

In this edition

Reserve spring 2011 for a new trekking peak in India.....try a sail/trek trip in the Caribbean (yes, the Caribbean!).....a round trip to Barcelona (by train and air) and the usual mix of relevant travel information.

Jopuno is a 5842m trekking peak in Sikkim (NE India), just 15km south of Kanchenjunga (3rd highest peak in the world behind the big E and K2). We are in the final stages of completing the details for this trip, due to take place in Apr 2011.



Jopuno conveniently sits just off of the Goecha La trekking route and with the Goecha La Pass itself at just under 5000m, it acts quite nicely as acclimatization for this peak. The hard packed snow final ascent is considerably longer than that of Island Peak but still, no previous climbing skills are required.

Notwithstanding the peak or trek, this is a wonderful traveller's journey; first to Delhi and then an internal flight to Bagdogra before driving north to Darjeeling (overnight in a hotel there) and onto Sikkim before starting the 13 day trek/climb. For those that are not keen on the climb, we are running a simultaneous trek to the Goecha La, which in itself is stunning enough. A new web-page will appear on the website with more details shortly.



This is the actual catamaran used on the trip

Sail and Trek the Caribbean. This is a fabulous and rather unique trip. It is also so niche that it comes around just once a year.

On arrival, you will spend 3 relaxing nights on the island of Martinique prior to joining your luxurious 13 meter long catamaran; your home for the next 10 days. With only 4 double berths on board, your professional crew will take care of your every need whilst sailing from Martinique to Trinidad stopping at the fabulous islands of St Lucia, St Vincent and Tobago.

In keeping with Travel and Trek's core business, whenever you visit land, you will be guided on treks including up to dormant volcanoes. These are day treks, so no sleeping bags and no dia-mox!

2011 departure is 3rd April, for 15 days. If you are specifically interested in this trip, please e-mail Travel and Trek (terrycrosby@travelandtrek.com) and you will receive information directly. More information shortly.

Mad September....

Something is obviously in the air for Sept 2010, we have departures guaranteed for a variety of treks in Nepal, including Everest for Softies, Annapurna Base Camp, Everest Base Camp as well as an EBC/Island Peak combination. The Circuit may well pop up too.

Training Weekends

The next planned weekend is 5/6th June, based out of Hathersage. Go to <http://www.travelandtrek.com/training.shtml> for further details

The training weekends continue to be of great value. Marion and John Floyd were with us for the Buxton weekend in March and shortly afterwards, jetted off to Spain to embark on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella starting on the French side of the Pyrenees at St.Jean Pied de Port. This epic journey on foot should take about 6 weeks and started on the 11th March. You can follow their amusing blog at: <http://twopensioners.blogspot.com/>

Help for Heroes Treks Are On The Move

Already the EBC H4H trek is guaranteed to go on 14th Sep so if you enjoy trekking in a group, now's your chance!

If the rigors of EBC is not for you, try the Sahara Desert set to go on 11th Feb 2011.

Everest for Softies

Guaranteed to go, this trek departs UK on the 25th Sep and starts the trek at the same time as some heading for Island Peak so plenty of company.

If the thought of very high altitude and cold temperatures fill you with dread, then this easy paced, low-ish level trek is for you. It delves into the villages that some on the EBC trail simply do not see. Plenty of time to wander around but still has the fab views of Everest.

BHUTAN GOSSIP

In the latest Wanderlust magazine (Apr/May edition, page 13), there was a small article on a report from the Bhutanese government about potential changes in Bhutan over the coming years. I spoke to my own contacts out there to see if I could uncover any more.....

Reported: *A potential increase in the nightly rate of \$200 to \$250 from 2011.*

This increase was due to happen in July 2009 but postponed due to the global recession. They gave 9 months notice for that increase and I would expect the same again, should it happen.

Reported: *The introduction of ATMs*

Given that the banks do not accept credit cards (yet), this appears to be way off.

Reported: *The introduction of new airports*

Perhaps they are considering upgrading Paro or introducing a new airport in Thimphu (the capital). The only real capability gap that I can see at the moment is the lack of any airport serving the eastern side of the country. Whilst Borjhar airport (situated in Guwahati, Assam, India) serves the region well (road links north into Bhutan), I am sure that the Bhutanese would like to have their own in order to save the long drive across the country. Whatever the plan, it will take many years to complete.

Reported: *Building and upgrading hotels.*

The Bhutanese want to standardise their hotels to 3*. There is a big gap in the standard of some of the 'tourist hotels' and not enough beds to take many more visitors at peak times. My colleague says that this is likely to take 3 - 4 years.

Reported: *Introduction of hire cars.*

For this to be implemented, the underlying system of tourism in Bhutan has to change. Tourism is a big employer of people in this country (Guides and drivers); the introduction of hire cars will eliminate them. I can't see it happening and nor would I wish to.

Even if Bhutan isn't quite on the march yet, the country clearly has it's thinking cap on. Let us hope that common sense prevails and whatever it is that they introduce in the coming years, it does not spoil their very unique country.

