

# Hideaways Life

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FAIRMONT MARA SAFARI CLUB

Safari breakfast at Fairmont Mara Safari Club—see page 7

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## Amsterdam on the Fly!

BY HIDEAWAYS FOUNDER/PRESIDENT MIKE THIEL

If you're headed to points in Europe with no direct service from the U.S.—or beyond Europe to Africa, the Middle East, or even Asia—there's a good chance you could be "hubbing" through Amsterdam. If that's an option, we certainly encourage you to do so, and break up your trip with a stay-over of at least a couple of days. That's what we did on a trip earlier this year to Egypt, and it was a great decision.

I had been to Amsterdam many years ago—more years ago than I care to admit—and, while I recall enjoying it, it don't remember it making a huge impression. Either I've changed, or Amsterdam has—or maybe we both have, because this time I had a ball. Not only is it the perfect place to stop off for a few days to break up a longer trip, it also is an intriguing and manageable city escape as an end destination.

## How Do You "Do Amsterdam?"

For starters, you should definitely stay right in the center of the historic district, preferably in one of its classic upscale hotels directly on one of the canals. Our favorites were **The Dylan**, where we stayed, the **De L'Europe**, and the **Amstel InterContinental**. The **Hotel Pulitzer** ran well behind those three. You can learn more about our impressions of each in "Hiding Away in Amsterdam," next page, and at [www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam](http://www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam).

Next most important item: Get yourself an "I amsterdam" City Card. As it proclaims, it is "your key to Amsterdam," offering unlimited free public transportation, entry to the top museums, a canal tour, and entry and discounts at various other attractions. There are cards priced for different durations of stay, getting cheaper the longer your visit. You can get the card online prior to arrival, at the airport, and at various places downtown (go to [www.iamsterdamcard.com](http://www.iamsterdamcard.com)).

The second strategic step I'd recommend is

*continued on page 2*

ONE OF THE NICEST, most relaxing places to enjoy a meal is on the outside terrace of the Amstel InterContinental, where Gail and I had a delicious lunch while watching the interesting and varied boat traffic pass by.



either taking that City Card canal tour right away or, better yet, getting a private guide for a half-day walking tour to become oriented to the city. We did the latter and thoroughly enjoyed the local insight, interesting stories, and tips for further things to see and do. If nothing else, our guide probably helped me avoid a hospital visit by advising me not to take any photographs of the prostitutes in Amsterdam's famous Red Light District. Apparently they've been known to chase down and beat on picture-snapping tourists.

## First Impressions

Amsterdam's historic district is truly Venice-like, but with a more organized layout. Its major and most scenic canals, with names like Keizersgracht, Prinsengracht, and Herengracht (by now you've no doubt figured out that "gracht" means "canal") form concentric semi-circles around the city center, appropriately dubbed the "Centrum." Streets run along both sides of the canals and radiate like spokes from the center, as do other connecting canals. Weaving its way through the center of the city, much like Venice's Grand Canal, is the Amstel River, and to the north is the busy commercial harbor.

Amsterdam is a very walkable city, and wherever you wander it's extremely photogenic, but the first thing you'll notice while strolling is that—IT'S DANGEROUS! No, not because of crime. It's the bicycles! I knew that Amsterdam was famous for its bicyclists,

but little did I realize just how popular this mode of transportation is. Thousands of bicycles are wheeling off in every direction, sometimes on the streets, sometimes in designated bicycle paths (but not necessarily in the designated direction), occasionally on sidewalks. Add to that the trams, buses, motor bikes, and regular auto traffic, and you really need eyes in the back of your head as you navigate Amsterdam's quaint but busy streets.

One of our fondest memories is of the canal scene around sunset. On a fine spring evening, Amsterdammers can be found socializing at canal-side, open-air cafés and bars. In fact, the canals themselves are party-central for those with boats who putter along them with friends and family, sipping wine, savoring those great Dutch cheeses, and having a very merry evening. This is a great time to take that canal barge tour of the city. You'll get a good feel for how fun-loving Amsterdam really is. Just make sure you set out early enough to have good light for photography, because you'll burn through lots of memory cards with all the beautiful and quaint scenes.

## From Red Lights to Dutch Masters

We packed a lot into our two days in Amsterdam, starting with meeting our guide at one of the open-air cafés in Dam Square to plan our morning tour. While we waited, we took in the scene of street entertainers

## Hiding Away in Amsterdam

**De L'Europe<sup>THC</sup>:** This is the most conveniently located of the luxury hotels we checked out, just steps from the Flower Market, Dam Square, the Muziektheater, and the Hermitage. Given its history and opulence, it often is referred to as the *other* "Royal Palace of Amsterdam." Public areas showcase original Dutch paintings from the collection of the hotel's owners, the Heineken family, and the 23 spacious suites in the Dutch Masters Wing feature marvelous copies (with permission) of famous paintings hanging in the Rijksmuseum. The hotel's architecture and decor are an interesting blend of classic and modern, and while very elegant, it still feels intimate. Staying here, you will definitely get a sense of Amsterdam's history, yet with all the modern technology today's traveler demands. Member perk: A €75 food & beverage credit and daily American breakfast. From January 1 to March 31, 2012, members also receive a guaranteed upgrade at booking, plus guaranteed early arrival and late checkout (until 4 p.m.). Rates start at €330.

**The Dylan:** This intimate boutique hotel, set on the picturesque Keizergracht, is in a quiet neighborhood just a short stroll from many attractions. With only 40 rooms, it was the smallest of the hotels we experienced. Public areas have a residential ambiance, and include a beautiful interior courtyard. Rooms and suites are not huge, but are chic, contemporary, and well-designed; many have either canal or courtyard views. Its spacious, brick-lined Vinkeles restaurant has garnered one Michelin star. Rates start at €350.

**Amstel InterContinental:** A stately building dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this "grande dame" sits on the banks of the Amstel, a short walk from most major sights. The entry lobby is particularly grand, with lots of marble, columns, and crystal chandeliers. Furnishings and decor are more classically formal than The Dylan or De L'Europe. Its 79 rooms and suites are decorated in floral patterns or Delft blue and white. The hotel has a fantastic indoor pool with glass walls looking out to the river, plus a cozy conservatory where you can sip afternoon tea and watch boats plying the water below. Rates start at €300.

**Hotel Pulitzer:** Part of the Starwood Luxury Collection, this highly touted hotel was a disappointment. We sat in the lobby far too long waiting for a tour, gave up, and strolled around by ourselves. The hotel is composed of 25 canal houses restored and joined together. The lobby was tired and uninviting, the service unimpressive. And from the foot traffic we witnessed, it seems this is the hotel of choice for tour groups. It would not be my first choice. Rates start from €185.

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The Herengracht offers one of the most photogenic spots in Amsterdam

MIKE THIEL

and Amsterdammers at leisure in the busy plaza. From there, it was a short stroll to Amsterdam's famous Red Light District, with its "coffee shops"—which have nothing to do with coffee and everything to do with marijuana—porn shops, and bordello-lined alleys and streets where "customers" check out the "wares" on display in its storefront windows. Having a private guide gave us the benefit of lots of history, rules, and sights of the district we otherwise wouldn't have appreciated. We even were witness to a mid-day "deal" negotiated right in the alley we were strolling through. Luckily, Gail is quite open-minded about these things, but it may not be for everyone.

No visit to Amsterdam would be complete without checking out its two most famous museums, the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum. Luckily, they are

within walking distance of each other on the park-like Museumplein. A little tip: While the urban Dutch all speak English beautifully, you'll sound a bit more "in" if you pronounce the Van Gogh as the "Von Kock" Museum. Unfortunately, I must admit I was somewhat disappointed in that particular museum, feeling that the layout, lighting, and display of the artwork could have been better. On the other hand, I loved the Rijksmuseum, with its old-world elegance, its fabulous collection of Dutch Masters, a nice flow pattern, and excellent lighting.

### A Foodie's Delight

One of my favorite excursions, on a tip provided by our guide, was a visit to the Albert Cuyp Market. Named after the street it occupies, which in turn is named for the 17<sup>th</sup>-century painter, this open-air emporium dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest and largest in Europe. It runs daily, with the street closed off to all traffic. Vendors sell beautiful fresh produce, all manner of fresh fish and shellfish, smoked fish, and cheeses, as well as clothes, antiques, and miscellaneous hard goods. Behind the stalls are even more shops and restaurants. This is a great place to have a bargain international lunch in scenic surroundings, as it is a shopping venue for Amsterdam's many immigrants: Turks, Moroccans, Indonesians, Surinamese, and others.

