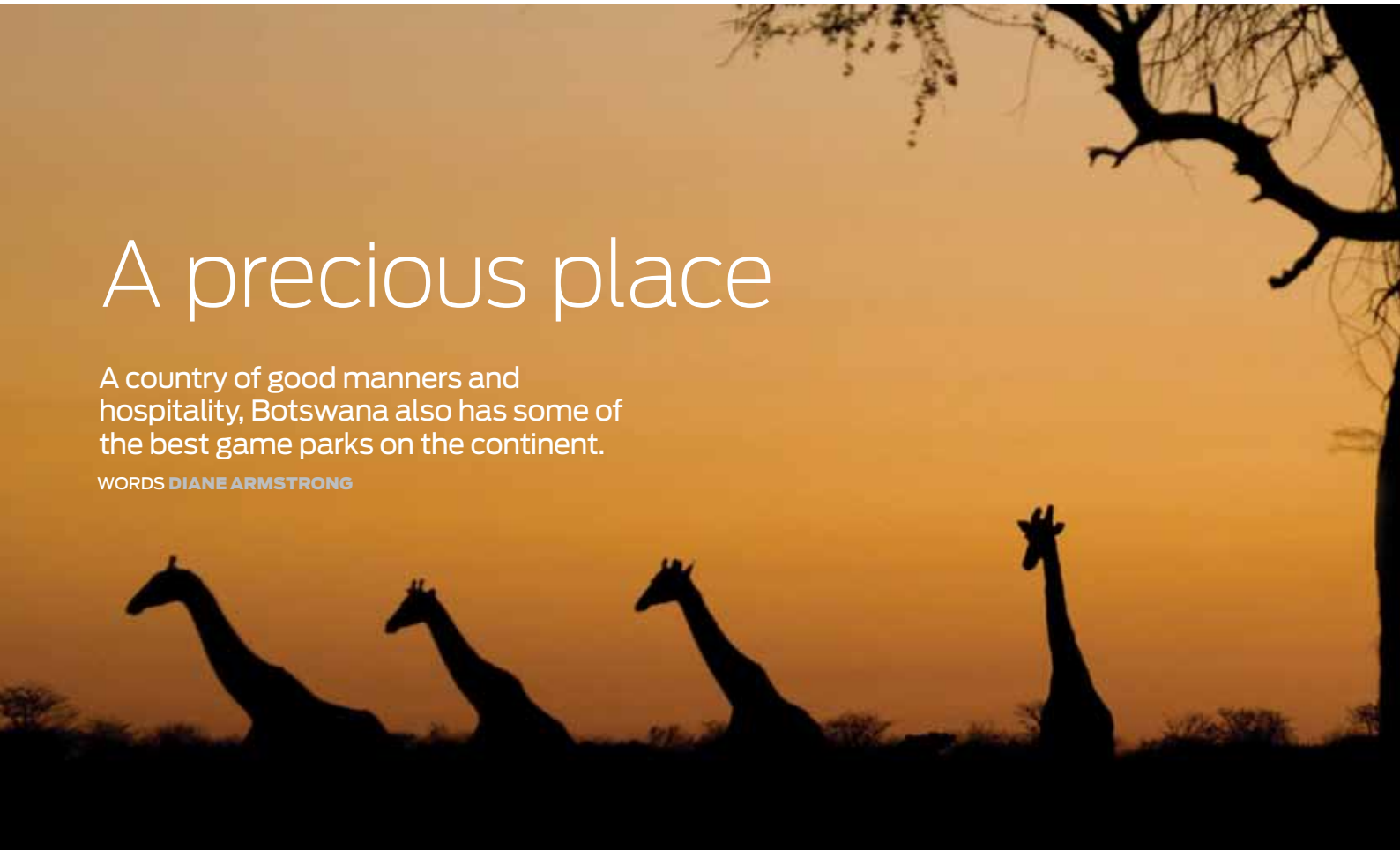
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A precious place

A country of good manners and hospitality, Botswana also has some of the best game parks on the continent.

