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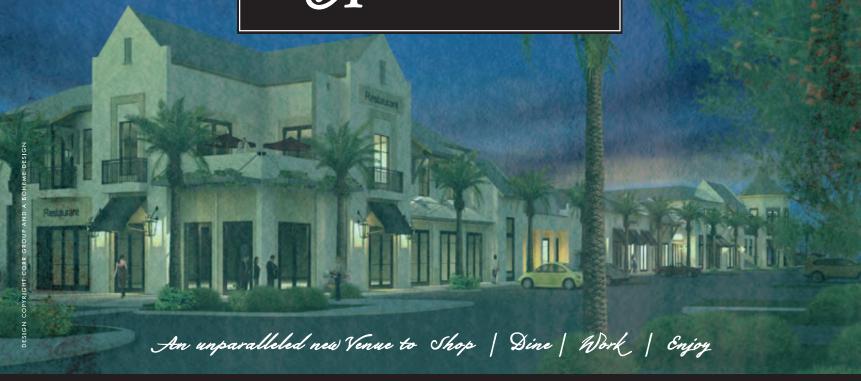


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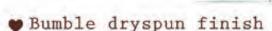
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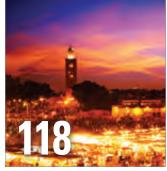
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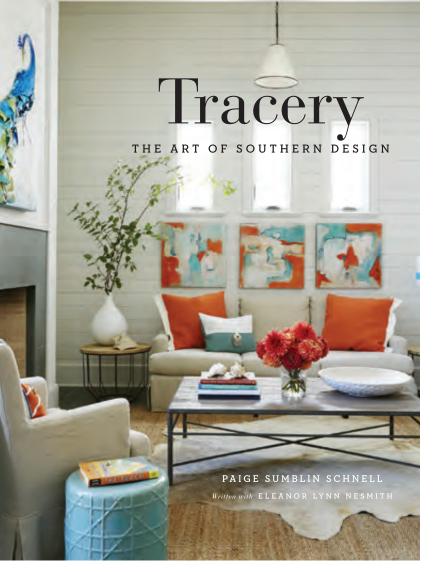
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#### CORRECTION:

Photographer credits for two photos that appeared in the article "Lights. Camera. Fashion. South Walton Fashion Week Dazzles the Catwalk" in VIE's November/December 2014 issue were incorrect. The photo on page 76 captioned "2014 Model Competition winner Maleena Pruitt wearing Mychael Knight" and the photo on page 77 captioned "SWFW organizer Hillary Fosdyck of Monark Events watches as the runway magic happens" were taken by Chip Kennedy of Kennedy Management. We apologize for the error.

#### On the Cover:



Artist Shantell Martin has traversed the globe and lived in some of its biggest and most happening cities—London, Tokyo, and New York. Just as each place has evolved over the years to become something unique and exciting, so has her art. Captured in her NYC studio by photographer Roy Rochlin, Shantell renders a map-like mural across the wall especially for this issue of *VIE*. Her signature black line drawings create a journey for the eye that expresses her take on travel and life.

PHOTO BY ROY ROCHLIN

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#### VIE Creative Team:

#### Lisa Burwell

Publisher lisa@viezine.com

#### Gerald Burwell

Editor-in-Chief gerald@viezine.com

#### **Bob Brown**

VP of Creative Services bob@viezine.com

#### Jordan Staggs

Assistant Editor jordan@viezine.com

#### Tracey Thomas

Art Director tracey@viezine.com

#### Devan Allegri Watkins

Graphic Designer devan@viezine.com

#### Bill Weckel

Web/Project Manager bill@viezine.com

#### Mark Thomas

Web Developer mark@viezine.com

#### Robert Wagner

Video Producer robertw@viezine.com

#### Tim Dutrow

Videographer tim@viezine.com

#### Abigail Ryan

Marketing Assistant abigail@viezine.com

#### Mary Jane Kirby

Account Executive maryjane@viezine.com

#### Scott Sajowitz

Account Executive scott@viezine.com

#### Julie Dorr

Account Executive julie@viezine.com

#### Margaret Stevenson

Copy Editor

#### Shannon Quinlan

Distribution Coordinator

#### Eric Shepard

Graphic Designer

#### VIE Contributors:

#### Contributing Writers:

Kelly Beasley
Sallie W. Boyles
Jill Burnham
Melanie Cissone
Kim Duke-Layden
Dale Foster
Jayne McAllister

Tori Phelps Mike Ragsdale Diane Siskin Sandra K. Woodward

#### Contributing Photographers:

Brandan Babineaux Kelly Beasley Jonathan Beckley Meghan Beierle Caty Dansan Adrian Gaut John von Pamer Romona Robbins Roy Rochlin Russ Schleipman

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#### THE SIREN CALL OF WANDERLUST



Lisa Burwell at Renvyle Thatched Cottages in Tullycross, Renvyle, County Galway, Ireland Photo by Gerald Burwell

The world seems much smaller than it used to. The digital stratosphere has us connected wherever we go and has made it possible to communicate near or far; therefore, it makes sense that we seem to travel hither and you with more frequency than ever before.

Speaking for myself, the main reason I can travel more now is that I have the ability to be connected to the office almost anywhere I go. When going on vacation fifteen years ago, back in the pre-BlackBerry era, I enjoyed the ability to actually vacate from my normal routine and disconnect from my "real" world. That to me was part of the great escape. But now, with the many tethers of communication, I am only half-immersed in the new destination I have traveled to because I am still checking voicemail, e-mails, and text messages.

Everything has trade-offs, and I'm not complaining about having the freedom to explore new places around

### Not all those who wander are lost

-J. R. R. TOLKIEN

the globe. But I sure do miss the old-fashioned way of travel: when you were there, you were there—not here. Actually, one of my favorite places in the world to escape to is just a two-hour drive from where I live—Apalachicola, Florida. Besides the obvious allure of the town's nostalgic charm, one of the primary reasons I love it is that while I'm there, my phone is outside of the network. I feel that I am able to truly be there.

We all know the call of the siren when we hear it, and we usually can't wait to go to someplace new. It may be because we are bored or just in need of rest, but I've

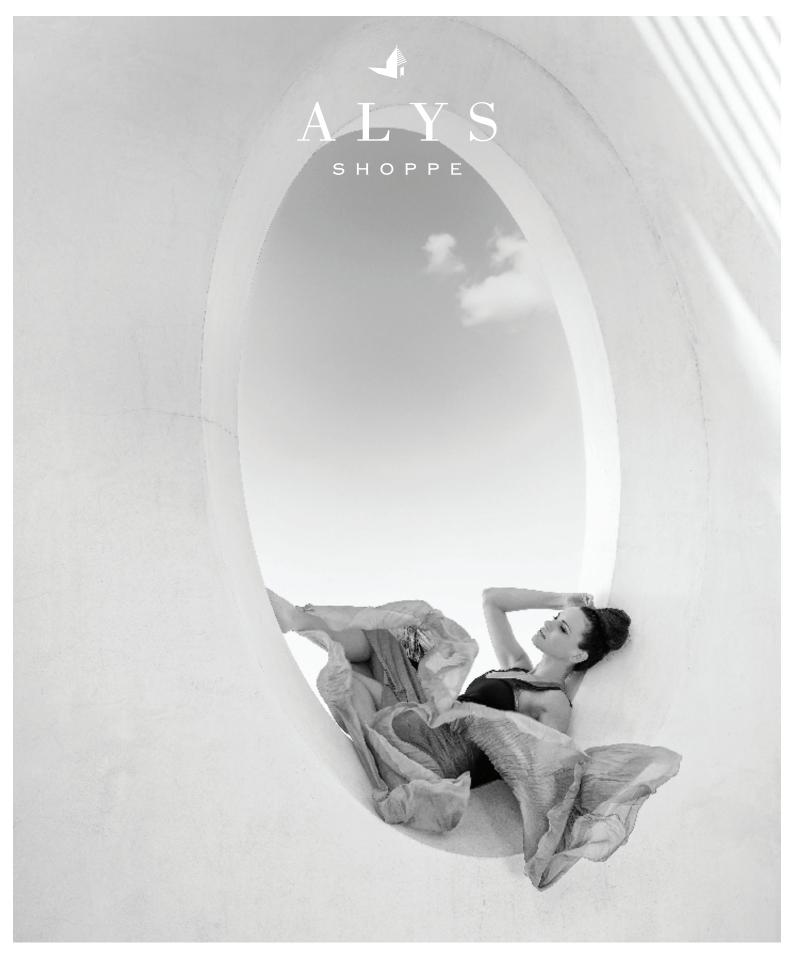
come to realize for myself that, more often than not, I just want to escape the routine of deadlines and always being connected. Sure, I want to see, explore, and learn of new places—the emotional and visceral need to get out and go is practically an ancestral genetic memory that rears its head and pushes me to get out and go. But mostly, it is simply a need to escape the bondage of the routine that awaits me at home. The irony of my quandary is that I could not travel if I wasn't connected to my life back home, so I will embrace modern connectivity and continue to explore.

In this, our very first travel issue, we have many places to see and learn about from the perspectives of different sojourners who were in search of either rest or enlightenment. Iceland, Ireland, Venice, Nepal, and even our own local Mexico Beach, Florida, are featured within these pages. Our cover artist, Shantell Martin, has traveled the globe extensively herself, and

she shares her philosophy, artistry, and uniqueness in the feature entitled "Life in Black and White." I met Shantell several years ago when she was a guest visual artist at Digital Graffiti in Alys Beach. This collaboration was a long time in the making, but we both agree that the timing couldn't be better. Shantell is on the verge of becoming an international sensation, and when we asked her to create her magic for the front and back covers of VIE using the theme of a world map, she agreed. In fact, she commented on the funny coincidence that one of MIT's attractions to offering her a teaching position in their media lab was that her artwork was reminiscent of maps. I went to visit Shantell at her SoHo studio in NYC this past September, and I continue to stand in awe of this self-made artist/teacher/life coach. One of the most intriguing aspects of Shantell's journey is that she is her own marketeer and pursues her career with a similar methodology to her art work. She follows the pen—one stroke at a time.

I believe that traveling can be a great teaching experience, but it's not just about seeing new places. One of the lessons is about cultivating patience when things don't go as planned; another might be the revelation that others around the world live in more humble surroundings than we imagined. Sometimes it's good to travel just so we can appreciate what we have when we get home. Nonetheless, the siren call of wanderlust will beckon again, and I will be listening.

To Life!
—Lisa Marie



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BY TORI PHELPS

# ARTIST SHANTELL MARTIN'S BLACK-ON-WHITE DRAWINGS POP UP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES—CARS, CLOTHING, CHAIRS—ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE "WHO ARE YOU?" AND SHARING A FEW OF THE ANSWERS MARTIN HAS DISCOVERED FOR HERSELF.

The first thing to know about Shantell Martin is that you don't know anything. To prove it, she flashes a photo of herself as a nine-year-old surrounded by her five younger siblings. It looks like an ad for a Scandinavian holiday, complete with blond, blue-eyed children as far as the eye can see. Until the eye lands on Shantell. The point? Everyone has assumptions about other people—where they're from, what their families look like—and they're usually wrong.

It's not a card she plays as a parlor trick-cum-artistic statement. Funny and genuine, Martin is refreshingly free of any angsty pretension one might expect, and even forgive, in an artist of her caliber. It's just her way of starting with a clean slate.

In fact, Martin starts most days with a clean slate. Her signature artwork involves black ink on a white surface—any white surface—therefore, Martin usually can be found surrounded by lots of crisp white surfaces. Whether it's a wall, a car, or the white shirt she's wearing, any area can be transformed into a provocative artwork, complete with grab-life-by-the-horns prompts like "go" and "now."

Martin is all about the now, vocal in her desire to look forward rather than back. She grew up in a southeast London community known as Thamesmead, which was built as a model of utopia, but, instead, became a hard-knock destination. It even served as the film backdrop for *A Clockwork Orange*. As to the happiness of her own family, Martin muses, "I don't know that there *are* a lot of happy families."

There were plenty of good times, Martin insists, but there was also no escaping the fact that she looked different from everyone else, both inside and outside her house. At a time when fitting in is most important, she didn't. Now, she sees that as a positive thing. "It was my first passport," she says. "Because I didn't look like everyone else, I didn't have that pressure to fit in. It allowed me to do what I wanted to do."

And what Martin wanted to do was draw. From an early age, drawing gave her some control over her environment. At first, she drew people and created backstories for them, satisfying her desire to make things appear as if she were controlling them. Later, art became a way of dealing with her feelings when she didn't know what else to do with them.

Martin not only enjoyed drawing, she was good at it. She earned a spot at the prestigious Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, where she flourished artistically and personally. Among these art students, most of whom reveled in their outsider look and attitude, she finally fit in. "I really enjoyed being around people where being an individual was celebrated," she smiles.

She graduated with first-class honors and, for the first time in her life, she felt pressure. Lots of it. Martin didn't believe it was possible for her to be a full-time artist; that was only for the lucky or the rich, neither of which she considered herself to be. Her solution? Move to Japan.

Martin developed an infatuation with Japan through an art school friend who hailed from the country. She decided that packing her bags for Japan to teach English would accomplish the dual goals of indulging her interest in Japan while also escaping the pressure of graduating with highest honors from a famous art school. As it turned out, the differences were more than she could take. She didn't mind the new culture or even the language barrier, but she couldn't get used to her placement in a relatively remote area of Japan. For a woman who was raised—and thrived—in a concrete jungle, living in the countryside was unbearable.

Martin got a new job teaching English in a Tokyo suburb, and though she loved her young students, she still didn't feel close enough to the action. The only solution was Tokyo itself, where she was hired to teach business and presentation English. A much happier Martin was making new friends, one of whom was an event planner who invited Martin to do live drawing at one of her events. Martin accepted and decided that, rather than the usual artist-drawing-in-a-corner routine, she would draw under a camcorder and project the evolving image onto a wall. That night was the beginning of her self-described "accidental career" as an artist in Tokyo.

The timing was perfect. "After art school, I didn't want to do art; I needed a break," she says. "That year and a half of teaching was enough time for me to get some space and figure out that, yes, I do want to do art."

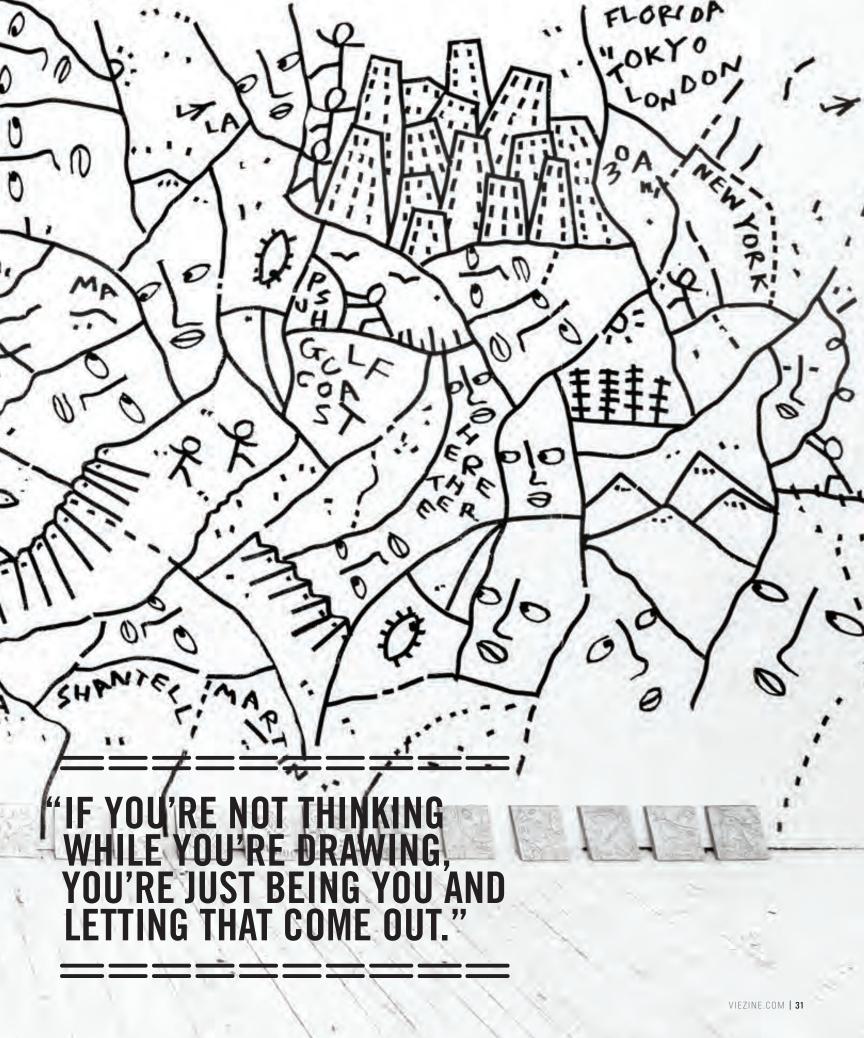
Martin found that she loved creating in real time, which was good because she was suddenly in demand. At first, she performed mainly in Tokyo's popular underground clubs with just her sketchbook and a projector. Soon she was invited to provide visuals at bigger clubs, where she used a computer and then-new drawing software. And, though she was physically separated from the patrons, Martin found a way to connect with them through her drawing; in the process, she shaped a new kind of experience for the city's clubgoers. "At the time, visuals were in the background," Martin says. "They weren't created in real time and had no connection to that specific experience. But if I saw people I knew at the club, I would write their names on the screen. And if the crowd went 'woo,' I wrote 'woo."

In effect, she brought visuals from the background into the foreground, and the artistic world took notice. DJ Mag, a highly respected European magazine, repeatedly voted Martin among the top ten VJs in the world. It was a double-edged sword for her. Because she was breaking new ground, her inclusion prompted heated debate about whether she was a real VJ. But that discussion also drew more attention to her work, leading to more gigs.

Photo courtesy of Shantell Martin







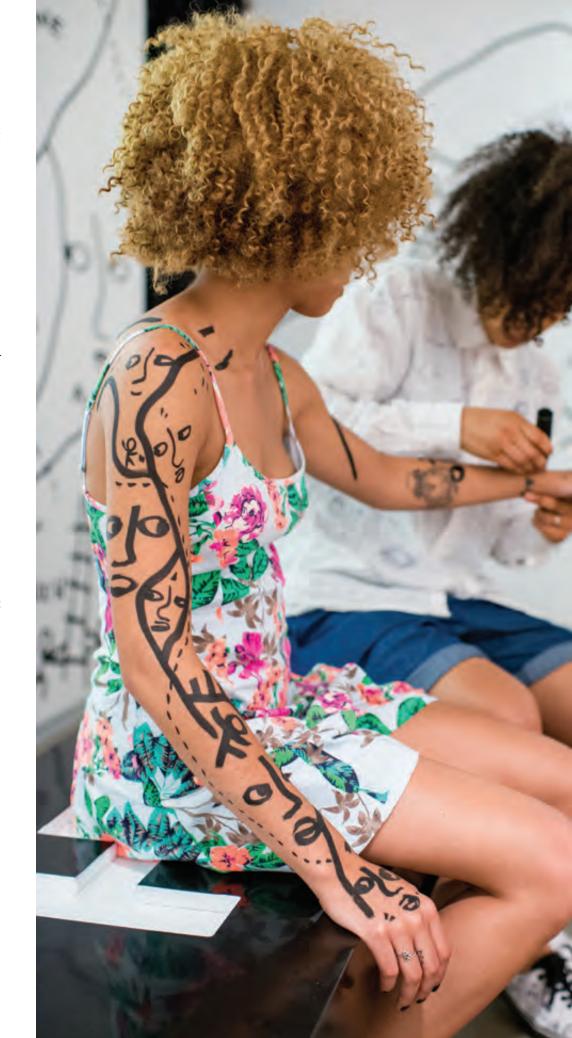
Not quite ready for or comfortable with the success she had achieved, Martin again made her escape—this time to New York City. She thought she would simply move her Tokyo life to New York, but she discovered that was impossible because the Big Apple didn't know much about Martin's style of art. "They tell you that New York has everything, but not if you're moving from Tokyo."

In Tokyo, she explains, animation is a cultural expectation. It's everywhere, down to the cartoon mouse that serves as the police department's logo. But in the States, Martin's career simply didn't exist. Forced to figure out something new, she went back to something old: a pen. Hundreds of hours spent drawing in Japanese clubs while simultaneously listening to music and talking to people turned out to be excellent practice for this next chapter. "If you're not thinking while you're drawing, you're just being you and letting that come out," she says. "I had drawn so much that the pen in my hand knew where it wanted to go without me."

That pen began drawing everywhere: on cars, on walls, on people. She was experiencing an artistic renaissance, but she also needed to pay the bills. Luckily, Digital Graffiti came calling. Organizers of the Alys Beach–based projection art show saw a DVD of Martin's work and asked her to participate in the 2009 event. The experience proved so successful for both parties that Martin has returned every year, and will return to participate in Alys Beach's Visiting Artist in Residency program in January 2015.

Not only did Digital Graffiti open doors for Martin in America, but beautiful South Walton Beach also inspired her artistically. It was here that she decided to rescue bottles from the area, paint them white, and draw on them with her signature black pen. Some of those bottles ended up in a show where the public had a rare opportunity to buy a Shantell Martin original. Apart from a limited line she launched recently with international designer Kelly Wearstler, which features Martin's hand illustrations on products ranging from clothing to home decor, it's been nearly impossible to own Martin's artwork.

Martin takes her motto of "drawing on everything" quite literally at a solo show in the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in Brooklyn, New York.
Photo by Roy Rochlin





"THE IDEA THERE IS
THAT YOU MASTER ONE
TOOL OR ONE CRAFT
BEFORE YOU MOVE ONTO
ANYTHING ELSE. FOR
ME, I DON'T KNOW IF
IT'S ABOUT MASTERING
A PEN AS MUCH AS
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Digital Graffit at Alys Beach. Flories, has been a unique opportunity for Marinto interact with seal underso and show off her talents since 2009. Top: Photo by Sell Missisce I Bottom: Photo by Gerald Burwell

VIEZINE COM | 33



KWxSM home decor collaborations with Kelly Wearstler Top: KWxSM Marble Head Trip sculpture Middle: KWxSM Big Kiss sculpture Bottom: KWxSM Brea ottoman Photos courtesy of Kelly Wearstler

Martin has focused mainly on wall commissions for high-profile New York companies, as well as museum exhibitions. She initially wanted to be involved with the gallery scene but discovered a catch-22: galleries wouldn't show her work if other galleries hadn't shown her work. Her commercial emphasis has left plenty of time and inspiration to create hundreds of pieces for herself, which she's considering making available for purchase. "It has to be in a way where I have control over it," she stipulates. "I care about my work, where it goes, and who it goes to."

She's considering an application form where potential clients can tell her why they want the piece and what it will bring to their lives. Martin sees it not only as a vetting process, but also as a step toward building a relationship between artist and collector. No doubt admirers salivating at the prospect of finally being able to acquire her work will be more than happy to fill out an application. For her many fans, color is highly overrated.

In a very real way, Martin has lived several different artistic lives. The most obvious evidence is the fact that different audiences would tell you vastly different stories about her work. She points out, for example, that Japanese friends would classify her art as colorful and animated, while Americans know her for stark, black-andwhite creations.

The truth may lie somewhere in the middle.

Stateside fans may be surprised to learn that Martin enjoys using color but only feels it's appropriate in a collaborative relationship, like the one with her grandmother, Dot Martin, who needlepoints Shantell's words in London and sends them to her in New York. "It could be in a club where people are dancing and bringing color to the visuals," she says. "Or it could be when I'm drawing on someone, and they bring their own color to the work."

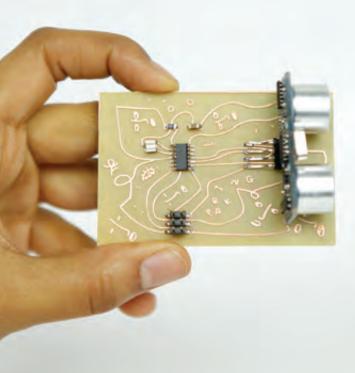
Kelly Wearstler models as Martin works on the KWxSM leather jacket







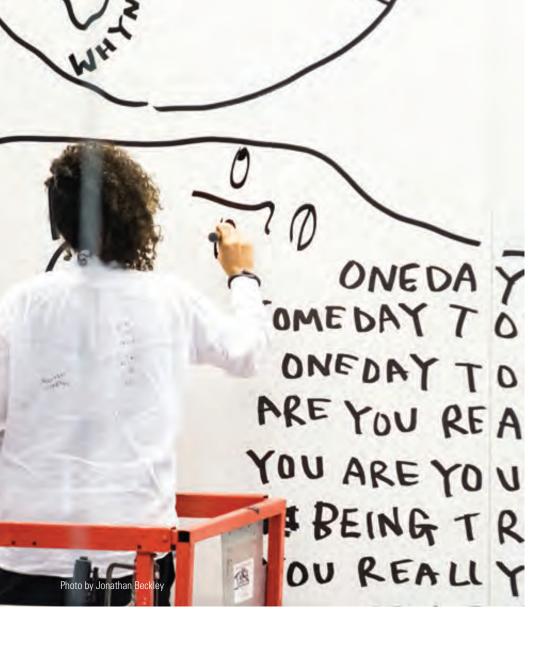
Creative printed circuit board design developed by Martin and Jonathan Bobrow at MIT Photo by Jonathan Beckley



When it's just Martin and a canvas, she prefers a simple black line. Rather than overwhelm a viewer, black-and-white art makes you want to spend time with it, she believes. "Sometimes color is too easy. When you see a colorful drawing, you say, 'Oh, that's pretty,' and walk away," she notes. "When it's black and white, everyone is initially drawn to a different starting place. I'm not dictating anything; I'm leaving room for discovery."

A pen has been Martin's trusty sidekick since she was a child. When other kids were drawing with pencil, she was already gravitating toward pen, which didn't leave messy eraser marks on the paper and required you to live with your mistakes. Now, she also appreciates that her tool of choice beautifully complements her globe-trotting lifestyle: just throw it in a pocket and go. Her time in Japan, too, taught her to stick with a medium until she'd conquered it. "The idea there is that you master one tool or one craft before you move onto anything else," she explains. "For me, I don't know if it's about mastering a pen as much as mastering a line. People don't realize what it takes to make a line look and feel right."

She's schooling other artists in confident lines as well. Building on her teaching background in Asia, Martin now instructs a graduate class at NYU each spring in



"ONE THING I'VE STARTED TO DO IS TAKE THE AMOUNT OF STREET IN SOME CITIES AND DRAW THE EQUIVALENT AMOUNT OF THAT STREET AS AN ABSTRACT WAY TO REPRESENT DIFFERENT KINDS OF DATA."

a course appropriately titled Drawing on Everything. It's not a class that teaches you how to draw, she clarifies. Rather, it's intended to help students find their unique style and pull it out of themselves—much in the same way Martin's time in Japan did for her. Through exercises and collaborative work, her students learn to work intuitively and spontaneously. "I get them to do stuff they're not thinking about," she says. "They're just making art."

During the last part of 2014, Martin also served as a visiting scholar in the Social Computing area of MIT's Media Lab. It's a place for researching and creating social models, such as affordable schooling for children. Martin is collaborating on some projects while also focusing on her own work, which combines data with lines and drawing. "One thing I've started to do is take the amount of street in some cities and draw the equivalent amount of that street as an abstract way to represent different kinds of data," she says.

If that doesn't compute with you, the takeaway is that Martin is not only a brilliant artist; she's just plain brilliant. Columbia University certainly thinks so. The school invited Martin to be a fellow at its Brown Institute for Media Innovation in 2015.

With so much on her plate, it's no wonder Martin's biggest challenge right now is finishing projects—or even starting the ones rolling around in her head. She knows she needs help in the form of a team, but it's tough for her to think about going from Shantell the individual to Team Martin. "Other artists have managers and assistants, and I know it has to happen," she says. "I'm a little resistant to that because I want to find a really good team who wants to work with me and vice versa. But I know it has to happen; there's only so much one person can do."

Martin clearly knows her limits. But she also knows how high she can fly. She's created a philosophy for herself that's made its way into many of her pieces. Martin pulls out small rectangular stickers with the words "Who Are You" stacked on top of each other. She covers all but the first letter of each word to reveal WAY. She does the same with a piece of paper containing the words "You Are You": YAY.

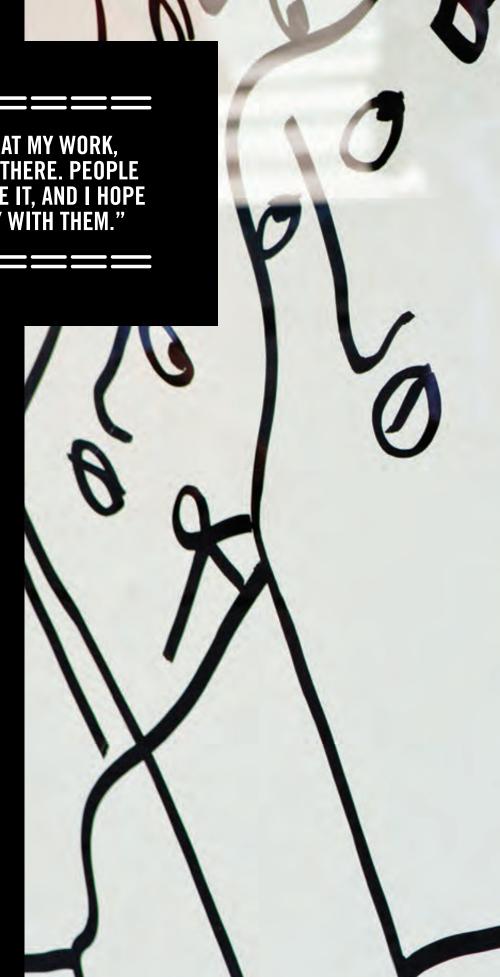
"I LIKE TO WATCH PEOPLE LOOK AT MY WORK, WITHOUT THEM REALIZING I'M THERE. PEOPLE USUALLY SMILE WHEN THEY SEE IT, AND I HOPE THEY TAKE SOME OF THAT AWAY WITH THEM."

