



Dear Everyone

Two days I returned from my first overseas tour (beyond Australia) since March 2020. It was a major milestone and I was so delighted 16 people joined me to explore the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

There's more about that later in this newsletter, the last for 2022 by the way, but first of all there's some very important information on future tours to share with you.

Changes in Travel

As international travel starts to build up again, we are being faced with all kinds of new challenges, many of which are affecting how we organise and schedule tours.

Airlines especially have become increasingly strict about how and when they will let us have group fares (group fares help us keep tour prices down) and how soon we have to book and pay for our flights.

Equally crucially, although the world is opening up to us, there are still far fewer flights available than before the pandemic and demand is regularly outstripping supply.

We are also finding overseas tour operators and hotels are demanding much earlier deposits and tour confirmation.

These are realities across the entire tour industry, not just small operators like Jill Worrall Tours.

All these factors mean the following for my tours:

- 1) We are having to ask for earlier deposits for tours so that we can confirm departures as soon as possible. It is no longer possible to wait until a few months before the tour is due to leave to decide if a tour can run or not. If we do this now there is a very real risk that we will not be able to get the seats we need on flights or rooms in hotels.
- 2) This does mean, too, that deposits for some tours have to be larger than in the past simply because we're being asked for larger deposits from airlines and our overseas partners.
- 3) Please remember that deposits are fully refundable up to the point tours are confirmed with the exception of the Egypt/Jordan tour which due to suppliers' requirements a non-refundable deposit will be required at time of booking. Once a tour is confirmed deposits are non-refundable.
- 4) We always try to get group airfares for my tours to keep costs down. This usually means that we need 10 tour members to leave New Zealand on the same flight. You still have flexibility to do further travel at the end of the tour. But if we all leave together then it means we can secure group flights (which also mean you have longer to pay for your flights than you do if you book independently) and we can get the tour confirmed earlier.



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Here's an example: If I had a tour going to India and 10 people book and leave NZ on the official tour start date we can get a group airfare and we can confirm the tour as early as possible. However, if we had for example, three people who want to arrive at our destination earlier or use a different airline that means we need to have another three people book to make up the 10 needed for a group fare before we can confirm the tour.

- 5) **It is a tremendous help to us if you do book early for a tour and helps us ensure that the trip you want to do takes off.**

Tour Confirmations and updates

I'm so delighted to let you know that my **Japan in Springtime** in April 2023 and my **Cruising the Adriatic** tour in May are both not only confirmed tours but are fully booked.

Full tour itineraries and prices for my June **Walking Ireland's Pilgrim Paths** and July's **Ecuador and Galapagos tours** are now available. These itineraries have been sent to people who have already expressed interest but if you haven't got yours or would now like to see these please contact Moray soon.

The full itinerary for September's **Spain and Portugal** tour should be available in the next few weeks. This has been delayed because of flight changes, which are beyond our control but do mean we then have to do some major rearrangements to tour schedules.

The November 2023 **Egypt and Jordan** tour is also nearly ready to release, and we hope to have this available in January. We will only have a very short window of 1 month in which to book this tour. This is due to suppliers' requirements particularly in Egypt for non-refundable deposits to be paid also immediately.

Feature Tour

Walking Ireland's Pilgrim Paths

June 10 to June 27, 2023

\$14,995 per person, twin share

This will be my last walking tour to Ireland as my local guide won't be available after next year's tour. As those of you who have travelled with me before know, my preference is always to work with people I know well and who enjoy and understand Kiwi travellers. I'm sure there are many wonderful other guides in Ireland but somehow, it just wouldn't be the same without Frank muddling up his lefts and his rights and his rallying cry of "Ok lads" (no matter how many women there are in the group...)

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This month I'm not going to talk about the full itinerary but just one destination on the tour that rates among my top five favourite places in the world (and as I've now notched up 98 countries, I have a few locations from which to choose).

The place is Great Skellig Island or Skellig Michael, a 230-metre-high pyramid-shaped rock that rises from the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of County Kerry. This rock is one of only two Unesco World Heritage sites in Ireland.

