



TRAVEL ESSENTIALS NEWS

ASHLAND, OREGON

www.travelessentials.com

Wherrrrre's Johnny?

by Nancy Bestor

I've heard it said that life, like fine wine, only improves with age. If my recent trip to the Bahamas to celebrate a friend's 40th birthday is any indication, my life is good and getting better. Three women friends and I traveled to the island of Exuma, south of Nassau in the Bahamas. Exuma is about 60 miles long and has 3700 full time residents. The sun shines almost all the time and when you exit an air conditioned plane, your glasses fog up and your shirt sticks to your skin in the steamy tropical air.

Tourism is fairly new to Exuma, and the best place to stay, The Four Seasons Resort at Emerald Bay, is also one of the few resorts on the island. We were lucky enough to have a two-bedroom condo at

the Four Seasons to call our own for the week. Johnny Depp and Orlando Bloom (oh yes, and Keira Knightley too) had recently stayed at the Four Seasons while filming scenes for Pirates of the Caribbean II and III. Rumor had it they were still somewhere in the Bahamas, and we were determined to find them if they were anywhere within a 40 mile radius.

Our group flew from Medford to Fort Lauderdale via Delta Airlines, then latched on to the lifestyles of the rich and famous, traveling by private jet from Florida to Exuma (on a much too short 55 minute flight). Upon arrival in Exuma, we took about two minutes to clear customs, after which we met Willie, a 70-year-old Exuma native, who would be our driver for the week. No Johnny Depp sightings yet.

Our first few days in Exuma were

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Where Music is Everything

World Sacred Music Festival—Fez, Morocco

By Steven Scholl

“We have fallen into the place where everything is music.”—Rumi

Today I have fallen into the ancient city of Fes, home of the World Sacred Music Festival. I hurry from my hotel to Bab Makina, site of the main evening concerts of the festival.

The Tokyo Gagaku Ensemble is performing. As their gentle chants reach us from the stage, set before the intricately tiled gate, or bab, the muezzin's evening call to prayer floats from a nearby minaret over the walls of Bab Makina and sweetly mingles with the ancient Japanese chants. This unexpected interfaith dialogue seems

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2nd Annual Travel Essentials' Geography/Travel Quiz

Sharpen your pencils! It's time once again for Travel Essentials Geography/Travel Quiz. Test your world knowledge on the following fifteen questions. Any entry with a perfect score will be entered into a drawing to win a \$100 Travel Essentials' gift certificate. Answers can be emailed to Travel Essentials at travess@mind.net. Please put "geography quiz" in the email subject. You can also mail your answers to Travel Essentials, 252 E. Main Street, Ashland, OR 97520. Good luck!

1. This lake holds 20% of the world's

fresh surface water.

- A measurement of 8,200 feet represents what physical geographic characteristic of Antarctica?
- This building had an almost 1,000 year run as the world's largest man-made enclosed space.
- For more than 550 years the monks at Kloster Andechs have dedicated themselves to what worldly endeavor?
- Enrique de Malacca is widely believed

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Wherrrrre's Johnny?...

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spent soaking up the sun and relaxing on the beach at Emerald Bay. With powdery white sand beaches, and warm, clear blue waters, it is truly paradise. The 200 room resort was only 16% occupied the first few days of our stay, so the two pools, steam room, hot tubs, work out room and long, lovely beach seemed ours and ours alone. We kayaked in the bay, snorkeled in the waters, and worked out the kinks of life. The snorkeling was magnificent. We saw a huge stingray, lobsters, an array of colorful fish, both big and small, and a lot of beautiful coral and shells. We did not see Johnny Depp.

On our third day in paradise we rode into Georgetown, the main "city" on the island, home to about 500 people, several restaurants, one school, and little else. We tried to rent four scooters from a 28-year-old Bahamian named "Bobo". When we arrived at the rental office, Bobo was not in, but a call to him told us he would arrive within 15 minutes. About an hour later, Bobo arrived with keys to just two scooters and three helmets. Apparently he had left the other keys and helmets in his car, which had broken down on the way in. We were in no hurry (island life you know), so Bobo said he would return in 45 minutes, and got a ride back to his car, where he could pick up more keys and helmets. An hour and a half later, Bobo returned, with keys and helmets for the four of us. Alas, only three scooters would actually start. Welcome to the Bahamas.

