

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 08 – Dec 2016 through Nov 2017

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 11 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 132 months, I have 16 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining eight mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made [café-au-lait](#), I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 11-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, [PDF](#). And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to [Wikipedia](#) and [Wiktionary](#)
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewers, good friends John Tew and Tom Plum, who have been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friends. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked either to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, April 2021.

1. December 2016, “Travel: Memories of Cornwall and Devon”

For many years, I'd been interested in visiting Cornwall, the southwestern-most county of England, and I finally got to do that in 2012. During that visit, I finished up having several spare days at the end, and when I asked a biking couple where I might spend that time, they immediately said, “Why Devon, of course!” And I did.

1.1 Cornwall

1.1.1 The Train from London

[Diary] I checked out [of my London hotel] at 9:15 am and stepped out into an overcast day with heavy cloud cover. There were people everywhere, many of whom were headed to or from the train station or one of several Tube entrances nearby. In the train station, I found a ticket machine that informed me that a regular one-way ticket from Paddington to Penzance was £132. That was a huge shock as I'd been online a few days earlier and found that the cheapest tickets cost £52! So, I went to the ticket office and got at the end of the long line. Fortunately, it moved quite quickly and soon I was talking to a real human, who was very polite and knowledgeable. He quickly ascertained that I'd be returning within 30 days, and sold me a Super Off-Peak return ticket for £97.50. And not only was that cheaper than I'd expected, but he also told me I could use the return over several days on my way back. The automated ticket machine didn't offer me anything like that!

As I still had 25 minutes before my train departed, I nipped into the Sainsbury's supermarket where I rescued some emergency rations for the 5-hour trip. These consisted of a small block of Cadbury's nut milk chocolate, a pint of whole milk, a bag of Maynard's Wine Gums, and a pack of Roundtree's Fruit Pastilles. These covered the essential food groups.

At 9:50, I went to Platform 8 to board the 10:06 to Penzance. Not having a reserved seat, I had to ride in Carriage E where I found an aisle seat facing forwards, at a table. Apparently, Friday morning was a terribly busy time on that route, don't you know, and there were few empty seats and lots of luggage. We headed out on time with the sun threatening to break through the clouds. The main stations on my route, in order, were as follows: Reading, Exeter, Plymouth, Truro, and the end of the line, Penzance.

I chatted with a number of people around me, several of whom were Irish with tick (as in “thick”) accents. Soon after we started, a man announced in an entertaining way that as the wrong catering carriage had been hooked up, the kitchen was operating with only a small grill, so the choices of cooked food would be limited. The people at my table agreed that would be acceptable so long as the caviar and champagne were cold!

1.1.2 Penzance

By the time we arrived in Penzance, we'd slipped 10 minutes behind schedule and the weather had deteriorated. There was a slow, but steady drizzle. I stopped in at the Tourist Information office to get some maps and brochures, and I had a very pleasant chat with the two older ladies working there. Although they could arrange accommodation, I declined as I had a list of B&Bs I'd try. After all, it was out of season and raining, so who in their right mind would be coming to Penzance to stay?

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Who indeed! I walked some distance getting wetter by the minute, until I located my Number 1 choice. I was greeted with a response that had the following meaning: "Frightfully sorry old chap, but we're booked out. Lots of people in town for the weekend, don't you know!" Well, the six neighboring B&Bs also has "No Vacancy" signs out, and as it was now after closing time at the Tourist Office, I was on my own. So, it was on to Plan B. I decided to walk to another place I'd read about online, but of course that too was full as were its five neighboring B&Bs. I was starting to see a pattern, so I stopped off at a Guest House only to find it had closed. That was Plan C. However, right next door and directly across the street from the harbor was the swank-looking Beachfield Hotel, and that became Plan D.

As soon as I entered, I knew it would be a budget buster, but I was wet and tired. Yes, the hostess could accommodate me for two nights, but at a price slightly higher than my London hotel. Of course, it would include a full/buffet breakfast and she'd be ever so happy to take a credit card. I asked to look at the room and we ascended several sets of stairs to a very nice room right out the back that just happened to overlook an overgrown block with lots of construction debris and abandoned stuff. Ah, the ambience of England by the sea! Fearing that my choices were lessening as I got wetter, I signed up for two nights and settled into my room where I used the electric kettle to make a cup of coffee. I ate my left-over breakfast sandwich and a biscuit (cookie that is) while watching some TV. Light rain continued and I was ready for a quiet evening.

I fired up my netbook computer and brought this diary up to date. Although I had free wifi internet access, the signal was blocked by the heavy fire doors leading to my room, so after a nice hot shower I went downstairs to a sitting room where I connected to the outside world. A flood of email arrived of which about half was spam. I took care of the important stuff before visiting a few websites. Then I moved to the formal lounge where I went through the brochures from the tourist office as well as the books and guides at the hotel, to make a plan for the next day.

[Diary] *At 8:15 am, I took a seat in the dining room and read a newspaper while toast and tea were served. My custom-made, cooked breakfast consisted of pork sausage, bacon, fried tomato, and scrambled egg topped with a sprig of parsley. It was served on a rather artsy square plate. Presentation really does matter! I am happy to report that it tasted every bit as good as it looked, and there were no leftovers. I took a full hour, and the morning sun shone full on me through the window.*

The bad weather had passed and there was plenty of blue sky and sunshine behind the clouds. I walked to the bus terminal where I found the coastal trail. The initial section of the path was anything but interesting. It was concrete with a man-made seawall to one side, and railway tracks and 4-lane highway on the other. Soon after, I caught up with two older men who were hiking with full packs. We walked and talked for some time. They were hiking a 600-mile coastal trail, three days at a time. Quite a few people were out with their dogs.

My destination was the neighboring town Marazion, which according to different sources was 1½, 2½, or 3 miles away. This quaint little market town was chartered in 1257 by Henry III. The reason to be there was the island a half-mile offshore. St. Michael's Mount (a smaller version of Mont Saint Michel in France, which I had visited several years earlier) consists of a fortress, priory, and harbor, not to mention a stately castle/home on the summit. Unfortunately, I discovered that it was open every day but Saturday, today. As such, no shops or restaurants on the island were open and no ferries ran.

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Bugger! It wasn't all bad news, however. A hand-laid stone causeway joined the island to the mainland over which vehicles and pedestrians could walk at low tide, which was to happen at 1:30 pm. To pass the time I walked around the town and sat in the sun chatting to a number of retired couples and a Chinese student. Lunch consisted of a cold pint of whole milk, which as the container declared came from "healthy, happy Cornish cows."

As the tide went out more of the causeway appeared and we tourists moved further and further along it until some large waves sent us scurrying back a bit. A few people had wading boots and they walked through a foot of water. A few brave souls took off their shoes and socks, and rolled up their trouser legs and followed. Frankly, there was little to see on the island as everything was behind the fence and required an admission ticket on open days. By the way, the original owners, who donated the island and improvements to the National Trust some 60 years ago, have a 999-year lease to keep living in the castle.

I decided to forego the bus and to walk back to Penzance. Along the way, there was a big marsh, which attracted a large variety of birds. The bird watchers were out in force watching with binoculars and taking photos. Along the banks were many holes near which wascally wabbits sat sunbathing.

I arrived back in Penzance just after 3:30 pm and immediately spied the Iceland Supermarket, which I'd heard sold most things much cheaper than others, so I went in to see what I could rescue. First up, I saw giant packets of Maynard's Wine Gums @ 2 for £4. Sold! A quart of whole milk was only 90p; sold! And then right by the register, yes ladies and gentlemen, they had 6-packs of chocolate Freddo Frogs with or without caramel filling. As I couldn't decide, I got one of each. Outside, I sampled the delicious, cold milk just to be sure it wasn't bad. And right there next to me was a sign for Drecklys Cornish Deli & Steakhouse, which was just a few doors down.

Although it was a bit early for supper, after my long walk I figured that I deserved a treat, so in I went and ordered a traditional steak Cornish pasty, just like Grandma used to make (although she happened to be German). I went upstairs to a table and started on this diary, but before I got very far, my pasty was delivered accompanied by two packets of tomato ketchup (yes, the Brits have finally sold out to the Americans, along with now also having drugstores instead of Chemist Shops) and two more of that mystery HP sauce. I used all of the former and none of the latter. The pasty tasted pretty good, but half was enough, and the rest went in my pack for an evening snack.

I strolled through a multistory shopping center on my way up to the high street. Shoppers were out in force and the sun beamed down upon us. I came across a £1 shop where everything cost exactly that. I rescued some blocks of Cadbury's nut milk chocolate. Eventually, I came to Penlee Park, which consisted of many acres of trees, gardens, and playing fields. I walked through that coming out on the street for my hotel.

By 5 pm, I was warming up back in my room. Soon after, I made a cup of coffee and finished off my pasty while listening to some music. Then I filled my big bath tub with very hot water and lay in it for a good long soak. After walking eight miles, various bits of my body were complaining. Not having had my full quota of sleep during recent nights, I very nearly fell asleep in the tub.

Given that accommodation seemed to be in short supply, I thought I'd better go online and find a place

to stay in my next stop, St. Ives. Four weeks ago, as I was talking to a couple on a ferry in Croatia, they highly recommended the Sloop Inn as a place to eat and stay. So, I went to its website and just when everything looked fine to book a room there, I noticed the small print: All rooms were double/twin, and single guests had to pay a £20/night supplement. Bugger! So, it was on to Plan B. (Does that sound familiar?) After 30 minutes of searching, I had not come up with any B&B's in the "Rex Budget" range that had rooms available. Of course, being out of season the tourist office was closed on Sunday (my planned arrival day), so they wouldn't be able to help me find a place to stay. Eventually, I settled on a swank hotel on 70 acres with golf course, badminton and squash courts, and heated pools. Interestingly, the rate was about the same as the hotel I had in Penzance, so I booked that.

1.1.3 St. Ives

[Diary] Around 11:30 am, I rugged up and headed out into what seemed remarkably like the setting of "Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day." It was overcast. I came upon a couple who were drying themselves off after a swim in the sea. The word daft came to mind.

I rode the 12:05 to the first stop, St. Erth, where I had a 15-minute wait for the connecting train. I chatted with a young family that was having a day outing. The 12:30 stopped at Lelant Saltings, Lelant, and Carbis Bay before arriving in St. Ives. The tourist office was closed as was the train ticket office, and the town map didn't cover the area in which my hotel was located. However, a local woman was ever so helpful, don't you know, and directed me to the shortest walking route.

The website for the Tregenna Castle Hotel said the hotel was a 15-minute walk from the station, but it didn't mention that is was up a very steep hill. The path certainly was scenic and from the top, the view out over the beach and ocean might have been impressive; however, I was too busy putting my heart back in my chest to notice. The hotel looked very much like a castle (surprise!), and the large foyer and lounge overflowed with leather sofas, tables, art, and potted plants. Yes, reception had me in the system, but my room wouldn't be ready for another 45 minutes, don't you know, but if sir would like to have a seat in the lounge and to use the wifi internet service, they'd take care of sir in a little while. Jolly good!

At 2:15 pm, I was in my ever-so-cozy room complete with double bed and view over a garden. I unpacked, boiled water in the electric kettle, and made coffee. There were two packets of biscuits on my tea tray: oat shortcake and Viennese finger. I ate the former. Although I was told the internet signal didn't reach the guestrooms, it reached mine, so that was a bonus, and I sat down to send some mail and to surf the internet.

Soon after 4 o'clock, I decided to go exploring on the hotel's Woodland Walk to see if I could see any of the announced wildlife (as in woodpeckers, rabbits, squirrels, robins, foxes, pheasant, badger, and owl). I opened the front door, and it was raining. Bugger! In any event, I rugged up and as the path was under a heavy canopy of trees, I didn't get very wet. Undeterred by the rain the golfers pushed on. Perhaps it helped them excuse their poor scores. Of course, none of the aforementioned critters were silly enough to be out and about. No, they were all inside keeping warm and dry, and sipping cognac!

At 5 pm, I was in athletic mode. First up, it was swimming and although the pool was heated, it took me a bit to immerse myself completely. Next up was the hot tub, which was much warmer, but by no

means hot. I tried going back into the pool, but that was way too cold by comparison. Thirdly, I sat in the sauna for a bit to cleanse my pores (not to mention my paws), and finally I had a short session in the steam room. I followed that with a very hot shower. After an hour of mild activity, I felt pretty good.

Back in my room, I made coffee, ate my breakfast leftovers, the other pack of biscuits (which I dipped in a tub of strawberry jam), and some dried fruit. I sent some email, read an old diary from my trip to Belfast and Dublin two years earlier, and faded fast.

[Diary] Breakfast was a buffet affair in a cavernous room. And, don't you know, they had all the windows wide open! Clearly, these people had no idea what nice weather is really like. Tea and a rack of six half-slices of mixed toast arrived soon after I sat down, and I eased into the day with a cup of tea and some buttered toast. I followed that with a full English breakfast, but took more than an hour to finish, as I was reading the travel section of the newspaper. [Over the next few days, I discovered that one could ask for any number of half-slices of toast, but one was always served exactly six!]

At 10:30, I arrived at the St. Ives branch of the Tate Gallery. (This 20-year-old gallery is a sibling of the one in Liverpool and the two famous ones in London.) A combined 1-day ticket for two galleries was on offer, so I asked the cashier if I could buy £10's-worth of kulcha. She recognized my Aussie accent, and just smiled. I spent an hour perusing the halls, which consisted of a variety of art forms. Only one piece really interested me. It was by an African man and was a large sheet of cream-colored paper that had been set on a tabletop, with two teacups placed on it. Hot tea had then been spilled over the paper around the cups but not under them, making an interesting pattern. The artist had then taken different colored ribbons and sewn a border around parts of the edge of the stain. It was such a simple and basic idea, yet the result was effective. (Besides, I saw a use for one of my old tablecloths!) At 11:30, I joined the 30-minute guided tour to try and improve my kulcha quotient. And while the talk was interesting, I'm sure I was no further advanced in the art-appreciation department afterward. One thing I'd glossed over, but which we stopped and looked at in detail, was a long, flowing cape with crocodile-like scales in lines down sections of the back. On closer inspection, the "scales" really were used teabags! I guess that's art.

After several hours, I was ready to move on, and so I walked to the Barbara Hepworth house/studio/gallery. Dame Barbara was a famous sculptor who blazed a trail for women as well as various art forms. She started out using the location as her studio, but eventually renovated several rooms as her living quarters. I was underwhelmed by both the indoor and garden selections although I very much enjoyed the 30-minute video presentation about her life. The highlights of the visit were completely unrelated to the artist. In the garden, numerous spiders were spinning webs, and I watched one from inches away as it went around and around. Further on, a large web was lying horizontal across the top of a shrub and it contained hundreds of tiny water droplets that sparkled in the light. Nearby was a small Catholic Church, and I went inside to see Hepworth's famous Madonna and Child sculpture. At least I could tell what that was.

The day was improving, and the sun even came out for a bit. Down at the harbor I stopped at one of the many Cornish pasty shops to rescue a piping-hot sausage roll with "dead horse" (Aussie rhyming slang for "tomato sauce"), which I washed down with some whole milk. Nearby, a man was selling tickets for a boat tour to a seal colony, and not having anything better to do, I signed up. I took my time walking

all the way around the harbor to the tour pickup point. There were 12 of us on the 3-o'clock tour, but as the tide was going out the tour boat couldn't come in to the pickup point, and a young man ferried us out six at a time in a small boat. The large set of rocks on which the seals lived was 3½ miles down the coast, and the ragged cliffs along the way had their tops hidden in fog. Of the 40 seals living there, we saw 10, four of which were in the water. It was a pleasant diversion.

[Diary] *After 4 days of Full-English Breakfasts, I needed a change, so I had a large bowl of cereal, toast, and tea, with some grapefruit slices on the side. I planned some train travel and worked on a Sudoku puzzle. After a leisurely hour, I went back to my room.*

[Diary] *I gave myself plenty of time to walk down to the station. In fact, I made such good time that I caught an earlier train, which took me to St. Erth 30 minutes earlier than I expected. The 14:58 to Plymouth arrived on time. It was like a train only smaller, consisting of two carriages. I faced forward at a table and watched the verdant countryside go by. There were lots of hedgerows.*

1.1.4 St. Austell

We arrived in St. Austell and I confirmed my directions with a fellow passenger. On the way to my B&B, I spied a Lidl supermarket, so dropped by for some milk, juice, Camembert cheese, and a BLT sandwich. I was very pleasantly surprised at the reasonable prices, something that hadn't happened much this trip. The walk to Pen Star House was almost a mile with a small hill climb. Hostess Anne welcomed me, and I filled out some paperwork and got my keys. My single room with en-suite was up one flight of stairs. It was very nicely appointed. It appeared that I was the only guest.

I stayed in for the evening eating my supplies while watching some television. Then I set up my computer on a table in the breakfast room and connected to the outside world. My main task was to find my next accommodation. I decided to stop at Totnes in Devon, as recommended by the couple I'd met in Penzance. Although there were numerous B&Bs listed, the first six I phoned were full or not answering. However, Number 7 was the winner. And as it was a cash-only place there was no credit card deposit process; it was simply a matter of trust that I'd actually show, a novel idea in these modern times. Soon after, I was back in my room winding down. Lights out around 9:30 after an easy day.

[Diary] *After a small bowl of fruit, I had bacon, hog pudding (a type of mild sausage not related to black pudding), a fried egg, tea, and toast. It was a lot of food, so I made a large bacon sandwich for later. I chatted with the host, Gary, who ran a gardening business when the weather permitted.*

I headed out at 8:45 in heavy fog and ever so light mist. In 15 minutes, I was at the train/bus station, which was pretty speedy for 1 mile; Senior Olympics, look out! The mist got a little thicker as I neared the station. I had 30 minutes to wait. The 9:30 bus to The Eden Project pulled up and six of us boarded and we were off a minute later. The £5.60 return ticket would get me a £4 discount at the gardens for having gotten there via public transport. As we climbed up above the town, visibility was reduced from 200 yards to 100. The country road was rather narrow, and we had to stop several times to let large, on-coming vehicles through.

[The Eden Project was the main reason I'd come to Cornwall. Built in an abandoned china clay pit with construction starting in 1999, and covering 35 acres, it is an experiment in regeneration. It's "an

educational charity and social enterprise, creates gardens, exhibitions, events, experiences and projects that explore how people can work together and with nature to change things for the better.”]

At the entrance, I paid my admission and bought a detailed guidebook. As there was no rain, I started by walking on some outdoor paths. Apart from the extensive outdoor gardens and plantings, there is an educational center and two huge biomes, each of which is made up of a series of climate-controlled, connected geodesic domes. The themes of those biomes are Rainforest and Mediterranean, respectively, with the former being billed as “the largest rainforest in captivity.”

In the rainforest biome, I waited quite a while for the lookout to open. This metal platform was reached by a long and swaying set of metal stairs, and was at the highest point of the largest dome. It certainly was humid up there with all the moist heat rising to that point.

Although I'd eaten a big breakfast, when I came across a pasty stand, the smell of that hot cheese and onion in pastry was too much and I succumbed. It tasted like what Grandma wished she could have made!

As you might imagine, the project is all about sustainability, and signs saying “Reuse. Reduce. Recycle!” were all around. Somewhere along the way, I learned about the [Big Lunch](#), an event that “encourages people across the UK and beyond to get together with their neighbors for a few hours of community, friendship and fun.” The idea behind this is that “we are better equipped to tackle challenges when we face them together.”

Numerous small signs throughout quoted pieces from well-known people. The following one from [Chief Seattle](#) (in 1854) caught my eye: “Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself.”

In the Mediterranean biome, I came across a large garden of hot peppers where I got the following lesson: “The spicy heat of a chili pepper is measured on the Scoville scale named after its creator [Wilbur Scoville](#), an American pharmacist working in the 20th century. The number of Scoville Heat Units (SHUs) indicates the amount of capsaicin present in the fruit. Capsaicin is a chemical compound that stimulates nerve endings in the skin, especially in the mouth and eyes. Pure capsaicin measures 15 million SHUs.” The hottest pepper growing there was 1.6 million, and if someone ate one of those, they'd need hospitalization. The pepper spray used by various law enforcement agencies around the world is 5 million, which accounts for its effectiveness.

So, was it everything I expected? Yes. It certainly was impressive and just shows what you can do with an idea, some energy, a few friends, and £140 million.

1.2 [Devon](#)

[Diary] *I stepped out at 10 am and took my time walking to the station where I arrived well before my 10:35 train. I stood in the sun on Platform 2 being careful not to stand directly underneath the pigeons, when all of a sudden, another heavy sun shower started. The 3-car train was quite busy and after most people got settled, others boarded with reserved seats, and we all played musical chairs. I faced forward and watched the countryside go by. We stopped quite a while in Plymouth. Then we raced into the county of [Devon](#) where many dairy cows grazed in green fields making cream for the next day's*

Devonshire teas!

We arrived in Totnes right on time and I got oriented with the help of a railway employee. I headed out to find my B&B, which, don't you know, took me up the steepest street in the town. Near the top, I stopped to rest in an old bookshop where I bought a collection of short stories by W. Somerset Maugham. Just when I thought I was in a quiet neighborhood, 100 yards further along found me on High Street, the narrow but bustling main street. Soon after, I found my street and my next home-away-from-home. The gentleman of the house was home and expecting me, and he showed me to my room. It was quite small, but adequate with a share bathroom and toilet down the hall. And at £30/night, it was by far the cheapest place of the trip. Frankly, it was what I'd been wanting all along.

