



EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB - ISSUE #4

Seek Adventure in Unordinary Places...

As flames of discord rage across borders and ideologies, the idea of adventure as an agent for peace might seem whimsical, yet it carries within it the power to bridge chasms and foster understanding where division reigns.

When one embarks into the heart of a foreign land, encountering new customs, languages, and traditions, preconceived notions often give way to enlightenment. The superficial layers of disagreement are peeled away, revealing the shared humanity that binds us all.

I just returned from an aerial tour of the Nepal Himalayas, a singular adventure designed by Jack Wheeler. Through shared experiences and the mutual awe beneath the world's highest peaks, powerful bonds were formed. The connections made transcended any differences that in isolation might have bred hostility, and the collective adventure paved the way for mutual respect, and empathy - the very foundations for a harmonious flight on spaceship Earth.



In conflict-ridden regions, adventure travel can serve as a path to peacebuilding. It can bring together individuals from opposing sides, creating neutral spaces for dialogue and reconciliation. It can help to rebuild trust and foster a sense of shared identity and purpose.

And the economic impact of adventure travel cannot be overlooked. Nepal is pinched between the superpowers of China and India, and each seeks influence and the capturing of hearts and minds. Visiting Westerners breathe life into local economies, offering opportunities for livelihood and sustainable development. As communities benefit from tourism, the incentive for conflict diminishes, replaced by a vested interest in preserving proceeds and assets, and welcoming guests with open arms.

So, let us embark on a journey of adventure, not just to experience mountains and explore remote corners of the globe, but to connect with fellow beings, and cultivate a world where peace prevails. Let us make adventure travel a force for positive change, a catalyst for discovering the interconnectedness of our world, a world where differences are celebrated, and the spirit of unity prevails.



An Invitation from Richard Bangs: Float the most stunningly beautiful river in the world: The Alsek of Alaska & Canada



Decades ago, I made the first raft descent of the lower Alsek, and now Laura and I have chartered a July 6th departure for a custom 8-day eye-popping adventure.

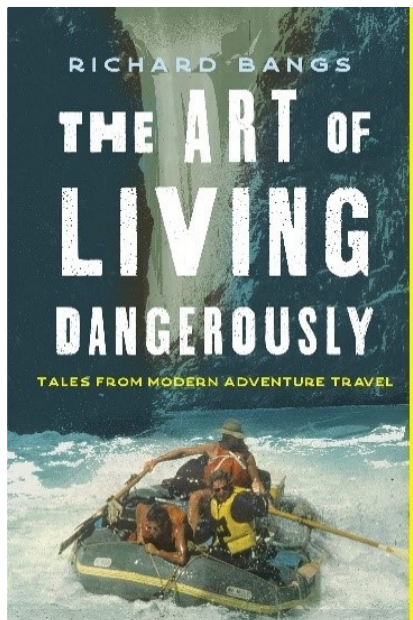
We'll ride through the largest contiguous protected wilderness in the world - including Kluane National Park & Reserve in the Yukon and Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska. Purl past a galaxy of glaciers, by the largest concentration of grizzlies, and beneath the greatest wheels of bald eagles in the world. - Richard Bangs

Details or to join, please contact: **Seth Heald, Sr. Director North America**

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Extraordinary Travelers Bookshelf

Holiday Read: The Art of Living Dangerously, on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. The thrilling new book celebrating Sobek's 50 years of insane exploration is available now. Just click the book image below to get started!



The Art of Living Dangerously by 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.”***

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](#)

Explorers' Club Invite - January 8, 2024

If in town, you are invited to The Explorers Club in New York, Monday, January 8th to celebrate fifty years of adventure with Richard Bangs.

If you can't make it, the event is streaming live on YouTube and Facebook. Click [here](#) for details: [The Art of Living Dangerously | The Explorers Club](#) *

Portugal Exploration - May 3-12, 2024



Explore Portugal: Lisbon, Sintra, Coimbra, & Porto

Join Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday who have offered this exclusive exploration since 2012. This is a wonderful exploration of the beauty, charm, and history of Portugal with a small group of 10-12 travelers.

You'll be immersed in the natural scenic beauty, discover the culture and long history, while enjoying high-quality hotels, delicious food and wine. You'll see castles, palaces, fortresses, and points of interest, including standing at the most Westerly point of Continental Europe.

