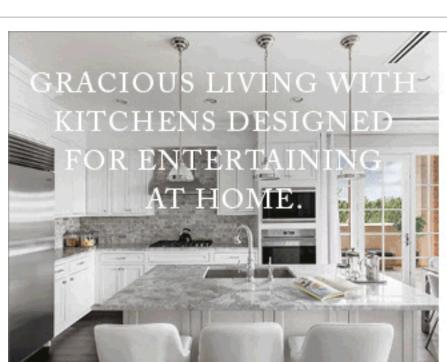
Search Q

Podcasts

U.S. Politics Economy Business Tech Markets Opinion Life & Arts Real Estate WSJ. Magazine World





Two and Three Plus Bedroom Condominium Residences Priced from \$1,800,000 to \$4,900,000 Immediate Occupancy SCHEDULE A PRIVATE TOUR

Crude Oil **42.23** 0.52% ▲

**BOOKSHELF** SHARE

4

Here, There and Everywhere A New York lawyer visited every country in the world over 50 years.



Strategic Intelligence From WSJ PRO and DUCKERFRONTIER **WEBINAR Beyond Brexit** August 20, 2020 at 10 a.m. EDT **REGISTER NOW** 

DX

By Edward Kosner

March 20, 2015 1:20 pm ET

SAVE PRINT AA TEXT

A friend once told me that he often puts himself to sleep by—instead of counting sheep—

naming as many obscure countries as he can: "Tuvalu...Burkina Faso...Andorra... Palau . . . Belize . . . Azerbaijan . . . zzzzzz." Albert Podell has done him one better. He has actually gone to all those places—and 190 more—and survived to tell about it. "Around the World in 50 Years" is his jokey, politically incorrect, thoughtful and continuously engaging chronicle of the 102 separate journeys he took to accomplish his

self-inflicted and likely unprecedented mission of visiting every recognized country on earth. Helpfully, he even includes a chapter, vetted by a law professor, defining what makes a place a nation. (Tiny, independent Pacific islands like Nauru, yes; non-self-governing British territories like the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean, no.) AROUND THE WORLD IN 50 YEARS

## Thomas Dunne, 354 pages, \$26.99

sports on his travels.

By Albert Podell

ton of supplies. He ultimately covered 26 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Central America in 581 days—an arduous and occasionally perilous warm-up for what turned out to be the next 50 years of gallivanting around the globe. Readers won't confuse Mr. Podell, a well-to-do retired lawyer and quondam magazine editor, for the master travel writer Paul Theroux, but they do share a taste for describing

the squalor of sub-Saharan Africa and forlorn Micronesia in near-sadistic detail. Mr. Podell

comrades on a trans-world road trip in a Toyota 4X4, an old Jeep and a trailer with a half-

He was first infected by the extreme-travel bug in 1965, when he set off with some

even gives his destinations a PPPR ("Podell Potty Paper Rating"), ranging from 1 (soft white) through 4 (newspaper) to 7 (no public toilets at all). He calls Haiti "the worst dung heap I'd been in"—even worse than Nauru, which was actually a giant mound of seabird guano until all the phosphate-rich stuff was sold off, leaving the natives bereft, or Burkina Faso in West Africa, where the author fell into a

sewer. Nor is he a big fan of another Pacific isle, Palau, where he was served a fragrant pie filled with a dozen fruit bats "facing up . . . with their fragile little wings spread and touching . . . hirsute ears erect and slightly pinkish . . . and all of them looking pathetically and accusingly, right at me." He can't resist regaling the armchair traveler with some of the other entrees on his vagabond diet, from roadkill anteater in Panama to monkey brains in Hong Kong, Mekong

rat in Vietnam and oven-roasted tarantula in some other godforsaken place. Fortunately,

his digestive tract is as indestructible as the duct-taped pants and I [heart] NY T-shirts he

Like Paul Theroux, Mr. Podell sticks to local transport. So he has endless excruciating

adventures on no-maintenance Third World airlines, when his flights are delayed, canceled or, in some cases, obliterated by the sudden bankruptcy of the carrier. On Air Uganda, he finds, there is "no preflight safety video. . . . And no stewardess standing in the aisle pulling life-vest toggles.... This four-year-old shoestring airline knew that if we were going down, we were going down." The 10-hour bus rides over dirt tracks are no more reassuring, not to mention the shakedowns at customs and endless wrangles over visas to places (like Chad and Angola) that few septuagenarian New Yorkers likely want to visit in the first place.

first name in his acknowledgments. And he ends the book with the triumphant announcement of his marriage to a fetching young Russian émigré named Nadezda, born, he reports, 20 years after he finished his first round-the-world trip. For all his macho posturing and mockery of some of the wretched of the earth, Mr. Podell can be a sensitive tourist and a shrewd observer. Without glossing over its Big Brotherly

ambience, he finds the capital of North Korea a revelation. "I was not prepared for the

