

Christmas Newsletter from Jill

Hi Everyone

First of all, I want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I, along with Moray and James, also want to thank you all very much for your ongoing support and enthusiasm for my tours. It is very much appreciated.

It's been a great travelling year, starting with our sojourn on beautiful little-visited Lord Howe Island. That was a great way to get back into overseas travel as it was so laid-back and low-key. Then I set off for Japan in spring and I know many of us became hooked on Japan as a result (so much so that there MIGHT be a chance of a Japan in Autumn tour sometime in the future!).

I then set off to Europe, first to cruise the Croatian Adriatic on the privately chartered lovely Luna and after a short break in the UK, flew on to Ireland for my walking tour following the routes of many of Ireland's medieval pilgrim paths. The island of Inish Boffin, especially, captivated many of us.

Spain and Portugal were next, with Barcelona's La Sagrada Familia being one of my personal highlights, as well as some special moments such as a beautiful winery lunch on a terrace overlooking the Douro River in Portugal. And then to cap off an exciting year, Egypt and Jordan. A report on that tour features later in this newsletter.

Tour Updates

I'm really delighted that my 2024 tours to Scandinavia; Vietnam and Cambodia and Africa are now totally full. The Central America tour is a confirmed departure and we have a couple of places still available on this tour.

The final tour to be confirmed for 2024 is South India and the finalised itinerary and pricing will be released in the New Year (it is a lengthy process getting hotel confirmations in India).

A bonus tour!

Unfortunately, the one tour I could not confirm for 2024 was the one to North-Eastern Canada. However, that has left a gap in my programme so I'm planning to relaunch my **Galapagos and Ecuador tour**.

Although I couldn't get enough people for the tour to run in 2023, interest seems to have increased since then, so the plan is to run this tour in 2024, departing in mid-July.



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So, what we need now is expressions of interest in this tour as soon as possible, ideally before Christmas. Then, if there is sufficient interest in the tour, we will plan to have the finalised itinerary and costs available early in the new year.

My tour schedule for 2025 is already in place and I've already got plans for 2026 so there is no room for the Galapagos tours in either of these years. **So, this is very much the last roll of the dice for me to run a Galapagos tour.**

The tour will be organised and run by Ecuadorian Xavier, whom some of you know. He's an exceptional wildlife guide and photographer.

The tour includes six nights in the Galapagos Islands. We are going to be land-based rather than on a cruise ship. This was a deliberate choice as it enables us to do day cruises in much smaller vessels (possibly sometimes with just our group aboard) and also to be able to avoid boatloads of other visitors because we can be more flexible with our daily programmes.

Late July early August is a cooler, drier time to be on the Galapagos and its mating time for many species including flamingos, lava lizards, boobies and frigate birds. There will be sea lion pups in abundance and it's an excellent time to see whales and dolphins.

Along with the Galapagos, on mainland Ecuador we'll visit Quito, the Mundo Cloud Forest, the Antisana Ecological Reserve, which is home to the Andean condor and spectacled bear, and the World Heritage-listed colonial era town of Cuenca.

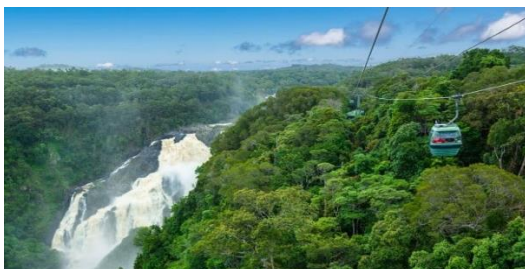
So, please do let Moray or me, or both of us, know as soon as possible if you're interested. This does **not commit you to anything at this point but will give us an indication about whether to proceed.**

Actually, there's another bonus tour for next year!

I know that for some of you, the thought of long-haul flights is now a bit much but you still like to get away, enjoy some relaxing travel and company with other like-minded travellers.

So, with this in mind I'm also planning a 12-day, approx. tour to the Far North of Queensland, including Cape York.

This tour is planned for some time in June 2024. The tour will start in Cairns before heading north through the Daintree Forest and Cape Tribulation to Cooktown. We will also stay at the Musgrave Telegraph Station and on a traditional Aussie cattle station and spend time at the top of Cape York, including a cruise out to Thursday Island. The tour ends back near Cairns with a relaxing stay at a resort hotel and options to visit the Great Barrier Reef and to take the Kuranda scenic rail trip and Skyrail cable car.



