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UPDATE

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THIS JUST IN . . .

News from the Traveler's World

TURKEY AND GREECE: TO GO OR NOT TO GO?

TRAVEL IN THE WAKE OF THE QUAKES

Since the tragic August 17 earthquake in Turkey, which killed more than 15,000 and left some 600,000 homeless, we've heard from many T&L readers wondering if it's safe or even possible to travel there. Are roads and railways functional? Are monuments and archaeological sites still accessible and intact? Is disease a serious concern, as initially reported? Should we cancel our trip?

The answer to the last question, as of this writing, is no. Faced with the staggering cost of the devastation (estimated between \$6 billion and \$13 billion), the last thing the country needs now is a drop in tourist dollars. Furthermore, the cities hit hardest — Izmit, Yalova, Sakarya, and Bolu, clustered



Marc Wheeler (right), of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Coalition, paddling Alaska's Inside Passage with a friend.

THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

If one Alaskan cruise operator has anything to do with it, clear-cuts in the Tongass may soon be a thing of the past

BY DAVID HERNDON

It's said that the Tongass National Forest wears a mantle of precipitation in modesty: on those rare days when the sun does shine, the landscape is simply too gorgeous. But perhaps the rainclouds are worn in shame, too—in a vain attempt to shroud the scars of a half-century of clear-cutting.

The clear-cuts along Alaska's Inside Passage—miles and miles of them—testify to a decades-long war over the Tongass, the world's largest remaining temperate rain forest. Conservationists, including those who support ecotourism, advocate the preservation of this precious habitat, home to bears, wolves, moose, deer, and bald eagles. The timber industry and its adherents, who include the state's disproportionately powerful Congressional delegation, have fought hard against logging restrictions and in favor of the subsidies upon which the industry depends. Right now, as the market for timber continues to decline and Washington seems bent on changing its policies, the greens have reason to hope that the campaign has finally shifted in their favor.

In April, Under Secretary of Agriculture Jim Lyons applied the final touches to a management plan that declared prime tracts of the Tongass off-limits to logging. The move reflected a national shift in Forest Service priorities, away from its traditional tree-farming agenda and toward a stewardship based on conservation,



Residents of Golcuk, Turkey, assess the damage.

approximately 70 miles east of Istanbul – are not prime tourist destinations. (Besides Istanbul, Turkey's popular destinations are largely in the southwest, far from the epicenter.) Although 984 people in Istanbul perished in the quake, the city's main buildings and infrastructure sustained little damage. Airports are all operating normally, and there have been no interruptions in rail service. Nor have doctors reported any hint of disease outbreak, despite dire early predictions. These may have been unwarranted, in any case: according to the World Health Organization, "Natural disasters do not import diseases that are not already present in the affected area."

On September 7, another earthquake, with its epicenter outside Athens, took the lives of 136 people. While the capital itself was barely harmed and archaeological sites survived intact, the northern suburbs were struck heavily, and tens of thousands lost their homes. But, as in Turkey, the country's transportation system kept working, and there were no reported closings of hotels, restaurants, or sights frequented by tourists.

To obtain up-to-date information on tectonic activity, log on to the Web site of the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (www-csem.bruyeres.cea.fr). For details on Turkey, contact the Turkish Tourist Office (212/687-2194, fax 212/599-7568; www.turkey.org). For news on Greece, try the Greek National Tourist Organization (212/421-5777), or www.phantis.com for the latest reports from Athens.

AN IMMODEST PROPOSAL

ZHIRINOVSKY'S PLAN FOR BOOSTING RUSSIAN TOURISM: ONE BIG BROTHEL!

Vladimir Zhirinovsky is at it again. Russia's number-one ultranationalist nutcase has outlined a plan to revitalize that country's sagging tourist trade – not by cutting the notorious crime rate, or building a few half-decent hotels, but by developing "a sexually oriented economy." In a manifesto reprinted in *Harper's* magazine, Zhirinovsky insists that Russia look to Thailand as a model for attracting visitors. Thailand, after all, "offers



recreation, and tourism. All eyes are on Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, who has declared a widespread moratorium on road building in "roadless areas" of the national forests—which basically means no new logging—while he decides on a nationwide policy. For now, happily for the Alaska delegation, the Tongass is exempt from the moratorium; 2 million of the forest's remaining 9 million roadless acres hang in the balance.

"The Lyons plan took us a long way, but didn't solve all the problems," says Marc Wheeler of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Coalition. "As long as the Alaska delegation is in place and there's a Republican Congress, it's all still pretty fragile." In fact, the day after the plan was announced, Alaska senator Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, vowed to gut the Forest Service budget if the agency followed its new agenda.

Despite the partisanship, however, the debate about the Tongass does not break down strictly along party lines. Michael McIntosh describes himself as a "fiscally conservative Republican businessman," and it annoys him that the government subsidizes logging in the Tongass to the tune of \$30 million a year. "If I need federal funds to underwrite my business," he says, "then I probably shouldn't be in that business." Especially when it harms viable businesses such as tourism. "People aren't going to pay a lot of money to go on a cruise and see a clear-cut."

