



Spectacular combination of natural and man-made in Cappadocia, Turkey

Susan and Richard's European Odyssey – a tantalising tour

EMBRACING EUROPE WITH PEOPLE WHO KNOW IT INTIMATELY AND CAN DELIVER SIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES YOU MIGHT NEVER DISCOVER ON YOUR OWN IS ONE OF THE JOYS OF A ONE-OFF GUIDED GROUP TOUR TO HAND-PICKED DESTINATIONS.

WORDS LIZ FRENCH & PHOTOS SUPPLIED*

Professional artist Susan Harrison-Tustain and her husband Richard Tustain are designing their next European tour, planned for September 2014. They are looking for 18 like minded travelers to join them. Some of the places are already taken, by people who have joined the Harrison-Tustains' tours before, enjoyed themselves so whole heartedly, learned and discovered so much in a fun, relaxing atmosphere that they would not miss another of these tailor-made opportunities.

This, their third European tour, starts in Istanbul, includes Cappadocia, features a week long small ship cruise which gives the opportunity to visit Gallipoli and has stopovers in the Greek Islands. There will be time to visit the Acropolis in Athens, before a flight to Annecy, the 'Venice of France' in the foothills of the Alps. From there they take in the Rhone Valley, France's south-west and Provence before boarding the high speed TGV train to Paris. It's the stuff travel dreams are made of! "No brochure could ever convey the fun that is in store," enthuses Susan. "Knowing the fine details of all that is ahead for our guests is incredibly exciting."

Susan Harrison-Tustain has an established international reputation as a professional artist. A book deal with an American publisher saw her *Glorious Garden Flowers* in Watercolor become a best-seller resulting in worldwide recognition. Her four yearly exhibitions attract both New Zealand and overseas buyers. She was chosen by Sir Ray Avery as one of 53 'New Zealanders who dare to dream' in his book *The Power of Us*, in the illustrious company of the likes of Sam Neill and Neil Finn. She teaches art here in New Zealand and in Australia, the USA and Europe.

Susan and Richard are now rapidly establishing themselves as leaders of very special personalised European tours which draw on their individual strengths. "We love creating memorable, trip-of-a-lifetime experiences with fun groups of people. Every two years we lead a new and exciting, very leisurely paced, tour to destinations which we pack with experiences and adventures handpicked from the things we have appreciated most."

It all started when Susan was approached in 2007 by Kay Rogers from United Travel to lead a painting focused tour to Europe.



Susan agreed, especially as what she could offer would be hugely enhanced by Richard having previously spent five summers leading tours in Europe. Factor in his wine knowledge gained from working in the industry for fifteen years and photography skills honed by a 40 year hobby and this couple had a wonderful mix to offer – the discovery of delightful and often unexpected aspects of diverse places where travelers may like to try their hand at painting, learn about wines, improve their photography or just relax and enjoy a carefree holiday where all the details are taken care of. “Our recipe really works,” says Susan. “It’s all about creating unique and authentic experiences and opportunities in each of our destinations.”

The South of France regularly features. “Because it is one of our favourite places in the world,” explains Richard who says past tours have also included the Swiss Alps, the Italian Lakes and Venice after which they have taken cruises to such places as the French and Italian Rivas, and the Greek Islands en route to Istanbul.

‘BEST’ SMALL SHIP CRUISE

The cruise in the 2014 tour promises to be a highlight among many highlights. Richard admits they had not considered incorporating a cruise until Kay at United Travel suggested it. “It was wonderful! Now a cruise is an integral part of the European experience we offer. We are highly impressed with Azamara Cruises on which we book veranda rooms. The two ships in their fleet vie with each other to be rated Best Cruise in the Small Ships category of the Cruisers’ Choice Awards. The Quest is currently ‘best’ and that’s the one on which we will spend seven days travelling

from Istanbul down the Turkish coast via Gallipoli and the ruins of Ephesus, then to the Greek Islands of Kos, Rhodes, Santorini and Mykonos.” Before guests board the ship they will have experienced the exotic in Istanbul and flown to Cappadocia for four nights in the incredible architectural and natural landscapes that abound there.

The hotels that Richard and Susan’s tour group stay in are chosen because they are very much a part of the authentic experience they offer. “They are not necessarily the most expensive, but they are the most interesting” points out Susan. “Our accommodation is very much a part of the experience we offer. We deliberately choose hotels which ooze character in their setting, their design, or their hosts – often all three! We look forward to savouring special evenings of great company, magical surroundings, tasty foods, wine and lots of laughter.”

SHARING A LOVE OF FRANCE

When touring with committed Francophiles it is no surprise half the holiday is spent in France. The 2014 group will fly from Athens to Annecy, a lakeside town not far from the Alps so an excursion to Chamonix/Mont Blanc is planned with a cable car ride up the famed Aiguille de Midi.

The tour then stays at a delightful and characterful country hotel from where there is a Saturday market and the spectacular walled town of Carcassonne to revel in. The home of Roquefort cheese and the amazing Millau Viaduct are on the way to St Rémy- de-Provence. Leisurely exploration of Provençal villages and visits to one or two Châteauneuf-du-Pape wineries are planned. Then the TGV whisks everyone to Paris.

ABOVE: Dessert anyone? French cuisine, Balmy al fresco evening on deck
RIGHT Clockwise: Buskers in St Germain Paris, Opulent decoration in the Topkapi Palace Istanbul Turkey, Enjoying haute cuisine in France, Beautifully furnished suite at the Museum Hotel Cappadocia Turkey, Cook school in Bellagio: Rob, Richard and Clive learn the fine art of making pasta, Produce Market Provence France.





ABOVE: Azamara Cruise Liner - home away from home on the Mediterranean



But this is just skimming the surface. The real experiences lie in the unexpected, they say. "Being tailor made, we have the flexibility to improvise and create unique opportunities in a care-free atmosphere as we meander through our favourite haunts in Europe. There is a painting around every corner, a fresh angle for a photograph, food just begging to be sampled and local personalities to be enjoyed."

Susan and Richard love seeing their tours create lifelong friendships between people having fun together. So if you measure the success of a holiday by how much you laugh then contact Kay Rogers at United Travel, Bethlehem, to secure your booking now! ■

Testimonial from a couple on our 2012 tour:

"In 2012 we booked our first European trip with Susan and Richard to France, Switzerland and Italy. We were after a no hassle trip that concentrated on unique adventures that were well researched and included a lot of the countryside as well as small towns and villages. Susan and Richard delivered way over and above the call of duty and every day was an exciting adventure that continually raised the bar from the previous day's itinerary. They made everyone feel very special and catered for everyone's requirements; dinners were always lot of fun trying Richard's well researched wines and local cuisine. Susan and Richard would go to great lengths to give us very memorable moments that we will cherish for a life time. I could not think of any couple better to travel with; they were so much fun and we will be definitely booking our next trip through them. We strongly recommend you consider Susan's and Richard's trip for your next European experience."

LEFT CLOCKWISE: The classic colours of Santorini, Greece, Music by the pool at the Museum Hotel, Cappadocia, Turkey, Joan and Lynne enjoying themselves in the gardens at the Museum of Paris in the Marais district, Facade of the ancient Roman Library of Celsus, Ephesus, Turkey

* Photos of Cappadocia, Turkey scenery © Julie Balsiger Photography (www.juliebalsiger.com) Photos of Museum Hotel, Goreme, Cappadocia, Turkey © Museum Hotel (www.museum-hotel.com) All other photos © Richard Tustain