I headed back out to High Street, and one of the first shops that I saw was called "Not Made in China." Now a word of explanation: Totnes is an alternative-lifestyle town where everything is organic with a capital O! It also has its own Totnes Pound currency to encourage shopping locally. Nearby was a shop that specialized in harps, and being an angel, I stopped to look at all the instruments in the window.

I walked down the very steep main street stopping off to read the menus at the numerous eating-places and teashops. I also went into a large supermarket and spent quite some time browsing, looking at products and prices. I bought some seasoning packets for menus I planned for once I was back home. I finally found the tourist information office where a very pleasant lady gave me a map and guidebook plus suggestions of how to spend my time. On the way back up High Street I stopped off at a butcher's shop to take some photos of his window displays of meat and prepared foods. I stopped by a small deli and ate a hot jumbo sausage roll with ketchup washed down by a way-too-strong latte. I worked on this diary while sitting there.

Next up was the Totnes Museum, a nicely renovated merchant's shop and house that had three floors and a courtyard. The friendly assistant included an audio tour in my ticket price, and I spent the next hour touring all the rooms and listening to details of life in the "good old days." The town goes back to Saxon times, around 900. A large room was dedicated to Totnes' favorite son, the prominent scientist and mathematician Charles Babbage, who made plans for a mechanical calculating machine and an accompanying printer, neither of which was completed until 200 years later, when they were built using only materials and skills known during his time.

I dropped by St. Mary's Church, an impressive edifice built by the Benedictine Monks who lived and prayed there happily ever after, at least, that is, until Henry VIII told them to pack their gear and "Push Off."

My B&B fronted a small square on one corner of which was a pub. As I came up to it, I saw a large, eye-catching sign, which contained the following text: "Is he getting under your feet? Is he moaning about shopping? Would your day be stress-free without him? We have the perfect answer! Drop him off at our HUSBAND CRECHE inside. It's FREE! We'll take good care of him. He is in safe hands and you can enjoy a peaceful afternoon. All you have to do is pick him up when you're done and pay his bar bill. TLC GUARANTEED." Very clever.

[Diary] At 9:45, I stepped out into a clear sky and sunshine. However, after 50 paces, it drizzled lightly. I started my cultural tour with a walk around three small gardens built and maintained as community

projects. Then it was on to the Totnes Castle located on a hill overlooking the town. Apparently, it was built around 1100 by some bloke called Norman (who I think was a distant ancestor of Bob the Builder).

I browsed the stalls at the market before strolling down High Street. I stopped to drool over the display of pastries in the window of a bakery, and rescued a large Belgian bun, which the assistant was ever so happy to slice in half and apply butter.

Down by the River Dart I stopped to look at a large monument to native son William Wills. He and his partner, Robert O'Hara Burke, lead the first European crossing of Australia from south to north and back. However, they perished on the return leg. I learned all about them in elementary school in South Australia. (I forgot all about them soon after!)

[Diary] The weather out was nice, and I walked the 15 minutes to the train station stopping twice along the way to bond with two very nice dogs, a Border Collie and a black Labrador. Quite a few people were waiting on the platform for an earlier train that was running 30 minutes late. I was quite early for my train, but as I could also ride the delayed one, I was in luck! I boarded Carriage E to find it quite full. However, I did get a seat at a table, facing backwards. The young woman also sitting there was happy to chat and before we knew it, more than three hours had gone by. She had been raised in England by a Portuguese mother, so was bilingual. We made up some time along the way, so I got to Paddington even earlier than I'd expected.

1.3 Conclusion

Apart from visiting the Eden Project, the rest of the trip evolved day by day. Certainly, the advice I received to visit Totness proved to be excellent. One lesson I learned is "October is too late in the season to go."

2. January 2017, “Travel: Airports”

When it comes to airports, “When you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all” hardly applies. They range from a single, small hut manned only a short time each day, to small cities open 24x7! And many of them provide places to eat, drink, sleep, shop, get a massage, and pray. [BTW, I’m of an age where I knew the word aerodrome before I knew the word *airport*.]

Looking at my flight log, in my 46+ years of air travel, I’ve spent time in 166 different airports, which sounds a lot, but isn’t when you consider how many thousands there are in the world. Those airports were spread around 51 different countries or territories. I’ve had more than 1,380 point-to-point flights, many of them out only, many in-only, and quite a few for a short layover. That’s about 30/year all told, but as I hardly flew in the first eight of those years, the annual count is closer to 40, which is one every nine days. I’ve also spent more than 500 8-hour days-worth of time getting to, getting from, or being at airports. At 50 working weeks/year, that’s about 2 years.

In this installment, I’ll comment on some of the airports through which I’ve passed.

[For details of my flight log, runway designations, and the phonetic alphabet used by air-traffic controllers and pilots, click here.]

2.1 Naming Conventions

As commercial air travel became popular, an international system for naming airports became necessary. (We don’t want to confuse San Jose, California, with San Jose, Costa Rica, for example.) The system you see used on your luggage tags is the 3-character alphabetic IATA code from the International Air Transport Association. This allows for 17,576 (as in 26 to the third power) possibilities. [If you’ve ever had such a tag read LTB, that probably meant “Lose This Bag.” Just kidding, or am I?] An alternate system—hey, you gotta have competition, right?—is the 4-character, alphanumeric ICAO code from the International Civil Aviation Organization. Throughout this article, I’ll use the IATA code only.

For a list of airports and their IATA and ICAO codes, click here.

The vast majority of the codes for the airports I have visited are quite obvious, when looking at the English-language spelling of the cities/areas in which they occur. For example, ADL (Adelaide, Australia), DEN (Denver, Colorado, US), KUL (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), OSL (Oslo, Norway), VIE (Vienna, Austria), and ZRH (Zurich, Switzerland). That said, there are more than a few that are not at all obvious, cryptic, or seemingly arbitrary. For example: ARN (Stockholm, Sweden), OOL (Gold Coast/Coolongatta, Australia), ORD (Chicago’s O’Hare, Illinois, US), and YYZ (Toronto, Ontario, Canada).

In the early days of flight in the US, numerous aerodromes had weather stations, and the US National Weather Service had a 2-letter code to indicate US cities. Some US airports adopted that 2-letter code, and added a suffix X to make three letters. Examples include LAX (Los Angeles, California) and PHX (Phoenix, Arizona).

Now Canada has a fairly simple scheme: All Canadian airports have an IATA code that begins with Y, except when they don’t; got it? The system seemed quite regular until I stumbled on a handful of

radicals daring to begin with other letters. (Actually, there is “some method in their madness;” the Y prefix indicates, “Yes, this airport is near a weather station.”)

2.2 Some Airports I have Graced

The airports listed here are in English order of their IATA code:

ACV – Arcata/Eureka, California, US: As Wikipedia states, “The airport was built by the United States Navy during World War II to test defogging systems.” Well, I got to experience firsthand the thick fog there when my departure was delayed, and I missed my connection in SFO.

ADL – Adelaide, Australia: This was the departure point of my first-ever jet flight, on a Boeing 727, for a 1-week business trip to SYD (Sydney), at the ripe old age of 17! (It’s possible that I flew in a light aircraft prior to that, but I have no memory of doing so.)

AKL – Auckland, New Zealand: I’ve been to NZ once, for a couple of hours, on a layover to Australia. And this airport was almost all I saw of that country, except for a bit on takeoff as dawn was breaking. Apparently, there is more to NZ than AKL!

AMS – Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Known as *Schiphol*, it is built where there used to be a large lake, on which ships sometimes sank during storms. (The word *Schiphol* means “ship grave.”) Here, more than 20 years ago, I was subjected to a very long “interview” by a gate agent who wasn’t at all convinced I was travelling on business, just because I was wearing hiking clothes and carrying a full-size backpack.

AYQ – Yulara, Australia: My first time in and out of this airport was on a small, private plane. At that time, there was no manned air-traffic control, just a set of rules as to how pilots announced themselves and gave priority to larger planes. Now that jet traffic is common, it’s become a real airport. Yulara is the town that serves the very popular tourist destinations of Ayers Rock and The Olgas, which are now known by their Aboriginal names *Uluru* and *Kata Tjuta*, respectively. If you are looking for a unique experience to a remote place, this would be a candidate.

BGR – Bangor, Maine, US: This airport rates Number 4 on my list of frequented airports with around 90 times in and out. [For many years, I worked on a computer system for a paper company in central Maine.] Commercial aviation shares the 11,400-foot runway with the refueling-tanker wing of the Maine Air National Guard. It is a common jumping-off point for military passenger charter flights to/from Europe. If you want a reason not to go to BGR, see the movie The Langoliers from the book by *Stephen King*.

BOM – Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India: Due to its location with respect to the world’s time zones, long-distance flights often arrive and depart here in the very early hours of the morning. I well remember having to go through numerous “layers” of staff, each of which seemed to have no purpose but to pass me along to the next person. (Perhaps it was a way to keep people employed!) A large and rather imposing security guard eyed a nice ballpoint pen I had in my possession, and he seemed to suggest it would be good if I made a gift of it to him. I hesitated, and after a very long pause, he offered to swap it with a third-rate pen he had. In the interests of getting into the country, I agreed.

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BOS – Boston, Massachusetts, US: This airport rates Number 2 on my list of frequented airports with around 200 times in and out. [For some years, I provided services to a company in the area; I also changed planes there when flying to/from BGR.] At one time, Boston had a problem with teenage pregnancy, and on the walls of some of the jet ways was a poster showing a very-pregnant girl, with the following text: “Make sure your daughter learns how to add and subtract before she learns how to multiply!” This airport is right next to the sea, and fog and/or low cloud sometimes occurs, and when one looks out the window one can only see water. On one approach, the pilot aborted the landing and then announced, “Ladies and Gentlemen, we seem to have missed the runway; I’m going to go around and try that again!” My long-term consulting client in Central Maine had its own twin-engine, prop plan, which sometimes flew to BOS. I rode it several times, once sitting in the co-pilot’s seat. Landing at a major international airport and seeing it from the cockpit is much more interesting than seeing out a side window when sitting in the back.

CAJ – Canaima, Venezuela: This is the airport that serves the area around Angel Falls, the tallest in the world. Now to visit the falls, one might well expect to have to pay serious money to a local tour group, and that certainly was possible, if one wanted to get there by river. However, the friendly Captain of my Avensa airlines Boeing 727-100 gave us a treat. He flew low over the airport (presumably to let the staff know he was in the area) and then headed for the falls. As we raced up the valley at the same level as the point at which the falls began, he asked those passengers on the other side of the plane to take their seats, as he was going to do a U-turn and come back, so they could get a good look out their windows! [The 727-100 was the original, short-body version, but with its large engines, seemed to me like a VW Bug with a 12-cylinder engine! Having been discontinued in 1972, that model was no longer used in first-world countries.]

CGN – Cologne-Bonn, Germany: I went there once, but I didn’t actually arrive by plane! I had a ticket from the US to CGN, via FRA (Frankfurt), which is only 85 miles away. To my surprise, the leg to CGN was actually on a train!

CPH – Copenhagen, Denmark: While it’s a fine airport, for me, the highlight of flying into CPH is seeing the formation of wind turbines out in the sea. They look like “poetry in motion.”

CUZ – Cuzco, Peru: This is the jumping off point for the famous Incan city of Machu Picchu. The main thing of interest is the airport’s elevation, high up in the Andes at 10,860 feet (3,310 meters). While in the area, I learned firsthand about altitude sickness!

CVG – Cincinnati, Ohio: This airport is actually across the Ohio River in the state of Kentucky! It is named for nearby Covington.

DCA – Washington DC - National (now Ronald Reagan), Virginia, US: This airport rates Number 3 on my list of frequented airports with around 105 times in and out. (I’ve lived in the greater DC area for the past 37 years.)

DEN – Denver, Colorado, US: Originally, this was the designation of the Stapleton International Airport, but the code was reassigned to Denver International Airport when that was built. For a while, the new airport was known (at least informally) as DIA.

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DMK – Don Mueang International Airport, Bangkok, Thailand: What I remember most about this airport was the large number of very short, heavily-armed soldiers on guard. It was July 1979, and the country was under military control, again. It was a bit of a surprise, but I didn't feel at all unsafe. [In 2006, a new international airport, BKK, went into service.]

EWR – Newark, New Jersey, US: This is one of the airports that serves New York City. As the US Navy reserves airport codes beginning with N, this code is made from other letters of the location's name.

EZE – Buenos Aires, Argentina: Its code comes from its being in the area of the city called Ezeiza.

FCO – Rome, Italy: I first landed at Leonardo da Vinci International in 1979. By the time we reached the end of our runway on landing, we were "way out in the vineyards," and took some 20 minutes to taxi to the terminal. It was my first time in Europe!

FRA – Frankfurt, Germany: This airport truly is a city that never sleeps! The first time I departed from there, in 1981, armed security people were very prominent, and German-Shepherd dogs sniffed everybody and everything. (Think Baader-Meinhof Group/Red Army Faction.) It was a little bit intimidating. One time I arrived late, and my in-coming plane went right by my out-going plane onto another terminal some distance away. By the time I got back to my next gate, my next plane had already departed, so I had to spend the night at an airport hotel. Nowadays when I depart FRA on a flight to elsewhere in Europe, the departure gate actually leads to a bus that takes the passengers a kilometer or more out to the plane.

HKG – Hong Kong: When I flew there in 1979, this code designated the old Kai Tak Airport, which is right at the tip of the Kowloon Peninsula, opposite Hong Kong Island. On takeoff or landing, one seemed to be flying between high-rise buildings. This was the destination of my first ever international flight. This code now designates the new Chek Lap Kok airport, which is located on an island some distance out of the city.

IAD – Washington DC - Dulles International, Virginia, US: This airport rates Number 1 on my list of frequented airports with around 300 times in and out. (I've lived in the greater DC area for past 37 years.) It is named for John Foster Dulles. I think that IAD might have been the first new airport designed for commercial jets. As such, it was built "way out in the country" as were many later airports. It serviced Concorde flights from London and Paris. At IAD, I once had the great pleasure of being "sniffed by a Beagle dog" that was searching among passengers and their hand luggage for fruit, vegetables and/or contraband.

ITO – Hilo, Hawaii, US: There are a number of theories about the code of this Big-Island airport. One goes like this: "Hilo Airport was called ITO after one of the first Hawaiian Airlines Hilo Airport station managers: 'Mr. Ito.' I flew out of there in 1982 on a plane with an unusual configuration. The front half was filled with passengers while the back half was filled with flowers (mostly orchids) headed for the US West Coast flower market.

IVL – Ivalo, Finland. This is the northernmost airport in the country, in the heart of Lapland, and it is the furthest north I've ever been. The Finnair Jet had its own retractable stairs, and the terminal was a

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small, log cabin. As we waited for our luggage, a large reindeer came out of the forest to welcome us and to stand still for photos.

JFK – New York City, US: This was my first stop in the US when I arrived from London in 1979. It was formerly known as IDL (Idlewild), and was renamed for President John Fitzgerald Kennedy after his assassination.

KEF – Keflavík airport, Iceland: Previously, the main airport for Reykjavík was RKV, which is close to the city. When I visited in 1987, I landed at the new airport, but all the car rental agencies and the hotel were still at the old airport, so the airport bus shuttled me between the two airports. During the ride, I recall seeing a sign for a “Texas BBQ” place. Later, I learned that KEF is shared with a US Air Force base. [RKV remains in service as a domestic airport.]

LAS – Las Vegas, Nevada, US: Only here would you find slot machines in the terminals, and you can hear them as soon as you get off the plane. I also discovered they have no airline lounges; instead, they want you there gambling while you wait.

LCY – London City, UK: Reachable on the Docklands Light Rail from the Tube, this small airport is just the thing for a quick trip to the Continent. The single runway is on a long, narrow dock between two waterways.

LGW – London Gatwick, UK: My one flight out of there was in 1979, to New York City in the US. It was on one of Sir Freddy Laker's “SkyTrain” DC10s. He was a pioneer of “no-frills” flying, and the flight cost US\$99. Passengers were encouraged to bring along their own food.

LHR – London Heathrow, UK: This place is huge, and I can imagine it being intimidating to the novice traveler. The quick/expensive way to/from the city is on the Heathrow Express train to Paddington Station. The slow/cheaper way is on the Piccadilly Tube line.

LIN – Milan Linate, Italy: Known for fog, I had a flight out that was delayed sufficiently that I missed my connection in Frankfurt to the US. During one trip there, the taxi driver asked me if I was in town for the fashion show. I looked down at my hiking clothes and boots and wondered just what sort of a fashion show it was.

MCO – Orlando, Florida, US: This is the jumping-off point for Disney World, Cape Kennedy, and many other interesting places to visit. It was formerly the McCoy Strategic Air Command (SAC) air-force base. Soon after I got my first video camera, I shot video on a family vacation at Disney World. Not being used to having a large camera bag, I accidentally left it on the mobile lounge that took me to my plane. In a panic, I went back to the main terminal where someone had turned it in.

MEL – Melbourne, Australia: Also known as Tullamarine Airport. In early 1970, before I got my first professional job, I worked a while at a plastics-extrusion company. One of its contracts was to make the tinted, hemispherical covers for all the light poles around the airport. I was the one making them.

MEX – Mexico City, Mexico: What a polluted city! The clouds were quite brown/yellow as I descended to this airport.

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NAN – Nadi, Fiji: Pronounced “Nandi,” it’s at the complete other end of the main island, a long way from the capital, Suva. On my flight out to Australia, I met a very drunk, young man from Germany who insisted I correct his English if he made any mistakes. When I questioned him about this, he told me that he had been travelling for many months with a large wooden trunk, and someone had told him the English name for a large wooden box was a *coffin*. So, he’d been telling people he was traveling around the Pacific with his coffin!

NRT – Tokyo Narita, Japan: This was a very controversial construction project in the 1960s with many—even violent—demonstrations. As I usually stay in/near Ueno Park, I find the (private) Keisei train to Ueno very convenient and not-so-busy. There’s an express or local version, with different prices. When NRT was built, its international flights took over from HND, and most domestic/short-haul flights stayed at HND. However, both airports now support both international and regional flights.

OGG – Maui’s Kahului Airport, Hawaii, US: The code comes from a well-respected pilot called Bertram J. Hogg.

OOL – Gold Coast, Australia: The code is derived from the airport’s former name, *Coolangatta*.

ORD – Chicago O’Hare, Illinois, US: The world’s busiest airport—a title it generally alternates with ATL (Atlanta, Georgia, US)— w.r.t the number of takeoffs and landings, it was my home base for my first year in the US. It has eight runways. Formerly called Orchard Field Airport.

ORF – Norfolk, Virginia, US: The US Navy reserves airport codes starting with “N,” hence the “ORF.”

OSL – Oslo, Norway: After I’d checked my luggage for a flight to London, at security, I discovered I had a Swiss-Army knife in my carry-on bag. Fortunately, it was a slow Saturday afternoon, and the friendly security man smiled and said he “could take care of it” and he did! He found a cardboard box, put the knife in it, got my flight information from my ticket, put that on a label, and told me to pick it up in London. Later, at the check-in gate, the gate agent called for a Mr. Jaeschke to come to the counter. My first thought was that it was something to do with my knife. But no, the agent just wanted to tell me he was upgrading me to Business Class, if that was OK. Sure enough, box and knife came out on the carousel at LHR.

PEK – Beijing City, China: Named after Peking, the former English name for that city. In 2015, I unexpectedly took off from there to the US two days in a row! On the first day, an hour into the flight, the pilot informed us there was a mechanical problem and that we’d be turning around and going back. After hours waiting on the ground, I finally got to a nearby hotel. The next day’s flight left without incident, so five weeks later, I went back and tried it again. (Yes, I really did have two conferences there, five weeks apart!)

PER – Perth, Australia: In 2003, which was well after 9/11, I went through security with a large VHS video camera in its bag. The checker couldn’t tell what was in the camera bag, so he asked another agent to check it. When I informed him it contained a spare, solid, old-style battery, he said, “No problem,” and waved me through without actually looking in the bag. I was stunned at his complete lack of attention to detail.

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PNS – Pensacola/Gulf Coast, Florida, US: As my flight approached, it appeared that half the area's house roofs were bright blue. And as we got lower, I could see they were large tarpaulins (presumably provided by the US Army and/or emergency services) after Hurricane Ivan had been through.

PUQ – Punta Arenas, Chile: This is at the southern-most tip of continental South America, and is the jumping-off point to the Andean glacier national parks.

RGL – Rio Gallegos, Argentina: This was the endpoint of my 10-day trip across the Patagonia. In the weeks preceding, a volcano had erupted, and its ash had caused the cessation of flight from this airport. However, by the time I got there, it was operational.

SAB – Saba, Northern Netherlands Antilles: As Wikipedia states, "The airport ... has one of the shortest commercial runways in the world ... flanked on one side by high hills, with cliffs that drop into the sea at both ends." As such, only Short TakeOff and Landing (STOL) propeller aircraft can use it. It's built on the only flat piece of land on the small island. And yes, the guy who checks you in and carries the bags to the plane, is also your pilot!

SAN – San Diego, California, US: One day as I was driving on the road between the airport and the sea, a barrier came around to block traffic. As I looked to the water, I saw a propeller-driven, amphibious, passenger plane drive up a concrete ramp and then cross the road to the airport. Not something you see every day!

