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Wanderlust is different. Here's why.

Lyn Hughes
Editor-in-Chief
& Publisher

YOU MIGHT NOTICE A FEW CHANGES THIS ISSUE. Over the past few months we've been unpacking the magazine, spreading its contents all over the floor, and then repacking it again in a different way. Like any good packing session, we've thrown out some kit we had in before, and stuffed in some new bits to try out for the first time. To find out exactly what's where, turn the page. But for all the differences, the fundamentals of *Wanderlust* remain the same.

We're independent.

We are a small, independent company of around 20 people passionate about adventurous, sustainable travel. We are not owned by a large corporation. We don't have a guidebook to plug or a TV series to promote. We work with anyone who shares our values.

We're trusted.

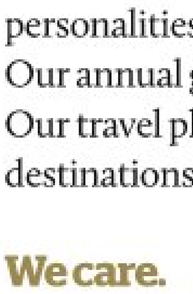
Wanderlust launched in my spare bedroom in 1993. Numerous travel magazines had been and gone, so a queue of 'experts' said we'd never last. Over 18 years we have proved them wrong. Moreover, we have grown up with the adventure travel industry, and we have close relationships with the companies and personalities within it. We know what is hype and what is worthwhile. Our annual guide awards are the only global recognition of tour leaders. Our travel photo competition is the UK's largest. We have repeatedly pioneered destinations other magazines would not cover.

We care.

We care about what we promote. We care about local culture, about wildlife and wilderness. We care about our readers – we want to bring you the best in travel.

Thank you.

I hope you like the new look, much of which is inspired by feedback we've had from you. I've never been so excited about a refresh of the magazine as this one, and must thank Dan Linstead, Graham Berridge and the team for doing such an amazing job with it. I trust you agree: spread the word! Buy a gift subscription. Visit our online forum. Tell us what you think about the mag: we're listening!



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The end of the Inca Trail: Machu Picchu, Peru (Jacob Halaska/Photolibrary.com)

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Welcome to the NEW Wanderlust

More, bigger pictures

> Our new 360° section kicks off the magazine with the most interesting and inspirational travel photography out there. Check it out on **page 8**.

More space for you

> You told us how much you valued the sense of community in the magazine – so we've created a new From the Road section for you. See **page 47**.

More pages and handy guides

> We've added 16 pages to the magazine, giving you more destinations each issue. Plus we've added three tear-out guides for UK and overseas trips – see **page 135**.

More expert travel advice

> *Wanderlust*'s health and photo pages are written by leading experts – follow their advice, and others', in our new Navigator section. See **page 81.**

Contributors this issue

Amy Watkins has dressed as a geisha in Kyoto, swum with crocs in Australia and eaten too much cake with a granny in Greenland. For us, she boarded an Inuit-run cruise in north Canada (see page 56). The best bit? "Watching a polar bear nearly out-swim our ship in Frobisher Bay."

David Leck has trekked the glaciers of Patagonia and scoured the streets of New York updating a guidebook. His heart, however, lies in South-East Asia. "My best Bangkok moment is enjoying a beer at Vertigo Bar while night falls and the city sparkles 61 floors below." See page 137 for more insights.

Cathy Harlow first visited Iceland as a child. Enthralled by its landscapes, she returned to live there for three years. After a stint in a fish factory, she studied Icelandic and trained as a guide; for the past 22 summers she has led groups through the volcanic island. See her tips in our Iceland adventure guide on page 20.

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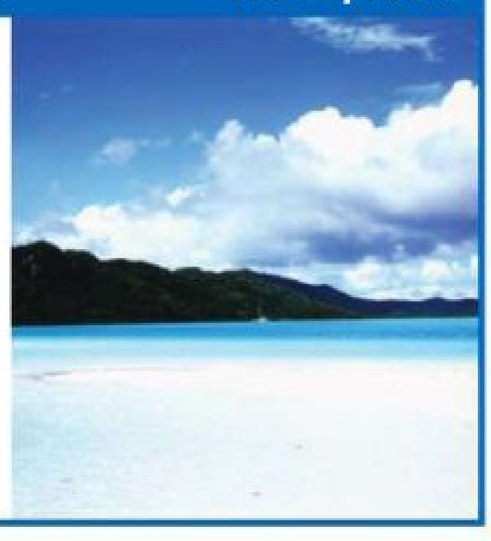

10nts Rockies Marvel Escorted Tour — fr £2,899

Marvel at the touring destinations that have been drawing travellers to Canada for decades. Stay in the cosmopolitan city of Vancouver before discovering the Rockies aboard the Rocky Mountaineer, then visit the alpine villages of Jasper, Sun Peaks and Whistler.

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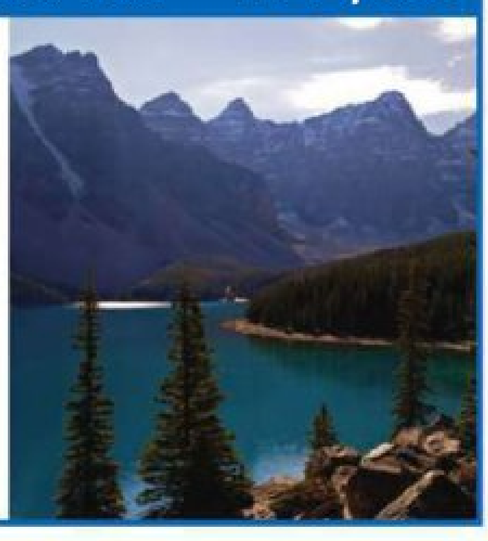
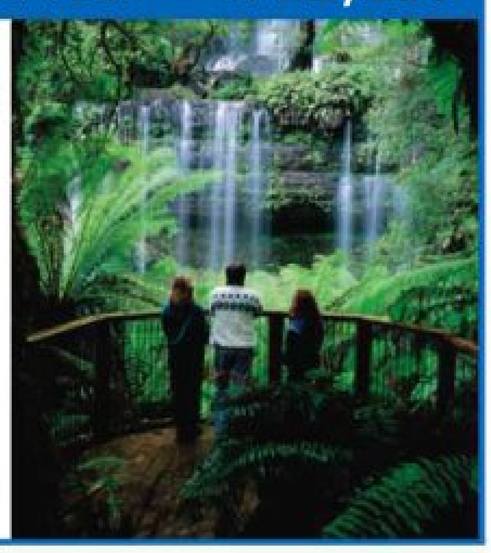


9nts Grand Tasman Escorted Tour — fr £2,259

See the beautiful coastline of Freycinet National Park and the ruins of Port Arthur before arriving in Hobart. Explore Mt Field National Park, with picturesque Russell Falls, as well as the World Heritage-listed landscapes of Cradle Mountain-Lake Sr Clair.

Includes: flights, accommodation, some meals, touring & Tour Director/Driver



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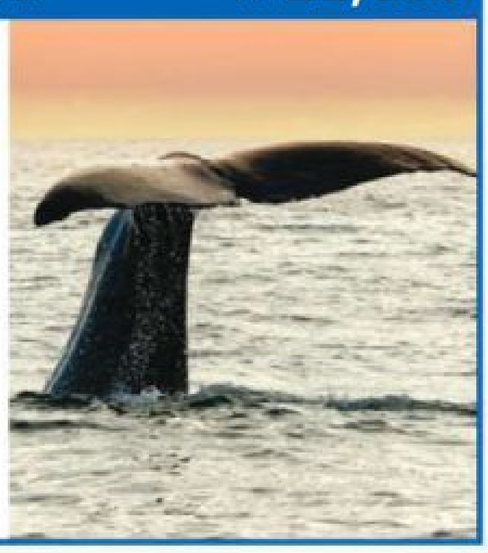
Includes: flights, accommodation, some meals, touring & Tour Director/Driver



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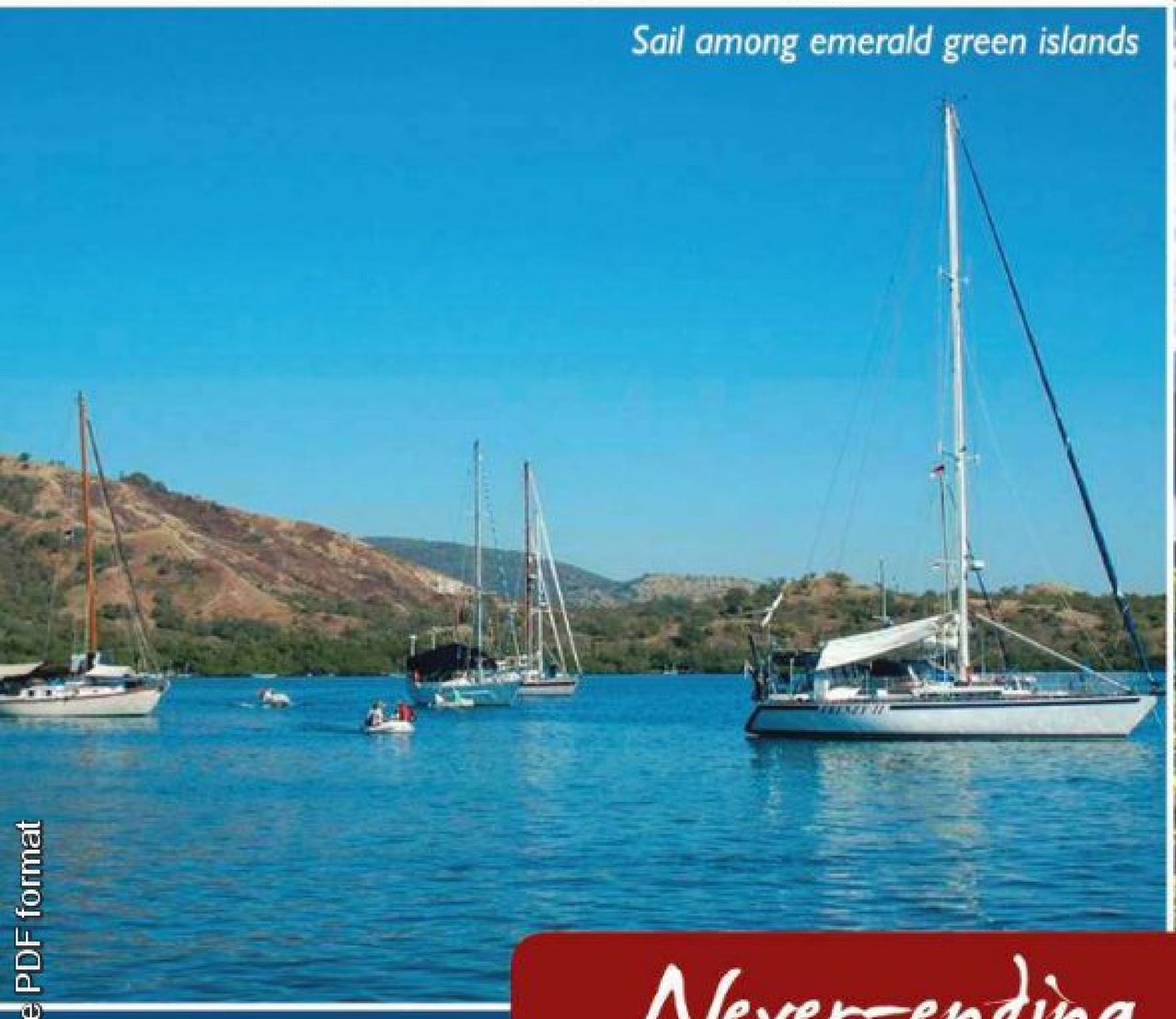

Sail among emerald green islands

Explore one of the world's most bio-diverse locations

Never-ending Fascination!

Beyond the beautiful palm-lined shores of the world's largest archipelago, swift currents, challenging waves and a fascinating underwater realm beckon nature lovers to explore and enjoy its enchanting waters.

Visit Indonesia and discover a magnificent marine environment waiting to be explored.

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Conserving National Heritage, Empowering Local Communities

A new wave of consciousness is spreading across Indonesia, with local communities and government leaders awaking to the potential of sustainable ecotourism.

From the well-trodden sites of Java and Bali to the hidden treasures of Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia; travelers can increasingly witness the unique wonders of Indonesia's landscapes while contributing to the conservation of the nation's natural and cultural heritage.

Situated in what experts describe as the Wallacea region, a natural boundary between the ecosystems of Asia and Australasia, Indonesia boasts 51 national parks and is home to 28,000 flora species, ranging from tiny rare orchids to tthe giant Rafflesia flower, together with 3,500 species of animals including the endangered Orangutans of Sumatra and Borneo, the ancient Komodo dragons, the great one-horned Java Rhinoceros and graceful Sumatran tigers.

As the largest archipelago in the world, Indonesia has tremendous marine tourism potential. "Indonesia has 59 premium dive sites, with 10 million hectares of marine protected areas (MPAs), a rich variety of fishing villages and aquaculture activities ready to be developed.", says Indroyono Soesilo, chairman of the Indonesian Association of Oceanographers. With more than 8,500 species of fish, 950 species of coral, 555 species of seaweed and 18 species of sea grass, Indonesia holds a vital key to Earth's treasure chest of marine biodiversity.

Komodo National Park - Real-life Jurassic Park

Declared a World Heritage Site and a Man and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1986, the Komodo National Park not only protects the great Komodo Dragon (Varanus Komodoensis) but also preserves its habitat ; the three major islands of Komodo, Rinca and Padar, as well as numerous smaller islands in the immediate area. The 500,000-acre conservation area encompasses sparsely grassed mountains, tropical savannas, dense woodlands and white sandy beaches. The park is one of the world's few lush marine sanctuaries, boasting astonishing coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds, submarine mountains and semi-enclosed bays

The Komodo National Park lies in the heart of the Coral Triangle, the richest marine region on Earth, and is haven to more than 1,000 species of fish, 260 species of reef-building coral and 70 species of sponge. Along with the living mermaid, the dugong, marine mammals inhabiting this magnificent real-life Jurassic Park include whales, dolphins, sharks, manta rays and sea turtles.

Vote Komodo National Park as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World at www.indonesia.travel and be a part of a greater goal to preserve and support its exceptional existence!

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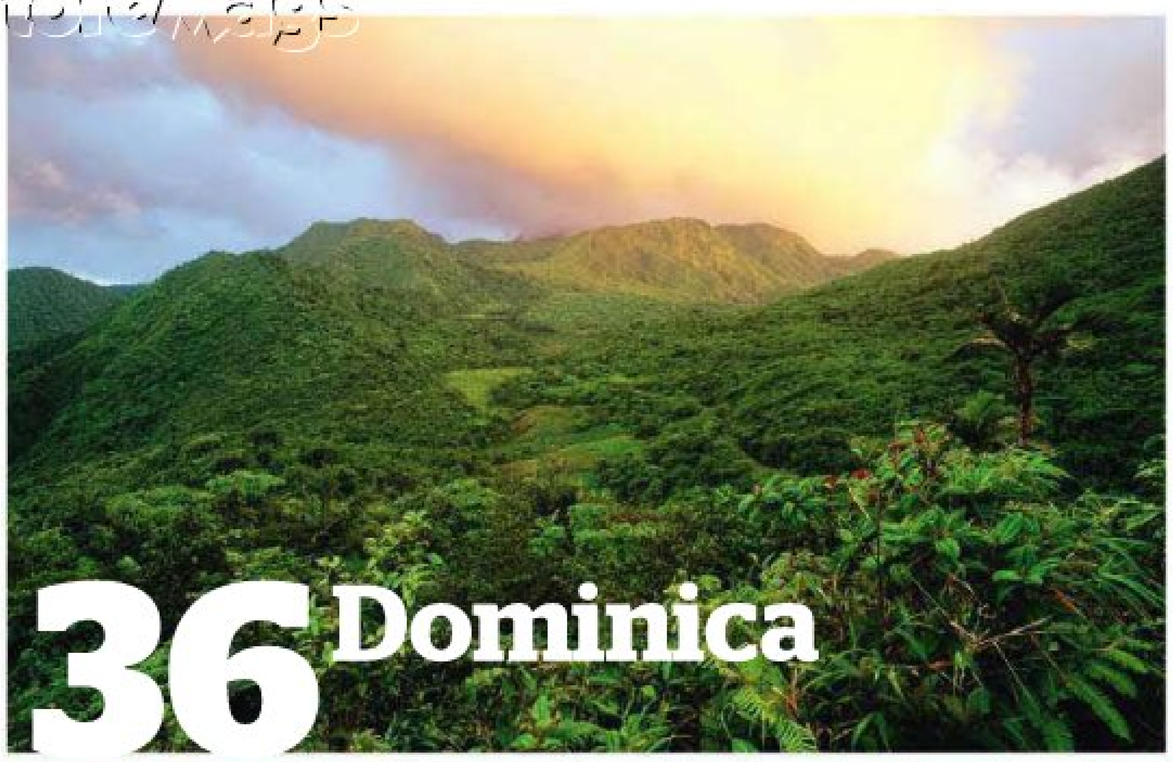

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New! Wanderlust POCKET GUIDES
(Caution: may need to be folded if your pockets are smaller than A4)

NEW THIS ISSUE
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Pocket Guides
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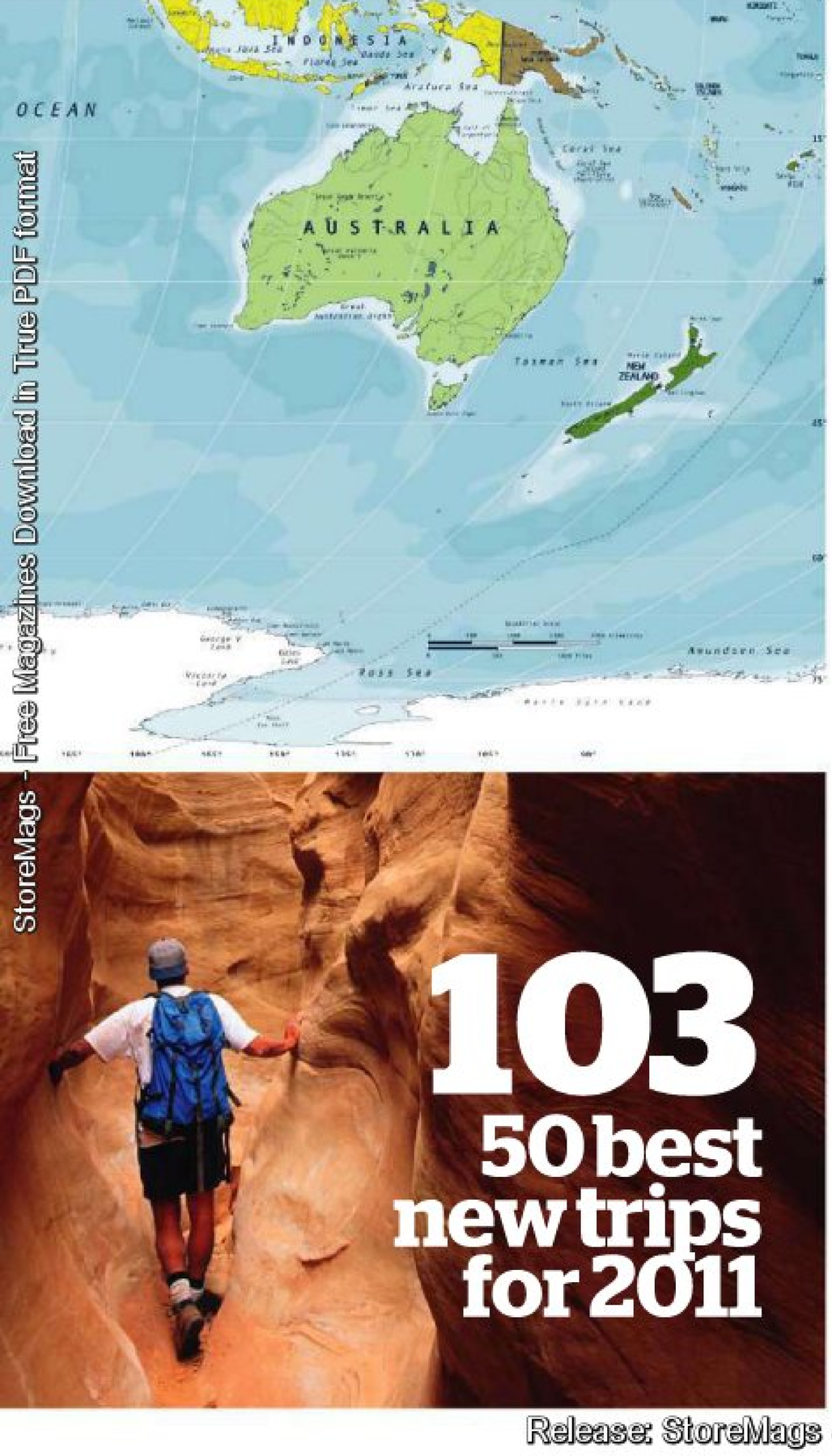

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GREENLAND
Tough breed

Photographer **Ragnar Axelsson**

"It is no small feat to have lived for thousands of years, as the Inuit have, under the oppressive cold claw of the ice, fighting for their lives every single day. The hunters sometimes stay for weeks, or even months, out on the ice. At times it breaks and the dogs howl in warning. The men immediately pack up their equipment, fasten the dogs to the sledges and drive as fast as possible to a safe piece of ice. It can get too slippery for the dogs, causing them to whimper as they scratch their claws into the surface. Finally, a lining of snow allows them to latch on and press forward, but for 10 hours they struggle to reach solid ground. When they do, the dogs get a long needed rest and lounge around on the ice, while the hunters set up camp. That evening the small hut feels like a palace."

Ragnar Axelsson's photobook *Last Days of the Arctic* (Crymogea, £38) is out now

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360°

Places jostling for our attention this month

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NAMIBIA
The dune of death

Photographer **Dale Morris**

"By its very nature, the Naukluft National Park in Namibia is not an easy place to access unless you have a sturdy 4x4 and a specialist guide with a multi-car back up team. Recently I had the privilege of joining a desert convoy that journeyed to some of the most remote corners of the park. In this photo, our lead vehicle is driving down 'The Great Wall of Death' a particularly steep dune, which once straddled, cannot be climbed. It's a one-way journey down, and once on the beach, a convoy must race against the tide for many miles eastwards until the next exit point presents itself. Timing is of the essence, and those who get it wrong not only lose their vehicles to the sea, but will also find themselves stuck in one of the most inhospitable environments on earth."

See more of Dale's images at www.geckoeye.com

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INDONESIA
When spears fly

Photographer **Ed Wray**

"I'd been hearing about the crazy spear-throwing festival in Sumba since I arrived in Indonesia. So a friend and I headed off to this remote and untouched island to see for ourselves. Sumbanese are proud of their festival and are extremely welcoming, but at Pasola time, the atmosphere churns with bravado, machismo – whatever you want to call it. We followed a bunch of riders before and after the event, watched as they sacrificed chickens and read through the entrails to see if they would be hurt or killed, and followed them out into the field to joust with bamboo spears. It's a magnificent sight, especially if you love horses. These beautiful, well-groomed beasts have fancier costumes than their riders, and the stern-faced and frequently moustachioed horsemen really seem to want to impale their opponents – though direct hits are few. Over a five-hour mock battle, grudges harboured over a year are worked out and finally spent... until the next year."

The next Pasola festival is in February 2011

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Puerto Rico
New routes to the Caribbean

1 One of the Caribbean's blind spots for European visitors, Puerto Rico, steps into the sunshine from 28 March 2011, as British Airways introduces twice-weekly flights from London Gatwick to capital San Juan. Founded in 1521, San Juan is one of the oldest cities in the Anericas, and a historic gateway to an island boasting over 320km of surf-lashed coastline. Additional perks come courtesy of Puerto Rico's coffee-growing history: sip an espresso at one of the island's many haciendas. Finally, don't miss the extraordinary bioluminescent Mosquito Bay on little-sister island Vieques. **www.ba.com**

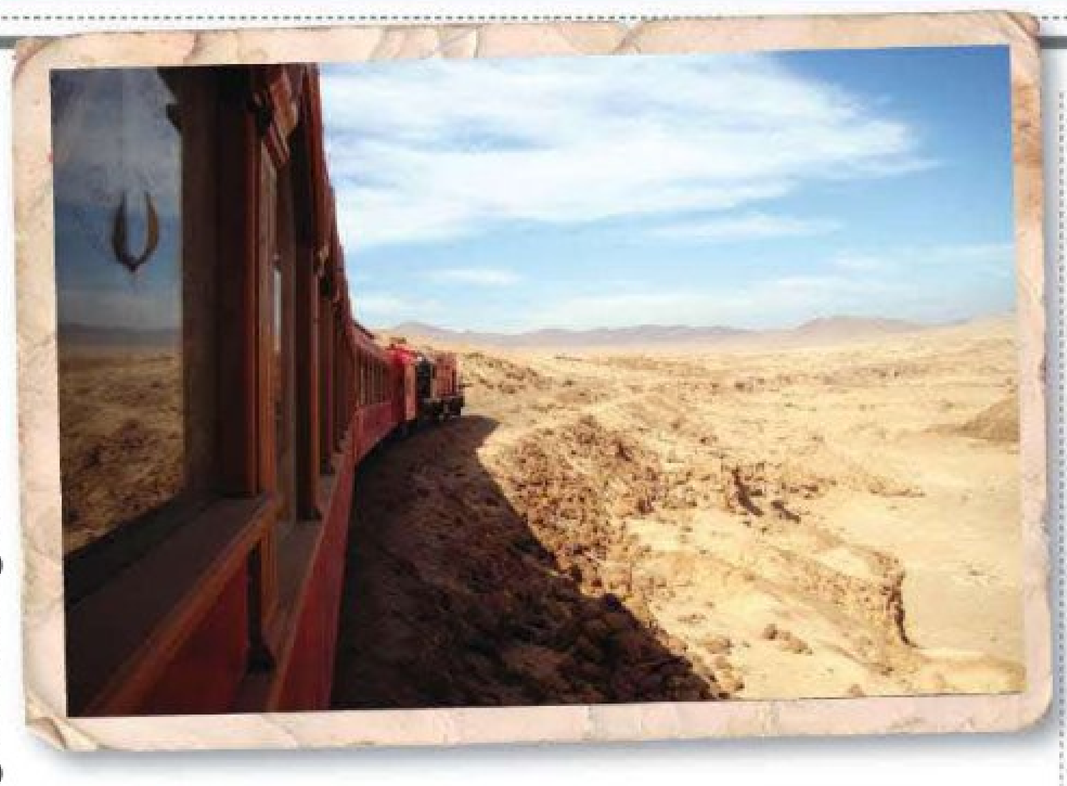
Malawi
Volunteer library rolls in

2 Book Bus, the mobile library staffed by volunteers, now has a third base – in Blantyre, Malawi. The project started out in Zambia, expanded to Ecuador, and is now bringing 'books, art materials, live performance and bags of enthusiasm' to kids in the small southern African nation. Volunteers welcome – read more about the Ecuador project next issue. £685 + local payment. **www.thebookbus.org**

Latvia
Baltics best for budgets

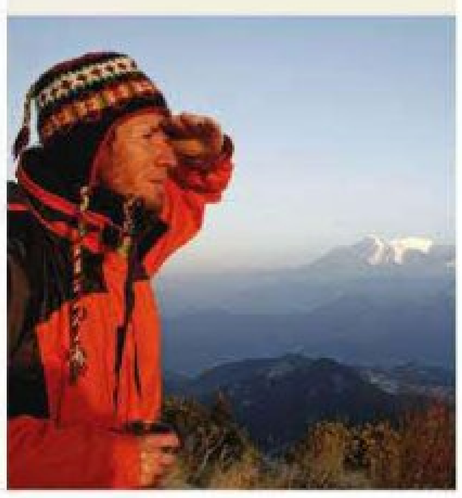
3 Latvia's capital, Riga, has been named the world's cheapest city for travellers in a price index by bookings website hotels.com. In spring this year, Riga rooms cost an average £52 per night – £4 less than last year. Tallinn (£54) and Bangkok (£58) filled out the top three, while Geneva gained the dubious honour of having the priciest beds, at £155 a night.

Shortcuts
A quick stroll around our planet



Nepal
New trekking routes to open

5 Four new trekking routes will be opened in Nepal in 2011, as part of plans to mark Visit Nepal year. The fresh trails are in the Annapurna Conservation Area, the Limi Valley near Tibet, and the Solukumbhu and Bhairav Kunda regions. Upgrades are also planned for Nepal's roads. **www.visitnepal2011.com**



Chile
Explore the Atacama Desert by train

4 The rescue of 'Los 33' from beneath Chile's barren Atacama desert was the feelgood story of the year – and the region looks set to benefit from a visitor boom. The latest option for day-trippers is the new TransAtacama train from Iquique: designed to take 1920s miners to work, the line now carries visitors 100km into the desert, past spooky nitrate ghost towns. Restoring the line was a major undertaking, says Eva Perkmann of rail operator TransAtacama. "We wanted to get visitors closer to the history of ancient mining towns – there was not a lot of infrastructure in the area." Tickets from US$168. **www.transatacama.com**

Mali
Timbuktu jewellery helps the Tuareg

6 Tuareg artisans in Timbuktu are selling exquisite items of handmade silver jewellery online, thanks to new charity Jump4Timbuktu. The collaboration began when the Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye twinned with the desert city. Now around 200 craftsmen from the proudly nomadic tribe are receiving an income from fair trade pendants, necklaces, rings and leather items sold through the Hay-based charity's website. In the last year, visitor numbers to Timbuktu have been decimated by official warnings over security risks, leaving the artisans with few local customers. Now the proceeds of online sales are helping the Tuareg to plant gardens and dig wells. Hand-crafted jewellery from £22; buy at **www.jump4timbuktu.org**

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Brazil

Offbeat eco-lodges beckon

7 As more travellers venture away from Brazil's main sites, a new website offers an inspiring range of small-scale, individual places to stay. Hidden Pousadas Brazil lists over 50 independent lodges, boutique hotels and B&Bs, from cheap-as-chips to honeymoon-indulgent. All have been personally vetted by founder Alison McGowan, who's lived in Brazil for over 30 years. **www.hiddenpousadasbrazil.com**

China

Icy artwork on display

8 Chainsaw-wielding ice-sculptors are gearing up for their busy period: the 27th Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival, in China's northerly Heilongjiang province, kicks off on 5 January. Sub-zero temperatures keep the artwork fresh – best viewed illuminated on a night tour. **www.cnto.org/harbin.asp**

China

Forbidden City crackdown

9 Beijing's centrepiece attraction, the Forbidden City, is to limit visitor numbers with a new e-ticketing system from 2011. The old imperial capital – to which access was once punished by death – is currently often overwhelmed with double its 60,000-a-day capacity, because tickets are sold manually.

Australia

New zipwire of the month

10 The seemingly unstoppable spread of zipwires through the world's rainforests has reached Australia's Great Ocean Road. The new Otway Fly allows hard-hatted, harnessed-up and buttocks-clenched visitors to soar between nine 'cloud stations' in the canopy of Victoria's majestic Otways rainforest.
www.otwayfly.com.au

Peru & Chile

Machu Picchu meets Easter Island

11 Two of Latin America's iconic sights – Machu Picchu and Easter Island – are being linked for the first time by a direct flight. From January, Chilean airline LAN will fly twice-weekly from Lima, Peru to Hanga Roa, Easter Island, in around five hours. Until now all flights to Easter Island – 3,790km off Chile's coast – left from Santiago.
www.lan.com

India

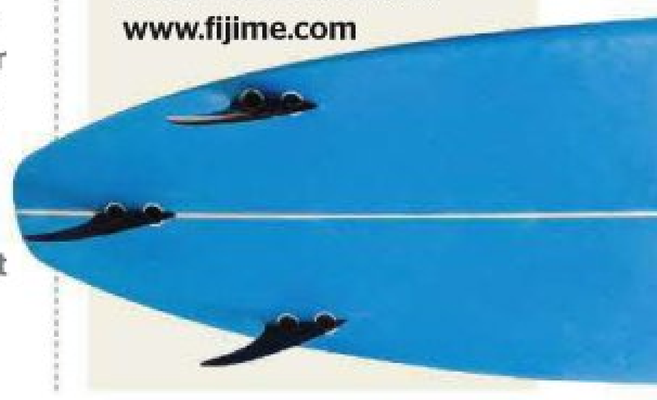
Corbett tiger camp wins award

12 A lodge in India's oldest National Park, Corbett, was been voted the country's 'most inspirational' by an association of tiger safari tour operators. Camp Forktail Creek in Uttaranchal, northern India, was recognised in awards organised by Tour Operators for Tigers (www.toftigers.org). The mud hut and tented camp lodge was launched by naturalist Ritish Suri in 2002 to immerse guests in a highly bio-diverse patch of Indian jungle.
www.campforktailcreek.com

Fiji

Surf breaks free

13 One of the world's top five surf breaks, Cloudbreak off Fiji, has opened to the public for the first time in a decade. Formerly limited to residents of private resorts, the 6m-plus swell has been liberated by a new open-access decree by the Fijian government. Cloudbreak is legendary for its huge 'pull', and on its biggest days, big wave surfers from all over the world have flown to the South Pacific to ride it.
www.fijime.com



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Photos: Dreamstime. Words: Robert Bright

Go now! Tallinn, Estonia

Forget its stag venue image – Tallinn is a cultural capital with a wild backyard. And at this time of year, there's plenty of Christmas spirit to go with it

Why go now?

If Tallinn's Old Town is pure chocolate box, during the Christmas period it's a ye olde tin of Quality Street. The justly celebrated Christmas Market (29 Nov-7 Jan; **www.tallinn-life.com/tallinn/christmas-market**) is one of the best in Europe: Raekoja plats (Town Hall square) fills up with stalls selling chunky-knit jumpers, hard-carved toys, gingerbread and jewellery.

Beyond its festive attractions, Tallinn is to become European Capital of Culture in 2011, a deserved accolade given that Estonians retain a deep connection to their history, folklore and music. For more, go to **www.tallinn2011.ee/eng**.

A long weekend

Fear not – despite what you might have heard, Tallinn is not overrun by stag parties on the weekends. What you get instead are friendly locals existing among a maze of cobbled streets, whitewashed 15th century Merchants' Houses and atmospheric Gothic churches that make up the Old Town. Must-sees include the Town Hall, the Alexander Nevsky cathedral and the hilltop views from Toompea Castle. Estonia has a thriving arts scene, and many of its greatest works are housed in the purpose-built KUMU (**www.ekm.ee**) in Kadriorg Park, but check out some of the smaller galleries such as Vaal and Draakoni too.

A week or more

Outside Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park 70km to the east, is great for coastal hikes, but there's likely to be snow during the winter, so pack sensibly. If you want to tap in to Estonia's rich folk music tradition then head to its spiritual home, Viljandi, about 130km south of Tallinn. Here you'll find the Traditional Music Centre, featuring performances all year round, including the Winter Folk Festival on 4-6 February. Go to **www.viljandi.ee** for more details.

Where to stay

For the budget-minded, **Euro Hostel** (**+372 644 7788, www.eurohostel.ee**) has a great location near Raekoja plats.

The St Petersbourg (**+372 628 6500, www.hotelstpetersbourg.com**) is a small boutique hotel with medieval charm.

The well-heeled should look up the **Three Sisters Hotel** (**+372 630 6300, www.threesistershotel.com**) situated next to St Olaf's church.

Where to eat

Café culture is a big part of life in Tallinn. They like their hot chocolate, so head to Chocolats de Pierre (**www.pierre.ee**), tucked away in one of Tallinn's oldest courtyards, where the prodigious cocoa-lover can take their hot chocolate with a side order of chocolate truffles.

If you can drag yourself away long enough to have an actual meal, step back into the Dark Ages and try a bona fide medieval feast at Olde Hansa (**www.oldehansa.ee**).

Getting there

From 14 December 2010, Ryanair flies direct from Edinburgh and Dublin, and from Luton as of 10 January 2011 (**www.ryanair.com**). Flights are from £29.99 excluding taxes. EasyJet and Estonian Air also fly direct from the UK.

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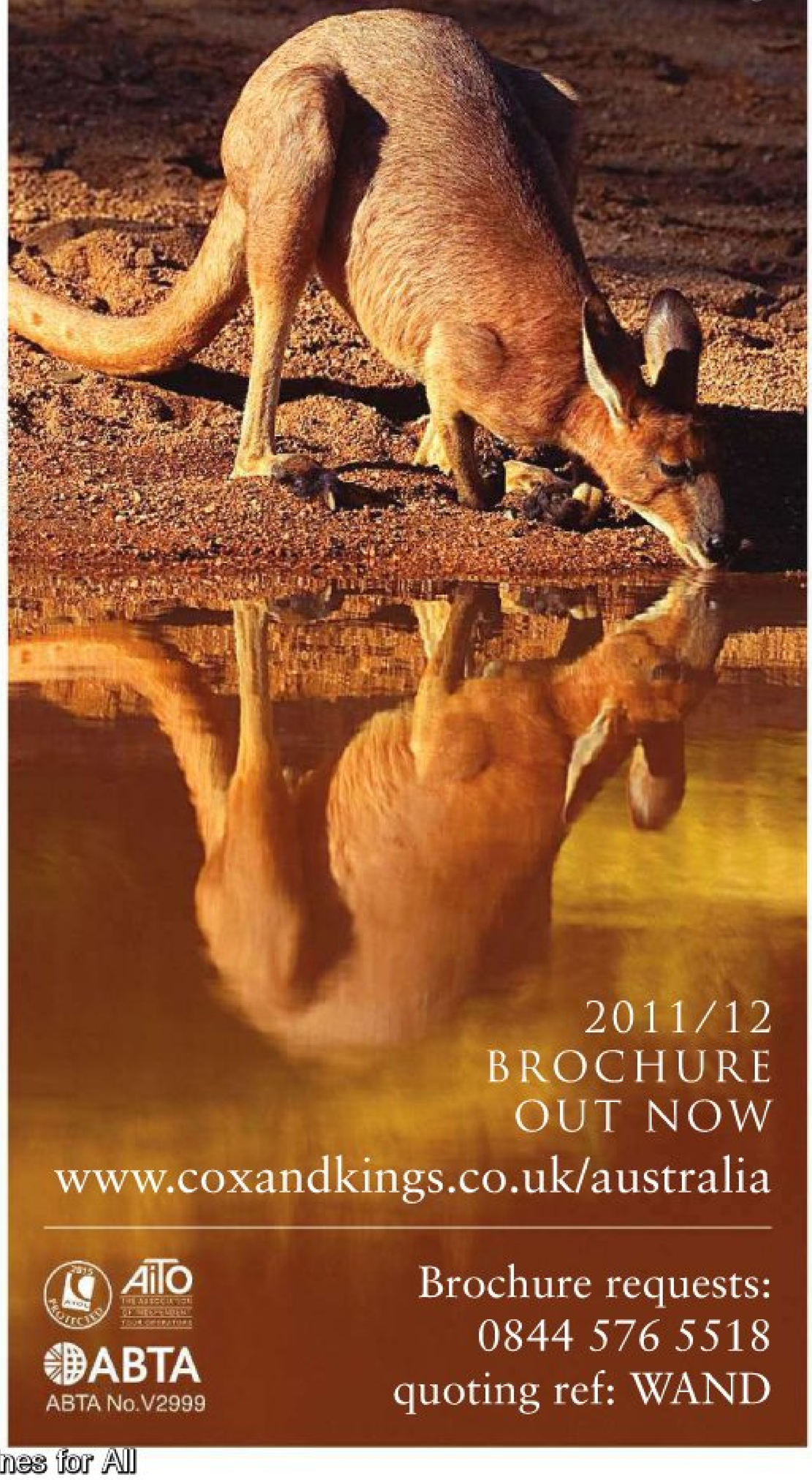

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10 things to do for free Zanzibar Island

There's more to Zanzibar than pricey hotels and sunloungers – from overgrown palaces to forest trails, we pick the Spice Island's best giveaways

Illustration: Scott Jessop. Words: Hazel Plush

1 Take in the view

Sailing from Pemba or Dar es Salaam, the approach into Stone Town's Zanzibar Port gives a wonderful view of the waterfront, from the balconies of the Old Customs House to the clocktower of Sultan Barghash's *Beit al-Ajaib* (House of Wonders).

2 Lose yourself in the streets

Hurumzi, the heart of Stone Town, is a labyrinth of packed houses and slender alleyways – but getting lost has never been so fun. Sip bitter coffee in tiny cafés, browse dusty antique stalls and have a guess at what lies behind all those heavy studded doors...

3 Watch an imperial sunset

Africa House Hotel once provided a haven of cricket matches and costume balls for its elite British members. Now renovated, its ocean-facing bar is one of the finest places to enjoy a sundowner – but the terrace is open to paupers, too.

4 Glimpse the locals

Jozani forest's most famous residents are the Kirk's red colobus monkeys – endemic to Zanzibar Island. Entry to the Jozani-Chwaka Bay National Park is $8 (£5), but the monkeys don't stick to boundaries – a troop can often be spotted near the gate.

Far from free Zanzibar's harrowing slaving past is memorialised in Stone Town, and evidence also lingers in slavers' caves at Mangapwani

5 Escape to a prison island

Head out early for a morning's birdwatching in Changuu Island's lush coral rag forest, then grab a snorkel to explore the shallow reef. The island, a penal colony in the 19th century, is also home to giant tortoises and a sweeping white-sand beach.

6 Breathe in the blossoms

Scottish botanist Sir John Kirk (who named the monkeys) came to Zanzibar in 1870 and created Mbweni's botanical gardens, now part of the Mbweni Ruins Hotel. Pop in for lunch or tea, then enjoy the 650 plant species in the garden for nowt.

7 Find a quiet retreat

Tucked away west of the mangrove-fringed Chwaka Bay, Chwaka is a quiet fishing village where you can watch the pink sunrise over Michamvi Peninsula, browse the open-air market, then enjoy the bustle as fishermen trade their catch.

8 Explore royal ruins

Sultan Barghash built Maruhubi Palace in 1882 for himself and his wife – and his 99 concubines. The palace itself was destroyed by fire in 1899, but dark tales of ritual executions and carnal desire still remain.

9 Re-trace the past

Mangapwani's idyllic shoreline hides a dark secret. Its dank cells, hollowed out inside the soft coral rock, were used by slave traders to hide their wares from the British Navy's anti-slavery patrols.

10 Party in paradise

Swimming and sunbathing are the main events in chilled-out Kendwa, but time your visit carefully and you'll catch the legendary full moon party – a free knees-up that brings the sleepy town to life.

And one to break the bank

Standing tall in the centre of Stone Town, 236 Hurumzi (formerly the Emerson & Green Hotel) is a sumptuous re-imagining of Zanzibar's royal palaces. A grand staircase leads to the rooms, each of which is dressed with lavish throws, hand-woven carpets and antique Zanzibari treasures. The building itself was once home to Sir Tharia Topan, advisor to Sultan Barghash – and his opulent style lives on. Prices from $120 (£75) to $300 (£190). Book well in advance. www.236hurumzi.com

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The Fjallabak Nature Reserve will have you searching for superlatives: volcanic activity on the island means it's very much a work in progress

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Guide by **Cathy Harlow** | Reports by **David Leigh Delport, Polly Evans** & **Alastair Humphreys**

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Reykjavík & the South West

Classic sites around the capital

East of the cool capital lie the hotspots of Geysir, Gullfoss Falls and Þingvellir National Park. The Blue Lagoon revives tired limbs, and leads to the surf-lashed Reykjanes coast and lighthouses. Further east rumbles Hveragerði's geothermal hinterland

1 Explore the golden circle

David Leigh Delport plunges into life around Iceland's capital

I am floating beneath 18m of frozen glacial water. I've lost all sensation in my fingers, but if I stretch my arms out either side of me, I can touch America on my left and Europe on my right. Why? Because I'm diving in a country which is coming apart at the seams. Iceland is separating at a rate of 2cm per year, and in one special place you can scuba dive right into the gap.

Iceland's Golden Circle – a day-long route through the country's natural highlights – is an unlikely name in a country dominated by shades of silver, grey and white. But it was conjured up by diplomatic alchemists keen to entice a visiting King of Denmark to venture outside Reykjavík.

History doesn't record whether the monarch was impressed, but the name stuck and the route is now accessible Iceland at its best. From Gullfoss waterfall to the gushing Strokkur geyser, city-breakers who stick only to the capital's trendy bars are surely missing out.

I had opted for a personalised tour by super jeep, the fat-wheeled ruggedised vehicles that are the transport of choice across Iceland's volcano-pitted landscape. I was grateful for the modifications as we left Reykjavík and crossed wind-buffeted plains and fast-flowing rivers, navigating off-road towards our first stop at Þingvellir National Park. Here, Lake Þingvallavatn lies directly over the separating American and Eurasian plates.

My dive guide, Magnús Leifur Sveinsson, led me to the water-filled fault line at Silfra – the entrance to the lake. Above the surface the scenery was staggering. On one side the sheer force of the wind redirected a waterfall back up the cliff-face, and we struggled to stand upright. I took a deep breath, steadied my nerves, and gingerly dipped beneath the surface.

I'd always thought of cold water as opaque. But here the underwater view seemed limitless, the crystal-clear visibility due to glacial water filtered over years through miles of volcanic rock. Although the water was bitterly cold, in my dry suit I felt like a human walrus, struggling to move on land, but sleek and protected once in the water, swimming between mountainous walls of rock, as delicate shades of aquamarine light filtered from above.

Ahead of me, towering lumps of lava formed a deep V-shaped chasm, the massive scar continuing beneath me towards the technicoloured Cathedral Lagoon. The visibility was utterly surreal. With no reference points to latch onto, I suffered fleeting vertigo. But I was soon more relaxed and, releasing some air from my dry suit, I sank to the lake bed and stretched out my arms, for a wonderful moment becoming a living link between America and Europe.

After finning through to the Silfra Lagoon, I surfaced half an hour later, feeling like I'd seen Iceland in creation. I was humbled, and a little cold. But there was time to warm up in the jeep, as I headed north east in the company of geography guide Adalheidur. ›

Previous spread: Martin Chamberlain. This spread: Magnus Leifur; Arctic Images/Getty

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‘I stretched out my arms and for a wonderful moment became a living link between America and Europe’

Fun above & below
A scuba diver minds the gap at Þingvallavatn Lake, while offroaders explore the ash-coated terrain under Eyjafjallajökull

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Don't get too close... The Strokkur geyser does its stuff every four minutes, eliciting gushing praise from those who come to witness it

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Water wonder
The Gullfoss waterfall is a rainbow-making marvel, with 70 cubic metres of water thundering down its flanks every second

Crispin Rodwell; Justus de Cuveland

‘The pulsating bubble dome of Strokkur geyser suddenly burst, releasing a 30m-high gush of steam and water’

Next stop was Þingvellir’s Gjabakkahellir lava caves, which lay largely unexplored by Icelanders themselves until as late as the 1960s. “My granny warned me off with gory stories of ghosts,” said Adalheidur. “She wanted to scare me!”

Iceland’s folk heritage is certainly blood-curdling, but Adalheidur thinks there was logic in her grandmother’s ghoulish tale-telling. “Looking back, I guess for many old Icelanders it was a safety mechanism to keep children protected in what’s a dangerous environment.”

But nobody was stopping us grown-ups, and Adalheidur led me inside the confection of lava tunnels, in some places stacked three deep and as much as a kilometre long.

At Gullfoss, the water thunders down 32m of cataract at 70 cubic metres per second. It’s a remarkable sight, and I imagined how it must have looked in flood when the volume reached an almost immeasurable 2,000m3/s. As with the rest of the day, I found myself thinking of the Icelandic sagas I’d read before coming here, like the true tale of a young lover who risked his life to swim across the falls to his sweetheart on the far side of the Hvítá River.

The view to the north is overtaken by Langjökull glacier, which tops the mountains like a monumental frozen wave. But for now I was pressing on to Geysir, the geyser which gave its name to the phenomenon. Geysir used to surge several times a day and was once so powerful that the whole valley would tremor at its eruptions. After recent earthquakes however, its flow has been sealed and the nearby Strokkur geyser now takes star billing. After a four minute wait the pulsating bubble dome suddenly burst, releasing a 30m-high gush of steam and water. I’ve seen more colourful geothermal areas in New Zealand and America, but for sheer clockwork reliability you can’t beat little Strokkur.

There’s one place in Iceland where the adventurer and the city explorer meet, and that’s its most famous tourist attraction, near to Reykjavík, and the end point on my Golden Circle tour – the Blue Lagoon. Here Icelanders have created a cool environment in a cold climate, a world-class natural spa on a lunar landscape. Originally a by-product of a geothermal plant, I was expecting an industrial-looking scene, but in the past 20 years the lagoon has been beautifully remodelled. Swimming out from the meticulous Nordic sauna area and restaurant, I emerged into a hot-water lake with a medicinal mud base and clear Icelandic skies above. I lay on my back, watching the autumn sun set at 3pm, and the stars come out. A quick turn in the water melted the snow on my chest and I relished the sensation of simultaneous hot and cold. The faces appearing through the steam were not Adalheidur’s ghosts, but my fellow lagoon users, their faces caked in white silica-rich mud, nature’s healing cleanser.

When I landed in Reykjavík I didn’t know what to expect. These days the country’s name summons up an image of ash, and of a primeval landscape creating chaos across our ordered world. But as I headed home from my trip, I reflected on a timeless land in a process of flux. The Golden Circle had me in its clasp.

Get started: The author travelled with Discover the World (**01737 218800, www.discover-the-world.co.uk**), which specialises in tailormade and escorted tours to Iceland. A three-night city break including flights, taxes, transfers and three-star accommodation with breakfast costs from £370pp.

You will need a PADI Open Water qualification to dive at Silfra, but snorkellers are free to swim between the continents, a similarly enchanting experience.

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2 Join the Rúntur in Reykjavík

At 19, you're old enough to vote and drive, but not drink. Here's how the *rúntur* pub crawl goes: dress up, drive around town with your mates, buy cola at the petrol station, stop and chat to those who don't have a car and block the traffic as often as possible. Over 20? Get drunk at home (it's cheaper), and then head for the city centre. For music, aim for the mid-October Iceland Airwaves Festival (voted by *Rolling Stone* magazine the hippest long weekend on the annual music-festival calendar) or Menningarnótt (Culture Night) in August.

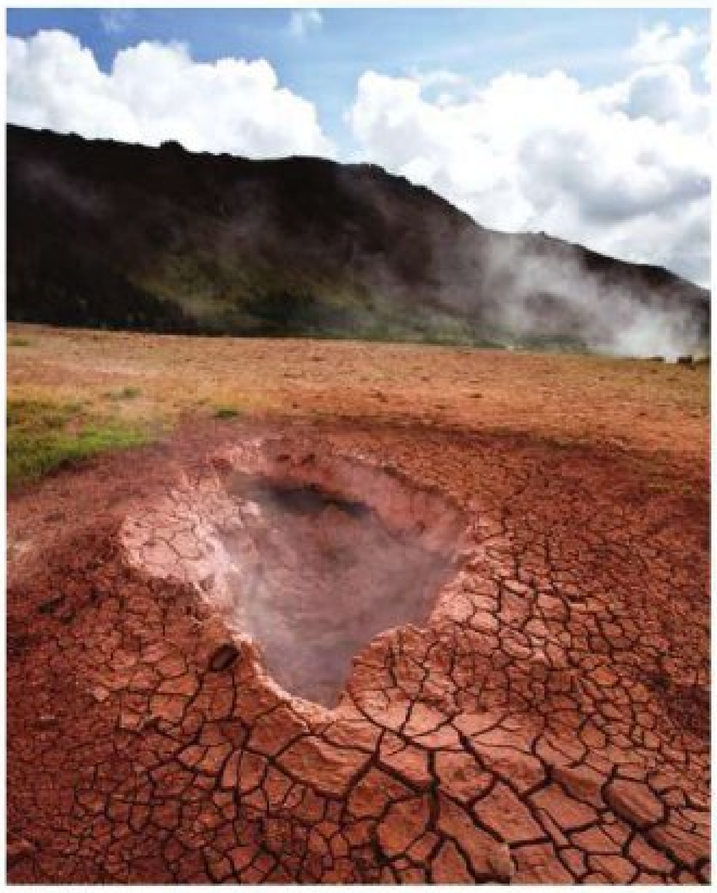
How long? Fridays and Saturdays, from midnight to 4am.

How tough? It's mostly good-humoured but watch out for flying bottles...

Get started: Head to Reykjavík's city centre; other towns have their own versions. For the festival see **www.icelandairwaves.is.**

3 Take a hot-spring hike

Steaming Reykjadalur Valley is an active geothermal field sited on a tectonic plate boundary. It's been 2,000 years since the last eruption here but in 2008 a powerful earthquake ripped through, bringing dozens of gurgling, sulphurous springs to life. A 3km



trail leads up the grassy valley to a warm stream, where you can take a dip. Watch your step and stick to the path as the crust can be wafer-thin and springs are unfenced.

How long? Three hours; longer if you bathe or decide to penetrate further into the area.

How tough? Moderate – the trail climbs 250m with a couple of streams to wade.

Get started: Hveragerði is 45km from Reykjavík. Pick up a map at the tourist office. The trail starts at a footbridge over a stream 2km north of the village at Rjúpnabrekkur.

4 Dip into the Blue Lagoon & Lighthouse Circuit

At €28 a ticket, the Blue Lagoon may be pricey and indulgent but you can stay all day in this giant therapeutic hot pond. After a hedonistic soak in powder-blue geothermal seawater, head for the nearby Reykjanes coast. Wild and treacherous, the boot-shaped peninsula is guarded by 11 lighthouses including Iceland's tallest, at Garðskagi. Extreme surfers and migrant birds flock here, and a passing whale might fluke offshore, but it's hard to beat the mystical volcano silhouetted across the bay at sunset.

How long? Three hours for the Blue Lagoon; two hours-plus for the 60km coastal drive from Grindavik to Keflavík; a whole day if you cycle it.

How tough? The Blue Lagoon is tough on your wallet, though it's free for kids under 13; 14/15-year-olds and over-67s pay €7.

Get started: Blue Lagoon and the Reykjanes coast are around 10-20km from Keflavík airport. **www.bluelagoon.com**

Clockwise from top: fumaroles belch at Hveragerði; one of the 11 lighthouses on the peninsula; the spa's the star at the Blue Lagoon

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West & North Iceland

Whales, wings and a step into the Arctic Circle

For its variety of landscapes the Snæfellsnes Peninsula is hard to beat, while the West Fjords are all about nature and deserted fjords (don't miss impressive Dynjandi Falls). In the north, cross the Arctic Circle on Grímsey, look for whales at Húsavík and explore volcanic Lake Mývatn and the Jökulsá Canyon, with its trio of thunderous waterfalls.

Top to bottom
Get your motor running and head for the summit at Snæfellsjökull; the harbour at Húsavík; one of the thousands of puffins that you'll see nesting at Látrabjarg in May

5 Journey to the centre of the earth in Snæfellsjökull

This perfect snow-capped volcanic cone is where Jules Verne based his *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*; it now boasts a ski tow and snowmobile tours to its 1,446m summit crater. In and around its national park you can hike along cliffs of jointed basalt columns, past sea stacks, craters and plenty of rugged lava. Head for the peninsula's north shore and Bjarnahöfn to sample the locally produced delicacies *hákarl* (cured shark) and *harðfiskur* (dried fish).

How long? A day or two.

How tough? Easy, but you'll need iron taste-buds for the shark…

Get started: The national park is 170km north-west of Reykjavík. Visit in spring and early summer for volcano excursions (**www.snjofell.is**). Bjarnarhöfn's Shark Museum is open daily all year (**www.bjarnarhofn.is**).

6 See eye-to-eye with puffins on Látrabjarg

Látrabjarg is a 14km-long cliff, rising over 400m, at Iceland's westernmost tip. Tens of thousands of puffins come ashore in May to nest in burrows, and are easy to observe. Nearby, take a detour to Rauðisandur, a gorgeous beach, empty but for a seal or two. Look out for Arctic foxes, too.

How long? From an hour to a day.

How tough? Care is needed on the cliff-top hike – it's dangerous to approach the edge or hike in the mist. Beware of high winds and puffin burrows.

Get started: At 60km from the nearest village of Patreksfjörður, it's remote. Your own transport is helpful.

7 Watch whales from Húsavík

Whale-watching boats jostle for space in Húsavík's snug harbour. Most days between May and September they chug out into Skjálfandi, a bay backed by brooding mountains. Look out for for minke whales and white-beaked dolphins – humpbacks and giant blues, sometimes turn up too. On land, allow time for the Whale Museum and a brew at one of the harbour's bars and cafés.

How long? Three hours.

How tough? Pick a calm day.

Get started: Húsavík is 90km from Akureyri. North Sailing runs whale-watching trips (**www.whalewatchinghusavik.is**).

www.whalemuseum.is

8 Cross into the Arctic Circle

With luck you can bag both Arctic Circle and midnight sun if you head for Grímsey, a tiny island 40km off the north coast and the only accessible place in Iceland within the Polar Circle. Tens of thousands of sea birds and a handful of sheep share this lush green territory – oh, and 90 or so resilient islanders. Hop on a plane or ferry from Akureyri, a lively northern town with an enviable sunshine record, strung along the shore of Eyjafjörður.

How long? An hour to a day or two.

How tough? It's mostly flat.

Get started: For the midnight sun aim to be there between 12 June and 1 July.

www.akureyri.is/grimsey/english

9 Take flight at Mývatn

As many ducks as tourists flock to this famous lake and nature reserve in summer but you can visit year round. The ducks are after the midge larvae, but for visitors it's the volcanic and geothermal oddities. Once you've done the round of craters, fissures, lava beds and solfataras, hop on a four-seater plane at the local airfield and explore the amazing lunar landscape from above. End the day with a soak in the Nature Baths, a geothermal spa overlooking the lake, and dinner with the cows at the Cowshed Cafe.

How long? A day at least.

How tough? Easy short walks.

Get started: A 20-minute sightseeing flight costs around £50 (**www.myflug.is**). Entry to the Nature Baths costs £14 (**www.jardbodin.is**). The Cowshed Café is at Vogar, on the lakeshore (**www.vogafjos.net**). ›

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The South & East

A land of waterfalls, fledgling volcanoes and the Queen of the Elves

The south-east is home to infamous Eyjafjallajökull volcano, standing mischievously in a land of waterfalls, glaciers and mossy lava beds. The Westman Islands lie offshore while, on the mainland, the south coast drive reveals 300km of black sand, Europe's biggest icecap and the photogenic iceberg lagoon. The island's east offers superb hiking and mouth-watering mountain and fjord scenery.

This image & below: Standing at the foot of Eyjafjallajökull, before it decided to wreak havoc all over Europe. And Polly amid the ashes of its recent hissy fit

10 Climb *that* volcano – notorious Eyjafjallajökull

Polly Evans walks into the ash zone

I wonder if the Icelanders have 100 words for waterfall, as the Inuit are supposed to for snow?

The 20-odd waterfalls we passed as we hiked to the glacier of Eyjafjallajökull warranted myriad names. There were tall skinny chutes that sparkled like white satin ribbons, and frothy flurries that flared out like multi-tiered meringues. There were lacy sprays that arced from the lava cliffs. And, at the hike's start at Skógar, there was a cascade that drenched us with its spray as it dropped a deafening 60m.

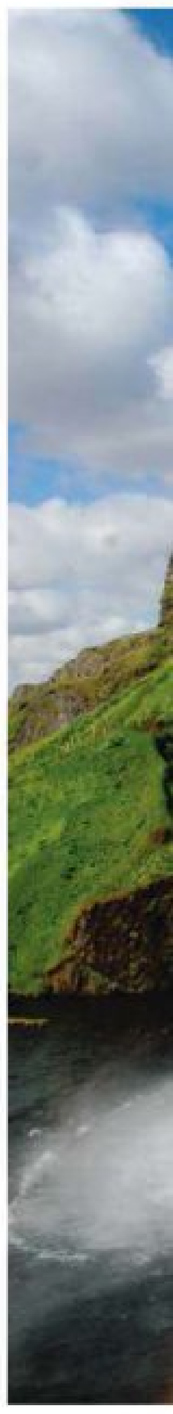
The waterfalls aren't the only natural features of this area to have invited attention in recent months, of course. The fine ash that blanketed the footpath provided a constant reminder of Eyjafjallajökull's eruption in spring 2010. As we climbed higher, following the path of the Skógaá River, the ash became deeper – to our ankles at times – and cushioned our steps like soft black sand. The grass, which had sprouted bright and sappy-new from its freshly made bed at sea level, grew sparse. And then, after three hours' walking, we crossed a footbridge over the river, and the vegetation vanished for good.

We struck out over a ragged path of footprints across the ash, but it was only after we'd been walking on it for 15 minutes or so did we realise: this was the Eyjafjallajökull glacier. It was so buried beneath the black, with just the tiniest slivers of muddied white peeking through, that we quite simply hadn't seen it.

"It's strange to have a glacier that's completely black," the woman in the information post later commented morosely. The locals hope that, when this winter's snow melts, its water will carry away the ash but there has been little glacial movement to shift it over the summer as the ash has acted as an insulting layer.

Once on the glacier, we wanted to continue: others we'd met on the path were pressing on to Thorsmörk where they'd spend the night. But we hadn't brought our sleeping bags. We just hadn't expected this hike to be such a mesmerising combination of topical intrigue and pure, heart-stopping beauty. And so we rejoined the river, and returned to the hotel in Skógar where a fine veil of ash still falls, and the window cleaners, presumably, curse.

How long? One day; longer hikes possible.
How tough? Moderate – volcanic drama permitting...
Get started: Visit the information desk at Skógar, then follow the well-marked trail.



