

Caring for Kiriwina

The saga of two bags in transit from Canberra to Kiriwina...

Having collected two pink shoulder bags from Beyond Q we knew we had the birthing kits yet we wondered about the parents of the children yet to be born and of the stories of those who were to assist in their births. The bags were smaller in size and less in weight than expected. While that would later prove a plus, at the early stage we wondered if we might add something more. Torches, ear droppers, Panadol and women's underwear were among the suggestions proffered by Jenni Lawton.

Hence, after a visit to a bookshop, a number of chemists and Big W and a decision to stay away from Panadol the bags were stuffed to capacity.

As our suitcases were light we had assumed we could add the shoulder bags as checked in luggage at Canberra airport. Yes, but not in the way we had envisaged! Not having read the fine print that our air tickets allowed only one bag per person the two bags were taped together and incurred only a single additional baggage charge. At Cairns airport the one bag became two once more.

The next step was to load them on board the cruise ship, mindful of the 'small print' on the ship's noticeboard indicating that 'weapons' and sharp objects needed to be declared. They were and we were informed to declare the bags as such to the security personnel at the wharf and expect them to be 'held' until we arrived at the port of Kiriwina where PNG Customs would advise the next step. Some thirty minutes after boarding those two pink shoulder bags were in our cabin: the blades were apparently a non-issue for the bag checkers at the Cairns dock.

Later, reading the on-board welcome sheet we learnt that any gifts to be handed over at any PNG port needed to be declared. After two forms were completed, one for each bag, and then stamped by P&O, we were advised to present the bags for inspection by PNG customs officers at 6.45am on the morning of our arrival off Kiriwina. They were duly stamped but on arrival at Kiriwina the Port Officer introduced himself and charged us K10 in port fees.

Afterwards, photographs were taken with Ruth Boaz and her husband. They had walked from Losuia and kindly offered to show us some local scenes as they walked part-way back towards their home. While we did see some vegetable fields and a yam house, and lots of chickens and dogs the children were the charmers as they performed for us at their school. Among the women and men some were great guides, others sat by the roadways and tried to sell a range of wares while the young men were touting small items of craft. Ruth kindly gave us three hand woven bags and some fresh corn as her thank you to us.

The two bags have reached their new home and we trust that the women who use them from across each of the villages on this beautiful island will recall the love of the Lawton family whose links continue through the United Church.

