

STARS AND STRIPES®

# Destination Paradise

2024-2025

Exploring the beauty across the Pacific





# Destination Paradise

2024-2025

STARS AND STRIPES®

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FACEBOOK



INSTAGRAM

**Cover photo** – Erin Henderson took this fantastic shot during an eagle festival in Mongolia.

**Background photo** – Kristine Stellhorn shared this shot of lovely Seaside Beach Park in Misawa, Japan.

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## "Travel far enough, you meet yourself."

- David Mitchell

**A**re you ready for your next adventure? If you have dreams of faraway lands, stunning sights and unforgettable journeys but don't know where to start, this is the magazine for you!

Destination Paradise is our love letter to hitting the road, learning about others and, in turn, getting to know ourselves. It is an invitation to see the world, how to do it and how you can bring along your friends and family, too.

Every page of this magazine is a travel tale bursting at the seams to awe and inspire you to explore. Whether you've dreamt of relaxing on the beautiful beaches of Phuket, running with the horses in Mongolia or sampling the delicious foods at a night market in Seoul, you'll find all of that and more in the following pages.

The stories go beyond a simple recounting of a destination's hot spots. These are the stories and tips from readers like you! That's right, the stories of wanderlust and excitement are all by fellow colleagues, neighbors and, maybe even friends who, just like you, are enjoying their duty stations in the Pacific.

Inside you'll hear from David Krigbaum, a Navy retiree living in Japan, about his wonderful trip to Miyakojima with his wife.

Turn to Pages 6-8 and Pages 22-24 for Erin Henderson's adventures in Bhutan and Mongolia with her husband and

two toddlers.

You'll even hear from some little ones on Pages 9-10 who give us their take on what their favorite vacation spots are and why.

And when you're done, don't forget to check out our community papers and websites—[japan.stripes.com](http://japan.stripes.com), [okinawa.stripes.com](http://okinawa.stripes.com), [guam.stripes.com](http://guam.stripes.com) and [korea.stripes.com](http://korea.stripes.com). These are fountains of information including culture stories, restaurant reviews, and the latest happenings on and off base.

Join us at Stars Pacific on Facebook and on Instagram @starsandstripespacific for more stories, helpful videos and fun contests.

Have a travel tale you want to share with us? We love hearing from our readers and want to include you in future issues of Destination Paradise! This magazine, as well as all our community papers and websites, are for you! So, reach out and I promise we'll get right back to you.

We look forward to hearing all about the incredible places you go. Happy trails!

*Denisse Rauda*  
Publishing and Media Design Editor  
Stars and Stripes

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*Learn Japanese*

*Earn my degree*

*Build a new future*

*Succeed Again.*



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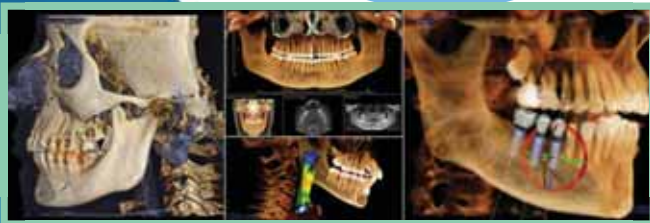




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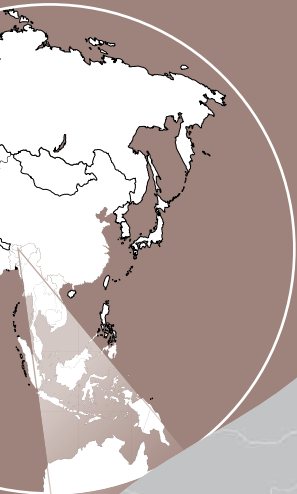


“With a day in Nepal to acclimatize, Scopolamine patches, and plenty of water, we managed to navigate the roads and altitude of Bhutan without any issues, and our children adapted surprisingly well.”

## 5 days in Bhutan with toddlers

Story and photos by  
ERIN HENDERSON

MY PARADISE  
Bhutan



Bhutan, often referred to as the “happiest country in the world” has been a long-awaited adventure for our family since our arrival in Asia. My husband, an ardent hiker, was particularly drawn to Bhutan's mountains and the promise of scenic hiking opportunities. Beyond its outdoor allure, Bhutan's unique status as the world's first carbon-negative country piqued our curiosity, promising a trip filled with discovery and learning.

Being carbon-negative means the country removes more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits. Bhutan has achieved this through reforestation and strict parameters for the tourism industry that the government closely monitors. By maintaining these regulations around tourism, they ensure minimal impact on their environment and culture.

Bhutan did not allow tourists to enter the country until 1974. Now, tourists must pay a daily fee for each day in the country. That fee is \$100/day for adults, lowered previously from \$200/day.

Bhutan's goal with tourism is to ensure it is mutually beneficial for visitors and local communities; daily fees are invested into schools, healthcare, and other community programs. You can only go to Bhutan by booking through an authorized tour company. We used Breathe Bhutan, which was fantastic.

As we prepared for the trip, I couldn't help but feel a bit anxious. I often get migraines from motion sickness, and we were heading to a country with the highest average elevation on the planet and notoriously curvy roads. On top of that, we were bringing our two young children,

ages three and 20 months, and were unsure how they would handle the altitude. However, with a day in Nepal to acclimatize, Scopolamine patches, and plenty of water, we managed to navigate the roads and altitude of Bhutan without any issues, and our children adapted surprisingly well.



Day 5 - Tiger's Nest Monastery.



Day 1 - Takin is a large mammal with the head of goat and body of a cow.



Day 2 - Druk Wangditse Lhakhang with the family.

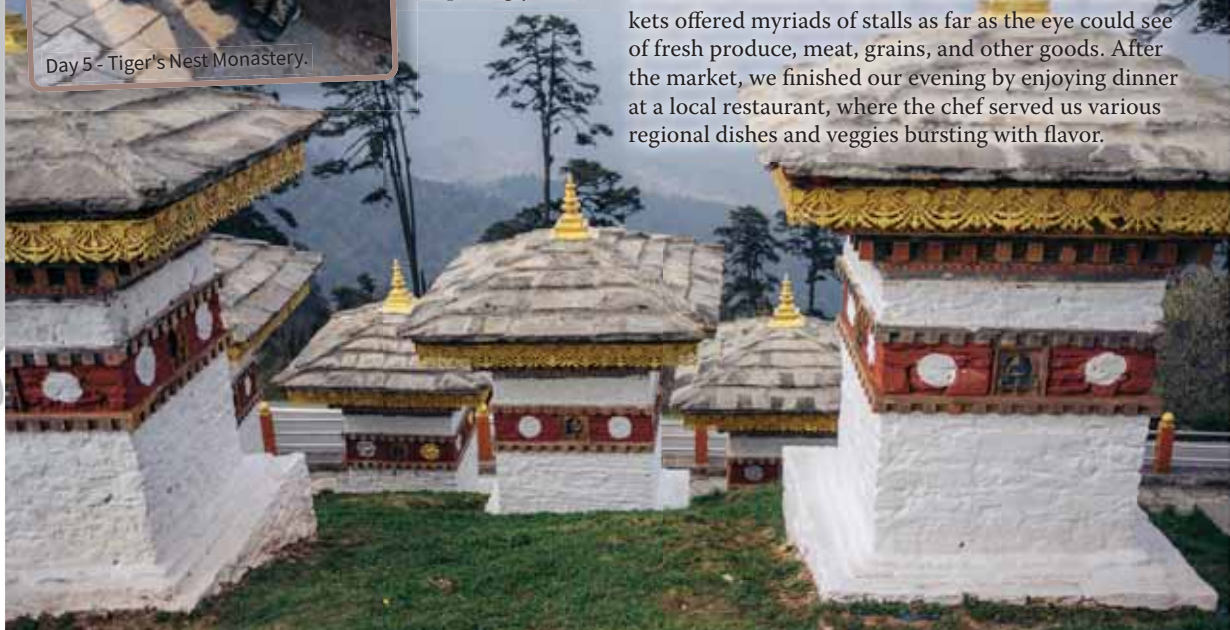
### Day 1

We landed in Bhutan at noon and were greeted by our guide for the week, Chozin, who was from Breathe, Bhutan. He donned us with scarves, flowers, and a welcome drink of rice wine. Our first destination was Thimphu, the country's capital and located about an hour's drive from Paro, where we had arrived.

We settled into our lovely boutique hotel, Pema, let our kids nap and then started again in the late afternoon at the Royal Takin Preserve. I had never heard of a takin or seen one, so that was a fun way to start the trip.

The takin is native to the eastern Himalayas, and our guide described it as having the head of a goat and the body of a cow. Due to the loss of land and hunting, their numbers have declined significantly over the last several years. Bhutan now focuses on preserving and conserving this unique species as they are symbols of the country's culture and heritage.

After we left the preserve, we walked through some of the best outdoor markets I have ever seen. The markets offered myriads of stalls as far as the eye could see of fresh produce, meat, grains, and other goods. After the market, we finished our evening by enjoying dinner at a local restaurant, where the chef served us various regional dishes and veggies bursting with flavor.



Day 2 - Druk Wangyal Chortens.





Day 2 - A student demonstrates his skill at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum.



Day 2 - Students in sewing class.



Day 2 - Our son working on his wood carving.



Day 2 - A wood-carving student chisels away at a dragon head.

## Day 2

Our first hike was to Druk Wangditse Lhakhang, built in the late 19th century and one of the oldest temples in Thimphu. It's an easy 30-minute hike to the temple with beautiful views of the valley below billowing prayer flags. We were among the few people at the temple that morning, welcomed by the head monk on site and the beautiful spring weather. As a note, we visited Bhutan in the first week of April expecting cooler to cold temperatures. We were met with warm spring days, typically hitting a high of around 70 daily. It was perfect; crisp mornings and mild, warm temperatures were ideal for hiking and sightseeing during our time there.

After we left Druk Wangditse Lhakhang, our next destination was the National Institute of Traditional Medicine. This museum showcases over 300 herbs, minerals, and animal parts used in making herbal medicine at the hospital next door. The next stop at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum was one of our son's favorites on the tour. This art school was established in 1971 by the Bhutanese government to preserve traditional art and teach 13 craft skills. Those skills are:

- Calligraphy
- Traditional Painting
- Wood Carving
- Bamboo Weaving
- Carpentry
- Paper Making
- Masonry
- Sculpturing
- Goldsmith
- Silversmith
- Blacksmith
- Embroidery
- Bronze Casting

The second room we visited was one of the wood carving rooms, and the high school-aged boys graciously invited our son to sit down in an empty spot and "work" on a wood carving using their tools. We will never forget their kindness to our son. It was all we could do to get him to leave that room. Attendees of this school typically spend 4-6 years perfecting their craft. Then, they can open their shops to sell these traditional Bhutanese art pieces. Many of their works are displayed in Thimphu's storefronts.

After we left the art school, our next stop was the Buddha Dordenma Statue. This giant golden Buddha houses another 125,000 miniature Buddhas inside. Though it was pretty windy while we were there, it did not stop our kids from enjoying the wide-open areas in front of the statue and running around and chasing each other. After enjoying our time at the Buddha Dordenma Statue, we stopped for lunch as we started the drive towards Punakha, a two-hour drive northeast.

During lunch, we were invited next door to the restaurant owner's house to watch as they had a house full of monks performing a traditional ceremony. The ceremony was to grant wishes, peace, and prosperity throughout the year, and we were told by the monk leading it to put our wishes into the universe. At the same time, the students played their instruments and sang. We sat down after the ceremony for tea and biscuits with the gracious family.

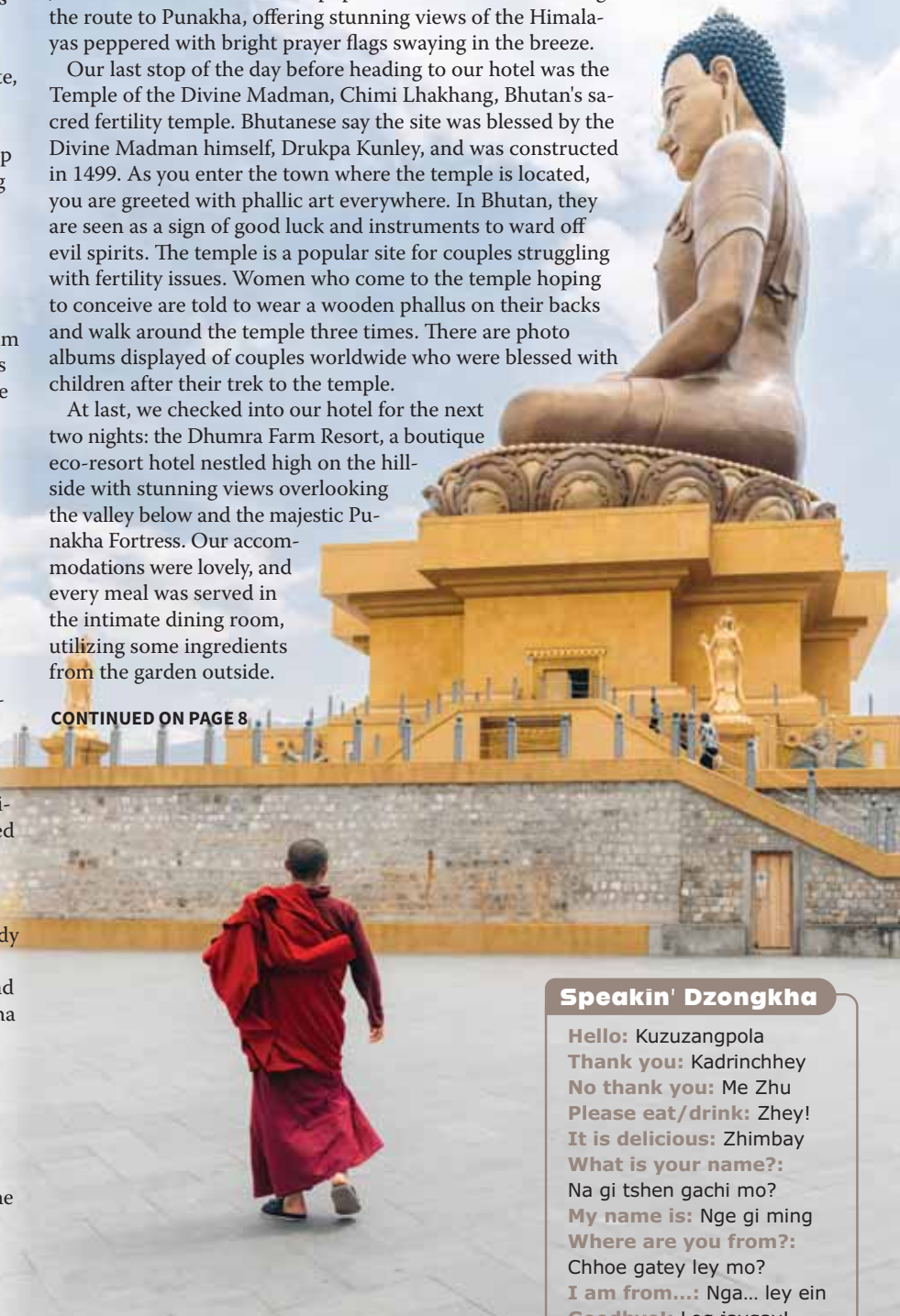
Next, we stopped at Dochula Pass, a memorial of 108 chortens (important monuments or shrines in Bhutan), to commemorate the lives lost in Bhutan's only war. The war lasted one day, and Bhutan was successful in driving out rebels from India,

but unfortunately, the lives of 108 Bhutanese soldiers were lost. King Jigme Singye Wangchuk approved the construction of the Druk Wangyal Chortens, and the memorial was completed in June 2004. The memorial is a popular tourist attraction along the route to Punakha, offering stunning views of the Himalayas peppered with bright prayer flags swaying in the breeze.

