

SUMMER EDITION 2010

It's that time of year again when Christmas trees are decorated, lights shimmer in the windows, Santa is coming to town, and before we know it we're wishing each other yet another happy New Year!

The team at Timeless would like to wish all their loyal readers and travellers a very merry Christmas and a prosperous and safe New Year. We look forward to welcoming new and returning readers and travellers in 2011! And, as always a big thank you to all of you for your contributions!

Comments on our newsletter and suggestions are always welcome. Email christina@timeless.com.au.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!!! The Timeless Team!

****Travel in Iran!!****

As you may know, Timeless has added Iran to our list of specialist countries. While not perhaps a first choice for many, we have had glowing (nothing to do with nuclear reactors!) reports from travellers we have sent there in the last couple of years. With thanks to those who provided reports and suggestions and with the assistance of our excellent Iranian operators, we sent Tom off to explore Iran last month. We are delighted to include parts of his 'travel diary' as well as some spectacular photos. For more information please keep an eye out on our website as we'll be adding the full 'travel diary' in the new year!

For those inspired to give Iran a go, we recommend Ozturk Tours' 12 day program in October 2011 (see page 4). If those dates don't suit we can, as with all our destinations, arrange individually designed itineraries year round. To those who argue that promoting tourism to Iran encourages a regime with a poor record on human rights and other issues, we'd politely beg to differ. In our view the more that can be done to further interaction between Iran, its citizens and the rest of the world, the more likely it is that those policies to which the world community (and many Iranians) object are likely to be modified and improved.

As well as Iran, this issue of our newsletter also contains some recent information on travel in Turkey as well as updated things to do in the United Arab Emirates. This is particularly useful if you are travelling with Etihad or Emirates and stopping over in Abu Dhabi or Dubai.

You'll find useful information on airfares, credit card fees, annual travel insurance and new cancellation fees put in place by one of the insurance companies we use. We have also touched base on Spain, Portugal and Morocco - three countries we will tell you lots more about in upcoming newsletters as Holly from the office will be travelling to those destinations in 2011.

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More about Iran!

GENERAL INFO FOR TRAVELLING IN IRAN

“Iran is a surprising country and almost all of the surprises are pleasant! From all the media reports we get, no-one could be blamed for going there with at least some trepidation, but my experiences confirm those of Timeless travellers who have been there in recent years. The Iranian people are warm and welcoming, there is no hostility to foreigners (outside the official media), the historical sites, museums, bazaars and handicrafts are fantastic, accommodation is excellent, cheap and varied, there are no safety concerns day or night in the parts of Iran where tourists want to visit and food is plentiful, fresh and varied.” *Tom, November 2010*



First, the basics:

Visas: Australian tourists require a visa to enter Iran which should be pre-arranged before departure. To get a visa, it's necessary to have a program booked and to receive an authorization number from Iran. Women's photos submitted with the application should be in a headscarf showing no hair (start to get used to that scarf!)

If documentation is correct the visa will be issued promptly – mine was returned from Canberra in a few days.

Language: The language of Iran is predominantly Farsi, a unique spoken and written language. English is not spoken much and not taught in public schools. Road signage in cities and rural areas is in both Farsi and English but shop signs are rarely in English.

While learning to read or speak Farsi is a complete waste of time for visitors, anyone going to Iran should learn the Farsi symbols for the numbers 0-9. It's not difficult (1 and 9 are like ours) but a great help in looking at prices in shops, mileages, phone numbers etc as our numbers are not used often.

Money/tipping: The currency is the Rial. There were 10,000 Rials to USD/AUD 1 in November. Notes have low denominations so, changing USD 200 at the airport, I received 100 x 20,000 notes, far too many to put in a wallet! Western credit cards and ATM cards CANNOT be used AT ALL due to sanctions. So cash is king and the USD is king of cash! I noticed at the airport bank that they accepted euros, pounds and UAE dinars however the rate for the USD was significantly better.

It is virtually impossible to change unused Rials back into other currencies on leaving Iran. So if your stack of notes is not diminishing quickly enough, we suggest you tip generously to guides, porters etc especially if you are happy with their service.

Because of visa requirements, full flights, difficulties in carrying/obtaining cash, securing good hotels and guide/drivers, Iran, as much as anywhere, is a place where it pays to have travel arrangements made and paid for in advance. At Timeless we are ready to make these arrangements for you!

News, Email and Internet Access: Mobile phones are everywhere and reception seemed good wherever I went. Facebook, Skype and emails are no problem except for some slowness. The internet is somewhat censored. Wi-fi is common in hotels and access to foreign sites is easy. Satellite TV is common though officially illegal and some hotels carry BBC, CNN, Bloomberg or Euronews on their TV channels.

