

UNIQUE

UNIQUE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES 2019



Fully escorted small group tours
bluedottravel.com.au

Blue Dot Travel
Go somewhere different

WELCOME

WELCOME TO BLUE DOT TRAVEL

WOW! This is our eighth year running Blue Dot Travel and since we started we've grown steadily. We now have 40 itineraries around the globe under our belt. Some of these we repeat every year, some every few years. Most get modified in some manner given the dynamic nature of travel. As long as there are new and interesting, lesser-travelled destinations on the planet, we'll continue to develop new itineraries.

Our core focus won't change – small group tours to unique destinations. We've made heaps of new friends and travelling buddies doing this – and it's what we love most. Some of you will have heard us explain our job, likening it to holding a dinner party for three or four weeks, whilst travelling. And like most dinner parties, many stories are shared and laughed over.

The last few years has also seen us offer our itineraries to private groups. This part of our business continues to grow. All you need is four or more, and you're off! We plan, manage and book it all for you.

Without doubt, for us the most satisfying aspect of Blue Dot Travel, is the fact that we have such a high level of repeat business. Over 60% of our customers

have done multiple tours with us. Plus, we have a very high level of referral business, for which we are most grateful.

This snap-shot brochure provides an outline of our plans for 2019. Like the previous years, there are some new tours and some repeat tours to help you tick off your travel bucket list. We look forward to sharing stories with you on tour.

ABOUT BLUE DOT TRAVEL

Small groups to unique destinations

We provide small groups of like-minded travellers with culturally rich travel experiences, to unique destinations around the globe. If it's a little 'left of field', or if it's not catered-for adequately, then we are interested in going there. Our average group size is just 14. This means we offer a more personalised



service and we are able to be more flexible than the larger touring companies who must be stringent with timetables to make it work. With 10 or more customers on any given trip, a tour host joins the group from Australia. Their role is to help things go



smoothly and liaise with the in-country guides. Less than 10 customers means the trip still proceeds with local guides at every destination.

We immerse you in the local culture

A Blue Dot Travel experience will include the best of what the destination has to offer – landscapes and sightseeing, flora and fauna, song and dance, food and wine, cities and regional places, architecture and history. And of course, people! We take you to the "must-see" places of interest plus lesser-travelled sights on tour.

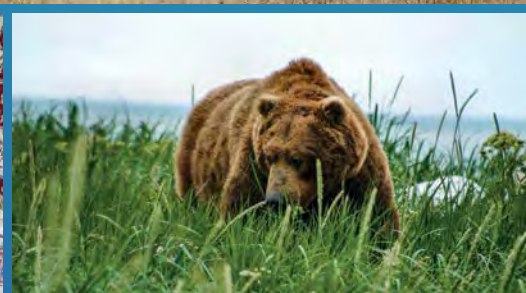
Why the name?

The name Blue Dot Travel, was suggested by a family member who happens to be a professor of astronomy. He suggested we call the company "Blue Dot" because "The Pale Blue Dot" was the name given to the photograph of Earth from space, 6.1 billion kilometres away. The photo was taken in 1990 from Voyager 1. We like the name, so for this we are thankful Chris. (So much for my 28 years in advertising!)

Professionals all the way

We only deal with professional tour operators with a good track record. In-country guides are with us each day. Their primary job is to teach us about core aspects of their country and they do





this well. Many of our in-country guides have become part of the Blue Dot family. They get to know us and our needs and we get to know them.

The photos we use

About 90% of all photos we use for our brochures (including this one), our website and itinerary documents, were taken by us or our travellers. The main exception is if the tour is an inaugural one, in which case we will seek library photos. This is not to big-note ourselves. Rather, we try and use photos of images that you will see on our tours. They are real, not professionally taken and not paid for.



