



355 DAYS

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A SABBATICAL IN WORDS AND PICTURES
Prospectus for Publication



KIRK HORSTED

INTRODUCTION

AT 4 AM ON CHRISTMAS DAY, my wife and I left our home in Minneapolis, with wine and fresh bread on the table to welcome the Canadian couple who'd be renting our place for the year we'd be gone.

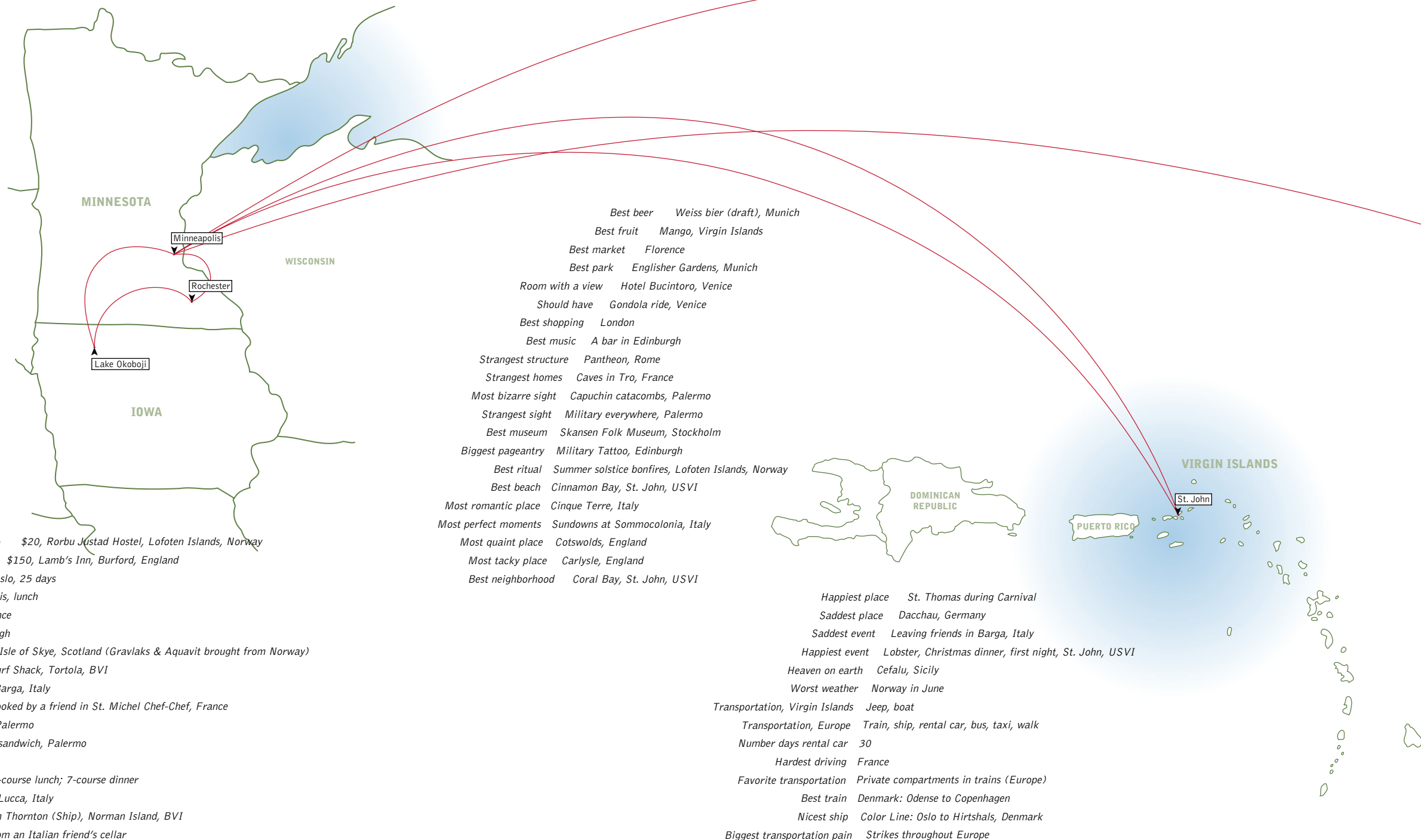
We spent the next 5 months on tiny St. John in the US Virgin Islands. In exchange for caretaking two vacation properties, we lived for free in a studio apartment in one of the homes.

On the 20th of May, we returned to Minnesota for ten days to switch wardrobes, catch up with family, and check in on our renters (who shocked us by announcing they wanted to leave). Then we were off to Northern Europe for three months of intrepid travel, followed by four months in a remote corner of Tuscany called the Garfagnana. There we found friends, "la dolce far niente," and a fine base for explorations of Italy.

From Day 1, I documented our experiences with photos and writings—until we flew home again on December 14, precisely 355 days after we left.

This is the story of that year. Actually, this is a sampling of the story. With any luck, this prospectus will help me find a publisher to help tell the rest.

