

50 Amazing Places Through My Eyes

BISHNU BAJORIA



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About the AUTHOR



BISHNU BAJORIA, son of Late Satyanarain and Lilabati Bajoria, was born on 14 November 1945 at Bankura in West Bengal in a respected and socially conscious philanthropic business family. After his initial education in Bankura Goenka Vidyayatan, he graduated from Bankura Christian College and did his M.A. in English from Jadavpur University in 1966. On completion of education, he joined family business at its office in Calcutta and later on shifted to Bankura. At present he is heading the business group which is one of the oldest groups in petroleum business in the country dating back to 1905 and is also involved in distribution of commercial vehicle, tractors, motor cycles, cement, battery, iron and steel besides also being in the real estate and agriculture sectors with main offices at Bankura and Kolkata and branches in many places. The group enjoys tremendous good will for its clean and transparent dealings. Besides business, he is involved in numerous social organizations. He joined Lions Club of Bankura as its Charter Member in December 1976 and went on to become District Governor in 1988-89 and International Director during 2008-10 and has held many important offices and earned numerous awards including the highest Lion award Ambassador of Goodwill. He served as President of Bankura Chamber of Commerce & Industry during 1995-2008 and President of FOSBECCI Association, an umbrella organization of businessmen in 9 districts of South Bengal for 4 years 2012-16. He is very popular in the social and cultural fields in Bankura District and is the President of the renowned NGO Bankura Sammilani which founded Bankura Sammilani Medical College, Bankura Sammilani College and Bankura Sammilani Blind School at Bankura, President of Amra Sobai Ek Sathe, an organization of right-minded people from the cultural, social and

intellectual fields. He is a member of the Governing Body of Bankura Zilla Saradhamoni Mahila Mahavidyapith, the only girl's college in Bankura District and also served as a member of Governing Body of Bankura Christian College for two terms and is the President of its Alumni Association. He has been acting as a Judge of Lok Adalat from time to time. He is currently the President of the Board of Trustees of Bankura Dharmashala Charitable Trust.

Under his leadership, Lions Club of Bankura has established S.N. Bajoria Memorial Bankura Lions Eye Care Centre, Lilabati Bajoria Memorial Lions Dental Clinic. He has over the years donated lands for construction of the office of Bankura Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Shyam Mandir at Kuch Kuchia Bankura, Anusilan Samiti and made endowments to Bankura University for S.N. Bajoria Gold Medal for the student securing highest marks in post graduate degree exams in Arts & Law faculties and to Bankura Christian College for Hari Bajoria Silver Medal for the student securing highest mark in English Honours exam. He also regularly helps students by scholarships for higher education.

He has been an ardent traveller and has travelled to more than 60 countries during the last 40 years. He is married to Indra, a very accomplished lady who secured rank in her graduation from Rajasthan University and has deep knowledge of religion, mythology and literature. They are blessed with two sons

Amit and Vinay, daughters in law Ritu and Parul and four grandchildren Vidhi, Sarthak, Arushi and Mihika who are all excelling in their studies with Vidhi working in Melbourne, Australia and Sarthak joining family business after completion of their education.

FOREWORD

From my adolescent period only, especially when our teacher-mentor Late Chandra Bhushan Upadhyay went to U.S.A in 1958 on a Fulbright scholarship for about 8 months and used to every week send an elaborate letter to my elder brother Late Hari Bajoria giving detailed description on places visited by him and his experience there which I also had the occasion to read, I had developed a keen desire to see the world. The first occasion came when after my marriage in November 1968, I and my wife Indra went to Kathmandu, Nepal for our honeymoon which was the first time that anyone from our family had gone out of the country. After my involvement in Lionism started after joining as a Charter Member of Lions Club of Bankura which was inaugurated in December 1976, Indra and I had the first occasion to go to Honolulu in U.S.A. to attend Lions International Convention and during the trip also went to Thailand, Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong. During the last 40 years since then, we have been to almost 60 countries. Friends have been asking me to share my experience about the visits and this is an attempt to do so along with a few photographs taken by me during such trips. I must acknowledge here the great effort made by my cousin nephew Abhishek Bajoria in setting up the whole thing without which it was just not possible to put together this travelogue. No appreciation is good enough to acknowledge his expertise and perseverance.

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BISHNU BAJORIA
January 1, 2023

***“Travel makes you realize that
no matter how much you know,
there’s always more to learn.”***

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Chicago - U.S.A

First time I had occasion to visit this big city of USA was in 2001 on way back from Indianapolis after attending Lions International Convention there with a view to visit the Lions Headquarters at Oak Brook which is a suburb of Chicago. On this trip with me was our good friend now 3rd International Vice President of Lions International Lion A.P. Singh. Since we were there only for one day, we could not see much of the city but went to see the highest building Sear's Tower but when we reached there it was late in the evening and visiting hours were over and on advice of people there, we went to see Hancock Tower which was the second highest building and the view from atop was mesmerising. Indra and I also spent a few days when Lions International Convention was held in this city in 2007 and this time, we went up the Sear's Tower. It is a very big but extremely beautiful city of U.S. A with a large lake in the



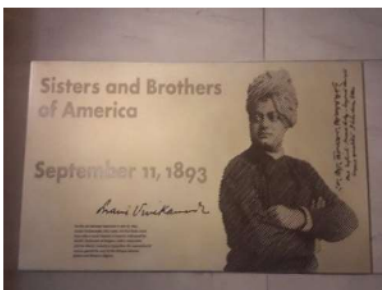
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middle which gives it a special attraction. Weather even in June-July is cool and very pleasant which during winter times becomes extremely cold with heavy snow fall. The Lions International Convention held again in 2017 was very special as it was the Lions Centennial Convention and also because an Indian Lion Dr. Naresh Aggarwal was to take office of International President at this convention. He was the 3rd Indian to assume this great office. It was also personally a matter of happiness for me as he and I served together as District Governors during 1988-89 and have been close family friends ever since then. It was also very memorable as I was given the privilege of being a Group Leader for schooling of District Governors elect where in my group there were participants from 8 countries and was a very special experience. This convention had record attendance with a very large contingent from



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India to see an Indian assuming the highest office of International President. This city assumes a special significance for Indians as it was here in this city that Swami Vivekananda delivered his famous speech at the World Religious Convention on 11 September 1893. We could not visit this place in 2007 and as soon as we reached our Hotel Hyatt in 2017, the very first day we enquired with the hotel concierge to learn that The Art



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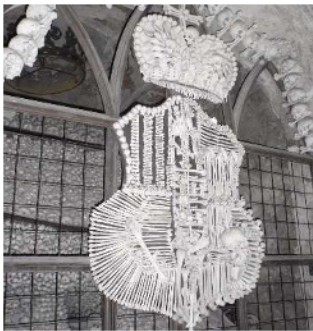
Institute of Chicago was at a walking distance from the hotel and without wasting any time, we visited the place. It was a wonderfully proud feeling visiting the place, more so on seeing that the main street has been named Swami Vivekananda Pathway. During our stay of almost 10 days there, we visited many other places of sightseeing in the city.



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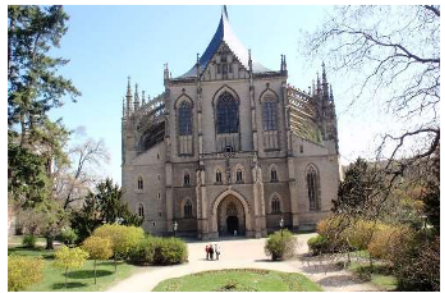
Kutna Hora - Prague (Czech Republic)

After my Lions Board of Directors meeting in Hamburg in Germany, as is our habit, we went to Budapest in Hungary and Prague in Czech Republic. Since due to volcanic eruption in Iceland, all flights were cancelled and our scheduled trip to Russia had to be cancelled, after staying a few extra days in Hamburg, we decided to avail rail journey from Hamburg and on return journey we stopped at Prague. All my photographs taken in Budapest were lost to a virus. Budapest is a most beautiful city on two sides of



a
river
and
are

named Buda and Pest. During our stay in Prague, we went after a drive of about 60 km from Prague to Kutna Hora having a chapel named Sedlec



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Ossuary in which 40000 human bodies are buried and the entire place is decorated with all kinds of human bones. Even the very big chandelier is made of only human bones. Although unique, the place gives you an eerie feeling. We also visited a palace here which had very artistic murals on its walls besides many artifacts.



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Kun Ming - China

We visited Kun Ming in China in June 2016 on our way to Fukuoka Japan for Lions International Convention. On this trip we were accompanied by Lion Dr Gouri Patra of Burdwan. It is called the spring city of China for its comfortable weather through the year with temperature between 28c and 12c. Copper and tin are the main produce of the place. The main attraction here is Stone Forest situated at a distance of 80 KM from the city which takes about 2 hours' drive. It has total area 300 sq km out of which the area of tourist interest is about 12 sq km. You are taken on a battery driven vehicle.

Entrance was 175 Yuan each and 25 Yuan for the battery car. It is a marvel of nature with thousands of different shapes of stones that make a most interesting view. These are all natural and one is forced to think how wonderfully beautiful are nature's creation. Weather was very co-operative as it was neither raining nor sunny



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which made walking around 5 km easier. No doubt it was a real-life time experience.



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Angkor Wat Temple - Cambodia

En route to Lions International Convention in Seattle USA in June 2011, we took the opportunity of going to Cambodia because of its history and more specially because it has numerous Hindu temples among which is the very famous Angkor Wat Temple depicting Hindu civilization at Siem Reap which had a population of only around 2 lacs but was a very clean city. Angkor Wat was declared a world heritage place by UNO in 1992 and has an area of 1500 mt. by 1200 mt. or about 2 acres surrounded by a water moat. The total area of the complex is more than 400 acres. Temple was built in 12th century as a Hindu temple but was converted to a Buddhist temple by the end of the 12th century. It was being restored by many countries like Germany, France, China, Japan and India when we visited. The inscriptions in the temple are mostly from Hindu mythology and specifically from Ramayana and



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Mahabharata. Really it was a memorable experience and you feel very satisfied. The central tower of the temple rises to a height of 65 mt. above the ground.



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Machu Picchu - Peru

I have no hesitation to admit that when my wife Indra expressed the desire to visit Machu Picchu, I had not heard about the place. When the Lions International Board of Directors meeting was held in New Orleans at the southern part of U.S.A. in September 2009, we planned to visit Brazil and Peru in South America. We went to Peru where the main place of tourist attraction and possibly its highest revenue earner is Machu Picchu, considered now as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was discovered in 1911 and declared a heritage site by



UNESCO in 1983. Situated at a height of 7000 ft above sea level, the excavated area atop the hill, presents a wonderful history of the old Incas civilization and the

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scientific progress the people of that era had made. The sun dial clock is unique while the acoustic system of the amphitheatre is something amazing when you think that it existed so many centuries ago. From a big height the king used to address his people and thousands of people gathered down below could hear him loud and clear without assistance of any device. You also find here 300 varieties of Orchid. We still wonder how Indra and I could go around climbing 500-700 ft through rough stairs and stepping on stones and coming down and going up again.



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Miracle Garden - Dubai

Every time you go to Dubai, you find the city changed with many more splendid structures, wider avenues, more shopping malls and things to see. Although we have been to Dubai a number of times since our first visit in 2009, it was only during our last one in December 2018 for the Lions ISAAME Area Forum there that we heard about the Miracle Garden and took time off in the afternoon after the forum was over to visit it with our close friend Past International Director G.S. Hora of Siliguri with us. At the garden we also found



close friends Sudipto and Nalini

Mukherjee of Jamshedpur with their relatives.

