



THE NEWS

... giving your travel direction!

Expeditions :: Tours :: Destination Inspiration :: Advice :: News

Greetings and a very Happy New Year to one and all!

February 2009 sees our 3rd birthday! How time flies, it seems only yesterday that the initial seeds of the STC were planted, but with business now in full flow and word of mouth recommendations ever increasing, our initial vision is now fast becoming a reality. The next few months will hopefully see a move to new premises and an expansion in staffing.

2009 will also see groups travel as far afield as Thailand, India, Egypt, Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, Morocco and USA amongst others, and we are delighted to be welcoming back previous clients for some repeat adventures!

Amongst the usual mix of diverse tours and expeditions, we have recently been working on a number of really exciting biology trips. These range from taking part in brown bear monitoring in the remote corners of Slovakia's Tatra Mountains, to species counts and transect surveys in Sri Lanka and Ecuador. Poland is also rapidly becoming one of our favourite destinations for biology groups. Not only is the wildlife viewing superb, but we can now access fauna research projects authorised by the Polish government (see article inside for more details). It's not just the wildlife in Poland, though, that is proving popular. Trekking in the Polish Tatras offers excellent hut to hut based routes as well as centre based options and is an excellent value introduction to expeditioning.

Over the Christmas holidays we had two groups travelling, both to Tanzania. Congratulations must go to Orley Farm Preparatory School in Harrow who, after a year's detailed planning, successfully got six of their group of ten boys aged 12 & 13 to summit Mt Meru (4566m).

The latter part of 2008 saw a flurry of new tour operators come on board, bringing to 37 the total number that we now deal with. New to the fold include Madventurer (see article inside), Wildlife & Wilderness, Diverse Earth and Go Russia. We are always excited by the prospect of offering an ever increasing range of tips from some of the UK's best travel companies.

We hope you find something in this issue that ignites a spark for a trip. If not, then give us a call and we'll be pleased to discuss some more ideas with you. Best wishes for the term ahead and for all your travels and adventures in 2009.

Orley Farm School, Mt. Meru 4566m

"After the weighing of bags and allocation of porters, we set off with a total of 10 boys, 2 teachers, 1 armed ranger, 2 chief guides, 2 guides and 18 porters! We soon realised why an armed ranger was needed, as we walked into a herd of buffalo..."



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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
PO Box 514
Exeter
EX1 9DW
Tel: 0845 838 7667
Fax: 01392 891078
Email: info@thestc.co.uk
Web: www.thestc.co.uk

Madventurer partners Dragoman and Intrepid

2008 saw the highly respected Newcastle based international project organisers "Madventurer" team up with two of adventure travels longest standing companies, Dragoman Overland and Intrepid Travel.

For 10 years, Madventurer have been praised for the sustainable nature of the projects they operate. Dragoman and Intrepid, with 48 years experience in adventure travel between them, are well renowned for their tour operations. The partnership of these companies and the addition of Madventurer into our portfolio is something we are really very excited about.

Madventurer's projects focus on youth development issues such as health, education and sport, as well as helping to build basic infrastructure that benefits whole communities. Their projects are community led and wholly community owned.

With school groups, a team of committed teenagers means a lot can be achieved in a short space of time. A minimum commitment from a group of ideally 5 or 6 days allows a chance to achieve really worthwhile goals. Madventurer have a strict health and safety policy and all projects are carefully assessed and overseen by full time in-country managers.

Once the project phase of a trip has been completed, Madventurer can hand over to either Dragoman or Intrepid for the travel and adventure phase. Current destinations where project work can be arranged include Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Peru and Fiji.

For more information on how to make the most use of this partnership, or to discuss ideas for a project related trip, please call us on 0845 838 7667. Tours, expeditions and projects arranged through the STC are priced exactly the same as if you approached an operator directly, and we can add significant value through our knowledge of the market and our independence, not to mention the reduction in your workload.



Poland: Europe's wildlife & trekking wonderland

Which destinations immediately spring to mind for biology, ecology or conservation related trips abroad? Costa Rica, Borneo, East Africa certainly, but how about Poland?

It is often easy to overlook what is right on our doorstep, but in Poland you'll discover the perfect short-haul destination for a wildlife and biology related tour, as well as offering some of Europe's best trekking.