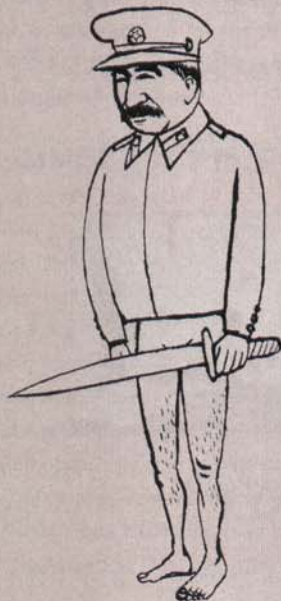
Unless they're on one of McIntosh's own little ships. He's behind an outfit called the Boat Company, which consists of two World War II-era minesweepers that have been retrofitted as luxury craft. They hold no more than 20 guests on six- and nine-day cruises that cost \$600 per person per day. His crews make a point of showing large clear-cuts to the passengers, and a naturalist explains their potentially harmful effects on the environment, which go well beyond aesthetics. Old-growth forest provides prime habitat for wildlife, especially deer. In southeastern Alaska, traditional clear-cuts work like neutron bombs in reverse: they devastate the forest infrastructure and leave the fauna to try to survive in the rubble. McIntosh wants his clients to learn that when you're splintering forests that have taken at least 250 years to grow, the ecology of the

all possible sexual services with a smile. . . . Its young people have a lot of good sex and make a great profit from it." According to Zhirinovsky, "Thailand also has the best situation as far as AIDS is concerned," proving that "the more sex there is, the less AIDS and drugs, and the more health, smiles, and laughter." (We did say *nutcase*, didn't we?)

"Everyone working in [Russia's tourist sector] must remember: rest, tourism, and sex are inseparable," Zhirinovsky writes. "[A] vacation without sex is money down the drain – and even worse, is a stress for the nerves." So what does Vlad the Impaler propose? That Russian hotels, spas, and resorts happily offer sexual services to guests, that all hotel guest beds be double-size, and that all rooms be furnished with plenty of condoms. "Moreover, the personnel must be aware of the clients' sexual needs and be ready to meet them." To better prepare Russian girls for this "big injection of capital," Zhirinovsky suggests incorporating sex lessons into school curricula. An experienced older man – known as a "sex knight," and presumably looking exactly like Vladimir Zhirinovsky – would be in charge of "defloration" and introducing his young pupils to the pleasures of sex.

"Be daring!" he concludes. "Enjoy yourselves and get rich."

More sex, please, we're Russian.



Sitka spruce, cedar, and hemlock in the Tongass National Forest.

area is devastated. "When it's gone, it's gone," he says, "and the world is worse off." He hopes visitors will take this message back home to their representatives—Republican and Democrat alike.

Fittingly, it was the great Republican forefather of conservation in America, Teddy Roosevelt, who first designated the Tongass a national forest in the early part of the century—and the McIntosh family's stake in southeastern Alaska goes back nearly that far. A subsidiary of A&P (the family grocery business) ran the largest salmon-canning operation in the region, and McIntosh himself worked on a fishing boat there in the early fifties. "I fell in love with the area," he says. In the late seventies he decided to go into the cruise business "on a mini basis," as

Clearly, Michael McIntosh is not your typical tree-hugger, any more than the Boat Company is your typical cruise line

a way to raise consciousness about the need to conserve the Tongass. At first his guests were drawn strictly from the ranks of the converted, Nature Conservancy members and the like, but over the years he has attracted, by word of mouth, a well-heeled, influential clientele that he estimates is 80 percent Republican. A newsletter and Web site keep former passengers abreast of political developments affecting the forest, and gently encourage them to take an interest in one of the conservation groups the McIntosh Foundation supports from its \$40 million endowment. ("A small foundation," he says.)

Clearly, Michael McIntosh is not your typical tree-hugger, any more than the Boat Company is your typical cruise line. It must be noted that conservation is not the focus of the line's trips. It could easily be argued, for instance, that fine dining is. Three outstanding meals are served daily. These glorious events are interrupted by stops in Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, whale-watching sessions, canoe outings, visits to villages, nature walks, and fishing excursions—which leads us back to dinner, where your own freshly caught halibut or salmon might appear on your plate, grilled. As for the boats, the 97-foot, 12-passenger *Observer* and the 144-foot, 20-passenger *Liseron*, both made entirely of wood

Now if only he could do something about those flaccid hotel bedsprings . . .

