

## **Sugar and Spice in Zanzibar Town by Rachel Jones**

Children chatter excitedly in Swahili, chasing balls that bounce jaggedly down narrow, cobblestone streets. Men – engulfed by long, white robes and crowned with *kofia* (caps) – discuss business while indulging in the pleasures of a chess-like board game. And as the sun retreats over the turquoise sea, turning Zanzibar Town into a silhouette, women shrouded in *bui-bui* (black coverings) beckon their families to dinner from behind carved wooden doors, enticing them with the familiar smells of cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon.

The spice trade has sustained the archipelago of Zanzibar, located just off the coast of Tanzania, for centuries. At its height, Indian and Asian traders exchanged their fragrant riches for slaves and ivory; today, spice tours offer but a whiff of the many attractions the islands hold for tourists.

In the capital of Zanzibar Town, prayers echo from minaret-laden mosques. The House of Wonders – a palace constructed more than a century ago by the Sultan Barghash – competes for attention with Camlur’s Indian Restaurant, housed in the relatively non-descript building where Freddy Mercury of the rock group “Queen” was born. Arabic, Persian, Indian, and European influences intersect in the historic center of Stone Town, where you can just as easily find solace in a Roman Catholic cathedral as spy on batik vendors from the windows of a Portuguese fort, or enjoy the decor of a colonial Indian dispensary.

And as you wind through the town’s alleyways, to the chorus of greetings swapped between elaborately shuttered windows, stop for a bite of *mantabali*, or Zanzibar pizza – an assemblage of mince, onions, peppers, and tomatoes glued together with an egg-based dough. Or dilute the heat with a coconut drink while discussing the archipelago’s turbulent politics with the highly literate, mostly-Muslim men who congregate on *barazas* – low stone benches used as sidewalks during heavy rains.

Find long-term heat relief a short *dalla-dalla* (mini bus) ride north at Fuji beach. Share isolated stretches of white sand with the occasional wandering cow or hermit crab. Immerse yourself in the Indian Ocean, where farmers tend to crops of seaweed; when you emerge, refreshed, allow local entrepreneurs to massage your shoulders, braid your hair, or apply delicate henna patterns to the backs of your hands. For a few shillings, some will invite you to join their families for a post-relaxation meal of octopus, ink-black squid, and *ugali* – a floury staple resembling thick mashed potatoes.

It’s rare to find the pleasures of a beach resort and the magnetism of an historic cultural center so artfully combined – all to the beat of the island’s unique *taarab* music. Indeed, in Zanzibar Town, time appears to be suspended amid the heat waves emanating from its incandescent shores.

And travelers, bewitched, will find that the town continues to beckon – long after their golden tans, the scent of cinnamon, and the hue of henna have faded.

## An Evening Alone With The Star Dancer by Sarah Gignac

I am lounging on the hostel's cheap deck chair, watching the northern lights dance. It is midnight and the sky is dark, something that I am having a hard time getting used to. For the last three months the sun hasn't set so much as dip just low enough to give the streets a duskish feel during the wee hours of the morning. But now, at the end of August, the days are getting noticeably shorter. Fall is in full swing, and the locals are stealing themselves against the inevitable overwhelming darkness that is a Yukon winter.

Whitehorse is the hub of nowhere. It lies in the middle of the lonely Alaska Highway, connecting Canada's tundra and America's lonely state with the rest of the continent. The road to this northern town is long and rough; no one ends up here by accident. Those that make the journey are rewarded with the harsh, raw beauty of a truly untamed landscape. Moose, bears, wolves, and beavers make their home along the outskirts of town. The wild Yukon River courses through the city center, and the skyline is painted with rugged mountains and ridges just begging to be explored. It is an outdoor adventure's paradise, during the summer.

The lights are dim tonight; the star dancer is shy. I'm told she grows bolder as the winter progresses. As the sky darkens the river will freeze, and Whitehorse will be blanketed with a cold, white silence. Not many people brave these winters, but those that do tend to get hooked. Perhaps it is the sheer isolation that attracts them, existing in a frozen shadow where time stands still and the rest of the world ceases to exist.

