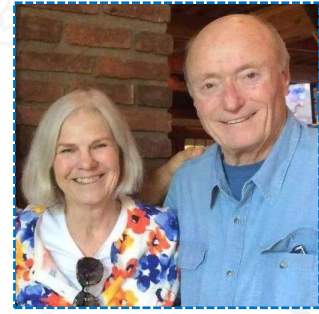


Editors' Note:

Craig Altschul and Peggi Simmons



There are two ways to travel, as Don Anderson aptly points out in this issue: In your comfort zone to Paris or way outside it to Palawan. When it comes to travel, to each his own.

We've discovered that, either way, unexpected things happen that are often the most memorable parts of the journey. They can be silly, scary, or bizarre. And they happen on cruise ships where everything is planned. Until it isn't. They happen when exploring famous and "never heard of" cities. Now we laugh, sharing the stories and memories. It's what makes travel so fulfilling and irresistible.

We'd been escorted by a gun-toting soldier to a tiny, scary-looking office in the bowels of the airport in Lahore, Pakistan, under a bare light bulb, facing a burly immigration officer, who seemed to be thinking, "What am I going to do with these two?" All because we had read online that a Visa wasn't necessary there. It was. We told him we were in the city to write a fundraising brochure for Foreman Christian College. He told us to sit right where we are and wait. After what seemed an eternity, he returned, shook our hands, and said proudly, "I am a graduate of Foreman Christian College. You may go now."

Very late one snowy, cold night, after thoroughly enjoying the huge Christmas Market in Prague and more mulled wine than we needed to get into the Christmas spirit, we found a cab and jumped in. The driver said, "Where to?" or something like that in Czech. We just looked at each other, hoping one of us would remember the name of the hotel or the street it was on. So, we drove around and around hoping we'd recognize it. We didn't.

"Oh, yeah," I said after 30 minutes and an ever-cranking fare meter, "We had sausages at a big public market a few blocks away from it." He found our hotel. Several years later, Go Travel's Bob Cook told us to always keep a business card from the front desk in our wallet.

Peggi was up early one morning, enjoying coffee on a cruise ship's balcony as we docked in Gdansk. I heard band music through the door. She yelled, "Get up and come check out the conductor." I came out in my underwear and rubbed my eyes. Leading a welcoming brass band was a giant rat.

We had checked into our nondescript hotel on a side street in Vienna several hours early one day. That evening, we were walking down a main drag, looking for a restaurant for dinner. A bundled-up man passed us, said, "Oh, hi there, Peggi," and kept on walking. That caused double-takes, for sure. We didn't know a soul in Vienna. After spending our entire dinner trying to figure out who knew Peggi, it finally dawned on us. He was the hotel clerk who had checked us in. Then, when we checked out a few days later, the morning guy behind the counter reached for my hand and said, "I'm Mr. Altschul, too. We enjoyed having you here, Mr. Altschul."

Oh, nothing big. Just memories. That's travel, and why we do it. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Perspective*. Join a YMCA Alumni Travel Club adventure. Choose, as Don says, to visit Paris or Palawan. Maybe both.

CRAIG ALTSCHUL, editor, and **PEGGI SIMMONS**, managing editor, have owned and operated *Craig Altschul + Associates (ca+a)* for 53 years. Their first client in 1974 was the Association of Professional Directors (APD). Their first assignment from Executive Director Bob Goff was to create a new magazine/journal. Thus, *Perspective* was born. Craig, Peggi, and colleague Steve Kendall combined to publish the magazine for 36 years. *ca+a* currently directs and produces communications programs for YMCA Alumni, including this new, modern revival of *Perspective*.

Cover Story:

Making the Right Travel Choices: Choosing Experiences You'll Never Regret

Julia Reviczky, Vice President, Go Travel



*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by.
And that has made all the difference." –Robert Frost*

Retirement changes many things, but perhaps the most profound shift is how we experience time. The calendar may be fuller or freer, but it finally belongs to you. Travel becomes less about squeezing in a vacation and more about choosing meaningful experiences... the kind that stay with you long after the suitcase is unpacked.

The most memorable travel stories rarely happen by accident. They come from thoughtful decisions: choosing the right pace, the right companions, and, sometimes, the right moment.

Over time, one pattern becomes clear. The trips retirees regret are not usually the ones they took but the ones they postponed.

Don't Save the Big Adventures for 'Someday'

It's easy to assume that the most ambitious journeys can wait. Antarctica's towering icebergs will still shimmer in blue-white silence. Giant tortoises will continue roaming the volcanic landscapes of the Galápagos. The rugged cliffs of Australia's Kimberley coast will rise from turquoise waters. The Northern Lights will keep dancing across Arctic skies. Ancient temples and vibrant street markets across Asia will still hum with life.

But in retirement, time is flexible. Energy is not.

Expedition travel often means stepping into small Zodiac boats, walking on uneven terrain, or spending full days immersed in exploration. Watching penguins waddle across Antarctic snowfields or standing beneath a sky painted in ribbons of green and violet light is extraordinary, but these experiences are best enjoyed when mobility and stamina are strong.

A common mistake is to reverse the order: saving physically engaging journeys for later years while opting for slower-paced travel first. In reality, it often makes sense to embrace bucket-list adventures while you feel capable and confident, and to reserve scenic rail journeys, relaxed river or ocean cruises, or extended cultural stays for later.

The goal is not to rush. It's to be intentional.

Choosing the Right Style of Travel

Not every trip fits every season of life. Selecting the right travel style can mean the difference between returning home energized... or exhausted.

Ocean cruising offers variety and ease. You might wake to a Caribbean sunrise, explore a Mediterranean harbor town by afternoon, and enjoy music and conversation onboard in the evening. For many retirees, it's a comfortable and social way to see multiple destinations without constant packing.

River cruising provides a more immersive experience. Smaller ships glide along storied waterways, docking steps from historic town squares and centuries-old cathedrals. Days might include guided walks through cobblestone streets, visits to hillside vineyards, and evenings watching castle silhouettes drift past your window. It blends convenience with cultural depth.

