

# travels with my family

*Faraway travel can bring loved ones closer. Three writers recall the journey they'll cherish forever*

## ALONG COMES MARY

Nigel Tisdall

I can't remember when Mummy became Mary, but a few years ago I noticed that this was how my siblings now addressed the source of my being. I suppose this formal approach is more appropriate for a mature and spirited widow in her mid-eighties with a scarily unquenchable taste for adventure. As I work as a travel writer, Mary has never had any qualms about asking me when I'll whisk her away somewhere exciting – and if I dither she just takes herself off on a package holiday, travelling solo or with some benign and unsuspecting friend. Peru, Thailand, China, Sri Lanka – there's no stopping her.

Eventually it was time to give in – so one Mother's Day I gave Mary the world. Or rather, a holiday brochure. After weeks of delicious umming and aahing, she opted for a 16-night 'South American Adventure' yomping through the highlights of Chile, Argentina and Brazil. The group was unusually large – 31 of us, mostly couples in their 60s and 70s – and the atmosphere was like a glorified OAP-outing. Our tour



leader was superb, and Mary and I made a great team. A crucial factor was having our own hotel rooms – some private space and time is vital on a full-on trip like this.

I had no doubt we'd get on well – we always have – but didn't foresee how much faraway travel can bring people closer. As we cruised across the Chilean Lakes, tramped through the mists of Iguassu Falls and shared a coconut on sunny Copacabana beach, chances arose for what one would have to call unscheduled, mutually acceptable mother-and-son quality time. Back home our days seem to be ridiculously bunged up with emails, work, shopping and rubbish TV – there's never time to hear the background story of the most important people in our lives. But 7,000 miles away, sitting in a backstreet bar in Valparaíso with a fine bottle of Chilean red, there's ample opportunity for a good old chat.

That's how I learnt where I was conceived, and came to appreciate all the turmoils my parents' generation faced during and after the Second World War. Those hard times clearly had a bearing on her toughness today. Faced with the pit of widowhood and all the depressing ailments that come with getting old, some people close up like a flower at sunset – but Mary has stayed inspirationally bright. Our travels together just increased my sense of admiration, and refreshed a natural desire to cherish her. 'I wish I had a mum like yours,' my fellow travellers would confide, as she jumped aboard ski lifts and hiked through the dripping rainforest – and that made me feel incredibly proud and lucky.

By the end of our whirlwind tour, Mary and I had taken nine flights, exhausted seven guides,

made innumerable loo stops and got on and off a coach 52 times. Ironically, the only day we were apart, I got mugged. While she went off to an *estancia* (ranch) to eye up gauchos, I fell victim to a rogue taxi driver in Buenos Aires who took me up a side-street, locked the doors and tried to take my money. Forget travel insurance – if you want to be safe, never leave the front door without taking a stick-wielding granny for protection.

As for Mary, our holiday was yet one more impressive footprint placed on the map, and I was pleased to have supported her commendable desire to see as much of this fabulous planet as she can while she can. It's just a small way to help repay the great debt of life – because of course, without Mummy, I wouldn't be seeing any of the world at all.

## RIDING OUT WEST Douglas Kennedy

Some years ago, when my son Max turned 13, I told him: I will take you away for a week to your choice of destination.

Max, in typical pubescent-boy style, said two words: Las Vegas... a choice that made me suspect that he was already far too old for his years.

When my daughter Amelia turned 13 a few months ago, she had other ideas: 'I'd love to go riding out West.'

Being half-American, the West for Amelia meant those mythic wide-open spaces on the far side of the US.

So, several weeks later, Amelia and I landed in the town with the less-than-mellifluous name of Jackson Hole, in the State of Wyoming – a place so empty that a recent census estimated there were only six people per square mile within its frontiers. Arriving there, we found ourselves surrounded by

## Memorable Destinations

Looking for ideas for a family holiday you'll never forget? Here are Greenbee's top five trips of a lifetime:

**1. Egypt** Visit the Great Pyramids and the famous Sphinx, one of the Ancient World's Seven Wonders.

**2. India** Explore the 'golden triangle' of Delhi, the Taj Mahal and the Pink City of Jaipur.

**3. Machu Picchu** This summit in Peru is one of the most revered archeological sites in the world.

**4. Cambodia** Don't miss the temples of Angkor Wat at sunrise.

**5. Tanzania** Experience the striking beauty of Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti National Park.

the epic grandeur of the Grand Tetons – one of the highest ranges of mountains in the US. After an hour, stern peaks gave way to arid planes with barren, eroded plateaus, vast in their dimensions and their sense of nothingness.

