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MARI SLATER

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Eat, Pray, and Leave the Crowds Behind

Written by E. Mari Slater
Tuesday, 10 August 2010 13:52



Eat, Pray, Love, Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir of a year of soul-searching by way of world travel, struck an immediate and passionate chord with women the world over. In Gilbert's own words in Eat, Pray, Love: "I wanted to explore one aspect of myself set against the backdrop of each country, in a place that

has traditionally done that one thing very well. I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy, the art of devotion in India and, in Indonesia, the art of balancing the two."

Given the sensation of Eat, Pray, Love, it was a forgone conclusion a movie adaptation would be in the works, and this month marks the release of Eat, Pray, Love, the movie, starring reigning American Sweetheart, Julia Roberts. Women around the world have packed their books and essentials, flocking to Italy, India and Bali to follow in Gilbert's footsteps. As a result, the same path trod solo by Gilbert is now jam-packed with would-be self-discoverers on **Eat, Pray, Love tourism packages**. Here's how you can capture the essence of Gilbert's trip, without being one of many faces in a crowded tour.

Gilbert chose Rome to explore the art of Italian pleasure. Instead of Rome, travel to the rugged, beautiful Amalfi Coast, for a week or so of beach, wine and food. Recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a cultural and natural world heritage site, the Amalfi Coast is an incredibly picturesque locale to wile away the days on a beach, or over a three-hour lunch atop a breathtaking cliff with views of the Bay of Naples.



Start your Amalfi Coast adventure in Naples for pizza and pastries. Traditionally considered the site of the original pizza recipe, Naples takes its pizza so seriously a law is on the books regulating the recipe to be used. The result: a pizza to be dreamed of and compared to all other comers in the future. Many guide books offer suggestions as to where to find the best pizza, but in Naples it's possible to start out in any random direction and find pizza satisfaction.

After noshing in Naples, it's time to hop on a ferry to cross the Bay to the smaller coastal towns and islands. Visit Capri, home of the Caprese salad, and tour the island, making certain to check out **La Grotta Azzurra**, or the Blue Grotto, a sea cave on the coast of the island that is most noted for the blue reflection that illuminates the cavern, seemingly from below. That is, if the tides cooperate and the tour guides can squeeze the boat through the entrance. Spend another day in the picturesque city of Positano. A truly remarkable city built on a cliff that seems to rise out of the sea, Positano's beauty takes the breath away. Spend the day on the beaches, or shopping for ceramics, a craft the region is known for (ceramics are to the Amalfi Coast as glass is to Venice).

Regardless, it's imperative to splurge on a lunch at **La Tagliata**. A family restaurant

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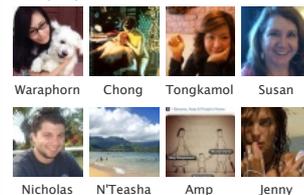
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perched at the top of Positano, the only way to get to La Tagliata is to take a cab from the town. Once there, request a table near the windows. The view of the surrounding cliffs and bay is stunning. The food is

equally sublime and is sure to be a contender for best Italian meal, ever. One antipasti plate follows another, the wine carafes never empty, and dessert is accompanied by limoncello, another regional specialty.

When visiting the Amalfi Coast, it's advisable to not only throw the no-carb diet out the window when visiting Italy, but also to pack an extra suitcase for the haul of regional ceramics you are sure to acquire.

La Tagliata
Via Tagliata n°22
Positano, Italy
Tel. +39 089 875 872
www.latagliata.com

After indulging in Italian pleasure, Gilbert traveled to India to study at an ashram. The internet is rife with guesses as to which ashram Gilbert studied at, and most center around the guru Gilbert was known to have been studying under at the time of her departure. Choosing an ashram is a personal choice, with many factors to consider including what branch of yoga you practice. Among the many yoga retreat options in India, there is one just outside Bangalore that offers yogic study and comfortable, beautiful lodging amenities, complete with spa offerings.

Shreyas Retreat makes yoga studies more approachable by being open to all who wish to understand yoga and the philosophical traditions of India without delving into its organized religious aspects. The center focuses on self-development workshops, offering not just physical posture classes, but also breathing exercises, visualization techniques, deep relaxation classes, candle meditation and more. In addition to classes, Shreyas encourages visitors to participate in one Community Feeding Exercise during their stay. These include everything from picking vegetables from the center's own organic garden, to preparing a meal and serving it to the children or elderly in the community, while sharing experiences.



If you are looking for even more luxury with your yoga study, the Taj Hotels & Resort group offers yoga retreats through a select group of its spas located in various locations around the country. Choose either the Jiva Spa at the Taj in Goa, to be near the beach and vacationing Indians and Europeans, or the spa at the Umaid Bhawan Palace, in Jodhpur. Offered for four or seven night durations, the Yoga Retreats offered by the Jiva Spas are tailored to each individual's skill level and include five yoga sessions each day, between 6:30AM and 7:30PM, and incorporate theory class, chanting and meditation studies.

