

SPECIAL INSIDE

- AFN personalities take you on a trip
- Q&A with a history and travel junkie

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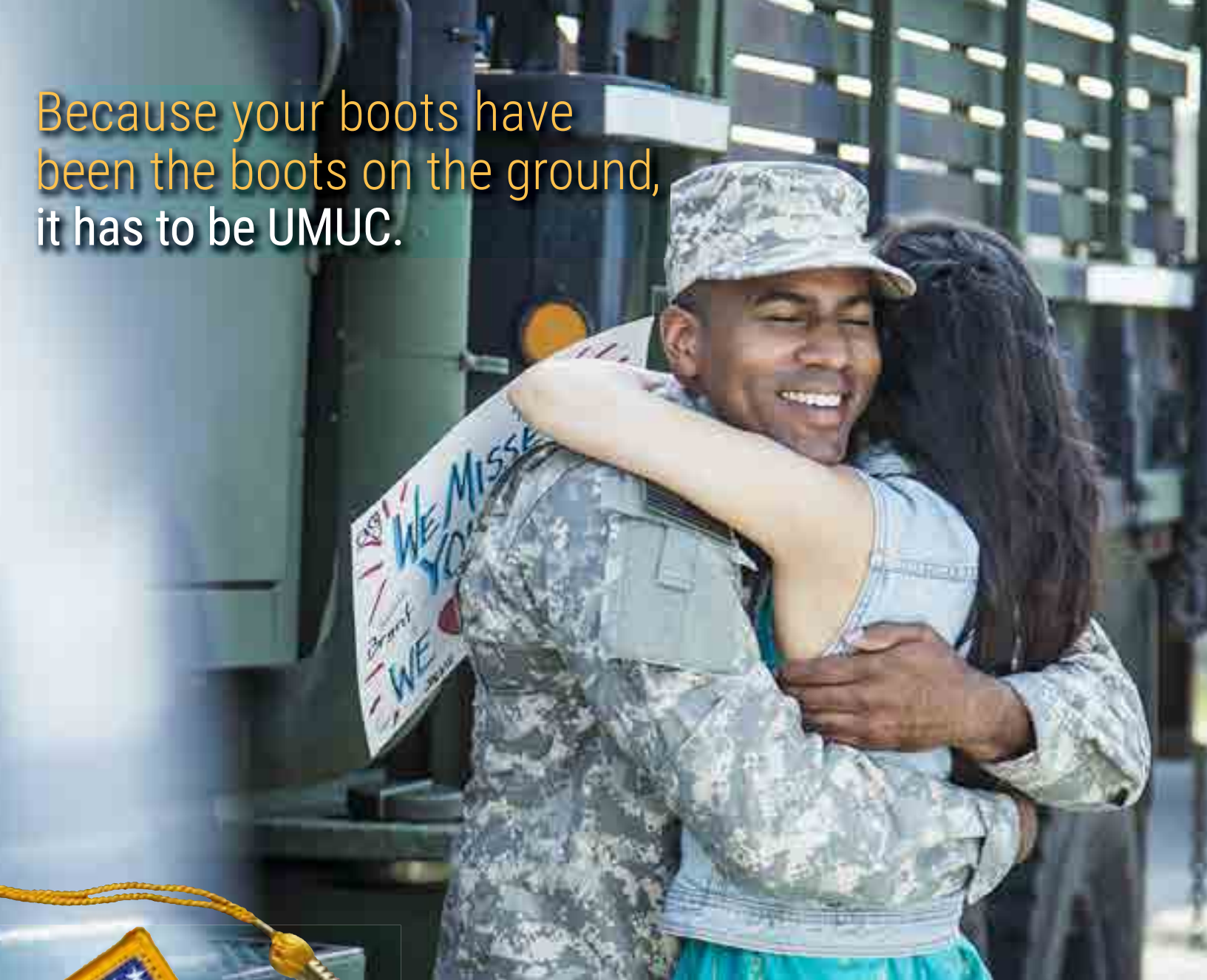
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DESTINATION PARADISE

Living in the Pacific, what a trip!

Folks, you did it again! You got off base, hopped on planes, trains and automobiles and explored the beautiful Pacific region. It's wonderful to see people taking advantage of the opportunities they have living and serving overseas. And we at Stripes are so happy that many of you have shared your travels with us in the 2017-18 edition of Destination Paradise.

Within these 68 pages (a record for this magazine), are 19 adventures that will excite, entertain and also motivate you to set out on your own quest to explore the wonders of the Pacific. Molly Carnahan from Guam doesn't need any motivation. Last year she literally monkeyed around with some primates in Japan. This year, she and her husband trekked to Australia and met up with some feisty kangaroos. Once again she made the cover of this magazine. That's a kangaroo with her, not her husband.

Kim Bosack ventured from mainland Japan to soak in the tropical paradise of Okinawa, and also discovered that Singapore is a land that isn't as "strict, sterile and super expensive" as she had heard. Nano Betts shared her honeymoon in Hawaii and Hong Kong highlights, while Ron Roman hopped from Korea to uncover the island secrets of Palau.

Two of our Stripes colleagues in Europe, Genevieve Northup and Stacy Roman, strayed from their continent to enjoy some fun and sun. Genevieve and her husband enjoyed a "beach vacation of a lifetime" in Maldives, while Stacy discovered another side of Oahu.

There's so much more, including four of our friends from AFN taking time off the air to type a tale of their travels. And Bryce Hollweg gives us some helpful tips for exploring Cambodia and Vietnam.

This year's magazine also includes a Q&A with certified history and travel junkie, David Krigbaum. David's stories have appeared numerous times in our community papers, magazines and websites. He loves to travel, and he loves to write. And we love that he shares his passion with us.

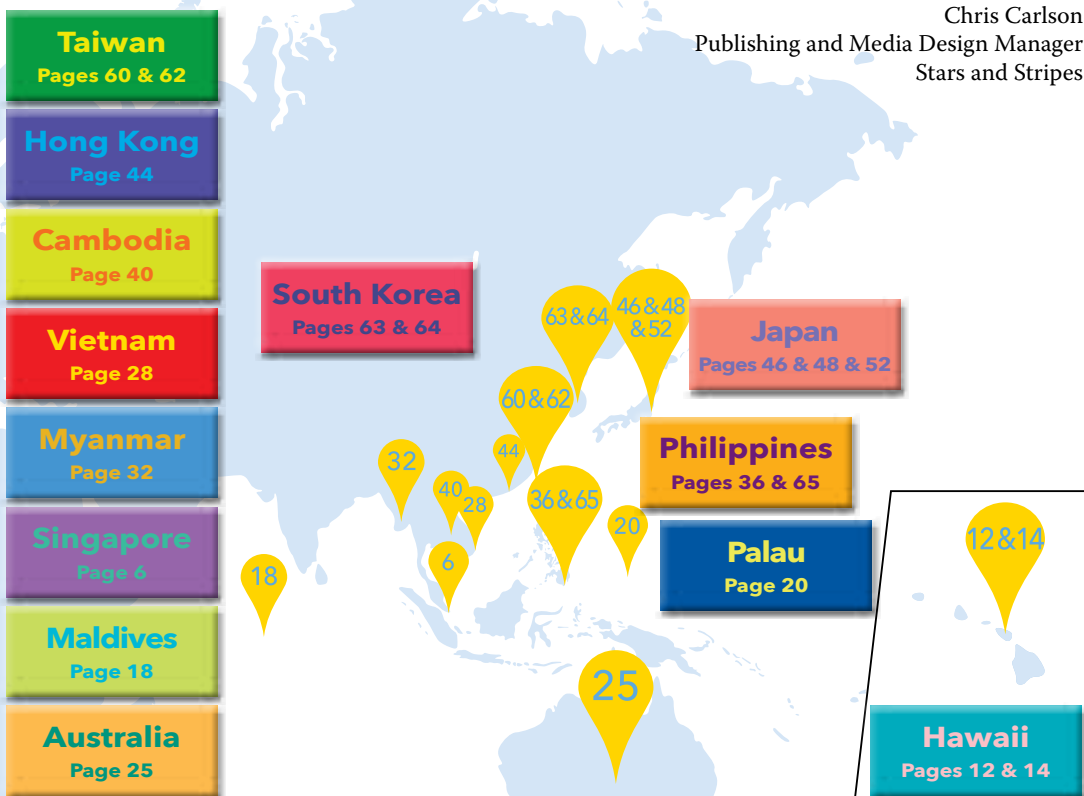
Stripes is all about giving folks like David the opportunity and platform to tell their stories. Destination Paradise is just a taste of what Stars and Stripes offers. Our community newspapers – Stripes Japan, Stripes Okinawa, Stripes Guam and Stripes Korea – serve up travel and culture stories, restaurant reviews, and the latest happenings on and off the local bases.

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

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

But, hey, before you do anything else, turn the page and start off on an adventure to paradise!

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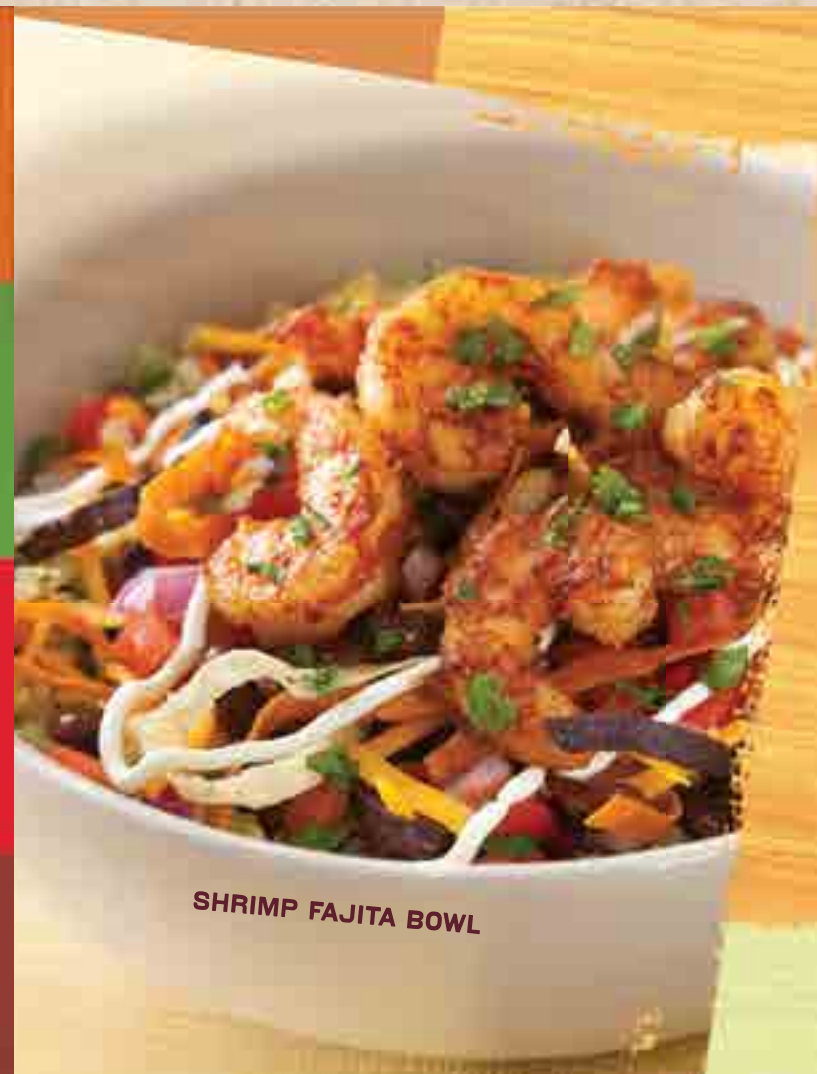
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“My preconceived notions before visiting there were based on the idea that it was strict, sterile, and super expensive.”



A butterfly just hanging out at the airport's butterfly enclosure!



strict, sterile, and super expensive. Pretty narrow minded, right? Those assumptions were based on hearing that chewing gum is illegal, littering is a crime punishable with hefty fines, and that the average cost of accommodation seemed higher than other cities I'd traveled to. I'd had opportunities to go to Singapore in the past, but always seemed to pass it up in favor of other nearby countries that were cheaper, or in my mind, had the grittiness and sensory overload of an Asian country that I loved.

I was wrong. So wrong!

I don't know if it is because I went into my vacation not expecting it to be as amazing as it was.

MY PARADISE



Expectation is the mother of all disappointment, as they say. But Singapore is one of those places that I feel people seem to write off as somewhere that isn't really a destination in itself. I know so many people that have gone on vacations and simply used Singapore as a transit point - and truth be told, I was one of those people. I had traveled through Changi Airport, on a trip I'd taken to Vietnam; I saw it as simply somewhere to break up a long flight, get a cup of coffee and stretch my legs. How naïve I was!

So let me shed some light on some of my preconceived notions for you - and also share some of the things I loved about this small but mighty country!

It is true that Singapore does have a lot of laws that probably seem excessively strict compared to other parts of the world. There are fines for littering, spitting, and chewing gum. Caning and the death penalty are still used for certain crimes (such as drug offences).



Super Singapore

Story and photos by
KIM BOSACK

I think a lot of us have preconceived notions of what a place will be like before we travel there. People look at France as the land of love, croissants and sidewalk cafes, Australia as a place where kangaroos and koalas are abundant (and maybe some poisonous critters too!), Thailand as somewhere that is friendly on the wallet with incredible beaches and resorts, and Italy as a country where you can enjoy amazing food and historical monuments, for instance.

When it comes to Singapore, my preconceived notions before visiting there were based on the idea that it was



Colorful exhibit at the ArtScience Museum

In saying that - it's one of the cleanest countries I've ever visited. I also never felt unsafe, and that's a big thing when it comes to being in a new place with new surroundings. I would recommend this for any country you plan on visiting, but it's useful to check out the U.S. department of State website to get an understanding of the laws of where you are traveling to. You wouldn't want to put a damper on an awesome vacation by doing something like chewing gum or drinking a soda on public transport and getting fined for it!

I think my misconception about Singapore being sterile came from what I just mentioned briefly; about there being such heavy penalties for littering. The streets are exceptionally tidy - you don't see litter just strewn about - but it's actually a lovely thing to have clean streets, spotless parks, and a population that seems well aware of the consequences of littering! Plus, it's a wonderful thing environmentally, too. The streets have so much character and charm that I think my ideas of it being not as interesting as other places across Asia were completely blown out of the water.

As for the expensive side of things, if you're thinking Singapore will be as budget friendly as say Thailand or Vietnam, you will possibly end up disappointed. But in saying that, it doesn't have to break the bank. I feel like it's a place where you can certainly choose expensive options if you have the capacity for it, but there are also ways and means to make it cheaper.

The hotel that my husband and I stayed at was only a one-minute walk from the Chinatown MRT station. I would absolutely recommend staying somewhere close to a train station - Singapore's weather seems to only know hot, sunny, humid and occasionally thunderstormy - just thrown in for good measure! Being conveniently located to public transport made it incredibly easy for us to get out and explore the city. Public transport is super affordable, and you can catch the MRT directly from the airport to the central business district area. Getting to and from the airport itself cost only \$2.50 Singapore Dollars each way - an absolute bargain when compared to the cost of a cab, and when compared to some methods of transportation in other countries!

One of the first places we made a beeline for once we had settled into our hotel was Gardens by the Bay - a massive area dedicated to adding



At the Raffles Hotel

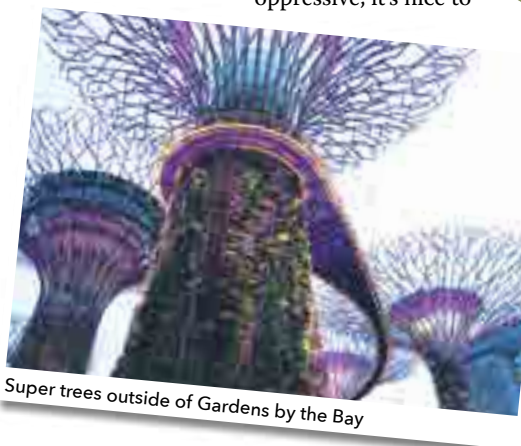
green space into a vibrant city. There are two big indoor exhibits, which are the Cloud Forest and the Flower Dome - and walking around those was incredible. It was the perfect blend of seeing the wonder of nature as well as the achievements of man-made structures - it honestly takes your breath away! Outside the two indoor exhibits was probably the most remarkable thing - the super trees, which are so futuristic looking that they make you feel as if you've stepped into 2050! There is an observation skywalk which connects two of the super trees, and it was fun getting to see a bit of a close up of them, and also a lovely view of the city. We went up to the skywalk around sunset, and it was gorgeous seeing the city from above at that time of day!

Finding fun things to do out of the heat was something we needed to do as well. There's plenty to do outside, of course, but when the temperature and humidity gets a little oppressive, it's nice to

have some respite indoors for a while! Shopping at one of the many malls is always an option, but there are also some fabulous museums to visit. We went to the ArtScience Museum to check out their Future World exhibit, and the National Museum of Singapore.

Future World was a great way to spend a couple of hours, and it was one of those museum exhibits that was very age friendly! The way the exhibit is described on their website is a "fully immersive digital universe," and I think they phrased it perfectly! One of our favorite

SEE SINGAPORE ON PAGE 8 ►



Super trees outside of Gardens by the Bay



We enjoyed Singapore Slings at the Raffles Hotel

SINGAPORE

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

parts of the exhibit was where you could color in a drawing (there were animals, cars, houses and other buildings) and then go and scan it, and your colored picture would show up on a projection on the wall as part of an interactive town! We found this super fun as adults - so I think kids would get a real kick out of it. The hands-on nature of the museum is what really won us over; getting to connect with the exhibits themselves was wonderful. The exhibit is a permanent one, and is scheduled to be at the museum for at least three years. It's definitely worth a look!

The National Museum of Singapore is also interesting, but more so from the perspective of learning about Singapore's history. I found out a lot about the period of British colonization, the Japanese occupation and the post-war period, and Singapore breaking away from Malaysia to make its own self-governing country. When watching an interview at the museum with the former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, one quote he made really stuck out in my mind. He said:

We are going to have a multiracial nation in Singapore. We will set the example. This is not a Malay nation; this is not a Chinese nation; this is not an Indian nation. Everybody will have his place, equal; language, culture, religion.



Beautiful, colorful streets of Singapore!



Chinatown - amazing architecture!

Based on that, we really wanted to explore the different cultural areas of Singapore. In a country with four official languages (English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin) it's beautiful to see the mix of backgrounds and the way they intertwine so cohesively. We checked out Chinatown, Little India and Arab Street, the three well known cultural areas of Singapore. A good thing to keep in mind if you visit any of these areas is that there are hawker centers selling an array of traditional dishes for incredibly good prices! For instance, a couple of plates of different curries and naan at one hawker center in Little India cost us SGD \$10 (about \$7.40 USD) - you can't go wrong feeding two adults for that price! I would wholeheartedly recommend checking out the different cultural areas in the city. Each has a different feel, but they definitely gave me an appreciation of how cultures can live together so harmoniously and still retain their identity, too.

