Every couple of months, Imagination Travel and Tips will feature a location for upcoming trips, starting with A and ending with Z.

This month, we’ll look at the city of Atlanta. With 9 million people, this city is definitely bustling and hustling!

From Nashville by car, to get to outskirts of Atlanta (which is America’s 9th largest city), it’s only 4 hours, yet many people don’t consider going to this city for vacation! There’s so much to do here, from easy-going and relaxing to adventurous and exciting! The temperatures are crisp now, making Atlanta an enjoyable place to enjoy.

Here’s a basic itinerary of things to see and do in Atlanta. **(Email me if you want a planned itinerary based on these things or any other ideas you have for travel)**

**Imaginationtvl1@gmail.com**

Settle into one of the many hotels in the area, (or for a different experience, check out a treehouse on Airbnb:

Then venture out to see the capital of Georgia at its finest. You won’t have to worry about driving in some places because for **$2.50**, MARTA (subway and bus system) will take you just about anywhere you want to go. *(You might want to avoid certain parts of south Atlanta, though.)*

Atlanta is chock-full of history. This is where the Civil Rights Movement began in 1954. For history and political lovers, head to the capitol building, named a National and Historic landmark, located at 206 Washington St SW. Opened in 1889, this building with unusual architecture offers free tours.

Park at the Capitol Building, then walk to Underground Atlanta. **Do this during the day**. There are lots of offices and businesses downtown, so it’s relatively safe, but avoid this area at night. **(For tips on safety when traveling, please email me at imaginationtvl1@gmail.com.)**

Underground Atlanta consists of 6 blocks of shopping, entertainment and dining.

Next, head to the world-famous Fox Theatre, located at 660 Peachtree St. NE. This is a highlight for most visitors to Atlanta, and there are one-hour tours where you can visit over 10 areas of the theater, learning about the history of the theater while walking the same steps that Elvis walked!

Modern art lovers will thoroughly enjoy the High Museum of Art. 1280 Peachtree St NE <https://www.high.org/>

Hours are Tues-Sun (closed Monday)

The World of Coca Cola is a blast! You can spend hours in here, looking at old Coke commercials, learning the story of Coke’s life throughout the years, even tasting some versions of Coke from other countries.

<http://www.worldofcoca-cola.com/>

The CNN Center is also a good way to spend a couple of hours, if you take a tour.

[http://tours.cnn.com/#](http://tours.cnn.com/)

The Tabernacle (if you wanna really sound cool, call it what Atlantans do, The Tabby) is a concert hall. <http://www.tabernacleatl.com/>

Centennial Olympic Park offers a lot for people to see, especially if you’re interested in the Olympics. There is a downloadable map and an audio tour to enhance what you see. <https://www.gwcca.org/park/visiting-the-park/>

Food:

If you’re like me, food is part of a vacation! Well, there are over 3000 restaurants in Atlanta itself, and that doesn’t count surrounding towns!

One of my favorites is Buckhead Diner, with their warm blue cheese chips listed as a “little snack”, but is in reality a full meal. Buckhead Diner is located at 3073 Piedmont Rd. NE. <http://buckheadrestaurants.com/restaurant/buckhead-diner/>

If you know the South, then you know that Georgia is known for its peaches. When the settlers first planted peaches, they probably had no idea that Georgia would end up with 1,571 peach orchards. One of the best places serving peach cobbler is Ivy’s Heavenly Cobbler. They’ve been featured on the Travel Channel and “Livingly”.

<https://www.facebook.com/IvysHeavenlyCobbler/>

Starting in the 1940s, Mary Mac’s Tearoom opened as a good way for widows to support themselves. They opened a tea room and started serving fried green tomatoes. Today the demand for this dish is so popular that they have to order 3 cases of green tomatoes every day to fill the orders.

<http://www.marymacs.com/>

The largest drive-in in America (and a favorite of my parents before I was born!) is the Varsity. They go through 300 gallons of chili on football days. They serve 10,000 burgers and 10,000 hot dogs and have the best Vidalia onion rings (going through 200 *gallons* of batter on game days) Started in 1928

Other restaurants that feature “southern food” are:

For fried chicken: Busy Bee Café <http://www.thebusybeecafe.com/home>

For red eye gravy: <http://www.thesilverskillet.com/>

For pimento cheese: <http://www.empirestatesouth.com/>

As with everything, please check the websites for hours of operation and location, bearing in mind some of these places may not be the best for traipsing around at night and/or with children in tow.

Enjoy this vibrant city, and if you have any questions, please contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com) or call 615-417-9859.

Happy travels!

Every few months, Imagination Travel & Tips will feature a location or idea, starting with A and ending with Z.

This newsletter is all about the “B” – Berlin, Germany.

Berlin is two opposites of the same spectrum, at one time full of history, but also modern and eclectic.

Getting there is a bit more time consuming than traveling locally. Americans do not need a visa; however, a valid passport is needed.

Because this is an international airport, you won’t have any problems getting a ride to your hotel. Uber is well known here and is safe, as of the publication today. Taxis have a set rate from the airport to your destination within the city limits. And of course, some hotels offer complimentary shuttles.

For ideas on the best neighborhoods to stay in, contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com)

Before the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, there was a distinct architectural difference between the east and the west side of Berlin. Even today, one can see the communist architecture in parts of the east, but don’t be under the impression that the east is not modern.

Berlin is easy to navigate once you reach the center of Berlin. The subway system (S-bahn, meaning strasse/street train, which is above ground and U-bahn, meaning underground) is easy to read and follow.

There are no humans to take money for subway tickets. Purchase them from the many machines available.

It might be tempting to “travel black” as the locals say, because there are no turnstiles to navigate. And maybe that’s why there are more subway police here than in other cities. So be sure you keep your ticket on you, as you may be asked to provide proof of payment, and if you can’t find it, you’re going to be fined approximately $50.

We can discuss more details about the subway if you contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com)

Now let’s move on to discuss what there is to do in this vibrant and exciting city!

Kaiser-Wilhelm Kirche (Kaiser-Wilhelm Church)

The original church on the site was built in 1895, but was partially damaged during WW2. Despite some of the damage, there were hundreds of tiny pieces of blue glass and not a one was shattered when it was bombed. Today, part of the church remains damaged as a daily reminder of the ravages of war.

The church is near the Kurfürstendamm (say that three times fast!), also known as the Ku’damm, which is a 2.2 mile long wide street, lined with restaurants and cafes, hotels and shops. A bit on the expensive side, but still worthy of a nice walk on a crisp autumn day.

After a walk and a peek at the sex clothing storefront windows, and maybe a light snack and coffee, get back on the subway. Get off at Hallesches station, where the Jewish Museum is.

Jewish Museum (Judaischees Musee) http://www.jmberlin.de/en

This museum covers 2000 years of German-Jewish history, so plan on spending at least 2 hours if you want to soak it all in. The outer courtyard has concrete leaning slabs of different sizes….and well, the reason behind this is intriguing.

You’ll need to either go in person or contact me to find out the story behind it!

Checkpoint Charlie <https://www.berlin.de/en/attractions-and-sights/3560059-3104052-checkpoint-charlie.en.html>

From 1960-1990, Checkpoint Charlie served as the main crossing point between West and East Berlin. Although you’re technically not allowed to take photos inside, they are pretty laid back about this, but just don’t use your flash.

When you’re inside, you’re going to see all the ways people escaped from the east to the west. It’s a humbling experience, that’s for sure.

Tip: Get to the museum early, because around 10:00a, it starts piling up with folks who act like they have just as much right to be there as you do!

DDR Museum https://www.ddr-museum.de/en

We may as well talk about this while we’re on the subject of depressing history. DDR stands for Deutsche (which means German in German) Demokratische (Democratic/ clearing throat here) Republik. It was a communist state during the Cold War period in Central Europe.

For car enthusiasts, definitely check out the Trabbant on display here. Back in 1989, when I went to Germany for the first time, you could buy a Trabbant for US $50. (I did not leave out a zero. Fifty US dollars.) But you get what you pay for………..still, the Trabbi is near and dear to many Germans’ hearts.

The propaganda from the DDR days is interesting. “Yes, we live a simple life, but that’s good because there’s no competition.” Ummmm, there’s also no meat, TV or freedom.

The DDR Museum is way cool…..it’s interactive, allowing you to experience everyday life in the DDR, living under a Socialist government. It, too is a bit humbling.

Berliner Unterwelen <https://www.berliner-unterwelten.de/en.html>

This exhibit is located under the metro stop called Gesundbrunnenstrasse. Quite interesting, as it is where citizens of Berlin would hide during air raids. It is a shelter, not a bunker, with the difference being a bunker is considerably thicker on the ceilings and walls, also made for the elite and the military.

