

Travel Chef *(Prologue)*

I decided to combine three of my hobbies into one story line. I will visit various places around the world, get a taste of the culture and cuisine while experiencing some adventure, drama, and fun.

Besides describing some of the interesting sights, I will visit some of the most famous eateries and then cook a unique recipe offered in those establishments. With pictures and critiques of course.

My first stop will be France.

Paris would be the obvious first choice, but I want to visit Marseilles instead. I toured that city during my Navy Mediterranean military duty. I am sure it has changed in the 56 years since then. I took a tour of Marseilles to another city close by. In my memory it was called Le Beau. It was the oldest city in France, established in 600 BC. I tried to find it on Google maps, but the closest I could find was a city called Panier, know as old Marseilles. The streets in the pictures I found, looked just like the ones I remembered. We had lunch at an old elegant ancient restaurants there. I took some pictures with a cheap camera I had purchased. The sky was the deepest blue I had ever seen and was contrasted with fluffy white clouds.

Travel Chef Chapter 1 *(Dinner in Marseilles)*





As I deplaned at the airport in Marseilles, I was asked for my passport. I told the agent, you never required me to show my passport when I landed on Omaha Beach in 1944. He didn't get it. I was one of many who freed France from Hitler's grasp. There is still a grave site dedicated to those who gave up their lives on that famous naval landing. I was one of the lucky ones.

It seems there is always some reason to go to war. Mostly, it is the corrupt politicians who promote the war for reasons unknown to the general public. It is now 1966, and the U.S. is defending South Vietnam from Communist invasion. Fortunately, at 41 years old, I am too old to be called up. Europe is fairly safe, although there is lots of bitterness toward the U.S. for their part in the Vietnam war.

Now, I was on a different kind of assault. I wanted to taste authentic French cuisine, and since Marseilles was the oldest established city in France, this was a good place to start. I took a taxi to my modest hotel and settled in for at least a week's stay. I was jet lagged, so my first task was to get a good night's sleep. I wanted to be rested before I journeyed out in the morning. This was an old hotel. I could tell by the noisy elevator that seemed to barely make its way up the shaft. There was only room for two or three persons and

it had one of those metal gates that opened and closed on hinges. Well, I didn't pay to stay at the Ritz.



It didn't take me long to fall into a deep sleep. When morning arrived, I felt invigorated and ready for my first day.

I had gotten a decent tourist map. I hoped this would keep me from getting lost. (Don't ask why I didn't use my cell phone and Google Maps with a foreign sim card.) This was 1966, personal computers had not been invented yet.) Before I entered any of the select French restaurants that I had investigated, I just wanted to walk around the area near my hotel and take in the local sights and smells. As I walked along the quay by the seaside, I was lured by the smells coming from a sidewalk bistro. They were serving French pastries and coffee. I had already had one cup in my hotel room, but this place looked very inviting.

I sat down and ordered some puff pastries. These had a soft delicate crust filled with real fruit lightly coated with sugar. Instead of coffee, I wanted to try something different. The menu listed ouzo and pastis.

Ouzo is a white drink favored in Greece, that had some real drug ingredients with a coconut flavor. Pastis was a green drink with a licorice flavor that contained anise. Both were outlawed in the states. I went with the Pastis because it was a French concoction. Not sure what reaction I was supposed to feel, but it was nothing psychedelic. Just left me with a pleasant calm. At

a table, not far from my location sat an attractive mid-30's lady. I caught her eye watching me. I wasn't looking for any romantic hookup, but she did look intriguing. I guess my return stare emboldened her as she got up and asked if she could join me. Sure, why not. I wasn't born yesterday and I am not an easy target for a scam. You are American. This was not a question. Her English was good, with a charming French accent. We continued with small talk. Why am I here? Where am I from? Etc. After our initial trading of personal details, I found out that she had spent some time abroad. England and the U.S. Maybe I was being too cautious. She seemed legitimately interested in me. She offered to show me around some of the sights. Having a local guide was not a bad idea. I could also ask her to dinner and get some advice on what to select. We agreed to meet at this same cafe in the late afternoon. Meanwhile, I found a tour offered at the hotel and decided that would be a good way to begin my trip. Besides the many interesting places near the hotel, the tour took us to Le Beau. This was called Old Marseilles and had been established in 600 BC. This was exactly the kind of place I wanted to see. We had a simple, but elegant lunch at one of the old restaurants in the center of the ancient streets.

Author's note:

When I was in the Navy in 1966, I did the tour to Le Beau. It was one of my most memorable tours and I ate at a restaurant similar to the one in my story.



I returned to my hotel and showered and dressed for dinner. I arrived at our arraigned meeting place early. You never want to keep a woman waiting.

This is bad manners. Although, if they keep you waiting, this is normal. She arrived several minutes after me. This is a good omen. So I had told her about the place I was most interested in dining at. She said that my selection was top notch. It was within walking distance of the hotel. I had made reservations for 7 PM. This is early for European locals. They often don't start dinning until 9 PM. So we got seated right away and ordered our drinks with a side of crisp bread sticks. I thought wine was appropriate at a French restaurant. I could have angered the waiter if I had asked for California wine. Several years before, a brand of California wine had won an international blind tasting test against some of the most prestigious French wines. I didn't want to appear cheap, so I ordered something in the middle of the wine list. Still, this was upward into the \$20 plus area. Remember, this is not 2025. Back then, \$20 was a decent amount.

So perusing the menu, I asked her what is the most authentic Marseilles entree? She said, that bouillabaisse was the oldest and most often ordered entree at this restaurant. I agreed that this was a good choice.

Typically bouillabaisse is made with a combination of mussels, clams, and chunks of flaky white fish with a delicate tomato and fish based broth. The serving was enough for both of us to dine. I also ordered some French bread, a delicate salad, and French pastries for desert. Her name was Marie, as in Marie Antoinette.



Her name is associated with the decline in the moral authority of the French monarchy in the closing years of the ancient regime. Although her courtly extravagance was but a minor cause of the financial disorders of the French state in that period. Her rejection of reform provoked unrest, and her policy of court resistance to the progress of the French Revolution finally led to the overthrow of the monarchy in August 1792.

Everything was going just super until an angry man came in and rushed to our table. Oh, deja vu. I feel like I have lived this moment several times before. What are you doing with my wife, he proclaimed in a loud voice? I am enjoying a nice dinner up until now. I knew this was too good to be true as he dragged her out of the restaurant. Just what I needed. To be killed by a jealous husband on my second day of vacation. At least we had almost finished our meal of bouillabaisse. I payed the tab, but only after I finished with a cup of coffee and a galette. This was a fruit filled pastry typical of French desserts.



The next morning, I decided to have breakfast at the same bistro as the day before. As I walked up to the tables, I saw Marie sitting at the same table as before. Without being asked I approached and sat down opposite to her. Instead of a welcoming smile, her face had a pronounced frown. I also saw some evidence of a bruise that her makeup could not completely conceal. I

said, why didn't you tell me that you were married? Marriage is not what I would call my present situation. It is more like prison. My husband is abusive and extremely jealous. I have been trying to leave him and take my daughter with me. I should have just gotten up and walked away at that point. Instead, I dived right in. Why don't you go to the police and report his abuse? My husband is the police. I have tried that, but he always comes up with some excuse and his buddies just ignore my side of the story.

So what is it that you think I can help you with? Obviously, your intention wasn't to provide me with a free guided tour. Oh, sorry about that. I don't have any family here that can help me get away from him. I need to take my daughter and leave. My husband has cut me off from all finances. No credit card or means of transportation. Is he going to suddenly appear and drag you out of her again? He is at work at the moment, so I am OK. My daughter is in school. I said, let me think about it. Getting involved in a domestic dispute was not in my plans. Meet me back here tomorrow morning, if it is still safe.

She got up and left. What am I getting myself into? I should just cut my trip short and leave while I can. I am just a sucker for a damsel in distress. After awhile, I came up with a plan that I think would work without much danger to me.

The next morning I returned to the same bistro. Marie was waiting there for me. I laid out my plan. Do you and your daughter have passports? Yes we do. OK, here is my plan. As I told you before, I am on a culinary journey. My next stop was going to be Barcelona. If you and your daughter want to come along with me, I can help you get there. That is as much help as I can provide. Your husband probably has resources to track you down. But it will at least give you some time and space to figure out your next move. She said, this is more than I hoped for. I have no way to repay you. Don't worry, I don't need any kind of repayment.

To be continued: Next stop Spain (only after I make some bouillabaisse and French pastries at home) This may take awhile.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 2 Trouble in Spain)



Marie and her daughter Reine made their escape with me and we arrived in Barcelona that evening. I set them up in a modest hotel and I found my own place a little nicer not too far from them. I at least wanted to treat them to dinner and chose a place to experience some of Spain's traditional foods. After all, this was the original intention of my travels.

Whenever I asked Google, (sorry, I am a time traveler you know), I meant the locals, what is the most traditional Spanish food, the #1 answer was paella. Some make it with some sea food, but the oldest version is made with chicken, either pork ribs or rabbit combined with green beans, butter beans, garlic, paprika and saffron. I wanted to try it with the rabbit. Not a typical meat used frequently in the states. There was no need to order anything else. It is all inclusive. But you can't go wrong with some pan basico tomato bread and prosciutto appetizer along with a bottle of wine.



