

THE VIP LOUNGE | WITH ROB MCCLURE

Broadway actor enjoys visiting places with old world charm

Last spring, Rob McClure joined the Broadway cast of the popular musical "Something Rotten!" He played one of the leads, Nick Bottom, and is reprising the role in the show's national tour, which kicks off in Boston Jan. 17 for a nearly two-week run. The Milford, N.J., native, who is married to actress Maggie Lakis (who is also in the touring production of "Something Rotten!") splits his time between New York City and Philadelphia. He was nominated for a 2013 Tony Award for his starring role in the musical "Chaplin," about the life of Charlie Chaplin, and has performed

in Massachusetts before: In 2008, he and Lakis were in Boston for the national tour of "Avenue Q," and in 2010, he was in the American Repertory Theater's "Johnny Baseball." McClure, 34, said that he and his wife are history buffs and are looking forward to returning to Boston and exploring the city and surrounding area. "What the city does well — similar to Philly — is that it's a modern metropolis with this really iconic history laced throughout it," he said. "I mean, you can just be wandering around the city and happen upon these amazing landmarks." We caught up with McClure to talk about all things travel.



Rob McClure with his wife, Maggie Lakis, in Venice.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? My wife and I want to do London, Paris, and Amsterdam next. That's our next dream vacation. Art and history — those three have plenty. We are not the types who like to sit on the beach for too long. [We] will lounge for a couple of hours, then one of us gets antsy.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? My Converse All Star sneakers. I have pictures of my feet in those shoes taken with landmarks all over the world. They've been everywhere.

Aisle or window? Window. I love staring out over the clouds to see a good sunrise or sunset. I never take for

granted that I'm in a chair strapped to a rocket.

Favorite childhood travel memory? Countless summers on the boardwalks of the Jersey Shore. The best. I loved the old world charm of those boardwalk rides, like the Great Nor'Easter at Morey's Piers in Wildwood, and remember being with my family on the beach watching the fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? Taking photos. I say guilty because there are times I will fully admit that I should put down the camera and soak it in with my own eyes.

Best travel tip? Make tons of plans, but allow for spontaneity. It's the places that weren't on your itinerary that you'll talk about for years.

JULIET PENNINGTON

Traveling abroad? Preparation goes a long way.

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Yes, I should have known. I'd worked at a hospital with a travel clinic. But it wasn't until we saw the giant billboard at the entrance to remote Tayrona National Park in Colombia that we remembered. In Spanish, it screamed "Fiebre amarilla" — yellow fever — beside a giant drawing of a mosquito. We had forgotten to get vaccinated. There was no going back. The other hikers were waiting. In a panic, my husband and I ran to a park kiosk, bought its local brand of repellent, contents unknown, and slathered it on.

At the trailhead, we found another surprise: armed guards bringing up the rear. The rest of our group seemed undisturbed. Protected by assault rifles, we hiked to the most beautiful beach I've ever seen and where the three young guards leaned against boulders to pose for photos by the sea. Neither mosquitos nor rebels appeared that day, but it was an eye-opener.

Now well before leaving home, we check destination-specific advisories on websites for both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices and US Department of State travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go.html. The State site has a checklist with links for faith-based travel and special challenges abroad for people with disabilities, solo women, and LGBT individuals.

Life can be different far from home. That's often why we travel, isn't it?

Plan ahead to make your experience easier and more rewarding. For starters, learn some basic vocabulary and common phrases in the language of your destination. More than 100 million people reportedly have used Duolingo for free, self-paced lessons in 22 languages online at www.duolingo.com.

Already at intermediate level Spanish, French, or Italian? Improve fluency by listening to www.newsinslowitalian.com, www.newsinslowfrench.com or www.newsinslowspanish.com

as spoken in Latin America or Spain. The free podcasts of the week's news read slowly by native speakers are available on Twitter, too. Join a special interest meet-up group at www.meetup.com. Watch foreign films at home with the captions turned on, or off.

