

## ***EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch***

### ***ISSUE #9 - September 2024***

- The Revolutionary Act of Adventure Travel
- With the Khampas in Tibet & the Dalai Lama in Washington D.C.
- Himalaya Helicopter Expedition - Oct 26 - Nov 2, 2024
- Explore Bhutan - The Land of the Thunder Dragon - Mar 28 - Apr 9
- Extraordinary Traveler Profile - Peter Greenberg
- CREST's 7th Annual World Tourism Day Forum on Justice & Peace

## **The Revolutionary Act of Adventure Travel**

By Richard Bangs

When, with the help of good friend Jack Wheeler, I organized and co-led an adventure travel trip to North Korea, I was cannonaded with protest emails, some with physical threats, arguing that such a tour was only putting hard currency into the pockets of a corrupt and murderous regime.

I countered that travel to places, however governmentally vile, allows the opportunity to connect with people who, like us, carry misconceptions about “the other,” and is a chance to dispel mistaken beliefs and discover commonalities, our shared humanity, and the universal love of family and life. Stepping into such a realm may not turn a régime or system to a friendlier state, but it just may put a chink in the wall, and with enough, the wall may come down.

**In the timeless dance of exploration and the human spirit, adventure travel can be an alchemical force, capable of transforming not just the traveler, but those visited.** It can help rebuild the bricks of a broken society. As I have trekked across forbidden places, it has become evident that adventure travel is far more than an indulgence in thrill or pursuit of adrenaline. It is a potent agent for international justice and peace, forging connections that transcend borders and foster a deep understanding that can pave the way for a more harmonious world.



Photo: Richard Bangs leading a group of pioneering Americans through Iran.

**At the heart of adventure travel lies the profound power of human connection.** When we step beyond the confines of familiar surroundings and immerse ourselves in the lives of others, we break down the railings of ignorance and prejudice. We discover shared joys, common challenges, and the universal aspirations that bind us all. In remote villages and bustling cities alike, I have witnessed the cathartic power of these connections. **A smile exchanged, a meal shared, a story told—these simple acts of human kindness bridge the chasms of cultural differences and lay the groundwork for mutual respect and understanding.**

**Empathy is the cornerstone of international justice and peace, and adventure travel is a profound catalyst for cultivating this essential human quality.** Breaking bread with a Bedouin family in Jordan or sharing a cramped bus ride through the Andes does more to foster compassion and understanding than any politician's speech or academic treatise ever could. By leaning into the lives of others, we begin to see the world through their eyes. We understand their struggles and celebrate their triumphs as our own. Through the lens of adventure, we become not just spectators of the human condition, but active participants in the quest for a more just and peaceful world.

**Adventure travel also serves as a powerful antidote to the stereotypes and misconceptions that often fuel conflict and division.** I've witnessed this in

Myanmar, Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua, Yemen, Sudan and so many other misjudged homelands. When we venture into the unknown, we challenge the broad brushstrokes that have been rendered about distant lands and their people. We see up close the complexity and richness of cultures that are often reduced to caricatures in media and popular discourse. This firsthand experience dismantles the monolithic images of "the other" and replaces them with nuanced, multifaceted understandings. **In this way, adventure travel becomes a revolutionary act, challenging the status quo and fostering a more inclusive and accurate global narrative.**



Photo: Richard leading a group of Americans on the Lebanese Trail

**A critical aspect of adventure travel is its potential to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable practices.** Costa Rica is the poster child. It was on a path to slay more forests for cattle and banana plantations when my friend Michael Kaye built the first ecolodge in the 70s. Its success was duplicated and then replicated to the point of undeniability of the powerful economic benefits, and the country pivoted to become a synecdoche for countries promoting mindful tourism.

I once hosted a PBS series called Adventures with Purpose. As we traveled the world we witnessed over and over the fragility of our planet and the urgent need to protect its natural wonders. By engaging with local communities and learning from their own sustainable practices, we were able to share sectarian environmental solutions. And we conveyed that the health of our planet is



inextricably linked to the well-being of its inhabitants. **Adventure travel inspires both travelers and hosts to a commitment to conservation and sustainability, essential pillars for achieving long-term planet-wise peace and justice.** It also provides economic opportunities that can lift people out of poverty while preserving traditional ways of life. The Assam warrior I met who once hunted rhinos now guides safaris, becoming a steward of the very ecosystem he once exploited.