So I was wondering how Marie was going to survive away from her husband's financial support. She provided me with a satisfying answer. I hope the relief didn't show up too much on my face. It so happens that she had a cousin in Barcelona who was willing to put her up until she could establish her own support. Marie was a school teacher by trade and with her proficient English, she could easily get a job teaching. With that worry out of the way, we all enjoyed the rest of the evening. I put them both in a taxi to take them back to their hotel and I assumed that was the last I would see of them.

I fell into a deep satisfying sleep dreaming of the next Spanish delicacies. The next morning, just as I was finishing my morning routine, there was a loud knock at the door. I opened it and to my surprise, there was a policeman claiming to be a member of Interpol. Accompanied by a couple others, he put me under arrest. I checked his credentials and they were valid. I guess it is true, "No good deed goes unpunished". You are charged with kidnapping and abduction. It wasn't hard to figure out where this came from. I willingly went with them down to the police station. Sure enough, when I arrived there was the same guy who had dragged Marie out of the restaurant days before. Where is my wife and child? I said why? You still need to satisfy your rage by abusing you wife some more. I saw the look on the police officer's face who brought me in. I am guessing he suspects there is more to the story than what he was told. I asked if I could talk to the Sargent alone. I said that I might be able to end this farce of an arrest. When I got alone with him, I said his wife and daughter willingly left with me out of fear. I will tell you where they are and you can send someone to fetch them without your French comrade in tow. Question them out of his presence and you will get a true picture of the situation. He said he would do that. They put me back in a cell and it was an hour later when someone came to let me out. You are free to go. As I was departing the police station, Marie and Reine saw me. She came up to me and apologized profusely. She told me her husband was put in jail himself for filing a false police report. I asked her if he knew about her cousin here in Barcelona? She said, unfortunately he does. Do you have any other relatives that you can safely stay with? Not really, but don't worry, I will figure out something.

I was still reeling from this mornings events. We shared a taxi back to our

prospective hotels. I asked her about how her daughter feels about her dad. She said she is scared of him because she witnessed some of his abusive behavior. I had already invested some effort into their safety, so I thought I shouldn't abandon them at this point. Why haven't you tried to get a divorce? Actually, I have already applied for a divorce and it is in the works. Even if I am not present, it will go into effect soon. How will you know if it gets approved? I have a friend in the court and I can call her to get the status. I decided to go all in. I said, I am not comfortable being in the same city as your husband. I had planned on spending more time in Barcelona, but Italy was on my agenda for my next stop. I am inclined to make the jump sooner. If you and Reine want to accompany me, you are welcome to come along. She said, you have already helped me more than I could hope for. I have no way of repaying you for your kindness. I told her that actually I am enjoying her company at my dinner experiences and if she is willing to come along, I will use her expertise in choosing the best culinary establishments. I am writing a book about my travels and the international foods I am sampling. This seemed to appease her temporarily. I said it would be best for us to leave ASAP and to take a train. I will cash in some of my travelers checks and pay for the train tickets in cash to reduce our paper trail.

I decided to go to Milan, Italy. It was about a 10 hr train ride. All three of us slept most of the way. Besides the U.S. and England, Marie had traveled extensively around Europe. She spoke fluent French, English, and adequate Italian. This was a tremendous help for me since I was lacking in that department. When we arrived in Milan, we found a decent middle class hotel. Before I reached the desk, Marie said that if I just got a hotel with separate bedrooms that would be suitable for her and her daughter, if that was agreeable with me. I thought that was a good money saving suggestion and it would be easier for us to make plans. It was still early morning and we were all beat. I suggested that we recoup for several hours, maybe take a nap, and then venture out in the early afternoon. They both agreed that this was a welcomed rest period. I was pleased to see that our rooms had separate bathrooms. This made it much easier to maintain our privacy and more comfortable. After all, we were strangers to each other. Next, Italian cuisine and culture

Travel Chef
(Chapter 3)

I told Marie that I thought we were fairly safe, but her husband seems to have some resources for tracking us down. I thought it would be a good idea to have all of us get some kind of disguise. It might even be fun. Her daughter thought it was a good idea too. So before we ventured out on tour, we found a costume shop. My hair was a common brown so I bought a red wig. Marie had long black hair and she went to a salon and cut it shorter. It actually made her look younger and cuter. I told her so. The daughter went for a blond wig. We also decided to act like a real family on vacation instead of one on the run. We sampled some really authentic Milanese dishes.



Polenta is basically cornmeal mush, and it can be made with any kind of cornmeal, ground coarse, medium or fine.

I asked Marie, what about Reine's school? She said she had just finished the year and began summer vacation. This takes care of another worry. We were free to go anywhere for at least the next three months.

We had lunch at a local cafe and Marie asked the locals about the best restaurants to sample Milanese food. Later we would go there for dinner. Meanwhile, we did act like a family on vacation and took some tours. Milan is not as well known as other Italian cities, but still has its own unique charm.

As we were just strolling along, we came upon some street performers. One was playing the violin and another some kind of guitar instrument. Marie went up to one of them and asked something that I could not hear. I saw his head give an ascent motion and then Reine came up and took the violin from his hands. Then she did something that astounded me. She played one of Mozart's concertos better than anything I have ever heard before. She even drew a larger crowd, and when she finished, many people threw money into the performers hat. She started to return to our side when the guy who lent her the violin dumped all the money into her little hands. She tried to refuse, but he insisted. As we walked away, Marie said, dinner is going to be on us tonight. Marie told me that Reine is a genius protege on the violin and she has high hopes for her career. After hearing her perform, I have no doubts about that.

Later that evening, I was treated to one of Italy's most tasty entrees. Osso buco.



To best describe this, it is a slow cooked bone-in center cut veal or pork

roast. I have had the American version of this and it was one of my favorites. Still, this had a more authentic flavor. Nothing like going to the source. Many people think Italian food is only spaghetti and pizza. They are really missing out. We also had a side order of risotto alla Milanese. This is a classic Italian dish made with Arborio rice, beef stock, saffron, onions, shallots, butter, white wine, and Parmesan cheese.

Veal is another Italian specialty. Veal is tender baby cow and is a traditional Milanese dish.



We took a taxi back toward our hotel. We both had more than enough wine to uplift our spirits. As we strolled along the sea side, without much notice, Marie grabbed my hand as we walked along. It seemed so much like a natural move, that neither of us thought too much about it. Back in our room, we talked for a little while before retiring. I told her about my army career and how I had spent 20 years in the service after the war ended. I had traveled to various military bases as a combat instructor. I guess that is why I never married. It got late and we both felt sleepy.

The next thing I noticed was the sun was up fairly high in the sky. When I went out to check on Marie and Reine, they had already left for the train station. My heart took a hit that really caught me off guard. I should have been relieved that Marie and Reine had a good chance to start over. My original plan was still in tact. In fact, I had already decided on Greece as my next adventure. Without thinking too much, I rushed out of the hotel and took the first taxi I saw. Pronto to the train station I told the driver. I hoped he understood my urgency. When I arrived, the train for Barcelona was just coming into the station. I surveyed the crowd and spotted Marie and Reine on the loading platform. I rushed over to them and grabbed both of their hands. Please don't leave, I pleaded. How about joining me for at least the next 3 months as I continue my journey? Same arraignments as before. You be my tour guide and interpreter, all expenses paid. I was afraid that I had just made the biggest fool out of myself ever. The sense of relief was overwhelming as both Marie and Reine stepped up and gave me a big hug.

Up until that moment, I hadn't realized how much I had enjoyed acting like I had a real family.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 4) Greece

While I was investigating some interesting restaurants, Reine and Marie were shopping in downtown Athens. We were scheduled to meet somewhere down near the pier. I had visited Athens and Corfu during my military travels. The Parthenon and Acropolis were the top tourist favorites.



The Parthenon is a former temple on the Athenian Acropolis. It is dedicated to the goddess Athena, whom the people of Athens considered their patroness. Construction started in 447 BC when the Delian League was at the peak power. It was completed in 438 BC. It is the most iconic symbol of Athens.



Foreign monies:

Greece was still using Drachmas. 30 Drachmas = \$1. In France they used Franks. 10 franks = \$2 In Spain they used the Peseta. 60 Pesetas = \$1 In Italy they used the Lire. 626 lyre = \$1. You had to be careful how you spent your money. It is easy to think you were spending Monopoly money instead of the real stuff. While walking around downtown Athens, I had seen several restaurants displaying roasting animals on spits in the window. I was never able to identify exactly what they were roasting. Not chickens or pigs for sure. I suspected they were possibly dogs, rabbits, or cats. Don't laugh. I had walked out on the pier waiting to return to my boat when I got hungry. I ordered what I thought was a hamburger from the vendor on the pier. The flavor was kind of sweet, so I asked him what was the meat. He told me it was cat.