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The name Miracle Garden cannot be more appropriate. The way the garden is developed with flowers and various designs using flowers is something really miraculous. It is very well maintained and attracts thousands of tourists daily. I would strongly recommend a visit to this garden for anyone visiting Dubai and not been there earlier.



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Hiroshima – Japan

Since during earlier visits to Japan, we could not go, after attending Lions International convention in Fukouka in Japan in June 2016, we went to Hiroshima which is surrounded by hills and sea and has a number of rivers. This is the biggest city of Western Japan with a population of 1.2 million. We visited Miya Jima Island where we went by a boat from the pier. There is Itsukushima Shrine built in 593 there of Japanese God Shinto. Deer is taken as messenger of God in Japan. There are many floating oysters which are very famous. Thereafter we saw the lone structure which has survived the



atomic bomb blast of 1945. It was Preference Exhibition Hall built by a Czech architect in 1915 and the bomb was dropped on it. Everything around was destroyed with no

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survivors. There has been a long debate whether this should be preserved or destroyed being a sad memory but ultimately has been preserved and is a great attraction for tourists. Next to this was also a hospital. The heat generated was more than 7000c and none survived within a radius of about 3.5 km. 90% people died instantly. Still there are a very few survivors but are still affected by radiation. Hiroshima Peace Museum is very well conceived and maintained showcasing the horrible holocaust and displaying numerous objects from the day on 1945. One becomes really very emotional seeing around.



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Acropolis – Athens – Greece

Taking a detour from our trip to U.S.A. for a Lions Board of Directors Meeting in June 2009, we took the opportunity of visiting Athens in Greece on our return journey since we have always been interested in going to places of historical importance rather than modern cities and naturally Greece was high on our priority list as the country has a rich history going back to thousands of years and reportedly the oldest democracy in the world. The city is said to have been founded in 3000 BC. Athens is a very beautiful city with a population of about 4.5 million in 2009 out of a total population of only about 11 million for the whole

country of Greece. Acropolis is an ancient citadel located atop a rocky hill above the city of Athens and was the seat of the world's democracy in 480 BC and attracts a large number of



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tourists every day. You see ruins of old buildings and structures and get a very good panoramic view of the city of Athens from atop the hill.



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Butchart Garden - Canada

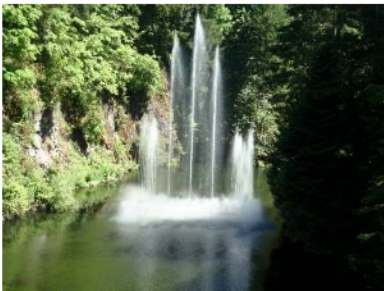
After attending Lions International Convention in Toronto in Canada in July 2014, as usual we took a week's tour to attractive places of the country. We took a full day trip to Victoria City and Butchart Garden in a ferry in which about 475 cars and 40 buses and trucks are accommodated and has 6 decks with all kinds of facilities of eating and entertainment. The ferry takes about 1 hour 40 minutes one way. Victoria is the capital city of British Columbia province of Canada although Vancouver



is the biggest city and commercial centre. The visit to Butchart Garden which is a

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private property spread over 55 acres and must be among world's best maintained gardens. Thousands of varieties of flowers from all over the world divided in various areas like Sunken Garden, Rose Garden, Japanese Gardens, Italian Garden are a real treat. One must not have seen roses of so many colours and hues in life elsewhere. It attracts about 35 million Canadian dollars in entrance fees every year. It has hundreds of gardeners working for maintenance. Visit to this garden is a wonderful experience and a photographer's delight.



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Bali – Indonesia

While returning from New Zealand where we went after the Lions International Convention in Sydney in June 2010 where I completed my tenure as International Director, we planned to go to Bali in Indonesia and landed in Denpasar airport in Bali which is part of Indonesia. The city reminds of any Indian resort and has narrow streets and not very clean area. Although Indonesia is a Muslim majority country, Bali has 95% Hindu population. The country has 17000 islands out of which only about 6000 have any habitation. It is said



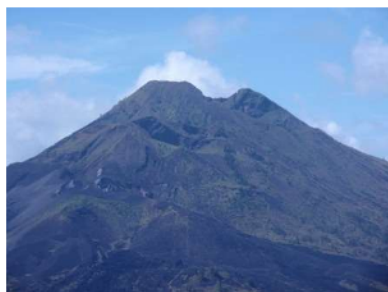
Batik art



originated in Indonesia. Petrol in 2010 was only about 50 cents per litre with Diesel prices being similar as the country is an oil producing country. Names of people are Hindu names here and even the Muslim population

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celebrates Hindu festivals like the majority population. We went to see the volcano site from Batur Mountain where the last eruption was in 1963. It was a good sight. Clothes were being vended quite cheap and Indra bought quite a few tee-shirts and got a very good bargain. Artistic work like wood curving, stone curving, painting, batik printing, glass showpieces is very common and of very good quality. The currency here is Rupiah and the conversion rate in 2010 was around 9000 rupiah to \$1 and there is only one denomination. Prices of goods here are overall quite reasonable. In Bali, all houses are small and no construction higher than 30 mt. is allowed which is lower than the highest coconut tree as a coconut tree is considered sacred and nothing higher can be constructed. In the hotel we were staying, vegetarian food was hardly available and language being a



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great barrier, it was very difficult to communicate with hotel staff and ascertain contents of the served food items to know whether they were vegetarian dishes or not.

However, the hotel was like a resort with cottages scattered over a large area and quite comfortable. Weather was quite hot at the time like any other tropical area.



“The island is home to more than 20,000 temples, earning its nickname “the island of a thousand temples” or “the island of the gods.”

Petra – Jordan

Before going to Dubai for Lions multi-national ISAAME Convention in December 2011, as is our visit, we went to Jordan. A visit to Petra in that country has been a memorable experience. It is now considered to be one of the Wonders of the World. Old ruins in a hilly area present a most spectacular view. Petra is a famous archaeological site in Jordan's south western desert. Dating to around 300 B.C., it was the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom. Accessed via a narrow canyon called Al Siq, it contains tombs and temples carved into pink sandstone cliffs, earning its nickname the "Rose City." Perhaps its most famous structure is 45m-high Al Khazneh, a temple with an ornate, Greek-style facade, and known as The Treasury. Famous for its rock-cut architecture and water conduit system, Petra is also called the "Rose City" because of the colour of the stone from which it is carved. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985.



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UNESCO has described Petra as "one of the most precious cultural properties of man's cultural heritage".



Colosseum – Rome (Italy)

While in Rome, a must-see place is the Colosseum which we visited both in June 1988 during our trip with our sons and in April 2016 during our trip with a business group. It is the most recognizable and iconic monument of Rome. If you see no other site in Rome, you should see this structure. This grand stadium was constructed by the Flavian emperors. The construction of a grand amphitheatre began in 71-72 AD. It was completed in 80 AD and by 81 AD a third level was added. The colosseum was used for bull fights, gladiator fights, chariot races, official



events and various public forms of entertainment. At its peak the most popular event was the Ludi Circenses, the chariot races, there were also naval battles reproduced with complex stage effects. The colosseum also hosted staged hunts, using live



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animals and often involved feeding convicts to the beasts. Mythological dramas were staged in the arena among scenic woods complete with forest animals. Rome had a strict class system and there were 5 levels of seating within the audience according to your social status. At capacity the arena could hold 50,000 to 80,000 spectators on the marble benches. Now in ruins, it attracts thousands of visitors daily and is a must-see monument for whoever visits Rome.



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Grand Canyon – U.S.A

During our trip to U.S.A. to attend Lions International Convention at Denver in June 1988 as District Governor Elect, we took the opportunity of going to Las Vegas and Grand Canyon which we had not visited during our earlier trip in 1983. From Las Vegas on 19 June 1988 was our trip to Grand Canyon by a small 6 seat plane which was an extremely thrilling experience, at times quite scary. The plane being so small only 5 persons besides the pilot can sit, you can see everything and, in the journey, there was some rainy rough weather when you feel really scared. But the tour was an experience worth making. The expanse and the length and breadth of the canyon terrain cannot be fully appreciated without an aerial view. It is a marvel of nature – the river Colorado daily carries 80000 tons



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of boulders which over millions of years had created this gorge. At the South Rim of the canyon, you get a fantastic view and it was a big surprise for us to find that atop one of the hills there was a Vishnu Temple. Our guide specially pointed it out to us. The arrangements of the guided tour here are really to be appreciated – perfect in all respects. We were given brunch at a lodge at Grand Canyon which was unexpectedly good even for us strict vegetarians. Indra is by nature fearless, but on this ride on a small aircraft in foul weather even she was very scared.



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Cairns - Australia

My two-year tenure as Lions International Director was to end at Sydney in Australia in June 2010 and that gave us the opportunity of visiting Australia. Before reaching Sydney, we planned to visit Gold Coast and Cairns where you see the great sight of the corals. Our first stop was arriving at Brisbane on way to Gold Coast and in our group, we had Lion Jayanti Mallik and her spouse Dr. R.C. Mallik from Asansol and were joined there by my colleague Director Shyam Malpani and his spouse Sunita. At Cairns we were also joined by Lion Dr. A.B. Patra and his wife Dr. Gouri Patra when we visited Kuranda Rain Forest which was a wonderful experience. The ride on army duck – a vehicle which runs on surface as well as on water – was something of a new experience for most of us although I had a similar experience in Boston in U.S.A. during my visit



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there in 2006. Trip to Great Barrier Reef in Cairns was a great experience where you can see corals of various designs and colours and huge in number and large in size. We had a cruise on a ship in the ocean and had a very rough ride as the ocean was very turbulent and many people threw up and got sick. Luckily both Indra and I were spared, possibly because we did not have any drink or eat anything on board. However, the way the staff was taking care of passengers was a surprising experience when you compare with our own country. Quite a large number of staff were all the time vigilant carrying paper cups to hand over to passengers feeling sick so that the area does not get soiled by people having to throw on the floor as it is difficult to resist in such circumstances. The journey was however a new experience. The ship anchored in the mid ocean where a platform was constructed where we all got down to view the corals from a



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room below the water level which had glassed walls to have a view of the magnificent colourful corals – a rare scintillating sight. Many people also took the opportunity of diving in the ocean with oxygen masks and do surfing.



“It is home to the world’s most dangerous bird. The amazing, and terrifying, the cassowary is native to the north-eastern parts of Australia. Though not as tall as the emu, cassowaries are far stronger and more dangerous.”

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Cape Town – South Africa

One of the most beautiful places that we have visited is Cape Town in South Africa which we visited in May 2009. It is the southern west most area of the African country famously known for its Cape of Good Hope. It is a most beautiful city with a very long most beautiful sea coast on one side and hilly area on the other side. The city is very well laid out and beautifully maintained with clean streets. We visited a number of attractive spots and the ride on a ship to inside the Indian Ocean was a thoroughly wonderful experience. We passed through many islands which were full of dolphins and



other sea creatures like seals etc. The view of the mainland was enchanting. Although normally you find penguins only in the icy areas, you see a lot of domesticated penguins in

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South Africa. The sight of a penguin walking majestically is something to be seen. Cape of Good Hope is the southern west most part of the African continent where the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean converge giving a most fascinating sight. There is a tower high above the hill top having a pole on which a number of placards are fixed showing the distance and direction of the important places of the world and one such placard showed the direction of New Delhi with distance being shown as 9296 KMs. Law and order position of the city at the time was not good and we were

advised
not to go
out alone
after
evening.



