

Travellers' Notebook

Newsletter of the Blackbourne U3A

Travel and Tourism Group

February 2005

The traveller's dilemma . . .

The tsunami around the shores of the Indian Ocean has caused many of us to think about the impact of the catastrophe on tourism, as well as risk factors that maybe we had not previously considered. Those who have happy memories of visiting the region inevitably feel a great sadness both for the plight of the people they met during their travels and also for the devastation of 'their piece of paradise'. Those who planned holidays that have been cancelled are now wondering whether to rebook later, or whether the whole idea of a holiday where there is so much suffering is insupportable. Herein lies the dilemma: if we tourists stay away, the economy of the region will suffer and recovery will be that much slower; if we choose to go, how can we possibly enjoy a luxurious holiday knowing that so many people have no homes, no work, and inadequate food and water? There is no easy answer.

THE BERLIN CORRIDOR

On 8 November, some 20 years on, John and Jan Dockerty told us about their experience of travelling through the Berlin military corridor to visit their son who was serving in the Army in West Berlin. They set off in September 1984 from West Germany, with all the necessary documentation having been arranged by the Army, and arrived at Helmstedt crossing. Here they were shown a film and given strict instructions on their journey: no turning off, stay in the car at all times (even if it broke down), speed 40 km/h, total journey time to be two hours or risk being accused of speeding or spying!

After being briefed at the Allied Control at Helmstedt they proceeded the short distance to the Russian Control stopping *precisely* on the designated white line. John handed in their papers and had to wait a long time in a barren room for clearance: no eye contact, no sitting or asking questions were allowed. All was well however. After a nerve-wracking journey during which they saw farms, small towns and many concealed watchtowers, they arrived exactly on time. They then drove through a no-man's land and arrived at the Allied checkpoint where they were debriefed. After getting lost in the busy city with its complex system of motorways, they found their son and the place where they were to stay, several hours late, but safe and well.

They were able to explore both West and East Berlin and to see the contrast between the two areas of the divided city. The West had been rebuilt and was an extremely busy, lively place, whereas the East was drab and miserable with little reconstruction since the war. Everything was very cheap in the East and there were beggars desperately trying to get hard currency. Streets, houses, families, even tramlines had been cut into two when the wall, 3.5 meters high, was built in 1961. Many people lost their lives because of the wall, but after 28 years the city began to open up and in 1990 the wall was pulled down.

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

At the December meeting, appropriately just 12 days before Christmas, Jean White told us about her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1998 when she spent nine days in Israel with 25 members of her church congregation and their young priest, Father Giles.

They arrived at Tel-Aviv airport where security was very strict and everywhere a strong military presence with armed guards. Being a pilgrimage, the group focused mainly on religious aspects. Father Giles said mass at many of the holy places that they visited: the Sea of Galilee, the Baptism Pool by the river Jordan, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Mount of Beatitudes, the Mount of Olives. However, they also did some secular sightseeing at Roman Caesarea with its 12 mile long aqueduct, floated in the Dead Sea, took the cable car to Mount Massada and visited the Holocaust Museum.

Nazareth is now a large congested city, predominantly Muslim, but one can still see below the modern Church of the Annunciation what are said to be the ruins of Mary's house; there is also a cave where Joseph had his carpentry shop. At Bethlehem the group visited the Church of the Nativity which marks the place where Jesus was born.

Jerusalem is a wonderfully bright white city built in a valley, and surrounded by hills, with many churches of all denominations and faiths. Jean found the Wailing Wall, where people say their prayers aloud, to be a moving experience. The group stopped to pray along the crowded Via Dolorosa at the stations of the cross before arriving at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

At some places Christians felt unwelcome. At one point in the tour Jean was left behind but she was rescued by some Americans, which proved to be an interesting experience!

EDEN AND HELIGAN

Harry Huson went to Cornwall in July 2003 with the Bury St Edmunds Probus Club. At the January meeting he showed us photos and gave us his impressions of the Eden Centre and the Lost Gardens of Heligan, both projects conceived by Tim Smit. The Eden Centre is a man-made structure built over an old clay pit. The main attractions are two biomes, one designed as a humid tropical jungle, the other containing sub-tropical Mediterranean plants. The surrounding gardens are unconventional with arresting plant and insect designs. In contrast the gardens at Heligan are more akin to an English garden landscaped around a stream that flows towards the sea. At both venues there were good paths for walking around and plenty of opportunities for rest and refreshment. The Probus Club stayed at the three-star Hotel Killarney in Newquay, which was good value, well run, and in an excellent situation on the headland.

E111 FORMS

The old forms for free health treatment within the EU are no longer valid. For 2005 only there are two new forms that can be obtained from the Post Office: form CM1 *one per family* should be completed and handed in at the Post Office; form E111 *one per individual* should be completed and stamped by the Post Office.

Take the E111 and the booklet *Health Advice for Travellers* with you while travelling within the EU. You are advised to make photocopies of the E111 as they will be needed by the hospital providing treatment.

From 2006 there will be a new health insurance card which will be issued automatically if you have ticked the box on the CM1. Information is also available at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers>

TRAVEL TIPS

Yvonne Ryder has been on a Solo's holiday for singles (www.solosholidays.co.uk) to Antigua. The trip was well organised, although as a single woman she was concerned about the isolated situation of her room at the hotel. St John's is a lively and colourful town. The beaches are beautiful.

Yvonne later went to Worthing by train. She chose a Super Saver apex ticket, which was economical, but involved six changes in each direction! She advises that this is not a good idea if you have suitcases.

Bob and Frankie Mountfort spent three weeks in Florida during November. They booked through Thomas Cook. They flew into Atlanta, where they found the new immigration procedures quick and efficient, then down to Sarasota. Delta Airlines was very good. One of the highlights for Bob was swimming with dolphins at the Dolphin Research Center, Grassy Keys (Marathon) (www.dolphins.org). Bob and Frankie also visited Naples, Venice, Tampa, and the Villages, the definitive retirement community (<http://www.thevillages.com/>).