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Travel and Tourism group

2010 Activities

January meeting cancelled through bad weather

February Meeting - A visit to Ecuador

In February Ann & Tony talked about the trip they made to Ecuador last March. They divided the talk into two parts. In this meeting they talked about the mainland including the capital Quito, the lower Andes and the Amazon region and they kept the visit to the Galapagos Islands for the March meeting.

Quito is at an altitude of 11,000ft and although they suffered no ill effects from this, two people out of the eleven in their group did. However, they quickly recovered and did not miss any of the excursions. The old Colonial areas of Quito are attractive and well worth visiting with their beautiful houses and churches. Quito is, of course very close to the Equator and a visit has to be made by all tourists so that they can have a foot in both the northern and southern hemispheres at the same time.

After a very interesting stay in Quito the group travelled north into the lower Andes for a stay in a beautiful hacienda which had a long, interesting history but now belongs to an Englishman who has restored what was a decaying ruin into the beautiful oasis of calm that it has now become. Like many of the haciendas in this area it is practically self sufficient, growing vegetables and herbs and keeping animals whilst offering accommodation to visitors from all over the world. The gardens here were beautiful to walk in and the visiting birds were plentiful. It was lovely to watch the attractive humming birds feeding.

Whilst in this area a great deal was learned about the way of life of many of the indigenous tribes. There appears to be a great deal of respect for the different cultures that all exist happily side by side. In one village the inhabitants believe that death is very much a part of their lives and visits are made to the local graveyards to converse with the dead loved ones and family news is shared. A special bread is made into attractive shapes and taken to the cemetery on All Souls Day. Another tribe does not allow its men to cut their hair, and all of the men can be seen wearing long pony tails. However, if the man commits a crime against the community, he then has his hair cut and has to leave.

The last area visited on the mainland was to the Amazon rain forest area. The long coach journey ended when the road ran out and everyone was transported down the river with their luggage in motorised canoes. Accommodation was in an attractive and comfortable lodge and an expert guide gave a great insight into the way of life of the inhabitants and their reliance on nature for food and medicine etc. Many interesting facts were learned about the plant and animal life that was seen on the various excursions.

A few photographs follow showing some of the aspects of the trip that have been mentioned.



Quito



Equator



Hacienda interior



Hacienda garden



Humming bird



One of the indigenous tribes



Exciting way of travelling



In the rain forest



Our guide's daughter

March Meeting - The Galapagos and Ecotourism

This talk by Tony Sear continued on from the February talk and concentrated on the visit he and Ann made to the Galapagos Islands last year as part of their visit to Ecuador. It was not just a series of holiday snaps, although there were a number of photographs of the amazing fauna and flora of the islands. The talk started with a discussion of plate tectonics and the formation of the volcanic 'enchanted isles' which are on a conveyor belt moving east towards the mainland of Ecuador at a rate of 6cm per year.

How the abundant fauna and flora arrived on the islands was explained and there were lots of pictures of the animals, many of whom are endemic and who are totally unafraid of humans.

Darwin's significant contribution to an understanding of evolution was mentioned as were some biological facts about significant animals such as some reptiles where the sex of their offspring is determined not by sex chromosomes and genes as in mammals, but environmentally by such factors as heat during incubation.

Tony explained that the guides talked about Ecotourism as a responsible activity and how it could be achieved. Energy, water and food production as well as imported pests were all discussed. Mass tourism is now unlikely to happen as the number of visitors has been controlled partly by the world recession as well as by the Ecuadorian Government. However, a smaller number of visitors is spending more per capita.

The chief Galapagos guide said that he was happy with the numbers of visitors at present and explained that not all of the islands are open to tourists and the whole operation is very carefully controlled. What he found far more worrying is the catastrophic events of periodic El Nino and the possibility of a 0.5 degree rise in temperature, perhaps accompanied by a re-alignment of significant currents such as the Humbolt.

Several questions were asked and there was discussion of many aspects of this talk.



