

DESTINATION HIMALAYA



Winter 2009/2010



Greetings from chilly Northern California! It really is cold out here; well, for us wimpy Californians, that is. With nighttime temperatures hovering near 32 degrees, we are all having to break out our “winter coats” – literally and figuratively!! Nevertheless, the sun is out, no snow to deal with, etc., so we really do have the easy life. Plus, festive holiday décor is gracing Grant Avenue right outside our office door here in downtown Novato, CA.

With the New Year upon us, we at Destination Himalaya would like to extend our warmest and sincere wishes to all of you. Positive energy is in the air, and we hope that you have a wonderful, healthy and happy 2010.

While we are immersed in the holiday season here in the USA, the high travel season is well underway in South Asia. But before we get into South Asia, we are sure you must be wondering just what Machu Picchu is doing in the Himalaya. Well, it hasn't moved - rather, Destination Himalaya has expanded its region of operation to now include Peru. 2010 marks our first year to offer hiking tours in land of the Inca. Read more about the trip on pages 4 & 5 of this newsletter.


With the exception of the high Himalaya, fall & winter are ideal times to visit the Subcontinent, as the weather is at its most optimal for explor-

ing sites in and around India. In addition, the US dollar is still very strong against the Indian rupee. To make India an even more attractive travel destination, we have joined forces with the Taj Hotels to develop a new series of itineraries, for both group and private travel, which has enabled us to bring to you great travel experiences at affordable prices – more on this in our new India brochure (or turn the page!)

Looking ahead into 2010, the Himalayan countries become perfect travel destinations in late Spring and Summer. With security issues fading into the past, Nepal is once again becoming the great travel destination that it once was, and there are wonderful cultural festivals to be witnessed in Bhutan (Ura Festival in April) and Tibet (Gyantse Festival in June). In addition, we also have some exclusive trips planned for Sikkim, Tibet and Burma, including the wonderful chance to experience the “Two Faces of Everest”, as well as the rare opportunity to travel with David Breashears and our very own Sanjay Saxena. Watch this space for announcements regarding 2010/2011 departures with David and Sanjay.

Feel free to give us a ring anytime at 1.800.694.6342 (1.800 MY INDIA) to chat about any of our trips, or to plan your own private adventure.

Once again, on behalf of all of us at Destination Himalaya, both here and in Asia, we wish you all a wonderful Holiday season!



Destination Himalaya

807 Grant Avenue
Novato, CA 94945



Condé Nast Award

On October 14, 2009, Sanjay attended Condé Nast's annual soiree in New York, where Condé Nast honors their list of "Top Travel Specialists." 2009 marks the seventh year running for Sanjay to receive the Top Travel Specialist award for India, Tibet and Sri Lanka, and the second year for Nepal. The following night was the "Readers Choice Awards," where Sanjay got to hobnob with the likes of Sir Richard Branson at the exclusive event (award winners only need apply!) Congratulations to Sanjay on his award – best wishes for award No. 8 in 2010!

New Itineraries & India Brochure for 2010/11

We have some very exciting news to announce regarding our group and private departures to India. In conjunction with Taj Hotels, who are working with us to offer the best pricing for their most prestigious properties, we have built a new series of itineraries to India, focusing on everything from wildlife to extraordinarily luxurious palace hotels, and everything in between. The brochure is currently in the final stages of production, and is slated to hit mailboxes at the end of January – if you are not on our "snail mail" list, let us know your details and we will be sure you get a copy. The brochure is looking fabulous, and the itineraries are all top-notch. To coincide with the release of our brochure, our website will also be updated with current information and new itineraries.

