

Jill Worrall Tours March 2024 Newsletter

Hi Everyone

It's just over three weeks since I returned home from my Winter Tour of Scandinavia. Along with a soft toy reindeer, a Lego snowmobile and a polar bear drink bottle (no, not for Derek but the grandchildren!) I came home with a rather vicious Northern Hemisphere bug (not Covid but similar). So, that slowed me down for several days.

But I'm up and about again now and working on future tour planning and getting ready for my next tour, Vietnam and Cambodia. which takes off on March 27. So, what is happening with my tours? Here's short summary.

2024 Tours

All 2024 tours are now full other than South India in November, the itinerary for which is about to be launched soon.

South India, Nov 9 – Nov 28, 2024

I know those of you who are on the priority mailing list for this tour will be wondering if we'll EVER have the final itinerary and pricing out to you! But the good news is that it will be available by the end of this month. Getting confirmation of availability and prices from hotels, which is something out of our control, has really slowed us down but we are now almost sorted! There's some more information about this tour later in this newsletter.



2025 Tours

March: Sri Lanka and the Seychelles

The full itinerary and pricing for this tour will be out in a few months. This adventure will feature a comprehensive two-week tour of Sri Lanka and then five to six days in the Seychelles. We'll be based on land for the Seychelles tour but will visit at least three stunning islands, including one that is home to the giant land tortoises.



May: Turkey

This extensive three-week (approx.) tour is being finalised now and will include Istanbul, Gallipoli, Ephesus, the Emerald Coast, Cappadocia and much more.

June: Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides

Due to some major complications trying to work with an expedition cruise company for the Shetland and Orkney section of this tour I've now swapped to a Scottish land-based operator who is highly experienced in all of Scotland's islands. I expect to have an itinerary ready to tell you about soon. It will include Shetland, Orkney, Lewis, Harris and probably at least two other islands of the Outer Hebrides AND, hopefully, a journey on the Jacobite steam train which travels part of the West Highland Railway, considered one of the world's most scenic rail trips. The itinerary will suit people who both want time to walk and also people who prefer a less active holiday.

Work is ongoing for the remaining three tours for 2025, **Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands**; the **Pamir Highway** (the itinerary is complete but it's too early for us to sort flights yet) and **Java by Rail**.

Important note: These days, tours - especially those that involve limited accommodation options i.e. cruises and island destinations - fill up fast. Single rooms/cabins are also always in short supply. So, if you're interested in a tour do make sure Moray or I know so that we can put you on the priority mailing list for itineraries as soon as they become available.

A few hints regarding 2026!

I've had a few requests recently about tours for 2026 so keep in mind that I'm thinking about a small group tour of England's gardens; Saudi Arabia and also, possibly in the mix are Mongolia, Patagonia or Uganda. It would be interesting to know if any of those appeal – feedback is very welcome!

A touch of the exotic

Some of the special features of my very comprehensive tour of South India scheduled for this November are some unique hotels. They are not simply places to stay overnight but are tour highlights in their own right.

Here's a couple of them to whet your appetite!

Visalam Heritage Hotel

When we are in the Chettinad region of South India we will stay for two nights in a 100-year-old former Chettiar mansion, Visalam. The Chettiers were prosperous traders who poured a considerable amount of their wealth into incredible palaces, many of which are now only home to elderly caretakers. But Visalam has been lovingly restored and converted into a wonderful hotel. I've stayed here before and it's an absolute treat with its high-ceiling bedrooms, locally made tiles, textiles woven by local weavers, original family photos on the walls and so on. There's also a beautiful pool set in a tranquil garden and a chance to taste the wonderful ly spicy aromatic Chettiar cuisine cooked by local experts.

Taj Kumarakon

This small five-star resort (there are only 28 cottages) is set on the shores of Lake Vembanad in the heart of the Kerala backwaters. The resort was once a family estate and the original bungalow, and many century-old trees are still in the grounds. The resort is right next door to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary, so the beautiful gardens are often visited by dozens of species of birds. The restaurant serves delicious Kerala dishes, there's a pool and Kerala's only zipline (flying fox) available to guest. There might be a chance to go kayaking too!

Tour Report - Sweden, Finland and Norway, Jan-Feb 2024



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It's honestly hard to know where to start and stop with the highlights on this tour! First of all, we were blessed with plenty of snow, both on the ground and on some days, falling gently while we were out and about. And far north in the Arctic Circle in Norway we had a brilliant display of the Aurora borealis, the Northern Lights.

