

Journey Beyond Travel Magazine
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Into the Heart

The Jungle is Neutral – Battlefields of South East Asia

By Philip Sen

They call it the Hellfire Pass, and indeed in the tropical sunshine and humidity it feels like the devil's kitchen itself. But remember what happened here and, despite the sweat and the flies and the dusty walk to get here you begin to think yourself lucky. Once, long ago, the Hellfire Pass drank the life and the blood of men.

Today it lies quiet; still and serene. The whips and tools were long ago laid down and the jungle on either side buzzes instead with insects, a thousand miniature chainsaws scraping out their cacophonous song. The rust-brown rockface is pitted and gouged by the picks and hand drills used to hew the passage 60 years before; the occasional drill bit has snapped off and embedded in the stone. Aside from this, however, little now remains. Perhaps seven or eight feet of railway track, worn away by weather and age, and a plaque festooned with withered flowers and drooping Commonwealth flags. But just this small section of the Burma railway cost the lives of hundreds of Allied prisoners of war, starved, beaten and tormented by their Japanese captors. One cannot help but to stop for a moment and simply contemplate.

Hellfire Pass, near modern-day Kanchanaburi in Thailand, is a fitting start to a loop of historical sites that takes you around South East Asia, following the progress of 20th-century war's bloody toll. The Japanese occupation of French

Indochina, as the eastern countries of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia were then known, was just one catalyst of the conflicts that unfolded there from the 1950s to 1980s.

Countless lines of marble headstones poke up from Kanchanaburi's three major cemeteries, tended to an immaculate standard by armies of Thai gardeners. The town is also the site of the famous Bridge on the River Kwai, fixed for posterity in our imaginations by David Lean's 1957 cinema epic of the same name. The structure that spans the flow now, however, is not the original bombed to destruction during the war; and the museum set up on the bank is a curious and decrepit mixture of authentic artefacts and badly-wrought papier-mache figures.

Despite the horrors of the past, Kanchanaburi is in fact a fine place to relax and settle into the pace of life in rural Thailand. Hotels and bungalows stand on stilts above the stream of the river itself, and the balconies and restaurants are ideal for lazy afternoons and laconic nights watching the water ebb by. Returning to Bangkok by train, one can still ride some of the original wartime railway.

On to Laos, scene of clandestine conflict during the Vietnam War. Much of the evidence lingers on. Instead of horsebrasses and pewter tankards, the shacks that pass for public houses in Laos often harbour macabre collections of clusterbombs,

grenades, small arms and ammunition discovered in the neighbouring fields. Hard to imagine now, perhaps more bombs were dropped on Laos than were expended over Germany during WWII; most over sections of North Vietnam's celebrated supply route, the Ho Chi Minh trail; some allegedly dumped by US pilots returning from Hanoi with bombs to spare. Even 40 years later, blue-capped United Nations mine disposal experts can still be seen combing the countryside for more unexploded ordnance.

Hanoi itself, capital of the now re-unified Vietnam, is an almost European city but for the heat and the oppressive whirr of thousands of mopeds (private car ownership is still rare in this reforming Communist state). The old centre is a cosmopolitan locale of lakes and leafy boulevards, the French influence readily apparent. Embalmed and somewhat waxy-looking, the corpse of Ho Chi Minh is preserved in a typically austere Stalinist-style mausoleum. Thousands of Vietnamese troop past every day for a quick gawp at the exulted leader. Yet for downed US pilots, Hanoi held few attractions.

Hoa Lo Prison, otherwise known as 'the Hanoi Hilton' was established by the French in the late 19th century. Now a museum, many of the exhibits (including the regulation Gallic guillotine) are devoted to the undoubted oppression of the colonial years. A section is dedicated to the building's life as

a POW camp and is stark proof of that old maxim, 'history is written by the victor'. American internees here apparently enjoyed cordon bleu cuisine, sports facilities, a well-stocked library and workshop. Propaganda posters extol the virtues of this model environment. You suspect that the museum is being economical with the truth.

From Hanoi it is a short flight to another name resonating with history, Dien Bien Phu. Despite its significance to the Vietnamese – the siege in 1954 signalled the end of the French empire – it is surprisingly tourism free. Stone plaques mark places of interest, such as the spot where a French artillery officer shot himself in despair, and General de Castilles' bunker has been roughly recreated. But for the most part, the ambience of Dien Bien Phu is in the rusting relics that never quite made it off the field of battle: tanks, guns and machinery of war litter the paddies and even the gardens of private houses, as if subsumed into the fabric of the countryside.

Further south, situated along the 17th parallel is the area known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This was the scene of the heaviest fighting during the 1965-1973 'American war' as the Vietnamese call it, and in the once wartorn city of Hue a tourbus industry has sprung up to cater for those who wish to revisit it. To the west is Khe Sanh. Set at an altitude of 600m among a panorama of jagged hills, part of the airstrip remains, desolate but for eddies of red dust kicked up by the wind. In 1967, the US Marines were besieged for weeks by overwhelming forces. It was a diversion for the Communists' real plan, the Tet Offensive. Some of the former

Khe Sanh firebase is now a coffee plantation.

Elsewhere in the DMZ can be found other sites such as former sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail, now sanitised and asphalted-over to become part of the road network. One can also visit the tunnel complex at Vinh Moc with its beachside escape routes and underground hospital the size of an outdoor privy.

These are overshadowed by the better-known tunnels of Cu Chi, hundreds of miles further southwest. With undisguised glee, the guides show you just how well hidden these catacombs were, kicking away dead leaves and undergrowth to reveal entrance holes no larger than a shoebox. While Vietnamese tourists deftly pop themselves through the openings, none of the Europeans present have a hope. Crawling through the 4ft-high passages themselves is even less fun for a tall, perhaps overweight westerner, and one pales further when shown the display of Viet Cong booby traps also on display. The thought of carrying a rifle through the heat, humidity and insects surrounded by such vicious devices as the 'souvenir' trap (that gripped the limb so firmly that troops had to be evacuated with it still attached) doesn't bear thinking about.

All roads in Vietnam lead to Saigon, where the regime finally collapsed on 30 April 1975. While helicopters evacuated the last remaining Americans from the embassy roof, Vietcong tanks smashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace at the heart of the city. With an exterior not unlike a multi-storey car park, the inside of the palace has been preserved to illustrate the lifestyle of the

fallen government of the South. Stylish and opulent conference rooms and offices and a swinging 1960s upstairs ballroom area contrast with the underground command centre. This was the Asian equivalent of London's cabinet war rooms, from where the war was run and lost in relative safety.

From Saigon, the route turns west to Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. As the Vietnam War wound up, another violent episode began in this small and backward country. A bumpy half hour ride from the town centre takes you to Choeung Ek, better known as the Killing Fields. It is the final resting place of 17,000 hapless victims of the Khmer Rouge, bludgeoned to death to save ammunition and cast into mass graves. These pits have now been excavated, and the crania of the anonymous dead that were found now goggle at you from behind a pane of glass, preserved for eternity as part of the monument erected to remind Cambodia and its visitors of what happened here.

