

PERSNICKETY TRAVELER

"WE LIVE IN A WONDERFUL WORLD THAT IS FULL OF BEAUTY, CHARM AND ADVENTURE. THERE IS NO END TO THE ADVENTURES WE CAN HAVE IF ONLY WE SEEK THEM WITH OUR EYES OPEN." – JAWAHARAL NEHRU

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Persnickety Traveler!

I've sent this first issue to clients, friends and colleagues who I believe share my passion for travel, in the hopes that it will be a source of travel inspiration and interesting travel tidbits for your wandering mind. In each newsletter, I promise to share only experiences I have had and places I have seen first – hand, in the hopes that sharing my story will motivate you to act on your own wanderlust.



Amy Ferreira

For those of you who didn't already know, last year I started my own travel business, Persnickety Travel, to deliver extraordinary travel experiences. Persnickety caters to individuals, families and groups who want unique vacations custom-designed specifically around their aspirations and interests. With an emphasis on international travel, we work to create journeys that will linger in the heart, mind and soul.

We also place an emphasis on supporting the communities that are important to our travelers and ourselves. We have made a commitment to the Rainforest Alliance to prioritize and advocate travel with hotels and tour operators that have been independently verified to promote sustainable tourism practices in Latin and South America. We also have direct giving opportunities through our Community Giving program, where we will donate 10% of the net proceeds from your trip to the non-profit organization of your choice, be it at home or in your destination country.

In this issue we will explore the idea of "Adventure Travel" in its many forms. When people hear "Adventure Travel" they usually think of rock climbing or sky-diving. At Persnickety Travel, we know that 'adventure' means different things to different people. The dictionary definition of adventure is "an exciting or very unusual experience." By that description some people would consider trying new food an adventure! In fact, my kids consider new pools to be an adventure. So regardless of how you define it for yourself, incorporating a sense of the exciting or the unusual into your travels can be exhilarating and rewarding.

Your friend,
Amy
The Persnickety Traveler

IN THIS ISSUE

ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES

Slovenia
Bahamas
Edinburgh

DESTINATION SPOTLIGHTS

Peru
Croatia

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"One of the best memories of our trip to Hawaii (planned by Persnickety Travel!) was the night we went snorkeling on the Big Island to observe manta rays. We were taken out on a boat with 30 other hearty souls, and jumped in the water. We proceeded to hang on to the side of a giant surfboard-like piece of equipment and wait for the manta rays to find us. After about 30 minutes, they did! It was a once-in-a-lifetime thrilling experience, having these exotic fish swim, literally, right under our noses. The best part was hearing all the squeals from everybody when the manta ray would get really close to them." Michael



ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS:

Hot Air Balloon over the Julian Alps in Slovenia

Whether it's active travel or quaint European culture you seek, Slovenia is a fantastic option for you to consider. This small, beautiful, clean and accessible country can give you the full experience and impact of its more popular neighbors without the touristy crowds. It's also delightfully close to Venice, enabling you cross that storied city off your list at the same time (or revisit it just because you can).

Beyond the vibrant and undeniably beautiful capital city of Ljubljana lies the relaxing resort town of Lake Bled. The glacial lake that gives the town its name lies in the majesty of the Julian Alps. An easy 40 minute walk along mossy paths with streetlamps straight out of Narnia takes you around the entire lake. From every vantage point you can see an extremely small island in the middle of the lake, taken up entirely by a 17th century pilgrimage church, where weddings still take place to this day. No motor boats are allowed, but handmade wooden pletna boats can be rowed by hand to take you to visit the island. And like a fairytale painting, medieval Bled Castle alights impossibly on the top of a cliff face overlooking the town and lake.

Lake Bled is popular with active travelers because the nearby national parks offer hiking, canyoning, rafting, mountain biking horseback riding, rock climbing, sky diving, kayaking, you name it – if you're looking for an active trip amongst the beauty of the Alps, this is a great place to go. Interested in post WWII Eastern European history? You can even live like a king, er, dictator in the very retro summer home of Former Yugoslavian strongman Josef Tito.

