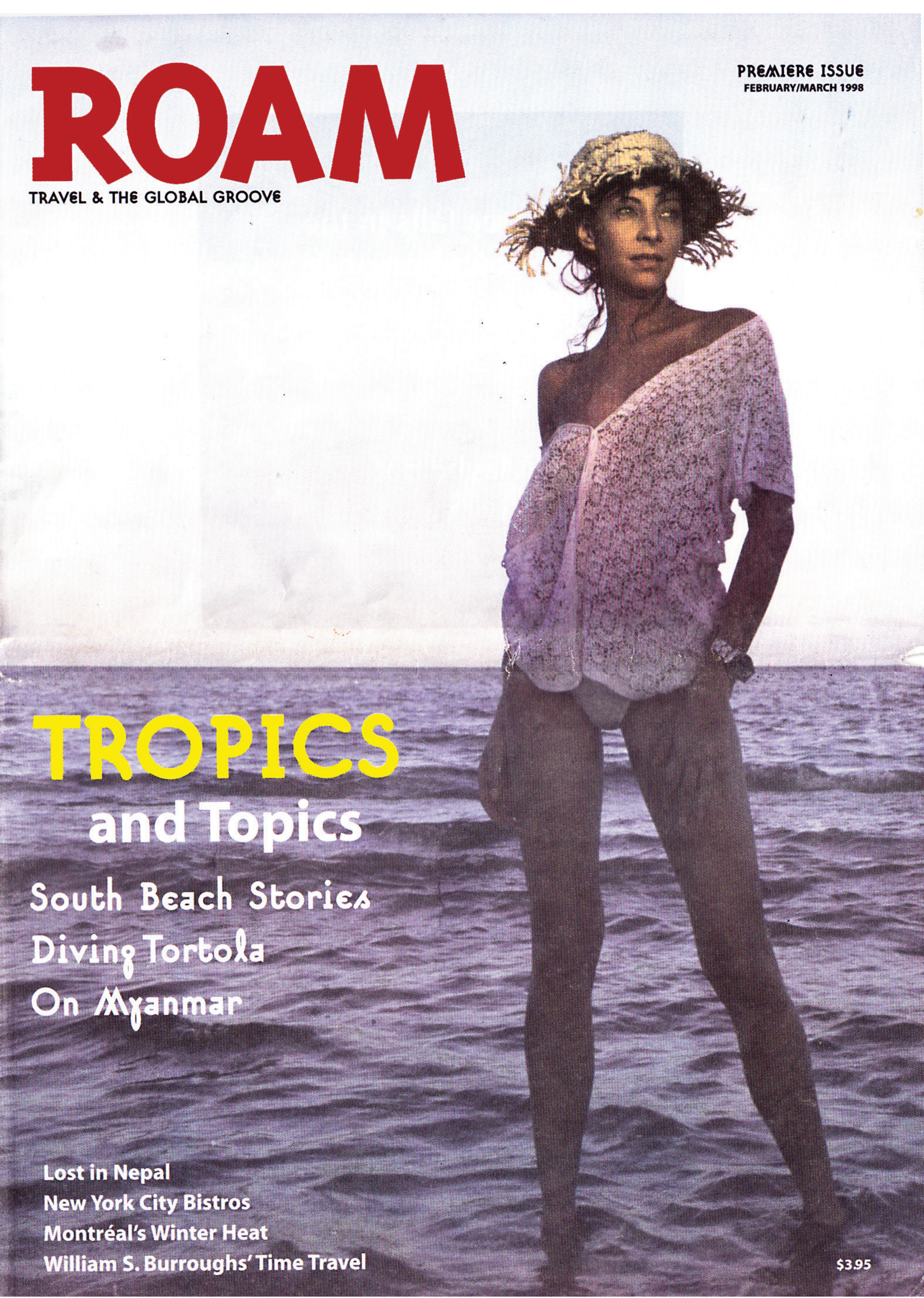
ROAM

TRAVEL & THE GLOBAL GROOVE

PREMIERE ISSUE
FEBRUARY/MARCH 1998

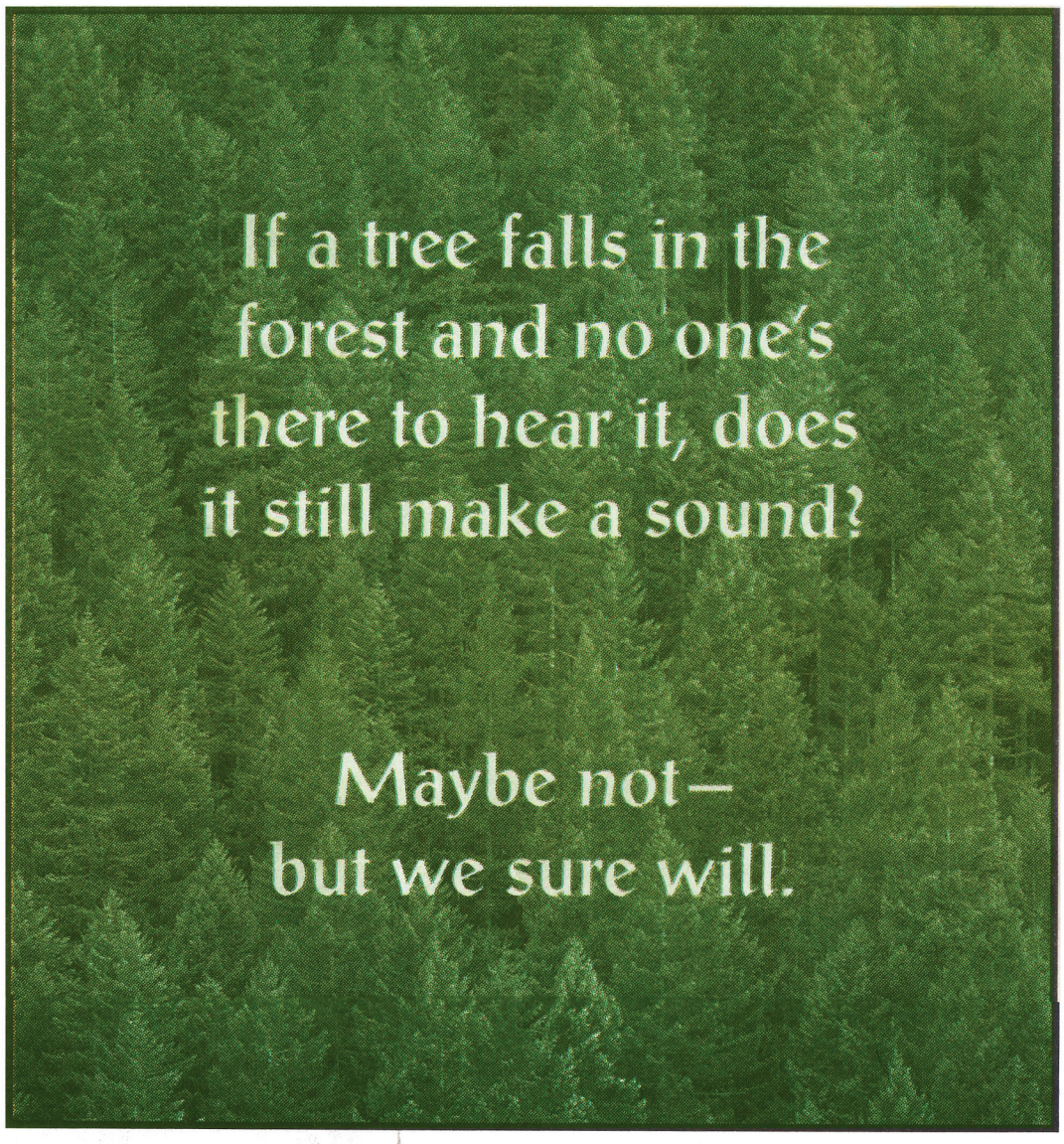


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ROAM

From the Publisher

The world is full of boundaries—social, sexual, political, racial—all designed to keep us apart and magnify our differences. But in the natural world these borders don't exist—we are all members of the same blue planet.

What if we chose not to be limited by boundaries—how would the world look then? At ROAM we intend to explore this premise in depth. A world where all cultures are respected and travel is the meeting of equals in celebration of life. *This is the global groove.*

At ROAM travel is a metaphor for exploration—physical, spiritual and mental. We want to take you to places you've never been. Places that reshape your ideas of the world and yourself.

In this, our first issue, ROAM explores some of the places, people and issues that make our world. Places like Montréal—a city that, even in the dead of winter, is hot with activity. Or Nepal, a spectacular country whose people continually surprise Westerners with their warmth and kindness. People like Joe Cummings, who addresses the sensitive issue of travel to Myanmar. Or William S. Burroughs, who's life was a continuous journey to the end.

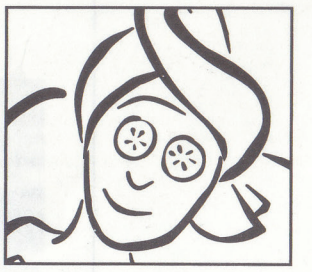
ROAM is going places—some new and exotic, others ancient and familiar—but always looking forward. In future issues we'll explore new cultures and places here and abroad—the places that make travel so alluring. We'll also uncover new ideas, issues and trends that affect travel and the world.

Please write with your ideas, opinions and criticism. Your thoughts matter. We've got new territory to chart. Precisely where we're going, we are not certain. But it's going to be one interesting journey. I hope you join us.

John C. Tripp

No. 1 February/March 1998

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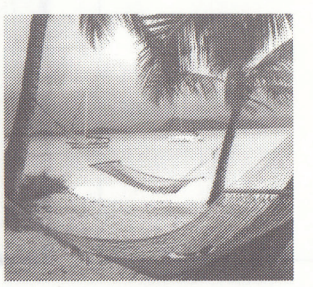
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ROAM

travel and the global groove

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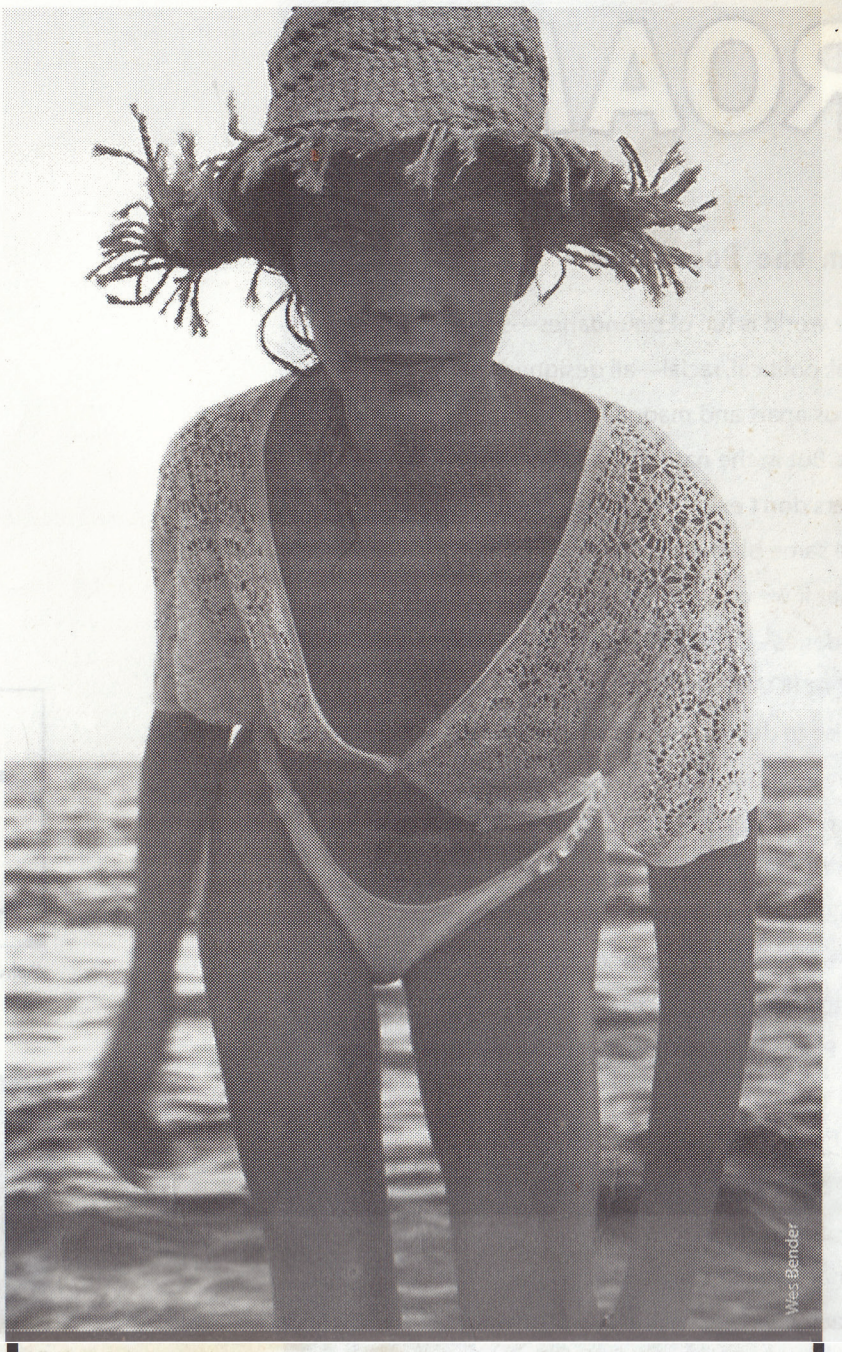
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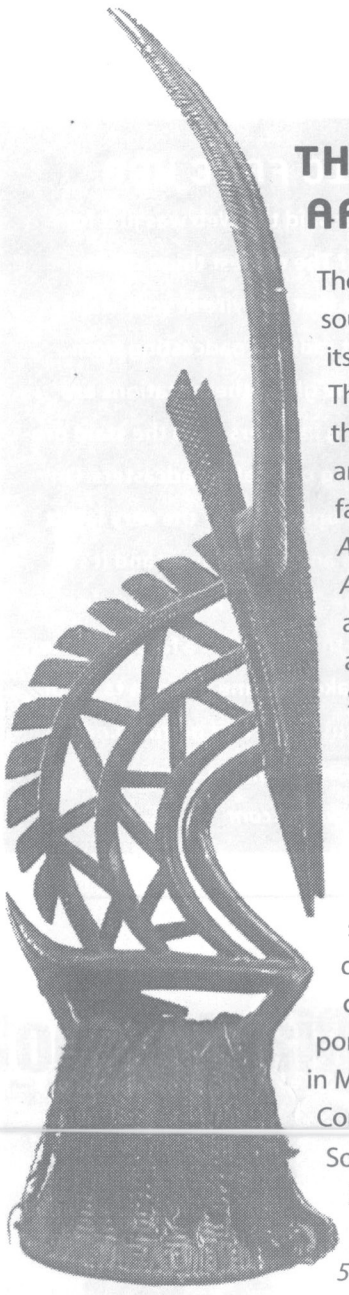
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THE MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART

The Museum for African Art brings the soul of Africa to the heart of SOHO in its gorgeous Maya Lin created interior. The Museum is an important link in the furthering of African art studies and serves as exhibitor, educator and facilitator. Its most recent exhibit, *African Faces, African Figures: The Arman Collection,* is an extraordinary assemblage of more than 180 masks and sculptures from West, Central, Southern and East Africa. Those yearning for hands-on adventure can join the museum's *Discovery Africa* program, which regularly travels to Mali, Ivory Coast, South Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The emphasis of the program is to inspire a deeper understanding of African culture, both traditional and contemporary. Upcoming trips include Senegal in May, focusing on the Biennial of Contemporary African Art in Dakar; and South African in October, with visits to Zulu Land and Zimbabwe.

The Museum For African Art,
593 Broadway, New York; (212) 966-1313.

HOTWIRE

"CAT'S EYE" GEMS DANGER

Low quality gems from India are reportedly being exported to Indonesia, where they are irradiated to change their color. The gems are then sold as the semi-precious stone known as "Cat's Eye." Travelers to Asia should use great caution when purchasing jewelry in Bangkok, Hong Kong and Indonesia, as the stones have entered these markets. Some stones have been found to contain more than 50 times the U.S. safety limit and could cause health problems, including cancer.

CHILD PROSTITUTION WATCH

The trafficking of child prostitutes and the social afflictions and disease associated with it have reached epidemic proportions in many developing countries. To confront the exploitation of children in sex tourism The World Tourism Organization has created *Child Prostitution and Tourism Watch,* a task force of tourism industry groups, governments and non-governmental organizations. The aims of the international campaign are to prevent, uncover, isolate and eradicate instances of exploitation of children. Participating groups monitor the sex industries of their respective cities, referring any violations of children's rights to the World Tourism Organization. Visit their web site at: www.world-tourism.org for country phone numbers to report violations.

BARGAIN TRAVEL IN S.E.ASIA

With the tumult of the Asian stock market hitting local currencies hard, travel to Southeast Asia is now a bargain for those carrying hard U.S. currency. Thailand's baht has fallen over 35% against the U.S. dollar and most currencies in the region have taken a dive. Though airline rates won't change, travelers can expect their money to go a lot further in normal currency transactions. Though the influx of traveler dollars has a positive impact the downside to this—decreased stability and social unrest—far outweighs the bargains found.

PINK TELEPHONES IN LONDON

The London Tourist Board is launching a special "pink" telephone hotline as part of a major campaign to attract more gay and lesbian tourists to the British capital. The campaign will promote London as a destination with a wide range of cultural and entertainment activities of interest these groups. The hotline will cover "bar and clubs, gay-friendly restaurants, theater and events of interest to the gay/lesbian traveler and information on how to find out more on London's gay scene.

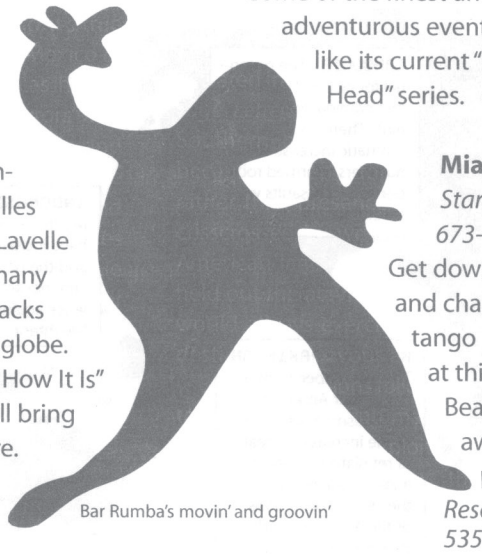
PRE-MILLENNIUM ATTENTION

It may be a bit premature but nevertheless, planning for New Year's Eve 1999 is already in the works. Whether you intend to spend it in Times Square or on a deserted island, now is the time to get your plans in order. To assist you in your decision, Rough Guide is releasing *The Millennium* a travel guide to 2000's festivals, projects and mega-events. Available in May, the book will include a history of millennium movements, details on travel packages and a glossary of web sites.

GROOVEFINDER

Looking for the perfect beat? Here's a list of some of the fabest parties and establishments to hear global rhythms on your next nightlife excursion in the big city.

London
Bar Rumba
287-2715
London's most groovin' establishment with DJs Gilles Peterson, James Lavelle of Mo' Wax and many more spinning tracks from all over the globe. Monday's "That's How It Is" is one party that'll bring you back for more.



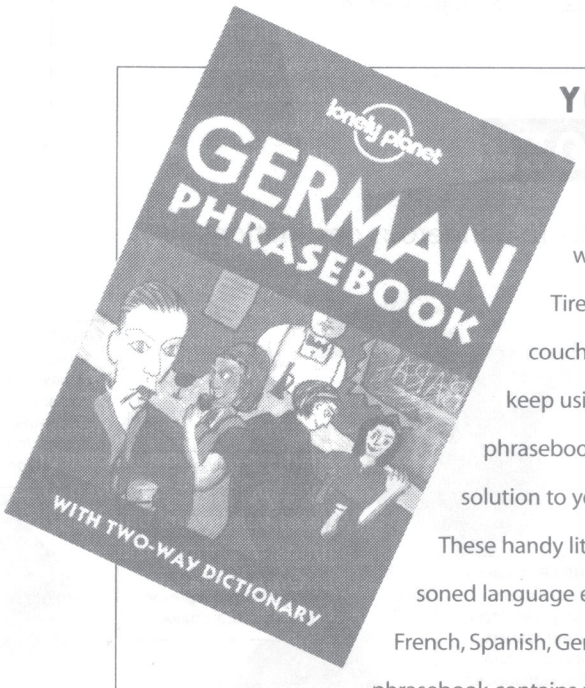
Bar Rumba's movin' and groovin'

New York
Organic Grooves
439-1147
A brilliant integration of DJs and live musicians. Find 'em at CBGB's and other spots. The most positive vibe on a Friday night.

Giant Step
714-8001
What would New York be without Giant Step? This moveable feast of rhythm and beats promotes some of the finest and most adventurous events in the city, like its current "Miles A Head" series.

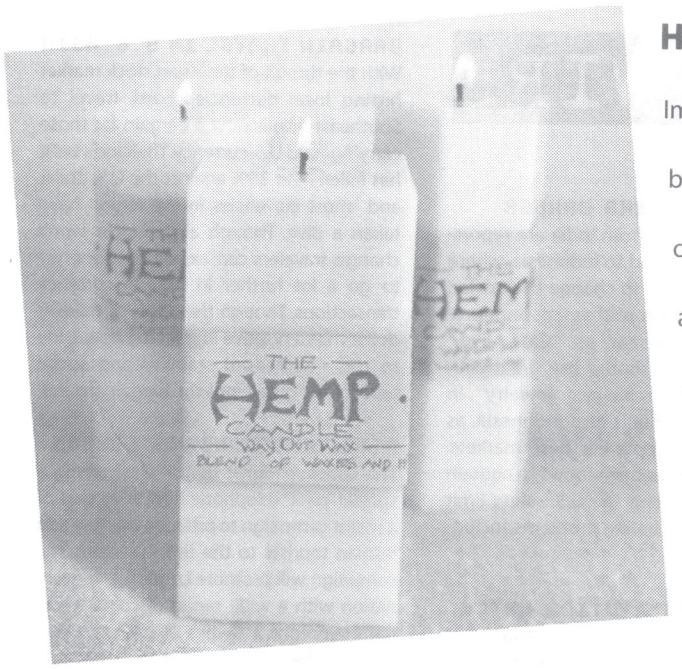
Miami Beach
Starfish
673-1717
Get down to salsa and cha cha cha and tango every Friday at this South Beach hideaway.

World Resources Café
535-8987
This outdoor café situated on the lush Lincoln Road is a perfect setting for live world beats by the likes of Jamaica's Cedric Brooks (Saturdays) and the café's legendary full moon parties.



YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

At a loss for words when travelling abroad? Tired of that "voulez vous couchez avec moi" phrase you keep using. Lonely Planet's new phrasebooks might just be the solution to your language barrier. These handy little books, written by seasoned language experts are available in French, Spanish, German and Italian. Each phrasebook contains useful chapters on pronuncations and grammar and a quick reference page on the inside cover. Chapters focus on the practical, such as numbers and emergencies, and activities like shopping and dining. When it comes to expressing oneself these guides cover all bases. All include the most intimate expressions, like "Io pratico solo sesso sicuro" (Italian for "I only have safe sex"), that one would hope to use. At $5.95 each these phrasebooks are the least expensive language lesson you'll ever get.



HEMP TO BURN

Imagine yourself, inside a jungle hut, kicking back to the night sounds and lighting up one of these natural light-green hemp-oil and beeswax candles. They lend a warm ambience to any room—at home or in the bush. Available in round, square and octagon sizes ($15) at Planet Hemp, 423 Broome Street, New York.

RADIO FREE WEB

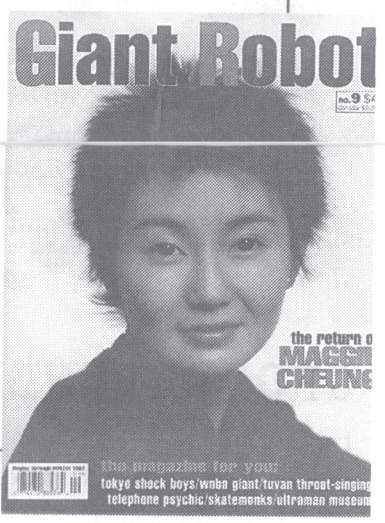
Whoever said the Web was just for looking? The coolest thing going through that hotwire in your wall is Webcast radio. Broadcasting from across the globe these stations are liberating listeners from the staid programming of local broadcasters. On the web one can hear the very latest in dance and world music and it's often live. The Real Audio plug-in (free on the Web) and a fast computer is all it takes to tune in. For a taste of what's out there visit *netradio.net, dancemusic.miningco.com or radio.audionet.com.*

Say you have the weekend free, have a little spare cash and have the urge to go somewhere exciting and spontaneous. You get the latest NetSAAver fares e-mailed from American Airlines and see that you can fly to Barbados for the weekend for just over $200. You quickly make your reservations on the web, pick up the tickets at the airport and spend the next couple days sunning your weary bones. Sound too good to be true? It's not. Simply visit American's web site (americanair.com), subscribe to NetSAAvers and each week you'll receive an e-mail list of hot, last minute deals. What more could you ask for other than a longer weekend?

HOT TIP

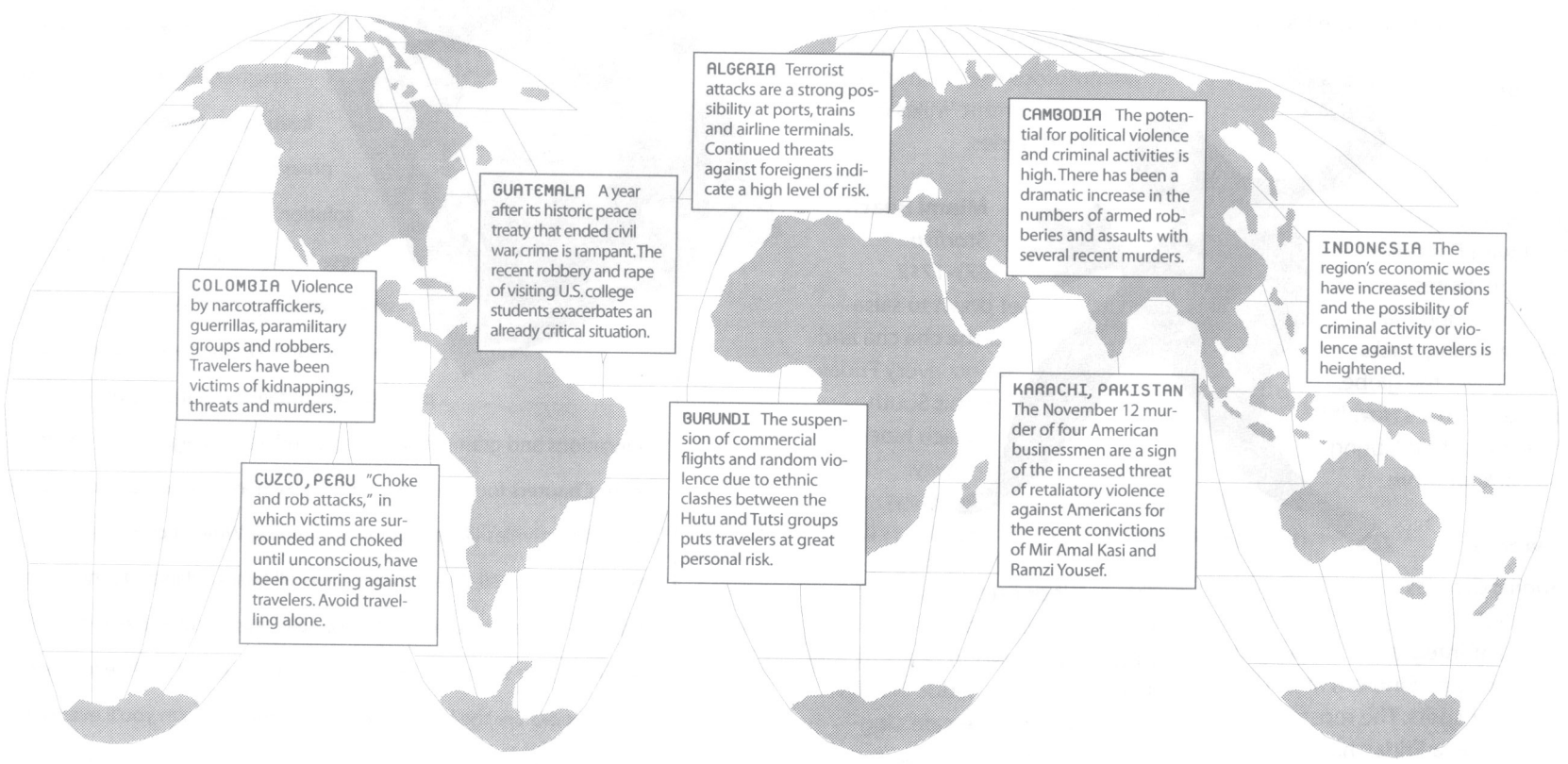
ROBOT IN ASIAN

Giant Robot *does for Asian-American youth culture what Jackie Chan did for karate—taking clichéd subjects and turning them on their head. While Chan does this physically,* Giant Robot *does it literately, with articles on wildly diverse subjects like sumo wrestling, cooking, Hong Kong, and travel. With nine issues strong, this zine delivers all the punch of a major magazine, sans filler.* Giant Robot *also offers a fun-filled, action-packed web site at giantrobot.com. Available at SeeHear, St. Marks Place in New York City.*



SAFETYZONE

ROAM's global guide to dangerous destinations





THE BRAZILIAN CONNECTION

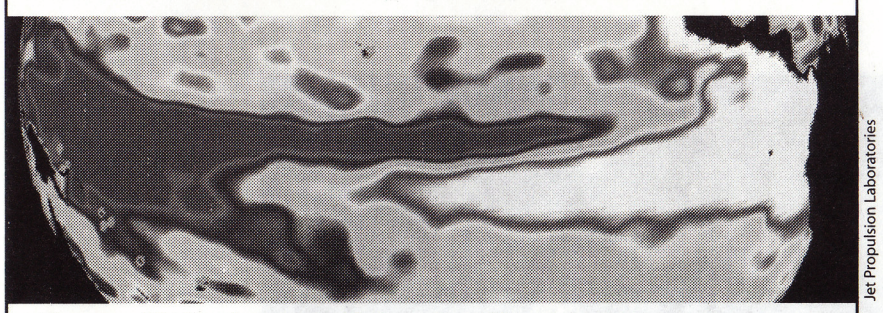
DJ Soul Slinger's first musical influences were in his own home country of Brazil but he's absorbed a plethora of styles along the way. "As a DJ my roots are in soul funk and house but I listened to samba and bossa nova when I was young. I was exposed to deep house in England in 1986 and it evolved from there—rave, techno, breakbeat and jungle," said Soul Slinger at his New York outpost for jungle culture, the Liquid Sky boutique. His musical evolution has become a revolution for Soul Slinger, who see's jungle as all-encompassing. "There is no definition of jungle, it's a universal language. Jungle is here today because of what came before it. Not everybody likes it, but tension creates a question and the question creates evolution."

Soul Slinger helped pioneer New York's jungle movement, DJing at the *NASA* parties and spreading the gospel. Today he occupies himself as a DJ, producer and remixer. Travelling frequently between Brazil New York his current projects include a remix of a Chico Science record and contributing to *Red Hot in Portugal*.

Today Soul Slinger assumes a more low key, but no less enthusiastic approach to his favorite music. "It's not about selling to the masses. People are not prepared, interested or dedicated to really perceive what jungle is. Anything that is really fresh will be directed to young minds who are open to new concepts." And this to whom Soul Slinger directs the music, avoiding the trappings of nightclubs and their policies. "We support underground parties like *Batucada*. We want to promote the music and the culture and you can't do that in a nightclub. The culture is for the person who wants to go to a place and listen and enjoy the music. That is what the DJ does. He is the sound generator. But without the dancer he is nothing, just a preacher without an audience."

IN HOT WATER

The latest and strongest ever *El Niño* has morphed into *Hell Niño* with its devastation of the Americas, Indonesia and Australia. This abnormal warming of Pacific Ocean temperatures now spans more than one-quarter of the distance around the globe and has been accompanied by large-scale changes in tropical rainfall, wind patterns and air pressure. With little relief in sight—the force of this current El Niño is expected to last through early summer 1998—travelers should be aware of its effects on planned destinations. Use the table below for a brief on how El Niño will impact your destination—and whether you should go at all.



Jet Propulsion Laboratories

The span of El Niño photographed in December 1997

REGION	EL NIÑO IMPACT
North America	Pacific Northwest–abnormally wet conditions on coast, dryer on interior, warmer temperatures; Southeast–wetter and cooler than normal, turbulence across South from California to the Carolinas; North–warmer temperatures, less precipitation.
Central America	Below normal precipitation. Dry, drought-like conditions.
N.E. Brazil, S.E. Africa	Drought conditions with possible widespread starvation.
Indonesia/Eastern Australia/New Guinea	Dry, drought conditions are causing widespread hunger in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and water shortages in Java.

Source: Environmental News Network

ALMANAC

Buddhism was established by the followers of Siddhartha Gautama who was born into a Hindu family in **present-day Nepal** According to the World Health Organization, sexual intercourse occurs more than **100 million times a day** around the world. As a result, approximately 910,000 conceptions take place About 63 percent of U.S. Hispanics **trace their roots to Mexico,** where about 55 percent of the population is mestizo, 30 percent Indian, and 15 percent white Of the **168 million native Portuguese** speakers worldwide, 154 million live in Brazil. In Angola there are just over 4 million The world's **ten largest islands:** 1. Greenland 2. New Guinea 3. Borneo 4. Madagascar 5. Baffin 6. Sumatra 7. Honshu 8. Great Britain 9. Victoria 10. Ellesmere

Source: *The New York Times 1998 Almanac*

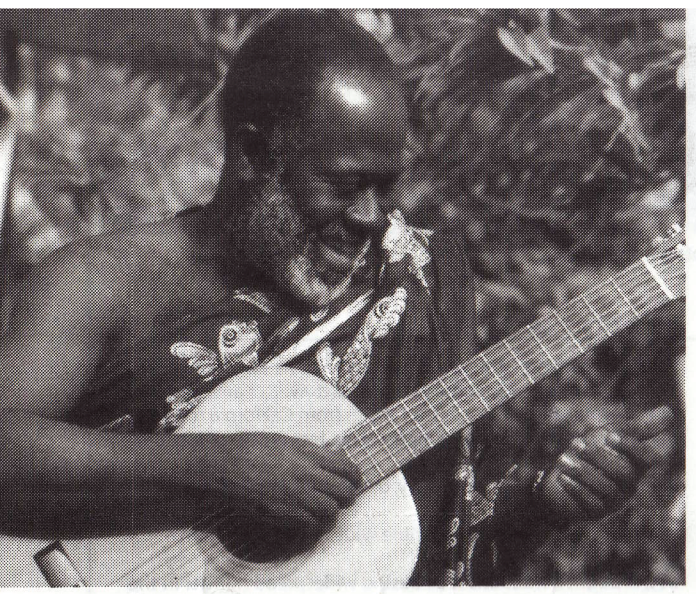


DIGITAL DELITE

First they tell us to throw away our vinyl, now they want us to throw away our photos. The world has gone digital mad. SONY has entered the foray with a new digital still camera ($599), an ultra-compact, high resolution device that has all the features of a traditional camera and more. At 4"x3" and weighing just over 10 ounces and featuring a LCD preview screen and video outputs, this might be the one. Digital cameras may be hard to accept, but we all remember what happened to those records.

Reel Whirled

Compilations of world music may be a dime a dozen, but that doesn't mean some aren't worth the money



African Troubadour: Ghana's Koo Nimo is the last of the old-school palm wine guitarists.

Compilations of international music are in abundance these days, and while most offer little more than a catalog of easy-to-find releases in trendy packaging (one label recently put out an unfocused collection of music from "coffee lands," a nice way of saying "the third world"), a few really dig in to introduce you to new music you might otherwise never find out about.

Silex is a French label that has championed new and adventurous works by folk-rooted artists for many years. **World Fusion: Mètissages** (Silex, via Harmonia Mundi) is a major two-CD sampling. It includes stunning new music by European artists who dare to ignore the boundaries, and yet still retain the essence of their local cultures. They include Benat Achiary, the Basque experimentalist; Quintettes Clarinettes, five woodwind players who challenge the roots; Valentin Claustrier, an artist who has found a new voice for the ancient *vielle a roue* (hurdy gurdy); and Tesi and Vaillant, a French/Italian duo of accordion and mandolin who produce a rich, romantic music that crosses the Alps. Twenty-five tracks cover a lot of territory, from the deepest traditions to the most contemporary expansions.

Compagnie Nuove Indye (CNI/Italy) is the title of the sampler from an Italian cooperative of the same name. Again, we get a two-CD sampling of a wide range of work, this time from Italian artists both in and out of the mainstream. A lot of the material on these discs is pretty tame pop music, augmented by some local sounds and the inevitable *didgeridoo* or *oud,* but a few of the groups stand way out front as innovative sound makers. Addosso Agli Scalini ("the top of the stairs") make a rock-folk hybrid that will bring Hedningarna to mind. FLK blend classical vocal arrangements with traditional and avant garde moods and interject a very classy sort of folk-fusion. Calicanto exhibit a deeply rooted folk music that bursts at the seams with new ideas. Twenty-four tracks promise you an adventure full of surprises, delights, and a few disappointments.

Unblocked (Ellipsis Arts) is an ambitious 3-CD set of "Music of Eastern Europe" (albeit, just folk music), a region they define as stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans. This is a huge area for any single exploration, but it is handled with both expansive vision and an eye for detail here. Editor Larry Birnbaum has approached this project with a lot of personal enthusiasm, and it shows in virtually every single track. There are the expected inclusions like Hungarian singer Marta Sebestyen and the Bulgarian Angelite choir. But the bulk of the work is going to be new to almost every listener: Latvian folk zither maestro Vadis Muktupavels; the fiddle and bagpipe sound of Tolovaj Mataj from Slovenia; solo singers and zitherists; huge string and brass ensembles. Unblocked is full of both revelation and wonder.

African Troubadours (Shanachie) also rises above the norm with 15 tracks that go from the singer-songwriter acoustic ethic of S.E. Rogie to the electric pop Juluka and Jimi Mbaye. Personal picks include Boubacar Traore from Mali, one of the most expressive acoustic guitarists in the world; the quirky Francis Bebey from Cameroon; and a self-consciously bluesy track from Kante Manfila's little- heard Kan Kan Blues that epitomizes the raw power African guitar can have.

Finally, we come to **The Music of North Africa** (World Music Network), one of a series of compilations to accompany the various travel-and-music *Rough Guides.* In among the familiar Chebs (Khaled, Kader and Mami) are some unique and far less accessible artists like Hassan Erraji and Arabesque, a Belgian- based Moroccan jazz outfit, and Algerian singer Houaria Aichi, whose voice soars above her drummers and vocalists. There is pretty good notation on the countries and styles (if you can read the incredibly small print!), but clearly this is meant to accompany the trade paperback *Rough Guide To North African Music* and so depends on its companion to supply greater detail. There are about a dozen of these compilations available so far, from a general "world music" issue to general Latin, salsa and reggae collections. A number of specific African and European countries are also included, each one well worth looking into.—**CLIFF FURNALD**

Cliff Furnald is the editor of *RootsWorld,* the online world music magazine at www.rootsworld.com.

ROAMARTSCALENDAR—FEB/MARCH

What better reason to go somewhere than to attend a festival or conference on the arts. For those looking for the perfect excuse to travel, ROAM has a few suggestions.

Festival

New Zealand International Festival of the Arts
Wellington, New Zealand; February 27-March 22
Seeking to highlight the range and diversity of the arts, this ambitious festival features a lot of everything. Expect a global sampling of all disciplines including: music by France's Latcho Drum, performing in the spirit of Django Reinhardt; dance, with Mark Morris Dance Group performing Handel's *L'Allegro;* and literature, with readings by the likes of Julian Barnes, Arundhati Roy, Pico Iyer and Maori writers.

Music

South By Southwest Conference
Austin, Texas; March 13-21
(512) 467-7979
Now in its twelfth year, the South By Southwest Music and Media Conference and Festival continues to attract the international music industry to Austin, Texas. SXSW has usurped the New Music Seminar as the pre-eminent meeting place for the music industry. This year's program includes a new film festival and interactive festival.

The Winter Music Conference;
Miami Beach, Florida; March 7-11
(954) 563-4444
Urban music fans don't miss out on this music conference-cum-beach party, held every year on Miami Beach. Attendees get to lodge at the kitschy Fontainebleau Hilton, schmooze poolside and hear some of the world's top DJs each night.

Film

Avignon/New York Film Festival; April 24-May 3
New York City (212) 343-2675
This American version of the French Avignon Film Festival features independent films from North America and France. With over 20 films scheduled to premiere along side retrospectives, seminars and lots of parties you can forget about the snowy west and wait till April to get your indie-film shot.

Beauty In Motion



Skin care on the road can be an exercise in practicality, excess or neglect. No matter your regimen remember— it's your skin and only you have to live in it

Travel can offer a chance to catch up on sleep, exercise, and reading—or else an excellent excuse to let it all go to hell. Admit it: even seasoned travelers often take the latter route, tempting the elements and ending up with sunburn, windburn and, yes, even dry skin and chapped lips.

Such hedonism almost always seems like a great idea at the time (who wants to apply sunscreen when there is that conga line beckoning?), but the results can ruin a trip. A 27-year-old Manhattan lawyer still remembers six reckless, sunburned weeks in Central America with regret that most of us can relate to: "I probably got skin cancer from that trip," she says. "I just wasn't aware of how easily you could get burned closer to the equator."



Manhattan makeup artist Courtney Shepatin is not surprised by such stories. "A lot of people go on vacation and it's just a free-for-all," she says. "But it's really important not to treat your trip as an invitation to damage your skin, because you're going to be depressed about it when you get back."

But skin care on the road can mean anything, depending on the person and the destination. Consider just a few of the personas variously offending and supplicating the skin god:



The Devil's Advocate. "I don't get neurotic about skin care, especially on vacation," says Jeanne Comeau, a 29-year-old systems administrator in Northampton, Massachusetts, who tends to tan rather than burn and never wears makeup. On two recent trips, to Mexico and to the South of France, she paid little attention to her skin and scarcely applied sunscreen. "I'm there to relax and I want to have fun. I don't want to worry about stuff like that," she admits freely and without a trace of sheepishness.

The Junkie. New York production coordinator Brenda Brown, 27, saw her recent week in Negril, Jamaica, as an opportunity to treat and revitalize her skin. Among the highlights of her trip: a full-body massage; a freshly cut aloe mask on her face; a sea salt exfoliation; and Body Shop Eucalyptus Pressure Point Cream, applied to her temples. "It was amazing—I was so relaxed," she says of her skin-pampering getaway.



Illustrations: Sue Riddle

The Spartan. For a three-week work trip to Bangladesh, Manhattan producer Lynn DesCoteau packed sunscreen, soap and bug repellent. Upon arrival, she found that while soap and hot water were easy to find, a washcloth was not: "Next time I go I would bring a wash cloth," she says. "I was really, really dirty at the end of each day from the dust and the pollution. I always felt like I needed some sort of scrubbing thing to really get clean."

The Buyer. "I tend to splurge on beauty products in other countries, especially in Europe," says Christina Bifano, a 29-year-old stylist and textile designer in New York. "You can buy the latest things that might not be available here. When I was in Italy I used to buy a honey cream called Perlier Bagno Schiuma. It's a moisturizing bath lotion, like a liquid soap, which is great to travel with. And in London I always go to Lush, which sells hard shampoos and muds and bath salts. The muds are gigantic cakes, and they cut off a piece for you and the salts are as big as softballs. You can't get them here."

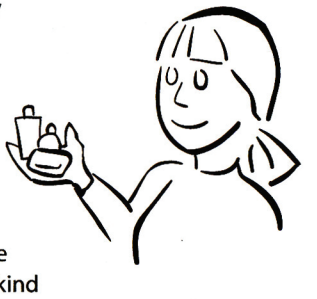
Whether you're a splurger or a spartan, the best skin care might also be the simplest: drink lots of water to avoid dehydration, bring a moisturizer, and wear sunblock.

The Minimalist. Liz Kinecke, a Manhattan television producer, may have her moments of decadence ("If I'm going to Paris, you'd better believe I'm going to have three kinds of lipstick, mousse and a blow drier..."), but for a recent hiking venture into the Argentine side of Patagonia, she was practically minimalist. "I'm going to travel as light as possible. We're talking heavy moisturizer, lip balm and sunscreen." Upon departure, her spare list of skin products consisted of Kiehl's "Sunshield" sunblock with SPF 15, Dermatone lip balm, Neutrogena Facial Cleanser, and Kiehl's Ultra Facial Moisturizer.

Whether you're a splurger or a spartan, the best skin care might also be the simplest: drink lots of water to avoid dehydration, bring a moisturizer, and wear sunblock. Shepatin advises against even careful tanning. "A better idea is to wear sun block and get a bronzing stick. That way you look great, but you're saving your skin." She recommends bronzing sticks by Guerlaine, Bobbi Brown and Nars.

Many travelers have discovered the convenience of liquid soap. Try Kiehl's Liquid Body Scrub and Cleanser, or Remedè's Milky Wash, a facial cleanser and toner available at Bliss Spa.