Even more chilling is Tuol Svay Prey High School, also known as Tuol Sleng or 'Poison Hill'. Bearing an uncanny resemblance to the functional architecture of a London secondary modern, the premises were converted into S-21, an administration and interrogation centre for the regime's enemies. Preserved just as it was when Cambodia was 'liberated' by Vietnam in 1978, the decaying complex is filled with bare cells containing nondescript iron beds, agricultural tools and dried blood, and understated displays illustrating the incomprehensible cruelty of torture practised in the camp. Most poignant of all are the thousands of mugshots taken from the prison files and now pinned up in rows on the

walls; the eyes of the condemned, sometimes defiant, sometimes pleading, sometimes uncomprehending, stare through space and time and remind you that yes, you are a voyeur.

It is strange how history works in these cycles. From the genocide of the Thailand to Burma Death Railway where the route begins, through the warzones of Laos and Vietnam, to the Killing Fields of Cambodia

where it ends, the bloody history of this troubled region maintains a presence there. Now the region is at peace, and is swamped with tourists looking for culture, adventure, and that-all important photo-op. Perhaps it is best that the past is laid to rest. But it is also right to remember.

And, one can only hope that eventually the lessons of history will be learnt.

Philip Sen is a freelance writer and photographer specialising in the politics, culture and natural landscapes of Asia. His work has featured in international magazines from Wallpaper* to Jane's Defence Weekly and British publications from The Sunday Times Travel Magazine to The Engineer. He was highly commended in the UK Periodical Training Council's New Journalist of the Year Awards 2001. See his homepage at:

<http://www.philip-sen.com>

Destination

By Jessica Titlebaum



red rusty paddle boat canoe
sitting on a wooden plank makes my bottom
hurt
for 2 hours — going to the mountain and
coming back

with a German couple
and the man with a longer ponytail than my
own
puts his maroon colored button down shirt
around my shoulders
to protect my skin from the beating sun

we climb man made steps made of rocks
through a jungle of green trees and
mountainous ravines to a cold cave decorated
with rows of Buddhas

walking back down with bottles of water and
red cheeks
Mary slips on a rock and falls to the ground
shaky, she gets back up

we borrow sunscreen from a man in a red shirt
it says Canada on it
Are you American or Canadian? I hear a
British man ask
as he puts the sunscreen back in his carry-on

on the canoe back to the shore
we see women paddle boats full of rice
collected in the paddies
they wear long sleeves and circle straw hats
with points at the top

we pass by a check point
and our 19-year-old guide who has been
paddling for two hours
gives the patrol office a piece of paper
the gate is lifted for us.

Jessica is amazed at the many coffee shops, around the world, that she has sat in and sipped coffee at. She spent some time in SE Asia and Europe, backpacking and teaching English. She has found a home in Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Florence, Italy. Jessica earned her Bachelor's of English at the University of Maryland and then moved on to receive her TESOL Certificate from TEFL International in Ban Phe, Thailand. She frequently calls Vietnam on her cell phone and believes that nothing is too fabulous to be true.

Photographer's Ground

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Selling great photos along with your work is a great income booster. The ability to take publishable pictures makes you that much more marketable in an editor's eye. There is also an axiom which states, "great pictures can sell just good prose," so honing our photography skills and learning the rules of the trade go hand in hand for the serious travel writer. Knowing a few tricks of the profession is essential. Two common questions new writers/photographers face concern photo releases and photo rights.

The rules regarding photo releases and whether or not you need to obtain them are actually quite simple. You need a person's written permission if you think you have a possible cover shot- a picture that will appear on the cover of a magazine. You will also need permission if the photo is going to be used for advertising purposes. This includes photographs that will be included in company or in-house publications. A trusted guide like *Writer's Market* or *Photographer's Market* will indicate which magazines require photo releases, as well as provide a sample release for you to copy and use.

In addition, use common sense and basic courtesy. If someone clearly shies away from the

Travel Photography Special: Aim High, Part I

By Renee Schluter-Phillips

camera- don't press them. Asking politely usually warms a subject. I recently took what I found to be an interesting photo of an elderly Oriental man playing the Chinese violin on the corner of Spadina and Dundas streets in Toronto, Ontario. The man was collecting tips from kind passers by in the open case of his violin. It was a curious looking homemade instrument that lent an authentic atmosphere to this cornerstone of Toronto's vibrant Chinatown. The image was perfect with the tell all street signs behind him. It could only be Toronto's Chinatown. Locals bustled by with their morning shopping in tow. The early sun was behind us shining square on his age old face.

I asked him if he minded me taking his photograph. He didn't. It was a friendly exchange between the two of us. He spoke with broken English. I know nada Chinese. Before I had ever approached him, I had taken some change out of my purse to enable easy access to it after I had captured the shot. I probably would have tipped him whether he had agreed to the shot or not- my own little way of supporting the arts- but the important lesson here is to show common courtesy and make good use of your common sense. Don't take from someone without giving back and be friendly.

Photos are usually sold on a one time rights basis. You hope and dream of some editor buying all

or some exclusive rights to your photos. If you want to give up those kinds of rights, the end result should be a lot more money.

But in most situations you are free to sell your photos again and again. To be clear, you can state on your captions "Photos sold on a one time rights basis." It is best to use common sense here as well, though. No editor wants to thumb through the newspaper or a competitor's magazine and come across the photo he just bought from you and is planning on including in next month's edition of his own publication. Use common sense if you want to earn an editor's respect. And, of course, you do want to earn an editor's respect.

In many cases, you can purchase photos or often get them for free. *Photographer's Market* is a good resource to access the availability of photos in the area you are covering. If your topic concerns businesses, organizations, or any other group that might benefit from the extra publicity contact them and don't forget tourism bureaus. Often, there is no need to kill yourself in an effort to get the right angle for that shot of the Golden Gate Bridge. The expected shot of this bridge, for example, has already been photographed, multiple times, and probably better by someone with better equipment and access to a helicopter.

If you didn't take the shot be sure to give photo credit, you can indicate this on your caption sheets. I remember when I first started out freelancing for *The Marion Times-Standard*, President Clinton was coming to town, and I didn't have the type of camera to cover such an event effectively. I probably could have borrowed a camera from the office, but I was new. I was a whole lot more timid then and I just didn't know. What I did was ask a friend who had gotten this incredible camera for Christmas if I could borrow her camera. She didn't want me to

do that, but instead agreed to come along with me if I could devise a plan to get a press pass for her too. We got her in the press stands- a coveted 20 feet from Clinton himself. It worked out great for me. I could focus on capturing the essence of the crowd and diligently scribbling down every conceivably important quote. I was busy making eye contact, literally, with the President, while she took all the shots in exchange for nothing more than our friendship, the once in a lifetime experience of it all, and photo credit.

So make yourself aware of your rights and obligations, educate yourself on both photography and writing; aim high, and remember to photograph the journey.

Renee Schluter-Phillips is a freelance writer with a background in environmental science and journalism. She currently lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina with her new husband, Rod, a Ph.D. Research Scientist, and her four wonderfully smart and creative children: Robert 15, Catherine Margaret 12, Jackson 9, and Helen Louise who is now 5½.

