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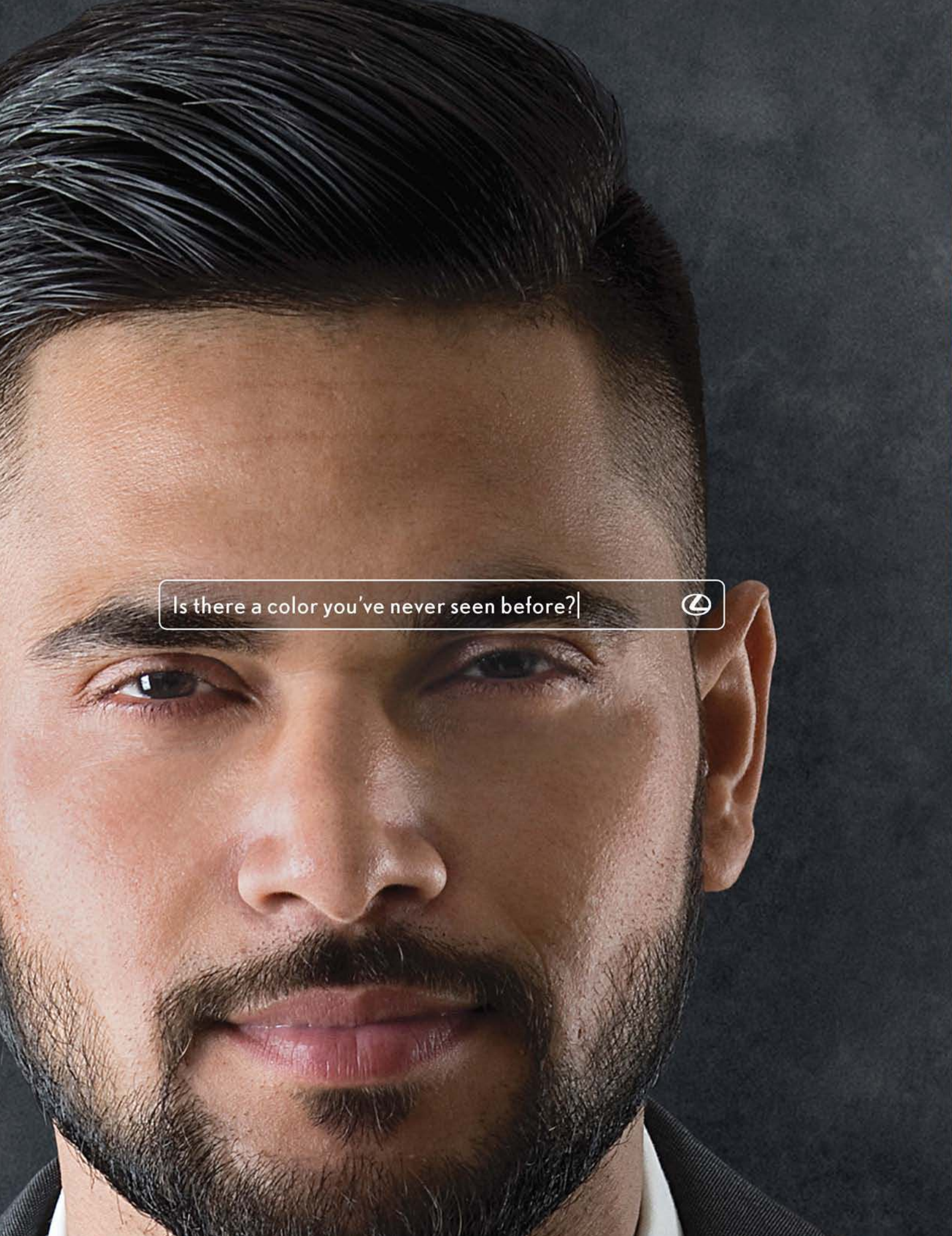
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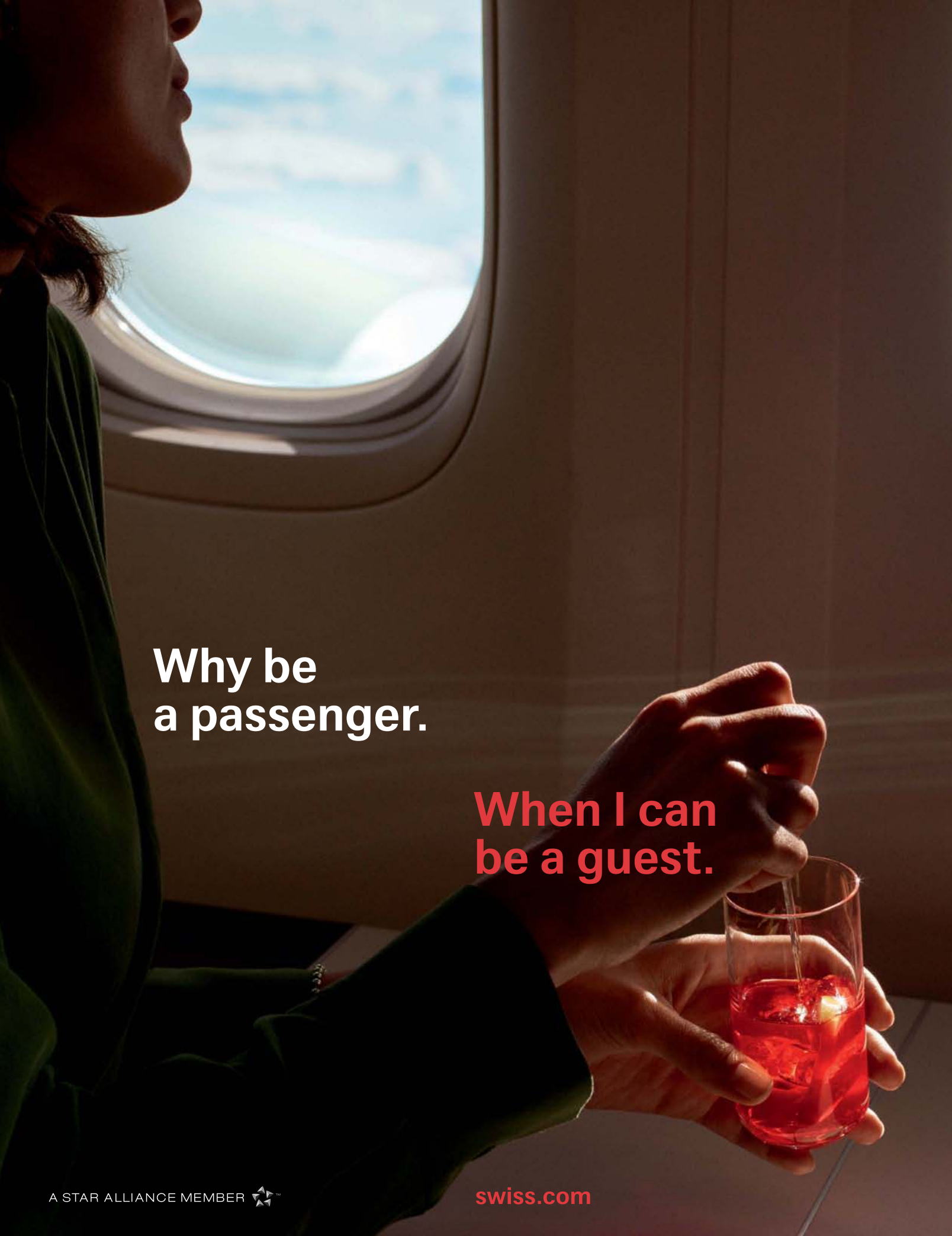


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**“It is our collective and individual responsibility to preserve
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—*Dalai Lama*

Is it too much to ask of ourselves and our fellow human beings that we do everything we can to preserve, protect, and defend our planet? In the past, especially in the United States of America, the companies and governments we rely on for food, energy, transportation, and other daily necessities have done almost nothing to produce the products we need in a renewable, safe manner. Because of this blatant disregard for our planet, we are now faced with the most severe environmental crisis that mankind has ever encountered.

According to Al Gore, “It’s clear now that all seven continents are manifesting the impact of the global climate crisis. As a result, our sense of urgency must increase yet again as we work to build the political will necessary to solve this rapidly worsening planetary emergency.”

In honor of Earth Day this year, I encourage people everywhere to do something every day to heal our planet and ensure its health for future generations. As a traveler who celebrates all the wonders of our world, I am also aware of my responsibility to live in such a way that sustains and nurtures the environment. In light of this, I propose the following:

- If you must drive to work, purchase a car that uses a renewable source of energy.
- If you don’t have to drive, don’t! Take public transportation, ride a bicycle, or walk.
- Encourage your family and friends to buy cars that run on renewable energy.
- Write to your elected officials and demand legislation that mandates and implements the use of renewable energy within 5 years.
- Before voting for anyone, make sure they are committed to implementing substantial changes concerning how we produce and use energy.
- Plant the seed of urgency amongst your family, friends, and colleagues that within 5 years the world must produce all its energy needs using only renewable resources.
- Support the production of organic, fair trade, and local foods and products.
- Eat Earth-friendly foods: one of the easiest ways to reduce your carbon footprint is to reduce the amount of meat you eat.

Protecting our planet has never been more important. Whether you decide to drive an electric car, convert your home to solar, wind, or another renewable energy, or only use products that are recyclable and reusable, everything you do makes all the difference in the world.

—*Robert Adams*

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Here's to chasing rainbows.

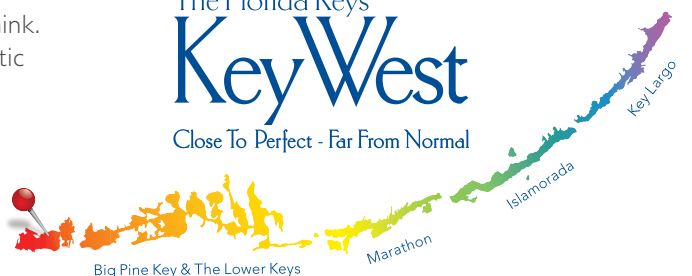


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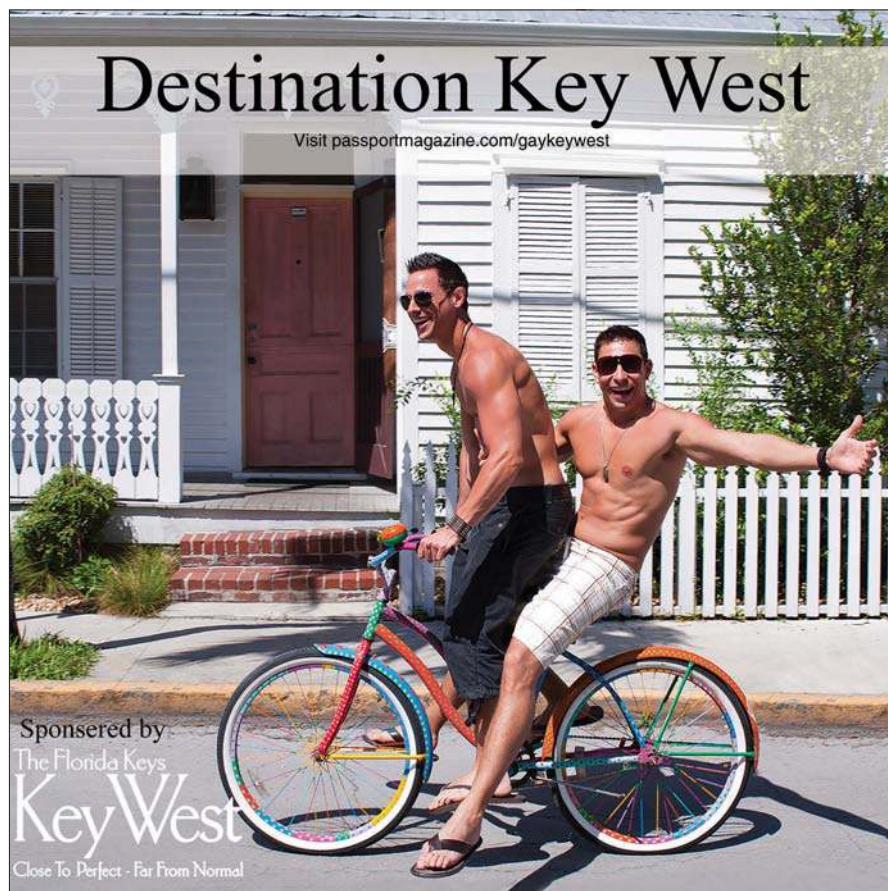
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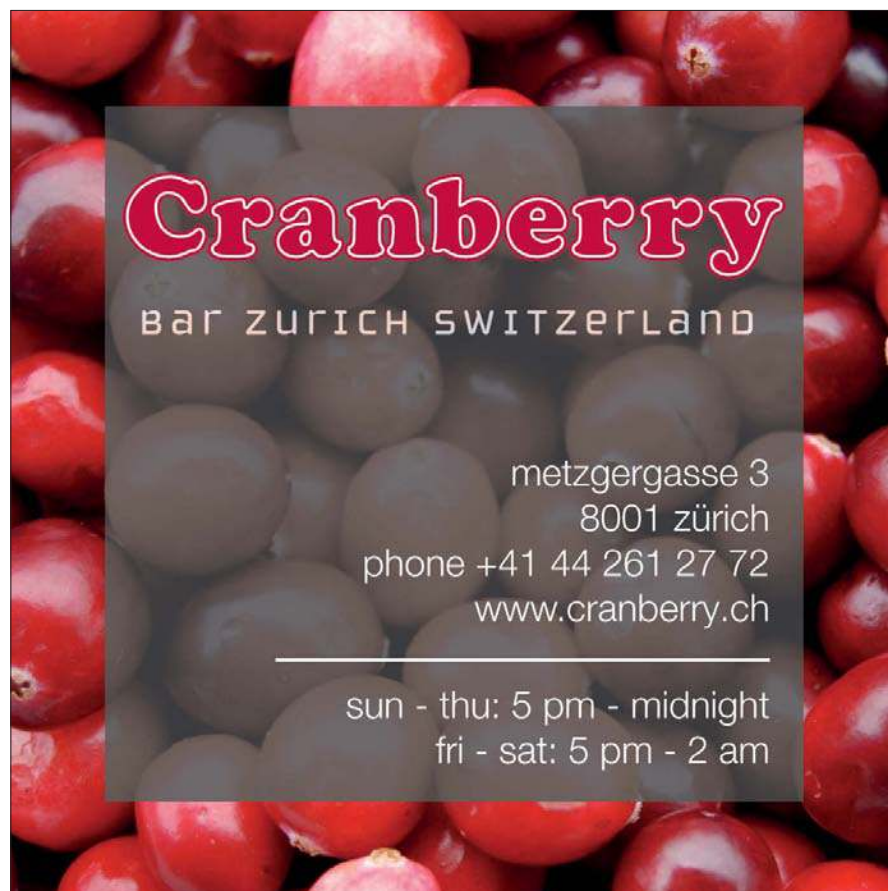
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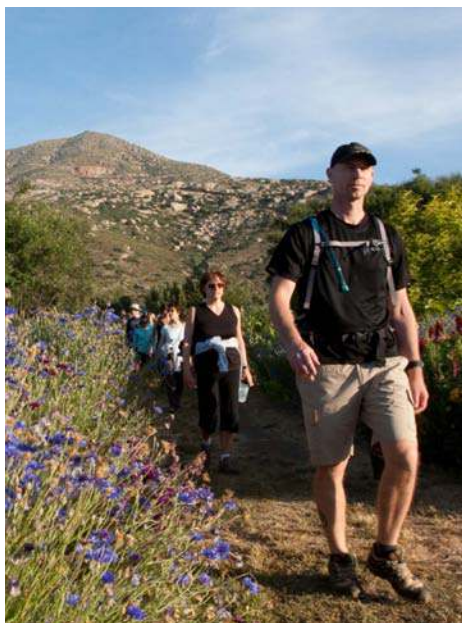
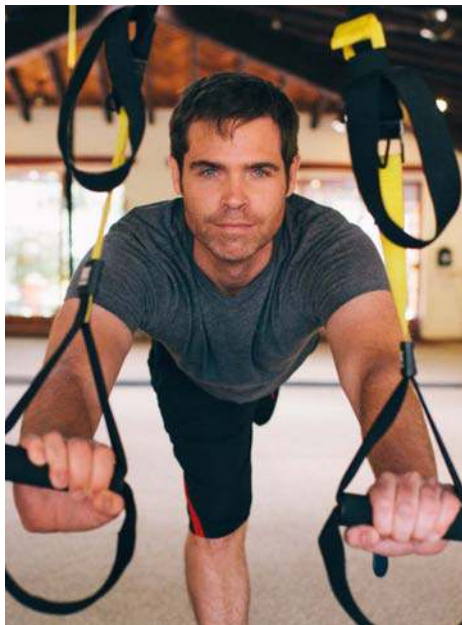


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MARK VORDERBRUGGEN

FORT LAUDERDALE MARRIOTT HARBOR BEACH RESORT & SPA

by Mark Chesnut

As one of the nation's highest-profile destinations for LGBTQ travelers, Fort Lauderdale is a hotspot for anyone looking for sun, sand, nightlife and fine dining. And while the hotels here cater to a wide variety of tastes and budgets, guests at full-service, upscale hotels have the advantage of expert advice and insider travel tips from the concierge staff. The Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa (3030 Holiday Drive. Tel. 954-525-4000. www.marriott.com) is one such property. Located steps from the beach and minutes from always-popular Las Olas Boulevard and the LGBTQ-famous city of Wilton Manors, the Marriott is well positioned for exploring all that the destination has to offer. With advice from resort concierge Mark Vorderbruggen, it's even easier.

Before a visitor ventures out to explore the city, what are some of your favorite in-house offerings?

I would be remiss if I didn't mention our own **3030 Ocean** (Tel. 954-765-3030. www.3030ocean.com) for modern American seafood. Executive Chef Adrienne Grenier is a local Floridian and offers a creative menu in a casual chic atmosphere with vistas of our beach and ocean. Chef Grenier was locally trained and has a resume that includes being a *Chopped* champion on the Food Network.

What other restaurants do you recommend?

Boatyard (1555 SE 17th St., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-525-7400. www.boatyard.restaurant) offers an upscale, nautical-chic vibe in a sophisticated, laidback atmosphere that embraces the pulse of the city's yachting culture. It has a prime view of the scenic Intracoastal Waterway and is the perfect setting to grab a bite or drinks with good company while enjoying an afternoon or evening watching the boats cruise by. It's located off of the 17th Street Causeway, just before the bridge that crosses the Intracoastal Waterway.

For great seafood and steaks, **Steak**



954 (401 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-414-8333. www.steak954.com), located in the W Hotel, is laidback and sophisticated as well. It's a Stephen Starr restaurant and its location on Fort Lauderdale Beach is perfect.

Outside of your hotel, where are the coolest places to go for cocktails?

Although Fort Lauderdale isn't known for a vibrant downtown with a huge skyline, there are two rooftop restaurants that I recommend. The first-ever rooftop bar in Fort Lauderdale is **Rooftop @ 1 W LO** (1 West Las Olas. Tel. 954-523-1956. www.rooftop1wlo.com), which is located at the end of our famous Los Olas Boulevard. The second one I recommend, and the newest, is **Sparrow** (299 North Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-9100. www.sparrowbar.com), a rooftop bar that's located at the top of one of our newest hotels, the Dalmar, which is also in downtown Fort Lauderdale and within walking distance of Los Olas Boulevard. Sparrow is a mod-designed, retro-themed bar, framed in violet neon, inspired by the 1950s and 1960s era of

American travel, with a lounge-y main bar and wood and brass accents.

Who serves the best weekend brunch?

Blue Moon Fish Co. (4405 W. Tradewinds Ave., Lauderdale-by-the-sea. Tel. 954-267-9888. www.bluemoonfishco.com) serves Sunday brunch with unlimited champagne, mimosas and bloody Marys. It's located directly on the Intracoastal Waterway and has a great reputation for seafood and one of the best brunches in the area.

Where should people go when they want to enjoy live entertainment?

For live entertainment, the Seminole **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** (1 Seminole Way, Hollywood. Tel. 866-502-7529. www.seminolehardrockhollywood.com) is a great venue for any live show. It hosts celebrity performances as well as award shows, comedians and

concerts. In addition to the main casino there are also additional venues, comedy clubs and nightlife. For those looking for more sophisticated entertainment, I recommend the **Broward Center for Performing Arts** (201 Southwest 5th Ave., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-462-0222. www.browardcenter.org), which is located in the Riverwalk area. The center brings a wide variety of cultural programs to Broward County. You can experience ballet, theater, musical performances, and opera, all under one roof.

Which museums do you recommend most?

The Museum of Discovery & Science (401 SW Second St., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-467-6637. www.mods.org) is a great choice. There are different exhibits for the entire family and the AutoNation IMAX 3D theater is a must-see experience. Built in 1920 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, **Bonnet House Museum & Gardens** (900 N. Birch Rd., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-563-5393. www.bonnethouse.org) is one of the few complete homes and studios of two American artists open to the public. It's nestled among

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miles of beachfront development on 35 acres of a native barrier island ecosystem.

What about guided tours and excursions?

The Everglades Holiday Park (21940 Griffin Rd., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-434-8111. www.evergladesholidaypark.com) airboat tour. All of the tours offered have their own charm, but I will have to say that anyone who visits South Florida should experience a boat tour of the Everglades. This tour offers you incredible views and experiences, where you can learn about many species of birds and wildlife, such as alligators. The Everglades is truly the heart of South Florida.

Fort Lauderdale is known for its LGBTQ pride festival, and in 2020 it's even bigger,

as the city hosts Pride of the Americas. What are the top annual events that should be on our calendar?

Our famous **Winterfest Boat Parade** (www.winterfestparade.com) and **Pride Fort Lauderdale** (www.pridefortlauderdale.org), which is one of the biggest pride festivals in the southeast. In the spring, the **Tortuga Music Festival** (www.tortugamusicfestival.com) takes place directly on Fort Lauderdale beach, with a variety of top-name musical acts, focusing mainly on country headliners.

What are the best options for exercising and working out?

If you want a gym with all the amenities, I recommend **LA Fitness** (multiple locations.

www.lafitness.com). They have classes, treadmills, gym equipment, weight rooms and even a pool. For a different experience, **Orangetheory Fitness** (Multiple locations. www.orangetheoryfitness.com) is my recommendation. They combine science, coaching, and technology in their workouts in a unique ambiance.

Who offers the best full-service spas in Fort Lauderdale?

My first recommendation is, the Spa at Harbor Beach, as it is the largest spa in the area, with its own adults-only outdoor pool and ingenious therapies individually tailored to restore the body, mind, and spirit. For a great off-site experience, I recommend **Mynd Spa & Salon** (The Galleria at Fort Lauderdale, 2598 E. Sunrise Blvd, Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-564-5787. www.myndspa.com/location-detail/ft-lauderdale). It has everything under the same roof, with a chic vibe and facial treatments, massages, nails, and hair salon.

What are the best options for shopping?

The Galleria at Fort Lauderdale (2414 E. Sunrise Blvd. Tel. 954-564-1036. www.galleriamall-fl.com) is very convenient in proximity and has a great array of designer stores. On the other hand, fashionistas will delight in luxury-brand outlet shopping at **The Colonnade Outlets at Sawgrass Mills**, with exclusive outlets not found anywhere else in South Florida, including Burberry, Diane von Furstenberg, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Prada, and Versace. Closer to the beach and downtown is **Las Olas Boulevard**, which many have nicknamed the Rodeo Drive of Fort Lauderdale.

Which LGBTQ bars do you recommend the most for cocktails?

DrYnk Bar & Lounge (2255 Wilton Dr., Wilton Manors. Tel. 954-530-1800. www.drynkftl.com), located in Wilton Manors is a good choice. The place is very unique, and their drinks have awesome reviews. They recently added an outdoor patio, which gives more life to the place.

And what about LGBTQ venues for dancing?

Hunters (2232 Wilton Dr., Wilton Manors. Tel. 954-630-3556. www.huntersftlauderdale.com) has a modern vibe with laser lights and a very hype atmosphere. **Scandals Saloon** (3072 NE 6th Ave., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-567-2432. www.scandalsfla.com) is a country western bar with pool tables and a unique country western line dance. **Georgie's Alibi** (2266 Wilton Dr., Wilton Manors. Tel. 954-565-

Photo: Sean Pavone



Fort Lauderdale Skyline

Photo: mariakray



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Fort Lauderdale Intracoastal Waterway



Photo: Fotoluminate

Celebrating Pride



Photo: Maria Kray

2526. **www.alibi.lgbt**) is one of South Florida's longest running, and one of the country's most successful gay restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, rolled into one. The club consists of four distinct areas, the main bar,

the sports bar, the Monkey Bar, and the patio. As one of the busiest venues in Florida with an award-winning, full-service restaurant, and more live entertainment than any bar in the area, you will find something for you.

When the evening's over, where's a good place for a late-night meal?

Big City Tavern (609 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-727-0307. **www.bigcitylasolas.com**) is a good choice. The food is great and they're open until 2 A.M. during the week and until 3 A.M. Fridays and Saturdays. For late, late night and into the morning dining, you have to go to the **Floridian** (1410 E. Las Olas Blvd, Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-463-4041. **www.thefloridianininer.com**). Known as "The Flo" to locals, the Floridian has been a landmark Las Olas eatery for over 70 years and is one of the oldest restaurants in Fort Lauderdale. It's open 24 hours, and they serve breakfast 24 hours. It's very eclectic; you'll be entertained by all of the photos of movie stars of the past who have stopped by the Floridian for a meal. They're also pet friendly!

What's a truly iconic Fort Lauderdale souvenir, and where can we buy it?

Fort Lauderdale used to be your typical ocean resort city, where the typical souvenir might include a T-shirt, plastic flamingo glass, or a shot glass from the iconic **Elbo Room** (241 S. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. Tel. 954-463-4615. **www.elboroom.com**). Well, the Elbo room is still there, and I do recommend stopping in for a drink or just for the nostalgia of the 1960s-era beach town that was known back then for Spring Break. And yes, there are still a few tacky tourist shops around, however, Fort Lauderdale is now more sophisticated, with its very own vibe and eclectic neighborhoods. Save your money for a nice comfortable guayabera or Tommy Bahama shirt to go with your Ray Bans. If you are still in need of something that screams Fort Lauderdale, pick up a sand globe that you can put on your desk to remind you of our beautiful beaches.