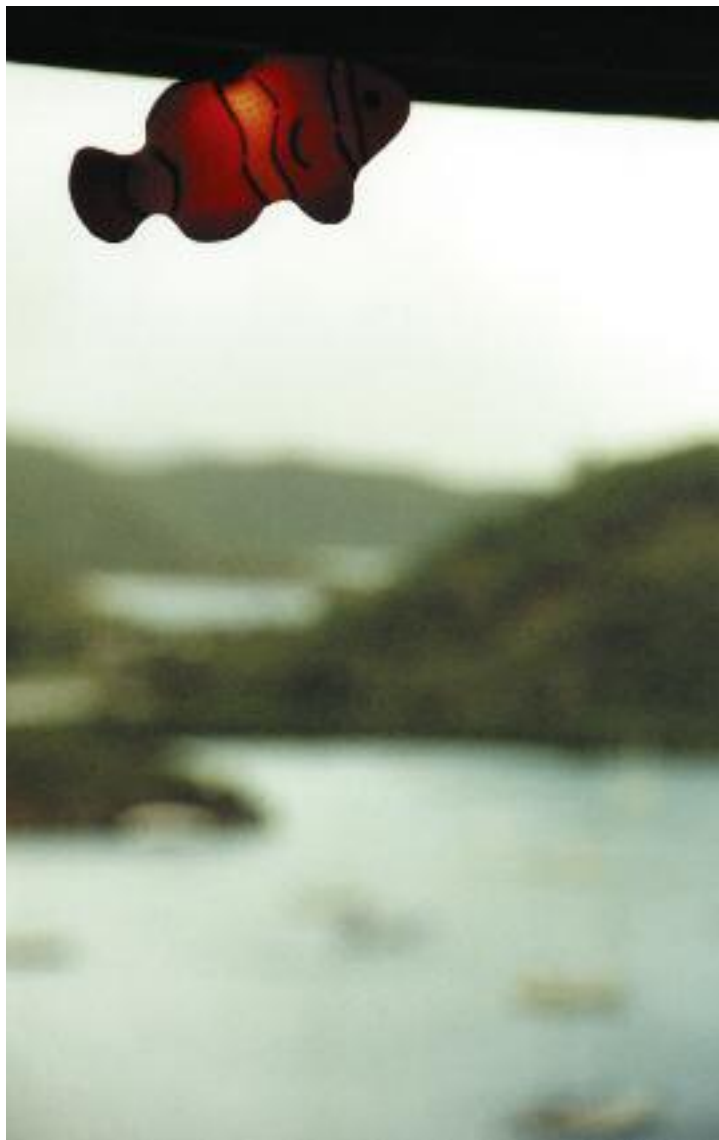
- Cheapest sleep \$20, Rorbu Jstad Hostel, Lofoten Islands, Norway
- Priciest sleep \$150, Lamb's Inn, Burford, England
- Longest stay, major city Oslo, 25 days
- Shortest stay, major city Paris, lunch
- Most overrated city Florence
- Most underrated city Edinburgh
- Best picnic Quiraing, Isle of Skye, Scotland (Gravlaks & Aquavit brought from Norway)
- Funkiest bar Bomba's Surf Shack, Tortola, BVI
- Favorite bar Bar Aristo, Barga, Italy
- Best lunch Fresh lamb, cooked by a friend in St. Michel Chef-Chef, France
- Best dinner Grilled Squid, Palermo
- Most controversial dinner Marinated tripe sandwich, Palermo
- Worst public bathrooms Italy
- Most decadent eating day Pornic, France: 5-course lunch; 7-course dinner
- Restaurant visited most Trattoria da Leo, Lucca, Italy
- Best drink Painkiller, William Thornton (Ship), Norman Island, BVI
- Best wine 1975 Brunello, from an Italian friend's cellar



- Best beer Weiss beer (draft), Munich
- Best fruit Mango, Virgin Islands
- Best market Florence
- Best park Englisher Gardens, Munich
- Room with a view Hotel Bucintoro, Venice
- Should have Gondola ride, Venice
- Best shopping London
- Best music A bar in Edinburgh
- Strangest structure Pantheon, Rome
- Strangest homes Caves in Tro, France
- Most bizarre sight Capuchin catacombs, Palermo
- Strangest sight Military everywhere, Palermo
- Best museum Skansen Folk Museum, Stockholm
- Biggest pageantry Military Tattoo, Edinburgh
- Best ritual Summer solstice bonfires, Lofoten Islands, Norway
- Best beach Cinnamon Bay, St. John, USVI
- Most romantic place Cinque Terre, Italy
- Most perfect moments Sundowns at Sommacolonia, Italy
- Most quaint place Cotswolds, England
- Most tacky place Carlisle, England
- Best neighborhood Coral Bay, St. John, USVI

- Happiest place St. Thomas during Carnival
- Saddest place Dacchau, Germany
- Saddest event Leaving friends in Barga, Italy
- Happiest event Lobster, Christmas dinner, first night, St. John, USVI
- Heaven on earth Cefalu, Sicily
- Worst weather Norway in June
- Transportation, Virgin Islands Jeep, boat
- Transportation, Europe Train, ship, rental car, bus, taxi, walk
- Number days rental car 30
- Hardest driving France
- Favorite transportation Private compartments in trains (Europe)
- Best train Denmark: Odense to Copenhagen
- Nicest ship Color Line: Oslo to Hirtshals, Denmark
- Biggest transportation pain Strikes throughout Europe

- Best biking Atop the city wall, Lucca, Italy
- Best hike Ram Head, St. John, USVI
- Most meaningful Finding lost relatives in Denmark and Norway
- Best book Innocents Abroad, by Mark Twain
- Most work done St. John, USVI
- Hardest labor Caretaking two vacation homes, St. John, USVI
- Weight changes St. John—lost 15 lb.; Italy—gained them back
- Best souvenirs Shells and coral from Virgin Islands
- Sweetest object Christmas tree made from dried century plant, St. John, USVI
- Strangest holiday Halloween, Barga, Italy
- Favorite item taken home Grappas from Italy
- Most handy item packed Frisbee—for exercise and picnic plate
- Most fun item packed Walkman with two headphones and favorite tapes
- Oddest new skill Crewing for a gaff-rigged ketch, Virgin Islands
- Favorite pastime Watching people, everywhere
- Mandatory stop Cemeteries, everywhere
- Favorite activity Snorkeling, Virgin Islands
- Worst crisis Head concussion in Copenhagen
- Biggest surprise Free medical care in Denmark
- Second-biggest surprise Clients hiring us from afar
- 2H earnings that year \$60,000
- Total cost, year \$55,000 (estimate)
- Length of sabbatical 355 Days



DAY **055**

FEBRUARY 18 St John, Virgin Islands
A Letter to Clients Back Home



DEAR FRIENDS,

Two months into our stay here, we feel at home, and at work. Oh sure, there are too many bug bites, phone problems, and drunk tourists. But home is never perfect, and neither is doing business.

Working long-distance has occasionally proven to be a challenge—we'd be practicing dizzying spin control to say otherwise—but the squalls are calming now. We've learned many things about long-distance business and technology, only to conclude that the information highway is passable, but still under construction. Suffice it to say that one learns to hitch-hike, try side roads, or do whatever it takes to get a job done. The future looks radiant, though; soon we'll all be travelling together through a macrocosm called cyberspace.

About 180 degrees from there, the microcosm of St. John could provide an MBA student a fascinating study of an isolated economic environment. Of our relationship to the U.S. despite a severe lack of media and information (and interest). Of our ways of getting by without an office supply store, supermarket, or movie theater. Of the way transactions are made (in person—after waiting patiently and chanting “Good afternoon” to those who line up after you). Of the pace with which things move (or don't): Mail carriers here—and everyone else—need neither snow, nor rain, nor gloom of night to stay them from their appointed rounds. “Doitomorrow” is reduced to one word, while “tomorrow” can be expanded by days or weeks. Indeed, the only things that seem to happen on time are the too-early ringing of the Moravian Church bells on Sunday morning and the elementary school's steel drum lessons bright and early on weekdays. Both, of course, lie directly across acoustically perfect Coral Bay.

