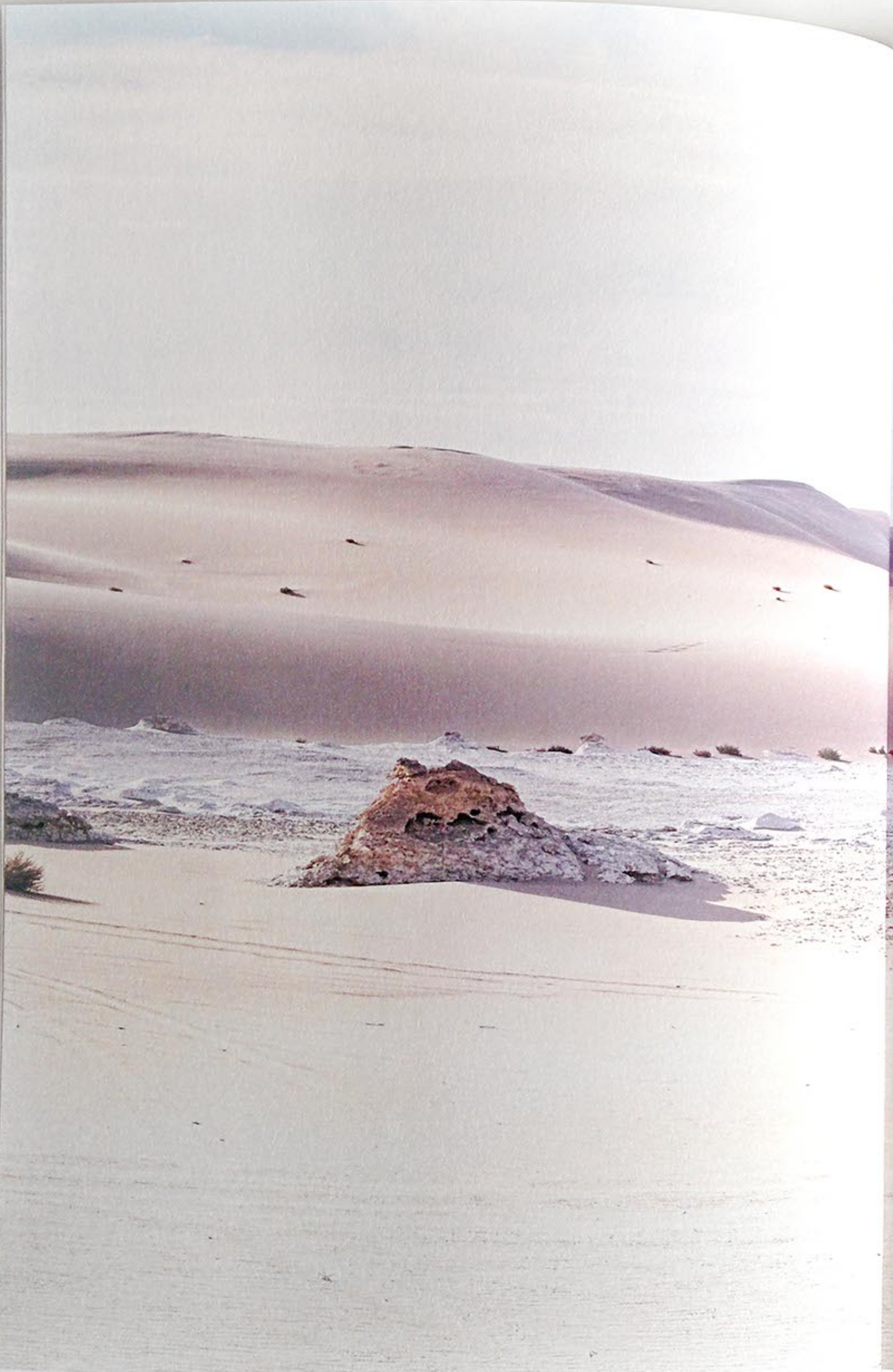




AU COURANT

AN UNDERSTATED LIFE/STYLE

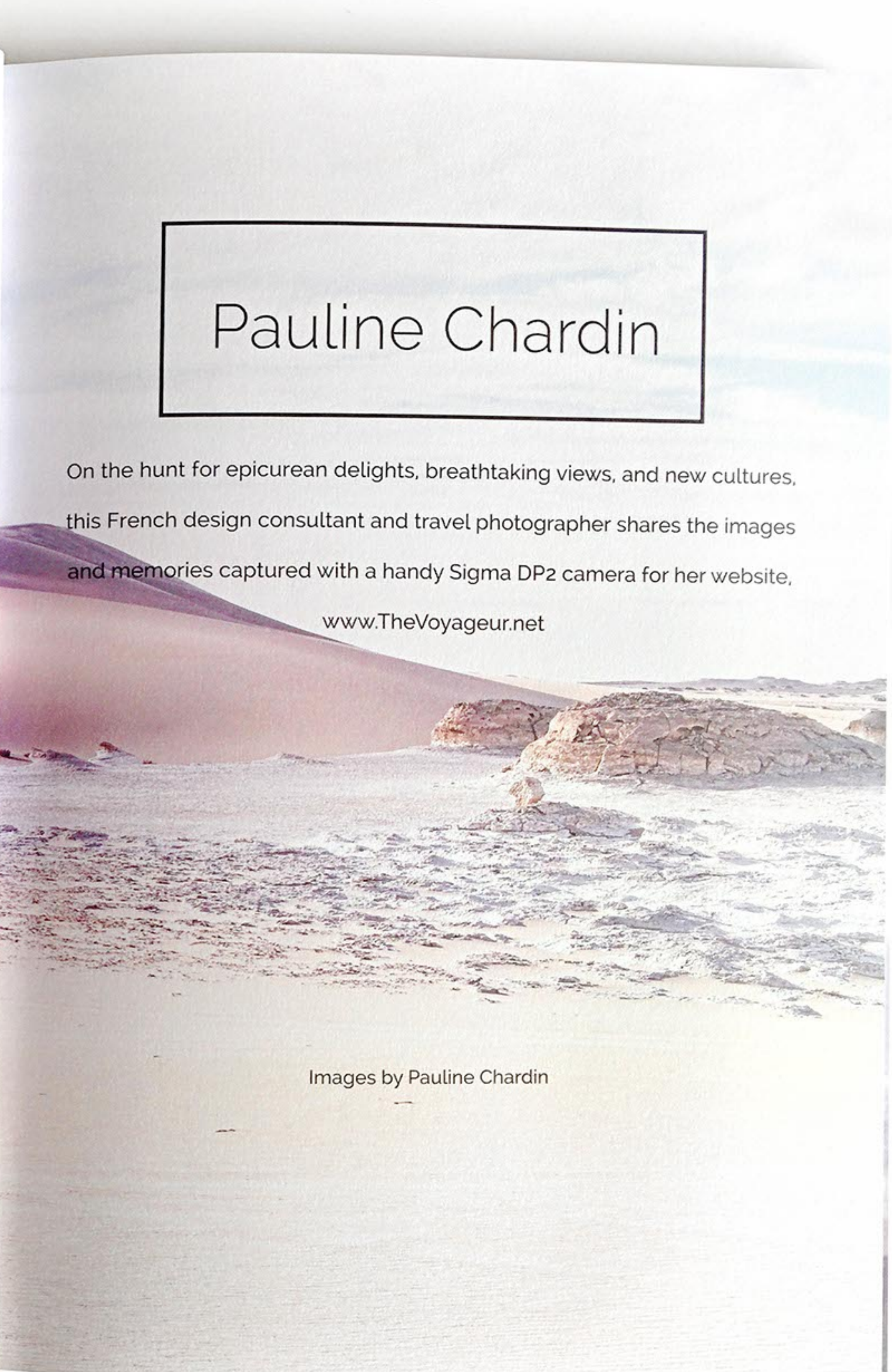
01



Pauline Chardin

On the hunt for epicurean delights, breathtaking views, and new cultures, this French design consultant and travel photographer shares the images and memories captured with a handy Sigma DP2 camera for her website,

www.TheVoyageur.net



Images by Pauline Chardin

Can you share an unexpected or unusual experience you've had on a trip?