But then there was being whisked through a snow-clad forest on sleighs pulled by reindeer, snowmobiling in Finland, meeting Santa Claus, going ice fishing (on a frozen lake), harnessing and driving our own dog-sled teams and then cruising through some spectacular coastal scenery as we travelled by ship from Tromso to Bergen. Even just driving along the roads in the far north, with cliffs festooned with icicles and reindeer grazing beside the road was wonderful.

We also visited three capitals. Stockholm, Helsinki and Oslo. Visiting the wonderfully preserved 17th century sailing ship the Vasa and dancing with Abba's avatars in Sweden, causing happy havoc in a Finnish sports' shop hunting for snow boots and ice grips or standing on the deck of a famous polar expedition ship in Norway – we did it all!

We indulged in fresh salmon for breakfast, tried reindeer pizza, elk steak and cloudberry jam; tour members sweated it out in saunas, and listened to traditional Sami joiks (chants) sitting round an open fire in a Sami lavuu (a tent used by Sami reindeer herders)

The feedback from this tour was tremendous – 'the best tour yet', 'we were thrilled with all the activities', 'I had the most incredible time on the tour'.

It is just possible that I might repeat this tour again; no promises as most of my tours are one-off but if you wished you'd been with me on this one, there might be a second chance! Do let me know if you're interested.



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Travel after a JW Tour

On most tours we get requests for people wanting to stay on in a country or a region once my tour has ended. In pre-Covid times this was often, but not always, reasonably straightforward to do.

But, unfortunately, those days have gone for at least the foreseeable future. It's a complex issue, but one I know causes some discussion and confusion among tour members so I will try to explain how it is working now.

On all my tours we aim for group airfares. Not only are these significantly cheaper than an airfare you might buy yourself, or even if we booked you individually but group fares mean we guarantee a certain number of seats on the flights we want and hold these at the same price for longer. A group fare also means, that if there is some major disruption to our flights it is a much more straightforward process to rebook flights because we're all on the one booking.

It used to be that, as a rule, as long as everyone left NZ on the same flight, it was relatively easy for people who wanted to stay on at the end of the tour and fly home later, to do so. This is no longer the case – some airlines, such as Emirates, now allow only a percentage of a group booking to deviate from the group booking and some don't want to allow any deviations at all.

We know that, for example, if I have a tour in Europe, many people may want to stay on and do their own travel after a tour so we're trying hard to work with airlines that give us the most flexibility. But we can't make any guarantees on this and the airlines may even impose an extra charge as they will reassess the group fare on current availability and fares.

So, the very important thing to note is: If you are interested in a tour AND want to do onward travel afterwards (i.e. not come home with me) then you MUST let Moray know as soon as possible. In fact, it's even better to let her know your plans even before you make a firm booking on the tour. We will then treat requests for deviations from the tour on a first-come, first-served basis. It's the fairest way we can do this but even so we can never guarantee that deviations are possible.

Meeting Jill in Leeston

If you live in the Canterbury region and/or have friends in the region who might be interested in a Jill Worrall Tour but would like to meet me in person, I will have a stall at the Leeston Fete on March 23 from 10am to 3pm.

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The fete is a great event with lots of stalls of local crafts and produce and entertainment – a proper country day out. I'd love to meet you if you are going to visit. All the stalls are in the main street so I should be easy to find!

On the home front

Natey has started school and so far, so good although we were surprised to hear him announce after two weeks that 'home learning' (i.e. homework!) was boring! But he's getting along very well, especially as he doesn't have any of his pre-school friends at his new school, so it's been a big step. Zoe's now graduated to the over-tvos room at pre-school and moved herself out of her cot with help from big brother and is now in a bed (well, for some of the night anyway!) Cousin Georgia is our real animal-lover and amazingly Flynn, my nervous little cat who is not normally keen on anyone under five, has taken a shine to her.



1. Matching Dad and daughter ambulances - Jono and Georgie.
2. Natey and Zoe

Derek, meanwhile, is booked in to have a hip replacement in May after one hip deteriorated rather suddenly and very painfully. He's both relieved and a bit apprehensive, which is understandable!

That's all for now. The next newsletter will be sent to you in late April once I've returned from my Vietnam and Cambodia trip.

Very best wishes

Jill