Our last stop of the day before heading to our hotel was the Temple of the Divine Madman, Chimi Lhakhang, Bhutan's sacred fertility temple. Bhutanese say the site was blessed by the Divine Madman himself, Drukpa Kunley, and was constructed in 1499. As you enter the town where the temple is located, you are greeted with phallic art everywhere. In Bhutan, they are seen as a sign of good luck and instruments to ward off evil spirits. The temple is a popular site for couples struggling with fertility issues. Women who come to the temple hoping to conceive are told to wear a wooden phallus on their backs and walk around the temple three times. There are photo albums displayed of couples worldwide who were blessed with children after their trek to the temple.

At last, we checked into our hotel for the next two nights: the Dhumra Farm Resort, a boutique eco-resort hotel nestled high on the hillside with stunning views overlooking the valley below and the majestic Punakha Fortress. Our accommodations were lovely, and every meal was served in the intimate dining room, utilizing some ingredients from the garden outside.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 8**



Day 2 - Monk at Buddha Dordenma Statue.

### Speakin' Dzongkha

- Hello:** Kuzuzangpola
- Thank you:** Kadrinchhey
- No thank you:** Me Zhu
- Please eat/drink:** Zhey!
- It is delicious:** Zhimbay
- What is your name?:**  
Na gi tshen gachi mo?
- My name is:** Nge gi ming
- Where are you from?:**  
Chhoe gatey ley mo?
- I am from...:** Nga... ley ein
- Goodbye!:** Log jaygay!





Day 3 - Punakha Fortress.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

### Day 3

After breakfast at our hotel, we set off for the next hike on our trip to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, one of the newer temples in Bhutan, completed in 1999. The hike to the temple takes around 45 minutes, with views overlooking the rice fields and farms below. After our hike to and from Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, we walked across the longest suspension bridge in Bhutan, the Punakha Suspension Bridge, which spans 180 meters, or 590 feet, over the Pho Chu River. The bridge is adorned with prayer flags and has a slight sway from the breeze as you cross.

We opted for a picnic-style lunch along the river with the Punakha Fortress in the background. When our guide mentioned a picnic lunch, I thought it would be a blanket on the ground and a simple lunch. We arrived at a tent with a set table, place settings, and a wonderful hot lunch. Much to our son's delight, a pack of horses trotted by, and he spent his lunch hour searching for the best sticks and rocks along the water while we enjoyed our lunch.

After lunch, we toured the stunning Punakha Dzong (fortress), which is the second oldest building in Bhutan. It was constructed in 1637 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, Bhutan's founder, and serves as the administrative center for Punakha. In addition to being a main tourist attraction, religious ceremonies, and festivals are held here throughout the year, and it serves as the winter residence of the Dratshang (central monk body). The day's last stop was the Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang Nunnery, a nunnery for college-aged women. When we asked how many students were currently attending, one of the students guessed around 60 women. We relished the early evening back at the hotel to relax after a few busy days with the kids.

### Day 4

This day was the slowest-paced day of our journey. We checked out of our hotel and started the drive back towards Paro. Along the way, we stopped at a beautiful nature park with rhododendrons in bloom and a small playground where the kids had to spend some time running around. That afternoon, we had lunch with the owner of Breathe Bhutan. During lunch, we met a family from England who were traveling with their two children. Much to my husband's dismay, we finished the day donning Bhutanese traditional dress and taking photos in our attire.



Day 3 - After hiking to and from Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten.



Day 3 - Nunnery students are all smiles.



Our daughter Emelia and guide Chozin.



Day 5 - Trying our hand at archery.

### Day 5

Finally, the day had arrived; it was time to hike to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery. We woke at 4:30 a.m. and munched on breakfast while driving to the starting point. Our guide estimated it would take us 2.5 hours to get to the top, not including a stop at the halfway point. As we started the hike, we were the only ones on the trail. My husband carried our three-year-old son the whole way in his carrier while Chozin, our guide, insisted on carrying our daughter in her carrier. Our walk time to the top was under two hours, not including the stop at the halfway point. As the iconic monastery, Paro Takstang, comes into view, it's almost like seeing a mirage perched on the cliff. It's right in front of you, but you still have a bit of distance to hike down stairs and back up to reach the temple entrance.

Once you arrive at the monastery, the security guard takes all of your belongings and places them into a locker. No photography or videography are allowed inside. You will have to take my word, it is beautiful and there are four smaller temples inside.

This hike was our favorite on the trip, and as we made our way back down through the crowds of hikers, they cheered my husband and Chozin on as they trekked with the kids in the carriers. We made a quick stop to hang our very own prayer flags and finished our descent back down the mountain. Having worked up an appetite with our six-mile trek, we stopped for lunch at a local's home, where we dined on rice, a Bhutanese dish of beef and peppers, dumplings, potatoes, and soup. After a brief toddler yoga session, we returned to the hotel to rest for a few hours.

We finished our last day in Bhutan by playing the traditional sport of archery. My husband was a natural with a bow; I am why they are now missing two arrows. We also tried our hand at darts before ending the evening with a fantastic dinner and, sadly, packing our bags.

Our time in Bhutan was our family's perfect last trip before our summer 2024 move. We encountered a few toddler meltdowns, which is expected when traveling with two young children, but we couldn't be more grateful for our guide, Chozin, who went out of his way to help us with the kids the entire trip. He insisted on carrying one during every hike and was extremely patient when they did have their moments. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the memories created as a family during this once-in-a-lifetime trip to the happiest country in the world.

#### Author's Bio:

Erin Henderson is a professional freelance photographer and writer whose work has been featured in a variety of publications. She is also a mother of two and a Marine Corps spouse living in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at [erinhendersonmedia.com](http://erinhendersonmedia.com) or follow her travels on Instagram @erinhendrsn.



Tour company info



Day 2 - Students playing music at the special ceremony.



“From the moment we set foot in Kathmandu, we were met with smiles. The locals, with their immense friendliness, made us feel instantly at home.”

## 2 days in Nepal

Story and photos by ERIN HENDERSON

MY PARADISE  
Nepal



Our decision to fly to Bhutan via Nepal was not just a practical one, but also an adventure in itself. The anticipation of a short flight from Nepal to Bhutan, the nostalgia my husband carried from his mountain trekking days in Nepal, and our bodies acclimatizing to the elevation changes before our onward journey to Bhutan, all added excitement to our travel plans.

From the moment we set foot in Kathmandu, we were met with smiles. The locals, with their immense friendliness, made us feel instantly at home. Even the immigration officer, despite the antics of my three-year-old son attempting to make a run for it, greeted us with a smile, a testament to the genuine warmth of the Nepalese people.

My daughter must have sensed these were her people. As we exited the airport, we walked past the waiting area where drivers and guides held signs for their guests to locate them; Emelia waved her way down the entire crowd, eliciting big smiles and waves in return. We have found that with each trip we embark on, our children become just a bit more independent and confident, and my husband and I could do nothing but smile at the little girl in the stroller, at just 20 months old, boldly greeting a large crowd of strangers on her terms.

During our brief time in Nepal, we visited the three Durbar Squares (squares in front of old royal palaces) and the Boudhanath Stupa because it was located right outside our hotel. The three squares, Kathmandu Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, and the Boudhanath Stupa, are all UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



Bhaktapur Square.



Kathmandu Square.



### Kathmandu Durbar Square

Up first was Kathmandu Durbar Square, also known as Hanu-mandhoka Durbar Square. As we loaded the kids in their carriers, a local woman ran up to see them and say hello. She was so happy to see the kids that I had to photograph her, as her smile was infectious. This encounter turned out to be the first of two days of reactions similar to hers as we walked around each square.

After walking around the streets, our first stop was the Kumari Bahal. The Kumari (translates as “virgin”) is considered the reincarnation of Taleju, a Hindu warrior goddess. Kumari candidates are chosen from working-class families of gold or silversmiths and placed in a dark room with disturbing scenes. Whichever young girl is not scared is selected as the next Kumari. She is kept in the Ghar with her feet never touching the ground and only leaves the grounds for religious events or festivals. Each day, people crowd outside, hoping for a glimpse of the goddess. She occasionally appears from her balcony, and it's considered good luck if you get a glimpse of her. Once the Kumari reaches puberty or bleeds in any way from an injury, she is transformed back to mortal status, and the process of finding a new Kumari begins again.

As we continued our tour, it became clear that this square had seen great devastation. We saw firsthand the catastrophic damage the 2015 earthquake had caused. There was extensive damage to historical structures all over Nepal, and 9,000 people lost their lives. Due to limited funds and skilled workers qualified to complete restorations on the ancient temples, it will still be many years until repairs can be completed. All around, 2x4s were holding buildings, and rubble can still be found piled around buildings nine years after the earthquake. Despite what could be seen as unlivable conditions by many, locals were cheerfully gathered around temple steps or outside



Local Kathmandu Square.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Patan Museum.



of homes, enjoying each other's company, and we were continuously met with smiles everywhere we went.

We continued past Taleju Temple (only opened once a year during the Hindu festival of Dashain), Jagannath Temple, Shiva Pavarti Temple, and Bhandarkal, a botanical garden, though only a little was in bloom when we walked through. After a morning of exploring the Kathmandu Durbar Square, we grabbed a table at a rooftop restaurant where we could overlook the bustling square below and enjoy a refreshing beverage. It was only a short time before a solo American traveler sat down at a table nearby, and we started a conversation.

We quickly discovered he had recently retired from the U.S. Marine Corps (my husband is also in the Marine Corps) and had spent much time at the same duty stations as my husband. Now, he was taking six months to travel worldwide before returning to the States. We chatted about travels and where we were all off to next and then went our separate ways. The world can seem so small when you have random encounters like these on a rooftop across the globe from home — certainly one of the great joys of travel.

**Kathmandu Durbar Square entrance fee:** 1,000 Rupees

### Patan Durbar Square

After paying our 1,000 Rupees entrance fee, we started our tour of Patan Durbar Square. Because of the number of temples (some dating as far back as the 14th century) in the square, 55, many people consider this to be the best of the three squares. My favorite stop during our time in this square was the Patan Museum.

Opened in 1997 and said to be the best museum in Asia, the Patan Museum is home to sacred Nepalese art, and admission is included in your entrance fee to the square. The halls are filled with historic relics and bronzed statues. The museum is the former palace of the late Malla Dynasty (they ruled Kathmandu Valley in Nepal from the 13th to the 18th century).

Some other popular locations within the square are the Krishna Mandir Temple, Bhimsen Temple, and Vishwanath Temple. Nearby is also the famous Golden Temple or Hiranya Varna Mahavihar. We spent the least amount of time in Patan Durbar Square with our children, reaching the point of needing some rest after four hours of touring.

After the kids had a quick nap, we walked half a mile from our hotel to the Boudha Stupa and explored. The Boudhanath Stupa ("Boudha or Budhha Stupa") is one of Nepal's most significant and largest stupas. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a sacred place for Buddhists. The stupa is located on the northeastern outskirts of Kathmandu (where our hotel was located). Several shops and restaurants surround the area, and it's a fantastic place to watch locals and tourists go about their evenings.

**Patan Durbar Square entrance fee:** 1,000 Rupees



Views of Kathmandu Square from rooftop.



Square around Boudhanath Stupa at sunset.



Making an offering in Kathmandu Square.



Kathmandu Square.



Local who ran up to see our children when we arrived at Kathmandu Square.

### Speakin' Nepali

**Hello:** Namaste

**Nice to meet you:**

Vetera khusee laagy

**How are you?:**

Kasto cha?

**Yes:** Huncha

**No:** Hudaina

**Sorry:** Maaf garnu hos

**How much does this cost?:**

Yeslaai katee paisaa ho?