Jungfrauoch – Switzerland

During our trip to Europe in a fairly large group when our sons Amit and Vinay were also with us in June 1988 when Indra and I were on our way to Denver USA to attend Lions International Convention as District Governor elect, among many interesting places one of the most exhilarating was our visit to Jungfrau in Switzerland. Although the weather all along remained cloudy and it was drizzling, after a one-hour tour of Geneva with a lady local guide, we started for Grindelwald for trip to Jung Frau which is supposed to be Top of Europe and the best place to discover a world of snow and ice and reached there around 12 noon. The trip was by a Rack Rail, a small special mountain train which cuts through the snow and climbs up the mountain to a height of 3454 meters above sea level. It was heated and had good arrangements. Just after 10-15 minutes we reached snow bound region and it was snow and snow all around. Although cloudy weather and little visibility, it was a most memorable



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experience. When we changed train at a height of 7000', about Darjeeling height, at the station it was snow fall which was a new experience for all. The children really enjoyed. In about 1 hour, we reached Jung Frau at the height of 11333', around the height of Kedarnath in India. Even at this height, the arrangements were something to be seen. We went to see the Ice Palace through a tunnel and it was a life time experience. The entire place was made of carving out of ice with ice on all sides. Beautiful figures of ice were there which were very attractive. The entire place was very slippery and Indra slipped twice and was hurt but fortunately it was not serious.



Afterwards we learnt many others also slipped and fell. The entire journey lasted for about 5 ½ hours and was a thoroughly memorable experience by common consent. Only a few photographs could be located and are shared. The entire group, more especially the children, really enjoyed.

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Niagara Falls – U.S.A./Canada

Niagara Falls on the border of USA and Canada is a must see for anyone visiting USA or Canada. During our first trip to USA in 1983 we went to see the falls from the USA side and since we did not take from India visa for Canada, we tried to get temporary one but being week end the concerned office was closed and we had to make do with only seeing the falls from US side. However, we took a ride on helicopter – the first in our life – to take an aerial view from the other side also. During this trip, we were accompanied by Past District Governor Lion R.R. Damani from Sernapore and his wife Rukamani. We also



took a ship ride on The Maid of the Mist which took us all near the falls and although we were all provided with rain coats, we were still totally drenched. In 2004 when I visited again, I had

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the occasion to go the other side from US side and the expanse of the falls and the view of the falls from that Canada side is really breathtaking. When we had Lions International convention at Toronto in July 2014, since Indra was not accompanying in 2004, we took a whole day trip by coach from Toronto to the Niagara Falls. Our friend Past International Director G.S. Hora also accompanied us on the trip. In Canada, there is concession for students and senior citizens above 65 in all tickets and entrance fees at various attractions. It was a most thrilling experience. The falls discharge 6 million cu. ft. of water every minute which is enough to fill 1 million baths tubs. The expanse of the falls and the sight are a treat to watch.



Jungle Safari – Kenya

Soon after I became Lions International Director in June 2008, there was a multi-national ISAAME Area Forum convention in Nairobi in November 2008 and Indra and I with some friends went to Kenya and that was our first visit to this beautiful country. On reaching Nairobi, on our request our local host Past International Director Lion Manoj Shah had made arrangements for our visit to the world famous Masai Mara Game Safari and that was a most wonderful experience. Our lodge in the midst of a large jungle was of 5-star standard with all amenities and we were taken around the jungle in open jeeps



where we could see all kinds of animals viz. lions, tigers, elephants, giraffes, wild buffaloes and varieties of birds in an open normal environment. Thousands of visitors from all

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over the world come daily.

There are a number of similar safaris in Kenya and when Indra and I went there again in 2010 as a Chief Guest for a Lions function, we had the occasion to visit another such safari Sweet Waters. On way to there, we had a unique experience. Our hosts the local District Governor and his wife and Vice District Governor and his wife were accompanying us and at a particular place they stopped the vehicle. At this place the equator line passes. If you go 15-20 meters towards the north and put water through a hole in a pot, the water falls in clockwise manner whereas if you go similar distance towards the south, water falls in anti-clockwise



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manner and if you do the same thing at the exact place where the line passes, the water falls in a straight line. It was something which we never knew and since then I have asked many people and hardly anyone knows the same. On way to our Sweet Waters Lodge, we had a view of Mount Kenya which from a distance resembles a temple. Our lodge had accommodation in tents which had 5-star facilities. Here also we went around the jungle in open hood vehicles to see wild animals in their natural habitats. Local currency Kenyan Shilling at the time was about KS 75 to \$1. Like many other African countries, here also the economy is controlled mainly by people of Indian origin.



*“Kenya has been the world’s
leading safari destination since
2015”*

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Honolulu - Hawaii (USA)

Our first visit abroad was in June 1983 when we toured USA, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand extensively to coincide with the Lions International Convention at Honolulu, Hawaii which was the first convention that I attended. Over the years I have attended two more Lions International Conventions in this city in 2000 and 2015. It is a most beautiful place with very friendly people who love music and wearing colourful dress especially with floral designs. Hawaii is rich with the spirit of ALOHA, a word which means a spirit of compassion, warmth and hospitality. Rickshaws called



Pedicabs are there in abundance but are however of modern design. People are very open and openhearted, very courteous and generous. The girls are very beautiful and

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relaxed and mix openly. Blue seems to be very popular colour and most people are seen wearing this colour. Dress mostly is very colourful and with big prints. Ladies wear Mu-mu, a long dress and it is a very common sight to see men and women wearing dresses made of the same cloth. The sea beach is vast and scenic. Being one of the most sought-after tourist place in the world, it attracts large number of tourists every year.



With numerous hotels and facilities, it is a popular place to hold conventions. 1983 convention was special for us as that was our first convention.



2000 convention was special as in this convention a friend from Kolkata Prem Lahoty was

elected as International Director and I had the privilege for the



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first time of going to various meetings (called caucuses) of other countries to present and talk about our candidate. 2015 convention was even more special as India had a candidate for International Vice President in Dr. Naresh Aggarwal who has been a close friend ever since we served together as District Governors in the year 1988-89. Indra and I were keenly involved in his election campaign as there was a contest. Also, another friend from Siliguri G.S. Hora was also elected as International Director. Hawaii time is 6 hours behind Eastern time of USA and in 1983 we flew from Boston in the eastern part of USA to Honolulu and since we were travelling from east to west, that day we had continuous sunlight for 21 hours as we started from



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Boston at 6 a.m. when it was already sunlight and when sunlight was over at 9 p.m. at Honolulu at it was already 3 a.m. of the following day at Boston from where we started the day. It was also 21 June which is normally the longest day in the year and I wrote in my diary that it was also literally the longest day in our life. In 1983 we went for Pearl Harbour Cruise and very much enjoyed. The ocean water looked blue and green according to depth and it was a real sight. Could interact with many people on the cruise among which a Belgian couple was very sore about controls in India and their returning back cutting short their trip and on enquiring, it transpired that it was during emergency time.



Desert Safari – Sharjah

We went to Dubai for the first time on our return from Africa in 2009 and have been there a number of times thereafter. For whoever visits Dubai for the first time, going to Desert Safari is a must although it is in Sharjah, which is a separate country but part of United Arab Emirates (UAE) like Dubai. It is a thrilling life time experience. You go on the safari by four wheelers in which about 8 persons are accommodated and the same runs on the desert sand and for miles after miles you see only sand and nothing else – not a single vegetation or living being. You wonder how the drivers know the way and take



you. At times, sand dunes are of pretty good height and when your vehicle climbs the same, it is really scary. It is common to see some vehicle stuck in the sands and as soon as one is so

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stuck, other vehicles stop and the drivers go to help and get it out. At the end of the safari, all are taken to an evening show of Russian Belly Dance and treated to free drinks and dinner. There are also available facilities for camel driving and other sports which children very much enjoy. In 2012 we went to Dubai again in a group and with the group experienced the safari again.



Victoria Falls – Zambia

I was invited as Chief Guest at the Lions District Conference in Zambia in May 2009 which accorded us the opportunity of visiting this small country at the south east part of Africa which was in the past part of the old Rhodesia before it divided into two countries Zambia and Zimbabwe. We reached Livingston, capital of the country early afternoon and were received at the airport by many senior Lions. While the aircraft was alighting, we were surprised to see hardly any constructions in the vicinity and were quite amazed. The country is a small country with a weak economy. We were taken to the VIP lounge and our friends offered to look after the



immigration formalities and collect our bags. However, another bigger surprise was in store for us as our bags did not arrive in the aircraft. The airline company assured to ensure that they arrive in the next flight which was to our utter dismay only 24 hours later. The local people were not surprised saying that this is a routine matter in these parts. It was a helpless situation

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over which none had any control. After our first visit abroad in 1983, we had always been in the habit of carrying at least one change of clothes in our hand bag along with the required medicines and other essential things. But since after becoming International Director, we were entitled to travel business class in our longer trips where you are accorded a special attention and provided more careful services, we had become a little lax. This was a lesson for us and we have since then again continued with the practice of carrying one change of clothes in the hand bag. This is a practice every traveller should follow. We went to see the world-famous Victoria Falls – a wonderful sight. You hear the roar of the sound of falling water from a distance of a few kilometres and when you go near the falls, you are totally wet from the water that rebounds after falling from such a height.



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It is really surprising that the river that ultimately becomes the fall is very calm and you can never imagine that it can become such an enormous water fall. The place was detected by a British person named Livingston



and the place came to be known by this name ever since. The river also divides the countries of Zambia and Zimbabwe which earlier were one known as Rhodesia. On the border, the currency notes of Zimbabwe were being sold almost free of cost as novelty items. It is learnt that the inflation rate in that country is somewhere near a few hundred percent per week. We travelled along the bridge dividing the countries and also stepped in the country of Zimbabwe for some distance. During the visit we were gifted by the local Lions a wall clock made of copper which is in the shape of the map of the country and it is an exclusive piece adorning the wall of my office chamber even after so many years.

“500 million litres of water cascade every minute. The numbers almost seem too impossible to imagine! That’s the equivalent of 200 olympic-sized swimming pools, to put things into perspective.”

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Queenstown - New Zealand

I had heard a lot about the natural beauty of New Zealand and always looked forward to get an opportunity of visiting there. The opportunity came when the Lions International Convention was scheduled to be held in Sydney Australia in June 2010 where I was to complete my 2 years tenure as International Director. We decided to take a week-long trip to the country. After Auckland, our next stop was Queenstown which is a most beautiful place. Till then in our estimation the most beautiful place we had visited was Cape Town of South Africa, but after coming here I wrote an email to our sons saying that now in our book, this was the best place we had so far



visited. With lakes and snow-capped mountains, snow in the streets, gondola rides and the like the place indeed seems to be out of the world. Totally pollution free environment and

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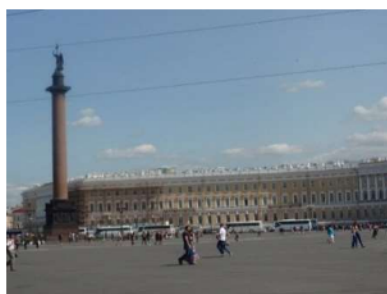
the abundant natural beauty makes the place all the more attractive. Being winter months, the temperature during day time was around 4 c in the afternoon and below 0 c in the nights. We visited Coronet Peak with snow all around where you see thousands of ski enthusiasts making the place a wonderful sight. While travelling in the coach, we stopped at a place where we saw Mirror Lake which is something novel where you see mirror image of hills and other things very clearly in the lake – a wonderful sight.