SNA – Santa Ana/Orange County, California, US: Also known as "John Wayne Airport." A nine-foot bronze statue of him dressed in western garb, complete with 6-shooter, stands at the entrance. Having seen it, I can cross it off my list of "10 things to do before I die!"

SPU – Split, Croatia: This is the jumping-off-point for those heading south down the Dalmatian Coast.

SXM – St. Maarten, Northern Netherlands Antilles: It is officially called *Princess Juliana International Airport*, which puzzled me, as it was not built before Juliana became Queen of the Netherlands. However, when she abdicated in favor of her daughter, Beatrix, she took back the title Princess, and the airport was named after her later on. Aircraft Spotters love to stand outside the fence at the end of the runway and watch wide bodies take off right over their heads.

TLV – Tel Aviv, Israel: I remember it well for two reasons: The approach for landing and the security on departure. I was on a Lufthansa Boeing 747 and we were only hundreds of feet above the runway when the pilot pushed all four engine throttles open and we took off and circled around to land safely on the same runway some 15 minutes later. No explanation was given, but all I could think off was that someone was firing rockets at the airport! On out-bound flights, it's normal to be at the airport at least three hours before a flight, and I used most of that time getting through security. I think part of the reason was that I'd come in that morning from neighboring Jordan. My luggage was X-rayed every possible way and my hand luggage checked, re-checked, and checked again.

TXL – Berlin Tegel, Germany: It is scheduled to be closed when BER (Berlin Brandenburg Airport) opens. Along with THF (Tempelhof)—which is now decommissioned—it played a major role in the Berlin Airlift.

YYC – Calgary, Alberta, Canada: I was taking off in a Boeing 727 when there was a very loud “bang,” after which the engines slowed down. The Captain informed us, “due to a high cross-wind, the top engine’s compressor had stalled, so I’m going to restart it and try again.” From the looks on their faces, I think many of the passengers were thinking, “Maybe we should go back to the terminal and find another plane!”

2.3 Conclusion

As to which city/metro area has the most commercial airports, I think London, UK, wins. It has Gatwick, Heathrow, London City, Luton, Southend, and Stansted.

As I was researching this article, I found that Wilkins Runway in the Australian Antarctic Territory rated an ICAO code, but not one for IATA, so what is used on luggage tags for baggage that goes there? Perhaps that’s where lost luggage goes!

By the way, if you are travelling with kids and there is the possibility of being at an airport for many hours, bring something along for them to do! In my family’s case, we travelled with a deck of UNO cards. And once all the bored kids in our part of the terminal saw how much fun we were having they came over and joined us. It was like an UNO version of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, except I had no desire to take any of the kids home with me.

And just in case you were wondering, there is an airport AAA (in French Polynesia). However, I couldn’t find a ZZZ.

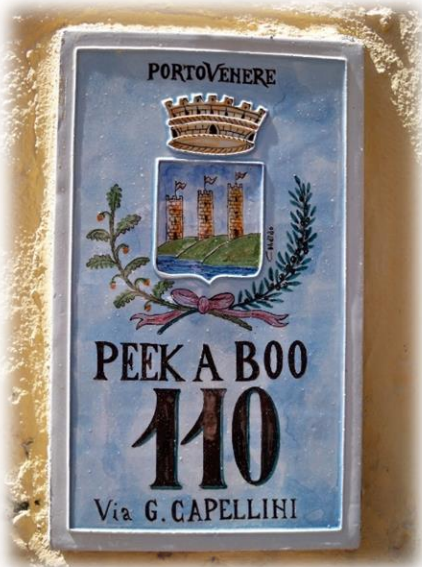
3. February 2017, "Signs of Life: Part 7"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some more, from trips to Italy, Jordan, and France.



Remember the good old [Circus Maximus](#)? It was the Roman equivalent of a modern-day Gran Prix, just with chariots instead of racing cars. Well, this road runs right by that site in Rome.

In 2009, I walked the full length of where the track used to be. In several places, I came across pieces of coconut husks, which I thought might have been dropped by African swallows on their way to England. (See [Monty Python's "Holy Grail"](#) for details.)



Now the address of this house is 110 G. Capellini Street, in the Italian coastal town of [Porto Venere](#). However, the PEEK A BOO bit seems to have been a flourish added by the builder or the owner.

I unexpectedly stayed in that town for three nights. I was on my way to the famous [Cinque Terre](#) towns nearby, but couldn't get there due to a rail strike. So, I took a bus to Porto Venere instead, where I had a wonderful time. Some days later, I took a ferry up the coast to where I'd originally planned to be.

In travel (and in life), always have a Plan B, even for Plan B!



The Pirate's Café in the quaint town of Vernazza, in the famous Cinque Terre, on the northwest coast of Italy. I was based in that town during my hikes between the five towns.

Although I went by this cafe on numerous occasions, I never saw any people with eyepatches, peg legs, cutlasses, or striped shirts. Perhaps they were all out to sea!

BTW, *pasticceria* is Italian for pastry shop.



A sign on the trail between Vernazza and Corniglia in the Cinque Terre towns.

These were present every kilometer or so and were accompanied by some sort of box for emergency communications. Given the very rugged nature of the trail, it wasn't at all clear to me how one might be evacuated in a real emergency.



I say, "Beware of any train station that you must enter through a *Tunnel of Love.*"

From a Cinque Terre town.



The sign says it all, don't you think?

A convenience store in the suburbs of Amman, Jordan.

Don't forget to read it right-to-left; it's Arabic!

BTW, the Greeks founded Amman, but they called it *Philadelphia.*



Being a non-recovering potato chip-aholic, this delivery van caught my eye. However, on closer inspection, the writing said something like, "The chips are all locked in a safe, and the driver does not have the key!"

In the suburbs of Amman, Jordan.



Sound too good to be true? I'd read the fine print if I were you!

In the suburbs of Amman, Jordan.



The JET Bus Terminal in Amman, Jordan.

Can you read the list of destinations? Me neither, which is why I had a Palestinian guide with me. In Arabic, he asked for two tickets to Petra, and after much smiling and such, we paid and boarded a bus, supposedly headed for that place. Imagine my surprise when we drove right by the exit to that old city, and went right on to Aqaba on the Red Sea coast! Don't you hate that when that happens! Well, four hours

and a US\$50-taxi ride later, we arrived at Petra. C'est la vie! Or as they say in Arabic, "إنها الحياة!"



Literally, "A Christmas Market," in Caen, in Normandy, France.

BTW, in French, Santa Clause is Père Noël, which, literally, is Father Christmas, the name used throughout the British Commonwealth.



From Caen, in Normandy, France.

"Put Fifi and Fido's droppings in the bag provided, if you please!"



Some advice from the French in Caen.



Roughly translated from the French, “Here lies William the Conqueror; may he Rise if Possible!”

In the Abbaye-aux-Hommes in Caen, in Normandy, France.

As I paid my respects, I said, ‘Bill you wouldn't believe how the Brits have let things go since your time! Except for the Channel Islands, they don't even own Normandy anymore! And as for their international cricket team, well “girly men” comes to mind!’



Okay, let me see if I have this correct: I can confess my sins between 18:00 and 19:00, on Mondays with Father Brillaud, and on Tuesdays through Fridays with Father **Cheese!**



A French drinking establishment called—yes it's the same in English—Vertigo, which doesn't seem at all like an enticing name for such a place. "Step right in and get dizzy and lose your balance with us!"



A French "Pleasure Partner" condom (*préservatif*) vending machine, from inside the confessional mentioned earlier!

4. March 2017, "Travel: Memories of Southeast England"

County Kent is the southeastern-most county of England. I (almost) accidentally spent a week there in December 2002, with my wife, Jenny. On one other occasion, I passed through it on the train from London to Dover, where I took a hovercraft across to France, and then a train to Paris.

When we reserved time on our calendars for a trip in December 2002, our first choice was to go to Uruguay. Given the very cheap fares United Airlines had been offering to South America, not only was I looking forward to meeting up with the friends I'd made down there during a 2-week visit a year earlier, I was also hoping for some much warmer weather, it being summer and all down there. However, that was not to be; when the time came to book, South America was no longer on sale! [Don't you just hate that when that happens?] However, London, England, *was* on sale, and as there are always plenty of things to do in and around that area, we made the decision to go there instead, I booked the flights, and I found a hotel, all in a matter of hours, only six days before our departure. So what if we were going to a different continent, country, and season; at least we were still going! [Remember my Travel Rule: Always have a Plan B, even for Plan B!]

4.1 London

[Diary] We travelled light; our luggage consisted of a full backpack and a daypack, for two people, for 10 days. We expected wintry weather, so took warm clothes. I even packed my long underwear (for which I was most grateful later on).

It was our first time flying since the Federal Government took over airport security from private contractors. Although the security line at Washington Dulles International (IAD) airport was very long, it moved quite quickly, and the inspectors were polite and most efficient. After years of having people messing around and not paying attention, and with each airport having its own idea of what a thorough search meant, it was most encouraging to see a major improvement.

We took the shuttle bus to the mid-field terminal and settled into the Red Carpet Club business lounge, where we had a light breakfast in comfort. Our flight left on time, and we were on a Boeing 767. Although it was quite old, the seats had been replaced; however, due to our last-minute booking, we were unable to get in the extended legroom section. Flying time was six hours, and we passed the time by reading. We had a huge tail wind, which brought us into London Heathrow (LHR) some 30 minutes early.

Almost all trans-Atlantic flights from the U.S. east coast depart in the evening, arriving early-to-mid-morning the next day. However, United had introduced one flight each day that departed Washington at 9:30 am, and arrived in London around 9:30 pm, local time, with the idea being that despite the 5-hour time change, one might be able to get on local time by going straight to bed on arrival. Since I hardly ever sleep at all on the night flights, I figured that this approach would be no worse, so was happy to try it.

We arrived with light drizzle falling, and soon had our luggage. We walked the long tunnels to the underground station, and immediately boarded the subway on the Piccadilly line. We got off at Earl's Court and waited for a District line train. While there, we chatted with a young German couple who

were winding up their holiday. From there it was a short ride to Paddington Station, an area with which we'd become quite familiar over the years.

Before leaving home, we'd searched the Internet for a budget hotel. While doing so we came across a special winter rate, which just so happened to be for the Royal Norfolk Hotel, 100 yards from Paddington station. We'd stayed there on a number of occasions many years ago, but the price had steadily increased over the years, so we'd stopped using it. However, their internet-only rate was only £45 for a double room with en-suite, tax, and full English breakfast included, while the regular rate if one booked directly with the hotel or via a travel agent was £110! So, we'd reserved one night at the start of our trip and two more at the end.

The front desk clerk checked us in. He was a typical Brit—an Algerian who had been raised in Denmark, but was now living in London. Such is the world of the EU these days. Although it was 11 pm, local time (but only 6 pm back home), we weren't quite ready for bed, so I ventured out to a fish and chip shop several blocks away, and laid in a good-sized snack. Like all hotels and B&Bs in the UK, our room came with all the equipment and supplies for making tea and coffee, so we put that to good use as well. Lights out at 12:30 am.

[Diary] Our room faced the street, and delivery people were out awfully early, so I awoke much earlier than planned. However, we both had more than six hours of sleep. We went down to the dining room for breakfast around 8:30 am. Our waitress was a young woman from Mexico, whose husband was attending graduate school. She got bored with sitting at home, so got that job. We had the full English breakfast, since it was included in the room rate: juice, bacon, sausage, eggs, fried bread, tomato, mushrooms, toast, and the ever-present pot of tea. Way too much food at any time, let alone so early in the day.

We checked out of the hotel at 9:30 and walked the 150 yards to Paddington train station. The information office informed us that the train we wanted left from Victoria station, so we hopped on the Circle line underground for a 15-minute ride.

Earlier that year, we spent a week in London with side trips to Oxford and Brighton. This time, we planned on covering the county of Kent with a short visit to the county of East Sussex, both south and east from London. We bought one-way tickets to Canterbury for £15 each, and headed off on the 2-hour trip. While no rain was in sight, it was pretty cold. We read a newspaper and watched the countryside go by.

4.2 Canterbury

From the station, we walked into Canterbury and located the tourist office just by the main gate to the grounds of the famous Canterbury Cathedral. As we hadn't done any advance research on what we might see or do on this trip, we made good use of these facilities. The young lady recommended the hotel built into the gate wall itself, only 50 yards away. The Cathedral Gate Hotel was 564 years old, and, yes, the manager did have a quaint twin room for us, right up in the attic, and for £46 at that, continental breakfast included. So, we checked in and proceeded to the "Rooftop" room on the top floor. The room floor had such a slope that the legs on one end of each bed had extensions fitted to

them to make them horizontal. However, the table had no such modifications as I found when a teacup I placed on it almost slid off the other side. In any event, we settled in and had a cup of tea.

We walked through the cathedral grounds then bought a ticket to go inside. It was certainly something to see although I thought the outside looked poor in comparison to other churches I'd seen. We paid our respects at the site where Thomas a' Becket was killed and where his shrine stood until Henry VIII had it destroyed when he broke with Rome. Until then it had been a major drawcard for pilgrims from all over England and Europe. (Such pilgrimages were recorded in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.)

As you may know, the archbishop of Canterbury is the head of the Anglican Church. A new one, Rowan Williams, had just been appointed and was proving to be somewhat controversial. He certainly seemed to be progressive, and most days we were in country he was the subject of one newspaper article or another. Apart from allowing women to have higher ranks in the clergy, the other main issue was the separation of church and state such that Prince Charles, heir to the throne, could be allowed to marry a divorced woman. And currently, certain clergy were entitled to sit in the House of Lords, but would that continue?

It sure got dark early—before 4 pm—so we went in search of a place to eat. We finally finished up eating sitting outside a fish and chip shop, devouring a Cornish pasty and steak and kidney pie. We took some deserts and drinks back to the room. I had a long hot bath in a very deep tub that was even long enough to fit me. Then we read through some tourist information to plan the next day's activities.

[Diary] *I was awake from 1–4 am, which was par for the course for trans-Atlantic crossings for me; however, I did get back to sleep until 8:15 am. As it was possible to have our breakfast delivered to our room we did so, and it arrived promptly at 8:30 am per our request. After a bowl of cornflakes, toast, and tea, we were sufficiently charged for our next expedition. However, I discovered the hard way that the electric kettle was not quite idiot-proof, and managed to scold my left thumb quite badly with a steam burn. I did manage to get my hand under cold water within seconds, and that saved a lot of pain and damage. In any event, we always travel with a first-aid kit, so no point doing that if we don't get to use it occasionally, right?*

We checked out at 10:30 am. It was overcast and there was light rain. As a precaution, I wore my long underwear as the temperature was steadily dropping toward freezing. We walked a short distance to the main bus terminal and waited for about 15 minutes. Eventually, a double-decker bus arrived, the driver informed us that the best ticket was a local area day pass, and we boarded, sitting upstairs at the front, so we had a good view. The movement of the bus in that position was greatly exaggerated, and we constantly thought we were going to sideswipe cars and passengers waiting at the curb each time the bus turned. By the way, the name of the bus company was "Stagecoach."

4.3 Whitstable

We got off in Whitstable, a small sleepy seaside town north of Canterbury. We found some very friendly ladies in the tourist office, and then we toured the town museum, which was very well organized and interesting. This was fishing country, so many exhibits had a nautical flavor. This was the site of the first steam-powered passenger railway. We walked along the waterfront, but the cold wind made it unpleasant; however, the rain did hold off during our stop.

4.4 Herne Bay

Next stop was Herne Bay, a little further east along the coast. By the time we arrived, the rain was back, so we quickly found a family restaurant for lunch. It had great food, great service, and great prices! I devoured sausage with onions in French bread while Jenny had sausages, chips, and peas. She also had a jam roly-poly with custard for desert, a little touch of home. And to top it off, the waitress made me her secret-recipe cafe-au-lait, of which I had two cups.

The town also had a small museum and tourist office, so we spent time there keeping dry and warm. We saw fossils of hippopotamus teeth and elephant tusks that had been excavated nearby. They dated back to a time when such critters lived in that area, which was hard to imagine given the current weather.

We walked along the waterfront for a bit to see the raging sea crashing on the beach. [Quite often, English beaches are quite stony, with large, rounded pebbles everywhere. Many don't have any sand to speak of.]

4.5 Margate

From there, we took the bus onto Margate, a larger town further to the east, again on the coast. It was quite cold and windy, so we got information at the tourist office, bought some groceries, and headed for the Luxor B&B. Unfortunately, it was on a busy road, and the bedroom window leaked cold air all night, which became a problem in the middle of the night when the room heat was switched off. In any event, it was adequate as was the full breakfast; it cost £46 for the two of us.

[Diary] After breakfast, we checked out and walked back into town to the bus station. We bought a day pass and headed out, again in a double-decker bus, with a young woman driver. She dropped us off not far out of town and we walked the mile to the beach, which had real sand. It also had chalk cliffs all around. Apart from seeing the cliffs up close, we visited this place because it was named Botany Bay, the namesake of the place at which the First Fleet from England settled in Australia, in 1788. (It's part of the Sydney Harbor area.)

Rather than walk back to the same stop at which we got off, we decided to go south along the cliff tops and catch up the main road further on. Unfortunately, the bus route must have gone inland, as no bus stops or buses were ever seen. So, we had a 3-mile walk through the countryside, stopping occasionally to watch the locals at work and play. There was a busy golf course near the cliffs, a few trees, and lots of cold wind. As if getting that damned ball in the hole wasn't hard enough already! In any event, the English Channel made for quite a water hazard.

4.6 Ramsgate

We finally got to the town of Broadstairs where we had lunch at the Prince Albert pub. From there, we took the local bus to Ramsgate, a popular summer resort with a large boat marina. We dropped into the tourist office to get information, and set off to find a place to stay. On the third try, we were lucky. Host Tony was very nice, took good care of us, and his place was on a quiet street. After a hot shower, we prepared the food we had bought, and stayed in for the evening watching TV. First, there was a most interesting documentary on ancient stone circles, then one on the development of radar in the UK,

followed by an interview with David Attenborough. [Like most places we stayed in England, TV was limited to four channels.]

We slept well although I was awake for an hour in the middle of the night, during which time I finished my Agatha Christie novel.

[Diary] *After our full breakfast, we checked out and walked back into the town along the waterfront. There was certainly some serious money tied up in the pleasure craft we saw. We got information on towns to the south and changed some travelers' checks at the bank. Then it was on the bus to Sandwich, home of the 4th Earl thereof (John Montagu), who invented the idea of sticking food between two slices of bread. Several stories abound as to when/how he did this: one has him playing cards, and he didn't want to get grease on them; the other has him taking lunch to work. The Earl was also the first Lord of the Admiralty in which capacity he was a sponsor of Captain James Cook, the explorer who (re-)discovered Australia. It was Cook who ran into the Hawaiian Islands on one of his voyages, which he named the Sandwich Islands to honor his patron. [Cook was killed just off the Big Island, near a town that now bears the name Captain Cook.]*

Sandwich was a quaint little town with half-timbered houses, narrow streets, and an old city gate and wall segments. We did the walking tour and finished up at the New Inn pub for a cup of hot chocolate and a chat with several of the locals who were having their noontime constitutional pint.

4.7 Dover

From there, we boarded the bus to Dover, again sitting upstairs in a double-decker. We had a good view of the countryside. Two big employers in the region were Pfizer chemicals and a nuclear power plant; we passed both.

In Dover, we dropped by the tourist office. Most of the B&Bs were clustered on two busy roads, so we went in search of a quiet neighborhood. On the fourth try, we found one that had a twin room for two nights. And with a multi-night rate of £40/night with full breakfast, it was a good deal. It was also close to downtown and the main tourist attraction, Dover Castle. The room had an en-suite bathroom and a double and single bed. After a rest and cup of tea in the room, we ventured out to a restaurant for dinner: bangers (sausages) and mash with peas for me, and fish and chips for Jenny. Back in our room, we watched TV and ate deserts.

[Diary] *After a large and excellent breakfast, we started the steep climb up the path to Dover Castle, which although open for the most part to tourists, was still a military establishment. I especially liked not having to haul the backpack. We arrived at 10 am, opening time, and proceeded to the secret tunnels only to be told that the first tour didn't start until 11. [Don't you just hate that when that happens?] So, we got tickets for that and walked around a bit, visiting a Saxon church from around the year 1000, and a Roman lighthouse. At 11 am, we joined the guided tour of the tunnel complex that had been carved out of the chalk cliffs over the centuries. The first section was the hospital. Then came the tunnels built during the Napoleonic Wars when an invasion of England was expected. More than 2,000 troops lived down there at that time, and, apparently, more of them died from disease from living in the cold and so close to each other than died of other causes. Apparently, the lower levels were extensive, but were still classified and closed to the public. In the event of a nuclear war, it was to be*

used as the base for government in the southeast of England; however, the authorities have discovered that radioactivity would leech in through water coming through the porous chalk, so that idea has been abandoned.

The tunnel complex was the base from which the Dunkirk evacuation was run when the Brits were forced from continental Europe in WWII. It was only in 1985 that the Brits acknowledged the tunnels even existed, and it appeared that the Germans had not known of their existence. We then toured the old castle keep where Henry VIII dropped by for a few days to inspect his fortifications. Finally, we finished up on Admiral's Way, an observation platform that stuck out from the cliffs, from which we got our first glimpse of the White Cliffs of Dover. Despite the cold wind, the visit was well worth it, and by the time we got back home it had taken more than four hours. After a nap, we headed out for fish and chips, and then bought food to eat in the room that night. The temperature was hovering around freezing and snow had been forecast.

