



TRAVEL ESSENTIALS NEWS

ASHLAND, OREGON

www.travelessentials.com

Thailand—Land Of Smiles and Inexpensive Dentistry

by Zach Ehlert and Mia Barnard

Editor's Note—Two Travel Essentials' staff members recently traveled to Thailand, and separately went for dental exams in different cities, Zach to Chiang Mai and Mia to Bangkok. Here are their stories.

Thailand is known as the land of smiles, so is it safe to assume they have good dental care there? Yes—good, cheap dental care.

Chiang Mai Dentist

While planning my recent trip to Thailand, I heard from numerous people that I should have my teeth cleaned while there, as it's much cheaper than in the U.S. and very hygienic. I scoured my guidebooks and the web, including the *Lonely Planet* Thorn Tree forums, and was easily able to affirm my suspicions on the cost and allay my fears on quality issues—all I found were glowing

recommendations, though some Thai dentists that cater mainly to westerners were a little more expensive than others.

Now that I had decided to get my teeth cleaned, the next step was to choose a dentist. Once again I turned to the Internet and after a short time stumbled across the CM Dental Clinic in Chiang Mai (www.dentalchiangmai.com). Initially I hadn't planned on going to Chiang Mai as it is supposedly much hotter in the north in late March when I was traveling. But after perusing more guide books and listening to the advice of trusted friends, I realized that this was a city not to be missed on my all too brief, three week tour of Thailand. And if I had any cavities requiring multiple trips to the dentist I would much rather do it in slower-paced Chiang Mai than in the humidity and traffic chaos of Bangkok.

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In Search of the Perfect Taco

by Nancy Bestor

When I think back on our family's week-long Spring vacation to Puerto Vallarta, I don't think about the lovely resort, our days spent relaxing under an umbrella on the beach or in lounge chairs by the beautiful pool. No, the thing that stands out most in my mind is the tacos. Seven days of mouth watering Mexican tacos—chicken, shrimp, pork, and beef. Tacos prepared right before our eyes with fresh corn tortillas—filled with a choice of meat, onions, cilantro and various delicious green and red salsas and other condiments. Authentic Mexican restaurants in the United States make good tacos, but they are nothing like local Puerto Vallarta tacos. Trust me.

We booked a weeklong trip to Puerto

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Travel Gear To Lighten Your Load

by Ember Hood

The latest news from the travel front for Summer 2008 is that airlines are not making travel any cheaper or easier. Fees are rising, and regulations abounding. Here are some travel ideas that will help ease the pain of higher prices and tighter restrictions. For more information on these and other great travel gear, call us at 800-258-0758. You can also check out these products online (and in color!) at our website, www.travelessentials.com.

Anne McAlpin Lightweight Tote

With well thought out organizational features and a roomy interior, Anne McAlpin's Coast and Cruise Lightweight Tote makes a great carry-on bag. Constructed from lightweight yet durable

ballistic nylon, the tote offers excellent organization with a special zippered pocket designed to keep all your travel documents secure and easy-to-find. A wide "slip" panel on the back allows the tote to slide easily over the handle of any rolling bag, keeping it secure as you navigate the airports, sidewalks and back streets of the world. In addition to the zippered organizational pocket, there are two handy end pockets that are ideal for water bottles and umbrellas. And best of all, the interior of the tote is roomy enough to hold everything you'll need for in-flight comfort and entertainment. The Anne McAlpin Lightweight Tote (\$39.95) is available in black, blue, olive

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Thailand—Land of Smiles and Inexpensive Dentistry...

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The CM Dental Clinic offers all sorts of dental treatment—basic cleaning, orthodontia, oral surgery, dental implants, and more. Communication through their website was easy, concise and prompt—they always replied to my inquiries by the next day. After a few brief email exchanges, I had an appointment for my first full day in Chiang Mai. And, as they noted in every email, complimentary hotel pick up and drop off service was included in the price.

