



photos: (left to right): Niki Gardner / Susanne Kries

Hidden Europe Beyond the Guidebooks

FOR THIS ISSUE OF PACKED WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO WELCOME TO OUR PAGES **NICKY GARDNER [NG]** AND **SUSANNE KRIES [SK]**, THE INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN BEHIND **HIDDEN EUROPE** - THE MAGAZINE THAT EXPLORES EUROPE'S SPECIAL SPACES.

HOW DID YOU COME TO START HIDDEN EUROPE?

[NG] Well, we were standing on a pier on a remote island in the Faroes, with the sun just beginning to poke through the morning mist. Stunning! We wondered why regular guidebooks just don't seem to cover these far-out spots.

WHY HIDDEN EUROPE?

[SK] Says it all, doesn't it? We wanted to feature those parts of Europe that are ignored by the regular media. And also perhaps give voice to the people who live in those places. There's more to Europe than Paris, Amsterdam and Venice.

MOTIVATIONS FOR TRAVEL. YOU'VE CHOSEN A LIFE OF ALMOST CONSTANT EXPLORATION. CAN YOU SAY WHERE THIS COMES FROM?

[NG] When I was a girl, only just big enough to walk, I always wondered where the path at the end of garden led to. I've never lost that naive curiosity about places. I was mad about maps, and used to make up imaginary journeys to places a thousand miles away.

[SK] For me, it was really languages that got me into travel. And books. Jules Verne for example always stirred my imagination when I was young.

WHICH HAVE BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE DESTINATIONS THAT YOUR WORK WITH HIDDEN EUROPE HAS TAKEN YOU TO?

[SK] That's a tough one. The Åland Islands are amazing. They're in the Baltic. And I really love the Orkneys in Scotland.

[NG] Albania and Belarus for starters. Plus I have a real affection for Polish small

towns. And I must throw in an island or two. The Lofotens in northern Norway are just wonderful.

[SK] I guess we both are great fans of islands because they are little worlds unto themselves. But in the end it's the variety of experience that makes working for *hidden europe* such fun.

AND YOUR FAVOURITE JOURNEY?

[NG] Well, for a day on a boat, it is hard to beat the ten hour stretch of the Hurtigruten from Harstad on the Norwegian island of Hinnøya down to Svolvær in the Lofotens. That's part of the famous Norwegian coastal ferry route.

[SK] Train wise, the hop over the Bernina Pass in the Alps – preferably out of season when you might have almost the whole train to yourself. Not a route for mid-summer though. It can be packed.

HOW ABOUT BEYOND EUROPE. ARE THERE SPOTS THAT YOU WISH YOU COULD INCLUDE IN THE MAGAZINE?

[NG] Well, I'm a great fan of deserts. I lived and worked on the northern fringes of the Sahara for a while. But we'd have to be creative to weave Algeria into hidden europe. Mind you, we do have a column entitled 'Europe beyond Europe' – where we've written about European outposts like Sint Maarten and Miquelon. We are just now thinking about doing a piece on one of the lesser known outer edges of the European Union: where French Guiana borders onto Brasil!

READING HIDDEN EUROPE, IT IS CLEAR THAT YOU RUN ACROSS MANY INTERESTING PEOPLE ▶

ON YOUR TRAVELS. ANY THAT STAND OUT IN PARTICULAR?

[SK] The old couple who told us their life stories over a vodka or two on a Russian night train.

DO YOU HAVE FAVOURITE EXPERIENCES FROM YOUR TRAVELS?

[SK] The sheer joy when our efforts in communicating in one of Europe's more exotic languages pay off. It's amazing what one can do with a dictionary, a phrase book and a bit of good will.

[NG] Arriving at Durres on the Albanian coast at dawn off the night boat from Bari. Crossing the Tatras on a winter's day. Feeling the heat of a Balkan summer on the slow train through Romania. That's just three. I could mention a hundred more.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE WORST MOMENTS?

[NG] Seeing the utter degradation of some of Europe's abused minorities. Be it the way that the Roma are often treated in the Balkans, the manner in which migrants from North Africa are held in detention, or the way in which women are trafficked... these and a dozen other similar injustices that crave our attention.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR OUR READERS ABOUT HOW TO FIND THE HIDDEN HIGHLIGHTS OF EVEN THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS?

[SK] Be open to a place and its people. Let the place introduce itself to you. And take the best map you can lay your hands on. Take the time to learn a couple of dozen words in the local language.

[NG] Don't rush. Take the slowest possible train. I'm always amazed how folk just dash through some of Europe's most beautiful areas. I think more and more that hidden europe is really a state of mind... being receptive, not being enslaved to a guidebook, just enjoying being in a place.

JUDGING BY THE MAGAZINE, YOU ARE AWAY AN AWFUL LOT. DO YOU EVER GET HOMESICK?

[SK] Not really. Of course we think about home when we are away. And travelling gives us the chance to learn so much about other people, and about ourselves, that we always see our home city of Berlin anew when we return.

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET BACK HOME?

[NG] Take out a blank sheet of white paper, sharpen my quill pen, and start writing. Only once the first hundred words are down on paper do I put on the kettle and make some tea.

THERE IS A CERTAIN STYLE THAT IS VERY MUCH HIDDEN EUROPE – VERY DESCRIPTIVE AND EVOCATIVE. WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN INFLUENCES WHEN IT COMES TO TRAVEL WRITING?

[NG] Well, there is a bevy of early travel writers whom I really admire: Gertrude Bell, Edith Durham and Isabelle Eberhardt all spring to mind. And of course some modern writers: Dervla Murphy, Jan Morris and Philip Marsden. Not a lot of magazines and newspapers give much space nowadays to prose that really evokes the spirit of a place. That's something we try to counter in hidden europe. Sometimes we'll take an entire page just to describe one tiny scene.

AND ANY TIPS FOR PEOPLE WANTING TO GET INTO TRAVEL WRITING?

[SK] Just write! It really is as simple as that. We tend to start with the idea, research it thoroughly, and only then set off on the journey.

[NG] I'd agree with Susanne on that one. I know a lot of folk who are really avid travellers, but can't write for peanuts.

If you cannot write a really sparkling piece of prose about your home town, then it's very unlikely you'd manage to pull something out of the hat when you suddenly find yourself with an hour to spare on a wet Sunday in Ruritania.

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE JUST ONE BOOK TO TAKE ALONG WHEN YOU ARE STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND (OR IN SOME ARCTIC COVE), WHAT WOULD IT BE?

[NG] I'd take the latest edition of *The Times Atlas of the World*.

[SK] That's an odd choice, Nicky. I thought you would go for the *Thomas Cook European Rail Timetable*. Guess we'd settle on a good cookery book. One on Armenian food perhaps...

FINALLY, HOW CAN PEOPLE GET HOLD OF HIDDEN EUROPE MAGAZINE?

[SK] That's easy. Just go to our website at www.hiddeneurope.co.uk, where you can purchase the magazine online. Or give us a call on 0049 / 30 755 16 128 or e-mail us at editors@hiddeneurope.co.uk.