Please finish this sentence: Don't leave Fort Lauderdale without ...

...taking the Water Taxi for a ride up and down the Intracoastal Waterway. It's a very unique way of getting around and the taxi captains give a great narrative tour of the homes and mansions, along with a history of the famous people that live here or have lived here. You can hop on and off for a meal or a drink or shopping for one reasonable, all-day ticket price. ■



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LISBON, PORTUGAL

by Dan Allen

Over 50 years ago, one of Portugal's most esteemed poets, Mário Cesariny, was arrested for "gross indecency" in Paris. During his subsequent two-month prison term, he wrote one of his most famous works, *A Cidade Queimada* (The Burnt City). More than half a century later, Cesariny's fellow queer Portuguese artists João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira (during their own Paris residency) were inspired to explore the legacies of Cesariny and the surrealist movement, especially as they relate to queer activism, persecution, and sexual liberation. Their resulting exhibition, *Loving as the Road Begins*, opened in October at the splashy new **MAAT** (Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Av. Brasília, Central Tejo, Belém. Tel: +351 210 028 130. www.maat.pt/en) on Lisbon's waterfront. The bold art duo's first-ever museum show, which runs through April 2020, is a fitting symbol of Lisbon's ongoing transformation into one of Europe's hottest and most LGBTQ-friendly destinations, and a city that's also now fully embracing its once-shadowy queer heritage.

Another exciting example of this progressive trend is **Fado Bicha** (www.facebook.com/fadobicha), a subversively queer take on the quintessentially Portuguese music genre of fado. Founded in 2017 by young Lisbon performers Tiago Lila and João Caçador, Fado Bicha brings a queer sensibility to traditional fado; a natural fit for a musical style that's always revolved around marginalized folks and melancholia. Though they've faced no small degree of indignation from traditional fado enthusiasts, the pair is rapidly gaining local traction, and is prepping an album for release in 2020.

Meanwhile, Lisbon's underground queer club scene is absolutely booming, with a number of exciting collectives like **mina** (www.minasuspension.com) and **Circa A.D.** (www.facebook.com/circaafterdeath) coming together for the city's



MAAT (Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology)

Photo: Radu Bercan

inaugural two-day **Ano 0** festival this past September. Revered global underground culture mag *Dazed* recently reported that these Lisbon queer collectives are "creating more room and support for marginalized people, both on and off the dance floor."

For visitors who might not be venturing deep into the city's coolest clubs, there's still much to get excited about these days. The white-hot local culinary scene just keeps getting better, with exciting recent additions like **Rossio Gastropub** (Rua 1º Dezembro 120, Baixa. Tel: +351 210 440 018. www.altishotels.com), where Michelin-starred chef João Rodrigues now serves delectable delights against the backdrop of incredible views from the seventh floor of the '40s glam Altis Avenida Hotel.

Two-Michelin-starred **Belcanto** (Rua Serpa Pinto 10 A, Chiado. Tel: +351 213 420 607. www.belcanto.pt), arguably the city's top restaurant, continues to move up the list of the World's Best Restaurants with its daring takes on traditional Portuguese cuisine. If you can't get in at Belcanto, its same superstar Lisbon chef, José Avillez, has a pair of restaurants (and a cabaret too) all under one roof just a few blocks away at the trendy

Bairro do Avillez (Rua Nova da Trindade 18, Chiado. Tel: +351 210 998 320 (Taberna and Mercearia); +351 215 830 290 (Páteo). www.bairrodoavillez.pt). An even newer addition to the José Avillez family, the Portuguese-Asian fusion **Casa dos Prazeres** (Rua Nova da Trindade 13, Chiado. +351 211 342 160. www.casadosprazeres.pt), opened just across the street last March.

Also not to be missed is **Time Out Market Lisboa** (Mercado da Ribeira, Avenida 24 de Julho, Cais do Sodré. Tel: +351 213 951 274. www.timeoutmarket.com/lisboa), which is set on the site of the city's oldest food market. It's one of the most consistently popular, exciting, and delicious hotspots in town, with a staggering 26 restaurants (including longtime Lisbon favorites like Pap'Acorda), eight bars, a dozen shops, and a swanky music venue, plus many of the city's top traditional market vendors of fresh meats and vegetables. Nearly four million visitors a year can't be wrong.

New museums in Lisbon include the aforementioned MAAT (which became the futuristic darling of the international art world when it opened in a former power plant in the Belém district in 2016), as well as another excellent new museum, which



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debuted a year prior. **Museu do Aljube—Resistance and Freedom** (Rua de Augusto Rosa 42. Tel: +351 215 818 535. www.museudoaljube.pt) is set on the site of a former prison that once housed those condemned by the church, then women accused of common crimes, then political prisoners of Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar. While LGBTQ people aren't specifically honored yet within the museum, it's a fair bet that countless of us suffered here simply for running afoul of anti-gay church and state policies.

In more recent Lisbon museum news, the **National Museum of Ancient Art** (Rua das Janelas Verdes, Lapa. +351 213 912 800. www.museudearteantiga.pt), which boasts one of Europe's largest and most impressive art collections, recently completed a renovation of its top floor, and plans to redo its second floor in 2020. And the superb **Museu Coleção Berardo** (Praça do Império, Belém. Tel: +351 213 612 878. en.museuberardo.pt) will remain open for the time being, despite the dire financial woes of its collection's owner, José "Joe" Berardo, and reports that his holdings have been seized by the Portuguese government. With things so unsettled, this could be one of your last chances to see this stellar collection of more than 900 modern and contemporary works, including important pieces by Dali, Picasso, and an exquisite portrait of Judy Garland by Andy Warhol.

Lisbon's **tram line 24E** is now reopened after a two-decade hiatus, connecting the city center with the Campolide neighborhood and the upscale **Amoreiras Shopping Center** (Av. Eng. Duarte Pacheco. Tel: +351 213 810 200. www.amoreiras.com). This is also great for those just seeking the obligatory Lisbon ride up a hillside in an adorable yellow tram, offering an alternative to the city's other tram lines, which are often uncomfortably over-packed.

One of those especially crowded and touristy tram lines is number 28, which runs from the city center up to **Castelo de São Jorge** high on a hilltop in the Alfama district. Alfama itself, once a salty barrio of sailors, has lost much of its authentic character to the trinket-buying cruise-line hordes. To see a more genuine Lisbon, albeit one that's quickly hipsterfying, head

a bit north to the **Mouraria** neighborhood. Once the Moorish district, and later the birthplace of fado, today it's home to a lively mix of artists and immigrants.

Another recently revived Lisbon gem is **Miradouro Panorâmico de Monsanto**, built half a century ago as an exclusive modernistic restaurant overlooking the city from its highest peak. It was left to rot for decades until rediscovered by urban explorers, who adored it for its hulky UFO-like frame covered with elaborate street art, not to mention its incomparable panoramic views of the city. Since 2017 the Miradouro has been safe and legal to visit, (though a bit tricky by public transport, so take an Uber). For the past two Septembers, it's hosted Lisbon's edgy art and music festival **Iminente** (www.festivaliminente.com). The Miradouro also recently served as a shooting location for Madonna, who was a Lisbon resident for a few years. Madge moved on this past summer and left the queen-blessed city to us mortals.

True Madonna devotees may want to snag a room at her former digs at **Palacio Ramalhete** (Rua das Janelas Verdes 92, Lapa. Tel: +351 213 931 380. www.palacio-ramalhete.com) in the tony Lapa neighborhood. But Lisbon also offers an ever-growing bounty of superb hotels, in a wide variety of styles and price ranges. On the top end is the brand new **The One Palácio da Anunciada** (Rua das Portas de Santo Antão 112-134, Baixa. Tel: +351 210 412 300. www.h10hotels.com), set in the city's most exclusive area, just steps from Avenida da Liberdade, Praça dos Restauradores and Rossio Square. Barcelona-based Chilean designer Jaime Beriestain provided the complete contemporary redesign of this 16th century palace, with original hand-painted ceramic pieces (a Lisbon staple) gracing the walls of its comfortably elegant 83 rooms. The property's elaborate and stunning 27,000-square-foot gardens include a protected century-old dragon tree.

Funkier, more affordable, and with an excellent Alfama-adjacent Baixa location is the **Pestana CR7 Lisboa** (Rua do Comércio 54, Baixa. +351 210 401 710. www.pestanacr7.com), the second of superhot Portuguese soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo's CR7 sub-brand of the Pestana hotel and resort family. Squarely aimed toward millennials, the

boldly-styled CR7 Lisboa offers modern necessities like lightning-fast WiFi (with free access to hotspots around the city), as well as Apple TV and Android Streaming.

For a stylish stay with a decidedly gay aesthetic, there's **The Late Birds Lisbon** (Travessa André Valente 21-21A, Bairro Alto. Tel: +351 933 000 962. www.thelatebirdslisbon.com), an all-male "gay urban resort" that opened in 2015 along a quiet alley in busy Bairro Alto. Portuguese architect Pedro Domingos transformed a heritage 18th century building into 12 guest rooms (including three suites) featuring custom pieces by local designer Marco Sousa Santos, all overlooking a gorgeous courtyard and pool.

Lisbon's LGBTQ nightlife scene has flourished in recent years, but as in most cities around the world, it's constantly in flux, so be sure to ask around once you arrive. A few of the best new bets in town are bear bar (but all-welcoming) **Shelter** (Rua da Palmeira 43A. +351 212 323 183. www.shelter-barlisboa.com), and super-fun weekend queer party spot **Posh Club** (Rua de São Bento 157. +351 915 814 224. www.facebook.com/poshclublisbon).

The preferred local beach for (legally nude) lounging after a night of gay partying is **Praia 19** (or Beach 19). It's reachable by public transport, but not very easily, and it'll take you a good two hours each way. A better bet is to book a 29 euro roundtrip bus excursion with **Lisbon Beach Tours** (www.lisbonbeach.com/tours/lisbon-gay-beach).

Lisbon also offers a number of fun and very popular annual queer festivals that you may want to book your visit around, including June's Lisbon Pride (www.ilga-portugal.pt/lisboapride), locally called **Arraial Lisboa Pride**, and the biggest Pride event in Portugal; **Lisbon Bear Pride** (www.lisbonbearpride.com) in May; and **Queer Lisboa** (www.queerlisboa.pt), one of Europe's best LGBTQ film festivals.

Whenever you come to Lisbon, you'll find an enchanting city full of gracious inhabitants, a stunning Old World European capital that's still effortlessly tied to its traditions, but one that's rapidly transforming into a thoroughly modern haven of art, culture, cuisine, and inclusivity. ■



VALLETTA, MALTA

MORE TO EXPLORE



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Photo: James Michael Avance

PEPPERMINT

As cool and refreshing as her name implies, Peppermint (www.peppermintonline.com) is having a moment. A longtime fixture in NYC's drag and LGBTQ nightlife scene, Peppermint (real name: Agnes Moore) went international thanks to *RuPaul's Drag Race* season nine, finishing in second place. As the show's first openly transgender-identified contestant she went on to appear in scripted TV series like *Pose*, *Deputy*, and a two-episode arc of CBS's *God Friended Me* as Pastor Olivia, a transgender pastor. Peppermint also broke new ground in entertainment, and on the boards, as the first openly trans actress to originate a Broadway role, as Pythio in 2018's Broadway musical, *Head Over Heels*.

For 2020, Peppermint has put a focus on her music career, with a long-awaited album release (a follow up to 2017's *Black Pepper*) which saw its first single, "What You're Looking For," released on Valentine's Day. She'll embark on a tour this summer. Meanwhile, on the activism side, Peppermint is spearheading a trans visibility campaign, #WeAreHere, for which she recruited a roster of fabulous friends and collaborators including Laverne Cox, MJ Rodriguez, Bob The Drag Queen, and Sander Jennings, brother of *I Am Jazz* reality series star Jazz Jennings (Peppermint has appeared on the show). Peppermint joined us in the VIP Lounge to spill tea on her projects, travel, and the tastiest kind of mint.

How did #WeAreHere come about, and what's its ultimate goal?

It started with attacks on the LGBT community, so it started a long time ago, but the last straw, at least for me, was the effort of the Trump administration to make it legal to fire LGBTQ people from their jobs. There were three cases that went all the way to the SCOTUS that challenged Title VII, which is the protection we already had in place. The SCOTUS hearing was this past fall, which I was lucky and fortunate to attend in person, and the thing that really stuck out to me was there wasn't much involvement from the general public. So I gathered some friends who have platforms, are concerned, and want to use their voices and brainstorm to see what we could do. It was Sander Jennings who had some of the most useful ideas as far as the social media strategy, and the goal was to get awareness out.

What's the biggest lesson you learned from being on *Drag Race*?

Don't read the online comments.

You played a transgender pastor on *God Friended Me*. Have you met any in real life?

It's no mystery that many queer people feel alienated by the church, but there are definitely churches popping up that are welcoming. Somebody like Pastor Olivia only exists in my world on TV, but hopefully we'll be finding queer, trans, nonconforming, and nonbinary pastors and preachers at different churches, whether considered a "queer" church or not.

What was it like being on *Pose*?

Amazing. Oh my gosh, *Pose* was a fantastic. It was so surreal to be on a working set inundated with queer people, trans people, queens, and gay folks in front of and behind the camera! My episode was directed by Janet Mock, and it felt so good to see that, if given the opportunity, we can rise to the challenge and exceed expectations.

Should everyone see a ball in real life?

Yes, just like Grace Jones says: every man should be penetrated at one time in his life. But take some comfortable shoes, darling, because the few balls that I've been to are all-day events. They're an opportunity for people to do their thing and show all the way out, and they're going to take their time. It's not ten minutes. It's like ten hours.

Tell me about your new album, which you're touring with this summer.

It's about the ups and downs of love and relationships, which is universal. But this has a little extra 'oomph' because sometimes that queer love story is something we haven't heard very much, especially in mainstream music, so I'm going to do my best to bring it to you. The first single, "What You're Looking For," is all about self-empowerment, and the road to the perfect, great partner leads back to yourself.

What's the most trans-friendly destination you've visited?

Aside from my apartment? I would say outside of NYC, London for sure. I'd say the places I'm surprised still have work to do are some [cities] in Eastern Europe and South America, but as a tourist and traveler I haven't had that many negative experiences. I'm a *Drag Race* queen who has been on tour, and an actress on Broadway, so I live a pretty privileged life.

What do you always travel with?

Everything! What don't I travel with? I have a miniature version of everything, from a luggage scale to hairspray to reusable battery chargers. Honestly, you name it, I have it. And a lot of the queens, especially when it's a drag gig, make fun of me and my big tote bag and call me Mary Poppins and think it's so funny. But they're the first to ask, 'Who has duct tape? Who has a safety pin? Who has extra foundation?' And I pull it right out of my bag and they're happy.

What's your number one travel tip?

Definitely get into programs like TSA Precheck, Clear, and Global Entry. Those things are lifesavers because time is of the essence. And I think it's a really good idea to have a quick change of clothing in your carry-on bag, and a toiletries kit, and phone charger, and adapter for different countries.

If you could take a vacation with another fabulous sister, who would it be and where would you go?

I've actually thought about this. Ivy Winters is who I'd want to be stranded on a desert island with, because she can make anything, cook anything, build anything. You can have a whole new wardrobe and fabulous vegan feast made with just the bushes. She's the craftiest queen I know.

If playing a tour guide, what are a few NYC spots you'd take a visitor?

The Highline for sure. It's just beautiful and a perfect mix of city and park. I guess we'd go to the Thai restaurant Room Service. And then I'd take them on a bar hop of Hell's Kitchen: Posh, Therapy, Industry, and Hardware. We'd end up at the new gay bar in the Village, Playhouse, where I'll be this weekend.

Whose life story would you love to play?

I'd be into playing Josephine Baker. I'm really interested in what happened at the turn of the century for African American people and entertainers. They had to get out there and endure a lot of the same pain and problems everyone else did, and then shine on stage. Plus I'd love to go naked in a banana skirt.

Do you actually like peppermints, or are you more of a spearmint gal?

Peppermints are my favorite candy. Being related, I love all the mints, even wintergreen, which isn't a real mint. Anything that's mint you can bring me, especially Starlight mints which I love, and my favorite thing is the purest mint possible, which is mint tea.

—Lawrence Ferber

INTERCONTINENTAL MALTA

by Robert Adams



Photos: InterContinental Malta

With UNESCO World Heritage Sites, temples older than Egypt's ancient pyramids, and a fascinating multi-cultural history, Malta may just be one of the most appealing locations for people who appreciate art, history, natural wonders, and international cuisine. Add to this the fact the Malta legalized same-sex marriage in 2017, and you can imagine how excited my husband and I were to visit this fascinating island nation.

The **InterContinental Malta** (St. George's Bay, St. Julian's. Tel: +356-21-377-600. www.malta.intercontinental.com), located in St. Julian's, just five miles from the capital city of Valletta, became our home away from home for several days. The hotel, and the location, was ideal for us. With a shopping mall right down the street, numerous restaurants, an onsite casino, and the gay club and lounge

Michelangelo right around the corner, we had the best vantage point for enjoying all the pleasures and attractions of Malta.

As frequent travelers, we know the importance of having accommodations that enable us to both work and relax. We booked a High-line Suite with a huge outdoor terrace and views of the Mediterranean Sea. The space felt more like an apartment than a hotel room, and we had to pinch ourselves to make sure we weren't dreaming. As part of our stay, we had access to the Club InterContinental Lounge that includes private check-in, a dedicated reception desk, a sumptuous breakfast, all day refreshments, afternoon tea, and pre-dinner drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Guests staying in the suites also have private access to the stunning rooftop pool, bar, and restaurant. Obviously, we were in no hurry to leave the hotel.

As this was our first time in Malta, we

wanted to experience as much as possible while we were there. **Visit Malta** (www.visit-malta.com) had arranged for a guide, Vince Debono (Email: vincedebonoguide@gmail.com) to show us some of the major highlights of the Maltese islands and its rich cultural heritage. Vince was born and raised in Malta, so his knowledge and experience gave us a special insight into present day life and an appreciation for the history, architecture, and art for which this country is well-known.

With so much to see and do in Malta, we highly recommend hiring a guide to take you to all the places on your must see list. This will save you an enormous amount of time, and it is a wonderful opportunity to experience the islands through the eyes of someone who knows first-hand all the wonderful attractions, hidden gems, and unique culinary offerings.

For LGBTQ visitors, **Allied Rainbow Communities** (www.gaymalta.com), the organizers

of Malta Pride, which takes place in September, also organizes regular events for the LGBTQ community. We interviewed Clayton Mercieca, the Community Manager & Coordinator for Allied Rainbow Communities about gay life on Malta and you can find his recommendations at passportmagazine.com. His suggestions will help make your stay truly memorable, and give you the opportunity to meet the LGBTQ people who live and work in Malta.

Before and after each day's excursions, we took full advantage of all the amenities that the InterContinental Malta has to offer. The first thing we like to do every morning before breakfast is to go for a swim. With three pools from which to choose, and a beach on the harbor, we were in swimmer's heaven.

The InterContinental Beach Club offers an exclusive sandy beach area set aside for guests' personal use, and there are a variety of water sport facilities located within the bay, including water skiing, wind surfing, jet skis, and boat rentals.

Our favorite place to swim, however, was the rooftop infinity pool. Here you can frolic in the water, or relax and enjoy the inspiring views of the island and the sea. These facilities, called Skybeach, are located on the 19th floor and include a bar and restaurant for guests staying in hotel's Highline Suites.

The suites range between 970 and 1,290 square feet and are designed with an emphasis on understated elegance. The décor is chic and contemporary, and if you have a chance, like we did, ask for a tour of 3 or 4 suites and choose the one you like the best. The first suite we looked at was ultra modern with leather furniture, floor to ceiling windows, and a personal treadmill in the foyer, in case we had a sudden urge for a jog.

We finally decided on a suite with a huge private terrace. The large living room and dining area were the perfect size for both us to do a little work in the afternoon before going to the Club InterContinental Lounge for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres.

Returning to the hotel after a late night out with new friends, we appreciated the comfortable king-sized bed and the luxurious Frette bed linen.

If you are overworked and need help balancing business and pleasure, you're in luck. The InterContinental Malta's butler service is available day and night to help you with dinner in your suite, personal shopping, and help navigating Malta's many historic sites and attractions.



SKYBEACH



InterContinental Malta's Private Beach



Paranga

Al Fresco Dining at Paranga



To further help you relax and rejuvenate, the InterContinental Malta provides some of the best fitness and spa options in the country. The hotel's fitness center, Cynergi, boasts a state-of-the-art, fully equipped gymnasium with over 70 cardiovascular machines, free weights, an aerobics studio and two squash courts.

After your workout, head to the Carisma Spa & Wellness and be pampered by therapists in an elegant yet personal environment. Here you can enjoy a traditional hammam and benefit from Dead Sea salt exfoliation treatments upon request. A visit to these Turkish baths is both a cleansing ritual, and a great way to promote health and well-being.

With all this exercise and spa treatments, you're sure to work up an appetite, and we can safely say you will not lack for culinary options at the InterContinental Malta.

Waterbiscuit is open every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and offers a charming and contemporary atmosphere where you can dine with friends or meet business associates for cocktails or a wonderful meal. The ever-evolving menu features the freshest Mediterranean ingredients. Start with the Salmon tartare drizzled with ponzu dressing and served with double-dipped prawn tempura. We followed this with risotto with tomato fondue, roasted cherry tomatoes, asparagus, local cheese, and a basil crisp; then it was time for their delicious slow roasted red snapper with potato fondant, baby leeks, roasted fennel, and pumpkin puree.

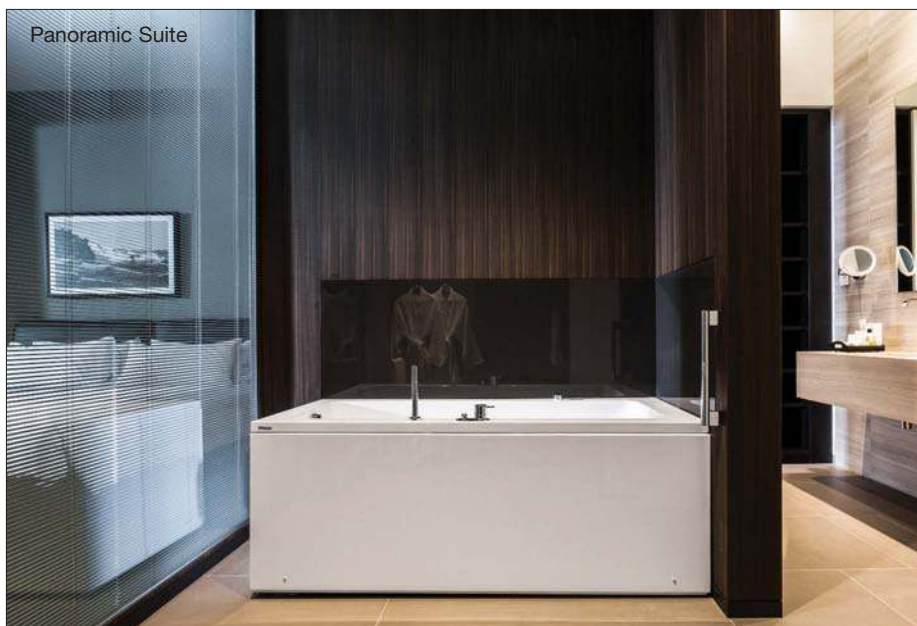
At each of the hotel's six restaurants you will discover many tantalizing dishes that lavishly portray the world's finest cuisine. One day, after touring the property with Marika Caruana Smith, the hotel's Director of Luxury, she invited us to have lunch together at Paranga, the hotel's seaside restaurant.

Set on teak decking adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, the hotel has created an enticing and exclusive atmosphere to enjoy some of the best food on the island. Our choices that day included a superb beetroot carpaccio with diced, dried apricots, crumbled Chevre cheese, apricot puree, walnuts, and rocket salad; barbecued octopus, chick pea puree, potato and onion croquette, sautéed green beans in garlic; and a perfectly prepared grilled rib-eye with caramelized shallots and an ale & pear sauce.

Looking out at the sparkling sea, we could not imagine a better way to spend a leisurely afternoon getting to know a new friend in Malta.

