

# EASTERN APPROACHES

*Escorted Tours through Archaeology & History*



Issue 8~NEWS LETTER~Summer 2011

## COMMENT

### Globe-trotting for All?

On a visit to one of the Scottish isles recently, we were recommended a particularly outstanding garden to visit by the local tourist office. On finding out that the gardens in question were closed on the

day of our visit, we were then advised to visit it virtually on the tourist office's plasma screen (thus saving, of course, the entry fee!) – or to visit it on the garden's website when we returned home.

Leaving aside the main purpose of our visit in the first place was to have a *break* from screens – computer, plasma or otherwise – it emphasised just how much 'travel' these days can be achieved without ever leaving our homes and with a happy disregard of Foreign Office advice, insurance issues, airport hassles or even the dreaded unpredictability of the weather. Google Earth gives us instant access to anywhere on the planet, with Street View even allowing us to explore the streets of Moscow or the canals of Venice. And they are just the tip of the iceberg: countless millions of websites with everything from slide shows and virtual tours to timetables, maps, weather reports and encyclopaedic information on everything under the sun makes any part of the world immediately available on our computer screen – or, increasingly, our smart phones

– all for a price that would shame the cheapest of budget airlines.

Has the age of unlimited, free and effortless travel for all finally arrived? The computer and digital world is here to stay – indeed, to grow exponentially in a very few years in a way that is inconceivable even today. Love 'em or hate 'em, they are our bread and butter. But they are also our tools, here to be used. Far from replacing travel, they can add to it. A radical new project currently being researched here in the Scottish Borders, for example, is going to make available a huge amount of local information to the visitor simply by using mobile phones to read strategically placed QR (quick response) codes placed around the region, (as an example, you can gain access to Eastern Approaches information from our own QR code below).

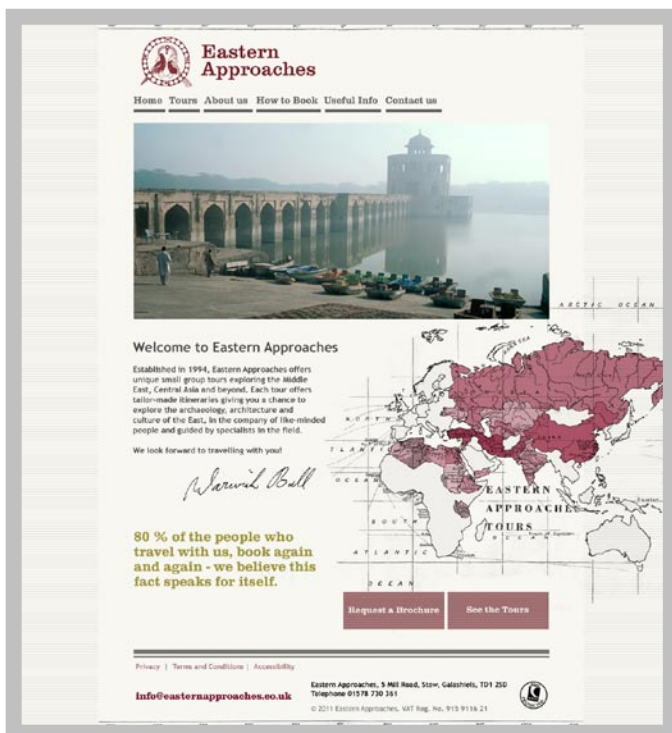
As for the feel, the tastes, the smells and, quite simply the adventure and excitement of travel: nothing will ever replace the real thing ... so read on!

*Warwick Ball*



## Our New Website! [www.easternapproaches.co.uk](http://www.easternapproaches.co.uk)

Eastern Approaches website has had a long overdue redesign. This has been completed by a design company in Edinburgh called Eskimo Design [www.eskimoonline.com](http://www.eskimoonline.com). They have come to grips with the core business and "flavour" of Eastern Approaches and we feel that they have done an excellent job. The website remains primarily an information website; because we are a small company we prefer to deal with bookings and enquiries personally rather than have automated systems. However, you can download booking forms and conditions, as well as get full information about advertised tours and useful links. You can even get a taster of some of the tours by taking a virtual tour using Google Earth. Visit the website yourself and let us know what you think!



