



Photos: Thomas Muller ©

South America Bolivian Aymara shaman gives blessings to Lake Titicaca

The World in 80 Days

Who waits until they're almost 70 to travel around the world in 80 days? Thomas E. Muller. From South America to Africa and home, he shares his whirlwind trip across eight continents.

That sickening, debilitating sensation swept through my body and burrowed into my brain. I had resisted asking the ship's doctor for Dramamine, thinking I could tough it out. Not a chance. Aiming carefully, like a mother penguin feeding her chick, I disgorged my temporary meal into the tiny washbasin and collapsed on the lower bunk bed of my austere cabin which was reverberating with engine-room noise and scented with diesel fumes. Lucky for me, Gordon Kilgore, my 70-year-old upper-bunk cabin mate from the US state of Georgia, was not there to witness this inelegant scene. I and 73 other expeditioners on this photo safari were in the Scotia Sea, and the converted weather research vessel, m.v. Ushuaia (Argentine registry),

was pitching and rolling toward the Falkland Islands. Seasickness is a constant companion to those who would venture into Antarctic waters. There is no quick and easy way to Antarctica.

At age 68, I had started my seven-continents-in-eighty-days journey from Brisbane, on 3 January 2008, and I was due back in Brisbane on 23 March – Day Number 80 – the crossing of the International Date Line having been factored into the calculations. Thirteen months of intermittent planning finally had been threaded together into a necklace of continental visits, starting with Antarctica, proceeding next to South America, then North America and across



Macau Incense Sticks burn at A-Ma Temple

to Europe, down to Africa; then back to Europe to continue to Asia, and finally home to Australasia.

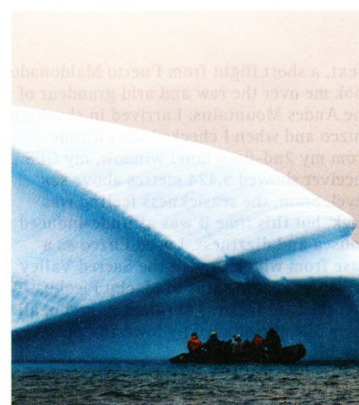
Seasickness aside, Antarctica is so utterly unique that I shall probably never have my fill of visiting her. Consider some of her extraordinary and bizarre features. Travelling to Antarctica is not visiting any country; she has none of the tourism aspects available to her six continental sisters – no political borders, native people or cultural heritage; no local currency, hotels, supermarkets or night clubs; no commercial airports or public transport; no cities, towns or villages – not even trees. And in the summer months, there is no night time, just unremitting daylight.



Ecuador Tom locates the equator in a local timber yard

We sailed from Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city at the tip of Argentina's Tierra del Fuego, and made two landings on the Falklands, thirteen landings on South Georgia (where I paid homage to my Antarctic hero, Ernest Shackleton, at his well-maintained grave), and eleven landings on the South Shetland Islands and Graham Land, part of the continental landmass. Despite the steady growth in Antarctic tourism, it is still a pristine wilderness virtually undisturbed by humans. The silence and isolation are almost mystic; the icebergs take on incredible shapes and colours; the sky, ice and rocks have a surreal character that cannot be described to the non-visitor; and the teeming wildlife everywhere are in a kingdom of their own.

A full month in Antarctica, and I press on through South America, flying from Ushuaia to Lima, Peru and taking a short flight to Puerto Maldonado, at the western edge of the Amazon Jungle. A boat ride down the Tambopata River – coloured a Baileys Irish Cream tint by the eroded clay suspension in the flowing waters – delivers me to the Posada Amazonas jungle lodge for a three-night stay. This was February rainy season, which taught me that anything hung up to dry stays wet when the relative humidity approaches 100 percent. The wet season brings ripening fruit to the trees and that's the best time to sight the many species of monkeys, parrots, parakeets, macaws, toucans and eagles. Clambering up a 38-metre tower lifted me to dizzying heights above the jungle canopy, with a rarely-seen view of the dense forest, stretching to the horizon.



