



Savannah in spring.

Literally DISTRACTED

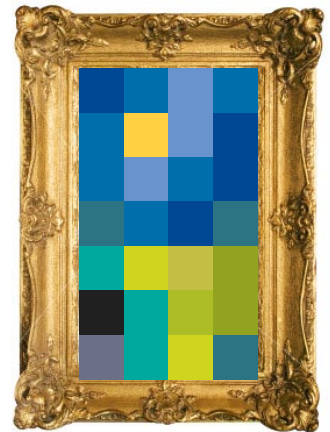


If you love to travel and enjoy reading, **Ann Kirkland's** Toronto-based company offers guided trips inspired by literature. "My clientele [mostly women over 40] are big readers," explains Kirkland. "Our trips remove the hassle from individual travel while creating experiences difficult to find on your own." Fuss-free, unique tours — likely the reason so many of Kirkland's clients have travelled with her more than a dozen times. This month, "Mystery & Manners in Savannah: Selected Works of Flannery O'Connor" visits the author's childhood home, where a personal friend of O'Connor's chats with the group. "Tak-

ing Your Soul for a Stroll" in October follows the famous path to Santiago de Compostela and looks at the theme of pilgrimage in books by T.S. Eliot and Yeats, among others. "Vietnam Voices: A Balanced Opposition" examines the yin and yang of the country's literature while travelling during November to Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Angkor Wat, Cambodia. Closer to home, a week-long series of seminars based on various readings will be held at the University of Toronto in July. One seminar focuses on women in literature and how men have portrayed them. Evening outings in Toronto include guided art walks, films and concerts (classicalpursuits.com).

CYBER SIGHTSEER

Seeing Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* in the flesh, so to speak, is an experience never forgotten. But not everyone is able to wander the world-famous halls of the Uffizi in Florence, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum or the Tretyakov in Moscow (where visitors must wear slippers to protect fragile inlay floors). With armchair art lovers in mind, the **Art Project** — launched by Google last year — not only gathers many of the world's great collections in one online place, it also lets you navigate 17 galleries via high-def imaging. You can even zoom in on details to examine brush strokes (Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* seems to come alive). Each featured artwork comes with a clickable description — so much less cumbersome than an audio tour. Since admission is free, you can lap up world culture while enjoying a latte in your local café (googleartproject.com).



DEALSONWHEELS

If the thought of huffing and puffing up a hill on your hard-earned vacation has kept you from biking in Europe, Canadian-based **Butterfield & Robinson** has caved to the cries of spent quads. This spring, the tour company introduces electric-assisted bikes. E-bikes have been known to save relationships (when one partner is more fit than the other) and appeal to the bike-averse. Also new to the roster are Bistro trips with a price tag 25 to 30 per cent lower than traditional itineraries. "We're using the hidden gems in our guides' black books, not the pricey Michelin-star hotels," explains Butterfield & Robinson president Norman Howe. That means the same breathtaking rides, savvy guides and infrastructure, but you might be staying in a 18th-century chateau without an elevator. *Tant pis!* (butterfield.com)