

DESTINATION HIMALAYA



Giving Back

Greetings to all of our friends around the world! We hope that 2009 has been a kind year to all of you, and send you our very best wishes from the Bay Area.

As discussed in our previous newsletter, while our focus will remain on the Asian destinations for which we are known, we are pleased to announce the first of our non-Asian locales – Peru! We have just returned from an exploratory trip, and are very excited with the destination, the itinerary and especially the quality of ground operations. We will be publishing a detailed field report in our Fall newsletter; In the meantime, we are pleased to announce that Spring of 2010 will see the launch of our Peru Operations with an introductory 14-day family adventure to “Machu Picchu.” Our itinerary includes a great trek, wonderful cultural sites, such as Cusco and the Sacred Valley, while staying in some incredibly unique and charming “Mountain Lodges” built by Mountain Lodges of Peru.

In keeping with our tried and true destinations, we have developed a new series of trips with a twist – our new “Voluntourism” departures. Custom tailored by Sanjay Saxena, these very special trips will allow us (both Destination Himalaya and you, the traveler) to not only experience some wonderful destinations, but to truly give back to the people who make our trips the unforgettable, life-changing experiences that they so often are. For these trips, Sanjay has chosen four regions and projects: the Jamba village area of Rajasthan; the Kumarakom area of

Kerala; the Sunderbans in Bengal; and the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. Each of these trips will focus on a specific charitable project, all the while incorporating time for cultural and leisure activities. For instance, in Kerala, you can get involved with one of our great schools projects, with which we work hand in hand with the wonderful people at the Grace Family Foundation. These projects encompass work at a unique school, run by amazing nuns, which assists mentally challenged youngsters. The second project in Kerala has succeeded in establishing a “nutritious lunch” program for underprivileged children. At the other end of India, high in the Himalaya, we work with a Tibetan lama who runs a remote school in Kye. In the Sunderbans, we work with an exceptional team on a traveling Medical Boat (no medical experience required for our VolunTourists, however!) In the Jamba area, we cater to the local Bishnoi tribals, who eke out a rough existence in the heart of the Rajasthani desert.

We feel very strongly about these projects and are quite excited to share them with you; in fact, we are so enthused, we have devoted a special section later in this newsletter to these new “Voluntourism” departures, and have also dedicated a special section of our website to these trips and our social and environmental awareness activities. We invite you to take a look at <http://www.destinationhimalaya.net/philosophy/givingback.php>

We hope that you enjoy perusing this, our third newsletter – please feel free to share your thoughts and stories with us. We would love to include some of our travelers’ tales in future newsletters, so drop us a line.





Destination Himalaya is pleased to announce that we have teamed with New Headings to offer a unique collection of apparel and gear to help you prepare for and enjoy your Destination Himalaya adventure or just to lounge around in your backyard.

A fun and easy to use "One Stop Online Shop," the Destination Himalaya Gear & Apparel Store stocks items that are sun-protective, lightweight, easy-packing, waterproof, windproof, moisture-wicking, quick-drying, insulating – everything you need for your adventure!

Operated by our partner, New Headings LLC, Destination Himalaya Gear & Apparel carries hand-selected gear and apparel from Mountain Hardwear, Patagonia, Outdoor Research, Eagle Creek, TEVA, Smith Optics, and other fine brands.

To begin, log onto Himalaya Gear & Apparel through our website or directly at <http://himalaya.newheadings.com>. For personal assistance call New Headings toll free at 1.888.924.2050 (non-North America residents may call at 1.203.924.2050.) So check out the site and take a look at all the great gear on offer from Destination Himalaya and New Headings.

Note that Destination Himalaya will be donating 100% of its earnings from the store to the "Grace Family Foundation" and its "Nutritious Lunch" program which serves underprivileged school children in Kerala, India. Read more about the Kerala Schools on page 4 of this news letter.