Speaking of dining, Amsterdam's restaurants offer a wonderful smorgasbord of cuisines, drawing on the city's tradition of worldwide exploration and immigrant influences. With immediate access to the sea, its fish and shellfish are fantastic. One of our most memorable meals was lunch on

the flower-bedecked terrace of the famous Amstel InterContinental, overlooking the busy boat traffic on the Amstel River. The service was great, the oysters as starters to die for, the main courses intriguing and delicious, and the dessert decadent. It was tough moving ourselves from our comfy and scenic seats to continue with our afternoon explorations.

One evening we wandered well to the northwest of the city to the newly hip and evolving dock area, where we dined at Nevy, one of a group of experiential dining and partying venues that are the imaginative expression of "IQ creative" ([www.iqcreative.nl](http://www.iqcreative.nl)). Most of the group's restaurants and clubs are in Amsterdam and are built around different themes, but their Supperclubs can now be found in Singapore, Istanbul, London, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Nevy's theme and cuisine focuses on fish, and they do an excellent job of it. The scene, in what could loosely be described as a warehouse district overlooking the commercial River IJ, is hip, young, and boisterous. The service is excellent and the fish selection varied and delicious, with attractive presentation.

Finally, no visit to Amsterdam would be "culinarily" complete without indulging in a rijsttafel (RYST-tah-fel). Dutch for "rice table," this is a feasting tradition imported from the Indonesian colonies. A classic rijsttafel includes multiple side dishes and condiments—as many as 40—featuring many different spices, textures, and bases, all served with various rice preparations. We enjoyed our rijsttafel at Selecta ([www.restaurantsselecta.nl](http://www.restaurantsselecta.nl)), a traditional Indonesian restaurant in the city center, very near the floating flower market.

Clearly, we only brushed the surface of what Amsterdam offers in our short visit. And though I haven't given them much mention up to this point, the Dutch people, perhaps counter to common perceptions, are really fun-loving, warm, and welcoming. On more than one occasion, we might have missed one of the city's hidden treasures if a friendly local hadn't helped us with directions, and then pointed out a little door on the left along the way that hides an ancient abbey, or some such off-the-beaten-path landmark. The friendliness of the Dutch would be one big reason for returning to explore more of Amsterdam, because that type of genuinely warm welcome can make all the difference in your perception of a place. **H**

*Don't miss Mike's complete Amsterdam report, including his slideshow and videos; visit [www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam](http://www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam).*



WHO CAN RESIST sampling one of the fabulous Dutch cheeses at the Albert Cuyp Market?

MIKE THIEL

# The Napa Valley, Revisited

The Napa Valley has always had a special place in my heart. One of my first dates with my now-husband was wine tasting in the valley, including a behind-the-scenes tour at the Mondavi winery. We love the area so much we were married in Yountville. It was only natural, then, that we decided to revisit the Napa Valley—and the good times—for our five-year anniversary this past summer.

BY HIDEAWAYS TRAVEL SERVICES MANAGER DARCY ALLEN

The Napa Valley is made up of several quaint towns along Highway 29 and the Silverado Trail. It offers dozens of choices when deciding where to lay your head at night, from hotels and resorts to small inns and private homes. For our two-day food-and-wine-themed getaway, we opted to stay at the newer **Hotel Yountville**, which opened its doors in 2010. This turned out to be a great choice for us, as we loved all the local restaurants and the convenience of the hotel's location for visiting nearby wineries. And since we've been to the Napa area several times before, we really wanted to break away and do something different, beyond the more popular wineries Napa is known for.

We started our day with coffee and pastries at Bouchon Bakery ([www.bouchonbakery.com](http://www.bouchonbakery.com)), Thomas Keller's famous *boulangerie* which has ridiculously delicious French pastries. It's a tiny bakery and very popular with tourists and locals alike, so expect to see lines out the door. Trust me, it's completely worth the wait (try the fresh bread and macarons!). Once we were loaded up on goodies and back in the car, happy as clams, we enjoyed a leisurely drive up the valley on Highway 29 toward St. Helena.

## Let the Eating & Drinking Begin!

Our next stop—the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena ([www.ciachef.edu](http://www.ciachef.edu)). Beyond being a famous culinary school, the CIA offers a great visitor experience that is not to be missed, including a variety of cooking classes and a wonderful

on-site restaurant with meals prepared by students. Our visit this time (yes, this was a repeat visit) included a course on chocolate at the Flavor Bar. We spent 20 minutes learning all you'd ever want to know about different types of chocolate and, of course, sampling—tasty *and* educational! We then enjoyed a behind-the-scenes tour led by a culinary student who not only shared the interesting history behind the buildings that house the school, but also her enthusiasm and passion for food—so much so that we definitely want to make time for a real cooking class on our next visit.

At this point, it was well after noon and a respectable time to hit the wineries! We decided to focus on visiting a few of the more boutique options the valley is becoming known for. In my opinion, one of the main benefits of visiting smaller wineries is

that their tasting staff is usually so much more friendly and knowledgeable than those at the large establishments. In our experience, they take the time to tell you their story and teach you interesting tidbits about the wines you're enjoying.

Almost directly across from the CIA is Markham Vineyards ([www.markhamvineyards.com](http://www.markhamvineyards.com)), one of the oldest continuously operating wineries in the valley. This little gem is run by just 24 employees and produces some rather fabulous wines. Known for their estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon, these folks win awards year after year.

After a thorough and informative tour, we had the opportunity to meet with winemaker Kimberlee Nicholls, who was kind enough to share a bit of the science behind making wine. Having married into a farm family (my husband's family runs a dairy farm in



Flavor Bar at the Culinary Institute of America

DAVID WAKELY/THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA AT GREYSTONE



The very private terrace of Oak Creek Lodge at Calistoga Ranch

CALISTOGA RANCH

New Hampshire), I had already grasped the general concept of planting and harvesting. However, I had never stopped to think about all the elements involved in making wine, from the many climate changes within such a small region to soil conditions, vine-growing patterns, and even how they prune the vines to help shape what the fruit will taste like. While Markham Vineyards does not typically offer winemaking classes, several other boutique wineries are expanding their tours to include special themed weekends and/or classes—definitely worth looking into if you are a budding wine connoisseur.

Feeling quite confident in our newfound knowledge, we cut over to the Silverado Trail and on to HALL Rutherford ([www.hall-wines.com](http://www.hall-wines.com)). The winery has three locations in the valley; this one is by appointment only and typically reserved for special events and groups. With its majestic location in the hills,

**BEAUTIFUL SCENERY** is a given when you tour the Napa Valley. Most any time of year is nice, but I'd suggest visiting in the fall, when the vineyards take on a golden hue, the weather is ideal, and the harvest is in full swing.



NAPA VALLEY DESTINATION COUNCIL

HIDEAWAYS LIFE - NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2011

## Hiding Away in the Napa Valley

### Hotel Luca, Yountville

This is a nice new 20-room hotel. Guest rooms are found in two main buildings and offer either a patio or balcony overlooking a central courtyard. Rooms are spacious, and many offer fireplaces. On-site amenities include a restaurant and bar, a small four-treatment-room spa, and a swimming pool. Located at the end of Washington Street, the hotel is within walking distance to shops and restaurants. Rates start at \$350/night and include daily breakfast.

### Bardessono

California's first LEED Platinum Hotel, this is a true hideaway in the heart of the Napa Valley offering just 62 spacious, spa-themed rooms. Designed with rich dark earth tones, many suites feature outdoor showers and soaking tubs. This is a wonderful spa resort for a romantic getaway, with a relaxing rooftop pool and an on-site restaurant that serves farm-fresh, locally sourced organic ingredients (very California!). Complimentary bikes are available for exploring the area. Rates start at \$399/night.

