

TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



The world's a year-round bazaar

There is a Christmas gift drawer in my house that I fill up as I travel. There are silver charms and chunky Caribbean earrings for my niece, English soccer books and Indian record albums for my nephews, a tropical shirt for my son and miscellaneous books, cassettes, stamps, coins and cookbooks for others.

Any traveler can save time, money and take some of the hassles out of Christmas shopping with a little forward planning this time of the year. The trick is to identify or set up a special interest for as many people on your Christmas list as possible.

Many simple gifts are available in other places that might not be found here. The main considerations are: is it something I can carry home? Can I afford it? Is it a gift I couldn't buy at home?

The gift doesn't need to be a five-foot-high carved Indian elephant to be a success, as I discovered recently when I took a box of travel trinkets to a Christmas party.

The most popular gift was not the silver spoon, the tiny wooden statue, the cookbook, the doll or any of the other exotic-looking gifts. It was a first edition stamp of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi.

You can't find a gift easier to buy and carry than that. In the future, I will buy stamps wherever I go.

If you are struggling with the Christmas gift ideas, consider starting a Christmas tradition that you can carry on when you travel.

• Charm bracelets. Buy a chain and single charm, and

add silver charms from Mexico, the Caribbean, Hawaii or any part of the world for about \$3.50. Gold is now too expensive for casual giving.

• Stamps and coins. Collectors come in all ages. A basic stamp or coin book can be reinforced as you go by a single stop at the local post office or bank. Some people would prefer a first edition stamp to a real live Hawaiian dancing girl.

• Records and cassettes. Rock music is the same the world over. Folk music is different. Either way, you please somebody with a total version of music.

• Silverspoons. Buy the first one at home and you'll never run out. This is a quality gift, and it doesn't stoop to being a souvenir ashtray.

• Cookbooks, travel books or any other special interest books. They're flat. Everybody prints them. You can't buy them at home. And, if worse comes to worse, you can mail them home book rate.

• Museum and art gifts. Museum posters cost a fortune in American book stores. A Yugoslavian museum poster will cost you \$2. Slides of art work hanging on a faraway wall can be bought before you get back on the tour bus and carried in purse or pocket.

• Be original. Try crafts, polished stones, special teas and cheeses. And, if you run out of other ideas, buy tiny bottles of local liqueurs. If your friends don't drink, they can always hang that gift on the Christmas tree or serve it to somebody else.

FROM THE MAILBAG—The Southeast Michigan Travel and Tourist Association operates a 24-hour SNOWLINE that gives up-to-the-minute conditions at major southeastern Michigan ski resorts.

Call 357-2800. Taped daily, the information includes news of cross-country skiing, ice fishing, tobogganing and other winter events.

The association also publishes a nine-county "Winter-fun" guidebook. Write to the Southeast Michigan Travel and Tourist Association, American Center Building, Suite 350, 2777 Franklin Road, Southfield 48034.

DRIVERS AND CAMPERS have access to another publication, called "Standby: A guide on how to be ready for emergencies." It is published by the Coleman Co.

It tells you what to do when the lights go out, what to carry in your car for emergencies and how to use camping gear and other things for lighting and cooking when winter closes the world down.

For a free copy, ask your nearest Coleman dealer or write to the Public Relations Department, Coleman Co., Inc., 250 N. Francis, Wichita, Kan. 67201.

HOTELS OFFER CHRISTMAS bargain packages this time of year, because business is slow when business people stay home with their families.

Holiday specials are available at the Plaza Hotel in Detroit, which offers a \$35 room for two, including a

cocktail and parking, and free sleeping space in your room for children younger than 18.

The Michigan Inn in Southfield offers one night at regular rates and the second night free, with free space to children younger than 18 accompanied by parents.

Hotels are eager to pay their rent during slow holiday seasons, so check rates at other nearby hotels if you want to consider a hotel holiday over the Christmas and New Year season.

LOCAL CHRISTMAS mini trips include the following Yuletide events at Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village: Toys around the Christmas Tree, an exhibit of antique toys and an exhibit of Christmas crafts in the making at the Museum; Christmas cooking and craft demonstrations plus old-fashioned decorations at the Village; a presentation of "A Christmas Carol" by the Henry Ford Museum Theater at 2 p.m. Dec. 28-31, and at 7 p.m. Jan. 6, 13, 20; and a sleigh ride and dinner at the Village through Jan. 14, for \$17 a person.

THE MICHIGAN CALENDAR of travel events will list recreational, cultural, sports and other events of interest to travelers if you can meet their Jan. 8 deadline.

This six-month seasonal calendar gives the public information about what is going in the state.

If you would like a copy, or would like to list an event, write the Travel Bureau at P.O. Box 30228, Lansing 48909.

