



Mirrabc Moments

Important Dates

2008

17 February -
Mirrabc Get-together
(see below)

19 May -
Galapagos & Easter Island
tour departs; 21 days, 8 days
cruising Galapagos. \$9,875.

15 June -
Namibian Explorer safari
departs; 21 days in this com-
pelling country. \$9,845.

6 September -
Turkey tour departs; 22 days,
\$6,875 + Greek Islands wind-
down option (see overleaf).



Wooden Architecture Museum
Irkutsk, Siberia

Gathering of the Troops

12 noon, Sunday, 17 February

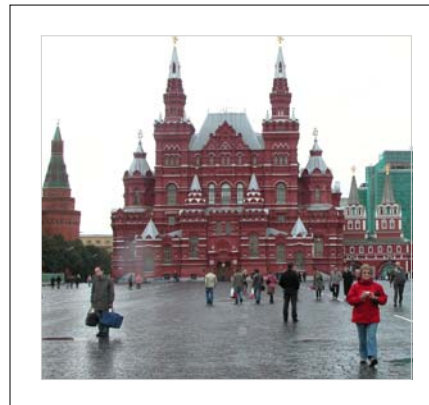
...has been tagged for the annual get-together of Mirrabc friends and fellow travellers. So if you can make it to the 'big smoke' (North Shore, AK), mark your calendar now and come along for a good feed, a round or three of travel tales and plenty of fun and laughter. If you haven't met us yet, why not join the troops and enjoy an entertaining afternoon. We'd love to see you. For venue details RSVP by: **Friday, 8 February** by phone, email or fax (details overleaf) or return the enclosed form.

Russia By Rail

There was much excitement, and just a hint of trepidation as our plane touched down in Vladivostok. How would we find 21st-century Russia?

If the Immigration officials seemed a little 'soviet', our smiling guide, Katya, waiting to welcome us was anything but. We were soon transferred to the grand Versailles Hotel and before you could say 'post-perestroika' we were wandering the streets, getting acquainted with the local scene. The port city, one of USSR's biggest Cold War secrets, was a great place to explore.

Thirty years is a long time between visits but that's how long tour leader, Rob, had waited to fulfil his dream of riling across Russia. So now



Spot the Mirrabc tourists, Red Square

we had a train to catch.

Our days onboard were busy—loitering by the windows to watch autumn's beauty slip past; studying maps and poring over guide books; checking out the food at station stops; taking coffee in the dining car; getting to know the neighbours.

During our excursions off-train

we got to know more about Russia's complex history and its Orthodox culture. And we got up close to the ornate spires and cathedral domes that decorate horizons across the countryside.

Irkutsk, near spectacular Lake Baikal, turned on hot, sunny days but a day after re-boarding we woke to a special treat — snow in Siberia!

Yekaterinburg, where the last Tzar and his family met their fate, was interesting while the museums and palaces of Moscow and St Petersburg were, quite literally, 'awesome'.

So much to see, too much to learn. We just might have to go back soon, after all.

Galapagos & Easter Island

Fortunately we haven't waited 30 years for a return visit to Galapagos and Easter Island—our 2008 travel season begins there in May.

There are several good reasons why May is a good time to visit Galapagos—firstly, because it is an absolute privilege to visit this 'natural laboratory of evolution' any time of the year; secondly, because it's the end of the hot, wet season so the seas are still warm and calm (great snorkelling!) and the rain has eased off leaving the islands green and lush; thirdly, it's just ahead of the high-season tourist crush so there's still room to move.

Pretty much the same can be said for Easter Island.

For many, this remote Chilean outpost is a total enigma.

The tiny island, just 11 kms wide by 24 kms long, is most famous for its *moai* - around 900 of them, some weighing as much as 25 intricately-carved tonnes.

Fifteen thousand archeological sites, including, thousands of petroglyphs and an ancient quarry, keep visitors guessing about the origins of this mysterious island and its almost 4,000 inhabitants.

Despite its sub-tropical spot Easter Island is strangely void of trees and vegetation—the land was cleared generations ago by islanders obsessed with appeasing the gods.



Easter Island's Mysterious Moai

Curious to learn more?