Expedition cruises focus on discovery in remote regions... remarkable and transformative, but requiring realistic expectations about activity levels.

Motorcoach tours and guided land programs vary widely in pace. Some move quickly; others allow longer stays where you can settle into local life by lingering in cafés, strolling open-air markets, or attending cultural performances.

Price is another important consideration. Budget travel can appear attractive, but lower upfront costs sometimes mean early departures, distant hotels, limited inclusions, or added fees. Spending more for well-located accommodations, knowledgeable guides, thoughtful pacing, and smoother logistics often transforms a good trip into a truly memorable one.

The right travel story isn't about trends. It's about matching the experience to your interests, mobility, and energy level today.

The Power of Traveling Together

Many retirees find that group travel adds unexpected richness. The right group doesn't limit independence; it enhances connection.

Shared travel replaces logistical stress with camaraderie. There's comfort in knowing details are handled and joy in turning to someone beside you to say, "*Did you see that?*"

Reunions are a perfect example. More than 100 guests from two neighboring high schools recently gathered for a five-night "*All Class*" reunion cruise. What began as a simple getaway became sunset conversations on deck, rediscovered friendships, and new memories layered onto decades-old stories.

Themed travel builds community just as quickly. Each year, hundreds of music lovers gather for a cruise featuring multiple Elvis tribute artists performing exclusively for the group. Guests dress for themed evenings, attend private concerts, and connect through shared passion. What begins as entertainment becomes fellowship.

Creative travelers find similar fulfillment. Knitters, quilters, and artists often travel with guest instructors, combining workshops with exploration. Imagine sketching beside a European river, quilting after a day touring historic towns, or knitting while sailing past vineyard-covered hillsides. Learning continues, but so does laughter and companionship.

Faith-based journeys add yet another dimension. Church groups trace Paul's footsteps through the Mediterranean or explore Scotland and Ireland through the lens of the Reformation. These trips blend history, worship, reflection, and shared discovery. Some travel with their own pastor; others join existing hosted departures. In either case, the journey strengthens both understanding and relationships.

For many retirees, group travel offers the ideal balance: independence within structure and companionship without obligation.

Travel as Legacy

Another growing trend is intentional multi-generational travel. Grandparents and grandchildren exploring together often discover that shared experiences create bonds no gift can replicate.

Whether sailing, visiting national parks, or joining guided family programs designed for multiple ages, the focus shifts from sightseeing to shared discovery. Standing together on a glacier overlook, spotting wildlife, or learning to cook a regional dish side by side creates stories that become part of family identity.

A single week of meaningful travel can shape conversations — and relationships — for decades.

The Quiet Advantage of Experienced Guidance

As travel options expand, so do the details: ship size, cabin location, terrain difficulty, seasonal weather, walking distances, insurance coverage, transfers, and cancellation policies.

Online platforms provide access... but not *perspective*.

The difference between a good trip and a regrettable one often lies in thoughtful planning: selecting centrally located hotels to reduce walking, choosing itineraries that fit your mobility, understanding the true pace of a tour, or recognizing when a small-group experience would be more comfortable than a large motorcoach tour.

For retirees, especially, aligning travel style with current interests and abilities is essential. Planning is not simply about reservations; it is about protecting the experience itself.

Organizations such as Go Travel, YMCA Alumni's longtime travel partner, specialize in helping members, family, and friends navigate those decisions with care and clarity, ensuring the story you bring home is one of joy, connection, and fulfillment.

Writing the Next Chapter

Retirement is not the closing act of adventure. It is the chapter where travel becomes more deliberate, more personal, and often more meaningful than ever before.

Choose the adventure while you have the energy to embrace it. Choose the pace that allows you to savor it. Choose the companions who enrich it.

Because the most meaningful travel stories are not accidental.

They are chosen.

***JULIA (BALES) REVICZKY** is a second-generation travel industry leader and owner of Go Travel, a full-service travel organization founded in 1979 by her parents, Clint and Susan Bales. Go Travel is the longtime travel partner of YMCA Alumni. Julia spent eight years in Hong Kong with Costa Cruise Lines and Flight Center Hong Kong. She previously lived in Beijing, managing projects for About Golf. She is a graduate of Furman University.*

On The Road Again. The Way We Did It

Phil Wortman

“Still round the corner there may wait, a new road or a secret gate.”

– J.R.R. Tolkien



I don't know whether there is a right way or a wrong way to RV. There are as many ways to use RVs as there are types of RVs. This is the way we did it.

If you are thinking about RVing ask yourselves two questions: *“Do you enjoy being together in a restricted area for extended periods of time?”* That needs to be a resounding *“YES!”* (The main reason I retired at 55 was to spend more time with my wife, Gail, and our family.)

“Do you both have the same travel interests?” That, too, needs a resounding *“YES!”* (We decided that our goal was to enjoy seeing all that the United States had to offer, rather than traveling internationally.)

We set our plans and goals. We purchased a used 24-foot Class C motor home several years before I retired in 1994 to see if we enjoyed the so-called RV lifestyle. We took some short trips from our home in Lakeland, Florida to North Carolina and into the Keys. We loved it.

That was 32 years, four motor homes, and more than 300,000 RVing miles ago.

We choose *“motor homes”* rather than *“5th Wheels”* or *“tag along trailers.”* We wanted everything to fit in one unit so it could be used even while traveling. (Yes, we know that is not a safe practice, but we did it at times.)

Stopping is the critical issue when driving a 30+ foot unit towing a jeep or a double tandem unit. Quick stops are not an option!! We kept to the right lane on Interstates; our maximum speed was 62 MPH, and on back roads, 57 MPH.

Just as the first Class C motor home served its purpose, the second Class C was perfect for the way we used it. We didn't have a *“toad”* (RV lingo for *“towing a car”*) for the first few years. As our travel plans and destinations changed, we began towing a Suzuki jeep to give us more flexibility in our touring options.

“Slide-outs” weren't available back then, and the extra sleeping space with the over-cab bed and pull-out sofa of our Class C was perfect for taking our three grandkids on week-long summer trips to places like Key West, Stone Mountain, and Silver Springs.

