Travel Gift Items to Brighten Your Loved Ones Holidays

The holiday season is a good time to buy great travel gifts for those you love — and since you should always love yourself, we’re talking about you too! Here are some of the newest and best travel products on the market today, highly recommended by the Travel Essentials’ team.

**USB Rechargeable LED Book Light**
Mighty Bright’s award winning Recharge LED Booklight ($28.95) puts a handy and stylish twist on a travel staple. Batteries are not included because they are not necessary. The Recharge powers up via USB, and can be plugged into either a computer or a wall socket. A one-hour charge yields 10 hours of clean and bright LED lighting on the high setting and 60 hours on the low setting. A recent winner of the “Red Dot International Design Award,” its nimble silicone neck bends to just about any position and ensures your reading material is always perfectly illuminated. The Recharge also boasts 2 LED bulbs that produce 10 lumens of brightness and a low

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Celebrating Dia de los Muertos In San Miguel de Allende

by Nancy Bestor

I have long been fascinated with Mexico’s observance of Dia de los Muertos — Day of the Dead. The idea of relatives who have passed on being remembered, honored and celebrated, rather than just mourned, is a tradition I wish my culture participated in. Thus it was with great delight that I traveled with Bob to Mexico, specifically Mexico City, Guanajuato, and San Miguel de Allende, over Day of the Dead this past fall.

We began our trip with three days in one of our favorite spots, Mexico City, at one of our favorite B&B’s, the Red Tree House. This was our second visit to both. They lived up to the reputations established on our previous outstanding visit, and we thoroughly enjoyed exploring the city (more in a future eNewsletter). From Mexico City, we flew to Queretaro, and then took a 90-mile Uber ride to get to Guanajuato. Once we arrived, we unloaded our bags at our Airbnb right in the heart of the city, and headed out on a nighttime walk to explore.

Each fall, Guanajuato hosts its annual Cervantino Festival, and the evening we arrived was the final night of the big event. This three-week long, internationally acclaimed artistic and cultural event includes live theater, opera, classical and folk music, dance, art and photography exhibits, and more, in several locations throughout the city. This year’s edition boasted 3500 artists from 31 countries. Fortunately for us, there were lots of street performers taking part, and as we walked through the packed colonial city on Sunday night at 10pm, we listened to musicians, watched

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Planes, Trains, & Automobiles

by Robert Bestor

On my first extended European adventure, choosing a mode of transportation was easy. In 1986, for a student traveler, the only option was a Eurail Pass. And the only decision to be made was whether you needed one for 30-, 60- or 90-days. Pretty easy, as I was too young to rent a car to drive the Autobahn, and modern day, cattle-call airlines were just a discount dream of entrepreneurs like Michael “seat belts don’t matter” O’Leary. He’s the CEO of Ryan Air who also thinks it’s a good idea to offer standing room only flights with hand straps dangling from the ceiling “like on the London Underground.” But I digress.

Fast forward to 2018 and for getting around Europe it feels like there is an endless array of options to choose from, each with their own pros, cons and often

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and it was beautiful. Altars, or ofrendas, popped up everywhere—in every business that we walked into, whether it was a restaurant, retail store, even the Biblioteca Publica, there was an altar honoring those who have passed on. Beautiful marigolds decorated the entire city, in doorways, windows, plazas, fountains, churches, and more. There was a celebratory feeling in the historic downtown, there were parades throughout the city, and entire families were out in the main plaza, waiting in lines to get their faces painted in skull artistry, socializing, listening to mariachi bands, and eating snacks from vendors.

But the local cemetery provided perhaps the most traditional celebration of Dia de los Muertos. The Panteón de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe cemetery was packed with families, members aging from the very young to the very old, all gathering around the graves of loved ones. Some families were weeding, painting and sprucing up their family member’s grave, while others decorated them with marigolds and marigold petals, favorite foods and drinks, and colorful banners. Yet other families hired musicians, even full on mariachi bands, to play and sing for departed family members. Some folks were simply sitting in chairs, eating and drinking around graves. In every case, however a family chose to honor their relative who had passed on, the celebration was respectful—not boisterous—but not seemingly too sad either. It is a wonderful tradition and a beautiful sight to see. I feel quite fortunate that we were able to experience it.