Journey Beyond Travel thanks Roberts Imaging. Located in Indianapolis, Indiana, Roberts has been offering quality photo equipment to professionals and hobbyists alike in the U.S. and abroad. We use them for all our photographic needs, so why not check them out online! They have great service, affordable prices, and fast shipping! Are you getting ready to travel and need that extra lens? Contact Robert's first!

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Writer's Ground

What a Day!
By Shaun C. Kilgore

When I first started writing--I mean, really writing--there was a keen sense of exhilaration that filled my heart at the prospect of stepping across the line. I'm sure you would agree that every writer has that point in time when they finally take the plunge, setting them apart from the countless others who only talked about writing but never did. For more years than I care to admit, I walked among those talking masses. I rationalized my place in it just like they did, providing my own comments along the way. "Yeah, oh boy, I'm going to do it, I'm going to write something spectacular. Yeah, I'm going to be a writer, you'll see." But, obviously, for a long time, nothing happened. I talked--we all talked right?

Then a day came when I really meant those words and they became something else. They began to flow with life. I came home from my regular job and instead of staring at the computer screen longingly, I walked over, sat down, and began tapping on the keys like a concert pianist during a solo performance -- a breakthrough. That is what it was. I stopped merely talking and actually acted on that impulse I had spent so much time suppressing and appeasing with hollow promises in the past.

Do you remember that moment? Wasn't it wonderful? Wasn't it intoxicating to see your thoughts and visions spread out before you? Let me tell you, it was for me. Writing those initial manuscript pages filled me with

such joy. Page by page, chapter by chapter, I was reaffirming that I, indeed, might actually be a writer. This is not to say that I didn't struggle. There was always something that I just could not convey or some aspect of the craft still completely unknown to me. The mechanics of my storytelling were rough and often tenuous, but I relished even my most awkward attempts. They were my validation.

Those fitful surges of creative juices were so inspiring and sparked a fire that has continued to burn. Every time I sit here and type I am stopped by my own thoughts. It is such a beautiful thing to create, whether by words being strung into sentences or by a brush and some paint; all proceeds from that same deep recess of the soul, the very center of the artistic spirit.

As a child, this was cultivated in more visual forms of expression. The writer that would later immerse found a way into my creative moments through something as seemingly trivial as sequential art. (Yes, I mean comic books.) Here these two powerful forms of expression were combined into a brilliant and exciting format which I readily devoured at a monstrous rate. The conveyance of story through pictures and words cast a heady spell over my young mind and even when I had that writer's awakening some years later, it came in the form of comic book-like visions dancing in my head, beckoning me along a crooked little path that storytelling often becomes.

The notion of creating my own comic books, the very marriage of my skills as an artist and still untapped talent as a writer, led me to seek schooling. It was the wrong road, though I hardly thought so at the time. I was convinced that the synthesis of words and images was what I was looking for, when in reality, I was more concerned with the story than I was with conjuring it up in the narrow confines of limited panels in a twenty-five page spread. No, I had wider vistas in mind, but not enough confidence to proceed further.

My awakening was still a few years off. So, I sat in silence. No mode of expression ever came close to what I knew was building up inside of me. But, with time, that growth of creative energy finally surged to the surface and exploded one summer afternoon after I had gotten home from work. The awakening had arrived.

I could tell you that I made my way carefully down this road, but I would not be telling the truth. I plunged headlong through the thickets of prose and pacing, not really taking the time to plan my venture. I was filled to bursting with the images of the fantastic, visions of chivalrous legends, and great magical powers at work in fictional worlds of my own devising. I could well imagine a field of super heroics within which I could play out the best parts of my comic book experiences, but cut through the limitations that this form imposed on the storyline.

I paid for this reckless launch. Time after time, I struggled terribly with my own limitations as a burgeoning young writer and every rewrite was testimony to my shaky creative choices. But this is not to say that the efforts were in vain. No, on the contrary, they were the whetstones that sharpened the blade of my writer's sensibilities.

The more I raked my ignorance and assumptions against them the clearer my insight into the nuts and bolts of the craft became. I grew. Now, after a number of years, I find that, thankfully, I am still being sharpened. I still struggle with some of the same elementary issues that marked my first efforts, but to a lesser degree. The pains I have gone through were well worth the effort expended. My satisfaction

continues to swell with every step of my journey down the writer's path. The artist in me continues to supply the necessary fuel of both real and imagined places and people, and I rejoice in this. I could have regrets for my wrong choices, but I would rather choose to learn from these and push on through the tangled forest of writing. What a day it is!

Special Announcement: WRITER'S CONTEST!

Journey Beyond Travel - First Book in Progress Award -

As listed in Writer's Market, Journey Beyond Travel is proud to bring our readers and writers our first annual First Book in Progress Award.

What: Worldwide contest for writers currently writing a nonfiction manuscript. It can be literary, creative, narrative, or a compilation of short stories regarding adventure / travel. We acquire the right to print the winning material in Journey Beyond Travel's e-zine and newsletter. Manuscripts will be judged by a panel with substantial writing, critiquing, editing, and publishing experience. Entries may be submitted through the website.

How: First, break out that old manuscript about adventure/travel. Or, if you've been dying to tell your story – that perfect book idea – now is your time to start typing! Send us a one-paragraph query, a one-page synopsis and the first thirty, double-spaced pages of your manuscript. Each page should be numbered and in pristine editorial condition. All materials should be sent via e-mail as Microsoft Word documents. Materials sent hardcopy may not reach us.

First Prize: US\$ 1000.00 & Journey Beyond Travel Book of the Year Seal upon publication.

Contest Begins: April 2006

Deadline: December 31, 2006; Winner announced in March 2007.

Entrance Fee: ONLY US\$ 25.00; via Paypal

Eligibility: Open to any writer who has never published a book before. Those who have had books self-published, published by a vanity press, or whose work has appeared in print or online journals may enter.

See the [Journey Beyond Travel](http://www.journeybeyondtravel.com) website once contest begins for further details!

Writer's Life

Living the Writer's Life – in Paris:

A Writer's Paris: A Guided Journey for the Creative Soul

By Eric Maisel

A Review By Erika Dreifus

If you've ever dreamed of absconding to the City of Lights (and its cafés) to write your novel or book of poems, Eric Maisel's new book may help you make that dream come true. "It is easy to find a Parisian studio for a month," Maisel says. Contrary to popular thought, it is not impossible "to live cheaply and well. I am not asking that you throw over your life in order to experience Paris. This is not a book about expat living. I am only asking that you use Paris not as a tourist destination, but as a place to write, and that you make Paris one of the stopping places on your creative journey."

Maisel, a San Francisco-based creativity coach and coach trainer, and himself the author of more than two dozen works of fiction and nonfiction, is all about that creative journey. He does include practical tips on finding a place to stay and sifting through the many web sites and guidebooks that will both simplify and enrich your life in Paris, but his main focus is helping

you mine the city and the experience of being there for your writing.