Sanjay's Trip to Everest: Dispatches From The Field

In early October, Sanjay led a private group on a trek to mighty Mt. Everest in Nepal. Beginning their journey in Kathmandu, gathering for preparations and trek briefings at the legendary Yak & Yeti Hotel, Sanjay and friends took the mountain flight to Lukla and began their journey to revel in the shadow the world's most legendary mountain peak. Accompanying them was our trek leader Mingmar Sherpa (profiled in this newsletter), who has summited Everest three times. For this special trip, we created a webpage to document the journey as it unfolded. To see images from the trek and read the group's "Dispatches from the Field", please visit:

<http://www.peakpromotionnepal.com/cybercast/dh/>

With the continued positive political developments in this vibrant Himalayan nation, Nepal is once again asserting itself as a major tourist destination. Home to several of the world's highest mountain peaks and greatest trekking routes, Nepal beckons the adventurous traveler with its exotic charms. In 2010, you can visit Nepal with our special group trips to Everest with David Breashears and Mingmar Sherpa, as well as our Himalayan Kingdoms itinerary. We can also work with you to create your own Nepali adventure or trek – what better way to explore this beautiful country, than at your own pace.

SQ Magazine

As highlighted in depth in the summer 2009 issue of our newsletter, our special Service Trips have been creating a lot of buzz as of late. A great value, both economically and in terms of being able to truly contribute to several excellent causes in India, these "voluntourism" departures are in the vanguard of the travel industry these days.



As such, our Service Trips have drawn interest from a plethora of would-be "voluntourists," as well as from several prominent media outlets around the globe. Specifically, our Service Trips to South India (Schools of Kerala) are featured in the January issue of the Silver Kris, Singapore Airlines' magazine. Another of our Service Trips, this one to the Indian Himalaya (the Munsel-Ling School project in Spiti), is slated to be featured in an upcoming publication in mid-2010 – while we can't "officially" announce it just yet, stay tuned for details!



Photo Cultural Journeys

Teaming up with professional photographers Lewis Kemper, Brenda Tharp, Jeff Davis and Alan Plisskin, we are pleased to announce our first two Photo Tours for 2010 in our successful series of "Photo Cultural Journeys." Although their emphasis is on photography, these tours are suitable for any adventurous traveler looking for a vacation that is out of the ordinary. In addition to the photography expert, all tours are also fully escorted by a cultural guide and tour leader.

TIBET – From Lhasa to Kathmandu

On the Roof of the World. Locked away for centuries, Tibet has always held a unique place in the human imagination, conjuring an unearthly realm beyond our reach. We begin our photography journey of Tibet with four wonderful days in the magical environs of Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, its skyline dominated by the majestic ramparts of the Potala Palace.

Leaving Lhasa after four wonderful days full of photo ops, we photograph the turquoise waters of Yamdruk Lake on our way to Gyantse and the elaborate Kumbum chörten. Continuing via Shigatse and the monastery at Tashilhunpo (home of the Panchen Lamas) we reach the North Face of Everest in time to see the setting sun light up the mountain. The trip is timed to be at the base of Everest on full moon, where we will do some night photography. Descending into Nepal we end the tour in the colorful bustle of Kathmandu.

Lewis Kemper will accompany this 15-day (USA to USA) trip, scheduled for September 2010. Please visit our website to view the detailed itinerary of our "Photo Cultural Journey" to Tibet. For more on Lewis, please visit his website: www.LewisKemper.com



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India – From Dharamsala to the Pushkar Fair

The Indian sub-continent is more than a repository of an ancient civilization; it is a lively and ever-changing work in progress. Visit a bazaar and groups of women in saris of seemingly impossible combinations of magenta and turquoise vie for visual attention with their sisters in silks of purple and yellow. Every surface is used to catch the eye: mud walls are decorated with traditional geometric patterns, camel pelts are clipped to produce swirling paisleys, cattle horns are painted and decorated with brass bells, cycle rickshaws are covered in painted parrots, landscapes, slogans and decorated with chrome studs.

Our photographic journey starts in Delhi, before flying to Amritsar to visit and photograph the Golden Temple. Driving across the fertile farmlands of Punjab, we head up to the Tibetan bastion at



Dharamsala. A wonderful three days here allows us the opportunity to photograph the daily life of monks and the local communities. We then head to Rajasthan and the Pushkar Camel Fair, ending the trip at the Taj Mahal - just in time for the full moon.

Brenda Tharp will accompany this 16-day (USA to USA) trip, scheduled for November 2010. Please visit our website to view the detailed itinerary of our "Photo Cultural Journey" to India. For more on Brenda, please visit her website: www.BrendaTharp.com.

