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Travel & Outdoors: Wednesday, March 01, 2006

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Goddess is my co-pilot: New guidebook focuses on feminine spiritual sites

By Lisa Richardson
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Entering author **Karen Tate's** apartment is like discovering an intact pyramid. On the walls, in curio cabinets — everywhere — are Egyptian artifacts and goddesses large and small, in headdresses and gold leaf. A 6-foot statue of Sekhmet sits guard in the entry (although **Tate** says the lion-headed goddess on the throne is temporary, soon to be moved to her garden in the desert).

As an advocate of goddess spirituality, **Tate** has traveled much of the world to visit places where figures from ancient mythology, such as Isis, Astarte, Artemis and Diana, were venerated. Much of her art was brought back from these trips.

Now she has written a book, "Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations," to help other seekers of the divine feminine to journey along those same paths.

Interest in the divine feminine has soared. No one keeps count of how many goddess believers there are in the United States, but an industry has arisen to accommodate them. There are goddess books and newsletters, Web sites and specialty stores. There is also a booming business in goddess travel tours.

The intense interest, **Tate** believes, has arisen in part because the world is out of balance. Wars, violence and a disdain for nature are the result of patriarchy suppressing more feminine spiritual values of healing, sustaining and nurturing, she says.

Goddess veneration works to restore a balance that **Tate** writes existed thousands of years ago.

"In the beginning, God was a woman, and from her womb she created all that is; thus she is all things and all things are her. ... That was true 30,000 years ago, and for millions it is still true today," she writes in her book.

Seated in an armchair with one of her two cats on her lap, she adds: "If you do believe in a god that is someone who's going to give birth, isn't that going to be a female and not a male — or at least a couple?"

Tate, who was born in New Orleans, calls herself a disconnected Catholic.

"I didn't ever feel very passionate about it; it wasn't a very warm, embracing faith — at least not as I was brought up in it," she says. She moved to Los Angeles at 30 and on a whim took a class through the Learning Annex called "Finding the Feminine Face of God." It was a revelation. "I felt angry; I felt like I had been duped for the first three decades of my life." But even before she began studying feminine spirituality, **Tate** had

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been drawn to goddess imagery. Instead of reading Dr. Seuss books as a child, she pored over Egyptian mythology.

"I can remember as a kid sitting there in awe, looking at these ancient relics," she says.

"Sacred Places," published by the Consortium of Collective Consciousness in San Francisco, is one in a series of travel guides focusing on spiritual journeys that the consortium puts out.

"People who frequently travel are looking for a little more in their journeys, rather than sitting around the pools sipping mai tais," said founder Brad Olsen. His market research showed that most travelers will buy 2.4 travel books per vacation: an overall travel guide and a book that focuses on art or history or some other niche.

"That means they buy their 'Lonely Planet' or 'Let's Go' and then something else. That's who we're targeting," he said.

Lydia Ruile of Goddess Tours in Denver takes travelers in groups of 10 to 40 to divine feminine sites in England, Florence, Italy, Turkey and elsewhere.

"There's a hunger in women to find different stories and ways of connecting to the spirit," she said. Ruile has been to many of the places in Tate's book, as a guide or pilgrim.

"I think she's done a great job of describing the stories surrounding these sites, how to get there and how to approach the sites," Ruile said. "It's a good guidebook."

"Sacred Places" starts in Europe and Asia Minor and moves through Africa to the Middle East, Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

Tate chose sites based on their historical, spiritual and cultural significance or for their physical richness. The book is a user-friendly guide that provides background information on a site's ancient or new-found importance. Some sections have ecological warnings about deterioration at some sites; these are called "Gaia alerts" after the Greek goddess personifying Earth.

Some associations are expected — Cypress with Aphrodite, the Parthenon with Athena and Isis with Egypt. Others are sites where Christianity, Judaism or Islam has long overtaken pagan worship and the divine feminine has been absorbed or supplanted by those traditions, **Tate** said.

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