### Calistoga Ranch

Those looking for the ultimate spa retreat need look no further. Located at the base of the Napa Valley hills, Calistoga Ranch is tucked away with minimal signage to protect their hidden oasis. The Ranch offers 48 freestanding guest lodges, each with one or two bedrooms and indoor/outdoor living space that includes a fireplace and private outdoor shower garden. Protection of the environment was key in planning the layout of Calistoga Ranch, and not one tree was removed in the building of its accommodations, which are plush and luxurious. The resort is known for its wellness programs, spa treatments, and Californian spa cuisine. Rates start at \$675/night.

we were treated to breathtaking views of the vineyards and valley on arrival. One of the more unique features here is their 14,000 square feet of barrel caves crafted from hand-made, imported Austrian brick. Pieces from the owner's magnificent personal art collection are beautifully displayed throughout the caves, making them the ideal place for a private wine-tasting experience. We also discovered they will arrange a private vineyard picnic at one of their other locations. What a romantic idea, and another note for our next trip!

## Beyond Vineyards

After an exhausting but wonderful afternoon, we headed back to the hotel to freshen up for dinner. The Hotel Yountville is an 80-room boutique hotel that draws its design inspiration from Tuscany, Provence, and the Napa Valley. I definitely felt the contemporary European vibe. The lobby has a lot of historic elements and is finished with dark, contemporary colors and fixtures. I found the rooms to be more Californian in style, with an airy spa-like feel. Guest rooms are spread out among several buildings, and on-site amenities include a spa, pool, restaurant, and lobby bar. They even offer complimentary bicycles for touring. Overall, the hotel was very comfortable and well priced for the area, and we would definitely go back. Rates start at \$265 per night.

We had dinner reservations that evening at Michael Chiarello's restaurant, Bottega ([www.botteganapavalley.com](http://www.botteganapavalley.com)). Being the foodies we are, we couldn't wait to sam-

ple the southern Italian cuisine that Chef Chiarello is known for. The restaurant treated us to a tasting menu not usually available for individual guests; you can, however, reserve the chef's table for 12 on Friday or Saturday night and have this special menu arranged.

Words cannot adequately describe dish after dish of the deliciousness we enjoyed. Our hands-down favorites for the night included the braised short ribs and creamy polenta (I'm getting hungry just thinking about it) and the chocolate volcano cake—which, incidentally, is not on the menu, you just have to ask for it. The restaurant is open for lunch and dinner and is definitely a "must-do" during your stay in the Napa Valley.

Another of our favorites is a second Thomas Keller restaurant called Ad Hoc ([www.adhocrestaurant.com](http://www.adhocrestaurant.com)), also in Yountville. It's open for dinner and offers a different set menu each night. You can check out their website to see what is being served that evening before calling for reservations, which are highly recommended.

As you probably can tell, we had a jam-packed two days in the Napa Valley. If you've never been, you may not realize just how much there is to do beyond wine tastings, including a plethora of outdoor activities from hot-air ballooning to horseback riding. You can easily eat your way through the valley at some of the finest restaurants in the world, or just enjoy a few relaxing days at the spa. Whether you're celebrating a special anniversary like we were or just getting away for a long weekend, the Napa Valley is a perfect retreat for all types of travelers. Feel free to contact me for ideas! **H**

## Rhino Tours? On St. Maarten?

Yep, you heard us right! It's all part of the Adventure Package you can choose when you stay at **Princess Heights**<sup>THC</sup>, a condominium boutique hotel perched on a hillside overlooking beautiful Dawn Beach. Of course, *these* Rhinos are fun and safe inflatable watercraft that seat two, so you and a friend can skim across the sea and have the time of your lives.

As part of the Adventure Package, you can choose two activities from a list that includes a two-and-a-half-hour Rhino/snorkeling tour; a zip-line eco-tourism excursion; the Golden Eagle Tour, which is a full-day sail around the island with a stop in Grand Case for lunch; a Kayak Lagoon Tour through a tranquil mangrove forest; and other jet-ski, horseback-riding, and sightseeing adventures. You'll stay in an Oceanview One-Bedroom Suite, receive a welcome gift basket, get a complimentary car rental for your entire stay, and enjoy a complimentary cell phone rental and Internet access in your suite. All suites have marble baths, full kitchens, and balconies with ocean views, so you'll feel right at home with friends and family. Adventure Package rates start from \$2,100 for five nights. Call *Hideaways* Travel Services (800-843-4433) to book your adventure.

## Great New Offerings

*Hideaways* is constantly on the hunt for exciting best-of-kind lodgings to invite into *The Hideaways Collection*®—so you, our valued members, can get our best exclusive deals, privileges, and specially negotiated perks. Here are a few of the latest additions.

**De L'Europe**<sup>THC</sup>, Amsterdam: A classic Dutch masterpiece located on the beautiful Amstel River. *Member-only perk: A €75 food & beverage credit and daily American breakfast. From January 1 to March 31, 2012, members also receive an exclusive guaranteed upgrade at booking, plus guaranteed early arrival and late checkout (until 4 p.m.).*

**Villa Sant'Andrea**<sup>THC</sup>, Sicily: A luxe private estate turned stunning seaside retreat. *Member-only perk: Lunch for 2 at the beach restaurant (min. stay of 3 nights).*

**Kupu Kupu Jimbaran**<sup>THC</sup>, Bali: A seductive escape on one of Bali's best white-sand beaches. *Member-only perk: A 60-minute Traditional Massage for two at Bamboo Spa by L'Occitane.*

**The Fairmont Royal Pavilion**<sup>THC</sup>, Barbados: A classic presence on the famous West Coast, with unrivaled tropical gardens on an 11-acre estate. *Member-only perk: Daily*

*breakfast, afternoon tea, and a welcome gift.*

Find out more about these terrific getaways—and all our offerings in *The Hideaways Collection*—at **Hideaways.com**. Then call your Travel Consultant at **800-843-4433** to plan your next great vacation.

## “And the Award Goes to . . .”

In what's regarded as the Oscars of the travel industry, Austria's **GrandHotel Lienz**<sup>THC</sup> was honored at the World Travel Awards 2011 European Ceremony by winning the award for “Europe's Leading Wellness Hotel.” During the gala event held in Antalya, Turkey, GrandHotel Lienz beat out such stiff competition as **La Reserve de Beaulieu & Spa** on the French Riviera and **Adler Thermae Spa & Wellness Resort** in Tuscany.

You can experience this award-winning concept for yourself when you visit this little slice of Tyrolean paradise. All the health benefits of GrandHotel's complete Medical Center are at your fingertips, including medical check-ups, targeted therapies, and traditional Chinese medicine, all overseen by accredited specialists. Once there, you'll be feeling “in the pink” before you know it!

## A New “Eye” on London

If you're a fan of the perky little Mini Cooper automobile made famous in the movie *The Italian Job*, here's something that might interest you. You can gain a unique perspective on the royal city from the passenger's seat of a pre-2000 “Mini,” one of the original models before they became “roomier.”

The company SmallCarBigCity.com has a fleet of four classic “Minis” that give tourists a low-to-the-ground view of London's famous sites and monuments, including Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, and Big Ben. Of course, there's also a William & Kate Tour that takes you to all the places made famous by England's newest royal couple. The company's drivers are personable and witty history buffs with lots of interesting trivia to share, so you'll be laughing all the way.

While in London, be sure to stay at **The Athenaeum**<sup>THC</sup>, where you'll be treated royally yourself. Your member perk is a fruit platter, two tickets to the Royal Academy of Arts, a one-way transfer to or from Heathrow (3-night stay) or a return car transfer from Heathrow or one-way car transfer from Gatwick (5-night stay).

## Get the Local Perspective

When you want the inside scoop on what to see and do on vacation, always go to a local. That's why the concierge staff at **Hotel Grande Bretagne**<sup>THC</sup> in Athens recommends a visit to the “indigenous” Monastiraki Flea Market. The best time to visit, they say, is on Sunday morning when the flea market is in full swing. You'll browse through aisle after aisle of unique antiques, indigenous gifts, and the largest selection of handmade souvenirs imaginable. Monastiraki was named after the Monastery of Pantanassa, which is located within the Old Town of Monastiraki on Avissynias Square.

For more information on the market, visit [www.athensguide.com/monastiraki.html](http://www.athensguide.com/monastiraki.html). And don't forget, when you book your stay at Grande Bretagne with *Hideaways*, you'll receive your member-only perk of formal afternoon High Tea service for two in the hotel's Winter Garden.