We are in the process of finalizing our Nepal and Bhutan Photo Cultural Journeys and they will be featured in our Spring 2010 Newsletter.

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Peru: In The Footsteps of the Inca

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We are pleased to announce our first "official" destination outside of Asia, as we venture south of the equator to Peru. Teaming with Mountain Lodges of Peru, we have crafted an excellent itinerary to this amazing country and the unforgettable archaeological site of Machu Picchu – one of the "new" Seven Wonders of the World.

In order to firm up our itinerary and operations with Mountain Lodges, John Harper traveled to Peru to experience the lodges, the trek, and to finalize logistics.

There are a number of international flight options to Lima, Peru's capital city, from the USA, including non-stop flights from Los Angeles (on LAN), Houston (on Continental) and Miami (American), as well as flights that connect through these hubs. Flights arrive in Lima late night or early morning, necessitating a short stay at the airport hotel, before connecting to Cusco, the former capital of the Inca Empire nestled high in the Andes Mountains. On arrival in Cusco, one certainly notices the effects of the elevation, which is approximately 11,000 feet. It is essential to spend a few days acclimatizing, either in Cusco or in the nearby "Sacred Valley." Nevertheless, this is a truly rewarding experience, as you can revel in the amazing Inca ruins and friendly people of the Andes. In Cusco, you can visit the historic Sun Temple and Cathedral, stroll the Plaza de Armas, and see the contrasting yet complimentary Inca and Spanish Colonial architectural styles. In addition, Cusco offers some exceptional shopping, incredible restaurants and some truly world-class hotel properties.

From Cusco, you then head into the Peruvian Andes to begin the trek to Machu Picchu. Whereas most trekkers and tours hike to Machu Picchu via the over-used "Inca Trail," Mountain Lodges of Peru has pioneered an exciting alternative to the iconic landmark via the far-less traveled Salkantay Route. To begin the trek, you head into the Andes via the Inca site at Tarawasi and the quaint town of Mollepata before embarking on a five-hour hike along an old aqueduct to the Salkantay Lodge. The trail is visually stunning, as you emerge into the shadow of the towering Salkantay and Huamantay peaks. Nestled in a valley below the peaks is the Salkantay Lodge & Resort, the largest of MLP's four lodges. The lodge is laid out in circular pattern, connecting the lobby, rooms, lounge and dining room, and offers grand views of the sacred Salkantay peak. The views are especially majestic from the panoramic windows of the inviting lounge and splendid dining room, not to mention from the Jacuzzi (surely one of the best hot tub views in the world!). Trekkers spend two nights at the Salkantay Lodge to acclimatize and to take a nice trek up to a nearby glacial lake. You then begin the journey over the nearly 16,000 foot Salkantay Pass, with the Salkantay peak towering above you, before beginning the long, downhill trek to the Wayra Lodge. Here, the comfy confines of the lodge and the warm hospitality of the staff is an inviting welcome after a long, tiring day's hike.



From Wayra, you descend into the Cloud Forest, with its sudden and dramatic change in topography and climate. Your destination is the Colpa Lodge, where you can experience a traditional Peruvian barbecue – don't forget to try the guinea pig, a local delicacy. From Colpa, it is a relatively flat hike along the river before reaching the Lucma Lodge, set amidst lush coffee plantations and a dizzying assortment of tropical fruits and foliage, including several varieties of wild orchids.

The last day of hiking from Lucma could best be described as strenuous. After an initial 2000-ft elevation gain (from 7,000 to 9,000 feet) you crest a hill and then, a few minutes later, rising in front of you, to the east, are the western ramparts of Machu Picchu. The view is astounding – and one that is rarely seen, since the Salkantay Trail is far less traveled than the popular Inca Trail. In fact, most of the people you will encounter are locals, plying their trades along the route. At the end of the trail, you board a train for the short ride to Aguas Calientes or, as it is more popularly known, "Machu Picchu Town."