I chose to stay at CM Blue House (www.cmlbluehouse.com), a quaint and quiet spot in the Tha Pae Gate area of old Chiang Mai, where an air conditioned room with hot water, TV and refrigerator cost 500 baht/night (about \$15). The grounds also include a delightful garden cafe with plenty of plants, fountains and a self-service beverage station that was great for wiling away the hot afternoons.

The morning of my appointment I called the clinic and made my pick up arrangements. I relaxed with a book in the garden as I awaited my ride and shortly before 10:30 was met by my driver, a young Thai woman who spoke excellent English. We made pleasant conversation as the van made its way through the narrow alleys of Chiang Mai. I figured it wouldn't take very long to get to the dentist, but at the time didn't know anything about the layout of Chiang Mai. We had to navigate lots of one way streets—over moats, around the old city walls and across the Ping river—all while battling constant traffic.

The air conditioned van had free bottled water and offered a good view of the city as my driver served as de-facto tour guide advising me on the hazards of riding a motorbike in Chiang Mai (she had been stopped the day before and had her bike impounded) and on the streets that close to traffic on Sundays and fill with all kinds of vendors.

Upon arrival at the clinic I was instructed to leave my shoes at the door and put on a pair of rubber flip-flops.

They didn't quite fit my "giant" American feet (size 11 1/2), but I appreciated the idea behind them. The reception area was spotless, with plenty of comfortable chairs and couches, and I was offered tea or coffee while I waited. I was perusing a Chiang Mai tourism magazine when I was informed the dentist was running a little behind schedule, but if I wanted I could use their Internet while I waited (nothing like any trip to the dentist I'd ever experienced!).

After about half an hour, someone

"up-sell" me on their "airflow" method. I have a small wire on the inside of my bottom teeth as a result of many joyful teenage years spent at the orthodontist, and was told that this method would make it easier to work around the wire and I'd get a better cleaning overall.

The airflow method basically entailed a tiny, zesty lemon flavored sandblaster. While it made the cleaning go much quicker and didn't result in any of the painful gum prodding I was used to, it did result in water occasionally running down my neck, and of course down my throat. Throughout the entire proceeding I was kept quite comfortable (for a trip to the dentist) as the assistant kept a soft cloth over my eyes—shading them from the light—and around my chin to soak up any airflow runoff. A few minutes later the airflow was done and after a quick floss and gum massage, I was on my way. It certainly didn't feel like enough time had passed for an entire trip to the dentist!

Back in the reception area I paid my bill—the basic exam and cleaning was 1,000 baht (\$30) with an extra 900 (\$27) for the airflow—and collected my wits for the ride back to the Blue House. Sure there were cheaper places to get my teeth cleaned, I spotted a few small clinics that offered cleanings for as low as 500 baht (\$15), but for the comfort and service I received, I was extremely impressed by the

CM Dental Clinic. It was actually a great cultural experience, and whether you want a simple cleaning or extensive dental work, I would highly recommend a visit to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

Bangkok Dentist

As we walked in the office my husband Jason turned to me and said, "Smells just like a dentist office."

At the 11th hour of planning our trip to Thailand I had the brilliant idea of visiting the dentist while in Bangkok. Neither Jason nor myself had been to the dentist since we were in the Peace Corps in West Africa, eight years ago. Let me tell you, the dentist in Thailand was quite a bit better than the one in Burkina Faso.

The dental group with the best



Street musicians at the Chiang Mai Market.

came to retrieve me from the upstairs Internet room—it was my turn.

Now, I've never been a big fan of the dentist. Sitting practically upside down while someone pokes and prods my gums all with a giant bright light shining directly in my eyes has never been my idea of a good time. The exam room was clean, well lit, and nicely open, not like some of the claustrophobic, stuffy exam rooms I've experienced before. My female dentist, who spoke decent English, asked what I needed, and when I laid back, she got to work. Even though she didn't speak much English, her assistant was helpful and friendly. After a brief exam, I let them



"My first rule of consumerism is never to buy anything you can't make your children carry." — BILL BRYSON

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In Search of the Perfect Taco...

