

ADVENTURES



The sand dunes of Mui Ne Beach near Phan Thiet in southern Vietnam draw tourists and Vietnamese alike. —PHOTOS COURTESY OF JORDANA SPIRO

When actress Jordana Spiro takes five, she heads for exotic destinations like Vietnam

BY JAE-HA KIM

In “Must Love Dogs,” Jordana Spiro played a ditzzy fashionista who loved luxury and liked John Cusack. In her TBS sitcom “My Boys,” the actress stars as a down-to-earth Chicago Sun-Times sports reporter covering the Cubs. But when she has a week or two off from work, Spiro relishes getting away from it all by traveling to exotic destinations.

While others in her position might book themselves into five-star accommodations, she prefers to spend less on hotels and more on experiencing the country’s culture. During her recent three-week trip to Vietnam, she made do with just one backpack. “Really, there’s almost nothing you can’t buy there if you need it,” she says. “It’s a completely amazing place and I’d go back in a second.”

Here are Spiro’s takes on Vietnam.

Price of a good night’s sleep

“I stayed in places for \$5 to \$10 [U.S.] a night. The rooms were very clean, safe and centrally located. They didn’t have a lot of amenities, but that was OK. I found them by walking around the city and getting recommendations from the people there. I did pre-book a hotel for the first night in Ho Chi Minh City that was more expensive [\$30]. I wanted to know I’d at least definitely have a place to stay for the first night without having to search for one with my luggage.”

Saigon it is

“Hanoi is in the north and Ho Chi Minh City is in the south. The Vietnamese still refer to [the latter] as Saigon. It was a lot easier to travel in Vietnam than I had imagined. It’s so long and narrow, so you’re either traveling north to south or the opposite. I was surprised at how many of the same [tourists] I ran into as I toured the country.”

Navigating language barriers

“[When I travel] I do my best to pick up

some words in that language beforehand. But after that, a lot of pointing to street signs and gesturing takes place ... and then I get lost anyway.”

Noodles, baguettes and beer

“I loved eating from the vendors on the streets. Everything I ate was like gourmet food. It was unbelievable. They have you sit on these little baby stools while they prepare your meals. For about 50 cents, you get this huge bowl of noodles with fresh fish or vegetables. You could get a good beer for 25 cents. You could get pure Vietnamese food or meals with a French influence. The Vietnamese can eat noodles for all their meals, but they serve tourists baguettes with coffee for breakfast.”

What she brought home

“There’s this old fishing village [in the middle of the country] called Hoi An, which has this huge garment district. You can walk into just about any shop and there are rows of tailors to measure you. For \$20, they’ll make you a beautiful dress in about eight hours. They measure it exactly to conform to your figure, so if I gain a pound I’m not going to be able to wear my dress. It was nice, though, ‘cause I couldn’t really find any pre-made clothes that fit me. The Vietnamese people are typically smaller than Americans. I wanted to get a new pair of jeans, and I never felt like a bigger person than when I walked into this store and the salespeople kind of looked me up and down and shook their heads. They had nothing for me. And I was in a men’s store!”

Must-have travel items

“My Lonely Planet guidebook. They offer good eco-tourism ideas for adventurous kinds of traveling and they also give good background information. I also brought an extra battery for my camera, because the most photographic day of the trip will always happen when I’m unable to recharge my battery. And a journal because every trip I promise that this

MUST LOVE TRAVEL



Actress Jordana Spiro of TBS’ “My Boys” and “Must Love Dogs” fame relaxes by kayaking in Halong Bay in northern Vietnam.

will be the trip where I will actually keep a journal.”

Most memorable experience

“I was in Ho Chi Minh City and the traffic was crazy. There was a sea of motorcycles, cars and cyclos [which I mistakenly referred to as rickshaws] traveling in all directions. There were no traffic lights and I couldn’t figure out how to get across the street. I was waiting and waiting, and finally this frail old man who’d been watching me just took me by the hand and walked me across. The cars just swerved around me. Once you get the hang of it, it’s a great feeling. But initially, you’re thinking you’re going to die.”