DH on Facebook

DH has also recently launched its very own Facebook page. Visit us at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Novato-CA/Destination-Himalaya/89168314668>

or search Facebook's site for Destination Himalaya and become a "Fan" of DH. On the site, Sanjay and John will update with new travel developments, photo albums and interesting tidbits and travel-related musings. More importantly, we invite you to stop by and share some stories and photos with us. You can also become "Friends" with Sanjay and John, or with any of our other "Fans" on our Facebook page – a great way to share information with fellow travelers and glean some advice for your next great travel adventure.



DH Has Moved

In other news, we have recently moved our office space. Leaving our "historic" home in San Rafael, we have relocated to warm, sunny Novato, California, right in the heart of the very quaint downtown area.

Our new address is:

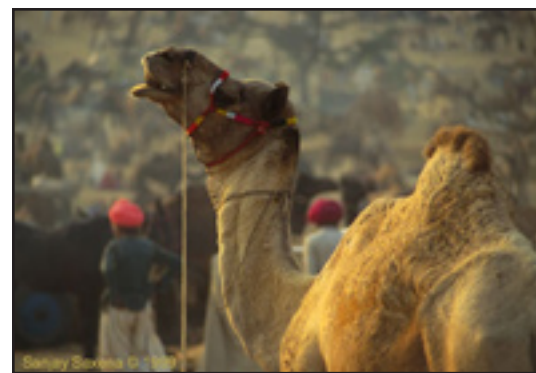
807 Grant Avenue, Suite A,
Novato, CA 94945.

Our new telephone number is 1.415.895.5283, and the fax is 1.415.895.5284. Our 800 number remains the same – the unforgettable 1.800.MY.INDIA (or the slightly less unforgettable 1.800.694.6342). So if you are ever in downtown Novato, come by and see us. We've got a nice patio with views of Mt. Burdell, overlooking Grant Avenue, and are near several great little restaurants and shops.

Most importantly, we are located right next door to Novato's newest (and excellent) restaurant – Anokha, Cuisine of India, which opened on June 1, 2009. Yummy.

Coming Soon:
"The Chaat Cafe"
Destination Himalaya Blog

Photo Cultural Tours: Festivals of India, Tibet & Bhutan



One of our favorite "themed" category of trips is that which focuses on photography and photographers. Being an accomplished photographer himself, our CEO, Sanjay Saxena, has put together and operated several incredible "photo adventures" over the past couple of decades. While geared towards the interests of photographers, our photo trips also delve deeply into the "living cultures" of the regions of Asia that we explore through the camera's lens – hence the title of our series – "Photo Cultural Tours." While thoroughly exploring the cultural treasures of Asia, our Photo Cultural Tours specifically include a cultural "highlight," most often one of the region's vibrant festivals.

Aside from our own "Destination Himalaya" branded Photo Cultural Tours, we also work in tandem

with some of the world's top institutions in bringing to you the very best trips on offer. One such joint venture has seen us work with National Geographic Expeditions on their "India Photography Expeditions." Our most recent trip with NGE occurred in early March of this year, which DH's John Harper was fortunate enough to accompany. Starting in Delhi, the trip headed to Rajasthan to explore the many cultural delights on offer in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, not to mention the fabulous Dera Sand Dune Resort, which our partners Far Horizon Tours operate in the Jamba village region. The trip culminated in Jaipur, where we reveled in the sights, sounds and incredible "colors" of Holi.



In October 2009, DH and NGE will be back in India – this time, the highlight of the tour will be the incredible opportunity to experience and photograph the annual Camel Fair at Pushkar. During the Pushkar Festival, music, dance, and religious rituals complement the famous bartering of camels. Here you can immerse yourself in the incredible celebration, capturing images of bathing ghats, traders towing their camels, and swirling dancers. Our NGE India Photography Expeditions are led by award-winning photographer extraordinaire, Nevada Wier. Nevada has contributed several amazing photos to the various National Geographic magazines over the years, and has traveled to the far corners of the globe in pursuit of her work. Aside from being a world-class photographer, Nevada began her career as a trip and trek leader in Asia, and is a fabulous "people person." Traveling with her is a rare treat, as John can attest from his experience on the March trip.



