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11. Friends on Tour

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"The first tour I led, to Sri Lanka, was actually thrust upon me at the very last minute. At the end of that 'sink or swim' experience, I came back determined to work toward developing written guidelines for tour leaders as it was evident that there is a lot more to leading a study tour than getting people on and off busses. I am very happy to see how smoothly our tours run now, thanks to the guidance and support given tour leaders prior to the tour."

- Mary Connors, fourteen-year FOM volunteer

Friends on Tour

Following an inaugural meeting in October 1978, study tours were first offered as regular programmes by the Friends of the National Museum in 1979. Within a short time our intrepid members were venturing outside Singapore, first to Malacca but within a year jetting off to Sri Lanka.

Our excited travellers first brought back news of their adventures to their families and friends. It was not long before there was interest from others and special presentations were made to members - in March



1994 a group gave a slide and talk presentation on Bhutan at a lunchtime gathering in the Goodwood Park Hotel. In April 1995 a report from Sue Beckett on Myanmar was the forerunner of the tour reports that now regularly feature in our newsletter.

This sharing of travellers' tales, whether through presentations, in the newsletters or at public lectures, is fundamental to the way in which FOM enlarges our pool of knowledge and makes it available for all.

24 YEARS OF DISCOVERY

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| 1979 | Malacca | 1993 | India, China, Indonesia |
| 1980 | Mandalay & Chiang Mai, Sri Lanka | 1994 | W Sumatra, Bhutan, Cambodia, Spice islands |
| 1981 | Malacca | 1995 | Myanmar, Borobudur (Indonesia), Isan (NE Thailand) |
| 1982 | China, Thailand | 1996 | Central Asia & N Pakistan, S India, Malacca, Cambodia x2 |
| 1983 | Malaysia, Indonesia | 1997 | Uzbekistan, Japan, Sarawak, Cambodia, Bali, Malacca, Laos & Thailand |
| 1984 | Kuala Lumpur, China, Japan | 1998 | Kerala, Goa & Bombay, Irian Jaya (Indonesia), Shanghai & Canton, Bhutan x2, Central Java, Taiwan, Malacca, China Silk Road, Cambodia, Beijing |
| 1985 | India | 1999 | Rajasthan, Myanmar, Japan, Lesser Sundas Islands, Laddakh (India), Malacca, Shanghai, Suzhou & Hangzhou, Bhutan, Sarawak, Bangkok |
| 1986 | Thailand | 2000 | Egypt, Rajasthan, N Vietnam, Tibet, Cambodia, Bali |
| 1987 | Gandhara (N Pakistan) and China Silk Road | 2001 | Isan (NE Thailand), Ajantha & Ellora (India), Bhutan, Hong Kong & Macao, Yunnan, Laos, S Sulawesi |
| 1988 | India, Malaysia | 2002 | Nepal, Japan, Turkey, Sarawak |
| 1989 | Jogjakarta & Solo (Java) | 2003 | Kerala (India), Bhutan, Myanmar, Shanghai, N Vietnam, Cambodia |
| 1990 | Sulawesi, Sarawak, Vietnam | | |
| 1991 | Java, Tibet and Nepal, Thailand and Laos, Laos and Cambodia, Nias (Indonesia) | | |
| 1992 | China | | |

Turkey, 2002

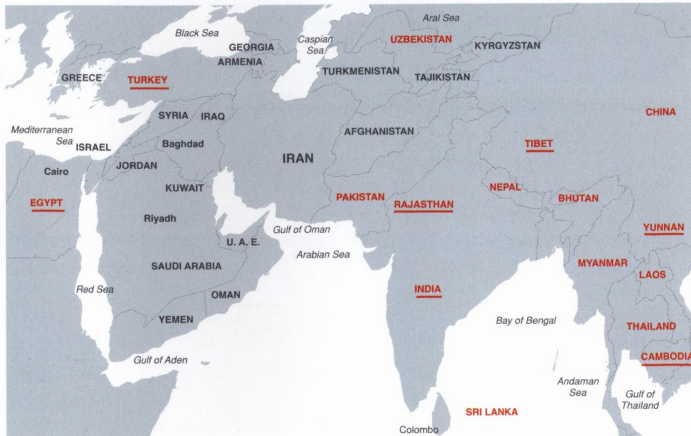
"It can't get better than this! was the daily cry from thirteen FOM participants. But it did get better. Every day Turkey provided an increasingly rich smorgasbord of ancient and modern history, breathtaking botanical vistas, bizarre geographical sights, peeps into daily village life and culinary delights as the tour progressed through the central and western regions of the country."