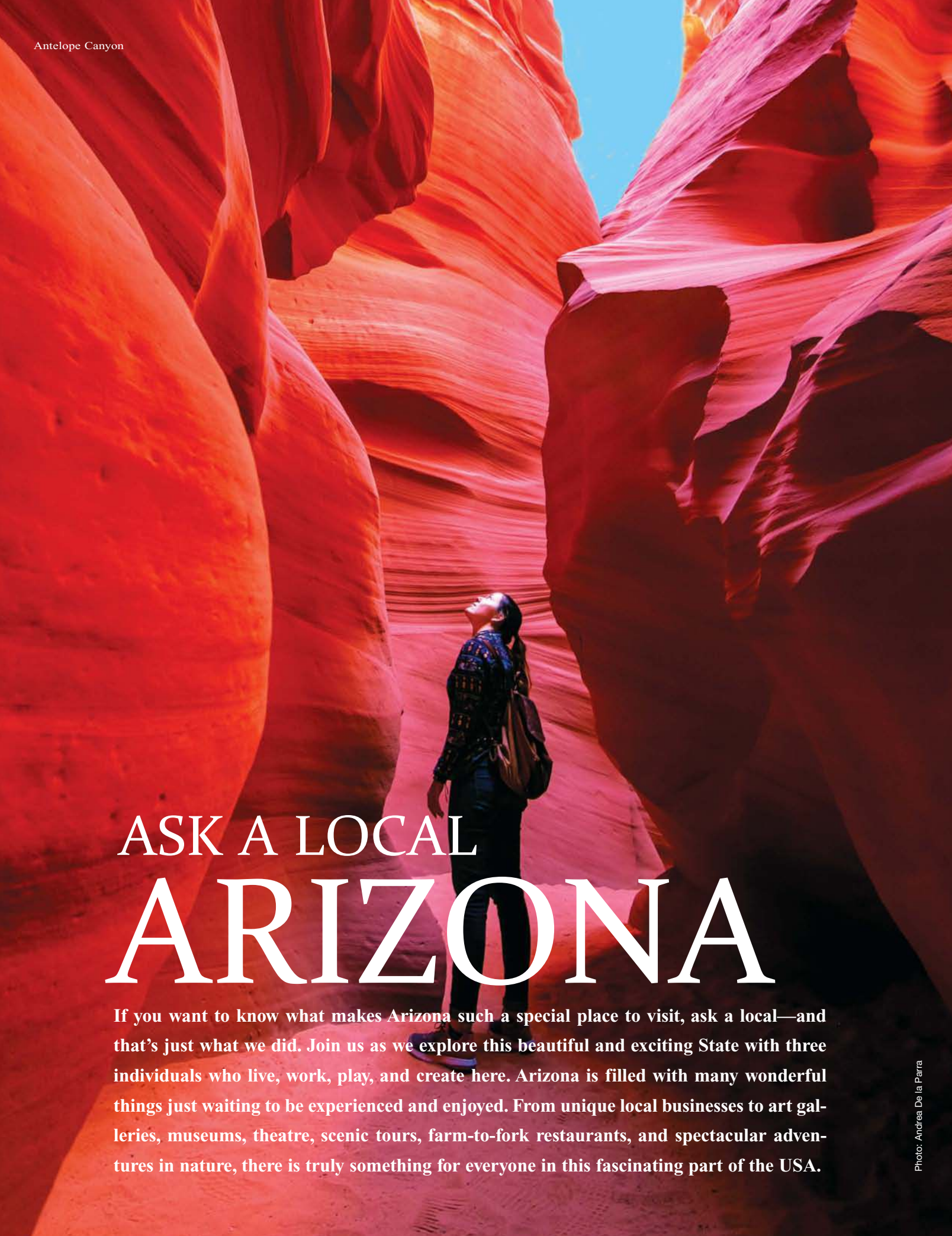
As we slowly finished our wine, we enthusiastically started making plans for our next visit in September for Malta Pride. ■

Panoramic Suite



Panoramic Suite



A full-page photograph of a person standing in the narrow, winding corridors of Antelope Canyon. The person, seen from the side, is looking up at the smooth, undulating red rock walls that are illuminated by warm, golden light. The perspective is looking down a path that leads deeper into the canyon.

ASK A LOCAL ARIZONA

If you want to know what makes Arizona such a special place to visit, ask a local—and that's just what we did. Join us as we explore this beautiful and exciting State with three individuals who live, work, play, and create here. Arizona is filled with many wonderful things just waiting to be experienced and enjoyed. From unique local businesses to art galleries, museums, theatre, scenic tours, farm-to-fork restaurants, and spectacular adventures in nature, there is truly something for everyone in this fascinating part of the USA.

CHEF MARIA MAZON**Tell us about yourself and what you do for a living?**

Well, that can take days! I'm a wife of a firefighter and a mother to the coolest 11-year-old boy ever. I'm a chef and restaurant owner of **BOCA Tacos y Tequila** (www.bocatacos.com). I have been doing it for 10 years (even though it feels like 100). I was born in Tucson, Arizona, but raised in Navojoa, Sonora. I'm the middle child (that explains a ton). I love to cook! I can't imagine doing anything else. I have an amazing team at work and at home, and also I love wine.

How long have you been living Tucson?

Well, I was born here but raised in Sonora. I came back for high school at 15, and now I'm 38, so you do the math!

If you moved from somewhere else, what influenced your

The food! Honestly, Tucson is beautiful beyond words. Yes we get a brutal summer, but that is only three months out of the

year—nothing a trip to Mount Lemmon can't cure. Tucson is the biggest little city I know. We are kind, fun, and love the desert.

What are some of your favorite places to go for a cocktail and/or dinner?

Besides **BOCA Tacos y Tequila**, and my own home, my wife and I love **Kingfisher** (www.kingfishertucson.com), **Anello** (www.anello.space), **Reilly Craft Pizza & Drink** (www.reillypiza.com), **Penca** (www.pencarestaurante.com), **Saffron Indian Bistro** (www.tucsonindianrestaurant.com), and **Cafe Desta** (www.yelp.com/biz/cafe-desta-tucson).

What cultural attractions are a must see for visitors to Tucson?

We have the **Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum** (www.desertmuseum.org) of course, **Mission San Xavier del Bac** (www.sanxaviermission.org), **Mount Lemmon** (www.skithelennon.com), and **Sabino Canyon** (www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/coronado/recarea/?recid=75425) to name a few.

A friend is coming to Tucson for the first time... Please describe the perfect weekend.

Wow! Start with a good breakfast at **Baja Café** (www.bajacafetucson.com), **Prep & Pastry** (www.prepandpastry.com), and definitely the brunch at **Ventana Canyon** (www.loewshotels.com/ventana-canyon/dining). Then it's time to explore **Fourth Avenue** (www.fourthavenue.org), baby! The next morning, start with a nice hike at **Sabino Canyon** then cool off with a cold beer at **Borderlands** (www.borderlandsbrewing.com) or **Pueblo Vida** (www.pueblovidabrewing.com)—two of my absolute favorite breweries—and eat your way through my beautiful city!

What are the best places to truly enjoy the natural beauty of the area?

Tumamoc Hill (www.tumamoc.arizona.edu/walk-hill), also **Gates Pass** (www.visittucson.org/business/gates-pass), and any of the amazing area gardens like **Mission Garden** (www.tucsonsbirthplace.org) or the **Tucson Botanical Garden** (www.tucsonbotanical.org).

What is your favorite time of year in Tucson and why?

The Fall (from October to May, LOL), because of the beautiful weather, and it's our busy season.

What's one souvenir to bring back for friends or family?

That is a hard one! **Barrio Bread** (www.barriobread.com), and any Tucson beer for sure. Also, **Whiskey Del Bac** (www.whiskeydelbac.com), and some local succulents (www.tucsoncactus.org).

Please finish this sentence: Don't leave Tucson without...

Eating At **BOCA Tacos y Tequila** and enjoying our sunsets!

ask a local **PHOENIX** arizona**Tell us about yourself and what you do for a living?**

I am the assistant to the Dean of Arizona State University's College of Health Solutions. Working in higher education has been a passion of mine for many years, and I love being able to help shape our college and educate the leaders of tomorrow. I am also the promoter for Miss Gay Arizona America (www.missgayarizonaamerica.com), which is a female impersonation pageant within the Miss Gay America pageant system. I have been promoting within that system for over 15 years! When I have "free" time, I love to give back to my local community. I was crowned Mister Phoenix Pride 2018, which led me to help raise a total of \$47,000 for the **Phoenix Pride Scholarship Program** (www.phoenixpride.org). I am also a proud member of the Imperial Court of Arizona (www.imperialcourtaz.org), a nonprofit that raises money for various charities and nonprofits throughout the state.

How long have you been living Phoenix?

I have lived in Arizona my entire life, but 12 of those years have been in the Valley of the Sun, Phoenix.

If you moved from somewhere else, what influenced your decision to move here?

I was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, which is about 100 miles south of Phoenix. I was only supposed to be in Phoenix three months, interning for a United States Congressman but that three

months turned into three years working for the Congressman. I loved the city so much that I stayed.

What are your favorite places to go for cocktail or dinner?

There are so many places in the valley to go for cocktails and dinner. One of the funkiest spaces in the valley to grab a cocktail is the **Swizzle Inn** (www.yelp.com/biz/swizzle-inn-phoenix). It is a really unique space and has often been voted as the "Best Dive Bar" in Phoenix. Two of my favorite LGBT spaces for drinks are **The Rock** (www.therockdmphoenix.com) and **Kobalt** (www.kobaltbarphoenix.com). The Rock offers fun drag shows several nights a week, while Kobalt is a cool space to hang out with friends and enjoy showtunes or drag bingo! You can't be in Phoenix without having Mexican food. One of my favorite local places for legit Mexican fare is **Tacos Huicho** (www.tacoshuicho.com). Their menu isn't large, but they serve some of the best tacos, burritos, quesadillas, and tortas!

What cultural attractions are a must see in Phoenix?

Visiting the **Arizona Heritage Center at Papago Park** (www.arizonahistoricalociety.org) is a must see for first-time visitors. It will take visitors on a journey of Arizona and Phoenix history. The **Phoenix Art Museum** (www.phxart.org) and the **Heard Museum** (www.heard.org) are also must do's for any visitor.

A friend is coming to Phoenix for the first time...please describe the perfect weekend.

A perfect weekend would include a hike up **Piestewa Peak** (www.phoenix.gov/parks/trails/locations/piestewa-peak). After our hike, we would go to the **Desert Botanical Gardens** (www.dbg.org), home to many plants, trees and cacti native to the Sonoran Desert. Then, have lunch and a couple of beers at **Four Peaks Brewing Co.** (www.fourpeaks.com/locations/8th-street-pub) in Tempe, close to Arizona State University's main campus. Afterwards, we would take a drive, two hours north to **Tonto Natural Bridge** (azstateparks.com/tonto), the largest natural travertine bridge in the world. After all that, come back and enjoy dinner at **Wrigley Mansion** (www.wrigleymansion.com) and enjoy the beautiful view of Phoenix at night.

What is your favorite time of year in Phoenix and why?

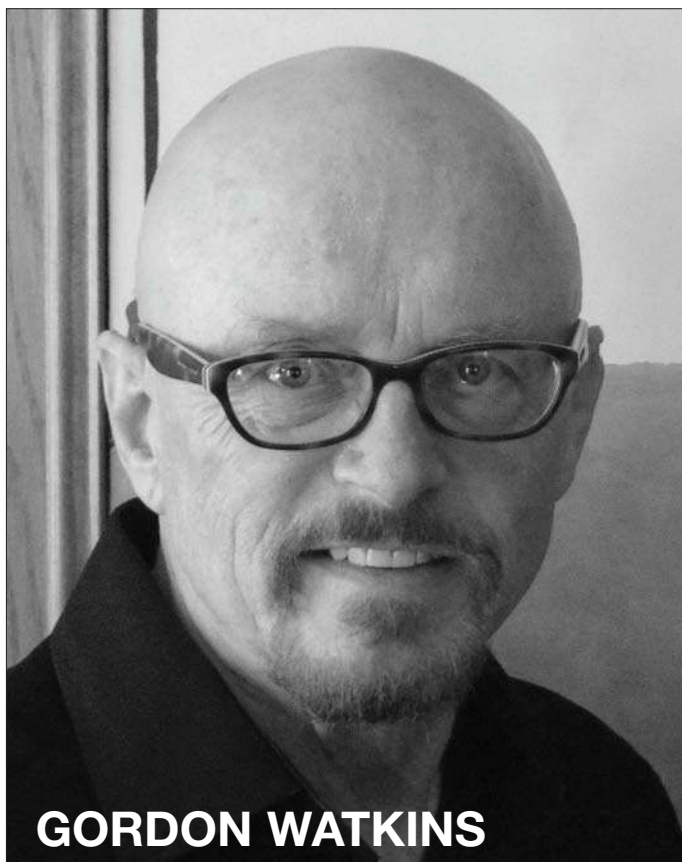
November is the best time of year. I have always said that the switch flips from hot weather to fall on Halloween. November is when we enjoy temps ranging from 65-85, all of which are a loved break from the heat of the summer. It also reminds me that the holidays are coming and #sweaterweather.

What's one souvenir to bring back for friends or family?

Prickly Pear Jelly. The jelly is a little bit tangy and tart and you can't beat that beautiful pink/purple color. Oh, and you can't forget tortillas!

Please finish this sentence: Don't leave Phoenix without...

Planning your next visit!

ask a local **FLAGSTAFF** arizona**GORDON WATKINS****Tell us about yourself and what you do for a living.**

Having started as a baker and cook at the age of 12, I have worked in the hospitality industry for over 50 years. After graduating from the Cornell Hotel School in 1974, I moved to San Francisco to work in Food & Beverage at the Hyatt Regency in the Embarcadero. Those were the days of Harvey Milk and “anything goes” in “Baghdad-by-the Bay” when the Hyatt hosted the Beaux Arts Ball and the Hooker’s Ball. Although married for 32 years, I always knew I was gay, but being gay just didn’t fit in to the corporate profile I pursued as a development, finance, and real estate corporate officer for companies such as Ritz-Carlton and InterContinental Hotels. I came out in 2005 after moving to Flagstaff. Today I own and operate **The Inn at 410 Bed and Breakfast** (www.inn410.com), a ten-room luxury B&B in the heart of Historic Downtown Flagstaff, Arizona. My husband Frank and I have worked together operating the Inn for the past 11 years. The Inn is an important piece of Flagstaff history and over the past 125 years grew from a modest 1-bedroom home to its current 7,500 square feet of guest space. Once the home of a wealthy banker, its architectural features include coffered oak ceilings and mahogany in the original dining room. With names like “Dakota Suite,” the “Conservatory” and “Southwest Suite” each of the Inn’s guestrooms are professionally decorated to inspire a unique character with modern features throughout. Along with free downtown parking and a complimentary open bar, the Inn offers a gourmet breakfast featuring all gluten-free entrees such as lemon ricotta or blueberry buttermilk pancakes with pure maple syrup and sides of

chicken or turkey sausage along with our Southwestern Baked Grits. The Inn at 410 is open year-round and welcomes guests from around the world not only coming to see the Grand Canyon, but also surrounding towns such as Sedona (45 minutes south) and Jerome and Native American historical sites at **Wupatki** (www.nps.gov/wupa) and **Walnut Canyon** (www.nps.gov/waca) National Monuments.

How long have you been living in Flagstaff?

Flagstaff (www.discoverflagstaff.com) has been my home since 2003. We live two blocks from the heart of downtown, and walking to its dozens of bars, shops and restaurants is easy from the Inn at 410. We enjoy playing pool at **Uptown Billiards** (www.uptownpubhouse.net). Uptown, as we call it, is very gay-friendly, and offers six pool tables, along with a very extensive menu of Scotch, American, and Irish whiskeys, and 34 beers to choose from. Our Celtic heritage is popular here so you can often see men in kilts at Uptown. While Flagstaff has no gay bars, we passed our Civil Rights Ordinance in 2012, insuring that no LGBTQ person can be discriminated against in any way. Downtown also has a wonderful “Ale Trail” with numerous craft breweries such as **Mother Road Brewing** (www.motherroadbeer.com), **Historic Brewing** (www.historicbrewingcompany.com), **Dark Sky Brewing** (www.darkskybrewing.com), **Flagstaff Brewing** (www.flagbrew.com), **Beaver Street Brewery** (beaverstreetbrewery.com) and its sister brewery **The Lumberyard Brewing Co.** (lumberyardbrewingcompany.com).

What influenced your decision to move here?

Los Angeles was my home for 24 years before I bought The Inn at 410 in 2003. I had searched many small towns throughout the Western U.S. and had done a fair bit of consulting in Sedona, almost buying a small hotel there. When the opportunity came up to buy the Inn, I jumped at it. I had always wanted my own small boutique inn and The Inn at 410 was the perfect fit. I love historic homes and I have had a great time restoring and maintaining the Pollock House (on the National Register of Historic Places) aka Inn at 410 during my ownership.

What are your favorite places for a cocktail and/or dinner?

Located in the Carriage House right next door to the Inn, **Brix Restaurant & Wine Bar** (www.brixflagstaff.com) offers extraordinary farm-to-table food, bringing in mouthwatering local cheeses and meats from Arizona and New Mexico. For my recent birthday dinner at Brix, four of us shared their largest cheese and charcuterie board featuring French Double Crème cheese, warm olives, prosciutto and pâté. I thought I was back in France with the variety of meats and cheeses we enjoyed. For more moderately priced food and drink, I recommend **Criollo Latin Kitchen** (www.criollo-latinkitchen.com) offering Latin inspired dishes like crispy plantain or wings with jalapeno ranch, and Happy Hour margaritas for \$3.50. Other recommended dining places downtown include **Karma Sushi** (www.karmaflagstaff.com) for great Japanese and **MartAnne’s Burrito Palace** (www.facebook.com/MartAnnes) for authentic Mexican dishes. Two very gay-friendly bars are the

Monte Vista Lounge and **Rendezvous Bar** both located in the **Monte Vista Hotel** (www.hotelmontevista.com). The **Zane Grey Bar** (www.weatherfordhotel.com), also popular with the LGBTQ community is located upstairs at the old Weatherford Hotel. This famous Western author lived here in the hotel for several years and it features a mahogany bar built by Wyatt Earp in 1878 down in Tombstone, Arizona and moved up to Flagstaff about 30 years ago.

What cultural attractions are a must see in Flagstaff?

The **Museum of Northern Arizona** (www.musnaz.org) is the best place to gain an understanding of the rich Native American history of our region. Artifacts dating back thousands of years can be found at the MNA. In the summertime, MNA features the three Hopi, Navajo and Zuni festivals with dances, artwork, and jewelry for the public. Since 1894 Flagstaff has been the home of the world-renowned **Lowell Observatory** (www.lowell.edu) where the planet Pluto was discovered in 1930. Daily lectures with tours of its libraries and telescopes, along with nightly stargazing are offered at the Lowell. The **Riordan Mansion** (azstateparks.com/riordan-mansion) offers docent-led tours year-round of this 13,000-square-foot former home of a lumber baron family built in 1902. Most important, the mansion is filled with original Gustav Stickley furniture, so I say the furniture is more valuable than house. Music and live theatre abound in Flagstaff. The outdoor **Pepsi Amphitheater** (www.pepsiamp.com) is home to "Pickin' in the Pines," a two-day bluegrass festival held in September. The **Orpheum Theatre** (www.orpheumflagstaff.com), just three blocks from the Inn is a more intimate setting where drag shows are featured after a gorgeous day at Flagstaff's **Pride in the Pines** (www.flagstaffpride.org). Some 4,000 folks, both LGBTQ and straight allies gather every year on the third weekend in June in one of our largest city parks to enjoy great entertainment and family fun. Live theatre is found downtown most weekend nights at the Doris Harper-White Playhouse, home of **Theatrikos Theatre Company** (www.theatrikos.com). **Northern Arizona University** or NAU (www.nau.edu) also offers symphony and opera throughout the year.

A friend is coming to Flagstaff for the first time...Please describe the perfect weekend.

Arrive on a warm Friday afternoon and check in at **The Inn at 410** (www.inn410.com), staying in one of our king-bedded rooms with a jetted tub, like "Monet's Garden," which is hand-painted in the style of the artist's home in Giverny, France. Head downtown for a cocktail at the **Zane Grey Bar** (www.weatherfordhotel.com), overlooking Heritage Square and then on to dinner at **Criollo Latin Kitchen** (www.criollo-latinkitchen.com). After a sumptuous breakfast Saturday morning at the Inn, head out for the day to the **Grand Canyon** (www.nps.gov/grca), just 78 miles north of town and take a picnic lunch. Travel north on Hwy 89 passing by the **Painted Desert** (www.visitarizona.com/uniquely-az/parks-and-monuments/the-painted-desert) and connect to Hwy 64 entering into the eastern end of the Canyon at Desert View. Start the tour by climbing the three-story Watchtower, built in 1932 and designed by the region's very famous

architect, Mary Jane Coulter. Move onto the next four viewing spots before reaching Shoshone Point, a little known "park and walk" viewing site that offers one of the most dramatic views on the Canyon Rim and is used for small weddings in Summer. Picnic tables line the rim here so enjoy the view and no crowds, it doesn't get any more scenic. Skip the Visitor's Center at Mather Point and head to **Yavapai Point** (www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/yavapai-geo.htm) where the Visitor Center there explains the Grand Canyon geology with a stunning view of the 5,000-foot drop into the Canyon's depths. Avoid the Grand Canyon Village and head back to Flagstaff on Hwy 180 passing through the lush **Coconino National Forest** (www.fs.usda.gov/main/coconino), home to the largest stand of ponderosa pines in the world. Enjoy dinner at **Brix Restaurant & Wine Bar** (www.brixflagstaff.com) before having an after-dinner drink at the inn's complimentary bar. After breakfast on Sunday morning head over to the nearby Flagstaff Farmer's Market that features locally grown foods, and arts and crafts. Then, perhaps, take in a tour of the **Riordan Mansion** (azstateparks.com/riordan-mansion) before leaving town.

Where are the best places to truly enjoy nature?

At 7,000 feet elevation Flagstaff sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks where the **Arizona Snowbowl** ski area (www.snowbowl.ski) offers year-round recreation for hiking, skiing, and summertime riding the Agassiz Skyride chairlift to 11,500 feet enjoying views of Northern Arizona all the way to the **Grand Canyon** (www.nps.gov/grca). The **San Francisco Peaks** were formed by a collapsed 16,000-foot volcano, and Mount Humphreys at 12,600 feet is the highest peak in the entire State and offers an all-day hike to the top. Other, gentler trails in the peaks include the Kachina Trail and the Aspen Loop Trail. Lockett Meadow, located in the heart of the volcano offers an unparalleled hike through thick aspen groves and flower-filled meadows. Elk and deer abound in Flagstaff's surrounding forests. All-day hiking trips in the Grand Canyon, including the Bright Angel and South Kaibab trails, allow visitors to experience the majesty of the Park.

What is your favorite time of the year in Flagstaff and why?

Winter is my favorite time of the year. I still ski and the packed powder at Arizona Snowbowl affords me many enjoyable afternoon get-aways from work. It is also my favorite time of year to visit the Grand Canyon since the crowds are down, the air is at its cleanest, and you can drive the entire South Rim from Desert View in the east to Hermit's Rest in the West. The snow-covered rim makes for some dramatic winter scenery. For an easy winter outing try snow shoeing, it's inexpensive and gentle on your legs.

What's one souvenir to bring back for friends or family?

Route 66 is one of the icons of this area so anything with the Route 66 logo on it is always popular; hats, coffee mugs, and even shot glasses.

Please finish the sentence: Don't leave Flagstaff without...

Visiting the Grand Canyon and all of our National Monuments. ■

FORT LAUDERDALE TO HOST THE INAUGURAL PRIDE OF THE AMERICAS

by Keith Langston



Photo: Maksim Kryuchkov

Fort Lauderdale, Florida will host the first-ever **Pride of the Americas** (sunny.org/prideamericas) from April 21-26, 2020. The weeklong event is poised to be one of the largest LGBTQ events ever, with visitors from 53 countries across the Americas in attendance. With a combination of parties and parades, as well as conferences, symposiums, and lectures, the event is aimed at being both exciting and informative.

According to Fort Lauderdale's openly gay mayor, Dean Trantalis, the idea for Pride of the Americas was born out of a rather precarious situation. "The origin of the concept actually came when Fort Lauderdale applied to host World Pride, but with the advent of the Trump admin-

istration, there was a tremendous fear that people from other parts of the world either wouldn't get visas to America or would simply be too afraid to come here. So, unfortunately, we lost the 2021 bid to Copenhagen. But we knew that our city is great for the LGBTQ community and, in fact, we have one of the highest concentrations of LGBTQ people in all of America, so we thought it would be excellent to form a new event...one that would bring the entire Western Hemisphere together. And with our strategic location, we're smack dab in the middle of the Americas and Caribbean, so it was the perfect formula. Thus, Pride of the Americas was formed and we decided to unite LGBTQ people across the two continents to

offer support, promote change, and increase awareness. We're all extremely excited for this to be happening!"

The event will kick off on Tuesday, April 21, with the Opening Ceremonies. From there, the week will be filled with everything from runway shows, arts festivals, and after-parties, to the much-anticipated LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness Conference and the Transgender Summit.

One of the major aims of this year's event will be to raise awareness of the conditions that LGBTQ+ people face in Latin America and the Caribbean. Miik Martorell, the President of Pride Fort Lauderdale, has been an integral figure in making the event a reality. He said that in the US, there tends to be a lack of awareness of what's going on in other parts of the

Americas. According to Martorell, “We need to remember we’re all living in the Americas. We want to create awareness and build bridges to countries that are right in our own backyard. We want to show solidarity and comradery.” One of the best examples of this will be the Pride of the Americas Business and LGBT+ Travel Conference on Friday, April 24. Here, business leaders will be able to share stories and ideas of how incorporating diversity can actually be profitable and make businesses stronger, opening a pathway to show other countries that there is strength in inclusivity.

Richard Gray, of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, said in an interview that this will be the first of many Pride of the Americas. The gathering will happen every two years in different cities across North and South America. Gray also said that the next host city will be announced at this year’s Closing Ceremony.

Ft. Lauderdale is a prime location to hold the inaugural event. The Greater Ft. Lauderdale area is ranked as one of the most diverse counties in all of the USA. High concentrations of not only LGBTQ residents, but also residents of color, and many with different ethnic backgrounds, gives the city a thriving art scene, delicious cuisine, and most importantly, a welcoming vibe. On top of its inclusive energy, the city is also an important hub for the LGBTQ community, being home to the AIDS Museum and Education Center as well as The Stonewall Museum and Archives.

Gray also stated that the city’s geographical location is an important factor. A four-hour flight north will get you to Canada, and a four-hour flight south will get you to South America. It has the benefit of being right in the center of the Americas.

And the city plans on being prepared. The airport, hotels, rental car companies, and mass transit systems are all taking steps to make sure they’re ready for the increased crowds. So when you go, be sure to have fun, keep an open mind, be respectful of those around you, and celebrate all things queer in one of this country’s greatest cities. Make friends, learn something new, and unite the Americas for a better tomorrow. ■



Photo: Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau



Photo: Rawpixel.com



Photo: Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau



Photo: Natalia Barsukova

Pink Flamingos in Aruba

DISCOVERING Aruba

by Keith Langston



Photo: Rodrigo Branco

I went to Aruba for one reason: ‘Kokomo’ by The Beach Boys. The island (and the song) seemed to be the very definition of a tropical escape. I figured that Aruba would be full of palm trees, resorts, beaches, and...well, really, that’s all I thought Aruba was. To me, it would be just like Florida, filled with Americans at a Margaritaville that played Jimmy Buffet ‘til 2 A.M. In reality, Aruba is nothing like what I thought. The island remains relatively untouched and is filled with surprises.

As the plane landed, I was already excited beyond belief. Out my window, I could see the ocean waves gently washing onto shore, emerald palms dancing in the tradewinds, and the bright tropical sun glowing down. A short drive from the airport was my hotel, the **Manchebo Beach Resort** (J.E. Irausquin Blvd 55, Oranjestad, Tel: +297 582 3444. www.manchebo.com).

After cleaning up, I went to Manchebo’s beachside pavilion for something to eat. There were people sitting at the bar and nearby cabanas with drinks in-hand and plates of food being shared. I ordered flash-fried croquettes made of freshly caught fish mixed with herbs, spices, and breading.

