



PATAGONIAN WINDS MAKE
HIKING DIFFICULT. / **Where I've
Been, D16**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2005

SPECIAL MEXICO SECTION

GOING PLACES

New England inns appeal to epicureans

Be a grape-crusher at a Rhode Island vineyard. Learn to make maple syrup in Vermont. Work on a lobster boat for a day in Maine, then cook what you catch.

These are a few of the "Epicurean Experiences" being offered as part of a hotel or inn stay through the New England Inns and Resorts association.

Travelers interested in wine production can turn their hands purple at a program run by the Castle Hill Inn & Resort in Newport, R.I., while the "Maple Magic" workshop is held at the Rabbit Hill Inn in Lower Waterford, Vt. The lobstering experience is offered by the Inn by the Sea, in Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

The lodging organization can also help you find more conventional culinary-themed classes, like pastry-making at the Bernerhof Inn in Glen, N.H.

For more details, call (888) 705-5353 or go to www.newenglandinns.com.

—The Associated Press

CLOSE TO HOME

Burbank's blooms

Legendary horticulturist Luther Burbank (1849-1926) found his life's mission after he moved to California as a young man. Until his death, he cultivated and experimented with all kinds of plants and trees for 50 years at his Santa Rosa home and its four-acre gardens. Mr. Burbank gave the world more than 800 varieties of new plants, including grains, grasses, perennials and shrubs. Among his engineering feats is the Shasta daisy, a quadruple hybrid that he developed over 17 years.

Today, the home and 1.6 acres of the original gardens are open to the public as part of the Santa Rosa Recreation and Parks Department. Guided tours of the home are available six days a week through October and the gardens are open year round. In late summer and fall, dahlias, Shasta daisies, ornamental grasses, peppers, zinnias and asters are among the plants at their peak.

Information: (707) 524-5445;
www.lutherburbank.org

—The Boston Globe

LIST DU JOUR

The bests in 10 categories, from Theme Parks Magazine's first readers' choice awards:

Park (overall): Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio

Park for thrills: Cedar Point
Park for families: Magic Kingdom, Orlando, Fla.

Most beautiful: Busch Gardens, Williamsburg, Va.

Cleanest park: Holiday World, Santa Claus, Ind.

Food: Epcot, Orlando

Wooden coaster: The Beast, Kings Island, north of Cincinnati

Steel coaster: Millennium Force, Cedar Point

Water ride: Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls, Islands of Adventure, Orlando

Themed ride: Spider-Man, Islands of Adventure

—Chicago Tribune

CORRECTION

The Cruising Notes headline in the Aug. 28 Travel section referred to Jewish history theme trips. The Jewish aspects are actually optional excursions on regularly scheduled cruises.



STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS

Guanajuato, Mexico, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1988, climbs the canyon walls onto to nearby hills.

Treasure of the Sierra Madre

Step into the past in colonial Guanajuato

By ANNE Z. COOKE
and STEVE HAGGERTY
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENTS

They were here yesterday evening and they're back today, strolling on the Jardin de La Union Plaza.

There are the two gray-haired ladies walking arm-in-arm, smiling and nodding at friends as they pass.

Schoolgirls in blue-and-white uniforms, totting book bags and licking ice cream cones. Farmers in sombreros, leathery skin creased by the sun, and university students in soccer shirts, laughing and teasing.

"I feel at home, and I don't know a soul," said Christina Cisneros, a student from Arizona, inviting a visitor to share her bench on the main square, in the Mexican city of Guanajuato.

"The older people usually sit here, in the shade. The students sit over there, on the theater steps," she pointed across the street at the Teatro Juarez. "If you wait a little longer, the *estudiantinas* (strolling student musicians) will sing."

Then there was the bearded tourist in rumpled shorts and sandals, cameras dangling. You'd recognize him anywhere. But what you won't see in Guanajuato, a colonial city folded into a steep mountain val-



Frog statues honor Guanajuato's ancient name, "place of the frogs."

ley, are expat colonies or retirees fleeing snowy northern latitudes.

Not that some Americans — count us in — enchanted by sunny courtyards, sidewalk cafés and the advantages of a world-class university haven't been tempted. Guanajuato, settled in 1548 and the capital of

the state of Guanajuato, is one of Mexico's best-preserved old cities, its steep hills and cobblestone streets an echo of its Spanish ancestry. But those streets and stones would be a poor choice of permanent home for unsteady legs and arthritic hips.