**Thank you:** Dhanyabaad

**It's tasty:** Mitho cha

**This place is beautiful:**

Yo thaau raamro cha

### Bhaktapur Durbar Square

The last square we visited was Bhaktapur Durbar Square, my favorite of all the squares. We spent several hours walking the streets, greeting locals and watching in fascination as the artisans and artists worked. Bhaktapur is considered the "Culture Capital," where you can find artisans of varying modalities. Watch as potters throw pots and see where the kilns are stored after drying. Walking down alleys, you will find painters and artists creating handmade works of art. We selected a small painting and, after a demonstration from the clerk, a handmade meditation bowl to bring home with us. Our son picked out his magnet, as it has become our traditions to pick one from every country we visit.

I could have spent hours in this square, but sadly, all great trips eventually end. Though you can squeeze visiting all three squares into one day, I recommend taking at least a day and a half to enjoy them. They are spread out, and Kathmandu traffic can sometimes become chaotic when driving from square to square.

Though our time in Nepal was short, the people we encountered left a lasting impression. Their quickness with a smile, a friendly wave, and genuine kindness warmed our hearts and had us boarding the plane with a smile. We can't wait to return once again when our children are old enough to trek this beautiful country on their own two feet.

**Bhaktapur Durbar Square entrance fee:** 1,500 Rupees

**Flights to Nepal:** Booked all of our flights via Korean Air with points from Delta

**Hotel:** Hyatt Regency booked via points with Hyatt

#### Author's Bio:

Erin Henderson is a professional freelance photographer and writer whose work has been featured in a variety of publications. She is also a mother of two and a Marine Corps spouse living in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at [erinhendersonmedia.com](http://erinhendersonmedia.com) or follow her travels on Instagram @erinhendrsn.



Pottery in Bhaktapur Square





# THE ULTIMATE NEPAL EXPERIENCE

Explore the wild and sacred beauty of Bharatpur!

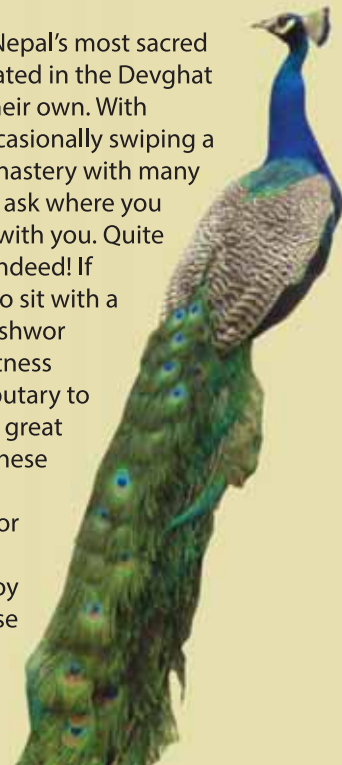


**B**haratpur has many venues to enjoy, the most famous being Chitwan National Park. Depending on the season, one can see wildlife from Bengal tigers to peacocks, with the males showing all their plumage to the max. Other birdlife abounds, including migrating Siberian Red-Lover Ducks, which only travel in pairs. You can also see a variety of monkeys swinging from trees overhead and crocodiles swimming and sunbathing. Full-sized, single-horned rhinoceros can often be found strolling down to the Rapti River to munch on grass, cooling off in wet mud and swigging down some river water. Other sites to see in Bahratpur include an elephant orphanage where you can bathe the behemoths, and recreational activities like speed boat rides on the Naryana River.

Those with a true sense of adventure can enjoy the thrill of taking flight as a paraglider! This high-in-the-clouds experience is newly available in the Chitwan region. Paragliding here allows visitors to peer over the wildlife in Chitwan National Park and the beautiful river valley. Of course, trekking, rafting, and other nature adventure tours abound!

Bharatpur also is home to some of Nepal's most sacred Hindu sites. The beautiful temples located in the Devghat area up in the hills have a beauty all their own. With monkeys swinging from trees (and occasionally swiping a banana or two), there is a massive monastery with many curious students running up to you to ask where you are from and have their photos taken with you. Quite the world of total friendly innocence indeed! If fortunate enough, you may even get to sit with a local guru, such as Aghori Shmashaneshwor Chandi, Chandi Baba. One can also witness devout Hindu followers entering a tributary to the most sacred river in Hinduism, the great Ganges. It is amazing to simply stroll these sacred grounds.

In short, Bharatpur has something for everybody! From the adventurer who wants to go trekking, paragliding, enjoy safaris and animal orphanages, to those who wish to meditate and reflect at a monastery, Bharatpur is the perfect place for you to EXPERIENCE NEPAL!



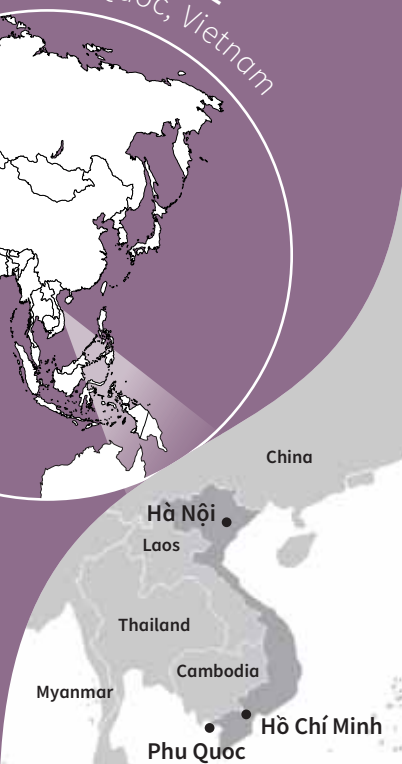


“My personalized tour included foodie-friendly adventures, so after a cautious climb on the nearby rocks, my guide took me for an afternoon snack of chè.”

## Solo adventure in Phu Quoc

Story and photos by  
**CHRISSY M. YATES**

MY PARADISE  
Phu Quoc, Vietnam



**P**hu Quoc, the biggest island in Vietnam, is known for its white-sand beaches, turquoise water and hiking trails. A destination wedding brought me to the “Maldives of Vietnam,” but after a few days I got tired of the resort life.

I found my guide, Hien, through Airbnb Experiences, where she offered a personalized 3-hour tour. We worked together via WhatsApp to put together an afternoon itinerary that included “eating a popular cake.” It cost \$20 initially, but I opted to have a lot of the tour be by taxi instead of scooter to reduce travel time and maximize our time at each location.



### Dinh Cau Rocks

We started with a tour of Dinh Cau Rocks, a small temple next to a lighthouse, both perched on a jagged rock formation. Hien explained that it was built to honor the goddess of the sea who protects sailors and fishermen. It is the most visited shrine on the island as it is located in Duong Duong Town, the center of Phu Quoc Island and a short walk from Phu Quoc Night Market. It offers breathtaking views of the harbor, especially at sunrise and sunset, but can get crowded, so our plan was to watch the sunset from a different location.

My personalized tour included foodie-friendly adventures, so after a cautious climb on the nearby rocks, my guide took me for an afternoon snack of chè, a Vietnamese dessert best described as a sweet soup or pudding. I chose a hot coconut milk base with soft tofu, tapioca and ginger syrup. It was sweet, surprisingly refreshing, and worth sitting in a deep squat on a plastic seat on a hot day.

### Ong Lang Beach

We got in a taxi then headed a bit north to Din Bah, a Buddhist temple that is set between two high end resorts on Ong Lang Beach. The beautiful grounds overlook the beach and ocean and have plenty of seating from which to take in the beautiful scenery. We were able to walk down



### Speakin' Vietnamese

- Hello:** Xin chào (sin chow)
- Thank you:** Cảm ơn (gahm uhn)
- Yes:** Vâng (vuhng)
- No:** Không (khome)
- Please:** Làm ơn (lam uhn)
- Excuse me/Sorry:** Xin lỗi (sin loy)
- Goodbye:** Tạm biệt (tam byet)



to the sand in front of the 5-star Ocean Bay Suites because, as Hien explained, in Vietnam, beach access is public. Hien pointed out that you can see a sliver of Cambodia from the beach.

### Suds and sunsets

The sun was already getting low as we left Ong Lang but we quickly made our way through the fish market, where Hien picked out some fruit for us to try later. We arrived about 15 minutes before sunset to have a beer at Tiệm beer thủ công - LoCo Beer, known for its craft beer. The spot is mostly for locals, so all the menus are in Vietnamese. It was a hot day, and my cold lager was refreshing and smooth.

### Did someone say cake?

Finally, it was time for cake. But something was lost in translation as the dish I had, banh xeo, is more like a seafood egg crepe and savory, not sweet. I enjoyed it nevertheless, but I struggled a bit using chopsticks to break up pieces of the crepe to stuff into the rice paper shell. However, once I got the hang of it, I was in heaven. The saltiness of the crepe's seafood filling paired well with the anise-like herbs, crisp lettuce and sour-sweet taste of the guava on top. I busied myself trying to create the perfect bite.

### Phu Quoc Night Market

Our adventure ended at the lively night market. There I saw plenty of seafood-based street foods, handmade crafts and inexpensive souvenirs. I was still quite full from the banh xeo, but made a little room for some rolled ice cream.



### Random tips

- **Don't let a long layover keep you trapped in an airport**

But make sure if it's in Vietnam, you get a multi-entry visa. There's baggage storage for cheap at the airport, so leave your bags behind. I booked a last-minute 3-hour Vietnamese cooking class via Airbnb Experiences to keep me busy during a 9-hour layover on my return flight.

- **Pack a USB fan**

This came in handy not only for cooling me off but also my phone as its clear plastic protective case made it very unhappy in the heat.

- **Transportation**

The wedding guests and I mostly used taxis via the Grab app as well as an area bus that went from our resort to the night market area. Scooters are also available to rent, but please wear a helmet.

- **Cash is king**

Many vendors in Vietnam don't accept credit cards. Surprisingly, some places will accept U.S. dollars on larger purchases. Watch out for high fees from ATMs and use an app, like Xe, to understand the conversion rate so you don't overpay for basics like bottled water.

- **Water, water everywhere, but from a bottle you should drink**

Tap water in Vietnam is unsafe. I noticed that even locals don't drink it. Make sure the ice in your drinks is from a purified source and even keep a bottle in the bathroom by your toothbrush to be extra safe.



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“ I decided to try a little of everything. I’m a Southerner, so eating from the ‘rooter to the tooter’ isn’t new for me.”

## A taste of Thailand by tuktuk

Story and photos by  
**CHRISSY M. YATES**

MY PARADISE  
Bangkok, Thailand



**T**our groups sometimes get a bad rap. Especially if you’re in a large group, one of 30-plus tourists shuffling along like zombies trying not to lose sight of the leader holding a flag or umbrella while being in the way of other tourists and locals alike. It can feel way too much like a school trip.

However, when you’re short on time or just exhausted, say after traveling around two different countries in two weeks, a tour provides the opportunity to escape some of the planning part and get right to the adventure. It’s even better if you end up in a small group.

I prefer to get to know a place through its food, but two and a half days is not a lot of meals. Fortunately, I found a tour in Thailand that boasted letting me try 30-plus foods in one evening.

My only problem was the tour was via tuktuk. I was a bit nervous to climb into a glorified golf cart without a seatbelt, but I let my growling belly be my guide. My guide introduced herself as Peach and started our tour at a small temple in the Nak Klang area.

From there we went to our first restaurant, Lung Ayut-thaya Boat Noodle. They were ready for our group of 10 and kept bringing dish after dish from the kitchen for us to try. One downside is I lost track of what was what. The only thing that stood out was the morning glory

greens, which reminded me of a similar dish I’d eaten in Hoi An, Vietnam. Not a great start.

The highlight of the evening for me was the third stop, at Wat Prayun, a 19th century temple with a white chedi. Inside, you can make a small donation and receive a tiny square of gold leaf to apply to the buddha or walls for good luck. It also offers cool views of the surrounding neighborhood.

Afterward, we stopped at a small food stall on the side of the road to try fusion Thai food at A-Roi Cheap. The standout dish was the fried crab rice, which smelled just as good as it tasted. We also tried glass noodles with prawns.

The most adventurous part came next as we walked through a crowded night market to B.B. Pork Fondue for some Isaan food, which hails from the northeastern region of the country.

Some of these foods proved to be a bit of a challenge for western palates. Among the many foods served here were fried duck beaks (the tendons inside were very chewy and salty, and I later learned it’s more of a beer snack), chicken feet (in a noodle soup that was wonderfully spicy) and beef tripe soup (way too spicy). While some of my fellow travelers stuck to the som tam (spicy green papaya salad), larb (a ground pork dish) and gai yang (grilled chicken), I decided to try a little of everything. I’m a Southerner, so eating from the “rooter to the tooter” isn’t new for me.

Finally, it was time for dessert. A short walk through the night market led us to Ni-Ang Ice Cream. However, we didn’t start with ice cream, rather with bua loy, or rice balls in coconut milk topped with a kai wan or sweet poached egg. It was like having egg tarts inside of



Coconut ice cream with sweet egg topping at Ni-Ang Ice Cream.

Gai yang, or grilled chicken.



Rooftop view from Wat Prayun.



A-Roi Cheap fusion Thai food in Bangkok.





Tripe and beef soup at BB Pork Fondue.

Papaya salad and chicken feet soup.



### Speakin' Thai

**Hello:** Sawasdee  
**Thank you:** Kob Khun  
**No worries:** Mai Pen Rai  
**Delicious:** Aroy

**Sorry / excuse me:** Kho Thot  
**What is your name?:** Khun Chue Arai  
**Bathroom:** Hong Nam



a coconut soup, delicious but very heavy and rich. Next came giant scoops of coconut ice cream with a drizzle of sugary egg syrup on top. Most of us were full and sadly the ice cream went to waste.

Our last dessert was Khanom Buang Thai crepes filled with meringue and strips of sweet fried egg. It was like eating a fortune cookie where the fortune was replaced with sweet, slightly eggy deliciousness.