Antarctica Stranded iceberg

Seasickness is a constant companion to those who would venture into Antarctic waters. There is no quick and easy way to Antarctica.



Atlas Mountains Inside a Berber kitchen



Guangdong Tom with China's newest generation, Shekou kindergarten

Next, a short flight from Puerto Maldonado took me over the raw and arid grandeur of the Andes Mountains. I arrived in sky-high Cuzco and when I checked the altitude from my 2nd-floor hotel window, my GPS receiver showed 3,424 metres above sea level. Soon, the seasickness feeling was back, but this time it was altitude-induced nausea and dizziness. I used Cuzco as a base from which to visit the Sacred Valley of the Incas, the ruins of Machu Picchu, and the Inca fortress at Ollantaytambo, all the while surrounded by towering peaks reaching 6,000 metres.

Then, it was off to Bolivia, by bus, and sailing by catamaran across Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake. By the time I reached Bolivia's capital, La Paz, I was sufficiently acclimatized to stomach the 4,073-metre height of the high plateau. Descending by bus, at night, from the plateau and looking down into the bowl full of twinkling lights where La Paz is nestled, must surely rank as one of the 10 best views in a lifetime of adventure travel. It's like your bus has wings and you're coming in for a landing on a crystal-clear, Christmas night.

Later came the flight from La Paz to Quito, Ecuador. With only two days left for South America, my goal was to find the true location of that great dividing line called the Equator. About 25km north of Quito stands the official Equator monument. Armed with satellite-precise GPS monitor in hand, I determined that the official marker is 700 metres too far south. I marched off in a northerly direction and found the equator to be running through a local timber yard. With guard dogs

snapping at my heels, the yard's owner was delighted with this Australian traveller's discovery and promptly drove a steel spike into the ground, to mark precisely where I had indicated the equator cuts through his property.

On to North America. A brief stay in Coral Springs, Florida and the same in Atlanta, Georgia allowed me to catch up with two former classmates from my Tehran, Iran high school days in the 1950s. Ten days go quickly when you are catching up on friends' lives and reminiscing about childhood and young-adulthood years. My next stop was Vancouver, where I visited my 90-year-old mother and my sister, then flew to Vernon, British Columbia for five days of skiing with my brother at Silver Star Ski Resort.

Day Number 66, and I still had Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia to go. Because I know Europe well, this was going to be a lightning visit to London, catching up with an old schoolmate whom I hadn't seen in 42 years, and driving to East Tilbury, Essex where I had spent three of my teenage years, training and working at the Bata Shoe Factory there. Arriving in East Tilbury put my life back half a century and the first thing I did was have lunch at the George and Dragon pub, where, 49 years ago, my former girlfriend's father and I were pub regulars on Sunday mornings. Then, I paid a quick visit to the shoe factory and was horrified to see that the entire manufacturing complex – once Bata's flagship shoe plant – had been abandoned and the buildings were crumbling hulks. The rusting, faded Bata sign, still standing atop the rubber

shoe plant where I had once toiled, was emblematic of rampant manufacturing globalisation. It was a ghostly scene and I returned to London with a heavy heart.

Next came Africa. I flew from Heathrow to Marrakech, Morocco and toured the souks and countryside for five days. A day-long trip to the Atlantic port of Essaouira gave me a chance to take a dip in the freezing ocean and to photograph the narrow alleys of the inner city. I rounded out my first impressions of Morocco by making a day trip into the Atlas mountains and its charming Berber villages.

Continent Six was Asia, where I had lived for many years. I nursed my dwindling journey time and made first-time visits to Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou (Canton). What impressed me most about mainland China was the furious pace of progress. The number of construction sites, tall cranes and modern skyscrapers, sprouting right alongside shabby, old residential blocks from Mao's era makes a paradoxical statement about the real China.