After 1988, when UNESCO declared the

city a World Heritage Site, the state government redoubled restoration projects in the historic center and funded programs designed to attract visitors. But with a name like Guanajuato (wah-nah-WHA-toe) — "place of the frogs" — name recognition has been a challenge.

Instead, people seem to discover the city accidentally. Some come with tours to Mexico's colonial mining towns, trips that also include Taxco, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi. Many more come for the Annual Cervantino Festival (Oct. 6-23 this year). A two-week event, it grew out of student skits based on Cervantes' stories and now draws an international crowd with cultural programs from literary seminars and readings, to theater, opera, music and dance.

"Where else can you hear performances by the world's best-known singers and musicians for \$5 to \$20 a ticket?" asked Maria del Rufio Ruiz-Velasco, the state of Guanajuato's director of tourism. Hoping to increase tourism, Ms. Ruiz-Velasco, whose experience includes a decade living in Los Angeles, was promoting the region's new international airport, built between Leon, a growing major manufacturing town, and Guanajuato.

"Three years ago we didn't have a single trained guide here, even in Spanish," said Ms. Ruiz-Velasco. "Now we're collecting visitor statistics hoping to help each attraction learn how to bring in more visitors."

Please see **MEXICO** on **D16**

Mexican matrimony

Destination weddings
double as vacations

By TRACI CARL
ASSOCIATED PRESS

I was never someone who dreamed of a big wedding — or any wedding, for that matter. My motto: Give me the honeymoon, and spare me the frothy white dress.

So when my husband proposed, I said yes — on the condition that we spend an afternoon with a judge and just a few close friends, then run off for a week at the



beach.

He wanted something a little more formal.

In the end we compromised. We got married at the beach, with 70 or so guests, in an event that ended up being cheaper and easier than a traditional wedding, but still unforgettable —

Please see **MARRIAGE** on **D15**

TOM DE WALT / NEWS-PRESS

Get on the bus

Mexico City's tour bus puts
ease, efficiency on itinerary

By LAURENCE ILIFF
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Mexico City's gleaming new skyscrapers and scrubbed colonial facades have been joined by tourist-friendly transportation worthy of the downtown area's budding rebirth.

No more cramming into packed subway cars and dodging pickpockets. No more robberies in street taxis. No more taking your life into your hands on rusting "microbuses" with bald tires and bad brakes.

The double-decker, open-air Turibus offers a unique view of one of the world's largest cities, and a good way to get

Please see **BUS** on **D16**

WHERE I'VE BEEN



COURTESY OF GWEN RIGBY

Gwen Rigby of Santa Barbara takes a break from fighting a stiff wind during a January hike in Patagonia.

In January 2005, I visited Patagonia and hiked the Argentine and Chilean sides of the mountains.

I went with a group called ElderTrekks (800-741-7956; www.eldertrekks.com), and this was a level-5 walking tour. We hiked four to five hours a day, and some took another four- to five-hour extension at three exceptional sites.

We were traveling between sites on the day of this photo. Because walking was supposed to be part of each day, our bus stopped and allowed us to walk ahead. Only a few of us went out and fewer continued for more than half a mile — the winds were 30 to 40 miles per hour with gusts up to 60. I finally gave up and waited for the bus by this tree. Patagonia is known for its summer winds — the tree tells it all. Once back on the bus, they told us that the walk was an intelligence test — the seasoned hikers stayed on the bus and didn't fight the wind.

Patagonia is the place to be right now. Young people from Europe, Asia and the United States were on the trails. It was a friendly and energizing experience. The cleanness and purity of the air — the wind notwithstanding — are memorable.

Note that I'm giving the thumbs-up sign. It's the thing to do in South America. We were told several times not to give an OK sign as it signifies something else there.

