THE TRAVEL CLUB

E-ZINE #12: APRIL, 2021

The kindness of strangers

A solo adventure through Iraqi Kurdistan

When one door closes

Stories from a travel photographer

Peggy's big

adventure

Exploring Ireland's west coast on horseback

Child's play

Tales from adventurous family travellers

Caught on camera

How community camera-trapping is changing conservation

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TRAVEL TAKEN SERIOUSLY

THE PRELUDE



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Welcome to the 12th issue of The Travel Club! A whole year has passed since the pandemic first hit, a year that seems to have gone in a flash while at the same time dragging on forever. The Travel Club was launched in May 2020, back during the early days of the first lockdown. As guidebook sales slumped, we knew that our survival lay in the support of our readers, a community of dedicated travellers. Your support surpassed anything we could have imagined, and that is something for which we will always be grateful.

But The Travel Club was never a charitable endeavour. We wanted to create something that offered genuine and long-term value to its members, something that would become a much-loved, essential resource for those who are serious about travel. I hope you feel we've succeeded. The e-zine has gone from strength to strength each month, with stories and contributions from far and wide – just take a look at this bumper issue! – and we've continued to build the list of exclusive membership benefits and discounts too (many of which will come in handy as the world begins to open up). Of course, if you've any feedback or suggestions of ways in which we could improve things further, or you'd be interested in contributing yourself, please do drop us a line at info@bradtguides.com. We want to do the very best we can and – when we start exploring the world again – to do so hand in hand with all those who were with us during the dark times.

Alien Philips

Adrian Phillips Managing Director, Bradt Guides

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COVER IMAGE Amedi, Iraqi Kurdistan © Nicole Smoot



COMMUNITY CAMERA TRAPPING IN TANZANIA

Conservation biologist **Dr Amy Dickman** on the success of this innovative and inclusive approach to encouraging human-wildlife co-existence on village land. Tanzania's Ruaha landscape is a vast, mixeduse complex, centred around the spectacular Ruaha National Park which, at over 20,000km², supports some of the world's most important remaining populations of large carnivores.

Immediately adjacent to the unfenced park is village land, where many people live in severe poverty, heavily reliant upon livestock and subsistence agriculture. This convergence of dangerous wildlife and vulnerable communities creates intense human-carnivore conflict, imposing major costs on both people and wildlife.

When we established the Ruaha Carnivore Project in 2009 we found extensive, indiscriminate snaring, spearing and poisoning of wildlife on village land, with devastating consequences for lions, critically endangered vultures and many other species. We also saw and appreciated the intense local anger as wildlife devastated crops, killed livestock and even people.

Relationship building

Initially, people were extremely hostile towards us, seeing us as outsiders who were there to

prioritise wildlife over them. It took years to build even the foundations of community relationships, but gradually we worked with people to better protect their livestock, using strategies such as using dogs to guard livestock, fortifying enclosures

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and engaging young warriors as 'Lion Defenders' to chase away lions when they come close to local households. Such approaches can be effective – and have been in Ruaha – but no-one will conserve wildlife just because the threat it poses is slightly reduced. For long-term conservation, people need to

recognise tangible, meaningful and locally desired benefits from protecting wildlife and its habitats.

Discussions with communities revealed their most-desired benefits were investments in education, healthcare and veterinary medicine for livestock. Over time, we developed multiple programmes around these themes: school twinning, investments in local clinics, school feeding, building veterinary capacity and others. People grew to like the project, and would engage enthusiastically with us on a surface level at least. However, it soon became clear that the benefits were associated with the project, not the presence of wildlife itself. People were doing what any one of us probably would – appreciating the benefits, but still killing the wildlife because the two seemed disconnected. Meanwhile, our initial attempts at using camera traps to monitor village wildlife were being stymied as they were frequently damaged or stolen.

A light-bulb moment

Anyone who runs a field conservation project will be wearily familiar with multiple things going wrong simultaneously – but in this instance these problems emerging at the same time led to a lightbulb moment, which in hindsight seems painfully obvious. What if, instead of us monitoring wildlife and handing out seemingly random benefits, the communities themselves monitored the wildlife, and the results of their monitoring were directly tied to the benefits? After promising initial discussions with villagers, our 'community camera trapping' concept was born.

The first step was round after round of community meetings so the idea could be codeveloped with the villagers. We all agreed the basic concept: that locals should own the process of monitoring wildlife, and the more wildlife they recorded on their land, the more community benefits they should receive. But the details were challenging: how would each species



and individual be valued, to provide a genuine incentive but one we could afford as a small, grassroots project? How would we budget for it, if we had no idea how much wildlife they would record? How could we fairly engage multiple villages with very different environments? How could we ensure that villagers were not unfairly penalised for issues such as reduced wildlife numbers because of drought, when they would need benefits more than ever? How should benefits be distributed, and how would it be fair and transparent? These issues dog virtually every wildlife benefit initiative, but must be openly considered. There are rarely perfect solutions, but honestly and openly discussing such issues between the project and the villagers was key to finding ways we could at least move forwards.

We decided that we would group villages into

units of four, based on relatively similar attributes such as distance to the park. Each village would select two 'community camera-trapping officers', who the project would train and pay to manage, place and monitor the camera-traps. Every wild animal captured on those camera traps would receive a number of points, with more points for more threatened and more conflict-causing species. This caused intense discussions: we originally suggested a simple scale from one to five points per animal, but this was deemed far too cheap: people wanted thousands or even millions of points per individual. A compromise was found: small, innocuous animals like genets or dik-diks were allocated 1,000 points each, while larger herbivores (up to and including elephants) generated 2,000 points each. Primates received 1,500 points each: they can

cause conflict with villagers by raiding crops, but are often seen in very large groups, so we did not want one sighting to completely dominate the results.

As a carnivore project we were biased towards large carnivores: those classed as Vulnerable by the IUCN such as cheetah and lion were awarded 15,000 points each, while the Endangered African wild dog was the top spot at 20,000 points per individual. Each species was discussed and eventually agreed on, with some additional conditions. No points were awarded for animals with presumed snare injuries (such as missing lower limbs), while double points were given for collared animals, as an additional benefit to the community from that programme. Pangolins generated unusually high numbers of points, to try to encourage people to conserve them rather than traffick them.

Every month, the community camera-trapping officers go with project staff to download images and tally up the points. The images are shared locally at community meetings and film nights, increasing awareness of wildlife on village land. Every three months, the group of four villages congregates, and community benefits are awarded: the village with the most points gets US\$2,000 worth of benefits, the second US\$1,500, the third US\$1,000 and the fourth US\$500. These are distributed equally across the agreed priority areas of education, healthcare and veterinary medicines. Village requests are discussed and signed off in community meetings, all purchase and receipt records are recorded and displayed on signboards at the village centres, and it is all openly discussed at the celebratory event each quarter. The points are then reset to zero and the process restarts.

A shift in attitude

Almost immediately after the programme started, there was a notable shift towards people recognising that it was their wildlife – and their actions – that determined the level of community benefits they received. We have seen villages engage and act in ways we never could: introducing village by-laws to protect their camera traps, placing community bans on killing lions and elephants; stopping people burning African wild dog and spotted hyena dens, and placing camera traps there instead.

As with any conservation approach, it has endless challenges and there is no silver bullet. People often placed camera traps on streams at village boundaries, leading to arguments about 'whose' wildlife was being photographed, so a decision was made that camera traps could only be placed at least 1km from the village boundary. That revealed disputes over village boundaries that often took months to clarify. People often want cash instead of benefits, governance and transparency remains challenging, and the community benefits are unlikely at this level to offset the costs of carnivore attack, so maintaining livestock-protection initiatives remains critical.

People always ask about sustainability, as this is clearly dependent on external funds. Happily we have found this one of our easier programmes to fund, as people see the clear importance for both people and wildlife. Fundamentally, given the crises facing wildlife and impoverished rural communities, we feel that expecting those communities to bear disproportionate costs of wildlife presence is unrealistic and unjust. Therefore, we think that sustainable models should include approaches where richer stakeholders pay to offset those costs, whether through a model like this or another way. We are extremely grateful to all our donors who have recognised and supported this, and the resilience of their funding has been particularly highlighted through the Covid-19 pandemic,

when the fragility of funding from tourism and other user-based models was exposed.