I had never ridden on a scooter or motorcycle before, let alone driven one, but with a short lesson from Bobo, I was ready to roll. We happily took the three scooters and rode about 30 miles south to Little Exuma, the "old part" of the island. Well out of the way, Little Exuma did not get electricity until the early 1980s and the roads and homes seemed fairly

deserted. We continued on and had a great ride to Williamstown, the furthest town south on Little Exuma, and stopped for lunch at a roadside shack, *Santanas*. Still no Johnny Depp.

Dee is the proprietor of *Santanas*, which she named after her 19-year-old daughter. The octagonal wooden restaurant is right on the ocean, with five bar-stool height benches around the outside of the shack looking right into the kitchen. The specialty of the house is pan-fried conch. Conch (pronounced conk) is readily available everywhere on



The author gets a driving lesson from Bobo.

Exuma, pounded into hamburger patties, deep fried in batter, or cooked Dee's way—pan fried in light batter and served over mashed potatoes. We thought we had died and gone to heaven. With a few Kalik Gold's (the Bahamas own fine beer, only 7% alcohol), we were feeling good about ourselves and just about everything else. Since we were still on the hunt for Johnny Depp, we asked Dee if she had seen any signs of him. She pulled out an album, chock full of Johnny photos. Johnny at her restaurant. Johnny posing with her mother. Johnny posing with her daughter. Johnny getting off a boat at her dock. Apparently several scenes had been shot just seven miles off Little Exuma, and Dee saw the stars many times. Jealously, but with full and happy bellies, we bid a fond farewell to Dee and motored back

into town. There is something amazing about flying 45 miles an hour on a scooter on a virtually deserted road in the middle of the Caribbean. It was exhilarating.

A day-cruise on the Emerald Lady, a 63-foot catamaran, provided us with another adventurous outing (www.bahamianrhapsodies.com). On a normal day the Emerald Lady holds up to 60 people. But this trip was anything but normal and on our voyage it was just the four of us, and a crew of two. Jim and Antonio took good care of us that day, keeping our glasses filled with rum punch, and showing us the sights on the waters. We snorkeled, jumped off the front of the boat while it was sailing and grabbed on the stairs at the back to get back on, slid off the slide on the back of the boat, and ate another memorable lunch at the *Chat and Chill* on Stocking Island, another wooden shack restaurant. The specialty here was Conch Salad, with bell peppers, lime, and many more delicious ingredients that I can't remember (could the rum punch have anything to

do with my lack of memory?). Sadly, still no Johnny Depp (this I would remember).

Our last full day on Exuma found us in the pouring rain at The Coco Plum Restaurant and Beach, north of the Four Seasons. By the time we finished our delicious lunch of blackened grouper served over sweet potato fries, the sun was back to shining its tropical shine, and we spent our final afternoon wandering the beach and large but shallow bay looking for sand dollars, shells and Johnny.

—Nancy Bestor is the co-owner of Travel Essentials. She is always on the lookout for a new island paradise and also for Johnny Depp.



"The question is not what you look at, but what you see." — HENRY DAVID THOREAU

REAU

Surviving The Airport

by Nancy Bestor

There are times when I know my husband is right, and I am just too darn stubborn to admit it. My recent trip to the Bahamas was one of those occasions. After I finished packing into the Eagle Creek SB Traveler, which is a duffle-like bag with backpack straps, Bob suggested I instead take the Eagle Creek Switchback (see page 4), a carry-on rolling bag. "I'm already packed," I thought. "Besides, how far am I really going to carry this lightweight bag?" Wrong, wrong, wrong.

In addition to my SB Traveler, I also carried on a small collapsible cooler with food for the week and my small Eagle Creek daypack/purse. While it was no trouble handling these three bags in Medford—an airport so small that when you're dropped off by car, you're almost on the tarmac—it was in Salt Lake City that my shoulder pains began. Our commuter plane from Medford landed at an outer terminal, and we had to hustle to another terminal to make our connection. It took only a few minutes for me to wish I had taken Bob's advice and was rolling my main bag, with my cooler sitting on top of it, instead of carrying two heavy bags (is it possible that they got heavier from Medford to Salt Lake City?) from what seemed like one end of the airport to the other.