As I approached our agreed upon meeting place, I witnessed some guy hitting Marie. As I got closer, I recognized him as her ex-husband. He had somehow tracked us down again. I needed to put a stop to this. I advanced on them as quietly as I could, grabbed him by the neck and pulled him off of

her. He turned to me and proclaimed, “So you are the guy who stole my wife.” As he ran at me in a rage, I spun him around, and without Reine or Marie seeing, I punched him sharply in the kidneys. Then I pushed him away from me. I could have killed him a dozens different ways, but I did not want them to see me do some serious harm to her ex and Reine's father. I imagine, as a police officer, he had some combat skills. But I had spent too many years training hardened combat veterans to be worried about this clown. Still, not wanting to do any serious damage, each time he ran at me, I just repeated the same move and punched him in the kidneys. The final time he tried to do harm to me, I put him in a choke hold and whispered in his ear, “If you ever come near these two again, I will kill you and no one will ever find your body.” He finally understood that he was no match for me. He finally left while looking back with a scowl on his face. Marie told me afterwards, that she was glad I didn't severely injure him. I said, he will recover, but he will be peeing blood for the next couple of weeks. I hoped that this was the last time we would have to face this kind of situation.

Marie and I were still maintaining a professional relationship. I did not want to take advantage of her in any way. Our relationship was moving along at a cautious pace, and we were getting closer each day. Reine had already accepted me as Marie's boyfriend, even though that was not my status. It was over the next several days that my status was elevated. We were still booking rooms with separate bedrooms. That would not be changing. But one night, after I retired, Marie slipped into my bed. Her excuse was that she thought Reine needed more privacy, since she was getting too old to sleep with her mom. Who am I to question her logic?

There are so many differences between the various countries cuisine. That was one of the reasons I embarked on this trip. I wanted to experience authentic dishes first hand. I didn't get to taste all the dishes I wanted to in France, Spain, or Italy, due to our circumstances, but now we can slow down and spend more time in each country. Here are some of the dishes we tried.

Souvake is the national skewered meat food of Greek cuisine.



I always like any kind of skewered meats. Pork, chicken, beef, or lamb.

Moussaka is one of the most varied meat dishes in Greek cuisine. Kind of like a meat lasagna.



Don't forget one of the most popular items. Pita bread sandwich, commonly called gyros in the U.S. The combinations are endless.



Besides Athens, we wanted to visit Corfu. When you see these photos you will understand why.





Here is one traditional dish from Corfu. It is called Sofrito. Veal cooked in wine sauce, garlic and white pepper.



Pastitsada is often served during festivals or special family occasions. It is a casserole dish that consists of pasta with spicy braised beef or rooster meat. Ingredients include chili peppers, garlic, onions, wine, olive oil, vinegar, cloves, bay leaf, cinnamon, tomatoes, black ground pepper, and grated Parmesan cheese. You can tell this is highly influenced by Italian cuisine. Looks just like spaghetti.



Now I am getting too hungry to continue the story. Me, Marie and Reine continue to enjoy these Greek Islands. We still have more adventures to report tomorrow. For now, we are stuffed with Greek delicacies.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 5)

We all really enjoyed the Greek islands, but decided it was time to move on. Next on my list was Israel. Not just for food specialties, but more for the history associated with this contested region.

Bethlehem, where Jesus was born is in Palestine. It is an agricultural market and trade town. Jerusalem is the site of some of Jesus's teaching and where he was crucified on Calvary hill and buried.

In 1947 the United Nations declared that Palestine, then under British mandate, should be split into separate Jewish and Palestinian states, and that Jerusalem, the holy city coveted by both groups, should be placed under international jurisdiction. The city is still highly contested and no resolution seems to be in the immediate future. Tourist can visit both sections of the city.

The only option for traveling from Greece to Israel was by plane. The flight was only 2 hours long and not too expensive. We had gotten up early and arrived in Tel Aviv around 10 am. We were all hungry and decided to immediately jump right into Israeli cuisine. We found a nearby local cafe.

Shakshuka is one of Israel's most popular dishes, typically served for breakfast or brunch. Hot, hearty and filling. It is based on a tomato and pepper sauce spiced with cumin and chili flakes with poached eggs on top with a sprinkling of parsley. You also have the option of having the dish centered in a bowl of hummus.

Reine opted for one of the most popular items. A falafel. It is a deep fried chickpea ball, served in a pita pocket with a bowl of hummus to dip into.

Marie and I tried Tubi 60. Tubi 60 is a potent liquor that originates from the northern city of Haifa. It is perhaps the most enigmatic drink in Israel, but no one is sure what is inside. It gives you a kind of high, but the company insists it has no drugs in it.

Shakshuka



Falafel



While we were walking around near our hotel, I spotted a music store. It was next to a plaza where many locals hang out. We went inside the store. I had been thinking about this ever since Reine performed on the streets of Italy. They had all kinds of instruments. I had played around with a guitar when I was younger, but hadn't touched one in years. Up on the wall were many fine violins. I asked Reine which ones looked the best. The shop owner took down several and let her play. She was very meticulous in trying each one. As far as I could tell, they all sounded pretty good, but I didn't have the ear of a virtuoso. After several minutes playing each one, she said one of them was far superior than the others. I asked the shop owner how much. The price he quoted was higher than I expected, but not out of my budget. I was still receiving a fairly high pension from my military service years. I told him to wrap it up. Of course that meant, put in in a nice sturdy case and I presented it to Reine. The delight that shown in her eyes was worth every cent. She never called me by my real name. She just referred to me as Viejo. (old man) This suited me just fine. To her, that is exactly what I was and looked like. She said, Thank you so much Viejo, but I don't know how I can repay you. I said, I know how. Can you stand in the center of the plaza and give me a private performance. What do you want to hear? Play something from "Fiddler on the Roof." She stood in the center of the plaza and started playing Hava Nagila. The title song is Hebrew for "Let us Rejoice"

Surprisingly, it had its source in Ukraine. It wasn't long before her private performance turned into a big public one. Drawn by her awesome playing quality, there soon was a circle of Jewish people around her with arms locked doing their traditional dance. After she finished, there was a collective applause. This was the highlight of my day and many of the elders came up and shook Reine's hand. Marie was pleased that I considered her daughter's desire to keep up with her music practice. I was sure that Marie would show her appreciation later that evening. I told her, we don't know when she can retrieve her own instrument and I didn't want her to miss out on something she truly enjoys.



So what to order for dinner? Israeli food is different from other European dishes. I wanted to try Sabich. It is served in a pita pocket, but is not considered fast food. It consists of fried eggplant, hard boiled eggs, hummus, tahini sauce, Israeli salad and pickles. For more flavor, replace the hummus with goat cheese and feta. Marie and Reine went for Chraime. It is a baked fish in tomato sauce, peppers, cumin, and paprika topped of with fresh coriander.

Sabich



Chraime



Israel by the ocean.



This is what I imagine Marie really looks like. I am so lucky.



An aerial view of Israel



The Masada



Fifteen Thousand Roman soldiers spent several months trying to assault the Masada. Eventually they built a ramp and successfully breached the citadel. When they entered, they found a city of death. All 960 anti-Roman Jews had killed themselves rather than be taken prisoners.

We got a good start on Israeli cuisine. Now it was time to visit Jerusalem. The history of this place gives me goosebumps. The Via Dolorosa means the way of suffering. It was the route Jesus walked on the way to Calvary to be crucified.





All three of us walked the entire route. There are 14 stations of the cross. I know this because I was raised by my mother as a Catholic. We used to stop at each spot and pray. This was totally different because I could imagine the actual scenes as I walked the Via Dolorosa. All three of us were extremely moved by this journey.





This is where Jesus was first condemned to die.

Here is another scene along the route.





We ended our walk at Jesus's tomb. I can't tell you how much emotion this



kind of tour leaves you with. You would have to experience it yourself. All I can tell you is all three of us were drained by the end of the day.

We didn't even feel like eating a big dinner. We just grabbed some street food along with a bottle of wine and returned to our hotel rooms. Since Jesus turned water into wine, I did not want that miracle to go unappreciated.



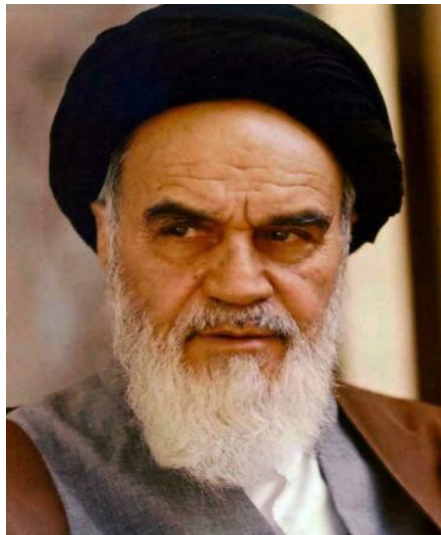
I am sure there are many other adventures that we could experience here, but I think for now we will set out to another country. Here are some photos of street food that is available. Really looks appetizing.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 6) Iran

I thought we should try something off the beaten path. France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Germany were the most common places tourists visited. In 1967, Iran was a friendly country to the U.S. The Shah of Iran was the leader until the Iranian revolution in 1979. He was kicked out and fled to the U.S. The Ayatollah Khomeini, I may be miss-pronouncing his name, but you get the

idea, took over and enforced Sharia law. This was a big setback for the Iranian people, especially the women.