Despite all the challenges that remain, community camera trapping has proved to be one of our most successful and enduring approaches, and has demonstrably led to greatly improved conservation engagement and action across the communities. It has now been implemented across 16 villages around Ruaha, and we are working with colleagues in Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique and elsewhere to use insights from our work to help them develop similar programmes. Conflict and coexistence is always complex, and perhaps one of the real strengths of this programme is not even the benefits generated (locally significant as they are), but the continual discussions, engagement and partnership that it fosters between villagers and a project like ours. We hope that our experiences and insights from Ruaha can help inform and shape similar approaches elsewhere, and ultimately move towards a situation where coexistence between humans and wildlife is beneficial for both

Dr Amy Dickman is the Kaplan Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. The <u>Ruaha Carnivore Project</u> aims to improve human-carnivore coexistence in southern Tanzania and is part of <u>Lion Landscapes</u>, which implements innovative approaches to carnivore conservation in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS: A JOURNEY ACROSS IRAQI KURDISTAN

As a solo female traveller, **Nicole Smoot** was warned not to visit Iraqi Kurdistan. But the region she discovered was not one of danger, but of friendly, hospitable people who went above and beyond to make her feel welcome.

You really shouldn't go alone,' said an American man sat across from me at a table in a guesthouse in Mazar e Sharif, Afghanistan. 'Iraqi Kurdistan is very unsafe, especially for lone women.'

We were chatting about our onward travels. From here, my plan was to continue across the border into Iran from Herat, spend a few weeks exploring the country and then cross into either Iraqi Kurdistan or Nakhchivan, a landlocked exclave of Azerbaijan, before returning home.

'Azerbaijan is much safer,' he persisted. But all I could think of was the irony – I mean, we were in Afghanistan after all. My cousin had spent time working in Iraqi Kurdistan, and had returned full of praise about the warmth and friendliness of the people he encountered. With this in mind, I chose not to heed the American advice, and I'm so glad I did.



Fast forward a few weeks and I was bidding my final adieu to Iran after crossing the country from east to west and north to south. I arrived at Haji Omaran, the border crossing between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, in the middle of a snowstorm. After a few hours waiting for the immigration formalities to be finalised, I walked around the lot, looking for the bus I had arrived on, only to find that there were now dozens in the park – and almost all completely identical. Shoot. I should have paid more attention to the licence plate before disembarking, I thought. *'Bebakhshid!'*

I looked to the left and saw a man waving at me. I responded in broken Farsi, and from my accent he immediately clocked that I was foreign. 'Where are you from?' he said, flipping into perfect English. 'I thought you were Persian!'

It turns out he recognised me from earlier in the day on the bus. His name was Mahdi and he was returning to Erbil, where he worked, having been visiting relatives in Iran. We re-boarded the bus together, and when we arrived in the city he called a taxi driver he knew and waited with me for him to pick me up. As he said goodbye, he typed his number in my phone in case I needed any help or had any problems during my stay in his country.

This wouldn't be the only time I'd be taken under the wing of a Kurd, showing me a kindness that seemed to know no bounds.



Haval and his sons, Mohammed and Abdullah

A warm welcome

Etched into the landscape by the Rubar Shakiu River, a tributary of the Great Zab, Dore Canyon is much less well known than the famous 'Horseshoe Bend' of Iraq at nearby Rawanduz. Indeed, I had never heard of the canyon until I got in contact with Haval Qaraman, one of the region's longestserving tour guides.

I messaged Haval before I arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan. I'd come in way under budget on my trip across Iran and so, rather than explore the area on my own, I decided to see if he was available for a tour. It turned out he was guiding a couple originally from Iranian Kurdistan while I was there, and had only one free day the morning after my arrival. He had been planning to take his family on a visit to Dore Canyon, but I was more than welcome to join. The only catch? I was asked to take family photos of Haval, his wife, Nagardeh, and his sons, Mohammed and Abdullah. This was a trade-off I was more than happy to take on.

In between family shoots I was given an introduction to traditional Kurdish clothing by Nagardeh, who had brought me my own *jli kurdi* - the traditional dress worn by Kurdish women - as a gift. This long-sleeved, floor-length dress is often worn over a short cropped vest, with long tails of fabric that extend past the wrists, almost grazing the ground. As she helped me to put on my dress, Nagardeh also explained about traditional men's clothing, using Haval and the boys as her models. Typically, men wear a *chogah* and *rank*: the chogah is an open-front long-sleeved jacket, worn with a cotton shirt underneath it and tucked into the rank, which are loose-fitting trousers. The outfit is completed by a long strip of fabric that is wrapped around the waist several times as a belt.

The struggle of the Yazidi

Lalish, a valley in the northern reaches of Iraqi Kurdistan, is home to the Tomb of Sheikh Adi Ibn Musafir, the holiest temple in the Yazidi faith. A faith I knew next to nothing about before I arrived in the region.

My driver for the trip into the valley was Aso, a Kurdish man who had married into a Yazidi family. Upon arrival, he explained that I must remove my shoes as a sign of respect. As we walked barefoot across the courtyard towards the temple, we were welcomed by a young Yazidi man who gave me an impromptu introduction to his people, religion and traditions.

The Yazidi are an ethno-religious group that practises a monotheistic faith called Sharfadin, commonly referred to as Yazidism. Sharfadin incorporates elements of Christianity, Islam, Manichaeism, Gnosticism and Zoroastrianism.

The temple at Lalish © NICOLE SMOOT

The religion is centred around one eternal god known as Xwede, who is said to have created the Universe and the seven angels. Tawuse Melek is revered as the leader of the Angels, so appointed because of his refusal to prostrate to anyone aside from God, proving his loyalty.

But the Yazidi have suffered much persecution throughout history, as some Muslims, Christians and other monotheistic faiths equate Yazidism to a form of devil worship as they believe Tawuse Melek to be an incarnation of Satan, rather than an angel. Since the 10th century, the Yazidi have experienced (and survived) some 70 genocides, most recently in the 2014 Sinjur Massacre during which the Islamic State captured and killed over 5,000 Yazidi, mostly women and children.

One of those captured women, our Yazidi guide explained, was Nadia Murad, who survived and has since gone on to found <u>Nadia's Initiative</u>, an organisation that advocates for survivors of sexual violence and strives to rebuild communities in crisis. Nadia was awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize (alongside Denis Mukwege) for her efforts to end sexual violence as a weapon of war.

The three of us continued to the tomb. Before entering, our Yazidi guide touched a stone figure of a snake on the right side of the doorway and then carefully stepped over the raised sill of the doorway with his left foot, and then his right. He explained that Adi Ibn Musafir was a Sufi leader that settled in Lalish in the 12th century and became a central figure in the Yazidi faith. The local population was impressed by his ascetic lifestyle and performance of miracles, believing that he was the human incarnation of Tawuse Melek.

We entered a long hallway adorned with bright fabrics that reflected what little light was inside the stone building. It connected to three rooms: one housing the Lake of Azrael, where the souls of the dead are brought to be judged; the next being the actual shrine to Sheikh Adi Ibn Musafir, where his tomb is draped in green satin fabric; while the final one holds countless clay pots filled with olive oil which, our guide explained, are used for Yazidi rituals.

Looking back, I was surprised to have received the warm welcome I did – during the rest of my time in Iraqi Kurdistan I came to learn that the Yazidi can be quite closed-off toward outsiders, but rightfully so after the suffering they have endured.



The monastery at Alqosh

The mountain monastery of Alqosh

Just outside the small Assyrian town of Alqosh sits Rabban Hormizd Monastery, one of the holiest sites for the Chaldean Catholic Church another faith that I knew little about. On arrival I was greeted by Ehab Malan, who moved to the monastery three years prior from Mosul and now spends his days welcoming visitors and sharing stories about Alqosh and Rabban Hormizd. **"It was heartbreaking to**

The church is truly a sight to behold, carved directly into the side of the mountain. As I surveyed the magnificent exterior, Ehab gave me a brief introduction to the Chaldean

faith – an autonomous church in full communion with the Holy See, the origins of which date back to 1552 following a schism from the Church of the East. Historically, the church has been centred around the Nineveh Plains which are situated to the northeast of the city of Mosul.

We moved inside the rock church, which itself dates from AD640. Ehab told me the story of Rabban Hormizd, who was originally from the Khuzestan region of Iran. He began a journey to Egypt at the age of 18, but it was thwarted by his meeting with the three monks of Bar Idta Monastery. They convinced him to join them at their monastery, rather than continuing on towards Egypt. That he did, living in and around Bar Idta for 39 years, where he became a monk and then an anchorite. After moving to the Monastery of Abba Abraham of Risha, where he resided for seven years performing miracles, he finally settled on a mountainside near Alqosh. Impressed by his abilities and miracles, the

locals set to work building him a monastery.