We begin in the capital, Lisbon, to see the best sights and attractions of historic Lisbon, Cascais, and Sintra. Next, we drive along the Portuguese Riviera to the Silver Coast, and ultimately visit Porto, the second largest city and home of port.

You will enjoy full days of interesting activities -- yet with a relaxing pace to experience the energy of this beautiful country. We stay in well-located, upscale properties and dine at outstanding restaurants. (*You choose your meal off the menu, no pre-set menus.*) Your hosts have been residing in Portugal for over a decade -- and are delighted to share it with you!

Contact: Rebel Holiday - holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com or click below for details and photos.

[Click for Details to Join](#)

Portugal Exploration

May 3-12, 2024



Cabo da Roca, Portugal - Most Westerly point of Continental Europe



Douro River, Porto, Portugal (*our hotel on the bank*)

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: Extraordinary Travelers Soar in Himalayas 2023



We ran two helicopter expeditions in the Nepal Himalayas, Oct 21-28 and Oct 28-Nov 4, 2023. It was definitely an experience of a lifetime! Led by Richard Bangs, Jack Wheeler, and Eddy Downpatrick. Rebel Holiday joined, along with our very extraordinary travelers from Australia, Italy, Portugal, the U.K., and the U.S.

The first photo below is the first group (*Eddy on the left, Richard Bangs on the right.*) The second group is next at Annapurna Base Camp (Jack and Rebel in middle.)

It's safe to say that all present found this to be a life-memorable and extraordinary experience to see all the peaks of the eight highest Himalayan Mountains in Nepal and more.



In addition to the stunning mountains and gorgeous vistas, we visit the ancient kingdom of Lo Manthang, the only place in the world where you can visit monasteries that practice true Tibetan Buddhism. We met Jampa, the head monk. He speaks English quite well and is very warm. He's in charge of the school for children who previously had no way to get an education. Now we're in touch on WhatsApp!



Here's a sweet local lady that Rebel befriended in this remote ancient village.



**Join Us for Himalaya Helicopter Expedition
in 2024**

**Click for Details to
Join**

Himalaya Helicopter Expedition

Oct 19-26, 2024

What Past Participants Have Shared:

“As someone who has always found spiritual bliss in the mountains, the Himalaya Helicopter Expedition was the ultimate experience. The profound and raw beauty of the Himalayas just can't be experienced through pictures.” -- Josh Gershtenson M.D.

“As a world traveler to 85 countries and counting and as a mountaineer having bagged 35 major peaks in the world and counting and my having a passion for visiting extraordinarily remote corners of the earth, Wheeler Expeditions has been over the top for providing unusual, well-organized, one of a kind and unimaginable travel experiences. The opportunity for me to visit 8 of the world's 8,000 meter peaks in 7 days by helicopter is an example of Wheeler Expeditions' extraordinary experiences which I never would have been able to experience otherwise in my lifetime.” Leave it to Jack to imagine -- and execute -- the unimaginable!” -- Ken Noack, Jr.



Extraordinary Traveler - Edward Windsor, Lord Downpatrick

Edward Windsor, Lord Downpatrick, (“Eddy Downpatrick”) Eddy is an explorer and adventurer. A partner in Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions, he takes great pleasure in designing and guiding exclusive expeditions. He is an International Member of the Explorers Club. Founding partner of Extraordinary Travelers' Club.

Favorite expeditions he's led include Himalaya Helicopter Expeditions, water-borne ski touring trips to the Norwegian Arctic, land-borne ski

touring trips to Macedonia, the remote wilds of the Rockies, encounters with bears and whales in Canada, and many times exploring the Alps. He especially enjoyed guiding surrounded by natural wonders of Ethiopia, Jordan, British Columbia, New Zealand, Australia, the Scottish Highlands, wild West Coast of Ireland, and historic sites across old-world Europe.

In addition to extensive travel, Eddy is an avid hiker, skier, cold-water swimmer, linguist, and is adept on a horse. He loves journeys with other Extraordinary Travelers!