**In a world increasingly defined by division and discord, adventure travel fosters a sense of cross-meridian solidarity.** It reminds us of our shared humanity and the interconnectedness of our destinies. When we climb mountains, traverse deserts, or run wild rivers, we do so alongside fellow travelers from diverse backgrounds, united by a common spirit of exploration. I once rafted the Chatkal River in Kyrgyzstan, then a part of the Soviet Union, with a team of Russian rafters, and by the end we were friends for life. **These shared experiences create ties that transcend nationalities and ideologies, fostering a sense of global citizenship. This collective spirit is a powerful force for advocating for international justice, as it mobilizes individuals to work together towards common goals and challenges.**



Photo: Richard Bangs with the Sami people in Norway

Finally, adventure travel inspires action and advocacy. **The bonds made and discoveries revealed during journeys can ignite a passion for making a difference. We return from our travels not just with souvenirs, but with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to effecting positive change.** Whether it is supporting local communities, advocating for human rights, or championing environmental causes, adventure travelers often become vocal advocates for justice and peace. Their stories and experiences serve as



powerful testimonies, inspiring others to join in the collective effort to build a better world.

**In the end, adventure travel is a profound agent for international justice and peace. It fosters human connection, cultivates empathy, challenges stereotypes, promotes environmental stewardship, builds solidarity, and inspires action.** As we make passage through the world's cornucopia of landscapes and cultures, we become not just travelers, but ambassadors of just and peaceful latitudes; we help dismantle the dams and build new bridges.



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**The fusion of adventure with connection and compassion promotes sustainable and responsible travel. This important combination is found in high-end** adventure operators, like [MT Sobek](#) and [Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions](#), both are committed to preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the destinations they explore. By investing in local communities, supporting conservation efforts, and adhering to eco-friendly practices, they ensure that impact on the environment is minimal and positive. This conscious approach to travel fosters a deeper connection with the places and people encountered along the way, enriching the overall experience.

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## **With the Khampas in Tibet & the Dalai Lama in Washington D.C.**

By Jack Wheeler



Photo: Jack Wheeler with Khampas in Tibet, 1987

**October 9, 2003. The Dalai Lama was in Washington and on this day, India's Ambassador to the US hosted a luncheon for him at his Residence.**

A Congressman friend of mine, Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) was invited as Chairman of the Asia Subcommittee and he invited me as I had traveled so much in Tibet. During the luncheon, I asked Dana if I could tell His Holiness a story. Here it is.

“Your Holiness, years ago in 1987, I led an overland expedition across the Chang Tang Plateau of Tibet. When we began crossing Kham I began looking for Khampas.”

I had his immediate attention. The Khampas are the warrior nomads of Tibet, wild and unrestrained. The Chinese were terrified of them.

“I saw five riders on horseback high on a ridge. I told our Chinese driver to stop the jeep, and told my friends with me that I would be right back. The Chinese driver saw the Khampas and began screaming, ‘No, no, no! You must not go to them, they will kill you, stop!!’ I told to calm down, and began walking up to the riders who had stopped. They stared at me suspiciously when I reached them; they were heavily armed with swords, knives, pistols and muskets.

I reached into my vest pocket and took out pictures of you, your Holiness, one for each of them. Instantly they jumped off their horses with smiles and laughter, pressing your picture to their foreheads, and pushing on my shoulders so we could sit down and have a cup of yak butter tea. I waved to my friends to come

up and join me. These Khampas did not know who I was, all they knew I was their friend who had given them a priceless treasure more valuable than gold.

When we were done, one of the Khampas took off his red silk topknot wound around his head and presented it to me. ‘Oh, very high honor from Khampas,’ the Dalai Lama commented. I replied, ‘the honor was mine, Your Holiness’.

