



McLoughlins' Missive December 2016

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After last year's roller-coaster ride, 2016 has been a much more settled year for us. We're still at the same address in Ellerslie and on the same mobile numbers (no landline), but please note the change of email address.

The year began with some delightful R&R on the Pacific island of Rarotonga, an easy flight from here. We chilled out in a small self-catering apartment on the west coast, with a nice little beach-bar just a few minutes' walk along the sand, from where we watched some amazing sunsets.

It was technically the rainy season while we were there, but apart from the first day, the sun shone gloriously on the trees and flowers, all in full bloom.



The people of Raro are very friendly and hospitable and we learned some of their history, including how they set out in their traditional boats to colonise New Zealand, back in the day.

Having enjoyed Raro so much, we decided to try another of the Pacific islands, and spent a long weekend on Fiji to celebrate our 43rd wedding anniversary in July. Here we could find no other option than to stay at one of the big hotels on the resort island of Denerau, which is very much a



tourist trap with exorbitant prices. Denerau Port, a few minutes away by Bulla bus, provided more sensibly-priced dining options, though we did celebrate our anniversary with a meal in a private cabana on the beach at the hotel.

One day we enjoyed a cruise on a lovely old schooner of the same vintage as ourselves, to a tiny offshore island for a day's relaxation in the sun. The following evening we set sail on a more modern vessel, to watch the sun set. However we were disappointed when we tried to venture into the more local areas of that part of Fiji in a hire-car, as all the roads turned to rocky tracks before we reached our intended destination.

In September we were off on our travels again, this time for a family catch-up in Singapore. Ruth and Neil had arranged to stop over on their way back from a family visit to the UK, in order to watch the F1 Grand Prix. John and Vicky thought that sounded like a good plan, and arranged to stay with friends of theirs there. We flew up from here and we all spent a lovely weekend together, visiting the zoo (nostalgia trip) and the new gardens at Marina Bay (amazing glass houses and aerial walkway) as well as



catching up with some old friends on East Coast Park for an afternoon chat followed by a delicious seafood dinner.

As Ruth, Neil and Emma returned home, the rest of us went on up to Thailand and spent a delightful week with old friends Donovan and Carolann at their holiday home in Hua Hin. Jessica turned two while we were there and we enjoyed celebrating her birthday with her on the beach.



Donovan and Carolann showed us some interesting sights around Hua Hin, including a wildlife sanctuary, where we learned of the horrors suffered by wild elephants while being 'tamed' to work for people. No more elephant rides for us! Before we left, we celebrated Donovan's birthday with a lovely meal at an international-style restaurant in Hua Hin town. Many thanks to D and CA for a wonderful time with them.

Back home, it was soon time to celebrate Emma's 4th birthday, at a princess party held at home with a lot of her little friends. Her mum had arranged for Belle from Beauty and the Beast to come along and entertain the young ones and most of the little girls

came dressed as their favourite Disney princess. Emma looked a picture in her own Belle dress.



And so we come to the end of another year, grateful for family and friends who have made it such a good one to reflect on. Mike is still working for the same firm of wine importers and distributors just along the road from where we live. Hazel has just completed a contract with a language school in the city, and is deciding what to do next.

We're looking forward to another Kiwi Christmas, followed by a few days' holiday in and around the Bay of Islands to the north of here. Our original plan to tour the Marlborough area of South Island has had to be changed due to the bad earthquake the region suffered in November. Fortunately Auckland is not prone to earthquakes, but our thoughts go out to those who will celebrate the festive season very differently from what they would have expected.

It just remains for us to wish you all the merriest Christmas and a happy and peaceful 2017.

Much Love,

Hazel + M

You'll find more pictures on our website if you're interested: www.mcloughlin.uk.com