And, says Shepatin, one should match moisturizer to climate. "If you're going to a moister altitude like the Caribbean or New Orleans, you'll want a lighter, oil-free moisturizer." She suggests Bobbi Brown Moisturizer with 15 SPF, or Oil of Olay for Sensitive Skin with SPF 15. For skiing or travel in extreme conditions, there is Kiehl's Mt. Everest 1988 Expedition Formula Moisturizer with an SPF of 18.



But even a blockbuster moisturizer like the Mt. Everest Moisturizer won't do any good if it isn't planned, purchased and packed before departure. As our Minimalist put it, "When you're travelling to the othermost part of the world, it's kind of hard to run into the local Duane Reade and pick something up, simply because there is none." And then what to do? "Then you're in trouble," she says. And we couldn't agree more. —**LARISSA PHILLIPS**

Buy Low, Fly High

Purchasing your airplane tickets through a consolidtor isn't easy but the extra effort pays off

Rather not spend half of your vacation budget on airfare? Too skeptical about secondhand and third-hand sources of tickets, such as consolidators? Most people feel airline tickets are expensive, but at the same time they are hesitant about purchasing them from anyone but the airline or a travel agent. It is not surprising to hear horror stories from travelers who lost large sums of money when airlines did not honor the reservations booked for them by bogus or bankrupt consolidators. There are always companies that try to swindle consumers, and sometimes they succeed. On the other hand, according to an informal survey of travel agents and airline reservation clerks, this does not happen often. By following the advice below, you can be sure your experience with a consolidator is a happy one.

Consolidators: Who Are They?

Consolidators, also known as ticket wholesalers, buy discounted blocks of tickets from airlines and then sell them to the public or travel agent at a reduced fare. Some consolidators also sell to "bucket shops," small, no-frills travel agencies who act as ticket brokers. Airlines contract with consolidators in order to sell tickets that otherwise might remain unpurchased. In the Sunday Travel section of *The New York Times* and other major newspapers, there are dozens of ads for consolidators announcing rock-bottom fares. Economy class tickets are the most common tickets available. Occasionally, a discounted business class ticket is offered. The difference in fare can be minimal, but usually adds up to large savings—sometimes of twenty to thirty percent.

What To Look Out For

Out-of-service 800 numbers

In *The New York Times,* consolidator companies often list both an 800 and a local number. Nine out of ten of these toll-free numbers "cannot be reached in your calling area," even if you call from one of the five boroughs. This means the local toll number must be used.

Limited hours of operation

Most consolidators are open nine to five, Monday through Friday, with no weekend hours. A few wholesalers keep even more limited hours.

Basic service

Because wholesalers operate on thin margins, the main priority of consolidators is to sell tickets, not to ensure customer satisfaction. Some pleasantries may be missing. The majority of consolidators do not offer the full services of travel agencies, such as booking hotels and tours.

Finding A Reputable Consolidator

Determining whether a consolidator is trustworthy is an essential part of purchasing the ticket. If anything seems fishy, don't hand over your money. There are enough honorable companies out there to get the price you want. You can take the following steps to ensure you won't be ripped off by fly-by-night operators.

Request names of wholesalers from the airline

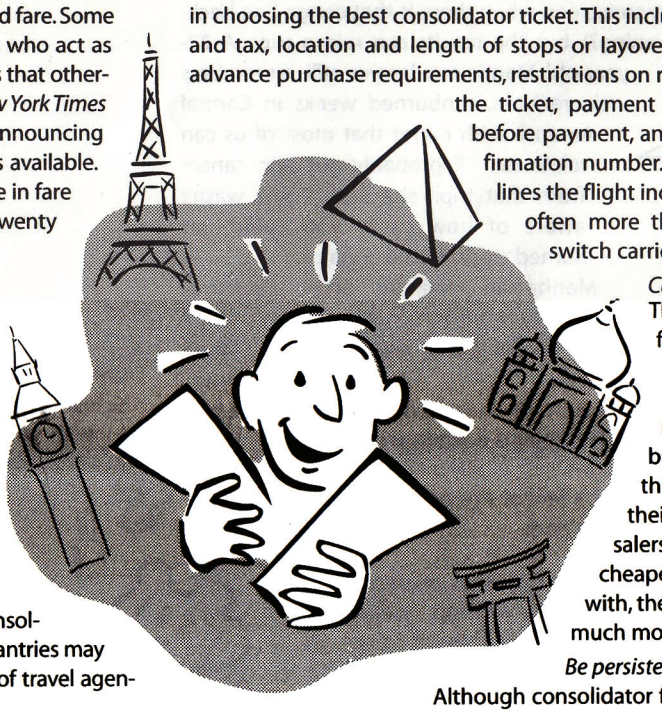
The party line on consolidators is that airlines do not give out lists of names to the public because "the information is confidential" and "it would not be fair" if only certain companies were mentioned. Be persistent and ask around, and you will find there are some airlines, and some reservations attendants, who will provide you with names, phone numbers, and contact people at consolidator companies with whom they do business. If the reservations clerk at the airline declines to help, call the Sales Department. Representatives there are usually willing to provide this information (especially to a travel agent! More on this below). A few airlines suggest that you call their contracted consolidators directly. These consolidators may have ethnic affiliations, or hold stock in the airline, and can certainly be trusted to issue a legitimate ticket.

Call the Better Business Bureau

The Better Business Bureau keeps reviews of companies on file for public access. They may be able to tell you if the consolidator you're dealing with has left travelers on the ground. They might also know how long the consolidator has been in business and about any complaints the company has had filed against them. Of course, truly shady operations shut down and open under a different name. In that case, the Bureau's information will not be useful.

Check with a travel agency or have an agent buy the ticket

Most well-established travel agencies have a book which lists reputable consolidators. After checking names of consolidators against the information in the book, you can buy the ticket on your own or you can enlist an agent's services. Travel agents also have the privilege of accessing information about wholesalers that airlines may not make available to the public. Sometimes agents have their own working relationship with certain consolidators.



Buying A Ticket

Be prepared

Customers are expected to clearly state their preferences. Occasionally, large consolidators that have contracts with dozens of airlines may ask what particular airline you'd like to use. If you're just looking for the cheapest, most convenient ticket, tell the agent that. You are also expected to know your departure and return dates, but can indicate flexibility of a few days on either side to get a better rate.

Ask the right questions

Some consolidators may quote a fare and then ask if you'd like to book the ticket. Don't let them rush you. Ask for the specific details you need to make an informed decision.

Questions which you would normally ask an airline agent can be especially crucial in choosing the best consolidator ticket. This includes questions regarding base fare and tax, location and length of stops or layovers, minimum and maximum stays, advance purchase requirements, restrictions on refunding, changing, or transferring the ticket, payment options, ability to book a ticket before payment, and availability of a reservation confirmation number. Also remember to ask which airlines the flight incorporates. On a long flight, there is often more than one airline and a layover to switch carriers.

Call the airlines

The consolidators that offer the best fares deal with foreign airlines, or those airlines servicing a specific geographic area. You may not have heard of the carriers before, but this is a good chance to call these airlines directly to compare their prices with that of their wholesalers. Because foreign airlines are often cheaper than domestic carriers to begin with, the wholesale offer may not save you much money.

Be persistent

Although consolidator fares are always cheaper than buying the identical ticket directly from the airline, there is a considerable amount of fluctuation among consolidators regarding fares, routes, and restrictions. It is likely that every consolidator company will quote a different fare. It pays to shop around for the best deal.

Protecting Your Money

Check your reservation with the airline before paying for the ticket

If possible, make the reservation with the consolidator and then check to be sure that you have a confirmed seat with the airline before purchasing the ticket. Request a reservation confirmation, or record locator, number from the consolidator. (Not all consolidators provide these.) The number will allow you to call the airline to confirm your reservation. Make sure you really have a seat and have not been stuck on the waiting list.

Pay with a credit card or postdate your check

Paying with a credit card lets you cancel payment if the company goes sour. You can also try to date your check after the date the consolidator claims the airline will have you booked in their system. If the airline cannot confirm the reservation by that date, cancel the check. Paying with cash is more risky, but some legitimate consolidators insist upon it. If you must pay in cash, visit the consolidator at the time of purchase and pick up the ticket in person.

Getting The Best Deal

The price of some tickets actually goes down as the departure date gets closer. If you call more than a month in advance, the consolidator may not quote a fare, but instead will advise you to call back in a few weeks. Follow this advice only if your departure dates are flexible. Otherwise, you may call too late to get the desired flight.

Last Words Of Advice

Buying from consolidators is not for everyone. It can be a frustrating, time-consuming process which takes away from the enjoyment of preparing for your trip. On the other hand, almost everyone loves a great deal for their money. The satisfaction of saving up to hundreds of dollars on your plane ticket can be well worth a few gray hairs. **—ALEXANDRA N. TINARI**

Illustration: Sue Riddle

The Way to San José

We all dream of life abroad—acting on our dreams is another matter



Illustration: Cristina Casañas

On October 30th my wife, Jerri, and I celebrated the second anniversary of our move from Miami to the capital of Spain, Madrid. The desire to leave Miami in search of new horizons had been burning in both of us for years, but we are both of a similar psychological stock and found it extremely difficult to make the decision once and for all to leave Miami for an undefined period of time. We had dabbled with the idea for more than a decade but stayed behind as other friends made a go of it and moved to other cities in the US and in Europe. Some of them came and went while we stayed behind waiting for the perfect moment to arrive. During those years we became professional travelers and hopscotched around, from San Francisco to New York to London and to Paris, where we visited those friends who no longer lived in Miami.

For me those *pleasure trips* became increasingly difficult to bear. The urge to uproot and settle in a new place only got reinforced by how easily my friends had managed to resettle and build a new life for themselves; a life I had only fantasizing about. Endless hours during those visits were spent imagining if I too could belong in a new place. I would check out the prices of apartment rentals and look at the want ads to see if there was any room for me in what I perceived to be the fantasy life my friends were living.

> As a child, in order to feel more connected to my family, I dreamt vividly about the Cuba I had never set foot on. At the drop of a hat I was able to recite the poetry of the Cuban patriot and literary figure, Jose Marti.

This obsession with fantasies is deep rooted in me and has a lot to do with my accidental birth in Miami where my parents resettled after a very difficult and forced departure from Cuba in 1960. As a child, in order to feel more connected to my family, I dreamt vividly about the Cuba I had never set foot on. At the drop of a hat I was able to recite the poetry of the Cuban patriot and literary figure, Jose Marti. When my parents would have friend over they chatted endlessly about Cuba and the unforgettable times they had shared there. In the early years of exile I was the only one at those parties who had never experienced any of those incredible times, which I later realized had been slightly glossed over with romanticism. In order to satiate my desire to fit in, I would join the conversations at hose gatherings and would place myself in a past that had occurred before my birth.

This sense of longing for a place I never knew and my intense curiosity about the people and place in other parts of the world I have yet to meet may be responsible, in part at least, for my voracious appetite for traveling. The more I traveled, however, the more I was invaded by a sensation from the first day of a vacation that it was over before it even started. Sure, a short visit to a city can be stimulating and exciting, but on those sorts of visits one only gets a taste of what lurks at the surface of a city or a foreign country. Nevertheless, I always settled for a two week vacation in Europe over my desire to make an indefinite move here because deep down inside I was overtaken by that ugly four letter devil called FEAR.

For more years than I care to mention fear had kept me from making a move both on the physical and symbolic level. Behind every decision I made hid that primal fear which kept me in check and living with my family for 30 years. The internal battle between the desire to have new experiences and the fear that said it was wrong and frightening to seek them out has colored every decision I have ever made. But, beyond the fear and the desire for new experiences lies a deeper rooted determination and will power that, when finally up against the wall, acts in a decisive and sometimes explosive manner.

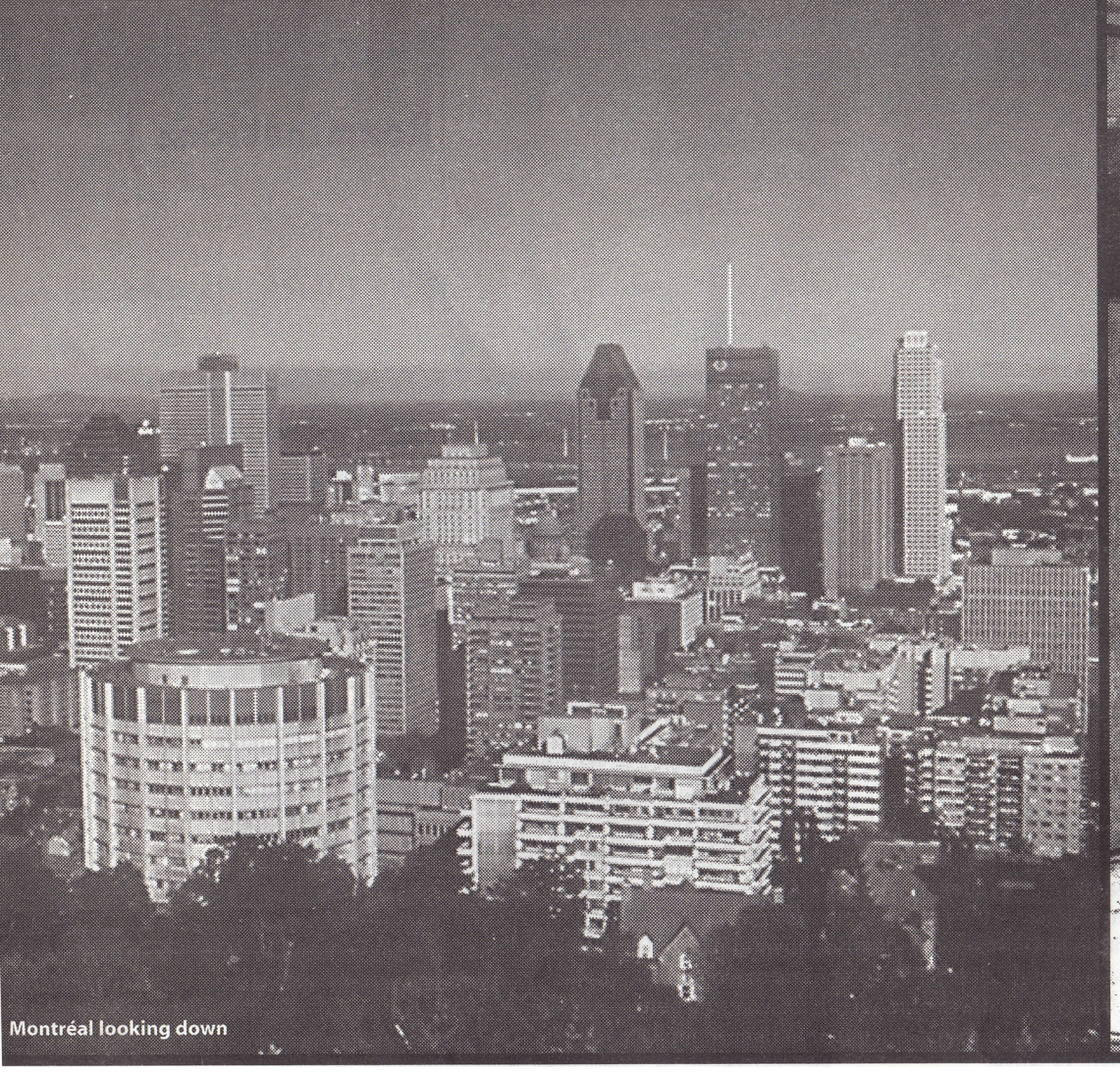
That determination, combined with Jerri's own, to make the move we'd been longing for, led us to where we are today, a 600 square foot apartment in the energized and noisy center of Madrid. This apartment, on Calle San Jose, is our new home base, one that feels less permanent and grounded than the previous one in Miami. It's a home where everything has a temporary feel to it.

At any given moment we could take the books off the collapsible shelves, take the lap-top computer and the portable printer off the desk, take the clothes out of the closet and out of the drawers that we salvaged from an imminent trip to the landfills, and pack it all up in our unbelievably large collection of war torn suitcases and trunks. Then, bam, in a slow motioned bat of an eyelash we could be on a plane to who knows where or on that return trip to Miami that we always keep handy in case the Spanish bureaucracy decides we've overstayed our welcome.

Our apartment on Calle San Jose has also been the place where we have played host to a diverse and always welcome group of visitors that ahs numbered over 25, not counting return visitors. In our first year here we were never alone for more than two weeks at one time. That's one thing to keep in mind if you are considering a move overseas. Don't underestimate the willingness of your friends and family back home and, more importantly, people you barely even know, to show up at your door-step at the most incredibly inopportune moments. Trust me no this one. If you're not a people person (as I most definitely am) don't move to top ten tourist destination sites like France, Spain or Italy. Choose a remote village in a war or famine stricken country. Then, you'll know who your real friends are.

After two years, though, the desire for permanence and for truly settling down is beginning to gnaw at us. The Spanish government and its labyrinthine bureaucracy have not made it any easier on us. The fact of the matter is we have been fighting a two year struggle to legalize our status once and for all, which is always met by a new challenge or a new interpretation in immigration law that brings uncertainty and instability back into our lives. Everyday is full of new sensations and surprises. The surprises of the red tape kind are not the kind we welcome, but there are also the surprises that the city, its traditions and its people often offer us.

We are finally living what we only dreamt about for too long. Although the drawbacks could fill many complaint forms, the fact that we have finally faced our fears and desires head-on has given a whole new sense of purpose to our lives that I, for one, wouldn't trade in for anything.—**EMILIO SAN PEDRO**



Montréal looking down



Montréal:

Avec Plaisir

Our neighbor "du nord" serves up a spicy selection of cafés, sex shops, nightclubs and boutiques to whet any hipster's appetite.

Lia Haberman reports

Montréal is the pleasure capital. Indulgence is applauded. Even lunch turns into an orgy of food and wine. And there's a laissez-faire attitude towards all things carnal, like the city's many sex shops, x-rated cinemas and topless hairdressers. It's Amsterdam but cleaner, Paris but friendlier, and with any luck your waiter speaks English like an American. So forget about schlepping through yet another museum or snapping pictures from a double-decker bus—this is a city that appeals to the senses. But how to get off the beaten tourist path and find the local favorites? Read on for this insider's guide on where to eat, drink and be merry in fabulous, French Montréal.

Top Of The Morning To 'Ya

There's nowhere else I'd rather start my day than at **Eggspectations** (1313 de Maisonneuve ouest). The line-ups are worth the wait for the generous breakfasts (the French Toast with strawberries in Grand Marnier syrup is a favorite), never ending coffee refills and pots of jam on every table. Old-timers will insist that 50s-diner-style restaurant **Beautys** (93 Mont-Royal ouest) is the real McCoy. Breakfasts there include blintzes and bagels and lox.

Bagels are a bit of an obsession with Montréalers. Don't bother getting into a debate on the merits of Canadian bagels versus American bagels. Just enjoy a fresh, chewy bagel at **St-Viateur Bagel** (263 rue St-Viateur ouest) or **Fairmount Bagel Bakery** (74 Fairmount ouest) 24 hours a day.

Passing Time

You can punctuate your meals and café breaks by strolling up Mont-Royal (the city's mountainous version of Central Park). Madonna makes a point of jogging along the miles of wooded track when she's in town. Reserve Sunday afternoons for "tam-tam" in the park, a gathering of bongo players who drum to a distinctly tribal beat. And you can't leave without wandering through the Plateau, home to the city's artists, writers, hipsters, and Jewish deli owners. Boulevard St-Laurent cuts through the Plateau and is

referred to by locals as The Main. Pop into the cavernous **Eva B.** (2013 St-Laurent blvd.) to sort through the *friperie*—racks of inexpensive, hip secondhand and vintage clothing. Just up the street, **Scandale** (3639 St-Laurent blvd.) offers funky local designer duds and some great lingerie. You can't miss their tantalizingly colorful window displays. Still haven't gotten enough of polyester, sequins and Hawaiian prints? Try your luck at the secondhand strip on Mont-Royal, between St-Laurent and St-Denis; the whole street screams retro.

But what if you're looking for something a little kinkier than a Peter Pan collar? **Boutique Seduction** (38 rue Ste-Catherine ouest) is a supermarket of sexual paraphernalia. Stock up on those hard-to-find movies and magazines, bright red stockings and simulated female orifices. Stop in for a little late-night shopping with a date. You might just discover their penchant for handcuffs. If Boutique Seduction offers lingerie of the *Hustler* variety, **Il Bolero** (6842 rue St-Hubert) is *Playboy* all the way. The swanky shop sells upscale fetish fashion, chains, canes, and chastity belts. They'll also custom-make those hard-to-find leather outfits. Film buffs should check out cozy **Cinema Parallele** (3682 St-Laurent blvd.), an independent movie house that screens French and foreign films. Set in a back room behind a café, this movie house gives you an experience much like watching a movie in a friend's living room. Black turtlenecks and berets are a must here.

> "Stop in for a little late-night shopping with a date—you might just discover their penchant for handcuffs."

Coffee Culture

Prendre un café, literally translated as "taking a coffee," is a favorite pastime. Vegetarian café **Santropol** (3990 St-Urbain) serves up coffee, herbal tea, and huge, healthy sandwiches in a commune/hippie-style converted apartment. The backyard patio, with its own resident cat, draws students from the nearby McGill University ghetto. Scattered around the city, **The Second Cup** is Canada's hipper version of Starbucks. Since these coffee houses are individually owned, the decor can vary wildly from location to location, going from luxe lounge to industrial chic.

Spacious and open 24 hours a day, The Second Cup is invariably packed with students during the afternoons and evenings and hung-over club kids in the wee hours of the morning. Definitely worth checking out the 4 a.m. crowd. **Cafe Republique,** a local chain, offers better beans and more stylish surroundings, with glass-topped tables displaying an array of coffee beans. But the café closes early, sending the beautiful people home before midnight.

Fine Dining

Eduardo's (404 Duluth est). It's cheap, tasty Italian food, and they let you bring your own wine. Just think—dinner, good conversation, and lots of wine, all for the price of bringing your date to the cinema.

You can't leave town without trying an artery-blowing smoked meat sandwich at **Schwartz's** (3895 St-Laurent blvd.). The service is indifferent, the cherry colas warm, but their thickly piled sandwiches with fries and a pickle can't be beat. A true Montréal institution. Slightly more modern is **Exotica** (400 Laurier ouest), where dining goes global. The ground floor houses a café and newsstand. The cocktail lounge is pure *Casablanca,* while the dining room shows its spots (leopard that is) with an African heartland theme. The food is all over the map, a true fusion.

Dance

The Jello Bar (151 Ontario E.) mixes up thirty-one different martini flavors (yum) and offers live music—jazz, big band and swing—every night. The furniture looks like your parents' college days leftovers. Great place to get cozy and flirt with the very glam-about-town types that hang out there.

New lounge **Wax** (3481 St-Laurent blvd.) attracts an older and more sophisticated crowd. The cigar bar has great ventilation, the atmosphere is intimate, and the tunes are pure lounge lizard. Great place to bring a date.

