

EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #20 - January-February 2026

- Why The Best Travel Isn't Horizontal - Go Vertical - by Richard Bangs
- Invitations & Calendar for Extraordinary Travelers - 2026
- Extraordinary Traveler Profile - Thia Konig
- Extraordinary Traveler Bookshelf - New Audio Book by Richard Bangs!



Richard Bangs with wife, Laura Huber, and their son, Jasper Bangs, Rafting Colorado River

Why the Best Travel Isn't Horizontal - Go Vertical!

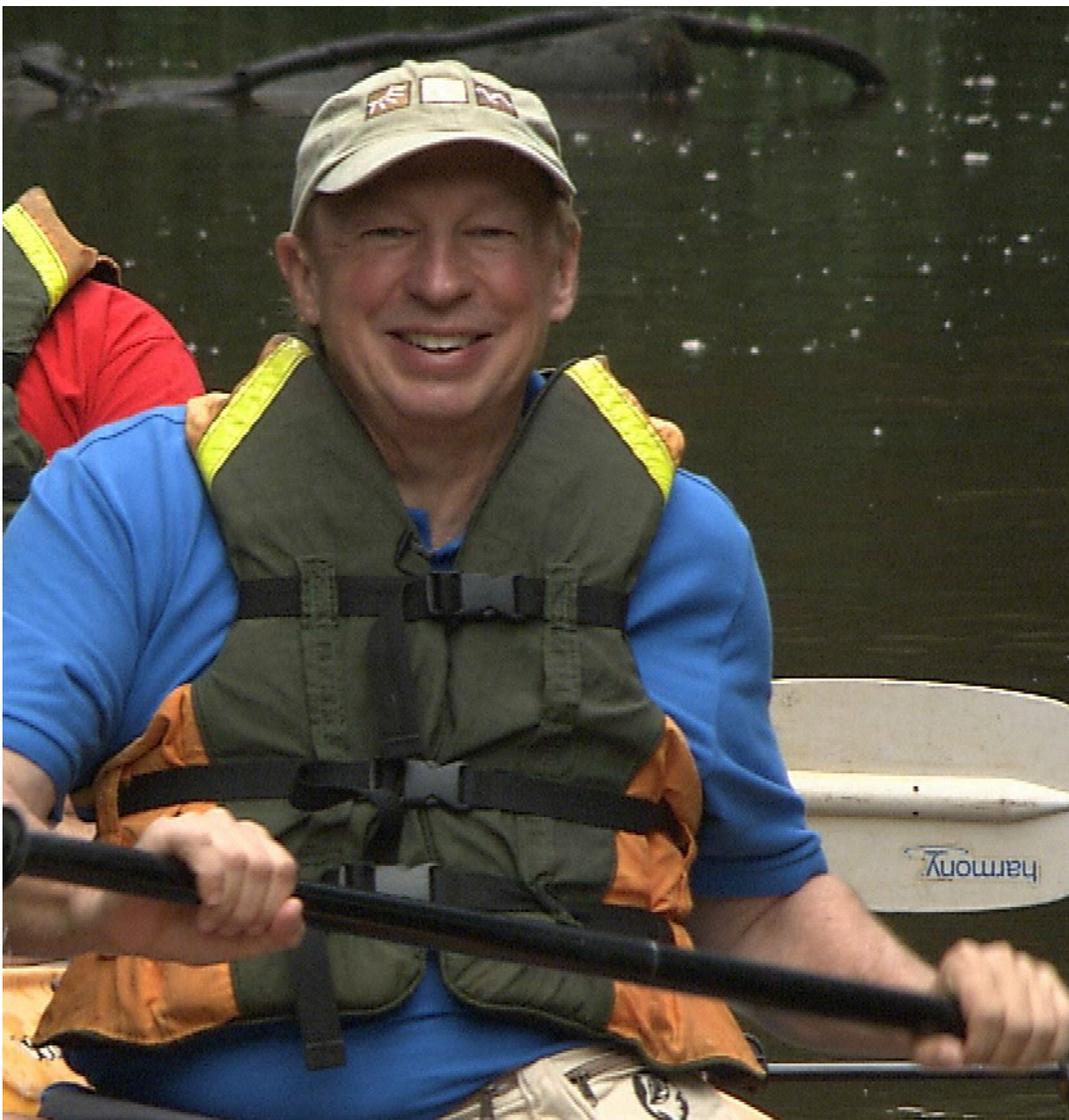
by Richard Bangs

I once guided a group down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon that should never have been assembled by any sane outfitter—or cosmic intelligence. Half the group were wards from the Church of Latter-day Saints. The other half were Hash House Harriers, a self-described drinking club with a running problem. **They shared a raft, a river, and very little else.**

