



John Coles @ Travel-PA

Newsletter 11, May 2020



At times of uncertainty, when I feel anxiety, I like to recall my travels. I browse through photos albums and take comfort in the happy memory of holidays that I enjoyed with family and friends. I am grateful to friends and business partners for sharing their own travel memories and a few photos. I do hope you enjoy reading their stories.

Cllr. Guy Lambert, Brentford

To be honest, I don't have clear recollections of this event, but I was clearly chatting up the girls in the Isle of Man when I was about 4, with about as much success as later, no doubt.



Later, our family holidays were to the south of France, trailing our Saro Terrapin speedboat, filled to the gunwales with tinned butter (really) Fray Bentos Pies and powdered lemonade because it was in the days when we were limited to £25 foreign currency per adult. 6 up in a Ford Zodiac with bench seats front and rear, aunty Betty remarking that ICI sell a lot of petrol in France (she saw the garages saying ici essence).



Then a month in Bandol, then a quiet fishing port with a secluded beach where someone imported a bit of sand every winter to keep us happy. Mind you, the water was cold enough when you water-skied against the Mistral.

Anthony Phillips, Johor, Malaysia

Samarkand is the midway point along the historic Silk Road, so it's very much where East meets West. Historically the crossroads between two world cultures, you can see the different influences that make Samarkand the remarkable city it is today.

Plenty hustle and bustle of Samarkand, as well all the beautiful buildings. If you want stunning architecture, lively markets, and a rich tapestry of culture and history, Samarkand is for you.

Explore the remarkable Registon Square, a huge marble square with three mosque surrounding it. And don't miss a trip to the nearby Bibi-Khanym.

If you're craving some green spaces, head to Afrasiab, the site where the original city once stood before it was raised to the ground by Ghengis Khan. Finally head to Samarkand Bhukara Silk Carpets to take a tour of the factory and watch hand-made carpets being created.



Just down the road from Samarkand is the city of Bhukara, another prominent stop along the Silk Road. At over 2,000 years old the city is the "most complete example of a medieval city in Central Asia" according to UNESCO.

Start by exploring the incredible historic buildings, such as mausoleum of Ismail Samani, which is considered a masterpiece of 10th century Muslim architecture. And there's the Kalon Minaret. At 47m high this carved minaret was probably the tallest building in Central Asia when it was built in 1127!

Bukhara's oldest structure is the Ark, which dates from the 5th century and was the residence of the emirs of Bukhara right up until 1920. If you're looking for stunning architecture and tons of history, Bukhara is the place for you.



Uzbekistan is big, which means travel there can be a little difficult if you want to see a lot of places. Fortunately, there is an excellent rail system, which is safe and comfortable. It connects most of the major cities, including Tashkent, Samarkand, Bokhara, and Khiva.

Jean Newport, Richmond

Having experienced a very long and cold winter in London, I gratefully accepted my Mother's invitation to go by cargo/passenger Royal International Line to see the famous Spring blossoms in Japan on a round sea voyage.

March 1960 saw us leaving from Durban on the cargo ship "RUYS" to start an amazing voyage with leisurely stops to Mauritius, Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong, also visiting the Territories, stopping at Kobe, Osaka and Yokohama.

Early sea travel was a lot different compared to modern cruise vacations today, but more relaxing as there were fewer passengers on board, and much simpler pleasures to enjoy.

One goes to sea with an unknown anticipation of what adventures await. As one arrives at the dockside you already feel the sea breeze and smell the salty air, and the hustle and bustle of cargo being loaded, passengers arriving and deck crew busy.

What fun arriving and stopping at new destinations, getting to know the Captain and officers. Also pleasant as the ships didn't carry many passengers and one got to know each other quite quickly.

It was fascinating to be taking part in a busy working ship with more interaction with the deck crew, watching the pilots come aboard and moving into berths, or at certain ports being taken ashore in small ferry boats while ships had to berth outside many harbours.

