

LETTERS

SOUTHEAST WAS NEGLECTED

To the Editor: Of the 31 places to go in the United States — “The 31 Places to Go This Summer” (June 1), you had only one attraction in the Southeast: Myrtle Beach, S.C.

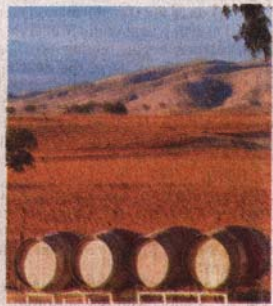
Your writer and the editor obviously ignored Mount Mitchell in North Carolina, the highest mountain east of the Mississippi (6,684 feet); Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee with its 800 miles of trails; and the Blue Ridge Parkway, a high-mountain road linking Shenandoah National Park and the Smokies. There you can find the highest mountains in the East, more than 40 higher than 6,000 feet and hundreds of waterfalls. **DANNY BERNSTEIN**
Asheville, N.C.

To the Editor: I was thrilled to read your recommendation of Paso Robles, Calif. We traveled to Tuscany three years ago, and chose Paso Robles as our trip for this past spring. To us, Paso Robles is the Tuscany of the United States. Its gorgeous rolling hills, friendly residents, boutique wineries like Minassian-Young (www.minassianyoung.com) and the quaint downtown restaurant scene make it a must-visit location without the touristy traffic.

LAUREN C. TOWNSEND
Fort Wright, Ky.

To the Editor: Your lead-in to Paso Robles says “Blame it on Sideways.” I would point out that “Sideways” was filmed not in the Paso Robles area but in the Santa Ynez Valley just over the mountains from Santa Barbara, where the country is beautiful and the wine great.

JOHN R. WEAVER
Blue Bell, Pa.



PETER DA SILVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

HOW TO PICK ASPARAGUS

To the Editor: In the explorer column, “On the Trail of a Sustainable Feast” (June 1), the author states that Ana Stayton reached “under a blueberry bush to yank a stray asparagus stem out of the ground for us to taste.”

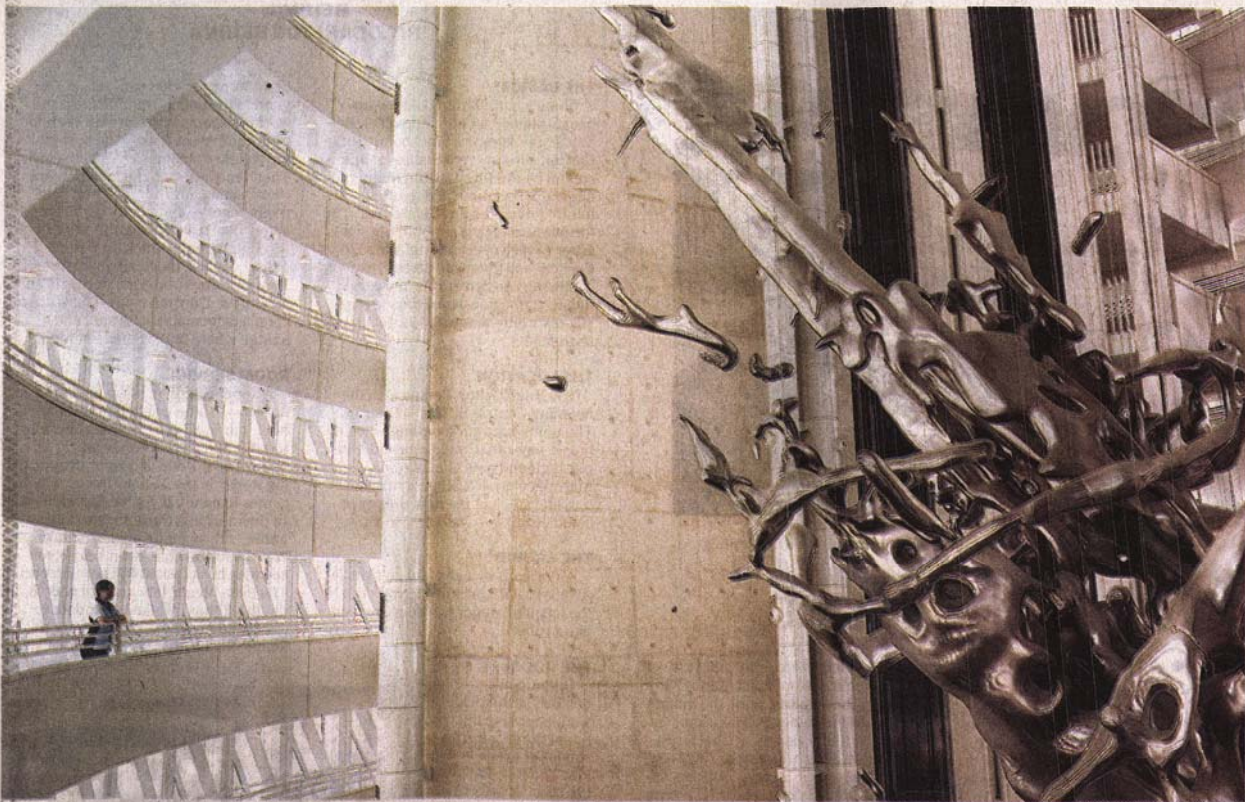
As a backyard asparagus grower, I have found two ways to harvest asparagus. One is to cut the stem, and the other is to snap it off at just the right place for the stem to be tender when cooked. One never — never — yanks it out of the ground because the well-established (takes a few years to establish) roots would be very unhappy to be yanked. In fact, the plant could be put in jeopardy. Maybe the author was looking the other way when the asparagus was harvested.