WORDS **DIANE ARMSTRONG**



IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING WHAT PRECIOUS Ramotswe has been up to since she solved her last mystery, I can tell you that the feisty heroine of *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* is now working as an immigration officer on the Botswana-Namibia border. I know this because the minute I stepped inside that office recently, the woman behind the counter greeted me and my companions like long-lost friends. Uttering excited cries of welcome - Dumela mma! Dumela rra! Good morning ladies! Good morning gentlemen! She proceeded to stamp our passports with gusto while her bosom heaved inside her brightly patterned caftan, her earrings jangled and her bracelets glittered.

Immigration offices are usually joyless places staffed by dour public servants, so I knew that this exuberant woman could be none other than Alexander McCall Smith's engaging heroine.

I must admit that Precious Ramotswe was actually one of my main reasons for visiting Botswana. I just knew that a country that produced such a lovable character, and whose currency when translated meant 'rain' and 'drops', had to be special.

Botswana didn't disappoint. During our first game drive in Chobe National Park, I almost fell out of the van with

excitement. Giraffes loped across the lime-green savannah and nibbled the tops of acacia trees, herds of zebra galloped towards us and elephants with their calves rolled around in the mud. Coming across a family of lions was thrilling, but what took my breath away was being close enough to hear them crunching the bones of a warthog, and to see their blood-stained whiskers. Behind the mopane trees, three cubs were scampering like playful kittens.

As we drove around this fantastic park, we passed other tour vans, whose passengers all had the beatific expression of those who had just had a glimpse of paradise. No wonder: Chobe was like the Garden of Eden.

It's one thing to view wild animals close up from the safety of a van, and quite another to be near them when you're camping. I discovered the difference that night. Lying in my tiny



We came face to face with hippos cavorting in the water like kids on holiday



Botswana: where the wild things roam free.



TRAVEL ADVICE

Make sure you have a yellow fever vaccination and pack anti-malarial medication. Take US dollars and South African rand. While Botswana has its own currency it also accepts the South African rand. Remember, no visa is needed for Botswana.

tent in the bush, listening to jackals howling and lions roaring, I felt vulnerable, and I wasn't comforted by our guide's comment that hungry lions don't make a sound. At sunrise, just as I was relaxing over our porridge, bacon and eggs, I heard that during the night elephants had passed very close to our camp.

No matter where we went in Botswana, unique wildlife experiences awaited us. In the Okavango Delta, I fell asleep to the sound of hippos grunting and snorting outside our houseboat. The delta is a picturesque labyrinth of waterways edged with tall phragmite reeds and lotus lilies. By day, we explored these twisting channels and watched huge golden crocodiles slide into the water like lethal submarines, while fish eagles roosted on tree tops, egrets winged across the water, and exquisite malachite kingfishers flitted among the bushes.

It was enchanting to glide along these narrow waterways in a makoro, a dugout canoe for two, poled by locals. Around one bend, my heart almost stopped as we came face to face with seven hippos cavorting in the water like kids on holiday. As hippos are aggressive, we sheltered behind a clump of reeds to observe them without being seen. A little later, we watched a family of elephants sluicing themselves only a few metres away. On the houseboat by sunset, we sat on deck sipping wine and exchanged travellers' tales. Over the tasty dinners that our genial

skipper cooked every night, we listened enthralled to our guide and driver as they described the formal courtship and wedding rituals of their people.

Back on the road, I was fascinated by the traditional villages we passed. They consisted of clusters of round mud huts with conical thatched roofs, surrounded by reed fences. Villagers squatted in the shade of the trees, smoking and gossiping. Donkeys wandered around the road, women with babies slung on their backs carried huge containers of water on their heads and, as soon as the van stopped, hordes of beaming children ran towards us.

Each time we passed a village, I scanned the women, looking in vain for Precious Ramotswa. This time I couldn't find her, so now I have an excellent reason to return to Botswana.

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High Tea with elephants

They may not be the daintiest of creatures, but these pachyderms know how to behave in polite society.

WORDS **SHERIDEN RHODES**

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY YOU GET TO HAVE A CUPPA with an elephant – especially not one good enough to carry the teapot itself using its adaptable trunk.

Elephants have long played an integral role in Thai traditions, revered as a symbol of majesty for the kingdom and a representation of Thai royalty and all its grandeur. These majestic creatures have been visiting the Sofitel Krabi Phokeethra for some time, but now guests can experience a delightful new 'High Tea with an Elephant' experience at this colonial-style property overlooking the Krabi Islands.