Next stop

“Cambodia!”

Jae-Ha Kim is a Chicago area freelance writer.

IF YOU GO

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT VIETNAM

Population: 81,624,700

Capital: Hanoi

Currency: Dong (\$1 U.S. equals 16,005 dong)

Time difference: Major cities in Vietnam (including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City) are 12 hours ahead of Chicago.

Language: Vietnamese. You may also find some natives who speak French, English, Chinese or Russian.

Climate: If you’re planning to visit both the north and south regions, pack accordingly. When it’s hot in the north, it’s pretty much cold in the south. Winter is November to April in the north, May to November in the south. Summer is May to October in the north, December to April in the south.

Religion: Buddhism

Information: www.vietnamtourism.com.

—Jae-Ha Kim

GEORGIA



JACKIE WITNESSES LYNDON JOHNSON TAKE THE OATH OF OFFICE ON AIR FORCE ONE

Eyewitness11 hed goes here and here

ATLANTA — Lady Bird Johnson recalls seeing First Lady Jackie Kennedy as “a bundle of pink, just like a drift of blossoms” as she threw herself over the body of her husband moments after shots rang out in Dallas.

John Boston, an escaped slave, writes to his wife in 1862 that he’s reached a land “where freedom will rain in spite Of earth and hell.”

A future president, George H.W. Bush, recalls a visit to the White House in the final hours before a predecessor, Richard Nixon, would leave the office in disgrace: “There was an aura of sadness, like somebody died.”

Twenty-five such recordings, letters and handwritten notes are part of “Eyewitness: American Originals from the National Archives.” The exhibit, making its first appearance outside of Washington, opened Feb. 2 for a three-month stay at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum in Atlanta.

Carter, who is releasing a portion of his personal diary recounting a historic meeting with Pope John Paul II for the exhibition, said the collection of firsthand accounts promises a take on American history not available in books.

“Obviously, when something gets in a history book it’s been abbreviated grossly and you just have a superficial description that’s been modified by the writer,” Carter said in an interview with The Associated Press. “To get back to original documents that have so far been highly confidential, I think, will be quite intriguing.”

The material for the archives exhibit comes from letters, photos, paintings and audio and video recordings, such as radio reporter Herb Morrison’s account of the explosion and crash

CRUISES

Book11 hed goes here and here and on and on

NEW YORK — It’s wave season, when many vacationers book their cruises for later in the year. Wave season runs through the end of March and is a good time to reserve if you want to make sure you’ll get your first choice of dates, itineraries and cabins.

But sometimes a themed trip or the ship’s amenities or ambiance is what makes the cruise appealing, rather than the ports of call or the scenery.

This year’s cruise offerings include a charter trip on the Queen Mary 2 for a weeklong gay and lesbian trans-Atlantic cruise, scheduled for a May 29 departure. Details at <http://www.rsvpvacations.com>. Prices start at \$1,595 per person, double occupancy.

How about a trip with culinary theme? Tony Princiotta, manager and wine buyer of the Cheese Store of Beverly Hills, is scheduled to lead a trip to ports in Greece and Turkey to visit markets, wineries, offbeat cafes and restaurants. The July 6-13 cruise will take place aboard the Silver Cloud, a Silversea Cruise Lines ship. Tickets start at \$4,406, not including airfare to Istanbul, Turkey, and home from Athens.

Holland America Line has Culinary Arts Centers aboard each of its cruise ships that resemble show kitchens used on TV cooking programs. Guests can see demonstrations and take part in tastings and classes on every Holland America sailing. The centers include theaters with large plasma video screens to show the food preparation close up; certain cruises also of-



An extra camera battery is one of the things Jordana Spiro always packs so she can capture shots like these: an aerial shot of Halong Bay (above) and the sand dunes of Mui Ne (right).