The Class C's were efficient, but they didn't have the livability we really wanted. They didn't have my recliner, a nice kitchen area, bigger bedroom and a shower. We had put 40,000 miles on the first one and some 90,000 on the second. The time was right to go for a new 36+ foot Class A.

I like it easy when stopping, whether just for lunch or for overnight. All I had to do with the Class A, when we stopped, was press a button, and it would level itself, press another button, and the generator would start providing electricity. We carried fresh water in our water tank for easy use. Then, if we wanted, we could press another button to expand the three slides. I

would be “home;” my bed, my recliner, my adult beverage bar, my bathroom. Who could ask for anything more?

Now our trips were longer. Over the next several years, we headed to the Midwest and the Upper Midwest, covering the states in between. We RVed across the southwest and checked off states, not forgetting the border states. We toured the northeast and into Canada, all the way up to Nova Scotia. If we hadn’t been there, we would plan to go there.

When traveling we would generally stop around 4 p.m. to beat the after-work traffic and enjoy the afternoon Happy Hour. We often would socially stroll around the RV park, checking out the various rigs and making new friends. The next morning, we’d leave around 9 a.m. to avoid the morning work traffic. After all, we were retired, why rush?

We had a boat, too. It was a 10-foot horizontal fold-up boat that looked like a large paddle or surfboard and was attached to the side of the RV. It unfolded into a hard-hull V-bottom boat with two swivel fishing chairs and a sun top, powered by an 8-horse outboard motor. We used it in waters from the Keys to the bayous of south Louisiana and the upper lakes of Minnesota.

We kept our home in Lakeland and were fortunate to keep our RV right beside our house, with full hookups and a sewage dump site. We kept the RV fully-loaded and ready to go for a quick “get-away” trip. It also served as an additional place to stay when the whole family would descend for the holidays. (Actually, Gail and I would give the family the house, and we’d escape into the RV in the late evening.)

All the time, we were nearing our goal of visiting all 50 states in an RV. Of course, that presented a problem. Walmart, Costco, or Camping World – none had flotation devices for RVs so Hawaii was out of the driving picture, so took a cruise there instead.

That left the “big RV trip” – Alaska. Gail and I liked to travel alone. That let us move, and sightsee on our own schedule without worrying about others’ preferences. We felt the same as we headed out to Alaska.

We left in June and headed up through the Carolinas into Michigan through Sault Ste. Marie, around Lake Superior and across Canada to Calgary. Then up to Banff National Park to Jasper. We cut across to Grand Prairie to head north to Dawson City and into Alaska at Chicken.

Once in Alaska we went everywhere a RV could go ... north to Fairbanks, south through Anchorage to Homer and Valdez and in-between, then down to Skagway.

It was now early September, and we had driven 7,600 miles. We took the ferry back from Skagway to Prince Rupert, then down to Vancouver to begin our return trip home.

Our goals were achieved. Our best memories are our times on the road with just the two of us. We have recently sold our last Class A. It had over 97,000 miles on it. We had “*been there and done that.*” There are many, many stories to tell; we still get the pangs to go, and miss having it conveniently parked beside the house. But it was time.

RVing may not be for everyone, but it was great for us. That’s the way we did it.

***PHIL WORTMAN** of the Willis YMCA Alumni Chapter, began his YMCA career as a physical director with the YMCA of New Orleans. The University of Georgia graduate retired as CEO of the West Central Florida YMCA. He is best known for 50-plus years as a key staff member and primary curricula writer for the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly Leaders School. "Mr. Phil" and his wife, "Mrs. Gail," were recently named to the Blue Ridge Assembly "Legends of New Orleans" room. He is a recipient of YMCA Alumni's F. William Stahl Award, AYP's Roberts-Gulick Award, and is a member of the Southeast YMCAs Hall of Fame.*



Open Up Your Comfort Zone: Paris Or Palawan?

Don Anderson

“They call me a dreamer, well maybe I am. But I know that I’m burnin’ to see those faraway places with the strange-sounding names. Callin’, callin’ me.” –Bing Crosby

One of the great joys of being old, retired, and having a little money (thanks, Y Retirement Fund) is that we get to travel to wonderful places.

On one end of the travel spectrum are commercial tours and cruises where everything is neatly scheduled for you and well organized to provide maximum creature comforts.

Simply show up at the embarkation point, and you are taken to famous places, eat wonderful food, and all arrangements are taken care of for you and a thousand or more of your closest friends. And, there is nothing at all wrong with that kind of travel.

The other end of the spectrum, however, might at first seem a little intimidating for us “aging seniors” who are likely concerned about planning an experience in an unfamiliar part of the world. You know, “*Faraway Places with Strange Sounding Names.*” Let’s explore that option.

Travel to lesser-known locations should be fun, safe, and fulfilling. Spend some significant time in one or two places vs. seven famous tourist locations in eight days.

You may do this as a sightseer or maybe as a humanitarian project volunteer. You give up some conveniences, certainties, and comforts, but you also gain some significant perks.

Included in those are a deeper, more authentic connection with local people, spontaneity, control over your activities and schedule, and emotional/spiritual satisfaction if you are part of a meaningful project. You become less of a spectator and more of a participant.

My life has been enriched by more than 40 of these adventures over the past 30-plus years. They’ve been in places like the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Bhutan, Laos, China, Singapore, Indonesia, and other countries.

The locations have those often hard-to-pronounce names such as Bataad, Lijiang, Angkor Krau, Luang Prabang, Sapa, Mrauk-U, Mambajao, and Singajara.

Perhaps you have never heard of these places, but I assure you, they were not difficult to reach and offer wonderful experiences. Go Travel, YMCA Alumni Travel Club’s partner, can be very helpful for flights, hotel reservations, and tours once you know where you want to be based and for how long. Most hotels can also arrange local tours. It’s all very doable.

Consider this type of travel with a small group of friends or as part of a volunteer group. This might be a humanitarian or scientific project with a museum or university (e.g., an archaeological dig).