There are no chain stores here, really. So the promotional gimmickry is decidedly downscale, but rarely uncreative. The big news recently, in fact, was that the only franchise on the island—Wendy's—bit the big burger, despite their desirable on-the-beach, by-the-ferry-dock location. (They have been replaced by a foo-foo restaurant named Saychelles—who should have hired us for naming help.)

It could be that Wendy's St. John numbers weren't up to mainland standards, or perhaps that people who just walk off the ferry don't yet know that it costs twice as much to subsist here. Could be that Wendy's couldn't count on the deliveries critical to a fast food business. Indeed, despite that cement blocks and bottled beer arrive by the boatload, it seems that anything dependent on timely shipping won't

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DAY **022**

January 16
St John, Virgin Islands
View from our balcony



make it. Those hamburger buns probably got hung up in the storm out east. Or stuck on St. Thomas during one of that island's private holidays. You hear it all here. But no doubt Wendy's sales trainers wouldn't advocate asking, “You don't want that on a bun, do you?”

Elsewhere on the commercial front, the really big news is the arrival of K-Mart on St. Thomas. Definitely K-Mart. They're talking about it from here to St. Kitt's. Finally, somewhere to buy wooden spoons, fishing lures, and furry toilet seat covers—should you want them. You have to pay a quarter for your cart there, but at least they have them; apparently, many stores don't, or so one is led to believe by the grocery store radio commercials boasting enough carts for everyone (when the station comes in, that is). On our island, there are no grocery carts, simply because there is no grocery (or other) store large enough to accommodate them. Besides, you'd need a home equity loan if you actually filled the cart—although at that point it may be tax deductible; ask your tax advisor.

Speaking of financial services, there does remain at least one chain in a little building with a big franchise on St. John: Chase Bank. We qualified to give them money, we're proud to

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DAY **056**

February 19
St John, Virgin Islands
This is Racon—friend, neighbor, bush doctor, Rastaman. Having Racon for a friend on St. John was like knowing Spielberg in Hollywood. We whiled away countless hours listening to his folk wisdom and island lore. Racon never rushed. In fact, his Samurai ran only in first gear the entire time we lived there.

DAY **065**

FEBRUARY 28 St John, Virgin Islands
Reflecting on Minneapolis



THINGS WE MISS

- Mornings without roosters
- Bowling
- Sledding
- Porches & pantries
- Curbside recycling
- Driving over 30 mph
- Friends & family
- A good steak
- Dependable phones
- Movies on video
- Seasons
- Snowflakes
- Morning paper
- Neighborhoods
- Fireplaces
- Productive populace

THINGS WE DON'T MISS

- Alarm clocks
- Video games
- Slipping
- Basements & garages
- Greenpeace at the door
- Rush hour
- Fundraisers & functions
- Expensive steak houses
- Phone tag
- Movie theaters
- Winter
- Dandruff
- Investigative reporting
- Gang graffiti
- Furnaces
- “I'm so busy!”



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DAY **082**

March 17
St John, Virgin Islands
Stone-washed coral

report. Now if we could only get it back. These people give a new definition to the term “Banker’s Hours,” and clarify without question the reason they’re named “Chase.”

So after a while here, you adopt the native survival mantra, “Don’t worry about it.” (Not to be confused with, “Don’t worry, be happy.”) The main reason, of course, is that there is typically nothing you can do. When your power goes out. When your Jeep breaks down and Charlie the mechanic is stateside for two weeks. When you want a *Wall Street Journal* (for \$3.50), which requires a trip across the island—if they have it—if they’re open—if the power’s on—if, if, if. (No use calling; the odds of the answer being right are about 50/50. Or they’ll just suggest you come in.) It’s called Island Time; it’s more visible than Minnesota’s Northern lights in August. And it moves more slowly.

It can drive you crazy, of course, and there are many loonies long landed here to prove it. Characters saltier than the Morton’s girl. While frightful at first, they eventually become models in how to chill (and check) out, and take a hike—however temporary—from reality.

Like the Reef Bay Trail, which winds through the rain forest, past Danish ruins from a bygone era, then past even older petroglyphs. You land on a long beach not accessible by car, where Caribbean blue sparkles infinitely before you like the world’s most precious gem. You stare, take your shoes off, squeeze the sand between your toes, and gaze at eternity. Then you do what the pelican does, what YOU must do: Dive in. When you emerge from the water, it’s all still there; this wasn’t a dream.

Hamburger buns? Jeep repairs? *Wall Street Journal*? You dive in again and hear the ocean (or is it something deeper?) whispering, “Don’t worry about it. Don’t worry about it.”



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DAY **106**

April 10
St John, Virgin Islands
Bananaquits jockeying for sugar

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DAY **124**

April 28
St John, Virgin Islands
Treasures from the sea

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DAY **126**

April 30
St Thomas, Virgin Islands
Although clients from afar kept us busier than we’d expected, we still sought excuses to visit neighboring islands. The Carnival on St. Thomas, which celebrates the freeing of the slaves, featured this four-hour parade with hundreds of jumbies, thunderous steel-drum bands on flatbeds, and some killer costumes. (Check out the vegetable ladies from Nevis!)



DAY **143**

MAY 17 St John, Virgin Islands
One Nation, Under God

GUY BENJAMIN SCHOOL is, shall we say, an open school. By that I don't mean to enter into a discussion of education models, but merely to point out that there really are no doors or windows. In fact, there are barely walls. And the kids mostly seem to be running around outside on any given day, at any given time.

The level of education is suspect, so we're told, especially to those of us who are products of some of the best public school systems in the country (so we were told). Yet most teachers here seem classy and committed when you see them out with their students. And one of the most vivid memories I have of being here happened as I lingered at Sputnik Bar (which opens early) near the school on the Monday after Christmas break: Inside, the students were reciting the Pledge of Allegiance—in English, but with their thick, island Patois. It was sweet—inspirational, even. “One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”



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DAY **145**

May 19
St John, Virgin Islands
Our last night on the island, at our favorite sundown beach

DAY **159**

JUNE 02 Hundborg, Denmark
First Impressions—Denmark

THERE ARE MANY THINGS a country can inadvertently do to welcome you, to make that first impression. In our case, a bus driver took control. After disembarking from the ship and finding ourselves on the streets of Hirtshals, we went to his stop, and he arrived momentarily.

Kyia popped on board and asked him if he spoke English, which he did not—making him perhaps one of 55 Danes who don't. Nonetheless, he wanted to help, so Kyia simply pointed to our rental car company name on a slip of paper. Hop on, he waved. So we did. He circled through the neat little harbor town, stopped at an impeccably clean mechanic shop to confirm the car rental location, and then took us—out of his way—to that place, whereupon he accepted no money and wished us well.

