

From the Publisher's Desk

Impressions of Cape Town and Tokyo By Bala Prasad, MD

My wife and I have the fortune to travel around the world while we are still in good health and are able to enjoy these travels. Having done so, and looking back, we wanted to see which country we liked the most and the worst. By far the best city we liked was Cape Town, South Africa. There were elegant hotels in good areas, good old world service With great deferential style, and good food and a clean surrounding. Of course, one has to keep away from some areas. But this is true in any city in the world. Being on the edge of an ocean, sea food is Cape Town was plentiful and fresh. We enjoyed fresh oysters and lobster every morning for breakfast in our hotel. This was a new experience for me, which I took full advantage of. Wonderful beverages were readily available, although I was very surprised by the modest price of alcohol. Beverages that cost twenty dollars in New York, London, and Rome, cost only five dollars in Cape Town. And you did not need to wait for happy hour for special prices. Poverty was rampant but I did not see much pan-handling. People appeared to be well-mannered and hardworking. Of course you still had to be careful about your safety and well-being. We also had the chance to go to Soweto, at once time the world's largest apartheid ghetto (just outside Johannesburg). But it was surprising that it had a lot of tin shacks like any other poor country. It was equally surprising to see magnificent mansions with blooming flowers and well-manicured lawns. We also saw the Nelson Mandela museum, his home and where he was imprisoned. As a country, Japan was the epitome of good manners, by far. Two examples will always remain in my memory. We were looking for a particular restaurant in Tokyo. We reached the area but could not locate the building. I inquired of a gentleman who I thought would speak English, but he did not. I gave him the written address. He could not figure it out. So he pulled out a map from his briefcase but still could not find the location. So he called a friend on his cell phone, which still could not help. He was with us

more than thirty minutes to no avail. But this time we saw a restaurant where the line was twenty deep. One did not need a recommendation! We bowed to each other and I had a wonderful meal. Take note: I speak no Japanese and he spoke no English. Another stop in memory lane was a Japanese bank. In those days in Japan, there was no ATM machine. We went to a local bank to get local money. Somehow, we reached the wrong floor. The bank teller directed us to the right place. A gentleman was listening to our conversation and offered to take us there. Later, I thanked him and asked for his business card. He was president of the bank! And finally, with the yen in hand we went to a local store. My wife wanted something that this store was out of. The manager asked us to wait and got the items from another store down the road, in the pouring rain! I also remember two occasions during my travels when we had to change our plan to eat fried local fish on the sidewalk, fresh out of a frying pan, served on a newspaper. Once at Vienna Railway Station in the evening, and another in Nassau. And then there was the time we were on a local train in Belgium without local money to pay for it, and another time when we reached the end of the line in the train depot, with no way out! And finally, in Stockholm we left our tote bag (which contained my wallet and passport) in a taxi. But remember when one door closes, destiny always opens another. So, we ate all kinds of street food and survived, got out of the train depot, was able to pay for the train ticket, and got my wallet and passport back! My travels around the world have certainly been interesting. Next stop: Cuba.

Sincerely,

Bala Prasad, MD