

MY HOLS

By Emily Byne

Mary O'Neill
Radio Presenter**What was your best holiday ever?**

Six years ago I headed to Barcelona with four pals and we had a great laugh. I loved the Gaudi architecture, the Picasso museum, the fabulous restaurants and of course, the shopping! We rented a little apartment just off Las Ramblas, so we were right in the thick of it.

Where did you holiday as a child?

As a child, back in the 80s, our holidays were in Ireland. I have really happy memories of staying in a mobile home at Carne Beach, Co Wexford and we also went to Skibbereen, in Cork. The summers seemed hotter back then, or maybe it's my rose-tinted nostalgia.

What is your favourite holiday food?

I was in Italy three years ago and I loved every meal I had. Even if I'm not in Italy, pizza with a glass of wine pretty much works anywhere. I also love chips by the seaside.

Where would you never go again?

I wouldn't go back to Bangkok. It was dirty and smelly and I couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Where did you go this year?

I haven't been anywhere! I've been really busy working on my new show *The Sunday Grill* on Beat 102-103, but I have planned a few weekends away.

Where will you be going?

I'm going on a river boat on the Shannon in July and there's a group of 18 of us going to Bratislava for a few days in August. I can't wait.

Where would you like to go before you die?

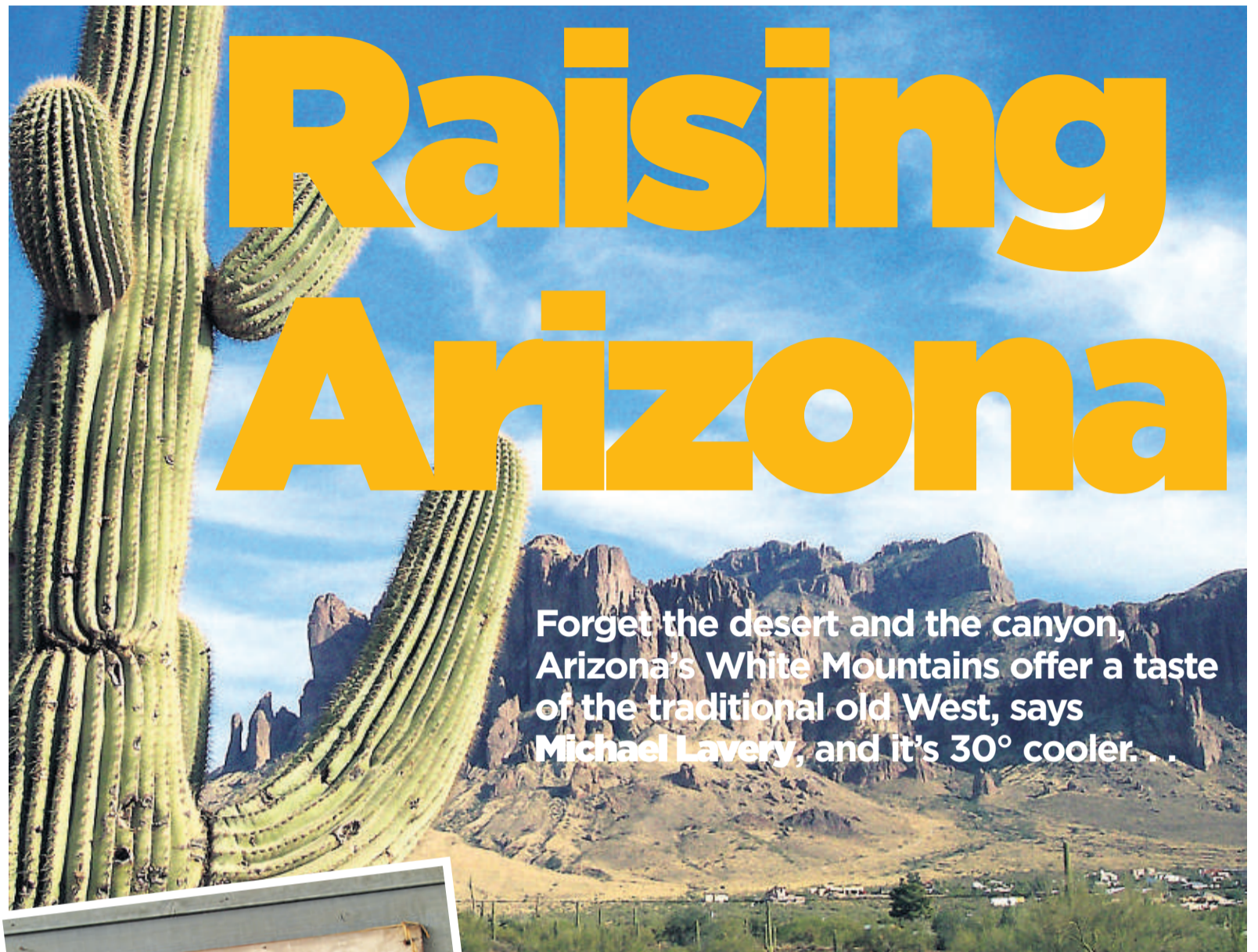
I'd love to go on a safari in Africa, and I'd like to explore more of Asia.