A few of our favorite sites in San Miguel included the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel, the multi-towered Catholic church in San Miguel’s town square, El Jardin. This stunning building is the parish seat, so it hosts a daily mass, and boasts four iron bells that are manually rung (with ropes!) on days of celebration. Of course, they were ringing off and on all day long on November 1 and 2. The church is home to a crypt that is only opened once a year, on Dia de los Muertos. It too was impressive. Next door to the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel is the small Iglesia de San Rafael, another church in the same courtyard as the Parroquia. The rather dramatic scenes of the statuary inside this church make it worth a visit as well.

Every day in San Miguel we ate delicious food from street vendors. We started our mornings with tamales from a cart in front of the Oratorio San Felipe Neri pink sandstone church. The 12 peso ($.59 cent) pollo verde tamales were big and delicious. Some days we splurged and each had two. We also ate lunch every day in the Mercado Ignacio Ramirez, a busy covered market with fresh fruit, vegetable, meat, and dry goods stalls. There were plenty of delicious prepared food stalls to choose from, and most days we ate things like chile relleno or enchiladas verde, and with drinks, our tab was usually under $7 for the both of us. At night, we were delighted to find a super crowded taco stand, with locals gathered all around on the street and sidewalk, eating terrific al pastor tacos. We ate there as many nights as we could, stuffing delicious $.70 cent tacos into our mouths as fast as we could so we could eat more before we got full. Because that’s how we roll. We often finished off our breakfast, lunch, or dinner with fresh made and delicious churros, from any one of the innumerable churro carts in the city (one bag, with four or five churros in it, cost...
Olé, Olé, Olé, Olé – “Enjoying” Mexican Soccer

by Nancy Bestor

Do you remember the early days of romantic relationships? Where you say that you “really enjoy” doing certain activities that your partner enjoys, but the truth is, you are just pretending to like them? Or maybe you are your partner’s biggest fan? After 30+ years of being with that same partner, can you finally tell the truth? I’m asking for a friend.

When Bob and I were in Mexico City recently, he really wanted to go to the rivalry game at Estadio Azteca between two of Mexico City’s premier soccer teams. Now let me tell you a little something about our relationship, (because the preceding paragraph was about someone else entirely). I have watched a lot of soccer games. I’ve sat out in the cold in the San Francisco Bay Area, Sunday after Sunday, often the only spectator, while Bob’s rec league team played another team. I’ve watched Tottenham Hotspurs play Manchester United on the TV many times. I’ve watched more World Cup soccer games than I can count. I’ve apparently even been to a World Cup soccer game at Stanford, that I have just a vague memory of, but not because I’ve blocked it out. I’ve even been to an English soccer game in London. All, ahem, for the love of the game.

So I was ready for Cruz Azul to take on Club América. I was pumped. I was dressed warmly—I have learned something over the years—and ready to see an exciting high scoring soccer match between two teams that one city loves equally. They’re the Mets and Yankees respectively of Mexico City. And, of course, we (and I am by no means using the word we loosely) would never be Yankee fans, so we were supporting Cruz Azul.

The stadium was only 45 minutes away, but Bob wisely wanted to give me plenty of time to soak in the soccer stadium atmosphere, so we left for the 9pm game at 7. It was a good thing too, because it took us just over an hour to get dropped off by our Uber, then it took a full 45 minutes to get from the stadium entrance to our seats. Mind you, there were 90,000 people at the game. We had to wait in two separate entrance lines, once to get into the stadium, and then again to get into our section, showing our tickets each time.

