

Go

1:44 PM PST, November 26, 2006

Weather Traffic

Jobs Cars Real Estate Apartments Shopping

Print E-mail story Most e-mailed Change text size



Travel

TRAVEL TURKEYS

Honey, saddle up the spider

Spending time in a distant land requires adjustment. The toilet paper is tiny — but tough — and the bugs go bump in the night.

By Tom Bentley, Special to The Times
November 19, 2006

ADVERTISEMENT

HOME

Site Map

Travel

News

California | Local

National

World

Entertainment News

Business

Sports

Politics

Opinion

Columnists

Print Edition

RSS What is RSS?

Calendarlive

Travel

West Magazine

House & Garden

Health

Food

L.A. Wheels

Obituaries

Crossword, Sudoku

All Sections

Corrections

Buy, Sell & More

Jobs

Cars

Related Stories

- Saving her clutch from their clutches
- 37 feet of sheer agony
- On the go and stressed? Treat yourself to an airport massage
- After 'I do,' trip doesn't
- Sure was a swell time (for her foot)
- Feeling flurries of panic
- If you can see it, you can eat it
- Driven to distraction on a family car trip

YOU might think it's the big things — weather extremes, clean water, foreign political systems — that require the biggest adjustments when you move to a far-off country, and certainly at some levels, those concerns are real.

But I think it's really the little weirdnesses, normal things slightly tilted or off-key that tell you home is more than a 911 call away.

Take toilet paper. It's that utilitarian stuff, understood by all parties and faiths for what it is, something to get a job done. But what were those tiny rolls of paper, about half the width of an American roll, that we found in the stores on Kosrae, the small Micronesian island where I had moved? In the clear wrapper, the six-roll pack appeared to be the regular stuff, other than the stunted size.

Ah, but look at the label: It's from Japan, as are many of the products here. Perhaps it's just one of those size adjustments we had heard are space-conserving practices in Japan, where seemingly everything is smaller, including countertops and carrot tops, a concession to the compact island and its densely packed population.

Titanic Exhibit
Escape Package
from \$188

Marriott
SAN FRANCISCO

CLICK HERE



TRAVEL TURKEYS

If something can go wrong on a trip it will. Our tales of road-trip flops and fizzes proves it.

Let's Hear Your Nightmare

Got a travel horror story to share? Email the Times: [TRAVEL EDITORS](#)

A select few stories will be published.

More Travel News

- Norway's grand prize
- Cheaper by the dozen: Manhattan treasures
- A freeway-free coastal journey

- [Real Estate](#)
- [Apartments](#)
- [Personals](#)
- [Deals at Local Stores](#)
- [Coupons](#)
- [Newspaper Ads](#)
- [Place an Ad](#)
- [Member Services](#)
- [Sign Up](#)
- [Log In](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [L.A. Times Archives](#)

- [HOME DELIVERY](#)
- [Customer Support](#)
- [Subscribe to L.A. Times](#)



When we sought to employ that paper for its primary purpose, perplexity ensued. It had a strange, stretchy quality, almost slightly rubbery. If you weren't absolutely precise in tearing off a piece, you'd end up with much more paper than you'd bargained for. Clean edges? Forget it.

Looking more closely at the package, I saw some English mingled with the Japanese. It's hard to know which feature should have topped this list:

- 100% pure wood
- High temperature disinfect
- No baleful chemical elements
- Multi-homely paper
- Enjoy the test tendance

Of course, I wish I could have enjoyed the test tendance, but I wasn't really clear what that might be. Perhaps it was one way of saying that if it couldn't be used in the bathroom, it could be tested for other tendencies, like its relationship to rubber bands.

And I was a little embarrassed that the manufacturers were proclaiming its homely qualities so openly. I suppose it's one of those cultural things where you bend over backward to appear not to be bragging. I didn't find it all that homely. Just plain, I suppose.

The wood content issue needs but one comment: ouch.

