

# THE CONCIERGE

## GEO QUIZ

The city of Ghent, Belgium, is connected to the North Sea by a canal that runs through what neighboring country?

- Netherlands
- Luxembourg
- Germany

Answer below. Source: National Geographic Bee

## TIPSHEET

### Four events with a glow about them

By MARY FORGIONE

Lights and light festivals lend a certain glow to a city or a place. Here are four that can light up your life.

#### Australia

Sydney rocks the light art world every year. Its free three-week Vivid Sydney festival lights and transforms the Opera House, the Sydney Harbour Bridge and several neighborhoods. New this year is a water fountain that uses lights and lasers to create an underwater experience. Vivid Sydney is May 25-June 16.

Info: [vivid.com.au](http://vivid.com.au)

#### U.S. and Canada

If you haven't been to Niagara Falls in a few years, you probably haven't seen the light show at the spectacular waterfalls. The falls have been illuminated since 1920, but two years ago LEDs were installed on the Canadian side allowing a range of colors. The cascades turn red and white on Canada Day (July 1) and red, white and blue on the Fourth of July. In April, the illuminated show operates from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Info: [lat.ms/niagaralights](http://lat.ms/niagaralights)

#### Oregon

On your next trip to Portland, take at least one evening to walk across the Tilikum Crossing over the Willamette River. Installation artists Anna Valentina Murch and Doug Hollis designed the LED modules that light the cables, towers and underside of the deck. The intensity and shades of the colors change according to a program based on the speed and temperature of the river water. The bridge accommodates light rail, cyclists and pedestrians but not cars.

Info: [trinet.org/tilikum](http://trinet.org/tilikum)

#### DIY

Polks are turning out to create their own messages of light at lantern fests. The idea is to light a lantern and let it loose to carry your hopes and dreams or maybe regrets. Lantern fests provide music, food and a lantern to launch. (You can't use your own.) Depending on where you go, prices start at \$35 per person, but many are \$50 to \$80. Check the websites for upcoming fests.

Info: Lantern Fest, [lanternfest.com](http://lanternfest.com), and Water Lantern Festival, [waterlanternfestival.com](http://waterlanternfestival.com)

## GEO QUIZ ANSWER:

Netherlands

## AIRFARES

	ATLANTA	CHICAGO	DENVER	HONOLULU	LAS VEGAS	NEW YORK/NEWARK, N.J.	PHOENIX	SAN FRANCISCO	SEATTLE	WASHINGTON, D.C.
LAX	\$308	\$280	\$184	\$496	\$88	\$340	\$102	\$88	\$168	\$332
SNA	332	324	226	485	108	465	170	98	190	372
BUR	382	341	228	598	102	467	160	113	186	396
LGB	388	352	225	732	88	392	174	95	170	368
ONT	396	325	186	705	114	389	185	131	191	458
INT'L	AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND*	CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO	LONDON*	PARIS*	SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA*	TOKYO*	VANCOUVER, CANADA			
LAX	\$1,122-\$1,328	\$236	\$418-\$878	\$645-\$1,055	\$1,150-\$1,409	\$659-\$1,098	\$258			

Restricted round-trip fares are researched on Thursday, the day before the travel action goes to press. Fares change daily, and availability is not assured. Fares, which may involve a change of planes, are for airlines serving Los Angeles International (LAX), Orange County/John Wayne (SNA), Burbank/Bob Hope (BUR), Long Beach (LGB) and Ontario (ONT). Domestic and international airfares include taxes and fees. \*These international fares vary because of differing fuel surcharges on different airlines. Sources: Sabre reservation system, airlines and web.



THE MARIENPLATZ in Munich, Germany, where perspective on travel can bloom in a flower shop.

## DEPARTURE POINTS

# Shorn of her old identity

Out of exile from a German barbershop for being female comes enlightenment on the true value of being abroad.

By JANICE NIORO

Munich, Germany, wasn't necessarily my first choice for a winter vacation. But I came here anyway for a friend's birthday celebration in early March, which coincided with an uncharacteristic Arctic blast across Europe.

The trip was a brief but intense immersion into German culture. I stayed with a German family and did what they did for a week. I had no time for jet lag. When Jorg, the father of the family, asked me to run some errands with him my first morning here, I said yes, even though my body said otherwise.

It was cold — so cold that the fountain in the Marienplatz, the central square in Munich, was frozen. No big deal. It was only a trip to the barbershop.

Besides, I love running errands where another language rules, because the context of a place makes understanding a few words of a foreign language a little easier.

The barbershop did not seem any different from any other, an old-fashioned parlor but with some modern updates. A well-coiffed shop attendant sported the latest in beard trends, and shelves were stocked with hair care products for men.

But it disguised some behind-the-scenes thinking. The shop attendant,

whose hair and beard I thought were so hip, was now telling Jorg that I had to leave. In English translated from German, Jorg explained that it was because I was a woman.

Under any circumstance, I would have found the rule odd, but that day, I found it even odder: It was 23 degrees outside.

I was invited to leave anyway, dismissed to a nearby small flower shop that was also a café.

The flower shop was cozy, so I summoned my seat German and ordered a hot chocolate, but there was a follow-up question. The shopkeeper repeated her question, which gave me a second opportunity to respond appropriately.

"Trinken sie hier?" (Are you drinking this here?)

"Ja," I said. Scintillating conversation it was not, but a minor accomplishment.

