



EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #12 - December 2024 - January 2025

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The Pulse of Resilience: Why Now is the Time to Visit Ukraine

by Richard Bangs

There are places we visit for their adventure offerings, others for beauty and history, and some for the potential to transform both sides of the travel equation.

But every so often, a destination calls us not merely as explorers, but as

participants in a play larger than ourselves. Ukraine, at this moment, is that destination.

Ukraine, battered but unbowed, is a land of stark beauty. Rolling wheat fields give way to the craggy Carpathian Mountains, where traditional Hutsul culture endures. Ancient forests whisper secrets, and knocked cities charge forward with newfound energy. We'll gawk at the baroque architecture in the golden light, visit world-class museums, and tap the thriving underground music scene. We'll inhale the sweet scent of pampushky bread in the mornings.

But the real asset is the people. Ukrainians are known for their warmth, humor, and indomitable spirit. We'll encounter locals who share stories of hardship and hope, of loss and laughter. The Ukrainian commitment to maintaining normalcy in abnormal times is nothing short of heroic. Their perseverance inspires; their kindness moves reachable minds.

What sets Ukraine apart right now is the urgent need for global kinship and support through tourism. Traveling to Ukraine today isn't just about discovery; it's about solidarity, sustainability, and helping to guide the path to reclaim its future.

Tourism has a unique power to heal and rebuild. It generates revenue for local businesses, sustains cultural heritage, and provides livelihoods for countless individuals—guides, restaurateurs, artisans, and hoteliers. By choosing to visit Ukraine this May, we directly participate in the country's recovery. Every cup of coffee purchased, every room booked, and every museum visited is a vote of confidence in Ukraine's prospects. We become partners in the bright day after tomorrow.



Natural beauty in Ukraine Courtesy Ukraine Tourism Board

Beyond the economic impact, there's a profound moral dimension. When travelers walk the cobble streets, when they visit small towns striving to reconstruct, they send a powerful message: **The world has not forgotten. Ukraine is a living testament to resilience. The people have toted heavy challenges, yet their spirit remains unbroken. To travel to Ukraine is to witness this resilience firsthand.** It's in the music played on street corners, in the art painted on war-scarred walls, and in the welcoming arms extended to American visitors. Ukraine's apologue is one of survival, creativity, and an unyielding will to thrive.

This is an opportunity to witness the cultural treasures of Ukraine not as static relics, but as symbols of a living, breathing culture. Many of Ukraine's landmarks have gained new significance as emblems of unity and identity.

The impact of tourism extends far beyond any pen-knife borders. Travelers become ambassadors, sharing perspectives that foster understanding and empathy. **By visiting Ukraine, we help counter the narratives of destruction and despair with ones of grace, strength, and promise. We step into and stand up for the things that make us human.**

There are moments when travel becomes more than a leisure pursuit; it becomes an act of connection and contribution. Visiting Ukraine now is one such moment. This is a country whose people are striving to preserve their unique customs and traditions, rebuild their lives, and look to tomorrow with courage and determination. And as travelers, we can bear witness and play a small but meaningful role in their journey. A visit here is a masterclass in character and affirmation.

Of course, there are risks. War casts a long shadow, and safety concerns are valid. But life itself is a risk. And sometimes, the greatest adventures lie in the unexpected, in stepping outside the comfort zone, in embracing the unknown. This isn't disaster tourism – it's conscious travel at its most vital, where our presence signals to Ukrainians that their story matters to us and the world. Quite possibly, this could be the most important place we choose to visit right now.

We will have a 12-day tour through Western Ukraine, largely untouched in the Interregnum, **So, join me and other extraordinary travelers on a trip that not only creates authentic memories, but adds to the legacy of a nation determined to endure and flourish.**

Click gold box below for details and itinerary.

**Click for Invitation
Photos & Details**

**The Best of
Western Ukraine**

May 15-27, 2025

The Best 2025 Adventures!

The new year is exciting and blank... beckoning you (and me) to step out of our same "life as usual" routines -- and into the unknown!

There are times when we may hold back -- yet the times that I remember as the "best," are the ones when I jumped into action. Here are some exciting options for you Extraordinary Travelers who are Born to Explore!

Explore Bhutan - March 28 - April 9, 2025 - Invitation
Co-led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday
Expedition Designed by Jack Wheeler
for Extraordinary Travelers



Click for Details

**Bhutan: Land of the
Thunder Dragon**

March 28 - April 9, 2025

Only 2 spaces left!