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Vallarta specifically for a little down time in a sunny beach location. Our lodging was the Villa del Palmar, just north of downtown Puerto Vallarta on Banderas Bay, where our one bedroom unit, with a pull out bed in the living room and full kitchen (complete with cookware and dishes), cost \$1100 for the week. The resort features two swimming pools, multiple hot tubs, a nice beach with lounges and umbrellas, and as few or as many activities as a guest is interested in.

Gigante, a Costco-sized grocery store, is just across the street, and proved handy for breakfast and lunch groceries as well as drinks and treats. While the resort boasts several restaurants, and many special events that include dinner (Italian Buffet, a Beach Party, and a Tequila Mariachi Party—ranging from \$25-\$40 per person), we chose instead to cook our own food and fill our bellies at the outdoor taco stands that are sprinkled throughout the town and on the beaches.

We did take part in many other fun (and free!) activities at the resort, including shuffleboard, ping-pong, bocci ball, kayaking, and a trampoline out in the ocean, just off the beach. Emily, Sarah and I even tried a little water aerobics one morning, kicking our legs and moving our arms to a variety of American tunes, but we snuck away when the exercisers joined hands in a circle and began synchronized swimming moves to music from *Flashdance*. I also wanted to try the free Salsa dancing lessons, but no one else in my family was game.

When not eating in town, Bob and I would wander down the beach near our resort, to snack at a fish taco stand. The offerings were simple but delectable—shrimp tacos and shrimp and cheese quesadillas, marlin and shrimp on a stick, grilled whole marlin, and shrimp with cocktail sauce. Most days we chose the shrimp tacos (\$1.50), shrimp quesadillas (\$2), and the marlin on a stick (\$2). Washed down with a coke (\$1) or beer (bring your own, as no alcohol is served), sitting under a tarp on the beach, you might just think you've died and gone to taco heaven. Few tourists ventured to the taco stand, and instead we

were lucky enough to be seated amongst local families, construction workers, and vendors taking a break from selling their wares on the beach.

And the vendors did sell their wares on the beach—all day every day—asking beach loungers to look at their t-shirts, hats, jewelry, artwork, sunglasses, temporary tattoos, hair braiding, wood carvings, etc. (the list goes on and on). A simple “no thank you,” in English or Spanish, would easily move the vendors along, at least until the next one arrived. One afternoon we sat near a family of six, and in the span of about 45 minutes, watched them buy toe rings, necklaces, sun dresses, t-shirts, and more, all while two girls got their hair braided and their parents tanked-up on colorful tropical

Sitting on the beach,
eating a shrimp taco
and drinking a beer,
you might just think
you've died and gone
to taco heaven.

drinks. The sun was hot on that beach, and we saw the same family the next day, sporting both their new purchases and their lobster-red sunburns.

Not once did we eat in an indoor restaurant, choosing instead to frequent the many food stalls throughout town. Most days we rode in to the heart of Puerto Vallarta on the local bus (\$.55 each), which took about 20 minutes. The buses into town (with a “Centro” sign in the front window) came frequently—we never waited more than five minutes, and the bus ride often provided free entertainment, as locals would walk the aisles selling magic formulas in a jar, singing for donations, or sometimes performing as clowns. We never knew exactly what was for sale, or what the donations were going towards, but most locals contributed something to the cause. We'd exit the bus in the heart of Old Puerto Vallarta, and walk the streets seeking out new taco stands.

Next to our beloved beach stand, our favorite taco purveyor was La Hormiga Feliz (The Happy Ant), on the corner of Vallarta and Madero streets. La Hormiga would open late in the afternoon (closed on Sundays), and serve up the most delectable carne asada (steak) and carnitas (pork) tacos I have ever had. The stand has bench seats around the perimeter of the cooking area, so you can watch your tacos being prepared. The tacos cost about \$.90 cents each, and were small enough that it would take about four to fill my stomach. Our family would eat to our hearts' content and drink four Fanta sodas, all for about \$16.