Sightseeing bus and boat:

While there are many to choose from, I think a Viator tour that gives you a 1 day or a 2-day HOHO bus ticket and includes a river boat cruise is the better deal. (FYI, HOHO means Hop On Hop Off). There are several stops throughout the city.

And after the Checkpoint Charlie museum and the DDR Museum, you’re going to want something fun and happy.

KaDeWe <https://www.kadewe.de/en/>

KaDeWe stands for (here comes more German) ….Kaufhaus (store) de (of) West (3 guesses)

This department store is on the HOHO tour, but it’s also located near the Ku’damm, so you can shop here while you’re strolling along the Ku’damm if you so desire.

Before you dismiss this store as being a German version of Wal-Mart, where you can shop at home, there are a few things you should know.

As with most European buildings, it’s old. (Opened in 1907). It was owned by Jewish people and they were forced to sell as a result of you-know-what.

It is now the third most visited place in Berlin, with everything you could hope to find. They employ 20,000 people. They have 7 floors. They have a full-service restaurant and an upscale food court.

But if you go to see nothing else, you must go to the floor for dog accessories. When a dog collar has genuine diamonds on it, that collar must be behind a locked-up case. And you’ll see that, along with real china dog bowls, along with goose-down high-quality beds.

TV Tower in Alexanderplatz

There is an interesting story about this TV tower. Originally, it was put up by the Russians for the east, to show that they could have something really huge and did not need anything as nasty as capitalism. Well, most communists are usually atheists. And when the sun would shine on the ball at the top of the tower, a large cross would light up. The east Germans got furious about this, so they painted over it. Yet every day the cross would shine. They did everything they could to keep the cross from showing but to this day, if the sun shines on it, there’s a beautiful Christ-cross peeking out.

See if you can view that from a distance, because a lot of beggars hang out at the base of the TV tower.

Holocaust Memorial <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/startseite.html>

This is worthy of a short stop only. I did it as part of a Segway tour, which is a great way to see the city, by the way.

This is a series of stone pillars, of various heights. Here’s a riddle for you:

There is no graffiti on the stones, and no wall to keep the stones away from the public. Anyone can go at any time to touch the stones. How can there be no graffiti?

Answer: The city has paid a fortune to have a gas in each stone that will immediately erase any writing on them. Now the ironic thing is the city discovered that the company who makes this gas is the same company who made the gas to kill the Jews in the concentration camps!

Brandenburg Gate

This is the gate separating the east from the west. Very famous for being the place where John F. Kennedy made his special speech, declaring he was a pastry. (He said “Ich bin ein Berliner”, meaning to say “I am a Berliner”; however, a Berliner is a pastry. He should have said “Ich bin Berliner”.)

Nearby is a square that has a book fair everyday at noon. You may be thinking….why would I care about that? Well, in this same square, back in the days of Hitler, youth would enter a library and burn in the square any book written by a Jewish person or any topic encouraging free thinking. To offset this act, the Humboldt University across from the square holds a free book fair.

Also, in this square is the opera house. Hitler was concerned that the citizens had such low morale and he could not understand it (apparently, he did not like Berlin because he thought that people in Berlin didn’t like him). Anyway, he didn’t think the low morale was because of no electricity or water, the war, lack of food, no fun, and no money. So he thought the answer was to remodel the opera house. That was one sick dude.

Dinner/Nocti Vagus <http://www.noctivagus.com/en/>

Take a taxi or Uber here.

And experience total blindness, as this restaurant is aka a blind restaurant. You get a menu in the lounge, and you can choose from a variety, or you can go with the “surprise” menu and you find out at the end of the night what you ate. I chose the surprise menu.

You’re required to zip up all purses, turn off phones, and take off your watch, just so there’s literally no light whatsoever. You descend under the ground via elevator. There will be a blind server who greets you and holds on to you (or in my case, I held onto him!) to get to the table. All servers are blind here. And you will experience what the blind do when they eat.

Are you wondering if I picked up my plate and licked it? I’ll tell you only if you email me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com)

There is so much more to see and do in this city, so this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Hope I’ve piqued your interest a bit….for any more information, travel tips and advice or planning any trip, large or small, contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com)

Looking forward to “C” in our alphabet series!

Every few months, Imagination Travel & Tips will feature a location or idea, starting with A and ending with Z.

There are so many wonderful “C” locations, so I asked friends what they would like, and while “Congo” and “Cần Thơ” sound intriguing, the most popular suggestion came back as Charleston, South Carolina.

Charleston is still trying to recover from being the birthplace of my brother, Peter. (A little joke, in case you don’t know how he and I jab at each other as frequently as possible.)

Except for that hiccup in its history (oh yeah and also being an integral part of the Civil War), Charleston is known for its historic architecture, outstanding food, beautiful harbor and easy tourism. “Travel & Leisure” rated it a top spot in the World’s Best Cities list. How can we go wrong exploring this wonderful city?

Let’s get started!

First, the main thing most travelers enjoy, whether they admit it or not, is food. Charleston is known for delicious food and is (like Nashville) known as a foodie city. Shrimp and grits. And low country boils. And okra. Fried green tomatoes. Crab cakes. Frogmore stew. Got your attention on that last one, didn’t I?

Normally, I’ll throw out some ideas of where to eat in Charleston, but this city has more restaurants than you can shake a stick at, and we have much more to cover in this newsletter. But if you decide to go, I’ll be happy to come up with some restaurant choices for you! Just email me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com)

If you have decided all you want to do in this lovely town is eat, that’s fine, it’s doable, no judgment!

But in case you want to get out there and see what else there is to do, let’s start with the history.

There are tours to be had, food tours, brewery tours, carriage rides, walking tours! Start with a carriage ride throughout the city center.

One highly recommended carriage ride is Palmetto Carriage Works, offering day tours and evening tours.

https://palmettocarriage.com/?source=GooglePPC&gclid=CIPDt\_iB584CFUNZhgod-zQNwQ

Charleston is a walkable city, which is good because there are no subways. If you don’t want to rent a car, you can take advantage of Uber, Lyft or taxis.

Walking tours – you can choose a self-guided one (a good one starts at the City Market mentioned below, walking along the coast toward Rainbow Row, a row of colorful historic buildings dating back to the 18th century.)

If you don’t want to do a self-guided walking tour, there are many companies you can select from for a group walking tour. Among some are:

Lowcountry Walking Tours <https://lowcountrywalkingtours.com/>

Free Tours by Foot: <https://freetoursbyfoot.com/charleston-sc-tours/>

Charleston Footprints Walking Tours: <http://www.charlestonfootprints.com/>

Chilling Charleston Ghost Tours: <https://ashleyonthecooper.com/>

The History of Charleston Walking Tours: <http://www.historyofcharleston.com/>

Charleston in a Nutshell Walking Tours: <https://toptourscharleston.com/>

As you can see, Charleston’s walking tours are a huge deal here, and I did not even mention all of them!

Historical Charleston City Market is one of the nation’s oldest public markets, hosting over 300 entrepreneurs selling arts and crafts and food. Have a late breakfast or a lunch here or at a restaurant nearby. The hours are Monday-Sunday 930a-5p.

http://www.thecharlestoncitymarket.com/

Along with food, history is a prominent feature of things to see and do in Charleston. Visit the Old Slave Mart Museum, Dock Street Theater and Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon, to name a few.

To get an idea of Charleston’s start in 1670, head to Charles Towne Landing. Back in 1670, English settlers landed along the Ashley River and established the birthplace of South Carolina. Here you will learn that Charleston was the leading city in the south from the colonial era to the Civil War. Because of rice and cotton, the city was able to grow as a stronghold in South Carolina’s economy.

There are hands-on exhibits, audio tours on the a self-guided history trail, 80 acres of gardens and more.

<https://southcarolinaparks.com/charles-towne-landing>

Because Charleston is located on a river, you know there are going to be plenty of water tours. Check out Adventure Harbor Tours which offer sunset boat cruises, Morris Island Boat Tours (which offer a 2/3 of a mile walking tour – not required – you can relax on the boat) and also an opportunity to learn about beach ecology.

If you don’t take the tour to Morris Island, it is still an enjoyable place to visit, as it’s unspoiled and undeveloped.

Another tour you may enjoy with this company is a Dolphin Quest tour. While the sightings aren’t guaranteed (those pesky dolphins sometimes want to be left alone!), this company says they are sighted almost every day.

If you’re just wanting the beach, Charleston offers a few choices, among them Folly Beach and Isle of Palms.

For an upscale area, check out the French Quarter and visit the French Huguenot Church.

Historic homes – Nathaniel Russell House, Aiken-Rhett House Museum, Drayton Hall, Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

More history: The Battery, which is a landmark defensive seawall and walking promenade in Charleston at the Charleston harbor. The Battery is famous for its antebellum homes.

Fort Sumter: Construction on this man-made island began in 1829. To get the most of your visit here, take one (or certainly more) of 6 guided tours.