He tells you about his own favorite writing spots, for instance (the Place des Vosges is one of them). He anticipates and counters many of your fears, blocks, and other obstacles—including my own unfortunate favorite: "I have no idea for a novel."

Along the way, conversationally, he imparts quite a bit of French history and culture (I found his section on "Disrespecting Albert Camus" particularly intriguing). Part travel book, part writer's manual, *A Writer's Paris* indeed provides a guided journey, and a very good read.

Erika Dreifus is a freelance writer and Francophile based in Massachusetts. Her own Parisian sojourns include a semester during college and several months conducting dissertation research as a graduate student. Be sure to visit her website: <http://www.practicing-writer.com>

Book Described Above: Writer's Digest Books, November 2005; \$18.99; 1-58297-359-8

Out and About

Hepatitis on a Stick? : Street Food in China

By Larry Jer

Eat anything that flies except airplanes; eat anything with legs except the table.

- Chinese adage (But Larry wishes he'd said it first!)



Eating street cuisine in China did not come easily to me. Without ever having set foot in the Middle Kingdom, I agreed to teach English for a year in Shenyang, northeast of Beijing.

Shenyang is heavy into industry and is known more for its sooty sky than as a haven of epicurean delight-- the air itself so chunked with particulate matter, it might actually qualify as a sidedish or at the very least, a condiment.

I lost twenty-five pounds over ten months that year, a change so dramatic I certainly could have marketed the diet, perhaps under the pen name, Dr. Fill. For I was never hungry yet I was soon punching new holes on the negative side of my belt.

Logic follows, with a billion-plus mouths in the land, each twig and root, every niblet and giblet, would be taste-tested at some point. If the morsel had potential, it was afforded an

exotic name, then served up with smothering sauces and an inflated tab.

I am no different than many of you, born and raised in North America. True to Canadian tradition, all foodstuffs deemed inedible or unsightly are disposed of, garburated, vaporized; atomic-sized remnants chased into oblivion by antibacterial sprays so even its essence no longer existed to offend.

What happened? I was eating reasonably well in China. Why rock the rickshaw? Well, each day as I rode past countless street vendors, tantalizing bouquets wafted from their carts and kiosks, promising fresh pastries, grilled seafood, barbecued lamb-- the siren scents chasing me back to my flat where I would sit and contemplate my roomy dungarees.

It was as good an appetizer as one could get as I always arrived at my school's cafeteria with great anticipation and not a little drool. I tossed down meals with much elan because, sadly, I couldn't afford to shed any more body weight, my body mass dropping like it had no emergency chute. Not only for necessity and weight concerns, I explored the city's food subculture as another aspect of life in China, dozens

of tiny field trips for my palate.

Actually, street food is easier to order than in traditional restaurants. You can see exactly what you're getting, watch them prepare it and without ever having to call it by name, you can always just say "zai lai yige." Translation: "Kiss me, you fool." No, really, this useful phrase means "one more, please." If not, simply move on to the next goodie wagon.



They say you never forget your first. Mine was five silkworm kebabs for a yuan (15 cents), not at all deterred by the fact that a few British expats named the pungent tidbits, "hepatitis on a stick." As I stood astride my flashy red girl's bike enjoying my treats, my senses must certainly have been heightened. How else could I notice that the kebabs were in fact, skewered on old bicycle spokes? Enterprising. Chinese have found a new way to recycle a cycle.

These days, in a perfectly scrubbed suburb of Vancouver,

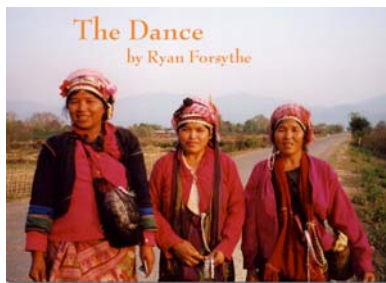
it's been a year and an eternity since rolling through the streets of Shenyang. Can I honestly say I miss the foul air, chopsticks that have never seen soapy water, huddling close to the makeshift oven because it's minus 20 and the

only thing keeping your fingers from frostbite is the freshly roasted yam you hold? How can I not miss it?

While waiting patiently for his nomad gene to kick in, Larry spends much of his day within arm's length of reclining furniture. He travels extensively in his mind and to a much lesser degree by commercial airlines.

Beyond the Surface

The Dance By Ryan Forsythe



Up near Laos' border with China, lies Muang Sing, a tiny town with one dusty main drag, a few guesthouses and restaurants scattered to either side. With its French-influenced wooden buildings and banisters, and a lone pig or the occasional pack of chickens walking free, there's a sense of a swinging-door ol' west frontier town. I didn't see any horses gallop by, but three elephants strolled past as I downed my beer.

The town has two markets. The main market near the bus stop is a great spot for people watching and picking up cheap wares: scarves and handbags made by local hilltribes; name brand knock-offs, such as Nikei: "Just For You;" fruits I never knew existed; and, of course, stacks of raw meat attracting crowds of flies.

Then there's the floating market. It's not quite like

other floating markets where hundreds of small boats converge as their owners barter and trade. This is the opium market, a pack of short, stocky women that float to wherever in town white people with overstuffed backpacks can be found.

I discovered them the moment I arrived. Or, rather, they discovered me. The only way to Muang Sing is from Luang Nam Tha. It's less than 40 miles, but takes more than 2 hours in a crowded bumpy bus. And who should welcome you to town, after your trip? The women of the Akha hilltribe, who come into town from outlying villages in the hopes of making a few dollars.

Stepping foot off the bus, I was immediately surrounded by five or six of them, some carrying kids, but each with a proud helmet of pink cloth held fast with headband bracelets of tin disks, coins, beads, and shells. Each woman had at least two or three handbags somewhere on their person—in their hands, over shoulders, some even hanging down their backs with the handles slung around their foreheads like sweatbands.

Reaching into the bags, the women would pull out a handful of colorful bead bracelets, smile earnestly and shout, with their grinning black and yellow teeth buzzing up and down like bumblebees: "Brace-let? Two-tousand! Two-tousand!..."

Almost in unison, the twenty bus riders spoke out. "No. No, thanks. Not interested. No, I don't want!" Only after repeated denials of their bracelets, did the women casually lift up the jewelry to reveal something hidden in their palm, small tablespoon size bags of fine dark-chocolate colored powder.

"Op-yum?"

They never actually spoke the word, perhaps out of fear for some police or military authority we never saw, or maybe to quicken our heartbeat at the secret danger of their forbidden fruit. It was always just mouthed. Either that or they'd make a puffing or sucking or blowing sound. Not so with the marijuana—that was always a whisper: "Ganja?"

They'd open up the bags to reveal more bracelets, some bamboo containers, and big bags of grass alongside the

small bags of opium powder. And they'd point. Want some of this?

With a dozen or so of them waiting for our bus of twenty passengers, each of us was able to tango with a good half of them before the driver dropped our packs from the bus's rooftop rack. I was one of the first to get my backpack and as I walked down the street, the symphony of solicitation played behind me: cries of "Brace-let!" swirling with screams of "No, leave me alone." Sucking sounds and bags rustling mixed together with shouts of "I said I don't want any!" And the whispers of "Ganja?" interspersed with queries of "Hmmm, how much did you say?"

