

THE NEWS

... from all points of the compass



The Specialist
Travel Consultancy

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Welcome to the current issue of THE NEWS! We hope that those of you who have been away over the summer on adventures, expeditions or perhaps just a well earned relaxing holiday, have had a truly memorable experience and that you feel invigorated and ready to think about planning the next trip. Despite the events affecting international travel over the recent months, there is much to be up beat about. New destinations and exciting project opportunities open up all the time and with close links to many of the best cultural tour and expedition providers from around the UK, the STC is perfectly situated to help give your travel direction.

Our newsletter, "THE NEWS" is published three times a year with destination reviews, reports from recent trips, information and advice on travel insurance, risk assessments and financial protection, as well as ideas for project work, trekking routes and much more besides. We hope you enjoy the read! If you would like more information on anything mentioned here, or are thinking of planning a trip in the near future, please get in touch and we will be delighted to offer our expertise. There is no obligation, and our service is free.

In this Issue

- **Costa Rica:** Coast to Coast
- **Morocco:** The Anti-Atlas
- **CO₂** finding the right balance
- **Turkish Delight**
- The importance of **Independence**
- **Travel Insurance:** be careful what you buy
- **Destination Inspiration**
- Travels in **Ethiopia**
- **Risk Assessments:** getting personal
- Forthcoming **events and courses**



Costa Rica: Coast to Coast

Winner of Outside Magazine's trip of the year 2006, World Expeditions' itinerary traversing Costa Rica is an adventure ideally suited to schools wanting an active and challenging trip that is packed with variety.

To start, there is a cycle through the farmlands and foothills of the Pacific coastal regions before setting out on a week long trek. The route follows remote trails across the Cordillera de Talamanca, home to the highest peak in Costa Rica, Cerro Chirripo (3819m). The trails are not always easy, with several river crossings to negotiate, but encounters with indigenous settlements deep in the cloud forest and glimpses of rare wildlife constantly add interest. On completion of the trek thoughts turn to the Pacuare River, one of the world's classic whitewater experiences, and an exhilarating rafting trip through spectacular canyons and pristine rainforest. The itinerary ends with a short kayak to the Caribbean coast.

The three week itinerary starts from around £2,000 per person, including flights, but can be tailored to individual requirements including the provision of project work if required. Please get in touch for details.

Competition

Win a years subscription to **Geographical** - The Magazine of the Royal Geographical Society. Every issue is packed with articles on people, places, cultures, adventure, responsible travel, history, science and environmental issues.

To enter: Email your answer to the question below along with your name, address and contact telephone number to:

competition@thestc.co.uk

Alternatively, you can send your entries by post to the address on the back of this newsletter.

Question: On which continent lies the point furthest from the centre of the earth?

- a: Asia**
- b: Antarctica**
- c: South America**

Closing date for the draw is 23rd October 2006. One winner will be drawn at random and notified by post.

Morocco: The Anti-Atlas

The Anti-Atlas is a volcanic mountain chain extending southwest from the High Atlas. Extremely hot in summer, it is an ideal region for winter exploration; in fact it is one of the few places close to Europe where the climate lends itself to trekking at this time of year. Jagged mountains surround small, isolated, self-sufficient villages and offer a genuinely remote trekking experience. In the 10 years our tour operator for this region has been running trips here, they have yet to see another organised western group!

With no altitude issues (the highest point reached is 2531m) the trekking is generally graded moderate to strenuous. Within an 8-day itinerary there is time for a 5 day point to point trek, as well as time to explore the narrow souks of Taroudant; dubbed "Marrakech in Miniature" (without the vast hordes of tourists, we might add)! This is a true immersion into the best that Morocco has to offer and is one of the most extraordinary itineraries, in terms of both trekking and culture, anywhere within a four hour flight of the UK.

Prices start from around £550 - £600 including flights, depending on the exact itinerary and numbers of the group.

Carbon Emissions: Finding the Balance

2006 has been the year that carbon emissions from air travel have finally made it into the headlines. Here at the STC, we believe very strongly that responsible tourism should relate not just to the countries and communities that we visit, but also to how we travel. Air travel currently accounts for some 3% of greenhouse gas emissions. On a typical return flight to India from the UK, for example, each passenger is responsible for the release of nearly 1.9 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The good news, however, is that there is something you can do to reduce the impact of these emissions.

“Carbon Offsetting” involves making a donation to a charity or company which supports projects aiming to reduce the atmospheric levels of CO₂ – recognised as having a major effect on climate change. The STC has linked up with international wildlife conservation charity, Friends of Conservation, (FOC). Amongst other activities, FOC promotes rainforest regeneration and fuel efficiency programmes, helping to mitigate the environmental ‘cost’ of air travel.