Such was only the beginning of what became a memorable, miraculous day. We took our time motoring through Denmark, and had barely made it out of Hirtshals before we stumbled on a “Keramik” sign outside a house near the coast. We stepped in the open door and began viewing a collection

in a comfortable home before the potter finally emerged. We ended up staying a long, long time.

I believe his first words (in English, as though he knew) were, “Are you coffee-tearstee?” which, of course, we were. So by the time we had moved on, we had sipped good coffee, met his cat who climbs in through the kitchen window to clean his beard every morning, viewed his impressive works, and heard stories of his life—which eventually turned into a long series of tales of ghostly and supernatural encounters. (I'd forever had the sense that going to Denmark was somehow a spiritual mission; his stories set the tone well). We'd also bought a piece of his sea-emulating raku—thus immediately shattering our pledge to travel light. But he was so gentle, and his pots were so lovely, that we couldn't resist a memoir.

We drove on, through hauntingly beautiful brick homes and countrysides which, inevitably, wound back to raw coastline again. Our mission was to find the villages of Hundborg and Snedsted (yes, Snedsted), both of which were the homes of my forebears. Could there still be family there?

Three weeks before, I had finally obtained a few names and addresses (village names only) from my father, who had dug them up from the only living relative



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DAY **160**

June 03
Fishing village near Vorupur, Denmark
My newfound family took us to this seaside village. Although fishing is no longer economically viable, Denmark subsidizes the village and fishermen rather than lose a precious piece of their culture.

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DAY **161**

June 04
Hørsted, Denmark
Signs of my roots



who had seen Denmark—albeit forty years ago when in the military. He had three names in all: one believed dead, and the other two mere unknown entries from the address book of my recently deceased great-aunt, Patrine. I sent letters anyway. But with this for a basis, I could not be hopeful.

So we took our time travelling, as there was much to see and we had the next day to find graves and, ideally, a living person too. We nearly stayed in the alluring town of Vorupor—on the coast and very near my two villages. But I felt a pull toward Hundborg. My gut did not let me down (though it nearly hit the floor) when, after I asked, “Taler de Engelsk?” the Hundborg hotelier looked at me and replied, “Are you looking for your family? Is your name Keerk...Horsted?”



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DAY **164**

June 7

Snedsted, Denmark

Eric (left), a schoolteacher, was one of many long-lost relatives I met in Denmark. Although he was raised by a distant cousin of mine, he is pictured here with his biological father—with whom he has maintained a close relationship.

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DAY **178**

June 21

Lofoten Islands, Norway

The summer solstice has always been a favorite holiday of mine, so it was a thrill to experience the longest day in the land of the midnight sun. (I even threw a solstice snowball!!) Although I took this shot around noon, I've also took pictures without a flash after midnight.



DAY **179**

JUNE 22 Lofoten Islands, Norway

Slacking 101



THIS HOSTELING THING IS NEW TO US. So we had prepared ourselves for most anything. To that end, we've been fortunate, as this is no ordinary hostel (which explains why we—not being ordinary hostellers—are here, but that's another story). Once again, however, we'll be quite ready to depart when our time here expires. The weather's been too gray, for one thing. Another is that even high-end hostel living has its imperfections. But the primary flaw is the onslaught of 18 college students from the University of Arizona. And their effusive teacher. How is it that we go to a remote part of Norway and find ourselves surrounded by scads of young Americans?

Now—in their defense—I must say that some of my best memories are comprised of hanging out with a group of fellow students, killing time and creating camaraderie as though it were rigorous training for a profession. It's warm and fuzzy, and a happy part of growing up that no one should be denied. But so much for charity.

These people are driving me nuts! In our hostel (lodged in an old fishing house) at the moment, there exists us, and them, and no one else. So we lose; we're outnumbered approximately 20 to 2. Not good odds. It wouldn't matter, except that they have completely taken over the modest community kitchen for their hangout—despite that there's a couch and four large tables in an adjacent dining room. But the action is in the kitchen, apparently. And action is evidenced by food spread out on every inch of countertop, guidebooks and maps atop that mess, and a coffee pot with clear, tan fluid in it—apparently a budget-conscious second-brew from the same grounds. They hoard their butter and jelly, but spread their disgusting cold virus like peanut butter. They sit, stand, and wander aimlessly in indecipherable patterns. It goes on past midnight, when I stick a sweatshirt over my ears to quiet their chatter, and has begun again before I wake up with fantasies of competent coffee, the kind that doesn't get slurped by skulking, slacking students. Maybe, like war, it doesn't end, this boring party of theirs.

Nor does it stop for breaks. It continues even in the private little bathrooms where, rather than shut the door, they leave it ajar or even wide open so they can peer out to see who's walking by—maybe share the experience of brushing teeth. It's easily mobile, just take a few of the crew outside and get in a rowboat—go 12 feet, laugh and yell and squeal, take some snapshots, then switch rowers, and wave at their buds on shore—whom they now miss—so they row in again. It's

DAY 194

JULY 07 Knista, Sweden
In Search of Grandpa's Swedish Family

THIS EVENING, after training from Oslo, Norway to Hallsberg, Sweden, after renting an elusive and overpriced car to search out family history, after finding next to nothing except a pleasant rental cabin by a calm lake, I sat on a rock and threw stones in the water while Kyia picked wildflowers in the woods.

Some petite yellow blooms shone near me, and they mysteriously fell into a terrycloth backdrop that was a piece of towel-art portraying "Svenska Landskapsblommer" hanging in my Grandma and Grandpa's farm in South Dakota. It was one of few Swedish acknowledgments in my deceased Grandpa's life, despite that his parents both emigrated from Sweden not long before his birth. The towel still hangs there today, in a simple bathroom that was added on midway through his life—a room where I have bathed or sat hundreds of times.

I have no explanation why there was so little Sweden in his life—only suspicions. His calm stoicism and unpretentious regality were as natural as the Swedes on the streets today. He was as handsome as any Swedish man can be, popping from his family picture with gray-blue eyes and startling Scandic features. He spoke with a Swedish lilt (from his first and long-time tongue) until the last time I saw him, and even had difficulty calling "Joan" instead of "Yoan" to his own daughter. But he never talked of Sweden, his parents' homeland. Nor did he visit. Or long to. Or arrange mementoes on the shelves.