"A lot of people say my drawings resemble maps," she says. "So this philosophy is all about trying to find your way in life—what you do, what you love, what makes you tick, and what you can share with the world. And then celebrate that. Yay." "A lot of people say my drawings resemble maps," she says. "So this philosophy is all about trying to find your way in life—what you do, what you love, what makes you tick, and what you can share with the world. And then celebrate that. Yay."

It's not something that's come easily for Martin. Today she can reel off a long list of things she likes—and likes about herself—but she admits it's taken a lot of hard work to get here. "Maybe at some point in the future I won't like myself again, but at least I know I can get back to the point where I can celebrate who I am," she says.

Speaking of who she is, it's tempting to draw parallels between the fact that Martin works in black and white, wears black and white—and *is* black and white. "It's not intentional," she insists of the outward expressions of her biracial background. "If it's a cosmic coincidence, it's a nice one."

It's certainly not a coincidence that people seem to take joy in her work, a reflection, Martin hopes, of the joy she puts into creating it. "I like to watch people look at my work, without them realizing I'm there," she confesses. "People usually smile when they see it, and I hope they take some of that away with them."









*Top:* Martin with American music and film icon Queen Latifah Photo courtesy of Getty Images

Bottom left and right: Martin draws on patrons at the Are You You solo art event at MoCADA in Brooklyn. Photos by Roy Rochlin





#### ON THE COVER ===

Martin draws on other people's walls for a living, but her own studio walls had remained stubbornly white. "I like it to be blank when I come in," she explains, "with nothing from previous projects bleeding over into new work." She broke that rule for VIE, however, allowing the idea of travel—one of her favorite topics—to express itself through her pen on her New York City studio walls.

She starts the project the same way she does any of her work: by sketching out a framework of the piece on the wall. As she moves back and forth—adding, changing, expanding, and getting a boost from her step stool when necessary—her marks seem random. But it clearly makes sense to her and, after a short time, to observers as well. It's a rare treat to watch an

artist in the process of creating, and Martin's movements are so intuitive that she can talk and laugh throughout the design.

Before long, she says she's almost done. How does she know? "You feel it," she says. "It starts here," she says, gesturing to her shins, "and right now it's about here," she concludes, pointing to her chest. Sure enough, after another five minutes she stops working and steps back. "Good," she pronounces in her lilting accent.

More than good, most would argue; Martin has created her unique brand of magic. With images of her own travel experiences and ocean-spanning moves as inspiration, she incorporates references to Florida's Gulf Coast, Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York, and

Massachusetts into her wall mural. She insists that traveling is a conversation with yourself as well as with people you meet, so she integrates plenty of people and faces into this drawing. "It summarizes the idea that traveling is a way to meet people, discover, and explore. That's what all these people are up to," she explains, waving her hand over the wall. "They're curious, they're intrigued, and they're learning new stuff."

And, like nearly all of Martin's works, this one contains a not-so-hidden challenge. "Don't hide in the corner" is written—where else—in the corner. "It's a reminder to get out and try new things," she says.



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# 





As the South got an early taste of winter and daylight savings came to an end, I felt it was an appropriate time to write about my recent trip to Iceland. Tennessee, Georgia, and even Florida were subjected to brisk winds, dropping temperatures, and of course, fewer hours of sunlight during the first days of November.

The stereotypical vision of Iceland is just that—a stereotype—only it applies all year long. During the summer, light fills the Icelandic sky—sometimes for twenty-one hours a day—the temperatures warm up, the brisk winds die down, and the interminable rains come. Most important,

Icelanders flock to enjoy the country's natural hot springs, mountains, and glaciers and to participate in anything outdoors, where they can be surrounded by wonderful fresh air, which is fueled by the island's North Atlantic oceanic climate and steady winds. Once outdoors, most of the people who reside in this country close to the Arctic Circle stay outdoors for as much time as possible. According to one Icelandic guide, "Icelanders have long enjoyed one of the highest life expectancies in the world." The explanation for this phenomenon seems to be a clean environment, a healthy diet, and exceptionally good drinking water (due to the

freshwater rivers that stream down from the mountains and glaciers).

In the last several years, since the Great Recession ended, Iceland has been slowly building its tourism market. And this market is no longer geared just to younger outdoor enthusiasts who partake in all of the extreme sports offered by the country. Yes, geothermal spas, such as the famous Blue Lagoon, and volcano and glacier viewing and hiking still draw visitors from the United States and Europe. But now the incentives to visit this island, which has a total population of just over 327,000, have expanded. Busloads of tourists

come from all corners of the globe, touring the countryside to view waterfalls, volcanoes, and museums. Still others come during the fall months to view the Northern Lights and in the winter for indoor venues and happenings.

The tourist board is focusing on special-needs travel, the viewing of exotic tundra, and places to visit where English is widely spoken. And no visa is needed to visit Iceland, which lies just three hours of airtime from Europe and five hours from the United States. "Meet in the Middle!" is the slogan for a Reykjavik Convention Bureau campaign promoting conventions and events.

"In Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, the Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre has added to the country's ability to host large events of different kinds, including orchestral concerts and conventions," said Helga Lara Gudmundsdottir, the manager of conferences and meetings for Iceland Travel. When singer/entertainer Justin Timberlake brought his sold-out show to Reykjavik this past August, it was not held at Harpa but at another venue instead. The concert's live stream provided a look for people in Iceland who couldn't get tickets, as well as for us here in the U.S.



Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre—the first purpose-built concert hall in Reykjavik. Harpa was opened in 2011.



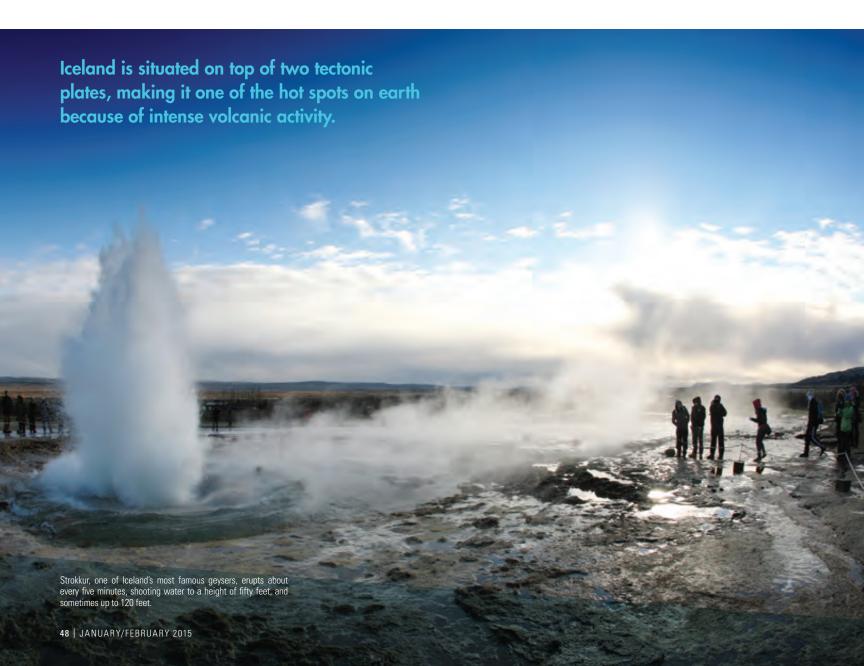
Everywhere we looked this past year, Iceland's name was popping up. Hafthor Julius "Thor" Bjornsson, winner of the World's Strongest Man competition, is possibly more quickly recognized as Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane in HBO's television series *Game of Thrones*, parts of which are filmed in Iceland; the *New York Times Magazine* featured a full-page color picture of a three-and-half-year-old at breakfast in Reykjavik in an article focused on what children all over the world eat for their first meal of the day; and this past August, the Icelandic musical *Revolution in the Elbow of Ragnar Agnarsson Furniture Painter* established a good run at one of New York's larger off-Broadway theatres.

But, the mention of Iceland that really caught my attention was still another article in the *New York Times* with the following heading: "Rare Arctic Land for Sale." It seems that the Chinese have taken a great interest in Iceland. One of their country's tycoons, Huang Nubo, wanted to purchase a vast wilderness tract to obtain a foothold in "the North." Additionally, Americans from the Northeast and northern Europeans are shopping for pieds-à-terre in Reykjavik for their own vacations, as well as to use for income-producing rentals.

What are those "other things" attracting the million-plus visitors per year to the country? The fact that you can experience both fire and ice in Iceland makes it a country of vast contrasts.

There are numerous rock sculptures, lava formations from prior volcanoes, and mountains and waterfalls of all sizes. In the west are high tabletop mountains with narrow fjords in between, but in the east, the mountains by the fjords are more harsh and rugged.

Iceland is situated on top of two tectonic plates, making it one of the hot spots on earth because of intense volcanic activity. Just a few weeks before we arrived, Bardarbunga threatened to erupt but, luckily for us, she decided to wait until after we left to spew lava down her slopes. Needless to say, Iceland is a paradise when it comes to seeing all of those varied formations in such a relatively small country.





Swimming in a geothermal spa such as the Blue Lagoon is another highlight for most visitors. The lagoon and the Myvatn Nature Baths, with their high levels of silicates and other minerals, have a rejuvenating effect on the skin. You can also take a dip in the North Atlantic at a geothermal beach near Oskjuhlio. And, you can even enjoy the Northern Lights (if you are lucky enough to catch them) from Reykjavik's Sundhollin indoor swimming pool and outdoor hot tubs. Stargazing has never been better! Seeing up close and personal the geothermal energy that Iceland produces to heat more than 90 percent of the country's buildings and most of its swimming pools is amazing. You can easily view these

renewable and highly visible energy sources as you drive along the roads outside of the capital.

All of the outdoor activities and viewing make you hungry, and the local restaurants and hotels feature an Icelandic diet based on farmed, bred, and caught seafood produced in superquality fashion. The fish, lamb, steak, and veal are delicious, but they are not inexpensive. *Skyr*, a low-fat, high-protein dairy product similar to yogurt, is a uniquely Icelandic specialty. Most Icelanders eat some Skyr every day. Fish stew is a popular menu item in restaurants and homes. The agricultural farming is done in the south coastal area, which doesn't get much snow.



A typical fish market in Reykjavik







In fact, shopkeepers in downtown Reykjavik said that they only got three to four days of snow last year—possibly due to global warming!

Most Icelanders eat some Skyr every day. Fish stew is a popular menu item in restaurants and homes. The agricultural farming is done in the south coastal area, which doesn't get much snow. In fact, shopkeepers in downtown Reykjavik said that they only got three to four days of snow last year—possibly due to global warming!

Speaking of shopkeepers, Icelandic fashion has come a long way. Check out Reykjavik's Fishpacking District (somewhat akin to New York City's Meatpacking District), where designer Steinunn Sigurd, who studied in New York City, is now the owner and creative director of her own fashion line and Laufey Jonsdottir is a fashion designer and illustrator. Sari Peltonen is the communications manager of the Iceland Design Centre, and she looks and dresses like a model. This area is a burgeoning mecca for fashionistas.

The clothing produced in Iceland is no longer just the traditional Icelandic wool sweaters and



Check out Reykjavik's Fishpacking District where designer Steinunn Sigurd is now the owner and creative director of her own fashion line. Photo by Diane Siskin

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the outdoor clothing known for its durability. Even the men's attire is so stylish that it looks like it would be at home on the most fashionable streets in London and throughout Europe. The JOR label by fashion designer Gudmundur Jorundsson and the company's cofounder, Gunnar Orn Petersen, presents a very mod approach to menswear.

The best way to visit Iceland is by Icelandair, which is well run, on time, and comfortable and offers well-priced flights from several U.S. destinations, including Orlando. Icelandair flies into Keflavik International Airport, which is about an hour and fifteen minutes from Reykjavik. You can also get a great package for a stopover on your way to Europe. However, more tourists to Iceland are arriving by cruise ship. Many major cruise lines now sail to Reykjavik and other destinations of this island country.

Hotel capacity is growing within the country, but most of the ones appealing to Americans can be found in and around the capital. The Hilton Reykjavik Nordica, where we stayed, is modern and very comfortable (complete with a fabulous health club and spa) and has an elegant restaurant. Rates for hotels, cabs, dining, and excursions are expensive. It is much better to purchase a package.

With its bars, cafés, and pubs, Downtown Reykjavik is known for its busy weekend nightlife and club scene. You can walk up and down the streets of Iceland, even very late at night, deciding which restaurant, club, or café you want to visit without fear. No major city can rival the safety of Reykjavik, which averages less than two murders per year in a city of more than two hundred thousand people.

So, Southerners can easily visit Iceland without fear of being greeted with freezing weather and an unsophisticated environment.

For general information regarding travel to Iceland, please consider the following sources:

Hilton Reykjavik Nordica:

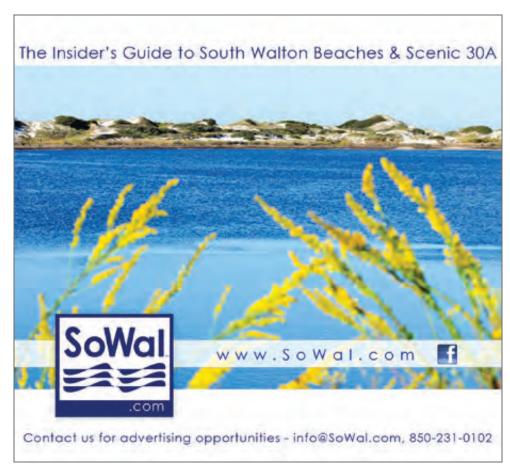
www.hiltonreykjavik.com

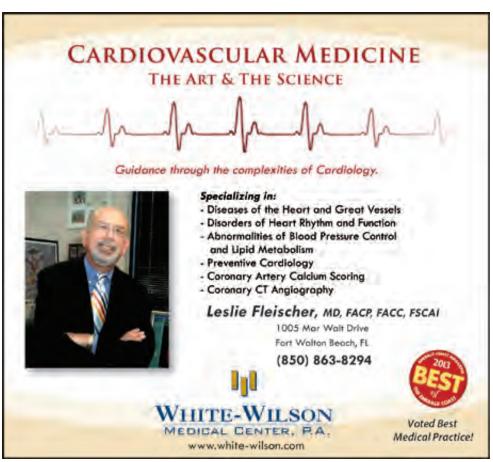
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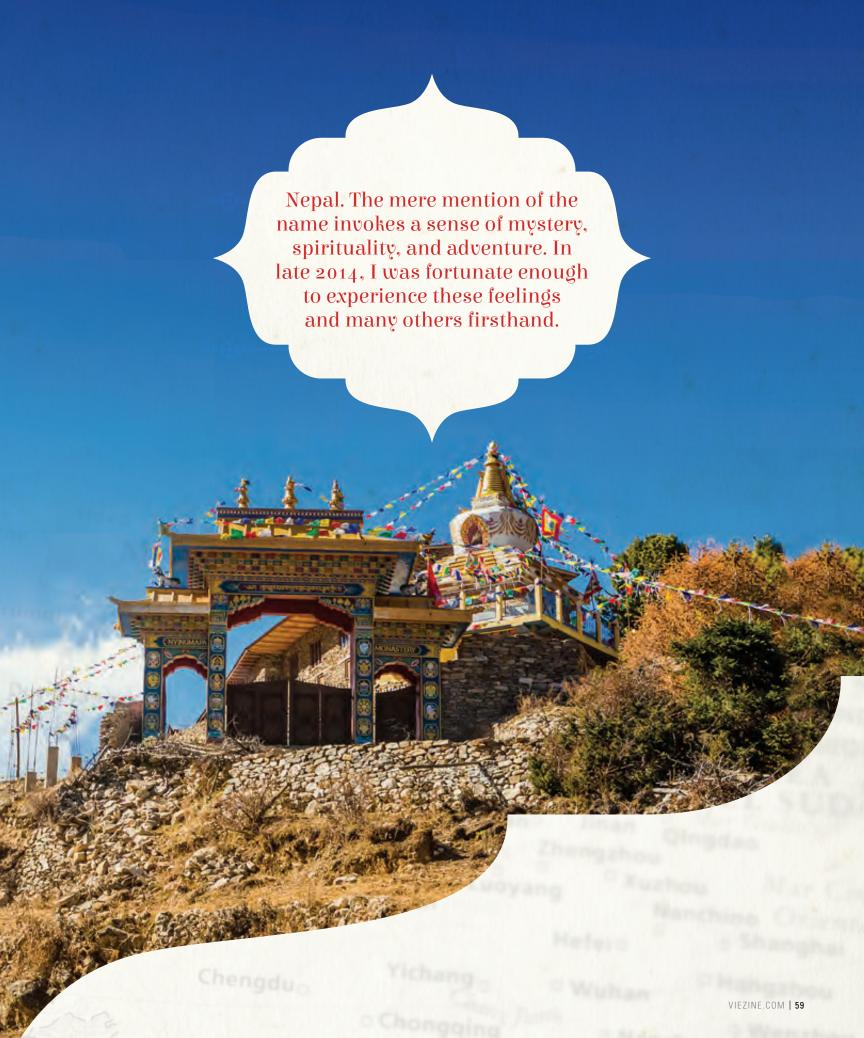
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A Journey Inside the Soul

By Dale Foster

PAKISTAN



edged between India and Tibet (China's Tibet Autonomous Region, to be precise), Nepal is cradled among eight of the ten highest mountain peaks in the world, including the highest point on Earth, Mount Everest. Everest, known to the Nepalis as Sagarmatha (Mother of the Universe), reaches a height of 29,028 feet. Nepal's nickname, Roof of the World, conveys its most distinguishing geographic feature, and some people believe it to be the center of the earth. It is the spiritual home to many practicing Hindus and Buddhists, and in fact, is the birthplace of the Buddha himself.

Nepal is a culturally rich country that hosts many diverse and distinctive ethnic groups. The Nepali people live in a variety of places: ancient cities featuring pagoda-roofed Hindu temples; small rural towns; and remote villages where terraced rice farms dot landscapes dominated by the towering Himalayas.

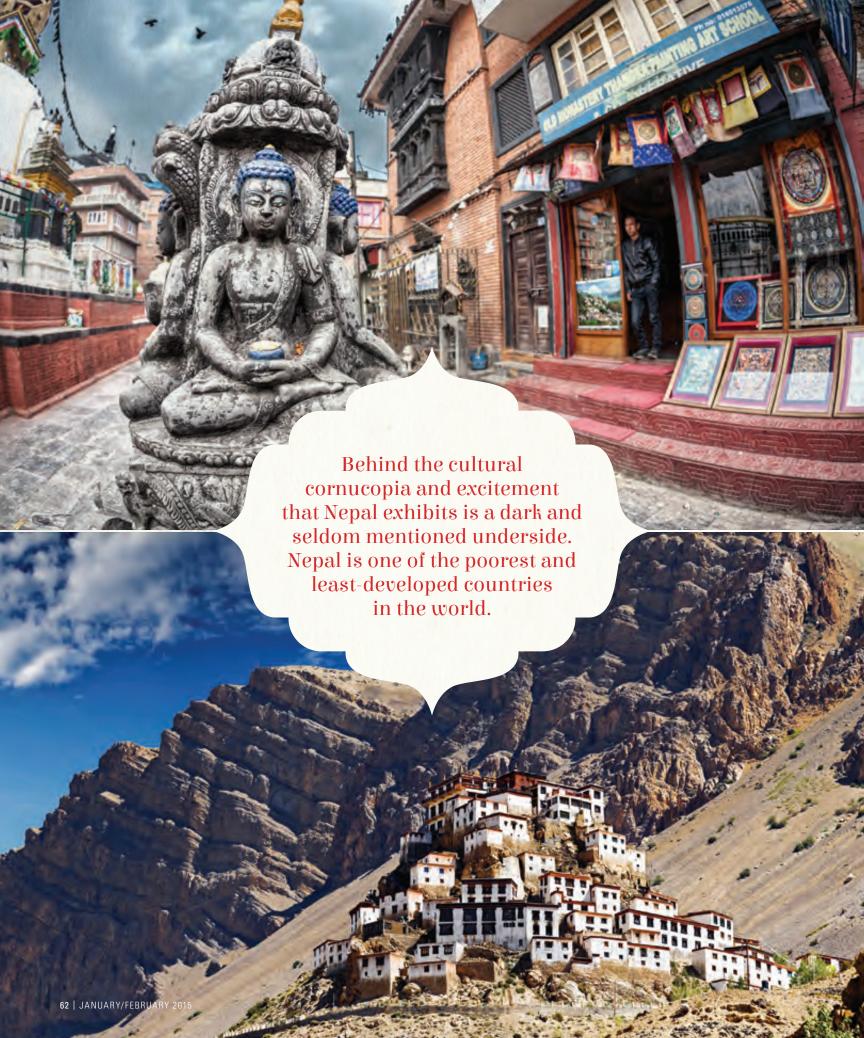
The capital, Kathmandu, is a sprawling, chaotic city with a resident population of nearly a million people. Traffic is frenzied with few traffic signals and seemingly even fewer traffic rules. Cars, motorcycles, animals, and pedestrians all share the same narrow streets, missing each other by mere inches. The city has attracted a steady influx of foreign visitors since the 1960s, when the government lifted its isolationist policies. Kathmandu has become a mecca to many alternative travelers, thrill-seekers, spiritual wanderers, and globetrotters.

Kathmandu is the center of Nepal's religious practices and varied ethnic cultures. The Pashupatinath Temple is one of the most important and sacred Hindu temples. Dedicated to the Hindu god Lord Shiva, it is located on the banks of the Bagmati River. It was here, along the river's edge, that we observed several outdoor cremations overseen by local Hindu sadhus.

Kathmandu's Durbar Square is a plaza in front of the old royal palace of what was once the Kathmandu Kingdom. It holds the palaces of the Malla and Shah kings who ruled over the city, and it is one of three Durbar royal palace squares in the Kathmandu Valley, all of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.







We also visited the ancient Buddhist stupa of Boudhanath, one of the largest Buddhist shrines in the world. Also called the Stupa of Enlightenment, it is said to be the most important and holiest Tibetan Buddhist site outside of Tibet. Worshippers come here to circumambulate the stupa while spinning prayer wheels and praying.

While Western dress styles were common sights on the streets of Kathmandu, equally common was traditional Nepalese clothing, including the *daura suruwal* and the *topi* hat for men, and the colorful silk sari combinations for women. Traditional Nepali dress usually has religious significance to it and varies by region.

We sampled a wide variety of Nepalese cuisine, including the staple dal bhat tarkari soup made of lentils and spices served over rice with vegetable curry. (Many of the dishes we ate were seasoned with curry.) Momos are popular steamed or fried dumpling appetizers containing vegetables or meat. For the brave palate, buffalo meat and small freshwater fish were available. A daily treat was the mountaingrown Nepalese coffee, which is full-bodied and tasty.

But behind the cultural cornucopia and excitement that Nepal exhibits is a dark and seldom mentioned underside. Nepal is one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world. As such, it is also one of the main sources for human trafficking in Asia. Trafficking victims are often taken from Nepal's rural villages and transported to cities in India, China, and the Middle East. Mainly, young girls and women are trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labor.

A combination of economic and cultural factors makes Nepal a prime source for human trafficking. Older daughters are sometimes sold by their families to raise money to support and raise younger children. Often the lure of a job in the city attracts those desperate for work. But the reality is that they are sold into economic bondage. In situations where a female is raped, she is often ostracized by her family and forced to make a living by any means. Desperate people do desperate things.

I traveled to Nepal as part of a team of people who felt compelled to assist in the efforts to rescue and rehabilitate survivors of human trafficking. The

team worked with World Christian Mission, which has opened the Apple of God's Eyes orphanage near Kathmandu, primarily for Nepali girls recovering from being sold for sexual use. Some of these girls were required to service twenty to thirty men a day and were left with psychological damage and no self-esteem. A smaller number of boys are housed in separate homes, rescued from forced labor or living on the streets.

What we experienced in this work was truly amazing, wonderfully unexpected, and definitely spiritual. Upon our arrival at the orphanage, all the resident girls presented us with colorful flower leis and yellow scarves—symbols of welcoming. To my astonishment, they said, "We have been praying for you!" It was then that I realized these were not young women as I had expected. These were children, almost all teenagers, and some very young teenagers. The thought that these children, who had endured so much trauma, so much abuse, and unspeakable acts of depravity, had been praying for me, brought tears to my eyes. Of course, our response was, "We have been praying for *you*!"



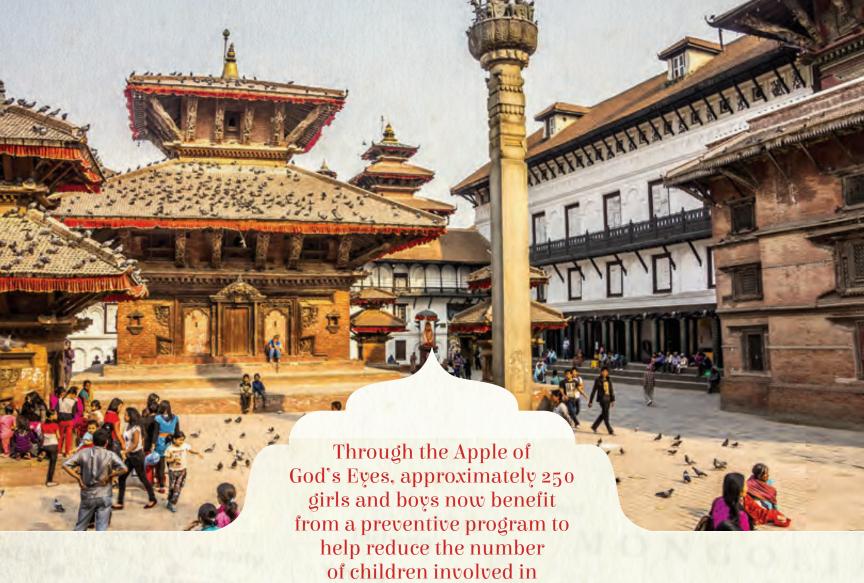
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The Apple of God's Eyes is a faith-based Christian ministry. In Nepal, religious tolerance is broadly practiced. Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexist peacefully and respect places of worship. While Nepali law prohibits converting others and proselytizing, personal religious conversion is allowed. The religious makeup of Nepal is roughly 80 percent Hindu, 10 percent Buddhist, 4 percent Muslim, and 1.4 percent Christian. Until 1950, Christian missionaries were not allowed in Nepal, and only since political reforms in 1990 and 2008 have Christian churches been allowed to operate. It is a country that truly does not have a basic knowledge of Christianity. Most Nepali people had never seen or heard of the Bible before then.

Through the Apple of God's Eyes, approximately 250 girls and boys now benefit from a school, a weaving factory, a retail store, a farm, dormitories, and a preventive program to help reduce the number of children involved in human trafficking. Our work at the orphanage consisted of teaching the

children about self-esteem, playing soccer with the boys, making arts and crafts with the girls, and watching them perform traditional Nepalese dances for us. We painted two of the homes, working hand in hand with the children. This was not a glamorous leisure trip with five-star resorts and spas. It was as much a journey inside the soul as it was about experiencing dazzling landscapes and mystic cultures. It was a journey to encounter love and hope—to *be* love and hope.

human trafficking.

We ventured up into the mountains to visit a village—the remote villages are major sources for human trafficking in Nepal. Located in the Nuwakot District, our elevation was near 6,500 feet. The landscape was lush and green with trees and terraced hillside farms. The rugged, snowy peaks of the Himalayas hovered in the background like majestic steeples. Our arrival at the village was met

with curiosity and skepticism by the locals; they had never seen an American before. For many, we were the first white persons they had ever encountered.

Our lodging was a small stone building that was being used as a church. We slept on the dirt floor—no electricity, no heat, and no water. What we had was a spirit of adventure and a dedication that transcended any lack of modern conveniences. The village children did not want to leave us, even after sunset, so we had an impromptu "dance party" for them by flashlight. They enjoyed our attempts at the Twist, the Robot, and the Moonwalk. They laughed hysterically at our antics and even tried to imitate us. The next morning, a woman from the village brought us breakfast of hard-boiled eggs and coffee sweetened with buffalo milk.

Our return home was quite eventful. Waiting at the airport in Kathmandu at the appointed departure time, we were frustrated to find that our plane had not arrived. After waiting for several hours, I asked

one of the airport employees when our plane would come. He said, "The plane be here when the plane be here. You get on plane." I rephrased the question: "What time will our plane arrive?" Again, he said, "The plane be here when the plane be here." I thought it was a very Zen approach in a predominately Hindu country. It certainly reduced the need for departure/arrival signage. Due to a twenty-four-hour delay in Kathmandu, we missed all our connecting flights. It took us sixty hours to return home—this included having to spend the night in the terminal at LAX.