—Gwen Rigby

Tell us where you've been. Submit a photo of your favorite vacation along with a brief description of the site, what made the trip special and why others might enjoy visiting. Send entries to Al Bonowitz, Santa Barbara News-Press, P.O. Box 1359, Santa Barbara, CA 93102-1359. Include your name, address and phone number. Photos will be held until publication and will be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Feeling the loss of a unique city

If you've been to New Orleans, you are mourning. If you haven't been to New Orleans, you are mourning because you missed it — for now and possibly forever. Some people have questioned the advisability of rebuilding, given the city's precarious location on wetlands. Even if it is rebuilt, structural damage is so extensive that it's going to take a long time.

The whole aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is overwhelmingly difficult to imagine, and we agonize for everyone involved. It is a nightmare, and shocking to us that in this information age, we can't even communicate.

Our concerns for the people are greatest at this point.

But as travelers, we have our own loss. There is no city that compared with New Orleans with its guaranteed "get happy" vibe.

Whether it was walking around on Bourbon Street listening to jazz with the now-eerily named hurricane drink in hand, or eating jam-

balaya, gumbo, po'boys or beignets, this city made you feel happy. Waiters and shopkeepers were charming and frequently funky, tourists were having an infrequently good time. Now what will become of the French Quarter with its shuttered windows and rich history? And the voodoo tours with a stop at the cemetery where bodies are buried above ground because the water level was so high? And the Garden District with its charming, historic homes?

Most of all, what will become of the people? Will they even live here again?

It is heartbreaking to imagine that New Orleans — on the list of must-visit places — is off the list for now.

Every traveler who has visited is sending heartfelt thoughts and perhaps a little voodoo charm — coming backatcha, New Orleans.

Anne Chalfant is travel editor of the Contra Costa Times in Walnut Creek.

Cruise ships shift away from Gulf Coast ports

By AMY GUNDERSON
THE NEW YORK TIMES

By the time Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast, cruise lines had already shifted ships out of ports in New Orleans and Mobile, Ala. Although the damage is still being assessed, it could be a month or more before cruise travel gets back to normal.

"We do not know when we might be able to resume operations out of New Orleans," said Jennifer de la Cruz, a Carnival Cruise Lines spokeswoman. "The reality is, the situation is so severe right now that resuming cruise operations is going to be a ways off." Carnival moved its two ships that sail out of New Orleans — the ninth-largest cruise port in the country — to Galveston, Texas. The Carnival Sensation ran four- and five-day trips out of Galveston to Mexico early this month, and the second ship, the Conquest, is to begin sailing out of Galveston on Wednesday. Carnival is also considering Tampa, Fla., for departures.

The New Orleans-based Delta Queen Steamboat Co. runs three paddlewheel boats on multiday trips on rivers in the South and Midwest, including the Mississippi River. Employees were moved to Buffalo, N.Y., and Memphis, Tenn.,

ahead of the hurricane, and no cruises have been canceled, although New Orleans has been removed from itineraries through this month. "We are planning on a minimum of 30 days," to return to New Orleans, "but it will probably be considerably longer," said Bruce Nierenberg, chief executive of Delta Queen.

Norwegian Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean operate seven-day winter-season cruises to the western Caribbean out of New Orleans, but in the first few days after Katrina they were taking a wait-and-see approach to itineraries. The 2,000-passenger Norwegian Sun is scheduled to begin trips on Oct. 16, and Royal Caribbean has trips to the Caymans and Mexico starting in December. Any moves by Norwegian will be relayed to travel agents, said a Norwegian Line spokeswoman, Susan Robison. "Ninety-five percent of our business is through travel agents, and we will let them know as soon as we make a decision."

If a cruise itinerary does change, passengers will be offered a refund. Airfare, if booked through the cruise line, will be changed without fees. Those who bought air tickets to the affected ports independently might also find the airlines flexible on changes.

Spaniards struck gold in Guanajuato

SPECIAL MEXICO SECTION

■ MEXICO

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Since bilingual signs are absent from most museums, understanding what you're seeing is hit or miss. For this, a good guidebook — check out "Colonial Mexico" by Chicki and Oz Mallan, a Moon-Avalon guide — will fill in the gaps. But recently the state produced several first-class travel publications, in English and Spanish, with lists of attractions and recommended hotels.

Guanajuato, at an elevation of 6,583 feet, was first explored around 1526 when Spanish miners searching for treasure found gold and silver. By the time the town was officially chartered in 1570, 15,000 people were already in the area, living in houses perched on the canyon walls, one above the other, each small plaza linked to the next by steep stone stairways and winding paths.