The Ambassador asked where he was born. His answer, “very remote village in far northern Tibet.” He was startled when I interjected, “Yes, I know, I’ve been there – I even bought a *doonchen* (telescoping 15 foot-long Tibetan prayer horn) in your village.” “A *doonchen*?” he exclaimed. “You mean...?” and put his hands to his lips to make this really loud WHOOOH like the horn makes. I nodded and did the same, WHOOOH. We belly laughed, while all the diplomats and Congressmen did not know what was going on. Then he wrapped his hands around mine and I felt an electric energy run through my body. It was his blessing. I will treasure it all my life.

**I tell this story as an example of how you can get along and make friends with most anyone on our planet, from the wildest of Tibetan nomads to one of the most revered human beings on earth, if you reach out and touch them in the right way.**



Photo: Jack Wheeler with the Dalai Lama in 2003, Washington D.C.



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## **Extraordinary Travelers: Soar in the Himalayas!**

### **Oct 26-Nov 2, 2024**



**This year the Himalaya Helicopter is Oct 26 to Nov 2, 2024.** It is always an experience of a lifetime. We ran two helicopter expeditions in the Nepal Himalayas, in 2023 led by **Richard Bangs, Jack Wheeler, and Eddy Downpatrick.**

The objective is to see all 8 of the highest mountains in the Himalayas of Nepal. It is simply extraordinary to be so close to some of the highest mountains on the planet. **More than life-memorable, it is deeply moving to be so close to the natural beauty of these majestic Himalayan Mountains.** Below Manaslu, and then, Makalu, both in the 8 highest Nepal peaks that we plan to see.



**We're often asked, who goes on this expedition?** Since 2016, we've taken people of all ages and backgrounds in normal good health. There is no hiking or trekking. We consistently get rave reviews from participants.

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











**Click for Details**

## **Himalaya Helicopter Expedition**

**Oct 26 - Nov 2, 2024**

This has been a favorite expedition of participants since 2016. We meet and finish in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Keep in mind, October is the best and only time of the year for this adventure.

**There are a few spaces left -- so reach out today!**

Click gold box above or contact: [holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com](mailto:holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com)

**The time for a Great Adventure is NOW!**



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# Land of the Thunder Dragon

March 28-April 9, 2025

by Jack Wheeler



The photo above is the **Tiger's Nest, the Taktsang Monastery in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan**. It is a country as close to the Shangri-La of James Hilton's 1933 classic "Lost Horizon" as you'll find on earth today.

Hidden between Tibet and the crest of the Himalayas to the steamy jungles of India, Bhutan is known as the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Independent for centuries and never colonized, Bhutan is a magic place that is spectacularly unique. **Explore Bhutan with us March 28 - April 9, 2025.**





**Experiencing Bhutan is a true adventure. Quite frankly, Bhutan is as fabulously exotic as our world gets.** At the same time, no other country is as serenely peaceful as Bhutan, no people more contented and cheerful as the Bhutanese, no land more welcoming and hospitable.

Bhutan's culture is a unique mix of the ancient Himalayan animism called Bön and Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. **The Bhutanese are renowned for being among the happiest people on our planet.** They love to laugh, sing, dance, and play – and you'll be invited to join them. Bhutanese happiness is infectious. One very good reason we Extraordinary Travelers will have a happy time of our lives on our Bhutan adventure.



In addition to Taktsang, we'll visit Bhutan's castle temples called *Dzongs* and witness the lama monk ceremonies.



The Dzongs hold spectacular costumed music and dance festivals called *tsechu*. We'll attend two of these famous Tsechus.





We'll dine and luxuriate well. We'll float/raft down beautiful rivers, and walk through gorgeous countryside.



In remotest eastern Bhutan, we'll meet and stay with the semi-nomadic **Brokpa people**, yak herders making their living bartering for what they need with yak milk, yak cheese, and woven yak wool.

**You may have never lived with a people so basic as the Brokpa. But you will be in touch with a basic humanity as never before.** If you have never been with nomadic people you will certainly find it to be a interesting and profound experience, and if you have, you know how unique this can be.