One other stop we were keen to check out was the Long Bar at Raffles Hotel. The bar is where the iconic Singapore Sling drink was created, and naturally we had to get one each to try! The Long Bar was a favorite hangout of the famous writer Ernest Hemingway, and it really does feel like you're stepping back in time to the colonial era when you enter. There are woven rattan chairs, and rows of unique looking ceiling fans on the roof to keep you cool - and of course the obligatory bags of peanuts that you can shell and throw on the floor when you're having your drink of choice! It's the only place in Singapore

that seems to be okay with you "littering"!

And last but not least, the airport is worth spending some time at! Those are words that I don't think I have ever uttered before. Spending more time than is absolutely necessary at an airport is usually associated with frustration and boredom to me. But Changi Airport really does change your mind on what an airport can be like. We got there with time to spare because I wanted to check out all the fun things they had to see and do. We flew Japan Airlines, and their policy allows you to check in up to 12 hours before your flight at Changi - so shopping and exploring seems to be encouraged! Here's just a little summary of the things we saw at the airport other than shopping and eating: free movie theaters showing current films, a video gaming area, cactus garden, sunflower garden, indoor butterfly enclosure, swimming pool, and a day spa amongst other things (we indulged in the fish foot spa pedicure!) There's no shortage of ways to spend time there, and I felt like it was honestly an attraction in itself! It was no surprise that they have been voted the No. 1 airport in the world for the past 4 years.

For a country that admittedly wasn't at the top of my to see list, Singapore really found its way into my heart. It's clean, safe, full of character and wonderfully easy to get around. There are things to do for nature lovers, shopaholics, foodies, and history buffs alike. If you're going through Singapore as part of a journey to other parts of South East Asia or beyond, I would recommend spending some time in Singapore too. It's a small nation, but as another quote by their former Prime Minister Lee Yuan Kew states - "a nation is great not by its' size alone".

This couldn't be truer for wonderful Singapore!



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Each diver will receive a copy of the book, The Flight of the Cormoran (out of print) that is signed by the daughter of Herbert T. Ward, the author and in memory of her father. A commemorative 100th Anniversary T-shirt, of the Cormoran/Tokai as well as a commemorative coin. There will also be a short history briefing about the wrecks and some of the unique parts of the dive itself.

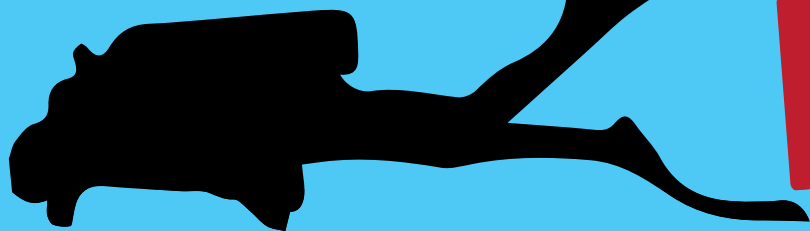
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“As cheesy as it may sound, I was quite thrilled at the idea of escaping with my loved one to the perfect lush tropical corner of the world to enjoy our first week as husband and wife.”

Honeymoon adventure & romance in Maui

Story and photos by
NANO BETTS

With nothing but low temperatures and howling wind outside my window, I cannot help but wanderlust for some sunny sky, ocean breeze and palm trees.

I know there are a lot of gorgeous islands and romantic destinations on our planet, and I've had a chance to visit some of them, be it turquoise waters of Caribbean, breathtaking Cote'd Azur, magnificent Palma de Mallorca or vibrant island of Cagliari. However, the place I still keep dreaming about is Hawaii. There is something about this place – exotic, spectacular, romantic, adventurous, fascinating – all at once. These qualities make it the world's most desired honeymoon destination as well as ideal spot for a romantic trip.

There was no long deliberation as to where we would spend our honeymoon – our mind had been already set on Maui, a place neither of us had been to. Mr. B handled all the arrangements and quite honestly, I did not object. What is better than have a personal tour operator plan a trip of your dreams for you?! As cheesy as it may sound I was quite thrilled at the idea of escaping with my loved one to the perfect lush tropical corner of the world to enjoy our first week as husband and wife.

Pale beaches are surrounded by Polynesian wildlife and water to die for. The sun is always shining, so you can enjoy amazing vistas without leaving your resort. In addition, a plethora of outdoor activities are bound to keep you busy and entertained during your stay. There is so much inherent charm that it can be overwhelming when planning your daily activities. You can make your stay as relaxing or as action-packed as you like. To make your future planning easier, I compiled my top 10 things to do in Maui so that you can make most of the romantic Hawaiian retreat and enjoy your days of adventure in paradise.

Stay in a hotel with a view

No matter which island you stay on, there is a wide array of high-rise

hotels, upland lodges, isolated resorts and cozy island-style B&Bs. We personally opted to stay in Sheraton Maui Resort and Spa in a gorgeous suite with an oceanfront view to enjoy sunset every night from our balcony.

The hotel is located by the famous Ka'anapali Beach on Ka'anapali Beach. Ancient Hawaiians believed that this was the place where their spirits went to jump off and join ancestors forever. Unlucky souls who could not be shown the way by their family 'aumakua' (guardian animal spirit), would wander and attach themselves to rocks in the area.

To counterbalance a gloomy legend surrounding it, the Black Rock is known to be one of the prime spots for snorkeling from the beach. The resort itself boasts of lush tropical grounds and beautiful coastline that will take your breath away.

Get on top of a volcano

The dormant volcano Haleakala towers 10,023 feet above the magical island of Maui. There are various options of getting up (hiking, biking, etc.). We chose the more comfortable way and booked a tour with Mountain Riders who drove us on top of the volcano to spend some time at the crater, and then gave us bikes to ride all the way back down!

MY PARADISE

When we got to the top, I truly had a feeling I was on top of the world. The sweeping views of the surrounding islands took my breath away. The crater is an extraordinary landscape of spewed red cinders and gray lava hills. It is so big that an entire city could fit inside.

Those who don't mind waking up early can book a special sunrise tour and watch the sun rise at the top of Haleakala. How romantic is that?!?! Mr. B and I both preferred the comfort of our bed at 3 a.m.

The bike ride back down was absolutely scenic as well. The slopes of the mountain hold native rain forests, lavender farms, eucalyptus groves and open pastures with large cattle ranches.

Other popular activities to be experienced at Haleakala include enjoying sunset, ranger guided tours, hiking, drive-up camping, and backcountry camping on Maui.

Enjoy marine life

Due to its warm coastal waters Maui is main wintering grounds for North Pacific humpback whales, making the island one of the best spots for whale watching. While it was almost the end of the whale watching season when we traveled there, we still were lucky to see a whale breach from our balcony! In general, Maui's finest shoreline whale



watching spots are the stretches from Olowalu to Maalaea Bay and from Keawakapu Beach to Makena Beach.

In addition, island has one of the most spectacular marine lives for you to admire. Thanks to a fantastic tour organized by Four Winds II, we had a chance to snorkel/snuba dive at the sunken volcanic crater of Molokini. The water was crystal clear and colorful fish, gorgeous coral and adorable sea turtles were my friends that morning.

Maui is also a mecca for windsurfers although we never tried it. Paddle boarding is also popular as ever.

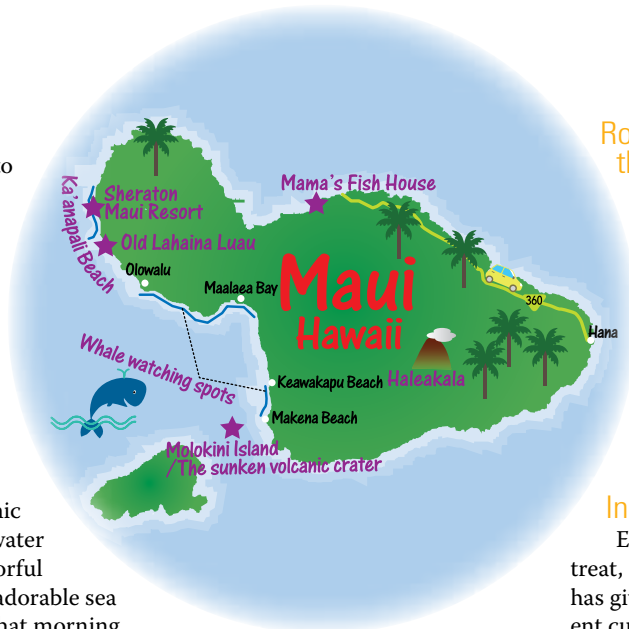
Take in a Luau Night

Even though Hawaii is part of the United States, it has very distinct cultural heritage that distinguishes it from other states. For a wonderful introduction to local culture, traditions and cuisine, I highly recommend booking a Luau Night – traditional Hawaiian feast that marks special events. While most of the hotels offer luau nights to their guests, we decided to book Old Lahaina Luau which, based on our research, is highly praised and indeed turned out to be an amazing experience.

From the warm aloha greeting to the extravagant feast, everything was truly outstanding. Set right on the beach with a perfect view of the sunset, the event is reminiscent of a fair with musicians, dancers and craftsmen providing top-notch entertainment.

Traditional decorations create authentic ambiance. And then of course, there was food – a crucial part of any luau. While you admire the performers' hula and firedancing skills, you'll dine on Hawaiian specialties such as kalua pua'a, fresh mahi-mahi and poi (mashed taro plant) and an array of salads and sides.

Served buffet style, each dish was absolutely delicious. The main course is kalua pua'a – pork roasted for eight hours in a pitlike earthen oven known as imu. We had a chance to watch how the pig is unburied before being served to the guests.



Learn how to surf

Something that totally blew my mind and got me hooked was a day spent surfing.

One day Mr. B decided to surprise me and booked a special tour with Maui Wave Riders, where a private instructor taught us all the basics to properly surf. Her name was Sol. She was fantastic instructor, very knowledgeable, patient and fun! While it was incredibly challenging in the beginning, there was a feeling of achievement in the end when I finally managed to stand on the board!

Go ziplining

Now talk about exhilarating adventure high above the ground! And don't get me wrong, I am terrified of heights.

But our charismatic tour guides from Maui Zipline assured me we were totally safe and I gave in. It was so thrilling to slide down at high speed one tier at a time while also admiring spectacular views of the shore and the ocean. Totally worth it!

Live a beach-bum life

Not every day has to be filled with action and adventure. In fact, it is almost imperative to soak up the sun at one of those long stretches of beautiful beaches and pristine waters.

Whether you choose to stay on a crowded resort beach or find a secluded and undeveloped strand, you are bound to have a romantic and relaxing time with your loved one.



Romantic dinner on the beach

What can be more romantic than a dinner for two under the stars with a sound of ocean waves in the background. Mr. B did not fail to plan one of our most romantic dinners.

Sheraton definitely obliged with arranging all the logistics of it all.

Indulge in gourmet food

Eating in Hawaii can be a real treat, as the islands' ethnic diversity has given rise to hundreds of different cuisines. You can find every kind of Japanese food, regional Chinese cuisines, spicy Korean specialties, native Hawaiian dishes and excellent Tai and Vietnamese food. Hawaii also has many restaurants run by renowned chefs that feature gourmet foods of all types, including continental fare. One of the restaurants I highly recommend is Mama's Fish House, which according to TripAdvisor, is on the list of Top 10 Fine Dining Restaurants in the U.S., while Zagat names it No. 1 restaurant in Maui for its food. Make sure you arrive a little before sunset to enjoy a spectacular view.

The atmosphere here is very comfortable and cozy with rustic decor. You really feel like you are at your mama's house on the beach. Similarly, each dish we ordered was totally delectable.

Take a ride around the island

Last but certainly not least, the scenic coastal drive to Hana via route 360 is definitely one of the island's highlights. Be prepared to drive on rugged and extremely narrow roads along the mountains, but the views are absolutely worth it! Sadly, back then I was not a crazy blogger so keen to document every step, plus my camera battery died and I do not have many visuals to share.

Overall, with a volcano in the background, and a Tiki drink in your hands, you can be sure Hawaii will ignite your marriage. I definitely cannot wait for Mr. B and I to go back some time in the future to explore other islands of Hawaii.



“While it’s easy to stay in the comfortable tourist trappings of Honolulu and Waikiki, take a short drive and discover a different side of paradise.”

Exploring windward Oahu

Story and photos by
STACY ROMAN

Swaying palm trees, world-class shopping, gourmet restaurants and golden, sandy beaches may be all you need in order to have a great vacation. On Oahu, most of this can be found in Honolulu and Waikiki Beach — along with throngs of tourists and crowds. Want to escape the hustle and bustle of downtown? Hop in your car and explore the rugged Hawaiian paradise of the windward (east) side of Oahu.

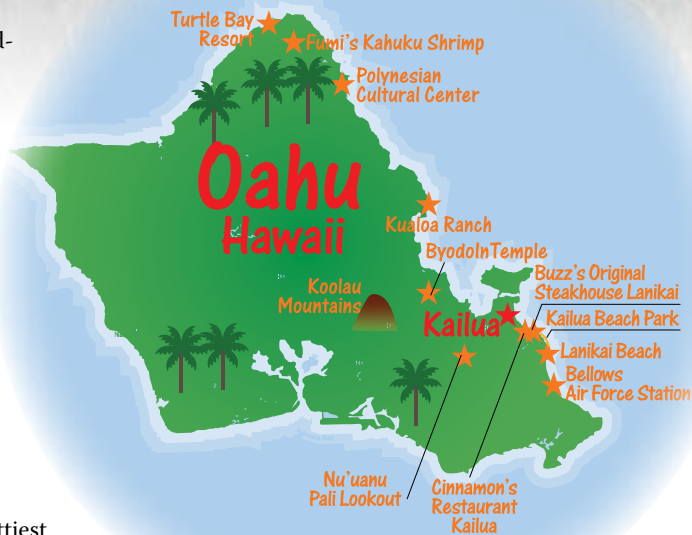


Beaches

Some of the prettiest and least-crowded beaches are a short 30-minute drive from Honolulu. Sugary, white sand stretches for miles along the shoreline. Natural beauty abounds with the steep cliffs of the Ko’olau Mountains providing a stunning backdrop. Kaneohe Bay is a protected inlet where tidal fluctuations leave unique sandbars exposed throughout the bay.

This half-mile stretch of beach is popular for kayaking and windsurfing. If the waves aren’t too choppy, rent a kayak and head out to the Mokulua Islands, or “Moks” to view the coastline from a different vantage point. If you need to stretch your legs on land, there is a paved trail around the park. Or check out the many quaint cafés and boutiques across the road.

Lanikai Beach. The Obama family helped put this sleepy neighborhood beach on the map. Located next to Kailua Beach Park, Lanikai is quieter than its neighbor. The water is more shallow, which makes it the perfect location for little ones



MY PARADISE

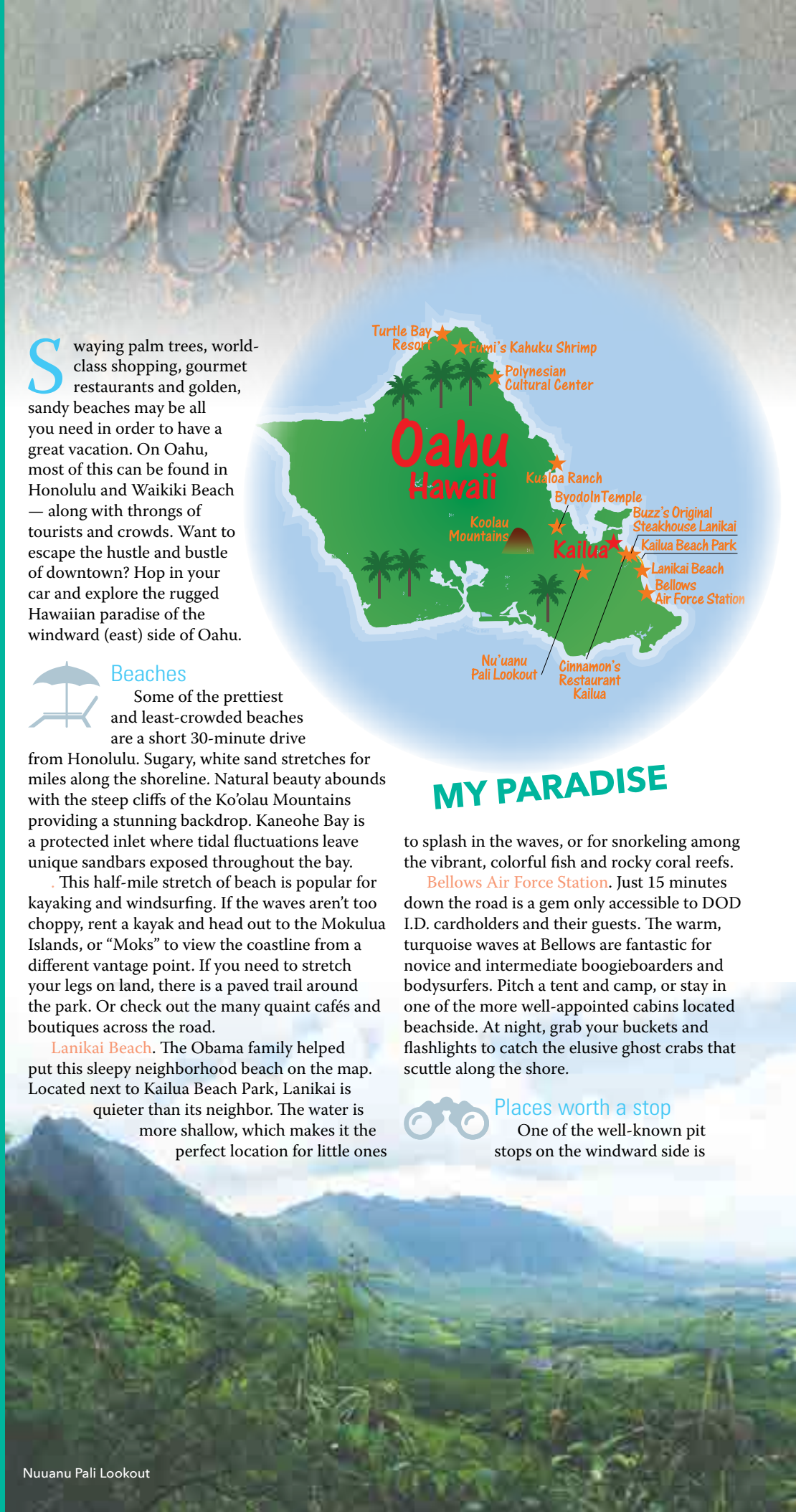
to splash in the waves, or for snorkeling among the vibrant, colorful fish and rocky coral reefs.