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The Hermitage - St Petersburg (Russia)

In April 2010, we were all set to go to Russia from Hamburg after a Lions Board of Directors meeting there, but due to a volcanic eruption all flights in most part of Europe was suspended for about a week and we had to stay back in Hamburg and cancel our tickets to St Petersburg though flight tickets and hotel bookings were all done losing considerable money. When Lions International Convention was held in Hamburg in July 2013, we availed the opportunity of making good and went to St Petersburg from there and then to Moscow before returning home. It was a memorable visit. In St. Petersburg one of the must-see places is The Hermitage, a huge museum.



Hermitage or place of reclusion was constructed in 8 years by Catherine II in 1764 as the winter palace of imperial family and is now a museum spread over 353 rooms. It is a very popular place to visit in St. Petersburg. There are 3 million things to see and if you spend just one

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minute for each, it would take 11 years without sleep or eating to see all. You see originals of masters like Rembrandt, Picasso, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Rubens, Van Gogh, Renoir and Rafael. It indeed is a must-see place. Our guide who was a very competent lady helped us in seeing the most important exhibits in the limited time that we could spend at the museum.



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While going around we were missing my niece Runu Agarwal and our daughter-in-law Ritu Bajoria both of whom are good painters. Ritu with our son Amit had however an occasion to visit and see the place in later years.



***“To get acquainted with all the
showpieces of the Hermitage,
you will have to spend
approximately 11 years,
provided you watch each item
for no longer than a minute
during an 8-hour daily visit.”***

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Abu Dhabi

During a company trip to Dubai in August 2012, we availed the occasion to also visit Abu Dhabi which is the capital of UAE (United Arab Emirates) consisting of 7 Emirates and is the richest one having 10% of world's oil reserves. The country is full of greenery despite being in a desert area. 290 million trees have been planted and being maintained. Ground water is only 5% and balance is met by desalinating sea water. Among the popular places of tourist attractions is Ferrari World which is a world-famous theme park which boasts of the longest and the faster roller coaster ride. It is the

biggest fully air-

conditioned indoor theme park in the world.

The most attractive must-see place is however The Grand Mosque which is the biggest in the world having the biggest carpet and the most expensive chandelier and the largest dome which has 24 carat gold



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tops. 40000 people can gather at a time to pray in the mosque area. The Hyatt Hotel building leans 18 degrees making it the most leaning structure in the world beating Leaning Tower of Pisa which tilts 13 degrees. The Royal Palace has decoration of 22 carat gold even in outer walls. The city also has a large spherical building which is unique in itself. The city has a hot desert climate and sunny blue skies can be expected throughout the year. The months June through September are generally extremely hot and humid with maximum temperatures averaging above 41c. The cooler season is from November to March which ranges between moderately hot



to
mild.



Dead Sea – Jordan

Sometime back at home I was reading about Dead Sea in a magazine and I remembered our visit there in December 2011.

The world-famous Dead Sea which is 400 metres below sea level and said to be the lowest place in the world is in Jordan.

Salt content is as high as 50% and as such marine life and plant life cannot survive. Water and mud here are supposed to have high medicinal value.

Although it is called a sea, it is actually a big salt water lake.

The resort where we stayed here was a huge property with all facilities. All resorts here have medical centres and spas where people are treated with mud



packs etc. Even I had one sitting of mud pack where your entire body was covered with the mud of the Dead Sea for about one hour.

“The water of the Dead Sea contains 26 beneficial minerals, and the air contains minimal amounts of dust and allergens compared to other places in the world.”

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Innsbruck – Austria

Coinciding with Lions International Board Meeting in New York, USA in March 2009, we planned to visit Austria and visited Innsbruck and Vienna which is the capital of the country. It is a most beautiful country and especially Innsbruck is with abundant natural beauty. One of the main attractions of the town is the Swarovski Factory and Museum where gems and artifacts worth billions of dollars are on display which dazzle your eyes and entice you to buy. However, both my wife and I do not like spending money unnecessarily, we could resist ourselves from buying anything. However nevertheless it was a good experience visiting the place. It was extremely cold at the time. The area surrounding the place with snow covered mountain range make a thrilling sight. One interesting experience we had while staying in the hotel here. In the evening we thought we would have some meal in the restaurant of the hotel and language was a big problem. The



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menu was in local language which we could not follow and the staff did not understand English. We told the staff that we are strict vegetarians which he did not understand. We tried to tell him that we do not eat meat, chicken, fish or eggs (we mentioned chicken separately since in many places chicken is not considered to be meat). On hearing this staff suggested why not eat cow. Hearing this my wife became very upset and we left the restaurant and going back to our room ate whatever dry food was available with us. Next morning, we were waiting in front of a shop for the bus when the shop keeper who was as Indian came out and invited us inside his shop, offered us



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coffee. While talking with him we came to know that he had been living there for many years and occasionally go back home to meet relatives but had no intention of returning to India as doing business there had very little hassles while back home in India, doing business had many hurdles with stringent rules and regulations.



“Innsbruck is a world-renowned winter sports destination. It has hosted the first Winter Youth Olympics in 2012, Winter Paralympics in 1984 and 1988 and Winter Olympics in 1964 and 1976.”

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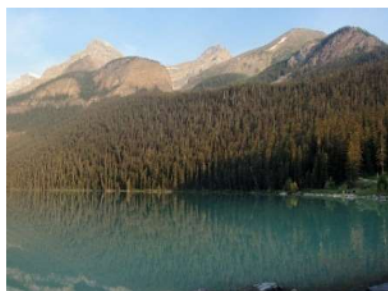
Lake Louise – Canada

During our trip to Canada, we took a two-day trip of on the Rocky Mountaineer Train to view the Rockies Mountain range which is considered to be one of the most enthralling areas of natural beauty. During this trip we went to Lake Louise where we stayed in one of the most famous properties called the Fairmont Chateau Resort which has possibly one of the world's best views - two valleys joining at the bottom in a formation looking like letter "V" with the huge snow filled glacier from the Rocky range in between as a back drop of the Lake Louise. We have been around many beautiful places around the world, but this surely stands out as one of the very best. Seeing this sight, you feel that this is possibly the most beautiful place on earth. The hotel of course is of the highest grade, but no free wi-fi facility. You have to pay for whatever you use. For the first time since arrival in Canada, I had no



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access to my internet connection. However, the hotel allows residents free use of computers in the business centre and I utilized the service to download pictures from my camera to pen drive to release camera memory. Since we had a free afternoon, we saw Football World Cup final match between Germany and Argentina which Germany won by 1-0 in extra time. The match started at 1 pm local time. Had we been at home in India, we possibly would not have seen the same as it was past midnight in India. Since July is peak summer here, you have sunlight till 8 pm or 8.30 pm and day light till beyond 10 pm and from about 4 am. In winter time, you have sunlight for a very short time. Weather in July has been a very comfortable one with temperature varying between 30c during day time at some places to about 6c at Lake Louise at night. Winters are



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very severe with temperature going down to -40°C at some places and around 0°C generally. Early next morning, we had a view of the beautiful sight on Lake Louise with the first rays of the rising sun falling on the valleys and the snowy glacier in between and it was an out of the world sight.



***“Lake Louise is one of the most
photographed sites in Canada
and possibly the world.”***

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Beirut – Lebanon

To attend the multi-national Lions ISAAME Area Forum convention in December 2011 we went to the most beautiful city of Beirut, the capital city of Lebanon. It is one of the most beautiful cities of the world and is considered to be the Paris of the Middle East and is said to be comparable to Paris even in fashion. The country's currency is Lebanese Lira or LL which was about 1500 LL to \$1 in December 2011. The city has long sea beach and sea front which lend to the beauty of the place. The city has all modern amenities and facilities like any other modern city in the world. The place is quite expensive.



Although the country was greatly damaged in civil strife over many years, it is fast being restored and has once again become very modern. Jeita Grotto caves, situated at a small distance from

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the city of Beirut, are a wonderful miracle of nature where you find numerous figures and designs made over centuries and it is said it takes 20 years for change of 1 cm. It is indeed a marvel of nature and a most fascinating experience which one has to actually visit to believe. I had the privilege of not only speaking at the main session of the Forum but also take a seminar in presence of Lions International President.



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Brazil

After a Lions Board of Directors meeting at New Orleans in the southern part of USA in October 2009 we went to Brazil and landed at Rio de Janeiro airport and found that it was not as modern as you now-a-days expect and the service was also comparatively very slow. The city had a population of over 7 million in 2009 and with its suburbs in excess of 9 million whereas the country had about 190 million. Rio is a very beautiful city with long sea beaches as also hilly areas. 50% of its population is Protestants whereas Brazil as a country is predominantly Catholic with its 80% population being Catholic. The city has many hills and numerous tunnels for traffic.



Soccer and Dance music are the craze among people here. We saw many wall graffiti throughout the city and were told it is very common. We took a cable ride to Sugar Loaf Peak which was an exciting experience. We visited a Cathedral which is a magnificent structure. Playing Beach Volley is a very popular game and widely played on the beaches. What attracted us as

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unique was to see that the main avenues of the city are very wide with 8 lanes a side.

Although the legendary football player Pele belongs to this country, not many blacks are seen. The Jesus Statue on a hill 710 mt high called Corcovado is very impressive and huge being 38 mt high and is the mascot of the country. However, since we had very bad weather on the day full of mist, we could not get a view although we went up the hill. Squirrels were roaming around freely and were pretty big in size and they were very friendly climbing on your laps and shoulder. When we were travelling in a coach during our

city tour with

people from a number of countries, we were surprised when our English-speaking guide informed us that a Brazilian young girl from the group wants to talk to us to know something. We were pleasantly surprised when she asked us the meanings of words like



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“Arre Baba”, “Mama”, “Dada”, “Cha”, “Chikchik”, “Chalo Chalo” etc and we tried to convey the English translations. We were told that Indian TV serials are very popular in the country and people see them with relish and interest and very much interested in India and these words they hear all the time in the serials and wanted to know their meanings. We also visited a place high on the hill, near the city called Rain Forest where it rains almost all the time although there is good weather at other places of the city.



“Brazil is the fifth-largest country in the world by land area and sixth-largest by population.”

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Norway

During our travel to USA in June 2009 for Lions International Board Meeting and Convention at Minneapolis, we took a detour from Frankfurt en route to visit Finland and Norway on our onward journey and to Greece on our return journey. We reached Oslo, the capital city of Norway from Helsinki, the capital of Finland. Oslo is a nice vibrant city. Language is quite a big problem here as common people do not understand English. We were advised to take an underground train from the airport to our hotel by the police person at the airport and he guided us from where to take the same, buy our tickets and which station to get down. When we asked him how long it should approximately take, he told us that it should take about 45 minutes. We boarded the train and luckily did not have bulky luggage except one suitcase and one hand baggage as we had kept our bigger suitcase and other things at the left luggage storage at Frankfurt airport. The train was very comfortable and we were passing through a number of stations



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as the train stops every few minutes. But since the names of the stations were all in local language, we could not determine or know which station we were passing through. When it was around 35 minutes, we showed our fellow passenger the name of the station where we wanted to get down and were shocked to learn that we have already passed the same. We got down at the next station, quite scared that we have overshot our due station as our tickets were only up to that station, but no one checked our tickets and we came out of the station. We kept on asking people about the where about of our hotel and walk hauling the suitcase. It took us almost one hour on foot to reach the hotel which was just outside the station where we were supposed to get down. It was quite surprising to see that many Indians were living in the city and that it had as many as 27



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Indian restaurants. In fact, at the main crossing, representatives of the Indian restaurants were wooing people to come to their places and we did go to such a place where we got very good hot Indian food. The city is a municipal town being a cluster of 40 islands. Sculpture Park here is very big where you find numerous statues but all with human figures – a unique sight. Cycling in this country seems to be very popular. Since it is mainly a cluster of islands people own boats and it is said every 8th Norwegian owns one. Although Nobel Prize is a Swedish prize, the Nobel Peace Prize is every year given from Oslo instead of from Sweden. We took a 24-hour trip which contained travel by train, ship and coach and it was a thrilling experience. The train ride from Myrdal to Flam has very nice views with many falls and natural beauty. You pass through dozens of tunnels. A



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wonderful experience overall. Situated as it is on the northern part of Europe, the country had bright sunlight till around 10.30 in the night in that summer time. Again, it became bright around 3 in the morning with dusk like time in between.



