

In this edition

Volcano blows the lid off travel industry.....meet some wonderful people on one of two Sahara treks.....One man's summit.....is it too late for the Annapurna Circuit?and information on the latest treks.

Travel Industry Has To Re-think It's Policies - Maybe You Should Too?

Just when you thought that EU Regulations and booking with travel industry protection bodies (such as ABTA) gave you full protection against holiday calamities, a volcano blows it to pieces!

I don't think that I am alone when I say that all we want, as travellers, is to be protected in a reasonable manner within the laws provided, without any hassle. We even buy travel insurance to boost the protection.

One single incident (albeit unprecedented) and it has some elements of the travel industry squirming because it has to actually pay money out in accordance with the law. Well, that's the plan but they won't make it easy. Many will unfortunately have to go to court to get it. Even if it is the Small Claims Court, it's a hassle that travellers can do without.

To be fair, from reports, many companies and indeed airlines have acted in an exemplary manner to assist travellers during the airspace shut down. It is the small pocket of resistance that hits the headlines. Those people tend to be in more serious situations like the family stranded in Singapore on their way home from New Zealand with BA. Quoted as not being able to get a flight before the 11th May (it was 24th Apr), their projected hotel bill directly associated with the delay was in the region of £12,000. It wasn't clear if BA was assisting.

Interestingly, the very associations that advertise their 'security' when booking with a company protected by them appear to be wriggling (ATOL, ABTA and AiTO). Their apparent argument is that although their association operators must 'offer assistance', they may not actually have to pay the bill! It will, apparently, depend on the actual operators Terms and Conditions (T&C's) that you booked with. That sounds very much like passing the buck to me! If it depends on the Company's T&C's, what do we need these Associations for? It costs companies an awful lot of money to belong to one of these Associations and they proudly fly the flag(s) to show that they are protected by a reputable travel industry organisation designed to come to the rescue when things go wrong at a high level. If they are not paying bills to help you out in such circumstances, what exactly are they doing?

Travel insurance policies are not fairing too much better either. This would no doubt be viewed as a classic 'Act of God' (or similar wording) by most policies.

Time for a personal re-think. If you really think about it, a simple 'self risk assessment' would identify where you are most vulnerable financially when abroad. Most of the time, you will be covered by an airline if you are delayed or the flight is cancelled (see page 3). Lost, damaged or stolen kit is covered by most Home Contents insurance policies, which leaves very little else. A credit card with a half decent credit limit in your back pocket would be enough to cover most emergency circumstances. The thorn in our sides is the high cost of medical repatriation.

The travel industry Associations are now having to re-think their policies, which will undoubtedly involve re-wording them. The question is, will they expand them to absolve themselves of any form of responsibility covering this sort of thing again or will they make provision for your protection?

Interestingly, a proposal to add £1 to every flight ticket sold in the UK to accumulate a pot to cover such eventualities in the future was rejected by the UK Govt.

Mount Jopuno



Ready for another trekking peak?

Mt Jopuno lies on the Goecha La trekking route in Sikkim India. It is just 48m short of the 6000m mark!

This will have the feel of real expedition with the formation of a Base Camp. From here, acclimatisation treks to High Camp and to the Goecha La Pass will be made before the summit attempt.

The trip flies into Kolkata and from there travels up to the famous tea plantation town of Darjeeling by domestic flight and road.

Travel and Trek is launching this trip next year, departing 28 Mar 2011. Join us.

http://www.travelandtrek.com/india_treks_goecha.shtml

Everest for Softies

UK Led, Late Oct, Let's GO

Not quite sure about getting to Base Camp?
Need that extra confidence when out there?

Look no further. I will be leading this group up as far as Tengbouche (with excellent views of Everest), which is just before the serious altitude begins.

Outside dates are 28 Oct - 9 Nov 2010.

Call 01400 250770 for more information.

NEWS

It's a really busy autumn for Travel and Trek and it's still not too late to join one of the treks.

New Everest for Softies Trek (28 Oct).....As I am in Nepal for the last 2 weeks of Oct, an Everest for Softies trek has manifested itself on the back end of that so I will be leading that too. It departs UK 28th Oct and returns 9th Nov (although the departure and return dates have a little flexibility); places are still available. This is perfect for those perhaps not wishing to go all of the way to Base Camp (colder and more basic conditions) or perhaps not so confident of their fitness. I will lead this trek at a nice easy pace and ensure that you are well taken care of throughout your time there. Don't delay though, good international flight connections are getting scarce.