Marine iguana



Land iguana



Turtle



Giant Tortoise



Frigate Bird



Blue Booby



Sea Lions

April Meeting

AGM and Christmas Party Slide Show

We hold a fairly informal AGM each year, mainly to give members the opportunity of seeing how their membership fees are spent. As was the case last year, we are in a financially healthy state even after subsidising the Christmas meal at Harveys. We do not need to raise the membership fees in spite of an increase in the cost of renting the meeting room and we would hope to be able to subsidise the Christmas event again this year. It was agreed that we would like to go back to Harveys again as it proved to be so successful.

The chairman thanked the past chairman for all of his work in the previous year and thanked him and his wife for offering to hold another summer barbecue at their house this year. He also recorded his thanks to Anne Anstead who has now left the committee having served for several years and having organised some very successful past trips.

The committee was thanked for all that they have done throughout this year and the group was asked if anyone wanted to join them to help in any way.

Other items discussed were the forthcoming trip to Croatia, an update on the arrangements for a trip to Jersey and the possibility of a trip to Scotland.

The chairman expressed the sorrow of the whole group at the death of Keith Rands and gave our condolences to Sally. He announced that we would make a collection later in the year in Keith's name and send it to St Nicholas Hospice.

After coffee a slide show of the Christmas Party was shown and we also watched a short comic video brought by Peter Pinel. Peter was once again thanked for the help that he frequently gives on technical matters.

Visit to Croatia May 2010

Mid May saw 18 of us fly off to Split for a group holiday in Croatia. Our first 2 days were exceedingly wet. We visited the Diocletian Palace, of which only the basement remains. It was, however, a blue print for all the subsequent floors. We saw a range of interesting domed ceilings even if they were permeable. In the beautiful baptistry we were treated to the unaccompanied singing of a male quintet. This was extraordinarily beautiful and very moving. We journeyed on to Trogir, a fascinating old city and port.

The third day started out very wet and we could not help but feel that our visit to the Krka Falls National Park would be a washout. However, not only did the sun break through, but the heavy rain had contributed to the most spectacular and dramatic waterfalls that had been seen for many years – a bonus!

The next day we moved on to Dubrovnik via Mostar, shell damage much in evidence though the famous bridge has been authentically rebuilt and was quite stunning. Dubrovnik, pearl of the Adriatic – absolutely true! Monasteries, museums, palaces and narrow streets make up the heart of this old city, added to which is a lovely harbour with places to sit and relax and watch the world go by. Some of us took advantage of the many boat trips to the numerous islands. There was something for everyone.

A full day tour was taken across the border into Montenegro to circle the Kotor inland sea. Kotor itself is old and impressive. Nearby Budva is an old town fort with pretty churches, all quite lovely. We observed that Montenegro was significantly poorer than Croatia. It has a lot of catching up to do. Conclusions – a very informative trip with stunning scenery throughout.



Diocletian Palace,
Split



Krka Falls
National Park



Mostar Bridge



Dubrovnik



Beautiful sunset
viewed from our
hotel

Kathleen Beaurain

July Meeting

Baltic Cruise

At our July meeting Shirley and Roger Bowden gave an interesting account of their Fred Olsen Baltic Cruise on board the Braemar. They were impressed with the Fred Olsen arrangements on board and having asked to sit on a table for eight, were fortunate to find themselves with like-minded companions for the whole of the holiday.



Route



Dinner table

The cruise departed from Dover with a first stop at Amsterdam where they spent the day seeing the sights including the Anne Frank museum. The ship sailed via the Kiel Canal, a short cut to the Baltic Sea, to visit Stockholm, an impressive city with plenty to see. Then on to Helsinki with a wonderful approach through many islands which is very beautiful. At each port the ship arrived before breakfast and left early evening and this gave plenty of time for sightseeing in a leisurely fashion.



Amsterdam canal



Windmill



Kiel Canal Lock entrance

The next port of call was the highlight of the trip – St. Petersburg. This particular cruise had been chosen by Shirley and Roger because the stay there was for three days. There is such a wealth of interest that even three days was enough only to see a fraction of the sights. They were particularly impressed by the way the city had been restored to all its golden glory. St. Catherine's Palace had been reduced to rubble by the Germans in the siege of St. Petersburg. There were photographs showing the devastation and it was difficult to believe that such perfect restoration had been possible. In a city so full of spectacular sights it is difficult to list them all but the Peterhof Palace, St. Paul and St. Peter's Fortress and St. Isaac's Cathedral stand out. One of the downsides of all this splendour is that St. Petersburg is packed with tourists and the Hermitage particularly is almost impossibly crowded.