As part of my personal journey along life's path, the trip to Nepal was an eye-opening, heartfelt, and life-changing experience. It reaffirmed my efforts to understand, accept, and appreciate other cultures without judging them. I saw how prominent religion is in the daily lives of the Hindus and Buddhists we encountered, and what an impact the relatively recent introduction of Christianity is having on their lives. I learned that, with the right attitude, simply being present in a place with such need can make a

difference. I learned that I have like-minded brothers and sisters all over the world, even in remote Nepal.

Undoubtedly, the most inspiring part of this trip was watching the orphanage children laughing and playing. Who could look upon those smiling faces, knowing what they have endured, and not be changed?

I learned that human trafficking is a worldwide problem—yes, even in our own cities and towns.

The teachings of Jesus speak of being "born again" and of a new life. We witnessed this in Nepal. The orphanage children were reborn into a new life. From a life of torment and despair, they now have hope and a brighter future. No matter your religious or spiritual leaning—or lack thereof—who would deny these children a better life? And the source of this new life is simple: *love*.

I learned that love is a powerful force that can be used to change the world. Spread it around.



#### About the author:

Dale Foster is a Certified Beach Bum, an inventor, an adventurer, a businessman, a writer, a television producer, and a volunteer for worthwhile causes around the world. He has been a happy resident of Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, since 2005.

If you would like to learn more or contribute to the work of the Apple of God's Eyes, please visit www.meninasdonepal.com.



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# MOUNTHALLI MASIC

Saying "I Do"
IN TELLURIDE, COLORADO

By Jordan Staggs Photography by Captivated Studios

When Jessica Proffitt and Levin Ford Bracken became engaged on Easter Sunday 2013 at Esperanza, an Auberge Resort in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, they already knew they wanted to celebrate their nuptials in their favorite place in the world—beautiful Telluride, Colorado.

ocated in San Miguel County in the southwestern corner of the state, Telluride is nestled into a box canyon in the San Juan Mountains. The area once served as a summer home to the nomadic Ute Indian tribe, who would hunt elk, deer, and bighorn sheep there before migrating to lower elevations during the winter season. Later, Spanish explorers traveled through the area along a route that became known as the Old Spanish Trail. The area became home to a mining camp around 1860, when gold was discovered in the region, and about two decades later the town was established. Between 1905 and 1911, over \$16 million in gold and silver was extracted from the area's mines. Telluride grew from a cluster of tents and cabins to a flourishing settlement with rows of elegant Victorian homes and stately brick structures, many of which are still standing.

Today, the area is known as a mecca for outdoor exploration, skiing, and summer events celebrating music, art, film, and culture. The Telluride Ski Resort is known for its world-class slopes and breathtaking mountain vistas.

Jessica, a native of Destin, Florida, and Levin, a Destin transplant originally from Memphis, were together for six years before their marriage. During that time, they traveled all over the world together, but Telluride is undoubtedly where their hearts lie. They were married at the Gorrono Ranch at Telluride Ski Resort on June 28, 2014, surrounded by an intimate gathering of sixty-five of their closest friends and family from around the world.

























# "Impeccable food,

INCREDIBLE MUSIC, AN OXYGEN BAR, LATE-NIGHT GRILLED CHEESES, A HUGE BONFIRE, CHAMPAGNE LIMBO, CIGARS FOR THE GENTLEMEN, AND A SPARKLER SEND-OFF WERE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EVENING."







"It truly feels like it was one of the most beautiful days Telluride has ever seen," says Jessica of the bright blue skies and clear mountain views. "This was a total destination wedding. Gorrono Ranch was the first and only venue I toured; I knew the second I stepped foot there that it was the place." She admits that most of the plans for the wedding were executed from Destin, thousands of miles from the San Juan Mountains. "It was risky but exciting!"

The rehearsal dinner, held at Honga's Lotus Petal in Telluride, was casually elegant, while the black-tie ceremony and reception at Gorrono Ranch were formal affairs highlighted with shimmering gold, royal blue hues, and rustic touches to reflect the surrounding mountains and forests.

"Impeccable food, incredible music, an oxygen bar, late-night grilled cheeses, a huge bonfire, champagne limbo, cigars for the gentlemen, and a sparkler send-off were some of the highlights of the evening," Jessica recalls. "It was truly the best night and we owe it to our incredible friends and family who made the journey to join us for our big day. A special thanks

goes to Lynn and Steve Dugas of South Walton, who opened their home at Ski Ranches in Telluride for my bridesmaids and me to stay in while the boys and our friends and family stayed at Mountain Lodge."

The happy couple enjoyed a "backward honey-moon," arriving in Telluride two weeks before their wedding to take advantage of the gorgeous hiking and summer activities, including the Forty-First Annual Telluride Bluegrass Festival. "We even jammed to the King of Telluride, Sam Bush, who is a regular in South Walton, Florida. We had the time of our lives."

In addition to the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, the town puts on several other signature events during the year, such as the renowned Mountainfilm in Telluride, the Telluride Film Festival, the Telluride Blues and Brews Festival, the Imogene Pass Run, and many more. Log on to www.visittelluride.com to learn more about events, places to stay, outdoor adventures, and of course, weddings, and celebrations in this beautiful mountain escape.





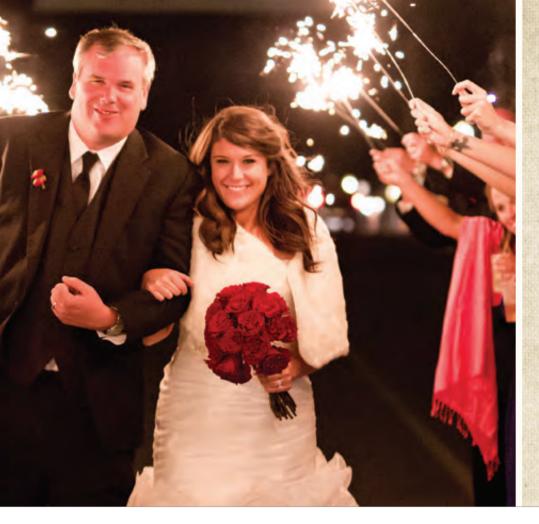


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### WEDDING VENDORS

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Gorrono Ranch at Telluride Ski Resort

PLANNING AND DECOR:

Nicole Shortridge

FLORIST:

New Leaf Design, Telluride

CEREMONY MUSIC:

Telluride String Trio

RECEPTION MUSIC:

The Great Funktier

OFFICIANT:

Mayor Stu Fraser of Telluride

CAKE

Sweet Spot Cakes

LODGING

Mountain Lodge Telluride and Ski Ranches

TRANSPORTATION:

Telluride Express

BRIDAL GOWN:

Allure Bridals

DRESS BOUTIQUE:

Simply Elegant Bridal in Fort Walton Beach, Florida

BRIDAL SHOES:

Jimmy Choo



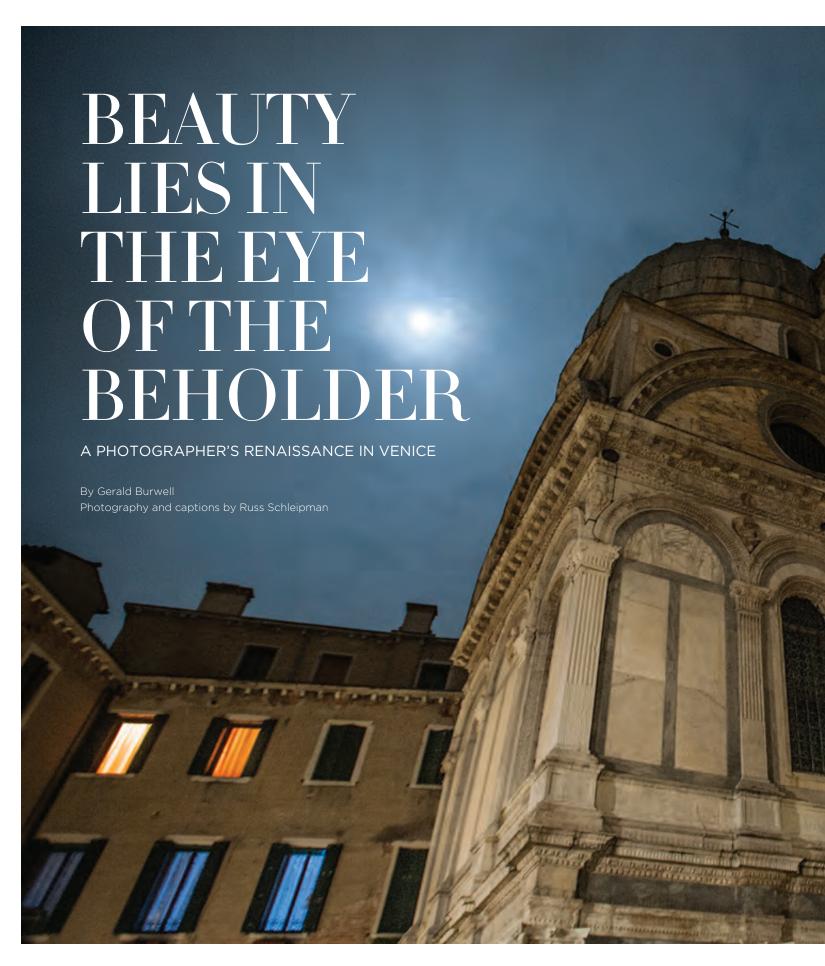
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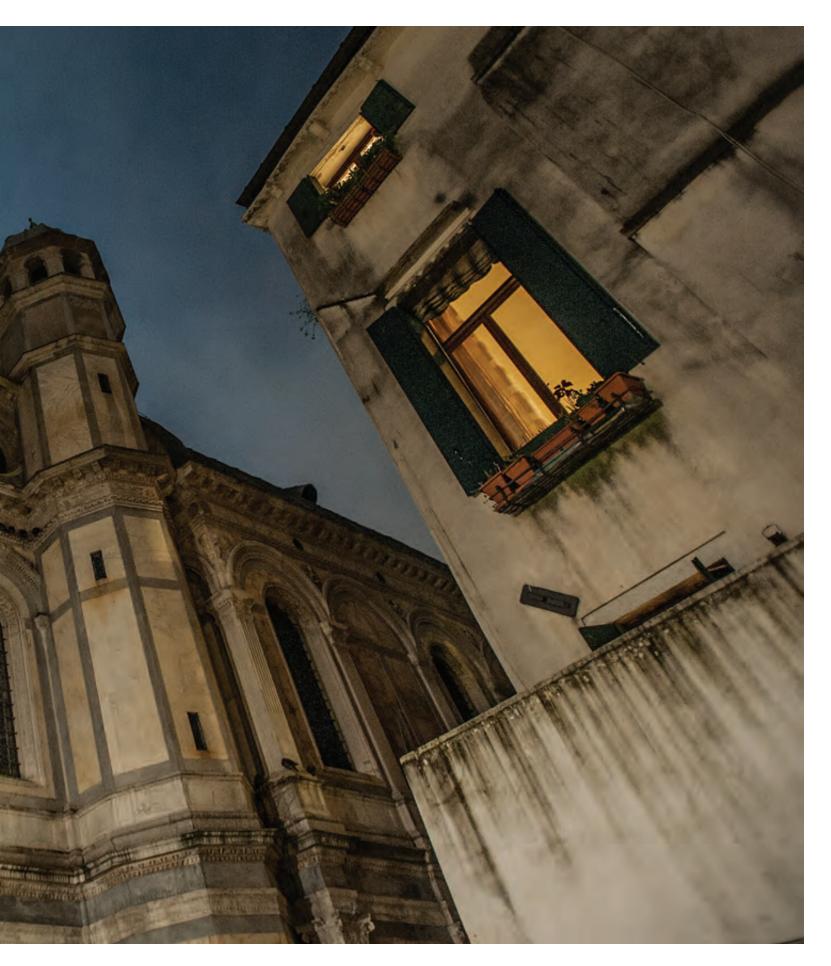
















ne of the most charming and romantic destinations the world over, Venice, Italy, is imbued with a sense of mystery. Fittingly, the city has been the setting for countless plays, novels, and films about love and intrigue, among them Shakespeare's *Othello*, Patricia Highsmith's award-winning and best-selling novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Contributing to the ambience of Venice are architectural gems that have generated a myriad of postcard images; two such places are the Rialto Bridge, which spans the Grand Canal, and Piazza San Marco (St. Mark's Square). Alongside the many iconic structures, however, there exists a very different Venice—one that has been captured by photographer Russ Schleipman.

#### Left::

Walking the southern side of the Grand Canal late one evening, avoiding the chaos of St. Mark's Square, we happened upon a delightful scene in the heart of Venice—a slice of pure Americana on a street with a very un-American name: Rio Terrà dei Catecumeni. Under the towering dome of the Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute, two youngsters had hung a hoop and were so into their game that they ignored me completely as I photographed them for ten minutes. Their banter, in lilting Venetian dialect, made a quirky accompaniment to basketball.

#### Opening Image:

On my last night in Venice I took a farewell stroll at midnight. I owned the city. Silent, embracing, and warm, it glowed under an elusive full moon, which ducked behind scudding clouds. Working my way past the Scuola Grande di San Marco to the quiet *sestiere* of Cannaregio on the northern side of Venice, I threaded my way down narrow streets to the intimate Campo Santa Maria Nova, a small square dominated by the marble wonder of Santa Maria dei Miracoli. Built in the early Renaissance (1480s), the church is a magnificent study in polychrome marbles.







From architectural and engineering standpoints, Venice is unique: there is no other city like it in the world. It comprises six *sestieri* (neighborhoods) built atop an ancient system of wooden pilings and platforms on 118 mostly tightly knit islands in the marshy Venetian Lagoon. With a width and length of approximately two and three miles, respectively, it is a very walkable city—which is a good thing because the only other means of transportation is by water: water taxi, gondola, or vaporetto (canal bus). Her intricate maze of churches, buildings, and plazas—linked by over four hundred bridges crossing a system of more than 170 canals—makes Venice extremely rich with inspiration for a photographer's lens.

*Opposite:* Fog was made for Venice. It wraps the city in a layer of mystery and silence, which only magnifies the magic of the place in any weather. Wandering the *sestiere* of Cannaregio with no special destination, I stepped into a long *campo*, Salizada dei Spechieri. At the far end towered a magnificent, powerful cluster of columns: the Jesuit Church of Santa Maria Assunta, also known as I Gesuiti. The care, the craftsmanship, and the eye for beauty are overwhelming. How did we descend to strip malls?

Left: Lost in the labyrinth, I spied a late-night couple—the only souls I saw for over an hour.

Top: On Rio de la Fava, another timeless wall wears the texture of centuries. If only it could speak.

"VENICE WAS SO QUIET.
ALL YOU COULD HEAR
WAS THE LAPPING
WATER AND THE
SHUFFLE OF FEET
ON ANCIENT STONE.
THAT SILENCE
COMBINED WITH THE
GHOST IMAGERY OF
PEOPLE MOVING
AMONG THE FOG
MADE IT MAGICAL!"

So, when a spontaneous invitation presented itself to Russ Schleipman last January to share an apartment in Venice for a week, he was game. "Having been before, and being totally enthralled by the place, I jumped at the opportunity," said Schleipman. "I looked at it as a way to dive into a new, wonderful, and very different environment."

With over eighteen million visitors per year, Venice certainly sees its fair share of cameras. Schleipman was looking forward to the challenge of overcoming the clichés of one of the most photographed places on the planet. "I wanted to push myself to come up with something new and a little different," said Schleipman. Wanting to capture Venice in an unexpected and, hopefully, beautiful state, Schleipman was blessed with conditions that would dash the hopes of most photographers. "I was lucky to inherit gray, foggy weather and not the process-blue postcard skies. Thank God!" he exclaimed.

One evening, a thick fog settled in and, it being late, there were only a few people out. It was the moment Schleipman was hoping for. "I went out around ten o'clock at night with a tripod and did all the gloomy, foggy imagery in about an hour. It was wonderful, beautiful, and slightly surreal," he said. "Venice was so quiet. All you could hear was the lapping water and the shuffle of feet on ancient stone. That silence combined with the ghost imagery of people moving among the fog made it magical!"

#### Right:

Gracing the entrance to the Grand Canal, the Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute, known simply as La Salute, soars breathtakingly above the surrounding structures. One cannot help but reflect on the wonders of the Baroque. Here, at the end of a dusky day, the gondoliers, nimble boatmen to a man, return home. The basilica, begun in 1631, is supported by more than a hundred thousand pilings and houses many works by Titian and one by Tintoretto.







Above:

Campo Santa Maria Nova—the square, which holds Santa Maria dei Miracoli, a favorite wedding site. Newlyweds come and go by gondola, embarking on steps worn by countless predecessors.

#### **ABOUT RUSS SCHLEIPMAN**

Like wine, art is for sharing. I create images to share them with others. There is tremendous satisfaction in the creating, but the knowledge that I might delight, surprise, or inform others is my motivation. The work on my website reflects decades of wonderful travel and rich experience, from Saharan crossings to flying in ultralights over Mont Saint-Michel to befriending penguins at the Strait of Magellan.

I strive to reveal the unusual in the usual and find beauty in the mundane or regularly unnoticed. Grand vistas from the Sahara, Australia, France, and elsewhere, intimate botanical studies, people, machinery, and simple household objects all hold visual secrets and have their unique story, which I try to tell with rigorous attention to design and composition.

—Russ Schleipman





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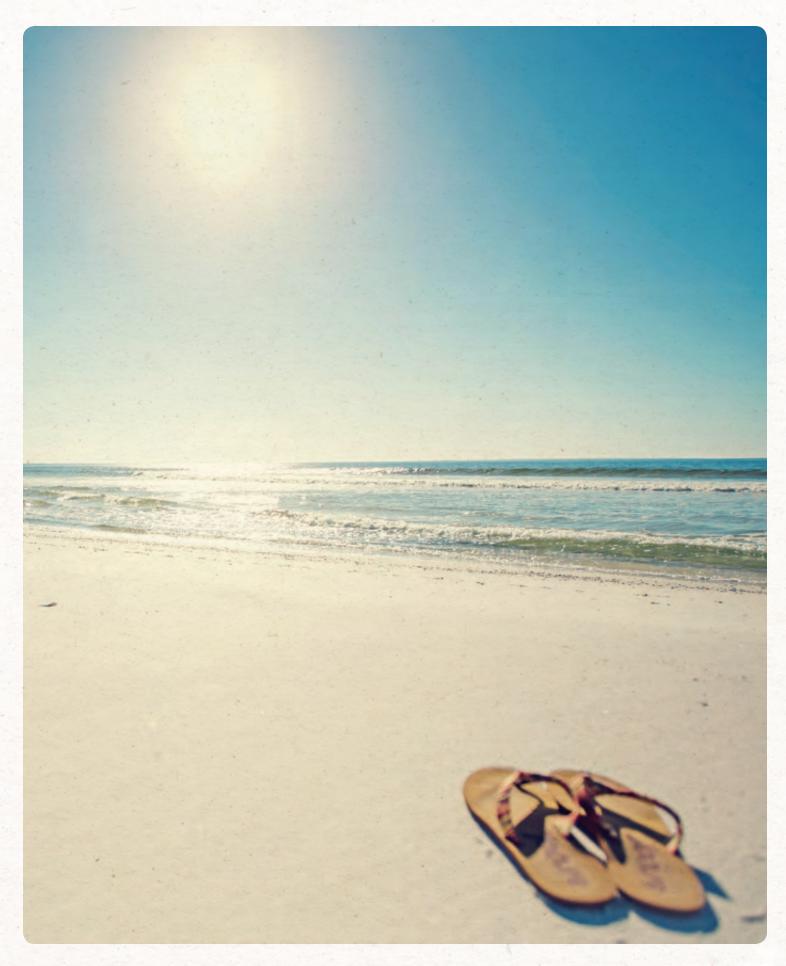
You attract and retain highly competent people who are as adamant about quality as you are. Our project superintendent, Kenny SanAngelo, was outstanding; and your subcontractors understand and deliver an equally impressive level of professionalism and pride in their work.

Most of all, we appreciate the fact that you are a "straight shooter." You have certainly earned our trust, respect and friendship.

Since we began coming to the Gulf Coast, we have had a dream of our own special place by the sea – that dream is now a reality. We appreciate you!

Sincerely,

Sonnie and Jerry Heffel



# A PIECE OF YESTERDAY

# on the Gulf of Mexico

By Sallie W. Boyles . Photography by Romona Robbins

# IN AN AREA THAT WAS ONCE DUBBED THE FORGOTTEN COAST, A CHAT WITH THE LOCALS OF MEXICO BEACH, FLORIDA, IS ALL IT TAKES TO SEE THAT THEIR TOWN IS TRULY UNFORGETTABLE.

"If you are a fancy pants, this isn't for you," says Wylie Petty, manager of the El Governor Motel in Mexico Beach. He's referring to the 124-room motel he has run since 1995 and also to the town itself.

Likewise, as Ike Godwin, owner of Gulf Foods and Gifts, puts it, "We don't have the wild bunch here for spring break."

In other words, Barbara Harmon, owner of Mexico Beach Harmon Realty, explains, "If you like a quiet, family lifestyle, you won't find a better value."

By fate and by design, Mexico Beach, which inhabits a five-mile stretch of snowy white beach between Tyndall Air Force Base and Port St. Joe on the Gulf of Mexico, attracts the kind of people who are proud of their town. Home to about a thousand residents, plus a happy variety of mom-and-pop businesses that offer the necessities and just enough niceties, this unique community has a history of enticing those who are content with enhancements that yield comfort and pleasure but don't overwhelm what nature has provided.

The modern-day community got its start in 1946, when Gordon Parker, W. T. McGowan, and J. W. Wainwright purchased 1,850 acres of land and formed the



Mexico Beach Corporation. Taking the lead on developing a family-friendly beach town, Gordon passed the torch to his son, Charlie, who, in 1949, settled there with his wife, Inky, and their two daughters. Upon incorporating the City of Mexico Beach in 1966, the townspeople voted Charlie, also a beloved Methodist minister, their first mayor.

Leaving a lasting imprint, Charlie and other leaders knew the value of beach

access. As other communities grew up, private property, often marked by high-rise condos and hotels, obstructed views and restricted who could set foot in the sand. In addition to implementing an ordinance that limits new construction to three stories, Mexico Beach maintains approximately one mile of public beach that cannot be developed.

Moreover, four public parks and several convenient boardwalks, located where city streets meet Highway 98 (which runs parallel to the coast), make the beach available. Any visitor or resident can cross over the dunes and claim a spot, and without the usual high-density complexes, beachgoers further find generous amounts of space for blankets and umbrellas. Many take golf carts—parking is free—but walking is also practical, since the farthest point inland is less than a mile from the shore.

# "PEOPLE WHO KEEP COMING BACK HERE WANT THIS LAID-BACK PLACE TO STAY THE WAY IT IS."

People also enjoy complimentary use of the City Pier and the City Boat Ramp. "We have the only free pier from here to Pensacola," says Ryan Harmon, who is among the community's newest generation of business owners and runs the vacation rentals arm of Harmon Realty. His parents, Barbara and Bubba, launched Harmon Realty in 1981, so Ryan not only grew up in Mexico Beach but also takes pride in comparing his hometown's advantages, namely its affordability, to other communities on the Gulf of Mexico.

"This is one of the least expensive white-sand beaches you'll find," Ryan says. "You can be within walking distance of the beach and pay in the low \$100,000s for a condo or small house, or purchase a private, five-bedroom beachfront home for \$1.5 million." Visitors who return year after year also know that among Mexico Beach's best-kept secrets are vacation home rentals and hotel rates that can run to one-third less than what they would pay in other Northwest Florida hot spots.

"They'll let everyone know that they go to Disney," says Kimberly Shoaf, president of the Mexico Beach Community Development Center, "but they'll tell only a select few that they go to Mexico Beach. People who keep coming back here want this laidback place to stay the way it is."

"They like the fact that it's a quiet beach," says Ike, who initially purchased a vacation home for his wife, Bonnie, on her birthday in 1995. Making regular trips between the family homestead in South Georgia and the beach house, they began investing in land and developing residential property. From owning and operating what he describes as "a little Walmart" in Pelham, Georgia, since the 1960s, Ike

was the ideal one to take over Mexico Beach's only full-service grocery store when the owner decided to sell. As hands-on retailers, Ike and Bonnie left their two sons in charge of the business back in Georgia so that they could personally manage the Gulf Foods and Gifts store.

In addition to sourcing fresh local produce, Ike says, "We're known for some of the best steaks around and for ground beef that is 93 percent lean." They cut and grind their meat right in the store; quality is important to the Godwins.







"When we bought the gift shop," Ike says, "it had junk, and things were priced out of reason. Bonnie completely redid that part of the store." Displaying her own original oil paintings alongside T-shirts, toys, jewelry, and beach-related treasures, Bonnie pleasantly surprises the most die-hard shoppers. "Two ladies came in here once and bought \$800 worth of gifts," Ike reveals.

Outgoing by nature, Ike also has a reputation for walking around the store, asking customers if they need anything and escorting them to the precise items they're seeking. He likes his employees to be just as personable. One is the mother of one of Nashville's biggest stars. She simply enjoys meeting and greeting people, so as a friend of Bonnie's, she works as a grocery bagger. Therefore, when ready to check out, country music fans often grab one final treat—a selfie with the local celebrity!

While they have become accustomed to encountering celebrities (from music, movies, politics, and sports) and treating them like everyone else, locals seem most intrigued by their foreign visitors. "I ask people who have come here from way off how they found us," says Ike. "A lot fly into Miami and rent a car to take up the coastline. When they stop and see what we have, they decide to stay."

"The people here still like to see travelers come through," says Peggy Wood, who owns the Driftwood Inn with her husband, Tom. She remarks that some of their second- and third-generation guests began staying at the inn before the Woods purchased it—forty years ago!

Tom and Peggy first met at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota and landed in Atlanta, where Tom launched an advertising agency. "I wanted to go back to the beach, but a quiet beach," says Peggy. They initially bought a duplex in Mexico Beach with friends in 1970. "When I began staying down here a lot in 1971," she recalls, "there were only three hundred people. If a car passed by, you'd stop to watch it." When the Driftwood went up for sale, Peggy recalls telling her husband, "Tom, that looks like something fun to do."

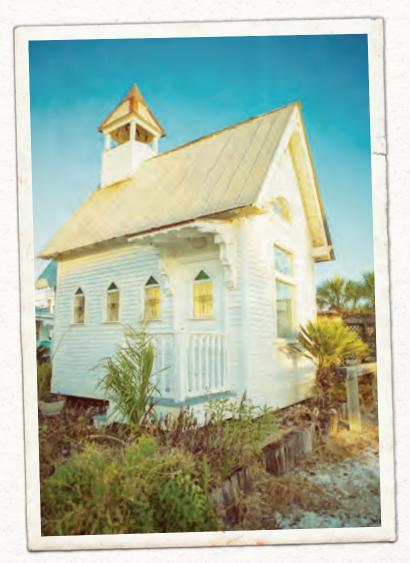
The consummate innkeeper, Peggy smiles and laughs and effortlessly makes people and their dogs feel at home. As a matter of fact, Woodie, Peggy's

lovable Great Dane, does her part in greeting guests! Besides parents, kids, and canines, the Driftwood attracts quite a few couples, including brides and grooms. During the busy season, in fact, the inn hosts two or three weddings each week.

With assistance from her daughter, Shawna (she co-owns the Graba Java Internet Café with Amy Hay), Peggy provides a turnkey wedding and reception. Couples are also free to make their own arrangements through an outside wedding planner. "I do whatever the bride wants," says Peggy, but adds she has many connections. She even jokes that she talked a friend, who is now known as Marrying Jack, into obtaining his license to officiate.

Peggy also persuaded Tom to erect a tiny chapel for her. The charming building, nestled on the grounds, is a replica of one she spotted in the North Georgia mountains.

The El Governor Motel, a friendly competitor, is another popular venue with a slightly different allure. As Wylie, the longtime manager, says, "If people are looking for a pool and a bar, Peggy sends them to me. If they're looking for a petfriendly place, I send them to her." Booking certain rooms a year in advance, he



reports that the wedding season runs from September through November. "We'll have them right on the beach," Wylie says. "The sunsets are beautiful." The City of Mexico Beach requires a permit but does not charge a fee.

For the most part, the El Governor, like the Driftwood Inn, draws families and retirees. "Although," Wylie adds, "we also appeal to couples looking for something of Old Florida, where they can enjoy the sunset, get romantic, and grill out at the tiki hut. The great thing about our guests is they are like family. You greet them with a hug when they come through the door."

"Everyone is a friend, either when they walk in or when they leave," says David Kiser, owner of Caribbean Coffee, a coffee shop that emerged from his passion for a premium brew. Born nearby on Tyndall Air

Force Base, David has always lived in the region, working as an electrician for thirty-three years. He and his wife, Cindy, a professional photographer, opened the coffee shop for a retirement business. David planned to hire employees to run the store but took over sooner than expected with no regrets. "I live a few miles away and bike to work," he notes.

Without question, the slower pace is an attractive feature of Mexico Beach, but those seeking recreation, certainly on and in the water, are as active as they want to be with motorized personal watercraft, floats, kayaks, paddleboards, canoes, snorkels, diving equipment, fishing poles, and fishing spears.

Fishing trips, known to be unpredictable, are often memorable, as Nate Odum, who co-owns Mexico Beach Marina with his brother-in-law, Bill Mulligan, relates. The two were fishing for cobia just five miles off the coast of Cape San Blas-twenty-four miles by land from Mexico





### "WHEN PEOPLE COME HERE TO FISH, THEY MIGHT GO ONLY FOUR TO FIVE MILES OUT, OR THIRTY TO FORTY MILES OFFSHORE. THE MAJORITY OF FISH ARE CAUGHT WELL WITHIN FIFTEEN MILES."