Shreyas Retreat
Santoshima Farm
Gollahalli Gate
Nelamangala
Bangalore, India
Tel. +91 80 27737102
www.shreyasretreat.com

Taj Hotels Jiva Spa Yoga Retreats
www.tajhotels.com

Finally, Gilbert ended her years-long journey in Bali, Indonesia. Drawn to Bali after an initial yoga vacation years before the events chronicled in her memoir, Gilbert studied under Balinese shaman Ketut Liyer, who has since found fame thanks to Eat, Pray, Love. Various tour companies provide access to Liyer himself. Even better, resorts and companies around Bali offer spiritual retreats that veer away from the more formal tours on offer, not to mention the crowds. One such place: the very luxurious **COMO Shambhala Estate**.



A residential health retreat near the village of Ubud, built into a jungle clearing and above the Ayung River, COMO Shambhala aims to inspire a lifelong goal towards better health in its visitors. The estate's holistic approach means each guest receives a wellness consultation, from which a plan of treatments

and activities is rendered. Whether it be yoga retreats visitors are

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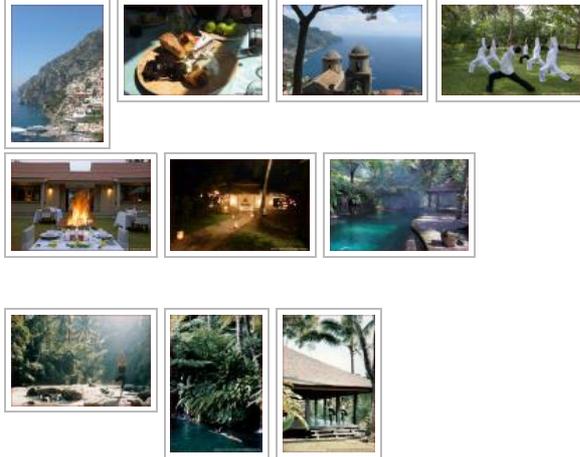
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looking for, mountain biking, or hiking through the forests, COMO Shambhala has it all. Explore Ubud's temples, the galleries and artist ateliers with estate-provided guides. Amidst its very luxurious amenities and lodgings, the Estate wants to help visitors discover Bali's rich Hindu culture in Ubud, so those new to Bali can truly experience and take in the culture.

Italy, India and Indonesia all have something to offer. Taking time to indulge in the passion of Italy, focus on your spiritual self in India and reconnecting with culture and ancient wisdom in Indonesia, could be just the antidote to our crazy, connected and hectic world.

COMO Shambhala Estate

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Your chance to Eat, Pray, Love... All in God's Own Country- Kerala
Culinary Tour December 12th- 21st, 2010 

If you love Indian food and or have always wanted to experience the real India first hand, here's your chance to go off the beaten path. The white sandy beaches, swaying coconut trees and turquoise waters of Kerala fulfill the criteria for most paradise seekers, but beyond this there is a rich culture and way of life accessible for those who are keen to add an extra dimension to their holiday in India.

Often called the Venice of South Asia, Kerala has fabulous cultural and food traditions. Tour and taste the best of Kerala with Nalini Mehta, as she takes you to her home country. She has for past many years been teaching Ayurveda cooking in Manhattan and guiding culinary tours of 'Little India' in NY. Nalini has documented traditional Kerala recipes and culinary techniques handed down through the generations. During the tour we will use these recipes while cooking with local experts in beguiling locations- on a houseboat in the backwaters, at a cardamom plantation, in organic spice farms and finally in the kitchens of a renowned Hindu temple.

Embark on an incredible journey of self discovery. All 5 senses will come alive here... Mornings will begin with yoga, meditation and a complete Ayurveda immersion. We will eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner as you deem fit! We will then explore the land and it's divine people. Each day will make you more proficient in Kerala and Ayurveda cuisine, its techniques and the use of it's prized spices. The same spices that Columbus went on a quest for almost 600 years ago, instead he discovered the Americas! All this, close to nature yet in the lap of ultimate hospitality and luxury.

The tour will begin in Cochin(Kochi to the locals), Kerala (COK is the international airport code) and will take you to 4 exotic destinations (you will need to arrive in Kochi by the evening of December 12th). It will last through the afternoon of Dec 21 and then we fly out of

Kochi later that evening. The good news is, we'll arrive back in the US on the same date, since you gain time.

While we try and accommodate you in 5-Star like high end luxury resorts/ hotels sometimes this may not be possible. However, there's a guarantee of at least a 4-Star equivalent facility.

For more details email nanusri@yahoo.com or call 2123619477

Itinerary

- Day 01: Arrival Cochin
- Day 02: In Cochin
- Day 03: Cochin - Munnar
- Day 04: Munnar - Periyar
- Day 05: Periyar - Kumarakom
- Day 06: In Kumarakom
- Day 07: Kumarakom - Mararikulam
- Day 08: In Mararikulam

kitchentantra , August 27, 2010

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