This was also when I met my true culinary love, Aruba’s very own Hot Delight papaya hot sauce. This relatively mild and sweet hot sauce adds a little bit of heaven to whatever you’re eating. It will be found in every single restaurant on the island and *everyone* will be using it. Who knew that a small island with a population of about 112,000 made one of the best hot sauces on this planet?

Later that night I met up with Aruban artist Naomi Landgraf, who took me to a restaurant called **Papiamento** (Washington 61, Noord. Tel:

+297 586 4544. www.papiamentoaruba.com). Papiamento is the name of the native Aruban language before the Dutch colonized the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao) and implemented Dutch as the main language. Papiamento (the restaurant), is built into a 126-year-old cunucu house. These were the traditional homes of Aruba before modern building materials began being used. This is also part of the reason why Naomi brought me here. Her art is making miniature versions of Aruba’s cunucu houses and telling the histories that go along with them.

For dinner, Naomi ordered us *keshi yena*, a dish native to Aruba and Curaçao. It’s basically a giant stuffed cheese casserole filled with spiced chicken, raisins, and veggies. I never knew that Aruba had a cuisine, nor did I think I would go to Aruba and find myself sitting across from an artist in a historical landmark. For dessert, we shared *pan boyo* (also written pan bollo/pan bolo), which is an Aruban bread pudding made with raisins, cinnamon, and a Southern Caribbean eggnog-type liqueur called *ponche crema*. I found myself blown away. Pan boyo is unbearably delicious and I had to stop myself from eating it every night during my stay in Aruba.

The next morning I was off to **Arikok National Park** (San Fuego 70, Santa Cruz, Tel: +297 585 1234. www.arubanationalpark.org) for a jeep tour of the island. Throughout the tour, the jeep would be making a few stops for swimming at the “natural pool” and exploring ancient caves. As we made our way into the interior of the island, Aruba managed to shock me once again. Much of the island is actually a desert.

This did make sense though. Aruba is famous for being outside the hurricane belt, so travelers need not worry about a potentially deadly



Hiking in Arikok National

Windmill in Oranjestad, Aruba



Photo: Diego Mariottini

Unlike Aruba's west coast, with the white sand beaches, calm waters, and resort-dotted-coastline, the island's east coast is rocky, wild, and untamed.

storm ruining their vacation. Being outside of the hurricane belt, however, means that their climate is also much different from other Caribbean islands. Aruba is drier and sunnier than the northern Caribbean. Naturally, this would lead to more of a desert climate.

The tour began and we all loaded into the jeep. We sped up and down steep cliffs, sometimes flying completely off our seats, while organ pipe cactus and desert wildflowers rushed by in a blur. Our first stop was Aruba's legendary **Natural Pool**. It's called the natural pool because a set of rocks keeps this body of water (relatively) protected from the crashing waves of the open ocean. An unusually high tide that day though made the pool a much wilder ride than normal.

Unlike Aruba's west coast, with the white sand beaches, calm waters, and resort-dotted-coastline, the island's east coast is rocky, wild, and untamed. By the time we climbed the rocks to the natural pool, a few people had cuts and bruises...but nothing a little seawater couldn't fix. We jumped in and were surrounded by an abundance of marine life: damselfish, crabs, lobsters, and even snails took refuge from the rough tides in the natural pool. Every few minutes, a giant

wave would crash against the rocks, sending saltwater flying into the air and then directly down onto our heads. This must have been mankind's first version of a water park.

After an hour of swimming and lounging on the rocks, it was time to head to the caves. Our first cave was **Guadirikiri Cave**, known for its massive chambers where the sun beams down through holes in the rock ceiling.

The inside of the cave's dome-shaped chambers are stunning and unreal. In the lighter parts of the cave, you'll see the occasional bat flying around, but a few of us were feeling brave and crawled into the darker chambers.

There, I discovered that the ground was covered in guano, and I was forced to walk around covered in it for the rest of the day. Above us though, were hundreds of bats. While completely harmless, there is just something about being in a dark cave surrounded by bats that really has a way of creeping you out.

That wasn't the only cave on our list though. Afterward, we drove to the nearby **Fontein cave**. Fontein is known for something really special that,

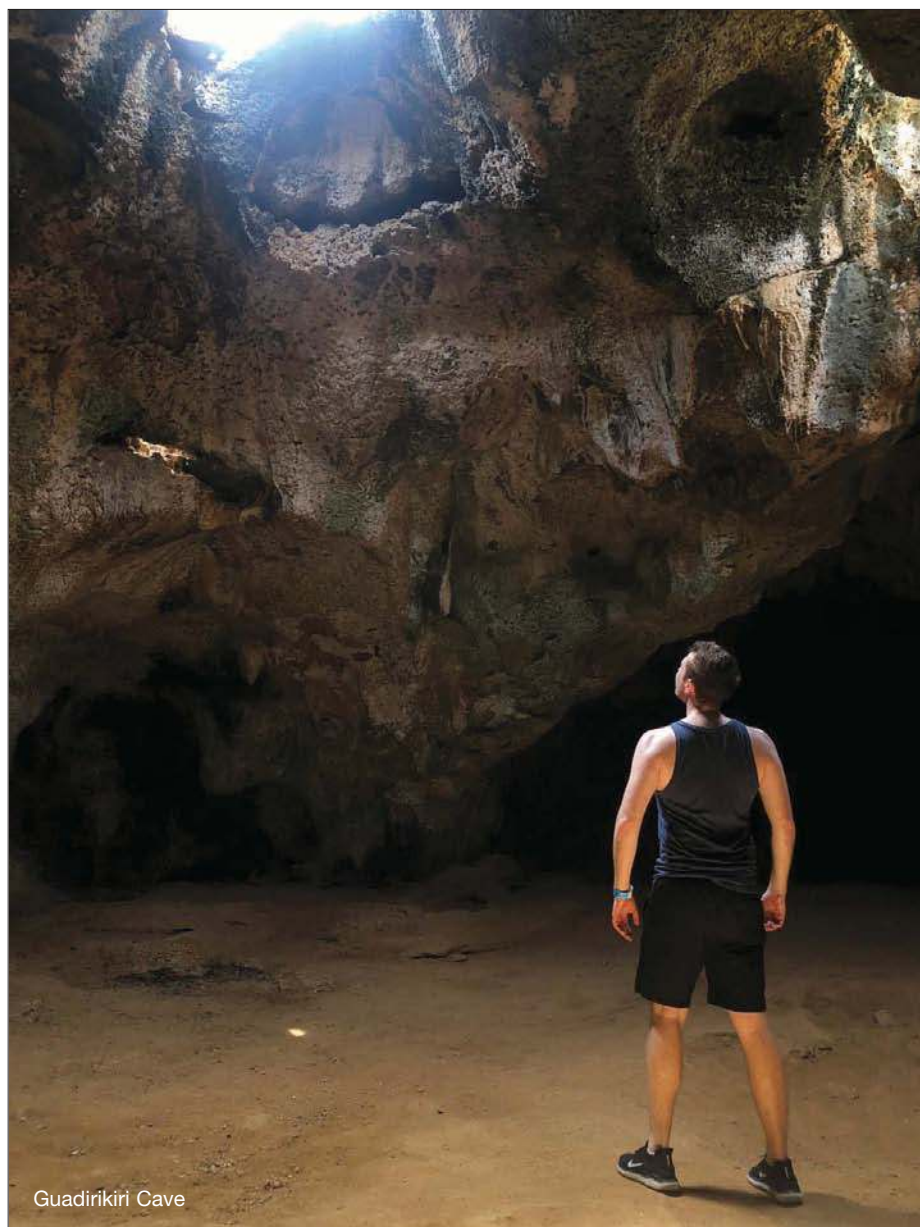


Photo: Keith Langston

Guadirikiri Cave



Photo: blue-sea.cz

Sea Turtles in Aruba

once again, I had totally not expected. The Fontein cave is filled with ancient paintings from the Arawak people, an indigenous group from the Caribbean and South America.

The paintings date back between 2,000 – 3,500 years ago, meaning that they're older than the bible. I had never seen cave paintings in real life before. They were only something I had seen in movies. Something mythical and exotic, but never real and tangible. To see them in real life is absolutely life-changing. They're physical markers of the humans who came before us. The humans who began civilization as we know it. That's the kind of curveball that life throws at you sometimes. You think you're headed for Aruba to sit poolside at a resort all day, and before you know it, you're standing in a cave, covered in bat shit, staring at cave murals that pre-date Christ.

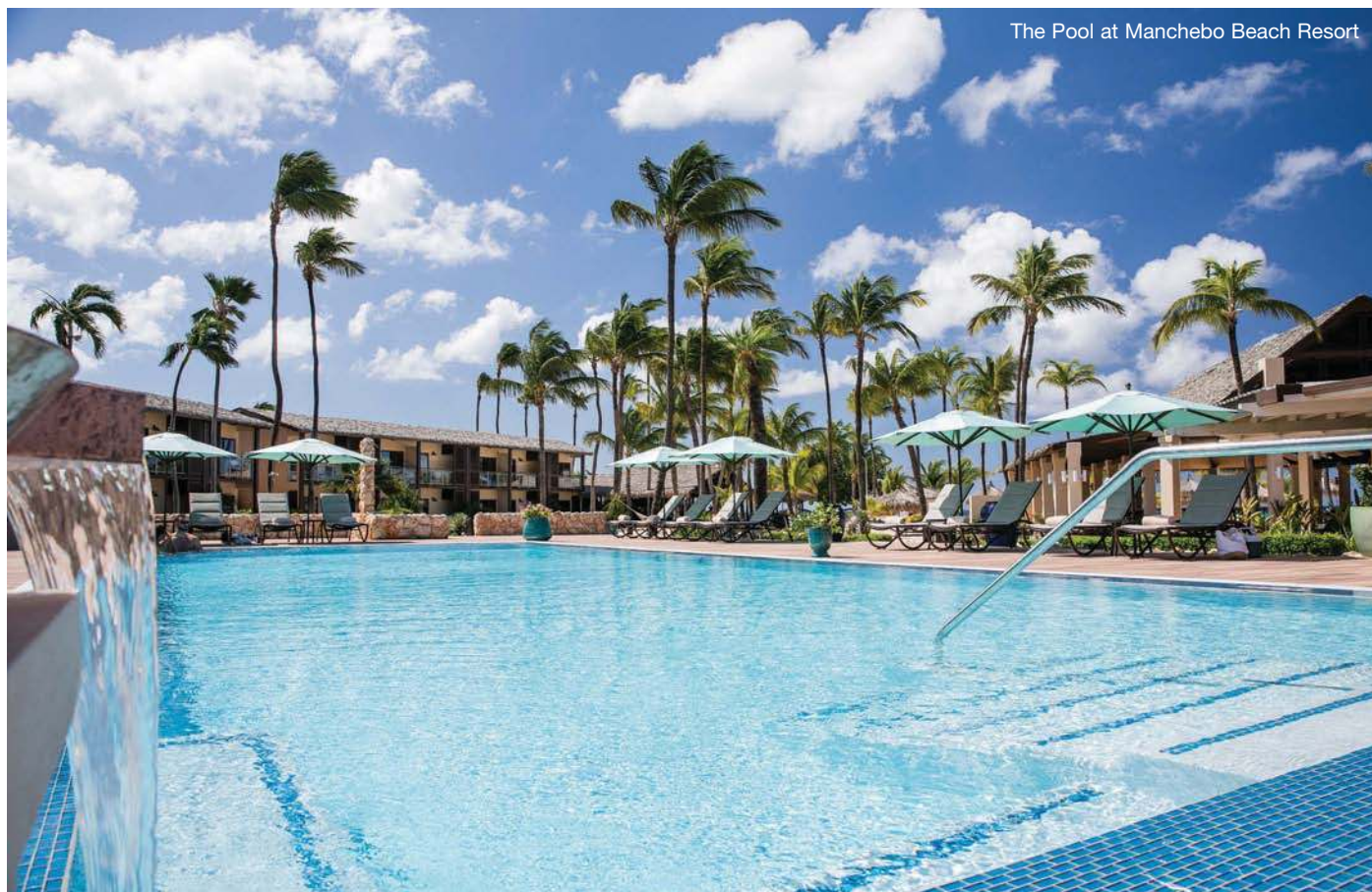
Afterwards, we hopped back in the jeep and made our way to **Zeerover** (Savaneta 270, Savaneta, Tel: +297 584 8401), an oceanside restaurant that sits on a dock jetting out over the shoreline.

Fishermen bring the daily catch straight to the restaurant, which is more like an overgrown dive bar with no walls, just open views of the Caribbean sea. Here, the kitchen staff gut, clean, fry, and serve the fish along with french fries, fried plantains, and *pan bati*, an Aruban corn pancake that's pan-fried to a golden brown. A fair warning, this place can get busy and is cash only. Luckily, almost every place in Aruba accepts the US dollar. Before you leave Aruba, make sure to exchange some of your money for Aruban Florin, the local currency. Aruba is one of the few countries around the world that has square coins! It's a unique souvenir that beats a logoed beer cozy any day.

On my final day in Aruba, I was off for a sailing and snorkeling adventure aboard the **Monforte III** (J.E. Irausquin Boulevard 232, Oranjestad, Tel: +297 5830400. www.monfortecruise.com). We departed Aruba's Pelican Pier in the heart of the hotel district and headed southbound towards the lagoons and reefs. There were about 10 of us total, plus four crew members, and it was an excellent way to get out onto the ocean.

It was a beautiful day on the water. We snorkeled, did some kayaking, and best of all, got to jump off the boat on a rope swing. The ship also has a bar serving cocktails as well as

The Pool at Manchebo Beach Resort



their homemade lemonade, which I highly recommend. They even serve a light and fresh lunch because all that swimming has a way of making you hungry.

Afterward, I had a free afternoon back at the resort, and as much as I loved exploring Aruba and discovering all these new things, I also really wanted an afternoon where I could just sit on a beach, listen to the waves, feel the sun, go swimming, and lounge around drinking an ice tea. I thought about the book *Eat, Pray, Love*. In it, Elizabeth Gilbert talks about a phrase she learned in Italy, *dolce far niente*, meaning, the simple joy of doing nothing. Well, I really wanted to do some nothing that afternoon, and that's exactly what I did.

I started off with a visit to **Santos coffee shop** (J.E. Irausquin Blvd 51, Tel: +297 280 0303. www.santos-aruba.com), a three-minute walk down the street from the resort. I grabbed an ice tea and then stopped into the carry-out across the street for *pastechi*. Like an empanada, *pastechi* is a fried pocket filled with meats, and sometimes cheese and veggies, all mixed with a combination of sweet and savory seasonings. I was beginning to see that this was the way traditional Aruban food is made—the perfect balance of sweet and savory in every bite. *Pastechi* is a traditional breakfast food but is also commonly used as a snack because of its easy-to-carry nature. Think of *pastechi* as Aruban street food, and be sure to eat as many as you can during your visit (and might I recommend some papaya hot sauce on top?)

After I had my snacks, I went back to the resort, claiming a lounge underneath a palm umbrella. I was outfitted with my journal, my tea, the copy of *On the Road* I was reading, and a towel. The afternoon was spent reading, writing, and splashing around in the ocean. *Dolce far niente*.

That night, a very special dinner was arranged at **The Secret Garden** (Caya Frere Eduardo 7, Oranjestad, Tel: +297 730 4675. www.thesecretgardenaruba.com). The event was hosted by Tina Causey-Bislick in her gorgeous home. The dinner I went to was full of Aruba's creative crowd to help give you a sense of the emerging arts scene on the island. At the dinner, I met some incredible people, all of whom continued to change my view of what Aruba is. I met the creators of **Tangerine** (Lloyd G. Smith Blvd 94, Oranjestad, Tel: +297 567 7668. www.wethebeachpeople.com), who make hand-stitched bags, totes, and wallets, all right on the island. I even learned that our host Tina had teamed up with local artist **Vanessa Paulina** and had just published a children's book called *The Search for Straya*, which is currently for sale in stores around Aruba and will soon be available online.

For dinner, we were served an excellent vegan rendition of contemporary and traditional Aruban dishes. Butternut squash soup was followed with a crisp salad made with local herbs. That was followed by *kasha yena*, using the heartiness of cashews to substitute for the meat. For dessert came my new favorite dish, *pan boyo*, the delicious Aruban bread pudding. The cream was replaced with coconut cream and vanilla, giving this already-tropical dessert a whole new level of island flavor. It was a meal so big and filling that I didn't even know it was vegan until someone told me afterward.

So, did I misjudge Aruba? Yes. Very much so. Aruba hasn't been bought and sold and turned into a giant Ripley's Believe it or Not like I was expecting. It's beautiful, yet untamed, while also filled to the brim with a creative life and culture I had never expected. So pack your bags and let go of your expectations, because you're in for one hell of a surprise. ■



Photo: Travis McGhie

Island Hopping

French Polynesia

by Thomas Mizer



Palm Trees and Quiet Bay in Moorea

Photo: Martin Valigursky

I'm not used to having half-naked men drive us around and carry our luggage." My husband, Travis, is whispering to me as a muscular porter, wearing only a thin wrap of fabric around his waist, leads us to our hotel suite. Travis has a point. This handsome guide, framed by palm trees dappled with watery, early-morning light, appears as if out of a dream. It is only our first few minutes off an eight-hour flight to Tahiti, but this sense of being somewhere otherworldly will follow us our whole trip. We turn to each other with a look of woozy awe and say, "Where *are* we?"

Technically, where we are is French Polynesia, a semi-autonomous "collectivity" of France encompassing 118 islands and atolls in the South Pacific. To put it more simply, we are in paradise. We are in that paradise of the cultural imagination, that far-away land of iridescent blue waters and palm trees and hypnotic fire dances that drove sailors to once-upon-a-time mutinies. Is that idyllic image truly French Polynesia? Our goal, beyond a much-needed break, is to see if that fantasy is real. Instead of one resort, we will visit four different islands. Though barely a toe dip in the region, it will hopefully give us a deeper sense of vacationing in the Society Archipelago, the most easily-accessible islands stretching west from the capital city, Papeete. "La orana," the porter welcomes us in the Tahitian language and opens the door to our room, the sparkling ocean out the window beyond. I think we may already have our answer.

TAHITI

Many tourists arrive in Tahiti, the largest and most populous island in French Polynesia, and then they immediately continue on. We've decided to spend a day and night, though, to get a brief sense of the area, and to ease any jet lag.

Our first home is the **InterContinental Tahiti Resort & Spa**, only five minutes from the airport but tucked into a private inlet that makes it feel a world away from the bustling port. We have arrived on a Sunday morning; thank goodness our brilliant Tahiti travel specialist **Christina Turrini** (www.frosch.com) has arranged an early check-in for us. Like most of the region, many attractions, including Papeete's bustling market, will be closed or have limited hours on Sunday, so we decide to stay put and decompress.

It turns out to be a wise and thoroughly enjoyable decision. Exploring the InterContinental is like an overture, an enticing sampling of the melodies we will encounter on the rest of our journey. We dig into a sumptuous brunch buffet, followed by a drumming, dancing Polynesian show that rocks the entire resort. We lounge poolside, drinking perfectly over-the-top tropical cocktails. We test out our rusty snorkeling skills in the safety of the resort's protected and teaming lagoonarium. We finish the day at **Le Lotus**, the resort's gourmet restaurant situated in two overwater bungalows. Listening to the water lap around us, Travis and I both opt for the catch of the day served in a buttery, exotic Vanilla sauce, a culinary wonder that will be mightily challenged but never quite bested during our whole trip.

That night, meeting somewhere in the vast middle of a king-sized bed, we marvel: if this was just our first day, a stay at the "airport" hotel, then we are truly in for something special.

MOOREA

Travis and I are standing on the forward deck of a ferry to Moorea. The approaching island is an adventure-movie ready backdrop of lush, jagged peaks so alluring that it is said to have inspired James Michener's fictional "Bali Hai." The boat slices into a wave and the left side of the deck is drenched in ocean spray. Instead of recoiling, sopping wet travelers cheer in delight, like the primal joy of diving into the sea on a hot day.

It is the perfect welcome to Moorea, a paw-print shaped island that has less than a tenth of the population of Tahiti, yet is overstuffed with adventure and smiles. Our home for the next few days is the **Sofitel Moorea la Ora Beach Resort**, which rests around a vibrant coral garden. We've booked a Superior Ocean View Bungalow on the beach and two delightfully ribald women celebrating a friends getaway tell us they didn't spring for an overwater suite either because "we're not kissing." But I can attest that the beachfront rooms do quite nicely on that front, with their pillowy beds, garden showers, and direct access to the lagoon.

Dodging an Instagram couple taking selfies of the postcard perfect resort, we head for the warm water with our masks and snorkels. Travis, an experienced scuba diver, immediately calls it one of the healthiest corals he's ever seen. Just yards from bungalows we are immersed in a maze of colorful formations. We drift like we're one of the school amidst hundreds of pink and white squirrelfish. Travis grabs my attention and points; ten yards away a black tip reef shark, then another, slip gracefully along the current. I am breathless, first from a twinge of



Photo: Thomas Mizer

Thomas and Travis Hiking in Moorea



Polynesian Dancer

Photo: Gunther Allen

We are in that paradise of the cultural imagination, that far-away land of iridescent blue waters and palm trees and hypnotic fire dances that drove sailors to once-upon-a-time mutinies.

unnecessary fear and then from the overwhelming beauty of it all.

Determined not to be “trapped” in the luxury of the resort the whole time, we set off on an adventure beyond the gates. Heinrich of **Hiking Discovery** (Email: tamislands.discovery@mail.pf) is our passionate guide as we explore the jaw-dropping beauty of the Opunohu Valley. We hike through pineapple fields, up to a panoramic mountain pass, and back down near the foundations of sacred temples, surrounded at all times by the majestic peaks of Moorea. On our decent, a tropical deluge thunders down but we barely feel a drop; the dense canopy of trees above us creates an echoing, cathedral-like shelter.

The rest of our stay at the Sofitel is unhurried bliss. We read by the pool and sway in a hammock. We return to the wonders of the underwater coral garden. We dine under an endless blanket of stars at **K Restaurant**, where a tasteful three-course menu is paired with adventurous wines by an attentive sommelier.

On our final morning, Jeanne, our favorite breakfast server with a smile-inducing laugh, gives us hugs and tells us, “If you don’t like Bora Bora, you just come back to us.” She truly means it and a piece of our heart is left behind forever on Moorea.

BORA BORA

Bora Bora is impossible, appearing out of nowhere like something in an ancient epic poem. Its central island sweeps upward from the ocean, protected by a perfect, ringed reef. A boat ride from the airport is a kaleidoscope of color and light, the water a variety pack of blue crayons melted in the sun. Our arrival at the **InterContinental Bora Bora & Thallaso Spa** is heralded from the dock by a bronzed god trumpeting on his shell horn. “Where *are* we?”

We are in honeymoon heaven, and it’s immediately clear why. There is a luxurious romance to everything around us: the sensuously leaning palm trees, the perfume store of flower scents, the spokes of overwater bungalows creating curving walkways perfect for strolling, hand in hand. And we, as a gay couple, feel absolutely comfortable joining in. From the moment we arrived, we’ve noted Mahu, members of the traditional Polynesian third gender, working as front desk staff, servers, and entertainers. From what we can see, they are accepted fully and are valued members of the community.

Kissing or no kissing, we’ve sprung for one of those over-water bungalows here and it is ridiculous, and perfect. Our bathtub sits in a window overlooking the lagoon. Our living room has a glass bottom coffee table to watch the fish below. Our private deck juts out into the lagoon and we sun

Diving Off Our Bungalow Deck at the InterContinental Bora Bora



Photo: Thomas Mizer

ourselves on towels that match the color of the water. We swear we may never leave this improbable place.

The trade-off for this luxury romance is that it is expensive. In fact, most everywhere in French Polynesia the food and beverages are eye-poppingly expensive. But we can see how the money is put to use at the InterContinental. The grounds are manicured to casual perfection. The service is first rate and a reminder that we are dolts who only speak one language as local waitstaff converse easily in French, English, and their native Tahitian. The spa generously, and at the last minute, moves my appointment to another day where I am treated to a stunning massage on a table that allows me to look down at the fish in a private lagoon. At **Le Corail**, they pull eclectic vintages from the largest wine cellar in French Polynesia and we take pictures of all the fabulous bottles we've tasted to try again at home.

But for all the resort polish of Bora Bora, glimmers of a more homespun life can be found. Fortuitously, we've arrived during **Bora Bora Heiva 2019**, an annual series of traditional singing and dancing competitions. Unlike the pre-packaged hotel shows, this features everyday people representing different districts and celebrating their culture for a largely hometown crowd. It is joyous and rollicking and, when two elderly women are helped to the center of the field only to belt out a duet, it makes us burst into teary applause.

Similarly, the next day we spend on a snorkeling tour with a local charmer named Roman from **Lagoon Service Bora Bora** (www.lagoonservice.com). Roman steers his boat with his knees while playing the ukulele and crooning about his love for Bora Bora. He shares sad tales of his ex who left him for San Diego and introduces us to his new "girlfriends," the stingrays he feeds by hand in a splashing frenzy. He takes us out beyond the reef and drops us into the ocean to snorkel with dozens of reef sharks. As we float amidst a swarm of black tips, three six-foot lemon sharks rise from 30 feet below us; one stares us down only to swim right by. It is thrilling, gorgeous, and impossible, perfectly Bora Bora.

Le Taha'a Bungalows



Photo: Thomas Mizer



Black-Tip Teef Sharks in The Moorea Lagoon

Photo: Bru Greg

TAHA'A

The weather has turned. 30 mph winds and dark storm clouds paint a dark crimson sunset as we drop to a landing on Raiatea. We skitter down a dock and transfer for our 40-minute boat ride to the next island over and **Le Taha'a Island Resort & Spa**. The small craft rises and falls and I can't see any lights coming from Taha'a. I know it's a small island, with only 5000 residents and few tourists, but in the wind and the rain it feels like the edge of the world.

Arriving on a tiny motu off the coast of Taha'a does nothing to change the mood, at once disorienting and exciting. The light rain flies horizontally and we are lashed by sea spray before we can fight our way into our over-water bungalow. It is rustic, but lovely. Exposed bamboo walls and a huge window for looking out to the thrashing lagoon. Travis and I look at each other with wide eyes. We are living our Swiss Family Robinson dream, shipwrecked in a storm and cuddled up in our homemade, but incongruously deluxe, tree house. How rustic can it be when there is complimentary champagne chilling as a welcome?