**SAFARI!**

# Take a “Long Journey” to Discovery

**L**ook up the word “safari,” and you’ll find that it’s derived from the Swahili for “long journey.” How appropriate! After all, going on safari for most people means taking a lengthy journey, usually to Africa, in search of something new and exciting, whether that’s wildlife, scenery, culture, or even the experience of overnighting in the wilds, in a tent—albeit, perhaps, a luxurious tent. A safari is the type of memorable experience that can forge lasting bonds between couples, friends, and family members traveling together. We guarantee you’ll be talking about your adventures around the dinner table for years to come.

So, who’s best cut out for the rigors and rewards of a safari? According to *Hideaways’* Travel Services Manager, Darcy Allen, you should be an independent-minded traveler, flexible, reasonably fit, and willing to rise early (no later than 6 a.m.) to hit the dusty road, as

this is often the best time to view game. The more off-the-beaten-track your safari is, the more important it is to be in good health, primarily because you’ll be so much farther out in the bush from any medical services, including hospitals. Of course, you’ll probably enjoy yourself more if you have an interest in wildlife, unique scenery, photography, and different cultures as well.

Darcy also suggests you should be a “go with the flow” type of person. “We often have people say, ‘I want to see elephants’ or ‘I’d really like to see the migration of the wildebeest and zebra between Kenya and Tanzania,’ which usually happens during the summer months,” says Darcy. “We’ll do our best to get you there at the right time, but you have to keep in mind that these are wild animals, so we never can predict exactly where they will be or when. But you’ll always see something fantastic, no matter when you go.”

PHOTO CREDITS: TOP: ZAMBEZI QUEEN/AMAWATERWAYS, BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: FAIRMONT MARA SAFARI CLUB



A luxurious guest tent at the Fairmont Mara Safari Club



Getting up close and personal with lions on a 4-wheel-drive safari

# Where the Wild Things are

Having the right “fit” certainly will make your safari experience more enjoyable. First-time safari-goers might want to stick with tamer, more well-known game reserves in destinations that are relatively safe and easy to get to, and where there are plenty of accommodation options for all budgets. Some of the more famous are the Masai Mara in Kenya, the Serengeti in Tanzania, and South Africa’s Kruger National Park. Each of these countries also has smaller parks and reserves that may be included in your safari itinerary to round out your experience.

If you already have a safari tucked under your belt and are looking to ratchet up the adventure quotient a notch or two, consider one of the lesser-known and lightly visited countries like Botswana, Zambia, or Namibia. Speaking of Namibia, it recently was featured on the *Today* show as part of the “Where in the World Is Matt Lauer?” series. Apparently William and Kate honeymooned there—in a luxury tent, of course—in search of the rare desert-dwelling elephants Namibia is famous for. These hearty animals have adapted enough to thrive in a region that receives less than six inches of rain a year, in herds that number around 500 elephants total. Namibia also is known for its desert black rhino populations, fiercely protected from poachers by conservation-minded communities that actually have ownership over their local wildlife.

One unique way to view wildlife is aboard the elegant, 24-passenger *Zambezi Queen*, on a land/river safari offered through **AmaWaterways**<sup>TM</sup>. This intimate vessel plies the waters of the Chobe River, which divides Namibia’s Caprivi Strip from Botswana’s Chobe National Park—a raw wilderness area with one of the densest

populations of large animals on the African continent. Water-based viewing from smaller excursion boats is especially thrilling, as crocodiles sun themselves on the banks and herds of elephant come to the river’s edge for bathing. You’ll also have the chance to hop in a four-wheel-drive for land-based game viewing or a cultural tour of a local village.

## Don’t Try to DIY

A typical safari runs 14 days and includes visits to several game parks, creating some potentially challenging logistics. Since these reserves are highly regulated, we don’t recommend taking a do-it-yourself approach to an African safari vacation. *Hideaways* Travel Services works with several reputable tour companies in each country, and your Travel Consultant can tailor an itinerary to fit your needs and budget.

For instance, there are escorted group tours available through some of the larger companies like Micato and National Geographic Expeditions, if you don’t mind traveling with strangers in larger numbers. But more often than not we recommend a private tour, which can be arranged to accommodate as few as two people in the vehicle. This approach gives you the ultimate in personalized attention and the flexibility to see and do whatever you want.



Case in point: When Darcy went on safari, it was on a small private tour. Here’s one of the highlights she recalls.

“I’ll never forget zooming over the Mara plains with our ‘rogue’ guide who took us off-road, thanks to a tip he got from a nearby driver/guide on his ‘walkie’ about a herd of giraffe maybe ten minutes away. Our guide zipped across the plains, and we landed right in the middle of about 20 giraffe that were busy eating in a clump of trees. That day we just happened to be touring in an open-top safari jeep, so we literally could have reached out and touched a giraffe. It was the most bizarre, stop-in-time moment I’ve ever experienced, especially since the giraffe paid us no mind whatsoever.

“I must point out that driver/guides are strictly advised not to go off-road with safari guests. However, the local guides feel this is their own backyard and they know it best, so it’s not uncommon for them to talk among them-

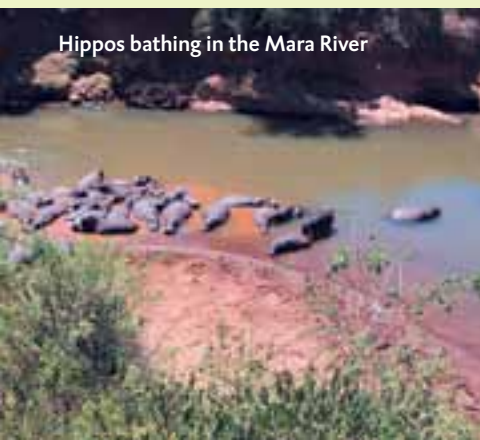
## THE “BIG FIVE” OF AFRICA

Originally a term coined in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by big-game hunters, the “Big Five” refers to those animals considered the hardest to track and the most dangerous to hunt: the lion, leopard, rhino, cape buffalo, and African elephant. Today, the goal of many safari-goers is to “shoot” these animals with their cameras for a different kind of trophy.

Of the “Big Five,” the leopard is considered by far the hardest to locate. When Darcy Allen was on safari in the Masai Mara, she was fortunate enough to see a leopard up a tree with her kill. “The guide explained that it was only because she didn’t want to leave her kill that we were able to see her at all, let alone get rather close to her,” notes Darcy.

selves on the ‘walkie’ in their native tongue and share the location of the animals. This is impossible to experience with organized group trips, which is why I always suggest going the private-tour route. You never know what kind of adventures you’ll come across!”

Whether you wet your safari feet with a group tour in Kenya or take an off-the-beaten-track private tour through a remote game reserve in Botswana, you’ll be rewarded with a memory card full of great photos and a lifetime’s worth of safari stories to tell. Are you ready to answer the call of the wild?



Hippos bathing in the Mara River



The 24-passenger *Zambezi Queen*



## Safaris That Are “Out of Africa”

Naturally, people first think of the well-known game reserves of Africa when they hear the word “safari.” But there are other options for wildlife viewing that will take you nowhere near Africa. Here are a few of our favorites.

### ELEPHANT TREKKING IN THAILAND

Most Asian elephant safaris are available in mountain regions like Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, where Thailand’s hill tribes eke out a living fishing and growing rice. These may not be safaris in the strictest sense—you’re actually riding an elephant into remote wilderness and learning about the Thai jungle as you make your way to camp. Along the trail, your guide/elephant driver will point out tropical birds, buffalo, wild fruits, edible mushrooms, and other unique aspects of jungle living. You’ll also have the opportunity to bathe, feed, learn to control, and bond with your four-legged-drive mode of transportation.

### TIGER SAFARIS IN INDIA

A number of national parks and reserves in India offer tiger safaris, but perhaps the most famous is Bandhavgarh National Park, an unspoiled habitat known to have the highest density of the Royal Bengal Tiger in India. Bandhavgarh has a rich history as a favorite game reserve of the Maharajas and their guests throughout the centuries. You’ll most likely climb aboard an elephant to access some of the more remote regions of the park, where you’ll glimpse glorious tigers in their natural surroundings, as well as the occasional sloth bear, leopard, wild boar, spotted deer, and Indian bison.

