

GLOBE TROTTER

If you can't find a friend, a friend of a friend will do



**CLAIRE
BUSHEY**

Everyone should have an expatriate uncle.

I can't overstate the benefits. Accommodation is free, insider information is readily available, and the fridge is always stocked. If your uncle is particularly cool, like mine, he will open at least one bottle of wine every night at dinner, and then you will

both sit around and watch soccer and British satire.

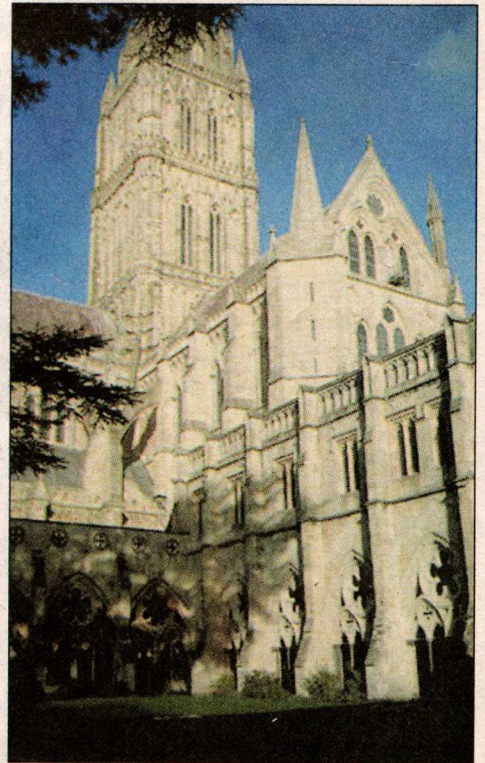
I've been in England's Chiltern Hills since November, steadily exhausting my uncle's hospitality. He drops me off at the train station in the morning, and I commute into London with the harried masses.

They, poor souls, are headed for work, but my itineraries are dictated by whimsy. Shall I spend today wandering among the antiques shops lining Portobello Road? I think I shall. Another day I might dedicate to visiting the great love of my life: The British Museum. (Yes, I am a geek. You're only now figuring this out?) But local knowledge and good times can still be yours, even without an expat uncle, if you make some advance preparations. You might even wind up with free accommodations, too.

How? By using both the Internet and the six degrees of separation principle. I've met several online acquaintances and friends of friends on this trip, and I haven't logged a single bad experience.

I belong to a networking Web site called Couchsurfing (www.couchsurfing.com) that exists to link travelers to residents of the country they are visiting. Rather like MySpace or Friendster, users create profiles and can search the database for other people with similar interests. Couchsurfing also lets users sort profiles by country and language proficiency, which is how I met Chivi and Rocio in Peru, and Sarah in Australia.

Chivi and her brother hosted me at their apartment in Lima. Chivi, a university student studying law, took me out for ceviche,



Claire Bushey

Salisbury Cathedral, in Wiltshire, contains one of the four remaining copies of the Magna Carta. The spire, at 404 feet, is the tallest in Britain.

fish cured in lime, a Peruvian specialty. I probably would have been too paranoid about illness to try it on my own. (I've eaten a lot of bread, cheese and rice in the last six months.) After sampling the sour delicacy, my concern switched to whether I'd be able to find it at home.

I met Rocio in the Andean city of Cuzco. We drank Cusquena with her friends in the Plaza de Armas and watched the *fuego artificial*, part of the celebratory runup to the Inti Raymi festival.

