

Seeing Stratford in a different light

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STAFF REPORTER

Last week, one well-travelled writer was in Stratford for a little bit of business and a whole lot of pleasure.

Evelyn Hannon, founder and editor of the renowned women's travel website Journeywoman.com, visited Stratford last week with her grandson Joshua, celebrating

his eighth birthday and taking a peek at what intergenerational travel is like in the Festival City.

When she started the website over a decade ago, many readers thought Journeywoman was for the single, solo, backpacking female.

But since then, there's been a huge shift in the women's market. Women of all ages are travelling like never before,

and many are not only doing so by themselves or with their friends or family – some are choosing to make memories with their grandchildren through travel.

"I really believe intergenerational travel is such a great way for grandchildren to bond with their grandparents," said Hannon, 68, a Toronto resident. "There's nobody like a grandparent to introduce them to a new area because they love them so much. They're going to protect them and they're going to try to teach them what they know."

And don't forget, there's also the chance to spoil them rotten.

"There's no question about it," she said, with a laugh.

Hannon has visited Stratford before, as recently as a few weeks ago, when she scoped out the city with some girlfriends to help prepare for her intergenerational trip.

Stratford was an easy choice when it came to deciding what city Joshua might enjoy best. His love of plays and costuming led Hannon to believe the city and its festival was a perfect fit.

And if one thing stuck out during their two-day visit, it was the hospitality of the locals, from Randy the friendly pedicab driver to Berthold Carriere, who took some time to talk music with Joshua after a chance encounter at Foster's Inn.

She expects to publish her most recent travel tale on her website shortly, where her thousands of readers

will get a peek into what Stratford has to offer.

In fact, her website receives over one million visits per year and about 63,000 subscribe to the monthly Journeywoman newsletter. She's received dozens of awards for her work and has been featured in *Time* and *People* magazines, just to name a couple.

But Hannon is quick to point out that Journeywoman isn't just her – instead, it's a network of women travellers from around the world.

"The concept is based on the fact that women are wonderful networkers," she explained.

Women – and the occasional man – send in their travel tips, sharing their experiences in foreign countries and doling out insider information about the best-kept secrets in their home towns. She describes it as "an incredible phenomenon."

So it wasn't a surprise that after including information about her trip to Stratford in her newsletter, a local Journeywoman, photographer Irene Miller, contacted her offering tips to make her trip complete.

Hannon arranged to meet Miller while in the city and even had the chance to have some professional photographs taken.

Though she names China as her favourite destination, she doesn't suggest it for first-time travellers flying solo. Instead, she suggests women take short trips to cities close to home to get their feet wet, before heading off to a traveller-friendly country, such as the Netherlands.

Her very first solo trip was to Belgium in the 1980s after divorcing her husband. She admits she spent most of the 35 days crying, but only dined alone five times the whole trip. The experience helped her to realize that despite her initial apprehension, she really could travel on her own.

While she considers Journeywoman her life's work, she's insistent she doesn't want to sound pretentious. After all, Journeywoman isn't about her.

"It's not about the awards, but much more. It's about reaching the women who are afraid like I was, it's about holding their hand and helping them to get out and understand that it's easier than they think it is."



Evelyn Hannon, founder and editor of Journeywoman.com, poses with her grandson Joshua, 8, at the Festival's costume warehouse last week. Hannon and her grandson were in the city to celebrate his birthday. She plans on writing an article about the trip, focusing on intergenerational travel.

IRENE MILLER PHOTOGRAPHIC ART

Evelyn's top travel tips

Though it proved difficult, Journeywoman.com founder and editor Evelyn Hannon agreed to select just three important travel tips to share with *Gazette* readers. Why was this such a hard task? Because she has thousands of tips. Just check out her website.

#1. Don't be afraid. Hannon suggests women start out slowly by taking trips close to home, much like her recent visit to Stratford. You'll be able to understand the language and know if someone is behaving in an anti-social way. "Get out there, just wet your toes a little," said Hannon. If you're comfortable travelling close to home but don't know if you can cope farther afield, join one of the many women's travel groups and head off to Europe. Bon voyage!

#2. Watch your wardrobe. Travelling in the same clothing you wear back home may not be your best bet. Instead of getting all dolled up, sometimes it is better to wear neutral clothes as to not attract too much attention. And of course, make sure you are culturally correct. "You can look pretty in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, but no one is going to pick you out of a crowd like they would if you were wearing full make-up or a T-shirt that is too low," she said. "You stay under the radar."

#3. Be familiar with food. When it comes to food and drink, it's best not to accept either from strangers. Most women are aware of the most obvious danger – rape. But sometimes clever thieves will drug travellers to make it easier to steal their belongings. "Next thing you know, you wake up and your backpack is gone or your suitcase is gone," said Hannon. While the majority of people who will offer you food have good intentions, it is safer to err on the side of caution.

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