

Antigua was the last cultural haven I haven't traveled to, so it was on my bucket list. Then, we arrived, the environment is so beautiful, the beauty of nature and wildlife that is so close to the heart.



GLOBE





Not just sun, sand and umbrella drinks, UCLA's Alumni Travel Program offers something more substantial. From astronomical features at ancient ruins to close encounters with Russian gunships, the adventures are rich and varied. Especially when a renowned university scholar comes along.

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A LOT OF MILEAGE can be logged in three-quarters of a century. Stories, too. As UCLA's Alumni Travel Program (UAT) celebrates its 75th anniversary, participants — travelers and lecturing professors — reflect on how packing their suitcases and heading around the globe has strengthened their Bruin bonds.

Founded in 1941, the UAT sent its first group of travelers on a cruise along the Mexican Riviera. Today, the program registers approximately 1,000 travelers on 55 trips annually — including land tours, cruises and a cultural program series.

The UAT's popularity stems largely from its niche structure and wide range of tours led by UCLA professors. "Our travelers aren't just going to Hawaii to lie on a beach and drink piña colodas," UAT director Christel Paillet says. "It's an educational experience that's elevated by the addition of a UCLA professor."

Indeed, it's easy to get swept up in talks by professors like Kathryn Morgan, chair of the Department of Classics. The themes of Morgan's lectures, from "The Myth of Atlantis" to "Captain

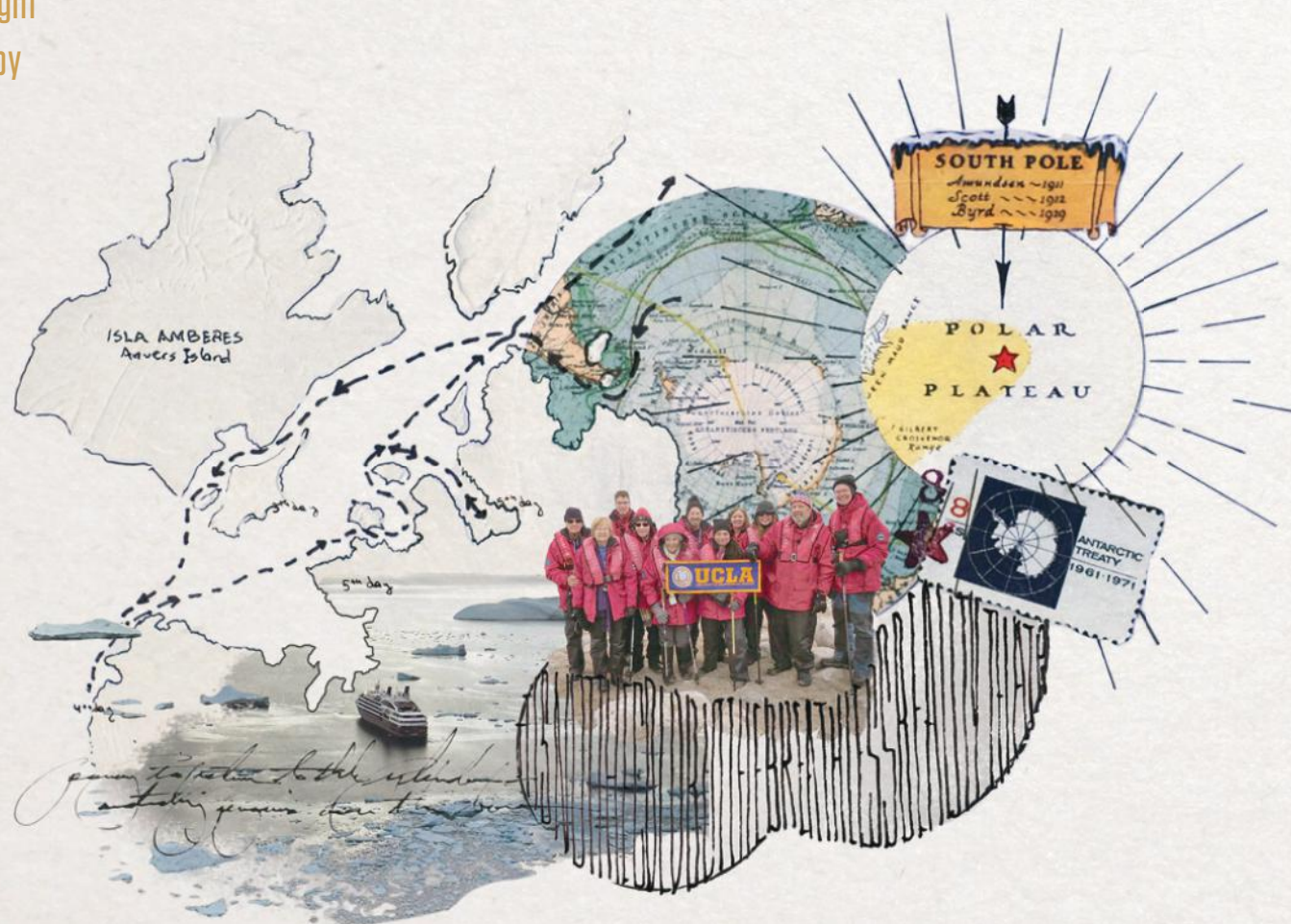
Cook and the Pacific," evoke a sense of place. Her favorite lecture from years of alumni travel is "Greek Myth and the Sea," which looks at the sea through the Greek imagination and features a translation of C.P. Cavafy's poem "Ithaca."