The many stands we tried in town all offered a multitude of condiments including limes, cucumber, salsa, onions, green salsa made with avocados and cilantro, traditional salsa verde, and more. Although many tourists to Puerto Vallarta worry about the cleanliness of food stalls, we ate at outdoor taco stands every day, and never got sick, and we ate excellent food every time. Each and every stand was clean and their operators, in every case, paid attention to that cleanliness by having someone other than the chef handle money.

We did a little souvenir shopping while in the old town, and although most stores and stalls tend to sell the same touristy stuff, we did find a few unique shops, including Lucy's Cucu Cabana (295 Basilio Badillo), where we bought a Day of the Dead skeleton mariachi band set, and Safari Accents (Olas Altas 224), where we chose from a beautiful array of colored glass bottles in various shapes and sizes. We also enjoyed walking the Malecón (Boardwalk), a half-mile raised cement sidewalk along the beach in downtown. Sunday evening seems to be the night every local in town is out walking with their entire families, enjoying live music, dancing in the square, and eating treats like corn cut off the cob and served in a cup with a heaping spoonful of mayonnaise (?), fresh mango on a stick, or crepes with nutella and bananas.

My mouth is watering (isn't yours?), and I find myself thinking longingly of returning to Puerto Vallarta, for another plate of tacos.

END

—Nancy Bestor is the co-owner of *Travel Essentials*. She loves tacos.



“One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind.”—CHARLES DICKENS

Travel Gear To Lighten Your Load...

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and red. It's one of our best selling items because it makes every trip a little easier.



Savvy Chic Clothing

Look great this summer in Ex Officio's stylish, lightweight and wrinkle resistant Savvy Chic clothing. Savvy Chic offers a great fit and makes stylish comfort easy with its amazing wrinkle-beating crinkled fabric that looks great right out of the suitcase. Made from a rayon/polyester blend with a hint of spandex for stretch, the Savvy Chic tops and bottoms are perfect for comfortable, easy travel.



The **Savvy Chic Athena** (\$49.95) is a stylishly shaped long sleeved shirt that comes in black and white, and is perfect with a pair of **Savvy Chic Pants** (\$54.95) or a **Savvy Chic Skirt** (also \$54.95). The **Savvy Chic Jacky** (\$54.95) is a lightweight zip-front jacket that finishes the collection and is perfect as an extra layer on summer and fall evenings.



Sunday Afternoons Kauai Hat

The **Kauai Hat** from Sunday Afternoons (\$34.95) is much more than just an attractive hat. With a UPF rating of 50, this stylishly woven hat will protect your head and neck from the harsh rays of the sun, whether you're spending a week on the beach or a day in the garden. Made from a long-lasting and richly woven cotton/polyester/paper blend, the Kauai has a 3.5 inch rolled brim that keeps the sun at bay. If you need a comfortable,



protective, fashion-friendly hat for your next adventure, it will easily pack down flat, or roll up to fit into any suitcase. The

Kauai hat is available in two colors, cream and tweed.

Eagle Creek Carry-On Tarmac

It's simple, Eagle Creek makes great bags. They are durable, functional, and absolutely guaranteed to last. So if you're looking for a sturdy, elegant and easily packable suitcase that will stick with you flight after flight, the **Tarmac 22 Rolling Bag** (\$275) is just the ticket. We believe that hands down, the Tarmac 22 is the best value there is in a maximum sized rolling carry-on.

Built-in storage cubes provide superior organization and make the Tarmac the easiest of suitcases to pack. You'll find that with just a little bit of creativity (and restraint!) your Tarmac 22 offers the perfect layout for all you'll need for just about any length of trip. Plus, the Tarmac's larger pockets are designed to work with Eagle Creek's Pack-It System folders and cubes, helping you to stay



even more organized when you're on the go. And, if you need a little extra room, and don't mind checking your bag, the Tarmac 22 has a zippered expansion that adds 15% to your available space.