Cultural misunderstandings multiplied faster than the rapids. By Mile 40, I was less concerned with navigation than with preventing a sectarian skirmish somewhere below Lava Falls. When the take-out finally appeared, there was a collective sigh of relief as each faction retreated to the familiar embrace of its own tribe.

Contrast that with trips I've guided where the vertical—the shared passion—was unmistakable. The Four Corners Geological Society, who read the canyon walls like scripture. Sierra Club Singles, for whom the trail was both metaphor and matchmaking.

The Foundation for the Junior Blind, whose courage and curiosity redefined what it meant to see a place. These trips didn't just work; they hummed. Conversation flowed. Trust formed quickly. Differences didn't vanish, but they mattered less because everyone was aligned along a common axis.



That's the power of vertical travel. It filters out the noise.

Instead of assembling a random assortment of strangers bound only by a departure date, you gather people who speak the same dialect of curiosity. Photography. Watercolor. Writing. Wellness. Spiritual inquiry. Cooking.

Wildlife. Adventure. These verticals don't narrow the experience—they deepen it. They create instant community, shared reference points, and a sense of belonging that turns a trip into a collective story rather than a series of logistics.

At The Extraordinary Travelers Club, we've leaned into this truth. Wildlife lovers find themselves shoulder to shoulder in Brazil's Pantanal, where jaguars slip through riverine forests like living myths. Others gather in Tanzania for the great birthing season, when the savanna becomes a cradle and the air itself seems charged with beginnings. This fall, I'll lead a **walking safari in Kenya**, where moving at human speed restores an ancient rhythm between footfall and landscape. And **Rebel Holiday**—co-founder of ETC and a force of nature in her own right—is guiding an **all-women's adventure through Portugal**, the country she now calls home, where shared experience becomes both mirror and catalyst. *(Email email her: rebelholiday@extraordinarytravelersclub.com - she's in trip design now.)*

Choose your vertical. Align your curiosity. **Travel not horizontally, skimming the surface, but vertically—drilling down into meaning, connection, and shared passion.** Join a like-minded community and culture, and discover that the most extraordinary journeys are often infra-ordinary: human-scaled, deeply felt, and rich with belonging.

Featured Invitation of 2026 - Explore Mongolia

Below Richard Bangs, Jack Wheeler, our Kazakh eagle hunter, and Eddy Downpatrick -- all inviting you to join our next expedition in June!



Calendar for Extraordinary Travelers - 2026

Invitations to Join Us

June 18 to 30, 2026 - Exploring Mongolia



EXPLORING MONGOLIA

An Adventurous Luxury Expedition
Designed by Jack Wheeler
June 18 to June 30, 2026



Exploring Mongolia is the dream of anyone with an adventurous spirit.

There is vast emptiness is of extraordinary beauty and diversity, while the people you meet are marvelously welcoming and hospitable. To see this enormous country is a tall order, but we have a strategy. We supplement scheduled flights with **private chartered Cessna Grand Caravan planes** landing on remote airstrips, to be met by our Land Cruisers to take us to extraordinary places and meet people other travelers don't see. This is a unique, luxury exploration of Mongolia -- your dream of Exploring Mongolia come true.

Note: **We can take only 3 more couples on this spectacular trip.** If you want to go, click the gold box for photos and the itinerary! This one always fills up.

Questions? Email Rebel holiday@wheelerexpeditions.com

Click Here for Details

EXPLORING MONGOLIA
A Luxury Expedition

June 18 - 30, 2026

June 5-14, 2026 - Atlantic Paradises: Beautiful Madeira & Azores Islands



ATLANTIC PARADISES

*Led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday
Madeira & Azores Islands
June 5-14, 2026*



WHEELER-WINDSOR
EXPEDITIONS

Atlantic Paradises is an exploration on which **you will see and discover magically beautiful places in the Portuguese Islands of Madeira and 3 of the Azores Islands.** You'll have both energizing and relaxing experiences. We stay in wonderful hotels, enjoy delicious local food and wine, and learn from our outstanding guides on tours and activities.

