



**Anita's Travel with Friends**  
**EXPLORATION, EDUCATION, ADVENTURE!**  
Sharing travel information and experiences

February, 2008

Welcome to the third edition of *Anita's Travel with Friends* newsletter.

I've been looking forward to sharing exciting upcoming plans, and adventure experiences with you all. Beginning in 2006, I've been blessed to be able to expand my travel schedule to twelve weeks a year. How exciting is that!

And I have a new website where you can view my next three years of travel goals and plans, lots of my photos and some of my stories. Check it out at [www.anitabrace.com](http://www.anitabrace.com). See prior editions and bulletins of **Anita's Travel with Friends**, and my current and upcoming photography exhibits.

Now involved in active travel for almost a quarter of my time, it is imperative for me to gain access to the best travel prices, and tons of additional knowledge. A little more than a year ago, I became a registered Travel Agent with a substantial online company, Global Travel Trends. Not only does this enhance my ability to get the best deals for myself and my friends, now I can assist you with your individual travel plans, offering information, researching and helping you get great bargains on your upcoming personal destinations.

And long-term planner that I am, I have that ever-evolving dream-list of new places I want to go and favorites that entice me to plan return visits to re-experience in greater depth the things that resonated in my soul.

So here we go. . . again!

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## **Scandinavia & St. Petersburg – Incomparable Geography, Contemporary Class, Incredible History, Art and Architecture – June 2008**

Near the top of the world, majestic natural splendors combine with culture-rich cities. Narrow cobbled streets, historic castles and cathedrals, open-air markets, and tranquil but dramatic fiords combine with modern prize-winning public art and architecture in this unique destination.

Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Copenhagen, Oslo, Bergen, and Stockholm display singular and complex ocean-influenced histories and cultures. Picturesque and quaint villages and farms and dramatic waterfalls and glacier-carved ravines lend the tranquility and ambience of the country-life side of these beautiful countries.

The three week trip will combine the best elements of incredibly dramatic and beautiful scenery, cultural exploration of traditional villages and markets, and immersion in fascinating archeology and history. Our tour will include many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, along with encountering local life and enjoying nature.

Our trip starts in St. Petersburg, the Venice of the North. Four nights, and three full days allow us to view the Hermitage, sumptuous Palaces, the Russian Museum, and many other stunning sights.

Leaving on the train to Finland, we disembark near Lappeenranta and spend some time enjoying the countryside, and staying in a rural manor near the town of Porvoo, the second oldest and most photographed in Finland. On to Helsinki, Ferry to Stockholm, Sweden, from there to Copenhagen. After Denmark, we board an overnight ferry to Oslo, Norway. Enjoying the city, including a boat tour, then on to board the Famous Flamsbana, one of the world's most spectacular rail journeys, board a leisurely fjord cruise, stop in the heart of the fjord region, and continue to the Atlantic-coast historic city of Bergen. The tour ends with a return flight to Oslo.

The maximum group size is ten, and there are several of you on the “I want to go to Scandinavia list”. Contact me immediately if you are interested and I will email you the detailed itinerary.

I may decide to add on a few days in Lapland for myself (and anyone else who wishes to keep me company) to experience the far north, its geography, history, and the Sami (reindeer tribe) culture.

## **African Epic – The Adventure of a Lifetime. Seven Countries, Six Weeks, a Hundred Inimitable Experiences – September-October 2008**

South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Madagascar, and Rwanda – the dates are set, the preliminary itinerary in place, and the decisions on the details are in process.

The South African travel company that did such a magnificent job for my 2004 trip is presenting a wonderful plan to encompass all the places and experiences I ask for. Wanting to go back to re-experience the places I loved and use the opportunity to explore many of the top-rated adjacent areas, I am planning a trip that will encompass as much of the absolute best of southern Africa as possible, east to west.

Don't have the opportunity to travel for six weeks? There will be shorter segments available. Contact me for the preliminary details.

The 40-day trip will combine the best elements of wonderful spring flowers, dramatic mountain, desert, and ocean scenery, multiple Safaris to top-rated destinations in Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, and Madagascar, cultural tours of traditional villages and markets, incomparable Victoria Falls, and personal interface with and support of at least two children's social projects. Available adventures can include balloon ascents, helicopter flights, ATV sand dune rides, jungle hikes, sunset cruises, and more. A visit to the magnificent rare and endangered mountain gorillas will be added to the end of the tour for those who don't want to pass up this one-more once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Email me soon if you want more information on this trip. There are already some sign-ups, and group size will be limited, normally to 10.

## **In the Works – 2009 and 2010 probabilities list:**

### **Antarctica, Galapagos & Ecuador, Guatemala, Myanmar, Chile & Patagonia, Northern Greece & the Dalmatian Coast**

Antarctica – not a group trip I'm putting together, but I will need a room-mate. And any one else who wants to join a small group tour to this area will be welcome. I'm doing the research now, have a file folder of possibilities, and plan to book for January 2009.

Galapagos & Ecuador – September/October 2009. This is spring-time at this location, and the best time to explore these incredible natural islands, enjoying the growing families in this restricted area. Plus take advantage of the nearby destinations to experience the surrounding cultures and countryside. Maybe start at the ocean's edge, Guayaquil, and climb after the islands tour to the high country in the Quito area. What do you think?

Myanmar (also known as Burma) – Likely late 2009 and/or early 2010. This is a hot country, and late fall or winter is best for me. Although I love every place I've been, I must return to this incredible country. The most scenic, strongly Buddhist, and friendly Asian country I have visited, with an often serene and generous lifestyle. In spite of the political hardships, tourists are very well treated, and outside the government-sponsored high-end accommodations, are able to help improve the local economies in many destinations throughout the country.