These locals are an eclectic mix. Artists, loggers, free spirits, hermits, alcoholics, entrepreneurs, - you name it, Whitehorse has it. Despite their many differences, the one thing these people share is their desire to be left to their own devices. It is a place where folks are happy to meet you, and just as happy to leave you alone. Even the summer tourists for the most part are a quiet, unassuming lot. They use Whitehorse as a refueling station (gas, food, gear, bug repellent, beer) before venturing into the bush, taking full advantage of the peace and seclusion the wilderness provides. They trickle into town in the spring and disappear before the first frost, leaving behind the oncoming night and an amazing light show.

The northern lights flicker and sizzle in the cast iron frying pan sky. They flash from white to green before fading out, like a young raver with neon glow sticks wrapped around her ankles and wrists. I think of Phoebe, goddess of light, shimmying amongst the stars, teasing the mortal realm with a psychedelic peep show. A performance that few people are lucky enough to see, and those who do never forget.

## **BAKPAK TRAVELERS GUIDE ESSAY CONTEST ENTRY** By Carl Finer

As your plane touches down at the edge of the continent, coasting to a stop amidst the bustle and glow of LAX, close your eyes for a moment. As thoughts of the sights and sounds of the Southern California dream waiting ahead of you fill your mind, keep them closed. Otherwise, you might miss the best and most overlooked part of your trip.

Los Angeles smells good.

Only yards away from the edge of the northern runway beacons a branch of the local burger chain In-N-Out and the start of your olfactory journey. The rules are simple: fries, burger, shake. Make sure to get onions on your hamburger, and possibly chili on your fries. Let the slightly sweet and robust scents reach your nose, along with just a hint of bitterness from the onions, meat drippings, and salt on your fries.

A drive north from the airport with the window rolled down will introduce more quintessential Los Angeles aromas. Wash down your burger at Randy's Donuts, the sugary stickiness clinging to the inside of your nostrils. Further north, park your car in Venice and stroll the boardwalk. Burning incense wafts through the air, along with the odor from the tools of the trade of myriad street performers -- possibly burning oil from a chainsaw juggler or a metallic highlight from the paint covering a living statue. When you've had your fill of boardwalk street theater, walk into the sand in the shadow of the Santa Monica Pier's giant Ferris Wheel. Erase the memories of home -- of snow or rain or dreary cloudy days. The sun is shining, the air by the beach smells crisp and clean, fed by the cool and salty ocean breeze, and coconut suntan lotion seeps into your pores, your nose and your mind.

The smells only get stronger at night, taking you up in the excitement they carry. Burning rubber attracts your attention to sleek sports cars, their passengers ready for a long evening. Start in Koreatown, where the smoky sweetness from marinated meat barbecuing right at your table clouds the air. Or hit a good sushi restaurant on the Westside, a pinch of wasabi reaching up through your nostrils and around to the inside of your eyes, drawing out a tear if you use too much. Head to a panadaria, a Central American bakery, and follow the cinnamon to your after-dinner treat. Take your energy to a club on the Sunset Strip, where stiff alcohol mixed with the sweat of moving bodies leaves you slightly dizzy. Or head to an outdoor concert at the Hollywood Bowl or film screening. Fragrant candles and a bottle of mellow red wine will set the mood. Lose yourself before bed in the swirls and steam rising to your senses of a strong cup of coffee back in Koreatown.

Spend your last day hiking. You can literally stop to smell the roses in the Huntington Gardens. Rub the leaves of the plants in the herb garden, where you can indulge in the perfume of chocolate mint, lemon, and rosemary. Meander the trails above the Hollywood sign in Griffith Park. The deep and musty odor of desert succulents envelops you.

Now imagine how good the experience will be when you open your eyes.

fczz6904 by Amy West

I am engulfed in the energy and movement of the tight jeaned, big buckled, cowboy hat wearing masses. A sly grin spreads across my sun coloured face and I can't help but join the excitement, throwing out a "yeehaw!" and a whoop of my own. As I savour the sweet, soft cinnamon flavour of "those mini-donuts" I have waited all year for, I have one thought; I am proud to be a redneck.

