

# MCRPA TRAVEL ADVENTURES

December 2023/January 2024



*Find your next journey around the globe...*



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As December and January approach, and with the winter break just a couple of weeks away, MCRPA is thrilled to present a glimpse into the journeys our members have embarked on throughout the year. Our diverse group of members has explored both domestic and international destinations, bringing back breathtaking experiences to share with you. Some ventured to South America, others stayed close to home, and a few ventured to Europe. In this special spotlight edition of the MCRPA Travel Guide, you'll have the opportunity to discover some of the remarkable places around the world that may inspire your own future travel adventures.

What's more, MCRPA is excited to announce our upcoming group travel expedition to Cancun, Mexico, in June 2024. The dates are set for June 8-13, offering a 5-night all-inclusive adventure that promises to create lasting memories, following the success of our first group travel experience on the Bermuda Cruise this past May. We will be luxuriating at the beach-front Barceló Maya Caribe, and we're delighted to share that several members have already secured their spots.

If you're interested in joining your fellow MCRPA members on this exciting journey, please make your reservations as soon as possible by following the booking information available in the MCRPA Digest. It's important to note that the total fees for this trip may fluctuate due to changes in airplane prices, so early booking is advised. If you have any questions or need more information about the Mexico trip, don't hesitate to contact MCRPA.

We hope you relish this edition of the MCRPA Travel Guide. So, turn the page and commence your adventure now...







# Travel Within and Abroad

A Few Travel Memories

**JENNIFER BAUGH**



Recently, I attended a group meeting where we were to introduce ourselves by name, favorite food, something that we like to do, and what we hope to learn, and I can say that travel answers every one of those questions for me. And I have now reached an age where I have been traveling for decades and I know how it continues to enrich my life in many different ways, but most importantly, how it has enriched my life within.

My thoughts will forever be altered and enriched by: the way the earth rumbled beneath my feet as I watched smoke pour out of Stromboli's volcano in a Sicilian town named Ginostra during a storm (a volcanic town only accessible by boat); the silence of the snowflakes falling during a stroll through a Heidelberg German Christmas market; discovering the elusive red Frogfish in Bonaire while scuba diving off shore of the Leeward Antilles; traversing Mt. Titlis in Engelberg, Switzerland on a snowboard at 10,000 feet with no other



way to get down; unexpectedly having to drive a famous Corsican road full of twists and turns, hairpin bends, zigzags, and steep drops as the sun set in order to safely get to our destination; being served desserts by the pastry chef herself at a famous Californian restaurant; trying to walk to the car with suitcase in hand during a cold, violent Mistral wind in the South of France; being shook awake during an earthquake outside of big bear lake; tasting wine with my life partner in Portugal on a small family owned mountain vineyard perched in the Duoro Valley; swimming with marine iguanas by myself in the Galapagos Islands; living with an Italian family in Montelepre for three weeks, a small town outside of Palermo in Sicily; enjoying the Blue Grotto sea cave (Capri, Italy) where Tiberius swam with my Italian grandmother; enjoying a show near Piccadilly Circus, London's West End theatre district with my British grandmother; swimming without a wet suit in the freezing waters of Cornwall, England; surfing waves in Maui with my life partner and his daughter, and her husband; setting up camp on Assateague Island, a 37-mile long barrier island located off the eastern coast of the Delmarva Peninsula with my immediate and extended family every year in my youth; and recently traveling home on a







bus from New York City and taking the last available seat next to a sculptor who described his Bronx museum artwork as “documentarian sculptures,” which I had never heard of before.

And these are just a few travel memories, as I will continue to be reminded of experiences that have forever altered, changed, and enriched my life.

My name is Jennifer Baugh. My favorite foods are spicy Thai and Italian dishes. Something I like to do is to travel far and wide. And something I hope to learn is more about myself and others through life’s journey.