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Helsinki – Finland

During one of our trips to U.S.A. for a Lions Board of Directors Meeting, in June 2009 we took a detour from Frankfurt and went to visit Finland and Norway on our onward journey and Greece on our return journey as we had been doing every time so that we could visit as many countries as possible. Helsinki, the capital city of Finland is a most beautiful city with a population of only about 5 million in 2009. The country is a cluster of number of small islands. Helsinki is not a crowded city like most other modern cities and does not look like a capital city of a country. The people of the country are



very friendly and has a pleasant weather which in the month of June was about 28c High and 12c Low. Situated as it is on the northern part of Europe, it has long sunshine with only about 2

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hours dusk like in the summer days while in winter times, the area sees no sunlight at all for almost 70 days with temperature going down to as low as -25c.

The city has many places worth seeing which include the Parliament House, Prime Minister's Office, City Centre, Chapel and the sea front. Going on a cruise is a wonderful experience. We stayed at Grand Marina Hotel where we found a unique thing which we have not seen anywhere else till now. The towel hangers in the bathroom were heated to keep the towels warm. The room also had a trouser press in which if you fit your trouser and close it, the trouser is pressed in no time. We also went to a place, at some distance from Helsinki, the name of which I cannot recollect now, where we were shown a small house where the poet laureate of the country used to live and one of its windows had a telescopic type of fitting and it



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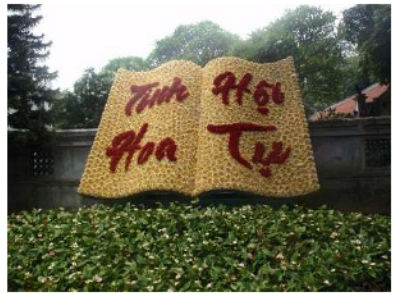
is said, the poet from inside the room could see the visitor and talk with him through this as he did not like to meet anyone in later part of his life. The town also has a very beautiful Church having unique architecture and paintings.



***“Helsinki has one of the world's
highest standards of urban
living.”***

Hanoi – Vietnam

From a very close friend we had heard a lot about the beauty of Vietnam and so we planned to stop over at this country on our return from Busan, South Korea after attending Lions International convention there in June 2012 and arrived at the capital city of Hanoi. The city had population of about 6.5 million and had about 4 million two wheelers and 3.5 lac cars. The population of the country was 88 million making it rank 13th in terms of population in the world. The city has two big lakes. The local currency Vietnam Dong in June 2012 was about 20000 to 1 USD. The economy of the country was growing at around 6-6.50% per year. North Vietnam is more aligned to Chinese culture while South is closer to Thai and Cambodia. Its coastline is more than 3300 KM long while the distance between North and South is about 2500 KM while between West and East of the country only just about between 200 to 500 KM. In Hanoi the cultural history heritage museum was worth visiting. We also saw a Water Puppet show which



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was very good and went around the open-air market called the opera area. Mausoleum for father of the nation Ho Chi Minh popularly called Uncle Ho has his body preserved since his death in 1969 and open for public viewing. The body is annually transported to Russia in September for two months for preservation treatment. The Presidential Palace area has the houses where Ho lived from 1954 to 1958 and then up to 1969 and had very simple living. We also saw a Pagoda having a Bodhi tree presented by Indian President in 1958. Temple of Literature built in 1070 in honour of Confucius is quite impressive. Government employees are not permitted to have more than two children. Education is free up to primary level or up to standard five. There is one party communist rule but like China it was now a market driven economy. Population is young with more



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than 70% being below 35 years. The dead here are buried and the body is excavated after three years and the bones are washed and cleaned and buried again after putting in a ceramic urn in another place at the cemetery. Literacy level is over 90% and unemployment level is just about 5%. People are short in height and are generally slim but very fair complexioned. The people are soft spoken, amiable and helpful by nature. Halong about 125 KM from Hanoi is the premier tourist place of the country with most beautiful bay view with many numerous hillocks in small islands and house boats where people spend overnight on cruise. The town is beautifully maintained with



clean wide streets and roadside flower beds. Boat ride over Halong Bay is a good



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experience. We had our private boat for the two of us. Many people stay overnight in large boats. The cave in mid sea with grotto rock formations is a fantastic sight with numerous formations. Lunch served on the trip was unexpectedly better for us vegetarians as we informed in advance.



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Kremlin - Moscow (Russia)

While in Moscow Russia in July 2013 we went inside Kremlin which means a fort and was built as a walled city in 1156 and the city gradually expanded all around. It is bound by the Moskva River to the south, Saint Basil's Cathedral and Red Square to the east, and the Alexander Garden to the west. The length of the wall is 1.8 miles which has 19 towers. It is spread over 28 hectares area within the wall and was originally surrounded on three sides by river which is now-a-days underground. Formerly serving as a residence for Tsars, the palace within is now the official residence of the



President of the Russian

Federation. Within it are five palaces, four cathedrals and an enclosing wall. We were lucky to visit on a Saturday morning as we could view the military show at the Cathedral Square which is put up only once a week on Saturday at 12 noon. Kremlin is

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called the city centre where only 10% people live and the area is also 10%. Famous Red Square is a huge open space in front of the Kremlin. The city of Moscow is now about 1000 sq. km.



Leaning Tower of Pisa – Italy

During our extensive trip to Europe in June 1988 before my wife and I proceeded to Denver USA for attending Lions International Convention as District Governor Elect, we were accompanied by our sons Amit and Vinay in a fairly large group. The trip was organized by Club 7 Holidays of Calcutta and we went to a number of countries in Europe. Indra and I had another opportunity of visiting Italy in April 2016 in a business group trip when we again went to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa which is one of the most popular places of tourist interest in the world. The construction of the Tower began

in 1173 and was

completed in the 14th century in 1399. Pisa got its name in 600 BC from a Greek word meaning “marshy land”. The original completed height of the Tower is 60 meters. Actually, the tower’s height is 56.67m on the highest side and 55.86m on the lowest side.



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The outside diameter of the leaning tower's base is 15.484 meters. The weight is said to be approximately 14500 tons. There are 251 steps from the bottom to the top of the tower which our children climbed in 1988 but we did not do either in 1988 or 2016. Our group in 2016 had a very good lunch at an Indian restaurant. Now-a-days you find Indian eateries in most parts of the country.



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Macedonia

I love going to new places and countries and an occasion arose when I went to attend the Lions Europa Area Forum in Skopje Macedonia in October 2018 in the company of good friends A.P. Singh and Sangeeta Jatia. The Republic of Macedonia, a small country on the Balkan Peninsula northwest of Greece, was formed in 1991 after declaring independence from Yugoslavia which was divided into 6 independent countries. Macedonians and Greeks have since sparred over who gets to claim the history of ancient Macedonia as its own. Greece considers the dynasties of Phillip II and Alexander the



Great to be part of Greek history and has for decades contested the use of a Greek name by the Republic of Macedonia, a nation whose ethnic majority is Slavic. Some

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Greeks feel the use of the name “Macedonia” by its northern neighbour amounts to a territorial claim over Greece’s northern region (also called Macedonia.) As a result, some international organizations, including the European Union and NATO, prefer to recognize the country as the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” It is also the birth place of the great Mother Teresa who is a household name in India. A small country but extremely beautiful, it is full of natural beauty and clean environment. It claims to be the first country in the world to make available free internet to all its citizens by making the entire country covered by wi-fi connectivity. The population of the country is just over 2 million while of its capital city Skopje about 0.5 million. In the month of October when I visited it, it was quite chilly. Like in most cities of Europe the City Square has numerous statues and mostly restricted to cars and vehicles. Roadside cafes and eateries abound.



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Vatican City – Italy

During our extensive tour of Europe in June 1988 our first stop was Rome and naturally we went to see the Vatican City. This city although surrounded by Rome is given the status of a separate state and is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. It is home to the Pope and is a trove of iconic art and architecture. Its Vatican Museums house ancient Roman sculptures such as the famed “Laocoön and His Sons” as well as Renaissance frescoes in the Raphael Rooms and the Sistine Chapel, famous for Michelangelo’s ceiling. Since it was a Wednesday, the Pope was out on the balcony to give a



public appearance which he does only once a week and we were lucky to see him. My wife and I had another occasion to visit Italy in April 2016 on a company tour when we had a

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guided tour of the place and the art and sculpture on display are really spectacular.



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Washington DC – U.S.A

During our first trip to USA in 1983 Indra and I went to quite a few places including to Washington DC, which is the capital city of the country. It was on 16th June 1983 we went in the morning for Washington DC Tour. In the group there were 3 other couples – from Israel, Japan and Spain. The driver was a Brazilian which made our group a really international group. Our lady guide was very informative and competent and took us around all the places – JFK Centre for Arts, Arlington Cemetery, Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, White House, Capitol – where we were lucky to see

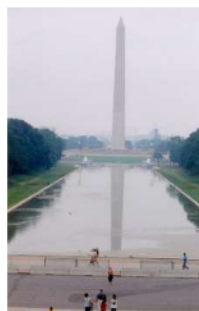
the American Senate in

session and in debate – Air and Space Museum, Tube Station, Smithsonian Institution etc. Washington has some areas which have fewer wide streets and with no traffic regulations which was unlike other American cities and reminded us of our own



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Calcutta. Although food in 1983 for us strict vegetarians was a problem, the best thing here however was the high quality of whatever you get and its hygienic strictness. I again visited this city in 2004 in a group of Lions from Calcutta although this time Indra was not accompanying. I have only a few photographs available which I am sharing.



Stockholm – Sweden

Before Lions International Convention in Hamburg, Germany in 2013, we arrived at Stockholm airport around 1130 on 2 July and at very first sight, it looked very neat and clean. Luggage handling was very fast as they arrived by the time, we reached the concerned belt. As you come out, a big picture of Swedish legendary tennis player Bjorn Borg is there saying welcome to my home city. The country has a population of around 9.5 million. We took a cab to come to our hotel Hansson in the city area and it cost us SKroner 470 which was roughly 4700 in rupees. However, the rates were fixed by each company although they differ from each other.



Exchange rate was about 8 SEF to 1 Euro. The country is quite expensive. Hotel Hansson is an old building with old style rooms with wooden floor but with all necessary amenities.