My husband is afraid of heights, so when I wanted to plan a balloon ride over Lake Bled we carefully discussed our options to make sure he could handle it. I think he liked the idea of a balloon ride in the abstract... the romance, the adventure, the view – it all sounded great! However, now that the morning had come at last, he was pacing nervously as two gentlemen set up the balloon in front of us. It was a small basket, and fit only three of us snugly – our pilot, my husband and myself. The ascent was quiet and smooth, and the air chilled as we rose over the lake. I was thrilled, however with each foot of elevation I could see the terror in my husband's eyes grow. We flew right over the Bled Castle, which we had toured the day before, while my husband's white knuckles clutched the edge of the basket. The balloon was so well controlled though; our guide was able to take us down, right to the surface of Lake Bled, with the bottom of the basket skimming the water for several minutes. His handling was so expert my husband eventually relaxed – suddenly feeling proud of himself for facing his fears. After gliding over the lake, the pilot took us back up and we soared over the town toward

a grassy meadow we finally came down. We shared a glass of champagne to toast our successful flight while the pilot shared stories of the hot air balloon business.

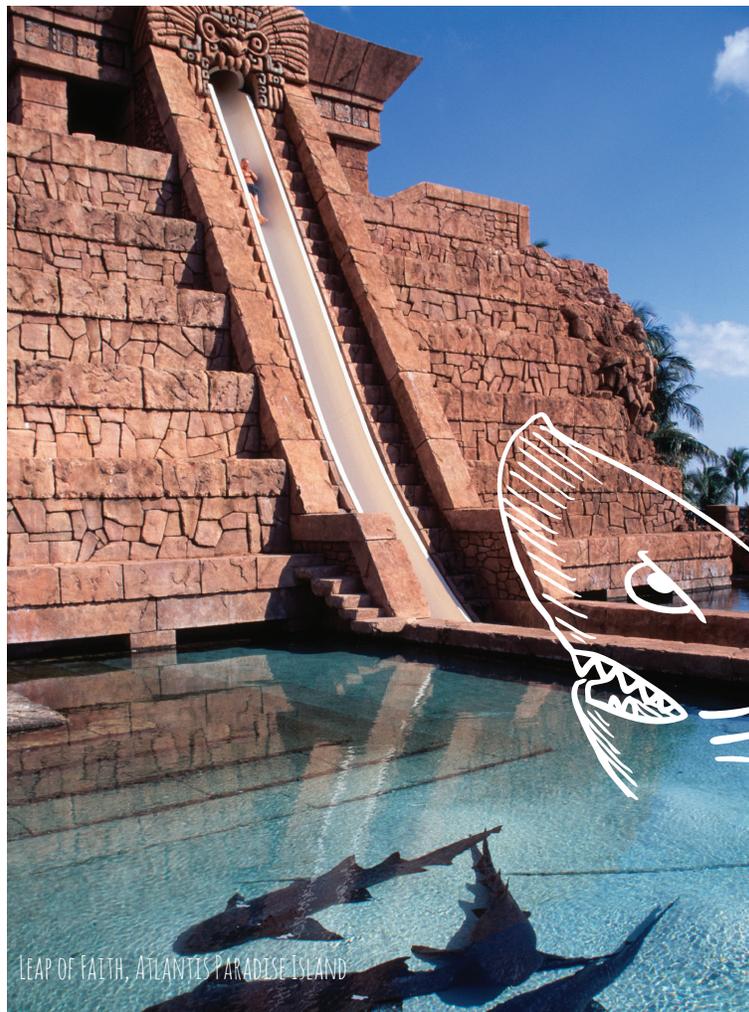
No other experience is quite like ballooning... just helium holding you up in the sky, you float silently above the world – taking in the raw power of the Alps at dawn. It is surely something everyone should do in their lifetime – after all, even my husband, who is afraid of heights, considers it one of the highlights of all his trips.

Thinking of seeing the world from a balloon? Let us know!