Wishing you all travel that moves you to leave our world a better place; exposes you to different cultures, ancient traditions, and authentic encounters; enables you many opportunities to delve into history, local cuisine, different



landscapes, lifestyles, and languages; affords you the time to fall off the radar and live in the moment; allows you time to reconnect with yourself and each other; and leaves you with an open heart and open mind that encourages self-reflection, environmental awareness and global action to help protect and conserve our planet for generations to come.

Safe travels everyone!



Photos are from visiting Porto, Duoro Valley, and Nazaré in Portugal this past September 2023.





**Going to New York?**

**Visit the High Line!**

**ELYSSE MEREDITH**

RESTORATION  
IN PROCESS



The High Line, located on Manhattan's West Side, is a unique park. Built on 1.45 miles of decommissioned elevated railway, the park is filled with native plants that are integrated into the walkways, providing a soothing walkway with small woods, open green space, and public art.

I particularly enjoyed a small water feature, where half of the path flooded with about a half an inch of water; benches in the space gave you place to take off your shoes and dip your toes in on a hot day!

While some of the green spaces are curated, many embrace whatever crops up, echoing how nature slowly reclaimed the railway when it was abandoned in the 1980s. The emphasis on native plants also means that the High Line is pollinator-friendly! Because the High Line is a long path, it has many overlooks of the city, as well as natural play areas, a food court, and an exit right by Chelsea Market. The city is never far away!









# A Drive Up to the

# Pocono Mountains

**KAYLIN NGUYEN**



We had the opportunity to visit Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania, during the third week of October due to my spouse's work conference at the Kalahari Resorts & Conventions. Family members were also invited to join, so we decided to take advantage of the chance to travel together. The scenic beauty with the fall foliage along the interstates we navigated was magnificent.

While the trees hadn't yet fully transitioned to their autumn colors, the landscapes were still incredibly captivating. The resorts boasted a large pool, where our 2-year-old daughter had a delightful time splashing around in the kiddie pool area. Inside the resorts, there was a spacious arcade with a variety of claw machines and arcade games, providing enjoyment for both adults and children.

On the day before our departure, the family embarked on a short drive to Big Pocono State Park, which offered a stunning panoramic view from the





mountaintop. The trees, even in their early autumn glory, were a sight to behold. As it was the off-peak autumn season, the park was pleasantly devoid of the usual crowds of cars and tourists, allowing us to take numerous photographs and relish the tranquility.

If you haven't had the chance to explore this area, I highly recommend planning a weekend trip during the autumn, avoiding the busy season. This will allow you to fully appreciate the striking landscapes and the shopping opportunities. A premium outlet mall, complete with numerous shops and activities, is conveniently located near the hotel. While the summer season may be more crowded and expensive, the hotel offers a range of summer activities. However, if your primary goal is to savor the autumn scenery without the hustle and bustle of the tourist season, late October and early November are ideal times to visit.







**King and Queen**  
for a Week in London

**CARROLL ROLLMAN**





Last Christmas, my husband gave me a delightful surprise by gifting us airfare tickets to London, one of the three places he's always wanted to visit. Our trip took place this past August, and despite our shared impatience with long flights, it was truly an amazing experience.

One of the highlights for me was attending a football (soccer) match between Arsenal and Crystal Palace. Even though I'm not typically a sports enthusiast, the energy and spirit of the fans made it a memorable and enjoyable event. We also had the opportunity to visit Buckingham Palace, conveniently located on the same street as our hotel. Exploring the opulent rooms where royal ceremonies and events take place was a captivating experience. Additionally, we savored the best fish and chips I've ever had at Hobson's Fish & Chips—a definite recommendation!