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I know most of this region very well, having been invited there numerous times to write for the Queensland's tourism authority. The rainforests and coastline are beautiful, the travel is easy, the temperatures will be warm and it will be a perfect way to shorten the NZ winter at home!

As always, do let us know if you'd like to know more about this tour.

A note on the priority mailing list

I know several of you have missed out on some of the 2024 tours because they booked out so quickly. One way to almost certainly guarantee there will be room for you on tour is to make sure you let Moray know you're interested in a tour as soon as possible. This will ensure you're on the priority mailing list for the finalised tour itinerary and pricing for whichever tour you're interested in. This is especially important if you're looking for a single room/cabin as on many tours these are very limited.

We already, for example, have names down for my planned 2025 tours (and South India for November 2024). As a brief reminder of the 2025 tour schedule here's the plan in brief.

2025 Tours

March: Sri Lanka and a four-night cruise around the Seychelles

May: A comprehensive tour of Turkey

June: The Pamir Highway (Tajikistan) and Uzbekistan

July-August: Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands

September: Shetland and Orkney (cruise) and the Outer Hebrides

Oct: Java by Rail

Tour report – Egypt and Jordan, November 2023



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I thought I'd start the report with some feedback from two tour members who came with me!
Thanks Alison and John for this!

When we read the Jordan-Egypt trip description we were blown away – and we were not disappointed. UNESCO World Heritage sites one after the other, lots of local experiences, great food, amazing shopping opportunities, and the security of knowing that Jill would take care of everything and anything that needed it. The highlights we expected (pyramids, Petra) were almost eclipsed by the unexpectedly amazing (wonderfully colourful temples and tombs, stories of the Crusaders as we visited their castles, dinner Bedouin-style at our Jordanian tour guide's home, Roman ruins, camel rides, channelling Agatha Christie and Lawrence of Arabia whilst visiting places they stayed in, fabulous balloon rides...the list goes on and on). Every day had multiple fun things, but with just the right amount of 'down' time to recover ready for the next adventure. Thanks Jill - could never have seen and done anything like this without your expertise.



That doesn't leave me a lot to say other than this really was a tour where the highlights just kept on coming. I know all of us on tour did wonder about how secure we'd feel in this part of the world given what was happening next door in Gaza and Israel. But none of us felt unsafe at any point and everyone involved in the tour in both countries went out of their way to make sure we were very well looked after.

I was so happy to be back in Jordan and to catch up with guide Harbi and his family, who I've known for many years. It was also great to know how many tour members said that although Egypt had been the main drawcard, Jordan had more than held its own in terms of history, amazing sights and welcoming people. I especially loved being back in the desert sands of Wadi Rum as well as being able to introduce my group to Harbi's lovely family.

Being beside one of the Great Pyramids during a totally unexpected thunderstorm was quite something (even more so for the group members who were inside the largest pyramid at the time). And it was so moving to be able to place poppies on dozens of the Kiwi graves at El Alamein.

Our Nile cruise was magical. as were our overnight stays in two classic historic hotels - the Cecil in Alexandria and the Winter Palace in Luxor. In terms of archaeological highlights for me, I think walking into the tombs in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor and being once again astounded by the colours and sheer extent of the paintings and hieroglyphics was top of my list, as was seeing the temple of Abu Simbel for the first time.



Along the way we celebrated Annette and Lena's birthdays, along with guide Ramy's special day; ate out with the locals, went swimming in the Red and Dead Seas, rode camels and horse-drawn carriages, sailed in a felucca, watched or took off in balloons and a relished the hospitality of a host of local people in both countries.

On the home front

It will be a relatively quiet Christmas this year with just seven adults (including two grown-up nephews), along with one teenager and two pre-schoolers here for Christmas dinner. This will be our first year with both Natey and Zoe staying here (with Mum and Dad) on Christmas Eve which I'm really looking forward to. Then we have our annual Worrall-Burrows extended family picnic on Dec 27, which this year will include about 20 people across four generations, from patriarch Derek to four of his great grandchildren. Rachel and Ats are hosting this one (phew!)

Then in the New Year we're gearing up for Natey's first day at school when the school year resumes. I can't believe that time has come around already. Then there's a week's holiday on Banks Peninsula with extended family before I jet off for Stockholm.

And that's all for 2023. I'll be back with another newsletter in January, before I take off with another group to Sweden, Finland and Norway on January 27.

Once again, thanks for your support and all my very best wishes for Christmas and for 2024, Jill