Headscarves and Touching: All women are required to wear headscarves in public and, on my arrival flight, they all magically appeared prior to the aircraft doors opening on landing! Women are often quite casual about them, show lots of hair at the front and sometimes at the back and seem in no hurry to adjust them if they slip. Surprisingly, I did not ever notice frowns or disapproving looks from other women or men when this happened. Favourite dress for women is jeans and high-heeled shoes or boots but usually covered by a cloak (manteau) or dress.

Some Iranian women are perfectly happy to shake foreign men's hands but others find it highly embarrassing and it certainly does not happen between Iranian men and women who don't know each other. If you, a foreign man, are introduced to an Iranian woman, wait for the woman. If she offers her hand there is no problem in taking it. While I don't have personal experience, the reverse also applies. Public kissing except on the cheek between friends of the same sex is unknown but it's common to see young couples of opposite sex holding hands in public places. It would be assumed that they are married but unless they wear rings (a custom, by the way, which originated in Iran) there is no way of knowing except by members of their families and friends.

More about Iran!

GENERAL INFO FOR TRAVELLING IN IRAN

Food: Iran's three staple foods are steamed rice, yoghurt and kebabs (chicken or lamb). They are served with fresh vegetables like tomato, carrot, cabbage, radishes and onion. Herbs like basil and mint accompany and there are tasty flat breads. Stews and potato chips are also common. Food comes in big quantities and lunch is the main meal.

Breakfasts are similar to Mediterranean - feta cheese, tomatoes, cucumber, but hotels also offer cereals and pastries, honey and jams. Hotels happily provide packed takeaway breakfasts if you are starting early. Food generally is fresh, plentiful and tasty. Fruit and nuts are also readily available everywhere. In November, it was mandarin, persimmon, pomegranate and melon season. There is a local gelato served in Shiraz called *falodeh* which is delicious as is a Tehran dessert, *ferni*, made from yoghurt and date syrup.

Tea is common as is a *doogh* (mint yoghurt drink), coke, fanta etc. Coffee is generally Nescafe. Alcohol is completely prohibited but can be found if you are desperate and there is a non-alcoholic beer which comes in several flavours such as lemon, strawberry or pomegranate! Fruit juice is rarely fresh in hotels.

Smoking is not common and women never smoke in public. Every hotel I went to had ashtrays in rooms and I don't know if non-smoking rooms are possible. Water pipes (*galyan in Iran, sheesha or nargile elsewhere*) are available in cafes.

Politics, the Military and Religion: Surprisingly, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is not much more evidence of religious observance than in secular Islamic states like Turkey and Syria. Pictures of ruling ayatollahs are everywhere but I saw few mullahs on the streets. Incidentally, those wearing black turbans are descended from the prophet Mohammed; those with white turbans are not related.

Political ranting on Iranian TV and in newspapers is pretty scary stuff but such views seem uncommon among the people. You don't see many soldiers but there are plenty of police, who seem well-respected, including traffic and tourist police. Some Iranians talk freely (and often highly critically) of government and politics in their country. Many are openly against the religious rule in Iran. I would strongly suggest to travellers in Iran that it is best to wait for an Iranian to raise such topics and to be cautious, initially at least, in your responses.

Odd Spot – Surreptitious Australian Invasion: It's currently very trendy to plant eucalypt trees in Iran especially in the south and in desert areas. You see recently planted gums at some of history's oldest monuments, as city street trees and in public and private gardens.



Getting Around: The international airport is connected by 'tollway' to Tehran though no-one seems to collect tolls. There is no obvious speed limit and the driving style is gung-ho. Road lanes have no connection with actual traffic streams, motor bikes use bus lanes in the opposite direction to buses and speeding is normal.

Because of incessant traffic jams in Tehran, Thursday afternoon and Friday (weekend) are the best days to visit. Most Museums are open. Monday is the worst day for sightseeing as only the Jewels Treasury is open among the main museums.

Other major Iranian cities do not have the same traffic problems as Tehran. Divided highways exist or are being built between all the major towns and cities and there are metros under construction or finished in the main cities.

There are EU warnings against some domestic flights in Iran – particularly those using antiquated Russian aircraft -but the two flights I took were well-flown in modern aircraft with excellent service and as good as anywhere else in the world.