Children (and adults, too) will enjoy the “Children’s Museum of the Lowcountry” and the South Carolina Aquarium

I realize I can’t get away from food in Charleston, but I also would highly recommend a walking food tour. There are several to choose from, and here are just some you may like:

<https://charlestonculinarytours.com/>

<https://charlestonfoodtours.com/>

<https://chow-downcharleston.com/>

<https://bulldogtours.com/food-tours/>

Tours last approximately 2 ½ hours, and you’ll get to taste food from different restaurants, sprinkled in between learning about the districts and about Charleston’s history.

Some tours don’t operate daily, so check out their website for the days and times. If you have dietary restrictions, they can accommodate that if you notify them in advance.

I assure you, I have mentioned only *some* of everything Charleston has to offer. This town is filled with lots more to do. If you’re interested in going, please contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com) or visit my website, <https://imaginationtvl.com/> and click on “Contact”.

D is for Downey

Many of you are wondering, where in the heck is Downey? It is a city located in southern Los Angeles County, California. Surprisingly, there is a lot to do in Downey, which we will soon see:

First, you’ll need to fly into Los Angeles – grab your luggage (if you’re one who checks your bags) and for about $30 with Uber, in 35 minutes you’ll arrive in Downey.

Those of you who know me at all know that I love food. Food and travel go hand-in-hand. So it should be no surprise to see the first thing on my list is “Downey International Food Festival”. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1935546490068302/>

This is held every year in September, so you’ll have time to book those flights in order to see it. You could feasibly spend a full day (it’s from late afternoon til 11p) because of all the food, music, craft beer and wine gardens, plus activities for the kidlets.

Also for children is “Dennis the Menace Park”. Now I’m going to assume if you’re going to visit Downey, you’ll probably want to go to Disneyland in Anaheim, and kids aren’t going to be fooled by the difference. Nice try, Dad, but this park is more like a playground. It’s a great place for you to relax while the kids burn off energy, *then* take them to Disneyland!

Visit, too the Columbia Memorial Space Center. <http://columbiaspacescience.org/>

Lots of hands on exhibits for the whole family that will make learning about space fun. There are several displays about aerospace history. Additionally, there’s a robotics lab, an interactive space mission simulator and Boiler Plate 12 (from 1964). Hours are from Tuesday-Saturday from 10a-5p.

Golf ‘n Stuff <http://www.golfnstuff.com/>

Again, with a lean toward families, Golf ‘n Stuff has an amusement park with miniature golf courses, go-karts, bumper boats, beautiful water features and landscaping, some rides and video and arcade games.

Hathaway Ranch and Oil Museum <http://www.hathawayranchmuseum.org/>

This is actually on outskirts of Downey, but worth the short (3 miles) drive. Here you will find ample collections of machinery, photographs with a focus on early 20th century farming, ranching and oil culture. There are hands-on exhibits, always lots of fun to participate in! Hours of operation are a bit unusual: Mon, Tues and Thurs 11a-4p. Fridays by appointment only.

Museum of Hoaxes <http://hoaxes.org/about>

If this isn’t weird, I don’t know what is. This museum focuses on misinformation throughout history, along with modern ways of being duped and tricks.

One other weird thing about this museum is their hours:

24/7/365

So if you wake up at 3:00a and have a burning desire to learn about ways you’ve possibly been duped, head on out to the Museum of Hoaxes!

Downey really has a lot of interesting things to see and do and is a great place to visit before going to Disneyland, but even if you don’t want to visit Disneyland, you can spend several fun-filled days here!

If you’re interested in learning more or you just want to get a boatload of tips on travel, contact me at 615-417-9859 or email me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com).

Day 1- departure from Nashville

Oh how I love that British Airways has a nonstop flight to London! Nashville’s airport is playing with the big dogs now!

My flight left at 8:20p, which is 2:20a in London. I know that I should take my own advice and approach the time difference mentally. In that case, I should be asleep. But I’ll miss out on this delicious food, and yes, the free wine is an added benefit. Plus, I tell myself, it will help me sleep – even though that’s a myth.

It’s just an excuse to drink wine.

Later- I did try to sleep, but all I did was stay still and keep my eyes closed. Some man is snoring nearby. Would it be wrong to smother his face with a pillow?

Day 2- arrival into London and then into Edinburgh

My flight arrived at 10:30a and after I quickly went thru Immigration and Customs, I found the subway (tube) called Heathrow Express, which took me to Paddington Station, where I changed to get to Kings Cross. I can’t get airplane rules out of my head. No, you don’t have to be at the train station 2 hours before departure! Actually, it serves no purpose because they won’t even post the track you leave from until 15 minutes before departure.

I had a seat reservation and had read that going north, you get to see a prettier view if you sit on the right side of the train. I agree with that. Lots of green, rolling hills speckled with farmhouses along the way.

After 4 ½ hours, I arrived at Edinburgh Waverley. Why on earth do I even have GPS? I knew that the hotel, the Scotsman, was near the Scotsman’s Steps, and GPS indicated that I go south on that street.

South! What???

I used to search in the sky for the sun in order to calculate the direction, but who are we kidding, I don’t have a clue which direction *south* is, so I finally downloaded a compass.

Fine. South is left, so that’s the way I turned. Then the GPS says turn right in 150 feet. Well, there are no steps at 100, 150, 250 or 500 feet. There were hills though. And cobblestone streets. Fun stuff, with luggage and a heavy backpack.

After circling around a lot, much to the amusement of a street performer who had witnessed my attempts, I finally saw the hotel entrance, which amazingly enough was directly across the street from the station exit. Damn that GPS! I really saw no steps either.

The Scotsman Hotel <https://scotsmanhotel.co.uk> has a fascinating history. Originally, in 1905, the Scotsman News was in this Baroque-architecture building.

They upgraded me to a suite, which was amazing. All the rooms in the hotel get complimentary scotch and, in the suite, additionally you get some sweets and 2 Nespresso pots with cold milk, not that nondairy packet of white powder that, no matter how hard I try, I can never get to just go into the cup without spreading it all over the counter.

I unpacked and then headed out to get the lay of the land. This hotel is in an excellent area, safe and clean, close to the train station as mentioned, but also close to Hop On Hop Off buses, upscale shopping, lots of restaurants and cafes and a 5-minute walk to The Royal Mile, which is a little town in and of itself. There’s a miniature park nearby and because of the lovely sunny day, people were lying on the grass, having picnics, and just basically chillin’.

I discovered if I turned left, I’d cross over North Bridge and that I’d also run into Princes Street Gardens. Turning right leads you to the Royal Mile and the famous Edinburgh Castle. It’s amazing to see a huge castle in the middle of a town.

I began my HOHO tour to get the lay of the land, and my first stop was at Dynamic Earth. <https://www.dynamicearth.co.uk/>

I needed two hours here. Inside I participated in a tour that led me through time, starting at something like a gazillion years ago, seeing what the earth was like, heading up to modern times. I also got the feel of what it’s like to be at the base of a lava eruption. (You don’t want to EVER be at the base of a lava eruption.)

Then the opposite, where I touched an iceberg and experienced standing beneath the Aurora Borealis, flying above glaciers. It was all very realistic.

And I read about geology and earth formations. For someone who doesn’t like science, I found this very interesting! Highly recommend this for families!!

Then I walked to the Museum of Edinburgh, located in the Royal Mile. It was only about ¼ of a mile. <https://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/venue/museum-edinburgh>

This (FREE) museum is the history of Edinburgh and goes hand-in-hand with the People’s Story (across the street). Both tell stories of Edinburgh, the people from way back when, you see lots of artifacts and read about their history up through modern times.

Then I walked to the Museum of Childhood, which was interesting but disappointingly small. Plus, there were lots of kids in here on field trips. The museum displayed a lot of old games and dolls. I really enjoy taking nostalgic trips and seeing old things. Old Monopoly sets were most cool!

I picked up the HOHO bus again, and got off at Grassmarket, a very picturesque area of Edinburgh that is loaded with shops and restaurants. Originally, Grassmarket was a place for horses to graze (how Grassmarket got its name) and appealed to very poor people. Today it’s quite the opposite.

No horses in sight, but it was here I saw the famous Greyfriars Bobby, a statue of a terrier who mourned the loss of his owner and stayed by his grave continuously. There were a lot of people lined up to have their photos made by this statue. There are true dog lovers all over the world!!

I had read about Mary’s Milk Bar, but the line was so long that I just couldn’t wait, as it was 1:30p and I was VERY hungry. I went to the restaurant next door and had a cheese toasty, also known as a grilled cheese sandwich. I don’t know if it was because I was hungry, but that was one of the best grilled cheese sandwiches I’ve ever had.

When I left, the line at Mary’s Milk Bar was still long, winding around the corner and there was a female bouncer-type lady out there trying to corral everyone to stay in line. Seriously, this woman had done this before. People get kinda crazy when it comes to gelato.