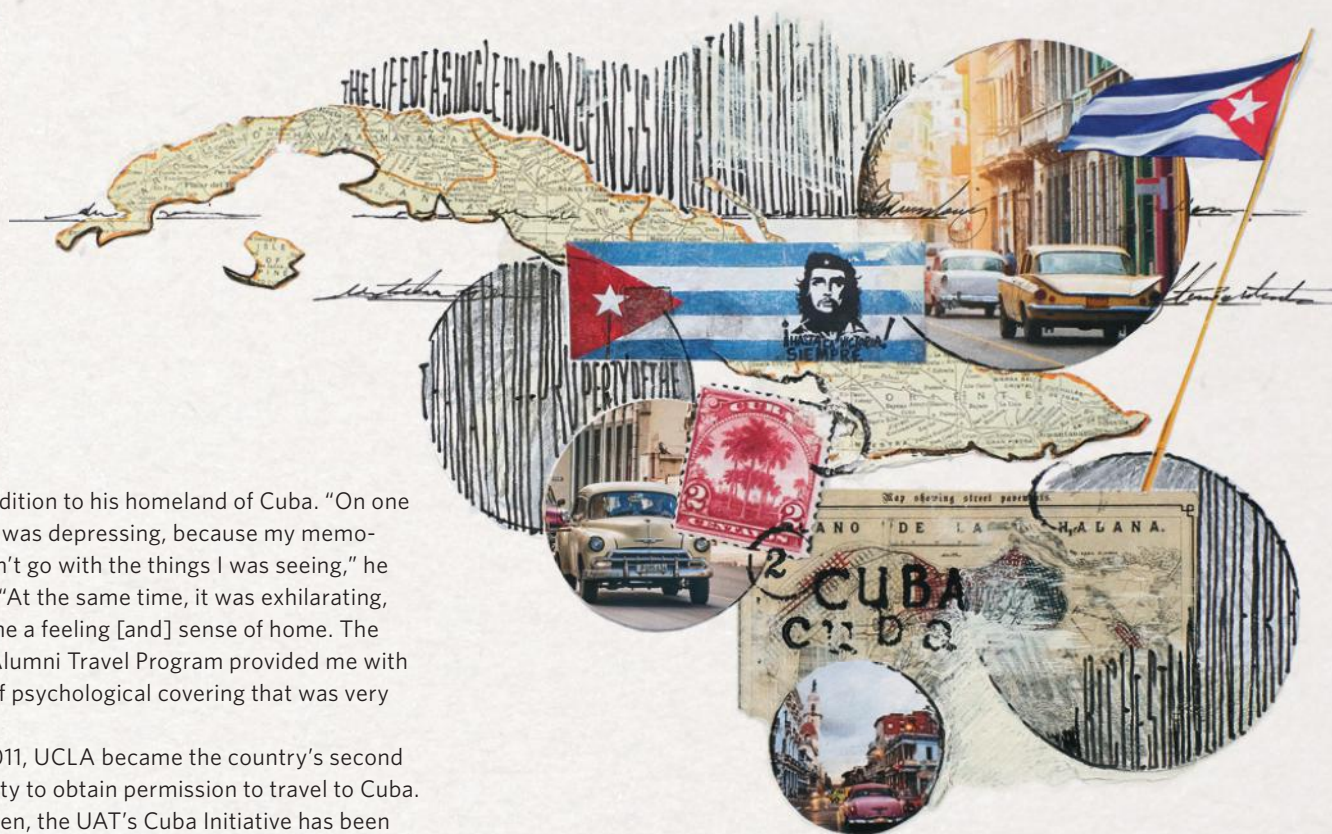
"It's a reminder of why we travel," says Morgan, quoting the poem. "'Then pray that the road is long. That the summer mornings are many, that you will enter ports seen for the first time with such pleasure, with such joy!'"

Cuba crossings

UAT has touched famed UCLA historian Teo-filo Ruiz on many levels. Since 2004, he has embarked on seven trips — some as a lecturer, others as a traveler. As a medievalist in the Department of History, he finds trips like those to Italy right up his alley. "My history lectures give context to destinations," he says. "For example, in Florence, I talked about the Italian Renaissance and its artistic development."

A trip that spoke directly to Ruiz's heart was





an expedition to his homeland of Cuba. "On one hand, it was depressing, because my memories didn't go with the things I was seeing," he recalls. "At the same time, it was exhilarating, giving me a feeling [and] sense of home. The UCLA Alumni Travel Program provided me with a kind of psychological covering that was very good."