## Arab Spring

One of our most frequently asked questions is: how are the current disruptions in the Arab world affecting our tours? Our 'Palmyra to Damascus' tour to Syria in April was cancelled at the last minute, and everyone received full refunds. Our sold-out 'Week in Aleppo' tour in November remains on the books (and nobody has withdrawn) but will naturally not proceed if the situation continues. Otherwise, Algeria in October and Cairo in November remain calm and are going ahead as planned. Next year our tours in the region are avoiding current trouble spots - although we have pencilled in Syria towards the end of the year as a statement of hope for all concerned.



## TOUR UPDATES - Where we are travelling next in 2011



### **TRADEWINDS: Old Trade Ports & Swahili Culture of Tanzania**

**8th September – 23rd September 2011 (with Bruce Wannell)**

The Swahili coast of East Africa boasts a rich cultural and architectural legacy going back to the early Islamic period when traders from the Gulf and Oman in the 9<sup>th</sup> century first established a string of colonies from Mogadishu down to Madagascar, reaching its height when Sultan Sayyid bin Sultan transferred the capital of the Omani maritime empire to Zanzibar in 1832. Zanzibar still preserves mosques going back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and its lovely old Stone Town is one of the gems of the Indian Ocean. Even older is the island of Kilwa Kisiwani, with its ruined palaces, forts and mosques displaying African, Arab and Indian influences. The coast has many other hidden gems, such as the overgrown ruins in the jungle of Songo Manara, or Pemba Island with its old Arab plantations of cloves and spices. The tour finishes in the lovely old port of Mikindani where Livingstone set out for his last venture into the interior.

**Tour price: £4747/ Deposit: £470/ Single Sup.£554**



### **UNDISCOVERED CAUCASUS: Archaeology, Art & Architecture of Georgia**

**9th September - 25th September 2011 (with Warwick Ball)**

Imagine an undiscovered pocket of medieval Europe situated in far-off mountains somewhere to the east of Turkey! A place where one can come across a stupendous Romanesque cathedral in the middle of nowhere: not surrounded by the trappings of mass tourism but with sheep grazing in fields that run up to the walls. There are not just Romanesque cathedrals: a magnificently rich heritage of churches, monasteries and frescos, of walled towns and spectacular ruined castles perched on mountain crags, of cave cities and ancient sites that recall Jason's Argonauts or Roman sieges, all set against the majestic backdrop of the Caucasus Mountains. Georgia is all of this and more. Still largely undiscovered, few realise its astonishing wealth and diversity, from great cathedrals to little known architectural gems set in enchanting remote valleys. Together with its rich architecture and magnificent landscapes, Georgia is utterly beguiling.

**Tour price: £3319/ Deposit: £330/ Single Sup.£293**

**ALMOST FULL!**



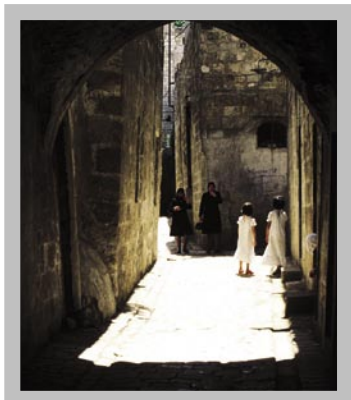
### **ROMAN FRONTIER IN AFRICA:**

**Berber & Roman Monuments in Algeria**

**5th October - 20th October 2011 (with Barnaby Rogerson)**

Algeria's position dominating the southern shores of the Mediterranean has given it an astonishing historical and architectural legacy: Numidian, Roman, Islamic and French. But Algeria's greatest glory is its Roman remains, and today the countryside is littered with some of the greatest monuments of the Roman world. This tour focuses on the extraordinary legacy of Rome's desert frontier in Africa. Today, an astonishing variety of remains attest to this legacy: great deserted legionary cities such as Timgad, enchanting upland Roman towns such as Djemila (which means 'beautiful' in Arabic), massive Numidian monumental stone tombs, gems of smaller frontier towns and monuments.