### MOOSE SAFARIS IN MAINE?

Yes, you can have a safari adventure practically in your own backyard! Travel into the heart of Maine’s moose country by canoe, kayak, or four-wheel-drive, and your experienced guide will point out beaver, otter, black bear, whitetail deer, and the majestic Maine moose. A private moose safari for a couple or small family takes you into the more intimate backwater settings of the Moosehead Lake region, where you’re most likely to spot these massive creatures cavorting in their natural habitat.

# SAFARI!

## Close Encounters of the Wild Kind

By *Hideaways* Member Jennifer Mandelson, Denver, CO

I admit, going to Kenya and doing a safari may not have been at the top of the list for my husband Dick and me.

But when our 22-year-old daughter, Emily, decided to spend a semester in Mombasa studying Swahili, it gave us the perfect excuse to go. Of course, we planned our trip for absolutely the worst time of year—May, which is the rainy season—and I was very concerned about spending all that money and then having the weather be horrible. But bless her heart, (travel consultant) Darcy assured us it would be fine, that it might rain for a few hours but then it would clear up. And she was right!

Darcy also recommended all our hotels and lodges for the two weeks we were

main lodge, which sits right on a watering hole. Each room has a buzzer, and, as the guide explained, each animal has a different number of buzzes. I forget, but it was something like one buzz means elephants, two means buffalo, three is something else, and four buzzes means, “You’d better get out to the viewing area right now, because it’s something spectacular!”

So Dick was already asleep, and Emily and I were in our jammies getting ready for bed, when the buzzer starts going off: one buzz, two, three, then four buzzes! We both screamed and just about knocked each other over running down the stairs to the viewing area. The guide says, “Look, over there, do you see it?” And Emily and I are straining our eyes trying to see what he’s pointing at. He says, “Look, see? Over there! A porcupine!!” We said, “What? We see those all the time when we visit Vermont!” The guy was so disappointed that we weren’t more excited. I guess porcupines are pretty rare in Africa!

At the **Fairmont Mara Safari Club** in the Masai Mara, we stayed in a beautiful tent and had our own personal valet. He came every night to turn down our beds, and took our beverage order for morning. At dawn we’d hear him outside our tent, calling out a greeting as he brought our breakfast. You get going early on safari, usually by 6 a.m. Our tent was perched on top of this cliff above the river, and the hippos would begin their morning greeting extremely early—a very loud sort of barking noise. One morning we thought we’d sleep in, but the hippos had other ideas.

I’d say our greatest thrill was seeing a mother cheetah with her cubs, which is a very rare sight. We also saw a male lion playing with his cubs, which they said is very unusual also, because the males normally don’t take much interest in their offspring.

I would go back to Africa without question. The Kenyans are wonderful people, very friendly, absolutely beautiful, and very well educated. And the wildlife was spectacular! This really was an amazing journey.



Emily gets a surprise “visit”

JENNIFER MANDELSON

there, and they were amazing. I told her my vision for this trip was being Meryl Streep in *Out of Africa*, and she really delivered. Because we were there in the rainy season, a couple of times we practically had the whole place to ourselves, and service was over the top. At the **Fairmont Mt. Kenya Safari Club**, they served us a surprise private dinner in this out-of-the-way spot. They had hauled everything there by golf cart, just for us.

Funny story: At **The Ark** in Aberdare National Park, we had a small room in the

## A New Look and a New Ship in French Polynesia

There's a fresh and seductive look in the works for the luxurious *m/s Paul Gauguin* in 2012, following its \$7 million renovation to both interiors and exteriors of the ship. If you've never sailed with them before, you'll be wowed by the new enhancements throughout, including elegant new furniture and window treatments, decorative wall panels, new outdoor furniture, and updated lighting systems. If you *have* had the chance to sail with them before, you'll immediately notice the ship's lighter, airier feel. There's even a refurbished dance floor in Le Grand Salon, so guests can dance the night away under the always-enticing French Polynesian sky.

Even more exciting is the news that **Paul Gauguin Cruises**<sup>THC</sup> has acquired a second ship, the elegant, yacht-like, 90-passenger *Le Levant*, from French-based **Compagnie du Ponant**. Following an impressive renovation, the vessel will be ready to sail the Tahitian Islands in December 2012, joining the 332-passenger *Paul Gauguin*. *C'est magnifique!*

### Enjoy All That Jazz

Things will be hopping next summer for passengers aboard the *Azamara Journey's* July 6, 2012, Skagen & Hague Jazz voyage, which begins with an overnight in Copenhagen and concludes with an overnight in Amsterdam. Along the way it calls in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where guests can attend the toe-tapping North Sea Jazz Festival and get a real taste of the local jazz scene. On the last day of the festival, the ship has scheduled a late departure of 2 a.m. in order to give guests ample time to enjoy post-festival parties and celebrations.

For those who'd rather party-hearty at Rio's infamous *Carnaval*, **Azamara Club Cruises** has a 12-night Carnival voyage aboard the *Azamara Quest* that departs January 31, 2013. The ship will overnight in both Buenos Aires and Punta Del Este, Uruguay, before arriving in time for two nights in Rio for the wild and crazy *Carnaval* celebration.

Can't wait for 2013? Then join the spectacle of *Carnaval* 2012 when you sail with **Crystal Cruises** and enjoy overnight port calls in Rio de Janeiro at the height of the festivities. The *Crystal Symphony* will sail Miami to Rio on February 6 and Rio to Buenos Aires on February 20, ending or beginning

on the parade's two best nights, Sunday and Monday, when 30,000 costumed performers wow the crowds with singing, dancing, drumming, and colorful floats. Don't miss the fun!

### Sailing with "Panache"

If cruising along Dutch canals through fields of colorful tulips sounds like pure romance, you'll want to try one of the Spring 2012 Tulip Cruises being offered by **European Waterways** aboard their new, 12-passenger luxury hotel barge, the *Panache*. The barge is fitted out with traditional yacht-style touches of brass and mahogany, has a large sundeck and spa pool, and offers panoramic windows in the saloon for viewing the passing countryside. Call **Hideaways Travel Services (800-843-4433)** for complete itineraries.

### Cruise News Briefs

Here are some of the latest travel trends and cruise news items in a nutshell.

- If the smell of race car fuel and the roar of engines gives you a thrill, plan to sail with **SeaDream Yacht Club** from Nice on May 26, 2012, and be sure to book their pre-cruise excursion to witness the

70<sup>th</sup> Grand Prix of Monaco. Talk about jump-starting your cruise! *SeaDream 1* will make port calls in St. Tropez and in Portovenere, Viareggio, Portoferraio, and Portofino, Italy, before disembarking guests in Monaco on June 2; fares start from \$4,899/person.

- Times certainly are changing! **Royal Caribbean** has decided to reposition its gigantic, 3,114-passenger *Voyager of the Seas* to Shanghai in June 2012, responding to demand for cruising in China as hundreds of millions of Chinese are now finding it within their means to travel. The line will tailor its ambiance more to Chinese guests with things like authentic Chinese food and on-board Chinese language services.
- Talk about over the top! The 197-foot mega-yacht, *M.Y. Yogi*, is about as luxurious as it gets—and now you can rent it for the party of a lifetime! The yacht has just six staterooms (choose your 12 guests wisely) and is set to cruise the Mediterranean May through December, or the Caribbean December through March. The starting price for chartering the entire yacht? Just \$484,000 per week in low season, including the services of a full crew.
- French-flagged cruise line **Compagnie du Ponant** recently placed an order with Italy's Fincantieri shipyard for its sixth vessel, a 132-stateroom yacht that will join its fleet by June 2013. The company currently operates *L'Austral*, *Le Diamant*, *Le Levant*, *Le Ponant*, and *Le Boreal*—which *Hideaways'* Mike Thiel and Gail Richard recently toured in Boston and described as "very sleek and European feeling."
- It's official—the *Queen Mary* has become a member of the Historic Hotels of America. The former **Cunard** ocean liner, which operated from 1936 to 1967, has been a treasured dockside attraction and hotel in Long Beach, California, since 1971. To be selected for membership in the Historic Hotels of America, a hotel must be at least 50 years old, listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, or recognized locally as having historic significance.

## A Hot Time in Hawaii

Things are jumping lately at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, where visitors to the Big Island are being treated to a gas and steam plume emitting from an active vent in the Halema'uma'u Crater, viewable from the Jaggar Museum and the Kilauea Overlook. New and exciting eruptive activity began occurring at Kilauea volcano after the collapse of a lava lake within its Pu'u 'O'o crater in early August. On a clear night, there's an impressive orange glow coming from the lava lake that can be seen for miles.