Do you have any holiday tips?

Always book your first night's accommodation in advance. I had a disaster in Amsterdam; the first hotel I saw had mice and a very nasty manager.



OUT OF AFRICA: Mary would like to go on safari



Forget the desert and the canyon, Arizona's White Mountains offer a taste of the traditional old West, says Michael Lavery, and it's 30° cooler...



VERY GINGERLY, I edged the fire burning on the end of a 10ft pole towards the Pyrodex black powder. With a bang like a civil war cannon, a large black anvil shot six feet into the air surrounded by clouds of smoke, followed by a concussion wave hitting me in the chest.

That, in the town of Taylor in Arizona's White Mountains, is the local idea of fun.

The Mormon pioneers who settled this part of the Wild West were short of a cannon, so they improvised - and came up with "firing the anvil".

A sheet of newspaper sprinkled with black powder is placed on top of a regular anvil. A hollow section of pipe filled with more black powder sits on the newspaper and a second anvil is balanced on top.

Next - and don't try this at home - a lighted flame is applied to the sprinkled Pyrodex. It ignites and flashes into the pipe, propelling the anvil straight upwards.

Has anyone been killed doing this stunt, I asked? "Not lately, but we have had lighter anvils go 30ft," one local said.

Nowadays, the anvil firing is confined to July 4, but the town elders, and the Taylor Fire Department, turned out to give this visiting journalist a blast.

Taylor and its twinned town of Snowflake, are famous for their annual rodeo which keeps alive the traditions of the Old West.

Many of the residents are Mormons, proud of their heritage and keen to preserve it.

Original homes, including one once occupied by an Irish woman who pushed a handcart 1,000 miles across the prairies, have been beautifully restored.

The White Mountains area is about three hours drive from Phoenix and many of the city's richer residents keep a second home in the mountains.

During the white-hot heat of a Phoenix summer, the mountains are 30°F cooler than the city. They offer skiing and snowboarding in the winter. It's possible to go for a swim in the city in January

and ski in the afternoon in the White Mountains.

We based ourselves in the small town of Pinetop-Lakeside, nestled in the largest contiguous strand of ponderosa pines in the world.

Its elevation of 7,200ft took a bit of getting used to. Some headaches and quickly running out of steam on steep hikes were the initial order of the day. The locales say it takes about three days to become acclimatised.

Pinetop-Lakeside has a population of 4,000, but jumps to 35,000 in the summer months, as people seek respite from the heat in the valley.

The area's population includes local Apaches, who run a big gambling casino, something the Navajo have, so far, refused to countenance.

WILDLIFE

But it is also home to thousands of elk, antelope and black bear. It's not unusual to see an elk or bear wander into Pinetop. The local golf club recently had to hire cowboys to round up wild mustangs who were playing havoc on the greens. And you get used to seeing "Elk Detected" signs by the roadside. Forest Rangers have put electronic collars on some elk, which send out an alert when the big beasts decide to cross the road.

Nearby is the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, home to the White Mountain Apache tribe, while the towns of Show Low, Springerville, Eagar, Greer and Alpine are useful bases for exploring the millions of acres of forests and rivers that are perfect for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting and white-water rafting.

We visited the Diamond X ranch - John Wayne once owned the neighbouring one - a working cattle ranch with a blue ribbon trout fishery on the Little Colorado river. It offers year-round accommodation for those who want to try their hand at wrangling, fly fishing or even taking part in an archaeological dig of Indian ruins.

A short drive away is the Sipe wildlife area where, if you're lucky, you could spot a bald eagle or a Mexican grey wolf, recently re-introduced to the area.

We drove north, towards the Navajo lands and to Holbrook, once as tough a Western town as Tombstone. Holbrook was the site of the infamous bloody shootout between Apache