

# Wow! Immersion Experiences

Gerri Bain



## TRAVEL ADVISORS SHARE EXAMPLES OF HOW THEY AMAZE AND DELIGHT THEIR CLIENTS

Travel advisors can seem a bit like magicians. They help their clients pursue their interests in very personal ways and arrange things most travelers would not even dream possible. Whether you are looking for an authentic connection with another

**culture, dreaming up a memorable way to propose marriage to your partner, or want to taste the best fried spiders in the world, travel advisors can tap into their experience, on-the-ground contacts, and network of vetted suppliers to create extraordinary experiences.**



## **FRIED SPIDERS AND A LIFE-CHANGING COOKING CLASS**

**Laurel S. Brunvoll, owner, Unforgettable Trips, a Signature Travel Network member**

When a couple asked Brunvoll to arrange a 20-day trip through Cambodia and Thailand, she thought about previous trips they had taken. Knowing they appreciated off-the-beaten-track culinary, arts and cultural experiences, she arranged a private guide and driver for each country and wove in traditional dance performances, visits to temples and markets, and unusual food experiences including a visit to Skuon, a town known for its delicious fried spiders.

Their son, a chef, met them in Bangkok. In addition to Michelin-starred restaurants, they discovered the night food scene on a guided tuk-tuk tour. "The highlight was a cooking class

that I arranged as a surprise," she said. "They shopped for ingredients at the markets with their chef/ host then traveled by boat to her home, where she runs an intimate waterside restaurant and cooking school. The couple described the experience as 'life-changing.' Certainly for their son, it was; he quit his job and moved to Thailand for a year to work with this chef."

## **INDIA THROUGH A LOCAL LENS**

### **Sharon Strelzer, Luxury Travel Advisor, Travel Made Special, a Virtuoso member**

Planning a two-week trip to India for a school principal who always looks for authentic, immersive experiences, Strelzer arranged expert private guides who provided entrée into the culture that is hard to replicate. There were meals at wonderful restaurants that few non-Indians know about, visits to private art collections, and stays historic and luxurious palace hotels.

A highlight was a day at a remote school where her client had the chance to meet teachers and speak with students. Another special day was a jeep trip to visit remote desert villages. "She stopped in the shops of shoemakers, weavers, pottery makers, and other craftspeople, and her guide introduced her to a farmer, who proudly explained their sustainable farming practices. I arranged for her to visit a Bishnoi village, whose 450-year-old tribe has a distinctive way of life and her guide helped her understand their customs and interact in a very real way with the people she encountered."

## **TRACING ROOTS IN UKRAINE**

### **Linda de Sosa, Independent Affiliate, Travel Experts, a Virtuoso member**

When Sam wanted to find her family's ancestral village, de Sosa agreed to help and accompany her. Sam said her family was from Ukraine, but confusingly, the town the family always talked about was listed as Austrian. "Using my ancestry.com and sleuthing skills, as I have done for other clients, I solved the mystery. The Austrian name dates from a time when Austria ruled that region. The name changed again under Soviet rule and I tracked the Russian name to the current Ukrainian one," de Sosa said.

The research led them to Rudka, "a sleepy village in the middle of nowhere," she said. "We walked with our interpreter down dirt paths and soon the whole town—about 50 people—seemed to materialize around us. Someone called the assistant mayor who started digging in the electronic archives. After two hours, we determined this was the wrong Rudka and locals directed us to the right one. Again, the entire town came out to meet us. Someone led us by bike to the home of a family with Sam's maiden name, where she met a second cousin. Sam described the day as 'magical and surreal' and thanked me for helping her realize her seemingly impossible dream."



## LUNCH WITH THE GOVERNOR AT WINDSOR CASTLE

**Kari Mollan, Travel Advisor, Stellar Travel, a Virtuoso member.**

One of Kari's regular clients does not just travel first class. "I reserve a private suite for her at the airport where she can relax, check in for her flight, clear immigration and security, and then be whisked to her flight in a limousine. Upon arrival, she is met at the door of the aircraft. On a recent nearly month-long trip to Italy and England, I arranged for personal shoppers, private tours, and a truffle hunting expedition. But when I told her I could arrange a private lunch with the governor of Windsor Palace for her party of five, even she was impressed," said Mollan. A military knight met the party outside the entrance and took them on a private tour of St George's Chapel, where the recent Royal Wedding took place. The highlight was lunch with the Governor of Windsor Castle, Sir James Perowne in his private residence, "They enjoyed having the chance to chat informally with him, and after lunch, he gave them a personal tour of the State Rooms and took them into areas not open to the public."

## ORCHESTRATING A SURPRISE PROPOSAL

**Angela Musso, Senior Leisure Travel Advisor, Valerie Wilson Travel, a Virtuoso Agency**

The last trip that Musso had planned for this couple included a luxurious tent safari in South Africa, so when they asked her to plan a relaxing holiday getaway, she suggested The Brando, a private island resort accessible only by plane on the French Polynesian island of Tetiaroa. "The resort feels very remote and authentic. It has just 36 thatch-roof villas, each with a private pool, and I knew its focus on Polynesian culture and preserving native flora and fauna would delight them," she said. "A few weeks before departure, the boyfriend asked me to help him plan a surprise proposal there. We tossed around lots of off-beat ideas of where to propose but he finally decided on a romantic dinner looking out at the ocean with their feet in the sand." Then, with specially selected music and a menu created just for them, he proposed, and she said yes. What could top that? They are planning to hold their nuptials on a glacier in Patagonia, followed by a twelve-day honeymoon through Chile.



## THE REAL GERMANY

### Michael Graham, Travel Investment Advisor, Cruise Planners

One month departure, a member of a Viking River Cruise group that Graham was leading asked him if he could arrange for her to see Siegen. "Brenda had just learned that her family came from there. It was about 1.5 hours from our port of call in Cologne and has a medieval center and a mountaintop castle; it was featured in the movie "Monuments Men" because the Nazis hid looted art in its iron mines." Rather than send her on her own, with her approval, he offered to host the entire group for a private tour of Siegen, including a typical lunch at a local restaurant. He hired a motor coach and an English-speaking guide and so that they could still see Cologne, he enlisted a local professor to guide them through its highlights before they rejoined the ship. "To this day, when people talk about that cruise, they usually mention that outing as a highlight. While Viking provided great guides and excursions, we always were among hundreds of other tourists. As one client said, "In Siegen, we felt like we were in the real Germany."

As these examples show, it takes expertise and experience to plan a great trip. "I think of each vacation I plan as a custom-crafted jewel. I know what works and what doesn't and how to find authentic experiences by reliable guides and suppliers who are selected and vetted with my client's preferences and interests front and center," said Strelzer.