If those dates are not suitable, try the 25th Sep departure, there are people on that too.

Updated Ladakh.....I still never quite fully know why so few trekkers go to **Ladakh**. It is truly one of the best areas I have ever trekked in; remote, quiet and visually stunning in the mountains. Travel and Trek has re-worked the Markha Valley trek itinerary and also added two more treks to the programme. Dates are already available for the summer of 2011 (although flexible for pre-formed groups). Take a look at the webpage.

http://www.travelandtrek.com/india_treks_ladakh.shtml



Following the Markha Valley in Ladakh

Jopuno (Mar 2011).....Talking of India, the Jopuno trekking peak trip in Mar/Apr next year is ready to go.

A great opportunity to get up into Sikkim between Nepal and Bhutan and bag that peak; it is close to 6000m.

The **Sahara** is highlighted on page 3 with two specific treks going in aid of charities, although there is no formal obligation to raise money. Please have a look at them, there are some great people on both treks. One departs in Nov 2010, the other in Feb 2011.

EBC and ABC Treks this autumn. There are numerous treks running to these two classic places.

Training Weekend.....We were very lucky with the weather earlier in the month for a training day walk in the Peaks. A lovely little train journey up through the Hope Valley to Edale got us underway for a 13 mile yomp over the top and down to the Ladybower reservoir before returning to Bamford and finally Hathersage. The next weekend is up in beautiful **Ambleside (Lakes), 18/19 Sep**.

500 Mile run to the Sahara!.....We are currently using our expertise in Morocco to assist with the planning of a 500 mile run (yes, on foot!) from Marrakesh down to the Sahara (and a bit more to get the mileage in!). The intrepid group of 4 or 5 runners from the UK are planning to run this relay style for charity. It is currently planned for next spring and should it go ahead, we hope to continue our support with full logistics.

The **Adventure Travel Show** is back on next year, 28th - 30th Jan, Royal Horticultural Halls, Victoria. Travel and Trek will be there.

Three Peaks for Softies! The Three Peaks (Ben Nevis, Scafell and Snowdon) has always been one of those challenges that gets some interest. Let's do it the softies way!! Traditionally, the challenge is to complete all 3 peaks (up and down) in under 24hrs including the driving. I plan to do all 3 peaks in 3 days (1 per day), using convenient and decent accommodation in between. It is still a physical challenge but without the pressure of speed, which puts many people off. It's good training, you get to see all 3 peaks (if you have yet to do so) and the feeling of completion is genuinely fulfilling. It is provisionally planned for late spring 2011. Due to the manner in which it is being done, the usual reliance on long days is not relevant. **If you are interested, please let me know and I will keep a list for planning purposes.**

It looks as if we are in for a rise in the amount of **tax** we pay on **air travel**. Both of the Govt coalition parties support a 'Plane Tax' as opposed to a passenger tax (as it is now). The previous Govt were receiving approx £2bn in revenue; the new target is widely reported to be £5bn. The impending Emergency Budget this week will reveal all.

The Annapurna Circuit

Is it too late?

The Circuit is changing. There is no doubt about that. The arrival of the dirt 'road' tracks capable of carrying 4x4's on some sections of the Circuit are putting a big question mark over whether the Circuit is still worth doing.

Without fear of contradiction, I would suggest that 7 days of an 18 day itinerary can be done on a road track now.

Don't despair; that's not the full story. You do not have to walk on these tracks for at least half of those 7 days. You can still trek on the original paths. Why some trekkers walk along the road track and then complain about it is a little puzzling?

Why are the road tracks being built? The simple answer is development.

You can't deny better facilities to the Nepalese people who have lived in very remote villages for years. It also allows the movement of crops to market much faster.

The Nepalese trekking fraternity is not blind to this concern either. Action is already being taken to establish different paths (where necessary) to keep trekkers away from the road tracks. This will undoubtedly benefit some villages previously by-passed.

Mike Young and his wife Liz completed the Circuit with Travel and Trek just a few months ago and wrote a captivating article with the same title 'Is it too late?' (I stole it!). If you are contemplating the Circuit or have done it before, I would urge you to read it (Annapurna Circuit webpage).

