

When warm weather comes, vacations are No. 1 on all of our to-do lists. And even in these difficult times, the perfect summer getaway is within everybody's reach. We asked Bruin experts to share travel tips, tales of life on the road and favorite destinations.

By Bekah Wright

Photos by Mitch Tobias

# A BRUIN GUIDE TO GREAT SUMMER TRAVEL

## WINGING IT

KATIE KIMBELL LARSON '79

Katie Kimbell Larson's love of travel began in the backseat of her family's station wagon, when her family "drove across the country every summer seeking out every historical marker, national park and 'World's Largest.'" Since then, she's put in 20 years at United Airlines doing everything from arranging travel for high-profile celebrities to negotiating maintenance contracts with global airlines around the world. Her forte: making airline travel both tolerable and fun.

### Follow What You Love

Visit places for the experiences they offer, Larson suggests. Some of her favorites — "Sitting on a friend's boat in Sydney Harbour on New Year's Eve, scuba diving the wall in Grand Cayman and the Great Barrier Reef off Australia, seeing Paris for the first time, exploring the Argentinean wine country, hoisting a beer at the Hofbrauhaus in Munich and taking in the sights, sounds and smells of Bangkok."

### Prepare for Takeoff

Do some research. Larson's first stops are websites like TripAdvisor.com. "There's advice on how to get through airports, where to change money, the best tours to take and things to see." When possible, talk to contacts with knowledge of the location. Once ready to book a flight, numerous options are available. Again, check the Internet for online agencies, like Travelocity or Orbitz, that offer a broad spectrum of fares. But "if you're booking a simple flight, an airline's website is the most cost-efficient as there are no extra fees," says Larson. "For complicated, international bookings, think about using a travel agent. They're experts on what visas you'll need, airport transfers to the hotel and more."

Katie Kimbell Larson '79>





### Packing Points

Frequent travelers are packing pros. Larson prefers carry-ons and swears by durable, 20"- or 22"-sized Travelpro bags to fit in overhead bins. Rolling up your clothes or using compression space-saver bags allows for more space. Strategic packing is key as well. "Wear your heaviest and bulkiest items," says Larson. "And pick a color scheme so pieces are interchangeable." Scarves also can double as a blanket or neck support during flights.

### Check-In List

Enlist in the airline's flight update services. "If you're checking a bag, get there 90 minutes before departure, even if you've checked in online," says Larson. "For international travel, make it two hours." And "sign up for the airline's frequent flyer program," Larson advises. "Those who have seat assignments, frequent flyer numbers in their record and who've checked in online have the best protection when it comes to cancellations, delays or full flights."

### Golden Rules

"Always have your passport on you," she says. "Carry copies in a few different places and have one available electronically that's accessible from anywhere in the world. This can speed up the process at the consulate if you're unlucky enough to lose it." At the rental car desk, Larson passes on hatchbacks, which give potential thieves an easy way to take inventory. Perhaps most vital, though — "Patience is an important item to pack," says Larson. "Learning a few basics of a country's language like 'hello,' 'good-bye,' 'excuse me,' 'please' and 'thank you' works wonders."

"LEARNING A FEW BASICS OF A COUNTRY'S LANGUAGE LIKE 'HELLO,' 'GOOD-BYE,' 'EXCUSE ME,' 'PLEASE' AND 'THANK YOU' WORKS WONDERS."

## HOSPITALITY HEROES

ROB LOWE M.B.A. '92 AND  
MATT WALKER M.B.A. '00

In 1979, Rob Lowe, president of the Los Angeles-based Lowe Hospitality Group, went to China with his grandmother. "Americans had just been allowed to visit," he says. "At the time, the media were worried about China and Communism. I learned the Chinese were regular people who just wanted to get to know you."

The destination that captured Matt Walker's heart became a touchstone. "If I had one day left to live, I would die in peace in Hanalei on the north shore of Kauai," says the senior vice president of Lowe Destination Development, Inc. "It's as close as it gets to the Garden of Eden."

The paths of both led to UCLA's Anderson School of Management and to careers as real estate operators and developers specializing in hotels and resorts. Walker, who also teaches real estate development at Anderson, tells his students, "I still pinch myself when I think about all the incredible places I've been and the wonderful hotels Lowe Enterprises has created." The latest: Terranea Resort in Palos Verdes, launched this June.

### Vacationing in Los Angeles

Approach L.A. as a vacation destination and it's possible to fall in love all over again with the City of Angels. Not only that, but it is possible for locals to vacation in L.A. without going the full staycation route of sleeping at home. Walker says there are myriad reasons why an L.A. getaway is a good idea: "No plane reservations, no going through security, no time-zone change, no screaming kids on a five-hour flight, and no lines at the rental car place." For Lowe, the best part of vacationing in his own backyard is instant decompression. "Immediately, you find you're in a different world from the rest of Los Angeles."

<Rob Lowe M.B.A. '92 and  
Matt Walker M.B.A. '00



### Pick Wisely

Book a trip based solely on a photograph and a harsh lesson may be learned — one person's paradise can be another's nightmare. Achieving the perfect vacation requires homework. "Know what you want from the experience before you select a resort," says Walker. "Some are quiet, secluded retreats. Others are melting pots in the best sense, where families can enjoy a host of on-site amenities and the buzz of activity." He suggests browsing websites for reviews by former guests. Finally, "If you have personal requests or preferences about the type of room you want, don't be afraid to ask when you book the reservation. Then check again right before you arrive."