**A Wheeler-Windsor Expedition**

**Co-Led by Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday**

This is only a tiny glimpse of what you'll see and do – for so much more



with a full itinerary and *lots* more pictures, click on the gold box:

**Click for Details**  
**BHUTAN EXPEDITION**  
**Land of the Thunder Dragon**  
**March 28 - April 9, 2025**

We invite you to experience the enchantment of Bhutan as only Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions can provide. Come with us and from now on you will always have Bhutan in your hearts, the memories of this extraordinary Happy Land of the Thunder Dragon will never fade.



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### ***Extraordinary Traveler - Peter Greenberg***

Peter Greenberg is a multiple Emmy Award-winning investigative reporter and producer, Peter Greenberg is America's most recognized, honored and respected front-line travel news journalist. He is the Travel Editor for CBS News, appearing on CBS Mornings, CBS Evening News, and Sunday Morning, among other broadcast platforms.

Greenberg produces and co-hosts an ongoing long-running series of acclaimed global public television specials on PBS, Amazon and Apple tv, "The Royal Tour," featuring personal, one-on-one journeys through countries with their heads of state. Including the King of Jordan, Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Israel and Presidents of Mexico and Peru, Greenberg's newest special features the President of Tanzania.

On radio, he hosts the nationally syndicated CBS News “Eye on Travel,” broadcast each week from a different remote location worldwide (including this week from Marbella), and is heard on hundreds of CBS radio stations across the U.S. Travel Weekly named him one of the most influential people in travel, along with Bill Marriott and Richard Branson. And he was inducted into the U.S. Travel Association’s Hall of Leaders for his contributions to the travel industry.



### **Extraordinary Traveler Profile**

**Peter Greenberg**

*August 2024*

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

**Peter:** It was the very first flight I remember (not my very first flight). I was six years old. My mother dressed me up and -- I remember it distinctly -- I never kept my seat belt on, and wandered up to the cockpit, where I proceeded to ask the pilots all sorts of questions. Before I knew it, the flight attendant had gently strapped me into the jump seat and I stayed up there the entire flight, including the landing. I was hooked.

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

**Peter:** I can't just give you one. It ranges from diving the rock islands of Micronesia to getting a security clearance to ride on an attack nuclear submarine on a still classified mission; traveling by longboat to the Lau Archipelago in Fiji; from exploring and camping the Wadi Rum with the King of Jordan; to climbing the Southern Alps of



New Zealand. rafting the Nile in Uganda; skygazing and interpreting dreams with the Aboriginals in Australia; exploring still uncharted islands in the Antarctic...and I'm just getting started.

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

**Peter:** I've had a number. In Iraq war 1, I flew in on the first Kuwait Airlines flight to Baghdad, and ended up on the road of death. My car then got stuck in an unseen pool of hot oil (from the burning rigs in the desert), and thankfully the Red Adair firefighters quickly hooked up a large earthmover to my car and yanked me out, just before everything exploded. In the middle of the war in the Sudan, I was able to escape Khartoum within five minutes of the airport being shot by the army, which apparently was looking...for me. And I've had more than a few emergency landings. But it did NOT motivate a re-assessment or a change in behavior, because I was not in control of any of those close calls, and the only available choice after the fact would have been to make a decision never to return. But I have always returned.

**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?**

**Peter:** It would be Mark Twain. Most people know him as an author of legendary American fiction, but I highly recommend a lesser-known work: *The Innocents Abroad*, about his trip around the world and his amazing adventures, experiences, and observations. The other traveler: Somerset Maugham. I also recommend one of his books that most people don't know, *A Writers Notebook*. He just kept a notebook and wrote down his thoughts on every destination -- and person - he met during his travels. Brilliant.

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

**Peter:** Never to take a "No" from someone who is not empowered to give me a "Yes" in the first place.

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

**Peter:** There's just one: the ability to adjust, to adjust quickly, intelligently and with sensitivity. The worst five letter word: "plans." A great traveler is one who looks at plans as only a point of departure, not a goal.

