

TRAVEL MISHAPS

Travel: the best way to be lost and found at the same time. ~ Brenna Smith



Jonathan Bishop went paragliding in near Canberra in Australia's Orroral Valley, in Namadgi National Park. His landing was almost ideal. He was only a few meters from his target, but those few meters took him where he didn't want to go ... into a wild animal enclosure.

Luckily, the animals were kangaroos. Unluckily, kangaroos are fond of boxing. One of the marsupials immediately began punching him.

View his Go-Pro footage [HERE](#).

—Nine News, Sydney, Australia



Sir Brian Goal #23

Shopping as adventure? Maybe!

Hidden in the outskirts of Pahrump, Nevada in a sun-scorched, sparsely-populated part of town lies an expansive cemetery of coffins and gravestones with a sign of black letters spelling out "Coffinwood."

[continued]

It was the best of food, it was the worst of food.

Ill de France

The locals of the French Riviera like to call Sete "France's Venice." They are the only ones to do so. For Sete is not a sprawl of wondrous, crumbling palaces rising from a labyrinth of canals, a collection of bridges and backwaters and whispers, of forgotten fountains, of moldy statues. No, Sete is —and for millennia been—a fishing village. Yes, it has canals. Mostly it has fishing trawlers.

I once had the privilege of guiding a tour hosted by a local chef. He and I both worked aboard *Wind Surf*, which was a small, seven-masted cruise ship in port. A guide as well as a host was necessary because we took two dozen American guests into Sete's labyrinthine market. It was a madhouse of fish, flowers, cheeses, and produce. Everything that could be bought and sold was. My job was to keep the passengers from unwittingly becoming a product themselves. The tour was to follow Chef as he purchased the goods for that night's feast. He was to buy whatever he deemed freshest and bestest at Sete's market—Sete's *wet* market.



Although it seems out of place for such a remote area, you have reached Coffin It Up, one of the world's most bizarre coffin-making studios.

While coffins in the United States have been largely replaced by caskets and cremation urns, Coffin It Up looks to bring back the art of traditional Obsidian coffin making to Nevada. Featuring both actual coffins and multi-purpose coffin-shaped accessories such as spiderweb coffins, CD case coffins, coffin-shaped end tables, and the coffin armoire, Coffin It Up can replace any piece of standard furniture with a coffin-like shape.

If you feel like sitting at the computer will be the death of you, the Cyber Coffin computer desk will do the trick. If the blackness of your coffee reminds you of death, the Coffin Coffee Table is the table for you. And if you're feeling unsure about your marriage, consider purchasing a Coffin Wedding Centerpiece.

In addition to these varieties, Coffin It Up also sells coffin purses, coffin-shaped headstones, Obsidian coffin jewelry, open-coffin cat beds, coffin suitcases, and even painted blades. And as if that wasn't enough, the Coffinwood Cemetery surrounding Coffin It Up is packed with headstones, ghosts, skeletons, an active pet burial ground, and even what is likely the only coffin-shaped greenhouse in the entire world.

Every year, Coffin It Up's creator, Bryan Schoening, buries a coffin under the dirt in the Coffinwood Cemetery to mark the "passing of the previous year". And to spice it up, Schoening has even designed a "Coffin Kitchen" in a nearby Las Vegas home, complete with coffin-shaped kitchen cabinets, a coffin-shaped breakfast bar, and a giant, coffin-shaped bathroom mirror.

—by Lew Blank of Minneapolis

There is a great misunderstanding about wet markets. It doesn't mean the selling of pangolins and cats (or tourists) for their meat. Rather, it merely means any market that needs to be hosed down.

The market was a large warehouse-style building, inside of which was row upon row of heaped, fresh awesomeness. Entire schools of fish crowded mounds of ice, pyramids of multicolored onions rose to glorious peaks, and refrigerated cases held carved wheels of cheese from cow, sheep, and goat milk. And the baked baguettes? They looked so sexy I would have robbed an old lady for one. But mostly Sete was a fishing village, so mostly the market was seafood.

Fishmongers hacked up all sorts of sea creatures. There was a lot of blood, a lot of moist flesh, a lot of googly eyes. Chef was French and classically trained. He knew heavy cream and perfumed liquors. He preferred simpler fare. His first order of business was to show us the type of quality unknown to America's supermarkets.

First he approached a vendor selling unusual, bicycle-like radishes. He began mercilessly interrogating the tiny, ancient grandmother who sold them. She seemed utterly unfazed by his barrage of questions. Satisfied by her answers, Chef then began painstakingly selecting the goods. Each radish was the size and shape of a man's finger. Atop a thick tangle of green, then a shift from fat purple to a tapered white tip. He handed each of us a radish, then moved on.

"He's not going to make us eat this, is he?" a rather portly American lady asked, aghast.

Overhearing her, Chef reassured her in his thick accent, "*Not to worry, eez already washed.*"

"How do you know?" she challenged. She held the offending vegetable at arm's length, staring at it with nothing short of dread.

"*Do you see any dirt?*" Chef asked lightly.

