



Sevanavank Monastery, Sevan, Armenia

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Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the latest Byroads newsletter. The year is flying by with some great Byroads trips scheduled towards the end of the year in Morocco, Uzbekistan and Iran.

In this issue Mary Kelly, who travelled on her first Byroads trip to Morocco late last year has written of her most recent travel experiences on the February 2018 'Mexico & the Yucatan' trip. We also take a closer look at the small desert nation of Jordan and showcase an unusual hotel on the fringes of the Sahara used on our Moroccan tour.

One of the more common questions I am asked is how much lead in time I would recommend when booking a holiday with Byroads so in this edition I have provided some guidance on when to book and finally I provide an introduction to the Byroads booking agent 'Travel on Q,' who manage the booking process and are there to assist you with any questions you may have.

Best wishes,

Steve

## **Mexico & the Yucatan - by Mary Kelly**

Having travelled with Steve and Byroads previously I was excited to visit Mexico, not actually knowing a lot about the country, its history and people. The carefully crafted itinerary along with our dynamic and passionate local guide Ana, ensured we got to see all the must-see sights and hidden gems and learnt a lot about Mexico's ancient civilisations, rich indigenous culture as well as contemporary society.

We began our tour in Mexico city. Our modern hotel was well located in the historical centre, close to the main plaza, the Zocalo, the massive baroque/neo-classical Cathedral and the city temple ruins of the Aztecs. The city is safe and easy to walk around, the buildings quite elegant (despite the cracks – the city is slowly sinking) and the buskers add a charming musical element. It was very special to see the striking Diego Rivera murals showcasing Mexico's political history at the National Palace and visiting Frida Kahlo's colourful house was a moving experience.



Over 15 days we travelled by comfortable coach to the south, then across to the east coast. Mexico is a big country! We saw active volcanoes, vast plains, the Sierra Madre mountain range and then swam in the Caribbean sea. We visited many interesting and beautiful colonial towns and cities along the way – Taxco, Puebla and Oaxaca.

One of my favourite places was San Cristobel de las Casas, where we felt the temperature drop dramatically, in this indigenous highland location. The highlights were simply walking around the old streets getting a feel for the vibe of the place, lots of interesting shops and especially the local Indian markets offering gorgeous handicrafts, textiles, pottery, jewellery and clothing – I needed another day here! We visited a small



together on the ground strewn with fragrant pine-needles with their offerings of lit candles, flowers and bottles of Coca-cola! It was fascinating and other-worldly.



Other memorable activities included a canal gondola ride, an exhilarating speedboat ride through the Sumidero Canyon, seeing crocodiles, pink flamingo and other birdlife, visiting a local family for a home-cooked lunch (one of the best meals of the trip), making chocolate from scratch (best I've eaten), tasting fried grasshopper (crunchy) and enjoying a daily Margarita (addictive).

The great surprise lay in Mexico's ancient archaeological sites and ruins. The vastness of these well-preserved sites, coupled with the explanations of how these cities were constructed and how people lived added a fascinating dimension to our understanding of the origins and influences of this country.

Mexico is a curious mix of old and new. While it is a very Catholic country (so many churches!) it is also quite progressive in that Mexico has legalised same-sex marriage, introduced a sugar tax (diabetes is the No 1 health issue) yet has no pension structure for its elderly. I came back wanting to know more, to learn Spanish and of course return one day.

I'm a big fan of the Byroads travel formula. From the mode of transport, to the quality of the accommodation and the calibre of the local guides, Byroads holidays are authentic and great fun. Steve, as the brains behind the operation is organised and attentive, joins in the fun and is the glue that keeps everyone bubbling along.





The next Byroads 'Mexico & the Yucatan' trip starts in Mexico City on the 1st of February 2019 and can be linked in with the 'Rhythms of Cuba' tour. [Click here](#) to view or download our 4 page brochure.

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### **Country Profile - The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

Although a relatively young country (created in 1946) Jordan occupies an ancient land and one that bears the traces of many civilizations. Separated these days from ancient Palestine by the Jordan River, the region played a prominent role in biblical history. The country is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south, Iraq to the north-east, Syria to the north, Israel and Palestine to the west. The Dead Sea lies along its western borders and the country has a small shoreline on the Red Sea in its extreme south-west, but is otherwise landlocked. Jordan is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy ruled by King Abdallah II.