I had to wait in line only about 15 minutes, but I figured these people knew a good thing; thus, the long line.

If you think I’m nuts for standing in a long line just for gelato, think again my sweet-tooth-friend. This is the BEST gelato in the world, even better than countries who are known for their gelato. I almost cried when I took the first lick of my dark chocolate concoction.

I went outside to the square and sat on a bench to enjoy this deliciousness in peace, and really liked watching the street performers here as well. The pedestrian-only square is full of street performers, outdoor cafes and shops. People were enjoying the beautiful day and lying on the grassy mound at the foot of Edinburgh Castle.

Day 3:

Last night I ate at #1 Balmoral Restaurant, which is a 5-minute walk from the hotel. <https://www.roccofortehotels.com/hotels-and-resorts/the-balmoral-hotel/restaurants-and-bars/number-one/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=local&utm_campaign=number_one>

Even by U.K. standards, this restaurant was expensive. But I loved every bite!

For breakfast, I ate from the hotel buffet and tried haggis for the first time in my life. I knew what it was before I came, and yet I still tried it because I am in Scotland and must experience all that is Scottish! It’s made from calf intestines, oatmeal, suet and it’s boiled in a bag. Anyone out there going to say yum?

I had a spoonful of Nutella at the ready, ate my ½ teaspoon of haggis and immediately followed it with 1 tablespoon of Nutella. I was able to get enough of the flavor of the haggis to know, well let’s just say, ‘been there, done that’!

I started off taking the HOHO tour to get off at Lawnmarket, the oldest part of Edinburgh. The name came from “land market” because this is where people from all around would come to sell produce that they had grown “from the land”. Later, a cloth market was started here and continued to thrive for decades. This area has the best closes (a close is a small alley) around.

Getting off the beaten path and walking through various closes was the highlight of my day. Yep. Even better than haggis!

Before I left, I was advised to get a Fast Track ticket to enter Edinburgh Castle. <https://www.edinburghcastle.scot/>

I am SO glad I did this because the regular line was really long. I walked around outside the entrance and got a great view from above, plus there is a gift shop with a lot of variety to choose from. It was cold and I left my pashmina in the room, so I bought a woolen scarf inside.

Note: be sure you buy high quality scarves, which means spending a little extra because the higher quality ones don’t scratch. The scarf I picked out here felt soft, but my neck had a different story to tell.

I ended up later giving it to a homeless man with a dog. I struck up a conversation with him about his dog who was performing little tricks on the Royal Mile, and then when I mentioned I was scratchy and he saw my red neck, he said his dog would love the scarf. How could I say no to the pup?

After the castle, I walked back to the center of the Royal Mile, but I had a few minutes to kill before my reservation (I pre-booked to save some money) for the Scotch Whisky Experience. <https://www.scotchwhiskyexperience.co.uk/>

I stopped at one of the many little cafes along the way and had a snack of Angus beef-flavored chips (called crisps in the U.K.) and a fat Kit Kat which I can’t seem to find in the US. This one was better than the regular one because it was peanut butter.

I passed on the haggis flavored crisps.

Sauntering slowly back toward the Scotch Whisky Experience, I saw more street performers. Lots of musicians, guys walking on stilts, Star Trek characters (or was it Star Wars?), people blowing life sized bubbles, and much more.

The Scotch Whisky Experience was really cool. (It’s spelled without an ‘e’ in Scotland.) I’m not a huge fan of whisky, but of course by the time I finished, I wanted to try every bottle in the place, and there are a LOT of bottles. There are several in locked cases, as they are special.

The tour starts with you in a big barrel that carries you slowly through a tunnel and allows you to watch a screen on the wall, showing different phases of the whisky process. This takes about 15 minutes, then you head up to the top floor to begin your scheduled tour.

While waiting, the woman leading the tour handed out small cards with different scents on them. At the end, we watched a movie that explained the regions associated with the scents.

We got to sample one for free, and if you purchased a certain package, you could sample more. I did and was presented with 5 different flavors. I drank a little out of each, probably coming to the equivalent of 2 shots. (It would have been 5 shots if I’d drank them all.) I think I’ve had enough scotch for a lifetime.

After the Scotch Whisky experience, I stopped at Camera Obscura. I can’t really describe this enough to do it justice. You buy your ticket and proceed to the top floor for an assigned time. Inside a room, which is totally dark, you’re able to see people walking along the Royal Mile by use of a camera on top of the building. You get a card and can presumably use the card to “pick up” the people and move them around. See – very difficult to explain.

Then you go down different floors, looking at exhibits and participating in different activities that make use of cameras and tricks of the eye. My favorite was in a room of mirrors that you try to get out of. I now officially feel bad for poor mice in the mazes! Admittedly, I was unable to get out correctly and had to go back out thru the entrance. ☹

Day 4:

Last night, I had dinner at Aizle. <https://www.aizle.co.uk/>

The food was outstanding and the experience was unique. Everything there is made in house. You get a 6-course tasting menu, which changes depending on what the truck has dropped off that day. The menu is what the menu is, so the restaurant can’t change things up based on your individual preferences, but if you give them a notice, they can cater to other requirements, such as vegetarian, gluten free, allergies, etc.

Later, I returned via Uber to my hotel. It was around 9:00p and the area was hopping. I didn’t feel like going in quite yet, so I had a glass of wine at an outdoor café, just watching the people. Even at this time of night, there were a lot of performers, but the main group seemed to be men on stilts.

Day 5:

Edinburgh is an extremely interesting town. I never realized how much there was to do here, and I feel like I need to return soon to experience the same things and add to it. The people are super accommodating and the food is excellent (well, except for you-know-what).

For further details, pictures, questions, please contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com) or call me at 1-615-417-9859.

Finland – a place most of us have only heard about, but not the most common place to vacation. Usually it’s a place to tack on when visiting Sweden and Norway, but there’s so much to do in this beautiful country, it warrants a visit on its own.

You’ll fly into Helsinki, the capital of Finland. After spending a few days there, you have opportunities to get out into the country and see what there is to offer in other parts of Finland.

In no particular order, here is a list of some of the most popular sites to visit in Helsinki:

The Helsinki Cathedral:

Try to see this from the water at night, and admire its beautiful light. During the day, you can visit and learn about the history and architecture.

Another popular church is Temppeliaukio (say THAT three times fast!), known for its dome inside, a circular skylight. The architecture inside and outside looks like an alien spaceship.

A must-see church if you want to see typical Russian influence in Finland, is Uspenski Cathedral. It’s the largest orthodox church in western Europe, located in an upscale neighborhood called Pormestarinrinne.

Linnanmäki is a 65-year-old amusement park that donates all its profits to a Finnish child welfare charity. My first thought is 65 years old? Think I’ll pass! But there are over a million visitors a year, so it must be safe. The major rides at Linnanmäki break Finnish records of being the highest and fastest in the country.

Hop on a ferry from the neighborhood called Kauppatori and visit Suomenlinna, which is a man-made fortress so huge that it cross over 7 islands.

For shopping, check out Old Market Hall, open every day except Sunday. When they say “old”, they mean it – it’s been around since 1889. The building is a byzantine revival style and inside you will find all kinds of stalls selling fresh foods, Finnish cheese and cakes.

If you knew that “sauna” is a Finnish word, you’ll appreciate that there are three million saunas in Finland. Just like in most saunas in the United States, men and women are in separate ones. You are allowed to go nude, but polite etiquette dictates that you wear a towel.

Waterfront walking: Seven kilometers long is a trail that takes you from one end to the other of the waterfront. You’ll pass a beach, monuments and lots of ice cream shops, parks and cafes.

The National Museum of Finland is a very interesting place to learn about Finland’s past, going back to the middle ages, through the Swedish occupation and then the Russian Empire.

Espa (the nickname for Esplanadi) is a park in the middle of the city where one can have a picnic or be entertained with jazz and other live music performances.

Food:

Popular foods in Finland are potatoes, pea soup, rye bread and something called Lihapullat muusilla ja puolukkahillola. (Looks like my fingers have moved over one space on my keypad). This is meatballs with mashed potatoes and lingonberry jam. Sorta like Swedish meatballs – but Finnish.

In Helsinki from late July to the end of August, it’s crayfish season. Seafood restaurants are very popular during this season, and the waiters will help you learn about the tradition of drinking Akvavit (similar to vodka, as it’s made from potatoes or grain.)

The most popular beverage in Finland is milk (surprises you, right?)

Besides Akvavit, two other famous Finnish liqueurs are lakka which is made from cloudberries and mesimarja, made from the brambleberry!

How to get around:

Currently, Uber is in Helsinki, although it’s not quite as popular as taxis.

There is an official app for ordering Finnish taxis called Valopikku. You pay a small fee for them to pick you up, but you are guaranteed to have a taxi once it’s confirmed.