Eruption activity at Kilauea's summit also is ongoing, and there's a chance you might hear the sound of exploding rocks only a short walk from the National Park's visitor center. Rangers warn there's the chance of hazardous fumes in certain areas of the park, and sudden road closures could occur due to the new volcanic activity. Kilauea remains one of the world's most active volcanoes, and has been continually erupting since 1983.

### Guilty Pleasure

Admit it—you've watched more than one episode of the new television series, "Pan Am." Turns out the series may not be too far off course from what the golden era of air travel really was like, thanks to the input of former Pan Am employees who were used as consultants in launching the TV series. In fact, the show's executive producer is a former Pan Am stewardess herself, having served in the skies from 1968 to 1976.

Anyone remember these details? There were no flight attendants, they were stewardesses, and they were all female. Hair could be no longer than the jawline, and bangs had to clear the eyebrows. Nail polish and lipstick color had to be Revlon's Persian Melon, white bras and step-in girdles were mandatory, and the dreaded weigh-in was a fact of life—a weight range of 110 to 135 pounds was strictly enforced, and stewardesses could be sent home for packing a couple of extra pounds. Hmm . . . can you say "politically incorrect?"

### Bigger and Better?

Thanks to a huge, ambitious expansion project currently underway, the Panama Canal will begin to accommodate longer and wider cruise ships sometime in the year 2014. Opened in 1914, the 48-mile-long canal now limits ships to 950 feet in length and

106 feet in width, meaning many of today's larger cruise ships must make the arduous voyage around Cape Horn at the tip of South America to transit from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Once this project is completed, a third lane of traffic will accommodate ships up to 1,200 feet long and 160 feet wide, allowing access to all but the mega-ships like Royal Caribbean's 6,296-passenger *Freedom of the Seas* and Carnival's 3,646-passenger *Carnival Dream*.

### Hideaways News Briefs

Here are some of the latest travel trends and news items in a nutshell.

- Love The Big Apple? Here's one more reason to visit soon. A unique exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls will be on display at NYC's Discovery Times Square until April 15, 2012, before moving to Philadelphia's Franklin Institute for five months. You'll be able to view four pieces of parchment that have never before been displayed, plus jewelry, coins, and a three-ton stone from Jerusalem's Western Wall.
- In a move somewhat reminiscent of the movie *Minority Report*, London's Gatwick Airport has introduced iris scanners as part of the screening process for some departing passengers.

The system is designed to get all passengers using its 34 automated "e-gates" in the South Terminal through ID check and security in five minutes or less.

- It seems northeastern Japan wasn't the only place hard hit by the March 2011 tsunami. **Kona Village**, on Hawaii's Big Island, apparently sustained heavy damages exceeding \$10 million, and won't reopen until 2013 at the earliest.
- Losing sleep won't be an issue when you attend the Sleep School at **LaSource** on the island of Grenada. The London-based sleep program periodically is offered free to LaSource guests, and teaches sleep-inducing exercises in a fun and relaxed setting, without the use of drugs.
- It's been a while since Gstaad, Switzerland, has seen a new five-star hotel—more than 100 years, in fact—but that's set to change with the much-anticipated and very luxurious **Alpina Gstaad**, due to open in December 2012 in the heart of the Bernese Alps. The new hotel will include two very chic private chalets with excellent access to the ski slopes.
- If you love sea turtles and are looking for a fun activity in a paradise setting next fall, head to either the **Sheraton Hacienda Del Mar Golf & Spa Resort** or the **Westin Resort & Spa**, both in Los Cabos, Mexico. Each offers packages for guests that revolve around their Olive Ridley sea turtle conservation programs, which run through the end of hatching season in late November. Guests learn first-hand about the nesting process and can take part in the release of the baby turtles as they make their way to the sea.
- Fans of the movie *Avatar*, take note! Walt Disney Parks and Resorts has entered into an exclusive agreement with the movie's producer, James Cameron, to create *Avatar*-themed lands in its amusement parks. We can't wait to visit Pandora in person!

# MEMBERS' FORUM

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## VILLA IL CORALLO

PRAIANO, ITALY

RATING: 4.9

This villa is a perfect hideaway for three couples. Our accommodations were great, and the view spectacular! Best of all, the villa's water access allowed us to swim and also take water taxis to restaurants and to Positano. Katia at *Hideaways* had food and wine delivered for us in advance, and the property manager supplied us with phone numbers for taxis, water taxis, and restaurants.

Don't rent a car, as parking is impossible here. Take taxis or boats to Positano, Ravello, and the many nearby restaurants. Finally, Praiano is a gem of a town, off the beaten track yet close to everything. A great spot!

On this trip, we also had a stopover at **The Cliveden House** in London—I rate it 5+ across the board. It was grand, spectacular, and expensive—but fun for a night.

EDWARD MCMILLAN, DENVER, CO

## VILLA CASALE ROSE GARDEN

TODI, ITALY

RATING: 4.4

The villa was beautiful, but the cook was not very good. She was very nice and a good housekeeper, but we couldn't use her for cooking—and restaurants are about 30 minutes away in Todi Center.

TED DAVIS, BEDFORD, MA

*Ed. note: It's important to keep in mind that there's a huge distinction between a housekeeper who often doubles as a cook—and who fixes just light, easy local cuisine—and a full-on chef you might hire who will prepare a gourmet Italian feast for*

## CALLING ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS!

Everyone loves taking vacation photos—and we want to spotlight yours in Members' Forum! When you return our "Welcome Back" survey with your vacation comments and ratings, just pop in a few duplicate prints of you and your travel companions enjoying your getaway. Or send your best digital photos to [edit@hideaways.com](mailto:edit@hideaways.com). As space allows, we'll run them with your comments in Members' Forum.

## Ask a Member!

Here's something you won't find on those generic online travel sites like TripAdvisor®. As a *Hideaways Aficionado*® Club member, you have access to first-hand advice and tips from other members who've just returned from their *Hideaways*-planned vacations. Many of these savvy travelers are willing to be contacted by you for their personal insight into the properties and destinations they've just visited that you might be interested in—a great planning resource you'll want to take advantage of! Just visit [www.Hideaways.com/ratings](http://www.Hideaways.com/ratings), choose a property, and look for member comments that include their email address.

*an additional cost. Be sure to discuss your desires with your Hideaways Travel Specialist to ensure the proper services are reserved for your villa needs.*

## OCEANIA CRUISES<sup>THC</sup>

JEWELS OF THE AEGEAN

RATING: 4.6

Our *Marina* on-board experience was excellent. The ship was very clean, and all of the crew members were friendly and treated us professionally and very well. Our suite was always well attended to and clean. Most crew members called us by name, which is always a nice touch! Our butler, Vinod, was great. He was very prompt, courteous, and a nice young man, always willing to help with reservations or special requests.



The ship's new specialty restaurant, Red Ginger, was a pleasant surprise. The service was great, and the food was different but very good. The sea bass was my best choice. We ended up going there twice, the food was so good. The tea choices and varieties were interesting, so everyone chose something different to try. While there are no windows in that particular restaurant, the atmosphere is comfortable.

One of our favorite places we visited was Turkey. The food and people were great. We even purchased a Turkish rug that we had shipped home to remember our wonderful holiday.

We are looking forward to being back on the *Marina* this February, as we have already booked our next cruise adventure to the Caribbean. My thanks to Darcy for all her help!

LAURIE BROWN, CLARKSTON, MI

## SILVERSEA CRUISES<sup>THC</sup>

ALASKA'S INSIDE PASSAGE

RATING: 5.0

The ship was fabulous in so many ways. Our stateroom was quite spacious compared to those on other large-ship cruises I've been on (Royal Caribbean, etc.), and we had a lovely big bathtub, cozy robes—and a walk-in closet! The size of the ship allowed us to get acquainted with the floor plan in a short time and start to feel "at home" after a couple of days. Even when I found myself turned around, a passing staff person would cheerfully point me in the right direction. And being on a smaller ship, dinnertime never felt like a cattle call.