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Water in the country is of top quality and safe for drinking. Tree shaded boulevard in the mid-city reminds you of old-time cities. You get 24-hour pass on payment which can be used on any mode of transport metro or bus or tram at SEK 135 per person. Cycling is very popular and there is normally a separate lane besides the main street for cyclists. As this was summer time, there was sunshine till late in the day being quite bright past 9 p.m. It never became fully dark throughout the night. In early July there was strong wind and chill in the air with day time temperature around 19 c and you need a sweater to be comfortable. Although Swedish is a different language, people generally also speak English. Ericsson Globe is said to be the world's largest spherical building where a smaller global machine takes you to the top for a top of the world view of the city for a ticket of SEK 145 per person – a wonderful



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experience. Smoking habit is rampant especially among women. You find cigarette butts all over the streets. City Hall is a heritage building where Nobel Prize dinner is held every year on 10 December. Sweden is a cluster of 30000 small islands and is called the Archipelago while the city of Stockholm has 14 islands and called the Venice of the North and is home to Greta Garbo, Bjorn Borg, Alfred Nobel, Dag Hammarskjöld. It is also called the capital of Scandinavian countries. The city is said to be rising by 4 mm every year and as such most structures were being raised by the help of pillars. The buildings do not have any space in between and have hardly any balconies and are separated only

by change of colour. The streets are very straight and one block has mostly 3 or 4 buildings. The



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crossings are rectangular and frequent making locating any part very easy. Public transport is very efficient and easily available at very frequent intervals.



Copenhagen – Denmark

As is our habit, before the Lions International Convention in Hamburg Germany in July 2013, we took a trip to Denmark and Sweden and arrived at Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The airport is quite big and baggage handling was very fast. We took an all day travel pass for 12.5 euros per person valid for 24 hours and got to our hotel Bella Sky by first taking train and then metro and reached within about 20 minutes. Public transport in all countries of Europe is very good and convenient. Our hotel Bella Sky was very impressive and an excellent structure with very good facilities. Like in



Stockholm, our previous stop, here also the buildings were old and had no balconies or space in between. May be a reason is the country has heavy snowfall and balconies will have accumulation of snow which may not be good. The Statue of Little Mermaid on the sea front is said to be



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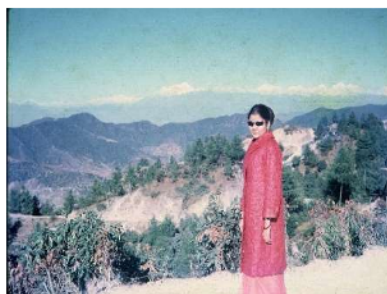
one of the most photographed statues. Rosenborg Castle is nice and its surrounding garden very well maintained with different flower beds. Like other Scandinavian countries here also cycling is very popular and streets have cycling lanes on the sides. Danish Kroner at the time was about 7 to 1 Euro but Euros are mostly accepted but refund if any is given only in local currency.



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Nepal

A week after our marriage on 24 November 1968, Indra and I went to Kathmandu, Nepal for our honeymoon. In our immediate family, we were the first persons to go out of the country and naturally everyone was quite worried, more so because for me also it was the first occasion to go anywhere unaccompanied by any senior person. Our family had an old friend in Mr. C.S. Banerjee, who was once a Sales Officer of Esso Company at Bankura and quite close to us, as District Manager of Esso in Nepal and he was contacted to make arrangements for our stay as also look after us during our stay there. He received us at the Kathmandu airport and took us to our



arranged hotel De'l Annapurna, a 5-star hotel in the city near the Royal Palace. It was a unique experience. The weather in December was quite cold but the right season to visit any hill station as weather remains clear and you can really enjoy the scenic beauty of the place. Since in those days, foreign goods were rare in India, we did considerable shopping for all

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members of the family and for ourselves. We saw all the important places in the city. Although I do not remember all the places, some are still vivid in memory and they are Pashupatinath Temple, Royal Palace, Kumari Chowk, Durbar Chowk, Budha Nilkantha, Patan Durbar. We also went to see Casino at the Solatee Hotel which was probably the first in the Indian sub-continent and a big attraction for visitors to Nepal. We visited the place and enjoyed seeing the glamour and razzle-dazzle of the place. However, being in principle not a gambler or believer in it, we did not play except perhaps a few hits on the slot machines. The most thrilling experience of this visit was the journey by a small plane to see the Everest Mountain in its finest glory. It is indeed a life time experience as you visit quite near the peak and have a panoramic view of the mountain range with its snow-



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clad peaks. After 1968, it was after long years in October 1996 that I had another opportunity of going to Kathmandu to attend a high-level meeting of the Lions Clubs International and spent three days staying at Soaltee Hotel which was at the time the best hotel in Nepal and still is among the best ones. After I became International Director in June 2008, I had quite a few occasions to go to Nepal during my tenure of two years as Director. Besides Kathmandu, we went to Narayangarh for a District Conference and were quite amazed at the enthusiasm of people there as almost 1000 people gathered from all over Nepal for the conference which was very well organized. In

Nepal, there are quite a few companies running air services to small places as road connectivity in the difficult mountainous terrain is not so good. We took this journey to Narayangarh by plane taking only about 15-20 minutes whereas the road journey would have taken anything between 5 to 7 hours minimum if you were lucky not to encounter any blockades or bundhs. During one of such trips, we took the opportunity of



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visiting Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha. The area is being further developed. The day we visited, the President of Sri Lanka was scheduled to pay a visit to the place and as such entry of all visitors was prohibited as a security measure.



However, we were being accompanied by the Lions District Governor of the area and he contacted the district Magistrate of the area saying that his International Director is visiting and we were quite surprised to see how the Lions are given respect when the District Magistrate gave special permission for our visit and also instructed the concerned local person to accompany us and take us around. It ultimately turned out to be a VIP visit as we went around all the places without having to face any crowd or restriction. Lumbini (Sanskrit for "the lovely") is a



Buddhist pilgrimage site located at the Nepalese town of Kapilavastu, district Rupandehi, near the Indian border. It is one of four Buddhist pilgrimage sites based on major events in the life of Gautama Buddha. Interestingly, all of the events occurred under trees. The other three sites are in India:

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Bodhgaya (enlightenment), Sarnath (first discourse), and Kushinagar (death). The site is a large garden with a grove of pipal trees. The area around Lumbini is entirely Hindu, but many Buddhist temples and shrines from various nations are scattered around the holy site

itself. The most important temple at Lumbini is the Maya Devi Temple, which enshrines the traditional site of the Buddha's birth. The current temple stands on the site of



earlier temples and stupas, including the stupa built by Ashoka.

The modern temple consists mainly of simple white building that protects ancient ruins, with the exact spot of the Buddha's birth identified. The delicate sandstone sculptures discovered here are now in the National Museum in Kathmandu. Since Nepal was once part of India, the cultures remain similar and

you do not feel as if you are in any foreign country. Language is similar to Hindi and people understand Hindi widely and there is no problem in communicating with local people.

Population is mostly Hindu and Nepal is possibly the only Hindu country in the world today. Many people of Indian origin live here and the economy and business include many Indian people. The Marwari



community is widely involved in business activities. People are

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friendly in demeanor.

Kathmandu has all the amenities of a modern city with many quality hotels. We did not get an opportunity of visiting Pokhra which is said to be one of the most scenic places of the

country, we would love to visit the same in future. However, the opportunity arrived when I was

invited as Chief Guest for a Lions District Conference held at Pokhra in April 2013. We

took a small flight in a small aircraft which is very common in Nepal and after a flight of about 30 minutes reached

Pokhra which is very picturesque and beautiful. The hosts were very hospitable as is common in Nepal and we were put up in a very good hotel. We

were taken sightseeing by a local Lion and went around the important places. For our return journey we faced a lot of problem since due to bad weather as is common in this area, our flight got cancelled and we had to go by road to Kathmandu which is at least 6-7 hours' drive. It became even longer due to bad roads and hold ups on way and we missed our flight from Kathmandu to Kolkata. We had to stay for



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another night at Kathmandu and next day had to return to Kolkata via Delhi as there was no direct flight on that day. We visited Kathmandu again in November-December 2013 for the ISAAME Area Forum and stayed for about one week at Hyatt Hotel which is one of the very good hotels in the city. The forum was an outstanding success with meticulous arrangements under the leadership of Lion Sanjay Khetan and guidance of ID

Sangeeta Jatia. Hospitality was top class and the program throughout well thought out and organized. I had an important assignment of organizing and facilitating various seminars which went off very well and were profusely appreciated by all.



“Nepal is among the few countries which were never colonized by any other country. Despite being a small nation, Nepal has always been a sovereign nation.”

Serbia

Before going to Milan in June 2019 for Lions International Convention, we went to Serbia and Croatia before reaching there. We landed in Belgrade the capital which has population of only 2 million and the country 7.5 million. The city is quite neat and clean. The airport was nothing extraordinary or very big. Local currency is Serbian Dinar which is about 118 to 1 Euro. The country was part of old Yugoslavia which is now divided in 5 countries after civil war which started in 1991 and ultimately division was completed by 1999. Things looked like were very cheap price wise. We had big scoops of chocolate ice cream which cost RSD 100 each i.e about Rs. 70 each which is lower than even in India. Petrol however was quite expensive at 1.10 euro per litre. Unlike in India diesel is more expensive. Our hotel Courtyard Marriott at City Centre was good with all amenities although the hotel was small in comparison to normal in big cities. Location in the heart of the city near city centre was an advantage. Its restaurant Credo had a large seating capacity and staff members were very friendly. As usual nothing much was available for vegetarians like us



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since In Siberia people mostly eat meats. Since 1999 the country is a republic with its President elected every four years. Voting right is at 18 years age. Main crop here are wheat maize and sunflower. Main minerals are iron and copper. About 10% go for higher education. Most popular is Economics because of economic condition of the country. Danube river is the biggest river of Europe running through ten countries and having four country capitals on its banks all with names starting with B. In Siberia the other side of the river is Romania. Through the city also passes another famous river Sava. 2 hours' drive from Belgrade is Golubac fortress. It was built possibly in the late 13th century by army. Position is unique as covered by a hill on one side and river on another. It has never been conquered. Pigeons are called golub and the place has a large number of them and nobody hurts them. 30 minutes' drive from Golubac is Lepenski Vir which is about 8000 years old where a museum is built exhibiting stone age skulls bones skeletons. It is just near the Romanian border. The area is called Iron Gate in Romania and Djerdap in Serbia discovered in



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1964. It is a prehistoric archaeological site. Novi Sad is the second largest city with about 250 thousand population. Is a nice city with a statue of the founder and mayor in the city centre. With many cafes and roadside shopping, it is quite popular with tourists and is about 90 minutes' drive towards the north from Belgrade. En route you see Fruska Gora monastery and Sremski Karlovci.



***“Several international polls
have rated Serbia as the most
hospitable nation in the world.”***

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Croatia

As is our habit before going to Milan for Lions International Convention we went to visit Serbia and Croatia and our first stop was Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. From Belgrade we drove to Zagreb which is about 400 KM distance but the highway being good car cruised at over 100 KM per hour speed. People told crossing border at times takes as long as 13 hours and we were scared but we were lucky we got through in less than one hour. The country is full of greenery as soon as you enter it. Price of petrol at the time was 1.30 euro per litre which was more than in India. Population of the country was about 4.5



million while of Zagreb around 1 million. Drive from border to Zagreb is mainly agricultural area with scanty habitation. Local currency is Kuna which is about 7.40 to 1 Euro. It seems Croatia is popular with Indian tourists. At the breakfast we met a couple from Kolkata Ashok and Jaya Butta who knew many common friends even some

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from Bankura like Ajay Lohia Sajal Ganguly Sandeep Narsaria. In the hotel lobby we also met a group from Mumbai. On our way to Split which is 410 KMs from Zagreb we passed through a 5 KM long tunnel the longest in the country. Both sides landscape is beautiful with thick trees and hardly any habitation. It is a beautiful city being second largest with population about 2.5 lacs. Our resort Radisson Blu was very good with scenic surroundings. Surprisingly in hotel room 2 Hindi news channels ABP News and Aajtak were available. About 1 hour sail by speed boat we were taken to see Blue Caves which are really marvel of nature attracting thousands of visitors daily. We visited 5 caves. Fellow tourists enjoyed diving and swimming in one of the islands. Wind was heavy and so during sailing we were drenched in sea water as water was thrown overboard but we enjoyed.