We ended with a tour of the Pak Khlong Talat flower market, which was a great opportunity to walk off some of the calories. Peach presented each of us with a gift, a small phuang malai or floral garland for good luck.

### Thailand Tips

#### • Transportation

Taxis are cheap, but traffic is bad. If possible, use the train to get around or leave a lot of wiggle room to get to destinations.

#### • Be adventurous but not dumb

I liked doing a food tour as it meant I had someone to not only translate my food allergies to the staff, but also someone who knew which places were less likely to give me food poisoning.

#### • Charcoal tablets

A tip I learned later is to travel with activated charcoal to help your tummy deal with dicey food decisions.

#### • Visit booths with lots of customers

During our tour, we didn't eat anything raw or undercooked, which made it a lot safer.



Sauteed morning glory.



Fried duck beaks.



Khanom Buang Thai crepes.



Stall selling khanom buang (Thai crepes).



Pak Khlong Talat (Flower Market).





Invitation To DAEGU The ultimate travel & healthcare destination!

# MEDI·CITY+ DAEGU

Look here for more information on tourism in Daegu!



Daegu view



Daegu Trip Road

## + Daegu, an inland hub of Korea's nationwide transportation network

Area | 1,499.47 sq. km. (578.9 square miles)  
Population | 2,374,960 (as of Dec. 31, 2023)





## + Medicity Daegu: Specialized Healthcare Areas

<p><b>Health checkup</b></p>  <p>Full-body checkup conducted with cutting-edge medical equipment</p>	<p><b>Traditional Korean medicine</b></p>  <p>Acupuncture, moxibustion, obesity treatment, traditional Korean medicine-based dermatological treatment, etc.</p>	<p><b>Plastic surgery</b></p>  <p>Meticulous procedures and an exhaustive follow-up care system</p>
<p><b>Cosmetology</b></p>  <p>Three-step system (consultation, procedure, follow-up care) based on cutting-edge equipment</p>	<p><b>Hair transplantation</b></p>  <p>Offered with the world's most advanced technologies</p>	<p><b>Dental care</b></p>  <p>Aesthetic treatments (e.g. implants, orthodontic care, scaling)</p>
<p><b>OB-GYN</b></p>  <p>Provided via foreigner-exclusive healthcare system</p>	<p><b>Eye clinic</b></p>  <p>Vision correction and cataract surgery conducted with cutting-edge laser equipment</p>	<p><b>Surgery for cancer and serious conditions</b></p>  <p>State-of-the-art treatment at centers/clinics specializing in serious conditions</p>

## + 4 wellness destinations in Daegu Designated as Outstanding Wellness Tourism Sites in 2024

 <p><b>S2BT's Beaulounge</b></p> <p>A comprehensive beauty care space that offers relaxation away from the stresses of the everyday along with beauty diagnoses (e.g. skin, scalp) and individually-tailored solutions.</p>	 <p><b>Spa Valley</b></p> <p>A nature-friendly space for physical and mental rejuvenation that includes a hotel built with cypress wood and red clay bricks, hot spring and bade pool infused with medicinal herbs, and a zoo that fosters healthy interaction between people and animals.</p>
 <p><b>Sayuwon</b></p> <p>Offers healing and meditation experiences that allow visitors to relax and recharge their depleted physical/emotional energies. Operates several wellness programs (e.g. Tea House, yoga).</p>	 <p><b>Korean Traditional Culture Center</b></p> <p>Offers interactive experiences of traditional Korean culture, including not only experiences of hanbok and tea ceremonies but also archery, healthy cooking (based on Principles and Practices of Eastern Medicine, a classical Korean medical text), and much more.</p>

## + Daegu's Representative Korean Medicine Tourist Attraction

 <p><b>Yangnyeongsi Oriental Medicine Museum</b></p> <p>Has inherited, and works to conserve, the richness of traditional Korean medicine culture, which has a 366-year tradition in Daegu, Korea's representative facility for exhibitions and activities on traditional Korean medicine, offering an experience of life in Yangnyeongsi in pre-modern times.</p>	 <p><b>Korean Medicine Experience Town</b></p> <p>A multi-purpose cultural space that aims to convey the excellence and richness of the tradition of traditional Korean medicine. Diverse activities based on VR and AR technologies available.</p>
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# Welcome To **MEDICITY!** A hub of medical tourism in Korea: **MEDI·CITY<sup>+</sup> DAEGU**

Using state-of-the-art technologies and services, **Medicity Daegu** is working to become a recognized center of global medical tourism.

Through 12 PR centers in six countries, **Medicity Daegu** invites people from all over the world to see what it has to offer!



Let's go! Medicity Daegu  
(360° VR)

## CONTACT US

+82-53-253-1561 ✉ [dgmt@dgmt.or.kr](mailto:dgmt@dgmt.or.kr)



Homepage



Youtube



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### POINT 01

## Top-quality medical facilities and services



Daegu is home to not only 3,800 hospitals and clinics, including five university hospitals and 12 general hospitals, but also traditional Korean medicine clinics and cutting-edge medical technologies (e.g. cosmetic surgery, cosmetology, hair transplantation, tooth whitening, health checkup) and administrative systems that allow you to receive safe and accurate treatment.

### POINT 02

## Extensive traditional Korean medicine infrastructure



Daegu, which has long served as a center for the shipping and international trade of medicinal herbs, is home to Yangnyeongsi, a medicinal herb wholesale market that is 360 years old. There are approximately 800 hospitals and clinics in Daegu specializing in traditional Korean medicine, including Daegu Haany University Korean Medicine Hospital, that offer a wide range of treatments (e.g. acupuncture, moxibustion, chuna manual therapy) and traditional Korean medicine-themed interactive facilities, such as the famous Yangnyeongsi Oriental Medicine Museum.

### POINT 03

## Concierge (One-Stop Service)



Diverse services are provided for foreign medical tourists, including transportation to and from hospitals for the duration of their stay and an interpreter. For those receiving a full checkup, a translation of the checkup results is provided.

### POINT 04

## Daegu Medical Tourism Information Center



The Daegu Medical Tourism Information Center offers all services related to medical tourism that foreigners need, including information on hospitals and partner organizations and a concierge.



# Kids' Paradise



## Perth perfect for family fun

By Callan Davidson

Australia is a wonderful place to visit. Perth is one of these wonderful cities to visit. There are lots of restaurants, stores, zoos, parks, beaches, and dessert shops. Perth is a city located in Western Australia. It has restaurants serving food from all over the world. For example, Sundays is a restaurant that has delicious Japanese food like curry and sushi. There is even delicious fish and chips to enjoy. One of the yummy dessert shops is Tutti Frutti, which serve up good Fro-Yo and can be found in Fremantle. There are also cookie shops with big cookies. These places have very delightful food so you should try them.

There are many kinds of food all over Perth.

A place you should visit is a giant market called Fremantle. This enormous market has food, clothes, trinkets, souvenirs, and toy stores indoors and outdoors. There is also a park with a spider-web-like structure that you can climb on and there is a giant Ferris wheel with a wonderful view of the harbor.

There is a zoo called Cohunu Koala Park. You can feed birds, reptiles, kangaroos and other animals all around the park. They have a train ride that goes around the whole entire park and a shop to get souvenirs. You can also hold a koala and have pictures taken.

➤ Caversham Wildlife Park is a big park full of marvelous animals like emus and kangaroos that can be found throughout Australia. You can watch a show where a person demonstrates how to shear sheep and crack a whip. They also ask a few children to feed some lambs with bottles of milk.

Whistlepiper Gully is located east of Perth. The trail has beautiful views and a river full of fish. At the end it leads to Lesmurdie Falls, where experienced climbers can climb.

Other exciting places are the parks around Perth where you relax and have fun. The parks have exercise equipment and some of them have bush walks. The parks have plenty of slides and ladders to play on. They have coffee shops nearby so you can get a drink or pastry to have while sitting down to enjoy the day.

More spots you can visit are the beaches. They have freezing waters as well as cold sand in the winter, but it is warm in the summer! There are also beach bars at some places. Some have steep cliffs and stairs. You can also surf all year, but remember it is very cold in winter but nice and cool in the summer.

These are wonderful places to visit in Perth. It has fun places to explore with your friends and family. They also have delectable food to eat. Going to Perth is worth the trip.



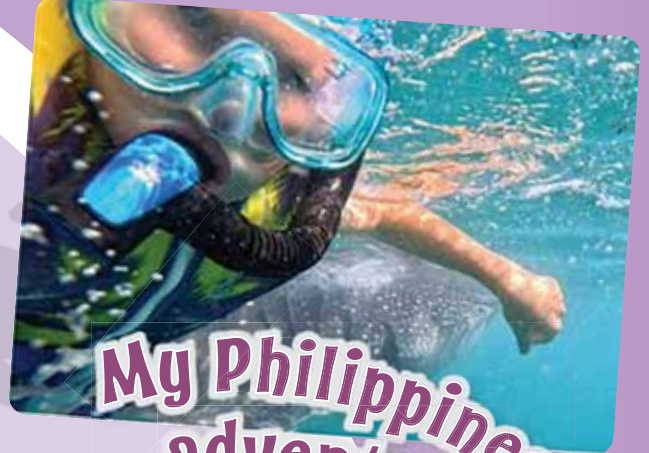


# Swing by Tarzan Pools for fun!

By Rowen Flahaut

Tarzan Pools is a place on Guam that is cool to explore. You have to go there by vehicle and then hike. It is so fun to visit with friends and family. Before you even get to it, there is a big mountain. Once you get there, there is a huge truck trunk. You pull it up the mountain and then you slide down in the trunk. It can give you some exercise.

After you finish the hike and get to Tarzan Pools, you arrive to a rope that you swing on. There is a cliff that you can jump off from the rope right into the water. Once you are in the water, you can swim, too. It could be a fun journey with your friends and you can play with them. You could do so much at Tarzan pools. Hike, go down the truck trunk, and swim. Have fun going there with your family and friends.



# My Philippines adventure

By Lars Anderson

Have you ever been to the Philippines? Swimming with whale sharks, seeing tarsiers up close, holding sugar gliders, and snorkeling with sea turtles and sardines were just a few of the exciting activities I was able to experience. It all began on the island of Oslob.

While the wake-up call to get to the whale sharks was 3 a.m. it was worth it for this incredibly unique experience. Everyone lines up in the dark, gets a number and then waits until it's their turn. We loaded up in the boat, about 14 people per boat. There were other boats already in the water feeding the whale sharks. Once we got out to where the whale sharks were, not far from the shore, I got in the water with my snorkel gear and saw them. They were huge! They swam up right by me. It was incredible watching them!

We then went to Bohol, another island in the Philippines. We had to get up at 4 a.m. and take a 2-hour boat ride. When we arrived there, we saw little tarsiers, which are native to the Philippines. They didn't do much because they were nocturnal, but they did have their eyes open a bit. Even though their eyes were open, they still couldn't see us, because it was daytime. After that, we saw and were able to hold sugar gliders. They are not native to the Philippines, but they were so cute and active. They also jumped up on our shoulders!

Then we rode on a boat to Pescador Island, where we snorkeled with jellyfish and a sea turtle. The boat later took us to a sardine run. There were millions of sardines, it was super cool! They swam in tube-like shapes. Then the boat took us to a nearby shallow spot in the water where we saw a sea turtle swimming up close. We saw it eat and come up for air several times.

If you haven't been to the Philippines, you should go because it's truly a unique experience! Swimming with whale sharks, going to Bohol and seeing all sorts of animals is so fun! You should think about booking your trip to the Philippines right now!



See more  
Kids' Paradise  
on Page 20





# Kids' Paradise

Continued from Page 19



## Fun things to do in Tokyo

By Naia Duenas

Imagine eating yummy food and going to cute cafés while being entertained by silly characters. Japan has lots of delicious food and fun things to visit and do, especially in Tokyo. It is amazing to explore Tokyo.

When you go to Japan, there is yummy food to eat. Some of the foods Japan serves are sushi, soup, curry, and seafood. Sushi is rice with seafood like shrimp and fish inside or on top. Ramen and udon are types of noodle soups. Ramen has broth, eggs, green onions, and noodles. Udon is similar but has thicker noodles. Curry has vegetables like potatoes and carrots. It is served with chicken, pork, or beef over rice. Seafood that Japan serves are fish, octopus, crab, shrimp, and lobster. While you are walking you might spot a café or bakery, and when you go inside, you will be amazed! The pastries that most bakeries or cafés sell are soft bread, tarts and baguettes. There are different types of cafés to enjoy around Tokyo.

There are many amusement parks to visit in Tokyo. If you visit Tokyo Disneyland, you will see characters from Disney. Some of the characters you will see are Minnie, Mickey, Toy Story, Winnie-the-Pooh and the Disney princesses. These Disney characters are very playful, nice, and funny. Silly characters are very fun to play with.

Sometimes you will be entertained by silly characters somewhere else. You may be entertained in a café, restaurant or mall. There are different types of cafés around Tokyo. Some of the cafés are Sanrio, Pikachu, Kirby, or Rilakkuma. Not only do the cafés entertain customers with characters, cafés also serve pancakes, coffee, cookies and other delicious pastries shaped like characters.

Japan has lots of fun things to visit and do. Japanese food is amazing. You should plan on going to Japan, and Tokyo is a great place to start!