"This is my favorite!" Travis declares before we've spent even a night. Nothing changes his initial impression during our three-night stay.

The resort feels singular. It's truly an escape, seemingly no one else for miles of water. A tiki bar and restaurant turn out to actually be in a tree house, serving stylishly presented dishes like Mahi Mahi in a lightly spiced green curry. The coconut mojitos are delivered in hollowed out coconuts, and they knock our flip-flops off. The spa consists of a few bamboo huts, open to the air, so a silky island breeze caresses you in tandem with the masseuse. What could seem kitschy instead feels like a fantasy castaway island. What could be unsophisticated instead turns out to be built on a foundation of first class service, exemplary food, and unpretentious luxury.

Another day of mixed weather and we take a shuttle over to the mainland for a tour of Taha'a with **Poerani Tours** (www.poeranisafari.com). We look out over the dense green dotted with farms and houses. We stop

to see the complex process involved in growing and drying vanilla, the black gold of the island.

On every other island, when we mentioned to locals we were stopping in Taha'a, they would get a far-away look and speak of it as "home," a place "like it used to be." It's not that Taha'a is untouched; it's more that it is unfazed by the wider world. The best example of the local spirit is a stop at **Iaorana Pearl Farm** (www.iaorana-pearl-farm.business.site). Twenty hard working employees seed, farm, and sell lustrous black pearls in a time intensive business that is modern and international, but also ancient and in tune with nature. Their pride and care is infectious, emblematic of this beautiful island's spirit.

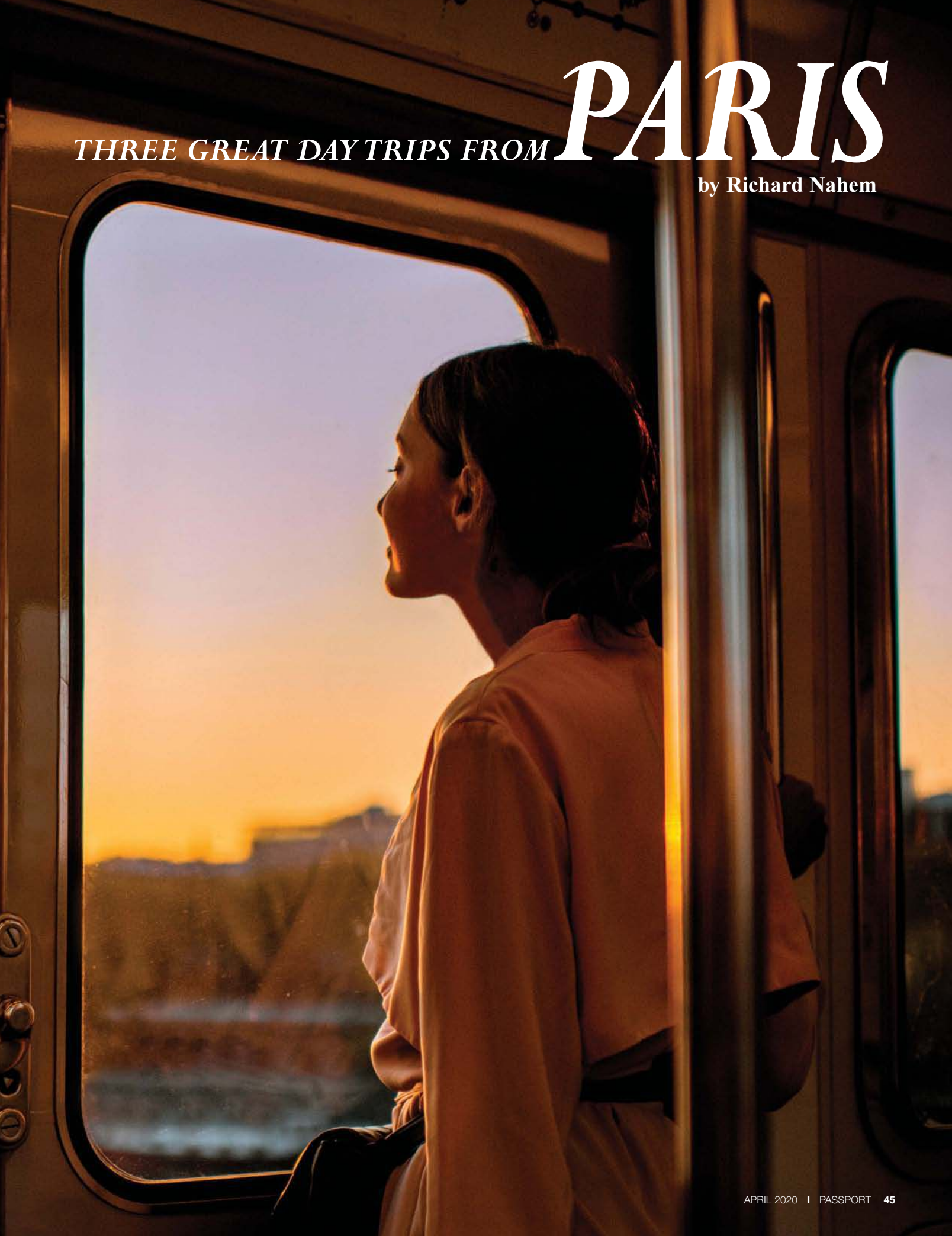
On our last morning, the storm breaks. Trees, flowers and people all bend toward the sun. We've scheduled a private tour of the widely famous drift snorkel that sits off the resort. Our young guide, in his cloth wrap, leads us down a beach path with gentle confidence and motions us to follow him into the water. He steps around some coral and then drops under the surface. We fall in behind him and are pulled into a current. Like dropping into the chute of a bobsled run, we are suddenly flying down a coral canyon, a wonderland of color and fish passing beneath us. With little effort, only a slight turn of the body, we curve through the path. It is astonishing. Suddenly, our guide twists to a stop. We are in the middle of an enormous school of black and white fish, at least 500 deep. Even our guide stares in awe, his practiced routine interrupted by this unexpected wonder. Completely at peace, the three of us float and let the fish dance around us. This magical land has captured us. We know we will be back.

Our guide leaves us, but there's still an hour until we have to catch our boat for the airport. Travis gives me a look and I grin back. We swim to the shore, head back down the path, and drop into the chute to ride the drift one more time. ■



Photo: Helen Ross

Paris

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light-colored trench coat, is seen in profile from the chest up. She is looking out of a rounded rectangular window of a train. The window frame is dark metal. Outside the window, a bright sunset or sunrise is visible, with a warm orange and yellow glow. In the distance, a river flows through a valley, and hills are visible on the horizon. The interior of the train is dimly lit, with a vertical metal pole visible to the right of the woman.

PARIS

THREE GREAT DAY TRIPS FROM

by Richard Nahem

I visited Paris many times before I moved here permanently in 2005, and during each trip I would promise myself I would travel to other places in France. But the lure of Paris would seduce me into staying, with my good intentions of visiting other places in France soon evaporated. Once I moved here, I had the opportunity to take the time to explore this vast and varied country, which is roughly the size of Texas.

One of the greatest discoveries I made was that I could take short day trips, two hours or under from Paris, to dozens of places including beaches, countryside, chateaus, gardens, vineyards, ancient cities, and much more. The extensive train network in France is one of the best and most efficient in the world, especially the high-speed TGV trains that can transport you to the Champagne region from Paris in 50 minutes and take you to the great cities of France including Lyon and Bordeaux in two hours. Here are my top three picks for great day trips from Paris.

CHANTILLY

In almost the same time it takes to get from the Marais to Saint Germain in Paris, you can be whisked to a fairy tale castle in the bucolic French countryside. In just 24 minutes you can be experiencing the **Chantilly Chateau** (www.domainedechantilly.com/en), the enchanted 19th century castle, for which Disney uses in its logo.

The roots of the chateau date back to 1386, when a fortress was first built and later replaced by a chateau for Guillaume de Montmorency in 1484. The chateau was destroyed during The French Revolution and Henri d'Orleans, the Duke of Aumale, inherited the property in the 1830s. He had the chateau rebuilt from 1875-1881 and turned into museum. Tragically the Duke's two sons died before him and since there were no heirs to the throne, he bequeathed the chateau to the Institut de France.

The chateau contains the second most important art collection in France after the Louvre, featuring masterpieces by painters Raphael, Watteau, Poussin, Fragonard, Corot, Delacroix, Ingres, and Van Dyck. An extensive library with floor to ceiling shelves, has over 50,000 books and 15,000

manuscripts. Andre Le Notre, who created the royal gardens for Versailles and Fontainebleau, designed the magnificent formal French gardens. Beyond the gardens of the chateau there are acres of forest, streams, and meadows, and in nice weather a picnic lunch is an ideal activity.

Earlier this year, after a two-year renovation, the royal apartments at the Chateau de Chantilly have reopened. In 1845 Henri de Orleans/the Duke of Aumale, chose architect Victor Dubois and decorator Eugene Lami in 1845 to design private apartments for he and his new wife, Maria-Carolina-Augusta, on the ground floor of the Petite Chateau next to the main chateau. Completed in 1847, the sumptuous suite of eight rooms includes the prince and princesses' bedrooms, salons, and bathrooms, plus the Petite Singerie, the only room that is completely intact since it was originally built. It features a series of wood panels painted in 1735 by Christophe Huet, humorously exhibiting the aristocratic activities of female monkeys (picking cherries, playing card games, dressing, and having lunch) referencing the clothes and expressions of the Condé princesses in all four seasons.

Chantilly is also best known for its world famous racetrack, horse stables, and horse training facilities. Just up the road from the chateau, **Hippodrome de Chantilly** (www.france-galop.com) is one of the most prestigious race tracks in Europe. The thoroughbred track, constructed in 1879, measures, 2400 meters. Five classic races attracting international guests, include the Prix de Diane and Prix du Jockey Club. Next door to the racetrack is the Horse Museum, located in the Cour de Remises, the enormous stables of Chantilly are the largest in France. Fifteen rooms exhibit over 200 objects and works of art including manuscripts, drawings, paintings, prints, and sculpture, relating the rich history and evolution of the horse culture of France.

Lunch or dinner is a must at Michelin star restaurant Le Table du Connetable, inside the Relais & Chateau **Auberge du Jeu de Paume Hotel** (www.aubergedujeupaumechantilly.fr). Feast on an exquisite menu by French born chef Julien Lucas of truly local specialties, where most ingredients are sourced within a 50-mile radius. Since Auberge du Jeu de Paume is only 20 minutes from Charles De Gaulle Airport, it's a great alternative to standard air-



Chantilly Chateau

Photo: Nick Nick



Auberge du Jeu de Paume Spa Valmont Pool

Photo: Jen Watson

One of the greatest discoveries I made was that I could take short day trips, two hours or under from Paris, to dozens of places including beaches, countryside, chateaus, gardens, vineyards, ancient cities, and much more.

port hotels, and they offer a special “Last Night in France” package.

A truly decadent experience at the Spa Valmont in the hotel is the 90-minute Thousand & One Chantilly treatment. It starts with a revitalizing exfoliation, followed by a relaxing massage and at the end your whole body is slathered with fresh, chilled Chantilly cream.

The good thing about Chantilly is it’s under the radar in comparison to more popular chateaus like Versailles and Fontainebleau, so there aren’t mass hoards of people overwhelming the chateau and grounds.

Trains run almost every hour to Chantilly from Gare Saint Lazare in Paris.

DEAUVILLE/TROUVILLE

Two seaside towns next to one another in Normandy represent two sides of the spectrum of beach resorts.

Deauville, much like the Hamptons in New York, is an upscale village filled with elegant mansions and sprawling houses and properties inhabited by well-to-do city slickers. Next door to Deauville is quaint Trouville, its more bohemian, let your hair down, sister.

Since the 19th century, Deauville has been the beach playground of Paris’ high society, richly represented in the Proust novel *In Search of Lost Time*. Besides the Norman style half-timbered villas dotting the village, Deauville is home to the five-star grand hotel & casino **Hotel Barriere** (www.hotelsbarriere.com) built in 1912.

Deauville sponsors many prestigious cultural events including the

Deauville American Film Festival (www.festival-deauville.com). Now in its 45th season, it exclusively screens American films. *Whiplash*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Thunder Road*, and *Little Men* are some of the recent winners of their Grand Prize.

A thriving horse culture is also present in Deauville. A sister city of Lexington, Kentucky and County Kildare in Ireland, two other places known for raising thoroughbred horses, Deauville has an annual yearling auction. Besides horse racing at the **Deauville-Le Touques Racecourse** (www.france-galop.com/en/node/63), polo tournaments, horseshows, and the European championship of miniature horses are also important side events.

Sharing the same train station as Deauville, Trouville is a charmer. While strolling along the boat docks, you’ll discover an outdoor seafood market brimming with the freshest oysters, clams, crabs, lobsters, and oversized sea scallops hidden under large shells. You can indulge right on the spot or take them to go.

Afterwards, head for the beautiful, wide beach, one of the only sand beaches on the usually rocky Normandy coastline. On the edge of the beach is an old fashioned boardwalk lined with illustrated posters by Trouville’s most celebrated illustrator, Raymond Savignac. Trouville has been a magnet for artists and writers in the past two centuries including Monet, Marguerite Duras, Eugene Boudin, Proust and Gustave Flaubert, and pale blue benches along the boardwalk have their names emblazoned on the backs of them.

Do you fancy running through the sand and jumping into the cold but

Reim, France



Photo: Boris Stroujko

Gare Saint Lazare Paris



Photo: Bensliman Hassan



Moulin de Verzenay boasts a breath-taking view of the Maison Mumm champagne vineyards.

Photo: Massimo Santi

invigorating sea? Rent one of the bold, striped canvas tent cabanas and relax for a few hours.

Brasserie Les Vapeurs (www.yelp.com/biz/les-vapeurs-trouville-sur-mer-2), a classic seafood café next to the fish market is the perfect place to satiate your growing appetite. Sit alfresco under the red and white striped awning and enjoy a pot of mussels steeped in white wine, served with crispy frites.

Meanwhile, **Villa Gypsy** (www.villagypsy.fr) is a cool café and tea salon, serving house made desserts, quiches, and sandwiches. Upstairs is a trendy home shop with local designs and merchandise.

A mammoth, 65,000 square foot Beaux Arts building from 1912, houses the **Casino Barriere Ouistreham** (www.casinosbarriere.com), which incorporates a casino with slot machines, table games, roulette, and poker, three restaurants, and live entertainment spectacles. Next door is the Trouville **Cures Marines Hotel and Spa** (www.accorhotels.com), from the Sofitel hotel group. This five-star hotel features the only Michelin star restaurant in Trouville, Le 1912, plus a Thalasso Spa.

The Trouville station is 2.07 hours from the Paris Gare Saint Lazare and trains depart at least 4 times daily.

REIMS

An easy 50-minute train ride from Paris, Reims is the portal city to the Champagne region, where hundreds of wineries produce the iconic sparkling wine.

Even before the age and allure of Champagne, Reims was the site of one of the most important cathedrals in France, the **Reims Cathedral** (www.cathedrale-reims.fr).

Construction of the massive cathedral started in 1221, on the site of a former church from the early 400s, which was destroyed in a fire in 1210. Flying buttresses are prevalent on all sides creating a dramatic effect, and other standouts include 2300 religious statues, cut limestone arches, and a smiling angel. The stupendous stained glass win-

dows are a visual kaleidoscope of color, and in 1985 just before his death Marc Chagall created a series of nine windows. For the 800th anniversary, German artist Imi Knoebel designed six modern stained glass windows, as a peace alliance between France and Germany. It was also at the site of Reims Cathedral that the kings of France were officially crowned from 1027 to 1825.

Reims was heavily bombed during WWI, when 90% of the buildings in the center of the city were decimated. The local government encouraged architects and builders from Paris to relocate to Reims to redesign the city. The result is an impressive array of Art Nouveau and Art Deco edifices with fabulous architectural details, including intricate iron and grillwork, ceramic tiles, and elaborate doors.

Café du Palais (www.cathedrale-reims.fr) is the quintessential café of Reims. The 1930s gem is decorated in grand Art Deco style, including a Tiffany-style stained glass ceiling and the walls are plastered with artist's sketches and paintings, including a rare Chagall drawing. Foie gras, entrecôte steak with frites, and floating island for dessert are just a few of the classic French dishes on the menu.

Not forgetting the essential reason to visit Reims, I recommend **Champagne, Maison Mumm** (www.mumm.com), one of the premiere brands of Champagne. The Mumm brothers from Germany opened their modest vineyard in 1827, and it's now one of the most respected brands of the region. A one-hour and fifteen minute visit includes a tour through the vast, deep underground caves where thousands of bottles of Champagne are stored and turned regularly. The guide provided an in depth account of the many step process of how Champagne is created from grape to bottle. A flute of chilled Mumm Cordon rouge, Brut Champagne aged over 20 months, provides a bubbly end to an informative tour.

Trains run almost every hour to Reims from Gare de l'Est in Paris. ■

The Magic of
SINGAPORE

by Lawrence Ferber



Photo: Sean Hsu

Supertree Grove, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore

I'm waiting for a Genie to appear. A California-raised Indian-American, Amed Gurnani is by night a fierce, tall, rubenesque drag queen named Genie with a penchant for horror movie-meets-*kawaii* (an extreme Japanese style of "cute") looks.

I'm visiting Singapore, where Genie/Amed has been working as an expat, and we've arranged to meet up for a kiki over dinner. I've arrived first, since I'm not operating on DQST (Drag Queen Savings Time). While waiting for Genie to materialize, I nurse a refreshing chrysanthemum tea and gin based cocktail, The Escape to Kaifeng, at the cozy, Gatsby-gone-Chinese gold and black **Yellow Pot Bar** at the new **Six Senses Duxton** (83 Duxton Rd. Tel: +65 6914 1428. www.sixsenses.com/en/hotels/duxton) in Chinatown's Tanjong Pagar district. The Six Senses Duxton is the resort brand's first foray into the urban boutique hotel space, and has been heralded with two Singapore properties: the 49-room Six Senses Duxton and, just a few minutes away by foot, 138-room **Six Senses Maxwell** (2 Cook St. Tel: +65 6914 1400. www.sixsenses.com/en/hotels/maxwell). More on those later, though!

The first Indian-American contestant on *Drag Race Thailand*, Genie turns heads upon arrival, dressed in a gender-nonbinary black outfit with tight leggings, a loose-fitting top, chunky, shiny boots that make Genie even more towering, and a white handbag as icing. After a drink, we settle down within the adjacent Yellow Pot Restaurant for incredible Chinese cuisine created with sustainable, healthy ingredients: hickory wood-roasted duck, giant tiger prawns resting in creamy curry, and crispy Sichuan chicken tossed with peanuts and peppers. In between gorging on this feast, our conversation ranged from dish about the show (Genie came in at eighth place) to Singapore's must-see local queens, including Vanda Miss Joaquim, a Muslim, and fellow *Drag Race Thailand* finalist, and OG Singapore stand-up comedian and drag personality, Kumar, who came out publicly in 2011.



Photo: Courtesy Genie

As with every time I've visited this cultural and religious melting pot, known affectionately as the "little red dot," the topic of Penal Code Section 377A arises. An archaic holdover from the British colonial days that criminalizes homosexual acts (a.k.a. "gross indecency"), 377A isn't on the books today for any logical reason, and it isn't actively enforced, but its existence is a buzzkill with nonetheless unpleasant effects.

LGBTQ characters cannot be depicted in a positive light on locally produced media, and the government won't promote openly LGBTQ-related anything. From what I've ascertained, 377A solely exists to appease and comfort stodgy, older legislators and segments of the population.

Singapore's populace, however, is changing, and 377A's days may be numbered. Launched in 2009, Pink Dot SG (www.pinkdot.sg) throws an annual demonstration and rally in support of LGBTQ rights and the repeal of 377A, and boasts a line-up of celebrity ambassadors. **Boo Junfeng** (www.facebook.com/boo.junfeng), an acclaimed, out Singaporean filmmaker, is a Pink Dot committee member and has produced slick campaign videos for it.

Junfeng tells me, "there has been progress, at least in the court of public opinion. A number of things have swayed in our favor, with establishment figures voicing their support for the abolishment or review of the law, including the former Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong. According to a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies this year, Singaporeans have grown more accepting over the last 5 years, so we are generally cautiously optimistic."

In 2019, Pink Dot made an overt statement calling for the repeal of 377A, with a campaign that "angled towards shedding light upon the trickle-down effects of 377A on the lives of LGBTQ+ Singaporeans," Junfeng added, "More than ever before, it is important to keep telling our stories so that lawmakers can see this not just as an intellectual issue, but one that actually impacts lives. On platforms like Netflix, LGBTQ+ affirming content can be viewed uncensored, and this has created an information divide where older generations who still watch mainstream TV have a different understanding of LGBTQ people and their lived experiences, as compared to younger people who consume entertainment online."

After dinner, I'm exhausted and stuffed, and Genie disappears to visit Neil Road's lively cluster of gay bars, which includes the perpetually lively **Tantric** (78 Neil Rd. Tel: +65 6423 9232. www.homeofthebluespin.com/tantric) and its upstairs **May Wong's Café** (named after Hollywood's first Asian American movie star, Anna May Wong); decorated with Broadway show posters, Tantric's adjacent sister venue **Backstage Bar** (80 Neil Rd. Tel: +65 6423 9232. www.homeofthebluespin.com/backstagebar); just across the street, the two-floor, 5,000 square foot bar and dance club, **Taboo Club** (65-67 Neil Rd. Tel: +65 6225 6256. www.taboo.sg); and, inspired by 1960s Hollywood, **Out Bar** (43 Neil Rd. Tel: +65 6224 2865. www.facebook.com/OutBarSingapore), which programs special themed parties, from "sports and tights" to "sailor" to, every second Saturday, Canto-Mando pop music.

Opened in 2015, **Dorothy's** (13A Trengganu St. Tel: +65 6221 6806. dorothysbar.com), and its upstairs balcony still boasts a lovely view of Chinatown. Celebrating its ten-year anniversary in 2020,



Photo: Lawrence Ferber

AS WITH EVERY TIME I'VE VISITED THIS CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS MELTING
POT CITY-STATE, KNOWN AFFECTIONATELY AS THE "LITTLE RED DOT,"
THE TOPIC OF PENAL CODE SECTION 377A ARISES.

Lluvia (145 Telok Ayer St. www.facebook.com/Lluvia-141966859205297) brings in the bears, cubs, and chasers (and friends) for karaoke fun, flirting, and drinks. Party promoters **Hypertainment** (www.facebook.com/hyper.com.sg), meanwhile, throw circuit-style events throughout the year at various nightclubs, which are listed on their Facebook page.

During this trip, I became captivated by the local craft cocktail scene, which is so dynamic that other Southeast Asian countries' bars, restaurants, and hotels are enlisting its mixologists and owners as consultants. Although Singapore's taxes on alcohol are insanely high (a bottle of Tanglin Mandarin Chili Gin, from the country's first craft gin distillery, runs \$80, while mixed drinks often ring in at \$20 or more) the cocktail culture is world class, with a whopping 11 venues featured on 2019's Asia's 50 Best Bars list.

Two musts: the three-year-old **Native** (52A Amoy St. Tel: +65 8869 6520. tribenative.com), which crafts sense-of-place libations with Singapore-centric ingredients (turmeric, dragon fruit, pandan leaf) combined with foraged exotica like ants (yes, ants), while the Bugis' neighborhood's two-year-old **Atlas** (600 North Bridge Rd. Tel: +65 6396 4466. www.atlasbar.sg) entails a sprawling, art deco fever dream come

to life, with 1,000+ gin bottles filling its eye-popping, gilded 15-meter-tall Gin Tower (locals can join its Juniper Society for special gin-driven events).

Gin lovers should also visit local distillery **Brass Lion** (40 Alexandra Terrace. Tel: +65 6954 0602. www.brassliondistillery.com), which opened in 2018 and offers a 45-minute tour on weekends, inclusive of a three-gin tasting flight. While bottle-seekers can save a bundle when buying booze at Changi airport's Duty Free, they're typically sold out, so you might want to plunk down here and chomp on a wooden stick to help with the tax sting.

Of course, the Singapore Sling is the country's long-standing house specialty, and its birthplace, the 133-year-old grande dame **Raffles Hotel** (1 Beach Rd. Tel: +65 6337 1886. www.affles.com/singapore), reopened in summer 2019 following a two-year-long, comprehensive renovation (the cost of which hasn't been divulged, but surely tops the \$116 million spent on a previous 1989 upgrade). Besides increasing its number of suites from 103 to 115, which retain classic and vintage elements (e.g. brass-on-wood light switches), the now 21st Century Raffles includes fresh white marble flooring, new restaurants Yi (by Chinese cuisine innovator Jereme Leung) and Alain Ducasse's BBR, a



Photo: Lawrence Ferber

Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple

rooftop pool, and of course the refreshed Long Bar, birthplace of the Singapore Sling (\$22).

I split my visit between two new properties. My first accommodation is the **Six Senses Maxwell**. Fashioned from fourteen converted shophouses with rooms that vary wildly in layout and color schemes, this sustainability-centric hotel (amenity kit toothbrushes are created from cornstarch), pays homage to Singapore's past with European accent, and captures the Six Senses luxe in city style. Upon entering the lobby (its floor is made of stones from medieval Italian cathedrals), one is offered a Tibetan "Singing Bowl" experience involving sound and vibrations to get your chakras on. Amenities here included a selections of local craft spir-its, a slender lap pool and sunbathing area, several bars with out-standing cocktails and food menus, and complimentary ice cream (from 1-5 P.M.) distributed from an outdoor cart.

The Capitol Kempinski (15 Stamford Rd. Tel: +65 6368 8888. www.kempinski.com/en/singapore/the-capitol-singapore) is in Singa-pore's cultural district, a block or so from Raffles and fifteen minutes' walk from the iconic Marina Bay Sands and *Avatar*-meets-botanical garden complex, **Gardens By The Bay** (18 Marina Gardens Dr. Tel: +65 6420 6848. www.gardensbythebay.com.sg).