Beach—when they spotted a large creature. "He looked like a big ray," says Nate, "but when we got closer, we realized he was a big black bear. His head was huge! The animal was buoyant with all of the fat on his body, but he couldn't swim."

Occasionally, indigenous black bears emerge from the woods to fish and get caught in the current, but the tide usually takes them back in. "Wondering what to do, Bill looks at me and says, 'They're going to think we're drunk if we call this in!" Other boaters ended up radioing the Coast Guard, who tranquilized the bear and pulled him from the water. Nate will never forget seeing that bear and also remembers the trip as the time he and Bill first joked about buying the marina.

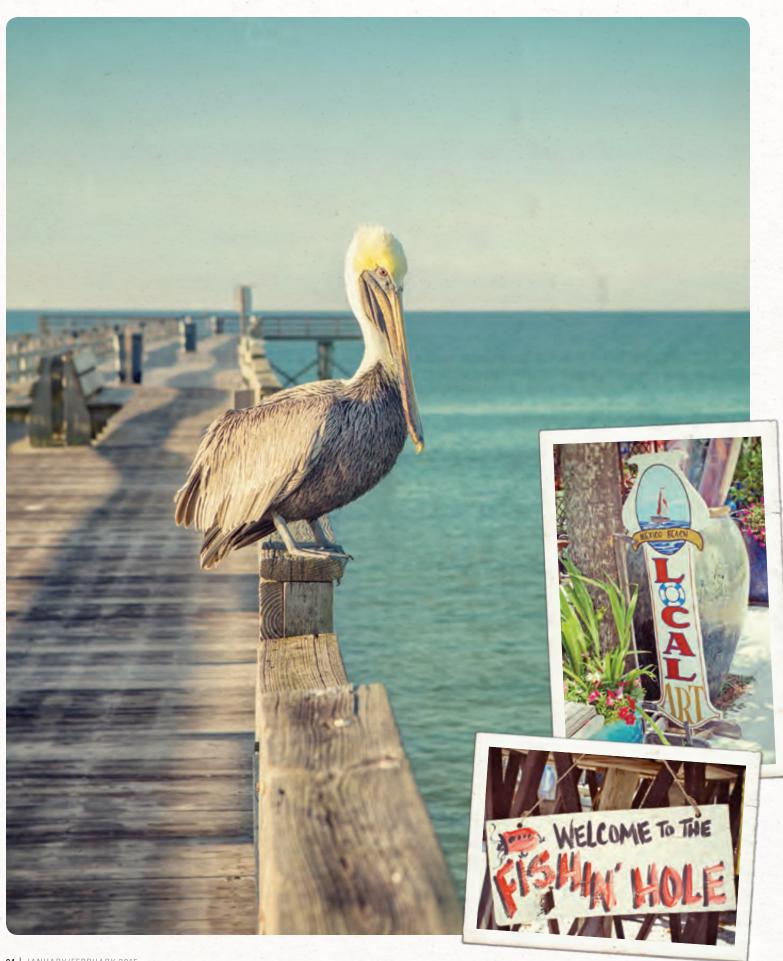
Having grown up in Miami, Nate has spent much of his life fishing and diving. Admittedly, however, he most enjoys the local hunting: hogs, turkeys, and ducks. When he and his wife, Melba, were seriously contemplating a move to Mexico Beach, the rich forests definitely influenced his decision to leave the insurance business, and neither Nate nor Melba has looked back. "The people here are tremendous," says Nate. "We're like a family."

The fishing is also good all year, but most popular during the warm months, when Mexico Beach hosts tournaments: The John Thompson Memorial Ling Ding Tournament happens in April over weekends that coincide with the cobia migrations. The Golly-Whopper Classic occurs during the first week of red

snapper season in June. The Mexico Beach Marina's Offshore Classic is a two-day fishing event in July. The Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association Kingfish Tournament takes place over the weekend preceding Labor Day weekend.

"When people come here to fish, they might go only four to five miles out, or thirty to forty miles offshore," says Nate, adding, "The majority of fish are caught well within fifteen miles."

Fishermen and underwater explorers alike can thank the Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association (MBARA) for the abundant fish populations they find close to shore, where much of the natural bottom is a sandy desert—not a zone where fish would naturally





thrive. Utilizing private contributions and public grants to support sustainable artificial reef habitats, however, the 501(c)(3) organization has placed hundreds of artificial reefs off the coast, fostering healthy numbers among all kinds of species, including red snapper, which is protected. "People who go down to dive or spearfish," Nate relays, "say they're tripping over red snapper." Nate serves on the MBARA board and mentions a study by a Florida State University professor that demonstrates for

every dollar the MBARA has spent on artificial reefs, the return to the five-county region affected ranges from \$131 to \$234.

"The fish stock is healthier than ever," confirms Chip Blackburn, a founding member of the MBARA. As the owner and charter captain of the *Miss Mary*, a thirty-eight-foot vessel equipped with the latest fish-finding technology, he would know—especially as a captain who prefers to take a slow ride out

while trolling the bottom. "Sometimes it's better to be the tortoise than the hare," says Chip. "Bottom fishing has advantages—coming across more natural structures and more artificial reefs, which the fish like. And by going slowly, my sonar and video cameras can pick up where they are."

For some of the best sea-life sightings and a rare glimpse of history, divers and snorkelers can go just 3.7 miles offshore to a shipwreck that lies in twenty-five feet of clear water. Locally referred to as the

Lumber Ship, the *Vamar* was carrying lumber from Port St. Joe to Cuba in 1942, when it sank for reasons that seem suspicious but remain unknown. "It's one of the nicest dive sites we have," says Barbara. "When my husband and I were diving, the sea turtles were amazing." One gentle creature, in fact, graciously allowed her to hold on for a ride!

For a little beach community that still doesn't want or need a traffic light, Mexico Beach has quite a bit happening inside the city limits. Other options—from ecotours to shopping excursions—are also endless for those who want to experience more and feel like traveling a few miles out by boat or car. For them, Mexico Beach offers a cozy, friendly home base in between trips and at the end of a busy day.

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### **UNFORGETTABLE EVENTS**

MANY MEMORY-MAKING MOMENTS OCCUR SPONTANEOUSLY, BUT THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO BEACH ALSO TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN HOSTING YEAR-ROUND EVENTS THAT CREATE SOME OF THE BEST TIMES:

**FEBRUARY:** On the Saturday before Presidents' Day, the Gumbo Cook-Off at Sunset Park with music, judging and food—all in the spirit of Mardi Gras

**APRIL:** The John Thompson Memorial Ling Ding Tournament with gifts and cash prizes

**APRIL-JULY:** Mexico Beach Photography Contest with winning photos published

**JUNE:** The first week of red snapper season, the GollyWhopper Classic with cash prizes for red snapper and kingfish

**JULY:** Mexico Beach Marina's Offshore Classic, a two-day tournament with cash prizes for dolphin, king mackerel, and wahoo

**JULY 4:** Best Blast on the Beach with a 5K race, a kids' fishing tournament, and fireworks from the City Pier

JULY-EARLY SEPTEMBER: Scallop season

**EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT IN SEPTEMBER:** Live music in the park by regional artists while the sun sets

LATE AUGUST: Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association's Kingfish Tournament

**SEPTEMBER WEEKEND AFTER LABOR DAY:** Beach Blast Triathlon and Duathlon, sprint and Olympic distances

**THIRD WEEKEND IN OCTOBER:** Four-day annual Blast on the Bay Songwriter's Festival, showcasing over twenty nationally acclaimed musicians

**FIRST SATURDAY IN DECEMBER:** Mexico Beach Christmas Tree Lighting at Sunset Park, featuring decorations, Santa in a golf cart parade, and hot chocolate and goodies for the kids

**DECEMBER 31-JANUARY 1:** Celebrate Twice, starting with New Year's Eve in Port St. Joe (eastern time zone) and concluding at Mexico Beach (central time zone) with complimentary shuttles between the beaches







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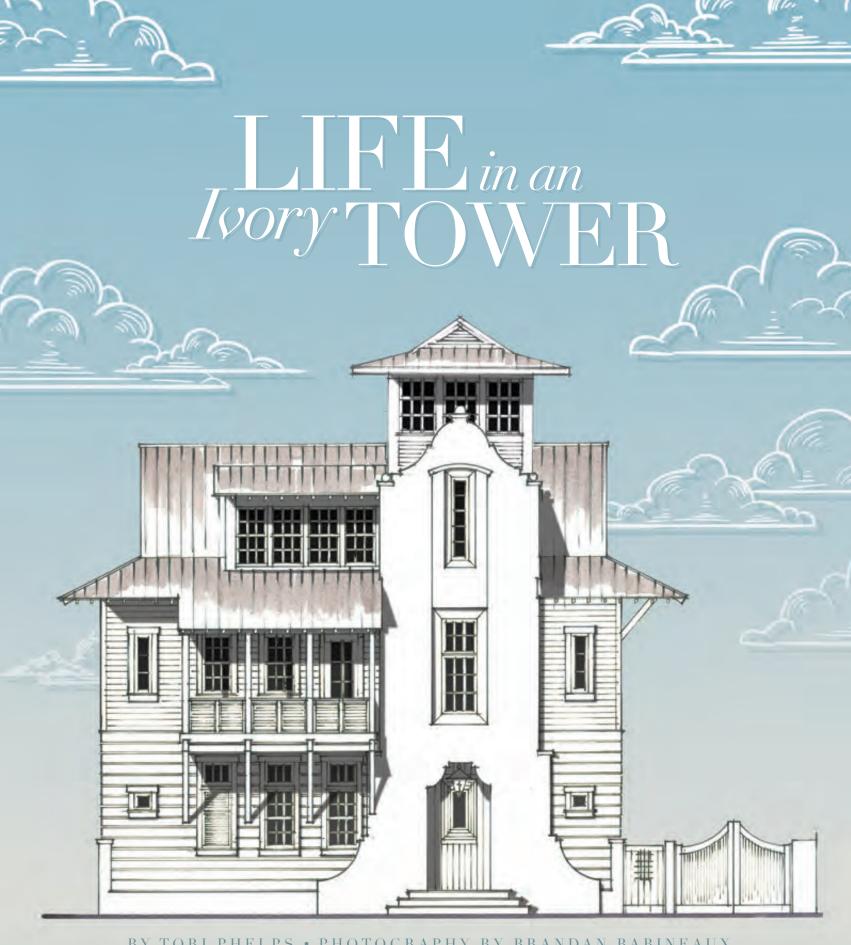


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BY TORI PHELPS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRANDAN BABINEAUX



If I had to live here, what would I want? It's the pivotal question that drives Faisal Syed, the founding principal of Syed Design Group, Ltd. When it comes to the house he recently designed and built in Rosemary Beach, however, there's no "have to" about it. He would consider himself lucky to live in the customized 4,330-square-foot beauty.

Alas, it's not to be.

Syed designed the house for someone else—someone who gets to move right into the six-bedroom, five-and-a-half-bath courtyard-style home on East Kingston Road. It's just a question of whom. What those future homeowners get, besides the luxury of skipping a lengthy building process, is a wholly unique residence in one of the region's most coveted areas: Rosemary Beach. Oh, and there's a tower, too.

The distinctive design all started with the lot, Syed says. While the average lot size in Rosemary Beach is forty feet by eighty feet, this considerably larger lot (sixty by one hundred twenty feet) cried out for a substantial home. Once the relative size was decided, he could begin the actual design. And that meant working within Rosemary Beach's New Urbanism town plan—a technical term for a community developed to promote an exceptional quality of life.

Several towns along the Emerald Coast are drawn from the New Urbanism playbook, and residents can attest to their success. Among the perks: points of interest (think beaches, public parks, pools) are all within a five-minute walking radius from anywhere in town.

The communities are developed around concepts found in small European villages and small-town America—places noted for interconnected living—but modernized for contemporary American lifestyles. The goal is to get people out of their cars and into their community so they become *part* of that community. There's more interaction with neighbors, more support of local businesses, and more success for the town as a whole. And you'll never get lost, thanks to a tower at the end of every vista.

That's where Syed's house comes in. Perhaps the most architecturally interesting detail of the home is its soaring observation tower, an element that was dictated





by the location of the lot. He says the idea—again, from traditional European villages—is that these prescribed towers offer a visual beacon so people can orient themselves to specific areas and pathways.

Syed went a step further than he had to with the tower, though, ensuring it delivered not only beautiful architecture, but beautiful views as well. The lot is at the north end of Rosemary Beach, a perfect location for privacy seekers but not for people who want the beach on their front step. So he brought the beach to the house, constructing the tower at a perfect height to deliver panoramic views all the way to the Gulf, with treetop views of the town as a bonus.

An instant saltwater fix also comes with the house, thanks to a twelve-by-twenty-four-footheated saltwater pool. The pool and its Dominican shellstone patio are focal points within the expansive courtyard, a feature that creates integrated indoor and outdoor spaces. So integrated, in fact, that the house transforms into an open-air showplace simply by throwing wide the doors from the interior to the courtyard. This expanded living space—emphasis on *living*—also includes an outdoor kitchen, a fireplace, and a covered area that provides shade on Florida's famously sunny days.



The visual feast begins with the handmade, oversized mahogany front door. Next up is the two-and-a-half-story entry foyer, highlighted by a custom-designed suspended chandelier. And when you want to explore the upper floors, you'll take the handmade mahogany and cypress floating staircase.

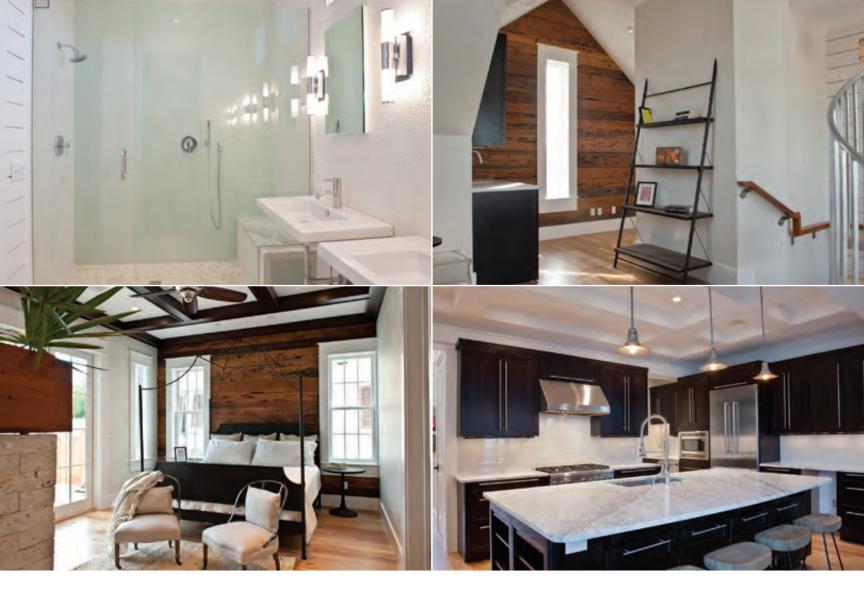
But the exterior is just the beginning. The interior of the home is where Syed's creativity and range of skills are truly on display. For the past twenty-three years, he's played a crucial design role in acclaimed residential and commercial projects ranging from the largest cancer research hospital in America to a luxury hotel in Beijing to upmarket residences right here on the Emerald Coast. With more than two decades of experience as a trained commercial and residential designer, Syed had a world of options at his fingertips when it came to designing this latest house in Rosemary Beach. He decided to go all out with rich details that are as impressive as they are livable.

The visual feast begins with the handmade, oversized mahogany front door. Next up is the two-and-a-half-story entry foyer, highlighted by a custom-designed

suspended chandelier. And when you want to explore the upper floors, you'll take the handmade mahogany and cypress floating staircase.

All of those handmade details? Syed again. Not only is he a renowned designer, but he's worked extensively as a general contractor. With two teammates, Syed constructed the massive entry door, the floating staircase, and the fireplace mantels. He rarely allows himself the indulgence of participating in the building process, but he couldn't resist this time. "Usually, I design a project and then someone else gets to build it and put their stamp on it," he explains. "In this home, I got involved in the hands-on details as well. It was very satisfying."





His wife, Jenifer, also a trained commercial and residential designer, made the home a family affair by serving as the interior designer. Though the materials are striking—wide-plank white oak hardwood floors, slatted wood walls, imported European tile—the overall feel of the house is anything but *museum chilly*. Rather, they've created a space that's inviting and almost playful. "It isn't overstuffed and pompous," Jenifer promises. "You don't need to have a degree in art or design to appreciate the space. It just feels right. It's meant to be a place for people to gather and make memories, and you can't do that if you aren't relaxed."

She used a neutral, tone-on-tone color palette, with darker contrasts pulled from elements like the aged cypress walls, mantels, and floors. The effect is a calm, elegant environment that's also functional (even the white furniture is slip-covered for easy care). And, most important, it's move-in ready.

While he recognizes that the home is an investment, Syed doesn't expect it to last long on the market. The list of advantages starts with location. It's not on the beach, and he says that's a good thing. Syed should know; his own house is on the north side of Rosemary Beach. When you live right on the beach, he says, your front yard becomes everyone else's playground. Not to mention all the foot

traffic through your property. "This location gives you privacy, and it's still only five minutes from the beach."

Another benefit of the location is the wealth of off-street parking. The East Kingston Road property has six or seven off-street parking options; contrast that with one or two designated parking spots for beach properties. Trying to find on-street parking for guests or your own second car can be nearly impossible in a beach community. Then there's the upkeep of a beachfront home. Between the effects of sand, wind, and sea spray, maintenance is a constant battle. Houses just a few minutes from the water require significantly less maintenance. "There's a reason 95 percent of people who live here full-time live on the north side," Syed quips.

Location aside, the house just makes sense. It all goes back to Syed's initial question: if I had to live here, what would I want? What he would want is practicality. That's why there's so much storage. He would also want universal accessibility. That's why he put one of the master bedrooms on the ground floor and also installed an elevator. Flexibility is important as well, which is why every floor has its own living area. If the kids are bored by adult conversation, for example, they can hang out in their own space on the second or third floor. Lastly,



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Syed built in rental potential. Because it's so large and has so many amenities, he confides that it could easily rent for \$12,000 a week. "The majority of the homes on the community's rental program earn enough to offset the mortgage," he says. "It could carry itself."

Syed admits he'll be a bit sad to let go of the home, though he looks forward to welcoming buyers to the laid-back, community-centric town of Rosemary Beach. And who knows? He might be hanging a "For Sale" sign on another design-build property before too long. "We have a lot of fun doing these homes," Jenifer says. "He's a master of flow and use of space, and then I come in and create areas for people to make memories. That's what it's really all about."

For additional information on the East Kingston Road residence, or to discuss a personal tour, please contact the Syed Design Group at (850) 543-5951.



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A FAMILY MAN ROOTED IN A LEGACY

# 

BY SALLIE W. BOYLES

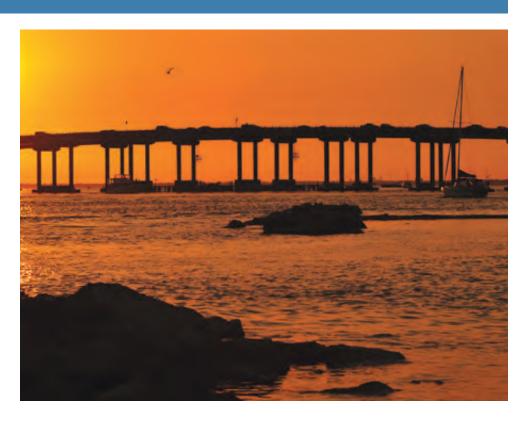
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NATHAN ABBOTT



Erin, Amanda, Finn, and Morgan Abbott are ready for a cruise on the bay.



"PEOPLE ALWAYS THINK OF THE GULF WHEN THEY VISIT, BUT THE BAYS AND BAYOUS ARE JUST AS AMAZING."



Most can relate to the back-to-reality feeling that descends when a vacation in paradise comes to an end, and home, no matter how sweet, cannot compare. Nathan Abbott is an exception, claiming that other destinations rarely rival the beauty, activities, and people of his Northwest Florida home. Biased or not, the man born in Fort Walton Beach fell in love with life on the Emerald Coast as a boy growing up. Now president of the Nathan Abbott Team, which originated from Abbott Realty, the first real estate company in Destin (established by his father and uncle in 1977), Nathan not only praises the Florida Panhandle's lifestyle, but makes a point of living it.

"I feel so blessed that my family brought me into the world to such a beautiful destination," says Nathan. They moved from Fort Walton to Destin when the World's Luckiest Fishing Village was, as Nathan recalls, "a place to go camping and explore the coastline. My father would take me in his four-wheel-drive truck down the beach and we would jump sand dunes to discover coastal dune lakes and other environments." In that era before cell phones, they packed plenty of water for such excursions. "If you were to get stuck in the sand or your vehicle broke down, you could expect to be stranded for hours or have to walk several miles to find anyone that could offer friendly assistance with a telephone."

Nathan also fondly remembers Sunday boating outings with his family, still a favorite pastime. "Over the years," he says, "I believe we've explored every waterway that our area offers. People always think of the Gulf when they visit, but the bays and bayous are just as amazing. For a true appreciation of the area, my best suggestion for tourists is to stop by Destin Harbor to rent a boat for the day and explore." Destin's deep waters just off the coast foster an abundance of sea life, and common sightings from boats include dolphins and turtles.

During the summer, the Abbotts love taking the Intracoastal Waterway to Black's Island, located in St. Joseph Bay at Port St. Joe, where they go scalloping. "You'll feel like you're in the Bahamas," Nathan remarks. "It's like a forgotten coast with miles of undeveloped land and pristine waters."

For a refreshing dip or a relaxing afternoon that's a quick trip from Destin's docks, he recommends paddling or motoring out to Crab Island—once a

small island but now an expansive sandbar—just beyond the Destin Bridge in the bay. Nathan also likes to snorkel along the jetties on the other side of the bridge at Destin Pass.

Land explorations are equally rewarding to nature lovers. Nathan suggests Arnett's Gulfside Trail Rides on County Highway 393 in Santa Rosa Beach for horse rentals and guided horseback tours along the Gulf of Mexico. "The property sits on the edge of Point Washington State Forest," says Nathan, "so you can ride for miles and miles."

Point Washington State Forest, which comprises fifteen thousand acres in South Walton County, is a haven for hikers and mountain bikers as well. "I also recommend hiking around the coastal lakes at Topsail Hill Preserve Park in Santa Rosa Beach and nearby Grayton Beach State Park," he says.

If seeking a spontaneous adventure, Nathan proposes a detour off a main highway, like 30-A, onto one of





many state roads. "Riding my bike, I'll cut through a path and find something beautiful," he says. Deer, bears, smaller mammals, and birds are among the wildlife. "Occasionally, you'll see bald eagles," Nathan reveals.

Combining his love of the outdoors and history, Nathan enjoys taking "a walk back in time" at Eden Gardens State Park in Point Washington, which features picturesque grounds and the elegant Wesley House, built in the 1800s.

The Apalachicola Historic District also offers a well-preserved glimpse of the past. "Consider staying in a bed-and-breakfast," says Nathan, joking that ghost tales heighten the ambience of quaint old lodgings. With or without spirits, he advises a restful night for an active day ahead. "Bring a bicycle to cruise along the shoreline," he adds. "Go by the old shrimp boats, the historic homes, and the Chestnut Street Cemetery." Local restaurants and boutiques are also worth visiting. "So many of our businesses in Northwest Florida are family-owned," Nathan informs, "which adds to the small-town charm and hospitality."

Welcoming all extends to special events. Some of Nathan's favorites include the Sandestin Wine Festival (April) in Destin, Seabreeze Jazz Festival (April) at Pier Park in Panama City Beach, Digital Graffiti at Alys Beach (June), 30A Songwriters Festival (January) at various venues, Destin Seafood Festival (October), Seeing Red Wine Festival (November) in Seaside, and Telluride Mountainfilm on Tour (November) in Water Color. Additionally, organizations like the REP, a repertory theatre company based in Seaside, and the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation, a source for music and fine arts festivals and programs, keep the cultural arts alive throughout the year.

"There are so many activities for all ages—and certainly for young kids," says Nathan. Although the pace slows in the winter, Destin and other beach communities no longer turn into seasonal ghost towns. "We're currently the third fastest-growing area in the country for primary residence and the second most-visited region in the state of Florida." As a matter of fact, tourism expenditures in Destin during the 2014 summer season surpassed all previous records.

Not so long ago, when Nathan traveled, he needed a map to point out Destin and 30-A. Today, people are informed, thanks to all kinds of press: *Boating* 



ALTHOUGH THE PACE SLOWS IN THE WINTER, DESTIN AND OTHER BEACH COMMUNITIES NO LONGER TURN INTO SEASONAL GHOST TOWNS.



Morgan Abbott relaxes in the family's pool.



magazine named Destin its best place to live and boat; *USA Today* cited Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort among its ten best beach resort kids' clubs; and TripAdvisor included Destin among its top ten destinations on the rise in the U.S.

"Several of my friends and I, who were born and raised here, have traveled around looking for other opportunities," says Nathan. "Sometimes you have to leave to find out what you have at home."

Amanda Abbott, Nathan's sister and a Nathan Abbott Team seller specialist, agrees wholeheartedly. "After college, I wanted to experience life in the city, so I moved to Chicago and then New York City, for a total of nearly ten years working in sales in the fashion industry," she says. "I took some time off in 2011 to spend the summer with my family on the beach, and I was blown away by the beauty of the area and the new connection I had to the water."

"WE'RE CURRENTLY THE THIRD FASTEST-GROWING AREA IN THE COUNTRY FOR PRIMARY RESIDENCE AND THE SECOND MOST-VISITED REGION IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA."



The visit inspired Amanda to move back home and entice others to join her. "You can enjoy an active outdoor lifestyle," she says, "and create a life here that doesn't break the bank like the other cities I lived in."

"The cost of living is affordable," Nathan affirms. "You don't have to be wealthy to lead a luxurious lifestyle here."

That being said, those who visit or move to the area often desire the extras, such as boating, dining, golfing, shopping, or any exceptional experience. Referring people to their personal go-to preferences for these amenities is second nature to Nathan and his family. His team recently launched an online referral source, www.EmeraldCoastLuxury.com, to help make these connections between local businesses and consumers happen more easily. "These are our hand-selected recommendations for luxury," Nathan says in a downto-earth tone that reflects how the family business has always operated. "We just build relationships that become friendships, and the rest follows."

Without question, the current generation of Abbotts takes great pride in perpetuating a vision that began with William W. Abbott Sr., who had been stationed at Eglin Air Force Base until retiring in 1968. Becoming a broker in 1970, William began selling condominiums at the El Matador-the only building within two counties that had an elevator—on Okaloosa Island. "Locals would come by just to ride the elevators," says Steve Abbott, William's son. Steve moved back home after college, obtained his real estate license and started working with his dad at the El Matador in 1971. "My brother Bill joined us in 1976," he says.

From living in many countries and traveling extensively as a military family, the Abbotts appreciated the Emerald Coast in comparison to other places. "We thought that Destin and the surrounding beaches were some of the best in the world," says Steve. "When my brother and I opened an office on Emerald Coast Parkway, which was out in the middle of nowhere but where we envisioned future development, people would say, 'What are those Abbott boys doing out there?" Where locals didn't see much, they saw incredible views.

Nathan injects, "People used to tell my dad, 'Steve, no one's going to want to live there!""



"YOU CAN ENJOY AN ACTIVE OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE, AND CREATE A LIFE HERE THAT DOESN'T BREAK THE BANK LIKE THE OTHER CITIES I LIVED IN."



Nathan and Erin Abbott are proud to live, work, and play in Northwest Florida.



Abbott Realty became the leading real estate company in Northwest Florida through the late 1990s, with over a thousand employees making it the largest employer there since the mid-1980s. Nathan has kept the business in the family by becoming the third generation of Abbott realtors and is a top-producing broker associate for ResortQuest Real Estate. Although times have changed since the inception of the business, its founding principles have remained the same: customer service, knowledge, hard work, and dedication.

"I still can't think of a better place to vacation or to raise a family," says Steve.

Nathan and his wife, Erin, not only agree, but they would also love for five-year-old Morgan and three-year-old Finn to make the same determination when they grow up. So far, the odds are good. Both children love the water and already know how to swim. And Morgan recently had some promising words for Nathan: "Daddy, when I get older, I want to be a realestator just like you!"

Readers can learn more about area real estate opportunities by visiting www.NathanAbbottTeam.com and www.EmeraldCoastLuxury.com or by calling 850-803-7653.

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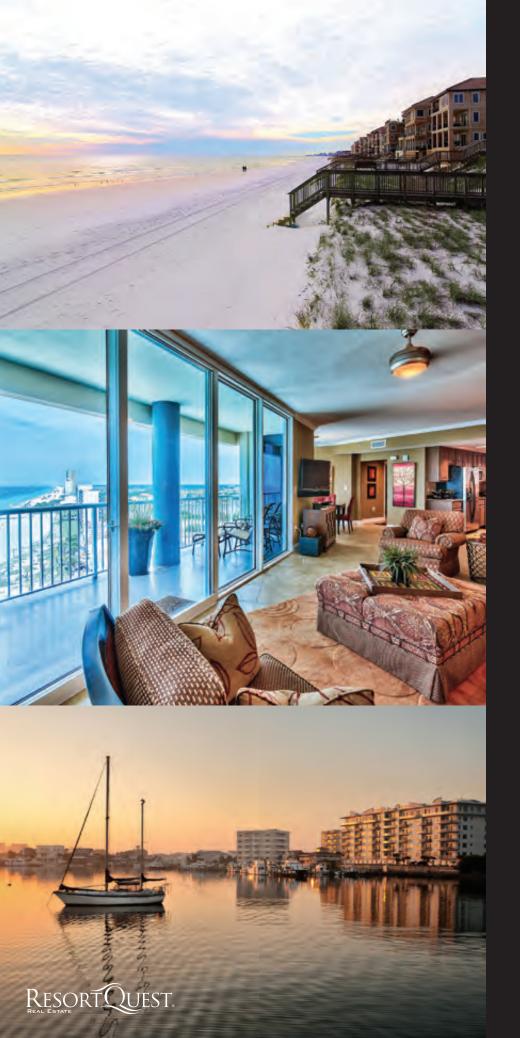
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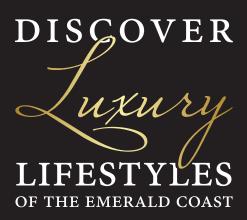
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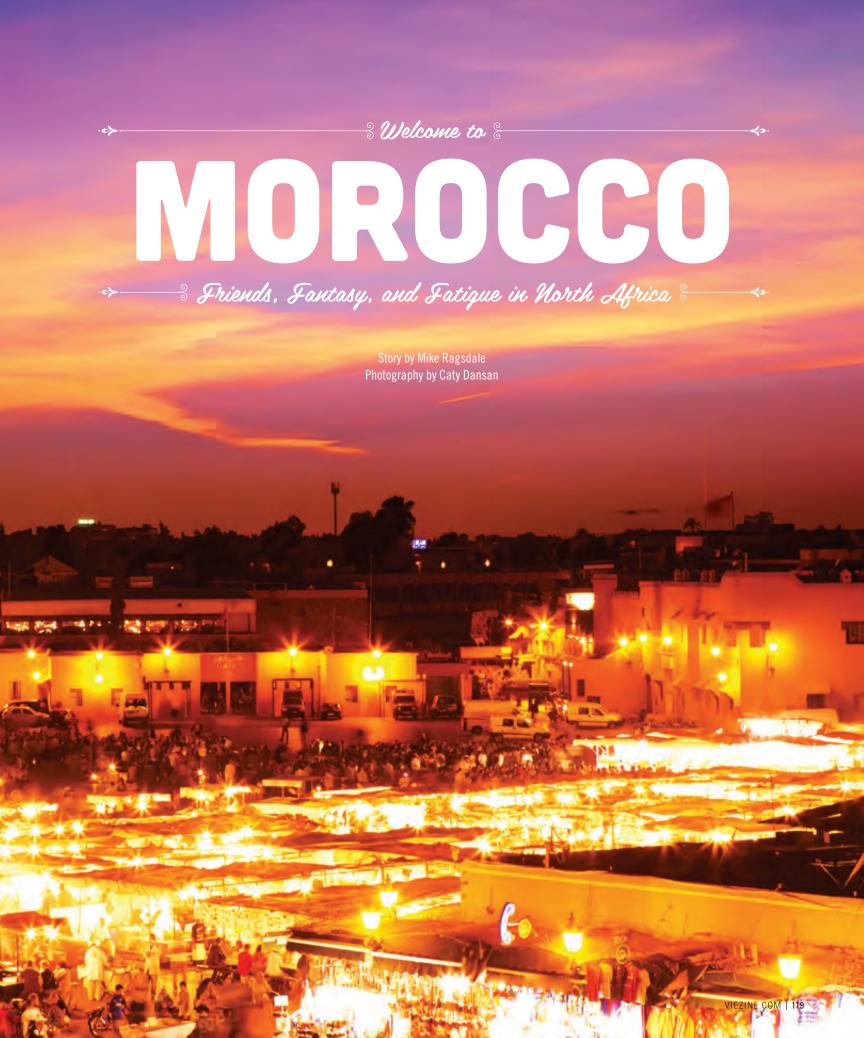
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EMERALD COAST

Luxury-

By the Nathan Arrott Team





The taxi driver sat on the curb beside me and lit a cigarette. He offered me one, but I politely declined in a language he didn't understand. It was well after midnight and the sweltering heat of the day had settled to a more tolerable temperature. Despite the late hour in this residential neighborhood, distant sounds of revelry ricocheted through an alley across the street.

"At least someone is having fun," I sighed.

"It is a wedding," said Badr, who helped guide us by foot through the bewildering maze of dark, narrow corridors of the medina in the moments after the accident. "It will last for three days. The first night is for the bride, the second night is for the groom, and the final night is for the entire family."

The glass doors on the building behind us swished open, and a young man in green scrubs emerged from the dimly lit reception area.

stronger than the day before. Though this process is excruciating, it's also exhilarating. After you're done, you feel a proud sense of accomplishment, I'm told. And the lifelong rewards are obvious.

International travel is a lot like that. Many times, you find yourself in strange places, asking yourself questions like: Why in the hell am I here? Why didn't I just stay at home where everything is familiar, easy, and comfortable? What did I just step in? What is that man pulling out of his ear?

Sitting on a curb after midnight outside a Moroccan emergency room and waiting for news of my friend was one of those times.

Even seasoned travelers experience a little culture shock when they first enter a third-world country. My wife, Angela, and I have explored some fairly challenging places, including Myanmar (Burma),



# INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL IS A BIT LIKE WORKING OUT. I SAY THIS WITH ABSOLUTELY NO FITNESS EXPERIENCE WHATSOEVER, BUT I ASKED MY WIFE, AND SHE CONFIRMS THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO MY THEORY.



"Your friend—he go into surgery now," he said in broken English. "I let you know when it is over."

"Welcome to Morocco," I thought.

International travel is a bit like working out. I say this with absolutely no fitness experience whatsoever, but I asked my wife, and she confirms there is some truth to my theory.

Working out can be tough, painful, and unpleasant. It can make you light-headed and nauseous. It's "working out," after all, not "playing out" or "lounging about," which is more my speed. And yet, despite all the suffering and pain and dread, the physically devout faithfully line up behind torture machines every morning, literally tearing their muscles apart so those tissues will heal back thicker, denser, and

Transnistria, Rajasthan in northern India, Moldova, Cambodia, and Bosnia, to name a few. Each presented its own cultural collisions.

This time was a little different, though, because we weren't traveling alone—we were with a group of ten wonderful friends, mostly from our hometown of Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. While a few of us were veteran travelers, some of us had never ventured far outside the United States, except to all-inclusive-style resorts in Mexico or the Caribbean, where the most awful thing likely to happen to you is a bad sunburn or a cheap rum hangover.

In the months before our journey, we tried our best to avoid overromanticizing travel to a country like Morocco. And yet our group's countless pretrip conversations could not help but be sidetracked



by seductive visions of ancient streets lined with exotic merchants, slow camel rides across windswept dunes, and decadent tagine dinners at lantern-lit tables.

On a workout difficulty scale from one to ten, Morocco probably scores a six. An all-inclusive Caribbean-style resort would rank a one. It's easy exercise. Most Western European countries are twos. Eastern European counties would score threes or fours, as would some Central American destinations, like Costa Rica. Places like Thailand and Bali are fives, if only because of the stark cultural differences. Almost anyone can venture to any of those places and enjoy a good time with relatively little discomfort or disorientation.

Places like Ecuador, Cambodia, and Morocco rank a little higher. They're truly fantastic places to visit—the people, food, sights, and experiences are all unique and worthwhile. But some places can also be a little more intimidating for outsiders. There's a slight undercurrent of tension, often fueled by a testosterone-high hierarchy found in some societies. You might get scammed in Asia or India, but I don't ever remember being worried about getting my ass beat. The thought of physical violence just never occurs to you because random violence just isn't part of the local culture. But that thought does sometimes occur to you in places like Quito and Marrakech, where cold stares from tourist-fatigued locals can begin to mess with your mind.

Myanmar and northern India score a seven or eight. They're extremely friendly—just harder for travelers to navigate due to lack of any familiar infrastructure. I have yet to experience a nine or a ten. I suspect that very remote African villages or mission trips deep into impoverished communities would rank nines. The highest score of ten is reserved for the most dangerous and inaccessible places on Earth, such as ascending Mount Everest, providing triage relief immediately after a major disaster, or conducting a midnight raid in Syria. I leave those sorts of adventures to the heroes and saints among us.

So, for someone who has never spent much time outside of the United States, jumping straight into a third-world country is a bit like going from power walking around a high school gymnasium to a P90X fitness routine. It can be mentally and physically overwhelming.

Upon arrival in Morocco—exhausted from thirty hours of travel—our airport shuttles unceremoniously dumped us at the edge of Marrakech's city wall. Our riad (basically Morocco's version of a bed and breakfast) was inside the walls of the medina (old city), where centuries-old gates and narrow corridors prevent intrusion by car.

"We walk from here," I said, quoting Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom—which no one noticed.

I could see nervous anxiety on the weary faces of our group. Two donkeys were tethered by our gate, standing next to piles of their own waste. A flaming heap of rubbish burned nearby. Motor scooters zipped in and out of the tiny door like hornets darting to and from their hive.

Handsome young Badr was there to greet us.

"Welcome to Morocco," he said with a genuine smile and a warm handshake for each of us. "Please, follow me."

We walked in a tight cluster for ten minutes or so, dragging our roller luggage through alleys and tunnels, dodging motorcycles, murky puddles, and stoic stares from veiled faces. "How in the hell will we ever find this place on our own?" I worried.

After such sleep-deprived sensory overload, our riad (Riad Porte Royale) felt like a scintillating sanctuary. We enthusiastically dispersed throughout the gorgeous threelevel, five-bedroom courtyard home to explore and claim our bedrooms. Badr and a woman presented us with freshly squeezed juice. We gathered around the large outdoor dining table beside the splash pool and toasted one another. "To Morocco!" we cheered, even though I could tell that a couple of us were secretly calculating change-of-ticket costs for early flights out.

Rather than succumb to the slumber that all of us desperately craved, we decided to power our way into the evening in an attempt to get our bodies and minds on local time. As the sun began to cast long shadows across the African rooftops, we mustered up our collective courage and, with a telltale tourist map firmly in hand, we marched our way back into the chaotic maze. It took a while—and some good fortune—but we eventually discovered a wonderful restaurant deep in the medina, serving fine wine, authentic tagine, live music, and enough laughter to finally set our rattled minds at ease.



I COULD SEE NERVOUS ANXIETY ON **OUR GATE. STANDING NEXT TO PILES** OF THEIR OWN WASTE. A **HEAP OF RUBBISH BURNED NEARBY.** 



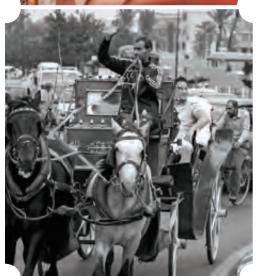












"WELCOME TO MOROCCO," HE SAID WITH A GENUINE SMILE AND A WARM HANDSHAKE FOR EACH OF US.









At midnight, we found ourselves still very much awake, enjoying cocktails in our courtyard and on the riad's rooftop. As I sat in a lounger and stared up at the star-filled Moroccan sky, I breathed a sigh of relief. "We're going to be alright," I thought.

Then I heard a cascading series of crashes that seemed to go on forever, shattering the peace and silence of the night. What in the hell was that?

I darted downstairs to discover shattered glass on the steps and floor, everywhere. Standing thereshirtless and with a stunned look on his face—was our friend Kevin, holding his right hand aloft, blood pouring down his arm.

Kevin had slipped on the slick, stone stairs. As he tumbled down, he instinctively extended his right hand to help break his fall. His hand went straight through a large light fixture on the wall, shattering the untempered glass and gashing a deep, gaping wound in his palm.

Fortunately, two of our traveling companions, Kasie and Bridgette, are nurses, so they instinctively jumped into action. They laid Kevin down on the bed and applied pressure to the wound. They picked shards of glass from his hand, comforting him as they worked with makeshift tools.

"He's losing a lot of blood," whispered Bridgette. "I think he might have cut an artery."

"We're not going to be able to stop the bleeding," said Kasie after a few more minutes of concentrated effort. "We need to get him to a hospital."

With his hand bandaged but still bleeding, Badr led Kevin and me back through the dark maze toward the medina's exterior wall.

"We can find a taxi there," said Badr.

My experience is that unless you're in a combat zone, the real risk in visiting foreign countries isn't terrorists. Or being imprisoned. Or getting mugged. Frankly, it's getting hurt out in the middle of nowhere and finding yourself hours away from proper medical help. It's falling off a temple in Bagan and breaking your spine.









It's getting into a car wreck at a random intersection, four hours deep in India's Khuri desert. It's as simple and fast as falling down some stairs and cutting an artery. These are the most dangerous moments because the emergency services that we all have come to expect sometimes aren't available.

Fortunately, our new friend Badr got us the help we desperately needed that night, delivering us to the best hospital and then translating for us with doctors, nurses, and specialists. Kevin underwent emergency surgery. The bleeding was stopped, and the severed tendon was repaired. Disaster averted.

However, because of the anesthesia, the hospital staff wouldn't let me take Kevin back to our riad that night. As he lay there disoriented in the recovery room, I assured him that I would in fact return to get him in the morning.

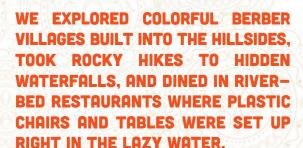
"Welcome to Morocco," I smiled.

Even though his fingers were visibly black and blue outside the bandages, Kevin never complained about his injury during the remainder of our trip—not once. Locals asked if he was a prizefighter.

After a couple of days, our culture shock began to subside, as it always does. We found ourselves relishing all of the beauty and romanticism that Marrakech has to offer. We usually slept in late and indulged in the royal spread of breakfast delights that the riad staff prepared fresh for us each morning. Angela sometimes led a rooftop yoga class for anyone not too hungover to participate. By day, we meandered through the alleys of the souk (marketplace), exploring exotic shops, interacting with colorful characters, and finding refuge from the ground-level chaos in rooftop restaurants. We ventured through the central plaza once or twice, where cobras, vipers, camels, monkeys, and touts tirelessly hustled the passing crowd.

We skipped most of the traditional tourist destinations, instead favoring the authentic buzz of life on the streets.

"Would you like to go to a museum?" asked Badr during one of our strolls.





"As far as I'm concerned, this whole place is a museum," replied Trevor. I couldn't have agreed more. The bustling streets of the medina are living history.

Our excursion to the Ourika Valley to the southeast was also a highlight. We explored colorful Berber villages built into the hillsides, took rocky hikes to hidden waterfalls, and dined in riverbed restaurants where plastic chairs and tables were set up right in the lazy water.

That's how we spent our days. But the nights—well, that's when our group showed its true colors.

I've learned when traveling in difficult places, you sometimes need to "reward" yourself after an exhaustive day of haggling and mishaps. We rewarded ourselves a lot in Marrakech, indulging in upscale restaurants, such as Jad Mahal and Lotus Club, and later partaking in cocktails and dancing until the late hours in swanky lounges like Silver, Nikki Beach, and 555, where the action doesn't even start until two. Get there before that and it will just be you and the Russian hookers, with each of you sitting around waiting for better prospects.

After the frenzy of Marrakech, the city of Fez in the north was a delightful surprise. Although both cities are home to roughly a million people, Fez still felt like a small town: genuinely warm and welcoming. As you strolled along, eager merchants would invite you into their shops, but if you declined they would simply and sincerely respond, "No problem, my friend. Welcome to Fez."

More than 9,400 alleyways crisscross through the medina in Fez, and weighed-down donkeys still deliver goods to the shops here every day, as they have for centuries. After all, there's no other practical way for deliverymen to navigate these tight, hilly corridors.

Hassan, our local Muslim guide, took us on an excellent tour of the old city. Among many other things about daily life in Fez, we learned much about the very close relationship between Muslims and Jews.

"The Jews and Berbers were here first," said Hassan. "When our Jewish neighbors celebrate their holidays, we cook food for them and bring it to their house. They do the same for us on our holidays. They watch our children, and we watch over theirs. We are all friends. Only in the media are we enemies."

Each interconnected neighborhood in the medina has everything one needs to enjoy a good life: a bakery, a school, a hammam (spa), a mosque, and a freshwater fountain. All of these can be found within a few steps of the average home, so that even small children and the elderly have access with minimal effort. In the old days, large wooden gates could be closed between neighborhoods at night, ensuring that children were safe and sound among their immediate neighbors. They could also be closed to prevent intrusion, more often from disease than marauders. Today, though, such gates are unnecessary. Toddlers wander the streets by themselves. "Perfectly safe, as they have been for centuries," said Hassan, patting young ones on their heads as they darted around us and warmly shaking hands with old acquaintances he passed in this city of a million friends.

Our final day in Morocco required a five-hour cross-country drive from Fez to the port of Tangier. The scenery in North Africa was both beautiful and surreal, but we were all secretly preoccupied with what waited for us just across the Mediterranean—two weeks of additional indulgence in Spanish wine, tapas, and nightlife.

Unfortunately, through a series of miscommunications and mishaps, we found ourselves at the right TIME but at the wrong PORT in Tangier—a full hour's drive from our proper point of departure. We missed our ferry, which was obviously a critical juncture in this twelve-hour travel day from Africa to Seville. So, in a mad scramble to try to make the next connection, we strapped our luggage into the open trunk of a dilapidated taxi, crammed ourselves inside and dashed along the cliffy African coastline like contestants in *The Amazing Race*.

When we rolled into the parking lot at the proper port, we could see the next ferry gearing up to depart for Europe. Missing it meant spending many more hours in Morocco and quite possibly angering the driver who we hoped was still waiting to pick us up in Tarifa, Spain.

We bought our tickets and ran toward the departure gate. "No problem," said a friendly local with a reassuring smile. "I will help you."

"Thank you so much," I said. "We have a very long day of travel ahead, and we already missed our first ferry."



"No problem. This man is very important," he said, gesturing to a uniformed terminal official. "He will hold the ferry for you, if you give him a little money. He will make sure that the ferry waits for you."

"Yes, of course," I said, fishing for my wallet. I had some extra dirhams that I would have to exchange anyway. I gave them each a generous amount and thanked them profusely as they helped our group quickly navigate through the immigration paperwork and security checkpoint. Once through the gate, it was an immense relief to round the corner and see the ferry still dockside. But, as we raced down the gangway, a mere fifty feet from our goal, the ship suddenly throttled up and began to pull away from

That son of a... They didn't hold the ferry for us. They scammed us, and now we were on the wrong side of the security gate, with no way to get back through. I felt the group's morale plummet. Two minutes faster and we'd now be on our way to Spain.

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Such is the roller-coaster ride of international travel. If you enjoy the leisurely loop of a carousel, go to Disney World, Sandals, or Atlantis. It's certainly fun, much safer, and much more predictable. You'll no doubt return home rested and relaxed. But once you've gotten a taste for the thrill of a roller coaster, the carousel can lose its luster. While the unpredictable ups, downs, twists, and turns of international travel can be nauseating and gut-wrenching, once you've emerged unscathed, it's hard to ever look at the carousel the same way again.

With our ferry churning off toward Europe without us, we turned around in fatigued defeat and slowly dragged our luggage back up the gangway. I looked up at the majestic African mountains in front of us and couldn't help but smile.

"Welcome to Morocco." ■

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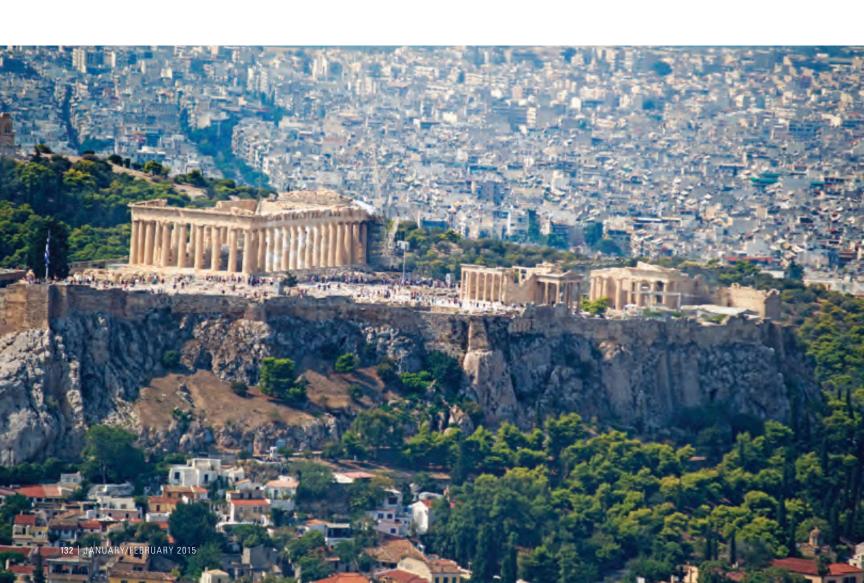




By Sandra K. Woodward Photography by Richard Woodward If you have long dreamed of a trip to the Greek islands, the good news is there is an overabundance of choices—from tiny, sparsely populated specks that could almost be classified as mere rocks to the other extreme of the large islands characterized by high population and major urban areas. Such variety allows the traveler to create an experience to fit even the most exacting specifications. Do you want a party island, where the nightlife never ends? A family vacation with beaches where young children can play safely while parents relax? Do you want to focus on exploring ancient ruins that evoke the Greece of museums? How about a hiking holiday, with spectacular vistas and challenging trails? The reality is that the islands of Greece offer the opportunity to explore each of these activities and more—and many offer all of them in one place.

The challenge in planning a Greek island vacation is the process of elimination. Finding the island that fits your personality and your travel goals can be a large part of the fun. On the other hand, who's to say it wouldn't be as much fun to close your eyes and pick an island—or several—on the map? Such a bold gesture reflects the spirit of adventure and romance that are almost requirements for those who choose to visit Greece and its islands. The very best news is that it's hard to go wrong. Whatever your choice, you will be on an island—in Greece!

Any journey to the Greek islands should begin with a stop in Athens. Not just the capital of Greece, Athens is one of the most important points of origin for all of Western civilization, and that history pervades the city at every turn. Round a corner and catch a glimpse of the Parthenon high atop the Acropolis. Stroll the Ancient Agora, or market square, where Plato, Socrates, and other great minds debated the tenets of philosophy, government, mathematics, and



science. Even a trip on the city's excellent metro system is a journey back in antiquity, with display cases in four of the city's metro stations exhibiting ancient relics such as water jugs, coins, and even a gravesite, all found during excavation for the underground tracks.

A visit to the new Acropolis Museum, completed in 2007, is well worth the investment of a day's time. While nothing can replicate the firsthand experience of a trip up to the Acropolis itself, this world-class museum does an extraordinary job of enhancing one's visit to the ancient ruins and providing extensive interactive educational activities for visitors of all levels of knowledge. The architecture of the building is a perfect setting for the treasures it houses. The glass walls offer astonishing views of the Acropolis itself, a brilliant blending of past and present. Even the museum's website, www.theacropolismuseum. gr, is exciting and innovative. As preservation work on the Parthenon and other buildings atop the Acropolis continues, the museum offers detailed explanations of the history and evolution of the site and three-dimensional views of its many antiquities, many never visible before. The exhibition of the Caryatids of the Erechtheion is a case in point. Five of the six magnificent female forms that have stood since 421 BC were moved to the museum for cleaning and restoration using sophisticated laser technology. The sixth was separated from her sisters and removed to England by Lord Elgin in the early nineteenth century, along with other treasures from the Acropolis now on view in the British Museum. Greece has long lobbied for the return of the Elgin marbles to the Acropolis, but the British authorities argued that there was no appropriate location for their protection and preservation. The new museum and its superb facilities would seem to negate that argument, and Britain can expect continued pressure for the return of Greece's precious antiquities.

Consider the Athens stopover a period of indoctrination into the Mediterranean mentality. From the quiet, sedate (wealthy) neighborhoods of Kolonaki nestled at the foot of the city's highest point, Mount Lycabettus, to the buzzing, never-seems-to-sleep vibe of Monastiraki and the Plaka, areas where Athenians and indeed visitors from around the world have always congregated, this is a vibrant, modern city with an infectious joie de vivre, replete with high-end stores, coffee shops, bars, and restaurants ranging from the most humble souvlaki stands to



the most sophisticated fine dining. Dining alfresco is the norm, with even the tiniest café offering a couple of sidewalk tables. The early September weekend of our visit was shared with what appeared to be all the citizens of Athens relishing the many outdoor restaurants in a most convivial atmosphere.

Athens is stimulating, but island life was the real reason for our visit, and it was time to see if dreams would match reality. On Sunday at midday, we joined throngs of metro passengers headed for the port of Piraeus and the outbound ferries. The term "throngs" is relative. One of the best reasons to choose September for a Greek island visit is that most Athenians and other Greek residents take their annual holidays in July and August. By September, the crowds have thinned significantly, but the majority of restaurants and attractions are still open until the end of the month, when proprietors return to their homes on the mainland or farther afield.

For my husband and me, the objective of traveling is to be, not to do. Rather than checking off every site listed in a guidebook, we prefer the leisurely approach to getting to know a new locale, its people, history, and culture. We stroll. We sit. We drink coffee or wine. We chat. Our chosen destination, Sifnos, in the western Cyclades, was the perfect match for us in size, scope, and ambience. Its thirty-five square miles comprise several population centers connected to each other and to more remote areas by a network of quite good roads for car or motorbike rentals, a well-used bus system, and taxi services, making the entire island accessible. With a year-round population of only about 2,200, the island is not crowded once the high summer season is over, a plus for our planned September visit. There are a wide variety of accommodation choices, from simple seaside cottages renting single rooms to hotels, secluded in-town apartments, and a couple of rather high-end resorts. Finally, Sifnos is a center of rich history and culture. In all, the island offers an environment that is friendly, welcoming, and fresh to even the most jaded traveler. One further note: We limited our visit to one island only. If exploring several islands is your goal, be sure to examine ferry schedules carefully; not all islands are accessible directly from each other, ferries may not run daily, and connections may require an overnight stay.



n Sifnos, the combination of an average September temperature of 73 degrees Fahrenheit and little rainfall ensures many hours of basking in the Aegean sun, whether sitting on the patio of a taverna sipping ouzo or one of the excellent local wines; swimming in the warm, crystal clear waters of the Aegean; or visiting some of the more than 360 churches that dot the island from sea level to the highest point of 2,228 feet. Spectacular vistas, warm breezes fragrant with wild thyme, the cobalt sea in the distance, and sugar-cube architecture embody the ideal of a Greek island vacation. But that's just the beginning.

Each major area of the island offers the visitor a unique experience. Since there is no airport, arrival by sea is the only option, and the introduction to the island and its culture begins for most travelers in the port of Kamares. While there are several ferry companies to choose from, we chose the Aegean Speed Lines *Speedrunner* fleet, featuring spacious and comfortable vessels and a fast three-hour Athens-to-Sifnos run. Speed was the order of the day, with the ferry disgorging people and vehicles onto the dock in record time, making us very happy that we travel with only one airline-friendly carry-on suitcase each. First impressions do matter, and Kamares, with its tidy waterfront (including clean public restrooms)





#### **PLAN YOUR TRIP** Two resources were especially valuable in planning our trip. The official Sifnos travel website, www.sifnos.gr, offers extensive descriptions and details about virtually every aspect and every location of the island. Even more helpful from the traveler's perspective was Matt Barrett's Greece Travel Guide, www.greektravel. com, written by a North Carolina resident who has been traveling to his ancestral homeland since the 1960s and who spends every summer there. It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive source of information. The site is organized, accessible, entertaining, and exhaustive in content. If you are not excited about traveling to Greece after reading Matt Barrett's website, you should probably

and geranium- and bougainvillea-bedecked hotel balconies, offers a friendly welcome. For us it was a quick hello. We headed directly for the Hotel Stavros, where we met Stavros Kalogirou, who with his British wife, Sarah, owns two hotels in Kamares and the Eleonas Apartments in Apollonia, where we had chosen to stay. His informal generosity reinforced the warmth and kindness we had felt from the e-mail exchanges with Sarah in planning our trip, and we picked up our rental car—a small Fiat Panda, the perfect size for maneuvering on the sometimes narrow, winding roads of the island—and followed Stavros to the capital of Apollonia and our home for the week.

The Eleonas Apartments are relatively new, nestled in a grove of olive trees, and arranged for maximum privacy, although only steps away from the heart of the town. Our patio was directly adjacent to Panagia Ouranofora, an eighteenth-century church said to have been built from stones from the seventh-century BC temple of Apollo, for whom the capital is named.

Apollonia is the throbbing heart of Sifnos. It is the busy crossroads for bus, car, motorbike, and taxi traffic and is the municipal and financial center of the island, the location of the post office, and a primary center for shopping. It is home to the Sifnos

Folklore Museum, and it is also the focus of much good food. The *steno* (translation: alley) is a narrow pedestrian street that snakes uphill from the town square, crowded with shops and restaurants serving many traditional favorites, from the cold caper salad at O Drakakis to the freshest grilled *lavraki* (sea bass) at Apostoli to Koutouki and the *loukoumades*, doughnut-like fried pastries drizzled with honey or chocolate at Three Blond Angels.

The food of Sifnos was one of our primary reasons for seeking out this island, and we were not disappointed. Even the most casual, remote beachfront tavernas serve wonderfully fresh food, and there

just stay home.



are surprisingly sophisticated dining options from Absinthe in the port of Kamares to the excellent Mamma Mia Italian restaurants in Apollonia and Platis Gialos, both owned by the Miano family from Milan, Italy.

The village of Platis Gialos was the site of our first seaside meal and our first beach walk, the evening of our arrival. Although we had not planned it, our week was enhanced by a glorious full moon, and that first evening as the moon rose over the Platis Gialos cove, reflecting on the water stained purple by the setting sun, the island began to cast its spell on us. Our dinner at Water and Salt, the first of the

THE ELEONAS APARTMENTS ARE RELATIVELY NEW, NESTLED IN A GROVE OF OLIVE TREES, AND ARRANGED FOR MAXIMUM PRIVACY. OUR PATIO WAS DIRECTLY ADJACENT TO PANAGIA OURANOFORA.



week's many memorable meals, introduced us to mastello, a slow-cooked, meltingly tender lamb stew that is one of the centerpieces of Sifnian clay-pot cuisine, along with a chickpea stew traditionally prepared on Saturday night, carried by the men of the family and placed in the village bakery's oven to cook overnight for the Sunday dinner.

Greece's most famous chef, Nikolaos Tselementes, was a Sifnian who codified the traditional recipes in the first-ever Greek cookbook around 1910. An annual culinary festival in his honor is held each September in Artemonas, a charming twenty-minute walk uphill from Apollonia through a winding, narrow pedestrianonly stone walkway—but also easily accessible by car via the main highway. The buildings fronting the immaculately paved stone pathway are iconic Greek island architecture: blindingly white structures trimmed with as many shades of blue as the changeable Aegean or, like our apartment, a signature pale green evocative of the island's shallow coastal waters. Tiny well-maintained gardens offer accents of brilliantly colored flowers or the welcome shade of pomegranate trees.

Sifnos is also known for its pottery, and Artemonas features studios offering locally produced wares. More potters are scattered across the island, many of them displaying the signature clay chimney pots found atop many homes on the island. Perhaps the best-known potter is the elderly Kostas Depastas, who works in a primitive studio in the seaside village of Cherronisos, where he still gathers wood from the surrounding hillsides to fire his kiln and digs local clay to make his pots. An impromptu visit to his studio was one of our most rewarding experiences on the island. Although it was the only time we encountered any language barrier, our appreciation for his craft and his willingness to welcome strangers transcended any minor miscommunication.

#### BEAUTIFUL BEACHES

Tiny Cherronisos is only one of the many renowned beaches on Sifnos. Vathi, considered by many to be the most beautiful beach on the island, is the site of a new development, Elies Resorts. The road to Vathi offers the added value of the archaeological site of the Mycenaean citadel of Agios Andreas, dating back at least to the twelfth century BC. The views from the top of the site are among the most spectacular on the island. Nearby Chrissopigi/ Apokofto beach is a bit quieter, in September at least. The beach is wider than some and a favorite for boaters who drop anchor far enough offshore so as not to pose problems for swimmers or sunbathers. Though only a short stretch of sand, it supports two tavernas with spacious covered patios offering respite from the sun. It is also home to the popular Sifnos Diving Center.

Close by, Faros comprises three beaches and the starting point of a footpath that winds around the cove to Panagia Chrissopigi, one of the most spectacular churches on the island. We began our exploration of the footpath at dusk one evening, sharing the path with a herd of goats grazing in the vegetation beside the path in complete disregard of our presence. Their tinkling bells adding a lovely musical accompaniment to our walk. We stopped to rest midway in the deserted terrace of yet another church, where we were joined a few minutes later by a young couple from Thessaloniki who told us they were planning to marry next year. They were considering a wedding at Panagia Chrissopigi and were on their way to see the picturesque church in the light of the full moon. Thanks to the charming presence of our four-legged companions, the beautiful setting, and the young couple full of such sweet plans for their future, we will always treasure that magical evening!

Nowhere on Sifnos is the sense of history greater than in the ancient citadel village of Kastro, the former capital of the island and the oldest continuously inhabited village, dating back to the prehistoric third millennium BC. Expect to climb many steps in order to explore Kastro fully, from the top of the citadel and the walkway that follows the old wall facing east to perhaps the most photographed spot on the island, the Church of the Seven Martyrs, which crowns a rocky headland above the sea.



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Kastro offers many spectacular views, fine examples of well-preserved island architecture, tavernas, and shops. Here, to commemorate Sifnos as the site of perhaps the world's first silver mine, we bought a few fine pieces of silver jewelry from Maximos, an Athenian jewelry designer who summers in Kastro. Perhaps one day these pieces will be passed down in our family along with the stories we tell of our visit, so that the siren song of Sifnos will be heard by future generations.

Our week on Sifnos exceeded all our expectations for a Greek island vacation. What it did *not* do was quench our desire to visit this beautiful part of the world. Instead, we are narrowing down our choices for our next adventure. So many islands, so little time.

Freelance writer Sandra Kytle Woodward has been a contributing writer to VIE since 2009. Based in Upstate South Carolina, she divides her time between plotting her next big trip and exploring the many back roads and historical markers in her own backyard. Sandra recalls her first travel adventure was an overnight visit to her cousin's house down the street at the age of four. Since then, she has never missed an opportunity to pack her suitcase and go. "I still recall the excitement of being on my own for the first time, even among people I knew so well," says Sandra. "Sleeping in a strange bed, eating what they ate, everything was familiar but different. Every time I travel, I experience the same joy of stepping outside my routine and learning more about myself and my place in this extraordinary world!"





# SIMPE SIATEOF MIND

Ten Things to Love about New York City

BY JORDAN STAGGS

There's no denying that if a place has had more songs written about it than you could possibly think of, there must be something pretty special about it. Fred Ebb said that if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. It's the Big Apple. The City That Never Sleeps. The concrete jungle where dreams are made. You know the place.

s stated in the hit musical (and recent remake) *Annie*, you can't quite explain the pull that people seem to have toward New York City, which is one of the world's largest concentrated populations within a relatively small acreage. Tourists flock there every year to see such iconic structures as the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and the newly erected One World Trade Center. They visit for the cultural highlights such as Broadway theatre productions, concerts of every genre and ilk, comedy shows, sporting events, and festivals. Some of them even decide to stay; everyone has his or her own reason. But one thing's for sure, whether you're visiting for a weekend or planning a more permanent venture, New York has something for you.

My first visit to the city was in high school, when my school's marching band made the twenty-hour journey by bus from Alabama to tour Manhattan. We hit all the top tourism spots, took a million photos, and had the time of our lives. As an avid movie and television lover, I'd always felt a draw toward New York because of the many stories I'd seen filmed there. Who doesn't want to stroll through Riverside Park in the spring like Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan did in *You've Got Mail*? Or chase down your favorite band during a whirlwind night of club hopping and Indie music? And I would be lying if I said I never wanted to have lunch on the steps of the Met like the cool kids in *Gossip Girl*.

I've visited New York several times since that initial excursion, and I've been bitten hard. I'd venture to say it's my favorite place (so far—I haven't been everywhere). No, I have never lived there, but I don't think that disentitles me from listing a few of the many things I love about the city, Manhattan in particular.

#### GETTING THERE

There are a few major airports to choose from around the city. LaGuardia and John F. Kennedy International are the largest, with Newark Liberty International in the neighboring state of New Jersey coming in a close third. But since New York is a major hub for trade and tourism, not to mention a gateway into the United States, it is virtually accessible by any means of transportation. This includes train, bus, car, and boat—or even on foot if you're brave enough to cross through the seven layers of the Candy Cane Forest and then walk through the Lincoln Tunnel like Buddy the Elf did. Yet the best part about arriving in the city's central borough of Manhattan is just before you actually get there. Watching the skyline reveal itself as you drive closer can leave you speechless, and looking at the maze of streets and skyscrapers from your airplane window is enough to take your breath away. Those streets hold a promise that anything can happen—good or bad—and that whatever it is will become a part of your story.

Did you know that New York City was once the capital of the United States? Founded in 1624 as New Amsterdam, it's older than the country itself.

#### **GETTINGAROUND**

Once you do reach the city, however you may have gotten there, you find yourself presented with an entirely new set of options for how to get around. Shiny yellow taxis zip through crowded lanes of traffic like it's nothing. For someone who grew up in rural Alabama, it's both terrifying and thrilling. Buses, bikes, and people bustle up and down Broadway and Madison Avenue. Then there's the ever-infamous New York City subway system. It gets a lot of flak for being dangerous and dirty, but it's the least expensive and most convenient way to get around.

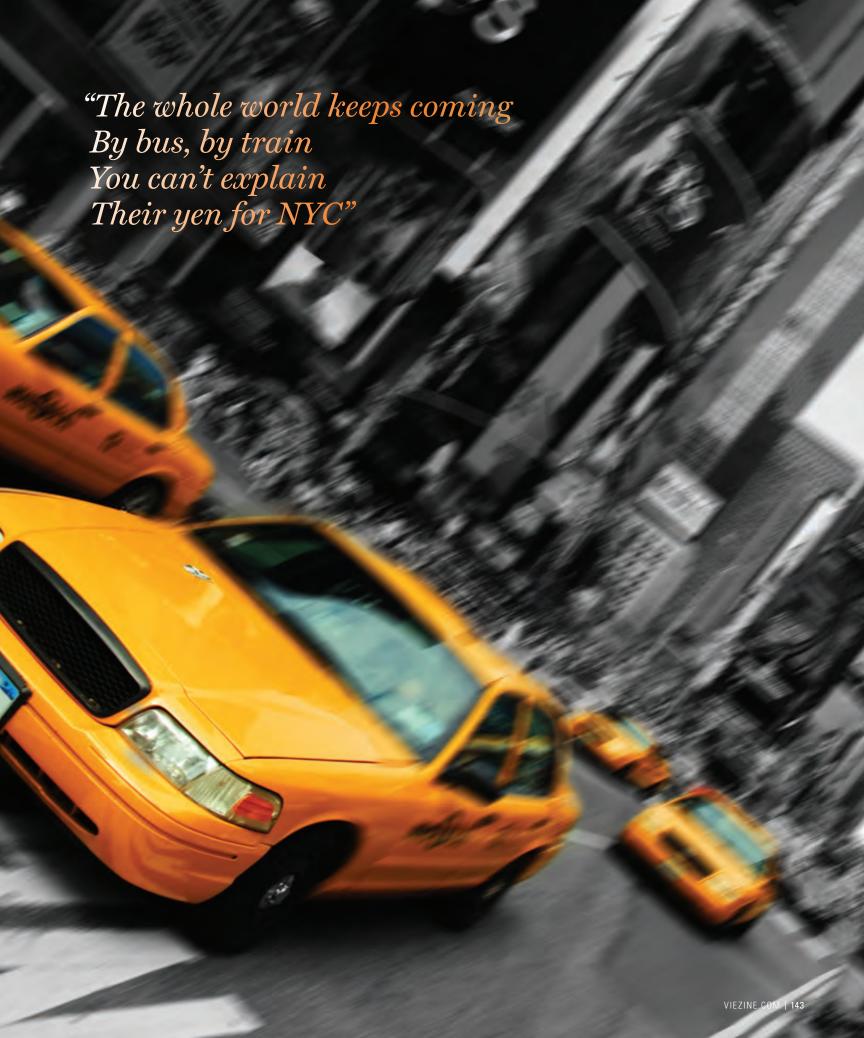
#### THE HISTORY

Did you know that New York City was once the capital of the United States? Founded in 1624 as New Amsterdam, it's older than the country itself. As one of the world's largest natural harbors, the group of islands became a valuable asset to Dutch traders. It came under English control and was renamed New York in 1664.

Everywhere you look in the city today, traces of its history are intermixed with all the bright lights and modern technologies. From nineteenth-century row houses and neo-Gothic cathedrals to Art Deco-style skyscrapers, the city's landmarks tell a story, and it's a long one riddled with both excitement and sorrow.

#### THE PEOPLE

You may have heard that New Yorkers are rude. If you haven't been there, it's a stereotype you might perpetuate. If you have been there, you might still agree. But personally, I found most of the people I met in the city to be friendly enough. One may assume that I, an introvert, hate crowded streets with people darting to and fro and that I am annoyed when a tourist walks too slowly or pauses to take a photo. Not true. I love the anonymity of it all. In New York, you're not one in a million—you're one in 8.4 million. And it's not sad or embarrassing if you're alone at a coffee shop or even a restaurant. People mind their own business; this is a novel idea for someone who grew up in the South (not that I don't love the idea of Southern hospitality). If you're a little skeptical about visiting the city because of the people, I urge you to toss that apprehension aside and go anyway. If you're nice to them-and don't get in their way-chances are you will have a good experience.



#### THE FASHION

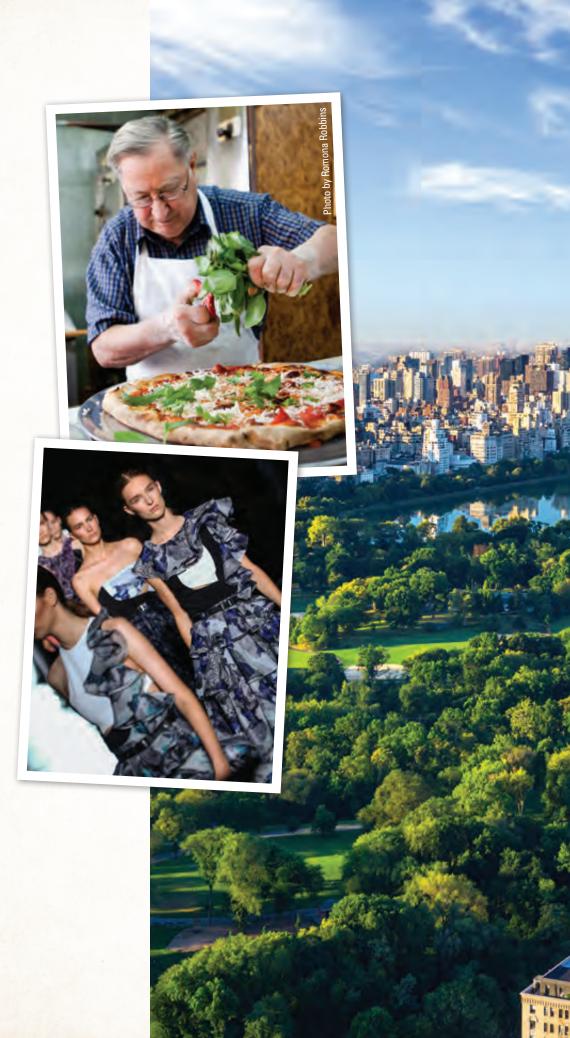
Maybe it's because of all the major publishing companies in New York and their numerous highfashion magazines that the Big Apple has developed such a reputation for being one of the style capitals of the world—or maybe it's the other way around. Either way, this city knows fashion. Twice a year it hosts Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, where some of the world's top designers showcase their collections for the next season. Many of them have studios and showrooms in the city year-round. On a street level, you will see everything from sneakers to stilettos being rocked by the city's fashionistas. Photographers will pause just to snap a pic of them on the subway. Outfits that may seem outrageous elsewhere are perfectly acceptable; New Yorkers wouldn't bat an eyelash at a lime-green top hat or a feathered coat. You can truly be yourself and let your fashion flag fly!

#### THE FOOD

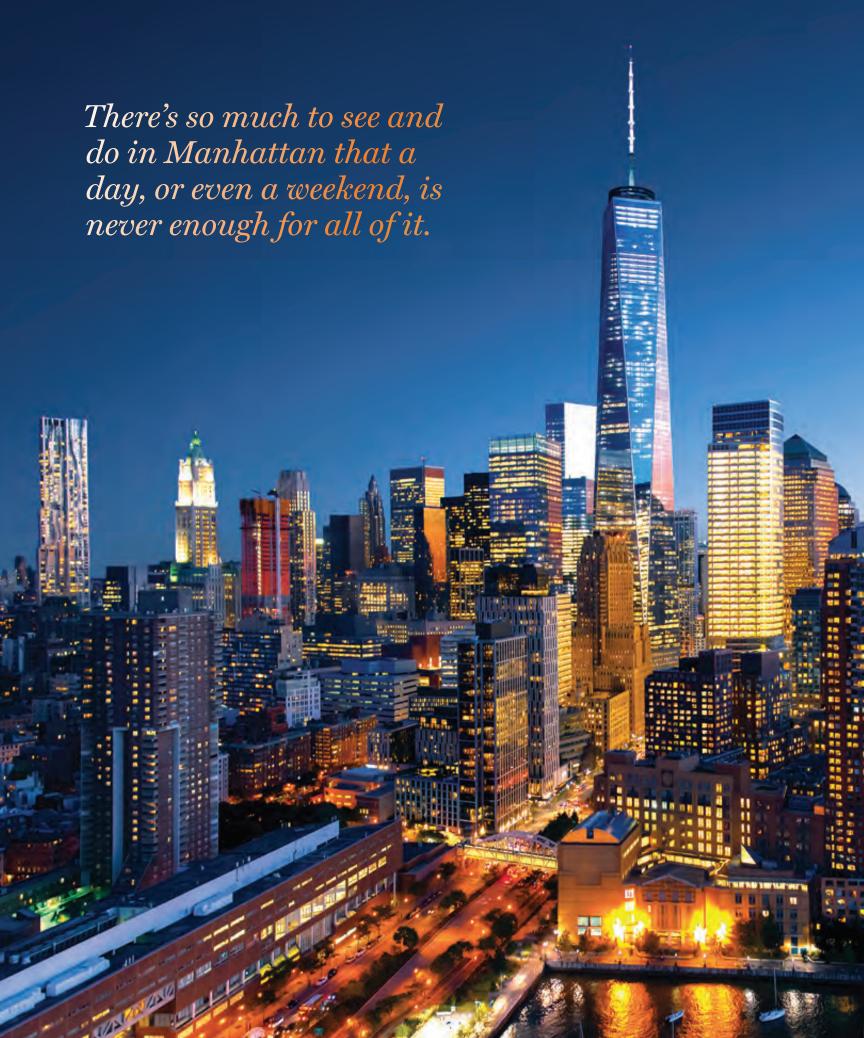
Craving some of the world's best pizza at three in the morning? No problem. How about authentic Chinese or homemade Italiano, like *mamma* used to make in the old country? Venture through New York's ethnically varied neighborhoods and you can find anything your taste buds desire. From five-star gourmet restaurants to street vendors like Nathan's Famous hot dogs, the city is a gastronomic mother lode, and you will want to try it all.

#### THE PARKS

Manhattan may be a concrete jungle, but its park system is a fantastic escape from the busy streets and gray walls. World-famous Central Park boasts lakes, sports complexes, a zoo, sweeping fields, fountains, event venues, bridges, tunnels, and more. But it's not the only park in the city and the others should not be sold short. Bryant Park, located in Midtown, is home to outdoor events and concerts year-round, along with ice-skating and a Christmas market in the winter. Madison Square Park in the Flatiron District features a spacious fenced area for the city's canines to enjoy. One of the newest and perhaps most unique parks is the High Line, which runs between Thirtieth and Thirty-Fourth Streets on Manhattan's West Side on what used to be an elevated freight rail line. A public park since 1999, it was founded by community residents and is maintained









by the Friends of the High Line, a nonprofit group that works with the city's Department of Parks and Recreation to preserve and enhance the park for the public's enjoyment. The High Line may be closed at certain times or during inclement weather, so be sure to check www.thehighline.org before visiting.

## THE SIGHTS

There's so much to see and do in Manhattan that a day, or even a weekend, is never enough for all of it. Everywhere you turn in New York City, there's a fresh feast for the eyes. Venture up Broadway to Times Square for a panoramic view of all the bill-boards, superstores, costumed characters, and more. You might even catch yourself on a giant LED screen if you stand in just the right spot! The Top of the Rock Observation Deck at Rockefeller Center offers some of the city's best views of Central Park, the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, One World Trade Center, and more.

In the warmer months (or any month if you've got enough scarves), a trip on the ferry from Battery Park to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty is sure to be a jaw-dropping experience. You never realize just how large the copper giant is until you're standing at the base, and you can imagine the awe on the faces of the millions of immigrants who came through New York Harbor over the years, seeking new life and opportunities in America. That hopeful feeling might overtake you as well, and you'll feel your chest swell with patriotism as you take it all in.

One World Trade Center houses the newly erected National September 11 Memorial and Museum, and it's an incredibly inspiring and sobering trip. Read more about it in *VIE's* 2014 Music Issue.

## THE MOVIES

New York City has been the setting for countless movies over the years and it is still a favorite location for directors. It's undoubtedly one of the most filmed places in the world, and chances are at least one of your favorite films has been made there (or the Hollywood studio version of New York). Some of my favorites include You've Got Mail, Enchanted, The Devil Wears Prada, Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist, Breakfast at Tiffany's, An Affair to Remember, West Side Story, Annie, and Marvel's The Avengers. If you're in the mood for a little slice of the Apple at home, check out www.timeout.com's list of the one hundred best films set in New York City.





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## THE ENERGY

They say it's the city where dreams are made. No doubt it's a professional shark tank, but there is just something about New York that has always made me feel invincible. Walking through the city, I want to see and do it all. The energy pulsing through everyone and everything is like a shot of adrenaline; the feeling of being part of something bigger than yourself—and being in the company of some of the most resilient people on earth—is liberating.

"You crowd,
you cramp
You're still
the champ
Amen for NYC"

Like I said, there's a lot to love about the Big Apple. (There are things not to love about it, too, but this is a love letter, not hate mail. Save those comments for YouTube.) Every person probably has a different list, but that's just one more beautiful thing about it.

You can also venture across the East River to check out New York's hottest borough, Brooklyn, in this issue of *VIE*! **M** 

# 



# One of the first questions people ask when they visit our area is "How can we be sure we're getting fresh seafood?"

That's an excellent question. There is a good chance that the seafood you will be offered traveled farther than you did. In the state of Florida, even though we are surrounded by water, more than 90% of the seafood sold this year will be imported from other countries.

Throughout the United States, the huge majority of seafood is imported. Most of it is mislabeled. Frozen seafood is sold as "fresh" and imported seafood is sold as "local." According to Oceana, 93% of fish sold as red snapper is actually some other species. 57% of tuna sold at sushi bars throughout the country is not tuna. Most of the tilapia served in this country comes from Viet Nam and Thailand and much of it is farmed in waters with sewage run-off and the source of feed is pig feces.

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TAKE A WHIRL AROUND THE

# EMERALD

From the Republic of Ireland's Bustling Cities and Quintessential Villages to Its Wild and Woolly Countryside

BY KIM DUKE-LAYDEN





For an island that is no bigger than the size of Maine, charming, visually addictive Ireland has endless sights to discover. If your New Year's resolutions include a hop across the pond, creating an Emerald Isle trip itinerary can be almost as daunting as driving on the wrong side of the road. Key planning points to consider are length of stay, transportation mode, travel distances between points, time of year, and your must-see sights or activities. To get you started, here is an insider's guide to many of the Republic of Ireland's most popular places along with lesser-known jewels, many of which are best accessed by car.

### DUBLIN

Ireland's friendly capital, Dublin, has a rich history with a cosmopolitan vibe, deftly blending the past and present into one delightful destination. The Shelbourne is Dublin's original grande dame hotel and features Waterford crystal chandeliers, a genealogy butler, and the Lord Mayor's Lounge, where Ireland's president, Michael D. Higgins, drops in for afternoon tea. This luxurious 1824 landmark overlooks St. Stephen's Green and is where the Irish Constitution was drafted in 1922.

Dublin is an excellent walking city, and not just because it boasts Ireland's mildest and driest weather. (Winter temperatures are sometimes warmer than Northwest Florida's.) From the Shelbourne, stroll a few blocks past ivy-clad brownstones with brightly painted doors to pedestrian-only Grafton Street in the city center. Redbrick pavers and colorful flower stalls add panache to Grafton's chic collection of restaurants and boutiques and Ireland's nicest department store, Brown Thomas.

Veer west a few blocks to Stephen Street Lower and find the Hairy Lemon, a convivial pub that pays tribute to a local dogcatcher from the 1950s, a man whose face supposedly resembled a lemon with gooseberry-like stubble. Relish the quintessential ambience, the friendly *craic*, and the lamb shank with potatoes and "mushy" green peas. If it happens to be Christmas Eve, return to Grafton Street

and keep a lookout for Dublin's most famous street performer—and U2's lead singer—Bono, who for the past five Christmases has busked for donations to a charity that serves the homeless.

Music has always been a big part of the Irish culture. In fact, Ireland is the only country whose national symbol, the harp, is a musical instrument. The Temple Bar district is Dublin's version of the French Quarter: it is a major nightlife center with boisterous bars and plenty of live Irish music. One of the area's best is the Oliver St. John Gogarty, a high-spirited pub and hostel on the corner of Fleet and Anglesea Streets. Gogarty's, named for one of Dublin's many colorful literary figures, hosts live music and merrymaking until the wee hours—forget about sleeping. The fourth floor bar is also the meeting place for Dublin's highly acclaimed Musical Pub Tour, which is led by witty musicians who provide attendees with a crash course on Irish music in between pub stops.

For authentic, traditional Irish music, known simply as "trad," venture away from the touristy Temple Bar area and hang with Dubliners at Devitt's on Camden Street. Its famed open sessions, held Thursday through Saturday nights, are typically acoustic Upstairs, seated around several regular pub tables topped with pints of Guinness, you'll find eight to ten musicians elbowing one another with fiddles and accordions as their mercurial tempos fluctuate from "Danny Boy"-style ballads to frenetic *Riverdance*-type rhythms.



Dublin's roots are entrenched in ancient Celtic history. They began in a black pool (or *dubh linn* in Irish) that was formed at the confluence of the Liffey and Poddle Rivers, where Vikings built a fortress in 841 A.D. Dublin Castle, whose large gray stones have withstood eight hundred years of the city's sometimes tumultuous history, rests atop the original settlement, although the moat's black waters have long since receded.

Famous pub in the Temple Bar district in Dublin

Savor a taste of history at legendary O'Neill's, where they have been dishing up corned beef and cabbage and Irish beef and Guinness stew for more than three hundred years. If you have a hankering to pay homage to the "black stuff" that has kept Dublin buzzing since 1759, the Guinness Storehouse is only a twenty-minute walk away. Watch Guinness being made, learn the art of the perfect pour, and drink up the Gravity Bar's 360-degree city vistas. Sláinte! (Cheers!)

## KILKENNY TO KINSALE

Irish towns that begin with the letter *K* are as common as the surnames Ryan and O'Brien. Kilkenny has been called Ireland's most charming medieval town, and thanks to Ireland's improved interior roadways, Kilkenny is just a couple of hours away from Dublin. It is also home to red ale royalty: Smithwick's (pronounced "Smiticks"). Explore the main street, lined with colorful eateries

and shops, and cross over the picturesque John's Bridge, where Kilkenny Castle stands sentinel. Grab a bite at Langston's before continuing another ninety-five miles to the city of Cork.

If nightfall is approaching, Cork makes a great overnight stop. Some dismiss Ireland's second largest city as just gritty, but dig a little deeper and uncover its hidden gems. Garnish House, situated on Cork's western outskirts near University College Cork, offers quaint rooms in the main house and legendary breakfasts, including fresh fish, warm scones, and porridge topped with Baileys.

Cork has a long rebellious history, such as its anti-Guinness allegiance to the local brews: Murphy's and Beamish stouts and Rebel Red Ale from Franciscan Well. Ask for a "home and away" in a pub and you'll be served a pint of Murphy's *and* a pint of Guinness. Follow the heritage pub trail through downtown's historic



Fishing boats in charming Kinsale Harbor, County Cork

Muckross House and Gardens in Killarney National Park

district and discover Cork's oldest, most atmospheric watering holes. Arthur Mayne's is a candlelit Victorian chemist shop turned wine and tapas bar complete with vintage pharmaceutical memorabilia.

The next morning, browse downtown's ornate English Market, brimming with plenty of local produce and colorful characters. Afterward, you could join the hordes at nearby Blarney Castle and hang by your ankles to kiss a saliva-slathered stone. Or-drive fifteen miles down to Ireland's scenic southwestern coast. Tucked between rolling hills and a crescent harbor speckled with bobbing fishing boats lies Kinsale, a picture-perfect seaside village and gastronomic haven. Stroll Kinsale's winding cobbled lanes trimmed with cute-as-a-button boutiques, like Boland Craft and Gift Shop, which sells art, jewelry, and quality woolen goods.

Kinsale, the Gourmet Capital of Ireland, has a wonderful assortment of gastropubs and gourmet restaurants: Fishy Fishy, Jim Edwards, and Max's are among the finest. The Blue Haven, a popular downtown hotel, serves award-winning seafood chowder. The White Lady Inn is less central but has a very reputable kitchen and offers contemporary, affordable rooms. Besides dining and imbibing, Kinsale offers fishing, sailing, seasonal whale watching, and golfing—a popular pastime throughout Ireland. Kinsale's Old Head Golf Links is reputed to be Tiger Woods's favorite Irish course and was named one of the world's best by Golf Magazine.

Even on a chilly, drizzly day, take the Scilly Walk, an undulating pedestrian path that winds around Kinsale Harbor and along the sea to Charles Fort. On the way back, refuel with fish-and-chips at the Bulman in teensy Summercove. Then get your gab on with the regulars at the Spaniard Inn, a legendary pub perched atop Compass Hill that feels like an old pirate haunt. If you're staying in Kinsale, the White House makes for a closer stumble back after a late night of Irish music.