BOBBIE RAYMOND
Oak Park, Ill.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Travel section welcomes letters. Correspondence for publication must include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number, and should be sent to The Editor, Travel Section, The New York Times, 620 8th Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018 or by e-mail to travelmail@nytimes.com. Because of the volume of mail, unpublished correspondence cannot be acknowledged.

JOURNEYS } SPAIN



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATIAS COSTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ABOVE The Water Tower at Expo 2008 in Zaragoza holds a hanging sculpture, “Splash.” BELOW A statue of Caesar Augustus in the Central Market square.

It's Zaragoza's Turn to Make a Splash

By ANDREW FERREN

UP to now, one could be forgiven for knowing next to nothing about the ancient Spanish city of Zaragoza, capital of Aragon and the country's fifth largest metropolis. For some reason, it's never had the same mystique as, say, Granada, Salamanca or Toledo. But that seems likely to change very soon.

Following the example of Barcelona, Seville and most recently Valencia — site of the 2007 America's Cup races — Zaragoza is now poised to spring, or at least step, onto the world stage. The transforming event is Expo Zaragoza 2008, an international exposition that opens this weekend and focuses on the timely themes of Water and Sustainable Development.

If the Seville Expo of 1992 showed Spain rushing to modernize, “Zaragoza 2008 is meant to show a thoroughly modernized Spain committed to sustainability and preserving our quality of life,” said Jerónimo Blasco, director of the consortium behind the event.

Before it closes on Sept. 14, organizers hope to have welcomed as many as seven million visitors — 10 times the city's population — to the Expo campus and to the newly spruced up city center. With more than 100 countries participating, along with private corporations and organizations like the Red Cross and Oxfam, there are, thankfully, about



60 restaurants, bars and cafeterias providing a global buffet at which to fuel between exhibits. Some 3,400 performances are on tap by more than 350 international troupes and talents ranging from Cirque du Soleil to Bob Dylan to Daniel Barenboim.

Getting to the Expo will not be difficult. Since the completion earlier this year of the high-speed rail link known as the AVE, Zaragoza can now be reached in under 90 minutes from Madrid and less than two hours from Barcelona. Once visitors have made it to the stunning new Delicias Station, the Expo can be reached on foot, via taxi or bus — or even by air, in little green and blue cable cars that link the station with the site. Water taxis make the trip up the Ebro River from the city center.

Spread over 60 acres bordered by the meandering river just west of the city center, the Expo site is punctuated with enough eye-catching architecture — like Zaha Hadid's sleek biomorphic covered-bridge pavilion — to ensure that environmentalists are not the only ones in attendance.

As host, Aragon is the only one of Spain's 17 autonomous regions to get its own pavilion. Designed by the Aragonese architecture firm of Olano & Mendo, it was inspired by local basket-weaving crafts; the reference is particularly evident at night when giant inflatable vegetables rise above its roof. Inside is a multimedia extravaganza

that includes the participation of leading Spanish contemporary artists and filmmakers.

But the Expo's signature edifice is the Water Tower, which, at nearly 250 feet tall, seems like a lot of building to house just two sculptures. The giant hanging sculpture “Splash” vividly captures in solid form the kinetic properties of water in motion. It can be admired from nearly two miles of ramps that wrap around the tower's interior. Elevators also rise to the top level, where a bar called Nube (“cloud” in Spanish) offers liquid refreshment and sweeping views of the entire Expo.

Closer to the river's edge, five thematic plazas powerfully, and sometimes playfully, highlight man's relationship with water. Covered with a dome of salt, the pavilion Thirst emphasizes innovation that has evolved from mankind's need for water. Another, the Beacon, designed to be energy efficient, is built of clay and is likened to a botijo, the Spanish terra-cotta drinking bottles that keep their contents several degrees colder than the ambient environment.

Such architectural puns turn out to be serious science and form a big part of the Expo's sustainability message. Striving to be carbon neutral, the Expo relies on such old-school low-tech cooling systems as well as state-of-the-art solar- and wind-generated power.

Long before there were Expos to rally public interest in such things as water and sustainable development, Zaragoza was aware of the importance of water to its civic well-being, and an exploration



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ONLINE: ZARAGOZA SLIDE SHOW

More images of Zaragoza can be seen at

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of the city is, in many ways, a thematic extension of the Expo. The city, whose name is a permutation of Caesar Augustus, the emperor who brought the region under Roman control, has three museums that focus on water in the Roman era — the port, the thermal baths and a fairly advanced system of 2,000-year-old water pipes and sewers.

BUT even without the water theme, Zaragoza is a delight to explore. The city that held out through two sieges by Napoleon's army in the 19th century is today easily conquered on foot. Fanning out from the city's center — the vast Plaza del Pilar, home to three churches, including the towering Baroque Basilica of Virgen del Pilar — is a maze of narrow lanes, most of which have a few brick churches and Renaissance palaces amid a delightfully dense profusion of tapas bars and cafes.

Not to be missed are the ones along the especially skinny streets of El Tubo, a tiny barrio between the Plaza del Pilar and the Plaza de España. La Cueva en Aragón (Calle Libertad 16; 34-97-620-4645), for instance, specializes in one thing only — a tapa of plump grilled mushrooms topped with a prawn and doused in a potent garlic-infused sauce. Around the corner is Bodegas Almau (Calle Estebanes 10; 34-97-629-9834), famous for its marinated anchovies. Spilling out from the restaurant's beautifully paneled 19th-century interior, tables have colonized the sidewalk and a nearby lot.

The city center, known as the casco antiguo, may be tiny, but there is something for everyone. In the nearby neighborhoods of Santa Cruz and La Magdalena, for instance, it's not uncommon to find a cafe where elderly men play cards sharing a tree-shaded sidewalk with reggae bars and martini lounges.

Now thanks to the Expo and the AVE, Caesar's under-the-radar city is about to go global.