After a nice dinner and a restful sleep at one of Aguas Calientes' top hotels, you rise early the next morning to beat the crowds up the hill, where you can revel in the glory of Machu Picchu as it emerges from the early morning mountain mists. This is truly one of those unforgettable travel experiences that should be on everyone's list. You should plan on spending the entire morning here. As the morning cloud cover burns off, and you gaze down on the monument and deep into the Urubamba River valley, new and exciting panoramic vistas reveal themselves. Truly a majestic sight to behold!

Bidding farewell to Machu Picchu, you board the afternoon train to Ollantaytambo and on to Cusco. From Cusco, flights to Lima depart throughout the day, allowing you to either connect back to the USA or perhaps to spend some time in Lima. If staying in Lima, the Miraflores and San Isidro districts offer some fantastic hotels and nightlife, as well as some incredible beach locales. Lima is also home to some well-stocked museums that are worth a visit for those interested in Inca and Pre-Colombian history.

Find a few friends and family, and you could have your own private Mountain Lodge in the Peruvian Andes. Please call us for the full itinerary - however, to perhaps whet your appetite, here is the itinerary outline for our first "Peruvian Adventure" for 2010:

- Day 1: USA to Lima, Peru
- Day 2: To Cusco & Sacred Valley (Aranwa)
- Day 3: Sacred Valley (Aranwa)
- Day 4: To Cusco (Casa Andina Private Collection)
- Day 5: In Cusco (Casa Andina Private Collection)
- Day 6: Begin Trek: Cusco to Soraypampa (Salkantay Lodge)
- Day 7: Soraypampa (Salkantay Lodge)
- Day 8: Soraypampa to Huayracmachay (Wayra Lodge)
- Day 9: Huayracmachay to Colpapampa (Colpa Lodge)
- Day 10: Collpapampa to Lucmabamba (Lucma Lodge)
- Day 11: Lucmabamba to Aguas Calientes (Inkaterra)
- Day 12: Machu Picchu & to Cusco (Casa Andina Private Collection)
- Day 13: To Lima & depart
- Day 14: Arrive USA



Our Trip Leaders Spotlight on Mingmar Dorji Sherpa

Mingmar Dorji Sherpa, our Nepali trekking guide par excellence, came to us via David Breashears. In true Sherpa fashion, Mingmar started his career as a trekking/climbing porter and soon rose through the ranks to becoming one of David's most accomplished assistants. An experienced climber, he has summited Everest three times, twice from the Nepali (south face) side and once from the Tibetan (north face side). Mingmar is also a noted journalist and videographer, reporting for NTV (Nepal Television) on mountaineering and other sporting activities.

Mingmar's First Everest summit was accomplished in 2004, when he was working with David Breashears on a filming project on Everest. The film "Storm over Everest" was released in 2008 and recounted the dramatic events of the tragic 1996-climbing season. His second summit (North face) was achieved when he was on assignment with Altitude films and Atlantic Productions on the Everest expedition of 2007 with Conrad Anker. Mingmar was the filming sherpa in charge of the expedition, which was dedicated to recreation of the 1922 legendary Everest climber, George Mallory's expedition. The documentary "The Wildest Dream" is set for release in the USA in 2010. Incidentally, Mingmar also played the role of Mallory's Sherpa in the film. In 2008, he achieved his third Everest summit while guiding a private client. Mingmar has also guided Michael Palin on the Nepal episode of the TV series "Himalaya with Michael Palin," which was produced by BBC and shown on television network worldwide.

In addition to his prestigious climbing record, Mingmar is also a wonderfully gifted trek and tour leader. He is a certified trekking guide and liaison officer by the Government of Nepal. Most recently Mingmar accompanied Sanjay Saxena (fall 2009) on a trek to the Khumbu and south face of Everest and will be leading our treks to Everest in 2010 & 2011.

Mingmar is currently scheduled to go back to Everest in the spring of 2010. We wish him luck for his fourth summit.



Photo Cultural Tours

India • Bhutan • Tibet
Mongolia • Nepal • Sri Lanka



Destination Himalaya

1-800-694-6342
www.DestinationHimalaya.net

DESTINATION HIMALAYA

807 Grant Avenue, Suite A
Novato, CA 94945
PH: 415.895.5283
1.800.694.6342 (800.MY INDIA)