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EXPLORING THE BEAUTY ACROSS THE PACIFIC REGION

Stars and Stripes Community Publication

SPECIAL INSIDE
• Q&A with a travel junkie
• The keys to responsible tourism

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DESTINATION PARADISE

STARS AND STRIPES®



"To travel is to live."

— Hans Christian Andersen

At Stars and Stripes, we love to travel! And though we strive to bring you all the great places to visit during your stay in the Pacific, we know you're out there enjoying yourselves as well. So, every year, Stripes reaches out and asks readers to send us their travel tales and photos. And, every year, you guys deliver. This year, you're taking us to India, the Philippines, Beijing and Palau, just to name a few. Your adventures are inspiring and are sure to move others to take advantage of their assignment in the Pacific and get out and explore.

If you're new to the Pacific, you'll want to read on for just a taste of the rich experiences, great food and fun activities this theater has to offer.

Check out Page 11, where one of Stripes' regular contributors, Sarah Hodge, shares some of her travel wisdom as she prepares for the end of her nearly five-year stay in Japan. And she's packing it with lots of travel. Hodge also recounts her visit to one of her favorite locations, Taiwan.

Other contributors to the magazine are also taking us on some fascinating journeys.

DODEA student James O'Leary shows us how hitting the slopes and waves are both possible in Japan. A young traveler, James already knows his version of paradise lies in both the surf and snow.

Stripes' own Rob Zuckerman takes us to the rainy reaches of the Philippine countryside to a local, multiple-day religious celebration. This unique experience is one not many get to witness firsthand.

Another trip of a lifetime shared with us comes from Marion Salun Fairbanks, who took her family (including two small children) to India for a two-week adventure. Not only did the entire family spend time at the iconic Taj Mahal, but they also spent time sleeping under tents in the deserts of Jaisalmer, riding camels and visiting some of the country's other amazing sites.

And did you check out the front-page photo? James-Paul Jacob's excellent travel shot from trekking the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route in Japan makes us want to get our backpacks and go out for a refreshing hike.

Traveling around the Pacific may seem daunting, but your fellow members of the military community are here to show you where to go and how to get there. Stripes is all about giving our readers a platform to tell their stories. After all, you are the experts when it comes to life abroad.

Our community newspapers – Stripes Japan, Stripes Okinawa, Stripes Guam and Stripes Korea – serve up travel and culture stories, restaurant reviews, and the latest happenings on and off base.

Although we can't always get everything into the newspaper, StripesJapan.com, StripesOkinawa.com, StripesKorea.com and Guam.Stripes.com are all packed with helpful, local information.

Many of our stories, as well as helpful videos, can also be found on our Facebook page. Search Stripes Pacific on Facebook and be sure to follow us to get all the latest info on what's going on, plus the details on all the fun contests Stripes is running.

We want to help you get out and explore, but we need your help! So, don't be shy. Reach out and tell us what's on your mind. I promise we'll get right back to you.

In the meantime, give this magazine a read and get some ideas for that next trip of your own. Who knows, maybe next year you'll find yourself published in this magazine.

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Front page photo

James-Paul Jacob, who is stationed in Japan, took this shot while exploring the beautiful mountain area of Toyama. Check out his story and more photos on Pages 40-41.

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My name is Thien and I am a 1st-term student at Lakeland University Japan. As a student veteran, I think I have a fairly unique background. I was born in Denver, Colorado, from immigrant Vietnamese parents and as I grew up, I learned to appreciate my heritage and wanted to begin my own legacy as an American.

I enlisted into the U.S. Marine Corps at the age of 17 and left home to boot camp right after high school graduation. Stationed in southern California, I served 4 years as a Field Wireman and deployed multiple times on Marine Expeditionary Units and Unit Deployment Programs.

Those deployments gave me the opportunity to explore many different countries, cultures, and cities throughout the Persian gulf and Southeast Asia. However, one country stood out to me from the rest during my enlistment and it was Japan.

Drawn in by the unique culture and people, I decided to return. During a rainy day in the chow hall line, I read about LUJ off of an advertisement in the Stars and Stripes Magazine. The school was an opportu-

nity for me to pursue a college education while experiencing Japanese culture. So I applied.

Now having parted from my friends and family state-side, I am studying and taking university level classes while creating new connections with locals, international students, and other fellow veterans. LUJ gave me a chance to utilize my G.I. Bill and experience the unique and robust lifestyle that is found only in Tokyo.



“If you are short on time, Taipei makes a fantastic home base for exploring some of the island’s most diverse attractions, from powerful waterfalls to old-time railway towns.”

Taiwan trip a time to remember

Story and photos by
SARAH HODGE

Taiwan is a stunning island paradise not to be missed during your Pacific assignment. Taoyuan International Airport is a little over 2.5 hours from Seoul or 3 hours from Tokyo, making it an attractive weekend destination for those stationed in Korea and Japan. Taiwan High Speed Rail (THSR), based on the 700-series Japanese shinkansen, runs along the west coast of Taiwan and connects the capital Taipei to the southern city of Kaohsiung (217 miles) in as little as 1.5 hours.

A colony of Japan from 1895 to 1945, Taiwan’s infrastructure was largely built by the Japanese, and you’ll find a plethora of preserved colonial buildings scattered around Taiwan, including Taichung Railway Station from 1917, the fascinating hot springs museum at Beitou, Hinoki Village in Chiayi, and Pine Garden in Hualien (a former administrative office of the Imperial Japanese Navy).

Taiwan’s official languages include Mandarin Chinese (Taiwan

writes with traditional Chinese, which looks similar to Japanese kanji) and Taiwanese Hokkien, although you will also find a large number of English speakers (and many young Taiwanese are learning Japanese for tourism and hospitality, making it an attractive destination for Japanese tourists as well).

If you are short on time, Taipei makes a fantastic home base for exploring some of the island’s most diverse attractions, from powerful waterfalls to old-time railway towns like Pingxi (famous for its lantern festival in conjunction with Chinese New Year) and mining towns like Jiufen, whose otherworldly lantern-lit ambiance inspired a great deal of the aesthetics in director Hayao Miyazaki’s award-winning “Spirited Away.”

Other nearby attractions include Wulai, with its hot springs, waterfalls and indigenous Atayal crafts and restaurants, and the impressive waterfall at Shifen. Many of these cities are quite small, so you may be better off renting a car (Taiwan drives on the right) and exploring these as day trips. Be sure to bring motion sickness medicine as driving between them involves numerous hairpin curves and switchbacks.

Central Taiwan offers the breathtaking vistas of Sun Moon Lake and expansive tea plantations, while nearby Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village demonstrates traditional houses, costumes, dances and crafts from some





Indigenous performers
at Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village



Jiufen



TAIWAN

MY PARADISE

of Taiwan's 16 recognized indigenous tribes, including the Amis, Bunun, Paiwan, Tao and Tsou. Qingjing Farm (nicknamed "Foggy Eden") looks more like an idyllic Swiss setting and features live-stock demonstrations and shows.

Eastern Taiwan offers some of the island's most stunning scenery, including Taroko National Park. The park's steep canyons, gorges, and waterfalls are a hiker's paradise. One of the best ways to discover it is to rent a car and drive down the Eastern coast. Notable points of interest include Qingshui Cliffs,

Taroko Gorge, Qixingtian, and Mugua River Gorge.

Southern Taiwan offers travelers sunny, unspoiled beaches, island paradises, dragon boat races, and the massive Buddhist monastery Fo Guang Shan. Tainan, Taiwan's capital from 1683 to 1885, is home to Anping Old Fort (1634) and Chihkan Tower, built in 1653 during the Dutch colonization of Taiwan. Taijiang National Park is well worth visiting for the scenic river cruise through a tunnel of mangroves (Sicao Green Tunnel).

Alishan in Chiayi County is one of Taiwan's top attractions: you can ride the narrow-gauge Alishan Forest Railway (originally built by the Japanese for logging in 1912), see the sun rise over a sea of clouds (this involves a super-early wake-up call), hike through sacred forests, and visit tea plantations (due to the high altitude, some of Taiwan's most prized teas are grown here).

For the adventurous, remote Lanyu/ Orchid Island (40 miles off the southeast corner of Taiwan near Kenting) can be reached by plane or boat. A scuba diving paradise, Orchid Island is home to the Tao tribe and their incredible carved wooden canoes and unique



Food is served family-style at
Taiwanese restaurants.

SEE TAIWAN ON PAGE 10 ►



Hinoki Village



Longshan Temple

TAIWAN

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9



Night Market
vendor selling bao, Taipei



Night market



Sun Moon Lake



Chihkan Tower,
Tainan

semi-underground homes (the Tao community values their privacy; please be respectful about photographing them). Green Island (20.5 miles east of Taitung) offers some of Taiwan's best reef snorkeling, Lyudao Lighthouse, and breathtaking coastal scenery.

Taoist/Mazu and Buddhist temples: Taiwan's Taoist and Mazu temples are riots of color and imagery. Standouts include Taipei's Longshan Temple, Dajia Mazu temple, Lake of Temples in Kaohsiung and the impressive Chan Buddhist monasteries at Fo Guang Shan near Kaohsiung and Chung Tai Chan, Puli.

Come for the food: Taiwanese cuisine is finally stepping into the international spotlight – highlights include beef noodle soup, gua bao ("Taiwanese hamburger"), Taiwanese sausage, hotpot, three cup chicken, xiao long bao (soup dumplings), peanut mochi and pineapple cakes. Another Taiwanese favorite is shaved ice, which comes in a variety of flavors topped with a mountain of fresh tropical fruit, sweetened condensed milk, optional ice cream, and/or tapioca pearls. Because a sizeable percentage of Taiwanese are Buddhists, vegetarian restaurants abound and can be found nearly everywhere (buffet-style is common). Look for the kanji 素食 on signs or menus.

Don't miss night markets: Found in most large cities, boisterous night markets are a fun way to sample Taiwanese street cuisine like aiyu jelly, oyster omelettes, stinky tofu, scallion pancakes, barbecue skewers, and steamed buns.

Taiwan is also home to some great hands-on cooking schools and food tours; I took multiple classes and market tours with **Jodie's Kitchen** (<http://kitchen.j321.com/>) and **Ivy's Kitchen** (<http://kitchenivy.com/>) and highly recommend both.

You may be familiar with Japan's highly refined tea ceremony, but did you know that Taiwan has an equally refined tea culture? Dating back to the 18th

ANNUAL EVENTS

Yanshui Beehive Fireworks Festival

Taiwan's most unique (and dangerous!) festival that coincides with Chinese New Year features thousands of high-powered bottle rockets fired directly at participants... who should come prepared with safety gear including motorcycle helmets, flame-retardant clothing, gloves, and hearing protection. Go at your own risk!!

Pingxi Sky Lantern Festival

Held in the small mining village of Shifen in February, thousands of paper lanterns float up into the night sky emblazoned with dreams and wishes for the new year. (IACE offers affordable package tours.)

Kaohsiung dragon boat races

Kaohsiung's Love River is host to the Kaohsiung Dragon Boat Festival and International Dragon Boat Races every June.

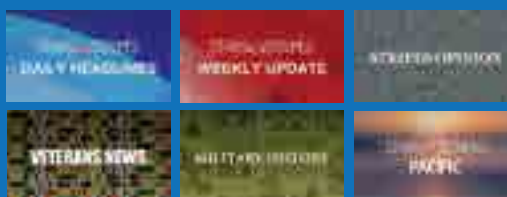
century, the Gongfu tea ceremony likely originated in Fujian and Chaoshan in China's Guangdong province. You can experience Taiwan's famed tea plantations and a series of atmospheric teahouses perched high over the hills surrounding Taipei in Maokong; a short cable car ride up the mountain will transport you to a different world. Try a tea flight sampler paired with traditional Taiwanese tea cuisine (for best ambiance, visit shortly before sunset and continue sipping as the lights of Taipei illuminate the valley below). Bubble tea was invented in Taichung in the 1980s at Chun Sui Tang (there are also branches in Japan) and has taken the world by storm. Another refreshing choice is watermelon juice, the perfect antidote to Taiwan's oppressively hot, humid summers.

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STARS AND STRIPES

Q and A with a travel junkie

Editor's Note: Sarah Hodge is a language instructor stationed at Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan. Since her arrival in 2015, she has done her best get out and explore. Hodge, who has written several stories that have appeared in our community papers, was kind enough to sit down with Stars and Stripes and share her thoughts on making the most of your time overseas.



Sarah Hodge

Q You've been stationed at Yokosuka Naval Base since 2015 and have really seemed to make the most of your time in Japan. You've really immersed yourself in the culture, haven't you?

A Absolutely! I was previously stationed at a Japan Air Self-Defense Force Base in Central Japan in 2010-2011 but have been interested in Japanese culture and language since childhood. Shortly before PCSing in 2015, I started joining a multitude of travel and culture groups online to do preliminary research – I am currently admin of a number of Japanese travel, gardening, and cooking groups and an active member of many others. I have participated in a number of cultural events like kimono dressing, tea ceremony, zazen (Zen meditation), Japanese archery, traditional crafts, and Japanese cooking classes.

I have many friends who are Zen/Buddhist priests all over Japan, and this year I am assisting with ZEN 2.0 in Kamakura, a global mindfulness forum hosted at Kenchoji (the oldest Zen training monastery in Japan established in 1253).

In addition, I've been involved with supporting and promoting Japanese men's rhythmic gymnastics since 2017 (I have dozens of coach, athlete, and parent friends across Japan) and assist with English subtitles for MRG videos and gymnastics blog posts in English.

Q What's your favorite thing to do in Japan?