'It's so lonely out here,' Amelia remarked as the truck left the frontier town of Dubois (replete with High Noon architecture and a proper western saloon) and bumped for half-an-hour along a dirt track to Bitterroot Ranch.

Ranches tend to come in two varieties: over-stylised resorts, or primitive outposts in which running water and a flushing toilet are a luxury. Bitterroot had it just right: simple, rustic cabins (with all the necessary conveniences), simple, rustic food and a great team of ranch hands.

Every morning and afternoon, our guides saddled us up and took us out into the great wide open. Although we had both ridden before, the ranch hands assessed our competence before taking us on to any challenging terrain, and spent one entire morning teaching us how to canter western-style. The routes were all well thought-out, fully exploiting Wyoming's scenery.

By the end of the week, we had negotiated a deep ravine on horseback, herded cattle, charged up a lunar-like hill





**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

Saddled up in Wyoming; the Tucker tribe in Seventies Spain; Nigel and Mary do South America



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at near-gallop and truly revelled in this western world so divorced from quotidian life.

'When I'm at university, I'm going to have a summer job here,' Amelia told me at the end of our week. 'But before that, could we come back next year?'

I immediately committed to this return visit – and, believe me, I will be held to it – not just because the week away gave my daughter and I an opportunity for an extended conversation for seven days, but also because the American West still remains one of the last extant frontiers of our time – a place where you can slam the door on modern life... and actually ride away into the sunset.

**VIVA ESPAÑA**

**Jenny Tucker**

I thought we might come back not speaking to each other. I thought there might even be fists flying. After all, it's been many decades since I spent a week's holiday with my siblings and now-elderly mother. But here I am, in a 'family' hotel suite in the south of Spain, sharing a double bed with my 80-year-old mum, while my very grown-up brother and sister are rammed into a box room that's obviously more suited to those who are 4ft tall and think Haribos are dinner.

My sister plods into my room looking desperate. 'He's sleeping in his pants!' she growls. I look at my mother who has a face cloth over her eyes and is already sparko. Her open mouth puffs air towards the ceiling. I offer a falsely chirpy, 'Perhaps we'll swap tomorrow,' but my sister has already huffed back to her box.

The holiday has come about because of my mum's significant age – for some time now she has wanted to return to this part of Spain where we once had a house and spent many joyous

summers. It's been 20 years since we last visited, and my father's death 18 months ago made us all realise that the clock is ticking.

Of course, the town has changed. My brother is outraged by all the Anglophile restaurants that have sprung up alongside the beach, and my sister barely recognises the town. But then, one afternoon, we drive back to our old family home.

Even though there's now a motorway close to our old doorstep, it is gut-wrenchingly familiar. My eyes swim with tears as I imagine my dad pottering around his terrace, admiring the frothy heads of the bougainvillea he loved so much. I am suddenly quiet and my sister, who knows me so well, links her arm in mine. I can hear my brother behind me repeatedly clearing his throat. Then a face appears from behind the wall and smiles. Unbelievably, it is the gardener who tended those flowers all those years ago. He recognises us straight away and, in turn, we gather and laugh and tremble with emotion.

The week passes without the flicker of a tantrum. We find that spending a length of time together, without work, kids and schedules, means we relish each other's company. Okay, so every family has its pecking order. My sister is the eldest and incredibly bossy. I am the youngest and a bit spoilt. In the middle, my brother jollies us along, constantly diffusing the potential female sparks. But, essentially we are from the same gene pool and, one day, when my mum succumbs to a slapstick tumble in the sea, we guiltily catch each other's eye and almost choke on hysteria.

Later, when all is calm again, I stand and look and think with a happy heart, 'thank goodness for you all.'