

## Jill Worrall Tours January 2020 Newsletter

Happy New Year!

On the world front it's been a terrible start to 2020 but I'm trying to be optimistic and relishing the positive as much as I can. It's not always easy but I find not looking at the news and Facebook too much helps!

We've had a quiet New Year in Leeston...plenty of family around, which has been lovely, and there's certainly not so much hard labour going on in the garden this year. I've more or less knocked the place into shape now and finally even got my pond. So far, the three goldfish who live in it (James, Tupaia and Joseph....it was a big pond and they were a bit stressed exploring it) have survived Flynn's scrutiny.



*Part of my new garden, before and after*

This month Natey turns one so that will be a milestone. A few days after that I have a birthday, I'd rather forget but hey, we'll have a good family party and later in the year a real Greek "do" while on the Crete tour. That should help ease the pain a little!





Meanwhile, it is, of course, full steam ahead with a very busy year of tours and Moray and I are also flat-out putting the finishing touches to our exciting 2021 line-up.

I'm already thinking about 2022 but that's under wraps at present! I love it that we can be innovative and come up with tours before many other operators but we're going to keep these plans under our hat for a little longer...do watch this space though.

## Our 2020 Tours

- My **Colombia** tour sets off in mid-February with a small group of intrepid travellers. Can't wait for that!
- **Romania and the Balkans in May** – more details below about this confirmed departure.
- **The Pamir Highway in June-July – this is also a confirmed departure. BUT we have space for one more person on this awesome adventure and what will almost certainly be a one-off tour.**  
Do get in touch soon if you'd like to join me as we journey along the Pamir Highway in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This will take us through some of the most stunning mountain landscapes in the world – definitely scenery to rival the Himalayas and the Andes. The road is the second highest 'paved' road (not so much paving in parts of it!) in the world. We'll get to glimpse across the Panj River into Afghanistan and stay in guest houses and yurts – a wonderful chance to meet some of the most hospitable people in the world.
- **Brazil in August/September** – more about this tour below!
- **Island-Hopping in Greece in October** – we're close to a confirmed departure for this tour, which will take us from Athens through to Crete with visits along the way to Mykonos, Santorini and ending up in historic and beautiful Rhodes.
- **Ethiopia in October/November** – there is so much interest in this tour we now have two departures to fit in everyone who wants to come and ensure a quality small-group experience. **There are just a few places left on each departure - dates are Oct 14 – Nov 4 and Nov 4 – Nov 25.**
- **New Year in Europe**  
**We've had a number of requests to run a New Year in Europe tour in Dec 2020- Jan 2021 so we're finalising an itinerary** right now. But here's a taste of what we have planned. If this sounds like you, do please let Moray know asap so you're on the list for the final itinerary and price. Dates (still to be confirmed) Dec 27, 2020 - Jan 15, 2021
  - \* Visit six countries - Croatia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Germany.
  - \* Zagreb's Christmas market (it operates into Jan!) - voted the World's Top Christmas Market in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and Europe's best in 2019.
  - \* New Year's Eve gala dinner and party in Budapest
  - \* Alpine resort visit in Poland with sleigh ride (snow-permitting!)
  - \* Three nights in stunning Prague
  - \* Berlin with its world-class museums, great night life and World War 2 history.
  - \* Free evenings to enjoy ballet, opera, orchestral, jazz and folk music concerts.

## This month's Feature Tours

### Romania and the Balkans (May 5 – May 27) - from \$11,495 share twin basis

This is a confirmed departure and we do have room for more travellers. This will almost certainly be my one and only tour encompassing all these countries, so if you've been considering it, do keep this in mind.

Romania is probably the most well-known of the countries on our itinerary – even if you can only think of the links with Vlad the Impaler aka Dracula! But Romania's countryside is a real step back in time and the whole country is still well off the beaten tourist trail.

Geographers love to debate whether Romania is truly part of the Balkans but the other five countries on our itinerary are undisputedly Balkan. We're going to travel to Bulgaria, Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia – six countries in the one tour!

Bulgaria is a real revelation. Sofia is a fascinating capital, the countryside is beautiful and again, it's yet to be discovered by mass tourism.