Unlike some companies of non-charitable status offering carbon offsetting, FOC guarantees that 100% of any money donated for Carbon Offsetting goes to the projects involved.

The **Cano Negro** and **Forest Refuge** projects in Costa Rica are two such examples. FOC’s local partners work with four communities to protect rainforest, reforest areas damaged through logging and agriculture and also create forest plantations using indigenous species. They also own and are reforesting land around the Cano Negro to prevent further damage to the lagoon caused by the removal of wood cover.

All schools and colleges arranging their travel through the STC are able to offset their emissions at a reduced rate: The STC will contribute 50% of the offset donation, provided that the school or pupils donate the other 50%. If you would like more information on this very worthwhile scheme, then please get in touch and we will be keen to tell you more.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the only educational travel company offering such a scheme.



“Fairy chimneys”, Cappadocia



Turkish Delight: A feast for the senses...

With one foot firmly in Asia, Turkey is knocking hard on the door of Europe. The resulting blend of cultures makes for an absorbing destination and the perfect objective for a short haul educational trip abroad.

Turkey offers an incredible diversity with history, archaeology, adventure and breath-taking scenery all served up with seemingly incredible ease. The opportunities for education are many and varied.

The west of the country provides some of the best examples of Graeco-Roman architecture to be found anywhere in the ancient empire. The extraordinary ruined city of Ephesus on the Aegean coast is certainly among the best places in the world to get a feel for life as it was in Roman times. Its huge theatre with a capacity of 25,000 is renowned for its acoustics and the attention to detail elsewhere on the site is certainly something to behold.

However, it is not just the Romans that are of interest in this region. A little further north of Ephesus lies the city and ruins of Bergama (Pergamum). Between the reigns of Alexander the Great and the Romans, Pergamum was one of the most powerful kingdoms in the Middle East. Its acropolis, library, theatre, aqueduct, stadium

and temples are nearly a match for those at Ephesus, but the area sees only a fraction of the number of visitors that Ephesus sees.

The great strategic city of Istanbul lies on the Bosphorus River dividing Europe and Asia and is home to many treasures, such as the world famous Blue Mosque. To the west is the Gallipoli Peninsula and the site of so many battles to gain control of this important region. Now a national park, Gallipoli’s cemeteries are a stark reminder of the tragedy of war.

While western Turkey may look towards Europe and hold many of the country’s historical and archaeological treasures, the central and eastern regions provide an altogether different experience. They offer the chance to experience a traditional Islamic country amongst some spectacular and bizarre landscapes. The central region of Cappadocia is famed for its moonscape valleys, “fairy chimneys”, rock-hewn churches and underground Troglydyte cities. It’s a magical place to explore on foot.

Turkey has much to offer those seeking adventure too, and the good transport links around the country mean that in a two week itinerary it is possible to pay more than lip service to the ancient sites of the west, whilst also allowing time



to explore the wilder sides of the country. For an active phase, there are two excellent long distance foot paths, “The Lycian Way” along the spectacular southern coast and “The St. Paul Trail” through the Taurus Mountains. The Taurus and rarely visited Kaçkar mountains in the north also offer serious trekking for those that are looking for more of a challenge.

Whatever your motive for an educational trip, be it history, culture or adventure, Turkey will never fail to deliver or delight. *One week historical tours of western Turkey start from around £550 per person including flights.*

Independence: *It's a wonderful thing...*

Why use our service? Well, in short: we think you, and perhaps more importantly your pupils, get a better deal. Why? Because in using an independent consultancy service such as ours, you gain access to a wealth of specialist knowledge and expertise that will help you make informed decisions throughout the preparation for your proposed trip, all at no extra cost. We are here to help. We are not here to push one product, one company or one style of trip. We are here to listen, give you choice, flexibility, access to the best operators in the business and some honest, independent advice.

Specialist Operators

We work closely with over 25 of the best educational, adventure, cultural and specialist tour operators in the UK. Each has been chosen for their expertise in a particular region or activity. They are true specialists in their field, and offer competence and reliability.

We are confident that our tour operators cannot be beaten in terms of experience, service or value for money.

Choice & Flexibility

No two schools' needs are the same when it comes to arranging a trip abroad, so why should you have to conform to one style of trip or a particular tour operator's approach? The answer is you don't.

We believe choice is a good thing: choice of destination, choice of operator, choice of trip style. The best thing is that we can help make the choice as easy as possible with a few strategic questions and a discussion on what you want your pupils to gain from the trip.

