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February

NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK, KENYA — Breakfast in the middle of a herd of eland: coffee and some delicious chocolate-chip cookies baked by my friend Isaac's daughters. No lions or rhinos, but plenty of giraffes, buffaloes, ostriches and gazelles, and a jackal slinking away in the grass. Back in Nairobi, Isaac and I left the car to wander round a market. We returned to find a window smashed and the remains of our breakfast gone. The thief must have known about the cookies.

BERGISCH GLADBACH, GERMANY — A ghoul, a clown, or perhaps a headhunter? Oliver couldn't decide how to dress. The carnival in the Rhineland is a Big Thing: a parade with floats, marching bands and dancers – only the chilly temperatures force the dancers to dress less entertainingly and more fully than their counterparts in Rio. The crowd of witches, nuns, pirates and cows cheers each float. In return, they are showered with sweets, plus less-digestible plastic jewellery, toothbrushes and sponges. Louder cheers invite a hail of cut flowers and boxes of chocolates. Small children forage for sweets that haven't fallen in a puddle. The highlight comes last: magnificent floats bearing the year's Carnival Prince, Virgin and Peasant. These are always older men (the Virgin wears padding in the right places, plus a blond wig with pigtails). Germany outside the Rhineland looks on in bemusement.

The carnival always throws up some unintended entertainment. This year, the Peasant in one Cologne suburb was discovered to be an arsonist: he was caught setting fire to cars. A couple of years ago, the visiting Prince from Berlin was hit in the eye by a flower thrown back from the crowd. And last year, supermodel Heidi Klum, Bergisch Gladbach's most famous daughter, wanted to ride in her own float in the town's parade. Fearing she would attract too much attention, the worthies on the carnival committee put her float near the beginning of the procession, as far away from the Virgin as possible. Ms Klum and her relatives dressed as bright purple aliens – all so alike that no one recognized her. She didn't turn up this year.

Oliver eventually borrowed some of my clothes, and went as a scarecrow. Is he saying something about my fashion sense?

March

AHMEDABAD, INDIA — "The best news of the year", wrote one of Evelyn's Indian friends when she said she would visit. She took it as a compliment, although the *only* other news from the city had been an earthquake that killed thousands. A month after the disaster, life was returning to normal, though cracks in the buildings were still being repaired.

Lying on her bunk in the train and trying to concentrate on something other than her dysentery-laden stomach, Evelyn watched three Indian passengers playing cards. On arrival at Ahmedabad, one of the men smiled and nodded; Evelyn returned the greeting. When she picked up her bags, she found a label stuck on her suitcase: "Room 102, Hotel Suzy, New Delhi".

Evelyn couldn't make this tryst (at least, that's what she told me). But I admire the man's technique. I've printed address labels of my own to stick on the luggage of good-looking female fellow-travellers.

Back home, Evelyn's bacteriologist friend Barbara was delighted. "Dysentery? Wonderful! Send me a stool sample to look at!" she trilled. I hope she doesn't identify a Delhi strain of amoeba.

LEATHERHEAD, UK — Was it the Tower of London? Buckingham Palace? Brighton? Windsor Castle? No — the highlight of Oliver's school trip to the UK was the LaserQuest game. Go into a darkened maze and blast each other with laser guns. Oliver's explained it several times, but I still haven't worked out how you can tell when you're dead.

April

MT EVEREST, NEPAL — Bored with the smog in Kathmandu, I shelled out \$109 for a "mountain flight": an hour's joyride to see the Himalayas in all their glory. The captain called the passengers into the cockpit one by one. "That's Everest over there", he said, pointing at a dark mass above a sea of rocks, ice and clouds. I took the opportunity to steal airsickness bags while the other passengers gawped out of the windows. I harvested 6 bags from the 19-seater plane: not a bad percentage.

May

BERGISCH GLADBACH — It's been a book-ridden summer. Our manual on camel medicine is out at last: now you don't have to find a vet next time your camel has an itchy hump: you can look it up instead. Check it out at www.mamud.com/camels.htm.

More hoorays. Seems like Evelyn and her co-authors have been working on it for the last quarter-century, but their book on ethnoveterinary medicine is also out. Now you can find out how the Amazonian Indians would have treated sick camels if they had had any. Propaganda at www.ethnovetweb.com.

PARIS, FRANCE — The only French Oliver spoke on his class trip to Paris? At MacDonald's: "Un hamburger, s'il vous plaît."



That's Norway in the background.