I say this because wandering around by yourself in exotic places makes you a target for bad stuff. Churches, service clubs, YMCAs, other NGOs, museums, and universities are sources for organized volunteer opportunities. Check online resources such as International Volunteer HQ (www.volunteerhq.org), the venerable Peace Corps, where seniors are welcome (www.peacecorps.gov), or Volunteer World (volunteerworld.com). All are reviewed by past participants to be legitimate and safe, though I have not personally used them.

You will find that shared experiences on small-group trips are a wonderful way to develop deeper relationships with others. Fellow participants on my humanitarian projects have become many of my closest friends.

Both the most pleasant and the most challenging experiences create bonds you will cherish and share for years.

There's a caveat: High-maintenance and needy people won't fit into this scenario. They won't enjoy themselves, and they'll make sure your fellow travelers won't either. It is often overlooked that who one travels with is at least as important as where one goes.

You want to be with people who can go with the flow when things don't proceed as expected. This happens frequently (even on tamer trips like cruises and motorcoach tours, even family road trips), but the adjustment can be your trip's highlight if you embrace it.

Many people our age are concerned about safety and coming home healthy and happy. It's a legitimate concern for all kinds of travel, so here's my straightforward assessment of safety issues on more exotic adventures.

There are four basic kinds of safety to consider: illness, injury, crime, and moral safety. Besides getting your required shots and meds before your trip, you need to focus on what you drink, eat, and on keeping insects away.

Drink only bottled or purified water, soft drinks, beer, and hot tea or coffee. Order your drinks with no ice made from local water. Don't believe anyone who tells you their local water is OK.

Eat only hot cooked foods and fruit. Avoid raw vegetables, including salads. They have been washed in water full of things you wouldn't consider condiments. Sharks kill about 10 people a year worldwide, lions 100, and mosquitoes 725,000. The lesson: Insect protection is imperative in tropical environments.

Use a repellent with DEET on your skin and spray Permethrin on your clothes before your trip. Having a fan blowing on you while you sleep helps, too. Enjoy swimming in salt water, but avoid exposure to fresh water in the tropics due to risks such as Schistosomiasis and Leptospirosis.

Consider vehicle transportation your greatest risk for injury. Choose your drivers and vehicle carefully and never indicate you are in a hurry. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes. Always use reef walkers or some other foot protection while wading.

The best ways to avoid crime are to go to bed early, keep most of your money and your passport in your room safe, heighten your environmental awareness, and stay out of bars and sleazy-looking places. If a place looks suspicious, it probably is. Follow your instincts.

Moral safety goes hand in hand with avoiding crime. Many travelers and expats project a negative image of Americans. Yes, the so-called “Ugly American” stereotype. These are the loud, self-centered men and women who can be found in nightclubs using their money to exploit the vulnerable. Stay out of these places and always demonstrate what a good American looks like.

Your behavior creates an impression that stays in the minds of the locals you encounter long after you return home. We need to adjust our behavior when visiting other cultures.

A big problem for Americans is that we tend to be too loud. That is considered rude and has many negative connotations in most cultures. Try to always be kind, gentle, polite, and soft-spoken.

Outwardly showing your frustration or losing your temper will lower people’s view of you. Don’t be pushy, demanding, or in a rush.

It is best not to talk politics, religion, or other sensitive subjects. Never criticize government or religious leaders, theirs or ours.

Elderly people are respected in most places, so don’t argue or embarrass them. Honor them. Other cultures have different ways of doing things. They may seem inefficient to us, but just do it their way and don’t try to fix it.

You worked at or ran a YMCA, so you certainly have the ability to put together a great two-week experience. Go to some out-of-the-way exotic places in our wide world. Slow down and avoid crowds. Pack light and don’t cram too much into your itinerary.

I am 85, and, as you read this, I am on Siquijor Island, Philippines, as a project volunteer, and then I will spend a few days in Hong Kong. I’ll stay at the YMCA, right next to the iconic Peninsula Hotel, and will be sure to enjoy “Afternoon Tea” at the Peninsula.

Airfare, meals, accommodations, surface transportation, and everything else will total about \$2,000. I’ll be gone for 17 days.

Open up your comfort zone. You’ll be glad you did. Be a guest, rather than a tourist. Your experience will be authentic and satisfying.

***DON ANDERSON**, a member of the Allen Stone Chapter of YMCA Alumni, retired as President and CEO of the YMCA of Honolulu, HI, after serving as CEO of the Berkeley-Albany, CA YMCA; VP, Financial Development of the Seattle, WA YMCA, and Program Director of the East Valley YMCA in Los Angeles, CA. He is the past chair of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR) and has twice been chair of the Honolulu Rotary Foundation. Don and his wife, Susan, live in Honolulu.*

What Was Your Favorite Trip Since Retiring? YMCA Alumni's 'Frequent Travelers' Pick Their Winners

Perspective asked several YMCA Alumni members known as “frequent travelers” about their favorite trip since retiring. Sometimes it’s not so easy to choose. As former Y-USA Executive Director Dave Mercer put it: “Asking us to write about our favorite trip is like asking who our favorite grandchild is? So many trips; so much fun.”



Dave and Joyce Mercer: ‘Down Under’ by Motorhome

Our favorite trip in the 25 years since retirement was a two-month-long motorhome adventure in New Zealand and Australia.

We went with a group, so everything was planned in advance. We knew where our campsite was when we left in the morning and traveled on our own during the day. We saw waterfalls, sheep, snow-covered mountains, and the country's sights. We even stopped by to see platypuses in their natural habitat. What a treat. We stopped at a sheep ranch and watched them shear one.

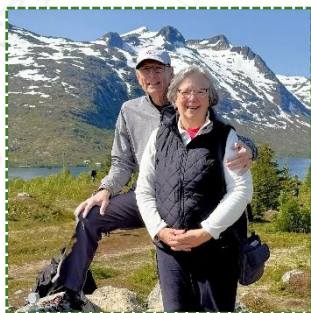
We saw Pancake rocks (heavily eroded limestone formations) and ate great seafood. Driving a motorhome around the roundabouts in reverse proved to be an interesting challenge.

