

Notes on Life & Living Well™

Smart financial choices are just part of the puzzle

Your garden flowers have deep roots in history

As you plant your seeds and set out tender plants, you are, whether you realize it or not, continuing a tradition that is millennia old. The Egyptians grew roses, cornflowers, daisies and iris. Queen Hatshepsut sent envoys south to Punt (possibly near modern day Somalia) and beyond to bring her new species of flowers and trees.

The Persians were renowned for loving fragrant gardens. Centuries later wealthy Romans planted beds of flowers in their enclosed courtyards. These were said to include crocus, cyclamen, cornflowers, lavender, lilies and violets.



Try this great travel diary idea

This is in the category of “why didn’t I think of that?”

It’s easy to take along a travel diary, but if we are honest, few of us write in it after the first few days of a trip.

Here is a way to have that record when you get home. Each day buy a postcard, wherever you are, and send it to yourself at home. You can write a brief account of what you are doing that day. When you get home, you will have a complete record of where you visited and what you saw. If you see two or three postcards that depict what you are seeing and want to remember, splurge and send two or three to yourself.

When you get home, you can put them all in a postcard album or scrapbook, or even bind them together.

Gardening in Europe declined with the fall of Rome, but the Arabs who conquered Persia and ultimately ruled as far west as the Iberian Peninsula brought the Persian appreciation of gardening, including flowers, with them. Roses, lilies, hollyhock, violets and wall flowers were among the species that graced those gardens.

Monasteries planned elaborate herb gardens and raised some flowers, especially to adorn the altar. Formal and elegant ornamental flower gardening was once limited to great estates and manor houses. But long before the first colonists arrived in the new world, there had been a democratization of flower gardening.

Just as today we sometimes contemplate what plants we would take with us to settle a new planet, our colonial forbears selected seeds and roots of their familiar plants and brought these with them to colonize a new world. Generally these would be easy to care for and have some use too. They might be remedies for common ailments, season food or dye fabric.

The earliest cultivation of flowers long predates written history. “Useful” flowers, including herbal remedies, were cultivated in the Neolithic age and quite possibly earlier than that. Most of the flowers we enjoy today have been grown – and altered by human selection – for countless centuries. The one essential criteria for a plant to become part of the gardener’s repertoire is that it be adaptable. Many of our common garden species are so adaptable they are today cultivated around the world. Their place of origin is sometimes lost in the mists of gardens worldwide.

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This is the year to travel abroad

Airline prices are lower. Average ticket prices to London, Paris, Madrid and Rome are down roughly 10% since last year, according to Expedia. The US dollar remains strong, which means your dollars will go further in Europe, for example. And there is no time like the present.

For children, there is no greater gift that you can give them, no more life expanding experience, than taking them to see other countries, other peoples, other customs and cultures. And by the way, it will also open your eyes because even if you are a seasoned traveler, you will be seeing the world through a child's eyes – and expanding their world for their entire lives.

Will it take them out of their comfort zone? Of course. It will also increase their cultural sensitivity. Not all people do as we do. In Spain and Portugal you may find most businesses closed and shuttered for a couple of hours in the middle of the day (siesta time, a smart choice in a hot climate), dinner isn't served until 7 or 8 pm, and parents may be strolling in the cool evening with their children at 11 pm. Travel teaches children to be open to new and unfamiliar experiences.

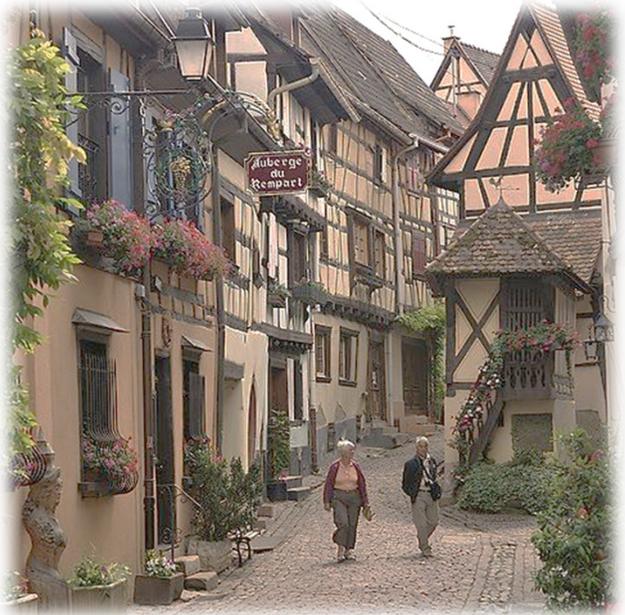
Traveling as a family introduces children to conquering the obstacles of using public transit in a foreign country, or asking for simple things in a grocery store. It helps build confidence that they can deal with the new, the unexpected and the unanticipated.

Even if you don't travel long enough for any second language fluency (which typically takes six months or longer), you will all be exposed to the sounds, rhythms, patterns, and different intonations of foreign speech, or even different versions of English. Later in their lives your kids' brains may be more sensitive to these nuances and they may even pick up languages more easily.

Traveling also helps prepare your kids to be world citizens – critical to all of our futures. Whether you like it or not, with the Internet and social media, we are globalizing quickly. Children who have been abroad will have more confidence going overseas again, perhaps for study or even for work.

Traveling abroad can also increase awareness of the span of history. In the US something 200 years old is *old*. A thousand years old here is *ancient*. In Europe, Westminster Abbey, still an active church, is almost that old. The church Santa Sabina in Rome, built in 422 AD, and largely unchanged since, is still in use by the Catholic Church. The French painted caves are more than 35,000 years old.

Or are you staying stateside because of terrorism? According to one travel blogger, "Your risk of being killed in a car crash (one in 19,000), drowning in your bathtub (one in 800,000), or being struck by lightning (one in 5.5 million) far exceed your risk of dying from terrorism (one in 20 million).



Jamaica Gingerbread

2 cups flour
3 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. baking soda
½ cup butter
¾ cup brown sugar
¾ cup molasses
⅔ cup milk
1 egg

Sift dry ingredients. Place butter, sugar, molasses and milk in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir until the butter has melted. Then add this mixture and the egg to the dry ingredients. Beat well. Pour into a greased 9 by 4-inch loaf pan. Bake at 325 degrees for 50 minutes to one hour. Cool on rack and store in airtight container.

If desired, glaze with Lime Glaze Icing:

1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
½ tsp. lime juice
Milk as needed for glaze consistency

Beat together and spread on gingerbread.