[Diary] *At breakfast, we met a Japanese man who had been transferred to London for three years. We chatted with him and then checked out, catching the 9:35 am bus for Hastings, a coastal city in the county of East Sussex. Although there was no snow, it definitely was freezing. Throughout the 2½-hour journey, we watched from our front seat—you guessed it—upstairs in a double-decker bus.*

4.8 Battle

After a short visit to the tourist office, we decided that we didn't want to stay right in the city, so after a snack and hot drinks we headed for the train station where we took a 15-minute ride to the town of Battle, some six miles to the north. The Battle of Hastings actually took place there in 1066 resulting in William the Conqueror's whipping Harold, but only just. Apparently, after killing all those Saxons, William decided to build an abbey on the site as part of his penance. In the years that followed, the town of Battle grew up around Battle Abbey.

We arrived in the afternoon of the last day of a fair, and the abbey admission charge was much higher and some usual activities were unavailable, so we walked about the town and ate in our most comfortable hotel room at the rear of a restaurant. A most interesting documentary on the evolution of English after the Norman Conquest played on TV. (Did you know that the chess term "checkmate" came from Arabic via French? It means, "The King is dead.")

[Diary] *Our full English breakfast was served in the restaurant and at a most respectable hour too. After that, we stowed our luggage with our host and headed for the abbey. We bought our tickets, got our audio wand, and headed out around the grounds, museum, and battlefield for a narrated tour. The audio wand allowed us to get commentary from the point of view of a Saxon soldier, a Norman knight, and Harold's wife (who was present at the battle, tending to the wounded). Of course, the two sides had different versions of the story.*

At 12:30 pm, we retrieved our luggage, walked to the station, and boarded the 1-pm train for London. We got off at Tunbridge Wells where we were met by friends. We had a late lunch together and walked around the old town before departing for London on the 3:30-pm train.

4.9 London

The train terminated at Charring Cross station, so we walked a few blocks north to Leicester Square, home of the discount-theater ticket office. We got tickets for a performance that night then headed back to our hotel at Paddington station to check-in, unload the luggage, and to prepare for an evening of theater.

At 7:45 pm, the lights went down, the curtain went up, and George Bernard Shaw's play Mrs. Warren's Profession began. Although it had been written in 1895, it was banned for 32 years, due to the nature of its subject matter. (Mrs. Warren and her business partners ran "houses of ill repute.") The star was Brenda Blethyn, to whom we had only recently been introduced in several movies. It was most enjoyable. We then went back home for a late gourmet supper of fish and chips with Jamaican ginger beer. What bliss!

[Diary] *This was our rest day. After breakfast, we took it easy in the room, planning the day. Finally, we headed downtown where Jenny visited the Cabinet War Rooms (from which Churchill ran his end of WWII). I had seen it before, so I went on a walking tour over the Thames on a new footbridge, to the huge London Eye Ferris wheel, and around the Houses of Parliament. We met up at Westminster Abbey, and then headed back to the theater district for a matinee play. This time it was Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap, which has been running non-stop for 50 years, with more than 20,000 performances. It was well cast and most enjoyable, and we were sworn to secrecy as to "who done it."*

Afterwards we stopped in at a large supermarket to get food for the evening as well as candy and a Christmas pudding to take home. Back in the room, we packed our gear and settled down to an early night.

[Diary] *Although the alarm was set for 4:45 am, we were awake before that. Soon after 5 am, we checked-out and walked to Paddington station where we caught the Heathrow Express train. Although it was expensive compared to the subway, it was much quicker and there was no change. At Heathrow, we were soon checked-in and seated in the Red Carpet Club lounge having a light breakfast. This time we managed to get exit seats with copious amounts of legroom, so the flight home was quite comfortable. United Airlines had declared bankruptcy a few days before, and from the quality of the meals, I could see where they were trying to save money!*

As we approached Washington D.C., we were advised that freezing rain was falling and that we'd have to circle for a bit; however, we landed with little delay. Once outside we found quite a bit of snow on the ground, rain, and freezing temperatures. Despite the weather and delays, passport control was quick, our luggage came quickly, and we got a taxi without waiting. However, at home, our front entrance was covered in a layer of ice, so getting up the steps to the door was tricky. As we had a very early flight back, we were home by 1 pm local time, so, while Jenny unpacked, I got the ice and snow off of one car and went shopping to fill the empty refrigerator. We were back in the real world, with 10 days' worth of phone messages, email, and mail to handle.

4.10 Conclusion

[Diary] *It was good to be back in our own place and bed; however, there was to be a distinct shortage of country sausage, bacon without large amounts of fat, and fish and chips. C'est la vie!*

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings: Volume 08 – December 2016 through November 2017

In the words of Mark Twain: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness."

5. April 2017, “Oh, the Things that I have Eaten”

Did you ever notice how habit-forming eating can be? In my case, I've been doing it at least twice a day for 63 years! I *love* food, I *love* preparing food, and I even *like* grocery shopping. And over the past year, I've found myself thinking often about what I was going to have for my next meal, sometimes even several meals ahead.

My food tastes were established at a very early age, when I was raised in rural South Australia, descended from German-speaking Lutherans from Prussia. Our menus were pretty much built around meat-and-potatoes, and rice was something you ate for dessert! Being farmers, we raised most of our own meat, fowl, fruit, and vegetables. With limited refrigeration and no freezer, we ate what was in season, or what was preserved in jars or smoked.

Like most farmers of German descent, my father could butcher most anything, and I recall from a very early age the story that “the only thing not used when a pig was slaughtered was the squeal it made as it was dying.” Imagine my surprise when some 45 years later, an older cousin informed me that, “No, even that was used; it was sent to the state capital where it went into making whistles for referees!”

Once I moved to a large city and then started traveling, my food tastes broadened quite a bit, from pizza to Asian food, from pasta to curry, and ultimately to biscuits and gravy and peanut butter and jelly!

In this essay, I'll mention some of the ordinary and not-so-ordinary things I have eaten, some of my ideal meals, and some things I will not put in my mouth. Bon appétit!

5.1 Meat

Many meat cultures have their *mystery meat* product, something made from all those unmentionable offcuts. In South Australia, it was called *fritz*. In an eastern Australian state, it was called *devon*. In the US, it's *bologna*. As a kid, I recall going to the butcher shop, sitting upon the counter eating a slice of fritz while Mom's order was filled. Fritz with tomato sauce (ketchup, that is) rated high in my school lunch sandwiches. These days, however, I rarely eat it.

For five years, I lived on a 4,000-acre farm on which we had many wild kangaroos and emus. From time to time, we'd hunt them, and occasionally we'd grill up some kangaroo steak with bay leaves. I recall it was tasty. Mostly, we cooked the meat and fed it and the soup made from it to the pigs. They also ate raw emu meat. [A few years ago, while touring eastern Germany, I came across a restaurant serving kangaroo. Presumably someone was farming them there, but it just seemed odd. I also saw an emu ranch in west Texas. What will they think of next?]

For more than 30 years, I lived near a 5-star restaurant, at which I ate on very special occasions. One of their specials was game, and I usually had the wild boar. Bison is readily available in my area, but I have yet to try that.

I was raised on a wheat and sheep farm on which two of every five years were droughts. When there was little else to eat, there was always lamb (or mutton), and I ate a *lot* of it. So much so, that ever

since, I don't much care for the taste or even the smell of it cooking. You can have too much of something!

As a kid, I trapped rabbits to sell for meat and skins. Some of them finished up in our kitchen pot, and I have fond memories of braised rabbit with gravy. In my area, rabbit was sometimes referred to as *underground mutton*!

On a family trip around Finland, I did eat a reindeer burger, and recently, I had braised reindeer in Norway. It's not a taste I care much for.

For some years, I stayed in a B&B in Chiswick, just outside London. One day as I was walking to my meeting place, I saw a sign advertising a new restaurant with a South African theme, so I dropped by to look at the menu. There was ostrich, kudu, buffalo, and zebra, among other exotic things, and all I could think of was how in the dark of night, the kitchen staff must jump the fence at the local zoo to get supplies. As it happened, with the reasonably low cost of air freight, they shipped in 20 kilos of meat from South Africa, twice a week!

One thing I miss about buying quality meat is South Australia's butcher shops, their great sausages, and bacon without all that fat the US seems to insist on having. Also, without all those preservatives. When traveling in Europe, I have been known to drool outside the window of a butcher shop, looking at all those wonderful meat cuts, except perhaps at a *Pferdemetzgerei* (horse butcher, that is) in Germany.

5.2 Fowl

In my early days, I ate a lot of chicken, and I still do. I also was involved in the production line when we butchered and dressed 20–30 of them at a time.

In my neck of the woods, ducks, geese, and turkeys were rare things. I probably ate turkey only once or twice in my 25 years in Australia. However, since living in the US, I eat it on a regular basis, not just at Thanksgiving.

In my very early days, we kept homing pigeons, and I remember some of them finishing up in our soup, and not just to swim!

I'm reminded of a story I once read about "How to cook a crow." It involved putting a crow in boiling water, along with a large stone. When the stone was soft, the crow was cooked!

5.3 Fish

For many years I lived 20–30 miles from a river or body of water, but fish was a rare thing, although we did have cans of sardines and, occasionally, tuna, and jars of fish paste. I do remember trying smoked fish, and I liked it. In fact, a few years ago, I rediscovered it and now have it regularly, especially in the form of salmon.

Now I'm allergic to shellfish, so when I travel to a non-English-speaking country, I try to find out how to communicate that. Several times I've failed, and either got no fish at all, or only shellfish. [As well as my throat constricting, if I touch shellfish and then touch my face near my eyes, my face swells. The doctors say it's to do with iodine, but I've never had any problem with using that directly.]

I quite like the texture of raw fish, and whenever I'm visiting my friends in Japan, we go to a local sushi restaurant. Of course, without shellfish the choices are halved, but there are still plenty of options.

Some years ago, Chilean sea bass started appearing on up-scale menus, and I've eaten it a number of times in Business Class on long-distance flights. It turns out, it's a bit of hoax. According to Wikipedia, "The name "Chilean Seabass" was invented by a fish wholesaler named Lee Lantz in 1977. He was looking for a name that would make it [Patagonian toothfish] attractive to the American market."

Given a choice, I'll put anchovies on my pizza. Unfortunately, where I live, most people don't care for the taste at all, and those pizza parlors that do provide them leave them in a can, so the diner can apply them himself without "polluting" the whole pie.

While I've eaten caviar a few times, I don't understand why people get so excited about it. But then, I don't drink champagne either!

5.4 Vegetables

I was raised on potatoes, peas, green beans, carrots, cabbage, onions, and pumpkin. I was probably 25 and living in the US when I ate my first ear of corn. Since then, I look forward to it every season, eating it with butter and black pepper. As a kid, I do recall having canned corn kernels in Mom's tuna mornay. My father banned from the table anything more exotic.

5.5 Fruit

I grew up in an apricot culture: fresh, dried, and as jam. I love peaches, including dried ones, also nectarines, pears, and oranges, both fresh and in juice form. I enjoy an occasional pink grapefruit half for breakfast, covered with sugar and left in the fridge overnight. While vacationing in Mexico some years ago, I rediscovered mangos, and love eating them and their juice. However, I have yet to master peeling one. My long-time Japanese friends introduced me to nashi (Asian pears), which I absolutely love, and often serve for dessert at dinner parties. It tastes like a pear, but has the look and texture of an apple, and doesn't bruise like a pear. I'm a fan of stewed rhubarb with apple, and if there's hot vanilla custard to go with it, that's just fine with me!

5.6 Pastries

I was raised in a culture having what we called *savory* pastries, such as meat pies, pasties (*PAH-sties*, that is, not *PAY-sties*) and sausage rolls. These were the staple offerings at my high school cafeteria, or if one ate at a bakery or deli for lunch. (According to Wikipedia, *savoriness* is "a culinary term traditionally contrasted with sweetness. Savory foods are flavorful but not sweet.")

Having lived in the US for 37 years, I'm very much aware of the popular American habit of eating sugar-laden, sweet pastries for breakfast. And while I have partaken occasionally over the years, eating a doughnut for breakfast just doesn't seem right.

5.7 Eggs

I love my eggs, but they must have come from a chicken; no duck eggs for me, thank you very much! I prefer them fried "over medium"; that is, flipped with the yolk a bit runny. Now I cannot bear to look at an egg whose white is not completely set. Unfortunately, this is rather a delicacy in Japan where the

egg is passed under a flame for only seconds, and is almost entirely clear. Then in Geneva, Switzerland, I ordered a pizza with an egg fried in the center. When it came, the white was hardly set at all, which quite put me off my pizza. [Sadly, some years later, I'd forgotten that, and ordered the same thing again!]

Now, we've all heard about the dangers of salmonella in food, and one way to contract that is by eating eggs that have not been refrigerated. When I spent two weeks in Saint Petersburg, Russia, in 1992, and prepared my own meals, I avoided buying eggs out on the street, as I'd seen them delivered there early in the morning, and stand out in the sun all day.

During a recent trip to Beijing, China, I stayed at a hotel that claimed to cater for international guests. However, almost no English was spoken in the dining room. I saw a young man making custom omelets, so I thought I'd try one. However, as best as I could tell, each one contained pieces of dried shrimp, to which I am allergic. Despite my questions to him, and his replying "Yes" to most anything I said, it was clear the omelet option wasn't!

BTW, who was the first person to see a chicken and say, let's eat the next thing that comes out of its butt?

5.8 Dairy Products

Being a growing lad, I like to consume at least a liter of milk a day, and I'm not talking that non-fat or low-fat crap! I mean whole milk that's come from a real cow, not a test-tube! However, I am *not* a fan of yogurt. One thing high on my list when I visit South Australia is the local thickened cream (which has no American equivalent). I can make do with clotted cream, but forget about that spray-can stuff served in the US. And I could eat vanilla custard every day.

Although I like a number of cheeses, my tastes are pretty basic; brie and Camembert are about as exotic as I'm prepared to go. In fact, if I find myself in the so-called gourmet-cheese section of a market, I have to hold my nose or detour around that section.

As I travelled around Europe, I learned of cheese made from sheep's milk. Who knew you could milk a sheep!

5.9 Offal

A favorite of mine when growing up was braised sheep's liver (lamb's fry), served with mashed potato, gravy, and onions. So, imagine my delight when I arrived in the US and saw "liver and onions" on a menu. After one bite, I discovered it was either pig's or calf's liver, and it had a very strong and terrible taste!

I also recall Mom serving up fricaseed sheep's brains. I don't recall if that's after I'd been good or bad!

5.10 Desserts

I don't often get as far as the dessert menu, but I have been known to indulge on occasion. High on the list come stewed fruit with vanilla custard or ice cream (but not just any brand will do). Thickened cream is a nice topping as is passionfruit pulp. A few slices of Asian pears are also fine.

For afternoon tea, I do like British Commonwealth-style buns, preferably buttered, or a slab of coffee cake. My grandmother and one aunt were masters of making what we knew as *kuchen*, a German cake containing potatoes, topped with streusel.

Many years ago, I was invited to supper with a family in rural Maine. The hostess asked if anyone wanted a slice of rhubarb pie? When several of us replied, "Yes," she put the pie in the oven, so we could eat it hot. When she served it, we found it contained rabbit stew, at which time she remembered just what the large letter R on the pie crust meant!

In 2005, for my mid-life crisis, I decided to walk the 187-mile-long Thames Path in England carrying a backpack. [See my essay "A Walk along the River".] One evening, I ate at a delightful pub right on the path. After my main course, I still had room for some dessert, and on offer was hot apple pie with vanilla custard, so I partook and ate outside in the garden. When I returned my empty plate, the young waitress asked, "How was it?" I replied enthusiastically, "It was better than sex, and if you wrote that next to the menu item on the chalkboard, you'll sell all of it." She declined my advice, but on reflection, I don't think I was exaggerating. After all, it was some darned fine pie and custard!

5.11 Drinks

I like plain and flavored teas (but not herbal) and instant coffee, provided sugar (or honey for tea) is available. While people have assured me that, "one can get used to going without sugar," I simply don't want to. When I make coffee for one at home, it's my own version of café-au-lait made entirely with milk.

I drink coffee-flavored milk by the gallon. Really!

When asked as to why I emigrated to the US, I often reply, "Because I don't drink beer or wine, I was not allowed to stay in Australia, so I went to the US, as that country takes refugees escaping all kinds of oppression." That said, I do like a nice glass of port wine. Unfortunately, I measure *nice* from the liqueur ports that used to be available in South Australia until some 15 years ago. But it appears the cellars have been emptied of them with no suitable replacement made.

After whole milk, fruit juice is king; orange, peach, mango, and occasionally pear are my favorites, and once in a blue moon, some pineapple. But never banana.

5.12 Foreign Flavors

As I travel around the world, I don't mind buying street food, so long as I know it doesn't contain shellfish. I also enjoy walking through fresh fruit and vegetable markets and supermarkets. At a glance, everything looks the same as back at home, but on closer inspection, many things really are different.

Now the Koreans think they have pretty good BBQ, but then they probably haven't been to an Australian or Texan BBQ. Quite frankly, they have no idea!

For my first adventure trip, I went into the jungles of the northern Amazon. On one hike, our guide took us to a native village to meet the chief where we drank some of the local homebrew with him. It turned out that it was from the root of some plant that was chewed by women who then spat the juice into a bowl where it fermented. Only the women's saliva would work. I haven't been back for seconds

since, however. Back in our camp, the local native cooks fed us mystery meat that was so heavily smoked, one couldn't tell what it was.

Ramen noodle houses are big business in Japan, and the highlight of eating in one, is that one can make as much noise as one likes slurping the soup. My young son was delighted at that custom.

When my wife and I arrived in Singapore in 1979, we heard about The Satay Club, which sounded to us like an upscale dining place. Imagine our surprise when our trishaw driver dropped us at a park where grandfathers cooked satays over charcoal fires while their grandsons served food and drinks to patrons who ate at picnic tables. It was great; I love spicy peanut sauce on meat. Unfortunately, the "club" no longer exists.

We found a Chinese restaurant in a small village near Munich, Germany. When the food was served, I wanted chopsticks, but the staff spoke no English and my small German dictionary didn't have the word. After some miming, I finally got a pair, but as I started to eat with them, I felt this strange sensation. All the Germans in the room were watching this European-looking guy eat with sticks. How Barbarian! [BTW, the German word is *Essstäbchen*, the French word is *baguettes Chinois* (literally, Chinese sticks), and the Japanese is *hashi*.]

I was in Antigua, the old capital of Guatemala, where I had two weeks of private Spanish tutoring. Each night, I ate at the same restaurant where I was served by the same waitress. She tolerated my poor Spanish and I tipped her well. Ordinarily, I don't eat big meals, but one night, I had room for dessert, so I asked her if she had any cake. She looked blankly at me, but didn't try to figure out what I was saying. After a number of attempts, I got annoyed. I was thinking to myself, "Darn it woman, don't you understand Spanish?" Several days later, I was clear across the country riding a bus when it occurred to me what I'd been asking for. I had the right word but the wrong language. Cake in French is *gateaux*, which is what I had asked for, but it came across as *gato*, which in Spanish means *cat*. So, it was no surprise I didn't get my dessert!

It was Todo Santo (All Saints Day), a big event on the Catholic calendar, and there I was as a lunch guest at a family in rural Mexico. From time to time, different people tried to get me involved in their (Spanish-language) conversation by asking me questions. I started talking about what I thought was His Holiness the Pope, but it soon became obvious that no one was following. As it turned out, I was using the feminine *la papa*, which means *potato*, when I should have been using the masculine *el papa*, the *Pope*. Potato, Pope; hey what's the big deal, right? [It occurred to me later that perhaps The Devil made me do it!]

While staying with a host family in Japan, I offered to cook them a Mexican dinner. However, finding all the ingredients in the local supermarket was a challenge. After lots of searching, I found an aisle of "obscure foreign stuff," and right there were the familiar yellow-and-orange boxes of Old El Paso Mexican food containing all one needed; YES!

I discovered empanadas when I first travelled to Central America, and I *loved* them! However, early on as I was chowing down on one fresh out of the oven, I bit into a whole olive that was inside the pastry. Not being a fan of olives, I quickly spat that out into the gutter. For all future purchases, I checked first

to see if an olive was inside, and if it was, I squeezed it out before I started eating, so it wouldn't pollute the ham and cheese filling.

5.13 Things Not on my Menu

There are more than a few things I do not care for or can't imagine putting in my mouth. They include the following: haggis; tripe; cold, boiled rice with raw egg mixed in, for breakfast (Japan); boiled eggs, black from pickling in vinegar (Korea); kimchi (Korea); pig's feet (trotters); the eyes from any animal; animal tongue; kidneys; duck; goose; pickled cucumber or cauliflower; raw beef; horseradish (except very mild wasabi on mashed potatoes); capers; many cheeses; qwark and other bacteria-laden things; buttermilk; any milk less than whole; blood sausages; Rocky Mountain oysters; olives; green tea; poi; and blood (ala the Maasai tribe's cattle herders). I'm sure there are many others, most of which I've tried very hard to forget over the years.