Meanwhile **Sona** (1437 Bleury) keeps `em grooving all night long. Stomping ground for the trendier-than-thou crowd, who dance to hip hop, soul, and lounge music under the beams of a psychedelic light show. **The Place Ville Marie** tower empties out by 5 p.m., but at midnight the lobby is packed with hopefuls waiting to take the elevator up to the penthouse club, **737**. The dance music can get to you, but the velvet lounge chairs and a 360-degree view of the city make up for it. Tapping into the underground scene can be difficult when you're from out of town, but a visit to clubwear couturiers **Juan & Juanita** (1455 Peel) will quickly help you find the pulse. The clothing and special-imports record shop serves as unofficial alternative nightlife guide and ticketmaster.

Lia Haberman writes Canada's "Cheap Thrills" travel colum. Now residing in Los Angeles, she is presently honing in on her first screenplay



On The Town *With Miss de Meaner*

In the interest of probing deep into Montréal's nightlife, *ROAM* consulted Miss de Meaner, gossip columnist for local *Hour* magazine.

What did you get up to this weekend?
Early Friday evening I headed to the Village to sip a few cocktails at **Le Lounge,** a laid-back but still kickin' spot owned by no-nonsense blond Patricia, who made the once fab Jello Bar such a hit. Saturday night things got phunky at the monthly hip hoppin' **Rituals** party, run by T'Cha, Zadio, Nanz and Manchilde, where wild woman and comedian Skid More helped me free my ass. Then it was off to after-hours club **Storm** to shake my liberated ass some more behind the bar (even a social hussy needs a bit of pocket money). The party was still going strong when I left at 9 a.m., but this kitty needed at least a catnap before brunch.

Monday night was Claudy Philius' laid-back R&B night Çoul at upscale lounge **Allegra** and, after a day enslaved by my computer and phone, I needed a bit of swank. Monday night is when all us club kitties, hardcore nitelife phreaks and bar wenches have the town to ourselves.

How does one get to be such a glamour-gal-about-town?
Years of keen observation of nightlife rituals, an insatiable interest in the social arts, compassion for stray club kittens, a love of phreaks and a deep and lurid fascination with people and their activities

Is there a dress code for social divas?
Comfortable shoes and nonrestrictive gear. Shoes preferably not made by sneaker imperialists who "just do it" to men and women in Asia, as opposed to paying people in their own country living wages.

Where to nosh in Montreal after hours?
Eurodeli serves up the best late-night casual Italian on the Main and the Eurodeli twins' movie, *Hang The DJ,* is catching quite a buzz. (Yes, everyone has got something goin' on on the side in this ville where even "nothing" is done with panache, darlings.)

Montréal's bouncer with a big heart?
My favorite, purrfectly cool cats are Etienne at Storm, Greg, who tends the VIP at Sona, and Zippa at Groove Society.

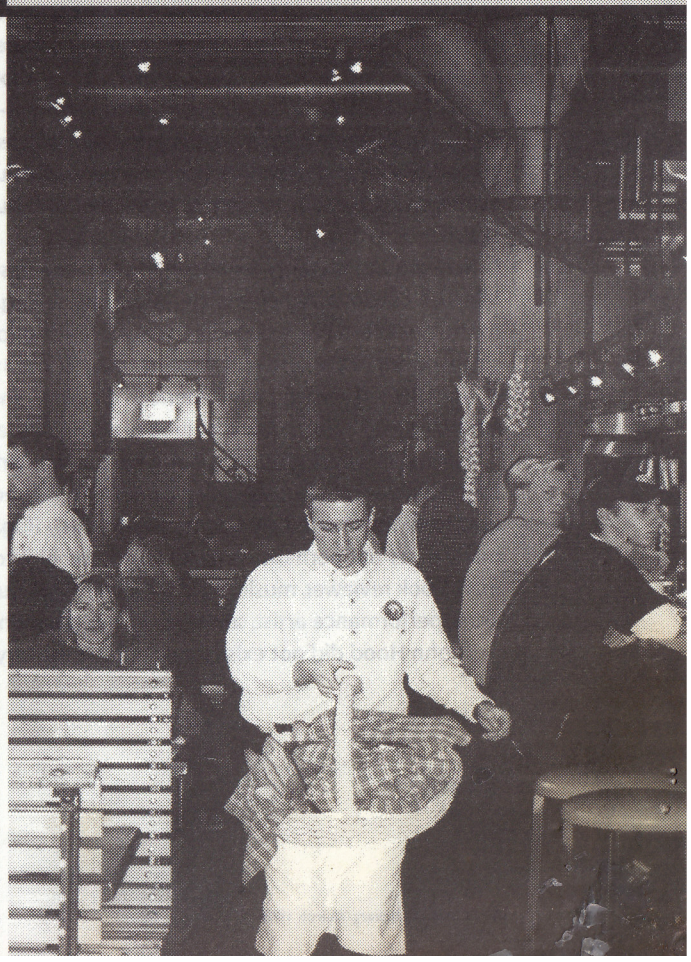
Phogotraphy: Carol A. Smith

At The Crossroads: Designs by locals at Scandale, *middle top.* Eggspectations, *far right,* to start your day right. Great bagels can be found at Fairmount, *middle bottom.*









Reborn in Miami Beach

Alexander Stuart arrived on Miami Beach at a crossroads—both personal and historical. On assignment for *British GQ*, he was there, not to write about South Beach and its high-gloss lifestyle—that didn't yet exist—but British boxer Nigel Benn. What he found was completely unexpected: "...This is 1990, so the much vaunted revival of South Beach has only just begun. The streets have a run-down, neglected air to them...I feel that I am in a city unlike any I've visited. This is America, yet it doesn't feel like America," Stuart writes in *Life On Mars* (Doubleday), his surreal, darkly humorous account of expatriate life in Florida. He found Miami Beach so intriguing, so unlike anything he'd ever experienced, that he stayed for seven years, witnessing its transformation from fading tropical ghetto to international hot spot.

Like the transient, ever changing cast of characters that washed up on its shores, Stuart too was starting over. He'd lost his young son, Joe Buffalo Stuart, to cancer and was agonizing over the immense personal loss. Miami Beach was a cathartic escape from the all-too-real pains of life and death. Little did Stuart know that it would also be the basis for his next book.

The following excerpt from *Life On Mars* captures the otherworldly essence of South Beach—a seedy, sun-saturated, hustling, artificial strip of sand, where image supercedes reality. This is Alexander Stuart's Miami Beach.

Sometimes, perhaps much of the time, Miami seems like a movie—and not just any movie, but the self-reflective, lived on the surface, trash-literate films of Quentin Tarantino. Miami is full of stories and shootings and dumb but fancy dialogue. *Reservoir Dogs* could happen in Miami; *Pulp Fiction* could define Miami.

Perhaps because it has no real history (Miami was only incorporated as a city in 1896), people need to invent or reinvent themselves here, need to create their own epic poems and mythologies. And the culture, the wider American culture of glamour and celebrity, music, movies, gas stations and malls, is exaggerated in Miami because there is nothing to detract from it—no real industrial or high-tech manufacturing base, no gut-grinding, ballbreaking, life-shortening work to spread gloom and despondency; only service industries such as banking, real estate, and especially tourism to stoke the slow-burning furnace of the Sunshine State.

Background texture—atmospheric colour—has never been in short supply in Miami, a city founded on dodgy land deals, selling parcels of mangrove swamp to the gullible. It has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with crime and violence ever since—from Al Capone and Meyer Lansky in the 1930s, through the drug barons of the 1980s, to exiled Latin American dictators and their thugs now—with an abundance of corrupt lawyers, judges and politicians fleshing out the cast.

Against this background, it is not hard to imagine a character like my friend John Hood—a studiously cool, Miami-born, Yale-educated (until he dropped out), New York-honed amalgam of Humphrey Bogart and Dick Tracey. A man of many parts but perhaps no particular focus: nightclub promoter, nightclub doorman, book reviewer, music critic, DJ, former low-budget film actor, recording artist, performance artist, sometime pimp (read on) and fugitive from the law.

If John Hood did not exist, it might be necessary to invent him, but exist he does, even if the name is not real (though it is certainly the one he goes by on the Beach). The fact is, John Hood has invented *himself*, and if South Florida generally is a place of transformation, then he is a walking advertisement of the possibility here to be however and whoever you wish to be—and to be accepted, for the large part, at face value.

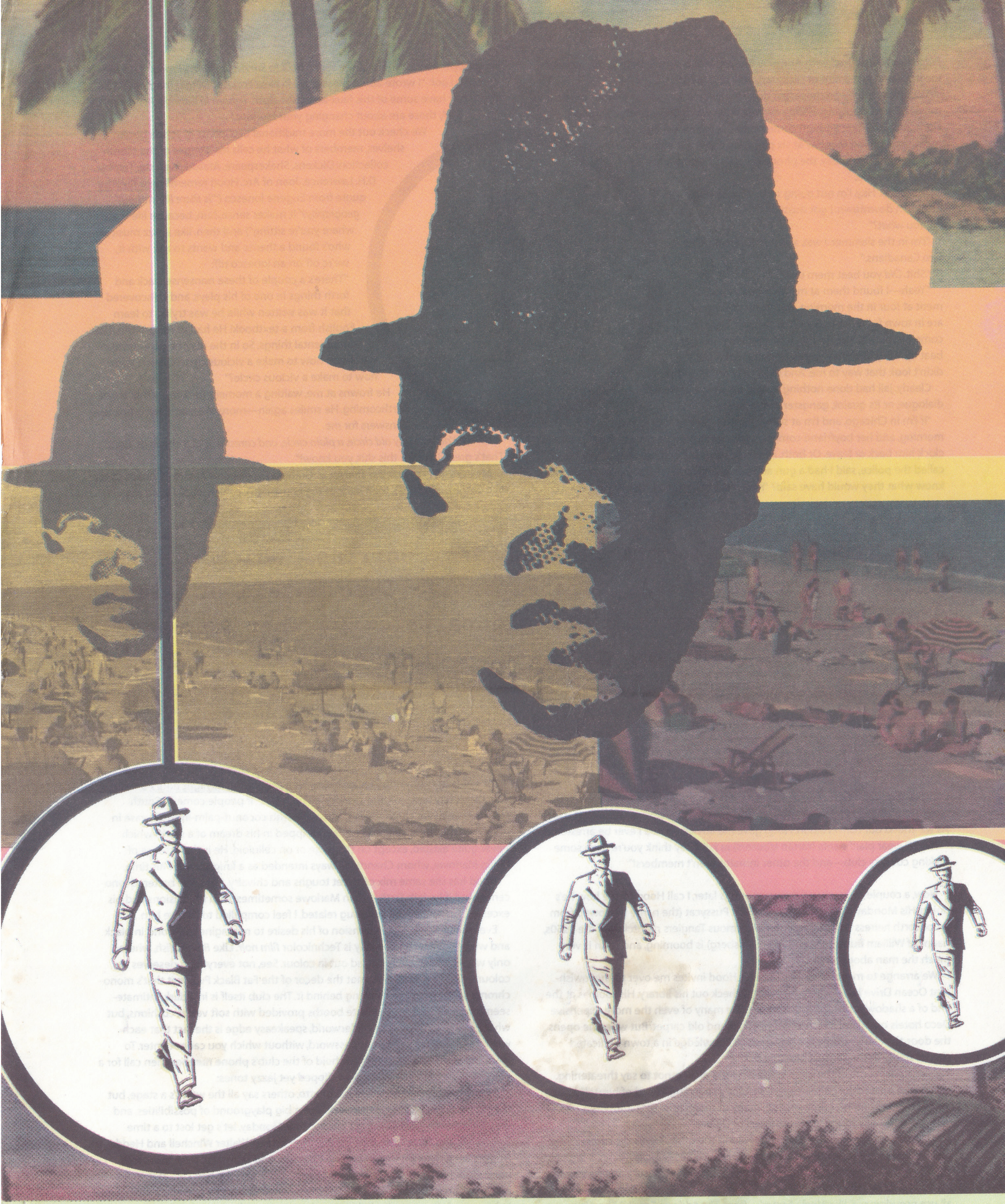
Like Bogart, John was born with something of a silver spoon in his mouth. He can trace his family on his father's side back to 1638 in Connecticut. His mother is a staunchly Republican public figure, another reason for his fictional name, given the trouble he gets into. John was probably not the toughest boy at school, or at Yale—a university not noted for producing gangsters. But like Bogart (whose mother used to dress him effeminately, in the style of the day), John has assumed the mantle of tough guy.

When I first met John, he was the bouncer at Mayday, one of the clubs on the Beach more popular with my teenage friends than with Miami's glitterati. You couldn't miss Hood: he was the guy on the door who looked like a 1950s B-movie gangster, always sartorially elegant in suit and hat, and never less than courteous when offering firm denials to underage girls trying to talk their way in. Even the uniformed cops keeping watch seemed to like him.

But if Hood was a figure out of DC comics—a malleable, youthful face buried, like his motives, beneath the *noir*-ish brim of his fedora—then he was a character who had travelled a circuitous route, through some pathologically cool, American gangster-inspired Parisian semiological text, back to the pages of the good ol' USA.

Fast approaching thirty, Hood was a one-man combination of trash culture and intellect, a self-described "literary thug," as likely to give you the Latin root of a verb as the toe of his boot. It was as if the spiffy John Travolta hit man from ▷

by Alexander Stuart



"Down here, I find it's real easy to trance yourself out and wake up in the morning and dump yourself in the cleansing waters of South Beach. I think it's the last best place for decadence."—John Hood

Illustration: Lucas Irwin

Pulp Fiction had fused with Anthony Burgess—and somewhere in the process incorporated just a hint of Dick Dastardly and Muttley.

We talked briefly on those first doorstep encounters about writing, music, and movies. Even in passing, Hood's conversation was laced with literary allusions and wit—rare enough commodities in Miami. We agreed to meet one coming Monday at six p.m. for a drink, but at five p.m. on the allotted day, the phone rang and I heard John's voice on the line.

"It's Hood. Hey, I'm not going to be able to make our drink. I'm downtown. I got busted."

"You *what*?"

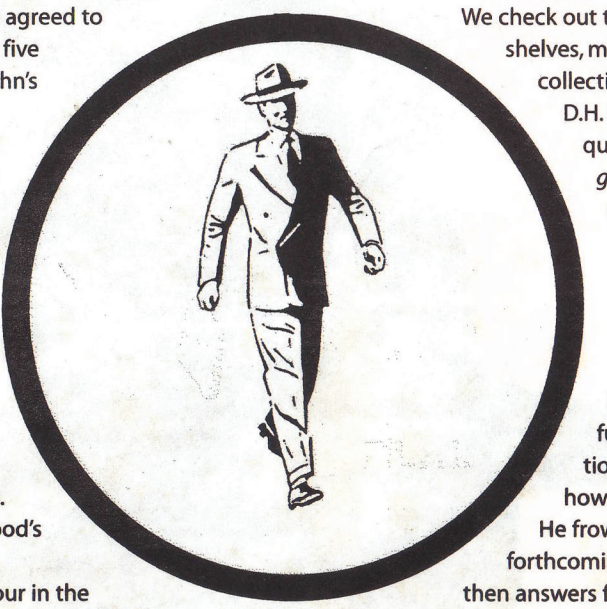
"I'm in the slammer. I was arrested for beating up two Canadians."

"Shit. *Did* you beat them up?"

"Yeah—I found them at my girlfriend's apartment at four in the morning. You know, these guys are in town for three hours on a stopover. They come to South Beach, to the Spot, meet her and get beat up. They said they were just doing coke, but it didn't look that way to me. And then they *ratted* on me.

Clearly, jail had done nothing to dull the thrust of Hood's dialogue, or its quaint, gangster movie bite.

"If I'm in Chicago, and I'm at some dame's house at four in the morning, and her boyfriend comes in and clocks me, I've two choices: clock him back or leave. Or both. *Never* rat, *never* fucking rat! They ran out and called the police, said I had a gun and was going to kill them. In New York, you know what they would have said? *'You let this guy beat up both of you? Get the fuck outta here!'*"



We talked some more about the severity of the charge and the likelihood of making bail. Our six p.m. drink was obviously out of the question, but I was impressed by John's courtesy at remembering the arrangement and, with all the restrictions prison places on telephone use, making the considerable effort to call. As we ended our conversation, Hood gave me advice, should I ever be arrested:

"Don't wear plaid pants (tartan trousers) in jail. They think you're from some fucking country club—and the other inmates aren't members!"

Now, a couple of years and many meetings later, I call Hood to see how he's doing. His Monday night club, the Fat Black Pussycat (the name borrowed from Woolworth heiress Louisa Carpenter's infamous Tangiers nightclub of the 1950s, haunt of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg) is booming, and John is very much the man about town.

We arrange to meet for dinner, but first Hood invites me over to the lowish-rent Ocean Drive hotel where he lives, to check out his library. His room is at the end of a shadowy corridor which smells, like many of even the more expensive Deco hotels on Miami Beach, of recycled air and old carpet. But when he opens the door, the clutter inside is a tiny oasis of knowledge in a town dedicated almost singly to the sensual pleasures.

Admittedly, some of the knowledge is a little arcane, not to say threatening. Like a man on a major caffeine jag, constantly speeding ahead of himself, Hood whisks me through his crime section, many of them "how to" handbooks of a variety not usually found at Waterstones or Dillons.

"OK," he says, running a trigger finger along the titles. *"Here's the crime: Techniques of Revenge. Counterfeit Currency: How To Really Make Money*—it gives you the blueprints of how to make money, it's by an ex-Treasury agent. *How To Kill, Volume One*—this is not playing, it's really how to kill people! See how they all use pseudonyms, like 'Uncle Fester'—from *The Addams Family*? There's a company I get these from. This guy's a very unique individual. His first book was *Making Crime Pay. Successful Armed Robbery* was his second. It tells you how to rob a bank!"

"Are these books legal to publish?"

"Yeah." Hood pauses barely a second to smile. "America, the Land of the Free!"

He sweeps me past more of the same: *How to Survive in Prison, Professional Killers: An Inside Look.* "I wrote about these guys in New York, for *Details* magazine, *Spin, Egg.* "They have some of this faux-anarchist stuff: *Reborn in Canada, Reborn in the USA;* those are about changing your identity."

We check out the more traditional occupants of John's bookshelves, members of what he calls his "Heroes of the Month" collection: Dickens, Shakespeare, Ataturk, Ivan the Terrible, D.H. Lawrence, Joan of Arc. Hood remembers a favorite quote from Eugene Ionesco ("*'Is there life without geography?'* It makes sense, huh, because life is about where you're sitting") and then, like a jazz musician who's found a theme and wants to run with it, we're off on an Ionesco riff:

"There's a couple of these nonsense, back and forth things in one of his plays, and I discovered that it was written while he was trying to learn English from a textbook! He had to relearn the most fundamental things. So in the play, he gives instructions on how to make a vicious circle. Do you know how to make a vicious circle?"

He frowns at me, waiting a moment for a reply that is not forthcoming. He smiles again—more of an amused grimace—then answers for me.

"'You take any old circle, a plain circle, and caress it until it shows its vices.' That's great. I live for this shit, you know!"

My eyes glance over the shelves at Graham Greene and Alberto Moravia ("He's like Calvino with tits"), then back to the crime—the cultish Black Lizard paperbacks and their Vintage Crime offspring.

I look at this man, with his speed and his intelligence and his insistent elegance (it is not common in Miami to wear a suit during daylight hours unless you absolutely have to), and wonder: "Who is he?" If people come to South Florida to reinvent themselves, it is usually with coconut-palm-infested ease in mind. Not this. John seems like a man trapped in his dream of a world which never quite existed, except on the page or on celluloid. He is the essence of Philip Marlowe, whom Chandler always intended as a knight out of his time.

Hood has the same mix of street toughs and chivalry, the same battered innocence. And if he falls farther than Marlowe sometimes, with his illusions and his excesses, legal, financial and drug related, I feel compelled to forgive him.

Even Hood's club is an extension of his desire to reimagine the world in black and white. ("What I'd like really is Technicolor *film noir*. Like *Rumblefish*, where only what's important is picked out in colour. See, not everything deserves colour. Colour's wasted.") It's not the decor of the Fat Black Pussycat that's monochrome so much as the thinking behind it. The club itself is in a dark, intimate-seeming space featuring private booths provided with soft velvet cushions, but what gives the Pussycat its underworld, speakeasy edge is the fact that each week John devises a different password, without which you cannot enter. To learn the word, you must first get hold of the club's phone number, then call for a voicemail message in Hood's own clipped yet jazzy tones:

"Some people say the world is a ghetto, others say all the world's a stage, but the Fat Black Pussycat says the world's one big playground of possibilities, and we've got the biggest swing set around. This Monday, let's get lost to a time when Nick and Nora were tops on the silver screen, Walter Winchell and Hedda Hopper spilled ink on the scene, and Chandler and Hammett were must-must reads. When Fifty-second Street was Swing Street, and the hep cats at the clip joints invented terminal cool with nothing but a wink and a nod and a snap. And in honour of the man who led his band to stomp at the Savoy a full two years before old Benny Goodman, this week's Fat Black password is Chick Webb. One more time: Chick Webb. A name without doubt you should know."

We dine in the subdued glamour of the Strand on Washington Avenue—opened in 1986 and thereby part of the first wave of the South Beach revival (as

His room is at the end of a shadowy corridor which smells, like many of even the more expensive Deco hotels on Miami Beach, of recycled air and old carpet. But when he opens the door, the clutter inside is a tiny oasis of knowledge in a town dedicated almost singly to the sensual pleasures.

opposed to a truly historic restaurant such as Joe's Stone Crab, at the bottom of Washington, which has served justifiably famous seafood since 1913). As we start working our way through a bottle of Merlot, John launches into his own highly (s)individual assessment of Miami Beach's position in a Galilean cosmology:

"South Beach, I think, would be Dante meets Milton. To me, Milton is Heaven, and Dante, obviously, is synonymous with Hell. I think it's a hellish version of Heaven."

(To give Miami Beach its due, despite the cultural wasteland it often seems, I was once able to purchase a collection of Milton's works at the New Cafe, a twenty-four-hour restaurant which doubles as a bookstore and magazine stand, at three a.m.)

John takes a sip of wine, glances round at the Strand's *de rigueur* beautiful people, then makes a vaguely rat-like tightening of his mouth which seems almost a studied Bogartian gesture. He adjusts his hat, which even here he wears as a testament to his chosen role, and tells me about his metamorphosis from plain John (real name omitted), to the quasi-mythical John Hood.

"I was at Yale, being groomed to inherit the WASP tradition. I was taking the standard BA thing—I had dual majors in art and literature. And I decided I'm either going to do this and go into politics—Yale is recruiting territory for the CIA, of course—or go into business or law. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing, but it's a mapped out thing.

