

## **Hi Everyone**

Happy New Year. It does seem that 2023 is starting off on a relatively positive note, travel-wise, although nothing is without its challenges these days.

There's a lot to cover this month, including my plans for 2024. which many of you have been asking me about for some time already, so let's get straight into it.

## **Another tour confirmed!**

**My Walking in Ireland** tour, which departs NZ on June 10, is now a confirmed departure. There is still room for a few more people so if you'd like to join me and about 10 other travellers to explore some of the most beautiful parts of Ireland so do get in touch soon. Nowadays it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get extra seats on our flights, especially as we move closer to departure time.

## **Progress with other tours**

I'm off to **Lord Howe Island** with a full tour in a couple of weeks, **Japan in Cherry Blossom Time** in April is full, as is my private charter **Croatian Island Cruise** in May.

**Ecuador and Galapagos (July 16 – Aug 4)** – bookings are coming in for this tour, but we do need a few more people to be able to confirm this departure soon. There's a special feature on this tour later in this newsletter.

**Spain and Portugal (Sept 1 – Sept 23)** – we only need one or two bookings to confirm this tour and are really confident we will be able to confirm this departure over the next few weeks.



**Egypt and Jordan (Nov 3 – Nov 24)** If you're already on the list of people waiting for this information you will receive this soon. If not, please do get in touch with Moray soon as places are VERY limited on this tour (this is largely because it is very hard to get a larger allocation of cabins on the Nile Cruise section of the tour).



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When I started to write the full itinerary for this tour a few weeks ago I worked out that I'd produced the longest list of highlights of any tour I've been involved in over the past nearly 20 years.

So, there didn't seem to be any better way to tell you about this tour than to list the highlights here!

This tour is going to fill fast and if you're a single traveller please note that we have only three single occupancy cabins available on the Nile Cruise section of the tour.

- Jordan's National Archaeological Museum and Citadel and Amman city souks
- Jerash, one of the best-preserved Roman cities in the world.
- The 6th century mosaic map in Madaba
- An overnight desert camping experience in awe-inspiring Wadi Rum with the chance to ride a camel.
- Red Sea cruise and BBQ
- Two nights in Petra with free time for independent exploration
- Family meal with a Jordanian family
- Sojourn on the Dead Sea with free time for a float
- Cairo sightseeing including the Museum of Cairo, the Museum of Ancient Civilizations (where Egypt's royal mummies are kept) and, if open, the new Museum of Egyptian Civilization
- Walking tour of Cairo's old city, including its famous Khan El-Khalili souk.
- Visit Egyptian Coptic Christian neighbour, along with the Coptic Museum and also the Ben Ezra synagogue.
- Private tour with an Egyptologist of the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx.
- The Second World War sites at El Alamein, including the Commonwealth Cemetery and museum.
- Alexandria's National Museum, Pompeii Pillar and catacombs
- A night each in two iconic, historic Egyptian hotels, the Cecil in Alexandria and the Old Palace Hotel in Luxor.
- Visit Howard Carter's former home in Luxor.
- Five days aboard a luxury Nile cruise vessel.
- See Luxor and Karnak temples and the Avenue of the Sphinx
- The Valley for the Kings at Luxor, including the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut.
- Edfu's Temple of Horus and Kom Ombo temple with its magnificent murals and bas reliefs.
- Aswan High Dam and the Temple of Philae, ancient granite quarries.
- Sail in a traditional felucca around the islands of Aswan.
- Return flights from Aswan to visit the temples of Abu Simbel.
- All meals on the four-night Nile Cruise plus all breakfasts, three lunches and six dinners while on tour.

**Booking for this tour:** We will only have a limited window of opportunity to book this tour due to Egyptian booking conditions that are totally beyond our control. There will only be one month between launching this tour and confirming the entire Egyptian portion of the tour (this includes the cruise, hotels and sightseeing). This means if you want to join me on what truly will be an amazing tour you will need to pay a non-refundable deposit by **02 Mar 2023**. We don't like having to do this but this rule applies to all tours, from all countries and for all tour companies.



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There is so much interest in this tour that we are certain it will be a confirmed departure and by taking out travel insurance from the point of paying your deposit you will be covered if you or we have to cancel the tour due to circumstances unforeseen at this point. There are terms and conditions relating to cancellations so please check these with Moray at the time of booking.