Shah of Iran



AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI

But in 1967, it was relatively safe to visit Iran. Also, we were not far from Iran as we left Israel. The flight to Tehran was about 2 hrs. and 45 minutes. The first thing we notice was most of the woman wore veils that totally covered their head except for the eyes. We were told, that this was not necessary for foreign woman, but it was advised to try to follow the customs of the land. It is ironic that this country would have this custom. In public, they portrayed their woman as pious and virtuous. In private, they treated

them like slaves and often beat them. If you don't believe me, watch the movie starring Sally Fields called “Not without my Daughter”. I purchased some head coverings in the airport before we ventured out to find our hotel. Better to be safe than sorry. These two photos show the contrast of before and after the revolution. Can you guess which is which?



I decided to splurge on hotel accommodations. We booked rooms at the Tehran Hilton. It had an ideal location near many local restaurants which of course was my goal.

Not far from our hotel was the Chattanooga Cafe. So named because the Shah visited Tennessee several times and the owner thought it would be a good name to use. The Shah often ate there. That is where we decided to

eat our first meal.

We ordered Fesenjan. It is an iconic dish dating back to the Achameinid Empire in 515 B. C. Made from walnuts, pomegranate paste and chicken or duck. At the ancient ruins of Persepolis, archaeologists discovered a tablet detailing the ingredients used to make this. I figured, after all that time, they should have gotten it right.



For dessert we ordered affron Ice-Cream and Faloode. Faloode is a cold dessert, consisting of rice noodles mixed in semi frozen rose water and sugar syrup, similar to sorbet. This was definitely worth trying.



The next day, I decided to spend some time in my hotel room documenting some of our travels and writing about the food we had sampled. Marie and Reine said they wanted to venture out into the shopping district that was within walking distance of our hotel. Shopping was not my cup of tea anyway, so I just told them not to get lost. I figured with the pro U.S. attitude, there was no reason to worry. How wrong I was.

I had been working for a couple of hours when Reine burst into the hotel room with tears streaming down her face. My Mom has been arrested. Tell me what happened. We had been shopping and bought some of the latest fashions. We had forgotten to take our head coverings, but thought it wasn't necessary because we saw many others walking without any too. Mom had bought an attractive dress, because she wanted to surprise you, so she was wearing it back to the hotel. That was when a couple cops stopped us and demanded to see our passports. They took her away to the police station, but let me go when I told them my Dad was waiting for me back at the Hilton.

I suspected what was going on. The country started to be divided between strict Muslim fanatics and pro American factions. I told Reine to remain in the room, and I promised her I would get her Mom back. You can see the contrast between woman's fashion in the 60s versus post revolution. In the 60s, woman's fashion mirrored what you would see in the U.S.





I inquired at the desk where the police station was. Luckily, it wasn't too far from the hotel. Still I had to take a taxi to get there. I walked into the building and inquired at the front desk if they had a French national named Marie Monet in custody. They directed me to an office where a lieutenant was sitting behind a desk. I asked him how can I get my fiance released? I could see the disdain in his expression. He said, normally, the fine is \$1000 U.S. for indecent exposure. But these French whores come to our city and display extremely lewd attire. In this case the fine is \$5000. I could tell I was being defrauded, but I kept my cool. I felt like killing the guy right there. I knew what was going on here. I said, I would need an hour to get that kind of money, but if it would free my fiance, it is no problem for me. I returned in less than an hour and approached his office again. As I entered, I handed him an envelope with the \$5K inside. He looked in and saw I had done what he had asked. He said, go wait in the lobby. As I was leaving, I saw his reflection in the glass door as he took out $\frac{3}{4}$ of the money and stuffed it in his jacket pocket.

At least he followed through as Marie was led out of the back area. I

indicated to her to keep silent. I did notice how provocative she was dressed and it pleased me to know that it was for me she had dressed up.

We kept silent in the taxi ride back to the hotel. When we entered the room, Reine ran to her Mom and gave her a big hug.

Now it was my turn to speak. I said we are done with Iran. We need to check out of this hotel and I am going to the train station to take a train that goes across the border to Turkmenistan. Don't worry about me. I know how to take care of myself.

I needed Marie and Reine to get away as quickly as possible from Tehran in case my plan did not work out. I told Marie, that Interpol may come questioning her about me. Tell them that my name is Roger Smith and that I am an Israeli. We met in Israel and decided to spend some vacation time together. I told you that I am going back to Israel. You have caused me too much trouble. We should part our ways. You two take a flight to Paris. Tell me the name of a hotel that you will stay at. I will contact you in about a week. By that time, things should calm down. Don't worry, I am not going to kill anyone, even though I feel like it. Take this \$1000 for expenses.

I felt relief as the taxi left for the airport. It was already 4 PM. I took a taxi back to the police station. I waited across the street in a hidden location where I could watch the door. About 5:30 PM, I saw the police lieutenant come out of the door and hail a taxi. I ran out and caught the next one. I told the driver to just keep going and I would let him know where to let me out. After about 10 minutes, the policeman's taxi slowed down and he got out in front of a modest town home. I was glad he had a private residence. This will make my task easier. I waited a ½ hour to make sure he did not leave. I snuck up to the building and went around the side where a block wall separated his place from his neighbors. I found a window that allowed me to break in. The latch was easy to flip, so I didn't need to break the window. I slipped the latch and entered. I quietly made my way through the rooms until I heard a TV playing. He was sitting on a couch watching when I sprang into the room. He had no chance to move and I was on him before he could even yell out. I grabbed his belt and secured him to a chair and stuffed a doily that I had snatched from the couch arm into his mouth. He still had his uniform on and his handcuffs had been hanging from his belt. I took them and shoved him over to a radiator heater that had gas pipes going into the wall. I

handcuffed him to the pipe. This should keep him in place for awhile. I found his coat and retrieved my money. While he was still handcuffed, I rifled through his drawers and found a stash of money that was twice as much as he stole from me. I took that too.

My job was done here. I removed the gag from his mouth and as he started to yell, I slapped him sharply across the face. That silenced him for the moment. I said, that was for calling my girlfriend a whore. You will never get away with this he said. I have already gotten away with this. By the time you figure out how to get released from this pipe, I will be long gone. I stuffed the gag back into his mouth and conked him out with a chop to the neck. It is up to him to figure out how to get released when he wakes up in the morning. I did one more thing before I left. I found some scissors and crazy glue in his desk drawer. Using a marker, I penned a note to some cardboard and stuck it to his forehead. It said, "I am a corrupt policeman!" Signed "A victim." When he doesn't show up for work tomorrow, the office will send someone out to check on him. I was hoping he would be too embarrassed to retaliate.

I left his building and took a taxi back to the train station. I had bought a ticket for a 7 PM departure. It took me 15 hours to get to Turkmenistan's boarder. I found a hotel and paid for a week in advance. With nothing else to do for at least a week, I decided to check out the local cuisine. Why not? It will be a lonely ordeal, but I had to do something while waiting to reconnect with Marie in Paris. Marie should be OK, even if Interpol questiones her. I told her to tell them about the corrupt policeman. There was no evidence of her returning to France with a companion. The Iranian police did not know my name and never saw my passport.

What food do they eat in Turkmenistan and is there anything to see?

I will find out.

Travel Chef *(Chapter 7)*

My train ride left me in Ashgabat, just across the border from Iran. Ashgabat is the capital of Turkmenistan. This would not have been my choice for my next cuisine journey, but every place has something to offer. I was missing

Reine and Marie, but did not want to call them in case Interpol was monitoring her movements and contacts. So I might as well make the best of it. The hotel I was staying in wasn't too bad and not expensive. It would have been nice to have air conditioning since this whole area is a giant desert. I have suffered worse conditions. I had spent many a night in a fox hole hoping not to get my head blown off.

First things first. What to eat in Ashgabat?

Shurpa is one of the most popular Turkmen and Central Asian soups. It is made from mutton broth and contains potatoes, tomatoes, fried onions, carrots, flour, bay leaves, salt, and pepper. The broth and vegetable mix is served in a bowl along with the boiled mutton. A dollop of sour cream tops off this delicious dish.



Another popular and common food in the Turkic countries is Shashlykin. It is different than that found in other countries. The region uses little spice as they believe it hides the true flavor of the meats. I ordered this dish on my second night in Ashgabat. I always like items on a skewer.



Gutap, meaning half-moon, is a kind of flatbread stuffed with beef or lamb and onions. To me it resembled a tortilla and is stuffed with a variety of meat, potatoes, spinach or pumpkin.



I tried a different dish each night I was there. Pilaf, also called “ash” is the jewel in the crown of Turkmenistani cuisine. It has two main ingredients, rice and meat. Most use lamb and it is served in a mix of rice with additives like peppers, onions, vegetables and sometimes fresh or dried fruit. My polish aunt use to make pilaf and this tasted similar. She cooked Armenian

food for her husband.



So what do I do in Turkmenistan, besides miss Marie and Reine? About 5 hours away in Darvaza by train is an unusual phenomenon. There is gas leaking up from a crater. Earth scientists set fire to the gas to prevent it spreading. They expected the gas to burn off after a few weeks. Fifty years later, it is still burning. I never heard of such a thing, so I made the trek to view it by day and late at night.

