

Mirrabac Moments

October 2009

life's an adventure
Be in it!

Newsletter of Mirrabac – Specialists in Small Group Travel

Issue 12

Coming Up

2010

13 – 29 May

Galapagos Explorer – dip into Ecuador + 8 days in Galapagos.

8 – 24 June

Splendours of Peru – lost cities, lofty mountains.

4 – 24 July

Namibian Explorer – capture the colour, connect with the wildlife.

4 – 22 August

Wild on Wildlife – 'wild' away 10 days in Kruger NP + others.

8 Sept – 11 Oct

Alaska & Great Bear Rainforest – majestic nature in the mighty outdoors.



First Nations Totem Pole – GBR

Travails and Travel

2009

Would-be travelers had to dodge lots of global gloom (and fickle finance companies!) in 2009.

For some, the wise choice was staying at home, others side-stepped talk of recession and skipped off for a great time anyway.

Whatever you chose for 2009, next year promises to be better for travel so we've lined up plenty of adventures to help you shake off any 'stay-at-home' blues or recurring 'adventure withdrawal'.

We're already taking bookings for 2010 and we'd love you to join us for a great year of travel.

The Great Bear Rainforest...

...on British Columbia's Pacific Coast had Rob bewitched during his 8-day journey into its magic realms at the end of August. Wandering wildlife, meandering waterways, unexplored islands – Rob was ready for something special. He reports:

Day One: "I arrive in the Great Bear Rainforest with my trusty camera and an open mind – I'm ready for whatever unfolds. The first (and only unwelcome!) surprise is seeing my 500mm lens case being loaded with a group of hearty Texans heading off for a week's fishing. Wrong charter – I quickly retrieve it! Time to jump aboard the **Island Roamer**, introductions all round, cabins allocated, safety briefing done and we're away. It's clear from the outset that our crew – the skipper, his first mate, a chef and a naturalist guide – is a top-notch team. The boat is comfortable and well-equipped and there's "No Puffin" on board. We're a happy bunch. Eyes get busy and we quickly spot our first bald eagles and some basking seals. Dryad Point, Seaforth Channel, Ivory Island, Percival Narrows – we glide past the landmarks, and tens of thousands of salmon, to our first shore stop at Salmon Bay.

The ancient forest is breath-taking, its shapes and colours stunning. High massifs rise around us, scarred by ancient glaciers. I feel dwarfed by our planet's geological history.

Day Two: Great excitement when we sight our first grizzly upstream of the zodiac we're exploring from. Soon another appears, intent on catching lunch. He doesn't find us at all tempting!



Exploring the estuary along bear trails

Day after day: I'm 'blown away' by the shoreline scenery and the photographic opportunities everywhere – huge moss-covered tree stumps, swathes of green-filled landscape, delicate lichen and colourful flora, mountain tops reflected in mill-pond inlets, misty mornings, blazing sunsets. It is truly a magnificent place.

Day Four – Marvin, a First Nations guide, leads our search for the rare Kermode or 'spirit' bear. It takes extraordinary luck to see one but we'll enjoy our surroundings anyway. We arrive at the hide and can't believe our eyes – a spirit bear in the river! Is this a set-up? No, we're just very, very privileged. Later a black bear shows up, then another. The shutters go crazy.

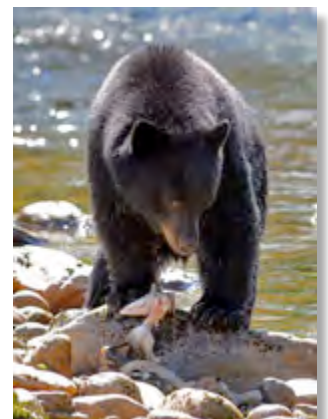


Checking the crab pots – early morning

The Tshimshian people have lived in the rainforest for thousands of years. What a backyard! Here, 1,000-year-old cedars soar gom, glittering waterfalls plunge gom, bears roam beaches and estuaries in search of salmon!

At night the slapping of gentle waves against the hull of our motionless boat is the only sound. It seems even the rainforest sleeps. At morning light I head out in the kayak to watch the rising sun shimmy across the water, illuminating orange and mauve sea-stars and casting a glow over the kelp. The overwhelming serenity and spectacular

shapes of nature cast a spell that's hard to escape.



Yummm...lunch!

Day Six – humpback whales and dall porpoises accompany us south. We come across a fin whale, second largest whale and second largest animal on earth, and its calf. More humpbacks pass by and, later, when we head out in the inflatables, there before us are five wolves frolicking in the grass.

The **Island Roamer** has a fantastic library. Something I read there sums up the **Great Bear Rainforest** perfectly:

'One of the last great places, not only in a geographical way, but also in a spiritual sense.'

It's so much, much more than just the hide-out of the elusive white 'spirit' bear and his brown and black companions."

No wonder Rob can't wait to return in 2010.

Who Dunnit?