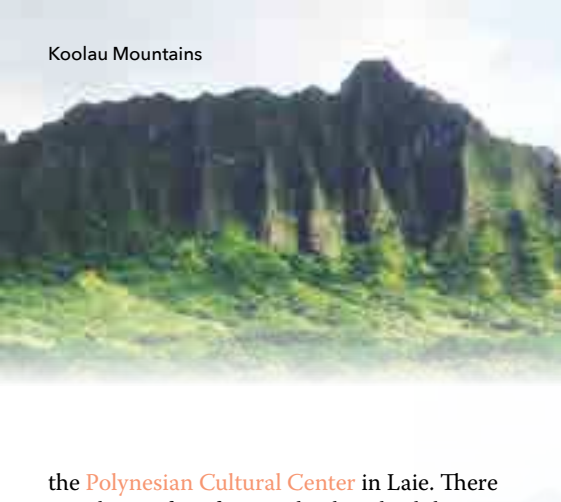
Bellows Air Force Station. Just 15 minutes down the road is a gem only accessible to DOD I.D. cardholders and their guests. The warm, turquoise waves at Bellows are fantastic for novice and intermediate boogieboarders and bodysurfers. Pitch a tent and camp, or stay in one of the more well-appointed cabins located beachside. At night, grab your buckets and flashlights to catch the elusive ghost crabs that scuttle along the shore.



Places worth a stop

One of the well-known pit stops on the windward side is





the **Polynesian Cultural Center** in Laie. There are plenty of artifacts and cultural exhibits to explore, with the option of a buffet dinner and luau. While it's an easy stop, there are many less expensive options that can give you a great sense of Hawaiian history and culture.

Kualoa Ranch. Famous for its scenes in "Lost," "Hawaii 5-0," "Jurassic Park" and many other Hollywood films set in the tropics, Kualoa Ranch is worth a visit. Hike through lush valleys, past old sets and props and take in the breathtaking island panoramas. Tour Oahu's oldest working cattle ranch via all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), or for more of an adrenaline rush, soar through the palm trees on a zipline. Catch your breath on a scenic boat ride and learn the fascinating history of the ancient fishpond and gardens.

Byodo-in Temple. Nestled in the Valley of the Temples just outside Kaneohe, is the Byodo-In Temple. The tranquil gardens and koi pond lend a feeling of calm and serenity to this final resting place for many. Ring the large, brass bell before entering for happiness and longevity. Be sure to remove your shoes or slippers when entering the sanctuary as a sign of respect. When inside, offer a prayer or have a moment of reflection next to the 18-foot-tall gilded Buddha.

Nu'uuanu Pali Lookout. Don't be intimidated by the droves of tour buses that stop at the Nu'uuanu Pali Lookout — they're stopping for good reason. This scenic overlook is located at the top of Pali Highway, halfway between Honolulu and Kailua. You'll be awarded with a stunning vista of windward Oahu. On a clear day, you can see Waimanalo and Kailua, and you may be able to watch aircraft taking off from Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay. Be sure to keep your hat inside the car; the wind at the top can be gusty. If you're feeling adventurous, walk the paved road to the Old Pali Highway. This is the



starting point for many awesome hikes below the lookout.

Turtle Bay Resort. This well-manicured hotel and golf resort are tucked away on the northernmost part of the windward coast. Turtle Bay served as the set for the film "Forgetting Sarah Marshall." Take a horseback ride along the quiet coastline of Kawela Bay, or if you're a "Lost" fan, trek into the secluded woods next to the resort and discover the mammoth banyan trees that were home to the mysterious "Smoke Monster." If you'd rather soak in the sunshine, it's easy to relax on the beach with the gentle waves lapping at the shore. Foodies will be in culinary heaven at Roy's Beach House, with delicious Euro-Asian cuisine courtesy of island Chef Roy Yamiguchi.



Good eats

During World War II, Spam was introduced to the islands. This inexpensive and non-perishable canned meat was a source of protein for many servicemembers stationed in Hawaii and the Pacific. Over the years, it has become a staple of the Hawaiian diet. Spam musubi, a hand-held snack of sushi rice and a slice of Spam wrapped in a thin ribbon of nori, is a local specialty. If you're not keen on the canned ham, don't worry — there are plenty of other delicious eats.

Fumi's Kahuku Shrimp. Shrimp shacks and food trucks in Kahuku, just south of Turtle Bay. While there are plenty of spots to choose from, Fumi's is a favorite. With virtually no line, an extensive menu and friendly service, this family-owned shop is worth the stop. Try the spicy garlic shrimp, served with a side of steaming white rice



and fresh green salad.

Buzz's Original Steakhouse Lanikai. Just a stone's throw from Kailua Beach Park, this steakhouse is a hidden gem. There are two restaurants on Oahu, but the one in Lanikai is the original and the best. With stunning views of the turquoise waters, seating is limited and intimate. Stop by for the delicious Ono and Ahi sandwiches or tri-tip salad for lunch. Or watch the sun dip below the Ko'olau while enjoying mouth-watering prime rib. Reservations are highly recommended.

Cinnamon's Restaurant Kailua. The word has gotten out about this charming breakfast and brunch spot in downtown Kailua. Offering pancakes the size of dinner plates, the cooks at Cinnamon's put a tropical twist on traditional breakfast fare. Try the Guava Chiffon pancakes, or my favorite, the Red Velvet. Craving something savory? The Kalua Pork Benedict comes with tender house-made Kalua pork and creamy Hollandaise sauce. It's best to go at opening, to beat the sleepy beach crowd. Reservations are only accepted for parties of eight or more.

While it's easy to stay in the comfortable tourist trappings of Honolulu and Waikiki, take a short drive and discover a different side of paradise.



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“The next six days proved to be the beach vacation of a lifetime that has yet to be outdone.”



To escape a frigid February in Germany and celebrate the completion of my post-graduate degree, my husband and I packed our bags for an escape to the Maldives, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean. We reached the capital city’s tiny open-air airport and sought bathrooms to strip off unwanted layers of clothing. Clad in shorts, sunglasses and sandals, my husband and I felt happier already.

I had been dreaming of this trip for months, thinking back to photos on Pinterest and articles on prominent travel websites. The next six days proved to be the beach vacation of a lifetime that has yet to be outdone. I cling to memories of the Maldives every winter.

Islands by air

We sat at the Kuredu Island Resort’s private lounge and watched a floatplane dock. Tanned travelers reluctantly emerged, realizing their holidays were over. We boarded a short time later, and the plane skimmed rapidly across the bay. Within five minutes of takeoff, we passed over clusters of thatched-roof huts floating on water so clear, I could see the white sandy ocean floor and reefs, even from a few thousand feet in the sky.

No shoes necessary

We landed at the Kuredu pier and removed our shoes at the suggestion of the pilot. I remained skeptical as I held my brand-new beaded sandals and crossed the worn wooden

planks. But when my toes touched the cool velvety sand, I was sold. The paths and sand floors of the open-air facilities were meticulously manicured throughout the day. All of the cute shoes I had brought remained unworn as I embraced the barefoot beach-bum lifestyle.

A waterfront backyard

The adults-only Sangu Water Villas were tucked away on the quiet northwestern tip of the island. The only sound we heard was the lapping of waves against our bungalow’s stilts. The ocean and blue sky stretched as far as we could see from the windows and two-level outdoor deck.

As the sun dipped below the horizon each evening, the sky and ocean surface turned shades of pink and purple. Later, the bright moonlight illuminated the black-tipped fins of reef sharks

Marvelous Maldives

Story and photos by
GENEVIEVE NORTHUP





as they hunted for dinner. We waded in the shallows of the southwest beach, which sparkled as bioluminescent plankton washed ashore. Before turning in each night, we stopped by the café at the edge of the pier. While sipping liquor-infused coffees, eagle rays and six-foot-long nurse sharks slowly glided by, visible courtesy of underwater spotlights.

A natural aquarium for snorkeling

A few yards from our bungalow, we crossed paths with grazing 300-pound sea turtles and 2-foot-long titan triggerfish. Reef sharks darted near the bottom, while colorful parrotfish and humphead wrasse (larger than the sharks!) stayed near the surface. None of the creatures bothered us, most either oblivious or unimpressed by our presence.

We booked an afternoon boat excursion in the hopes of glimpsing manta rays. We grew anxious because the trip was more than halfway

over, and we had yet to see any. Finally, a crewmember pointed and yelled — we had found them! For 20 minutes, we snorkeled a few meters above a cluster of mantas, each with a “wing” span of 8 feet or more.

Our first diving experience

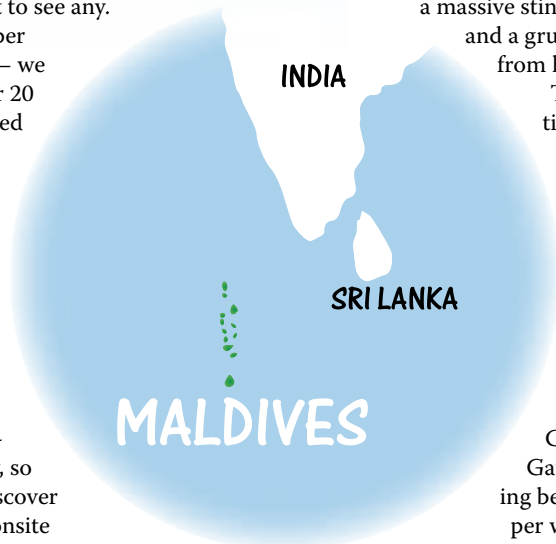
We had to try diving in one of the world’s best destinations for the activity, so we signed up for Discover Scuba through the onsite PADI five-star facility. After a bit of theory, we went to the southeast lagoon to practice. Comfortable with breathing, hand signals and safety basics, like how to clear our masks and retrieve our regulators, we submerged for a resort dive. Highlights were

a massive stingray stirring up food and a grumpy moray eel peeking from his coral home.

The last day of vacation, we geared up for a longer, deeper expedition — we didn’t set foot on a boat. We hopped in from the jetty and swam to the house shipwreck and reef. Covered in colorful plants and corals, the hull looked like something from Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí’s imagination. Hiding beneath, a car-sized grouper waited for his next meal to come by.

At dinner that evening,

we toasted cocktails and listened to the waves. Our waiter had spelled out “C U SOON” in rose petals on the white tablecloth. It’s been two years, and I still dream of returning to paradise.



MY PARADISE



“There’s little by way of dangerous wildlife, though seawater crocodiles do lurk in mangroves primarily off the West Coast of Babeldaob Island, largest of Palau’s 250 islands.”

Palau: Your tropical island paradise

Story and photos by **RON ROMAN**



Riding the monorail to Ngardmau Falls at Eco-Theme Park

Looking for a relaxing and safe year-round tropical getaway? Pristine Palau, situated in Western Micronesia between the Philippines and Guam, is your best bet for a convenient tropical paradise vacation with non-stop travel on Asiana Airlines from Incheon International Airport direct to Palau International Airport.

Unless on group tour, it’s best to first arrange auto rental. You can rent from the airport on Babeldaob Island, though it’s cheaper to get something while on Koror Island, about a 20-minute ride south. I got my rental for only \$28/day (local currency is in U.S. dollars) across the street from the Palau Visitors Authority (PVA) while inquiring there. The PVA is on the main drag toward the end of downtown Koror city, business hub of Palau, where half the country’s population of 21,000 reside. Get over to PVA first; they’re open mid-morning to late afternoon. Staff are very helpful and friendly; they’ll answer all your inquiries and even propose an itinerary for you based on your personal needs. Since Palau gained independence from the U.S. in 1981 and is now a U.S.

protectorate, English is spoken throughout with Chinese and Japanese widely understood at major attractions, as well as some Korean. PVA tourist brochures, maps, and guides all come in the aforementioned languages.

A fair-sized American ex-patriate community resides here. While resting inside one of Koror’s two major department stores alongside the main thoroughfare, I bumped into “Dale,” originally from California, now a permanent resident of Palau. He first came in 1974, served three years with the American Peace Corps, moved to Guam in 1978, then Saipan, and

now resides in Koror with his Palauan wife.

According to Dale, crime is low; Palau remains safe and tourist-friendly. There’s little by way of dangerous wildlife, though seawater crocodiles do lurk in mangroves primarily off the West Coast of Babeldaob Island, the largest of Palau’s 250



PALAU



PALAU

Koror Island

MY PARADISE



Monorail ride

Driving Tips

Note: Steering wheels in Palau cars are on the right, though traffic moves on the right as well.

Caution: Most roads tend to be very rough with speed bumps everywhere. Speed limits are set low, though police patrol vehicles are seldom in sight.

Interesting tidbit: There are no traffic lights in Koror or adjoining islands; the last one was removed several years ago. During “rush” hour between 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., however, traffic gets congested. Drive slow. Throughout Palau there are dogs, dogs, dogs everywhere roaming the streets.



islands, and where the Airport is located. Don't swim there alone and at night. This travel writer can testify to Dale's overall assessment: the countryside is safe; Palauans are noted for their warm heartedness and hospitality.

There are no major franchise-type tour operations like Grayline Bus Tours, which is found virtually worldwide. Downtown Koror offers individual-owned and operated agencies, though expensive. A one-day guided tour could easily set you back \$150 per individual. Suggestion: Get a good, compact-sized rental car for under \$30 daily, and tour the islands yourself. Gas is more expensive compared to the U.S., though cheaper than in Korea where I reside. Koror Island is small, yet outlying islands are bridge-connected. It'll only take about two hours to drive from Ice Box Park in the southern

tip of Malakal Island, travel across Koror, and finally reach Ollei Port and Rest House in the northernmost tip of Babeldaob. That's it; that's the end of the road. Other than nearby Ngarkebesang Island, bridge-connected to Koror, other islands must be reached by boat.

Ready for some great tropical island adventure? Great. The following are just a few of many exciting places to take in. Let's start first by heading over to Etpison Museum on the left of Koror's main drag before Japan-Palau Friendship Bridge connecting Koror with Babeldaob. It's a must-see. Named after the country's third president, it's a three-story set-up laden with Palauan artifacts and displays. “Elvis,” a white cockatoo, greets you inside upon arrival.

Though he doesn't sing rock 'n roll, he'll salute you in plain English. Explore a compilation of Palauan history and culture, ancient and contemporary, brought to life by miscellaneous souvenirs, storyboards, gifts, photos, wood carvings, artwork, seashells, jewelry, books, and myriad publications in the Art Gallery. Walk around and take in the bright-colored cultural exhibits featuring ancient artifacts, prints, maps, and displays

like the famous Bai, traditional Palauan men's meeting house and the country's best-known symbolic image. The architecture employs unique styles of finely crafted hardwood-constructed designs elaborately painted in brilliant hues of black, white, ochre, red, and, especially, yellow. (Drive over to Belau National Museum in southern Koror to see a huge Bai outdoors on the Museum grounds as well.)

Getting a little hungry or thirsty? Drive a few minutes south on Koror's main street and on your left, stop by Burger House. They've got

SEE PALAU ON PAGE 24 ►



Palauan dancers performing at the Seabird's Sunset Dinner Cruise show



Top deck of the Seabird Cruise



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Surfer's Point: Located between the family and kids pool and the remarkable Infiinty pool is the pool bar serving various refreshing beverages and cocktails to quench your thirst and delectable burgers and sandwiches to renew your energy from all the excitement.

La Cascata: Daily lunch and dinner themed buffets offer a different cuisine with specialty stations every day for you to enjoy. The Mongolian Grill station is highly recommended for a freshly prepared entree just the way you like it.

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Bayside BBQ Dinner & Show: Guam's culture is as rich as its history. Experience it while enjoying an island style fiesta dinner buffet as you watch the only authentic Chamorro dance and chant shows by two of Guam's renowned entertainment groups, Pa'a TaoTao Tano and Inetnon Gefpa'go.

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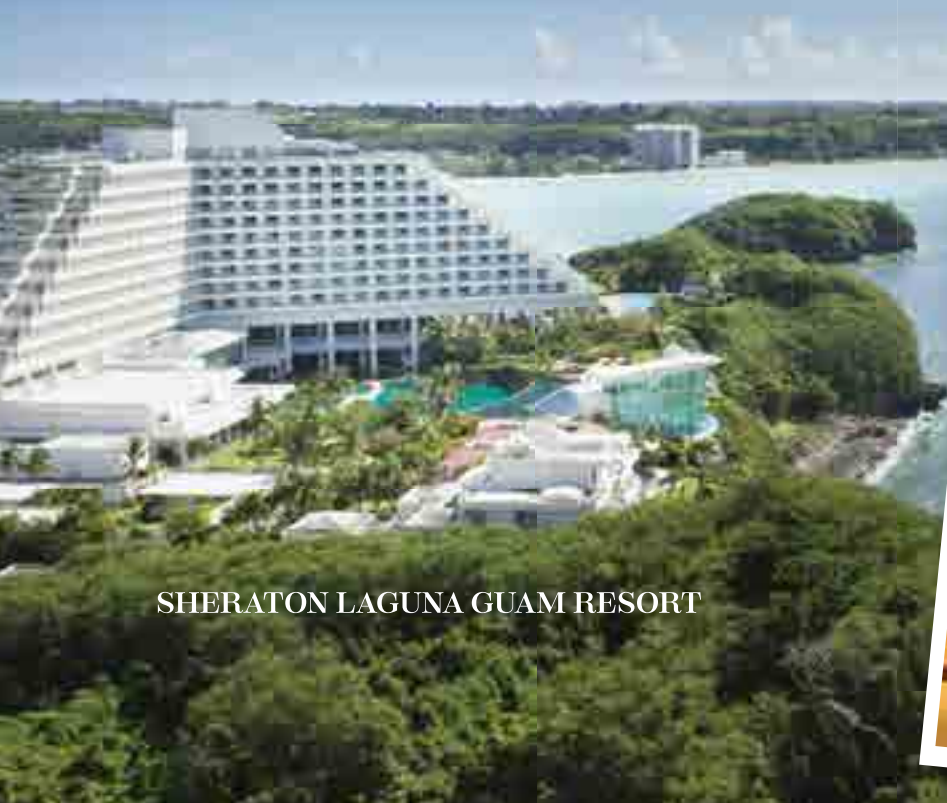
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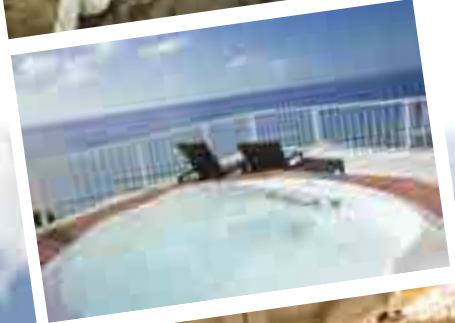
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PALAU

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

made-to-order hamburger dishes, along with other fast-food meals, and great tropical fruit milkshakes. There I met "Wanda," a friendly nearby Airai State government employee; she elaborated on how low incomes coupled with high expenses remain the primary problem for permanent residents today. Now let's turn back around to explore sights on Babeldaob Island....

Immediately after crossing Japan Friendship Bridge on the left, take a three-hour Jungle Kayak and Blue Cave Tour at Nature Island Resort Tours. RSVP a day in advance.

(Because of the tides, virtually all Palau's water tours are conducted in the morning.) Kayak 2.5 kilometers with guides through a lush green maze of mangrove bushes for a couple of hours. Enter the surreal Blue Cave; it has the deepest, Parrish-blue seawaters you ever laid your eyes on.

Don't attempt an impromptu dip; an occasional, small saltwater crocodile might be nearby. You've been officially forewarned!

