

## Leaving international travel behind



Our tour group at the pyramids in Egypt

As we look back on Christmas letters past, we realize that we have finally descended into the world of full retirement and are struggling to elude the sedentary lifestyle that often follows. We have seen the world, experienced adventure and dodged health issues that have threatened to take us down. We have survived the breakup of our daughter's 25 year marriage, endured the challenges of repairing the threads of communication with grandchildren and mutual friends and adjusted our lives to accommodate a growing number of health care appointments that keep us in moderately good shape - mostly repairs and maintenance.

As many of our friends have just begun to experience international travel, we have retired from it. After 44 trips to Europe and Africa, countless journeys to Southeast Asian and many others exploring the U.S. and other parts of the world, we have hung up our wings. Twenty three cruises have fulfilled our limited enjoyment of being stuck on a cruise ship and, after 50 years of traveling abroad we have found that the world of travel, although not unappealing, has become more tedious than enjoyable.

After retiring from our chosen fields, we took on the challenge of showing the world to others. Our years of escorting tours for

Royal Heights Tours and Brooks Holidays gave us a unique understanding of how things work in the countries that we visited as we were responsible for organizing meals and making sure that the guests were taken care of. We miss our guides, who became our good friends, in Cuba, Greece, Egypt, Peru, Ecuador and all the other countries where we lead tours.

One of the most often asked questions was; don't you find it dull coming back to the same country every year. Our answer was always that we got a thrill from seeing our guests experience some of the unique venues for the first time. For example, to get to Machu Picchu in Peru required a flight from Lima to Cusco taking us from sea level to 14,000 feet in one hour. This was followed the next day by a four hour train ride to Agues Caliente then a twenty minute mini bus ride along a switchback roadway near the top of the Andes Moun-



Machu Picchu, Peru

tains until we finally reached the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu. Our guests were wide eyed as they finally walked onto the site and we took pleasure in sharing their anticipation throughout the long journey.

Although most tours with the help of local guides went smoothly, there were always challenges that had us scrambling to adjust the itinerary. We had to deal with natural events like volcanos, earthquakes and storms that threatened to disrupt our schedules. There were strikes, train derailments, religious festivals and disagreements with local guides who wanted to change the itinerary in favour of their own agenda. There were people in our groups that were unfit for travel or became sick along the

but agreed to keep a friend company. But, most guests were truly interested in the unique culture of the countries we visited and did a lot of homework before their departure. These were the guests that made it all worthwhile.

We learned a lot over the years about the human nature of our travelling guests. There were people who spent a fortune for the tour but would complain about spending 50 cents for a bottle of water. People who would invent all manner of conditions that would require them to be in the front row of the bus. And still some who complained about any variation that the itinerary might take and others who refused to heed our warning about staying away from certain foods and paid the price.



Knossos on the Greek island of Crete

way and accidental falls that required trips to a foreign hospital. There were guests who had no interest in the country we visited except to cross it off their bucket list and some that had no interest in travel at all

Overall, however, it was a wonderful and rewarding experience full of travel and adventure and it crowned the many years of travel that we had experienced prior to our tour leading days.



## Escape to the desert

So, looking back at our last year of activity, we realize that there was simply nothing much to report. During the winter before, we spent a great deal of time shovelling snow so, in November, we headed to Palm Desert where we had reserved a house on a golf course for the months of December and January. We took our time to get down there, visiting friends in Redding, CA and Sacramento, CA along the way.

Once settled, our days consisted of cycling, swimming in the pool across the street, walking around the golf course (not golfing) and finding the best places in "the Desert" to eat.

During the month of December, the place was empty as most locals, who were originally from somewhere else, went "home for

Christmas” and the regular visitors were still at home before travelling down for the winter.

We met many folks from British Columbia and Alberta who began to pour in during the first week of January and, by the time we left on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, the Desert communities were busy. We managed to hook up with friends for lunches and visits and our computers kept us in touch with home so, other than not having to deal with snow, not much had changed in our daily routine.

Having been there before visiting friends, we rediscovered the Joshua Tree Park not far from Palm Desert. Spending time at the weekend markets that have become famous in Palm Springs was also on our list of things to do. Paige visited for a week to celebrate her Mom’s birthday and she plans to do the same this year. Other than that, we just took longer to do stuff. We headed back home at the end of January this year and spent the next month shovelling snow. This year, however, we have extended our southern stay for another month and will spend the month of February exploring more of the state of Arizona.

## SCUBA



Other than the odd trip to Cozumel for some warm water diving, Gord has all but retired from the SCUBA scene. The equipment is old and his dive buddies have either given it up or are no longer healthy enough to participate. He always said that if he did not do any cold water diving within a one year period, he would give it up. Faced with the option of diving with a bunch of kids, he chose to hang up the dry suit. He was certified in 1990 when he was 47 years old so it’s been a good run and a lot of fun over the years.



## Family News

**Daughter Paige** is still working with Expedia Cruise Ship Centers. She works independently from their offices in Ocean Park and enjoys a growing clientele. She has been living on the waterfront in White Rock for the past two years and expects to buy in the area if the house prices continue to drop. She hangs out with a group of friends from the beach who meet regularly to enjoy the events that take place at the shoreline park.

**Grandson Mathew** has taken time off from Douglas College to work full time. He’s intent on staying in good physical condition so is working for building contractors and landscapers at the moment. He has

yet to hit the rough weather and may rethink his decision to take some time off from college.

**Grandson Ben** continues his auto mechanic apprenticeship after successfully completing the second of four related academic studies at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He will have a few more years of practicum to complete but eventually will gain his Red Seal which provides a stamp of approval on his tradesman’s capabilities. He spends the weekends 4-wheeling in the mountains with his buddies and their girlfriends and has shown us some amazing footage of navigating over large boulders in the rivers near Harrison Lake.

