SOMETIMES THE WILDLY FOREIGN IS JUST DOWN THE ROAD

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NEW YORK, NY — When times are hard or time is short and an exotic trip seems unattainable, it’s time to look closer to home. But closer to home needn’t necessarily mean familiar sights and sounds. Armed with the right inspiration, you don’t need a big travel budget or overseas itinerary to enjoy authentic art, food and festivals made famous by some of the world’s top overseas destinations. Here, for instance, are three close-to-home ways to enjoy Japan, Russia and Germany without the price tag, travel time or jet-lag. From borscht to bento to beer, these destinations deliver more than a taste of vacation hot-spots around the world right here in North America.

VISIONS OF JAPAN

The sound of gently falling water and the sight of artfully sculpted plants combine to create a home-grown Zen experience at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach, Fla. This 6.5-hectare park includes six traditional Japanese garden styles. Each garden is painstakingly maintained using age-old pruning methods by master garden designer Hoichi Kurisu, who learned his craft in Tokyo. A 2-km-long path through the garden — recognized as one of the Top 10 Japanese gardens in Europe, North America and Australia by the Journal of Japanese Gardening — provides ample opportunities to meditate and marvel. Admission to Morikami, at 4000 Morikami Park Rd., is $13 per adult, $8 per child (ages 3-17) and free for museum members and children under 3.

PRIME TIME: On Oct. 19, Morikami will host the 36th-annual Lantern Festival in the Spirit of Obon to mark Japan’s traditional three-day holiday honouring deceased ancestors. The Morikami event will include taiko drummers, folk dancing, lanterns placed throughout the garden to illuminate the way for departed souls, and fireworks. Tickets are $15 per adult, $10 for ages 4-17, free for members and children under 3. Advance tickets required. Contact 561-465-0213 or morikami.org.

EAT THIS: The Morikami’s Cornell Cafe, which has been featured on The Food Network, offers an authentic bento box lunch for $13.95.

BUY THIS: A lacquered bento box made in Japan, $25 from the museum store, is the most elegant way to brown-bag it.

STAY HERE: Seagate Hotel & Spa in Delray Beach. Rates start at $309, double occupancy at 1000 East Atlantic Ave. Contact 877-577-3242 or theseagatehotel.com.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: Though Japanese gardens date back to the year 710, kokan didn’t make an appearance until the 1800s when the invading Chinese introduced the fish to Japan. The Chinese revere koi, which they call Chinese carp, as symbols of power. However, the Japanese were the first to breed the fish for aesthetic appeal.

FLAVOURS OF RUSSIA

The Brighton Beach neighbourhood in Brooklyn, N.Y., is known as “Little Odessa by the Sea” even though immigrants have flocked here from all over Russia since the first big wave came in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

PRIME TIME: On Aug. 25, many neighbourhood blocks will close to traffic and fill up with food stalls, live bands and more than 150,000 festival goers who show up to celebrate Russian culture during the annual Brighton Beach Jubilee.

EAT THIS: People in the know call M&I International Foods at 249 Brighton Beach Ave. “The International.” The 35-year-old institution has miles of aisles of canned...
You don’t have to leave North America to experience diverse cultures. Bon Odori dancers, top left, take part in celebrations at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach, Fla., left. Taiko drummers, above, demonstrate Japanese drumming techniques during Morikami’s annual Lantern Festival, right. There is always lederhosen — and plenty of beer and sausages — at Frankenmuth, Michigan’s annual Oktoberfest, the first outside of Germany to be recognized by Munich.

**Buying Tip:** Matryoshka measuring spoons, $7.95, are a fun and useful twist on the traditional Russian nesting dolls and are available from Saint Petersburg Trade and Publishing House at 230 Brighton Ave. Contact 718-891-0719 or fromrussia.com.

**Stay Here:** Griffin Boutique B&B, just 20 minutes from Brighton Beach, offers one two-bedroom suite with a kitchen that sleeps up to five people. Be sure to ask to see the Russian owner’s matryoshka collection. Rates start at $175 double occupancy with breakfast at 32 Dekoven Ct. Contact 718-875-7645 or thegriffinbandb.com.

**Local Knowledge:** Diamond’s clothing store in Brighton Beach was originally owned by singer Neil Diamond’s parents.

**Taste of Germany**

Frankenmuth is the Little Bavaria of Michigan, but it almost didn’t get settled at all. In 1854 it took more than four months for the first 15 settlers to reach Michigan from Bavaria. They endured shipwrecks and malaria in order to fulfill their dream of establishing a Lutheran town and converting native Indians to the religion. “Franken” is place where the settlers came from and “Muth” is German for courage — which they had in spades. The settlers failed to attract converts to their religion but the settlers’ descendents have succeeded at attracting tourists. Today Frankenmuth sees three million visitors a year — more than any other Michigan attraction.

**Prime Time:** Frankenmuth’s annual Oktoberfest (Sept. 19-22) began in 1999. German entertainment, food, dancing, Oktoberfest scavenger hunts, amusement park rides, and authentic Oktoberfest German-brewed beer from Munich’s Hofbrauhaus are highlights. Tickets are $8 daily Sept. 19-20 and free entrance Sept. 22. Visit frankenmuthfestivals.com for details. For tickets, call 800-FUN-FEST.

**Buy This:** Clock making is a centuries-old tradition in Germany’s Black Forest region. A cherry or oak clock with letters spelled out in German is a modern, nonchimering way to get German timekeeping expertise into your home. Get it for $40 from ‘The Frankenmuth Clock Co. at 906 Main St.

**Eat This:** Famous for its all-you-can-eat chicken dinners, Zehnder's claims to be the world’s largest family-style restaurant. Up to 1,500 dinners are served by waiters in traditional Bavarian attire. Dinner is $19.95 ages 12 to adult, $3.95 to $8.95 for kids. Located at 730 South Main St. Contact 1-800-863-7999 or zehnders.com.

**Stay Here:** The 38 room Marv Herzog Hotel was created by Marv Herzog, a legendary Frankenmuth native and band leader. Rates start at $115 double occupancy including complimentary breakfast with beer, wine and snacks in the evening at 501 South Main St. Contact 877-400-4210 or marvherzoghotel.com.

**Local Knowledge:** Oktoberfest was created in Munich in 1810 to celebrate the marriage of Bavaria’s Crown Prince Ludwig and Princess Theresa.