

By Bonnie Kassel
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The hurried pace of contemporary life makes it easy to forget what we all learned reading Henry David Thoreau's "Walden Pond" — that it can take a lifetime to truly see even one place.

So in the same way the Slow Food movement was promoted as an alternative to fast food, I'd like to sing the praises of Slow Travel in contrast to the more frenetic tourism typical today. Establishing a base and staying put for a while is a wonderful way to learn about another country and become part of the community. Fortunately, there are numerous ways to do this within any budget: home exchanges, house rentals, Airbnb (private rooms with bath as well as entire apartments and homes offered by their owners in 192 countries), or house sitting. There's no cost for house sitting, but in exchange for the use of a lovely home or apartment, you will have responsibilities.

There was no way I could have turned down a request to house sit on the west coast of Majorca for 2½ weeks last October. The common association of Majorca as a holiday destination for millions of tourists is only part of the picture; the mega resorts are actually confined to a few areas. The Balearic Islands have a rich cultural history, thriving vineyards, and an unusually diverse landscape. Friends familiar with the islands described them with enticing adjectives like "authentic," "windswept," and "unchanged," and my plans were ambitious when I arrived at the apartment of Kym and George in the village of Esporles at the base of the Tramuntana Mountains.

House sitting often involves the care of beloved pets, but George was an avid gardener and the vast array of plants lining two terraces were his concern. As I took careful notes, Kym scrubbed mussels for the paella party she'd organized so that I could meet several of their friends before she and George left. The first days alone I settled in by wandering every street of the town, talking with neighbors and shopkeepers. Esporles was picture perfect; each forest-green shuttered home showcased a textured palm or flowering shrub in a terra-cotta pot outside the front door or on a windowsill, the tiny bakery and small food stores were superb, Post Office and bank conveniently located, the cafes open long hours. "It spoils us," Kym had joked before leaving, and it was easy to see why.

I branched out by hiking in the mountains, stopping occasionally to peek through the gates of posh estates



BONNIE KASSEL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

House sitting comes with a long menu and time to sample

hidden from view. My pockets were stuffed with carrots to feed any burros I passed. Saturday was market day and the fruits and vegetables still clung to their branches in the crates, each egg was gently nestled in straw. One of the artisanal vendors, Yolanda, made it her mission to teach me about the seemingly endless variety of goat and raw cow's milk cheeses, some with a touch of ewe's milk added for depth. The differences were as dramatic as the wines in Burgundy. Then Kay, a friend of Kym's who'd been at my paella party, invited me for coffee at the 1595 finca (estate) she'd restored, and I was completely unprepared for the magnificence of the property. The stone house overlooked terraces of fruit trees, olives, and grapevines; the only sound came from tinkling bells on the goats wandering the fields below. I told Kay I couldn't imagine waking up to such beauty each morning.

The Esporles bus stop was five minutes from the apartment and it was a joy not to have to research peak/off peak, senior, daily/weekly/monthly passes. There was one fare and you paid cash. The weather was ideal and in each surrounding village I visited, cafes overlooking the sea were filled with people nursing espressos as they read. There was so much to see and do in and around Esporles, it was a week

Kym and George are the couple for whom the author house sat on Majorca, the Spanish island in the Mediterranean off the country's east coast.

before I went into the capital Palma for the first time, even though it was just 25 minutes away. The Palma bus station is located in the center of town along with everything else. Bicycle and baggage storage rentals are at the top of the stairs as you leave, the train station outside on the right, tourist information on the left. In front of the tourist office is a line of bus stops numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., and a posted list of each destination. Why can't every city be organized this way? Even I, with no sense of direction whatsoever, couldn't get lost.

Directly across the street from the station is an entrance to Palma's historic old town. Meandering pedestrian lanes passed the city food market, shoe stores, galleries, museums, and pasteleria with a tray of spiraled flaky pastry dusted with powdered sugar called ensaimadas in the window that looked like clouds piped out of a pastry bag. I'd arranged to meet Nicole,

another friend of Kym's, for lunch. Together we walked 45 minutes along the waterfront admiring former fishermen's cottages that had been converted into homes. Our alfresco lunch was the national dish: Pa amb oli, thick slices of salt-free dense Mallorcan bread rubbed with garlic, a special tomato called ramollet that has less juice than traditional ones and is stored hung like strings of peppers, olive oil, and then topped with a slice of Menorcan cheese or Iberian ham. The scene before us: a sea of bobbing sailboats, the whitecaps transformed into lighted sparklers by a brilliant sun.