"Pesticides! Fertilizers! Chemicals!"

"*From ze French countryside?*" He scoffed. "*Ze only fertilizair eez manure. Eez as natural as yoo can get.*"

"Manure! Oh my God!"

"*Eez clean,*" he insisted firmly.

"What if she spit on it?" Mz. Portly asked, suspiciously eyeing the old woman in the crocheted shawl. The woman smiled back at her, ignorant of the conversation. The chef was

offended for her.

Next Chef went to a salt peddler. Here he rubbed into his palms samples of crystals ranging in color from clear all the way to black. He narrowed down to three, delicately tasted each. He ultimately purchased a small bag of an oddly fluffy white salt. He moved on.

The last vendor sold butter. I had no idea there was such a wide variety of something as simple as butter. I'm not talking about butter vs. margarine or any other processed spreads—I'm talking about plain old butter. That vendor was nothing less than the Baskin Robbins of butter. Eventually Chef selected a freshly churned, non-salted, cow's-milk butter.

He led us away from the crowds, into a relatively quiet corner. Everyone was ordered to line up and hold out their hands. Into each outstretched palm he delivered a small, circular scoop of frothy, frigid butter. Atop each he added a pinch of frost-like salt. We were encouraged to take a bite of the radish and then a bite of the salted butter.

The radish was arresting in its sharpness, yet the tongue was calmed by the airy, creamy butter. After swallowing, the boldness of the radish faded into a delicate tingling of salt. I never imagined something so simple could be so sublime. The combination even drove one woman to blaspheme that she'd take it over chocolate.

But not all French cuisine was so successful that day. Another French colleague recommended his favorite restaurant to a friend and I. It was a truly authentic place, he added with pride. So it was that we found ourselves at a place place of sardines and mackerel, of heavy oil fish that could keep your heart pumping smoothly despite an overabundance of heavy cream and copious cheese. We smelt the fish, yes, but also the algae from the canal.

We sat at a sidewalk table beside the canal.



GLOBAL GOOD LUCK CAT

This cat lives in Provence, in the hilltop village Ramatuelle. It's quaint, with streets too narrow for cars, cobblestone. Every doorway was festooned with plants and cool with shade. This wasn't his house. I watched him chase a mouse, fail, and choose here to nap. Is there a better life than this? Unlikely. Still, we all need help sometimes. Be an [Alley Cat Ally](#).



Nearby was a bronze water fountain that was, it turned out, prophetic. Atop a series of pools was an elevated stone bowl. A perimeter of dolphins spat out shoots of water. That much was pretty common. But the bowl disgorged a thick, writhing mass of oxidized bronze tentacles high, high into the air—anatomically correct down the to the suction cups—as if the fountain were birthing great Cthulhu himself.

The waiter took a long time to arrive, which was good because we took a long time to figure out the menu. Neither of us knew French, though my friend had claimed to. (She was not pleased at having her bluff called.) The waiter did not speak English, so I merely pointed at the largest selection of seafood. We gleaned that it was enough for two (certainly the cost indicated so, at about \$100US—15 years ago) and

covered everything wet, so I thought surely we'd find something we liked.

The food did not take long to cook. That's because it wasn't.

"What the hell...?" My friend gasped, cigarette dangling dangerously from her lips. "It's all raw!"

The oysters were raw, yes, and not very good. The mussels were raw, too, which I had never before encountered. So were the clams. All had a strange, metallic tanginess, so they tasted as gross as they looked.

The remaining seafood was hesitantly steamed—just enough so that you won't die, I guess—and looked downright menacing. Crustaceans look like aliens. The lobster's antennae were over a foot long and jabbed outward to probe us even in death. The beast had been split in half down the middle, revealing all the innards—items I supposed to be inedible. The guts were startling multi-colored and waxy, like a box of melted crayons. The escargot—in their snail shell, of course—were too slimy to have been cooked. I presumed they had been waved over a pot of boiling water.

Atop the whole pile of raw seafood was a whole crab—presumably straight from the sea.



We had no idea how to open the shell. Once we figured it out, we wished we hadn't. All sorts of creepy stuff was in there. It reminded me of the dissected Facehugger in the movie *Alien*. (In fact, such innards were precisely what was in the prop.)

There we were, surrounded by an entire restaurant filled with beautifully prepared mussels in nice broths, steamed lobsters, rich crab bisques and crusty French bread. We left and, at my European friend's insistence, ate at McDonald's. She was most satisfied with the food. I wondered if they'd spit on it.



LOCAL HARD LUCK CAT

Alas, Gandalf is no longer traveling the world. True, he's an indoor cat most of the time, but when his humans grab his leash he runs to the door and waits impatiently for action. Then it's on to see the world!

He was adopted when his humans lived in Korea. They moved to California, where he went on tour of 8 states. Now he lives in New Zealand.

Alas, poor Gandalf is in quarantine, like the rest of us, due to this global pandemic. He has gone from touring the Grand Canyon to being stuck in the living room. He suffers more than you and me because he expects more from life than you and me. Cuz he's a cat.