I stayed at the Muang Sing Guest House. Beds were comfy enough, but I never did find a light switch in my room. Not much need, I guess, when the whole town together goes dark at the same time each night. Sure, we had light when needed, as it kicked on around 6:24pm and off around 8:57pm. It was a good thing I didn't want to be fast asleep during those hours, though I suppose the mosquito would have kept out a bit of the bright fluorescent light. For under \$3/night, I couldn't complain much.

My room 209 overlooked the main street, so I was able to safely observe the ladies in all their splendor. Every now and

then, the Akha organize. They gather in a circle of 9 or 12, I think to plot strategy: "Mouthing 'ganja' isn't working...we may have to start whispering." Or maybe it's to discuss who's managed to escape their grasp: "Keep working that guy from Ohio, ladies; he's not leaving without a purchase." Of course, it could be the opposite: "The smiling Australian woman has brought six bracelets already—keep at her, girls, keep at her!"

And then they break huddle—3 wandering that way, 4 toward the bus stop, 2 off to run interference, maybe 2 more hanging back to gauge the assault and plan their next attack.

My second day brought breakfast with Aussies Neil and Julia at the Tailu Guest House and Restaurant, but it also brought something new to the repertoire of the Akha women. They surrounded our table—no escaping, at least not until we finish our omelets. First came the bracelet offers. No, no, no—not interested. Next, the silent soliciting of drugs. Not today, no thank you. Third time's the charm, the ladies thought, and tossed their new ammo.

"Massage?"

Before Julia could respond, there was a hilltribe woman rubbing each shoulder, pulling her hands this way and that,

rubbing each of Julia's fingers, while a third woman dug her fingers into Julia's back. Don't like what's in the bag? Try some Lao lovin' instead.

I ran into a lot of people who ran fast from Muang Sing, just because of the ladies. The Danish family couldn't stand the constant offering of drugs. The Frenchman called it a zoo. Others felt the women were just too darn pushy. Understandable, all. But compared with visits to Ho Chi Minh City and New Delhi and Arusha, Tanzania, I found the women were harmless. Always smiling, they'd go away after a few minutes. Or if you walked away, there'd be no problem. The safari touts in Tanzania and the small kids in Saigon can always keep up with you—no matter how fast you walk or run. But these ladies didn't have it in them. Cradling a kid or two, sporting 3 or 4 sacks of drugs (and bracelets)—they just don't have the gas to keep up if you keep on walking.

Of course, no reason to run if you're there to talk business: opium, ganja, or bracelets. Or even a massage.

Ryan Forsythe was born in Cleveland, and once climbed a hill in a Malaysian rainforest with the then-Miss India, but can now be found in California, with his wife Kaci, son Rory, and school bus, Lola. For two years, he wrote "Traveling Light" for the Oberlin News-Tribune, a light-hearted column focusing on budget travel.

Cobra Show Thailand (The Floating Market)

By Jessica Titlebaum

coconut 10 baht, they say
sun beating down on my shoulders
glare in my sunglasses
on paddle boats in the canal
Thais eating fried noodle soup out of blue
dishes
with chopsticks, floating along
a traffic jam
sun still shining off the gold rim of my glasses
a French man in white pants buys a mango
and peels it for his girlfriend

a local holds an umbrella over her head
an Israeli couple passes in the boat next to us
and in this heat she still wears a hair wig

I feel like I am on a ride at Disney World,
I say to Mary next to me
fake bags like Louis' are sold alongside spices
like galangale and chili pepper

I see a Buddha image I would like for my living
room wall
but it would be too hard to carry home
the woman in front of me in a yellow tank top
buys a Mango for 40 baht
its sticky and sweet and when offered to me
slides from my fingers and stains my jeans.

Beyond Culture

Tanduay and Cokes
By Brenda Lee Intengan

On my eighth night in Moal Boal, I found myself in the Chili Bar, playing pool and drinking San Miguels with a friend I had met on the dive boat that afternoon, a law student from Boston who studied in Hong Kong for the semester. He was vacationing in the Philippines for a quick break, before heading to Sierra Leone to do legal defense for war criminals on behalf of the U.N. A young filipino with short hair and high cheekbones in a white tank top sauntered over and introduced himself.

"I heard you are a filipina. When I look at you, I can't believe it," he declared cheekily.

"Oh really. Do I not look like a filipina?"

"No, you look Japanese."

"But I have a tan now! I've been here for two weeks! You are crazy."

"Where are you from?"

"I was born in Chicago. But my parents are both Cebuano. Not only are they both filipino, but they are both from Cebu. My father is from Balamban, my mother is from Sogod." I had had this conversation with almost every filipino stranger that I had met since I flew into Cebu. "So I really, truly, I am a filipina."

I waited for this information to register as I leaned over to aim my cue.

"But you don't speak Bisaya?"

"My parents never taught me. They wanted us to master the English language. I'm learning Cebuano now though, gamay lang."

"Your mother is from Sogod?"

"Yes. When we were children, my brothers and my sister and I would come here during our summer vacation. For us, summer vacation is during June, July and August- not April to June like here. So we would be in town for the fiesta in Sogod in July. I would meet all of our cousins and we would all sleep on the floor in my grandfather's house."

"My mother is from Sogod too! She is from the mountains just outside Sogod! What is your last name?"

"My last name is Intengan. My mother's last name is Comendador." I loved saying her name, it sounds so Spanish and authoritative.

"Comendador. I will tell my mother. Maybe tomorrow you can meet her? We will have a

barbecue in the afternoon. You should come and meet my mother. I will tell her all about you tonight. Where are you staying? How long will you be here?"

"Hey man, I think it's a little too soon to meet your mother. I am diving in the afternoon, I have no time for partying. We are probably related anyways."

"Probably. So what's it like in Chicago? Did you ever meet Michael Jordan?"

"No, but this girl I know, a filipina, claims to have dated Scottie Pippen. Chicago is very cold. I practically did not see the sun for fourteen months! I'm exaggerating, but last year the weather never got warmer than 85 degrees- I mean 25 degrees. In the wintertime it gets very cold. You have to wear a sweater, a big coat, gloves, a hat, a scarf, long pants, socks and boots just to go outside to get a newspaper. The snow can be as high as your knee. Girls pay 20 dollars to lie in tanning beds, with long strong lights lining the inside, and they close themselves in it just like a coffin to burn their skin because there is no sun. That's why I am so pale. It's not good for a filipina to be in the cold."

His eyes grew large with wonder, and the law student set another beer in front of me and lit me cigarette. I nodded my thanks.

"Are there other filipinos in Chicago?"

"There are a lot of filipinos there. I grew up with many filipino friends who were born there just like me. We eat filipino food, we have parties on the weekend and order a big

lechon on special occasions. A lot of my closest girlfriends happen to be filipinas- maybe we just understand each other's lives better. We get together all the time and eat."

"You like filipino food?"