My body moves in cadence with the crowd and I allow myself to succumb to the images and thoughts that crowd my head, and I reflect on the reasons why I keep coming home. Now that I have been infected with the travel bug, my desire to experience wild places and meet unique people has clouded the attractiveness of the adventures I have experienced in my own back yard, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The recollection of my first Calgary Stampede makes me giggle, as I remember my wide-eyed reaction to the bright lights and big sounds of the action packed Midway. Like most Calgarians, I consider the "stomp-ede" to be an important part of our culture and history. Gone are the pin striped suits, high-heeled shoes and panty hose, traded in for dusted off wranglers and brightly coloured western attire. Millions of visitors every year get into the spirit of the "greatest outdoor show on earth". They subject themselves to the adrenaline induced rides, feast their eyes on testosterone charged cowboys at the rodeo and may even partake in a free pancake breakfast slathered in the sweetness of lip-smacking Canadian maple syrup.

As I gaze about my surroundings, I am reminded of the allure of my hometown. Calgary is a gateway for the senses, from the vast, golden prairies east of the city, to the rugged westerly Rocky Mountains. The calm of serene turquoise lakes, the excitement of encounters with the majestic wildlife, and astonishing raw beauty of the mountains still sends chills through my soul. Whether it is skiing the fresh powder on the slopes, enjoying a breathtaking hike, or just relaxing on a leisurely drive, the natural landscape attracts adventurous souls from all over the world.

My thoughts turn to some of the highlights of my adventures and I recall exploring the Alberta badlands, home of the Tyrell Museum and the most extensive collection of dinosaur fossils in Canada. I visualize the magnificent view from the Calgary Tower of the city set against the jagged peaks to the west and I smile as I relive racing down the luge track at Canada Olympic Park, host of the 1988 Winter Olympic Games.

The warmth of the last mini-donut melts in my mouth and sense of pride washes over me. I ease myself back into the dynamic crowd while thinking, Calgary is a young, vibrant city unique in people, culture, natural landscape and architecture. It is a city continuously moulding an exciting history, a history that I am proud to be a part of.

## **Ha'ena, Hawaii: Land of Legend by Victoria A Barabas**

On the northernmost tip of an island that was formed by either the fire of the earth, or the fire of a goddess's burning love, a small village lies where magic transforms realism. Here, the sky may take on shades of gold, violet or emerald, towering cliffs stretch in triumph over the vast Pacific Ocean, and a steamy mist often permeates the air, as if the fire in that goddess's heart has just begun to cool.

The little town of Ha'ena on Hawaii's Kaua'i Island is the last stop along the northeastern coast, starting where the paved road ends, and a world of legend and fantasy begins. Sea creatures are transformed into plants as red Lobster Claw blossoms spring at your feet; lime-green geckos grant you good luck if you happen to spot one amidst the trees; and Lehua flowers flourish throughout the land in blooms of red, orange and yellow, born of a legend that promises rain if you pluck one of its amorous buds.

As it turns out, this magical land is built on legend. It is the scene of the love story between the fire goddess Pele and chief Lohi'au, where, during a hula performance, he lured her spirit from across the seas and was instantly smitten by her beauty. And the evidence exists. At Ke'e beach, a short stroll will lead you to the ancient ruins of a Tahitian-style stone structure, hidden behind a thicket of vines, said to be chief Lohi'au's house; while a hike along Makana mountain's coastline rocks will bring you to the *Ke Ahu a Laka*, a shrine dedicated to the hula goddess, Laka, dressed in offerings of leis and mangoes.

But perhaps the true essence of Ha'ena's divinity lies in its awe-inspiring landscapes and surreal natural beauty, where the spirit of *mana*, or power emanating from sacred places, is said to reside. In the Waikapalae cave, formed by Pele's tragically failed attempt to build a home, you will become enveloped in a luminescent blue light, reflecting either the sunlight off the fresh water, or the aura of Pele's sadness. Meanwhile, the famous Na Pali coast features 4,000-foot celestial *pali*, or cliffs, that loom like deity over a worshipping sea of sparkling sapphire.

Notably a kingdom fit for the gods, it is no wonder that mere mortals are humbled within Ha'ena's walls. The people of Ha'ena respect its spirituality and natural landscape, and for generations, natives lived in harmony with the land. Today, the town's development is monitored, and Ha'ena is considered less of a village than a state of mind.

In transcending to this world, you may be tempted to abandon the familiar luxuries of life, leave your car at the town's entrance, and set up camp on Ha'ena County Beach Park. There, under an eternal blanket of stars, you may feel as if you have traveled to the ends of the earth if only to catch a glimpse of that miraculous world where your spirit will one day retire.