Tram rides: You can kill two birds with one stone if you take a tram ride, getting a brief (approximately 20 minutes) tour of the top sights, and also you can get on and off at any of them. The tram itself is a site, as they are over a century old.

No visit to Finland is complete unless you get out of the major city of Helsinki and see the rest of the country and its beauty.

Outside of Helsinki is where you want to go to see the Aurora Borealis, also known as The Northern Lights, which are a spectacular reason to visit Finland. This is a light show put on by Mother Nature herself, and can be viewed in a variety of ways, from sitting outside in a camp to luxurious suites.

Is renting a glass igloo to sleep under the Northern Lights on your bucket list? If so, the best place to visit is Saariselka, very close to the northern tip of Finland. It’s a 12-hour drive from Helsinki (car/bus), but there is an airport.

Make your reservations way in advance at Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort (at the same time you can make an airport transfer reservation).

The Northern Lights show up between September through March, but be aware that they don’t work on our timetable. You aren’t guaranteed that nature will accommodate your requests, but if the sky is clear and starry, you’ve got a good chance of seeing the northern lights.

You can also take a dog sled safari to see the beautiful area around you.

Another small town outside of Helsinki is Porvoo, the oldest town in Finland. To get there, you drive through the Finnish countryside, approximately one hour from Helsinki.

Streets here are cobblestone and the entire area is quaint, on a small canal. This is a town for Finnish souvenirs, mainly glassware, cookware and tableware (the most valuable type in Finland is littala, founded in 1881) After a long time on your feet shopping, have a rest at any of the numerous cafes and enjoy hot coffee and pastries. Even when it’s misty and cool, people enjoy their afternoon time in the cafes.

While there are many small towns to visit in Finland, the town that was once the capital and largest city in Finland is a must-see called Turku. Time seems to stand still in Turku, and if you go in the warmer months, you’ll be there at midnight, drinking in an old pharmacy or old schoolhouse- obviously, not an operating school!

Another small town to hit is Maarianhamina. Notice in that name, you’ll see “Marina” in it. That’s because this town has a long history as a port and offers a large marina to explore. There’s also a museum ship in the harbor called Pommern. Maarianhamina was built in the late 19th century and still maintains that ancient look, with wooden buildings and colorful homes.

A little on the outside of Helsinki is an open-air museum featuring typical Finnish buildings from all over the country called Suerasaari Island. Guides dress in typical traditional garb from over 400 years until present day and will tell you about life during the time period they represent.

If you are expecting bear hugs and huge smiles from the Finnish people, you will be disappointed. But what you see is what you get, and you won’t be disappointed at their helpfulness and desire to show you their country.

If you are interested in going to Finland, please contact me at [www.imaginationtvl.com](http://www.imaginationtvl.com) or email me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com), or call/text me at 615-417-9859. I can give you a lot of information about the culture and etiquette in Finland.

Because of COVID-19, many people have decided to stay close at home. If home for you is the United States, then here’s a perfect trip that’s in a state with very few cases of COVID-19:

G is for……GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

Now of course, I’m going to give you other places to visit in Colorado, but here’s a really interesting driving itinerary. If you want to skip to “G” – Grand Junction, go down to Day 6.

When I went, I flew and you may not want to hop on a plane at this time, but if you do, I assure you that as of the time of this writing, the airplanes are clean and the airlines are a lot more diligent in keeping us safe. United has nonstop flights from Nashville, and if you’re interested in other options, I’m here to assist in that.

Day 1:

Fly into Denver.

Rent a car. (I advise Hertz. They have filed for bankruptcy, but they’re still operating. I would avoid Avis at this location.) Car rental companies are off-site, so you’ll have to get a shuttle to drive about 10 mins to get to the location.

From here, drive to Steamboat Springs. (Alternatively, drive to Boulder, a free-spirited city)

Check in at Nordic Lodge. (No elevators, so request a room on the lower level if steps are a problem.) <https://www.nordiclodgeofsteamboat.com/>

Eat at The Laundry Restaurant, 3 minutes’ walking. <https://thelaundryrestaurant.com/>

Even if steps aren’t a problem, note: the air is much thinner in the Mile-High State, so don’t be worried if you wake up gasping for air simply because you rolled over.

Day 2:

Go tubing on the Yampa River. There are many places to choose from for tubes. The best one, IMHO is Bucking Rainbow. The other places require walking down uneven rocks, but Bucking Rainbow has an easy walk down wooden steps. <http://www.buckingrainbow.com/>

Walk around the downtown area, shop and drink and snack.

Drive to Saddleback Ranch and go horseback riding. <https://saddlebackranch.net/>

Day 3:

Go to Fish Creek Falls in the morning. You’ll need about 45 minutes here.

Drive 3 hours to Palisade, known for its orchards and wineries. Here you’ll find the BEST tomatoes. Sorry, I’m a Georgia peach myself, but the peaches here rival those in Georgia.

Check into Wine Country Inn. <https://coloradowinecountryinn.com/>

If you’re adventurous and getting the grasp of breathing again, drive to Palisade Rim Trail Head and hike. It’s ummm, treacherous, so don’t try to be a hero here.

Day 4

Pay a visit to Suncrest Orchard Alpacas and learn everything about these amazing creatures. You’re gonna leave wanting one for a pet. <https://www.suncrestorchardalpacas.net/>

In the afternoon, visit Sprockets Segway. You’ll get a history lesson, but this is just a freeing, exciting way to get around. If you have a need for speed, this is the tour for you! <https://www.sprocketsgj.com/>

Day 5

Winery day- there are at least 25 wineries, all within 10 mins’ driving. You can have a tasting at many of them. But bring your own snacks, if Covid-19 rules are still in effect. And please, do NOT drink and drive. Sit outside and relax between wine tastings, enjoy the beautiful scenery, pet the kitty cats in the yard of at least one winery. Consider Uber if necessary.

Mix up your stops by visiting Sprigs and Sprouts Lavender. <https://www.sprigsandsprouts.com/#/>

Day 6

Now we are in GRAND JUNCTION, the highlight of this newsletter.

What a perfect place for outdoor activities!

Today, check into your hotel. Enjoy dinner in Palisade.

Enjoy a sunset hike. There are at least 10 places that are incredible to hike in Grand Junction.

Day 7

White water rafting in the morning. You can choose any from Rapids I to Rapids 5. Doing this in the morning is the best for weather, but if you are dying to fish, you may want to switch out the white-water rafting for the afternoon.

More hiking in the afternoon, or bicycle along the Colorado National Monument (select up to 23 miles along Rim Rock Drive).

Day 8

Hike along the Audubon Trail, which has 200 species of birds to see. The early morning hours are the best.

Golf or fish in the afternoon.

Day 9

Drive to Salida. Pronounced with a long “I”.

Check into Woodland Motel. This is the closest one to town, about 1 mile. There are lots of places to park closer in to town. What a sweet motel!

Partake in a History on Tap tour with Salida Walking Tours. They offer additional tours, too. Here is where you’ll learn why it’s pronounced Sal-EE-duh. <https://www.salidawalkingtours.com/>

Day 10

Shop. Shop. Shop. Eat, eat, eat. (Some of the best restaurants are in Salida.)

White water rafting again or tubing on the Arkansas River.

Ghost tour with Salida Walking Tours. This is NOT a cheesy tour. This is full of information about hauntings in this small, historical town.

If you are interested in anything about this tour, I’m happy to provide more information and more details. 615-417-9859 or [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com).

Colorado is, at this time, a mask-required state unless you’re in nature, such as hiking, rafting or sitting outside. Some of the shops do have lines of people waiting to enter, as they enforce the social-distancing rules.

Those of you who have been faithful to our “location of the month” newsletters know that the next one in line is going to start with the letter H.

However, I’m gonna mix things up a bit. Instead of a location beginning with H, I want to focus on HOTELS. Following are some hotel tips that I hope you find useful.

As always, please give me your thoughts and add any tips you want to share.

1. There are several websites that get you deals, such as Expedia, (and their partner, TripAdvisor), Hotels.com, Priceline, Kayak, Agoda and more. Be aware of the fine print! (Or contact me to do the ugly work of reading the fine print for you.)
2. Many discount hotel websites benefit you after you’ve used them for a while, such as Expedia, where you build up points that save you money on future hotels. It pays to be loyal to a specific hotel chain or a discount website.
3. If air conditioning is important to you, ask the hotel if there is individually controlled AC in your room and if it’s operating! Some hotels technically have AC….but they turn it off in the months they consider to be cool. Or technically speaking, they say “sure we have AC”, but then you find out it’s only in the lobby.

Same for swimming pools, hot tubs, the gym: They may have a swimming pool, but it’s closed for the season. Yes, they have a gym, but it’s closed for maintenance.

