



**John Coles @ Travel-PA**

Newsletter 1, September 2018



Welcome to my first newsletter and the launch of my exciting new business. After over 30 years of travelling the globe for both work and pleasure, I now aim to channel that experience into providing tailor made holidays for individuals and groups as an independent travel agent and tour organiser. This is a passionate venture for me; one that captures my enthusiasm for travel and my interest in learning about the world, its people, and their history.

I will be operating under the **Travel-PA** franchise. The name Travel-PA explains the concept: think of me as your “personal assistant”, who can help you select the destination; choose the itinerary; book the best hotels; or find the right cruise ship. I’ll provide a personal service to assist you in arranging a holiday with unique travel experiences and create lasting memories. Travel-PA and I will combine our abilities by offering:

**Knowledge** is the key to successful travel, knowing where to go, and how to plan a sensible itinerary. I’ve travelled widely in Asia and each of my Travel-PA colleagues have their own areas of expertise that they are willing to share. This is complemented by a wealth of information available from our network of suppliers, trade associations, and national tourist boards. We attend trade shows and conferences to learn about destinations and innovations, and have regular meetings with suppliers for briefings on their latest products.

**Convenience** means there are no time constraints. I will be available at a time and place that suits you. I’m willing to spend time to understand the type of holiday you enjoy and discuss the places you want to visit. I can then arrange everything for you. Or if you prefer to be more involved, I’ll do the research, present options, and together we’ll select each element of the travel package.

**Value for money** results from having access to contract prices through Travel-PA, but without the overheads of a traditional high street travel agent. Our purchasing power means we negotiate agreements with tour operators and qualify for preferential hotel rates. We have access to many trade-only suppliers who do not sell direct to the public. Each day we hear about special offers, so tell me where you want to travel and I’ll find right deal for you.

**Peace of mind** is assured because Travel-PA is a member of ABTA and we’re covered by the ATOL bond. Under the franchise agreement Travel-PA handles all financial matters, so your payments are protected. In the event that you need help, remember you have a “personal assistant”. Not a call centre. Not a web site. Call me directly and I promise to do my very best to resolve the problem.



Travel-PA is an innovative and exciting division of Sunset Travel Ltd.

**Hamish Kaumaya**, Travel-PA’s Founder and Managing Director, tells the story:

“Sunset Travel is a family run organisation. The Kaumaya family originate from the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

My father Harvin established the company in 1980 to serve the Mauritian community in the UK and operate tours for holidaymakers to the island.

We launched Travel-PA in 2012 in response to trends in the travel trade. The decline of traditional high street retail outlets is well documented, but there remains a consumer demand for the service of well-travelled, knowledgeable professionals who can offer advice and source the very best prices.

We presently have sixty-five members of the team and this is growing rapidly since we introduced the Training Academy in 2016. The academy allows people from other professions to train for a career in travel, creating a dynamic mix of experienced travel trade veterans and enthusiastic newcomers with fresh ideas.”

**Competition: Where is the phone box? A discount of £20 off your first booking if you know the location.**

## Cuba - Finding our own Goats in the Road.

By Helen Anderson

The Caribbean's 'forbidden island' was always on our 'to do' list and with the rumblings of 'see it before it changes' ringing in our ears, we made a last-minute decision to explore its treasures. We wanted to travel independently, to go beyond the colourful photos of pastel pink buildings and 50's vintage cars. But where to begin? Cuba's challenges are complicated and travel staples such as car rental go beyond a simple google. But don't let that restrict your ambitions, with the right connections, support and planning, using your own four wheels gives you a freedom that takes you into the heart of this wonderful country. Because, while Cuba truly is amazing, it was the first time in many years that travel really challenged our senses, pricked our conscience, yet was exciting at the same time.



Unquestionably the faded grandeur of the architecture of the buildings throughout Cuba is incredible, not just the odd tourist enclave, but everywhere. In Havana looking up is as important as looking around; the symphony of sounds, live music intermingled with the throb of old 50's Chevy engines, streets bustling with energy and the rich smell of life. Then there is Trinidad, a calm centuries-old colonial cobbled town with barely a building higher than two stories, almost no cars, where transport is horse and cart interspersed with the odd tractor.



Whilst these are all remarkable places to visit, it is off the beaten track, where the goats roam freely, that allowed us to melt into the culture of a country and experience the resilient, kind, resourceful people that live there. Where nothing is wasted, everything can be repurposed, food and water not only savoured but treasured. Where richness of life is not measured in material possessions but in family, community, health, education, culture, art and music. Where history has shaped a richness that provides so much more than the fragile economic infrastructure.

Cuba gave us a magical holiday but more importantly a chance to reflect on our own priorities and the opportunity to appreciate what we take for granted in our everyday lives. So please do go and visit Cuba. Visit it responsibly and knowledgably, without judging and enjoy the treasure of exploring and finding your own goats in the road.

## River Cruises - Creating a Sharper Image.

Our image of a river cruise is often shaped by those TV adverts showing a ship drifting sedately down the Rhine. That genteel image belies the innovations of cruise lines to upgrade their fleets, add exciting new destinations, and appeal to a younger audience. This investment has made river cruising one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry.



In recent years, leading cruise lines have launched spectacular "six-star" ships offering comfortable staterooms, all-inclusive service and imaginative shore excursions. My favourites are the colourful Uniworld ships that resemble a boutique hotel. Crystal focus on attentive service, providing gourmet meals, unlimited beverages, and a butler to deliver morning coffee and croissants. Tauck leads the way with exclusive cultural events such as an after-hours tour of an art museum or private concert in a Viennese palace.



The river cruise industry started on the Rhine and the Danube, the Seine and the Rhone, but has now spread across the globe. Scenic offers the Jewels of Russia cruise along the Volga from St Petersburg to Moscow. CroisiEurope have the African Dream sailing the Chobe River and Lake Kariba in southern Africa, enabling a cruise to be combined with a wildlife safari. Pandaw pioneered the route from Saigon through the Mekong Delta and across the Tonle Sap to the ruins of Angkor, and now have ambitious plans for cruising the Ganges.



Aiming at a wider audience, cruise lines offer a greater variety of shore activities, with cycle tours and kayak trips. Tauck encourage active participation: shopping with the chef at the local food market; or a tour of Monet's garden in Giverny with a local artist followed by an onboard painting class. "U by Uniworld" is a new brand aimed squarely at younger people, with two distinctive sleek black ships named *the A* and *the B*. The interiors feature bold contemporary design and shore excursions include street art, bar crawls and nightclubs.



CLIA is the cruise industry trade association. I will attend their River Cruise Conference in Paris on November 10 and 11. The major cruise lines will be present to showcase their products, introduce their new itineraries and display their latest ships on the Seine.



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