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

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Travel Gear To Lighten Your Load...

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In addition to its sleek functionality, the Tarmac cuts no corners when it comes to durability. This bag is made to last. Protective skid plates, sole patches and ballistic nylon where it counts, all protect the bag where it takes the biggest beating—on its corners and edges. Strong wheel housings add form to the bag and prevent wear and tear on the already extremely sturdy wheels. Other features of the Tarmac 22 are really icing on the cake—a slip away luggage tag hides your personal information, and an add-a-bag clip helps you attach a second bag to your Tarmac, making airport navigation a breeze. The Tarmac 22 Rolling bag measures 14 x 22 x 9.5 inches when unexpanded and 14 x 22 x 11 when expanded. The Tarmac 22” is available in black, palm and sienna.

Zip-Out Shopping Tote

Baggallini's Zip-Out Shopping Tote comes in a myriad of colors and three sizes, all ready for you to open and fill with groceries, books, clothes, toys, or anything else you might need to carry. Pack the tote in your suitcase or handbag, then open it up for a handy shopping bag or to pack souvenirs on the trip home! Once the bag is expanded, the pocket in which it was housed becomes a handy zippered compartment for change, a wallet, cell phones, etc. And, when it's full, you can zip it closed to make sure nothing falls

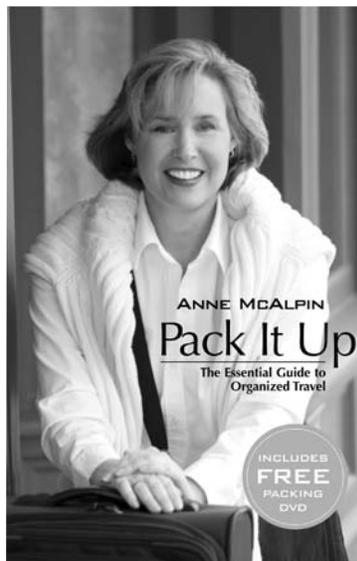


out. All of the Baggallini Zip-Out bags are made from a durable, water-resistant nylon that will prevent a little rain from soaking your stuff.

The Small Zip-Out Shopping Tote (\$15.95) measures 5.5 x 4.5 inches when in the pouch and 15 x 18 x 6 inches when opened. It weighs 8 ounces and is perfect for quick trips to the market, a picnic in the park, or a day at the beach. The Medium Zip-Out Shopping Tote (\$19.95) measures 7 x 7 inches when in its pouch and 17 x 17 x 6 inches when opened. It weighs 12 ounces, and it is great for shopping trips. It can also be used as a carry-on bag when flying. The Large Zip-Out Shopping Tote (\$21.95) measures 8 x 8 inches when closed and 18 x 22 x 7 when opened. It weighs 15 ounces. This is a big bag, so you won't want to try to fill it with heavy items, but it's great for holding clothes or light yet bulky items.

Pack It Up Book and DVD

Anne McAlpin likes to say, "If you want to get away from it all, don't take it all with you!" With that in mind, she wrote *Pack It Up*, a guide to traveling light. Anne has shared her packing advice on *Oprah*, *The View*, CNN and HGTV, and she's determined to help everyone pack



efficiently. And, with 280 days on the road and an average of 25 flights per month last year alone, she certainly has the experience.

With all the luggage fees and charges that are cropping up among the airlines, Anne has taken it upon herself to teach the masses how to pack for any trip in a carry-on bag, saving you both time and money while still taking everything you need. *Pack It Up* (\$19.95) also includes a packing DVD, for visual instruction on how to pack a simple, compact bag.

GreenSmart Laptop Sleeve

GreenSmart Laptop Sleeves and



Jackets keep plastic bottles out of the landfill, and puts them to good use. Made almost entirely from recycled plastic water bottles, the Laptop Jacket (\$39.95) provides excellent protection and makes for a handy, stripped down computer case. While there's not much room inside for anything other than your laptop, there are two large slip pockets and a zippered pocket on the exterior for cords and batteries and such. With both a detachable shoulder strap and comfy handle, the Laptop Jacket is easy to carry. GreenSmart's Laptop Sleeve (\$24.95) is simply a stripped-down version of the Jacket. With no shoulder strap or handle, it's the better choice if you need laptop protection for a brief, backpack or tote you already own.