These islands are quite unique—why not join us and discover them for yourself.

You may have heard of the 'Big Five'...

...and you may know who they are: Lion, Leopard, Elephant Buffalo, and Rhino. The quintet got their fame from 19th century hunters who considered them the most dangerous animals to hunt.

While it's a huge thrill (and privilege!) to spot all Big Five while on safari, wildlife addicts know there's much, much more to see in Etosha and Kruger National Parks. They also know there's never enough time to see it all.

This year our 8-day Kruger Park extension at the conclusion of our Namibian safari got us to thinking about offering a quick-fire safari dedicated solely to the wildlife experience. Just an idea at this stage, but how does a two-week package with 10 days in Kruger National Park sound?

Cost would be approximately \$4,995 and would include return airfares, (AK-WLG-CH), transfers to and from the Park, chalet accommodation and some meals.

This safari would be suitable for anyone who is passionate about wildlife but quite happy to leave other country highlights to the 'all-rounders'.

If you could be interested, return the enclosed form or drop us a line—we'd be happy to give it more serious thought.

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Life's an Adventure

Namibia—we can't resist it

Imagine a country more than three times the size of New Zealand but home to only half as many people; a landscape where the rich apricots, reds and yellows are a complete contrast to New Zealand's cool greens, blues and greys; a countryside where kori-bustards rather than pukeko wander through the grasslands, where bat-eared foxes rather than the next-door neighbour's dog trot along the roadside. That's Namibia—it's irresistible. If you haven't been there yet, you should probably go soon. We'll be heading that way again in June 2008. It'll be our 11th year showing Kiwis around the country we love so no-one knows it better than us. If you'd like to grab one of the last seats, contact us or return the enclosed form as soon as possible—right now would be a good time!



Meerkat Star

By the By...

'Namibia – Eine Grossartige Reise'...

...will join 'Namibia – A Spectacular Journey' in Namibian bookstores next year. Rob Bickford Publishing's first publication has established itself at the forefront of bookstores around Namibia. We hope the German edition will prove equally popular with the 70 percent of Namibia's tourists who hail from Germany. Copies of the English edition (also being reprinted) are available in New Zealand directly from Rob Bickford (\$30 + \$3 p&p).

If you like to receive our online updates...

...and you're a customer of Xtra, you'll need to add rob@mirrabac.com to your webmail address book. You can only do this through "Yahoo Xtra Bubble Mail", not through Outlook or Outlook Express. Oh, the joys of communicating through cyberspace!

Just so you know...

...all our tours for 2008 are filling fast so if you think you might like a fun and friendly travel experience next year, talk to us very soon.

and remember....

...lots of Kiwis love to travel which we're pretty happy about and so are the airlines. But trying to book airline seats at the last minute can prove a headache for would-be travellers. There just may be no seats available which can mean, at the least, additional accommodation costs if the traveller has to leave earlier, or worse still, total disappointment. with no flights open. Avoid hassles—book early.

Turkey + Greek Island Option

Turkey is the final offering in our 2008 schedule and the Turkish countryside should be aglow with autumnal glory when we wander that way in September. We'll start out in Istanbul with its fabulous monuments linking the country's past and present – Topkapi Palace, the Blue Mosque, and Hagia Sophia to mention a few. Of course, we'll also drop into the timeless Grand Bazaar and the exotic Spice Markets.

It's quite possible weird and wonderful Cappadocia hosts fairies and other whimsical creatures so we'll stop by to



Fairy Chimneys, Cappadocia

search them out. And we'll encounter some magnificent ancient ruins en route to the Mediterranean - you don't need to be a Roman Empire history buff to appreciate their architectural excellence! Quiet time at Gallipoli will bring the adventure to a fitting end.

Greek Island Option

After three weeks of brain buzz,

absorbing all the history, mystery and heroics Turkey has to offer, some travellers may like a total wind-down so we've put together the option of a sojourn in the Greek Islands with a taste of Athens.

We'll spend seven nights on three different islands so there'll be plenty of time to hang out and explore with the group or simply unwind at leisure. The 10-day option, including flights, accommodation on B&B basis, transfers and Athens city tour is \$2495. We can't think of a better way to wind up the year's travels. Can you?