In 2011, UCLA became the country's second university to obtain permission to travel to Cuba. Since then, the UAT's Cuba Initiative has been extremely successful, with 27 sold-out departures and close to 700 travelers.

This fall, Ruiz will return to Cuba with the UAT. "Some of the passengers who came on the first trip four years ago are joining us again because I'm lecturing, which is very flattering," he says. "One lives in an intimate setting with these travelers, getting to know them and sharing things."

The formation of such bonds is common on UAT trips, Paillet says, noting that more than 70 percent of the program's travelers are repeat customers. "The trip doesn't end on the last day of the tour; it continues," she says, referring to the forging of friendships.

Cruising and companionship

It was a UAT trip that sparked a friendship held dear by Wilma J. Pinder J.D. '76. During a cruise to the Galápagos Islands, she met another traveler who turned out to be the recent widow of Arthur Rosett, one of Pinder's favorite UCLA law professors. The two women's conversation was anything but solemn. "He'd drive you to drink!" Pinder had proclaimed, eliciting laughter from Rosett's wife, who said, "'Well, that's my husband,'" Pinder recounts. "We got really close on that trip."

Aboard a UAT cruise along the Turkish Mediterranean coast, Morgan garnered some new friends of her own. "While swimming in the sea, we kept breaking into hysterical laughter when

heaving ourselves onto a floating platform. It's easy to understand how lasting friendships are formed during these trips," she says. "Get-togethers back home are an extension of the discoveries made about each other on the trips."

The world is not enough

For Professor Jean-Luc Margot of the Department of Earth, Planetary, and Space Sciences, UAT offers a wonderful twofold of his passions for astronomy and travel. As an educator, he gets to lecture on pet subjects. "I have an easy job, because the universe is so amazing," he says enthusiastically. "Like Machu Picchu's Temple of the Sun, where there are all kinds of astronomical alignments; the Galápagos' geology; Antarctica's sky patterns and motions found due to high latitudes. And, of course, there are the prospects for life on other planets."

At the same time, Margot is able to satisfy his zeal for travel. "The planet's beauty is breathtaking and spectacular," he says. "I feel very privileged that UAT has given me access to these destinations." He confesses losing his heart to Antarctica, which was on his bucket list as the last continent he had yet to visit. When he arrived, he marveled at how the environment, with its nature and wildlife, was so unlike any other he'd seen.

"Antarctica was the last continent I hadn't traveled to, so it was on my bucket list. Then, when we arrived, the environment was so unlike any other, with its beauty of nature and wildlife that's so close."

— Jean-Luc Margot

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where I was born
and grew up, was an
incredible experience.
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— Teo Ruiz



Memory makers

Susan Lewis, UAT’s director from 1986 to 2000, participated in the cultural tour series for 15 years. “From the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to a touring Cézanne exhibition to the Santa Fe Opera Festival, these specialized trips have been highlights on the Alumni Travel schedule,” says Lewis, who now works in UCLA Marketing and Special Events.

Lewis has collected many UAT stories, from Olympian Rafer Johnson ’59 running in a laurel wreath crown while re-creating ancient Greek games, to a Texas couple planting a flag at the North Pole and then right away booking a trip to do the same at the South Pole.

Some UAT adventures have included the unexpected. “We were going through Yugoslavia on the Danube River during the Gulf War,” Lewis recalls, the incident clearly still fresh in her mind. “Our ship was blockaded by Russian gunboats, so we had to wait in a nearby village for emergency visas and clearance to go further.” In a lighter vein, Lewis adds that “the villagers thought I was Marilyn Monroe because of my blond hair!”

Paillet explains the silver linings that can reveal themselves during such occurrences. “Because we’re dealing with the world, and with everything from economics to political unrest, certain travel situations can be complex, but also very fun.”

Into Africa

No matter what happens, memories are made. Doug Donnell ’56 has traveled on 21 UAT tours so far. His favorite? “An Amazon River trip on this ancient wooden ship that looked like it was right out of *The African Queen*,” he says.

Sounding a little like Bogey himself, Donnell transports the listener back in time. “On the top deck was a bar with pisco sours that went down easy, and the crew served double duty as a band, playing incredible Andean music,” he remembers. “As we’re floating down the river, the sunset against incredible cloud formations silhouetted the locals in their dugout canoes.”

He reminisces about the chef’s cooking with ingredients gathered along the way, longboats being paddled among lily pads for breakfast picnics, and meeting with a resident shaman. Plus a night of communing with nature in the rainforest: “Standing there, you’d hear jungle sounds and look up at the stars,” Donnell says. “It’s an experience I’ll never forget.”

Memories like these have kept Paillet at the UAT for almost 23 years. After all, she says, “Having daily calls from travelers returning from trips saying they’ve just had the journey of a lifetime — well, how could you not be happy enriching people’s lives that way?” ■