Extraordinary Traveler Profile

Edward Downpatrick

November 2024, London

Q. What is one of your more extraordinary travel experiences?

Eddy: From more recent memory, soaring high in the Himalayas of Nepal. Reaching Everest Base Camp at 7am, having beheld the peaks of Everest, Lhotse, and Makalu in a single lofty frame, and a more extended sortie around Cho Oyu and her magnificent glacial lakes, to fly above the Khumbu Icefall and hop a 23,000ft pass into the Valley of Eternity, dipping into this lush idyll of secluded beauty to have a drum of fuel rushed to us by two men taking shelter under the pines, the weather turned us east towards the border with Sikkim.





Having started the day in the most glorious icy demesne I could imagine, to just four hours later enjoying a cup of tea as monsoon-like rains thumped onto the rainforest before me was utterly surreal. There was a feeling of deep satisfaction and immense contentment that I will never forget. By this stage of the trip, we hadn't yet made it to the wild expanses of Upper Mustang. What we encountered there only added to that feeling.



Q: What do you dream of doing or place you dream of exploring?

Eddy: I'd like to explore the most northerly reaches of our world, by all manner of craft, voyaging along Russia's Arctic coastline, exploring the islands that lie within that rarefied body of water, dropping down to Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Kuril Islands above Japan. The onward venture would take me weaving through the Aleutian Islands before cutting over the top of Alaska, wending my way

towards the Northwest Passages and ultimately Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Shetland, and Orkney.

Q: How do you relate to the notion of the “road or path less traveled?”

Eddy: Even on the paths most frequently travelled there are hidden gems one might have missed. It’s at this point that you need to seek out something rather rarefied, the worlds within worlds that enable the greatest of unveilings and therewith, enlightenment.



Q: If you had time and money for one adventure in the next 24 months, what would it be?

Eddy: I’d like to go swimming with orcas in the Norwegian Arctic and do the same with humpbacks in the South Pacific off boats equipped with listening devices. I’d also love to find the migration point of Beluga whales in the Canadian Arctic and witness a spectacle of the natural world that very few have before. I’ve now listed a number of adventures, but perhaps we’ll just roll it up and call it wanderings with whales.



Going There: A Path to Peace in a Turbulent World

by Richard Bangs



Richard Bangs in North Korea. Photo by Richard C. Garrison

When word got out I was taking a group to Myanmar, I received this email:

Dear Mr. Bangs: I strongly advise you to drop travel to Myanmar. The treatment of the Rohingya minority is so appalling that I feel that no one should be visiting that country...

This is not the first cease and desist-style communication I've received about travel to a destination whose politics are at odds with our own. When I received a permit to take a first group of Americans to The People's Republic of China in the mid-1970s, I received calls and letters from angry folks who were aghast that we would consort with the Communists. This was a few years after Nixon's historic visit and the advent of ping-pong diplomacy, but, to some, the idea that we would visit an enemy state as travelers was abhorrent.

I received similar notices during Apartheid in South Africa, when we took a group to Cuba in 1979, when I first visited Iran, and once more when I took a first group of Americans to Gaddafi's Libya.

Probably the biggest barrage of hate mail came when I co-led, with Jack Wheeler, a group of Americans to North Korea. Even friends implored me not to go, arguing that the monies paid to the DPRK government would go to further oppression, and maybe even enhance

nuclear armaments. Our tourism dollars might contribute to WWII.

In John le Carré's 1990 book, *The Secret Pilgrim*, George Smiley reflects on the end of the Cold War:

"I never saw policies as much other than excuses for not feeling. It was man who ended the Cold War in case you didn't notice. It wasn't weaponry, or technology, or armies or campaigns. It was just man. Not even Western man either, as it happened, but our sworn enemy in the East, who went into the street, faced the bullets and the batons and said: we've had enough. And the ideologies trailed after these impossible events like condemned prisoners, as ideologies do when they've had their day."

I don't agree with governmental ideologies and policies of many of the places I've visited. I don't even agree with many US policies, or even policies in my neighborhood. But I don't believe a travel boycott is ever the answer. In fact, I deeply believe travel contributes, often granularly, but ultimately measurably, to the solution, or at least the evolution of consciousness. It is the human connection, and the arming of the oppressed with a larger truth, that empowers people to act.

Without travel and person-to-person encounters, mental walls are erected, and it becomes easier and easier to demonize the other side. They're evil, monsters, not like us, ready to destroy us at first opportunity. But it is more often than not governments — and their ideologies, policies, and leaders — that paint us as different and worthy of ruin. It is the corrupt regimes — not the commuters or mothers and their children — that violate human rights with alacrity and little consequence. In North Korea, for three generations common folk have been fed a nonstop diet of animus towards Japan, South Korea, and America. Most North Koreans believed what they were served, until recently when evidence that proved otherwise began to leak across the borders through cell phones, thumb-drives, DVDs, and visitors from the West.