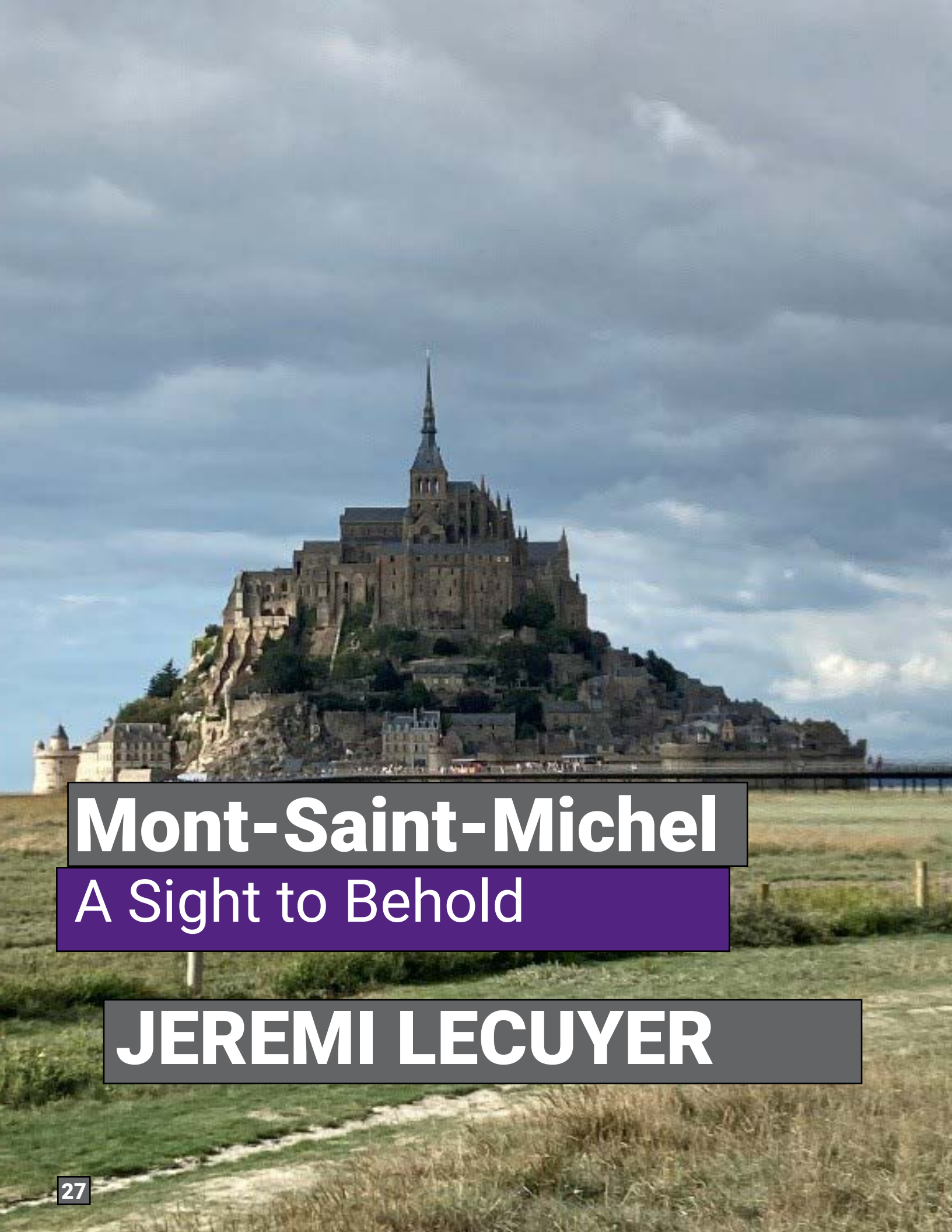
A particularly exciting aspect of our trip was indulging in the quintessential British tradition of afternoon tea. I had a blast dressing up and wearing a fascinator for the occasion. Despite being there for just four days, we managed to pack in a lot, and we were fortunate to have sunny weather throughout our stay, with the rain only making an appearance on the day of our departure.

Upon returning home, it was a joy to spot the sites we had visited in various reality shows that I watch. This trip allowed us to create beautiful memories together, and I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to share this experience with my husband.