One time I went for a swim in a lake in Sri Lanka, got a little bit lost on my way back, and ended up stuck in fifty centimeters of mud. I screamed for help but just ended up angering the buffalos around me. Eventually I resorted to pulling my own legs out the mud, literally lifting them one after the other, and came out covered in dirt to the shock of my worried-sick husband. I try to be a little bit more careful now, but I still have an uncontrollable itch for adventure sometimes.

What's one of the most memorable places you've stayed at?

Vil Uyana in Sri Lanka. It's a rather secluded eco-lodge in the middle of the country where the proximity to nature is moving and amusing at the same time. The architecture is also truly beautiful, and it's a very peaceful and inspiring place. I spent my time there drawing exotic leaves, peeking at colorful birds, chasing peacocks and trying to spot crocodiles. Otherwise, I was deep in a coma of happiness, swimming in our own, private stone pool.

And what about the food? Surely you've had quite a few tasty and intriguing dishes that you can tell us about.

Good food definitely plays a big part for me when traveling. My most delicious memories include halloumi in Vejer de la Frontera, Spain, cassata (ricotta cake) in Lecce, sage tempura in Florence, coconut and raw fish spring rolls in Phu Quoc, homemade apricot icecream in Castro Marim, biriyani in Kerala, nigri sushi in Japan,

fish souvlaki in Leros and romaniya (lentil and pomegranate soup) in Siwa. I'm a little bit of a cook myself, and I love when I can come back from my travels with so much inspiration to cook new dishes or to re-invent old ones.

You've been able to snap rather intriguing images on your travels. Looking back on past trips, is there any thing or place you regret not being able to capture?

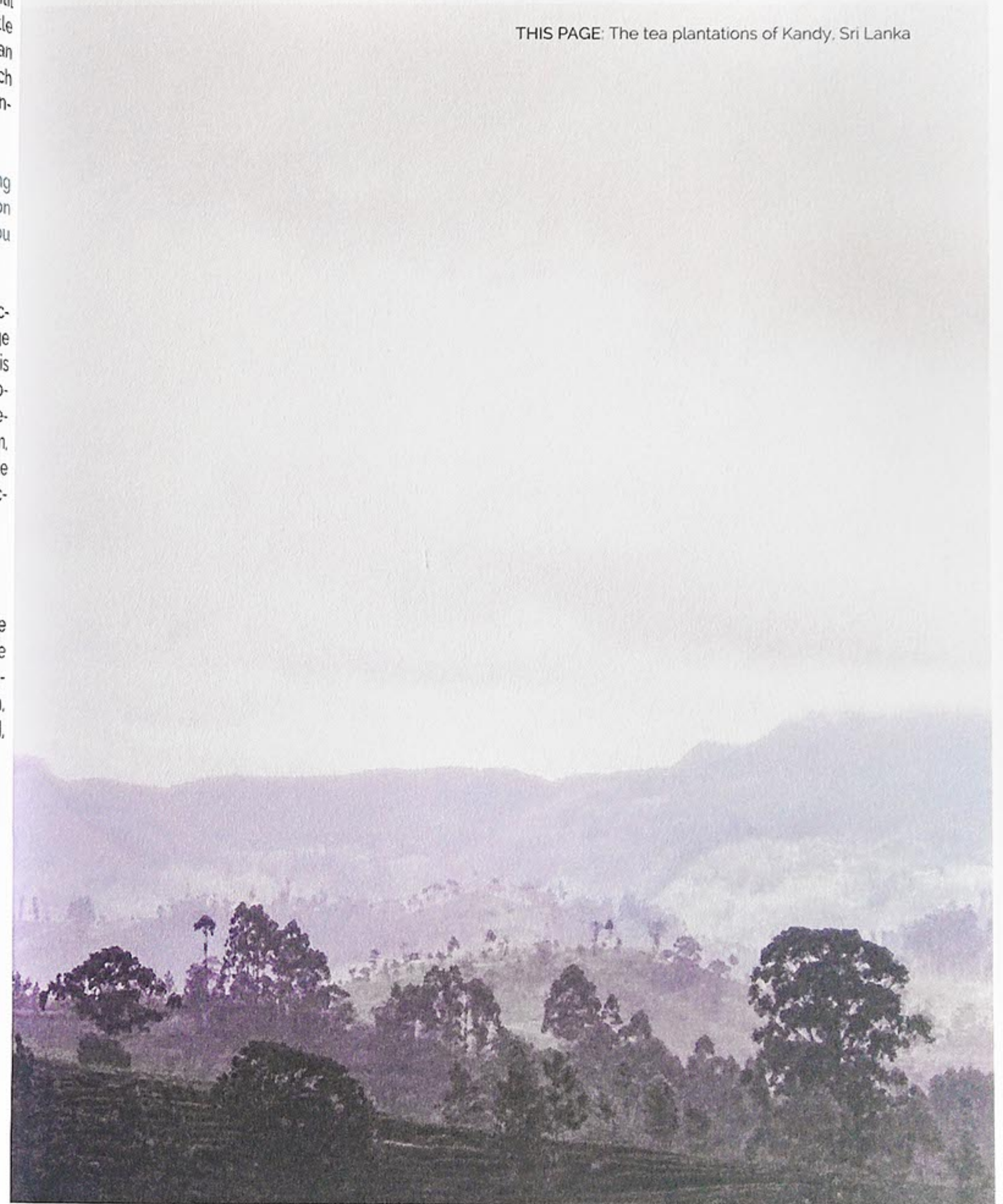
I do get very frustrated with the "no pictures allowed" signs. I generally manage to steal a few snaps while my husband is on the lookout, but even our guerilla-photographing methods aren't enough sometimes, like in Cairo's Archaeology Museum, where they confiscate your camera at the entrance. There were unbelievable pictures to be taken inside, what a shame!

