

One of my favorite ways to experience some of our local restaurants is to order tapas. That way the flavors mix & mingle and open up your appetite for either a main course or more of the tasty little tidbits. When asked to write this article, I thought that a good approach might be to mix and mingle topics about travel in much the same manner. Who knows – one of these may open up your appetite to visit a new spot on the globe, engage in a new activity half-way around the world, or just enjoy and dream about where to go next.

So, here are some small bites from the travel world...

With the ever-expanding interest in cruising, cruise lines have new builds & launches set out as far as spring 2015. Ten new ships will launch this year – most recognizable for the American audience the Carnival *Magic* (launching May, 2011) and sailing in Europe & the Caribbean; and the Disney *Dream*, accommodating 4,000 guests & sailing the Bahamas her first year, she sports the first roller coaster at sea called the AquaDuck Water Rollercoaster! And in May, look for the launch of the *Avalon Panorama* cruising Europe's finest rivers -- the first of its kind in the industry, with two full decks of suites featuring a Wall-to-Wall Panoramic Window that transforms the living space into a unique Open-Air Balcony™

Who knew a dark, mysterious trilogy of books written by a little-known journalist named Stieg Larsson would revamp Stockholm's tourism trade? Bookworms are already heading over *en masse* to see the places he wrote about in *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (et al), and all sorts of tours are popping up to capitalize on the planned Hollywood remakes of the Swedish movies.

Where to go before it gets really busy? Brazil is set to bask in the glory of its sporting prowess - it is hosting the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016 - and new visitors from across the world are expected to samba on down. And, watch for their national confection called Brigadeiro, cocoa-based but flirting now with various flavors, to hit the international candy scene!

Costa Rica was so hot for so long but now Nicaragua, likened to Costa Rica about 20 years ago, is THE place. The “Survivor” series has also put it on the map, so to speak. Peru is also hitting the headlines as it celebrates the centenary of Machu Picchu's re-discovery in 2011. And, I think someone mentioned a wedding taking place in London – which will continue its rise in popularity through the 2012 Olympics.

On a parting note, “digital detox” getaways are coming into their own – unplugging from everything and just enjoying where you are. Instead of experiencing the trip before even stepping off the plane by checking apps for where to stay and where to eat, this type of getaway returns to actual exploration of a place without being short-circuited by technology.

Connie Valmont has nearly 20 years in the travel industry, both in marketing & sales, for leisure agencies large and small in Seattle, Denver, southern CA and the Lowcountry. She calls St Petersburg, FL (and now Beaufort) "home" but has lived in all four corners of the US and traveled extensively. She can be reached at 843-368-1104 or by email at compassrose@rockettmail.com