# Mont-Saint-Michel

A Sight to Behold

**JEREMI LECUYER**







From September 8th to September 19th, 2023, our family embarked on an unforgettable trip to France. One of the highlights was our day of hiking along the picturesque beaches of Benodet, enjoying the serene coastal landscapes.

On September 13, 2023, we set out for an afternoon adventure to the iconic Mont-Saint-Michel. It proved to be a truly memorable experience as we trekked approximately one mile from the nearest parking lot to reach the Mont-Saint-Michel, encountering random sheep along the way, adding to the charm of the journey.

To complete our day, we savored a delicious lunch at my grandmother's house in Quevert, France, creating lasting memories during our family's French escapade.











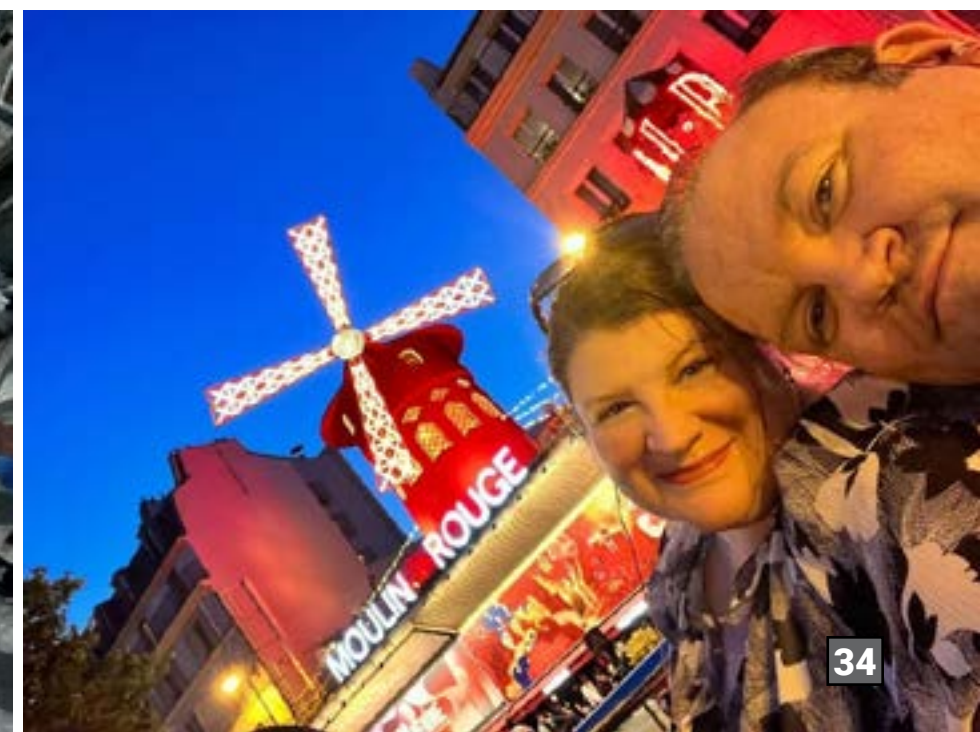
# A Magical Birthday Celebration in Paris

And Beautiful London

## CHRISTINE CREFTON

A while back, we had this dream to jet set around the globe wherever we wanted. We set up our whole life to have no strings attached so we could just pick up and go, today is one of those times for joie de vivre! And we were off to Paris, Disneyland Paris, and London. We went from June 7-17, 2023, and we jam packed it with adventure.

Our first stop was Paris! A breathtaking city, with twinkling lights and delicious food. I loved every second we had there. I got to spend my birthday in Disneyland Paris and it was so beautiful and magical!







First day in London with a few side quests completed: Tea time on the Thames by the Tower of London, sailing under London Bridge and walking over the Millennium Bridge at night, and seeing A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Globe Theatre. What a spectacular day in an absolute beautiful city!

Some highlights of Days 2 & 3 include seeing three shows: Mousetrap, Pretty Woman, and Back to the Future the Musical. We saw Jenna Fischer and her family at the theatre and that was cool. A lovely woman complimented me on my "frock." We ate so much cheese at Pick and Cheese and rode all the public transport options available. Also, we went for a walk across Abbey Road for my mom.









