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A look back at the wackiest travel moments in 2013

From award-winning pandas to dirty dining, it's been a memorable year



Most travellers want a normal, relaxing vacation. However, bizarre travel-related promotions, incidents and trends permeated the news in 2013. Let's look back at some of the wackiest. Cypress Inn, Carmel, Calif.

Pampered animals

We treat animals like people and our furry friends are especially popular on the Internet, but they've really taken the spotlight this year. For instance, we've already got the Oscars and Grammys – do we really need the Giant Panda Zoo Awards? Well, apparently, yes. The inaugural edition in January, with some 28,000 online voters, saw the San Diego Zoo's cuddly Xiao Liwu named "Panda Cub of the Year." (Fortunately, Kanye West didn't leap on stage during the presentation.)

The Cypress Inn (owned by legendary actress Doris Day) in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., celebrated Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month (April) by treating visitors' dogs like the Sultan of Brunei. Not only did these pampered pooches get upscale dog bowls and beds, but they could also get an upgrade for their owners by doing tricks at reception. There was even a "Yappy Hour" menu for canines that included such treats as "Chowhound Chicken" and "Muttloaf."

Even Siberia tried to boost tourism with a weird animal-related promo. The Sheregesh ski resort announced plans to build a yeti park with a hotel, inviting guests to attempt to catch the Abominable Snowman. The hair-raising prize for success? One million rubles (more than \$33,000), comrade.

Travel like the Griswolds

On the lighter side, we learned comic actor Chevy Chase still inspires remarkable devotion. Exploiting their distinctive surname, Steve and Lisa Griswold drove their children from Georgia to Florida's Walt Disney World this past summer as a 30th-anniversary tribute to Chase's 1983 hit movie, *National Lampoon's Vacation*. They even used a replica of the station wagon Clark Griswold and his fictional brood travelled in. (Wally World was closed, so they made do with Walt Disney World.)

Gourmet dirt

Meanwhile, in Tokyo, Japan, a gourmet restaurant offered an eye-opening seven-course menu for 10,000 yen (\$110). The key ingredient? Dirt. Chef Toshio Tanabe of Ne Quittez Pas dished up such dirty delicacies as soil risotto with sautéed sea bass and soil ice cream. The mineral-rich soil was purified, so the chef's reputation remains unsoiled.

Showing skin

Finally, if you vacationed at one of WestJet's many beach destinations this summer, you might have wondered about the nationalities of the people you saw showing the most skin. Wonder no more. According to a recent Expedia survey, Germans are the most likely to go nude on the beach (17 per cent, compared to the worldwide average of seven per cent). Danish women are the top topless sunbathers at 40 per cent. And, if you spotted a dude rocking a Speedo, he was likely Brazilian: 22 per cent of Brazilian men enjoy wearing those tight-fitting swimsuits.

Stay tuned for more travel-themed wackiness in 2014.

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