

## Roosevelt memorial

Four Freedoms Park – a memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt – on Roosevelt Island, New York City is based on a plan that is four-decades old, and is all set to open on October 24 this year.

## FRENCH CONNECTION

# Basque in history

**KALPANA SUNDER** explores the delectable history of the French fishing port, St Jean de Luz, and finds out what makes this place an ideal spot for a seaside vacation.



ON HISTORICAL SHORES Ancient geological formations that line the coast of St Jean de Luz. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

There is a quiet corner in France at the foothills of the Pyrenees, where the light is translucent, the long beaches have silvery surf and life is in the slow lane. A place where French and Spanish influences are in a perfect harmonious marriage.

Picturesque St Jean de Luz is situated in the feisty Basque country with its own ancient language called Euskera (not connected to any other language in the world) and distinctive culture and cuisine. The town lies in a sheltered bay between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees. From the 16th century, the town became rich from whaling and pirates called corsairs, who worked with the blessings of the government, and built fine houses with their ill-gotten wealth. This fishing port is in the mouth of the Nivelle river, which empties into the bay of St Jean de Luz. The Basque name for the town is Donibane Lohitzune ('Doni Bane' meaning Saint John, and 'Lohitzune' meaning marshes). This refers to long ago, when the river flowed wild and the estuary was a vast marsh which often flooded.

Our Hotel La Reserve has a dramatic cliff-top location on the edge of town, above the stormy Atlantic, with views of the azure crescent bay and the crashing waves from my French windows. The hotel interiors have tiled floors, antique wooden furniture, local Basque furnishings and an infinity pool that looks like it can fall down the cliff at anytime. The Church of St John the Baptist is the showpiece of the town. I am entranced by its superb, intricately carved, Baroque altar featuring 20 French saints, and three-tiered dark oak wood galleries. The wooden galleries were meant for the men; the women stood on the ground floor, signifying their role in Basque society as being connected to the dead spirits buried below. From the ceiling hangs a paddle wheel ship, which was a gift from Eugenie, Napoleon III's wife. This was the venue of the famous wedding of Louis XIV with Maria Theresa in 1660 – a political wedding which cemented the relations of two countries. Legend has it that the door through which the royal couple entered was blocked forever, symbolising an end to the hostility between Spain

and France!

We walk along the long promenade with its sturdy sea embankment, built to protect the locals from the rage of the ocean, lined with 19th century seaside mansions. The Basque country is dotted with churches built by sailors as thanksgiving for returning home safely. The town is small and we walk everywhere. Artists work on easels and markets overflow with fresh produce. The town is also famous for its Thalassotherapy – treatment with salt water, seaweed and algae, which cures all ills from migraines to rheumatism to sprained ankles. The focal point of the town is the Place Louis XIV, the house where the famous monarch spent the last few days of his bachelorhood. Close by is Rue Gambetta, the pedestrianised shopping street connecting the fishing port to the beach. It is lined with boutiques and distinctive whitewashed timber-framed houses, with their doors and shutters painted in red. Around every corner, there are men in black berets, and the national colours of the Basque flag – red, green and white.

The town seems to have a huge sweet tooth. I am assailed by the aromas of sweet macaroons, caramels and pastries. There is the famous shop of Pierre Oteiza filled with cured meats, homemade foie gras and rustic sheep's milk cheeses paired with black cherry jam. I bite into the famous lo-

cal macaroons, invented for the royal marriage at La Maison Adam, dating back to 1660, made with a secret recipe that has remained unchanged down the ages. Our sweet trail leads us next to Maison Paries. While their *mouchous* (softer than macaroons, made with more almond paste and less sugar) are fantastic and come in amazing boxes ('mouchou' means 'kiss' in Basque), it's their *kanougas* (chewy caramels first created in 1905) that I fall in love with. Every shop sells the crumbly, butter pastry cake called *gâteau basque* filled with almond cream or, sometimes, black cherries. I succumb helplessly to the distinctive Linge Basque, with vibrant candy-coloured stripes on heavy sailcloth, sold in shops with brands like Tissage de Luz and Artiga, offering a range of tablecloth, bags, napkins and bread baskets.

### See it as it is

The *raison d'être* of the town is the sea – even the festivals celebrate this connection. We hear about the Fete du Thon, which celebrates the bounty of tuna catches, with music, dancing, sizzling tuna steaks and a festive atmosphere. We walk to the port with its fishing nets laid out to dry and ship-owners' homes dating from the 17th century. The Nivelle river separates the two parts of town – St Jean de Luz proper and its newer 'suburb', Ci-

bourne (former home of the composer Ravel). We take a boat cruise down the Nivelle river, passing into the bay, watching the dramatic Flysch-geological formations of limestone, sandstone and shale with more than 50 million years of history. In the distance is the 3,000-foot summit of La Rhune, the emblematic Basque mountain that marks the Spanish frontier.