Kosovo is the newest country in Europe and an excellent place to gain an insight into its recent, complex history. North Macedonia is also exotic and intriguing – we'll learn all about why it had to change its name from Macedonia while we're there! Lonely Planet rated it in its Top Three places in the world to visit in 2020 by the way.

Serbia is almost never visited on tours, but we'll be travelling through the southern part of this country – the last country of the former Republic of Yugoslavia that I'm yet to visit. Albania is an almost forgotten part of Europe, but it has a rapidly growing economy and a history that includes Ottoman and Roman heritage.

This whole region is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse in all of Europe. It's also extremely good value (great news for independent meals! but we've also included some fantastic included lunches and dinners, and the usual very popular mixture of sightseeing with quality local guides and free time.



*Plovdiv, Romania*



*Lake Ohrid, Macedonia*

### **The Wildlife of Brazil (Aug 16 – Sept 6)**

This is a repeat of our wonderful 2019 tour with a few small tweaks. I was absolutely blown away by the wildlife in Brazil and amazed that we shared some stunning viewings with so few other visitors. We had at least five very close encounters with magnificent jaguars, watched giant river otters catching and eating their breakfast, saw the Amazon's pink dolphins up close and gazed in awe at some of the most ridiculously, gorgeously coloured birds on the planet, including hyacinth macaws, toucans, parrots and dozens of other species. Our tour takes in the Atlantic Forest, the Pantanal (a region considered the Serengeti of South America) and a three-night cruise on the Amazon-River Negro river systems. We end the tour in wonderful Rio de Janeiro, which is now one of my favourite cities. I'll be joined on this tour by my very good friend German Rojas from Central America who was with us on last year's tour. He's a wildlife guide and photographer extraordinaire and simply a lovely person to travel with.

Along with our three-night Amazon cruise we'll be using a floating hotel as a base for several nights in the Pantanal (the optimum way to give us the best chance of seeing the jaguars) and use small wildlife lodges. Much of our bird watching takes place just a few steps from our doors! All meals on tour are included in this itinerary, along with the services of local wildlife experts and our wonderful German.

Do join me – there are no more plans for a Brazil tour in the foreseeable future.





## Travel talks with Jill

If you live in the Christchurch or the wider Canterbury region, I'd love to see you at one or more of my travel talks that we've organising.,

These talks will feature specific countries to which I'll be taking tours either this year or in 2021 but there will also be a talk with me simply talking about my travels over the years. So, there is a mix of the informative and I hope the just plain entertaining!

Our first talk date will be Thursday 13 February where we will have the specific country talks: the Balkan countries at 10 am, Brazil at 12 midday, Ethiopia at 2 pm and Winter in Europe at 4 pm. The general travel talk will be in March, details to be advised in the February newsletter.

Please join me, along with Moray and James for refreshments and an informative talk. RSVP to Moray for full details – morayj@hotmail.co.nz.

## Our Travel Survey

Our December newsletter featured a survey about countries you'd like to visit, the kind of tours you like, length of holiday and so on. We had an enthusiastic response but maybe because everyone was a bit busy before Christmas there weren't quite as many returns as we would like.

So, we've attached the survey again here with this email and would love it if you would take the time to complete it and return it to Moray.

Everyone who took part in the December survey went into the draw for a Christmas hamper and this was won by Megan Clark. Well done, Megan, and we hope you and your family enjoyed the contents! There's no prize for the new round of the survey but we really do appreciate your comments. We'll give you a round-up of some our findings in the February newsletter!

## Small Group Specialists

One common theme among respondents was that they really appreciate our small group tours. My groups very, very rarely exceed 18 people with most around the 10 to 15 mark and sometimes we travel with even fewer tour members. Our Mongolia trip, for example, had six of us on tour and we all had a wonderful time!

## Refer a Friend

This is proving very popular so don't forget that if you refer a friend (or mere acquaintance!) to us you are in line for a \$500 discount on your next tour. All you have to do is let Moray know who you have referred and when and she will take it from there. We think word of mouth is one of the very best ways to spread the news about my tours and this is one way we can say thank you for your support and enthusiasm!

Very best wishes Jill