A Experiencing local culture – often this means visiting local temples and participating in unique regional festivals. I love to participate in hands-on cooking and craft classes and try to sign up for a unique experience on

every trip. So far, that's included indigo dyeing in Ome, making Kamakura-bori chopsticks and pottery with local artisans in Kamakura, and hand-blowing Edo glass windchimes.

I also love onsens (hot springs), collecting goshojin (temple and shrine seals – I currently have around 9 books in various stages of completion) and Japanese pilgrimages. In 2017, I stayed at two different temples on Koyasan, and in 2018, I visited Kumano Kodo in Wakayama. In 2020, I hope to walk at least part of the 88-temple pilgrimage in Shikoku.

And there is something deeply powerful about Japan's ancient cedar forests and waterfalls, so I make it a point to visit as many as I can. So far, this has included Kumano Kodo's Nakahechi Route, Oirase Stream in Aomori, Kego, Ryuzu, and Yutaki Falls in Nikko, Shiraito Falls in Shizuoka, and Nachi Falls in Wakayama.

Q What's your favorite place outside Japan and why?

A In 2015, I worked in Taichung (Central Taiwan) for six months and had the opportunity to travel extensively around Taiwan, including Taipei (Wulai Falls, Shifen, Jiufen, Pingxi), Tainan, Chiayi, Sun Moon Lake, Cingqing Farm, Kaohsiung/Fo Guang Shan, Alishan, and Hualien/Taroko National Park. I immediately fell in love with Taiwan's gorgeous scenery and abundant nature, food scene (I visited many night markets and took six cooking classes around Taiwan), and its warm and gracious people.

Over the last several years, my travel has been limited to Japan, but I spent three magical weeks exploring Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Montenegro in 2017 and highly recommend this gorgeous region!

Q You're a definite travel junkie. What advice would you give folks just beginning their tour in the Pacific?

A Don't be afraid to simply hop on a bus or train, hop off at a random (or interesting) destination, and simply get out and explore. All station staff speak some English, most major station/bus signs are in English and Japanese, and many towns now have a dedicated tourism information office in or near the train station (most have staff that can speak some English; all should have at least one map or guide available in English). In addition, there are several excellent smartphone apps in English with detailed sightseeing and transportation information.

Another fantastic option to make new friends and really experience local culture is signing up for tours and volunteer guides through Systemized Goodwill Guides (<https://www.japan.travel/en/plan/list-of-volunteer-guides/>). I have signed

up for numerous guides and events in Kamakura, Matsue, Nagano, Kanazawa, and Nikko and can't recommend them highly enough – the majority are retired volunteers who are thrilled and honored to share their local hometown and culture with you. I always bring small local souvenirs from Yokosuka to present my guides with at the end of our time together.

Plan for major festivals and events well in advance. Popular events like Aomori's Nebuta Matsuri, Kochi's Yosakoi Festival and Hiroaki's Cherry Blossom Festival mean that hotels can sell out a year in advance; if there is a unique regional event you have your heart set on, research and make reservations as far in advance as possible. Hotels may also have special rules/rates for these festivals.

For those with tattoos, be aware that most Japanese hotels, ryokans, spas and many beaches ban tattoos (some may allow small tattoos to be covered with a bandage), be sure to research in advance if your accommodations/destinations have a no-tattoo policy (if a ryokan has a private onsen, you can use the private one).

Q What place is next on your list to visit and why?

A Next year will be my last year in Japan, so I am already planning my final trips to include Kyushu, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, Shikoku and the San'in Coast (Shimane Prefecture). Hopefully this will include hands-on ceramics experiences in Arita, visiting Kami-shikimi Kumano-imasu Jinja in Takamori, and walking at least part of the 88-temple pilgrimage in Shikoku along with attending the Matsue Water Lantern Festival, which has been on my wishlist the last four years. I would also like to visit Eihei-ji in Fukui (one of two head temples of Soto Zen founded in 1244) and participate in the Sanro Zen meditation experience.

Q Never leave home without ...

A Local currency. When traveling in the countryside especially, many hotels and restaurants are cash-only. Also, older diesel trains do not have outlets for charging phones, so bring a power bank to charge mobile devices. And of course, spare camera batteries, extra SD cards, and a sense of adventure!

Q Finish this sentence: When living in a foreign country ...

A Never pass up the opportunity to experience local culture, especially when invited to participate!





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“I was told that this area rarely sees a foreign face, and it would not surprise me if I was the first ‘gringo’ the villagers had ever seen.”

My Santo Nino Fiesta experience

Story and photos by
ROBERT ZUCKERMAN

I recently visited the Philippines for the first time, a trip I'll never forget as I was fortunate to take part in a local festival that allowed me to fully immerse myself into the country's culture.

I was cordially invited to the Philippines by Sei Suzuki, better known as Tess Bonifacio back on her home turf of Nikko Park Lodge. Her family members are descendants of one of the Philippines' revolutionary heroes, Andrés Bonifacio y de Castro (November 30, 1863 – May 10, 1897). The family not only wanted me to attend, but also play a role in the local Santo Nino Fiesta of Masantol, a small village roughly three hours by car from Makati in downtown Manila.

Masantol is located in the province of Pampanga and lies on the river which bears its name. The majority of locals commute and travel by boat rather than car. The other modes of local transportation are the “three-wheelers” – motorcycles with side cars and tricycle taxis where the passengers ride behind the owner who busily pedals to the customer's requested destination. The famous Jeepny mini-buses are used by the masses for longer distance travel. Holding up to 28 passengers, it is the responsibility of the one seated closest to the cab area to receive the fare from the other passengers and hand it to the driver.

I was told that the Masantol area rarely sees a foreign face, and it would not surprise me if I was



Piggies



Masantol kids



Crazy tricycle passengers with their driver.



the first “gringo” the villagers had ever seen. A poor area, Masantol is home to mostly unemployed squatters living in small huts – albeit many with nice televisions and satellite dishes – along the waterways.

The local market opens daily at 4 a.m. with fresh meat and fresh-caught tilapia, milk fish and other delicacies for sale. A local favorite meat dish is a sweet sausage, which you see drying on strings hung in the open market. Also for sale are every tropical fruit and vegetable you can name, from the “King of Fruits,” durian, to various types of bananas, coconuts and so much more.

On special occasions, such as the Santo Nino Fiesta, locals make a delicious stuffed milk-fish dish named Areyanong Bangus. Watching the ladies prepare this dish was quite a treat, as was eating it. They deboned the fish and mixed finely chopped carrots, onions and other vegetables in with the meat of the fish and stir fried the mix. Then, they wrapped it back in the original fish skin and put it in foil. When it was time to eat, it was fried in a wok before serving.

My host family, the Bonifacios, were in charge of the fiesta. Not only were they in charge of the nightly entertainment for the week-long festivities, but the family was also responsible for cooking all the food on the final day of the fiesta.



MY PARADISE

Watching them prepare all the dishes to feed up to 500 mouths was amazing!!! They prepared many of the previously-mentioned stuffed fish, various chicken dishes and many pork dishes, all from locally-bought pigs, one of which was slaughtered before our very eyes while having breakfast!!!

The Masantol Santo Nino Fiesta includes nightly contests where the local villagers and others participate. Each night's event had its own panel of judges. Events ranged from a talent show to several pageants,

a rock band contest and the most popular – a basketball tournament. A Japanese gentleman living nearby who runs an environmental NGO and I were both asked to be judges for the talent show.

As the crowd enjoyed seeing foreigners on the judging stand, we were also asked to be two of five judges for the beauty pageant. We remained until the end despite the fact it had begun to rain. By the way, when you are asked to be a judge, local tradition requires that you not only accept the honor, but also that you make a donation to said event. It is believed that making the donation will bring you good fortune in the following year; hopefully that is true.

As Masantol is only a few miles from the ocean, full-moon or high-tide nights result in impassable flooded roads where the three-wheelers and tri-cyclers carry many a passenger to dry land. My last three nights were such evenings. Though we could easily walk to the fiesta grounds, by the time the festivities were wrapping up for the evening, we needed to hitch a ride across the flooded area to dry land which is usually only a two-minute walk.

Each morning I was there, the “village alarm,” as I started to call it, would awaken anyone who hadn't

SEE PHILIPPINES
ON PAGE 18 ►



Fiesta finale parade begins



Fiesta's opening act
of talent show



Dinner guests

“An all-black-clad guard wielding a baton popped out of nowhere and ran toward me, hollering at me to clear out. I have visited China before, so I know that Chinese officials can be very loud when dealing with foreigners.”

Eastern China's hidden gem

Story and photos by
RON ROMAN



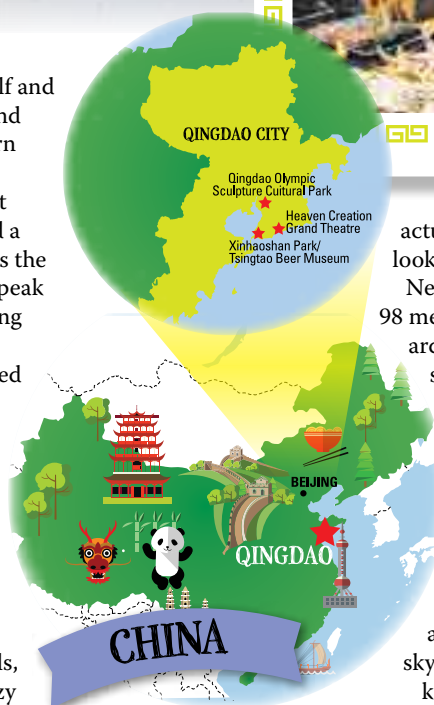
Qingdao Street vendors



Pichaeyoon Market food stall

Recently, my better half and I opted for a whirlwind tour of China's eastern city of Qingdao, a bustling former German colonial port on the Yellow Sea. We joined a Seoul-based tour of 20. I was the only non-Korean, though I speak the language somewhat having lived off and on in Korea for quite some time. We crammed a week into a couple of days. It was exhausting, but worth it.

After settling down in our hotel rooms, our guide, Mr. Yang Ho, took everybody over to meander through Pichaeyoon, an old market-turned-tourist-trap crammed with fast-food stalls, loud street vendors, and glitzy accessory stores. It is one of the few places there where you'll see a concentration of Western faces, and has pungent smells of greasy Chinese fried foods wafting in the air. I tried a diluted coconut drink for 15 yuan; got ripped off. Foolishly, I had flashed my cash before asking the price, as though I knew the



MY PARADISE

actual cost. The wife threw a dirty look my way. OK, next time ...

Next stop: Xinhaoshan Park. It's 98 meters above sea level, with an arduous trek to the rotating observatory at the top. Careful — no guardrails! I did a midway stop to take a memorable photo or two of the city's skyline to the west. The park was originally known as Signal Hill, so-named to signal incoming ships to the harbor. Go there at dusk and see Qingdao's downtown skyline light up like a distant kaleidoscope!

We stayed downtown at DoubleTree Hotel, which is dubbed as five-star. At 5:35

a.m. the next day, just outside our 16th-story window, we witnessed a wild display — of all things! — of fireworks. Short-lived (at about three minutes), it nonetheless scared the hell out of my wife and me. Later, our tour guide explained that

Author with tour guide
Yang Ho





Left: International beer bottles
Right top: The outside of Tsingtao Beer Museum
Right bottom: The inside of museum



it was a special event independent of hotel management, probably generated by some “family event” like a wedding, to augur good luck.

After breakfast at the hotel, we boarded our bus for a one-hour ride to a pearl shop on Qingdao's outskirts. We listened to a 15-minute spiel on the benefits of wearing (and presumably buying) Yinzhu jewelry. The lecture was delivered in Korean by an attractive Han Chinese woman named Zhang Ling, so my comprehension was limited. (She refused to have her photo taken for this story.) Then everyone mingled around the store. My wife bought some pearl facial cream for us (she doesn't need any; I do). The store manager tried to lure me into purchasing an expensive pearl necklace for my significant other; I pleaded poverty.

We then hopped back on our bus and headed for the beach and Pal-tae-kwan Park (Eight Great Things), even though it was late in the fall. Obviously, nobody was swimming (Qingdao is 36 degrees latitude), but a lone just-married couple stood posing for pictures on the shoreline. The Qingdao Seaside Walkway is 40.6 kilometers. Here, you can visit anti-communist Chinese Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek's old vacation home,



Memorial to Freedom from German colonialism

now a pay-for-view public attraction. Upon returning to the bus, I inadvertently strayed on private premises while searching for a shortcut. An all-black-clad guard wielding a baton popped out of nowhere and ran toward me, hollering at me to clear out. I have visited China before, so I know that Chinese officials can be very loud when dealing with foreigners. I scurried back to the group.

From there, it was a five-minute drive

to Tsingtao Beer Museum. Tsingtao has long been famous worldwide; here, you'll learn its origins. Inside is an exhibition dedicated to the history of beer-making, originally by the Sumerians in ancient Mesopotamia dating back 6,000 years. Tsingtao Beer was founded here in 1903 as the German Naval Brewery. Inside is a holographic image of a beer taster at work, who then spins around to face you while splashing some hops drops on a screen. Behind the unknowing spectator, a fine mist (not real beer, of course) is sprayed. People jump.