Travel and Trek has also produced a map of the Circuit (in 4 parts), which shows where the road sections are in general terms.

To answer the original question; not at all. A few days of road does not spoil a wonderful 18 day experience in the middle of Nepal. You should try it someday.

Namaste!

JOIN SOME GREAT PEOPLE IN THE SAHARA

There has perhaps never been a better time to consider trekking in the Sahara Desert.

We have two specific treks, both being run to support very different but equally worthwhile charities.

There's no nonsense with registration or set up fees and no set fund raising targets, you don't even have to support a charity. It's great if you do of course; those on these treks already are supporting the following Charities:

Departing 19 Nov 2010 - Royal Brompton Hospital, London
 Departing 11 Feb 2011 - Help for Heroes and Grantham Hospice



Royal Brompton Hospital

Celena Perry's daughter Becky (pictured right) would not be here today if it were not for the Royal Brompton Hospital.

Becky was born with a heart condition called Pulmonary Stenosis. It was not diagnosed until she was 3 months old and ironically it was Celena herself that referred her! She was admitted immediately and after initial tests Celena was informed that Becky had been surviving off just 10% of oxygen for the last 3 months. Had this continued, her organs would have deteriorated one by one; she would have died. 12 hours later she was on the surgeons bench having open heart surgery.

Becky had a 50/50 chance of survival had they needed to re-open her for further work. After an awful lot of care on Rose Ward for a very worrying 5 days, Becky was allowed home. Signs were that she would be on medication for the rest of her life.

A year after surgery, Becky was doing so well that she no longer needed the medication. There were however, complications. Her main arteries appeared to be narrowing. This is still on going; Becky is now 6.

Celena feels an enormous sense of gratitude to the hospital and specifically Rose Ward, whose staff took care of Becky in that vital period of the initial surgery and post care. She is raising money to support that Ward. Please join her in the Sahara in November.

Help for Heroes and The Grantham Hospice

The Help for Heroes Charity speaks for itself now. Nationally known, it has raised millions to support our Armed Forces in their rehabilitation after injury (primarily in Afghanistan).

The Grantham Hospice is very local to Travel and Trek, supporting the local community in a whole host of caring roles. It is being closed later this year for a £1.3m refurbishment, which includes a £40,000 extension. We have teamed up with the Grantham Journal to promote this trek to support the Hospice and hopefully raise some funds for the extension.



This delightful young lady has probably spent more time in hospital than most of us reading this put together!

EU verses Non EU Airline?

In extreme cases like the recent volcanic ash situation, EU airlines might seem a good idea bearing in mind the high level of Passenger Rights that you have (as long as they are applied!). I would not argue with that; the level of protection on paper is very good indeed.

It may therefore appear sensible to travel with an EU airline?

The recent circumstances have highlighted that it is perhaps not a question of what protection is in place but how willing they are to apply them without any hassle to you.

I wouldn't wish to be stuck in Delhi but take the Gulf airlines for example. Both Qatar and Gulf Air (and probably Etihad too) have their own airport hotels and will put you in those, completely free of charge, should you experience a serious delay of any kind; no questions, no hassle, no payment.

Compare that service to some of the treatment witnessed on TV during the airspace closure. I accept that many, if not most will get their money back but how much hassle have they had to go through in order to get it?

Above all, we do have to accept, that travel has an inherent risk of delay/failure and the more links you have in the chain, the more it is likely to break. It's part of travel!

Government Advice?

How many of you remember during the ash cloud crisis Gordon Brown appearing on TV advising UK traveller's abroad in Europe to make their way to the Channel Ports?

Those that adhered to his advice and used hire cars, trains and whatever else they could muster will probably have to foot the bill for their journeys. Had they stayed where they were and waited for the flights to resume they would have been entitled to their hotel and food costs as well as the flight that they were due anyway.

I believe a few are taking him (or the Govt, not sure) to court for the public advice given, which ultimately cost them a lot of money.

The outcome will be interesting!

ONE MAN'S SUMMIT

Fit and keen, Jonathan Crookes has a long term plan when it comes to mountaineering but he had never been tested at serious altitude.

Summitting Island Peak suddenly became a rather important key to everything else. This is his story (in brief!)...