At the gate I found that my troubles were not yet over. "You're only allowed two carry-ons," the not-so-friendly Delta grounds crew person said. "You'll have to check one of your bags." This would be a problem, because we needed to get right to our private plane in Florida in order to arrive on Exuma before dark. We couldn't wait for checked luggage. Informing the grounds crew person that I had carried all three bags on from Medford made no difference at all. In fact, it seemed to make her more determined. I had a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn't butter her up if I told her I had a private jet to catch in Florida either.

Technically, the grounds crew person was correct. I did have three carry-ons.

However, I was getting on a flight that was less than half full (yes, there are still flights out there that are not oversold!), so there was plenty of room on the plane, and my third carry-on was a small purse/backpack. She was determined to follow the rules, and nothing would change her mind, so I stuffed my purse into my companion's backpack and we were ready to go. But, not so fast. Our rule following grounds crew person now told us that my companion's backpack (with my purse inside it) was too big to be a second carry-on, and she could not get on the flight. We mentioned (again) the fact that the flight wasn't even close to full, and couldn't she just let us get on with our bags? She was ready to deny us, but by now we were beginning to hold up the whole plane and finally, she told us we could get on, but of course added that the flight attendants on board would surely make us check one or more of the bags. As soon as we were out of her sight, we pulled my purse out with the flight attendants not paying us the least bit of attention. Lesson learned? Some grounds crew people will stick to their guns, and enforce the two carry-on rule, others don't care at all. If you must carry on your bags for any reason, follow the rules and take only two bags, including a purse. You may just meet my special grounds crew friend somewhere along your journey.

Here are a few other random travel lessons from this recent trip. I brought my I-Pod Shuffle along to listen to music on the plane, but did not want to bring any noise canceling headphones to crowd my luggage. Bad idea. It was very difficult to hear the music without blasting the volume. Am I less tolerant of an airplane's noise, or are the engines getting louder? Hard to tell. Lesson learned? Next time I'll make room in my carry-on for the headphones (see page 4). The headphones would have worked for the in-flight movie too, and I wouldn't have had to pay \$2 to use the truly lousy Delta headphones to pass the time and watch the movie.

I flew out on Medford's early morning flight. We hardly had any time in the Salt Lake City airport, but we had the

foresight to grab some muffins while rushing through the terminal. Good idea. Our four-hour flight from Salt Lake City to Fort Lauderdale included light snacks only. We had gotten up so early to catch the Medford flight that I hadn't had a thing to eat. I surely would have withered away by the time I got to Fort Lauderdale if we hadn't gotten those muffins. Lesson learned here? Always bring some "extra" food on long flights.

Finally, the clothes I packed. I have sat in on at least five of Anne McAlpin's packing workshops. I know the tips. I know that packing lighter is packing smarter. Do I listen? Apparently not. I knew there would be a washer and dryer in our condo. I knew it would be warm and I would often be wearing little more than a swimsuit. Still, I packed WAY TOO MANY CLOTHES for my weeklong trip. I did not wear several things that I brought. My heavy carry-on bags (see above) would have been much lighter if I had left that second pair of shorts, those two short sleeved shirts, the capris, etc., home. Lesson learned? I don't know, check back with me after our trip to Tokyo later this month.

END

—Nancy Bestor co-owns *Travel Essentials* with her husband Bob, who is more often right than wrong.

Credit Scam...

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a total of 3%. But even at 3%, I like my credit card for most overseas purchases; I get the miles, the best exchange rate, a record of each transaction, the ability to dispute charges, and I don't have to come up with the cash for at least a couple of weeks.

* We assumed 1 euro equals 1.18 U.S. dollars for this transaction. END

—Robert H. Bestor Jr. is part-owner of *Travel Essentials* and the founder and publisher of *Gemütlichkeit*, *The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria & Switzerland*, (www.gemut.com) now in its 20th year.



"On vacations: We hit the sunny beaches where we occupy ourselves keeping the sun off our skin, the saltwater off our bodies, and the sand out of our belongings." —ERMA BOMBECK

Top Travel Products—Add Ease and Comfort

Today's travel is not as easy as it used to be, nor as comfortable. At Travel Essentials, we're always on the hunt for items that will make all of our travels as easy and comfortable as is humanly possible. Here are some travel products we're excited about that will do just that.