We did a bunch of touristy things: Toured St Paul's Cathedral, went to Buckingham Palace and even saw King Charles leave the palace, rode the London Eye, had some fish and chips, toured the Tower of London to see the Crown Jewels and some ravens too, and took an evening bus tour of the city. Oh, and Jeffrey took me to where Bridget Jones and Mark Darcy shared their first kiss. It was another magical day!

Our last full day in London was another day for the books. Started at Borough Market for fresh fruits, smelling truffles, and tasting samples. Then, to eat pie and mash- I have been making pie and mash for a year but had never eaten it officially, and today, my research ended and I plan on perfecting the recipe 100%. Then, off to ride a sky car - just like Disney World but much scarier. Then, to Greenwich park, the Prime Meridian(s), and delicious food at the Tavern. Another beautiful river cruise and walk before getting back to our room to watch my niece Maddy's high school graduation, virtually, of course!







# Standing in the Middle of the World

0° Latitude in Ecuador

## NGHI NGUYEN & JEREMI LECUYER









We set off for Ecuador early in the morning. Following a seven-hour layover in Atlanta, we finally reached the historic city of Quito, established in the 16th century upon the ruins of an Inca city, arriving late in the evening. The subsequent morning, we gathered for a group meeting, meeting the other 30 travelers with whom we'd be spending the entire week.

Our first full day in Quito was a delightful exploration of its narrow cobblestone streets, where we soaked in the city's charm by visiting renowned landmarks like Independence Plaza, the Cathedral, Presidential Palace, and the Archbishop's Palace. We marveled at the exquisite interior of La Compañía de Jesus Church and the grandeur of the Church and Monastery of San Francisco—a remarkable religious structure of the New World, featuring an impressive facade and atrium. Later, we ventured to the Middle of the World



Monument, positioned at 0° latitude, straddling the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Interestingly, our tour guide informed us that the Monument's actual location deviated slightly from the precise 0° latitude. Hence, we were directed to the authentic 0° latitude spot for photos, validating our positions using GPS technology. It turned out the Middle of the World Monument was a few degrees off.

Our journey continued to Otavalo, nestled in the Andes Mountains at an elevation of 8,441 feet, where we stayed in a picturesque hotel against the





backdrop of the majestic Andes. The subsequent day, we explored the quaint town of Peguche, pausing at a waterfall for scenic photos before journeying onward to Papallacta for our overnight stay. The following morning, we ventured into the Amazon basin, embarking on a two-hour hike through the Misicocha Private Nature Reserve, immersing ourselves in the vibrant flora and fauna of the rainforest. Despite the sweltering and humid conditions, we visited a cacao farm, learning about cacao cultivation and indulging in delectable chocolate-covered bananas and strawberries. Later, we visited an animal rescue center, encountering various Amazonian animals.

The next morning, we boarded a canoe for a brief trip to La Punta Ahuano before continuing by coach to Patate. En route, we paused to admire El Pailon







del Diablo, also known as “The Devil’s Cauldron,” one of Ecuador’s captivating waterfalls. We captured numerous photos from a distance and ventured close, even standing beneath the falls for stunning pictures. Our journey then led us to Baños, a charming town famed for its thermal baths and the occasionally active Tungurahua Volcano. Here, we relished a local restaurant’s lunch and witnessed a demonstration on the traditional craft of vegetable ivory, which





utilizes tagua palm nuts to craft jewelry and animal carvings.

The subsequent day, we embarked on our return journey to Quito, making a stop to tour a magnificent rose plantation. Despite roses not being native to Ecuador, the country's conducive environment has made it one of the world's leading rose producers. At the plantation, we gained insights into the entire cultivation and exporting process. One of the most astounding revelations was the ability to purchase three dozen roses in Ecuador for about \$5!