Polly Evans; Cathy Harlow

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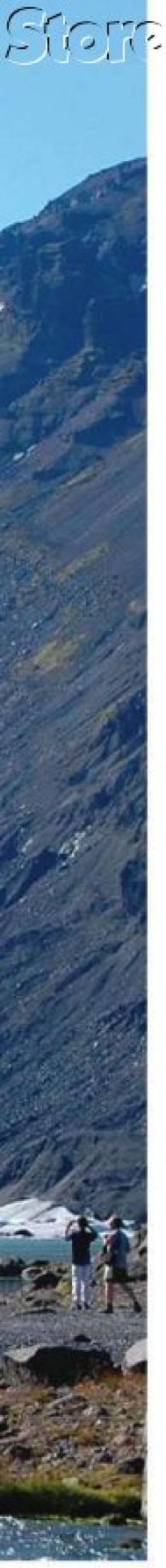
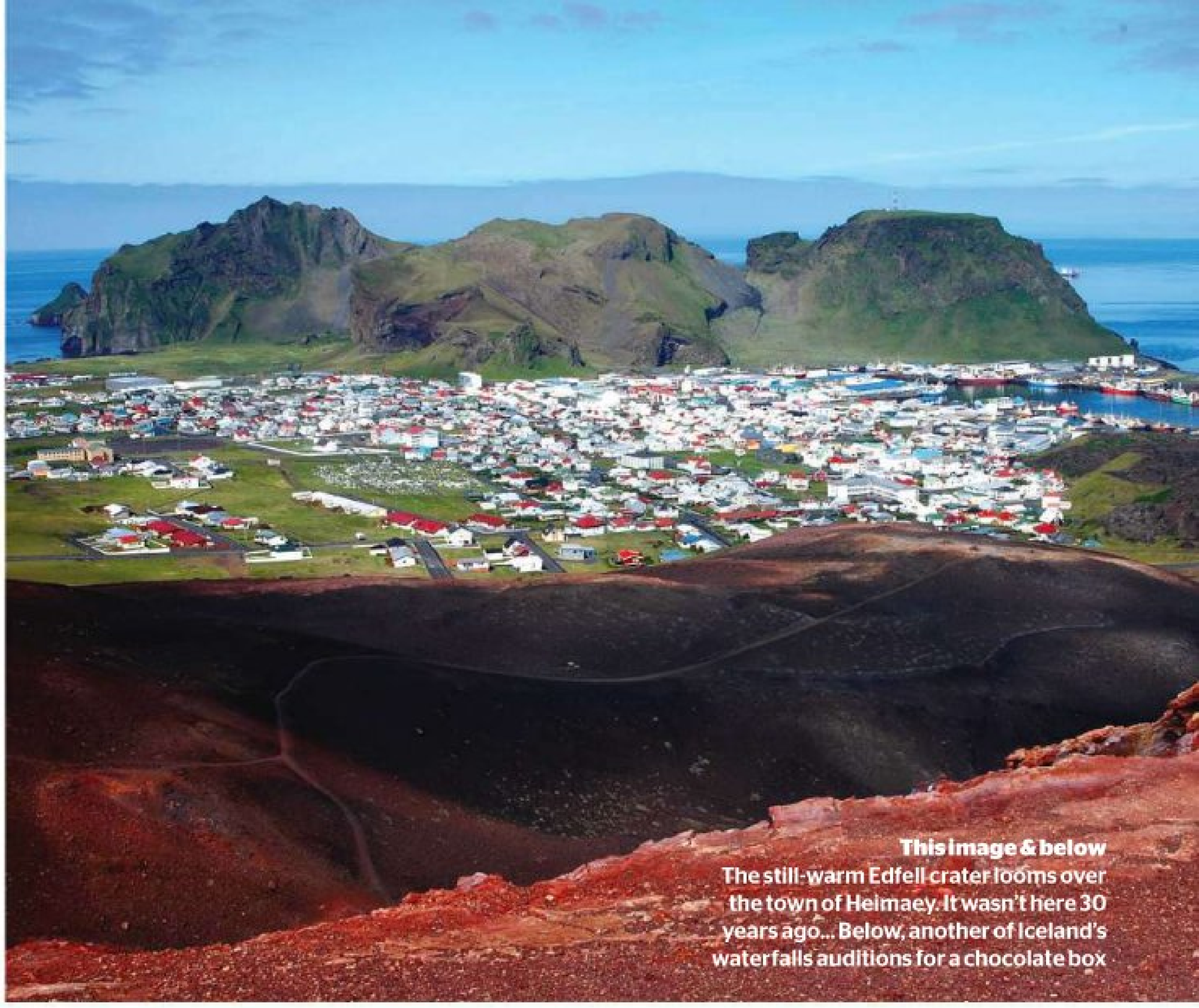


11 Climb a steaming crater on Heimaey

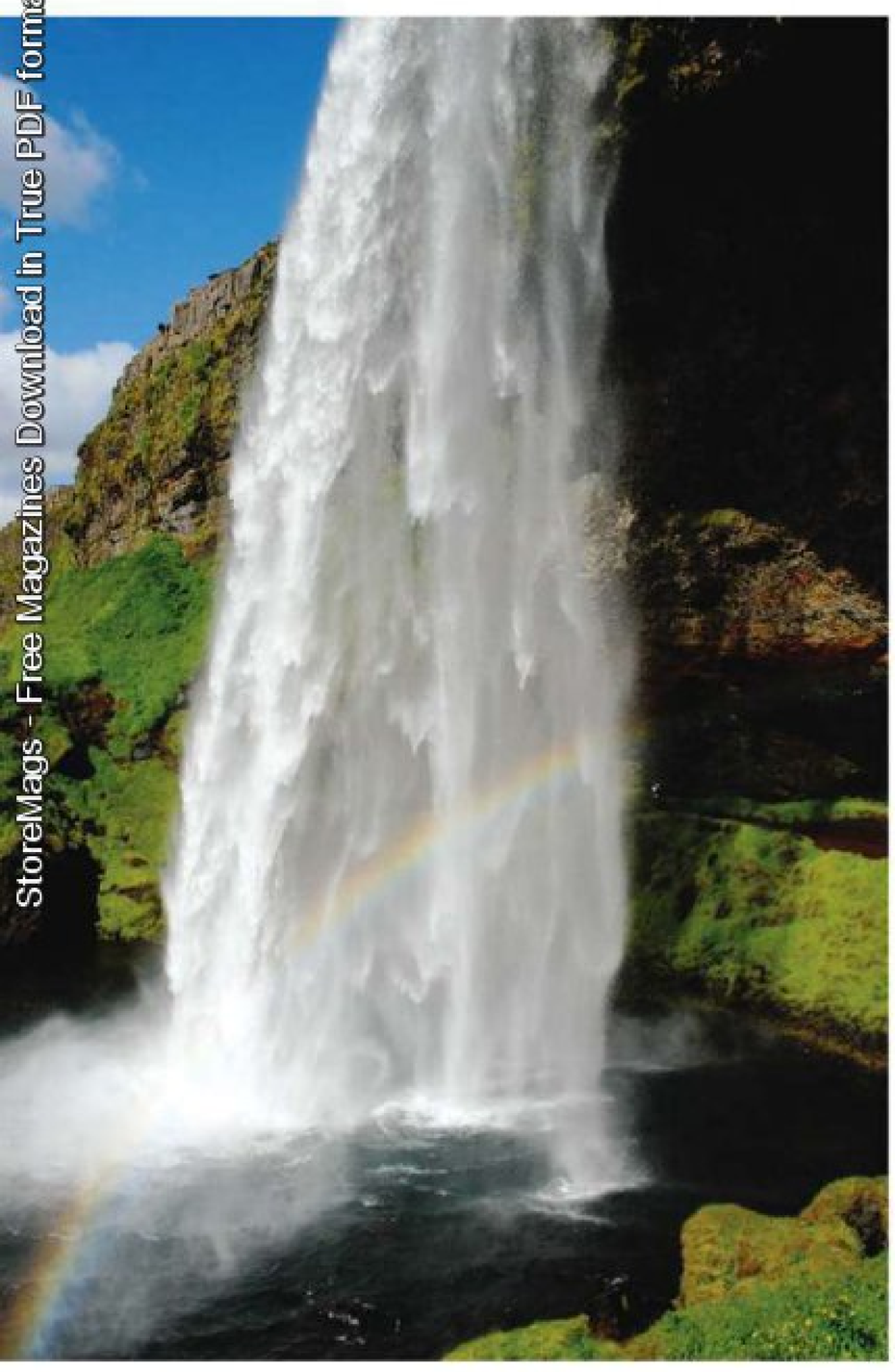
Ravaged by pirates in 1627, Heimaey, on the Westman Islands, came under attack again in January 1973 when a volcanic fissure opened up yards from the town. The 5,000 islanders fled on trawlers. Returning five months later, a third of their homes lay buried under lava and ash and a new crater named Eldfell towered over their island. From its 221m summit observe how lava engulfed the town and feel the heat of the steam seeping from the rock. The 'Pompeii of the North' project lets you walk among the ruins of houses dug from the rubble.
How long? Half a day gets you up the volcano and around the town; allow longer to see the puffins (May-early August).
How tough? A steep haul up the crater.
Get started: A ferry from Bakki gets you there in 30 minutes or you can fly from Reykjavík. **www.pompeinordursins.is**



This image & below
The still-warm Edfell crater looms over the town of Heimaey. It wasn't here 30 years ago... Below, another of Iceland's waterfalls auditions for a chocolate box

12 Walk behind a waterfall

The 60m plume of Seljalandsfoss spills over a former sea cliff. Scrambling behind the falls you'll find a huge cavity festooned with moss, ferns and saxifrages. It's not the highest nor the most powerful of the island's hundred or more *fossar*, but there's a lot about the place that is magical and romantic. Make a wish as you gaze through the misty veil of water, then walk along to the next cascade, Gljúfurárfoss, wading up its dark spray-soaked canyon.
How long? 30 minutes will get you around Seljalandsfoss; an hour to see both falls.
How tough? Steep and slippery steps lead behind the falls; prepare to get soaked.
Get started: Seljalandsfoss is just off the main road, 120km east of Reykjavík at the foot of Eyjafjallajökull. Aim for an afternoon or evening visit to get sun on the falls.



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13 Ice-hike in Europe's largest national park

Vatnajökull is an 8,100 sq km dome of ice (one twelfth of Iceland's surface) up to 800m thick, protected in an eponymous national park. To explore the rumbling glaciers, hire a guide, who'll provide the gear and steer you safely through the jumble of crevasses and pinnacles. Then, head for Jökulsárlón, a glacial lagoon jammed with thousands of giant icebergs calved from a glacier. Stroll along the moraines and gaze at the icebergs as they drift by and out to sea.
How long? At least a day. Guided glacier walks from 2 hours to a day; iceberg lagoon boat trips 30-40 minutes.
How tough? Glacier walks go from easy to strenuous. The iceberg lagoon is a stroll.
Get started: Accessible glaciers are at Skaftafell on the south coast, 330km from Reykjavík. Jökulsárlón is 55km east of Skaftafell. For guided glacier walks contact Icelandic Mountain Guides (**www.mountainguides.is**). For boat trips see **www.jokulsarlon.is.**

14 Wander around the heritage village of Seyðisfjörður

Founded by Norwegian fishermen, this hip little East Fjords town is worth the detour and spine-tingling hairpin descent. Wander among the painted timber houses packed onto a narrow spit of land and ponder how anyone could live without sun for three months of the year, so sheer are the 1,000m peaks rising from the fjord. Adopted by Dieter Roth and other artists, the place hosts offbeat cultural events. In a similar vein, Skálanes, at the mouth of the fjord, is a nature reserve and heritage centre.
How long? A half-day – longer if you visit Skálanes or plan to hike.
How tough? The hardest bit is tearing yourself away.
Get started: Seyðisfjörður, 27km from Egilsstaðir, is the ferry terminal for sailings to Europe. **www.visitseydisfjordur.com**

15 Explore the realm of the elves

Iceland boasts a rich and beguiling folklore. Borgarfjörður Eystri claims that the Queen of the elves or *huldufólk* (hidden people) inhabits a rocky outcrop in this remote fishing hamlet. But even non-believers will be wowed by the mountains – sensibly, the locals have staked out walking trails and provided huts to stay in. Don't miss Dyrfjöll, a cleft mountain that collapsed, rolling boulders bigger than houses down a valley, and Hvítserkur, a pink rhyolite pyramid banded with basalt veins.
How long? From a day to a week.
How tough? A gentle stroll or a backpacking expedition.
Get started: Travel by air or overland to Egilsstaðir in east Iceland. Bus or self-drive 70km north to the end of the road.
www.borgarfjordureystri.is ›

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Stanfords

The Interior

Weird rocks, stinking pools, horse trails and nature's best light

It's hard to distil Iceland's huge, wild highlands into something recognisable: the views are vast, the solitude absolute. The highlands are punctuated by glistening icecaps and splashes of luminous green moss and purple willowherb. The intensely colourful rhyolite mountains of Landmannalaugar are an enduring emblem of the interior.

'Dust and ash swirled across the lunar landscape; I could see why NASA trained the Apollo astronauts here'

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Out of this world
The Landmannalaugar Mountains, near the Hekla volcano, a place where Neil, Buzz and the gang got to grips with the idea of being on an alien landscape

Maciej Duczynski

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16

Hike 'Iceland's Inca Trail'

Alastair Humphreys celebrates a great secret walk

The Laugavegur is one of the great hikes of the world, yet is little known outside Iceland. It is a 53km trek that begins in a lava field, crosses rainbow mountains, passes bubbling pools and glacial ice, traverses a black-ash desert and finishes in green woodland at the foot of Eyjafjallajökull, the now-famous volcano.

My trek began, as all journeys should, wallowing in a hot spring. The pool lay at the foot of a labyrinth of jagged lava that long ago oozed down the flanks of the volcano above me. Relaxed and clean, I wound through the lava towards clouds of stinking, sulphurous steam gushing from cracks in the hot earth. Getting into my stride now, I climbed up to a pass striped with an extraordinary range of colours.

Over the crest was a hole in the rocks, a spring boiling like a cauldron and gushing down the hillside. Away from springs and bright-blue pools, I crossed a dark plain shimmering with obsidian, with a glacier to the north and mountains all around.

The second day began crossing small valleys and snow bridges in warm sunshine. Below lay a vista straight out of *Lord of the Rings*. Volcano cones stretched across a green plain slashed through with shining streams. On the southern horizon was grey and grubby Eyjafjallajökull.

Day three was different again. It began with one of the route's three memorable, cold river crossings. Ahead, whirlwinds of dust and ash swirled across the spartan, lunar landscape; I could understand why NASA trained the Apollo astronauts here.

The Markarfljót River races through an impressive canyon. From the rim of the canyon you can look down to the rapids far below, or southwards towards the oasis of Thorsmörk, the end of the trek. After four days of wilderness, after the sterile mountains and plains, Thorsmörk's birch trees and flowers smell so sweet: one final surprising twist on this most enchanting of treks.

How long? Four days.

How tough? You need to be quite fit and well equipped – there are some steep bits.

Get started: You can do it independently but local guides are available. **www.fi.is/en/hiking-trails/laugavegurinn** ›

Cathy Harlow

‹ 17 Bathe in Hell at Askja

Icelanders have a favourite word for gaping craters that blast out millions of tons of volcanic debris – *víti*, meaning hell. To get to the famous one, formed in 1875, you'll need to negotiate the vast ash, sand and lava desert of the island's core. Then, hiking over desolate pumice beds into the Askja caldera, Víti appears like a giant witch's cauldron, fuming and sulphurous. Why we choose to swim in the tepid, stinking water is another matter.

How long? You can get there and back from Lake Mývatn in a very long day; but having made all the effort, stay overnight in the mountain hut.

How tough? Open summer only, the rough highland track is for 4WD jeeps. It's a slippery scramble down into the crater – boots and walking poles are a must, a swimsuit is optional (and you'll soon be out of your depth in the milky water).

Get started: Join a tour (**www.askjatours.is**) or hire a high-clearance 4WD. To stay in the hut contact the Akureyri Touring Club (**www.ffa.is/en/page/huts**).

18 Stay awake for the aurora borealis

From late August to March the ethereal northern lights can be seen all over Iceland. This celestial light show needs a clear, dark sky away from light sources. The solar particles that collide with the earth's atmosphere work in cycles, so you have to check the forecast – and allow plenty of time.

How long? Stating the obvious, but the longer you stay, the better your chances.

How tough? If you can stay awake all night...

Get started: Anywhere in the countryside will do as long as you're away from artificial light. The wider the view the better. Check out Hotel Rangá, near Hella – they'll wake you up when the aurora gets going (**www.hotelranga.is**).

19 Traverse the highlands on horseback

The Kjölur Trail is a historic route through Iceland's highlands, a 210km trek between two icecaps. The sure-footed Icelandic horses take it all in their stride, fording glacial torrents as they have done for centuries. There's always a herd of free-running horses so the riders swap mounts during the day. But it's not just about the riding – it's the open vistas, the glaciers and lava deserts, the golden plovers whistling over the moorland and the evening sing-song in the hot pool.

How long? Eight days, with six in the saddle.

How tough? Best suited to experienced horse riders

Get started: Local specialists Ishestar run the treks (**www.ishestar.is**).

20 Ride a super-jeep in the land of the gods

Wedged between glaciers in the deep south you'll find a surprising oasis of green. This is the forested valley of Thorsmörk – named after the early Icelanders' favourite Norse deity, Thor. The recommended way into this hiker's paradise is by bus or, for more fun and thrills, by super-jeep. When you see the track and size of the rivers you'll understand why it's best to let the locals do the driving.

How long? A day trip, or longer for more serious hikers.

How tough? Don't attempt to self-drive – these rivers are raging. The hiking goes from easy to strenuous.

Get started: Book yourself onto a safari with SuperJeep (**www.superjeep.is**). ■

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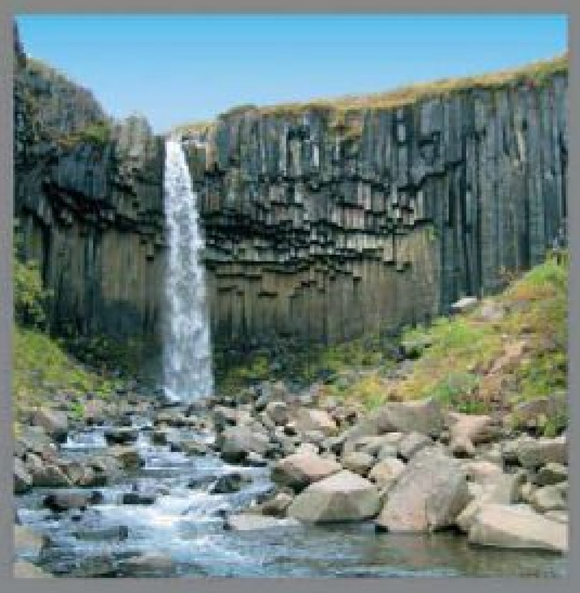

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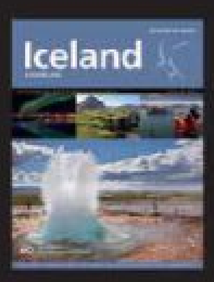

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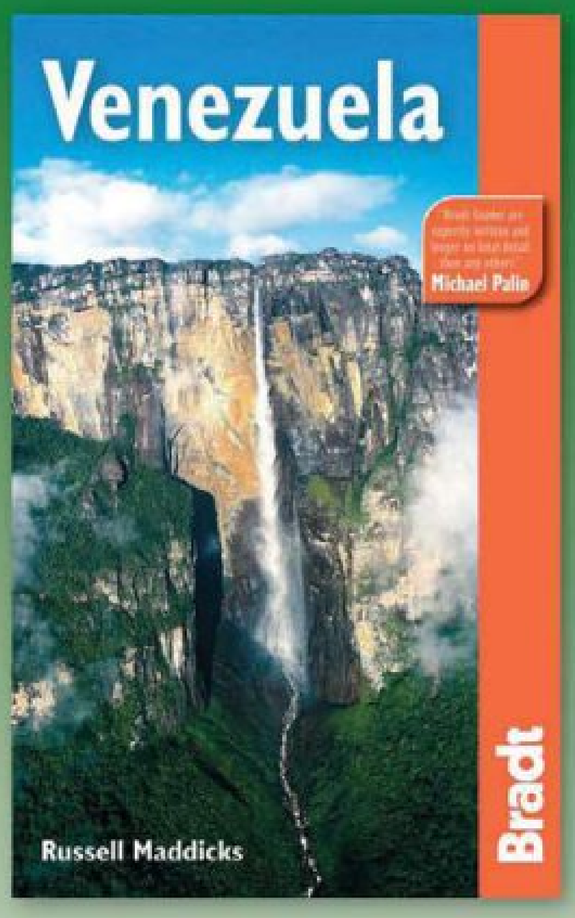

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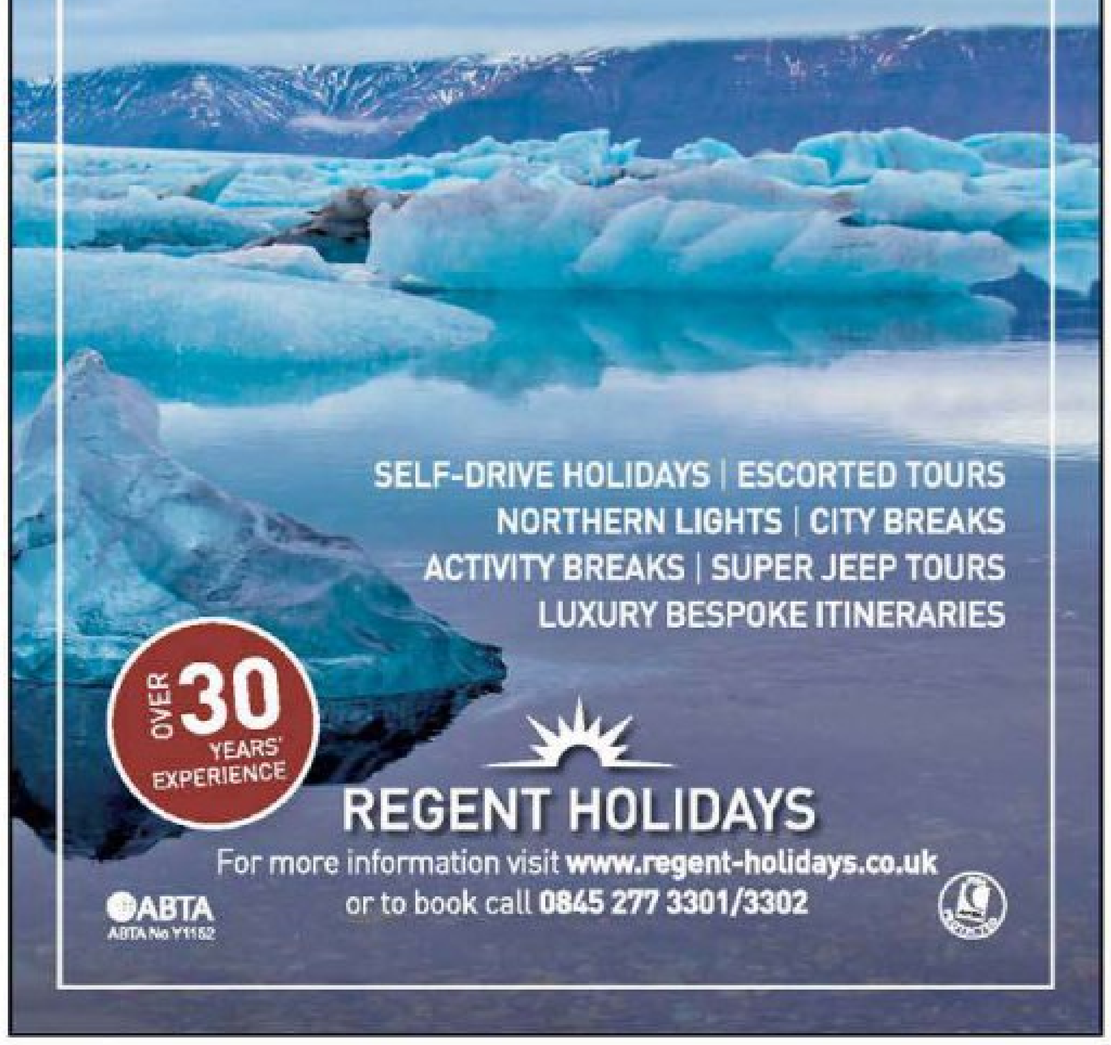

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ICELAND Footnotes

The nitty gritty of travelling to Iceland, designed to make your life a bit easier. *Wanderlust* accepts no responsibility for volcanoes that might try to do the opposite...

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Reykjavík
Population: 307,000
Language: Icelandic (English is widely spoken)
Time: GMT
International dialling code: +354
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Icelandic krona (Isk) currently 188 Isk to the UK£. ATMs are available in towns. Credit cards are widely used. Tipping is not expected in restaurants, hotels and taxis but is appreciated by tour guides and drivers.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

Apr-Oct: The warmer months are best for general touring. Some excursions/activities only operate May/June-September. May-early July is best for birds; May-September for whales. 24-hour daylight lasts May-end of July. Average Reykjavík temperature in July: 12°C.

Nov-Mar: Out of season, accommodation in the countryside may offer only a limited service, though you can find bargain Reykjavík city breaks.

Dec-early Jan: There are 5-6 hours (including twilight) of daylight per day. Average Reykjavík temperature in January: 0°C.

Heath & safety

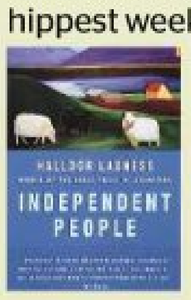
Weather is changeable so pack warm clothing and wet weather gear. Other natural hazards include unbridged rivers, cliffs, glaciers and geothermal areas.

Further reading & information

Landmark Visitors Guide: Iceland (Landmark Publishing, 2006 – reprint due 2011) by Cathy Harlow, the author of this article. Informative general guide.

Dreamland: A Self Help Manual for a Frightened Nation (Citizen Press, 2008), by Andri Snær Magnason, explores ethics and the environment in the polemic exploitation of Iceland's natural resources.

Waking up in Iceland (Sanctuary Publishing, 2003), by Paul Sullivan, explains how Iceland's music scene made the country one of the hippest weekend destinations.



Independent People (Vintage Classics, 2010), by Nobel Prize-winning author Halldór Laxness, is an epic tale of hardship in rural Iceland in the early 20th century.

THE TRIP

Getting there

Icelandair (0844 811 1190, www.icelandair.co.uk) flies from Heathrow, Manchester and Glasgow to Keflavík; Iceland Express (0118 321 8384, www.icelandexpress.com) flies from Gatwick to Keflavík. Return airfares start at around £200 including taxes; flight time from London is under three hours.

UK-based Discover the World (01737 218800, www.discover-the-world.co.uk) is the world's largest tour operator to Iceland, and offers a 'volcano disruption charter'.

Getting around

Air Iceland (+354 570 3030, www.airiceland.is) flights link Reykjavík with other parts of Iceland, including Akureyri, Egilsstaðir and Ísafjörður.

Sterna (+354 551 1166, www.sterna.is) operates most buses, including the highland routes. Herjolfur (+354 481 2800, www.herjolfur.is) sails to the Westman Islands; Sæfari (+354 458 8000, www.landflutningar.is/saefari/english) sails to Grímsey.

Self-drive car hire is a popular option. The main Ring Road is paved and open all year but may be affected by heavy snow in winter.

Cost of travel

Hotel prices are cheaper from October to April. Self-catering summerhouses are good value for families/groups. Children and senior citizens (67+) can get good discounts on transport, attractions and excursions. National parks and reserves are free.

Accommodation

Reykjavík has the best choice of hotels. Hotel Arnarhvoll and Hotel Þingholt, with doubles from around £60pp with breakfast (+354 595 8500, www.centerhotels.is), offer value. Icelandic Farm Holidays (+354 570 2700, www.farmholidays.is) offers a huge range of farmhouse B&Bs, country hotels and self-catering summerhouses. Winter B&B prices start at £29pp.

Boutique hotels are another option: try Country Hotel Anna (Moldnupur; +354 487 8950, www.hotelanna.is; from £55pp).

You can camp (£6-8pp), but only at official sites in national parks and reserves. Hostels (from £18pp; +354 575 6700, www.hostel.is) and mountain huts (£14-£24pp; +354 568 2533, www.fi.is) are another option.

Food & drink

Try fish menus or local specialities such as smoked puffin and guillemot breast. Coffee is great with pancakes, cream and rhubarb jam. Try *skyr*, a milk-curd dessert, and *surmjólk*, a light yoghurt.

What to pack

For exploring you'll need strong walking boots, a breathable rain jacket and trousers, and warm clothing in layers. Footpaths are often rugged – take walking poles. Away from the towns there are few options for lunches, so take a thermos, knife, fork and plate for picnics.

From the archives

Sailing the West Fjords – issue 103, Apr/May 09
Elves in Iceland – issue 88, Jun/Jul 07
Horseriding Iceland – issue 87, Apr/May 07

ITINERARIES

A long weekend
Base yourself in Reykjavík; roam the city (including a dip in the Blue Lagoon) or hire a car and head to the Selfoss/Geysir area.

A week
Explore Reykjavík, the Golden Circle, Westman Islands and south coast glaciers and waterfalls as far as the iceberg lagoon. Or head for Snæfellsnes and the north, including Lake Mývatn.

Ten days
Do the full circle round the Ring Road, or tackle the north, west and highlands or the south, east and highlands.

Two to three weeks
You have time for the full circle, plus the West Fjords, Snæfellsnes and a foray or two into the highlands.

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Win a solo trip to Ecuador & the Galápagos

PRIZE WORTH £3,800!

Explore vibrant Ecuador on a Tucan Travel small group tour, then take an unforgettable cruise to the Galápagos Islands

Sandwiched between Colombia and Peru, Ecuador packs a big punch for a small country. Sandy beaches, snow-tipped peaks and tropical rainforests all wrestle for space within its borders – and let's not forget the country also flies the flag over a collection of rather unusual islands known as the Galápagos. Now, thanks to award-winning independent tour operator Tucan Travel, you could see it all yourself – for free.

High Society

Tucan Travel's *Ecuador Discovered* trip is perfect for solos – you'll meet like-minded people, and won't be held back by less intrepid partners or friends!

The trip starts in the capital city Quito, which at 2,850m above sea level will initially leave you gasping. From here you'll head to Otavalo, home to one of the oldest markets in Latin America.

Next, you'll descend into the Amazon Basin and travel down the Rio Napo in a dugout canoe. In the forest you'll have the opportunity to immerse yourself in jungle life, try panning for gold, and spot jungle critters on an optional nocturnal trek. Next stop is the attractive spa town of Baños, and then on to Ecuador's third-largest city, Cuenca, a Unesco site famous for producing Panama hats.

Viva la evolution!

After 12 days exploring the Ecuadorian mainland, you will fly from Quito to San Cristóbal for a three-day cruise of that old Darwin haunt, the Galápagos Islands. You'll have a chance to make up your own mind about natural selection through shrewd observation of flightless cormorants, giant tortoises and marine iguanas – before reluctantly heading back home.

Want to go?

For your chance to win, simply answer the following question:

Q. What was the name of the ship in which Charles Darwin visited the Galápagos Islands?

Enter at **www.wanderlust.co.uk** or send your answer to: Wanderlust (Tucan), PO Box 1832, Windsor SL4 1YT by **6 January 2011**. Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email. Please state 'no offers' if you'd prefer not to be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

The prize itinerary

18 May: Fly London – Quito

19 May: Arrive Quito and join tour

19–31 May: Ecuador Discovered tour

31 May–3 June: Quito hotel stay

3–6 June: Galápagos cruise

6 June: Fly Quito – London

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The prize is for one person only, on a fixed departure from 18 May–6 June 2011. It includes the *Ecuador Discovered* tour with Tucan Travel, a three-night Galápagos cruise, three nights accommodation in Quito, return international economy flights from London and return domestic flights from Quito to the Galápagos Islands. The prize does not include tips, visas, items of a personal nature or the Carbon Offset Scheme donation. The prize cannot be transferred to any other person, cannot be redeemed for cash and is non-refundable. It is not valid in conjunction with any other offers.

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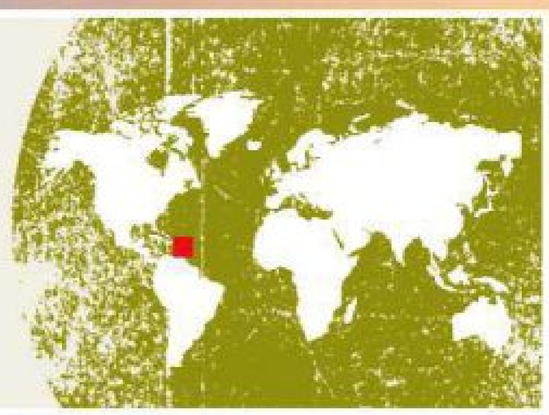
Dominica



Unspoilt yet accessible: the Caribbean's best island for walkers and nature lovers

8 hour flight from UK to Antigua, then a 1-hour transfer flight to Dominica

Go May-Jun: off-peak, warm and dry

Green & pleasant land
Luscious Morne Trois Pitons National Park is a Unesco World Heritage site

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GREEN FOR GO

On the lush island of Dominica, the Caribbean's first long distance walking trail offers a fascinating journey through mango orchards, boiling lakes and ancient Carib culture

Words & pictures **Mark Stratton**

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Dominica

When Christopher Columbus was asked by the Queen of Spain what Dominica was like, it's said he crumpled a sheet of paper and replied: "Like this". Yet during his voyage through the Caribbean in 1493 he sailed straight past the island without setting foot ashore.

I have a theory as to why Columbus didn't drop anchor: he was suffering exploration overload. Sailing past on a Sunday, he'd no doubt endured a long hard week naming islands and thought, let's just call it Dominica and be off. Thus the rather unimaginative Latin name for 'Sunday' stuck.

Had he squeezed into his 15th-century hiking boots and delved into this petite Windward isle, he'd have met the native Carib-Kalinago tribe who called their home Waitukubuli, which poetically translates as 'tall is her body' in deference to Dominica's soaring volcanic spine. Although in hindsight it was probably just as well he didn't call in – for centuries after Columbus

the Caribs proved fiercely protective of their little slice of paradise in the face of British and French colonialists who enslaved, squabbled, plundered and finally left.

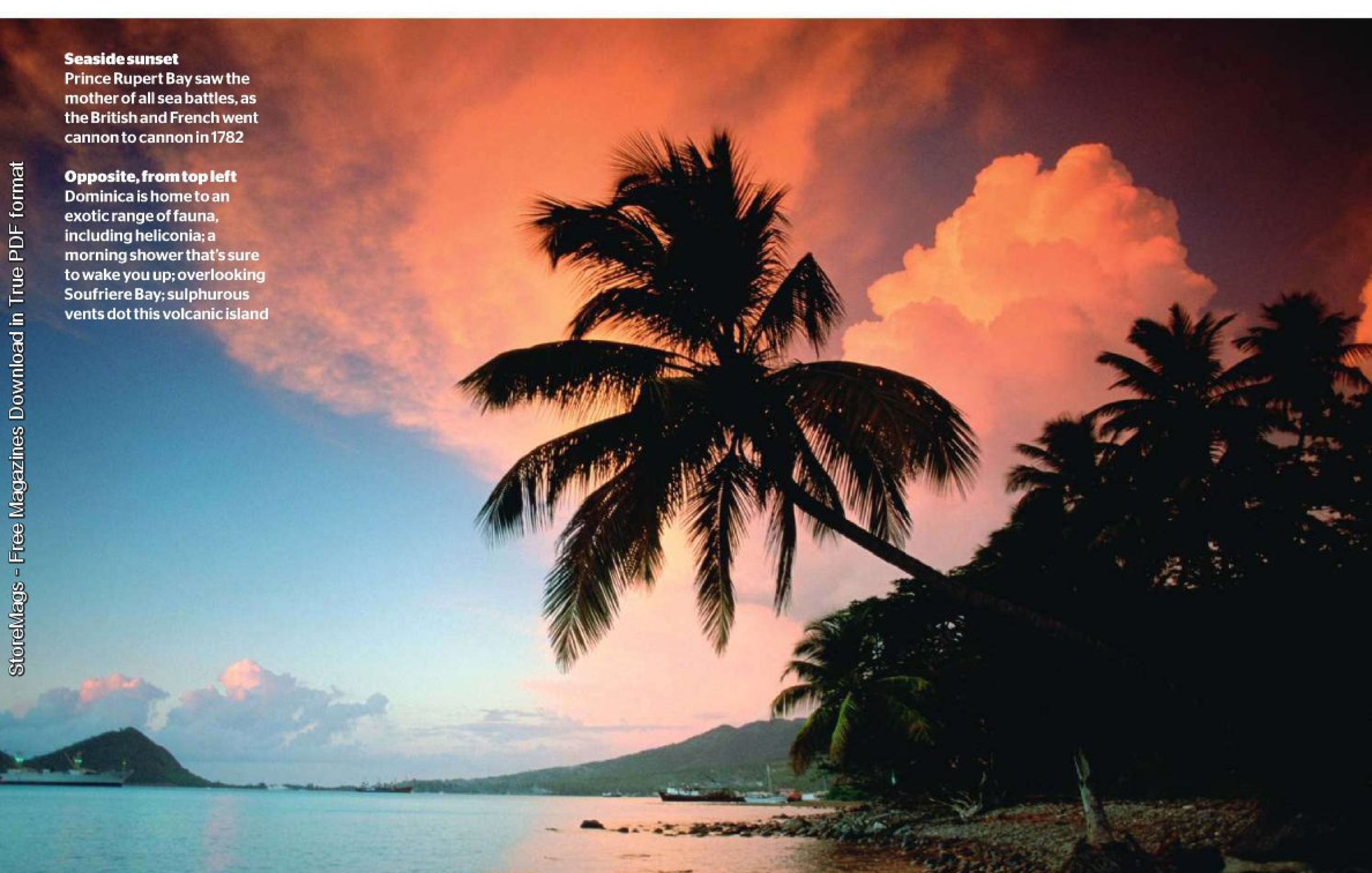
Putting in some leg work

Jetting in from neighbouring Antigua, I suspected Dominica's craggy lushness has changed little since Columbus's days. The volcanic terrain below was blanketed by impenetrable-looking rainforests, surging like green lava flows to both Dominica's eastern Atlantic coastline and the western Caribbean side. Knife-edged watersheds delineated the gullies, filled by stripes of vaporising mist. The only roads I saw concertinaed inside the extreme contours.

With almost 70% forest cover, abundant rivers swollen by high rainfall and relatively few beaches, Dominica (pronounced 'Dom-i-NEE-ka') promotes itself quite differently to fellow Caribbean islands. Its tourist board brands it the 'Nature Island' – another potential moniker missed by Columbus.

Besides whale-watching and scuba diving, the island is rated the Caribbean's premier hiking destination and possesses numerous well-marked footpaths. I'd arrived to investigate the new 184km-long Waitukubuli National Trail – the Caribbean's first long-distance hiking route, due to be fully open by late 2011. In Tardis fashion, Dominica has somehow squashed this route into its modest 47km length. The route will sashay between the island's most ›

Previous page: George HH Huey/Alamy. This spread: Galen Rowell/Mountain Light/Alamy; Banana Pancake/Alamy



Seaside sunset
Prince Rupert Bay saw the mother of all sea battles, as the British and French went cannon to cannon in 1782

Opposite, from top left
Dominica is home to an exotic range of fauna, including heliconia; a morning shower that's sure to wake you up; overlooking Soufriere Bay; sulphurous vents dot this volcanic island

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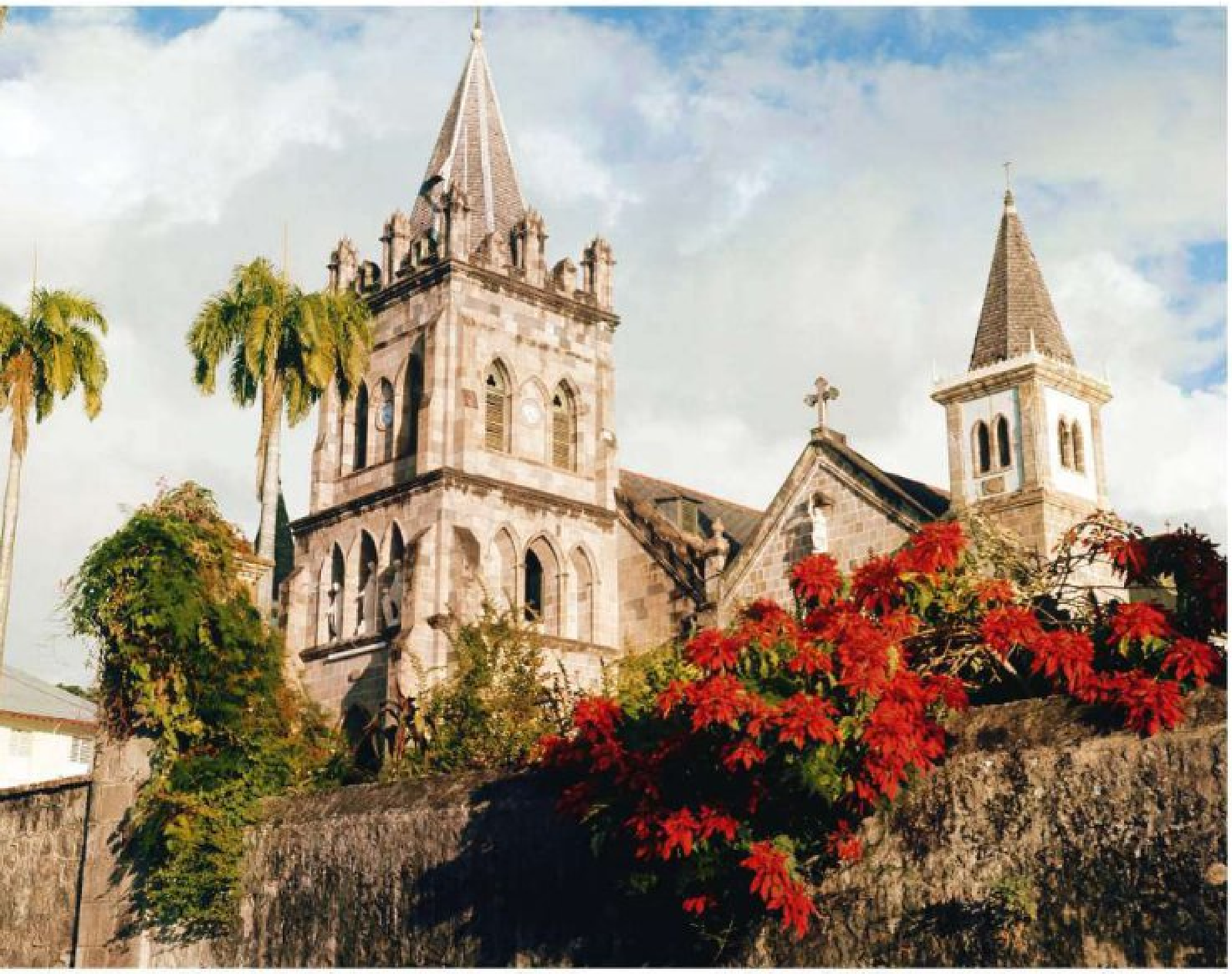

southerly and northerly points, taking in volcanoes, coastal cliffs, muddy rainforest scrabbles and villages with names longer than their roll-call of inhabitants.

The Waitukubuli has been funded by the EU to promote socio-economic growth in the wake of the demise of Dominica's banana-growing sector. Much of the trail reprises the footfall of generations: from routes used by escaped slaves (maroons) to Carib hunting trails and colonial plantation tracks wide enough to drive a horse and carriage through. Its 14 segments will offer those who don't have time to walk the entire length (estimated to take around ten days) a choice of day hikes.

It didn't take long, however, to discover that the Waitukubuli was no calypso stroll in the sunny Caribbean.

"Oh… My… God," panted 26-year-old local dive-instructor Francesca, who I'd met at Scotts Head, on Dominica's southernmost tip – the start of Segment 1. "I've been looking at this mountain all my life but never realised it was so steep."

In between breathlessly ascending the murderously vertiginous Morne (Mount) Crabier, and attempting not to splatter the footpath with crustacean pâté as thousands of flailing land crabs shimmied sideways underfoot, there was time to pause and look down on the diminishing Scotts Head peninsula. Martinique floated beyond on a Caribbean Sea as smooth as liquid mercury.

On Morne Crabier's plateau, a farmer tended a sumptuously green field where Jersey cows chomped contentedly under mango trees. "You looking tired, man," he noticed. "I do this walk every day."

I would learn that walking is very much part of Dominicans' DNA.

Thereafter we moseyed through undulating farmland where cashews and guavas ripened alongside disintegrating ruins of 18th-century French colonial farmsteads. Near Soufriere village lay sulphurous vents, which act as pressure-release valves for the brooding volcano chain ahead. "I remember in 1990 when everything was shaking," recalled Francesca, "there were green and pink glows coming from these vents – it was so beautiful."

Onto the volcano

The new trail will allow hikers to explore Dominica's southern central heartland, encompassing the Unesco World Heritage-listed Morne Trois Pitons National Park. These segments weren't fully opened during my visit, so I based myself in nearby capital Roseau to sample several well-established day hikes.

Before setting off, however, I explored the capital a little. It's retained the sort of happy-go-lucky vibe that is fast disappearing across the Caribbean as the cruise-liner industry all but gentrifies these port cities.

LOCAL VIEW

Ann Vanderhoof, author

"My husband and I have been travelling on our sailboat through the Eastern Caribbean for the past four years, and Dominica is probably our favourite island for hiking. More than just lush, it has a true untamed beauty."

I loped around town trying not to walk too fast – because nobody else does. The noisy music-filled King George V Street retains dainty wooden houses with patterned fascias and balustrade balconies reflecting 18th and 19th century French influences. In fact French forms the basis of the island patois even though Dominica remained a British possession until 1978.

Fuelled on breakfasts of bakes (fried dough balls) and cocoa-water tea, I laced up my boots and left the city behind, heading into Morne Trois Pitons. I trekked to bludgeoning waterfalls, luxuriated in trailside hot springs and swam in subterranean caves – all accompanied by tropical downpours, which Dominicans endearingly call 'liquid sunshine'. But what really staggered me was the riotous fecundity exploding from the volcanic hills. It was as if God didn't quite know what to do with His post-Genesis leftovers.

Around the start of a tough six-hour scramble to Boiling Lake, the forests hybridised with cocoa, banana, mango and breadfruit trees. "The breadfruits were brought from Africa to feed the slaves," explained Peter Green, my wiry hiking guide who possessed mountain goat athleticism.

As we hiked by Breakfast River, overhead sunlight was extinguished by an extravagant thatch of dripping rainforest biodiversity: swan-billed heliconias, dreadlock-rooted mang blanc trees and giant tree ferns, which provided umbrellas during downpours. Every bough seemed so smothered in mosses, tree orchids and bromeliads that they might give way at any moment.

Yet after scaling Morne Nicholls' 935m summit it appeared that hellish forces had obliterated all greenery. The biblically named Valley of Desolation was shrouded in eggy-smelling mists that partly obscured barren scree-slopes stained yellow and pumice-grey. Fumaroles burped little scalding fountains while Peter boiled an egg for our lunch in a superheated pool.

Boiling Lake lay ahead. The 61m-wide pool bubbled furiously, swirling as if somebody had pulled out the bathplug. "Sometimes the plate opens and sucks all the water out," said Peter. "It's eerie, man, I'm telling you."

North into Carib Country

Had I walked Segment 6 of the Waitukubuli several hundred years ago I'd have aroused suspicion. ›

Carolyn Clarke/Alamy

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'I was staggered by the riotous fecundity of the hills, as if God didn't know what to do with His post-Genesis leftovers'

Top left
Roseau Cathedral, in the Dominican capital – which still retains an old-world feel

In the thick of it
Try to avoid stepping on land crabs on your way up the appropriately named Morne Crabier

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Dominica

Fruits of the forest Locals will offer homestays along the trail, giving travellers a chance to connect on a deeper level – and to sample the spoils of the lush gardens

This 15km jaunt from Castle Bruce to Hatten Garden, further north in east Dominica, follows picturesque basaltic lava bays, pummelled by the Atlantic's crashing surf, along an old colonial-era track through the Autonomous Carib Territory, granted to the Kalinago in 1903.

I performed double-takes whenever encountering the Caribs: so different from the otherwise overwhelmingly Afro-Caribbean population, their lighter skin and Asiatic features betray their past as humanity's great travellers – they arrived from Latin America by canoes thousands of years ago, yet their ancestry has been traced back to Mongolia.

Sadly, my European ancestors were less enthusiastic about them. Four hundred years previously the Spanish issued an edict to enslave all of the Caribbean's Caribs; by the 1760s most had been removed along the Lesser Antillean chain, as these became plantation islands.

"The French and British massacred our people and wanted rid of us completely," explained Prosper Paris, my hiking guide and community activist. "My ancestors retreated back to Dominica in the 1780s because it was easier to hide amid the terrain." The total Carib population sunk critically low at this time, to around 400, but now Dominica's 3,500 Caribs are spread across eight coastal villages.

It's worthwhile calling in on Kalinago Barana Auté, near Crayfish River, while walking Segment 6. A model village has been set up with historical displays and crafts made on site, all centred on a *Karbet* – a thatched tribal meeting hall.

"How can Columbus have discovered the Caribbean when we were travelling through it a thousand years before?" voiced Kevin, the centre's manager. "The Waitukubuli Trail can assist us to preserve our culture by bringing in local revenue from hikers," he hoped. The centre plans to build several huts to cater for walkers.

Meandering on mangos

Beyond Hatten Garden the trail enters challengingly mountainous terrain in the uninhabited Northern Forest Reserve surrounding Dominica's highest volcanic peak – the 1,447m Morne Diablotin. But these footpaths were under construction so I made do with Waitukubuli's final two segments around the northern coast.

These segments provided the calypso saunter I'd envisaged prior to arriving. My penultimate day from Penville hamlet meandered along an old plantation track, through coconut stands and overgrown plantations where I squished fallen mangos underfoot. The prevailing winds had backcombed the cliff forests into verdant quiffs, and I halted for views towards Guadeloupe and Marie-Galante, the latter island named after Columbus's galleon *Santa María la Galante*.

Along this undemanding 8km stretch, sharecroppers used the 250-year-old trail daily to access their little vegetable gardens. I asked

LOCAL VIEW

Dr Lennox Honeychurch, historian

"The Waitukubuli may be a new trail but in reality many of the paths have been open for over 250 years – for slave labour in colonial times or following old hunter's trails."

Bernadette Benn what she was tending. "It's tania," she said holding a tuberous root, "you can bake it, boil it or mash it into porridge."

Such opportunities to stop and chat with islanders really endeared the trail to me. I was able to sense the historical vibrations within the footsteps of modern Dominicans still using these tracks to pursue their daily lives.

At the end of Segment 13, the lovely Gilles Carbon awaited me at Capuchin. "I walk 90 minutes every other day to tend my garden; it keeps me healthy and is in my blood," she beamed with a broad smile.

Gilles offers one of the first homestays set up along the Waitukubuli. This should develop island-wide and provide a direct conduit for funnelling money into local pockets. I spent the evening at Gilles's house, discussing island life as she cooked me Dominican broth, flavoured with chunks of mahi-mahi fish and starchy tania.

The final segment the next day followed a boulder-strewn beach to Fort Shirley. This coastal section witnessed the biggest naval engagement ever fought in the Caribbean: 'The Battle of the Saintes' between the British and French in 1782.

The solid 18th-century Fort Shirley seemed a fitting end. From cannon-lined battlements there was a sweeping panorama across Prince Rupert Bay, the spot where Sir Francis Drake harboured in 1565 less than a century after Columbus passed by during his headlong rush to discover the Americas.

I was fully topped up with 'liquid sunshine' and vitamins from all the wild fruit I'd eaten. But I was also tired enough to know I'd seriously stretched my legs. And from Fort Shirley's walls, I imagined standing there five centuries earlier, watching the great navigator whizzing by with his mini-armada. I think I'd have been tempted to yell: 'Oi, Columbus! Over here! You don't know what you're missing!' ■

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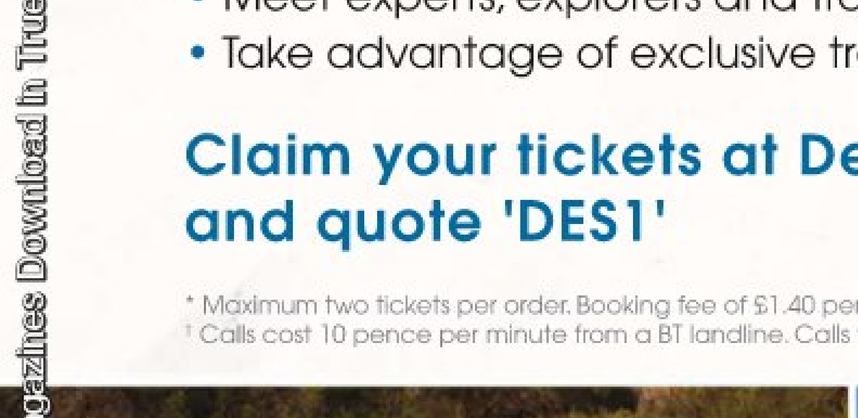

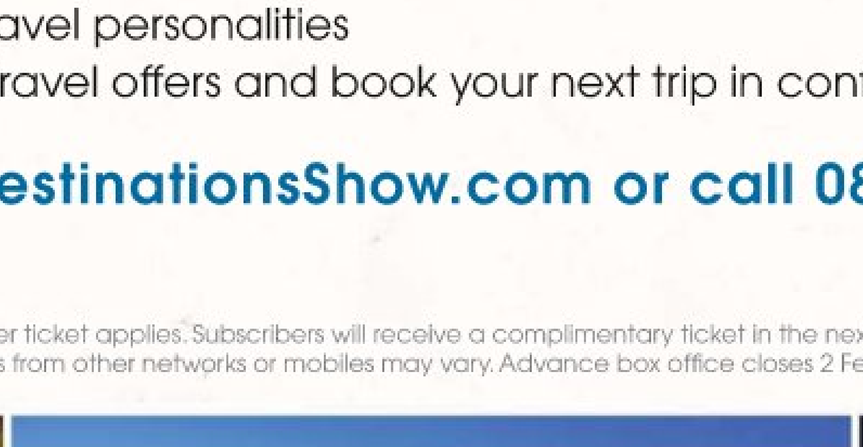

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Dominica Footnotes

The essential info you need for visiting the Caribbean's Nature Isle – whether you plan to tackle the whole 184km hike or try a shorter segment

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Roseau
Population: 72,660
Language: English, French-Creole
Time: GMT-4
International dialling code: +1 767
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: East Caribbean Dollar (EC$), currently around EC$4.2 to the UK£. Many hotels and tours are priced in US dollars.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

December to April is hot with lower rainfall; this is peak cruise season so there are more visitors. February is Carnival time.

Good for hiking, with clear days – although heavy rainfall is possible. May sees the annual Hike Fest (www.dhta.org/hikefest.cfm).

Theoretically hurricane season, with heavy tropical downpours and high humidity.

Health & safety

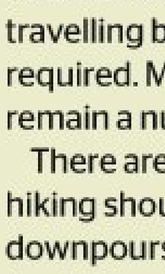
Dominica has few security issues – it's one of the Caribbean's safest and most relaxed havens. Consult your GP before travelling but no particular vaccinations are required. Malaria is absent but mosquitoes remain a nuisance so carry repellent.

There are no venomous snakes but hiking should be taken seriously as heavy downpours may lead to flash flooding and landslides. Getting lost on wilder trails such as the Chemin Letang is a significant possibility – a guide is advised.

Further reading & information

Dominica (Bradt, 2007 – new edition out in 2011).

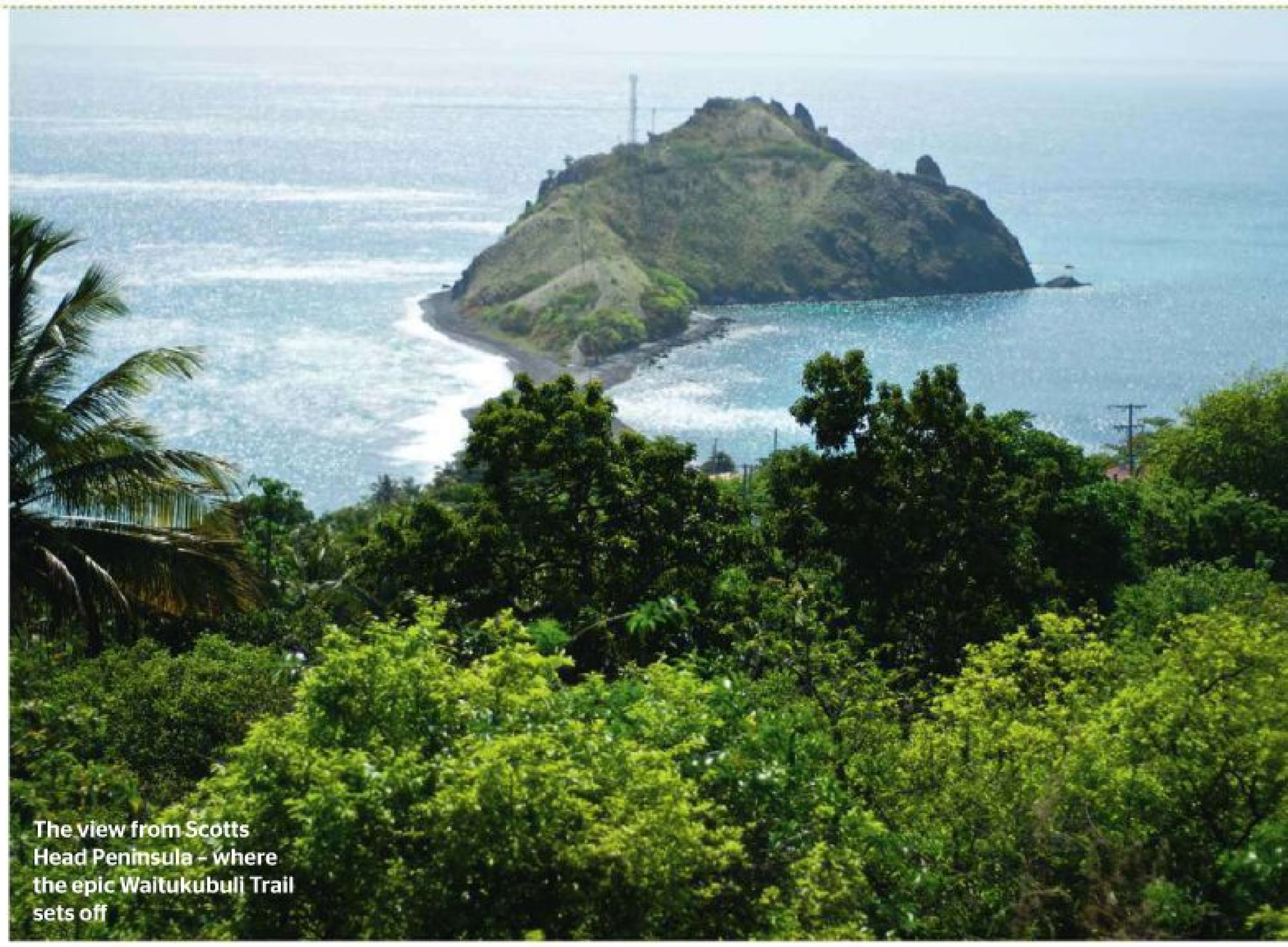
The Spice Necklace (HMH, 2010) by Ann Vanderhoof is a delightful journey and culinary exploration by yacht along the Windward and Leeward island chains, with chapters on Dominica.



The Dominica Story: A History of the Island (Macmillan Caribbean, 1995) by Dr Lennox Honeychurch, provides an authoritative account of Dominica's turbulent history.

Discover Dominica (020 7928 1600, www.discoverdominica.com) – all purpose information on the island.

www.avirtualdominica.com/waitukubulitrail.cfm – useful link for current status of the Waitukubuli Trail.



The view from Scotts Head Peninsula – where the epic Waitukubuli Trail sets off

THE TRIP

Getting there

There are no direct flights to Dominica from the UK. British Airways (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com) flies from London to Antigua from around £590 return including taxes. Flights take about 8 hours 30 minutes. LIAT (www.liat.com) offers one-hour transfers from Antigua; returns cost around £150 if booked in advance.

Getting around

Public transport to the remote places along the Waitukubuli Trail is scarce. If you plan to hike the entire trail it's straightforward to pick up a minivan in Roseau to Scotts Head, where the hike begins; upon finishing, it's an easy extra stroll into Portsmouth to find transport. If you're walking selected sections it's best to arrange **taxis** to take you to the start of your hike and collect you at the end. I used the engaging and reliable Margel Durand (+1 767 225 5173, ontimetaxitours@hotmail.com).

TOP TIP: SHOP LOCAL

Look out for local handicrafts in Dominica: Carib baskets, natural soaps, bags of spices and herbal teas all make good, authentic souvenirs

Cost of travel

A budget of £50 a day would comfortably cover all costs for hikers staying in and walking out of Roseau. You can reduce this further: simple **guesthouses** exist from £20 a night for a double, while meals plus drinks should cost little more than £10-12. Theoretically, when homestays and camping spots are in place along the trail, costs will be modest for those walking the entire Waitukubuli.

Accommodation

Garraway Hotel (1 Dame Eugenia Charles Boulevard, Roseau; +1 767 449 8800, www.garrawayhotel.com) has fairly business-like rooms but is well located on Roseau's seafront. Doubles start from US$100 (£63).

If you're looking for an upmarket option in Roseau, give **Fort Young Hotel** a try (+1 767 448 5000, www.fortyounghotel.com). Its history as a fort is asserted by the old cannons that decorate this 74-room hotel. The best ocean-front rooms cost between $165-205 (£103-128).

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Mark Stratton

Wild Dominica highlights

1. Morne Trois Pitons National Park

This 70 sq km Unesco World Heritage-listed national park offers hiking excursions of all durations to all abilities. The six-hour-return hike to Boiling Lake is the most arduous and should be combined with a swim in the subterranean waterfall at Titou Gorge – you'll certainly need it. Less demanding walks include Freshwater Lake, Middleham Falls and Trafalgar Falls.

2. Diving

There are numerous top-class dive sites and resorts located off Dominica's western Caribbean coast. The undersea volcanic vents and vertical walls spawn a rich marine life protected in several marine reserves at Cabrits and Scotts Head. Classic dive and snorkelling spots include Champagne Reef, with its submerged fumaroles and opportunities to see turtles.

See Dive Dominica (+1 767 448 2188, www.divedominica.com) and East Carib Dive (+1 767 449 6575, www.east-carib-dive.com) for packages, accommodation and trips. For a fuller list of options for diving, try www.scubatravel.co.uk.

3. Whale-watching

Spotting sperm whales off Roseau is highly probable as they are resident year-round; humpback and pilot whales and bottlenose dolphins are other possibilities. Trips cost around US$50 (£31) for a half-day excursion from Dive Dominica; you can stay at its dive lodge, Castle Comfort Lodge, just south of Roseau (www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com).

4. Hot springs

Dominica bubbles away with hot mineral-rich springs – pools are available along hikes to Trafalgar Falls and around Boiling Lake. Better-known and more accessible hot springs include Soufriere Sulphur Springs near Tête Morne and the commercially-run bathing facilities of Screw's Sulfur Spa (www.screwsspa.com).

Papillote Wilderness Retreat (Trafalgar, Upper Roseau Valley; +1 767 448 2287, www.papillote.dm) is heavenly. Run by Anne, a delightful American lady, Papillote's wooden cabins are set in luxuriant tropical gardens in the Roseau Valley – very accessible for hikes in Morne Trois Pitons National Park. Doubles from US$115 (£73).

For homestay accommodation, the best plan is to contact Discover Dominica for an up-to-date list.

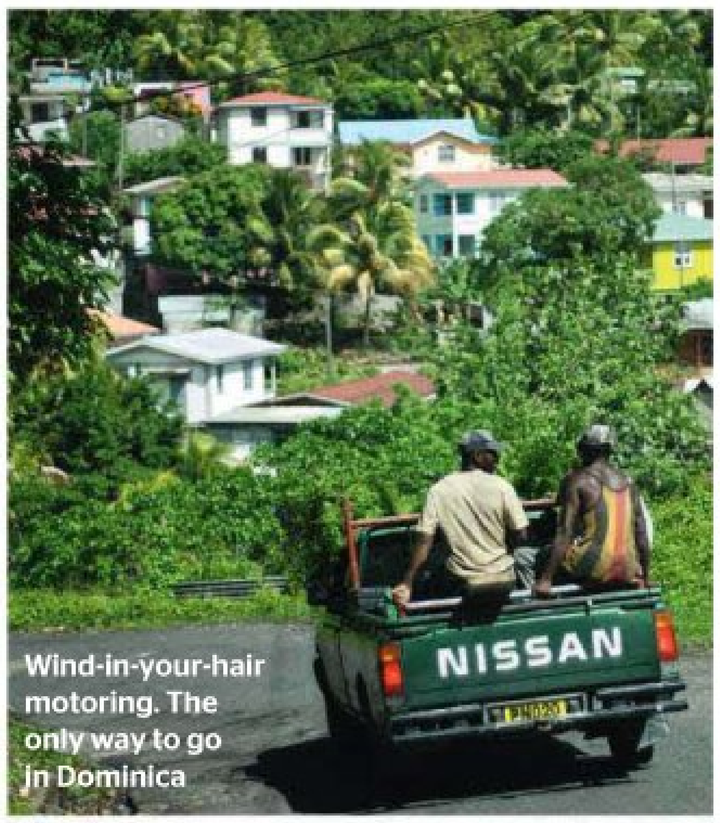
Walking

For information on well-signposted and maintained hiking tracks, click on the 'Hike!' link at www.discoverdominica.com and download the brochure of suggested routes. The walks are graded by degree of difficulty, from one to five.

The **Waitukubuli National Trail** does not have its own website as yet but information, a map and updates can be read at www.avirtualdominica.com/waitukubulitrail.cfm.

What to take

Lightweight rain jacket Select a breathable, lightweight waterproof to avoid over-sweating.



Wind-in-your-hair motoring. The only way to go in Dominica

Hiking poles Essential for slippery descents and fording fast-flowing rivers.

Sturdy boots Choose boots rather than all-terrain sandals due to the razor grass.

Waterproof camera bag Protect your camera to avoid an expensive repair bill.

Swimming costume Useful for refreshing waterfall dips and hot spring baths.

Dollars You'll need cash to pay local trail fees: costs are typically $5 (£3.10) for a single hike; $12 (£7.50) for a weekly pass.

Guide To avoid wrong turns, I used the excellent and experienced Peter Green (+1 767 235 2270). A list of guides can be found in the Bradt guide to Dominica.

Food & drink

With abundant fruits, seafood and vegetables, visitors eat and drink well here. Food is often spiced with peppery Creole sauces, particularly fish and chicken dishes. Islanders love broth – a cook-all meat or fish and vegetable stew. Other dishes include calalou soup (made from spinach-like dasheen leaves), goat water (goat stew) and crab backs (baked, spiced crab). A typical local breakfast might consist of cocoa tea, bakes (fried dough stuffed with fish or cheese) and salted fish – you'll see lots of takeaway places with 'snack' signs selling salted and barbecued cod and tuna.

