

May-June newsletter

Hi Everyone

Winter hit Canterbury with a vengeance this morning – nearly -4C here, which was a bit of a shock to the system given not much more than 10 days ago I was sweltering in northern Guatemala at about 43C!

Anyway, more about my last tour soon but in the meantime some updates on upcoming tours.

South India Nov 9 to Nov 28, 2024



This tour is close to being a confirmed departure, but I am looking for at least three more people before we can make the tour a reality.

I reckon it's better to let you know the exact status of this tour because a few people have told me in the past that if they'd known that a tour was teetering on the brink of being cancelled, they'd almost certainly have stepped in and booked!

So – **I do need a few more people on this tour** that is going to take us to a part of India far less travelled than the better-known regions such as Rajasthan. But make no mistake, it might not be so well known but South India is full of fascination, vibrant colour, extremely friendly people, delicious food and incredible history and culture.

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November is considered one of the very best times to visit the South (the other times include December and January which is never an ideal time to get Kiwis to travel overseas!). Although nothing can be guaranteed these days, temperatures in this area (where we are either close to the coast or up in the cooler hill areas on most days) should not exceed about 32C, with lower humidity and little chance of rain.

Highlights of the tour include the finest examples of Hindu temple architecture in all of India, the Unesco World Heritage-listed temples, visits to tea and spice plantations, a cruise on the Kerala backwaters, the weekly extravaganza that is the Maharajah of Mysore's palace illuminations and excellent hotels throughout the tour, including a two-night stay in a wonderful heritage hotel in the Chettinad region and a one-night treat in a hotel where each room has its own private plunge pool.

I am especially looking forward to the visit to the royal palace in Mysore. Built in 1912 for the then-ruling dynasty of the Wadiyars, this is a confection of a building topped with pink and gold-plated domes. It's the second most visited attraction in India!

We have timed our visit for a Sunday when the palace is illuminated with nearly 100,000 light bulbs. It will be extremely busy but the place grounds always have something of a carnival atmosphere on illumination days so it will be a lot of fun and definitely something quintessentially India. It will be unforgettable and an event only a small proportion of visitors to India ever get to experience.

I will be managing the tour as always and will be accompanied by a longtime Indian guide and friend Kush. He's a wonderful travel companion and, of course, exceptionally knowledgeable about all aspects of Indian life, history and culture.



Updates on tours for 2025

(more details on Pamir Highway and Java by Train tours later in the year)



Sri Lanka and the Seychelles - 17 March- 08 April: we have to wait until June for flight details for the Seychelles part of this tour so the full itinerary and costings will be ready to send out to you by late June-early July.

The Very Best of Turkey – 29 April – 20 May: this tour is being finalised now and full itinerary and price info will be available soon.

An Island Odyssey in Scotland – 05 June – 26 June: Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides

I am really delighted with the itinerary for this tour. We're going to fly into Edinburgh and then head by air to Shetland. We'll be visiting the prehistoric and Norse settlement of Jarlshof, Sumburgh Head, which is home to thousands of birds including puffins; the northern isles of Yell and Unst (including going as far north in the British Isles as it possible to drive in a coach); visit the ruined castle at Scalloway and spend time in the main town of Lerwick. We then sail to Orkney to visit archaeological sites, including stone circles, the neolithic settlement of Skara Brae, the Churchill Barriers and the Italian chapel at Scapa Flow. We then sail back to the mainland and drive along what is known as Scotland's ultimate road trip, the North Coast 500.

Then it's across the waters to Lewis and its 5000-year-old Standing Stones of Callanish and the historic black houses before heading to the island of Harris with its stunning beaches and church tombs. We also visit North Uist and its museum and arts centre, a wildlife reserve and tour the islands of Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and Barra.

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After crossing the island of Skye we will be taking the famous Jacobite steam train, one of the world's most spectacular railway journeys.

Along the way there will be some free days for you to enjoy some easy walks or simply to relax or take a stroll from the homely country and town hotels. There might be the odd whisky distillery along the way too! The tour ends in Glasgow.

Of course, you could visit all of these places on your own but I know from personal experience organising this tour that to fit in so many islands with the complexities of ferries, flights and hotel availability it would be extremely time-consuming and complex to do so.

The Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland – July/August



This tour has been a major mission to organise but we are nearly there! And it's going to be an epic adventure! With Greenland's ice sheets melting at an alarming rate, this tour does have an element of 'last chance to see' about it, so this really is a once-in-a-lifetime trip and a tour that definitely is a one-off. Iceland too, is going to change irrevocably over coming years as glaciers melt, so the sights and experiences we're going to have will be truly memorable.