As we wandered through the tunnels, halls and prayer rooms, Ehab described the recent events that had taken place in the Alqosh area, including his experience

of watching ISIS advance across the Nineveh Plains towards the town. It was heartbreaking to imagine such violence and destruction in such a peaceful place.

Bidding farewell in Erbil

I wrapped up my final day in Iraqi Kurdistan in Erbil, or Hawler as it is known in Kurdish.

The region's capital is among the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world, seeing the rise and fall of infamous civilisations such as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Achaemenids, Sassanids and many more. The city is centred around a remarkable ancient hilltop citadel that dates back to around 2300BC, but despite Erbil's longstanding history, it is quite modern, marrying its ancient sites and 21stcentury comforts with ease.

It was here at the citadel that I met Pusho and Hakim, a pair of locals who proceeded with pride to give me yet another impromptu tour. They showed me around the ancient castle and the 13th-century Qaysari Bazaar next door, a large covered maze of a market selling everything from scarves and shoes to yoghurt and cheese. Afterwards they gave me an open invitation to join a picnic with their families and friends – a common occurrence during my time in Iraqi Kurdistan. Unfortunately, I had to politely decline as I had already made plans that afternoon to

join another family l'd met in the city. So much for Iraqi Kurdistan being unsafe.

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Nicole Smoot is an Alaska-based travel writer and photographer. You can read more of her adventures on her <u>travel blog</u> or <u>Instagram</u>, <u>Twitter</u> and <u>Facebook</u> pages. For more on Iraqi Kurdistan, take a look at our <u>guidebook</u>.

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TANKED UP: A DIVER'S STORY

To celebrate the release of his new book, **Ben Thompson** reminisces on a life spent underwater and how his diving adventures all have one thing in common – chance.

People were often saying to me, when they heard my stories of travel, out-of-theordinary jobs and awkward situations that I had found myself in, 'Oh, you should write a book.'

I have kept journals and detailed dive logs over the years, but I think my first taste of recounting tales was in the letters sent home to family and friends in my early forays away. Often out of contact for many months at a time (phone calls were expensive and this was long before the internet), I would find joy in recounting an experience by cramming as many words as possible on the flimsy blue airmail paper envelope, getting carried away trying to translate these wonderful new lands and encounters I was having into words.

I remember one series of letters from Nepal, depicting our attempts to complete the Annapurna Circuit only to be frustrated by avalanches; and us racing up Poon Hill for sunrise only for my partner, Vic, to injure herself, resulting in me having to carry her down on my back for two days, to many a cheer from the Sherpas. I wrote reams of letters by gas light in the draughty teahouses we shared with the Sherpas at night and stored them all up and dispatched them once finally back in Kathmandu. On returning home six months later I was surprised to get so many positive comments from my family and friends about how the stories brought the mountains alive, and how they enjoyed our daring antics.

BEN THOMPSON



'Diving gave me a second chance'

I don't imagine my primary school teacher Miss Button would have thought I would ever be capable of writing a book. I had trouble learning, lived in dread of the weekly spelling test and spent a lot of my school years standing in hallways for punishment. I was eventually sent to an educational psychologist, where I performed well in IQ tests and was told I had an 'above average' score for my use of words and vocabulary, but I was pronounced dyslexic. I could not leave school fast enough and had never intended to go to university, but when a burst ear drum sent me home early from Spain where I had been working as a dive guide and my father laid down the law, enrolled. By then laptops were popping up everywhere and without Mr Bill Gates's fantastic word processor I don't think I would have ever been able to finish my course - which I did by the skin of my teeth though, I have to say, that was more to do with my penchant for hedonism than my learning disabilities.

It was at university that I met Vic, my long-term partner who has been at my side for well over 20 years. She is both a moderator of my exuberance and enabler of my dream-chasing. We have danced round the world, learning and growing together, often totally reliant on each other, and never on a piece of paper to keep us together. On leaving uni, we worked briefly to save money and as soon as we had saved sufficiently, we were off. And for me that was pretty much it: the only suit I would be wearing from now on was a wetsuit. In fact, in the last 20 years I think I have worn a shirt and tie perhaps six times, and you can probably guess what occasions they were for.

Approaching 40 and after having countless dive and travel experiences, both good and bad, it was finally health issues that caused me to take a pause in my dive career. I ended up being

Captain on a yacht based on an idyllic island in the heart of The Hamptons, a string of luxurious seaside villages not far from downton Manhattan, where the generous owner also provided me with a beautiful cottage just set back from the sea in the woods. Owing to his

age, the sailing schedule was somewhat relaxed, and I found myself with three to four afternoons a week free in this incredibly serene and peaceful environment. Unable to dive, I began to write.

'All this happened simply through serendipity'

I had attempted several years earlier to start writing but had always been distracted. In our 30s,

we had spent six years living and building a dive centre in a remote fishing village called Vilanculos – an off-the-grid part of Mozambique where life was challenging to say the least both on land and below the water. There was nowhere to buy a toilet or even a door handle for the centre, our boat was sabotaged by superstitious fishermen, we had to deal with corrupt and nefarious officials, and on one occasion even had to pull bodies from the water when a microlite crashed and there was no coast guard to help. I think I

"For me that was pretty did ha much it: the only suit I would be wearing from now on was a wetsuit."

could have written a book for every year we spent there. I did have articles of our early endeavours printed monthly in *Diver* magazine following our trials and tribulations. It was with these experiences most prominent in my mind that I sat down to write, to

chronicle the escapades we got into. But when I started to explain briefly how we had found ourselves in the heart of East Africa and how such relatively young people could undertake a task like this, it seemed a synopsis would not suffice.

To explain how, by the age of 29, I had already been diving 15 years and working underwater for 12, and had jobs in countless countries across the world – this couldn't simply be summarised. Not well enough, I thought, to do the story justice and explain why, for example, at 17 I was living in a caravan in Spain working as a dive guide – this, I thought, would need some explanation. I made a kind of flow chart, laying out the time frames, countries visited, dived and worked in and then all the key events that happened in each region. It was only after I had done this and was reflecting



on how this had all come about, it struck me. All this happened simply through serendipity.

All the dive jobs I have had - in Indonesia, Spain, Mozambique and on the Great Barrier Reef - came about due to circumstance. In fact, the only job advert I ever responded to was for a post in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and that came with the caveat that I had to be happy working with naked people! When I then looked back at most of my travel escapades, I realised the places I had ended up were because of the random people I had met - world events such as 9/11 forcing us to lose our job in Turks and Caicos but opening a pathway to owning a bar in Thailand, guests in that bar inviting us to come and stay in their lodge in Botswana, or George Soros causing the Asian banking crisis that devalued the local currencies, meaning we were temporarily rich and could extend our travels to the Philippines, Nepal and India.

I realised now that not only did I want to tell stories of my adventures and the wonders of the underwater world, but I wanted to show that none of this would have happened if I had stayed sitting at home in Yorkshire. Nothing was planned, but by saving my money so I could follow my passion for diving and by putting myself out there in the world, life and adventure just happened.



Ben with a huge sea fan, 30m down on a wall dive in Pulau Ambon, Indonesia

I now felt like I had a map to start, I had the stories and locations along with the theme of serendipity and chance tying them all together. I realised, however, I could not tell tales of the beauty of the underwater world without talking too about the state of the environment. Whether it be dealing with the devastating consequences of shark finning, dynamite fishing, the cyanide tropical tank trade or huge ecological events such as coral bleaching, I wanted to highlight what pressure these underseas kingdoms are under and to what lengths I had to go to find pristine reefs. We would often try our own initiatives to help combat some of these practices such as building fish attraction devices for the fishermen so they would not bomb their local reefs, or organise dives to collect miles of lines and hooks used for indiscriminate shark finning. Occasionally we worked with the authorities to go on patrols to stop the hooker divers that used cyanide, but the guards could be heavy handed. We even tried running education campaigns in the villages on the importance of protecting marine life, only to be offered turtle stew and eggs afterwards by way of thank you. Pushing an environmental agenda was frustrating to say the least, but that didn't stop us.

As I sat in the tranquility of my little bungalow by the sea, I realised the themes of serendipity and environmental awareness went hand in hand with mine and Vic's journey of discovery and adventure from Asia to Africa and how we came to find a unique and pristine location perfect to build a dive centre. Finally, I found the

words tumbled, if badly spelt, on to the page and I hope an informative and exciting story is the end result.