5.14 So, Just What do I Love to Eat?

Off the top of my head, here are some ideal things I might have in-between snacks:

Breakfast: cornflakes with fruit; sausage or thick, slab bacon with little fat; eggs fried (over medium); crisp, shredded hash-brown potatoes with sausage gravy; wheat toast with strawberry jam or perhaps some orange marmalade; a large mug of steaming café au lait or hot chocolate (but without the girly-man whipped cream). And, yes, ketchup does go on eggs! And my home-made stewed tomato and onions goes well over sausage and eggs.

Lunch: A pasty (or maybe a meat pie) with ketchup, buttered finger bun (with a small amount of frosting and coconut), and a carton of iced coffee (made entirely with milk, as God intended, not like that watery crap sold in the US!) On a cold day, a bowl of soup just-like-grandma-used-to-make hits the spot. Now while chicken noodle soup is a good standby, I'm partial to tomato and basil with a freshly buttered bread roll on the side, and I make a wonderful hot-and-sour soup laden with soyed chicken, carrots, mushrooms, and bamboo shoots.

Dinner: Bangers and mash with onions and gravy; medium-hot curried chicken and vegetables over steamed rice; a simple tuna or ham salad with cucumber, pickled beets (only certain brands will do!), lettuce, grated cheese, and 1000-Island dressing. Oh, and a few garlic-flavored croutons. And, for afters, some stewed apricots smothered with hot, vanilla custard, or a bowl of truly ripe fresh strawberries with French vanilla ice cream.

Anytime: Whole milk (but not too creamy; 4% fat is adequate); passionfruit-flavored anything; mango juice; German mettwurst (preferably with garlic) from South Australia, on its own or in a sandwich of very fresh bread with butter. Stir-fried vegetables with peanuts, coconut milk, and some spicy sauce, optionally with meat.

I do love plenty of chopped parsley on everything except maybe cereal and dessert, and of course, a good dose of ground, black pepper. (Don't you just hate that when the waiter stops grinding over your food after just a few turns of the pepper mill? Did I say, "Stop"?)

And I have been known to eat a pound or three of milk chocolate with hazelnuts!

5.15 Conclusion

One strong bit of evidence that there is a coordinated international conspiracy against me, is that all too often, when I go to a restaurant, the vegetable of the day is broccoli! Who was it that said, "Just because I'm paranoid, doesn't mean they aren't out to get me!"?

Bottom line: I like my food "regular"; you know, from a menu that has pictures, and is served on a placemat that has kids puzzles and drawings to color in. None of that exotic stuff for moi, thank you very much! As such, I chose not to eat in swank places. In fact, my most common up-scale dining experiences have usually been while flying in International Business Class (and on rare occasions, in First Class). Then, the selection process is usually by elimination: no shellfish, no duck, nothing I need a dictionary to figure out, and preferably not pasta. Fancy restaurants even find ways to ruin a perfectly good salad! Who stole my lettuce and replaced it with some wild rocket/arugula crap!

I'll leave you with some bits of food-related advice: not all cornflakes around the world are created equal; potato chips are not food, but they can be a food-delivery vehicle; it is okay to fry an egg on a pizza or to put pineapple pieces on it; it is possible to have too much Worcestershire sauce; breaking up chocolate or cookies does *not* let the calories escape; and not all red sauces are ketchup! Oh, and by the way, there is a big difference between using a *capful* and a *cupful*, especially when it comes to measuring vinegar.

6. May 2017, "Signs of Life: Part 8"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some more from trips to France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State.



Fast food, Italian style, in France!



From a small town in Normandy, France. Do you suppose this shop actually sells ketchup?

Perhaps it's actually an art gallery that specializes in Andy Warhol paintings.



A bakery in the French town of Avranches, named for the famous US tank commander, General George S. Patton, who liberated the town during WWII.

I stayed in that town when I visited Mont Saint-Michel.



And to truly show their admiration, they even named a pizza place after him!



In France. On the one hand, you could argue that this is a useful sign. On the other, it might well give some kids an idea they wouldn't have otherwise thought of.



You'll find this sign at the waterfront in Helsinki, Finland.

Finland is official bilingual: Finnish and Swedish; so, all public signs are in both languages.

Just off the coast on a series of interconnected islands is an impressive fortress complex with large dry docks, called Suomenlinna in Finnish and Sveaborg in Swedish.

And since I just know you're wondering about the three initials, the Helsinki City Transport system is called HKL (Helsingin kaupungin liikennelaitos in Finnish) and HST (Helsingfors stads trafikverk, in Swedish).



So, there you are, driving along a Finnish highway going out into the country for the Juhannus Day weekend, and you stop at a gas station and food place for a bite to eat. But what to have?

The literal translation for säilykkeet is canned food, and Pastat is pastes. But what caught my eye was the Tex Mex; Texas-style Mexican food, in Finland. Hmm. "Build it and they will come." I guess!



A Christmas advertisement with a difference, for the world-famous San Diego, California, Zoo.

Apart from their main property, their Safari Park in Escondido is definitely worth a visit.



There I was riding my little motor scooter on the back roads of the Dalmatian-Coast island of Hvar in Croatia, when I came across this sign.

It says that “The disposal and storage of waste materials and garbage is prohibited.” Fair enough, but I though the picture of the clothes washer or dryer and the brick wall were an interesting way to reinforce the message.



This interestingly named shop is in the quaint town of Totnes in Devon, England.



From outside a pub in Totnes in Devon, England. Very clever!

BTW, TLC stands for “tender loving care.”

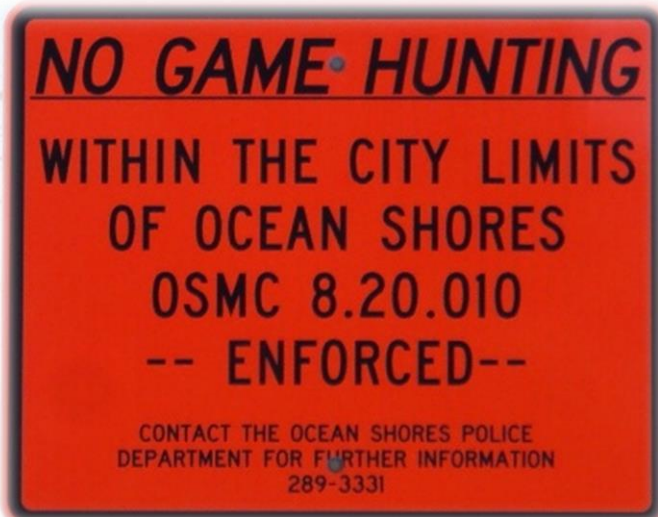


This photo was taken in my hotel room on the South Korean island of Jeju (sometimes called Cheju).

It certainly made me wonder just what kind of natural disasters might actually occur there.

BTW, the rope was to help guests get over the balcony to the one below, from where they used that balcony's rope to go further, and so on.

If you happen to be wondering around Ocean Shores, Washington State, wearing a deer costume for Halloween, it's nice to know that hunters are not supposed to shoot you!



Although it sounds like good advice, while the elk weren't looking, I stuck my foot inside the 100-foot zone!





One of many such signs in and around [Crescent City](#), Northern California.

The most startling thing were the posters at various beaches asking people who found human remains from the Japanese earthquake of 2011, washed across the Pacific Ocean, to report them to authorities.



The sign of civilization! Yes, I am a long-time patron of [Denny's](#). Any place that serves breakfast 24 hours a day is okay with me. And on many occasions, the waitstaff have given me crayons and pictures to color while I was waiting for my food to be served.

The ultimate experience came when I found a Denny's restaurant in the parking lot of a [Motel 6](#)

hotel, in Anaheim, California, in which I stayed during a family trip to [Disneyland](#).

7. June 2017, "Travel: Memories of Jordan"

Official Name: Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; Capital: Amman; Language: Arabic; Country Code: JO; Currency: dinar (JOD)

Once I learned I had to attend a conference in Tel Aviv, Israel, I immediately started planning a side trip to Jordan, primarily to visit the ancient site of Petra. This essay contains excerpts from the Jordan part of that trip. While I was in Amman, I was based at the house of an English academic, Richard, which he shared with his Palestinian friend, Abu. Richard was a host with Servas.

7.1 Amman

[Diary] The airport was quite some distance from the capital, Amman. Along the way, we listened to a cassette tape of 50's American pop classics, and I sang along. There were many billboards along the way, as well as numerous "traditional" Jordanian food places, such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and Burger King. A very large sign on an overpass was trying to lure people to a dream vacation in the Maldives (presumably before the islands sink) with Oman Airways.

We stopped at an international supermarket to get some groceries. It was very large, and I walked around looking at the products. As expected, everything looked the same, yet, on closer inspection, everything was different. Of course, all the signs were in Arabic, but most also had English. One thing that jumped out at me immediately was that all the prices had three decimal places instead of the two that most currencies have. There are a number of things worth mentioning about the Jordanian dinar. The basic unit is more valuable than US\$1, and 1 dinar has 100 piastres, each of which has 10 fils, so there are 1,000 fils to the dinar. [At the time of writing, 1 fil was about 1/8th of a US cent, and it's not clear one could buy anything with that amount.]

[Diary] I slept soundly until around 04:00, and then I lay there thinking about sleeping! [Don't you just hate that when that happens?] At 05:10, off in the distance I heard the first call to prayers at a mosque over a PA system. 15 minutes later, there was a second call. After what seemed like an eternity, I went back to sleep only to be awakened rudely by my alarm at 08:15.

At 11:00, Abu and I walked some distance up to the main highway to a row of banks. I needed cash, so selected one, and swiped my bankcard in the security door lock, and, lo and behold, the international banking computer system recognized the card, the thick glass door slid open, and I had access to the cash machine. I entered my card and PIN, and the system recognized it was issued in the US, and changed from Arabic to English. I politely asked for 200 dinars, and it politely handed over that amount in a combination of bills right down to five ones. I was off to a good start.

We took a taxi to the new bus station. It was a good thing Abu was with me, as all the bus signs were in Arabic, and we were looking for the one to Jerash. All the scribbles looked the same to me, and were impossible to decipher! We soon found our bus, an aging Mercedes that had seen better days, but it still had some get-up-and-go. The cost for the two of us for the 35 km to Jerash was 1.400 dinars, which was pretty cheap. However, there was one problem; the bus had no schedule. It simply left when it was full or the driver decided he had enough passengers to make it worth his while. The bus had heavy curtains with royal blue on the outside, and burnt orange on the inside.

Seventy minutes after we boarded, the bus pulled out, and we were out on a highway with three lanes in each direction. (I say "lanes," but as best as I could tell, a lane was defined as that strip of road containing the bus, and the lane moved sideways with the bus!) We climbed up and down some pretty big hills, and the driver spent quite some time changing gears, but the old Mercedes performed admirably.

7.2 Jerash

We eased into the town of Jerash as a dust storm blew, and got off the bus several hundred yards from the site of the ruins. The city really got on the map in the 3rd century BC, and saw lots of construction and destruction over the centuries. It was a favorite place of Roman emperor Hadrian, the Christian Byzantines controlled it for a bit, then the Muslims moved in, and, later, the Crusaders took it back. My admission was eight dinars while Abu's was only half a dinar.

We started at Hadrian's Arch, and moved on to the huge elliptical Oval plaza and its 160 Ionic columns topped with lintels, and a complex drainage system under the paving stones. Several groups of young people were working on digs around the place. The main road through the ruins was more some 800 meters long, was flanked by columns, and was paved in thick slabs of stone, many of which had been pushed up or down by a series of earthquakes over the years. The South Theater was beautifully restored as a 3,000-person amphitheater with a magnificently carved stone stage. A troupe of musicians in uniform played bagpipes and drums. From there, we went to the Hippodrome, a smaller version of Rome's Circus Maximus, complete with chariots, horses, and centurions in full armor. After a demonstration, the charioteers took paying customers for rides on part of the track, and soldiers posed for photos.

By the time we finished walking around, the dust had stopped, and it was much more pleasant. We stopped in the bazaar among the touristy stuff, and sat in the sun drinking Coke and eating potato chips while contemplating Roman history. ("What did the Romans ever do for us?" I hear you Monty Python fans say.)

The next challenge was to figure out where the bus back home might leave. And after a false start, we headed in the right direction expecting to have to wait a good while. As we walked, a private vehicle with two enterprising young guys pulled up and asked if we needed a ride to Amman. The cost would be 1 dinar each. We quickly agreed, and got in the back of the small sedan. 100 yards further down, they got another customer, a Canadian from Vancouver, and they looked around for one more. As the car was small, and we didn't want to be crammed in, we offered to pay an extra dinar to keep the space free.

7.3 Amman

[Diary] *A taxi dropped me downtown where I was met by Maha, a 24-year-old Palestinian woman who was a student in a Masters' program in American Studies. She was a day host in the Servas hosting program, and we had corresponded quite a bit in the weeks leading up to my arrival. Her parents were Palestinian, but were forced to leave the West Bank many years ago. They moved to Kuwait, where Maha was born. They all moved to Jordan some years ago, where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Italian and English.*

Several hours into our meeting, we were joined by Maha's good friend Rawan, who had attended university with her. Rawan was also a Servas day host, and her family background was similar.

We went on a driving tour. The first stop was the Roman Theatre. Built around AD 170 in a semicircle with around 6,000 seats, it was very nicely preserved. We entered from the street, right onto the main stage. There were several small museums featuring tribal costumes, crafts, and lifestyles. Next, we drove to an old part of town to the former compound of a wealthy family that now has a Foundation that sponsors numerous projects in Jordan. The gardens were nice, and the place had been turned into a gallery. We drank tea and juice in the trellised courtyard.

By the time we finished our drinks and another lengthy chat it was quite dark. Maha flagged a taxi for me and explained to the driver where I wanted to go. After what seemed like a lot of driving on small streets, we came out on a major highway, and, soon after, I saw a familiar landmark, the amusement park near home. From there, I used my hand-drawn map to locate the house (there were no street signs or house numbers). Two doors down from my house was a small corner store run by Wafa Al-Safadi, a very nice woman. Born in Saudi Arabia, she had lived in various places around the Middle East, and then eight years in Dallas, Texas, where her children were currently in university. Her English was excellent, and we chatted while I bought some emergency rations.

7.4 **Aqaba**

[Diary] Abu and I took a taxi to the south-side bus station at Mojama' al-Janoob. We decided to ride in style, in a coach with reserved seats, so we went to the JETT office and bought 2 one-way tickets to Petra for six dinars each. We had 1:20 hours to kill, so we walked around the yard stopping for drinks. Then we sat in the JETT waiting room. The 11:30 bus pulled up at 11:15, and we boarded soon after. We were in Seats 1 and 2, right behind the driver. I asked the driver if he had a license. He smiled, said "No," and that many drivers in Jordan drove without one!

We headed south on the main highway, and for three hours it was flat and desolate with very little vegetation. Apart from the divided highway with two lanes in each direction, there was a train line and a high-voltage power line. We passed through one large town and a few small villages. Most houses were incomplete. They built the ground floor and moved in, and added on as they could afford it. As a result, the roofs of most had 1–6-foot tall concrete pillars sticking up with steel reinforcement rods hanging out. I saw a few refugee camps, and the occasional camel and donkey.

We passed a turnoff to Petra, and I mentioned that to Abu. He said not to worry, as we'd stay on the better road until the last minute. We passed a second turnoff, and I asked again. "No problem," he said. I was a little concerned. When we passed the exit to Wadi Rum, I knew we had a problem, as that was well south and east of Petra.

Soon we came to a major security checkpoint where a soldier came on board and checked everyone's ID. Another soldier manned a machine gun mounted on the roof of a truck nearby, and had it aimed in the general direction of our bus. As I suspected, we were approaching Aqaba, the port city on the Red Sea, 100 kms south of our intended destination. [Don't you just hate that when that happens?] Obviously, there had been a major breakdown in communication. Oh well, on to Plan B,

right? Ironically, I had decided to forgo Wadi Rum and Aqaba, as they were too far out of my way, yet there I was!

We pulled up at the bus terminal and went to the office to see how to get back to Petra. Naturally, the buses to Petra left from another station, so we asked several taxi drivers to give us a quote for the 120+ km trip to Petra. After some negotiations, one driver dropped his price to 35 dinars, which was three times what we'd paid for four hours on the bus. He said it would take two hours. In any event, we accepted, and off we went to Petra. Well, not quite. First, we had to go by the driver's house to feed the cat, kiss the wife, and spank the kids, as he'd be gone for four hours. So, we sat in the taxi outside his house and waited. Fortunately, it was only for 10 minutes. He jumped in the cab, and we then we really were off to Petra. Well, not quite. We stopped a km from his house while he made a phone call. His car was old and, possibly, might not be able to make the trip, so he called the half-brother of his uncle's cousin's next-door neighbor, who had a much nicer newer taxi, to see if he could take us. Yes, he could, and, surprise, he was there in two minutes, I kid you not. Finally, we actually set off for Petra.

We came across several herds of goats and sheep being driven by shepherd boys who were walking or riding donkeys. Some herds crossed the road, so we had to stop. Several other herds were being driven down the steep mountainside towards the road.

7.5 Petra

By the time we got to Wadi Musa, the town near Petra, the sun had set. We drove all the way to the entrance to Petra, and up a side street to the Petra Inn, at which I'd booked a double room for three nights, the day beforehand, via the internet. It was 18:00, and we were in Petra, only three hours behind schedule and 35 dinars out of pocket. It could have been much worse.

[Diary] *We each packed a daypack, and stopped at the corner store to buy water. We knew that once we got inside Petra the prices would double or even triple, as everything has to be hauled in, mostly with horses and donkeys.*

We entered the park at 08:00, and there was a small but steady stream of people going in. After a few hundred yards, we entered the Siq, a 1 km-long horizontal crack in the rocks through which Wadi Musa runs. Although it's dry much of the year, it can see some serious water flow.

Petra was built by the Nabataeans from 300 BC through AD 100. They were Arabs from eastern Arabia. They built a city of 20–30,000 people, but as they lived in tents, there were very few permanent buildings left to discover. However, what they did do was make some serious tombs, but rather than actually build them, they carved them out of the sandstone rock. And we are talking big here, 40-meter-high front entrances on some!

The Siq wound around and sloped steadily down. The people had cut channels in the walls to divert water into storage cisterns. They were big on water conservation. At the end of the Siq, one comes out to the main highlight, the so-called Treasury building. [If you saw the first Indiana Jones movie, you saw this place.] It certainly was impressive.

From there, we climbed ruins all around, and, eventually, climbed hundreds of steep steps up to a cathedral carved out of a cliff face. We rested there on seats with soft pillows, all set into a large cave.

Although my can of lemon drink was expensive, it was cold and tasted great after the 1-hour climb. The lazy tourists with too much money opted to pay to have tiny donkeys haul their overweight butts all the way to the top. One thing I learned on the hike up, if you walk behind a farting donkey, keep your distance!

There were vendors everywhere trying to sell crappy trinkets. One entertaining old guy offered me old coins made 2,000 years ago or fake ones made last week in China! There were camels, donkeys, and horses for hire everywhere one turned.

The vast majority of tourists were French, German, Dutch, Italian, and Australian. I met a couple from Leesburg, Virginia, the seat of the county next to mine, and a businessman from McLean, Virginia, not far away. I chatted with a retired Canadian couple who were on a National Geographic 30-day world tour. I had received that catalog, and recalled it had a chartered Boeing 757 fitted out as all-First Class. [I recalled that the cost per person was around US\$60,000. OK if you are an armchair tourist with lots of cash!]

Of course, what goes down must come up, and the up-hill walk through the Siq and outer area reminded me I was still alive. I made it to my corner store where I drank half a liter of cold milk without stopping. Then it was up the very steep last hill to our hotel and a great shower. It was 15:30, and we'd been touring for 7½ hours. (I almost never work that hard for money!)

[Diary] *Having covered most of Petra the day before, my plan was to sleep late, forgo breakfast, and go to the park around mid-morning. However, that was not to be. I figured that I had about four hours of solid sleep, and then lay awake until daylight broke around 06:00. [Don't you just hate that when that happens?]*

By 06:45, I was ready to get up, and, soon after, I was in the hotel breakfast room. It had the same bland fare as the previous day, but I discovered the boiled eggs. Although they had been in a pan over a steam bath for a lengthy period, mine had not yet turned into a science experiment gone-wrong. People came and went while I took my time eating, drinking, and writing in this diary. I also started reading a new novel, but had a vague idea I'd read it before.

A short while later, I walked over to the park. I'd missed the morning rush, and the Siq was almost devoid of people. I travelled light, having left my daypack and video camera in my room. I wore my jacket, as it was rather cool, especially in the shade. I made it to the Treasury in double-quick time, and sat and watched the tourists take photos and try to mount camels for rides around the valley. A few hundred yards further on I located the path to the High Place of Sacrifice. Although it was steep, it was only half as far as the previous day's climb. The top was very exposed, and a stiff cold breeze blew over. I walked to the edge of the rock formation to take some photos of the Street of Facades far below. Halfway down the path a French family asked how far it was to The Cathedral. I pulled out my map and showed them they were on the wrong mountain, and quite some distance from the right one.

Back at the Treasury, I found a spare seat next to an English couple. We chatted at length about British Government and History, especially Churchill. I enjoyed it so much it may have been the highlight of the day!

I ran into people from New Zealand, Ukraine, Canada, Czech Republic, and Northern Ireland.

I took my time walking out, stopping, and sitting occasionally to look at the rock formations on the canyon walls.