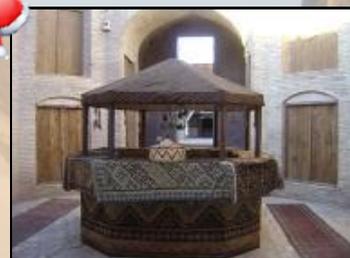
In Iran, many guides drive. We'd recommend and can arrange for travellers to have one national or several local of the excellent and relatively inexpensive English-speaking professional Iranian guides.

More about Iran!!

SIGHTSEEING IN IRAN

Iran has majestic snow-capped mountains, lakes, seas and a variety of climates to rival Australia's. But like Australia, Iran lacks rivers and water in a large part of the country and its historical character was largely formed by the ability to tame the heat and aridity of the deserts for human survival.

Historically, Iran first became prominent under Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC when a number of tribal kingdoms were united and expanded. Under rulers following Cyrus such as Darius and Xerxes, Persian empires rose and fell under a bewildering succession of dynasties. A surprising amount remains physically even from the early years of empire and Iran has eight designated World Heritage sites.



Any Iran tour should include Tehran, Shiraz Esfahan and preferably Yazd for at least two nights each. Sites and museums are rarely crowded and entry is ridiculously cheap.

Among the major historical sites located near Shiraz, Persepolis with its temples and bas-reliefs stands out. But in each of the cities there are beautiful gardens, spectacular mosques, religious shrines, stunning palaces, public squares, beautiful handicrafts and amazing bazaars. And there is an array of interesting museums particularly in Tehran. Yazd, Iran's oldest city and the desert region which surrounds it, showcase the desert (*kavir*) culture of wind-towers, *qanats* (underground water channels, mud bricks, ice houses and caravanserais which taught humans how to survive and flourish in hostile climates. Only in the 20th century, with the spread of electricity and piped water, have these ancient systems been superseded.

Known to locals as *Nesfe Jahan* (literally half of the world), Esfahan is one of the world's most beautiful cities and a fitting climax to any visit to Iran.

Please note that people touring Iran need to be prepared to do a lot of walking. Obviously, as at ancient sites in most countries, there is a lot of walking and climbing of stairs required. But lack of parking in main cities is another factor. For inner city museums, monuments, mosques, and parks, it is often easier for guides and bus drivers to park in one spot and walk you from place to place so a reasonable level of basic walking fitness for 5km or more per day and good walking shoes or sneakers are essential. Old roads and paths in central city areas are often uneven and/or cobbled so you also have to watch your step.

However, we know that the friendliness of the people and the marvels of history and culture in Iran will appeal to most travellers.

OZTURK TREASURES OF PERSIA - 12 Days/ 11 Nights - 10 October 2011

You will discover a *country of warm and fascinating people* living within an ancient and sophisticated culture.

Embrace Iran and allow the Iranians to embrace you. **Visit Tehran**, the dynamic capital of Iran, visit **Shiraz**, the cultural capital and **Esfahan with its rich Persian and Islamic architecture**. We **travel to Yazd**, Iran's oldest inhabited city, where your journey will take you back to the time when humans not only mastered harsh conditions but also produced a rich and unique civilisation in the desert. You'll **also visit Kashan and Qom**.

For a full itinerary, booking form, airfares or further details please contact us on (02) 9904 1239 or email travtour@timeless.com.au.

Dates: 10 October - 21 October 2011; **Costs:** \$3250 per person (double/twin share), single supplement \$650

UAE & Turkey!!



United Arab Emirates (UAE)



Many travellers have visited Dubai in recent years and, despite stories about the effect of the global financial crisis there, the city continues to expand at a rapid rate. A comprehensive metro system is already in partial operation and new and interesting buildings are being opened all the time. A new hotel complex, Atlantis, in the Palm development is well worth a look as are the amazing array of new shopping complexes.

Less than two hours west of Dubai is the less well-known and largest of the Emirates, Abu Dhabi. Serviced by the excellent Etihad Airlines from Australia, Abu Dhabi is wealthier than Dubai and is taking a more restrained approach to its development. The facilities and sights in Abu Dhabi will eventually overtake those of its flashier neighbour and there are already a wide range of excellent hotels.

The Yas Island complex, quite near to the airport, already hosts a Formula 1 grand prix circuit, the spectacular Ferrari World theme park and a Guggenheim Museum is due to open in 2012.

The Grand Mosque is a superb building of marble, gold and jewels and non-Muslims, including women, are welcomed warmly. Other sights include the Heritage Park and the magnificent Emirates Palace Hotel.