Gas burning crater at Darvaza



I ended up most nights drinking in a bar down the street from my hotel. Mostly these locals left me alone. On my third night, an attractive lady asked to join me at the bar. Why not? I had no intentions of starting a romance, but talking with someone would ease my loneliness. Her name was Darma. She worked in a weaving factory, that as she described, was not much more than a back room in the store. The city had once been in the path of the silk road that originated in Shanghai and went all across middle Asia to Venice. I told her about my hobby of writing about foreign cuisine and that I would be leaving soon. Not having much to do, I was interested in her profession. I know that carpet and silk scarves were so after and this region was famous for their ancient technique. She offered to show me her store and how the technique of weaving was done. I told her that I was interested and I would visit her store the next day.

For breakfast I tried another local delicacy. Bilini or blinchiki are thin pan-sized Russian inspired pancakes. They are much thinner and wider than American style pancakes, but not as thin and wide as crepes. They are tasty and versatile, often served with sour cream and jam.

I am racking up some unusual treats that I would not have gotten if I had not needed to flee Iran. Here is a photo of Bilini.



After breakfast, I moseyed over to the textile store. I asked the attendant if Darma was working today? She goes into the back room and Darma comes out with a nice smile on her face. Not sure if you would come or not. I can



see by your wares that I am glad I did. She said, come in the back and I will show you some of our weaving mechanisms. This is not a modern factory. We have been using this same techniques for centuries. We find that it gives us the maximum control over the weave quality and fineness of the stitching.

Turkmen carpets and rugs have long been renowned for their durability and unique designs. They are exported to more than 50 countries.



I asked Darma to help me pick out a scarf for my girlfriend. Besides wanting some expert advice, I wanted to make it clear to her what my relationship status was. We went back out to the store front. Here is the scarf she picked out for me. I am sure Marie would be pleased with this gift. I also picked out a smaller one for Reine.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 8) *Back in France*

I awoke refreshed 5 hours later. It was still afternoon so I had time to spend with Marie and Reine catching up. I asked Marie what they had been doing since I was gone. Marie said she had been to Paris before, but it was many years ago. They had been acting like real tourist and seeing the sights. She said we will take you on a tour of the best ones. We don't mind seeing them again. She said that she did indeed get interviewed by Interpol. She told them about being arrested and being given a stiff fine. They said they have had similar complaints from other French woman and the government has issued a travel warning for Iran. They asked about you, and I told them what you told me to say. After that, I haven't heard from them again. By the way, here is \$6000 I took from that corrupt cop. You deserve compensation for the way he treated you. I also recovered the illegal fine I paid. Now it was my turn. She asked, why did you go to Turkmenistan? I said it was the closest country from Tehran by train and I didn't want to be seen at an airport. It would have been easy to spot my travel if that cop had put out a sketched portrait. I knew the train ride would take 15 hours and the cop would not get free from his own handcuffs until someone sent his buddies to rescue him. I imagine the embarrassment he endured. I told her about the message I glued to his forehead. This brought a smile to her face. I had no idea what was in Turkmenistan to see, but I have learned every city, no matter how boring it might seem, has something to offer. I gave her this example from my past.

I was touring Yosemite and Sequoia national parks with a group of friends and we happened to spend a couple nights in nearby Fresno, California. After one day in Yosemite, we didn't want to return, because the route had a winding road with too much construction that slowed us down. I bought a local tourist guide map and it listed this place called Forestiere Underground Gardens. This turned out to be one of the most unusual tours we had ever been on.

Baldassare Forestiere was an Italian immigrant. In his home town, they had dug out some corridors with hanging vines and plants. This vision had stuck in his memory. His first job in America was in New York digging train

tunnels for the railroad. Eventually he made his way to California and wanted to become an citrus tree farmer. Southern California was already saturated with orange tree farms, so he purchased land in Fresno. He soon found out that the top 4 feet of hard pan dirt was unsuitable for growing citrus trees. He dug a small cellar to escape the summer heat. Finding it effective and comfortable, he carved out a series of attached rooms. Thus began his 40 years of digging tunnels and rooms throughout his 10 acres of land. He found that the earth below was OK for growing citrus. At one point, he had carved out a tunnel large enough for cars to drive through and he envisioned opening a resort. He died after a surgery operation that left him with an infection that he did not take care of. Here is an example of one of the rooms in his miles of underground space.



So while in Turkmenistan, I visited the gas fire crater, a textile factory, and some ancient ruins. Mostly I just ate and documented the local food which was very unique and tasty.

I did not mention my dinner with Darma. No need to insight jealousy, even though I had conducted myself in a truly gentlemanly manner. Some things are best left unsaid.

So now that we were caught up on our separate week apart, it was time to get back to my hobby. Tasty foreign foods. Since we didn't stay that long in Marseilles, I didn't get a chance to experience much French cuisine. Of course Paris is going to be different just like different parts of the U.S. Southern food is much different from Detroit, New York, and East coast. States that border Mexico like Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico are all influenced by their southern neighbor.

Marie took me to the traditional sights, like the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and a boat trip down the Seine. All extremely enjoyable. Here are some of the foods we sampled during our 4 days in Paris.

So each morning we started out at La Maison d'Isabelle. It is a boulangerie that makes the best croissants in Paris. Coffee, orange juice and a croissant was all we really needed to start our day.



I would never think of eating snails, but when in Rome, do as the Romans do. Marie and Renie ordered them at dinner, so not wanting to be a sissy, I tried them too. Not bad, as long as you don't think too much. We dined at the most famous place to serve them. L'Escargot Montorgueil, a true Parisian institution that has been serving snails for nearly 200 years. They are usually served a dozen at a time in their shells stuffed with a variety of spices and sauces.



I finally found something I wanted. Steak tartare. I ordered this only to find out that it is made with raw ground beef seasoned with capers, onion, and black pepper. It is served with a raw egg on top. What ever happened to cooking stuff? Still, I ordered it, so I had to try it. It actually turned out to be very delicious. I just hope I did not come down with a case of botulism. It came with fries and some green beans. I ordered a side bowl of French onion soup and French bread. I couldn't go wrong with that.

I was really enjoying my time in Paris with good food, awesome sights, and being with Marie and Reine. Reine practiced her violin each day late

mornings. She didn't want to disturb the other hotel guests.

Steak Tartare



It was nice to see someone so dedicated to her craft. It wasn't a chore for her, but a delight. For us too.

I suggested to Marie that we head north. We can hit three countries at once. Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Summer is a good time to visit. She agreed. I was aware that we were half way through our three month adventure and I started to wonder how the end would turn out. Well, we will have to cross that bridge when we get there.

For now, I just want to enjoy the moments.
Northern Europe here we come.

Travel Chef

(Chapter 9) Northern Europe

Traveling by train in Europe is easy and affordable. We took a train from Paris to Copenhagen. After our two day stay in Denmark, we flew to Oslo. Since we had to pass through Denmark to get to Norway, we decided to spend a short time there. Copenhagen is a picturesque fishing town that kept

its old world charm.



The Danish “open faced” sandwiches, smorrebrod, are perhaps the most famous of the Danish food classics. It is simply rye bread with various toppings.

Typical toppings include pickled herring, roast beef and eggs topped with mayo and shrimps. A great choice for an authentic lunch.



stegt flæsk med persillesovs



A few years ago, Danes were asked to vote for their national dish. Stegt flæsk med persillesovs was no surprise. Crispy pork with parsley sauce and look at those potatoes.

Who has not tried Danish pastries? Even though, most people associate them

with Denmark, they were really brought there by Austrian bakers and are called Vienna bread. Who cares what they are called? We had these with our coffee every morning.



So what did we see while staying here for two days? Denmark has one of the oldest monarchies still in existence. It is a constitutional institution and a historic office of the Kingdom of Denmark. This includes Denmark proper, as well as the autonomous territories of the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. At Amalienborg Palace you can go behind the scenes in a real royal palace. Don't miss the palace square where you can watch the unforgettable changing of the guards.



We also toured the Copenhagen Zoo, a fantastic aquarium, and an art museum.

During this period, I noticed a slight change in Marie's composure. Men have no clue what goes on in a woman's mind. There is no training manual,

new or old, that can explain it. So I waited until Reine retired for the night and asked Marie what is wrong? At first she hesitated, but then she said, she was wondering where our relationship was going. I guess she had been thinking about the end of summer too. I said that I can't predict the future, but I hope she was going to be a part of it. She said, I just don't want to be thought of as a casual sex partner to be forgotten once our summer trips are over. Marie, I could never think of you that way. I just know that you still have a daughter to raise and guide her career. I also have some things I need to accomplish before I am ready to settle down. I am not good at expressing my feelings, but I can tell you that I fell for you a long time ago. When the time is right, we will know how to proceed. I hoped this talk eased her mind and let us continue to enjoy our trips and each other.

I must have said the right words, because the next morning she was upbeat and smiling again.

We were ready for our next country. Oslo, here we come. We flew there. The flight was only 1.5 hours. To take a train or ferry would have been a long ordeal.

Even though these four countries were close to each other, I expected the cuisine to be totally different. I was not wrong about that.

We arrived in Oslo and secured out hotel for 3 days. I know that this seems a short time to be able to visit all the city has to offer, but we have many other places to check out. The hotel was helpful in directing us to a good restaurant close by. I was anxious to try Norway's delights. Here are a couple shots of what the city looks like.