Eastern Poland is sparsely populated, relatively undiscovered and in places, truly wild. It is an area where four magnificent National Parks still contain a huge variety of endangered species living in their natural habitats. In the northeast, amid the meandering lowland rivers and flooded meadows, are large populations of elk and there are places where wolves still roam. Nearby, in the best-preserved fragment of ancient lowland forest anywhere in Europe is the last stronghold

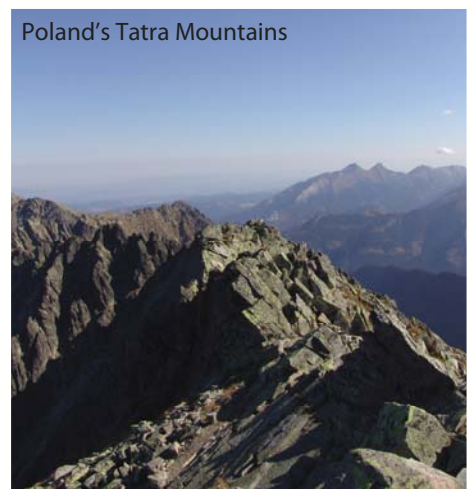
of European bison, whilst wolves, lynx, elk, deer, wild boar, beavers and an incredible array of smaller mammals as well as some extraordinary birdlife can also be observed. Over 80% of all Europe's bird species have been recorded in Poland. Of these, perhaps the large owls are the most impressive.

The rounded, meadow-topped mountains of the far southeast are home to Europe's largest wolf population which primarily hunt red deer. You'll also find bears, bison, beavers and otters that frequent the woodlands and river valleys. Further south the great Tatra Mountains are excellent for day walks and extended trekking and the limestone hills nearby hold several hundred species of butterflies and orchids.

Our specialist wildlife operator for Poland has access to some of the best guides in the country, as well as the ability to

organise lectures and conservation work with local researchers. All inclusive 8 days wildlife and biology focused tours start from around £850 per student, while trekking itineraries start from around £865 per student for a 9 day itinerary.

Poland's Tatra Mountains



D of E: Important Changes to Overseas Expeditions

The requirements for completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition section have recently changed. These changes will affect many schools who up until now have used foreign adventures and the "Other Adventurous Project" as a means of completing this section of The Award.

In a tightening up of their criteria The Award is bringing the requirements for ALL expeditions in line with those that are run in the UK. Critically, they now need to include remote supervision and self sufficiency during the assessed phase, wherever in the world they take place. Clearly this has significant implications on a foreign expedition.

There are 20 conditions that must be met in order to meet the requirements of the expedition section and very soon Local Operating Authorities will only be accepting applications from a new breed of "Authorised Activity Providers". 2009 trips already organised will not be affected by the new rules.

We are delighted to say that late in 2008 our friends at Far Frontiers Expeditions were the first company to be awarded this new status of AAP. What's more, only a handful of AAPs have currently been appointed, and Far Frontiers Expeditions are in the even more select group of being able to offer the expedition phase of The Award overseas. This is a position that some of even the UK's biggest school expedition companies have not been able to achieve. Some options for D of E through Far Frontiers Expeditions include:

Morocco: 8/9 days (both trekking and biking options); **Borneo:** 2 weeks or more (trekking, multi-activity, wildlife, community projects and biking); **Norway:** 8/9 days (trekking and canoeing); and **Nepal:** 2 weeks or more, (multi-activity, trekking, whitewater rafting and jungle).

It is testament to Far Frontiers Expeditions' professionalism and attention to detail that they are now leading the way in the new phase of D of E expeditions. Well done, guys! We look forward to continuing to work with you in the years ahead.



Calling all parents... Calling all parents...

If you are a parent reading this newsletter and experiencing growing pangs of envy over your child's impending adventures, then we may have just the tonic...

While school expeditions and tours are the mainstay of our business, we are equally at home arranging fantastic holidays to all corners of the globe for individuals, couples, families and friends.

As independent agents for a multitude of hand-picked specialist holiday companies, we can turn your plans into reality, saving you time, money and hassle in the process. And if, like us, you can't think of anything worse than spending your next holiday "full bored" on a sun-lounger, then we can provide you with many an inspirational holiday idea to invigorate the senses and challenge the mind.

Tailor-made itineraries, small groups adventures, luxurious safaris, tough treks, gentle ambles, cycling, independent tours, in-depth cultural visits, wildlife extravaganzas... should we go on?

Visit our website for more information or get in touch and let us help you give your travel direction.



Hog Hollow Country Lodge, Tsitsikamma National Park, South Africa.



Unlocking the Slave Trade

With the slave trade now firmly in the national curriculum, there has never been a better time to visit the fascinating cultures of West Africa.

Ghana is an obvious choice with English as the official language, but both Togo and Benin offer a more intense and adventurous West African experience with less of a tourist infrastructure, higher prevalence of Voodoo cultures and, of course, the opportunity to practice one's French!