*

Pass the pesticide

THERE are a few other little island items I found troubling. Well, more than a few.

The ant population on Kosrae must number in the billions, two-thirds of which stroll daily through my kitchen to see what's on the menu.

These are no ordinary ants. There are actually three types: tiny, punctuation-mark ants, which seem almost dear in their diminutiveness, until they've so completely covered the coffee spoon you left out that you can't see its silvery shine.

Then there are their much burlier cousins, weight-lifter ants, which, I'm very happy to report, spend most of their time outside bowling with coconuts and playing other recreational sports. If they were to decide they want to be inside, it would be simple majority rule: I'd be

ADVERTISEMENT

sleeping on the beach.

But it's the middle-sized ones that are the most intriguing. These are nothing like the languid California ants I've known and felt vague affection for. These ants are darting bursts of lightning, visible streams of electrons, miniature missiles. If you drop a crumb of cake or a dollop of dough or a spot of soup on the floor, these ants will appear in seconds, en masse, purposeful and organized.

The insects sense your every move. Approach them and they flee at eye-torquing speeds. Try to squish them on the counter, and you'll appear to an observer to be having some kind of seizure, reaching out, pulling back, drawing a bead, missing, missing again, trying the other hand, poking yourself in the eye. The creatures are geniuses of evasive movement.

I did say it was the little things in travel that are disconcerting, didn't I? Well, it's the slightly bigger things too. Like spiders big enough to have bank accounts and carry billfolds.

Note: Big surprises — and spiders — shouldn't happen very early in the morning.

In the early morning, things are innocent and new. You haven't committed any crimes, you haven't insulted your family, you haven't even had your morning coffee. The appearance of a spider large enough to drive isn't appropriate then, much less on any list of morning desires.

Hazy morning light can play tricks on your eyes. I got up one morning not long after we had moved in, and I saw a gecko cross the kitchen floor. Cute little fellow. Eats bugs too.

But what was that over in the corner from which the gecko ran? No. No way. That must be some crumpled trash or something. That can't be a spider, not that big.

The trash moved. It was a spider, one that probably had an engine and manual transmission. This was a spider that wins cockfights. I grabbed a broom, thinking I could just brush it out the door if I hunkered down and pushed, but no, this creature moved toward me when I approached it, and rapidly too.

Have you ever made one of those sounds that you think a goat might make if it were being probed by aliens? I did when that spider rushed me. Then I bashed it with the broom.

Unfortunately, big spiders bleed. Too much to be cleaned up with toilet paper made of 100% wood.



The Ultimate Driving Machine®

Certified Pre-Owned

Click here
to find
the Certified
Pre-Owned BMW
that's right
for you at
bayareabmw.com



There are many other oddities — surely that puree-like squash here would make a better mustard plaster than a meal — but if I go on, you'll just think I'm one of those fussy travelers who can't roll with the punches. Not true.

Why, just recently, when I saw a medium-sized centipede (in size, just a bit shy of a rolled-up newspaper) in the bathroom, I calmly went for the toilet paper. I knew that I could get it to grab one end with its pincers and that I could then slingshot it out the door.

You just have to adapt to the territory.



Norway's grand prize

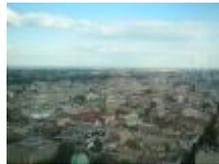
Oslo, known for its Nobel ceremony and

skiing, it's a cosmopolitan city of

contradictions.

-Cheaper by the dozen: Manhattan treasures

Travel Specials & Deals from our preferred advertisers.



View our readers' travel photos and share your own at *Your Scene*. **Europe/Western**

Submit your photo now >>

Partners:    Copyright 2006 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Home Delivery](#) | [Permissions](#) | [Contact](#)

	<p>Fly to New Zealand from \$1056*</p>	<p>For the best deals, book now at airnewzealand.com <small>*Restrictions, taxes, and fees apply</small></p>	
---	---	---	---