Mini Travel Speakers

Vivaldi or Mozart. Van Morrison or the Gypsy Kings. Jewel or the Backstreet Boys. Share your music with this portable stereo speaker system that works with any portable audio source. Measuring a slight 4 x 2.5 x 2.5 when stored, this handy fold-up design is perfect for stashing into your briefcase, backpack or carry-on. The Mini Travel Speakers connect to your favorite



audio player with a universal 3.5mm earphone jack plug-in. And that allows you to connect to any Ipod, MP3 player, CD player or laptop computer.

Weighing in at a feathery eight ounces, the ultra-compact **Mini Travel Speakers (\$34.95)** are perfect for hotel rooms, camping, picnicking or anywhere you might like to relax or dance to the beat of your favorite musicians without headphones.

Our manager Steve took a set on a recent camping trip and ran his Mini Speakers for over 20 hours on a single set of AAA batteries.

Noise Cancelling Headphones

In the last few years noise cancellation headphones have become a true travel necessity. Providing help in

fighting the fatigue and jet lag associated with flying and drastically improving your enjoyment of both on-board entertainment and your own personal audio sources, **Solitude Noise Cancellation Headphones (\$199.99)** are of the highest quality and a value leader in this crowded field.

Both customers and staff have



tested Solitudes side-by-side against the competition and the results have been overwhelming that, for the price, the Solitudes win hands-down.

Audiophiles will appreciate the fidelity offered by the Solitudes while frequent fliers will benefit from the highest level of noise cancellation available.

Here's what one customer said:

"To our amazement, the solitude phones blocked out more plane noise than the Bose (perhaps 25% better) and the sound quality for music listening was equal."—Rick Smith, Travel Essentials' Internet Customer

Solitudes run on two AA batteries, provide 18db of noise cancellation and excellent fidelity and fold down into a compact carrying pouch that provides excellent protection from the rigors of the road.

Eagle Creek Switchback Max ES

Another homerun from Eagle Creek and a winner of Outside Magazine's 2005 "Gear of the Year" award, the Switchback Max ES is quite simply the finest wheeled backpack ever produced. Features include a unique, lightweight, curved "Touch Point Radius Handle System" that

provides a smoother, easier feel when wheeling, and a contoured Comfort zone Carry System that fits to a T when used as a backpack. The full-size zip-off daypack offers a complete organizer pocket, two water-bottle pockets each designed to carry a 32 ounce Nalgene bottle, and plenty of storage to be the perfect bag for your days out on the town. With the daypack removed, the main wheeled compartment meets most airlines carry-on requirements, while the daypack performs the function of your underseat carry-on handbag. Weighing only 11 pounds 2



ounces, it is among the lightest in its class while easily being the most durable and no doubt the best value. On top of all that Eagle Creek has backed up the Switchback Max ES with an unconditional "No Matter What" lifetime guarantee. That means that you never have to make a claim with the airlines for a damaged bag.

Switchback Max ES 22" (carry-on size) \$275

Switchback Max ES 25" (checked baggage size) \$295



"A turtle travels only when it sticks its neck out." — KOREAN PROVERB

Top Travel Products—Add Ease and Comfort

It is absolutely positively no fun to be sick when you're on the road. In fact it's no fun to be sick at anytime. But for this cold and flu season we've got two products to help you fight the bugs and one to help you fight the jet lag.

Airborne (\$6.95 for 10 tablets) is an immune system boost of vitamin A, vitamin C, magnesium, echinacea



and more in an effervescent tablet that dissolves in a glass of water. Developed by a grade school teacher who was sick of getting sick in the classroom, Airborne is designed to be taken at the first sign of a cold or just before entering crowded environments like airplanes.

Flight Spray (\$14.95 for a 30ml bottle) is formulated to alleviate nasal dryness and prevent colds, flu and sore throats caused by recycled airplane air. Flight Spray helps to enhance the immune system, moisten nasal passages and keep sinuses clear during even the longest of flights.



No Jet Lag (\$9.95 for 32 tablets good for 50 hours of flying time) is



actually Travel Essentials all-time best selling product. The repeat business and referred customers for this homeopathic product is phenomenal. And that means No Jet Lag works at helping long distance fliers beat the effects of jet lag.