[Diary] *Although I woke a couple of times during the night, I went back to sleep soon after, so was delighted that it was 09:00 when I woke. I had some bread, cheese, and drink in the hotel restaurant, which was almost deserted.*

Back in my room, I packed my gear, and then checked out. The room had been more than adequate, and given the decent price so close to the park, it was good value.

I said goodbye to the front desk staff and walked down the hill to the row of taxis. The drivers were talking and smoking, and welcomed me with big smiles. I asked how much to take me to the bus station. One guy said five dinars. I said that was way too expensive. Eventually, he dropped to three. I said that the hotel told me one dinar was the going rate, so he told me to go back to the hotel and let them take me there for that price. I smiled and started walking to another group of taxis, and one young guy followed me and said he'd take me there for only one.

It was 09:45 when we pulled up at the so-called bus station. It consisted of a paved area with a 20-person minibus and two small shelters sheds. The bus was going to Amman, and the driver told me the price was five dinars. We'd leave when the bus was full. I was the 2nd passenger to arrive, and being Friday, the big religious day of the week, business might be slow, so I settled down to a long wait. After 15 minutes, the count had risen to four.

At 11:30, after a 1:45-hour wait, there was a flurry of activity, and passengers appeared seemingly, out of nowhere. The driver started the bus, everyone boarded, and we were "off to see the wizard." Just outside town, we pulled into a gas station to fill up the tank. The cost was 410 fils/liter, about US\$1.10/US gallon, less than half what I paid at home.

Once we got out on to the highway, an older man played conductor, moving around the bus collecting money. He wore a pinstriped robe with a matching jacket, and a traditional red-and-white Hashemite headdress. The load was made up of 20 adults and five children, including the driver, conductor, a young policeman wearing a pistol, four women covered from head to toe in black robes with faces covered, a big guy around two meters tall (who I pegged as a Special Forces assassin!), and one infidel, me. I sat in the back row with my legs sticking out in the long aisle, as that was the only place on the bus I could fit comfortably. There were two spare seats, one either side of me. Coincidence? I think not; no one wanted to take a chance on catching infidel-itis by sitting next to me.

We drove on a back road through a number of towns, dropping off and picking up people. The road was in very good condition. After some 60 minutes, we were at the main highway, and we turned north to Amman. Up until then, the driver had us tapping our toes to some contemporary Arab music and singing, but, then, he turned to what I figured was a religious channel, and a cleric started in on a 15-minute sermon. Right from the start, the only mental picture I had was of Adolf Hitler giving a speech in Arabic, really! After a short break, another man came on and started singing in a rather pleasant voice. This went on for 30 minutes. My guess was that he was reciting verses from the Koran.

Traffic was light, and I looked out the windows watching the world go by. It was wonderful to have no smoking and no air conditioning. The children were all very well behaved, played quietly alone or with each other, and looked out the window. [They reminded me very much of Latin American kids in that they had an attention span of more than 15 seconds, and quietly observed the world around them without needing constant artificial stimulation.] At one point, we had to slow right down as shepherds pushed two large flocks of sheep (mostly with black wool) out over the 4-lane highway. Each man was assisted by two sheep dogs.

At 13:10, we pulled into a roadside café for a 15-minute break, and everyone got out. We were 100 km south of Amman. The "Special Forces assassin" came over to talk to me. He turned out to be a nice fellow, and he had a handle on a number of languages although I found it hard to understand his English. He gave me his phone number and email address, and asked me to contact him in Amman if I had any free time. He was especially interested in my hand-held computer, so I demonstrated some of its functions.

7.6 Amman

About 80 km out of Amman, we ran into a dust storm. Although it wasn't too thick, several times we had to slow down due to poor visibility. Strangely, light rain fell through the dust, and the driver had to put on the windshield wipers.

As was common, passengers waiting by the side of the highway waved down the bus. We stopped to pick up one guy, and the only spare seat was right next to me. He took it, but with some hesitation. Then, as we got going again, I noticed that several hundred yards down the road there was a large prison set on the hillside with high walls and guard towers. I wondered if my new seatmate had been visiting someone there, or, perhaps, he was an escapee. [I say this because once I was driving in the state of Utah in the US, and before and after a prison near the road, signs said not to pick up any hitchhikers.]

As we got closer to the capital, the rain got heavier. And as it was so dry and the roads had patches of oil and grease that had dropped from vehicles, we slid around in places.

By the time we arrived at the bus station at Mojama' al-Janoob it was 15:00, and the rain was coming down hard. I got a taxi right next to the bus, and with help from my assassin friend, managed to explain where I wanted to go. The driver took me straight there, but refused to use the meter. (If I never have to bargain with a taxi driver again in my life that would be just fine with me.)

Both Richard and Abu were home when I arrived, and Abu was cooking a chicken dinner, which we ate early with spiced rice and red pepper.

After supper, I showered and consolidated my luggage, and then downloaded the 220 emails that were waiting. I discarded more than half of them, but it still took a while to go through them. One was from my wife telling me that someone had tried to use my primary credit card to buy a lot of stuff, and that the card was now cancelled as a result. [Don't you just hate that when that happens?] I reviewed and named the digital photos from my trip to Petra.

[Diary] I woke for a few minutes when the 05:00 prayers were called, and then slept again until 08:30. I actually felt rested. Richard was making tea, so I made a pot as well, and sat down for tea and toast. Afterwards, I read a bit, and then caught up with new email that had arrived overnight.

I packed the last of my belongings, and worked on this diary throughout the morning. Then I noticed that a young man from my hometown in Australia was on-line, so we had a chat via instant messenger. He and his wife were currently living in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea. They had just returned from a week in neighboring Georgia.

Around noon, I packed up my computer gear, closed my bags, and chatted with Richard. He had reserved a taxi for 13:00, and it arrived right on time. I said goodbye to Wafa at her corner store, and we headed off. It was a very nice clean taxi, and the driver was young, polite, and dressed in a neat uniform. It was not your average Jordanian taxi and driver, I can assure you.

We stopped at a cash machine, so Richard could get some money. Then, soon after, we dropped him off to go in a different direction. We'd said our goodbyes en-route, and I looked forward to keeping in touch with him. Then, we headed for the airport.

It took 20 more minutes to get to the airport exit, and just before the terminal, we saw the Golden Tulip Hotel. We had to stop at a security gate where the guard asked if I had a reservation. I said that I did, and showed it to him. He then opened the gate, and we drove to the front entrance. There, I was greeted by two staff members, don't you know, one of whom ran off with my main luggage. I paid the taxi driver the very reasonable fare plus a small tip.

To get into the hotel, I had to put my luggage through an X-ray machine, and walk through a screening device myself. I thought perhaps I'd arrived at the Beirut Hilton by mistake, but, no, I was in what I thought was sleepy old Jordan. The woman at the front desk was ever so pleasant, and found my reservation right away. Yes, she agreed, I'd prepaid via the internet with a booking agency. She asked my flight time the next morning, and recommended a wake-up call at 04:00 with ride to the terminal at 04:30. I agreed. My room was being made up, so she asked me to wait five minutes. The foyer was rather cavernous and nicely decorated without being "over the top."

Once my room was ready, the bellman took me to my room and set up my luggage. The room was nice, and had a large bed. I opened the curtains to the warm afternoon sun, but kept the window closed as a cool breeze was blowing. I decided against buying internet time, as there was no need for me to be connected again anytime soon. I set up my computer, and had it play some albums while I played games. Then I read my novel until the sun set.

At 17:00, I went down to the coffee shop off the foyer for a light supper. The prices were unbelievably good for a big hotel at an international airport. I ordered a tuna salad sandwich, which came in a large sesame seed bun, French fries, side salad, and a brand-new bottle of Heinz ketchup. Veddy civilized indeed, I must say. As I ate, I read my novel, which had gotten very interesting. The good news was that the author had written a series using the same character, so I had more stories to read once I got home. I finished off with a nice pot of hot chocolate. It was a fine "Last Supper in the Holy Land."

Back in my room, I read my whole diary making changes and corrections while listening to Vivaldi. At 19:45, I took a nice hot shower. Lights out soon after. All too soon, that 04:00 alarm would ring. Although I was tired, I took a while to get to sleep. A major problem with airport hotels is that they tend to be near airports! And a number of planes landed and took off with considerable noise.

[Diary] I slept right through to my 04:00 alarm. In 10 minutes, I was shaved, dressed, packed, and in the elevator heading downstairs. Checkout was a formality, and a driver was summoned to take me to the terminal, three minutes away. The security checkpoint was manned, and a soldier stood at his machine gun on the back of a humvee. At the terminal, the driver took my big bag and wheeled it inside the main building. What service!

I went through security and was Number 2 in line at check in. Royal Jordanian's computer knew all about me, so I was soon processed. I asked the agent if he was up that early every morning. He replied, "Yes, but I prefer to think of it as late the night before!" Security and passport control was equally quick, and, by 04:40, I was sipping some wickedly strong coffee at the entrance to Gate 6. It had all been very uneventful, which was fine with me. And everyone made sure I was leaving the country with a good last impression.

At 05:45, I went through gate security and down to Gate 6. From there we boarded a bus for the short drive to the mid-field where an Embraer 195 jet named Petra stood ready to go. It was a crisp cold morning out and the sun was rising. We proceeded up the stairs in an orderly fashion and I sat in Seat 13A, window portside, at an exit with plenty of legroom. Instead of the usual cold air blowing around the plane, the heaters were on. Yes! Boxes of orange juice were handed out, the safety announcements made, and Royal Jordanian flight RJ342 took off at 06:30 to the southwest for the 20-minute trip to Tel Aviv.

7.7 Conclusion

Petra was everything I expected and more, and made the whole trip worthwhile. I only learned about Jerash a few weeks before the trip, and that was a very pleasant surprise.

Once while riding a bus near Amman, I saw a campus called "University of Philadelphia." My first thought that it was an American school. But No! Amman used to be called *Philadelphia*. According to Wikipedia, "Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Macedonian ruler of the Ptolemaic Kingdom who reigned from 283 to 246 BC, renamed the city to "Philadelphia" (literally: "brotherly love") after occupying it. The name was given as an adulation to his own nickname, *Philadelphus*.

8. July 2017, “What is Normal - Part 10: Automobiles and Driving”

Most of us who drive on a regular basis take it for granted. When we want to, or need to, go somewhere, we just get in the car and go!

As a farm boy, I started driving small pickup trucks and tractors around the age of 10. I well remember that in 1964, my older brother bought a brand-new car and he let me drive it on the dirt, public road near our farm. Although I was tall for my age, I had to look between the dashboard and the upper rim for the steering wheel. The car had a 3-speed, column-shift, manual transmission, but he restricted me to using first and second gears only.

It turns out there are many different aspects of driving, some of which I'll cover in this essay. And to be sure, road rules and customs vary from one state or country to another.

8.1 Getting a Driving License

In December 1969, I turned 16 years-old, the age at which one could get a driving license in South Australia. At that time, written and practical driving tests were administered by the state police, and most towns with a thousand or more-people had a police station. On the day of my driving test, the policeman got in the passenger side and told me to *drive like I'd been taught*, which was probably my downfall. I failed the test because I went over the speed limit, with a policeman in the car. What was I thinking! Anyway, I retook the test two weeks later, and passed. Back then, very few cars had automatic transmissions, so it was much more challenging to have to park on the side of a steep hill going upwards, and to take off again, using the handbrake.

I don't remember the details, but after one passed the theory test, one got a *Learner's Permit* and L-plates to put on a vehicle until one passed the practical test. (Years later, new drivers got a provisional or P-plate, which had to be used for a year or more.)

Three years later, I came back home in the summer to help my father with his wheat harvest. However, to drive his truck filled with grain to the local silo (US: grain elevator), I had to get a truck license. When I took that test, one of the first things I had to do was to drive around the very large roundabout. Now my dad had warned me that the latch on the driver's-side door wasn't working properly, and, don't you know, half way around the circle, the door swung open. I simply reached over and pulled it closed, and put my arm out the open window to hold it closed, and told the policeman, “Sorry about that; the latch is a bit of a problem!” He just laughed it off, and I passed the test. After all, that's how some farm vehicles are, right?

Back then, South Australian drivers' licenses did *not* contain a photograph.

In 1980, I got my first US license, in the state of Maryland, at the Department of Motor Vehicles. It was a very high-tech process. For the theory, I had to sit at a computer terminal and answer multiple-choice questions with respect to colored diagrams showing a series of driving scenarios. The one I remember vividly was that in which I had a green light, but a policeman was standing in the intersection with his hand held up, presumably indicating I should stop. One of the answer choices

was, “Run over the policeman.” Now I was pretty sure that was not only the wrong answer, but selecting it would probably fail me immediately.

One winter, I went to [Saba](#), one of three islands in the northern Dutch Antilles in the Caribbean. Although it's part of the Netherlands, the government wasn't much interested in spending money to build a road system on an island with few people and only five square miles in size. Well, some enterprising locals built some roads and brought in some cars. Of course, with almost no traffic, it was very safe. And, interestingly, any license granted there could be used back in Europe! Soon, a travel agent started promoting a trip to the Dutch back home: “Come to Saba for a week's holiday and bring back a driving license!” And it worked. However, it became clear that the testing process was hardly rigorous, and the conditions were nothing like in the Netherlands, so the practice was stopped. [As best as I can tell, in many western European countries, one cannot get a license until age 18, one must take a lot of expensive lessons, and one often takes several tries before passing. On the other hand, people can consume alcohol at age 15 or 16. In the US, many states allow driving at 15½, but no drinking until 21.]

While many countries issue licenses for 5–10 years, they also require annual tests for those with disabilities or beyond a certain age. For many years, I've lived in states where it is mandatory to have one's car inspected annually to make sure it's safe. However, none of those states ever checks whether the driver is roadworthy! I think that would be a great idea, as well as a serious source of revenue. I see having a driver's license as a privilege not a right! And I'm willing to sit and pay for an annual written and practical test to have that privilege.

8.2 Driving on the Left vs. Right

This a fundamental difference between countries. I was raised in Australia, and like most [British Commonwealth](#) countries (with the notable exception of Canada), drivers sit in the right-hand side of a vehicle, and drive on the left-hand side of the road. I did that for nearly 10 years. Then I moved to the US where I sat on the left and drove on the right. Since everyone is doing it, it isn't difficult to master. What can be a challenge is switching over when traveling abroad. And to make it more interesting (read: dangerous), some places differ yet again. For example, in some former or current English territories in the Caribbean, the road rules are British, but many cars are American, which means one is driving on the left while sitting on the left. [I recently experienced this on the US Virgin Island of [St. Croix](#), which I believe it the only US territory to have this convention. Interestingly, this island was formerly a Danish possession, not English.]

Although the US uses left-hand-drive cars, there is one important exception: US Postal Service delivery vans are right-hand-drive, so the driver can put mail in mail boxes at the edge of the road, on the right-hand side.

For more details about driving on the left vs. driving on the right, click [here](#) and [here](#). As you will read, numerous countries changed sides!

[Note that international rules for driving power boats on water require water craft to keep to the right. Interestingly, this rule is also applied in Australia, so rules for boating there are the opposite from those for land-based vehicles.]

8.3 License Plates

All countries to which I've been require some sort of plate on vehicles used on public roads. While many require a plate on the front and back, some require one only on the back (as in [Indiana, US](#)). In some cases, the front and back plates are of different color (as in the UK, where the front plates are white, and the back ones are yellow). According to [Wikipedia](#), in the UK, "It is compulsory for motor vehicles used on public roads to display vehicle registration plates, with the exception of vehicles of the reigning monarch used on official business." (As my dear friend Günter is fond of saying, "Oh, it's good to be King!")

I remember arriving in the US in 1979 and moving to Chicago, in the state of Illinois. I was stunned to find that that state was just introducing [vanity/personalized plates](#); after all, even sleepy old South Australia had them back then! (As it happens, much of the TV and movies exported to Australia back then were shot in California and New York, which did have vanity plates. I've since learned not to generalize about the US based on any one state, or region, for that matter.) Some countries prohibit certain personal "spellings."

In [Japan](#), plates indicate the vehicles engine capacity.

In my early years in the US, each time when I renewed my car's registration, I got a new set of plates. Perhaps, they really were made by prisoners (as has often been claimed), and those fellows had to be kept busy, right! Nowadays, I get two small stickers, for month and year, which I put on the front and back plates. That said, they are quite easy to peel off, and I wonder why more are not removed or defaced by trouble makers. In Australia, we had decals instead, which were put on the passenger-side quarter-vent window, something that no longer exists. (In Virginia, I do put decals on my windshield, but they are for state inspection and a county tax permit.)

Many areas have plates with one of a number of approved slogans. South Australia is "The Festival State" highlighting its world-famous [Festival of Arts](#). One from Virginia, US, is "1607 400th Anniversary 2007."

Ordinarily, [German](#) plates start with a 1-,2-, or 3-letter code based on the [district](#) (city or county) in which the vehicle is registered: For example, Berlin is B, Magdeburg is MD, and Rostock is ROS.

According to [Wikipedia](#), "Several Native American tribes within the United States register motor vehicles and issue license plates to those vehicles." I recently witnessed that firsthand when I drove through the state of Oklahoma, a state that was created specifically as a home for a number of Indian nations (currently numbering 39).

8.4 Parking

If I understand correctly, with space being such a premium in Japan, one cannot register a car there unless one can show proof of a place to park it.

Now we're probably all familiar with high-rise parking buildings, but in Japan I saw cars being stacked one above the other using some kind of individual-car elevator. That is, there are no ramps, as there simply is no space!

From my observations in Italy and France (and probably other countries as well), it seems that if any one square centimeter (or inch) is inside a legal parking spot, then the whole car is parked legally; I kid you not!

I'm reminded of a story about a friend. In many paid-parking lots in his country, there is a metal device that after parking over it raises up under the car to prohibit it from being moved until payment has been made. He dutifully put in his money, and some car somewhere in the lot was freed, but not his! He'd entered the wrong space number; don't you just hate that when that happens!

In some cities in the US, a vehicle at an expired meter gets *booted*; that is, a heavy metal lock is placed on a wheel to prohibit the vehicle from being moved. (The rationale appears to be that drivers simply throw away parking tickets left under their wipers.)

8.5 Toll Roads/Bridges/Tunnels

More than a few places around the world charge a toll to use their roads, bridges, and/or tunnels. And sometimes the costs can be surprisingly high. Two such incidents come to mind. I was heading south from Innsbruck, Austria, towards the Italian border. Naively, I got on the autobahn and found I had to pay a large fee even though I only wanted to go a short distance to an exit just before that border. [Don't you hate that when that happens!] The other involved my driving across a bridge from the US mainland to Staten Island, New York City, and then across another bridge onto Long Island. And I did it in the reverse direction on the way back. That was the most expensive 10-mile trip I've ever driven!

Now I do live in an area with toll roads, especially one to my international airport. However, I avoid them unless I am really running late, or I can claim the expense as a business deduction (after all, time *is* money). In recent years, the circular beltway around Washington DC has added one or more *express lanes*, which one can use for a fee. (These are not to be confused with High-Occupancy Vehicle [HOV] lanes, which allow only vehicles with two or more passengers, at no charge.)

I've been travelling to the greater Seattle, Washington, area for more than 35 years, and on most trips, I crossed the Evergreen Point Bridge across Lake Washington. However, a couple of years ago, it was turned into a toll bridge, and I simply refuse to pay to cross. As such, when I use the approaching highway, I have to be sure to get off before a toll is due, to take an alternate route. I have also learned to configure my GPS unit to avoid paths requiring tolls.

Now, if I commuted some distance twice each work day, I might succumb to paying tolls if using a toll road was faster, but for the 32+ years I've been working from home, I haven't noticed much traffic between my bedroom and my office!

8.6 Roads

Here in the US, we have interstate highways, state roads, and local roads. I **love** the interstate highway system. North-south freeways have odd numbers starting from the west to the east. East-west freeways have even numbers starting from the south up to the north. Ordinarily, they have one- or two-digit numbers. Those with three join a major interstate at one or both ends. [I recently drove 2,631 miles (4,209 kms) in seven days, from Northern Virginia to Utah. Almost all of it was on Interstate 81 (I81) and Interstate 40 (I40).]

Until 25-odd years ago, most local and many state highways in the US had route numbers only, and a few had names. However, in an effort to assist fire and ambulance services, everyone in rural areas needed to have an address, so they could be found easily in an emergency. This meant having house numbers and road names. [A similar situation occurred in Australia.]

In my home state of South Australia, most of the interstate highway system consists of two, undivided lanes, with occasional passing lanes when going up hills. These roads are nowhere near as well-constructed as US interstate highways, yet the Aussie speed limit is 100–110 kph (62–69 mph), which is way too fast for this kind of road, especially when the lanes are not divided. Another problem is the discontinuation of much of the state's railway network, which has led to a huge increase of road transport, especially when it comes to hauling grain using monster B-double trucks/trailers. The wear-and-tear on many roads is quite obvious.

8.7 Signs

For the first of many pages of international road signs, click [here](#).

One sign in Latin America that had me confused, showed the letter E inside a red circle with a slash through it. Obviously, something was prohibited, but what? It meant “No parking”; as *estacionar* is the Spanish equivalent for *parking*.

One of my all-time favorite signs is the set of three one sees when approaching an exit on an autobahn. The first, with three bars, indicates the exit is 300 meters on, the second has two bars indicating 200 meters, and the third has one bar for 100 meters. How sensible!