## Manila's tasty food, beautiful sites

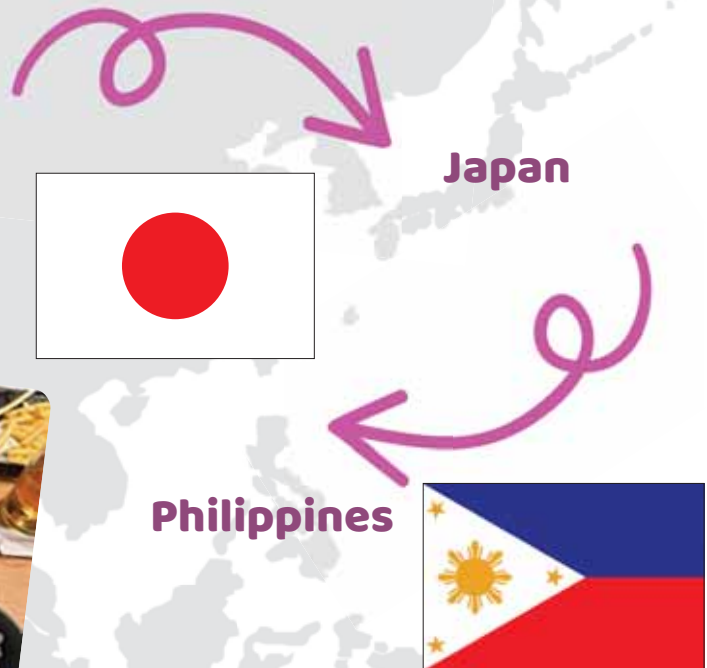
By Chrysan Agulto

Imagine going to a super fun place that has beautiful sites and a variety of delicious food. That is what Manila is mostly known for. As well as a variety of classic yet delicious Filipino food, Manila is well known for the remnants of Spanish colonial history, a showcase of Filipino art and culture.

Manila has delicious foods like Halo-halo and Lechon. One of the most popular street foods is a dish made with barbecued pig or chicken intestines. A food that almost all Filipino people eat is lumpia. Lumpia can be with banana, meat, or vegetables. There are multiple kinds of lumpia, so lots of people can eat it, even vegetarians. It is recommended to try Filipino food.

In Manila there are beautiful places and sites. Some of the sites include the Star City, which is one of the top sites in Manila. It is a huge amusement park in Pasay. There is also Fort Santiago, one of the oldest fortifications in the Philippines. It is really popular because it was used as the military headquarters for the Spanish in beginning in 1571, British from 1762-1764, Americans from 1898-1964, and the Japanese from 1942-1945.

Manila has tasty food and beautiful places to explore. Manila has lots of things to do for everyone!







## PIZZA HUT LOCATIONS:

### Yokosuka 1000-2100

(Delivery 1130-2030)

Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings  
Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert, and multiple drinks.

### Atsugi 1000-1900

(Delivery 1600-1830)

Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings  
Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert, and multiple drinks.



**LIVE MÁS**

## TACO BELL LOCATIONS:

### Yokosuka 1000-2100

(Drive thru and Dine In)

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts,  
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.



### Atsugi 1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts,  
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.

### Sasebo 1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts,  
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.





“The lack of electricity, running water, and bathrooms, save for lights powered by a large car battery, was a stark contrast to my usual urban lifestyle. I could go four days without a proper shower or bathroom, right?”

## My solo trip to Mongolia

Story and photos by  
**ERIN HENDERSON**

MY PARADISE  
Mongolia



Russia

Ulaanbaatar

Gobi Desert

China

South Korea



Mongolia, a land of nomadic people and vast landscapes, appealed to me. In early March 2024, I embarked on a solo adventure, landing amidst snow-capped mountains. After a brief stay in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city, I found myself back at the airport, ready to fly to the western region of Ulgi. This was the start of a seven-day journey filled with unique experiences and cultural immersion.

The itinerary for the week included spending several days with nomadic families, witnessing a local eagle festival and culminating with the vibrant Nauryz New Year celebrations. As I landed in Ulgi, the smallest airport I have ever seen, I was greeted by my guide and driver for the week at the carousel luggage claim. My guide

estimated a population of 40,000 in Ulgi, but the last census in 2014 showed a figure closer to 30,000. Regardless, the town, reliant on tourism, particularly in the summer when the mountains are open for hiking and camping, was a charming gateway to the nomadic lifestyle.

After collecting my luggage, we set off in a Land Cruiser, my trusty companion for the week. After a quick stop at a local restaurant for a meal and one last indoor bathroom break, we embarked on a journey to the countryside, where I would be staying with two nomadic families. The lack of electricity, running water, and bathrooms, save for lights powered by a large car battery, was a stark contrast to my usual urban lifestyle. As someone who had not grown up camping, this was a new and exciting experience for me. Yes, I could go four days without a proper shower or bathroom, right?



Gathering around for a meal during the eagle festival.



Nauryz Parade.

### Nomad stays

We arrived in the countryside as the sun set and were greeted by the first nomadic family. The home was a three-room concrete structure; the single light bulb in the kitchen was sourced from one small battery, and heat was from a cooking furnace in the "kitchen" area. I would spend the next two evenings with Beken, his wife, and their youngest son, Baku. In addition to being an eagle hunter and herder, Beken is a father of four, a talented musician, and quick with a smile.

That night, with the light glowing from that single light bulb, I dined around the table with the family, my guide Baku (not to be confused with Beken's son, also Baku), and Adilbek or "Ada," our driver. In Kazakh culture, horsemeat is a prime source of protein, especially during the winter months. As someone who is now down one gallbladder, introducing new things or anything that has a lot of fat is usually a recipe for disaster, and this particular disaster I was determined to avoid. I sampled a small amount of meat but stuck to the bread and soups during mealtimes. That night, after putting off the inevitable trek outside into the blustery cold evening, I finally put my headlamp on and mustered up the courage to use the great outdoor bathroom.

Pitch black outside, I wandered around briefly, trying to find the perfect spot. As I was settling into my place, I was suddenly startled by the four eyes that I caught in my





Playing Mongolian string instrument in Nauryz parade.

headlamp. As my heart rate spiked, I realized it was not kidnappers coming down to take me; it was the yaks, taking in the sight of this American girl clearly looking like she was way outside of her element, and they wouldn't be wrong. I hurriedly took care of business as the wind whipped around me. Then, I ran back inside to snuggle into my sleeping bag and blanket for the evening.

The next day was spent visiting several local nomad families and eagle hunters. At each home, we were welcomed with bottomless bowls of milk tea, candies, bread, and cookies. In Mongolia, it is tradition for the youngest son to live at home with his wife and family and help care for his parents. Though Mongolia has the sparsest population in the world, everywhere we went, there seemed to be no shortage of children at each home we visited.

I learned that in attempts to bolster the fertility rate, Mongolia offers awards and monetary compensation for families with four or more children. Mothers are awarded Second Order of Glorious Motherhood for having four or five children and \$77 a month. Mothers are awarded the First Order of Glorious Motherhood for having six or more children and \$154 monthly. Another title that has come under fire is Darkhan Ber, which translates to "champion" or "high-ranking bride." This title and a medal are given to mothers with three boys in a row. Human rights activists say this behavior is discriminatory against mothers based on their child's gender and against women who choose to not have children or cannot have them. Other Asian countries such as Korea and China have also used (and are still using) monetary compensation in attempts to increase their declining birth rates.

After a day of visiting nomadic families, we arrived back at Beken's home. That evening, after dinner, we were serenaded with music from Mongolian and Russian string instruments and a bayan, a modern button accordion. After the music festivities ended, I once again curled into my sleeping bag for the evening, exhausted from the day's activities.

The next day, we would move on to the next nomad's

home, where I was supposed to spend the next two evenings. I would get from Bekken's home to the next nomad's home by horseback. Though I felt like I was adequately prepared for the extreme cold, I caught a chill I could not shake after almost three hours on horseback in the wind. When we finally arrived at our next destination, I was shivering so much despite sitting next to the furnace and zipping into my sleeping bag for warmth.

It took hours for me to finally warm up. I had already been fighting a slight cold when I arrived in Mongolia, so instead of staying the fourth night in the countryside, I requested to head back into town where I could take a day to rest and recuperate. Despite knowing I needed to hydrate more with the elevation, I wasn't doing as much as I should have because I wanted to avoid continuously going outside into the cold to do my business. This also factored into how I was feeling. Don't do what I did; be smarter and drink those fluids.

After a day of rest, I felt much better and excited to head to a local eagle festival. Since it was March, this was the end of the season for the eagle hunters. They typically only hunt with the golden eagles during the winter months because in the summer, the eagles wilt, and the prey has thicker coats in the winter. Historically, Kazakh families used eagles in the winter to hunt small game like foxes and rabbits. This tradition is said to have been adopted around the 12th century. Today, it's mainly used for sport, and the eagles are released back into the wild around the age of 10 or after hunting for five to seven years. Golden eagles have a lifespan of around 30 years.

### The eagle festival

The last small festival of the year was held in the Ulgii province amongst the Altai mountains. Participants were tested in three categories: speed, agility, and accuracy. In the first event, participants start on the mountain, leaving their eagle with a trusted friend or fellow hunter as they ride down the mountain when it's their turn. They then call the eagle with a piece of meat, and whoever's eagle comes to them in the fastest time from the call wins that event.

Some eagles flew right away, others took a detour route, and one even escaped to start a new life. It was fascinating to watch. After a morning of eagle calling, we took to the ger's to share a meal with the eagle hunters and fellow visitors.

After lunch, the next event kicked off to test participants' agility: coin pick up. On horseback, they would ride and pick up a "coin" (stuffed ball) without stopping. There were many misses, a few falls from the horses, and fantastic grabs. The next event was archery on horseback, followed by tug of war on horseback. In the end, an overall winner and individual winners were crowned for each event.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



Khaizm, eagle hunter from Sagsai Village.



Kabylkhakh Kuney, 81, in his home.



Eagle festival participants in action.



Tenelkhan Bugibay, 74, with grandson.



Eagle festival participants before the start of the event.



### Nauryz

The following day, the town of Ulgii hosted its annual Nauryz Parade. This celebration is held yearly during the vernal equinox, and the name means "new day." This New Year is celebrated by several Central Asian countries, and countries like India, Iran, Georgia, China,



Traditional Mongolian wedding attire in Nauryz.



Sunset among the Altai mountains.

and Turkey. The holiday symbolizes renewal, and the days around this time are spent visiting with families and loved ones. My guide, Baku, said they typically see around 40 families in the two days around the new year. He said his family came close to visiting all 40 families in one day one year!

On my last evening, sitting down for a final meal with Baku and Ada, I learned I was their first solo traveler. Typically, I love a good solo trip, but I will be the first to admit this trip was a little more difficult than I had anticipated. The remoteness, coldness, and lack of cell connection to my family back home was a mental challenge, though one I needed. My downtime with the nomad families was spent reading and journaling and really trying to be present in the experience as I knew it was one I may not have again for a long time.

Mongolia is such a beautiful country with such a unique culture. If you are considering a trip, I recommend going during the summer, when the warmer temperatures allow for more outdoor activities, including hiking and camping. The landscapes are some of the best I've seen, and should I get the opportunity to return in the warmer months, I will not hesitate to do so.

**Author's Bio:**

*Erin Henderson is a professional freelance photographer and writer whose work has been featured in a variety of publications. She is also a mother of two and a Marine Corps spouse living in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at erinhendersonmedia.com or follow her travels on Instagram @erinhendrnsn.*



Traditional dance at the Nauryz Parade.



Kazakh Tours website

### Speakin' Mongolian

**Hello:** Sain uu

**Goodbye:** Bayartai

**Hello! How are you?:**

Sain! baina uu?

**I'm good, thank you:**

Bi sain, bayarlalaa

**What is your name?:**

Tanii ner khen be?

**My name is...:**

Minii neriig

**Thank you:** Bayarlalaa

**You're welcome:**

Zugair zugair

**How much is this?:**

En hed ve

**I am lost:** Bi toorchihloo



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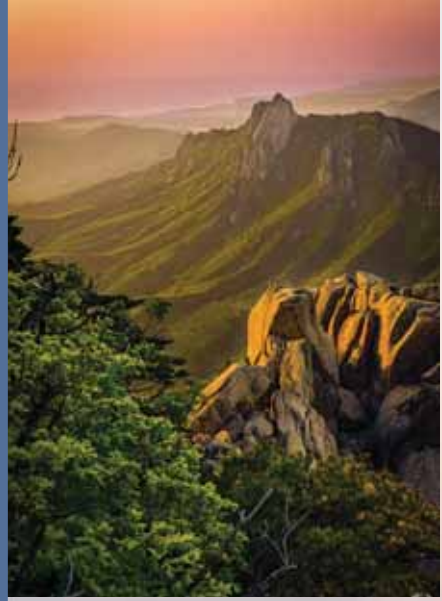
# Early morning adventure at Ulsanbawi Rock

Story and photos by  
**KYLE HANEY**

MY PARADISE  
South Korea



North Korea  
Seoul  
Ulsanbawi Rock



3 a.m., my alarm goes off. It was my reminder that I made a goal to catch a sunrise over Ulsanbawi Rock.  
“Holy crap, I’m tired,” I mutter as I lay there with my eyes closed. I began weighing the pros and cons of hiking this early in the morning.

“What if the park isn’t even open? Am I just gonna sneak through the gate?”

“What if I just go over to the beach and catch a sunrise over the ocean again?”

“...what if there’s a bear?”  
That last one cracked me up.

As I talked myself back into this last-minute idea I came up with six hours prior while polishing off a beer at Craft Root, I got out of bed and got dressed. Thankfully, I had an extra instant oatmeal packet and an energy bar from the day before.

I heated some water, made the oatmeal, walked out the door, and realized I forgot said oatmeal on the counter. “Screw it” I said, and continued to the trailhead with just the energy bar.



For more great travel stories by Kyle, check out [globetrotterkyle.com](http://globetrotterkyle.com)

### Speakin' Korean

- Good morning:** Jo-eun achim-ieyo (좋은 아침이에요)
- Let’s go hiking:** Deungsan-hareo gayo (등산하러 가요)
- What a beautiful sunrise!:** Jeongmal areumdaun ilchul-iya! (정말 아름다운 일출이야!)
- Let’s take a photo:** Sajin jjik-ja (사진 찍자 -informal) / Sajin-eul jjigeub-sida (사진을 찍읍시다)
- I can’t wait to do this again:** Naneun ppalli igeol tto hago sipeoyo (나는 빨리 이걸 또 하고 싶어요)



VIEW VIDEO

### Getting to the trailhead

At 3:30 a.m. I was parking my car in the exact same place I parked two days prior when I made this same hike in the daytime like every other sane person. This time, though, I was surrounded by nothing but pitch-black emptiness.