Then we walked into our section. Bob had bought our tickets on StubHub, paying about $50 each for two seats behind one of the goals, not at ground level, but not way at the top either. What our StubHub ticket description didn’t tell us, however, was that we would be sitting behind a chain link/barbed wire fence. That’s right, our view of the game was excellent, save for the chain link and barbed wire. I took it in stride, however, knowing if I got so angry that I wanted to throw my beer onto the field, I would need a high arching toss to make it over the fence. Outside of the chain link view, I quite liked our seats. And really, where else would I have rather been sitting? I mean, besides perhaps in a spa.

The game itself was quite fun. Fans were chanting for each team (it made complete sense that Cruz Azul—or Mets—fans, were largely in our section, behind the chain link fence), singing team songs, and cheering wildly with claps, noise makers, and yells. Azteca Stadium is the home stadium for both teams, and they each appeared to have an equal number of fans at the game. Just like at stadium games in the USA, you can buy food in the stands, but you can also buy beer in the stands in Mexico. And you can buy donuts too.

And the game itself? What a wild game it was. Final score: 0-0. In my 30 years of being a huge soccer fan, frankly, I would expect nothing less. I can’t understand how a game that takes 90 minutes—plus injury time—to play can regularly have no score at all. But I’m not complaining mind you. I love the fancy footwork and great passing, even when there are no goals scored at all. And by the way, if you’re in the market, I’ve got a great bridge that I’m selling too.

When the game finally ended, Bob and I, along with 90,000 other people, had to figure out how to get back to town. It might be difficult. We were advised not to take public transportation, because it would likely take hours as most fans would also be using that method. So we planned on another Uber. But we had to get out of the stadium to a spot where we could get picked up. Thus we joined the throngs of people leaving the stadium, crossing a pedestrian bridge where we were packed like sardines, and for a short time, pushed forward by the masses of people behind us. I had a moment of panic, as I can’t remember ever being in a crowd of this magnitude and packed this closely together before. After a short and tight bottleneck, however, things opened up and we were able to breathe with a little space around us again. When we were out of the stadium, we used the Uber app to call for a ride, and 20 minutes later we were in a car on our way home. Not too bad after all.

We had a great experience at the Mexico City soccer game. Sure, the final score wasn’t the most exciting, and our seats, while a true picture of what it’s like to be a Cruz Azul fan—at least one who doesn’t know what sections of the stadium look like when buying tickets—might not have been the best. But we got a real taste of something that is very important to locals. And that’s what the best kind of travel experiences are all about. We had such a good time that this winter, we’re talking about a trip to England, and buying tickets to a Tottenham Hotsprs game, Bob’s (and of course my) most favorite soccer team EVER. Serenity now.

“I can’t understand why men make all this fuss about Everest.” — JUNKO TABEI

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The great value of travel is the opportunity it offers you to pry open your hometown blinders and broaden your perspective. And when we implement that world view as citizens of our great nation, we make travel a political act.” — RICK STEVES

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battery indicator. A micro USB recharging cable is included to complete the package and makes this the perfect travel reading accessory.

Eagle Creek Expans Luggage
Bang for your buck. It’s what Eagle Creek is all about. And with their new Expans line, they’ve upped the ante by removing a few features (and their weight!) but none of their legendary durability, to offer their lightest weight and best-valued luggage ever. The Expans line offers a full range of choices including both two and four-wheeled bags of all sizes. From a Wheeled Backpack, to an International Carry-on, and all the way up to a 30-inch Checkable Spinner that’ll give you enough packing space for the most gear-intensive adventure but, with its 4-Wheel Rolling System, will remain easy to handle. While Eagle Creek has removed some built-in organization from the Expans line, each model still offers a handy exterior front-load pocket and most have an expansion zipper that adds about 15% more packing space. Each Expans bag is covered by Eagle Creek’s “No Matter What Guarantee” so you can be certain that you’ll get your money’s worth. (From $179-279.)