BTW, George Harrison famously wrote, “If you don't know where you're going, any road'll take you there.”

8.8 Fuel

The price of gasoline (*petrol* in British Commonwealth countries) varies widely, and often includes more taxes than fuel cost. Here in the US, local governments—counties and towns—can levy their own gasoline tax, and many do. And many large metropolitan areas straddle two or even three state borders/tax zones.

One aspect of the metric system that confuses me is the measure of so-many liters per 100 kilometers, versus the Imperial system's miles-per-gallon (mpg).

Filling a gas tank in Iceland or a remote Caribbean island, can give one a shock! The cost of fuel per day might be more than the cost of the rental car.

Some years ago, I drove to New Jersey (what was I thinking?) and needed to fill my gas tank. I noticed that I had to wait for an attendant to do it for. Apparently, at least in that area, only full-service existed; no self-service was allowed! [But then I also recall that on one interstate toll road through that state, when one wanted a toll ticket, one had to be handed it by a person who took it from the machine. The driver was not allowed to take it directly from the machine!]

By the way, where I was born, gas stations are called *road houses*. And I'm old enough to remember when attendants washed one's windshield (AU: windscreen), checked the tire pressure, radiator, and battery, and maybe even gave one a set of drinking glasses.

8.9 Speed Limits

These vary widely around the world, from very low on small Caribbean islands to very high, with some countries even having minimum limits only in certain freeway lanes.

Years ago, in the US state of Montana, there was no limit during daylight hours provide one was driving safely. The nighttime limit was 75 mph (120 kph). However, when I was in that state a year ago, there was a daytime limit (85 mph).

As I mentioned above, I recently drove a small moving van across much of the US. For the first half, the limit was 70 mph, and most of the second half was 75 mph. While I drove at the limit much of the time, doing so with a crosswind and sometimes alongside a semitrailer, made it hard work.

In many US states, radar detectors are illegal. In Australia and other places, a device called an *amphometer* is used to catch speeders. This involves the use of two black tubes across a lane, with the time a car takes to run over both being used to determine its speed. I've heard stories of truckers slamming on their brakes when they see one, which rips the whole apparatus to shreds!

8.10 Roundabouts

My home town in South Australia has had a large roundabout (turning circle) for as long as I can remember, and people never had any trouble using it. And I've seen roundabouts in other countries, including parts of the US. In the past 10 years, they have been introduced to my area in Northern Virginia, including my town, and I hear nothing but complaints. As I say to my American friends, "How hard can they be to master? Foreigners have done it for years!" Personally, I think roundabouts are fine, and if they cause drivers to think about what they are doing and to look at the other traffic around them, well it's about damned time they started paying attention!

I'm reminded of one of Chevy Chase's National Lampoon's Vacation movies where he is stuck going around the same roundabout many times on a trip in Europe, trying to figure out which exit to take. On the rare occasions that I drive down Massachusetts Avenue here in Washington DC, I fully understand his concern when a circle has eight or more exits.

8.11 Accidents

As I mostly work from home, I don't drive a lot, but from time to time, I've come across traffic accidents. One involved a stopped car on fire, with black smoke billowing up from the burning oil and tires. Another involved a sports car that had driven up on top of the end of a guard rail and tipped over on its side. In a third case, I heard a loud bang, and looked in my driver-side mirror just in time to see a car crash into the median 100 yards behind me.

The one time I saw a tornado way off in the distance, I drove quite fast away from it, lest I finish up in Kansas!

For details of my own accidents, see my January 2016 essay, "[Accidents and Incidents.](#)"

8.12 Weather

Although I've never had to put chains on my tires to go through snow and/or ice, I've seen numerous "chain-up" areas in various countries. And way out in the country on some US interstate highways, I've seen long gates that can be pulled across to close the highway during winter emergencies.

While many places still spread salt to melt ice and snow, more are turning to sand to improve traction (but not actually melt anything), as that doesn't rust vehicles and it doesn't leave a chemical residue behind afterwards.

In Alaska and Norway, I've seen flexible orange poles on the sides of roads, which indicate to snow plows where the edge of the road is. Given these poles can be more than 15 feet (5 meters) high, I'm glad I don't have to deal with that much snow.

In December of 1978, the Mother-of-All-Winter-Storms hit Chicago. There was so much snow that earthmoving equipment was used to clear whole streets, with more than a few cars being destroyed or discarded in the process.

Five years ago, I moved to a house with a garage, and I've had one ever since. The only new car I ever owned wore out from exposure to the elements: heat, cold, humidity, and birds. Now while many people would give a great deal to have a garage, almost all those Americans I know who have a garage (and sometimes two or even three) have them so full of crap that they don't have room in them for a car!

8.13 Hitchhiking

I hitchhiked some back when I was a teenager living in Australia. Since then, I've picked up more than few people doing likewise, in various US states and other countries. However, it wasn't until January 2016 that I tried it again, on the Hawaiian island of Maui. For the first half of my trip, I had no car, and I was walking down a steep hill to a supermarket, and soon after I stuck out my thumb, a man in a pickup truck stopped. Unfortunately, no one did when I walked back up, in hot sun, carrying several heavy bags of groceries. The next day, I got rides to and from a state park with the second couple insisting on driving me right to my destination even though it was out of their way. Then once I rented a car, I gave two young guys a lift up to the top of the [Haleakalā](#) volcano, and I picked up a young man walking a bicycle loaded up with a car tire and rim.

8.14 Conclusion

My pet driving peeves are [tailgating](#), not completely stopping at a Stop sign or when turning on a red light (here in my area one is supposed to actually come to a stop for three seconds), and talking/texting while driving. You know, the one good thing about [capital punishment](#) is there are no repeat offenders!

Finally, while they have some kinks to work out yet, driverless cars will almost certainly be a major improvement over the (way too many) idiots that inhabit our roads now!

9. August 2017, "Signs of Life: Part 9"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some more from a trip to [Barcelona, Spain](#).



When I'm traveling abroad, I like my foreign words to be recognizable. "Shake it Mama!" indeed! (See top-left and bottom-right corners.)



A pest-control place? No, it's actually a chain of do-it-yourself laundries.



From a live-concert poster. One of the band's names was INSANE, perhaps written just the way it's shown here. Is that crazy, or what?



Sign on waterfront kiosks. Beer, Coke, and ice cream all in same place; serving three of the four food groups is pretty good.



The main entrance to the [Mercat de St Josep de la Boqueria](#), a covered market.

Inside, it is wall-to-walls stalls, mostly selling fish, meat, fruit, vegetables, drinks, and other forms of cheesy [comestibles](#).

I rescued several [empanadas](#).



Now if you are fussy about the origins of your octopus, this stall brings them in from Galicia, an area of northwestern Spain.



Just the kind of non-descript front door you want when you are in a Witness Protection Program, and living in the backstreets of Barcelona.

Actually, this was the door to my apartment building.



The flag of Catalonia (*Catalunya*, in Catalan). For some time now, there have been very strong moves towards more autonomy and even separation from Spain.



A warning against bungee jumping without a cord! 'Nuff said!

Literally, "Fall Hazard" in Catalan.



Atenció! Prohibit pujar als ampits.
Perill de caiguda.

Atención! Prohibido subir a los alféizares.
Peligro de caída.

Danger! Climbing prohibited. Fall hazard.

What's missing is the speech bubble saying, "I'll meet you at the bottom. Love you, Honey. Oh, and I'll try to save the camera!"

As with most public signs in Barcelona, this one is written in Catalan, Castilian (what many of us known as *Spanish*), and English.



A sign outside the Barcelona Olympic Stadium.

Now, let me get this straight: No roller blading, playing football, or cycling (Olympic athletes excluded, presumably), no killer dogs, and no driverless, black cars.

Oh, but leave all the graffiti you want!



No prissy poodles here, thank you very much.

I quite agree, and nowhere else either, for that matter! Just admit they simply are glorified cats and stop embarrassing the other breeds by calling them dogs. Hmm, but then perhaps the cats would be embarrassed.



Without even reading the text, you just know it's got to be some artsy-fartsy place!

The best part of the place by far was the inside and outside of the building itself, and the very comfortable, deep leather seats in the lobby. As for the art, I guess I just have my taste in my mouth!

I did see one Picasso, an abstract babe with the usual deformed head.



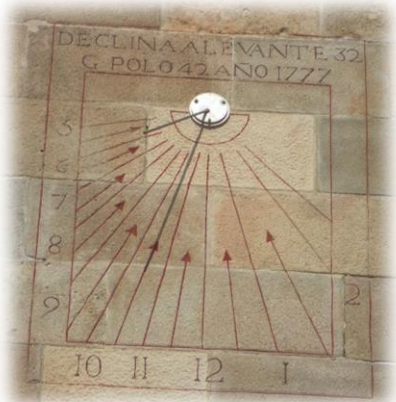
No, this is not a €10-million painting in the modern section of the art museum; it's a sign on the grass along the outside!

I'm reminded of the question, "Under which sign were you conceived?" "I think it was 'Please keep off the grass!'"



Signs on an outdoor escalator leading down to Plaça d'Espanya.

Here are the rules for riding, so listen up! Down the left side: No baby carriages; kids must hold Mother's hand; don't get your foot jammed against the edge; and you must carry little dogs under your left arm. Down the right side: No women in period costume or mourning dresses, and definitely no sitting on the handrail; no black children sitting on the steps; no unaccompanied children (although one would have expected a red slash instead of "NO"); and certainly, no black Crocs!



Yes, it's your basic sundial. However, this one is on the eastern side of a tower while its mate is on the western side, so the folks defending Montjuïc Castle could tell the time during all daylight hours.

10. September 2017, "Travel: Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao"

With it being winter, I'd looked at the possible warmer destinations reachable directly from my home airport, and settled on the three southern Dutch islands just off the northwest coast of Venezuela. I planned two days on Aruba, seven days on Bonaire, four days on Curaçao, and then two more back on Aruba. Together, these islands are sometimes referred to as *The ABC Islands*.

[In December 1991, I visited the three northern Dutch islands, [Saba](#), [St. Marteen](#), and [St. Eustacius](#). According to Wikipedia, "The Caribbean Netherlands collectively refers to the three special municipalities (officially public bodies) of the Netherlands that are located overseas, in the Caribbean: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. The territorial grouping is alternately known as Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba or the BES islands. Although part of the country of the Netherlands, the special municipalities remain overseas territories of the European Union at least until 2015." So, Aruba, Curacao, and St. Marteen have some other, special status.]

10.1 [Aruba](#)

Official Name: Aruba; Capital: [Oranjestad](#); Language: Dutch, [Papiamentu](#); Country Code: AW; Currency: [Aruban florin](#) (AWG)

[Diary] I'd booked my hotel via the internet; however, when I arrived, the owner was out for at least an hour and her mother wasn't able to check me in, although it wasn't clear why. So, I stripped down, sat at a table in the shade next to the pool, and started reading "[Seven Years in Tibet](#)," by Heinrich Herrer. A nice breeze wafted through the palm trees surrounding me. Sometime later, the owner called me via the hotel phone to say that there was a complication. The previous occupants of my room had failed to check out, and she had no other rooms. So, she said she'd make "other arrangements" for me. And she did, but it took some hours.

[Diary] I settled into a hammock in the garden and read my novel until I thought about eating. It was then that I discovered that while I was engrossed in my book, the mosquitos had been feasting on my arms and legs. The restaurant was an open-air space under a very large, thatched roof, and had friendly staff. I ordered a bowl of tomato soup and some Dutch snacks involving sausage. It was all just like Grandma used to make, and hit the spot! Total cost was only US\$10.

Back in my room, I opened the window and door to let the breeze come right in while I worked on this diary. I decided to have a quick shower to wash away the day's perspiration, and that's when I discovered that there was no hot water. I don't mean the hot water taps gave no hot water; I mean, there were no hot water taps! Of course, given the temperature outside, a cold shower was fine. Afterwards, I read some more until lights out at 11 pm. Although I didn't finish up quite where I'd planned to, the detour wasn't unpleasant, and may well have left me in a better situation. C'est la vie! Always have a Plan B, even for Plan B.

[Diary] At 8:30 am, my driver and guide arrived to take me for a tour. She was most informative and took me to several lookouts (lighthouse hill, water tower hill, and natural rock formations), to ancient lava beaches, an old, very tiny Catholic church built in the middle of a cactus patch, and a donkey

refuge. Along the way, we stopped to have some local ham and cheese snacks and coffee, then later on, some cold drinks. On the way home, we stopped at a supermarket (most of which are run by Chinese) where I bought some emergency rations: several liters of milk, some nuts, and a chocolate bar. I also managed to get a complete set of local coins and the smallest denomination banknote for my currency collection. All told, we were gone more than four hours.

Back in my room, I settled down to several tall glasses of cold milk while I brought this diary up to date and tended to some email. Afterwards, I went down to the pool and took up residence on a lounge chair in the shade. After a bit of reading, I spent 30 minutes swimming and doing some water aerobics to strengthen my aging knees. Then it was back to my novel. As far as I could tell, all the guests I saw were young people from The Netherlands. So, it was Dutch being spoken all around me. Late afternoon, I got into writing mode, and settled down at my laptop to proof and write essays for my monthly blog. That effort was quite successful.

[Diary] *In anticipation of the mosquitoes coming out to feed early evening, I'd put on plenty of repellent, so was able to have my room window and door wide open while I lay on the bed reading. Unfortunately, the light bulb in my room was so dim, I read for 10 minutes before I realized I had my book upside down! [Don't you just hate that when that happens!]*

10.2 Bonaire

Official Name: Bonaire; Capital: Kralendijk; Language: Dutch, Papiamentu; Country Code: AN, BQ, NL; Currency: US dollar (USD)

[Diary] *At "The Lizard Inn," my home for the next 7 nights, co-owner Rene took me to my room, gave me some information and a quick orientation, and we agreed that I'd formally check in the next morning. I unpacked a few things and then stripped down for the short walk into town for supper. My hotel was located in a quiet neighborhood only five minutes' walk from the sea and there were plenty of streetlights and little traffic. Once I reached the promenade, I turned left and walked another 10 minutes to the so-called downtown. A gentle breeze blew and many pleasure craft of all shapes, sizes, and prices bobbed up and down at anchor just out to sea.*

I stopped at a number of restaurants and looked over their menus. With almost all food being imported, prices weren't cheap, so I kept on looking. Eventually, I found a great place, Paradise Moon. Everyone was eating outside, but most tables were occupied. The waitress asked how many were in my party, and I told her it was just my imaginary friend and me. She smiled, and led me to stools at the bar where she made room for both of us! I sipped ice-cold pineapple juice while I considered my options. I quickly settled on the spicy, shredded pork tacos with black beans and wild rice. The waitress gave me some of her secret habanero pepper sauce to liven it up a bit, and was it H-H-HOT! Each day, the staff makes ice cream, so I had a bowl of vanilla, and it too was great. In fact, the whole experience was wonderful, and by the time I left with a doggie bag of leftovers, I'd picked out dishes for at least two more visits.

[Diary] *Having arrived after the shops closed the night before I was unable to buy any supplies for my kitchen, so I'd ordered a catered breakfast. At 8:30, I sat under the large open-air thatched-roof hut in the center of the yard, and minutes later, Annemieke (the other co-owner and Rene's partner) came to tell me she'd serve my breakfast there. There were plenty of fresh bread rolls, ham, cheese, jam, juice,*

and hot tea. The occupants in the room next to me had assembled their own breakfast, but they ate with me in the communal hut. Two hours later, we'd had some very interesting conversations. They were Friesian [the former Kingdom of Friesland became part of The Netherlands 150+ years ago], and he was a crane operator who had worked on oilrigs, windmills, and mostly large and exotic projects. He worked a month on and then had a month off. I mentioned how much I liked the Friesian flag, at which point the wife went inside, and brought me a present, an eyeglass-cleaning towel in the colors of that flag. I gladly accepted it.

At the office, I filled in a bit of paperwork to become an official guest, and I was inspected by Max, the very large chocolate-brown Labrador who "guarded" the place. After I scratched him a few times, we bonded a little, and he gave his seal of approval. Back in the Netherlands, Rene had been a detective for 20 years, but his passion now was scuba diving, so Bonaire is his Paradise. He and Max go swimming in the sea every morning.

I had expressed interest in diving, so Rene sent me to a place nearby where they would give me 10% discount. I signed up for a 3-hour "Discovery" session the following afternoon to see if I might like to take some lessons. There I sat in the shade of the verandah and chatted with an American man who'd moved there some years ago, and a young woman who was studying travel management in The Netherlands, and was working as an intern on Bonaire for five months as part of her course.

Back home, I set up my laptop in the communal hut and took care of quite a bit of personal and business email while listening to several albums by Enya and Andrea Bocelli. I also filled out several detailed forms required by the dive shop before they would let me participate. A stiff breeze blew all afternoon and, occasionally, guests drifted in and out to say "Hello." The young maid who cleaned my room was from Poland, and came from near my ancestral home area (Poznan), which I'd visited last summer. We chatted a bit and I shared some of my coconut cream cookies with her for afternoon tea. Annemieke was busy painting some outside walls. All in all, it was a very pleasant and productive afternoon.

[Diary] *At 1:30 pm, I set off for the local dive shop and my test dive. Richard, formerly from the UK, was my instructor. I started with a video that explained to me my equipment, safety rules, and basic hand signals. Then I had a 10-question quiz, which I aced. He discussed a number of things and answered my questions. Then we suited up: boots, wetsuit with short sleeves and legs, weight belt, buoyancy vest and, finally, a single tank. We carried our fins to the water's edge across the narrow street in front of the dive shop. As I wear prescription glasses, I needed a facemask that allowed me to see. Fortunately, Rene had one at the hotel, which he lent me, and that was a really good match for my eyes.*

I have to say that the first 20 minutes were "touch and go," as I was not at all comfortable. It turned out there was a lot to remember, and while it sounds silly, every so often I forgot to breathe and got a bit panicked. Plus, breathing in and out of one's mouth only can take a bit of getting used to. I finally broke the initial fear, sank to the bottom some eight feet down, relaxed, and worked on my breathing. Then I managed to practice purging my regulator as well as removing it, locating it behind my back, reinserting it, and clearing it. I also managed to purge water from my mask. Things were going okay, but not great. The water was very clear and there was plenty of activity below, including a school of

quite small fish, some others up to 6" long, a couple of squid, and then came a monster fish more than three feet long. A nicely colored Angelfish also went by me.

As we moved out to deeper water, I had trouble with my buoyancy and as I'm a poor swimmer, always trying to swim with my head out of the water, I had great trouble swimming downwards. Also, the deeper I went, the more pressure came on my ears making them ring quite loud. Of course, I forgot to practice my pressure equalizing technique. To be sure, Richard was very encouraging and was never more than a few feet away from me at all times. Although an option was to swim out to a reef and go deeper, I declined as I felt I wasn't anywhere near ready for that, so we went back to shore, swimming under a boat and around a group of divers who were sitting on the bottom practicing some techniques. Near the end, I noticed that I was biting down extremely hard on my mouthpiece.

As I tried to get out of the water, the full weight of the gear came to bear, and it was hard standing up. Both Richard and I knew that I was no natural "water baby," but he was very encouraging. Halfway into the experience it was quite clear to me that diving was not my "cup of tea." However, it was worth the try. It's often just as important to know what one does not want to do in life, as it is the opposite. Once I stripped off my gear, I showered, dressed, paid my bill (about US\$85), and headed back home, with both ears blocked. 10 minutes after I got back, the dark clouds opened up and let fall a short shower of rain.

[Diary] *I went to visit Rene in his office to have him help me rent a car. Within minutes, he'd arranged for me to be picked up and taken to the rental office. 10 minutes later, a Dutchman arrived, and we drove off together. He gave me a not-so-gently-cared-for Japanese SUV and we walked around it noting all the small dents and rust spots. His wife took care of my paperwork in the office and soon I was on my way. It was a 5-speed stick shift. I'd started with a quarter of a tank of gas, so the first thing I did was to add US\$25-worth. At US\$1.34/liter (US\$5.10/US gallon), it wasn't cheap, at least not by US standards. I noticed that the car was equipped with an altimeter and a compass, and it puzzled me why I'd need either. On the way back to my hotel, I stopped off at a bank and coaxed cash from the machine. I lathered up with sunburn cream, had a small snack and drink, and packed my stuff to go driving for the afternoon.*

I decided to cover the southern half of the island, and within 10 minutes, I was down beyond the airport, going along the southwest coast. The main highway was barely more than one lane wide. The whole coast had a reef and there were literally dozens of snorkeling and diving spots. All the beaches consisted of mostly smooth pieces of coral. There was little sand anywhere. The first 50 yards of the sea out from the beach were that classic turquoise color you see in all the travel brochures for tropical islands. Few people were about.

Quite a bit of the island to the south is dedicated to salt ponds and there are a number of "slave huts" there where the slaves lived that harvested the salt back in the 1850s. The ponds are quite pink due to the bacteria that live in them. A small freighter was docked, and a series of conveyer belts went to the dock from inland more than half a mile. And just as I pulled up to have a look, the conveyer started up and I watched a steady stream of salt pass by and be loaded into the boat. The belt ran just above the ground until it reached the road, at which point it went up and over a bridge and then out to the pier. There were quite a few large pyramids of salt waiting for an excavating machine to load them onto the

conveyor. A number of brown pelicans fished as I sat there. There was not a tree in sight except for a few palms planted by some buildings. Hence, there was no shade.