In the next room, a riotous throng queues up for free beer and nuts. We chug down our own samples, then stroll through the museum where Tsingtao Beer is packaged. On the way, there's a mini-exhibit recreating what it's like to be drunk: you go inside a room with tilting floors designed to simulate walking while inebriated. Finally, several escalators lead downstairs to a large room with yet more riotous folks seated by the dozens chugging down yet more samples and

SEE QINGDAO ON PAGE 18 ►



Close-up of Qingdao's skyline



Cheongyang Night Market

QINGDAO

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

heartily munching on assorted snacks. I swill my beer and chomp down on Tsingtao honey-roasted peanuts. A large gift shop and various vendors populate the premises. Soon, we were having lunch at a traditional Chinese restaurant; everything was served on a revolving lazy susan, forcing diners to jockey for servings. Tasty stuff!

Our guide next took us for a rubdown at Yu Dao massage parlor in central Qingdao, the “respectable” spa (so advertised in English in the lobby). No hanky-panky—this was a family tour! Soon, my wife (who was in the same room) was hollering “Apayo!” (“It hurts!” in Korean), and “Ganjirahwoyo!” (“It tickles!”). Helluva beat-down! After 90 minutes, our bodies were putty.

We rode the tour bus quite a bit. (Qingdao’s topography is relatively flat, with steep, rugged mountains to the east.) Arriving at the Heaven Creation Grand Theatre, overlooking the Yellow Sea, we saw a performance of the play Dreaming of Qindao. It’s a glitzy tearjerker of a musical dance and magic show, based on the real-life love story of Michael (American) and Su-jin (Chinese), featuring about 30 classical dancers. The

Dancers at Olympic Park

story is told by a deep-throated off-stage Chinese narrator. In this post-Mao era, even Santa Claus makes a brief on-stage appearance!

After dinner, it was on to the Cheongyang Night Market, which showcases everything imaginable: exotic desserts, fruits, footwear, jewelry, accessories, even three adorable gray kittens, which to me were reminiscent of the pets that used to be for sale in front of Osan Air Base Main Gate in Korea, not far from where I live. Just watch your wallet if jostled in this spot; pickpockets frequent the area.

Tour the streets at night here, and you’ll find the downtown area festooned with brilliant red Chinese lanterns. In China, red traditionally is considered a lucky color; even for non-Chinese, it enthuses the spirit.

Reveille sounded at 6:30 a.m. the next day; an hour later, we were all aboard the bus. First stop: Yegrin Luxury Jewelry store, featuring all kinds

of exotic personal items, most notably men’s specially designed ventilated undershorts (no kidding). Asked if I wanted to buy any, I took a pass. Finally, we toured Qingdao Olympic Sculpture and Culture Park. Most interesting here are the oddly shaped statues of Chinese Olympians in athletic mid-motion flanking both sides of the square. Among them, a bevy of elderly dancers paired off and started swirling to traditional Chinese music blaring out of their music boxes while we boarded our bus for our final ride to the airport.

Qingdao: Eastern China’s hidden gem. If anybody asks you why you’re visiting, just tell them Ron sent you!

– The author has taught English and the Humanities for the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) all over the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command originally since 1996.

as the marching band followed behind, entertaining the masses with their music. Let’s just say the band was much more pleasing to the ears later in the day than at the crack of dawn.

Local tradition dictates that those who have the means should make at least a minimal donation before kissing one of statues for good fortune. Though not Catholic, I figured ... “when in Masantol” ...

The first arrivals to be fed breakfast on the final day were the local police, who were dressed

in full camo and carried machine guns. No, not military, the local police!

They happily posed for photos with us as we brought the food out for the fiesta buffet. It was clear that they enjoyed it, as they even thanked me when they saw me strolling around town later that day. They also all came back for another round of delicious food at dinner time.

Needless to say, I was honored to be treated as an insider in such an amazing local festival during my visit to the Philippines. It is definitely not an experience your average foreign tourist can have and I am grateful to the Bonifacio family for the experience.

SALAMAT PO!!!!!!!

PHILIPPINES

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

gone to the market earlier at around 6:30 a.m. And I’m not talking about the roosters singing their morning songs from about 5 a.m. on. No, I’m talking about a marching band, one that seems much louder early in the morning. Upon my asking if this is a daily event, my hosts laughingly explained that this is only due to the fiesta week and does not happen 365 days a year. That was good to know.

The final day of the fiesta featured the Santo Nino statues being paraded through the village



The Morning after - high tide



Tommy Bonifacio with his canopied boat

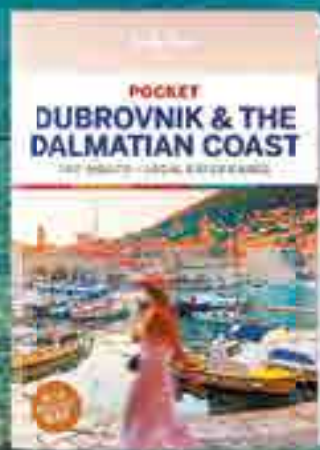
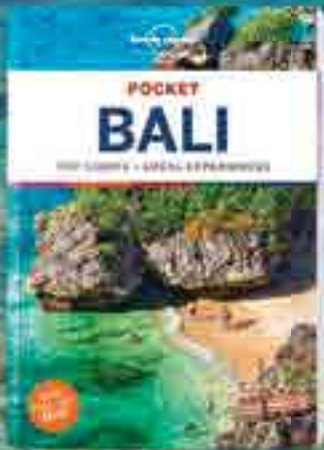


Sunset over the Masantol River



Relax and Explore

with Lonely Planet



“Unsurprisingly, the unassuming grey architecture and communist signage reminded me of some bits and pieces of Moscow.”

How to spend 3 days in Beijing

Story and photos by
NANO BETTS

GREAT WALL



When we arrived from Shanghai to Beijing it seemed like we traveled to another country – people, architecture, and the overall atmosphere are totally different. We were supposed to have three full days here, arriving early afternoon on the first day. But apparently China is infamous for delaying flights (both internal and international), so we didn't get to the capital till 4 p.m. When the plane touched down, we saw a thin layer of yellowish smog enveloping the entire city.

Unsurprisingly, the unassuming grey architecture and communist signage reminded

me of some bits and pieces of Moscow. We got stuck in a terrible traffic jam and didn't get to our hotel till 6 p.m., so the only thing we managed to do that day

was go out for dinner.

Naturally, the next two days were packed with sightseeing. We truly appreciated the history and culture of the city – with UNESCO sites around every corner, it's full of attractions, sights and areas.

We were also impressed by the vastness of Beijing – of its broad six-lane avenues (in one direction) and expansive gardens. Here are all the details of how we spent our time in the capital of China and the list of top things to do and see in Beijing.

HIKE THE GREAT WALL

I don't think a trip to Beijing would be complete without seeing one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Unwilling to hustle with logistics of the trip, we booked a full day private tour that included visits to the Great Wall and The Summer Palace. When you plan to book your visit to the Great Wall, the most important aspect to consider is which section to visit. In general, there are a variety of options around

Beijing – the closest and busiest being Badaling, while the more remote stretches include Jiankou and Simatai, which are quieter but require more effort to get to (and involve vigorous hiking). Our tour took us to a good middle ground – Mutianyu. The

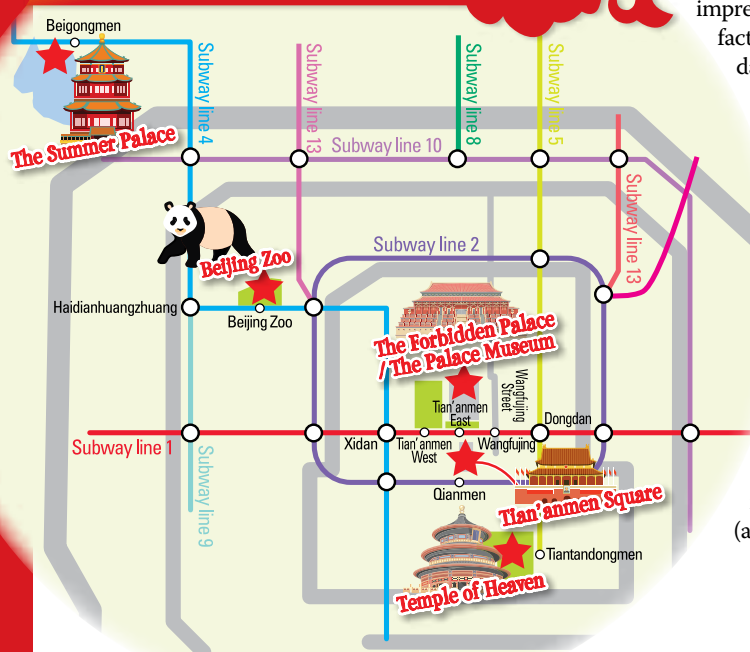
latter is a restored part of the wall, and history buffs might argue it is not an authentic experience. Honestly, I don't think it was any less impressive. Nothing can undermine the fact that you are standing at a site that dates back to 770-221 BC. It was incredible to see the wall on both sides stretch as far as the eye can see – a total of 21,000 km!

In general, the trip should take two to three hours, depending on which section you visit. We left early in the morning, at 8:30 a.m. and arrived at a perfect time – the place was almost tourist-free, and we managed to enjoy the scenic surrounds without having to compete for a spot. To be fair, there were more tourists gathering by the time we left (around 11 a.m.) so going early was



MY PARADISE

CENTER OF BEIJING





FORBIDDEN CITY

Read more from Nano at
travelswithnano.com

TIPS TO HELP PLAN YOUR TRIP TO BEIJING

- Usually foreigners need to apply for a visa before travel to China, but Beijing has a convenient visa free travel policy. The policy allows foreign tourists to travel around Beijing for up to 72 hours without a visa.
- Just like Shanghai, there's no need to tip for restaurants or services, although taxi drivers never refuse some extra cash.
- When shopping in tourist areas, be wary of higher prices and don't be afraid to bargain. Starting prices are typically anywhere from 2-4 times the market price of the item. Also, please beware of scammers. At one of the silk shops, I was told I would be given a discount, but was charged the full price!
- The subway system is a cheap and convenient way to get yourself around the city. Buy a prepaid IC Card for convenience when using public transport.
- Taxis are also very cheap, but none of the drivers speak English. Make sure you get a card from the hotel with its name and address written on it. And request your concierge to explain to the taxi driver where you want to go.

a smart idea! Going up and down was also quite fun – there is a ski lift bringing you up to the wall, and a toboggan (luge slide) to whizz back down.

STROLL IN SUMMER PALACE

I think this might have been one of my favorite places during our trip to China. Both Justin and I were thoroughly impressed by the expansive grounds of the imperial garden – the largest and most well-preserved in China dating back to 1750. Another one of Beijing's many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the Summer Palace is

situated around the picturesque Kunming Lake (entirely man-made!). It was the summer retreat of the royal members and was particularly favored by the Empress Dowager Cixi who didn't shy to spare a lot of funds and labor to perfect it. The entire Palace spans over 700 acres so you will need sufficient time to explore the area. It is rich with splendid pavilions, halls and temples as well as flawless landscape of natural beauty that exude timeless aesthetic. An elegant stretch of woodwork along the northern shore, the Long Corridor is trimmed with a plethora of paintings, while the slopes and crest of Longevity Hill behind are adorned with Buddhist temples. One of the most impressive features were the Presence of Virtue Temple and the Boat of Purity and Ease – Cixi's personal project made entirely of marble! I also couldn't help but note the poetic names of each section of the garden – Longevity Hill, Hall of Serenity, Pavilion of Bright Scenery, Hall of Dispelling Clouds, Garden of Virtue and Harmony, Hall of Moral Glory and the like.

WALK TIANANMEN SQUARE

Located right in the center of the city, Tiananmen Square (literally, Gate of Heavenly Peace) is an iconic place in Beijing, with much historical significance. Built in 1651, it is the third largest square in the world. It is here that Mao Zedong announced the birth of the People's Republic of China and the famous Tiananmen Gate is adorned with his portrait. You'll see guards constantly parading on this square, and will have to go through a security check point in order to access the area. Entrance is free.

GET LOST IN FORBIDDEN CITY

The city within a city, this massive labyrinth of palaces, pavilions and manicured gardens seems to be a maze of worlds within worlds which holds hundreds of secrets and mysteries of the imperial court. Built in 1406, the Forbidden Palace (so called because it was forbidden for commoners to enter during emperors' reign) was there to follow the move of the capital of China from Nanjing to Beijing. The Palace Museum, or the Forbidden Palace is the historical home of the Emperor of China, having been the center of Chinese government for over 500 years. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is one of the largest and most well-preserved palace complexes in the world. It is said that there are 9,999 rooms in this construction – number 9 being the number of the Emperor and thus hording great importance. I loved the time we spent to peruse the multiple manicured green spaces where elegant willow trees draped over canals and arching bridges. The vibrant colors and the intricate ornaments of the halls are equally stunning and make you feel like

SEE BEIJING ON PAGE 28 ►



PEKING DUCK



TIANANMEN SQUARE



XIDAN & WANGFUJING STREETS



THE HUTONG AND NANLUOGUXIANG

DELHI

“Rajasthan had always evoked so many things to me, namely colors, dances, music, folklore, beautiful attire, etc. We fell in love with Rajasthan!”

A family adventure in India

Story and photos by
MARION SALAÜN FAIRBANKS

Our family of four (with two children, ages 6 and 7) and our friends went on a wonderful 16-day vacation to India this past Christmas. December/January is the high tourism season to visit Rajasthan, and the weather was perfect overall. India, particularly Rajasthan, had been on top of our list for many years. We decided to use a travel agency to help us arrange and coordinate the trip, and it was the best decision!

We took a direct 7-hour flight from Narita Airport, Japan, and spent our first day in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh. We visited the magnificent Jama Masjid Mosque, the Spice Market in Old Delhi, Raj Ghat, the Mahatma Gandhi memorial; the Indira Gandhi Museum and, finally, the Sikh Temple Sri Bangla Sahib Gurudwara. We toured the temple's very large kitchen where hundreds of volunteers help prepare more than 10,000 free meals every day to be offered to those who need them.

This first day was full of unforgettable visits, monuments, faces, colors, and tastes. While I had been to Bangladesh before, our first day in India was definitely an intensive cultural and emotional one! The Sikh Temple and the mosque were particularly interesting.

After spending some time in Delhi, we were on our way to explore Rajasthan, a large state in the Northwestern part of India, for two weeks. Rajasthan had always evoked so many things to me, namely colors, dances, music, folklore, beautiful attire, etc. We fell in love with Rajasthan!

We flew from Delhi to Jaisalmer (less than 2 hours), the Yellow City at the gate of the Thar Desert, not far from neighboring Pakistan. We spent our first days visiting the beautiful Jaisalmer Fort, where one quarter of the city's residents live, a nearby lake, royal cenotaphs, enjoying copious cups of masala tea, and visiting artisans such as camel bone carvers (they carve the bones of camels which have died of old age or natural causes), etc.

After a wonderful stay in our hotel, and spending Christmas Day there, we drove to the desert and visited a Rajasthani village on the way.

We then went on a camel safari in the late afternoon. Most tourists opt for the 20-minute ride, but our friends wanted to ride longer, so we rode for 2 hours to a rather remote area. We had fun in the sand dunes, enjoyed a camp fire made with dry vegetation nearby, and watched a magnificent sunset. We then went to a camp to have dinner,

JAISALMER



Jodhpur Fort



Roads in India

JODHPUR

watch a beautiful Rajasthani dance show, and spend the night under large tents. This was the only place where we had to worry about mosquitoes; we fought them for 30 minutes while our sons were fast asleep, and went to sleep with lots of parties happening outside. The camp was at full capacity as Indians were celebrating their end of year holiday. In the distance, we could hear the celebrations happening across the border in Pakistan.

The next day, I got up before the sun and walked in the dunes to watch the sunrise – it was beautiful and peaceful. After breakfast, off we went on our camel for a two-hour ride back to the beginning of the desert. The ride was definitely too long and we understood why most people choose the 20-minute option.

Once back in Jaisalmer, we switched vehicles and headed to Jodhpur, the Blue City.

Visiting Rajasthan requires spending quite some time on the road (usually between 3-6 hours



MY PARADISE

every 2 or 3 days), and we were ready with lots of books, drawing pads and snacks. We arrived in the chaos of Jodhpur and had to switch to a tuktuk to reach our hotel in the heart of the old town. Fitting our many pieces of luggage in our tuktuk was

not an easy task.

We spent a couple of days in Jodhpur, the highlight of which was the Mehrangarh Fort. We also enjoyed visiting the Jaswant Thada (cenotaphs), and walking around the blue houses, as well as visiting a few artisans and cooperatives.

After Jodhpur, our two families split and we went on to Udaipur, the White City, for a couple of days. On our way there, we visited the gorgeous Ranakpur Jain Temples, as well as the splendid Kumbhalgarh Fort.

SEE INDIA ON PAGE 29 ►



Lake Pichola

UDAIPUR

Flute player

RAJASTHAN

Kumbhalgarh Fort

“We back rolled in and slowly descended into the crystal-clear water to watch schooling sharks, large forests of staghorn coral and soft corals in sandy canyons between the coral heads.”



Flying Manta

Perfect Palau a dive odyssey

Story and photos by
DOUG JOHNSON

Easy access, sublime floating islands, incredible visibility, big pelagics and friendly locals all combine to make Palau a dive destination not to be missed. In the time it takes to say Alii - the local term for “hello” - you’ll fall in love with this unspoiled paradise just 90 minutes from Guam.

I departed Guam at 7:30 p.m. and soon arrived at Koror International Airport at 8:40 p.m. The first thing I noticed when leaving the airport and crossing the Friendship Bridge to downtown Koror was the beautiful deep blue sea and the multitude of islands that seem to be floating on the water.

After a short 20-minute shuttle ride to downtown Koror, I checked into my hotel to get some rest for my dive odyssey. The next morning, I was met by my guide from Sam’s Palau Dive Shop and taken to their office for check in. The shop is a well-established and large operation with its own dedicated dock, gift store and restaurant/bar for divers.

After registering and getting my gear, I boarded one of their many outbound dive boats and set up before getting a dive briefing and departing the dock into Koror Bay. As we motored out, we weaved in and out of narrow channels between large uninhabited islands until reaching the open sea. Once out, Palau’s myriads of smaller signature islands become visible and because of the lush foliage that extends all the way to their limestone bases, appear to be floating on the sea. Once out into the main channel water, visibility also increased markedly and our captain throttled up for the 25-mile ride out to our first dive site.

SANDBAR

Out in the main channel just adjacent to a pure white crystalline sandbar was this easy dive in less than 20 meters of water. After mooring and receiving our dive briefing, we back rolled in and slowly descended into the crystal-clear water to watch schooling sharks, large forests of staghorn coral and soft corals in sandy canyons between the coral heads. Deeper down were big plate corals and mushroom formations surrounded by masses of schooling groupers. After an hour, we slowly ascended back to the boat to off gas and eat Palau’s famous dive bents above schools of fish beneath our boat greedily waiting for handouts.

ULONG CHANNEL

The next site was on the west coast of



MY PARADISE

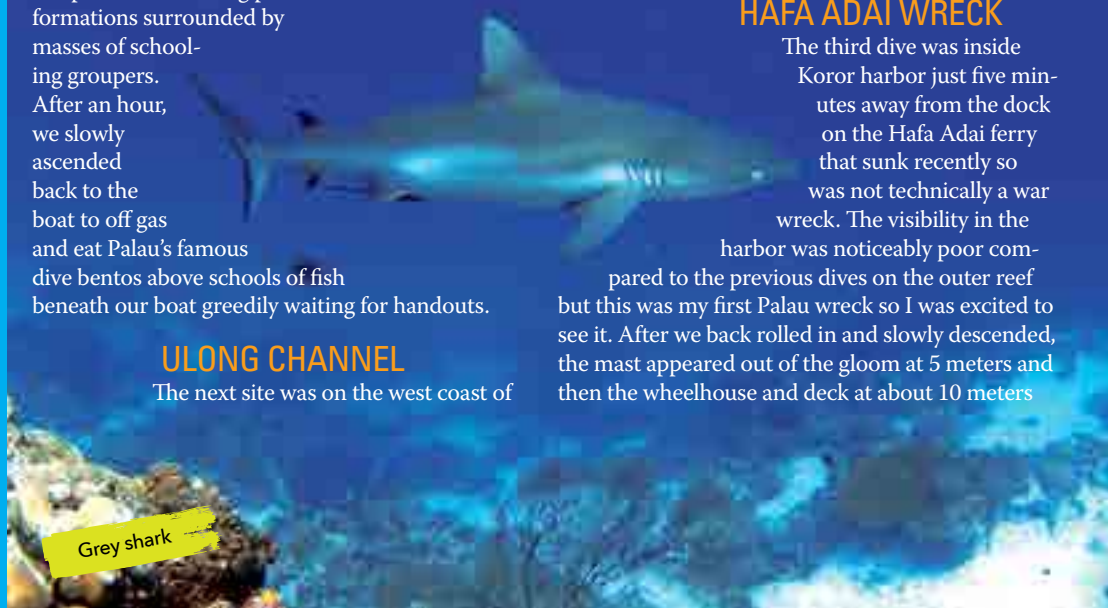
Palau and has a reputation of being an awesome drift dive, so I was excited to dive it. The tide here rips so it was critical to time it correctly on the incoming tide, so we rolled in late morning into crystal clear water to the bottom at roughly 15 meters. The entrance to the channel had coral gardens along the bottom and the channel itself was about 500m wide narrowing to an average of about 25m.

At the entrance to the channel facing the open sea, was a white sandy bottom where we started our drift at about 15 meters up through the progressively narrow channel riding on the rushing current as if on an underwater magic carpet - zero effort required. The current took us through the channel lined with giant plate coral and shoals of drifting glass eyes and squirrelfish. After about 20 minutes, we emerged to be greeted by more sharks and schooling pelagics before surfacing and returning to our waiting skiff and jetting back to Koror.

HAFA ADAI WRECK

The third dive was inside Koror harbor just five minutes away from the dock on the Hafa Adai ferry that sunk recently so was not technically a war wreck. The visibility in the

harbor was noticeably poor compared to the previous dives on the outer reef but this was my first Palau wreck so I was excited to see it. After we back rolled in and slowly descended, the mast appeared out of the gloom at 5 meters and then the wheelhouse and deck at about 10 meters



Grey shark

Things to know

- **TOPSIDE:** While off gassing between dives, take time to visit the weekend night market, have a Palauan Red Rooster beer and talk to the locals.
- **EQUIPMENT:** All shops rent full gear sets. Enriched gas is readily available. Tech or CC divers will want to contact dive shops beforehand with special requests such as gear compatibility or sorb. On Palau, Yoke is more common than a DIN valve. All boat dives request divers carry a computer and a sausage.
- **GETTING THERE:** United flies direct from Guam and other destinations. See their homepage for schedules.
- **DIVE SHOPS:** There are many, see the Palau Visitor's Authority homepage for more details. I used **Fish n Fins** www.fishnfins.com and **Sam's Tours** www.samstours.com. Both are great operations.
- **DIVE CONDITIONS:** The average water temperature is a warm 28 degrees Celsius, 83 degrees Fahrenheit. For protection in the water, a 3mm wetsuit, full or shorty, a skin, or even a t-shirt pleases most.
- **GET MORE:** Palau Visitors Authority www.pristineparadisepalau.com
- **RECOMMENDED FOR BOOKING TRIPS AND DIVE TOURS TO PALAU:**
 - MDA Aquaquest Travel: islands@mdaguam.com or matt@mdaguam.com 671-472-6325
 - Ax Murderer Tours: travel@amtguam.com or 671-654-2933



Palauan beer

with most hatches opened. The wreck lists to port and as I went further down over the bow and then to the stern I found the lifeboat in the sand at 15m and proceeded through the gloom along the hull to the prop (surprisingly not yet salvaged) and the rudder then back around to the port side and up the hull to explore the main deck and cargo area before slowly ascending for a safety stop and then back on the boat for the short ride back to the dock.



Hafa Adai wreck

barbeque to the park downtown. I had my fill of chicken and beef followed by cold coconut milk in the husk while listening to the local bands playing on stage before heading back to get some shuteye for the next day.

The next morning, I was picked up from my hotel by Fish n' Fins Dive Shop and taken down to their large dock which ported both their large fleet of dive boats and two large liveaboards in addition to the ATVs for their off-road adventures tours. After registering and grabbing my gear, we zipped out.

KOROR NIGHTLIFE

Koror has plenty of local restaurants, and since most are within walking distance of the major hotels, it's easy to get to them on the main boulevard with everyone else. Our dive guide told me about the local night market, so I followed the smell of

CLARENCE WALL

This was a wall dive on the southwest reefs of Palau about 25 miles out by boat, which took us

SEE PALAU ON PAGE 28 ►



Clownfish



Reef hooks in the current




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The Marianas

[Saipan] [Tinian] [Rota]

The Marianas are an archipelago of 14 islands - including Saipan, Tinian, and Rota - in the Western Pacific under the U.S. Territory. Latte stone limestone monoliths from the time of the pyramids, traditional nature-based ocean navigation not reliant on modern technology, and a culture seasoned by East and West influences are just a few of the experiences awaiting visitors to The Marianas, where pristine sea, sand, and skies are just three to four hours by plane from major Asian gateway cities. The Marianas are home to indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian people, as well as over 20 different ethnicities from around the world who live and work in this harmonious tropical paradise. There are direct flights available from Japan, China, Korea and Guam. For more information on The Marianas, visit www.mymarianas.com, Facebook/[mymarianas](https://www.facebook.com/mymarianas), or Instagram [@themarianas](https://www.instagram.com/themarianas).



