

## Tales from remote islands

Christopher & I have been fortunate to travel a lot, particularly over the last four years since I retired. We have been to many of the 'usual' places such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA, South America, etc, but I thought you might be interested to hear about some of the more remote islands which we have visited over the years. We have a particular liking of islands.



### **Falkland Islands**

My father taught at a British school in Argentina in the 1930s/40s. The pupils in those days included boys from the Falkland Islands. In the year 2000 we travelled there on a military plane from Brize Norton, stopping to refuel on Ascension Island. We visited Carcass Island, Sea Lion Island, Pebble Island & Saunders Island. The main attraction in many of these places was the variety of wildlife, particularly the penguins – enormous colonies which were content for us to be relatively close. In the capital, Stanley, we viewed the cathedral with its whalebone arch outside, made from the jawbones of two blue whales. On Victory Green (not far from Thatcher Drive!) we saw the mizzen mast from the SS Great Britain. The ship, which was badly damaged



in a gale off Cape Horn in 1866, lay for many years in the outer harbour of Stanley before being towed back to Bristol in 1970, leaving its mast behind.



### **Ascension Island**

On our way home from the Falklands we spent four days on Ascension. The island is not equipped for tourists but we managed to hire a car, walked a lot on the rough volcanic terrain, and visited a radio station. There were many seabirds to be seen and we 'skinny-dipped' in a remote bay! We took a boat trip to an islet where we saw birds no longer on the main island.



**Stewart Island:** Many of you will have been to New Zealand but did you know about its third island? Stewart lies a one-hour ferry ride to the south of South Island and has a population of around 400. The main settlement is called Oban. Flightless birds such as the kiwi thrive there owing to a lack of predators. On a boat trip we came very close to the magnificent (southern royal) albatross, several of which were sitting on the water near our boat.

### **Easter Island**

Three years ago we flew via Santiago in Chile to Easter Island where we joined a small cruise ship (100 passengers). Before setting sail we spent two days visiting the sites and seeing the amazing moai, the monolithic human figures carved by the Rapa Nui people many years ago.

I'm sure you will all have seen pictures of the main moai 'line-up', so I've set out below some of the less well-known figures. It is truly amazing to see them in real life and really close up.



## Pitcairn

From Easter Island a couple of days at sea in a truly 'pacific' ocean took us across to the Pitcairn group of four islands. Apart from Pitcairn itself we also landed on Ducie, a sandy uninhabited island 335 miles east of Pitcairn. We were thrilled to be able to land on Pitcairn itself. The prospects didn't look good at first – see the waves by the landing jetty in the picture below – but we and the other passengers were amongst the lucky visitors to Pitcairn and all got ashore in the ship's tenders. When we left, the islanders insisted on taking us back in their longboats – see below. These are very seaworthy but not very comfortable. They are designed to carry cargo rather than to seat passengers. Most of us ended up sitting in the bottom of the boat.



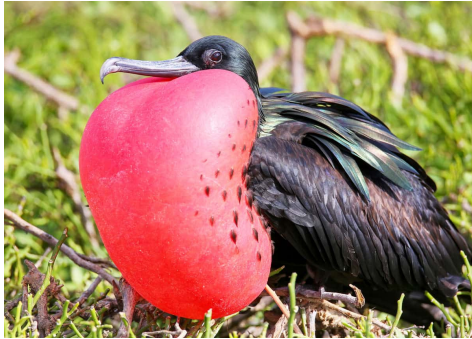
After a fairly steep climb up the only paved road on the island, we reached the main square and were able to meet many of the islanders who plied us with their wares – teeshirts, carved items, etc. We were then offered a ride on a quadbike to be shown the rest of the island – quite the most alarming experience I've ever had. I don't think they've heard of health and safety. A notice on the quadbike stated that nobody apart from the driver should ride on it and that helmets must be worn, but none were provided. There was no proper seat on the back of the quadbike so we clung to each other, and if one of us had fallen off, the other one undoubtedly would have done so too. However, the ride took us to see some stunning scenery (below left) as well as the recently constructed second jetty and breakwater, which cost Britain several million pounds and should give better shelter for passengers from visiting ships (below right). We were told all about the mutineers from the Bounty, who burnt the ship after arriving on the island in 1789 so that the Royal Navy wouldn't find them. There are only about 50 inhabitants, most of whom are descended from the mutineers. They all have multiple jobs to run the island.





## Aldabra

On another trip, this time in the Indian Ocean, we visited Aldabra, the outermost of the Seychelles Islands, 700 miles south of the main island. The only human inhabitants are a few research scientists: amongst the other inhabitants are lots of frigate birds and giant tortoises. We also snorkelled off these islands and saw many fish, including some large sting rays.



## St Helena



Just under two years ago we flew, via South Africa and Namibia, to St Helena, just two years after the airport had finally opened. In the past it was, of course, only accessible by sea. Arriving by air, the landing at St Helena was not guaranteed due to wind shear, but we were fortunate to have no problems despite the two previous flights being unable to land due to strong winds.

It is a sleepy old-fashioned place but fascinating. The locals are very friendly. We explored the island mainly by vehicle, including a 4-wheel drive. We visited the tiny court, old forts, the grand house where Napoleon lived in exile, and also the Governor's house where we patted the resident 200 year old giant tortoise Jonathan (the oldest living land creature in the world), and saw endemic plants and birds. Above is a picture of the capital, Jamestown, and here is Jacob's Ladder, 600 steps leading from Jamestown and the harbour up to a village at the top of the hill, all that remains of a cable railway built in the 1800s.



We have a lot of memories to keep us going through lockdown!

## Erica