Both are available in black or a light brown "toasted almond", and both feature green interiors to remind you that you're helping the environment while you protect your laptop. **END**

—Ember Hood manages Travel Essentials' website, www.travelessentials.com.



"Travel has no longer any charm for me. I have seen all the foreign countries I want to except heaven and hell and I have only a vague curiosity about one of those." — MARK TWAIN

The Many Wonders of China

by Liz Bestor

You have entered a “No Gasp” zone, was the puzzling admonishment of our host, Mac, as we climbed into his car that day in Beijing. Puzzling because, even though we had been in China only a few hours, gasps were coming fast and furious; we gasped at Beijing’s dazzling new 21st century airport, at the masses of people crowding the Silk Market, and at the sheer chaos of the city’s traffic, where street lanes are mere suggestions and any open space is instantly filled by a wild collection of bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and pedestrians who think nothing of jaywalking across six lanes of traffic.

How could you not gasp in China? Mac’s warning was like putting a couple of 12-year-olds on a roller coaster and telling them to keep quiet—it wasn’t going to happen. In fact, our sharp, abrupt intakes of breath continued for the next two weeks. We gasped at the history of the Great Wall, the wonder of the Terra Cotta Soldiers, the beauty of the Li River, and the masses of skyscrapers in Hong Kong.

Mac is Jane’s brother and he and his wife, Janny—who compares driving in China to an intricate dance: “car-eography”—were our Beijing hosts. They took us to the Great Wall at Mutianyu, the Temple of Heaven, and the Dirt Market. Our best education, though, came at the Silk Market where Janny taught us to bargain without knowing the language. If we were interested in something, we pointed and said “How much?” in English. The seller understands, whips out a calculator and enters a price. The buyer is obliged to look aghast and turn to walk away. The seller then thrusts the calculator into the buyer’s hands, thereby requesting a counter offer. It is then the seller’s turn to put on a face and enter yet another offer on the calculator, and so on until a deal is made. Five years ago the Silk Market was a warren of narrow lanes filled with shops; today it is a six-story building. The basement is the leather market and possibly the most crowded with shops

and shoppers; “Hello lady, you want Gucci bag?” Floors one, two and three sell a vast variety of fabric merchandise, including yardage, tablecloths, clothing, and, of course, souvenirs. The fourth is cheap jewelry and watches, five is expensive jewelry and six is restaurants. For Pashmina Scarves, try stall C3-0027 where we got ours for \$4 to \$5 each.

Next stop was Xian where we were met at the airport by Melanie, a driver/guide Janny had used on her trips to the city. We had called ahead to arrange for Melanie’s services and, sure enough, there she was at the airport to meet us. Her English is excellent, she has a great sense of humor, and knows her area well. Contact her at mami_melanie@hotmail.com. Jane and I also recommend the Garden Hotel, next to the Big Goose Pagoda and within walking distance of the

(jerrytour@hotmail.com), a competent, English-speaking CITS (China International Travel Service) guide. Our choice of the Gui Shan (Jasper) Hotel was unfortunate as it is too far from the main downtown area. A better choice is the Sheraton whose rooms we inspected and found to be satisfactory. We had better luck with our booked-from-the-states Li River tour. It was just as the scroll paintings depict it; mountains jutting to the sky, misty air, water buffalo, and all variety of river craft including bamboo rafts. Afterwards, we signed on for a tour into the countryside to visit a centuries-old farmhouse and a bamboo raft ride on the river to watch cormorant fishermen. Through Jerry, we arranged to see rice paddies in the Longji Mountains and visit the village of Ping’an. It was well worth the time: about a two-hour drive followed

by a hike up the mountainside to the paddies. The village is also known for its ethnic embroidery.