We didn't book a balcony stateroom, but since it rained almost every day we really didn't miss it. Instead, we spent our time on the Observation Deck or simply enjoyed the view through our large stateroom window. The staff was especially pleasant and helpful—it was wonderful being greeted by name!

AMY FELGAR, PORTSMOUTH, NH

## PRINCESS CRUISES

GREEK ISLES & MEDITERRANEAN

RATING: 2.3

I've taken a *Celebrity* European cruise in the past. After that, Princess just couldn't catch up. On *Celebrity*, absolutely everything is better: food, cost, value, amenities, and more. Princess messed up on several items that I confirmed in advance, like separate beds for my siblings. Stick with *Celebrity*.

AMANDA SNOWDEN, ROCHESTER, MN

“Florence was amazing! Imagine our first night, listening to Puccini under the stars while standing in the Piazza Signora. It was magical.”

[ CARLA WHITE RECALLS HER TRIP TO ITALY ]

## My Love Affair with Italy

First of all, thank you to *Hideaways* for setting everything up for me. This was a fabulous trip and could not have been more perfect. As always, Katia was the best!

My latest Italian excursion started out in Rome, with a visit to the **Stay Inn**. It was in a fantastic location. I stepped directly out onto Via del Corso right across from the Nike store, Sephora, etc. Still, it was a quiet room—no street noise, or else I was so jet-lagged I didn't notice. It was not a large room, but very adequate and updated (very nice bathroom). Kind of city chic. The desk people were really friendly and helpful, and the breakfast (included) was very good. The location fit with my desire not to take a taxi, because I was able to take the Leonardo into Termini and then the metro to the Spanish Steps.

Taking the train to Florence was so much fun. I was actually able to use some of what I learned in Italian class. My friend, Jane, came into the Santa Maria Novella station at almost the same time as my arrival. We grabbed a taxi and went to the **Hotel de Rose**, which was very close—but I'm glad we didn't walk. It was another great hotel, just a nice stroll from the hotel to the Ponte Vecchio along the Arno, so I thought the location was very good. It was on a nice, quiet street and was very convenient to most everything. It felt like having an apartment rather than a hotel room.

Florence was amazing! After a year of studying Italian art, I was overwhelmed, as you can imagine. There was a music festival going on while we were there. Imagine our first night, listening to Puccini under the stars while standing in the Piazza Signora. It was magical. Actually, our entire time in Florence was full of magic moments. We had drinks in the shadow of the Duomo, shopped the Ponte Vecchio (but didn't take out our wallets nearly as much as we wanted to!), shopped the markets (did buy leather purses, jackets, etc.), and even ran into a gelato festival in front of the Pitti Palace.

From Florence, I took the train to Siena and immediately fell in love. I had almost regretted planning time in Siena because there was so much I wanted to see in Florence and Rome, but once I arrived I was so glad I had come. I loved the **Locanda di San Martino**. I opened the windows of my room and could see in the distance blue and white flags flying in the air. The only issue I had was that they did not have an elevator—I had done some shopping in Florence—and my room was on the fourth floor. They were planning an elevator, and the front-desk staff took my bag up for me, so I really could say nothing negative about this charming inn.

It turned out that I took a bus through the countryside from Siena to Chiusi and then the train to Roma. I would say it was



Carla White raises a toast to her beloved Italy

almost the highlight of the trip, but how could you choose just one? It had to be the most beautiful bus trip ever, though!

In Roma at Termini again, I took the metro to the **Hotel Quirinale**. It would have been easier and quicker to walk—very close. It was an elegant and lovely hotel, definitely the poshest of my journey. I felt like a *principessa*. A great location, the best breakfast, and a beautiful room, but maybe not my favorite hotel of the trip. Not because of the hotel, but (this is going to sound horrible, but . . .) it seemed like this was where a lot of Americans stayed. By this time I was feeling fully immersed in Italy, and somehow people in jeans and T-shirts clustered in groups was not “my thing.” I did love talking to the bellmen, the waiters, and the front-desk people. I must have improved my Italian (or they were being very generous) because I was only speaking Italian by this point, and they always responded in Italian. I felt so accomplished!

I absolutely loved a store down the street that was *the most fabulous shoe store ever*, and it had a complimentary bar. I was thinking, “Now *this* is what we need in New Orleans!” I also made it back to my most favorite restaurant in all of Rome, which is next to the Basilica degli Saintissimi XII Apostoli. I believe it goes by the name of XII Apostoli. The owner is always so accommodating, and the homemade pasta is amazing. I get teary-eyed just thinking of it.

I could go on and on about all the wonderful things I saw, did, ate . . . yes, I am *really* ready to go back to Italy! Ciao, ciao!

CARLA WHITE, WILLIAMSBURG, VA

*Ed. note: Read Carla's entire report on her most recent trip to Italy—including her memories of the Italian Air Force flyover that left a trail of red, white, and green in the sky—at [www.Hideaways.com/carlasitaly](http://www.Hideaways.com/carlasitaly).*

# Making a Difference, One Cruise at a Time

Every once in awhile, we hear about something so heartwarming we just have to share it with you. That was the case when we learned of the ODA (Opportunities & Development through Art) Free English School in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Generously built and supported by *Hideaways* partner **AmaWaterways**<sup>THC</sup>, the school has an interesting story behind it. And who better to tell that story than Jake Schreiner, the son of AmaWaterways President Rudi Schreiner and the cruise line's Africa Product Manager.

**HIDEAWAYS INTERNATIONAL:** How did AmaWaterways become aware of this opportunity to partner with the ODA Orphanage?

**JAKE SCHREINER:** Fortunately for us, we were put in touch with an Australian volunteer named Shirley Hawe. For the past three years, Shirley has dedicated her life to assisting in the startup of several ODA Free English Schools throughout Siem Reap, as well as providing daily support to the orphanage. We felt she was a very reliable source for us to become involved with.

In October of last year, my father and I had the chance to meet with Shirley and Leng and Sry On, the young married couple that

founded ODA. As we drove on the dirt path that leads up to the orphanage, we watched a crowd of young faces light up, and everyone came running to the car. With those smiling faces surrounding our vehicle on all sides, the two of us knew we were in the right place.

Leng and his wife are not only the founders of ODA but also its backbone. At a very young age, he was tragically orphaned after witnessing his father's murder under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. He used this past adversity as fuel to change the lives of young children who, like him, were in need of an outlet. Leng and Sry On live with their two children and more than 20 young boys and girls they have taken in and raised on their own.



Shirley Hawe with school director Leng On

Another vital member of Leng's team is Sophan, head teacher for the English schools. He's an extremely bright young man who, in addition to teaching his own classes and helping Leng run ODA, also gives the other teachers daily English lessons to keep them sharp. And he does all this as he is simultaneously studying for his Master's in English!

**HI:** Have you had a chance to visit the school?

**JS:** Unfortunately I haven't, since it only opened about six months ago. But I was in Cambodia last October and had the opportunity to visit the small schools Leng was already running. That was something I'll never forget. I had never come in such close contact with such poverty. Yet, as you watch these kids in class, you would never know they were struggling to get by each and every day. Their enthusiasm was overwhelming as they took turns repeating simple English sentences written on the whiteboard.

During my visit to the third school, there was a large tropical downpour, so we all tucked ourselves underneath the small raised house to avoid the rain. Right then, I realized more than ever how crucial it was for them to have a real classroom building. The following day, we set off in search of the right piece of land to build our own school on.

**HI:** What classes are taught at the school?

**JS:** We have two separate programs set up for the different age groups of village children. The kindergarten classes are the first ones held each day for the youngest kids in the community, usually ages 5 and under. We get about 16–20 of the little ones per class, rain or shine. In addition to getting started with English, the kindergarten offers a fun place for the kids to come together and play in a safe environment. They really love it.



AmaWaterways passengers pose for the camera with some of the school's 50 or so students

The second program is for the older kids who are over the age of 6. These classes focus solely on the study of the English language. A few hours after the kids get out of their primary school classes, they have the option to attend one of the two hour-long classes. We currently have about 40–50 students attending each of these classes daily.

**HI:** How does AmaWaterways support the school?

**JS:** Our primary support is financial. Through our sponsorship, we began with the land purchase and the complete construction of the school. In addition to helping with the start-up, we provide them with ongoing funds they need for everything from teachers' salaries to school supplies and other necessities.

