

IN MY SUITCASE

Gadgets galore

All the comforts of home with portable wash bag, turntable

BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER | GLOBE STAFF



SCRUBBA When I first read about this humble invention, I nearly wept with joy. Scrubba is a “portable wash bag” that allows you to do laundry on the road. I’ve never been good at the whole packing-light thing. I’m usually hauling around a suitcase the

size of a large steamer trunk. But a genius from Australia devised Scrubba, a polyether bag with a built-in, flexible rubber washboard that allows me to pack (slightly) lighter. Put in your clothes, fill the bag with a gallon of water, add a smidge of detergent, release excess air, and roll the thing around for about three minutes. Your T-shirts, socks, unmentionables, and other laundry items come out quite clean. When not in use, it neatly folds up. For someone who is on the road a lot but without a budget for hotel laundry service, it’s a life saver. I imagine it would be helpful for campers as well. \$49.95 at www.amazon.com.

GO TRAVEL CLOTHES LINE If you’re going to wash your clothes on the road, you need a place to dry them. The problem is that as more highfalutin hotels install separate glass showers, the shower curtain rod — otherwise known as the travelers’ clothes dryer — is quickly becoming extinct. Go Travel’s clothes line stretches to 6 feet and sticks to surfaces with suction cups. The design makes it possible to hang clothes without clothes pins, because I’ve never met anyone who travels with clothes pins. \$7.95 at gearx.com.

INFLIGHT COMFORT KIT I can count the number of times I’ve flown first class on one hand — with several fingers to spare. This handy collection of travel essentials attempts to take some of the sting out of economy by giving you a taste of how the other half sleeps. It includes an inflatable, jersey fabric-covered neck pillow, eye mask, and earplugs. Sadly, it does not include complimentary wine or additional legroom, but it’s a start. \$12 at www.seejanetwork.com.

SAFETYTAT Imagine you have a young child who has a habit of wandering off into crowds and doesn’t respond to the sharp sound of “Jimmy, get your butt over here *now!*” The way my parents dealt with the situation was by lifting me as I kicked and screamed until they could administer appropriate corporal punishment. Parents today have it much easier. All they need to do is slap a tattoo on their kid. SafetyTat is a temporary tattoo that



you apply to your little Magellan in case he gets lost. It simply reads: “If lost, call [fill in your cell number].” Your child may be ashamed that he is labeled like luggage, but perhaps the tattoo will embarrass him enough to finally stop running off at the airport. \$11 at www.amazon.com.

CROSLEY REVOLUTION PORTABLE TURNTABLE Much to the chagrin of my traveling companions, I spend at least two or three, or, perhaps four hours every trip flipping through vinyl records in dusty shops. Most of the stores have turntables where I can preview these gems, but not all. Crosley’s Revolution turntable allows you to preview anywhere. It’s not quite pocket-sized, but close. It runs on batteries and also includes a USB hookup that allows you to transfer records to digital formats. Best of all, it allows impatient vinyl buffs to listen to their new-found treasures back in their hotel rooms. Let the dance party begin! \$70 to \$73 at www.target.com (online only).



PETCUBE I make no secret of my hope and dream that someday there will be a reality series called “America’s Next Top Cat Lady.” I would consume this program the way that brides-to-be in Duluth consume lemon drop martinis at bachelorette parties. So of course I’m excited about one of the finest products to find its way to the Internet this year — Petcube. The 4-inch-square contraption stays at home and allows high-definition video to be streamed to your phone so you can watch your dog or cat ruin your furniture while you’re on the road. But it’s more than a camera. There is a speaker that allows you to communicate with your little bundle



of furry joy. There’s even a laser pointer on the cube that allows you to play with your pet from afar. Until I can begin traveling with my beloved cat Mrs. Davenport, the cube will have to do. \$199 at petcube.com.

Christopher Muther can be reached at muther@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @Chris_Muther.



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Absorbing history in Portugal’s ‘City of Bones’

By Claudia Capos
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

EVORA, Portugal — Ancient bones harbor tales of strange deeds, both mercurial and macabre, here in Évora, a “very noble and always loyal” city favored as the home of Portuguese monarchs, wealthy patricians, and renowned artists.

Within its stone battlement walls, nearly two millennia of history are heralded by national monuments spanning Roman times to the Golden Portugal Age. Many of these icons stand juxtaposed and rest triumphantly upon the fallen remains of earlier edifices erected by the conquering Romans, Visigoths, and Moors. Both the victors and the vanquished have left their indelible marks on this museum city, which was anointed a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986. The hustle and bustle of Lisbon, 95 miles to the west, seems far removed from the slower pace of life in the rural Alentejo region.

Yet Évora has one unearthly attraction that suggests the moniker — City of Bones. Eager to see this anomaly, we set out early in the morning from the M’ar de AR Muralhas hotel and thread our way along cobblestone-paved Rua dos Mercadores past whitewashed Moorish-style houses to Praca de Giraldo, or Gerard city square. The previous day when we had arrived in Évora after an hour and a half drive from Lisbon’s international airport, we had sunken limply into seats at an outdoor

café in the square’s breezy center. Over bowls of flavorful Alentejo-style tomato soup, served with a cooked egg in it, we had admired the spaceship-like Henriquina water fountain in front of the Church of Saint Antao and watched meandering tourists through our jet-lag haze.