I was all alone.

No more crowds of people to dodge around, no more laughs of children running from their parents. Heck, had I heard any laughter that early in the morning, I would have been scared, turned around, and driven off.

At 4:45 a.m., and I’m about three-quarters of the way done with the hike. Sunlight had finally begun piercing the darkness above me. However, my immediate surroundings still remained cloaked in the most beautiful shade of midnight blue.

At this point I figured, “if someone out here is going to kill me, they would’ve done it by now”. I also thought, “this sunset sunrise over Ulsanbawi better be worth it” lol. Doing another quick check of the sunrise time on my phone, I determined I was going to make it to the summit on time. At my pace, it looked like I was going to make it to the top about 10 minutes early.

Perfect.

### Arrival at Ulsanbawi Rock

As I climbed up the final few stairs to the summit of the Ulsanbawi Trail to catch a sunrise over Ulsanbawi, the beauty I was rewarded with in that moment was unlike anything I’d ever seen. Well, almost unlike anything I’d ever seen.

The first time I caught a sunrise from the top of a mountain was in Colorado. I was extremely fortunate to be just over 14,000 ft above sea level in Colorado on Mt. Evans.

The photo I took that morning is one that I’m still extremely proud of. I stood atop a 14k-foot mountain and watched a hundred-mile-long shadow stretch across the Rocky Mountains. It was as if I was standing on top of the center of the entire solar system.

This journey, my adventure to witness the sunrise over Ulsanbawi Rock, transported me back in time to that exact moment.

I watched the sun cast its warm rays of light onto the jagged peaks of the Taebaek mountains and relived one of my favorite moments in Colorado.

All alone, shivering on the side of a desolate mountain in South Korea, I found a sense of joy. All because I chose to get up early and get moving. Story of my life, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

### Get up, sleepy heads!

Long story short: get up early and catch a sunrise at least once in your life.

And if you choose to do it at Ulsanbawi Rock, I promise you you won’t regret it. When you see the sun rise over the East Sea and fill the valleys of the Taebaek mountains with one of the most magical collisions of light and darkness, you’ll be thankful you made the journey to witness the sunrise over Ulsanbawi Rock.





“When asked about the dangers of diving, they shared stories of getting caught in discarded fishing nets underwater and being clipped by a ship's propeller when they came up during a dive.”

## Hanging out with Korea's iconic haenyeo

Story and photos by  
ERIN HENDERSON



It's less than two weeks until my family moves across the world (again), and I find myself four hours south on South Korea's coastal island of Geoje. I am bracing among the rocks of the waves on a small fishing boat, angling to get the best images as Sohee Jin and Jungmin Woo jump overboard, armed with their nets and tuwaks, to begin their day of work in the water. The boat captain graciously idles for a few minutes while I snap some more photos before we speed away to let the girls work. That's when it dawns on me; these girls will dive for hours without a break in the open water and harsh sun. It's incredible.

When you think of the famous haenyeo of South Korea, perhaps your mind conjures up the famous images of the beautifully weathered elder haenyeos of Jeju Island. If you have never heard of these iconic women divers, haenyeo, or sea women, are free divers who have been free diving to collect abalone, sea urchins, seaweed, octopus, and other sea creatures since before the Joseon Dynasty. They do so without the help of oxygen tanks. Their strength, resilience and ability to hold their breath for long periods are just a few characteristics that make these women unique.

Sohee and Jungmin relocated to Geoje from the bustling city of Busan, though they did not know each other then. Sohee's aunt encouraged her to become a haenyeo because she thought it would provide a great opportunity and source of income.

Shortly after her move to Geoje, Sohee did a one-year apprenticeship without pay, learning as much as she could from seasoned haenyeo.

For several years, Sohee and Jungmin worked on different boats, eventually pairing up with one other haenyeo who only dives part-time as she is 77. They explained that in the past, the boat captains would take a percentage of whatever was harvested and sold, taking a large piece of the profit. Now, they pay a flat monthly fee to the captain for use of the boat and can keep the profits from their harvest sales.

It is clear from the moment you meet Sohee and Jungmin that they are close friends and deeply passionate about what they do. After their dive, we rejoined them while they quickly prepared a special order for a long-time customer who had driven in from Busan. They offered samples of fresh abalone and oyster, and Jungmin joked that they make such a great pair because Sohee loves to sell the seafood, and Jungmin loves to eat it. Their love for their work is truly inspiring.

After Sohee finished her negotiations, we chatted over lunch. Curious about how they sell their catch, I learned the girls are utilizing their following on social media to take orders and share updates about what they have available. They are also in the process of setting up a storefront on Naver. They have amassed fame and quite the following online within South Korea for their appearance in the movie *Smugglers*. They have also appeared on local news programs and were visited by popular



MY PARADISE  
Geoje, South Korea







South Korean radio hosts. Jungmin was even featured in a Korea Disney Plus commercial as the haenyeo shown before the clip of Ariel from "The Little Mermaid."

After lunch, we found ourselves back at the docks while the girls quickly showered and began prepping the remainder of their catch from the morning. They moved seamlessly around each other, completing a task in unison while I bombarded them with questions. I learned that though the population of haenyeo is dwindling, Sohee and Jungmin are doing their best to be ambassadors for this ancient practice. They estimate around 100 haenyeo are in Geoje, and 10 younger haenyeo have joined over the last few years to follow in the footsteps of Sohee, 32, and Jungmin, 38.

When asked about the dangers of diving, they shared stories of getting caught in discarded fishing nets underwater and being clipped by a ship's propeller when they came up during a dive. In addition to the physical dangers, they stressed that climate change plays a pivotal role in their ability to continue diving; warmer water equals less sea life. They also deal

with illegal poachers who dive at night without a license and remove far more than what is allowed.

Though the girls dive year-round, the peak season is December through February, sometimes early March, as that is mating season for sea life. The haenyeo of Geoje dive more often than the haenyeo of Jeju simply due to Geoje's location. Jeju sees harsher shifts in tides and larger swells, making the conditions more challenging for safe diving, thus resulting in fewer days to be in the water.

Though the future of haenyeo remains unclear, one thing is sure: Sohee and Jungmin love what they do and are proud to call themselves haenyeos. They see diving as a bridge to connect their culture to the outside world and do everything they can to encourage the younger generations to get involved in diving. When I arrived, one of the first things the girls said to me was, "Thank you for showing an interest in our culture." Their dedication to preserving their culture is a reminder of the importance of staying connected to our traditions. Sohee and Jungmin, thanks to you for allowing me to spend the day learning about your beautiful culture. I am forever grateful for our time together.

**Author's Bio:**

Erin Henderson is a professional freelance photographer and writer whose work has been featured in a variety of publications. She is also a mother of two and a Marine Corps spouse living in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at [erinhendersonmedia.com](http://erinhendersonmedia.com) or follow her travels on Instagram @erinhendrsn.



**Speakin' Korean**

**These women are amazing!:**

I-yeoseong-deureun nollawoyo! (이 여성들은 놀라워요!)

**They are very brave!:**

Geu-deureun ahju yonggamhaeyo! (그들은 아주 용감해요!)

**How long can they hold their breath?:** Geu-deureun eolmana orae sum-eul cham-eul su innayo? (그들은 얼마나 오래 숨을 참을 수 있나요?)

**Peak season is December through February:**

Seongsugi-neun 12 wol-buteo 2 wol-kkaji imnida (성수기는 12월부터 2월까지입니다)

**I love seafood:**

Jeo-neun haesanmul-eul saranghaeyo (저는 해산물을 사랑해요)

**Let's eat more:** Deo meokja (더 먹자-informal) / Deo meogeup-sida (더 먹읍시다-formal)

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“ We would like to take you on a journey through East Seoul, a place full of history, food, fashion and many more wonders.”

## Exploring Seoul

Story and photos by  
**JIWOO YOO, MIN KONG,  
AND MICHAEL GALICIA**

**MY PARADISE**  
Seoul, South Korea



North Korea

Seoul •



**S**eoul is a sprawling megalopolis. The surface area itself is one thing but almost 50% of South Korea's population calls Seoul home. There is so much to explore, with a lot of focus given to the historic center of Seoul and modern districts like Gangnam. But for this story, we would like to take you on a journey through East Seoul, a place full of history, food, fashion and many more wonders.

### Dongmyo

When it comes to thrifting in Korea, there is no better place to enjoy it than Dongmyo. Once you go out Gate 3 of Dongmyo Metro Station, you are introduced to a long strip of street, busy with people buying and selling goods.

Within what many call “flea market street,” there are people of all ages and genders talking to each other, bargaining and enjoying their time. Inside the market, you can find much more than just clothes, including little collectibles, pins, lighters, pans, knives, rice cookers, bikes, helmets, wallets, statues, TVs, DVDs and even both ROK and U.S. Army-related trinkets. Not only that, you will no doubt be attracted to all the street food they have to offer, such as iron-griddle toast or Korean-style twisted donuts (kkwabaegi). While you walk around enjoying the shopping and food, you will soon reach the Donggwanwangmyo Shrine, or Dongmyo Shrine in short.

The Dongmyo Shrine was built in honor of Guan Yu, a 3rd century Chinese commander famous throughout many Asian cultures for his heroism and bravery. Requested by the Chinese people during the Imjin War (16th century Japanese invasions of Korea), it holds great history, representing the friendly relations between China and Korea at the time. Although frowned upon by Koreans when it was built, it's now a landmark sitting in the middle of the Dongmyo flea market community.



Dongmyo “flea market street.”

### Dongdaemun [Great East Gate]

Walking further east from Dongmyo, you will reach Dongdaemun, or the Great East Gate. This gate is one of eight gates into old Seoul (Hanyang), and is instantly recognizable by its imposing structure and architectural peculiarity. This is the only gate in Seoul that has a semi-circular fortification ring in front to prevent direct frontal attacks by invading forces. Approaching the gate from the east gives a true sense of its grandeur and importance. While it is not possible to walk through the gate, walking past it will take you to the most eastern point of Jong-ro – the main central thoroughfare in Hanyang, now lined with shops, modern buildings and skyscrapers.

The modern-day area around Dongdaemun has grown into a diverse and culturally exciting hub, with vibrant Indian, Nepalese and Central Asian neighborhoods located nearby, with local shops and restaurants showcasing the cuisines of those countries. Within eyeshot of the gate is the DDP (Dongdaemun Design Plaza), a



The Dongmyo Shrine built in honor of Guan Yu.





The Great East Gate.



Clothing at Dongmyo.

monumental neofuturistic landmark designed by Zaha Hadid, featuring a park on the roof and large exhibition spaces indoors (the annual Seoul Fashion Week is held here). Dongdaemun has also always been famous for its markets, especially fabric and textiles.

### Naksan Park (Hanyangdoseong)

Naksan Park, extending north from Dongdaemun, is part of the Hanyangdoseong, a fortification wall that was made when King Taejo founded Joseon (1392-1897) and moved the capital of Korea from Gaesong (in modern-day North Korea) to Hanyang. With the wall reaching an enormous length of 18.6 kilometers, it was made to protect the palaces and city from enemies during war time. The word Naksan itself means "Camel Mountain" in Korean, a nod to the humped shape of the mountain ridge.

Of course, the wall no longer serves its old purpose as a protective measure against enemies. However, the wall and the hiking trails along it currently stand as a popular sightseeing area, with Naksan Park being a top spot to go take in the city skyline. It is well known for its beautiful night view of the city. If you like K-Dramas at all, you may have realized many of the shows use this area to film different scenes. Some notable K-Dramas showing Naksan Park are "Guardian: The Lonely and Great God" and "Itaewon Class."

### Speakin' Korean

- Please take us to Dongmyo:** Dongmyo-ro gajuseyo (동묘로 가주세요)
- This wall is huge:** I seongbyeok-eun geodae-haeyo (이 성벽은 거대해요)
- Let's go shopping:** Shopping-hareo gayo (쇼핑하러 가요)
- The food is delicious:** Eumsigi masisseoyo (음식이 맛있어요)
- Let's drink some makgeolli:** Makgeolli masibsida (막걸리 마십니다)

### John & Mark

After a long day of touring East Seoul and having fun, there is only one thing left to do: recharge and eat. John & Mark is a Korean fusion restaurant where you can drink and have a great time. The mood inside was welcoming. The lighting, pictures on the wall, food and music all made it a great experience.

John & Mark is especially well-known for their makgeolli, a traditional Korean alcohol made with rice. Think of it as basically rice wine. John and Mark had 14 makgeolli and 2 house makgeolli to choose from, sorted according to its flavor profile (sweet, sour, dry). They also had a choice of 4 highball drinks. We ordered a 600ml house makgeolli for 5,000 won, one non-alcoholic apple highball for 6,000 won, and an alcoholic apple highball for 8,500 won. The drinks were tasty and good value.

As for the food, we were served some soft tofu and pickled radish and jalapeno for starters. The tofu was dipped in a soy-based sauce and was surprisingly very good. Other than the starters, we ordered a Bacon Cheese Kimchi Jeon (pancake), Chinese and Korean Fusion Japchae (glass noodles) and steamed pork. All of the food was delicious and paired really well with the drinks. The kimchi jeon was crunchy, the japchae spicy, and the steamed pork was nice and soft.

With our tummies full and tired from the long day, it was time to go home. As much as we enjoyed exploring trendy, creative and diverse East Seoul, I hope you enjoyed the experience reading about it too and following us on our journey. We hope you have a chance to visit Korea, the Land of the Morning Calm!

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“With no crowds, any of these welcoming destinations close to Misawa relax body and soul, providing plenty of ways to unwind and great photo ops.”

## Near Misawa it's nature, not crowds

Story and photos by  
**KRISTINA STELLHORN**

**H**ome to Misawa Air Base, Misawa is a small city surrounded by farms and forests. To the not-so-distant west sit the majestic Hakkoda mountains – snow-capped for much of the year – and the Pacific Ocean is only a few clicks from the center of town to the east.

Though it has so much to offer nature-wise and its location is ideal when it comes to beaches and mountains, Misawa isn't a huge tourist mecca. If you love the Great Outdoors and seek peace and quiet in nature, this is the place to explore. With all that it has to offer, this serene and stunning corner of Aomori Prefecture has much to see, and many of Misawa's gems in the countryside are only a few minutes' drive from town.

Got a dog? All of the following gorgeous spots are the ultimate in dog-friendly. All you have to decide is whether you want to keep the leash on.



Sunrise at Seaside Park.



Raised wooden walkway at Shimoda Park.



Forest walk.



Uphill path at Shimoda Park (with Jack).

### Forest paths & uncrowded beaches

Any time is a good time to explore some new walking paths close to the eastern coast of Honshu, and in particular, this wild and wonderful region called Tohoku, where Misawa is situated.

Wanna take a walk in the cool pines? The eastern coast nearby town is lined with forests. Trees are filled with songbirds, like the cuckoo and Japanese warbler. Those will be the only sounds you'll hear, except for the ocean waves, visible only a few yards beyond the tree line. Unpaved walking paths replete with wildflowers and tall grasses welcome every visitor, immersing them in tranquility. The shade of the woods and quick access to the ocean offer nature-seekers the best of both worlds, side by side.

Step out of the woods into the sand, and you'll find yourself on one of the following. And remember: Misawa stays cooler longer due to its more northerly location, so if you're dying to escape the heat, head up here.

### Veedol Beach

This popular beach is named after Miss Veedol, the plane that flew from Misawa to Wenatchee, WA, making the world's first non-stop flight back in 1931. Swimming at Veedol Beach is much safer than the open ocean, because two long, man-made jetties consisting of giant cement jacks protect the beach from dangerous waves and riptides. Veedol Beach Park has many trees, grassy areas with tables for picnics, walking paths, and public restrooms. Because Misawa is an undiscovered gem, this beach is rarely overcrowded. Misawa's Port is adjacent, and boat enthusiasts will enjoy a leisurely (and quick!) drive through it as well. Be sure to pack a picnic and prepare for a day of relaxation and sunshine.

### Oirase Town Seaside Park

For camping, fishing, beachcombing, sunning and long strolls on Japan's volcanic gray sand, Seaside Park is preferable for those who want to enjoy unlimited views of the vast Pacific without man-made barriers or jetties. This more natural, "less constructed" beach park, about 2.5 miles to the south of Veedol Beach, makes for plenty of leg-stretching, playing in the sand, and running with your canine friend. However, the water isn't safe for swimming; there are no jetties or lifeguards to protect oceangoers, and turbulent waves are constantly crashing onto shore. However, if you're a collector of sea glass or shells, those waves wash up some great treasures.



View of Shimoda Park pond and tower.

MY PARADISE  
Misawa, Japan







### 'Surfer's Beach'

Yes, Misawa has surfing and its own set of beaches with the best swells around. Does your dog need a play date before you head seaward to take a walk in the cool sand or have a wienie roast? Park at the dog park on Highway 338, let your best friend play with dogs of all sizes, then head downhill toward the ocean. You'll see a large cement tsunami/erosion-prevention structure to walk along. Head north, and you'll find two soft, sandy beaches separated by a long, man-made jetty. Access to these beaches can also be gained by driving down one of the roads that run north or south of the Misawa Dog Park entrance. Surfers like to park their rides on the outcropping above the beaches and watch the waves come in if they're not out there on the water. If you feel like taking a longer walk, keep strolling north to find yourself on beautiful, sandy bluffs overlooking the ocean.

### Tranquil parks

A walk in the park is easy in Misawa, which boasts several lush nature retreats. Get out of the city and head to one of the beautiful parks nearby – and a short drive from base.

### Speakin' Japanese

**Misawa is beautiful.:** Misawa wa kirei desu.

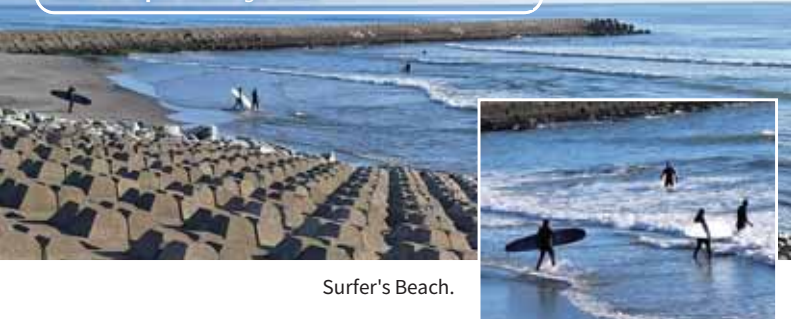
**I love nature.:** Shizen ga daisuki desu.

**Let's go for a hike.:** Haikingu ni ikimashou.

**Is that the Statue of Liberty?:**

Arewa Jiyu-no-megami desuka?

**Surf's up!:** Nami ga kita!



Surfer's Beach.

### Shimoda Park

Shimoda Park is a quiet, sparsely-populated park nestled amidst farmlands, about 15 minutes south of Misawa Air Base. "Shimoda" is a common Japanese name meaning "lower rice paddy." Parkgoers might think it means "swan," since the theme there are the large white birds, as signs and sculptures throughout the park indicate. In spring, cherry trees planted along every pathway show off their fresh growth. In summer, everything is radiant green. Fall is also picturesque in the park, because of the many changing leaves. No need to drive further!

Wanna relax? It's easy here. Take a calming stroll in the section of the park accessed by a wooden walkway built above the flora and leading into a small canyon. There you can have a seat – and simply breathe – beneath the small, open, ramada-like shelter in the middle. Take a moment to absorb the sights and smells, and listen to the sound of wildlife all around while you gather your serenity.

Throughout the park, there are many trees, lots of walking paths and hikes uphill (for those wanting a bit more exertion), and a large, spacious playground adjacent to a pond for hours of kid fun. A stair-cased tower sits above the park on a hill bordering a quiet and clean campground, and visitors can climb inside it as well. Traversing further, paths lead past one soccer and two baseball fields, another pond/lake, and on woodsy, ascending trails. There is also an open-air theatre and stage across the street for festivals. Walking around the larger pond, you'll see fish jumping and ducks and swans swimming. Every season is a delight in this park. What a perfect place to walk your dog and soak up nature!

### Lake Ogawara Beach Park

U.S. service members can enjoy the "Base Beach" on magnificent Lake Ogawara, bordering Misawa Air Base. However, if you wish to see more of the lake (from the Japanese side), check out Lake Ogawara Beach Park, only a few kilometers away from the base gate. Here, you can barbecue, take long walks, swim, and enjoy beautiful sunsets shimmering off the lake. Camping spots are available with reservations, and SUPs and kayaks are also for rent. It is from this park that Japanese and American people enjoy the 4th of July fireworks set alight on Base Beach. Spend a day – or a long weekend – enjoying the great outdoors in the Japanese countryside.

### Momoishi-Machi – 'Statue of Liberty' Park

This park has several different names, including Ichou Park and Oirase Town Ginkgo Park, but Americans know it as the Statue of Liberty Park. It has just about everything park and nature lovers enjoy, plus... a replica of the Statue of Liberty. Here on the outskirts of neighboring Oirase, stands Japan's largest, at 30 meters tall, built because the city shares the same latitude as New York City (40.40N). This local Lady Liberty overlooks a large pond and huge park complete with athletic center, community building, playground, one of the longest slides ever created, landscaped rock gardens, and so much more.

Walking through this park on the paths that lead around the pond or under tree canopies can take hours, because there's so much to discover. The unique village of Momoishi lies to the west of the park and has some interesting architectural and whimsical landmarks, also worth a look.

### Ichou Park

Another hidden gem in the Misawa area is Ichou Park, located in Oirase and shown on maps as adjacent to the Statue of Liberty Park, via trails. Ichou is pure nature, with paths that lead through and around trees, streams, fence lines and small ponds. Bike paths are there for cycling enthusiasts, and because this is a smaller park, those paths lead from and into adjacent neighborhoods. Driving here, you might miss the entrance, because the park doesn't draw unnecessary attention to itself. It's simple and lovely.

With no crowds, any of these welcoming destinations close to Misawa relax body and soul, providing plenty of ways to unwind and great photo ops. If you're ready to escape the congestion and noise, take a long, leisurely walk on the beach, or do your workout at the park while feasting your eyes on nature, head to one of Misawa's natural treasures. You may find you're the only human there!



Momoishi-Machi "Statue of Liberty" Park (with Jack).

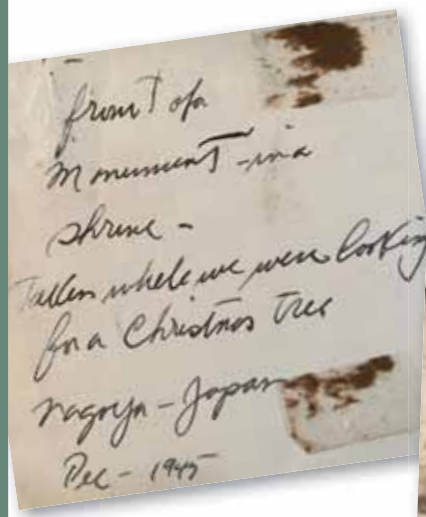


“It was a closure to another one of our adventures that Grandpop and I have shared halfway around the world and decades apart.”

# Retracing Grandpop's steps in Japan, Site 4

Story and photos by STEPH J. PAWELSKI

MY PARADISE  
Nagoya, Japan



1945

Komakiyama Castle Ruins in Nagoya.



2023

It was September 2023, our second year into our return to Okinawa. My family and I were figuring out where to travel over Thanksgiving break and didn't have time to plan a trip to Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. We weren't sure about traveling to the Philippines quite just yet and the seats on Peach Airlines going to Thailand were already filled.

Even though we've been to mainland Japan a few times, we enjoy it and searched for other cities to visit.

I told my husband, Jeff, that it would be beneficial for us to visit Nagasaki since our family (including our children) were already at Hiroshima in 2018. I want them to also see the sites that remain from when the United States dropped an atomic bomb at Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945; these bombings influenced Japan to surrender to the United States a few days later, ending World War II.

"We can do that!" Jeff said as he and our son were walking out the door to go see "One Million Miles Away" at the Camp Foster Movie Theater. Our daughter was already outside playing with her friends.

I began developing a passion for learning about, locating and visiting World War II sites in the western Pacific region since moving to Okinawa the first time in 2013.

I sat on the couch and thought about my late (maternal) grandfather, Louis H. Lautenbach. He and I are both from the Philadelphia area. Grandpop was drafted in the United States Army in the 1940s and was in the southwest Pacific shortly before the end of World War II.

He took his camera along and had pictures taken of him standing in front of distinctive landmarks throughout the Philippines, Okinawa and mainland Japan. Lucky for me, he wrote brief descriptions on the back of the photos, which was just enough evidence for me to retrace his footsteps, including a shrine in Okinawa's Bise Village, the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, and the Imperial Hotel (originally located in Tokyo) located in present day Meiji Mura (north of Nagoya). Comparison collages were created with his and our pictures!

### 3 more to go!

There were three more locations I know Grandpop was at, one in Manila and two in mainland Japan. I am still certain they exist to this day, including a Japanese monument in Nagoya that he stood in front of while searching for a Christmas tree in December 1945.

Nagoya is an 11-hour trip by car from Nagasaki. I was certain we could get there within a few hours using the Shinkansen... "if" I could find the site.

I typed "Nagoya" into Google Maps and began searching several parks.

I clicked on each attraction at Komakiyama Castle Ruins but didn't see anything representing this Japanese monument in his picture.

I eventually clicked on the main pin to the park and flipped through the photos. There were many of the castle, torii, the surrounding city, cats, and cherry blossom trees. But none of a Japanese monument.

I wasn't any closer to finding this monument than I was a decade ago. I was losing motivation flipping through each of these photos.

Then I clicked on Photo 82. It was a picture of a Japanese monument, on a hill, with a circular cement base. It looked very similar and once again I was experiencing déjà vu. I compared this picture to Grandpop's black and white photo, I finally found "the" exact spot he stood almost 78 years before.

I began blowing up Jeff's phone while he was watching the movie and asked if we could visit Nagoya over Thanksgiving, as well. "Of course!" he quickly replied.

### Thanksgiving weekend

My family and I traveled to Nagasaki on Wednesday, Nov. 22, 2023.

We went to the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and visited the Hypocenter Park on Thanksgiving Day.

"Our family has developed a unique way of celebrating holidays," Jeff said during lunch. "The U.S. military has located us all over the world since our kids were born, we've formed a new tradition of holiday meals at irregular restaurants including this year at Jolly Pasta."

The next day, we took the Shinkansen almost 600 miles northeast, traveling at about 200 miles per hour. We passed many Japanese cities and towns. They all appeared similar with (many) apartment and office buildings, Japanese-style houses, cultivated fields, and train tracks and stations. We stopped at a few along the way to drop people off and pick some up.

There were mountains in the background, the leaves on most trees were red, orange, and yellow. Japan is a beautiful country with many amazing people!

Jeff, Hannah, William, and I got to Nagoya around 2 p.m. after riding on the Shinkansen for three hours. We got to our hotel and learned we had to pay an extra 1,000 yen for checking in 15 minutes early. We did, our rooms were no larger than a shed. A Denny's was close by, so we got an American meal that filled each of us all up. It





See previous story on Pages 44-45 of Destination Paradise 2023-24.