TANKED UP ADIVER'S STORY BENTHOMPSON Bradti

Ben Thompson is the author of <u>Tanked Up: A Diver's Story</u>, which is out this month. The Travel Club members can get their copy for just **£4.99** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

CHILD'S PLAY: WHY TRAVEL WITH KIDS IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

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Independent travel has become *increasingly popular with families in recent years, with many parents* opting to forgo the traditional package holiday for something more adventurous. But for those considering this option for the first time, it can be a daunting prospect. Here, members of the family travel community <u>Our Tribe Travels</u> share their experiences of travelling with kids in unconventional destinations and explain why taking the plunge is easier than you might think.



A family holiday in Mongolia © sinead camplin

For many parents, the typical package-holiday format of staying in one location has lost its appeal. More and more, families are opting for experience-led adventures, finding more unconventional destinations to explore and planning trips that push boundaries of what is considered 'child-friendly'.

For these parents, travel is an integral part of their children's education, helping them to learn about and appreciate the natural world, to experience different cultures and food and immerse themselves in a completely new environment. Travel helps children to understand diversity and adventures on the road offer valuable life lessons that will stay with them for years to come.

Make no mistake, though: it isn't all rainbows. Travelling with children is hard. Toddler tantrums don't stop just because you have an Instagrammable backdrop. A local bus with no toilet on board is fine for an adult, but with a screaming six-year-old who is desperate, it suddenly becomes a challenge – simply saying 'cross your legs' isn't enough. And it's not just the little ones who make things tricky – trying to find food for a picky tween off the tourist trail can be testing. Throw in some jet lag for good measure, and you might begin to question why you didn't just opt for that villa in Tenerife.

But the rewards of discovering different cultures and landscapes, trying new experiences

and creating incredible memories together far outweigh the negatives. And for those looking to take the plunge for the first time, connecting with like-minded parents makes planning far easier. That's where Our Tribe Travels comes in,

an online community that helps adventurous families explore the world with confidence. Members can share first-hand experiences and recommendations and there are plenty of practical articles and videos, giving us

all the confidence to try something new. Here are just a few stories from members in praise of adventurous family travel.

Nepal

Susannah Cery, founder

It was 03.30 – a chilly -5°C and day three of our five-day trek to the summit of Poon Hill, Nepal.

After leaving Pokhoro in a rickety minibus, we'd spent the previous two days trekking from Naya Pul to the village of Birethanti and on to Bhurungdi Kholat, from where we started our tricky sevenhour ascent. Clambering up 3,280 steep stone steps certainly challenged my fitness and took its toll on my knees, but one family member was full of energy despite the early start. Aged three, Alf fully embraced the challenge of climbing 'Tiger Mountain', a name we had given to Poon Hill to make it sound more exciting to a toddler. Beforehand we'd drawn maps and talked about the snow, the food we would eat, and the

"For these parents,"

travel is an integral

part of their children's

education."

friendly people we would meet en route. As we made the final push to the top of Poon Hill, Alf was in good spirits. Wrapped in blankets and snuggled inside a *doko* (a traditional Nepalese carrying basket), he sang and chatted

to his new friend, Suji, the friendly Sherpa who carried him on his back.

We were greeted by spectacular views of the Annapurna range, glowing orange with the rising sun. And at that moment all fears and concerns about bringing a three-year-old to such a challenging environment melted away.

We weren't strangers to adventurous travel. We'd spent seven months backpacking around southeast Asia when Alf was a baby, sleeping in treehouses in Cambodia, travelling on overnight buses across Thailand and exploring jungles in Borneo. But this was one trip that we had entered into tentatively, not knowing if Nepal was pushing the boundaries of our family's comfort zone one step too far. As Malaysia was home to us at the



time, we weren't sure how our short-wearing toddler would adapt to Nepal's freezing January conditions. But the pull of trekking the Himalayas was just too great.

Seven years on, Alf still talks about our Nepal adventure. He still remembers the friendly people who greeted us in the hillside villages, the teahouses where he stretched his legs and played with the local kids, and where he snuggled up at night, fully dressed in hats and gloves.

Guyana

Kyla Hunter (*Where is the World*?)

'What are you going to do with your kids in Guyana?' That was the most common question asked by well-meaning friends prior to our family adventure. Most of them couldn't find Guyana on a map, and some weren't even sure which continent to start looking at (South America, if you're wondering!). They had no idea what there was to do in Guyana and couldn't imagine why we would consider it as the destination for our family holiday.

The truth is that I wasn't exactly sure how suitable the trip was for children. Scouring the internet for information repeatedly resulted in the same conclusion: Guyana is not a country too well equipped for those travelling with little ones in tow and traditional child-friendly attractions likes theme parks and activity centres are non-existent. But this simply fuelled my stubborn spirit to prove them wrong.

My doubt was washed away on our first day at Iwokrama River Lodge. We were up at dawn to enjoy a privately guided walk through the surrounding forest. This seemed a daunting prospect, given the depth of the forest, but the girls, who were seven and nine at the time, were able to move at their own pace with the guide adjusting our route based on our speed - which was not very fast. We learned how to distinguish between lesser and greater bullet ants - the presence of which sent the girls screeching in the opposite direction and any potential wildlife as far away from us as possible - and that the sound of the screaming piha bird signifies a healthy rainforest. Soon enough the girls were pointing out common plants and insects all by themselves - an educational experience beyond anything found in a classroom.



We quickly fell into a relaxed routine where rainforest walks and boat rides were interspersed with lazy afternoon naps, family card games and plenty of time for the girls to play. It was the perfect travel pace. Sure, there weren't any museums or amusement parks to keep the kids occupied, but they had access to the greatest playground of all – the Amazon rainforest, with never-ending inspiration for imaginative free play.

Upon our return I had no problem answering the questions from friends and family about what we did with the kids in Guyana. We ran through the trees on the Iwokrama canopy walkway and learned about Amerindian culture in the village of Surama. We watched the thunderous water plummet over Kaieteur Falls while standing on the ledge of an impossibly high cliff, with my heart pounding in my chest any time the girls even thought about getting close to the edge. We spotted a tiny golden tree frog and the impressive cock-of-the-rock in the Amazon, but also observed the deep scars in the rainforest caused by gold mining.

Together we discovered an incredible country rich in wildlife and friendly people working hard to protect their culture and environment.

Mongolia Sinead Camplin (*Map Made Memories*)

The name 'Mongolia' had always conjured images in my mind of an exotic faraway land with rugged, windswept landscapes and fiercely proud nomadic people. Although I had yearned to travel to the country since childhood, little did I think I would actually make it there – and certainly not with three children in tow aged 6, 10 and 12.

The opportunity arose during our family gap year when a long-held dream to ride the Trans-Siberian Railway transformed into an epic overland rail trip from Hong Kong to the UK. When we arrived in Mongolia, I quickly realised that it is a country of contrasts.

In the sprawling, polluted capital, Ulaanbaatar, squat creamy-white *gers* (Mongolian yurts) stood shoulder to shoulder with sparkling new skyscrapers. Aged shop fronts lined crumbling pavements, and inside the shelves offered colourful fruit and vegetables alongside the latest phones and tech gadgets. Dilapidated buildings from the communist Soviet era provided the fastest internet connection we experienced in our year-long trip.

Our family's favourite memory is from our time spent with a nomadic family on the sparsely populated Mongolian steppe. We slept in a cosy ger and attracted the curiosity of the family's cashmere goats who developed a taste for the fabric of our backpacks. Whilst I adored the smiling, dimpled Mongolian kids, our blueeyed children were fussed over by our hosts. We watched the family milk their cattle, marvelled at their children's horsemanship and explored for miles, savouring the clean air and stillness of our environment. Our children had more freedom than they had experienced in months as they could roam far from our ger and yet remain visible on the treeless landscape.





But it is the nights that cemented Mongolia's place in our hearts. With a new moon, the sky was a sea of stars; brighter, clearer and more varied than we had ever experienced. As I stumbled sleepily out of our ger, holding my youngest child's hand on the nightly challenging pitchblack quest to find the world's most isolated drop toilet, we always became transfixed by the bountiful stars above. Mongolia exceeded my wildest expectations; it is an incredible country that none of our family will forget.

Namibia

Emma Morrell (Wanderlust and Wet Wipes)

There were already half a dozen vehicles at the watering hole in Etosha National Park. We inched the 4x4 forward, trying to get a better view. Our three-year-old daughter strained against her carseat straps, desperately trying to see.

'There they are!' shouted our six-year-old son. And there they were. Five or six elephants made their way down the hill towards the water, their hips swaying pendulously with each step. Trotting behind them was a calf.

I turned in my seat to look at my children's faces, feeling triumphant. This was why we had brought them here. All the doubting, all the lowlevel – but constant – anxiety, all the long hours of driving in our rented 4x4 with tents on the



roof immediately left me. This was what it had been all about.