Blue Dot Travel tours are reasonably priced

When it comes to costs, we are certainly not at the "top end of town" but nor do we expect you to back pack or camp. Many of the places we visit – especially in developing countries – have simple accommodation options – all part of the experience. In the more modern destinations, most of our hotels are between 3.5 & 4 star in our language. If there is a certain itinerary in this brochure which interests you, the prices are listed on our itinerary documents at our website. When the inclusions are taken into consideration – flights, accommodation, transfers, most meals, guide and a lot more – you'll be pleasantly surprised with the cost. In fact, an analysis of our customer surveys provides us with a very high rating of overall value for money. That's something we are very proud of.

At a glance

Over the pages you'll read more about our itineraries for 2019. We have many wonderful tours planned. Our detailed itineraries, set out day-by-day and complete with costs, are all available at our website. If you'd prefer for us to post you a copy, we're happy to use snail mail.

2018 tours – last quarter	Departs
Romania, Bulgaria & Moldova	Sep
Sicily & Her Isles	Oct
Israel & Jordan	Nov
Nagaland & North East India	Nov
Christmas in Southern India	Dec

2019 planned tours at a glance	Departs
Ethiopia – for the Timkat Festival	Jan
Uganda – Gorillas & More	Feb
The Guianas – Suriname, Guyana & French Guiana	NEW TOUR Mar
Panama & Colombia	Mar
Portugal & Her Isles	NEW TOUR Apr
The Stans of Central Asia	May
The Caucasus – Georgia, Azerbaijan & Armenia	May
Botswana, Namibia, Cape Town & Victoria Falls	May
Western China – The Silk Road	NEW TOUR Jun
Mongolia for the Nadaam Festival	Jul
Alaska – Must-See Wilderness	NEW TOUR Jul
Madagascar – Nature's Own Laboratory	Jul
Kamchatka – Russia's Far East Wilderness	Aug
Sumatra & Rinca	NEW TOUR Sep
Japan in Autumn	Sep
Malta, Sardinia & Corsica	Sep
Iran – Gem of the Middle East	Oct
Nagaland & India's North East	Nov
Christmas in Sri Lanka	Dec

Note, all tours and dates are subject to change. Visit the website for the latest, detailed itineraries. Refer to our terms and conditions before making a decision to travel.

Let us keep you up to date

We promise not to bombard you with information! We produce just one or two printed newsletters a year along with our brochure and we distribute just three or four e-newsletters a year. Often tours fill quickly, sometimes they are cancelled or postponed for reasons beyond our control, itineraries can change and new ones are added. If you'd like to be kept in the loop, please provide us with your email address. You'll receive our e-newsletter more frequently than our printed newsletter. Simply email us at brett@bluedottravel.com.au and we'll make sure you are kept in the loop.

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WHY CHOOSE BLUE DOT TRAVEL?

- Fully guided and escorted* – we look after you from start to finish.
- Quality, reputable in-country operators, tour guides and airlines.
- Small, personalised groups means greater flexibility.
- Experts in unique destinations where we immerse you in the local culture.
- Comprehensive, well-planned itineraries.
- Good balance of leisure time so you are not always on the go.
- Excellent value! Our tours are inclusive of airfares, accommodation, expert in-country guides, Australian host, most meals, sightseeing and transfers.