Saipan

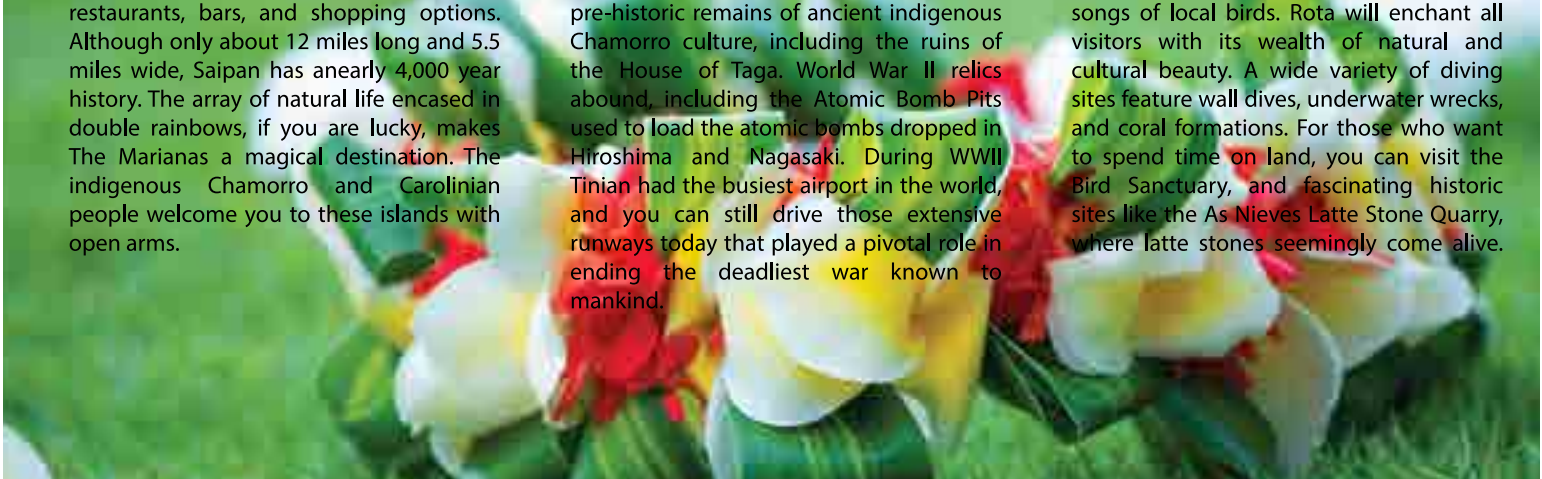
Saipan, as the capitol, is the largest and most populated island in The Marianas. This tropical paradise offers beautiful white sand beaches with crystal clear water and pure, fresh air. Warmth is in the air and in the people you will meet. It is a throwback to a relaxed lifestyle coupled with modern hotels, incredible sights, adventurous activities and shopping. Garapan is the epicenter of activities with many restaurants, bars, and shopping options. Although only about 12 miles long and 5.5 miles wide, Saipan has a nearly 4,000 year history. The array of natural life encased in double rainbows, if you are lucky, makes The Marianas a magical destination. The indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian people welcome you to these islands with open arms.

Tinian

Home of the annual "Tinian Hot Pepper Festival," Tinian, a neighboring island just three miles south of Saipan, is easily accessible through a short hop on a plane. Stretches of secluded beaches await your footsteps. The crystal-clear water, colorful marine life, and pristine coral reefs surrounding the island offer excellent snorkeling, scuba diving, and fishing. Explore Tinian's rich historic sites. See pre-historic remains of ancient indigenous Chamorro culture, including the ruins of the House of Taga. World War II relics abound, including the Atomic Bomb Pits used to load the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. During WWII Tinian had the busiest airport in the world, and you can still drive those extensive runways today that played a pivotal role in ending the deadliest war known to mankind.

Rota

Nicknamed "The World's Friendliest Island," Rota is known for its friendly nature, sweet potatoes and coconut crabs. If not the local delicacies, Rota's people will soon charm you with their smiles and warm hospitality. A sense of family will soon overtake you. Dip your toes in the Swimming Hole or book a round of golf. The Wedding Cake Mountain and Twerksberry Beach are sights to behold, all accompanied by ceaseless songs of local birds. Rota will enchant all visitors with its wealth of natural and cultural beauty. A wide variety of diving sites feature wall dives, underwater wrecks, and coral formations. For those who want to spend time on land, you can visit the Bird Sanctuary, and fascinating historic sites like the As Nieves Latte Stone Quarry, where latte stones seemingly come alive.





PARADISE FOR EVERYONE



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The Marianas
| English | Spanish | Korean |

BEIJING

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

you've stepped back in time.

Please note that you must show your passport to be able to buy an entrance ticket. Forbidden City is closed for the entire day every Monday, except the Chinese national public holidays and the summer vacation from July 1 to Aug. 3. Another important thing to note is that you have to enter Forbidden City from its southern gate (linked to Tiananmen Square) and exit from its northern gate, which is officially set as a one-way south to north travel route. Thus, it makes sense to tour the Tiananmen Square first and then proceed to the Forbidden City.

ENJOY SUNSET VIEW

Once you exit the north gate of the Forbidden City cross the street from the underground tunnel and enter Jingshan Park. A 10-minute hike atop the hill will bring you to the pavilion which grants fantastic 360-degree views of the entire city. You'll be able to get the bird's view of the Forbidden City itself and be amazed by how much ground you covered. Time your visit to catch sundown reflecting off the gold-tiled roofs!

VISIT BEIHAI PARK

Beihai Park, literally meaning Northern Sea, is a public park and former imperial garden located in the northwestern part of the Forbidden City. First built in the 11th century, it is among the largest of all Chinese gardens and contains numerous historically important structures, palaces, and temples. Built to imitate renowned scenic spots and architecture from various regions of China, the structures and scenes in the Beihai Park are described as masterpieces of gardening technique that reflects the style, architectural skill and richness of traditional Chinese garden art.

TOUR TEMPLE OF HEAVEN

Built in 1420 for the Emperor to show respect to the gods and hold annual ceremonies of prayer to heaven for a good harvest, the Temple of Heaven is a beautiful piece of architecture, and an incredible look into the spirituality of China. The round shape is a symbol of heaven, and the main buildings are formed to replicate this shape perfectly. Full of gorgeous colors, this UNESCO site is located in the south of Beijing and is surely worth your time.

PERUSE THE HUTONG

If you want to step into time and get an insight into the Beijing of yesteryear (alas renovated), Hutong neighborhood and Nanluoguxiang

street are a good place to peruse. You'll enjoy the narrow (dusty) alleys with their ramshackle and gray-brick courtyard dwellings. The areas are also seeded with interesting art galleries, trendy shops and restaurants – just like in Tianzifang in Shanghai.

SHOP ON XIDAN STREET

If you care to shop around Xidan and Wangfujing streets – located along the Forbidden City on west and east sides, respectively – are filled with souvenirs shops, designer boutiques and shopping malls. There are tons of restaurants and street food stalls as well, so it might be a great place to enjoy lunch or dinner.

SAVOR PEKING DUCK

Visit to Beijing is kind of synonymous with eating Peking duck, and there are a lot of restaurants that serve the famous bird. Da Dong seems to be one of the most popular spots in town. It's worth noting that they have personnel of over 200 people in the kitchen which made us a bit wary of its quality. We opted for two of the smaller restaurants and Duck de Chine located within trendy complex of 1949 The Hidden City turned out to be our favorite of the two. To be honest none of them matched the quality of Lung King Heen in Hong Kong, but Duck de Chine came pretty close and the Peking duck was excellent.

PALAU

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

about 50 minutes flying at high speed. Once at the point, we anchored to a buoy in the shallows then suited up and rolled over and into the blue abyss below. As we reached the top of the vertical reef wall at about 10 meters, the visibility soared to more than 30 meters and we could easily see the white sand below at 30 meters. The gentle current pushed us northeast along the wall, and as we drifted, we were greeted by the tamest and biggest sea turtles I had ever seen. We were also joined by large schools of barracuda and white tip sharks, as well as giant coral sea fans on the wall starting at 18 meters. As the current picked up, our guide popped his surface marker and we slowly ascended to be picked up by our boat.

BLUE CORNER

This world-famous

dive site is next door to Clarence Wall and is where the now world-famous Palauan reef hook was invented to keep from getting blown away in strong currents. After splashing in from the eastern buoy and descending to the top of the wall, we all affixed our hooks to the reef and then clipped the other end to our BCDs to watch the show. As we shook slowly immobile in the heavy current we watched a who's who of patrolling pelagic swim by including Black Snappers, Big Eyed Jacks, barracuda, wrasses and triggerfish, as well as whitetip sharks. It was like being inside a giant aquarium with the fish coming to us completely unafraid and curious.

GERMAN CHANNEL

This historic site was created at the turn of the century by German companies in Palau who wanted a channel deep enough to navigate from the inner

island bay to the outer sea in large cargo ships, so they blasted a channel through the rock to make a navigable passage. The channel connects the inner lagoon to the open ocean. We splashed in on the southern side and drifted slowly along the wall to one of the fish cleaning stations where our guide had us descend to the white sand and wait for what seemed an eternity. Suddenly out of the abyss a giant manta slowly flew up and around us like an inner space stealth fighter before slowly soaring above our heads while being cleaned by the small cleaner fish who darted in and out of its gills and fins. As suddenly as it had appeared, it flew off and we slowly ascended back the boat and headed back to Koror.

Diver with Napoleon

INDIA

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

We loved the City Palace, but the most pleasant part of our stay there was taking a boat on Lake Pichola and going to Jagmandir Island. The weather was simply perfect and we enjoyed spending time on the island having a drink and relaxing.

We left Udaipur and went on to Pushkar, a holy city with a lake surrounded by numerous bathing ghats, in one of which Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were scattered. That day happened to be a Brahma day and some 50,000 people had come to bathe in the ghats that morning. We strolled around the market, which sells camel leather items. Pushkar is the site of a very large camel fair in November every year. I did not realize how significant a role camels play in that part of India; we saw some pulling marble blocks, transporting local people, etc.

We spent Dec. 31 in Pushkar and were very lucky to have a celebration at our hotel, as well as a wedding. The evening that ensued was unforgettable, in terms of dances, Hindi and Rajasthani musics, foods, etc.

The next day, we were on our way to Jaipur, Capital of Rajasthan, to meet up with our friends who had gone there early to go to Ranthambore National Park to see wild tigers (they did not see any). While we would have loved to see tigers in the wild, we did not feel comfortable with the low-to-the-ground vehicles used on the safaris and had decided to explore Udaipur and Pushkar instead.

We spent 3 days in Jaipur, where we enjoyed the beautiful City Palace, the impressive Amer Fort, the Hawa Mahal, the Jantar Mantar, the monkey temple, etc. So many historical sites to visit!



City Palace Jaipur

We spent a morning at Elefantastic Elephant Sanctuary, the only (of many) place I could find that did not allow elephant riding, or bathing (in winter). We had a wonderful time and went on a long walk with two elephants; we saw a fox and lots of monkeys on our walk. We finished the day with a wonderful cooking class by Chef Lokesh.

The next stop was Agra, in Uttar Pradesh state, a long awaited visit. On our way there, we visited Fatehpur Sikri, a beautifully preserved fort and Chand Baori, an impressive stairwell. We went to



Taj Mahal

see the Taj Mahal at sunrise and it was as breathtaking as we could have dreamt of. We spent the allotted three hours there and soaked in as much of the beauty of the site as we could. An equally impressive site to visit was the Tomb of I'timād-ud-Daulah on the banks of the Yamuna River. We loved visiting the Agra Fort as well.

After having driven most of the time through Rajasthan, we took the train from Agra back to Delhi. The train was wonderful and the kids played with fellow passengers. A meal and tea were served to all passengers. After less than two hours, we were back in Delhi. The next day, we spent our last day visiting the final sites we were interested in (World Heritage Site Qutab Minar, Lotus Temple, etc).

We flew back to Narita that evening with our eyes and hearts filled with the most wonderful memories.

One of our favorite things in Rajasthan was the sheer amount of fauna one can see. Everyday we saw lots of buffalos, cows, goats, peacocks, monkeys, pigs, sheep, etc. We also saw antelopes in the country. The kids loved it.

Finally, we were accompanied by the most wonderful guide, Hemender, throughout most of our trip. Needless to say, our adventure would have been nothing like it was, had it not been for his kindness, sense of humor, knowledge, love of children and dedication. We are most grateful.

We know that one day we will return to India.

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“While icebergs were the star of the trip, I discovered Newfoundland has SO MUCH more to offer than just big chunks of ice.”

Exploring Newfoundland with my Dad

Story and photos by
CORINNE KLEIN

My Dad has a bucket list to end all bucket lists. “See icebergs” was one of them, which is how a trip home to Calgary ended up with us on a 6-hour flight across Canada to St. John’s, Newfoundland.

As with most of my Dad’s well researched travel plans, we went at peak iceberg sighting time and were not at all disappointed. Icebergs are unicorn level magical while looking like they were placed in the ocean by aliens. While icebergs were the star of the trip, I discovered Newfoundland has SO MUCH more to offer than just big chunks of ice. Here are some of my favorite ex-

periences from my weeklong daughter/dad trip:



St. John’s

Most likely the place where you will fly in and out of Newfoundland and very much worth a wander around. We learned about rocks at The Johnston Geo Center (my Dad’s a geologist so there was no way we weren’t going there), ate a delicious

dinner at Clinched, had beers made from ICE-BERG WATER and listened to local music at the Quidi Vidi brewery. No matter where you go in St. John’s, you will be greeted with colorfully painted houses, known as named Jellybean row (which is misleading because it’s not a row -there are houses everywhere, and there are no jellybeans).

Lighthouses

Being an island, it should come as no surprise that Newfoundland is full of lighthouses. Built along the rugged coastline, they provide spectacular views and were a great place for spotting icebergs. I couldn’t choose just one lighthouse so here are my top three:

Cape Spear Lighthouse — short drive from St. John’s and where you can stand on the most eastern tip of North America. There are World War II artifacts, such as bunkers and canons, that are left over from when Cape Spear served as the counter-bombardment for St. John’s harbor.



Bonavista Lighthouse –

This wonderful lighthouse is open to the public and restored to look like it was in 1870. Most impressive were the parabolic mirrors which are made of polished silver and reflect the light from argand oil

lamps. There is an intricate pulley system that allows the reflectors to turn but needed to be reset every two hours throughout the night by the lighthouse keeper.

Ferryland Lighthouse – It’s a short hike to get out to this lighthouse and we were rewarded with sunny weather, beautiful views and icebergs all around. During the summer months you can order a homemade picnic complete with sandwiches, a blanket and mint lemonade.