We waited.

The elephants stayed here for a while and after getting their obligatory snaps a few of the cars moved on, leaving space for us to manoeuvre into. By now the children were sat on our laps in the front, all of us craning to see the animals. Behind the first group came more elephants, until some 40 stood at the edge of the water. The whole herd had arrived, it seemed, and it felt as if all of us watching collectively caught our breath.

Travelling with children is never easy – someone once said it is just parenting in another location

- and very few people recommend taking them on safari. Most reserves have minimum age limits on game drives and many of the most luxurious lodges are adults only. For families passionate about taking young kids to Africa, though, the best way to do this is on a self-drive safari. And Namibia is a country that is easily navigable for independent travellers.

On our way to Etosha, we climbed burntred sand dunes and gazed at scorched trees in salt pans. We found flamingos and dunes that descended into the sea, saw shipwrecks off the coast, and admired 2,000-year-old rock paintings. We learnt about the lives of the Damara, one of the country's oldest tribes, and fell asleep under an inky black sky, sprinkled with stars.

During these moments, I forgot all about my previous worries – that our children had barely eaten a vegetable for two weeks, that their sleep schedules were off, or that we had spent up to 8 hours a day listening to children's audio books while on the road. The memories made it all worthwhile.

<u>Our Tribe Travels</u> is an online community run by **Susannah Cery**, who in 2020 launched <u>familyhomeswaps.com</u>, a global community and home-swap platform designed for families who want to explore the world through the eyes of a local. For more on travelling with kids, check out <u>Kidding Around: Tales of Travelling with</u> <u>Children</u>, available for just **£5.49** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

GO EAST: GETTING OFF THE TOURIST TRAIL IN TURKEY

Diana Darke takes a closer look at the ancient temples, Ottoman mansions and remote valleys of Turkey's little-visited eastern region. E astern Turkey is like a country within a country, light years away from the sophistication of İstanbul and the glamour of the Mediterranean coastline. Until 2000 access was difficult, with whole tracts under martial law and designated as military zones. And, although travel in the area is much easier now, for many it remains an unknown.

This vast region is often confined to the back pages of general Turkey guides, covering only the poster sights of Cappadocia, Lake Van and Mount Ararat. But there is much more to savour, from striking Ottoman towns to the oldest temple in the world. This is just a selection of its most intriguing highlights.

Gaziantep

Long hailed as the capital of the pistachio nut and easily the most sophisticated city in southeast Turkey, Gaziantep (or simply 'Antep' as it is always referred to locally) now has a further claim to fame – its extraordinary collection of mosaics, rescued from the nearby site of Zeugma before it was flooded by the Birecik Dam on the Euphrates. It is well worth making sure that your itinerary includes a stop to see them in the state-of-the-art Zeugma Museum, one of eastern Turkey's major highlights. The 35 huge mosaics are stunningly displayed in a vast hall on three levels, as if in situ in the villas where they were found, with columns, fountains and walls placed in their original respective positions.

As well as the museum, Gaziantep's old quarter near the Seljuk citadel in the centre of town has been the focus of extensive restoration work in recent years, transforming what was once a collection of semi-derelict medieval buildings into a vibrant series of museums, markets and hotels. Many mosques, hans and old buildings have also been restored, as have its beautiful Ottoman houses, some with fine wall and ceiling paintings.

Göbekli Tepe

Only inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018, this ancient temple sanctuary in the hills north of Şanlıurfa is slowly becoming eastern Turkey's most famous monument. Meaning 'potbellied hill' in Turkish, Göbekli Tepe is a unique site and all changes have to be made very carefully. Excavations began at the site in 1995, and discoveries show its rock-carved animal reliefs date to 9000BC, turning our perceptions of prehistory on their head.

The previous thinking had been that monumental architecture with complex sculpture and symbolism began in Egypt and Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago, yet here at Göbekli Tepe, a full 6,000 years earlier, man was already building such monuments. Four separate stone circles have currently been excavated, but even a casual glance



TEOMANCI

Göbekli Tepe is thought to be the world's oldest temple

at the surrounding landscape makes it clear there are others below the surface – the expectation is that at least 20 more remain uncovered.

Safranbolu

One of the most complete traditional Ottoman towns in the country, Safranbolu is best known for its exquisite 19th-century mansions. Its most enchanting area is Çarşı, the UNESCOlisted Old City, where attractive black-timbered, whitewashed houses line narrow, cobbled streets, today restored to house hotels, cafés, shops and museums. Getting lost among the nooks and crannies is the chief delight here: every twist and turn brings another vantage point from which to enjoy this enchanting Ottoman scene.



Safranbolu is one of the best-preserved Ottoman towns in Turkey

Konya

For those who know something of Islamic history, the name 'Konya' conjures up a certain magic and mystery, for this was the home of Sufism, Islamic mysticism, with its famous Whirling Dervishes. Their centre was the Mevlâna Tekke in the heart of Konya and, with its unforgettable blue-green tilework, it remains the highlight of any visit – not least because it is the burial place of the poet, Rumi. The city also boasts a number of exceptionally beautiful Seljuk buildings, more or less well preserved, all dating from the 12th and 13th centuries when Konya was chosen as capital for the most powerful Turkish state of the Middle Ages in Anatolia, the Seljuk sultanate of Rum.



Mardin and the Tûr Abdin

With the stunning architecture of white limestone houses, mosques and madrasas, Mardin belongs more to Syria and the Arab world – an example of the arbitrary borders of the region. Some are almost like palaces, hinting at the past splendour of the town, with exquisite stone carvings and decoration.



Mardin is known for its remarkable preserved Arab architecture

On the nearby plateau, the Tûr Abdin, lie scattered monasteries and churches, remnants of early eastern Christianity, as featured in William Dalrymple's *From the Holy Mountain*. Among the legends associated with the region is the

one that Noah's Ark came to rest on the 2,114m Mount Kadur, which rises in the east, rather than on Mount Ararat, the more popular story. Noah's grave in the town of Cizre is a point of pilgrimage for Christians and Muslims alike.

The Georgian valleys and Pontic Alps

In the remote northern Anatolia region, these dramatic, heavily forested hills are liberally sprinkled with the ruins of Georgian churches tucked away in beautiful and remote green valleys, akin only to the remotest corners of the Pyrenees or the Alps. In the tiny settlements, houses are all made of dark wood, with gables for the snow to slide off – think more rustic versions of alpine chalets. In between the forests are grassy clearings and slopes, excellent pasture for cattle.

There is very little habitation before you reach Şavşat, just a couple of camping spots, tucked away among the trees on the descent from Ardahan. You need at least four days to see the main churches here, though most people just content themselves with seeing one or two as they pass through to the Black Sea. Coach tours can only reach Öşk Vank and Dolişhane, so the remainder are barely visited and you are likely to have them to yourself.

For more on eastern Turkey's marvels, take a look at Diana's <u>guide</u> to the region, available for half price with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.



WORLDLY APPETITES: TURKISH DELIGHTS WITH FEAST BOX

South

to START YOUR JOURNey!

AFRICA

Bring the taste of your travels to your table with Feast Box, *the UK's top-rated recipe box specialising in cuisines* from all around the world. They deliver weeknightfriendly recipe cards with straightforward instructions with all the pre-measured ingredients you'll need for each recipe. We've teamed up with them to offer an exclusive discount (page 49), but here are a couple of their favourite Turkish recipes to whet your appetite!

Adana kebab with tomato bulgur

Cooking time: 40 mins Available to order 5-11 April

Located in southern Turkey, Adana is a cosmopolitan centre of industry and agriculture, its streets dotted with kebab vendors who cater to the busy locals. They mince up lamb meat and sweet red pepper by hand with crescent-shaped iron cleavers, before placing it on wide skewers over charcoal-powered grills known as mangals. Bread is wrapped around the kebab while it's still on the grill, allowing it to warm up while also catching the meat's dripping juices – a technique we've tried to recreate in spirit, even for those of you without your own mangal!