HOW THE POLITICAL PARTIES STAND ON AIR PASSENGER DUTY AND AIRPORTS



Labour - Have raised APD massively since 2006 with a rise due in Nov this year. Labour supports a 3rd runway at Heathrow.



Conservative - A promise to reform APD although it is likely to be a 'per plane' tax. Abandon Heathrow's 3rd runway and block expansion at Gatwick and Stansted.



Liberal Democrats - Same stance as the Conservatives although they would increase tax on some domestic flights where alternative and less polluting transport was available.

Whichever party wins, it looks like a rise is on the way.

VOLCANIC ASH AFFECTS TREKKERS

The number of trekkers affected by the closure of much of Europe's airspace is growing. Many trekkers have been unable to get to their long haul destinations and some have been stuck in intermediary countries.

Having summited Island Peak, Jonathan Crookes got as far as Doha with Qatar Airways before he was halted there. Fortunately. Qatar Airways are generous hosts and any stranded passengers there are accommodated and fed (free of charge) in their hotel. Future travellers take note when choosing an airline!

The closure has been lifted this morning (Wed 21st Apr) so let's hope that those affected get to their destinations before any further potential disruption.

Nepal Charges for Trekking Certificates

The Trekking Information Management System (TIMS) is designed to allow the authorities within Nepal to track individual trekkers as they enter and exit trekking areas. It is aimed at those that go missing (and some have).

To date, the certificate has been free with a small administration charge for processing.

The Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) have declared that from 1 April, there will now be a charge of \$10 and \$20 for group trekkers and individual trekkers respectively.

This does not affect prices for Travel and Trek clients.

Kingfisher Fly London - Delhi

Kingfisher has been granted rights to fly the London - Delhi route (direct) making them the 3rd Indian airline to do so. JET and Air India already do so with BA and Virgin amongst many more serving this route. Kingfisher commenced flying on the 28th March. They will use the new (and comfortable!) Airbus 330 aircraft.

Oman Airways

In June this year Oman Airways will commence flights (from Muscat) to Kathmandu adding another Gulf airline to the list of those serving Nepal.

Air Passenger Duty

Despite persistent objections, the Govt have not changed their intention to raise the APD in Nov this year. In some cases, this tax has risen by 325% in 4 years! The Daily Telegraph is raising a petition to object again and if you value your travel, I would encourage you to support it. This is the link to join in

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/air-passenger-duty/6459706/Air-Passenger-Duty-APD-campaign-the-Telegraphs-petition-to-stop-the-tax-on-travel.html>

EMERGENCY BACK UPS

DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU NEED IT

When you are abroad and either you or a friend needs help, you may need it fast. Don't wait to appreciate this until it happens. This can apply generally but when you are trekking, it becomes even more important that you are well prepared.

Rarely will an incident happen that will involve life or death on the spot but when any incident does occur, you need to be able to instigate some form of action as quickly as you can.

Situations that you may need assistance will include: a medical incident that requires serious professional help in a hospital abroad (and/or medical evacuation by air), being mugged and all of your cash stolen, your passport stolen or lost or air tickets lost/stolen or any similar incident that is going to require you to see outside help.

You can't shield yourself from every conceivable incident like those listed from happening but you can offset the risk to help you get out of it more easily should it happen.

How? Put simply, you need to copy and/or duplicate various documents and details and distribute them wisely. The chances of you being mugged AND your hotel room being ransacked AND the internet disappearing off of the face of the earth at the same time are pretty minimal.

Shown here is the actual size of card that I use; a 60 x 95mm lamination pouch covers this nicely. You can see how much and the sort of information that you can fill it with. The reverse side of mine is a scanned copy of my passport photo page.

Actual size of card
 Next of Kin details: Name, tel number (home and mobile)

 Home address (for others to read if you are unable)

 Travel details, flight numbers, times, Booking ref (most airlines work on e-tickets now, which is all you need to get on board)

 Medical allergies, Blood group
 Useful phone numbers/e-mail addresses of where you are going
 Travel insurance details; emergency No

Prior preparation could save you literally hours so take the time before you depart to think seriously what you may need and how to carry/store it. Modern mobile phones are superb but don't put all of your eggs in one basket.

I keep my information as a template on my PC and adjust it for each trip (timings, flight numbers, e-ticket numbers, etc...). Distribution also varies with each trip but at the very minimum, I keep one on me and one in my main bag. All of this is also available via a web based e-mail account such as hotmail. Send the file to yourself with the file attached to a message before you depart and it will always be sitting there to download if you need to do so.

Don't Like ID Cards?

For those that are security conscious (we all should be), you may be wrestling with what is effectively producing a self made bespoke 'ID' card! That is true and the decision to do this or not resides entirely with each person. For the record, when I am trekking, I make sure at least one person knows precisely where my details are. If am taken seriously ill, I know they will be able to locate my travel insurance details quickly. After all, it's me that they are helping.

Did You Know?