### **Our guarantee to you about deposits**

As you will have read in the last newsletter and probably have noticed about all my new tours, we are needing some very early deposits for tours.

The demand for this is coming from almost all our overseas operators, who are in turn under great pressure from hotels and other service providers for non-refundable deposits before they will even agree to make my tour arrangements. They are increasingly wanting these deposits before we can even confirm flights and have the tour ready to launch!

I and James Greer, my business partner fully understand that no-one wants to risk sending us a non-refundable deposit before a tour has been confirmed. So, we are making this guarantee to you:

**When you pay a deposit on any future tours, and we do not reach the minimum numbers to be able to run the tour we will reimburse you for your FULL deposit or you can transfer the deposit to another tour.**

I hope this news will ease any concerns you have about deposits, especially as we are needing to ask for them much earlier than pre-Covid times. This is happening all over the world and it is not just small, independent operators like Jill Worrall Tours that are being impacted.

### **Refer a Friend Discount**

Once again, we are offering a Refer-a-Friend Discount on all tours, beginning with the Ireland tour. This means that if you refer a friend (who is not currently on our mailing list) and they book on any tour, beginning with the Ireland tour, you will receive a \$500 discount on the next tour you book and pay for, conditions apply.

## **This Month's Feature Tour**

### **Ecuador and The Galapagos Islands**

**July 16 – August 4, 2023: Priced at \$18,450 on a share twin basis ex Auckland**

Ecuador is one of the smallest of South America's countries but is one of the most environmentally and geographically diverse. This is good news for travellers because it means there are so many places of interest packed into a relatively small area.

This tour, which includes 10 nights on Ecuador's mainland, and six on the amazing Galapagos Islands features historic, cultural, landscape and wildlife highlights. Our guide throughout the tour will be Ecuadorian Xavier Munoz, with whom some of you will have travelled on my tours to Brazil and to Colombia.

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Xavier is a world class photographer and wildlife guide but as a proud Ecuadorian he is also extremely knowledgeable about his country's history, culture and, of course, its cuisine.



The Galapagos Islands must be on just about every lover of wildlife's bucket list. This archipelago of 19 islands is a Unesco World Heritage site and has been declared a living museum and showcase of evolution and a melting pot of marine species. Its unique flora and fauna, including marine iguanas, giant tortoises, finches and huge cacti, also helped fuel Charles Darwin's landmark theory of evolution by natural selection.

Islands on our itinerary include Cristobal, Espanola, Santa Cruz, Isabella and North Seymour. We are not joining a cruise for this tour, but instead will be based on several of the islands and taking cruises, all of them on smaller vessels, and on occasions, possibly chartered just for us.

We'll discover all of this for ourselves while in the islands, but our mainland tour will introduce us to Ecuador's long history, including Inca and Spanish periods from the 15th century, its markets, foods and villages.

On mainland Ecuador we'll spend time in the globally recognised Minto Cloud Forest, visit the Equatorial monument, have a city tour of the capital Quito, and take a road trip through the Andes to Guayaquil via fascinating local villages and markets.

It's another one-off tour and like many other wildlife hotspots around the world, the clock is ticking. I've included the links to a couple of You Tube documentaries about the Galapagos. One is a straight documentary, the other more of a video blog which, between the two of them, will give you a great idea of what to expect in this amazing archipelago.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=zDC-M0iCT8E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paTsVDhqX9Q>

## And now for 2024!

It's a goody! I can promise you that. There are some real bucket-list tours on my schedule, and they will almost all certainly be one-off trips. Each tour is totally bespoke – we've gone to our chosen operators with my wish list, they and Moray have almost certainly torn their hair out trying to make them all work and here's the result.

I am genuinely so excited to announce this programme!

I'm sure too that you are aware that for the foreseeable future, travel costs are not going to come down and in fact seem to still be going up. But we have done everything we can to keep prices down, but at the same time not compromising on itineraries and quality. We're also very confident that our prices are competitive because we've researched that too. There could well be tours out there that look cheaper, but it pays to check the small print and especially what is and isn't included and that's not even taking into account the around-the-clock care from me while on tour and Moray's awesome experience and efficiency with bookings and any extra travel arrangements you need.