Lonely Planet Food and Wine Trails
Food and Wine. Two of the things that make life great and also two of the things that make travel great. Fortunately Lonely Planet now has books devoted to each. Their Food Trails and Wine Trails titles ($20-25) offer all you’ll need to plan perfect weekends, chalk full of drinking and dining adventures the world over. Just flipping through the pages will surely start your stomach to rumbling and might just get you heading straight to the computer to check airfares and accommodation rates. Each hardbound edition—including Wine Trails for the World, Wine Trails for the USA & Canada, Wine Trails for Australia and New Zealand, and Food Trails for the World—serves up over 250 pages of mouth-watering, full color photos and information on how to get the best out of the world’s finest food and wine destinations. Whether it’s a meat feast in Buenos Aires, koh kaw moo (slow braised pork leg) in Chiang Mai, or discovering the unique, indigenous grapes of Puglia on the heel of Italy’s boot, you’ll find all the inspiration and information you’ll need to plan your next gastronomic adventure!

GeoToys Magnetic Puzzle
Magnetic Puzzles from GeoToys are the classic combination—fun and educational! These 100-piece puzzles ($9.95) measure 10” x 13” when complete, and stick to just about any refrigerator (except those fancy stainless steel ones) and can also be put together old-school style on a table top too. They’re also durable and come in a security. Both bags come complete with YKK water resistant zippers and are made from Cordura’s lightweight yet rugged siliconized rip-stop nylon.
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Baggallini Anti-theft Bags

For more than 20 years, Baggallini has led the way in producing stylish and thoughtfully organized lightweight purses, packs, totes, and more. And now they’ve added a line of security minded bags to their already impressive selection of travel and everyday wares. The offerings in their new Anti-Theft collection each include double cable anti-cut straps, locking zippers, RFID protected interior pockets, and SecureTex slash-proof fabric panels. The Anti-Theft line includes a Convertible Back Pack ($128) that can be worn like a traditional daypack and can also be configured as a cross-body bag. And both the Slim Crossbody ($98) and the Large Hobo Bagg ($118) feature a grommeted cord opening for secure phone charging and detachable shoulder straps designed to attach to chair arms or table legs for extra protection. It’s all the security you need with all the style and function that you love from Baggallini.

Royal Robbins Waterproof Jacket

Every traveler needs protection from the elements. It’s good to be prepared for the wind and rain when on the road. And what you really need is an outer layer that gets the waterproof job done with plenty of comfort and breathability but not a lot of bulk. The good news about bad weather is that Royal Robbins Oakham Jacket ($115) gets it done for both male and female adventurers and packs into its very own pocket. With 4-way stretch for easy mobility, and Tempretech fabric to help keep you cool and dry, this hooded and vented shell is the perfect companion when the weather doesn’t cooperate. It also includes a side-zippered storage pocket and is quick-drying and wrinkle resistant.

Eagle Creek Ultralight TSA Lock

For the weary traveler every ounce counts. Nobody wants to haul around anything extra, let alone needless extra weight. Eagle Creek’s Ultralight TSA combination lock ($9.95) saves you a few precious ounces and gives you a little peace of mind all at a nice price. Instead of a metal body, it uses rugged ABS plastic and weighs in at less than an ounce. Its three-dial combo can be set to the combination of your choice, and its white numbers on a black background are easy to see. Last but not least, it is TSA approved and Travel Sentry certified. And to top it all off, we’ll gladly set the combination for you right here in the store!

Magnetic Chess and Mini Dominoes

Travel should be fun. And on a plane, on the train, or over a coffee or a beer, what’s more fun than a little friendly competition? These attractive Magnetic Chess ($19.95) and Mini Dominoes ($24.95) game sets from Luckies of London are perfect for travelers who like to pass the time playing a low-key casual game or maybe even for the championship of the whole entire world. It just depends on how seriously (or unseriously) you take it. They both come in a handy 4” x “3” x 1” metal travel tin and stay stowed for just the right moment, like a delayed flight or a rainy day on the road. No matter the reason, they’re a perfect way to determine who’s got the bragging rights until the next time you break them out!