Let's head north. Deep inside the jungles of northwest Babeldaob is Eco-Theme Park in Ngardmau State on the eastern side of American-built Compact Road, showcasing Ngardmau Waterfalls, biggest in Palau. There used to be a cable car to the base of the falls; now take a 20-minute monorail ride or walk down. There's a zip-line zipping over the canopy of jungle treetops for adventurous souls. Take your pick. Whatever you choose, bring a swimsuit to cool off in the nearby crystal-clear stream or pristine pond at the waterfall's base. No crocodiles here! Note: This is free-flowing inland water. By Palauan standards, it's cold!



Underwater view inside the aquarium

Next, get back on Compact Road and head north to Ollei Port and Rest House. It's a hectare or so block of land jutting out into the Pacific, marking the northernmost point of the island and end of Palau's highway system. There you'll find Tour Extreme Outfitters offering a medley of boat tours and activities run by local Hadley Renguul. Later, you can start back south, get on Compact Road, and hug the eastern shore of Babeldaob....

Best bet on the return trip to Koror is to stop by the Palau National Capitol (Ngerulmud) in Melekeok State on the central-east coast about an hour drive from Ollei Port. The capital was moved there in 2007 with expectations that businesses would follow. Such was not the case. The Capitol's adjacent vicinity is virtually deserted; the Capitol itself is a magnificently structured work of architectural design beautifully painted in soft pastels that blend in perfectly with the surroundings, especially at dusk. I recommend you visit then. You won't be disappointed.

Back in downtown Koror, try the 3-D Cinema to take in a good Hollywood blockbuster. It's on the second floor over the bank of Guam on the left heading south. Can't miss it. Admission is only about \$5. Stop by or call ahead. A minimum of four patrons are necessary and it seats 21. Coziest public movie house you ever visited, and the only in the country. Want to see more? Tomorrow we'll head over to the Palau Aquarium....



View of the bay

The country's premier aquarium is located just off Koror's main highway. It sports an expansive indoor exhibition hall and miscellaneous outdoor exhibits featuring the area's unique marine wildlife. Read about the legendary founder of Palau: Chuab, a gigantic baby born to a local woman who, upon death, fell into the ocean and formed today's Palauan Islands. The legend is recounted and graphically illustrated on outdoor signboards. Although traditionally seafaring people, many Palauans, like other Western Pacific islanders, can't swim.

For a memorable evening of luxury boat dining and entertainment, sign up for the Seabird Cruise Sunset Dinner Cruise. Rates are reasonable. Sets out to sea around 5:30 p.m. for dinner of your choice under starlit skies. Feel the ocean breeze gently caress your skin, followed by live entertainment featuring traditional Palauan music, singing, and dancing. Get up on stage with island dancers and dance up a Palauan storm. The ship is docked opposite West Plaza Hotel on the T-Dock Peninsula. RSVP recommended.

If ever asked how you heard of any and all these activities on the islands, just tell them: "Ron sent me!"

Ron Roman has taught English throughout the Pacific Command, at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) originally, since 1996. He can most recently be seen acting as Admiral Forrest Sherman in the Korean War movie "Operation Chromite," featuring Liam Neeson.



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“It was definitely a cool experience to be so up close and personal with the Australian wildlife.”



Adventures in Aussie Land

Story and photos by
MOLLY CARNAHAN



MY PARADISE

In May of 2015, my husband Jeremy and I got to check off the biggest items on our bucket list. We took a short 4-hour flight from Guam to Cairns, Australia. When we arrived, we stayed at the Pullman Cairns International Hotel. We were only planning on staying a few days, so we had a lot to see and do in a short time. The big things to see were the Great Barrier Reef and the rainforest.

We hit the ground running on the first day with a skyrail trip to Kuranda Village, a little tourist town located in the middle of the World Heritage Rainforest. We soared over lush green rainforest and saw a lot of beautiful landscapes.

When we got to Kuranda Village, we shopped, went to Bird World, and my favorite—Koala Gardens. We were able to hold a koala and pet kangaroos. It was definitely a cool experience to be so up close and personal with the Australian wildlife. When it was time to head back, we decided to take the scenic railway and experience the rainforest from a different point of view. It was

really nice because they actually stopped the train a few times to let us get out and take pictures of the different landscapes. It was a really awesome day trip.

The next day, we decided to take a trip to the Great Barrier Reef.

We took a big boat out to Green Island National Park.

The ride out there was the most beautiful boat ride I have ever taken. The Green Island is the only coral cay in the Great Barrier Reef with a rainforest on it. We were able to walk along different trails on the little island and see different parts of the rainforest and reef. We took a glass bottom boat ride and saw an array of beautiful fish and turtles. We ended the day with a nice sunset cruise back to Cairns.

I will always remember my trip to Australia. It is definitely one place on your bucket list you have to see. The area is beautiful and the people are kind. It was worth every penny we spent on this trip. If you have the time, Cairns is definitely a trip you need to take while stationed in the Pacific.



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“If you allow it to, the city will put your mind into a borderline sensory overloaded, but surprisingly enjoyable, trance.”

48 hours in Vietnam

Story and photos by
BRYCE HOLLWEG



At first glance, Hanoi is a city of chaos: swarms of motorbikes weave through the congested streets, horns and chatter sound constantly, and everywhere there are people, people and more people. However, if you allow it to, the city will put your mind into a borderline sensory overloaded but surprisingly enjoyable trance. Much like the “umami” taste triggers a multi-faceted experience for the taste buds, Hanoi stimulates all of the senses at once: the smells emitting from hole-in-the-wall restaurants and street food vendors, the sight of mopeds and pedestrians harmoniously maneuvering the streets together like a well choreographed dance, the sounds of laughter that seem to silence the roar of vehicles, the taste of pho that has brewed over a pot streetside for hours, and the touch of an ice cold Bia Hoi on the palm and lips. What once seemed chaotic now seems comfortingly calm and beautiful, even. Hanoi is umami for the senses.

Hanoi is an easily walkable city, centered around Hoan Kiem Lake. Off the northern tip of the lake is the heartbeat of the city – the Old Quarter. The Old Quarter is an ideal location for tourists, offering a variety of accommodations, restaurants, bars and markets to explore while maintaining to local charm of the city.

Be sure not to miss “Beer Corner” at the intersection of Ta Hien and Luong Ngoc Quyen in the Old Quarter. Enjoy a \$0.25 beer (5,000 VND) and the thoroughly entertaining people watching while sitting on a plastic child-size chair. Other worthwhile sites around Hanoi include Ngoc Son Temple located on an island on Hoan Kiem Lake and accessible by a charming red bridge (Tickets are 30,000 VND / \$1.50); Hoa Lo Prison, where P.O.W.s during the Vietnam War were held captive (including Senator John McCain), and the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. If time allows, a day trip to Ha Long Bay is quite feasible from Hanoi as well.

MY PARADISE





port. Private transportation set up by the hotel should be around \$19.

- For those traveling on a budget, I recommend staying at the A Dong Hotel in the Old Quarter. Great rooms with excellent location for ~\$15/night for private room with

bathroom, breakfast included. Staff is extremely courteous and helpful. Book through Agoda or Hotels.com or email them at adonghotelhn@gmail.com.

- All beer in Vietnam is cheap...but don't miss out on the Bia Hoi beer for \$0.25 on Beer Corner.
- If you're looking to party all night, Hanoi isn't the best place. All establishments in Hanoi (at least in the Old

Quarter) are required by law to close by midnight. So get your Bia Hoi and street eats in early.

- If you're buying something at the market or shop, do not be afraid to haggle on prices. It is part of Vietnamese culture to negotiate prices and is expected. Your offer should be 50% of what the vendor tells you...then meet somewhere in between that is mutually beneficial for whatever you are buying.
- There is an endless number of travel shops where you can book excursions to Ha Long Bay, Sapa, etc., busses or flights. Check the prices that your hotel offers and then shop around a bit.
- Don't be intimidated by the traffic and crossing the street. The drivers are very alert. Just walk slowly and confidently and they will dodge around you. Don't make sudden movements or hesitate.

Helpful Tips:

- Visa Requirement – Be sure to check your country's Visa Entry Requirement before traveling to Vietnam:
 1. Visa Approval Letter
 - You can get a Visa on Arrival (VoA) at the airport, but will have to have a Visa Approval Letter in order to get the VoA. I have used Visa4Vietnam twice with no problems. They charge \$19 per person for the Visa Approval Letter.
 2. Visa on Arrival – Upon arrival at the airport in Vietnam you will queue up to get your Visa. Fees are paid in USD and are as follows:
 - Visa single entry for 1 month or 3 months: \$45
 - Visa multiple entries for 1 month (staying less 30 days): \$65
 - Visa multiple entries for 1 month (staying 30 days) or 3 months: \$95

****DO NOT FORGET TO BRING 2 PASSPORT PHOTOS WITH YOU FOR THE VISA****

- Most hotels offer transportation from the airport to the city. Setting transportation up beforehand eliminates the possibility of being ripped off by a taxi/tuk tuk driver at the air-





ON THE BEACH IN THE HEART OF GUAM

LOCATION

Guam Reef & Olive SPA Resort, offers hospitality and high quality entertainment space. Located in the center of the shopping and entertainment district just 10 minutes away from Guam International Airport, and within walking distance of all the exciting Tumon attractions. Guests at the Guam Reef beachfront hotel can enjoy Guam's famous emerald blue sea and white sandy beaches spread out below Guam Reef's world famous Infinity pool.

DINING

Guam Reef & Olive SPA Resort offers a wide selection of restaurants and bars for your convenience. Enjoy an International all-you-can-eat buffet at MAIN; Japanese fusion cuisine at WAON; happy hour with a beautiful sunset at the Top of the Reef, and a tropical BBQ experience at the Infinity Beach Club.

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“I saw thousands of Buddha statues in the cave temple. It was a little spooky, but a great, unforgettable experience.”

Journey to Myanmar, the Golden Land

Story and photos by YASUHIRO MUNENO



After an hour taxi ride from the airport brought me to Kalaw Town in Myanmar, I checked into my hotel and began searching for a good trekking tour to Inlay Lake. There are many local trekking guides in the town offering almost the same type of tours, so you have many options.

After reserving a tour, I soon took a motorcycle taxi to Myiyamahtit Cave Temple, located on the outskirts of the city. Although some locals said foreigners can't leave the town on a motorcycle taxi, I was able to pass through the town gate without a

problem.

The Myiyamahtit Cave Temple was built in a 656-foot long natural cave on a small mountain. Since it's an hour outside of the town, very few tourists visit the temple. Admission was free, and I took my shoes off at the entrance and walked through under the dim light in the damp cave. I saw thousands of Buddha statues in the cave temple. It was a little spooky, but a great, unforgettable experience.



Afterwards, I returned back to town and toured various markets, as well as the Shweomin Temple and an old train station.

The next morning, my journey took me to Inlay Lake, located 25 miles away. This two-day trekking tour with other five to eight tourists not only let me walk through the beautifully cultivated fields, rivers and forests on the highland (4,265-foot), but it also gave me a chance to get a close look at the life and traditions of the locals.

We walked six hours until we arrived at a large village of 1,000 locals. It was so quiet. I saw the traditional look of village meshed with the surrounding mountainous landscape. With a big radio tower on the mountain, I was even able to use my cell phone.

Interestingly, each of the local tribes has its own uniform. Women of Pao tribe, for example, wore a colorful turban-like cloth symbolizing a dragon on their heads, because they believe their ancestors were born from a dragon.

We stayed overnight at a civil house of the Pao





tribe. There were a few stores selling bottled mineral water, soap and snacks. The Pao use rain water for bathing and toilet. The temperature was not too hot, so I challenged myself to take a bath with the rain water and a small bucket before it got dark and col. The dinner was mostly made of vegetables, such as peanuts, ginger and cabbage, to go along with a little chicken. They were all delicious.

I left the village after breakfast the next day, and returned to Inlay Lake. From there, I crossed the lake by a boat for Nyaungshew Town, and was excited to finally arrive after the long journey. When I visited this town in 2002, it was just a small village that was easy to walk around. But it has grown as a really big town over the last 15 years. As I wasn't sure how to catch a taxi in the town, I had to take a long walk to find a hotel for the night.

Like other towns in Myanmar, Nyaungshew Town didn't have many nighttime attractions. So, after having a traditional Myanmar massage and some tasty curry, I visited a traditional puppet show. Frankly speaking, the show was dull and boring. I realized there were any other audience but myself in the hall.

According to puppet master, the skills and expertise of traditional puppet show had been passed down from parents to children throughout the generations. With not a lot of interest in the traditional performing arts, and it being hard to make a living on, he was not sure if he'd be able to pass the art on to future generations. His words reminded me of the Pao who told me that young



MY PARADISE

women in the village don't want to weave traditional fabrics anymore, so the traditional weaving skills are on the way out.

Since the government lifted national isolation policy several years ago, various modern things have been imported from foreign countries and have changed the life and values of locals very rapidly.

The next morning I met a line of Buddhist monks on the alms round.

I chartered a taxi to visit Kakku Remains. To get there,

I had to hire a local guide and pay for the entry fee to the government in Taunggyi City, the capital city of Shan State, located two hours from the remains.

I remember that roads to the remains were mostly unpaved when I arrived there 15 years ago. This time I saw more than half were paved. According to my guide, earthquakes, typhoons and illegal digs destroyed many stupas at the remains. Locals decided to leave the destroyed stupas as is, although the completely damaged main stupa was in the process of being restored, according to the guide. Despite the miserable condition, I was able to see the beautiful stupas. Afterwards, I headed to the airport and flew back to Yangon.

At night, I visited Shwedagon Pagoda in the center of Yangon City. It was a huge place, like a baseball field, and its main, 328-foot tall golden stupa, was surrounded by beautifully lit temple buildings.

Myanmar is rapidly modernizing. But, as the government opens more rural regions for tourists, you still have a chance to observe traditional attractions in this Golden Land.



Visa policy of Myanmar

Americans must obtain a visa to enter the country and hold a passport that is valid for at least six months. Myanmar has an eVisa system in place that allows you to get your visa within five working days.



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must see list

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Paris

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Egypt
camels
tombs



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aqueduct
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Saipan
Tinian
Rota

“We glided into a still world of stalactites and stalagmites, populated by thousands of chirping cave bats that swirled around us as we went deeper into the labyrinth beneath the mountain.”

It's more fun in the Philippines

Story and photos by
DOUG JOHNSON



Cave entrance



Puerto Princesa beach



Sheridan Resort



Puerto Princesa outrigger group shot

From the white sands of Puerto Princesa to the ultra-chic Resorts World, the Philippines is as energetic as it is relaxed. The islands truly live up to their hype as a tropical escape. And, it really is more fun.

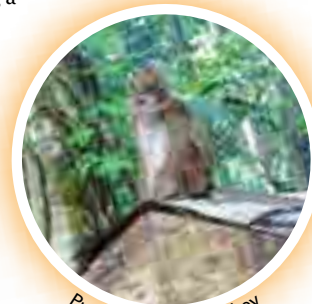
Accompanied by 11 of my friends from Guam, in July I fulfilled my dream of finally experiencing Manila, Pampanga and Puerto Princesa firsthand.

MANILA

After a short hop from Guam on the ultra-friendly Cebu Pacific Air, we were soon on the ground in Manila. A shuttle took us to the massive Resorts World Manila, just in front of the airport, and we checked into the nearby Belmont Hotel.

Afterwards, we walked back to Resorts World for dinner at the renowned Happy 9 restaurant. Here we sampled Master Chef David Choo's fusion creations before finishing with a unique desert plate that included a white puff pastry that resembled "Sonic the Hedgehog."

After our meal, we took in a live burlesque show at the famous Bar 360 - located in the huge casino. The show, in middle of the bar (thus 360 degrees), included many well-known and unique numbers in addition to several elevation acts using a winch mounted in the ceiling. This was definitely not something normally seen on Guam.



Puerto Princesa monkey

PAMPANGA

Early the next morning we left metro Manila in vans to experience the famous Puning Natural Hot Springs at Pampanga - about three hours away. As we drove out, the bustling sprawl of Manila slowly thinned to countryside paddocks, then rolling fields and finally mountains as we approached Pampanga.

Once we arrived at the Puning Hot Spring stage #1 area, we split into groups and jumped into the back of souped-up Jurassic Park-esque jeeps for the ride up to the springs. As we bounced and roared up the mountain, the road became steadily narrower before gradually becoming a dusty track. Then the road itself disappeared and our drivers headed into the Sacobia riverbed, which alternated between sandy and dry tracts to swiftly flowing water deep in huge mountain gorges.

We clung onto our jeeps for life, and after flying past stage #2 and crossing several mountain traverses, we finally

came out of the river onto a wide sandy plain. In front of us was stage #3 Puning Hot Springs on terraces, like some mystical Shangri-La surrounded by volcanic mist.

We dusted ourselves off and climbed out the jeeps before hiking up the stairways to the springs. Along the way, we passed a crystal-clear waterfall that at first glance appeared to be cool and refreshing, but after offering it my big toe, was revealed to be scalding hot.

The hot springs have flowed forever, but it was only recently that locals discovered their healing powers and hewed out terraces in the mountain top to make them more accessible.

We climbed to the top level and sampled pools of water ranging from very hot to tepid and cool, all the while enjoying the panoramic full view of the surrounding mountains and alluvial plain below. We could see the source of the water, where the locals had created rock dams out of riverbed stones to contain the naturally flowing waters into flumes, which flowed down the mountain into the soaking pools around us.

After being alternately stewed and cooled, we returned refreshed to the base, and after some cooling drinks, hopped back into our monster jeeps for the ride back to stage #2.

After a short albeit bumpy 15-minute ride back through the riverbed, we arrived at the Puning Spa. I'm admittedly not a fan of the spa thing, though I've spent my share of time waiting for my better half outside them. The 2nd station at Puning was a different thing altogether, though.

The Puning Spa hot sand spa consists of a large covered sandbox with ovens beneath to heat the sands. This purportedly enhances body circulation and eliminates joint pain.

The staff had raked the box to Zen-like perfection - with perfectly symmetrical lines - so it seemed a shame to destroy their work. Nonetheless, they dug shallow grave-like holes for us to lay down in before shoveling sand on top of us until we were all covered and immobile.

The hot sand felt weird at first and sensations of being buried alive notwithstanding, I found myself drifting off to sleep, especially when one of the attendants used her toes to massage my shoulders through the sand.

After about 15 minutes, we all sat up resurrected and were directed to stage two: mud packs. They explained to us that the mud was sourced from the bottom of the thermal spa lakes and was high in magnesium, potassium chloride and calcium.

It looked like swamp goo to me, but I gamely let the staff slather my face with the stuff and waited. After the treatment, our group looked like a bunch of white-faced zombies, and



Resorts World Manila burlesque show



MY PARADISE

after being brushed down by the staff with long horsehair brushes to remove residual sand, we boarded our jeeps and flew down the mountain back to stage one.

To the natives working along the road, we must have looked like a pack of ghosts flying straight out of Hades. We returned to basecamp for a welcome shower and local chow before heading back to Manila International Airport.

