



Above, Rick Shaver visited Rio de Janeiro 2011 with his wife Jane. Left top, Shaver on the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania, 2009. (Shaver photos)

Milestones

Collecting countries and experiences

Curious Travelers' Century Club members chalk up nations

By Florence Sicoli

Sharing travel experiences with others is part of the passion that moves us to journey from home. And Rick Shaver has a lot to talk about.

Having visited 108 countries, the Canadian co-ordinator for Travelers' Century Club has an abundance of stories from his travels

to Northern Ireland, Brazil, Andorra, Spain, Baleric Islands, Germany, Tahiti, Bora Bora, the Cook Islands, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belize, Honduras and dozens more worldwide destinations listed on his club's website.

Ask him to name his most unique destination and he'll tell you: "For sure, Trans Dniester, a country of 600,000 people sand-

wiched between the Ukraine and Moldova. This place is kind of a Soviet open-air museum where they all wish they were 'back in the USSR,' with Stalin statues, hammers and sickles everywhere."

Shaver is co-owner of The Hive Strategic Marketing Inc. in downtown Toronto, where some 62 members of the two-year-old Canadian chapter of the Travelers' Century Club gather three times a year to hear speakers and share travel experiences and tips.

Full membership in the non-profit social club requires visits to 100 destinations. There are 2,000 members worldwide and, Shaver adds, his local chapter includes "a Canadian ambassador, a university professor, businessmen and women, and a couple of folks who travel up to seven months every year."

Surprisingly few travelers get to 100 different destinations, Shaver says, adding: "Unless you really work at it opportunistically and knowingly, with a goal of getting a hundred, you'd miss or bypass chances to collect countries ... But the overriding obstacle is having the time and money do all this, which most people don't have."

If anyone has travel "bragging rights," it's likely John Deacon, a Winnipeg lawyer and 200-country member who joined the U.S.-based club about 25 years ago and has since visited 232 of the club's list of 321 official countries and territories.

His most unique destination, Deacon says, "is Bhutan, a small country on the northern border of India. They speak perfect Canadian as (Jesuit) Father (William Joseph) Mackey from Montreal set up the school system."

But is collecting 100 or more countries in your passport a valid reason for travelling?

"Not really," Shaver says. "But if you are a goal oriented person as I am, it motivates you to get to places and have unique experiences that you wouldn't ordinarily have ... If there is an overriding trait that I see with our Canadian TCC members, it is curiosity."

Indeed, curiosity is what led Merrill Carmichael, a club member from Ancaster who has visited 79 countries, to experience the mind-altering experience of the Burning Man Festival in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, where about 50,000 visitors set up a makeshift city in the scorching sands and survive for a week in late summer by using their wits.

Another of her unique travel experiences was dancing on an ice floe with the penguins in Nekko Harbour, Antarctica. "At Lochrow



Merrill Carmichael revels in the scenery on a trip to Antarctica. (Carmichael photo)

outpost, I was inches from them,” Carmichael says. “You sit down, you don’t move. The gentoo penguins come up to you, looked at me, walked around me ... they are small, three feet tall.”

The senior manager of a community agency has also experienced how world travel fosters tolerance of other cultures: “Although I find it very difficult to travel to Islamic countries in the Middle East, due to the overt oppression of women, I ... comply with the traditions ... I wear the hijab, cover up limbs and so on. In doing so, I have developed more respect and understanding for what Muslim women’s lives are like.”

And Carmichael has at least one scary travel tale: “I was declared a security risk when flying on El Al airlines from Toronto airport to Tel Aviv. I was detained for three hours with two different agents, my suitcase dumped, they did a body search. I had brought a Bible

... to refer to when visiting historical sites. They went through every single page in that Bible to see if I had written any notes ... At the end of the day, a security guard with a gun escorted me to the plane while all the other passengers looked at me. By then I was crying. Afterward they said the agents (mistakenly) thought my ticket was bogus.”

Chalk it up to travel experience. Summing up her passion for travelling, Carmichael says: “I decided that once my mortgage was paid off, I was going to build new wonderful memories ... and accomplishments to look back on, like hiking the Inca Trail up to Machu Picchu, climbing up Mount Sinai in Egypt in the Sinai desert, hiking to Mount Everest Base Camp in Tibet.”

Travelers’ Century Club fees include \$100 for initiation and \$85 annually. For more information, see website travelerscenturyclub.org.