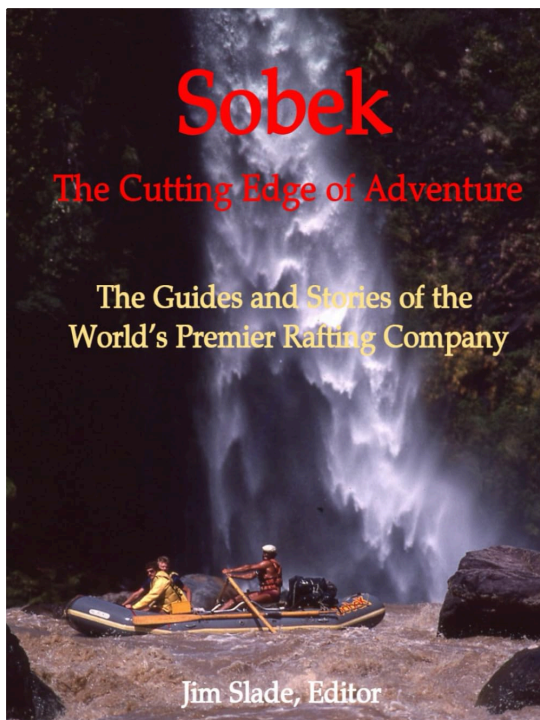
**Q. What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?**

**Peter:** There's one goal -- a dream -- that I've had for a while, but don't think I can attain. Sitting right seat or back seat for a night carrier landing. But I have no regrets

if I don't get to do that. There are roughly 196 countries in the world. I've been lucky enough to have been to 152 of them. That leaves 44. That's actually 151 more countries than most Americans have ever seen (embarrassingly, only 44 per cent of Americans even own a passport!). But I hope people will remember that this country count doesn't represent a race. It's not about ticking off boxes. There are no prizes. I may never get to all the countries, and if my life ended tomorrow, I have enough memories to fuel my dreams for three lifetimes.

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## Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf

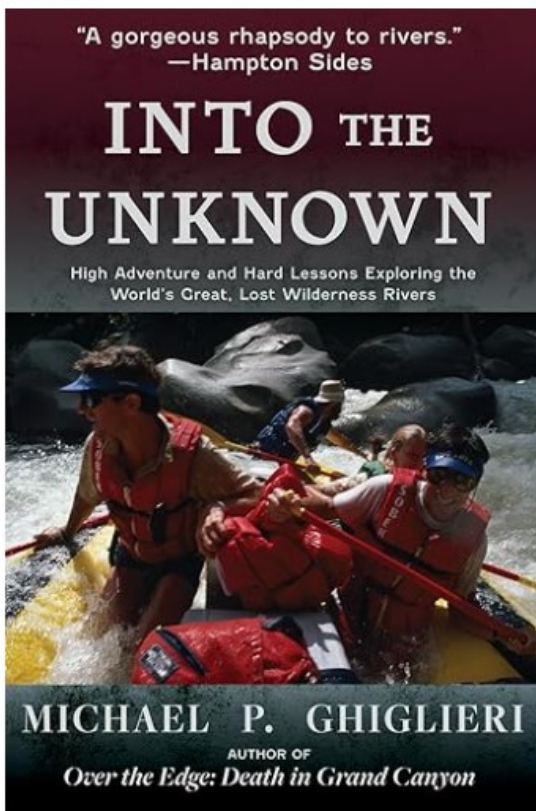


### **Sobek: The Cutting Edge of Adventure**

**Jim Slade, Editor**

More than a century after Major Powell completed the first descent of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, a great many of the world's rivers had still never been run. The guides of Sobek set out to change that and made more than 100 first descents of rivers around the world, many of which became classic, including the Omo (Ethiopia), Tatshenshini/Alsek (Canada/Alaska), Watut (Papua New Guinea), Bio Bio (Chile), Coruh (Turkey), and Zambezi (Zambia/Zimbabwe). Meet the guides and hear their stories from the cutting edge of adventure. Forward by Richard Bangs.