Explore Mongolia - June 16-27, 2025 - Invitation

Co-led by Richard Bangs & Laura Hubber

Expedition Designed by Jack Wheeler

Especially for Extraordinary Travelers



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

Overland you need 4 to 6 weeks. Mongolia is enormous – 2½ times the size of Texas. Outside of the capital of Ulaan Bataar and a few towns, the population density is 3 people per square mile, mostly nomads.

This is your dream of Exploring Mongolia come true. How can we do it in just 11 days? By private charter plane to see remote wonders, land cruisers, even camel-back over sand dunes of the Gobi.

That emptiness is of extraordinary beauty and diversity, while the people you meet are welcoming and hospitable. We will learn about their lives and customs; how they herd, hunt, and ride camels over the dunes.

Explore Mongolia with Richard Bangs & Laura Hubber June 16-27, 2025

Limited Space on planes - Registration Open & Filling Now

Click for Details
EXPLORE MONGOLIA
June 16 - 27, 2025



These gers (yurts) of the local Mongols, we stay in some fancier ones...





Co-Led by Richard Bangs, Laura Hubber

This is only a tiny glimpse of what you'll see and do.

Ever ridden a bactrian camel? Here's your chance!

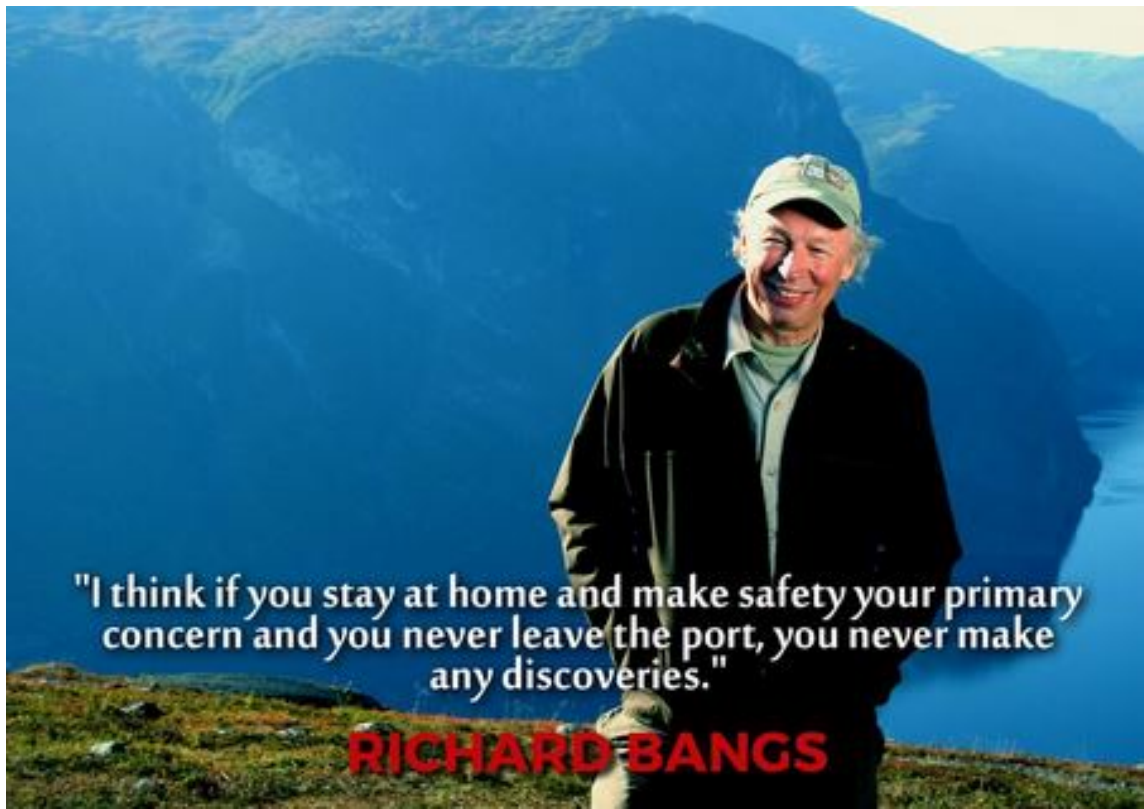


Click for Details

EXPLORE MONGOLIA

June 16 - 27, 2025

Limited Space Available



Experience Portugal - May 2-11, 2025

Co-led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday

Calling Extraordinary Travelers!