Leap of Faith: A waterslide with a shark tank

Genius or madness? The Atlantis Paradise Island Resort in the Bahamas is an enormous resort with dozens of activities and amenities, but is best known for its truly awesome water park. Few waterparks deliver on the promise of ‘something for all ages,’ but this is the best execution of that promise I’ve seen so far. If family sun and fun is where you want to be, then the Bahamas should be at the top of your list.

The most noteworthy slide by far is called “The Leap of Faith,” a slide that starts atop a Mayan temple-looking structure (yes, it’s cheesy) and descends at a near-vertical 60’ drop, through an acrylic tunnel that is submerged in a shark-filled lagoon. Yep, you heard that right – sharks. And not the hammerhead or zebra shark variety without the scary teeth – these are bull sharks. There’s no chance the sharks can get you, and in reality you are going too fast to really see them anyway, so it’s the mental trip that does you in. Oh yeah, and the 60’ drop! Be forewarned, you MUST hang onto your swimsuit. I literally gave an old man quite a show my first time down when I popped out of the tunnel and stood up, so exhilarated by the ride that I was completely unaware my swimtop had slipped (way) down. He and my husband shared a good laugh at my expense – super classy, I know. Didn’t stop me from going back on it though!



Best waterslide ever.

Want a family adventure that will knock your socks (or your top) off? Let us know!

New Year's Eve in Edinburgh

Much ado is made in our country about the New Year's Eve festivities in Times Square, but my favorite crazy New Year's night was in Edinburgh, Scotland. A combination of medieval relics, storied history and a thriving modern cultural scene makes the city a dynamic study in contrast. Every New Year's, Edinburgh hosts what they call their 'Hogmanay' celebration, and it's one of the biggest street celebrations in all of Europe. Just to give you a flavor, let's just say that the three-day festival is kicked off by tens of thousands of men dressed as Vikings carrying torches in a procession through the streets. Then comes music and dancing.... and no, I can't remember everything that happened. Yes, it was freezing cold. And yes, it was so crowded that at one point my feet were lifted off the ground as I moved with the mass of jubilant, friendly people. But I do remember the most amazing fireworks display I have ever seen shooting from the cannons at the medieval Edinburgh Castle, perched above the city, as the ground shook and the whole crowd sang Auld Lang Syne at the top of their lungs.

Ready to shake up your New Year's in 2014? Well now you know where to go! You're welcome. 🌍



DESTINATION SPOTLIGHT: PERU





Peru stands as one of our all-time favorite destinations. Stunning beauty, amazing history, active local culture, great cuisine, and unforgettable wildlife come together to captivate the imagination in a way that is distinctive and welcoming. Add to this the diversity of the Peruvian landscape – spanning rainforests, deserts, mountains, beaches, canyons and everything in between – and there’s really no limit to the adventures you could find yourself in. I’ve shared one of my favorites below.

The Amazon Rainforest

Most photos of Peru feature the green mountains, Incan ruins and colonial buildings of the Sacred Valley; however, there is more to Peru than Machu Picchu. Not to be ignored is the vast wild frontier of Amazon rainforest that is the perfect place for a natural adventure. Ours began with a flight into the VERY small airport of Puerto Maldonado – only 2 gates total. We taxied through the frontier town on our way to the port, where we met a boat to take us to our luxury ecolodge, Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica. One of their trained naturalist guides met us as we journeyed along the murky Madre de Dios river (a headwater tributary of the Amazon). Upon our arrival, we were greeted with ice cold towels and fresh fruit cocktails (did I mention it was a luxury ecolodge?), which was heavenly.

Our lodge, (#10) was a fully screened standalone casita, with a king bed covered in mosquito nets. The room had hammocks, lounge chairs, a private deck area, tons of space, high ceilings with a ceiling fan, and large bathroom with warm water shower – rustic luxury for sure! Since it is remote, all meals are included in your board – and all of the delicious meals are served in their beautiful dining room from fresh, local ingredients. The dining lodge is a large, dramatic, screened in space built around the enormous trunk of a strangler fig (one of our waiters referred to it as the mother-in-law tree). By nightfall, the resort is lit only by lanterns and the generators turn off, leaving the sounds of the forest to come into focus.