Of course Norway is the land of the Vikings. This Viking museum was on our list of attractions and we all enjoyed viewing it and reading the history.



The Ra II boat, made of reeds, attempted to sail from Peru to Polynesia in 1947. It did not make it. Thor Heyerdahl tried to prove that the Polynesians sailed north to inhabit Norway centuries before. I watched a good movie about this.



All these cities are rich in history and have many museums to display it. But I was here mainly for the food, although we did visit several museums and some castle forts.

Mathallen Oslo was the perfect place for us to start. It has over 30 specialty shops, cafes, and eateries that offer high quality products and dishes from small local chefs. Besides the traditional Norwegian cuisine, they offered some unique entrees that could not be found anywhere else.





Fiskesuppe is a comforting creamy and buttery fish soup that is iconic to Norway. The dish is made with fish, shellfish, and root vegetables boiled in a cream broth with butter and milk. This reminds me of a New England seafood chowder that I have made myself back in the states.

Known as the Norwegian national dish, Farikal is really a simple dish of mutton and cabbage. Like most traditional Norwegian food is hearty and tasty.



What not to order. Sheep's head. Even though this is a sot after meal for

Norwegians, I will pass. They say, the tastiest parts are the eyes and tongue. I should make this for my sister back in the states. She will not eat anything that looks back at her. Ha!



Every country has a different version of meatballs. Norway is no exception. These pan fried flat minced meatballs are served at Christmas time. To balance out the meatiness, hard boiled potatoes add the right touch. Pair the dish with mushy peas and lingonberry jam. This tastes something like cranberry gelatin.



Luckily we do a lot of walking getting around to the restaurants and museums or we would all be getting fat. Marie and Reine don't seem to be phased by the caloric intake, but I have to start watching my weight.

I perform a series of exercises each morning and also jog outside in the early morning before breakfast. This routine has served me well over the years.

So two northern countries down and two to go.

First we will tackle Sweden, then on to Finland to Finish. Ha, get it, to Finish. I've still got it. What I've got is some kind of mental disease. So my friends and family say.

Our last night there, I checked on Marie's feelings for me. It seems that she is still hot for me. Lucky me.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 10)

If Norway is the “Land of the Mid-Night Sun” Sweden is the land of “Blue Eyed Blonds” As we stepped off the train in Stockholm, Marie caught me eyeing the abundance of beautiful blonds that seemed to be everywhere. She said, I see you are looking at all these beautiful woman. Well, I have to look somewhere don't I? That's the best excuse you can come up with? Well, I really prefer dark haired woman. I hoped she could not see the lie in my eyes. I added, don't worry, none of these babes have anything over on you. I saw her smile and I hoped that got me out of this trap.



Swedish Bikini Team
Was I lying?

Stockholm is a unique capital. It encompasses 14 islands and more than 50 bridges on an extensive Baltic Sea archipelago. The cobblestone streets and ocher-colored building of Gamla San (the old town) are home to the 13th century Storkyrkan Cathedral, the Jungilig Slttet Royal Palace and the Nobel Museum. Ferries and sightseeing boats shuttle passengers between the islands. We planned on visiting that area.



We booked rooms for another three night stay. I hoped this would give us enough time to see the most traditional sights and sample Sweden's delicacies. Here are our dinner selections for the first night's meal. What a surprise. Swedish meatball are #1 on most lists. Still, not a bad selection. I liked the side of mashed potatoes and lingonberry. I mentioned before, this berry was kind of like cranberry, but sweeter.



Toast Skagen

We tried this as an appetizer. A toast with a mix of shrimp, mayonnaise, and sour cream.

Sill - This is a dish that you will either love or hate, there's about a 50/50 chance of either. There are many varieties and you can even eat fried herring fillets, but the most common way to eat herring in Sweden is the pickled herring.



I love this. I order this back in the states. It comes in a jar with what looks like sweet tarter sauce.

Marie ordered this tasty salmon dish. I also had to steal some from her plate.



Gravad lax (salmon)

It is made with savory herbs and topped with some kind of mustard sauce.

Reine opted for this traditional Swedish yellow pea soup.



So our first night in Sweden was a big success. I marveled at the large selection of unique Swedish dishes that were so different from Denmark and Norway.

Tomorrow should be a great day too.

It's tomorrow now.

So we had a great breakfast at Cafe Schweizer. A highly recommended coffee shop close to our hotel.

We ordered Swedish pancakes. Much lighter than the American kind. Kannelbular is a type of cinnamon bun that we found very tasty. I found out that most Swedes just eat some kind of sandwich for breakfast. Rumor has it that the reason is men don't get up before noon. Therefore, lunch seems to be their breakfast. I guess in a socialist country, working is not such a high priority.

We found these Swedish pastry items delicious. Pictured below is something called marins and crepes.



It was time for us to do some touring. I didn't mention much about Reine, except her exceptional musical ability. She is 14, going on 21. A beauty, just like her mom. I guess all the drama in her early life forced her to grow up faster than normal. Traveling around to all these different countries gives her a world perspective beyond her years. On one of our tour stops, it appeared we picked up a follower. Not following me or Marie, but a young Norwegian

boy, whom I imagined Reine somehow talked to. I asked Marie if she noticed? She said, I may not be as savvy as you, but I have a mother's instinct. Yes, I see we have a trailer. Instead of hiding from the situation, why don't we invite the young man over to be properly introduced? At least we can make a judgment on his personality and demeanor. We don't want Reine sneaking off to visit behind our backs. So that is what we did at the next tour stop. His name was Björn. A good Swedish and Norwegian name. Many heroic Vikings were named Björn. Also, I remember Björn Borg was a fantastic tennis player. I actually saw him play against Jimmy Connors in a celebrity tennis tournament in Newport Beach. Hi Björn, I am TC. That is what my girlfriend Marie calls me. Short for Travel Chef. I guess you have already met Reine. Yes, I did. His English was not bad. Do you also speak French? Yes I do, I have studied abroad and have learned several languages. How old are you? I am 16. I decided he seems OK. Polite and not too pushy. I will have to get Marie's impression a little later. Do you want to join us on our tour? Maybe you can give us some local information. It would be my pleasure.

Later, with Marie to the side, I asked her what she thought. As long as we can keep an eye on them, I approve.

I imagine Reine is old enough to experience some careful companionship. We shall see.

Actually, with Björn along with us, we did get to see some of sights that were not on the tour agenda. As the day was winding down, I asked him if he would like join us later for dinner. I almost expected him to say, "Does a bear xxxx in the woods. No, he just politely accepted. I said, we will venture out from our hotel about 7:30. This far north in the summer, the sun almost never sets. It kind of throws off your time clock though.

So now we are a foursome, at least for the next day or so. I could see that Reine was more upbeat and outgoing than usual. This was a good change. She was probably getting bored just eating and looking at museums.

So Björn met us as we left our hotel. Do you know of any off-beat eateries that might have some unusual entrees? He said, I know of a couple. They are not fancy places, but do have the best food in the area. That is what I am looking for.

So we followed him to a back alley cafe. He was right about not being fancy, but we didn't care about that. I was looking for items that were not on the top of the traditional country's menus. This is what we were presented with. He brought us to a smorgasbord. The selection was endless. There were so many choices that it was hard to decide. Some were just appetizers, some full entrees. This was not exactly a buffet. You could not sample everything. So we selected what looked the most interesting. There were too many pictures to include, so I just selected the most interesting.

Smorgstarta, a creamy and savory sandwich cake. Prepared with two or three layers of delicious sandwich filling and then decorated with vibrant and fresh vegetables, seafood and cold cuts.



Marinated cucumbers sitting between the butter and picked herring were another choice for us.

These pictures are worth a thousand words.







Björn really came through for us. We enjoyed this meal as the best experience we had during our days in Sweden. As we walked back to our hotel, I told Björn we were leaving the next morning for Finland. I was worried the parting would have a negative effect on Reine. She seemed to take it all in stride. Maybe she was more mature than I gave her credit for.

The train from Stockholm to Helsinki takes 27 hours. The air flight takes 1 hour. This was a no-brainer. Björn was there in the morning to say goodbye. I thanked him for his guidance and told him his presence was a great help.

We will arrive in Helsinki early enough to get our hotel and get ready for Finland's nighttime cuisine. I was told, it was much different than Sweden, Denmark, and Norway because it is isolated from those countries by the Baltic Sea. Many tourists skip Finland because of its remoteness. To me, it just meant the food will be more unique.

Travel Chef
(Chapter 11) Finland

So just as I suspected, Finnish food was totally different from other countries. These were the selections for our first dinner here. Also, Helsinki was worth the trip to investigate.



Lohikeitto is a soup made with salmon, onions, carrots, potatoes, and cream of full fat milk. It is often garnished with dill and served with rye bread. All these Scandinavian countries all seem to have an abundance of fresh salmon. And why not? They are surrounded by deep cold seas and fishing is one of their means of income and commerce. We ate at Lappi Ravintola because we were told they have the best salmon soup in town.



Kaalikaaryleet (Cabbage Rolls) are a flavorful side dish or light main course. The cabbage is stuffed with beef, spices, onions and usually served with lingonberry jam. Where have I heard that name before? All over Scandinavia.