The people

Canadians are known for their friendliness but Newfies take it to the next level. They are SO welcoming and nice. Every interaction we had was beyond pleasant and it felt like people had time to have a little chat and genuinely wanted to get to know you. Best of all, they loved sharing all sorts of fun tidbits about Newfoundland. Our Airbnb host made us an amazing breakfast where we first learned what a touton was (and how to properly pronounce it- ‘tow-tonne’). It’s delicious deep-fried bread that will leave you full and happy for the day. I learned about “mummers” from a local artist in Twillingate that had mannequins of them displayed





outside his shop. Mummers used to come out at Christmas time and were locals who would dress up, covering their faces, and go from house to house singing. People would invite them in, offer them a drink, and after a lot of singing try and guess who they were. On one of our boat tours, I learned

what the ceremony of being “screeched in” entails. A short recitation, kissing a cod, and taking a shot of “screech rum” (cheap and 40% alcohol) will earn you a screech certificate at any bar. Wondering how throat burning moonshine rum ended up in Newfoundland? Back in the day, Newfoundland used to sell their worst cod to Jamaica which in turn would sell them their worst rum.

Icebergs

The star of the trip! Ten -thousand-year-old blocks of ice the size of buildings that took three years to get to where you are now staring at them in awe is worth going to Newfoundland in itself. Our first boat tour to get an up-close look at the icebergs had my mouth permanently wide open and gaping. I was completely blown away. They are quite a sight to see from the shore but up close these beautiful towering blocks of ice are absolutely breathtaking. Most of the icebergs floating past Newfoundland and Labrador hail from Western Greenland where they have broken off of glaciers and get carried down the coast on ocean currents and ultimately end up melting. It's extremely hard to predict exactly where icebergs will float because there are so many variables (wind, ocean currents and temperature, number of bergs, amount of sea ice and many more). We ran into a local who used to work on the software used to predict iceberg movement and he said they still haven't figured it out.

Nature and hiking

With 13,000 acres of protected land and only 1.4 people per square km, Newfoundland and Labrador have plenty of uncrowded wilderness to explore. We visited sea caves at Dungeon Provincial Park, saw a fin whale off the coast of Bonavista, hiked the striking and dramatic 5 km coastal Skerwink trail, and had 100's of Atlantic puffin's fly over us at the Witless Bay Islands Park Reserve. It was my first time seeing a puffin and I had no idea they were so small, standing tall at only 18cm, making them one of the smallest out of the four puffin species. I also had no idea how terrible they were at flying. We saw multiple less-than graceful landings while they were attempting to land on the grassy slopes where they make their burrows for the breeding season.



SEE NEWFOUNDLAND ON PAGE 35 ►



Responsible tourism

By Corinne Klein

Exploring a foreign country is one of the most exhilarating and eye-opening experiences you can have. People are traveling more than ever before, and today the tourism industry provides millions of jobs worldwide and even more in revenue. Unfortunately, tourism can also lead to environmental damage, commercialization of culture, and cultural clashes when tourists refuse to follow rules or behave inappropriately. I am by no means a perfect tourist but the more I see people “doing it for the ‘gram’” with a general lack of awareness, and often times with total disrespect, has made me strive to be a more thoughtful traveler.

1. Book local

Booking guides, tours, and accommodation run by local organizations means your money is going straight back into the community. It usually takes a bit more research but booking tours and hotels run by locals will give you a richer experience of the country. Usually the cheapest and easiest way to do something will not be in support of anything local.

2. Shop and eat local

Buy from local artisans, eat at mom-and-pop restaurants, and drink at the local bars. The worst food poisoning I ever got was at a waterfront restaurant that was full of tourists in Cay Caulker, Belize. After recovering I realized all the Belizeans were eating at places 2-3 blocks away from the water where the food was delicious and about three times cheaper.

3. Seek out cultural experiences

Take a cooking class, participate in a homestay, or visit a local festival. Airbnb Experiences is a great way to find these in any city. We did the Namba Night Walking Tour in Osaka and our local guide, Yuji, spent two hours showing us off-the-beaten path places to eat. Some spots were tucked away down tiny alleyways that we would have never found on our own. He even brought us to a building where the whole second floor was comprised of mini theme bars, much like those you find at Golden Gai in Shinjuku.

4. Give back to the community

Seeing beaches full of plastic while visiting Bali? Participate in a beach clean-up! Always wanted to be a marine biologist? Sign up for a scientific expedition! Booking tours that help non-profits or contribute to scientific research are a great way to use your dollars for good. Many environmental organizations have trips allowing you to spend a day or more helping scientists collect data. You get to learn something new and give back to the community, all while having a unique experience.

5. Opt to pay for carbon off-setting

Many airlines allow you to pay to off-set the carbon impact you will be making by taking a plane ride. While this isn't ideal, it does help and the money is donated to environmental organizations. When you land, think about taking public transportation, renting bikes, or exploring places on foot. You can also skip flying all together and instead of an international trip, explore places that are closer to home.

6. Reduce plastic waste

Anything you can do to cut down on plastic, while traveling and in your day to day life, is helpful. Type “zero waste products” into google and you'll find a plethora of stainless-steel straws, bamboo cutlery and more water bottle/coffee mug options that you know what to do with (personally I love Hydro Flask and mine goes with me everywhere).

7. Research customs, laws, etiquette

Every country has different ideas of what constitutes appropriate dress and body language. One action or clothing item may be perfectly acceptable in your own coun-

try, but completely disrespectful in another. Researching a country beforehand and knowing what is and isn't appropriate will show respect to that country's traditions and people.

8. Follow local customs and laws

Does the sign say “No pictures”? Don't take any pictures! Is it inappropriate to do yoga poses while at a Buddhist temple? Probably! If you're trying to sneak a picture while posing, why not do the respectful thing and just skip it all together. Always remember that you are in someone else's home and act accordingly.

9. Learn basic greetings and phrases

Simple things like “hello” and “thank you” will bring smiles to anyone who can see that you're trying and took some time to learn a bit about their country.

10. Avoid wildlife encounters

As a general rule, if a wildlife encounter advertises touching animals you normally wouldn't be allowed to and if you are handing someone money to do it, you should avoid it. I think this is the hardest one for people to avoid. We deeply want to connect with animals and nature. The draw to visit any place that will give us this interaction, be it sanctuaries, animal cafes, or others, is extremely tempting. Unfortunately, there is a sinister side to wildlife tourism where animals are often drugged or chained, with many being psychologically and physically harmed. Sadly, even places claiming to be sanctuaries that allow you to interact with the animals are usually doing more harm than good. Do as much research as possible and speak up or share your experiences if you see animals being mistreated or being really well cared for.

11. Avoid buying certain souvenirs

Your best bet is to steer clear of all animal products, including shells (hermit crabs will thank you). Animals should be left in the wild and shells should be left in the ocean. Why not send a postcard instead! It's thoughtful and you can find them almost anywhere. There is even an app called TouchNote that allows you to use your own pictures and sends them off for you.

12. Use reef-safe sunscreen

Beach vacations are awesome. Protecting coral reefs while on your beach vacation is extra awesome. The two ingredients found in most sunscreens are oxybenzone and butylparaben, both of which have been shown to cause harm to corals leading to coral bleaching and disruption to their reproduction. Hawaii and Palau have completely banned sunscreen that isn't reef-safe. When buying sunscreen, make sure it is zinc-based which is naturally occurring in the ocean.

13. Ask before taking a person's picture

Intrigued by a person's dress, mannerisms, or look and want to snap a picture? Ask nicely. Even better, if you speak the same language, introduce yourself first and get to know that person a bit better before asking. If you don't speak the same language and someone indicates no with hand gestures or looks uncomfortable, don't take the picture.

14. Be mindful about what you post

Social media is a fantastic way to share your travel with other people. It allows people to get a glimpse into a different area of the world that may be new to them. That being said, if you wouldn't post something from your home, don't post it from someone else's country. That especially applies to minors that are not part of your family. If you haven't gotten explicit permission from their parents to post their faces on your social media platform, don't do it.

“For such a small island, Iejima is full of beautiful places, history, agriculture and kind people.”



A weekend on Iejima

Story and photos by
ALLIE WHALEN

We made a day trip to Iejima and were instantly in love. The ferry ride from the Okinawa main island was an easy 30 minutes, and once you're on the island, it is like a breath of fresh air (literally.) Iejima one of the most beautiful tropical islands in the Ryukyu Islands chain. We knew before we left that day from Iejima, we wanted to go back and spend more time exploring the things we didn't get to on that day trip.

About a week before our trip (so last minute!), we booked a house on Airbnb. After we checked in, we immediately started exploring. Our first stop was at Family Mart (the island has two and a grocery store for all your needs) to grab dinner. We had planned on hiking up Mt. Gusuku before sunset to have a picnic dinner

and watch the sunset

over the East China Sea.

It did not disappoint!

The hike was all stairs but don't let that scare you. Our oldest two (ages 9 and 7) did it without a problem.

My youngest (3) got a piggyback ride, but he

still talks about wanting to hike it again. It was an amazing workout and we stayed at the top enjoying the view of the whole island. The 360-degree view was unreal.

On Saturday morning after a delicious Family Mart breakfast (really, the Family Mart there had delicious breakfast sandwiches), we did a little geocaching, which took us to the Ahasha Cave and then the Deer Fossil Digging Site. After, we all went down to GI Beach to spend a lazy afternoon playing in the water. GI Beach is the most beautiful

JAPAN



beach we've been to around Okinawa so far. We even saw sea turtles swimming by while we were standing on the beach. We grabbed

dinner at Ace Burger,

where we all got something different from the menu, and it was all amazing. It was a full day, but it didn't feel overwhelming because the island

has such a slow pace to it.

The next two days we explored places on the island that we hadn't seen yet - the old WWII airstrip, the bombed out Public Pawnshop Ruins (also the only surviving building after WWII), the hibiscus farm, the sweets shop where they use locally grown peanuts and sugar cane to make the most amazing peanut brittle, a war memorial, the fresh water wajee, and fields upon fields of tobacco leaf. And, of course, another trip to the beach.

For such a small island, Iejima is full of beautiful places, history, agriculture and kind people. You can easily bike around the island if you choose to (highly recommended!). There are plenty of restaurants and places to get groceries and other supplies. We all want to go back again and are scheming up ways we can move there. The ferry prices are also reasonable for passengers and cars.

So, if you've got a free day or weekend, head on up to Nago, hop on the ferry to IE Island and enjoy your time on a pristine island that will make you feel like you've stepped back in time!

IE ISLAND



MY PARADISE



Deer Fossil Digging Site



The ruins of the Public Pawnshop



Ahasha Cave

Okinawa dragon boat races

Story and photo by
ALLIE WHALEN

The dragon boat races (or haarii) are an age-old tradition in Okinawa. As with many things on this island, it finds its connection to the sea. Every spring, they kick off during Golden Week, which begins April 29 and ends in early May. (This is another fun cultural topic – it is the longest holiday in Japan and is a collection of four holidays in one week.) The races continue through the summer on the weekends, so if you haven't caught one yet you still have a chance!

Dragon boat races in Okinawa are always a family and kid-friendly event. Whole communities come out to support their family and friends and people set up tents to hang out for the whole day of racing. There is also more diversity in the teams than I realized there would be. There are some teams made up of just men and some teams

that race just to have a good time. There are even teams made up of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine and military-affiliated people. So whichever race you go to watch, you are guaranteed to see a wide variety of racing styles!

Some of my friends were on a team together and it was great to go and show my support. Since I was new to this sport, I asked my friend lots of questions! Christine isn't new when it comes to team sports, so I was intrigued to know why this was the sport she chose while in Okinawa. She loves a good challenge and she said that was one of the main reasons for choosing dragon boat racing. She loved that it was different than any other sport she's ever participated in. Just like any team sport, camaraderie plays a vital role,

too. Christine said her group is "a team of driven and strong women who love and support each other, not only on the boat but also in life." The team, Yasha Dragons, is one of the only all-American and all-female teams! Like many sports teams, there are different positions on the boat. There are usually about 11 or 12 crew members, including the oarsmen (paddlers), helmsman, and drummer. And there is never a lack of spectators cheering the teams on. Whichever race you go to you are sure to have a different experience each time!

And I can't leave out that all the kids at the dragon boat races have a blast! There is always an area for kids to run around and play and sometimes there is a beach for them to play on. What kid doesn't love a day on the beach?! If you're going to check out a dragon boat race on Okinawa make sure you pack some towels, toys, sunblock, snacks, and plenty of water. (Maybe some life jackets, too, if your kids love the water.) And the races are so much fun to photograph, so come prepared for some bright and vibrant pictures!

We have enjoyed many new experiences living in Okinawa and dragon boat racing was definitely a fun one! I'm so glad we got to experience a traditional part of the Okinawan culture. It was incredible watching the races and imagining the Okinawans crossing the seas in their small boats in search of the fresh catch of the day.

If you travel to Okinawa during the summer months, ask around for a dragon boat schedule or look it up on Facebook. The Yasha Dragons have a Facebook page with all the updates and I know they would love your support! Enjoy your time experiencing an Okinawan tradition!



NEWFOUNDLAND

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

Wine and beer made from icebergs

We didn't know that our iceberg tour getting canceled would be a blessing in disguise and lead us straight to the delightful Auk Island Winery. Shockingly yes, there is a winery in a place that has snow 70% of the year and definitely doesn't grow grapes. Not that they let that stop them. Auk Island Winery uses iceberg water adding local berries, dandelions, and even a splash of rum to make a combination of delicious and unique tasting wines. Berries I had never heard of like the bakeapple berry, a yellow/orange raspberry-looking thing that grows in the arctic tundra and tastes like honey and apricot. The winery is located in an old high school and produces 22,000 cases of wine every year. For five dollars, we got to tour the facility and sample five of the many hilariously named wines like "Moose Joose",



"Krooked Cod", and "Funky Puffin." You better believe I maxed out my baggage weight getting as many bottles as I could back to Japan.