That evening, we head to the local *fronton* or court to watch a pelota game. This Basque game is one of the fastest ball games in the world, played with a long hook-shaped wicker basket, back and forth against the walls like squash. This men-only game has a great fan following locally, and I see families cheer and enjoy their evening at the pelota match.

Local Basque cuisine is distinctive, often flavoured by piquant Espelette chillies. We have dinner at the Olatua Restaurant with a traditional Basque menu and historical photographs lining the walls. The charismatic Basque owner, Ramuntxo Berria, talks to us about the centuries-old Basque language, which his children learn at school even today. He speaks with passion about Basque cuisine which is loaded with veal, lamb and fish, special white beans and cod fish with potatoes. Our meal at his restaurant is fresh and tasty with a fennel soup with chunks of local cottage cheese and light Jurancon wine full of exotic citrus flavours. The meal ends with Patxaran, an alcoholic beverage from Navarra, which has anise, liqueur, fruits and prunes and is matured for five months. At the end of the meal, I mull over the toast in these parts – "*Salud, Amor y Pasetas.... y el tiempo para gustarlos*," which translates as "health, love and money...and the time to enjoy them!"

“THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST IS THE SHOWPIECE OF THE TOWN. I AM ENTRANCED BY ITS INTRICATELY CARVED, BAROQUE ALTAR FEATURING 20 FRENCH SAINTS, AND DARK OAK WOOD GALLERIES.”

## PERSPECTIVE

# Unhappy ever after

When my TV was taken away for repair, I hit rock bottom. Watching drops of condensation fall down the window before coming to rest on the decaying wooden sill could keep me occupied for hours. I merely sat there, alone, in my paint peeling apartment, pondering about the temporary nature of happiness and the permanency of disillusionment. Thankfully, before resorting to taking up wrist slitting to pass the time, the TV returned. Now the TV is back, I can get on with letting it destroy my life.

The trouble with TV is that it far too often subjects us to idyllic notions of love. Many programmes and commercials sell us the notion that there is someone out there just for you, the 'special one'. Out of nearly seven billion people, strangely there is only 'one'. Why not ten, or a thousand? No, just the one. Just think of all those love songs and watch all those movies that tell us this.

You see it all the time on TV. Good-looking boy meets good-looking girl. It's either love at first sight, or one has to win the other's heart and go through a series of humiliating, soul-destroying setbacks before two hearts become one and they end up together, living happily ever after.

Now, the odds that you could ever possibly stumble across this person are too astronomical to contemplate. The notion that there is just one person out there waiting for you is almost as ludicrous as the notion that you will ever be able to find them in a world containing billions of people. Nevertheless, so many buy into this guff and spend their whole lives looking



for this mythical person. I kind of gave up looking after numerous futile, self-defeating quests.

You meet someone. They are attractive and, if lucky, they will find you attractive too. It's is all very exciting. It's all brand new as you discover your potential lifelong soulmate. This could be 'the one'. The voice, the mannerisms, the looks. How wonderful. The air crackles with magic, and nights watching paint dry in a dark,

dingy room are a thing of the past.

A few months or years down the line, however, that voice, the one you once found so soothing, has developed into an irritating, grating noise that drones on and on. The cute mannerisms are now merely annoying. And those facial features that were once so appealing...well, the eyebrows are too thick, the nose too long, and were those ears always that big? Maybe this person isn't 'the one' after all. Perhaps

it's all been a massive mistake and they have been on a course of ugly pills since we first met.

Of course, the person is just the same as when you first met them. It's just that the perfectionists, the overly critical, the easily bored and the constant fault finders among us could never be satisfied, even if god's gift to humanity were to suddenly fall into our laps.

Replace 'happily ever after' with 'aching disillusionment'. Replace the notion of 'the special one' with someone who will 'make do'. For Cinderella and her glass slipper, read ugly sister and old, worn out moccasin. All the movies and songs that held up the notion of true love, endless passion, beautiful people. Two hearts becoming one – it was a big, fat lie!

But, it just wouldn't do to portray romantic love as some kind of wrinkly old slipper that's not very appealing. It wouldn't work having Valentine cards celebrating the crushing realisation that there is no unique 'special one' out there waiting for you and for you alone. It wouldn't do to have the myth of romantic love shattered by the notion that all there is to look forward to in life is a big-eared, thick-eyebrowed annoyance with whom you could sit watching TV for decades to come in some damp, peeling apartment.

Just imagine, the only glimmer of relief from such a desperate relationship might well entail bursting into tears while watching the condensation roll down the window pane before coming to rest on some decaying sill.