1. If a hotel is priced considerably lower than normal or others similar to it (by location, style, amenities), ask why. Maybe there’s been a change of ownership, maybe there’s construction. OR ask me to do this work for you.
2. Use a travel professional (clearing throat!) if you want to get an upgrade. If that doesn’t work, you can try for an upgrade when you check in, but be nice and engaging, as that works better. (Also, don’t ask if other guests are around, because you’ll be guaranteed a ‘no’ for sure!)
3. If problems arise, address them immediately. Don’t be shy about asking for things to be fixed, to change rooms if necessary.
4. Check out the terms of your rate. If it’s non-refundable, it’ll be a better rate, but if you have to cancel your trip, you may lose the prepaid rate.
5. Cleanliness check: Don’t use anything without cleaning it yourself first. If you can remember, leave your luggage in the hall or put it in the shower/tub and THEN pick up your mattress to check for bedbugs. If the room has these critters, they will get inside your suitcase immediately. Even the nicest hotels have been known to get them.
6. Check that peephole every time you enter your room. Again, even the nicest hotels have been known to have unscrupulous previous guests or maintenance men….they can switch that peephole around and watch you thru from the outside.
7. Take a long charger for your phone. Some hotels don’t have outlets near the bed.
8. Sure, take the small used soaps and shower gel. Don’t take the sheets, the light bulbs or the bathrobe.
9. Continental breakfast- it sounds so exotic and chic. It’s basically coffee and juice and packaged muffins. Don’t pay extra for this. Every hotel in the world has a coffee place nearby.
10. Want a big room at no extra cost? Ask for a corner room. Not only is it larger, you also don’t have the problems with noisy neighbors. Well, it’s not guaranteed, but it’s a bit more certain.
11. Carry a card with you that won’t matter if it’s stolen; e.g., Kroger gas card, and I mean the larger ones, not the keychain size. If your hotel room requires a room key to go into the slot in order to keep the electricity on, ok be mindful and turn off the lights, but if you don’t want to return to your 80-degree room and wait an hour for it to cool, this card replaces your room key. This doesn’t work every time, but when it does, it’s nice.
12. If you like coffee in the room, and there’s no coffee pot, ask the front desk for one. Often, they have them and just hold back, especially during our lovely Covid-times.

These are just a few tips for enjoying your hotel stay more. I’d love to hear from you! You can email me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com) or call/text at 615-417-9859.

India

This month, I is for India. I started not to write about this as the location of the month, because so many people have a negative connotation about this diverse country. Here are the yesses and nos:

Yes, India is dirty. But the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has made terrific strides in cleaning it up. I’ve been to India 8 times and in the last 6 years, I’ve seen surprising improvements.

Yes, it’s weird there. I mean it, I could write a book on how weird everything is. Want more specifics? Give me a call for details.

Yes, it’s busy. Oh my gosh, how busy! I absolutely love it. Between the sing-song truck honking, the Muslim call to prayer, cars, bikes weaving in and out of traffic, cows, monkeys, families on motorbikes, smells of delicious food, it never seems to slow down! If you are looking for a peaceful, quiet place to rest, this is not the country for you. At the end of the day, your senses will be in overload.

Yes, there is Indian food! If you aren’t familiar with Indian food, you are so going to appreciate the service you get in India. You’ll often get free samosas, biryani, masala dosa….have I lost you already? You just have to say to your server, “I don’t know what to order” and they will bend over backwards to help. 

No, you aren’t stuck eating just Indian food. Don’t worry about packing tons of potato chips just to have something to sustain you. There are places you can get whatever you want. (Unless you want steak or a hamburger, as cows are considered sacred.)

Yes, cows are sacred. That doesn’t mean people are walking around bowing to every Tom, Dick and Cow they see. They don’t pray to the cows, they just consider them sacred. Let me know if you want details on this.



Yes, food is spicy. (I’m back on the food.) But you can say “little spicy” and they will accommodate you, without losing any of the awesome flavors.

Yes, they speak English, for the most part. Remember, Britain ruled India until 1947. Plus, it’s a huge touristy country, lots of English-speaking people go, so they want to be sure we keep coming.

No, it’s not safe for a woman to walk around the city by herself at night. There are some tips that I can share with you on how to be safe if you’re a single female. Just contact me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com). In most of the ways, it’s a very safe country, despite how crowded it is. We just have to be extra vigilant if traveling alone as a female.

Yes, it’s best to have a guide to show you around. No, you’re not going to be stuck doing boring things. A personal guide is going to watch out for you, take you to authentic Indian restaurants and shops, help you get great deals on anything you want and will tailor the tour to fit your desires.

No, it’s not all forts, temples and art, but the RAT TEMPLE in Bikaner and the bike temple in Jodhpur were very intriguing. If you like havelis, Mandawa is THE place to be. Let me know if you want information on how to contact the best tour guide or something to do other than forts, temples and art.



I could go on and on about India and tell you some amazing stories, but let’s save that for my book, shall we? Or you can get some personal insights if you want by contacting me at [imaginationtvl1@gmail.com](mailto:imaginationtvl1@gmail.com) or calling me at 615-417-9859.

J is for Jamaica!

What comes to mind when you hear Jamaica? Well, there’s a reason that it’s the #1 honeymoon destination and there’s a reason people want to return again and again!

Perhaps you’ve been and the memories are sentimental, as posted on Facebook Jamaica Travel Specialist Group by Kim Monroe Stoot:

“It was a very emotional moment for me as it was our kids very first time at 4 and 7 going out of the country and climbing Dunns River falls after we had just lost our rock, our matriarch, my grandmother, and we met another family of 4 who I just poured out my love for my grandmother to and she became instantly emotional. We formed a friendship right then and there, total strangers.”

For fun, let’s pretend you have **only** 11 days to spend in this lovely Caribbean island and you want to hit the top five cities. This isn’t nearly enough time to experience the mouth-watering food, the fun in the sun and the warm hospitality, but let’s see what **can** be done in 11 days.

Day 1: Fly into Montego Bay.

Rent car. You’ll have no shortage of car rental companies to choose from, from the big corporate companies to smaller, island-owned ones such as **Classique MBJ**. For help deciding which one is best for you, contact me at [www.imaginationtvl.com](http://www.imaginationtvl.com)

Are you the kind of person who wants to dive right in to activities after arrival? If so, depending on where your accommodations are, here are some activities to jump-start your trip:

Visit a plantation, followed by a visit to some tropical gardens. There are many of each to choose from, but if you choose **Day-O Plantation Restaurant and Bar**, you tour the plantation, then drive about 10 minutes to **Ahhh…Ras Natango Gallery and Garden**. This is a gallery with local paintings and other crafts that is located on a hillside and set in flower and foliage gardens that attract many species of birds.

Return to the hotel to freshen up and relax….don’t sleep quite yet!

But do have an early dinner, somewhere near your hotel or B&B. If you want a typical Jamaican dinner, the first thing to try is jerk chicken or jerk pork. Don’t worry if you see jerk meat being prepared in a metal container along the road. This allows for the jerk seasoning to permeate the meat and is not only an authentic experience, it adds to the flavor!

Day 2: Montego Bay

This morning, after a typical breakfast of Johnny cakes and salt mackerel, hop in the water for a diving or snorkeling excursion. These are best done in the morning. If this isn’t your cup of tea, maybe this morning you can golf or fish.

For dinner, try oxtail. Usually cooked for several hours, it’s served with peas and rice and is very hearty. If you’re not sure where to go to get the best tasting oxtail, but you want to experience this, let me know and I’ll give you several options.

As you can see, Montego Bay needs more than 2 days! But we still have much more of the island to experience.

Day 3 Drive to Ocho Rios

After a typical breakfast of callaloo (a leafy vegetable) with ripe plantains, drive 1 hour and 45 mins to Ocho Rios. This is the place known for Dunn’s River Falls. While not steep, you will find it slippery, so hold on to the person in front of you, as you make your way up the side of the waterfall. The view along the way is worth every exhilarating moment!

After the falls, drive about 30 minutes to Blue Hole, a swimming cave and mineral springs. After this, take advantage of the mud massages.

Tonight, let’s opt for more typical Jamaican fare and have curry. Curry isn’t necessarily a spice, it’s a dish served with rice and a sauce. In Jamaica, you can get curry mutton, chicken or goat. My mouth is watering already!

Day 4: Ocho Rios

Today if you still want to experience typical Jamaican breakfasts, have steamed cabbage and saltfish, then take a horse ride through the countryside and on the beach. Later, pick up an ATV for an adventure not to be forgotten!

After this adventurous day, you’ll probably want to relax and have a simple, but a typical dinner of Jamaican Fish Escovitch. This is fried red snapper, topped with pickled onions, carrots, peppers and chayote (a type of squash). It’s usually served with bammy (casava melon flatbread).

Day 5: Drive to Port Antonio

This morning, pack up and plan to leave Ocho Rios around 9:00a so you’ll arrive on the east coast of Jamaica, to Port Antonio, around 11:00a.