Our patient, kind and knowledgeable guide for the stay was Moises. He had grown up in Puerto Maldonado and had a well trained eye for spotting birds, monkeys, spiders, snakes, and local medicinal plants. Our first evening there we took a ‘night walk’ with him and saw all manner of creatures including tarantulas and chicken spiders. Moises used a stick to demonstrate how terrifying large a chicken spider is – this giant beast native to the Tambopata Reserve area, lives in a large hole in the ground and is large enough to drag small birds or even chickens into its nest to eat. I watched where I stepped very careful after that demonstration!

In the morning, the sounds of the howler monkeys woke us. I have heard this unique sound best described as “an extended, whooshy roar – something between the wind blowing through trees and a blast furnace.” It certainly sounds nothing like what you would expect to come out of a monkey. After breakfast, we visited the lodge’s fantastic canopy structure, which stands 100 feet above the rainforest floor. Built with funding from National Geographic, both researchers and tourists benefit from the unique vantage points you achieve so high up in the canopy.



LAKE SANDOVAL, PERU



CAPUCHIN MONKEY

Descending from the canopy we walked the rainforest at ground level, where the trees become the stars of the tour. The forest is truly magical when you walk it with a well-trained local guide, as all of the guides at Reserva Amazonica are. We saw the barren ground surrounding the trees inhabited by fire ants, the dying trees taken over by aptly-named strangler vines, and the ‘walking’ palm trees whose above-ground root systems enable them to move up to 3 feet in a year to seek out sun and water.

Our final excursion was to Lake Sandoval. With the afternoon sun starting to set, we caught intimate glimpses of leaping howler monkeys, caiman, exotic birds and playful otters. After a magical sunset, we began the 3km walk back – in the dark, with our knee-high rainboots sucking and plodding with each step through the mud. The flashlights we clutched tightly in our hands revealed more than just the path ahead; the occasional baby anaconda and jumping spider would appear, which was alternately trying and thrilling for our group. Moises led us on unphased, as he would stop intermittently to help pull someone out of the 8-10” of mud, or point out a large spider web we would have otherwise walked right into.

When we got back to the resort afterward – we were safe but exhausted, covered in mud and DEET. We took off our rainboots, hung them upside down on the porch, went in and took a nice warm shower, and then toddled off to our three course dinner. After a gourmet meal of beef tenderloin and a well-deserved glass of red wine, we were more than ready for bed. The Lake Sandoval trek was definitely an intense adventure, but it also stands as one of my favorite memories. While the Amazon rainforest might not be everyone’s idea of an enjoyable adventure, for this Persnickety traveler Moises and the other fine staff at Inkaterra took me far out of my everyday life, and provided me an experience that now lingers indelibly in my memory.

Want your own jungle adventure story? Let us know! 🌍

“While traveling in Spain, we rented a car to drive from Madrid to Segovia to see the famous Roman Arch which is over 2000 years old. Having a latte sitting in the shadow of this enormous ancient aqueduct is a must do experience. As we drove off to see the rest of the city, we used a GPS device we rented. The GPS could not keep up with the endless winding streets and continuously told us “recalculating.” We laughed, shut it off, and let our curiosity guide us the rest of the way. We walked to the city sites and ended with an amazing lamb dinner and wine from Rioja.” – Jeanne



UP-AND-COMING DESTINATION: CROATIA

In this charming and historically well-contested country across the Adriatic Sea from Italy, you can see medieval cities, sun-soaked islands, family vineyards and truffle farms, stunning national parks, charming lighthouses and darling coastal towns. An up-and-coming destination, Croatia is a friendly, welcoming and forthright nation with a strong, safe local infrastructure. Set aside what you heard years ago in the news – the Croatia of today has experiences that will amaze you.