Travel Ear Buds

New to Travel Essentials are noise isolating ear buds from Ultimate Ears. You have no doubt followed our excitement over the past two years as noise canceling



headphones have developed into a low cost, effective solution to airplane noise. With the advent of "noise isolating ear buds", we can now reduce the size and weight of our traveling headphone system

(compared to traditional over the ear headsets) by 95%, cut out between 16 and 26 decibels of that awful engine noise, and relax in auditory comfort with superior fidelity. Ultimate Ears Super.Fi Ear Buds come in three styles for every budget.

At \$99.99, **Super.Fi 3 Studio Earbuds** offer the best value with 16 decibels of noise isolation and single speaker drivers in each ear. Features include a universal ear tip fit kit, cleaning tool and an elegant thin leather pouch for protection.

Super.Fi 5 EB Earbuds up the audio quality level with dual drivers in each ear (one for low range signals and one for mids and highs). Your \$199.99 also gets you a metallic crush-proof case and the thin leather pouch.

For those who like to get the absolute best, **Super.Fi 5 Pro Ear Buds** (\$249.99) will be your choice. Audio fidelity is maximized by utilizing a passive crossover system that directs the low, mid and high range signals to one or both of the two driver/speaker systems. Thicker, customized silicon flange fittings provide a full 26 decibels of noise isolation without producing "ear fatigue". They are the best you can buy, so it is easy for us to recommend them as a true Travel Essential.

END

Pack The Travel Essentials Way—Save 70% in Weight!

We're big fans of ultra-light packing. You'd be amazed at how much easier it is to travel—whether rolling a bag or carrying it—when you're hauling less weight. The next time you've packed for a trip, pick up your bag(s) and imagine you could cut the weight by a fourth. That would mean going from the typical 36 pound carry-on bag down to 27 pounds. Want more? How about switching to a lightweight gear bag and cutting another five pounds? Now your 36-pound load weighs only 22 pounds, and wedging it into the overhead compartment doesn't

require a crowbar. We were even able to take our carry-on packing list, replace every item with lightweight and packable products, and reduce our weight to 11 pounds and our size to something just larger than a laptop briefcase!

Impossible? Well we did it! To read how we dropped 70% off our weight and 50% off our size just by choosing lightweight travel equipment, go to this link on the Travel Essentials website: <http://www.travelessentials.com/ultralight-travel.html>

END



"The cool thing about being famous is traveling. I have always wanted to travel across seas, like to Canada and stuff.." — BRITNEY SPEARS

Where Everything Is Music...

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to me the perfect introduction to the spirit of Fes, and the World Sacred Music Festival.

Situated at the foot of the Atlas Mountains, Fes is the most ancient of the Imperial Capitals of Morocco. Founded in the ninth century, the city has long been a center of international commerce and a cultural crossroad. Fes is home to Qaraouine University, also founded in the ninth century, and one of the oldest centers of higher learning in the world.

Fes provides a feast to one's senses. Fes el-Bali (Old Fes) is the main attraction and home to close to 700,000 Fassis, and the residents of Fes are called. The narrow and winding lanes of Fes el-Bali do not allow room for automobiles inside the walls of the old city. Fes el-Bali's honeycomb of small lanes are packed with vendors selling leather goods, jewelry, carpets, fabrics, clothing, fruit and vegetables, wood carvings, perfumes, herbs, and more.

Guides are available to help navigate the maze that is Fes. Or, you might follow novelist and transplanted Fassi Paul Bowles's recommendation, to "lose oneself in the crowd — to be pulled along by it — not knowing where to and for how long . . . to see beauty where it is least likely to appear.

New Fes, or Fes el-Djedid, is new only in relation to Fes el-Bali, having been built in the thirteenth century. Here you will find ancient palaces and the old Jewish quarter. Then there is Ville Nouvelle, the New City, initiated by the French and continually expanded by Moroccans since the country regained independence in 1956. Ville Nouvelle bustles with commerce, education, and the arts, and is home to another million plus inhabitants.

As chaotic as Fes seems on first sight, it is an easy town to get around, either by petits taxis or local public transit buses.

Two or three dollars can get you a taxi ride across town from Ville Nouvelle to Fes el-Bali, while the trip by bus costs less than a quarter.

Guidebooks and friends who had visited Morocco in years past warned of hustlers and overbearing guides and shop owners, but it seems that things have changed. I spent a week wandering old, new, and nouvelle sections of Fes and never had an unpleasant experience being hustled or hassled. Fassis are generally



The Akhawat el-Fane el-Assil Ensemble perform at the Roman ruins of Volubulis.

happy to help and love to take time to share a cup of mint tea or lunch with a new friend.

