

Greetings, One and All!

Happy New Year 2008



It's that time again. It's time to wish you all that you would wish yourself and more. It's time to bring you up to date on what we have done this year of 2007 that is almost over.

Two years ago we would have been surprised to learn that we would end 2006 and start 2007 in Australia. Even at New Year's 2007, we would have been hard put to predict that we would end 2007 and start 2008 in Australia. But that's what happened – in between making our first complete circle of the globe since we started our travels eight and a half years ago.

Ending 2006/ Starting 2007 in Sydney



Sydney Harbor – We lived at top-left of Picture

In case you've forgotten, we ended 2006 by working our way through Indonesia and flying from Bali to Sydney in early November. The rest of the year we spent in Sydney getting to know and love its water views, its fresh sea breezes, and yes, of course, its beaches, although in southern springtime the waters off Sydney were still much too cold for us to go swimming comfortably.

When January rolled around we were uncertain what to do when our apartment lease was up at the end of January. Should we buy a car? Should we fly to New Zealand? Our decision was made much easier when we got an email from our friend Veronica in Paris asking if we would like to take her apartment again in April. We went back to Sydney travel agents Flight Centre and found their good deal was still on: we could have an around-the-world ticket for a reasonable A\$2,500 that would allow us to stop off in South Africa on the way

to Europe and in the USA on our way back to Sydney. That in essence is what we did: When you can't decide what to do where you are, simply go somewhere else!



Bondi Beach

Towards the end of January we sold the few items we had bought for the flat (a TV, an electric frying pan, a fan), our second-hand bicycles that had brought us so much fun, and our camping chairs that we often carried down to Rushcutter's Bay Park on sunny afternoons for a picnic and to the Domaine for free concerts.

South Africa



Lion in Kruger National Park

Unburdened, off we went to Johannesburg, thirteen hours and nine time zones away. We had been talking about visiting South Africa for decades and yet were a bit surprised that we were actually there. Perhaps shell-shocked might be a better word to describe Jan's feelings. The cumulative effect of being very jet-lagged, and worried to death about security in this most infamous of infamous places, was compounded by our arrival by guesthouse car from the airport to our chosen backpacker's guesthouse in a Johannesburg suburb. The guesthouse was set in large gardens, which were surrounded by a very high wall, which was topped with barbed wire. To get into the compound you had to ring a bell and get someone inside to open a huge iron gate. For Jan it felt as though we were going to prison; Gerry, of course, was much more sanguine.



Elephants in Kruger National Park

But time solves all problems; over the next five days we caught up on sleep, gathered information about renting a car for our travels around the country, and slowly started to feel more comfortable as we chatted to other guests. We managed two outings to a local shopping center while limiting our tourism to the famous Apartheid Museum, 15 km away on the other side of downtown. The taxi driver who drove us to the museum and back refused absolutely to drive us near the train station because he was afraid thieves would break his taxi windows to get at us rich foreigners. Gerry, seeing university students going about their ways as we drove past them, was unconvinced that Johannesburg is as dangerous as the taxi driver and its reputation makes out.

At the end of the five days, we had found a car to rent and drove off in it on an 11-week adventure. Our car was called a Chico, but in reality it was a very old-fashioned, South African made, and very ill-equipped Volkswagen Golf. It had no air-conditioning, no automatic windows and no remote door-locking. But it was almost brand-new, very economic and very reliable. We were definitely not inclined to cut corners on the latter.



View from Table Mountain, South Africa

Our eleven weeks took us 11,000 kilometers from Johannesburg north to Pretoria for an enjoyable stop, soaking up some history and doing laundry. On we went to the Punda Maria (the northern most) gate of Kruger National Park and ten days in the park (enough time to see all the big five, most of the little five, and much more wonderful stuff) with a side trip to drive the Paradise Route and to see the Blyde River Canyon

area. We continued south through Swaziland and out to the Santa Lucia National Wetlands Reserve and then worked our way along the coast to Durban to stay with our friend Pam.

We have been corresponding with Pam for more than thirty years. We met her in Nancy, France, not too long after Gerry and I had met and since then have been promising her and ourselves that we would visit her some day. What a joyful reunion it was! Pam made us wonderfully welcome in her lovely hillside home and introduced us to her horde of unruly but truly lovable dogs. She had eight when we left her and was vowing to let the tribe dwindle in numbers as fate would surely decree, but only weeks after we left, we heard that she had taken in a ninth which otherwise would have had to be put down. Through her eyes and those of a dozen strangers that we met we got some insight into the life of South Africans, black and white.

Our stay seemed oh so short, but we would have another reunion to look forward to as we said goodbye to Durban and headed through the Transkei for the southern most tip of Africa and the point where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet. We were too late in the year for whale-watching but we did catch sight of dolphins on one of our coastal walks and penguins near the Cape and were enchanted by the wildness of the waters all along the coast.