Today, however, we don’t stop and tarry. Instead we turn toward the south end of the square and weave through gawking window shoppers until we reach Rua da Republica. Then we turn right again and continue south to the Church of Saint Francis, known as the Gold Convent, which served as the royal chapel for Kings John II and Manuel I. A sidewalk fruit and vegetable market near the church’s plaza overflows with local shoppers, who cluster around stands selling fresh lettuce, rosy tomatoes, and dimpled potatoes, lending a lively air to the setting. Saint Francis is one of the Portugal’s largest religious buildings, and its decorative portico arches and interior features reflect Alentejo, Gothic, and Arabic influences.

We skirt the church’s main entrance and go around to a side door leading into the chapterhouse, where blue and white ceramic tile murals portray scenes from the Passion of Christ. An attendant takes our entry fee and then waves us onward. With some hesitation, we step into the church’s most infamous attraction: the Chapel of Bones.

The chapel’s three dimly lit naves and eight columns are completely cov-

ered with the bones and skulls of 5,000 people, who were exhumed from Évora’s churches and cemeteries in the 16th century. The airless expanse of the ossuary smells faintly of decay. We imagine spirits of the departed hovering nearby. As startling as it first appears, the chapel actually conveys a sense of artistry and precision. Geometric patterns of shinbones mimic the carved stonework in Gothic cathedrals. Rather than gilded cherubs and acanthus leaves, however, rows of sightless skulls accent the vaulted ceiling.

Two desiccated skeletons, of a man and a boy, dangle by ropes, and braids of human hair, thought to be offerings made by young women when they got married, hang on one wall. The remains of the three prescient Franciscan monks, who created the Capela dos Ossos as a meditation retreat for contemplating life’s transitory nature, are entombed in a marble coffin near the altar. The inscription over the chapel’s entrance leaves little doubt about the unsettling message they meant to convey: “Our bones that are here, for yours we wait.”

We emerge from the Chapel of Bones and take a few gulps of fresh air. Then we retrace our steps up Rua da Republica and zigzag through a labyrinth of streets to the heart of the historic center. From a tranquil formal garden, we enjoy a 360-degree kaleidoscopic view of key landmarks denoting great pinnacles and turning points in Évora’s past. There are ruins of a 1st-century Roman temple, the city’s imposing 12th-century cathedral, a regal 14th-century ducal palace, a 15th-century convent (now the beautifully restored Pousada Dos Loios luxury hotel), and the stoic 16th-century Tribunal of the Inquisition (now the Eugenio de Almeida Forum).

At the far edge of the garden, a modernistic stone and marble sculpture gazes over the wall at the Aqueeduct of Silver Water, built during the 16th-century reign of King John III and funded by local nobility to replace a former Roman aqueduct. A five-mile biking and hiking trail now follows the aqueduct from Évora to Metrogos.

“This city is very quaint as well as historic,” said Phyllis Angelson, of Queens, N.Y., who is taking a weeklong tour of Portugal that includes a stop in Évora. “It is awe-inspiring to stand here and look at all these incredible monuments built over the span of 20 centuries.”

A guitarist plays lilting melodies on the plaza in front of Évora’s majestic medieval cathedral, distinctive for its lantern tower and portico column shafts representing the Apostles. Construction began in 1186 on the site of an Arab mosque and continued well into the 1500s. We pass through the massive hobnail wooden entry doors and ascend a spiral staircase, up 106 steps, to the rooftop terrace. Through the crenels in the battlement merlons, we savor lofty views of red-tile roof houses and serene vineyards that produce Alentejo’s dark, rich wines. Descending to the cathedral’s main floor, we stroll through its 14th-century square Gothic stone cloister, one of the

most impressive in Portugal, and stop at its museum of art to admire gold artifacts and religious paintings.

The afternoon sun is casting golden rays that illuminate the 14 granite Corinthian columns of the Roman temple, also called Diana’s Temple, when we reach the base of the ruins. Once the crown jewel of the acropolis in the Roman city’s forum, the temple was later transformed into a military tower and then used as a slaughterhouse before being restored in 1871. We venture into the Palace of the Dukes of Cadaval, anchored on the foundation of a Moorish castle, and then Loios Church, which showcases Antonio de Oliveira Bernardes’ exquisite azulejos (ceramic tiles) depicting the life of a prominent religious figure. Inside the church’s nave, we peer through a floor grate at more bones, those of the monks who resided there.

Small souvenir, furniture, and wine

Evora’s cathedral, seen through a cloister, was built on the site of an Arab mosque.

shops along steeply pitched Rua 5 de Outubro beckon as we make our way back down to Gerard square. We stop at O Cesto to buy a cork-skin ball cap and several ceramic tiles painted with Portuguese country scenes. In early evening, the maître d’ at the M’ar de AR Muralhas hotel’s Sabores do Alentejo restaurant ushers us to a table overlooking an outdoor patio, where we watch the sun sink behind the ancient city wall. We encounter still more of Évora’s bones over a quiet dinner. But these belong to a wild rabbit stewed in red wine and a duck breast covered with wild berry sauce.

Claudia Capos can be reached at capocomm@sbcglobal.net.

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