

The Trips We'll Treasure Forever

Everyone dreams of that special holiday: the one that leaves you with more than a suntan. Three readers remember their holiday of a lifetime

Scarily high – Capilano suspension bridge is 230ft above a canyon

Melonie Pickering visited Vancouver Island, Canada

Visiting Canada had long been on my list of things to do before I turned 50. My friend Debbie had just lost her husband and wanted to see her brother, Gary, who lives on Vancouver Island, so she said, 'Why not come with me?'

In May 2003, we set off from Manchester airport and arrived at a motel in Vancouver, surrounded by high rises. We spent a few days in the city and crossed the Capilano suspension bridge –

460ft long and 230ft high above a canyon.

It's so scary that someone's employed to help people across if they start panicking, but Debbie and I were fine – and that's where we saw our first bald eagle.

We just stood and stared, watching it fly in circles like in the films.

Then we caught the ferry across to beautiful Vancouver Island itself, where we stayed in Gary's cedar wood cabin. There are trees on Vancouver Island 200ft tall and so massive you can't get your arms round them. We went down on to China Beach, where the trees come right down to the water, and a little seal appeared in the waves!

I'd just started bird watching and Vancouver Island was bliss. We saw the biggest woodpecker I've ever seen in my life; American robins, which are like huge blackbirds but with a scarlet breast; and a Northern Cardinal so red it looked like somebody had put a postbox up in the trees. And I was standing on the balcony of Gary's house when I heard what sounded like a big bee; it was, in fact, a hummingbird.

My husband and I still love bird watching and I always tell him that when I win the lottery I'll show him what's so special about Vancouver Island. Debbie and I reminisce about that fantastic holiday all the time.

Tokyo and temples were just the start of Jan's adventure

Jan Kellond travelled across Japan by train

My daughter, Joanna, had just finished teaching English at a university in Tokyo, so I decided to fly out and join her for a three-week trip. We spent five days exploring Tokyo – the temples, the Imperial Palace, the government building where we had fantastic views of the city from 45 floors up – and we went to the Kabuki-za theatre, where Shakespearean plays are performed by an all-male cast in the traditional Japanese style.

We then stayed in Kyoto for five days. Tokyo, with all its skyscrapers, was very impressive, but Kyoto was what I had imagined older Japan to be like: full of traditional buildings like Nijo Castle and Todaiji Temple – until 1998 the largest wooden

busy village where the streets were lined with big TVs that people would sit outside and watch in the evenings.

A local guide took us around Cairo's souq markets, where I found I was brilliant at haggling! I managed to get some great bargains on scarves, papyrus and jewellery. The stallholders told my partner I'd make a good Egyptian!

We saw the sun rise over the Valley of the Kings from a hot-air balloon – there are no words to describe how magical that was – and every night we'd have drinks outside our hotel in Luxor and watch the sun set as local kids had their last swim in the Nile before heading home.

But the real highlight was seeing the ancient artefacts and monuments. I was so

The colossal statues at Abu Simbel temples reduced Isabel to tears

As a girl, Isabel dreamed of seeing The Pyramid of Khafre and the Great Sphinx of Giza for herself

'Streets were lined with big TVs that people watched in the evenings'

overwhelmed by the colossal, 20-metre-high statues at the Abu Simbel temples that I burst into tears! We also went into the Pyramid of Khafre – the second largest – incredibly

claustrophobic and pitch black until we reached the inner chamber, which was so deep in the stone that it was cold.

Tutankhamun's death mask also moved me to tears. It was so beautiful – brilliant gold studded with coloured glass and lapis lazuli – I could have stood there for hours looking at it. I'd waited so long to see it, and I always knew I would one day.

structure in the world – and even beautiful geishas. We visited the nearby Nara, where friendly deer roam the streets, followed by ladies cleaning up after them with a dustpan and brush, and rowed down the river through a bamboo forest.

The train was a brilliant way to *'I was surprised how similar the landscape was to Pembrokeshire'*

see the landscape. We bought 'bento boxes' full of sushi and sashimi to eat on the journey, and sat on long seats that faced on to the windows, so we could watch the view go by. I was surprised at how green and almost British the scenery was: the Izu Peninsula, which joins Mount Fuji, looked like where I'm from in Pembrokeshire at first!

But when I got closer, I saw it was made from black volcanic rock.

I'd told Joanna that if I was travelling that far I wanted to see Hiroshima, because of everything the city suffered at the end of the war. It was the one place Jo said she would never have chosen to go, but we were both enthralled by it. It's amazing how the city has been rebuilt – you'd never believe it was devastated 70 years ago. The people are friendly and not frightened to remember what happened. We were so overawed by the Peace Memorial Museum that we visited it twice.

From there, we went out to Miyajima Island, where the Japanese maples were starting to turn a brilliant red, and saw the stunning 19-century Itsukushima Shrine with 'torii' gates that appear to float on the water. It's the furthest I've ever travelled and a culture entirely different from ours.

Vancouver Island – bliss for bird watching, says Melonie

'The trees are so tall and massive you can't get your arms round them'