June

BERGISCH GLADBACH — Don't all rush to the shop at once. My book on development communication is also published. See www.mamud.com/information_revolutions.htm for details. Now we'll have to think of something else to write about.

SENTANI, INDONESIA — The locals here in the Indonesian half of New Guinea live on sago. Chop down a tree, split open the trunk, hack out the starchy pulp, wash out the fibre, and you can feed a family for two months. Cooked sago is a white, rubbery goo that looks and tastes suspiciously like wallpaper paste. No need to chew. It sits in your stomach like, er, wallpaper paste.

For dessert, try betel. Pop a walnut-sized areca nut in your mouth and start chewing. Dip a piece of betel in powdered chalk and place in mouth too. "Don't swallow the juice! Spit it out!" they said. I pretended I hadn't just swallowed some. My saliva turned dark red: the result of a chemical reaction among the areca, betel and chalk. The ground here is splattered with bloodlike spittle stains. "Are you dizzy yet?" they asked. No, but I had a huge lump at the back of my throat and could scarcely breathe. "That's normal for the first time, especially if you swallow", they said. Particularly when combined with wallpaper paste?

August

HIRTSHALS, DENMARK-KRISTIANSUND, NORWAY — Disappointment at first, when we discovered that the ferry offered only plain white seasickness bags. We stole some anyway, and began to decorate them with coloured markers. Lucky we were early: it was a rough crossing, and groggy passengers quickly depleted the stock of bags. Oliver suddenly looked green himself, but he managed to throw up onto the floor rather than into his newly decorated bag. Good lad.

September

BONN, GERMANY — Evelyn booked a bus for 30 conference participants, arranged pick-up points, confirmed and rechecked everything. The bus duly arrived, and the driver got out... locking his keys inside. How do you open a bus door without the keys? Answer: kneel on ground next to front wheel, lean inside wheel arch, and release pressure in air hose. Leap up and pull on door handle (the door is kept closed by air pressure). Repeat until door opens.

After 30 minutes, the door still was not open, so we arranged alternative transportation. Fortunately so few participants had shown up that we all were able to squeeze in two taxis.

ROME, ITALY — No problem with my Swiss Army penknife on the flight here from Frankfurt. But on the way back, the scanning machine at the airport detected it in my cabin bag. I had to go all the way back to the check-in counter, where the clerk made a little white cardboard suitcase, popped the knife inside, festooned it with stickers, and checked it as luggage. On arrival at Frankfurt, I had to wait for the white suitcase to appear on the carousel, so missed my train. The only reason I carried my penknife was for its toothpick. From now on, I'll rely on the free one that comes with the airline meal.

October

BOGOR, INDONESIA — The newspapers have been full of exaggerated stories about threats to Europeans and Americans by radical Indonesian Muslims. No problems in Bogor though: it buckets down with rain every afternoon, and rioting isn't much fun if you're wet. I reckon all the radicals here go down to (drier) Jakarta to cause mayhem there.

November

BOGOR — Slaughtering the goat was the last straw. The hotel's other guests complained that the Turkish family partied noisily and late into the night. The staff said that the partygoers had consumed tomorrow's breakfast. When one evening's celebrations featured a goat, slaughtered and roasted in the hotel garden, the manager decided to throw the family out.

They came back a week later. They had bought a new laptop computer in Malaysia: could I help load a game onto it? I quickly discovered there wasn't enough hard disk space to install Microsoft Flight Simulator. Checking the machine out, I discovered a bunch of emails and documents that had nothing to do with either Turkey or goats. Suspicious, I jotted down the email address and sent a message off. Next day, I got a reply. The computer had been stolen the previous week from an Australian in New Zealand, taken to Malaysia and sold to the Turks, who had brought it to Indonesia. That's what I call globalization.

BERGISCH GLADBACH — Evelyn has spent 11 months this year pregnant. She's just given birth to a website. Pretty gruesome it is too: skin diseases, internal parasites, traditional livestock surgery, indigenous castration techniques. Beats me why anyone should be interested in this stuff. Check it out at www.ethnovetweb.com.

December

BERGISCH GLADBACH — We gave Oliver a set of weights for his birthday. Barbara has added a chest expander. Big mistake. My office is now a gymnasium. No space in his own bedroom because of the mess on the floor.

I'm glad to report that my airsicknessbags website (now 729 bags, www.mamud.com/airsicknessbags) has received more visitors than Evelyn's ethnovet site. Ha!

A very happy Christmas, Idul Fitri, Hanukkah and New Year!

Paul, Evelyn and Oliver



Season's greetings from Mr Cool.