Egypt, 2000

"We were lucky to have such a knowledgeable Egyptologist as our guide who almost made the sculptures come to life during our visit to the atmospheric Luxor Museum."

S India, 1996

"It was wonderful. My memories are of excellent research papers read to us on the sea wall at Pondicherry; the story of the Mahabharata in the Nilgiri hills; the Ramayana in front of a roaring log fire in an old colonial hotel in Ooty; hearing about the philosophy of Yoga and then trying a few poses as the sun dropped over the hills leaving us in candlelight and then sitting around a camp fire eating potatoes."

**Tibet, 2000**

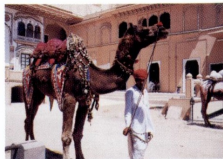
"The air is thin, pure and cold: I can't get enough of it. If all you had to do to survive here were to breathe, this place would be a paradise, once you got used to the altitude."

Yunnan, 2001

"One of the more memorable experiences we had in Zhongdion was a visit to a farm. An old monk greeted us enthusiastically at the gate and led us into an open courtyard with flowers growing along one wall. The yaks were stabled on the ground level so we were invited to the family rooms on the second floor."

Cambodia, 2000

"After a day and night in Phnom Penh, we took a short afternoon flight to Siem Reap to be met by our guide Lorm, a remarkable man, 'guide extraordinaire', with a vast knowledge of all things Cambodian, endless patience for all our questions and tolerance with our fluctuating schedule."



Beijing, 1998

"Although I had been to Beijing before, this trip gave me a much wider perspective of the city and its people. When I am very, very old I will have all the wonderful photographs to help me remember."

Myanmar, 2003

"The highlight for many in the group was an early morning balloon ride over the archaeological field of Bagan. Gliding silently over the temples and watching the Burmese go about their daily morning rituals was a gift from the gods."

Thailand, 1995

"Before leaving, we spent an evening with an unusual man who added a lot to the homework we had already done - Pira Sudham, author of 'Monsoon Country'. This Nobel Prize nominee shared with us his love for the Isan people and opened the door to his native village, Napo in Buriram province."

Bangkok, 1999

"From palaces to temples, barge trips on the river to Thai dancing, we tried to see and do everything. We were fortunate having Diane Reitman as our leader. She had lived in Thailand and shared much of her local lore with us, as well as some of her favourite restaurants. We ate like gourmets and enjoyed every minute of it."

Sulawesi, 2001

"Our very knowledgeable and helpful guide, who initially had to overcome the shock of having to accompany sixteen ladies, liked us so much that he gave each of us a book written by a friend on the meaning of Toraja carvings as a farewell gift."

**Japan, 2002**

"Famed architect Yoshihiro Takishita talked to us about the minka style houses of Japan. To save two of these eighteenth-century houses thirty-five years ago, he dismantled them and transported them piece by piece to a commanding position high on a hill in Kamakura overlooking Sagame Bay."

N Vietnam, 2000

"I could not help but be touched by the many encounters I had such as learning to plant rice from a Zai woman dressed so colourfully in her bright green and pink blouse. She was so willing to teach, however shy she was and however silly she must have thought this foreigner to be."

Sarawak, 1997

"Our final visit was to the Astana, built by Charles Brooke for the Rane's arrival in 1870 and now the residence of the Governor, the Head of State. Permission to visit had to be specially obtained as it is not a tourist spot."

Malacca, 1996

"During the evening, a Peranakan gentleman Mr Charles K Chua entertained us in his home and fascinated us with his family's history. Mrs Chua had spent many hours preparing a Tok Panjang - a ceremonial long table with Nonya dishes full of exquisite subtle flavours."