The grand hotels Majestic stones rival glass-and-chromes

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

The Chateau Frontenac Hotel peers down from a high cliff over the restored old city of Quebec, Canada. Presidents, prime ministers and kings have stayed there for 100 years. It is one of the visible grand hotels of North America.

On the other side of the continent, L'Ermitage hides quietly amid affluent apartment buildings in Beverly Hills, Calif. Its most famous guests are rock stars and movie stars. It is one of the less visible grand hotels.

Grand hotels, old and new, give travelers an unusual option in a world of standardized chain motels. Each hotel has an unique environment, legends about famous guests, and personal service and higher-than-average rates.

They once were reserved for the rich. But rising hotel costs make them a reasonable buy nowadays if you plan

to spend the high dollar demanded by first class glass-and-concrete high-rises which dominate city landscapes.

Unusual hotels like this have been maintained and restored in rural and city settings all over the United States and Canada. The Grand Hotel sprawls in all its white clapboard splendor across Mackinac Island. Old ladies still peer over the railings of the huge spa hotel in French Lick, Ind., now the French Lick-Sheraton.

All of them were built for the very affluent and the very famous of one period of another, and all are now trying to attract the middle- and upper-middle-income traveler.

The Chateau Frontenac is one of the late 19th and early 20th century hotels built across Canada by the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways.

The first Canadian Pacific Hotel was the Banff Springs, which rises in rocky splendor out of the Rocky Mountains at Banff, Alberta.

Canadian Pacific could not haul heavy dining cars over the mountains 100 years ago, so the company built dining cabins which eventually were replaced by the Banff Springs and the nearby Chateau Lake Louise for train travelers.

Other famous railway hotels, in the heart of almost every Canadian city, are the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, the Royal York in Toronto and the Empress in Victoria.

Sometime during the last 10 years, every one of these hotels has been threatened with demolition by company treasurers who were appalled by the cost of upkeep.

Canadians were so enraged at the idea of losing their famous downtown meeting places, that they threatened to revolt if the companies touched one brick on the historic old dames of stone.

Canadian National and Canadian Pacific chose an alternative. Renovate and reorganize them for the younger

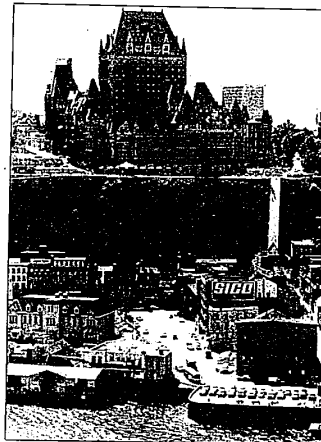
and the middle-income traveler.

You can dance all night in discos now in most of these chateau hotels. The stuffy old dining rooms have been replaced by beer and wine pubs, rock bands and elegant French and oriental dining rooms.

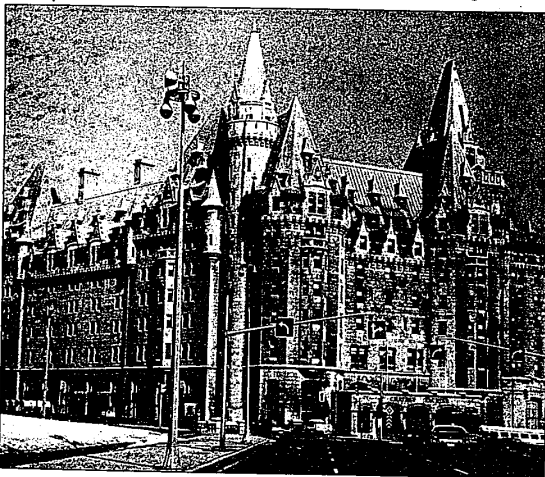
Prices are comparable to better quality hotels anywhere, with \$50 as a starting price for a room for two and special rates for weekend packages.

The L'Ermitage in Beverly Hills has none of the history associated with the chateau hotels of Canada, but it was recently built for the same reason: to provide unusual, elegant surroundings to travelers who are bored with ordinary accommodations and are willing to pay for something grander.

Arnold and Severny Ashkenazy, who were born in Poland and schooled in France, built the hotel as a California version of the European "hotel de grande class."



The Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City.



The Chateau Laurier in Ottawa.



The proud and stately Chateau Frontenac overlooking the docks of Quebec City.

Suggestions?

Occasionally, unusual hotel accommodations will be an ongoing Observer & Eccentric travel page feature. They may be expensive, inexpensive, large, small, historic, contemporary, or off the beaten path, but each will provide you with an out-of-the-ordinary travel experience.

If you have found lodging in an unusual hotel anywhere in the world, we would like to hear about it. Of particular interest are unique hotels in the United States and Canada. Contact Iris Sanderson Jones, 22170 W. Nine Mile, Southfield 48034, or call 356-3366.

Photos by Micky Jones

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