

THURSDAY

GOVERNMENT RELAXES FINANCIAL PENALTIES AGAINST NURSING HOMES, 5A

\$1.00

Texarkana Gazette

Established 1875

JANUARY 4, 2018 | 2 SECTIONS, 20 PAGES | VOLUME 142 NO. 4

texarkanagazette.com

TEXARKANA, TEXAS/ARKANSAS

1/15/2018

CALL OF THE WILD

TRAVEL

Thursday

TEXARKANA GAZETTE ★ JANUARY 4, 2018

8A

Travel series 'Places to Love' comes to PBS

By BETS J. HANBY

NEW YORK—You may know Samantha Brown from her years as a Travel Channel host for shows like "Great Hotels," "Green Getaways" and the "Passport" series about Latin America, China and Europe, among others. She's back with a new series on PBS called "Places to Love," launching Saturday with 13 weekly episodes through March. "Places to Love" is about finding the experiences, the destinations, but, most importantly, the people who really make us feel like we're part of a place," Brown said in an interview for the AP Travel podcast "Get Outta Here!" Destinations featured on the show range from Shanghai to places Brown says you might not think of going "that close," like Houston's 4,000-acre, nicknamed Rocket City for its work with NASA and the space industry. Brown talked about the show's philosophy, some individual episodes and the challenges of succeeding as a woman on television. Here are some excerpts.

THE FLOWERS OF TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

"When you are producing a show totally based on flowers being in bloom, it is a nightmare. We were getting reports, updates, we had our flower-watchers. I was following bloggers and Instagram... I mean, I had a plan. It was finally they were in bloom and we saw the Texas bluebonnets in all their glory."

TRIPS ANYONE CAN DO

"Places to Love" is all about what you can do. I am not having any experiences that you cannot have. None of my experiences are VIP or exclusive, are created for the camera, which I used to do a lot in my past days... Everything I do, you can do. Just about everybody I meet are people you can meet."

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN ON TV

"Even if the show for a time they will let that male boss have that show for much longer so they can slowly gain those ratings to the point where they do have a successful show. Women are not given that chance. That to me was a huge frustration... It's just sort of the male-driven kind of world that men have adventures and women really don't. And so of course, I don't believe in that but there's a perception there... I wish it would change and the way I changed it was I decided to produce and find my own content."

GROWING UP

"There was nothing like getting up at three o'clock in the morning and our parents piling us in the Pontiac station wagon with the dog, with our banana sandwiches and making the 10-hour trip to visit relatives in Pennsylvania. I loved it. It was Canada. That was our big trip because we were from New Hampshire so we could go there. But that's what I brought to my experience when I first started as the Travel Channel. There is this idea that travel is a privilege and you have to be privileged not only with money to travel, but time and most importantly, confidence. I think it takes a lot of confidence to get on a plane and go somewhere else especially to a foreign land. And so I always wanted to be that person who could connect that experience with the person sitting on the couch. If I can do it, you can do it."

FAVORITE EPISODE

"I would say my most powerful memory I have is my first show which we taped in Houston, Texas. There was something about starting the day. I've got a cameraman, I've got a camerawoman, I've got a producer, a director and of course the crew, and I realize that in all because of our hard work and we did it. Two years before, people said there's no way you're going to raise the money to make a travel show and yet here I was. We were in this wonderful city, Houston, which I really fell in love with. It's the most culturally diverse city in the U.S... We shot that before the flood, about five months before (Hurricane) Harvey came. It will be the first show to air on your PBS stations because we feel so strongly about it, that this city came back from a historically bad flood. It's because of the people."

FUTURE BUCKET LIST

"I'd love to spend more time in Africa. I've only been to Cape Town, South Africa. My dream is to see the entire borealis. I'll see it anywhere—Alaska, Finland, doesn't matter."

Listen to an interview with Samantha Brown about her new show on AP Travel's weekly podcast "Get Outta Here!" available on iTunes (apple.com/2237411)

Listen to an interview with Samantha Brown about her new show on AP Travel's weekly podcast "Get Outta Here!" available on iTunes (apple.com/2237411)

Samantha Brown walks through a field of flowers April 4 in Fredericksburg, Texas, with John Thomas, the owner of Wildseed Farms.