Authors Note:

Several months ago, I really made Swedish meatballs. I ordered this lingonberry preserve from Amazon to make my meal authentic Scandinavian. It is really tasty.



Helsinki, a very picturesque city.

Now here was an entree that I just had to try.



Proonkaristys is the national dish of Finland. Prepared by sauteing reindeer meat. The dish originates from the Arctic Lapland where the semi-nomad indigenous people called Saame have been herding reindeer for centuries.

The next morning, as we were getting ready for some tours, who do you think met us at our hotel steps. Björn. Reine must have phoned him with our hotel address. Why am I not surprised? Young love is relentless. Björn said he is familiar with Finland's cuisine and would like to be our guide if we let him. He said he is on summer break from school and also from his job. I was not about to put a damper on Reine's mood. Of course I said yes. The delight in her eyes said I made the right choice. Later on, I told Marie we have to keep a double watch on these two. She echoed my concern. I decided that I needed to do more than just agree. I am not Reine's father, but in his absence, I feel like it is my duty to set things straight. Björn and I were alone, while the ladies went to the restroom, I gave him my speech. Björn, I want you to realize who you are dealing with. Reine is a potential world class violinist. In my mind, she is already world class. I want you to ask her to play for you. I also want you to understand that if you do anything that alters her course away from her true goal, that I will hunt you down, and there is no place on

Earth where you can hide. I can see that he was offended by my comments. He said that he would never do anything to hurt Reine or curtail her career. I said, I feel you are sincere and it is not you so much that I am worried about. Reine is impetuous. You are probably the first real love interest, other than some middle school crush, that she might have had in the past. So I am relying on your maturity to correct her, if she has a mind to run off with you. Do you understand? Yes sir, I understand completely.

So Björn did as I asked. He told Reine that he would really like to hear her play. He had been told that she was pretty good. I found a plaza just like the one in Italy and Israel. Not too many people were around until Reine started playing. She played two famous concertos. As she played, just like before, she drew a crowd. Before she finished the second one, there were 50 locals standing around in awe. I could see that Björn was just as impressed as anyone. I think this exhibition did more for him to understand than all the words of my speech. The rest of the evening, Björn treated Reine like she was a glass figurine. Being careful not to touch or get too close.

Björn was fairly familiar with Finland. Apparently he had visited the country during one of his past summer breaks. Just like before, his guidance insured that we saw the best and most economical parts of the city. He also knew of the best places to eat. This helped me considerably with my food investigations.

Here are some of the tours we went on.

We took a boat cruise tour of Tallinn. The Historic Center (Old Town) of Tallinn is an exceptionally complete and well-preserved medieval northern European trading city on the coast of the Baltic Sea. It was an active trading center in the 13th thru 16th centuries. It is a UNESCO world heritage site.

Here is a photo of the town center.



This was a 3 hours cruise and took up most of our second day. With only one day left, we wanted to make the best of it.

We took a 1.5 hour boat cruise around the islands. We went past many of Helsinki's top tourist spots and spent a relaxing time doing it. The boat served lunch aboard and that was a treat in itself.

I asked Björn what he wanted to do with his life. He said he wanted to study structural engineering. There are so many bridges in Sweden and new ones are being proposed every year. The old ones need structural strengthening. I agreed with him. That is not a bad choice for a career. I was starting to like this boy more and more.

Let's make this night a memorable one.

Björn did not disappoint. True to his word, we sampled some of Finland's most unique dishes.



Kalakukko (Fish Pie)



Leipajuusto (Cheese Bread)



Mustikkapiirakka (Blueberry Pie)

Last night was our last day in Finland. Marie and Reine were scheduled to fly to Barcelona this next afternoon. In the morning, when Marie went to check on Reine, she found out that she was missing from her room. Panic time. I suspected where she might have gone. I told Marie that she probably didn't want to leave Björn, and that is most likely who she is with. Don't worry, I will track them down. As I left the hotel lobby in a hurry, who was coming down the walk holding Reine's hand. It looked like my speech and Reine's performance had the right affect on Björn. I could see that Reine was crying. Mr TC, I have brought Reine back to her Mom and you. I said, Reine, you don't have to be so dramatic. You can call Björn, write to him, and if he has some time off, he can come visit you in Barcelona. This seemed to appease her somewhat. I thanked Björn for his help in returning Marie's daughter. We are both thankful to you and you will always be welcome to be our tour and food guide in another time or place.

Last night Marie told me that she needed to go back to Barcelona. Her cousin was asking about her and she needed to get back there in time to find a job as a school teacher. Reine needed to sign up for fall semester. I had forgotten how quickly our time together went by. Of course I knew these

where all legitimate reasons to end our vacation. I told Marie that I needed to continue my research and that I was thinking of going to Russia. The end was happening all so fast, I didn't have time to process my emotions.

Back in the hotel, Marie and Reine were having a conversation that I was not privy to. I could hear some yelling and crying behind the door.

This was their private discussion:

Marie: What were you thinking? Were you going to throw your career away on a boy you have only known for a week? But Mom, I love him. You are infatuated with him. You are too immature to know what love is. What about you and TC? Do you love him? My feelings for him are strong, but we have only known each other for a few months. Don't you think I would like to run away with him? We both have responsibilities and are mature enough to realize that. If we are meant to be together, time will tell. That is the same for you and Björn. I like him too, but he hasn't established himself in the world ether. Like TC said. We are not forbidding you from seeing him. Give it some time, write and talk to each other. If your feelings remain strong enough, they will pass the test of time.

When they both came out of the bedroom, I could tell something got resolved.

For now, we had to hurry to the airport. We didn't have much time to talk about our future. I told Marie that I would call her when I got settled in Russia. I have made a commitment to this project.

Travel Chef
(The Last Chapter)

I had trouble deciding how to end this story. Does everyone live happily ever after? Does Travel Chef marry Marie? What happened to Reine?

It would be easy to just compile a happy ending, but every story needs some drama before the final curtain.

This is what I came up with.

From Russia with Love.

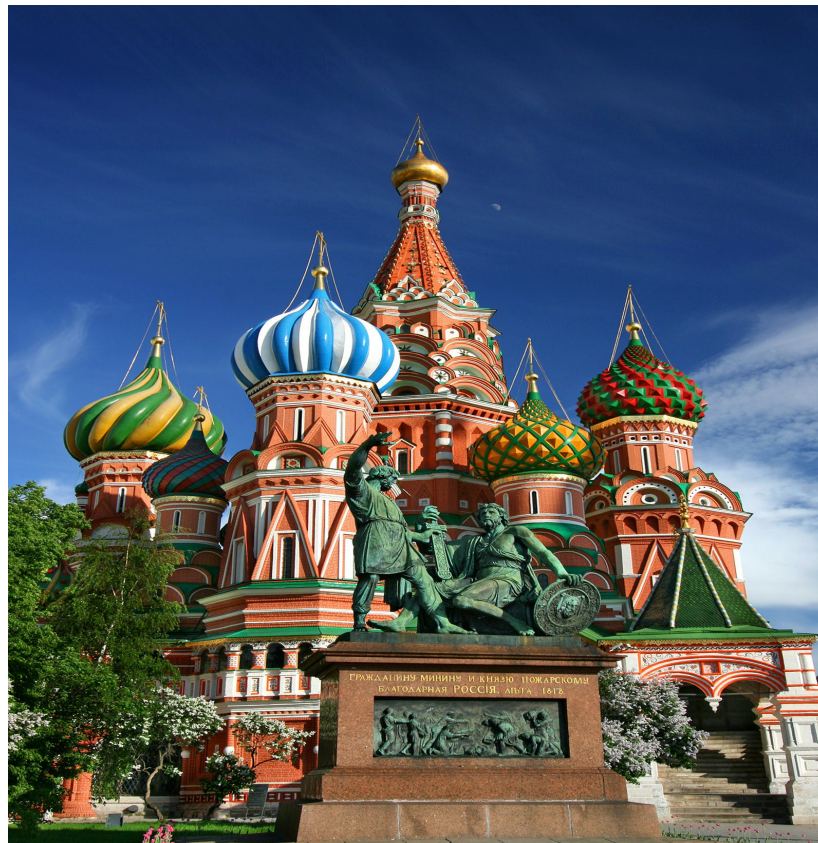
In 1967, Nikita Khrushchev was no longer head of the Communist Party in Russia. His influence was still felt though. I remember, what I considered a funny story at the time. Khrushchev wanted to visit Disneyland in Anaheim. He required the park to be closed to all others. Disneyland refused to grant his request. They said, this is a free country and no foreign dictator has priority over common U.S. citizens. You can imagine what an insult this was to him.

The Kremlin





Moscow seen from the the Moskva river.



Moscow, a truly spectacular city.

I arrived in Moscow the day after I left Marie and Reine at the airport. I had stayed one more night in Helsinki. I took a train to Moscow. An 11 hours trip. The ride gave me some time to process my feelings and contemplate my future. It was sad to travel alone, but I knew Marie and I still had a future

together. Not sure what that would be, but I was sure we would join up again. Meanwhile, I had to get my mind back on my project. My intent for this whole ordeal was to publish an international cookbook. I had been taking lots of pictures of the surroundings and of all the dishes that I had sampled. I have a lot of material. Each day I had been keeping a journal of the places and food specialties along with the ingredients of each countries cuisine.

