Mark Twain once said “clothes make the man.” This immediately reminds me of the time when I was 19 and bought Bob a somewhat hideous outfit at Macy’s in New York that he would NEVER WEAR, but smilingly accepted (and that my friends is true love). But I digress.

If clothes make the man, it can also be said that our stay at The Red Tree House Bed & Breakfast made our recent trip to Mexico City.

On a whim, we decided with Bob’s sister Laura and her husband Philip to book a long weekend in Mexico City, to celebrate our respective 20th anniversaries. I had been yearning to visit for some time, not because I knew anything about the city itself, but because I wanted to stay at the Red Tree House. Located in the beautiful Condesa neighborhood, the RTH is owned and operated by former Ashlander Craig Hudson and his partner Jorge Silva, and is everything a guest would want a small hotel to be. The rooms are beautifully decorated, the courtyard garden—where a full Mexican breakfast is served each morning, and drinks are served every evening—a delight to relax in, and the aforementioned food and drink delicious. But the service, oh the service. Each and every employee of the RTH treated us like friends. They remembered our names, discussed our days’ activities with keen interest, and helped us book whatever we needed—whether it be a dinner reservation, a driver to the Teotihuacan ruins, or a taxi to the airport. Their warm, professional and personalized service made it feel as if we were the most

continued on page 2

New Travel Gear Sure to Make Your Next Journey A Snap

by Ember Hood

We’ve scoured luggage and travel shows this year to bring customers lots of great additions to our line of outstanding travel gadgets and products. Here are some of our best bets!

Eagle Creek’s rugged new Adventure Luggage is built to stand the test of time. These packable, organized bags offer the durability and protection of more adventurous gear, but with a little extra sophistication. And as usual, each bag is backed by Eagle Creek’s amazing “No Matter What” Warranty. The line features both two-wheeled and four-wheeled rolling bags, all of which are expandable for extra packing space. Our favorite is the Four-Wheeled 22” Carry-On ($280) which—with lockable zippers, an organized front panel and the smooth transportation that only four-wheels can offer—is the perfect bag to carry on the plane. The line also features a handy

continued on page 4
The Red Tree House—A Heavenly Oasis...

continued from page 1

important guests at the hotel. They would listen with intent about where we had been, what we had eaten, and what our opinions were of our escapades.

And we had some great escapades.

too. My feet are still swollen from all the exploring. Highlights include our visit to the National Museum of Anthropology, which chronicles the civilizations of Mexico from the prehistoric to the present and is one of the finest museums we’ve ever encountered. Rather than try and see the whole thing, we chose a couple of key sections, including the Aztec Hall, with its famous 12-foot Sun Stone, and the Maya Hall, and its full scale replica of the tomb of King Pakal. The tremendous water fountain in the courtyard (see above) is stunning. Very close to the museum is the Castillo de Chapultepe, or Castle at Grasshopper Hill, a great stop for the views (even though it was smoggy!) and a chance to see how royalty (in this case Emperor Maximilian) lived.

On a recommendation from Victor, one of our favorite RTH employees (Who am I kidding? Every RTH employee was our favorite!), we also visited the massive and beautiful Jamaica Market. Open daily, this market offers just about everything one can imagine, with an emphasis on flowers. From cut flowers to flower arrangements and for everything from weddings and funerals to religious ceremonies, if you can’t get it at the Jamaica Market, you can’t get it. There is so much on offer that it is hard to believe that the flowers all get sold before they wilt away.

We also spent more than an hour wandering through the Centro de Artesanías La Ciudadela, a popular artist’s market, but part of that was because I wanted to find some paper mâché skulls I had seen upon our arrival. (Note to self—if you see something you want in a large, bustling and somewhat confusing craft market, BUY IT! It is nearly impossible to find it again later, and you may really annoy your husband, who was trying to convince you to buy it the first time you saw it.) On a related note, I admit that I am a terrible haggler in foreign countries. I always feel like the first price I am quoted is so good, that it just seems rude to try and talk them down. Please accept my apologies for driving up prices for everyone else.