From 2004 to 2008 the country enjoyed strong economic growth however since the global economic slowdown and the large influx of refugees from the Syrian conflict economic growth has slowed dramatically. The Jordanian economy is one of the smallest economies in the region having little of the petroleum and gas reserves of its energy rich neighbours. The tourism sector is considered a cornerstone of the economy, being a large source of employment, hard currency and economic growth. Jordan is considered as among the safest of countries in the Middle East and offers a warm welcome to tourists.

Jordan has been traversed by camel caravans and Nabataean traders plying the legendary King's Highway for centuries whilst Roman legions, Muslim armies and the Crusaders have all swept through this ancient land on their journeys of conquest. Although largely desert, Jordan has lush farming lands, dramatic mountains and beautiful beaches. Crusader castles and ancient churches dot the countryside and there are the enduring sites of Wadi Rum, the Dead Sea and the jewel in the crown of the country's many antiquities, wonderful Petra, the ancient Nabataean city carved into the pink sandstone cliffs in Jordan's southwestern desert.



The Byroads 8 days '**Kingdom of Jordan**' tour starts in Amman on the 28th of Oct, 2019. [Click here](#) for details. The tour can also be combined with our tour of Oman to provide a comprehensive look at two of the region's most peaceful and interesting desert nations. [Click here](#) for details of our 15 days '**Oman & Jordan**' tour

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### When to Book your Byroads Holiday

I am often asked how far in advance I recommend booking a Byroads tour. When considering this question it is always worth remembering that to reserve your place on

not to go ahead for any reason, this deposit would be refunded in full to you. By paying your deposit early this secures your place on the trip and allows the tour to reach minimum group numbers quickly and you can start planning your holiday with confidence.

Importantly, this also allows Byroads the ability to confirm hotel allocations early with our preferred properties. Many of our hotels are small boutique hotels with limited availability so the further out we are able to advise them of our group size the greater the opportunity to secure the best available rooms. With these points in mind my recommendation is to try wherever possible to book between **6 to 12 months** out. I do understand however that there may be times when this is not possible and of course Byroads will always do its best to accommodate any late bookers.



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### **Travel on Q – Your Byroads Booking Agent**

As I travel with each Byroads group and am therefore not always on hand to receive bookings and to offer prompt travel advice Byroads has secured the services of Travel on Q to manage its bookings. Travel on Q is a small, professional travel company run by Carole Grassby and Tina Briggs who between them have a wealth of travel experiences. I first worked with Carole many years ago in Sydney when we both represented the UK based expedition company Encounter Overland, one of the pioneers of overland travel in Africa, Asia and South America. Travel on Q today offers the Byroads customer a personalised travel service that can meet all their travel needs. Whether it is destination knowledge, flights, travel insurance, visa services or additional holiday arrangements Travel on Q can assist.

Travel on Q is affiliated with itravel, a wholly owned Australian company with over 130 dedicated and passionate travel agents. itravel is IATA (International Air Transport Association) accredited; a member of AFTA (the Australian Federation of Travel Agents) and ATAS accredited ensuring that all its agents are appropriately qualified to offer professional advice and quality service.

To book your Byroads trip or if you have any queries at all about a particular tour please contact Carole or Tina by email at [travel@travelonQ.com.au](mailto:travel@travelonQ.com.au) or if you prefer to speak to them in person please call them on 02 9357 6800.

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### **Feature Accommodation - Kasbah Mohayut - Merzouga, Morocco**

The small Moroccan town of Merzouga in the Sahara Desert is situated close to the Algerian border. It is known as the gateway to Erg Chebbi, a huge expanse of sand dunes north of the town. At the foot of these great dunes lies the small 3 star boutique hotel of Kasbah Mohayut - the perfect place to combine relaxation, authenticity and adventure!



The Kasbah offers spacious rooms and suites set around the swimming pool or the patio. Each room combines lovely Moroccan features and is air conditioned. There is an excellent restaurant at the Kasbah serving delicious Berber specialities and there are great views to be had from the roof top terraces where at night you can admire the wonderful star filled sky.





The Byroads '**Moroccan Mosaic**' tour stays at Kasbah Mohayut and includes a sunset camel ride to the tops of the nearby dunes. [Click here](#) to view or download our 4 page colour brochure.

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