"I had this whole thing in college, that it was prolonging my dependence. So I went to the Chelsea Hotel in New York. I gave them nine grand and said, 'I'll move out when this runs out.' In fact, I had ten grand. I kept one. Then I got a job in a bookstore, and everybody's, 'Read this, read this!' And I just did. The books cost me absolutely nothing. I read everything in sight. I joined the Marxist School, I went for a couple of sessions, and I'm like, 'This thing was created to combat something that doesn't even exist anymore.' I said, 'Fuck these people!' You know: everybody's got to share in the wealth. No, I believe in the exercise of individual will. Sovereignty. I wasn't a Republican then, but I'm sure that was a strong reason why I became one."

Hood started writing for hip New York publications like the *East Village Eye* and *Paper* magazine (an author friend told me that John's book reviews were among the best he had ever read), and graduated into other activities such as performance art, songwriting and recording.

"Then I was in a movie called *Alphabet City*. This was mid-1980s. I was supposed to be this gangster, Cochran, wearing a hood, and this dame I was hanging with, Donna Domino, started calling me 'Hood.' She says, *'Hood, you look like a hood.'* So I decided to use two four-letter words, each of one syllable, instead of my real name. It simplified things greatly. I would be John —, and people would say 'who? what?' So I just said, 'John Hood.' The movie was a big flop, but when I signed with Warners to make dance music, I kept the name, "Hood". I was twenty-three."

I glance at him now and can't decide whether he looks younger than his thirty years or older. Somehow he manges to seem both. I find it hard, too, to credit him with being quite as tough as he claims, though he has the arrest record to prove it. But where, I wonder, was this life of the gangster milieu born? On the streets of New York? Inside the bookstore?

"No, in Miami. I grew up in Miami—yes, people do grow up in Miami!" The Bogart rat-grin again. "And Miami is a place with really no history. Miami's history is purely that of the carpetbagger or the criminal. Selling swampland. It's the grifter. I think it's the first city to be founded upon the merits and the true definition of grifting. And it was the first city where the class of a grifter was less important than his talent. A good grifter, be he blue-blooded or barbaric, can make it.

"You know, most of this island came from Biscayne Bay. They just dredged up whatever was at the bottom of the bay, put it here, and this is Miami Beach. I call this the Sixth Borough of New York, with so many New Yorkers here. But here's the difference between Manhattan and Miami Beach. Here we have causeways between us and the mainland. In Manhattan, you have bridges and tunnels. Same thing. The difference is that Manhattan is a rock and being a rock, Manhattan pulsates. And this is sand. Sand, due to its chemical make up, isn't capable of making a pulse. And the worst part: this isn't quicksand. This is slow sand. It's a grimy little Venus's flytrap."

Aloft in near poetic form, Hood's subtle but unceasing gestures become ever more agitated—not so much anxious as impatient, as if words are merely a brake on the speed of his thoughts.

"I think making money down here and having great ideas are sure to succeed," he says, "but they rank in a dubious realm compared to surviving with your spine intact. Down here, I find it's real easy to trance yourself out and wake up in the morning and dump yourself in the cleansing waters of South Beach. I think it's the last best place for decadence. You could swallow a jellyfish, step on a bottle, have unsafe sex and, after an eight-ball evening, still feel like, 'Well, I'm OK. I've got a suntan!' Because it's true. When you look in the mirror and you have a sun tan, it's a great deceiver, it's so alluring."

Alexander Stuart is the author of *The War Zone, Tribes,* and was the executive producer of Nicolas Roeg's film *Insignificance.* Now residing in Los Angeles, Stuart is in final preparation for the March filming of *The War Zone,* to be directed by Tim Roth.

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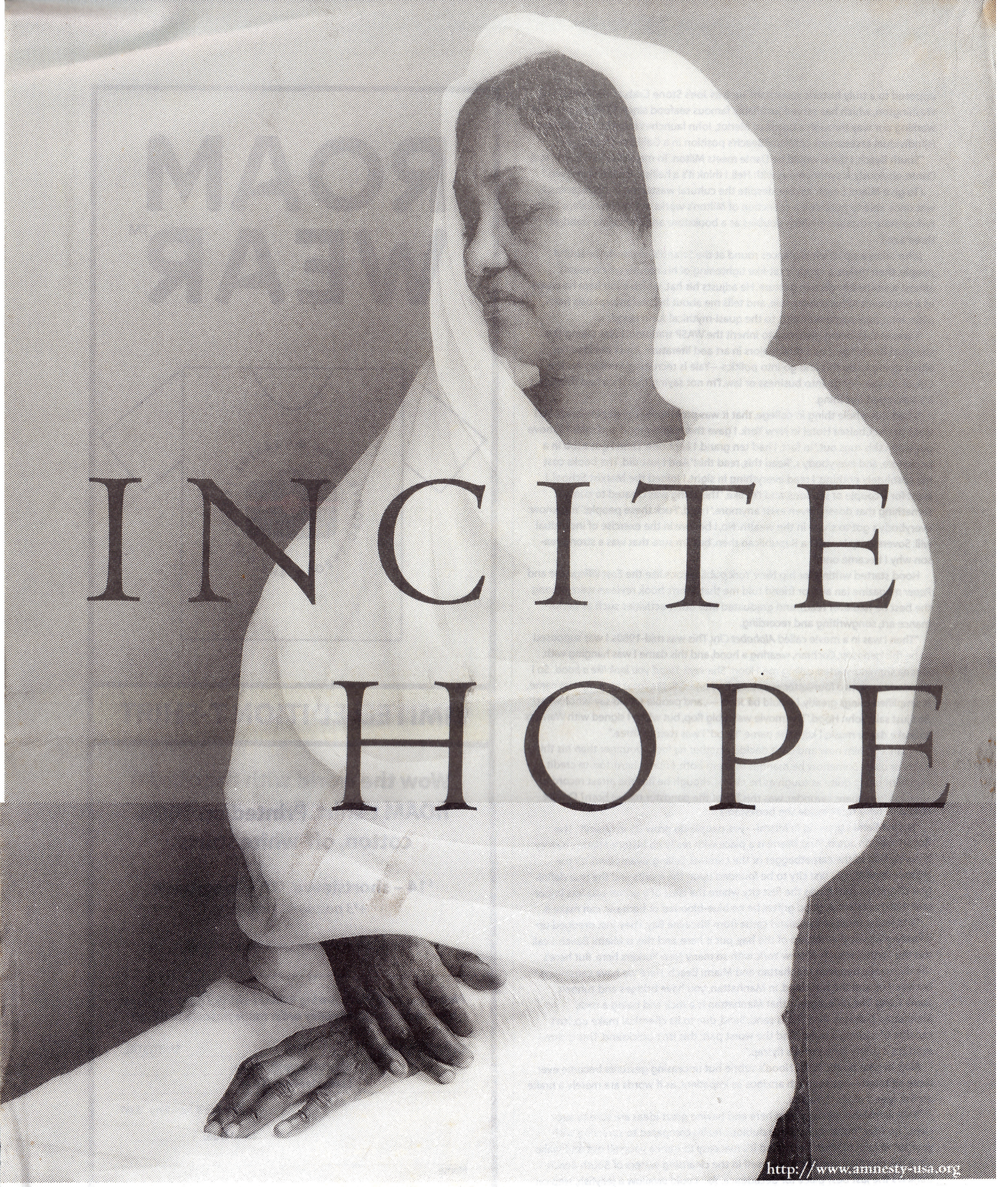
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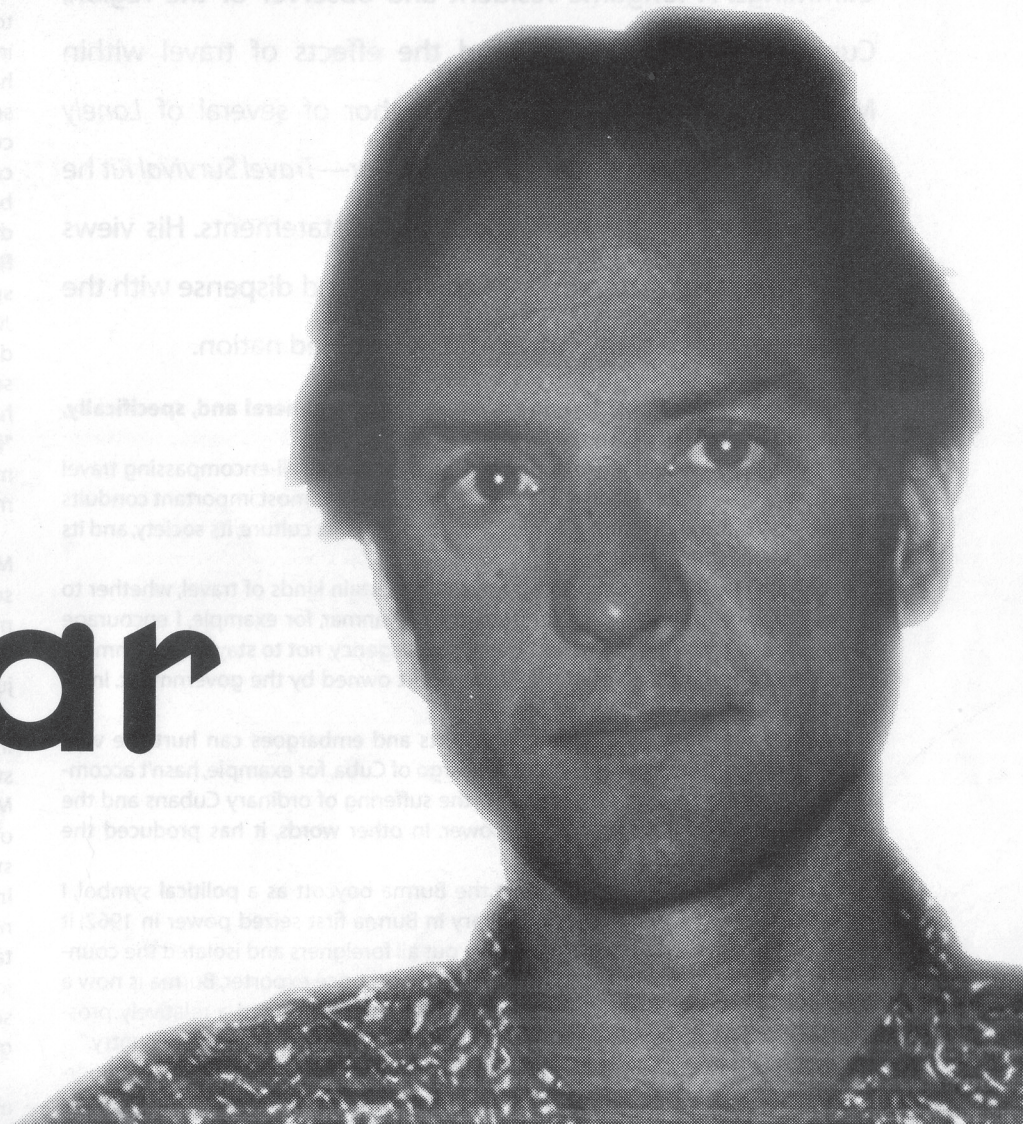
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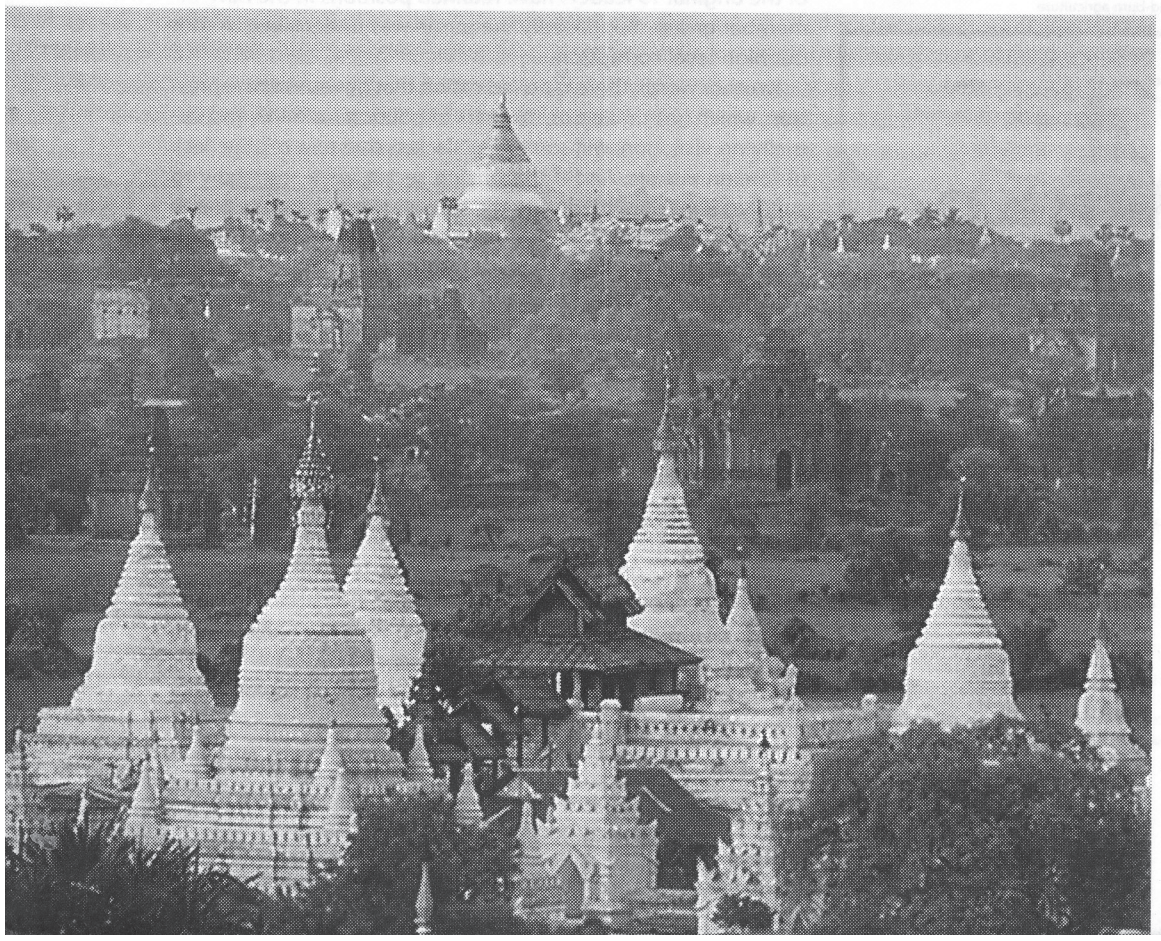
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Going To Myanmar



Lonely Planet author Joe Cummings addresses the complexities of travel to this troubled but spectacular nation.

by John C. Tripp



Though it is by no means an anomaly, the military junta-ruled nation of Myanmar (Burma) stands as one of the most contentious of travel destinations. With an oppressive regime, SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), firmly in place, the idea of travel to its spectacular but strife-torn borders remains an issue of heated debate.

Strong opinions exist, with one side arguing that any travel to Myanmar further empowers SLORC, with travel currency providing direct funding of its military. Another argues that travel to Myanmar empowers its people, with badly needed currency placed directly in the hands of the people. Staying away, they say, would do more harm than good.

There are no clear answers to the question of travel to Myanmar, but one thing is certain—people are visiting Myanmar regardless of the politics involved. Though a travel boycott has been called for by a number of organizations, including Myanmar's National League for Democracy, it seems unlikely that travel to the nation will cease.

The debate is far from over though, and the question remains: is travel to Myanmar constructive or destructive? ◊

One individual who brings reason to the debate is author Joe Cummings. A longtime resident and observer of the region, Cummings has seen firsthand the effects of travel within Myanmar's borders. And as the author of several of *Lonely Planet's* travel guides, including *Myanmar—Travel Survival Kit* he is fully aware of the implications of his statements. His views reflect the great complexity of the issue and dispense with the polemics that surround travel to this troubled nation.

ROAM: What is your position on travel boycotts in general and, specifically, the travel boycott of Myanmar?

JC: On principle, I would never support an unconditional, all-encompassing travel boycott for the simple reason that travel remains one the most important conduits for two-way information about a place, its inhabitants, its culture, its society, and its political leadership.

In certain cases I might support a boycott of certain kinds of travel, whether to a specific place or in general. With regard to Myanmar, for example, I encourage people not to patronize the government travel agency, not to stay in government hotels, and not to use forms of public transport owned by the government. In all of these cases, there are alternatives.

I should note that unconditional boycotts and embargoes can hurt the very people they purport to help. The U.S. embargo of Cuba, for example, hasn't accomplished anything beyond an increase in the suffering of ordinary Cubans and the solidification of Castro's totalitarian power. In other words, it has produced the exact opposite of its intended effect.

And if one is supposed to support the Burma boycott as a political symbol, I must ask "at what cost?" After the military in Burma first seized power in 1962, it expropriated all private businesses, drove out all foreigners and isolated the country from the outside world. Once the world's largest rice exporter, Burma is now a net importer of rice. In three decades, the military transformed a relatively prosperous and largely peaceful country into a strife-torn "least developed country."

I have longtime personal friends in Burma—including members of the underground resistance, risking their lives on a daily basis—who maintain that sealing Burma off from the outside world only further cements the military regime's fear-driven control over the people.

ROAM: How does contact with visitors impact a host country's people?

JC: There are economic, cultural, and social impacts, most of them fairly obvious. One really must discuss specific examples to judge whether the net impact is positive or negative in any given instance. Even then, much depends on your perspective. Experts I know who are familiar with the hill tribe cultures of northern Thailand, for example, tell me that in general these cultures are stronger than they have been at any time in the last century despite ethnological tourism. On the face of it, this seems difficult to believe, but I happen to trust the judgment of these particular individuals. They claim that the biggest pressures on tribal life don't come from tourism, but from habitat loss due to logging and swidden[1] agriculture, and from Thai government-implemented assimilation programs.

Obviously, there are many instances where tourism has reinforced handicraft and cultural performance traditions, or inspired the restoration of world architectural treasures. On the other hand, we all know examples where cityscapes have been seriously maimed by the construction of multistory hotels and the like—though the local residents might disagree with our assessments—or where beaches or forests have been trashed by mass tourism. Luckily, in my experience, tourism accounts for less of this type of degradation than just about any other industry you can name. But there's lots of room for improvement. I'd rather see hotels than tin mines on Phuket, and I'd rather see recreational scuba divers in the sea than coral dynamiters. From what I have seen and experienced in developing-country tourism, only when local and national governments—and their constituencies—can see an economic value in it will preservation or conservation be assured. Travel is always potentially a double-edged sword that can cut in either direction.

ROAM: Does the "trickle down" effect work in Myanmar? Can you cite some specific examples that you have witnessed?

JC: I wouldn't necessarily call tourist expenditures in Myanmar a case of "trickling down"—depending on how you travel, and how you select tourism products and services, virtually 100 percent of what you spend may stay local and out of the hands of the state. As with travel anywhere in the world, there is less economic "leakage" in the budget/independent/backpacker style of travel than there is in mass-market/ group-oriented/package tourism. And there are, of course, many modes lying along the continuum between these two poles.

If you hire a pedicab driver to take you somewhere in, say, Monywa or Mawlamyine (Moulmein), that driver uses every *kyat* you give him to sustain himself and his family. Same for any handicraft purchase at a private vendor stall, a meal purchased at a local briyani place, or the hiring of a local guide for a walk in the hills outside Kalaw, to name just a few examples.

On the other hand, if you stay in a four-star joint venture—state/private—hotel in Yangon, Mandalay, or Bagan, 50 percent of the profit earned from your stay may go to government interests—although it won't necessarily find its way to military budgets since most of the joint ventures exist for the personal enrichment of individual government officials.

"There is no indication that government repression, which has thrived on 36 years of political isolation and virtually no visitation, will somehow slacken due to a relative lack of foreign visitors."

Tourism channels more money directly to ordinary people than does any other form of foreign activity in Myanmar. If a boycott were to have any significant effect—and so far there is no evidence to suggest it has, since visitor numbers keep going up year by year—many people in Myanmar, especially in Mandalay, Bagan and the western Shan State, will suffer.

ROAM: Does travel to Myanmar undermine attempts being made to pressure SLORC to make real change? As long as the money is flowing, why should they care?

JC: The money that the government takes from tourism is trivial compared to the amounts they take in from all the major enterprises over which they exercise sole legal control—gems, timber, and energy resources. If all tourism to Myanmar stopped tomorrow—and the numbers aren't that large to begin with—it would have virtually no effect on Burmese government policies. Incidentally, it's no longer SLORC but SPDC—State Peace and Development Council—and only four of the original 19 leaders have retained positions in the new 14-member group. Supposedly the purge was undertaken to root out high-level corruption.

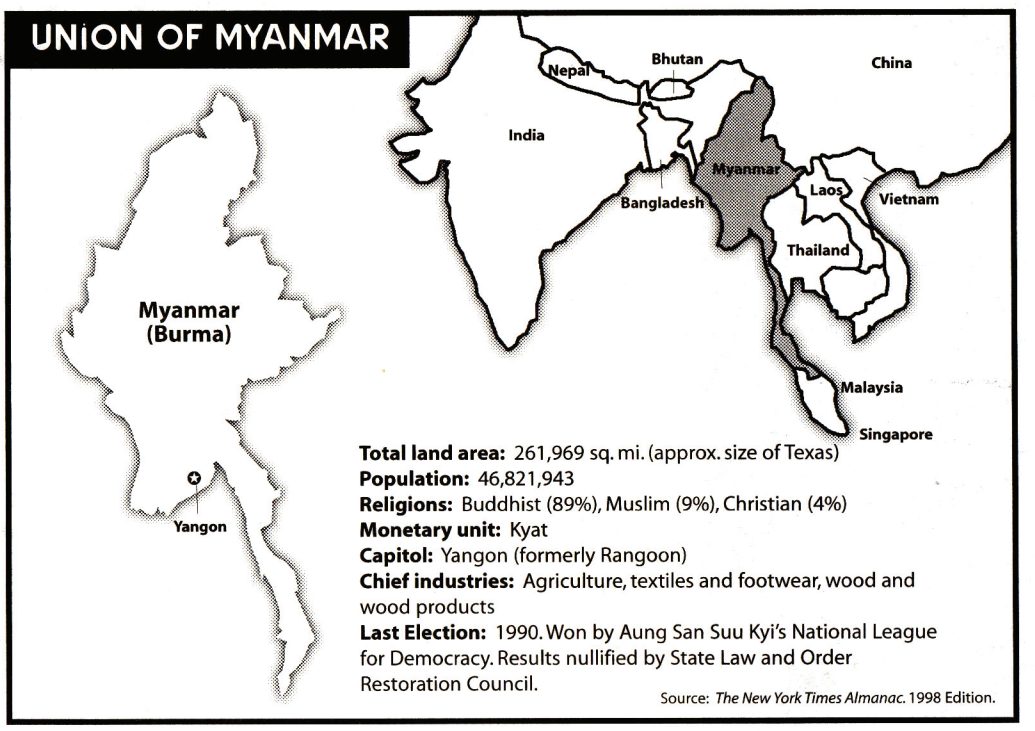
In other words, there is no indication that government repression, which has thrived on 36 years of political isolation and virtually no visitation, will somehow slacken due to a relative lack of foreign visitors. And if the private sector were somehow to suffer as a result of a boycott, the ruling junta will simply blame the opposition and continue raking in hard currency through their total monopolies on natural resources.