We suggest that any visit to Abu Dhabi (or Dubai) should include a trip to the ancient Silk Road city of Al Ain located inland on the Omani border. There are interesting museums, an ancient camel and goat market, the area's best zoo and the mountain Jebel Hafet which overlooks the town. The Heritage restaurant has an excellent array of reasonably priced local and foreign food and there are several good hotels in the town.

Travelling with a driver and guide is a reasonably priced and practical way to explore the UAE and we can arrange this through our local operators.

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Turkey



Turkey remains our most popular destination and a recent visit confirmed that there are perhaps more different places of interest for visitors than any of our other destinations.

Datca, across the Gulf of Gokova from Bodrum and connected by regular summer ferry services is located on a historic and less explored peninsula. The town has some excellent places to stay, is a good point of access from the historical ruins at Knidos and now offers boat trips to the Greek island of Symi.

The Sadberk Hanim Museum in the Bosphorus village of Sariyer north of Istanbul on the way to the Black Sea is one of Istanbul's lesser known museums but well worth a visit. Run by one of Turkey's largest companies (and named after the wife of the founder), it is well-organized, displays are described very well in English and Turkish and there are very good displays of its three specialties – archaeology, handicrafts and historic clothing.

We offer Bosphorus day trips which include a visit to Sadberk Hanim or it can be accessed by either local ferry or the new metro plus a short taxi ride.

Many who have been to Cappadocia have experienced a great hot air balloon flight by pilots Kaili and Lars, the couple who started ballooning in the area and whose company Kapadokya Balloons still provides the best experience. Kaili and Lars sold the company last year but we are pleased to report that, under the capable management of long-time employees Levent and Sevgi plus the excellent team of experienced local and international pilots and a great ground team, Kapadokya Balloons continues to flourish.

Kaili and Lars are building a home at Selimiye near Marmaris overlooking the blue waters and spending time sailing but are still returning to Cappadocia to help out with balloon flights in the busy times.

Sahiba Gokcen is Istanbul's second airport and is served by some of the European low cost carriers. What some people making internet bookings don't realise is that this airport is on the Asian side of the Bosphorus and can be as far as four hours from central Istanbul in heavy traffic! Beware!

Many people in Australia are still unaware of Turkish Airlines because it doesn't fly here. But we have worked with them for many years and are happy to report that they now have the eighth largest route network of all the world's airlines. Among the new routes they aim to open by the end of 2011 are Dhaka, Vietnam, Atlanta, Shiraz, Basra, Valencia, Manila, Oran, Erbil, Toulouse, Guangzhou and Novosibirsk!



**Visit Spain, Portugal & Morocco

Timeless Tours offers coach, private and regular tours to Spain, Portugal & Morocco.

We tailor-make individual programs to suit your specific needs!

Visit our website: www.timeless.com.au or ring to speak to Holly for further details.

Holly will be visiting these countries in early 2011, so keep posted for further information in later newsletters!



Spain's sweeping coastlines and rugged mountains, busy cities and peaceful villages, modern, Baroque and Moorish architecture and sun-drenched islands have enchanted visitors for centuries.

Timeless Tours offers:

- 2-14 day coach tours of Spain from Madrid, Barcelona & Costa del Sol
- Spain & Morocco combination coach tours
- Spain & Portugal combination coach tours
- Spain, Portugal & Morocco combination coach tours
- Private and regular sightseeing tours in Madrid, Barcelona & Costa del Sol
- Individualised programs staying at unique properties
- Great car hire rates for self-driver programs or to visit family and friends

**** It's World Youth Day in Madrid – 16-21 August 2011****

Portugal: Welcome to a cultured, stylish country with a tradition of gentle hospitality, gourmet foods and great wines. A seafaring nation with a complex history, Portugal has produced such legendary navigators and explorers as Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan. For a time, with Spain, it dominated the New World. Today, it is a country with a rich heritage and thriving cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Timeless Tours offers:

- Private & regular coach sightseeing tours and transfers
- 2-11 day Portugal only coach tours
- Portugal & Spain combination coach tours
- Portugal, Spain & Morocco combination coach tours
- Lisbon & surrounds sightseeing tours
- Porto & surrounds sightseeing tours
- Individualised programs staying at unique properties
- Great car hire rates for self-drive programs or to visit family & friends



Morocco: This ancient and exotic land offers

breath-taking mountain ranges, impressive waterfalls, wonderful beaches, cedar forests, the great Sahara Desert and a rich, complex history. Morocco has been inhabited since prehistoric times and the vibrant culture reflects its occupation by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs and, more recently, the French.