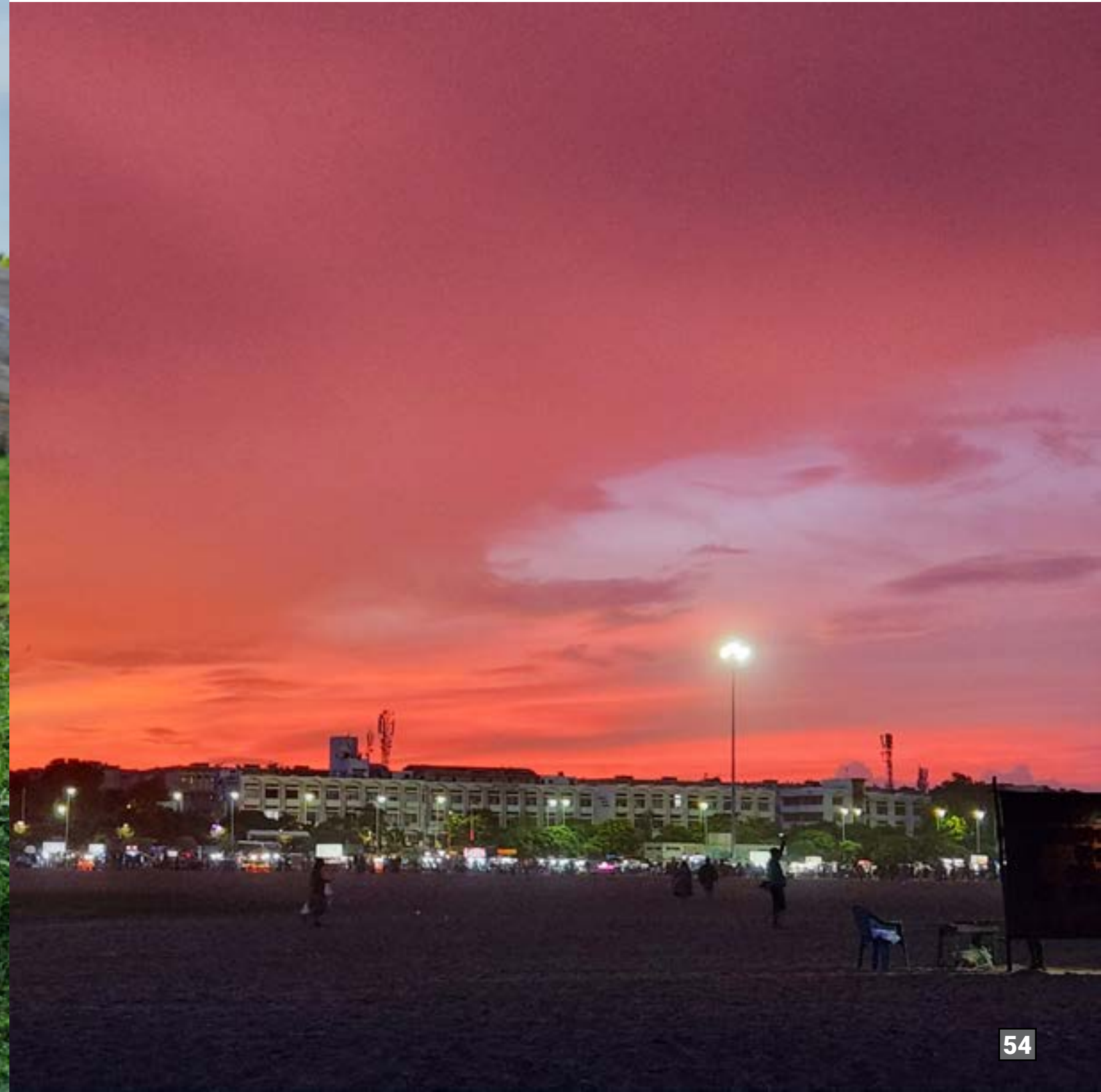
# Reconnecting With Friends in India

An Unforgettable Experience

**ANNA DONOHOE**

In September 2023, we embarked on a memorable trip to Tamil Nadu, India, to reconnect with friends settled in the vibrant city of Chennai. Our visit was an exquisite blend of culinary delights and captivating explorations.