Two heritage buildings, the 1905 Capitol Building and Stamford House, have been joined to create a fabulous 157-room The Capitol Kempinski, a colonial-influenced oasis of calm (thanks to impressive

soundproofing). If you like to swim, you may be disappointed. A friend and I who were wearing new swimsuits, excitedly ran to the outdoor saltwater pool, expecting some splish-splash frolic and laps, only to find a walled-in, glorified, shallow jacuzzi that felt cramped in every way. I loved my room, the service, the free cookies, a selection of local Fossa craft chocolates, and treatments in its intimate 3-room spa. Breakfast in the 15 Stamford restaurant was flawless as well.



Singapore Style Noodles

Photo: Foodio

Of course, Singapore is foodie heaven to many locals and visitors alike. The Michelin guide's arrival in 2016 motivated chefs and restaurateurs to up their game. 2019's edition saw two three-star entries: the 25-year-old, ever-evolving **Les Amis** (1 Scotts Rd, #01-16 Shaw Centre. Tel: +65 6733 2225. www.lesamis.com.sg), and **Odette** (1 St Andrew's Rd. Tel: +65 6385 0498. www.odetterestaurant.com), the latter located within the **National Gallery Singapore** (1 St Andrew's Rd. Tel: +65 6271 7000. www.nationalgallery.sg).

It's worth noting the National Gallery, NOT to be confused with the National Museum (which I learned the hard way), is a must thanks to its collection of contemporary Southeast Asian art, including edgy and queer work like Vincent Leow's bottle of "Artist's Urine," and video of Josef Ng's 1994 performance, "Brother Cane," which addressed the arrest and caning of 12 homosexuals for sexual solicitation, and which, subsequently, got Ng arrested as well (and banned from performing to boot) for obscenity.

Also keep an eye out for art exhibitions and performances by Zihan Loo (www.loozihan.com) while in town: he reenacted Ng's "Brother Cane" in 2012 (without getting arrested) and is one of Singapore's most visible (and beguiling) queer young artists and activists.

Back to food, a few of my Singapore go-to's include Aussie chef David Pynt's **Burnt Ends** (20 Tek Lim Rd. Tel: +65 6224 3933. www.burntends.com.sg), where veggies and meat morph into transcendent creations with help from a wood-fired oven; **Candlenut** (17A Dempsey Rd. Tel: +65 1800 304 2288. www.comodempsey.sg/restaurant/candlenut), where chef Malcolm Lee reinvents ethnic peranakan dishes through a modern, fine dining filter; and "Mod Sin" chef LG Han's spectacular Michelin-starred **Labyrinth** (8 Raffles Ave. Tel: +65 6223 4098. www.labyrinth.com.sg). Each course at my recent dinner at Labyrinth was accompanied by an illustrated postcard explaining its origin, where ingredients were sourced (a deep amber honey from Batam, Indonesia, made by stinger-less bees), and Han's personal inspirations.

For the first time, I tried lunch at **Fatfuku** (Tel: +65 9387-6399. www.fatfuku.com), a "private kitchen" in the home of food writer-cum-chef Annette Tan (you receive the address after booking). Besides an onslaught of ever-changing family-style courses (one highlight: an Indonesian gado gado vegetable salad), with a particular focus on peranakan/nyonya cuisine (including a kickass *mee siam* noodle dish with quail eggs and sambal prawns), the meal included delicious conversation with fellow hardcore foodies, a couple of whom were gay. I made new friends, and garnered valuable intel on where to find a solid cold brew coffee, and which restaurants are overrated versus underrated (you'll need to ply me with booze for that).

On my final day in Singapore, I spent an afternoon among the ancient splendor of the historic Hindu **Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple** (19 Ceylon Rd. Tel: +65 6345 8176.), which is dedicated to my favorite god, Ganesha. Dating back to 1850, there are dozens upon dozens of sculpted, intricately painted depictions of the elephant-headed Ganesha's many incarnations and other characters (like his adorable rodent pal) adorning the architecture, and expansions are always in the works. The latest phase will see a 32-foot-tall Lord Vinayagar statue. I'm not sure if a Genie can speed that process along, or kick 377A to the curb, but rest assured Singapore's dynamic new generations will make both wishes come true. ■



Photos: Home of the Blue Spin

Liverpool, Blackpool, Leeds, and Manchester

NORTHERN ENGLAND

by Joseph Pedro





The Beatles Sculpture in
Liverpool by Andrew Edwards

Photo: kenny1

“I can tell you’re American love, you’re going too easy on the ingredients,” my gin-making class instructor in Manchester tells me as she sprinkles extra rose hip into a pestle. “It’s all about putting you in the alcohol,” she adds. A nosy British granny comes up behind me and twists a little lemon in my cup. “Add a bit of flamboyance,” she squawks swishing around dizzily from one too many complimentary gin drinks. Her husband and son then insist I add a bit of spice. “A little spice makes everything nice,” the older gentleman tells me. “Or...it makes the Northern English weather a bit warmer,” the son retorts while passing over a jar full of red chili flakes. I look over to my friend Andy who is battling his own group of busybodies questioning his recipe. “It’s kind of like a strange family reunion in here, I’ve never seen British people cozy up to one another so quickly,” he says laughingly as his copper gin contraption begins to distill the liquor.

The gin drops slowly into a beaker, and the crowd is giddy with anticipation. And as the gin pours, the conversations grow louder around the room. We’ve already given up on trying to explain to our newfound grandmother that Andy and I are just friends and not international lovers, and that no matter how much she insists, we won’t be able to attend her son’s wedding in Dallas with her. It is all great fun, and we merrily roll along with the jokes and laughter.

Once our gin concoctions are ready, we each take sips of what we’ve created. “Strong, flavorful, loud, a bit moody, colorful, with some spice thrown in,” the instructor tells me after trying a taste. And I think to myself, what an incredible way to describe the North of England.



Liverpool Pride

Photo: Steve Bridge



Liverpool Waterfront

Photo: Jeanette Teare

It’s pretty easy to see how gay-friendly **Liverpool** is, just look around,” Char Binns, director of **Homotopia** LGBT+ arts and heritage festival (www.homotopia.net) told me over a coffee on bustling Bold Street. Across from us is an LGBTQ bookstore, one of the most comprehensive in the UK, called **News From Nowhere Radical & Community Bookshop** (96 Bold St, Liverpool. Tel: +44-151-708-7270. www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk). Each of the shop’s windows proudly displays a rainbow flag. Binns also excitedly tells me of the work it takes to put on this massive cultural festival that sees the city celebrating filmmakers and artists from around Liverpool and the UK who come to share their work in such a welcoming environment.

LGBTQ surprises abound at the **Museum of Liverpool** (Pier Head, Liverpool Waterfront, Liverpool. Tel: +44-151-478-4545. www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk) Besides the historical permanent exhibits, during my visit, the museum also had a spectacular floor showcasing John Lennon and Yoko Ono, as well as a fantastic look at the city’s pioneering queer community called *Tales From The City*, where objects and memories from Liverpool’s LGBT+ community takes visitors on an unforgettable queer journey.

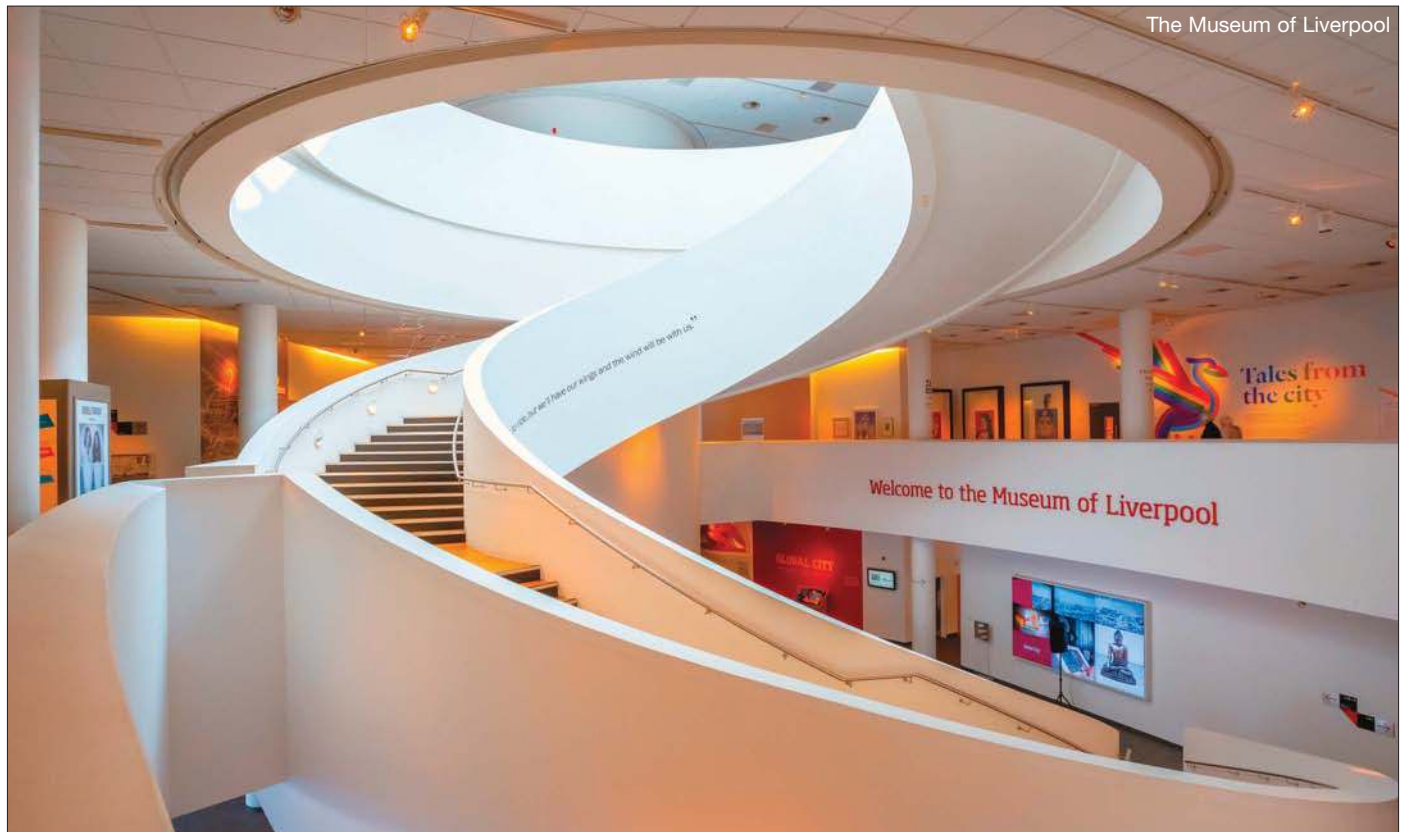
You’ll also want to take a quick spin around the **British Music Experience** (Cunard Building, Canada Blvd, Liverpool. Tel: 44-151-519-0915. www.britishmusicexperience.com) where, of course, the Beatles memorabilia is displayed, but also outfits, original lyric sheets, and other goodies from British gay icons like Elton John, Freddie Mercury, and George Michael.

I am lucky enough to meet with one of the curators at the **Victoria Gallery and Museum** (Ashton St, Liverpool. www.vgm.liverpool.ac.uk) who is excited to show off their brand-new initiative called the LGBTQ Working Group. “You’ll be surprised how many of our works of art have a queer connection,” she tells me. Pieces are marked with a rainbow flag to denote the community connection. She shows me one sculpture that was turned around to showcase the sculptor’s emphasis on the figure’s rear. “We never realized how homoerotic the sculpture was of the man until we presented it to viewers in this manner.” She continues: “We look to unearth previously hidden or unknown LGBTQ histories in the collections and aim to facilitate understanding of LGBTQ identities and histories through research, public programming, discussion, and debate. We also consider the ways in which visitors themselves interpret and make sense of museum objects on the basis of their own identities and experiences.” An LGBT- specific tour of the galleries can be booked by messaging LGBTQ@vam.ac.uk.

Taking in Liverpool from the water is also a must-do. I loved the quick journey on **Mersey Ferries** (www.merseyferries.co.uk). Sit outside and enjoy the architecture that dots the shore. Travelers will particularly like to see the original Cunard building, replete with its nautical nuances.

During my day in Liverpool, my accommodations are at the **Hope Street Hotel** (40 Hope St, Liverpool. Tel: +44-151-709-3000. www.hopestreethotel.co.uk). While waiting for my room to be serviced, I’m ushered into the dining room for a lunch where I am so glad I have a chance to try the cuisine at **The London Carriage Works**. The modern-British fare and delicious cocktails are a treat. Goats curd, heritage tomatoes, basil, and black onions are just the intro to seared bass and spring vegetables. My room is a corner unit with large windows, modern amenities, an oversized bath, and king-sized bed. The hotel is expanding, and the new section will also house one of the few hotel spas and pools in the city.

Tell people from the neighboring cities that you’re going to **Blackpool** and expect to hear polarizing opinions. Most remember the seaside resort city from their childhoods, others from a wild stag or hen party, but most ignore the city’s rich history as a queer enclave and a center of enter-



The Museum of Liverpool

Photo: cowardlion

I think about my entire trip to Northern England and I recall the flavors of the food, the sense of humor and love from the people, and the fascinating history of this exciting region.

tainment both lush-filled and sober.

I'm standing in front of the **Blackpool Tower** (Promenade, Blackpool. www.theblackpooltower.com) on the comedy carpet with Cybil DuVaux, the drag queen owner of **Peek-a-Booze**, a gay club and hotel. He recites some of the more memorable comedy lines that blanket the floor. "Nice to see you, to see you nice," he chuckles reading the line made famous by Bruce Forsyth. He also tells me about **Pride Blackpool** (www.prideblackpool.co.uk).

"We did promotional pictures for pride right here on the comedy carpet. Imagine me in heels walking around in broad daylight all glammed up in front of all the tourists, it was fabulous," he tells me laughing. But he also goes on to describe the pride festivities that take place just down the boardwalk where LGBTQ locals and those from the surrounding area come up for a raucous time.

That afternoon, I watch as kids run around in the chilly sea air on the boardwalk, but the attention is all on the awesome **Blackpool Tower** (www.theblackpooltower.com). This 518-foot-tall, turn-of-the-century building, modeled after the Eiffel Tower, is a showstopper. The building, when it debuted in the 1800s, attracted tourists from all over the world who took the elevator to the top to take in the sea views and iconic sunsets. It also contains one of the most spectacular ballrooms in the country, often hosting the wildly popular *Strictly Come Dancing* finale. At the time of my visit, the building was getting glammed up to celebrate its 125th anniversary.

No trip to the seaside is complete without eating classic fish and chips.

DuVaux brings me to his favorite spot, but don't be fooled by the name, **Yorkshire Fisheries** (Topping St, Blackpool. Tel: +44-1253-627739. www.yorkshirefisheries.co.uk) (we are in Lancashire after all). The mom-and-pop shop, located off the boardwalk serves no-frills fried fish, chips, plain toast, and mushy peas. Splash some vinegar on it and get ready for a taste treat while you enjoy some great people watching.

Nearby, the **Winter Gardens** (97 Church St, Blackpool. Tel: +44-1253-625252. www.wintergardensblackpool.co.uk) is a must visit. This Victorian entertainment venue may not look like the most impressive theater from the outside, but inside it's filled with beautiful surprises. If you're not going to see one of the many traveling productions that occupy the main theater, sign-up for an architecture tour where you'll be able to see some of the lesser-visited stages, as well as the grand ballroom with its massive arched ceilings and golden etchings.

At night, I attend **Funny Girls** (5 Dickson Rd, Blackpool. www.funnygirlsonline.co.uk), a long-running cabaret show that features drag performers and men in tight pants who show off some exceptional talent as they perform oldies, pop hits, and also some sultry burlesque numbers. Afterward the crowd rushes to over a dozen queer bars that are all located within walking distance of one another. I, of course, head to Peek-a-Booze to watch my favorite lady Cybil DuVaux command the crowd. And as the ocean breeze mixes with the smell of late-night revelry, I make my way back to my room, to continue my journey.

Blackpool Tower



Photo: Jonny Essex

Central Pier at Blackpool

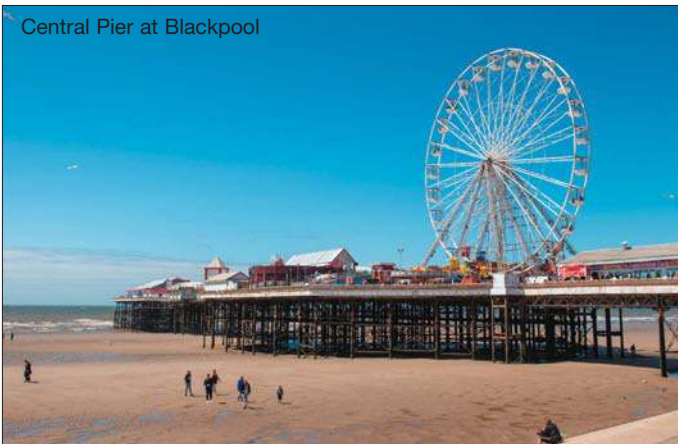


Photo: Doubleclix



Winter Gardens Domed Ceiling

Photo: DMC Photography

There is a lot of shopping here, lots of beauty, it's very LGBT-friendly, but above all it's a northern city filled with characters who will call you 'love' no matter who or where you are" says Liaquat Ali from **Leeds Pride** (www.leedspride.org) as we take a free water taxi down the canal. Ali is also a member of the community's rugby team, The Leeds Hunters RUFC. We are on the way to the **Royal Armouries Museum** (Armouries Dr, Leeds. Tel: +44-113-220-1999. www.royalarmouries.co.uk), and the water taxi is an excellent way to get a glimpse of the gorgeous architecture that lines the River Aire. We go beneath the currently under-renovation Leeds Bridge that was built in the late 1800s and is painted in a majestic baby blue.

The **Royal Armouries Museum** in Leeds houses a major part of the national collection of arms and armor, and displays over 8,500 objects

throughout its five themed galleries. The remarkable displays are reason enough to visit this exciting museum. You'll marvel at the recreation of an Englishman riding a massive elephant and a full-on snow battle. I particularly love the more modern exhibit that showcases some fictional items, like the guns from James Bond films. Outside in the summer months, guests get to experience some of the armor in action with live jousting.

Part of the charm of Leeds is that its city center is super-compact. One thing you'll notice right away is that this city is built around shopping. Named the best shopping destination in the UK by the *Rough Guide to Britain*, Leeds City Centre has over 1,000 shops. But it's the diversity of places to shop (both high-end and vintage) that makes it exciting. With businesses housed in beautiful arcades and listed buildings, you'll find luxury brands at **Victoria Quar-**

ter's arcades. It's also home to Europe's largest stained glass window and more than 75 designer brands, including Vivienne Westwood, Louis Vuitton, Ted Baker, and The Kooples. Leeds' Harvey Nichols, the first outside of London, also calls the Victoria Quarter home.

The historic **Kirkgate Market** is one of the largest covered markets with over 400 stalls inside and a further 200 outside. While browsing the stalls, keep an eye out for the Marks & Spencer stall, it's their first one ever. On the first and third Sunday of every month, it plays host to the Farmers and Craft Market that features fresh, organic produce and all the craft supplies you'll ever need.

Home to a wide range of choice independent retailers and tasty eateries, the **Corn Exchange** also regularly hosts vintage markets and record fairs. Under the stunning domed roof of Leeds Corn Exchange, you'll find a large number of independent stores ranging from Northern Acoustics, and Mad Elizabeth Vintage to Village Bookstore. With vintage, craft, record and food fairs taking place regularly, there is always something new to discover.

While Leeds is lined with traditional pub fare and market-fresh food stalls, I dine at talk-of-the-town **Issho** (Victoria Gate 3rd Floor Rooftop, George St, Leeds. Tel: 44-113-426-5000. www.issho-restaurant.com), which means 'together' in Japanese. This gorgeous restaurant in Victoria Gate serves Japanese dishes and is home to a rooftop bar and terrace. Fresh seafood is key to the delicious sushi, according to the restaurant's manager who brings me plate after plate of expertly prepared dishes. But I seriously fall for their grilled plates (*robata*), including the duck breast and miso black cod.

Before heading out for the night, I return to my hotel, the **Malmaison Leeds**. (1 Swinegate, Leeds. Tel: +44-113-426-0047. www.malmaison.com) where I am lucky enough to get one of their specialty suites. Mine, the Surrealist Suite, is yellow and black, where bizarre statues (monkeys holding light

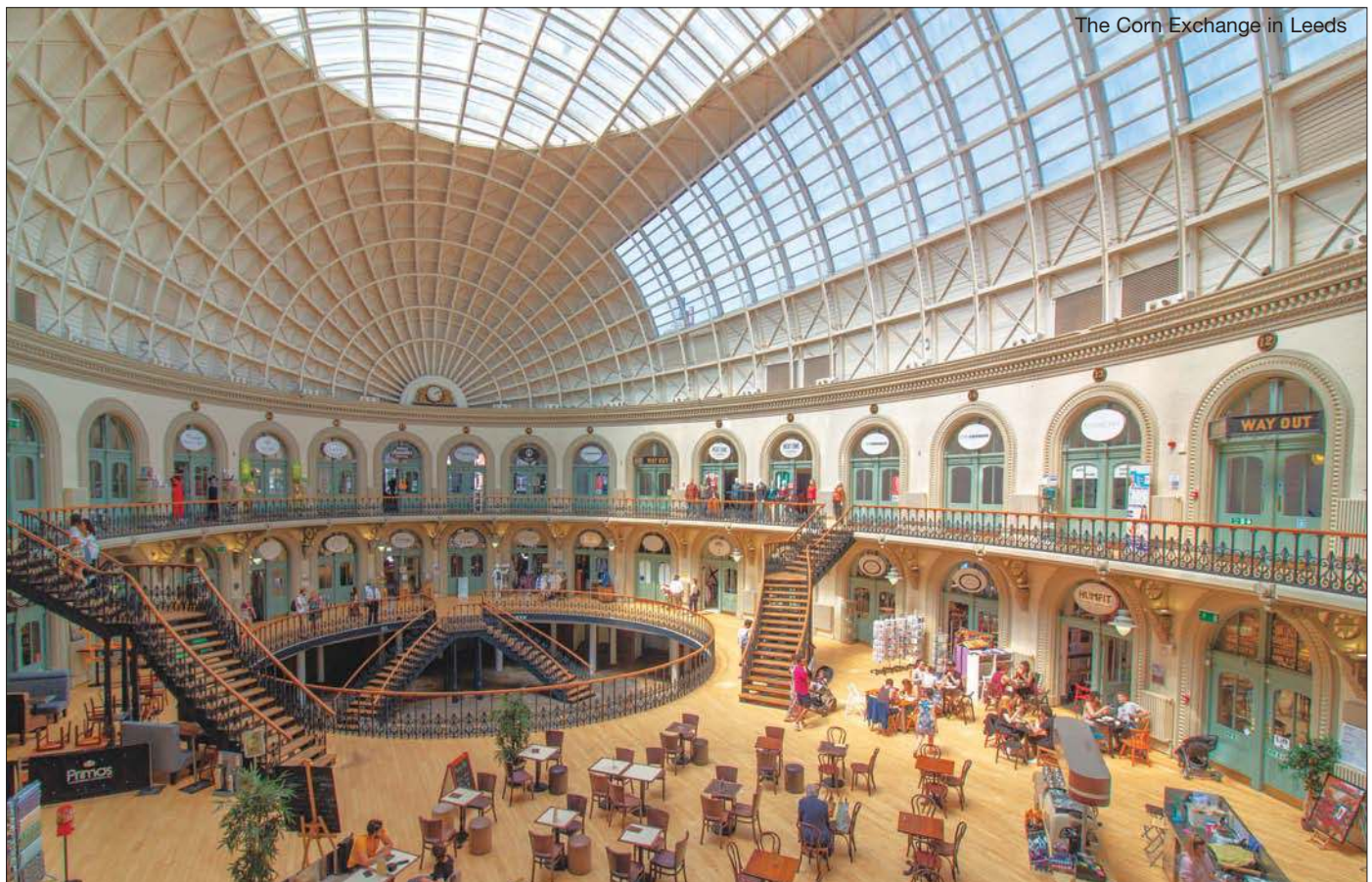


Victoria Quarter in Leeds

Photo: Tupungato

bulbs and a giant yellow hippo) turn the room into a work of art that's campy and over-the-top fun.

The most unexpected discovery for me in Leeds was the large number of LGBTQ bars that occupy a "quarter" of the city. The amount of places to visit is a point of pride for locals who traipse from spot to spot. I'm out on a Thursday night, and it's packed with people from all walks of life. I start at **Fibre** (168 Lower Briggate, Leeds. Tel: +44-113-344-9550. www.barfibre.com), a chic cocktail lounge with an outdoors, but I ultimately end up with new friends at **Tunnel Leeds** (1 Commercial Court 11A, Briggate. Tel: +44-870-124-6534. www.tunnelleeds.com), an exciting venue that features some of the best DJs, dance parties, and performers in the city.



The Corn Exchange in Leeds

Photo: J. Jackson



Photo: Visit Britain/Ben Selway

Gay Village in Manchester

Manchester is a city that purrs with a level of excitement not many places can rival. Luckily for traveler's from the USA, **Virgin Atlantic** (www.virginatlantic.com) has regular non-stop flights to Manchester from New York, Los Angeles, and Boston.

It's here where the Industrial Revolution began, and it also has a proud history of science, politics, music, arts, and sport. This is the city where the atom was first split, the world's first passenger railway was opened, and the modern computer was invented. It's where pioneers like Emmeline Pankhurst, Alan Turing (who you can pay tribute to in Sackville Gardens), LS Lowry, and Anthony Burgess all called home.

It's impossible to talk about Manchester without discussing music. It's where bands like the Smiths, Oasis, Joy Division, and the Stone Roses were inspired to write music that moved the world. One place to walk is the façade of the former Hacienda Nightclub. A timeline is etched in the walls of the now-apartment complex on the side of the Rochdale Canal. You can see the importance of this venue as a center of the city's creative, nightlife scene. Madonna performed here back in 1983 and the club eventually became an epicenter for house music and the queer community, earning the city the reputation as Gaychester in the mid-90s.