COLIN TODD HUNTER

## HUMOUR

# Super bloopers

Being an ardent English teacher, I can vouch for the importance and relevance of each and every punctuation mark and letter in the English language. Indeed, an omitted punctuation mark or letter can inadvertently alter the meaning of the sentence, sometimes with life-altering drastic results! Don't believe me? Read this article to see how.

Once there was a PhD professor who gave a talk to an audience consisting of both men and women. She gave the following sentence and told them to punctuate it, as they deemed fit, "Woman without her man is nothing." They thought pensively for some time, and then almost all the men punctuated the sentence as, "Woman, without her man, is nothing," while most of the women punctuated the same sentence as, "Woman! Without her, man is nothing!" What this simple exercise went to prove is that punctuation marks can alter the meaning of the sentence to such an extent that the same words are rendered diametrically opposite in meaning due to the different punctuation marks used in the two sentences.

Ironically, even the omission of a single punctuation mark can make a world of a difference. In the days of yore, when there was no e-mail or mobile phones, emergency messages which had to be conveyed immediately had to be sent by telegrams. Now telegrams (for those of you who are familiar with them) were notorious for being grammatically obnoxious and were full of misspelled words. In this scenario, there was a proud mother who wanted to congratulate her recently

married daughter on her success in clearing her B Ed examination in flying colours. So, she sent her daughter a telegram. Imagine her daughter's sense of ire, chagrin and eventual mirth when she opened the telegram and read, "Congratulations for your success in Bed!" The Morse code technician had forgotten to put a full stop after 'B'!

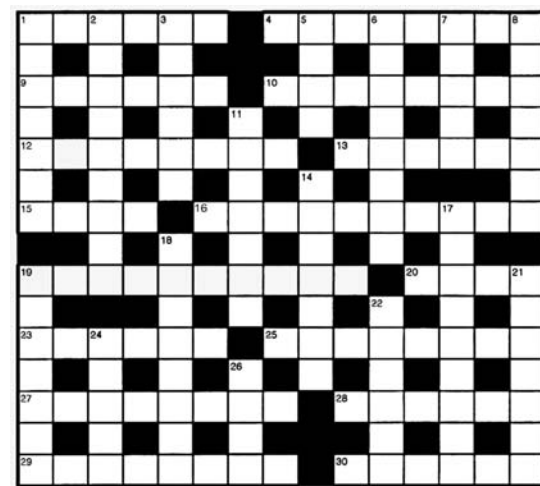
Another punctuation mark, which can be highly controversial, is the comma. Before I did an intensive grammar course, I either used to put commas where they were not required or omit them where they were needed. A dangerous proposition, as commas not used properly can alter the meaning of the sentence, sometimes drastically, as the following example shows. It took place at my first job in a medical transcription company where one of the trainees was supposed to transcribe the medical report as, "The patient denies vomiting, diarrhoea." Quite inadvertently, he left out the comma after 'vomiting', with the result that the sentence read as, "The patient denies vomiting diarrhoea!" Ugh! Too crass and gross for words.

Sometimes, apart from a single punctuation mark omitted, a letter omitted in a word can also cause a world of difference. In the following example, a husband almost ended his marriage because of an omitted letter in an SMS message. He had gone for a weekend business trip when he wanted to send an SMS message to his loving wife as he was missing her. He took his mobile phone and hurriedly typed a message which read thus, "Wish you were her!"

HEERA NAWAZ



## CROSSWORD 1977



### Across

- 1 Largest Mediterranean island (6)
- 4 Legitimate object of pursuit (4,4)
- 9 Respiratory disease (6)
- 10 Stay firmly in one's place (3,5)
- 12 Notably (3,5)
- 13 Bird of dove family (6)
- 15 Greet (4)
- 16 Be summarily dismissed (3,3,4)
- 19 Fatal character flaw (4,2,4)
- 20 Style of dressing (4)
- 23 An attack by aircraft (6)
- 25 Speaking persuasively (8)
- 27 Broken (2,6)
- 28 Lay waste (6)
- 29 Government department (8)
- 30 Genial (6)

### Down

- 1 Loyal (7)
- 2 Allow very little margin (3,2,4)
- 3 Tightly sticking mollusc (6)

### Solution to crossword 1976



- 5 Eager (4)
- 6 Shopkeeper (8)
- 7 Point of view (5)
- 8 No longer existing (7)
- 11 Fundamental nature (7)
- 14 Culpable (2,5)
- 17 Typically (2,7)
- 18 Permanently (3,5)
- 19 Extreme right-wing movement (7)
- 21 An artillery unit (7)
- 22 A court game (6)
- 24 To martyr (5)
- 26 Tolerate (4)