

TRAVEL

Couple answers adventure's call on world tour

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Did you ever get the notion to just drop everything and go around the world?
Doug and Tracey Ridenour of Birmingham got the notion, and they did it.
Beginning in the fall of 1992, the young couple took off for a trip that would take them across the Pacific, through Southeast Asia, Europe and home over 11-1/2 months.
"The idea was to move to Australia for a while, my husband had visited there and knew people there," said Tracey. "But getting a work visa was impossible. We thought if we can't work in

Australia, let's just travel."
Armed with Lonely Planet guide books and a special round-the-world air ticket, the Ridenours, married in 1990, began to plan their trip. The special ticket cost \$3,400 each and was valid for a year on Qantas, British Airways and United.
"We rented our bungalow in Birmingham. We put things in storage. Doug works for his family's business, Ridenour Builders in Fenton, for his dad. And he got time off. I worked in an ad agency and they were willing to rehire me when I got back," said Tracey, who now owns her own photo and graphics studio, Creative Force, in Troy.
Their odyssey would take them to grass huts on tropical islands, white water rafting on raging rivers, elephant rides through jungles, a hike to a mountain top to stare into an active volcano and from the teeming, choking pollution of Bangkok to pristine, remote jungles.

The journey began conventionally enough with visits to friends in Denver, California and Hawaii before going on to Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Bali, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Bangkok, Paris, London and Greece.
"In the islands of Indonesia, we were living like kings at \$15 to \$20 a day, really cheap," Tracey said. "It was most unique. Doug and I would say if anyone could tune in to us with a video camera they would not believe what we were doing."

Backpacking, staying at hostels or renting inexpensive apartments and avoiding the usual tourist spots helped save money and make the trip more enjoyable.
"In Fiji, we stayed on an island in a grasshut with electricity from a generator," Tracey said. "It was run by an Australian married to a Fijian woman. It was \$12 a day plus diving."

The Ridenours stayed with a group of 16 divers from Scotland, Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

"A boat came around every two weeks, so there we were stuck with these people, sort of like an Agatha Christie mystery. It was just such a neat place, and the Fijians are just such warm people," Tracey said.

The diving, she added, was "fantastic" with "abundant, colorful and unbelievable life."
The Ridenours love for outdoor adventure found its fullest expression in New Zealand where they hiked, rafted and bungee jumped for a month before moving on to Australia.

Tracey said New Zealand is the place she would most recommend for first-time travelers, both for its beauty and its activities.

In Australia they rented an apartment in Melbourne for three months, which became a base for exploring the great island.

"In Australia, we probably traveled more than the Australians ever travel in their lives," Tracey said. "We took trains from Alice Springs to Adelaide. We drove along the coast from Perth."

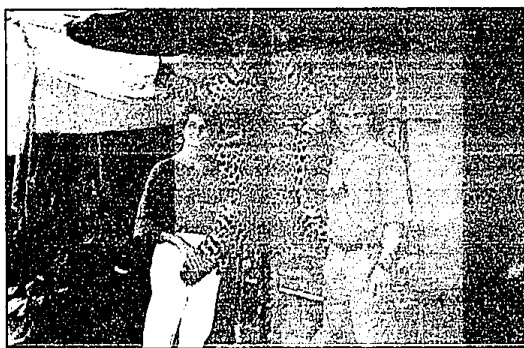
As they moved into Indonesia, Malaysia and mainland Asia, the Ridenours were confronted with unfamiliar cultures and unexpected beauty.

"Bali was one of my favorites, but every spot had a wonderful point about it," Tracey said. She said the main activity was just watching the people, absorbing their culture, spending time to talk with them. Often the only belongings they had were fit into a backpack.

"It was actually very easy, you can get rid of a lot of stuff following the sun. We didn't know what to do with a lot of clothing. There were no fashion police there," she said.

Except for a minor confrontation on the Malaysian-Thailand border, they didn't encounter any problems on their journey.

"Nothing major happened to us, we were not robbed. Now we



Shopping: Tracey and Doug Ridenour enjoyed the bazaars of Europe where even leopard skins were available.

look back and say, "Wow, were we lucky," she said. "Thieves are very prevalent and very good at it. We were very careful."

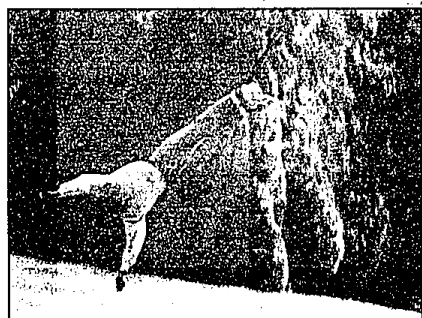
The Ridenours credit the Lonely Planet guides for giving honest, down-to-earth advice on the countries they visited, especially on potential crime problems.