### Your Perfect Spot at the Perfect Spot

Get the lay of the land when you arrive at a resort. Many properties have different areas designated either for families or adult-only. This can range from restaurants that cater to families with a more casual atmosphere or intimate venues for couples to connect over candlelight. Activities fall under this category as well. Many properties have different pool experiences targeting specific guests. Check into activities as well, such as sunset cruises for couples, children's clubs for tykes or classes that span ages. Finally, use the resort as a base camp for day trips to local attractions often overlooked. Spend a few days soaking in the California sun at places ranging from San Francisco's Golden Gate Park to San Diego's Balboa Park and the words, "There's no place like home," take on new meaning.

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## LA DOLCE VITA

SUSANNAH KING '99

During her junior year at UCLA, King enrolled in the UC system's study abroad program, traveling to Venice and Siena. On her 21st birthday, King and a friend vowed to return after graduation. King did — for five years. Her first year back in California, King, now an event planner in Northern California, worked with a travel agency specializing in Italy, helping as many others as she could enjoy "la dolce vita."

### Turn to the Experts

The Internet may not be the route to the perfect itinerary. "Travel agents are a dying breed," says King. "However, they can offer deals you wouldn't be able to access yourself and more flexibility if you need to change plans ... Working with one that specializes in a country or region in particular is key. They have established relationships with vendors such as hotels, taxi drivers, restaurants and concierges."

### Solo Versus En Masse

Some travelers swear by group expeditions. Others feel they gain deeper insight on their own. "I think there's a time for both," says King. The upside of partnering: "A girl on my travel abroad program was studying art history," she recalls. "She taught us so much more about the churches and museums we visited than we would have learned on our own." The downside: "When you're with a group, what you do is controlled by others; you have less opportunity to break away and explore on your own."

### Travel Globally, Think Locally

"Go off the beaten path," says King. "Otherwise, you get a very limited understanding of the city." Her recommendation for finding hidden gems involves reaching out to locals. "Ask your taxi driver his favorite restaurant, your waiter where he shops, your hostess where she goes after work." Then, there's always stumbling on a find. "My mom and I were wandering along the beach of Ischia," she recounts. "We came across a shack where we bought bruschetta and beer. The whole meal cost \$9, but it's the best meal I've had my whole life."

"ASK YOUR TAXI DRIVER HIS FAVORITE RESTAURANT, YOUR WAITER WHERE HE SHOPS, YOUR HOSTESS WHERE SHE GOES AFTER WORK."

### Enjoy the Unexpected

Study a guidebook cover-to-cover and there still may be some details you've overlooked. One that might seem obvious for a "floating city" such as Venice — flooding. "Walkways that look like picnic tables are put out so feet don't get wet," informs King. Still, "It's not unusual to see Prada shoes floating in the water." King's way of approaching unexpected dilemmas — "For me, high-water days were like snow days," she recalls. "I'd never experienced anything like that in California, so even if I ruined a pair of shoes or two, I approached it as something fun."

### Be Good

King has many travel tips, from asking for a hotel room upgrade to packing a duffel for treasures collected along the way. Her No. 1 for tourists is to remember they are guests and to be on their best behavior. "There are different ways of life abroad we may not understand or agree with," she says. "But we need to adapt while there. Be polite. And, though it may sound cliché, when in Rome ..." ■



## ALL ABOUT FALL

Once summer has waned, don't put your suitcase away just yet. Fall is a great time to hit the road as well — crowds are down and so are sweltering temperatures. Larson gives tips for getting the best airline bookings for the buck. "Wait to book fall airfares until after Labor Day, when sales typically start," she says. A possible downside — "Some areas are seasonal and not available."

Her picks for fall travel? International destinations, particularly over Thanksgiving week. "Most Americans stay home and the flights are packed domestically, but are readily available internationally," she says.

At such times, Lowe travels to international hot spots like Provence, St.

Tropez and Sardinia. King, of course, makes a beeline for Venice. "You get holiday festivities without the crowds," she notes. Locales Larson recommends avoiding during fall: "Tropical destinations tend to be very crowded over Thanksgiving week, particularly in Hawaii and the Caribbean."

If traveling domestically, Larson says fares tend to escalate in areas with foliage tours. High prices, however, don't deter Walker from heading to New England to watch leaves turn. "Wrapped in a jacket with the cool, brisk weather, the white church steeples and explosion of colors on the mountains," he says. "It's like walking into a Norman Rockwell painting."

Fall is also ideal for checking out metropolitan areas. "You do need to look out for business travelers in the fall," Larson warns. "Frankfurt has a lot of conferences, New York City has Fashion Week and many cities have popular annual events that draw large audiences."

Angelenos need merely hop in the car to reach idyllic, fall destinations. "Fall in Southern California is the best season to visit the coast," says Lowe. "The summer coastal fog is gone and you have crystal-clear views of Catalina Island, and the weather's warmer during the day and cooler at night."

— Bekah Wright