Dining in Fes runs from French elegance in upscale restaurants to sumptuous feasts at small food stands deep in the heart of Fes el-Bali. I preferred the latter to the former, and usually had two main meals each day. I began each day exploring the city after a tall glass of fresh squeezed orange juice. Juice stands are everywhere in Morocco and a large glass of OJ goes for 50 cents. This kept me going until around 10 a.m. when I stopped for breakfast in one of the many

mini-restaurants in the old city. For \$2 I would get a large omelet, fried potatoes, a baguette and more orange juice. Some mornings I would just go with a fruit-yogurt drink topped with nuts.

Lunch and dinners are made memorable by the use of Moroccan spices. My favorites for dinner were kebabs and tajine. Chicken, lamb, and minced meat form the heart of the kebab experience.

Tajine is a stew, steam-cooked in an earthenware pot with a conical lid. Tajine includes lamb with prunes and almonds or chicken with olives and lemon. Kebab or tajine meals in the market shops run about \$3.

My guide Abdu'llah (\$35 with tip for one day) asked me what I wanted to see in Fes. I replied without hesitation, "a hammam." Hammams are the communal steam baths used by most Fassis for bathing. At the hammam you can go in and sweat for as long as you like, and for an additional fee get a vigorous scrub down and massage. Hammams are usually unmarked, so you'll need a guide or very good directions. In Fes, there are separate hammams for men and women. In smaller Moroccan cities the local hammam will have different hours set for men and then women. Be prepared to exhibit more modesty than you would find in the steam room of your local YMCA.

This hammam had different rooms heated by huge earthen basins of water kept at specific temperatures for each room. My masseur, Hamid, was a tiny, wiry fellow in his late 50s. He proceeded to pour bucket after bucket of hot water over me. Once warmed up and washed down, he slipped on a rough rubber mitt and began to scrub me down. After the wash and scrub, Hamid got serious. He proceeded to inflict a deep tissue massage, to put it mildly. After about half an hour the massage ended, but Hamid was not quite done yet. He poured another dozen buckets of water over me, with the last

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"As far as I knew, he had never taken a photograph before, and the summit of Everest was hardly the place to show him how." — EDMUND HILLARY

Where Everything Is Music...

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few being at a cooler temperature. The cost for 90 minutes in the hammam, massage and tip included, came to \$12.

Sufi Nights

A special feature of the World Sacred Music Festival is the midnight gathering of Sufi musicians. The headline concerts at Bab Makina wrap up between 11:00 and 11:30 pm. From Bab Makina it is a short walk into the old city to a courtyard and garden. Here the festival becomes a Sufi revival meeting. The courtyard is covered with carpets, and women, men, and children cram into the space and wait for the musicians to let loose.

These are samá' sessions, divine listening, where members of Moroccan

Sufi orders present their popular chants in a call and response style. As the call and response chant builds, the courtyard becomes something of a Sufi trance dance scene. Young men and women rise and begin moving to the music.

I am standing to the left of a Sufi shaykh, dressed in white robes with a bright blue sash and turban, and a twenty-something Moroccan woman in jeans and a blouse. They hold hands and move together in rhythm to the chant, bouncing and bending first to the left, then to the right, then to the center. I follow along beside them, discreetly, not knowing the song and desperately trying to pick up the Arabic refrain. The chant goes on for nearly a half hour and by the end the small crowd of about 300 looks as transformed as the musicians.

It is nearly 2 am and the Sufi chants

continue as I make my way back to my hotel, exhausted yet alive with the spirit of Fez and the magic of the World Sacred Music Festival.

—Steven Scholl writes on religion and culture from his home in Ashland, Oregon. Contact him at stevescholl@jeffnet.org. Imagine Adventures leads tours to the World Sacred Music Festival. For more information, visit their web site at www.imagine-adventures.com. Phone: 541-301-7469.

Travel Photo Contest Winners

Congratulations to Travel Essentials Photo Contest winners. The following talented amateur photographers were the winners of the 2005 Travel Photo Contest. It's not too soon to take photos for next summer's contest, so start snapping!