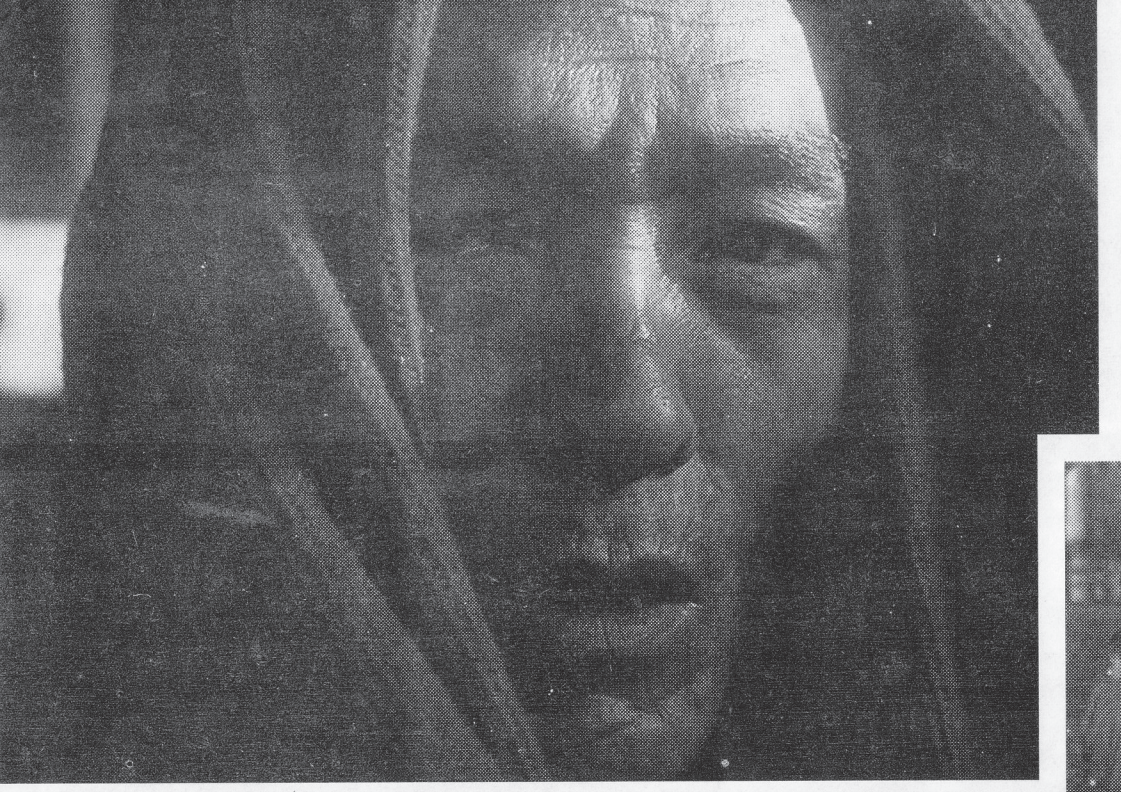
ROAM: Has Myanmar been unfairly singled out, when other governments exhibit even far worse behavior towards their people?

JC: Absolutely. China executed 4,000 people without trial last year and maintains large forced labor camps beside which the use of draft labor in Myanmar pales by comparison. Vietnam has a very poor human rights record, as documented by Human Rights-Asia and Amnesty International. Pakistan, Israel, and Bhutan look very bad on paper. Certain countries on the African continent also come to mind. Israel still has forced labor in the form of a military draft, as do several other industrialized countries. Even in the U.S. certain states continue to use convict labor for road construction and other public works.

ROAM: Is forced labor being used in Myanmar to construct tourist facilities?

1. Slash-and-burn agriculture









JC: The only case I have personally documented has been the restoration of the Mandalay Palace, and draft labor was halted there after foreign visitors submitted photos to the international press. Convict labor persisted till the end, but then, as I said, convict labor is used in various Western states as well. As any one in Mandalay can tell you, prisoners working on the Mandalay Palace restoration project actually paid for the opportunity to work there in order to receive sentence reductions, to be able to arrange conjugal visits with their spouses, and to see some life outside prison walls. This is not to say that many of them might not have been unjustly imprisoned in the first place, or that working conditions approached minimal international standards. The Mandalay Palace, however, is just as much a symbol of Burman nationalism as it is a tourist attraction—perhaps more so. In the case of roads, where draft labor has also been used, it's difficult to argue that any of them were built solely or mainly to serve tourism. The two railway lines known to have been built by draft labor —the Ye-Dawei line and the Loikaw railway—are both off limits to foreigners.

As far as I know, no hotel projects in Myanmar have ever used draft labor. Unverified reports from certain activist organizations outside Myanmar say this has occurred, but I have seen no convincing evidence supporting the allegations. Even if it turns out to have been true in one or two cases, it is certainly not the general practice for hotel construction in Myanmar. The same questions could be posed with regard to China and Vietnam.

ROAM: What might a visitor do to benefit the condition of Myanmar's people while there?

JC: If you decide to visit Burma to see for yourself, go with as much advance information as possible and travel with your eyes and ears open. If you'd like to maximize the positive impact of your visit to Burma and minimize your support of the government, follow these simple tactics:

- Don't stay in government-owned hotels. Stay at private, locally owned hotels and guesthouses.
- Don't take Myanmar Tours & Travel (the state tourist agency) tours.
- Don't take modes of transport for which MTT controls the tickets (e.g., the Mandalay Express train and the Mandalay-Bagan boat). Take local transport.
- Buy handicrafts directly from the artisans rather than from government shops. As of 1997, well over 90 percent of all tourist-oriented businesses in the country belonged to the private sector, so avoiding government-owned or government-operated concessions is fairly easy.

ROAM: Is dissent by a visitor, such a wearing a t-shirt, a constructive action one could take? Or is this counterproductive?

JC: I can't speak with any authority on this question, as I've never tried it or seen anyone else try it. Hypothetically speaking, I don't think the government would tolerate such dissent, and it could lead to an official halt to tourism—as happened in Tibet a while ago. As should be clear from everything I've written on this topic, I think a closing of the country would only take Myanmar back to its stark isolationist days.

ROAM: How might a visitor make a positive political statement without endangering him- or herself or others?

JC: While in the country, keep your eyes and ears open. Talk to people who are willing to talk about the political situation, but be sure not to do it in public places like teashops. And always allow the Burmese to initiate the topic themselves, as some people are more willing to talk than others. It is a myth that the Burmese are afraid to talk to foreigners about politics, or that you always endanger them when discussing politics, but prudence is necessary. Almost every Burmese I have met in Myanmar over the last 12 years has sooner or later brought up the topic themselves. I consider this one of the major benefits of travel to that country—you provide a sounding board for local opinion and observations, and you can bring information to the outside world about what people really think is going on.

ROAM: How do you respond to the pleas of Aung San Suu Kyi and other groups not to visit Myanmar?

JC: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi encouraged a boycott of Visit Myanmar Year 1997, not a boycott of all travel to military-controlled Myanmar in perpetuity. I happened to disagree with her on this issue, or specifically on this tactic. And I believe the majority of Burmese—as best I can tell having travelled the length and breadth of the country—also disagreed with her on the topic. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is loved and admired by a great many people—myself included—but she is not infallible.

I actually haven't met anyone inside Burma who supports a tourism boycott. This includes the many people I have met in the pro-democracy movement. Even Par Par Lay of the Moustache Bros of Mandalay, who is now serving seven years in prison for satirizing the government during a *pwe* performance for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters in Yangon, is not a boycott supporter. I recently received a personal message from Par Par Lay, relayed directly to me by his family after they returned from a visit to the Myitkyina prison where he was being held, in which he essentially said "tell people to keep coming to Myanmar."

ROAM: Does SPDC allow freedom of movement within Myanmar? Are there restricted zones where most of the oppression might occur?

JC: Every state and division in the country is now open to tourism, but there remain a few restricted areas within a few states or divisions. Most of these are in border regions where fighting or political friction between government troops and ethnic insurgents takes place with some frequency—for example, between Taunggyi and Kyaingtong in the Shan State, the eastern section of the Mon and Karen states along the Thai border and certain India-Myanmar border areas in the Chin State. Security appears to be the issue here more than an attempt to hide human rights abuses, though the warlike conditions in these areas are always ripe for such abuses on both sides of the struggle. Perhaps the worst abuses by most standards take place behind locked prison gates, through which of course all ordinary visitors are denied passage. Still there are opportunities to observe government repression—if that happens to be one of your objectives—even in Yangon or Mandalay. You may see the use of draft labor or the occasional rounding up of student dissidents, among other things.

The world might not have known about Tiananmen Square or about the 1988 Rangoon riots without the presence of tourists. Incidentally, it's untrue, as suggested by the otherwise true-to-life-if-fictional film *Beyond Rangoon,* that there were no cameras around during the 1988 events. Extensive video footage was shot by American and Japanese visitors at the time. I have viewed some of it privately. None of it to my knowledge has ever been publicly telecast, perhaps because it documents the many abuses committed by the students—such as disemboweling and decapitation of suspected informers, without trial or ceremony of any kind—as well as by the soldiers. Not "politically correct" stuff and definitely not *America's Funniest Home Videos.*

ROAM: What are the criteria that determine whether it's OK or not OK to visit a country?

JC: Each individual traveler must fix his or her own list of criteria, then decide for themselves. This is why Amnesty International, for example, will not take a stand either for or against boycotts/embargoes of any kind.

ROAM: What do you see as the future of Myanmar?

JC: Barring any major—and at this point unpredictable—social upheaval, I see a very slow, gradual and uneven improvement in human rights and economic, if not political, freedom over the next decade, just as I have seen over the last decade in Myanmar. All of the human rights abuses in Myanmar that have been so widely publicized since the 1988 uprising have been going on since 1962, and many of them—such as draft labor—long before that. They have decreased, not increased, in recent years. The average lot of the urban dweller has improved substantially over the last 15 years, particularly since 1989. Anyone who challenges this basic fact—substantiated, by the way, by annual UN human development indexes—has either never visited Myanmar both pre- and post-1989, or is ignoring the truth to support their own political agenda.



Getting cozy at Jules in the East Village

Bistro Fare

It may not be Paris, but that hasn't stopped these New York bistros from creating their own take on this great French tradition.

Larissa Phillips reports

photos by Amy McCafferty

As a reformed hedonist, I have clung for years to the idea that I can smoke in foreign countries and get away with it, and right about now that skewed logic is rearing its ugly head like never before. I am camped out at the bar of your typical French bistro, surrounded by cigarettes, wine, and other forms of the mild decadence commonly found abroad. To my right, two mop-headed French youngsters are lighting up over twin sets of espresso and wine. Farther down the bar, a gaunt mid-40s woman dressed all in black is tilting her head to the jazz trio playing behind her, absently working her way through a long, skinny cigarette and a glass of wine. The young Frenchman to my other side, wine in hand and cigarette barely extinguished, is urging me to try some of his moules frites ("Is delicious! I love zee bread, to dip!"). The lighting is low, there is the sound of native French all around, and I am beginning to wonder why I quit smoking to begin with.

The only thing is, I'm not in France. I'm on St. Marks Place in Manhattan's East Village, at Jules, a cozy red-banquetted bistro, getting a taste of the sort of earthy decadence and sophisticated comfort food that Americans once needed passports and plane tickets to find. But—Francophiles and reformed expatriates, rejoice—those days are long gone. Bistro culture has infiltrated Manhattan, in ever growing proportions and with no signs of slowing down.

"It's very competitive in New York right now for bistro fare," says John Bondellio, who with his wife Rebecca owns and operates Seasons, a crisp little bistro in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. "It's really having its heyday."

Indeed, whether the overriding motif of the particular place consists of lace curtains, spare chrome counters or vintage French junk, Manhattan bistros have made their mark. And if the defining characteristics of a bistro—never mind a New York City bistro—can get a little hazy in the rush, there's no need to worry, since most definitions have always left plenty of room for interpretation. "A bistro is a regional type of eatery that came about in the late 1890s, around the turn of the century," says Doris Tobias, Manhattan food writer and coauthor of *La Bonne Soupe,* a collec-

tion of recipes from the 30-year-old midtown bistro of the same name. "Bistros offered food that was very rustic and gutsy. Each region had its speciality.... It was supposed to be a very informal place to have good wine and good food."

Sounds clear enough for the traditionalists, but what about the definitive New York bistro? "That's sort of an oxymoron," says Tobias. But she suggests, "I would think that a New York City bistro uses the term to mean a pleasant place for homey food."

Daniel Saltiel, owner of the country-French-inspired bistro Danal on East 10th Street, which is soon to be adding a wine bar, says a bistro has two essential offerings: "a comforting space where people feel at home," and "what Americans refer to as 'comfort food'." But this is meat and potatoes like my mom never made. "It is comfort food," he says, "but the mashed potatoes aren't just mashed potatoes; they can have celeriac in them or herbes de Provence or lemon."

Over in Brooklyn, Seasons is after just this sort of individual take on the bistro. Chef Bondellio and his wife Rebecca act as a classic husband/wife proprietor team in a modestly priced neighborhood kind of place, and yet they have strayed beyond the usual boundaries. "Something that makes us different from a traditional bistro is that each plate is designed," says Bondellio. "Roasted beets and goat cheese we made into towers, floating in this bright pond of carrot juice and a beet juice vinaigrette. It's this bright yellow and deep ruby red. It almost looks psychedelic.... In a traditional bistro this might be served in a little more of a utilitarian fashion."

Sami Kader, chef and partner at the sparsely decorated and newly opened Le Tableau on East Fifth Street, has a similar philosophy: "We are not an expensive restaurant. We are comfortable and casual; we are a neighborhood place," he says. But the food is another matter. " We take classic bistro fare and play with it just for the fun of it. Most of the classic bistro fare is normally heavier; we just lighten them up—we give them a little modern twist."

But there are still those of us looking for more than that. Sometimes we want irony, novelty, and a glam sense of fun even as we wolf down vital nourishment. We want a bistro like Florent—serving drag queens, club kids, and publishing types side by side in the meat packing industry, 24 hours a day. Part retro-American flair and part jaded French know-how, places like Florent might take liberties with the classic elements of the bistro—martinis are as common as red wine—but in essence they have not strayed far from the model. If patrons are ducking in for sustenance, not after a tough day in the quarry, but rather after too much decadence—a grueling bender, say—the bistro is still serving its prescribed function, which is to nourish, to relax, to enliven.

Whatever the continent, the borough or the neighborhood, details are not important, save these few elements: the atmosphere should be rustic and knowing. It should be down and dirty even as it reeks of continental allusion. You might get smoke blown in your face, but it will be the smoke of a Gitane and it will smell pretty good.

And then there's the food. Various interpretations notwithstanding, there is nothing like bistro fare to set the stage for that pas de deux between hunger/longing/misery and food. There are snails, pâte, steak, wine. There is seafood soup with rouille, there are mussels and croque monsieurs, omelettes, and did I say wine? There may even be hamburgers, but altogether, between the food, the ambience and the drink, a bistro should inspire faith in the simple process of satiation and indulgence. It should, in fact, comfort.

Whether a bistro with a hipster jumble of vintage fans and seltzer bottles like Flea Market on Avenue A, a revamped classic like Le Singe Vert in Chelsea or an upper-echelon movie star hideaway like Balthazar, the New York City bistro, like other well-known Manhattan entities, is eternally capable of reinvention and interpretation. As Daniel Saltiel of Danal says, "There's still something to be said for personal creations."

With so many bistros out there, native soil or no, there is wine to be drunk, food to be eaten and even cigarettes to be smoked. Who says you have to go abroad to discover the pleasure of a little decadence here and there? And I'll drink to that.

Larissa Phillips writes frequently for *Allure*. She resides in Brooklyn.

Whether the overriding motif of the particular place consists of lace curtains, sparse chrome counters or vintage French junk, Manhattan bistros have made their mark.



Dishin' it up at Danal

DAY 33

by Alexandra N. Tinari

"We're lost," I admitted. Carol just nodded with a smirk. Having walked a full day from Phedi, we'd been without direction for several hours, climbing one steep trail after another only to be led down again on slippery cow paths. At the end of each path, cloudy water gurgled out of the mouths of black plastic pipes. The terraced rice paddies began to lose their meditative quality as I felt I was trapped in a labyrinth of karmic proportions.

It was four-thirty, late in the day for Nepal. By this time, most porters had reached their destinations for the night and were settling down beside kitchen fires to chat with the *bhatti* owners. Within an hour, they would be eating *dal bhat tarkaari,* rice topped with lentil soup and vegetable curry, and drinking *chang,* occasionally breaking into song or smoking *churots.*

The people of the Nepal countryside, lacking paved roads and modern conveniences such as electricity and telephones, rely on porters for commodities like kerosene and imported goods. The porters carry loads up to several times their body weight over vast distances, often wearing only tattered flip-flops to cradle their feet.

Now we backtracked to the last place the trail split. Carol scoured the dirt for signs. Footprints, cow dung, arrows etched in the dirt to guide dubious travelers. I opened our *Lonely Planet* guidebook for the eighth time that day, hoping, perhaps, to find a clue embedded in the syntax. Just as the book had suggested, we had earlier passed through Dhobane Bazaar, peeked in on the notable tailor shop, and continued over the ridge. But we had not made it to Nunkawa Besi, a location that was supposedly just a cantilever bridge away from our destination of Dhubidanda.

Where did we go wrong? I tilted my neck up toward the sal trees and rosewood and listened for voices. Nothing.

It was the first and only time I had ever felt isolated during the trek. Even while staring at shadows in an enormous stone guest house in Chaurikharka, where a shriveled husband and wife placed their hands in boiling water to stir viscous noodles, I knew I was among friends. The smiling old man had even led me down the steps to the *chorten* for water so I wouldn't become lost in the fog.

Five weeks ago, we had started at Jiri, a bazaar town about 188 kilometers northeast of Kathmandu. In the weeks that followed, we had trekked through the tangled Terai jungle, up through hobbity forests dripping with moss, and had crossed over a total of seven major rivers, only half trusting the buoyant bamboo beneath our feet. Later, we had approached high mountain plateaus on stone staircases and had strode beside the massive Khumbu glacier. After we had finally climbed the summit of Kala Patar, at 5,545 meters, to get a glimpse of Everest, a small black hump in the distance, we could easily have called it a trip and flown back to Kathmandu with scores of other triumphant trekkers. But we had walked on, toward the eastern border of Nepal, into the low Arun River Valley.

Now, near sunset, Carol detected a few Rai houses on the opposite bank. "Thank God," I muttered, "It's about time!" I was cold and very, very hungry.

It took us almost an hour to cross the river and make our way up to the group of huts which kept appearing and disappearing in rhythm with the curves of the footpath. A young boy of seven or eight ran out to greet us. "*Didi,*" he cried, keeping a few steps in front of us. "*Didi,* you must come to stay in my father's house. You like it there. Ramro, very good. I carry your pack? OK? *Didi!*"

Surprised at his English, Carol addressed him in Nepali. "*Bahai,*" she asked, "*yo gaunko nam ke ho?*" The boy said something we couldn't understand.

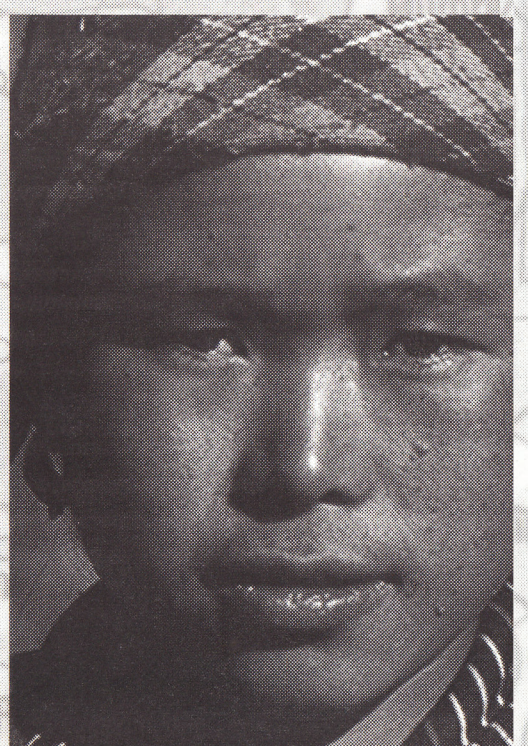
"Dhubidanda?" I offered, hoping that was enough to get the idea across.

"You stay," was all he repeated, "at my father's house."

It seemed the entire village had emerged from their houses. Pairs of dark eyes followed our steps, and women gathered their children around their soiled skirts. The walls of the grass-roofed huts seemed newly painted, and bright animal deities decorated the outside walls. Our small guide led us to one of the huts, where an old woman (who turned out to be his grandmother) lay apparently dying on a bench near the door. She clutched at my shirt as I passed, and I paused, unsure of what to do next.

"Medicine," the boy said, "you have?"

We had encountered requests like this before this day. One night as Carol lay recuperating from altitude sickness, the young son of our guest house owner cried and moaned without relief. He was a mischievous boy, with whom we'd collected basketfuls of yak chips just a few hours earlier. In the morning, Aama, our hostess, asked us for medicine, explaining that her son's teeth were causing him great pain. In broken Nepali we explained that we weren't doctors and that the boy should see a doctor in Pheriche. Then we gave her a handful of Tylenol, describing in sign language how they should be swallowed whole.





The old woman before us now in this village kept pointing to her throat and grunting. "Carol," I said, "I don't think this is Dhubidanda." Chaos ensued. The boy dove at my pack, while other villagers started shouting and gesturing in a tightening circle around us. Children howled, dogs barked. I stood for a moment, horrified at this turn of events. "Come on!" Carol yelled, and instinctively we wrestled ourselves free from the circle of grappling hands and waded into the rice paddies. I slipped a few times on the muddy slopes, but always Carol hauled me up and we continued on, not caring which direction our feet took us.

Later that night, safe in bed with full stomachs, Carol and I discussed the sudden fortuitous turn of events after our escape. Carol had been the one to see the men. We had just laid out our sleeping bags on the cold, damp shore of a large river, eaten the last two packages of "emergency" biscuits, and resolved to give up on the day. That's when she pointed out two shadowy figures in the glow of a fire in the distance.

As we approached and greeted them, the men smiled broadly. They took us in, and the younger one's wife cooked us an enormous dinner, with pickled grapefruit for a treat. Just a few hours ago, the men had completed building a guest house for porters. They asked if we thought the place needed a fourth wall and then invited us to participate in the blessing of their new *bhatti*. Later they inquired about America and asked how we liked Nepal. When we told them of our experience in the Rai village, they looked deeply concerned and shook their heads. *"Ke garne?"* they said, a favorite Nepali expression. "What to do?"