Located in an area locally referred to as the Naga Mountain, the resort is also close to one of the Thai royal family palaces. It prides itself on its links to the local community and has fostered a special relationship with the local orphanage, Chet Panom Camp. The elephants come from Krabi Town, next to the Tiger Cave Temple. The cheeky Asian elephant Som Chai (meaning strong man) was the star guest at our high tea. On other days, baby elephant Nam Kan is the star attraction.

On arrival, guests will find a decadent spread on the lawns near the pool. Included are fresh chicken sandwiches, chocolate cake, strawberry jelly cakes, rice paper rolls, iced tea, espresso and, of course, a cup of steaming hot tea. When participants are assembled, the elephant makes its entrance, walking past the vast lagoon pool to where guests are gathered.

A cabana is set up for guests to relax on, while cushions and blankets are spread out on the lush lawns. Participants get to feed the elephant bananas and coconut leaves and have their photo taken with the visiting elephant, while



SHERIDEN RHODES

enjoying the high tea. I must say Som Chai was a charming afternoon tea guest – even if he did give me a cheeky whack in the back with his ear.

The backdrop for the elephant high tea is the 276-room low-rise Sofitel Krabi. It comes with its own honeymoon wing of suites and adds a European touch to one of southern Thailand's most romantic beach destinations, fronting a white sandy beach and a vast 7000m lagoon pool. Krabi has a feel not dissimilar to Phuket in the early seventies – low scale tourism, a small village, markets and access to the pristine waters surrounding the series of islands.

Legend has it that the peninsula was home to the mythical Naga, from where the resort gets the name Phokeethra which roughly translates into Land of the Naga.



SITE SEEING

Online resources deliver information to travellers to open up your minds; read the world weather; keep up with exchange rates; make savvy choices when using local transport; understand quarantine and customs regulations across all borders. Go armed with the knowledge that you have sourced every bit of data you can to stay safe, legal and informed.

Worldwide airports:

www.worldairportguide.com

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Your all-time favourite destination?

Waikiki. I love the laid-back life style, the culture, dining options.

What is one thing you never leave home without?

My husband - to carry my bags and pay the bills.

Your favourite destination in Australia?

Melbourne - love the European influence, great dining and the wonderful entertainment.

Your favourite destination overseas?

South Africa. It's a must for everyone's bucket list.

Your favourite hotel in the world?

Fairmont Banff Springs - simply beautiful.

Can you predict the next 'hot destination' or 'hot activity' in travel?

Russia. This breathtaking country has opened its doors to tourism and it's not just for the seasoned traveller.

What can you give clients that the internet can't?

Personalised service, ability to determine that product meets client needs, 24-hour assistance and the added protection of the Travel Compensation Fund.

Best advice you give your clients?

Travel light, dress comfortably.

Your all-time favourite destination?

Alaska. There's nothing better than wandering through Haines at dusk.

What is one thing you never leave home without?

An open mind.

Your favourite destination in Australia?

The Kimberley region. There aren't many places where you can walk where no human has walked before.

Your favourite destination overseas?

If it were a city it'd be Vancouver. If it's a country, Costa Rica. I would really love to go back and spend more time there.

Your favourite hotel in the world?

Wynn Las Vegas. It had a flat-screen TV in the toilet and I needed a ladder to get in bed.

Can you predict the next 'hot destination' or 'hot activity' in travel?

Walking tours through the UK and Europe where travellers can escape from the crowds and get back to nature.

What can you give clients that the internet can't?

A great big smile and a bloody awesome cup of coffee.

Best advice you give your clients?

If you're doing it, do it properly. It's the holiday of a lifetime!

