

## Travel

### TRAVEL ROUND-UP

#### EAT AND WIN A TRIP TO SWITZERLAND

DINE at La Fondue in Dempsey Hill, and stand a chance to win a trip to the Alps of Switzerland in a lucky draw. During the month of December, diners will receive one lucky-draw voucher with every \$50 spent. The winner gets a five-night trip for two to the land of cheese, chocolate and watches, and will get to stay at the Parkhotel Bellevue Lenk in the Swiss Alps. The closing date is Dec 31, with the draw date on Jan 2.

Take advantage of the Festive Menu (\$75++ per person) on Dec 24, 25, 31 and on Jan 1. Call 6474-0204 to book, or for more information.

#### THAI AIRWAYS TO OPERATE BIOFUEL FLIGHTS

THAI Airways is set to be the first airline in Asia to undertake a commercial passenger flight using biofuel, on a Dec 22 flight from Bangkok to Chiang Mai. The flight, to follow a non-commercial one on Dec 21, is to support the company's Travel Green initiative that is part of its corporate-social-responsibility programme.

#### THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

#### HILTON OPENS SECOND HOTEL IN NANJING

THE Hilton hotel chain has opened its second hotel in Nanjing. Hilton Nanjing Riverside, the second Hilton property to open in Nanjing in less than a month, is located on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and is 7km from the Central Business District and 45km from the Nanjing Lukou International Airport.

The hotel features a contemporary style with 411 guest rooms and suites, many of which have a private balcony with Yangtze River views, bathrooms and walk-in closets, along with generous work spaces and high-speed Internet access, the company said in a statement.

#### MAN ADMITS TRYING TO OPEN DOOR IN MID-FLIGHT

AN ILLINOIS man could face up to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to trying to open a passenger-jet door in mid-flight. Reynel Alcaide of Burbank, Illinois, pleaded guilty last Friday to interference with flight-crew members and attendants. Sentencing is on March 8.

Alcaide was on a Continental Airlines flight travelling from Houston to Chicago on May 8 when he repeatedly tried to open an exit door when the plane was in the air. Passengers and crew members subdued him eventually.

AP

*The T'ang Quartet recently performed in Burgundy, France. Cellist Leslie Tan recalls the trip*

BY LESLIE TAN  
IN BURGUNDY

CONCERT tours are always hectic.

We fly in, do a quick rehearsal and sound check, perform, then leave. With a schedule like that, this is what one sees: Airport, hotel, concert hall, airport.

Which is why, when I heard that the T'ang Quartet – the 12-year-old string quartet I'm part of – was booked to perform two concerts and to give a master class in France over 11 days, I was (needless to say) excited.

It would be a work trip, but one filled with rest, relaxation, and lots to see and do, for we were to visit Burgundy – that wine-growing region which boasts great cuisine, history, arts and culture. To top it off, we were there at the beginning of autumn.

This means very few tourists, an intense sun neatly balanced by the cool, crisp air and the colourful autumnal foliage.

The capital city, Dijon, is a two-hour train ride from Paris. This is a small city, with a population of about 150,000. But despite its size, Dijon offers more than its signature mustard. It can dish out a very diverse palette of history, arts and culture.

Home to the Dukes of Burgundy from the 11th to the 15th century, this province – and in particular, Dijon – was a great centre of the arts and sciences from mediaeval times right up to the 20th century.

A walk through Dijon – easily covered on foot, or, for the fans of extreme sports, by Segway – will reveal a large number of churches, an extraordinary number of architectural wonders dating from the middle ages (most of the walled and daubed, half-timbered houses are 800 years old), and many town houses from the 18th century, all of which are still in use today.

Not to be missed is the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon with its exhibitions of, among other things, a 15th century ducal kitchen and an eye-opening collection of European art from Roman times through contemporary art.

Of course, you must visit the church of Notre Dame, and the Placé François Rude, where you'll see beautiful half-timbered houses, a fountain, an old carousel, and a lot of cafes and bars. A walk through the winding streets of the mediaeval district is also a must.

History was all around us

# BLISSFUL



**BEAUTIFUL LIGHT:** The autumn sunlight hits the rolling hills of the small village of Merry-la-Vallee – which doesn't even have a bakery – situated to the north of Burgundy.



**SLICE OF HEAVEN:** The T'ang Quartet – (from left) Ng Yu-Ying, Ang Chek Meng, Leslie Tan and Lionel Tan – rehearse in a 17th century town house, Dijon's Hotel Bouhier de Savigny.

and it was easy to become blasé. Even our rehearsals were in a 17th century town house, the Hotel Bouhier de Savigny, still in use today as private residences.

The Quartet was there as part of Musiques en voutes, a travelling festival combining architectural heritage, art and music in Burgundy. All concerts are held in the multitude of ancient churches sprinkled all over the region.

No concert, in the seven years of the festival, has ever been held at the same venue. The two concerts we played were in churches in St Martin-du-Puy, and in Sennecey-le-Grand.

St Martin-du-Puy was an end-of-the-road village with only a town hall, a boulangerie (bakery), one cafe and an 11th century church.