There was only one small table. No other customer was in the shop, so I sat down and occupied myself with my drink and with photographing the flowers.

A few minutes later, a woman came in and sat down across from me. It wasn't long before I broke the uncomfortable silence and started a conversation as she sipped her coffee.

I told her in German that my German was not very good.

She laughed and said, "I'm not German."

She was from Colombia but had been living in Germany for 15 years. She said her English was poor, so we spoke in Spanish, English and German.

We easily traded superficial facts

about our lives, and then I asked how she liked living here. Colombia to Germany must have been a tremendous cultural shift, I said.

She replied, "I feel as if I am now from two different worlds. I am boring in Colombia."

At first, I didn't quite understand what she meant. Then I understood. In Colombia, she felt boring, as in quiet or not interesting to talk to. In Germany, she was considered a wild, colorful South American woman.

Having lived in Norway, I was familiar with the feeling. There, I had come off as this bold American who asked many questions. Back home in the U.S., I was an extreme introvert.

Our conversation was no longer a simple exchange of words between two strangers.

Maybe, I thought as I talked with her, you don't realize your true nature until you are in another country.

I found I had a gift for something I might never have seen at home. It's one of the reasons I love to travel. At home, societal norms rule, and families and friends shape our behavior, but when you're traveling, you take risks by putting yourself out there because no one at home will ever know.

Freshly shorn, Jorg picked me up from the flower shop.

On a routine errand, I had already discovered a different perspective on my exile from the barbershop — and maybe, some new insight on who I could be.

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## TOURS & CRUISES

### SWITZERLAND AND GERMANY

# Classic places to go cuckoo

Time will fly on a nine-day tour that introduces participants to some of Switzerland's luxury watchmakers as well as the world-famous cuckoo clocks of Germany's Black Forest. Participants will visit Geneva, Montreux, Neuchâtel, Bern, Basel and Zurich in Switzerland as well as the Black Forest region, birthplace of the cuckoo clock. Highlights include the Zytglogge, a landmark clock tower built in Bern in the 13th century, and a family-owned workshop in Germany that has been handcrafting cuckoo clocks since the 1860s.

**Dates:** Custom dates  
**Price:** From \$4,499 per person, double occupancy. Includes accommodations, breakfasts, seven private tours and museum admissions. International airfare not included.

Info: [Zicasso.com/watchmaker](http://Zicasso.com/watchmaker)  
— ANNE HARNAGEL

## AUSTRALIA

### All Queensland

Walk in a rainforest, see the Great Barrier Reef and learn ancient stories as told by indigenous peoples on a four-day vacation organized by Touring Treasures, which plans custom itineraries. The Queensland sampler includes helicopter trips and three nights' stay at Silky Oaks Lodge, a high-end treehouse lodge on the banks of the Mossman River adjoining Daintree National Park. Helicopter rides will fly above the Great Barrier Reef and focus on areas where whale, manta ray and turtle sightings are common. Other highlights include an interactive rainforest tour with an indigenous guide.

**Dates:** Custom dates  
**Price:** About \$4,500 per person, double occupancy. Includes accommodations, meals, activities and excursions. International airfare not included.

Info: Touring Treasures, (800) 536-5328, [lat.ms/touringtreasures](http://lat.ms/touringtreasures)  
— ROSEMARY McCLURE

## EUROPE

### Cruise in style

If your idea of a European vacation is floating on a waterway with a butler nearby to serve your favorite snacks and beverages, Crystal River Cruises has a tour for you. Crystal, which advertises that its voyages feature suites, balconies and butlers, has added more than two dozen new getaways this year. The six- to nine-day voyages sail the Danube and Rhine rivers, with calls in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Slovakia, Belgium and the Netherlands.

**Dates:** Multiple departures through November  
**Price:** From \$3,575 per person, double occupancy, for a six-day cruise. Includes accommodations, meals, beverages, some excursions and gratuities. International airfare not included.

Info: Crystal River Cruises, (888) 799-2437, [www.crysrivers.com](http://www.crysrivers.com)  
— ROSEMARY McCLURE

## DEAL OF THE WEEK

### Montage takes 15% off best room rates

Montage Hotels & Resorts, which opened its first luxury property in 2003 in Laguna Beach, will mark its 15th anniversary by offering 15% off the best available room prices at its properties.

The deal: The Sweet 15 offer is good at Montages in Beverly Hills and Laguna Beach as well as in Deer Valley, Utah; Kapapua Bay, Hawaii; and Bluffton, S.C. Full payment is required when you reserve; no refunds or cancellations are allowed. Book by Nov. 15 for stays through Dec. 31.

Info: [montagehotels.com](http://montagehotels.com)  
— MARY FORGIONE



MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH opened in 2003. To celebrate the 15th anniversary, Montage Hotel & Resorts has a deal at its properties.

## TAHITI FOR \$881

Fare: From LAX to Papeete, Tahiti, on Air Tahiti Nui, a round-trip fare of \$881, including all taxes and fees. Bonus: Flights are nonstop. **Restrictions:** Subject to availability. For travel May 6-June 30, and Sept. 1-Oct. 25. Tickets must be booked by April 30.

Info: (877) 824-4846, [airtahitini.com/us-en](http://airtahitini.com/us-en)  
Source: [Airfarewatchdog.com](http://Airfarewatchdog.com)