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- 01** Travelling long distances can be challenging for older family members and parents with young children. Aim for a destination that's viable for everyone.
- 02** Try to find a comfortable middle ground when it comes to accommodation, as each family member is likely to have a different holiday budget.
- 03** Staying in separate rooms at the same resort may be slightly more expensive than renting a holiday home, but sometimes it's nice to have your own space. Many families use this as a trial to see if holidaying with extended family works for them.
- 04** Opt for a holiday home that is a little too big, rather than one that's too small. Ideally it should have a large living area and multiple bathrooms.
- 05** Consider an informal roster when it comes to chores or look for alternatives. For example, if someone hates cooking on holiday, they may prefer to treat everyone to dinner at a local restaurant when it's their turn to cook.
- 06** Don't take your folks for granted. Even if grandparents insist they love babysitting, a small thank you gift is always appreciated.
- 07** Cruising is ideal for multigenerational family groups. Choose an itinerary with easy-to-access ports if there are travellers with mobility issues, or parents with children under five in your group.
- 08** Schedule some time together and apart. There's no need to stick like glue.
- 09** Allow time for young children and older family members to rest. Having some quiet time in the afternoon often works well for both age groups.
- 10** Parents may like to consider taking their children out for the day occasionally to give other family members a break. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.



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Hobart	Travel With A Cause	(03) 6231 3844	🚢

VIC	Agency	Phone	Cruise
Balnarring	Balnarring Travel & Cruise	(03) 5983 1998	🚢
Balwyn	Belmore Travel	(03) 9857 4555	🚢
Bentleigh	Brand Travel	(03) 9557 8833	🚢
Castlemaine	Travel & Cruise Castlemaine	(03) 5472 3822	🚢
Chelsea	Chelsea Cruise & Travel	(03) 9773 1900	🚢
Croydon North	Gem Tours & Travel Service	(03) 9726 0444	🚢
Eltham	Travel Bound & Cruise	(03) 9439 3755	🚢
Essendon	Triple R Travel	(03) 9374 2300	🚢
Frankston	Karingal Travel	(03) 9787 3344	🚢
Gisborne	Jetaway Travel	(03) 5428 4466	🚢
Hoppers Crossing	Y Not Travel	(03) 9748 4022	🚢
Kyabram	Boomerang Travel Centre Pty Ltd	(03) 5852 3433	🚢
Kyneton	Midland Travel & Cruise	(03) 5410 8006	🚢
Mansfield	Mansfield Travel & Cruise	(03) 5775 1274	🚢
Melbourne	Outdoor Travel - Melbourne	(03) 9670 7252	🚢
Melbourne	Taking Off Tours	(03) 9521 1475	🚢
Mentone	Bay Travel & Cruise	(03) 9585 5855	🚢
Mill Park	Minna Travel & Cruise	(03) 9437 9222	🚢
Mooroolbark	Brian Campbell Travel	(03) 9726 0222	🚢
Mordialloc	Mordialloc Travel & Cruise	(03) 9580 8100	🚢
Mount Eliza	Canadian Bay Travel	(03) 9787 9477	🚢
Numurkah	Numurkah Travel & Cruise	(03) 5862 2803	🚢
Scoresby	Scoresby Travel & Cruise	(03) 9764 0533	🚢
Somerville	Somerville Travel & Cruise	(03) 5977 5433	🚢
St Arnaud	St Arnaud Travel Centre	(03) 5495 2294	🚢
Surrey Hills	Planet Shakers Travel	(03) 9896 7999	🚢
Upwey	Travellers Place	(03) 9754 1655	🚢
Warrandyte	Warrandyte Travel & Cruise	(03) 9844 2477	🚢

WA	Agency	Phone	Cruise
Australind	Australind Travel & Cruise Centre	(08) 9797 1799	🚢
Byford	Our Travel Agent	(08) 9525 0900	🚢
City Beach	City Beach Travel & Cruise	(08) 9245 1988	🚢
Duneraig	Carine Travel Bug	(08) 9246 7277	🚢
East Perth	Magic Carpet Tours & Travel	(08) 9221 1207	🚢
East Perth	TravelClub	(08) 9223 6590	🚢
Floreat	Floreat World of Travel	(08) 9387 6211	🚢
Forrestfield	Stodarts Travel & Cruise	(08) 9453 1088	🚢
Kalgoorlie	Stodarts Travel & Cruise	(08) 9021 1855	🚢
Kingsley	Wise Choice Travel Service	(08) 9409 9777	🚢
Margaret River	Margaret River Holidays	(08) 9758 7152	🚢
Marmion	Tour de Force Travel	(08) 9246 2177	🚢
South Perth	Everett Corporate Travel	(08) 9368 5279	🚢
Two Rocks	Bridge The World Travel & Cruise Centre	(08) 9561 5095	🚢
Victoria Park	Capricorn Travel	(08) 6250 9585	🚢

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