Penguins on the Cape Peninsula, South Africa

Finally, a few days after visiting the Cape of Good Hope and nearly six weeks into our trip, we reached our furthest point from Johannesburg, Cape Town! There we spent an all-too-short six days getting to know it and its environs, including of course a trip up to Table Mountain and Cape Point, the terrific aquarium and botanical garden. Nearby we stayed in delightful Franschoek and visited Stillebosch.

Then it was inland for the return journey to Johannesburg and visits to more famous game parks and the SA desert. We took an amazing drive through Lesotho, land-locked, high-mountain scenery that is breathtakingly beautiful and astonishingly poor. Back in South Africa we drive through the breath taking area of Clarens and the Royal Natal National Park that follows the border of Lesotho. We followed this by an intensive three day visit/study of the Battlefields country. Finally down to the Drakensberg Mountains we went to meet up with Pam again and to get to know one of her favorite holiday destinations, where the dogs can run free and everyone can enjoy the majestic views of the Dragon Mountains. Our little Chico had already more than proved its mettle by driving us over miles and miles of gravel roads in Lesotho and once again it proved its sturdiness on the unpaved roads into and out of the Drakensberg.

Finally, however, it all had to come to an end. We said goodbye to Pam, drove the many unpaved kilometers out of the mountains, saw some more Boer and Zulu sites in passing the Battlefields, and a day later we were at Oliver Tambo International Airport boarding a flight for Frankfurt, the end of our outbound round-the-world journey.

On To Paris



Hotel des Invalides, Paris

Our terrific fare was offered by Lufthansa and one of the conditions was that we route our European legs through Frankfurt. That meant that we flew to Paris via Frankfurt and later from London to Newark via Frankfurt. We would have liked to have time to stop and see Frankfurt proper, but sadly Veronica's flat was sitting empty waiting for us and we could no longer dawdle; afterwards we would have used up Gerry's 90 day visa and it wouldn't be possible. (We are always having such problems. Visas are another reason why we left Australia, to come back at the end of the year.)



Place de la Concorde, Paris

We arrived in Paris as the French presidential election campaign reached its climax; we got to go to giant rallies for the four major candidates: Nicolas Sarkozy, who eventually won for the UMP, François Bayrou, the "spoiler" from the centrist UDF, Ségolène Royale, the candidate of the socialist party, the PS, and Jean-Marie Le Pen, the candidate everyone loves to hate from the National Front party.



Le Moulin Rouge, Pigalle, Paris

We got to take two lightning trips and experience the joys of TGV travel. Going along at 300 km/hour *on the ground* is pretty impressive, with trucks and trees whizzing by. (In the air at high altitudes even much higher speeds are not so spectacular). The first trip was to Lille to say hello to our friends Dinah and Mick from London, and the second to Port La Nouvelle on the Mediterranean to attend the wedding of our second cousin, Bertrand to the love of his life, Pascale. There we were surprise guests; Bertrand, who invited us, had kept our coming visit secret from all of Jan's relatives.



Parisian Patisserie

Half of April had gone on the elections, then June rushed by with the two visits, and soon it was mid July and we had to leave. (What happened to May? We just lived (and well).)

Back to the English Speaking World



Darlington in the rain

Now things speeded up. Rather than three months in a country we reduced ourselves to a month here and there. From Paris, we took a bus to London and another bus to Darlington to say hello to Jan's family and celebrate her sister-in-law Jhap's fiftieth birthday. We also had the rare pleasure of hosting Jan's college friend Cheryl who came down from Scotland for the day. Then, all too soon, it was back to London to say hello to Dinah and Mick again and to Paloma. And then it was off again, this time to New Jersey to catch up with Moshe and Cris, Ron and Virginia, Faina and Simon, Ann and Vic, Sue and Jemma, Li-Wei, Zongsheng, and Yiqing.



Darlington in the sunshine

There was too little time for all we would have liked to do, but by this time we had decided that we should get back to Australia before their high summer and so should not dawdle too long in the northern hemisphere. We had to get from New Jersey to Vancouver, Canada, under our own steam; as our first step we opted to take an Amtrak train from New York to Chicago, our first ever American passenger train trip together. It was a fun trip; even though we had to sit up all night the seats were big and comfortable compared to airline seats and the restaurant car served delicious brewed decaf coffee.



Chicago Botanical Gardens Prairie

In suburban Deerfield we stayed with Gerry's brother Allen and his wife Barbara, visited with their daughter Jennifer and her husband Chuck, and got to know their gorgeous girls, Rachel and Kate. Gerry got to trace down his roots – his mother grew up in Chicago – by having a reunion with half a dozen cousins and locating the graves of his maternal grandparents. The same grandparents who had immigrated from Narodichi, a small Russian/Ukrainian village before World War I that we visited in 2002. At a small barbeque Gerry met by chance a man whose parents came from Narodichi!