This is a wonderful exploration of the beauty, charm, and history of Portugal with a small group. 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 the most westerly point of continental Europe.



Cabo da Roca, above photo by Jack Wheeler

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 most Westerly point of land Cabo da Roca, the Silver Coast, and ultimately visit Porto, the second largest city and home of port. You will enjoy full days yet with a relaxing pace to experience the energy of this beautiful country.



Quinta da Regaleira, above photo by Jack Wheeler

After returning from the North, we complete our journey in beautiful Cascais. All along the way you will be guided by Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday who have resided in Portugal for over a decade and are delighted to share it with you.



[Click for Details & Itinerary](#)

Portugal Exploration

May 2 -11, 2025

Extraordinary Traveler - Brenda E. Smith



Brenda E. Smith had been a dedicated traveler since her youth. Spellbound by wanderlust after working as a whitewater river guide, Brenda has lived, worked, or traveled in over forty countries. While overseas, Brenda pursued adventures on less-traveled roads through remote villages, collecting a raft of stories about her exploits.

She is the author of “Becoming Fearless: Finding Courage in the African Wilderness” and her newly released book, “Becoming Amazed: Discovering the World with Eyes Wide Open.”

In her first book, *Becoming Fearless*, she explored how personal fear of the unknown had prevented her from seizing opportunities for personal growth and discovery; the weight of that realization was profound. "Nothing in life is without some risk, but with a bit of knowledge and preparation, risk can be managed. So, I set off on a lifelong journey to discover as much of our world as I could, knowing that no one lives forever."



Brenda in Trafalgar Square Prior to her first Adventure Abroad, photo by Richard Bangs

Now retired, she lives in Belfast, Maine, documenting cherished memories of her escapades in memoirs, essays and poems, often pounding the keyboard into the wee hours of the morning. When the ocean calls, she can be found rowing a dory in Belfast Harbor.

Extraordinary Traveler Interview: Brenda E. Smith

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

BES: Magical worlds came alive in my imagination as a young child, when Mom read bedtime stories to me. My favorite book followed the adventures of an eccentric young girl named Pippi Longstocking, an orphaned nine-year-old who lived on her own in a ramshackle house with a horse, monkey and a trunk of gold coins. Pippi *never* did anything the “normal” way. She didn’t climb up trees, she climbed inside them. Pippi could turn any activity into an adventure. I adored Pippi and dreamed of going on hair-raising pursuits with her.

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

BES: It’s impossible to describe just one extraordinary moment during my decades of travel. Here are a few of my most memorable experiences:

- Floating within 20 feet of a magnificent wild lioness, her golden fur gleaming as she basked in the sun on the Tanzanian river bank. Her composure remained regal; her expression serene and unyielding.
- Spending three days with members of the Ethiopian Karo tribe who had never encountered white people. Performing for us, they sang and danced around shimmering flames of a campfire. They also shared raw wild honey we watched them harvest from a hive in the tree canopy high above our tents.
- Watching in disbelief as a boy from the Mursi tribe played hauntingly beautiful music on one of my hollow aluminum poles.
- Journeying across the Bolivian high desert plains (12,500 ft) to the vast Salar de Uyuni, the largest salt crusted lake in the world, whose brine beneath contained the richest known untapped source of lithium. In the middle of the *salar*, the flat scene ahead of us consisted only of the blue sky above and the white salt below. It felt like I’d stepped into a two-dimensional world.
- Fishing for piranha in the Amazon rain forest that we pan fried that night for supper. A swift, unexpected move that tipped the canoe could have reversed the situation!

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

BES: I am so curious about our world. I like to say, “Put a blindfold on me, put me on a plane to an unknown destination. I’ll be delighted to explore my new surroundings wherever I land.” If one of my less daring friends reminds me that “Curiosity killed the cat,” I’m quick to respond, “Yes, but remember, satisfaction brought her back!”

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?

BES: An extraordinary traveler I very much admire is Richard Bangs. I've known him, worked with him, and he was the one who decided I needed to go on a real adventure. He immersed me in wanderlust, and by example showed me how to venture fearlessly into the world.

