

TRAVEL

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IRIS SANDERSON JONES

Vacation 101: Do your homework

Last week, Dee Head of Farmington asked me where to go for a spring weekend with a budget of \$200. Several weeks ago, Sandy Pennington of Novi and Jane Eibaus of Bloomfield asked what they should do with two weeks in China. This week, Sharon Churchfield of Plymouth wants to know where to go to celebrate a 25th wedding anniversary.

All these people are really asking the same questions. Where should I go? What should I do when I get there? How do I get the information I need to plan a great vacation?

The answer in almost every case is ask for the facts, ask for help and ask somebody who has been there. The essential word is "ask."

If you don't know where you want to go, you should probably start by talking to friends and co-workers and by spending some time in your local library.

The downtown Detroit Public Library has a huge travel department. Almost every local library has at least a few shelves of travel information. Ask the reference librarian to show you where the maps are. You can spend a rewarding afternoon just browsing through maps of your area of interest.

Step two is to contact the government tourist bureau of the city, state or country that interests you. Three steps: Call the Detroit Public Library travel desk for an address. Call telephone information for the capital city of the state or province that interests you. Call telephone information in New York City, where most foreign travel offices are based.

Tell the operator what government tourist office you're looking for and chances are she will find you a number.

These governments spend millions of dollars creating literature for travelers. All you have to do is ask for it. That works almost all the time, although I still haven't heard from the China National Tourist Office in California, which must have received my letter almost four months ago.

Jane Eibaus and Sandy Pennington couldn't wait for that, because Jane's daughter Renee will only be in China until midsummer. They had already done their basic library research so they took the next step. They asked me, and through me, my readers, for advice.

Several of you wrote to me with good information. Virginia Hayward of Ann Arbor "had a most successful trip — 21 days, six provinces — because I picked the brains of my friends who went the year previous." She asked somebody who had been there.

Kathryn Briggs of Farmington has been to China three times and appeared on a public television program, "Travel With Kay." She learned how to ask her Chinese guide about attractions that had special interest to her, like a little-known royal garden.

Barbara Swanson of Canton Township requested and eventually visited the ancient observatory in Beijing and the site of the discovery of Peking Man. All of these people know how to ask questions, and I will share their letters with you in coming weeks.

By now, you have probably contacted a travel agent, maybe more than one. Remember, it doesn't cost you a penny to work with an agent. Commissions from the travel industry pay the agent's rent. Go to your local agent, check out the nearest AAA World Travel office or find an agent that specializes in the area that interests you.

When Micky Jones wrote this week's article on Goa, he followed all of the above, even though he had already visited Goa. He took guide books out of the library. He contacted the Government of India Tourist Office in New York for information. He called an Indian associate he met long ago through his office, and was directed to two specific agencies.

At his friend's suggestion, Micky visited Jays Travel and Tours in Southfield, because it specializes in trips to India. At the agent's suggestion, he contacted India Tours Inc., of Chicago at a toll-free number, (800) 55-INDIA.

You'll find my reply to Sharon Churchfield's questions on this page soon.



Going, going... Goa

By Micky Jones
special writer

A guided tour of India's exotic cities is fascinating, but not relaxing. The cultural shock of extreme wealth, poverty, history, filth, religion, noises, costumes, smells, beggars, languages, animals, customs and foods is hard for many westerners to absorb.

After two weeks touring areas north of Bombay, we flew into the tiny west-coast state of Goa for a few days of relaxation at a luxurious beach resort. The round-trip flight from Bombay to Goa costs \$82, and a four-day, three-night stay at the luxurious Major-da Beach Resort, where I stayed, is still just \$160 per person including three meals a day.

It took less than an hour for our Indian Airlines plane to make the 250-mile trip south from Bombay. Goa can also be reached by train or bus, but we didn't hear good things about the 400-mile ride from Bombay that can take 24 hours or more.

Goa, which is roughly 45 by 40 miles, has 60 miles of uncrowded beaches on the Arabian Sea. Europeans, especially Germans, fly in by the thousands on inexpensive charter aircraft for two weeks of relaxation at one of several large beach resorts.

At one, The Aguada Hermitage, you can rent the one-bedroom villa occupied by Maggie Thatcher or the two-bedroom unit occupied by Indira Gandhi during a 1983 Commonwealth Conference.

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MICKY JONES

Baskets of little fish (above left) are ready to be taken to market in the Indian state of Goa. An Indian woman sells trinkets on a beach in Goa (above), as a sacred cow mingles with tourists (at left).



Showboat Week set to invade Chesaning

By Phyllis Kröger Stillman
special writer

In the old days, when transportation was difficult, isolated small towns situated along a river looked forward to a special time of the year — showboat season, when the outside world came to visit.

Chesaning recreates those magic times every July during Showboat Week. And if you're a frustrated (but talented) performer, you could be part of the magic.

Chesaning has long been known as Michigan's showboat city. Every year since 1937, Chesaning has dusted off its old showboat, the Shawassee Queen, invited a big-name performer (like Tennessee Ernie Ford, Debbie Boone, Steve Allen, or Mickey Gilley) and hosted a week-long party. This year, Polish Prince

Bobby Vinton will be the featured performer during Showboat Week, July 10-15.

For many Michigan residents, though, the famous performers are not the best entertainment during Showboat Week. Each evening's performance features six amateur acts from all over Michigan, selected at an audition in May.

This year's audition is May 3-4, and everyone is invited. All you have to do is show up at Chesaning Middle School, at 6:30 p.m. either night. They'll give you a number, and then you'll wait for your chance to perform for the judges.

Be prepared to wait a while. People really do come from all over for a chance to be part of the festivities. Howell High School freshman Amie Sawallish, 15, went last year with her mother, Cindy. "It was very long. Amie

was one of the last ones to audition. We didn't get out of there until almost 11 p.m.," said Cindy.

Amie said it wasn't a bad experience. "I was a little nervous, but it was fun. The auditions were a little long, but they were well organized."

Amie was selected to appear in the Showboat, and sang "Wind Beneath My Wings" last night. "I had a really good time that night. There were a lot of people there, and I like a big audience."

If people like Amie are any indication, competition is tough. Amie has been singing since she was 5, and performed with various community theater groups, including Ann Arbor Civic Theatre (playing Gretl in "The Sound of Music") and in vaudeville shows with Howell's

community theater. She also performs at weddings.

Jamie Kus, 13, a seventh grader at Hays Middle School in Grand Ledge, is another committed performer. "Jamie is very serious about this kind of thing," said Jamie's mom, Melody. "She's been doing gymnastics since she was in first grade. She's hoping to get a scholarship and maybe even make a career of it."

Like many performers, Jamie heard about the audition through classes. She attends LaDonna School of Dance in Grand Ledge, operated by LaDonna Fair. Last year, though, Jamie tried out on her own. "Jamie just decided to choreograph her own routine and try out," said Melody.

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Jamie Kus, 13, is a gymnast who plans to compete at Showboat Week in Chesaning in June. "I'm more excited than nervous," she said.