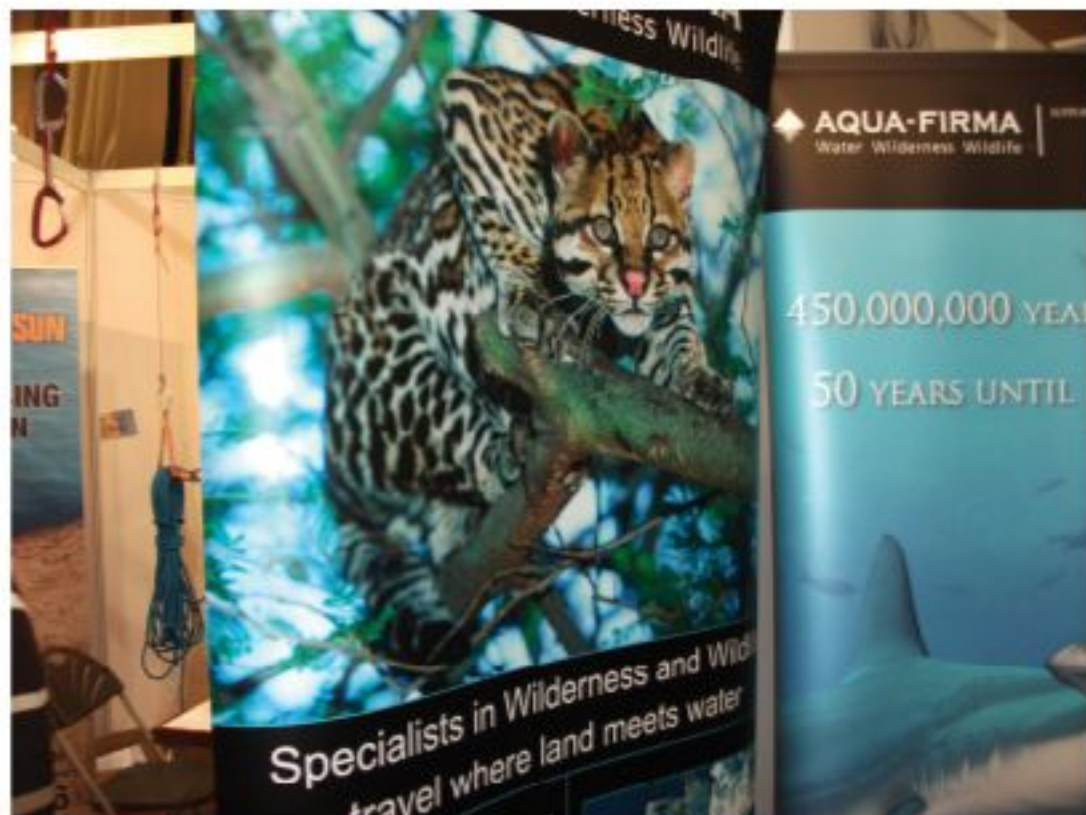


Beyond the Beach: Adventure Travel Show Helps Discover Journey's Of A Lifetime

By Karen Dabrowska



Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Armenia were among the destinations in the Muslim world showcased at this year's Adventure Travel Show. Noted by their absence were the Gulf States, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Jordan and Syria which usually promote desert adventures and safaris.

Adventure Travel Live held in London at the end of January, was the one stop shop for anyone planning an off-the-beaten-track travel adventure. The show was packed with inspiration and travel advice helpful to uncovering the journey of a lifetime, from small group adventures, wildlife encounters, trekking, family adventures, career breaks, safaris, overland expeditions, volunteering and gap years.

The winning images from the 2009 Travel Photographer of the year competition were displayed in a stunning exhibition of truly

inspirational travel photography. Forget the Taliban, wars and tales of woe and horror. It is possible to visit Afghanistan and Pakistan as Hinterland Travel, Travel Pak, Karakorum Jeep Treks and Untamed Borders proved.

Pakistan is the single place on the planet with the highest concentration of mountains over 7000, the longest glaciers outside of the polar regions with seven over 40km long. There is also an ancient culture surrounded by a vibrant mix of customs, cuisine and colour.





TravelPak usually starts its tour of Pakistan at the historical, cultural and gastronomical heart of the country, Lahore with the fascinating architecture left behind by the Mughal emperors. The tour then heads north through the plains and an over night stop at a traditional village. A day is spent in Islamabad and from here the scenery changes as the spectacular mountains of the north area approached.

Karakourm Jeep Treks specializes in trips to the Northern Areas of Pakistan through the Karakorum, Himalayas and Hindukush - the three highest mountain ranges in

the world. In addition to jeep treks, it offers several 'bolt-on' expeditions; the 'K2 Trek', for example, includes a complete jeep tour of North Pakistan followed by an unforgettable walk across the Baltaro glacier, which ranks as amongst the highest peaks in the world, including K2 (second only to Everest). There is also a China Tour to Kashgar after crossing one of the highest international borders in the world at 16,000 feet. The trip means that travellers see the Pamirs and its central Asian people.