The day Kym and George were returning, I took the 2½ hour ferry over to the smaller island of Menorca. The former 1722 capital Ciutadella with narrow cobbled streets and Spanish architecture is a national treasure. The entire square around the Saturday fresh fish market was crowded with families at small tables, munching on tapas and drinking local wines as their children and grandchildren played around them. Ten minutes outside of town, civilization seemed to stop. All of Menorca is a biosphere reserve, and the Cami de Cavalls (former military track) circles the entire island and has been turned into a footpath for hikers and horses. I wanted my days off the grid, and took no phone or laptop. It was all so mesmerizing, I walked ef-

IF YOU GO . . .

Where to go first

Home exchanges: homeexchange.com
Housesitting: trustedhousesitters.com; mindmyhouse.com; housecarers.com
"Break Free: The Ultimate Guide to Housesitting" by Jessica Ainlay and Dani Heinrich; available on Amazon.com or the authors' website, globe.trottergirls.com
Owner direct house rentals: vrbo.com, airbnb.com

fortlessly for hours each day, going over low stone walls that had separated farms for hundreds of years, around the scattered remains of prehistoric monuments called talayots that are the oldest remnants of civilization in Europe, sat on beaches backdropped by steep cliffs, sipped a cappuccino on a glorious autumn day in the picturesque fishing village of Fornells. Without thinking, my photos focused on details of twisted olive tree branches formed into gates, close-ups of moist, luscious fig cakes.

I spent two days with Kym and George in Esporles before returning to New York. We drove to Deià, the resting place of the poet-writer Robert Graves and home to many contemporary artists. Kym and George treated me to a glass of champagne on the terrace of La Residencia overlooking the entire valley, a more intimate hotel one couldn't imagine. We went to dinner in a converted windmill outside of Palma. The last night, Kym invited a few of their friends over who were now mine as well, and George grilled salmon on the terrace.

I'd had to look for Esporles on the map when the offer to house sit first arrived, now the names of towns rolled off my tongue: the exquisite hamlet of Biniaraix, smack in the center of wine country, Binissalem, where each family receives three bottles of wine gratis from the town to celebrate the grape harvest on a holiday called la Vermada. I never got to the unspoiled Península de Formentor on Majorca or the dunes and wetlands rich with birdlife in Parc Natural S'Albufera des Grau on Menorca. I hadn't seen half of what I'd intended, but I couldn't remember ever having learned so much in one month or feeling so content.

Thoreau said, "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." And indeed on this trip, I saw. Now, like a preacher who's seen the light, I want to encourage everyone to pick one place in the world they've always wanted to visit, and do the same.

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Halifax shaped by history, its harbor, and hipsters

By Janet Mendelsohn
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HALIFAX, Nova Scotia — "It's all downhill from here," joked Cameron Mitchell at the Halifax Citadel pedestrian gate. We were watching the changing of the guard. A group of middle school students, herded and shushed by their teachers, was mimicking the stoic, red-jacketed guardsmen, entertaining us in the process. We'd just met Mitchell, 23, our tour guide, outside the star-shaped fortress at the summit of this steeply sloped city. Built in 1856 and home to the 78th Highland Regiment, the Citadel was the fourth in a series of British forts that made Halifax a key naval station in the British Empire. The restored landmark boasts imposing walls, a defensive ditch, earthen ramparts, garrison cells, and scenic views of our destination, across the city to the seaport far below.

On impulse, I had e-mailed Mitchell during breakfast that morning after reading about his fledgling Halifax Free Walking Tours in the daily Chronicle Herald. We liked the sound of what drives the enterprising young man whose team of guides offers visitors 90-minute historical tours twice daily, three times a day on weekends. Despite the no-obligations hook, a well-earned donation was appreciated at tour's end.