The big bonanza, the silver strike that put Guanajuato first among Mexico's many mining towns, didn't come until 1760, when miners hit a fantastic vein of silver at the Valenciana Mine. Worked by Chichimeca Indian laborers forced into virtual slavery, the mine was a money-pit, producing one half of all the silver Mexico sent annually to Spain, and one-fifth of the world's total supply.

To get an idea of the human cost of supporting Spain, take one of the one-hour mine tours led daily by English speaking guides. Joined a group of 15, we climbed 150 feet down into one of the original shafts, descending into the gloom on a steep rock staircase. (The mine entrance is northwest of town, on a side road off the Panorama Highway — Carretera Panorámica — which circles the city.)

"It was horrible work," said guide Omar Guerra, handing out hard hats and leading the way to a dark hole in the ground. "The Chichimecas carried 400 to 500 tons of ore to the surface every day, carrying 80 pounds at a time in leather bags. It took a ton of ore to get a half pound of silver. The average worker died of lung disease after eight years."

Silver from the mine — and gold, found in smaller quantities — paid for the Church of San Cayetano (also called the La Valenciana Church), across the road from the mine. Built in 1788 by the Valenciana Mine's owners, the Obregon-Alconcer family, the church is Guanajuato's most beautiful and a classic example of churrigueresque architecture. Swirls and curves decorate the pink stone facade, and the interior is a riot of carved and gold-gilt shapes, designs and figures.

Don't miss the city's most unforgettable — and its weirdest — attraction, the Mummy Museum (Museo de las Momias), a collection of 117 parched cadavers. As the guides tell it, the story started in 1885 when the local cemetery ran out of room, forcing new arrivals into graves beyond the boundary. The incident was forgotten until 1901, when local builders unexpectedly unearthed dozens of bodies, each preserved by the minerals and salt in the soil and as stiff and leathery as an old boot.

Not sure what to do next, the local doctor, a Frenchman, stood the bodies up in a nearby outhouse where visitors came to gawk at them, until suddenly some genius said, "We could make a business out of this!"

And so they did, displaying the mummies — men, women, children and infants — in glass cases under subdued light in a rambling one-story building. The display is more



STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS

The fountain of Plaza de San Fernando offers an oasis within the city.



Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato in 1886. This building was the artist's childhood home.

bizarre than gruesome, but wandering from room to room does tend to provoke reflections on mortality.

Here's a lady in her best leather boots, a man wearing nothing but socks, babies in rotted hand-sewn clothes, women with their heads propped on velvet pillows and old men with clenched hands. Don't be surprised if maintenance is ongoing as you pass, mostly consisting of energetic dusting.

Guanajuato's other special museum is dedicated to the muralist and painter Diego Rivera and occu-

pies the home where he spent his childhood. A narrow, three-story house furnished with period beds, chairs and tables, it's spacious and pleasant, with nice courtyard lighting and plenty of room for a family.

The very sort of privileged household, in fact, that tends to produce socialist thinkers like Mr. Rivera. Climb to the second and third floors to see a collection of 90 art works, with drawings, watercolors and paintings.

But these are just a few of Guanajuato's treasures. You'll need three

IF YOU GO

Information: The Tourism Office is at Plaza de la Paz 14, across from the Basilica of the Virgin of Guanajuato (La Parroquia Church). See www.guanajuato-travel.com (in Spanish); www.tripadvisor.com (English); and www.visitmexico.com. Send requests to info@guanajuato-travel.com.

Airline connections: Book tickets directly to the Leon/Bajo Airport (BJX), or fly through Mexico City, five hours away and connected by daily bus service.

Dining: La Tasca de la Paz has local specialties at the café on the Plaza de la Paz, city center; Casa Valadez serves lunch and dinner in a bistro atmosphere on the Jardin de la Union Plaza; El Jardin de los Milagros offers candlelight dining with Chef Bricio, 80 Calle Alhondiga.

HOTELS

Hotel Posada Santa Fe: Rooms for two from \$90. Central location, old but historic home. E-mail requests to reservas@posadasantafe.com.

Holiday Inn Express: Rooms for two with full breakfast from \$86. Three miles from the center. Book with Holiday Inn (800) 465-4329.