My recommended 11-day itinerary starts with a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage City Centre of Dubrovnik (a.k.a. Kings Landing for you Game of Thrones fans). Eat gelato, walk the 7-centuries-old medieval walls that have made this city famous, and do some shopping. Stop for a drink at a local bar that hangs precipitously onto the cliff face outside the city walls. Continue your trip to the sun-soaked islands of Korcula and Hvar, as well as the darling seaside town of Rovinj. Spend a day at the heart-stopping beauty of the National Park Plitvice, another UNESCO World Heritage site. On the Istrian Peninsula stop at a family farm for some local truffle hunting, along with a demonstration and tasting of how truffles can enhance everything from cheese to eggs to honey and olive oil. Take in the beautiful landscapes and small medieval towns along the way as you end your trip in Pula, where you can visit one of the best preserved Roman amphitheaters in all of Europe, dating back to the 1st century.

If your style of adventure combines activity with a healthy dose of culture, consider Croatia. From sailing to hiking, fishing to kayaking, you can fit in a little of everything (in between noshing on the world's best mussels and killer Plavac Mali red wine). 

“One of my most memorable travel experiences was during a trip I took with my sister and a couple of friends in 2011. The standout moment was canoeing down the Zambezi river. I was in one canoe with a friend and the river guide. My sister was in the other canoe with a friend and a river guide. It was relaxing and peaceful. Our guides were so friendly and full of information. As we floated along, I noticed our guide started picking up speed...A lot of speed. I was oblivious and asked, “Cool! Are we racing my sister?!” to which the guide answered very matter-of-factly, “No, Miss... We are being chased by a hippo.” What?! Sure enough, everyone, except me, looked behind us and shouted, “We ARE being chased by a hippo!!!!” I looked straight ahead, never looked back and was certain I was going to be swallowed by a giant hippo. Fortunately, our guides were very skilled, remained calm and maneuvered us away from the curious (ahem, ferocious) hippo. My adrenaline was pumping and it’s a story I’m happy to be alive to tell!” Kim



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TRAVEL FAQ

I am often asked why someone would use a travel agent. Since so many of us came of age the same time as the Internet and online travel sites – I will share some thoughts:

I think online booking tools are best for simple trips. For example, if all you need is a flight, or a cheap flight-hotel package, book online. For more complicated travel, like international travel or group travel (more than 4 people or more than one family), I believe using a travel agent like Persnickety is the way to go. Persnickety will listen to what you want, and talk you through your options. We think of things you haven't thought of... that's our job. We will be your advocate if anything goes wrong. Persnickety will make sure that the food meets your diet, and that there are trustworthy children's activities and services that your young brood will like. Persnickety can steer you toward more reputable choices, and recommend less crowded times and days to visit the most popular sites. We have access to different inventory than the major online sources. We can coordinate information between groups or families with different travel needs or itineraries. And in so doing, Persnickety will save you the extraordinary investment of time and energy you would have expended in doing all these things yourself.

So there you have it! The Persnickety POV.



BITS & BLURBS



DO YOU HEART A CAUSE? Then we do too!

We developed our Community Giving programs to support the communities that are important to our travelers and ourselves. 10% of all net earnings from your itinerary can be donated to the non-profit organization of your choice. Participation is easy! Just let me know you're interested before you book. (Hint: this is a GREAT idea for groups)



We are a Rainforest Alliance travel agency!

Persnickety Travel is excited to be a member of TOPS, or Tour Operators Promoting Sustainability. This community of travel professionals believes that sustainable tourism has the power to conserve threatened ecosystems, generate sustainable livelihoods for local communities, and mitigate tourism's impact on natural and cultural treasures.



Want to get in touch? Do you have a suggestion, comment or idea for a trip or a future newsletter?

Email us!
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"IT'S A DANGEROUS BUSINESS, FRODO, GOING OUT YOUR DOOR. YOU STEP ONTO THE ROAD, AND IF YOU DON'T KEEP YOUR FEET, THERE'S NO KNOWING WHERE YOU MIGHT BE SWEEPED OFF TO." – J.R.R. TOLKIEN

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