We also got in a bit of bicycle riding which pleased us and went to the Chicago Botanical Garden. The latter emphasized plants of the Great Plains; how different it was from the Kirstenbosch Gardens, in Cape Town, with its glorious Proteas and from the soon-to-be visited gardens of Canberra suffering but surviving under long-term drought conditions.



Pike's Place Market, Seattle

From Chicago we flew to Seattle where we spent a couple of days seeing the Downtown, the Space Needle, and the wonderful Pike's Place Market, before boarding a bus to Vancouver where we spent a week. We had originally hoped to take some kind of boat ride along the inner passage but we had too little time and so put it off for another time. Our life is a constant game of comparisons and so a visit to the Anthropology Museum of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver allowed us to compare American Indian culture with that of Australian aborigines as shown in the museums of Sidney and Melbourne.

Hawaii – Diamond Head - Waikiki



Waikiki from Diamond Head

From Vancouver, we flew to Honolulu and were surprised to really enjoy our week near and on what must be the most famous beach in the world: Waikiki. We swam most mornings and evenings, walked up to Diamond Head to get great views, and visited the Battleship Missouri and the Arizona memorial for a taste of history.

Full Circle, Mate



Suitably named Snowy Mountains, New South Wales

And so it was that our trip came full circle and from Honolulu on a Wednesday we flew to Sydney, landing on Friday Sept 29, having lost Thursday when we crossed the dateline. In Sydney we found a temporary home from home in Kriskindl, a great hostel run by a former Catholic priest, John and his wife Mary. We stayed there two weeks while we tried to find a car to buy that 1) we thought would take us around Australia without breaking down, and 2) wouldn't break our budget. It was tough.



Wingan's Inlet, New South Wales

While trying to make up our minds, we decided that no matter what we should extend our visas. We expected to stay in Australia only four or five months, but our automatic visa on arrival only gave us three. In spite of encountering a rather unhelpful immigration officer, we did get nine-month visas that allow us to stay until July 2008 if necessary. Simultaneously, we found on Craig's List that someone was trying to sublet an apartment in Melbourne. We decided we should take the apartment and perhaps buy a car in Melbourne. The day after we settled on the apartment we found a car.



Lizard at Wingan's Inlet, New South Wales

Two days later we were on our way by car to Melbourne, with stops in Canberra, the Snowy Mountains and Hobart Beach, Wingan Inlet and several other beaches. We were delighted to get to see our first real live, not in a zoo, kangaroos as well as our first, (but distant) sighting of a whale and a near sighting of a pod of dolphins. Almost every day of the trip we took a long, long walk on the beach or in the mountains. Half of our nights we camped: We nearly froze in the Namadgi National Park and were eaten alive at Wingan's Inlet. But it was wonderful, as was learning about Australian Caravan parks (which offered great cabins) and self-catering Cabins which are far more luxurious than the name implies and saved us from a rainy night under a tent.

Melbourne



Melbourne Central Business District

One moment to the next (as it seems, although it was two weeks) we were in Melbourne where we have been ever since and from where we are writing this account. We quickly found our short-term apartment and immediately liked it for its spaciousness and 1950's atmosphere. We didn't like having to move our car twice a day as parking was not provided; fortunately after two weeks we borrowed a parking place from the upstairs neighbor.



**Building where we stayed in Melbourne;
we were in the ground floor apartment on the right**

In our first week we found bicycles and have enjoyed them ever since, going up the nearby Yarra river on them and to the CBD (Central Business District, 6 km distant), puffing as much as we ever did in Sydney. We also got library cards and became familiar with three of the city's terrific public libraries.

We made contact with Michael Price, Jan's boss from Hong Kong days, and enjoyed getting to know him again during a three-day visit to his country farm as well as several visits in the city. Of course we explored the city and its museums, but not as actively as in Sydney: the time has been too short, and we are a bit museumed-out.



The Yarra River, Melbourne

We're sending this off early for us, just before our departure for Adelaide. We have agreed to rent an apartment there for the last two weeks of December and that's where we will welcome 2008. It should be hot (unfortunately) and for Jan that doesn't go with Christmas. But we're game and we'll go to whatever Carols events they have (in addition to one here the night before we leave).

Plans? Hopes?



Saving the World, while visiting Michael Price in Merton, Victoria

As usual at the end of the year we try to look forward a bit and predict where the next year will take us. In early January we should set out for Alice Springs and Darwin, a trip of 3000 km, if we don't deviate too much. Most likely we will be back in Europe sometime between March and June. Right now we toy with the idea of a summer bicycle trip across France, perhaps Paris to Geneva. But then we might change our minds and find ourselves a place to stay in Amsterdam or Madrid or Italy. Check our website or wait for our 2008 letter to find out. In the meantime, whatever happens, we hope that you have all had a wonderful year in 2007 and that 2008 will bring more of the same.

Good on yer!

Jan and Gerry