Expert Advice

We are experts in travel, but we are not a tour operator and do not claim (or want!) to be one.

The staff at the STC have travelled and trekked extensively in over 50 countries worldwide, both independently and on expedition. We know what it is like to cross the Sahara, walk the Inca Trail or trek in the Himalaya. It is this invaluable travel experience combined with many years working in the industry that means we are able to help you find your ideal destination, itinerary and, perhaps most crucially, the best tour operator or expedition provider for your needs.

Free & Independent

We do not charge for our services and the cost of the travel services we help arrange is exactly the same as if you went to one of our tour operators directly.

Our fees are paid by the companies we deal with, yet we remain an independent company, not tied to any particular tour operator.

Our reputation rests on giving the best possible advice for your current requirements, and recognising that these may be different from year to year. Repeat business and recommendations are an important part of our business profile, so we will not compromise on our independence and the quality of service we provide.



Destination Inspiration

With so much choice it can sometimes be difficult to decide where to head for and what options are open to you.

To help you in your search for a suitable destination, the STC has a set of detailed country dossiers on many of the more popular countries that are suitable for educational travel.

These dossiers are packed with useful information including facts and figures on each country, the country's highlights, climate and the best times of year to travel, suggested itineraries and also a price guide. There are also details of national holidays, festivals and interesting or important customs, as well as a wealth of background information to help give you a feel for the country and hopefully get the feet itching just a little...

If you would like to receive a copy of any of these dossiers, either by email (in PDF format) or a hard copy sent by post, then please get in touch and we'll be pleased to send any you may be interested in.

Alternatively, if you are after a well travelled mind to bounce ideas off, then please give us a call and we will be able to help you with the decision making process.



Travel Insurance: be careful what you buy...

There are few products that you actively buy hoping never to use, but travel insurance is definitely one of them. However, whilst many people are aware of many of the most important elements of a travel policy such as medical assistance and repatriation, there are some areas that are often overlooked.

The first is "**activities**": It is important to ask yourself the question "Does our policy cover all the activities that we plan to be participating in?" For adventurous expeditions, perhaps involving trekking at altitude, a standard insurance policy is unlikely to provide cover. Nor will it cover activities such as white water rafting, camel trekking or community work, to name but a few. If you are using the services of a tour operator to arrange your itinerary, then their insurance policy is likely to cover all the activities that they are providing, but it is worth double checking.

Perhaps the most overlooked part of travel policies is that of **liability**

insurance. Many policies do not automatically include cover for this, and yet it is a vital part of covering your financial risk. Liability insurance covers you and your pupils' liability for other people's property and possessions whilst you are travelling. Take the following true story as an example:

A woman travelled to Florence on a business trip and stayed in a recently restored 4 star regency hotel. Her room was on the 5th floor and one night, distracted by a phone call, she forgot that she had started to run a bath... The resulting damage to the hotel from her over-flowing bath was valued at over £750,000 - all due to a moment of forgetfulness that any of us would be capable of.

Whilst a 4 star hotel is unlikely to feature on a school trip, the need to protect our liability is relevant to all. In the above example, the lady in question did have liability insurance as part of her travel insurance cover and the insurers concerned picked up the tab for the redecoration of the hotel!

Travels in Ethiopia: a report from this beautiful and ever surprising country by Dr. Sue Snape

"Ethiopia? Why Ethiopia?" – so many friends would ask us. We had plans for a three week trip away from the UK, to include a cultural tour of the northern highlights and a two week trek in the spectacular Simien Mountains.

A little more than 12 hours travelling time after leaving Heathrow, our domestic Ethiopian Airlines flight descended through the patchy clouds over Lalibella. A timeless landscape of fields, ravines, and tiny villages appeared beneath us. Soon after, the 50 seater prop taxied to a halt in front of an airport terminal the size of a golf clubhouse. As the engines stopped, we descended the steps onto warm tarmac. It was then that we were struck by the space, and the silence, of Africa.

For the next couple of days we explored the remarkable churches of Lalibella. Hewn out of solid bedrock over 700 years ago, they are still a centre of pilgrimage for Ethiopian Christians from all over the country. Though very dark inside, the churches' interiors are all elaborately painted with religious art and stories to educate the pious, but largely illiterate, congregations. The town itself seemed to echo the wider country – development



is slow, but it is happening. The main street is newly paved, and there is even some electricity, but each evening the pungent smell of wood smoke still emerges from the local's Tuckels - traditional thatched mud huts.

Next stop was Bahar Dar, a town of 100,000 people, where our hotel was on the shores of Lake Tana – the source of the Blue Nile. A short cycle up to a hill above town gave superb views over the lake, the town and the fertile green fields that stretched for as far as the eye could see – more "British home counties" than the stereotype of a famine-struck desert.