"Of course I do! It is comforting to me. Last month I was in Germany and I met a filipina who cooked calderata for us, and it was so nice to eat filipino food in a foreign country. I felt more comfortable, immediately. My girlfriends and I do all the same things that I do with the girls that I've met here on Panagsama Beach. We eat-pancit, palabok, adobo, everything."

"What else?"

"We talk... about most of the same things I talk about with the girls I know from here."

"Like what?"

I blushed. "Umm... we talk about boys and astrology."

Last night at the Lipay Lipay bar on the beach, I attended a one year anniversary party, at which I sat with four filipinas for dinner. After the initial questions about where I had come from, a girl named Sally casually asked me what my zodiac sign was. I was in familiar territory. The next hour was a flooded with astrological analysis, which we applied to the various love interests in our lives and our own personal self-investigations. Oddly enough, had I been in Chicago that evening, I probably would have found myself doing the exact same thing with my close girlfriends, except we would have been drinking a Pinot

Noir or a Sancerre instead of Tanduay and Cokes.

"Huh?"

"Yeah. Don't ask. It's girl stuff. Anyhow, I know I did not grow up here, but my parents are very filipino. I was raised the same way you were."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you ever have to kneel in the corner and face the wall when you were bad?"

His eyes grew large, and he stood up and pointed at me. "You are a maldita! You are the maldita of the family!!! Yes, yes, I had to do that! I even had to hold a glass of water in each hand!"

He stretched out his arms like he was being crucified, palms up and eyes rolled to the ceiling.

"Whatever. I had to kneel on a pilke of uncooked rice!", I trumped.

"Did your father chase you around and spank you with his belt?", he asked.

"Oh man, that happened all the time."

"See, I knew you were the maldita of your family."

The word maldita used to make me wince. My mother would say it in fury, in a long, slow accusatory tone with her jaw jutted out. "Maal-diii-taaa." It always came at the moment that I got caught doing something bad. I thought that it sounded like a curse, and hearing the word had always made me flinch.

The week before, however, I chanced upon a little boutique

that had the word Maldita written across its entrance in the mall. It sold clothes for young women, and featured an ad with a girl proudly sporting the word across her t-shirt. I walked in.

"What does Maldita mean?" I asked the girl at the counter.

"A bad girl."

"My mom used to call me that all the time. Both of my parents are from Cebu. So, its bad, like an evil girl?"

"Its not bad like that. More like... a rebellious girl."

"Not like a curse then?"

"No, like you just do whatever you want. Like you have attitude, or you are free."

I could practically feel the gears turning in my head as many, many gaps of misunderstanding filled, and for some strange reason the weight of many years of guilt were

lifted off my shoulders. Before I left the shop, I bought two tank tops that had Maldita sassily emblazoned across the back.

"If I wasn't the maldita of the family, do you think that I could be staying here alone? My mother would die if she knew I was hours away from my family in Cebu City, scuba diving everyday, and staying out until the early morning playing pool, singing videoke and drinking beer with cute boys from all over the world! She wouldn't even let me sleep over at anyone's house until the day I left for college! And when we came to Cebu when I was a kid, she wouldn't let us go anywhere without a driver or a nanny." He considered this.

"You should have a brother, or a cousin with you."

"But I know that I can defend myself. Being a maldita, I have found myself in many situations where I have to look out for myself and keep my

wits about me. I do a better job at that than any of my male relatives can. When we go out, I have to babysit them."

He backed away and looked at me from across the pool table. We were evenly matched.

"Can I buy you a drink?" I asked. I went and got another round of San Miguels without waiting for his reply.

"Salud. To being Cebuanos and malditos."

Brenda Lee Intengan was born and raised in Chicago, and spent the summers of her youth on Mactan Island in the Philippines. The island is famous for the legendary battle in which the local chieftan Lapu Lapu defeated Ferdinand Magellan in hand to hand combat when he led a Spanish invasion in 1521. She resides in Chicago, where she skateboards, dances to house music, practices the filipino martial art of Eskrima, and writes about the chaos and irony of her daily life and existence.

Beyond the Destination

Hitchhiking the World

By David King

“You’re enormous,” begins a message of admiration on Ludovic Hubler’s Web site. It’s just one of over 300 such postings from people around the world who have written to express praise and support for Hubler and his journey.

While the 28-year-old Frenchman from the city of Strasbourg may not be enormous himself, many consider his trip to be. On January 1, 2003, Hubler set off from France to hitchhike around the world, a journey he expects to complete by 2008.

Yes, around the world.

Speaking at a gathering of French enthusiasts in Chicago, Hubler recounts his often-told story. When he was eight or nine years old, he would look at maps and think to himself that he’d some day travel the world. When he reached his late teens, his parents let him hitchhike; he began in Strasbourg and then branched out in his region, to other parts of France, and eventually to other countries in Europe. He would seek out drivers at gas stations, a tactic that allowed him to choose someone with whom he felt comfortable.

Hubler began his trek around the world with one restriction: he wouldn’t spend any money to travel from place to place. (He would, however, pay to travel within a city once there.) Over the past nearly three years, he has lived a nomadic life, mostly using the

technique of approaching people at gas stations when traveling over land and soliciting rides on boats to cross water. Other modes of transportation have included plane, snowmobile, donkey, and dromedary.

Before reaching the United States last October, Hubler touched 27 countries across Europe, Africa, and South America. (He decided to travel west, because westward winds make sailing easier in that direction.) He has a budget of about ten dollars a day, carrying most of his belongings between two backpacks and washing his clothes every eight or nine days. To fund his trip, he has obtained money from sponsors and written articles for local newspapers in France, in addition to using his personal savings. He has no phone but does carry international medical insurance.

The reactions in the U.S. to Hubler as a Frenchman have been diverse. “Some people love my country,” he remarks, “and some others hate it.” One man refused to pick him up because Hubler was French; five minutes later, another told him he wished that the U.S. and France had a better relationship— and was all too happy to let the Frenchman ride. All in all, Hubler generally has been well-received in this country, he says, especially by families. “They really want you to feel at home,” he observes of many families. “They want you to get the Coke in the fridge any time and

wanna’ make sure you don’t need anything.”

By the same token, he has found hitchhiking in the U.S. to be more difficult than in other countries. He attributes this to what he sees as “a culture of fear and individualism more important than Latin America or Africa.” Once, for example, he found himself waiting next to a road under a strong rain for a long time, watching as hundreds of cars passed by. Another time, a police officer in Florida, where hitchhiking is illegal, offered him the choice of paying for a taxi or going to jail— both of which Hubler narrowly escaped when a driver who overheard the conversation offered to drive him. (When that same driver let him off, Hubler found himself approached by the police again. Only this time, the officers were sympathetic and helped him to find another vehicle.) On still another occasion, one driver did not pick up Hubler because the man wasn’t going in his direction— but did invite Hubler to Thanksgiving dinner.

Over the course of his journey, he has ridden with people who were drunk, who drove 150 miles per hour, or— on one occasion— who had a gun in the dash (Hubler was fine with that, so long as the driver didn’t use it on him). In Columbia, he passed through the so-called “red zone,” a dangerous area inhabited by guerillas. Throughout it all, Hubler, who is about 6 feet 2

inches tall, says he's never been threatened.