“I will buy any creme, cosmetic, or elixir from a woman with a European accent.”
— ERMA BOMBECK
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complicated rules and regulations to consider and gotchas to be wary of. And while the end result is certainly more glamorous than choosing your phone or cable package (You’re going to Europe!), it can easily be every bit as dizzying, frustrating and doubt inducing. But never fear, with just a little bit of consideration of your budget, schedule and personal travel preferences, it’s not too hard to figure out what will work best for you on any particular trip.

The good news is that the three main options, car, train and plane, are all similarly priced. One positive result of discount air travel is that it has driven down the cost of train travel. And the more folks you can pack into a car, the cheaper it gets.

And car travel might just be the best way to get yourself around the continent, as the pros of car travel in Europe are very nice indeed. You get to go where you want, when you want. And being able to act on your own whims and be lord and master of your own schedule ranks high on just about anybody’s vacation list of priorities. Certainly getting away from it all includes getting away from living your life on other people’s schedules. If you choose car travel, you won’t ever have to figure when you’ll need to leave your hotel in order to make it to the airport in enough time to get through security. And you’ll never rue the fact that you figured wrong and arrived too early, or worse, a minute late.

There’s a flip side to everything though, and car travel does have its cons. Starting with the fact that you are the one who has to drive and navigate unfamiliar highways and fight through city traffic. And if you are visiting Europe’s great cities, parking can be an issue, along with the fact that many historical downtowns are closed to all but local drivers. Inadvertently driving in these restricted areas, even though it’s an honest mistake made by an unaware tourist, can result in large fines.

You’ll also have to be on the lookout for unscrupulous car rental companies. They’ll often try to sell you insurance you likely don’t need and offer to sell you the first tank of gas and the “convenience” of bringing the car back with the tank empty. Bad deals both. For a complete rundown on how best to rent a car in Europe go to www.gemut.com. Full disclosure, this is a Bestor family company. Since the late 1980’s, Andy (my brother) and Bob (my father), have offered European car rentals to travelers from all over world. Their service includes the best primer you’ll find on avoiding being taken for a ride (pun alert!) during this often confusing process. They’ll also advocate for you if necessary, and their prices are always competitive.

Train travel is hands down my favorite way to travel the continent. Relaxing in a comfy chair while someone else drives and the European countryside slides slowly by my window is the quintessential travel experience. Unlike flying, which is mostly a chore, the train is something I look forward to. Along with the food, the drink and the sites, train travel is one of the features of European travel that makes it special.

For visitors, the European rail system has only improved over the years. Tickets are cheaper and easier to purchase, and schedules are easy to decipher as European rail websites can be translated to English at the touch of a button. Just about every town has service and big city train stations are usually right downtown. And it sure is fun to emerge from a grand and bustling European train station after a long, but relaxing ride on the rails and find yourself in the heart of Paris, Florence or Amsterdam.

It’s difficult for me to think up drawbacks to train travel, but there are a few. Although train stations are often downtown, you’re not getting door-to-door service. You’ll likely have to drag your luggage through the city or pay for a cab to get to your hotel. You’re also traveling on their schedule, and for long journeys, trains can be quite a bit slower than planes.

Which brings me at last, and definitely least, to my least favorite option – air travel. Everyone knows the cons: cramped seating, baggage limits, fees, security, etc. Airports are also often quite a ways out of city centers and therefore require more time and greater expense to reach. That, coupled with the need to arrive at least 90-minutes in advance of departure, adds even more lead-time. If driving, you can get in your car and go. If taking the train, you can safely arrive just a few minutes prior to departure with no problem. Often when flying, by the time the plane is finally taxing for take off, I feel like I’ve been “traveling” for three hours (because I have been!) but haven’t gone anywhere yet.