**Subject to 10 or more travellers*



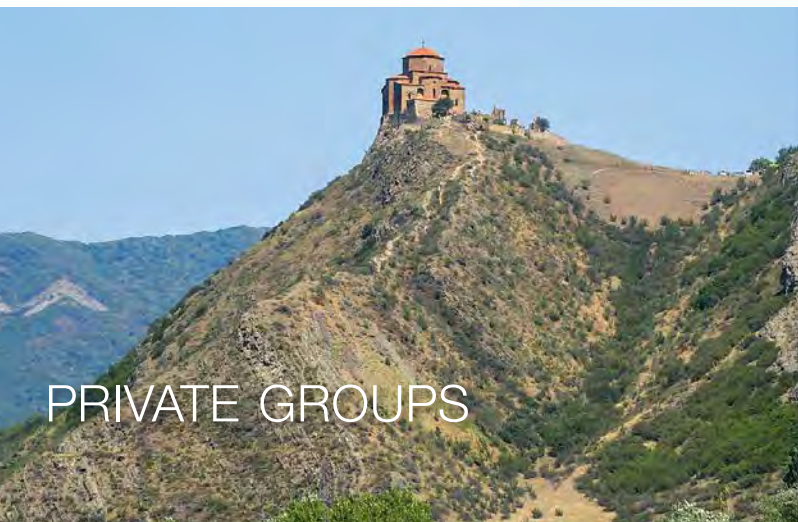
FAMILY FRIENDLY TOURS TO EXCITING DESTINATIONS

As parents of well-travelled children, we know what kids want on a holiday. And we know what mum, dad and the grand parents want too. We developed family friendly itineraries designed for travel within school holidays. The beauty of these tours is that you can do as much or as little as you like but regardless, all the hard work is done for you. Hotels, transfers, guides, excursions and most meals have all been planned for you. You just have to pack and show up at the airport!

We currently have tailored family itineraries for five destinations – Sri Lanka, Southern India, Madagascar, Japan and Southern Africa. Visit the website for more information or call us today.



PRIVATE GROUPS



We understand that not everyone wants to go on a group tour – even if it's a small group. That's why we offer our itineraries on a private group basis.

Our website will be updated this year with independent tours on offer, so stay tuned. In the meantime, if you see one of our itineraries which you would like to do with just a few people, give us a call. Chances are we can arrange it for you.



ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia – Timkat Festival

26 DAYS Ethiopia is a traveller's dream. It offers diverse peoples with vibrant cultures, varied wildlife and fauna, and magnificent scenery embracing every landform from high mountain plateaus to parched deserts. In fact, given it's almost void of tourists, Ethiopia is a destination without peer. Add to this one of the finest climates in Africa ("thirteen months of sunshine!") and you have so many reasons to visit this incredible country.

Located in the northeast Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is the oldest nation in Africa. A country with one of the richest histories on the African continent, Ethiopia has extraordinary archaeological sites. In the North of the country are the seventeenth century castles and the Imperial Compound of Gondar, the monasteries of Lake Tana and the thirteenth century monolithic rock-hewn churches of King Lalibela in the Wollo Region – the Eighth Wonder of the World. In the East, the 1000-year-old city of Harar, with its 99 Mosques, is the fourth holiest city of Islam, after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

However it's the experience with the tribes of the remote south, in the Omo Valley about which most visitors rave, with good reason. This will be our fifth tour to Ethiopia. Come join us.

DEPARTS
JAN 2019



UGANDA

Uganda – Gorillas & More

20 DAYS Uganda is a land-locked African nation about the size of Victoria. With stunning scenery, much of the country is on a plateau which ascends to over 5,100 metres on Mount Stanley in the south – the fifth highest peak in Africa. The landscape is a combination of amazingly thick virgin jungle, grasslands and farmland. Uganda shares Lake Victoria – the largest tropical lake in the world – as its eastern border with Kenya and Tanzania.

The West first took real notice of Uganda in the early 70's when the dictator Idi Amin took power. Dubbed "the butcher of Uganda", Amin was a military official who, after seizing power, was responsible for the expulsion and murder of hundreds of thousands of people – namely anyone who did not agree with his ways. He died in exile in 2003. Today, it is a very different story. While the people are generally poor, they are at peace with their government. Visitors are attracted by the gorillas which are protected from poachers around the clock. However, there is far more to see than just the gorillas – as amazing as they are up close. Uganda has an abundance of other wildlife with hippos, elephants, giraffes and the big cats. There are 10 national wildlife parks throughout the country and you are sure to spot most of the wildlife when you travel.

It could be considered a raw destination for many travellers but this is another major drawback. Food and accommodation is surprisingly good. Come to Uganda for the wildlife, including the gorillas, but also for the wonderful friendly people, scenery second to none and a serious cultural hit.

