



13th December 2020

Hello from Byroads,

I hope everyone is well after a very difficult year. While all of us have had to contend with the Covid-19 pandemic, others have had the added burden of drought, bushfires and floods to contend with. No doubt 2020 is a year we will all remember. While the world is still in the grips of the pandemic, Australia and New Zealand are now in an enviable position. Both countries have little or no community transmission and with the rollout of effective vaccines commencing I think there is now cause for cautious optimism going into 2021. Certainly it's wonderful to be able to travel interstate again to see family and friends this Christmas and I'm feeling more confident that in 2021 we will all have the opportunity to travel even further afield.

In this newsletter you will find details of the withdrawal or rescheduling of some tours in the first half of 2021 to give time for the rollout of vaccines. The first Byroads trip in 2021 will now be towards the end of August to explore Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Stephen and Meredith McDonald from Goulburn travelled on the February 2020 Byroads 'Jordan and Egypt' trip and have contributed to this newsletter. They share with us their impressions and experiences exploring the highlights and some lesser visited sites of Egypt. I also shine a spotlight on the small South Caucasus country of Georgia and feature the Sacha Lodge, deep in the heart of Ecuador's Amazon Jungle.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy Christmas and New Year. I am approaching 2021 with growing optimism and although I know COVID-19 is impacting travel

plans right now continue daydreaming about your next adventure and when the time is right to start travelling again Byroads will be here to help you on your way.

Best wishes

Steve

2021 Tour Schedule Update

With the end of the year almost upon us I want to take this opportunity to update you on some changes that I have made below to the Byroads tour schedules for 2021 and 2022. As you may be aware the only two trips to run this year were in Jordan and Egypt before the pandemic hit. All remaining tours in 2020 were cancelled. Now that the situation is becoming clearer regarding the roll-out of suitable vaccines I have withdrawn or rescheduled trips in the first half of 2021. I have based these changes on the assumption that it will take until at least mid-year before vaccines have been procured and then distributed widely enough for confidence to return to those seeking to travel abroad again and for regular flights to resume. I'm very pleased that the vast majority of people who were unable to travel in 2020 have indicated that they want to roll-over their deposits and travel with Byroads in either 2021 or 2022.

- The Kingdom of Jordan - 1 Feb 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [14 Feb 2022](#)
- Jordan & Egypt – 1 Feb 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [14 Feb 2022](#)
- Egypt Encompassed - 8 Feb 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [21 Feb 2022](#)
- Mexico & the Yucatan – 5 Mar 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [11 Mar 2022](#)
- Mexico & Cuba – 5 Mar 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [11 Mar 2022](#)
- Rhythms of Cuba – 20 Mar 2021 is withdrawn. Next tour [26 Mar 2022](#)
- Ecuador Adventure - 9 Apr 2022 is withdrawn. Next tour [8 Apr 2022](#)
- Ecuador & the Galapagos – 9 Apr 2022 is withdrawn. Next tour [8 Apr 2022](#)
- The Galapagos Islands - 15 Apr 21 is withdrawn. Next tour [14 Apr 2022](#)
- South Caucasus – 21 May 21 has been rescheduled to [8 Oct 2021](#)
- Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan – [22 Aug 21](#) is unchanged
- Uzbekistan - [28 Aug 2021](#) is unchanged
- Turkey Discovery [13 Sep 2021](#) is unchanged

All tours are now updated on the Byroads website at www.byroads.com.au



Pyramid of Khufu - Giza Plateau - Greater Cairo

A Traveller's Tale - Egypt Encompassed- by Stephen & Meredith McDonald

February 2020 saw us joining Steve on a Byroads tour of Egypt. We arrived in Cairo, a bustling city with a massive population almost as large as that of Australia. There was so much to see in this desert metropolis and our group of twelve were kept busy and entertained. We travelled to nearby Saqqara and the stepped Pyramid of Djoser and then to the even more famous pyramids on the Giza plateau including the Great Pyramid of Khufu and the Sphinx. They are truly amazing constructions as is the nearby Grand Egyptian Museum which is nearing completion. When finished it will be one of the largest museums in the world and is already being called the 'Crown Jewel of Egypt'.

In Downtown Cairo we were guided through the Egyptian Museum with its vast array of artefacts from archaeological discoveries all over Egypt. Shopping in the Khan el Khalili Bazaar was such a wonderful experience and the Mosque of Ibn Toulon in Cairo's Islamic Quarter was amazing. At the end of our Cairo stay we joined the sleeper train, travelling beside the Nile River to Luxor in Upper Egypt.



Khan el Khalili, Islamic Cairo

Luxor's Karnak Temple is reputed to be the largest temple complex ever built. Having explored Karnak we crossed to the west bank of the Nile to Hatshepsut Temple and to the Valley of the Kings

where we entered several of the more than 60 tombs so far discovered, including that of the 'boy king' Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

The small Nile cruise boat “La Traviata” was our home for four nights and proved perfect for our cruise along the Nile to Aswan. With comfortable rooms, a wonderful restaurant and bar the consensus among the group was that the cruise was one of the highlight of the tour. Relaxing in the company of good travel companions, enjoying a drink and watching the passing scenery made us appreciate how the Nile continues to be the lifeblood of the country, as it has been for thousands of years.

Heading upstream to Aswan we stopped to visit the great temples at Edfu and Kom Ombu and in Aswan we enjoyed a sunset felucca sail and went behind the wall of the high dam to visit the beautiful Philae Temple.



From Aswan we flew south to Abu Simbel to view the enormous temples that had been raised during the building of the high dam. We were back in Aswan in time for lunch at our Nubian village homestay and in the evening took a boat to Seheit Island for dinner with a Nubian family in their home. A wonderful experience and another highlight!