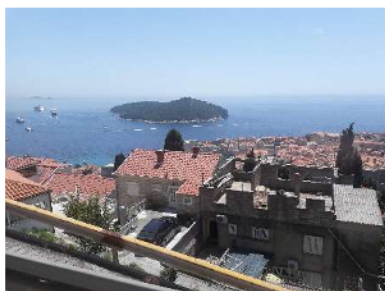
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The full trip took about 10 hours and we were 12 persons from Norway Belgium US and three of us from India as Dr Gouri Patra of Burdwan was accompanying us. Hvar Island was the biggest where we stopped for lunch. It has quite a few hotels and we saw tourists coming to check in. Drive to Dovrobnik from Split was picturesque all through and for about 10-12 KMs had to pass through Bosnia Herzegovina which enabled number of countries visited by me go up to 64. Our hotel Sheraton Riviera was a very excellent one. In the evening we went to see the old town where old heritage structures and churches are preserved. No vehicles being allowed inside you have to go down and up hundreds of stairs and walk and walk but a good experience. Next day we went for a full day boat trip to Elaphite Islands and stopped for three hours at the most beautiful island of Lopud with a nice



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sea beach numerous shops and lots of tourists enjoying swimming and water sports. Free drinks not however alcoholic was provided as well as lunch to passengers.



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Shanghai – China

After attending Lions International Convention in Fukuoka Japan and visit to Tokyo & Hiroshima, we arrived at Shanghai in July 2016. It is called the city of China's future and had a population of 27 million in 2016 being the largest and the business city in China having 3 out of 10 tallest structures of the world. The area is 6400 sq. km and the average temperature round the year is 19c with highest being 35c and winters 5-7c. 70% of population in China used to follow Buddhist religion but after the cultural revolution of 1960s religion was banned and so now 99% of young people have no religion – they believe their destiny is in their own hands. The average life in China is 70 for men and 72 for women. But in Shanghai it is 88.5 for women and about 78 for men. In Shanghai female population is 60%. For marriage boy's parents have to give dowry to the girl's family which is minimum 60000 yuan. Divorce rate is very high at 30% in cities and 22% in rural areas. All work in this country and so there are no housewives.



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Men do more house work like cleaning and looking after children and mostly no cooking is done at home specially Monday to Friday. Green cover in the city is very less and you hardly find any birds as they cannot find food easily. Green tea is very popular rather than coffee. People have dinner by 6 or 6.30 in the evening and as a result get at least 3 or 4 hours to digest before going to sleep. This is the reason people do not have pot bellies like in India. Many bullet trains run here. There are also magnetic trains which run without drivers. It is a young city only 45 years old. 2016 was called the Happy Year and also the China-India Friendship year. The underground metro network in Shanghai at more than 500 km is largest in the world. Owning a car is not a problem but getting a Shanghai number without which, you cannot run it in the city is very difficult. The charge



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for it is 85000 yuan per number and there is a big waiting list. If you wish to get it fast you have to bid for the same quoting higher cost. There are 80 universities in Shanghai itself. For 40 years couples were allowed only one kid and so 85% population have only one kid while 15% have twins. In Shanghai the average size of an apartment is between 60 to 80 sq. meters because the size of the family is only 3. Local people are only 30% of the population and the balance being emigrants from provinces. The average salary of a person was only 6000 yuan compared to Japan with about 20000 yuan per month. Living condition of average people was reported very bad having to live in very small apartments with only common bath and wash rooms and availability of hot water only on 3 days a week. By current regulation no building can be less than 22 storeys. In China 99%



people are non-veg and eat whatever flies in the sky, walks on the ground or swims in water. There are many elevated roads even 6 storeys and the main streets are 6-8 lanes. Shanghai by night from the cruise over the Huangpu River was a wonderful sight with its razzle-dazzle



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comparable only with Las Vegas. We had dinner at an Indian restaurant named India Kitchen spread over two floors and with a good capacity. Quality was good with a good spread including ice cream as dessert. Jade Buddha statue is made of one big block of jade stone and is unique. The temple is more than 100 years old. We were also taken to a government run silk producing and sale centre. Nanjing Road is a street where vehicles are not allowed



and is a walking shopping street where stores of all big brands are located. Free tram cars run across the street for shoppers. A.P. Xinyang Fashion & Gifts market is a popular market complex where goods are available very cheap. One has to do very hard bargain quoting just 25% of the quoted price and you are very likely to get it for 1/3rd of the originally quoted price. Shanghai Museum, established in 1952, is spread over 4 floors and entry is free. Surprisingly in China entry to museums is free whereas entry to temples is ticketed unlike in other countries. We also went to the Yuyuan Garden which is a market square where old style buildings have been built to give a touch of the old and houses numerous shops. It is all the time crowded.

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Moscow – Russia

After Lions International Convention in Hamburg Germany in July 2013, we went to Russia which we always wanted to visit and after spending a couple of days in St. Petersburg, we travelled by super-fast train to Moscow which covers the distance of 650 KMs in only 3.50 hours. Speed of the train and outside temperature are displayed on the monitor all the time. Speed went up to 220 KMs. Habitation in countryside was sparse and houses were small but well maintained. Thick vegetation and greenery are seen all around. Moscow city derives its name from Moscow River and



at first sight looks like

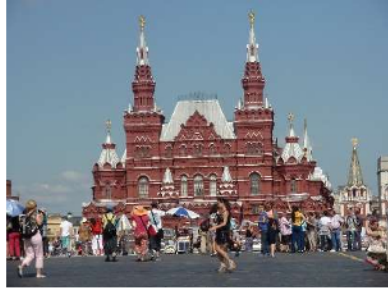
any big city like London. Population at the time was around 12 million but unofficially people say was around 15-16 million.

Streets are very wide by normal standard. Kremlin which means a fort was built as a walled city in 1156 and the city gradually



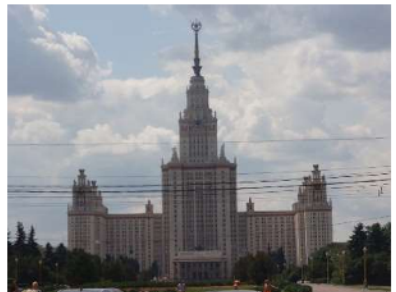
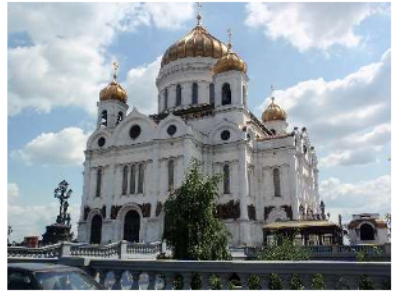
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expanded all around. Famous Red Square is a huge open space in front of the Kremlin. The city is now about 1000 sq. km. In Soviet time, people were not viewed well if they go to church, but now there are more than 500 active churches in Moscow. People mostly follow Orthodox Christianity like Greece. About 27 million people from Russia were killed in the 2nd world war. Even now more mass graves are being discovered. The main church of Russia is the which is built in 2000 as an exact replica of the original which was blown by Stalin to build a high rise building but could not be possible due to the 2nd world war. It is a most elegantly designed and decorated church. President or Prime Minister comes to offer prayer on important days. Maxim Gorky Park in the centre is 14 sq. kms long and is the place where people flock and has many



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attractions and sports and games. Moscow State University founded in 1755 today has a huge elegant building with a large campus. The city has many large parks and open space unlike other large cities and has lot of greenery that makes it a beautiful city. The metro stations are all differently designed with sculptures and paintings and are really attractive. The stations are very deep down the street level like in London. There are a good number of bridges across river Moscow which runs through the middle of the city. Divorce rate is very high about 56% and as a rule the children stay with the mother. Property derived after marriage is divided equally but earlier property is one's own. Only about 7% of population has more than 3 children now. Normally the children live with their parents until their marriage. Retirement age is 55



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for women and 60 for men but it is not mandatory. Some people still fondly remember Soviet Rule saying even though there were no rich people, there were neither poor person, and accommodation, education and medical facilities were free for all while now only education up to secondary level is free. Housing has become very expensive at minimum \$3000 per sq. mt for an apartment. Congress Library in US is the biggest and Lenin Library here is the second biggest in the world.



London – England

I was always fascinated by London and had wished to go there whenever the chance arose. During our trip to Europe in 1988 when we went to many places in the continent, we also planned to spend 2-3 days here with our two sons before we went to



U.S.A. to attend Lions International Convention at Denver as a District Governor Elect. We took BA flight 315 from Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris on 13 June 1988 at 19.30 hours and reached London at the same time as the flight took one hour and London time was one hour behind Paris time. Justice A.K. Basu and his grandson were also with us. We had an acquaintance from the side of my brother-in-law Suraj Garg's in laws in Mr. G.K. Rath who lived in London and his man Mr. Asit came to receive us and we reached his house around 9 p.m. – a beautiful apartment in a posh most central part in London.



Mr. Rath was a thorough gentleman being very hospitable and soft spoken. He was kind enough to take us out for dinner at an Indian restaurant round the corner and the food was most delicious. London at first sight looked to be a beautiful clean

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city although we had heard that London is like Calcutta in many respects and not as clean as other cities or the world. After a leisurely time, next morning we went out for sight-seeing with Mr. Asit in his car. We first of all went to Madam Tussaud's Museum which is a thing which cannot be imagined unless seen. The models are so life like that it is difficult to believe they are models. The model of The Sleeping Beauty even was breathing by some mechanical device to make it all the more life-like. We took photographs besides Viv Richards, Ian Botham, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and Rajiv Gandhi. The children in particular were thrilled. My younger son coming back home showed his photograph with the model of Viv Richards to his friends and they were all the time asking where could he meet him. We also saw Buckingham Palace, Parliament House, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, 10 Downing Street (official residence of Prime Minister of



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England), Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus. We did considerable shopping on Oxford Street and did some shopping from Marks & Spencer's stores – a huge store. We also went in C&A, another big store but did not find it all that impressive. We went to see the Tower of London, an old fort which we did not find anything outstanding. We also went for shopping to Harrods, Marks & Spencer's, C&A, Mother Care, Hamley's, Jaegar and some other stores – all of them being huge complexes and selling almost all goods. The behaviour of people in London is very cordial except for a few Indians working here. We took a travel card for 2 pounds each and 0.80 each child which in 1988 entitled a person to ride on underground trains and buses for the entire day without any restrictions. London is very clean. The taxis were all of a certain model Austin car specially designed which have sufficient space for 4 persons to sit on the rear seat. We had a very satisfying dinner at an Indian Vegetarian Restaurant Ravishankar on Euston Road which has a number of Indian shops and restaurants. Getting Indian food and vegetarian food