If you are interested in photography but are looking for a destination other than India, we are currently offering Photo Cultural Tours to Tibet and Bhutan.

Our August trip, Photographer's Tibet, will explore the cultural wonders of Tsedang and the Yarlung Valley (including Samye Monastery), Lhasa (with visits to the Potala Palace, Jokhang and Sera Monastery), Gyantse (with the sublime Kumbum) and Shigatse (with the impressive monastery of Tashilhunpo). The cultural highlight of this photo tour will be the annual Shoton Festival, where we will witness the unfurling of the massive thangka at the impressive Drepung Monastery.

Our April (2010) trip, Photographer's Bhutan, begins in Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city, before heading deep into the heart of Bhutan in Punakha, Trongsa and Bumthang. In the area of Bumthang, we will experience the colorful Ura Yakchoe festival. At Ura, people from all over Bhutan gather to pay their respect and in turn be blessed at this social gathering. Dressed in their finest clothes and jewelry, Bhutanese people attend the Ura Yakchoe in celebration of purification and religious blessings. Following our participation in the festivities at Ura, we make our way to Gangtey and the "idyll valley" of Paro, where we will see the iconic Tiger's Nest monastery.

To join us on our NGE India Photography Expedition, or our Photo Cultural Tours to Tibet and/or Bhutan, call us at 1.800.MY.INDIA (1.800.694.6342)



Voluntourism

Dealing exclusively with small, local organizations, we have long been personally involved with our chosen projects. This hands-on approach is much more than just giving money. We are actively involved in each project and have maintained our involvement over time. This creates an invaluable atmosphere of trust and understanding as a long-term relationship continues to develop between Destination Himalaya and our beneficiaries. Building on this close relationship with the local populace, we have carefully designed our trips to visit some of the most beautiful places on earth and to serve some of the planet's most impoverished. In each case, our "volunteer" groups work with visionary individuals who have committed their lives to meaningful community projects. Be it a school for disabled children in Kerala, a health clinic in the Thar Desert, a "medical boat" in the remote Sunderban Islands, or the first high school in a remote Himalayan valley, we have developed our Service Trips carefully, so that we are certain that our client's energies and offerings will be optimized in the best way possible, in order to improve the lives of the those who so desperately need our help.

Our goal has always been to integrate the best parts of travel - exposure to culture, art, geography, history and recreation - with the best part of human nature - the desire to connect and improve each other's lives. We feel certain that our "Voluntourism" project will help us to fulfill this long-held goal.

Kerala: The Deepthy Special School & Kerala Schools Project

We are working with two very special projects in Kerala, in conjunction with the Grace Family Foundation: the Deepthy Special School in Muhamma Village and the "Kerala Schools Project" program in Kumarakom.

The Deepthy Special School project can be done as a stand-alone 10-day US to US trip, or can be incorporated with the Kerala Schools Project in a 14-day US to US departure.



The first of our South India Service Trips is to the state of Kerala, to assist two inspirational nuns of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, Sisters Reesa Paul and Sister Kusuman Rose (both of whom were Honorees at the 2009 "Unsung Heroes of Compassion" presided by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.) These Sisters run the Deepthy Special School in Kottayam, a "home and school for intellectually disabled children." Our clients will have an opportunity to work closely with the nuns and their students for four school days. The school offers education, life skills and job training to seventy-five disabled children. Beyond academic studies, students participate in yoga, team sports, crafts, gardening, music, and job training for potential employment in local cottage industries. This is an ideal Service Tour for individuals who would like to experience the peace and wonder of South India while making a positive impact on the lives of members of India's most disenfranchised populace.

This two week Service Trip incorporates visits to four of the schools that Destination Himalaya has been actively supporting in this region. First, an early morning speed boat ride will carry us across the waters of Lake Vembanadan to the Deepthy Special School, a school for developmentally challenged children. This school is run by two inspirational nuns, Sisters Reesa Pal and Sister Kusuman Rose (both

of whom were Honorees at the 2009 "Unsung Heroes of Compassion" presided by His Holiness the Dalai Lama). At Deepthy Special School our clients will have an opportunity to work closely with the nuns and their "special needs" students for three school days.