Kubuli is Dominica's beer, although the brand Carib is widely served alongside rum punches fermented from various fruits. ■

From the archives

- **Learn to dive Dominica** – issue 71, Apr/May 05
- **Dominica on land** – issue 71, Apr/May 05
- **Caribbean Blueprint** – issue 106, Oct 09

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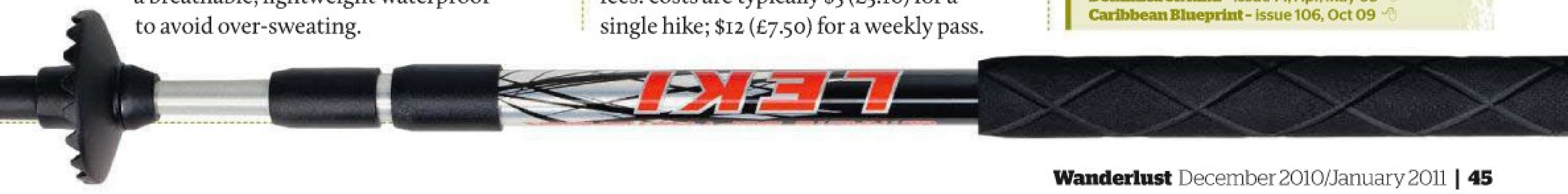

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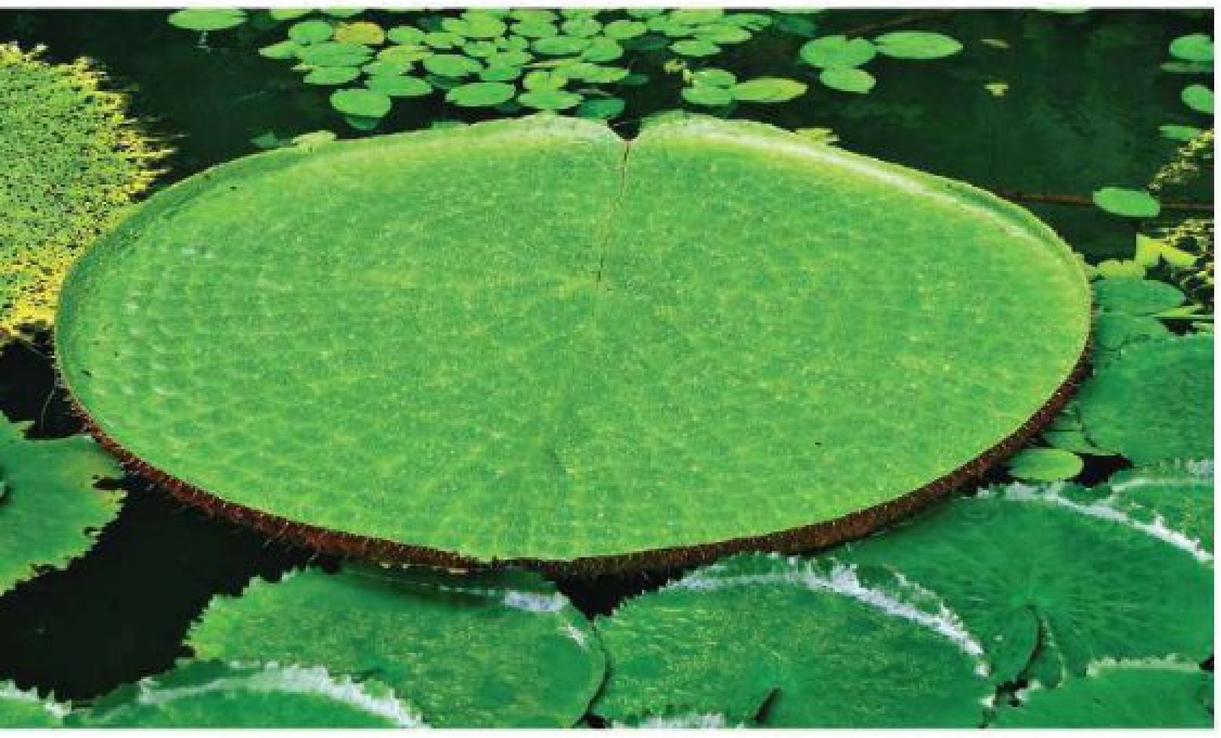

Win an Amazonian Adventure

Head into the Colombian jungle with Travel the Unknown and the Colombia tourist board

Ever heard of a pink dolphin? It might sound like a naturalist's practical joke designed to embarrass the amateur – the equivalent of stripey paint – but the pink dolphin is actually a very real and rare phenomenon. And if you've ever seen one, you're practically an endangered species yourself – someone who has not only made it to the Amazon, but got off the beaten track once you arrived.

Wet 'n wild

Win a trip to the Amazon, courtesy of Travel the Unknown and the Colombia tourist board, and pink dolphins are not the only sight that will have you doing a double-take. Flying into Colombia's capital, Bogota, you'll take a flight to Leticia, right on the border with Brazil and Peru, and start travelling downriver by dugout canoe, exploring largely uninhabited regions of the world's mightiest river. Expect to see exotic species of monkey, rare and brilliant birds, iguanas lounging in the trees and a bewildering variety of butterflies and insects, not to mention extraordinary flora unique to this corner of the world.

Tribal gathering

As well as a chance to indulge your passion for wildlife, this trip gives you an opportunity to learn more about the tribes-people who have spent millennia in the Amazon, and whose way of life reflects not only an intimate knowledge of the forest and its uses, but reveals a deep spiritual connection stretching back millennia. They might even teach you a thing or two about fishing for piranha, or how to spot crocodiles (and avoid being eaten by them).

Want to go?

Travel the Unknown offers travellers the chance to explore the backwaters of the backwaters in places as different as Syria, Serbia, India and Colombia. They're offering the *Amazonian Adventure* for one winner and their companion for a week. For a full itinerary, map and trip notes, go to **www.traveltheunknown.com/amazon**

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How to enter

For your chance to win, simply answer the following question:

Q. What is the capital of Colombia's Amazonas district?

Visit **www.wanderlust.co.uk** to enter, or send your answer to: Wanderlust (Amazon), PO Box 1832, Windsor SL4 1YT by **6 January 2011**. Include your name, address, phone number and email.
Please state 'no offers' if you'd prefer not to be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

This prize is for two adults as part of a small group trip, departing on 19 February 2011 (returning on 26 February) or on 12 March 2011 (returning on 19 March). The prize includes return economy class flights from London. Passengers must confirm their choice of travel dates and provide all necessary documentation within two weeks of notification of winning the prize. Prizes are non-transferable and no cash alternative is available.

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From The Road

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

Ripping yarn

'I sailed from Iceland to Greenland'

Forget the Greek isles: real women learn to sail in the Arctic...

Silence. That was the first thing that hit Jo-Anne Croft when she arrived at Jan Mayen, an isolated isle in the Arctic Ocean. As part of a Polar Front expedition, the novice sailor had cast off from Iceland and sailed for three days to reach it.

"The eerie outpost – which barely sees more than ten visitors a year – was other-worldly," she recalls. After clambering ashore to climb most of Beerenberg, the world's most northerly volcano, they surged onwards. Their destination? Greenland. "Surreal, impossibly still and with a powerful beauty, it was like nothing I have ever encountered before," she says. "Awe-inspiring Dalí-esque icebergs cleaved from immense glaciers, and dwarfed our boat's 29m mast."

The trip piqued her taste for adventure. "I'm not an experienced sailor but I got stuck in and loved every second of seeing some unique, beautiful and truly remote places."

Jo-Anne travelled with the Polar Front (www.thepolarfront.com).

Got a ripping yarn of your own? Email **fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk**

Win Páramo gear!

We want your photos, letters and tales for this new section – email **fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk**

See page 51 for prize details.

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Letters etc

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Comment online www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust
Twitter #wanderlustmag
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Kili: a mountain of disappointment

We have just returned from trekking up the Rongai Route to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro. Our sense of achievement was marred by two things.

The Rongai Route is often described as being relatively untouched. Nothing is further from the truth: it's crowded with hundreds of trekkers and campsites bulging at the seams.

Secondly, it's not responsible tourism when virtually every large rock is being used as a toilet (at high altitudes it takes years for faeces/toilet paper to degrade), tents are pitched 12 inches apart causing a fire hazard and porters are underpaid (seemingly relying on tips for wages), poorly fed and not equipped with the right gear for such extreme conditions. On 23 September a porter died on the final summit ascent – allegedly he had not had any food or water for two days.

John & Jan Mason, Oxon

Me in a mask at the amazing Mt Hagen Cultural Show, **Papua New Guinea**. *Richard Bakewell*

"Serious photographers tend to travel better, see more and engage more with local people"

Steve Davey blogs at www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/blogs

A haggle too far?

I was dismayed to read Conor Woodman's advice on haggling in the market (Nov issue, p31). What's fun for the traveller may be a matter of full or empty stomachs for the vendor's family. Yes, prices will be higher for foreign visitors, but why not pay what the article is worth rather than what the vendor is willing to sell it for? And, please, never denigrate the quality of the workmanship just to push the price down. It is surely a universal human characteristic to be proud of something you have made yourself, or that your family or friends have made. Why crush their self esteem for the sake of saving a dollar or two?

Hilary Bradt, Devon

» *Conor Woodman replies:*
I think Hilary misses the point. What something is 'worth' is what someone is 'willing to sell it for'. Why should that be different simply because you are foreign? If Hilary's business is to feed the hungry then why not donate to a charity rather than help propagate the myth that foreigners are there to be ripped off because they can afford to be? Haggling is a universal human activity and always requires a degree of hyperbole. In my experience, no trader ever feels 'denigrated' when eventually your cash crosses their palm.

Over to you, Hilary... – Ed.

Walking in Isalo NP, **Madagascar**, a week after a bad fire. *Louise Markus*

Never too old to travel

I was interested in the letter 'Only for the young?' (Nov issue) and would like to reassure Helen that there are at least two old gits or 'more mature' readers who have planned and embarked on their own round-the-world adventure! My husband and I (aged 63 and 60 respectively) retired a year ago – at last we were free to go off and

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From the forum

'Does travel help you find yourself?'

As Julia Roberts seeks enlightenment in the film *Eat, Pray, Love*, our online forum pondered inner journeys...

I always feel a bit reborn when I come back from a trip with lots of solitude, risk-taking and meeting strangers. For an introvert, it really is a chance to find yourself.
John P Crane

Sometimes, people just need to get away, break out of their usual rhythm and use the space to rediscover their motivations and desires. It's too easy to get stuck in a rut in the rat race, and I'm sure many people have been very successful in these 'pilgrimages' to reset their attitudes and goals in life.
Sergeant_Pluck

I'm not a big believer in 'finding yourself' full stop, let alone using travel as a medium to do so. If I'm travelling I'm doing it to experience different things. Watching the sunset over Machu Picchu may be amazing but it won't suddenly make me realise my true meaning.
whydontpenguinsfeetfreeze

Travel feeds the imagination. With our heads buried in the sand of day-to-day existence, it's only natural that, when we do lift our heads up and look around (perhaps by travelling), we are prompted to ask ourselves the question: 'What are we doing here?'
steve 48

Travel does nothing to help you find yourself. You learn about other places and cultures. You find new people. It is enjoyable and improving, but that's not the same thing.
Hal Wolf Ewing

Want to comment?
Join the debate at
wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust

Enjoying the magnificent colour of Lake Parón, **Peru**. *Arron Baxter*

travel completely independently with no time restraints!

Despite the reluctance of our children we spent the first month in Chile and Argentina. It was wonderful having complete freedom, and the beauty and scale of the Patagonian landscape was breathtaking. After chilling out in a beach hut in the Cook Islands we spent five weeks in a campervan in New Zealand before calling in at Sydney and Hong Kong on the way home. During our trip we walked with penguins, swam with dolphins, went sky-diving in celebration of our 40th wedding anniversary and escaped a threatened tsunami.
Ros Hanlon, Solihull

A *Wanderlust* ice-breaker

I always take a copy of *Wanderlust* on my travels – it breaks the ice with fellow travellers. On a recent trip some American and Canadian travellers decided to take out subscriptions as they said there aren't any travel magazines in their countries that are as good as *Wanderlust*!
Alex Hinton, Belfast

"I was on a ferry with an elderly couple once who swore by *umeboshi* (Japanese plums)"
QunoSpotter reflects on cures for sea sickness

Wild sightings in Scotland

Your 'Wild Scotland' article (Aug/Sep issue) was an interesting read, but you only highlighted the west coast, Orkney and Shetland. These are popular sites but some of the best marine sightings are made from Caithness in the far north.

This year there have been sightings of Risso's and bottlenose dolphins, and a huge pod of pilot whales – not to mention orca, minke and fin whales.

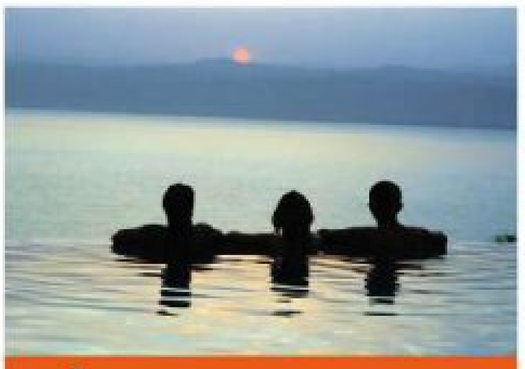
These can all be seen from land, although passengers on the John O'Groats ferry are often treated to great close-ups of the local wildlife.
Sally Marshall, Caithness
Thanks for the tip-off, Sally – one more reason to head north – Ed.

A family affair in South Africa

We have just returned from South Africa's Madikwe River Lodge where we had a great time with our children aged 11 and 13. In August it was free of insects with no malaria risk and an electric fence so the kids felt safe from hungry lions. Top tips: take woolly hats and gloves, and give the children their own digital cameras so they can take photos while you concentrate on watching the wildlife.
Janette Franks, Norfolk

A great gadget

My friend and I have just returned from a six-month trip to Sri Lanka, Everest Base Camp, Tibet, China and the old Silk Route. My son gave us a ›



Looking out at the Dead Sea from **Jordan**. *Dimple Agarwal, Tejas Katre & Sonia Sharma*

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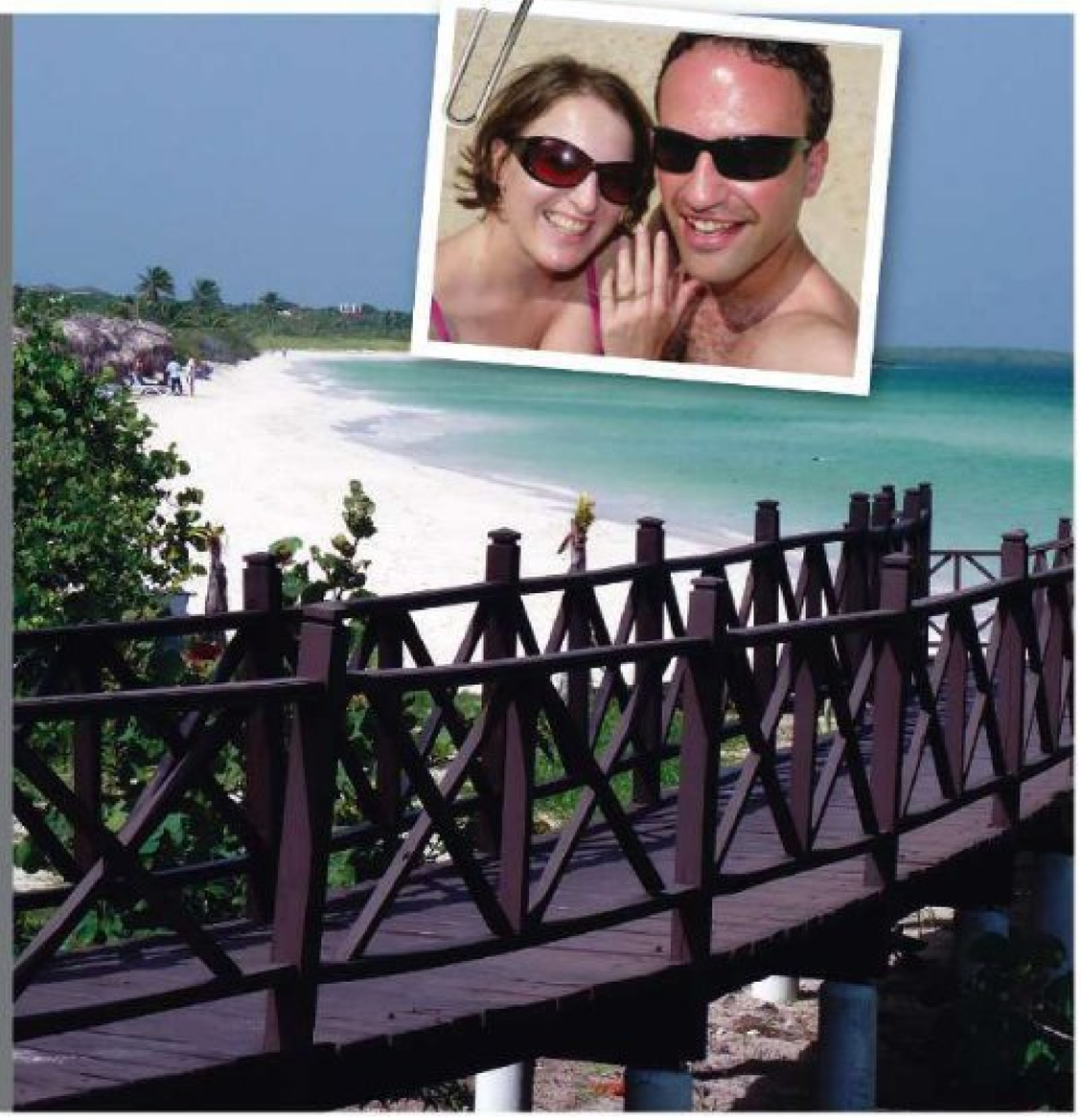
Winners Return

'I bagged a free trip to Cuba – and a fiancé!'

One lucky *Wanderlust* reader recently scooped a trip to Cuba – and a husband to boot. Rachel Newton, a 31-year-old client manager from London, won Travelzest's Captivating Cuba trip in our June/July issue.

"My boyfriend Richard and I spent a life-changing week in the Caribbean," Rachel smiles. They loved wandering round Havana, but the best was yet to come.

"We were lazing around on the perfect beach when he drew a ring in the sand and got down on one knee," she says. "At first I thought it was a joke. Then I said yes and we're now planning our wedding! I've entered *Wanderlust*'s Vietnam competition in the hope of winning a honeymoon too..."



Club Corner

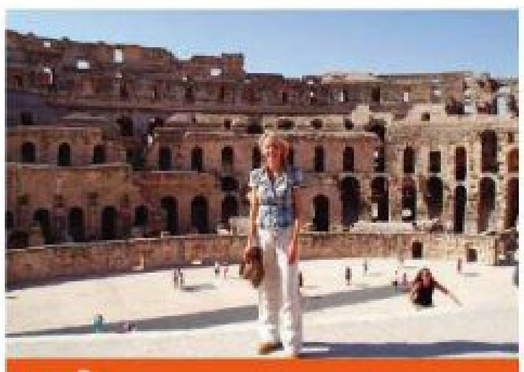
Who: The Globetrotters Club (www.globetrotters.co.uk)
History: Founded in 1944
What: A club for independent travellers of all ages with around 500 members worldwide
Where: Meetings in London and Toronto
When: Regularly throughout the year – see the website for details
How much: A one-year membership costs £15 for UK residents (£18 worldwide)

remarkable gadget called Spot (www.findmespot.eu/en). No bigger than a mobile phone, all I had to do was press a button several times a day and it would pick up our location and send an email to ten prearranged email addresses telling them our exact location with a Google Earth connection. Our families, friends and grandchildren could see exactly where we were! Marvellous.
Gay Grove, Worcestershire

Taken for a ride

The letter 'Rickshaw decider' (Nov issue), reminded me of the trip my husband and I made to Nepal many years ago. Waiting for a bus to take us from Kathmandu the 5km to Patan, we were surrounded by several rickshaw drivers all begging us to go with them. We explained that it was too far but one youngster was very persistent so we agreed, rather apprehensively, that he could take us.

Halfway to Patan the young lad's legs gave in and he could cycle no more. We took pity on him and my husband offered to cycle the rest of the way with the lad sitting next to me in the back! We got some incredulous looks from passers by as my husband and the driver swapped places. We arrived safely in Patan but he had the audacity to charge us the full fare!
Vanessa Smith, Huddersfield



Marvelling at Roman ruins, El Djem, **Tunisia.** *Laura Ferguson*

"Thai authorities should ban all elephants in a city. It is a cruel practice."
Mudskipper tweets about new Thai ele-feeding fines

Overlanding tips

After just returning from an overlanding tour through Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania I felt I had to send in some advice.

Bear in mind that you'll be in close quarters with the same people on long and sometimes stressful journeys. Also, while overlanding takes the hassle out of planning your trip and you see a lot, distances are long and you're constantly on the move with many exhausting early mornings. However, it can't be beaten for travelling in countries where it can be difficult to get around on your own, for single travellers, and for those off-the-beaten-track experiences with locals and communities.

Check whether visas are cheaper at the border or in advance (when crossing several borders this can save hundreds of dollars) and make sure you have budgeted for the price of extra activities.
Georgia Vavasour, London

'We took spacehoppers to Mozambique'

Jenny Delaney, economist, New York, & Antonia Cobb, consultant, London

'We first read about Stuff Your Rucksack (www.stuffyourrucksack.com) in *Wanderlust* and really liked the idea of giving back to communities we would visit on our travels. We were heading to Vilankulos, Mozambique, where Happy Africa has an inspirational pre-school that provides kids with classes and nutritious food. We collected books, paint, pens, magazines, toys and even a pair of spacehoppers! As soon as we arrived, we were ambushed by youngsters climbing, clapping, playing, holding our hands and wearing our sunglasses. What an inspirational charity.'

Have you stuffed your rucksack? Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk

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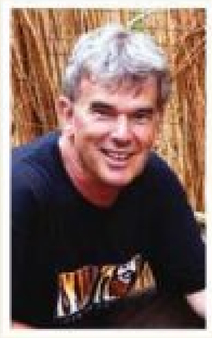
Photo of the month

Our favourite reader photo on www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust. This issue:

Bear fight
Katmai National Park, Alaska

Michael Vickers, retired, West Sussex



'I recently stayed at Geographic Bay in Katmai National Park, Alaska, on a small boat moored just off the shoreline. Every morning and early afternoon I would travel to the shore and watch about 25 brown bears fishing for Pacific salmon in the river and streams. I was lucky to snap these two large male grizzlies as they fought over prime fishing rights. I'm pleased to report that neither bear was injured from the short confrontation.'

Win! *Páramo* trousers worth £105 + *Wanderlust* goodies

From the Road is all about your travels, and we want your contributions – by email, post, or online (see page 48 for addresses). We're after snaps of you on your travels, letters and advice, great travel tales and photographs – even quirky souvenirs. So surprise us!

Each issue our favourite contribution wins Páramo gear plus a bundle of travel must-haves. This issue – to tie in with our features on Iceland and Arctic Canada – we're equipping you for the cold and wet.

Páramo, pioneers of ethically manufactured clothing for the most extreme environments, provides the insulated Páramo Torres Trousers (RRP £105, www.paramo.co.uk). The innovative design of these overlayering trousers makes them simple to put on and ideal for adventurous travel. To keep you even cosier, we are also giving away a copy of gripping new photobook *Face to Face: Ocean Portraits*, an Exped dry bag, and an assortment of other goodies.

The winner this issue is Michael Vickers' stunning bear photo, above. For more details, see **www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions**

Experience

It's the new Serendipities! Each issue we'll pick our favourite travel tale posted in the Experience area of www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust. This issue:

Helen Keep, training manager, Yorkshire

Balloons in the Solomon Islands

You'll need balloons in the Solomon Islands, my friend Emma had said. I was puzzled…

I had travelled to Salio, deep in the South Pacific rainforest, for a party to thank us for money we'd raised to help build a church. The whole village came. We were the honoured guests at 'top table' (the only table), granted the prized delicacy of the fish's head. They presented numerous gifts, handmade by the villagers. They made lovely speeches, and I had to respond in pijin, after some feverish practice: "*Halo. Nem blong mi Helen. Tanggio tu mas…*"

Then came entertainment. The singing was amazing. Then there was dancing: boys prancing around as frogs, men strutting like cockerels. We had to perform too – the hokey-cokey went down a storm!

But the best was saved till last… balloons. They're difficult to get in the Solomons, and as we handed out one to each child, you'd think we were distributing gold!

It was an extraordinary evening. We'd given the people of Salio a little help with their church, but what they gave us back that night was priceless.

Write your own story – visit wanderlust.co.uk/aboutus for details >

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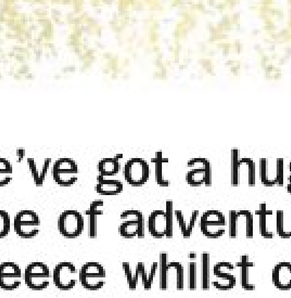

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The world according to...

Marcel Theroux
AUTHOR

Ragnar Axelsson
PHOTOJOURNALIST

Jackie Horsewood
WANDERLUST SUBSCRIBER

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

I like being beside the sea but if there are mountains too – as there are in the Crimea, Corsica and Hawaii – all the better.

Mountains for their beauty and tranquillity.

Desert every time – the peace, tranquillity and fascination of the inhabitants. Ocean? Definitely not, I can't swim!

What was your first great travel experience?

Going to Tamil Nadu, India, aged 17. It felt like another galaxy and made me realise that there are multiple worlds on this planet.

Greenland was exciting – travelling by rubber boat along the coast, fishing for food and living in a world of silence.

Age seven, touring Europe with my family in an orange mini-van. Quite adventurous in 1960 and entrenched travel into my blood!

What has been your favourite journey?

Going to northern Siberia – its beauty and strangeness has stayed with me ever since.

All my journeys have been happy ones but it has to be Greenland again – it was like a dream.

From Thailand to Laos to Cambodia by boat on the Mekong. The people, landscapes and Buddhist sites were magical.

Which are your top five places worldwide?

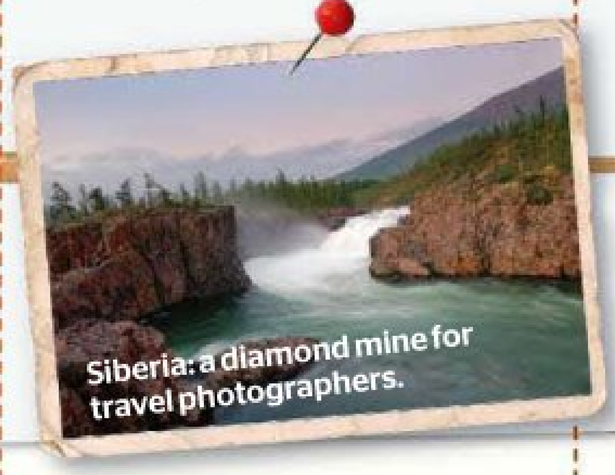
Route 6A, Cape Cod, USA; a first-class sleeper, Russia; a provincial Japanese ryokan; a good pub after a long walk; the London Library.

France; the Faroe Islands; Italy; England; Spain.

Khong Island, Laos; Stone Town, Zanzibar; Old Havana Square, Cuba; Imam Square, Isfahan, Iran; the Festival of the Desert, Mali.

Which passport stamp are you proudest of?

The special accreditation I got to visit Grozny in 2001.



North Korea – or it would be if they had stamped the passport!

Which passport stamp would you most like to have?

I was born in Uganda but have never been back; I'd love to.

North Korea.

Where or what is your guilty travel pleasure?

Long-haul flying.

I never regret a thing.

Hair straighteners! Well, a girl has to look presentable wherever she is.

Marcel Theroux's latest novel, *Far North*, is published in paperback by Faber and Faber. Ragnar Axelsson's new book, *Last Days of the Arctic*, is published by www.polarworld.co.uk.

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The great rail photo challenge

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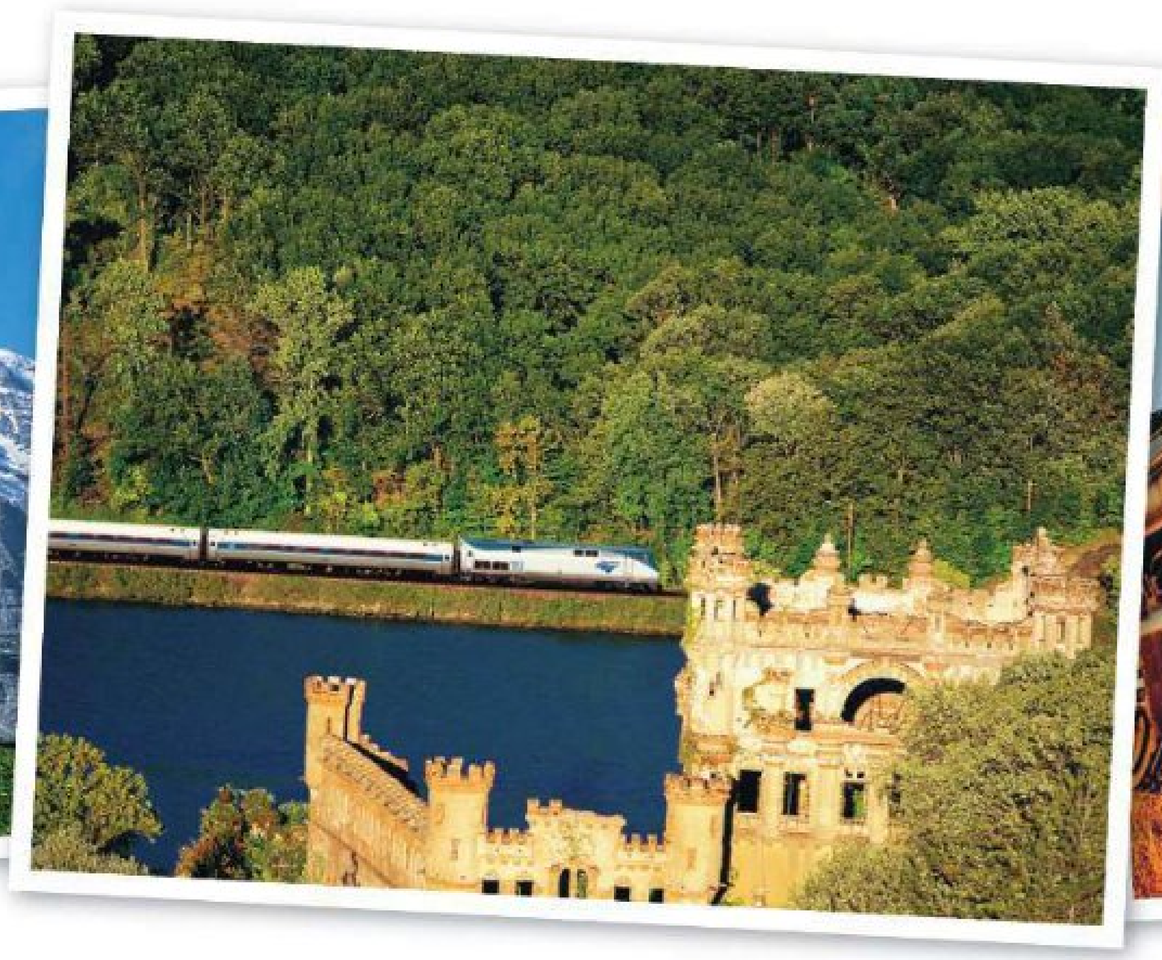
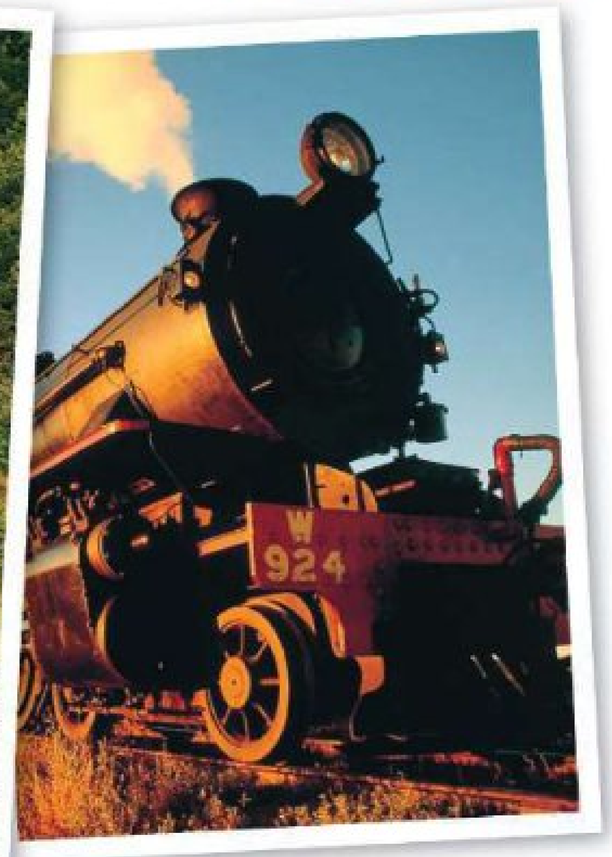




It's hard to imagine a more varied and dramatic landscape than the United States of America. From the Great Lakes of the north to the swamplands of the Deep South, the cactus-studded deserts of Arizona to the towering Rocky Mountains, travel in the USA is nothing short of spectacular.

These epic landforms have backdropped thousands of movies, and inspired a million journeys of discovery. And for a grandstand view of the scenery, the only way to travel is by rail.

Although historically trains have lived in the shadow of Americans' great love, the automobile, rail is finally being recognised as the most economical, easy-going and scenic way to cross the States.

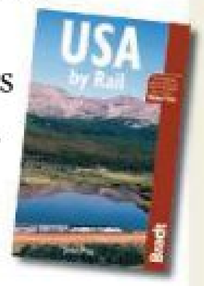
The US passenger rail service, Amtrak, serves more than 500 destinations in 46 states, over a 21,000-mile route network. And with 18 iconic long-distance routes, from California to Vermont, you can expect to see all manner of panoramas unfolding past the trains' wide sightseeing windows.

For longer journeys, you can enjoy convivial meals on board, and whisk through the night in comfortable sleeper roomettes (see box). Some routes even pass through iconic National Parks, where rangers may hop aboard and provide a running commentary to passengers.

Wanted! Your loco photos

Want to jump aboard yourself? We're looking for inspirational photos of rail travel from around the world, be it your local network or somewhere far more exotic. The prize is the freedom of the US rail network: a pair of 15-day/8-segment Amtrak rail passes. The winner and a companion will fly to New York courtesy of Trailfinders, the travel experts – voted top tour operator in this year's *Wanderlust* travel awards – and then take an unforgettable ride on the rails.

Ten runners-up will receive copies of Bradt's *USA by Rail* guidebook, the bible for US-bound train travellers (www.bradtguides.com).



Got a great train photo?

We're looking for photographs that capture the romance, drama, personality and scenic splendour of train travel. The pictures can be taken onboard a train, or (safely) as the train goes by. They can be abstract or traditional; and can be shot anywhere in the world (not just the US).

How to enter

Photos can be emailed in as digital files or sent as prints. For full details of how to enter, visit **www.wanderlust.co.uk/amtrak**

The closing date is 31 March 2011 and winners will be announced at the end of May. Judges from Amtrak, Bradt, Trailfinders and *Wanderlust* will decide the winners and runners-up. Good luck! ■

AMTRAK RAIL PASSES

Three passes are available on Amtrak: eight segments of travel within 15 days – $389 (£248); 12 segments within 30 days – $579 (£369); and 18 segments within 45 days – $749 (£478). Sleeper costs are additional. A 'segment' is any unbroken journey between two stations, regardless of distance. Amtrak runs 'Thruway' buses from stations to local attractions; a 'Thruway' bus connection counts as a single segment.

COACH OR FIRST CLASS?

Coach Class seats are large and comfortable, with foot rests, fold-down tables and reading lights. Passengers can either stay in their seats for privacy or sit in the lounge car and mingle with other passengers. Coach class passengers can upgrade to first class for overnight journeys to enjoy a 'roomette' and complimentary dining. Roomettes have two facing seats that convert into bunks at night. At higher costs there are also more spacious 'Bedrooms' and four-berth 'Family Rooms'. Bedding, meals and soft drinks are included.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The USA Rail Pass prize offer is for coach travel on Amtrak routes nationwide over any 15-day period. Sleeper accommodation is not included. Standard terms and conditions for this pass apply – check www.amtrak.com for details. The USA Rail pass is not valid on the Acela Express, the Auto Train, Thruway motorcoach connections (7000-7999) or Canadian portions of trains jointly operated with VIA Rail Canada. The pass alone is not valid for travel: tickets must be obtained before boarding the train or a Thruway bus service. The pass is not transferable, and may not be combined with any other type of discount or offer. The prize includes two economy class flights from London to New York, courtesy of Trailfinders. The flights are valid for departures 22 August to 9 December 2011 & 1 January to 31 March 2012. They are subject to availability and the winner and their partner must travel together. For full terms and conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/amtrak

Image rights All photos submitted will remain the photographer's copyright. However, by entering the competition you grant Amtrak and the other sponsors the right to reproduce images, free of charge, in any communication, online or in print, specifically relating to this competition. Any further use will be by negotiation.

TRAILFINDERS THE TRAVEL EXPERTS

Bradt

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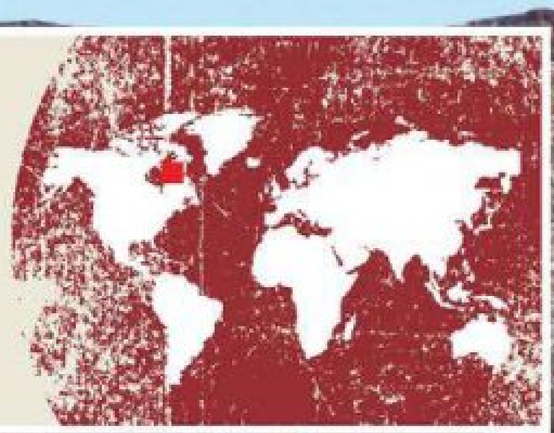

NORTHERN

Polar bears, indigenous art – and Facebook? **Amy Watkins** uncovers

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EXPOSÉ

surprising contrasts on an Inuit adventure cruise in Arctic Canada

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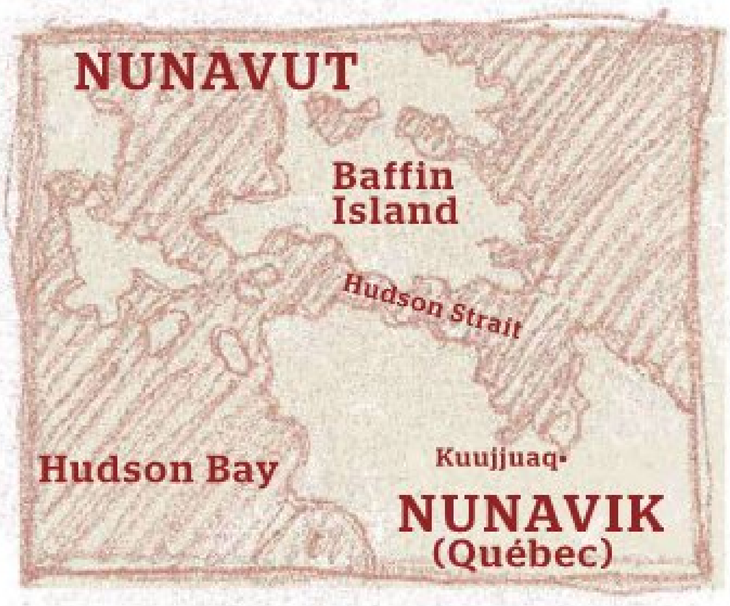
Previous spread: Gerraint James. This spread: Jean Weller; Bob Mesher; Hans GPfaff; Matthias Breiter/FLPA

When our small ship shuddered and sliced through an iceberg, causing our expedition leader to topple over during the daily briefing, it hit home that this was an expedition, not a holiday. Only the seven young Inuit trainees, all northern natives, looked unconcerned as we made our way through the ice floes of eastern Canada's Lower Arctic.

Inuit-run Cruise North is not your usual cruise line. Our old Russian ship was not going to win any beauty pageants, while hearty moose stews replaced fine dining.

But who cares? I'd not come for glamour. I was on a ten-day journey from northern Québec to Nunavut during which time I'd be given unrivalled access to local people and their ancient hunting grounds, not to mention getting the chance to experience the region's best wildlife-spotting.

It took a three-hour flight north from Montréal to reach our embarkation point in Kuujjuaq, in the Inuit-governed Nunavik region of Québec. The town's splattering of red, green and blue houses sat amid grey tundra, and as we made our way to join Cruise North's Arctic Safari a chilly summer breeze shook the white cotton-flowers and carried howls from hilltop kennels.



The adventure didn't take long to get started. After leaving Kuujjuaq, we had our first glimpse of a polar bear in Ungava Bay, when an eerie ghost ship of an iceberg appeared. As it loomed closer, a hulking yellowy-white bear came into view, dripping blood as it tugged a seal carcass across the blinding ice. It was a grisly yet compelling introduction to life in this remote region.

At 5am the next morning we bundled into Zodiacs for a bleary-eyed visit to Akpatok Island, home of the world's largest colony of thick-billed murres, birds famous for their spectacular diving skills as they hunt for fish amid the icy water. The boats took us through black clouds of them, billowing out in Hitchcockian proportions as they sought to avoid the glaucous gulls that eyed them from the rocks.

We did most of our sailing at night; by day, land expeditions were a good chance to stretch our legs, with the trainees acting as polar bear monitors, guns strapped to their backs. At Diana Island we bumped into one of the trainee's cousins, a man called Willie. He was carefully shucking mussels, perched on his *umiak* (canoe), beached on the shingly shoreline. His boat was overflowing with local boys who'd been learning traditional hunting skills – one teenager munched kelp and poked seal entrails with his hunting knife as he told us he'd recently killed his first polar bear. Halfway through a conversation about the weather, Willie turned and asked: "Hey, are you on Facebook?"

Inuit status update

Canada's north is not the barren, lifeless place you might imagine. Change has been rapid here for the local Inuit people. In less than two generations communities have acquired broadband, shiny Skidoos, and mud-encrusted All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), while brightly painted houses have replaced a nomadic lifestyle of igloos and dogsleds.

But people like Willie make sure the younger generation still learns the old ways. On Diana Island the trainees expertly ›

'An eerie ghost ship of an iceberg appeared, and a hulking white bear came into view'

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ARCTIC WILDLIFE
a spotter's guide

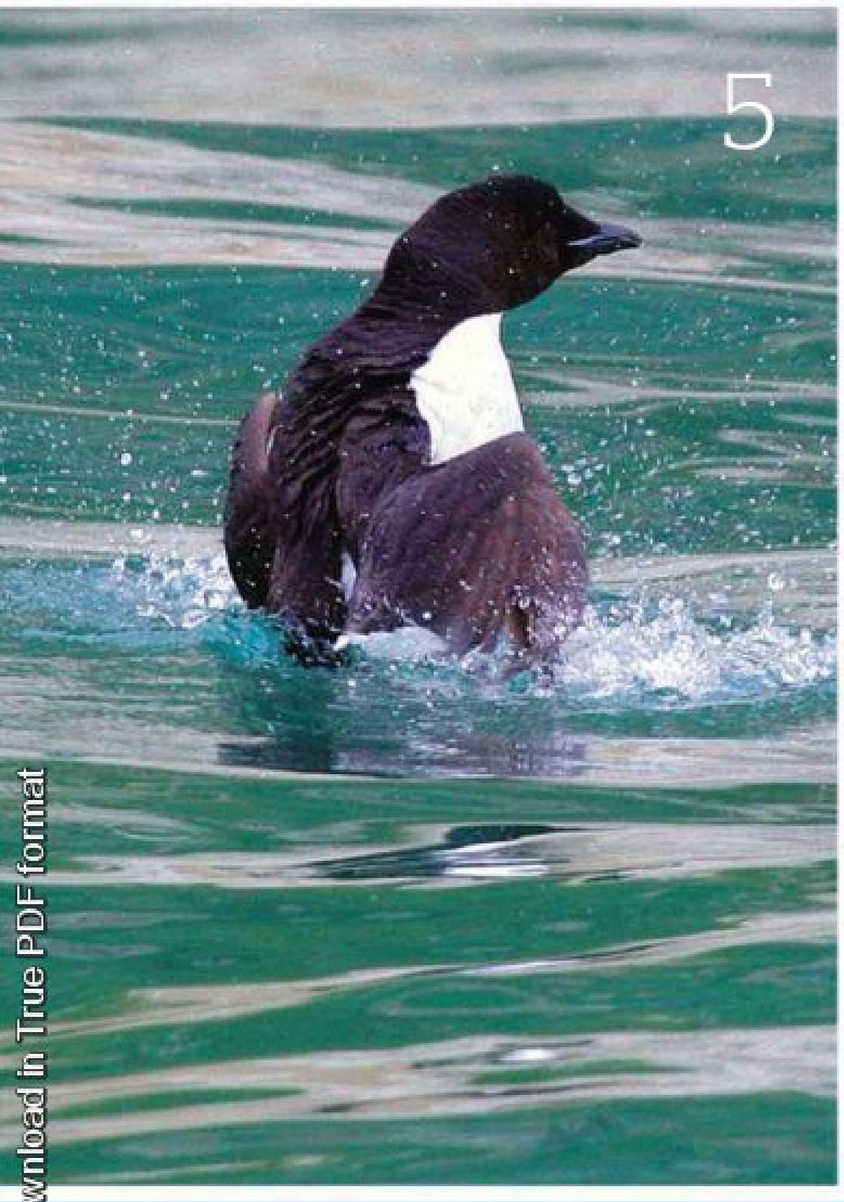
1. Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*)
Characteristics: Caribou are North American reindeer. Look out for ornate antlers on both sexes.
Best place to spot: In groups in vegetated valleys or fjords.

2. Polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*)
Characteristics: Males can grow up to 3.5m. Woolly under-fur and translucent outer fur keep them warm. Strong front legs help with swimming.
Best place to spot: On pack ice. Later in the season you'll see them along coastlines and offshore islands.

3. Muskox (*Ovibos moschatus*)
Characteristics: Shaggy double-layered fur with rounded horns for breaking snow.
Best place to spot: Established migration routes and residencies in vegetated areas.

4. Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*)
Characteristics: Males can weigh up to two tonnes. Blood vessels close to the skin keep them cool and turn them pinky brown.
Best place to spot: Predictable haul-out zones.

5. Thick-billed murres (*Uria lomvia*)
Characteristics: The 'flying penguins of the north' are about 45cm long with sharp beaks and narrow wings for diving.
Best place to spot: Predictable colonies with sheer cliffs.



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Clockwise from below
It's not the *QE2*, but the boat serves a decent moose stew; a polar bear offers her cubs a few swimming lessons; new generations of Inuit still learn how to hunt; the locals have a laugh at writer Amy's throat-singing

'We reached a waterfall, where a solitary pair of caribou antlers moved across the yawning valley'

monitored skittish muskoxen, while we stayed downwind on boggy tundra polka-dotted with tiny white saxifrage flowers and flamingo-pink fireweed. Orange lichen clung like discarded chewing gum to the Canadian Shield rock, which we clambered over just in time to see a small herd flee, honking up the mountainside in a flurry of fur.

As the beasts bolted, so did we, returning south to Nunavik's mainland. We cruised past the annual cargo ship, piled high with colourful crates of ATVs and household goods, and called at Kangiqsujuaq, an old Hudson's Bay Company trading post that got its first paved road last year. A local teacher gave us a lesson in the Inuit language, Inuktitut, and told us that climate change is already ringing alarm bells in her classroom: the children can't understand why books show ice melting in late summer when they can see it's all gone by June.

In Kangiqsujuaq's sports centre we munched on bannock (fried bread) with berry jam while two ladies gave us a throat-singing demonstration, clasping each other's arms and making guttural noises like animal calls. It's a traditional Inuit game – the first to drop the rhythm loses. Other Inuit games, such as owl hop and one-foot high kick, have a more ferocious edge to them, and are used for conflict resolution, building strength and keeping occupied during winter. Physically demanding games are still important here, even if kids tease each other online about how fast they can seal crawl.

You want fries with that?

At that evening's briefing, talk turned to food. Favourites included goose, caribou, seal – and chips. Wild meat is popular: hunter support programmes and communal freezers ensure that even those who can't hunt can access country foods. Some local delicacies were handed around, including dried char, dried caribou and *mattaq* – whale blubber. Whales are limited to one per community each year, while a tag system regulates polar bear hunting quotas – some tags can be sold to game hunters for around CAD$30,000.

Sounding and smelling less appetising were the giant *Odobenus rosmarus* that we spotted the next day at the well-named Walrus Island, in northern Hudson Bay. Hundreds of the leathery mammals grunted on the ice-pocked island. Hauling themselves out of the water they took on a rosy hue as their blood rushed to cool them down – it was easy to see why their Latin name means 'pink tooth walker'.

Cruising around Baffin Island we called at Cape Dorset, a place made famous as a centre for Inuit art by artist James Houston in the 1950s. Low brooding clouds gave the mountain-ringed town an uneasy air that whispered of social problems and didn't tally with the beautiful carvings we saw being created, or the striking prints on display in the art co-op.

The art was fascinating, but our expedition team was keen to spot wildlife, so we detoured back across Hudson Strait to the narrow grey fjord of Douglas Harbour to stalk caribou. Here, a rough beach led to rapids peppered with rocks; we carefully picked our way across and climbed over

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OUR LAND
NUNAVIK & NUNAVUT

Nunavik is a region the size of France in northern Québec. It was formed in 1975, as part of Canada's first modern land rights treaty.

It took a protracted court battle over hydroelectric construction work (and a further two years of negotiations) for representatives of the Canadian and Québec governments, the Cree and Inuit, to get together to sign the James Bay and Northern Québec agreement. The Inuit gained hunting and land ownership rights, CA$90m compensation was paid over 20 years, and Nunavik's Kativik regional government and school board were created. Compensation was managed by the Mavivik Corporation, which now majority-owns tourism businesses in the region, including Cruise North and two airlines.

Nunavut (meaning 'Our Land'), which encompasses Baffin Island and a fifth of Canada, is the country's newest self-governed territory. It was formed in 1999 from parts of the North West Territories, following 20 years of negotiations. It's home to nearly 30,000 people, around 83% of which are Inuit.

Lee Narraway; Stephen Gorman; Jean Weller; Gerraint James

loose stones to reach a waterfall, where a solitary pair of caribou antlers moved across the yawning valley.

Follow the bear

Polar bears remained high on everyone's wish list, so the last two days of the voyage were dedicated to finding more of the gracefully menacing creatures. We cruised back to Baffin Island's Nannuk Harbour. Nannuk means 'polar bear', so this optimistic name – combined with piles of sun-bleached bones and the chirrup of radio alerts – filled us with hope of another close encounter. After an uphill trek over moss-encrusted rocks, powered by the restorative qualities of bittersweet mountain sorrel, we were rewarded with the sight of a bear lumbering leisurely across a patch of ice on the other side of the fjord.

Mother Nature still had a few surprises in store for us on our final expedition. As we Zodiaced through the russet rocks of the lower Savage Islands, which slumped around us like a collapsed soufflé, a ringed seal wriggled on an iceberg and turned to look at us, its inquisitive face resembling a dog in a scuba mask. Another had not been so lucky; a polar bear emerged on an outcrop above, a bloody flipper hanging from its mouth.

Another bear joined us for the last leg of our journey, paddling furiously between ice floes as we cruised past Frobisher Bay's dark mountains, wedged with glaciers and ice mirages that stood like skyscrapers on the horizon. Frobisher mistook this bay for the Northwest Passage in the 1570s and was thus disappointed when he reached Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital – our final destination.

At the little airport, we waited for our flight with one of the Inuit trainees, Adam. He was adamant that nothing beats caribou fur when it comes to winter camping gear, and said he'd consider using throat-singing in his metal band if they made an album. He also started to tell me about his first solo caribou-hunting trip.

"How do you track them?" I asked, picturing him eyeing footprints in the snow.

He gave me an exasperated look: "Sat nav."

I should've guessed: Adam personifies the easy integration of the contemporary Inuit generation – he's someone well connected, to both the past and the internet. ■

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CANADA Footnotes

It's not easy to access the far north of Canada alone – here's how best to cruise the Arctic waters, and what to pack for the journey

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Ottawa
Population: 33 million
Language: English, French (plus Inuktitut in Nunavut)
Time: GMT-5 Eastern Time (March-Nov GMT-4)
International dialling code: +001
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Canadian dollar (CAD$), currently around CAD$1.6 to the UK£. Most communities in the far noth have an ATM at the local co-op and the Cape Dorset art co-op accepts credit cards, but it's best to take cash. Cruise North accepts CAD$ or credit cards onboard.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

Apr-Sept: Summer is the best time to go, with long days and 24-hour sunlight near the Arctic Circle. Melting sea ice means that Cruise North can operate, although fog and other weather conditions can affect routes. Expect changeable weather, but generally temperatures range from 4-18°C.

Oct-Mar: Through the winter communities are generally only accessible by air or Skidoo. Some airports are not equipped for instrument landings so expect flight delays if visibility is bad. There are few daylight hours and it can get bitterly cold, temperatures averaging -20 to -30°C.

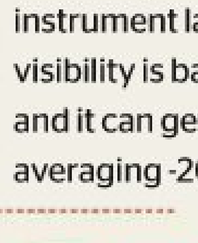
Heath & safety

Cruise North requires passengers to be covered for medical evacuation on their travel insurance.

Further reading & information

The Nunavut Handbook (Ayaya Marketing, 2004) covers everything from how to reach Nunavut to spiritual attitudes.

The Arctic: A Guide to Coastal Wildlife (Bradt, 2005) is useful for wildlife spotting.



Cape Dorset Sculpture (D&M Publishers, 2005) is a solid introduction to Inuit art.

www.nunavuttourism.com
www.canada.travel

THE TRIP

Getting there

The author travelled with Cruise North (+001 416 789 3752, www.cruisenorthexpeditions.com). The ten-night itinerary included meals onboard, twin cabin and all excursions.

In 2011 *Arctic Safaris* run in July and August between Kangerlussmaq in Greenland and Puvirnituq in Québec. A similar itinerary would cost approx $6,645 (£4,129pp) plus tax, based on two sharing.

Air Canada has daily direct flights from Heathrow to Montréal (0871 220 1111, www.aircanada.com); other airlines fly non-direct routes. Average price is from £700 return; flight time is six to seven hours.

From Montréal First Air (+001 800 267 1247, www.firstair.ca) flies daily to Kuujjuaq; Air Inuit (+001 800 361 5933, www.airinuit.com) flies three times a week. Flights take approximately three hours and start at around $1,600 (£996) return. Flights to and from Montréal for the new 2011 *Arctic Safaris* cost from $1,160 (£722).

Getting around

Not surprisingly, there are no road networks – ships or planes are the only options. Cruise North organises airport transfers and land excursions.

Cost of travel

This is a seriously remote area: everything has to be imported and prices reflect this. A tip of $10 per person per day is suggested. Tips are not included in the cost of the cruise.

Accommodation

Cabins on Cruise North are twin or triple with en suites. Most communities have an inn or hotel.

Food & drink

Onboard, the chef cooks up hearty dishes using moose and Arctic char. Restaurants have caribou, seal or whale on the menu. You might get the chance to try dried fish, meat and blubber during community visits.

What to pack

You will need base layers, waterproofs, rubber boots for wet landings, binoculars, sunglasses, insect repellent, gloves with handgrips and a small backpack.

From the archives

Exploring Nunavut – issue 40, Jun/Jul 00
Mark Carwardine in Nunavut – issue 99, Nov 08
Polar bears, Churchill – issue 111, Apr/May 10

CRUISING CANADA

Northwest Passage

Sail through the fabled polar deserts of the Northwest Passage, starting at Resolute Bay in the High Arctic and passing the islands lining the route across the Arctic Ocean, which links the Atlantic and Pacific.

Inside Passage

Cruise through the Queen Charlotte Islands on Canada's densely forested Pacific Northwest coast, up to glacial Alaska. Many major cruise lines run this route from Vancouver in the summer, or you can hop on ferries and do a DIY version instead.

Baffin Island/Greenland

Do as the Inuit once did and sail from Canada's lower Arctic and Baffin Island across Davis Straits to Greenland.

East Atlantic Coast

More for city adventurers than hardcore explorers, a trip down Canada's Atlantic coast is often combined with a New England route on autumn itineraries.

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Fiona Pearce, Audley Canada Specialist

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The Inca Trails

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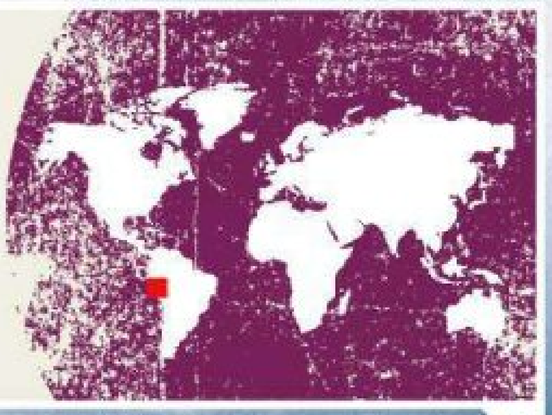
Go May-June – dry, with fewer hikers



TRAVEL ICON

MACHU PICCHU

It's 100 years since Hiram Bingham stumbled on the Lost City of the Incas, and a world wonder was revealed. High time to see it for yourself

Words **Chris Moss**

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Inca Trails

By the time I got to the Sun Gate I was almost too shattered to take in the view. I'd arrived at this quasi-mythic entrance to the Machu Picchu site via the High Inca Trail, a gruelling but spectacular seven-night hike combining the highest passes of the classic Inca Trail with an even higher pass on the eastern flank of mighty Salcantay Mountain. My thighs were tingling, my calves burning, as I hobbled towards this much-hyped viewpoint.

And there before me was... a gaggle of Berghaus-red tourists and, beyond them, a hazy, greyish and rather distant mountain. Beneath it were the stone walls, primitive monuments and tiny doorways that confirmed I was, indeed, looking at South America's premier tourist site.

To be honest, your first experience of Machu Picchu can be a bit of a let down.

But, stay awhile. Do a guided tour, let the weather mix with the archaeology, and you'll start seeing something of the wonder of the place. You even begin to enjoy the way those clouds cause shadows to fall on certain sections and add depth to the view. '*¡Qué chévere!*', you'll proclaim – the lovely Peruvian expression for anything that is magnificent or deeply pleasurable.

For despite the other tourists and often inclement weather, Machu Picchu – both a natural and a cultural Unesco World Heritage site – is a truly breathtaking construction. The setting is jaw-dropping, the architecture mindbogglingly intricate and audaciously organic. The sheer size and ambition of the enterprise continues to astound some 400,000 visitors a year.

Once you're inside the walls, only the most cold-hearted would fail to be moved by the sight of clouds swirling round the peak of Huayna Picchu, the mountain that seems to provide the model for the pyramidical forms of the fortifications, roofs and religious structures. Then there are the hundreds of terraces, once sown with quinoa and potato, and now used by grazing llamas that will happily pose for that perfect Peruvian holiday snap.

The most fitting way to arrive at Machu Picchu is on foot, via one of the many trails that lead here. Walking allows you to soak up the natural beauty of the region, and introduces you to the smaller sites en route – the hillfort at Huillca Raccay, the water channels at Sayacmarca – which act as an overture for the big one. When you reach Machu Picchu itself, you're an 'Inca Trailer' – and you can't help but feel just a little superior to those who came by train and bus. You have followed the footprints of the Incas and earned your glorious arrival at the ultimate lost city. Here's how to get started... ›

MACHU PICCHU
A POTTED HISTORY

Machu Picchu means Old or Big Mountain, and actually alludes to the 3,000m peak to the south of the Inca citadel. The fortified city was constructed on a saddle between this peak and 2,720m Huayna Picchu (Little or Young Mountain) around AD 1400-1450, and was a small settlement, with an estimated population of around 1,000. Just 80km from Cuzco, the Inca capital, it was one of several urban centres in the Sacred Valley of the Urubamba River.

Pizarro's *conquistadores* penetrated the region in the 1530s but it seems they never found the site. However, by 1572, Machu Picchu was abandoned to the jungle anyway; smallpox may have decimated the population.

There is no further record of the site until 1875, when French explorer Charles Wiener wrote of Inca ruins at a place called Huayna Picchu; he never reached them.

American adventurer Hiram Bingham arrived in Cuzco in 1911, intent on finding the cities of Vitcos, the last refuge of Manco Inca, and Vilcabamba, the last Inca city to be conquered by the Spanish. In July 1911, having first stumbled upon Choquequirao, Bingham arrived at Machu Picchu.

In 2008 it was proved that German settler Augusto Berns knew of – and looted – Machu Picchu in the 1860s. But it is Bingham who brought the Lost City to the world's attention.