Halifax, the provincial capital, is the largest urban area in Canada's Atlantic provinces and a major seaport on one of the world's deepest natural harbors. Embarking on our urban hike, Mitchell pointed toward the water where Canada's largest naval base is close by and a ferry was making the short crossing to Dartmouth, a small city across the harbor. For \$2.50 (Canadian) the ferry affords a terrific view of Halifax, while other reasons to go are galleries, shops, bars, and cafes, nearly all locally owned.

"I think Halifax is a great place to learn the skills of how to operate a business," says Mitchell. "People have

been incredibly supportive here. I don't know if that would have been the same anywhere else." A Toronto native who recently graduated from university here, he admits he wants to make the business a staple of Halifax tourism, then move on to something else. In a city with a youthful population, all things seem possible. As we headed for another hilltop landmark, the Old Town Clock, a 30-something couple and her mother spotted our guide's hand-held sign. They, too, had read the newspaper story while on holiday from Montreal and joined us. When it became obvious the older woman spoke no English, Mitchell occasionally switched to Mandarin, one of four languages in which he's fluent.

That multicultural encounter took on greater meaning later in the day when my husband and I visited the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the Ellis Island of Canada. From 1928 to 1971, Pier 21 was the landing point for more than 1 million immigrants who arrived by ship. During World War II, the facility served as the staging site for the Canadian Armed Forces. Today the building is Canada's sixth national museum and only the second outside the Ottawa capital region. People from all over Canada come to research their family history or learn why and how immigrants came to start new lives in this country. A short film presents a patchwork quilt of moving stories by people from around the globe.

Halifax feels like a smaller Toronto by the sea. The city is shaped equally by hipsters and history, fishing, commerce, students, and tourism. Its two largest employers are the Department of National Defense and the port. Six universities, each with a particular specialty, give Nova Scotia its reputation as "Canada's University Capital." Nova Scotia School of Art and Design owes its founding in 1887 to a British teacher, Anna Leonowens, best known as the tutor for the king of Siam who was immortalized in "The King and I."

Overshadowing that brush with fame, however, are two marine disas-



PHOTOS BY JANET MENDELSON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



ters that occurred a century ago. Both are the subject of permanent exhibits at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, the oldest and largest maritime museum in Canada.

On April 14, 1912, a distress call was received from the RMS Titanic: "We have struck iceberg sinking fast come to our assistance." From the closest major port, Halifax-based cable ships, Cunard ocean liners, and government vessels, along with the citizenry, responded. Now 19 sites in metro Halifax mark locations where victims were buried or survivors treated. Snow's Funeral Home (1740 Argyle St.) still stands, but the building has become a highly praised restaurant, Five Fishermen. Back then, John Snow and his sons coordinated a team

Tour guide Cameron Mitchell at Province House garden, with its statue of one of his heroes, Joseph Howe, founder-editor of what is now Halifax's Chronicle Herald. Youngsters tried to make a guard smile at the Halifax Citadel National Historic Site.

in the battle between alcohol and temperance. Now overlooking those giant cranes and steel beams, restaurants and bars bustle with a young but not exclusively millennial crowd. Here and elsewhere, city code seems to be kind to these establishments because by early June, many had expanded onto the sidewalks for the season with patios that sometimes double their seating capacity. Compensating for lost walkways are temporary sidewalks that encroach on the road.

Halifax was named for George Montagu Dunk, Earl of Halifax, Chief Lord of Trade and Plantations, who played a key role in its being founded in 1749 as a British settlement and military base. After the American Revolution, British loyalists fleeing New England landed here and the city grew rapidly. By the late 1800s, more than one-third of the population was Irish.

Today, Haligonians seem to support all things local. Farmers' markets abound, including a big one on weekends at the Seaport. The splashy new maritime complex includes a cruise ship pavilion, the Immigration Museum, Garrison Brewing with tours and tastings, and more. The boardwalk will lead you past modern high-rise office buildings and condos, touristy shops, and restaurants with water views. Children will like the giant wave sculpture and a creative playground. Next time, we'll visit the largest art collection in the Maritimes, at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, one of many places to learn about African Nova Scotia communities dating to the 1600s.

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