



Food for the Soul

Article and Photographs by Melody M. Nuñez

Art and travel are two of my favorite things in life, and my passion for each grows by the day. I'm somewhat of a late bloomer when it comes to both, and I'm beginning to understand their importance in my life. I've come to think of art as breathing, and travel as food and nourishment. Art is the thing that keeps me alive and helps me through the day-to-day, and travel feeds my soul and breaks up life's routine. Not only does travel feed me as a person, but as an artist as well. An adventure trip with no art activities is as artistically important as one where I take photos or journal – all these breaks from the ordinary nourish my soul in their own particular way.

My first trip overseas was just over a year ago, and my first international destination was Ireland. Artist Lynne Merchant once told me that a trip begins when you decide to go, and she was right. The country became real to me long before I set foot on its soil, as I researched, planned, and imagined. Happily, the reality of it was even better than I'd hoped for. Sure the weather could've been better, I could've had more time at each stop, and would've loved to have a longer stay overall. However, the week I had there was pure happiness. My tour, though fast-paced and just six days long, was very informative and showed me a wonderful sampling of the country without me having to worry about navigating in unfamiliar territory. I absorbed the history, drank in the sights, and captured all the sweeping vistas and tiny details I could. I was nearly giddy with excitement and happiness each and every day (except when I had to leave!), and was able to live in the moment – to put daily life and worries on hold.

Another thing I'd been longing to do for years was to go white water rafting. Happily, I was able to do that in the past year as well. My husband and I signed up for a trip on the Kern River, and had an amazing time. The natural beauty of the area was definitely a treat, and I loved the rush of the rapids, but the real satisfaction came in the form of rock jumping. We had the chance to climb up

on some rocks about fifteen to twenty feet high and to jump into the icy waters below. It was a bit dicey climbing up, and it was a long way down once I'd made it up there, but I was compelled to meet the challenge and take the risk. So I did, twice! *Carpe diem* seemed to be my motto that day, and though it wasn't Mount Everest it was challenging enough for my husband to call me his dare devil! My most recent trip was a three-day cruise to Ensenada, Mexico. Virtually everything about the trip was wonderful, but it was a surprisingly good time for art journaling. I haven't had nearly enough time to work in my journal lately, so I brought along my current book and a few basic supplies. When I had some free time I curled up in a lounge by a plate glass window overlooking the sea, and worked in my art journal. Or I listened to music in my cabin and played in the book's pages. I found that when I had some down time, I just wanted to relax, sketch, doodle, and play with water-soluble crayons. I also glued some paper that was stuffed inside a purse my aunt bought me onto a spread of pages and journaled on top of that – making use of "found" materials.

These trips, though very different, had such an impact on me. Each experience in life helps us grow in new ways, and these experiences helped me go after what I wanted, to savor each moment, to take risks, and to allow myself time to relax and play. Life is not one big holiday, but we can relish the opportunities we get or make for ourselves and apply them to our daily lives. I can work toward that next goal, enjoy the natural beauty I see on my morning walks through the neighborhood, and push myself toward that "next level" art submission. I can allow myself the time to just play more often, even if I'm not sequestered at sea. I've shifted my priorities in life to include more of these artful and adventurous experiences, and I'm more fulfilled. Hmm, where shall I go next? ✚

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