PUERTO PRINCESA

After a quick check-in with the friendly staff at Cebu Pacific, we were airborne and oscar mike for Puerto Princesa. 85 minutes later, we touched down and were greeted by the local tourism board, local dancers and music.

Before taking a two-hour ride over the mountains to the Sheridan West, we stopped by the famous Badjao restaurant to sample some local seafood.

Our drivers proved their expertise on the narrow winding mountain roads. The path was full of dogs, cats, snakes and goats that had come out to sleep on the warm pavement and were completely unafraid of oncoming traffic.

We arrived exhausted at the resort in the pitch-black night without having injured any animals. The next morning we awoke to a vision of paradise incarnate - the azure sea laid out in front of the white sand resort as far as the eye could see.

Puerto Princesa is home to one of the new Seven Wonders of Nature: The protected 8.2 k.m. Subterranean River National Park. We gathered for our safari into the underworld, and began the short 30-minute journey from nearby Sabang Wharf to the caves. We took large outrigger canoes, constructed with no nails or metal fasteners of any kind, but rather lashed together with heavy monofilament fishing line. Simple but effective.

After arriving at the white sandy beach entrance to the national park, we trekked inland through rainforests filled with birds, monkeys and Komodo lizards, to the black lagoon dock for our journey to the cave.

We piled into six-person canoes and our cave guides slowly paddled us across the lagoon to the huge underwater river



Cowrie island



Puning stage #3



Puning hot spring Jeep

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Atsugi



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Yokosuka



Sasebo

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“Siem Reap is the poster child for what the country hopes to become: clean, inviting and capitalizing on tourism, all while maintaining its cultural charm.”

Quick trip in Cambodia

Story and photos by
BRYCE HOLLWEG



Prior to my recent venture to Cambodia I had been to many places throughout South East Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam) but never to the Kingdom of Cambodia. Travelers I had met in my previous adventures boasted about their affinity for the country. They praised Cambodia, describing it as lawless, but in a good way. They gushed about the culture, the people, the beaches, the prices. Most ranked it No. 1 on their list of “off-the-beaten-path” destinations. With this much hype, I had to see it for myself.

My first stop in Cambodia was Siem Reap. The only thing I wish I had was more time. After years of turmoil, Cambodia is surely on the rise...and Siem Reap is the poster child for what the country hopes to become: clean, inviting and capitalizing on tourism, all while maintaining its cultural charm. One stroll through “Pub Street” will open your eyes to what I consider an anomaly – a third world country with first class restaurants and cafes at jaw dropping prices. Gourmet meals for seemingly pennies and beers for even less. What more could you ask for?

The obvious reason people make the trek to Siem Reap is to visit the venerable Angkor Wat.



The relics of Angkor Wat have always intrigued me, as I’m sure they have for any wanderlust traveler. They invoke a sense of mystery that the ancient European relics just don’t incite. Simply put, the temples are incredible and should be at the top of anyone’s list of things to see before you die. However, with only 24 hours in Siem Reap, I worried I would feel shorted. I was very happy to find that even with a limited time I did get to experience its magic thanks to a reliable, efficient Tuk Tuk driver and an early start. Using the itinerary and tips (right), you’ll hit the highlights – Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Bayon and Ta Promh – and still make it to Pub Street for a beer or three.

Proposed 24-hour itinerary:

- 3 p.m.: Arrive Siem Reap Airport and transfer to hotel
- 6 p.m.: Sunset at Angkor Wat
- 8 p.m.: Dinner at Il Forno authentic Italian restaurant
- 9:30 p.m. Dessert at Gelato & Coffee Lab
- 10 p.m.: Pub street bar hopping
- 5 a.m.: Sunrise at Angkor Wat
- 6 a.m.: Tour Angkor ruins
- 1 p.m.: Lunch at Siem Reap old market
- 3 p.m.: Depart Siem Reap





Helpful Tips:

- You can obtain a Visa on Arrival when you land at the Siem Reap Airport for \$35 USD. Be sure to bring at least two passport photos with you.
- The primary currency in Cambodia is the U.S. Dollar. ATMs will dispense money in USD.
- As with everything in Cambodia, accommodations are very cheap. I stayed at the Angkor Secret Garden Hotel for \$10 per night, which included transfer to and from the airport, breakfast, and a nice room with private bathroom.
- Arrange your trip to Angkor Wat and the surrounding temples through your hotel. They will set you up with a Tuk Tuk driver who has a proven, efficient route through the best temples for around \$15 for the day.
- The entrance fee for the Angkor Archeological Park is \$20 for a 1-day pass (\$40 for 3 days and \$60 for 7 days). The pass is valid beginning at 5 p.m. the day before, so you can enter the site to watch the sunset.
- Your driver will take you to all of the main sites including Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Bayon and Ta Promh. Even when taking your time to enjoy the sites, 5-6 hours is plenty of time to see what you came for. A second day is only necessary for those who want to see temples beyond these main sites or who want to spend additional time exploring.
- The nightlife area in Siem Reap is located around Pub Street. Tons of cafes, restaurants and bars...all dirt cheap.



PHILIPPINES



▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

cave. The entrance loomed from the side of the limestone mountain like a natural “Pirates of the Caribbean” ride.

We glided into a still world of stalactites and stalagmites, populated by thousands of chirping cave bats that swirled around us as we went deeper into the labyrinth beneath the mountain.

Amazingly, the bats navigated in the pitch black without hitting us or our boats. Our guides warned us to keep our mouths closed to avoid any chance of tasting bat droppings.

As we slowly U-turned, I asked our guide to turn off his flashlight

so we could fully experience the darkness of the cavern, and once extinguished, all sense of direction was lost. After paddling out to the lagoon and dock, we returned to our outrigger canoes for the ride back to Sabang Wharf. Here we transferred by van to our next stop: Sta. Lourdes Wharf on Honda Bay in Palawan.

Fun facts of the Philippines

Capital: Manila

Language: Filipino but English is often spoken

Currency: Philippine peso (1 USD = roughly 47 PHP)

Time zone: GMT + 08:00

PALAWAN

Honda Bay is famous for its small resort islands, so we boarded a local outrigger to experience Cowrie Island in the middle of Honda bay. Cowrie is a boutique island that is almost too beautiful to be real. As we approached, the word “Cowrie” was even spelled out in 10-foot letters on the white-sand beach.

The island’s main activity is doing nothing but relaxing on the beach, getting massages and marine sports.

After eating local fruits and soaking up the sun for afternoon, we piled back into our boat for the ride back to Sta. Lourdes and then home to Guam.

All too soon our journey was finished, but we promised to return soon to experience more of the paradise that is the Philippines.



Puning sand soak

For more info:

Cebu Pacific Airlines: www.cebupacificair.com

Belmont Hotel: www.belmonthotelmanila.com/

Resort World Manila: www.rwmanila.com/

Puning Hot Spring Spa and Resort: www.facebook.com/PuningHotSpringAndRestaurant/

Sheridan Beach Resort: www.sheridanbeachresort.com/

Hyatt City of Dreams: cityofdreamsmanila.hyatt.com/en/hotel/home.html

Philippine Department of Tourism: www.experiencephilippines.org/

escape to a tropical paradise

Bright sunny days and spectacular sunsets are the norm at the Pacific Islands Club Saipan. Set on a belt of pure sand and ocean pebbles, gentle waves beckon guests to soak in the blue ocean or simply lounge on a tranquil beach.



Amenities to fulfill your every need for a lush beach resort, guests may select from a range of room categories from the Rota, Tinian or Tasi Wing. Experience the ultimate dream vacation in relaxing guest rooms, provided with cozy bathrobes, air conditioning, plasma-screen TVs, and more, plus breathtaking views of the ocean. Romance and relaxation await couples, in the Tasi Ocean Front Spa Room, seeking an exotic escape from life's everyday hassles.



The Hibiscus or Flame Tree Suite offers a fabulous retreat for creating the most memorable holiday of a lifetime.

With water temperature averaging 80 degrees, there's almost always a gorgeous day of sun and fun waiting for you in the underwater world. Explore what lies beneath the surface while snorkeling, kayak to our colorful reef, set sail on a catamaran, or swim among an amazing variety of tropical fish and marine life. If you prefer to stay dry on land, discover the excitement of archery, mini-golf course, or a stimulating tennis match. For the adventurous sports enthusiast, explore the Rock Climbing Wall, or Point Break Flowrider.



The Hinemlu Fitness Center is equipped with free weights including dumbbells, stationery exercise bikes and treadmills.



Kids aged 4 to 12 can enjoy playtime at the Kids' Club hosted by the "ambassadors of fun", the PIC Clubmates. A multitude of activities and daily programs are especially designed by the Clubmates with our younger guests in mind.



The Magellan restaurant's amazing dining room is a complete buffet menu with savory dishes served for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Try the burgers or enjoy a great cup of coffee at the newly renovated Galley, open all day and late into the night.



The new Isla Restaurant overlooking the seashore features unique Teppanyaki cuisine in a sophisticated setting. Seafood and steak are the all-star options at the Seaside Grill Restaurant, where locally sourced ingredients and high-quality flavors are combined with superb service.

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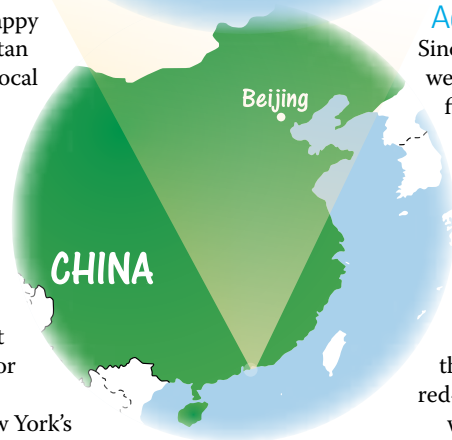
“The guide told us we should never stare into the monkey’s eyes.”

What a perfect getaway! I won't lie, Hong Kong has never been on my radar as a travel destination until I started following my lovely London bloggers who endlessly rave about the Pearl of the Orient and even then, I was never fully convinced that I'd love the city so much.

I didn't know what to expect in Hong Kong and was so happy to discover a real cosmopolitan city with its own character, local identity (so unlike mainland China) and pizzazz. Hong Kong is like a melting pot offering a mix of British colonial history with a rich Chinese culture and tradition. Despite its chaos and mess, it has a terrific verve and frantic energy that will keep you coming back for more.

It also makes light of New York's skyscrapers and San Francisco's hills. For uninitiated, HK consists of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories, and well over 200 different islands in the South China Sea. I was thoroughly impressed how modernized and completely westernized it was. The vertical city with its futuristic architecture is eye-catching, although the sheer number of concrete high-rise apartment buildings was quite mind-boggling.

Those traveling there for the first time should not worry, superb public transportation system, cheap taxis and even cheaper Uber service, and bilingual signage make it a cinch to navigate. We caught an Airport Express fast train which was cheap and comfortable way to get to our Airbnb. We chose to stay in Central's Soho neighborhood—an incredibly lively place with bohemian vibe that also turned out to be a perfect location for exploring the city. I made sure to rent a portable wifi at the airport so we'd have internet connection 24/7.



MY PARADISE

Having spent only four days in Hong Kong, I'm in no way a fitting candidate to offer you a "guide" of the city per se. In fact, we barely made a dent on all the things to do and see in Hong Kong. However, I'll gladly share the highlights of our getaway to help you plan your Hong Kong trip.

Aqua Luna Cruise

Since we arrived in the afternoon, we decided to take it easy on our first day and spend some time wondering the neighborhood and walking along the pier to get the feel for the city. I pre-booked tickets for the famous Aqua Luna sunset cruise which takes you around the Victoria Harbor on a junk boat, one of the few remaining traditional red-sailed Chinese boats in the world. We set off for a blissful 45-minute ride around the harbor, taking HK's arresting shimmering cityscape while

enjoying a glass of wine. It was such a pleasant, carefree AND romantic way to ease into our vacation and soak up the city views. We also enjoyed renowned Symphony of Lights right after the cruise, a spectacular light and sound show at Victoria Harbor that incorporates a dazzling array of colorful lights synchronized to music.

Soho

We absolutely loved the élan that this area in Central oozes. It's a quite charismatic and bohemian neighborhood filled with numerous galleries and art shops, restaurants and bars. In fact, it is a haven for pub crawlers and gets pretty packed on weekend nights. I loved finding colorful murals along the way as well as discovering street markets on the alleyways.

Soho is also home to world's longest escalator which allows commuters to get

Hong Kong highlights

Story and photos by
NANO BETTS



The Victoria Harbor



The Victoria Peak

to their street without mounting endless flights of notoriously steep stairs and slopes. Comprised of 20 escalators and moving walkways, it takes 20 minutes to complete.

We also checked out Man Mo, a little unassuming temple within a minute walk from our apartment. It is located on Hollywood Road and pays tribute to the God of Literature and the God of War. It was extremely chaotic due to workers renovating it and tourists mixing together in a cramped space, but I still liked the sight of giant hanging incense. I wouldn't qualify this place as a must-see, but it won't hurt to check it out if you are in the area.

The Victoria Peak

The second day of our trip was completely lost due to a strong typhoon that hit the city. We spent most of our time chilling indoors and savoring amazing food and drinks. This meant we had to make up for it next day, which thankfully, was bright and sunny (and HOT and HUMID). We opted to book a 24-hour hop on/off bus tour taking tourists all around HK's main sights. The deal also included tram tickets and admission to the Sky Terrace 428 on Victoria Peak, which allows truly breathtaking panoramic views of the city. We hopped onto the Peak Tram which turned out to be a bit exhilarating ride as it mounted at a pretty steep angle. A 360-degree view of the city was absolutely worth it, and I would encourage everyone to there if you have time.

Stanley, Repulse Bay & Aberdeen

Thanks to the time-efficient bus tour, we did manage to take a ride to the south of the HK

island and get a glimpse at a golden beach of the Repulse Bay and floating village of Aberdeen. We walked around Stanley which seemed like such an atmospheric and pleasant seaside area with cute little cafes on the waterfront. Guidebooks always stress the importance of seeing the historic Murray House. Apparently, this Victorian-era building built in 1844 had housed officers' quarters in Central before it was moved to Stanley in 2000s. While I appreciate the history, I was a bit disappointed to see it has been turned into an H&M store!

Street markets

There is certainly no lack of shopping malls filled with any brand imaginable on this planet in Hong Kong. However, for a taste of something more local, we headed to peruse the city's famous street markets in Stanley. While the endless rows of stalls are filled with lots of knock-offs and kitschy merchandise, we did find a few stores selling gorgeous handmade items

like lacquerware, crockery and art. We shopped our hearts out and got a few art pieces. Other popular markets include Ladies' Market, Night Market and Jade Market, which sadly we didn't have time to hit.

Promenade on Tsim Sha Tsui

I literally couldn't get enough of the spectacular views over Victoria Harbor and decided to head to Tsim Sha Tsui to enjoy it from a different angle, and stroll along the beautiful promenade.

The big buddha on Lantau Island

On our last day, we traveled to the Lantau Island. The adventure started with a 25-minute scenic ride on a cable car which took us to



Ngong Ping village. You have an option to ride on a crystal bottom gondola, but it was an extra 1-hour wait time. Plus, to be honest, with my fear of heights, the standard car was exhilarating enough. I'm pretty sure I shared the sentiment. I highly recommend pre-booking your cable ride tickets so you don't have to line up for over an hour like we did.

The village at the end of the ride attracts thousands of tourists daily who flock here to see Tian Tan (The Big) Buddha. It was quite a remarkable sight to see the huge bronze statue loom overhead, as if floating in the air above the lush verdant forest. If you feel brave enough, you can climb 262 steps and see it up close, plus enjoy the views from the observation deck.

We also visited the monastery grounds and the most spectacular gold-drenched main hall which houses dozens of Buddha statues.

5 o'clock cocktails

Hong Kong knows how to do a Happy Hour right. Central, especially Soho, seems to be the place to be if you're yearning for your 5 o'clock cocktail. It reminded me of London where I often saw folks dressed up in suits gathering in front of pubs with a glass (or bottle) of wine and chatting their hearts out after a long day at work. The place is awash with cheery bars and we picked a random one for couple of pre-dinner drinks on our final night. In general, HK has one of the best and tallest rooftop bars in the world – the glitzy Ozone Bar housed on the 118th floor of The Ritz Carlton!

SEE HONGKONG ON PAGE 47 ▶

“Scuba divers flock here to swim among rare and exotic species of fish and coral.”



The tropical fish of Kushimoto, Japan

Located in the southern most region of Japan's Wakayama Prefecture is a serene paradise that is a scuba diving haven: Kushimoto.

Scuba divers flock there to swim among rare and exotic species of fish and coral. Similar to the Gulf Stream of the Atlantic Ocean, the Kuroshio Current runs north and feeds the waters surrounding Kushimoto.

Over Columbus Day weekend, I set out to explore Kushimoto's warm and plankton rich waters. I stayed at Seaman's Beach, a dive shop which offers Japanese-style accommodations that are separated for men and women.

Diving with the team from Seaman's Beach is worth the trip. Divers are provided warm tea and a fresh warm-water rinse after each dive. They offer diving and snorkeling for all skill levels. They also dish up some great food. I recommend signing up for the Saturday Barbecue at the Seaman's Beach Dive Club, where fresh tuna is sliced and served raw or fried tempura style. Also served are items from hot grills, including soba noodles, vegetables, chicken and pork.

Wherever I went in Kushimoto, I was welcomed and encouraged to join and participate in the celebrations. When not diving, one can enjoy the sights of the National Scenic Park in Kushimoto. The Hashigui-Iwa Rocks were pushed up during the



volcanic activity that formed these islands. These rock formations provide a beautiful and peaceful view.

I also enjoyed live performances of the Lion Dance. During my weekend there, performing troupes presented with drums

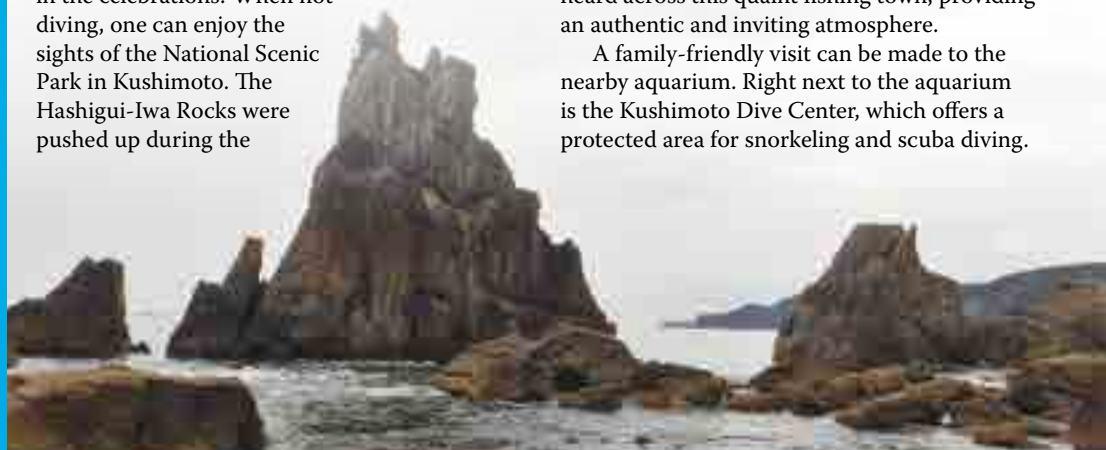
and flutes the Legend of the Lion. A typical dance and story lasted for one hour and was free to visitors. The troupes moved around the town for the day, and also performed at Seaman's Beach Dive Club. The sounds of the drums could be heard across this quaint fishing town, providing an authentic and inviting atmosphere.