**HI:** It must be exciting for your cruise guests to be able to visit the school.

**JS:** You're right, it definitely is exciting to be able to visit such a unique, unfamiliar learning environment. We receive emails from past passengers about how inspiring it was to be in such a poverty-stricken place, yet surrounded by children whose smiles made it seem like they had everything in the world.

In order to give the children their space to learn, passengers only stop by the school once a week. They come into the classroom and watch as the teachers take the children through their lessons. For the first part of the class, the children start by taking turns going to the board and reciting different sentences in English. Passengers love to watch the littlest ones walk up to the front with their big pointer and speak aloud with the confidence of someone twice their size.

Toward the end of the class, our guests are given the chance to walk around the room and interact with the kids through very basic conversation, giving students a chance to test

ONE OF THE SCHOOL'S TALENTED STUDENTS expresses himself through his art. Leng has a passion for teaching the children the skill of painting, and the school even has its own thatched-roof art "gallery" where Leng and his students display their work.



AMAWATERWAYS

out their most recently added vocabulary. Prior to the school being built, the majority of these children had never seen a Westerner before, so you can imagine how shocking it was for them the first time a group of 30–40 passengers came in. Yet, as the weeks have gone by, they've stepped out of their comfort zones and gotten much more confident speaking English.

**HI:** Can passengers bring the children small gifts?

**JS:** Definitely. We encourage them to do this, especially school supplies. With an increasing number of students hoping to attend classes each week, every bit of support makes a difference. We actually provide our passengers with a short "wish list" which Shirley and Leng update, so they have an idea of the school's current needs. We get a lot of great feedback from our guests about

how incredible it is to see the kids' faces light up over the most basic gifts, from pencils and crayons to coloring books and building blocks. Even the smallest things have significant value for children who have next to nothing.

**HI:** Are there any long-term opportunities for cruise guests to support the school?

**JS:** We haven't set up any official long-term support system yet, but our passengers can contact us to send things like gifts, supplies, or money. It's not always easy to get packages out to small villages in Cambodia, but we manage it. Just today, I actually received an email from a Canadian group that recently returned from their Mekong River cruise on *La Marguerite*. They wanted to let me know their office recently started a special Christmas collection for the kids. They're gathering textbooks, stationery, toys, and other basic items to send over to Siem Reap.

In hopes of making donations easier in the future, we'll be connecting the charity to our Facebook page, giving passengers the ability to donate online. We also hope to use social media as a way of keeping our passengers connected with the kids' progress in school, through pictures and monthly updates from Cambodia.

This is all part of the philosophy that AmaWaterways ODA Free English School is built on—making a difference one child at a time. With Leng at our side, we are completely optimistic about the future of the children attending our school. **H**

## What's AmaWaterways All About?

Known for its European river cruises, this award-winning—and socially altruistic—cruise line celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2012. While the majority of its 14 vessels meander along the major rivers of Europe, AmaWaterways also cruises through Russia, Africa (see our "Special Report: Safaris" on page 7), and Cambodia/Vietnam.

The 92-passenger *La Marguerite* was introduced in 2009 specifically to cruise the waters of the Mekong. Most of the vessel's staterooms and suites have balconies, and all are designed with a sleek, contemporary Asian flair. There's also a spa, the Sun Deck with an outdoor pool, and a lovely restaurant serving both Asian and Western specialties.

Have we piqued your interest in a Mekong voyage? View the entire 16-day overland/river-cruise itinerary—which includes 3 nights at Siem Reap and a 7-night Mekong River cruise—at [www.Hideaways.com/mekongitinerary](http://www.Hideaways.com/mekongitinerary).

For more information on AmaWaterways, visit [www.Hideaways.com/amawaterways](http://www.Hideaways.com/amawaterways), or call your Travel Consultant at 800-843-4433 to book any of their outstanding river cruises. *Hideaways* members receive their perk of a \$100 shipboard credit per stateroom.

## SPECIAL SAVINGS OFFER

# Looking for Sensual? Head to Bali!

Every once in awhile, travel should be a bit hedonistic and more than a little seductive. And Bali certainly is one destination that fits the bill, satisfying those special travel occasions when sublime romance and over-the-top pampering are in order—think honeymoon, anniversary, or simply some much-needed together time.

From its lush tropical mountains to the ribbons of white-sand beach encircling the island, Bali is an exquisite escape for couples hoping to indulge and reconnect. *Hideaways* can help you on your way with the **Kupu Kupu Barong**<sup>™</sup> and **Kupu Kupu Jimbaran**<sup>™</sup> “Best of Both Worlds” mountain-and-beach package that includes luscious stays at both resorts, plus enough pleasures to keep the romance going long after you and your loved one return home.

Start by working on your tan at Kupu Kupu Jimbaran, which has its own private beach club on what is considered one of Bali’s best stretches of sand. You’ll spend three nights in a premium Uluwatu Suite, designed in ethnic Indonesian style

with hardwood furnishings and offering lush garden views from an expansive private balcony. A stylish infinity pool and the Bamboo Spa by L’Occitane are perfect places to relax and let the cares of the world drain away. Top off each evening with French/Indonesian cuisine in elegant Topeng Restaurant, followed by a romantic nightcap on the beach.

Then it’s off to Kupu Kupu Barong for two amazing nights in the mountain region of Ubud, where each of the resort’s 34 private villas embraces its natural tropical setting, and many overlook the stunning Ayung River Valley. Your spacious villa has its own private plunge pool and a large terrace where you can relax with your morning coffee and watch the mists rise from the river and drift above the forest. Traditional decorative touches like teakwood floors, silk fabrics, and coconut-shell panels complete the exotic feel of your own little paradise. No stay is complete without dining at La View Restaurant, with its dramatic outdoor terrace and gourmet Southeast Asia-inspired cuisine.

Immerse yourself in a romantic interlude with this 5-night, *Hideaways*-exclusive package that includes all transfers to/from the airport and between resorts; luxe accommodations and daily breakfast for two; welcome cocktails and a tropical fruit basket on arrival at both resorts; daily afternoon coffee or tea with Balinese sweets; a complimentary dinner for two at Jimbaran’s Topeng Restaurant; a complimentary 90-minute spa treatment at Barong’s Mango Tree Spa by L’Occitane; complimentary Wi-Fi at both resorts; and an exclusive welcome gift at Jimbaran.

Package rates start from US\$1,369 for two, and run through December 31, 2012. Trip also can be done in reverse (Ubud to Jimbaran); additional nights available. Taxes and service charges not included; package subject to availability. For more details, call your personal *Hideaways* Travel Consultant at **800-843-4433** (+1-603-430-4433 outside the U.S.), or email [ts@hideaways.com](mailto:ts@hideaways.com).



The soothing infinity-edge pool at Kupu Kupu Jimbaran



Jimbaran’s lovely Bamboo Spa by L’Occitane



Dining in the “Bird’s Nest” at Kupu Kupu Barong

## What’s New at Hideaways.com

Find a wealth of additional deals and insight when you visit us on the Web at [www.Hideaways.com](http://www.Hideaways.com), including:

1. **A whole slew of incredible “Buy-1-Night, Get-1-Free” deals** at some of our favorite lodgings in *The Hideaways Collection*, at [www.Hideaways.com/bogo](http://www.Hideaways.com/bogo);
2. **Hideaways member Carla White’s complete memoir** on her most recent live-like-a-local trip to Italy, at [www.Hideaways.com/carlasitaly](http://www.Hideaways.com/carlasitaly); and
3. **Mike Thiel’s complete report on the delights of Amsterdam**, including his in-depth hotel reviews and full slideshow, at [www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam](http://www.Hideaways.com/traveltoamsterdam).

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## Don’t Miss These Sizzling Cruises

Cruising the South Pacific is going to be hot, hot, hot for the 2012/2013 season. Our advice? Book now, since these voyages often sell out a full year in advance.

Our fave picks for the region are two Pacific Rim sailings—Auckland to Sydney and Sydney to Bali—that actually are part of **Crystal Cruises’** 98-day “Asia Pacific Adventure” cruise. These can be done separately (13 and 12 days, respectively) or booked back-to-back for 25 grand days of spectacular scenery.

Rates start from \$5,890/person for 12 days; depart Auckland January 29, 2013, and debark in Bali 25 days later on February 23.

**Book soon with *Hideaways* for these great savings & amenities:**

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