His age notwithstanding, Mr. Podell likes to brag about the younger women who have

inexplicably volunteered to accompany him on his travels over the years—he lists 34 by

modernity and wealth of Pyongyang," he writes. "I'd expected a shabby, run-down town not much different than the capitals of many poor nations, so I was amazed to find instead a clean, modern, prosperous-looking, smoothly functioning, and livable city. It may be the world's largest Potemkin village, but it more than did its job of creating a favorable impression." Elsewhere he writes about how the do-gooder staffers of humanitarian nongovernmental organizations who swarm developing countries like Macedonia, Kosovo and East Timor

are supposedly there to help. He marvels at the biodiversity and the ingenious rice culture of Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, just off the southeast coast of Africa. Rice, he points out, is the basic food of half of humanity, but production has essentially stayed flat since the 1960s Green Revolution, even as world population has doubled. Now climate change is putting

convulse the local economies. They can spend \$60 for dinner in a land where most people

don't earn that much in a month, he reports, pushing prices out of reach of the poor they

added pressure on rice harvests, while the global population is projected to grow to 9.6 billion by midcentury. In Ethiopia, Chad, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Mali, Mr. Podell comes face to face with the inroads being made by militant Islam. "It is the same war Islam almost won a thousand years ago," he writes, "when the Saracen sword slashed its bloody way to the walls of Madrid and the border of China, but a war in which Islam today" has access to

appetite for adventure and the pleasures he unerringly finds at the ends of the earth. -Mr. Kosner is the author of "It's News to Me," a memoir of his career as editor of

Still, the rewards of Mr. Podell's book are less his geopolitical insights than his endearing

nuclear weapons, endless supplies of oil and funding from Gulf-state fundamentalists.

Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily News.

KOHL'S:

Kohl's coupon

20% off your entire order with

SHOW CONVERSATION (1)  $\vee$ 

# Walmart coupon: \$10 off all departments

sneakers & more with eBay

**SPONSORED OFFERS** 

EBAY: Up to 15% off branded

WALMART:

coupon

**HOME DEPOT:** 10% off furniture using Home

Depot coupon code

TARGET:

**EXPEDIA:** 

\$15 gift card with Spectra breast pump - Target offer

Expedia promo code - Up to

75% off Jamaica getaways

### Race Heats Up for U.S., Russia and China

Stamp Out

Anyone?

High-Stakes Arctic

**RECOMMENDED VIDEOS** 

 $_{1}$ 

If New Zealand Can't



**Rush Has Investors** Digging for Profits President Trump Is

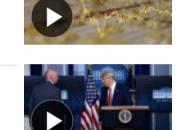
**Escorted From Press** 

Briefing by Secret

Service

Modern-Day Gold

Coronavirus, Can



Is the Classroom Safe? One Community's Debate to Return to School

**WSJ MEMBER MESSAGE** 

emerging artists.



**Decorate Your Home** With Savings on Saatchi Art

Create stunning spaces with an exclusive

rate on the online gallery's prints and

original works from hundreds of top

**REDEEM NOW** 

## Biden Leads Trump, 50% to 41%, in Poll Ahead of Party Conventions

**JOIN THE CONVERSATION** 

WSJ News Exclusive | Sixth Street Partners Amasses One of the Largest Private-

Capital Funds

Amid Coronavirus

Presidential Election

Work-Life Balance Is

Coronavirus Impact



Pandemic, Census Shows Traders Brace for Haywire Markets Around



Gold Is Flying High, but Getting Harder to Mine



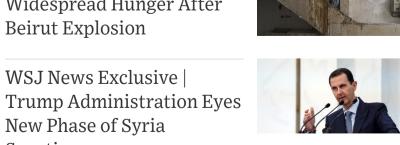
Help. Black Workers in Buffalo Face Bigger Share of

Changing. These Apps Can



Widespread Hunger After Beirut Explosion WSJ News Exclusive

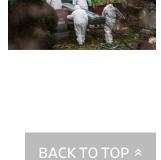
Lebanese Face Threat of



New Phase of Syria Sanctions Covid-19 Deaths Strike

Early for Many Minorities

More



Sign Out

About the Newsroom

**WSJ Membership Customer Service Tools & Features** Ads WSJ+ Membership Benefits **Customer Center** Emails & Alerts Advertise

Guides

Why Subscribe? **Corporate Subscriptions Professor Journal** Student Journal WSJ High School Program **WSJ Amenity Program WSJ Live** 

**Subscription Options** 

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**English Edition** ▼

Contact Us

My News RSS Feeds Video Center Watchlist **Podcasts** 

Place a Classified Ad **Sell Your Business** Sell Your Home Recruitment & Career Ads Coupons

Commercial Real Estate Ads

Jobs at WSJ Masthead **News Archive** Register for Free Reprints Buy Issues

Corrections

**Content Partnerships**