A family-friendly visit can be made to the nearby aquarium. Right next to the aquarium is the Kushimoto Dive Center, which offers a protected area for snorkeling and scuba diving.

MY PARADISE

Dive into Kushimoto

Story and photos by
NELL GRIMM



Hashigui-Iwa rock formation, also called one of the "Seven sisters"



This is touted as the oldest dive center in Japan. Rental of snorkeling equipment is available.

Everywhere one looks in Kushimoto, there is a postcard photo waiting to be taken. I hope more people have the chance to visit this wonderful place.



Saturday Night BBQ at Seaman's Beach, Kushimoto Nanki



A Few Tips

- Divers should consider shipping dive gear in advance to avoid lugging cumbersome dive gear through the train stations.
- Seaman's Beach is a full-service dive shop and offers Nitrox, gear rentals and accommodations. I recommend that you email through their website and reserve well in advance of your trip.
- Seaman's Beach offers shuttle pick up at the train station.
- If Seaman's Beach's sleep accommodations are full, there is another inn one block away.
- For the fastest form of transportation to Kushimoto, I recommend the Kuroshio Express train from Osaka.



Lion Dance Festival

HONG KONG

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

Luxury dining & local cuisine

You certainly don't have to worry about missing your meal in Hong Kong. From hole-in-the-wall and mom-and-pop shops serving traditional Cantonese fare to the most sophisticated Michelin-starred restaurants offering western epicurean delights, the choice is dizzying. The city is notorious for its splendid fine dining scene and I and I indulged in our fair share of outstanding dinners during the trip. Highlights included tasting menus at Amber and L'Atelier by Joel Robuchon, Peking Duck at Lung King Heen and dim sum at Tin Lung Heen.

Besides its multitude of high-end restaurants, Hong Kong is filled with old school no-frills haunts where you can get a taste of local cuisine. No visit to the metropolis is complete without trying dim sum and BBQ pork buns, so we headed to Tim Ho Wan, one of world's cheapest Michelin-starred restaurants; here I successfully satisfied my cravings for both.

We also loved our dinner with a playful twist at Yum Cha in Central, where food is

not just tasty, but incredibly adorable!

Naturally, we only managed to scratch the surface in four days. Next time I'd want to have breakfast at the Elephant Grounds, try the praised Afternoon Tea at Intercontinental Hotel and iconic Peninsula, savor dim sum served in an old-school way at Maxim's, slurp on beef brisket at Kau Kee, check out hip and trendy Little Bao, try the famous Tai Cheong egg tarts and egg waffles, enjoy cocktails at Ozone Bar, wine and dine at Vea, Mott 32 and 8 ½ Otto e Mezzo among many many other places. I mean, there is so much to try, one lifetime wouldn't be enough.

Hong Kong is a real haven for lovers of urban adventures and food enthusiasts. I wish we had more time to explore Kowloon, peruse the neon-lit streets of Mongkok, visit humble fishing villages in Tai O or hop on a ferry to Macau. Alas, we'll have to wait till next time...



“I was struck by the greenness of the foliage, the deep azure hue of the sea, and the friendliness of the locals.”

Discovering the beauty, peacefulness of Okinawa

Story and photos by
KIM BOSACK



I feel like I'm in one of two mindsets when I travel. Part of me is the kind of vacationer where I'm trying to cram as much into my days as is humanly possible, for fear of missing out on things.

I have that desire to schedule activities and do a ton of research on my destination beforehand, so that not a moment is wasted. On those trips I'm constantly on the go, to the point that I'm practically asleep by the time my head hits the pillow each night.

And then on my return to "real life", I'm left wanting another vacation because I've overdone it. I start dreaming of tropical sandy beaches, with a cocktail in my hand and nothing but time to read, relax, and not move a muscle if I don't want to. Sound familiar, anyone?

Okuma, on the Northern portion of Okinawa, can give you the opportunity to do just that if you so desire. I've been lucky enough to travel to Okuma twice whilst living at Yokota Air Base (near Tokyo), so that should tell you how much I enjoyed it. My first trip was with one of my girlfriends living here; we visited when we were both pregnant as a mid-week

getaway without our husbands (they couldn't escape work!) My second trip back was more recently with my husband and our daughter. Both times were great, and I think the area is wonderful for a guys getaway, a romantic couple's retreat, or a fun family beach trip, depending on what you're needing in your life at the time.

MY PARADISE

On the two times I've visited Okuma, I stayed at the Okuma Recreation Facility - which is only a 50-mile drive from Kadena Air Base. It's an easy and pleasant drive, too. Okuma might seem like a sleepy little town when you arrive, but if you want to be active and get out to explore, you won't find a shortage of stuff to do nearby either.

Hiji Falls is literally a couple of kilometers away from the Okuma Recreation Facility. I love nature, and I quite enjoy hiking, so on my first trip to Okuma my friend and I thought checking out the falls would be a nice way to spend a portion of the day. Mind you, we were both about six and a half months pregnant at this point in time. When we were lining up to pay our admission, the man at the office apprehensively asked us if we were both pregnant, seemingly in an attempt to try and warn us about the intensity of the walk.

We brushed it off, thinking that we were still quite fit, and honestly, as we had been lining up, we saw some older Japanese couples returning from



the walk, looking as fit as fiddles. Surely we were able to handle it if they were, right?well, barely. There were stairs. A lot of stairs. Steep stairs. Did I say stairs enough, yet? We made it there and back and it was absolutely beautiful, but we felt like we'd just run an entire marathon by the end.

Lesson learned - definitely visit the falls, but maybe don't do it if you're pregnant or have any other physical conditions! If the attendant there tries to warn you, it's probably a good sign to not go ahead with it!

But I digress. Okinawa really is a place of so much natural beauty. Another place that isn't too far from the Okuma Recreation Facility is Cape Hedo, which is the very northernmost tip of Okinawa. The views there are just stunning. The amazing cliff faces and rock formations standing in the ocean amidst tropical fern foliage is definitely something to see. Also, there's a monument there that recognizes the end of the U.S. occupation of Okinawa and the return of the island to Japan. I think for military families, the significance of this certainly isn't lost on us, and it's a testament to the relationship and friendship the U.S. and Japan have as nations and allies today.

If you're looking for indoorsy activities, particularly if you have children, I highly recommend the Yanbaru Forest Toy Museum. A short drive from the Okuma Recreation Facility, I feel like it's brilliant for kids and kids at heart. My husband and I took our daughter there on

our family trip on a somewhat rainy day, and it was fun for all of us! There are all manners of wooden toys, from wooden magnetic fishing sets to a ball pit filled with wooden "eggs" that you can climb into. We probably spent a couple of hours there, and only ended up leaving because it was time for our little one's nap. We really could have stuck around longer!

Also, I feel like one of the biggest draws to Okinawa itself is the beautiful Churaumi Aquarium. It's only 40 kilometers or so from Okuma - about an hour's drive, give or take a little to account for traffic. I've been to a number of aquariums around the globe, but this one to me really took top spot for size, the numerous displays and interactive opportunities. It's something else that I think is fun whether you have children or not. To me, marine life is fascinating, and when you can explore it in such a world class setting, you'd be crazy to pass up the chance to do so!

Then of course there's the option to simply spend time at the Okuma Recreation Facility and not even move from there if you don't want to.

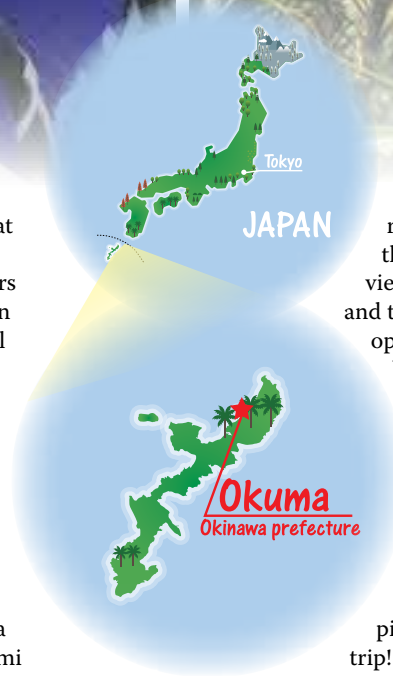
There's plenty to keep you occupied! You can rent pedal bikes, play mini golf or tennis,

ride around on go-karts, explore the grounds (there's some great views if you explore a little!) - and that's just on land. There's also opportunities to take a glass bottom boat tour and check out all the beautiful coral and sea life, or rent a snorkel and going swimming to check it all out for yourself! Plus, the on-facility dining is delicious and the staff are super friendly.

My husband and I are still dreaming of the wood-fired oven pizza about a month later after our trip!

So, long story short - go and visit this gorgeous part of the world. Get together with some girlfriends for a relaxing weekend away, or get your guy friends and go golfing and jet skiing if that takes your fancy. Plan a date with your husband, wife, or significant other - pack a picnic basket and enjoy it on the beach. Bring your entire family, build sandcastles, swim, and grill out.

Make memories. Relax. Don't worry about other commitments and rushing around like you're missing out on things. You're not. Sometimes you need to slow down to recharge, and this is exactly what Okuma has done for me. I left rejuvenated and with no worries. Hopefully you will too!



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In addition to lavish rooms, guests can indulge in an array of culinary delights and refreshments in every outlet.

Aqua offers the freshest and finest of ingredients are woven into an exciting buffet tapestry of local and international fare with live-cooking stations, seafood, cured meats and cheeses, handmade dim sum and one of the largest dessert selections on the island.

Now open for dinner only is Alfredo's Steakhouse, serving premium cuts of meat, live lobster and a wine list to intrigue any connoisseur.

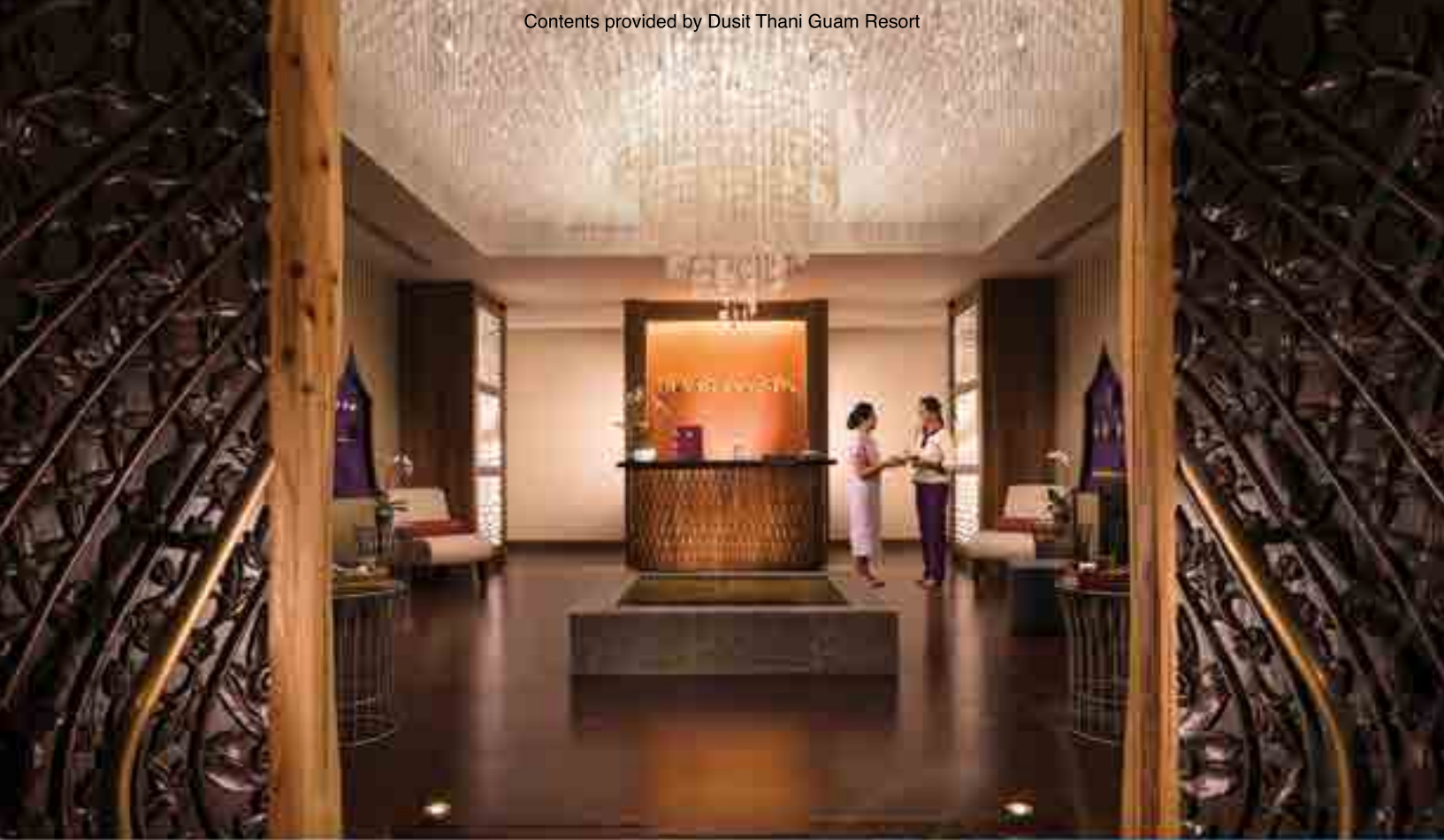
Or savor the flavors of world-renowned Thai street food at Soi which means "street" in Thai. Expanding its hours to accommodate guests for lunch and dinner, the focus at Soi is on small plates that are perfect for sharing and pairing. Elements of trendy Bangkok shop houses are infused throughout this casual yet polished Thai bistro.

Tasi Grill is where tropical gardens and white sands surround this open-air beachside grill. Guests can enjoy the art and style of traditional local barbecue. Cravings for late night fare and live entertainment can be met at the Lobby Lounge featuring artfully crafted cocktails and spectacular sunsets inside or from the spacious outdoor terrace.

Breathtaking views of the magnificent Tumon Bay, a World Luxury nominated spa. Offering guest rooms and suites that span as high as 30 floors while boasting everything from ocean views and private terraces to studios furnished with living rooms, there is no compromise in luxury at the Dusit Thani Guam Resort.

Exclusive Villas include six styles of suites each one featuring a living room, pantry, an en-suite bathroom with premium amenities and a luxurious spa treatment room. Enjoy private terraces and a plunge pool to soak in the spectacular beauty of Tumon Bay. Guests are also entitled to the full range of Dusit Club privileges.





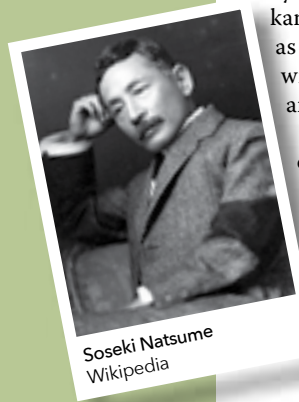
Dusit Thani Guam Resort is also home to Devarana Spa, Dusit International's signature spa. Inspired by the concept of the garden in heaven, Devarana Spa provides luxurious pampering and healing treatments in a soothing and stress-relieving environment.

The new facility offers ten deluxe treatment rooms and suites plus a couples' suite, hydro-jet massage pool, hot/cold plunge pools and a Himalayan rock salt meditation room.

Experience a world of luxury and hospitality at Dusit Thani Guam Resort that will enliven the individual spirit, no matter the journey.



“Dogo Onsen was my fiancé’s idea. I’d never heard of it but she’s a Kyushu girl and loves onsens something fierce.”



Soseki Natsume
Wikipedia

A holiday in Shikoku

Story and photos by
DAVID KRIGBAUM

There are many fine places in Japan to spend a long holiday weekend, but the one I think doesn’t get enough consideration is Shikoku. Maybe it’s because MWR doesn’t plan tours there, but for those willing to drive the extra miles, it’s a fantastic place with lots to do and see.

On our four-day Shikoku trip, my fiancée and I saw two of Japan’s dozen original castles, relaxed in an onsen that’s supposedly been used since the days of King David, crossed over a ravine on a vine bridge, saw one of the first bullet trains and visited one of the most disappointing tourist spots in Japan to see if it lived up to the hype. And of course we ate mikans. Always more mikans.

EHIME prefecture Matsuyama

Matsuyama has a lot to offer for visitors looking for uniquely Japanese, and even unique among Japanese, experiences. During our short trip we took in an inspirational onsen, an original castle and one of the 88 pilgrimage temples on Shikoku.

Dogo Onsen was my fiancée’s idea I’d never heard of it but she’s a Kyushu girl and loves onsens something fierce. She let me have my castles (and suicide torpedo museums, kamikaze museums, castle ruins that doubled as massacre sites... I’m amazed she puts up with me), so this was her itinerary addition and I’m glad she added it.

Dogo Onsen is a fantastic throwback of a bathhouse, the last stubborn holdover from a much earlier age surrounded by the modern world and still holding its own. According to the onsen, it’s Japan’s oldest and has been used for millennia. The current building was erected in 1894, but then people kept adding rooms and towers and other bits over the next 30 years resulting in an elegant collection of grown together halls, and towers with a mix of black tile, upswept green copper roofs, and woodworking not usually seen outside of temples and castles in today’s Japan.

The onsen’s first brush with pop cultural fame came with its use in the 1906 book “Botchan,” by Soseki Natsume. The protagonist hates every single thing about redneck backwater “na moshi” Matsuyama except for this onsen. Given that the author was a frequent visitor when he lived in Matsuyama I wouldn’t be surprised if he is the reason you’re not allowed to swim in the bath just like Botchan.

A century later, the onsen provided artistic

inspiration again for the bathhouse in Hayao Miyazaki’s animated film, Spirited Away. It inspired me as well, at least to mention it in this travel article.

Beautiful as it may be on the outside, an onsen is only as good as its ambience and bath water and Dogo did not disappoint.

There are a few bathing options to choose from as there are different baths inside; we chose Soul Water and Gods Water. We were then led through a minor maze to get to where we could put on yukatas and go to our baths. This meant a lot of going upstairs, downstairs, up a single stair then back down and around the corner to get anywhere; I’d like to think the trip hazards are part of that cobbled together charm of the building. It’s easy to see where Miyazaki got some of his ideas from for the movie and a few spots look like the real life locations for a few scenes.

My first onsen, the Tama no Yu or “Soul Water,” was back down stairs, but a different set of stairs and disrobing I was greeted with a blast of cold air from outside. The windows were open to an inner courtyard, but reed blinds kept anyone from looking in.

