

THE YEAR OF LIVING

Lamayuru Gompa, Ladakh, India



DANGEROUSLY

*True adventure travel is the greatest gift you can give yourself in these difficult times, says **Tom Marchant***

Change is afoot. How we spend our precious days off is being challenged and influenced by a word that normally seemed the opposite of what you wanted to do when looking and escape from the stresses of the daily grind. That word? Adventure.

Previously seen as being a pursuit that belonged only to the extremely intrepid, physically fit or carefree youth, we are now seeing the need for adventure becoming a regular request for those planning holidays abroad. Be it a short European weekend with a shot of adrenaline in the arm or a long haul trip that takes people to the extremes of the earth, you will find adventure being woven into the fabric of many of these trips.

So why the change? Many reasons but two really stand out. The first is the increasing realisation that for many what they want when they take time off from work is distraction more than anything. If the aim of a break is to take you, far, far away from the reality of the daily grind and its accompanying stresses, a beach break where you find yourself with hours on hours of time dedicated to well, doing nothing, can be counter-productive. Without a distraction, the mind drifts back to the real world and the next thing you know the day to day issues that you had hoped to escape from are now back in your mind. The solution? Find something that distracts you, focuses the mind, provides a target for all your concentration and soon you will find the travails of

your regular working life at the back of your mind. If you are climbing a mountain, or kayaking between islands, every effort and thought is on the here and then, to focus on completing the activity. Soon you will find the mental escape that you had been seeking. This has been an emerging but very clear trend with our customers over the last few years and is set to continue. For distraction, read adventure.

The second key reason is that people like to be ahead of the curve. No-one wants to be at the dinner party where everyone has else has already stayed in the place they are jetting off to that weekend. What people want are stories, bragging rights if you like, that both silence and amaze their audience in equal measure. And where can you get those stories? Adventure. Whilst it is as accessible, rarely will you find one experience of an adventure the same. Equally, the number of people actually pushing themselves to do them is lower (for the time being), thereby reducing the likelihood of the 'been there done that moments' on social occasions. If someone is mocking you about the property you stayed at in Buzios, Brazil as being so last year, tell them you spent the week before that hunting for ananconda in the Pantanal. That should silence them.



*Traditional war clubs,
Papua New Guinea*



Mongolian shepherd

And yes, it needs to be acknowledged that in these challenging economic times, people are being more selective with their travel choices. As travel plans fall by the wayside on the basis that they are discretionary, so people want to ensure that if they do go away, they are doing something of true excitement, something that won't be forgotten once the sun tan has faded. If they are going to spend money they want to be able to justify it. That is easily done through a travel experience that challenges them and takes them a little out of their comfort zone but importantly will give them memories that they will keep for a lifetime. A bland beach break won't do that. Adventure undoubtedly will. So as a means to justify the spend this year, get your adventure head on and set out for an experience of a lifetime.

So where's hot this year and what are people looking to do? Below are the top 10 adventure experiences to enjoy this year. They are spread throughout the globe and

offer a range of different pursuits. In terms of destinations emerging this year, continue to look at South and Central America, but with lesser known destinations such as Nicaragua. The expanses of northern India and Mongolia will be popular too. Both perfect landscapes for a fix of adventure. Closer to home northern Scandinavia is throwing up some great adventures and should be strongly considered. If I'm honest, adventure opportunities are opening up everywhere. The key question is to ask yourself just what you want from your adventure and match it to those criteria, ideally with the help of a company like ours. The thought processes set out above should help but ultimately one person's adventure is very much their own and will give them their own set of memories. That's the beauty of it.