So with all these considerations, for our recent European trip, we chose to fly from Amsterdam to Berlin, but to take the train from Berlin to Prague. From door to door, our Amsterdam-Berlin leg took about 4.5 hours. We walked to the train station (20 minutes), took the metro to the airport (20 minutes), and arrived about 90 minutes early for our one hour and 15 minute flight. Upon arrival in Berlin, it took us about an hour on public transportation to reach our Airbnb. The train certainly would have been more comfortable, but the ride alone takes about nine hours. On the other hand, for our Berlin-Prague leg, direct flights were not available, making flight time alone close to three hours. The train ride is 4.5 hours. So with the extra comfort and convenient service, the train was the obvious option.

Figuring all that out was pretty much a snap. We spent a little while on the internet checking prices and schedules, and our best plan of attack was soon apparent. And while I do like to drive, renting a car just did not fit the bill for this trip. But on the plus side, we didn’t get stuck in traffic nor did we have to hunt for parking. Then again, I still didn’t get to crank it up on the Autobahn. Next time for sure!

“Why is it that when Robert Redford flies away in the golden glow Out of Africa, he is pursuing his destiny? And when I walk away I’m just a chick who’s scared of commitment and on the run, who’s weird for ignoring Glamour’s predictions of my eggs drying up?” — Holly Morris, Adventure Divas
Fairyland Hiking in Bryce Canyon

by Nancy Bestor

When I heard the word “Fairyland” associated with a hike in Bryce Canyon National Park, I knew I had to check it out. Bob and I were traveling through Utah, Arizona and Nevada with his sister and her husband on another epic long weekend. After a couple of days exploring Zion National Park, and an outstanding adventure through the waters of Zion’s Narrows hike, I wondered if Bryce could compete? Well compete it did, and the Fairyland Loop Trail proved to be yet another favorite and highly recommended outing in the beautiful Southwest.

Although alike in some ways, Zion and Bryce National Parks are also very different. Being in the same geographic region, the two parks have similarly beautiful deep orange and red coloring. But their terrain and scenery are distinct. Zion is most famous for its slot canyons, and when in the park you are “in” the canyon. At Bryce, with its equally famous hoodoos, you’re on the rim, looking and hiking down into the canyon.

Zion felt more populated and appears to have more amenities—there’s even a Disneyland-like tram that takes you to trailheads, as cars are not allowed—but that being said, I would not have missed hiking in Zion’s Slot Canyons. Bryce felt a little more remote, and during our visit, was far less crowded.

The Fairyland Loop Hike is an eight-mile jaunt along the rim and through the canyon. It’s nothing but up and down the whole way, along skinny ridges, past spectacular hoodoos, and up to amazing viewpoints. The hike is considered strenuous as all those ups and downs add up to about 2300 feet of climbing. However, it is so worth it. The hoodoos are beautiful when viewed at a distance from the rim. But up close, with the opportunity to appreciate their grand scale, these towering and weathered rock formations are even more impressive. Carved by the continual freezing and thawing of ice and snow—Bryce reaches both above and below freezing temperatures more than 200 nights every year—the shapes of the hoodoos vary widely. Their beautiful layers, holes and pillars make for outstanding vistas, and outstanding photos too! Perhaps because of the trail’s length and its elevation gains, and perhaps also because it was spitting drops of rain and thunder cracked in the distance, on our visit, there were very few people on the trail. Folks gathered at the rim to enjoy the impressive views, and we also saw more people walking along the rim trail, but once we started hiking down into the canyon, there were just a small handful of intrepid explorers. It took us four hours to complete the circuit, with several stops for photographs, water, and snacks, and to take in the views.

Zion and Bryce National Parks are about 75 miles apart, so we booked an Airbnb between the two, in the very small town of Orderville, Utah, making it very convenient for us to visit both parks in the four days we spent in the area. Orderville, not unlike the other small towns near Zion and Bryce, does not have a whole lot going on. My guess is that most visitors spend the bulk of their time inside the national parks. Our Airbnb was terrific though, with a rooftop deck perfect for a relaxing cup of coffee in the morning, and a well-deserved beer in the late afternoon. And we didn’t need Orderville to provide much, as we had procured groceries for most of our meals in St. George, Utah, on the way in from Las Vegas—highly recommended, as the grocery stores close to Zion and Bryce leave something to be desired in both selection and price.

