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*Inspiring Escorted Journeys*



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Hi Everyone,

I am writing to you from Casablanca having just finished the 16 Days Moroccan Mosaic trip. It has been great to be back in Morocco and I am sure all in our group had a wonderful experience in this colourful country. Mid-week I am off to the South Caucasus to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia to research the new Byroads trip for 2019. Currently I am working on our 2019 programs with new trips planned for the South Caucasus, Jordan, Oman and India. Many of Byroads well known favourites will remain for 2019 and some of them are already live on the website.

### **Byroads Facebook Page**

Times are changing and Byroads needs to get with the times. More and more I am seeing Byroads travellers using Facebook to keep in touch with their family and friends and to keep up to date with what is happening in their areas of interest. In order to keep with the times I've just started a Byroads Facebook page and will use it to provide the occasional updates, blogs and images from our different Byroads tours. If you are currently a Facebook user it would help me greatly if you could take a look at the site and 'like' the page and share it with your friends. This helps give Byroads a greater audience reach which ultimately helps with the success of the business. Please [Click Here](#) to 'like' and 'share' the Byroads Facebook page.

In this newsletter I have provided an update on the impact of the recent Caribbean hurricanes and the earthquakes in Mexico. I've also included a brief country profile on Mongolia and you can

learn about 'Casas Particulares' in Cuba. Sharon Goddard from Canberra who recently travelled with Byroads on the September 2017 'Moroccan Mosaic' has also written a few words to share with you about her trip.

Best wishes,

Steve

### **Moroccan Mosaic September 2017 - by Sharron Goddard**

This was my second trip to Morocco with Byroads and my fourth trip with them overall. Yep – they're that good! So it was lovely to revisit some favourite places and faces, and discover new ones. With our tour leader Steve, local guide Mohammed, and driver Abdullah, the trip went without a hitch (that we were aware of anyway), and I thank them dearly for making it such a wonderful and memorable experience.

The riads and Kasbah accommodation are a real highlight and a great way to immerse yourself into Moroccan hospitality and culture, and which you can only really do in small groups. We visited amazing places well off the beaten track such as the ancient Tafilalt village of Ksar Maadid, where our local guide invited us for tea at his house. We stopped to taste the local honey for sale at the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, dined at local restaurants with authentic Moroccan food, and made our own discoveries during the frequent periods of free time to wander the souks and narrow streets of towns like Chefchaouen, the labyrinth of the Fes medina, and Le Jardin Marjorelle in Marrakech - which was not on the itinerary but well worth the visit.

With shopping you're spoilt for choice and haggling the price is expected and fun – we got quite good at it! A Bedouin carpet seller in Ait Benhaddou let us take his carpets then travelled the way to meet us near Marrakech to get internet connection for his credit card machine. That is dedication for a sale – and we really wanted those carpets! That's not to say we weren't connected – all the places we stayed had free sign-in wifi for guests.

The camel ride in the Sahara and watching the sunset from on top of a huge sand dune is a magical experience I'll never tire of - which may sound a bit clichéd but it really is special. No matter how many times you visit, Morocco will always fascinate, delight and surprise.



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## Country Profile – Mongolia

Mongolia is a vast landlocked country nestled between two giants, China and Russia. Historically known as Outer Mongolia it's not be confused with the province of Inner Mongolia which is part of modern day China. The country's enormous expanse links land and sky and it is one of the last few places on earth where nomadic life is still a living tradition. With only 1.8 people per square kilometre it is one of the least densely populated countries in the world. It is this majestic and vast emptiness that is its enduring appeal, bringing the intrepid traveller into close communion with nature and its nomadic inhabitants.

Ulaanbaatar is the country's capital. Located in the centre of the country the city is set around the giant Genghis Khan Square, named after the ruthless founder of the 13th century Mongol Empire. Soviet control in the 20th century led to a religious purge and the city is dominated by several large Soviet-era buildings. The city is home to the restored 1830 Gandantegchinlen Buddhist Monastery as well as the best museums displaying historic and ethnographic artefacts.



South of the city are the Bogd Khan Mountain and the ruins of 18th Century Manzushir Monastery. Central Mongolia also encompasses Karakorum, the 13th century capital established by Genghis Khan. Northern Mongolia contains the country's deepest lake Khovsgol Nuur and the Amarbayasgalant Monastery which dates from early 18th century. The south is defined by the Gobi Desert, which includes the Three Beauties peaks; Yolyn Am, a deep gorge with ice; and the Flaming Cliffs, where dinosaur fossils have been found. The remote west is home to the Altai Tavan Bogd National Park and its dramatic high mountains including the highest, Khuiten Peak at 4374 meters.

Our Byroads 14 days 'Mongolian Discoverer' tour in July 2018 includes the famous local Naadam Nomad Festival. Join us on tour and witness firsthand the colourful traditions of the country's nomads and discover the magnificent beauty of this less-travelled nation. [Click here](#) for details.



## Byroads Featured Accommodation - Cuban 'Casas Particulares'

A 'casa particular' is Spanish for a 'private house' and in Cuba this is a popular form of accommodation for travellers. It is effectively a private home-stay, similar to our own bed and breakfast accommodation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of Cuba's main economic supporters, the country entered into a severe economic crisis and in 1997 the Cuban government decided to allow Cubans to rent out rooms in their houses or apartments to tourists. This measure allowed Cuban families to legally have a new source of revenue during bad economic times. It also allowed tourists a more authentic opportunity to meet Cubans and sample local Cuban cuisine. Today they are a popular form of accommodation, particularly in Havana and Trinidad.

Our 14 Day 'Rhythms of Cuba' tour uses the services of 'Casas Particulares' in the seaside town of Trinidad. These are generally more simple accommodation than hotels, but they are clean and comfortable and they afford a unique opportunity for you to get to know the local Cubans.

[Click here](#) to see our tour details.



## **Natural Disasters Update - Cuba & Mexico**

Following on from the recent hurricanes that have torn across the Caribbean and the earthquakes that have struck Mexico I wanted to provide an update on any likely impact that these natural disasters could have on the February 2018 Byroads Mexico and Cuba trips.

In both Cuba and Mexico I have been in touch with our Byroads local operators to obtain a first hand update on their current situations. The good news is that in both countries all the families and staff of our local operators are unharmed and are getting on with their daily lives.

Our Mexico operator reports that all accommodation for the Mexico tour is undamaged and operating as normal. There is some damage to the cathedrals in Taxco and Cuernavaca and these are currently closed whilst the damage is being investigated. All museums and other sites are operating as usual and are receiving tourists without any issues. The overall advice from the Mexico operator is that given that the tour is 4 months away our clients can expect a normal and uninterrupted tour, which is great news.

Similarly in Cuba our operator has reported that although the hurricanes have damaged several areas of Cuba it will not have any impact on the running of the Byroads Cuba tour. All accommodation, sites and museums etc are operating as per normal.

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