One of our favorite and most impressive stops was our visit to Teotihuacan. The ancient ruins are a 45-minute drive from Mexico City and the RTH came through (again!) by booking us a driver, Ricardo, who drove the four of us from our hotel to the ruins, waited 2+ hours while we explored the sites, and then drove us back into Mexico City for $100 total. Teotihuacan offers the most majestic pyramids I’ve ever visited, all of which can still be climbed. Meaning “the place where men become gods,” today Teotihuacan covers about 32 square miles, and is the most visited archeological site in Mexico. The largest and most famous pyramid, the Pyramid of the Sun, is 213 feet high, and a leg burning 248 steep steps to the top. At the end of the Avenue of the Dead lies another impressive edifice—the Pyramid of the Moon. The pyramids aren’t the only remarkable sites at Teotihuacan however. There are also many well preserved murals and stone figures throughout the ruins. This is well worth a day trip from Mexico City, or as in our case, ⅔ of a day.

If you’re a regular reader of our newsletter, you’re probably surprised that I have yet to mention food. Lest you be worried, we did eat in Mexico City. We ate often, and we ate well. Our plan was to try and squeeze four meals a day into our visit, and if I wondered whether we would be compatible travelers with Laura and Philip, their enthusiasm toward these efforts instantly squelched my worries. We were mostly successful in eating four squares, even though I can’t say any of us ever spoke the words “I’m hungry.” We started our mornings with the outstanding full Mexican breakfast from the RTH, which was included in the price of our room. Every day a buffet of fresh fruit, cereal, juice, coffee, churros, and more was served along with a hot meal. We ate it all. Then we diligently planned our daily excursion to include a stop around 11 or 11:30 for a pre-lunch meal. One day this meant carne asade tacos from Las Costillas in the Condesa district, another day it was huaraches at El Huarache Azteca, down the street from the Jamaica Market. Then about 2-3pm we’d stop for a “real” lunch. In Mexico City, lunch is the biggest meal of the day, and traditionally Mexicans take their time and eat several courses. Never ones to buck tradition, we ate long and we ate lots in our lunches.

Our favorite afternoon meal took place at Azul y Oro café, located at the continued on page 8
Traveling Safe and Smart...

When you live on a round planet, there’s no choosing sides.” — WAYNE W. DYER

wallet. My passport always stays inside, along with my credit cards, my ATM card, and any large sums of cash I may be carrying. (Why am I carrying large sums of cash you ask? I’ll never tell.) My favorite style is the Undercover Deluxe Neck Wallet from Eagle Creek. I wear it crossways, underneath my blouse, and tuck it into my pants or skirt. Keep in mind that I always keep a small amount of cash out for the day, so I’m not constantly getting into my money belt for small purchases. But I know if my day bag or backpack were to be stolen, my cash, passport and credit cards would still be with me. I often wear a backpack when out for the day, but the only things in it are a bottle of water, a guidebook and map, and maybe a sweater and snacks. Even so, after having my backpack unzipped—while it was on my back—and rifled through in San Jose, Costa Rica, I try and remember to move the zippers to the least accessible place, just to make it harder for a would-be thief to get it open.

I also always travel with a luggage lock. I never lock my suitcase when I am checking my suitcase with the airlines, because I don’t care if someone (like a TSA employee) wants to steal my clothes. I don’t own any fine jewelry (Bob, are you reading this?), but if I did, it certainly wouldn’t be in my suitcase. The same goes for any electronic devices like cameras, iPhones, and computers. All these items stay with me in my carry-on bag. There have been many, many accounts in the news about unscrupulous TSA agents who steal iPads, cameras, jewelry and more from checked bags. Don’t assume that all government employees are honest, and don’t give them an easy opportunity to steal from you!