## KILLARNEY TO KINVARA

Some of the greenest fields and hillsides you'll ever see line the drive along N22 between Killarney and County Clare. Before arriving in ultratouristy Killarney, stop off at splendid Killarney National Park. Take a tour of the stately





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nineteenth-century Muckross House and Gardens and explore the national park's lovely lakeside lanes via horse-drawn buggies known as "jaunting cars"—motorized vehicles are prohibited.

In neighboring County Kerry, the famed Ring of Kerry is one of Ireland's most popular attractions. The 110-mile cliff-clinging drive around the breathtaking Iveragh Peninsula can be done as an easy day trip. *Tip*: Rather than snail behind a convoy of tour buses, drive counterclockwise on N70 from Killorglin to Kenmare. Both towns provide ample accommodations and restaurants away from congested Killarney. A shorter alternative to the Ring of Kerry is the Slea Head Drive, a thirty-mile loop around Dingle Peninsula. Boasting scenic coastal vistas, this slower-paced, circuitous course begins and ends in Dingle (*An Daingean* in Gaelic), a town with beautiful beaches and buzzing pubs.

Shannon in County Clare is home to one of Ireland's international airports. Numerous castles and renowned natural wonders are also close by. A few miles from Shannon Airport, dreamy five-star Dromoland Castle stands regally and makes a fit-for-royalty stay. Fifteenth-century Bunratty Castle features fortress tours, touristy medieval banquets and a folk park—picture an Irish Williamsburg. And, dig deep into Ireland's past at the restored fifteenth-century Dysert O'Dea Castle, which is an archaeology center and museum.





Streetscape in historic Galway City—a medieval coastal city that is now a lively cultural center and popular tourist destination

Each year thousands brave the narrow nail-biter drive along R478 from Ennistymon to the soaring Cliffs of Moher (pronounced "More"), one of Ireland's most photographed places. Expect crowds and frigid, blustery winds as you gaze across five miles of jaw-dropping bluffs that dramatically plunge into the churning Atlantic. Return to Ennistymon and turn on N67 north for a scenic corkscrew route through County Clare's beautiful countryside.

Pass through quaint Lisdoonvarna, home of Ireland's famed Matchmaking Festival, before reaching Burren National Park. The Burren can best be described as a stark, striated limestone landscape. Stretch your legs or take a hike on the windswept hills that span ten square miles. Lovely Kinvara makes a great place to stop between Shannon and the city of Galway. Have a pint at Sexton's Pub before heading to the Pier Head for fresh seafood and views of Kinvara Bay and Dunguaire Castle.

## **GALWAY CITY TO CONNEMARA**

The city of Galway in County Galway is just three hours away from Dublin via the not-so-scenic M6/N6 motorway. Western Ireland's unofficial capital (population 75,000) is an artsy university town with a trendy medieval quarter and thriving trad music scene. Galway is famous for its oysters and Ireland's symbolic *Claddagh* (clad-uh) ring, which originated nearby and depicts two outstretched hands (friendship) holding a heart (love), topped by a crown (loyalty).

Hotel Meyrick, an elegant landmark overlooking Galway's famed Eyre (pronounced "Air") Square, exudes old-world sophistication and has hosted dignitaries since 1845. For chic accommodations with an Austin Powers-meets-Audrey Hepburn style, stay at the ultratrendy G Hotel, a fifteen-minute walk from the city's center.

One of Galway's best restaurants is Ard Bia at Nimmo's, which is nestled behind the Spanish Arch in a centuries-old stone house overlooking the River Corrib. The award-winning café and wine bar specializes in seasonal organic produce, fresh seafood, and mouthwatering cakes and tarts. Stroll around the corner to Galway's medieval Latin Quarter, packed with trendy shops and pubs, like Tig Coili and Taaffes Bar, that pulse with riveting Irish tunes. For an intense, "unplugged" session, seek out the Crane Bar in the southwest part of the city and snag a stool upstairs for a rare treat!

Have a pint at
Sexton's Pub before
heading to the
Pier Head for fresh
seafood and views
of Kinvara Bay and
Dunguaire Castle.



Galway is also the gateway to Connemara, Ireland's untamed wild west, which begins just beyond the city fringes, but feels worlds apart. This borderless region is the Old Sod, a harsh backcountry that stretches across County Galway to the Atlantic's craggy beaches and is blanketed in rocky outcrops, ancient peat bogs, and a smattering of small towns and villages. Connemara is home to Ireland's highest concentration of Gaelic (the traditional Irish language) speakers—the brogue tends to be a wee bit thicker here—and to the Connemara pony, which is world-renowned for its hardiness, good work ethic, and mild temperament.

The charming village of Cong is situated northwest of Galway near the County Mayo-Galway border. For millions of Yanks, Cong was their first glimpse of Connemara, which is where the 1952 Oscar-winning movie *The Quiet Man*, costarring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, was filmed. Situated on serene Lough (lake) Corrib is Cong's other claim to fame, stunning Ashford Castle, one of Ireland's most opulent five-star hotels. Cross over the drawbridge to the eleventh-century fortress, where fairy tales come true—at least for a night or two.

Quaint Letterfrack is situated along Connemara's western coast and is known as the portal to Connemara National Park, the region's most visited attraction. Diamond Hill is a popular hike within the park's five thousand acres of unspoiled, raw beauty. The arduous hour (or so) ascent up to the 1,300-foot summit rewards climbers with spectacular 360-degree panoramas of glistening Ballinakill Bay to



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Kylemore Abbey in Connemara, County Galway. Kylemore Abbey was originally built in the 1870s as a private residence but has been a Benedictine monastery since 1920.

the west, the jagged peaks of the Twelve Bens (or Twelve Pins) to the south and east, and lovely Kylemore Lough to the north.

Nestled between hilly woodlands and Kylemore Lough's mirrorlike waters is Letterfrack's other breathtaking gem, Kylemore Abbey. Kylemore was built in the 1870s as a magnificent neo-Gothic private estate and was later converted into a Benedictine monastery and convent boarding school. Daily tours are offered, which include the beautiful grounds and the colorful Victorian Walled Gardens—a must-see.

Experience refined country living at one of Connemara's historic manor house hotels. Tucked near the national park entrance and overlooking Ballinakill Bay and Diamond Hill, lovely Rosleague Manor, built in 1820, is an ivy-clad Georgian mansion that features spacious rooms, a Michelin-starred restaurant, and a Victorian conservatory. In 1883, Irish writer Oliver St. John Gogarty opened Renvyle House on a150-acre seaside estate near Renvyle, which includes stunning views, simple rooms, a golf course, and award-winning cuisine. Nineteenth-century Ballynahinch Castle is hidden within a 450-acre woodland estate near Recess. This relaxed four-star hunting and fishing lodge offers tasteful rooms, exquisite fine dining, and views of the Owenmore River and the Twelve Bens.

Explore Connemara's secluded southwest coast and discover picturesque

Roundstone. The nineteenth-century fishing village clings above a crescent-shaped harbor flecked with small wooden boats called curraghs. Remote Roundstone is also a mecca for talented artists and craftsmen, including Malachy Kearns, Ireland's revered master bodhran (traditional Irish drum) maker. Drop by Roundstone's best pub, O'Dowd's, for grilled salmon or shepherd's pie washed down with a "kit" (a pint of Guinness and a shot of Irish whiskey).

Undulating Sky Road delivers awe-inspiring panoramas of Clifden Bay and its tiny neighboring islands, before unfurling into Clifden's lively downtown square. Situated midway between Letterfrack and Roundstone, Clifden is Connemara's largest town (population 2,000) and offers the region's best collection of shops, restaurants, and pubs. Shop classy Millars for designer town-and-country fashions and gifts. Snag a table at affable E.J. Kings, which has live music most evenings, or trendier Mitchell's Seafood Restaurant. Afterward, dance an Irish jig a few doors down to Lowry's Bar, Clifden's legendary hot spot for late night traditional music and tasty Irish coffee.

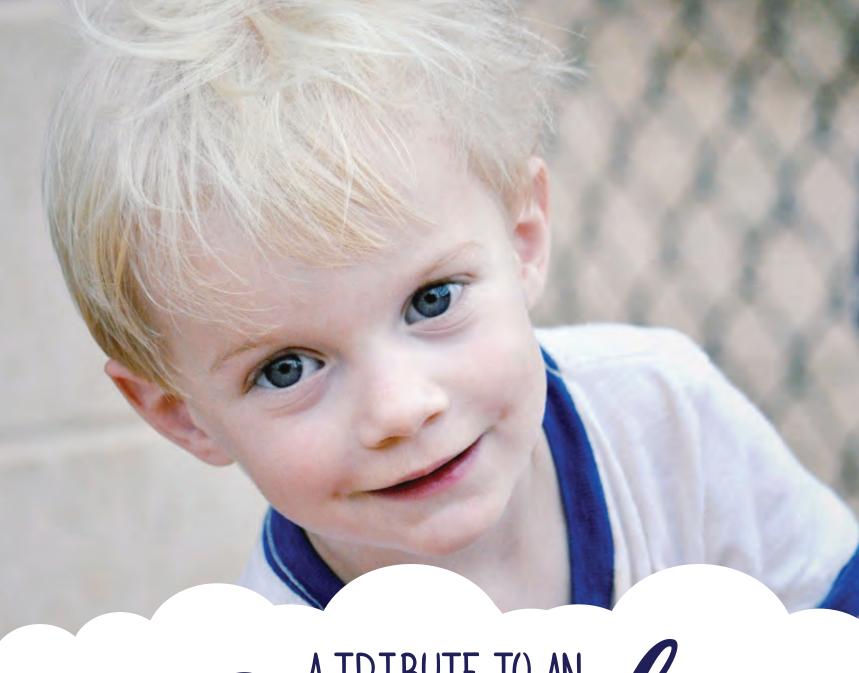
Whether you take the high road, the low road, or the road less traveled, the Emerald Isle is bound to captivate you with its ravishing scenery, intriguing culture, and engaging, quick-witted Irish people. Go ahead and give it a whirl. And, may the luck of the Irish be with you.





# Somewhere between indulgence and nature lies a place that connects both.

Portofino Island Resort on beautiful Pensacola Beach, bordered by the protected Gulf Islands National Seashore to its east, is a luxurious full-service resort on the Gulf of Mexico featuring eight swimming pools, including an Olympic-style indoor pool; watersports; Spa Portofino; tennis center; fitness center; casual and fine dining; children's programs; and much more.



# A TRIBUTE TO AN



WESLEY MAC BURNHAM

JANUARY 30, 2012-DECEMBER 19, 2014



IT'S STRANGE HOW SO FEW OF US UNDERSTAND THE FRAGILITY OF LIFE, EVEN THOUGH WE ALL KNOW THAT AS WE WALK OUT OUR JOURNEY HERE, NO ONE ESCAPES DEATH. IT'S THAT MUCH HARDER TO UNDERSTAND THE LOSS OF A CHILD, THOUGH, AND EVEN MORE PAINFUL WHEN A TRAGEDY LIKE THIS HAPPENS AT CHRISTMASTIME. WESLEY MAC BURNHAM WAS AN AMAZING SON; HE WAS A BROTHER TO NINE-YEAR-OLD JACOB AND SEVEN-YEAR-OLD NOAH; HE WAS A COUSIN, A GRANDSON, AND A FRIEND. THIS PRECIOUS TWO-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD BLOND-HAIRED ANGEL WAS THE PROUD SON OF JEFF AND JILL BURNHAM UNTIL HE MADE HIS JOURNEY HOME TO HEAVEN ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2014. THE STRENGTH, DIGNITY, COURAGE, AND GRACE THAT WESLEY'S PARENTS AND LOVED ONES HAVE SHOWN TO THE WORLD SINCE THE FATEFUL ACCIDENT THAT TOOK HIM HOME HAS BEEN OTHERWORLDLY. HOW THEY'VE MANAGED TO ENDURE THEIR LOSS AND GRIEF IS A TESTAMENT TO THEIR CHARACTER AND THEIR TRUST IN GOD.

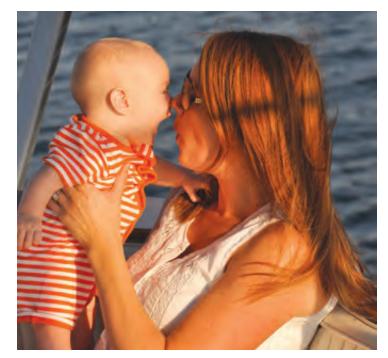
# A MOTHER'S LOVE

By Jill Burnham

Wesley was a miracle from the start. Born January 30, 2012, via C-section, Wesley had a full overhand knot in his umbilical cord. When the doctor pulled him out, the whole staff said, "Oh, my gosh." Jeff and I immediately panicked. The doctor assured us that he was okay, but said, "I have never seen a baby born alive with a knot like this." He told Jeff to watch as he gently pulled on each side of the knot; the blood flow immediately stopped and the cord went white. He said if Wesley had pushed the cord with his foot or hand while in the womb, he would have cut off his life supply. He said, "This is a miracle baby."

Two weeks before Wesley passed, we were driving home from school and talking about his day. As I went to turn onto Thomas Drive, he said to me, "Mommy, I'm getting an electric guitar." It wasn't a shock because it's all he has talked about for the last three months, but for some reason that day it was different—he had certainty in his voice. When he said he was getting a guitar, I asked, "How do you know that? Do you think Santa is bringing one?" He replied, "They are making it for me—I can see it." I remember it taking me back for a second, and I wondered: "Who does he think is making it and how do I answer this one?" You see, Wesley knew about the magic of Santa, but was too young to understand the idea of elves and Santa's workshop. When he spoke, he made no reference to Santa, but just said they are making it. Then he got very quiet and softly said, "Do you want to see it, Mommy?" I asked how I would and he replied, "Because they are making it for me and I can see it." I will never know for sure, but I believe that he was not talking about a gift from Santa, but a gift from God made by angels just for him.

I had major surgery on December 5 that required me to recover at home in bed for a few weeks. Wesley's Gigi, Peggy Burnham, lives close by, so she offered to help us by driving him to school every day so that Jeff could take his older brothers to their school. They received the list of songs he was to learn for his Christmas program and practiced every morning. The day of the program he was ready! During his celebration of life service, Gigi spoke about how she was uncertain of her speech the night before, but when she got into bed, she had a vision. She said she couldn't help but wonder if Wesley's Christmas program wasn't the real program he was preparing for, but maybe a casting call for leading the band for Jesus's birthday celebration.





Wesley's last day on earth, he spent the morning in his classroom preparing for the program. His teacher, Deanna, said it was almost like it was his day. As they had circle time and rehearsed one last time, he got in the middle with his guitar and his friends held hands and sang around him. During the program, he got his own microphone and proudly played his guitar and sang next to his idol, Mr. Bill. But as excited as he was, he was different that day. He was very calm and quiet and clingy, yet distant at the same time. It wasn't unusual for Wesley to run after his Daddy when he left the house, but he had never gone past the door. I will never understand what was different about that night and why for the first time he ran not only to the gate but also through it. He had sixty seconds to run from inside the house to the road from the time the gate opened to the time it closed. I have to believe that maybe he was seeing angels and went to them. We may never have the answers as to why, but we do know Wesley is pure again. He will no longer suffer from the burden of celiac disease; his body has been restored, and he is in Heaven with a sibling he had never gotten to meet. We have an angel watching over us, and although we'd give anything to have him here on earth, we know he was loved and will always be missed. ■



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# Private Residence

Rosemary Beach, Florida

# BOHEME







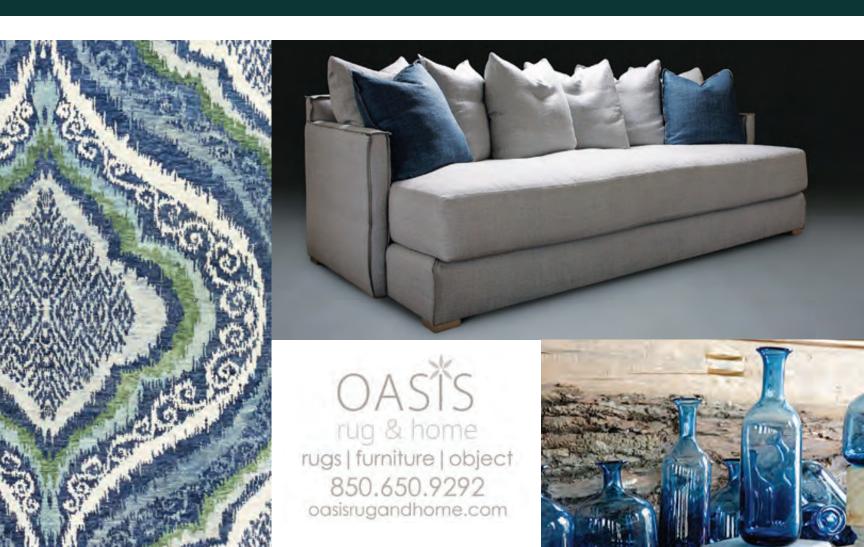


Wesley's parents have set up a foundation to honor their son's love for music, his love for God, and his love of people. The mission is to provide scholarships for families who need financial assistance, to help fund music programs, and much more. Woodlawn Child Development Center at Woodlawn United Methodist Church, where Wesley attended school, is a very loving, safe environment that nurtured his love of God and music. They are currently limited in space and are in need of an addition to their building. They have a waiting list of two years, so while scholarships will help people immediately, they can't reach full potential until there is more space to grow. The immediate goals are to provide scholarships and to help fund a new preschool building. Once those goals are accomplished, they hope to reach out beyond the Woodlawn family and help others in the community. They currently have a Facebook page at facebook.com/wesleyburnhamfoundation, and the BurnhamFoundation.org website is coming soon.

The Wesley Mac Burnham Foundation, Inc. has made application for tax exemption status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code; that application is pending at this time. Contributors/donors to the Wesley Mac Burnham Foundation, Inc. do not have advance assurance of deductibility for contributions to the organization while the organization's application is pending. If the organization ultimately qualifies for exemption for the period in which the contribution is made, the contribution will be tax-deductible by the contributor/donor. Alternatively, if the organization ultimately does not qualify for exemption, then the contribution will not be tax-deductible by the contributor/donor.



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# POOR LITTLE RICH KID—ALL GROWN UP

BY MELANIE CISSONE :

nce an independent city, the seventeenth-century Dutch-settled borough of Brooklyn is experiencing a twenty-first-century renaissance. Not unlike the tree described by Francie Nolan, the protagonist in the popular book and film *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, this chameleon-like borough and its diverse population of residents derive strength from struggles. The highs and lows of the last nearly four hundred years illustrate the tenacity of a place, its people and, combined, that Brooklyn state of mind.

With a meager population of 2,150 in 1731, Breuckelen got its start as one of six parishes chartered by the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland. From its British conquering thirty years later to its reorganization from parishes into Kings County with six municipalities, the settlement was the location of the first major battle of the American Revolutionary War. British occupied until the Treaty of Paris in 1783, after which the Brits began evacuating, Kings County experienced a subsequent surge in urbanization and industrialization, making it both a formidable seaport and a manufacturing center.

The onset of the American Civil War saw an inkling of Brooklyn's independent spirit when the Fourteenth Regiment New York State Militia—the Fourteenth Brooklyn, the only regiment named for its city—was called to service by Lincoln himself. The Red-Legged Devils, as they were called, were so nicknamed for the red French-inspired trousers they wore. "Hold on, boys! Here come those red-legged devils again!" is what Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson shouted to his soldiers about the relentless charges by the Fourteenth Brooklyn on Henry House Hill in Virginia near Bull Run.

Brooklyn maintained its independence and, as a port city and manufacturing hub, witnessed tremendous economic growth in the post—Civil War nineteenth century. Its population had tripled by 1900. Sugar refining and shipbuilding sustained the local economy.

With the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, access to Manhattan—theretofore only possible by boat—ceased to be an issue. Despite its residents' major opposition, Brooklyn was consolidated in 1898 into the city of New York.

The completion of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903, the construction of the first subway between Manhattan and Brooklyn, and the subsequent building of the Manhattan Bridge all strengthened ties to Manhattan. For the next fifty years, including during World War II when the Brooklyn Navy Yard played a pivotal role in the construction and repair of battleships and aircraft carriers, Brooklyn exploded. The population reached a high of 2.7 million residents in 1950 as immigrants and the working and middle classes found refuge in its diverse neighborhoods. Sports were the pride of the borough, and the Brooklyn Bridegrooms-turned-Dodgers were the most celebrated of its teams. Those were the borough's glory years.

The heartbreaking departure of the Brooklyn Dodgers for Los Angeles in 1957 (and the Giants for San Francisco that same year); white flight to more affordable suburbs; the decommissioning of the Brooklyn Navy Yard; industrial and commercial downturns in the economy, including a nearly bankrupt city, strikes, blackouts, and clashes; and civil unrest between and among ethnic groups in Brooklyn led to the borough's decline through the second half of the twentieth century. Think-tank fellow of the prestigious Manhattan Institute Kay S. Hymowitz wrote about 1990s Brooklyn in a *City Journal* article titled "How Brooklyn Got Its Groove Back," saying "Brooklyn came awfully close to becoming an East Coast Detroit."

Hymowitz attributes the borough's avoidance of Detroit-level disaster to Giulianiand Bloomberg-era policing reform in high-crime Brooklyn neighborhoods; rezoning for the coexistence of residential, commercial, and light industry; and the influx of a new generation of "gentrifiers." Instead of random artistic and creative pioneers who made their way to Brooklyn Heights in the 1980s and 1990s, neighborhoods such as Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fort Greene, and Bushwick to the north of Atlantic Avenue, and Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill, Park Slope, Prospect Heights, and now Crown Heights to the south of Atlantic Avenue were encroached on and then flooded with college-educated, entrepreneurial, and tech-savvy writers, artists, architects, film and television producers, actors, and other professionals. A new era was upon the BK. Today's vibe is hipster-business, and the brownstone-speckled, tree-lined streets of its neighborhoods are dotted with Zagat-rated restaurants, prenatal yoga classes, non-Starbuck's cafés, craft breweries, and an overall sense of community.





here's no better way to start a Brooklyn adventure than a few nights at the seventy-room Wythe Hotel in trendy Williamsburg. The fully renovated former cooperage, built in 1901, has a boutique feel and historic charm. Many of its rooms have sweeping floor-to-ceiling views of Manhattan, and a couple of its king-sized rooms adjoin to bunk rooms, making it ideal for family stays.

One stop on the M train from Manhattan's Union Square, the riverfront hotel's most breathtaking views are from the Ides, its sixth-floor rooftop bar and terrace. The hotel's main-floor restaurant is Reynard, where the executive chef at Seaside's Pizza Bar, Phil McDonald, spent much of last year as sous chef. Reynard was the brainchild of "nouveau gentrifier" Andrew Tarlow, who established the restaurant Diner (American fare in a converted dining car). Diner was a transformative game changer for Williamsburg in 1998, a time when it was better known as a place to score some drugs. Tarlow now has a virtual empire of popular dining establishments and hoppin' bars, including the Ides, Marlow & Sons, Marlow & Daughters, Achilles Heel, She Wolf Bakery, and Roman's.

For a more authentic life-in-Brooklyn experience, arrange a stay through Airbnb, which offers economical rentals that include everything from a room in a shared apartment to a full brownstone rental. Airbnb offers a great alternative to the major and minor hotel chains located in downtown Brooklyn.

After arriving by taxi or the many subway lines that pass through Brooklyn, settle in and make your way to view the sunset over Manhattan with a cocktail at the Ides. After dinner at Reynard, amble over to Brooklyn Bowl. This multitasked warehouse space ain't your mama's bowling alley; it has sixteen bowling lanes next to its own concert hall, where you can see a rising musical star perform or dance the night away to the late-night tunes of the top DJs who spin there.

Come morning, download and open your Uber application or rent a Citi Bike and punch in a destination: 448 Lafayette Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant. There you'll find Dough, where you can dive into such exotically flavored artisanal doughnuts as Passion Fruit, a sweet-tart glaze made with fresh passion fruit puree and sprinkled with cocoa nibs, or café au lait, which is a topping of fresh roasted coffee beans and pecan brown sugar over Dough's signature glaze. Walk off the doughnut yumminess with a stroll through Clinton Hill, and check out the

## THERE'S NO BETTER WAY TO START A BROOKLYN ADVENTURE THAN A FEW NIGHTS AT THE SEVENTY-ROOM WYTHE HOTEL IN TRENDY WILLIAMSBURG.

Rubelle and Norman Schafler Gallery at Pratt Institute, which shows the work of this leading design school's faculty, students, and alumni.

From Pratt, head south to one of the most exciting and fun market-bazaars in the world: Brooklyn Flea's Winter Flea + Holiday Market (Saturdays and Sundays, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.). You're certain to find unique vintage clothing, furniture, antiques, collectibles, and crafts among the hundred or so vendors, all curated by Brooklyn Flea founders Jonathan Butler and Eric Demby. If you get hungry while you're shopping, don't worry—there are some thirty food vendors at Brooklyn Flea too. A block away, created by the same duo, is Berg'n, a Brooklyn beer hall, which features an enormous variety of draft beers and food from Asia Dog, Mighty Quinn's BBQ, Pizza Moto, and Ramen Burger.

A bit farther south of Brooklyn Flea and Berg'n are a world-class museum, a botanic garden, and a zoo. The Brooklyn Museum stays open until 10:00 p.m. on Thursdays and until 11:00 p.m. on the first Saturday of the month. Among its several special exhibits and its permanent collection, the museum is currently exhibiting *Killer Heels: The Art of the High-Heeled Shoe* through February 15. *Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks*, rarely seen notebook pages of sketches, personal observations, poetry fragments, and word play of Brooklyn-born artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, will launch on April 3 and be on display through August 23.

Winter, spring, summer, or fall, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden is alive with activity, and its varied outdoor gardens, conservatory gardens, and research collections are always on view. The Prospect Park Zoo is open 365 days a year and, whether you are an adult or a child, there's nothing quite like seeing a red panda, a dart-poison frog, or any of the other 125 species the zoo houses.



A table of trendy finds at the Brooklyn Flea Photo by John von Pamer

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# HEAD SOUTH TO ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING AND FUN MARKET-BAZAARS IN THE WORLD: THE BROOKLYN FLEA · WINTER MARKET

Bed-Stuy's Saraghina restaurant is exactly where you want to land for that special end-of-adventure dinner. At that moment when you sit down at one of its long family-style tables and dine on the simple Italian fare, it's impossible not to breathe a sigh of "feels like home." Zagat gives Saraghina a twenty-five rating,

which tells you all you need to know about the rising popularity of such neighborhoods as Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It is a cash-only establishment.

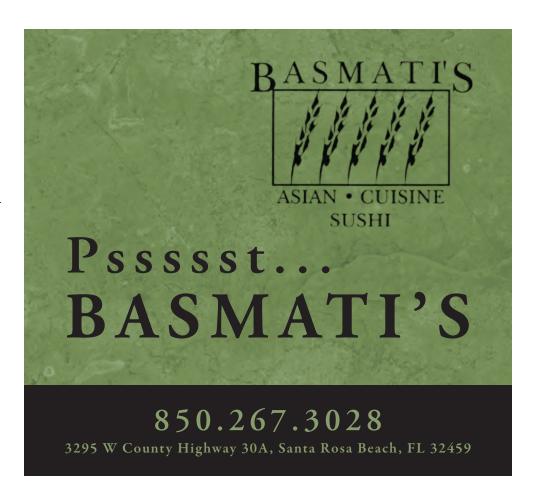
To get a feel for brownstone life in the past and the present, take a walk through historic Stuyvesant Heights, a section of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood that is a real throwback to a former life. In particular, walk along Stuyvesant and Lewis Avenues and MacDonough and Chauncey Streets. To get a Brooklynstyle Southern fix, stop in at the centrally located Stuyvesant Heights restaurant called Peaches, where you'll find grits, blackened catfish, collard greens, corn bread, and lots of other comfort foods. Owners Ben Grossman and Craig Samuel formed B+C Restaurants in 2006 with the establishment of the Smoke Joint in

Fort Greene, which was followed by Peaches, the Hothouse, Little Brother BBQ, and Marietta. The Pig Bar is the Smoke Joint's next-door bourbon and beer dive bar.

Other noteworthy stops on a Brooklyn tour include the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), a multifaceted arts center with world-renowned programming in music, dance, film, opera, comedy, theater, visual arts, and literature. If you are traveling with children, stop at the Brooklyn Children's Museum or the 526-acre Prospect Park. For a little late-night adult playtime, check out the schedule at the Knitting Factory, a music venue and concert house where you might hear anything from aboriginal rock to classic jazz, or catch a performance of an up-and-coming comedian. At the SHoP Architects-designed Barclays Center, sports fans can take in a Brooklyn Nets game—keep an eye out for fans Beyoncé and Jay Z-or attend a headliner concert or the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. For the shopper, step into Owl and Thistle General Store, an old-fashioned concept in Crown Heights with a new twist: the owners believe in offering unique local, sustainable, and fair trade goods at reasonable prices. If you're still looking to shop, the "best shopping hood in America," according to GQ magazine, is in Williamsburg, from the exit of the Bedford Avenue subway station south along Bedford Avenue and snaking over to the riverfront and back again to Broadway. Along those streets, you'll find surf shops, perfumeries, urban lumberjack outfitters, vinyl record stores, bespoke tailors, art galleries, and cafés with great coffee.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A Manhattan transplant to 30A, Melanie Cissone lived for thirty years and raised her family of five children in New York City. With the exception of one visit to Brooklyn Heights in the 1980s, treks to other boroughs were virtually nonexistent. The relocation of three of her children to Brooklyn has changed all that; these days she finds herself frequenting such formerly "forbidden" neighborhoods as Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights.