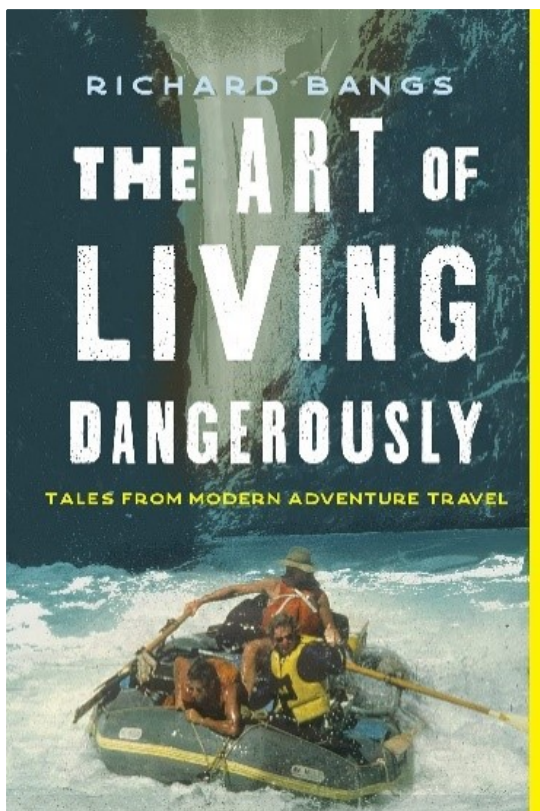




## Into The Unknown

by Michael P. Ghiglieri

Veteran wilderness guide Michael P. Ghiglieri takes you into the unknown-- among white-water rapids, crocodiles, hippos, gorillas, lions, and impossible waterfalls. His riveting memoir not only serves up true high adventure, it also presents the ecology, natural history, conservation (or the lack of it), and exploration history of nine far-flung wilderness regions across the globe. Order now!



## 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](#)

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# Don't Miss the Center for Responsible Travel's (CREST's) 7th Annual World Tourism Day Forum on Tourism, Justice, and Peace



JOIN US

## World Tourism Day Forum

*Tourism, Justice, and Peace: Bridging Barriers  
and Raising the Voices of the Unheard*

September 24-25, 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia

If you're passionate about bold conversations in travel, I cannot recommend this conference enough. Join us at CREST's 7th annual [World Tourism Day Forum in Atlanta from September 24-25!](#)

This year's theme, *Tourism, Justice, and Peace: Bridging Barriers and Amplifying the Voices of the Unheard*, promises to push the boundaries of traditional sustainable tourism conferences. With a global scope—last year's virtual event attracted attendees from 74 countries—this forum is designed to create tangible local impact, elevate diverse voices, and position Atlanta as a key hub for transformative discussions on tourism's intersections with justice, civil rights, and sustainability.

We are thrilled to feature an incredible lineup of [speakers](#), including renowned peacemaker Aziz Abu Sarah, Sasha Vosk from Rebuild Ukraine Travel, Jill Savitt of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the world-famous Gullah Geechee Ring Shouters. These and many other thought leaders will inspire, challenge, and guide us as we explore the vital role tourism can play in promoting justice and peace.

CREST anticipates welcoming 200 industry pioneers, government officials, academics, and civil society leaders, ensuring a rich cross-sector collaboration. The forum will offer interactive workshops, an ideas exchange and poster session with global researchers, dynamic panels, and ample networking opportunities. This is your chance to engage with leading changemakers and co-create innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges facing the tourism sector today.

Don't miss this opportunity to be part of a bold and engaging event that will shape the future of tourism!

[Secure your spot today by purchasing tickets](#) here and join us in Atlanta for a conference that promises not just to discuss change, but drive it.

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## Coming Up in 2025...

**Watch this space!** Richard is putting together adventures to Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and perhaps Tristan da Cunha (the most remote populated island on the planet) for 2025. Contact [NicoleRusso@mtsobek.com](mailto:NicoleRusso@mtsobek.com) to be on The List.





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**Yes, Let's Go There!**



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



## Extraordinary Travelers Club



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](mailto:richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com)

Share with us your Extraordinary Travel experiences!

## Connect with Richard Bangs



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## Special Thanks To Our Fellow Travel Pioneers...



### Extraordinary Travelers Club

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