First Place

Ralph Walker
Arlington, Virginia
"Glacier Express in Mirror"

Second Place

Leslie Selcow
San Francisco, California
"Smoking Man"

Honorable Mentions

Sol Blechman
Ashland, Oregon
"Peace Fountain, Nagasaki, Japan"

Paul Jorizzo
Medford, Oregon
"Tanzania"

Neal Thompson
Ashland, Oregon
"The Aeromotor"

Norah Griffin
Grants Pass, Oregon
"Group of Penguins"

Judith Blum
Davis, California
"Bike Taxi"

In addition to Travel Essentials' gift certificates and subscriptions to *National Geographic Traveler* for the first and second prize winners, and Travel Essentials' gift certificates for the honorable mentions, this year's winners were also honored with a display of their fine work in the front window of our Ashland, Oregon store. You can still view all these prize-winning travel photographs and many more noteworthy entries from a link on our homepage: <http://www.travelessentials.com/photowinners2005/page1.html>.

END

Quiz...

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- to be the first person to do what?
6. The Spanish phrase "Encontrarse como un pulpo en un garaje" means what?
7. Name the two islands separated by the Strait of Bonifacio.
8. What are Agulhas and Koroshio?
9. Every evening people gather at Mallory Square and give a hand to what?
10. U Fleku is the world's oldest what?
11. If you throw a coin over your shoulder into the Trevi Fountain in Rome, Italy, what are you wishing for?
12. Name the journalist who in 1890 eclipsed Phileas Fogg's literary achievement by eight days?
13. The ancient land of Mesopotamia, sometimes referred to as the "cradle of civilization", is in which contemporary country?
14. What is Bloemfontein?
15. Hispaniola is made up of what two countries?

END



"Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and enjoy the journey." — BABS HOFFMAN



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The Latest Travel/Credit Card Scam

by Bob Bestor, Jr.

As a visitor to Europe you may be asked at some hotels, restaurants and shops to pay 4 or 5 percent more than locals do for the same product. How can that be? Easy. It's called Dynamic Currency Conversion (DCC) and though the procedure is not illegal, I put it in the scam category.

An increasing number of European establishments—Harrod's in London being one—now offer DCC "service." For North Americans, this rip-off converts overseas credit card transactions from local currency to Canadian or U.S. dollars on the spot.

Let's say you're checking out of your Paris hotel and the bill is 1000 euros. The clerk asks if you'd like to pay in U.S. dollars. For savvy travelers this is a question that should set off alarms, but to less experienced sojourners it might appear to be an attractive option. It would be nice, they may reason, to know the exact amount in dollars that will appear later on their credit card invoice; no more worries about currency fluctuation. In this respect, DCC might be of mild

interest—provided it were free, but it is not. Far from it.

The website of Planet Payment, a seller of DCC, contains this statement: "The cardholder gets the benefit of transacting in his own currency, while the merchant and acquirer/processor participates in a significant new revenue stream." Naturally.

The dirty little secret of DCC is that it adds 4 to 5 percent to each transaction, a huge and unnecessary fee. For what? So that you'll know your 1000 euro hotel bill will appear on your credit card invoice as precisely \$1239* instead of the approximately \$1191* it would if you paid in euros with a credit card that charges the minimum 1% conversion fee? That's not the way I want to spend \$58 when I'm in Paris.

There is no earthly reason for DCC, other than to enable its promoters, such as Planet Payment, and the unscrupulous hotels, restaurants and shops that subscribe to this useless "service," to get deeper into your pocketbook.

What do you do? When in Europe, if you are presented with a bill in dollars, do not accept it. Demand to pay in local

currency. All credit card transactions should be processed in local currency and converted to dollars by Visa or MasterCard on your monthly statement.

All this raises the question: what is the best way to deal with currency exchange when overseas? We advise readers of our monthly newsletter, *Gemütlichkeit, The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria & Switzerland* (www.gemut.com, \$59 per year), to use their bank ATM card to obtain cash when overseas. We discourage the use of travelers checks for European travel, even in local currency, as the exchange rate is unfavorable and they are often difficult to cash.

For larger purchases, we recommend using a credit card that charges the minimum 1% currency conversion fee on foreign transactions. These "1%" cards are issued by many smaller banks and savings and loan companies. Most major banks, such as Citibank, Wells Fargo and Bank of America, add an additional 2% (for which, incidentally they do nothing) to the credit card company's 1% charge, for

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