



THE NEWS

... giving your travel direction!

Expeditions :: Tours :: Inspiration :: Advice



The Specialist
Travel Consultancy

Happy New Year to all our clients - past, present and future! We hope 2010 brings you some exciting adventures and memorable experiences whether they are educational in remit or purely self-indulgent.

2009 was a tough year for the travel industry. A number of high profile companies went bust (including Ireland's biggest tour operator) and many more laid-off staff. Industry experts predict 2010 will bring with it a new round of failures. However, here at the STC we are weathering the storm very well with forward bookings healthier than ever before.

Whilst the UK economy is certainly not out of the woods, there is some good news when it comes to travel. If you know where to look and how to travel, there are some bargain adventures to be had and our clients are making the most of our expertise to find them. We have numerous groups heading out on tours, expeditions and adventures at really excellent prices. See inside for some great value-for-money destination suggestions.

We also have a growing number of families with young and not-so-young children, as well as individuals and private groups seeking out adventures of their own. Perhaps one of the most exciting ventures we are currently arranging is a complete circumnavigation of the Taklamakan Desert in Western China. This 26 day tailor-made expedition includes some major highlights of the Silk Road along with stunning scenery and many little visited and out of the way treasures. Expert multi-lingual guides and three fully equipped Land Cruisers will see the group of friends travel over 5,600km around the world's 15th largest desert.

If you are planning a trip for 2010 or beyond, whether for yourself, your family, friends or students, then we'd be delighted to help make it happen. We have recently signed three new excellent tour operators to broaden our scope (see inside for details).

Closer to home, Adrian has recently been invited to join the regional committee of the Royal Geographical Society and is soon to become a Geography Ambassador.

For the full range of educational tours and expeditions, tailor-made holidays, small group tours and family adventures, please visit our newly expanded website. Happy travels in 2010!

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The Specialist Travel Consultancy is an independent niche travel agency.

We specialise in creating imaginative adventures, educational tours and personal development expeditions for schools, colleges, scouts and other private groups.

We also arrange tailor-made journeys, safaris, polar cruises, treks and adventure holidays for individuals and families with a wandering spirit.

Contact Us

The Specialist Travel Consultancy
11-15 Dix's Field
Exeter
EX1 1QA
Email: info@thestc.co.uk
Web: www.thestc.co.uk

Tel: 01392 660056



Baobab Avenue, Madagascar, by Paul Cornish from The Coopers' Company and Coborn School
Winning entry in our 2009 photographic competition. Congratulations Paul - a classic image!
To arrange a tour, expedition or wildlife holiday to Madagascar, contact us for details.

Adventure at the right price: 4 winning destinations when budgets are tight

You don't need to pay a small fortune for quality adventures and expeditions. We are noticing, and schools are telling us too, that the average group sizes on expeditions and tours are lower now than a year or two ago. In the current climate of financial worry, it is important that trips are priced at a level so that such educational experiences are within striking distance of the majority, not the few. Even the more well-off students will thank you for it.

With this in mind, here are four destinations we have recently quoted on that offer unbeatable adventure at realistic and attainable prices. For each destination (and of course many more!) we can provide "off-the-shelf" trips or tailor-made itineraries to individual group requirements. Contact us for more details on these or any other trip ideas you may have.

Morocco: 7 - 21 days

You just can't beat Morocco when it comes to bargain adventures. If you've been before, why not go again? There is always something new to explore. We can design tough extended trips for older students as well as great first time adventures.

Trekking amongst the Berber villages and dramatic peaks of the High Atlas is a pleasure at any time of year, but don't discard the smaller ranges of the Mgoun Massif, Jebel Sahro Anti Atlas and the Rif Mountains for more off the beaten track adventures.

Step off the plane just three hours from the UK and enter a world of Arabian nights, Jellabas and snake charmers.

10 day expeditions start from around £800 per student including flights and free teacher places.

Thailand: 10 - 21 days

Thailand has recently been voted "best value long haul destination", and it's not hard to see why.

12 day trips start from around £1,400 per student and could see you trekking to remote hill tribe villages, learning about elephant conservation, having private chanting lessons from Buddhist monks, learning the art of Thai cooking, white-water rafting, jungle trekking, helping out in a home-stay village or relaxing on glorious white sand beaches.

Thailand gets a lot of bad press, some of which is justified, much of it not. We can help you experience a side of this country that is a million miles away from the package travel haunts and seedy bars. It is a country of amazing diversity and incredibly friendly locals.

Vietnam: 12 - 28 days

Vietnam is one of the most beautiful countries in South East Asia and a fantastic adventure tour and expedition destination.

There is excellent trekking in the north of the country amongst the hill tribe regions near Sapa, as well as sea kayaking opportunities amongst the spectacular cliffs and islands of Halong Bay. It is also perfect for cycling tours (35 million Vietnamese can't be wrong!)

Interspersed through all of this is a warm smiling welcome, a rich colonial heritage and, of course, a Vietnam war history lesson at almost every turn.