Next, we visit two rural elementary schools in the Kumarakom region. One of the schools, the Primary School of Kummanom, was the original beneficiary of the successful "Nutritious Lunch" program sponsored by the Grace Family Foundation and Destination Himalaya. The second school in the village of Cheepunkal is the latest addition and involves a half hour canoe ride along the waterway to reach the School. Here, clients will assist the teachers in everything from English and Mathematics instruction, to Music and Art, based on the schools' needs our clients' background and interest. Finally, we journey to a secluded hotel on the white Arabian Sea beaches of Marari, just walking distance from our next school. Three days are spent at the Primary School of Mararikulam, aiding with English, Mathematics and Computer instruction.

The Sunderbans: Medical Boat Project

The Sunderbans make up one of the worlds most unique environments. At the same time, the lives of Sunderban villagers, the millions of farmers and fishermen who eke out a living on small islands amongst the waterways, is extremely difficult. Mohammed Abdul Wohab and Sabitri Pal, two dedicated individuals (both of whom were Honorees at the 2009 "Unsung Heroes of Compassion" presided by His Holiness the Dalai Lama) founded and operate the renown Southern Health Improvement Samity (SHIS). Recognizing the shortfall in medical care for the Sunderban villagers, they took steps to help. Now, four "medical boats," waterborne clinics, carrying everything from x-ray units to pathology labs, make their way through the region providing much-needed care. The boats also dispense Ayurvedic herbal remedies cultivated by SHIS trained women. On this Service Tour, clients will have the opportunity to explore the city of Kolkata, as well as to witness firsthand the work of the SHIS Hospital and Ayurvedic facility in the "City of Joy." Days aboard the "medical boat" will be spent traveling through the Sunderbans, stopping in small villages to provide medical care. (MEDICAL TRAINING IS NOT NECESSARY TO PARTICIPATE ON THIS TOUR.)



Spiti: The Munsel-Ling School

This Service Tour will take travelers to the high Spiti Valley (averaging an altitude of 12,500 ft), a breathtaking land set in the far reaches of North India's Himalayan peaks. Here, subsistence farmers cultivate small plots of land using snow melt from the Himalayas, while their sheep and yaks roam the valley slopes. A monk, Lama Tashi Namgyal (an Honoree at the 2009 "Unsung Heroes of Compassion" presided by His Holiness the Dalai Lama), recognized that something must be done about this deficit and, in 1996, opened a school in Spiti Valley itself. This school is called Munsel-Ling or "Place Illuminating the Darkness" and has been tremendously successful. A girl from the first graduating class of the Munsel-Ling school was recently accepted to medical school.

This is our most physically demanding Service Tour, as we will spend a great deal of time above 12,000 feet. Volunteer travelers will work in the school providing English Language, Mathematics and Computer instruction.



Rajasthan: The Bishnoi Tribal Project

This Service Trip will take you into the Thar desert area of North India. The Rajput people living in the numerous villages in this region are known for their exquisite adornments and craftwork, and also for their warmth and hospitality in welcoming visitors. Travelers will stay at the Dera Sand Dune Resort, set atop a 130' high sand dune with panoramic views of the vast desert. Through our long-term contact with the local Bishnoi tribes, we have become aware of the most critical shortfalls, and it is here that we devote our time in community service.

Volunteer travelers will work in the school providing English language and mathematic instruction. Those with teaching experience will also have the opportunity in helping train local teachers. Professional medical expertise is always welcome.



Land of Tiger Pench & Kanha National Parks with Taj Safaris

As the leaves start to turn and Fall is upon us, India once again becomes a prime destination. The heavy summer monsoon rains refresh the country, and as the weather starts to cool off, India beckons the traveler to come and explore all of her bounties. Aside from the many fantastic cultural sites on offer, India is also an animal lover's paradise. With several unique species of flora and fauna, India should be on every armchair naturalist's list of must-see destinations. Of course, on everyone's mind is the incomparable Royal Bengal Tiger – and, of course, nowhere else in the world can this elusive animal be seen in the wild.