We began in Christchurch on New Zealand’s South Island and ended in Auckland on the North Island. We watched demonstrations of the local Maori dance and culture.

We then flew across the Tasman Sea to Australia. We toured the East Coast, visited opal mines, and saw the Great Barrier Reef. We toured the iconic Sydney Opera House and gingerly took a “tightrope walk” on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

We flew to Alice Springs and Ayers Rock (now known as Uluru) in the Outback. We had a great dinner out in the open overlooking Uluru at night, rode a camel, saw plenty of kangaroos, and enjoyed dances and demonstrations by the native Aboriginals.

Dave and Joyce, members of the Allen Stone Chapter, have taken more than 50 pleasure trips since Dave’s retirement from a 43-year career with the YMCA. He served 23 years with the Los Angeles YMCA; 10 as President of the San Francisco YMCA, and another 10 as National Executive Director, YMCA of the USA. Dave and Joyce have been married for 67 years. The pair has five grandchildren, and two great-grandkids are on the way.



Patrick and Jan Murphy: Skål – Off to the Fjords

Since retiring in 2015, we've taken more than 20 longer trips, totaling more than 2 weeks of our time – some lasting up to a month. Usually, it's two big ones a year, but Covid caused some “we need to catch-up!”

We choose Norway as our favorite. We've been there twice, and we're ready to go back again.

Why? The scenery is otherworldly in its beauty. It seems to go on forever; the fjords, mountains, waterfalls, and wildlife are so close to the towns and cities you visit. We took two ocean cruises there, but also rented cars to venture beyond the ship's excursions. Plus, we lingered longer at the places we wanted to visit. Patrick enjoys photography, and a lot of our choices revolved around natural scenery as a result.

One Norwegian highlight was our quite chilly “Bird Safari” in Honningsvåg, above the Arctic Circle, where several of our YMCA Alumni Travel Club co-travelers were with us. Among the exciting sights were the seals, eagles, and hundreds of puffins.

Patrick and Jan celebrated 47 years of marriage in 2025. They have three adult children and one granddaughter. Jan was a high school math teacher for 25 years, and Patrick was a YMCA Professional for 35 years, mainly in Texas. He retired as CEO of the Central Texas YMCA in Waco. They are members of the Schreiner Chapter. Patrick is a past chair of the YMCA Alumni Travel Club.



Judy and Sam Wurtzbacher: Tourin' and Cruisin' with Friends

Retirement has a way of turning long-held dreams into real itineraries and rewards well earned. When Sam and I retired in 2013, we knew that traveling would become a priority, and traveling with friends would make it even more special.

Fellow retirees Bob and Judy Shafe, Steve and Denise Rowe, Bill Davis, and Kathy Pavey planned to take a special trip through Slovenia and Croatia in 2023. It felt like it added a layer of camaraderie – people who knew how to savor the moment, laugh easily, and appreciate both comfort and curiosity.

Our road trip through Slovenia with Bob and Judy was a relaxing adventure. We wound through emerald-green valleys and storybook villages, stopping often because no one was in a rush. Lake Bled looked like something painted for postcards, its island church rising from still waters. In Ljubljana, we strolled along the riverbanks and enjoyed café lunches.

Before meeting up with the rest of the group for a seven-day cruise through the Croatian islands, we traveled through Croatia, exploring Zagreb, Plitvice National Park, and Rovinj. We left the Croatian highways for open waters.

Life on board quickly found its rhythm: mornings with a delicious breakfast, afternoons spent touring each island, its stone streets and local history. Each island had its own personality – some lively, some peaceful, but all fascinating.

What made the trip unforgettable wasn't just the landscapes, but the people. Meals stretched into conversations, friendships deepened, and laughter echoed from deck to dock. It was travel without pressure, adventure with little strain. Retirement isn't about slowing down, but about finally traveling at your own speed.

Sam and Judy of the Marston Chapter enjoy living in San Diego and look forward to continuing their travel adventures. Sam's YMCA career spanned 42 years, starting in Southern California, then five years with the Canadian Y, and retiring as Executive Director of the La Jolla YMCA in San Diego. Judy served for six years with the Y in Southern California, then spent 26 years with the YMCA of San Diego County.



Craig and Ellen Schaefer: Ireland for her – Egypt for both

For Ellen, Ireland has her heart. We've been there three times; the last visit was a month-long trip to various small towns. (Forget Dublin – it's just another big city.) That was a vacation that included hiking and swimming in the Irish Sea, hanging out at pubs, and eating fabulous food.

For both of us, Egypt – Cairo, and sailing up the Nile. Go Travel arranged our private tour and took care of all the details, private driver, guides, and wonderful accommodations. The information poured into us each day was more than our little brains could retain. It is amazing to actually see the pyramids, King Tut's tomb, and all the temples. Because tourism is important to Egypt, security measures are present everywhere. We began one morning at 1 a.m., climbing Mount Sinai to reach the top by sunrise.

Craig and Ellen have taken many trips, since retiring, usually 2-3 major ones (2-5 weeks) each year, plus numerous shorter ones. Craig worked for the YMCA from 1967 to 1994, when he left to lead a nonprofit cancer organization. His last YMCA position was as the NE District Director in Fort Worth, TX.



Bill and Teri Hooson; 12 Years in Costa Rica; Family Travel to Homeland

All of our trips – family travel, travel with friends, and just the two of us – always include trying to get out of the most “touristy” areas, although we do enjoy visiting museums and historic sites. We seek out the restaurants, guesthouses, and natural areas locals visit.

Our favorite experiences have been in Costa Rica, so much so that after three visits, we purchased a villa with three other couples, which we enjoyed sharing with friends and family, as well as getaways for just the two of us. Costa Rica is an amazing place to explore, enjoy

nature, or simply relax. It has a rich culture, and the people are genuinely friendly. With regrets, we sold it at the end of the pandemic.