Adult education classes at your local high school offer a bonus. Along with grammar and vocabulary, you can look forward to conversations with others at your level. It's not unusual for people outside the United States to know much more about our country than we do about theirs. Language classes can include a cram course on their culture, current events, and relevant history, as well as differences in social expectations.

Maurice Bombrun, a native of Provence, is a French instructor and tutor in the Lexington and Concord-Carlisle school systems. As students in his adult ed class, we were encouraged to learn as much of the language as possible beforehand. But he cautioned a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

"Be careful what you say after a meal," said Bombrun. "One of my students once told me she and her husband went to a restaurant in France. When they were done with dinner they were surprised to find an ambulance waiting for them at the door instead of the taxi they thought she had ordered. After the confusion, they realized they had said she was pregnant (the word *plein/e* means 'full' and 'pregnant' for an animal) and that she was finished (*finie*, meaning finished, done for)."

Another recalled the time he went to a bistro in France on a busy Saturday night. "I told the *maitre d'hôtel* I would like a table for one and I was alone," said the student. "He showed me to my table and as the meal progressed I felt I was getting an unusual, inordinate amount of attention. The *maitre d'hôtel* came over to my table to see how everything was, the owner came over, different waiters inquired as to how I enjoyed my meal. I was sure I was being

Tell your credit card companies and bank you'll be traveling so you can charge meals and purchases and get cash at ATMs.

mistaken for some French VIP. Later I learned that instead of saying "table for one, I am alone," I had said "table for one and I am lonely."

Don Hunton of Acton recalled an equally embarrassing time when as a teenager, he traveled to Germany with his parents. Neither of them spoke German and he knew little more. One day, his mother needed to find a bathroom quickly. "I pieced together a sentence to ask a stranger, 'Do you have a Ladies' Room?' But the woman was clearly offended," he said. Later, a German-speaking friend burst into laughter and explained. "My literal translation of Ladies' Room, 'Frauenzimmer,' connotes more a person than a place. Apparently I asked for something like a nasty old woman, a hussy, or wench."

Still, people everywhere appreciate the effort when you attempt their language, however badly it gets mangled. Before we met in French class, Hunton and his wife, Nancy, rented a cottage in the countryside north of Aix-en-Provence. When they arrived, the promised key was not in the mailbox and no one was home. Knowing only rudimentary French and clueless what else to do, they knocked at the nearest house. A couple who spoke no English listened as the Huntons struggled to convey their predicament. They invited the Americans to wait on the porch while the man tracked down the absent home owner and his wife served wine to celebrate her husband's birthday.

Then there was the morning in a Paris café when my husband and I attempted to get breakfast. A waiter spent more than five minutes correcting Bob's halting French. It wasn't just that only tourists order eggs to start the day. Bob had failed to precisely shape his lips to say eggs (*des oeufs*) correctly. The waiter was persistent. Was he rude? Were we insulted? Not at all. We had been forewarned that the French, especially Parisians, consider proper pronunciation a matter of national pride.

In Cuba, a nationwide shortage of paper means public restrooms typically have no toilet tissue. An attendant, if present, might sell you four or five small squares per person, not more, sometimes less. I'm not proud to admit we brought toilet paper from our hotel room to use at restaurants, museums, and a botanical garden. I hope to visit Cuba again, but next time I'll bring toilet paper sold at camping supply stores. Minus the cardboard insert, it packs flat in a backpack or suitcase.

We always bring a small amount of local currency in small denominations for taxis and whatnot upon landing. It's easy enough to exchange money at home at an office of AAA, Bank of America, or other ma-

to such safety precautions as where to hail a taxi, and where not, or whether it's wise to use public transportation. Before visiting cathedrals, mosques and other sacred places, you'll want to know what locals consider proper etiquette. Shorts and flip flops might not be permitted, and maybe you should pack a shawl to cover your head and bare shoulders.

Janet Mendelsohn can be reached at janet@janetmendelsohn.com.

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