DEPARTS
JAN 31 2019





THE GUIANAS

The Guianas – Suriname, Guyana & French Guiana

**NEW
TOUR**

22 DAYS Perched on the Atlantic Coast between Brazil and Venezuela, each of these countries offer something very special. Collectively, they are often referred to as “The Guianas”. While they are all part of the Guyana Shield and Amazon Basin, they differ in that they were colonised by different European cultures. They each provide indigenous culture with Amerindian history, along with colonial history – mainly Dutch, French and English but the Spanish and Portuguese were also there at some stage. African slave labour was used across the region and a strong Indian influence is evident resulting from the plantations of sugar and other crops. Add the distinctly Caribbean feel and you have a melting pot of people, like no other. 80% of the region is tropical rainforest and pristine rivers with unique wildlife including the giant anteater, giant beavers, jaguars and a plethora of birdlife.

The colonial capitals are all gems. In fact, Paramaribo – Suriname’s capital – with its beautiful timber buildings in the old town, is UNESCO-listed. Iles du Salut (or Devils Island as it is more widely known), where the book Papillon is set, is not to be missed. Georgetown, French Guiana’s Space Centre and Rainforest River lodges are also highlights.

**DEPARTS
MAR 2019**



23 DAYS Colombia is an amazing land of contrasts and after being off the “wish list” for many travellers for some years, it is rapidly becoming one of the highlights of South America. With its rich cultural history, amazing colonial architecture, geographical diversity and the simple warmth and hospitality of its people, it’s easy to see why this fascinating country is becoming an increasingly popular spot for overseas visitors.

It is the only South American country to boast two coast lines – the Pacific and Atlantic (Caribbean) Oceans. It also shares Amazonian rainforest with Brazil and Peru. The tourists are well and truly returning to Colombia. Place it on your bucket list. Better still, join this tour and see her best.

The republic of Panama occupies a narrow isthmus between Costa Rica and Colombia and has a small population of just over 3.2 million. For years it has remained one of the world’s most strategic cross roads, dividing North and South America with its canal. Around

half of the country is tropical rainforest. It is very mountainous with less than 10% of the country flat and suitable for agriculture. The Spanish claimed Panama in 1502 and it was not until 1821 that it became an independent nation. Today, the culture represents a rich mix of Amerindian, Spanish and African influence.

Due to the canal and its business opportunities, Panama also has an extensive international community that makes the Canal Zone, one of the most cosmopolitan areas in Latin America. The canal contributes 80% of the country’s GDP but for the savvy tourist, it’s not all about the canal. There is much to see and do including colonial history, eco lodges, wildlife and amazing scenery. The old Spanish Quarter of the capital – Panama City – is being restored thanks to UNESCO funds. It is a wonderful place to stroll, eat and absorb the culture.



PANAMA

Panama & Colombia

COLOMBIA

DEPARTS
MAR 2019

NEW
TOUR

PORTUGAL

Portugal & Her Isles



Plus, Portugal is relatively inexpensive in comparison with some of her European neighbours – especially the wine!

On arrival into Portugal you might notice how tall you are in comparison with the locals! Due to genetics, the average height of the Portuguese is considerably shorter than many other western societies. It makes sight-seeing through crowds, just that much easier!

Once a medieval super power due to its superior navigational skills, Portugal has history at every turn. It was visited – invaded – by the Romans, the Celts, the neighbouring Moors and Christians. Today, the country is primarily a Catholic society with over 80% of the 10.5 million inhabitants identifying as being Catholic. Portuguese is the sixth most spoken language in the world. This is mainly due to the colonisation of countries like Brazil, Angola, Mozambique and even parts of India and the subcontinent.

On our tour, you’ll also visit some of the Isles off the coast in the Atlantic – Madeira, Sao Miguel, Faial and Pico in the Azores. The scenery on these volcanic islands will take your breath away, as will the fresh seafood at the numerous fishing villages on the coast. Grab your camera, hat, sun glasses, bathers and appetite!