My Paradise: Retracing gradpop's steps on Okinawa.



Bise Village in Motobu, Okinawa.

Imperial Castle, Tokyo.

Imperial Hotel (originally located in Tokyo) located in present day Meiji Mura.

was 3:30 p.m. and we agreed it would be best to travel 40 minutes to the Komakiyama Castle Ruins to locate the Japanese monument. A taxi picked us up. We were at a standstill and the sun was scheduled to set in a half hour. I began feeling nervous. We eventually turned on to a backroad and immediately saw the hill in the distance as our taxi driver was driving 65 kmh in a 30. So much for speed limits.

The hill is huge, it reminded me of a mini mountain. The castle was on top. We were almost at the park, but the main entrance was closed due to construction. There would be no way we could find this monument by sundown.

**'There it is!'**

Our taxi driver quickly turned around and zoomed his way around other cars... on a one-lane road. We pulled into another entrance to the park and jumped out.

Jeff, Hannah, and William went to the left and I to the right in search of the monument. I saw a local walking his Shiba Inu. I greeted him in Japanese, showed him the present-day picture of the monument and asked if he

knew where it was. He gestured to follow him, so I rounded up the family. We crossed the main road, walked past stores and crossed over a few back streets. We seemed to be getting farther away from the park. I became disappointed, but knew we had the next morning to visit this site again. I was hopeful to have that second chance.

All of a sudden, I heard Jeff say, "there it is!" He was pointing across the street to a Japanese monument, on a hill, with a circular cement base.

We showed our appreciation to the man as we ran up the steep steps, along the main road, to the base of the monument. The sun was at the horizon, but a few rays shined directly on us. Grandpop was holding the sun up for us. This allowed the right amount of light needed for us to quickly take photos of the site and of us standing close to where Grandpop stood.

The monument appears to be a lot larger than it is in Grandpop's picture. It could be the type of camera used, the distance it was taken at, or it may be a newer monument replacing the one from 1945.

We finished taking photos as the sun disappeared. It was a closure to another one of our adventures that Grandpop and I have shared halfway around the world and decades apart.



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“If you’re stationed on Okinawa, trips like this are easily accomplishable and should be on your bucket list.”

## Marvelous Miyakojima

Story and photos by  
**DAVID KRIGBAUM**

MY PARADISE  
Miyakojima, Japan



Naha  
Okinawa  
Main island

Miyakojima



While stationed on Okinawa for four years, my wife and I realized something: Even people who live on tropical paradises need a getaway sometimes. As much as I loved Okinawa’s main island, learning and experiencing all I could, there were still more Okinawan islands with their own brand of tropical charm and points of interest. One of which is halfway between Okinawa and Taiwan, Miyakojima. Its ecology and culture are different from the Okinawan mainland, though the stories of the islands are intertwined, which makes for an engaging trip whether you’re in it for its nature or history.

Starting with a primer on those topics allows for greater appreciation and enjoyment as the trip unfolds, so our first stop was the Miyakojima City Museum. Miyakojima’s culture developed independent of Okinawa, so its traditional beliefs and customs are unique to the island but influenced by Okinawa, mainland Japan, and China. Its wildlife also ranges from majestic sea turtles to diminutive horses, one of Japan’s eight native horse species, which gave us something to add to the itinerary later.

For more recent history, my wife waited in our rental car while I walked through the rain looking for the Imperial Japanese Navy 313th Construction Corps Underground Bunkers at the Miyakojima Botanical Gardens down the road from the museum. These are a set of connected tunnels burrowed into the side of a hill and likely only appeal to a subset of historians and mud aficionados. The rough tunnel work is reminiscent of the Underground Naval Headquarters in Naha, Okinawa.

The city also has an easy circuit of shrines and tombs,

which I recommend seeing after the city museum. Miyakojima Shrine combines native deities with Ryukyu architecture and Japanese Shinto religion. Down the hill is Harimizu Utaki, a sacred site associated with Miyakojima’s creation myth.

The royal Nakasone tombs show an evolution of design and influences and are unique to this island. The sites are also open and walkable, visitors can move about their levels freely and get a feel for them without guard rails!

Near the tombs is the poll tax stone. It was erected in 1637 by order of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Anyone taller than this 4’6” stone, regardless of health, had to pay heavy taxes in millet grain for men and cloth for women. This burden wasn’t lifted until 1903, well after the fall of the Ryukyu Kingdom and Okinawa becoming a prefecture of Japan proper.

Well away from the city is an anomaly left over from the bubble economy days in the late 1900s. Since no tropical paradise is complete without a European castle, Miyakojima built the Ueno German Cultural Village around a replica of Germany’s Marksburg Castle. The castle itself is a convincing replica that contrasts with its tropical seaside environs but works. This rather unexpected cultural exchange and tourism draw was inspired by the 19th century shipwrecking of a German crew who recuperated on Miyakojima until they could be rescued. The museum would be at home in Germany, with replica medieval rooms, plenty of German artwork and recreations of German life around the turn of the 20th century.

Even without its plentiful observation spots, the island itself, surrounded by sparkling, clear waters and



Cape Nishihenna.



Harimizu Utaki.





## Speakin' Japanese

### Okinawan islands are lovely:

Okinawa no shimajima wa utsukushii desu.

**Let's go island hopping:** Shima meguri ni ikimashou.

**That's a long bridge!:** Are wa nagai hashi desune!

**I love history:** Watashi wa rekishi ga totemo sukidesu.



Kurima Bridge.

full of dense jungles, is its own attraction for relaxing drives. We spent a quarter of the trip just going end to end with little purpose beside hitting the points of the compass, engulfed in nature and little else. We stopped where something looked interesting, with the most standout being Higashi-Hennazaki, a long, high peninsula with perfect views of the sea and shore in every direction.

Joined with Miyakojima by the serpentine Kurima Bridge is Irabu Island, which I wanted to see because of a place from an anime: The Blue Turtle. We lazed away the midday at this chill spot for sun and sea with a white beach trail leading to the water. My wife, Emi. Getting her onto that beach brought out all of her girlish charm as she got her feet wet in the translucent water and played along the shore. Basking in her unbridled joy here alone made the entire trip worth it.

Back on Miyakojima, she spent her afternoon with real sea turtles, but because of my poor and mismatched eyesight, I had to decline joining her. I'm not jealous I missed out on swimming with my favorite sea animal because I found a World War II machine gun nest near the hotel and that's almost as good, right?

The four eventful days went quickly and in the end it was satisfying, yet the island still had more to offer, including ancient ruins and points of interest with strange rock formations. If we're ever back, we may try more island hopping with a few days in Miyakojima and then on to another adventure. I still haven't seen a wild Iriomote yamaneko after all.

If you're stationed on Okinawa, trips like this are easily accomplishable and should be on your bucket list. We flew during the tourism off-season in November, resulting in cheap airfare and accommodations. Planning around the weather is paramount, with indoor activities on rainy days and outdoors on the clear or less rainy ones. In this part of the world, rain is always possible, so it's best to plan for both.

## Things to know



For a cheat sheet of ways to see the island, Discover Miyako has several suggested courses you may enjoy.



Miyakojima City Museum Gardens' Imperial Japanese Navy 313th Construction Corps Underground Bunkers.



Miyakojima Shrine



Royal Tombs



Harimizu Utaki



Ueno German Cultural Village



Blue Turtle Beach.



Bunker entrance.

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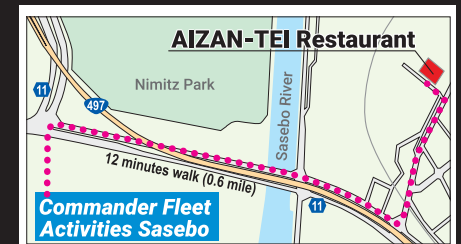
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“ We spent an hour trekking through the jungle from village to village on the stone path. It was an area that time had forgotten as there was no water or electricity.”

## Step back in time in lovely Yap

Story and photos by  
MAX DECO



### We come in peace

The morning after our arrival, I woke up and went with a local friend for a trek on the famous Colonia stone path that started by my hotel and ran through the local villages. Although the hand-made stone path had been laid a millennium ago, long before the current roads came into use, it was in pristine shape. Before we started our trek, my friend trimmed both of us a handful of leaves that we needed to hold in our right hands during our hike to signify to the locals that we were passing visitors and came in peace. We spent an hour trekking through the jungle from village to village on the stone path. It was an area that time had forgotten as there was no water or electricity. At the end of the trail, we emerged back on the main road and returned to our hotel.

### Monstrous mantas

The next day, we boarded one of Manta Bay Resort's dive boats for a glimpse of Inner Space Yap. After a blazingly wet 35-minute ride out, we arrived at the dive site, where huge manta rays congregate to be cleaned by wrasse and smaller fish. The actual cleaning area was only 15-feet deep above a huge coral head, but as we hunched down with our cameras, the marine bats would swoop in above us to be cleaned and then just as quickly fly away. After 40 minutes of observing the monstrous mantas, we dove into the depths and back to our boat.

For our second dive, we cruised out beyond the waves to the outer reef to a spot named Vertigo. Our boat anchored at the edge of the outer reef in about 15 feet of water, with the drop-off going down to about 150 feet to white sand. The amazing thing about this dive is that sharks are accustomed to being fed chum and blood by the boats, so when they hear the motors, they congregate nearby. When a diver splashes down, they all rush up, regardless of whether there is actual food available for them. During our dive, we had no fresh guts for them, so they soon swam deeper. However, the sensation of having so many sharks up close and personal was awe inspiring. After our hour was up, we returned to our boat and headed back to Manta Bay Resort.



Photo courtesy of Guam Visitors Bureau





## Forbidden Island

Yap has many islands, but perhaps the most famous is the formerly Forbidden Island of Rumung, which is now accessible by private boat, albeit with permission only. Together with friends from Yap Visitors Bureau and others, we took a short 30-minute boat ride past the outer reefs to the Forbidden Island. Once we got to the remote coast, we docked at an old meeting house to meet our resident guide Ben, who led us on a hike to abandoned villages via raised limestone paths. As we trekked on, we were surrounded by ancient stone money that ranged from a few feet wide to huge pieces bigger than us and are the largest in the republic. After hiking through the sweltering heat, our guides gifted us freshly cut coconuts that were filled with sweet milk. Our guides told us that during World War II due to lack of supplies, many Japanese troops used the coconuts and their juice as natural IVs to rejuvenate from injuries and wounds. We then boarded our boats for the wet ride back, first stopping for a dip at the most beautiful, submerged beach on the planet.

## Song and dance

For our last adventure, we traveled to the village of Balabat Rull in Colonia to view a traditional dance performed exclusively by female dancers. After arriving, we joined other guests and sat on the ground to view the show. Yap is traditionally segregated depending on the occasion, with females not allowed in the men's meeting house. Since it was an all-female group performing, I was not allowed to cross over to the other side. After the ladies sat down, family and friends came out and presented them with presents ranging from candies and sweets to fruit juice and beer. After the gift presentation, a group of about 50 female dancers dressed in traditional colorful hula skirts came out and sat in front of the Rai money stones, chanting several songs before performing some dances. After the last dance, the ladies quietly retired back to their staging area. We went home with the satisfaction that we stepped back in time for a brief moment.

### When to go

Anytime. Yap is warm year around, although it does experience some heavy rainfall from September through December.

### What to wear

Always cool and comfortable gear is best. Shorts, slip-ons, and a T or polo shirt.



## Contact info



Manta Ray Bay:  
Email: yapdivers@  
mantaray.com or use  
the chat feature on their  
homepage mantaray.com



Yap Visitor's Bureau



United Airlines



## Speakin' Yapese

**Hello:** Mogethin

**How are you?:** Ke urgom boch?

**Good morning:** Fal'e kadbul

**Good afternoon:** Fal'e misii

**Good evening:** Fal'e baleyal





# Virtual Vacations

There is still so much of the world we have left to see, so join us as we revisit our favorite locations in the Pacific and highlight the must-see spots.

## Taiwan



VIEW VIDEO!

Come along as we travel to exciting Taiwan for majestic mountains, pristine beaches, cheerful people and delicious cuisine. Here you'll see traditional architecture come together with cutting-edge skyscrapers. Our trip will take us to Chiufen Town, the inspiration for Hayao Miyazaki's "Spirited Away" animated film, and for some shopping at the 111-year-old Shilin Night Market. We also make sure to grab some Paigu Chaofan, a pork sparerib and fried rice dish. Tasty!



## Bali

Take a trip to tropical and exotic dream destination Bali! Here we'll make virtual stops at one of the country's oldest temples for an amazing view and a taste of local traditional dance. Then, we'll swing from the palm trees above the Jatiluwih rice terraces for some adventure and great views. Later, we'll pick up some tasty satay chicken and mee goreng fried noodles. Let's go!



VIEW VIDEO!

## Hawaii



VIEW VIDEO!

Get ready for some aloha time with a quick virtual trip to Hawaii. There is a lot to see and do here so get ready as we head out a beach day at Waikiki, a look at island history at the tribute to King Kamehameha in front of the State Supreme Court, and some hiking at Diamond Head. Hungry? That's great, because we're also going to Ewa Beach for some tender and juicy Kahlua Pork and a show!



## Guam

For this virtual journey, we head to "Where America's day begins" – tropical, beautiful Guam! This is a snorkelers' paradise and one with easy access from anywhere in the Pacific. We'll head to Chamorro Village for some good eats and local shopping, then to the Latte Stone Park for a trip back to ancient Guam. We'll also try some delicious Chamorro foods like kelaguen and finadene sauce. A stop in Guam also requires a visit to Two Lovers Point for a beautiful view of the crystal turquoise waters and some beautiful photos. Whether you're stationed outside of Guam or will soon PCS to the island, you won't want to miss what we have in store for you in this online tour.



VIEW VIDEO!







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**AMENITIES**

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*On The Beach in The Heart of Guam*



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