"Chaos ensued. The boy dove at my pack, while other villagers started shouting and gesturing in a tightening circle around us. Children howled, dogs barked, and I stood for a moment, horrified at this turn of events."

When Nepalese smile, it is not a matter of polite custom as it is in the United States, but a show of genuine friendliness. *"Namaste,"* the typical Nepali greeting, which functions as "hi, how are you?" literally means "I bow to the god within you." The word retains much of its literal meaning.

In this landlocked country, where the most common form of transportation is walking, there is an ancient tradition of *baas,* or giving shelter to a weary traveler. The country has a history of extensive trading, travel, and resettlement, and tea shop guest houses existed long before the first tourist came from Britain. Porters with their bamboo baskets, farmers selling and buying goods, entire families migrating according to the season, people traveling to weddings, funerals, or festivals, Gurkhas on government or military leaves, and tradesmen traveling to practice their trade—all receive a warm welcome from locals, who offer food and shelter for a minimal fee.

The foreigner, too, is treated with kindness and respect—despite our one unpleasant experience. Although Nepal has only been open to foreigners since the 1950s when the trekking industry blossomed, its people have a traditional knack for making everyone feel at home. Nepal has not experienced foreign colonization, so suspicion and resentment of tourists, commonplace in other "developing" countries, is not common in Nepal. At times when we were interacting with the Nepalese, it seemed their generosity, grace, and hospitality were boundless.

There was the time a young woman invited us to take shelter in her barn because she wanted to provide us with a place to stay (we were far from the usual village stop) and there was not enough space in her one-room hut. She stayed up with us far into the night, and although she knew no English, we talked and laughed and shared pieces of our lives. There was the day that a young guide offered his services for free when Carol suffered from altitude sickness. And the nuns who allowed us a tour of their "closed" monastery. I remember, too, the young girl who ran across a field to hand us, two strangers, two foot-long carrots newly tugged from the earth. They were of the brightest colors, orange and green, I have ever seen. And delicious.

During our thirty-seven day trek, day 33 was an anomaly. Carol and I had expect open hearts and gentle hospitality. Instead we confronted the harsh reality of one Nepalese village and its inhabitants' reaction to the sudden appearance of well-to-do foreigners in their home.

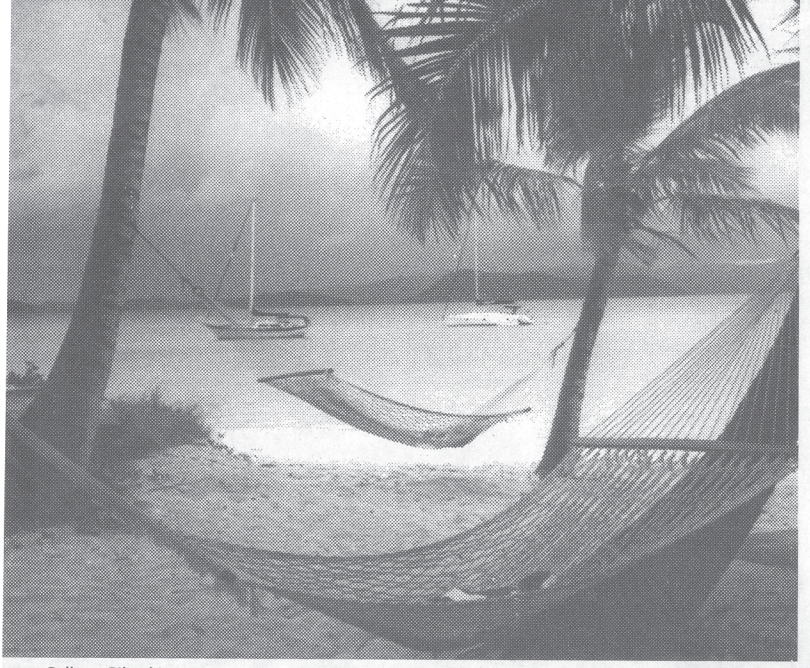
Sometimes I laugh when I think of the time we got lost somewhere between Phedi and Tabutar. But mostly, I think back on this time with a twinge of sorrow and disappointment in myself. I had in that moment—overtired, hunger-struck, and frustrated—forgotten to recognize the charming subtleties that are always present, even in the midst of confusion or threatening disorder.

Day 33 was not a particularly relaxing day, but when it came to an end I was happy again. Even the chickens tied under my wooden bed platform, continually trying to squeeze through the space between board and wall, did not irk me.

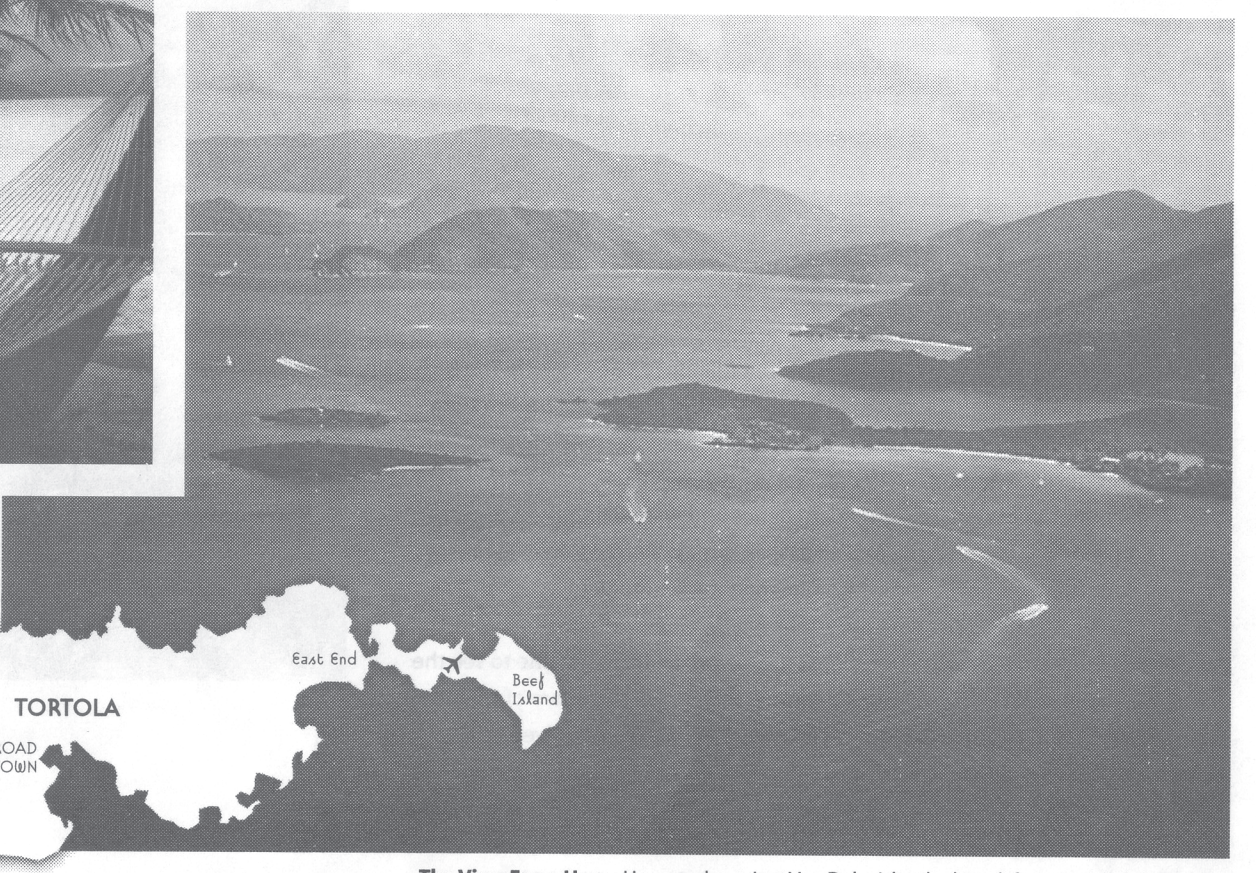
Before I fell asleep, I slipped my hand down to pet the soft, wispy feathers on the heads of the chicks and smiled.

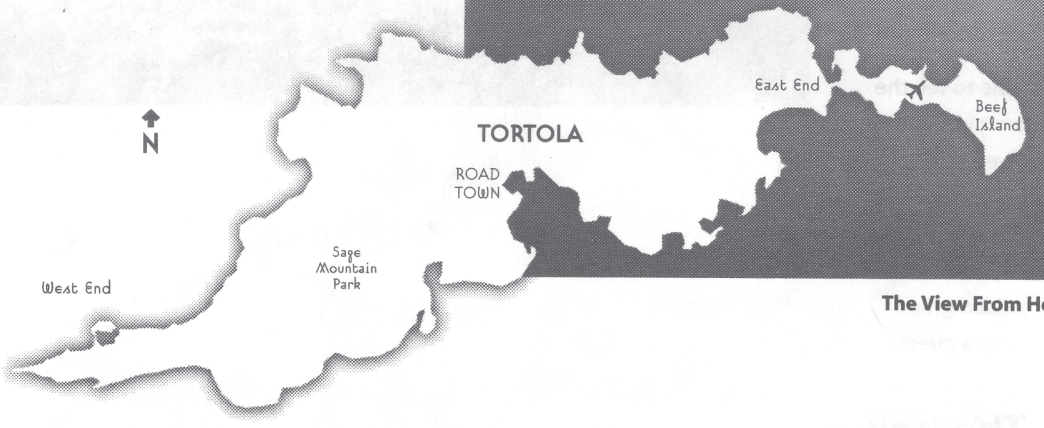
After dinner, not feeling up to it herself, Carol had asked me to read our guidebook in preparation for tomorrow's events. The book said "this trail may be hard to follow." But I didn't believe a word.

Alexandra N. Tinari is Coordinator of Special Projects at the International Partnership for Service-Learning. Currently residing in Brooklyn, she is planning her next trip to Iceland.



Colleen Pilarski





The View From Here: Hammocks at Jost Van Dyke island, *above left.* An aerial view, *above.*

by Colleen Pilarski

B.V.I.'s Tortola is as close to paradise as

An annoyed customs officer wasn't the greeting Tina and I anticipated. But there he was, waiting at the gate, the final barrier to our "escape New York and the boyfriends" week of sun and diving in Tortola. "I'll need the exact address where you're staying," queried our officer, eyeing us like drug smugglers in from Venezuela.

Oops. This being the off-season, we had planned to choose a hotel upon arrival, knowing that most of them would have rooms available. "We don't have an exact address," I said with a smile, hoping he'd show some sympathy and let us through. No such luck. "Sit over there and think about it," he said, pointing to a wooden bench. We took it in stride though; how could we not, with the warm, salty Caribbean trade winds caressing our skin and clear blue skies, palm trees, and a turquoise ocean teasing our eyes.

Presuming that he just wanted an address, Tina offered the name, captain, and marina of a friend's boat that, as it turns out, was not due on the island for a week. Our little fib won no accolade from our now furious officer. Two hours and four phone calls later we had an address and, lesson learned, were allowed entrance to paradise. Moral? Know the address of where you are going to stay in Tortola—they don't take kindly to the homeless here.

Situated just 60 miles from Puerto Rico, at ten square miles Tortola is the largest of the British Virgin Islands. With none of the rampant development and commercialism found on too many Caribbean islands, Tortola remains a friendly, serene and seductive destination. Add to that the nearby scattering of islands, some deserted, and you have one of the most sublime destinations in the West Indies.

Sailing is the activity of choice for Tortola's genteel crowd, though that is hardly all it offers. Its white sand beaches and crystal blue water provide spectacular beach and diving spots. And for the landlubber, there are lush hiking trails throughout the Sage Mountain National Park rain forest with breathtaking views of the surrounding islands and sea.

We were there for relaxation and fun. When we escaped the airport, we had our first taste of Tortola's white sand beaches. Instructing our cab driver to take us to the nearest beach, we leapt into the aqua waters and all remnants of stress floated out to sea. We had our first taste of Tortola's roller-coaster roads en route to our hotel, the exceptionally pleasant Ole Works Inn, made of the remains of a sugar mill and on a spectacular beach. After a quick tour of the grounds, we ventured to Road Town, the island's hub and about as different in pace from New York as one can get. We ate a quick Caribbean-style dinner at Virgin Queen, a West-Indian-meets-English pub with a lively mix of patrons, and then strolled down to Sir Olva Georges Square, seduced by the evening breeze and the colorful West Indian architecture.

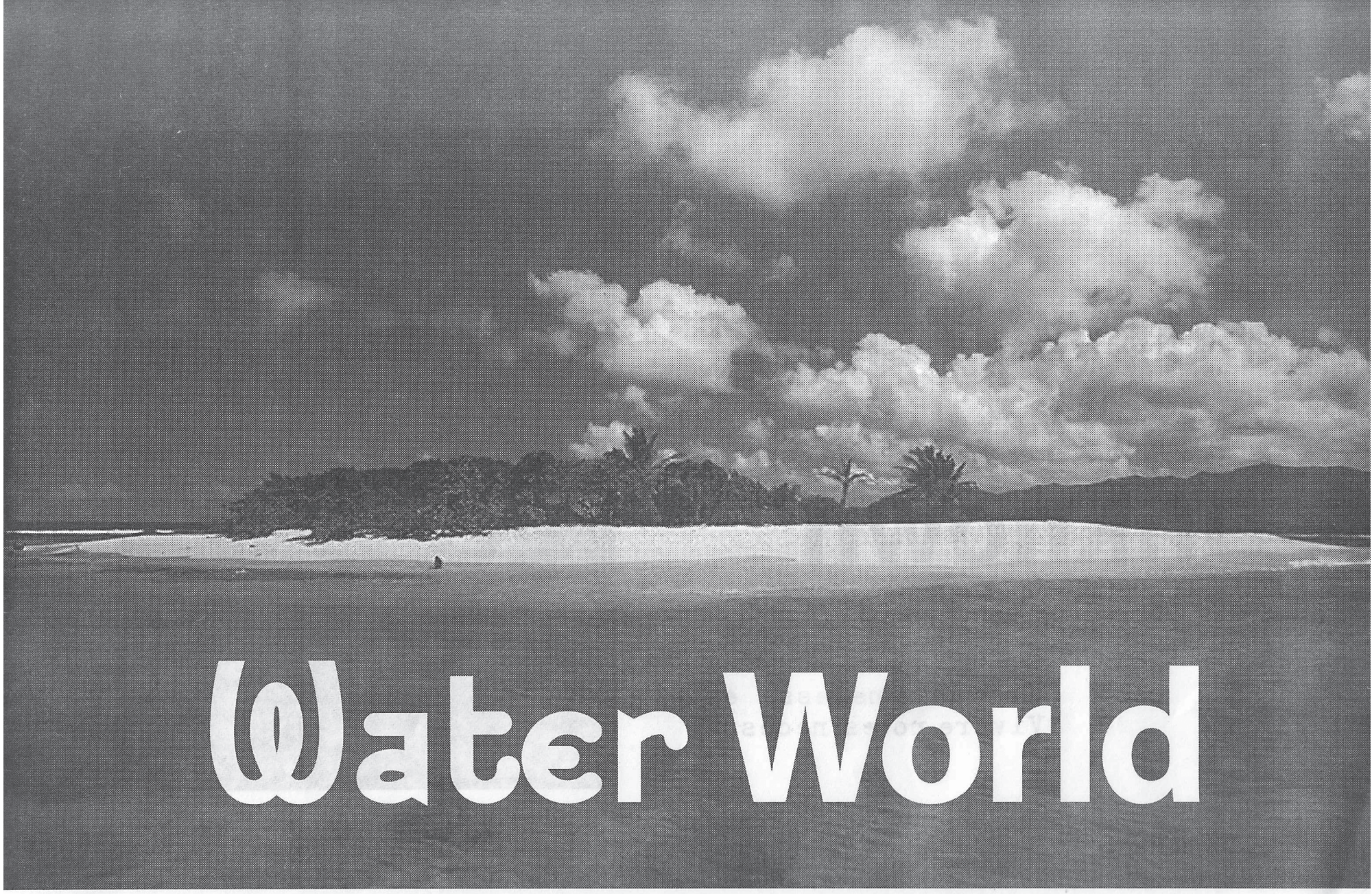
Later that night, while sipping drinks at Pusser's Landing, an island version of T.G.I.F.'s, we were quickly befriended by the bartender and some locals, who couldn't seem to get enough of us. While grooving to the island's "fungi" music, we met "Captain Paul," a friendly Tortolan sailor who charmed us into a chartered ride the next day. After some friendly chat and chiding, we retired to our room and fell asleep to the sound of gently breaking waves.

Rising to a picture-perfect day, we met Captain Paul and sailed around the island, mooring off Jost Van Dyke Island, just north of Tortola's western tip. With the area to ourselves, we snorkeled and cavorted in the calm and clear waters, mesmerized by the variety of color and life. Lunch was just a quick swim ashore to the Salty Dollar bar. If it were only this carefree in Manhattan! This rustic island would suit anyone's fantasy of a deserted beach paradise.

The next day we chartered a motorboat with Blue Water Divers and ventured to Cooper Island's Manchineel Bay, where we dove on a natural reef. Submerged in a world of color and variety beyond imagination, we were like kids in a candy store, trying to grab everything that passed. By the time we decompressed and neared our second dive site, a squall appeared. I became so seasick that I bailed on the dive. I went so far as jumping into the rolling water, but I promptly panicked and was hauled back on deck.

Two days later, after some idle "chill" time, we ventured to the wreck of the Rhone, a 300-foot British mail ship that sank off Salt Island in 1867. Now a marine park, the Rhone is Tortola's best-known diving site and deservedly so. We swam through the hull in several places, awed by the ship's gears and 17-foot prop. Waiting for the rest of the group, my instructor, Lofty, performed underwater acrobatics and encouraged me to give it a whirl. I promptly executed what he later called the worst somersault he'd ever seen in his life.

Between dives that day we anchored off an isolated white sand beach at Salt Island. We swam ashore to appease our stomachs and regain our equilibrium.



Water World

it gets—aqua waters, blue skies, white sand beaches—but first you have to get in

There we met the locals who gather salt from the two salt ponds on the island. They graciously provided a tour of the small island, instructing us in its colorful history. As legend has it, their ascendants were honored by the Queen for burying the Rhone victims as they washed ashore. Salt Island became theirs in exchange for one bag of salt a year, which is still sent to the British monarch to this day.

Submerged in a world of color and variety beyond imagination, we were like kids in a candy store, trying to grab everything that passed.

Appeased with our aquatic adventures,we spent our remaining time touring, shopping, and eating. After a few days of cautious driving—adapting to Tortola's roller-coaster roads and driving *a l'Anglais*—we ventured on a cross-island tour, stopping along the way to enjoy the sparkling waters and funky architecture. No amusement ride could be this spectacular, with lush greenery and commanding views at every hairy turn.

A vehicle is a must for seeing Tortola, but be prepared to be on the edge of your seat. We found the five-mile route along Waterfront Drive to be the easiest drive, with the water running parallel to the road. Our most adventurous drive was Zion Hill Road, which cuts through the West End and offers more gorgeous vistas than one can imagine.

With so much activity, eating was guilt free and we found Tortola's cuisine to be delectable. The island favorite and a must-try are "rotis," a mixture of African and Indian cuisine vaguely resembling a burrito. A "roti" is wrapped in a tortilla-like shell with a filling of meat, vegetables, and two sauces, one sweet and one fire hot. The sauces are supposed to complement each other, but the hot stuff was too much for us.

For less exotic fare you can't miss the Chicken Bus, a Tortolan locals' favorite. The best fried chicken on the island is prepared and served from this customized old red bus. The Chicken Bus is open late for those stumbling home from the bars. It is also the place to participate in the most heated game of dominoes you'll ever experience. Grown men have been known to cry from the insults dished out, but they are an important part of the game's ritual.

Sun and sloth was the agenda for our final day on the island. We had heard about a remote and beautiful beach called Long Bay and set off to find it. After driving down a dirt road near the airport, we passed through a mud swamp to get to our hidden bay. It was worth the drive: Long Bay is probably the most beautiful and definitely the most remote beach on Tortola. With no restaurants, moorings or tourists in sight, it is precisely what one hopes to discover when visiting a Caribbean island. You just have to find it.

With that image etched in our minds and the salt of seawater still on our skin, we rushed to the airport for our return to New York City. Although it was not quite as unexpected as our introduction to Tortola, we found it rather ironic when we were forced to pay a ten-dollar exit tax to get to our plane. It had been such an ordeal getting in and now we were paying to leave. I almost wished I didn't have the money.

Island Life: One of the many cayes just off Tortola's shores, *above*. The infamous "Chicken Bus", *below*.



Colleen Pilarski

Forwarding Address Unknown

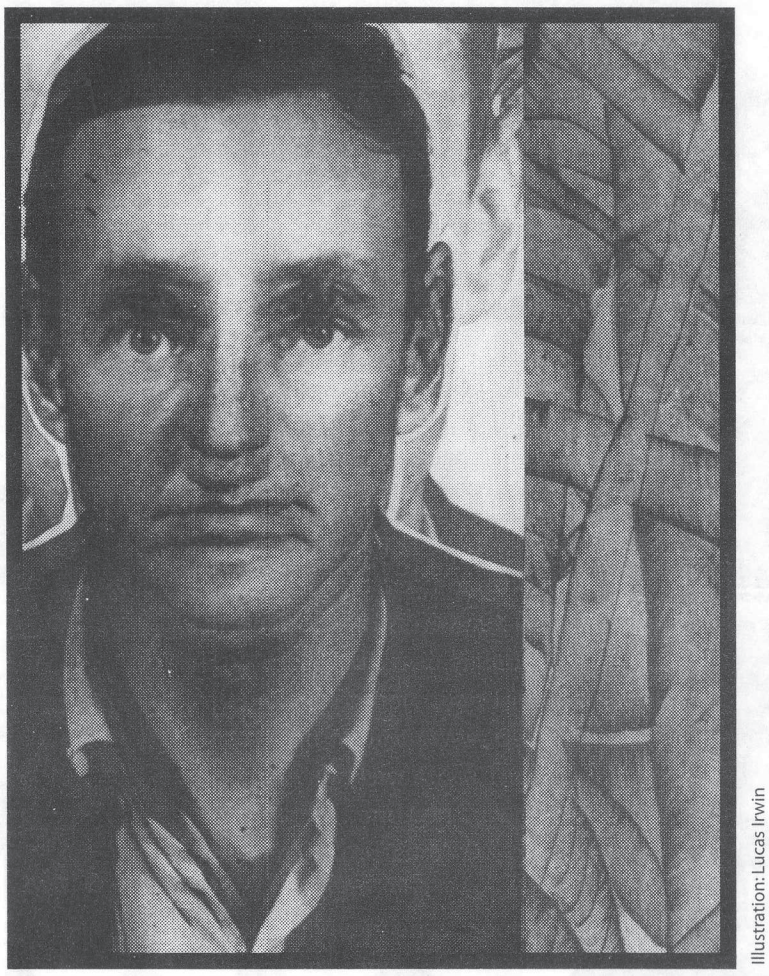


Illustration: Lucas Irwin

Navigare necesse es.
Vivare no es necesse.

by Oliver Harris

From 1914 to 1997, from St. Louis, Missouri—by way of New York City in the 1940s, Mexico, Panama, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and then Tangier in the 1950s, Paris and London in the '60s, New York again in the '70s—to Lawrence, Kansas in the '80s and '90s, from birth to death the exotic itinerary of William S. Burroughs has traced a line of strangely circular outward flight and homeward return. And literary chronology has mapped a second symmetry onto that of geography. In 1950 Burroughs crossed national and creative borders at one and the same moment to begin a quarter century as writer-in-exile outside the United States, followed by another quarter century as one inside it. Demonized as addict and homosexual, Burroughs could not have written his first two titles, *Junky* and *Queer,* within the straitjacket of Mass Society, Cold War America and was outrunning its disciplinary systems when he ventured into the twinned, alien territories of expatriate existence and the writing life. In Burroughs, the zones of time and space and the phases of literary production are seemingly synchronized, describing a career of radical exploration and experiment closed within the circle of Midwestern origins and Midwestern endings.