I came across a guy kite boarding, which involves a short surfboard and a parachute and harness. A bit further on, I came to a kite school where several more people were out trying that sport. Parked there was a big old bus that functioned as a mobile snack shop. It had all the basics except ice cream, the one thing I was after.

In places, there were small pools between the coast and the road, and they contained many mangrove trees. At the southern tip of the island, there was a lighthouse, and I stopped to walk around it. It was being renovated, but was still in operation, working on solar power. While I was there a couple of young Dutchwomen from Utrecht arrived on their bicycles and we chatted for some time.

As the east coast is open to the Caribbean Sea, the waves were much higher and many beaches had lots of flotsam and jetsam, mostly plastic trash. One piece was the door from a full-size refrigerator! I came upon some lakes in which a number of bright pink flamingos were feeding. [In the center of that part of the island there is a large flamingo reserve.] A series of short windmills with long tail fins were working hard in the wind to pump water from an inlet of the sea into the salt ponds, the level of which appeared to be about the same as sea level.

One of the most popular places to visit is Lac Bay, a huge and shallow lagoon protected from the open sea by a long reef. It was the perfect place for windsurfing, and people were doing just that by the dozens. The water was only a few feet deep and a light blue. The beaches there were quite sandy. I parked in the shade of some trees in a place with a good look over the action although I saw little, as I got engrossed in a new novel. Occasionally, I sipped pineapple juice. It was another hard day in Paradise!

From there, I drove a bit further up the east coast until the road turned inland heading for the main town, Kalenji. A couple of speeding drivers tried to run me off the narrow road, but I managed to avoid them, as well as the herd of goats and a second one of sheep that were grazing near the road. Very quickly, I got into thick brush with occasional tall cacti. A small lake had lots of flamingos feeding.

As I neared home, I spied the big, new, Dutch supermarket, so I stopped in for some emergency rations. I'd been without potato chips for nearly a week, so I rescued a large bag of those. However, despite them being my favorite brand, they fell short of my expectations. The place had pretty much everything you'd find in a supermarket in Amsterdam, and while some prices were decent, others were outrageous. For example, a liter of vla (Dutch custard) was US\$5.50, and although I'd been salivating over the prospect of finding some, once I saw the price I lost interest. However, I did find 100-gram blocks of chocolate with hazelnut, and five blocks just happened to fall into my basket. And as I was leaving, I found that each customer was being offered two free packs of bread rolls, so I took those and gave them to my hosts.

Back home, I set up my laptop out in the communal hut, put on an Enya CD, and had a snack and a cold can of Pepsi. It was just the thing after a hard afternoon of touring. It was overcast much of the day with a strong wind, which kept things cool. I worked on my diary catching up the past two days.

[Diary] I headed north up the west coast, and pretty soon the road narrowed to one lane only although there was traffic in both directions. After the flat, featureless, and undeveloped south the day before, I rose a bit into hills, covered in dense brush with cacti towering above, with pockets of houses here and there.

My first stop was at "1,000 Steps." Although there were stone steps carved out of the side of the cliff to get down to the water, there were far fewer than 1,000. I met a couple who'd just seen two very large turtles swimming further along the coast, so I scampered up along a path to see if I could find them. No luck, but I did see a huge fish. It was at least five feet long and with a big girth, and it was mostly bright green. It was buffeted about among the rocks below me by the waves that crashed in. Off the coast, a boatload of divers was getting instructions for an open-water dive.

At each stop, I parked my car in the shade with the windows down, and one time I came back to find a cute frog had jumped aboard, so I took him a few stops further up the road. I'd seen many small iguanas, especially some with bright blue stripes, but today I saw some that were at least three feet from nose to tip-of-tail. There were a number of lakes and one was a flamingo sanctuary; however, no birds were about.

It was paved roads all the way to the entrance of the national park. I paid my US\$25, which bought me a 1-year admission. Mostly, it helped the conservation effort. The unpaved road was one-way, and I could choose the 1½-hour or the 2½-hour route; I chose the shorter as the roads were so poor in places. I didn't need an extra hour of that kind of driving. I came across a lake with many flamingos with their heads underwater feeding. Next came some large iguanas, a goat, and a good-sized bull. The brush was very thick and all the cacti had many, sharp needles. In places, the road was in such bad condition I thought I was driving in Washington D.C.!

Eventually I came out to the northwest coast where I stopped at a couple of places to look over the sea from the 20-foot cliffs. At the final beach, I pulled up in the shade next to an extended local family picnicking under some trees, and I got a great musical concert from their sound system. I started my next novel, a western I'd picked up at a thrift shop. I walked along the beach to find cacti growing right up to the edge of the cliff overhanging the water.

At the park exit, I looked at the small, but informative museum before heading back to Rincon on a road made of concrete. This town was the first on the island, settled by the Spanish some 500 years earlier. Many of the houses were gaily painted in yellow, orange, green, pink, and purple. From there I drove along the northeast coast through thick brush. Dark clouds threatened rain all the way, and given the pools of water by the roadside, it had just rained in that area. Finally, light rain fell and along with the cloud cover and rain, the wind felt great as it came in one window and went out the other.

By the time I was home, it was 4 pm, and I'd had enough of driving. I felt like I'd had a complete aerobics workout while sitting—or should I say sliding around—behind the wheel. Light rain misted as I pulled up at my hotel and setup my laptop in the communal hut to update this diary. I was winding down, as the next day I'd be moving on. After some time on my computer, I lay on the couch nearby to read my novel. Soon, rain started to fall quite heavily, so much so that it started dripping through the thatched roof, right onto my laptop. Fortunately, it was a smallish drip and I shut down my computer

rather quickly and took all my stuff to my room. The rain kept coming down for 15 minutes, so I stayed indoors after that, especially as the mosquitos came out to feed.

The first time I'd eaten at the Paradise Moon restaurant, I picked out meals for my remaining visits, so the anticipation of my "Last Supper" there had mounted. Soon after 7 o'clock, I hopped in my car and drove into town to feast. Imagine my surprise to find that damned place closed! [Don't you just hate that when that happens!] Well, nothing else could compare, so I found a Dutch fast-food place and sulked my way through some chicken strips smothered in peanut sauce. Back home, I sipped a wonderful café au lait while finishing my novel.

10.3 Curaçao

Official Name: Country of Curaçao; Capital: Willemstad; Language: Dutch, Papiamentu, English; Country Code: CW, AN; Currency: Netherlands Antillean guilder (ANG)

[Diary] *The rental car desk was busy with another customer, so I got talking to a man sitting next to me. He was from Brazil, but didn't speak English; however, we got by in Spanish. A customer finished his paperwork to get a car and left, but minutes later was back as he had not been given any keys. We all joked that he'd only rented the car and that the keys would be extra! Then it was my turn. I got the agent smiling especially once she learned that there was just my imaginary friend and me going driving. She thought that was very nice that I'd take him/her/it out for the day.*

[Diary] *The one tourist brochure I'd grabbed at the airport actually had something useful in it, and that was information about my favorite American diner, Dennys. Yes, there was a Dennys in town and it was only a mile or two from my hotel, so I went off to find it. Things were picking up indeed. I hadn't intended to eat, but wanted to checkout their hours and to look at the menu selection and prices. The menu looked just like one back home and the prices looked pretty steep, but I confirmed they were in Netherlands Antilles Guilders (NAF). "Since they took credit cards and I was already there, why not eat something," said the voice in my head. So, I ordered a bowl of chicken noodle soup and a Grand Slamwich: toast containing scrambled egg, ham, sausage, cheese, and other secret ingredients. A side of hash brown potatoes accompanied that. Well, the soup was fresh and steaming hot, just like Grandma used to make. It was almost a meal in itself, so I had a small part of my breakfast sandwich, taking the rest with me. My waitress was friendly and very efficient, so I tipped her well. When I asked if there was a supermarket near, she showed me on the map and then took me outside and pointed me in the right direction.*

[Diary] *I packed a few things and headed out for the afternoon. I soon got the hang of my little car and was putting it through its paces, careful not to go much over the 40 km in-town speed limit, although, frankly, I seemed to be the only driver doing that. I headed north and west along a decent highway for a few miles before taking a major road west. Halfway along that it turned into a series of patches on patches, and was quite r-r-rough. There was plenty of greenery and some hills with the occasional stand of tall cacti towering over the brush. I was headed for what the map said was a lighthouse, but I ran into the security gate at the oil refinery instead. The friendly guard showed me a flashing light on a short pole nearby, and explained that that was now the navigation aid. There was no actual lighthouse. So, I walked back to my car, but as I put my key in the ignition, it sounded its alarm rather loudly. I figured out how to switch that off and tried again. Three times, it refused to let me start*

the car insisting each time that I was a car thief. By pressing all the buttons on my keychain in some random order, I managed to convince the electronics that it was okay to let me start the car. Bloody computers!

From there, I backtracked to a sign that said a beach was nearby. Quite a few cars were there, and they charged admission only for divers. Inside, they had a large array of nice deck chairs in the sun and under a large canvas roof. A waitress in her bikini went from chair to chair around the beach selling drinks, but there was no pressure to buy anything, so I sat in the shade for a couple of hours reading my novel. The beach was quite sandy and people enjoyed swimming and playing. The skies were quite dark at times and light rain sprinkled now and then. Eventually, a heavy rain shower came, and everyone scrambled in under the canvas roof. Here they were at the beach, but they didn't want to get wet! A PA system piped enjoyable music to a large speaker near my chair, which made it a very pleasant afternoon.

After I left the Kokomo Bar beach, I took another exit, into a sleepy village, and I drove the back streets to see how the locals lived. In one area, I came across an inlet in which many pink flamingos were feeding. Fifteen minutes after leaving there, I was back at my hotel having a cold drink and working on this diary. The day definitely turned out much better than it had started.

[Diary] *Around noon, I headed out into the bright sunshine. I drove north and west to a small town with a brightly painted and large church. It had a cemetery surrounded by a high wall, but I found a side gate that was unlocked, so I strolled around. All the graves were above ground in large crypts. Perhaps the ground was too stony to dig. Nena Sanchez, a former Miss Curaçao and now a well-known artist had her gallery in an old plantation house nearby, so I stopped in to look just as light rain fell. All her things were brightly colored and with simple lines and patterns. The old house has been restored and looks down over the flamingo sanctuary that now occupies the former salt ponds where slaves had harvested that commodity in former times.*

I followed the main road and soon ended up at the entrance of a gated, upscale private community, so I turned around and backtracked to an unmarked side road. That led me through heavy brush to a beautiful, secluded bay with sandy beach and turquoise water all the way out. Some 50 people were seated in deck chairs out in the sun or under small, thatched huts. Some resident roosters, hens, and very small chickens strolled around among the sunbathers. I found a shaded picnic table and sat down. I read some information about the island and made notes about future travel and life plans while I watched swimmers and snorkelers. More rain fell, and as the holes in the roof of my hut were quite a bit bigger than the raindrops, a few drops splattered down on my book. However, the rain went as quickly as it came and soon the sun was back out. Behind me, a tree full of parrots chattered incessantly, and an army of small ants paid me a visit.

[Diary] *I went out in the hot sunshine and wound up the rubber bands on my little clown car, and off we raced into the downtown area. Right near the water's edge, I spied a spare spot on the street and pulled right in. At the end of every batch of parking spaces, there was a solar-powered kiosk at which one could buy a parking permit. I asked for English mode and followed the instructions inserting my credit card and paying for five hours. That took me right up to 6 pm, the time at which the meters stopped charging. The total cost was less than US\$5, which I thought was decent.*

Downtown, there is a 300-yard-wide channel that goes inland into a large maze of waterways for cargo ships and tankers going to the big oil refinery. As I walked to the rail overlooking that channel, a large tanker was being pulled through by two tugboats. As I watched, I got talking to a retired couple from near Toronto, Canada. Behind the tanker came an enormous cruise ship. It was Italian and had been moved from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean for the winter.

Ordinarily, the way people cross the channel is by the Queen Emma floating bridge. [Emma was the current queen Beatrix's great-grandmother.] However, as shipping demands, that bridge is driven open by swiveling on a hinge on one end, and pushed against one side of the channel. I watched that happen several times, and it was quite impressive. The whole structure and its 15 supporting "floats" were made of wood. And passengers could stay on the bridge while it was opening or closing. At times, there was so much water traffic the bridge stayed open for 45 minutes. During those times, two ferries took people across free of charge. (I tried both ways of crossing.)

The buildings on both sides of the channel were painted in bright colors and truly looked like a picture postcard. Things were neat and tidy. I walked along a side canal where there was a fresh fruit and vegetable market and some stalls selling souvenirs, which, no doubt, were made by prisoners in China or some other far-off place nowhere near the Caribbean! The place definitely appeared to cater to the cruise ship passengers. Apart from the ship that arrived while I watched, another one (from the US) was already docked just outside the channel at the Megapier. As a result, most of the people I overheard were tourists speaking a multitude of languages.

I stumbled on the island's government center, which consisted of a 3-story set of stone buildings built in 1769. They were painted light orange with white and green trim, and surrounded a large yard that had trees and some small gardens. The flags from The Netherlands and Curacao flew over the Governor's office. Between that and the sea was a long row of very thick stone defensive walls, which enclosed many former storage areas and powder magazines. These had all been turned into specialty stores, and when I went through one arch out to the seaside, I found myself in a series of up-scale restaurants with tables on platforms hanging out over the rocks and water.

By the time I got back to the channel, the bridge was open again, so I rode the ferry while chatting with a couple from Detroit. From there, I went to the old fort and climbed up some battlements to look down into the courtyard full of date palms shading people eating outdoors in restaurants that now occupied the place. Back at the channel, I found a shaded place, and sat and read while watching more water traffic.

10.4 Conclusion

I'd rightly figured that Aruba and Curaçao were far more touristy than Bonaire, so was very happy to have had half my stay on the latter. And as is often the case while traveling, I mix work and play. That said, doing business on a laptop under a thatched roof in the Caribbean in winter somehow doesn't seem much like work.

Bucket List: Having had a good look around each of the ABC's I've no compelling need to go back.

11. October 2017, “English – Part 7: Adverbs”

In [Part 6](#), we looked at verbs. This time, we'll look at adverbs. According to Wikipedia, an adverb (abbrev. adv.) is “a word that modifies a verb, adjective, another adverb, determiner, noun phrase, clause, or sentence. Adverbs typically express manner, place, time, frequency, degree, level of certainty, etc., answering questions such as how?, in what way?, when?, where?, and to what extent?”

I freely admit that adverbs are the part of speech with which I was least knowledgeable, until, that is, the time I started researching this essay. So, it's never too late to learn, even at age 63!

11.1 Some Examples

Modifying a verb:

- The boy ran fast. (*fast* modifies the verb *ran*; it says how he ran)
- It rained yesterday. (*yesterday* modifies the verb *rained*; it says when it rained)
- We keep it there. (*there* modifies the verb phrase *keep it*; it says where we keep it)
- He hardly eats anything. (*hardly* modifies the verb *eats*; it describes the degree to which he eats)

Modifying an adjective:

- The light was quite bright. (*quite* modifies the adjective *bright*; it describes the degree of brightness)

Modifying another adverb:

- The tortoise moved very slowly. (*very* modifies the adverb *slowly*; it says how slow the tortoise moved)

Modifying a determiner:

- I have only this. (*only* modifies the determiner *this*)

Modifying a noun phrase:

- They each brought only one piece of luggage. (*only* modifies the noun phrase *one piece of luggage*)

Modifying a sentence:

- Certainly, we have to find a way to feed the refugees. (*certainly* modifies the whole sentence)

11.2 Single- and Multi-Word Forms

In all of the examples above, the adverb is a single word. However, a phrase or clause can take on the role of an adverb. Consider the following:

- He'll fix the flat tire *tomorrow*.
- He'll fix the flat tire *in a few hours*.
- He'll fix the flat tire *whenever he gets around to it*.

In the first case, the adverb *tomorrow* is a single word. In the second sentence, the adverbial phrase *in a few hours* acts as an adverb even though that phrase contains no adverbs. In the third case, we see an adverbial clause.

11.3 Adverbs Enhance

Consider the following sentence: I swim.

From a grammatical viewpoint, it is complete, and sensible. The verb *swim* is intransitive, in the present tense, in the first-person singular, and it agrees with the subject. However, it says absolutely nothing about how, when, where, or why I swim. We can make such a sentence convey more information by adding one or more adverbs, adverbial phrases, or adverbial clauses. For example:

I swim for exercise for an hour non-stop every Thursday morning at the town pool.

11.4 Adjectives-to-Adverbs

In many cases, we can add the suffix *-ly* to an adjective to form the corresponding adverb. For example, *amazing/amazingly*, *certain/certainly*, *honest/honestly*, *usual/usually*, and *extreme/extremely*. But, of course, that doesn't mean that all words ending in *ly* are adverbs. For example, *friendly* is an adjective. However, we can use the adverbs *more*, *less*, or *very*, to modify that adjective.

11.5 Position and Ordering

Consider the following pairs of sentences:

- I walked to work yesterday. Yesterday, I walked to work.
- There are many islands in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, there are many islands.

Both are correct. As to which you use comes down to whether you want special emphasis, by starting with the adverb or adverbial phrase.

Normally, adverbs don't go between a verb and its object. However, if there is no object, an adverb can follow the verb. If multiple adverbs are used to modify the same target, their usual order is manner, place, and time. For example, *I ran very fast at the track yesterday*.

11.6 Beware of Dangling Adverbs

Consider the following sentence:

At the age of five, my father bought me a two-wheel bike.

Here, the adverbial phrase *at the age of five* is attached to my father, not to me and my bike, and I very much doubt that when he was five, he bought me anything! To correct this, we can rewrite the sentence, as follows:

At the age of five, I got a two-wheel bike from my father.

or

When I was five, my father bought me a two-wheel bike.

11.7 Conclusion

Although adverbs are often not well understood, we use them all the time! How many times today did you use the following: *almost, before, certainly, during, equally, fortunately, generally, how, indeed, just, later, monthly, nearly, obviously, possibly, quite, really, simply, together, up, vaguely, while, and yet?*

In some future conversations, try dropping in the following adverbs: anon, hither, holus-bolus, fain, forsooth, sharpish, thereof, and yon.

12. November 2017, "Signs of Life: Part 10"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from trips to the Hawaiian Islands of [Maui](#) and the [Big Island](#).



As you might expect, this is a stop sign; however, the text is a little unusual. The [Parker Ranch](#) was at one time, the biggest privately-owned cattle ranch in the US. For Wiktionary's meaning of *whoa*, click [here](#).

[Mahalo](#).



'Nuff said; now show me some ID and that you have "sufficient means of support" for that bikini!



You weren't confusing me with some Politically Correct person, were you?

For the record, here's the real P.E.T.A. Also, see here.



You do know that while dogs have masters, cats have servants!



License plate on an under-cover Soviet agent's car.

BTW, when I was in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1992, from a street stall I bought a T-shirt that said the Russian equivalent of, "I was an agent of the KGB." Wikipedia says that KGB stands for "Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti, ... Committee for State Security."



This Hawaii Administrative Rule governs certain actions regarding fishing with nets. I guess it means something to the locals, but I was worried that perhaps I'd inadvertently somehow lain my net incorrectly, and might end up spending years languishing in a Hawaiian prison especially during their severe winters!



There I was, minding my own business driving on a back road on Maui when I came across this sign. “Okay, I’m watching out, but what exactly am I watching out for?”

Wikipedia says, “a long speed hump with a flat section in the middle.” Hmm, how about “speed bump ahead”?



A fish restaurant on Maui.

Read here for the English idiom.



Isn't that just the cutest thing to see on the T-shirts of a honeymooning couple? Now excuse me while I throw up!



You're not fooling me! I know this has absolutely nothing to do with a donkey. See other possibilities [here](#).



Okay, I give in, what's a Mo'o? Surely not the dress a local cow wears to a luau. Or am I confusing that with a muumuu (Mo'o Mo'o)?

Au contraire, according to their website, it's an ice cream with a (presumably crushed) cookie in it.



I never could find an official explanation for this road sign. The best I could figure out is that you should go slow, as you can't see very far ahead.



When was the last time you got birthday greetings written using bits of coral on a background of smooth lava pebbles?



So, smarty pants, which of the 50 US states has the British Union Jack on its state flag?

There are various stories about why this might have come about, but I think this part of the Hawaiian flag history remains a bit of a mystery.

BTW, Brit Captain James Cook did name the islands The Sandwich Islands after his sponsor, The Earl of Sandwich.



Ain't that the truth? A hand-made sign in [I'ao Valley State Park](#).



The imposing figure of [King Kamehameha the Great](#) can be seen at the entrances of all Hawaii state parks.

Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–11

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

A.1.1 Volume 11

- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

A.1.2 Volume 10

- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

A.1.3 Volume 9

- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.

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- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)

A.1.4 Volume 8

- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)

A.1.5 Volume 7

- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #80 July 2016: [It's all Greek to Me](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)

A.1.6 Volume 6

- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)

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- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #62 January 2015: [Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)

A.1.7 Volume 5

- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #58 September 2014: [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #56 July 2014: [Technology, Revisited](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)

A.1.8 Volume 4

- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
- #37 December 2012: [Symbols and Marks](#)

A.1.9 Volume 3

- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)

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- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.

A.1.10 Volume 2

- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

A.1.11 Volume 1

- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.

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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
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- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)

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- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things

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- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.
- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan

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- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire