

ALL INCLUSIVE

Electrically charged shower heads, suicidal kangaroos and dangling swastikas. In and around the hotels of this world, unknown dangers are lurking. And our author Sebastian Heinzel has mastered them all. An instruction.

Finally, a rotten sign saying »Hotel« hanging lop-sided from the facade of a building tells me that there's a place to stay that fits my price bracket. For much too long I have been wandering the streets of Oaxaca in the south of Mexico. The startled receptionist repeatedly asks me if I am sure I really want to spend the night in this place. I am used to this kind of reaction. They don't get to see a lot of Gringos here. I insist and pay in advance.

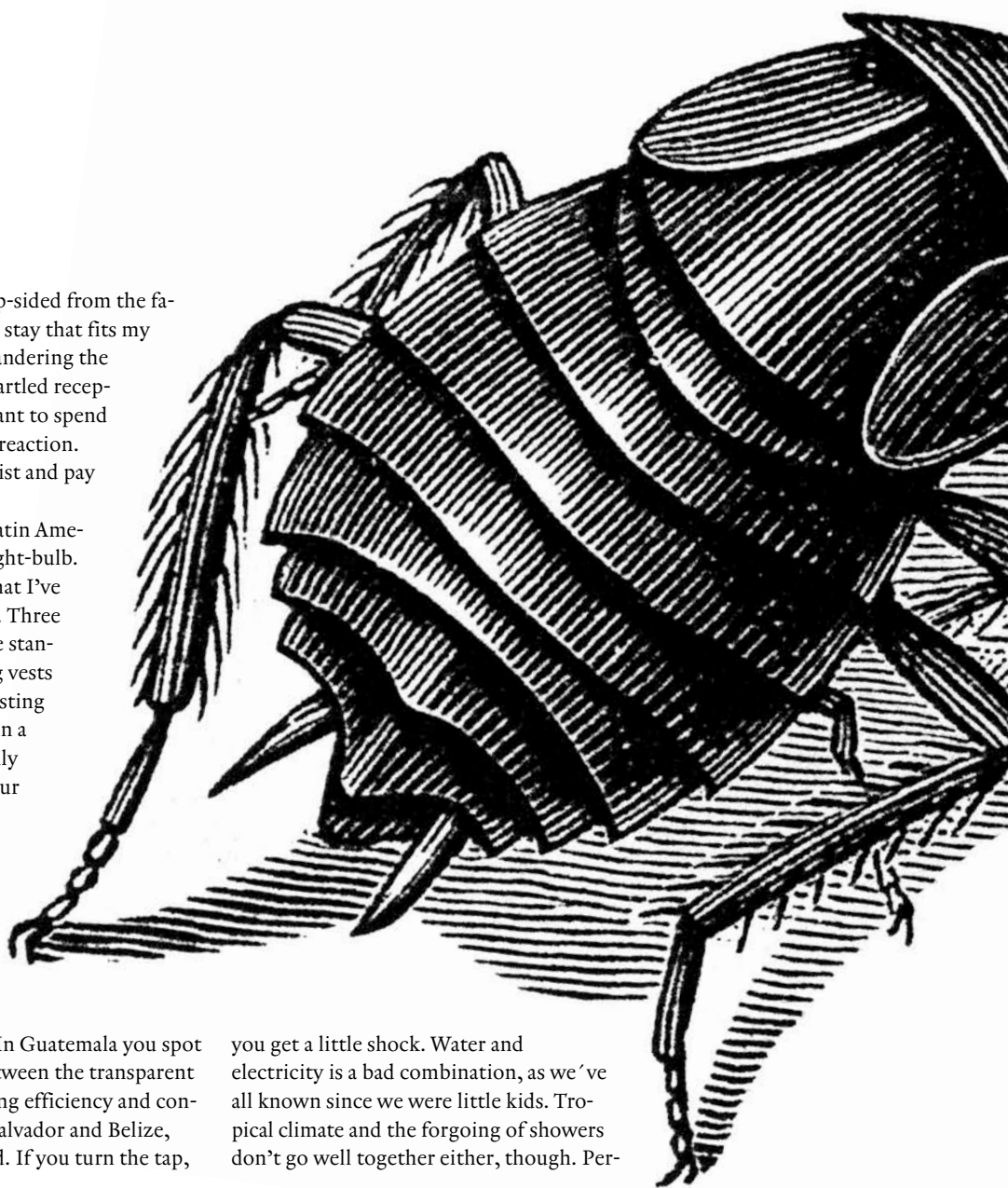
At first sight, my room looks like any other in Latin America. Dirty tiled floor, sagging mattress, naked light-bulb. But as I walk back out onto the street I realise that I've moved in way down at the bottom of the ladder. Three giggling fat older women with loud make-up are standing in the doorway now, their loose-knit string vests pulled taut over sagging breasts. Fat feet are bursting out of much too tight high heels. I have landed in a low-down mexican whorehouse and I am the only one who will voluntarily spend more than an hour in this shithole.

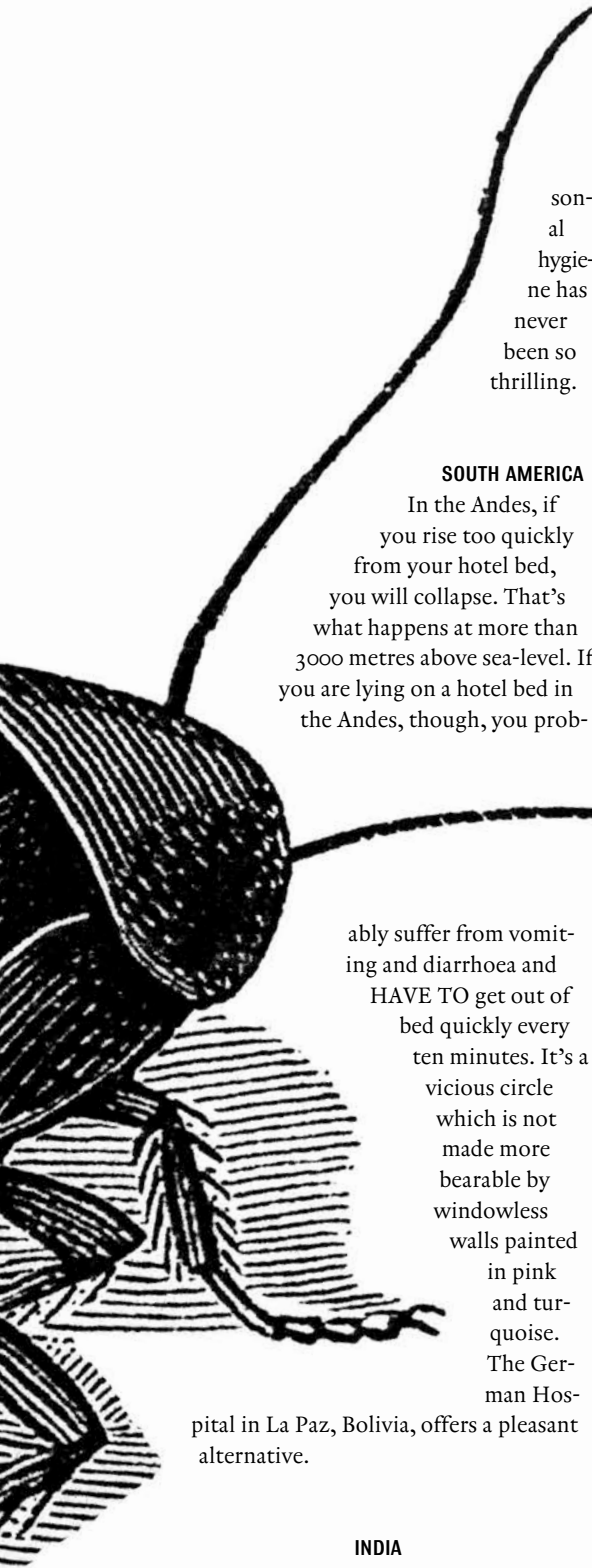
But am I supposed to look for a new place now? No way, better go to the next bar to reflect upon the global perils of the hotel business with a few glasses of Mezcal for comfort.

CENTRAL AMERICA

In Central America death awaits in the shower. In Guatemala you spot a nasty scorpion sitting patiently at eye level between the transparent shower cabin and the bathroom wall, encouraging efficiency and concentration while you're taking a shower. In El Salvador and Belize, electric wires are coming out of the shower head. If you turn the tap,

you get a little shock. Water and electricity is a bad combination, as we've all known since we were little kids. Tropical climate and the forgoing of showers don't go well together either, though. Per-





sonal hygiene has never been so thrilling.