DEPARTS
APR 2019

20 DAYS Portugal is a traveller’s dream come true. You’ll find fortified towns with cobblestoned streets, well preserved castles dating back to the medieval period, glorious beaches, food and wine to die for and magnificent coastal and inland scenery. It has no less than 15 UNESCO-listed cultural and natural sights! All-the-more fascinating when you consider this tiny country has an area of just 92,000km² – meaning it can fit into Australia over 82 times. The fact that it is a small country, means getting around and seeing the core sites is easy. You don’t need to spend long days travelling from place to place. In the morning you can be on a beach, by lunch time in the mountains and in the afternoon, a vineyard!

Blue Dot Travel

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Go somewhere different

THE STANS

The Stans of Central Asia

27 DAYS Central Asia or “The Stans” as the region is known to us westerners, is a vast land-locked region of Asia, increasing in popularity amongst travellers who want to experience one of the world’s last great frontier lands. In Stalin’s time, the area was known as Turkestan. Soon after independence, these former Soviet Central Asian Republics – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan – were defined as Central Asia. This is the common modern definition. The fifth “Stan”, Tajikistan, is considered politically less stable than the four we visit.

The Silk Road gave rise to unprecedented trade, but its true brilliance and unique place in human history were the result of the interchange of ideas, innovations and philosophies that occurred amongst the very different peoples that used it. Our travels will encompass many of these historic places along with many other “story-book” destinations. Wonderful monuments, some restored, some not; museums full of ancient artifacts; colourful bazaars, all combined with stunning landscapes, make this a memorable experience.

Uzbekistan has three standout historical places of interest – Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. All three are very special in their own way and no trip to Uzbekistan is complete without seeing their mosques, colourful markets, squares and other places of interest.

Turkmenistan is a wonderful mix of old versus new. There are the ancient ruins of Merv and Nisa and the ultra-modern capital Ashgabat which is like a combination of Shanghai, Dubai, Astana and Canberra all wrapped up in one.

The countryside of Kyrgyzstan looks more like a postcard than a postcard – if that makes sense! Snowcapped mountains with bright green fields in the foreground, yurts dotting the countryside, lakes, rivers and picturesque townships are to be found. Images that will stay with you forever.

Kazakhstan is by far the largest of the Stans countries in terms of area. Much of it is vast steppe land – almost desert like. Almaty, with its Russian influence is a wonderful city to stroll and observe.

DEPARTS
MAY 2019



THE CAUCASUS

The Caucasus – Georgia, Azerbaijan & Armenia

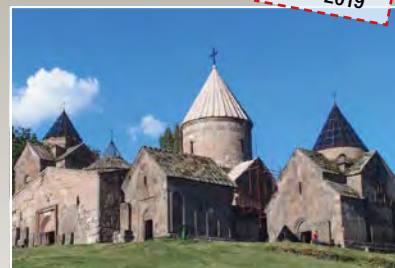
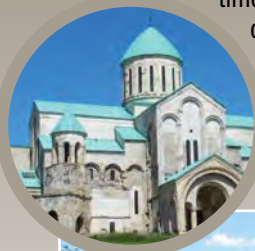
25 DAYS Snow-capped mountains dominate the region and make for beautiful views with hill top villages and green valleys.

Georgia has an ancient culture and a unique alphabet found nowhere else in the world. Over the centuries all her neighbours have coveted over her land. Turks, Persians, Mongols, Arabs and more recently, the Russians have invaded. Ethnic conflicts and periodical civil war has also left its mark. But nowadays, it is a peaceful country. The capital, Tbilisi, will surprise you with its modern, very European café-style society. Yet, leave the city and you may feel like you are travelling in medieval times. Georgia is developing an excellent reputation for quality wines. In fact if you travel around the Western Asian region and order wine, it will most likely come from one of Georgia’s largest wine producing regions. Tourists (not that there are that many) visit mainly for the scenic beauty of the higher Caucasus Mountain range, the highest point of which is over 5,000 metres.

The Republic of Armenia, a landlocked country in the Lower Caucasus, is a very small country at less than half the size of our own Tasmania and with a population of less than 3 million. Like Georgia, it is a Christian country with an ancient history. Armenia has the distinction of having the oldest Christian cathedral in the world! Once a part of the Soviet Union, independence was reclaimed in 1991. It is a very “indigenous” country with 98% of the population being and speaking Armenian. Tourism is growing as infrastructure and services improve. Also like Georgia, the countryside is beautiful with the jewel being the alpine Lake Sevan at almost 2,000 metres above sea level – one of the largest freshwater alpine lakes in the world.