Life aboard was relaxing, deck chair sunbathing near the small pool, early morning exercising, three course meals, morning and afternoon teas, observing passing ships, reading the daily news sheet, and day's activities and lazy days with no land in sight, but watching the ever changing ocean and dolphins playing around the ship. There was no chance of boredom. Deck games, fancy dress evening, dances. Meals were a delight with many Dutch specialities.



Memories of the holiday include experiencing a Geisha tea ceremony in kimono, being a guest at an Indian wedding in Mauritius, seeing clothes being made in Hong Kong, riding a buffalo in the Territory's! As it was a very cold start to Spring in Japan, we were fortunate to see the beauty of the cherry blossoms and seeing Mount Fuji capped with snow.

I recall the Zen ornamental Gardens being so well laid out, the spectacular 15m Buddha at Nara with the vermillion painted temples and shrines, and the Japanese Noh theatre. The Japanese people were so polite, proud and welcoming.

Having grown up in South Africa and spent several years in England, this trip really imprinted lasting memories of a once in a lifetime trip and am so grateful for this opportunity to travel with my Mother.

Nick Calvert, Bracknell

So have you ever heard of the infamous fictional detective Inspector Montalbano who keeps the mafia at bay across the island of Sicily ?.... If not then I suggest that you do some investigation of your own, because watching the numerous series of this Andrea Camilleri penned episodes is truly engrossing.

So we found ourselves posing outside the Municipal Town Hall in Scicli, which is used as a set location in the series on our first night, like true tourists admiring it for that reason rather than the superb architecture.

Little did we know that just a couple of days later roads would be blocked with barriers, and notices sellotaped to them in Italian with one clear word written on them 'Montalbano' !! Was the actor Luca Zingaretti really coming to town ?

So we wolfed our delicious buffet breakfast down on the stated morning, and were there outside the 'Vigata Police Station' hoping to get a glimpse of our 'hero', and we weren't to be disappointed either, even lothario 'Mimi' (Cesare Bocci) blowing my wife Marian a kiss as would be expected from his series character !

The contrasts on the island were stark from the fabulous culinary experiences to the crumbling buildings, and unfinished roads but the island held such a charm that I am sure we will return with or without the chance of bumping into 'Salvo' Montalbano again ! If only to have authentic Arancini again !



Sally Smith, Hounslow

Back in the 80s, before the children, Rob and I used to travel to France for our 2 week summer holiday – ‘exploring’. We’d drive south towards the sun, avoiding the Peages motorways, using the yellow roads. Rob had a blue Fiat X19 with a mid engine and hard sun roof, which we would remove in Calais.

In July 1982 the weather was extremely hot. We were driving from Sisteron, where we’d been for a few nights, but there had been a hot wind and the campsite was a bit grotty and had no pool. I have not mentioned that we used to camp. We drove though the Gorges de Vaucluse as it looked interesting on the Michelin map and came across ‘our’ village, below Mont Ventoux. All along the route there had been signs advertising a new campsite with a pool. We were ushered in and given a drink, sadly rather luke warm. The campsite had just opened a few weeks before and that was the beginning of such family holidays.

It was the perfect set up, the small fortified village was a short walk away. There was a tiny shop, a butcher and two cafes/bars. For the next 25 years we kept returning as it is so perfect. We introduced my family and from the mid 80s we would all holiday together. I think the largest number we ever reached was 21. When Rob and I had children, we’d drive on the motorway through the night, knowing that when we got there my mother would already be there to look after the children so we could sleep.

My parents had 10 grandchildren and they watched them grow up in that Provencal village. Phoning schools from the local phone box for GCSE results, buying boules of wine from the local Cave, which the grandchildren would finish off, once the adults had gone to bed. About five years ago my sister and I with our families took my parents back for their last visit. My mother had dementia but she knew the village so well, it was ‘home’ to her.