Previous page: Jacob Halaska/Photolibrary. This spread: Keith Levit/Photolibrary; Alex Robinson; SIME/Pavan Aldo

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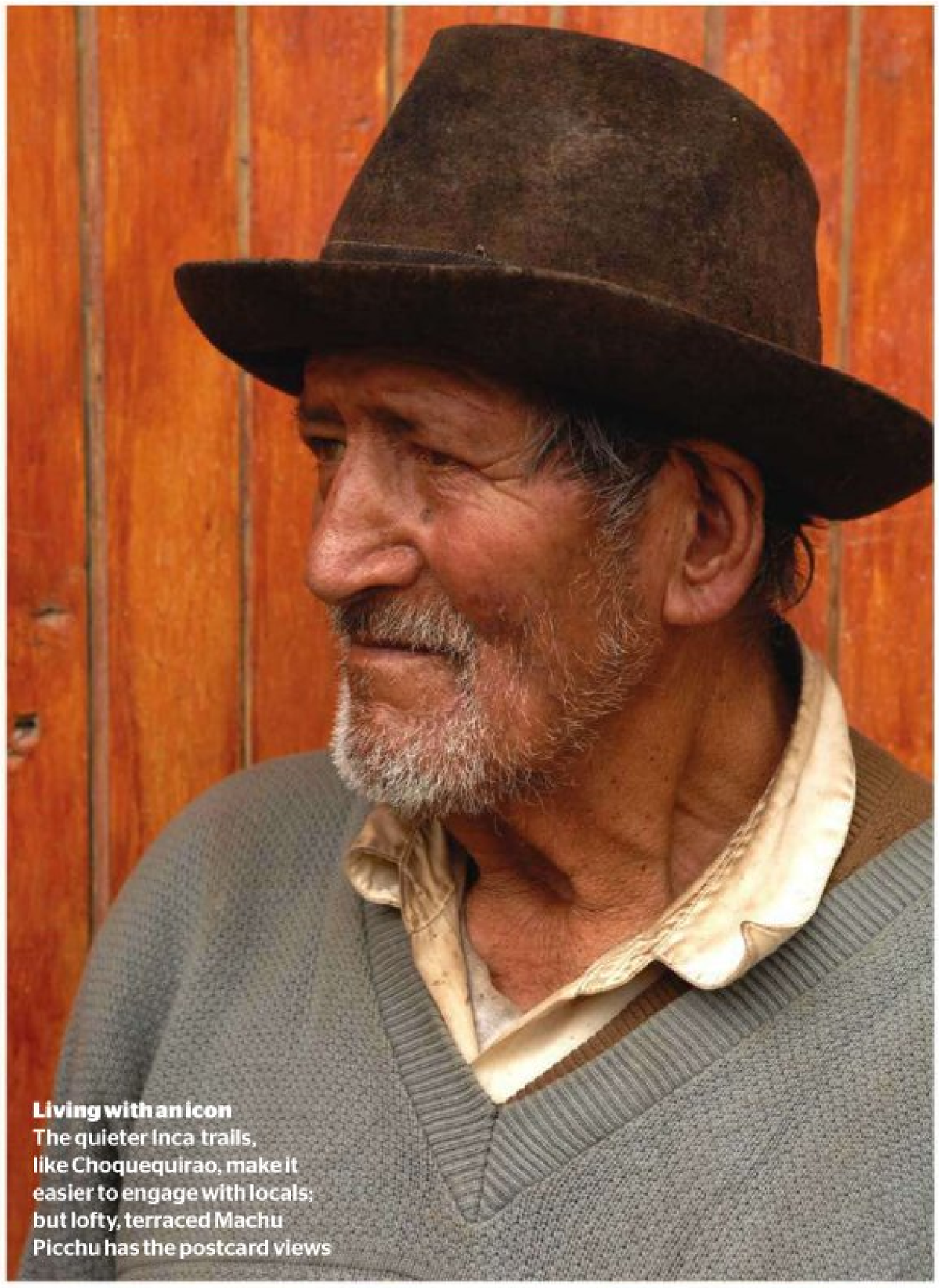
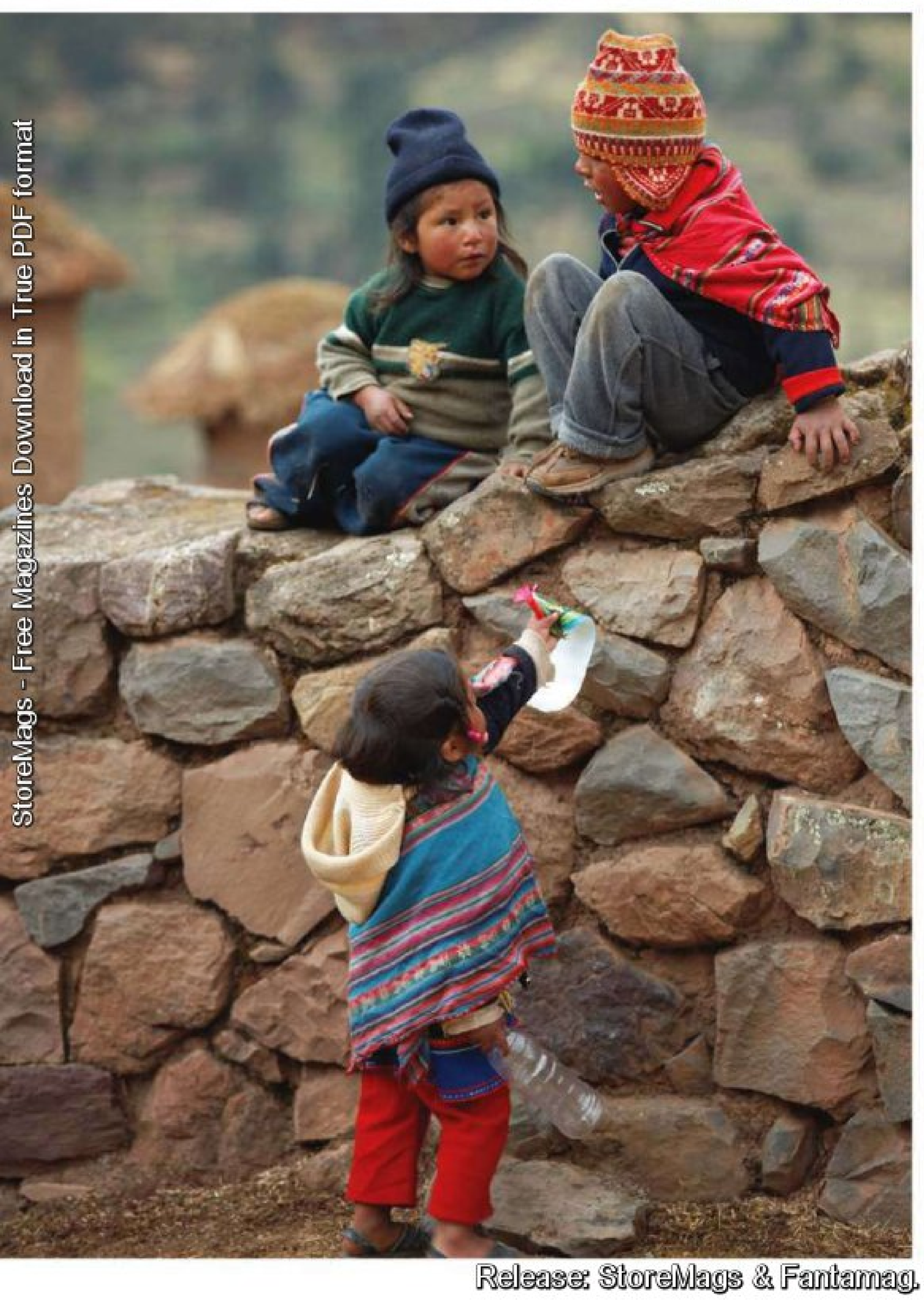


Living with an icon
The quieter Inca trails, like Choquequirao, make it easier to engage with locals; but lofty, terraced Machu Picchu has the postcard views



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The Inca Trails

Whether you have a day or a fortnight, want the classic trail or something more offbeat, here are the best ways of reaching Machu Picchu.
For maps see page 79

‹ Classic Inca Trail

Route: Km88 to Machu Picchu
Distance: 43km
Time: 3-4 days
Why? The iconic route

The starting point for the classic trek is the Km88 train station on the rail line from Cuzco (the regional capital) to Aguas Calientes (the pueblo at the foot of Machu Picchu). Take the train to Km88, cross a footbridge over the Urubamba River and you're off. The first day takes you to either the small campsite at Hatunchaca or the settlement of Huayllabamba, which has more pitches. Serious hikers can continue to the camper-friendly meadow at Llulluchapampa.

On the second day there's a tough hike up Dead Woman's Pass – at 4,200m, the first of three passes and the highest point on the classic trail. For the second night there are campsites early on at Pacamayo (large site) and just past the Runcu Raccay ruins (smaller), though most walkers prefer to tackle a second, 3,950m pass and then sleep at either of the excellent campsites at Chaquicocha and Phuyupatamarca.

Day three takes in a third, 3,650m pass and an Inca tunnel; almost all hikers bed down at the (sometimes congested) campsite of Huinay Huayna. There are cloud forests on the last day, but it's the iconic Sun Gate, or Intipunku, that everyone's heading for – to get that first glimpse of Machu Picchu. Note: it's also possible to extend this walk by starting at the Km82 or Km77 train stops.

Getting started: Numerous UK operators offer this route, including Gap Adventures (www.gapadventures.com), Select Latin America (www.selectlatinamerica.co.uk) and Tucan Travel (www.tucantravel.co.uk). Andean Adventures (www.andeanadventuresperu.com) and Condor Travel (www.condortravel.com) are respected Cuzco-based agencies.

TOP TIP: BOOK WELL IN ADVANCE

Everyone on the classic Inca Trail needs a permit – numbers are restricted to 500 a day. Book 2-5 months in advance, and even longer for peak-season (July-August).

Cooler climbs
Wrap up warm for the lofty Salcantay Trail – one pass is named simply 'The Pass where the Inca Got Cold'

MULES & PORTERS

Beasts of burden are banned for all but the first day of the classic Inca Trail, though are permitted on all other routes. After that, you either carry your own stuff or rely on porters, who are permitted to carry up to 20kg on their backs (plus 5kg of personal effects)

Porters are aged from 18 to 60 (no children allowed), and those employed by reputable firms are paid relatively well: approximately $15 a day.

In preparation for your walk, discard all unnecessary belongings to lighten your porter's load, and take a daypack for your essentials (see page 78).

Always move towards the mountain when porters pass, and allow them to keep walking – or rather, jogging – at their natural pace. Don't move towards the cliff edge: a bulky pack borne by a porter could send you flying down to the valley below.

Whole communities depend on porters for their livelihoods, and they often belong to proud teams, denoted by uniforms or football-style strips.

High Inca Trail (aka Salcantay Trail)

Route: Mollepata to Machu Picchu
Distance: 69km
Time: 6-7 days
Why? High altitude crowd evasion

This walk, for fit hikers only, gives you four days on a lonely trek with few fellow hikers, including a tough climb to the top of the near-5,000m Inca Chiriasq'ua Pass ('The Pass Where the Inca Got Cold') before joining the classic trail at Huayllabamba – so you get to summit Dead Woman's Pass too. The early stages take in some outstanding views, including a close-up encounter with the mighty Salcantay (6,270m), a campsite beside an Inca canal and a small but impressive Inca site at Paucarchanca. Note: the Inca Chiriasq'ua Pass occasionally gets blocked by snow.

Getting started: Chris Moss travelled on the High Inca Trail with Exodus (0845 863 9601, www.exodus.co.uk). The 16-day trip also includes a stay in Cuzco and Sacred Valley excursions. From £2,509pp incl. flights; next departure 14 May 2011.›

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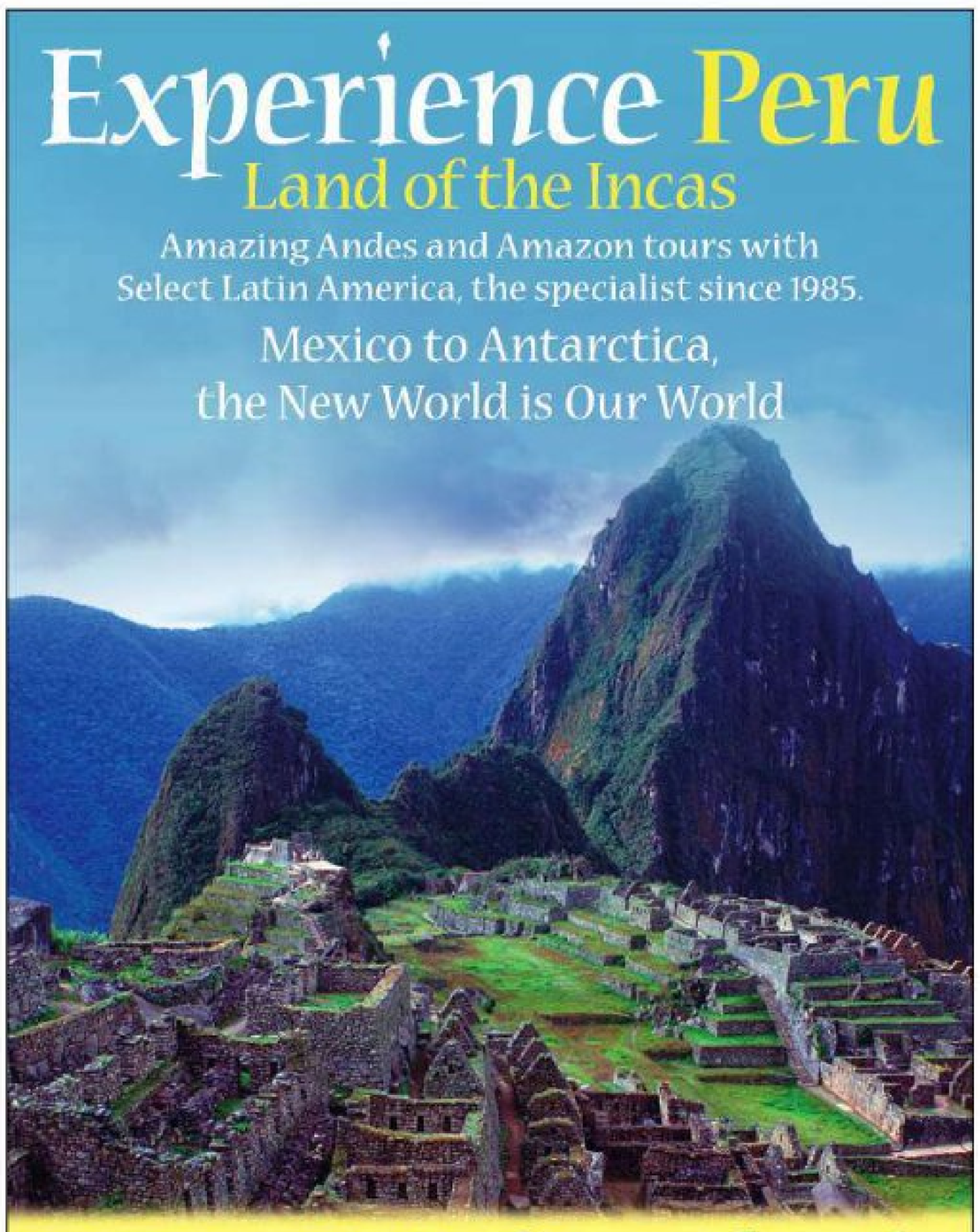

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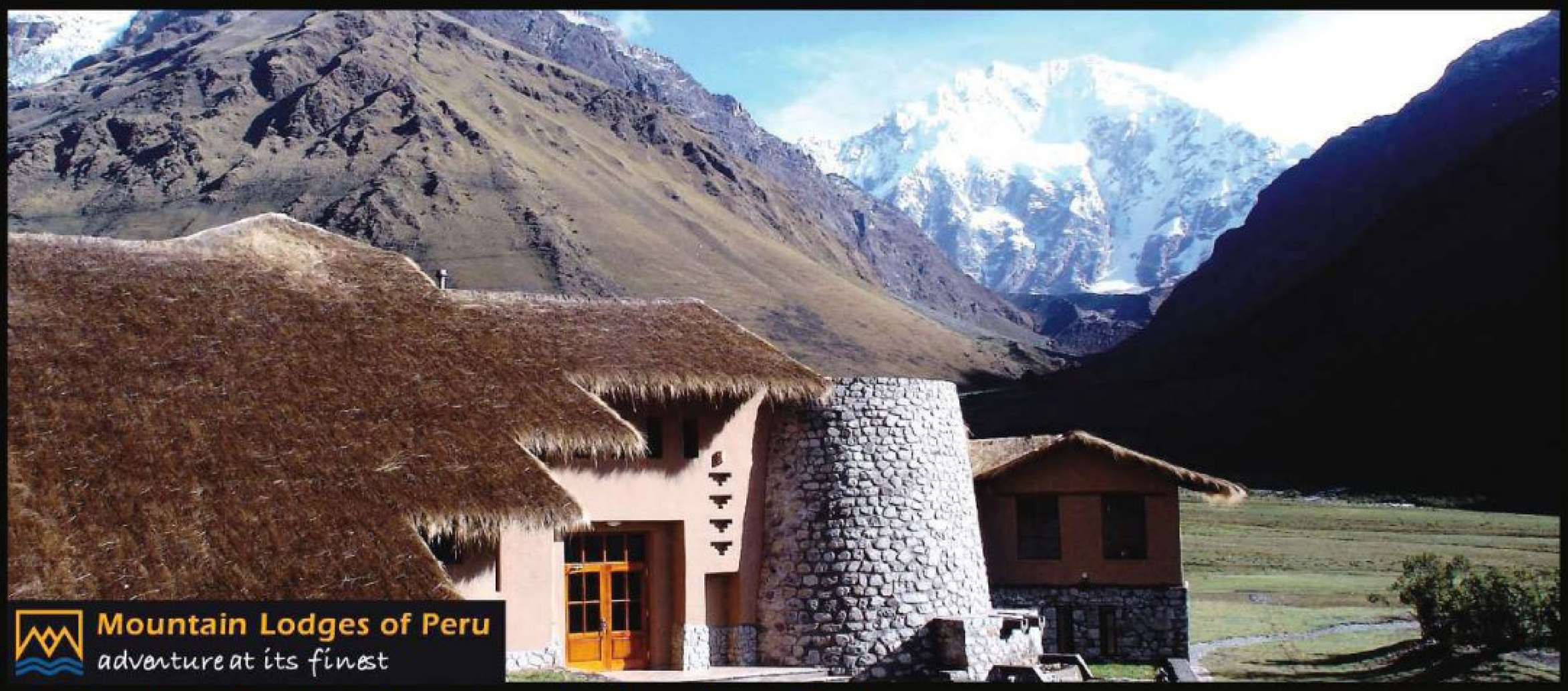

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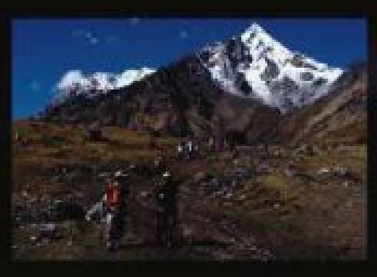

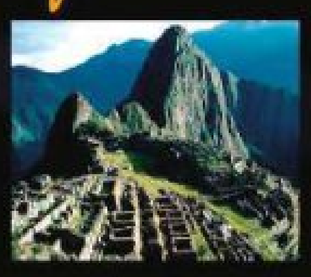

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Where did everyone go? Choquequirao is another major Inca site that receives just 1% of Machu Picchu's 400,000 annual visitors

‹ Camino Real Trail (aka Santa Teresa Trek)

Route: Soraypampa to La Hidroeléctrica train station
Distance: 62km
Time: 3-6 days
Why? Tough walk crossing a 4,638m pass, but with fewer tourists than the classic trail – and soft mattresses at the end of the day; no Inca Trail permit hassles

Austro-Peruvian company Mountain Lodges of Peru (MLP) has built four large, well-appointed faux-rustic hotels along a trail from Soraypampa, at the base of Salcantay, to Lucmabamba, close to the hydroelectric railway station (which has a frequent service to Aguas Calientes for Machu Picchu). The first lodge can be reached by car/minibus so it's a quick way into the heart of the mountains, from which there's a tough initial climb up to a collar beneath Salcantay and then a hard but relatively slow-paced walk through a range of montane landscapes.

It is possible to walk this trail without using the MLP lodges and some tour groups do tackle it using tents and mules. As there is no government regulation of the route, it's also theoretically possible to walk it independently, though securing mules (at Mollepata) can be tricky in high season. Weather conditions are unpredictable and the high altitude can cause problems – if tackling the Santa Teresa Trek without a registered guide, prepare very carefully indeed.

Getting started: Mountain Lodges of Peru (www.mountainlodgesofperu.com) runs regular fixed departures year round, from US$2,560 (£1,626) including guides, accommodation and entry to Machu Picchu.

TOP TIP: TAKE A BATH
Post-trek, take an early evening bath in the hot springs at Aguas Calientes – they're very easy-going, and you're brought pisco sours and beers while you soothe your weary muscles.

Choquequirao to Machu Picchu

Route: Cachora to La Hidroeléctrica train station
Distance: 100km
Time: 8-10 days
Why? See another great, tourist-free citadel en route

This up-and-down hike allows you to tick off two major Inca sites in one go. Starting at the village of Cachora, 60km south-east of Machu Picchu, the first few days involve steep descents and ascents to the beautiful, quiet Inca site of Choquequirao (meaning 'Cradle of Gold', in probable reference to the effect of dawn and dusk light striking the mountain saddle). The trail then runs north-east towards Machu Picchu, along rarely-used trails traversing dry savannah, cloud forest and llama-grazed high pasture. It winds up to the San Juan Pass (4,400m), then climbs even further alongside the Rio Yanama (views of Machu Picchu, weather permitting), before descending into the Santa Teresa Valley for the final leg along the Camino Real (left). Note: it's also possible to visit Choquequirao on a four-day return trek from Cachora, or a nine-day walk from Huancacalle.

Getting started: Various UK operators run trips including Choquequirao – try Audley (www.audleytravel.com), KE Adventure (www.keadventure.com), Mountain Kingdoms (www.mountainkingdoms.com) and Wilderness Journeys (www.wildernessjourneys.com). ›

Alex Robinson

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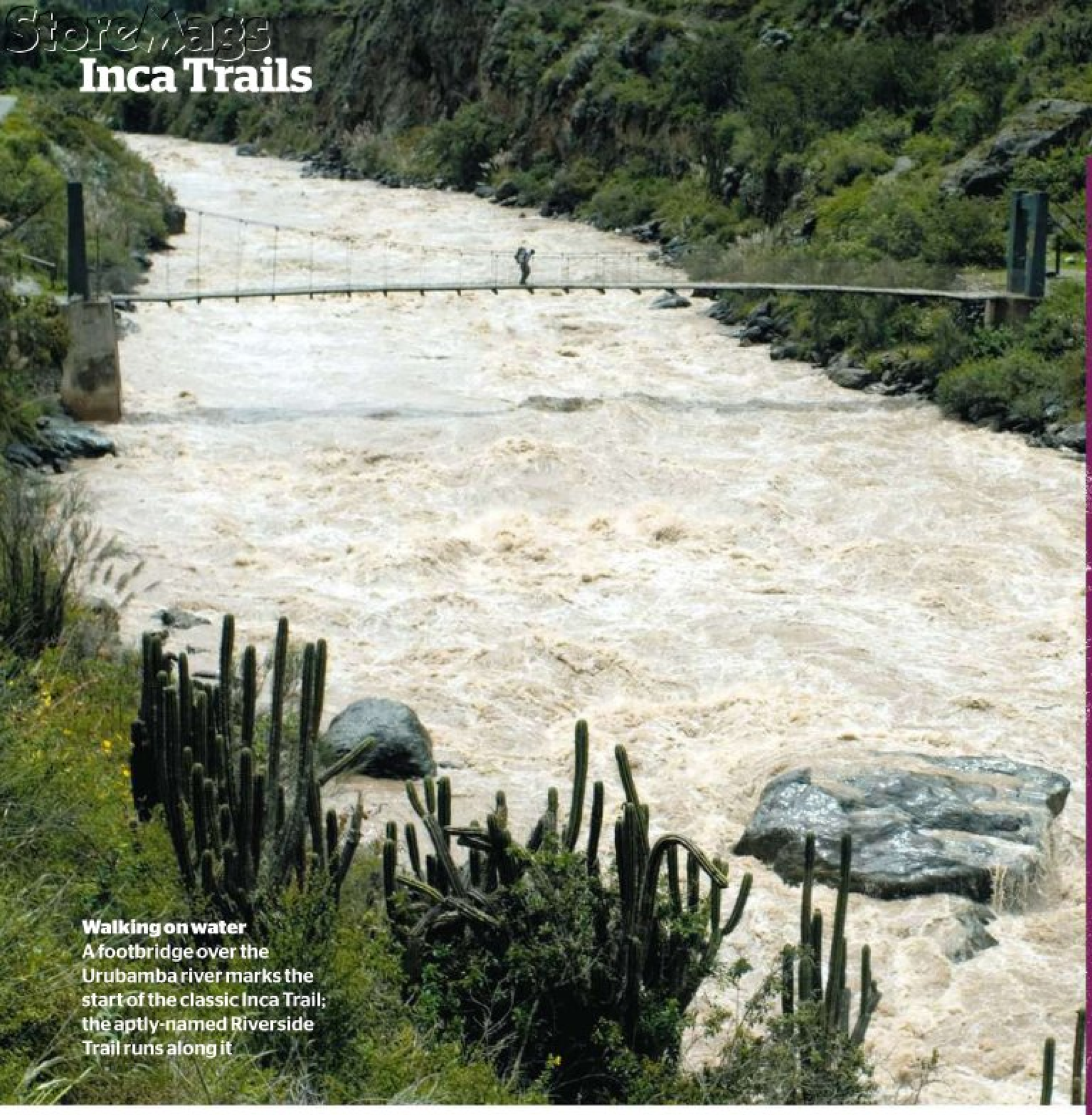

Walking on water
A footbridge over the Urubamba river marks the start of the classic Inca Trail; the aptly-named Riverside Trail runs along it

TAKE THE TRAIN TO THE TRAILS

Most travellers heading for Machu Picchu take a bus from Cuzco to Ollantaytambo, where they board the train towards Aguas Calientes (1 hour 45 mins). Note: the train no longer runs from Cuzco, following complaints from locals about traffic and safety. Train buffs may prefer to board at Poroy, just north of Cuzco, to make the journey longer (just over 3 hours).

If you're walking the classic Inca Trail you can take a bus to Km82 or the train as far as Km88; you can then catch the train back from Aguas Calientes. There is no road between Km82 and Aguas Calientes, though in September 2010 Peruvian newspapers reported that the government was investigating allowing road access – see www.perurail.com

The *Backpacker* is the bog-standard service, with little or no food on board; *Expedition* is new, with slightly bigger windows; *Vistadome* has comfy seats, partly transparent ceiling, and drinks and snacks on sale; the *Hiram Bingham* is luxurious, with pisco sours, snacks, a live band and space to move around. One-way Ollantaytambo-Aguas Calientes tickets cost from $31 on Backpacker, $34 on Expedition and $50 on Vistadome.

‹ Mini Inca Trail & Purification or Royal Trail

Route: Km104 to Machu Picchu
Distance: 10km
Time: 1-2 days
Why? Short and relatively painless way to get an Inca Trail experience and spy Machu Picchu from the Sun Gate; also, it's open in February

If you want to arrive at Machu Picchu on foot but can't spare a week, there are a couple of short options. The easiest option is to get off the train from Cuzco at Km104 (Chachabamba) and walk for three hours to join the classic route, close to the campsite at Huinay Huayna.

An alternative short trail, known as the Royal or Purification Trail – high-caste Incas used the route for ceremonial purposes – follows a riverside path to Choquesuysuy before making a tougher ascent to Huinay Huayna. As well as ruins at Chachabamba, both trails take in the Intipata terraces and the Sun Gate.

Getting started: Journey Latin America (www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers this route as a two-day option, spending the night at a hotel, from £412 (www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk). Also try Llama Travel (www.llamatravel.com).

Machu Picchu only

Route: Train to Aguas Calientes, minibus to Machu Picchu, walking tour of site
Distance: Up to 10km
Time: 1 day
Why? Less hiking, more history

Don't think the Machu Picchu site is a stroll. If you walk all the way up to the Sun Gate, then visit the whole site, and lunch inside before doing further walks in the afternoon, you'll easily notch up 10km. If you're feeling exceptionally fit, go early and sign up for the hike to the top of verdant, vertiginous Huayna Picchu – only 400 people a day are allowed to climb the steep peak; you are recommended to be at the site by 7am to join the queue.

Note: you can walk up and down from Aguas Calientes – lots of backpackers do this to save the return bus fare of US$14 – but the walk is boring, steep and potentially dangerous, as the path crosses the main road, full of switchbacks and tricky corners, many times.

TOP TIP: LINGER AT MACHU PICCHU
If you're visiting for the day, don't rush back to Cuzco on the last train. After 4pm the site grows quiet: enjoy the silence, then stay the night at Aguas Calientes.

Getting started: For train information see www.perurail.com. Entrance to Machu Picchu costs S/128.00 (£29).

Riverside Trail

Route: Km88 to Machu Picchu
Distance: 20km
Time: 2-3 days
Why? Mainly low-level, scenic trek, that's crowd – and, generally, slope – free

From Km88 you can follow a trail beside the Urubamba River all the way to Km104, where you join the Mini Inca Trail. You miss some ruins but avoid steep climbs, and have only the ascent to Huinay Huayna to negotiate. You can camp along the way at the warden's post by the Pacamayo River and at the ruins at Chachabamba.

Getting started: For further details of the trail, see the new edition of the Trailblazer guide to *The Inca Trail* (out January 2011). ›

Aaron Mccoy/ Robert Harding

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE **SACRED VALLEY**

Cuzco, the former imperial capital – its name means 'Navel of the World' in Quechua – is the ideal place to start a trip, not least because, perched at 3,400m, it will help you acclimatise. The city has several impressive sites: must-sees include the Museo Inka, the Koricancha Museum (sometime temple to the Sun God and later a convent) and the impressive cathedral.

Sacsayhuamán, about 2km outside Cuzco, is a huge Inca military site that some visitors find even more extraordinary than Machu Picchu – not least because of the way huge granite slabs were brought here.

On the **Sacred Valley Road**, which runs north-west from Cuzco, the towns of Ollantaytambo, Moray and Chinchero have Inca sites; on the road from Cuzco to Pisac – to the north-east of the city – are four smaller Inca ruins that can all be seen in a day by taxi/bus.

En route, stop off at a **chichería** (pub) to try the local maize-based brew, and try a roasted *cuy* (guinea pig) in a local restaurant. Indigenous **markets** – in particular the one at Pisac – are lively, colourful and essential trading hubs for the rural population.

Around the main roads and trails of the Sacred Valley, there are many **Inca sites**; Peruvian operators Amazonas Explorer (www.amazonas-explorer.com) and InkaNatura (www.inkanatura.com) offer two/three day walks along the Lares or Weavers' Way to the east of the Urubamba range, which takes in hot springs, beautiful fertile valleys and the early-Inca site of Pumamarca.

A range of seven- to 11-day treks around 6,384m **Ausangate** includes high passes, low oxygen and remote camping. As these walks don't use any of the classic Inca Trail they can be done in February. Contact Exodus, KE Adventure and High Places (www.highplaces.co.uk).

To explore the Sacred Valley on **horseback** contact Equine Adventures (www.equineadventures.co.uk) or Ride Worldwide (www.rideworldwide.com). **Archaeology** lovers should check out Andante's specialised tours of the Sacred Valley (www.andantetravels.co.uk). **Birdwatchers** may enjoy one of Naturetrek's specialised Machu Picchu itineraries (www.naturetrek.co.uk).

Those interested in **volunteering** will find plenty of opportunities, from working with special needs students at Kiya Survivors' Rainbow Centre (www.kiyasurvivors.org) to helping out at local schools and on archaeology projects.

This gate marks the main entrance to the city.

The Sacred Plaza is the site of the finest structures at Machu Picchu. The Temple of the Three Windows is to the right, and the Chief Temple is in the Centre.

The Intihuatana – the 'hitching post of the sun' is a solar observatory that was designed by Inca Priests as part of a ritual to ensure the return of the sun after the Winter Solstice. Sadly, part of the dial was chipped off when a careless cameraman let his camera swing into the post during the filming of a Peruvian beer commercial.

The quarry. Different types of rock: granite, andesite, basalt, boulders and hematitas, among others, were used in construction work. Inca stonework was remarkable. Blocks, sometimes with as many as 32 corners, fit snugly together without using mortar, making buildings more resistant to earthquakes.

The Watchman's Hut (aka the Guard's House), from where this photo is taken, is the best spot for the classic shot of Machu Picchu, with great views of the whole complex.

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Machu Picchu explained

Wanderlust guide of the year **Peter Selman**, of Journey Latin America, decodes the picture-postcard view everyone wants to see

Huayna Picchu, meaning 'Young Peak' in Quechua, rises 2,720m above sea level, and is about 300m higher than the Machu Picchu site. These were the names used by the local people when Hiram Bingham rediscovered the site in 1911. The original names remain a mystery. Huayna Picchu is believed to have been the residence for the high priest and the local virgins.

The Sacred Rock marks the northern end of the city and is the beginning of the trail to Huayna Picchu. Entrance to the trail is limited to 400 visitors per day for safety reasons, and closes at 1pm. Go early (preferably before 8am) to avoid disappointment.
The steep, tricky one-hour hike is worth it for some stunning views of Machu Picchu and the surrounding valley.

The Temple of the Sun. Was used for important religious ceremonies during the Winter Solstice. This may have been the mausoleum of the Inca Emperor Pachacutec.

The Temple of the Condor is composed of a group of buildings and caves with evidence of ceremonial importance and has a large carved rock representing a condor in the centre of the main patio.

Terraces designed for agricultural purposes flank Machu Picchu on either side. A cemetery was found in the lowest terraced section, and of 135 skeletons, 109 were identified as female.

Path to the Sun Gate (a steep 45-minute walk). This is the end of the Inca Trail, and the Sun Gate, at 2,720m above sea level, is the first view of Machu Picchu people arriving from Cuzco would have had.

The road to Aguas Calientes – a 20-minute bus trip along a winding road down the side of a mountain. Spectacular views of the mountains, including Huayna Picchu, Putu Cusi, and the Sun Gate. If you have time, don't miss the Machu Picchu museum, next to the bridge across the Urubamba River.

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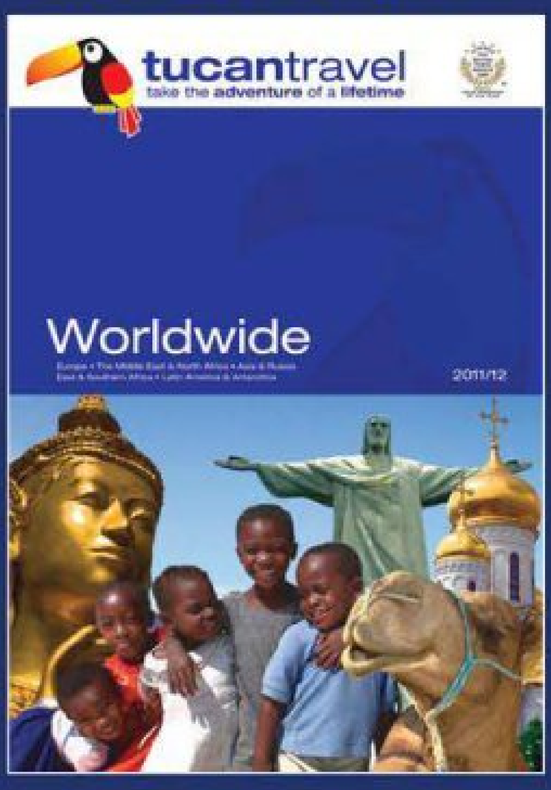

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Planning your trip

When to go

The Inca Trail is closed for the whole of February every year for repairs and conservation. The rainy season is October to March; temperatures at high altitude at this time can drop below freezing. April to September is drier, but attracts the crowds: Machu Picchu can be very busy. From a cost point of view, the high season runs from mid-April to the end of October, and the last two weeks of December. May-June is the best period, with low rainfall and cooler lows; it's also slightly before the peak summer holiday season.

Tour group or go it alone?

TOP TIP: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

If you're walking the classic Inca Trail, ask your tour leader if you can set off in the late morning, to enjoy the peace after the hordes have gone through.

In response to concerns about the erosion of the Inca Trail, in 2001 the Peruvian authorities limited the number of walkers to 500 a day. This number includes guides and porters, who make up around two-thirds of a typical group. Most groups are limited to 12-16 walkers, though you may meet groups with as many as 25 trekkers. Some of the campsites – in particular Huinay Huayna – can be noisy and congested.

It is possible to walk the Inca Trail independently, but all groups must be accompanied by one licensed guide for every seven hikers. If you do decide to walk without porters, pack light and prepare for steep climbs and long days – between campsites there can be 8-10km, or five to seven hours, of walking. Many hikers discover after day one that they aren't quite as strong as they thought, hence the porters at Huayllabamba touting their services for the steep walk over Dead Woman's Pass.

Drinks are sold at some points during the first two days of walking – the price increases the further you get from the trailhead. The public loos are pretty awful; one big advantage of going with an organised group is access to clean portable toilets. Human waste is removed by porters.

To ensure you obtain your Inca Trail permit, apply at least two months in advance, and ideally five months – for the peak months of July and August, even earlier if possible. If you turn up in Cuzco in the last months of the rainy season (January or March) you may be able to get a permit from a local agency five or six days in advance of a trek departure, but last-minute spaces are rare indeed. Permits cost $88 (£54).

It's far easier to go with a UK tour operator and let them manage the paperwork. For a wide choice, see the Latin American Travel Association's website (www.lata.org), www.aito.co.uk or www.wanderlust.co.uk. ›

High drama
Altitude can take its toll on all the Inca trails – allow time to acclimatise in Cuzco, and pace yourself

Andrea Booher/Getty images. Previous: Keren Su/China Span/Alamy; Pete Selman

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As you have to go with a registered guide, independent travellers need to contact a local agency in any case – there is a useful list at www.andeantravelweb.com/peru/companies/peru/recommended_peru_travel_agencies.html. Always check the guide is registered with the Peruvian Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INC).

Health

Above around 2,000m, *soroche* (altitude sickness) can be a problem. Acclimatising in Cuzco is one way to prepare, though some people suffer even after several days' gentle preparation. The symptoms are not unlike those caused by flu: shortness of breath, headaches, fatigue. Some trekkers find the classic folk remedy of coca leaves – or milder coca tea infusion – helpful. In general, lots of rest and water is required if you begin to feel nauseous; if symptoms persist, it may be necessary to descend to a lower altitude.

There are irritating midges – known locally as *pumahuacachi* or 'the gnat that makes the puma cry' – at Machu Picchu (though less so on the trail, which is higher), so you're advised to cover your neck, legs and arms before visiting.

Alex Robinson

Stomach problems aren't common on group tours – food is carefully packed and sourced.

What to take

For all trails, you will need: good boots; walking poles (especially for coming down the Inca stairways) with rubber tips to prevent damage; a 3-4 season sleeping bag; waterproofs; a warm fleece; lightweight clothing; snacks; water bottles (carrying 2-3 litres); insect repellent; biodegradable loo roll; and wet wipes (there are showers at Huinay Huayna but nowhere else).

For a visit to Machu Picchu itself, take waterproofs, a small daypack (the staff at the entrance sometimes prohibit large packs) and insect repellent.

Nomad (www.nomadtravel.co.uk) offers a free kit-out consultation for mountain trekkers – call your nearest store for details.

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Further reading

The Inca Trail (Trailblazer, 2011), the most detailed guide, with a blow-by-blow account of the classic trail and route maps for all the main alternatives – the new ed., out Jan 2011, has a history of the Incas by Hugh Thomson.

Peru Handbook (Footprint, 2008 – new edition out Feb 2011), all the practical details you need to plan a trip, and usefully concise history and cultural information.

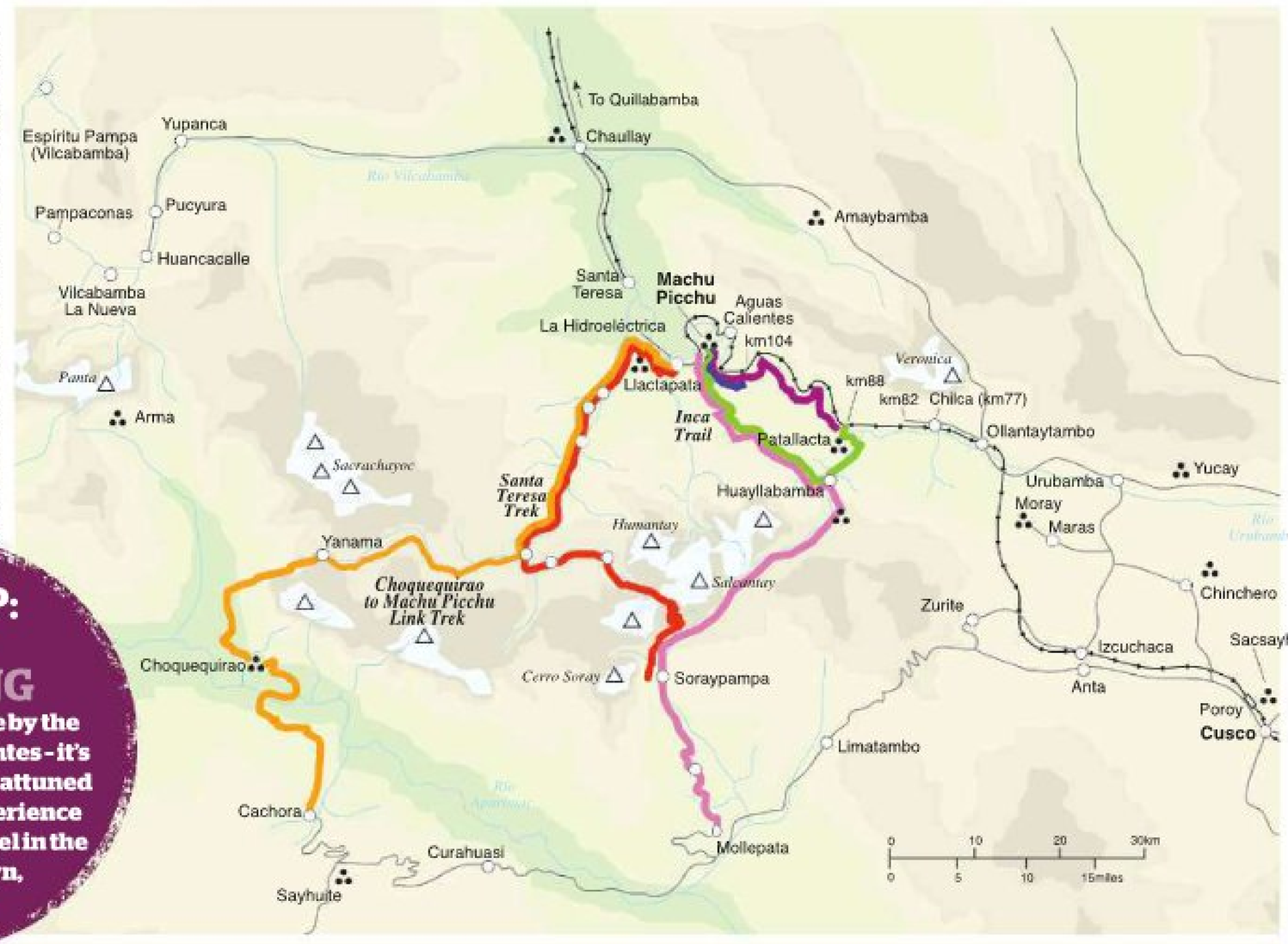
Lost City of the Incas (first pub. 1948) by Hiram Bingham, the classic account of the rediscovery of Machu Picchu.

The Conquest of the Incas (Pan, 2004) by John Hemming, an academic account of Inca history and the end of empire.

White Rock: An Exploration of the Inca Heartland (Phoenix, 2002), by Hugh Thomson, a lively account of exploring the Sacred Valley. ■

TOP TIP: COOL CAMPING

Stay at the campsite by the river in Aguas Calientes - it's calmer and far more attuned to an Inca Trail experience than staying at a hotel in the busy main town, 2km away.



The Inca Trails

- Classic Inca Trail
- High / Salcantay Trail
- Camino Real / Santa Teresa
- Choquequirao to Machu Picchu
- Purification / Royal Trail
- Riverside Trail

Map courtesy of Trailblazer guides (www.trailblazer-guides.com)

From the archives

- **Hiking the Inca Trail** – issue 75, Nov 05
- **The Choquequirao trek** – issue 98, Oct 09
- **The Cordillera Blanca** – issue 80, Jun 06

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Spare your blushes with our etiquette guide to steam-cleaning, Middle East style

1 Choose your service from the price list or, better, go for everything. Payment is up front; there's no time limit. Allow one hour minimum, preferably two. Proper hammams are never mixed, but have separate set hours for men and women. Men never remove their towel from their waist; women can go topless or naked. The modestly inclined can take swimwear.

2 You are given a towel, wooden clogs, soap and a coarse mitt, then shown to the changing area – often a beautiful room with raised benches. Valuables can be locked up. When changed, clip-clop into the warm room to adjust, then pass into the steamy hot room.

3 Find a basin and sit beside it, scooping hot or cold water over yourself and soaping yourself at leisure.

4 When summoned for your massage, lie down on the central hot marble slab; allow yourself to be oiled and pummelled from head to toe.

5 Next, the full body scrub with the coarse mitt, which removes filth – and several layers of skin. After a final soaping into a frothy lather, you're rinsed off. Back in the changing area you are given dry towels and tea; relax as long as you like.

Words: Diana Darke, author of Bradt guides to Syria, Oman, East Turkey and North Cyprus

Keep your kit on
Men never go naked in the bathhouse; women may do so. The sexes are always separated

Did you know...? The Ottoman hammam was the only place where women were permitted to socialise freely – much matchmaking used to take place, with mothers eyeing up potential brides for their sons

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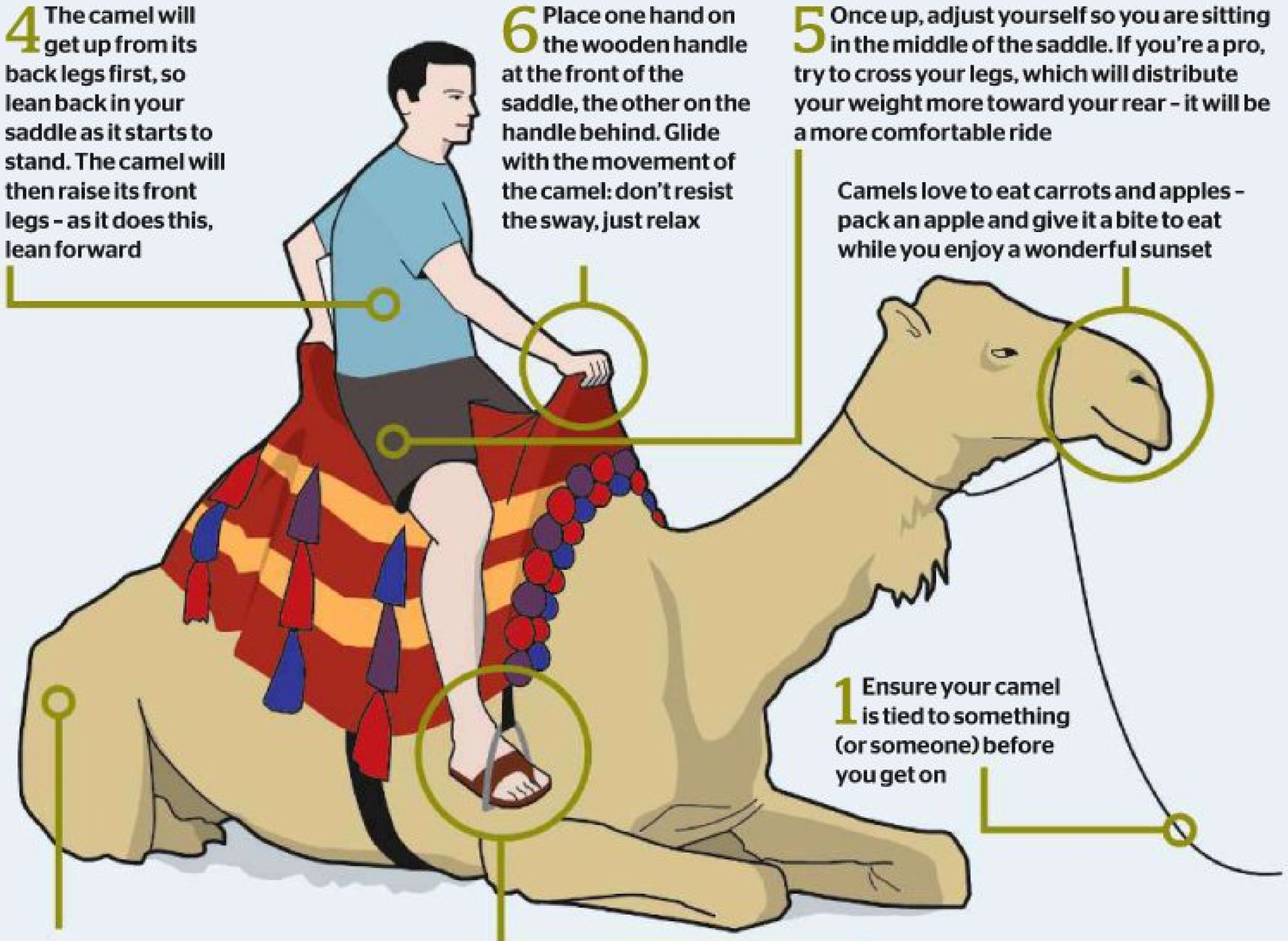
How to **ride a camel**

By Egyptian guide/camel expert **Ehab Ghareb**, who guides for On The Go Tours (**www.onthegotours.com**)



4 The camel will get up from its back legs first, so lean back in your saddle as it starts to stand. The camel will then raise its front legs – as it does this, lean forward

6 Place one hand on the wooden handle at the front of the saddle, the other on the handle behind. Glide with the movement of the camel: don't resist the sway, just relax

5 Once up, adjust yourself so you are sitting in the middle of the saddle. If you're a pro, try to cross your legs, which will distribute your weight more toward your rear – it will be a more comfortable ride

Camels love to eat carrots and apples – pack an apple and give it a bite to eat while you enjoy a wonderful sunset

1 Ensure your camel is tied to something (or someone) before you get on

Camels like to kiss and sniff each other: don't be alarmed if the camel behind comes up close to give your camel a peck on the butt. The camel behind might also like to have a little rub against your leg

2 Walk to the side of your camel – don't stand in front: camels can nibble, sneeze or blow big bubbles of foam from their mouths

3 Swing your leg over the back and place yourself in the middle. There is normally a stirrup (only one) to help you mount. The stirrup is not used in riding – it's only used to assist you in getting on and off

COUNTDOWN TO A TRAVEL RALLY

6 MONTHS TO GO: Ideas & fundraising
Select the rally you want to drive (Rickshaw Run? Mongol Rally?). Then pick a charity. Start badgering people and dream up ingenious fundraising tactics. Building a website and getting your story in the local press will help.

4 MONTHS: Route planning
Pore over maps/drink wine with your team mates. Get an idea of which countries you want to go through (and any you can't – see www.fco.gov.uk) . Talk to people who've done the route before but don't over-plan – situations change all the time.

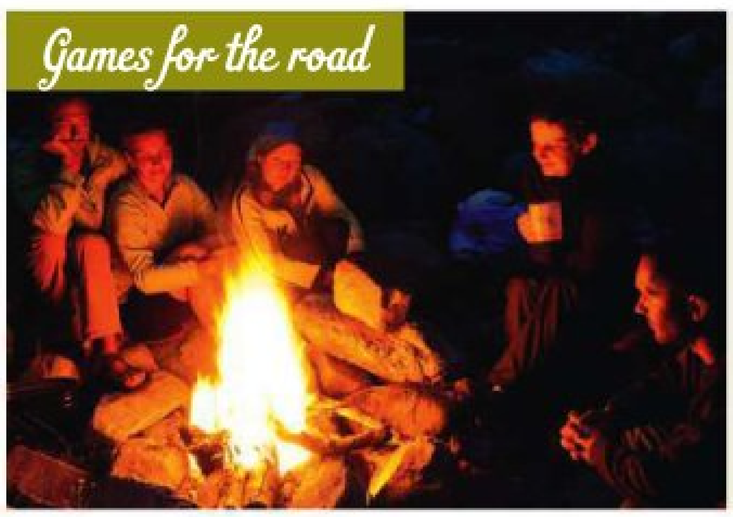
3 MONTHS: Sensible bits
Vaccinations, visas, international driving permits, insurance – find out what you need.

1 WEEK: Equipment
If you're taking your own vehicle, ensure it's pimped and raring to go. Then pack: hip flasks, maps, a jerry can, compass and spanner are all useful.

For rally ideas and more see www.theadventurists.com

Illustration: Luke Webb, Dreamstime.com

Games for the road



Two truths & a lie

This equipment-free parlour game is an ideal icebreaker for groups meeting for the first time. Each player takes it in turn to tell three facts about themselves – "I once forced a plane to make an emergency landing" etc – one of which is a lie. The group then quiz the teller about these facts, and try to guess which is false. NB revelations about your spicy 60s love life or secret stash of Nazi bullion are likely to colour others' opinions about you for the rest of the trip – true or otherwise.

Know your enemy...

Funnel-web spider

Danger rating: Medium. There are 40 species in total; the male Sydney funnel web species (*Atrax robustus*) is responsible for all recorded funnel-web deaths (13) – its venom attacks the nervous system.
Identification: Body length 1-5cm; varies from black to brown; shiny. Burrows have irregular silk trip-lines radiating out from entrance.
Where found: Moist forest regions of east coast Oz. Sydney funnel web found in small area immediately in/near Sydney, often under rocks, logs etc.
Likelihood of encountering: Mostly nocturnal. Rain causes increase in activity. Males wander looking for mates Nov-April – encounters more likely at this time. Often fall into swimming pools.
What to do if bitten: Apply pressure bandage, binding entire limb above and below bite. Apply sling or splint to discourage movement of affected part. Keep victim calm; take them to hospital for antivenom. Keep spider for identification.
For more see **http://australianmuseum.net.au**

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What to pack for the Arctic

1 THE EVERYMAN CRAMPON Fix **Yaktrax Walker** traction cords to your shoes for safe strolls in slippy conditions (£15.99, yaktrax.com) **2 THE ULTIMATE JACKET** At 800+ fill premium goose down, the **Nightfall** is the toastiest coat (£225, rohan.co.uk) **3 THE FINE FLASK** Keep a cuppa warm for 24 hours in the **Stanley Outdoor 1L Vacuum Flask** (£24.99, stanley-pmi.com) **4 THE KIT COSY** These **Padded Cells** are water-resistant, pile-lined stuff bags; use them as emergency mittens, too! (from £4, alpkit.com) **5 THE HOT HAT** The **Mountain Hardwear Compressor Dome Hat** is ferociously warm, even when wet (£20, nomadtravel.co.uk) **6 THE SNOW SPECS** Banish glare and UV with **Polaroid Peak** sunnies (£49.99, polaroidsunglasses.co.uk) **7 THE TRUSTY FLEECE** The **Corey Microfleece** is warm, light, fast-drying – an Arctic staple (£30, craghoppers.com) **8 THE HOT TOP** The **Merino Rapture** keeps bodies snug and stylish (£50, finisterreuk.com) **9 THE FINE THERMALS** The Merino **Bodyfit200 leggings** will keep you warm as you get active in the snow (£47.99, icebreaker.com) **10 THE FLEECY FOOTWEAR** With faux shearling lining and a super-cushioned footbed, the **Hoodoo Mids** keep cold out (£100, keenfootwear.com)

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The art of **snapping sunsets**

The setting sun is a tricky character to capture – professional photographer **Steve Davey** helps you make the most of the moment

Like so many moths, travellers flock to the sun. Every night, so-called 'sunset points' are packed with people staring into the light, peppering the night with weak flashes in a vain attempt to come away with that atmospheric shot. So how do you ensure your pictures of that perfect moment aren't a total let down?

The single most effective way to improve your sunset pictures is to keep the sun out of them. Except at the very last moment, just before it sinks below the horizon, the sun will be too bright compared to the rest of the picture: the result will be either a small yellow ball in an almost black sky, or a completely bleached-out sun.

Instead, either wait until the sun has just gone down to take your shot, or point your camera at a part of the sky that doesn't include the sun. A telephoto lens will help with this, and make a smaller part of the scene appear more dramatic. If there are clouds in the sky, a sunset will become more and more striking for several minutes afterwards.

To preserve the colours of a sunset, switch off the Auto White Balance function on your camera. This function will attempt to filter out colour casts in your image, which in this case will include all of the golden warmth! Choose the Daylight setting to preserve the colours, or the Cloudy setting to enhance them. You can also choose the Sunset picture scene mode if your camera has one. If you're shooting RAW you can adjust the white balance more precisely at the post-processing stage.

With sunsets, the key is to keep shooting. They change rapidly – often improving right up to the moment that the moment has passed. If you wait until that moment is perfect, you'll miss it.

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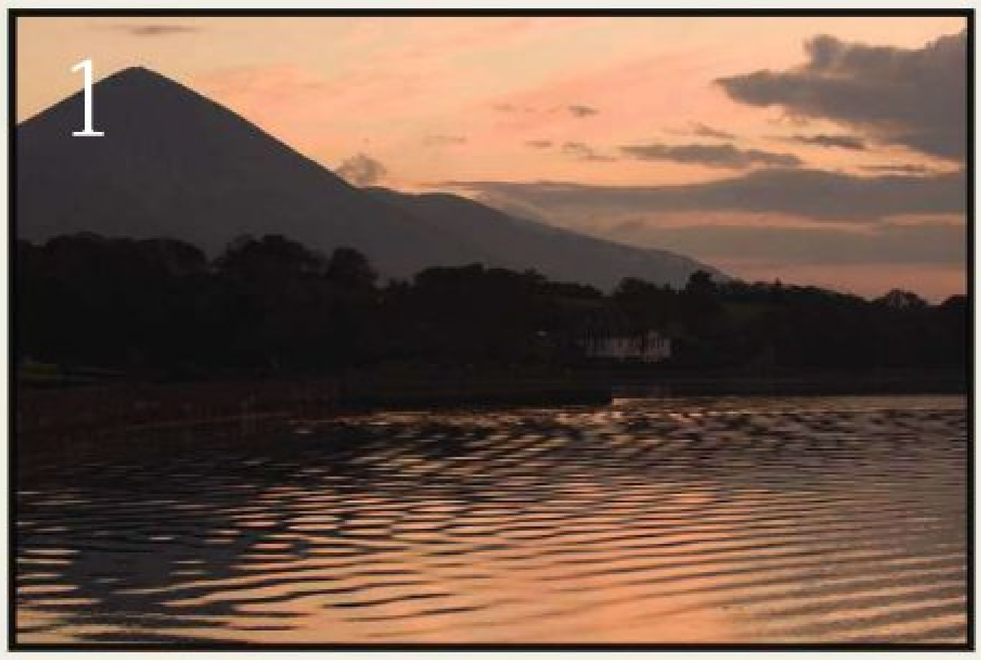
TAKE A PIC LIKE THIS

STEVE'S GALLERY, PLUS HANDY HINTS



1 USE A TRIPOD
Taking shots after the sun has dropped below the horizon means the contrast between the sky, reflection and shadow area is not too great for the camera – all show detail. This shot – sunset over Croagh Patrick in Westport, Ireland – was taken on a tripod, allowing a small aperture and broad depth of field.
Nikon D2x 70-200mm @105mm with tripod, ISO 400, 1/80 sec @ f7.1

2 PRAY FOR CLOUD
Cloudy skies often yield more dramatic sunsets: the light from the sun – here, over Si Phan Don, Laos – reflects on the undersides of the clouds, casting contrastingly darker shadows.
Nikon D2x 28-70mm @28mm (effectively 42mm), ISO 100, 1/60 sec @ f3.5

3 BE PATIENT
Sunsets, such as this peach over Mont St Michel, France, look better if you wait until the sun is out of the sky. With the sun in the picture the contrast is too great: the sun will either be bleached out, or the sky too dark – or both.
Nikon D2x 300mm with tripod (effectively 450mm), ISO 100, 1/400 sec @ f6.3

4 LEAVE THE SUN OUT
By cropping the sun out you can achieve a feeling of sunset without having to balance high contrast ranges. This is a much better way of showing detail in the foreground – like these boats on the Mekong in Laos.
Nikon F5, Fuji Provia 100, 80-200mm lens @ 200mm

THE BIG 3

KEY RULES OF SUNSET SNAPPING

1 If you only remember one thing... Sunset pictures look better without the sun: it makes the light levels more balanced and exposures easier to calculate. Meter off the sky to get the best exposures.

2 Tech tip Switch off Auto White Balance if you're shooting JPEGs. The Cloudy/Shady setting will make the sunset appear warmer and more saturated; you can use this setting if you're shooting RAW, but in this format you can also tweak the pictures at the processing stage.

3 One for the kitbag
Use a lens hood if shooting into the sun – this will minimise lens flare, which causes bright spots in the picture.

Steve leads his own exclusive range of travel photography tours, with land arrangements by Intrepid Travel. Destinations for 2011 are Laos & Cambodia, Ladakh and Morocco.
www.bettertravelphotography.com/phototours

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Health after travel

You've been away, bought the T-shirt, returned home safely – or so you thought. But what IS that weird rash? And why are your bowels a-rumbling? **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** helps you cope with post-travel ailments

STOMACH GRIPES & ACHES

Symptoms: Rumbles and a dull discomfort that moves around. Pain builds, then fades – often with a fart or bowel action.
Diagnosis: Colic, due to bowels being stretched by gas or by intestinal spasms. Or it might be getting used to new foods.
Serious? Rarely; tends to settle over a week or so. Constipation also causes colic.
What to do: Understand the gastro-colic reflex: the desire to stool 15 minutes after very hot/cold drinks or a big meal. A bland, high-carb, low-fat, low-dairy diet should help.
Long-term consequences: No lasting damage, but some people develop irritable bowel syndrome after a tropical trip. Persisting pains should be taken to a doctor.

UNUSUAL BOWELS

Symptoms: Unpredictable bowels: often you just get a feeling of unreliability.
Diagnosis: Rumbles suggest guts are too active, but it can also be a sign of parasites. Might be giardia, might be worms.
Serious? Rarely. Occasionally a sign of serious troubles so have a check-up if symptoms persist. Worms tend to die of old age at 12 to 18 months.
What to do: Get three separate stool samples screened by your GP.
Long-term consequences: If giardia, you'll lose friends until you cure your sulphurous farts with a short course of metronidazole. There's a possibility of ongoing IBS. It's not uncommon for unusual bowels to plague you long after a tropical trip; most travellers learn to live with them.

A MYSTERY RASH

Symptoms: Weird spots.
Diagnosis: Most causes are benign. However, there is a long list of possibilities. Skin scrapings are the best way to diagnose fungal infections.
Serious? Most rashes are irritating or annoying more than health-threatening.
What to do: A medium-strength steroid such as Eumovate will often settle troublesome itchy rashes. If symptoms persist you need a diagnosis – visit your GP.
Long-term consequences: Depends on the cause. Fungal infections are probably the most common cause of an itchy flaking rash. Allergic conditions including eczema and hives are also frequent. Treatment is available once a diagnosis has been made.

TOP TIP: EAT YOGHURT
Though diary products are best avoided if your guts are rumbling (bland food is best) yoghurt can be quite soothing

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TOP TIP: INFORM YOUR GP

Malaria can hit any time from a week to a year after being bitten by an infected mosquito – if you have flu-like symptoms within this time, tell your GP where you've been

BOILS & BUMPS

Symptoms: Skin lumps.
Diagnosis: Possibly insect bites – which should fade in a couple of weeks. Or do they seem deeper or stranger? Some bites thicken and become more pigmented – especially if scratched excessively. These may never disappear but will stop itching. A few unfortunate travellers develop recurrent boils.
Serious? Depends. Leishmaniasis and skin cancers are serious and need treatment within a few weeks. These both cause a persistent lump that fails to completely heal.
What to do: If new lumps appear daily, spread your bedding out in the sun – to discourage fleas. Any lesion that appears to heal but then breaks out again needs to be checked by a doctor – but it can wait a month. GPs can take swabs and eradicate any boil-causing microbe with an appropriate antibiotic, or arrange surgical removal of any potentially malignant skin lesion. If you might have been exposed to leishmaniasis seek out specialist treatment.
Long-term consequences: There's scope for cure or disaster. Get proper diagnosis.

LINGERING COLD

Symptoms: International flights are perfect incubators for respiratory viruses. The common cold lasts no more than a week, ten days tops – if it's lingering, it isn't a simple cold.
Diagnosis: If you're feeling ill and feverish and have face or forehead pain, it could be sinusitis. Mucous discharge from the nose when you're not that unwell is probably an allergic reaction.
Serious? No, but it can wear you down.
What to do: Allergic nasal discharge (aka rhinorrhoea) should stop with a steroid nasal spray or antihistamine tablets. Steam inhalations help sinusitis; you might need a course of antibiotics from a GP.
Long-term consequences: Large tissue bill.

CHILLS & FLUSHES

Symptoms: More than a cold, you are running a high temperature – is it over 38.5°C? Are you aching all over, feeling ill?
Diagnosis: It could be malaria. Serious? Yes, potentially very.
What to do: Get to a good doctor within 24 hours and tell them where you've been over the past three months; remind them this could be malaria/another tropical infection.
Long-term consequences: Unlikely – if you survive. Having had malaria once, you are no more likely to catch it again in the future but equally you gain no immunity. ■

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth is a GP in East Anglia and medical director of The Travel Clinic Ltd (www.travelclinic.ltd.uk)

MEDICAL KIT MUST-HAVE
CONDOMS

One of the most useful and adaptable pieces of travel kit is a packet of condoms. These make:

- Surprisingly voluminous emergency water carriers
- Perfect containers to pack with ice and apply to sprained ankles/knees/shoulders
- Emergency fanbelts (allegedly)
- Waterproof finger covers, useful if you smash up your hand
- Excellent bribes for kids, who like to use them as balloons
- And they can even be used to practise safe sex if romance is in the air

Health Watch

in association with nomad travel clinics

Chikungunya & dengue, France

What's happened? The first cases of chikungunya fever due to being bitten by an infected mosquito have been reported in two children attending the same school in Fréjus, south-east France. Also, the first case of locally acquired dengue fever was reported in an individual living in Nice. These diseases are more common in tropical areas.

Advice to travellers: Both diseases are transmitted by the daytime-biting *Aedes* mosquito and have similar symptoms of fever, joint pains and rashes. They can be very debilitating but the risk of travellers to France catching them is low. Good mosquito bite avoidance measures should be taken when visiting southern France.