Accessible only by boat, Great Skellig is legendary for both its 6th century monastic ruins and one of the most important seabird habitats in all of Europe. The monks' beehive cells and tiny chapel, along with the stone steps they cut into the steep hillsides, are an awe-inspiring sight and the climb up to them is literally breath-taking.



And then there are the birds - guillemots, fulmars, the world's second largest colony of gannets and best of all puffins – thousands of them and we're there when the pufflings are hatching and their parents are constantly on the wing and at their burrows feeding their ever-hungry youngsters.



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Playwright George Bernard Shaw described the island as an ‘incredible, impossible, mad place’ and I totally agree. It’s unforgettable. And because it’s so popular and visitor numbers are strictly limited it’s extremely difficult to get to Great Skellig, especially during puffin season unless you have the right contacts – which I do.



Even though I’ve been fortunate enough to visit the island at least five times, the sense of history, the spectacular scenery, the antics of the puffins, never, ever dulls – it’s just as wonderful every time.

Tour report: The UAE and Oman (Nov 20 to Dec 5)



It was such a thrill to land in Dubai and not long after finding us sitting in an historic house tucking into a typical Arabic-style lunch before plunging into the over-the-top bling of the gold souk.

That was familiar territory for many of us but not so the next two days when we visited the neighbouring emirates of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. Sharjah’s amazing fish, fruit and vegetable souks were great and the massive thunderstorm and epic surface flooding that followed made for an exciting day out! Abu Dhabi’s falcon hospital, where we were able to see close up several dozen highly prized hunting falcons, was fascinating and the Louvre Abu Dhabi was the most beautiful piece of architecture.



It was a real change of pace to arrive in Oman's capital Muscat where there are no high rises or glass-fronted buildings. We began our tour at sea with a sunset cruise off the spectacular coastline with its many forts and watchtowers; marvelled at the beauty of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the Royal Opera house, before setting off in a fleet of five 4WDs to head south.

After watching boat builders working on a massive traditional ocean-going dhow in Sur, we ended the day on the beach at Ras al Jinz where we were so lucky to see a green sea turtle laying her eggs.

Our convoy then took off into the desert, zooming up and down enormous sand dunes. That night many of us watched World Cup football on a giant screen while reclining on cushions under a starry sky.

It was then into Oman's spectacular mountains and oases where we walked through shady date plantations and walked through tiny villages perched on mountainsides with terraces full of roses, pomegranates and walnuts.

The tour ended, literally on a high note, back in Dubai when we ascended the tallest building in the world, the Burj al Khalifa, to the 125th floor viewing deck and then watched a musical fountain on the Palm Jumeirah, a huge residential and resort developed and built entirely on reclaimed land. A fitting note was that most of the fill used to create the island came from Oman!

We really enjoyed being back on the road again, the exhilaration of new sights and experiences, a change of diet (delicious dates and lemon and mint drinks especially) and getting to know the locals, especially our team of drivers and Mohammad our guide in Oman.

Happy Christmas and a Great New Year

And now all that's left for me to do is to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and, hopefully an exciting and travel-filled 2023.

I also want to thank everyone who has inquired about tours this year and, of course, everyone who has travelled with me, whether it was in the wild seas off the coast of Fiordland, Northern Territory, Western Australia or Tasmania across the ditch and/or to Oman and the UAE.

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Your support and encouragement means so much to me and has absolutely made sure I am able to keep going planning and then taking you to some of the most special places on our planet.

A special thank you to Moray, who I know many of you have 'met' either on the phone or by email. Moray does an amazing job answering all your queries (and mine) sorting out often complex flight itineraries for you all, as well fine-tuning all my overseas arrangements. She's indispensable!

Even though the holiday period is approaching, Moray or I will still be able to reply to any emails or calls – someone will always be in touch other than on the statutory holidays such as Christmas Day etc.

We will be back in action in mid-January with the first newsletter of 2023, which will include some information about what exciting and memorable tours I have planned for 2024!

Very best wishes

Jill