Scuba diving

I couldn't visit a place surrounded by water and not attempt to see what the underwater world was like. Like with everything else, Newfoundland did not disappoint. There are flooded mines, shipwrecks, old whale bone graveyards, and if you're brave enough, you can see what

an iceberg looks like underwater. I could have easily spent the entire week diving (and may or may not be planning another trip back to do just that) but opted to do a local shore dive at Main Harbor just outside St. John's. Scuba diving in Newfoundland is not for the faint-hearted and I think I may have regretted my decision for a minute when my face first hit 35-degree F (2-degree C) water. If you visit in the summer, water temperatures are more manageable hovering around 15-16-degree C.

Once I pushed past the crushing cold and was able to fully take in my surroundings, I was blown away. The water was crystal clear, the seabed covered with huge anemones and massive purple sea stars, and all around me comb jellies shimmered like the rainbow. We spotted lobsters, a large wolf eel (picture the ugliest fish you've ever seen and put the tail of an eel on it), and a fish they call the Mick Jagger because of its massive lips. I couldn't feel my face or hands after the dive, but thankfully hot coffee and Tim Horton's donuts were waiting at the surface.

In summary, go to Newfoundland. I dare you to be disappointed.

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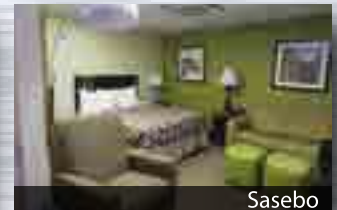
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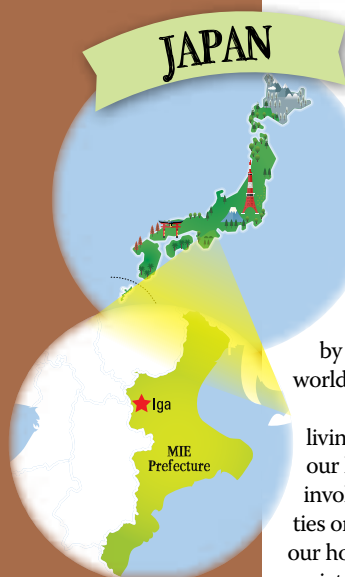


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“I take great comfort in the fact that clay pot cooking will forever keep us connected to Japan.”



The world of Japanese clay pot cooking

Story and photos by
KARA BAKER



Donabe

Classic and Modern Japanese Clay Pot Cooking can be purchased in English from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Nagatani-en donabe, Iga-yaki pottery, ingredients, and other specialty Japanese products can be purchased online from toirokitchen.com.

Recipes and inspiration for donabe Cooking can be found on Naoko Takei Moore's Instagram account [mrsdonabe](https://www.instagram.com/mrsdonabe).



Weeks after finding out our next assignment would be Camp Zama, Japan, and shortly before our arrival in the Land of the Rising Sun, I happened upon a cookbook co-authored by Naoko Takei Moore and Kyle Connaughton. “Donabe: Classic and Modern Clay Pot Cooking” is expertly written and filled with far more than mouth-watering recipes. Chapters about its authors, the history of clay pot cooking, and its role in modern cuisine, all accompanied by stunning photography, beckoned me into the world of Japanese donabe.

Soon, we were settled and living a busy life on-base, our kids in school and often involved in sports and activities on weekends. I welcomed any way to connect to our host nation, its rich traditions and modern-day society. Donabe cooking did just that, forcing me into Japanese grocery and specialty stores using what little of the language I knew, and gathering my family around a little gas burner as I raised the lid of the donabe, revealing recipe after recipe from my new favorite cookbook.

If you aren't familiar with the Japanese clay pot known as donabe, its origins date back over 1,000 years. Today, nabe (for short) are often used to prepare and serve hotpot meals tabletop for quick and simple weeknight dishes, more elaborate dinner parties, at restaurants, or even camping and on-the-go. It is this ability to prepare, cook, and serve my family and guests, I've found, that makes each nabe meal almost magical. Simple ingredients transform, steam billowing from the boiling pot like a magician's

smoke, as I serve something that nourishes not just our bodies, but our souls.

Moore describes this phenomenon as nabe o kakomu, or “surrounding a pot.”

“This expression evokes how sharing a hot pot meal at the same table creates an intimate communal experience,” she explains. “It's the communal dining experience that donabe creates, and it teaches the concept of ichigo-ichie — every moment is a once-in-a-lifetime treasure.”

Just two months into our tour in Japan, I found myself convincing my family to take a road trip to Iga in Mie Prefecture, home of the most coveted nabe in Japan. Millions of years ago, the land that would become Iga was located underneath Lake Biwa, and as a result, its prehistoric clay is rich and porous, yet strong. It has extremely high heat resistance as well as retention, and all these features combined make this particular clay the perfect material for donabe.

Founded in 1832, the most famous manufacturer of Iga-yaki, or Iga-style donabe is Nagatani-en. The company has been run by the same family for eight generations and was designated a Tangible Cultural Property by the Japanese government. I slowly

MY PARADISE

climbed the stairs aside the 16-tiered kiln in awe, and peeked into windows where craftsmen worked, I realized, as they'd done for over a century before. I took in everything, while my feet padded along the very ground that makes Iga-made nabe so very special. My husband and I enjoyed tea with the current chairman's son, while our children explored the garden surrounding the family's 200-year-old home. After, we shopped their pottery, which epitomizes ideal Japanese aesthetics — simple and rustic, yet somehow perfectly refined.

Though Iga is certainly worth a visit—it is also the birthplace of Basho Matsuo, Japan's most famous haiku poet, and the center of all things ninja—you can also shop Nagatani-en's retail store Iga-Mono in Ebisu, Tokyo. Not far from the New Sanno Hotel, it's run by the ninth generation of the Nagatani-en family. We have visited a number of times and, surrounded by the pottery and esthetic of Iga-mono, I'm always transported back to the little town in Mie Prefecture famous for its clay and craftsmanship.

Sadly, as we are about to PCS, our most recent visit will be our last. Heart-broken over having to say goodbye to the country that has truly become our home over the past three years, I take great comfort in the fact that clay pot cooking will forever keep us connected to Japan. Therefore, my paradise, rather than any one destination, is now anywhere a donabe sits warming atop a flame, with friends and family gathered around, celebrating Japanese cooking and culture.



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Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.

“Our goal was to backpack through the entirety of the trip bringing only the essentials, plus my camera gear: body, lens, tripod and extra batteries, all the while enjoying our time left in Japan ...”

Backpacking adventure through gorges, alpes in Japan

Story and photos by
JAMES-PAUL JACOB

Taking inspiration from YouTube travel adventures, our sights were set on traversing Toyama and experience the beauties within. Our goal was to backpack through the entirety of the trip bringing only the essentials, plus my camera gear: body, lens, tripod and extra batteries, all the while enjoying our time left in Japan. We needed just enough room to bring back some omiyage for our dear friends watching our pet cat!

The most well known attraction, the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route, was our ultimate destination. However, we decided to take a quick detour to Unazuki Onsen Town for some much needed R&R. There are several ryokans nestled here but there are also hostels. One in particular was above a pizza parlor, the owner of both, he introduced us to a new, but, surprisingly delicious combination: whitefish, onions and corn personal pizza. Strange? Yes. But, still not as strange as Hawaiian pizza!

What is most notable in this area is the Kurobe Gorge Railway, a sightseeing train originally with the purpose of aiding the construction of the Kurobe Dam. Today, it runs along a 20km route between Unazuki and Keyakidaira stations through several bridges and tunnels. In between, there are stops where you can get off and explore such as the “man-eating cave.” The most popular time to go is in autumn when the foliage accentuates the red

bridges and the train itself!

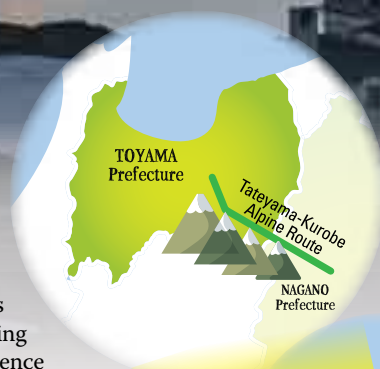
There are two car options: an enclosed and comfortably seated one where you can enjoy the route in a safe environment. The other option is an open concept car with a roof but open to the elements; if you choose this option, bring appropriate clothing as rain is common and it gets fairly chilly in the tunnels. Either way, you get to see panoramic views of this amazingly pristine gorge from mid April through November!

At Tateyama Station, you can buy a pass that will cover all the transportation expenses along the Alpine Route one way. We

chose to go in the direction of going

from Tateyama Station towards Nagano Station. Before starting our ascent through the Alpine route, we took a bus towards Shōmyō (350m) and Hannoki (497m) Falls, the two tallest waterfalls in Japan. We hiked about 30 minutes from where the bus dropped us off. Words cannot come close to describe how majestic these two were side by side. As we walked closer and closer to these enormous entities, we felt no more than specs in the grandness of it all. It was truly a memorable experience.

Finally starting our ascent, we took a cable car followed by a bus towards Murodo where we would stay at one of the many accommodations located there. Along the way, you can see many attractions like a birds-eye view of the waterfalls as well as the snow corridor: a road flanked with up to 20-meter snow walls best seen in April after months



MY PARADISE

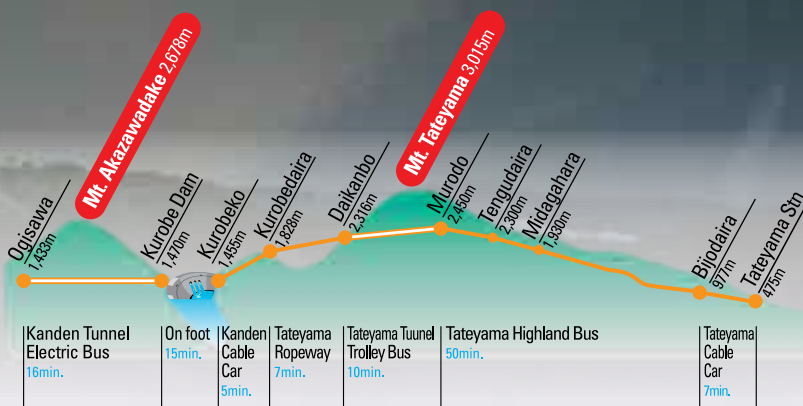




of heavy snowfall. We missed it, of course, but it didn't matter. We reached our checkpoint and bathed in the beauty of the Tateyama mountain range!

Japan's rainy season has definitely given us some blues but upon our arrival at Murodo, our spirits immediately lifted. It was surreal seeing human settlements here and beyond it, a rolling sea of clouds. Literally the highest point along the Alpine Route, Murodo stands at about 2,450 meters above sea level. However, there are hiking trails up the mountain range which go above 3,000 meters.

Our greatest feat to this date was climbing Mt. Tateyama: a grueling 3-hour climb from our base camp towards the summit. After several sketchy snowy patches and steep rocky precipices with loose gravel, we reached the top! What awaited us was a welcoming hut where we bought snacks to replenish our energies for the hike down. We even bought hiking sticks to help support our descent! Admittedly, it was more of a keepsake and an impulse buy. Those who reach the top can be blessed by a Shaman via a traditional Japanese prayer as well as being given some sake! How about that on the way down? All jokes aside, it is a very steep



descent and hikers need to be equipped with appropriate footwear and clothing.

My wife and I certainly have come a long way from when we first moved to Japan. We were always afraid of the language

is clutch!

I implore you to explore what's right under your nose in this amazing country. We might even see each other during your travels!

More on the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route:
<https://youtu.be/WXSBg5Xfe6U>



“Both these sports are super fun and addicting, but it is rare to find a place where both surfing and snowboarding are possible ... Well, Japan just happens to be such a place!”

Riding the waves and hitting the slopes in Japan

Story and photos by
JAMES O'LEARY



The military can be a great travel agency. My family has been stationed overseas for the last 9 years, first to Hawaii, then Germany, and now, Japan. In Hawaii, I learned how to surf. I took up snowboarding in the Alps. Both these sports are super fun and addicting, but it is rare to find a place where both surfing and snowboarding are possible. That would require a place

with snowy mountains and a beach with waves close to one another. Well, Japan just happens to be such a place! In fact, surfing and snowboarding in Japan is some of the best in the world!

Northwest of Tokyo, snow abounds. Japan's snow is fresh, soft and powdery, giving a floaty feeling. Also known as "Japow," it is not uncommon for a whole meter to accumulate overnight, making it very interesting on the slopes. Skis often sink deep into the snow, causing skiers to be stuck. However, snowboards have a higher surface area, keeping them afloat. For a snowboarder, especially one like me who specializes in freeriding, Japow is the best kind of snow. Freeriding is snowboarding ungroomed slopes, making use of natural terrain features.

Freeriding is often really dangerous as snow-





MY PARADISE

boarders must hike outside of ski resort bounds, where there is no ski patrol and slopes are not checked for avalanche danger. In Japan, however, there is the possibility to enjoy freeriding inside the bounds of ski resorts. Not only is it safer, but it is also easier because a long hike is unnecessary. Japan's freeriding has been featured on the Freeride World Tour at Hakuba, and in qualifying events at Lotte Arai, Niigata.