Flying back to Cairo we drove to Ismailia, halfway along the Suez Canal. A visit to the canal allowed us to witness the heavily laden ships moving along the canal that links the Mediterranean with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The building of the canal is considered one of the world's great engineering feats.

From Cairo we took the desert road to Alexandria on the Mediterranean Coast. Just to the west is the WW2 battlefield of El Alamein with its military museum and the well-kept Commonwealth war cemetery. It's a sombre place and a reminder of the sacrifices made in the deserts of North Africa. Alexandria is another big city with a great deal of development happening to revive it as a tourist destination. With two days in the city we were able to see the Catacombs of Kom El Shuqqafa, Rosetta, Abou Mandour Mosque and the Nile Delta. Also in Alexandria is the new Library, which serves as a research centre and commemorates the Library of Alexandria that was lost in antiquity



We returned via the Nile delta farmlands to Cairo and to the end of our tour. Both of us have travelled extensively in groups and privately, but nothing has been better than this Byroads holiday. Steve has put together a wonderful tour of Egypt which covers the length of the country. The accommodation was very good, and the various modes of travel were comfortable. Our fellow travellers were a friendly bunch of a similar vintage and our local guide, Waleed was a fountain of knowledge and fitted right in with the group. We were able to meet many local people who were friendly and welcoming. Between them, Steve and Waleed ensured that everything ran smoothly. Egypt is definitely worth visiting. It has a mixture of old and new and a rich history of culture, religion, politics, conflict, and engineering and is so much more than the pyramids.

The next Byroads 13 days '[Egypt Encompassed](#)' tour is now scheduled to start in Cairo on the 21st February 2022. This trip can also be combined with the Jordan trip to make up the 19 days '[Jordan & Egypt](#)' adventure starting in Amman on 14 Feb 2022.



Feature Accommodation - Sacha Amazon Lodge - Ecuador

Sacha Lodge is an accessible 2000 hectare private ecological reserve in the heart of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The astounding biodiversity of its pristine rainforest provides the opportunity to encounter incredible wildlife including some 600 species of birds.



Sacha Lodge - Amazon Rainforest

Imagine walking across a bridge suspended over the rainforest canopy, paddling through creeks in search of monkeys and river otters, climbing to the very top of a giant kapok tree or swimming in a black-water lake, threading your way through trees in search of the world's tiniest monkey. And at the end of the day you will return to the luxury of Sacha Lodge to relax and unwind and to enjoy a drink whilst looking out over the waters of the Pilchicocha Lake.



The Byroads '[Ecuador Adventure](#)' and the '[Ecuador & the Galapagos](#)' trips spend 3 nights in this remarkable lodge. The next Byroads tours to visit the lodge start in Quito on the 8th of April 2022. If you love wildlife, you will love your stay at Sacha.

Alaverdi Winery - Georgia



Country Profile - Georgia

Wedged between Turkey, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia until recently was little known among Western tourists. Considered a holiday haunt of the privileged elite of the Soviet Union, today's country has now become a deeply rewarding travel destination for all. Georgia is a country rich with history. The language of Georgia is one of the oldest languages in the world that is still used and the country's current capital, Tbilisi, is over 1500 years old.

Much of Georgia's history involves portions of the country being part of some other empire including the Persian, the Romans, Byzantium, the Mongols, and the Turkish Empires. During the 11th and 12th centuries Georgia experienced its golden age. It became a powerful independent kingdom under the leadership of its greatest rulers including King David the Builder and Queen Tamar. In 1783 the country became a protectorate of Russia. Except for a brief time of freedom in the early 1900s, for the next 200 years Georgia would be in some way part of or tied to Russia; first to the Russian Empire and later to the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991 Georgia declared its independence and became a free country.



Gergeti Trinity Church - Georgia

Georgia is largely mountainous with the Great Caucasus Mountains in the north and the Lesser Caucasus Mountains in the south. The nation's highest peak is Mt Shkhara at 5200 metres. In the west the Kolkhida Lowland opens to the Black Sea in the west. The Mtkvari River which originates in Turkey as the Kura River flows through the broad, fertile valley between the Greater and Lesser Caucasus mountains, passing through the capital Tbilisi before flowing into Azerbaijan to the Caspian Sea. These fertile lands gave life to the earliest recorded wine industry in 6000 BC.

The country's main economic activities include cultivation of agricultural products such as grapes, citrus fruits, and hazelnuts; mining of manganese, copper, and gold; and producing alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, metals, machinery, and chemicals in small-scale industries. The country imports nearly all of its needed supplies of natural gas and oil products and has sizeable hydropower capacity that now provides most of its electricity needs.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is Georgia's dominant religious institution, and 84% of Georgian people are members. The Orthodox Church of Georgia is one of the oldest churches in the world.

The next Byroads trip visiting Georgia is the 8th October 2021 '[South Caucasus](#)' tour.

BYROADS TOUR SCHEDULE 2021 & 2022

[The Kingdom of Jordan - 8 Days](#)

[Egypt Encompassed - 13 Days](#)

[Jordan & Egypt - 20 Days](#)

[South Caucasus - 16 Days](#)

[Uzbekistan - 12 Days](#)

[Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan - 18 Days](#)

[Moroccan Mosaic - 17 Days](#)

[Mexico & the Yucatan - 15 Days](#)

[Rhythms of Cuba - 14 Days](#)

[Mexico & Cuba - 29 Days](#)

[Ecuador Adventure - 8 Days](#)

[Ecuador & the Galapagos - 16 Days](#)

[Galapagos Islands - 10 Days](#)

[Turkey Discovery - 16 Days](#)