If you choose to eat Chinese in Guilin, be ready for anything. That’s *anything*. The first clue we might be in for something quite different were the plastic dishpans filled with turtles and frogs in front of the restaurant. Inside, there was but one English menu, waitresses wore blue vests and scarves, and only one spoke a little English. The menu’s first page featured such daily specials as fried bamboo rat, civet, and several kinds

of snake. Quickly we flipped pages until we found dishes a little more in line with our timid western tastes: Guilin fried rice with scrambled egg, onion, and pickled green beans; braised pork belly with taro; and mushrooms with baby bok choy. A small packet of tissues was provided as napkins, and place settings were enclosed in shrink-wrapped clear plastic. Some customers ordered dishes requiring hot plates, and extension cords were strung all across the floor, great for tripping over.

After this first, nameless, somewhat scary Guilin restaurant—and a little research—we moved on to Rosemary’s Cafe and the Sheraton’s Studio Café, both of which lived up to guidebook praise.

You don’t need a package tour to see much of China. With careful planning, you can do it on your own. END

—Liz Bestor is Bob Bestor’s mom. This was her second visit to China.



Beijing’s Temple of Heaven

outstanding Shaanxi History Museum.

In Xian it is against the law to use a car horn within the city limits, but on the toll roads not only are horns ok, drivers can also use a siren that sounds like a police car! This is where we had our best cab ride. After picking us up, the driver did a U-turn across six lanes of traffic and “car-eographed” his way back to the hotel at top speed.

The main reason to visit the high desert city of Xian is to see the amazing Terra Cotta Soldiers. The Muslim Market, the city wall, and Banpo Village, an excavation of a village from Neanderthal times, are also recommended.

Then it was on to Guilin and the beautiful, misty Li River. Through our Xian escort, Melanie, we met Jerry Weng



“Be careful going in search of adventure. It’s ridiculously easy to find.” — WILLIAM LEAST HEAT MOON

Thailand—Land of Smiles and Inexpensive Dentistry...

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feedback on the *Lonely Planet* Thorn Tree Forum was Thantakit International Dental Center (www.thantakit.com), so we gave them a try. Thantakit has three locations in Bangkok, one of which is a six story dental center with a very fancy hotel across the street. At first that seemed like it might be fun, but I had a talk with my private travel consultant Nancy Bestor, and changed the appointment to the All Seasons Place branch near the Atlanta Hotel, where the Bestor family stayed several years back.

We arrived in Bangkok at 10:00 pm and caught a cab to the Atlanta, where we were greeted with glasses of fresh squeezed watermelon juice. We chose an air-conditioned room, as we had our two-year-old daughter Daisy with us, and were pleasantly surprised by its spaciousness. The hotel staff was very helpful and friendly, they even tried to get directions to the dentist at 12:30 a.m. Surprise! No one at the dental office

answered the phone. When we went to the lobby the next morning, however, a hotel staffer had not only found where we were going, but had the address written out in Thai for our Taxi driver.

Upon our arrival at the dentist, the receptionist offered us drinks from

water and Daisy got a kick out of the tiny straws we were given to use. After a short wait, I was called to the chair. The dentist was soft spoken as he asked what I was there for. I told him it had been about eight years since I'd been to the dentist and I needed an exam and cleaning. He looked at my teeth, sent me in for x-rays, then gave them a thorough cleaning.

Both my husband and I received a clean dental bill of health, for a cost of \$100 for both of us. After a painless hour and a half, we were on our way.

I only wish I could do as my Thai dentist asked and go back for a check-up in six months. **END**

—Zach Ehlert has worked at *Travel Essentials* for two years. A fine amateur photographer, this was Zach's first trip off the North American continent.

Mia Barnard is a former *Peace Corp* volunteer and the manager of *Travel Essentials*.