Northern Greece & the Dalmatian Coast – I want to see this before it becomes the absolute hot-spot of tourism. And as usual, stray off the beaten track. Maybe spring of 2010, when the wildflowers are exceptional in many areas, and before the number of travelers increases in summer. A month spent in Greece during May 2006 was perfect weather, north to south.

Chile and Patagonia – Late fall or winter 2010. (There summer season is our winter.) And I have heard incredible experiences from friends who have adventured in these areas. From remote national parks to bustling ocean side towns, there is a lot to explore.

Guatemala – Don't have a schedule here yet, but it will fit in. Somewhere. The colorful culture, incredible archeology, and abundant nature have received praises from several friends. My turn!

Travel tip: Take \$100 in \$1 bills. (New is nice, and almost universally accepted.) They often come in handy for tips, small gifts, and incidental expenses where change is difficult, and you are out of local currency. It's worked well for me for several years. The best time to be able to get new \$1 bills is just before Christmas. That's when your bank will most likely have them available.

### **Recommended reads:**

A Companion to Africa (the PBS Series), John Reader, Photographs by Michael S. Lewis. ©2002 National Geographic Society. I had to include this review in the newsletter for the second time. I checked this book out of the library before my inaugural trip to south and east Africa in 2004. When I started reading, I couldn't put it down. History, geography, economics, ecology, all compiled with the most intriguing essays and beautifully descriptive photographs imaginable. As the dust jacket blurb says, "A wonderful, extravagant tapestry of peoples, flora, and fauna, *Africa* is as colorful, as beautiful, as alluring, and as endlessly fascinating as the magnificent continent it celebrates." I couldn't wait to add it to my library and give it as a gift to two friends who traveled with me to these fascinating lands.

Hearing Birds Fly: A Nomadic Year in Mongolia, Louisa Waugh, ©2003, Abacus Book, Time Warner Book Group, U.K. After two years as a journalist in the capital of Ulaanbaatar, Louisa's applications to teach English in the countryside only gave her a position to be fed and housed in return for teaching in the very remote western mountainous portion of this altogether sparsely-populated country. Her year of trials, observations, and ultimately a developing understanding and acceptance of this nomadic, practical and hardship enduring culture is a fascinating read.

## Blue Pearl

Northern Mongolia, Lake Khovsgol – July 2007

When I mentioned Mongolia, friends would say, “What is there to see in such a dry, flat country?” The steppes - vast, mostly level and treeless plains - are a major part of eastern Mongolia. Almost a synonym for their nomadic way of life.

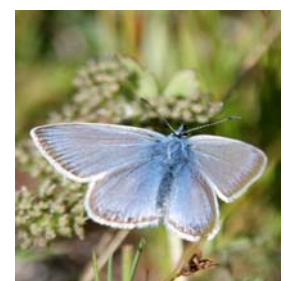
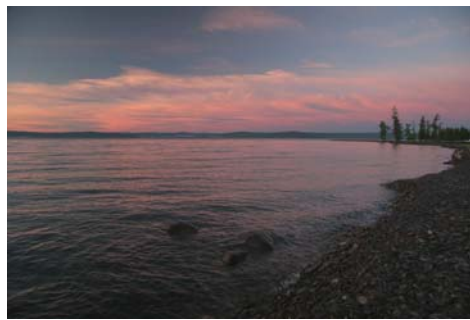
Little did I know. Until beginning to research travel in this remote and newly-democratic Asian country, I had no idea that there were so many different aspects of Mongolian geography. Including the “Switzerland of the North”.



Bordered by grassy, flower-strewn wet meadows or steep, rocky, forested cliffs, Lake Khovsgol lies near the northern border of Central Mongolia. Its 136 kilometer length at just under a mile-high altitude is cradled by the gently-peaked Khoridol Saridag Nuruu mountain range, the northern tip of the lake nearly touching the border of Siberia.

Pristine water is so clear that the pure, arching blue sky creates an intense luminosity. The reflection of white clouds adds more light, a subtle silken iridescence bringing a jeweled tranquility. Local year-round residents call it “The Blue Pearl.”

Washes of intense colors create a compelling kaleidoscope throughout the green meadows. Hundreds of flowers seen elsewhere in expensive nurseries or perennial catalogs captivate the senses. Dark blue and dusky black delphiniums, miniature stalks of dusty-pink speckled lilies, a blue mist made by crowds of forget-me-nots, bellflowers, monkshood, geraniums, buttercups, violets, anemones, bright orange trollius, drifts of fuchsia stalks of tiny orchids combine endlessly, creating a riot of hues.



**If you are a lover of nature and want to be in the middle of it, this is a prime destination. Summertime hiking and horseback riding, fishing, kayaking or a boat ride to visit nearby bird-nesting islands will show you the most glorious scenery imaginable.**

**Spending four days here was not enough – I didn't want to leave.**

## **Where are you Dreaming of?**

**Iceland. . . New Zealand. . . Ireland. . . Italy. . . Bhutan. . . Tibet. . .?**

**Where do you want to go, and when? Share your favorite travel experiences, tips, and photos. And let's make plans, get together, and go!**

### *Quote of the Month*

*“Discovery is the result of a unique combination of curiosity, observation, knowledge, and persistence.” First interpretive sign-Discovery Trail, Bristle Cone Pines National Park, Bishop, CA*

### **Bon Voyage**

**Anita**

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This newsletter is a non-commercial communication between friends. Any travel arrangements made will be a collaboration of individuals, and each participant will be responsible for their own transportation to an agreed upon departure point, payment of fees, visa and passport arrangements, and any trip cancellation or medical insurance.