We didn’t find much in the way of restaurants around Orderville either. In fact, on a Sunday evening in May at 6pm, there were few restaurants even open. Zion has a handful of eateries in and around the park on its southwest end, but on the east side, nearest Orderville and Bryce Canyon, there’s very little.

What this part of the world lacks in grocery stores and restaurants however, it more than makes up for in scenery, and roadside attractions. Little Hollywood in Kanab, 20 miles south of Orderville, with its collection of sets from the many westerns filmed in the area, may be one of the wackiest assemblages of movie memorabilia I’ve seen. It’s definitely worth a 30-minute stop if you’re in the area. And a hike through the Navajo Reservation Slot Canyons of Page, Arizona are at the top of my list for outstanding sights in the American Southwest. There’s so much to explore in this part of our country, four days in the region hardly did it justice.

Notes:

• Our Airbnb, with two bedrooms, one bath, living room, kitchen and rooftop deck, cost $200 a night for all four of us, very reasonable when you consider that the lodge in Zion National Park is over $200 a night for one room.

• Zion and Bryce National Parks are not the easiest places to get to. We flew in and out of Las Vegas, rented a car, and drove three hours or so to get there. Why someone didn’t think to build the national parks a little closer to a major airport, I’ll never know.

• Entrance fees to each park cost $30 for one car. An annual “America the Beautiful” National Parks Pass, which allows entrance for one car into any national park for one year, is $80.

“I can wear a baseball cap; I am entitled to wear a baseball cap. I am genetically predisposed to wear a baseball cap, whereas most English people look wrong in a baseball cap,” — BILL BRYSON
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just 15 pesos - .73 cents).

To work off all the food we ate, and thus make room for more, Bob and I walked everywhere, logging anywhere from 8 to 12 miles a day. We walked up and down cobblestone streets, looking at beautiful homes, courtyards, doorknobs, and more. We walked through the lovely Parque Juarez, with its winding pathways, and watched local women play in a basketball game (because I'm sure that watching someone else exercise burns calories too).

Prior to our visit, several people told us that San Miguel is overrun with expats and other gringos, and that it doesn't have a traditional Mexican feel to it anymore. Although there were definitely more tourists in San Miguel de Allende than there were in Guanajuato, we did not feel the ex-pat/gringo vibe that others had talked about. Perhaps because we were eating at local food stalls, and were also visiting over Day of the Dead, where locals were perhaps out celebrating more, and thus were more visible. Spanish was almost exclusively the language we heard spoken everywhere. In fact, at all of the stalls we ate at, no English was spoken at all. We did a fair job of communicating just how many tacos we wanted. Yes, I really did mean to order six tacos. And yes, I really did manage to eat them all.

Notes:

• We traveled from Mexico City to Guanajuato via Uber, about 2 ½ hours and $75. First class buses take four hours and cost $28 per person. In both cases we would have needed to take a taxi or Uber to the bus station to pick up the first class bus. We were happy to pay the additional $19.

• Our lodging in both Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende was apartments booked on Airbnb. In each town, we stayed right in the heart of the city's center, making everything just a short walk away. Our apartment in Guanajuato was $46 per night, and in San Miguel, $83.

• We took the first class bus from Guanajuato to San Miguel for $7.50 each on the Primera Plus bus line. We easily booked our tickets online the day before, and the experience was excellent. The seats were more comfortable than economy airline seats, by far. We each had our own TV and were given a bottle of water and granola bar snack. The ride took about 80 minutes. It did require an Uber ride (54 pesos, $2.50) to the bus station in Guanajuato, and then a taxi for 80 pesos, about $4, (as Uber did not have any drivers available) from the San Miguel bus station to our Airbnb.