We will be flying to Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, before flying on to the Faroes for four nights. The Faroes are a cluster of 18 islands in the Atlantic found halfway between Iceland and Scotland. The scenery is astonishing with massive cliffs, waterfalls, fjords, and velvety pastureland and the inhabitants have a fascinating blend of Norse, Celtic and ethnic Faroese ancestry. Our short tour begins on the island of Vagar but we will be based in the capital Torshavn on the island of Streymoy. We will explore this island along with the northern islands of Kalsoy and Vidoy during our three full days.

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We then make the short flight to Iceland, where over about a week we will do a full circuit of the island taking in as many of its key attractions as possible - its geothermal areas, incredible glaciers, spectacular waterfalls and the less well known but beautiful eastern fjords.

From Iceland we fly to Greenland where we will be based in Ilulissat, the jewel in Greenland's crown. We will cruise Disko Bay looking for whales, marvel at the Ilulissat Icefjord and Eqi glacier and because we are there during the Midnight Sun, I also plan to fit in a visit to an Inuit village and a nature boardwalk.

It will be a packed tour, with good reason, as there is no escaping the fact that these are three very expensive parts of the world to visit. I could make the itinerary slower and fit even more in but then it would certainly be beyond most travellers' reach and I want as many people as possible to join me. Certainly, in the case of Greenland and the Faroes you will be among very few world travellers ever to visit them!

TOUR REPORT – Central America (Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama)



I was joined by 11 travellers on this tour (we'd reached our maximum of 12 but one person had to pull out due to medical reasons) and I think almost everyone is still trying to process everything we saw during our three weeks of travel.

Certainly, many of us are still trying to identify our photos of the more than 100 animal species we saw in Costa Rica and work out which Mayan temple or pyramid we've photographed rising up out of the jungles of Tikal in northern Guatemala.

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And I've had to admit that, if the number of photos I took there are anything to go by, I became somewhat obsessed with the technological wonder that is the Panama Canal (and its new extension for superships)

The Costa Rican section of the tour was guided by German Rojas, who some of you will remember from previous trips to Costa Rica and Brazil. German is an amazing guide, whose enthusiasm for the animals and natural environment of his country is wonderful to experience.



We watched rare macaws feeding in the trees beside the Caribbean, soaked in hotel pools with a cloudless view of a steaming volcano, skywalked amid the cloud forests and then in Guatemala found ourselves right in the middle of religious procession through the cobbled streets of Antigua, with its carefully restored Spanish colonial architecture. Our hotel beside Lake Atitlan in Guatemala had grounds worthy of a botanical garden and the flowers and birds we saw were replicated in the beautiful embroidery of the Mayan women who live around the lake shores.



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We then flew into a heatwave in Tikal to view one of the great Mayan archaeological sites of the world. We watched sunset from high up one of the pyramids and pondered on the way the winners of Mayan ball games were the ones who were sacrificed. It was hot and sweaty work as temperatures soared well beyond the norm for this time of year.



Our tour ended with a full-on two days in Panama as we cruised the canal in the company of giant ships loaded with containers and cars; retreated from the heat for a fantastic 3D film about the canal and visited the extraordinary Frank Gehry biomuseum. The tour ended with a delicious farewell meal in the heart of Panama's old colonial Spanish quarter.

On the home front

Husband Derek is now the proud owner of an artificial hip. For all kinds of reasons he opted to have the surgery carried out while I was literally in the middle of Lake Atitlan, which I found rather nerve-wracking. But all went exceptionally well and the speed with which he has bounced back has been truly remarkable. Four weeks earlier he couldn't stand in one spot for longer than five minutes or walk further than a few metres. He's already cast off the elbow crutches and is positively steaming around the block on our newly instated daily walks.

Natey (5) is a confident emerging reader, Zoe (2) has now perfected a hilariously dramatic sulk involving sagging shoulders, a bowed head and a heavy sigh and Georgia (1) is a smiling bundle of energy heading towards her second birthday in July.

That's all for now and do remember, if you want any more information on future tours there's no need to wait until the next newsletter, just email Moray or give me a call or email me. Talking of which:



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IMPORTANT EMAIL ADDRESS CHANGE

I have finally parted company with Xtra so please note that my new email is jill.m.worralltours@gmail.com

My phone number remains the same at 0275 38 99 55.

Very best wishes

Jill