Imagine swimming with dolphins, watching whales in the wild, and exploring tropical gardens. You'll learn local customs from friendly Portuguese locals. Atlantic Paradises is unique in what we experience, how we experience it, and in value. It brings you a life-memorable and pleasurable experience!

Email Rebel: holiday@wheelerexpeditions.com

Click for Photos & Details

**ATLANTIC PARADISES:
Madeira & Azores Islands**

June 5-14, 2026

Sep 11-30, 2026 - The 5 Stans of Central Asia



The 5 “Stans” Of Central Asia

*The 5 Stans of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,
Tajikistan & Turkmenistan*

Friday, September 11 to Wednesday, September 30, 2026



WHEELER-WINDSOR
EXPEDITIONS

The 5 Stans of Central Asia - Central Asia. These words evoke the ultimate in remote, exotic, and unknown wonders. **Find the ancient cities along the Silk Road still in all their splendor, reminiscent of the days of Marco Polo.** We'll meet descendants of ancient peoples and learn about centuries of fascinating history. **he natural wonders abound:** here you will find the Mountains of Heaven and the stunning mountain lakes called the Seven Pearls of Shing, and more extraordinary scenic beauty.

It's an enormous area in the center of the Eurasian continent. Just imagine exploring these exotic countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Each is different and fascinating in its own way. While most all world travelers dream of visiting these countries, few have the chance to so. What's more, those few that do rarely experience the coolest places in each. That's what we're going to do on this exotic expedition. Join us to experience this fascinating region.

Email Rebel: holiday@wheelerexpditiions.com

Click for Details & Photos

The 5 "Stans" of CENTRAL ASIA

Sep 11-30, 2026

**Oct 26 - Nov 6, 2026 - Kenya Walking Safari with
Richard Bangs**



Kenya Walking Safari with Richard Bangs

**Designed and Led by Richard Bangs
October 26 to November 6, 2026**

MT SOBEK ADVENTURE



So, take a walk on the wild side with Richard Bangs in the remote corners of Kenya. This safari includes incredible wildlife encounters, moderate walking with various tribes as guides, and deeper explorations of Nairobi National Park, the Mathews Range, Lake Turkana, Laikipia, and the legendary Masai Mara.

Contact Nicole Russo at MT Sobek NicoleRusso@MTSobek.com

+1 510 594 6041 or +1 800 974 0300

Click for Details & Photos

KENYA WALKING SAFARI with Richard Bangs

October 26- November 6, 2026

October 23-30, 2026 - Himalaya Helicopter



HIMALAYA HELICOPTER EXPEDITION

Friday, October 23 – 30, 2026

Kathmandu, Nepal to Kathmandu, Nepal

All photos taken by Jack Wheeler



You get to soar in the highest peaks in the Himalayas on this world-class expedition designed by Jack Wheeler, dubbed the "real life Indiana Jones" by the Wall Street Journal. **In only one week, our goal is to reach these 8 incredible mountains – Everest, Lhotse, Cho Oyu, Makalu, Kanchenjunga, Manaslu, Annapurna, and Dhaulagiri.** Seeing and experiencing these mountains in this way is an ultimate Himalayan experience.

No trekking whatsoever. **Instead we're flying in the AS350 B3, the most advanced, high-altitude helicopters in the world.** The expedition group will be a maximum of 8 members. Now, since 2016, Wheeler Expeditions has led this extraordinary and exclusive expedition, featured in the Robb Report. **This is arguably the greatest adventure that you can have in one-week on the planet today.**

Email Rebel: holiday@wheelerexpditions.com

Click for Details & Photos

HIMALAYA HELICOPTER

October 23 - 30, 2026

Venture Out! Be As Extraordinary As You Are!

So come—step off the well-worn path. In 2026, join us for something that shimmers with the spirit of real adventure. Walk Kenya's wild tracks with

Richard and new friends. Or explore the stunning Atlantic Paradises, or Mongolia with Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday, or join one of the many soul-stirring journeys offered by [MT Sobek](#).

There's a peculiar alchemy that happens when shedding the weight of everyday obligations and pointing toward an unmapped quadrant. **When you push through the undergrowth and leave the marked signs behind, when you taste the metallic flavor of genuine risk, you're not just passing time. You're stoking the fire that keeps us human.** You're reasserting what it means to play, to want, to be utterly present in the narrow space between nothing and everything.