In order to see India's king of the jungle, you must venture to one of her fantastic National Parks and Tiger Reserves. A visit to one of India's Parks or Reserves can easily be incorporated into a cultural-based tour, whether it be Ranthambore in Rajasthan (which ties in nicely with Jaipur and Agra) or one of the many great Parks in Madhya Pradesh, namely Bandhavgarh, Panna, Pench and Kanha (which can be combined with great cultural destinations such as Varanasi and Khajuraho). In addition, with its plethora of wonderful Parks and diverse wildlife, a unique, comprehensive wildlife tour can offer an attractive travel option.

In March of this year, I was afforded the wonderful opportunity to visit Pench and Kanha National Parks. Specifically, I journeyed incognito to these Parks to inspect and experience first hand, the Taj and their partners, & Beyond's, new series of absolutely phenomenal lodges in the four Madhya Pradesh Parks referenced above.

My wildlife adventure began in Pench. Located a short two hour drive from the city of Nagpur, Pench was the inspiration and setting for Rudyard Kipling's iconic "The Jungle Books." A dry deciduous teak forest, Pench is a small but stunningly beautiful Park. Its smaller size makes it quite easy to cover a great deal of territory during your game drives. My hosts at Pench were the terrific staff at Baghvan ("bagh" means tiger and "van" means forest), the Park's premiere guest property. Nestled on the banks of the Pench River, Baghvan is comprised of twelve beautiful suites. The suites feature lovely, impeccably designed bedrooms, with a covered patio and walkway adjoining a spacious bathroom and dressing area. The suites offer the option of an indoor or outdoor shower. One of the most interesting design features at Baghvan is the "machan," or covered platform, on top of the suite, which is an excellent place to relax and listen to the sounds of the jungle or enjoy a unique sleepout. The lobby area of Baghvan is comfortable and beautifully designed, and the lodge also has a small library and gift shop. A highlight of the Taj Safaris' lodges is undoubtedly the cuisine. Aside from the safari drives, one of the interesting activities on tap at Baghvan (and the other Taj lodges) is the interactive kitchen. In conjunction with the lodges' wonderful chefs and kitchen staff, guests can learn how to prepare their own unique Indian and fusion cuisine. At Baghvan, I was treated to a fantastic Anglo-Indian chicken dish, which was simply out of this world – and I am looking forward to preparing it myself one day for friends!

As fabulous as was my experience at Baghvan, believe it or not, the hospitality was ratcheted up a notch at Banjaar Tola at Kanha National Park (one of the original nine Project Tiger reserves founded in 1973), Taj Safaris' newest luxury game lodge. This property was an excellent contrast to the design of Baghvan, with its tented suites offering a wholly different accommodation experience. The layout and floor plan is circular, compared to the angular design of the suites at Baghvan. The design and interior decoration complimented the setting of the Kanha National Park, which is more expansive and airy than the intimate teak forest at Pench. Again, as with Baghvan, the emphasis at Banjaar Tola is on refined luxury. The tented suites have huge King platform beds, and are immaculately decorated using handiworks and objects d'art created by local and indigenous Bastar and Dogra craftsmen and artisans. The level of service was quite extraordinary. As the lodge had just opened prior to my arrival, I was fortunate enough

Musings by John Harper

to be one of the first guests to experience this wonderful property. Entering the property gates, a short drive to the banks of the Kanha River brought me to the West Camp, where I was greeted by what seemed to be the entire lodge staff! I met the Property Manager, the Naturalist and was introduced to my own personal "butler"! Suffice to say, I was very well looked after for the duration of my visit.