THE FIRES THIS TIME

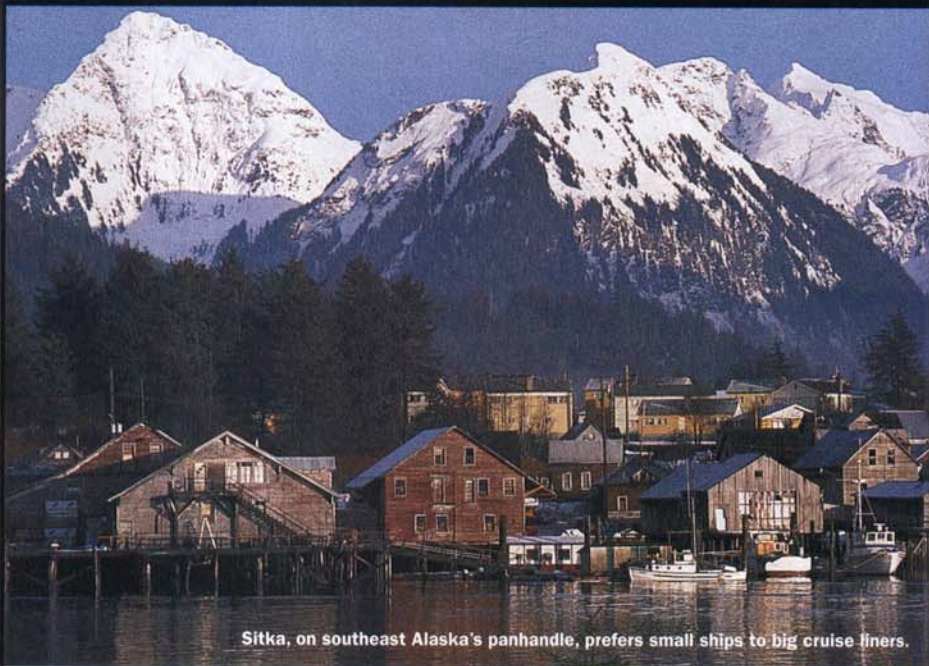
SOUTHEAST ASIA'S INFERNO RAGES ON

The forest fires that have plagued Sumatra and Borneo returned with a vengeance this summer, spreading a blanket of haze throughout Southeast Asia and temporarily closing a few of the region's airports. Thousands of people wound up in hospitals with eye irritations and upper respiratory problems.

Malaysia's Department of Environment has refused to release air-pollution statistics, for fear of creating bad press and scaring away tourists. Meanwhile, the latest round of fires has barely merited a single news-in-brief item in U.S. media. Perhaps news organizations are tired of a nearly three-year-old story. But the problem isn't going away. While rainfall in early September kept the damage from reaching the unprecedented levels of 1997 and 1998 – when 25 million acres of forest were destroyed – that's not likely to be the case when the predicted return of El Niño next year or in 2001 brings with it an extended dry season.

Poised on the brink of yet another environmental disaster, Indonesian officials have proven unable or unwilling to stop the

Smoke and haze surround a village in Kalimantan, on the Indonesian side of Borneo.



Sitka, on southeast Alaska's panhandle, prefers small ships to big cruise liners.

and detailed with mahogany brightwork, are so distinctive that the company can't buy any more; a third vessel, a wood-and-aluminum copy of the *Liseron*, has been commissioned and will launch next season.

"I'm a big fan of what the Boat Company is doing here," says writer and cultural anthropologist Richard Nelson, and he's not just talking about the open-bar comforts of the *Observer's* lounge. In fact, Nelson is much more in his element while wholly immersed in the raw rain forest; his book *The Island Within* details a year in the life of one of the Tongass's uninhabited isles. "Because the *Liseron* and the *Observer* are such small boats, they give you great views," says Nelson, "but they're unobtrusive—not a huge intrusion on the land and water."

Tourism's impact on the character of southeast Alaska is a hot topic. The region's 70,000 residents host 650,000 tourists every summer—double the number of 10 years ago. Some towns, like Juneau and Ketchikan, have embraced the big-time cruise lines that account for most of the visitors, while others, like Sitka, have resisted. "We want tourism based on quality as much as quantity," says Nelson, who sits on the board

'People aren't going to pay a lot of money to go on a cruise and see a clear-cut.' Unless they're on one of McIntosh's own ships

of the Sitka Conservation Society. "For a lot of us, the essence of the Alaska experience is solitude." He's not the only one who thinks so. The Forest Service is trying to figure out how to manage access so hunters, kayakers, and small-craft passengers will experience no more than three daily "encounters" (loosely defined as waving distance) with other humans.

It remains to be seen whether such an exclusive arrangement can bring the kind of economic sustenance needed to help offset the decline in commercial fishing and industrial logging. But for now, conservationists are cautiously celebrating their recent victories. "People need to appreciate the place for its wildness and beauty and biodiversity, not as a source of pulp for Pampers," says Nelson. "The wonderful thing about tourism is that trees become more valuable on the mountainside than when they're cut down and hauled away. Locals are beginning to see this."

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