Azerbaijan also boasts an ancient culture. History dates back to prehistoric times and stone-age settlements are evident. Most neighbours came, made their mark and then left at some stage. The country borders Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Iran. Her entire eastern border consists of the Caspian Sea. For many years, her economy has been based around the abundance of oil and gas reserves. The capital Baku, could be considered a modern and dynamic city.

DEPARTS
MAY 2019





BOTSWANA

Botswana, Namibia, Cape Town & Victoria Falls

DEPARTS
MAY 2019

25 DAYS Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone is believed to have been the first European to view Victoria Falls in 1855. The indigenous name for the falls is Mosi-oa-Tunya—"the smoke that thunders". While it is not the widest or the highest falls in the world, it is certainly one of the most spectacular and is a bucket list item for many travellers. It's a natural starting point for an African safari.

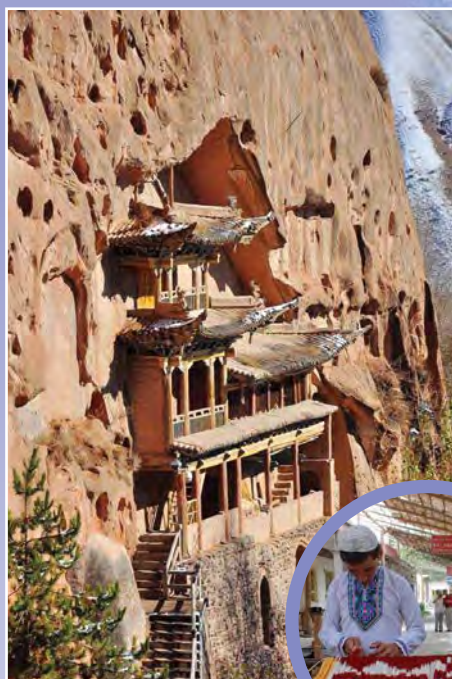
Botswana has a wonderfully diverse culture, with many different tribal influences coexisting with Europeans. Home to large populations of wildlife, rugged national parks, wetlands alive with birds and one of the world's largest deltas, Botswana's bounty of natural treasures is

remarkable. With winter sunshine, a temperate climate and golden sunsets, it's no wonder most locals have beaming smiles – they're surrounded by some of Mother Nature's greatest triumphs.

Home to proud tribes steeped in tradition, herds of rare desert-dwelling elephants, wild horses and massive colonies of seals, Namibia showcases the very best of Africa's raw landscapes. From quaint German-inspired towns to uninhabitable deserts, bushland filled with wildlife and a rocky coastline littered with shipwrecks, Namibia's untamed charm is compelling, captivating and camera-worthy. Red desert dunes, rugged bush veld, dense woodlands and plains of gravel make up

Namibia's ancient terrain. Home to the monumental Fish River Canyon and sharing the iconic Kalahari Desert with South Africa and Botswana, Namibia has some of the most interesting landscapes in Africa, if not the world.

Cape Town's most distinctive feature is its stunning setting: it lies on a dramatic coastline of pristine white beaches and icy waters, overlooked by the iconic flat-topped Table Mountain. It is arguably Africa's most picturesque city and while the world knows about the regions winelands, it has also become internationally recognised for the food culture as well!



NEW TOUR

CHINA

Western China The Silk Road



26 DAYS Our China Silk Road itinerary has been designed for those who wish to experience the glory of ancient China's far western border region. We start our tour in Lanzhou, an important Yellow River crossing and a major Silk Road trading hub for merchants from Mongolia, Sichuan and Tibet. Chinese, Huns, Bactrians, Sogdians, Turkmen, Mongols, Uyghurs and Tajiks all played historic roles in this fascinating region.