Chennai welcomed us with its enchanting parks, enriching museums, and quaint board game cafes, offering us a glimpse into the city's diverse cultural tapestry. A mesmerizing sunset stroll along Marina Beach, stretching as the









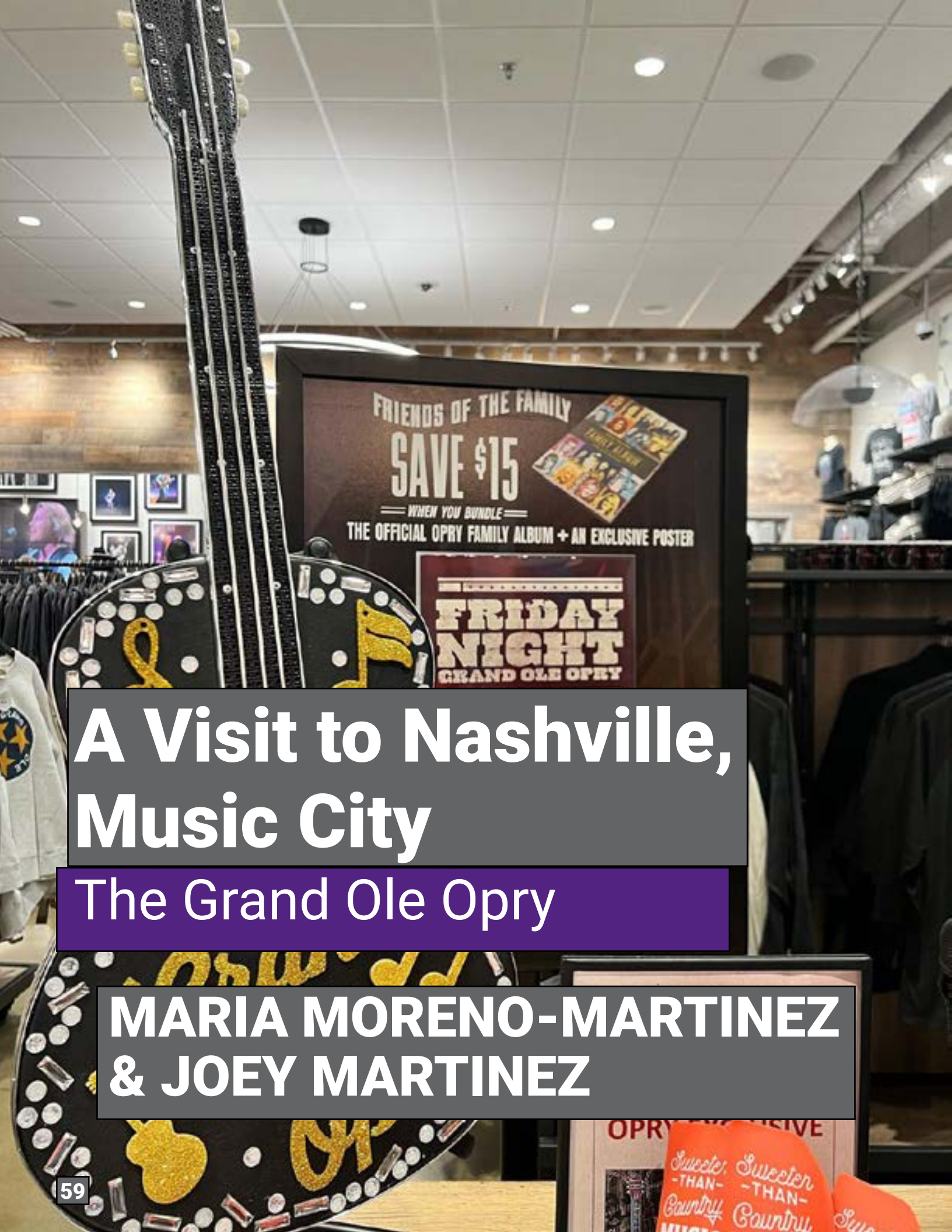


world's second longest urban beach, became an unforgettable experience. Venturing beyond Chennai, we immersed ourselves in Mamallapuram, a quaint town nestled along the Bay of Bengal. Renowned for its intricate stone carvings and ancient monuments dating back to the seventh century, Mamallapuram captivated us with tales of artisan dedication spanning multiple generations.

Among its marvels stood Krishna's Butterball, an enormous boulder perched atop a rocky hillside, intriguingly unmoved despite a historical attempt involving seven elephants. Amidst these awe-inspiring sights, I found joy in discovering the elegance of the Tamil language and its graceful script.

However, our adventure wasn't confined to historical marvels alone—befriending the local fauna, including an unexpectedly large snail lazing by the pool, added an endearing touch to our cherished Indian escapade.





# A Visit to Nashville, Music City

The Grand Ole Opry

MARIA MORENO-MARTINEZ  
& JOEY MARTINEZ

Nashville, TN it's known as Music City, and rightfully so!

It's beaming with music both old country, new age pop, and everything in between. There is so much to do from museums, wonderful landmarks, an array of restaurants and bars all full of music.

During our short week visiting, we were able to enjoy concerts from Ke\$ha at the Ryman Auditorium to Carrie Underwood at the Grand Ole Opry. Not to mention the theaters venues, museums (both art and music), historic tours and various attractions.











If a vacation in the city is not to your liking; then you can visit Knoxville for the Jack Daniels, the oldest distillery in the US.

My favorite was Pigeon Forge for its many attractions. We loved Dollywood Theme Park where they were celebrating Great Pumpkin LumiNights, and offer everything pumpkin-flavored and amazingly lit, artfully-carved pumpkins.

If you like adventure and nature the Smokie Mountains and Gatlinburg is beautiful especially when the leaves change in the fall. In the end, Tennessee has a lot to offer for couples and families alike-- a fun destination that will not disappoint.