Quinta Las Acacias: Standard suites for two from \$185. Up a steep hill. (888) 497-4129; www.quintalas-acacias.com; e-mail quintalas-acacias@prodigy.net.mx.

Hotel San Diego: Rooms for two from \$80. Historic building in city center. Requests to sandiego-hoteler@prodigy.net.mx.

or four days, at least, to see the rest: Churches, haciendas, gardens, museums, and the Hidalgo Market, in a two-story, open-air structure. Shopping for silver jewelry is a must, along with Talavera-style pottery.

To see it all you'll have to come back, but if you're like us, you'll want to. As the old saying goes, "Guanajuato is hard to pronounce, and hard to forget."

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty are Marina del Rey-based freelance writers.

Mexico City impresses with its rolling attraction

■ BUS

Continued from Page D14

around the central part of town. The Turibus is quickly becoming a Mexico City icon, with the number of London-style, bright-red vehicles jumping from just one when the service opened two years ago to 15 today.

The buses now form a circuit through most of Mexico City's top tourist destinations: the historic downtown, which is undergoing a massive renovation; Reforma Avenue, studded with statues, including the Angel of Independence; the swank Polanco neighborhood, with its luxury stores and pricey restaurants; the leafy, museum-laden Chapultepec Park; and the hip Condesa neighborhood.

There are 130 sites of interest along the route, with 25 official stops where riders can get off and on. Just about the only major area of interest the bus doesn't cover is the southern neighborhood of Coyoacan. Tickets are sold on the bus. For the equivalent of about \$10, visitors to this centuries-old capital founded by the Aztecs can hear recorded descriptions of the sights in five languages (including English) via head-

phones. A security guard and multilingual guide also are on board.

The entire tour takes about 2½ hours, depending on traffic. Two- and three-day passes are sold at a deep discount over the one-day rate. The daily service (except Christmas Day and New Year's Day) runs from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The success of the Turibus, which carries about 15,000 people a month, is not only because of the Mexican capital's growth as a tourist destination with the addition of public works projects and street police. A tribute to its popularity, a spokesman said, is that most riders are residents of the capital and its sprawling suburbs, which combined are home to 18 million people.

"One thing that has truly been surprising is the number of people from the city who are taking the bus to get to know (downtown) better," said spokesman Carlos Betancourt. Sixty percent of riders are in that category, with 20 percent from the Mexican interior and another 20 from foreign nations.

One Wednesday each month, Turibus offers a private tour of the museum dedicated to the late Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, followed by a live jazz show, and a late-night bus tour that begins at 9.

IF YOU GO

Information: Call Turibus at 011-52-55-5563-6693 or 011-52-55-5598-6309. Several languages, including English, are spoken.

Detailed information in Spanish is at www.turibus.com.mx (Flash 6 required). An English-language version is expected later this year.

The Turibus may be boarded at 25 locations along its circuit. The most popular include Auditorio Nacional (National Auditorium) in Chapultepec Park; Casa Lamm cultural center in the Roma neighborhood; and the Zocalo plaza in the center of historic

There also are special tours of the Papanote children's museum, and Thursday night bus tours.

So, have there been any complaints? A few, said Mr. Betancourt.

There are no restrooms aboard the buses, but riders may get on and off as often as they like. Except in winter, would-be Turibus passengers should take a hat to avoid getting sunburned.

Also, Mexico City is awash in street protests that often close major thoroughfares, such as Reforma,

downtown. Find a complete list of boarding locations on the Internet site given above (on the lower left side of the home page).

Touring resource: The Mexico City government has a tourist site, www.mexicocity.gob.mx, with information in English (in the yellow bar on the upper left side of the page, click on "English" if site opens in Spanish). Find basic Turibus information by going to "transportation" under "for leisure" at left under the yellow bar. Find phone numbers by clicking on the "i" icon.

which forms the backbone of the downtown area. Luckily, the buses have been able to take alternate routes.

Finally, Mexico City traffic can be brutal, although peak demand for the Turibus is from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., which avoids the worst traffic and the rain that usually falls on summer afternoons.

"There is a profound renovation going on in the city," said Mr. Betancourt, "and the Turibus is part of that package."