This bath was originally built for imperial servants when the emperor visited (as extremely rare as they were, Dogo set aside a lot of space to handle the Emperor’s visits.) so has that little bit of history to go along with the relaxing water. The temperature was practically perfect, hot but not scalding, which not all onsen can seem to pull off. The onsen water as well was rather light, it’s fed directly from the source spring and is both colorless and odorless.

After steaming in the bath for a spell, the blast of cold air from outside that made me shiver before was now a pleasant end to my first Dogo Onsen experience. This was followed up by the second bath, “Water of the Gods,” which was a more impressive setting with its Buddha-headed water tank and painted back wall depicting cranes and what I thought were mountains, well that or those cranes were massive in ancient Japan.

Given its long history, a few corners are preserved as miniature museums. There’s the Botchan no Ma (Botchan Room), which is the room author Natsume Soseki liked to use when he visited, and it has pictures of people associated with the author and his book.

We were given a guided tour of the emperor’s suite before leaving. Used only a handful of times, the gold-leaf gilded rooms mimicked a palatial atmosphere, and I found them artistically pleasing to view. The suite consists of the bedroom, a rock garden, bathroom and private onsen. It cost extra, but my fiancée had this added to our trip because she knows I love to learn when I’m relaxing, even in an onsen.

Before leaving, I picked up a pink souvenir



Dogo Onsen



Matsuyama Castle

towel that again is inspired by Botchan, as the protagonist's towel has turned pinkish as its colors ran after being used in so many onsens.

As freshly steamed as a nikuman from not one but two hot baths, now how does one get from fantasy onsen to one of Japan's last real medieval castles? Just like they did a century ago, aboard a whimsical German train of course! (Schedule permitting.)

Dogo Onsen Station is an architectural counterpoint to Dogo Onsen. Built in 1895, a year after the Onsen, whereas the onsen was a throwback to the traditional Japan, the station embraced the new, modern Japan. Elsewhere, whether in the U.S. or Britain, I'd call its architectural style Victorian, but in Japan it's Meiji, the reigning emperor when it was built and an example of how Japan modernized by taking Western ideas and making them it's own. It feels like it belongs in Disneyland and not out in a city, an image that fits perfectly with the special train that stops here, the Botchan Ressha.

This "matchbox" like train is miniature and at first I thought it was just some silly fake like you'd seen in a mall around Christmastime with its small cars and chibi-engine, except it's not. It's a fully functioning and full-scale replica of the real German-built trains that ran around Matsuyama a century ago, which even in their day were commented on for being toy-like because of their diminutive size.

For train fans this is a must, though there are only a few of these running and the rest of the streetcars that service the station are normal streetcars, so plan accordingly. The current train is a replica; to see the original you'd need to make a trip to the city's Baishinji Park where it is on display.

While visiting the area, we walked through the L-shaped arcade connecting the onsen to the station and saw Botchan inspired statues and a clock tower, adding to the amusement park atmosphere. We stopped into a "sesame everything" shop for sesame soft cream and ate at one of the little eateries where they served anago, a local eel and locally brewed Dogo Beer. I tried a porter which, while no Guinness, was

still not bad.

A quick word about food on Shikoku- this is the land of mikan. Everywhere, all the time. I cannot fully express just how mikan crazy this island is, and I live in Nagasaki Prefecture, the prefecture with the best mikan in Japan according to the Emperor. (Or so I've been told.)

Most Japanese castles today, original and reproduction, are shadows of their former selves. A donjon, or keep, amidst a scenic park, maybe an inner layer of defensive walls and an original gate, but the majesty is gone. The layered defenses, several series of walls and moats that blend into a fortified city essentially extending the castle itself for miles, no longer exist. Himeji probably comes closest to maintaining its scale, but Matsuyama, with its large still-fortified footprint atop a hill overlooking its former domain, still impresses as it maintains all of its gates and most of the hilltop is walled and turreted as it has been for centuries.

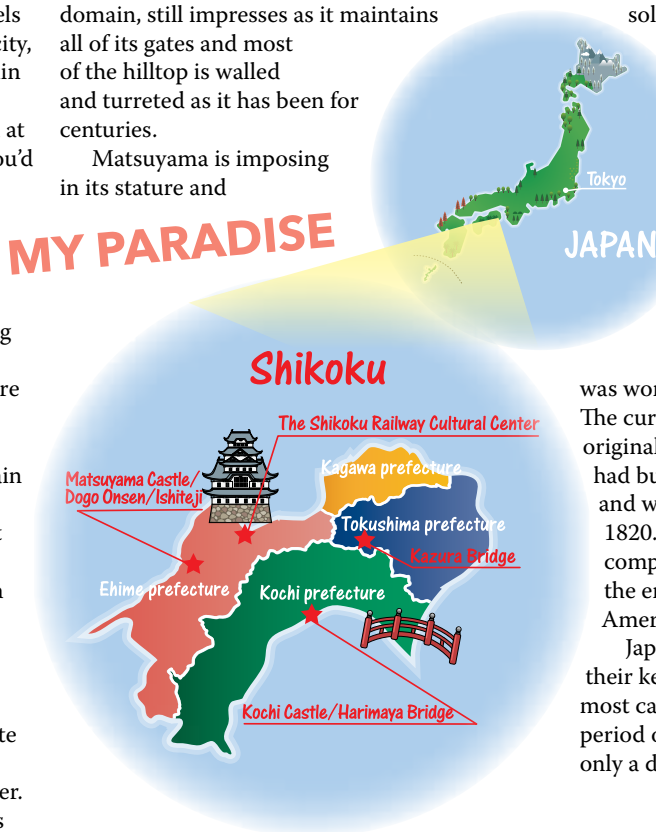
Matsuyama is imposing in its stature and

as the approach to it is still made up a hill with the castle looking down on visitors and helps one appreciate the scale and awe it was meant to inspire. The most imposing view was at the first inner gate to the keep; coming upon it meant passing through a walled valley topped with turrets and the keep itself bearing down on me. An invader would be at a severe disadvantage as they would be run through a series of interconnected gates positioned at awkward angles and at all times be under direct attack from every direction.

This is one of the few places where visitors can appreciate this kind of defense, though not all of these parts are original but have been convincingly rebuilt. The original castle was built by Kato Yoshiaki in 1602, shortly after the country's unification. Kato was an accomplished soldier and sailor who served Toyotomi Hideyoshi and later Tokugawa Ieyasu in some of the battles that would shape the destiny of Japan. For his service the samurai was made a daimyo and given control of Masaki and then Matsuyama. The castle's mascot, Yoshiaki-kun, is a cartoonish representation of the man and visitors can take their picture in the courtyard with him and the castle the real Kato built.

Kato's castle took 24 years to finish but was worked on and modified over the years. The current keep is actually the youngest of the original castle keeps in Japan. The previous keep had burned down on New Year's Day in 1784 and work on a replacement didn't begin until 1820. Beset with misfortune, it took 35 years to complete – just in time to see the beginning of the end of its era as it was finished shortly after American Commodore Perry's visit.

Japanese castles are considered "original" if their keeps are from the Edo period or older. As most castles were torn down during the Meiji period or destroyed in World War II, there are only a dozen left and only a few are rated as



SEE SHIKOKU ON PAGE 54 ▶

SHIKOKU

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National Treasures. Matsuyama is a step down on the cultural scale as an Important Culture Asset, though from looking at it, it's as good as all three National Treasure castles I've been to.

A surprising amount of the castle is original beyond the keep itself. Many of the towers and gates are centuries old, though arson and wartime bombings meant that other bits have had to be rebuilt in the modern era. Looking at them I'd be hard pressed to tell most of the reproduction buildings from the originals.

Inside is a typical but well-put together museum, with most everything in English, which shares the castle history and the stories of its inhabitants along with a healthy volume of artifacts.

After finishing with the castle, we had an abrupt shift in scenery as we passed the ruins of a gate and took a stroll down the forested hill to the Ninomaru Shiseki Teien. Autumn came late to Shikoku so the trees were a mix of green, gold and red, a combination enhanced by the golden sunset resulting in some beautiful shots of the castle atop the hill.

The ninomaru, originally the castle's second palace, looks like a walled palace from the outside, but inside it has been re-imagined as a citrus-tree laden garden with tea house and koi pond. I found it interesting that the outline of the original building has been preserved in the garden walkways. The castle and ninomaru, though complimentary, are unrelated and visitors have to buy tickets to both separately. I had fun here having an impromptu photo shoot with my fiancée under the fall leaves by the koi pond.

The last stop on our Matsuyama tour was Ishiteji, the Stone Hand Temple. The name is derived from the legend of a monk who went on a

pilgrimage to 88 temples on Shikoku. The monk, Emon Saburo, was originally a wealthy farmer, who one day found a monk at his door begging for food and shelter while on the pilgrimage. Saburo turned the monk away who then died. Soon after this, Saburo's eight sons died, and seeking forgiveness, he became a monk himself and took part in the pilgrimage. He learned what it was like to be a begging pilgrim like the monk he turned away, and as he neared death he wished to be reborn with wealth to take care of pilgrims that came across his door. He died with a stone in his hand and at that time a child was born clutching a stone that read "Emon Saburo reborn." This child grew up and restored the old local temple, now named Ishiteji.

That's the legend; what is known is that the temple was originally founded under a different name in 670 A.D. and is one of Shikoku's 88 pilgrimage temples. These temples are a unique feature of Shikoku and visiting them all requires trekking across the island, which predates modern marketing attempts at tourism.

At first I wasn't sure what to make of it. Out front are some very new statues of Buddhist figures, a dragon and a monk, and a tower, but the main complex is hidden from the roadside. We then passed under a long covered hall with food stalls and stalls selling charms, before coming out in front of the Niomon Gate. Built in 1381, it's a National Treasure. The temple complex was pleasantly simple. Its plain wooden buildings and it's subdued and

natural appearance is a contrast to the colorful red or vermilion temples and shrines that are commonly seen. Nestled in a forested area, it feels to be completely in harmony with the natural beauty surrounding it.

After leaving Matsuyama, we headed for the other side of the island and the city of Kochi to visit

my fiancée's brother, though we took in a few sights as well, including Kochi Castle and the Harimaya Bridge.

KOCHI prefecture

Kochi

Kochi Castle is one of the 12 original castles, like Matsuyama, but Kochi alone is the real life Swamp Castle! The castle was built where two rivers are close enough to make for a natural moat. The joining point was also a natural swamp. Ignoring this, twice someone tried to build a castle upon this swamp and twice it failed, but trying again this one was finally erected. I tried sharing this Monty Python joke with my fiancée but I don't think it translated well to Japanese, nor did the one about great big tracts of land.

After its completion in 1611, it was the capital of the Tosa Domain and absolutely nothing worth mentioning happened here until it was retired in 1868. Then it became a delightful park.

The primary selling point to visiting Kochi (for normal people) is its completeness; its

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Ishiteji



Statue of Emon Saburo and Kukai Wikipedia



Kochi Castle



Harimaya Bridge



Q&A with a history/travel junkie

David Krigbaum is a Mass Communications Specialist in the U.S. Navy who is stationed at Sasebo Naval Base. The first class petty officer is a history buff who loves a good adventure and is willing to share his travels with others. We sat down with David to see what makes him tick.

Q There's a lot of folks who don't get off base much. You're not one of them. Tell us why you believe it's so important to take advantage of your location and get out and explore:

A I come from a Navy family so I don't really come from anywhere. Every place I live is a new opportunity to try new things or, like when overseas, experience a new culture. I don't know if or when I'll come back again, so I need to make the most of it. I've lived outside of the U.S. since 2009 at duty stations around Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Every place has been different and presented great opportunities that I could ramble on about endlessly.

Q You took a trip of a lifetime to the Philippines, which was chronicled in this magazine last year. What destinations are next?

A I've yet to decide on my next trip outside of Japan, since I already have so many planned here! There really is so much to do just in Japan. I'd like to see all 12 original castles. So far, I've only seen five. There are a number of World War II museums I want to see, as well as tracking down rare aircraft and I'd love to see Tsuchiura's restored and running Type 89 tank.

When we finally do travel outside Japan, my fiancé and I are looking at visiting South Korea, since it's a neighbor neither of us have seen. I'd like to see their military museum in Seoul and visit Gyeongju to admire the ancient architecture.

Q Love your blog. What's your motivation behind it?

A I was motivated to start the Wayfarer Daves travel & history blog because I wanted to share my travel experiences with other people who share my interests, and because I don't care for most of the travel blogs I've come across. Most are written by people who I find to be completely not relatable in that they've quit their jobs to spend months or years on the road writing about what wows them using an overabundance of adjectives. So my friend and I, Dave Hansche, decided we'd make a blog that shared what we enjoy, the history of a place, our

experiences visiting them and giving tips and advice for other interested travelers, who at the end of the trip still have to go home.

We talked about doing the blog when I was stationed in Europe and traveling to different countries over long weekends. It didn't get off the ground until I moved to Japan and decided to stop talking about it and just do it. I started with an article I'd originally had published a few years back, and we started putting out new material after a rather grueling winter break tour where Dave and I visited Tokyo, Yokohama, Hikone, Kyoto, Uji, Nara, Osaka and walked part of the Edo-period Nakasendo through the Kiso Valley.

The last bit, hiking in the dead of winter through a miserable drizzle with a damp backpack, reminded me that an adventure is always miserable when it happens; it's an adventure in the retelling. Also, a Jeremy Soule Skyrim/Oblivion/Morrowind playlist sounds just as good walking through a Japanese forest and old unchanging villages as it is wandering around a Welsh castle ruin.

Q Without a doubt, you are a history buff. And, you love old planes. Japan is a great place to dig into history, isn't it?

A Japan is wonderful for historians because so much has happened here and this culture has a documented, sometimes historic and sometimes mythical, history that stretches back millennia. The Japanese culture itself, its castles, religious architecture, ruins and old houses are all great to get out and see, not to mention photograph.

Studying World War II here is unique as you can't study it the same way in the U.S. In Baltimore and Boston, I visited warships that survived kamikaze attacks (USS Cassin Young and USCGC Taney). But here, I've visited four museums at the air bases these attacks were launched from and got to see some of their perspective, not to mention rare aircraft - some of which were kamikazes.

Not that I'm looking at these things from an ethical 'right or wrong' perspective, but just understanding different perspectives. When I visited the Tachiarai Peace Memorial Museum, one of the kamikaze museums, they had parts



David Krigbaum

of a downed B-29 on display. Then, looking up, I realized the whole room was in the shadow of an outlined B-29 overhead, this dreaded thing that rained death from above. (Despite how that may have sounded, Tachiarai handled their whole presentation on World War II honestly and even-handedly.) It's a very different way of seeing it than when I saw B-29s on display in the U.S.

Q Traveling can be expensive. Got some tips for us on how not to blow your budget?

A The key to managing a budget on a trip is planning and research.

Before leaving on a trip I'll make an outline - Day 1: Where am I sleeping? What transit will be done? Day 2, Day 3, etc. This allows me to fill in the blanks by researching costs for trains, buses, rental cars, etc. After I sort through hotels to find one that suits my needs, I plug in that price as well. Factor in money for food, museums entry fees and special meals, and you have a rough estimate of how much the trip will cost. Add at least 20% to this amount and you're more in the ballpark of what you'll actually spend, because things will come up, some plan may change or you may like some souvenir you'll regret whilst trying to get it back through the airport. If I'm fine with what this cost is, then I'll leave it. If not, I go back and see what I'm willing to drop, such as going for a cheaper hotel that is less convenient.

Also, here in Japan you have to be able to use Japanese language hotel booking websites to get the cheapest hotel deals.

Since letting my Japanese fiancé pick our hotels using Jalan and Rakuten, we've been finding dirt cheap, yet nice hotels around the country that I can't find on their English counterparts.

Q Anything else you'd like to add?

A It's been a pleasure being able to do what I've done; I look forward to the next adventure and being able to share it with everyone.



SHIKOKU

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54



hilltop citadel retains all of its original structures. But if Matsuyama had the miniature train, then Kochi has the miniature castle keep. The keep and adjoining palace are quite small and contain a small Japanese-language only museum.

The castle's most interesting part is the big Tsumemon, guardroom or "trick" gate, that obviously leads to the citadel, until an invader breaks through and realizes they are now on the opposite side of the same hill and no closer to getting up to the citadel. It's a neat trick I've not seen in any other castle.

Another stand out point is the main castle gate, which from the right angle can be photographed along with the keep. According to Kochi Castle you cannot shoot the main gate and keep of any other castle in this way. I'm not sure if it's true, I'll have to visit a few dozen more castles to verify.

Before leaving Kochi we also stopped by the famous Harimaya Bridge. It's a tiny red classic bridge over an almost non-existent stream that's famous for a story about a priest and his lover, and having a movie named after it. My fiancée said that it's also been rated among the most disappointing tourist spot in Japan, so I had to see if it lived up to the hype. Unfortunately it did not. It was not disappointing, because how can it disappoint if I expect it to? Either way, it was a quick and quirky stop that's famous for being famous and it was free so I couldn't complain.

TOKUSHIMA prefecture Miyoshi (Kazurabashi)

Since we were in a bridging mood, on our way back to Kyushu we took a detour into Tokushima Prefecture to walk across a vine bridge. Tokushima is quite rural and our drive consisted of endless green mountains ending in deep valleys and small roads leading to other smaller roads along said mountains until reaching Kazurabashi, a bridge made of wood and held together with vines (and hidden steel cables) that has hung across the Iya valley for 800 years. Legend holds it was first built by Heike refugees who'd fled to the region after losing the Gempei War in 1185, or by the founder of the Shingon Buddhist sect, Kodo Daishi.

Regretting that I'd left my fedora and bullwhip at home, we paid our yen and got in line with the other tourists to cross the bridge. Gently swaying ancient bridge or not, it's not as adventurous when you're in a line going across, well to me anyway. My fiancée carefully watched her footing on the loosely spaced planks and never let go of the vine rail as she crossed a single step at a time. I stopped to take pictures the beautiful rocky river bed that cut through the bottom of the

forested "v" at the bottom of the mountains and... now she wants to know how I can stop and shoot with both hands, that's not safe. So I got a little thrill in handing my camera to another person to take a blurry picture of me in the middle of the bridge, knowing full well he could drop it and it would plummet to the river below and I'd be out \$1000. I recommend not using a phone for a selfie across the bridge. If you're willing to take that risk you're a better traveler than I.

When we finished, we took a moment to crawl around the large rocks along the river, which were an odd grey-green color, and enjoy a dekomawashi, a dongo like treat made with soba, konnyaku, tofu and potato and sweetened with an orange miso glaze.

EHIME prefecture Saijo

We'd originally planned to spend the night in Saijo and leave early the next morning without visiting any local points of interest. After getting there I discovered our hotel was next to the train station, as the passing trains throughout the night could attest, (Full disclosure- I'm a Sailor and have lived under an active runway, so passing trains are nothing to me) and that train station had an attached railway museum. My fiancée gave me one hour to explore it the next morning, so I had to work much faster than usual to take it all in.