So the irony of my being here hit hard tonight. Against great odds, and at great effort and expense, I came to find a homestead—and ideally some relatives—that might help me fill in the gaps of the past, the branches on the tree. Instead I found a few helpful and empathetic locals, more distant and disinterested ones, and a church where his parents may have worshipped, like 600 years worth of Swedes before them. The phone book for this modest area contained hundreds of Jansons and Johansons—my family names—with none of them residing in Knista, the now nonexistent town of my kin. So if I came with a few clues and rich hopes, I shall leave with neither.

Yet it was here that I realized most deeply one thing Grandpa and I share: My desire to have a homeland connection and be more than American is as vital as his need not to have a homeland and be only American. Both come from the same,

applicable to laundry—best done in sinks (using up all the hot water) and hung all over the house like little flags of intimacy. It likes props—including books that are sprinkled around but unread. (In fact, no one studies or meets or lectures or researches or takes field trips.) More props are diaries and Coke and waterbottles and bandanas and *The Bridges of Madison County*—the one book everyone is reading, discussing, and arguing about whose turn it is to read a chapter. Bad books and conformity are rampant for Americans, but shouldn't higher-education students and professors be able to tell that book is a brain Twinkie?

Again, college is a time for hanging out, and even moreso when doing strange studies or travel semesters like the one they're on. But enough already: You're in Norway, for God's sake, on an incomparable island. So get out there and climb a mountain. Or dig up mythology. Or collect shells. Or photograph wildlife. At least for part of the day, damnit. You can slouch around the rest of your life.

Matter of fact—trust me on this one—you will.



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DAY 187

June 30
Naerøfjord, Norway
Seems like everywhere you turn in Norway, there's a storybook scene awaiting. Although we endured some lousy weather when travelling, the beauty still shone through.



sad longing. So while I found no family today, I felt closer to him than I can remember. And whereas in Denmark and Norway there were auspicious relatives with familiar smiles and arthritis to take me in, here there were no such rewards or distractions.

I stared at the lake, understanding that, like Grandpa, I have no Swedish past or family. Neither Grandpa nor his people can be found here, because he is as dead as the stones I clutch in my hand, and as gone as the ones I threw into the deep, dark water. So the tears streamed harder for him than any day since his funeral 13 years ago, until my face and neck were wet. I realized I'd quickly trade all my exotic Scandinavian travels for one more peaceful afternoon with him on his proud prairie farm, watching his gentle hands work, hearing him whistle and whisper through his teeth.

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DAY 196

July 9
Stockholm, Sweden
Street in Old Town; Swedish Royal Marching Band

▲
DAY 216

July 29
Bergen, Norway
Early morning by the harbor



DAY **216**

JULY 29 Bergen, Norway
Norway's Self-Perception Problem

AT THE MONSTROUS TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER in downtown Oslo, there is a 25-minute, multi-media presentation about Norway. It's light in narration (all English), and heavy in pictures of places and people. It runs for free, on the hour, every hour. Anyone there is a tourist who's already paid dearly to come to Norway, and is therefore already in the fan club. But humble Norway, rather than take advantage of this rapt audience and big moment, refers to itself as "Silly, stubborn, foolish, proud, little Norway." Those are the final six words. They don't match the images, only Norway's self-perception—which a tourist may not even yet have considered.

For yet another example, here is a bit of copy from a splashy and colorful Norway tourism publication we picked up in Bergen: "As to Bergen's restaurants, these can and do satisfy most tastes and pockets... It is not at all difficult to find a pleasant place to enjoy really good food." Most tastes and pockets? Not at all difficult? My, how inviting!

I understand. All too well, I'm sorry to say. Having been brought up in a house of pure Scandinavian descendance, my response to, say, a string of compliments after having cooked and served a meal of many courses and wines might be: "Yes, I think everything came out OK, even though the stuffed tenderloin was a bit overdone and the Bordeaux not as good as the previous year's."

This is a familiar, comforting place, that way. And personally, I much prefer this mentality to that of selling you things you've already bought, which many people do, and which has become quite American. I'm an ad copywriter—a purveyor of superlatives—but verbose pride makes me sick, and I view overgrown egos as a sign of chronic insecurity or unenlightenment.

I hope, though, that someday these silly, stubborn, foolish, proud, little people can learn to pound their chests when appropriate. The Olympics they hosted was reputedly the best Winter Olympics ever. And they won more gold medals than anyone, despite their tiny population of 4 million! Yet they reminisce the mammoth event with comments like, "Everything went quite smoothly, and the weather even cooperated for a change." Hence, it's often hard to give thanks for kindness or generosity here. When I've offered token gifts, Norwegians will furrow their brow, turn their head, put it down somewhere and mumble, "Oh, thanks, but you need not do this." It leaves you feeling rather unfulfilled, or even guilty—which, of course, is a familiar feeling too.

► SCOTLAND

DAY **220**

AUGUST 02 Isle of Skye, Scotland
Another Day, Another Island

STEPPING ONTO THE ISLE OF SKYE feels much like stepping back in time to the Celtic days of Scottish history. Indeed, some 80,000 people still speak Celtic, and most of them live on or around Skye, which also boasts a small university specializing in Celtic studies. Road signs, menus, and various communications are in both English and Celtic—a language three times messier than German. Our inn—a delightful, traditional place on the water (our room is the turret!)—is managed by a Celtic woman who, when she turns it on, is incomprehensible, as are many of the Scots around this eerie, haunted island. I love it: Live music happens spontaneously in ale-perfumed pubs; fresh and flavorful seafood is available for each and every meal. This sparse place is not yet spoiled by the hands of time. Even some roads are single-lane, with occasional carvings for one car to wait for the other to pass, though it's really the stupid but peaceful sheep that drivers must watch out for. Next year, however, everything—yes, everything—will change, when a multi-lane bridge connects Skye to the mainland. One by one, the vibes that now rise from the land will be tromped by tires, stomped by hikers.



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DAY **221**

August 03
Somewhere in Scotland
A quintessential scene

► ENGLAND

DAY **226**

AUGUST 08 London
Name that Pub!

THROUGHOUT GREAT BRITAIN, people do their drinking in pubs more than at home. The major beer companies own most of the pubs, though you would hardly know it by each pub's uniqueness—which begins with its name.