Vaccinations, bite avoidance, medical kits, antimalarials, and travel health supplies. FOR ALL TYPES OF TRAVEL www.nomadtravel.co.uk
Travel Health Info Line: 0906 863 3414 (Calls cost 60p per minute) Visit our clinics: London | Bristol | Southampton | Manchester | Bishop's Stortford

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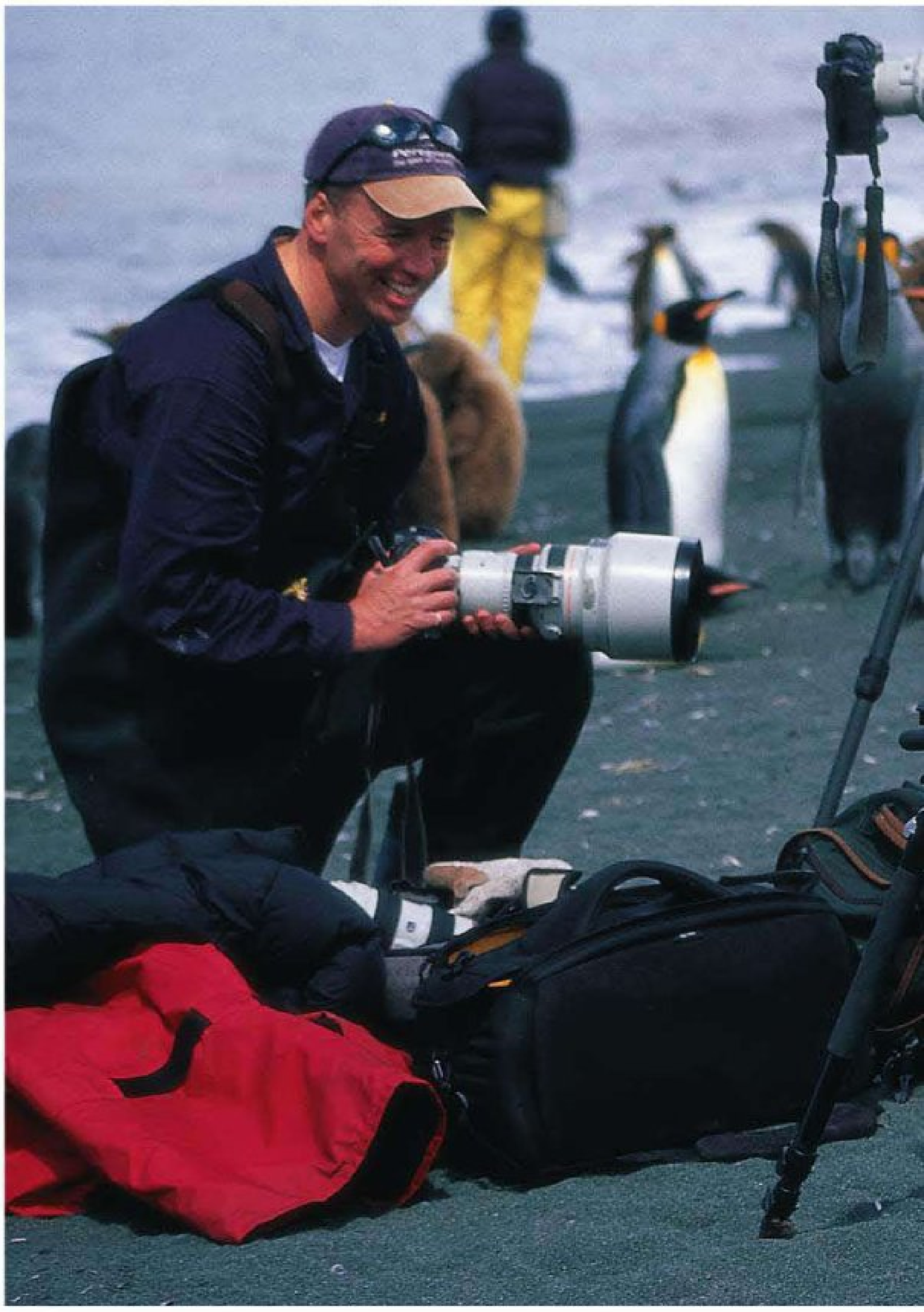
Q&A

You put the questions, we find the answers. This issue: where to see penguins, Christmas markets, and how to buy a carpet. Email your queries to **editorial@wanderlust.co.uk**



Q I want to see penguins but they're so far away – where are the best and most economical places to go?w

A With almost all wildlife there are cheaper options but often they leave you short-changed. Black-footed penguins can be seen near Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and the coasts of Chile and Argentina have some penguins – if they're just a species to be ticked off, these are the least expensive options.

A low-season Antarctic cruise will give you better access. South Georgia is the finest area for huge colonies of kings. The adélie, gentoo and chinstrap rookeries on the west Antarctic Peninsula are incredible. The Falklands has good numbers and is the closest place to see kings; it's marginally cheaper to reach but has spasmodic flights.

If you choose an Antarctic cruise, choose a small boat. Big boats barely allow you to get off due to the number of passengers.
Paul Goldstein, Exodus tour leader & Wanderlust *blogger*

Q I'm going to Istanbul. I want to buy a carpet but don't want to be scammed – what should I look out for?

A Do some research online to find out what types of carpets you like – or visit a carpet store where you live to gather information.

To test for natural or synthetic dyes, rub a damp white cloth on the carpet: natural dyes won't come off. Do this test on each colour on the rug – there may be a mix of dyes. Also, bend the carpet and examine the bottom: if the bottom of the thread is a completely different shade than the top, there is a good chance chemical dyes were used.

New rugs generally have tighter knots than antique ones. Over time, knots will tend to loosen. Also antique rugs tend to have a more luminous surface. Turn the carpet over to see if the colours on the back are richer than on the front, indicating that the top has faded with age.

To tell if a carpet is hand-woven or machine made, turn it over and look at the weaving. If the knots are exactly the same in a tight, even pattern, it is machine made.

Generally, the more knots per inch, the more expensive the carpet will be. Be prepared to bargain. Always listen to your intuition. If you feel that a merchant is not honest, leave.

One good way to go carpet shopping is with a local resident unconnected with the carpet trade. If you're serious about buying carpets, consider a personal shopper. They'll take you to reputable dealers and bargain on your behalf.
Kathy Hamilton, istanbulpersonalshopper.com

Q I've got two weeks' holiday to take before the end of March. I want to go cycling: where will be nice during this time, and not extortionately expensive?

A For a cheap fortnight's riding this winter ride down the coast of Croatia into Montenegro (one of Europe's great secret spots). Although it won't be particularly warm (about 10°C) you will enjoy the beautiful coastline and Dubrovnik will be less crowded than in the summer. Make sure you get to Kotor – a gorgeous walled town tucked at the head of a mighty fjord.

A bit tougher, but safe, friendly and fascinating, would be to take a tent and ride round

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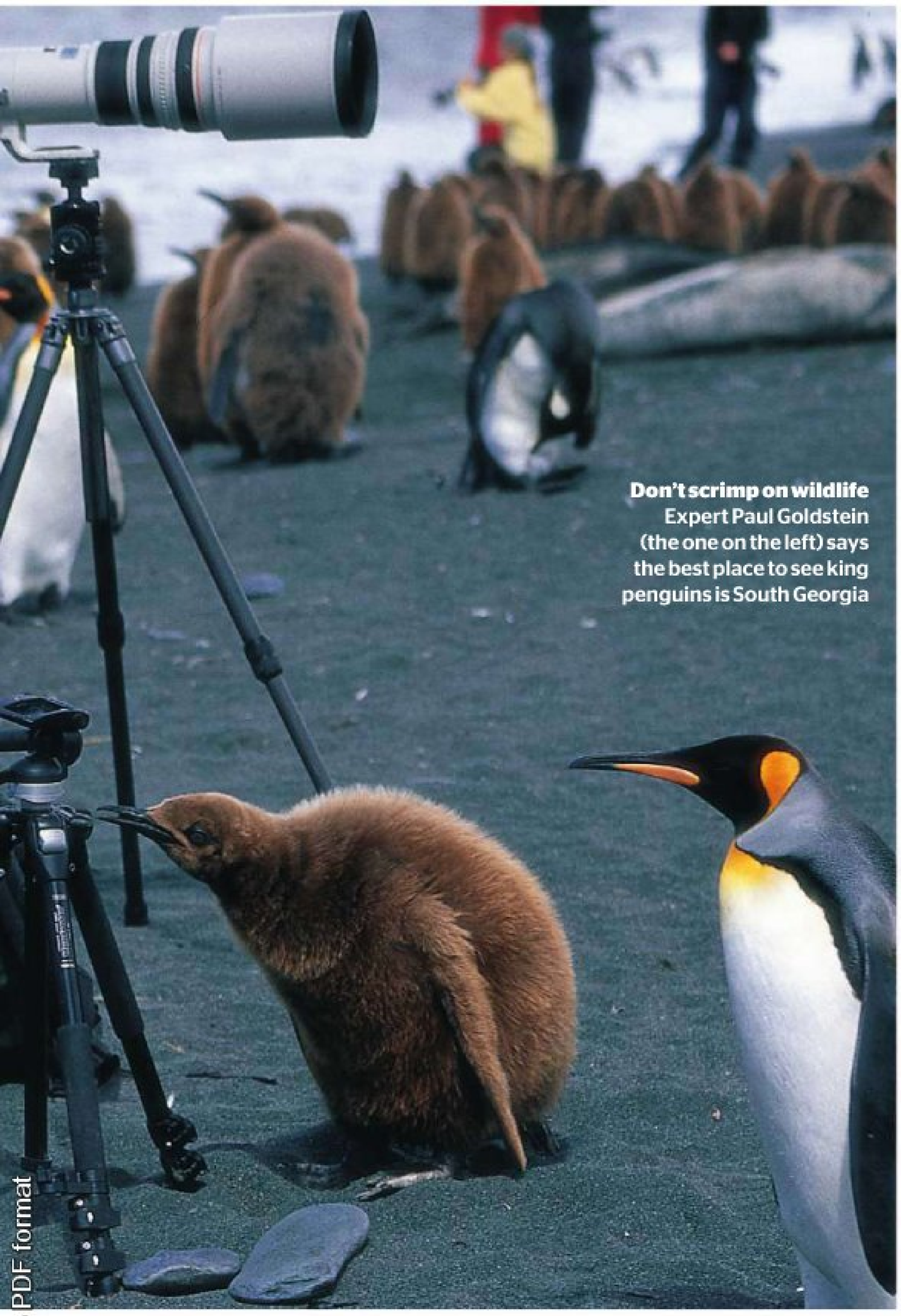
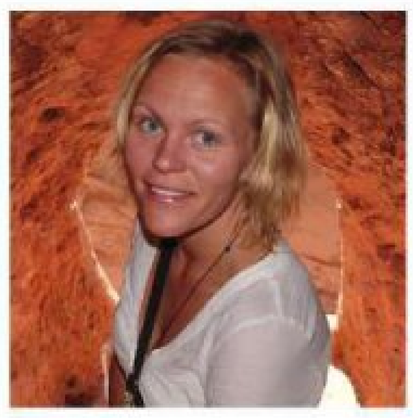


Don't scrimp on wildlife Expert Paul Goldstein (the one on the left) says the best place to see king penguins is South Georgia

THE GUIDE'S GUIDE TO...

Addis Ababa

Mette Steen, tour leader for operator **Wild Frontiers** (020 7736 3968, www.wildfrontiers.co.uk), gives her top picks for the Ethiopian capital



There is more to the Ethiopian capital than meets the eye. It's a real city of contrasts, from fancy bars to the red light districts of Chechnya, from the coffee shops on Bole Road, to the open-air markets of Shoa and Mercato.

To stay Loathed by many, but loved by me is the **Ghion Hotel**. Still government-run, this concrete relic from the Communist era has the most friendly staff, who have been looking after me for many years.

To eat **Mothers Kitchen** in Kazanchi is scrumptious – head for the bathroom outfitters street, then look for the sign of an evangelical mission. For the best steak and chocolate mousse in town, try the French restaurant in Endaressie. Called **A La Votre,** it's often known as Guy's Bar; it's a good spot for beer and music, too.

To visit The **Ethnographic Museum**, in a former palace, now houses the library for the Centre of Ethiopian Studies – complete with a great collection of icons, crosses and musical instruments.

To explore I love walking along **Bole Medane Alem Rd** early in the morning, as everyone makes their way to church. Or visit one of the many artists: details are in the *What's On In Addis* guide.

Wild Frontiers arranges group trips and private tailormade travel to Ethiopia and beyond

"Research showed that mud, ash and soap all achieved good hand hygiene"

the highlights of Jordan. It's only a 4.5 hour flight to Amman, but a different world on arrival. The ancient King's Highway undulates across a red rocky landscape to world-famous Petra. The long swoop down from Amman to the Dead Sea is well worth the long slog back up afterwards. Great people, great food, and camping in the desert (perhaps at Wadi Rum) also help make Jordan so wonderful.
Alastair Humphreys, RTW cyclist & Wanderlust *blogger*

Q Do hand-sanitising gels actually work?

A They're better than nothing but don't achieve nearly as good bacteriological cleaning as a bar of soap and a running tap. Research in Bangladesh showed that using mud, ash or soap all achieved good hand hygiene.

Washing needs water, and for the hands to be rubbed together enough to remove the cleaning agent. I travel with a bar of soap in a plastic box and keep that in my daysack at all times. It's nearly always possible to find water to wash with.

Note, the water doesn't have to be clean (although if it's thick and lumpy that's not so good...) – muddy water and a good cleaning agent, followed by air-drying, is fine for getting the bacteria off.
Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth

Q Which is the best Christmas market? Preferably in a city that's interesting too, and a market that isn't too cheesy.

A My fave is Vienna. When you get fed up of Christmas decorations, hot chocolate and Sachertorte warms you up nicely.
JayR, my Wanderlust forum

Berlin: loads to see and do, great night areas, and lovely authentic Christmas market without many tourists. Great stuff!
Mijb, my Wanderlust

I visited one in Bamberg a few years ago – charming town in the heart of Bavarian brewing country so you can combine it with a few brewery tours to really get in the holiday spirit!
ccummings, my Wanderlust

The Christmas market in Lübeck is delightful, with plenty of traditional German stalls selling wooden decorations and other festive fayre scattered through the city, plus a fantastic craft market in the Holy Spirit Hospital. There's normally a snow sculpture festival too.
DrG, my Wanderlust ■

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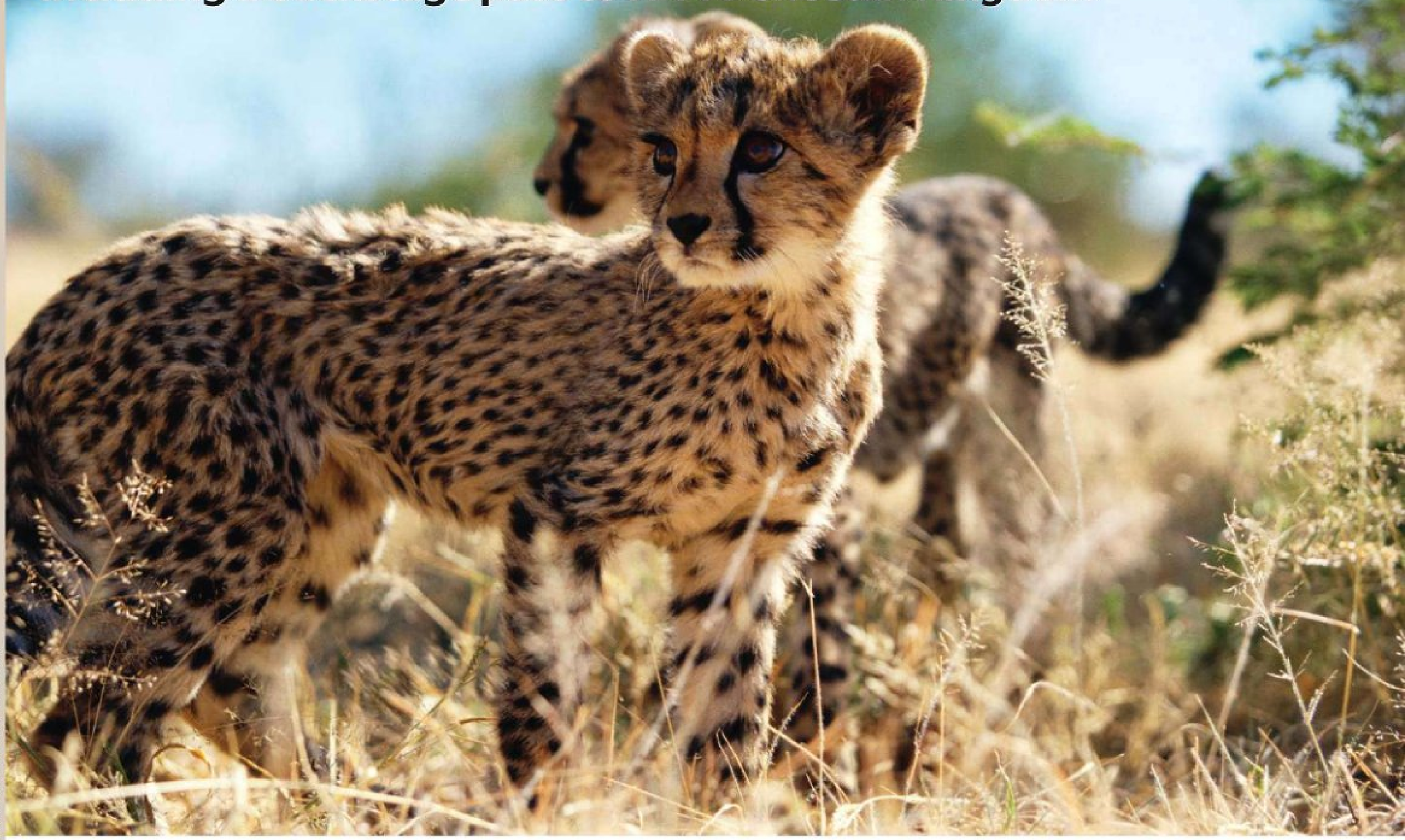
Promotion

AFRICA'S CONSERVATION STAR

Win an 10-night self-drive safari for two in Namibia, including a backstage pass to ITV1's *Cheetah Kingdom*



We know you love Namibia – after all, you've consistently voted it Top Country in the *Wanderlust* Travel Awards down the years, including 2010. We also know why you love it – the ageless Namib Desert with its mountainous dunes, the desiccated camel thorn trees that haunt the Dead Vlei, the breadth of wildlife within and beyond the arid coast... And then there's the fact that Namibia continues to be a conservation pioneer, its popularity with visitors used to positive effect by encouraging a responsible approach to the environment. With government support, Namibia has frequently shown the way when it comes to providing sustainable solutions to the ecological and sociological issues it confronts today.

So far, so good

Namibia was the first African country to incorporate protection of the environment into its constitution, and Namibia's Communal Conservancy Tourism Sector (NACSO) is achieving conservation and community benefits on an impressive scale. Today there are 59 registered Communal Conservancies covering 16.8% of the land area of the country. The results speak for themselves:

- In 1995 only 20 lions roamed freely in northwest Namibia – today that number is over 130.
- In 1982 the Black Rhino was almost extinct – today Namibia has the largest concentration of free roaming Black Rhino in the world.
- Other wildlife such as giraffe, kudu and springbok have gone from numbers of less than 1,000 to tens of thousands today.
- Namibia is home to about 25% of the world's cheetah population of which 90% live on farmland.

Who's who?

As well as NACSO, there are a number of private operators in Namibia dedicated to the cause of conservation. They include the AfriCAT Foundation (www.africat.org), whose efforts in running the largest cheetah and leopard rescue-and-release programme in the world is currently being featured on ITV1's *Cheetah Kingdom*.

In the Kunene region in northern Namibia you'll see a rare phenomenon – free-roaming elephants, not restricted by fences as they might be were they living in a National Park. One of the conservation organisations here is EHRA (Elephant Human Relations Aid), a Namibian-registered NGO that aims to enable the peaceful cohabitation between subsistence farmers, local people and the desert elephants. Such efforts on behalf of EHRA and others are clearly working – from as low as 52, there are now over 600 of these magnificent beasts populating the Kunene desert. ■

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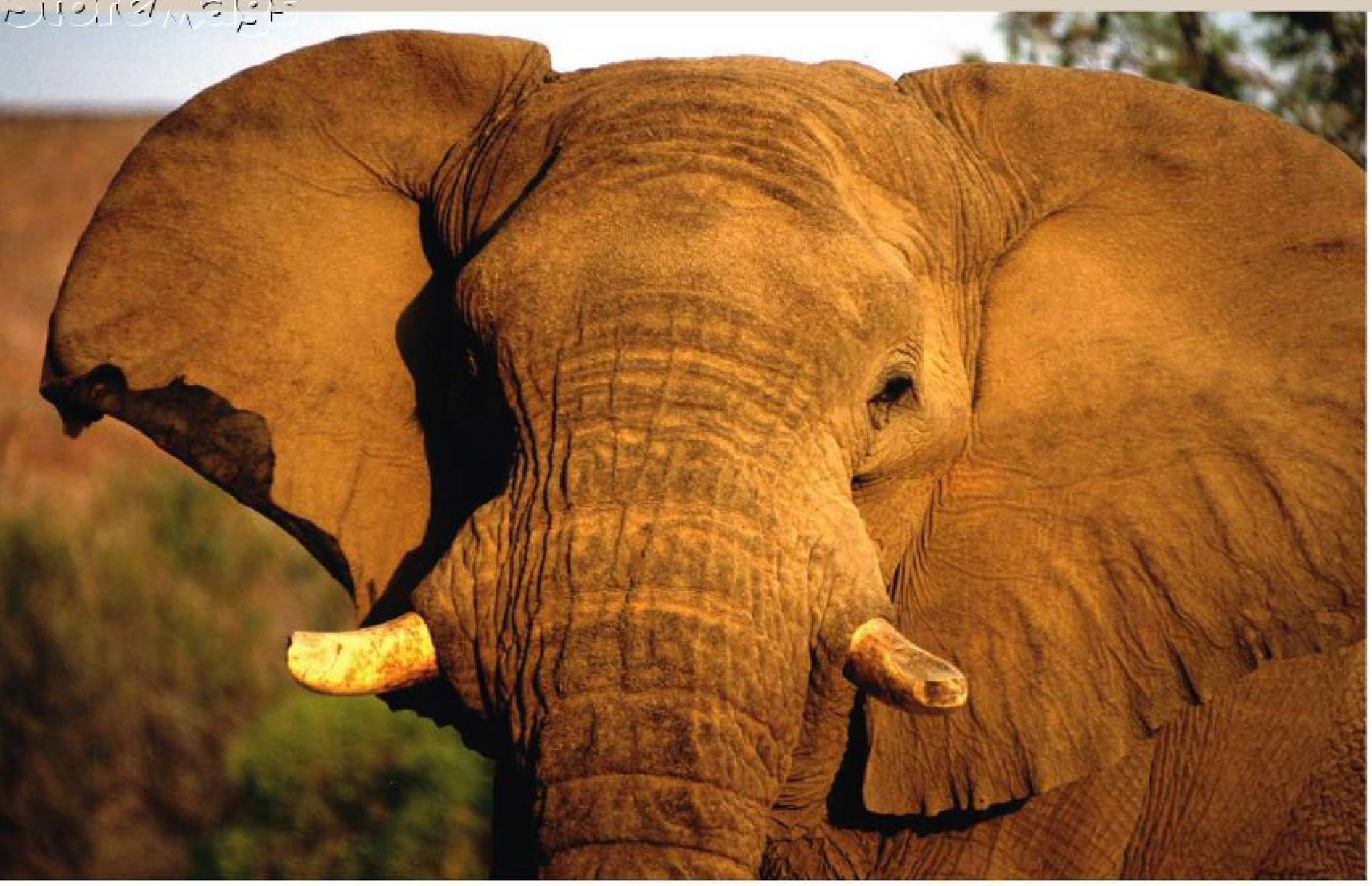

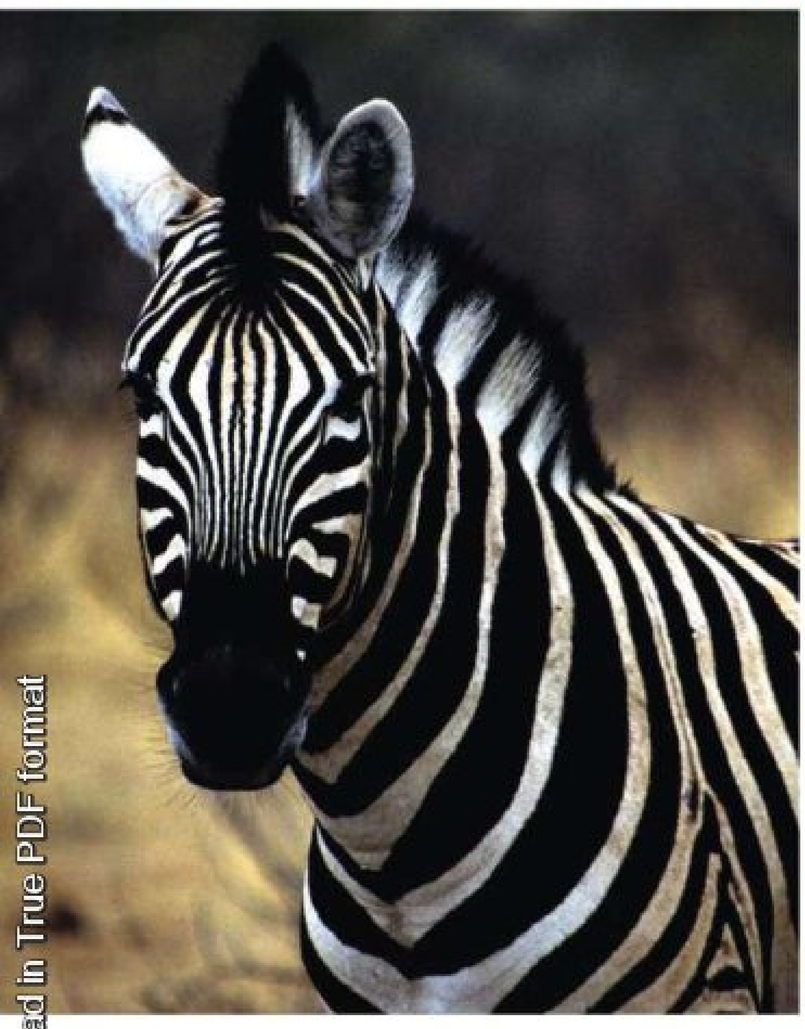

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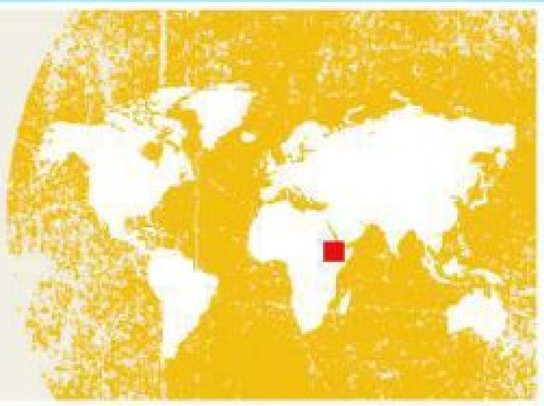

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HIGHER GROUND

Travel in Ethiopia has its challenges, but up in the northern highlands, an inspirational community project repays every step of the journey

Words **Henry Wismayer** | Pictures **Dave Watts**

Rising expectations
An Ethiopian guide takes some time out to ponder the view on the way to Mequat Mariam

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Through the fog of semi-concussion, I flipped myself over in the pile of litter, looked up at the Ethiopian night sky, and wondered where it had all gone wrong.

I was 650km north of Addis Ababa, lying sprawled in a 3m hole in the pavement that I'd somehow contrived not to see in the predawn gloom. It was a new low on an increasingly arduous journey from the deceptive comforts of the capital, and for the first time I was beginning to agree with the downbeat mantra I'd read in the guidebooks and heard from other travellers: "Travelling in Ethiopia is hard!"

Perhaps it was to be expected – after all, two decades of famine and regional warfare hadn't done much to encourage high

expectations. But back in Addis Ababa, it had been easy to wave away such negative comments. There I had sipped macchiatos, ogled display cases full of early hominid bones at the National Museum, and enjoyed one of the world's finest cuisines in the evening. Even better, I'd found a man who offered to drive me up to the northern highlands, the land of soaring 3,000-4,000m plateaus I planned to explore en route to the rock-cut churches of Lalibela, the eighth wonder of the world.

But things had changed these past two days. I'd spent most of the time watching Habtamu, the man who had offered me the lift, tinkering with the spluttering entrails of his Toyota Hi-Ace, only emerging from its innards to remark, "This is when we say in Ethiopia, 'Shit happens'."

Then there had been the infamous bouts of 'faranji frenzy' that see foreigners constantly harassed by hordes of children shouting *'You! You! Faranji! You!'*. And finally there was the fleapit of a hotel when I arrived in Dessie, a town I had come to speculate was short for 'despair', and that I had been rushing to escape when this pothole put in an unscheduled appearance.

Lying there, I'd concluded that Ethiopia would have to pull off a miracle if it was going to expunge the black mark now hanging over it on my imaginary map.

The audacity of hope

What I didn't know then was that something miraculous had already happened, a miracle that had been seven years in the making.

As the rest of the world geared up for the 21st century (according to the Ethiopian calendar, it is currently only 2003), an Englishman called Mark Chapman was laying the foundations for Tourism in Ethiopia for Sustainable Future Alternatives, shortened to Tesfa, which means 'hope' in Amharic. Tesfa works with the people living on the Meket Escarpment, a sheer-sided wedge of basalt highland between Dessie and Lalibela. Their idea is simple: local communities guide and host walkers through this landscape of shivering prairies and spectacular clifftop views, trekking by ›

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Clockwise from left: Life in the *tukuls* really is lived on the edge; walking through wild flowers on the way to Wajela village; a hell of a vantage point; kids put in their requests for pens

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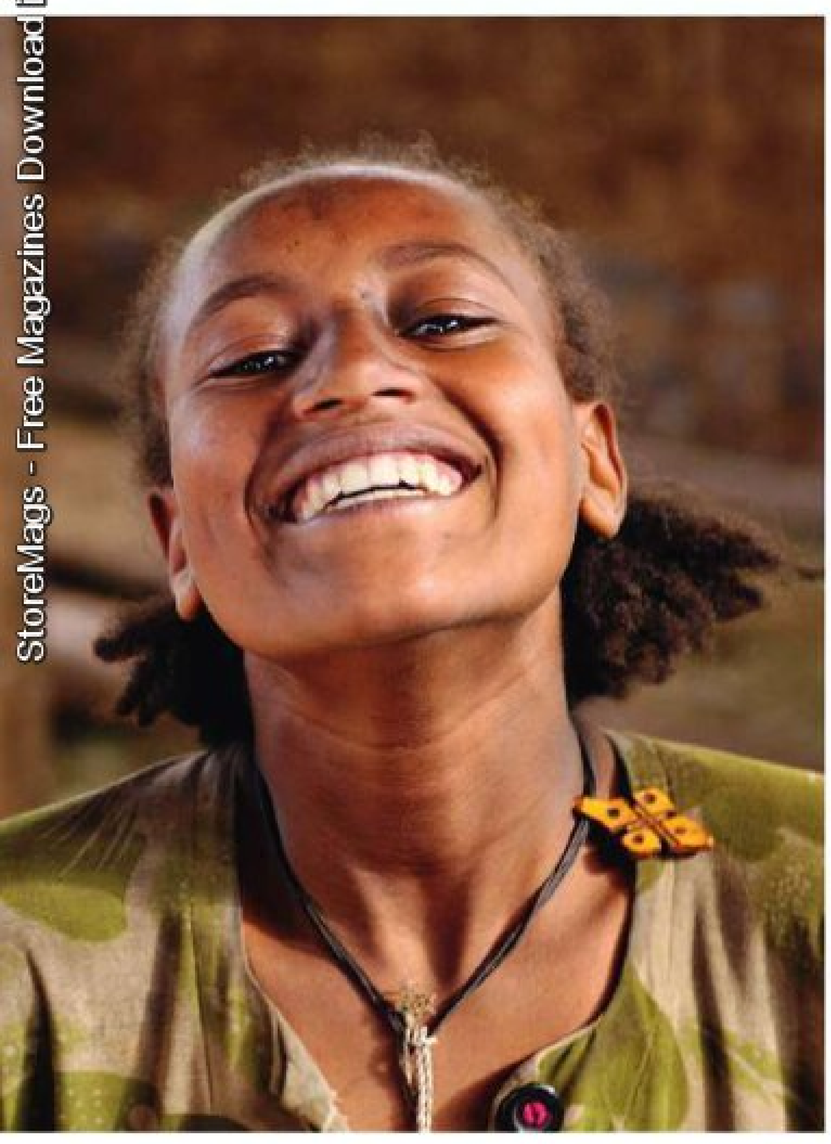

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‘After a long day’s trek, I realised this place was as unaffected by the onrush of modernity as it was possible to imagine’

day and stopping each evening at a collection of specially-built *tukuls* (roundhouses), perched on the precipice. A chain of these camps run along the plateau, and I planned to walk east from Yadukalay – the fourth in line – along the escarpment, and then down to Lalibela. It seemed, in theory, a perfect *quid pro quo*, providing an impoverished region with vital income while giving visitors like me the chance to experience a cultural Lost World.

Nonetheless, the next morning, as Tesfa guide Zalalem led our group away from Yadukalay, I hadn’t entirely relinquished my scepticism about Ethiopia. So when a gang of boisterous youngsters came charging towards us waving sticks, I naturally assumed we were being ambushed. It turned out they were practising *ganna*, a highlands team game a little like hurling. One of them offered me his stick to have a go. After five swipes at thin air, I finally connected, sending the small leather ball dribbling along the floor. The kids – all smiles, no frenzy – erupted into sympathetic applause.

Brad who?

Over the course of a long day’s trek, I quickly recognised that here was a place as unaffected by the onrush of modernity as it was possible to imagine. The Meket remains the land of the eucalyptus crook and the ox-driven plough, of mud-and-wattle roundhouses set in sorghum fields. When Brad Pitt visited in 2004, no one recognised him; if he came here today, they still wouldn’t.

One of the great successes of Tesfa has been to introduce tourists to the Meket without upsetting this venerable status quo. The accommodation, while furnished with comfy beds and blankets, looked from the outside to be little different to the local homesteads. At lunch, everyone scooped fistfuls of *injera* and *shiro* – an Ethiopian staple – from the same goatskin tub. At dinner, having arrived at Boya camp, we ate not-so-Ethiopian spaghetti around a fire in the communal tukul with the cooks’ half-naked babies toddling around us.

“Be careful where you walk; it is a cliff, you know,” Zalalem’s disembodied voice called after me as I trundled off to bed. “Also, there are hyenas – just something to bear in mind.”

The next morning I stood in the doorway of my tukul and watched the sun rise over Boya’s staggering location. Two metres beyond the threshold the ground fell away, plummeting half a kilometre before running west in a patchwork of mineral halftones – pink, blue and green – dotted with flickering breakfast fires, and sown with hills and mesa-like mountains.

The trek from Boya to Aynamba was more genteel, the route taking us north-east over sun-yellowed grasslands and jigsaws of cracked basalt. As most of the walk was to be spent away from the escarpment rim, it became a day most memorable for its encounters across the cultural divide. We ducked into a family tukul to watch a mother attend to an impromptu coffee ceremony – beans roasted on an iron-plate, frankincense burned on an upside-down saucepan lid, mud-thick brew served to those gathered.

I kicked a deflated football about with an village-worth of children – me versus 100. And we visited a primary school where students with anxious faces took it in turns to perform an English recitation:

“This is Kame’s House
It is small
It has one room…”

Fighting for change

Amidst the arcadia, it took some effort to remember that life on these steppes remains one defined by hardship. 2010 was no different – as we stopped for lunch at the new market centre of Waru Mikeil, one of Boya’s local guides, Musgab, whose wind-leathered face sat beneath a brilliant-blue turban, summed up the perennial problem of the subsistence farmer with affecting simplicity: “This year, not enough sky. Cloud is no. Hard life.”

During the Derg’s ‘socialist experiment’ of the 1980s, the Meket’s smallholdings were

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This image & left:
The magnificent attire of an Ethiopian Orthodox priest; two girls do their water-carrying chores; Gelada baboons shelter from the rain; a girl takes a break from making beer

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Kevin Rushby in theguardian on the trip to Mali

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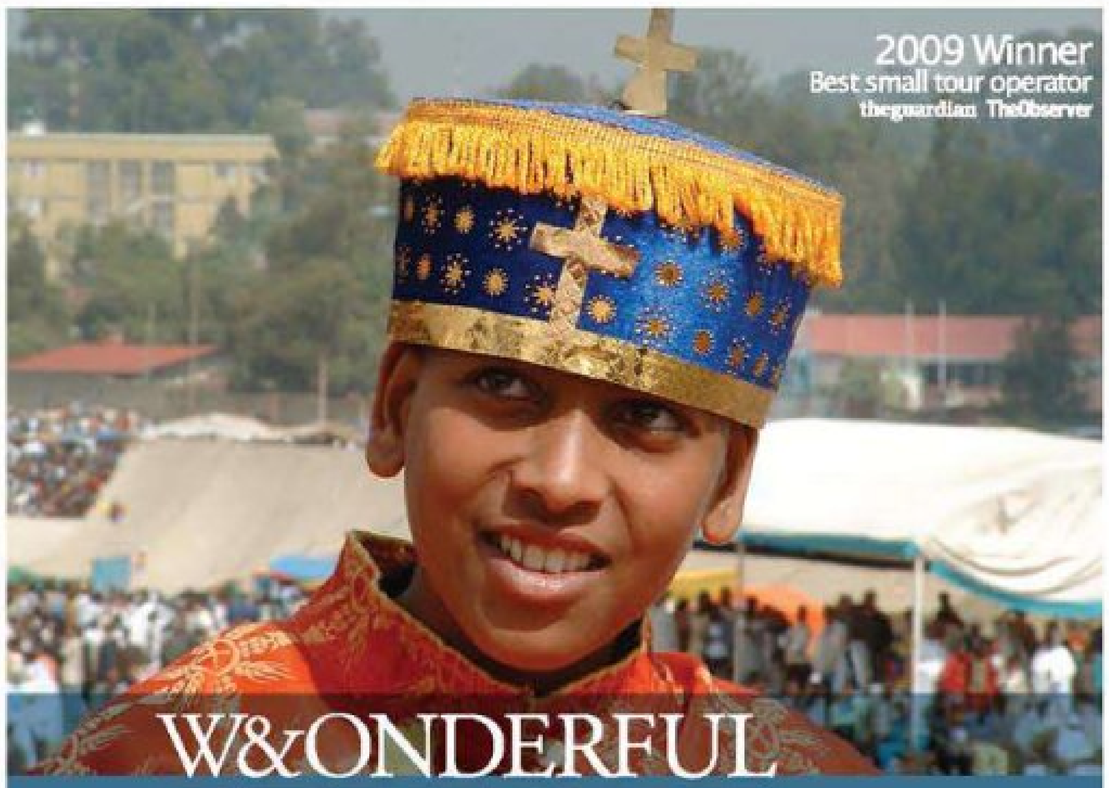

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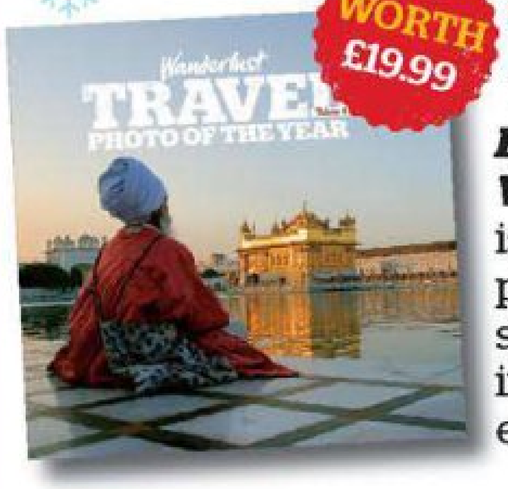

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‘We sat on a wicker bench outside Aynamba and watched a faraway troop of gelada baboons swarming uphill’

expropriated by the government and absorbed into dysfunctional cooperatives. When successive harvests failed in the mid-decade, Addis turned a blind eye, and the world watched in horror as northern Ethiopia suffered apocalypse. One million people are thought to have died.

The knowledge that we were actively contributing to avoiding a rerun brought its own dividend. Tesfa’s host communities each receive more than half of the proceeds – around 50,000 birr ($3,000) a month, no mean sum in a country where annual GDP per capita averages less than $400. Decisions affecting how money is allocated are taken democratically by *K’ire*, a committee system in which every household has a vote; most goes towards paying off land tax, offering micro-loans to smallholders and establishing a network of grain banks, steps that have helped release communities from the life-or-death cycle of knife-edge subsistence.

Walking to Lalibela

Later that afternoon, we sat on a wicker bench outside Aynamba drinking St George beers, and watched a faraway troop of gelada baboons swarming uphill from the griddle-pan of the lowlands. For most visitors, Tesfa provides an unforgettable experience of the Ethiopian highlands in the raw. For us, having run the gauntlet of culture shock to get here, it was Ethiopia’s redemption, plain and simple. But it had left me with a quandary to ponder. Lalibela was still two Tesfa-stages away: a steep descent off the escarpment followed by a gruelling kick across sun-scoured lowlands. My companion was taking the bus...

“Why don’t we walk?” challenged Zalalem. “Don’t worry,” he added, reading my frown. “You’ll make it. Like Haile Gebrselassie says, ‘*Yichalal*’ – anything’s possible. But we will have to leave while it’s still dark.”

By around 8am we’d already been on the move for three hours, scampering a vertical mile down sheer grey lava flows before starting the quick-march west over a series of bread-loaf hills – known locally as *abta gorbtas*, or ‘up-and-downs’. Throughout the morning the sun had crawled upwards along with the temperature.

The trail continued onto the alluvial flats of the Tekezé River – no more than a few braided rivulets, crossable in a single stride – then climbed through terraces of bright-green tef. By mid-morning we’d stumbled into the small town, and final Tesfa site, of Geneta Mariam, named after the rock-hewn church that sits on its outskirts, a lichen-stained oblong encircled by irregular square pillars supporting a gable-roof embellished with slender crosses, and cradled by the hillside from which it was born.

In the 12 and 13th centuries AD that constituted the heyday of the Zagwe Dynasty, dozens of these churches were carved into the bedrock of the Ethiopian highlands. Most famous, of course, are the 11 in Lalibela. Like the growing number of Western visitors now making the pilgrimage, I was destined to spend the coming days in thrall to this 800-year-old ‘New Jerusalem’.

Ethiopia’s marquee attraction is magnificently preserved, with its faded frescoes, intricate masonry, custodian priests holding tasselled parasols and groups of young deacons intoning prayers in the sacred language of Ge’ez. In the lead-up to Christian festivals, Ethiopians descend in their tens of thousands on this spiritual heartland, some walking hundreds of miles in the process. Put in that context, our jaunt was a cakewalk. At least, that’s what I told myself, as I sweated through the remaining hours of the journey.

Finally, we plodded over a last ridge to see Lalibela, a constellation of tin-roofs lit up in the sun, the roads thronged with men and grain-laden donkeys. I didn’t notice Zalalem make the surreptitious phone call, nor did I pay much attention when, five minutes later, a minibus pulled up beside us, motor purring. Then Habtamu hopped out and enveloped me in a bear-hug. “You made it!” he cried. “Welcome to Lalibela.”

Travelling in Ethiopia *was* hard. But in the right place and in the right way, the rewards were definitely worth it. ■

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LALIBELA THEN & NOW

Pictures **Dave Watts**

Ethiopia's greatest monument is a work of art and a testament to faith. Guidebook pioneer **Hilary Bradt** revisits it after 30 years

My stomach muscles are sore today. Maybe it was from the mule ride, trying to keep upright down those steep hills, or perhaps it was from trying to emulate the traditional dancers in the *tej abet* bar yesterday evening.

34 years ago I was much fitter. It had taken me three adventurous days to reach Lalibela on foot, when the countryside was infested with bandits but the local people touchingly hospitable. In 1976 I stayed in a flea-ridden guesthouse with hay on the floor. There was just one tourist hotel; now there are 20.

The tourist infrastructure may have improved but Lalibela's churches have changed little since the 12th century. Imagine the scene: your king, Lalibela, has had a vision that he must create 14 churches out of the hard basalt rock on which the little town of Roja is built. He's been shown the design by a helpful angel who promises to assist in the construction. But these churches will not be built up from the ground from bricks or stone, they will be created from the rock itself. Just as Michelangelo cut away all the marble that wasn't David, so these stone carvers had to remove all the rock that wasn't a church.

To accomplish this task they had only iron tools and the glory of God. They drew out the basic design – a square, a rectangle or, in one case, a cross – and cut downwards.

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Helped by a team of angels, they carved the upper storey with windows and the tops of pillars, cutting deeper and deeper, creating a perfectly symmetrical interior with arches and columns, sometimes decorated with elaborate relief carvings of crosses and swirls. They kept going until the church was up to 10m high.

The last, and perhaps the most beautiful church to be hewn was St George's, carved in the shape of a cross. Legend has it that the patron saint of Ethiopia first demanded that he have his own church and then stayed to supervise the workmen – no doubt with a good complement of angels.

Rock of ages

Even if these churches had been abandoned, Lalibela would be an extraordinary place, for what makes a visit here so moving is the devotion of the people. Members of the Ethiopian Coptic Church have been worshipping Christ for longer than any other society and adherence to their faith is as much part of their life as tilling the land.

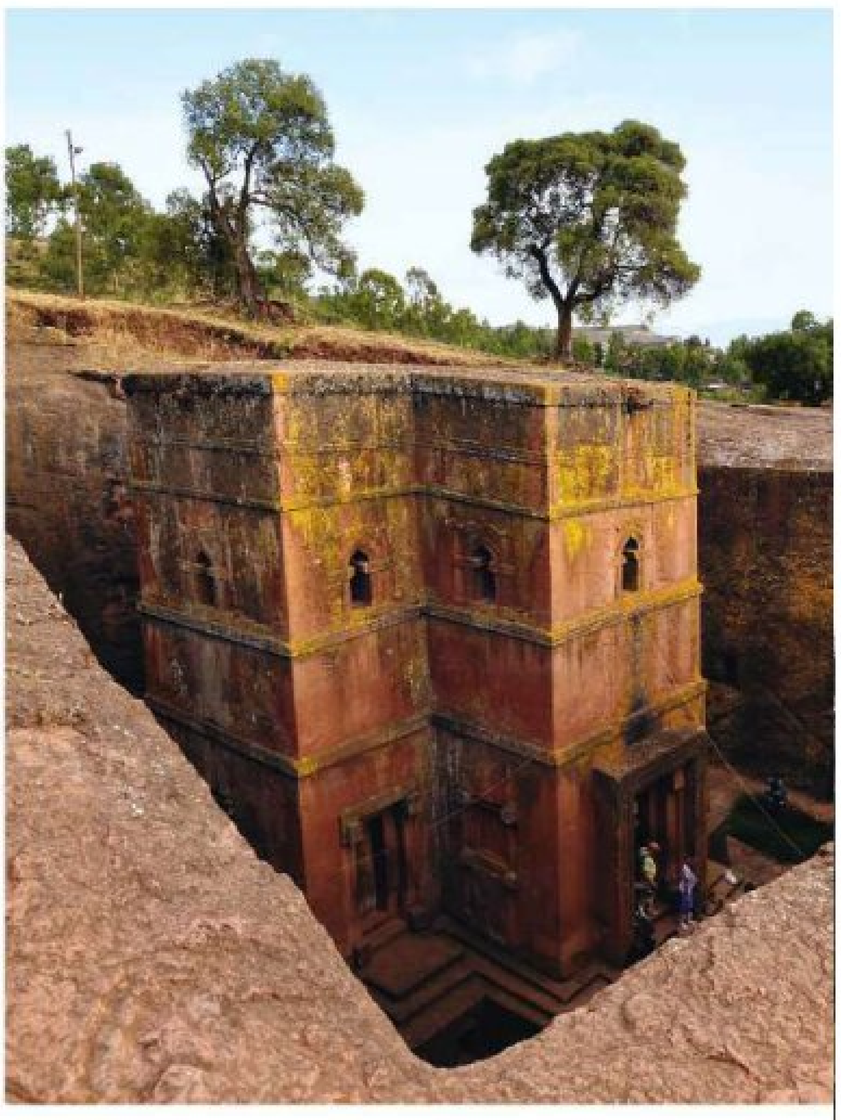
At dawn on a chilly October morning, I watched the white-swathed figures toiling up the hill to St Gabriel's church on his saint's day. They kissed the ground at the entrance of the church, and the pillars, and the large golden cross that the gorgeously-dressed priest held in front of them for the healing ceremony. They lit candles, and gazed at the chanting deacons and drum-beating novices with reverence. Then they returned to their fields.

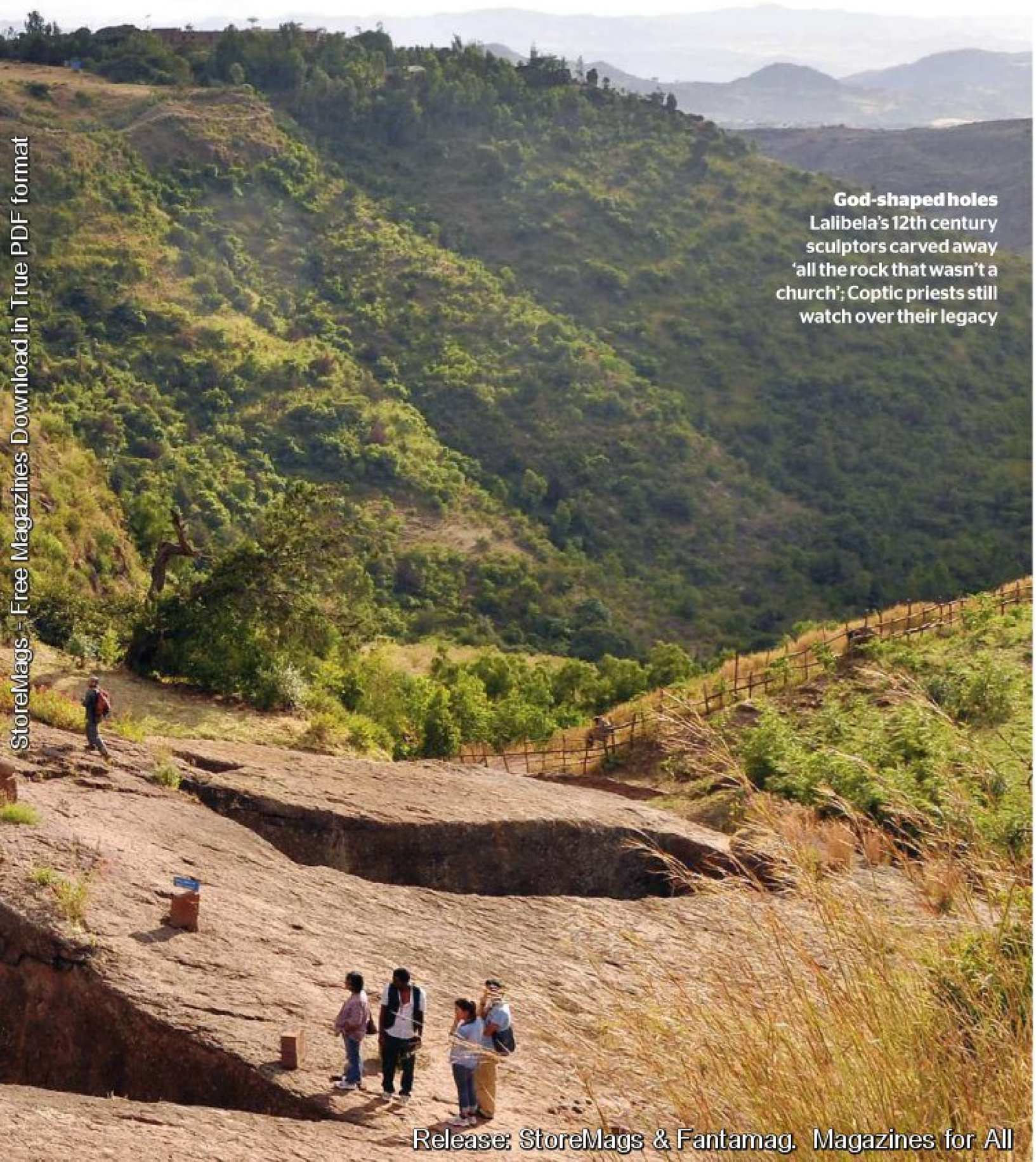
One theory of how the people of Lalibela were able to accomplish the task of building its churches is that this was always an exceptionally fertile and therefore wealthy part of the country, and to this day the surrounding landscape is as much an attraction as the churches themselves.

Flat-topped, scalloped mountains circle the town, broken by dramatic rocky lumps and towers. So part of my visit to Lalibela was the mule ride to one of the outlying cave churches, Asheton Maryam. With my trusty mule picking his way over the rocks, I was free to observe the villagers going about their daily tasks. The church is simple and rough-hewn, but its location at the foot of one of the highest peaks in the area is sublime. And the treasures that the priest showed us was exceptional: large gold crosses and a richly illustrated parchment bible which is said to date from the time of King Lalibela.

So to the *tej abet*. Tej is the national drink – honey wine; I love the stuff – so Solomon, the hospitable owner of the Jerusalem Hotel invited me to the Askalech tej abet, where it's served. In a tiny, dark room decorated with Ethiopian weavings, we watched an energetic woman singer/dancer accompanied by a man playing the *masinko*, a chunky, one-stringed instrument.
My efforts to imitate her dance were dismal but enjoyable. But I'm sore today. ■

Hilary sent this story from Lalibela as we went to press in November. She travelled with Rainbow Tours (www.rainbowtours.co.uk) and stayed at Lalibela's Jerusalem Hotel (www.lalibelajerusalemhotel.com).





God-shaped holes Lalibela's 12th century sculptors carved away 'all the rock that wasn't a church'; Coptic priests still watch over their legacy

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Ethiopia Footnotes

Walk the country's epic highlands, meet local tribes and sense the devotion in its rock-cut churches. Here's how to plan your trip to Ethiopia

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Addis Ababa
Population: 70 million
Language: Amharic plus other tribal languages
Time: GMT+3 (summer GMT+2)
International dialling code: +251
Visas: Required by UK nationals – available on arrival at Bole International Airport; a one-month, single-entry tourist visa costs $20. Those arriving via a different port of entry must obtain a visa prior to arrival.
Money: Ethiopian birr (ETB), currently 25ETB to the UK£. There are no banks or ATMs in Lalibela.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	**Aug**	**Sept**	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**

■ October and November offer the best weather, with clear skies, cool daytime temperatures and meadows in full bloom after the rains.

■ December to April is still good for trekking, though advance planning is required if travelling during Christmas, Easter or the festival of Timkat (19 Jan).

■ July to September sees the peak of the rainy season (*krempt*). Tesfa closes several sites over this period due to unpleasant walking conditions.

Health & safety

Malaria is not endemic in Addis Ababa or the northern highlands – over an altitude of 1,800m, the malarial mosquito cannot survive. Only Bahir Dar in the north is low enough to be malarial. However, travellers are advised to err on the side of caution and take prophylactics. Immunisations against tetanus, hepatitis A and typhoid are recommended and a yellow fever certificate may be required.

Crime rates are low, but be prepared for '*faranji* (foreigner) frenzy' when visiting remote regions.

Further reading & information

Ethiopia (Bradt, 2009)
Ethiopia & Eritrea (Lonely Planet, 2009)
www.tesfatours.com Tesfa website
www.villageways.com Community tourism operator Village Ways
www.cyberethiopia.com Ethiopia info

THE TRIP

Treks with Tesfa Tours (+251 118 100 920, www.tesfatours.com; info@tesfatours.com) cost 600 birr (£23) pp per day. An eight-day trip – including a night in Addis Ababa, a six-day trek (full-board), a night in Lalibela and all transfers costs US$600 (£400) for two. New sites opened in Tigray in May 2010. For an excellent guide in Addis, contact Habte Melesse (www.learnethiopia.com; melesseh12@yahoo.com). UK operators Village Ways and Wild Frontiers also offer itineraries in partnership with Tesfa.

Getting there

Ethiopian Airlines (0800 635 0644, www.ethiopianairlines.com) and BMI (0870 6070 555, www.flybmi.com) fly direct from London to Addis. Flight time is eight hours; fares start from £465 return. Egyptair and Gulf Air offer cheaper indirect flights.

Getting around

Ethiopian Airlines has an extensive network of internal flights – expect to pay from £115 from Addis to Lalibela one-way.

Improving roads and the advent of a few luxury bus companies has made public transport less challenging than in times past. However, those travelling overland will still have to be prepared for slow journeys.

Cost of travel

Ethiopia is inexpensive – a determined budgeter could get by on £20 a day. Mid-range hotel rooms cost $30-80; a meal for two costs from 25 birr (£1), a bottle of St George beer 8 birr (40p). Small tips are expected.

Accommodation

In Addis, the central Ras Hotel (Gambia St; +251 115 517 060) has spacious, careworn rooms from 280 birr (£11). The old-world, if dilapidated, Itegue Taitu Hotel (+251 111 560 787, www.taituhotel.com) remains a popular budget choice.

A good mid-range option in Lalibela is the Mountain View Hotel (+251 333 360 804, www.mountainsviewhotel.com); from $49.

Food & drink

Ethiopian food is a joy. Meat and veg dishes tend to be spiced with berbera, and normally come in a *wat* (stew) or *tibs* (sautéed), with communal *injera*, a sourdough pancake, the national staple.

Ethiopia claims to be the home of *buna* (coffee): coffee ceremonies are a ritual hospitality. *Tej* is a potent honey wine.

From the archives

Ethiopia highlights – issue 93, Feb 08
How to make *injera* – issue 102, Mar 09
Tribes of the Omo Valley – issue 70, Mar 05

Highlights

1. Lalibela
Timeless devotion and rock-hewn churches
2. Simien Mountains NP
One of Africa's great trekking destinations
3. Aksum
Crumbling ruins of a once mighty kingdom
4. Gonder
Medieval seat of Ethiopia's Solomonic kings
5. Harar
Old Islamic town with evening hyena feeding
6. Danakil Depression
Lava lakes, searing heat and Afar tribesmen
7. Bale Mountains NP
Stronghold of the rare Ethiopian wolf
8. Lower Omo Valley
Remote home to charismatic tribes
9. Blue Nile Falls
The mighty river at its most spectacular
10. Lake Tana
Home to 14th-century island monasteries

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Tanzania
Enjoy a feast of film

It's a balmy evening and you're stretched out under the stars watching the movers and shakers of African cinema light up the big screen. Sound good? Then you'll love Zanzibar Festival Tours' new *Zanzibar International Film Festival* experience. It provides ample time to enjoy open-air movie screenings inside Stone Town's crumbling Old Fort, taking in flicks from Africa and its diaspora, with some dolphin spotting and beach time thrown in for good measure.

Who: Zanzibar Festival Tours (0800 542 1200, www.zanzibarfestivaltours.com)
When: 2 Jul 2011
How long: 10 nights
How much: from £1,600 (excl flights)

Save £250 if you book before 1 March 2011!

Laos
Join a wild caravan

See Laos from the ultimate vantage – perched atop an elephant. On Bamboo Travel's *Land of a Million Elephants* expedition you can travel through tropical forests and sweeping paddy fields as part of an elephant caravan, stopping to dine by village campfires. The animals all come from an ethical NGO working to protect the Asian elephant. Gleaning expert knowledge from mahouts, you'll get to wash, groom and feed your companions. Tours can be customised to coincide with the colourful elephant festival in Paklay (18-20 Feb).

Who: Bamboo Travel (020 7720 9285, www.bambootravel.co.uk)
When: flexible departures
How long: 12 days
How much: from £2,595 (incl flights)

India
Mingle with the tribes of Nagaland

The Nagaland Hornbill Festival is no ordinary knees-up. Remote Nagaland, often considered India's true frontier state, is reputedly home to the last head-hunting tribe of Asia. Every year local tribes gather for a riotous festival which, thanks to Travel the Unknown's *Nagaland and Hornbill Festival* tour, you can be part of. After enjoying a whirl of traditional music, Naga wrestling, archery and flower shows, you can spot unicorn rhino in Kaziranga and sail to Majuli, the world's largest river island. Bragging rights come as standard.

Who: Travel the Unknown (0845 053 0352, www.travelthe unknown.com)
When: 26 Nov-8 Dec 2011
How long: 13 days
How much: from £2,095 (excl flights)

Mali
Get with the rhythm

Plunge headfirst into Mali's throbbing music scene with Songlines' *Bamako, Ségou and Festival on the Niger* trip. See *djembé* and *kora* makers crafting traditional instruments, visit the capital Bamako for a flavour of Malian nightlife, and then make for Ségou, home to one of the continent's best festivals, where you can immerse yourself in hypnotic beats and head-spinning performances. We defy you not to get up and dance.

Who: Songlines (020 7371 2777, www.songlines.co.uk)
When: 29 Jan 2011
How long: 9 or 10 days
How much: from £1,299 (excl flights)

Previous page: Jim Lundgren/Alamy. This spread: JNTO; Reef and Rainforest Tours

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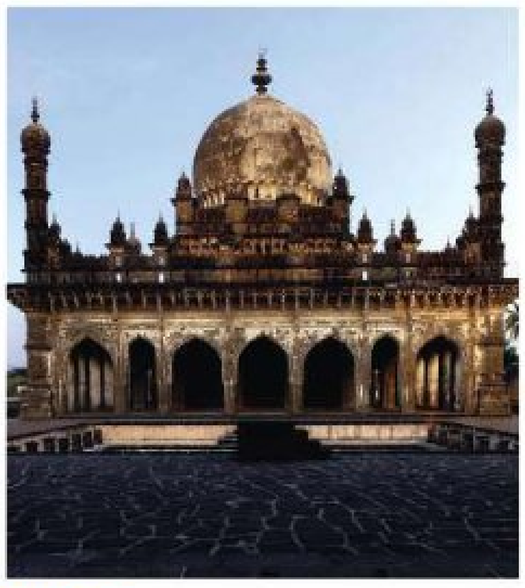


India
Soak up excess in Madhya Pradesh

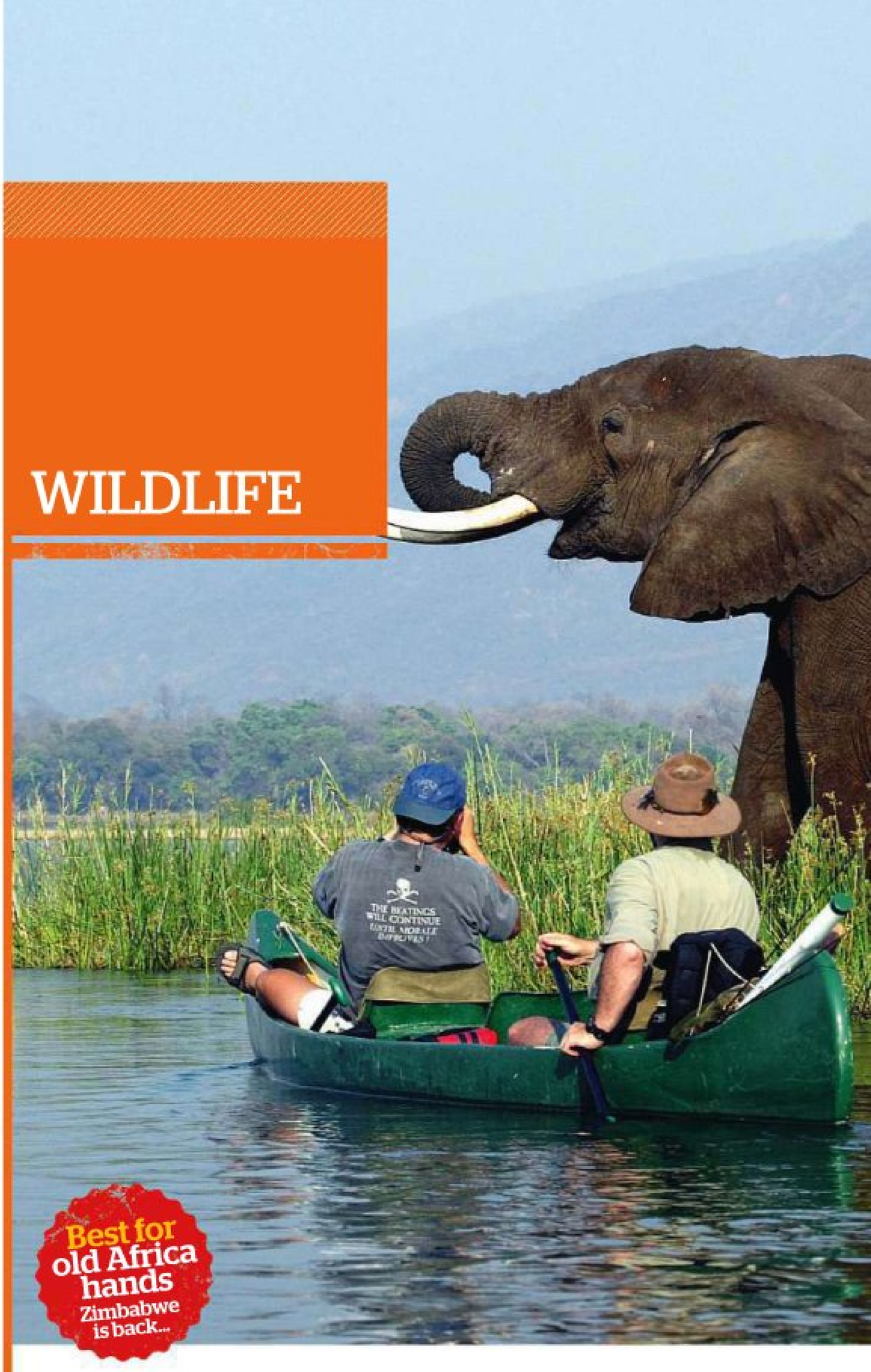
Such was the Maharaja of Gwalior's retinue of staff, he had someone employed solely for the purpose of cracking walnuts. You'll get a sense of that indulgence when you take the TransIndus *Hidden Gems of Central India* tour, which takes in Gwalior's imposing fort, as well as such beguiling places as the Ghost Town of Mandu near the Ahilya Fort, and the World Heritage sites of Sanchi and Bhimbetka. There's also a chance to see rich birdlife along the ravines of Chambal and the eccentric gharials (Indian croc-like creatures) that inhabit the river.