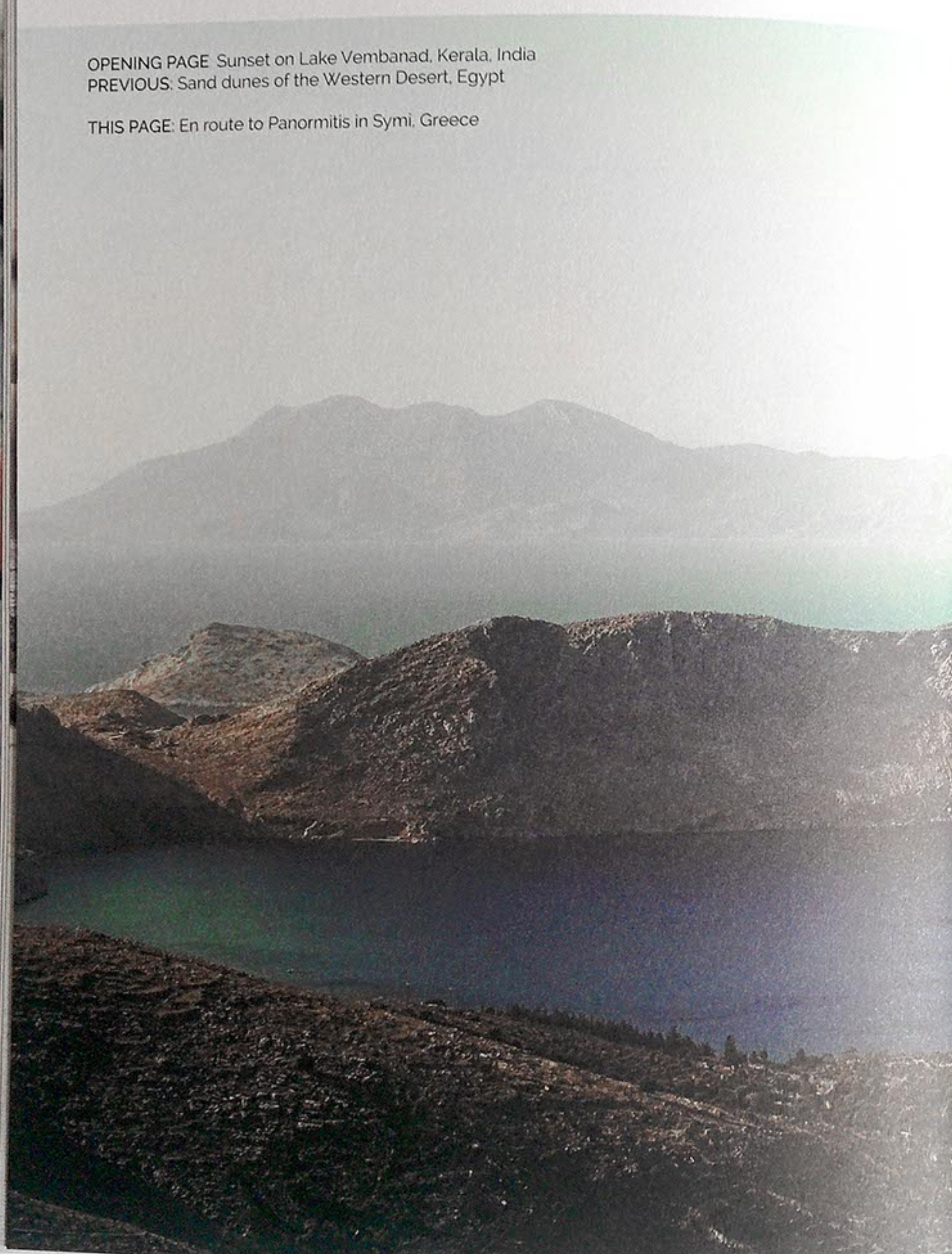
Where do you dream of going next?