Veteran overland tour operator Geoff Hann, who led the first tourists into Iraq after the fall of

Saddam's regime, focuses his Pakistan adventure on the Kalash Spring Festival. The Kalash Valleys of Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir lie approximately twenty-two miles south of Chitral.

The spring festival takes place in the middle of May and lasts for four days. It honours the fairies and also safeguards the goats and shepherds before they go to the pastures.

Before the festival the women and girls gather from all over the valley and decorate their houses. Inside

the houses local wine and milk products are shared. The women then sprinkle milk on the goddess Jestak, the protector of their children and home. The festival begins at Rumbur where the Shaman and tribal chiefs lead a procession to the Malosh altar, high above Grum and sacrifice goats to the Gods.

On Hinterland's tour travelers spend four nights in Rumbur Valley. Rumbur is rugged and majestic; the mountain ridges are high and the river is wild. With its sparkling streams, shady

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meadows, groves of mulberry, apricot and walnut trees and yellow and green fields it is a beautiful, picturesque area. Only seldom does the sound of jeeps destroy the peaceful silence of the valley. At the top end of the valley there is a Nuristani village.

Following the visit to the festivals, the tour proceeds on to Mastuj and beyond, exploring mountain forts, redolent of early British colonial history, sleepy Hunza villages and towns, and touches the evocative

Karakorum Highway before returning to Islamabad.

Hinterland Travel runs a central and North Afghanistan tour which has been awarded a place in the National Geographic 50 tours of a lifetime. There is also an Uzbekistan and Lapis Mines of Afghanistan tour.

Untamed Borders specializes in travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its tours coincide with a festival an

event or a time of the year when the region is at its best. Attractions include a three day long polo tournament on a 3800m high mountain pass in the Hindu Kush, a visit to Pakistan-Kashmir, hiking on glaciers in the Karakorum, and viewing the almost inaccessible minaret of Jam, the second highest free standing minaret in the world. Oasis Overland showcased trips to Egypt, Egypt and Jordan, Turkey and Syria Overland, a roof of Africa trip taking in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and an Istanbul

to Cairo adventure.

BOX

Top 10 adventures

1 Tiger tracking on elephants, Kanha National Park, India
«You'll never get so close to a tiger in the wild» - Bryn Thomas.

2 Skiing on Asahidake, Hokkaido, Japan
«Asahidake is the island's highest mountain and sends out a stream of smoke from its vents. Forget





what you know about powder skiing in Europe. Hokkaido enjoys eight metres of snow a year, and the powder is some of the most consistently excellent in the world.» - Perry Wilson.

3 Diving with hammerhead sharks in the Galapagos

«With basic scuba skills you can safely dive with these fabulous, iconic sharks - in the company of so many of them that you lose

count. Even if you're not a diver, you can still get up close and personal with them by snorkelling» - Paul Rose.

4 Encounter with mountain gorillas in Rwanda

«Nothing rivals a close-up with our closest relatives. It is at altitude, in a rainforest, with no paths. The trek can take five hours, all for an hour of personal space with your «prime mates». Worth it - massively,

emotionally - and it helps this poor, war-ravaged country.» - Paul Goldstein

5 = Inca Trail to Machu Picchu in Peru

«Popular though this three-day trek is, nothing can prepare you for the awesome first sight of the «lost» city of the Incas as you round the trail on the last day, seeing it perched high above the Urumaba with the mist swirling around it» - Bryn Thomas.

6 = Larapinta Trail in Australia's Northern Territory.

«Classic Outback country: dry, dramatic, lots of wildlife ... the «dry» component would normally make it unwalkable, until the establishment of regular water tanks made it one of Australia's best hikes.» - Tony Wheeler.

7 Trans-Siberian Railway, Russia.

«The greatest rail adventure of them all. I'd suggest the weekly Moscow-Mongolia-Beijing train rather than the less interesting





Moscow-Vladivostok. Its six nights and over 5,000 miles across Siberia, the Gobi Desert and through the Great Wall for as little as £410. You can even start your trip at St Pancras.» Mark Smith

8 Hot-air ballooning over the Serengeti of Tanzania.

«Even if there are no migrating herds, just to pass over the African savannah in silence is something you will never forget.» - Benedict Allen.

9 Hiking the Grand Tsingy Circuit, Madagascar

«Tsingy are grotesque pinnacles and spikes of limestone creating the world's most exotic rock garden. Rare succulents shelter in the gullies that visitors cross using boardwalks, ladders and bridges. An extraordinary experience on an extraordinary island.» - Hilary Bradt.

10 The wildlife of the Pantanal, Brazil

«Check out giant otters, caimans, jaguars, green iguanas and more.» - Tim Fryer.