He believes it's important to share his experiences with others, and to that end, he speaks at schools, universities, Alliance Françaises, and other places and occasionally posts writings to his Web site, www.ludovichubler.com. Recent entries have included musings on the Quebecois' protectiveness of the French language, the insularity of the Amish community, and the diversity of New York City. He also sends out an E-mail newsletter— which friends translate for him into English and Spanish— to people on his mailing list every six to eight weeks. “If I would meet my parents today,” he says half-jokingly, “I wouldn't have that much to tell them.”

Hubler estimates that 80 million people have heard of his trip. He has been interviewed numerous times by the media, including an appearance on Programa do Jô, the most widely-viewed Portuguese-language talk show. One of the most important audiences to him, however, has been a group of some 30 cancer patients at a Strasbourg hospital to whom he acts as a mentor. He writes to the patients, aged 15 to 18, about the places he visits, and they, in turn, use his writings— and webcam appearances— to study subjects such as geography, history, and math.

“The more you travel, the more you switch [...] from a 'local thinker to a 'global thinker,' and you start considering all the world around you,” says Hubler, who speaks confidently and has a big smile.

He recognizes an inherent danger in hitchhiking but nonetheless sees it as an effective way to get to know people across social and cultural backgrounds. As for this trip, one of his greatest satisfactions has been seeing with his own eyes that “the vast majority of people in the world are honest and nice.”

Hubler, who received a Master of Science in Management from the Strasbourg Business School three years ago, is considering working some day for the United Nations or to strengthen ties between the European Union and Latin America. But all that is for later. At last check, Ludovic Hubler was in New Zealand. He had some 25 countries left to go.

David King is a freelance writer in Chicago. He can be reached at: dkgrenoble@yahoo.fr

Traveler's Secret

Shopping Secret: Tchibo

By Kate Baggot

Tchibo is the shopping adventure to discover on your visit to Germany. A chain of “coffee” stores found across the country, several different blends of freshly ground coffee can be purchased every business day. But coffee, as a German radio comedy recently put it, is quickly becoming an after thought. “Boss, this lady wants to buy some coffee. We don't sell coffee here, do we?” asked the comic salesgirl.

“Every week is a new world,” goes the Tchibo slogan, and every Tuesday shopoholics across Germany crowd window displays to see what wonders that world has to offer for the next seven days. Recent offerings included cell phone packages placed beside the most comfortable

women's winter underwear, and his and her pyjama sets. Another week featured horseback riding gear for young girls and children's raincoats, rubber boots and hats.

The only problem is that, on the streets of Germany, everyone recognises every Tchibo purchase. Style and distinction come through combining the goods with more individual pieces of clothing and accessories. Luckily, no one is likely to recognise your purchases at home.

And, if you have to find a gift for that quintessential difficult person to buy for, there's always coffee.

Place & Time

Ghost Month in Hong Kong By Nicole Trilivas

A typhoon cloaked Hong Kong in a dense fog. The air, saturated and weighty, hugged my clothes like a scared child. It was, after all, ghost month (August), and I had to tread carefully as spirits could be freely roaming the eerie landscape.

Hong Kong seemed hushed with superstition. The smell of incense hung thick in the air, and even restaurants put out extra place settings in the middle of their tables for any lurking spirits. Always the considerate traveler, I also tried to be accommodating- it's considered dangerous to travel during ghost month and the last thing I needed was a vaporous ghost chasing away my luck.

The tradition through osmosis was seeping into me, I thought, as my ferry undulated in the spooky, gray waters of the South China Sea. I recalled Tin Hau, the Taoist goddess of the sea I had read about in the Hotel's tourist attractions book. Hong Kong, reliant on trade and encased by salty water, is scattered with temples and shrines devoted to Tin Hau- protector of seafarers. I think of her now, and silently promise her half of my

mooncake if she gets me to Lantau Island safely. Between the typhoon and the ghosts I'm beginning to feel ganged up on.

Lantau is covered in a thicket of green. The abundance of forest on Lantau resulted in the island being called the "lungs of Hong Kong." Heavy, opaque mist lounged ominously throughout its precipitous peaks like a bad crowd. If these are Hong Kong's lungs it looks like she's a smoker.

The mysterious ambience is provoking. I resolve to put my American tourist-mentality on pause. I cannot be troubled to get the perfect picture, and I cannot waste time looking down at a guidebook with all this haunting beauty surrounding me.

I am a religious wanderer. This is my pilgrimage. I am the penitent monk looking for the Tian Tan Buddha. I climb the steps in Po Lin Monastery. The heavens are unforgiving, and shower me. Good thing I've decided to stop being a tourist because something like rain would have really gotten me down, but as an unruffled monk enveloped in spirituality, I am unfazed!

I pounce up the stairs – very un-monk like – but the Nepalese chanting, like incense smoke spiraling upward from the monastery below, fuels me. I begin to see the Buddha's silhouette above the steep, never-ending stairs in front of me.

The great bronze Tian Tan Buddha sits 85 feet high above Po Lin. Hand-raised, and ear lobes sagging; he's both formidable and subdued. Although initially disheartened by the austere weather, the overcast backdrop makes the scene ethereal, and I slip with ease back into tourist mode rapidly firing my camera, and plunging back into my guidebook.

The restless spirits scatter and the fog parts as I descend towards the Nepalese chanting. The Tian Tan Buddha's behind me, watching my back.

Nicole Trilivas is a 2005 graduate of Boston University's College of Communications. She is currently working in advertising in New York City, as well as pursuing a career in freelance writing. Nicole can be reached at: ntrilivas@gmail.com

Traveler's Wisdom

Get Lost!

By Kathleen M. Wooton, M.D.

Someone has just told you to get lost. This is as an insult to the world at large. It's a not so polite request for you to make an immediate change in venue, a statement that one person's view of the world is a lot better without you in it, a fervent wish for your instant teleportation to anywhere other than where you are now. It is, in essence, the ultimate "beam him up, Scotty" moment.

I just don't see it that way. Getting lost is so much more than that, and can be a heck of a lot of fun. To me, "Get Lost" is an invitation to explore a brave new world, a fascinating way to travel the globe and meet new people. It's a challenge, a dare, an alternative to the safe and the mundane. It's a spontaneous journey into the unknown, and it is as simple as making one wrong turn. I do it all the time.

Get lost and see the world - that's been my experience thus far. I highly recommend it - I think the world be a much happier place if people got lost more often. The joys of discovery and meeting new people more than compensate for the temporary embarrassment you'll

experience as you enlist the help of the natives to help find your way home. And the beauty is, it takes so very little effort to do it well. If you believe variety is the spice of life, embracing the lost lifestyle will spice up your life considerably.

You can start on your road to adventure by taking a shortcut to the grocery store - a.k.a. getting lost close to home. With any luck, soon you'll see new neighborhoods, meet new people, and find cool places to shop. It's a mini-vacation that is doubly delightful for its sheer spontaneity. Unfortunately, you'll have to enjoy it while you can, for you may not pass that way again. Getting lost as recreation is an art form, but getting lost in the same place twice takes years of practice.