We can advise you on possible itineraries, the best times of year to travel, suitable tour operators and pre-departure considerations.

Expeditions: In addition to tours focusing on the slave trade, West Africa is a fantastic place for an extended expedition of up to three or four weeks. Granted, there are not the trekking possibilities of other destinations (except in Mali), but what it lacks in mountains it makes up for in other ways. West Africa is truly a world away and provides an exceptional level of adventure and challenge with ample opportunity for immersion into tribal cultures, walking safaris, community projects, jungle canopy walkways and some of the best markets in the world. Add to this the friendly welcome, inherent rhythms, dance and singing that West Africa is renowned for, and you have all the makings of a truly eye-opening trip.



We know this region very well. We deal with three tour operators who specialise here, each of whom have at least 10 years experience of operating across West Africa - a pedigree that is distinctly lacking in a number of companies apparently offering to take schools to the region. We can arrange everything from cultural and historical tours, to adventure travel and overland expeditions, including community focused building, maintenance or teaching projects.

Contact us on 0845 838 7667 for sample itineraries and more details.

Snippets and other clippings...

BS8848 & LOtC Badges

It is now a year since the British Standard for Overseas Tours, Field Work and Expeditions came into being and the agreed 12 month review is about to take place.

Take up of the standard in the first year has not been high, but this may be about to change with the launch of an external evaluation and assessment scheme provided by the Young Explorer's Trust.

At the same time, the Learning Outside the Classroom Badge Scheme covering a wide range of out of classroom activities is also set to go live. The badge scheme is intended more as a way to ensure quality in the educational values of a visit (either in the UK or abroad), rather than just focusing on the safety aspects of a trip as the BS8848 does.

US Visa Changes

Changes to the USA Visa Waiver Program became effective from 12th January 2009. From this date many travellers to the United States (including Australians, New Zealanders and British) must have a pre-arranged travel entry authorisation in place. This is obtained electronically for passport holders from countries eligible for the Visa Waiver Program.

The authorisation can be obtained at the following website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Please note that obtaining an ESTA will still be required even if only transiting the US (e.g. on route to South America or the Pacific), so check your flight routes carefully.

Galapagos Park Fees

2009 is the 200 year anniversary of Darwin's birth and 150 years since the publication of his work "On the Origin of Species". In an effort to limit the ever increasing numbers of tourists visiting the Galapagos, the INGALA (Instituto Nacional Galapagos) has approved an increase in the Park entrance fee to US\$200 per person.

With flights to South America seemingly increasing all the time, especially in our summer months, this will make visits to the Galapagos all the more expensive. However, if the result is better conservation and protection, then that has to be a good thing.

EF closes UK Office

EF tours, one of the world's biggest student and educational travel companies, is to close its UK office and halt all overseas tours for UK schools as of March this year.

EF has never been one of the companies we deal with, but if you or a colleague have been affected and would like to look at alternative providers, then you can access the tour operations and services of 37 leading travel companies just by contacting the STC.



It's all Doom and Gloom: Or is it?

These days you cannot turn on the TV, open a newspaper or scratch your nose without someone mentioning the "current economic crisis". Whilst the dreaded "R" word is being mentioned at home, the fall in strength of the Pound has, in many places, had a dramatic impact on travel abroad. Here at the STC, we have had enough of all the negativity and instead we wanted to share a little optimism.

If you know where to look, it is still very feasible to organise expeditions and overseas tours at some very good prices. The choices you make on how and where you arrange trips have always had a significant bearing on price, but now their impact is greater than ever. But with the help of some independent advice and an open mind in how to approach overseas trips, you can still find true adventure at an affordable price.

If you have a budget to keep to, then some and possibly even your preferred destinations may be out of range. But that should not stop you having a fantastic trip to somewhere you may not have otherwise considered.

And that is the joy of travel and adventure. There are SO many different experiences and possibilities out there that there is something to suit everyone's budget and level of adventure.

It's our job to help you find it.

And Finally: How to milk ships...

We are always on the look out for interesting project work. Whilst recently researching possibilities for an expedition in Turkey, we had an offer of some amazing and, we are fairly sure, completely unique project work high in the spectacular Taurus Mountains. Here is a snippet of the itinerary sent through from the Turkish ground operator...

Day 8: Service project; taking milk from ships. Today we will meet in Emli Valley with local people, some yoruks [nomads] and shepherds, we will meet them and we will learn how to take milk from ships and then we will help them to take milk from ships.

We would like to know whether funnels are supplied...!



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