Even in the days running up to departure I was unsure, travelling alone, whether I'd enjoy this expedition. Would I like Kathmandu, would our group get along, could I avoid the seemingly inevitable sickness, would I be strong enough to summit Island Peak? And this was meant to be a holiday! But the prospect of the adventure of a lifetime was more than enough to counter any concerns.

If you've never been to Asia before arriving in Kathmandu could be an overwhelming experience. Immediately you're in the chaos that is airport arrivals, but once through I quickly identified the Travel and Trek representative and was warmly greeted. I was then promptly whisked away through the incredible sights and sounds of the city to the hotel where I'd meet three amazing girls bound for EBC that made up our group.

After spending time exploring Kathmandu the trekking portion of my trip started with the amazing flight to Lukla, then follow the well-trodden path through the Khumbu and to Everest Base Camp. A steady pace is chosen to allow people to acclimatise safely while absorbing this incredible environment. And what an environment! Breathtaking scenery, fascinating culture and friendly people. The sights, sounds, smells will remain with me forever. Over the next 9 days we'd walk for a few hours per day, followed by personal time to relax before dining in our tea-house accommodation. The accommodation is modest but the welcome genuine. It's amazing how quickly the spare time goes by.

All too soon we found ourselves at Gorak Shep, just a stone's throw away from Everest. It's astonishing the number of friends made along the way. British, Australian, German, Israeli, American, Nepalese etc. Such a diverse mixture all here to enjoy their own adventure and all bringing their own rich experiences. A genuine surprise and something that the brochure did not convey. The final trek to base camp and ascent of Kala Patthar represents the ultimate goal for many; take a moment here to consider where you are and what you've achieved. For others, the prospect of Island Peak looms.

None of us suffered from any sickness or altitude problems at all. We were incredibly fortunate. When the time came it was difficult to split away from the girls. They returned to Lukla while I headed towards Chukkung. We formed great friendships and they remained in my thoughts, hoping them a safe journey home, but Island Peak was my goal now.

My team, now consisting of two porters, climbing guide and myself would overnight at Chukkung then head for Island Peak the following day. A few days earlier we'd opted to bypass base camp and go straight for high camp. I was feeling strong and this would put us in an excellent position to make the summit on summit day. Conditions at the 5,600m high camp were harsh: thin air, cold, no water or facilities. The porters did an excellent job of making it home for a night or two, somehow producing generous quantities of good food. The views were incredible as the sun disappeared to reveal a tapestry of stars. Lights out about 9pm I fell asleep listening to my iPod. Amazingly, despite the thoughts of the following day's endeavours, I actually had a great night's sleep.

At 1:30am it's dark and very cold high on Island Peak. Time to wake and prepare for the climb. A short while later my guide appeared at my tent with a generous and varied breakfast: I'm still amazed how they produce such meals. Then, wearing or carrying everything I needed, we started up the mountain under star light. As always in darkness, sense of distance, time and scale become confused. We scrambled up steep rock and for what seemed like an eternity, taking the occasional rest to catch breathe while looking down at distant head-torches of other climbers.

Stepping on to the glacier brought a real sense of trepidation; steep ice slopes falling away into an oblivion created by the mind out of the darkness. Dawn broke revealing the true magnitude of the ice already travelled and the scale of the ice wall and summit ahead. Even for the fittest of people progress herein is slow and steady. Above 6,000m the air is thin and ice cold, but any discomfort is secondary to the challenge at hand. On making the summit ridge from the ice wall I knew nothing could stop me now. And about twenty minutes later my guide and I stood on the summit alone and in perfect conditions.

All that was now left was to safely descend and make our way back to Kathmandu. Personal goals achieved and for me a stepping-stone to bigger things, but this unforgettable experience will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Every trip to Island Peak is different; the size of the group, the people in it, their experience (or lack of), the weather, possible sickness from the altitude (or anything else) and whether to use Island Peak's Base or High Camp? So many variables make this a superb expedition like experience.

If you have the urge to summit Island Peak, we would be delighted to provide you with any advice that you may need. This is a very achievable trekking peak and has inspired many to go on to greater things. Life's too short to let it go!



Oh, what a feeling that is! 20,305 feet in the air on the summit of Island Peak with Lhotse Sha in the background, masking Everest from view.

Climbing Sherpa Lhakpa high on the ridge looking down over the glacier and further down to Base Camp by the lake.