14 day expeditions start around £1,800 per student

Kenya: 13 - 28 days

Kenya is nature's treasure chest in East Africa with a huge diversity in flora and fauna, deserts, lush grasslands, soaring mountains, glaciers, volcanoes and sandy beaches.

Mt. Kenya (5199m) is a definite contender for Africa's most stunning trek and we can arrange a full traverse of the mountain on little visited paths, summiting the highest walkable summit, Point Lenana (4895m).

We can also arrange wilderness walking safaris and camel treks in Laikipia conservation area with possible conservation or community based project work too. Finish off with a classic safari in world renowned game reserves such as Samburu or Lake Nakuru.

20 day expeditions start around £2,700 per student.



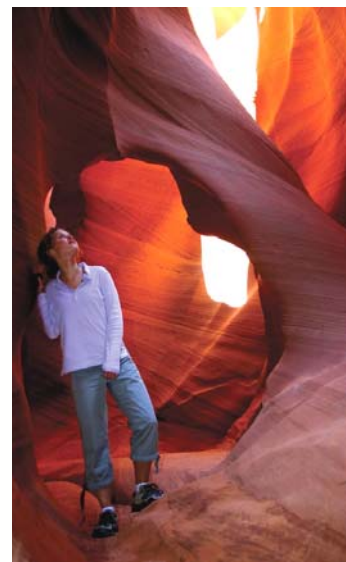
Family Adventures: Expanding horizons young and old...

"Full Bored" family holidays, they are not. Fun? Adventurous? Educational? Yes. Active? If you want. Eye opening, enriching and utterly memorable? Most definitely.

Our range of family holidays from some of the UK's leading adventure specialists is a fantastic opportunity for families to spend quality time together exploring the world and discovering its wildlife, cultures, scenery and people.

So what exactly do such holidays entail? Well, you could be drifting down the Dordogne in inflatable canoes, dog-sledding in Finland, exploring the temples of Egypt or discovering lost cities and llamas in South America. Wildlife is always a big hit with kids, African safaris and coming face to face with sea-lions in the Galapagos are just two examples of wildlife holidays suitable for families. It is even possible to take relatively young children trekking in the Himalaya if you know how (and with whom).

We know both - so if you want your next holiday to be one that the kids just won't stop talking about, give us a call. As parents, we know what it is like to travel with young children and can give you hints and tips on how to plan and prepare for your trip. See our brand new family adventures section on the website for more details, or call 01392 660056.



New Operators signed up:

We are always delighted when we sign up a new tour operator. In doing so, we not only increase the range and diversity of countries and travel products we can offer our clients, but we also extend our network of reliable and trusted people within the industry. As our list of tour operators grows, so too does our stature within the industry and we are now in the position where operators are approaching us. We choose our operators very carefully, and feel comfortable saying you couldn't be in better hands.

In the past couple of months we have added three well respected operators to our growing list, now bringing the total number of travel companies we deal with to nearly 50.

Many of you may know of and perhaps already have used Discover the World, the UK's leading specialist Iceland operator. We are delighted that they are now on board and supporting us in our vision. New too are Activities Abroad, one of the UK's leading adult and family activity holiday providers and has a wonderful selection of trips right across the globe.

Finally, Fulani Travel, is a specialist West African tour operator offering small group and bespoke tours and expeditions across the Sahara and West African region. Whilst a relatively new tour operator in name, they have a huge pedigree amongst their staff from some of the leading names in African travel over the past 25 years.

We are delighted to be working with these and all our tour operators to bring you the very best on the ground experiences .



Work in progress

The diversity in expeditions, tours and holidays we handle seems to expand on a weekly basis. With the range of leading tour operators that we deal with ever expanding too, there is every likelihood that we have the contacts to arrange your next educational or personal trip abroad, and do it extremely well.

To give an idea of the range of trips we handle, we thought we'd share with you a selection of our current enquiries and bookings:

Educational trips & expeditions:

- School partnership tours and associated expeditions in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Egypt and Ghana, ranging from 10 to 28 days.
- 22 day multi-activity, trekking and project based expedition to Turkey.
- 10, 12 & 16 day trekking, desert and project based expeditions in Morocco.
- 13 day Mt Kenya Expedition for 11 & 12 year olds.
- A 2 week expedition to Vietnam, Thailand or Costa Rica for a school for blind and partial sighted students.
- An introduction to Scuba diving and PADI open water course in Egypt's Red Sea.
- Educational discovery and adventure tours in Italy, China, Iceland, India, Morocco, South Africa, Peru and Costa Rica.

Holidays & bespoke expeditions:

- 26 day circumnavigation of the Taklamakan Desert in Western China for a private group of eight friends.
- Family adventure & discovery tours in Finland, Jordan, China, Vietnam and Thailand.
- An "overland" style camping safari for a family travelling to Namibia.
- A tailor-made safari and beach honeymoon to East Africa.
- Small group adventure tours to many different countries.
- A school ski holiday to Austria with multiple families travelling together.
- Trekking holidays in the Himalaya and a relaxed walking holiday in Europe.



