

# When Travelers Fall In Love

Some trips are just a trip — a vacation, a getaway — but others turn into life-changing experiences. That’s what happened to me when I first went to New Zealand. I stepped off the plane in Auckland and was nearly overwhelmed with the feeling that I’d come home. I don’t know if it was the smell of the freshly-washed air or the number of friendly faces — but it was definitely love at first sight.

I’ve subsequently returned to New Zealand many times, led tour groups, written four guidebooks and numerous magazine articles, and planned itineraries for other travelers. I wrote about the trip I designed for Del Mar residents Sandy and Bram Dijkstra in the May 2011 issue of *Ranch & Coast*.

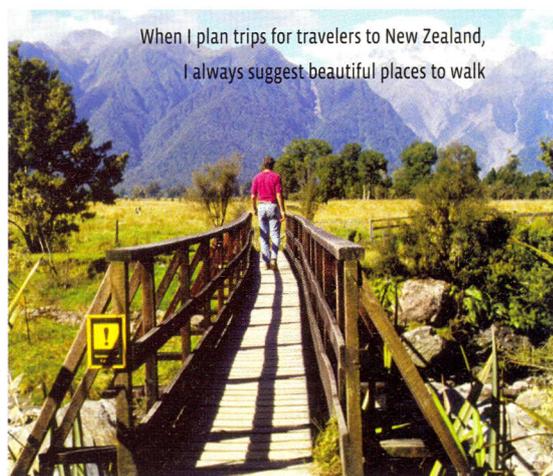
Of course, I’m not the only traveler to fall in love with a destination.

SDSU grad John Locher attended the 2008 Beijing Olympics and became enamored with all things Chinese. He’s returned seven times — and now takes small groups of visitors with him.

Locher notes, “China caught me by surprise. I really didn’t know what to expect but quickly fell in love with the people, history, rapid growth, and grandeur of it all. It is hard to completely describe what is so captivating. Perhaps growing up with news of China as Nixon helped open it up, and all the decades of stories since then cast a curious expectation for me.”

Locher’s tours feature expert speakers, friends, and guides who add a unique perspective and create distinct learning experiences. His small groups offer the flexibility of custom travel and a good-value luxury

experience. The next trip is scheduled for October 2012. ([www.johnlocher.com/china](http://www.johnlocher.com/china))



I met Locher through *Ranch & Coast* reader Brenda Holtzclaw, and I met another traveler who fell in love when I sought out New Zealand connections here in San Diego. Carol Gardyne’s roots are in Minnesota, but her husband is an ex-pat Kiwi. The pair traveled to France and became enamored with Burgundy 15 years ago.

Gardyne likes it because “it has real seasons — similar to New Zealand — and is less touristy than Provence.”

In San Diego, Gardyne is well known for the hand-painted silk garments that she sells in her Little Italy boutique. In fact, her innovative, colorful designs have earned her a following of loyal clients.

Gardyne loves her life as a silk artist as well as her home in Burgundy and combines the two by taking small groups of visitors to her French country abode four >>



John Locher takes small groups of travelers to his favorite places in China

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAMS/HANSEN STOCK PHOTOS, JOHN LOCHER, CAROL GARDYNE, AND INGRID HUFFMEIJER

<< times a year (twice in May and twice in September). There, two guest apartments accommodate up to five people. The house also has an art studio, where visitors spend the morning learning and practicing the art of silk painting. In ten days, up to 25 pieces — scarves, table runners, and wall hangings — can be completed.

“Some husbands say they don’t want to paint,” Gardyne says, “but they end up having a great time. A retired radiologist from Oakland returned to California and built a studio in his home.”

After lunch each day, Gardyne provides tours of the region, including cathedrals, museums, and centuries-old historic buildings. The rolling hills and wooded setting of her home are also ideal for walking and photography. The house overlooks a lake and is just a short distance from the village of Chaumard. Meals feature

Carol Gardyne's home in Burgundy is surrounded by scenery that inspires the silk painters in her group



San Diegans can see Carol Gardyne's work and meet the artist at her shop in Little Italy

beautiful table settings or, weather permitting, dining in the garden. ([www.carolgardyne.com](http://www.carolgardyne.com))

While Gardyne favors Burgundy, Del Mar resident Ingrid Hoffmeister and her creative partner Savannah Sincoff think Tuscany is the perfect place for their workshops.

“Play2Create does not use conventional teaching methods but utilizes the environment for writing, improvisational drama, movement, art, and play, which inspires the emergence of each participant’s unique creative expression,” Hoffmeister explains.

Workshops are held in June and July at the Tuscan Renaissance Center, 30 minutes outside of Siena. Here, in this majestic 13th-century converted monastery, “a spirit of contemplative awe and ancient history meld with contemporary life. This fertile environment supports a transformational



Play2Create workshops take place in a 13th-century converted monastery in the Chianti Classico region of Tuscany

journey and personal renaissance.” ([www.play2create.com](http://www.play2create.com))

This is the magic of travel: a trip can turn into a life-changing experience. For me it happened in New Zealand. For John Locher it was China. Carol Gardyne’s delight is Burgundy and Ingrid Hoffmeister’s passion is Tuscany — and each of us has found a way to share our discovery.

Where will you fall in love? And how will you lead others to your special place? ELIZABETH HANSEN