"The Lonely Planet guides were the bible," she said. "But we also found out things from people we met. 'Where did you guys stay?' 'What do you guys recommend?'"

Not all adventures were easy or enjoyable. Tracey said she'll never go whitewater rafting again after her experience in New Zealand.

But there were images that will never be forgotten - Doug's trip to the top of an active volcanic mountain, Balinese women carrying high baskets balanced on their heads, trance dances, a battle between Thais and Laotians to catch the largest catfish (more than 600 pounds), and the many native arts and crafts found everywhere in Asia.

When the Ridenours returned to their Birmingham home, they gave their neighbors a slide show on their garage door.



Away we go: Tracey Ridenour goes for the gusto as she bungee jumps in New Zealand.

"We had a great time and now we have an 18-month-old son, and will never do it again," Tracey said.

She said that maybe, someday,

they would be able to take their son, Dean, on an adventure trip, but for now they have their photographs and rich memories of a world of adventure.



Ball balance: The women of Bali carry heavy baskets of fruit to market on their heads.

GREAT ESCAPES

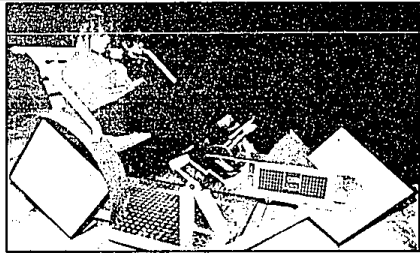
Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 691-7279.

TELL US YOUR STORY

We want to hear from you! Have you been someone interesting? Have you had a special adventure? Is there a quiet island you'd like to recommend or a highly promoted place you'd like to warn against? Do you have special tips for other travelers to make their journeys easier? Have you met some interesting people in other countries that you'd like others to know about? We want to share your stories and your color pictures on our travel page. Call Hugh Gallagher at 734-953-2118, or fax him at 734-591-7279 or e-mail him at hgallagher@oe.homecomm.net.

SQUARE WHEELS

COSI Toledo has a new exhibit, "Square Wheels... Driving Science Home" May 28 to Sept. 7 in an 8,000-square-foot exhibition that includes 30 life-size,



Square wheels: What's it like to drive a vehicle with square wheels? These visitors to COSI, Toledo seem to be enjoying it. The road is specially designed to conform to the shape of the wheels. It's all part of learning about the science of cars, through Sept. 7.

interactive opportunities for visitors.

Using the automobile as an ingenious avenue to explore basic science concepts, "Square Wheels" breaks this familiar mode of transportation into its parts and allows visitors to discover science through 30 larger-

thing.
COSI Toledo, 1 Discovery Way, Toledo, is a hands-on science, learning and fun center that opened last year. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is \$5 for children 2-18; \$6.50 for adults; \$5 for seniors and \$25 for a family. Call (419) 244-COSI(2674) or visit their website, www.cositoledo.org.

SUPERIOR SHORES

West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation is sponsoring a fall trip to the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minn., Sept. 16-20.

The luxury motor coach trip will travel along the north shore of Lake Superior. The two days and two nights in Ely will include special programs from the staff of the wolf center. Naturalist Jonathan Schechter will escort the tour.

The trip costs \$625 per person

based on double occupancy, \$695 per person based on single occupancy. This includes round-trip transportation on a motor coach, four night's lodging, guided tours and educational programs, all meals and taxes. A \$100 deposit is due by July 15, the balance due by Aug. 14.

For more information, call (248) 738-2500.

CHINA TRIP

Teacher Kim Dalrymple will lead an excursion to China, Oct. 9-20, including stops in Beijing, Xian, Hangzhou and Shanghai. Dalrymple teaches Chinese language and culture at Washtenaw Community College and Schoolcraft College. While the tour will visit such world-famous attractions as the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square and the underground terra-cotta warriors, Dalrymple plans to incorporate additional interactive and educational elements.

The tour is being arranged by

Seminars International Inc. For more information regarding cost, itinerary and enrollment, call Seminars International at (800) 541-7606.

MY KIND OF TOWN, CHICAGO IS

West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation is sponsoring a pre-Christmas weekend in Chicago, Dec. 4-6. The trip features two nights at the Inn of Chicago, within walking distance of fine restaurants, department stores, theaters and museums.

The trip costs \$209 per person based on double occupancy, \$259 per person based on single occupancy and \$95 for a child (under 18 years of age) who stays with an adult.

A non-refundable deposit of \$50 must be made for this trip by July 1. Final payment is due Oct. 1. (Trip deposit and payments are non-refundable.)

For more information, call the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation at (248) 738-2500.

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