- Dog & Trumpet
- Man in the Moon
- Balls Bros.
- Barmy Arms
- Pig & Whistle
- Frog & Nightgown
- Nag's Head
- Two Puddings
- Bishop's Finger
- Bag o' Nails
- Water Rat
- Bunghole
- Angel
- Kick and Bottoms
- Friend at Hand
- Cat & Mutton
- George
- Olde Dr. Butler's Head
- Green Man & French Horn
- Barley Mow
- Jack the Ripper
- Father Red Cap
- Blind Beggar
- Widow's Son
- Cock Tavern
- Intrepid Fox
- Bunch of Grapes
- Magpie & Stump
- Skinkers
- Prince of Wales' Feathers

DAY **227**

AUGUST 09 London
Pilgrimage to a Street Shrine

WE'VE JOURNEYED TO SEVERAL STRANGE PLACES this year. But the strangest trip of all, and at the greatest distance, was to go to London primarily for a Beatles pilgrimage. Residents of Great Britain, when I told them why I was there, would cock their heads and snort, "Yes, of course," in that aloof British way. But for me, it was worth it. Just to see some sights, dig up some old stories, and look for some ghosts; a competent Beatles tour helped immensely. Certainly I wasn't alone in any of these pursuits. The day before I saw Abbey Road—on the 25th anniversary of the album cover photo shoot—it took a troop of police to deal with the hundreds of fans paying their respects and shooting their pics at the crossing. I limited my photos of the crosswalk to about half a roll, nearly got hit by cars only twice, and yelled at just once. For a change, the obscenities were in a language I actually understood; I prefer it the other way.





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DAY **233**

August 15
Tro, France

We found this church in the French village of Tro, which overlooks the Loire Valley and includes dozens of homes built deep into the hillside. Because this day happened to be the village's annual "open house," we got to see how contemporary Troglodytes live.

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DAY **234**

August 16
St. Michel Chef-Chef, France

This was a charming resort town in Brittany, and we took an evening stroll before dinner. When serendipity rode by on horseback, my camera was happy to oblige.

DAY **240**

AUGUST 22 Munich, Germany
Photolog: Sheep Shot

SHEEP GRAZED their way into this year, spinning a common thread, oddly enough. They seem to be everywhere in Europe, dotting hills and valleys like white puffballs fallen from the sky. I wanted to photograph the sedate creatures—up close, not just sprinkled in the background. Never did, though. There was always some limitation. Until I found myself face-to-face with the gentle beasts on a misty day in the middle of Munich.

It was our second day of biking (the first was so good we came back for more), and we headed into the miles-long, ever-green Englisher Gardens. Midway through the ride, a flock of sheep caught my eye in the distance, so I dismounted my bike and ran after them. A bearded man who looked like he'd just come down from the mountaintop was shepherding them, with the help of his skillful dogs. I kept closing in, having only the instamatic (with no zoom) to capture the scene that had eluded me in several countries now. The sheepdogs eyed me warily; the sheep became confused; the man started yelling at me in German.

So I started to slide away, feeling like the ugly American who just crashed a private party. When the shepherd yelled again, I yelled back "Kein Spreche Deutsch!" or some equally disastrous attempt to tell him I speak no German. He smiled wisely, opened his hands to the sky, and responded slowly, "Eet's Oh-Kay!" So I shot away.

Clever Munich apparently uses sheep to keep grass cut short (without mowing) and fertilized (without spraying). In this city, tradition meets today with the natural ease of sheep grazing in a park.



▲
DAY **242**

August 24
Munich, Germany
Traditional Munich

▲
DAY **243**

August 25
Munich, Germany
Modern Munich

DAY 244

August 26 Barga, Italy
 Travelog: From Munich to Tuscany

MUNICH WAS MAGNIFICENT. I could have stayed there and started a new career, except that no one offered me one, it's frightfully costly, and I speak no German (other than "danke" and "bier"). So we reluctantly moved on this pristine, sunny morning.

The train ride took us through Austria and three countries' worth of Alps. We scored a first-class, six-person compartment for ourselves, so I strapped on both Walkman and Powerbook—which made me feel oh-so-suave as we gawked at Mother Nature's panoramas and a string of villages, each a perfect pearl hugging a dastardly mountain. At some invisible border, the train crew became dark-haired and surly, and their speech changed from throat snorting to poetic singing. Welcome to Italy, I said to myself, the last stop on a trip that should never end.

Maria-Grazia and Serafino, storybook young Italian friends, met us with cheek-kisses at the Lucca train station. Then they zipped us inside Lucca's magnificent ancient wall for a walk, then Prosecco, and then a hearty, traditional Tuscan dinner on the patio of Trattoria da Leo: Crusty breads, pastas in sauces, fresh fish and veal, breaded and fried zucchini flowers, and always that bottomless glass of wine—poet's pal, family's catalyst, blood of Christ. We then boarded their limo-like Saab

and were sped to the best gelatti in the region, and then to Barga, where—for a while—a marble-laden villa owned by Maria's uncle shall become our home. Home, it's a nice word; I haven't used it, even loosely, in a while.



DAY 260

September 11 Barga, Italy
 Our New Second Home: Aristo's Bar

ONE COLD TUESDAY evening, an old woman who lived in an apartment upstairs had died suddenly. So the mood in the bar was more mellow; an awkward but appropriate reverence hung in the air. A few regulars kept thrusting the guitar at me anyway. Hoping to cut the somberness, I eventually gave in—strumming and softly singing a little rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In." It seemed like the right thing to do; I meant no disrespect. As I moved into a second verse, Aristo began filling in some singing-horn solos: "Oh when the saints"... "BOP bidoobity BOP"... "Go marching in"... "BOOP bidoobity WAH!" Our new artist-friend Keane grabbed his drum and quietly joined in. Aristo, meanwhile, began beating his bartop resolutely, as though he had no intention—despite his age—of accompanying his departing neighbor. Like a ramshackle N'Awlins trio, we played on as we watched three men march the body into darkness.



DAY 268

SEPTEMBER 19 Florence, Italy
 Me and the Mafia

TRAVELLING REQUIRES SCHEMING. Manipulating. It's a jungle out there, and getting a room with a view, a desirable table in the restaurant, or the best of anything can bring out the beast in all of us. On this fine Florentine evening, we landed at il Chingiale Bianco (the white boar) for dinner. It was low on our possibility list and high on the price list, but time was running out for passing judgment on restaurants, and we were far from our room on wobbly legs. We desired to dine early—which means 7:30 or 8:00 by both Italy's standards and ours. Il Chingiale Bianco told us they could seat us at 7:00.

One of our guidebooks told us to ask for the table in the loft, so we did. The friendly restaurateur nixed that idea posthaste, so Kyia pointed to another fine table, one stuck partly into a little cave away from the hub-bub of the main room. No, he said, that's reserved by a fellow restaurant owner—a Mafioso from Sicily. Then, with the devil in his eye, he bubbled, "Oh what the hell. He's only a mafioso. It's yours!" We left for a drink and to kill some time, and came back at 7:00, sharp.