St Petersburg



Ballroom

The cruise continued via Gdansk and Copenhagen. All full of interesting architecture and history. The majority of these ports were part of the Hanseatic League, a trading organisation similar to the Cinque Ports in this country. This brought wealth from trade and despite differences of language, culture and religion, was a means of unification. To some extent this is evident in the style of architecture – the Dutch style being very strong.



Gdansk
Cathedral

Helsinki
Monument

Copenhagen

Shirley and Roger certainly whetted the appetites of those who had not yet visited this part of the world.

Mya Turgoose

August 2010. Travel & Tourism Group Summer Barbecue

We were pleased to accept the kind invitation of Jan and John Dockerty to hold our annual barbecue in their garden again this year. Once again we were blessed with a beautiful sunny day in an otherwise very unreliable week of weather. As usual, we erected the gazebo which seems to act as an insurance policy against rain. Long may it continue to do so!

Only 2 of our members were unable to attend which shows how popular this social event has become. We all enjoyed excellent barbecue food from our local village butcher together with salad and lovely home-made rolls made by one of our members. The meal was completed by a good choice of cheesecakes and cream. There was the usual light hearted competition and raffle and everyone enjoyed a very pleasant sociable time together. Our thanks go to all who made this possible.



The Travel & Tourism Group is very sorry to have lost a few members this year as a result of bad health and so we do have room for a few new members. If you are interested in joining a group of around 40 people who are interested in travel and tourism and who meet together on a monthly basis to share ideas and experiences, you will be made very welcome. There is quite a lot of travel experience within the group and people are always willing to advise and help anyone who is thinking of undertaking a particular trip.

Our main function is not to organise lots of trips but we do enjoy travelling together once or twice per year. A large number of us are going to Jersey in June of next year, flying from Norwich and we are also planning a trip to the Dordogne region of France by train in September. Some of our trips have been by plane and others by short coach journeys but you might like to experiment with us on a trip on Eurostar instead. If you are a member of Blackbourne U3A and would like further details of either of these trips please contact Tony Sear 01359 230423. We will be happy to include you if at all possible.

September 2010 Meeting

Gillian Bush gave a presentation based on snaps taken last November when she and her husband, Stephen, went on a Noble Caledonia Cruise to North Africa. At the end Tony said she hadn't sold the cruise to them, but which were the places she felt were really worth visiting. After a moment's reflection she said that Jordan was probably the most comfortable and safe of the countries she had visited and there were plenty of things to see there. However she wouldn't have wanted to have missed the Egyptian part with the Cairo museum, the Gisa pyramids and the Valley of the Kings. Libya had some wonderful sites of ancient Roman cities, but it was new to tourism and the guides were inexperienced and the facilities were often rather primitive. However the population looked young and energetic and there was new building everywhere.

The tour was entitled "North African Odyssey" and the odyssey bit was certainly accurate as it was a long, adventurous and ambitious journey. It began with a flight from Heathrow to Valetta in Malta and continued with a cruise across the Mediterranean to Tripoli, then along the coast of Libya from Tripoli to Egypt, along the Egyptian coast to the Suez canal, along the canal into the red sea, down the Egyptian coast a bit to allow an excursion to Luxor, back up to the Sinai Peninsula and then across to Jordan where passengers left the boat to go by coach to Amman. The adventures were a road accident and a wrist fracture, which Gillian and Stephen were personally involved in.

The night the boat sailed for Tripoli passengers were informed that there was going to be no alcohol available on board while the boat was in Libyan waters – the mini-bars in the cabins were emptied and the boat's reserves

were locked up. When the boat docked in Tripoli these arrangements were checked by Libyan officials. They also took laser temperature checks on each passenger because of the swine flu concerns and everybody's passport was carefully scrutinised. The information given to cruise applicants was that Libyans would not let people with Israeli stamps on their passports get off the boat and Americans needed special visas. In spite of neither of these criteria applying one chap missed two excursions because officials, who rechecked the passports at every new port, refused to let him get off the boat. His wife however was allowed to go. On every excursion in Libya a policeman accompanied each of the 3 coaches and there was a police car leading the convoy, except on the last trip to Cyrene and Apollonia when the drivers of the coaches began by trying to race each other away from the port and later the road accident occurred.