The moment is fleeting. The time is now.

Come join us on an Extraordinary Travel Experience.

Carpe Diem!



Questions? Reach out to us:

richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

or

rebelholiday@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

We're happy to discuss!

Extraordinary Traveler - Thia Konig



About Thia Konig

Thia Konig is more than a travel photographer with a journal. She's an advocate for cultural understanding, using her lens and her pen to bridge divides and celebrate our connectedness. She invites us to join her on her journeys, to shed our attachments to comfort and schedules, and to move about the planet with childlike eyes, living authentically and fearlessly. Konig, 60, hangs her hat in Sun Valley, Idaho, and is always dreaming of her next adventure.

Thia Konig graduated with honors from Brooks Institute of Photography in 1991. Being curious, yet vulnerable, she has been hopping on boats, buses, camels, and canoes ever since. Thia is a chronicler of joy, a seeker of beauty, and a champion of the human spirit.



Thia with her new Indian friends

Extraordinary Traveler Interview: Thia Konig

Q: How old were you when you began to dream of and imagine extraordinary adventures?

TK: My mother is from England, so I've had a passport since I was three, in order to visit her side of the family near London. I have fleeting memories of climbing barefoot on a pile of cold cannonballs and petting a spotted deer in a clearing near a forest. One day, to set up a photo opportunity, my mother made me approach a guard dressed in a red suit with buckles and a tall, black, fuzzy hat at Buckingham Palace and ask him where the Crown Jewels were. I thought she was too scared to approach him and ask him herself, and I knew -- then and there -- that I was more brave than she.

For my fifth birthday my parents gave me the best birthday present I can remember. It wasn't anything you could unwrap, but instead it was a trip to San Francisco. The whole day was for me, and I got to ride a cable car and climb on the arched red bridge at the Japanese Tea Gardens and say hello to the sea lions at Pier 39. A good habit I try to continue to this day - having new experiences over new stuff.

My great aunt, a widow with no children and a bit of a world traveler even into her 80s, had a glass globe from the 1940s that lit up. I can remember sitting cross-legged in a chair next to it and playing the game of spinning the globe and then stopping it randomly with my finger at my next surprise adventure destination. "I will go there!" "And I will explore there!" I would promise myself endlessly.

My parents had a subscription to National Geographic, which made my travel bug worse!



Thia in the Tien Shan Mountains, with locals at the end of the Cold War

Q: What is one of the more extraordinary travel experiences that you have had?

TK: Timing is everything. In 1989, I ended up on a peace expedition into Soviet Russia at the end of the Cold War. (Solo travel was impossible back then, the only way into the USSR was with a group). It was a backpacking trip in the Tien Shan Mountains with some very creative folks from Kiev. Three days before embarking on the trek, a horse accidentally kicked me in the leg, to the bone, and I was going to get left behind. An American couple on the trip from Berkeley were both physics professors and shamans (physics/metaphysics - it comes full circle), and they taught me to train my own mind to heal myself so I could join the group. I did most of it, although the Soviets delighted in carrying me across the streams.

There were no official maps (something about satellites not allowed above?). Every night when we got to camp, our Soviet hosts would send some scouts to scamper up to the next saddle or peak, to check their hand-drawn maps against reality and make sure we were on the right track. At the meeting of three valleys at the end of the trek, we planted a crystal (programmed for peace by the folks from Boulder, Colorado - seriously, I can't make this stuff up). One week after we left the USSR, the Berlin Wall came crumbling down. I'm not

saying that it was all up to us, but sometimes all it takes is a feather in the wind to tip the scales.

Q: Have you had a close call while traveling, and if so, did it motivate a re-assessment or change in behavior?

TK: The first question I always get about traveling solo in the Muslim world, is “Did I ever feel I was in danger?” And the quick answer is “No.” In Muslim culture the guest (that’s me!) is sacred, and always treated with the utmost respect. A very large majority of Muslims around the world (and that’s a lot!) are peaceful. The Islamic theme color is green, which stands for peace, so it’s their main jam. It’s only a small sliver of the extremists that give the rest a bad name. (kind of like Christianity). That said, to do it again I would wear a wedding ring. A single woman traveling alone is rare and subjected to incessant questioning. I think next time I would rather fib and have a story about my imaginary husband.

