

SNAP DECISIONS

Southward bound

SUSAN KUROSAWA

My friend P has a weekend retreat about an hour south of Sydney; I live 90 minutes to the north. Both our homes are in waterside settlements of a snug size. Meet in the middle? No way.

I accept his lunch invitation and head off via the capital's bamboozling network of motorways that seem to suddenly jag off to the extreme right. I would need to be in a helicopter to make sense of the route. Go west to get south via the east. But it works and then, whoosh, I'm funnelling down through Royal National Park, where I attended "youth camps" in early high school years and learnt to row a boat and hide indigestible scones under the pillows in my bunk.

My arrival at P's tidy curve of a village is a



revelation. It feels so similar to where I live. Houses come in myriad sizes and styles, from waterfront mansions with jetties to granny-like cottages. There are frangipani trees, palms and ferns, boats and bushwalks, safe swimming spots and coastal tracks, cliffs that

stand like fortifications, gardeners out and about with barrows and brooms. Many residents seem to be retirees, whereas others, like P, spend part of each week working in the city.

The views are wide and watery and both real estate markets are enjoying a boom as more and more urban-dulled escapees seek quieter lives. It makes me realise how many of our larger cities must have such havens on the doorstep, perhaps once dismissed as old-fashioned and boring but now freshly coveted for precisely the dagginess and sense of community that previously was derided.

To say goodbye, P gives me a few "pups" from his potted agaves to take home. They are now planted and flourishing, two and a half hours up north at Hardys Bay, angled southward in salute to Bundeena (pictured).

Instagram: @susankurosawa

SPEND IT



The late, legendary American designer Ken Scott was a great lover of vividly coloured floral prints, so much so he became known as the "fashion gardener". His psychedelic fabrics from the 1960s and 70s combined colours that many thought should never be seen together, let alone in a man's suit. Gucci has used prints sourced from the archives to create a Ken Scott capsule collection that celebrates the man and his bold vision. Handbags, shoes, clothing and other accessories breath new life into the designs. T+L fancies one of the bags for our next jaunt to Milan, where Scott was based during his heyday. Pictured are the GG Marmont small shoulder bag (\$2165) and a flamboyant velvet jacket (\$5200).

gucci.com

PENNY HUNTER



I am in Kyoto's Ponto-cho district, in a circa 1750 ochayo, or tea house, named Tantsuru, where a geisha (geiko in regional dialect) and apprentice maiko are hosting a session in which they talk about their professional lives. The maiko performs a traditional dance accompanied by the geiko on a three-stringed shamisen lute-style instrument. Their embroidered kimono, stylised hair and white kabuki-like theatrical makeup are all trappings of their roles as entertainers skilled in age-old arts.

Kyoto has five geiko districts known as hana machi (flower towns) but the traditional ochayo are typically reserved for regular clients and special gatherings and such exclusivity means tourists rarely have an opportunity to visit. But here I am, and I can almost smell the sweet tatami matting and the waft of sake rice wine.

Such sensory transportation is entirely in my imagination, however. This little window



into Japan's capital of culture is streaming via my computer screen while I sip sparkling yuzu soda out of tiny ceramic sake wine cups, which is surely a cultural gaffe unknown in any geiko playbook.

Kyoto-based Luxury Tours Japan, founded by local tourism dynamo Yuka Sato, has just launched a series of virtual tours and interactive events to bring the city to life. A series via Zoom, which includes a live-streamed guided cherry blossom-viewing stroll, tea house experience and recorded dance performance, is on offer on selected dates from March 25 at 7pm Japan time, for 90 minutes and includes a Q&A component; JPY8000 (\$95), tax included. Sato intends to diversify the virtual offerings to other themes built around Kyoto's heritage, such as traditional crafts, visits to ateliers and nature-based discoveries.

luxurytoursjapan.com
SUSAN KUROSAWA

BOOK CLUB

FROZEN MUSIC
Francis King

British author Francis King's early childhood was spent in Raj-era India and he drew from deep knowledge and nostalgia for this 1987 novella. King, who died in 2011 at the age of 88, was a prolific novelist, drama critic, biographer of EM Forster, envoy for the British Council in countries such as Japan, and writer of literary travel companions. But while he can be called a man of many words, he never reached the giddy heights of best-selling fame, and nor did he appear to seek widespread acclaim.

There is tangible melancholy in his writing, often laced with sheer loneliness and gloom. But it is precisely that air of worry and uncertainty that makes *Frozen Music* such a compelling read. It's a slip of a book, just under 150 pages in small-format paperback, and occasionally I take it travelling to read anew, even shoved into my handbag for commuter train rides. It is a wonder King could have fitted so much into so little; remarkable that subsequent readings keep revealing more.

Philip, the book's senior character, is an expatriate sahib who lost his wife while stationed in India. He's elaborately polite, in dodgy health and has returned with his new second wife, an ex-nurse many decades younger, Finnish,



strapping and shiny. Along for the journey is Philip's divorced and somewhat idle son Rupert, who recalls every detail, perhaps imperfectly, of his frail mother's painful passing and is the novella's narrator. They all travel by chauffeured car, deep off usual tourist routes, headed for her grave in the now shabby town of Balram, so changed from the recollections of both men as to be an hallucination.

The pace is perfect, the evocation of rural India brimming with detail and insight. But can anyone ever exorcise the past? Is Philip really just a doddering fool?

The tale unfolds gently but persuasively as feelings of duplicity and the unreliability of memory collide. But at the centre is the always complex matter of fathers and sons, of expectations and failures, recriminations and long-told untruths.

It's not a bright burst of an ending but the eventual plot resolution, and a peep into the futures of both men, does force the reader to re-evaluate every passage and action of the plot. And then there's the presence of big, bold, unstoppable Mother India, taking us along for the bumpy ride.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

FOLLOW THE READER

Legging it in Java

JILLIAN HUNTLEY
EDEN HILLS, SA

We are at the railway station at Banyuwangi, the eastern tip of Java, heading for Surabaya. Only a few foreigners are waiting for this early train as women in brightly coloured traditional dress gather their children, arranging travelling bags.

Suddenly a band begins to play. There's an assorted collection of musicians with well-

used guitars and a drummer whose expression belies the enthusiasm of his drumming. But, wait. Is that Elvis we are hearing? The band is crooning a melancholy version of Love me Tender.

The station security guard wears a policeman's uniform, his white tin hat resembling a large upside-down pudding bowl. He sits at a desk, monitoring arriving passengers. Suddenly he is off his stool, swivelling his hips to the beat of Viva Las Vegas. He knows the words; he rocks out dance moves as he continues the check-in procedures. We are engrossed.

I decide he will be today's recipient of a clip-on koala gift from Australia. The train arrives, the koala is in my hand, the music stops and I approach the security guard, disrupting his duties. "A gift for you," I say,

showing him the koala and attaching it to his shirt. He is surprised but smiling. Unfortunately, the koala's leg falls off and hits the ground. I bend to pick it up just as the security guard does likewise and I crack my head on his tin helmet. I retrieve the leg, but can't fasten it back on the koala.

There is no time to search my bag for

another pin. I hand the leg to the security guard and hurry aboard.

As we pull out of the station, I glimpse the one-legged koala clinging precariously to the guard's shirt. He is clutching the broken leg, looking perplexed. Sometimes well-intended gestures of international friendship don't quite work out.



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