SOUTH AMERICA

In the Andes, if you rise too quickly from your hotel bed, you will collapse. That's what happens at more than 3000 metres above sea-level. If you are lying on a hotel bed in the Andes, though, you prob-

ably suffer from vomiting and diarrhoea and HAVE TO get out of bed quickly every ten minutes. It's a vicious circle which is not made more bearable by windowless walls painted in pink and turquoise.

The German Hospital in La Paz, Bolivia, offers a pleasant alternative.

INDIA

You have checked out of a hotel but forgot to hand in the room key, only to find it when you arrive back home: A harmless mistake that might happen to anyone. But on a journey through India this can have grave legal consequences. Not because the Indian authorities are currently staging a big clamp-down on foreign key thieves. The problem lies in the fact that Indian hotels often like to call themselves »Swastik« (after the Hindu sun symbol) and have big swastikas dangling

from their room keys. Try to explain that to a customs officer in Austria where all Nazi insignia are strictly illegal. Anyway, travelers in India would do better staying at some Guru's commune. The food is good, the sheets clean and guaranteed swastika-free, and sometimes those mad hippies even forget to ask for your money.

AUSTRALIA

Along the hardly populated west coast of Australia, travelers can stay the night for free if they follow a simple trick. At dusk life stops, the strong arm of the law turns off the light at the police station and even the porters at the ubiquitous campsites go to bed. So if you drive until it's dark and roll silently onto the campsite under cover of the night, you

can erect your tent in peace, take a long shower and wave nicely bye-bye in the morning as you hit the road. But there is a price to pay after all: Driving at dusk. Just as the visibility gets worst, countless kangaroos are coming out of the bushes and taking up their positions at the edge of the endless dead straight highways. One of those beasts is always dumb enough to jump into a car. Which causes very unattractive noises, an expensive repair bill and no end of paranoia whenever you get back in the car.

NORTH AFRICA

In North Africa, you don't need to worry about finding a friend. »My friend! My friend!« You can hear it from all sides. With dedicated persistence, young men will offer you meals at their uncles' restaurants, rooms at their cousins' hotels and their neighbours' rugs. A certain type can be encountered in the Moroccan Rif mountains and in Dahab on Egypt's Sinai peninsula, where self-proclaimed friends simply walk into your hotel room, sit down on the bed and stay there until you have bought a big chunk of hash from them. Resistance is futile. If you refuse they start yelling and bleeding from their foreheads and threatening to shop themselves and everybody else to the police. In order to avoid stress and unwanted attention, it is ad-

visable to buy a small amount from them. At any rate, chances are high that while you're not looking they will swap the lump of dope, which is covered in black plastic, for an onion at the last minute and make off with the hash and the money.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

In Botswana's savannahs there is only one basic rule of behaviour: Never leave the hotel on foot. For lions and other murderous beasts, a walking human being is easy prey, whereas a human being in a vehicle is an impressive wonder of creation. Those who take this to heart have an easy life.

You arrive on a little plane piloted by a Scotsman who reeks of alcohol and get into a Jeep once the grazing antelopes have been chased from the over-grown landing strip. The luxury lodge which is built from precious wood on safe stilts is standing isolated in the great wide African open and offers space for about twelve people. The urge to take a walk quickly fades in the afternoon heat. Better put your feet up, slurp on a cocktail and smile at the passing elephants and the grunting water buffalos under the hotel.

Back in my Mexican brothel I am far removed from such idyllic scenes. The Mezcal helps me not to think of what exactly how many Mexicans have already done in my bed. But the whole extent of the horror only becomes apparent once I have looked under the bed - straight into the eyes of the biggest cockroach I have ever seen.

I hate the cockroach, my eternal companion in the hotels of this planet, with archaic passion. My joy in killing it is only surpassed by the disgust of having to touch it in the act of killing, even if the awful bursting of its hard back can hardly be sensed through the thick sole of a hiking boot. But tonight I decide against direct combat. My mosquito repellent spray and my cigarette lighter make for an excellent flame-thrower. Die, beast! Burn! My horror multiplies, as the cockroach emerges unimpressed from the flames. Will this monster get the better of me? It takes several long bursts of flames to burn off its legs and, now that it's immobile, finally kill it off. Exhausted by this titanic battle, I collapse on the bed. Tomorrow I'm going to check out.