Ingredients

1 red onion, diced
1 red pepper, finely
diced
4½ tbsp of tomato
puree
150g bulgur wheat
1 cube vegetable stock
2 tbsp salted butter
300g lamb mince

1 tbsp red chilli flakes
1½ tbsp crushed garlic
20g flat leaf parsley,
finely chopped
150g natural yoghurt
1 tbsp sumac
1 lemon
1 tomato
4 pita breads

Method

- 1. In a large bowl, add the lamb mince, chilli flakes, crushed garlic, half the sumac, half the red pepper and most of the parsley, leaving a small handful aside for later. Season and mix everything together well. Fill and boil your kettle.
- Use your hands to form and roll the mince into four equal sausage-shaped kebabs.
 Place the patties on a baking tray and lightly press to flatten them. Cover and put the tray in the fridge to firm up before cooking.
- 3. Mix the stock with 200ml of boiling water. In a saucepan heat 2 tbsp of oil on a medium heat and add most of the onion, leaving some aside for the salad. Cook until softened, roughly 2–3 minutes. Add the rest of the red pepper and fry for 1 more minute, then add the tomato purée with a pinch of salt and pepper and cook for 2–3 minutes, stirring frequently.
- 4. Pour the bulgur wheat into the pan, then add the butter. Add the stock, simmer and cover. Reduce the heat to low and cook for around 20 minutes, until the liquid has been absorbed and the grains are tender. Run your fork through the bulgur to fluff it up.

- 5. Take the kebabs out of the fridge. In a frying pan heat 2 tbsp of oil over a medium heat and fry the patties for 4-5 minutes on each side. The meat is cooked when it's no longer pink in the middle. As soon as each kebab is ready, put it on a plate to rest. Leave the juices in the pan we'll use them later!
- 6. Meanwhile, pour the yoghurt into a bowl. Mix in a pinch of the remaining sumac, the zest and a few drops of the lemon and a pinch of salt.
- Chop the tomatoes into 2-inch chunks. Add to a bowl with the remaining onions, then squeeze over a few drops of lemon juice. Add the remaining parsley and sumac along with 1 tbsp of oil and mix well. Cut the remaining lemon into wedges.
- 8. Return the kebab pan to the heat and warm the pitas, allowing them to soak up all that kebab flavour.
- 9. Nestle each kebab in its own warm pita. Divide the bulgur wheat between plates, then place the pitas and tomato salad alongside. Finally, drizzle over the lemon yoghurt and serve with the lemon wedges.

Turkish lamb gozleme

Cooking time: 65 mins Available to order 26 April-2 May

Gozleme are often mistaken for stuffed pancakes by tourists, but that's just a testament to the skills of the women who make them – they're actually a flatbread, with the dough rolled to perfect thickness using an *oklava*, a long thin rolling pin around which the dough is repeatedly wrapped and unspooled. Though difficult to master, the dough can be made by even a novice baker, then fried until it develops those characteristic *goz* or 'eyes' – the dark, extra-crispy spots of surface charring. Originally a humble Anatolian village food, gozleme are now a beloved treat all over Turkey.

Ingredients

175g plain flour
1 bunch mint, finely
chopped
1 bunch parsley, finely
chopped
1 onion, diced
300g lamb mince

200g baby spinach 1 tbsp red chilli flakes 2 tbsp za'atar 150g natural yoghurt 2 tbsp crushed garlic 1 tomato, roughly chopped

Method

- 1. Set aside three level tbsps of flour in a small bowl. Put the rest of the flour and half a tbsp of salt in a mixing bowl.
- 2. Measure out 85ml of cold water. Gradually pour the water into the mixing bowl while stirring with a wooden spoon. Once the water and flour have almost combined, knead the dough in the bowl with your hands until it reaches a smooth consistency and is no longer sticky.
- **3.** Remove the dough from the bowl, knead for 5 more minutes on a flat surface, then cover with a damp tea towel or clingfilm and leave to prove for 20 minutes.
- 4. Meanwhile, heat 2 tbsp of oil in a pan over a medium heat and gently fry the onions with a pinch of salt until soft. Add the lamb and cook for 4–5 minutes until browned. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper.
- Add two thirds of the spinach. Once wilted, take off the heat and stir through most of the za'atar, chilli flakes and chopped herbs. Divide the lamb into four equal portions and set aside.
- 6. Return to the dough. Divide it into four and roll each section into a small ball with your

hand. Using a few generous pinches of flour, lightly dust a flat surface and roll each dough ball into a thin 12x20cm rectangle. Spoon one portion of the lamb into one half of the rectangle, leaving a 1cm gap around all the edges. Fold the dough over to enclose the filling and press the edges together to seal (you may need to dab a little cold water to seal the dough edges).

- 7. Dust the gozleme with the remaining flour. Using a rolling pin, gently flatten out each gozleme, ensuring that the filling doesn't tear through the pastry and ooze out. Don't worry if it does - just take a little bit of pastry from one of the overhanging edges and use it to patch the hole up. Brush your sealed gozleme with oil.
- 8. Heat a large frying pan on a high heat (no need to add any oil) and fry each gozleme for 2 minutes on each side until crispy and brown.
- **9.** Place the tomato and remaining spinach in a bowl. Mix the yoghurt with the crushed garlic, a generous pinch of salt and pepper and the remaining za'atar. Serve the gozleme alongside.

CALLING ALL CRONES! STORIES NEEDED FOR NEW BOOK

Juicy Crones is a celebration of cronehood. A rethinking of what it means to be an older woman, a wise woman. The mantra is, 'it's only too late when you are no longer here'. It is about women who have found their way to do, or to be, what they really want at this stage of their life. A woman who is celebrating her authentic self and embracing her third act, in all its many guises.

In search of crones

I am on a quest to find and celebrate the lives of women who are embracing their 'third act' with gusto. For some women, our 'third act' is border country: an unknown landscape full of skirmishes, inner conflict, and redefinition of territory. It throws-up opportunities to trade responsibilities for freedom, and caution for derring-do.

Juicy Crones wrestle with the paradox of time at this phase in their life. We are all aware of the big 'Exit' sign looming and many of us have had close encounters or lost dear friends too soon. Time is relative. With luck and statistically speaking, we may have twenty or more good years ahead of us. Doing new things, codes in the memory as having lived longer. Trying out



Caroline at her expressive drawing workshop

new things with a beginner's mind helps us to feel sharper, more alive. Many of us have chosen not to play the concealment game but embrace this time and squeeze every drop of meaning from it, trampling under heel any ageist or sexist remarks that come our way. In learning to live in the present we are, strangely, able to lose track of time. To emerge and emanate. A metaphysical deep-clean. No one experience is the same, in sharing these experiences we all become richer and we add to the collective sense of well-being.

My plan to meet fellow Juicy Crones in a serendipitous way on *my* adventures and travels, has of course, been almost completely stymied by Covid19 restrictions. So, I am hoping that you might be able to help me? I would love to speak to women who have seized the opportunity in their post-menopausal years to do the things that they had always dreamed of, or to embrace something entirely new. Many women are blossoming into lives that were denied them



Andie is about to qualify as a pilot

growing up in the 50s and 60s. I understand that plans may be currently on hold or have been, like mine, curtailed temporarily.

Taking the courageous option

Juicy Crones are the ones taking the courageous option. For example, Andie was an air-hostess in the 1970s, but what she really wanted, was to pilot the plane. Now in her 60s she is realising her longheld ambition, and is about to qualify as a pilot.

A Juicy Crone may have responded to the call of the wild and is now living alone on a



Deborah learning to dive in Mexico

remote island experiencing mystical union with nature. Another may have always regretted not having had a gap year and has now bought a rucksack and is travelling to places that inspire her. She may have started running in her 50s and now runs marathons or endurance fell-races. Unencumbered now by dependents, she may have recently become an activist fighting for justice for planet and people and has accepted the risk of arrest or imprisonment.

After a lifetime of raising children and looking after elderly parents and grandchildren, she may have decided to fulfil her dream by setting up a business. Or like Caroline, opening an art gallery, celebrating local artists and giving would-be artists chance to learn drawing and painting.

She may have decided to retrain for a completely new profession – there's the woman with a successful career as an accountant behind her, who has now set herself up as a mountain tour guide instead. Or, for example, Deborah who finds herself unexpectedly alone in retirement, learning to dive in Mexico and taking solo trips to India, whilst also campaigning for free health care for Alzheimer's patients.

Some women have embraced the wisdom that being a crone affords them and have discovered their innate ability as healers. They are retraining as herbalists, chiropractors, counsellors and life-coaches. The possibilities are endless, my

suggestions here are certainly not exhaustive, but only limited by my imagination.



JAY COURTNEY

es' descriptor to share, then please do get in contact with Jay Courtney on <u>surtney@juicycrones.org.uk</u>.

STORIES FROM A TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER: PASCAL MANNAERTS

Based in Brussels, **Pascal Mannaerts** is a photographer with a curiosity and passion for different cultures and their interactions with the natural world. He discovered photography as a student and over the last 20 years has travelled to Asia, Africa, Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East, with a particular love for the Indian subcontinent.

Here, he shares a collection of one of his favourite subjects to shoot on the road: doors.