Timeless Tours offers:

- Individualised programs by vehicle with English speaking driver
- 3 Morocco only coach tours
- Imperial Cities tour - weekly departures
- Oasis, Dunes and Desert tour and Discovery of Morocco Tour
- Morocco & Spain combination coach tours
- Accommodation in beautiful Riads and hotels
- Individualised programs staying at unique properties

Timeless 2011 tours

****ON SALE NOW****

2011 SYRIA & JORDAN TOUR

Jointly with Ozturk Tours!

28 April - 10 May

2011 itinerary and prices are available on our website www.timeless.com.au

Please call us to make a booking or if you need more information.

Tour program consists of:

- 14 days and 13 nights
- Tour starts in Aleppo (Syria) and finishes in Amman (Jordan)
- Visiting main sights of both countries: Aleppo, Palmyra, Crac des Chevaliers, Damascus and Petra.
- In depth, small group tour
- Experienced and personable Aussie tour leader
- Excellent English speaking professional local guides
- Special hotels throughout Syria and Jordan
- 4WD tour of Wadi Rum and horse ride in Petra

Timeless offers flights and travel insurance!

****ON SALE NOW****

2011 GALLIPOLI FOR ANZAC DAY TOUR

Small group!

21 - 25 April 2011

2011 details are available on our website www.timeless.com.au

Please call or email us to make a booking or if you need more information.

Tour program consists of:

- 5 days and 4 nights
- Tour starts and finishes in Istanbul
- Visiting Istanbul and Gallipoli battlefields for Anzac Day
- Our 15th year of Anzac Day tours
- In depth, small group - Maximum 20
- Experienced Aussie tour leader - 8th Anzac tour
- Excellent English speaking professional Turkish guide
- Quality hotels - Istanbul's best views and centrally- located boutique hotel in Canakkale
- Seating for disabled and elderly at Dawn Service arranged

****ON SALE NOW****

2011 OZTURK BOUTIQUE TOURS

Book now as 2010 tours filled quickly!

	Tour Dates 2011
Grand Sultan	Start 10 May -Finish 26 May Start 31 May -Finish 16 June Start 17 Sept -Finish 03 Oct
Best of Black Sea	Start 28 May -Finish 06 June Start 27 Aug -Finish 05 Sept
Marvels of the East	Start 05 June -Finish 15 June Start 04 Sept -Finish 14 Sept
Great Silk Road	Start 26 April - Finish 08 May
Best of Russia	Start 18 June - Finish 27 June
Ukraine Discovery	Start 28 June - 8 July
Allure of Azerbaijan	Start 4 October - 10 October
Treasures of Persia	Start 10 October - Finish 21 October

****BIG DISCOUNTS****

Ozturk Tours are celebrating their 10th birthday and giving away big discounts for the 2011 tours!

- All tours are small group and fully accompanied with tour leader and local guides.
- Book and pay 10% deposit by 31 January 2011 to receive these great holiday discounts. Applies only to new bookings.
- Many tours can be combined.

\$200 per couple for the **Best of the Black Sea, Marvels of the East, Anatolian Highlights and Allure of Azerbaijan** tours.

\$300 per couple for the **Best of Russia, Ukraine Discovery, Great Silk Road, and Treasures of Persia** tours.

\$400 per couple for the **Grand Sultan** tour, our main and most popular tour.

For more information on above tours call toll free: 1800 671 610 or (02) 9904 1239

...or visit our website www.timeless.com.au. Email travtour@timeless.com.au

Credit Card Surcharges

Timeless Tours, like all companies are charged fees by our bank when any of our passengers or travel agents use a Visa, Mastercard, Amex or Diners card.

We may pass on fees to you in accordance with those fees we are charged. Amex and Diners cards incur the highest fees followed closely by Premium (Corporate, Foreign, Platinum and Company) Visa and Mastercards. The lowest fees are charged on personal Visa and Mastercards.

As much as we dislike these fees, we do not have any control over them... we get charged as much as you get charged!

Annual Travel Insurance

Booking annual travel insurance may be a cheaper option if you're travelling more than once within a 12 month period.

Travel insurance has generally been increasing in price and passengers tend to seek cheaper options. We find that our clients who are travelling more frequently, can benefit significantly by buying annual travel insurance.

CANCELLATION COVER OPTIONS - CoverMore (one of the insurance companies we sell) have made cancellation cover an optional additional cost within their insurance cover. Don't think of cancellation cover only as being applicable if you have an accident or are sick! It applies to factors and events outside of your control - a recent example is the shutdown of European airports due to snow and frost! If you had pre-booked hotels, transfers, connecting flights or rail travel to coincide with a European arrival, most of these arrangements would have been non-refundable and worth covering in advance with cancellation insurance. So, although the cost may seem higher and the travel insurance a little more complicated, in the event of circumstances outside your control causing cancellation of arrangements, it becomes by far the cheaper option!