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990 Washington Avenue (Crown Heights) (718) 623-7200

**Brooklyn Bowl** 

61 Wythe Avenue (Williamsburg) (718) 963-3369

Brooklyn Children's Museum

145 Brooklyn Avenue (Crown Heights) (718) 735-4000

Brooklyn Museum

200 Eastern Parkway (Crown Heights) (718) 638-5000

**Knitting Factory** 

361 Metropolitan Avenue (Williamsburg) (347) 529-6696

Prospect Park Zoo

450 Flatbush Avenue (Prospect Park) (718) 399-7339

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It's one of my favorite places to explore in Northwest Florida. In my kayak, I float on top of waters teeming with life. The once crystal clear river meanders quietly. Her banks camouflage countless eyes of birds and other animals observing my presence from afar and scolding me vocally; I am an intruder paddling through their sacred home, their spaces greatly reduced from the actions of my kind. Out of respect, I try to keep a low and quiet profile.

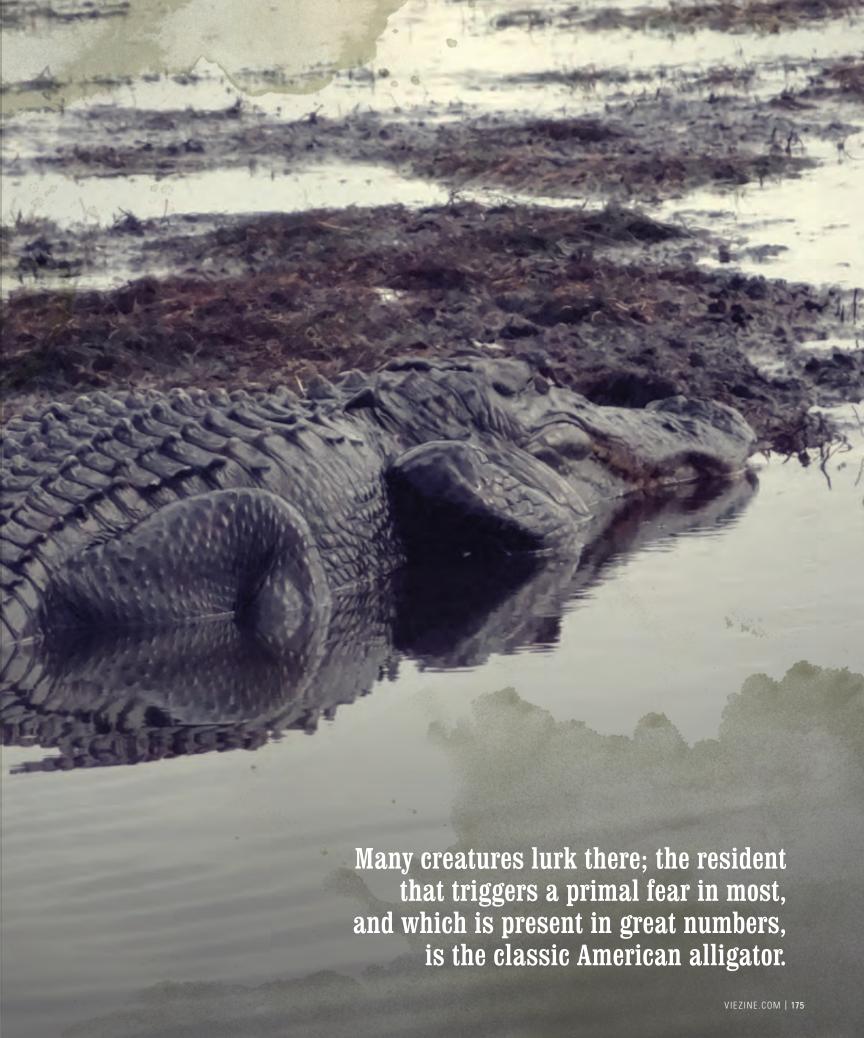
he Wakulla River portrays Old Florida in an almost Jurassic way, with nature and wildlife reigning supreme. Her freshwaters surge from a limestone cave at the basin of Wakulla Springs, located just south of Tallahassee. It is one of the largest and deepest of its kind in the world.

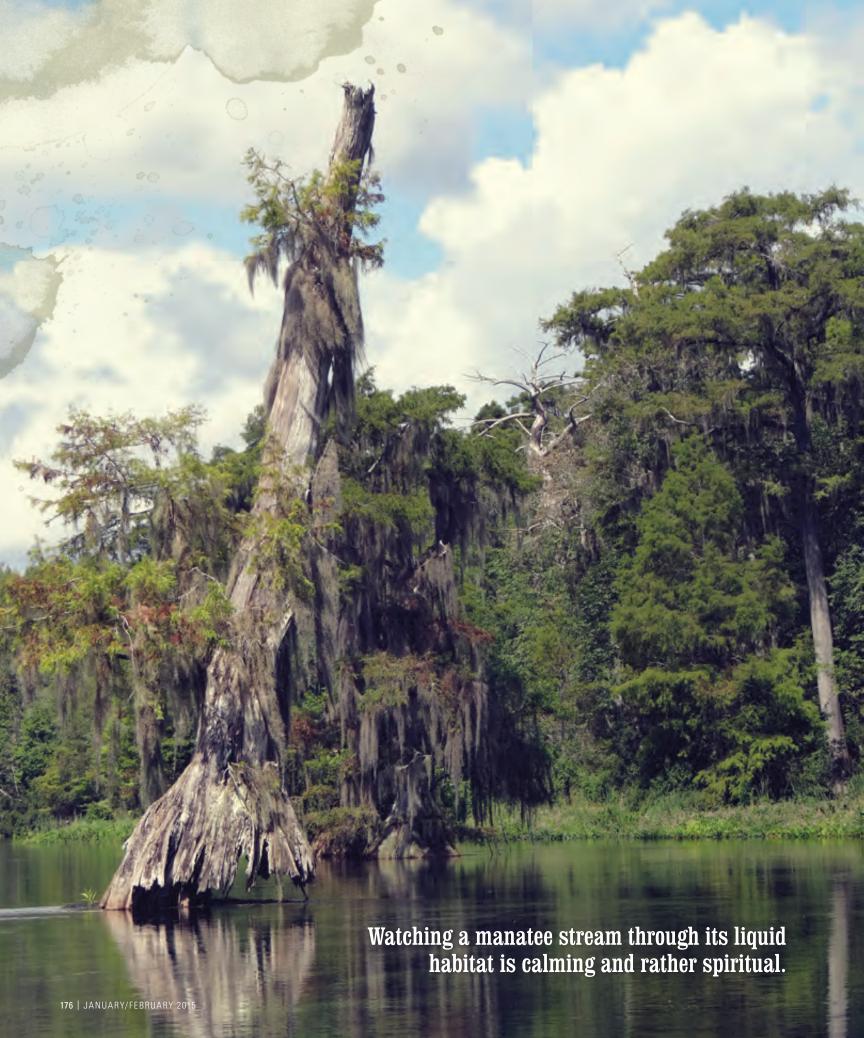
At this place of heaven on Earth, so many treasures await your exploration. One can enjoy a trip down the river by boat or kayak, but submerging your fragile flesh in her depths may be a bit risky. Many creatures lurk there; the resident that triggers a primal fear in most, and which is present in great



numbers, is the classic American alligator. These toothy hunters are the rulers of this river, basking on her banks or gliding silently through her waters. However, our fears are often unnecessary. Gator attacks on humans are rare, and the only recorded attack at Wakulla Springs happened in 1987. Wakulla Springs is now a state park with a dedicated area fenced in from the rest of the river so that visitors can swim with the assurance of safety.

West Indian manatees are also prevalent in the river. If you're lucky, you will likely witness one of these gentle giants pushing its way through the





water, propelled by its mammoth tail. Watching a manatee stream through its liquid habitat is calming and rather spiritual. If you are even luckier, one of them may rise to the surface to see what you are all about. I was blessed with just that experience: it was like God was saying "hello" to me through the manatee.

Birds also favor this river's scenic route. Egrets, ibis, sparrows, herons, cormorants, and more seemed to pose, beckoning me to capture their spirits with my Nikon. Birds of every color complement the greens and browns of the water and of the forest background. Turtles are easily spotted sunning on sandy islands and fallen trees. Venture too close to them and they begrudgingly push off of their perches to splash down into relative safety.

Snakes, though they mostly keep out of the water, get cozy in the camouflage of trees and brush.

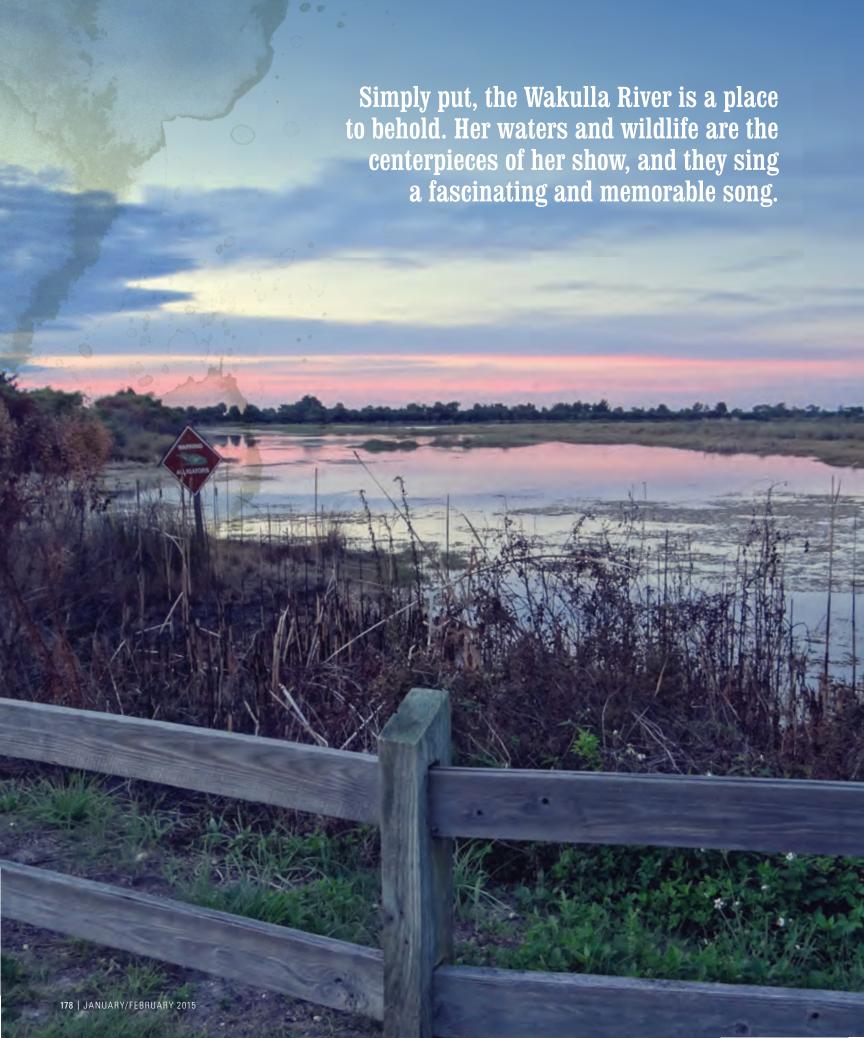


Spider webs are displayed in the trees in staggering numbers and sizes like intricately designed works of art cupped and stretched by the breeze. If you stay out from under the brush along the banks, you won't run into any eight-legged artists.

Simply put, the Wakulla River is a place to behold. Her waters and wildlife are the centerpieces of her show, and they sing a fascinating and memorable song. Her notes swell when you first experience them and then peak into a refrain of serenity and peace. Yet, there's a murky secret behind the beauty of her music. If you listen carefully, you will hear a quiet plea. Underneath the calm surface, the river is suffering.

In the mid-1980s, I attended a camp in the area and we swam at Wakulla Springs. I remember the river as a Garden of Eden. Looking down into her waters was like looking through cellophane at a beautiful



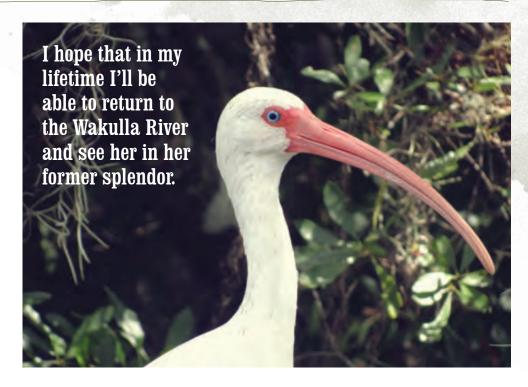


landscape on a perfectly clear day. From below, swimmers appeared to be flying in slow motion through midair. But her true clarity has now been obscured by green algae and floating algal blooms, primarily caused by rising levels of nitrogen and other pollutants from septic tanks and lawn fertilizers used within adjacent watersheds. You can no longer see the once easily visible cave opening below the springs or the remains of a mastodon and other fossils lying inside it. It is truly a shame.

The river is crying for help, warning us of our belated response to the effects our society has on nature. Work is being done to create awareness and to pass new laws to help reverse the injury to our natural resources. I hope that in my lifetime I'll be able to return to the Wakulla River and see her in her former splendor. Hopefully, her song will soon be as glorious as it once was.

· No maximum ticket amount

· No restriction on return date



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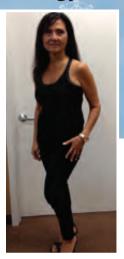
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# Parta Cana

A PLAYGROUND FOR ALL AGES



By Kim Duke-Layden · Photography courtesy of Club Med Punta Cana

# How could a place that was nothing more than an isolated, impenetrable jungle just fifty years ago become one of the hottest destinations in the Caribbean today? Last June, I joined a group of journalists to find out firsthand.



The Dominican Republic ranks as the number one tourist destination in the Caribbean. Although its charming colonial capital, Santo Domingo, has long attracted worldly travelers—such as Christopher Columbus—Punta Cana has emerged as the country's hottest spot among twenty-first-century travelers, including international A-listers.

Punta Cana is not a city; rather it is an ever-expanding swath of pristine *playas* (beaches) on the Dominican Republic's easternmost cape. Beaches such as Bávaro, Juanillo, and Macao boast sugar-white sands, crystal clear seas, and protected coral reefs. Add in abundant amenities like world-class golfing, all-inclusive resorts, and the Caribbean's most well connected international airport, and Punta Cana equals one hot ticket.

Just minutes away from the airport is the area's first all-inclusive property, Club Med Punta Cana. Back in the '80s and '90s, Club Med had a reputation as a swinging singles resort destination, but times have changed. "In 2004, the company rebranded and began catering to families, who currently make up 70–80 percent of our business," said Tanya Ansaldi Sacchi, PR and partnership manager for Club Med.

Besides having a convenient location, Club Med exudes an inviting tropical charm, with pastel-colored guest bungalows nestled amid seventy-five lush acres of fragrant plumeria, flamboyant flowers, and a palm-studded lawn that extends from a huge lagoon-shaped pool down to the cerulean sea. A constant breeze is felt throughout the resort, thanks to Punta Cana's enviable perch straddling the Atlantic and the Caribbean. I felt like I was in Hawaii, minus the jet lag.

The resort features more than 550 renovated guest rooms and multiroom suites with flat-screen TVs, balconies, and minifridges stocked with nonalcoholic drinks. The tropical-chic Tiara suites are the most sumptuous rooms and are secluded along the seashore within the resort's Five-Trident (Club Med's own ratings system) Luxury Space. Added luxuries include a private concierge, room service, and access to a private pool club and bar with sunset receptions. And, luckily for us journalists, that's where we stayed.

Shortly after arriving, I met my fellow wordsmiths for a property tour led by France native Felice, one of the resort's many outgoing Gracious Organizers (GOs). Besides holding various resort jobs, GOs actively engage with guests to create a memorable stay infused with the unique Club Med Spirit. Tiara's resident manager, Marie-Claude Poirier, who hails from Quebec, said, "All GOs speak at least three languages and most Club Med properties have GOs from at least twenty-one different nations." And because the resort hosts many French-speaking guests, GOs are as likely to greet you with "Bonjour" as with "Buenos días."

There aren't enough hours in the day to take advantage of the many daily activities that Club Med offers, from snorkeling to sailing to salsa dancing. Teaching and instruction are emphasized, as sports have been part of the brand's DNA for more than sixty years. So if you've ever wanted to learn how to swing a club or a racquet and drive a ball through the air with the greatest of ease, this is your kind of place. And best of all, daily activities-along with snacks, meals, alcoholic beverages, and gratuities are included with your stay.

There are tons of activities for kids, too. Club Med's award-winning programs, created for ages four months up to seventeen years, have garnered rave reviews on TripAdvisor. Activities include cooking, archery, junior tennis, an awesome splash park, and a "circus school" that teaches tightrope walking and unicycle riding.

Meals are casual affairs, and both of the main restaurants serve buffet-style. Breakfast and lunch feature









international fare, including a great selection of healthy offerings and delicious Dominican *comida criolla* (Creole food). Tiara guests may also order yummy à la carte food at the Perla bar or through room service. Dinner themes rotate nightly and highlight various ethnic cuisines, like Italian or Caribbean. Club Med has several whimsical traditions, which include an optional nightly dress code color. If you haven't packed adequately, the resort's trendy boutique offers many enticing options.

Flickering tiki torches and live island music set the mood for our first night's sunset reception at Perla's lovely infinity pool, which seems to kiss the Caribbean. At Hispaniola, the resort's open-air waterfront restaurant, we joined fellow guests dressed in black and relished flavorful Moroccan delicacies washed down with free-flowing wine and the tasty Dominican pilsner, Presidente. The only thing missing was a magic carpet ride back to my room.

Besides being the Cigar Capital of the World, the Dominican Republic rules as the Caribbean's premier golf destination. Some of the finest links are in Punta Cana, so the next morning we toured a few. La Cana features a twenty-seven-hole course designed by P.B. Dye and a spectacular clubhouse and beach club designed by the late fashion icon and native Dominican, Oscar de la Renta.

The affable Don Law, who *Golf Magazine* touts as one of the top one hundred teachers of the game and who created the acclaimed junior golf academy at Club Med Sandpiper Bay in Port Saint Lucie, Florida, was on hand to teach us the renowned Stack and Tilt golf swing method. Miraculously, I drove several balls down the green! A first!

Considered to be among the top twenty international courses, Corales is a very exclusive eighteen-hole, Tom Fazio—designed course, the last three holes of which have come to be known collectively as the Devil's Elbow. "Corales has one of the most opulent, lavish layouts and very special oceanfront holes," said Brandon Tucker, managing editor of *Golf Advisor*, who ranks Corales among his three favorite Caribbean courses. Club Med is partnered with both La Cana and Corales and offers guests affordable multiround packages.

My afternoon visit to Club Med's spa was *ahh*-some. Nestled in a serene Zen garden near the water's edge, the Caribbean's only L'Occitane-branded spa is a fragrant haven of pampering and relaxation; the beachside *palapas* with billowy white curtains add a special dreamy quality to the experience. Lemongrass-scented breezes and crashing waves lulled me to sleep as Griselda massaged warm essential oils into my tense muscles. Like the tide, my fatigue ebbed away. Spa services are not included but are definitely splurge-worthy.

Friday's festive Gala Night was buzzing with excitement. Samana, one of the on-site restaurants, was a sea of white with chefs, servers, and guests all dressed in their beachy best for the week's most elaborate spread, which included an endless platter of grilled lobster.

By nine o'clock, Cielo, the resort's chic open-air bar, had become party central. Already under way was Club Med's nightly Crazy Signs ritual of choreographed dances led by dozens of animated GOs. The comical hand gestures and dance steps, all



with an impromptu flair, are partly passed down through the years, while others reflect the current generation of GOs.

Crazy Signs blurred into a flash mob party of oldschool line dances, conga trains, and Haitian dances performed by local GOs. The party progressed to the Celeste beachside bar, where in the midst of giant video screens, a disco ball, and exploding confetti cannons, we boogied the night away.

Mornings are so much sweeter when accompanied by room service and chocolate croissants. And circus school was better than a triple shot of espresso! From a dizzyingly high perch, I channeled my inner Carrie Bradshaw, caught hold of the trapeze, and leapt into the air with the shakiest of knees! After gripping the trapeze with my legs, I slowly and terrifyingly released both hands and swung like a pendulum upside down, then backflipped to the net below. It was the thrill of a lifetime!

Still flying high with adrenaline, I beelined to the beach and signed up for an afternoon windsurfing class. However, my lofty aspirations had sailed out









to sea without me. Instead, I blissfully whiled away the afternoon sunning and sipping bubbly poolside with Castillo and the rest of Perla's endearing and personable staff, who made me feel like family.

Tiara guest Angela Shoma, who was vacationing from Toronto with her eighteen-year-old son, echoed my sentiments. Angela told me she'd been coming to Club Med for the past thirty years and praised the kids' clubs, the resort's new director, and Tiara's sweet perks. She added, "When I come to Punta Cana, I wouldn't consider staying anywhere else."

Much too soon my pleasurable stay ended, and yet it left a lasting impression on me. With today's trend of sprawling all-inclusive resorts where bigger, bolder, and faster is the norm, it's nice to know that charming playgrounds like Club Med Punta Cana still exist—and that they are as enjoyable as ever!

For more information on Club Med Punta Cana, call 1-800-ClubMed (1-800-258-2633) or visit www.clubmed.us.



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# TIPS FOR A HEALTHY By Jayne McAllister

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, approximately two million passengers travel on flights within, to, and from the United States every day. There are approximately twenty-five thousand to thirty-thousand US domestic passenger flights taking off and landing each day. Whether you are a frequent business traveler, a newbie to travel trips, or preparing for a long trek, Jayne McAllister recommends the following top tips to help you stay healthy during your travels:

# FOOD CHOICES

Think light when it comes to eating on the road (or in the air). Staying hydrated is important while traveling but hardly anyone does it enough, partly because they don't want to make bathroom stops if they're driving, or use the airplane lavatory if they're flying.

If you want to avoid frequent bathroom stops, eat foods with high water content such as fruits and vegetables. Little containers of fruit are easy to find in airports and service areas—if you can steer yourself away from the doughnuts and the cinnamon buns.

Fruits and vegetables are also lighter on the digestive system, which is a real boon if you're sitting in a car for hours on end or, even worse, flying. In a plane, your body's various systems have to work extra hard to deal with the low humidity and keep you functioning normally. Your body needs friends, not foes, in these instances, so skip the salty and sugary snacks. They'll only mess with your hydration and energy levels.

If you're really worried about too many pit stops, hydrate as much as you can in the hours before you depart.

Think twice about snacking. Do you snack because you're really hungry or just because you're bored? Thanks to the food industry's marketing, we've become a nation of snackers. Eating between meals may stop you from fully digesting your food and burning fat. Mindless eating—in the car, on a plane, or in front of a TV screen—can cause you to consume up to 30 percent more calories, which are likely to convert into extra pounds.

# **PEXERCISE**

Travel may be a convenient excuse to avoid exercise, but it's not necessarily the smartest excuse. While you're in transit, chances are you're sitting scrunched up in a car or on an airplane, so it's extremely important to get your circulation going at the first opportunity. If you don't have time for a full workout, take a brisk walk, even if it's around the airport terminal or around the block when you get to your destination.

Spinal compression may occur after remaining seated for too long. This can lead to back pain, sciatica, and other issues. It's very important, therefore, to stretch frequently. Combining stretching with core strength exercises will improve posture so that you don't slump and cause compression. This will help mitigate lower back problems and make you look slimmer.

# SLEEP

Strange beds, lights, and noises all interrupt regular sleep patterns. In turn, lack of sleep makes it harder to stick to a healthy regimen. When you wake up tired rather than refreshed, you're more likely to reach for caffeine and sugar to get you through the day. This can create a self-perpetuating yo-yo of energy highs and lows.

Your first investment should be a good-quality eye mask. Jayne McAllister Travel Wellness recommends the Lewis N. Clark Comfort Eye Mask (\$6). Whatever mask you get, it's got to be big enough to block out cabin lights in airplanes and TV and clock lights in hotel rooms. Earplugs are another necessity: they eliminate background noises like fellow passengers on aircraft and elevators, ice machines, and in-room refrigerators in hotels.

Make sure you're warm enough. If you're flying in coach, carry a shawl or light blanket to keep you warm. Airplanes can be extremely cold.

Avoid taking sleeping pills, whether natural or prescribed. Your body will produce melatonin—the hormone that initiates sleep—if you follow the recommendations above. You can also eat melatonin-rich foods like pineapples, bananas, oranges, oats, sweet corn, rice, tomatoes, and barley.

# **4** STRESS

Understand what makes you frazzled about traveling so you can preempt it. By planning what you will do to handle a stressful situation—perhaps a flight delay or the loss of luggage—you can take control of the situation. Travelers tend to stress out when they don't feel in control. Something as basic as planning how you might spend your time at the airport if you're delayed will make a huge difference to how you react if that eventuality occurs.

No matter what the purpose of your trip, schedule some time for yourself, away from others. It might be a soak in a tub, closing your eyes and meditating while the plane is landing, or unplugging all your devices and taking a ten-minute nap. Give yourself the time to recharge your batteries.



# **GENERAL TRAVEL HEALTH TIPS**



Germs can be found on airplane tray tables and armrests. Wipe them down when you sit down.



Avoid drinking alcohol when flying. Not only does it worsen your level of dehydration, but it also causes mucous and eustachian (ear) tubes to swell, giving you "airplane ears."



Start the day right. Rushing and avoiding breakfast sets you up for a fall. The body feels stressed if it doesn't receive food within an hour of rising. Stress means more cortisol, which has four times the receptors in the abdomen, leading to belly fat. That said, beware sugar-laden cereal, juices, and bread products. A breakfast of fruit, oatmeal, or eggs with sautéed veggies, especially spinach, is a great way to start the day.



If you do fall off the wagon, brush yourself off and move on. Beating yourself up will only lead to a sense of failure and possibly the temptation to throw in the towel. Remember it was only one meal and it's what you do all week that counts.

Jayne McAllister combines over twenty years of business travel with her passion for teaching long-lasting healthy habits to frequent travelers. Jayne is the host and diet/exercise expert for the Healthy Travel Summit: International Expert Interview Series; creator of dineoutloseweight.com; and an ambassador for maiden-voyage.com. Jayne graduated from Cambridge University and the Institute for Integrative Nutrition.

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# The Cosmetic Vein & Laser Center Leads the Way to Healthier Legs

# NON-INVASIVE LASER TECHNOLOGIES FOR TREATMENT OF VARICOSE AND SPIDER VEINS RESTORE THE HEALTH & BEAUTY OF YOUR LEGS

Don't let unsightly and uncomfortable varicose and spider veins rob you of your energy and natural beauty. Dr. Kimberly Moskowitz is one of the Emerald Coast's only Board Certified Vein Specialists. As a leading expert in vascular disorders, she has helped pioneer the safest and most up-to-date treatment options for varicose and spider veins. Today, these options include state-of-the-art non-surgical techniques that allow patients to return normal activities the same day.

"I am so truly grateful that my education, experience, and technology allow me to spend every day doing exactly what I love to do. I place enormous emphasis on my relationships with my patients and do my best to help them look and feel young, natural, and healthy. I want everyone to maximize the beauty they were born with."

Untreated, varicose and spider veins can lead to serious health risks like blood clots, phlebitis, cellulitis, and leg ulcers. Expert treatment of varicose veins dramatically improves symptoms in the legs such as aching, swelling, discomfort, cramping, fatigue, and restless legs syndrome. During the initial consultation, Dr. Moskowitz will perform a diagnostic ultrasound of the leg veins to accurately assess the severity of vein disease and determine the most appropriate treatment plan.

Dr. Moskowitz has been performing and training other physicians to perform EVLT (Endovenous Laser Treatment) aka EVLA since its FDA approval in 2002. During this 30-minute, safe, non-surgical, outpatient procedure, an ultrasound is used to guide placement of a thin laser fiber into the abnormal Saphenous vein/s in the leg. Laser energy causes the abnormal vein to immediately collapse and redirect blood flow to the normal healthy channels in the leg. The body then reabsorbs the abnormal vein, resulting in improved circulation and symptoms. Local anesthesia is used to numb the area around the vein making the procedure virtually painless. EVLT has a 99% success rate, and has eliminated the need for painful surgical procedures such as vein stripping.

Contrary to what many physicians believe, spider veins often cause the same symptoms as larger varicose veins. Also, because 55% of spider veins are associated with underlying larger vein abnormalities, it is often considered medically necessary to treat them. Because of this, most spider veins will dramatically improve during treatment. Sclerotherapy (tiny injections of a solution that



closes the veins) is the most effective and least painful treatment for spider veins and blue veins under the skin surface called reticular veins. Skin lasers are used to treat small veins on the face and chest; however, for leg veins, they are less effective, more painful, and often lead to scarring

and hyperpigmentation.

The Cosmetic Vein & Laser Center provides the most advanced non-surgical treatments for skin, face, legs, neck, and cellulite reduction. Also a Skin and Laser Medicine Specialist, Dr. Moskowitz offers today's most advanced treatments for Cosmetic and Medical Dermatology, Skin tightening, and Cellulite reduction: Fraxel™, PDT for skin cancer and acne, Botox, Injectable fillers, IPL, laser hair removal, Smartlipo, Velashape, and Thermage for non-surgical body contouring and skin tightening. Dr. Moskowitz also offers the very best in Anti-aging Skincare products.

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