So, here we go:

### Scandinavia and the Northern Lights: 28 Jan 2024 to 17 Feb 2024



This tour is going to take us through Norway, Sweden and Finland and is timed to give us the very best chance of seeing the Northern Lights. This can never be guaranteed but there are so many other remarkable experiences and sights on this amazing tour.

We're going to start with a tour of Sweden's capital Stockholm, including a visit to see the 17<sup>th</sup> century Vasa galleon, before taking an overnight ferry to Finland's capital Helsinki. Then we head north right on to the Arctic Circle to Rovaniemi, the capital of Lapland, to visit a reindeer farm and Santa's Village. Then we will spend a night in a glass-roofed igloo (ensuring a warm, luxurious bed from which to look for the Northern Lights!) and have an option to try snow-mobiling. At Lake Inari we get to try ice-fishing before crossing into Norway to visit the home of the Sami people of northern Norway.

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We'll eventually reach almost 70 degrees north at Alta and stay in an amazing ice hotel. I've included a ride with a sled dog team, a visit to a Sami family and then, in Tromso, we'll be boarding a cruise for a three-night journey through the Norwegian fjords to Bergen and finally fly to Oslo.

Our cruise will take us through magnificent fjords and includes the Alesund Archipelago, taking us away from all possible light pollution and giving us yet another chance to experience the Northern Lights.

### **Vietnam and Cambodia: March 2024**

This tour is specifically designed to appeal to people who are looking for destinations closer to home. I am also a great fan of river cruising so a special feature of this tour will be a seven-day (approx) cruise on the lower Mekong River. There will be many day excursions from the ship that will introduce us to local life in both Vietnam and Cambodia. Along with this cruise will be tours of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and, of course, a visit to the Angkor Wat, the largest religious site in the world, a World Heritage site and possibly the most important destinations for visitors in all of South-East Asia. We will also travel to northern Vietnam to see the city of Hanoi and join a two-night cruise around the wonders of Halong Bay.



### **Central America: April-May 2024**

I love Central America and this will be my third tour to the region. Costa Rica is famed for its wildlife and stunning scenery and we'll be travelling through this country with my wonderful guide and good friend German Rojas, who I know many of you have had the pleasure of travelling with before. Guatemala is also on the itinerary where we will visit one of the best preserved and most beautiful colonial-era towns in all of the Americas, Antigua, stay beside the high-altitude Lake Atitlan and visit probably the best Mayan ruins in all of Central America, Tikal. Details of the third Central American country on the tour will be available soon.

### **Epic Eastern Canada: June 2024**

This tour is going to include most, if not all of the following regions and islands – New Brunswick Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Foundland and Labrador. It's also been scheduled to give us the best chances to see whales, puffins and if we're very lucky, icebergs. There will be quintessential coastal scenery, picturesque fishing villages, history and wildlife.



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### **Zambia, Botswana and Namibia: September 2024**

We'll be visiting one of the best and most underrated national parks in all of Africa, South Luangwa in Zambia and, of course, the Victoria Falls. We will also be spending time in Botswana's Okavango Delta, one of the world's great natural wonders, and touring through some of the wildlife and scenic highlights of Namibia. I love Africa and if I could only ever do one more trip in my life, it would almost certainly be an African safari. This will be a tour of great contrasts from deserts to deltas to vast plains and will offer us a chance to see a huge variety of wildlife.

### **Southern India: November 2024**

It probably seems an age ago but many of you who came with me on my last tour to India asked me and our wonderful Indian guide Kush to come up with a tour to South India. And we have! We're going to start in Chennai (formerly Madras), visit the most stunning Hindu temples in all of India, experience the hill country with its tea and spice plantations, visit the extraordinary Chettinad region, cruise the Kerala backwaters and as a grand finale see the Mysore Palace, one of the most stunning and largest royal residences in all of India.

If you are interested in any of these tours, please do register your interest soon as some of these tours will have very restricted numbers. Expressing interest in the tours doesn't commit you to anything but does mean you will be first to receive the full itinerary and prices as they become available.

***And that's it for this month! I will catch you up on all the family news next month as this newsletter is already very long. Suffice to say that Natey has celebrated his fourth birthday, Zoe her first birthday and Georgia will be turning one not too long from now. They are keeping all of us busy! Derek is also gearing up for a trip to the UK to see his youngest daughter and for a reunion with two school friends from more than half a century ago!***

***Very best wishes***

***Jill***