# Galapagos Island & Big Tortoises

A Sisters Trip to Ecuador

**ADAORA NWIGWE**

Imagine hearing about the giant tortoise and finally getting to see one up close and personal!

That is exactly what happened when my sisters and I made our sisters trip to Ecuador!

This was indeed a trip of a lifetime.







The Galapagos Islands are 13 main islands off the coast of Ecuador, known as a national park with its own entrance and exit visas. To get to any of the islands, visitors must travel by plane from Quito– the country’s main airport, to Guayaquil before arriving to their destination.

My sisters and I picked San Cristobol as our island, due to our research, we’d be able to see the giant tortoises, iguanas, and other indigenous animals. We also picked this island due to many videos saying how easy it was to do a







walking tour of the island. One can take a \$20 taxi ride to the tortoise, which is what we did.

Our driver took us to Centro De Crianze De Totugas Terresters–Terresters Tortoise Breeding Center. This 1-hour long walking tour allowed us to see so many tortoises, even where the babies are raised. We even got to see one emerge from the foliage, look at us, and go about its business. It was incredible. We also saw sea lions, red crabs, and iguanas.







**Nothing Beats  
Some Local Travels**



Kayaking on the Tidal Basin ~ Megan Cooperman





Ocean City, Maryland  
Nghì Nguyen



Northside Park in Ocean  
City, Maryland





**We want to thank all contributors:**

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**Join MCRPA by completing a membership profile.**

MCRPA was established in 2011 as an employee affinity group. We collectively seek out opportunities to learn and grow as individuals and as burgeoning professionals. Our members are enthusiastic supporters of Montgomery College's mission and community. If you have a desire to get involved and participate in hands-on personal and professional development activities, networking, and community service, you are a perfect fit for MCRPA.

<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/offices/mcrpa>

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