

Hi Everyone

I've just got home from my last tour for 2019 so am catching up with family and garden for a few days before getting stuck into more work on our 2020 and 2021 programmes.

So, what's new?

**Where have I been?**

My last tour for 2019 was a small group tour to Cuba, my fifth visit to this Caribbean nation. Every time I go there have been significant changes. This time, especially as it was just before Havana's 500<sup>th</sup> birthday, the restoration work around the city was very evident. That was on the plus side – on the negative side, especially for long-suffering Cubans, were severe shortages of petrol (due to US sanctions and the fact that most of their fuel comes from Venezuela which is in chaos at present).

We travelled all the way across to Baracoa in the west and then drove back to Havana rather than flying...some of you will remember the dramas I've had with domestic flights in Cuba in previous years so I'd decided this time not even to try flying. It proved a good decision as by the time we arrived, there were no domestic flights available anyway!

My small group enjoyed some great bed and breakfast accommodation, lots of music, a couple of swims in the Caribbean, plenty of opportunities to meet Cubans and the added excitement of an early morning fire evacuation when the top floor of the house next to ours in Baracoa caught fire!



### **At home with the Worrall Burrows Meadowcroft Grey Clan**



Our extended household continues to work out really well and Jono has now finished his cardiology paper (he did it for fun!?) and is waiting for his result. Meanwhile work with St John continues, mostly in charge of despatching rescue helicopters around NZ. Em is finishing her teaching degree and is up to her neck in an enormous assignment. My little cat Flynn has now totally switched allegiance from me to them! (I think they've been bribing him with cat treats!) Nate is now 10 months old and I'm feverishly finishing embroidering and appliqueing his Christmas stocking for December 25<sup>th</sup>. I'm sure he'll be much more interested in the wrapping paper! Rachel will be back teaching as assistant head of social studies at Lincoln High School next year and Atkins is working his way through the process of applying to join the NZ Police. Derek keeps us all on an even keel in his usual unflappable manner as well as being my invaluable PA when I'm away and continuing to write his weekly newspaper column...he's now by far the longest-serving newspaper columnist in the country!

### **Where Am I going in 2020?**

The first tour off the blocks next year is Colombia in February. This is a confirmed departure and at time of writing we only have one room (which could be a single or twin-share) left.

### **This Month's Feature Tours**

#### **The Philippines – 20 March to 03 April 2020**

This two-week, close- to-home tour is scheduled for..... It will be a great holiday for anyone with limited time available, who wants only a short-haul flight (we fly direct from Auckland to Manila) and who wants to visit a country still largely untouched by Kiwi tourists.

I always look forward to taking travellers to a new destination but there are two places in the Philippines that especially intrigue me.

One is the so-called Chocolate Hills in the province of Bohol. These are catnip for geography-geology geeks as they are uniquely shaped conical and almost symmetrical mounds...there are more than 1200 of them! Each one is a grass-covered limestone hill – kaast formations like those found in Slovenia and Croatia and also Pinar del Rio (which I saw just a few weeks ago!)



They are one of the most special attractions in the Philippines. And the name? In the dry seasons the grass on the mounts dries and turns chocolate brown – giving the entire region the appearance of a vast array of Hershey’s chocolate kisses!

Another amazing natural attraction in the Philippines is the tarsier – the second smallest primate in the world (it can easily fit into an adult human’s palm) which is another of the world’s endangered species. With its tiny body, bat-like ears and huge eyes it’s also extremely unusual. We will be visiting a special sanctuary in Bohol to see the tarsiers (apparently although they look very cute, males will fight to the death over their territory!)



So, if unique landscapes and wildlife, plus a tropical climate, gorgeous beaches and intriguing history and culture appeal, do join me for my short jaunt into south-east Asia! Tick another country off your list! **As this is a late tour release, we only have a short window for booking this tour, so if you are interested we really need to hear from you now for the tour to reach minimum numbers so we can confirm the departure.**

### **Wildlife of Brazil – 16 August to 06 September 2020**

After the success of our 2019 tour to Brazil we've decided to offer the same tour (with a few tweaks!) for 2020. We have bookings coming in already, but places are limited so do get in touch soon if you'd like to join me.

My tour will include three of Brazil's wildlife hotspots – the Atlantic Forest (where we stay in a lodge surrounded by prolific birdlife and where last time one of our tour members saw a puma!), the Pantanal, the Serengeti of Brazil, where we had five lengthy sightings of magnificent jaguars and where we stay for six nights, and the Amazon River system. Here we have a small cruiser just for us and explore the Amazon's largest tributary, the River Negro. We had a fantastic time exploring narrow channels and tranquil reaches of the river by motorboats, spotting toucans, sloths and many other rare creatures.



It was truly a magical experience and surprisingly there were so few other travellers there! I'm delighted that my great friend and wonderful wildlife expert and photographer, German Rojas, will be accompanying me on the tour. German is a treasure; everyone loves travelling with him.



### **Greek Odyssey – 14 September to 04 October 2020**

The full day-by-day itinerary and flight schedule for my special Greek Island Hopping tour next year is now available. This is going to be fantastic tour – Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, Rhodes and eight nights days in Crete. We'll be seeing all the prime attractions, have some great meals and two special Greek party nights. There's an excellent balance of organised sightseeing and free time to enable you to both discover more about the island from experts and have time to do further exploration on your own. This is not a cruise - we're using ferries to move from island to island (if they are overnight sailings en suite cabins are included) so we'll get to see much more of the islands than you would on conventional cruises. This worked exceptionally well on this year's Mediterranean Isles tour and was a lot of fun!



### **Some Sad News**

Many of you have travelled with me on various European tours with Zlatko Maticevic, and on occasions with his wife Kate as well (I know many of you remember her wonderful singing). I'm really sad to tell you that on Nov 20, Kate died after a long and gruelling battle with lung cancer. Zlatko cared for her at home (with help) right to the end. I'm in regular contact with him so if you want to send any message to him, just send it to me and I will forward it on.

### **Refer a Friend**

Don't forget our Refer a Friend discount. Already many of you have taken us up on the offer of a discount if you refer someone to us and they subsequently book on one of my tours.

Refer a Friend works like this: if you recommend a tour to anyone and they then book and pay for a tour you will receive a \$500 discount per person booked off the next Jill Worrall Tour you book. It is important that after you have made a recommendation that you do let Moray know as soon as possible so that she can record who has recommended whom!

That's all for now – more news in December!