Another extraordinary traveler I admire is Lhakpa Sherpa and she holds the record for the most Everest summits by a woman. She has reached the summit 10 times, but until Netflix made a recent documentary of her life, hardly anyone whose house in Connecticut she cleaned or shoppers where she worked at Whole Foods would have guessed her superhuman, odds-defying conquests of the world's highest mountain. Born to yak farmers in rural Nepal, she was denied an education and work as a sherpa because of her gender. In 2000, Nepal's Prime Minister's daughter gave her permission to fund the first all-female Everest expedition. *Mountain Queen: The Summits of Lhakpa Sherpa*, chronicles her astounding achievements. She climbs, not for fame or money, but to show that women can accomplish their dreams and to inspire other women, including her daughters, to climb mountains.

Q: What characteristics do you like to find in your travel companions?

BES: As a young woman, I'd never dream of going anywhere alone, but now I don't mind traveling solo, because I have the freedom to spontaneously change plans when I discover a place or native celebration I didn't know existed. I like finding a native of the country I'm visiting to travel with, because I get to see their country as they do. They know where to find the best local restaurants and cafes for authentic foods. They can direct you to clean, cozy, affordable lodging, and show you the best hidden gem attractions most tourists never see.

The kind of people I most enjoy traveling with know how to pack light but smart, are filled with curiosity, and are grounded by common sense. They must be able to adapt to changes in plans and always be aware of what is happening around them. Most of all they must want to have fun!

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

BES: The most important thing I learned from my travels and living abroad is that all human beings aspire to the same common ideals. All humans strive for enough food and water to nourish their bodies, adequate shelter from nature's fury, and good health for themselves and their families. Ideally, they want to live

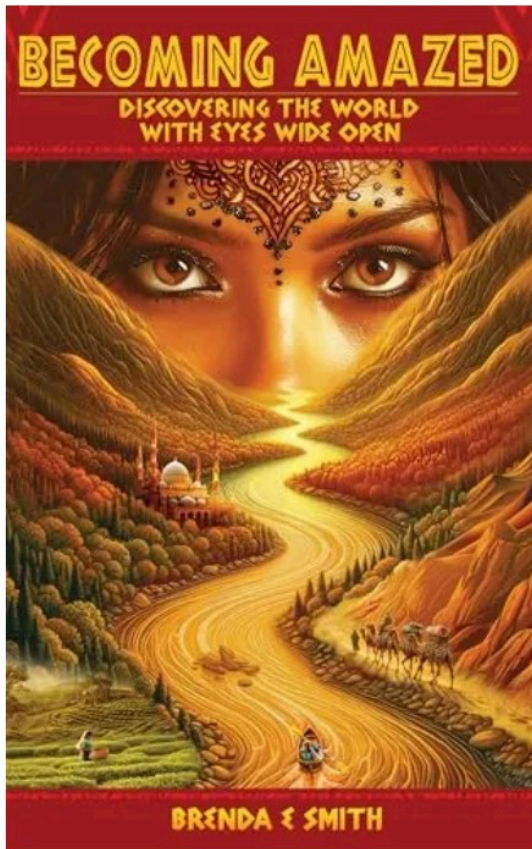
in peace and create supportive communities where neighbor helps neighbor. All living beings share this planet and we need to share its resources to survive.



Brenda on Mt.Kilimanjaro, 1981 Photo by a fellow traveler

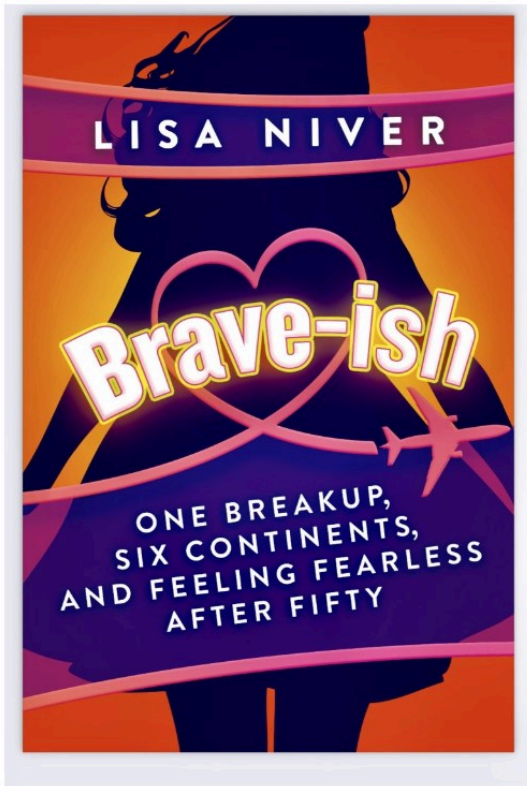
BES: When I debated becoming a river guide 45 years ago, my boss at OARS, Inc., George Wendt, told me “We save what we love and we love what we know. Our job is to show people how truly special these rivers are, so they will engage with us to preserve them forever. His wisdom convinced me to give up a job in the business world, which over a lifetime could have made me wealthy. I left that job behind to begin a quest for a different type of wealth: knowledge of the world in its entirety. I’ve never regretted that decision.

Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



**Becoming Amazed:
Discovering the World With
Eyes wide Open
by Brenda E. Smith**

What reviewers say: "Brenda's stories transported me to places I've never been. She has the ability to make me feel as if I am with her on her adventures. Even her more serious stories are uplifting because Brenda finds a way to make the best of difficult and - at times- heartbreaking situations. The places she has been to and the people she has met (and loved!) are amazing. I was amazed. You will be too!"



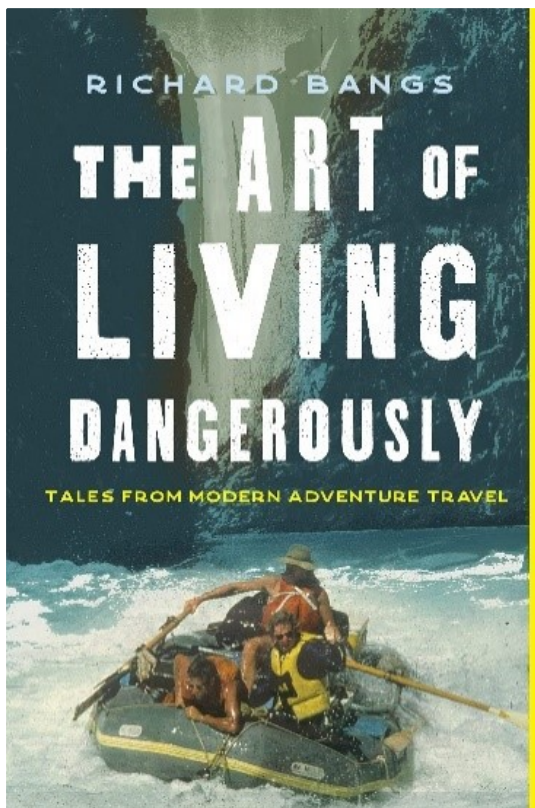
Bravish

by Lisa Niver

Lisa's charming and heartfelt adventures will captivate and inspire.

What reviewers say:

“This was an inspirational memoir of a woman's journey from a very low place in her life to finding her own inner strength and going on the most amazing adventures. It is easy to lose our way and as she points out is never too late to re-center ourselves. I really admire her strength, determination and grit. It also shows that even the strongest have self crippling doubt that can prevent us from living our best lives.” *Liz Taylor*



The Art of Living Dangerously

by Richard Bangs

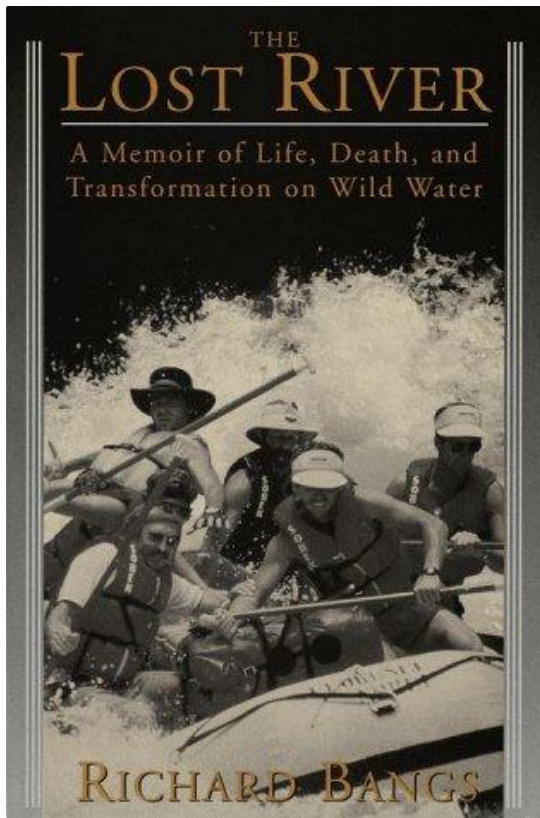
Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

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](#)



**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)



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>

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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