The reason I travel with a luggage lock is so I can lock my suitcase when it is sitting all alone all day in my hotel room. Who knows how many people have access to a hotel room? I sure don’t. And while I know anyone can ultimately get in to a suitcase if they really want to—even if it is locked—a combination luggage lock will at least deter a would-be thief, and perhaps they’ll move on to someone else’s bag. My top choice is the Triple Security Lock. I use the first loop to lock my suitcase closed, and then loop the other cable wire end to a stationary item in my room like a bed frame, keeping my entire suitcase from being stolen.

I’m also somewhat uncertain how “safe” hotel safes really are. I’ve read that some can be opened by simply using four zeros no matter what combination you may have set your safe to. I have tested this theory in a few hotels and although it’s never worked, there must be some way for a hotel employee to open a safe if a guest has forgotten the combination, or left the hotel without leaving the safe open. Hmm?

The world of radio frequency identity (RFID) theft is the new hot topic in travel security. Last month a customer told us that a good friend of his had his data stolen electronically. While we have no personal experience with this, it appears that RFID theft does happen. The best way to thwart this is to protect your passport (all passports issued since 2006 have an RFID chip inside them) and credit cards that have RFID chips with RFID blocking sleeves and wallets, which range in price from $6-$40.

We also offer a popular line of travel bags, wallets, backpacks and suitcases from PacSafe. These products all have multiple security features, including slash-proof straps and wire mesh, lockable zippers, RFID blocking pockets, and more.

I’m not trying to instill fear into our customers. I’m just suggesting that a few simple and inexpensive precautions could give you some valuable peace of mind and save you lots of hassle on your next trip.

"When you live on a round planet, there’s no choosing sides." — WAYNE W. DYER

If you’re not subscribed to our monthly email newsletter, you’re missing out! We’ve recently featured stories on:

- renewing passports,
- eating in the Pacific NW,
- pros and cons of duty-free,
- seeing the stars in L.A.,
- navigating airline customer service,
- and much more.

Sign up today by emailing service@travelessentials.com.
New Travel Items to Make Your Next Journey...

continued from page 1

Wheeled Tote ($195) that can be stacked on larger luggage when needed, and an over-the-shoulder Weekender Bag ($150) that features tuck-away backpack straps for a more comfortable carry. With its durable, organized design and “No Matter What” Warranty, the Adventure line from Eagle Creek offers value that’s hard to beat.

The VioLight Slim Sonic Toothbrush ($14.99) manages to turn a quality electric toothbrush into a fashion accessory. This sleek, compact and trendy toothbrush lets you smile in style, no matter where you are. Just slip off the cap and let the electric toothbrush do its work. The head vibrates at 22,000 brush strokes per minute, and leaves your pearly whites sparkling. And the Slim Sonic Toothbrush even comes with an extra head. So, pick your favorite pattern, toss it in your purse, brief case, pocket, gym bag, or backpack — because at a mere 6.5 inches long, it will fit almost anywhere.

The GorillaPod with Griptight Mount ($29.95) is a handy accessory for Smartphone photography. Since today’s smartphones take such high quality pictures, many people don’t need to bother carrying a separate camera. So, GorillaPod came up with a solution — the GripTight mount. It grasps your smartphone and clips into the GorillaPod tripod. Whether you’re looking to be in the shot, or just to steady your hand, the GorillaPod with Griptight Mount will help you get the perfect shot.

Pacsafe’s new Toursafe 21” and 25” Anti-Theft Rolling suitcases ($219.99 & $239.99) are at the cutting edge of travel security. Both bags feature puncture-resistant zippers and lockable zipper pulls. They are also lined with a braided steel “exomesh” that stops thieves from cutting through the sides. The Toursafe Uprights also feature a drawstring compression system in the main compartment to help keep your belongings compact and in place. If you’re looking for a secure rolling upright — in either a checkable or a carry-on size — the Pacsafe Toursafe Anti-Theft bags let you relax with the confidence that your belongings are protected.