As soon as we are able to travel, we’ll be returning with our three children, now approaching and already in their 30s. Sadly we are no longer able to camp as my husband is disabled, so we’ll hire a gite. I know the location of them all in the village. And no, I’m not going to give away the name of ‘our’ village – I’m afraid I want to keep it to myself!



Pippa Duncan, Sheen

Vietnam is a country of contrasts, from beautiful, bustling cities to the remoteness of the hills. We travelled from Hanoi at the top, down through to Ho Chi Min city (Saigon) and the Mekong Delta at the bottom and everywhere the people are warm and friendly, the food delicious, the scenery lush and always, always, the humidity.

Hanoi was full of vibrancy, the world heritage site of Ha Long Bay and its picturesque islands were beautiful but touristy, the coastal retreat of Hoi An, a haven of boutiques and fabulous dishes eaten straight from the food stalls. But it was our three-day motorbike trip from Dalat to Nha Trang that stood out. Riding pillion with two experienced leaders, we left the tourist spots and headed into the hills to meet the village tribes and see a very different way of life.



And everywhere you go, there is that sense of recent history, the signs of old battles etched into the landscape and the cities.

Indeed, a country of beautiful contrasts.

Pippa Shawley, Ealing

It was past midnight when I arrived at my camp in Mongolia’s Orkhon Valley. The 10 hour drive from the capital, Ulaanbaatar, had taken me out of the dense metropolis, past enormous herds of horses, through the sandy ‘Mini Gobi’ and across the sprawling green steppe. In the dark I could just make out the ger (yurt) I’d be sleeping in, and the faint sound of running water.

Stepping out the next morning, I digested the magnificent view of the valley before me, lying under an endless blue sky, as I chewed on bread smeared with yak butter and sipped salty milk tea.

After breakfast, I was helped onto a stocky pony and led by my host’s two children, aged about 8 and 13, on a two hour trek along the banks of the river towards the captivating Orkhon Waterfall. Even then, back in September, I felt lucky to be in such a wide open place, but now, confined to my suburban home, I realise just what a gift it was.



John Naish, Strawberry Hill

Wonders like the pyramids of Egypt, Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat as well as today's great cities can inspire wonderful memories. But it can be part of the canvas, rather than the whole, that lodges in the mind.

On an Asian holiday a while ago, my wife asked me to show her friend's husband around Hong Kong. It was his first visit.

In showing him the sights, I took him on as many forms of public transport (and Hong Kong has quite a few) as we could squeeze into a few hours.

Morning on the Star Ferry from Kowloon to Hong Kong Island Central district; queueing for the Peak Tram - memories of movies of Jennifer Jones and Clark Gable – as well as views to die for on the way up; taxi to Aberdeen, bus back to Central as temperature and humidity rise, a snack then aboard one of the old trams where from the top deck the senses absorb the atmosphere of vibrancy. From the old to the new and a few stops on the state of the art subway before an afternoon ferry to Kowloon in time for an evening beer. How could I forget?



Bella, Julian, and Leonard Fok, Hong Kong

It may not be easy to go through the earth crust but we can try looking into a crater to understand what is down there! My family visited Hilo on the Big Island of Hawaii three times and we would like to go there again.



Although Kilauea Volcano is active, a relatively mild eruption once after some years is safe for a visit to the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. It was amazing to stand just steps in front of the slow flowing lava of several hundred degrees with smoke on a highway. Some played with the red-hot lava with steel rods.



To see even more, I suggest to ride a helicopter up to the crater at the daytime and go for a cruising along the coast with dropping lava at the night time. There are too much we have missed in our geography class.

Senimili Kamikamica, Kew

Lake Bled, in the Julian Alps of northwestern Slovenia, and 55km from Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital, is a magical place. Surrounded by mountains and forest, the lake is picturesque in summer and even more so in winter. At one end of the lake is the small town of Bled, with its few shops and bars, and nearby, in summer, there are stalls selling local produce. The charm of the lake, with its emerald-green water, is best seen walking around its perimeter, which can be done in about an hour and a half, or from above the lake, perhaps from Bled castle, which is open to the public and has a range of interesting exhibits.

