

## Visited more than 100 countries? There's a club for travellers just like you

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Stating the nations

Figuring out how many countries you have visited isn't just a matter of totting up the number of stamps in your passport. In some instances, determining whether the place you have visited is an actual country can be a surprisingly fraught affair involving calculations of geography, culture and geopolitics.

Does, for instance, a federation like the United Arab Emirates count as one country or seven? What about colonies? Or disputed territories?

For its part the Traveler's Century Club takes an expansive approach and counts any entity distinct by either geography, ethnicity or politics. Under this definition, the world has 321 countries or territories. For comparison, the UN has 193 member states.

MISSISSAUGA — In the upstairs study in Rick Shaver's Port Credit house, one of the walls is dominated by a large map of the world. Scores of colour-coded pins have been stuck in it, so dense in parts that it is difficult to make out the countries beneath. Surrounded by photographs, the map represents all the places Shaver has visited.

He is a well-travelled man. Europe is a forest of red, the States a sea of white. There's a good smattering of pins in South America, Asia as well as the Caribbean. Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia appear to be less well known to him, but no sensible person would bet on them staying that way.

Shaver, who is a partner in a downtown marketing firm, is also the founder of the Eastern Canada branch of the Traveler's Century Club.

The 59-year-old club offers membership pins only to those people who have visited at least 100 countries or territories, making it one of the more difficult, or at least time consuming, clubs to get into in the world. (Provisional membership is offered to people who have at least 75 countries under their belts).

"Finding people who have visited 100 countries is pretty difficult," says Shaver, "but every so often they emerge and it is so great because they go 'I thought I was the only one.'"

On Saturday (Dec. 7) Shaver hosted a meeting of the branch at his home, where 16 members showed up, each clutching an image from their journeys to discuss.

Some of the members had travelled the world on business, others were retired folk who had made use of their freedom to explore the globe and there were a few teachers who spend their vacations learning about the world first hand.

One member, Jurgen Freise — who describes himself as "World Traveller" on his business cards — is a gardener who works all summer to pay for his winters travelling. He was flying out the next day on a trip to Dubai.

For those not so well travelled, sitting in on TCC meeting is a slightly disconcerting experience. Tales of far-flung destinations are bandied about like anecdotes from a day at the mall. The Galapagos, Ethiopia, Antarctica, all were discussed with intimate familiarity. Half the room had seen the Northern Lights (though there was division on whether it is preferable to see them from Iceland or Canada) and petting a lion seemed to be considered a normal day's work.

The meetings offer the group the chance to discuss their trips and spark ideas for new ones, says Shaw, who adds that the club's members are inherently "interested and curious people."

In such company, telling a surprising travel story is going to be tough. One member, Derek Smith, received kudos during the show-and-tell part of the meeting for brining out an image of Mt. Cook in New Zealand. He used it as a springboard to talk about his family's aerial trip of the location used in filming the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

But the stand-out story came from Joseph Lee and his trip to see a rare moonlight rainbow over Victoria falls near Mombasa. Upon discovering that he didn't have an alarm clock to wake him at 3 a.m. in time see the rainbow he did what only a truly savvy travel pro would do: he drank six glasses of water before bed and let his bladder act as his alarm clock.



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