Without Marie and Reine to accompany me, my desire to tour was curtailed. Still, I had to eat. I even hired a guide to take me to the best restaurant where I could sample the best of what Russia had to offer.

My dinner venture turned out much better than I expected. This kind of got me out of my funk. Just like other countries, Russia has some unique foods and presentations. These are the first two dishes I tried.



Pelmeni

Pelmeni is a Russian spin on China's dumplings and Poland's pierogi. Somewhat of a national dish, it's best enjoyed smothered in sour cream with a shot of Vodka. What would Russian food be without Vodka?

Borscht Moskovy



Borscht is a Slavic staple native to neighboring Ukraine. I have always heard this is a standard Russian mix made up mainly of beetroot, cabbage, and beef. The beetroot gives it a distinctive bright red color. I knew I needed to try this. I never had any in the states.



Blini, sometimes known as a Russian or Ukrainian pancake is a must to try when in Moscow. Imagine a paper thin crepe made from buckwheat flour smothered in toppings such as caviar or smetana. This is typically 8 inch in diameter, so it is a full meal.

PONCHIKI



These Russian doughnuts are served a number of ways, but one thing is always certain, they should be piping hot and smothered in powdered sugar. These delicious treats are common in food stalls, but can also easily be found in cafes that specialize in ponchiki called pyshechnaya.

KHACHAPURI



Khachapuri comes in many forms, but the most popular is Adjarian khachapuri. It is a buttery cheese boat made with sulguni (a brine Georgian cheese) and topped with a raw egg.



CHEBUREKI

Another, not-so-Russian must eat, hailing from Crimea, is chebureki. It is essentially a Crimean empanada filled with cheese, meat, or herbs. I tried all three fillings. Sounds like something from South America.

So my first two days in Russia were a success. I spent the evening writing a letter to Marie. I wanted to tell her how much I missed her and that even though we have different responsibilities for now, someday we will have the time to make plans that will keep us together. I know that she will not be able to respond, since I am on the move. But I feel I have enough material to return home and make the book I want to make.



Since I am here, I might as well see some sights.

There was really not much to see here in Moscow. I did visit Red Square, Gorky Park, and took a river cruise down the Moskva river. I booked a flight back to the states with a stop over in Paris. It is approximately 6000 miles from Moscow to LAX. With the stopover, I arrived in LA in 11 hours. I was exhausted, so it took me a day or so to recover from jet lag.

Gorky Park



The next nine months went by in a whirlwind. I published my book and started doing the chef tour. My book was a hit and the recipes I cooked and showed on TV made me a minor celebrity. Along with my pension, I started to replenish my bank account.

With my new earned wealth, I opened a very inventive restaurant called “Five Worlds”. I sectioned off the building into 5 small International kitchens. They featured, French, Italian, Israeli, Spanish, and Turkmenistan cuisine. My idea was a big hit.

I continued to write and call Marie. Lots of things were changing for her too. She did find a job as a school teacher and Reine continued to climb higher with her ability on the violin.

Björn did indeed visit Reine and they started up a long distance relationship. They are both busy growing up and establishing their own careers, but still kept in contact with each other. He even made a trip during summer vacation to see her. I don't blame him. Reine would be a catch for any guy.

Reine also re-connected with her real father. It seems that he realized that his former actions isolated him from his daughter and he vowed to change. I asked Marie if that meant she would connect up with him again too? She said, no way. I was relieved to hear that. After that, both Marie and Reine returned to Marseilles to live back in their home city.

Summer time was rolling around again and I wondered if Marie would be interested in joining me on another food tour. She agreed to spend at least a

month with me. This time, I had something else in mind. I told her that I wanted to experience the cuisine of the Polynesians Islands. I flew to Marseilles and picked her up. We then flew to Bora Bora. I booked an over-water bungalow for a week.



Unique underwater restaurant



We spent the first two days and nights re-acquainting our selves. It was like we were strangers again. After a couple days snorkeling and enjoying staying in Paradise, we settled into a comfortable routine. On the third day and night, I arraigned a very romantic dinner and island cruise. It was on the boat that I presented her with an engagement ring. I told her that I only had room in my heart for one person, and she was it. Just like all men, I was afraid that she would say no. She didn't say no. She said yes, but I can't marry you yet. I still have Reine to watch over. My job as a mother is not done. I told her that I know this, but I didn't want to lose her to another suitor. She said you shouldn't have worried, I also only have you in my heart. I will marry you when the time is right. Our affection for each other just took a giant leap forward. We spent the final days there as if we were really on a

honeymoon. I still took advantage of the local cuisine to add to my culinary collection.

Pua toro is a dish that is essentially canned corned beef. The dish is prepared by sauteing corned beef in a skillet together with chopped red onions, cabbage, canned tomatoes or tomato sauce, garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper. It is recommended to serve it with spaghetti, rice, or roasted breadfruit. This doesn't sound very Polynesian, does it?

Pua toro



Poisson cru



Poisson cru is a Tahitian national dish that consists of raw tuna, lime juice, various vegetables, and coconut milk. The tuna is briefly marinated in lime juice and then coconut milk is added to mellow the acidity. Not sure if I want to try anything that starts with the word poison.

Pahua taioro



This is an exquisite Tahitian dish that can be based on either turbot snails (ma'oa) or clams (pahua). Both snails and clams should be soaked in fresh water for a few hours before being combined with taioro, a condiment made by fermenting almonds, grated coconut, seawater, and shrimps.

In the end, garlic, onions, salt, and pepper are added. This dish should be served at room temperature.

First poison tuna, now snails again. I am thinking maybe Polynesian cuisine is not my cup of tea.

Fafaru



Fafaru is a traditional and unusual Polynesian dish. It is distinctive because of its intense aroma of rotten fish. Crushed shrimps are marinated in a glass jar filled with seawater, preferably under the sun, for two or three days. The mixture is filtered, and tuna slices are left in the liquid to ferment for three to eight hours, depending on the desired flavor.

Contrary to its strong smell, fafaru has a slightly sweetish, soft taste. It is best served with bottled *mitihue*, which is a fermented coconut milk product.

Poison fish, snails, and now rotten fish. Isn't there something that Maria and I can actually eat?

This reminds me of two Asian foods that I have sampled only once in the past. I tried stinky tofu. Yes, you heard it right. I have never eaten shit, but I imagine it would taste something like that. They say it is an acquired taste. Why try?

Another Asian mystery food is Durian fruit. Durian has been described as the most foul-smelling fruit in the world. Its aroma has been compared to **raw sewage, rotting flesh and smelly gym socks**. Durian's smell is so pungent, that the spiky-skinned, custard-like fruit is even banned from public places in Singapore and Malaysia. No thank you.



Poulet fafa

Poulet fafa is a traditional Tahitian dish, and it is most commonly used as a part of ahima'a, or pit barbecue. The Hawaiian version of the dish is called chicken luau. Chicken is cut into pieces, fried in hot oil until browned, and then removed. Looks like the leaves that covered the meat are chopped up and added to the dish. Onion, garlic, and ginger are sauteed in the remaining oil, then the chicken pieces are added back into the dish and cooked until tender. It is recommended to add cornstarch or arrowroot dissolved in coconut milk into the dish, as it will thicken the sauce.

Finally, something that we can eat. This was a very tasty dish. Mostly Marie and I stuck to traditional meals, like steak and lobster.

So my and Marie's honeymoon like trip has come to an end. We reluctantly returned to our separate lives. I continued to work on my restaurant's cuisines and published a couple more culinary books.

We continued like this for a few more years. Then I heard that Reine was invited to play at Carnegie Hall.

Marie and I traveled to New York City and meet up to see her performance.

When I saw Reine before her performance, I realized that she had grown up and was independent. I was surprised, but not too surprised, to see Björn there too. I noticed that Reine was carrying the same violin that I had purchased in Greece. I asked her, are you sure you want to perform at the Canegie with this same old violin? Reine said, this same old violin is a Stradivarius. I am sure the shop owner knew this when he sold it to us. It was worth thousands more than you paid for it. I imagine that shop owner saw something in her that only an expert could see. Of course Reine played superbly and received several standing ovations.

Later we all joined to celebrate at one of New York's famous restaurants. It was just the four of us, myself, Marie, Björn and Reine. Just like old times. Reine's father begged off, saying he had some business to attend to.

Later that night, it was just Marie and I in our hotel room. I said, Marie, it is time. She knew what I meant. We set the date for our wedding for the following spring. After we were married, I asked her, where do you want to

go on our real honeymoon? She said, you're the Travel Chef, you chose.

The End

Now I have to spend some time going through all the pictures I inserted in this story to see what I want to select to actually make. This may take some time. At least I can skip Polynesian cuisine.

Some parts of this story were taken from my real life. I did not serve in World War II, but I did serve during the Vietnam War. I made two tours to the Mediterranean and visited many of those cities. I did tour Marseilles and Le Beau. I also ate a cat burger on the pier in Athens and visited Corfu. I drank Pasteis and Ozzo. I never visited Bora Bora, but I always wanted to. I think that is one thing on my bucket list that I will not get to experience. Probably \$12K for 1 week. There are other places almost as unique for half the price.