



Pieces of the World: Photographer Cecilia Lewis Archives Trip Around the World

Published in the Las Cruces Sun-News (New Mexico)

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November 14, 2004 — The ruins of Machu Picchu in a misty fog, a holy man in tennis shoes, perched in an Ethiopian cave, figures in azure blue robes drifting in the Sahara desert, giant statues standing sentinel in Easter Island, the Taj Mahal glistening in the sun...

Las Cruces photographer Cecilia Lewis just returned from the trip of a lifetime, a three week, around-the-world voyage on a private jet to some of the planet's most exotic locales.

"It was a feeling of being on a magic carpet, being dropped from culture to culture," Lewis said. "It was like a fairy tale, seeing the beauty and diversity of cultures, how people solved problems and how many religious and cultural groups live in gentle, peaceful ways."



Lewis said the trip began in Washington, D.C., and headed for South America for a stop in Lima, Peru, and the long-lost city of Machu Picchu, rediscovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911. Then it was on to Easter Island and its famed *moai* statues. Next, after touchdown in Tahiti, came snorkeling in the Pacific Island of Rarotonga. A day later the group admired the mystical red Ayers Rock in Australia.

The next day they were among colorful birds at the jungle Karawari Lodge in Papua New Guinea, communing with the Huli, also known as Wigmen.

The World Heritage site of Angkor Wat in Cambodia featured a tour of restoration projects in the ancient stone city, and trips to markets and a floating village built on pontoons.

The Kingdom of Bhutan, a small country in the Himalayas "was closed to the rest of the world until the 1960s. The people were



wonderful and it was a delight," Lewis said.

Agra, India, and the famed Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jahan to honor his wife, impressed her with its legendary beauty.

African destinations provided some of the most moving experiences for the seasoned traveler.

"I loved the churches carved in the rocks of Lalibela in Ethiopia. There are holy men who live in caves, and who also apparently die in their caves. You see the skulls still there," she said.

Dogon dancers met the group at Bamako, Mali.

The 'blue men of the desert' in Timbuktu still haunt her dreams, she said. "There in the Sahara they were wearing their beautiful blue robes, a very intense blue. The dye actually colored their skin. The architecture there was lovely, too, adobe, much like ours," she said.

The exotic journey ended in the winding alleys of Marrakech, Morocco. It was a "magical experience... just fascinating," even for an international veteran like Lewis, whose own life reads like a novel.

Born in China to British parents, she spent the first three years of her life in a Japanese concentration camp. She grew up to be a Chinese scholar, a Phi Beta Kappa philosophy major and a New York publicist who worked with clients in fields ranging from movies to fashion.

She was a model for Mary Quant, the fashion icon of the swinging '60s in London.

"I also did television ads for Revlon in London. It was a fun time. I went clubbing with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones," she recalled.

This fall, her exotic international dancing partners ranged from the Wigmen of Papua New Guinea, to Mali's Dogon dancers and members of a Rarotonga dance troupe ("which included our bus driver") who are striving to revive and preserve their Polynesian heritage.

With her husband, best-selling wine guide author Alexis Bepaloff, she has traveled the world taking photographs for magazine features. Since moving to Las Cruces in 1995, she has been active in several civic causes and founded Fresh Eyes, ongoing programs to teach photography in regional adult and juvenile detention centers.

"Alexis is a Harvard alum, and I learned about the trip through Harvard University. They work with the National Geographic Society to arrange the itinerary and there are experts that come along," she said. The journey included authorities in anthropology, botany, art history and



archaeology.

"They do advance work in each place and when we arrived there were lectures and special presentations," she said.

The whirlwind itinerary involved everything from museums, art galleries, nature preserves and local marketplaces to harrowing climbs in rocky ruins and archaeological sites.

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