Q: Who are extraordinary travelers whom you admire? If you could sit down and speak with any extraordinary traveler, living or dead, who would it be?

TK: The way I move about the planet and see the world through my camera lens is due largely to Paul Liebhardt, my photojournalism professor at Brooks Institute of Photography. I saw him in action in Guatemala back in the late 90s, and it made quite an impression on me. Years after I had graduated, we bumped into each other by surprise in the tiny town of Todos Santos for the drunken horse race and colorful cemeteries during the Dia de Muerto celebrations. I knew he didn’t know a lick of Spanish, but I watched him walk back from the cemetery with a group of locals, and they were all laughing and hanging on his arm, and carrying on like old friends. He plays the clown to warm everybody’s heart. Like Moses, parting the seas of life with humor. Joy is the common language, and Paul was hilarious. Everybody wins. He spawned a whole tribe of like-minded travel photojournalists from Brooks, myself included. He just recently passed, so Paul would be my pick to have a conversation and share some more laughs with.

Q: What mindset do you adopt, or have naturally, when you venture into the world?

TK: You tend to find what you are seeking. Be careful what you are looking for. If you are looking for heart rocks, you will find heart rocks. If you are looking for things to make you angry, you will find them. The more I look for beauty, the more beauty I find. I tend to wear my soul on my sleeve, so I cross paths with others doing the same. It’s the law of the universe.

Q: What characteristics do you choose in your traveling companions?

TK: A sense of humor, curiosity, and the ability to roll with the punches. Otherwise, I’d rather travel alone. That’s the difference between a disastrous, excruciating, or unfortunate circumstance, and a hilarious one.

Q: What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

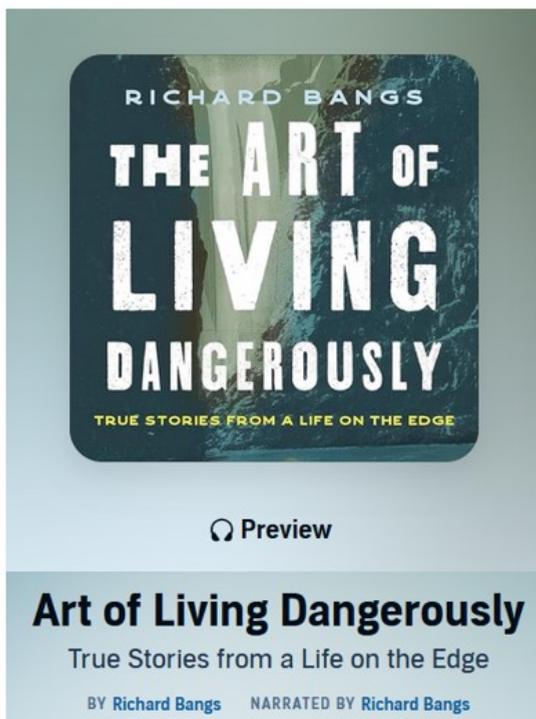
TK: I want to sail around the world, fly in a wingsuit in the Alps, see the polar caps before they melt, and scuba dive under the blue ice with the penguins and seals (I’ll need drysuit training and a boat with a hot tub), hang out with and photograph the indigenous tribes in Ethiopia, I hear they have blue doors in Tunisia, sleep in a cave in Turkey, hike to temple pagodas and hot springs in Japan, see Iceland from a helicopter, and swim with jellyfish in Palau and whale sharks in Mexico. The more I write, the more that comes to mind.

Q: As a veteran explorer and extraordinary traveler, any advice for a young traveler just setting out?

TK: Explore the world while you have the fire in the belly and are mad for experiences. Travel alone for the full, direct experience. Have an open heart, an open mind, and don’t be afraid to talk to strangers.

This is currently completing her upcoming book, “Traveling Naked.” To join her early notification list, email her at thiakonig@gmail.com.

Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



NEW Audio Book!