Thai boats on the island of Ko Lanta

a cooler filled with such cavity causing sodas as Fanta and Sprite. I did find some

News, Advice and Tips For Travelers

- There has been much discussion in the travel media lately about currency exchange and the fees associated with using credit cards and ATMs overseas. The fact that many of these fees are onerous bank ripoffs causes many to overlook the most important element in purchasing foreign currency: the exchange rate. One customer told us how she avoided all fees during a three-month vacation by going to her bank prior to her trip and exchanging several thousand dollars for euros. Presumably she carried some or all of them on her person. Aside from the security issue, that's a bad idea because, compared to using an ATM in Europe to obtain euros (or any other European currency), most bank rates of exchange for such transactions are simply awful. One traveler told us how his bank wanted to charge \$1.68 for each euro when the bank-to-bank exchange rate

(which he would have gotten with his ATM card) was \$1.58. On a \$3000 currency swap he would have gotten 123 fewer euros, about \$194. Check any offered exchange rate against rates quoted at www.xe.com.

- Our suggestions for currency exchange are: 1. Use a debit or ATM card in Europe to obtain cash from ATM machines; 2. Don't use your credit card for cash advances; 3. Get a Capitol One credit card which charges no foreign transaction fees; 4. Forget travelers' checks, they are hard to cash in Europe, and even if you get them in a foreign denomination the exchange rate is likely to be unfavorable; 5. Do not purchase foreign currency from your bank without comparing the exchange rate to that posted at www.xe.com.
- The dirty little secret of buying European city-to-city rail tickets

from the U.S. is to avoid U.S. sellers such as Rail Europe. You can take advantage of advance booking deals and get a much better train selection by purchasing online at the websites of the various European rail operators. Here's the very recent experience of one savvy traveler. For a late May trip from Venice to Munich for her family of four, Rail Europe's website quoted \$802 second class. Germany's Deutsche Bahn (www.bahn.de) showed a regular fare of 189 euros (\$302) for the group but also listed discounted options of 134 euros (\$214) and 94 euros (\$150). The 94 euro option was not available but she was able to book with a credit card at the 134 euro rate, thereby saving nearly \$600. Of course, if you will take more than a couple of rail trips in Europe a rail pass may save you money. Go to www.gemut.com. **END**



"Personally I regard idling as a virtue, but civilized society holds otherwise." — J. MAARTEN TROOST, AUTHOR, *THE SEX LIVES OF CANNIBALS*

Travel Essentials' 8th Annual Photo Contest—Enter Now For Your Chance to Win!

It's time once again for all budding travel photographers to submit their finest travel photographs and send them in to Travel Essentials for the 8th Annual Amateur Travel Photo Contest!

Now through August 31, you can enter any two of your travel snapshots, and you'll be eligible to win fame and prizes, *and* have your photo displayed in large format online and in the display window of Travel Essentials' Ashland, Oregon store. Here are the rules:

- Submit any size, color or black and white photograph (no negatives or slides please), in person, snail mail or electronically to Travel Essentials, 252 E. Main St., Ashland OR 97520, or to bob@travelessentials.com.
- Include your name, address and telephone number, as well as the place the photo was taken. If entering online, please put "Travel Photo Contest" in the subject field.
- All photographs will become the property of Travel Essentials. Please



2007 Grand Prize Winning Photo, taken by David Wood of Ashland, Oregon Vendor, Can Tho, Vietnam

make copies for yourself before sending!

- Travel Essentials will be the sole judge of the contest, and reserves the right to reprint and display the photographs.
- The contest is open to amateur photographers from the U.S. and Canada, and no more than two entries will be accepted per person.

Prizes are as follows:

1st Prize: A \$250 gift certificate to Travel Essentials.

2nd Prize: A \$100 Gift Certificate to Travel Essentials.

Five honorable mentions will receive a \$50 Gift Certificate to Travel Essentials.

To see a slideshow of some of the amazing photos entered last year, visit the 2007 Photo Contest Winners at our website, www.travelessentials.com.

So wow us with your most stunning travel images. We look forward to seeing your photos!

END