Bill's most memorable experience, however, was a recent two-week family trip back to his Norwegian homeland. Accompanying them were their son, Steffen, and his wife, Tabitha, and their 18-year-old grandnephew, Owen. The itinerary was planned around everyone's personal desires, from architecture to fjords to museums to mountains to family and friends.

On their second-to-last night, they were invited to a distant cousin's home for dinner. After a scrumptious meal and a delightful evening, as they were walking to the trolley station, Tabitha put her arm in Bill's and said, "Thanks, Dad. All your family and friends make me feel so welcome and loved. It makes me feel that I am really part of the family." Bill says, "It doesn't get any better than that!"

Bill and Teri have been married 45 years, are past co-presidents of the Weatherford Chapter of YMCA Alumni, and he is a former chair of the YMCA Alumni Travel Club Committee. Teri, now retired, is the founder and Director of Animal Control for Newton County, Georgia. Born in Oslo, Norway, Bill began his YMCA career as the Aquatic Director at the Cambridge, Ohio Y. He also served Ys in Elkhart, IN; Newark, OH; Milwaukee, WI; Lansing, MI; and Atlanta, GA. Part of Bill's portfolio in Atlanta was enhancing its partnerships with the YMCA of the Republic of Georgia and the ACJ of Costa Rica. They are parents of two grown sons.



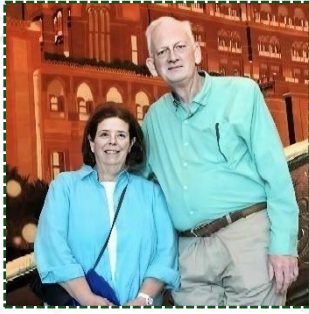
Lou and Mary Falk: The Bottom of the World – Black, White, Icy Blue

Our favorite trip has been an adventure cruise to Antarctica. It began with a flight to Buenos Aires, where we spent several days. Next was a flight to Ushuaia, at the southern tip of Argentina, where we boarded Le Lyrial, a 245-passenger Ponant cruise ship. The next two days were spent crossing the Drake Passage during some rare days when the waters were calm.

We arrived in the black and white world of the Antarctic Peninsula, where the only color we saw was the icy blue of the many icebergs, including A23a- the largest in the world at that time. As it was summer there, time ceased to exist with over 22 hours of daylight each day.

Every day featured at least two Zodiac landings, where we saw a zillion penguins and some science stations as we motored around the icebergs. "Ethereal" is the only word we can use to describe the quiet, peacefulness, and beauty of Antarctica, which, because of multinational treaties, will remain this way long into the future. We weren't so lucky crossing the Drake on the return trip. Waves over 30 feet gave us a great ride.

Lou and Mary have taken 89 trips across seven continents since Lou retired in 2002 as District Executive and International Program Director at the Hartford, CT, YMCA. He is the past president of the New England YMCA Alumni Chapter, where he originated a long-standing homebuilding project in the Dominican Republic, served as Vice President/East of the YMCA Alumni, and is currently chair of its very successful National Service Project. Mary was a lifeguard and swim coach at the YMCA and served as VP/Programs for the New England YMCA Alumni Chapter.



Kurt and Catherine Kaboth: A cultural, historical visit to India

Kurt and Catherine have been inveterate travelers ever since Yale sent Kurt to work in northern India in 1979. And so, given the opportunity to reunite with Church friends in Goa in 2020, they decided to take what became our favorite trip: an Azamara cruise along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, across the Arabian Sea to Mumbai, and then on to Goa. It was an amazing cultural and historical experience.

We visited Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Muscat. While impressed with the buildings and wealth of the seemingly westernized Abu Dhabi and Doha, we were most impressed with the slower pace of Oman. Along the way, we journeyed into the desert to witness falconry exhibitions and camel wrangling. There were tremendous museums and religious buildings that helped us understand the development of these cultures.

Mumbai brought us back to an India that had changed yet remained the same. The sights, sounds, and smells were familiar. Kurt, a train fan, was especially impressed with the enormous Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. We transitioned to land and air travel, and after a couple of days, we were in Goa with our friends in a quiet village outside the capital.

We then took a tour across Karnataka to Mysuru, visiting botanical gardens and wildlife reserves, and spending a night in an old British hill-station home (colonial era summer cottage). We also stayed at a look-alike of the “Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” (remember the 2011 British comedy?) and climbed 1,000 steps to the Shravanabelagola pilgrimage site. Then back to Mumbai and our way home.

Kurt and Catherine celebrated their 50th Anniversary last year aboard the Queen Mary II, the last of the great ocean liners. Kurt grew up in Indiana and attended Indiana University, studying business and law. He met Catherine there, who was studying comparative religions. When she enrolled in Yale University Divinity School in Connecticut, Kurt went to work for Yale on research in the U.S. and India. He later joined the YMCA Retirement Fund in several roles, including general counsel, and retired after 25 years with the Fund. Catherine has served four churches as a pastor and two educational institutions as a professor. A member of the Willis Chapter, Kurt is Assistant Treasurer of the YMCA Board for the World Brotherhood Fund.

The YMCA Alumni Travel Club and You

"Our Travel Club 'Land of the Midnight Sun' cruise was simply fantastic. Good friends, beautiful Norway, and excellent accommodations. We met new friends and saw fantastic sights."

--Pam Power, Sam Schreiner Chapter



Cruising the Danube River. To Paradise and Back from the West Coast. An Atlantic Crossing with a stop in exotic Morocco. The destinations already announced for the YMCA Alumni Travel Club's 2027 season continue the legacy that began nearly a decade ago.

What appeared on the surface as a routine Task Force meeting became a landmark event in a YMCA conference room in Tampa, Florida. A Task Force appointed by then-President Mary Carol Fish of the Mott Chapter and chaired by Phil Wortman of the Willis Chapter brought recommendations to the board that set our organization on an exciting new path.

The board approved the Task Force recommendations to change the Association of YMCA Retirees (AYR) name to YMCA Alumni, eliminate dues for first-year joiners, and respond to member surveys by focusing on a new mantra: **Connect, Travel, and Serve.**

And, from all that, the YMCA Alumni Travel Club was born. President-elect Dale Packer appointed Phil Wortman as its first chair.