**Tour Price: £3693 / Deposit: £370/ Single sup. £360**

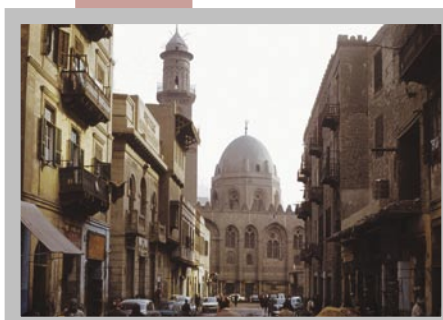


### **A WEEK IN ALEPPO: Aleppo & the Dead Cities of Syria**

**16th November - 23rd November 2011 (with Warwick Ball)**

Aleppo is everything that the popular image of an Arab Middle Eastern city ought to be. It has one of the best bazaars in the Middle East, it is dominated by a magnificent citadel, it has an immense history, and a colourful people. We also explore one of the least known but most enchanting aspects of Syria's past: its Dead Cities. One of the most extraordinary areas of ruins and the greatest storehouses of Late Roman/Byzantine architecture to be found in the ancient world. Between such an enchanting world of the past and the relaxed, sophisticated atmosphere of present-day Aleppo, there are few better places to visit.

**SORRY - THIS TOUR IS FULL!**



### **A WEEK IN CAIRO: Egypt's Coptic & Islamic Heritage**

**26th November - 3rd December 2011 (with Sarah Searight)**

Egypt has been one of the great tourist destinations since Herodotus. And rightly so: the allure of pharaohs, mummies and pyramids, the stories of fabulous treasures and lost cities have seduced visitors from Mark Antony to Verdi, and the millions of tourists who visit today. But Egypt did not vanish with the last pharaoh: it became a great centre for Hellenistic, Christian and Islamic civilisation. Hence, this tour focuses on the legendary city of Cairo. Largely the creation of the Fatimid caliphs of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, its architectural embellishments continued under successive Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties. It also explores Egypt's great Coptic heritage at the monastic centre of Wadi Natrun, as well as the rich oasis of Fayyum, site of the astonishing art of the mummy portraits from the Roman period.

**Tour price: £2293/ Deposit: £230/ Single Sup.£335**

## FURTHER ADVENTURES FOR 2012



### ANCIENT NUBIA: Undiscovered Northern Sudan

**2nd February – 14th February 2012**

Imagine the glories of ancient Egypt before it was discovered by mass tourism. Pyramids, great temples, gaunt, bare ruins with nothing but the desert around, still preserving the aura – and the impact – that so overwhelmed the first European travellers of the eighteenth century. Such are the ancient remains of northern Sudan. The ancient civilisations of Nubia in the Upper Nile have remained relatively unknown to this day, yet the ancient Sudanese kingdoms boast remains as almost old as the better known ones of Egypt and in some cases rivalling them in grandeur. Indeed, long after Egypt itself had succumbed to Macedonian and Roman rule, Egyptian civilisation enjoyed an Indian summer with the flourishing Nubian kingdom of Meroe, whose spectacular royal necropolis remains one of the greatest but least known sights of the ancient world.

**Tour price: £4482/ Deposit: £448/ Single Sup: £643 (£350 for pre-set and Khartoum) Note: we first operated this tour in 2004, when feedback was the highest we have ever had from any tour. Since then, conditions and facilities in Sudan have improved immeasurably**

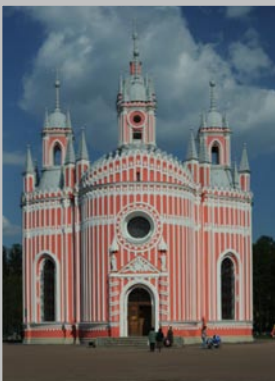


### ROYAL CITIES OF THE ATLAS: A Week in Northern Morocco

**17th March – 24th March 2012**

This tour gets away from well trodden paths of hurried itineraries and takes a relaxed, informed and in-depth look at two of Morocco's great cities: Fez and Meknes. Fez has been at the heart of Moroccan civilisation for over a millennium, and today stands as one of the most intact monumental cities in the Arab world. Its less well known – and quieter and less visited – sister city of Meknes flourished as the capital of Moulay Ismail who ruled Morocco 1672-1727. We also visit a third 'royal city' from a rather different era: Roman Volubilis. The capital of King Juba II of Mauretania and Queen Cleopatra Selene (daughter of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra), Volubilis was built as the westernmost outpost of Hellenistic civilisation in the 1st century BC to provide a fitting home for the descendants of both the Numidian and the Ptolemaic kings – and thus the end of a legend.