Who: TransIndus (020 8566 3739, www.transindus.co.uk)
When: 9 April 2011
How long: 16 days
How much: from £3,995 (incl flights)

Japan
Marvel at snow sculptures

Every year Hokkaido, Japan's second-largest island, rolls out reams of fantastical ice sculptures at the Sapporo Snow & Ice Festival. We're not talking your average ice sculptures either – these are big, brilliant masterpieces. You can see them and partake in an array of other sub-zero activities (including snow golf) on The Oriental Caravan's *Through the Land of the Ainu* tour. You'll continue through a haunting land of icy volcanoes to ogle snow monkeys, peer at red-crowned cranes and bathe in hot springs.
Who: The Oriental Caravan (020 7582 0716, www.theorientalcaravan.com)
When: 6 Feb 2011
How long: 15 days
How much: from £2,495 (excl flights)

WILDLIFE



Zimbabwe
Be first to return

Zimbabwe – a land ruptured by conflict or a wildlife idyll? Long before political tensions marred this beautiful southern African nation, it was known for its plentiful fauna. Now tour operators are returning, and local guides, lodges and ordinary Zimbabweans are welcoming them back. Audley's *Zimbabwe* tour has serious pulling power, offering the chance to canoe through Mana Pools National Park – a 2,200 sq km mass straddling the Zambian/Zimbabwean border, studded with zebras, hippos and crocs – before retiring to a string of super-luxury lodges.
Who: Audley (01993 838 000, www.audleytravel.com)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 8 days generally
How much: from £3,125 (incl flights)

India
Track tigers on foot

Romanticised and, alas, incredibly rare, tigers are the big cats on every wildlife lover's wish list. The chance to see them up-close and personal is something you don't get every day – let alone the option to do so on foot. In fact, the only tiger reserve to offer walking safaris is little-visited Satpura National Park, venue for Reef and Rainforest Tours' new *Luxury Tiger Walking Safari*. Stride out into this lovely reserve in Madhya Pradesh, and you could ›

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come within whispering distance of the elusive felines.
Who: Reef and Rainforest Tours (01803 866965, www.reefandrainforest.co.uk)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 10 nights
How much: from £3,863 (incl flights)

Madagascar
Love those lemurs

With a shock of dark fur and eyes bright enough to light up the jungle, the endangered black lemur is surely one of the highlights of Rainbow Tours' *Wildlife in Madagascar* trip. Leading you into the African isle's national parks and Sambirano forest, alive with myriad endemic species, guide Rija Rakotoarisoa (a previous nominee for the *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards) will bring you into contact with fluorescent frogs, exotic birds and, of course, lots of lovable goggle-eyed lemurs.

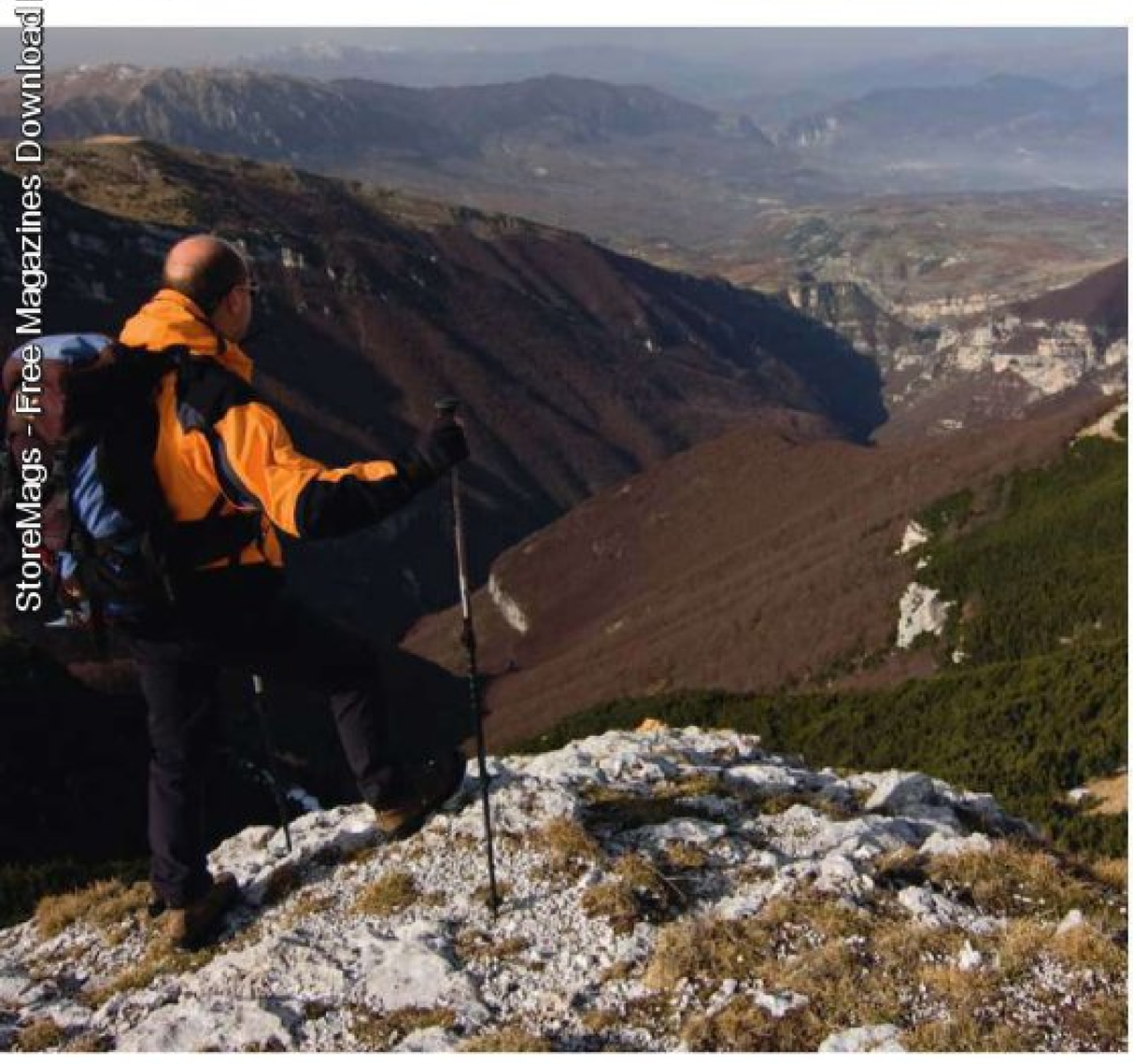
Who: Rainbow Tours (020 7226 1004, www.rainbowtours.co.uk)
When: 9 Sep 2011
How long: 13 days
How much: from £3,625 (incl flights)

Canada
Take a wild road trip

No need to don walking boots and thermals to experience the rugged North Atlantic coastline – on Wildlife Worldwide's *Natural Wonders of New Brunswick* self-drive tour you can see it all from the comfort of a car. Driving through Fundy National Park (*pictured, right*), you'll see a plethora of wildlife including North Atlantic right whales and grey seals. For more drama you can stop at Hopewell Rocks where twice a day the highest tides in the world (up to 14m) flood the beach.
Who: Wildlife Worldwide (0845 130 6982, www.wildlifeworldwide.com)
When: daily departures Jun-Oct
How long: 11 days
How much: from £2,390 (incl flights)

Italy
Howl with the wolves

Admit it – you thought Italy was more about Chianti and Caravaggio than carnivores. But there are plenty of wild corners, including Majella National Park (*pictured, below left*), just a two-hour drive from Rome. On a tailormade short break from Wildlife Wilderness, in association with Pan Parks, you can stride through its limestone mountains, plunging gorges and vivid foliage. With a mixture of self-guided walks and professionally guided tours, you may well catch sight of the rare Apennine wolf.
Who: Wildlife Wilderness (0845 004 4599, www.wildlifewilderness.com, www.panparks.org)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 4 days or more
How much: from £585 (incl flights)



Tanzania
Safari minus the men

If you've hankered after the sun-scorched African plains but can't find a decent companion, Tracks Safaris' *Ladies Only Safaris* could be for you. The small-group tours are aimed at solo travellers (so no hefty single supplements) and allow you to mingle with the Maasai, spot elephants, wildebeest and hippos, and picnic at the Ngorongoro Crater, a volcanic caldera overrun with lions. The best bit? No hairy, list-obsessed, egomaniacal men to spoil those gorgeous sunsets.
Who: Tracks Safaris (01823 256 630, www.trackssafaris.co.uk)
When: 22 May 2011
How long: 10 days
How much: from £1,600 (excl flights)

Ladies only 100% testosterone-free safari

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ACTIVE

Indonesia
Discover a coral wonderland

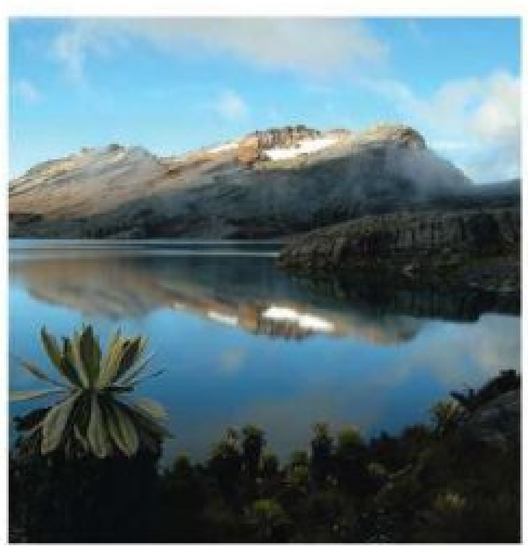
Take the plunge with Dive Worldwide's new *Spice Islands* trip. Lying between West Papua and Sulawesi, the waters of the Moluccas Islands are virtually devoid of tourists but brimming with pristine reefs and marine life. Whether you're an apprehensive snorkeller or a die-hard diver you'll get to spend your days plying the silent world under the sea, floating among eagle rays, humpback whales and hammerhead sharks with barely a plastic flipper in sight.

Who: Dive Worldwide (0845 130 6980, www.diveworldwide.com)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 14 days
How much: from £3,120 (incl flights)

Best for families
Monsters + activity = happy kids

Colombia
Trek the secret Andes

Five years ago the remote Sierra Nevada del Coquy mountain range in Colombia was a no-go zone, blighted by guerilla warfare. Now this stretch of the Andes is trouble free and tempting trekkers. KE Adventure Travels' groundbreaking *Sierra Nevada del Coquy* tour progresses across paramo grassland into high passes, tumbling glaciers and snow-iced peaks.



Who: KE Adventure Travel (01768 773966, www.keadventure.com)
When: 18 Jun, 26 Nov 2011
How long: 15 days
How much: from £2,495 (incl flights)

Scotland
Seek the Loch Ness monster

Bring the Loch Ness legend alive on Wilderness Scotland's *Canoeing in the Great Glen* adventure, specially intended for families. You'll be deemed the coolest parents in town as you tuck your own little monsters into a canoe to ›

Adriadne Van Zandbergen; Bruno D Amicis/PanParks; www.keadventure.com

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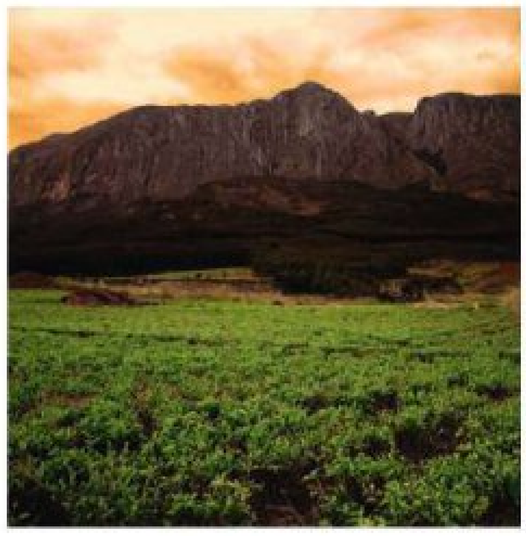
whoosh and slosh along the Caledonian Canal, paddling into a series of sun-dappled lochs and gliding out onto the huge expanse of Loch Ness to spy Urquhart Castle – and, if you're lucky, Nessie herself.
Who: Wilderness Scotland (0131 625 6635, www.wildernessscotland.com)
When: 22 Jul, 5 Aug, 9 Aug 2011
How long: 4 days
How much: from £445 (excl flights)

Bali
Learn to surf

Travellers flock to Bali for many things but world-class waves are one of its biggest draws. Where better to indulge your action-man/woman fantasies than on Flight Centre's *Surfing in Bali* trip? During three days of tuition you'll get to grips with the ups and downs of being a surfer and, as part of your education, there will be plenty of time to soak up the beach bum vibe, pick up some lingo and watch blazing sunsets.
Who: Flight Centre (0844 800 8660, www.flightcentre.co.uk)
When: departures 1 Jan-30 Mar 2011
How long: 7 nights
How much: from £789 (incl flights)



Malawi
Scale the heights of southern Africa

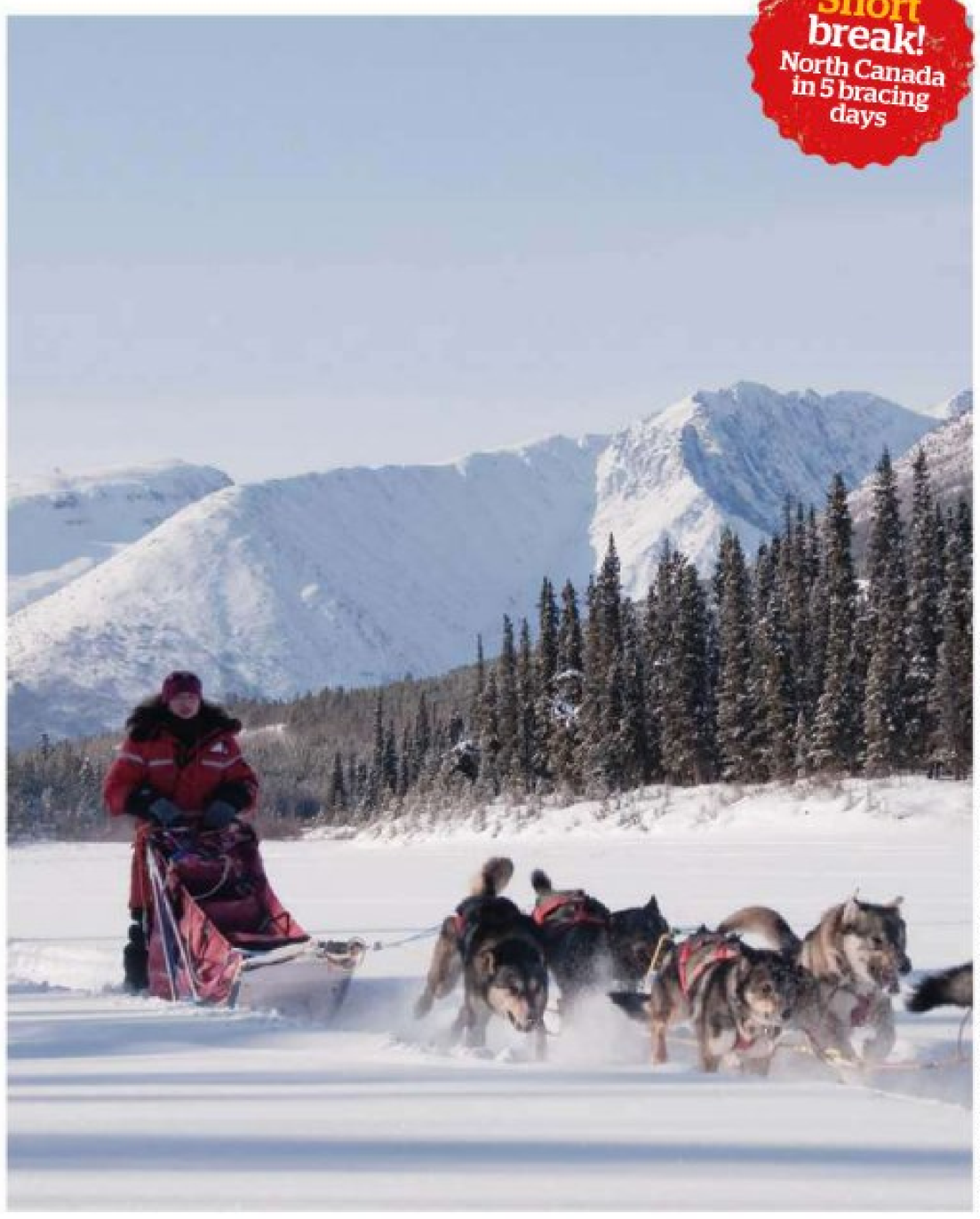
You can't beat seeing Malawi on foot. Wilderness Journeys' *Mount Mulanje Trek* allows you to stroll amongst the wildlife in Liwonde National Park, amble around colonial settlements and tramp through the forests of the Zomba Plateau. Then, if you're still standing, there's the small matter of climbing 3,002m Mount Mulanje to attend to. You'll be handsomely rewarded – the highest mountain in southern Africa offers all the drama and dizzying vistas of Kilimanjaro without the throngs of trekkers.
Who: Wilderness Journeys (0131 625 6635, www.wildernessjourneys.com)
When: 16 Jun, 25 Aug 2011
How long: 10 days
How much: from £1,895 (excl flights)

Peru
Ascend an Inca peak

During the Inca days, sprinters delivered messages back and forth across the Andes, stopping to rest in *tambos* (lodges). On Sunvil Traveller's *Andean Lodge Trek* you can hike through their former stomping ground, staying in a series of similar lodges. You'll need to dust off your walking boots and look lively – not only will you be hiking for six to seven hours a day past alpacas, waterfalls and chinchilla-dotted rocks but you can also ascend Apu Ausangate, the most sacred Inca mountain of all.
Who: Sunvil Traveller (020 8758 4774, www.sunvil.co.uk)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 10 nights
How much: from £3,550 (incl flights)

Canada
Sled the Yukon

One, two, three – mush! On Discover the World's *Yukon Winter Dream* short break, you can be speeding across frozen landscapes behind a team of panting huskies, powering through the vast Canadian wilderness on a snowmobile and gawping at the northern lights as they dance overhead, all in the space of four days.
If that sounds like too much excitement, you can also opt to wander Whitehorse and defrost cold, aching limbs at the nearby Takhini Hot Springs.
Who: Discover the World (01737 214 252, www.discover-the-world.co.uk)
When: Jan-Mar 2011
How long: 4 nights
How much: from £1,090 (excl flights)



Liz Male/Wilderness Scotland; Wilderness Journeys; Discover the World

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NEW FRONTIERS

North Korea
Get inside the Axis

Thanks to an exclusive arrangement with the state travel monopoly, Regent Holidays' *North Korea East Coast Explorer* group tour is a real one-off. Starting in Pyongyang, you'll see the cult-of-personality monuments of this notoriously neurotic nation for yourself, and then head east to explore coastal areas rarely seen by visitors. Highlights here include a visit to myth-shrouded Mt Kumgang (off-limits for years) and the

beachside Chilbo homestay. Illuminating and unique.

Who: Regent Holidays (0845 277 3317, www.regent-holidays.co.uk)
When: 1 October 2011
How long: 16 days
How much: from £2,220 (excl flights)

Guinea-Bissau
Delve into West Africa

Here's one for Africa completists: Undiscovered Destinations' *Guinea-Bissau Discovery* tour lifts the lid on one of West Africa's smallest and least-visited nations. Starting in sleepy capital Bissau, the trip includes a day tracking chimpanzees in the nearby ›

Algeria
Venture into the deep Sahara

Tired of Tunisia? Unmoved by Morocco? Explore's *Algeria: Tassili Plateau & Hoggar Mountains* trip plunges you deep into the wild and magnificent heart of the Sahara. Although there's time to see the Unesco-listed Kasbah of Algiers, the bulk of this 4WD-and-camping trip is far to the south, where dramatic rock formations, prehistoric rock art and huge sand dunes hold sway. Highlights include the sand seas of the Tadrart El Biredj valley, stops at mudbrick Tuareg villages, and climbs up the volcanic Hoggar peaks.

Who: Explore (0845 013 1537, www.explore.co.uk)
When: 16 Apr, 15 Oct, 19 Nov, 17 Dec 2011
How long: 14 days
How much: £2,237 (incl flights)

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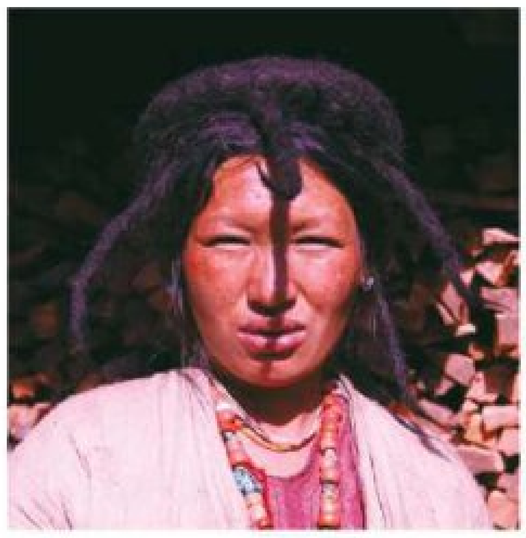
forest, and several days hopping around the idyllic Bijagós Archipelago. Home to remote communities, saltwater hippos and turtles, these islands are culturally and biologically fascinating. The March departure also visits the lively Bijagós and Bissau Carnivals.
Who: Undiscovered Destinations (0191 296 2674, www.undiscovered-destinations.com)
When: 4 Mar, 18 Oct 2011
How long: 8 days
How much: from £1,699 (excl flights)

DR Congo
Navigate the Congo

Few get beyond fantasising about Africa's great river, running as it does through the troubled territory of the DRC. Hats off, then, to Wild Frontiers, whose *Congo – In The Footsteps of Stanley* expedition centres on a 20-day, 1,000km river cruise from Kisangani to Kinshasa. En route you'll trek to pygmy villages, watch scenes of rural life unchanged for centuries, and camp on the riverbank. Not for the faint-hearted – but a thrilling achievement.
Who: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, www.wildfrontiers.co.uk)
When: 9 Sep 2011
How long: 27 days
How much: from £5,910 (excl flights)



Bhutan
Be first in the East

The Merak Sakten region, nestled into the far east of this mysterious Himalayan kingdom, was closed to travellers in 1995, to protect its distinctive culture and – so the legend goes – its flourishing yeti population. In 2010 it was reopened, and a few tourists experienced its forest-covered valleys, largely untouched by the progress of time. Be one of the first to traverse the hillsides, high passes and raging rivers of the region, pausing to drink yak-butter tea with locals in *shamo* – the regional, and quite unique, headgear of choice, which is less hat, more spider.
Who: Blue Poppy Tours & Treks (020 7700 3084, www.bluepoppybhutan.com)
When: Anytime – tailormade
How long: 10-21 days
How much: from US$2,230 (approx £1,370) (excl flights)

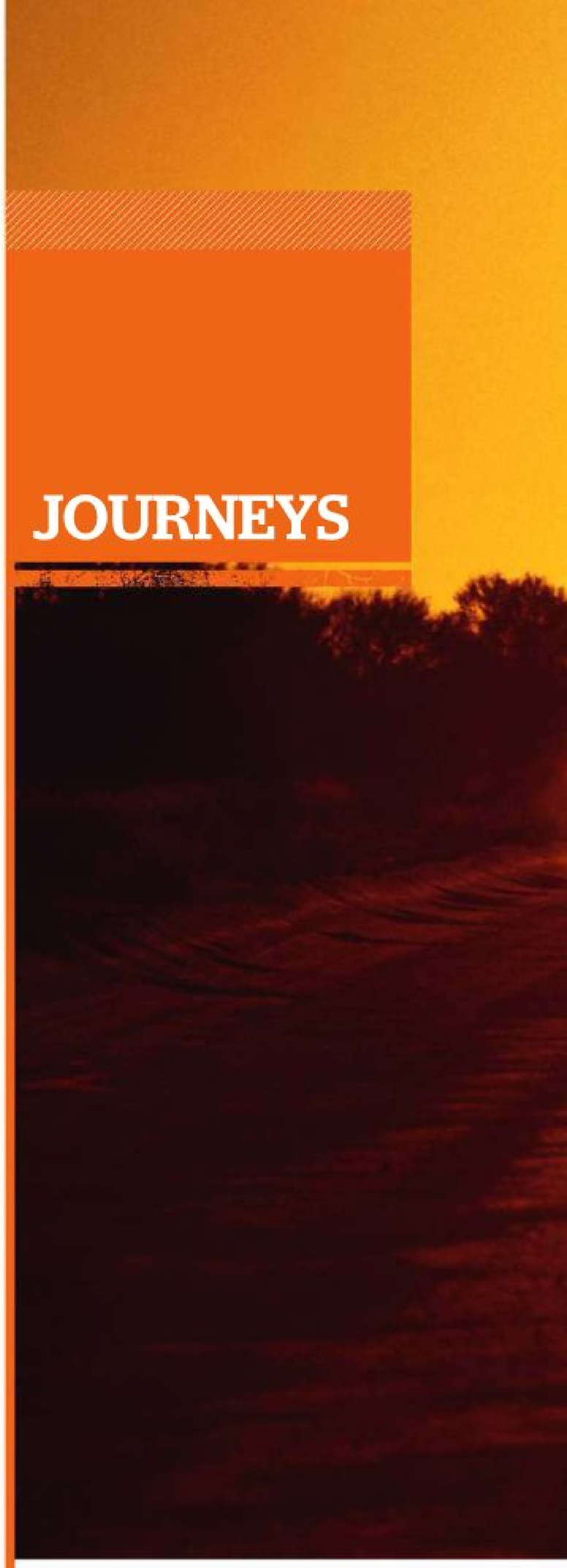
More next issue
We report from Eastern Bhutan on sale 6 Jan

Banda Aceh
Speed the recovery

On Boxing Day, 2004, 61,000 people lost their lives in the Indonesian city of Banda Aceh as the tsunami smashed into northern Sumatra. Although backpackers have returned, Intrepid's *Sumatra Highlights* tour is the first time a major operator has featured the rapidly recovering region. Kicking off in Medan, the trip includes a stay on volcanic Lake Toba and jungle camping in Gunung Leuser National Park. Then you'll enter Aceh province, where you'll meet NGO volunteers, speak to children learning English, and visit tsunami landmarks to grasp the true scale of this natural disaster. A sobering trip, but a hopeful sign.
Who: Intrepid (0203 147 7777, www.intrepidtravel.com)
When: frequent departures
How long: 15 days
How much: £635 (excl flights)

Cambodia
Discover South-East Asia's secret jungle

There aren't many secret corners of traveller-friendly South-East Asia, but Cambodia's hitherto off-radar Cardamom Mountains are one of the most exciting. Covering 20,000 sq km of the country's south-west, the varied habitat conceals numerous endangered species including tigers, bears, hornbills and pangolins, plus half of Cambodia's 2,300 bird species. Mountain Kingdoms' *Cardamom Mountains Trek* visits O'Malu Waterfall, Chhay Tameas Rapids, O'Spott Bat Cave and the Bokor and Popokvill Falls. The tour also takes in favourites such as the sprawling temples at Angkor Wat, as well as spending some time in capital Phnom Penh.
Who: Mountain Kingdoms (01453 844 400, www.mountainkingdoms.com)
When: 29 Jan, 2 Nov 2011
How long: 16 days
How much: from £1,395 (excl flights)



JOURNEYS

Brazil
Go beyond the beach

From the energy of Rio to the capoeira moves of Salvador da Bahia, feel the rhythms of Brazil on Dragoman's *Brazilian Heartland* trip. Going further than the typical overland tour, this itinerary includes two full days at Chapada Dos Veadeiros National Park, camping in Brazil's interior and a visit to the enormous cave system –

Sarah Baxter

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Australia
Take the bus – in style

Oz-Bus's *London to Sydney* route is one of the longest overlanding journeys available, but if you don't fancy roughing it through Europe, Asia and Australia, its brand new comfort trip could be for you. This addition follows the same itinerary as the original, but all accommodation is in hotels and high-quality campsites, leaving you with more energy to take in the epic journey and its countless spectacular sights.

Who: Oz-Bus (0800 7319427, www.oz-bus.com)
When: 8 May, 5 Oct 2011
How long: 85-88 days
How much: from £6,499 + €400 (kitty for guides etc)

Nepal
Trek the length of the Himalayas

Winding through some of the highest mountains and most remote communities in the world, the Nepal section of the *Great Himalaya Trail* is now open for trekking with World Expeditions. Three celebrated Everest summiteers have been confirmed as trek leaders on the 1,700km route – and although the trip takes an exhausting 157 days to complete, it's also available in seven shorter stages.

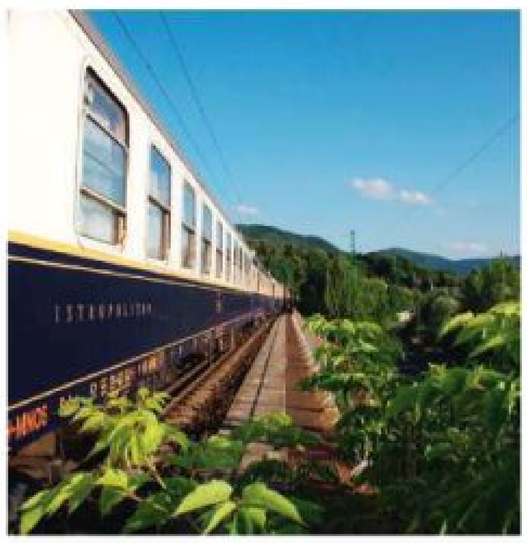
Who: World Expeditions (0800 0744 135, www.worldexpeditions.co.uk)
When: 15 Feb 2011
How long: 157 days
How much: £20,490 (excl flights); from £2,350 for shorter sections

The Arctic
Set sail on an iconic ship's final voyage

The icebreaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov* makes its final voyage across the Arctic next year – and you could be on board for Discover the World's epic *Arctic Circumnavigation* trip. Sailing from Anchorage via the Russian Far East, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic, the itinerary includes land-based expeditions and lectures led by Arctic experts including author Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen and ›

South America's most extensive – at Terra Ronca.

Who: Dragoman (01728 861133, www.dragoman.com)
When: from 1 Jun 2011
How long: 17 days
How much: from £615 + $360/£221 (kitty) (excl flights)



Central Europe
Ride the rails

Recreate the romance of the rails on the *Bosphorus to the Baltic* trip onboard the Danube Express. The journey passes through the heart of Central Europe from Turkey to Poland, crossing into the Carpathian Mountains, over the Danube and through the Tatras, unveiling dramatic views of medieval cities and rolling countryside.

Who: Danube Express (01462 441400, www.danube-express.com)
When: 21 May, 3 Sept 2011
How long: 9 days
How much: £5,390 (excl flights)

Southern Africa
Take a grand tour

From the wildlife-rich savannah of the east to the arid plains of the south, the *Grand Africa* trip by Tucan Travel follows one of the continent's most iconic routes – with an added twist. Set off from Nairobi and wend through east and southern Africa's parks, jungles, beaches and deserts. Pause in Cape Town and then continue up through Lesotho and Botswana to Livingstone, Zambia. Epic.

Who: Tucan Travel (020 8896 1600 www.tucantravel.com)
When: Mar 2011
How long: 73 days
How much: from £3,960 (excl flights)

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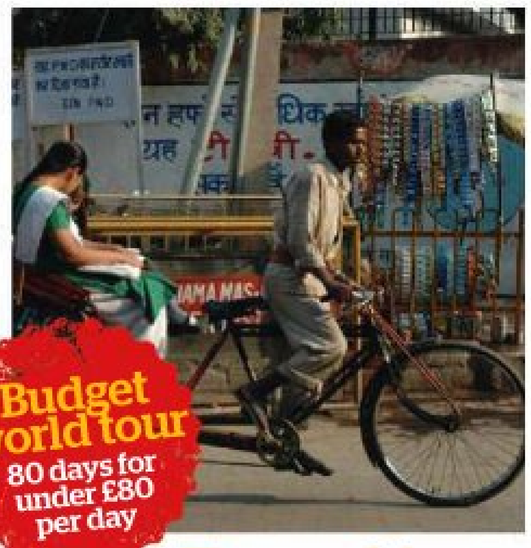
John Murray, producer and director of the film *Franklin's Lost Expedition*.
Who: Discover the World (01737 214250, www.discover-the-world.co.uk)
When: July 2011
How long: 66 days
How much: £60,190 (excl flights)



The world
Go globetrotting

So much to see, so little time... If you can't decide between the pink palaces of Jaipur, the surf-pummelled beaches of Sydney or Peru's Sacred Valley, then why not opt to do them all? Rickshaw Travel has joined forces with Travel Nation to launch the *Phileas Fogg – Round the World in 80 days* trip, an ambitious tour taking in some of the world's greatest sites. They can arrange limitless packages allowing you the freedom to travel independently without the headache of making arrangements yourself.
Who: Rickshaw Travel (01273 322 040, www.rickshawtravel.co.uk)
When: flexible departure dates
How long: 80 days
How much: from £6,280 (incl flights)

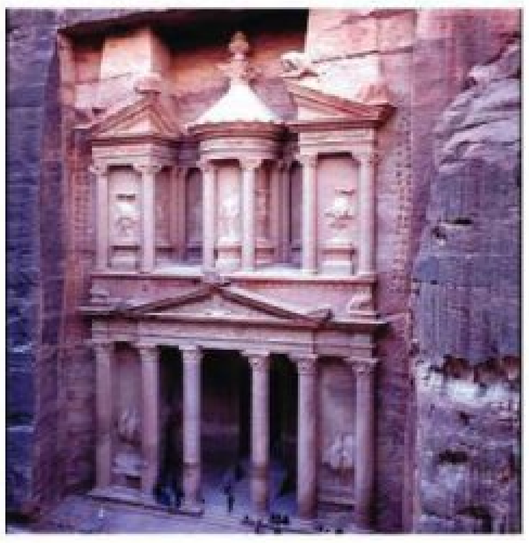
Egypt & Israel
Make a cross-border pilgrimage

History buffs will certainly appreciate this journey through antiquity with Oasis Overland's new *Egypt and Israel Explorer* overlanding trip. It provides a rare chance to properly get to grips with the shared legacies and stark contrasts of these ancient lands. Local guides explain all the main sites, and the price includes two days' sailing on the Nile, a day at the Dead Sea, and a walking tour of Jerusalem's Old City.
Who: Oasis Overland (01963 363400, www.oasisoverland.co.uk,)
When: from 24 Jul 2011
How long: 19 days
How much: £1,090 (excl flights)

CULTURE

Ukraine
Explore the Crimea

Bordering the Black Sea and straddling Europe and Asia, it's not difficult to see why the Ukraine has such a beguiling cross-cultural heritage. Byzantine caves, Greek ruins, Tartar palaces, Genoese castles and Soviet battleships all point to its tumultuous history. Its capital city Kiev is the original comeback kid, rising and falling with the empires that have swept through it, while the Crimean ports of Yalta and Sevastopol evoke their own striking mixture of the turbulent and the tranquil. Throw in a climate that's Mediterranean enough to create some rather good wines, and Ukraine represents a destination worth exploring before the crowds catch on – see it on Cox & Kings' *Treasures of the Ukraine* tour.
Who: Cox and Kings (020 7873 5000, www.coxandkings.co.uk)
When: throughout 2011
How long: 8 days
How much: from £1,275 (incl flights)



Jordan
Follow Tintin to Petra

Hergé's buttery-quiffed hero has seen a bit of a resurgence of late, primarily thanks to the Steven Spielberg film, *Secret of the Unicorn*, due for release at the end of 2011. So why not take his adventures as a cue to your own with On The Go Tours' *Jordan and the Rose City* trip. Follow in the footsteps of the intrepid cub reporter, snorkelling in the Red Sea at Aqaba, exploring the medieval ruins of Shobak Castle, camping in Wadi Rum under the stars and, of course, visiting Petra.
Who: On the Go Tours (0207 371 1113, www.onthegotours.com)
When: 5 Feb, 28 May, 13 Aug, 24 Sept 2011
How long: 8 days
How much: from £1,579 (excl flights)

Armenia
Unravel the Silk Road

On the western edge of Armenia the view is dominated by Mount Ararat. It's here that Noah's Ark is said to have come to rest,

Israel Ministry of Tourism; Fynbos Farm; Sri Lanka Tourism

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and it seems as if many of the animals that came tumbling out two-by-two are still dwelling among the country's diverse panoramas. Caucasian leopard, wolf, lynx, bear and an abundance of exotic flora occupy the landscape, making Armenia a rewarding place for the hiker, as Walks Worldwide's *Armenia – Beyond the Silk Road* trip reveals. The country's position means it's also seen its fair share of armies, merchants and adventurers over the past two millennia, and this vivid fusion of cultures is also emphasised.
Who: Walks Worldwide (0845 301 4737, www.walksworldwide.com)
When: 9 July 2011
How long: 11 days
How much: from £1,695 (incl flights)

Jamaica
Jam in the Caribbean

Get a sense of what this cool Caribbean island is really about on Gap Adventures' *Jamaica Rasta and Reggae* trip, which includes an opportunity to meet locals at both a Rastafarian and Maroon village. Reggae fans can also pay a visit to the Bob Marley Museum in Kingston, while this eclectic tour also includes the

chance to trek the interior, spot crocodiles and visit a rum distillery.
Who: Gap Adventures (0844 272 0000, www.gapadventures.com)
When: from 18 Mar 2011
How long: 10 days
How much: from £959 (excl flights)

Romania
Step back in time

Best for Romantics: Features writers, wolves & gypsies...

Along the Enchanted Way is William Blacker's captivating story of Romania, the last place in Europe where medieval traditions are still part of daily life. His book provides the inspiration for Wild Frontiers' *Romania Wild Walk: Along the Enchanted Way* tour, which starts in the foothills of the Gutai mountains at the town of Breb, the author's spiritual home, and takes in the rolling

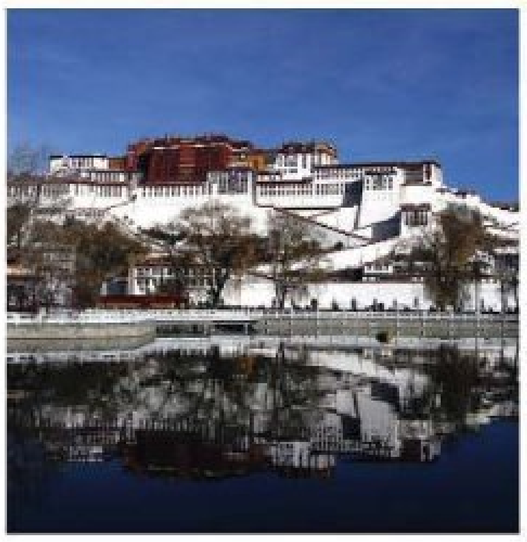
Maramures, the Iza Valley and the highlands of the Rodna National Park. Saxon villages, Romany gypsies, elaborately painted monasteries and the odd Transylvanian wolf all lend an air of brooding romance to the journey.
Who: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, www.wildfrontiers.co.uk)
When: 16 July 2011
How long: 9 days
How much: £1,165 (excl flights)

South Africa
Discover the real Garden Route

South Africa's most famous trail is hardly remote, yet it's remarkable how many people do the Garden Route and fail to encounter anything resembling a well-tended herbaceous border. Not so with Down to Earth's self-drive *Garden Route,* designed to get you back to nature by organising picnics in wacky botanical gardens, visits to vineyards along the Cape, homestays with green-fingered locals and a treetop canopy tour. You can whale-watch in Plettenberg Bay and see the eles at Knysna Park too.
Who: Down to Earth (01728 685672, www.downtoearthholidays.com)
When: 8 Oct, 29 Oct 2011
How long: 8 days
How much: from £730 (excl flights)

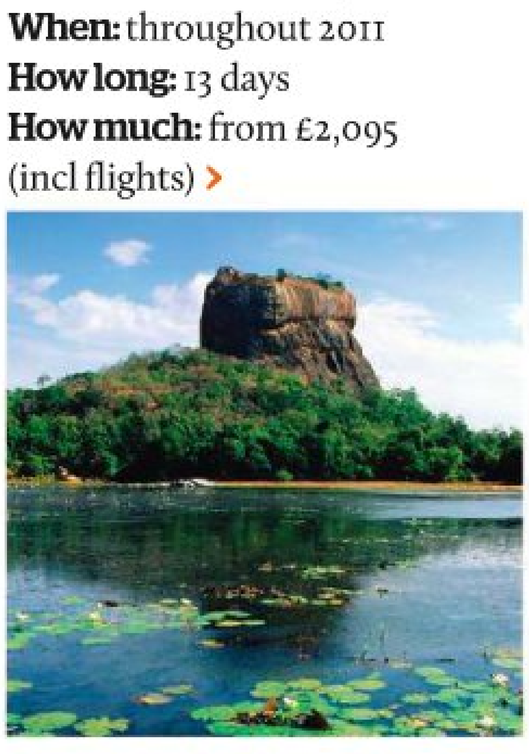
Tibet
Explore the kingdom

Venture to the heart of Tibet on Bales Worldwide's new *Tibetan Explorer* journey, which includes train travel on the dramatic route from Xi'an to Lhasa, a visit to Everest Base Camp and guided city tours through Beijing and Shanghai.
Who: Bales Worldwide (0845 057 0600, www.balesworldwide.com)
When: Apr-Oct 2011
How long: 19 days
How much: from £3,825 (incl flights)



Sri Lanka
Find enlightenment

With mostly Hindu India as its next door neighbour, it's easy to forget Sri Lanka remains largely Buddhist – until you wander around places such as the Ritigala monastery, the huge stupa at Anuradhapura or the monolithic rock fortress at Sigiriya. Bales Worldwide's *Sri Lankan Odyssey* trip also includes the sands of Trincomalee, a visit to an elephant orphanage and safaris at the Minneriya Sanctuary and Yala National Park.
Who: Bales Worldwide (0845 057 0600, www.balesworldwide.com)
When: throughout 2011
How long: 13 days
How much: from £2,095 (incl flights) ›



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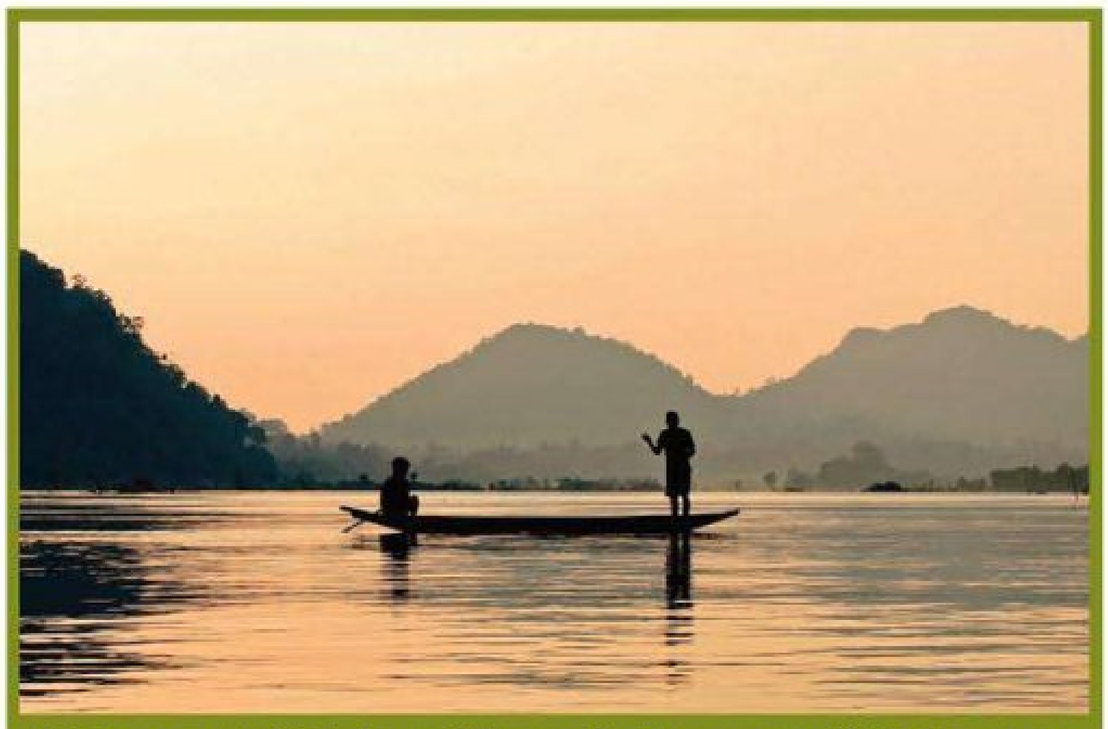

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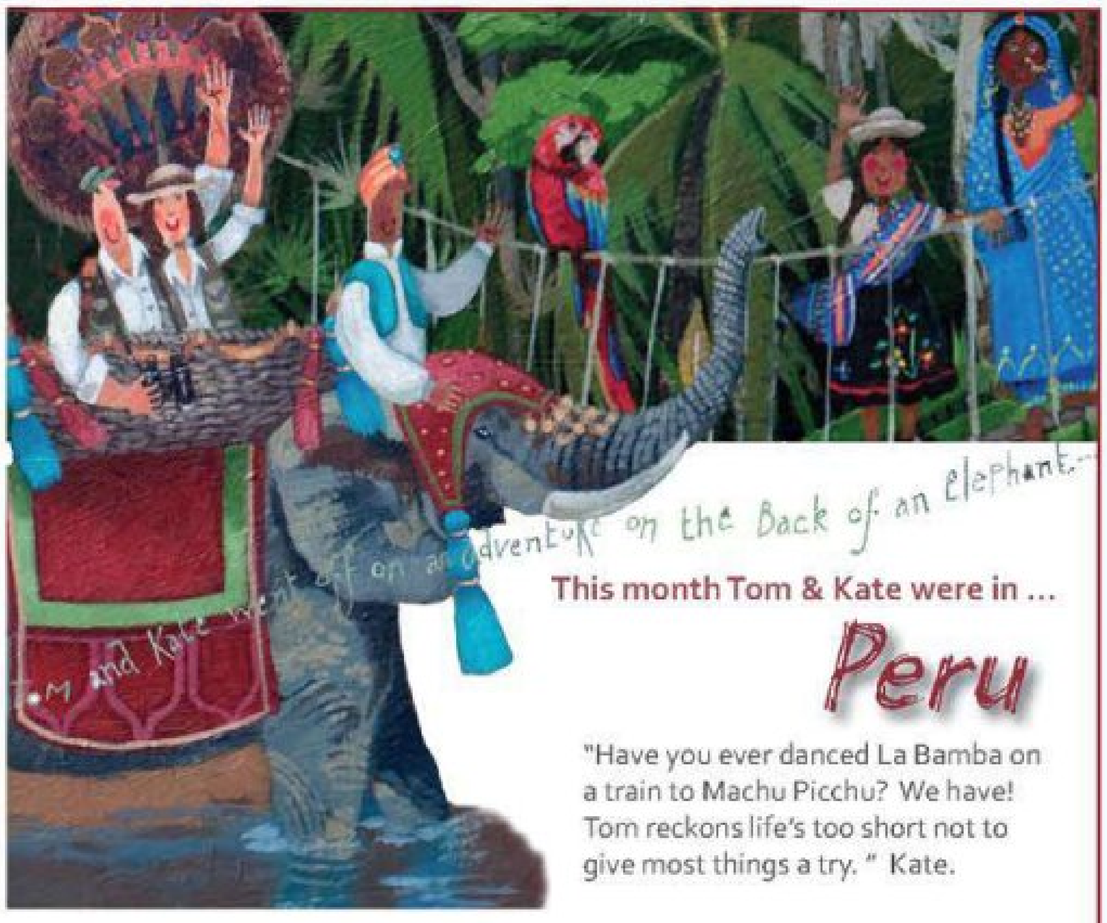

This month Tom & Kate were in ...

Peru

"Have you ever danced La Bamba on a train to Machu Picchu? We have! Tom reckons life's too short not to give most things a try. " Kate.

The 11 day '**Active Inca Highlights**' let us see Peru the way we wanted. A great combination of sighteeing, time alone, some guided tours, and importantly, the chance to enjoy the *most* fabulous scenery on foot on a 3-day trek through the Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu. And we learned to cook a mean 'lomo saltado'!

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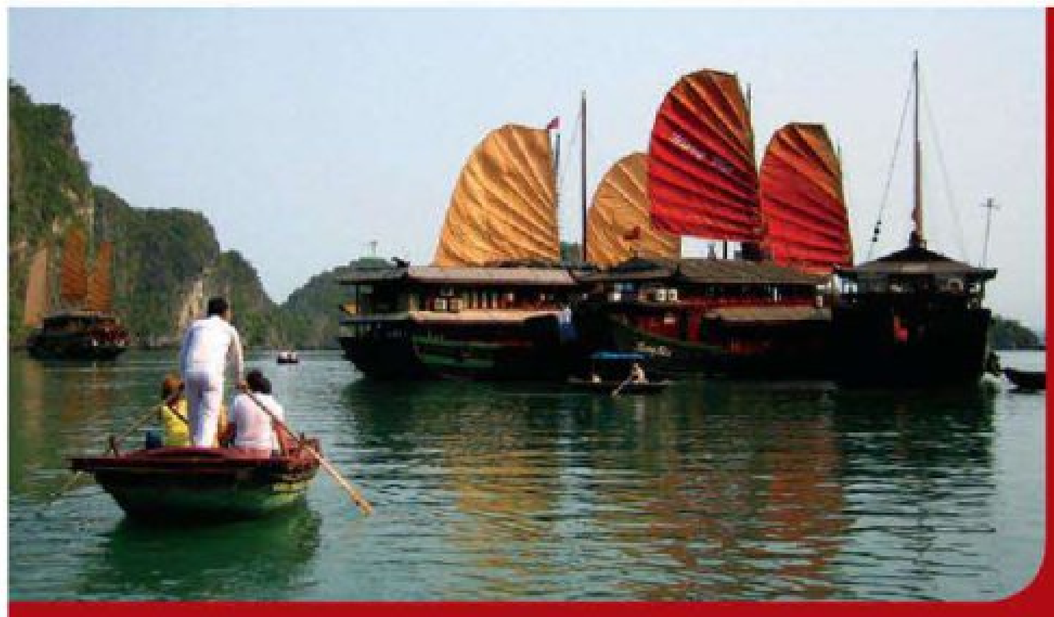
Down to Earth holidays



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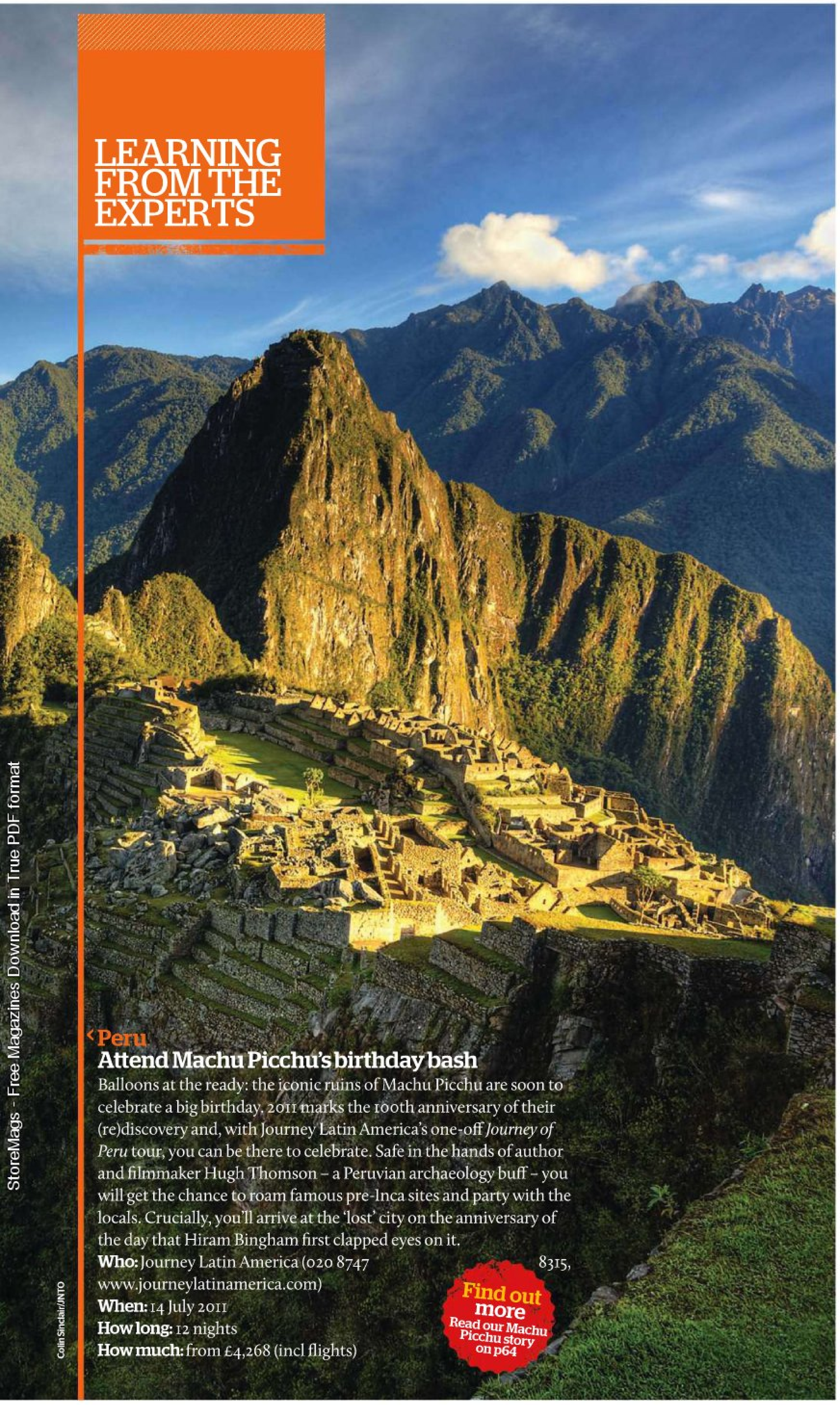
LEARNING FROM THE EXPERTS



‹ Peru
Attend Machu Picchu's birthday bash

Balloons at the ready: the iconic ruins of Machu Picchu are soon to celebrate a big birthday, 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of their (re)discovery and, with Journey Latin America's one-off *Journey of Peru* tour, you can be there to celebrate. Safe in the hands of author and filmmaker Hugh Thomson – a Peruvian archaeology buff – you will get the chance to roam famous pre-Inca sites and party with the locals. Crucially, you'll arrive at the 'lost' city on the anniversary of the day that Hiram Bingham first clapped eyes on it.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 8747 8315, www.journeylatinamerica.com)
When: 14 July 2011
How long: 12 nights
How much: from £4,475 (incl flights)

Find out more
Read our Machu Picchu story on p64

Colin Sinclair/JNTO

Japan
Learn textiles from the kimono queen

Ornate oriental costumes have long had a part to play in Japan's allure. Dive headfirst into a world of delicate silks and *obi* sashes with The Traveller's *Textile and Photographic Spectacular*. Lecturer Gina Corrigan, whose extensive collection of textiles was snapped up by the British Museum, will share her photography prowess and help develop your sartorial élan; you'll watch a kimono fashion show and learn how to craft your very own kimono.

Who: The Traveller (020 7269 2770, www.the-traveller.co.uk)
When: 6 Sep 2011
How long: 13 days
How much: £4,475 (incl flights)

Thailand
Spice up your skills

Unleash your inner chef on Flight Centre's *Cooking in Thailand* trip. This gastronomic adventure, based in Chiang Mai, will teach you the essentials of Thai fare. First up you'll tour the local market to learn about lime, lemongrass and a bevy of other fragrant ingredients. Then you'll get to chop, sizzle and stir under the guidance of a chef before celebrating your newfound kitchen skills with a belly-bulging feast. ›

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50 best new trips for 2011

Who: Flight Centre (0844 800 8628, www.flightcentre.co.uk)
When: flexible departures
How long: 7 nights
How much: from £799 (incl flights)

Norway
Snap polar bears

Click away till your heart's content on Exodus trip, the *Spitzbergen Explorer*. Guided by photographer Paul Goldstein and a host of other experts, this voyage takes you to the Svalbard Archipelago, a frozen world of ice and tundra specked with polar bears, walrus and squawking sea birds. Lectures and photography classes will equip you with all the skills to be out on deck taking stunning snaps, aided by no less than 24 hours of light each day.

Who: Exodus (0845 287 2331, www.exodus.co.uk)
When: 16 Jun, 16 Jul 2011
How long: 11 days
How much: from £3,349 (excl flights)

Cornwall
Dig into prehistory

Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat may be packed with culture vultures, but how much do we know about our own ancient civilisations? Archaeology specialist Andante's new *Cornwall* tour roams across the wild, rune-filled county, taking in formidable Iron Age forts, stone circles and probably the oldest village street in Britain. Led by Cornwall expert Nicholas Johnson MBE, the trip also explains the stories behind iconic sites such as St Michael's Mount, Tintagel Castle and Bodmin Moor. Now that's our idea of a staycation.

Who: Andante Travels (01722 713800, www.andantetravels.co.uk)
When: 12 June 2011
How long: 7 nights
How much: £1,645 (incl meals)

Iceland & Norway
See climate change first-hand

The isle of Jan Mayen quivers in the icy Arctic Ocean some 600km from civilisation. Few people have set eyes on it. You could be one of them with Hurtigruten's *Climate Voyage*. Sailing from Iceland to Norway, in the tradition of legendary explorer Fridtjof Nansen, this trip makes an inaugural visit to Jan Mayen and includes lectures and discussions on climate change. The dramatic setting is sure to intensify your onboard findings.

Who: Hurtigruten (0844 448 7654, www.hurtigruten.co.uk)
When: 21 July 2011
How long: 8 days
How much: from £1,866 (incl flights)

Jordan
See your words and pics in *Wanderlust*

Do you ever wonder what it's like to be a travel writer or photographer? Do you want to hone your creative skills and perhaps take them beyond a hobby? Then join *Wanderlust On Assignment in Jordan*. We'll be taking a group of keen writers and photographers to research and collaborate on an article on Petra and Wadi Rum. Our recent assignment to Marrakesh sold out within a month, so register quick!

Who: Wanderlust Journeys (020 8505 2582, www.wanderlust.co.uk)
When: October 2011
How long: 5 nights
How much: tbc ■

Paul Goldstein/Exodus; Cornwall Council; Paul Morrison

Argentina
Learn to tango and blend wine

From the glaciers of Patagonia to the heady scent of Mendoza's wineries, Virgin Worldwide Journeys' *Argentina with a Difference* tour takes in the best of this Latin American nation. And then some. Not only will you get to master the basics of the tango and trek across the Perito Moreno glacier but you'll also get to grips with winemaking by blending grape varieties to create your own signature tipple.