While this town isn’t the first one some thing of when planning a trip to Jamaica, it’s a town not to be missed. Now we’re getting into a place less frequented by tourists, but still offering many things to do.

Frenchman’s Cove is a beautiful turquoise lagoon where you can swing into the water and swim in the coves that mingle with the sea.

Definitely raft down the Rio on a bamboo raft. You can do this in other towns, but since our time is limited, and the other towns have other activities to choose from, Port Antonio is the place to do the bamboo rafting. Guides will regale you with stories and you’ll learn about the culture of Jamaica from a Jamaican’s point of view.

As the day begins to come to a close, if you want to relax on a quiet beach, stop at Winnifred Beach. You’ll have to take a bit of a hike down some steps, but when you arrive, you’ll be in a secluded beach area. Walk along the shoreline, pick up shells, listen to the waves.

Day 6: Drive to Kingston

Before you depart from Port Antonio, stop along many of the souvenir and craft shops lined up. Walk up and down to see all you can choose from, then on your way back up, you’ll know where to stop for the souvenirs you want. They don’t take credit cards here, so have plenty of cash.

Skip breakfast this morning so you’ll be good and hungry for an authentic Jamaican beef patty from Juici Café, located in the Port Antonio Shopping Village. Jamaican beef patties are **made with** a rich flaky yellow pastry dough filled with seasoned ground **beef**.

Plan to leave Port Antonio after lunch. Arrive in Kingston a little over 2 hours later.

What shall we have for dinner tonight, if we want to continue eating authentic Jamaican foods? What about Run Down? Now one of the cultural tips is how to pronounce things so you feel more comfortable when you speak to native Jamaicans. The “down” is pronounced like “dun”.

Run Down is a fish stew made with garlic, onions, tomatoes and spicy peppers. It’s slow cooked in coconut milk and served with dumplings and green beans.

Day 7: Kingston

After checking into your hotel or vacation rental home, take a Jamaican Music History Tour. Start at the Bob Marley Museum, have a snack and then relax in Trench Town where you can meet local musicians and listen to bands practicing.

If you’re into hiking and want to hike the Blue Mountains, be prepared for a 7- or 8-hour trek. Most people start in the morning and spend the night at the peak at **Wildflower Lodge** or **Whitfield Hall** or continue to enjoy nature and camp at **Portland Gap**. This is an extremely challenging hike, over 7400’ and maybe you’re still trying to recover from your waterfall trek at Dunn’s River Falls, in which case you may certainly drive, and no one will think less of you!

For dinner, have some fish tea, which is actually not a tea but a spicy fish soup. It can be a light broth or a thicker, fuller kind. It has vegetables and green bananas in it, and has a reputation that it’s energizing and an aphrodisiac. (Remember, Jamaica is the #1 honeymoon destination!)

Day 8: Drive to Negril

If you’re a foodie and want to continue to try typical Jamaican breakfasts without repeating what you’ve had, then this morning, give ackee (a type of fruit) and saltfish with bammy a go.

Drive 4 hours to Negril. Note: there are 2 options for this drive. One takes you back up to Ocho Rios, but you already drove the route between Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, so I’d opt for the southern route so you can experience another part of the island.

After you check in to your accommodations, rest up because Negril is known for nightlife.

Have an early dinner of **Rastafarian inspired Jamaican corn soup, which is usually served with a half ear of corn in the middle of the bowl. It has onions, garlic, celery, split peas, pumpkin, potatoes, ginger and more. Yeah, this is a hearty one, but if you’re going to nightclubs later, you might want to fill up on this.**

Check out **The Jungle**, voted #1 as the best nightclub in the Caribbean. Although there is an enforced dress code, don’t worry about dressing up. It’s pretty casual. There are 4 DJs spinning several genres of music and two dance floors (one is air-conditioned)

Day 9: Negril

This morning, try cornmeal porridge and saltfish fritters. Then take an early morning jaunt to Seven Mile Beach. Here you can rent snorkel or scuba gear and head out to see some of the best underwater life in Jamaica; dare I say it, in the Caribbean.

Alternate snorkeling with relaxing on the beach with rum drinks.

Before the sun begins to set, go to Rick’s Café, also on Seven Mile Beach. Maybe you’ve got that Jamaican adventureous spirit and will hop on a diving board along the way, and dive into the water. Eventually, though, walk up the steps carved into the rock and snag a seat so you can watch the divers. Enjoy cocktails and one of the most beautiful sunsets you’ll ever see.

Day 10: Drive to Montego Bay

The last full day on this beautiful island! Sleep in, then have a late breakfast of fried dumplings and **Jamaican** hot chocolate tea, made from roasted chocolate balls and spices.

It takes only 1 ½ hours to drive to Montego Bay. This last day, plan on relaxing, doing one last exciting activity you didn’t get to when you arrived, doing some last-minute shopping and packing to prepare for your trip back home.

Since this is the end of your trip, why not splurge and have a delicious dinner at **Marguerites**, which focuses on seafood, but also has pork, lamb and chicken. Let me make reservations for you to ensure getting a table on the Almond Terrace, overlooking the water.

Day 11: Fly home

Today, you have to go through the logistics of returning your car and getting to the airport and flying home.

After you’ve settled in, I want to hear every detail and see every picture of what I’m sure will be an awesome trip with memories to last a lifetime.

Please contact me if you’d like for me to arrange any aspect of a trip for you, whether it’s day tours, hotels, restaurant choices or the complete deal! [www.imaginationtvl.com](http://www.imaginationtvl.com)

K is for Kansas City

Where would you go if you wanted to listen to some jazz, eat barbecue, take in some world-class shopping and scream in excitement at either a major league baseball game, a national football league game or a major league soccer game?

Well, if you said Kansas City, you read the title of this blog or you lived there or you have experienced all of the above!

Kansas City was recently rated as one of the best cities to visit by readers of Travel & Leisure, and for good reason.

If you are planning a trip to Kansas City, be prepared for a 30-minute jaunt from the airport, but once you get into the heart of the city, you’ll forget about that long drive.

My faithful followers know that I’m a foodie, and I want to talk first about the food in Kansas City.

If you like shrimp, you must try the absolutely best shrimp Diablo at Garozzo’s Italian Restaurant. After eating it for the first time a decade ago, I continue to search for one that rivals it and have not had any luck.

I can’t possibly list all the barbecue restaurants, as there are more than 100 in the city, but I’m going to suggest one: Joe’s KC Bar-B-Que, which serves mouthwatering barbecue and other sandwiches, served from a counter in a fully functional gas station.

If you’re really into barbecue and want to spend most of your time checking out all 100, we can contact Guiness Book of World Records, then get with me and I’ll set you up with an itinerary to hit as many as you want!

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If you want to burn off a few calories, visit Country Club Plaza for shopping. It was opened in 1923 – gosh, they’re coming up on their 100th anniversary! It’s privately owned, one of the first planned suburban shopping center and the first regional one to accommodate shoppers by car. Today it’s rather upscale with a variety of restaurants and boutique shops.

While not the most attractive sounding name, the Power and Light District is home to more than 50 bars, restaurants and shops. It’s an eight-block entertainment hub and this is where you’ll find “KC Live!”, which is a covered outdoor courtyard, hosting more than 150 free entertainment events each year.

One of the most enjoyable activities I did was visiting Steamboat Arabia, a side wheeler steamboat that sank in 1856. She was carrying 200 tons of cargo when she hit a tree snag and sank.

Researchers were able to unearth all kinds of cool things, fine china, various jarred foods and many other artifacts. You’ll simply be in awe of how these items survived.

Back to food, did you know that Kansas City is also famous for coffee? And you thought it was just Seattle! Visit Oddly Correct Coffee Bar and taste their own line of beans, roasted and served in an eclectic, brick walled coffeehouse.

Other museums:

* Negro Leagues Baseball Museum
* Museum of Illusions
* TWA Museum (or Airline History Museum)
* National Museum of Toys and Miniatures
* Royals Hall of Fame
* National WW1 Museum & Memorial

Other activities:

* Cue and Brew Tour (cue…as in bar-b-cue, get it?)
* Segway tour
* Organized scavenger hunt
* Legoland
* And more….

Contact me at [www.imaginationtvl.com](http://www.imaginationtvl.com) or call me at 615-417-9859. I can do anything you want travel-related. Help you book these tours, come up with an efficient way to spend your time in Kansas City, book flights, recommend restaurants, hotels, arrange pick up and drop off and much more.

L is for London

London, a city with a population of over 7.5 million people, has so many things to do that you can spend weeks here and never run out of options.

Even though there are that many people in this city, it somehow never feels crowded, yet the vibe and excitement are all around.

I’m going to break this blog into three sections: History and government (including royalty, of course!), Food (because that’s my favorite topic) and Other.