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is no problem in London as it has a large number of Indian restaurants. Next morning, we went to see the changing of guards at the Buckingham Palace which was nothing very impressive besides the show of British olde-worlde charm and pageantry. We also went to see the British Museum which is a huge complex but as with all other museums you need enough time and special knack to appreciate all things. We had a sumptuous vegetarian Indian lunch at Chutneys – a buffet lunch with 12 dishes



including Ksheer, Jalebi, Samosas, Pakoras besides Rice, vegetables etc. The children left for India - the taxi fare up to Heathrow airport was 20 pounds including tip but the driver was very cooperative. After seeing off the children, we returned by underground railway and did some more shopping at Marks & Spencer's. During our trip to Miami Convention in 1989, we again had a two day stop at London as the previous year we were fascinated by the city as we found many similarities with cities in India. The underground tube railway system here is something worth appreciating. There are a number of lines and once you get accustomed to it, you can go

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to any part of the city in the shortest time. This year we became quite accustomed to travelling this way and during the two days that Indra and I spent here we were going from one place to another very easily. We utilized the time for doing



shopping. The best part of free enterprise and open market is that shops and stores give the best service to the customers. The previous year, Indra had purchased some under garments from Marks & Spencer's which did not properly fit her and we took the same with us to take a chance to exchange if possible and if accepted by the store although we were not very sure as such things did not happen in India. But we were very pleasantly surprised when the sales person in the store was most cooperative and told us that there is no problem in exchanging the same and that we may take anything in lieu of the same although we did not have with us the cash memo for the earlier purchase. We did considerable shopping at this store and still would love to visit this store. Broadway show of London is something considered world famous. Club 7 Holidays, who got the business of more than 94 persons through me in organizing tour in connection with Miami International Convention of Lions were Rohit C. Mehta was to be elected Vice President gave us courtesy stay at London and offered us two tickets for the Broadway show. Indra and I went to see the show but did not greatly enjoy the same – may be

because we did not have the mental makeup to enjoy this type of show. When in 1998, the International Convention of Lions was in Birmingham, I had another opportunity of visiting this country in June of the year and spent some time in London moving around London city in the underground rail and do some shopping. My feelings about London have always been very good and I would love to visit this city anytime given an opportunity. The British people, although supposed to be snobs, are quite helpful and friendly. The weather here is unpredictable and it may become suddenly very cold even during summer months. It may start raining any time and people here are in the habit of carrying an umbrella whenever going out of home. Since our visits were many years ago, only a few photographs are available.

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Egypt

My wife Indra has always been interested in visiting places of historic importance rather than a modern city as according to her all-modern cities are the same with high rise buildings and concrete constructions



with hardly any much of difference. When there was a Lions ISAAME Area Forum in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2008, we decided to avail the opportunity of taking a side tour and also visit the ancient country of Egypt to see specially the Pyramids. After the forum was over, we took a flight from Nairobi to Cairo via Sudan and reached there by the early evening. Our tour operator's representative was there to receive us all at the airport with a luxury vehicle to take us to our designated hotel.



However, for the first time in our life, we were confronted with a new reality which we later found has become a normal affair at many a place, was that no drinking water was provided in your hotel rooms and if you needed any, you have to purchase the same. On enquiry we found the price of bottled drinking water

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in Cairo was very high. Later we found price of one litre bottled drinking water was costlier than the price of one litre petrol or diesel since this country is rich in oil. A visit to the Pyramids is a life time experience. You really



wonder how 5000 years ago; people must have constructed the same when there were no mechanical arrangements to lift heavy stones to such a height. Another surprise was to know that no cement or any binding material was used and that the stones have been kept one over the other. You really marvel to think how these have survived so long seeing through weather vagaries and natural calamities. There are a number of

Pyramids and the place attracts a very large number of tourists every day. The Sphinx near the pyramids is huge in size and presents a venerable sight. We also saw in the evening a Light & Sound show that is presented



there to recreate the history behind the pyramids and sphinx. Cairo is a very big city with a large population. People are quite handsome and well-built and women are very beautiful. Language for us was not a problem as people speak Urdu

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which is quite similar to Hindi and you face no problem to converse with local people. We also visited a museum where old mummies are kept among other antique value things. The country is famous for its Egyptian



cotton and we went shopping in a market where hundreds of shops sell their wares mostly local things. Cotton and Spices are the most famous goods one buys here. I brought some cotton shirt pieces which back home was said to be costing quite a high price. In the evening we took a cruise over River Nile in a very luxurious ship where local artists presented a show and we were served an elaborate dinner. It was an enjoyable experience. We also went to the coastal city of Alexandria which is a most beautiful sea side city and situated at a considerable distance from Cairo. The drive enabled us to see the countryside. Alexandria with its long sea beaches and a very long sea front avenue present a very pleasant view. The sea water is very clean and deep blue. We spent a few hours enjoying the place and also visited a Palace near the sea. People of the country are well behaved and courteous. Amitabh Bachhan the famous Indian actor is very popular and people you meet often refer to him. The people are quite interested in India since the two countries have traditionally maintained a close friendly relationship ever since Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Nasser were ruling the two governments in the 1950s

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and 1960s. Most of the pics of this trip it seems have been erroneously deleted from the computer and as such only a few which are available are shared here.



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Pretoria - South Africa

During our visit to Livingstonia Zambia for a Lions District Conference in May 2009 where I was invited as Chief Guest when I was Lions International Director, we took the opportunity of visiting South Africa, which we wanted to visit since we had a lot about this country. Besides Cape Town and Sun City, we also spent some time in Johannesburg. We also went to Pretoria, an old city which is like a twin city with Johannesburg. This is a place where Mahatma Gandhi practiced law during his stay in this country. This is also the capital of the country and the day we reached saw the country completing its general elections and we saw the preparations for the oath taking ceremony of the new government. We had a very good lady guide who was also the driver of the vehicle in which we were being taken around in Johannesburg and Pretoria and the lady was very accommodating and helpful. We showed great interest in seeing the house where Mahatma Gandhi used to live and none seemed to know the place. But



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the lady kept on enquiring and asking people all around and ultimately took us to the place where we could see the small house where Gandhi had opened his law office in South Africa and we took its photograph which remains one of the most treasured photographs taken by me. Pretoria also has a square in the heart of the city named as Gandhi Square having a statue of the great man. Since there was heavy traffic and parking space very scarce, our car could not stop there or find a park space and so we could not take the photograph of the square of Gandhi statue. We also went to see a gold mine where we were taken under the ground in a lift to be shown around and were explained how gold was mined there.



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Brussels – Belgium

During our trip to Europe in 1988, we also went to Brussels the Capital of Belgium and went around the city. It is a typical European City with very old buildings and structures. At the time it was reported that more than 75000 apartments were lying vacant as people did not like to live in the city but in suburbs and outside. We saw the Little Boy a statue of a little boy passing urine which is very famous and almost like the symbol of Brussels as all the souvenirs, cakes and candles etc. available here are shaped like this. I had another occasion to go to Brussels again in September



2012 in connection with Lion

Magazine Editors Conference which is held every 3-4 years to which I was invited as the editor of the Indian edition of LION magazine having a circulation of more than 2 lacs every month. I went around the city in a city tour which has been my habit of



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undertaking whenever and wherever we have been going over the years as it gives you the opportunity of seeing the important places of any city.

Brussels is a city with a population of about 1.1 million in 2012 which is low

considering to the growing population of most of the cities in the world and there is not much of a rush. The city is quite beautiful but with many narrow streets and roads. City Centre is about 14 KM from the airport.

The main languages in Belgium are Dutch, French and German while in Brussels City it is mainly French. The total population of the country is about 11 million in 2012. Trams are still popular but they are

quite elegant and comfortable with AC cabins beautifully maintained. You also see trams with multiple cars – at times 5 to 6. The city is very green with big trees all around. Brussels is also the capital of European Union



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and has the European Parliament and is as such politically very important in Europe. Unlike in 1988 when we came first time when the public face of Brussels was the Little Boy passing urine – a statue in the city square, in 2012, the public face of the city was the Atomium, a monument created to mark the world trade fair held here in 1958 in which 40 million visitors are reported to have participated. It is an architecturally imposing structure with 6 or 8 globes hanging up on the structure and with a restaurant up over in one of the globes. The city is quite old with many heritages type impressive structures and buildings and cathedrals and churches with a distinctive style. Smoking habit among people even women looked to be quite high like many other European countries whereas the same is going down in most other countries in the world. Belgian chocolates are world famous and



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we even went to a reputed chocolate manufacturing unit where the process of chocolate making was demonstrated. Dozens of varieties of chocolates were available and we tasted quite a few varieties.



Tanzania

During my scheduled trip to Kenya in April 2010 as Lions International Director we fixed up a programme for a short visit to Tanzania. After a short flight from Nairobi, we reached Kilimanjaro which is a small airport between the two important cities of Moshi and Arusha in Tanzania. Like in most other countries of Africa, here also people of Indian origin command good respect and position and control the economy of the country. Custom formalities were completed in no time and we were not required to do anything ourselves as you have normally to do everywhere and was taken care of by the people who came to receive us. On way to Moshi, we saw the majestic Mount Kilimanjaro which at 20000 ft is the highest peak in Africa and is said to be a dead volcano. The countryside was very similar to our own countryside and it never seemed as if you are out of India. The weather here is good and pleasant the year round and Mother Nature seems to be very lavish on African countries with beautiful flora and



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fauna and wild life. Nature here has virgin beauty as it remains still untarnished by pollution and modern vagaries. Economy of the country like any other African country is dominated by Asian community and more specifically by Indian origin people. Tanzanian Shilling at the time was a very weak currency being 1300 to \$1. We were taken to visit Maynara Lake and Game Reserve spread over app. 600 sq kms where you can see a variety of wild animals and is reported to be the only place in the world where you can see Lions on the trees if you are lucky. Of course, we were not that lucky. We were presented an exquisite leather art work showing an elephant with the mountain Kilimanjaro in the background and it is proudly adorning the wall of my office chamber and whoever visits cannot but admire the same. We visited a school run



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by Lions Club there and I was given the honour of inaugurating a new dormitory for students.



***“Tarangire National Park is Home to
Unique Tree-Climbing Lions.”***

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Calgary – Canada

Calgary was our last stop in Canada in July 2014. It is a metro city with population of about 1.2 million and our hotel International Hotel & Suites gave us a big suite with more than expected facilities including free Wi fi and business center access. It had a bed room, a drawing room, a dining space and a kitchenette with microwave oven and other gadgets and must be measuring around 450 sq ft minimum. We went around important places in the city. Calgary Tower is more than 600 ft high and gives a graphic aerial view not only of the city, but of far-off places also due to its height. You are



given an ear phone and a tablet while you enter, which give you elaborate description of the places in view. There is a glass bottom platform at the top on which you can walk on and get

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the feel of the height as you see the street below and it is quite scary. The office buildings in downtown are high rises but what is interesting is the decoration in the front with nicely maintained flower beds and other artifacts beautifully made and maintained. We also saw the China Town which is a common phenomenon in most cities of North America due to large immigrant Chinese population everywhere. What appeals you in Canada is the way people follow all rules. No one violates traffic rules, speeding rules and everyone crosses roads and streets only when the walk sign is on. Everyone is well behaved and cooperative. You find Indians



working in hotels almost everywhere. In Calgary as winters are very severe, most buildings are joined by a walkway on the first floor including at road crossings so that people



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may walk over from one place to another with ease. A good thing about most cities in most countries of the world is that streets are numbered and not named like in our country and are mostly parallel to each other and thus easy to find out your destination. Also, streets in one direction are called streets and the diagonal ones are called avenues for easier identification. For example, if streets in east-west direction are avenues, the ones in north-south direction would be streets.



“I travel because it makes me realize how much I haven’t seen, how much I’m not going to see, and how much I still need to see.”

– Carew Papritz