Who: Virgin Worldwide Journeys (0844 225 1235, www.worldwidejourneys.virginholidays.co.uk)
When: through 2011 (excl May-Aug)
How long: 10 days
How much: from £2,965 (incl flights)

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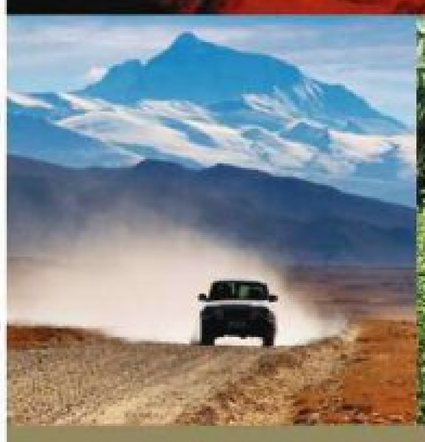

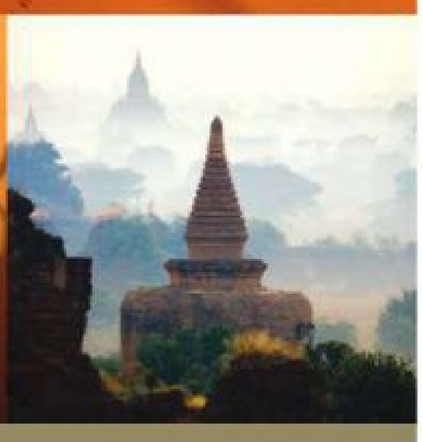

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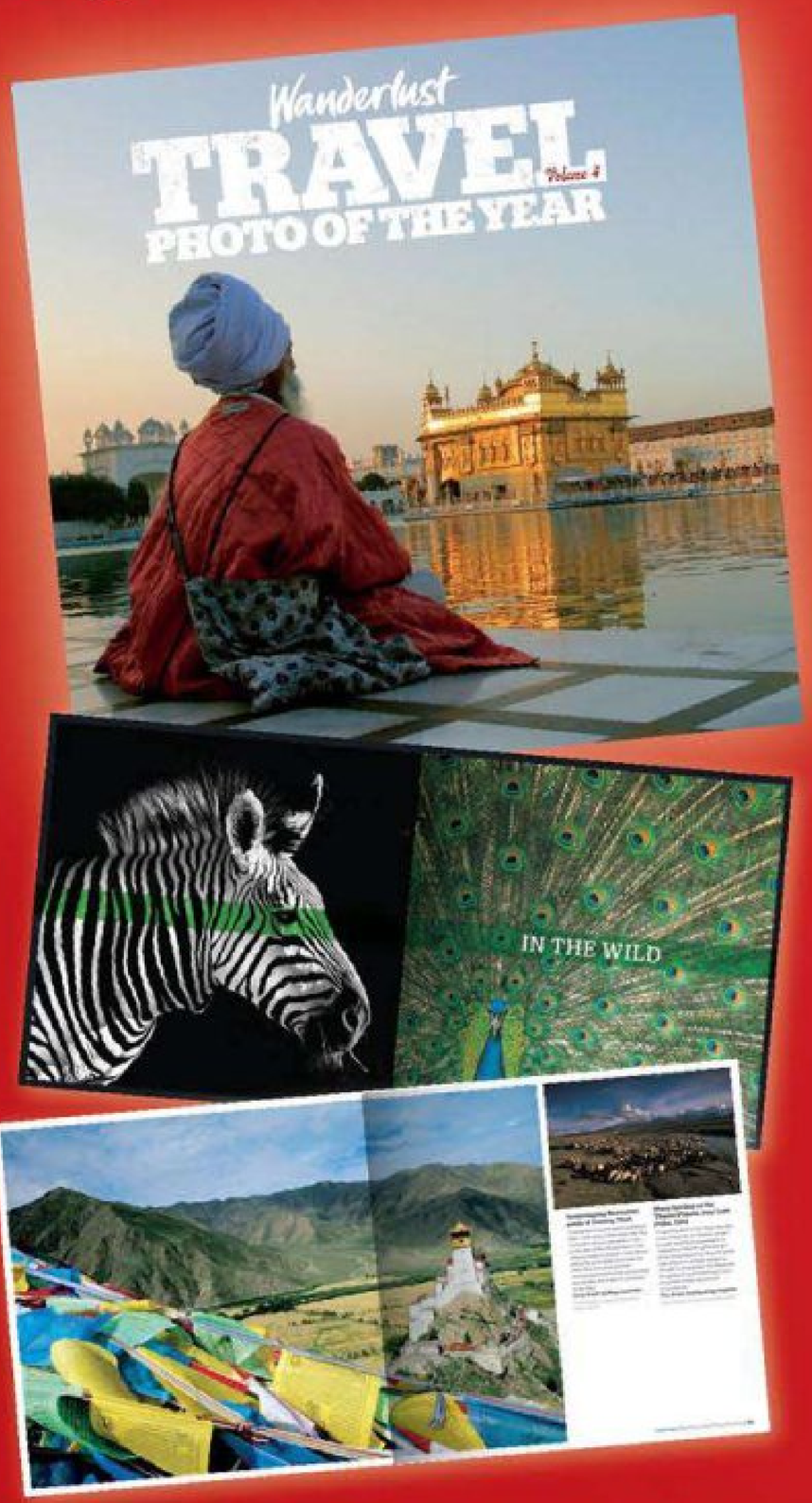

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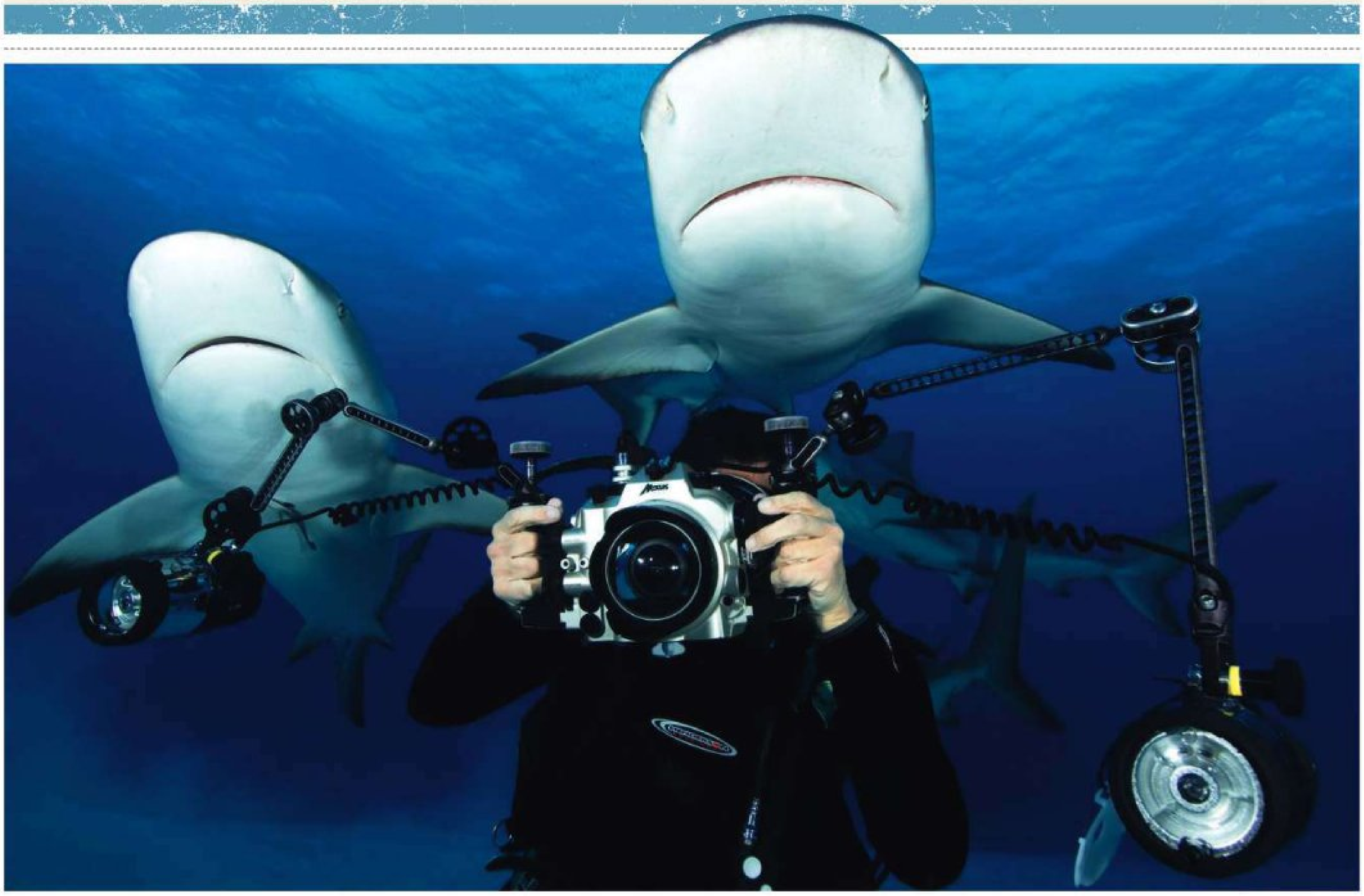
Arrivals

The new books, music, events and travel gizmos giving us itchy feet this month

"One of the most iconic musical figures Africa has ever produced"
Nigeria comes to the UK, p123



Life and death in the deep freeze

Turn up the central heating – this month's new releases are braving the elements

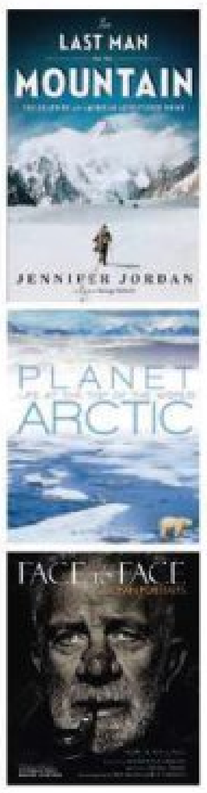
In 2002, on an afternoon walk around K2's base camp, Jennifer Jordan stumbled across a pile of human bones. Such discoveries aren't rare on the 'Savage Mountain', but a name-tagged weather-beaten mitten betrayed the body's identity: Dudley Wolfe, the first man to attempt to reach the summit.

It prompted Jordan to write ***The Last Man on the Mountain*** (Norton, £18.99) – an exploration of Wolfe's life, from his tumultuous private affairs to the taste for adventure that led to his downfall.

But as it picks through letters, journal entries and anecdotal accounts, the plot takes on an air of mystery: did ambition get the best of Wolfe, or was there a darker cause behind his death?

Wayne Lynch's glossy photobook ***Planet Arctic*** (A&C Black, £24.99) is proof that, in the battle for survival in sub-zero temperatures, life can actually flourish against the odds. It celebrates the hardy species that call the Arctic hinterland home – from weather-worn muskoxen and polar bears to Arctic bumblebees.

Perhaps most fascinating, however, are the delicate images of 'Arctic miniatures', the plants that brighten up the otherwise desolate tundra. This is a glimpse of the Arctic at its most colourful – a vitality that defies the most ferocious of chills.



From craggy landscape to craggy faces: ***Face to Face: Ocean Portraits*** (Conway, £30) is a gallery of 100 sea-worn individuals who've spent their lives on the waves. A collection of historic portraiture alongside contemporary photography, the images commemorate those who repeatedly brave the elements – from naval veterans and lifeboat crews to deep-sea divers. It's portraiture at its best: personal, insightful and delightfully intriguing. ***Hazel Plush***

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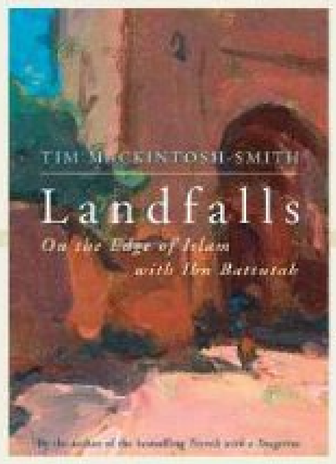
The Big Read

Landfalls

Tim Mackintosh-Smith (John Murray, £25)

★★★★☆ **On the road with Ibn Battuta**



'I awoke to an amplified temple chant and to a less melodious fanfare of farts.' Tim Mackintosh-Smith always knows how to paint a picture.

Following on from *Travels with a Tangerine* and *The Hall of a Thousand Columns*, this is the final part of a trilogy in which Mackintosh-Smith has crisscrossed the Islamic world in the footsteps of Ibn Battuta, the 14th century traveller who makes Marco Polo look like a day-tripper.

It could be said that Mackintosh-Smith is obsessed with the person he knows as IB, and a page rarely goes by without reference as TMS (sorry, can't resist) travels through 11 countries from the Maldives to Sri Lanka to China to southern Spain.

But, while the book is in part a history lesson, it gives surprising insights into the countries too. You have probably associated the Maldives with beach holidays rather than sorcery until now – through IB we learn that the Maldivians ate a lot of tuna and believed it had certain powers: "The fish... has an extraordinary effect on their sexual prowess," IB recalled. "I myself when I lived there had four wives, and concubines as well."

We also learn that, like Marco Polo, there is some controversy over whether IB visited China, due to many errors in his account. 'I find it hard to defend IB against the charge,' says TMS, before going on to do just that.

With its historical theme, this isn't a book for everyone, but it's beautifully written, with lots of humour and earthy descriptions: 'Glimpsing... jackfruit breasts of a hefty woman feeding a hefty baby.' There is plenty of food for thought too. At a bullfight in Moorish Spain, it strikes TMS that *Olé* 'must derive from the equivalent Arabic exclamation, heard at football matches from Morocco to Oman: Allah!'

Being the final book in his trilogy, we inevitably find TMS feeling a little wistful at the end. It will be interesting to see what he does next – he is too talented a writer not to throw himself into another book. And he is a true traveller too. So will he find another reason to follow IB, or has he finally said goodbye? 'Here was the greatest traveller in human history, disappearing into the crowd on a donkey.'

Lyn Hughes

Been There, Read That

A Dragon Apparent

Norman Lewis (Eland, £12.99)

Read by *Wanderlust* reader **Jenny Edwards** while travelling in Indochina

When faced with a bathroom of flying cockroaches in Laos, my normal reaction would verge on the hysterical. This encounter happened, however, while I was reading Norman Lewis's *A Dragon Apparent*, a record of his travels through Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in 1950.

As I travelled through the countries my fear threshold became far higher thanks to the nonchalant way Lewis meets – and conquers – impending doom. To greet the cockroaches with anything more than a raised eyebrow would be cowardly after reading about Lewis's encounter with a wild tiger in a bandit-infested jungle. Equally, it was out of the question to complain about a 16-hour bus journey when the driver used the horn in place of the brake – Lewis faced the almost inevitable threat of Viet Minh ambush without so much as a squeal. This book steadied my nerves on many occasions. I couldn't think of a better companion – bar Norman himself.

Have you read a great book on location? Email **editorial@wanderlust.co.uk**

In Brief

Libyan Sands

RA Bagnold (Eland, £12.99)

★★★★☆ **1920s desert travel classic**

Wild, unforgiving and lifeless, the Libyan Sahara is no ordinary desert. Crossing it by car would be daring now, but back in the 1920s and 30s it was unthinkable. But, while on leave from their Egyptian base, a band of British officers decided to do just that, pitting some Model T Fords against sandscapes hitherto only crossed by camels.

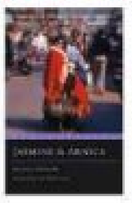
This classic account of their exploits, re-issued by Eland, is captivating. Beginning with naive skids, they are soon venturing to the Pyramids and risking life and limb to glimpse little-known Petra. They graduate to daredevil expeditions, trundling thousands of miles into the dead world of East Africa, and changing desert exploration forever.

Anna Webber

Jasmine & Arnica

Nicola Naylor (Eye Books, £7.99)

★★★☆☆ **Blind author gets a feel for India**



When Nicola Naylor lost her sight in her early 20s, she assumed she'd never travel again. The images of India that she'd spent her youth poring over were now forever out of reach.

But after building a successful career as an aromatherapist, a sabbatical to India provided the perfect chance to learn Ayurvedic massage techniques – and prove her independence.

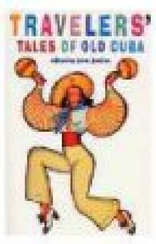
Jasmine & Arnica, re-released in 2010, is a tale of determination, frustration and discovery – not only through touch, smell, taste and sound, but through Naylor's 'third eye', a combination of heightened senses, sharp memory and intuition. Her descriptions are deliciously vibrant, giving a glimpse of India that passes many sighted travellers by – a poignant reminder that travel should be about absorbing a place with all your senses.

Hazel Plush

Travelers' Tales of Old Cuba

ed. John Jenkins (Ocean Press, £10.99)

★★★☆☆ **Riotous stories revealing pre-Communist Cuba**



'There are few places in the world as colourful as Cuba,' writes John Jenkins. Over the past 50 years that colour has been revolutionary red, and such is the effect of Fidel Castro on the Western psyche, it's easy to forget Cuba has 450 years of history prior to Communism. This collection of travellers' tales – set out as letters, journal entries and essay extracts – does a good job of giving us the full story, with rollicking tales of pirate invasions, a gung-ho Hemingway gone fishin' and the mafia running rampant in the dog days of Batista's regime.

Daisy Cropper

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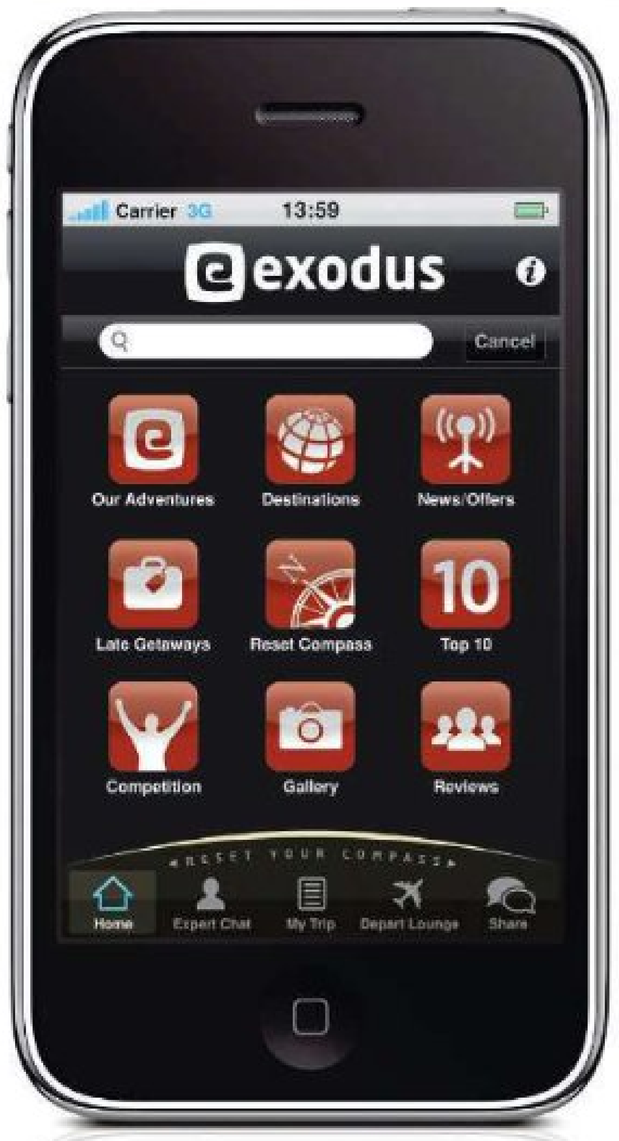
5 of the best adventure travel apps

Got an iPhone? Check out these free downloads



Exodus Adventure Holidays

UK adventure tour operator Exodus is the first of its kind to launch an app – and it's a great start. At heart, it's a digital brochure, so you can search for trips by date, style and destination, browse Top 10 lists – or shake the phone for random inspiration. There's also a decent gallery space, with a few hundred destination photos and readers' shots, plus a smattering of video content.

iOutbackNT

Jam-packed with videos and destination info, this is a useful app for those heading to Australia's Northern Territory. For those who aren't, there's a 'didgeridoo', which bellows when you blow your phone – gimmicky, yes, but fun, too.

Visit Cairngorms

For an adventure a little closer to home, this Scotland-appreciating app has info on leisure activities, walking and biking trails, and local attractions. You'll also find contacts and mini-reviews for restaurants and accommodation.

EveryTrail

If you're planning a hiking trip, it's worth giving *EveryTrail* a glance. With hundreds of trails uploaded by users – including photos, journey details and detailed mapping – and a tracking device that records your route, this is a good starting point.

Alaska

A visit to Alaska is an action-packed affair, but this app has pretty much got it covered. With articles on everything from clam-digging to bear-watching, and useful advice about health, accommodation and survival (there's even a section on kosher travel), *Alaska* gives the guidebooks a good run for their money.

All apps free from the App Store. Found a great travel app? Email **editorial@wanderlust.co.uk**

Handy advice

Underwater Photography for Compact Camera Users *Maria Munn*

(Ocean Visions, £17.95)

Top tips for sub-aqua snappers

Maria Munn's new book is great for those without whizzy SLRs – all you need is a waterproof casing and a few pointers. Here's five to get you started...

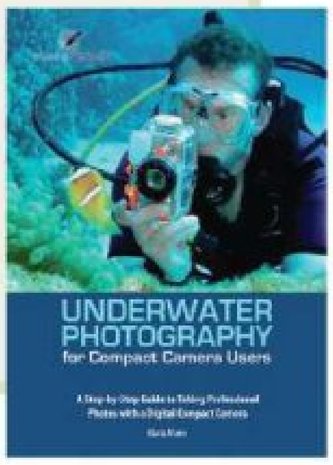
1. Practice on land
Adjusting your camera's settings can be fiddly underwater – try the casing out on dry land first.

2. Shoot close up
Capture detail to minimise dull background colours.

3. Try new levels
Don't just point and click – try alternative angles.

4. Take spares
Cold water and in-built flash zap battery power – be prepared.

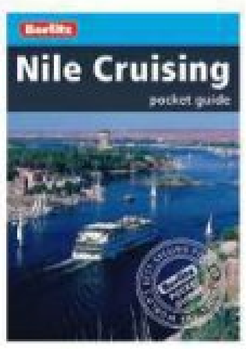
5. Avoid backscatter
Take care with your buoyancy – movement can create clouds of particles that pick up flash light.



Selected new guidebooks

AFRICA	Publisher	Edition	RRP
Namibia	Bradt	4	£15.99
ASIA			
Laos	Rough Guides	4	£13.99
Japan Travel Pack	Globetrotter	5	£8.99
AUSTRALASIA			
New Zealand Step by Step	Insight	2	£8.99
EUROPE			
Vienna Encounter	Lonely Planet	1	£7.99
Trekking in the Dolomites	Cicerone	3	£14
The Isle of Mull: Walkers Guide	Cicerone	1	£12.95
Istanbul	Time Out Shortlist	1	£7.99
MIDDLE EAST			
Afghanistan	Odyssey	2	£24.95
LATIN AMERICA			
Brazil	Footprint	7	£16.99

"Stay on Luxor's West Bank and try one of the restaurants near the ferry terminal for a breakfast of *fuul* and steaming hot tea"



***Nile Cruising Pocket Guide*, Berlitz, 1st edition, £5.99**
Written by experienced tour leader and lecturer Chris Bradley, Berlitz's guide to cruising the River Nile covers all the essentials – everything from choosing a vessel to what to pack. Take your pick from destination highlights and key ports of call, and use the Perfect Day features to plan an action-packed 24 hours.

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World Music

The godfather of Afrobeat rocks on

Nigeria's **Fela Kuti** is being celebrated in a musical at the National Theatre. Here's what you need to know

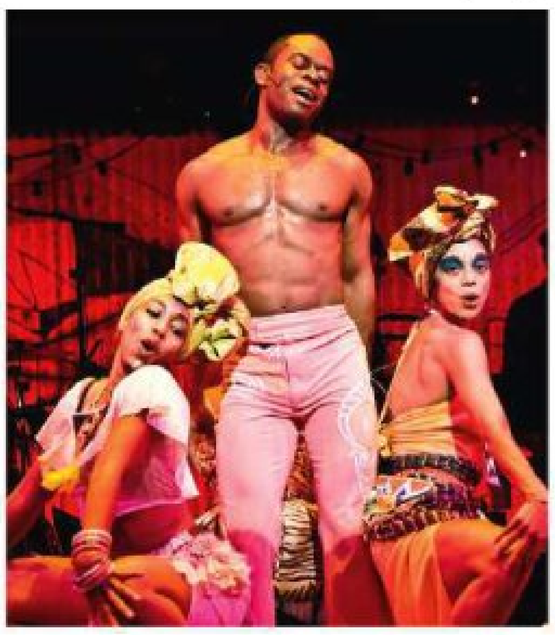
In Nigeria, 1977 will always be remembered as a year of musical revolution. While in the UK the Sex Pistols continued to gain notoriety for 'Anarchy In The UK', Lagos was rocking to 'Zombie' by Fela Kuti and Africa 70, a far more dangerously subversive record, satirically lambasting the Nigerian military junta.

Fela's musical insurgency sparked a violent reaction from the establishment. Enraged by his performance of 'Zombie' at a festival in Lagos, which sparked street riots against the government, on 18 February 1977 Nigeria's military dictators sent more than 1,000 soldiers to attack Fela and destroy the commune that he had named the 'Kalakuta (Rascal) Republic' and declared independent from the Nigerian state.

Fela was severely beaten and his mother thrown from a window, causing fatal injuries. His Kalakuta compound was burned to the ground and his studio destroyed. Fela's response was to record yet more provocative songs about the incident and its aftermath, such as 'Coffin for Head of State' and 'Unknown Soldier'.

Fela's style in the 1970s became known as Afrobeat, a mixture of jazz, funk, Highlife and Yoruba music. It's the Yoruba element that anchors him to Nigeria. The culture of the Yoruba people is extraordinarily rich, steeped in a complex cosmology that features enough deities to give Hinduism a run for its money.

But it has also produced a very particular style of folk music in which the drum forms a central role, its pitch regulated so that it 'talks' and is thus often used to accompany a storyteller – the perfect instrument, then, for the polemical ambitions of Fela, the drums acting like an army of highly vocal supporters to his rebellious cause.



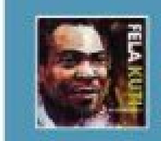
Yoruba music has since come to inform Cuban and Afro-Caribbean styles of music, not to mention Western pop and rock music from the 1950s onwards.

Fela Kuti died in 1997, but he's still revered as one of the most iconic musical figures Africa has ever produced. His life has now been brought to the stage in a multi award-winning concert/performance piece, FELA!, now showing at the National Theatre. Go to **www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/felalondon** to find out more.

3 Fela Kuti albums you should own

***Zombie* (Wrasse)**
For many, this was Fela's finest hour, described by Damon Albarn as the sexiest piece of music ever recorded.

***Music is the Weapon: The Best of Fela Kuti* (Wrasse)**
This double compilation plus DVD includes 'Shuffering and Shmiling,' a favourite of *FELA!* choreographer Bill T Jones.



***Anthology Vol. 2* (Wrasse)**
Eleven classic tracks from the mid to late 70s, plus previously unreleased film of Fela in concert in Berlin, 1978.

A version of this article, by Nigel Williamson, was originally published in *Songlines* magazine. Check out the new issue – which includes an exclusive CD – for more on Fela Kuti. www.songlines.co.uk

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What's on in Dec/Jan

Chill out in Kyoto, Japan

Japan's loveliest city is at its most serene (and affordable) in winter. When snow falls, temples such as the Kinkaku-ji, or Golden Temple (*pictured*) take on a fairytale air, and Kyoto's formal gardens get an artful dusting of snow.

The city's ancient streets are quite a sight too: during the **Kyoto Arashiyama Hanatouro Festival** (10 –19 Dec) historic sights including bamboo-lined walkways and the Togetsukyo Bridge are bathed in the gentle glow of over 2,000 *andon* (paper lanterns) and decorated with floral displays. Meanwhile, restaurants serve up delicious warming hotpot dishes to keep the chill at bay, and a rich programme of concerts and festivals provides nourishment for the soul. Beats Oxford Street any day, we reckon. **www.kyotowinterspecial.com**

Get to Japan from only £790 with Japan Airlines. Go to www.uk.jal.com or www.jaltour.co.uk/tours

Get yourself in a spin, Turkey

For the Whirling Dervishes of the Mevlevi Islamic order, dance is laden with religious meaning. Watch them twirl at the Museum of Mevlana, Konya, Turkey. **www.kultur.gov.tr**

Tickle your tastebuds, Tasmania

Showcasing the best of Tassie's produce, the Taste festival is pure foodie heaven. Dip in for samples and demos. **www.tastefestival.com.au**

Welcome in the New Year in style, Brazil

Head down to Copacabana Beach for food stalls, dancing and fireworks that continue well into January. **www.embratur.gov.br**

Dance in the desert, Mali

The world's most intrepid musicians descend on the sands near Timbuktu for the Festival of the Desert, three days of live music and dancing. **www.festival-au-desert.org**

Twirl your parasol, Thailand

Traditional Thai parasols are opened en masse for the Bor Sang Umbrella Festival, near Chiang Mai – browse stalls by day, then wander down the lantern-lit streets when night falls.

Grab a partner, Peru

Flirtatious interplay, pacy rhythms – *marinera* is one of Peru's most popular dances. Pull on your dancing shoes in Trujillo for the Marinera Festival to learn some moves. **www.peru.info**

JNTO; Babitha George; Embratur; Intagrist El Ansari; Venson Kuchipudi; Jonathan & Angela Scott

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UK Events

FRANKFURT CHRISTMAS MARKET
BIRMINGHAM, 18 Nov-23 Dec
www.visitbirmingham.com
Victoria Square, free
Birmingham has been twinned with Frankfurt for over 40 years – and its German Christmas market is a true taste of the original, with traditional food, craft and *glühwein* stalls.

AFTER HOURS AT THE NHM
LONDON, 26 Nov, 28 Jan & 25 Feb
020 7942 5011, www.nhm.ac.uk
Cromwell Road, SW7 5BD
10am-10.30pm, free
See the Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition (£9), visit the futuristic Darwin Centre, listen to live music and relax with tapas on the museum's late-opening nights.

BERGHAUS LECTURES: MICK FOWLER
EDINBURGH, 2 Dec
01768 774493, www.planetfear.com
Ratho Climbing Centre, EH28 8AA
7.30pm, £10
Mick Fowler, expert mountaineer, talks about his love of remote climbing challenges. He's just returned from scaling the Xuelian massif in the Chinese Tien Shan range – only the third expedition ever to tackle the north face.

WILDERNESS LECTURES: FRAN SANDHAM
BRISTOL, 15 Dec
0117 9299966, www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol
7.30pm, £7.50 (£7 advance)
When travel writer Fran Sandham took off on a solo walk from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean, Tanzania, he did it alone. With no sponsors, no film crew and no backup, this was a risky adventure, which will make for truly inspiring listening.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? ICZN FUNDRAISING LECTURE WITH SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH
LONDON, 16 Dec
020 7942 5653, www.iczn.org
Royal Geographical Society, SW7 2AR
7pm, £20
Sir David shares some of his favourite animal encounters, while Professor Richard Fortey explains why scientific names are more than just labels in this lecture on behalf of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.

ADVENTURE TRAVEL LIVE
LONDON, 28-30 Jan
0871 230 7159, www.adventuretravellive.com
Royal Horticultural Halls, Victoria, London, SW1P 2QD
Fri 6pm-9pm, Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 10am-5pm
£10 (£8 in advance; under 16s free)
£45/55/75 Photography/Travel Writing workshops
Whether you're planning an African overlanding adventure or a winter break snowshoeing in Lebanon, ATL is the show for you. With over 60 talks by experts, exhibits from all major adventure travel providers and workshops in photography and writing from the road, this is a great place to start plotting your next adventure.

ALISON MCCLEERY: BEYOND TABLE MOUNTAIN
GLASGOW, 6 Jan
01738 455 050, www.rsgs.org/events
Renfield St Stephen's Church, Glasgow
2.15pm, £8 (RSGS members/under 18s: free)
Alison McCleery, Professor of Health and Social Sciences, explores the daily life of the many poor South Africans who live in Cape Town's townships. An insightful look behind the usual stereotypes of drugs, gang warfare and unemployment.

WILDERNESS LECTURES: COL JOHN BLASHFORD-SNELL
BRISTOL, 12 Jan
0117 9299966, www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol
7.30pm, £9.50 (£9 advance)
John Blashford-Snell, one of the world's most seasoned explorers, has led over 70 expeditions to remote corners of the globe. Hear how he used traditional reed boats to navigate the rivers running from Bolivia to the Atlantic.

WILDERNESS LECTURES: SARAH OUTEN
BRISTOL, 26 Jan
0117 9299966, www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol
7.30pm, £7.50 (£7 advance)
Aged just 24, Sarah Outen became the first woman and youngest person to row solo across the Indian Ocean, spending 124 days alone at sea. Hear tales from her ocean adventures, and learn about her next expedition, a solo human-powered circumnavigation.

ANCIENT ROCK CARVINGS FROM DAZU, CHINA
CARDIFF, 26 Jan-3 Apr
029 2039 7951, www.museumwales.ac.uk
National Museum, CF10 3NP. Free
Ancient rock sculptures from Dazu China, some of which have never before been seen outside China

MARK CARWARDINE: LAST CHANCE TO SEE...
ABERDEEN, 31 Jan (1 Feb: Dundee; 2 Feb: Dunfermline; 3 Feb: Edinburgh)
01738 455 050, www.rsgs.org/events
Fraser Noble Building, King's College, AB24 3UE
7.30pm, £8 (RSGS members: free)
Behind-the-scenes tales from *Last Chance to See*, Carwardine's series with Stephen Fry – and an update on what the future holds for the species featured.

LIONS: THE TRUTH
LONDON, 14 Dec
020 7348 3408, www.foc-uk.com
Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, SW7 2AR
6.45pm, £15 (talk only)/ £18 (talk and reception)
Celebrated wildlife presenter Jonathan Scott talks about the challenges facing the increasingly vulnerable big cat. Accompanied by award-winning photography by himself and his wife Angela, Jonathan will speak about his time in Kenya's renowned Masai Mara region observing the 'Marsh Pride' – familiar to many from the BBC's *Big Cat Diary*.

DESTINATIONS 2011
LONDON & BIRMINGHAM, 3-6 Feb & 4-6 Mar
0871 230 7141, www.destinationsshow.com
£10 (advance). *Wanderlust* subscribers receive two free tickets with the February 2010 issue.
The top travel show is back again – with the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year exhibition, lots of world food to nibble, and a plethora of expert talks.

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On Television

Born to run

National Geographic Channel examines one of nature's greatest spectacles – the race for dinner and a nice warm bed

Think of migrations, and what springs to mind? Lines of geese heading south for the winter? Herds of wildebeest trampling the Serengeti in pursuit of rain? In fact, migration underpins the survival of countless species – from the golden jellyfish of Palau to Australia's flying foxes – and it's one of nature's strongest instinctive behaviours.

The *Great Migrations* series tells the stories of these vital journeys, revealing the ongoing struggle for survival as never seen before. More than two years' worth of filming is condensed into four hour-long shows, flitting between all seven continents and 20 different countries.

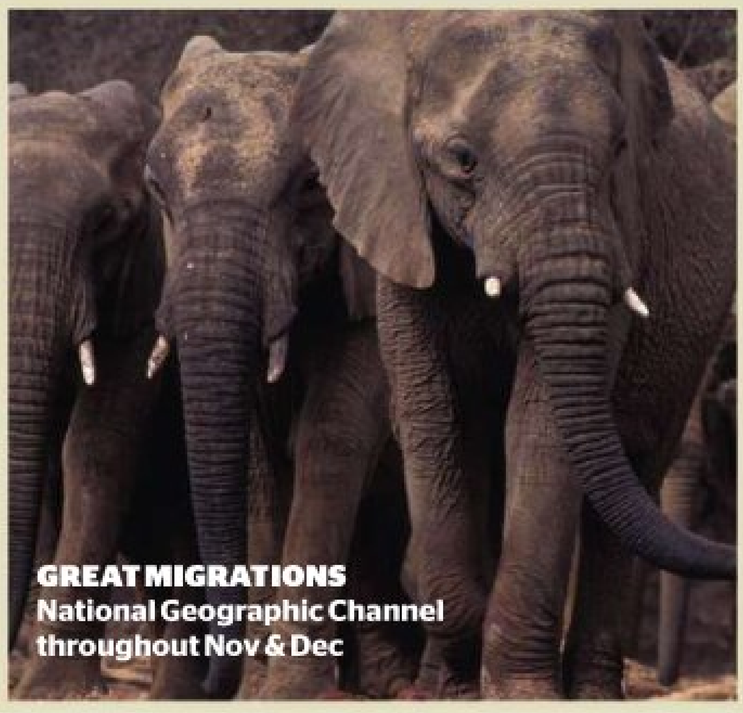
The true power of movement is clear in the plethora of animals that are documented. From microscopic plankton to Pacific great white sharks, few species are left untouched by the need to migrate.

And there's history to be made, too, as vast numbers of Sudan's white-eared kobs – thought to have been wiped out during 20 years of unrest – are filmed for the first time.

Indeed, the footage is a technical tour de force, and the team's efforts don't go unnoticed: the accompanying *Science of Great Migrations* and *Behind the Scenes* programmes reveal the lengths to which the crew were stretched, from battling ferocious sandstorms in Mali to the fiddly task of attaching radio transmitters to monarch butterflies.

Not only is this a groundbreaking documentation of the struggle for survival, but a beautifully shot window on an unseen world.

***Great Migrations* will air on National Geographic Channel on 24 Dec, with *Science of Great Migrations* and *Behind the Scenes* shown throughout December.**



GREAT MIGRATIONS
National Geographic Channel throughout Nov & Dec

Film

OF GODS AND MEN
General release, 3 Dec
When seven French Trappist monks from the monastery of Tibhirine, Algeria, were found beheaded in 1996, conspiracy theories raged. This award-winning drama examines the victims' stories, the impact of the harrowing events, and why – despite the ongoing civil war – the monks were still living in Algeria.

ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE
General release, 10 Dec
Cambodian investigative journalist Thet Sambath probes the actions of the Khmer Rouge, the leaders of the 1970s brutal regi me.

TV

GREAT SCENIC RAILWAY JOURNEYS NEW ZEALAND
Travel Channel, 8 Dec
From the rainforests of the North Island to the coasts and rugged interior of the South Island, railroads played a crucial part in the development of New Zealand. Train aficionado David Holt hops on board for a railway tour.

NOMAD'S LAND
Travel Channel, 13 Dec
What does the future hold for the world's nomadic tribes? Christophe Cousin visits some of the few remaining tribes to see how they've adapted in a world obsessed with cars, carbon footprints and consumerism.

FLAVOURS OF SCOTLAND
Travel Channel, 15 Dec
Charlie Ottley eats his way around the Scottish Highlands, gorging on grouse, wild boar and oysters – and a tot or two of whisky.

HUMAN PLANET
BBC1, 13 January
Filmed in high definition over four years, *Human Planet* is a landmark documentary of life at its most extreme. From desert nomads in Mali to the Altai Mountains tribesmen of Mongolia, each episode focuses on survival in a single environment – and the price that humans have had to pay to adapt. Thrilling, insightful, and accompanied by a beautifully shot coffee table tome.

Radio

EXCESS BAGGAGE
BBC Radio 4, Saturdays, 10-10.30am
John McCarthy and Sandi Toksvig present the weekly travel show. Missed an episode? Over a year's worth of Saturday morning broadcasts are accessible via BBC iPlayer.

SIMON CALDER'S TRAVEL CLINIC
LBC Sundays, 1-3pm
The *Independent*'s travel editor investigates the stories behind the travel news, answers your travel queries by phone, email and text, interviews key industry figures and keeps you up to date with the world of travel.

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It's all a blur
Destinations showcases top travel photos, like Jonathan Clay's award-winning image of a Vanuatan festival

It's **Destinations** time again!

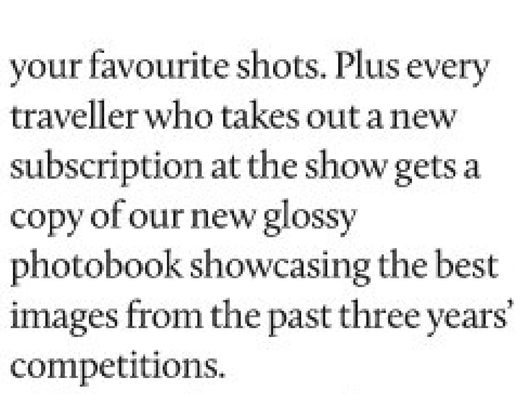
The country's top travel show visits London and Birmingham once again this spring, and you could be there for free – but what's all the fuss about?

Whether you're planning a trip or just on the look-out for inspiration, Destinations is the travel show for you. It offers a plethora of entertainment and advice, with opportunities to meet tourist boards, pick the brains of travel experts and chat to operators about their trips for 2011 – plus, we'll be there to talk about all things *Wanderlust*...

In the frame

Make sure you're there for our favourite part of the show – this year's *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year exhibition (*right*). The winner will be announced at the London event – it's nailbiting stuff, and an excellent chance to swap photography tips and tales from the road. New for 2011, you'll be able to order prints of your favourite shots. Plus every traveller who takes out a new subscription at the show gets a copy of our new glossy photobook showcasing the best images from the past three years' competitions.

When we're not poring over your travel photography, we'll be offering travel advice and chatting about the new-look *Wanderlust* website. We'll also be unveiling the champions of our Travel Awards – including the categories for best country, airline and gear brand – that you've voted for in your thousands.



Jonathan Clay

Tips from the top

But we're not the only travel buffs who'll be doing the rounds – adventurers and celebrity speakers will be packing the Meet the Experts theatres. Hear tales from Mark Kalch's descent of the Amazon, chat about all things wild with Ben Fogle and Michaela Strachan, and quiz circumnavigator and wanderlust.co.uk blogger Alastair Humphreys (*above*) on his pedal-powered adventures.

And you don't have to be planning an epic adventure to enjoy Destinations – whether you're plotting a weekend in Barcelona or a Kilimanjaro hike, there'll be experts galore to set you on the right track.

A taste for adventure

A day's globetrotting can be tiring stuff, but Destinations' Touch, Taste and See the World section – new for 2011 – is the best place to grab some energy-boosting freebies: fragrant tagines, Argentinean wines and spicy curries – with kitchen demos from Italian cooking master Antonio Carluccio.

All this for free?

Yes! All *Wanderlust* subscribers will receive a voucher for free entry for two to either Destinations London (3-6 Feb, Earl's Court) or Birmingham (4-6 March, NEC) in the February issue of *Wanderlust* (out 6 Jan). Tickets: £10 + booking fee. **www.destinationsshow.com**

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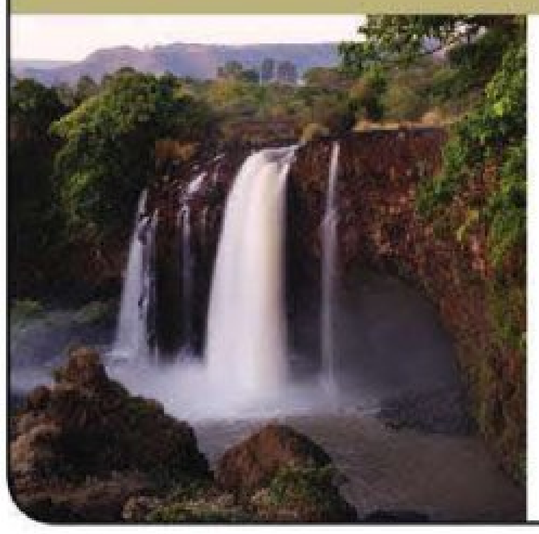
Hot offers

For more exclusive *Wanderlust* discounts, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk

Save £500 on a Kerala trip

Save £500 per person on **TransIndus**'s 9-day tour (normally £1,895) covering some of the most popular destinations in Kerala. The journey begins on the scenic backwaters of Kumarakom before setting off to explore the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary and the vibrant port city of Cochin. The trip ends with time to relax at the Marari Beach Resort in the quiet fishing hamlet of Mararikulam.
To book, call 020 8566 3739 and quote 'Wanderlust'. www.transindus.co.uk.

Save 20% on trips to Ethiopia



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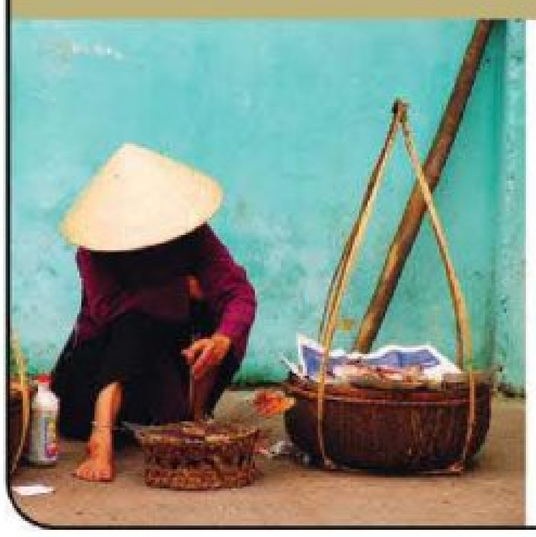

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Travel company tales

Trailfinders

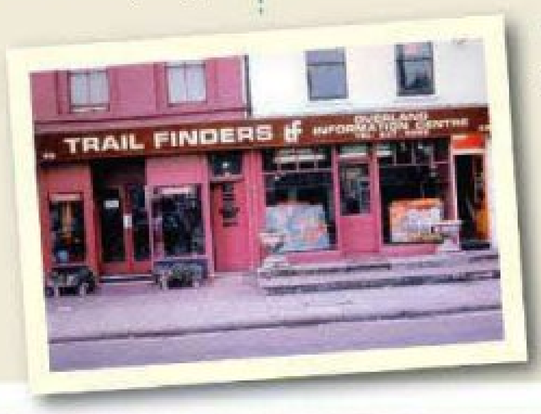
Wanderlust's Top Tour Company of 2010 finishes the year celebrating its 40th anniversary

How did it start?
In the 1960s there were overland companies taking groups to Africa and Kathmandu but the people running these tours could be inexperienced. Travel agents tended to just organise package holidays. So, in 1970 former SAS officer Mike Gooley (*left*) set up Trailfinders – he realised there was a gap for an agency run by experienced travellers who could give good advice.

What were the early challenges?
Not long after Trailfinders opened, there was a postal strike. Only the very wealthy used credit cards then; most Trailfinders clients paid by cheque – which were posted. With no post arriving, no money arrived. Luckily some clients came to visit us with their cheques. Mike always thanked them by taking them to the local pub for a pint!

What makes Trailfinders unique?
The staff. Almost everyone in the company, including Mike, started as a travel consultant. We believe that to sell travel you need to love to travel. Call Trailfinders and the person dealing with your trip arrangements will have travelled extensively in at least two continents outside Europe; they will probably have visited where you want to go.

What does the future hold?
We now have 25 travel centres in the UK and Ireland. There's a deep-seated belief in the company that there is no substitute for the human touch. A computer can't talk to you or tell a joke – we're not promising their jokes are always funny but when it comes to travel we will promise our agents know their stuff!
www.trailfinders.com



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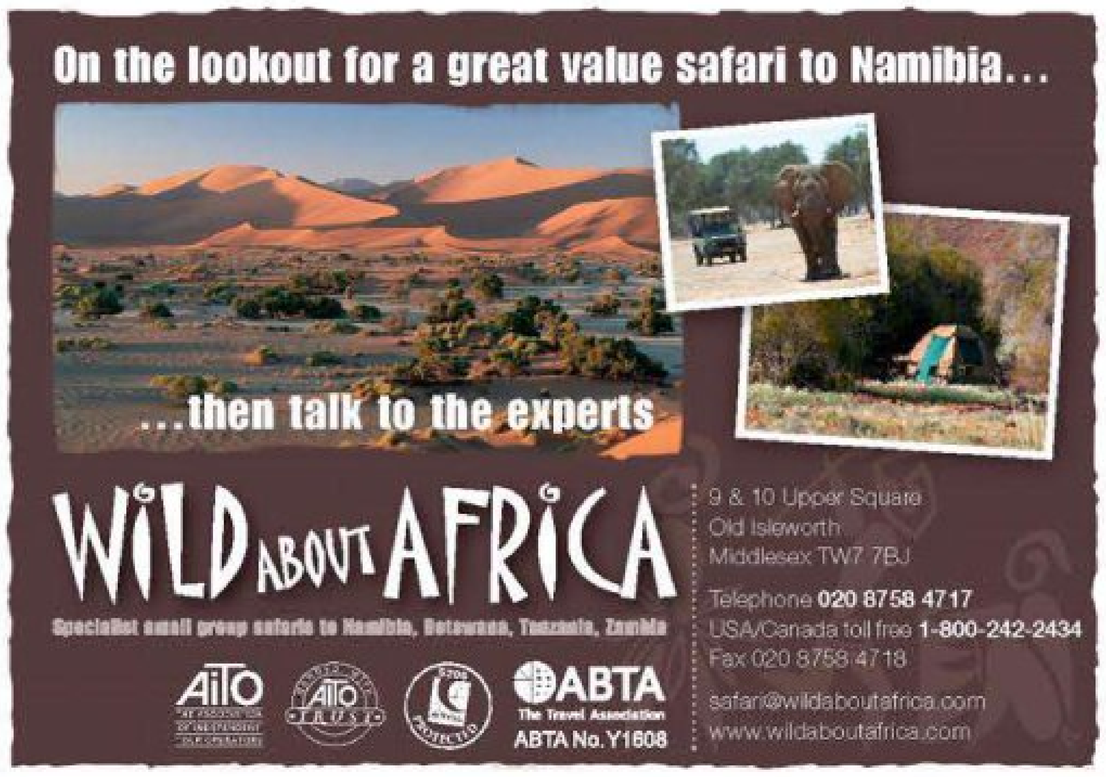

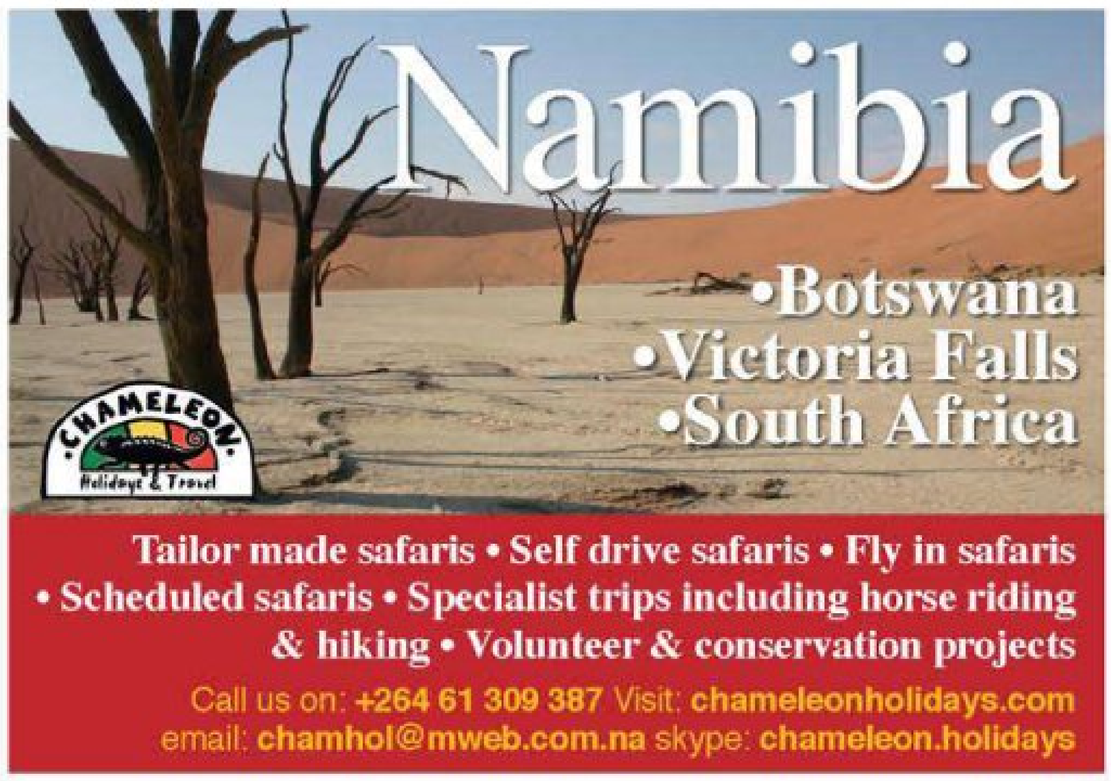

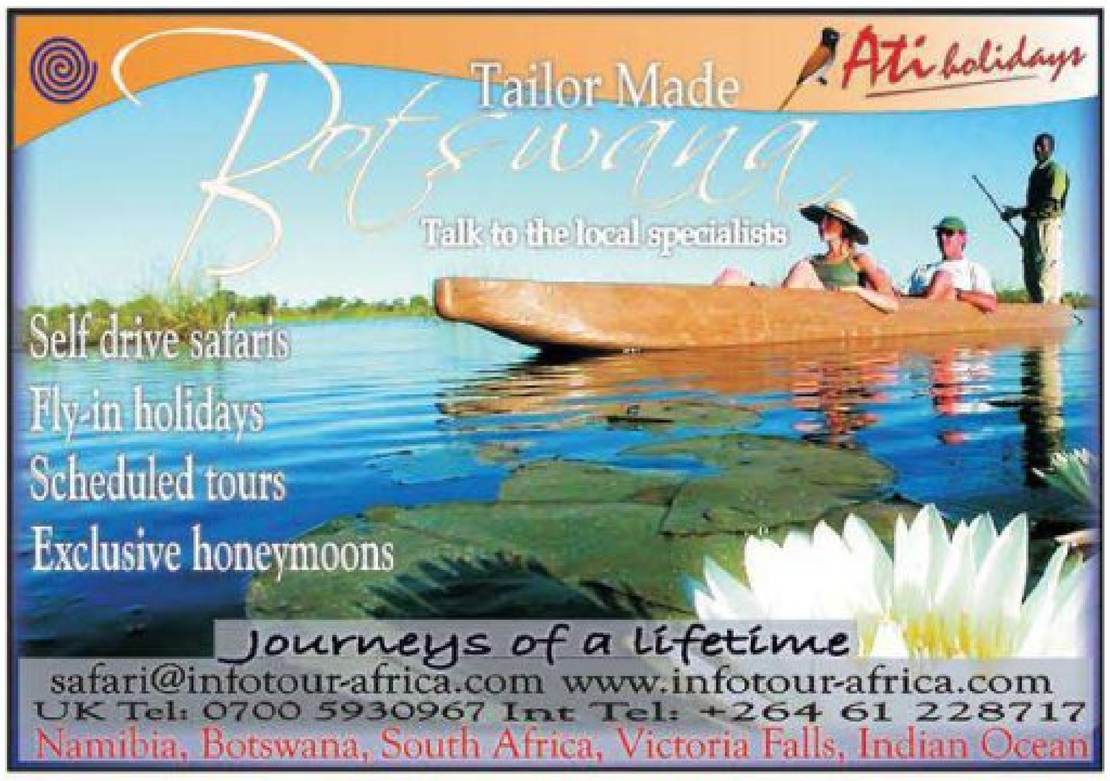

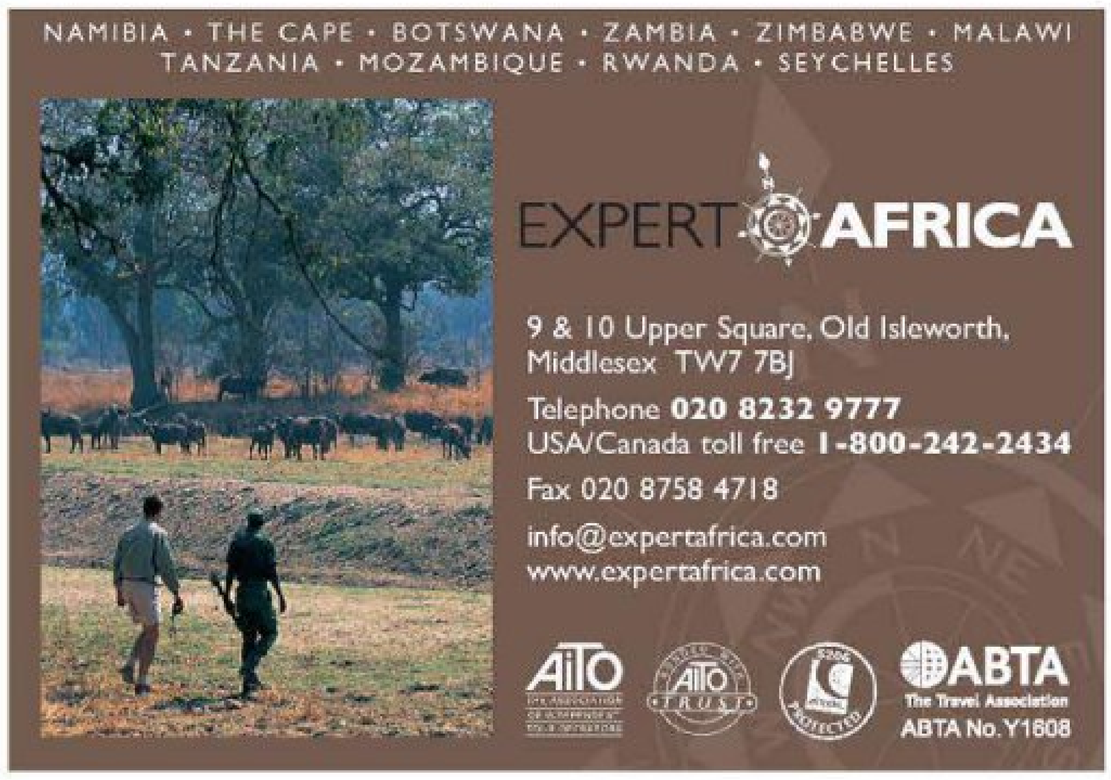

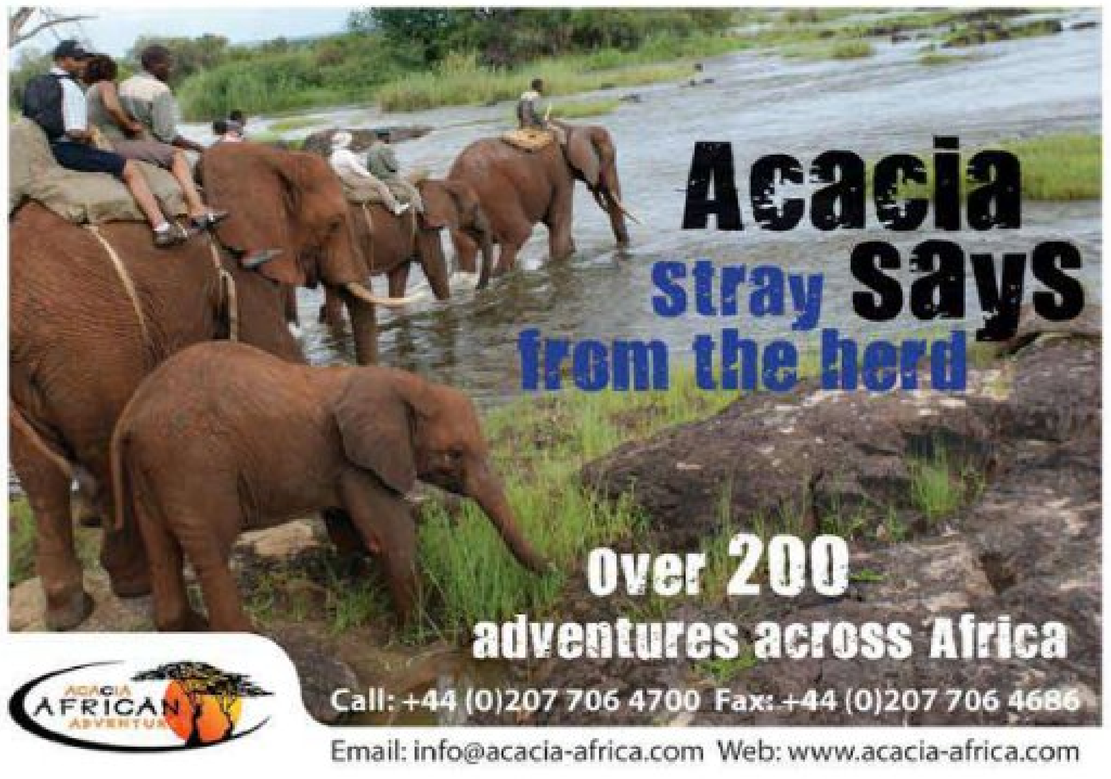

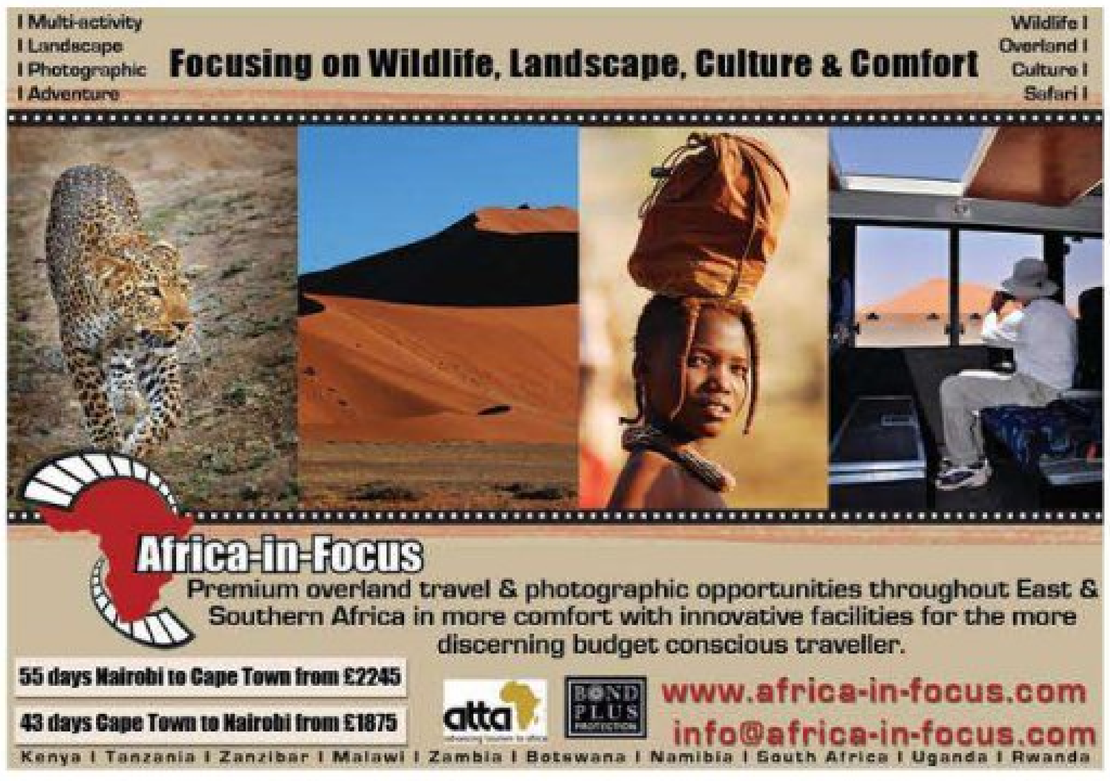

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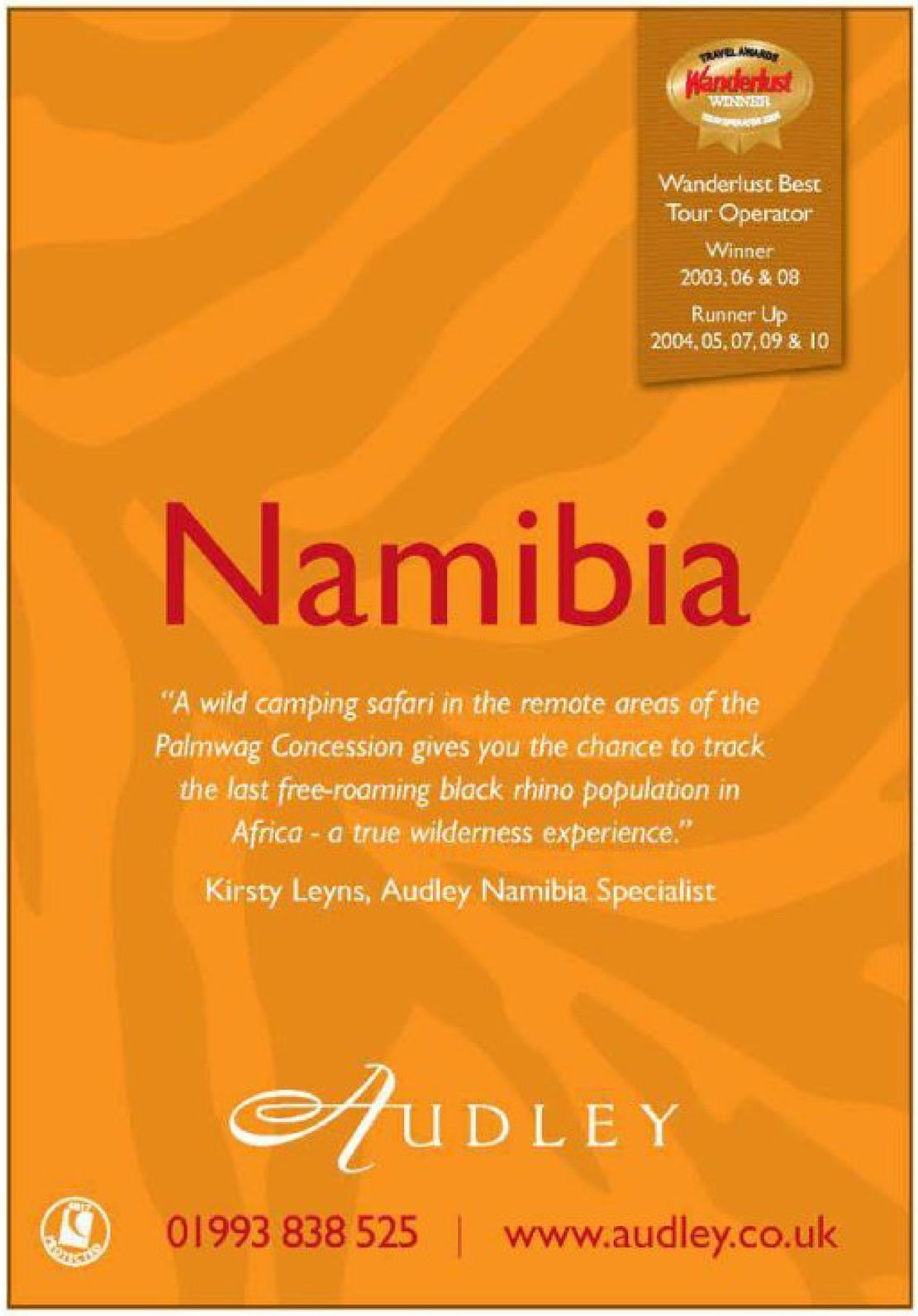