A step up on the lost-o-meter is the family vacation. Buy a map, rent an RV, pack up your family and gather your passports, it's time to follow the open road. It's loads of fun, and you may even get to see Canada or Mexico without even trying (hence, the passports). Be sure to take along a plentiful supply of bottled water and Pepto-Bismol, just in case you anger

Montezuma in your travels. Brushing up on your Spanish wouldn't hurt either, just in case you succeed in angering Montezuma and you need to quickly find the loo.

To wholeheartedly get lost, you need to think globally. To totally and royally lose yourself in a place where you don't speak the language is the ultimate journey into the Lost Realms. Prior to doing this, you must be sure you've memorized "please direct me to the American Embassy" in several different languages (or, if you're concerned about anti-American sentiment, ask for the Canadian Embassy and make sure you can sing the first two verses of "Oh, Canada" by heart), or you may find yourself in the middle of a messy international incident. Remember, there is no clever "My wrong turn landed me in a foreign jail and all I got was this lousy T-shirt" top which you can sport after such an ordeal.

The next time someone tells you to get lost, be sure to thank him or her and do just that. Get lost. See the world. You never know where you'll touch down.

World Foods

Schnitzel International
By Kate Baggot

We all know Weiner Schnitzel sautéed in butter or deep-fried, Jaeger Schnitzel in its deep brown huntsman's gravy, or maybe even PilzenSchnitzel covered in mushroom sauce. But do you know Schnitzel Mafioso or Hawaiian Schnitzel? As the world grows smaller the number of ways Germans enjoy their schnitzel is increasing. Our local take-out and delivery place offers dozens of options inspired by cuisines

from around the world. Care for some Schnitzel Griechischerart? It comes dressed in a Greek-style combination of tomato sauce, tomatoes, black olives and feta. Or, if you feel like something from home, try the Bonanza Schnitzel covered in chilli and grated American cheese. Is it surprising that our local, Schnitzel Express, does a sideline in pizza?

True Traveler

Big (Sur)Prise!
By Janice Arenofsky

I hate surprises — especially ones caused by careless communication.

Take Big Sur in California. From the time the forest ranger at Andrew Molera State Park instructed me to "have a good day," I sensed I was on shaky ground--no, it wasn't an earthquake. It felt more like a highway traffic sign warning, "Danger Ahead. Faulty Language."

I could tell the Keeper of the Conifers was verbally challenged from the way he ticked off (from memory) the park rules: Don't litter; don't bring domestic animals; don't touch the vegetation; don't squeeze the Charmin. The list went on and on. This was followed by an educational overview of the flora and fauna we could expect to see during our "nature walk."

According to Mr. Park Ranger, we had a choice of two trails. One led through dense underbrush and oaks to a large eucalyptus grove that sheltered hordes of migrating monarch butterflies. The other route bypassed the winged beauties, blazing a scenic path to the beach.

We chose Door Number One.

For the record, I have nothing whatsoever against exercise or, for that matter, rocks, dirt and creepy-crawlies. But people employing phrases like "nature walk," when what they really mean is a three-mile HIKE with all the trimmings, including poison ivy, pesky wildlife and pulled muscles, need to carry pocket dictionaries—at all times.

We suffered scrubby shrubs that scratched our ankles, low, overhanging branches that swatted our heads and narrow, rock-protruding passages that

scrambled our feet. We trudged up earth-packed, dusty inclines, tripped over hidden roots and staggered downhill, sliding to shaky and slippery stops. Up, down, up, down. If this was a nature walk, I was Martha Stewart!

In an effort to interact with the environment as well as keep up our morale, we chatted about the hotel naturalist's orientation spiel on Big Sur and its natural beauty and pristine surroundings. Lately, though, a terrorist had invaded its shores, our guide told us. The California beetle was destroying hundreds of Big Sur's trees, causing a disease our local bio-expert called "Sudden Oak Death."

"What a ridiculous name," I said to my husband as we trudged through yet another rain-starved copse. "All I can picture is a giant ICU forest with dying trees hooked up to

dozens of moss-covered oxygen tanks."

My husband snickered. "Maybe that's the real reason why Medicare is tanking."

"Yup," I joked back. "They turned over every leaf looking for that name. Even "Beetle-Mania" would have been better."

By now, we were yuking it up big time--and sweating profusely. Had it not been for our overpowering desire to see the much heralded butterflies, we might have pulled up a few rocks, rested our derrières and swapped one-liners.

"We're getting closer to the butterflies," my companion said excitedly. "Are you ready for the Monarchs of Molera?"

Snapping our heads to and fro, we risked whiplash, watching the colorful creatures slip in and out of the leafy branches. Minutes later, we had counted 50 butterflies—not the

"hundreds" the concierge promised. A case of mistaken hyperbole?! Had our resident travel host miscommunicated? Were we being led down the garden path of overstatement and exaggeration?

We still held out hope, however, for Vista Point at the end of the trail. Our travel agent had touted the natural beauty of precipitous cliffs and clear, shining ocean water, but one glance told us she misspoke. We gawked as a truckload of teens with ghetto blasters noisily waded across a crystal clear inlet connecting us to a strip of sandy beach. The kids' high-pitched hollering inspired us to head back to base camp, ASAP.

On the way, we noticed other nature worshippers. I briefly considered warning one morbidly obese couple of the exhaustion that awaited them. But how do you tell Southern California's poster pair for conspicuous consumption (literally) that they're risking a

coronary for 50 feathery bugs? "I hope they really, really, really want to see those butterflies," I said to a companion.

When we finally stumbled into the parking lot and crawled into our roasty-toasty rental car, I could barely breathe, much less speak. "When does the fun begin?" I mouthed.

"After tomorrow's 'leisurely stroll' to the waterfalls," my companion hissed back. "At least that's what the brochure says."

Leisurely stroll? Uh oh!

Can you say rock climbing?

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Upon The Charming

By Jessica Titlebaum

was a jewelry boutique on Le Thanh Ton
in District 2 of Ho Chi Mihn
that I stumbled upon while looking for an ATM
one evening at the end of July
beautiful gems set in silver and gold
fashionable and chic I saw my reflection in the
window

I found a blue ring surrounded by carved flowers
an accessory almost as identifying as the Carrie
Bradshaw necklace
she misplaces in Paris at the end of the season
light sparkled and shined off the diagonal surface
and I could almost see the crystal waters of my
trip
on the palm of my hand when I slipped it on

since they knew nothing of Visa and Mastercard
I hesitantly placed the ring back on the display
promising myself that I would return after
getting cash

similar to Venice, Saigon has little alley ways
twists and turns in the road to get a foreigner
lost beyond recognition
and it seemed that Uncle Ho Chi Mihn himself
didn't want me to return to 56 Le Thanh Ton
for I searched but never found my way back

in a taxi and days later, on my way to the
airport
we passed the small boutique I had been in before
I stopped the driver and ran to buy my ring
a priceless purchase that only cost \$6
and no time on the meter.