The patterns are inevitable clichés: Burroughs first traveled and wrote in parallel; the forced pace of literal journeying then yielded to willed imaginative adventures; observed worlds on the lam gave way to an envisioned otherworld. It's true that Burroughs worked in the national grain when he found the trace in Mexico of lost frontier conditions and that he moved South through the Americas half in flight and half in quest as a picaro ethnographer, evading the "stasis horrors" and collecting "copy" for later writing. It's true that he relocated to North Africa and found in the International Zone of Tangier an edge city that cut both ways: on the one hand, an optimal cultural collage, an inspiring heterotopia of primitive and futuristic, real and dream world potentials; and on the other, left hand, *noir* images of claustrophobic doom and the repetitions of terminal addiction. And it's true that, on the point of finally exiting what Freud might have named the City of Schickselzwang (his term for compulsivè "fate neurosis"), Burroughs claimed to have learned one thing: I don't want to do any more traveling. In short: whether in Paris, London, New York City, or Kansas, for Burroughs it was now words that made all the important journeys out: from *Naked Lunch* to *Nova Express,* from *The Wild Boys* to *The Western Lands.* After Central and South America and North Africa, to us lone cats all supermarkets look alike.

It's fair enough to specify the 1950s as the crucial, nomadic decade, as the years Burroughs traveled seriously, notating what lay on or beyond the limits of his geographic and cultural map of the West—and to say that by decade's end he had broken through, turned cosmonaut of inner space, spending his last writing years as a cartographer of the definitively unknown, the afterlife, the Western Lands. But it makes all the more startling and anomalous the plans a frail Burroughs had for one last expedition aborted only by death: why should William Burroughs in his final year have set his dying sights on crossing the Pacific to reach a remote volcanic rock dotted with giant obsidian heads called Easter Island? One answer lies some forty years earlier in the tropical rain forests of the Amazon, in the frontier Peruvian town of Pucallpa.

Nineteen-fifty-three was the year Burroughs found himself exiled twice over. Forced to leave his adopted home of Mexico City—his legal future after the tragic shooting of his wife looked increasingly bleak—he now embarked on a quest narrated in the letters of "In Search of Yagé," published a decade later as part of *The Yagé Letters.* In some curious way, this slight epistolary travelogue into the Southern hemisphere is not marginal but essential to Burroughs—perhaps because the letter form is the most elemental mode of travel and exile, of absence rather than presence, and of distances in time and space and knowledge to be crisscrossed by writing. But certainly because *Yagé* is the first scoring of South American landscapes into the imagination of Burroughs' fiction. South America held out the atavistic allure of lost primitive worlds and long-closed frontiers and would always exercise a special fascination. It signified for William Burroughs a destined rendezvous as surely as Central Africa did for Joseph Conrad.

Burroughs' visions follow passage through a territory of particular dread and decay, the jungles of the Putumayo region. Haunted by a grotesque history of colonial genocide and economic exploitation, the Putumayo has been well named by the anthropologist Michael Taussig as "the space of death." Burroughs loathed it. "Especially," he confided to Allen Ginsberg, "I hate the whole Putumayo region." This is an important kind of hatred for the Western traveler; Burroughs hates it with the horror of the colonist who confronts a fantasmatic mirror. The same story, set in the same region, is told thirty years later by the German filmmaker Werner Herzog during the extraordinary production of his *Fitzcarraldo.* Herzog visibly recognized his own cursed creation and his own cursed colonial presence—bringing Caruso to the jungles, bringing Klaus Kinski—in the alien looking glass of this accursed landscape. The association is necessary because Yagé has so strong and unusual a sense of place—contrast the anonymous locales of Mexico and Central America in *Queer,* written the year before.

Beyond the level of trenchant cultural critique, Burroughs' alter ego, William Lee, is pressed through this region by the dictates of an unnamed but relentless psychic malaise. The urgency of his travels, the unbearable sense of location foreshadowing his every step, comes from the knowledge of a destination he can neither know nor escape: the knowledge of death. "Where am I going in such a hurry?" The answer is always: *Appointment in Samarra.* Lee never spells out why he roams through the Putumayo seeking out the telepathic and prophetic hallucinogen yagé, but he does give his verdict: "Yagé is space-time travel." The drug, in short, performs on the physical body the work of writing outside it: these are indeed yagé letters, travel writing in every sense. The rest of the Burroughs oeuvre is governed by this understanding: from *Yagé* onwards, the spatial and temporal limits are off.

For detail and insight, Burroughs' accounts of taking yagé compare favourably to any in the published ethnographic literature. Like the shamans and the field researchers, he describes cities he has never visited before, sudden fears and wracking abjection, the motion sickness of a kaleidoscopic visual field, and the intense, animistic vitality of the natural world. For Burroughs, the climactic experience came in June 1953 in Pucallpa—"Hold the presses!" he calls out, "Yagé is it." His visions are curiously edited as a finale in the published text, under the byline Lima, where he pictures the Composite City, a cityscape of larval juxtapositions and journeys in the poetic lineage of the Villes of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* and the fantastic migrations of St. John Perse's *Anabase.* In this phantasmagoric scene, travel through space and time and identity is accelerated into dense, poetic images of metamorphosis via images that are themselves metamorphic: these verbal transformations generate the flickering effect of a montage always in motion. Burroughs' pinta—the paintings of yagé intoxication—owe everything and nothing to the location. Despite an extraordinary piling up of physical detail, all the key words here are defined by negatives and by absence: "unknown," "unconceived," "incredible," "unborn," "inhuman," "unthinkable," "unspeakable," but above all "unknown". This is what Rimbaud called anti-knowledge, when the poet "reaches the unknown, and when, crazed, he ends by losing understanding of his visions, he has seen them!" This is a vision of death, in the sense that it cannot be

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known in words. Burroughs gave the key account in his letter from Pucallpa: "What followed was indescribable. It was like possession by a blue spirit. (I could paint it if I could paint.) Blue purple. And definitely South Pacific, like Easter Island." A drugged glimpse and augury of Polynesian seas from in the heart of the Amazonian forest. In South America Burroughs found less a literal source than a visionary portal.

I don't say this is the travel vision of William Burroughs, one potentiated by the convergence of place and pharmacology and reanimated both in and through writing across his oeuvre. Nor is the question why he edited down his original revelations. *Yagé* is not *A Yaqui Way of Knowledge,* fifteen years before Castaneda; yagé could not be his botanic Grail. A final fix is the horror of stasis, of being no more than this, nowhere else but here. This is what Burroughs' travels into the unknown taught him. Perhaps, for the man who hailed from the Show-Me State, there was no need to reach Easter Island. Perhaps Burroughs had already seen his final vision. It is necessary to travel. It is not necessary to live.

Oliver Harris edited and wrote the introduction of *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945–1959* (Penguin). His articles have appeared in *New Statesman, Harpers & Queen,* and the anthology *William S. Burroughs: At the Front* (Southern Illinois University Press).

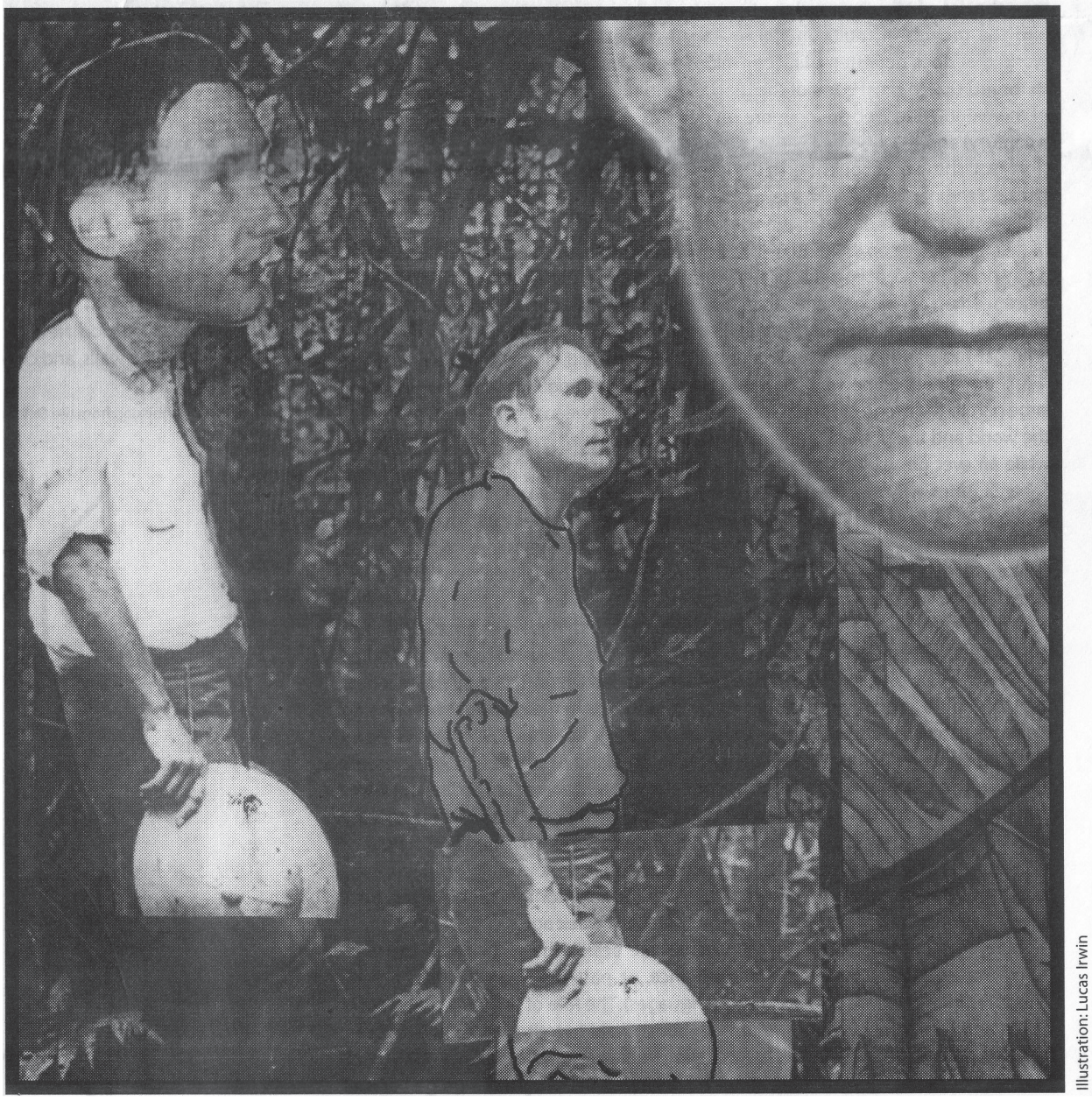


Illustration: Lucas Irwin

The Haiti Test

It may be a wired, wired world, but the majority of us aren't connected

All the world's a single unit, the ads and headlines in our newspapers increasingly inform us; IBM promises "solutions for a small planet" and AT&T boasts of "bringing the world together." Bill Gates writes that the majority of the world's adults will be wired within ten years, and the Earth on which we move seems in danger of being renamed "Planet Reebok," if it's not called "Planet Hollywood." Even the tiny English-language newspaper in my rural Japanese neighborhood, where I write this, comes with a small box at the top that says, "Global Magazine for Global Marketing… *Reader's Digest*—the Magazine in Globalese."

Globalese, however, was not the tongue that reached me when I set foot in Port-au-Prince earlier this year, on holiday. Women were relieving themselves along the main boulevards, in front of shacks that called themselves the Centre René Descartes, while buses bumped and lurched over potholes next to the "Sexy Photocopie" shop and the "Wonderful Semi-Lycée." Along the unpaved main roads there were no signs, no traffic lights and no central dividers, and next to the national Highway 1 the principal roadside attractions on view were tombstones. In the fancy French restaurants in the hills, foreigners (like me) talked about the days when gasoline had been "a hundred U.S. a gallon," while down near the Presidential Palace, the signs that said, "Tomorrow Belongs to Haiti" were all but obscured by mountains of trash.

Before I had even left the airport (where my flight, like all others, was greeted by a four-man troubadour band playing on the tarmac), blood was streaming from my hands, my possessions were (I gathered) in someone else's hands and the car that was meant to take me into town was getting violently rear ended (a not inconsiderable feat, given that it could hardly move). It was a salutary, and not unwelcome, reminder of what I call the Haiti Test, the administering of which is the main reason I travel these days: to set the topics of the dinner table where I and my friends chatter—the rise of Microsoft and the hegemony of America, the "borderless economy" and the growth of multiculturalism—against the simple, stubborn realities of a world that does not often think of itself as small. And to remind myself (as it is easy to forget) that in most parts of the globe, World Phones, World Plans and the power of the World Wide Web are no more on people's minds than they were a decade (or a century) ago.

In fact, the world could be said to be growing less and less connected, if only because the gap between the few of us who babble about the wiring of the planet and the billions who do not grows ever more alarming. In Haiti, where fully 70 percent of the people have no jobs and 60 percent of those over the age of 25 have never had a day or formal schooling, talk of the "home office" and the glories of a virtual workplace seemed almost obscene when they were not redundant. And in the Church of St. Gérard, where girls in fluffy orange dresses were playing voodoo drums (instead of an organ) to parishioners standing amid pillars that said, simply, "Piety," "Force" and "Fear," there seemed no way one could talk about a homogeneous planet. Thanks in large part to the progress that we celebrate, the gap between the richest 20 percent of the world and the poorest 20 percent has, in fact, doubled over the past thirty years, while an ever greater percentage of our population is represented by those in sub-Saharan Africa, who are not creating home pages on the Web. Even the places that do watch the O.J. Simpson trial or listen to Madonna are no closer to us than they ever were—in India people flock to a McDonald's outlet where they serve no beef, and in China, 300 million may watch the Super Bowl, but their government remains no less intractable to Western reasoning.

Of course the Haiti Test—as a way of challenging the things we deem to be important—could just as easily be administered by riding the subway to the end of the line in New York City, or stepping over the border near San Diego. The briefest walk near the U.S. Capitol at night puts "global village" simplicities in their place. Yet everything is sharper, stronger when abroad—a slap in the face is how travel awakens us—and Haiti, just three hours from New York by plane, an island of phantoms that presents itself as a kind of voodoo Versailles, is a particularly potent way of reminding ourselves that he slogans of AT&T and IBM tend to run out when phones and computers are unavailable. In most of the places that I've visited—whether Tibet or Ethiopia or Nicaragua—the issues of the moment are the same ones they've always been: how to live amid suffering; how to hold on to faith when reality contradicts it at every turn; how to live with neighbors who killed your parents a week ago.

None of this means that all our topicalities are beside the point when you walk along the Rue des Miracles, in Port-au-Prince, or past a Haitian hospital nearby ("Arms Prohibited Inside," it says in two languages). The fate of the United Nations is hardly an idle issue in a country that is tenuously held together, its people told me, by the U.N. peacekeeping forces I saw playing volleyball on the beach. And the way new opportunities for communications have helped the drug trade go global is of keenest interest to a people whose leaders have encouraged the use of their country as a trans-shipment point. Yet event those are often lesser concerns in a land where the average man is dead by 44, there is one doctor for every 10,000 bodies and—not coincidentally enough, no doubt—one child in every ten dies at birth. And our cozy faith in the universality of such rehabilitated pieties as "one man, one vote" takes on a different meaning on an island where people tell you not to go out at night "because of democracy," and where recent elections attracted perhaps 10 percent of the electorate.

To some extent we know all this already, and it has always been thus: The concerns of London and Paris have always seemed remote in the provinces, and it would be naïve to expect global marketers to tailor their pitches to an impoverished island where more than half the people cannot read. But the danger is that these days such truths grow ever easier to ignore, as all the momentum of the age propels us toward a belief in United Colors of Benetton notions and reminds us that we can contact a college roommate in Prague for the price of a local phone call. There is jet service to Pyongyang and Internet access in Cuba, our magazines keep telling us; CNN reaches "210 countries and territories around the world," including even Haiti, it reminds us on the hour. All of which tempts us to ignore the fact that there may be e-mail in Cuba, but there's little bread, no Tylenol and often no electricity. And Havana, by the standards of most parts of the world, is well off. It can be treacherous to submit too readily to the hopes of multinationals when, it's often said, there are more telephones in Tokyo than on the continent of Africa.

The Haiti Test is almost self-administering, and I've found it amplified in Bhutan (where there's no television) and North Korea (where the least of local worries is privacy on the Internet) and Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, where the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr. is surrounded by a neighborhood as orphaned and stricken as many in Port-au-Prince. And it has the useful effect of qualifying, when it does not nullify, most of what I might say about the end of history, the importance of Windows or Steven Spielberg's control upon the world imagination. Insofar as the world is, in some regards, better linked than it used to be, that is principally useful, perhaps, if it can help us take ourselves back to those places where such developments are hardly known. A holiday in Haiti seems a slightly perverse idea, I know, and could smack of political voyeurism; yet I rejoice in the souvenirs it left me with every time I read an article (as I did in the newspapers this May) talking about how we're "Overwhelmed by Good News," next to an ad about how we're living in a world where there are no walls, and only bridges.**—PICO IYER**

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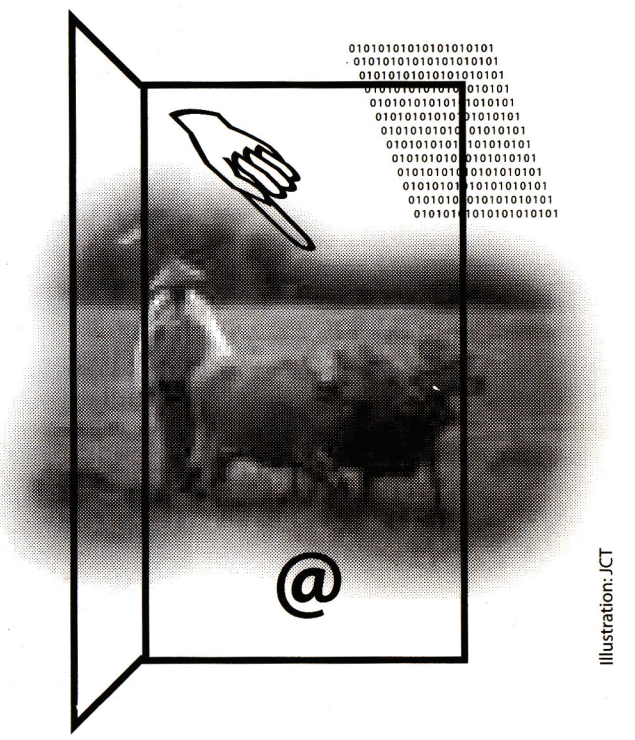


Illustration: JCT

Keep Cruelty Out of Your Travel Plans

There are many beautiful sights in the world. There are also some ugly ones, like bullfights and blood fiestas. Bullfights are so cruel that they are outlawed in the United States.

Village fiestas shock the world with their celebrations of cruelty: goats thrown from towers, geese and chickens hung upside down and beheaded by people on horseback, donkeys and bulls chased through towns and tortured to death by crowds.

There is a growing movement in many countries to ban these atrocities. You can make sure your money and goodwill don't go to countries that host bullfights and other cruel spectacles.

PLEASE TAKE THESE TWO STEPS:

- Before making travel plans, ask your travel agent if the country you'd like to visit allows bullfights and cruel fiestas. If so, refuse to visit that country.
- Call PETA when you witness "entertainment" that harms or kills animals.

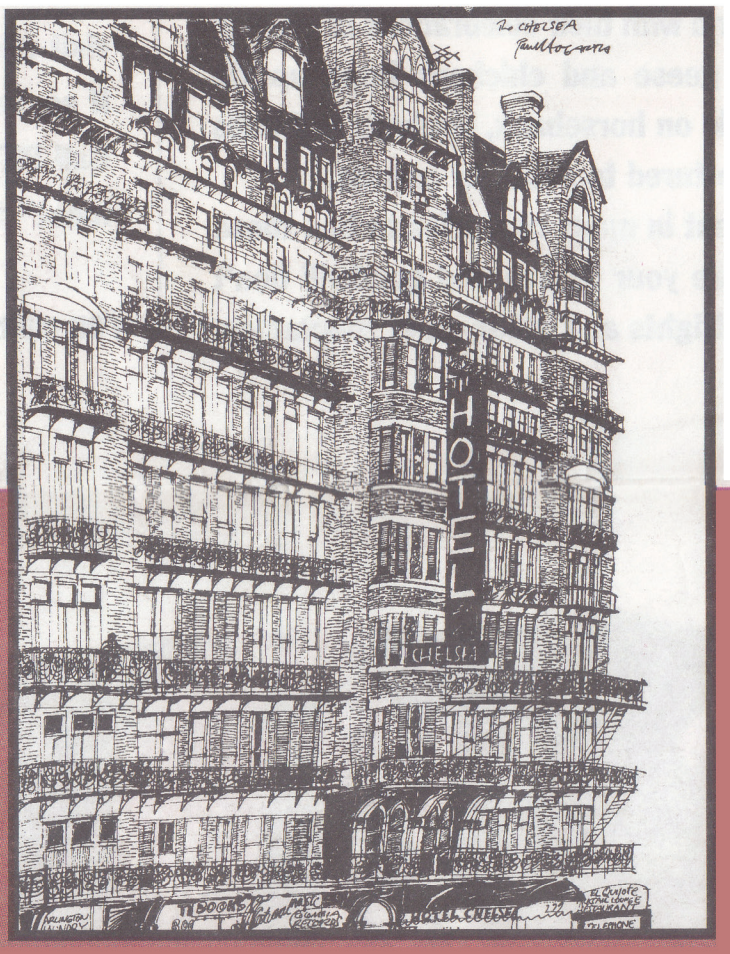
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