Antarctica: The highest, coldest, driest and windiest continent.

Whilst impressive, the above adjectives say nothing of what many people consider to be Antarctica's finest attribute: the wildlife. Extraordinary bird and marine life abound in the White Continent, and the thrill of seeing nature in its element is made all the more dramatic with a back drop of towering peaks, surreal icebergs and enigmatic history.

We act as agents for many of the best Antarctic operators and can give you independent advice as to how and when to go about your visit. For many people Antarctica is a once in a lifetime trip, so make sure you get it right first time with some expert advice from us.

Antarctica *is* expensive, and it is also very, very special. Flight inclusive expedition cruise packages start at around £4,400 pp, but if you are quick there are currently some good last minute deals available. Of course, if money is no problem then top of the (price) list, might be the final tourist voyage on the legendary Polar ice breaker, Kapitan Khlebnikov. In December 2010 it will semi-circumnavigate Antarctica from the Falkland Islands via the Antarctic Peninsula to the Ross sea and on to New Zealand. The price? A snip at a little over £19,000 per person (for a basic cabin and excluding flights, you understand...)

Contact us if you would like to know more, or visit: www.thestc.co.uk/antarctica.php

Snippets and clippings...

Expanded website

Over the past few months we have updated and significantly expanded our website.

The changes reflect the growth of our business and now include more than 40 dedicated country pages where you can get the low down on the highlights and travel opportunities in a wide range of countries.

We have also added a brand new section on family holidays as well as a dedicated insurance page when you can obtain a quote in a matter of minutes.

Updated pages throughout the rest of the site mean that, now more than ever, our site is a great place to gain some inspiration for a wide range of tours, expeditions and holidays. Take a trip at...

www.thestc.co.uk

and then give us a call to set your travel wheels in motion.



Yellow Fever... and eggs!!

A growing number of countries in Africa and South America are requiring all travellers to show a valid Yellow Fever vaccination certificate on arrival.

Whilst this does not represent a problem for most (except the expense of having the jab), it does have implications for some.

The Yellow Fever vaccination is grown on egg shells and so is not recommended for anyone with an allergy to eggs. If you know of anyone allergic to eggs who is planning to visit a Yellow Fever infected country, it is vital that they talk to their GP or travel clinic before paying deposits and committing to a trip.

For everyone else, make sure you get good travel health advice and your jabs in plenty of time before departure. Once vaccinated for Yellow Fever, cover lasts for at least 10 years.

"Late" holiday getaways...

With adventure holidays, whether of the small group variety or tailor-made, it pays to book well ahead to guarantee the best airfares and availability.

With half term fast approaching, and Easter not too far away either, if you are planning a get-away, then contact us as soon as possible to get things moving.

Many of our operators still have some availability for these periods, but where they have allocations of flights they will be releasing these back to airlines very soon resulting in potential flight availability issues.

There is currently half term availability on holidays as diverse as walking on the Amalfi Coast, winter adventures and dog sledding expeditions in Finland, Kilimanjaro climbs, family holidays in mainland Egypt and the Sinai Peninsular, walking holidays in Greece and Andalucía, cross-country skiing in France, snow-shoeing in the Pyrenees or Slovenia, safaris in Kenya, cultural tours in Asia and wine-tasting in South Africa.

Contact us and we can search availability with over 40 leading holiday operators.



IB CAS Programme: Using expeditions to gain qualifications

Overseas expeditions are an ideal way to fulfil many aspects of the Creativity, Action and Service element of the IB Diploma programme.

Obviously the expedition is the ultimate end goal and highly rewarding in itself, but as with any overseas trip, it is the opportunities prior to departure that can maximise the educational benefits of such a trip.

Undertaking a community or conservation project is perfect for the Service element of CAS, and feedback from groups travelling with us often mentions the project section as the most impacting and fulfilling.

Projects can vary widely in remit lasting

from a day or two, to a week or more.

Whatever their nature, we are passionate that the projects our clients work on are responsible, sustainable and led by local need, rather than by the wishes of the operator or group. Repainting walls that have already been painted by previous groups benefits no one.

We have arranged a number of IB CAS related expedition programmes with one group, Bridgwater College, heading back to the same project in Morocco for successive years.

Of last summer's trip, Ollie, a student at Bridgwater said "Undoubtedly it was tough at times, but it was also a truly amazing,

once in a lifetime experience, one which we will never forget. Taking part in the community project was highly fulfilling, and it made us realise that language barriers don't limit the capacity for people to get along, help each other and form friendships... A stupendous trip, immaculately organised, very fun and educational. Utterly life-affirming "

Student feedback like that is what makes it all worthwhile...

Contact us if you would like to discuss ideas for a CAS related expedition, or visit our dedicated IB webpage at:

www.thestc.co.uk/ib_cas.php



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