A drawback of the ambitious itinerary was that time was always constrained. Each day's programme gave the time for departure of the excursion which was often very early and everyone had to be ready and waiting. However if the pilot had not arrived on time to guide the boat into its berth or the officials took extra long to do their checks, the start of the excursion would be delayed. The return had to be on time to allow the boat to leave on time, so lunches in particular were vulnerable to being condensed from an hour into 20 minutes to try and catch up. Another drawback for some elderly passengers was that most of the Libyan sites were very spread out and it was uneven under foot, so anyone with walking difficulties often had to sit down when they ran out of energy and wait for the tour to pick them up as it came back to the coaches. In Libya there was no begging or intimidation of tourists, but it was also almost impossible to find postcards, stamps, hats, or other tourist needs and all the toilets required small denomination local currency which was difficult to come by.

This routine was continued in Egypt and there were some very long excursions by coach which could have been better planned with a couple of hotel nights in Cairo, although this would undoubtedly have put up the price of the cruise. By contrast to Libya, begging and intimidation of tourists was constant at the tourist sites. Stephen had chosen this cruise especially because he wanted to visit the El Alamein battle site and he did this, but tripped up a step at the museum and broke his wrist. He was looked after extremely well by the Ukrainian lady doctor on board and at the Port Said hospital, but he missed the Cairo trip that day and later opted out of the full day's excursion to a historic monastery near Mt Sinai so he could rest up a bit.

The Jordan section of the tour was entirely by coach and included a jeep trek in the desert, complete with sand storm, a day's tour of Petra and either a mud bath in the Dead Sea or a tour of Amman with Roman sites, a museum with very ancient statues and some of the Dead Sea scrolls. It finished with a flight home from Amman.



October 2010 Meeting

At our meeting in October Yvonne and David gave an interesting report on the holiday that they had just returned from, which was a four week tour of China. They started in Beijing and then travelled by overnight train to Xian to see the terracotta warriors which were amazing.

From there they started their journey across China on the Silk Road Route. They travelled mainly by coach with varying degrees of comfort and had three separate overnight train journeys which proved to be very interesting.

On the trains there are three different classes. In first class there are four people to a cabin which they shared twice with the local people. In second class there are six people to a cabin and third class is 'hard class' as it means sitting upright all night. After three weeks of travelling they finally reached Kashgar, which is famous for its Sunday livestock market where people come from Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and of course China to buy and sell their produce, ranging from a cow to a pair of shoes. They then flew back to Beijing in two stages and on from Beijing to home. This proved to be a very interesting talk on quite an adventurous holiday which was certainly not for the faint hearted. Thanks to Yvonne and David for sharing their experiences with us.



November 2010 Meeting

At our travel meeting in November we had an excellent presentation given by Roy Fidler, on Flensburg, a Baltic port in Schleswig Holstein, now administered by Germany, although it is only 7 kms from Denmark. It is a large attractive town with a strong maritime history, with an important annual Summer Regatta, attracting a wide variety of yachts. In fact a very good place for 3-5 day visit.

Roy's photos were set to music in an impressive slide show, revealing his skills not only in typical landscape photography but also in seeing scenes that many of us would have walked by, not noticing.

This presentation has set us a very high standard for us to follow, but we accept the challenge and as some of our school reports used to say: Must try harder.



December 2010

There was an excellent turnout, as always, for our Christmas party this year and it was good to have some of our new members with us. We met first at New Green where we enjoyed drinks and nibbles and were entertained by the committee. In an amusing game of Heads and Tails we raised £75 for St Nicholas Hospice in memory of Keith Rands. We then enjoyed an excellent Christmas meal at the Orchard Room at Harveys Plants. Teresa prepared a Table Quiz for us and Roger gave a short and interesting talk on the advantages of investing in garden plants. They give better returns than stocks and shares and bricks and mortar, he claims!

We wish everyone a Happy Christmas and look forward to our next meeting on January 17th when we shall have an informal meeting which will give us a chance to get to know a little better the people who have recently joined our group.