A legacy of trips, cruises, and reunions rolled out. Two of the most memorable adventures each sold out in 2019. The first was a motorcoach tour of England, Ireland, and Scotland, followed immediately by a land-and-sea trip to Alaska.

The pandemic literally shut down domestic and worldwide travel for more than two years. However, the Travel Club instantly rebounded with a cruise into the Mediterranean, highlighted by a visit to the beaches of Normandy.

We cruised into stunning Scandinavia and its fjords north to the Arctic Circle; took a memorable motorcoach trip on Colorado's Historic Trains through some of the most awe-inspiring scenery in the world; another motorcoach tour through Scotland, including enjoying the world-famous Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo; joining Royal Caribbean's President's Cruise back to Alaska, a motorcoach visit through the Upper Midwest to beautiful Mackinac Island; YMCA Alumni reunions in jazzy New Orleans and into the sunny Caribbean, and more

The YMCA Alumni Board of Directors entered into a licensing agreement with Go Travel in March 2025 to fully manage and expand the Travel Club. Go Travel was founded in 1979 in Florida, growing into a major, privately owned agency with multiple locations across Florida and North Carolina, and a full online presence specializing in cruises, custom tours, and group travel.

The agency has been a trusted partner with YMCA Alumni since 2000, when they booked and managed our first reunion cruise for more than 400 members. National Sales Director Bob Cook has been an advisor to the Travel Club Committee from its onset. The new agreement calls for an advisory, not management, committee of our members, and travel to be booked and trips and carriers selected through Go Travel.

Here's how it works: All members of YMCA Alumni are automatically members of the Travel Club, allowing them, as well as their family and friends, to join in our group tours and to book

personal, individual, and family travel with Go Travel's knowledgeable agent/advisors. A significant rebate from all bookings is provided annually to the National YMCA Alumni treasury.

Go Travel has relationships with 3,000+ cruise lines and tour operators and can obtain group pricing and priority treatment, generally at discounted rates.

By Go Travel's booking with the most reliable entities in the business, there is no liability for YMCA Alumni, and trips are guaranteed to go, no matter how many have registered.

There's a caveat here, however. We call it "Snooze, you lose." Group space is limited and can often sell out quickly. That's especially true on motor coach tours (usually about 40 seats) and river cruises (with under 200 cabins). Even larger cruise lines to popular destinations can sell out their best staterooms across price ranges well in advance of sail dates.

Two vivid examples of this are realities for this year. Our Scenic Switzerland by Rail trip set for May sold out completely within a week, while our cruise that begins in NY Harbor for America's biggest 250th birthday celebration on July 4 sold out in just two days.

The lesson: When you see a trip announced in our Going Places newsletter or on our website that excites you, call our Go Travel agents right away and book it, even if it's several years out.

We all understand that *"life happens,"* and sometimes you may have to cancel your booking. Your agent will tell you the last day to do so for a refund. But you will get the best pricing and the best available cabin choices by booking early. And, you won't be shut out.

So, travel with friends on our YMCA Alumni adventures and be sure to book your personal travel, too. You will be very glad you did.

--Craig Altschul, Editor.

An Event and a Vacation: Combining the Fun

Enjoying major events or small-town festivals is a great way to travel domestically or abroad, combining a visit to a traditional event with a tour of the surrounding area.



We've compiled some of the best... world famous and not-so-world famous here at home and in Europe. They are not listed in any particular order. Some mean flying and, depending on where you live, others just involve a hop in the car. Try something different. When applicable, get your tickets early and book your travel and lodging to avoid disappointment.



Virtually every city and town in the United States, will be celebrating **America's 250th birthday**. The two largest celebrations will be in **Philadelphia** and **New York**, but you won't miss out anywhere. Here are suggestions in chronological order.

2026 Events:

Florida: **Spring Break in Destin** on the Panhandle has become a family-oriented getaway when the kids are out of school. Sure, there are some not-so-rowdy college kids, but nothing like Panama City (50 miles away). Beautiful beaches, a fun-charged atmosphere for all.

Info: <https://destinflorida.com>

Kentucky: The **Kentucky Derby Festival** is a large, community celebration held in Louisville, Kentucky, during the two weeks leading up to the Kentucky Derby, **May 2, 2026**.

Info: <https://kdf.org>

Nebraska: The **College World Series, June 12-22, 2026**, at Charles Schwab Field in Omaha, features the final eight teams from the 64-team NCAA Tournament. A variety of packages are available.

Info/Tickets: <https://www.ncaatickets.com>

Massachusetts: The iconic **Boston Pops Fourth of July 2026** concert and fireworks spectacular on the Charles River Esplanade, is a tradition not to be missed. Bring chairs and blankets.

Info: <https://www.bso.org>

Maine: The **Maine Lobster Festival** on the coast in Rockland, **July 29 – August 2, 2026** offers five days of lobster feasts from the World's Largest Lobster Cooker. Free admission.

Info: <https://mainelobsterfestival.com>

Iowa: The **Iowa State Fair Aug. 13-23, 2026** is one of the oldest and largest expositions in the country. Oh, and the food...

Info: <https://www.iowastatefair.org>

Michigan: Something different. **Cheeseburger in Caseville Aug. 14-23, 2026**, a 10-day tropical-themed festival celebrating cheeseburgers and Jimmy Buffett. Caseville is located where the Pigeon River meets Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron.

Info: <https://casevillechamber.com/cheeseburger-fest>

Tennessee: Head to “the birthplace of country music” in Bristol for the **Rhythm & Roots Reunion Sept. 11-13, 2026**. Bristol spans the Tennessee-Virginia border in the Appalachian Mountains.

Info: <https://bristolrhythm.com>

New Mexico: The **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta Oct. 3-11, 2026**, is the world's largest hot air balloon event, a massive nine-day festival featuring hundreds of colorful balloons.

