

# TIPS FOR SAFE Toilet Travel



A VOYAGE INTO THE STINKY, SCARY, SUBLIME WORLD OF FOREIGN LOOS.

## PRETTY MUCH YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE

In spite of my five-foot-ten-inch frame, it is still difficult to pee into the pink porcelain sink attached to the wall. This is the only time I agree with Freud's theory of penis envy. This would be so much easier with different equipment.

I keep my eyes trained on the spider straddling the inside bowl of the matching pink toilet. It's flattish, and with its thick grey legs, it's as wide as my spread fingers; I'm taking no chances as I try to balance. I try to pee without actually putting any weight on the ceramic edge. Success. Relief.

I slam the bathroom door and scurry back to bed, but I can't sleep. I need proof. Who's going to believe a 2:34 a.m. spider story? Things always look scarier in the middle of the night. Moving quickly, I switch on the jittery fluorescent lights and grab my camera. Snap on the telephoto lens. I don't want to have to get too close.

I push the door open slowly, tensed to jump. The spider is highlighted against the pink inside rim of the toilet. He hasn't moved. The lens zooms him in a little too close. I shut my eyes and click.

—Colleen Friesen

## GOING HIGH-TECH IN PARIS

The automatic street toilets in Paris are fantastic. They're self-cleaning, and the mechanized seat, which slides in and out of the wall for sanitation purposes, does so to the tune of piped-in Muzak. Except for the lack of a window opening onto the Eiffel Tower, a coin-op Parisian potty could do double-duty as a throne for Louis XIV.

These cans, however, can be too smart for the average tourist.

After you've fed the toilet a few euro coins, the door opens automatically and you walk into a newly disinfected, wet-floored stall. Actually, the entire interior of the plastic box is decontaminated after each use, leaving a wet seat behind. You have fifteen minutes to go, so there can be no hanging about as the door automatically opens, exposing you to the world.

My travel partner, however, learned this the hard way. Thinking he could save some cash for a croissant, and forgetting my earlier warnings, he ducked in as a recently relieved patron was exiting—and was promptly sanitized. The toilet had received no new payment, thought it was empty, and retracted the toilet bowl into the wall (with him sitting on it), then sprayed him with blue sterilizer. Not the kind of *eau de toilette* one might expect to find on the Champs Élysées, but a memorable scent nonetheless.

—Cindy-Lou Dale

## THE LEFT-HAND RULE

Toilet paper can be rarer than gold in many Muslim nations. From Indonesia to India to Iran, Islamic tradition dictates that you clean yourself after No. 2 using water and your left hand. Usually, you'll find a simple metal or plastic container of water (called a *lotah* in several South Asian countries) near the squat toilet, and a little splash-swipe-splash action with your left hand is expected.

Argue all you want about the convenience of toilet paper versus the cleanliness of water, but what matters is that your left hand is taboo on the streets of Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh. Never hand over money to a shopkeeper with the bills in your left palm. And God—Allah—Miss Manners forbid you scoop up your dosa and curry with your left hand! I found out the hard way about giving offense. I was standing on the side of a dusty road in Sumatra, Indonesia, trying to flag down a bus, and each would approach, slow down, then zoom past, leaving me covered in a sticky film of dirt. Only when one driver glared at me through his streaked windshield did I realize that raising my left hand was the Muslim equivalent of flipping the bird. Aha. Left hand = left behind. Right hand = ride.

—Jeff Booth