Day Number 80 – 23 March – and I'm back in Brisbane with 6,000 digital photographs on my pocket hard drive. Later that day, my wife and I danced into the night at a gala organised by the Iranian community living in Gold Coast, to celebrate the Persian New Year. It seemed as though Asia was still lingering on my progressively compressed, round-the-world itinerary. ●



contents

- 18 True Grit** Victory, defeat and sheer terror. Australia's much loved, three-time track and field Olympic silver medallist, Raelene Boyle, shares stories of a life well-lived with Sarah Saunders.
- 22 Hot to Trot** Who says seniors don't do sex? They do and they're loving it – and, frankly, why not! Swinburne University's Sue Malta shares her research and debunks the myths.
- 24 Fair Game** As with every other Australian business operator, doctors too are monitored by our competition watchdog. Patients should ask upfront how much a procedure will cost, says Graeme Samuel.
- 28 Desert Nomads** Have caravan, will volunteer. Sarah Saunders catches up with Melbourne couple Harry and Elaine Tys as they make a pit stop to volunteer in remote Western Australia.
- 31 Pension Politics** Older Australians, struggling with rising living costs, were disappointed to miss out on a pension increase this year. Minister for Families, Jenny Macklin, explains where to from here.
- 44 Italian Local** Risotto to veal osso bucco, Fifteen executive chef and Jamie Oliver's best mate, Tobie Puttock, shares his passion for all things Italian with Abby Campbell.
- 50 The World in 80 Days** He's back! On the cusp of 70, our intrepid explorer, Thomas E Muller, crosses eight continents and pops in to see old friends, from South America to Africa.

Cover: **Golden Girl** Olympic silver medallist, Raelene Boyle, heads to Beijing to join the Seven commentary team.

every issue

Executive Diary	9
Letters	11
First Up	14
World Watch	16
Working For You – Policy	35
Working For You – Benefits	38
Health	41
Events	58
Garden	60
Books	63
Movies	64
Agony Planner	65
Crossword	68
Compton	70

editor



Hate to state the obvious but Raelene Boyle really is a trooper. Yes, she's battled cancer and won three silver Olympic medals but it's more than that. It extends to her

professionalism and her willingness to jump in boots and all.

Pushing deadline on a Friday afternoon 50 something requested an interview.

Saturday morning as she drove down from the Sunshine Coast to Brisbane for a Melbourne flight, Raelene was on the phone.

Twice during our chat we were disconnected. Cursing gently as I fumbled to call her back, I could only imagine the wrath I would face once I had her back on the line. But she didn't bat an eyelid.

Raelene also has an interesting story to tell, one that she's rarely asked about in the media. Imagine being in the Olympic village during the 1972 Munich games when eleven Israeli athletes were taken hostage and killed by terrorists.

Aged only 20 at the time she still vividly remembers the fear and the shock as if it were yesterday. It is, she says, something that changed her life forever.

Finally, Raelene will say sport and politics shouldn't mix. But I'm not so sure. Sport is just a fraction of who we are, as is art or music. Infuse it with politics, the ongoing battles and evolution of humanity, and it becomes a deeper, richer experience and a true marker of history.

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Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, was elected to Federal Parliament in 1996. She has an honours degree in commerce from Melbourne University and prior to entering Federal Parliament worked in research roles with the Australian National University, the Legislative Research Service and the Labor Research Centre.



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Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chairman, Graeme Samuel, has been president of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a Macquarie Bank executive, National Competition Council president, Australian Opera chairman, and an AFL commissioner. As ACCC head, Samuel is committed to open and fair trading.



Thomas Muller is exploiting his retirement years travelling to the Earth's remotest and least accessible places. As we go to press, he is exploring the Russian Far East, and sailing through the Bering Strait to Wrangel Island in the Arctic Ocean. Thomas is a National Seniors life member and before retirement was a professor studying and writing about the travel motives of seniors and retirees.

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