We were seated, and then abused periodically by the restaurateur's wife, Waitress from Hell #55. Toward the end of the meal, while I was away peeing, the restaurateur introduced Kyia to the mysterious mafiosos (who had been seated at the table next to us). Paulo, who was young and suave, spoke a LEEtut INgleesh, wore jewelry, and explained that he was in "import, export—wine, pasta, bread, whatever's moving." (Importing and exporting bread?) His cohort, the older and distinguished, suitclad Luciano spoke no English, but knew the universal language of debonair quite well. Shortly after I returned, a grappa bottle and two glasses appeared on our table. We were touched (and confused) by their kindness, and poured ourselves a couple shots when our food was gone. To be polite, we toasted them, and thus ended up in a conversation, and soon found ourselves standing next to their table, chatting away. We had—in classic American style—filled our little shotglasses to the brim, which appeared rather silly compared to their restrained half-full shots, but proved to be downright disastrous when I proceeded to spill my entire shot on Luciano's lap. Yes, it was one of those nights.

Red-faced (and ready to fall to my knees), I apologized in 15 languages while visions of cement shoes danced in my head. He kept saying, "No problema, va bene!" but was staring at the big wet spot with a

▲
DAY 244

August 26
 Munich, Germany
 Departing for Italy

▲
DAY 262

September 13
 Lucca, Italy
 A slice of Tuscan life

tilted head. His face reminded me of Brando's in *The Freshman* (a *Godfather* spoof) when he's warning the stockbroker, "Louie, I told you to call me when my stocks are *up*, not down..." I poured another glass, not quite so full this time, and we all drank. Then we toasted and drank again. Following that, I somehow dropped my glass to the floor, where it shattered into about a million pieces. If their kindness was motivated by recruiting some blond American mafiosos, I think I failed the test. About this time, the owner wanted our table, so we paid and moved on—inviting our new friends for coffee in reciprocation for all the grappa. First they said no, no, then si! si! So we took a long, long walk down a dark street by the river, until they spotted a gelati bar to their liking.

I don't drink coffee at night and felt too full for gelati, so I ordered a vino bianco instead. This move made them cringe with disapproval—heads swaying, foreheads in hands—which signaled the clerk to refuse my order. Panicking, I pointed to the nearest gelati—which happened to be mango. It was delicious! The flavor transported me to simpler times on St. John, where we ate football-sized mangoes by the dozen. (I thus discovered perhaps the first link between these two homes of mine this year.)

We talked, sometimes all at once. We exchanged addresses and phone numbers. They were from Palermo, Sicily, of course, which is the true headquarters of the mob. We were told we'd "be taken care of" in Palermo when we visited, which, ironically, we were planning to do. We were to see Luciano there, and call Paulo (who'd be in L.A. at the time, yet omnipresent thanks to international cellular technology). Paulo would set us up at his hotel/restaurant, we'd meet his family, and who-knows-what else. He also told us he'd be visiting us in Minneapolis next winter, since he'd be in nearby Chicago anyway. When I asked for the gelati and coffee tab, the Sicilians sternly said my money's "no good in this country." The gelati workers knew their roles well—standing at attention and smiling to Luciano and Paulo as if fully aware that these men demand respect. To me, the workers just grinned, shook their heads, and hid their hands when I tried to give them cash.

These gentlemen had to work tomorrow, calling on contacts in Florence. So after another long, verbose good-bye, we all headed in separate directions—into the black, cavernous streets of Florence. Like all Sicilians I've met, they were magnetically friendly—warm and alluring. As I wander this world, I strive not to judge people on the fact that they may be of color, of unusual beliefs or clothing, or of the mafia. In fact, my intrigue usually increases with someone from a different mold. The mafia is—after all, and particularly as they view it—just another way of doing business.

Nonetheless, I think we may forget to call them in Palermo. In fact, I hope never to see them again.



▲
DAY **269**
September 20
Florence, Italy
Tourists, tourists everywhere



▲
DAY **270**
September 21
Venice, Italy
Italians warned me that Venice was a theme park that endures only because of toursim and massive preservation efforts. Maybe. But amid the masks I also saw a thriving community—complete with noisy, neighborhood bars, piazzas with kids playing soccer, and aging Venetians who will never live anywhere else.



DAY 274

SEPTEMBER 25 Aosta, Italy
One Day, Two Festas

LOCATED IN A TINY, almost-flat space in the middle of massive mountains where Italy, Switzerland, and France meet, Chambave is one of those quainter-than-imagination, lost villages where nothing ever changes. On this Sunday, their annual Sagra de la Uva (also called the Festa de Raisin), the residents were praising the grape in oh-so many ways: in a contest in which judges determine whose are the best; in an outdoor church service climaxing in a mass toast of the new wine; and in a feast for all with live music, dancing, and much rejoicing. Needless to say, the fruity new wine of the region was generously revered—and consumed—on this gloriously sunny day. And the only people missing were the few folks still in the vineyards grabbing those last grapes while the sun finally shone.

We reluctantly caught the only bus of the day and headed onward—after losing ourselves in the Catholic mass, the bar, and the crowd of happy people—to the village of Cogne. Here, the Bataille de Reines was the celebration du jour, and all the stout little people with dark hair, serious faces, and great hats came out to watch nearly 200 bovine fight it out—to determine once and for now who had the toughest cow. The bar-on-wheels was strategically set up nearby, but most men brought their own jugs of homebrew to make sure that if their thirst for victory went unquenched, the more pedestrian thirst would be sated.



▲
DAY 278
September 29
Vagli di Sotto, Italy
Submerged village that
reappeared during dam repair

▲
DAY 285
October 05
Barga, Italy
Catholicism is everywhere

▲
DAY 288
October 08
Palermo, Sicily
Kyia savors (and buys) the essence
of Sicily

▲
DAY 291
October 11
Cefalu, Sicily
The seaside village with a mountain-hat

▲
DAY 293
October 13
Rome, Italy
President laying wreath on a tomb

DAY 303

OCTOBER 23 Barga, Italy
Tacky Poem

THIS DELIGHTFUL POEM needs no introduction. But I'll give one anyway.