Read by the Author:

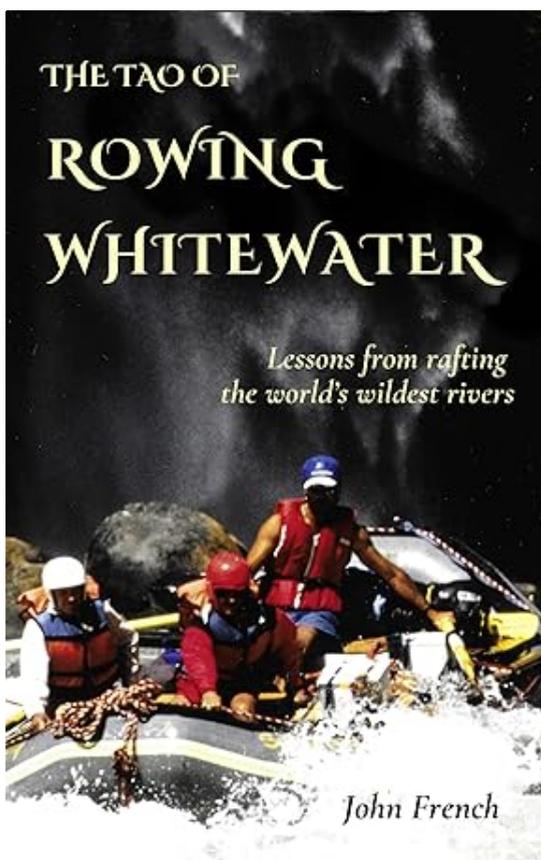
Richard Bangs

Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

What reviewers say:

Thom Beers, creator of The Deadliest Catch, says ***“Richard Bangs is the epitome of living life to the fullest. Danger is and has always been his comfort zone.”***

[***Art of Living Dangerously Audiobook by Richard Bangs***](#)



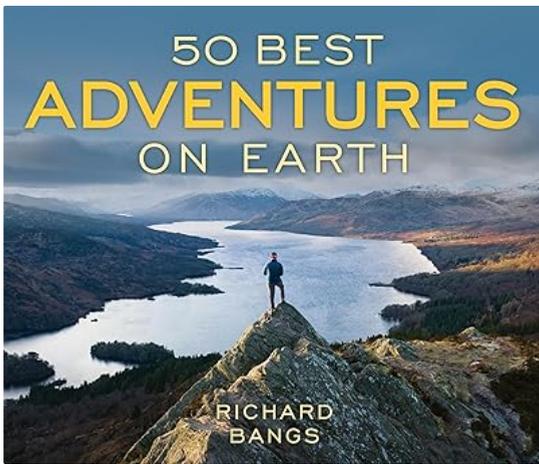
The Tao of Rowing Whitewater

***Lessons from rafting the world's
wildest rivers***

by John French

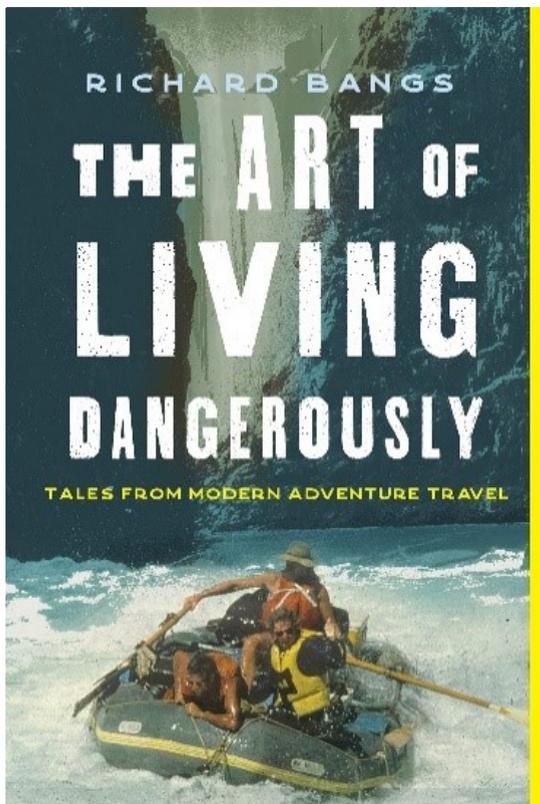
About the book: In an intriguing mix of memoir and philosophy, a veteran guide shares what he learned from navigating the world's most challenging rivers. By blending the art of running rapids with the practice of Tai Chi, he found techniques for rowing whitewater with grace while remaining calm amidst chaos.