While the Gaychester nickname has been left in the 90s, the city's queer community is thriving. As a tourist, a walk around the Gay Village reveals just how LGBTQ the city is today. Dozens of canal-lined cafes and restaurants transform into thriving clubs at night. The streets light up into a Mardi Gras-style gay celebrations and the people of Manchester also live up to their reputation as a party-hard crowd. If you visit during the summer, make sure to attend **Manchester Pride** (www.manchesterpride.com),

where people from all over England come to celebrate all things LGBTQ.

The arts continue to thrive here, too. One new development, **HOME** (2 Tony Wilson Place, Manchester. www.homemcr.org), has created a much-needed modern-day arts space for local and traveling performances. Its programming is also queer heavy. When I visited, I had the chance to see Jinx Monsoon (winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race*) perform to a sold-out crowd. HOME also hosts many of Manchester Pride's cultural films and theatrical performances.

As you explore the city, you may notice that Manchester's entrepre-



The Edwardian Manchester

Photo: Visit Manchester



Sculpture of Alan Turing in Sackville Gardens

Photo: 360b

neers and architects are having a lot of fun creating some creative new spaces by reclaiming some of the city's iconic out-of-use structures. One such place is the **Manchester Three Rivers Gin School** (21 Red Bank, Manchester. www.manchesterthreerivers.com) where I took that exciting class. The area, north of the City Center, is known as The Green Quarter. It's also home to some secret queer parties such as **Homoelectric** (www.facebook.com/Homoelectric-16499670131).

A Manchester icon, the **Mackie Mayor**, is another example of reclamation. This former meat market on Swan Street was in disrepair for decades, however, it has been brought back to life by the team behind the wildly successful Altrincham Market. The bright food court has a wide range of options (from Thai cuisine and pizza to fish and chips) with chalkboard menus changing throughout the day.

My hotel, too, **The Edwardian Manchester** (Peter Street Free Trade Hall, Manchester. Tel: +44-161-835-9929. www.radissonblu-edwardian.com) is in an impeccably revived building. It was formerly the Free Trade Hall where the likes of The Smiths, Shirley Bassey, Leonard Cohen, The Ramones, Gladys Knight, and Abba performed. The most important performances to have taken place here, though, are by Bob Dylan in 1966 and a concert by the Sex Pistols for only 30 people (in audience were New Order, The Buzzcocks, Simply Red, and even Morrissey). The hotel now is a comfortable place to call home in Manchester, located in the City Center, where guests will get all the amenities they need. My favorite activity at the hotel during my stay was a visit to the spa and a swim in the indoor pool.

The hotel is also making waves for its restaurant, **Peter Street**

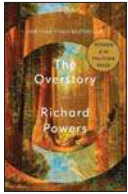
Kitchen, which opened as a part of the hotel's multi-million-pound renovation. This place is for 'shared dining' and consists of small plates from two different cuisines: contemporary Japanese and Mexican. The result is surprisingly wonderful.

The next day I take a truly fabulous tour of the ultra-hip Northern Quarter. The tour is called **The Modern History of the Northern Quarter As Told Through its Public Art** (www.theskyliner.org/tours). I love having blogger and historian Hayley Flynn take me along to uncover the story of the Northern Quarter, from its humble beginnings as a hub of cotton manufacturing to one of the city's best-loved bohemian areas, as well as home to the city's best and brightest street art. She is wildly knowledgeable about the neighborhood and points out everything from major art installations to tiny pieces that most Mancunians would walk right by. The neighborhood is buzzing on this Saturday, too, and we walk into shops like *Queer Eye's* Tan's favorite clothing shop in Manchester (he lived here) **Afflecks** (52 Church St, Manchester. Tel: +44-161-839-0718.), which is dubbed "an emporium of eclecticism, a totem of indie commerce" and has some of the best-curated stock of clothes I've ever seen.

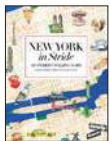
That night in the Gay Village, everyone seems to be out enjoying the first warmer spring nights. Drag queens mingle with sashay-wearing 18 year olds who dance on the cobblestone streets in front of stag parties. I think about my entire trip to Northern England and I recall the flavors of the food, the sense of humor and love from the people, and the fascinating history of this exciting region. "Strong, flavorful, loud, a bit moody, colorful, with some spice thrown in," describes it perfectly. ■

travelbound

Hot Type for Savvy Travelers by Jim Gladstone



It's rare for a single novel to combine stunning prose style, emotionally engrossing storylines, undeniable moral gravity, and several college semesters' worth of esoteric information. When such a book comes along, it deserves to be celebrated. And in the case of Richard Powers' ***The Overstory*** (W.W. Norton. \$18.95. www.richardpowers.com), it has been. This decades-sweeping work of compassion for humanity and for the natural world that we both depend upon and destroy, won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize and was named a best book of the year in publications including *The Washington Post*, *Oprah Magazine* and *Time*. LGBTQ folks will have their minds opened further by Powers' compelling argument that we must appreciate and honor diversity, not just among people, but all living creatures. In early chapters that could stand alone as brilliant short stories, we meet the novel's nine central characters, including an Airforce veteran suffering with PTSD, an Asian-American engineer-turned-therapist, a paraplegic Indian American computer genius evocative of Stephen Hawking, and a brilliant botanist with a theory that plants communicate with each other. Each of these people has an early-life encounter with a tree that makes a profound imprint on their souls. In a plot that feels organic rather than coincidental, these disparate individuals end up joining forces as eco-warriors. Together, they take a stand against both the lumber industry and the Humans First sense of privilege that drives squandering of natural resources. While the book is punctuated with heartbreak and tragedy, Powers manages to end things with a glint of hope. His characters blossom with new levels of human empathy as they discover their deep-rooted connections with nature.

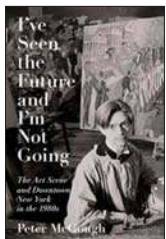


New York in the springtime is a walker's paradise, with surprising changes of scenery around every corner. While aimless meandering has pleasures of its own, two new books from Rizzoli guarantee that your rambles will reap rewards. ***New York In Stride*** (\$27.50. www.rizzoliusa.com) features neighborhood-by-neighborhood strolling itineraries, carefully curated by Jacob Lehman, who focuses on historical buildings, architecture of note, and public art, turning streetscapes into galleries for the wandering eye. Charming watercolor illustrations by Jessie Kanelos Weiner whet your appetite for exploration without the spoiler effect of photographs that show you just what you're about to see. You can pick up a copy at one of the small shops spotlighted in Cleo LeTan's ***A Booklover's Guide to New York*** (\$27.50), which features over 200 general and specialty bookstores (Mysteries! Cookbooks! Plays!) along with literary landmarks, from Truman Capote's one-time home to opulent private libraries.



In 2016, Garth Greenwell dazzled readers with his slim, precision-crafted diptych, *What Belongs To You*, an elegant, acutely felt fictionalization of his time teaching English and exploring his sexuality on foreign turf. Now, with ***Cleanliness*** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$26. www.garthgreenwell.com) he returns to Sofia, Bulgaria to delve further into the lives and psyches of his characters in a series of connected stories. Through Greenwell's immaculately detailed prose, readers will experience the exquisite high-tension version of gaydar that one must develop in a country where homosexuality is forbidden. In one section, the narrator takes his young Bulgarian lover on a trip to Italy. They slowly make their way through a museum gallery, taking note of the artwork's most minute details; there's an echo, and an elevation, of cruising in this scene. This same sensitivity to subtle nuance and encoded meaning makes the book's two keystone scenes of S&M sex particularly stunning. Yes, the action is hot, but Greenwell's cool intellectual take on it packs an even greater wallop.

"Not lovers/though we loved; Not boyfriends; though we were friends and still boys in most ways...; Not partners/Though we parted." In 1992, Mark Bibbins watched as hundreds of helium balloons were set aloft as part of an AIDS memorial. A dozen of them were launched in honor of his own companion, who had passed away at age 25 just one night before. Bibbins elegiac new book, ***13th Balloon*** (Copper Canyon Press. \$17. www.markbibbins.com), is a single novella-length poem, accessible to even poetry-averse readers. Like its namesake, the verse floats across time and space, moving gracefully from the present to the past. Throughout the poem, Bibbins refers to books he's read, memories of his long-gone friend rising up between the lines. Like great literature, he suggests, great love and great grief never truly leave us behind.



AIRPLANE READ OF THE MONTH

"Oh my gawwd," he shrieked. That pretty much sums up the overall tone of ***I've Seen The Future and I'm Not Going*** (Pantheon. \$29.95. www.mcgoughandmcdermott.com), the screaming mimi of a memoir by industrial grade eccentric and one-time art world darling Peter McGough. He spills tea and drops names with Page Six fervor from start to finish, but never quite manages to pull together any retrospective wisdom. For over 40 years, McGough was the creative, and sometimes romantic, partner of David McDermott (now living as a tax exile in Ireland). Staples of the early 80s Lower East Side scene, they collaborated on paintings and photographs that chronicled their bizarre, time-defying lifestyle: In downtown tenements and upstate country houses, they decorated and dressed like Victorian dandies, frequently denying themselves modern comforts like, oh, electricity. Yet, somehow, they didn't find any anachronism in partying hard with Warhol, Basquiat, Schnabel, Steve Rubell and dozens of other bold-faced names of a certain Manhattan milieu. Their work was accomplished, providing them inclusion in two Whitney Biennials, and for a period earning them tens of thousands of dollars for each new piece. But before, during, and after that period, they had a wilfully naïve attitude toward money, spending profligately on real estate, horses, antiques, and foreign travel, perpetually teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. High-strung McGough is a shiny dragonfly of a storyteller, alighting on this party for a moment, that gallery opening for a page or two, then flittering on to this hot boy, that outrageous behavior, and so on. Disconcertingly, though, McGough's narrative style remains the same after he's diagnosed with AIDS and stubbornly dabbles with a pre-cocktail array of pseudo-scientific therapies, including Raw Foodism and spiritual babble. Miraculously, McGough ultimately agreed to take conventional meds and today, at 62, is still here to share his tales. His stories are a hoot, but you'll have to make your own sense of them.

BUSINESS CLASS



PATTI LUPONE

GORDON PROUTY

GIFTS AND GADGETS

TRAVELING GOURMET

WORLD EATS VENICE

PATTI LUPONE

Written by **Richard Nahem**

Edited by **Matthew Wexler**

She's played a charismatic South American dictator, a tyrannical stage mother, a baker making pies of human remains, the queen of cosmetics, a faded silent screen diva, a happy-go-lucky night club singer, and a single mother forced into prostitution. Patti LuPone's non-stop, five-decade career has spanned every conceivable medium: television, stage (musical and drama), opera, and recordings, in a range of roles very few actors have accomplished. Winning two Grammy Awards (Best Classical Album & Best Opera Recording: *Weill: Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 2008); two Tony Awards (Best Actress in a Musical, *Evita*, 1980, and *Gypsy*, 2008); and two Olivier Awards (Best Actress in a Musical, *Les Misérables*, 1985, and Best Actress in a Supporting Role in a Musical, *Company*, 2019) LuPone's talent has been justly rewarded.

Part of the first graduating class of Juilliard's drama department in 1972, along with Kevin Kline, her theatre career blossomed in the mid-1970s. Early on she showed off her versatility as a serious actress with her Broadway debut in *Three Sisters*, followed by her comedic and musical talent as Rosamunde in the musical *The Robber Bridegroom*, for which she was nominated for her first Tony Award.

Although LuPone said, "*Evita* was the worst experience of my life," the 1979 musical made her a star. It was also one of the first Broadway shows to use television commercials, making LuPone a household name with her dominating presence as a blonde siren singing "Don't Cry for Me Argentina."

Along with the fame of *Evita*, LuPone gained the title of a diva. "The word diva to me means doing something supernatural with something natural" is the way LuPone interprets "diva."



Patti LuPone (Joanne) Company

Photo: Brinkhoff Mogenburg

In the 1980s, LuPone's theatre career soared with plum roles in *The Cradle Will Rock* (New York and London productions), as Reno Sweeney in *Anything Goes*, and Fantine in the London production of *Les Misérables*. In 1988, LuPone married Matthew Johnston, a cameraman she met on the set of the television movie *LBJ*, in which she played Lady Bird Johnson.

In an almost 180 degree turn around, LuPone starred as a working, suburban mother in the television drama, *Life Goes On*, which successfully ran for four seasons on ABC from 1989-1993. The groundbreaking show was the first television series to feature an actor with Down syndrome.

In the ultimate diva role, LuPone starred as Norma Desmond in the musical *Sunset Boulevard*, which premiered in London in 1993. Real life created much more drama offstage than in the show when Andrew Lloyd Weber abruptly fired her and replaced her with Glenn Close, who went on to star in the Broadway production.

As part of the quirky, scaled-down,

Broadway revival of *Sweeney Todd* in 2005, not only did LuPone play the role of Mrs. Lovett, she also played the tuba in the show, a hidden talent from her high school band years.

Proving her fearless talent once again, LuPone more than pulled out all the stops as Mama Rose in a revival of *Gypsy* in 2009, bringing to the role a new intensity and depth not seen before, especially in the truly gut-wrenching rendition of "Rose's Turn." The role garnered LuPone every major acting award that year, including her second Tony.

In 2019, LuPone had a juicy role as a vengeful and vulgar landlord in another groundbreaking television series, *Pose*, created by Ryan Murphy, about the drag ball culture and trans-community in New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Years ahead of her time, LuPone fearlessly portrayed strong-willed women who weren't afraid to speak their minds, mirroring them in real life with her pull no punches opinions about life, show business, and politics.

Fresh off the sold-out London run of *Company*, for which she received an Olivier Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical, LuPone returns to Broadway this spring playing the same role of Joanne in the Broadway revival. LuPone breathes new life into this iconic character, putting her unique stamp on the role of the boozy New York City housewife, as though we were seeing the character for the first time.

Who were your first entertainment idols, and what attracted you to them?

Bette Davis and Edith Piaf. They are still my role models. They were courageous. They led with open souls. They were not conventionally beautiful, and yet they were mesmerizing.

What came first to you, becoming an actor or a singer?

They go hand in hand. I couldn't sing without acting the story of the song.

You were in the first graduating class of Julliard's Drama Division and studied with John Houseman, which is pretty impressive. Who were some of your teachers, and which of them had a lasting impact on your career?

John Houseman was the artistic director along with Michel Saint-Denis of the Drama Division from the beginning. The teachers that most affected me were Jacques Lecoq, Anna Sokolow, and Marian Seldes.

Did winning the Tony Award for *Evita* open up your career in a big way? What roles and opportunities were you offered?

Winning the Tony did nothing for me. The only role I was offered was Lady M in *Macbeth*. I thought, "Haven't I been playing her for the last two years?"

After playing women who were fighters and larger than life characters, what was the transition like playing a toned-down mother of two children in *Life Goes On*?

I found the writing of Libby Thatcher such a poor portrayal of contemporary working mothers. I wished it had not been the patriarchal environment that it was. It was actually quite boring.

You recently played a Leona Helmsley-like character in the series *Pose*. Was it fun playing that role? What was it like working with Ryan Murphy and cast of the show?

On *Pose*, I played a character loosely based on Leona Helmsley. I was so honored to be a part of the show, and I have such respect and admiration for those Warrior Goddesses. They are brave and beautiful. Billy Porter is so wonderful in it as well, and Ryan Murphy is a kind of savior because he brings into focus the disenfranchised and the minorities.

What was it like shifting from playing the leading lady to being in an ensemble cast in *Company*?

It did not take any adjustment. I'm a trained actor who has worked in ensembles my entire career. I believe the whole picture is more interesting.

Is there a role you would still like to play that you never have?

I don't think that way. I'm just grateful and happy when roles do come my way.

What was the most difficult role to prepare for and then play? Which role was the most fun?

Evita was the most difficult role to prepare for and play. I couldn't sing it. It took a long time to be able to walk onstage with confidence. Rosamund in *The Robber Bridegroom* was probably the most fun to play—a slapstick comedy.



Anything Goes

Photo: Brigitte Lacombe



Evita

Photo: Martha Swope



War Paint

Photo: Joan Marcus

Gypsy



Photo: Joan Marcus

Sweeney Todd



Photo: Paul Kolnik

Which character do you identify most with, or is most like you?

Every character I've played is an aspect of me.

You've had a long-time affinity with the gay community, and are also very vocal in the press about gay issues. Last July you tweeted a message to Lindsey Graham: "Lindsey Graham you are a disgrace. On a personal note, why don't you just bite the bullet and come out. You might just come to your senses."

What was the reaction, good and bad, and what was your purpose for posting it?

The reaction was mixed to the Lindsey Graham tweet. I tweeted it because he's an idiot and because I think he's closeted. If he were true to himself, he would be a much better human.

You've been vocal, both onstage and off, for your disdain for cell-phone use in theatres. What actions would you suggest producers take to encourage more attentive audience behavior? Do you think Actor's Equity should get involved or make recommendations toward solutions beyond pre-show announcements?

Actors should not be responsible for policing those few people who eat, use their cell phones to text or film, or do anything that might disrupt the experience for the rest of the audience, but we are. I don't know what else can be done. I just know I don't want to have to stop a show.

With a career spanning more than 40 years in the theatre industry, you've worked with a range of directors. Who has created the most collaborative work environments for you to excel at your craft and how?

Marianne Elliott and Michael Greif are two of the most collaborative directors that I've ever worked with. I can't tell you why. Perhaps they respect the actors they cast.

Has your sense of humor eased the difficult times in your career?

My humor has saved me from everything. There's nothing like laughter, even in the most grim or tragic situations. ■

GORDON PROUTY

VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
WESTGATE LAS VEGAS RESORT & CASINO

by Jeff Heilman

As the third reincarnation of the original 1969 International Hotel, few Vegas buildings sing with history like the **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino** (3000 Paradise Road. Tel: 702-732-5111. www.westgateresorts.com). Ushering in the Vegas mega-resort era, the International was the world's largest hotel at the time. Barbra Streisand inaugurated the 2,000-seat Showroom Internationale with a month of twice-nightly shows. With the room warmed up, Elvis Presley famously followed with his record 837-show run.

The star parade stretches from Ann-Margaret, Tom Jones, and Liberace to current headliner Barry Manilow. James Bond came calling in 1971's *Diamonds Are Forever*, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock musical *Starlight Express* rollerskated here from 1993 to 1997.

Changing owners three times, including its golden stretch as the Las Vegas Hilton, the pioneering property, acquired by timeshare titan David Siegel in 2014, remains one of Vegas' greatest hits. Present day distinctions include women in prominent executive positions, rare for Vegas, led by charming President and General Manager Cami Christensen.

Gordon Prouty brings his own multifaceted talents to the Westgate. Formerly a senior level media executive working in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, the Syracuse, New York native also taught media and retail advertising at Syracuse University's prestigious S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

In 2015, he relocated to Southern Nevada to become group publisher for the Greenspun Media Group and its award-winning outlets including *Las Vegas Magazine* and *Las Vegas Weekly*. Three years later, Prouty joined the Westgate, where we met for this interview.



Photos: Westgate Las Vegas

With sartorial savvy and debonair dash, he cuts quite the figure. Impressive, too, was the setting for our conversation. Spanning the top 30th floor, Westgate's three Sky Villas are pure fantasy. At 15,000-plus square feet, the Verona is America's largest hotel suite. Amenities include the hot tub where Michael Douglas and Matt Damon went in flagrante for *Behind The Candelabra*. The Tuscany suite incorporates an updated portion of Elvis's former penthouse digs, while the two-story Versailles includes a panoramic outdoor terrace.

Swearing me to secrecy, Prouty and entertaining Master Butler Valentino Crespo shared some of the VIP bacchanals hosted within these gilded walls. Head spinning with those tantalizing images and echoes of Barbra's "Hurry, It's Lovely Up Here," I settled in for Prouty's dish on the property and his embrace of the Vegas scene.

How has switching hats treated you?

Since moving to Vegas, I became increasingly intrigued by the inside world of hospitality, entertainment, and gaming. Jumping into these fields has been an exciting eye-opener. No two days are alike. I'm working harder than ever in promoting the Westgate and telling our story to as broad an audience as possible. Like all things Vegas, building relationships is the key to success.

Las Vegas is synonymous with reinvention. Fifty years in the making, what defines the Westgate's appeal today?

The Westgate's ongoing legend parallels the history of Vegas itself, especially when it comes to entertainment. Virtually every major Vegas act played here. We keep that tradition alive with acts including the Barry Manilow residency and Jennifer Romas' SEXXY Show. Neighboring the under-expansion Las Vegas Conven-

tion Center since day one, the resort continues to host and support major sporting events, conventions, and trade shows.

Since taking over in 2014, Westgate Resorts has invested more than \$275 million in ongoing renovations to keep our appeal sharp. Unique features include the world's largest race and sports book and historic Benihana Village.

Above all, our people set us apart in the market. Nearly one-third of our 2,200-plus team members have worked here for 20 years or longer, including 50 with more than 40 years of service. Our entire staff views the Westgate as family, guests included. We may not be the trendiest property in Vegas, but our people ensure that each guest has the best experience, tailored to their individual taste.

You've lived around the U.S. How does Vegas compare?

While often visiting for parties, conventions, and shows, I'd never considered living here. The pleasant surprises keep coming. Vegas is one of the friendliest places I've ever experienced, with affordable living costs and a real sense of community. You have the finest entertainment and dining options in the world all packaged in a manageably

sized city. There are wondrous regional attractions, too, such as **Red Rock Canyon** (www.redrockcanyonlv.org); **Hoover Dam** (www.usbr.gov/lc/hooverdam); and of course **Grand Canyon National Park** (www.nps.gov/grca). Friends and family love to visit, which is a plus. Thinking we'd only stay for a few years, my husband and I are now planning to retire here.

As a man "in the know," which Vegas diversions would you recommend for visitors, gay and otherwise?

Las Vegas overall is very LGBTQ-friendly, so these options generally work for everybody. Westgate's **Edge Steakhouse** (Tel: 702-732-5277) was a personal favorite even before I joined the property. Helmed by Michelin-trained Executive Chef Steve Young, the restaurant was named TripAdvisor's number one steakhouse in Las Vegas in 2019.

Long-timers **Piero's Italian Cuisine** (355 Convention Center Drive. Tel: 702-369-2305. pieroscuisine.com), and **The Golden Steer Steakhouse** (308 W. Sahara Avenue. Tel: 702-384-4470. www.goldensteerasvegas.com), a 1958 heirloom featuring booths where Frank Sinatra and Elvis once dined, offer a true taste of vintage Vegas.

On the newer side, I've enjoyed **NoMad** (3773 Las Vegas Blvd. Tel: 702-730-7000. www.thenomadhotel.com/las-vegas/dining) restaurant at the new NoMad Las Vegas Hotel within Park MGM. I also like Asian-fusion **Greene St. Kitchen** (4321 W. Flamingo Road. Tel: 702.489.2129. greenestkitchen.com) at the PALMS Casino Resort.

Off-Strip favorites include steak-driven **Echo & Rig** (440 S. Rampart Blvd. Tel: 702) 489-3525), with its own butcher shop. **Other Mama** (3655 S. Durango Drive #6. Tel: 702-463-8382. www.othermamalv.com), is a hot new seafood concept with a great raw bar and cocktails.

Other classy spots include the 23th-floor **SkyBar** (3752 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Tel: 702-590-8888. www.waldorfastorielasvegas.com/dining/skybar) at the Waldorf Astoria, and **Lakeside at Wynn** (3131 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Tel: 702-770-3310. www.wynnlasvegas.com).

Off-Strip watering holes include **The Golden Tiki** (3939 Spring Mountain Road. Tel: 702-222-3196. www.thegoldentiki.com). Great dives include **Double Down Saloon** (4640 Paradise Road. Tel: 702-791-5775. doubledownsaloos.com). **Herbs & Rye** (3713 West Sahara Road. Tel: 702-982-8036. www.herbsandrye.com) is a local hospitality industry hangout.

For LGBT options, **Piranha Nightclub** (4633 Paradise Road. Tel: 702-791-0100. www.piranhavegas.com) is a popular LGBT bar and dance venue. **The Garage** (1487 E. Flamingo Road. Tel: 702-440-6333. www.thegaragelv.com) is a more casual local favorite, with outdoor patio. LGBT-owned **DW Bistro** (9275 West Russell Road. Tel: 702-527-5200. www.dwbistro.com) hosts a lively Sunday brunch.

What about culture and entertainment?

With so many options, that's another tough one. Located near Downtown, **The Smith Center for the Performing Arts** (361 Symphony Park Ave. Tel: 702-749-2000. www.thesmithcenter.com) features wide-ranging programming, from Broadway shows to resident acts Myron's Cabaret Jazz and David Perricco Pop Strings Orchestra. The latter also performs at **Cleopatra's Barge** (3570 Las Vegas Boulevard South. Tel: 866-227-



Verona Living Room

5938. www.caesars.com), the famed 1970's-era live music venue and bar inside Caesars Palace, where the tented show, **Absinthe** (www.caesars.com/caesars-palace/shows/absinthe) is great adult entertainment. I also shamelessly recommend **The Magic of Jen Kramer** (www.westgateresorts.com) here at the Westgate. Jen is the only female headlining magician in Vegas and her show is incredible.

For Vegas history buffs, guided tours of the retired signs in the Neon Boneyard at the **Neon Museum** (770 Las Vegas Boulevard North. Tel: 702-387-6366. www.neonmuseum.org) are a must. Notable installations include the martini glass-shaped "Red Barn" sign. Converted from an antique store in the early 1960's, it was one of Vegas' first gay bars, featuring the "FB Follies" drag show.

The nearby **National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement** (300 Stewart Avenue. Tel: 702-229-2734. themobmuseum.org), or Mob Museum, is another arresting Downtown visit, complete with speakeasy-style bar.