TOM MARCHANT is MD of Black Tomato; blacktomato.co.uk

THE TOP 10 ADVENTURES

1 | TREK THE LAST GREAT WILDERNESS

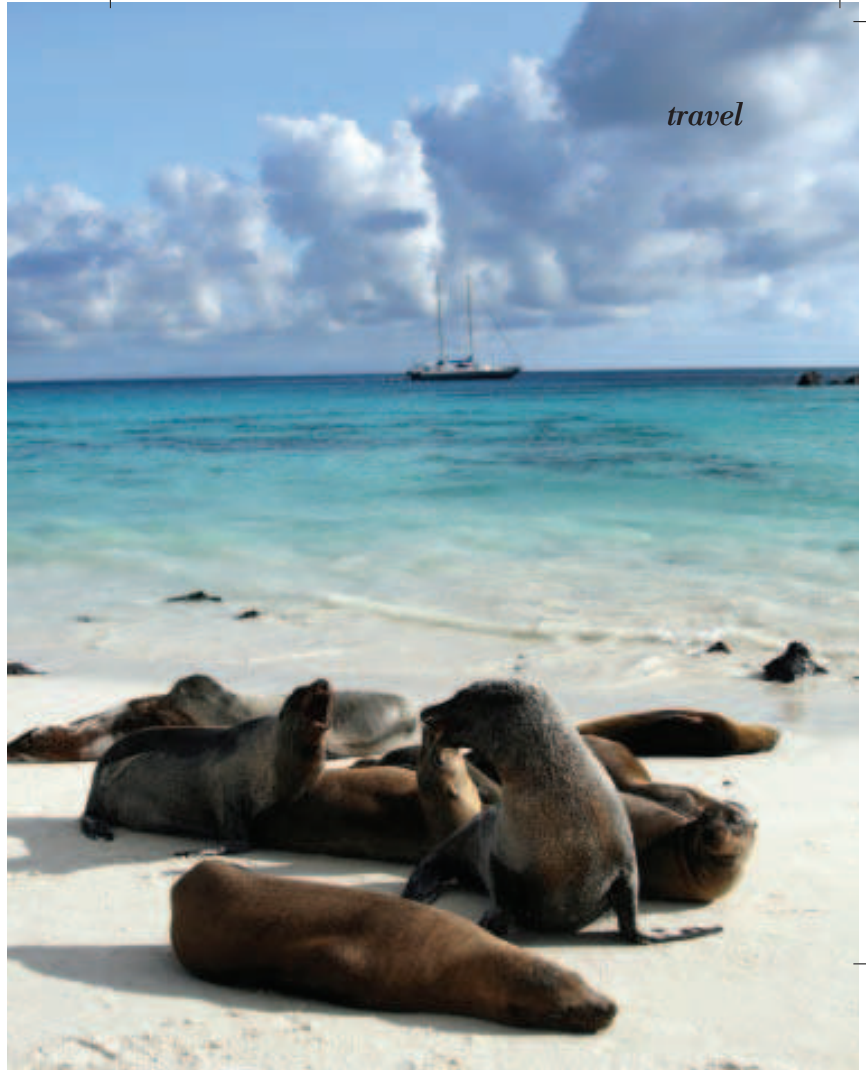
Following the publicity of 2006's 800 year anniversary of Mongol leader Genghis Khan, the attraction of the landscape of sweeping steppes, deserts and mountains that make up Mongolia has become come onto people's radars. Truly one of the last great wildernesses of the world, this adventure includes a combination of trekking, horseback riding and motor biking deep into the steppes. Starting in Ulaanbaatar and heading off road by motorbike into the Gobi desert, over 10 days you will take a route that will end each day with you staying in a yurt tent out in the open with the expanse of the wilderness all around. You will see wildlife such as the Gobi Bear, history such as the ancient monasteries of Karakorum (home to Marco Polo) and landscapes that will leave you breathless. Best of all though the isolation, the remoteness and silence of the adventure will stay with you forever. The stark contrast between the city you have come from and the thousands of empty square miles will be indelibly etched in your mind.



Stepping out in Mongolia



travel



2 | KAYAK IN THE GALAPAGOS

Whilst there are numerous opportunities to see the Galapagos by boat this is the first ever experience where you can kayak along the coastline and enjoy views of the aqua marine water, pristine beaches and cooling caves. Over an eight-day trip you will stay aboard a luxury 50ft catamaran and each day set off by kayak to explore the islands. The opportunity to get up close to the marine life and witness the stunning landscape of the islands from the water is unparalleled and ranks this as a once in a lifetime experience. As well as being on the water, you will pull up onto the beaches before setting off on treks to explore the different islands that you visit. Whilst others may have toured it on a major vessel with the tourist crowds, this is a deeply personal adventure where you will truly be immersed in the local environment and far away from the snap happy tourist boats.

The beaches in the Galapagos are teeming with wildlife

3 | VISIT A LOST WORLD - PAPUA NEW GUINEA

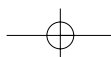
Some people feel that there are no genuine adventures left in the world. Well take heed: this is an adventure that will take you far, far off the beaten path and into Papua New Guinea's uncharted tropical jungles. Not for the faint hearted, this is the Black Cat Track. Over six adrenaline fuelled days, you'll pass through remote villages, crossing gorges, building rafts to negotiate rivers, and sleeping in traditional homes (or even in a hammock, if you wish). This is no walk in the park - the

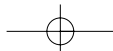
terrain is incredibly raw and varied: grasslands, rainforest, cloud forest, canyons and fascinating WW2 relics. Truly one of our last frontiers. You'll be rewarded with the satisfaction that you have completed an immense challenge and with a gorgeous palm-fringed beach as you emerge from the trail where you can go deep sea shark diving. The diving here is spectacular: perfect blue waters teeming with tropical fish, cute pygmy seahorses and orca whales. A perfect end to a perfect adventure.

Traditional village, Papua, New Guinea



Meet the locals in the jungles of Papua, New Guinea





4 HELI-SURF ON NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND

If it's about access to the inaccessible then this is one of the greatest adventures you can have. Surfers talk about the quest to find the perfect wave and whilst this can't guarantee it, what it will do is guarantee you surf stretches of coastline that few, if anyone at all, have ever surfed. Based out of the adventure capital of the world, Queenstown, New Zealand, this week comprises taking a helicopter each day to remote beaches that are not accessible by road, only air. Strapping on surfboards to the side of the helicopter, you will fly each day to a different beach. Here, with a top surf instructor alongside should you wish, you will get to surf wonderful breaks with the waves and the beach all to yourself. Each night you will retreat to the comfort of your hotel in Queenstown before heading out again to enjoy what some are calling the greatest surf adventure on earth.