Left and following page Patterns, prayers and paintings in the old part of Varanasi. Of all the places I have visited in India, this holy city is my favourite. It offers the most complete picture of all that can be found in the subcontinent: the intensity of daily life, the richness of the region's spirituality and its fascinating culture and history. There's also plenty of human variety in Varanasi, given that it is a city of pilgrimage welcoming people from across India and beyond all year round.

Previous page

The UNESCO-listed city of Chinguetti in the desert in Mauritania. Located on the trans-Saharan caravan route, it was famous for its architecture, its trade and cultural influence.





Left A monk invites me to visit the monastery of Wat Xieng Thong in Luang Prabang, Laos. The city's architectural ensemble is exceptional and it has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1995.


Following page A Buddhist monk enters the prayer room of Tharlam Monastery in Boudhanath, Nepal.

Right

A house of worship in the village of Langar, GBAO province, Tajikistan, close to the border with Afghanistan. The horns of Marco Polo sheep, found across the region, are thought to be a symbol of purity, so you will often see them hanging above entranceways.





Left Some 10,000 people live in the Dheisheh refugee camp, near Bethlehem, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. But almost everywhere across the region, I saw signs of hope from the Palestinians that they would return to their land one day.



Left The Cuban national flag displayed on the front door of a house in the city of Bayamo, Granma Province.





Far left

Located in the Iranian mountains, the ancient village of Abyaneh is characterised by its mud red houses. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it was built in the Karkas Mountains to protect its people from enemy invasions.

Left

With trees growing out of ruins and the jungle all around, Ta Prohm in Cambodia is pure magic. Its unique and enchanting atmosphere has made it one of Angkor's most popular temples, particularly after it was used as the film location for Tomb Raider.

Following page

In the fortress city of Jaisalmer, India, the entrance to each house is decorated with an image of the Hindu elephant god, Ganesh, a symbol of hospitality and good fortune.







Far left

A candy-floss seller stands in front of the entrance of Devi Kanya Kumari temple in Kanyakumari, a Hindu pilgrimage city in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Left

A man checks his mobile phone in a street near Howrah Station in Kolkata, India. A moment of calm in a noisy, overcrowded neighbourhood.

Following page Sunrise over a ger camp in the Gobi Desert, Mongolia. The Gobi is one of the largest deserts in the world, but it is covered with stones more than it is sand.



Right

A man prays at dawn in front of the 12th-century Chennakesava Temple, Belur, India. Built over three generations, it took 103 years to complete.



Pascal's photos have been featured in many newspapers and magazines worldwide, and exhibitions of his work have been held in Paris, Belgium, Brazil and India by Alliance Française, Amnesty International and Les Maisons du Voyage, among others. You can see more of his work on his <u>website</u> and <u>Instagram</u> page.

PEGGY'S BIG ADVENTURE: AN EXTRACT FROM A CONNEMARA JOURNEY

In 1984, **Hilary Bradt** set out to fulfil a childhood ambition to do a long-distance horse ride. This extract is taken from her new book, A Connemara Journey, which brings together two earlier books, Connemara Mollie and Dingle Peggy, into a single volume for the first time.

It's been a powerful experience emotionally to relive those ten weeks in Ireland in the continual company of two very different ponies. Why two? Because Mollie, the beautiful grey mare that I had saved up to buy and who carried me and my luggage for the first 400 or so miles was tragically killed in an accident in the hills of Kerry. I completed the 1,000-mile journey on Peggy, a diminutive pony who I was determined not to like, but who inched her way into my emotions. I have such warm memories of my relationship with both ponies, but it's Peggy who I remember with the most affection. This extract tells you how and why.

A fine rain was falling in the late afternoon when I came to a deep wooded valley. Ahead of me were the Nagle Mountains; they looked gentle enough on the map – none of the closely crowded contours or dark browns that are so exciting to the adventurous map reader – but they still commanded respect, so I decided to stop early for the night. Crossing a bridge over a river I saw below me a grassy clearing in the pine forest with a newly constructed path leading to it. By the little silver gate was a sign announcing that this was Mass Rock. I went to have a look. Beyond the grassy clearing a narrow footbridge crossed the stream and the path led to the rock where Mass was celebrated in the 17th and 18th centuries when Catholics were forbidden to practise their religion. A simple aluminium cross marked the rock, along with a plaque in Irish and English.

It was a perfect campsite. It had fresh running water, flat ground for the tent, and plenty of lovely green grass. I had to unload Peggy on the road and coax her up the flight of steps, through the narrow



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gate and down 12 steps to the clearing. There was no need to tether her in such an enclosed area, I just stretched her rope across the entrance to the path to discourage her from gazing over the gate and drawing attention to herself.

I still hadn't learned about The Wrong Sort of Grass, nor did I correctly interpret Peggy's strange behaviour that evening. Instead of settling down to graze, she showed an uncharacteristic interest in my activities. She hung around the campsite putting her nose into everything, chewing the tent and my jacket, and showing particular interest in my soup cooking on the stove. I was afraid she'd burn herself (or knock over the soup) so pushed her away. Undeterred, she came back and I found her standing with a guy rope in her mouth dangling its tent peg. Of course it was all very endearing and I didn't really have the heart to get cross. I even let her lick out my saucepan.

Next morning I was woken at six by Peggy stamping and snorting around the tent. My little room wobbled as she tripped over guy ropes and rubbed her chin along the flysheet. 'For heaven's sake go away!' I shouted. She did. I dozed in blessed silence for another hour and then unzipped the flap and looked out. I couldn't see her. She must be behind the tent near the river. I dressed, crawled out and looked around in increasing disbelief. Peggy had gone. A wave of sheer panic swept over me as I recalled that morning in the mountains of the Dingle Peninsula when I first realised that Mollie was missing. Struggling to keep calm, I considered the possibilities. Had she been stolen? It was possible, but unlikely in such a hidden spot and with my tent close by. I checked the area for hoof prints but the ground was too hard to see them. Then I noticed that the ground had been disturbed around the path leading to the gate; it looked as though she'd scrambled up the bank to get round the rope blocking her exit. There were definitely fresh prints on the path, which was strewn with wood chippings; I'd smoothed it last night after pitching the tent to cover up the evidence of our visit. The gate was closed but she'd either jumped down on to the road or climbed up an equally steep bank through the pine trees to a large field above. I pulled myself up the bank to the field, praying that she'd be there. She wasn't.

I tried to think calmly. Before Mollie's death I might not have been too worried, but now I'd learned what



horrible surprises can await for the unprepared, I was beside myself with anxiety. Suppose she was hit by a car? Or hurt in a dozen other ways? I thought she would probably head back to the stables where she'd enjoyed such good hospitality the day before so started back along the road. It curved between high banks and I could never see more than 10 yards ahead of me. This was ridiculous; I'd never find her this way. Perhaps I should flag down a passing car? But there was no traffic on this minor road and she'd had over an hour's head start. I returned to the campsite to collect my binoculars and on impulse crossed the footbridge and said a little prayer at the shrine. Then I climbed back to the field above the gate where I could get a good view over the surrounding countryside. A herd of cows were grazing in a field about half a mile away. And among the black-and-white animals was a brown one. Yes, it was Peggy! She was standing by the fence, watching me out of the corner of her eye as she stuffed herself with grass. Then she walked towards me with a little whicker

Just how or why Peggy came to be in that field I'll never know. The gate was open so she probably just walked in looking, as always, for company. But how did she find a field so far off the road she knew? If, as seemed equally possible, someone had come across her in the early morning and kindly put her in with the cows, why hadn't he shut the gate? Adhering to the rule that gates should be left as you find them, I led Peggy out and of course was followed by a herd of cows. Perhaps on normal days they obligingly take themselves into the farmyard for milking, but today they all accompanied me down to the road while I ineffectually said 'Shoo!'. I had just tied Peggy up and collected a long stick to drive them back when the flustered farmer appeared on the scene. 'I think I may owe you a big thank you,' I said between moos, but he just looked mystified when I explained about Peggy.

Each time I tied Peggy up that day she whinnied when I returned. 'Bitch!' I said. 'Think I'll forgive you that easily?'

If I had been unnerved by Peggy's adventure, she was transformed. Thereafter I couldn't leave her for more than a few minutes before I would hear her neigh, and have to go out to reassure her that I still loved her and promise that I would never tell her to go away again. Endearing though this was, it did put a dampener on some of my pleasures. She had always had a puritan streak and disapproved of pubs, but now it was like being back in the days of prohibition. I would just be settling down to my glass of Guinness when I'd hear pitiful neighs and have to finish my drink by her side. She didn't even have the excuse that she was tied up so couldn't share the refreshment. One time when I was enjoying a drink in the evening, knowing she was safe in an adjoining field next to my tent, I was called back by heart-rending sobs. I mean neighs. This time I thought she must be greeting another horse nearby, but no, she wanted me. So I had to forego a second glass of Guinness and return to the tent and write my diary by candlelight.