The zig-zagged walls of Peru's Sacsayhuaman, have baffled archaeologists for centuries. They are uniquely different from Stonehenge, the Pyramids and the Mayan structures.

Massive irregular boulders – up to 8.5m high and over 60 tonnes – fit together so perfectly that not even a blade of grass can slide between them. What's more, there is no mortar and their complex surfaces would pose a major headache for modern-day stonemasons

How were the boulders shaped and smoothed? How were they lifted atop one another? They're from a distant quarry so how did they get here in the first place? "Don't know" on all counts. Yet everything in Sacsayhuaman suggests advanced technology. 16th century chronicler Garcilaso de la Vega, born 20 years after Sacsayhuaman's completion and raised in the shadow of its walls, had this to say: "It is indeed beyond the power of imagination to understand how these Indians, unacquainted with devices, engines, and implements, could have cut, dressed, raised, and lowered great rocks, more like lumps of hills than building stones, and set them so exactly in their places. For this reason, and because the Indians were so familiar with demons, the work is attributed to enchantment."

So who **was** responsible – peerless engineers or powerful extraterrestrials?

Come with us in June 2010, then 'You be the Judge'.

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Ready and Waiting for You... 2010

See full details of all tours on Mirrabac's website

Galapagos + Ecuador – May

The Galapagos, place of wild beauty, mysterious creatures and exotic plants, lived in peaceful oblivion until the 1800s when Darwin, fishing and whaling changed its fame and fortune. Now tourists flock to explore this incredible living museum and the islands' greatest challenge is keeping the balance between tourists and tortoises. 'Too many tourists' is a risk to the biodiversity. 'Too few' is a risk to conservation efforts, which rely on the tourist dollar. Yet, Galapagos remains one of the most pristine tropical archipelagos in the world and responsible tourism will continue to protect its future. It is one of those very special places to 'see while you still can'. Join us in May for eight magical days exploring the islands' from our 16-berth boat – an unforgettable experience. Swim with the seals and learn some great bird-dance moves. We'll also enjoy some of mainland Ecuador's other highlights en route. *Group limited to 16.*



Land Iguana

Peru + Bolivia – June

The history of Peru spans several civilizations – the Norte Chico, first civilization in the Americas, the Incan Empire, largest state in Pre-Columbian America, the Spanish Empire, and finally the modern state, established in 1821 after the Peruvian War of Independence. The Kingdoms, monarchies and empires left behind a land characterized by colour and intrigue. We'll explore its unsolved mysteries in magnificent Machu Picchu, the ruins of mysterious Sacsayhuaman and Ollantaytambo, colonial Cusco and many other enigmatic sites.

Join us next June for an enthralling journey. *Group 16-20.*



Did You Know?

...juvenile grizzlies are like kids with flailing attempts to land their food. On the other hand, adult grizzlies just stand, grab their salmon, eat - no fuss!

...humpback whales all sing the same tune. Each year they return to their summer playground singing a similar song to last year, chorus and all, and by season's end they'll have added a few more notes. No information available on the key composer!

...*lycaon pictus*, the Latin name for the African wild dog, means painted wolf. But unlike wolves and other dogs, wild dogs have four toes instead of five. And unlike other predators they hunt mostly in the day, reaching speeds of up to 60km per hour. A rare encounter with a pack of eight wild dogs was a huge thrill during a sojourn in Kruger NP earlier this year!

...a group of porcupines is called? A prickles. We observed several 'prickles' in Okonjima this year.

Alaska & The Great Bear Rainforest – September

Alaska, Last Frontier for old gold hunters but new frontier for Mirrabac. We're planning an 11-day itinerary taking us to some of the best-known as well some of the least-known gems this spectacular state has to offer. There'll be plenty of awe and action. We'll then cruise down the Inside Passage to join our 7-day boat charter in the Great Bear Rainforest – the largest intact temperate coastal rainforest on the planet, bigger than Switzerland, twice the size of Africa's Serengeti Plains. *Group limited to 14.*

African Favourites – July & August

The biggest danger in visiting Southern Africa is that it grabs you and keeps pulling you back! There's a power in the smell of the veld, the call of the wildlife, the extreme beauty of the awe-inspiring landscape that pervades the soul and calls you 'home'.

This we can confirm after more than 30 safaris and many returning clients over the last 14 years. For those who want it all, we think our unique **Namibian Explorer**



Elephants – Kruger National Park

itinerary is as good as it gets – spectacular scenery, huge volumes of wildlife, fascinating geology, overwhelming colour everywhere you turn. *Group limited to 12.*

If wildlife is your main passion, our **Wild on Wildlife** itinerary includes an incomparable 10 days in Kruger NP, plus time in one of our favorite haunts, Pilanesberg NP, Sth Africa's fourth largest game park. Pilanesberg, set in the crater of an extinct volcano, has a pretty lake at its centre with a great hide for birdwatching.. So if Africa is calling you, heed the call, contact us now. *Group limited to 14.*