New RFID-Executive wallets from Pacsafe ($19.99 - $49.99) offer a new level of sophistication in anti-theft technology. These stylish leather wallets...
New Travel Items to Make Your Next Journey...

Continued from page 4

are lined with an RFID-blocking material that prevents thieves from scanning the RFID chips in your credit cards and passports. With five sizes to choose from, you’ll find the right wallet for your needs. Whether you simply want to protect a couple of credit cards or you need to carry your passport and other documents, Pacsafe has you covered.

At only seven inches long when collapsed, the Davek Mini Umbrella ($49) is a sleek lightweight umbrella for every occasion. This sturdy guy weighs only eight ounces and comes in four fun colors—black, red, yellow, and turquoise. And, the Davek Mini umbrella has an Unconditional Lifetime Warranty—that means that if the umbrella stops functioning or has a defect, the company will replace or repair it—for life. All you have to do is throw it in your purse, pocket or bag and you’ll never get caught in the rain!

The Oasis Shirt from Sunday Afternoons ($72) is the perfect long-sleeved, lightweight summer travel shirt. Available in both men’s and women’s sizes, the Oasis is made from a lightweight, breathable polyester material and features under-arm vents and a hidden back-vent as well. The roll-up sleeves have buttoned tabs to prevent them from unrolling when you’re on the move, and the full collar has hidden buttons to keep it in place. With a UPF sun protection rating of 50+, you won’t worry about getting sunburned either. Fashion-forward, cool, comfortable and lightweight, the Oasis Shirt is perfect for hot summer days.

Loksak Dry Sacks ($7.95 - $10.95) are super-tough, high-stretch dry bags for smartphones and tablets. They are liquid-tight, airtight, dustproof and waterproof to 200 feet. Each pack comes with three Loksaks, and the flexible material is thin enough and pliable enough that you can still use your touch screen while your phone is in the bag. Great for water-centric trips, or just to keep your phone from getting sweat-soaked in your pocket on a hot summer day. With a Loksak you won’t have to worry about water damaging your electronics, ever. And if you’re pocket-less or just need a place to carry your precious items, the Loksak Neck Caddy ($17.95) and Loksak Waist Pack ($19.95) offer a convenient carry-space and come with a set of LokSak Dry Sacks inside.

A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Camino de Santiago ($29.95) is written for those who want to make the emotional, spiritual and physical pilgrimage hiking the Camino de Santiago from St. Jean in the south of France to Santiago in western Spain. The book blends practical travel information with some history and spiritual guidance. People who decide to hike across Spain in this five-week pilgrimage do it for many reasons, and A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Camino de Santiago helps to guide you through your inner journey as you undertake the pilgrimage.

Trek & Travel Soaps ($3.95 each) are carry-on approved, ultra-concentrated soaps for the traveler. The five varieties (shampoo, body wash, shaving cream, laundry wash and hand sanitizer) are all in TSA-approved sized bottles and have inner and outer caps to help stop leaks. And because they’re concentrated you’ll only need a small capful to get the job done, meaning they will likely last your whole trip and beyond!

“If an ass goes traveling, he’ll not come home a horse.” —THOMAS FULLER

continued on page 7
Life on the Open Highway—Road Trippin’

by Nancy Bestor

I love to travel. While flying makes many nervous, it never fails to excite me. And while I love the wild blue yonder and an airplane’s ability to carry me 10,000 miles in a matter of hours, road trips have their own special place in my heart. I’m not sure why. Maybe it’s because I’ve spent most of my adult life cruising up and down Interstate 5 between Ashland, Oregon and the Bay Area. Maybe it’s because Bob’s and my honeymoon was a six-month lap around the United States in a Volkswagen Camper Bus. Whatever the reason, I’ve got great road trip memories, and am a firm believer that the best way to see a country (any country) is to drive it.