I had the uncomfortable feeling that, in terms of dominance, Peggy now had the upper hand. First her pathetic neighs were far more effective than broken fence posts in ensuring that she never stayed tied up and lonely for long, and she completely had my measure when it came to general competence. That day, as so often happened, the saddlebags slipped while I was leading her. And when, as so often happened, I didn't notice and pulled crossly at her rope when she stopped, she looked me straight in the eye with such a hard stare that the memory of it still discomforts

me.

A Connemara Journal of the second sec

Hilary Bradt will be in conversation with Jane Badger on 28 April discussing her travels in a **Connemara Journey Q&A**. Travel Club members can access the talk for **FREE** (normal tickets are £5); click <u>here</u> to register. If you would like to use your members' discount to buy a signed copy, please send us a direct message via the Patreon site.

THE TRAVEL CLUB MEMBER BENEFITS

Our aim for The Travel Club is not only to entertain and inspire, and to bring together like-minded travellers, but to save our members money! We have three exciting new offers to bring you this month, alongside our ever-growing list of other discounts.

10% off Slow travel holidays with Byway

Byway's Slow travel holidays through the UK and Europe help you explore the world by travelling through it, instead of flying over it. They help you to experience the joy of journeying by train, bus, boat and bike, stopping for unique stays and discovering lesser-known experiences en route, without the hassle of researching and booking everything yourself. Trips are built around local, sustainable stays and experiences that are part of their communities.

Personalised support from their team via WhatsApp before and during your holiday means they can tweak your trip right up to the last minute and even while you're away. Their experts will



create a personalised journey plan full of delightful detours, local shops and businesses, wonderful walks and eateries tucked away from the crowds.

To claim your 10% discount, use the code **BRADT10** when booking (expires 31 May 2021).

30% off plus a free bottle of wine with Feast Box

Taste the world in your kitchen with <u>Feast Box</u>, the UK's top-rated recipe box specialising in over 50 of the world's tastiest cuisines. Feast Box delivers weeknight-friendly recipe cards with straightforward instructions and ingenious tips, along with all the necessary pre-measured and authentic ingredients needed to create the recipe at home. Learn something new in the kitchen, speed up your preparation time, free up your fridge space, and discover hard-to-find ingredients, sourced by a team of dedicated experts.

Feast Box are offering The Travel Club members 30% off their first two boxes plus a free bottle of wine. To claim your discount, use the code **BRADTFEAST** at checkout.

10% off with Natural Britain

Natural Britain are a new UK-focused tour operator with a focus on slow and sustainable travel, and are the first operator in the country to introduce carbon labelling for every trip. Their hand-picked selection of exciting adventures and unique accommodation is designed to inspire active travellers to discover the best of Britain through the eyes of passionate people keen to showcase their local area. They work with carefully selected partners whose values are in line with their own: those who put ethical travel at the heart of the experience offered.

The Travel Club members can enjoy 10% off two brand-new tours, <u>Hidden Hampshire</u> and <u>Champing in Natural Northants</u>. To claim your discount, use the code **BRADTNB** at checkout.

Aardvark Safaris: 5% off all tours

Aardvark Safaris specialise in tailor-made, high-quality African safaris away from the crowds. Just email <u>mail@aardvarksafaris.com</u> and mention that you are a Travel Club member when booking.

The Adventure Creators: 10% off all Pyrenees tours

This <u>adventure outfit</u> based in the Pyrenees specialises in tailor-made, outdoor holidays

in the region. To claim, quote **Bradt10** when enquiring.

Adventurous Ink: get your first month free

Adventurous Ink is a unique subscription service. Each month you'll receive a new book or journal featuring writers, photographers and illustrators who really 'get' the great outdoors. Get your first month free with the code **BRADTINK** (valid when purchasing a two-month subscription).

Craghoppers: 20% off

Founded in Yorkshire in 1965, <u>Craghoppers</u> is a global leader in sustainable technical outdoor and travel clothing. Use the code **BRADT20** at checkout (valid on full-priced items only until 2 June 2021).



The Cook's Place: 10% off cooking courses

Based in North Yorkshire, <u>The Cook's Place</u> is an independent cookery school offering a range of courses. Enter the code **BTG21** at checkout (valid on all half- and full-day courses until 30 November 2021).

DUPINE TRAVEL

HÔRD: 10% off everything

Yorkshire-based <u>HÔRD</u> create meaningful and high-quality gifts and apparel for the adventurous and wild among us. Just use the code **HORDXTRAVELCLUB10** at checkout.

Inertia Network: 5% off any booking

<u>Inertia Network</u> run immersive expeditions that support local communities in remote and threatened regions. Enter the code **Bradt2021** in the 'How Did You Hear About Us' box when making your enquiry.

Lupine Travel: 5% off all tours

UK-based Lupine specialise in unique and offthe-beaten-track destinations, from Chernobyl to North Korea. Just email <u>info@lupinetravel.co.uk</u> and mention that you are a member of The Travel Club when booking.



he Shrine of Hazrat Ali in Mazar, one of the highlights of Lupine's Afghanistan tour

National Geographic Traveller (UK): three issues for £3

With a reputation for compelling storytelling and a focus on off-the-beaten-track travel, *National Geographic Traveller (UK)* is a favourite with intrepid travellers. <u>Click here</u> to get your first three issues for just £3.

Safari Drive: 10% off vehicle and equipment hire

<u>Safari Drive</u> are a UK tour operator who have specialised in creating bespoke self-drive safari

holidays in Africa since 1993. Just mention that you're a Travel Club member when booking.

Tonic: 10% off subscriptions

Tonic is a brand-new biannual drink and travel magazine. Simply use the code **BRADTTC10** at checkout to redeem your discount, which currently also includes free UK and EU shipping.

Travel Africa: 20% off subscriptions

Founded in 1997, *Travel Africa* remains the only international magazine dedicated to exploring Africa's attractions, wildlife and cultures. <u>Click</u> <u>here</u> and enter the code **BRADT2020** at checkout.

Untamed Borders: 10% off group tours

Adventure travel company <u>Untamed Borders</u> runs bespoke trips and small-group adventures to some of the world's most interesting and inaccessible places. Use code **BRADT10** to receive 10% off any 2021/2022 group departure.

Wanderlust: £10 off subscriptions

This legendary travel magazine is still going strong after nearly 30 years, offering issues packed full of articles on wildlife and cultural travel. <u>Click here</u> and enter the code **WLMAG20** at checkout.

OUT THIS MONTH!

The Travel Club members can claim their exclusive **50% discount** on ALL our books by using the code **TRAVELCLUB50** at checkout. This month's new titles are:

A Connemara Journey Hilary Bradt £12.99



Seychelles Lyn Mair & Lynnath Beckley £17.99



Tanked Up: A Diver's Story Ben Thompson £9.99



In 1984, explorer-publisher Hilary Bradt fulfilled a childhood ambition to do a long-distance ride. Set against the history, legends, landscape and people of a vanished Ireland, this is a story of joy and tragedy, and her bond with two Connemara ponies.

Originally published in separate volumes, *Connemara Mollie* and its sequel, *Dingle Peggy*, this <u>new book</u> – containing additional narrative and photos – brings the whole journey to life. Now in its sixth edition, this remains the most comprehensive English-language <u>guide</u> to these Indian Ocean islands. Packed with practical details and information on the country's fantastic wildlife and marine parks, it offers expanded reviews of the many accommodation options – from fivestar hotels to local eco-lodges – as well as insights into the islands' many secrets. When Ben Thompson was a boy, he was swept out to sea by a freak wave. From such inauspicious beginnings was born a lifelong fascination with the deep. But Ben's love affair with the sea was always fuelled by a need to escape.

This colourful memoir traces not only the author's years as a diving professional, but also his journey from restlessness to a place of peace. From diving one of the world's only vertical shipwrecks to exploring Indonesia in a pirate boat, from encountering great white sharks to bonding with America's largest naked diving group, *Tanked Up* reveals the wonders of the underwater world and the dramas of a dive instructor's life.

COMING NEXT MONTH...

In May's issue of The Travel Club: Walking with eagle hunters in Mongolia, exploring a brand new cycling route in Flanders and an in-depth look at whether Instagram is damaging the travel experience.