Another internal flight and a 2 hour minibus journey took us to Debarq where our trek began.

At first our route took us through farmland, where crowds of local children would throng around us, but soon we had climbed up to over 3500m, and into dramatic open grasslands scattered with Giant Lobelia trees. For several days our walk took us along the top of 500m cliffs; home to the famous Gelada Baboons, and offering stunning views over many miles of patchwork countryside lying far below. Each evening, as tired legs carried us into camp we would be met by the cheery local support staff, who would prepare our meals and endless mugs of tea. In the morning, they'd load our kitbags onto the mules, and be gone before we knew it. By the second week we had got through the National Park to the foot of Ras Deshen, 4456m, the fourth highest peak in Africa, and the biggest day on the trek. Towards the top

we were greeted by some local shepherds – boys aged ten to fifteen who live on the stony plateau above 4000m for 10 months of the year, tending their sheep and goats; no school for them.

The following day brought fresh surprises. A huge sloping field of golden barley was being harvested - by hand. Nearby there were biblical scenes of oxen (and horses) threshing the freshly cut crop, and men winnowing it in the breeze.

Now the path took us off the high plateau and down into the lush, forested, valley below. The temperature climbed, but our new-found fitness, luxurious long lunches and afternoons spent bathing in natural pools, meant that the final few days' walking felt more like a series of gentle strolls than a tropical expedition. All too soon we had walked back to the roadhead, where cool drinks and our minibus awaited us; back to Addis and then 'civilisation' as we know it.

So why Ethiopia? It *is* different – *very* different, and not what you would expect. It's a country full of surprises, beauty, culture and a lot more to go back to.

A 10 day archaeological, cultural and trekking tour of northern Ethiopia starts from around £1,400 per person including flights. Longer itineraries with extended trekking as described here, a community project or a visit to the anthropological wonderland of the Omo Valley in the south of the country, are also possible. Please get in touch for more details.

Risk Assessments: Getting personal...

The importance of a thorough risk assessment before departure and a constant on-going appraisal of it as the trip progresses is obviously vital to the safe running of any trip abroad.

The majority of tour operators offering services to the education sector are able to prepare a detailed risk assessment of the arrangements they are providing, based on their extensive knowledge of the area being visited and the terrain, climate and transport that will be encountered. However, there is a fundamental part of assessing risk that no tour operator can perform, no matter how experienced they are.

The reason? Risk assessing has to be personal. The relationship between individual members of a team can sometimes be the prime cause of a problem, especially when under pressure in a challenging environment. No tour operator has the ability to know your pupils like you do, so only you can do an effective assessment of the risk posed by individuals within a group.

Don't let this put you off. This area forms only part of the risk assessment for the whole itinerary, and is a small price to pay for the benefits gained from running a successful tour or expedition.

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Events and Courses

The following is a list of forthcoming events and courses. For more information on any event given here, please contact the organising body directly.

Courses & Events at the Royal Geographical Society, London:

For more details contact: The Expedition Advisory Centre at the RGS : www.rgs.org, tel: 020 7591 3030, email: eac@rgs.org (or alternative addresses given below).

- **Certificate in Off-Site Safety Management:** This OCR accredited certificate course is particularly relevant to EVCs, teachers, youth leaders, and university lecturers who are responsible for off-site visits within their organisation. 12 - 13 Oct 2006, 5 - 6 Dec 2006, £211.50 inc VAT. Email: go@rgs.org
- **LEA Overseas Expeditions and Fieldwork:** A one day course for teachers and EVCs organising an expedition or fieldwork overseas. 17 Oct 06, £112 inc VAT.
- **Educational Visits Co-ordinator Training:** A training course for EVCs at independent and foundation schools. This course provides training to enable EVCs to plan and manage all educational visits. 7 Nov 2006, 8 Feb 2007, 2 May 2007, £176.25 inc VAT. Email: go@rgs.org
- **Explore 2006 :** The annual expedition planning seminar - Over 100 of Europe's leading field scientists and explorers will cover a wide range of topics in a series of lectures, workshops and exhibits. 25 & 26 Nov 2006, £94 inc VAT. Student concessions and group ticket reductions available.

Courses from the Young Explorers' Trust (YET):

- **The YET Expedition Leaders' Planning Course:** Open to anyone intending, hoping, or even just interested in leading youth expeditions (UK or abroad). 18 & 19 Nov 06, Sheffield. £80. visit: www.theyet.org. Contact the course director: Peter Drake, 68 Ridings Fields, Brockholes, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, HD9 7BG