

THE INSIDERS SKETCHING DESTINATIONS

DEBBIE MACKINNON
ARTIST

CITY: Istanbul has everything to inspire a sketchbook: the bustle of the fragrant spice bazaar; men washing their feet in the mosque courtyard; a rooftop restaurant view of the glittering minarets of Hagia Sophia; a glass of apple tea at a tiny sidewalk cafe; a ferry ride along the Bosphorus. Every day is a drawing adventure; goturkey.com.

COAST: Britain has so much variety in its coastline. Devon is a favourite spot, with its Dartmoor stone cottages and traditional riverside pubs. Verdant yellow and green meadows, ringed with cow parsley, overlook the switchback coastal path. Or try the remote Western Isles of Scotland, where the dramatic coast on the Isle of Harris reveals stunning white sand beaches (but freezing cold water); visitbritain.com.

COUNTRYSIDE: I sketch on a traditional *shompoo* boat for two days, travelling down the Mekong from northern Thailand to Luang Prabang in Laos. Sporadic heavy rain gives way to mist, cloaking the lush mountains, as the boat travels down the river. I draw chickens, villagers and their houses in ethnic villages along the banks.

ISLAND: Vanuatu provides incredible opportunities: I sketch local kids on the beach, and in a *kastom* (traditional village), brightly dressed ladies at the busy food market, and even sketch on the rim of one of the world's most accessible volcanoes in Tanna; vanuatutravell.info.



TAKE: A sketchbook that easily fits in your day bag, or even your pocket, fine line pens, plus a glue stick. Keep equipment light so you won't be put off actually making a drawing. You can always add some colour back at your accommodation. I carry a small watercolour box and a couple of water-reservoir brush pens

(one holding plain water and one with ink).

TIPS: Anything can be inspiring if you just take a moment to look. Draw on anything to hand — maps, postcards, menus, place mats, museum brochures. They can all be stuck in your book later. Don't be a harsh judge of your work; even a quick scribble will recall the moment.

Debbie Mackinnon is the founder and director of me Artspace in St Leonards, Sydney. An exhibition, *Drawing the Line — Sketchbook*, opens at the gallery today and runs until March 6. It offers glimpses into the sketchbooks of 10 artists and there is an associated sketching workshop program; debbiemackinnon.com; meartspace.com.au.

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Book by March 31 for savings averaging 20 per cent on train passes in France and Germany plus Eurail deals; book by March 8 for discounts on selected Eurostar routes; raileurope.com.au.



AAT Kings supports the Rainbow Springs Kiwi breeding program in Rotorua on New Zealand's North Island; visit the facility and learn more on the operator's Rotorua Discovery tour; aatkings.com.



Lonely Planet's Guides app has launched with 38 cities in the detailed mix of maps and insider tips, from Bangkok to Barcelona; free for Android and iOS; lonelyplanet.com/guides.



As alternatives to resort stays, renting units and luxury homes across French Polynesia is the big new thing; the three-bedroom Te Tavake villa on Tahiti's west coast starts at \$3694 a week; tahiti-homes.com.

HOME AND AWAY



Bethany is a name synonymous with arguably Australia's most colourful political couple, Joh and Flo Bjelke-Petersen. The Kingaroy farm, once their home, is the location of four pretty self-contained holiday cottages. Joh and Flo married in 1952 and the following year moved into a new brick house on the farm, where they lived until Joh, Queensland premier from 1968 to 1987, died in 2005 and Flo later moved to a nursing home. To get to the cottages, check in at the old wooden house where you'll be met by their son, John, or his wife, Karyn, and then drive along a dirt track, past avocado trees and grazing cattle, and up a hill that offers stunning views across the farmland of South Burnett to the Bunya Mountains. The one and two-bedroom cottages have reverse-cycle airconditioning and a fireplace for chilly winters. There's also a three-bedroom farmhouse for rent. John Bjelke-Petersen runs tours of the farm, which his grandfather Carl established in 1913, that end with tea and the pumpkin scones made famous by his mother Flo, who was a senator for Queensland. From \$140-\$175 a couple a night, including basic breakfast items; children, \$12.50. More: (07) 4162 7046; bethany.net.au.

DOMINIC DUNNE

T&I LOVES

Hipster cafes and galleries are opening apace in Myanmar's newly fashionable Yangon. But the name of The Rangoon Tea House definitely suggests nostalgia. We get lost and stop for directions.