My favorite place to snowboard is Tanigawadake Tenjindaira in Gunma. It is a very uncrowded ski resort, so much so that I'm surprised they even stay in business. It also has amazing Japow, and the ski resort owners make no effort to groom it into hard pack for skiers, keeping it nice and powdery for freeride snowboarding. The lack of crowds and the abundance of Japow simulates an untouched, pristine, natural alpine environment, though it is in fact within a ski resort, where all slopes are inspected daily for avalanche danger and treacherous slopes are closed off. My paradise is snowboarding deep, untouched Japow, without avalanche danger.

Snowboarding in Japan is not possible year-round. However, in the summer and fall, the water around Japan is warm enough to surf. On any given day, it is usually possible for me to either have an amazing surf session, or day on the mountain. The snow season at my favorite mountain starts in

December, and great Japow falls well into April. Surfing is usually best from May to November. For starters, the water is warm enough then, but it is also when offshore typhoons bring big waves.

(Note: Typhoons that actually hit Japan aren't just destructive, they also bring strong onshore winds which make the waves too choppy).

To Tokyo's northeast, there are numerous beaches, many of which have great surf breaks. For example, the first-ever surfing event in the Olympics will be held next year at Shidashita Beach in Chiba. Chiba is close to Tokyo, so even though the water is warmer, it is more crowded. That is why I prefer to surf further to the northeast in Ibaraki. The water temperature in Ibaraki from May to November fluctuates from the low 60s to the mid 70s. Except in the warmest weeks of August, a 2/3 mm wetsuit is required, and for some of the season, a 4/3 mm is necessary. Wetsuits have greatly improved recently, and I do not notice much of a difference when paddling my surfboard with my 4/3 mm wetsuit or without one.

Because of the colder water temperatures where I surf, my family and I are sometimes the only people in the water. Even on good typhoon days in the height of summer, there are only around 10 other people. In a tropical place like Hawaii, there can be up to a hundred people battling for a single wave. In Ibaraki, I can get unlimited waves all to myself. Though Japan's waves may be significantly smaller than those of Hawaii's North Shore, I am not a professional, only surfing waves less than 10 feet anyway. My paradise is surfing 5-foot waves in Ibaraki at a place shared only with my family and a couple of friendly Japanese surfers. An offshore typhoon bringing in 8-foot waves every once in a while? An added bonus.

Where exactly is Tanigawadake Tenjindaira (Japow mountain)? What about the place I surf in Ibaraki? Well, Tanigawadake Ropeway is located in Gunma Prefecture, a mere 2-hour drive from Yokota Air Base, and my surf spot is near Aqua-World Oarai, Ibaraki, also 2 hours away. My family enjoys snow sports and surfing almost as much as I do, and we have a snow or surf day almost every weekend. That is what really makes my paradise awesome, experiencing it with my family.





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“Like the American West, it was a wilderness rich in natural resources and unique possibilities, and sparsely populated by a native people who would be marginalized as progress advanced. Though tamed now, elements of that old Hokkaido have been preserved and can be seen if you know where to go.”

Historic Hokkaido Adventure

Story and photos by
DAVID KRIGBAUM



ABASHIRI

Above & below: Abashiri Prison House

Hunting history in a new place is my idea of paradise. The thrill of seeing something amazing for the first time and going a long way to do so is exciting. So, in the dead of winter, my wife and I went to Hokkaido for a week of non-stop discovery, crossing the island and its national park-like interior to learn about how the north was won.

Hokkaido was Japan's last domestic frontier. Previously known as Ezo, Japan claimed the island for centuries but it wasn't until the early 1870s that pioneers, willing and unwilling, were sent northward to settle. Like the American West, it was a wilderness rich in natural resources and unique possibilities, and sparsely populated by a native people who would be marginalized as progress advanced. Though tamed now, elements of that old Hokkaido have been preserved and can be seen if you know where to go.



north as part of a scheme to cheaply and quickly build Hokkaido's highways and infrastructure with an expendable workforce. When it was de-commissioned the old prison became an open-air museum.

Abashiri Prison Museum

On Hokkaido's northern coast is a once remote town that was home to one of the nation's most dreaded prisons, Abashiri. This prison's population was imported



OTARU

Otaru Canal Right: Otaru Romankan





KAITAKU NO MURA

Above: Oishi Sweets Shop Right: Yamamoto Barbershop

Beyond its foreboding red brick gate is the functional walled village that was Abashiri Prison. As an isolated prison in an inhospitable country, Abashiri was entirely self-sufficient, able to be cut off from the outside world almost indefinitely. It has a farm complex, workshops for metal working, storehouses, a prayer hall, bathhouse and living quarters for guards and their families. All of these facilities, most of which are original with a few reproductions to fill in gaps, are present and all spaces furnished and equipped with prisoner and guard mannequins giving Abashiri a “live” feeling that illustrated what it was like not so long ago.

The centerpiece of this village is the radial five-wing prison house built in 1912. Its rows upon rows of gloomy cells lining long, narrow halls illuminated by sky lights gave an impression of oppressive orderliness.

Otaru

Quiet today, Otaru once played an important role in the development of Hokkaido. At its peak in the early 20th century, this was the Wall Street of the North. Its former prosperity still shows in the rows of old warehouses standing shoulder to shoulder on the canal, the banks clustered in city blocks and a tight row of Victorian businesses on Sakaimachi that are still illuminated by gas lamp-style street lights which when the sun goes down gives the streets a Dickensian Christmas atmosphere.

Otaru itself is its own biggest attraction thanks to this heavy concentration of late 19th and early 20th century architecture. It's easy to imagine it as it was a century ago when there were more sleds on the streets than cars. After arriving, we found more museums than we could handle in 24 hours and had to decide what to see; though we put that off until after a romantic canal walk.

Two must-see museums are the Otaru Canal Museum to learn about Otaru's development and the Otaru City Museum, which is more of a train museum than a city one.

Its centerpiece is an American locomotive from the 1880s.



MY PARADISE

For a night out, we visited the Otaru Beer Hall to imbibe locally-brewed German beer that's the best I've had outside of Germany. The exterior is an old warehouse but inside is pure Munich beer hall with everything except lederhosen.

Kaitaku no Mura

Hidden in the trees just outside Sapporo is a frontier town surrounded by farms and a fishing village. These 52 buildings are not a functioning town but rather an architectural open-air museum telling the story of Hokkaido's pioneering past: Kaitaku no Mura, the Historic Village of Hokkaido.

When Japan was developing the island they brought in American advisors whose advice

turned Hokkaido into a Japanese American Midwest complete with dairy farming, raising cattle for beef and brewing beer – industries that were almost non-existent anywhere else in Japan. They also came armed with plans for American architecture that could withstand the brutal winters far better than most Japanese designs.

Kaitaku no Mura is the physical remains of this Americanized Hokkaido. Laid out along a broad tree-lined boulevard are government offices and housing ripped straight from Ohio and Illinois along with hybridized Japanese personal businesses, homes and an inn with farms just beyond the town's edge. The variety of buildings also makes it feel like an actual town that's always been here, if only reduced in scale.

As pretty as these exteriors are, what makes Kaitaku no Mura come alive is inside every building. Homes and shops are furnished with period furniture, equipment and small items so that it feels as though the owner will return any minute or that the shop clerk will be with you shortly.

Sapporo

Sapporo is a modern city but has a few historic highlights from its pioneering days, the Sapporo Beer Museum, Akarenga government building, Hoheikan and, Japan's most disappointing tourist attraction, the Sapporo Tokeidai (Clock Tower).

Since the Sapporo Beer Museum is a corporation's museum, I expected the visit to the old red brick brewery to be a boozy exercise in brand communication, but was pleasantly surprised to learn a lot about the early history of Hokkaido as the beer, originally a government enterprise, was part of the island's development. The museum can be toured for free, but the 500 yen premium guided tour is the only way to go because it comes with a glass of the original 1876 recipe lager, which is not sold anywhere and only served on this tour. Yes, you can get drunk on history here!

The Tokeidai is a victim of expectation and lack of context. It may be dwarfed by surrounding skyscrapers and its peaceful atmosphere assaulted

SEE HOKKAIDO ON PAGE 48 ►

HOKKAIDO

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

by the constant sound of traffic, but the little clock tower hall is an artistic structure that still serves the former frontier community that grew up around it. With its lacy trim and colorful red and white late Meiji era (1868-1912) paint, it's a very striking hall amid drab mountains of modern steel and glass.

Like most Hokkaido government buildings of its era, the clock tower hall an American design and could be any New England church, chapel or barn, which makes it one-of-a-kind in Japan. The Kaitakushi (Hokkaido Development Office) red Pole Star patriotically adorns every corner and like in the other former government-funded enterprises is a consistent motif.

The Akarenga (Red Brick) Government Office Building looks like a luxurious mansion set in an evergreen park near Sapporo Station. Red bricks, green dome and white snow, it's at its visual best in winter. Inside is a collection of free mini-museums, each room dedicated to a different aspect of Hokkaido history and ongoing issues.

Hoheikan is an elegant baby blue hotel built in 1881 for dignitaries and visiting high-level government employees; it was finished none too soon as its first visitor would be Emperor Meiji on his first and only visit to Sapporo. I don't believe he found it disagreeable. No expense was spared in its construction and though it may not have wowed in New York or London, it would have impressed in the American West. Artifacts from imperial visits, such as the bowl used to wash both Emperor Meiji and Taisho's own dragon countenances, are on display.

Asahikawa

Hokkaido's second biggest city was a military town, home of the Imperial Japanese Army's 7th Division. The Hokuchin, as they were called, fought in some of the Russo-Japanese War's bloodiest battles and during World War II detachments fought at Nomonhan, Guadalcanal and Attu. The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Hokuchin

ASAHIKAWA

Above & right: Ainu Museum

Kinenkan follows their story from the first soldier-farmers that pioneered Hokkaido to the end of World War II and today's JGSDF.

The museum displays 2,500 artifacts which, more than remembering just the wars and battles, covers their complete history including peacetime activities and unit evolution over time. It doesn't come across as glorifying war but remembering generations of Hokkaido's soldiers and their accomplishments. For military buffs this is probably the most complete collection of photographable Japanese militaria you will ever see.

As Hokkaido developed, the native Ainu people were constantly forced to change and adopt Japanese culture. Fearing that their culture would be lost, the Kawamura Kaneto Ainu Museum was established. It's a place that focuses less on history and more on sharing the traditional Ainu way of life through artifacts, like clothing, tools and art which makes the museum visually engaging and memorable. There's an inborn artistry in the culture, the clothing is eye-catchingly colorful and ornate and they seem to carve little designs in almost any wooden items they used.



Hokuchin Museum

More than snow

Thoughts of Hokkaido and Sapporo may conjure up snow sculptures and freezing temperatures, there is much more to experience in Japan's final frontier. Easily accessible from the mainland and Okinawa, it is a cool escape for a different landscape and historical perspective of Japan.

SAPPORO

Left: Sapporo Beer Museum
Right top: Sapporo Clock Tower Right bottom: Hoheikan





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“A trip to Seoul, therefore, is kind of like coming home as well as going somewhere completely new – and completely worth doing.”



Gwangjang Market



Hanbok

Want to get out and see the big city? You might not notice it if you're just passing through, but Seoul is constantly on the move. If it had a middle name, it'd be "change." It's as old as the early Roman Empire, yet as modern as Silicon Valley. This is what you get when you've been constantly reinventing the wheel over the past 2,000 years as a result of creativity and conflict from forces home-grown and external.

Yet no one could have predicted postwar Seoul's shift into a powerhouse of global pop culture, trendy new foods the folks are talking about back home, and very likely the inner workings of your cell phone. A trip to Seoul, therefore, is kind of like coming home as well as going somewhere completely new – and completely

worth doing.

Figuring out where to start comes down to individual taste, but many travelers begin with a pilgrimage to Seoul's ancient royal palaces – Gyeongbokgung is the oldest and largest, dating back to 1394, while Changdeokgung has the most UNESCO cred (don't leave without checking out the Secret Garden). Close by, Insa-dong's old-world art streets offer crafts and coffee houses, while a trip



to Bukchon Hanok Village puts you up close with traditional Korean housing still in use by local residents.

If you don't feel like strolling outdoors too long in the sweaty summer sun, a large chunk of Lotte World theme park is indoors, with rides like the Pharaoh's Fury, Comet Express, and Jungle Adventure. It's a fun way to beat the heat. Coex

Starfield Mall is another option, with an aquarium featuring a mermaid show every hour, Hogwarts-style library, and a bunch of food options ranging from On The Border Tex-Mex to Kervan Turkish. You could also just spend a day exploring Pierrot, a huge multi-floor Japanese store within Coex that sells just about everything you could imagine.

The big, old traditional Korean market at Namdaemun is full of fun sights and smells – in fact, Namdaemun is Korea's oldest still-running commercial market. There's also Yongsan Electronics Market for all kinds of everyday digital stuff (though do be sure to shop around), and Dongdaemun Fashion Town for clothing.

Dongdaemun Market is also famously always open, but you'll find Seoulites are big on nightlife (as in seriously, no-kidding, massively big), so staying out late and expecting things to be open is in no way unrealistic. You can go for a cosmopolitan food and bar scene in Itaewon, or

hang out in Hongdae for a more Korean-style pub and club experience. Or, you can head completely up-market and dig deep for Gangnam's luxury cocktail bars and celebrity haunts to find out what Gangnam style is all about!

Great place to stay

There are plenty of places to stay in Seoul, but if you're looking for accommodation with familiar surroundings, there is the Dragon Hill Lodge at USAG Yongsan. As it is an Armed Forces Recreation Center, it offers classic American hospitality and resort facilities.



Gyeongbokgung Palace

Travel is good for the Seoul

Story and photos by
BEN JORDAN



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