Five Star Airlines

Skytrax is an independent body that grades the worlds airlines on a star system similar to that used in the hotel industry. It is based on the ground operation as well as on board the aircraft.

There are only 6 airlines that currently have the top 5 * award and all of them from Asia: Qatar Airways, Malaysia Airways, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Asiana and Kingfisher.

British Airways is 4 * and being reviewed!

Gear Guide

One of the best 'gear guides' I have seen in years. Seek out the April edition of Trail magazine (the Gear Guide comes with it).

If you are interested in keeping up with the latest gear, don't miss this bumper supplement. It is good for reference.

Adventure Travel Show

Thank you to those that visited the Show in London in Jan; it is nice to put names to faces and to meet new people.

Qatar Increase Flights to Kathmandu

From 28 Mar, Qatar will increase the number of flights from Doha - Kathmandu from 2 to 3 times a day.

Orienteering Courses

The Army have opened its doors to civilians for the purposes of teaching orienteering. The courses are from novice, to intermediate right through to advanced level and run from Mon - Fri on specific dates throughout the year. It's run at Longmoor Camp (Hants) by qualified coaches. Trust me, these guys are good.

The cost is £100 for the course and £25 per night for food and lodging. Excellent value on what is a superb course.

Contact me in the first instance and I will provide the necessary contact and further details if required.

TRY THIS

London - Barcelona, Train (via Paris) 24hrs in the City, Return by air

For those that like to travel, try this excellent round trip with 24hrs in a city that really surprised me.

This journey starts in London with a Eurostar connection to Paris. We took the 1404hrs train, arriving into Paris's Gare de Nord at 1725hrs local time giving us 3 hrs leeway to get across Paris to the Gare Austerlitz. This is where the overnight train to Barcelona departs (2025hrs).

The Paris Metro will get you from the Gare de Nord to the Gare Austerlitz in 20 mins; we chose to walk (we've been to Paris before and knew roughly where we were going!). It took approx 90 mins through the lovely streets and by coincidence takes you via Notre Dame.

The overnight train to Barcelona is called the 'Elipsos'. It takes 12 hrs, arriving at 0825hr and the station is within mins of the heart of the city.

The train itself is quite amazing, although as this was a 'treat', we were travelling 'Grand Class' (first class to you and me!). For our money, we had a 2 berth cabin complete with fully functional shower and toilet. Compact but it worked extremely well and the complimentary



Above, the very functional shower element of the 2 berth cabin and below, the smart restaurant.



toiletory bag was the most comprehensive I have ever seen. Also included in the price was a 4 course evening meal complete with initial glass of champagne. Breakfast is also included. The dining car itself and service were both excellent; better than some restaurants!

Also available were 4 berth cabins with communal toilet facilities and also reclining seats. Both had access to a buffet dining car.

By the time we got to Barcelona, we were pretty much rested and ready to head straight into the city. We walked the 30 mins from the station through the old town (watching the town wake up was good to see) and up to the top end of Las Ramblas (one of the main shopping arteries of the city). Our hotel was located there and can certainly be recommended.

Barcelona is a very clean and open city with many different areas to it.

We flew back from Barcelona - Heathrow using a scheduled BA flight. The airport is extremely easy to get to using a bus (5 Euro pp) from the centre of town. The airport is modern, clean, efficient and easy to get through with no crowds!

This is a great little getaway and packs what seems an awful lot of places into a short space of time. Recommended.

So What Did It Cost And How To Book

We booked the whole trip in sections all on the web.

We travelled light. Just one piece of hand baggage between the two of us. It made the walking we did in Paris and coming off of the aircraft very easy.

Eurostar was booked via their website but gear your departure to the Elipsos trains' departure. I would recommend that you book the Elipsos train first before you book the Eurostar. Eurostar costs from £54 standard to £99 Leisure Select one way.

The **Elipsos** train was booked using the excellent www.seat61.com website. Follow the advice on there; superb.

Our Grand Classe journey cost £329 for two people. Book early for the cheapest fares. There are 4 berth cabins and reclining seats also available.

We walked across Paris (about 90 mins); no cost. It's very doable and good fun provided that you have sufficient time and are confident about where you are going! The alternative is the Metro.

We walked from the station in Barcelona to the hotel, 30 mins, no cost.

We used the **Regina Hotel** (4*) on the northern edge of Las Ramblas (well known hot spot in Barcelona and well placed). We arrived early (9am) but as the room was available, they allowed us to check in. Cost 90 euros including taxes.

It didn't include breakfast (cost 16 euros pp) but we used one of the very local cafes and paid approx 12 euros for the two of us.

We paid 5 euros each to get to the airport on public transport (bus).

We flew BA, 1315hrs departure. Flight booked on the web; find the best deal you can. E-ticket so no requirement for paper. Cost £118 one way for two people.

Underground from Heathrow to central London.

We left home at approx 1100hrs Thu.
We arrived in Barcelona at 0825hrs Fri
We left the hotel at 1000hrs Sat
We arrived home at approx 1800hrs Sat