I’m pretty sure my 16 and 18-year-old daughters will always have fond memories of the road as well. Hopefully they’ll carry on the great Bestor road trip tradition. They’re planning a summer adventure to California right now, in celebration of Emily’s imminent high school graduation. (For some reason the food that comes to mind right now is Cheetos. Not that we buy them when we’re splurging on our road trip food, but Cheetos do make me think of gas station food marts. And honestly, for me, a bag of Cheetos every once in a while is a little bit of heaven.)

We’ve had some great road trips abroad as well. When we’re a long way from home, I really appreciate having a car, because it becomes the one thing that “belongs” to us, at least for a short time. We can leave some of our gear inside when we’re moving from hotel to hotel, when pressed we can use it as a dining room if we don’t want to eat in a restaurant, and if 100% desperate, we can even sleep in the car. We’ve had four-wheel drive. Okay, “we” didn’t, Bob did all the driving there. He loved how the rules are quite a bit more malleable in Italy and pretty much wherever you can stick your nose first is your lane. The horn honking was not daunting to Bob, he jumped right in and beeped his horn almost as much as the Italians.

I remember with great fondness our honeymoon around the US. We took the time to drive lesser-traveled roads, rarely in a great hurry to get anywhere and just happy to enjoy the ride. Most of the people we met with similar agendas were decades older than us and delighted to offer us a cocktail and pass along some nuggets of wisdom regarding the open road. Pre-mixed Manhattans, chilled and ready in the ice chest was one of the finest of those nuggets.

The girls always brought their own listening device. Back in the day it was personal cassette players. Then they graduated to individual CD players and now of course, they have iPods. This has saved our family’s relationship many times over. They don’t want to listen to the music we play, and we certainly don’t want to listen to the music they play. We didn’t back then (think Raffi or the Wiggles), and we (mostly) don’t now. We always bring our own food too. We never know if we’ll be hungry when there’s a good place to stop or if we’ll be in the wasteland of southern I-5, where choices seem to be limited to McDonalds, Burger King, and Taco Bell for what seems like hundreds of miles. It’s always fun to buy “special” car food too, things that we don’t often eat at home, but splurge on for a road trip.

We’ve driven in big Italian cities too. Okay, “we” didn’t, Bob did all the driving there. He loved how the rules are quite a bit more malleable in Italy and pretty much wherever you can stick your nose first is your lane. The horn honking was not daunting to Bob, he jumped right in and beeped his horn almost as much as the Italians.

Once, in France, we couldn’t find a single gas station that offered diesel. We were getting dangerously close to empty, which stressed us both out to no end. Come to find out later, we were reading all the signs wrong, and every gas station in France offers diesel. It’s funny now, but at the time, not so funny. Then there was the time in Costa Rica that we had to ford a knee-deep stream running over a washed-out road—thank goodness we had four-wheel drive.

“Hitler didn’t travel. Stalin didn’t travel. Saddam Hussein never traveled. They didn’t want to have their orthodoxy challenged.” —HOWARD GARDNER
Rapunzel Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair

by Robert H. Bestor, Jr.

One of the many joys of European travel is a category of overnight accommodation that is rare in North America—the gemütlich little hotel and restaurant operated for decades by the same family.

Yes, there are bed and breakfasts in many of our cities but rarely do they have a restaurant, and in our town of Ashland, Oregon, (home to about 60 of them) the Las Vegas over-under betting on burnout for B&B proprietors is about four years.

One could argue this point, but surely it is beyond dispute that another European hotel category is totally without a North American counterpart—the small, family-owned castle. Our favorite example of this genre is Schloss Haunsperg (http://www.schlosshaunsperg.com) in Hallein bei Salzburg, an eight-bedroom, one-chapel hideaway owned and gracefully operated for several decades by Eike and Georg von Gerneth, who roll out the warmest welcome in all of Austria.