Info: <https://www.balloonfiesta.com>

2027 Events:

California: Take in the magnificent, world-famous **Tournament of Rose Parade** in Pasadena **Jan. 1, 2027** in person. Reserve grandstand seats early.

Tickets: <https://sharpseating.com>

Arizona: *La Fiesta de los Vaqueros*, **Feb. 20-28, 2027**, is a century-old celebration of the city's western heritage, featuring nine PRCA rodeo performances and the world's longest non-motorized parade.

Info: <https://www.tucsonrodeoparade.org>



And, more events in Europe **in 2026** to wrap your vacation around:

Spain: The **San Isidro Festival** in Madrid, Spain, **May 13-17, 2026**, centers on the main day, Friday, **May 15**, with events running all five days, with traditional costumes, folk dancing, and a bullfighting fair.

Info: https://www.spanish-fiestas.com/festivals/san-isidro/#google_vignette

Monaco: Auto racing fans will love visiting Monaco to experience the glitz and glamour of the **Monaco Grand Prix** auto race, **June 4-7, 2026** as the streets of Monte Carlo transform into a high-octane racetrack. Book early.

Info: <https://monaco-grandprix.com/en/>

Sweden: Midsommer is a joyous, magical celebration around the summer solstice in **June**, filled with flower crowns, dancing around maypoles, and traditional food.

Info: <https://visitsweden.com/what-to-do/culture-history-and-art/swedish-traditions/midsummer-tradition/midsummer-sweden-something-another-world/>

Switzerland: The **Montreaux Jazz Festival**, **July 3-18, 2026**, features jazz, rock, pop, and global sounds across multiple stages. Montreux is a beautiful resort town on the eastern shore of Lake Geneva.

Info: <https://www.montreuxjazzfestival.com/en/>

Croatia: The **International Folklore Festival** in Zagreb, **July 16-20**, showcases traditional culture parades, concerts, workshops, and performances on city stages and in nearby towns.

Info: <https://msf.hr/en/>

Scotland: The **Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo**, presented nightly from **August 7–29, 2026**, on the Edinburgh Castle Esplanade, along with the **Edinburgh Fringe Festival (The Fringe)**, **Aug. 7-31**, the world's largest performing arts festival.

Info: <https://www.edintattoo.co.uk/>; <https://www.edfringe.com>

Germany: It's **Oktoberfest** in Munich **Sept. 19 to Oct. 4**. This is the world's largest "Volkfest" --beer festival and fair. Admission to the tents is free, but food and beer are not. Get accommodations early.

Info: <https://www.oktoberfest.de/en>

Austria: Almabtrieb, spread out over **September** and **October, 2026** is a delight. This alpine tradition showcases farmers bringing elaborately decorated cows down from high mountain pastures before snowfall. Exact dates and towns in the Tirol will be determined in the summer.

Info: <https://www.austria.info/en-us/inspiration/cattle-processions/>

England: Winter Wonderland is a gigantic Christmas Festival in London's famed Hyde Park, from **Nov. 28, 2026**, through **Jan. 3, 2027**. Bundle up.

Info: <https://hydeparkwinterwonderland.com>

--compiled by **Peggi Simmons**, Managing Editor.

My Perspective Tips for Smooth, Safe Travel

Bob Cook, Go Travel Sales Director



Book Top Attractions Early: Many attractions and cities now require entry tickets for top sites such as the Pantheon or Trevi Fountain in Rome or the Louvre in Paris. You must book weeks or months in advance for specific time slots to avoid missing out.

Value Versus Price: Spend more for better, well-located hotels and buy airport lounge access to enhance your travel experience. Go Travel has access to more than 300 airport lounge access programs.

Use Tech: Use Apple Air Tags or similar GPS trackers for luggage, purses, phones, cameras, and more. You'll know where they are at all times.

Pack Light, But Smart: Use only carry-on luggage to avoid baggage fees and long waits, and keep essentials (*meds, chargers, jewelry*) in a smaller bag.

Take Photos of Packed Luggage: This provides proof of contents for insurance claims if bags are lost.

Use Vacuum Seal Packing Cubes: This method keeps luggage organized, maximizes space, and makes repacking easier.

EXCESS BAGGAGE



by Paul Fell

FROM THE
"TRAVEL
PROMISES
THAT WERE
NEVER MEANT
TO BE KEPT"
DEPARTMENT.

Off-Peak Travel: Travel during shoulder seasons to avoid crowds and higher prices. Examples: Portugal in September and October, New York at the beginning of November rather than summer or December.

Pro Tip: Download offline maps and always keep digital copies of your travel documents accessible.

Don't Get Lost: Traveling in places where English is not the "first language?" Be sure to ask for a hotel business card from your hotel's front desk. Your taxi or Uber driver will know just how to get you "home."

Buy Travel Insurance: This is a must. It will protect against unexpected cancellations, medical emergencies, or lost luggage. Buy evacuation and medical coverage at a minimum.

Get TSA PreCheck and Global Entry: These programs expedite your entry through airport security and customs, saving time and stress. ([TSA.gov](https://www.tsa.gov); [USAglobal-appoint](https://www.usaglobal-appoint.com))

Check Passport Expiration Date: Renew at least six months before expiration, as many countries require a valid passport. Follow the photo requirement carefully; it's the only tricky part. ([Travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov))

Bob Cook is Director of Sales at Go Travel, our YMCA Alumni Travel Club partner. He has decades of experience advising travelers and has been in this top sales role for more than 30 years.

PERSPECTIVE APRIL 2026

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Congratulations!

Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places!

You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes

You can steer yourself

Any direction you choose.

--Dr. Seuss



SUMMER: August 2026: Serve – So Many Ways

FALL: December 2026: Hobbies for Fun and Profit

WINTER: February 2027: Y Retirees Across The
Globe: Their Stories

COMING UP IN PERSPECTIVE!

Would you like to write for *Perspective* on any of these subjects? Please send a query note to Managing Editor Peggi Simmons (peggisimmons@icloud.com) summarizing your story concept. She will acknowledge your query. Please don't write it until your story idea is accepted.

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