In addition to being an outstanding writer (and photographer), I am, of course, a prolific poet. I have been leaving my poems (pronounced po-EMMS, not PO-umms) mostly out of this particular body of work because, in fact, the poems will be compiled and published under separate title and cover (hardcover only, with watercolors). The promotional tour (and TV, radio, and newspaper interviews—not to mention readings at various qualifying universities and bookstores, plus fundraisers for select liberal organizations) will also be a completely separate endeavor, to be undertaken long after publication and praise, and then only when my attitude and posture have become sufficiently disdainful, detached, and bent.

Today I hesitantly contribute another of the few poems specifically created for 355 DAYS. I composed it this foggy, fall afternoon—while most American males are busy watching football. There are no neanderthal Sunday activities such as American football here in modern-day Italy. In fact, there is nothing to do whatsoever on Sunday. Except, perhaps, to hang out in the cold, wet streets (as most of the locals do), or to compose bad poems.

Here, then, is said poem, which needs no introduction:

The Roses of October
The roses of October
It pains me to remember.
For when young, I think,
They bloomed in spring!
(Though springtime seemed forever.)

The roses of October
Have told me I'm a member.
Of clubs of fears,
Of quickening years,
Like trees—so taut—til "Timber!"

The roses of October
Burst forth so I won't slumber.
Through precious days,
That despite the haze,
Finite, they are, in number.



DAY 312

November 01
Barga, Italy

November 1 is "Tutti Santi" (All Saints) day in Italy. Before the feast, everyone visits their loved ones' graves. Italian cemeteries are always alive, however. Every grave marker boasts a framed photo. Flowers are fresh. Plants are pruned. And—in one of my favorite examples of divine meeting mundane—battery-powered candles glow by the hundreds.



DAY 327

NOVEMBER 16 Sommocolonia, Italy
Old Italy is Dying

LIFE IN SOMMOCOLONIA is decidedly slow, simple. The hearty but aging residents meander through afternoons trimming grape vines, stacking wood, hanging laundry, and sitting with a cigarette on the same stump they sat on yesterday—and decades' worth of yesterdays before that. They putz away each day, but get everything done that they need to. Nothing is wasted; wild bamboo plants are chopped and turned into grapevine-poles; old bread makes a common Tuscan soup. Most Sommocolonians rarely go down the hill "into town," and many townsfolk look down on these mountainfolk (even though Sommocolonia looks down on Barga). The women up here look more like strong, weathered barrels with each passing day, while the men's noses get redder from long "pensione" years spent perfecting their wine in the cantina. Many of them will live to be 100. But each time a life stops, the future picks up a little speed.

Sommocolonia, like more and more of these towns, is slowly being infiltrated by Americans craving culture and Northern Europeans starved for sunshine. This new breed fills the old homes with pricey paraphernalia, rents their renovated "villas" for \$1000+ a week, and—if possible—endeavors to write a book about it all. Then carloads of ex-pats carting cameras and Chiantis come charging up the hill. It's a peaceful merging, really, and perhaps some of the lifers relish the attention plus the potential for work (not to mention the accelerating property values). But time and time again, I see the Steves and Stacys stealing some of the simple soul of this place—erecting a grand terra cotta terrace where lettuces, grapes, and green grass used to grow.

To be fair, most of the vacationers are respectful, even reverent, short-term neighbors. They absorb the local color, then spend the rest of their getaway daytripping to Florence to devour pasta, museums, and leather goods—thus herding themselves out of the way. By November, they've mostly flown back home, leaving the town back in the hands of the hillpeople. But when the old man next door sits down on his stump for his long, afternoon cigarette, I wonder what he's thinking when his wandering, yellow eyes meet yet another set of gawkers from the other side of the world, from cities and lifestyles far more foreign to him than he is to these well-travelled "stranieri."

In my many strolls, each day another familiar face smiles instead of sneers at me; they finally deem me to be not just another flighty foreigner. I stayed more than a week. I, too, have wood to splinter into kindling. I'm lucky and blessed to have had four months to live in real-life Italy. It will always be here, and will always be a precious and historical place. But it won't always be the same. Monied EU neighbors and US capitalists are changing the face of the mountainfolk forever.



DAY 333

November 22
Sommocolonia, Italy

One of Italy's countless cats

DAY 335

NOVEMBER 24 Sommocolonia, Italy
A Day to Give Thanks

COOKING IS MORE FUN in Italy. So we got up early—just like our families back home—to create this American feast with an Italian accent. Two friends joined us, and we all felt thankful, indeed.

THANKSGIVING DINNER MENU

- Roasted chicken basted with olive oil, herbs, seasalt, and crushed peppers
- Stuffing of farro, fennel, chestnuts, porcini, currants, and sage
- Whole onions roasted in pan drippings
- Skins-on, mashed new potatoes
- Pan gravy with chicken stock and white wine
- Fried, sliced beets with pink peppercorns
- Rum-rosemary applesauce
- Soave

Buono appetito!



DAY 347

December 06
Lucca, Italy

Supermarkets are scarce and refrigerators are small. So shopping for food remains a vital daily ritual for many Italian women. While some remain loyal to a few vendors, others float from place to place in search of a dinner idea, a perfect artichoke, or a fresh piece of gossip. I found this regimen tiresome—and the women sometimes treated me like an intruder—but the ever-changing ingredients inspired some exciting meals.



DAY 354

December 13
Milan, Italy

The angst of the end

DAY 354

DECEMBER 13 Milan, Italy
Countdown at One

ALTHOUGH WE'RE ENJOYING MILAN, it hardly feels like we're here. I've already forgotten last night's piano concert at La Scala, and I'm all but bumping into buildings. Kyia and I even did something today that we've rarely done this year: We went our separate ways. She wanted to shop; I wanted to experience DaVinci's "The Last Supper" before we ate ours. Naturally, it was closed for restoration. So I wandered the streets alone.

During the past few weeks, I've fantasized that if someone told me I couldn't go home to my career, my house, and my stuff, I'd be relieved. But tomorrow we fly home anyway, and this journey will end. As it must. And if there is one thing I wish to take home with me, it is this: To keep living like my days are numbered.

So now I must stop. I'm out of days, out of film, and my feet and heart are aching. It's time to go home. Time to sleep in my own bed. Time to let the next dream begin.



DAY 354

December 13
Milan, Italy

Wandering in the Galleria





About the Author

Kirk Horsted lives in Shoreview, Minnesota, on the shores of Lake Owasso—just 15 minutes north of two big-city downtowns. He is one-half of 2 Heads Communications, along with his partner in all senses, Kyia Downing. They work, sauna, and chase destiny in their restored boathouse, while pursuing ordinary life in a cedarhouse up the hill. Jesper Ellis Horsted, 2, now lives and roams as well. The family is scheming a sabbatical sequel to begin in 2000.

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