Another is Schloss Sommersdorf, an 800-year-old moated, stone fortress in the tiny village of Sommersdorf about 12 km straight south of Anspach along the Frankfurt-Nürnberg Autobahn. A mere 460 years ago the family von Crailsheim signed escrow papers at the local title company and took over the Sommersdorf, and naturally, they still own it today. Then 15 years ago, the current occupant and major domo, Baron Manfred von Crailsheim, a physician practicing in Anspach, converted a portion of the interior into small apartments and guest bedrooms that are now available to rent.

Before an overnight or two is possible, Sommersdorf is best suited for stays of a week or more, and it makes sense of a stay. An additional, connecting bedroom costs from €68 to €85 per day. Breakfast is extra.

Contact: Dr. Manfred von Crailsheim, D-8802 Schloss Sommersdorf, Germany, tel. +49/09805/91920, www.schloss-sommersdorf.de.

New Travel Items
continued from page 5

Looking for a fun gift for the French, Italian or Spanish-speaker in your life? These foreign-language Magnetic Poetry sets ($19.95) offer all the fun of magnetic poetry, while helping you learn and enjoy a foreign language. Each set has more than 500 magnetized words and word-fragments so you can tell a story, write a poem, or just practice your grammar on any magnet-friendly surface.

"Every exit is an entry somewhere else." — Tom Stoppard
continued from page 2

University of Mexico. Getting to this café was quite a trek, as we first took the Metro, then walked and walked and walked in the hot sun through the huge University campus. Philip had read great things about it, however, and as many of our readers know, we are willing to go a long way for good food. Not surprisingly, we were not disappointed. Azul y Oro is the brainchild of food historian and chef Ricardo Muñoz Zurita, author of the 600-page Encyclopedia of Mexican Gastronomy. Our meal included fish in a mango salsa, chicken enchiladas with black mole, deep fried shrimp in a ginger mango sauce, and more. It was all inventive and delicious, and once it was determined that we spoke no Spanish, we were personally attended to by Ricardo Zurita’s sister Tila, who could not have been more friendly.

After a late afternoon siesta, we’d meet up for drinks in the courtyard of the RTH, often chatting with other guests, or our “favorite” RTH employees Eduardo, Ernesto, and Victor. Then we’d head out for a late dinner, having worked up yet another appetite with a nap and drinks. We ate two excellent dinners (both recommended by the RTH) just a hop, skip and a jump from the hotel. At El Tizoncito, we consumed 22 al pastor tacos (don’t judge, they were small) that had been cooked on a spit with pineapple, onions, and cilantro. Legend has it that El Tizoncito is the birthplace of tacos al pastor, and they were fantastic. Our other top dinner spot was Lampuga Cocina de Mar (seafood cuisine). We started with a delicious lobster broth amuse-bouche and things just got better and better. We shared outstanding shrimp and calamari tacos, a tuna sashimi, ceviche, and more. The meal ended with complementary shots of smoky mezcal.

Our trip to Mexico City ended too soon. We didn’t have time to visit Frido Kahlo’s home and studio, nor to eat at a few of Anthony Bourdain’s favorite spots. At one point while sipping drinks in the Red Tree House courtyard Laura suggested our 20th anniversary adventure should really be a first annual trip. Agreeing, I asked where we should go next year. “Right here,” Laura said. “Indeed,” I replied, “right here.”

Notes:

We walked everywhere, took the Metro and buses, and took a few taxis as well. All were perfectly safe, and easy to use.

We did not drink tap water, but all of us did eat street food, agreeing that if we went down, we were going down together. We stayed healthy.

The Red Tree House is hands-down my recommendation for the best place to stay in Mexico City, even though I have not researched anywhere else. At the time of this writing, the RTH has 450 reviews on Trip Advisor, and a five star rating. Every review is gushing. I have never seen a hotel reviewed so well. Our lovely room was $115 a night, which included a full breakfast and wine/beer in the evenings. www.redtreehouse.com

—If Red Tree House owners Craig and Jorge are not willing to adopt her, Travel Essentials co-owner Nancy Bestor will look into joining the RTH staff as a courtyard drink pourer and socializer. It could happen.