River runners rafting to Pacuare Lodge in Costa Rica encounter easy Class 2 rapids getting there; and when they leave, heart-pounding Class 4 and 5 rapids downstream.

TRAVEL GUIDE | CENTRAL AMERICA

CALL OF THE WILD In Costa Rica, health and environment come first

By ANNE Z. COOKE

TRIKALIA, Costa Rica—It was 6:01 a.m. when we heard them barking, an insistent "huh-luh-luh-luh" floating through the rain forest canopy and over Pacuare Lodge.

"Howler monkeys," said Steve, squinting at his watch. Then a toucan weighed in, two long, raspy "screeches" close to our deck, in the Rio Pacuare Forest Reserve, in eastern Costa Rica's Barbilla National Park.

Up in a flash, we grabbed the binoculars and dashed outside, where a chorus of hoots, chirps and whistles ushered in the dawn. "Shhh!" Steve said, hopefully peering over the railing into the underbrush. "Listen! Was that a growl?" Wildlife on parade is a predictable event at most Costa Rican eco-lodges. Coatis, capuchin monkeys, birds and butterflies lead off, followed by sloths, baellus lizards (Jesus lizards because they "walk" on water) and green frogs, with howler monkeys, tapirs, armadillos and tarantulas at the rear. But big cats, ecotots and pumas? Once in a green moon.

"Jaguars? Maybe, but don't count on it," said travel planner Alison Carey, three months earlier when she called to talk about our trip. A Latin America specialist with Scott Dunn Personal Journeys, Carey and her colleagues research and book custom, one-of-a-kind adventures for individual travelers.

We'd been to Costa Rica before, but just briefly, on a cruise ship stopover. This time would be different, we agreed. Hence the call to Scott Dunn Personal Journeys, a leader in the growing trend toward custom travel.

"You'll like Pacuare Lodge," said Carey. "It's on the river, an easy, four-mile raft ride downstream," she said. "It's known for wildlife, and wild cats, too, though they're rarely seen. It's isolated, but that's part of the appeal. You know what they say? Costa Rica is one of Central America's safest countries."

Was it? Sporadic upheavals have plagued Central America for decades, from corrupt governments and armed insurrections to civil wars and more recently, drug trafficking. What makes Costa Rica different?

Then our itinerary arrived in the mail, a spiral-bound notebook listing dates, places and our contacts at each, with blank space for notes. The last three nights would be on our own, joining well-liked friends for a reunion at Villa Manzu, a palatial mansion on the Papagayo Peninsula. But the question lingered. "Is it true? Is Costa Rica Central America's safest country?" I asked Abel, the Scott Dunn driver who picked us up at the Juan Santamaría International Airport, in San Jose, the capital.

"We think so," he said, heading for the Finca Rosa Blanca hotel, north of the city. "It's because we have no military," he continued. "The money goes instead for schools, high school and colleges, and for health care and doctors. And it's all free," he said. "Of course, there are always people who don't want to work and are tempted to steal. But most people here have jobs," he added as we reached the hotel, a restored, 14-suite Spanish Colonial house on a coffee plantation, with a pool and a popular open-air restaurant.

On the way for the day's coffee plantation tour, we thought we'd learn about coffee. But the two-hour uphill walk with naturalist Manolo Munoz was as much about sustainable farming as it was about a good cup of joe.

Guiding us among the coffee trees, planted in volcanic soil between banana and potato trees in a mixed-species forest, Munoz explained that "trees add important minerals" to the soil. "A mix of sun and shade grows better cherries (coffee beans) than the big commercial farms do," he said.

That evening, as the sun slipped between the palm fronds and Miguel, the house waiter, came around with menus, I decided



Keel-billed toucans, bright-colored and slow-flying, are easy to spot in dense rain forests like those in the Pacuare River gorge in Costa Rica.

THE NITTY GRITTY IF YOU GO: Scott Dunn Personal Journeys, a leader in the newest trend in travel, researches, plans and books personalized vacations and adventures. www.scottdunn.com. All lodging prices may vary with discounts, dates and availability.

THE LODGES: At Finca Rosa Blanca, double rooms start at \$254 per night; www.fincarosablanca.com. At Pacuare Lodge, rates for two in a bungalow with meals, most recreation and non-alcoholic beverages start at \$766; three nights are recommended; www.pacuare.lodge.com.