River runners need instinct and skill to meet the demands of split-second timing and adrenaline pumping fear. This book offers lessons for the novice that take years to learn. Shore-bound readers will experience the thrill of a wild and exotic sport, as well as anyone seeking to push boundaries to live life at full capacity.



50 Best Adventures on Earth by Richard Bangs

About the book: From scaling untouched Himalayan peaks to navigating pristine Amazon rapids, *50 Best Adventures on Earth* is your ultimate guide to the planet's most extraordinary experiences, handpicked by legendary explorer Richard Bangs. Transform your travel dreams into reality with this definitive guide from the founder of Sobek Expeditions, who has led over 35 first river descents across six continents.



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

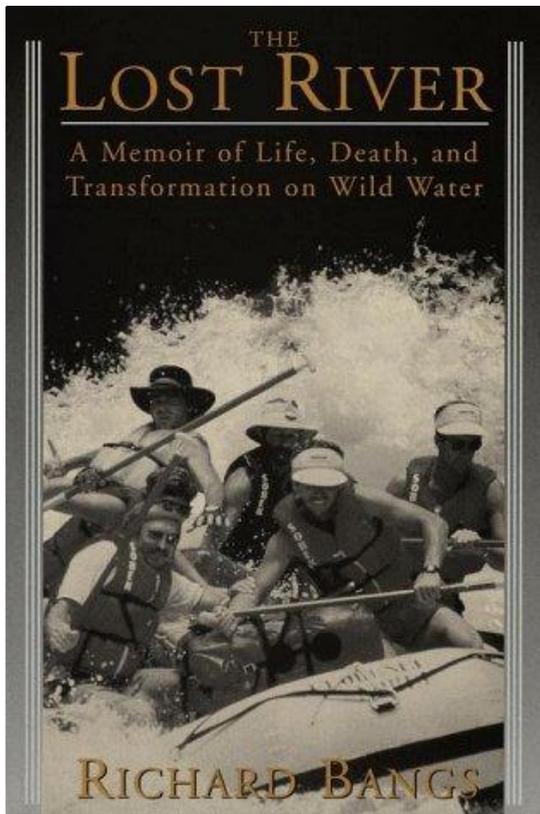
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Paul Maritz, conservationist, tech investor, former senior exec at Microsoft and VMware says, "*Richard tells great stories, some of them true.*"

[The Art of Living Dangerously](#).



The Lost River: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Transformation on Wild Water
by Richard Bangs

Finally, now available in Kindle.

What reviewers say:

“It is not only a wonderful adventure story...it is also an intensely personal self examination by Mr. Bangs. This is one of the great adventure stories of all time, but for me, it also served as a "self help" book. You'll be amazed and entertained by a fabulous story while going through your own internal exam at the same time..”

[The Lost River: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Transformation on Wild Water](#)

Yes, Let's Go There!



Jack Wheeler and Richard Bangs, always reaching for the stars. (photo by Jasper Bangs)

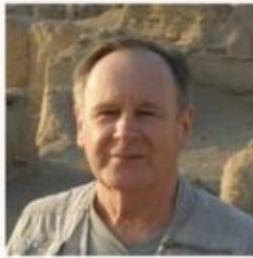
Write in and tell us where YOU want us to take you!



Extraordinary Travelers Club



Richard Bangs
Founder



Jack Wheeler
Founder



Eddy Downpatrick
Founder



Rebel Holiday
Founder

The **Extraordinary Travelers Club** is a celebration of extraordinary travels and those who pioneer and partake. Each month we offer commentary, interviews and opportunities to explore our remarkable world, to turn unturned corners and breathe rarefied air.

This is a club for the bold, the curious, and those who seek exceptional experiences in the hidden scapes and the back of beyond. There is no membership fee; just the currency of curiosity. We invite you to be a part of this wayfaring League, a community within which to share the insights, codes and secrets with like-minded travelers from around the globe.

Join us in the [The Extraordinary Travelers Club](#).

Prior ETC Dispatch Issues:

<https://www.extraordinarytravelersclub.com/etc-newsletter-issues>

Upcoming Club Expeditions:

<https://extraordinarytravelersclub.com/extraordinaryexpeditions>

Your comments are welcome, email:

richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

Share with us your Extraordinary Travel experiences!

Connect with Richard Bangs



Special Thanks To Our Fellow Travel Pioneers...



Extraordinary Travelers Club

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