Sennecey was a bigger city that offered historical sights from the 11th century right up to World War II, when it was a hotbed of anti-Nazi resistance.

Travel between the different villages and cities took us onto secondary roads, criss-crossing, often, through the Parc Naturel du Morvan. This extensive natural park of 2,023 sq km, right smack in the middle of Burgundy, has huge forests, verdant, rolling hills, mist-covered fields and lakes.

And food and wine are a religion in Burgundy. Try naming a few French dishes and, invariably, coq au vin, escargot and boeuf bourguignon will come to mind.

And, here, three-Michelin-star restaurants can be found. I

had my birthday lunch with my better half, in one – the Hostellerie du Chapeau Rouge.

It was a criminal, mouth-watering and lip-smacking seven-course degustation menu, accompanied by a bottle of 2008 Vosne-Romanée. The cost? An affordable 218 euros (\$377) for two.

Burgundy is also an oenophile's dream. There are day tours along the route of the Grand Crus – from Dijon to Beaune, stopping at Gevrey-Chambertin, Vosne-Romanée, Nuits-Saint-Georges, among others.

But if you're lazy, whole bottles of vintages are cheaply and readily available from the local cafes and stores.

CONTINUED ON TRAVEL A11



# BURGUNDY



(PHOTOS: LESLIE TAN)



**WALK THE STREETS:** The Place François Rude in Dijon features beautiful half-timbered houses, as well as lovely cafes and bars that are must-sees.



**MICHELIN-STARRED:** Chef William Frachot at Hostellerie du Chapeau Rouge. (PHOTO: INTERNET)



**AFFORDABLE VACATION HOME:** The gîte in Merry-la-Vallee where the writer stayed.



**11TH CENTURY SITE:** The elegant Chateau De Ratilly sits in the countryside near Treigny.

## TRAVEL ESSENTIALS



TO GET to Burgundy, once considered the heart of France, first fly to the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. From there, it's possible to take a high-speed TGV train to Dijon, Burgundy's capital. There are also TGV trains from the city centre in Paris' Gare de Lyon Station to the Cresut Montceau Montchanin TGV station in Dijon. The journey takes 1 hour and 20 minutes. Visit <http://www.tgv-europe.com/en/> for routes and fares.

Note that Burgundy is the Anglicised name for Bourgogne. Visit <http://region-bourgogne.fr/Burgundy21.intl.en> for more information about the region. Maps and more are available here.

### FROM PAGE A10

After all that hard work in the south, I drove, with friends, to a little place called Merry-la-Vallee. We had rented a gîte (an affordable vacation rental) with two bedrooms, a living room, a fully equipped kitchen and a garden, at 400 euros for five days.

Merry-la-Vallee was so small it did not even have a boulangerie, only a van coming by every day to sell bread, and another to sell meat.

It did, however, have a church established in the 12th century and a fancy restaurant – Le Galopin. We called to make reservations for dinner and were the only patrons there that night, so the restaurant fired up

the stoves just for us, rather than turn us away. What hospitality!

From here, we explored the surrounding area. Ten minutes away is the town of Toucy, which boasts a church with battlements and fortifications; and a cute tourist train that runs only during the weekend.

Auxerre is a 20-minute drive away. With its unhurried atmosphere, its busiest thoroughfare is its river. Once a busy port, now the river caters to holiday cruisers and barges.

A river and canal cruise is one of the more exciting things one can do in Auxerre. A little more taxing is a wander around the steep and narrow cobbled alleys in search of the Cathedral of St Etienne (established in the 11th century), the

Abbey of Saint Germain (9th century) and the old clock tower.

Slightly farther away is Chablis. Solely dependent on the Chardonnay grape from which the wine Chablis is made, this is a pretty and prosperous little town. All that is evident in the wine domains, specialist shops, fancy restaurants and luxury hotels that jostle for space along its narrow streets.

But prestigious as it is, like all places in Burgundy it was easy to get around. People were generous, patient and hospitable.

Day trips were easily made to numerous places of interest from Happy Valley.

In between wine tastings, we managed to visit numerous cha-

teaus – the Route des Ducs de Bourgogne has at least 16 – and a few exquisitely picturesque mediaeval villages. Not to be missed is Noyers-sur-Serein.

For all the attractions of Burgundy, the real star is the light.

The sun is just different in this part of the world. Ask the grape vines. The light is life-giving – warm but never harsh.

At night, in the Valley, the Milky Way and her constellations were conspicuously visible.

I spent my remaining days there in admiration of the land, and in quiet contemplation. Burgundy cannot be explained. It has to be experienced. It simply has that certain *je nais se quoi*.

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◆ *The Tang Quartet will perform on Jan 26 and 27 at the National Museum of Singapore as part of its Dreams & Reality: Music at an Exhibition Friends and Followers series. Tickets, at \$45, are available via Sistic ([www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg), tel: 6348-5555).*

### HELPPESK 我的字典

**String quartet:** 弦乐四重奏  
xián yuè sì zhòng zǒu

**Eye-opening:** 令人大开眼界  
lìng rén dà kāi yǎn jiè

**Boulangerie:** 面包店 miàn bāo diàn

**Canal cruise:** 游运河 yóu yún hé