

TRAVEL

Jans gets jazzed on Tanzania

William Jans has a love-hate relationship with his gold tooth, which glints at the back of his mouth when he talks. While others might replace it with enamel, he's in no hurry. "I normally hate it," he confesses, "but I'm keeping it now because overseas, it's the biggest hoot."

The ultimate people person, Jans can make friends literally by opening his mouth. "It's been a real conversation starter," he says of the tooth. In Tanzania, two Masai warriors couldn't get enough of it. "One of them asked if I was born with it. The other asked if it went right to the top of my head."

Jans shares images of his encounters with the Masai at his show *Tales From Tanzania*, which takes place next Thursday (October 14). A second show, *Trekking in Tibet*, happens on October 21. Both events are at the Hollywood Theatre (3123 West Broadway) at 8 p.m.

A professional corporate photographer who lives in Vancouver, Jans has a passion for travel and storytelling. For over 17 years, he's been periodically staging what he calls "live multimedia

extravaganzas" as a side project. In a phone interview, he tells the *Straight* that over 30,000 people have seen the show in Vancouver and other cities in western Canada. Most people learn about his shows from a friend's rave review, and Jans says he's sold out theatres including the Ridge 15 times.

The shows are hard to describe because they're so different from anything else out there. The evenings are fast-paced, with Jans mixing slides of *National Geographic* quality with video and audio clips, audience participation, zany commentary, and even a costume change or two. It's pure entertainment, whether or not you're a travel buff.



Adventurer William Jans, whose loony ways help him make friends with the locals, will share his lively tales at the Hollywood Theatre. William Jans photo.

His repertoire includes five shows, each focusing on a different part of the world. Tanzania is his latest, created in 2008. It features a climb up Mount Kilimanjaro, a safari, and a stay with the Masai people.

The Tibet show covers Tibet, Everest base camp, southern China, and Laos.

Does the fact that Jans visited Tibet back in 2001 and Africa in 2007 make his shows less relevant today? "It's not so much a how-to but a 'Here's what happened to me,'" he says. Great stories are timeless—such as the one about how the Masai slaughtered a goat and offered him the spinal cord for breakfast, an honour usually reserved for elders.

Inquisitive, culturally sensitive, and just plain loony, Jans draws out the best in people the world over. He says that one of the biggest compliments he's received was from an audience member who said that the people in his videos and photos looked like they were

having just as much fun as he was.

The secret, he says, is learning a bit of the language and interacting with the locals, rather than just hopping off the tour bus and snapping photos. "That's a person," he says. "How would you feel if you were at IGA and somebody did that to you? So I take that extra time to either befriend somebody or ask [to take a photo]. And if they say no, I don't do it."

His approach wins him friends. "There are so many people out there who travel for landmarks and vistas, and that's fine," he says. "But I travel to meet people. That's what really jazzes me—especially finding the commonalities as well as the wild differences."

The Masai, he learned, have much better teeth than he does. ♦

Tickets for both shows are on sale for about \$20 at Happy Bats Cinema (2832 Main Street) and Videomatica (1855 West 4th Avenue), and on Jans's website. If any remain, they will be sold at the door. See www.wriphoto.com/.

Travel Notes Carolyn Ali

