

The Hamer Newsletter



18 December 2008

Hello to One and All,

Well, what a fantastic trip we had in August/September to USA, Canada & Alaska, with stops on the way home in Honolulu and Fiji. The 7 weeks flew by and our brains are stuffed full of images of the places we went through, stayed at, and photographed. Frans has a big job sorting out all of the photos and selecting the best ones to keep.

We started out in New York and had a great time going around Manhattan and Brooklyn in double deck tourist buses, walking, and using the subway. The only downside was that Frans broke a tooth on our first morning there and we had to find a dentist who could fit him in and fix it – just a simple filling and a bit of building up of the tooth, at a whopping cost of US \$500, but I guess the dentist has to pay for his Central Park address somehow!! Luckily, we were able to claim the cost on our travel insurance when we came home, and after a bit of argy bargy with the insurance company they paid in full.



Visiting the relatives in Connecticut, USA and the eastern side of Canada was great and we enjoyed warm hospitality and family time with them. They made the first part of our trip very relaxing and easy – we didn't have to do a thing except kick back and enjoy ourselves. The scenery was magnificent and the cute little chipmunks, squirrels and birds in the gardens kept us amused – watching tiny little chipmunks stuff nuts into their cheek pouches was good entertainment. Niagara Falls was as good as we thought it would be, except the tourist town which has grown up around the Falls was



unexpected – Bev somehow had the idea the Falls were “in the country”. Also unexpected was the beautiful area on the way to the Falls, with vineyards and wineries, fruit orchards and lovely little villages with beautiful flowers everywhere.





After 3 weeks on the eastern side, we flew to Victoria B.C. and joined our tour group. The next 2 weeks was hectic to say the least, with many early morning departures and lots of travel by coach and train through the magnificent Rockies, staying at



fabulous Fairmont Hotels most nights and enjoying great food. We were lucky with the weather which was mainly fine,

but quite cool and we even had fresh snow on the mountains some mornings. It just so happened that we picked the coolest summer for 40 years for our trip so the warm clothes really came in handy.



We even had a light snow shower when we went up in the gondola on Sulfur Mountain at Banff. A short helicopter trip in Banff was an exciting and incredible experience, flying over and through part of the Rockies.



After finishing that part of the trip in Vancouver, we boarded the Sapphire Princess and cruised up the Inside Passage to Whittier, Alaska, with stops at Ketchikan, Juneau and Skagway, and slow meanders through Glacier Bay and College



Fjord to see the glaciers. What an experience, and how awesome the landscape. We saw ice “calving” off the edge of the glaciers and glimpsed a few whales in the distance.



Then we went by coach from Whittier to Mt McKinley via Anchorage. A night at the fabulous Mt McKinley Fairmont Lodge, then the Midnight Sun Express train through the mountains to Denali for another 2 nights at the Fairmont Denali Lodge.

The beautiful gold and yellow colours of the autumn leaves is hard to describe, mixed in with the evergreen trees, stretching for mile after mile across the mountains.

We also went on a horse ride on the Alaskan tundra.

We were on the last tour of the year and the staff at the hotels were preparing to pack up for the winter after we left. They board up the windows and the hotels sit empty for 7 months until the spring season starts.



It was hard to believe that the beautiful landscapes we were viewing would be covered in 25 feet of snow within weeks of our departure.



We finished the tour in Fairbanks, then flew home via overnight stays at Honolulu and Fiji. The temperature change (from 3 degrees in Fairbanks to 30 degrees in Honolulu) was a bit of a shock, and we took a while to acclimatise to the heat.

On arrival back in Cairns near the end of September, we picked up our home, Stopalot, and checked into a van park for a few weeks.

Back to reality and having to do our own cooking and bed-making and all the normal chores after 7 weeks of luxury – what a shock to the system.

A pleasant surprise was that our little fighting fish was still alive and well, having



been looked after by friends, and he is still with us today. We both had bronchitis after catching nasty colds on the trip – seems to be a common hazard as the majority of the people on our tour came down with colds or worse.

Since leaving Cairns in October, we have visited friends at Tin Can Bay and spent time at our favourite camping spot at Crows Nest, at Frans' sister's place where we chopped up great piles of wood for their winter fires over the next

couple of years.

We have attended two CMCA Chapter meetings at Maleny and Kenilworth and enjoyed their Christmas parties, and visited friends in Capalaba. We will go back to Crows Nest and spend Christmas and New Year there, before starting the journey south. We are attending a CMCA national rally in Whyalla S.A. at the end of March, then plan to go up the centre to Darwin, across to W.A. for the start of spring and the wildflowers, then travel south following the flowers.

Our travel in future will be a lot slower than it has been in the past, with longer stays at nice places and maybe a bit of work here and there (either paid or volunteering). At least fuel prices have come down a bit so the budget is not quite as stretched.

Frans was elected to the Board of the CMCA (Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia) in October and spends a fair chunk of time on that. That will keep him occupied for the next 3 years.

We will sign off now for 2008 and wish you all the very best for Christmas and the New Year celebrations, and the hope that 2009 will be a less of a roller coaster ride than was 2008.

Take care, keep smiling, catch up with you again next year,

Regards

Bev and Frans