For full details contact us for a policy brochure. All of our staff are qualified to assist with travel insurance enquiries.

Airfare Update!

As usual at this time of year, airlines are waiting to see 2011 forward bookings before deciding on further special offers. Early-bird fares have already been extended into January by some major airlines and we predict that market uncertainty will keep prices reasonable early in the new year.

Our main advice to intending passengers is to avoid rushing to lock in seemingly cheaper fares (which may carry heavy penalties for cancellation or alteration) before having land arrangements settled. For most travel, airfares are just one component of the overall cost.

ISRAEL COACH TOURS 2011 - *reduced prices*

All tours depart every week, offer a choice of hotel standards and operate with a minimum of 2 passengers.

Highlights Tour - 8 Days / 7 Nights:

- *Sunday* arrival and departure
- Starts and finishes in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem
- Visit Beersheba, Arad, Masada, Jerusalem, Tiberias, Galilee, Golan Heights, Nazareth, Acre, Haifa *and more*

Heritage of the Holy Land Tour - 8 Days / 7 Nights:

- *Thursday* arrival and departure
- Starts in Tel Aviv and finishes in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv
- Visit Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, Jordan River, Dead Sea, Masada, Jerusalem *and more*

Bibleland Tour - 8 Days / 7 Nights:

- *Monday* arrival and departure
- Starts in Jerusalem and finishes in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem
- Visit Jerusalem Old and New, Beit Shean, Nazareth, Galilee, Golan Heights, Acre, Haifa *and more*



Israel programs are cheaper than they have been for many years due to the stronger Aussie dollar.

Coach tours offer an excellent and economical way to sample Israel's highlights.

For those with more or less time we can arrange individual programs, day tours, car rentals and stopovers including Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

****PASSENGER FEEDBACK**** *(continued next page ...)*

TURKEY:

“The organisation of the land arrangements in Turkey were superbly done, the hotels were fantastic right from the airport hotel at Istanbul airport through to Arcadia back in Istanbul overlooking the Blue Mosque, room 601, brilliant. The Museum Hotel in Cappadocia was unbelievable, we had the Tafana room overlooking Rose Mountain watching the balloons rise in the morning to sunset in the evening.

Our balloon ride, as quoted by Graham, our pilot, was the best flight he had flown in five months. We took off and glided down through Love Valley across to the town that was built into the mountain but was abandoned when half of it collapsed, across the face of Rose Mountain then up over the mountain to land on the other side. The balloon flights for the next two days lifted off and glided past our hotel, the wrong direction to Rose Mountain, so we were certainly very lucky. We have spoken to a couple of our friends who are unbelievably envious of our journey and the itinerary that you put together, so I might be sending some of our friends your way to book Turkey land arrangements. Again, on behalf of Sue and I, thank you for arranging an absolutely wonderful holiday that we will remember for a very long time. Cheers for now.” *Peter Hewlett, National Sales Manager, Asiana Airlines.*

‘Feedback is one of the essential elements of good communication’

SYRIA, JORDAN & ISRAEL:

“We are now half way through our holiday and have been glad of the couple of days respite in Tel Aviv.

Damascus was great, people were lovely and the place very atmospheric. The hotel was very good – definitely recommend it – and had its own Hamam bath house. Our guide Lena and our driver were both really nice – funny and warm and we felt very comfortable with them. All of the places on our itinerary were well maintained/reconstructed and all were worth the visit.

As for Syria, the trip through Jordan was seamless. Our driver was great – Joseph – and had spent several years in the USA before being deported after overstaying his visa, so spoke good English with a black American accent. Petra was very hot but our guide was informative and we took donkeys for a lot of the time inside. The hotel at Wadi Musa was excellent – a whole ‘house’ all to ourselves and again very atmospheric. The camp at Wadi Rum was well organised and the VIP tent was a bonus. We went for the obligatory camel ride at sunset with a nice young Bedouin and next day had the 4 hours in a 4WD, which was also very good. Aqaba was very hot and dusty but our driver organised a glass-bottomed boat for the afternoon and we had a very good snorkel on a coral bommy. We left Aqaba in a dust storm. We could see Eilat across the way which we will be going to in a week or so – silly having two cities so close never to mix. From Aqaba we could see Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Egypt.