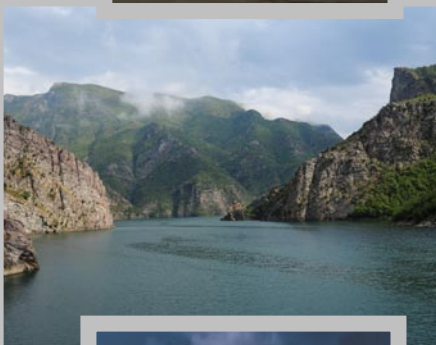
**Tour price: £2189. Deposit: £220. Single Sup: £226**



### ST PETERSBURG EAST AND WEST: Treasures of the Hermitage & Russia's Trade

**21st March – 27th March 2012**

In 1715 Peter the Great of Russia formed a collection based on the spectacular discovery of Scythian gold objects from Siberia. The collection formed the basis of what became the Hermitage Museum, probably the greatest single repository of art treasures anywhere in the world. It was also the beginning of a love affair that Russia has had with the East: a love affair that extended far beyond mere conquest to encompass fashion, collecting, exploration and archaeological excavation. This tour explores the Hermitage's treasures in depth, focussing on its Oriental connections – but also Russia's window on the West with excursions to Peterhof and the great medieval trading centre of Novgorod as well as elsewhere in and around St Petersburg. **Tour price: £1947 (half board)/ Deposit: £200/ Single Sup: £180**



### INLAND ILLYRIA: Northern Albania & Kosovo

**24th April – 4th May 2012**

The boat trip along Lake Komani in northern Albania is described by the Bradt Guide as 'one of the world's most classic boat trips' - and this is just the introduction to some breathtaking mountain scenery. Neighbouring Kosovo - Europe's newest country - has a wealth of the unknown, the undiscovered and the unexpected: painted mosques and monasteries, old Ottoman towns and bazaars, and some of the loveliest alpine scenery in southern Europe. Stability and economic development are now restored and Kosovo enjoys an open border with Albania as both countries sharing a common language and culture move closer to each other. Taking advantage of a surprisingly good infrastructure, this tour offers a rare glimpse of little known treasures in this little known corner of Europe.

**Price available end of June 2011**



### THE SULTAN'S ARCHITECT: Sinan, Suleiman the Magnificent & their Age in Turkey

**1st May – 9th May 2012**

The age of Suleiman the Magnificent – known to the Turks themselves as Suleiman the Lawgiver – was the high point of Ottoman civilisation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a golden age of imperial splendour when the Golden Horn lay at the heart of one of Europe's greatest empires. Not only the capital, but cities throughout the empire were transformed by the Sultan's great architect, Sinan, one of the most prolific architects in history. During the reigns of three successive sultans, Sinan was responsible for hundreds of buildings throughout the empire, not only great monumental mosque complexes but more modest buildings such as kitchens, bridges and water works. This tour takes both the age and the architect as its theme to look at both the background and the high point of Ottoman achievement in the two imperial capitals of Istanbul and Edirne.

**Tour price: £2292/ Deposit: £230/ Single Sup.£350**



## The Venice of the Caspian

Astrakhan: the very name conjures up images of the remote and exotic. Like Venice, it is a city of canals built on marshy islands: although the islands are part of the Volga delta, Europe's mightiest river, rather than a lagoon. Also like Venice, it is a city of trade and traders, making it one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world in its heyday. But unlike Venice, Astrakhan remains practically unknown to tourism.

