

Relishing Armchair Travel

by Diane Nielen © 2012

Back in November of last year I introduced you to Sandy and Darren Van Soye. The couple was getting close to departure on one of the most ambitious undertakings I had heard of – a 424 day venture that would take them around the world, visiting 50 countries on six continents. It was more than just a trip – it was a mission. Their goal was to inform and excite school children about geography and the history of all of these exotic places. And not just kids. Any of us could become “Friends” and receive their weekly online communiqués and thereby share their adventures. What a super opportunity!

Darren and Sandy didn't wait until they were underway to produce and publish their first three educational modules. The initial issue which was dated January 9th focused on telling about all the preparations which had to be made, and shared the basics of geography. They addressed latitude, longitude, the meridian, equator and hemispheres. Then for “PreTrip Minus 2 Weeks” they wrote about the trekking gear they had to include and showed it in a video. They had taken their backpacks and gear on a “test drive,” hiking about seven miles to see how it would all work together. The focus of their final pre-departure module was the technology they couldn't do without. It facilitates contact via their computers as well as smartphones.

Way back in 2003 the Van Soyes took their two daughters who were then 10 and 12 around the world for 4 1/2 months. They had taken them out of school for a semester and were home schooling them on the road. And they saw what an impression a trip like this made on them as well as on their classmates back home. They learned that the emails they were sending to the girls' teachers were also being shared by the entire school! The seeds for this current odyssey had been planted.

Sandy said, “We had no idea how our girls would be changed by our 2003 trip. But when we returned, we could really see a big difference. Both girls came home understanding where places are and that much of the world lives differently than they do in California. They had more confidence and were also not afraid of interacting with adults.”

This past month when the Van Soyes were passing the half-way point of their trip they had traveled about 32,373 miles from their starting point in California. Also they had already hiked 254 miles! And the parents had a welcome reunion in Bamberg, Germany, with their two daughters who they had not seen in seven months. The video that week featured a discussion among the four of them, sharing the impact past travels had had on all of their lives. Darren reported “Lauren, now 21, will be a senior in college this Fall. She is majoring in International Development with a minor in African Studies at UCLA. She has been to Africa three times since our trip and will seek full-time employment in Africa upon graduation. Kristen, now 19, will be starting her second year in the German Studies program at UC Irvine. Kristen is already fluent in German after taking four years of it in high school and a year in college. In addition, she has traveled to Germany seven times (twice by herself).”

And the girls asked their parents about their favorite destinations. Darren was most impressed with Krakow in Poland, calling it a “real city with lots of culture.” He'd like to go back and spend a month there. Sandy gave high marks to Tasmania for its beauty and bountiful nature. And they shared their enthusiasm for Latvia, especially Riga. Looking ahead they are particularly excited about the prospect



Sandy and Darren at Everest Base Camp in Tibet

of their 1,000 mile voyage up the Amazon through the rainforest and learning about sustainable living in those environs.

At the mid-point in their adventure they had been on the road for 210 days and visited over 20 countries. Wherever they go they seek out opportunities to visit local classrooms and talk with the children, either in English or with the aid of an interpreter. And they welcome questions from any of the students from around the world who are following their travels. They respond to these queries, often in their weekly bulletins.

Wanna know where they have been and where they are still headed? When I wrote last year about the upcoming trip I outlined an overview of the Van Soyes' destinations. That Mid-November 2011 issue of the Fullerton Observer is still accessible on the paper's website. Just scroll down as far as possible, then select “More Headlines” for older editions. Scroll down again. Click on “next.” You will have access to the issue. The article is on Page 20.

And who all is sharing the Van Soyes' adventures via their postings? Approximately 55,000 students! They have subscriptions from 850 educators in 20 countries and another 300-plus Friends, folks like you and me. I'm hoping that my previous article motivated some of you to become Friends and share the weekly adventures vicariously. If you haven't already joined, it's very simple to do by going to their website, www.trekkingtheplanet.net. You'll have the opportunity to sign up right on the first screen as a “Friend” or as an “Educator.” There is no charge.

What you have to look forward to in your incoming email: that weekly newsletter which includes a four-page education module, stories, pictures and videos from their current location. Ofttimes there are references that you can click on to learn more about some topic. And they update their Twitter and Facebook pages almost daily. To see where they are RIGHT NOW visit <http://www.trekkingtheplanet.net/live-tracker>.

Recently our travelers wrote up a paragraph entitled “Take a Look at the Eight Most Surprising Items in our Luggage.” Here they are - and you can try to guess the “whys” before I provide the answers: 1. Baby Wipes, 2. Small shovel, 3. Silk sheets!, 4. A drain stopper, 5. Wireless router, 6. Duct tape, 7. Candle and matches, and 8. Extension cord.

And if you are just getting “on board” I have great news: all of their pronouncements, pictures and videos are “out there” in cyberspace for your perusal. You

Go to
www.trekkingtheplanet.net/news
for archives of all the reports on
their adventures.

can immerse yourself in all the fascinating locales. To reach the archives of all their reports, ask for www.trekkingtheplanet.net/news. When the screen comes up scroll down, paying attention to what you are seeing in the right hand

column. Soon you'll come to “Categories.” Keep going a little further to “Previous.” Below that you'll find a listing of months. The number in parentheses after each month tells you how many pages of content there are to look at. Pick a month, click, and enjoy those reports which will be available on the left-hand portion of your screen. You'll be able to access the videos and extended reports on various subjects as well.

Ready for the explanations of the eight items? O.K.: 1. The most convenient way to keep their hands germ free. Staying healthy is all-important., 2. Needed when a bathroom is not available in remote trekking locations, 3. Sometimes the cleanliness of the sheets in their lodgings is suspect so they use their own. Also when camping in cold weather they put the sheets inside their sleeping bags to add about 10 degrees Fahrenheit, 4. To be able to do their laundry in their room, 5. The router is essential for setting up their own wireless network to synchronize their two cameras' pictures and videos between their computers. This also provides a backup., 6. What can't you do with duct tape? It's in their Repair Bag., 7. When all else fails – electricity, batteries – let there be light., 8. They searched out a compact six-foot-long retractable cord. Frequently the power source in a room is far from a working area. The cord gives them an “office.”

I haven't the space to share in detail any of their finely crafted weekly chapters. They are as professional as you could expect from two retired computer techies. Beautifully produced, every one. For a glimpse into their quest bring up <http://youtu.be/YSQPoTrARvY> to watch a two-minute overview of the undertaking.

Following the Van Soyes' adventures is definitely a case of the next best thing to being there. I challenge you to read just one of the education modules online. I keenly believe you'll be impressed and rate it time well spent. And share the opportunity with a school-age kid. It could be life changing.

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