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Have Salami, Will Travel

Alan B. Plevy takes Katz's kosher salami around the world

It might be easier to tick off the places Alan B. Plevy *hasn't* been. He's traveled through most of Europe and been to China twice. He climbed a volcano in Costa Rica and viewed the sunrise from atop Egypt's Mt. Sinai. He's spent time in Colombia, Morocco, Tibet and Mongolia. Remember the Holy Grail temple from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*? Plevy visited it in Petra, Jordan.

His home study is lined with photos from his travels: a shot of villagers drying rugs following a rainstorm in the Atlas Mountains north of Marrakesh; a snapshot of a trained cormorant fishing for its master on China's Li River.



Plevy's off-the-beaten-track travels, such as here in Mongolia, have been for pleasure. "If I could find somebody to send me anywhere like that on business," he says, "I'd take that trip."

Plevy, 56, thinks he caught the traveling bug from stories about his grandfather, who emigrated from Russia. As a high school student, Plevy vowed to go to Lhasa, Tibet, after marveling at a textbook photo of the beautiful Potala Palace, the historic home of the Dalai Lama located at the “roof-top of the world.” He realized that dream in 2005.

This September, Plevy plans to spend 20 days in Africa, during which time he’ll trek to the top of Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro.

All of his world travels have been for pleasure. “If I could find somebody to send me anywhere like that on business,” he says, “I’d take that trip.”

Unfortunately, there’s not much call for world travel in family law. A New Jersey native, Plevy founded his Tysons Corner, Va., firm, Smolen Plevy, with law school colleague Jason D. Smolen in 1977, right after both graduated from George Mason University’s law school. His personal law practice is concerned with divorce, custody, support and equitable distribution cases. “It is difficult work,” Plevy says of family law, “and if you

don’t enjoy it, helping the people you’re helping, you can’t stay in it long.”

Plevy generally goes solo on his travels, because his wife, Catherine, spokesperson for the Takoma Park, Md., police department, and their four children (ages 7 to 23) don’t always share Plevy’s yen for exotic settings off the beaten track. They prefer the tourist-friendly climes of Mexico and the Caribbean.

But he recalls spending a day with his wife in Marrakesh’s town square, the Place Djemaa El-Fna. “It was just fascinating to watch this one place change its character as the day progresses,” he says. The morning fruit vendors give way in the afternoon to the “soothsayers and the acrobats and musicians and the snake charmers” who pack up in turn as hundreds of food stalls open for dinner, selling snails, lamb and goat.

Plevy has to watch his gastronomical adventures, however. As snakes are to Indiana Jones, spicy foods are to Plevy. So he tends to bring along plenty of his favorite salami from New York City’s oldest deli, Katz’s, the location of Meg Ryan’s faux orgasm in *When Harry Met Sally*. Plevy

has patronized Katz’s for years and his propensity for carrying its food around the globe earned him an interview in a recent documentary about the deli. (Plevy’s segment can be found at: youtube.com/watch?v=USuovlYnuwg.)

In the documentary Plevy recounts visiting a camp of gers (or yurts), the Mongols’ wood-framed, tent-like homes, on the Central Asian steppe. One of the Americans in Plevy’s group hooked up her iPod to an old speaker system in the tribe’s mess hall. “Finally we found some old Beatles and Stones tunes on the iPod. That was the only music that was familiar to them, the Beatles, and they enjoyed that. We started dancing around the room,” Plevy says. Several salamis and tequila and vodka bottles later, they had beaten the language barrier and forged friendships. Exiting into the Mongolian night, “we were mesmerized by the absolute blackness of the sky north of the Gobi Desert,” Plevy recalls. “The stars were just incredible.”

—Richard Foster

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