Tel Aviv is like any western city, not that we have seen much of it. Rode to Jaffa today on the hotel’s loan bikes – it was hot and muggy so we took it easy.

So far the highlights of the trip have been in Syria and we couldn’t speak more highly of it as a destination, and Petra and Jerash (which was excellent). Tomorrow our guide is picking us up for the northern Israel part of the trip.” *Mark and Bindy*

LEBANON:

“Just to let you know we had a fantastic time in Lebanon. I think it could be an addictive place and if I were younger I’d be planning to return sometime soon. All the arrangements were good, transfers, driver and guide.

A comfortable bed (and the twin beds were), decent reading lights (bit lacking there but we sorted ourselves out) and a clean functional bathroom is about it for us.

Clearly there are much classier hotels but we were very happy to be in Hamra with the cafes and bookshops...it was an easy walk into the rebuilt centre of the city (beautifully done and such a huge contrast with the many remaining bombed out/burnt and pockmarked buildings in the city) which was a plus as well. The hotel cafe downstairs was great.... pretty good food and a great place to do a bit of 'locals' watching. We did find a very cool new cafe/bar a short distance away which made for a good Saturday night out.

I had wondered if staying the whole time in Beirut might not be a good idea but it worked well for us. I think we both could have spent a night in the Bekaa Valley though so that we had more time there. So glad we had a driver as the trip across the pass to the valley via the Damascus road was awful...fog and snow with mad, mad drivers but we felt very safe with Pierre. I had also been a bit curious about having a guide in the car with us but Nadine made it easy...just so knowledgeable, well-educated and fun to be with. So a wonderful 6 days. Thanks very much! ” *Cheers, Helen.*

IRAN, SYRIA & LEBANON:

“Iran is a wonderful country to be an independent traveller - provided all the planning and bookings are done properly by an agency as good as Timeless Tours, as was ours when we visited Iran for 15 days. You need to spend some days with knowledgeable guides who will make the sites and sights come alive for you. Then you can also wander about freely, with the only restriction we found being that women tourists have to wear a long scarf (hejab) to cover their hair - something of a time saver each morning! - as well as covering their arms and legs. The accommodation, food and transport (we used planes, inter-city buses and cars) were all very good to excellent. Above all, the young and older people we encountered were friendly, courteous and welcoming - and proud of their long history which has shaped them; their Farsi language; their poets and heroes; the beauty of their land and its historic places. We visited Tehran, Shiraz, Yazd, Esfahan, and Kashan: the most beautiful for us was Esfahan (go there to see why!!), but all of them have special big and small things to see and enjoy... we long to make a return visit to explore more.

With the same excellent planning, bookings and guides, we also visited Syria (our third visit) and Lebanon. We stayed for a few days in the old city area of Damascus, certainly one of the most people-friendly big cities we know, and also visited the well preserved Crusader castle, Crac des Chevaliers.

In Lebanon we went to many great sites around Bekaa Valley and in the mountains, but none more impressive than the huge, well-preserved Roman ruins Ba'albek. In Beirut, a highlight was the restored National Museum, and the story of how it and its treasures were saved through the civil war that finished in 1991.” *Lawson Lobb and Jill Harris.*

LEBANON, SYRIA & JORDAN:

“Lebanon: No problems with entry to Lebanon and no visa required. No payments asked for. Processing at airport very slow. Sylvia a good guide and the driver Hassan was good too. Hassan, in particular, was extremely intelligent and a hive of information, particularly on current political and social events.

All sites visited in Lebanon were great, although we were slightly disappointed with Byblos, largely because key features had been relocated to provide better viewing for tourists rather than being left in situ. Jeita caves a revelation. Cedars lovely, Anjar and especially Ba'albek were great.

An unscheduled highlight was a visit to the Mouawad Palace on Sylvia's recommendation, a private museum in Beirut, set up by a wealthy Lebanese jeweller (now a resident of Switzerland), showcasing fabulous furniture, ceramics and jewellery, including a diamond encrusted bra worth about eleven million dollars. Could be worth including on future programs.

Syria: No problems at border although a bit slow. Already had visa and I think this helps move things along. Guide Ahmad Al' Shalabi was terrific. A young man (30 years old) but we got on very well and had many interesting discussions on a range of topics. Highly recommended (...) Ahmed was an intelligent, educated, “with-it” young man while Mr Nabile was anything but. Ahmed even took us to have afternoon tea with his mother at her house outside of Damascus (...).

Syria was our particular favourite of the countries we visited. Compared to Lebanon where there are banks and ATMs about every block, Syria has virtually none so potential tourists need to be advised about changing money when they can, particularly in centres other than Aleppo or Damascus. Sites in Syria exceeded our expectations.

