

# *Travellers' Notebook*

## *Newsletter of the Blackbourne U3A Travel and Tourism Group*

May 2005

### *Twenty years ago . . .*

*. . . who would have thought about going to Poland for a holiday? My view of Poland has been coloured by heart-rending films such as 'Schindler's List' and scenes on TV of Lech Walesa fighting for Solidarity. A country under Communist governance held few attractions. One was likely to encounter drab towns, bureaucracy and economic deprivation, and be offered unappetising meals in Spartan hotels. What a difference now! Poland is a member of the EU and Krakow, the 'cultural capital of Poland', with much of its historic architecture still intact, has become a tourist destination. Sandwiched between the USSR and Germany, Poland has had a turbulent and, in many respects, a tragic history, which will be reflected in what we will see on our forthcoming trip. I am looking forward to learning something about this Eastern European country that has for too long been a closed book to me, and, I suspect, to many members of our Travel Group. I am sure that we will not be disappointed. JC*

### *LEADING A TOUR*

On 14 February Rob Parker gave us an insight to what is involved in becoming a tour leader when he told us about how he led a tour for a Naturetrek holiday in the Italian Dolomites. Rob is a keen entomologist who has a specialist knowledge of butterflies. He went to a presentation by Naturetrek, an eco-holiday organisation, and was told that they had no guide for their butterfly holiday in the Dolomites. Having offered his services as a tour leader, he then realised that although he knew his butterflies, he had no experience of leading a group in unknown territory. Furthermore he could not speak Italian!

The tour would be in the Val de Fassa, so Rob and his wife, Alex, went on a winter skiing holiday to the area, and found that this part of Italy was originally the Sud Tyrol where German is the preferred language, and the ambience is more akin to alpine Austria than to Italy. Rob familiarised himself with the mountains and then returned in the early summer to investigate the best places to see butterflies. Although it was wet, it all looked promising. In the meantime he studied the 'tour leaders' manual' provided by Naturetrek.

In June 2004, the week prior to the butterfly tour, Rob joined the Naturetrek botanical tour at the Gran Hotel Mugon, Tamion. This provided invaluable local knowledge and a preview of potential pitfalls. Rob's homework and the experience he had gained the previous week, together with good weather, all combined to make his week leading a group of butterfly enthusiasts a success. It was hard work as he had to drive a minibus, organise picnic food and plan each day, as well as impart his specialist knowledge. The evenings were fully occupied too.

Rob had to be self-sufficient, but back-up was available. Naturetrek provides good after-sales service. Rob's report may be seen on <http://www.naturetrek.co.uk/> and also in the Naturetrek brochure.

## ***A POLICEMAN'S LOT IN UGANDA***

On 14 March David Love told us about the time he spent in Uganda as head of the British Police training team at the end of 1988 when four men endeavoured to guide the training of 13,000 men throughout the country on how to deal with crime!

David spent six months in a two-storey 'bungalow' in Kampala, just six miles north of the equator. He assured us that water does indeed go straight down the plug hole when precisely on the equator, but spirals in opposite directions a few yards on either side.

Food was bland with no spices, the staple diet being green banana, Nile perch and a fish called tilapia from Lake Victoria. Shops were constructed in concrete and all sold the same commodities. The people lived in primitive dwellings created from whatever materials were available such as plastic sheets, old boxes and natural vegetation. Transport on the lakes was by dug-out canoe.

The army was in charge of the country and roadblocks were not to be ignored. These comprised just a tyre in the middle of the road placed strategically between bushes on either side. No-one could be seen, but it was known that a man with a rifle was poised waiting to open fire should a vehicle not stop.

Among David's many slides were some taken in the Queen Elizabeth II game park showing elephant, lion, buffalo and hippo; also maribou stork, large birds that David consider to be the ugliest, being scruffy scavengers that pick over rubbish.

We enjoyed this glimpse into a part of David's working life and were left wanting to see more.

## ***A JAPANESE HOLIDAY***

At the April meeting Joy Bolwell presented images and impressions of Japan which she and her husband, Ian, visited in October 2003. They stayed with their son, Andrew, who lives in Chiba, near Tokyo. Andrew's flat is very modern with high-tech gadgets, for example the kitchen cupboards lock automatically if there is an earth tremor.

In Tokyo, Joy and Ian found everywhere very clean, with lots of cyclists on the pavements. They went to the Kabuki-za, a traditional Japanese theatre. They visited the Meiji shrine and saw children in traditional costumes and Shinto wedding parties. They also took a cruise up the river Sumida and saw how the poor lived in shacks.

Joy and Ian then took the Shinkansen ('bullet') train to Hiroshima where they visited the Peace Park. Here they saw many memorials and the flame that will burn until the last nuclear bomb in the world has been destroyed. The Peace Museum was a memorable although harrowing experience. They stayed on Miyajima island in Hiroshima Bay with the vermilion 'floating' Torii gate and Itsukushima shrines.

On the return journey Joy and Ian stayed at Nara, once the capital of Japan, and visited several temples including the world's oldest wooden building. Kyoto was the next stop where they visited the famous Golden Temple and the beautiful Japanese tea houses and gardens. In Gion, which still has the traditional 17th century houses, they spotted a geisha with white make-up and wearing a kimono.

On their last day in Tokyo Andrew hired a car and they drove though hilly terrain along fast toll roads to Mount Fuji. Station 5 at 6000 ft was cold so they ate noodle soup and bought some souvenirs.

The flight to Narita airport takes 12 hours via the Arctic Circle, and the time difference is 9 hours. Japan is an expensive country!

## ***CHECKLIST FOR KRAKOW***

1. Currency is zloty (pln), divided into 100 groszy: about 5.35 to pound: euros *may* be accepted but are not official.
2. ATMs are widely available and credit cards are accepted.
3. Time zone is BST + 1 hour.
4. Electricity is 220 V a.c.: take continental adapter.
5. Remember your insurance documents and *new* E111.
6. Weather is changeable: take umbrella and raincoat, and warmer clothes for Zakopane.
7. Pickpockets are active at tourist places and railway station: take usual precautions.
8. Transport: buy tram/bus tickets for a fixed time or a whole day from newsagents.
9. Shopping: amber, silver, embroidered linen, wood carvings. Exporting antiques is illegal. You can bargain at bazaars.

## ***TRAVEL TIPS***

Judith and Andrew Constantine went to Cyprus in March. They stayed at the superb five-star Elysium Mediterranean Beach Resort at Paphos, <http://www.elysium.com/>, a relatively new complex whose unusual design reflects the history and culture of Cyprus. There are some good deals available while the hotel is establishing its reputation.

The village of Lefkara, about 25 miles from Larnaca, is Andrew's birthplace; this was the first time he had visited since 1950. Amazingly some of the villagers remembered his family. Lefkara is a traditional Greek Cypriot village famous for its drawn thread-work lace and filigree silver – beautiful but not cheap. Visit <http://www.cyculture.net/lefkara>