At Nayara Springs and Nayara Resort, bungalows for two start at \$351, but vary with discounts and availability; www.nayarasprings.com. At Villa Manzu, the all-inclusive rate for the house is priced per night. Multiple guests, groups and families can share the cost. Call for dates, availability and current prices; www.villamanzucm.com.

GOING THERE: Fly into Juan Santamaría International Airport, in San Jose. For Villa Manzu, in Guanacaste Province, fly into Liberia Airport.

to see what he'd said: "Uh, Miguel, why do people say Costa Rica is Central America's safest country?"

"Because we don't have an army," he said. "After the civil war, in 1949, the government decided that paying for education, hospitals, culture and parks was more important than guns and soldiers."

Local police handle regional crime and a national government-supported 70-man team of "commandos," a trained "security and intervention" group, is available for extreme emergencies. But beyond that, no army.

In Costa Rica, we learned, education, health and the environment are more than a campaign promise. They are the framework for a peaceful future.

No wildlife conversation lasted more than 10 minutes before the topic turned to Costa Rica's many species, and how they have adapted to the country's 12 climate zones, each at a different altitude, from sea level to the summit of frosty, 12,533-foot Cerro Chirripo Volcane.

Rafting through the Pacuare River's narrow gorge, to Pacuare Lodge on the river bank, we could see the difference between the trees along the river gorge and those on the mountain side above, where the howler monkeys live.

As for the forest, Pacuare Lodge is both self-sustaining (electricity is limited to several hours daily), rustic and luxurious. Candles light the upstairs bar and hall, and the dining room downstairs and adjoining

deck, where all meals are served. Most of the bungalows have some screened walls, bringing the outside in. The first group were built along the river; the luxury suites climb the hill, each a five-star treehouse.

Our days were busy with discovery hikes, wildlife prowls and trips to the nearby indigenous village, with an occasional plunge pool and nap in our hammock. Leisurely dinners with like-minded guests made the rain forest silence that much more serene.

A startling contrast, indeed, to our next destination, Nayara Springs Resort, on a highway near Arenal Volcano National Park, in central Costa Rica. Greeted by a uniformed bell boy, we thought we'd made a wrong turn.

But this popular vacation village and honeymoon retreat only masquerades as a hotel. In fact, it offers urban sophistication in a rain forest setting. With its sumptuous suites—and swimming pools, shaded patios, bars and pubs, a spa and gym, restaurants and shops—connected by a maze of heavily landscaped serpentine paths, each is hidden from the next. A five minute walk beneath the trees—with resident birds and 30-odd sloths overhead—was a stroll in the woods.

As our Scott Dunn-planned trip ended, we said goodbye to our driver, Andreas, who delivered us to Villa Manzu. And there was the mansion, overlooking the ocean, a modern, sandy-colored stone building flanked by grassy lawns and trees, pools and patios.

Art and artifacts lined the corridors and walls. The kitchen-plus-bar stools adjoined the living and dining rooms; the theater, two bars, party room and eight luxurious bedrooms with bath completed the luxury. A path to the cliff-side barbecue circle faced the sunset.

With a staff of 12, including butler and three chefs, this luxurious hideaway, on five acres, guarantees privacy for those who can afford it: celebrities, tech-company millionaires, movie moguls, industry titans and sports greats. For us, being there was dumb luck.

"Make yourself at home," said our hostess, with a warm hug. "Take in the scenery," or join us in the pool; it's heated. "Meet our butler, Luis Mora, who makes the most marvelous cocktails."

Sit at the kitchen counter and "talk ingredients" with the chefs, or "ask about wine-pairings." Borrow a kayak or fishing gear and "walk down to the beach." Take a car, to visit the Beach Club or play golf. "Villa Manzu has guest privileges." Arrive by yacht and tie up in the harbor. Or fly: "The driver will meet you at the airport."

The Villa sleeps 20-plus adults and/or children. Because this is your house, everything's included: Meals, wine, cocktails, snacks, sports equipment, fishing gear, a cut, guides, and as always, Costa Rican hospitality.

GEOQUIZ Where would you travel to visit Halong Bay? — CHICAGO TRIBUNE

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY; COURTESY OF PACUARE LODGE; COURTESY OF VILLA MANZU