I dream of many destinations and we're already starting to think about the trip we will take this fall. The battle is raging between Northern India and Southern Japan, but the latter seems to have a good lead, though.

• • •

THIS PAGE: The tea plantations of Kandy, Sri Lanka





OPENING PAGE Sunset on Lake Vembanad, Kerala, India
PREVIOUS. Sand dunes of the Western Desert, Egypt

THIS PAGE: En route to Panormitis in Symi, Greece

AU COURANT

11

What do you find yourself responding to when visiting a place for the first time?

Definitely the architecture. It's my gateway to understanding a country's culture and aesthetic. Inspiration can start with Cairo's suburban geometric towers, Vienna's art deco signage or Palermo's baroque churches. There is nothing like that ride from the airport when I'm looking through the windows, already trying to pin down what will make this place unique.

You've been to some incredible destinations thus far. Is there any place in particular that stands out in your memory, and why?

My heart used to belong to Italia and India, but that was before I went to Japan last spring. I was so impressed by the country and its people, and it's such a different kind of travel - not so much about jaw-dropping sights but more about the sum of small things. I was in a state of complete euphoria, even though sometimes it was almost too much. The cultural shock is a real thing; there was so much stimulation everywhere that I felt a little bit overwhelmed at times.

Do you feel more at home in the far flung, exotic locales or in a scenic city?

I really love both, but I find myself craving nature more and more these days. I've been living in Paris for ten years now, but spent my childhood in the countryside, in the middle of vineyards. Cities, with all the culture they can offer, are pretty much a given for me. But nature has this seducing combination of adventure and

peacefulness that appeals greatly to me as well.

Speaking of "feeling at home," what helps you to adjust when you're in a new place?

It's a fragile and fleeting feeling, "being comfortable," away from home. For me it starts with good food and a warm, but casual welcome. If the first impression is good, I'm generally quite forgiving with whatever may come next. On the other hand, when we're off to a bad start it might take me some time to realize that the whole country isn't against me!

With new places come new cultures. What are some of the interesting lifestyles, cultural similarities - or differences - you've encountered when traveling?

Traveling has made me more aware of my own culture and how different a foreign country can be, which is actually a great realization in our so-called globalized world. I love observing and trying to decipher all these cultural details that shape the day-to-day life in a place, even if some of the traditions are bound to remain mysterious for the traveller that's only passing by. Ironically, that's also the beauty of experiencing a new culture.

It also puts your own values in perspective. I came back from Kerala with a different view on modesty, and my recent trip to Japan made me reflect on what we might achieve here in France if politeness and selflessness were a bigger part of our culture.