When and if North Korea enjoys regime change, it will likely not be because of saber-rattling or brinkmanship, or boycotts or sanctions. It will likely be because the human spirit that thrives everywhere will find the voice, courage, passion, and righteousness to force that change. And, while visits from foreigners will not be the tripwire that sets this off, they will be a contributor. Every human touchpoint is a chip in the wall. Every time I exchanged a smile, a handshake, a gift with a North Korean, I made a connection, a human link, making one another not just an abstract representation, but somebody closer to relative than enemy. In most cases, we don't want to see harm come to our family or friends, or even people we've met, no matter how briefly.

In these suitcases where we travel to despotic regimes, will our tourdollars contribute to a worsening or extending of bad rule? Not likely. Withholding visitation monies, insignificant in the grand scheme, by not visiting will not influence policy or effect meaningful change.

Whatever monies end up in the wrong hands or spent in a way we don't approve, there is the other side of the ledger: the human factor.

Everyone touched by a foreign visitor has the chance to see an alternative, to take measure of a friendly, curious face, and to question the status quo. One by one, the drip, drip, drip of humanity wears down the dam.

Western musicians were beseeched to boycott South Africa during Apartheid. Paul Simon ignored that plea, and made beautiful cooperative music that resounded in the ears of the world. Few would disagree that the country is better off today, and that visits by artists, travelers, and others during that dark time made a material difference.

In Christopher J. Koch's novel, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a Chinese-Australian dwarf, Billy Kwan, is aghast at horrific Indonesian government policies that have impoverished the masses. His response: He decides to help one random prostitute and her child, turning over the bulk of his paycheck each week, with the theory that if we all reach out and influence even one other human being, we are adding to the raindrops, and, at the end of the day, water always beats stone.

Flesh-to-flesh visits enable this, though often fractionally. Each time we sit down at a table with someone beyond our ken, we together move the pieces forward, advance the game, and impede the stalemates.

Which brings me back to Myanmar, one of the most beautiful and culturally rich countries on the planet. Yes, true democratic reform is a long way off, but things have progressed significantly, and a Western-sense of fairness and equality is inching forward. By our going, rather than staying, we help that process, not inhibit it. Just being there affords a heightened awareness — for ourselves and for those we meet — of each other's social, cultural, and political history. And thus, we discover commonalities, cohesions, and human kindness.

Yes, by traveling to Myanmar we unavoidably contribute in some measure to a bad regime. But monies spent locally go directly to the villagers, helping to increase quality of life, including education and health. We can't travel throughout the whole country and help everyone in this way, but by helping a little, we help build the hill for bigger possibilities. When we stay in a local hotel or eat at a local restaurant, we directly support small businesses. That lifts the economic boat, and when people are able to meet their daily needs, they are more able to work to remove tyranny.

Beyond the transactions and cultural reciprocity, an American visiting Myanmar can inspire local inhabitants to action. For many Americans, our heritage is built on immigration, fleeing persecution, oppression, and human-engineered environmental disaster. Our ancestors acted, and we and our system of governance, no matter how imperfect, are the result of that action.

But what is equally important is how we, the visitors, are affected and informed by traveling. When a place is just a distant swath on the map, an intangible and trivial concept, it's easy to dismiss. Why bother? How many people in your community or town know that the Rohingyas are among the most persecuted minorities in the world? Who cares? If you go, you will.

Once visited, a place like Myanmar, or The Stans, or any beset place, becomes familiar, like a backyard or a family member. There is an emotional connection forged, an acquired understanding, and when there is a call for help, we are more likely to use our resources to act, to raise voices, to open wallets, to spend time, and to reach out. We, too, can make a positive difference. And it all starts by going there.

Yes, Let's Go There!



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

Connect with Richard Bangs



Join us in the [The Extraordinary Travelers Club](#).
Your comments are welcome, email
richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

Share with us your Extraordinary Travel experiences: email to



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.

Special Thanks To Our Fellow Travel Pioneers...



Extraordinary Travelers Club

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