*Pantanal, Brazil*

5 | ADVENTURE IN THE PANTANAL

Deep in central Brazil lies an area of land called the Pantanal. Made up of lakes, marshland, open plains and jungle it is home to a staggering amount of wildlife and its bio-diversity easily matches the Amazon. Preferred by many Brazilians to the Amazon as a place to visit for adventure it offers one of the best travel experiences in the world. Over a week spend time exploring the vast expanses of the area. One day you will be riding by

horseback along jungle tracks and past trees full of killer bees before emerging into wild plains and galloping into the sunset. On other days you will be hunting for anaconda and fishing for piranha (which taste wonderful when grilled over a small fire by the lake - a surreal dining experience). This adventure is about getting into the heart of both a mesmerising landscape and an array of wildlife that rivals anywhere on earth.

*Heading into the foothills of the Himalayas*

6 | DRIVE ENFIELD BULLETS IN INDIA

When it comes to adrenalin fuelled experiences, driving Enfield Bullet motorbikes around the Himalayan foothills can't be beaten. Definitely the best way to see the stunning landscapes of the Himalayas, riding Enfield bullets, the longest surviving motorcycle in the world, means you are guaranteed an unforgettable experience on this unique journey. Start off in the remote region of Ladakh and spend a week roaring around snow covered mountains, through lush valleys, alongside wild rivers, through deep ravines and past ancient monasteries. Stopping to soak up the crisp mountain air, and take photos of the magnificent views while drinking tea with locals just adds to the experience. Spend nights in house stays in the beautiful villages that are dotted throughout the landscape. With their classic design, comfy saddles and reliability, the bikes are the perfect iconic accompaniment through this iconic landscape.

*Chyulu Hills, Kenya*

7 | SAFARI ON HORSEBACK IN KENYA'S CHUYULU HILLS

Some people think that a safari only extends as far as the roll bars and doors of the jeep that you view the game from. Not true. For an adventure that gets you far closer to game and deeper into the landscape, head to Kenya's Chyulu Hills for a week's horse-back safari. An area that is well off the beaten track, the Chyulu Hills are the perfect backdrop for seeing some of the best game in Africa. Over the week you will follow a route that takes you along the base of and then through the hills. The experiences you will have are mind-blowing. By being on horseback you can get closer to game (who are more receptive to the horses) and you can enjoy moments such as galloping across the open African scrubland alongside herds of buffalo. Each night guides will set up a mobile camp for you. A nomadic existence for a week and one of the best adventures on earth.



Arctic adventure in Svalbard, Norway

8 | POLAR BEAR SAFARI IN SVALBARD

Whilst some people may have seen polar bears, few others will ever have undertaken this incredible adventure above the Arctic Circle in Norway's Svalbard archipelago. Based on the island of Spitsbergen, you will take off into the great wilderness on snow-mobiles and spend four days tracking polar bears in their natural environment. As far removed from the zoo-like feel of some safaris, this adventure will see you racing through

vast expanses of white desert, fjordland and glaciers without another human soul in site. Staying in former trapper's lodges, set deep into the snow covered tundra and being accompanied by an expert on these incredible animals, this is a true arctic adventure, based around the thrill of setting eyes on arguably the most feared animal on the planet.



Get up close and personal with a whale shark in Australia

9 | SWIM WITH WHALE SHARKS

There are aquariums, sealife parks and submarine experiences but for a sealife adventure, nothing comes close to this. This experience is based around swimming with whale sharks off Western Australia and is breathtaking. Based on the gorgeous Ningaloo reef in the Cape Range national park, over a week you will board a power boat and head out to swim with the largest living fish species in the world each day. Starting on the white sand beach, a helicopter spotter flies ahead to look for shoals of these colossal fish (which can weigh up to 13.6 tonnes), meaning you are guaranteed to find them. Once spotted, they radio back to the powerboat driver who then sets off with you to meet up with these magnificent creatures. Swimming amongst the bulky bodies of the whale sharks as they follow the warm tropical streams gives you a humbling reminder of how small we are on earth. Alongside them you will also get to see a vast range of marine life including sea

10 | VOLCANO-SURF IN NICARAGUA

You may have heard of this before but those that have still find it hard to believe. The one adventure that has emerged over the last year and is still only beginning to gain traction in people's thoughts still ranks as one of the must do adventure experiences in the world. Fly to Managua in Nicaragua before heading to the gorgeous colonial town of Leon. From here you will trek to Cerro Negro. An active but currently dormant volcano whose

ash strewn slopes offer the perfect run for a spot of Volcano surfing. Looking down on the lush, jungle, covered valleys you will set off from the rim of the crater, carving arcs in the ash before reaching the end. Combine this with a crocodile safari on the banks of the San Juan river in the south of the country and you'll see why people are referring to Nicaragua as the adventure capital on Central America.

All these adventures are available through Black Tomato; blacktomato.co.uk