Crac des Chevaliers, Apamea, St Simeon, Rassafeh, Palmyra and Bosra were all fantastic. Aleppo and Damascus museums also excellent. I think we got more out of visiting the various sites first followed by the visit to the museum in Damascus on the last day – meant more to us than perhaps doing it the other way round.

I know we wanted to go along the Euphrates and we liked the drive. However it is possibly not an area that would appeal to everyone. From Aleppo to Deir ez Zor was great and from there to Palmyra too but the extra bit down to Mari and back not really worthwhile as the Mari site is currently undergoing more renovation and hard to see much.

Being close to the Iraq border was exciting! Loved Aleppo and Damascus – both fascinating cities.

Jordan: Our driver Sufyan was excellent. In fact he took our basic program and rearranged the timing to make much better use of time. One thing we discovered too late is that it is possible to do a day tour to Jerusalem from Amman (possibly from Dead Sea resorts) and we would have done this had we known. You get a special ‘visa’ at border on Allenby Bridge) but require a double entry visa for Jordan.

Dead Sea Spa superb. Perfect place to spend last afternoon.

One aspect not quite clear to us was the extent to which we could ‘impose’ on guide/driver. We didn't really need them hanging around for us on most occasions but there were a couple of instances (eg at Badiat Cham) when it might have been helpful to have them available after the day's touring. Probably need to be spelled out to customers.

All in all, a fascinating trip and experience which we would strongly recommend to others. Arabic people a delight and so friendly.”
Roger and Helen Allnutt

DUBAI, SYRIA & TURKEY:

“Please accept a very belated thank you from Tim and me for the informative tour you organized for us. Since returning to Australia I have been in ‘overload mode’ with the launch of the museum here at UC and my latest book, etc. Every minute of the trip was wonderful and our guides were excellent particularly the one in Syria who even managed to show us Palmyra where we stayed overnight.”

Malcolm Beazley

TURKEY, SYRIA & JORDAN:

“Thought you’d like to know how the trip is going. We’re in Petra today, heading out to the ruins shortly. Syria was great, loved Aleppo, probably our favourite, but Damascus was fascinating as well. Palmyra and Jerash were also very interesting.

Everything went fairly smoothly crossing the border from Turkey; Hamit took us to the bus station and we caught a bus which left about 12:30pm. Leaving Turkey was okay, just had to get our passports stamped and the boy from the bus handled getting the passports signed at the Syrian side, all in all it took about an hour. Hussein, our driver met us at the border and took us to the hotel in Aleppo. We both think it would have been easier to just get the bus straight through to Aleppo, and get picked up at the bus station in Aleppo. The hotels have been just great, mainly small boutique hotels, just what we like.

The program has worked well, we’ve enjoyed everything and we’ve had plenty of free time to wander around. Our guide, Ahmed and driver, Hussein, in Turkey were both great, and our driver in Jordan, Raad, is excellent. Their English is very good, and they have all been very nice people, so no complaints. Really looking forward to seeing Petra, I’m sure it will live up to its reputation. Jordan has been just wonderful, the people are great and we loved the trip to Wadi Rum. We’re now in the Dead Sea Spa Resort, just lovely way to finish off.”
Val and Pat

TURKEY:

“We had a marvellous time in Turkey, and loved it all. What an amazing place; the people, the scenery, the food. I'm hoping to go back again next year with another friend, and we're going to spend the time out east. There wasn't time for that this year, as you know. We were fortunate getting as far east as Nemrut Dagi. Our kayaking and Lycian Walk were both wonderful, and we had the best guide you could imagine. And he was a great chef too!

If you'd like to see some of how it was for us, you could have a look at www.daring2go3.blogspot.com After the written posts you can scroll down further, and there are more photos down at the bottom.

The car worked out really well. No problems. As you'll see on the blog we had 'fun' finding our hotels. The open roads are really good, well signposted, and we found the driving easy, but there are so few (if any) street signs in the cities that it was difficult finding our way, even with the Google maps I'd printed off. So we got a cunning plan - we hired a taxi, Darcy got in the taxi with the driver, and we were shown the way. Worked a treat.

That's funny about us having the record for the most distance for a Turkey car rental. Marie wonders if you read the bit about how good Avis were about returning her camera. I did a Google search on Avis a while back, and that part about her recommending Avis Rentals came up.” *Jillian Wilson*

**FROM ALL OF US at
TIMELESS TOURS ...Merry
CHRISTMAS & Happy New
Year!~**



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