"Over there, climb a ladder," suggests one chap. The next local we ask kindly escorts us to a narrow doorway, beyond which lies a stairway that, if not exactly ladder-like, is rather steep. We climb and climb and then, as if whooshed up a funnel, we're in a big, white room with a high-beamed ceiling and old French windows. There's a pile of green coconuts on the timber floor and a retail area selling branded aprons, teatime accessories and coffee beans. Cute papier-mache figures adorn windowsills and shelves. The menu has an Indian slant, from mutton samosas with jaggery and tamarind dipping sauce and biryanis to thali-style "rice sets". Try yummy triple-cooked tofu chips or an updated version of mohinga, the Burmese national dish of rice noodles, served here in a complex butterfly broth. There are dozens of types of tea, the coffee is robust, or go for a mango lassi; the less cautious could opt for the Toddy Palm Pitcher of fermented palm wine, coconut water, egg white, vodka, gin and kaffir lime served in a terracotta pot. But do watch your step on the way out; 77-79 Pansodan Street.

More: facebook.com/RangoonTeaHouse.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

IN THE HOME

KRINKLE BAMBOO PLATE, \$12.95

Add a splash of colour to the dining table with this bamboo platter in a cheery bird and bush print. Made from fine-ground bamboo powder, vegetable resin and vegetable dye, the 28cm piece is dishwasher safe and stain-proof. Claimed to be virtually unbreakable, this is also a handy option for outdoor dining. More: krinkle.com.au.



SHARON FOWLER

ON THE ROAD

LUMIRA SCENTED TRAVEL CANDLE, 100G, \$24

Lumira travel candles come in a smart black-and-gold tin and T&I's favourite, Oriental Jasmine, smells of wild lavender, rose geranium and white cyclamen as well as heady jasmine. The candles have a burn time of 15 hours and come in a range of fragrances, including Sicilian Citrus, Persian Rose, Tahitian Coconut, and Tuscan Fig. Also recommended as covetable but inexpensive gifts for your favourite travellers. Available online; free shipping within Australia. More: atelierlumira.com/travel-candles/.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

No room at the inn for companionable couples

This is the story of a Japanese ryokan, and how the weaver of a tangled web meets her comeuppance. It's summer in Japan and I've arrived at a hamlet deep in the misty, mountainous landscape of an old ink-brush painting. I greet the owner of the ryokan where I've booked two rooms — one for me and one for my male companion — and, oh, the look of consternation turning to ire as the innkeeper realises I've pulled a swiftee.

Yes, embarrassing to admit, but I lied when I made this booking. I said we were four people, instead of two. Because it's very hard to make a booking for two rooms, one person in each, in a traditional Japanese inn during the high season. When I was making the arrangements, months before travelling, my request for two rooms, one person in each, was turned down by traditional lodgings all over the so-called roof of Japan.

The rugged prefectures of Nagano and Gifu, located inland from the west coast, are intensely beautiful in August, their mountains draped in a rich green tapestry of bamboo, cypress, maple and beech foliage, wreathed

THE INCIDENTAL TOURIST

PRUE MOODIE

in cloud, and illuminated by flashes of fluorescent yellow from harvest-ready rice fields tucked into the valleys. Nagano and Gifu are also home to myriad gorgeous ryokan, in the best of which your futon is laid on tatami mats that still smell fresh, like hay.

At night, you all but boil in a bath (or private natural springs in the upper-echelon ryokan) and then, lounging in your yukata robe, pick languidly at a delicious, complicated dinner.

The experience was never intended to cater for the sole traveller, an agent with Japan Specialist Travel tells me. The term ryokan has become more standardised over the past century. The per person charge usually includes elaborate meals and assumes at least double occupancy of each room. And my theory is that the Japanese are constrained by conscience from charging a single traveller double the per-person rate. Simpler for them to say no, at least during high seasons.

After two weeks of travelling, our last stop before Tokyo is the Kiso Valley, a ravine on the old mountain route from Kyoto to Edo (old Tokyo), known as the

Nakasendo. In a final attempt to organise a traditional experience, my travel companion had discovered an "English-speaking" ryokan in a Kiso village, Tsumago, and emailed to ask for two rooms. He was rebuffed. And so, driven by desperation, I rang that ryokan the next day, and asked for two rooms for four people. The rooms, I was told, were quite small, just big enough for a couple as long as suitcases are closed when futons are laid out in the evening. However, they'd be delighted to offer these rooms to two couples at a small discount off the standard rate. So I took the rooms, giving three false names in addition to my own. The ryokan would not be out of pocket, as we'd pay for four people despite being two. But, now on arrival, how to explain?

In the end, no explanation is necessary. About halfway through my lame story about what has prompted two no-shows and a personnel change, the innkeeper grasps the situation. He doesn't like it, but he gets that we are not a couple and why I resorted to such subterfuge. He withdraws our discount, though, and I am hardly in a position to argue.