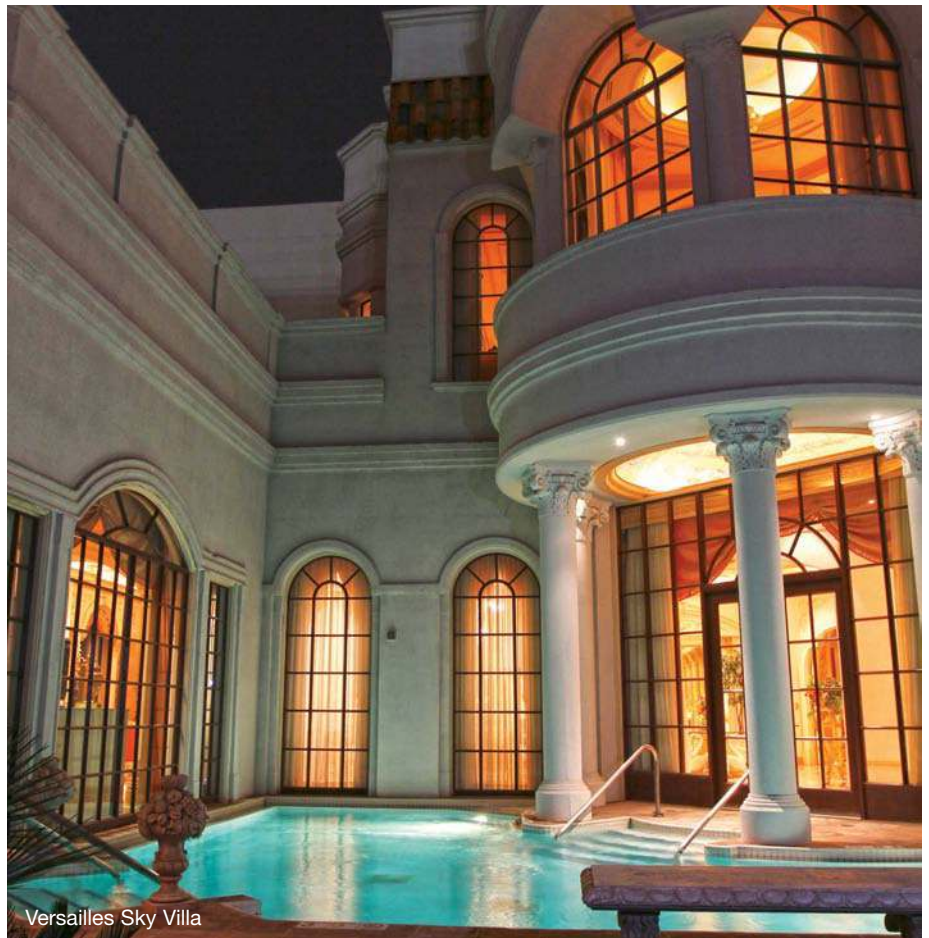
Hidden gems include **Mondays Dark** (www.mondaysdark.com). Staged at **The Space LV** (3460 Cavaretta Court. Tel: 702-903-1070. www.thespacelv.com), this twice-monthly variety show was created by host Mark Shunock. He's a former hockey player and acclaimed actor well known in the area for emceeing the Vegas Golden Knights, Magic Mike, and a host of other things Vegas. Featuring Hollywood and Strip talent, musical acts, athletes and celebrity chefs for 90 minutes of chat, entertainment and laughter, each show aims to raise \$10,000 in 90 minutes for a different charity.

If traveling here in August, **Aid for AIDS of Nevada** (afanlv.org) holds its annual Black & White Party. Marking 34 years in 2020, it's one of the largest and most popular fundraising events in Las Vegas.

And I'm really excited about **Light Ball Las Vegas** (www.lightballvegas.com). My good friend Lena Giroux is bringing ballroom culture to Vegas in 2020 with this new event featuring guests from *Pose* and other ballroom legends from New York and Los Angeles. ■



Barry Manilow is Appearing Through 2020 at The Westgate



Versailles Sky Villa

great stuff for the
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BLUETOOTH HEADPHONES

Finding quality Bluetooth headphones at a decent price isn't an easy task. Luckily, **iFROGZ** has created an excellent pair. If you're not familiar with the brand, it's a sister company to the popular charging brand, Mophie. So find your favorite song, pop on these headphones, and take them anywhere you want to go. \$49.99. **Zagg.com**



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STONE PAPER?

Looking for an ethical choice in your travel products? Well, **A Good Company's** stone notebook is a sure bet. Pulverized stone creates the smoothest paper you'll ever feel. Plus, the notebook is actually *climate-positive*! And what better way to write on your notebook than with a sustainable pen made from meadow grass? Crisp, bold, and sleek, this product makes you feel proud to be helping the planet. Notebook: \$23, Pen: \$6. **Agood.com**

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VENICE, ITALY

by Arthur Wooten

My first trips to Venice were almost entirely focused upon music and art. It may have been tickets to the world-renowned opera house, Teatro La Fenice, or possibly enjoying a selection of world-famous arias presented at Musica a la Palazzo in their sumptuous mansion overlooking the Grand Canal. It may have even been a simple and moving church concert such as at the Chiesa of San Vidal performed by extraordinary talented musicians. The museums to explore are endless, and then there's Venice herself. It's always a glorious experience to simply wander through her streets and crisscross over the canals, bridge after bridge, stopping periodically to take in her stunning beauty.

A few years back, however, a huge shift occurred. In my book, Venice suddenly became a culinary destination. There's no denying that Venetians were always enjoying splendid local produce or catching the freshest seafood in her waters, but it seems as though a new wave of culinary artists appeared while simultaneously, small trattorias and tavernas were upping their game.

Join me as I explore some of the best places to dine in this always-inspiring city by the sea.



Photo: Rudy Balasko

PANE VINO

On past trips to Venice I had marked a visit to Pane Vino on my culinary to-do list, but for whatever reason it didn't happen. Luckily, on my most recent trip, by chance, my travel partner Bud and I rented an apartment directly across the street from the restaurant. This was also the week of the 2nd highest Acqua Alta in 50 years! Our first night, we passed the Osteria as a waiter stood in the doorway. I expected him to wrangle us in, but no, he just pleasantly smiled. We walked on a bit and I turned around and he waved to me. I stopped Bud and said, "Let's go back."

His name was Massimo and although he would disagree with me, he spoke wonderful English. Being on the early side (jet lag was setting in) there were just a few patrons scattered throughout the charming and rustically decorated restaurant. After introductions were made and menus offered, two refreshing glasses of crisp and dry prosecco appeared, compliments of the house.

For appetizers, Bud ordered a plate of their grilled veggies: eggplant, zucchini, and peppers. All local and fresh, and the char on them was lovely. I ordered the sardine in saor, sweet and sour sardines. I surprised myself

because I'm not a fan of sardines, but this is such a huge staple of Venetian's diet that I thought I must give it a chance. The serving size was enormous with the sardines smothered in caramelized onions and toasted pine nuts and raisins. I took a bite and my eyes widened. Massimo must have been watching because before I knew it he was standing next to me. Still savoring the perfect bite and not speaking, I pointed to the dish and looked up at him. He smiled and nodded, knowingly. It was magnificent. The bones in sardines are edible and a great source of calcium, but you always feel them crunching away. These sardines melted in your mouth and the dish had a right balance between sweet and sour. The onions and raisins were the perfect counterbalance to the sardines and the vinegar, while the nuts offered the crunch factor and earthiness. These sardine in saor made the back of my palette sing!

Next up, Bud ordered the black tagliolini with shrimp and porcini mushrooms. Another fantastic dish. The black squid ink in the pasta was subtle but very distinct. It truly tasted like you were eating a mouthful of the Adriatic Sea. Coupled with the porcini and the shrimp, this was heaven and sea mixed into one.

This would not be our last visit to Pane



Massimo at Pane Vino

Photo: Arthur Wooten

Vino. On another night, I ordered as an appetizer their scallops and razor clams au gratin. The chef treated the dish with a flame broil. It was so simple yet amazing that I did something I've never done before. I signaled Massimo while I was still chewing and he walked over and smiled. I pointed to the dish and managed to express my joy by blurting out, "I'll have another, please?" He laughed as I confessed to him that this was the very first time I had ever ordered a dish twice in one restaurant visit. And each night we dined at Pane Vino, Massimo offered us complimentary ice cold limoncellos.

It was the combination of the food, the coziness of the tavern during a week of natural disasters, and Massimo's charm and skill that created an exceptional dining experience in the Dorsoduro neighborhood of Venice. I can't wait to return. *Calle Lunga San Barnaba, 2861. Tel: +39-041-241-0873. pane-vino-e-san-daniele-san-barnaba.business.site*

LA CARAVELLA

Located within the stunning Hotel Saturnia, and on one of the more fashionable promenades in Venice, Via XXII Marzo, La Caravella is an excellent choice for fine dining. Entering the restaurant is like stepping into a vintage sailing vessel. The wood paneling and lighting is warm and inviting, but

there's also a gorgeous outdoor garden in the back when the weather is nice.

This is first class service without being fussy or pretentious, and the food matches the attentiveness. Upon sitting down your waiter will offer you a complimentary hors d'oeuvre. Most recently we were served a marinated sardine.

For starters I highly recommend their burrata. Here's an example of a very simple dish that's transformed into a 5-star delight using the fresh local ingredients that are served in a stunning way. Burrata has an outer shell of mozzarella but inside is your reward, stracciatella and cream, which creates a luxurious texture. Surrounded by fresh crunchy carrots and zucchini resting in a cold tomato soup and topped with daterini (tomato) confit and basil, this dish is a standout.

Another starter I recommend is their sea selection Caravella style which is comprised of sea-bass, scampi in saor, stuffed squid, scallop, octopus, broccoli, pesto, salmon caviar, and soft pumpkin cream with ginger. It's a true feast for your eyes and your taste buds.

We've also enjoyed their spider crab with a lemon infused emulsion and parsley mousse, and the pumpkin and goat cheese pie on Parmigiano Reggiano cream with black truffle flakes.

For mains try their braised port cheeks,

Mixed Grilled Vegetables at Cantinone Storico



Photo: Arthur Wooten

which are fork tender, and their savory and sweet lacquered duck breast with orange caramel. Both entrees are deliciously decadent.

La Caravella is a dependable Venetian classic that offers seasonally inspired and innovative recipes. *Via XXII Marzo 2399. Tel: +39-041-520-8901. www.restaurantlacaravella.com*

CANTINONE STORICO

I first stumbled upon Cantinone Storico on a trip to Venice with Bud to experience Carnival. One night while meandering back towards our apartment after taking in all the sumptuous Carnival costumes people were donning throughout the city, we came upon Cantinone Storico.

Located on a side canal off of the Grand, it was peak dining hour so we peered into the restaurant through their ancient wavy glass windows and a waiter from inside encouraged us to come in. We entered into a glass vestibule and I could see that the restaurant was full except for one table for two. Tentatively, I opened the inner door so as not to disturb the diners and suddenly there was a very loud and startling crash. I had made my inconspicuous entrance. The head waiter rushed to my side and assured me all was fine. A stack of heavy leather-bound menus had been placed on a table next to the door haphazardly and I clearly knocked them over by opening the door. The restaurant, once realizing what had happened cheered. That's one way of breaking the ice.

We were greeted with open arms, sat down and were immediately offered an amuse bouche of deep fried tangy olives served on a stick. We ordered the house white wine, which was crisp and refresh-

Sea Selection at Caravella



Photo: La Caravella



Photo: Lunargento

Bruschetta at Da Gino

ing. and then decided to share an order of the appetizer of mixed grilled vegetables. What appeared was a gorgeous platter of the freshest local ingredients. It was a feast unto itself!

For entrées Bud ordered the fish of the day, which was a gorgeous red snapper served with vegetables and scallops, and I had lobster with spaghetti and red sauce. The pasta was al dente so it had just enough bite while the lobster was cooked to perfection and had such a sweet, buttery quality. To top off the meal, the restaurant offered us glasses of limoncello on the house.

The food was delightful, the owners and waiters were warm and friendly; it felt like we were welcomed into a friend's home. *Fondamenta Bragadin* 661. Tel: +39-041-523-9577. www.cantinonestorico.it

BAR RISTORANTE DA GINO

When museum hopping between the Peggy Guggenheim and the Accademia, be sure to stop by Bar Ristorante Da Gino. Equidistant to both museums as well as the Santa Maria Della Salute Church, it's a fantastic bar and restaurant to rest your tired feet and regain your sightseeing stamina.

Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, they are self-proclaimed "Champions of Bruschetta" and trust me...they are. Light and scrumptious with endless combinations, my favorite is the fresh local artichokes and asiago cheese.

But don't let the bruschetta overshadow their pasta dishes and sandwiches. If you allow yourself to start the day off with a sweet beginning, you must try their buttery

croissants overflowing with custard filling.

For an afternoon delight, try any of the various flavored macarons, muffins, cannoli, or their tortino ai mirtilli (blueberry pie). One of my favorites is their sweet palmiers (elephant ears). Add to this an espresso or an Aperol spritz, and Da Gino is a great culinary retreat between museums. *Dorsoduro* 853/a. Tel: +39-041-528-5276. www.facebook.com/daGinoVenezia

CAFFE CENTRALE

Caffè Centrale is located in the Palazzo Cocco Molin. It was once a palace owned by the Cocco family built in the early 1500s. Prior to being the restaurant, the space was an old cinema. Nicolò Santuri is the owner and manager of Caffè Centrale and has done a magnificent job of renovating the historic space, creating a hip and modern atmosphere while still acknowledging it's revered history.

There's a very comfortable lounge area next to the main dining room, and through a passageway there is access to their private dock if you happen to arrive by gondola or a water taxi. Located in the San Marco district, the restaurant is just steps away from Teatro La Fenice as well

as Piazza San Marco.

The menu is artisanal and features both meat and fish dishes, raw and cooked. They even make their own ice creams and fruit juices.

The crispy egg with *delice de bourgogne* cheese, porcini mushrooms, and black truffle was a work of art both visually and gastronomically. One of my favorite pasta dishes is their linguine di gragnano with yellow cherry tomatoes, stracciatella cheese, and basil. On other visits I've had the beef tenderloin in Amarone wine sauce with potato pie with spinach. It was seriously melt in your mouth gourmet comfort food.

According to Nicolò Santuri, "In the kitchen there is a very young team of chefs, but very prepared and with a great desire to create new dishes."

You can understand why I make at least one trip to Caffè Central every time I visit Venice. This is elegant and refined dining without being fussy or pretentious. Also, a major plus for a city that surprisingly closes up rather early, is that they are open late (Saturdays until 1 A. M.)

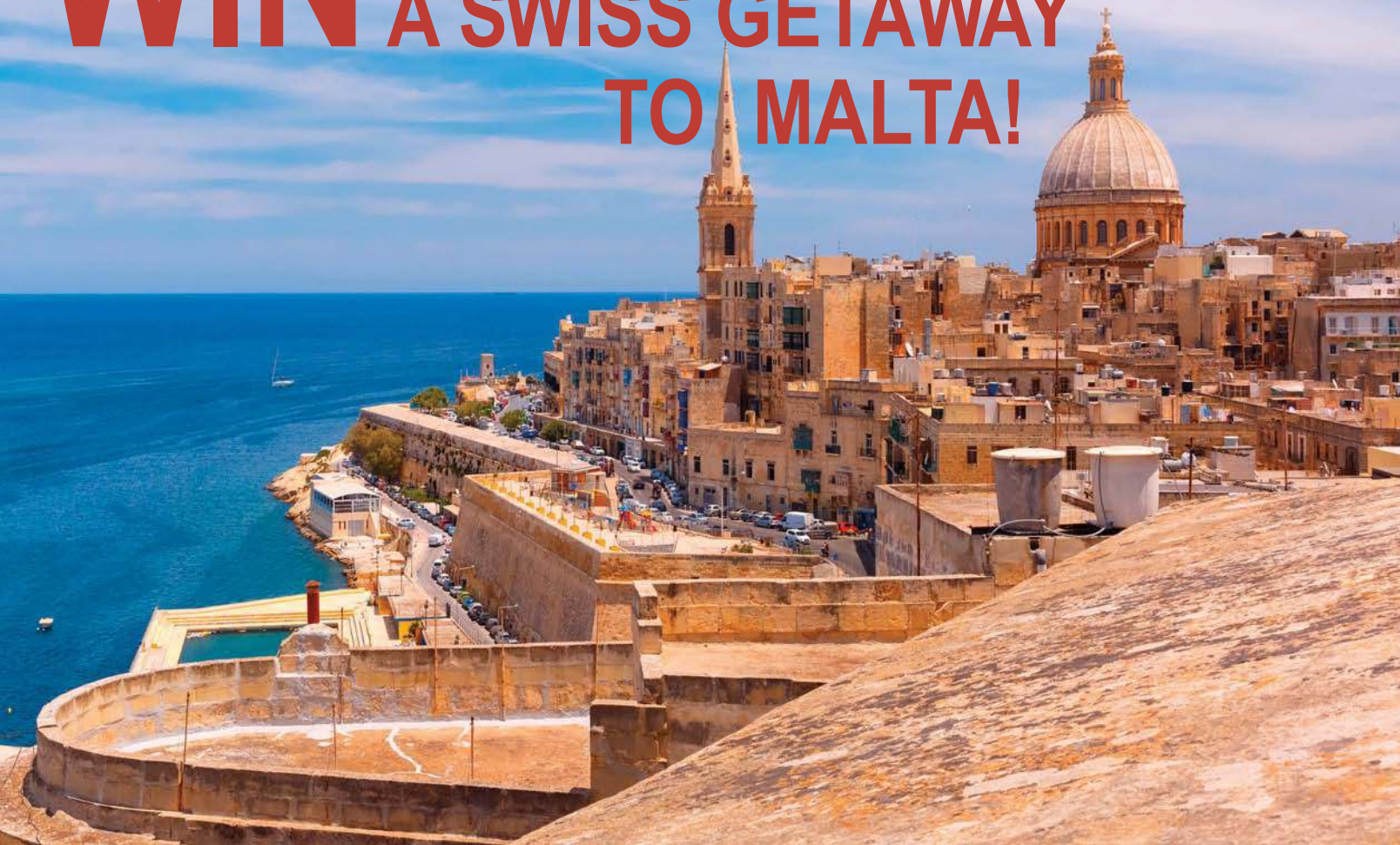
Piscina de Frezzaria 1659/B, Tel: +39-041-887-6642. www.caffecentralevenezia.com.

Linguine di Gragnano at Caffè Centrale



Photo: Nicolò Santuri

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MY FAVORITE FOOD STORIES

by Rich Rubin

In decades of writing about travel and food, I've experienced some foodie moments to beat the band. Some were hilarious, some infuriating, some downright touching, but all of them were notable in some way. Some of these experiences were so memorable that friends and I still laugh, or groan, about them years later. From the meanest waiter in the history of waiters, to innocent but hysterical foreign language glitches, to some servers that really know how to do it right, here are some of my favorite food stories from over the years.

CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR

This one actually happened to my friend Jackie, but it's so funny I had to lead off with it. Here she is in a Paris restaurant, where she insists on doing her ordering totally in French, shrugging off any translations because she is determined to do it "right." Now, normally I approve of immersing yourself in your host country's culture and language, but it can have some unforeseen results, to say the least. Jackie places her order, the waiter asks her some version of "are you sure, Madame?" She replies that of course she is sure. So he gives a big Gallic shrug, places the order, and a few minutes later returns to the table with exactly what she'd ordered: a single stalk of asparagus. Busted at this point, what could she do but smile, dig in, and pretend like it's exactly what she wanted?

SAY IT RIGHT

This story also involves a language barrier of sorts, or maybe more accurately a dialect barrier. I'm with my friend Larry in a fast-food place in Brooklyn (remember the location, as that's essential to the story). He likes tartar sauce on his French fries, so, not unreasonably, he says, "Do you have tartar sauce?" The young woman behind the counter (who must be all of 16) looks at him in bafflement and says, Brooklyn-style, "Huh?" He says "You know, tartar sauce." She replies, "Huh?" Well, we go back and forth with the "Tartar sauce/huh?" for several minutes till finally, I see the figurative lightbulb illuminating above his head. He looks her right in the eye and asks, politely, "Well, do you by any chance have Taw-tuh sawce?" "Ohhhhhh," she replies in delight, "Taw-tuh sawce!" and throws an extra packet or two into his bag. Sometimes you just have to speak the language!



Photo: Click and Photo

WHERE GOOD INTENTIONS LEAD

I had my own funny translation problem, though it worked the other way. I was in the lovely Voorbij Het Einde in Amsterdam. They knew me there because I was among the first writers to include them in an article, so they were happy to see me again. As I'm led to a seat, the host asks, "You're not vegetarian or anything, are you?" I reply that I don't eat red meat, and he gives me a menu and disappears. A few minutes later, as my server comes to take my order (fish and vegetarian tasting menu), he presents an amuse-bouche whose main ingredient is—ready for this?—elk. Seeing the look on my face, and given my order, he asks if this will be a problem. Honestly, I reply, it kinda is. A few minutes later my original guy comes to the table and says, "I'm so sorry. I didn't know the phrase 'I don't eat red meat,' so I translated it literally into Dutch and I thought it meant you like your meat well done." Oops! This would have been fine, and the end of the story, except that now the chef is determined to dazzle this "important" journalist with an elaborate vegetarian tower as an amuse-bouche, which is great except that at this I'm point dying of hunger. He insists, though, and soon he places on the stand an absolutely gorgeous little stack. The waiter picks it up, turns around, and promptly crashes into another waiter! My tower goes sprawling all over the place. It's fine, I assure them, I've seen it, it's gorgeous, it's all still on the

plate, but no: the chef must re-make it. End of story: it arrives just in time to avoid me collapsing from hunger, the fish and vegetarian menu is amazing, and I've learned a lesson about how language is not always our friend.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

I love the crazy signs you sometimes see, always unintentionally hilarious (at least, I assume they're unintentional). There's the packet of lettuce seeds in a Sonoma County establishment that proudly proclaims "Heat-resistant crop" before adding, as if apologetically, "(for lettuce)," which pretty much negates the previous statement. There's the (late and not-so-great) 7th Avenue Gristede's in New York that tried to jump on the bandwagon with the trend of mesclun (i.e., baby mixed greens), but for literally months had a sign above the greens proclaiming, "Mescaline \$5.99 a pound." (My first thought: where do I sign up?) My all-time favorite, though, is when I go to get dessert at a casino buffet in St. Louis, and find, among the gooey butter cake and banana pudding, a sign that offers what might be the most disgusting and hilarious mishap all at once. For I find that this buffet is offering "Chocolate Moose Cups." I try for a minute to think about what chocolate moose might taste like till I finally figure I'm best off not going there. Well, at least I got a good laugh in exchange for all the money I lost in the casino.

ONE POTATO...

This one happened to my friend Duncan, the son of Jackie (of asparagus fame). He's with a group of friends in a steakhouse, and his potato seems a little...off. He motions over the server and says "I think this potato is bad." Well, any ordinary server would take the potato back and bring him a new one. But this was no ordinary server, and as the table looks on in glee, the server proceeds to start slapping the potato, admonishing "bad potato, bad potato!" before taking it away and making the table's denizens totally forget there had ever been a problem. Sometimes a little humor goes a long way!

SERVER FROM HELL

Not all servers have quite the grace (or the humor) of Duncan's waiter, and my friend Lucy and I experience what might be the worst waiter in the history of waiters. We're in this Indian restaurant in Philadelphia, we've placed our main dish order and the waiter asks, "And did you want any bread?" Lucy says, "Well, actually, I'd love a poppadum." The guy's face turns every shade of red, and our puzzlement grows as he starts to sputter, and finally, in a voice loud enough to be heard back in India, he screams at Lucy, "A POPPADUM IS NOT BREAD!!!!" We sit there, aghast: has he really just yelled at her like that? Over something so minor? We're tempted to say "well, whatever it is, just bring it," or "well, no one actually said it was," or a simple, "yes, darling, we know," but we're both so startled we can't seem to form any words. I'll tell you something, though: even now, years later, if the server brings us bread, we'll inevitably say to each other when he/she leaves, "That is NOT a poppadum, which as you know IS NOT BREAD!" Well, I guess he unintentionally provided us with many future moments of laughter, though we still can't figure out what it was that so seriously offended him about the request.

SERVERS FROM HEAVEN

There is a right way to do these things, even when you're dealing with the one and only Lucy. In the late great F12 in Stockholm, all the appetizers were fish/seafood, which Lucy does not love. So she orders the tuna and asks for it well done. I go off to the rest room, and when I return, Lucy has a chagrined look on her face. The server, she tells me, has just come back to the table and pronounced these ineffably sweet words: "The chef asked me to tell you that if you want your tuna well done, he's happy to do it for you." (Telling pause.) "But...he wouldn't suggest it." Now THAT'S how you deal with someone who makes a request you don't think is right! Maybe the Poppadum Man could learn

a few lessons from her.

Similarly, I was with my family in the (sadly, also "late great") Café Terracotta in Scottsdale, where my mother, who famously dislikes "mixed up food," is having trouble finding something that suits her. She finally arrives at chicken in a chipotle-cherry sauce, and proceeds to start pulling out ingredients one by one. "Chipotle is spicy, right, can we leave that off?" "I don't know about cherries on my chicken." Well, this goes on for a few minutes, till finally the waiter stops writing, looks at her, and after a pause during which we're trembling at what he's about to say, utters these classic words: "Ma'am," he proclaims, "if what you want is a plain, grilled chicken breast we can do that for you!" It was a hilarious moment, but taught us all something important: ask for what you want rather than being upset that you didn't get it. They're there to serve you, not the other way around. (Though Lucy agreed to have her tuna medium-rare, and she loved it, so I guess you never know.)

MORE GOOD INTENTIONS

Sometimes, though, a server with the best of intentions can't quite get it right. Take my friend Joe, bless his heart. All I can say is, it's a good thing he's had success in the theater world because I don't think he ever had a great future as a waiter. I include his experiences here because one day you might run into a Joe-like waiter, and I beg you to be understanding. First he was working in an Italian restaurant. A woman ordered pasta and insisted, "It must be al dente!" Well, Joe of course had no clue what this meant, so he took a stab at it: "Ummm....ummm...we're all out of the al dente, ma'am! Is spaghetti okay?"

Which is nothing compared to his (equally brief) stint in a Japanese restaurant. Picture this: it's his first day there, and a more experienced server is "trailing" him (maybe his reputation preceded him?). At the end of the evening, trying to be encouraging, she says "Joe, you did really great tonight! I do think you should know, though, that they're not really called 'SH*T take mushrooms.'" I try my best to imagine the look on the customer's face when he offered them the SH*T takes," but I come up blank. Like I said, the restaurant world's loss is the theater's gain.

At least he was trying, which is all you can really ask of anyone. What I've found through these foodie experiences is that meaning well, and keeping a smile on your face, go a long way toward making the best of any misadventures that might occur. It's not world peace we're talking about here, after all. It's just food, whether bread or not, al dente or not, or even chocolate moose. ■

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—Keith Langston

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