Let’s get started:

~~ HISTORY/GOVERNMENT ~~

Churchill’s War Rooms- I had to start with this because, being a WW2 buff, this was one of my favorite things to do in London. These war rooms served as a command center for the British government during WW2. You will see Churchill’s life, see the rooms where they met during the war meetings and hear about the secrets. There’s a particularly interesting story about the toilet in the hall….

The Tower of London- it’s served as a royal palace, a place of execution, an arsenal, a prison and a royal mint. It really is a cool place to go to, especially when you think about all the deaths that took place there.

Buckingham Palace- the official residence of Queen Elizabeth. Also, the changing of the guards, one of the most boring things to see ever. Do I stand alone in that opinion? But if you’ve never been, it’s worth seeing it once.

Westminster Abbey-officially considered a royal church, this is where the queen (or king) is coronated and also is a burial site for the English and British monarchs. When you’re walking around inside, it’s a little weird to realize you’re walking on the burial sites. The outside of the abbey is interesting and huge, rather intimidating, too. Really a gorgeous abbey.

Kensington Palace- a royal residence, set in Kensington Gardens, home of the British Royal Family since the 17th century.

Jewel Tower- A tower constructed 656 years ago that holds the Iron Age sword, sculptures and other ancient artifacts.

The Tower of London- this is where the crown jewels are kept, which is a secure fortress and royal palace. You’re not supposed to take pictures, although I saw many people who did. I never thought I’d care to see the crowns, but it was a little exciting to see them up close.

Winchester Palace- a 12th century palace, one of the most important in medieval England.

Charles Dickens Museum- the home of Charles Dickens, where the author wrote many of the popular books.

Baker Street- Stroll up and down this street, where the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes was. Daunt’s Books is here. Remember book stores?

If book stores aren’t your thing, you can visit a whisky tasting room (selling whiskeys and rums from France, Japan, India and all over the world).

British Museum- Art, but also human history and culture. The departments in this museum are grouped according to continents, arts and historical artifacts. If you spent one minute at each one, well you’d spend 2,222 years, there are that many. If you want me to help you narrow it down, give me a shout at 615-417-9859 or www.imaginationtvl.com.

Brunel Museum- Originally, this museum was an urban marketplace and hidden spot for thieves. But it’s more than that now. The museum pays tribute to an engineering family who built the world’s first tunnel through soft ground under a river. They also hosted the first underground concert party in 1827. No one at that party cared if it rained! Today, the museum has a rooftop garden and a café.

Shakespeare’s Globe Theater- if you’re a Shakespeare fan, this is the place to be. This theater performs Shakespeare’s plays every day.

~~ FOOD ~~

Because London is so heavily-populated, there are a lot of choices here to cover the variety of ethnic groups. The most famous types of food common to England though are:

Steak and kidney pie. This is shredded steak and actual kidney in a small custard-type covering. You can get these from food stalls on the street or in restaurants. Be sure to have a napkin in your hand and that there’s a trash can nearby, unless you like the flavor of organ meat. Kidney is an organ, you know.

Fish and chips- maybe you know this, but chips are French fries and potato chips are called crisps. Almost always, fish and chips dinners will be served with a side of mashed up peas. There are some awesome places to get a delicious, authentic meal of fish and chips. Just call me and I’ll tell you where.

Afternoon tea- this is a light meal that focuses on scones, finger sandwiches, jam, lemon curd and other small snacks, along with a tea such as Earl Grey or chamomile and mint. Have your pinky finger ready for a snack like this.

Bangers and mash- sausage and mashed potatoes. Plus, it’s just fun to say this.

Cockles- this is an edible shellfish. Another word that’s fun to say.

Toad in the Hole – this is sausage baked in Yorkshire pudding. Hmm, yet another!

Yorkshire pudding- this is baked pudding made from eggs, flour and milk. It’s not sweet as one would think pudding is. It’s often served on the side with roast beef drippings. It is really tasty!

~~OTHER~~

Tower Bridge- not to be confused with London Bridge, this architectural style is Victorian Gothic. It’s fun to drive over, but if you can see it from the water, it gives you more time to examine the “palace” appearance.

The London Eye- this is a Ferris wheel 443’ high. You’re in a pod with others. It takes 30 minutes to complete and gives you angles from above of Big Ben, Buckingham Palace and more. To be honest, they need to replace the pods so the floor to ceiling windows aren’t scratchy. It’s not easy to get a good photograph.

The Shard- a great place to see the skyline. 95 stories high! There’s open air viewing on the 72nd floor. And yes, here you can get a great photograph! Learn to use the pano setting on your phone!

Harrods Department Store – this is more than a store. You can find a huge floor of foods of all kinds, you can sit at a counter for lunch, and then after lunch, you can purchase a $1000 genuine diamond studded dog bowl. (No, that’s not a misprint. $1000. Real diamonds. Dog bowl.)

This department store dates back to the 1800s and has more than 300 departments in it. The architecture inside is stunning.

Big Ben- This huge clock stands in the center of town. If you’ve never heard of Big Ben, shame on you.

Trafalgar Square- if you don’t do anything here except walk around, you’ll enjoy it. The National Gallery and the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields is here. This square is known for political rallies and celebrations such as New Year’s Eve. Loads of cafes and shops abound.

Walking around- the best place to take in the London vibe is Piccadilly Circus, which is not a circus at all, but a neighborhood with loads of activity going on at all hours of the night. If you don’t feel like walking, you can get on the tube. Even the subway stations themselves are cool, with extremely long escalators. I can’t help but think how dreadful it would be if they broke down and one had to climb up.

London is a cosmopolitan city where you will be constantly entertained. Call me for the ins and outs of the culture in England or any other travel information you need. 615-417-9859 or check out my website: [www.imaginationtvl.com](http://www.imaginationtvl.com).

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LET’S GO TO LONDON!

M is for Montana

I’m so excited to bring you the blog about Montana! This is a state I wasn’t the least interested in until I went, and now when I think about it, I immediately feel my shoulders relax and my heart is full of peace. That’s Montana!

You don’t even realize how remote the state is until you get on the highway and begin driving out of the big city. It then occurs to you, my goodness, my car could break down and I’d not see another person for hours. Ok, maybe that’s exaggerating it a smidge, but it does feel remote.

However, you forget all that when you see the stunning beauty all around you. Montana’s diverse terrain has the plains on one side and the Rocky Mountains on the other. I’m sure you’ve heard of Glacier National Park. Again, I say: stunning!

Something about Montana makes you want to just take it easy. There’s no pressure to go anywhere or be anywhere at a specific time, which is good because you’ll find yourself at least 2 hours later than you thought. That’s because you’ll stop and take a photo….get back in the car and drive some more, get out for another photo, each time, thinking THIS is the last time. Surely there can’t be anything that tops what I already saw. You’ll round a curve and guess what? Another beautiful sight. Out of the car you hop, take your photo and repeat.

But of course, Montana isn’t just remote highways with beautiful scenery. There are plenty of things to actually DO!

Let’s start with Glacier National Park. One million acres of beauty. You’ve got 700 miles of trails to hike and bike or if you’re just wanting to take it all in while seated, you can drive Going-to-the-Sun Road, a 50 mile, paved scenic mountain road in the Rocky Mountains.

The Garden of 1000 Buddhas! Montana just doesn’t seem like the place to see Buddhas, but sure enough, there are 1000 white concrete Buddha statues placed in a circle.

Ringing Rocks, a series of rock formations that sing. Rather, they chime when you tap them with a hammer or something similar. This isn’t set up by humans; rather, there are only a few places in the world to experience this phenomenon. By the way, you can’t walk off with one of the boulders. If you do, the formation will no longer sing!

Montana was greatly affected by the silver rush in 1858. You’re likely to pass through several ghost towns. In particular, stop in Castle where Calamity Jane stayed while she also ran a restaurant.

Flathead Lake is another downright gorgeous destination spot. Part of the lake is on tribal reservation land and you must purchase a pass. In the middle of the lake is Wildhorse Island, which is a 2000-acre state park and accessible only by boat.

Little Bighorn Battlefield is one of the best-known historic landmarks, made up of a cemetery, museum and battlefield.

And my all-time favorite national park: West Yellowstone. If you want to stay near the park and still be in some of the “action”, as it were, let me know as I have some recommendations.

Get up early, enjoy a relaxing cup of coffee and head to the park as soon as you can. There is a peace in this area that defies definition. Of course, you’ll see all kinds of wildlife such as bears and wolves and the most beautiful hot springs called Emerald Pools!

Montana isn’t a quiet, sleepy state. Yes, things do operate a little relaxed here, but you can enjoy some really fun activities in Helena, the capital and Billings, the largest city, too.

All that’s left is for you to call me at 615-417-9859 or email me at [info@imaginationtvl.com](mailto:info@imaginationtvl.com) and I’ll give you ideas and help as much as you want!