Kanha National Park is a nice contrast to Pench, and actually works quite well in conjunction with a visit to Baghvan. Both the lodge properties and Parks compliment and contrast each other quite well. The lodge design and property layouts are unique and offer a very different feel and atmosphere. As well, Kanha National Park is vastly different to Pench - it is much more expansive with a greater diversity of terrain, with vast grasslands and savannahs, as well as a number of elevation changes. The forest is largely comprised of sal trees, which are quite a bit different in appearance to the teak forest at Pench. At 1945 sq meters, Kanha is one of the largest parks in India, so it is important to allow at least a couple of days at the lodge to make sure you get the full experience that the Park has to offer. In fact, we strongly recommend a minimum of two nights at each Park, to enable you to maximize your time and to give you a better opportunity to see the elusive Indian tiger.

Of course, the reason for visiting the Parks is to get out and see the exquisite wildlife that calls these preserves home. Without a doubt, Taj Safaris game drives are without peer in India. Their vehicles are top of the line, open-air 4 x 4 jeeps, with specially designed tiered seating. On the drives, which are timed around sunrise and sunset, when the animals are most active, you are accompanied by a Taj and Beyond trained Naturalist, as well as a Park Ranger. These individuals are incredibly adept at tracking the animals, listening for the warning calls of prey animals, such as the spotted deer and sambar, as your guides seek out the elusive big cats, the tiger and leopard. As mentioned, my visit to Banjaar Tola occurred a mere fortnight after the lodge's official opening, and I was treated to having a wonderful Naturalist, Durgesh, as my private guide. With Durgesh's guidance, on one lucky Sunday afternoon I was able to see two tigers, (one from atop the back of an elephant, as seen in the photo to the right) a leopard, a sloth bear and a host of other animals. Seeing a tiger in the wild is an awe-inspiring event – to see two in one day was unforgettable!

Aside from the lodges at Pench and Kanha, Taj Safaris' lodges in Bandhavgarh (Mahua Kothi) and Panna (Pashan Garh) are also setting the standard for India's luxury safari properties. We can incorporate any or all of these lodges in custom itineraries; in fact, Taj Safaris is now also offering a private air service between the lodges, enabling you to visit all four lodges in one itinerary with minimal travel time between them. In addition to the wildlife viewing and enjoying the jungle settings of the Taj lodges, we can easily incorporate cultural touring - for instance, a visit to the sacred city of Varanasi and the millenium-old Chandela temple complex at Khajuraho is a nice addition to the varied wildlife of Panna and Bandhavgarh, where you can enjoy the great Mahua Kothi and Pashan Garh lodges. A visit to Pench and Kanha can easily be incorporated into an itinerary featuring the Taj or the Buddhist-Hindu-Jain sites of Ellora and Ajanta, as the Parks are serviced by the cities of Nagpur, Raipur and Jabalpur, which offer direct flights from Delhi and Mumbai.

Whatever your choice, you can not go wrong with "Wild India" and Taj Safaris!



Trip Update

Cruising the Brahmaputra on the MV Mahabaahu

With the onset of the heavy monsoon rains in Northeast India, the mighty Brahmaputra River swells and expands, making navigation of its waters exceptionally difficult for the summer months. By September, however, when the annual monsoon has run its course, the Brahmaputra's waters recede to its normal banks, and life again returns en force to this crucial lifeline for the peoples of the region. This Fall, however, something new will be plying the byways of this sacred river – the M.V. MAHABA AHU, the first luxury cruise ship to sail the Brahmaputra. Our first public departures will begin in October 2009. The M.V. MAHABA AHU will provide a unique sailing experience. Offering 27 cabins (all with en-suite facilities), an elevator, sun deck, swimming pool, massage room and health club, indoor theater, the M.V. MAHABA AHU offers intimate 5-Star comfort and luxury. Our guest lecturers, onboard Naturalist, Cruise Director and highly trained staff complete the overall experience of a great journey of exploration. The M.V. MAHABA AHU will be the most luxurious river cruise ship of India, cruising on India's greatest river – call us to reserve your space or to inquire about sailing dates and itineraries.



Summer 2009, Volume 1, Issue 3

Photo Cultural Tours

India • Bhutan • Tibet
Mongolia • Nepal • Sri Lanka



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