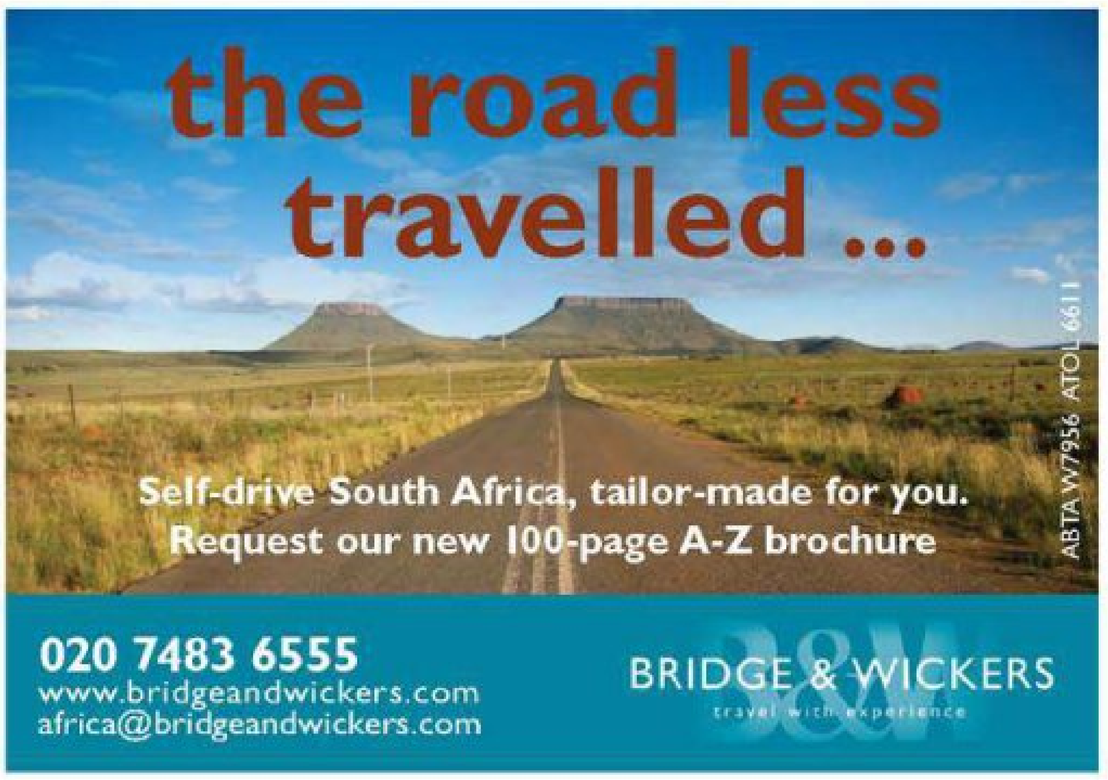

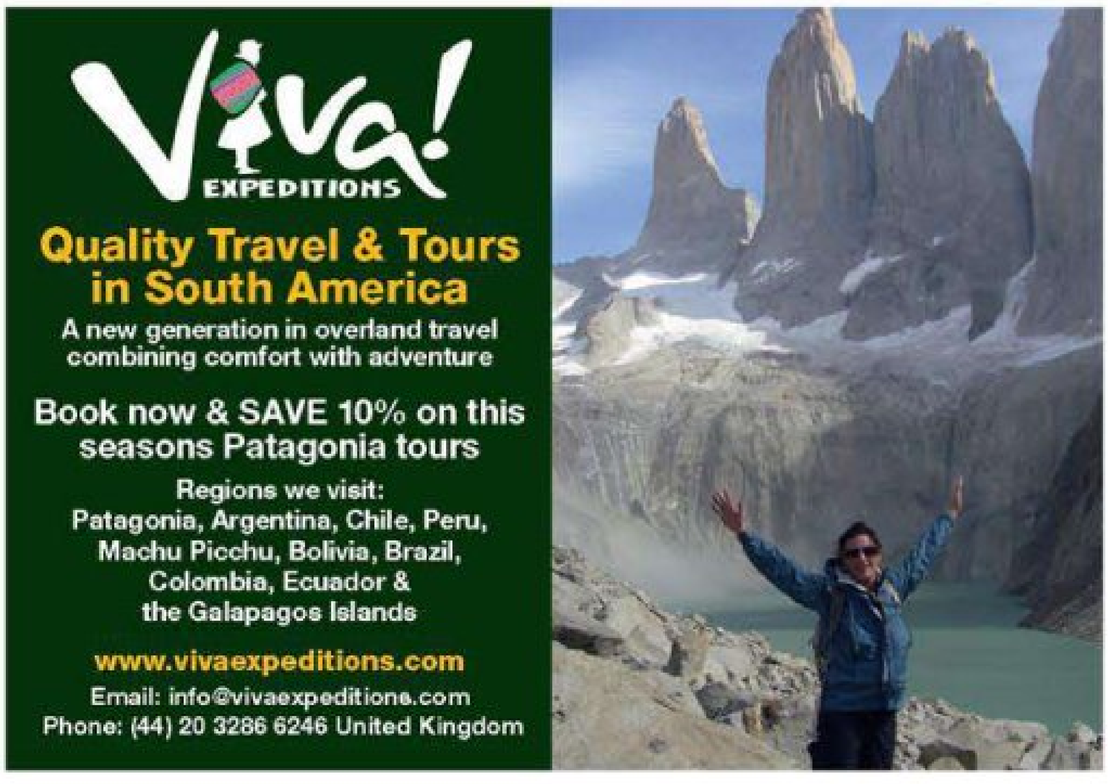

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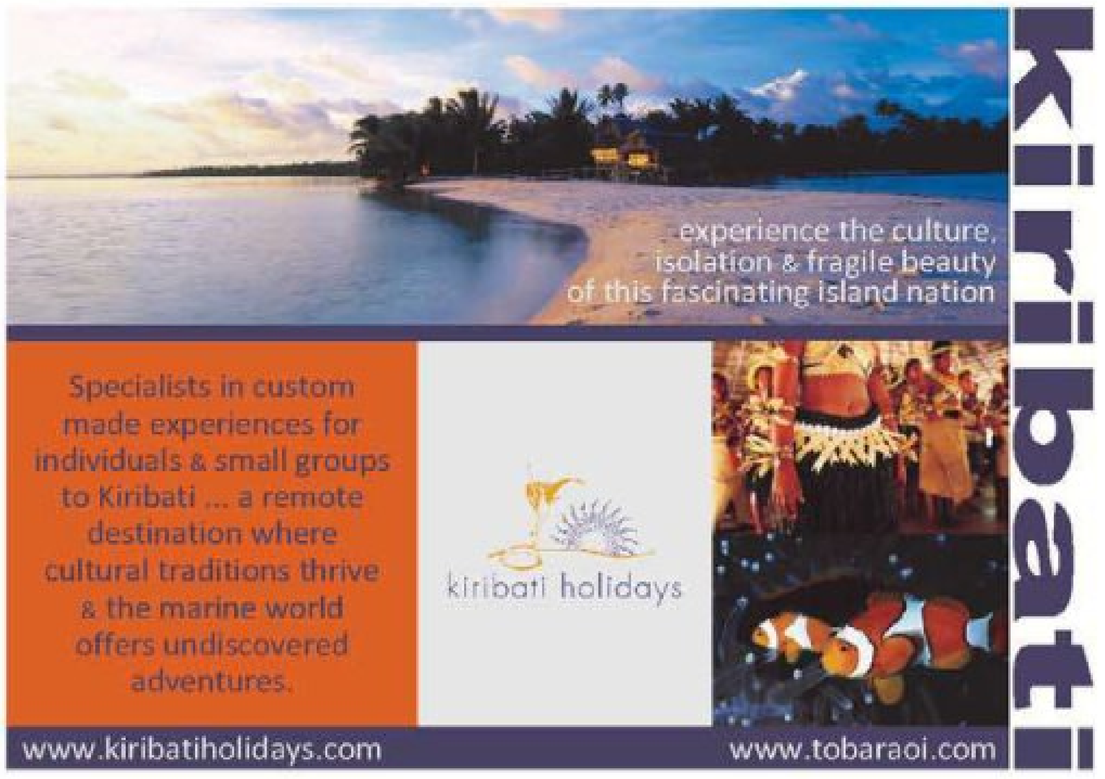

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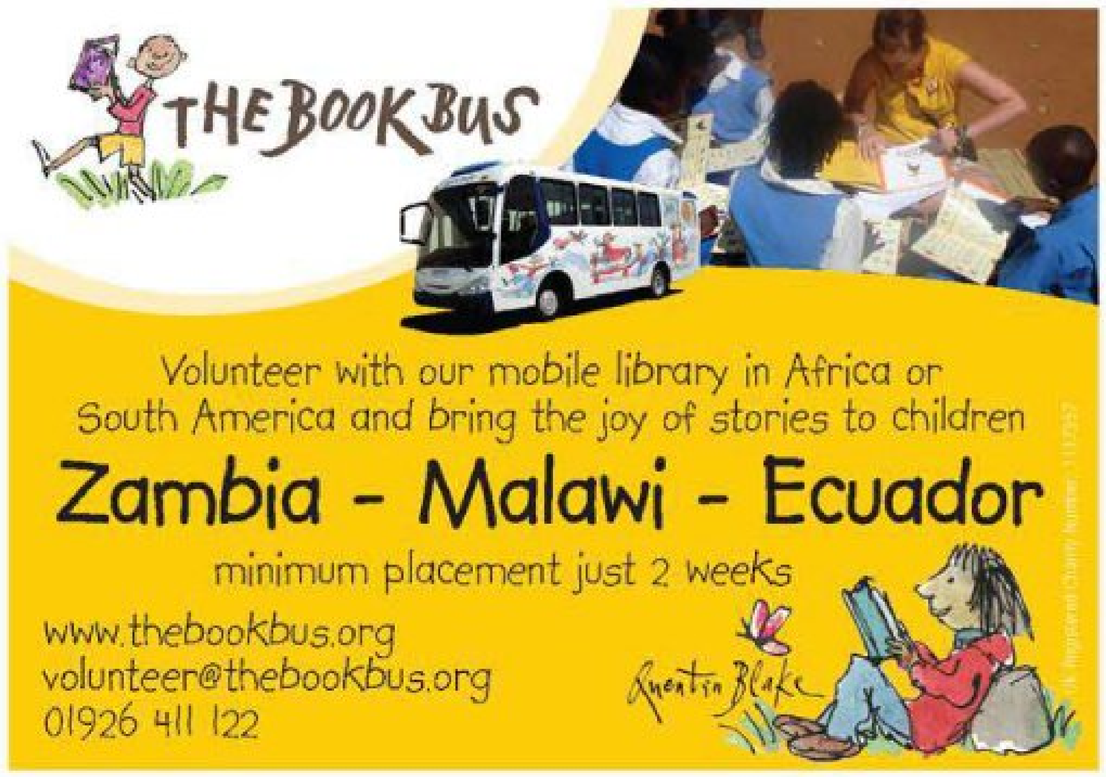

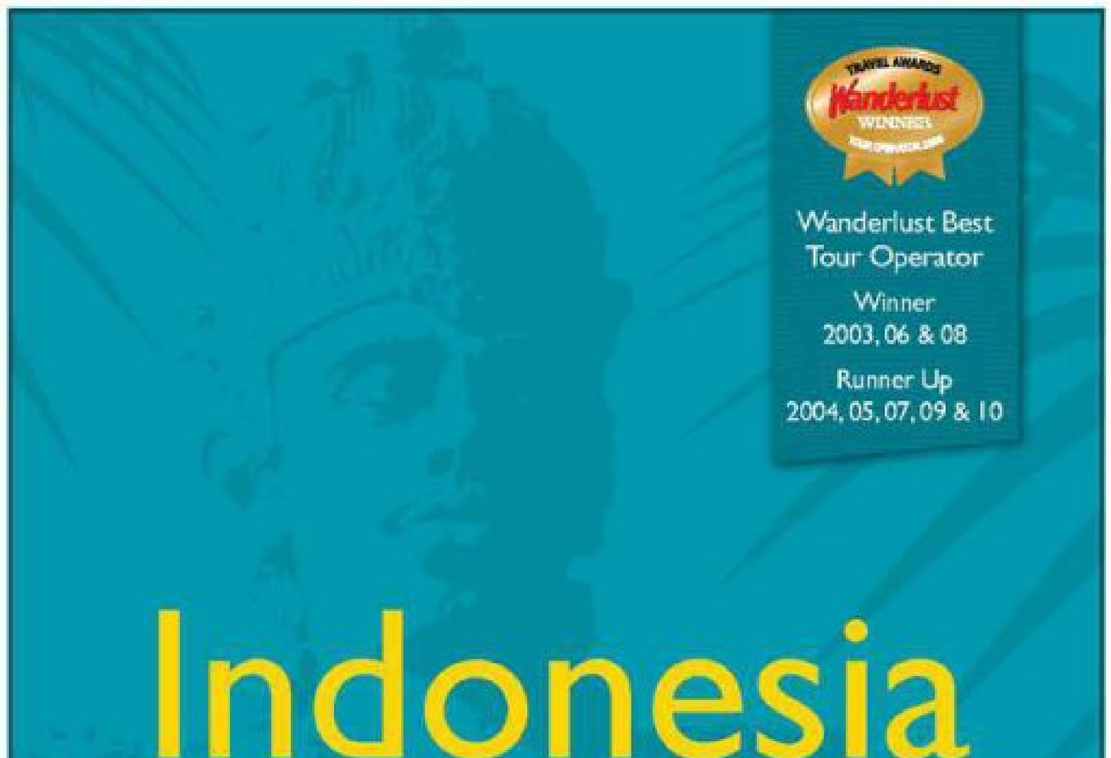

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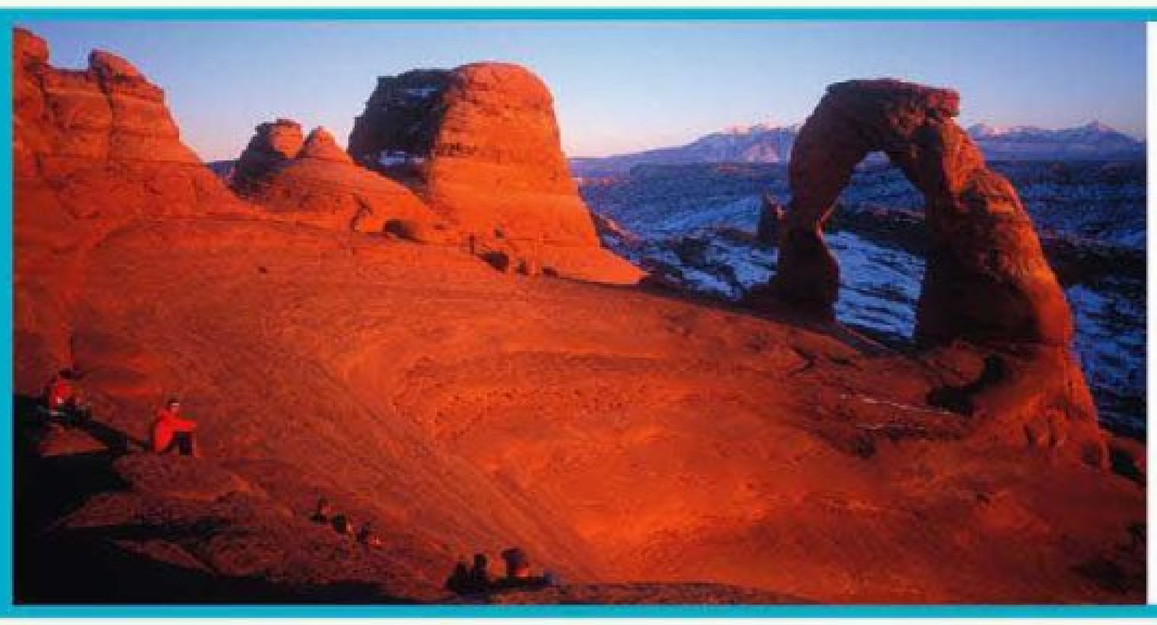

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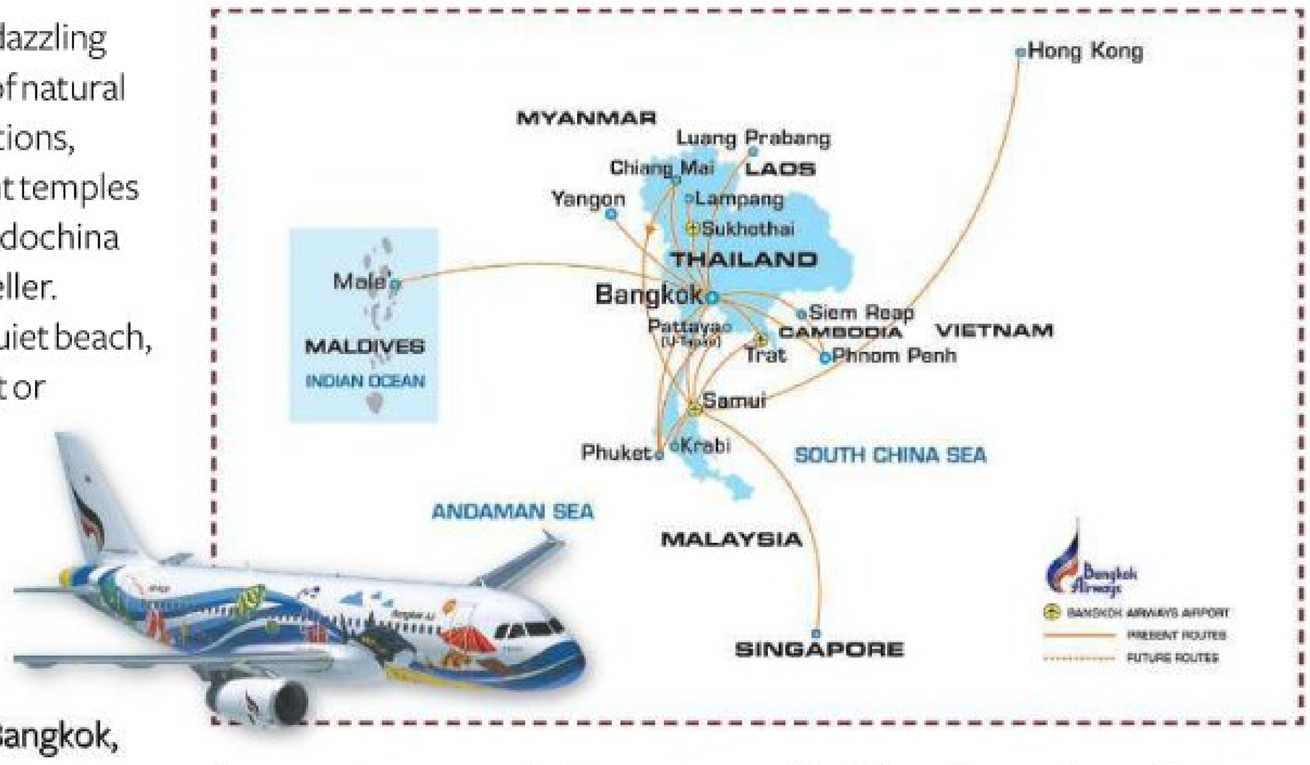

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To make it even easier to get around, pick up a Discovery Airpass. This coupon-based ticket allows you to fly on selected routes operated by Bangkok Airways and Lao Airlines from as little as US$60 (excl taxes) – just buy a minimum of three coupons before you arrive in Thailand.

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First 24 hours

BANGKOK THAILAND

Where? Southern Thailand
Why? The exotic meets the chaotic in a city brimming with energy
When? Nov–Feb

It's sprawling, noisy, polluted and congested – but there is something about Bangkok that captivates nonetheless. David Leck offers some pointers for your first 24 hours in the Thai capital

Before you arrive

Bangkok has been the Thai capital since 1782. Today it's a modern city where religious shrines share pavement space with Starbucks, and Buddhist traditions are counterbalanced by gleaming temples to high finance. The size and scale of the city can overwhelm the first timer but it's generally extremely safe, with a modern transportation network that makes getting around easy.

As Buddhists, Thais are generally a pretty laid-back and forgiving bunch. Losing face and raising the voice is not the done thing – they like to laugh and enjoy their *sanuk* (fun). The King is revered by Thais to a level that might seem unusual to those from countries with a constitutional monarchy.

There isn't a lot of hassle. Hawkers will push you to look at their wares, and single guys may be offered 'female company' (Bangkok's nightlife is notorious) but it's mostly done with a smile.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (www.fco.gov.uk) offers general advice to British nationals to avoid demonstrations and large gatherings. It's worth noting that recent disturbances were confined to a small area of the city.

At the airport

Suvarnabhumi, one of the world's newest airports (and a stunning piece of architecture in its own right) is 25km east of downtown Bangkok and is a stylish, modern and efficient operation. Clearing immigration and customs should be a stress-free experience, after which there are exchange facilities, ATMs and hotel and ground transportation desks.

WORST SCAMS

Beware of... locals who tell you a particular hotel or attraction is "closed today" in an attempt to lure you somewhere else; unscrupulous tuk-tuk drivers (always agree a price in advance); eating in a restaurant where fish is purchased by weight – prices can skyrocket.

Getting into town

Bangkok has metered taxis (make sure yours is one of them). There is a fair amount of (good-natured) hassling of freshly landed and frequently bleary-eyed passengers so take the escalator up two floors to Departures and hail a driver who is dropping off. The duration of the journey depends on your arrival time, the location of your accommodation and the traffic. For a more consistent journey time, exploit the new high-speed rail link from the city to Suvarnabhumi opened in August (www.bangkokairporttrain.com); the 15-minute journey costs 150 baht (£3). It connects with the Skytrain service at Phaya Thai station.

Other ways to arrive

Trains from Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore arrive at Bangkok's main railway station, Hualamphong Station, as do those from Chiang Mai, Hua Hun and the islands of Samui and Phuket. There is also a rail service connecting Bangkok to Vientiane (Laos). Also, a recently opened stretch of road has halved the journey time from the Cambodian border to the Thai capital, so the city is accessible from most of South-East Asia.

The sprawling, multi-level Mo Chit bus station services north and north-east Thailand – get the Skytrain to Mo Chit then take a short taxi ride. Services to destinations in the south and west depart from and arrive into the Southern bus station across the river in Thonburi. Buses to and from Pattaya, Koh Samet, Koh Chang and eastern destinations are served by the Eastern bus station (Ekkamai Skytrain station). ›

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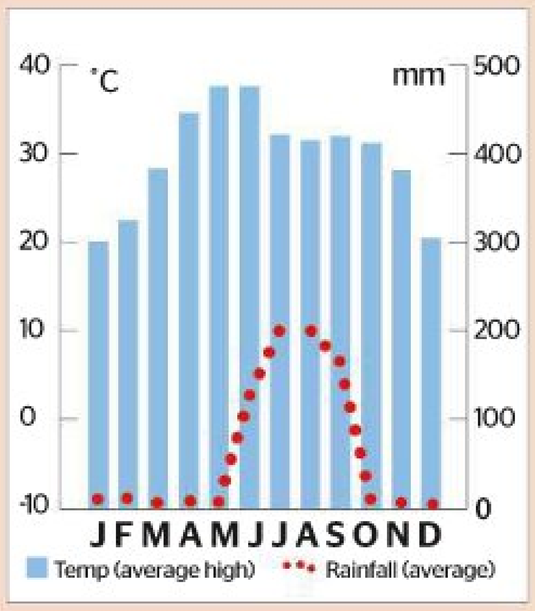
BANGKOK ORIENTATION

Some essential facts, plus touring the city and day visits further afield

Essential info

Population: 9 million
Language: Thai
Time: GMT+7
International dialling code: +66 2
Visas: Entry cards are distributed on inbound aircraft. Visas are not required by UK nationals for stays of less than 30 days (15 days if entering the country at immigration points bordering neighbouring countries).
Money: Thai baht (THB), currently around THB48 to the UK£. US dollars, euros and UK£ travellers cheques are widely accepted as are most major credit cards.
Highest viewpoints: Most of Bangkok's best views can be found from a clutch of stylish rooftop watering holes. Try Vertigo, on the 61st floor of the Banyan Tree Hotel (www.banyantree.com/en/bangkok), or the 63rd floor Sky Bar (www.lebua.com).
Health: Healthcare in the Thai capital is generally of a high standard. Drink bottled water.
Recommended guidebooks: *The Rough Guide to Bangkok* (Rough Guides, 2010); *Bangkok's 25 Best* (Fodor's, 2009)



Web resources: The Tourism Authority of Thailand (www.tourismthailand.org) has a good site. For general news and information, try the excellent English-language newspaper, *The Bangkok Post* (www.bangkokpost.com). BTS Transit, the city's public transport operator, has a free app, available from iTunes.
Climate: The best time to be in the city is between November and February when temperatures are relatively pleasant and it is generally dry. March to May are the hottest months; June to October are wettest, with the monsoon in full swing.

First day's tour

Central Bangkok is divided into five districts – Thonburi, Old City (Ratanakosin), Chinatown, Downtown and Dusit. Two of the city's must-see attractions – Wat Pho (home to the Reclining Buddha, *right*) and the breathtaking Grand Palace – are to be found in the Old City. Dusit is home to the city zoo and the majestic golden teak structure of Vimanmek Mansion.

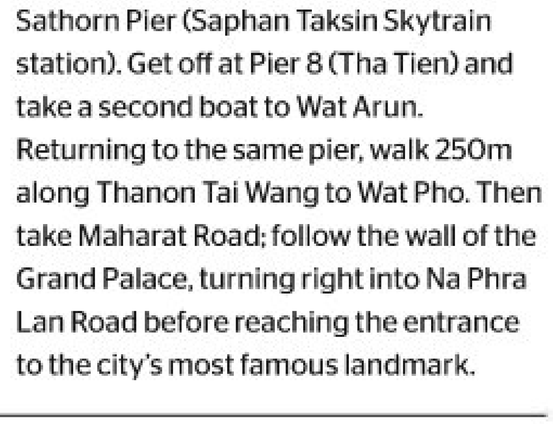
Downtown features Lumphini Park, Silom Road (Bangkok's commercial heart), Patpong (biggest night market and red light district), the Oriental Hotel and Jim Thompson's House, a delightful oasis commemorating the life of the American who reinvigorated the Thai silk industry.

Thonburi, across the Chao Phraya River, is the setting for Wat Arun, one of Bangkok's most famous landmarks and a great example of Khmer architecture.

The backpacker mecca of the Khao San Road is located in Old City, close to the National Museum and serviced by stop 13 (Phra Arthit) on the Chao Phraya River Tourist Boat.

The city's BTS Skytrain is an excellent (and cheap) way to get around, as is the subway (MRT) system. Where you see 'soi' within an address, this is a small road/lane running off a main road.

Bangkok is fun explored on foot. Take the Chao Phraya River Tourist Boat from Sathorn Pier (Saphan Taksin Skytrain station). Get off at Pier 8 (Tha Tien) and take a second boat to Wat Arun. Returning to the same pier, walk 250m along Thanon Tai Wang to Wat Pho. Then take Maharat Road; follow the wall of the Grand Palace, turning right into Na Phra Lan Road before reaching the entrance to the city's most famous landmark.



BEST DEAL

The Chao Phraya River Tourist Boat (www.chaophrayaexpressboat.com) serves Chinatown, the Khao San Road, Wat Pho, Wat Arun and the Grand Palace. A day ticket, which allows you to hop-on and hop-off, is a steal at 150 baht (£3).

First night's sleep

From the backpacker haunts of the Khao San Road to some of the world's finest hotels, you're spoilt for choice in Bangkok.

Top-end: The Oriental (48 Oriental Avenue; +66 2 659 9000, www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok) With its history, sense of tradition and regular top spot on lists of the world's best hotels, The Oriental is pretty hard to beat. Doubles from a wallet-incinerating US$375 (£235) per night.

Mid-range: Old Bangkok Inn (*pictured above;* 607 Pra Sumen Rd, Pra Nakhon; +66 2 629 1787, www.oldbangkokinn.com) Delightful residence fashioned out of an historic building, featuring rooms furnished with teak and decorated with floral themes. Doubles from US$92 (£58).

Budget: Manhattan (13 Sukhumvit Road, Soi 15; +66 2 255 0166, www.hotelmanhattan.com) Superior tourist-class hotel, ideally located on Sukhumvit Road. Doubles from 1,800 baht (£38).

Stay or go?

Bangkok is a city that can hold you in thrall for days, weeks and even years. All the same, you will want to escape the mayhem from time to time. Popular trips away from the city include a visit to the former capital of Ayutthaya (*above*), about 80km north of Bangkok. During its heyday from the 14th to the 18th century, Ayutthaya was so well-endowed with temples that sunlight reflecting off the gilt decoration was said to dazzle from 5km away.

Those with an interest in military history (or David Lean films...) might want to venture 120km north-west to the region of Kanchanaburi, site of the notorious death railway and bridge crossing the River Kwai, where you can ride the train and visit the war cemetery, known as Don Rak.

Finally, 56km west of Bangkok lies the oldest town in Thailand, Nakhon Pathom, where Buddhism first entered the country over 2,000 years ago. ■

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Great British Escape

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in association with ROUGH GUIDES

Taking the long view
The harbour of Ilfracombe from Rillage Point, a good place for seal spotting

Why? A dramatic landscape and ever-changing coastal scenery
Where? South-west England
When? Now, for crisp, bracing sea air

North Devon's rugged and historic coast is recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. So don't leave it till summer – go now for wind-lashed walks, real ales and a helicopter ride to Lundy Island

Getting there

By train North Devon's chief town, Barnstaple, is at the end of the branch line from Exeter and is a good place to get started, with extensive transport connections. London to Exeter can take between two and three-and-a-half hours; standard tickets from £34.

Trains run from Exeter to Barnstaple hourly Monday-Saturday, and six times a day on Sunday. Tickets from £12 return; www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk

By bus National Express buses connect Devon with London, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, Southampton and other major centres. Book early for cheapest fares. www.nationalexpress.com

By plane There are scheduled flights to Exeter International Airport from Leeds-Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich with Flybe; return flights from £55. www.flybe.com

Getting around

The chief bus companies in Devon are Stagecoach and First. Most villages in the region are covered daily.

To check locations, times and prices, visit www.stagecoachbus.com and www.firstgroup.com/devon

For Lundy island The *MS Oldenburg* crosses to Lundy up to four times weekly from Bideford or Ilfracombe between April and October. Day-return tickets cost £32.50, open returns are £56, and the journey time is around two hours. In winter, helicopter is the only option – adult returns from Hartland heliport cost £95; call 01271 863636 for details.

Where to stay

Hartland Quay Hotel (Hartland; 01237 441218; www.hartlandquayhotel.com). Distinguished by being right on the sea front.

Victoria House B&B (Mortehoe; 01271 871302; www.victoriahousebandb.co.uk) An upmarket B&B featuring rooms with terrific sea views and great breakfasts, including freshly-baked bread.

Bridge Farm (Croyde; 01271 890422) Right at the centre of the village, and close to the beach, this thatched farmhouse with three large rooms is often booked up. The same people run **The Orchard** campsite (01271 890422). No credit cards for either.

Food & drink

The Rock (Georgeham; 01271 890322) Traditional and highly popular local, with real ales, excellent bar meals and a conservatory. Booking recommended for evening meals.

Terra Madre (Muddiford; 01271 850262; open Friday and Saturday evenings; no credit cards; part of the Broomhill Art Hotel) A relaxed place specialising in Mediterranean-style cuisine.

For a quick bite to eat on Lundy Island, try the **Marisco Tavern**. The buffet lunch and local ale are so good, some visitors never make it further afield.

AMAZING CREAM TEA FACT!
The Devonshire cream tea is believed to date back to the 11th century, when Tavistock monks rewarded labourers working on the monastery with this chubby-chasing combo.

Activities

Walking is the number one draw (see routes overleaf), but if you're not a hiker, there's still plenty of scope for experiencing the outdoor life, including mountain biking, wildlife trails, caving and kayaking (in season).

The website www.ukmountainbiker.com is an invaluable resource for cycling in the region, including routes and stores. There are scores of activity centres in the region catering for caving and climbing enthusiasts – for example, Totnes-based Essential Adventure (www.essential-adventure.co.uk).

Kitesurfing is gaining increasing interest among extreme sports fans on the peninsula's beaches. The British Kitesurfing Association (www.britishkitesurfingassociation.co.uk) has a list of recognised schools and suitable beaches.

Further information

For Lundy Island, visit www.lundyisland.co.uk or call 01271 863636. For the rest of North Devon, visit www.northdevon.com ›

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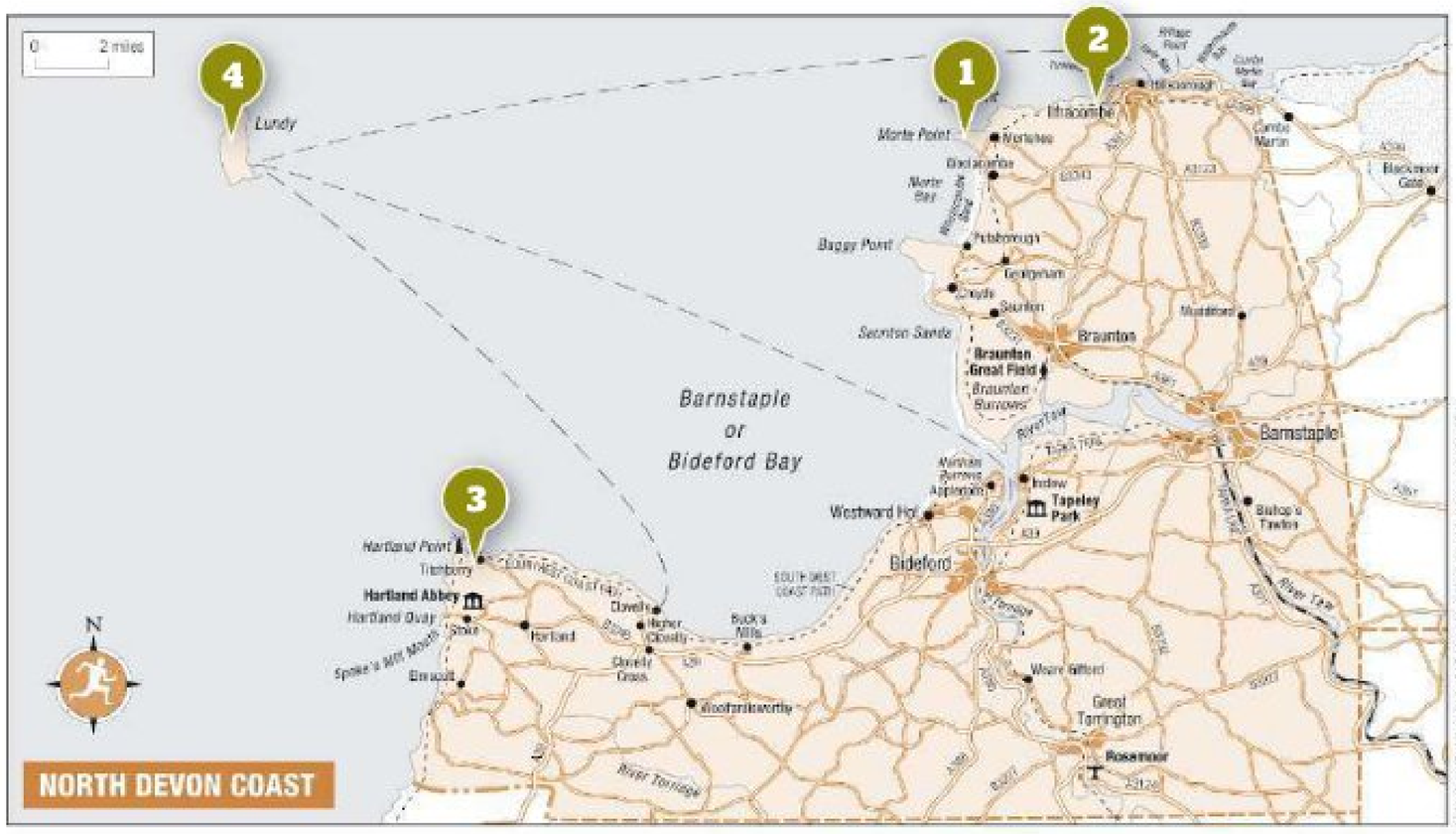
NORTH DEVON COAST HIGHLIGHTS

Get your walking boots on and enter a landscape that never fails to surprise and inspire



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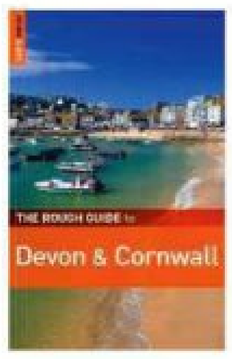
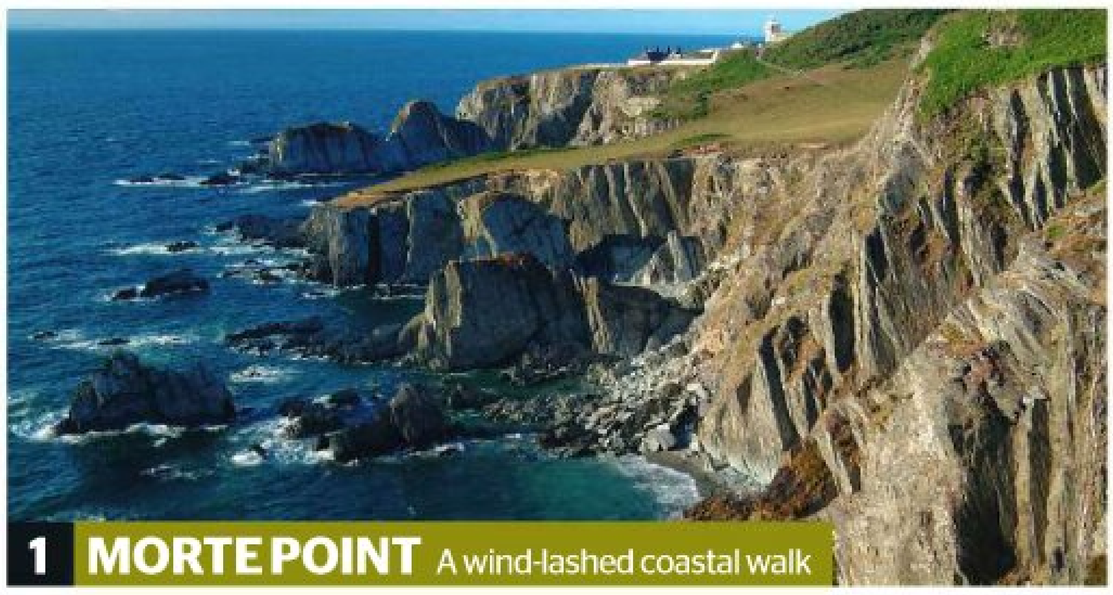
This guide is adapted from *The Rough Guide to Devon and Cornwall (£12.99)*, a comprehensive companion to the whole of the southwest. For more information, visit www.roughguides.com





1 MORTE POINT A wind-lashed coastal walk

At its northern end, Morte Bay is bracketed by Morte Point, an area of grass and gorse that's good for walking. Below stretches a rocky shore whose menacing sunken reef earned it the name Morte Stone. A break in the rocks makes space for pocket-sized Barricane Beach, famous for the tiny tropical shells washed up here from the Caribbean by Atlantic currents, and a favourite spot for swimmers. Walkers can take in the splendid rock contortions hereabouts by continuing a mile or so beyond Morte Point to Bull Point, where a lighthouse warns ships off the fractured reefs tapering away out to sea.

2 OUTSIDE ILFRACOMBE Go searching for seals

Outside Ilfracombe, one of Devon's loveliest coastal walks extends east towards Combe Martin; it involves a stiff ascent up to the grassy heights of Hillsborough, about a mile from the centre, which offers a perfect prospect over Ilfracombe. Beyond, Hele Bay – its deep waters almost encircled by cliff – is the first of a sequence of undeveloped coves and inlets surrounded by slanting rocks and heather-covered hills. Rillage Point offers the occasional seal sighting, while the first-class sand beach at Watermouth Bay, three miles east of Ilfracombe, is protected by yet more cliffs and its imposing castle.

3 HARTLAND POINT Look to the light

Four miles west of Clovelly and about three from the coast, Hartland has a quiet, insulated air, remote from the main routes of the West Country. The coast to the north and west provides the main incentive for being here, reached – unless you're on the coastal path – along narrow, high-hedged lanes between cultivated fields. Three miles northwest, the Atlantic meets Bideford Bay at Hartland Point, one of Devon's most dramatic sights. A solitary lighthouse, 350 feet high, overlooks jagged black rocks battered by the sea. When it's clear, the bare horizon is interrupted only by the low profile of Lundy.

4 LUNDY ISLAND A twitcher paradise

Disembarking on the windswept island of Lundy, twelve miles north-west of Hartland Point, feels like arriving at the last outpost. Walking is really the only thing to do here, and tracks and footpaths interweave all over this island, home to early Christian communities of the 5th and 6th centuries. Inland, the grass, heather and bog is crossed by dry stone walls and grazed by ponies, goats, deer and the rare Soay sheep. The shores – mainly cliffy on the south and west, softer and undulating on the east – shelter a rich variety of birdlife, including kittiwakes, fulmars, shags, Manx shearwaters, not to mention the famous puffins. ■

istockphoto; Alamy; North Devon Coast AONB

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Travel Icon

KARNAK EGYPT

in association with DK

Why go? To explore the world's greatest open air museum
Where is it? 3km NE of Luxor, Egypt
Best months to go March–April, Oct–Nov

Built on an epic scale that continues to awe visitors, Karnak was 1,300 years in the making. Here's how to immerse yourself in one of the Nile Valley's greatest wonders – in just a day

Get orientated

Most visitors to Egypt's Nile Valley head to the tourist magnet of Luxor, where the magnificent Luxor and Karnak temples and the Theban necropolis are the major attractions. Modern Luxor grew out of the ruins of Thebes, once the capital of Egypt's New Kingdom (1550-1069 BC).

After the pyramids of Giza, Karnak is Egypt's most important Pharaonic site. Excavations over the years have gradually uncovered the original structure of the temple complex, which was built over a 1,300-year period and covers half a square kilometre just north of Luxor. As well as the colossal temple of Amun, the site comprises a fantastic array of temples, chapels, pylons and obelisks, all testifying to the importance of Thebes.

TIP
Don't swim in the Nile – crocodiles are a rare menace, but the parasitic disease bilharzia is not

Getting there

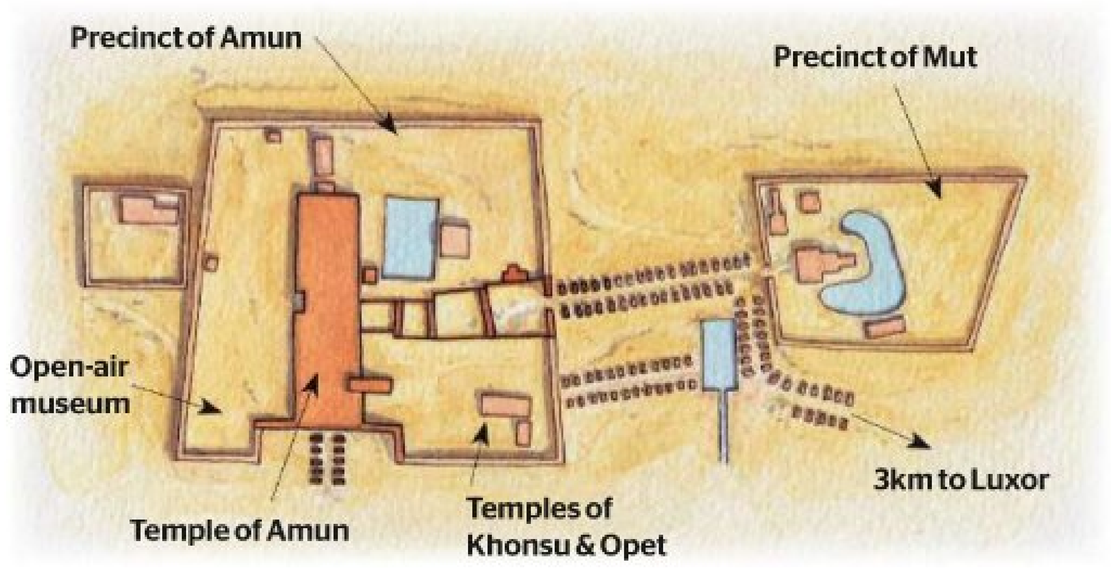
You can no longer travel all the way from Cairo to the lower Nile by boat, so if you're flying into the capital you need to transfer by air, road or rail. Luxor and Aswan airports are served by regular flights from Cairo (www.egyptAir.com; from around £150 return). Trains run frequently from Cairo to Luxor (9-12 hours) and Aswan (12-15 hours), stopping at major towns en route – see www.egyptrail.gov.eg and www.seat61.com for details. However, the current security situation means that care should be exercised if visiting sites between Cairo and Luxor – police escorts are provided for groups.

The visit

From Luxor, you can travel the 3km to Karnak by hired bicycle, bus, taxi or horse-drawn calèche. None should cost more than about E£10 (£1.10). If you choose the calèche, watch out for mistreated animals; Luxor's Brooke Hospital for Animals (www.thebrooke.org) cares for horses brought to the clinic.

Karnak is open from 6am to 6.30pm daily in summer, and from 6am to 5.30pm daily in winter. Entry costs E£50 (about UK£5). Get there early or in the late afternoon to enjoy it free from tour groups. You can explore freely on foot, but the sheer size of the complex means that one visit is seldom enough. Make sure you have some water and a snack or two, as facilities are limited and expensive. Many people return to see the slightly bombastic nightly Sound and Light shows (E£55; £6) unravelling the complex history of Karnak's construction.

Photographers should be aware that in Luxor there is a charge for taking photographs of the tombs (payable at the main kiosk) and that no flash photography is permitted. ›



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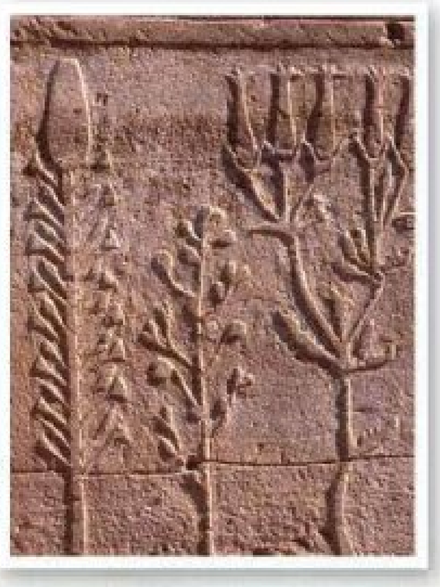
KARNAK HIGHLIGHTS

A giant scarab, intricate columns and imposing pylons define this vast sacred site

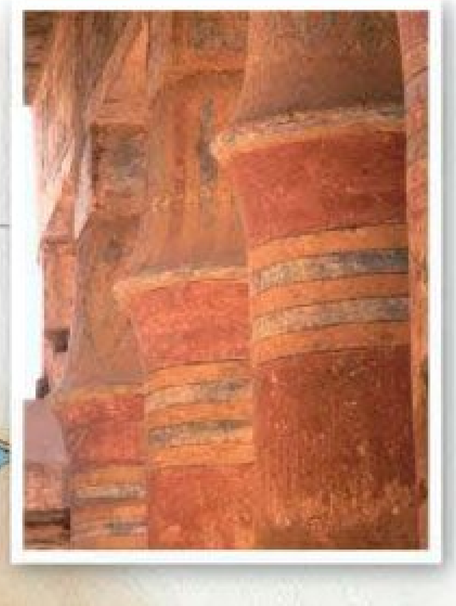
The temple of Amun

At the heart of the immense Karnak complex lies the Temple of Amun, dedicated to the king of the gods, and featuring endless courts, halls and colossi, and a huge sacred lake. From its modest 11th Dynasty beginnings, pharaoh after pharaoh added to the existing buildings, seeking to make their mark on the country's most important temple. During the 19th Dynasty, some 80,000 men worked in the temple as labourers, guards, priests and servants. The temple lay buried under sand for more than 1,000 years before excavation work began in the mid-19th century. Today, the huge task of restoration continues. Allow 2-4 hours to explore, and bring water and a sunhat.



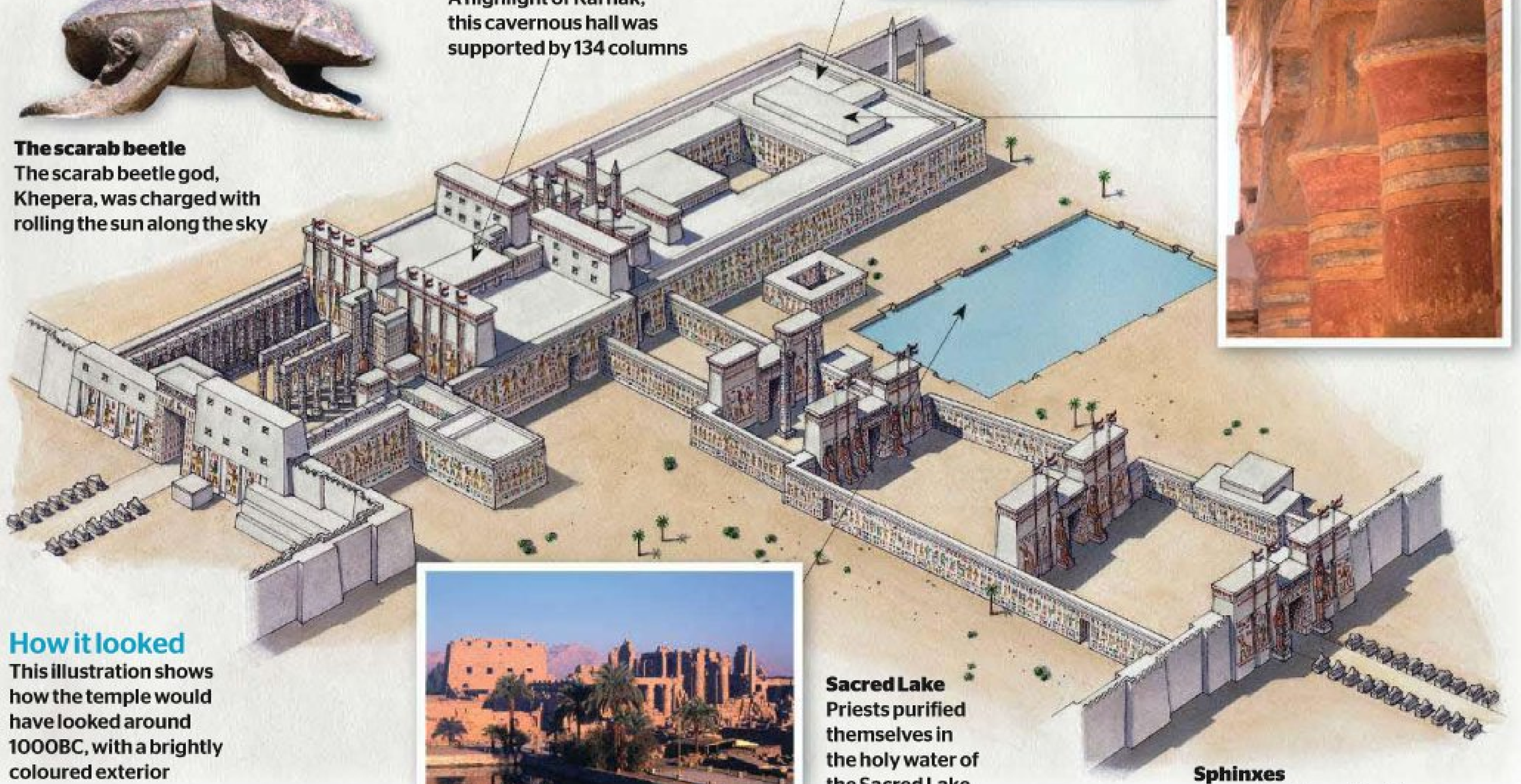
Botanic gardens
This roofless enclosure was built by Tuthmosis III. It is decorated with reliefs of exotic flora and fauna, brought back to Egypt by the pharoah during his campaign in Syria

Great Festival Temple
The central hall of this temple built by Tuthmosis III was supposedly designed to resemble the tent in which he lived while on campaign



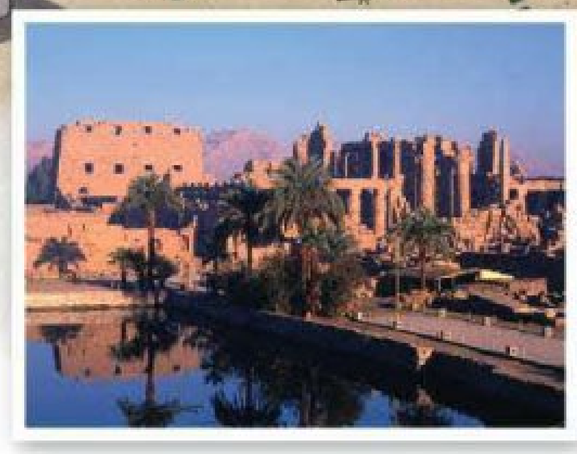
The scarab beetle
The scarab beetle god, Khepera, was charged with rolling the sun along the sky

Great Hypostyle Hall
A highlight of Karnak, this cavernous hall was supported by 134 columns



How it looked

This illustration shows how the temple would have looked around 1000BC, with a brightly coloured exterior



Sacred Lake
Priests purified themselves in the holy water of the Sacred Lake before performing rites in the temple

Sphinxes
Rows of sphinxes line the entrances to the temple

Precinct of Mut

Built by Amenhotep III – whose reign around 1380-1350 BC was characterised by unprecedented artistic splendour – the precinct contains the ruins of a temple dedicated to Amun's consort Mut. Huge, black granite statues of the lioness-goddess Sekhmet line the temple courts. To the west of the sacred lake surrounding the temple is the ruined 20th-Dynasty Temple of Ramses III (1186-1155BC approx.), a man who struggled to maintain Egypt's power in the face of foreign invasions . Relics of the Temple of Amenhotep III, dedicated to Amun, lie to the northeast.

TIP
Get to know Egypt's principal deities prior to arrival and you will have a richer experience when you explore

Open-air museum

Located to the northwest of the Precinct of Amun, the open-air museum contains a fine collection of monuments that were discovered during an excavation of the Third Pylon. Among the main attractions is the lovely, reconstructed 12th-Dynasty White Chapel of Senuret I, with its carvings of the king making offerings to Amun. The newly restored 18th-Dynasty Red Chapel of Hatshepsut can also be seen here. Other attractions include the Alabaster Chapel of Amenhotep I and the Shrine of Tuthmosis III. A separate ticket (E£20) for the museum must be purchased before entering the complex.

Temples of Khonsu & Opet

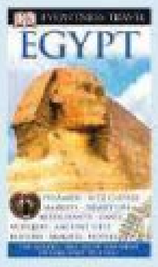
Dedicated to the son of Amun and Mut, the well-preserved Temple of Khonsu was built largely during the reigns of Ramses III and IV. The main entrance is via a magnificent gateway that resembles an ancient Egyptian version of the Arc de Triomphe, and was built by Ptolemy III. It's still virtually intact, giving visitors the chance to marvel at the beautifully carved hieroglyphs.

Close by is the smaller Temple of Opet (the goddess thought to be the mother of Osiris, god of the underworld). It contains some finely decorated reliefs dating from Ptolemaic and Roman times, and its use was primarily for rituals that formed part of the mythical resurrection cycle focused on Amun and Osiris. ■

EGYPT ESSENTIALS

Language: Arabic (English widely spoken)
Time: GMT +2
Visas: On arrival (UK£15)
Money: Egyptian pound (exchange rate is currently E£9 to UK£1)
Health: No vaccinations required

This guide is adapted from* DK Eyewitness Travel Egypt *(£16.99), the ultimate visual guide to the country. www.traveldk.com



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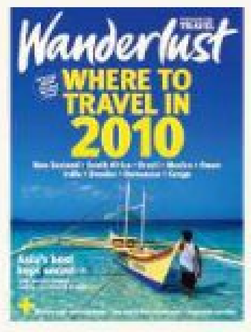

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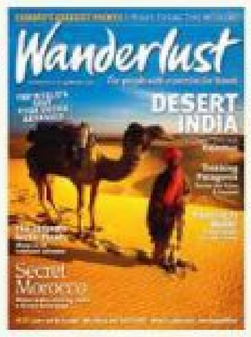

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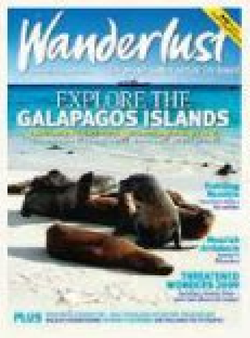

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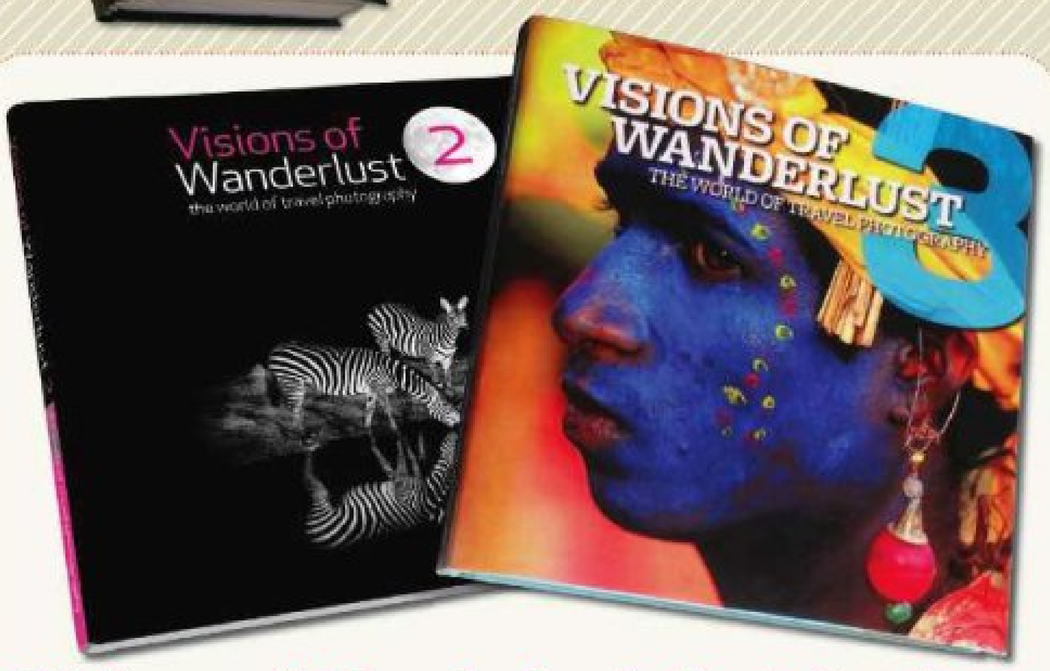

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QUIZ OF THE YEAR

20 questions to test your travel know-how – all the answers have appeared in *Wanderlust* over the past year, and will be on **www.wanderlust.co.uk** from 1 January 2011

1 In which countries would you find these national parks?
a) Volcanoes – home to a 40-strong group of primates
b) Yala – reopened to travellers earlier this year
c) Chapada Diamantina – site of one of the world's best day walks

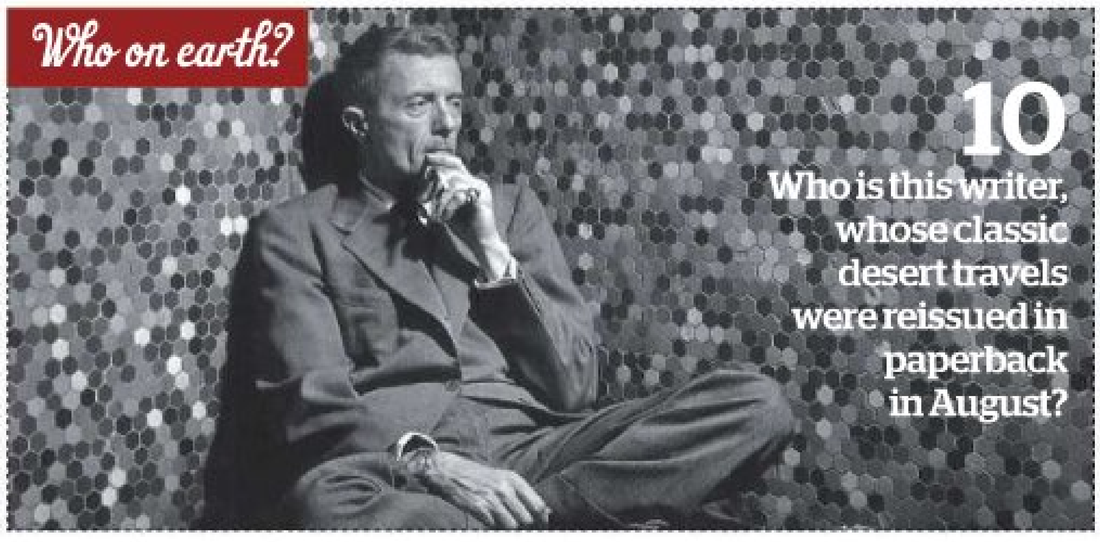
2 Earlier this year, *Wanderlust* reader Helen Jackson trekked 483km from Lüderitz to Walvis Bay with no fresh water. In which country was she?

3 Mountaineering legend Reinhold Messner described it as "that little hill that defeated me". Which 5,671m summit (*below*) was he describing?

4 A *hanami* requires a blue tarpaulin, a bento box and no shoes. What is it?

5 Match the Thai hilltribes below to their names.
a) Akha
b) Hmong
c) Karen

Who on earth?



10 Who is this writer, whose classic desert travels were reissued in paperback in August?

Where on earth?

11 Which here-today, gone-tomorrow lake – with a sporadically active yacht club – is this?

6 Which 25km x 12km mini nation is Europe's last absolute monarchy? And – for an extra point – which item of clothing is its Head of State known for neglecting to wear?

7 At any one time, what percentage of the world's population is estimated to be itching – 2%, 9% or 20%?

8 Which British island, whose inhabitants subsisted largely on seabirds, was finally evacuated in 1930?

9 Hyoscine, cinnarizine and – allegedly – jam sandwiches are all remedies for what?

12 Which highly endangered creature, showing off to *Wanderlust*, is pictured above?

13 Where would you find the Bolaven Plateau and the Plain of Jars?

14 What is the more common name for the 650,000 sq km Rub' al Khali?

15 In which country would you find the tunnelled town of Moose Jaw?

16 You spot the sign above. Which country are you in?

17 Which world landmark is designed to resemble a pile of seashells?

18 Name three species of whale that can be spotted (at various times of the year) from Scotland's coastline.

19 In which West African country can you purchase a built-to-order 'fantasy coffin'?

20 These brightly coloured public buses are a standard mode of transport throughout the Philippines. What are they called? ■

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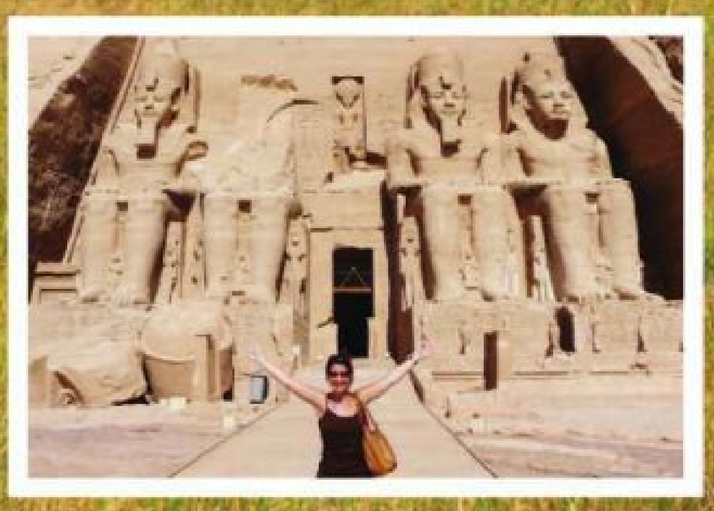

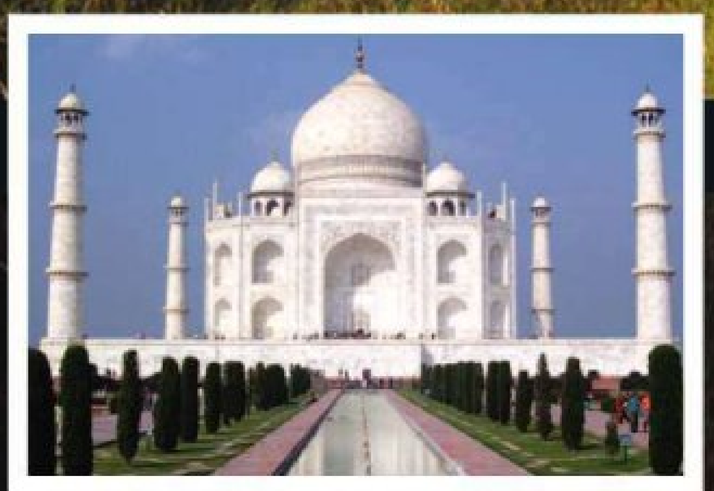

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