Astrakhan marks roughly the mid-point of what is probably the most diverse journey it is possible to make within Europe: Russia's southern steppe between the Volga and the Don. We encounter Amazons, Scythians, Sarmatians, Khazars, Avars, Huns, Greeks, Mongols, Cossacks, Tatars, Kalmyks, a short-lived German Volga republic, an even shorter lived Black Sea Greek Republic, a Jewish Empire, the lost capital of the Golden Horde, and Europe's only state

Astrakhan by Mikhail Dolivo-Dobrovolsky, 1879

whose official religion is Tibetan Buddhist. We sail through fields of lotuses in the Volga Delta to the shores of the Caspian. We visit Stalingrad, where Germany lost not only a battle but a war. We see both the old and the new Cossack capitals. We investigate megalithic monuments and ancient Greek colonies on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. In short, the steppe region of southern Russia is nothing less than extraordinary – probably richer, more complex and more polyglot than anywhere in Europe. This is an opportunity to know a side of Europe of which few in the west are aware.

Our tour to Astrakhan and southern Russia **Land of the Golden Horde**, is scheduled for June 2012. All of our previous Russia tours sold out very quickly so if you would like advance details please contact us - available for booking late summer 2011.

## ON THE DRAWING BOARD

This is our time of year for hard thinking as we plan the next year's programme. We usually come up with a short-list of 20 or more mouth-watering tours that we feel we simply must offer our readers – and then comes the hard decisions. Not what to offer: but what to reluctantly cross off our list as practicalities force us to pare it down to a realistic number. I hope therefore that the following menu has you reaching for your atlases (or Google Earth if you must). Further details will be in our Autumn Newsletter with full details in our main brochure as usual in November, but advance information of many of these tours are available before then as prices come in, so do get in touch – and remember, many fill up fast.

(all dates are for 2012)

- **Land of the Golden Horde:** Amazons, Greeks and Mongols in Southern Russia. *June*
- **Kurdistan to the Caspian:** Churches, Mosques and Monuments of N.W. Iran. *June*
- **Land Below Ararat.** Art, Archaeology and Architecture of Armenia. *July*
- **Sand-Buried Ruins of Desert Cathay.** Lost Civilisations of Chinese Central Asia. *September*
- **Crim Tartary.** Ukraine's Black Sea from Crimea to Bessarabia. *Late September*
- **Hill Towns & Hittites.** The Black Sea and Western Pontic Alps of Turkey. *Late September*
- **Ancient Chorasmian Wastes.** The Lower Oxus and Aral Sea in Uzbekistan. *October*
- **Palmyra to Damascus.** Classical, Crusader and Islamic Monuments of Syria. *October*
- **A Week in Byzantium.** Byzantine and Ottoman Architecture in Istanbul. *November*
- **A Week in Luxor.** Tombs and Temples of Middle Egypt. *November-December*
- **Great Cities of the Deccan.** India from Bombay to Hyderabad. *December*

**TO BOOK OR MAKE AN ENQUIRY**  
 telephone: 01578 730 361  
 e-mail: [info@easternapproaches.co.uk](mailto:info@easternapproaches.co.uk)

## OFF THE BOOKSHELF

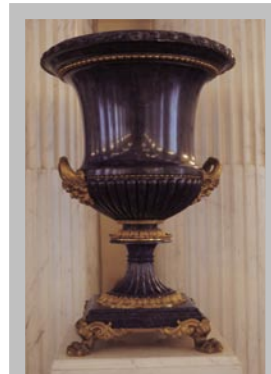
*Some lump, ah God, of lapis lazuli...  
 Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast...*

The above lines are from Robert Browning's poem, 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church'. It captured the imagination of a young schoolgirl, author Sarah Searight, who later fell in love with the celestial blue stone itself on her first visit to Afghanistan in 1973 as a journalist starting out on a successful writing career. She has pursued the stone ever since from remote Hindu Kush mountains to

dusty museum shelves and pharaohs' tombs. This life-long fascination has culminated in her latest book, *Lapis Lazuli. In pursuit of a Celestial Stone*, published just last year by East & West Publishing of London.

This book covers all facets of this ever fascinating stone as well as being a hugely enjoyable personal account of the author's own travels to far off corners in search of the stone and its uses. Most of all it is a celebration of lapis itself, a stone that did, after all, have even a dying bishop casting his last thoughts towards 'a vein o'er the Madonna's breast...'

Sarah, as well as being a successful writer, is also one of Eastern Approaches' more long-standing tour lecturers with an impressive repertoire: A must for your suitcase!



Lapis Lazuli vase in the Hermitage seen on our tour to St Petersburg 4th – 9th March 2012



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