

BEGINNINGS

'Cannibals' yells the man next to me on the large motorised boat roaring across the waves away from Viti Levu, the largest of Fiji's 300-plus islands. In fairness, I did just ask him what the area is best known for. Cannibalism was widely practised in this part of Fiji until the mid-to-late nineteenth century, but the only people roasting on Tai – the island we're heading for – are the tourists on the beach without adequate sun protection.

Gorgeous time: Carl Durham (le.

In the Brecon Beacons even the sheep are adrenaline junkies. "Like that one," said Carl Durham, pointing through the wind-screen, "loitering at the side of the road. Thing about sheep is, they always think the grass is greener on the other side. And up here they have a habit of waiting for a car to come before walking across to find out." Dangerous sport. Risky for people, too: we passed fresh black skid marks where, Carl said, a lorry had narrowly missed a sheep – and flattened the oncoming car instead.

We were here for adventure, too: myself and six other city folk riding in a minibus pointed with the woods black.

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'Armageddon?" someone had said to me in amazement before I left for Israel. "You can't actually go there, it's not a real place."

Happily it is (though it's more commonly known as Megiddo) and here I was, standing atop its ruins, with the wide expanse of Israel's Jezreel Valley fading away below me into the heat-haze.

The first recorded chariot battle took place here between the Phoenicians

In the extravagant African sunset the Zambezi River was deep red, reflecting the crimson sky, and it shimmered in oxbows across the dusk-black landscape of the flood plain like a vessel thick with blood.

The Zambezi teems with life throughout its 1,633-mile length. "This magnificent stream," David Livingstone exclaimed, when he first travelled down in 1853. More tellingly, he called it "God's highway", an access route for Christianity and commerce. Livingstone imagined the Zambezi's future as a vast thoroughfare, with good-sized trading vessels plying up and down the river, bringing prosperity to the interior of Africa.

The city authorities in Miami have adopted a bit of a cliché as their slogan. Where tourism is concerned, they're always willing to 'go that extra mile'. Cliché it may be, but they've breathed new life into it. For a city a little over 150 years old, Miami has a remarkably advanced network of institutions and individuals whose main purpose in life seems to be ensuring that visitors have a good time.

He was drinking a Wild Turkey. She had a yard of tequila in her hand and probably a yard more in her body. He wore a two-gallon stetson with a rattlesnake-skin hatband, a matching choker and 100 per cent hornback 'gator cowboy boots. She had rings on every finger and a beehive. Her boots were probably full-quill ostrich. Both of them were hot.

"Man, oh man! Boy, oh boy! See

your journey to

They came for us the moment we slipped over the netting and into the enclosure, an explosion of fins and grins darting about us in the clear, warm waters of the Red Sea. And what a racket they made. Click! Ping! Chirp! Crackle! Peep! Were these two dolphins talking to each other? Were they talking to me? Should I reply?

Thank you, dolphin!

There is a land of innocent beauty and bounty, a blissful Eden. When ancient mariners sought refuge here, after hunting Moby Dick, they called heavenwards and fowls fit for a feast would appear from the sky. Providence provided: Providence petrels. They nest on the peaks that keep watch over the island. The sailors needed only make a noise – a low hoot, a cawing note – and the birds landed at their feet. And were swiftly dispatched to the pot.

Maybe Copernicus got it wrong and the world is flat after all. A skein of sunlit, blue water, level as a mirror, stretches as far as the eye can see. Mudflats cloaked in sea-grasses break through the shallows either side of the channel in which our boat, the Eolo, is moored.

'Rodney Marsh?" Frances wants to know why we're visiting the blond ex-clown prince of English football. "No, dear. Romney Marsh. The area in Kent between Hythe and Rye." "Is he still playing?" she wonders. Welcome, dear reader, to my life.

Romney Marsh turns out to be more or less empty of ex-footballers, or anyone else, for that matter.

Tramontane, Autan, Cers, Marin and Sirocco are the five winds that, depending on the season, waft or howl their way round the Langue-doc in south-west France. With an average 300 days of annual sunshine, the main criterion for an enjoyable stay thus shifts perceptibly. Rather than scanning the horizon for clouds, poke a finger into the air to check the wind direction.

The icy breeze burnt our faces and froze our breath, weighing down the delicate strands of our wolf-fur hoods with frosted beads and turning our nostril hairs into icy needles. I cried out with excitement as we shot over the ice and immediately felt the lining of my lungs freeze; I almost saw the sound of our laughter shattering into splinters in this frozen world.