The Shikoku Railway Cultural Center is small but with six trains is worth seeing. Two in particular excited me, a Type 0 Shinkansen and a C57 steam locomotive engine. The two designs are only a quarter century apart in age but demonstrate the rapid pace of technological innovation during the mid-twentieth century. With its bulbous nose and big windows, the Type 0 wouldn't be considered sleek or fast looking by today's standards, but it was the pinnacle of rail transit in its day. Sitting in the passenger cabin I noticed how little has changed for the passenger, even if the train itself has.

The C57 looked ready to take a load of passengers to Hogwarts or whatever its Japanese equivalent is. (Probably the same, but built in a tasteful early Edo style) These trains ran from the late 1930s until 1975, when this particular engine pulled its last cars for Japan National Railway, and only a year before the museum's Shinkansen engine was built.

With minutes to spare, I returned to the hotel and we were able to get back on the road and finish our journey home. We did a lot more than this on the trip, but to write of it all would result in a small book, and besides, where's the fun if I don't leave a few surprises for other visitors?

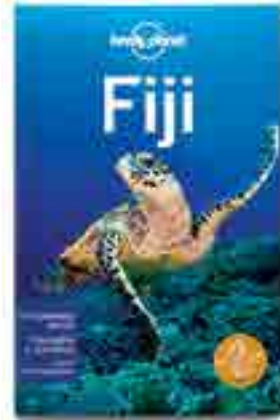
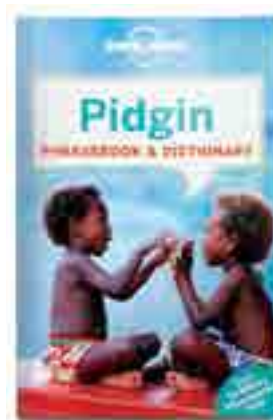
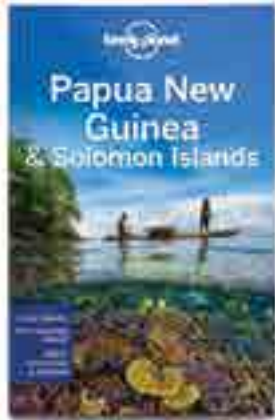
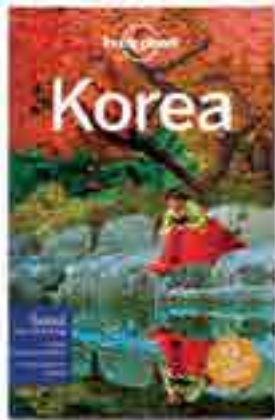
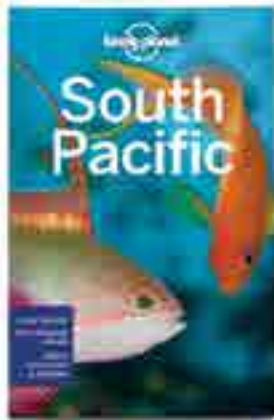
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Being an LUJ student changed my perspective significantly. It certainly has shown me a diverse environment as the campus is located in the city of Tokyo and many opportunities are filled within this college. For example, there are temples and shrines to visit not too far from school. Also, the size of each class is quite small, which makes it easier to get individual help from the professors. There is nothing comparable with studying in a delightful locale in a beautiful country."

— Tyra Kemp, Kinnick High School Alumna and a LUJ Graduate

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“Avoid getting hit by one of the countless mopeds that roam the streets and be sure not to forget that deodorant.”

Take a tour and taste Taipei

Story by
IAN WADDICK



Photos courtesy of Amy Merdian

Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall

When we decided to move to Tokyo for a couple of years, one of the big draws to the big move, was the ability to travel around the Pacific - a part of the world we'd likely never see otherwise.

We'd heard a lot about Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Seoul. "You definitely have to go to [insert city]," many friends and coworkers told us. Well, I'm sure they're right, and I'm sure we'll get to a few of them eventually, but in the end, it was a personal recommendation from a friend living abroad that led us to our first stop on the tour of the Pacific - Taiwan. Taipei to be more specific.

For those unfamiliar with the area, Taiwan is an island located just east of China and just north of the Philippines. And officially, it is a state in East Asia called the Republic of China.

After a quick four-hour flight from Tokyo (everything seems quick compared to 13 hours from Tokyo to Chicago), we landed in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan.

On the ground, we quickly purchased a three-day train pass, which was perfect for our long weekend there, and were on our way.

Once outside of the airport, the heat hit us like a brick wall. It was toasty. If a sub-tropical climate and multiple showers a day is your thing, then Taiwan is perfect.

The biggest thing we

wanted to do during our time in Taiwan, was to see as many of the historical monuments as we could. And a great way to see the city, and free yourself of the time spent planning a trek from point A to B to C, D and E, is a guided tour.

To begin with, we weren't 100% sure of exactly everything we should be visiting as tourists in the city. So, a guided tour took the decision making out of it. It made life easy and much more relaxing. If it was important, they took us there.

On a recommendation from my friend, we booked the all-day tour (7 a.m.-6 p.m.) through mytaiwantour.com.

The tip could not have been more spot on. The tour was excellent. Our host, and her van driver, took us and about eight other tourists to 10 must-see locations in Taipei for just under \$100. At \$10 a place, and no transportation costs, you can't beat that.

Among the highlights of the tour were: Longshan Temple, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Taipei 101, lunch (we'll get to this later), Beitou Hot Springs and the National Palace Museum.

Along with the picturesque views of the city, our highly-knowledgeable tour guide was great. She knew just about everything there is to know about the history and culture of Taiwan. I can't speak for all of the guides, but if you enjoy a good learning experience while on vacation, I would highly recommend this tour.

The excellent tour finished up at the Shilin Night Market, one of many night markets Taipei is known for. Here, people pack the

Take on
Taipei Part 2
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MY PARADISE



Taipei 101



Longshan Temple



Xiaolongbao



Statue of Chiang Kai-Shek

narrow walkways lined with souvenir shops and food stands. And we're not talking a couple of food stands you see at a carnival. This particular market had countless stands, many with some random Taiwanese dish you've never had, but it looks odd and smells amazing. If you're a person that enjoys trying new and random foods, this is your heaven.

Our night-market dinner ended up being just a respite from the thing that I will likely remember the most from the trip – Din Tai Fung.

For lunch on the tour, we ate at the immensely popular restaurant, Din Tai Fung, which has many locations throughout the country (Locations also include Korea, Japan and the U.S.). We ate at the Taipei 101 location, and it was love at first taste. My buddy also said we must try this place, and that he still craves the pork dumplings (xiaolongbao), despite now being a vegetarian. His statement was strong, but the food lived up to the hype. After eating a special tourist sampler lunch, we proceeded to eat Din Tai Fung two more times within 24 hours. Thankfully, we've since learned

that we live five minutes from a Tokyo location.

Overall, Taipei provides a quick and fun weekend trip. If you find a place to stay within Taipei city, all you need is a rail pass, and you can get just about anywhere you need to go. Avoid getting hit by one of the countless mopeds that roam the streets and be sure not to forget that deodorant. If nothing else, take a weekend to enjoy the historical sites and stuff your face with the tasty local fare.

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Shilin Night Market



Tell us about paradise, Miss DJ!!

“If you like shopping, history, the arts, culture, nightlife, food or the great outdoors, you can find it in Taipei.”

Treats of Taipei

Story and photos by
TECH SGT. JOELY M. SANTIAGO,
AFN PACIFIC



When you Google the word paradise, images of palm trees, beaches and waterfalls populate your page. For many, that's the epitome of paradise. And it is for me too... kind of. My paradise lives in the undiscovered. Experiencing new things and seeing new places.

This year, I was lucky. I traveled a lot. I saw so many awe-inspiring places, met plenty of fun and friendly people and ate plateful after plateful of exotic (at least to me) foods. But out of all the places I went, Taipei was my favorite paradise.

It's the kind of place that has something for everyone. If you like shopping, history, the arts, culture, nightlife, food or the great outdoors, you can find it in Taipei. And it's easy-to-navigate public transportation system makes it easy to see and do it all.

I only had five days to get in as much of Taipei



MY PARADISE

as I could, and there's so much, so sleep was on the backburner for the week. My first priority was food—spicy beef noodles in particular. So after a little research, I set my sights on Yong Kang. We arrived to find a line half a block long of locals and foreigners alike waiting to get their serving of noodles. I was certain this meal would be legendary, and it did not disappoint.

The noodles were spicy and flavorful, the beef tender and well-seasoned and the side dishes...

well, there are no words. It only took one meal to know that this place would be everything I hoped for and so much more.

After dinner, we went for dessert and city views at Taipei 101—the tallest building in the city. Seeing how big Taipei is from up high inspired me to set a rough itinerary of how I wanted to spend the remaining four days. I'm the wing-it type, so I didn't have anything planned. But my time was limited and there was a lot more to see than I'd originally anticipated.

I spent the remaining time visiting parks, hiking hills and mountains, checking out monuments and museums, exploring nearby cities, feasting on street foods, navigating through night markets and frequenting temples and art

• **Why I like working for AFN:** I like working for AFN because I like having a hand in bringing a little bit of home to those of us stationed overseas. I know how important it is to have the things that make you feel connected to what's happening in the States, whether it's NFL football or the most recent episode of your favorite show. Those things help make me feel a little closer to home, and I'm sure they do the same for others. Knowing that makes doing my job every day more enjoyable.



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galleries. It was incredible. Taipei was so clean and vibrant. The people were so kind and warm. The food was unique and gratifying. And the fact that nearly everyone spoke or understood enough English to assist me in getting around, made the experience that much better.

I could write pages about how phenomenal this trip was and city is, but I think it's best to experience it for yourself. Take my word for it, it's worth it... even if only for the food.

Comfort in Kunsan

Story and photo by
SUSIE LEE,
AFN PACIFIC



Kunsan isn't the horrible, remote assignment that people make it out to be. Kunsan is remote, it is more country than Seoul, but it is also full of splendor. I've been hesitant to write this piece because writing it means I'll have to expose my secret gem. And, I run away to this place- quite literally. But, I suppose sharing is caring, right?

It was such an unexpected treasure, a moment of brilliance to find this place. I'd been feeling anxious that my life was moving slower than time was moving, and I'd just been having lots of thoughts, to say the least. When I have thoughts, I like to get out, go for walks, go for drives, go for bus rides—something, anything, just vacate the place. Well, then I found Eunpa-Lake Park (은파 호수 공원). It was just so majestic. All of my thoughts just disappeared. Wouldn't it be great if nature could really do that? Just wipe away all of our worries? Haha! Well, at least there's a place of my own, in Kunsan, that

MY PARADISE

does that for me, at least for a little while. I run here, I rest here, I think, and I also don't think here. This

place, Eunpa-Lake Park is just majestic to me, particularly at night.

In the middle of the lake, there is a bridge that is beautifully lit with lights that alternate colors; the park is outlined with a path for miles upon miles for runners and walkers. The air is clean, the water is clear, and surrounding the park are lights and mini speakers that play delightful music. On one end, I can hide and rest away in a traditional Korean wood-framed hut, or I can go to another side of the lake and go to a café for a café mocha. Walking the whole perimeter takes 5-6 hours, so in terms of thinking time, anyone with lots of thoughts won't have a problem.

To me, Eunpa-Lake Park is my private get-away. I come here to escape from the entropy that we call life. It's so easy to forget how beautiful the world is in our busy lives, but we have to remember to get away and to just take in a moment for ourselves; take in the moonlight hitting the water and the lights from the bridge that complement it so stunningly. You'll feel much better after you take a few deep breaths of fresh air and a few long glances into Eunpa Lake and all her glory!

Susie tested and Susie approved!



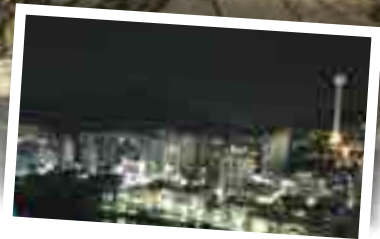
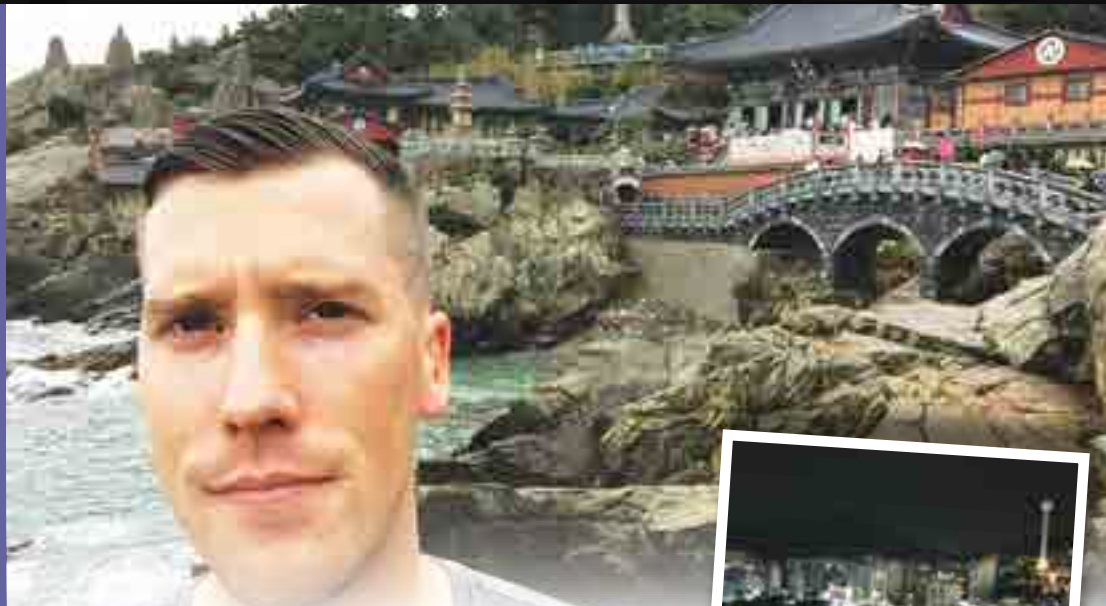
• **Why I like working for AFN:** I love working for AFN because I get to interact with the community, and my personality gets to shine through. I'm a people-person. I can't handle being in a box and not talking to people. When I'm on the radio, I just have a different type of energy and excitement for work; I can be the dorky little girl that I am, and Kunsan Airmen just have to accept it!

Tell us about paradise, Mr. DJ!!

“We all immediately took notice to how different the climate and culture felt from the Seoul area.”

Bullet train to Busan

Story and photos by SR. AIRMAN CHRIS DUCKWORTH, AFN OSAN



The most interesting destination I've traveled to while I've been in South Korea has to be Busan. Located about 200 miles southeast of Seoul, it's only around three hours away from Osan if you take the bullet train. We easily booked a house through Air BnB and set off for our 3-day/2-night adventure.

Upon arrival, we all immediately took notice to how different the climate and culture felt from the Seoul area, despite still being in the same country. Busan is the second largest city in South Korea and is a giant port with miles of coastline. Although we went in October and the weather was starting to turn cold, one of the biggest draws are the many beaches in Busan – for this reason I'll probably end up going back in the summer.



MY PARADISE

Traveling around was easy enough with the train system and train app we had downloaded. The first evening we checked in to our lodging and went out for a great Italian dinner nearby. The next day we visited a Japanese food exposition at a nearby convention center and ate our fill of ramen and gyoza. Afterwards, we visited the impressive Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, a Buddhist temple built in 1376 that is right on the coastline. The scenery of being right by the ocean, coupled with the architecture of the temple and its statues, made for a memorable day.

Even though we only had a few days to experience the city, it left a positive impression on me and my friends. If you're ever in South Korea and looking for a destination beyond Seoul's limits, I'd consider turning your gaze Busan's way.

• **Why I like working for AFN:** When I was a kid living overseas, all we had to listen to or watch was AFN – I listened to the radio, watched the news, and it left an impression on me. I've always been interested in music and current events as well, so now as a radio DJ I'm able to surround myself with a few things I considered hobbies in the first place.



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AFN ... We bring you home!

A historical look at Manila

Story and photos by
MASTER SGT. BRENDAN C. VARGAS,
AFN MISAWA

Most people arrive in the Philippines and use Manila as a transit point to head on to the world famous beaches the country is known for.

However, to skip out on visiting Manila, means you lose the chance to get a good introduction to what makes the Philippines tick. You will also miss out on getting a history lesson into one of Asia's most interesting places; having been a former Spanish then U.S. colony before independence followed by Japanese occupation and eventual liberation during World War II.

After arriving in Ninoy Aquino International Airport, instead of heading for the glitz and upmarket streets of Makati or The Fort, head out to Roxas Boulevard and travel up the road to Intramuros for a look at old Manila and the impressive Spanish-era architecture that remains.

On arriving in Intramuros, make your first stop Fort Santiago, where you can learn about Dr. Jose Rizal, who was a driving force behind Philippine independence. Rizal was a Freemason and author who wrote many books that infuriated the Spanish and ultimately led to his arrest and execution. It was Fort Santiago where he was jailed and executed. You can walk his final trail by following the footsteps you'll notice on the grounds of the fort.

There are plenty of exhibitions in Fort Santiago that will give you good information on Rizal and Philippine Independence without overwhelming you.

After Fort Santiago, you can make your way over to the Manila Cathedral to see one of the largest Catholic Churches in Asia. At the same time, it's worth learning the history the cathedral and many of the other buildings in old Manila. During the end of Japanese occupation in World War II, much of the city was completely destroyed when the allies liberated it.

The square next to Manila Cathedral is a great place to hire a "calesa," which are the horse and buggy carts you see waiting for passengers.



• **Why I like working for AFN:** What I like best about AFN is being part of a historic organization which has been a part of the military community overseas for over 70 years in one form or another. We've provided the news and entertainment to keep service members and their families connected, as well as give our local friends outside the gates the chance to hear American music and connect to the USA.

A good price to agree on for an hour of touring should be no more than 300 Pesos. The drivers will give you a full tour of Intramuros while explaining all of the important parts of the area. Stops worth taking include the Casa Espana and the different access points of the wall.

After your time in Intramuros is done, head back down Roxas to the Manila Hotel, the most historic hotel in Manila. It was here where Gen. Douglas MacArthur lived after he returned to the Philippines, and his suite has been maintained and is available to visit. It's a good hotel to spend a few nights, or at the very least, have a cup of coffee in the lobby, as the Manila Hotel maintains high standards that complements its historical landmark status.

Within walking distance of the Manila Hotel is Rizal Park, or Luneta, where you can see the point from where all distances in the Philippines are measured from - kilometer zero. Plus it's a nice green spot in the middle of the hectic city.

Further on down Roxas is the Aristocrat, a well-known and favorite restaurant of Filipinos celebrating its 80th year in business. Its barbeque chicken with java rice and sauce is fabulous, and there's always time to try it because the restaurant stays open 24 hours. The Reyes family ensures that Lola Asiang's recipes are followed to this day in order to serve some of the best meals in Manila. You can get a good taste for all kinds of Filipino classics while people watching in the large dining area. Oh, and make sure you save room for dessert because the Hot Tsokolate and flan should not be missed.

So while the hustle and bustle of historic Manila is definitely not the tranquil climes of the white sandy beaches the Philippines is well known for, taking the time to spend a few days there is well worth it.



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