At one end of the lake, too, is the Church of the Assumption, access to which can be gained only by gondola, which will deposit you at the South staircase, which was built in 1655. Visitors to the church can ring the bell, and there is a souvenir shop.

In the summer, many tourists visit Bled, but we went out of season and were struck most by the serenity of the area, and the stunning views of the lake, and of the island with the church. There are several hotels in the town, but we stayed at the Hotel Triglav, a mile or so from the town, which looks over the lake. The food was excellent as were the views.





Glenda Shawley, Ealing

My pick is the lovely old city of Girona. Just 40 minutes by train from Barcelona it's the perfect place for a short break. We stayed at the Hotel Ciutat de Girona which is comfortable, very central and just a 10 minute walk from the train station.

Our visit was in early May in time for the magnificent 'Temps de Flors', a flower festival

with over 100 exhibits and staged annually by the city's residents.

I don't have a head for heights but a walk around the walls wasn't too challenging and put the layout of the city in perspective. The cathedral is also well worth a visit as are the many cafés, restaurants and bars.

Girona is a good base for more sightseeing. We enjoyed an eye-opening, privately guided, Dali tour which included trips to the Dali museum in Figueres and his home in Cadaques.

Kevin Hartney, Boca Raton, Florida, USA

Sometimes the best travel adventures come from the most unexpected events.

A few years ago John and myself were asked to approach ATR, the regional aircraft manufacturer, on behalf of our employer, Volvo Aero Services, to see if we could expand our aftermarket aircraft parts business to include regional ATR aircraft material. So we scheduled a trip to ATR in Toulouse France. During my 30 plus years in aviation I have had the opportunity to travel all around the world. However, I had never been to Toulouse and knew very little about the city and the region.

I scheduled my flight from Miami, Florida to Paris with onward travel to Toulouse after a layover. After flying all night I finally boarded our plane to Toulouse mid-day. As we descended into Toulouse the beauty of the countryside became clearly apparent. Rolling hills with the mountains off in the distance.

After a short cab ride, I arrived at the Le Grand Balcon. A beautiful boutique hotel on the edge of the city square. The staff was amazing and the ambiance of the hotel was truly special. Ironically that evening we had dinner in a restaurant called Le Florida.... Awesome!



Mahinda Ambahera, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Etosha National Park is best experienced by self driving through its excellent gravel roads. Due to the Park's extensive size it's not often we encountered other safari vehicles within the Park. We came across Lions, Rhino, and Elephants regularly. However leopards and cheetah due to their skittish solitary behaviour is encountered only through sheer luck.

Lions were often seen resting under large trees near waterholes. Lions tend to hunt mostly by night (when National Parks are closed for visitors) or in the early mornings. Therefore it is very rare to see lions hunting and making a kill and witnessing such an event is the ultimate safari experience. It's intense, emotional and a mesmerizing scene of true nature. We were extremely fortunate to experience just that.

One day early morning a lone lioness was spotted at a waterhole surveying the area. Due to harsh and very dry landscape animals visit the waterholes to quench their thirst as there are no other sources of water. The lioness probably smelt or saw an approaching herd of wildebeest. The lioness was then seen creeping towards a thicket to hide.

About 10 minutes later as expected along came a herd of unsuspecting wildebeest searching for water.

All of a sudden the lioness sprang from the thicket and charged at one hapless wildebeest managing to catch it by its neck. The lioness was not totally in control of the fight for several minutes as the wildebeest tried to break free. It took a good 10 minutes for the lioness to finally subdue the wildebeest.

Initially it appeared that the herd of wildebeest were dazed and could not comprehend what was happening. Soon they realized the gory sight and they all ran for their lives leaving the stricken wildebeest to its fate. Wildebeest unlike buffalo do not go to the help of its fellow comrade in trouble. Leaving the happy lioness with her hard earned breakfast.