In 1372 the Ming dynasty general, Feng Sheng, defeated the last of the Yuan dynasty's Mongol armies (1279–1372) and built the great fortress at Jiayuguan, guarding the entrance to the Hexi corridor from steppeland invasion and creating the furthest major stronghold of imperial China. Whilst ancient cities like Jiaohe in the Turpan basin have disappeared, leaving only remnants of their walls and citadels, this region is rich in cultural and religious sites.

We will explore ancient Chinese cave temples and pagodas, visit Central Asia's largest mosques with their distinctive Transoxanian minarets derived from Zoroastrian and Hindu sacred towers. We'll climb high to Xiahe to see one of Tibetan Buddhism's greatest monasteries and search the Buddhist cave complex in Dunhuang, in a journey that shows how the world's great religions spread and prospered through regional trade.

We follow countless traders, skirting forbidding deserts framed by some of the world's highest mountain ranges. We will visit ancient tombs, bazaars, fortresses and caravanserais showing the fascinating architectural heritage of this trade system.

Finally ending our tour in Kashgar sitting on the edge of the vast, forbidding Taklimakan Desert, we will visit the famous Sunday Kashgar animal markets and trading bazaar where time seems to have frozen. Here we shall encounter a number of local peoples like the Uyghurs and Tajiks who still make up the ethnic majority in this part of modern day China. Come join us on this fascinating journey along the Silk Road.

DEPARTS
JUN 2019

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MONGOLIA

Mongolia for the Nadaam Festival

21 DAYS A trip through the Land of the Sapphire Blue Sky is something very unique. If you're looking for a five star type, cushy, comfortable holiday, then Mongolia is probably not for you. If you want to get off the beaten track then Mongolia is unmatched in its wild beauty and rawness. In three weeks you will be rewarded with a wonderful taste of what this country has to offer. Mongolia will be indelibly imprinted on your memory. Your senses will be engaged –

smell, hearing, taste and sight. You will see a night sky so clear that you'll be reminded that the galaxy is infinite, camp on the edge of a vast steppe covered in chive flowers as far as the eye can see. It is one of the world's least developed, least-populated countries. You will be blessed with the stunning views of a country so untouched that you know you've reached its true heart.

From the stark Gobi in the south, to the incredible rock formations and magnificence of Khogoryn Els (Mongolia's largest sand dunes) to the crystal blue lakes and rushing clear rivers of the North, it is a land serene, with a culture that is warm and welcoming.



DEPARTS
JUL 2019

MADAGASCAR

Madagascar – Nature's Own Laboratory

with reunion add-on

21 DAYS Madagascar, 400 km off the East coast of Africa, is the world's fourth largest island (excluding Australia), a fragment of Gondwanaland left behind when the ancient landmass split to form the continents of Africa, India and Australia; it stretches 1600 km from north to south and is 650km across at its widest point.

The most astonishing thing about the island is not its size however, but its flora and fauna, which are found nowhere else in the world. The island has been referred to as "nature's design laboratory", because of the many unique creatures and vegetation, some of quite a primitive nature, which are found only here. The terrain varies from tropical rainforest to desert, from high stony plateaus to lush green islands with many amazing geological and geographical formations throughout.

Madagascar has a whole range of unique animals from the rest of the world. The most notable



are the lemurs of which around 100 are described (depending on which book you read). We will visit a number of their known habitats and search both day and night, so that, with just a little luck we will see a fair number of these pro-simian primates. For the bird fancier there are over 250 species of which 106 are endemic, whilst for lovers of reptiles most of the world's chameleons are found here. In fact, the country is as well known for its chameleon population as for its lemurs.

The flora has its own peculiarities, the vegetation varying greatly by climatic region – thorny scrub in the south-west, tropical rainforest along the east coast, heath-land and moss forests on the central plateau and savannahs in the western lowlands. The two best-known examples of these unusual plants are the fan shaped Ravenala, known as the Traveller's Palm and the Baobab of which there are 10 different species. We will see many examples of these throughout while in the tropical forests we will see trees lush with ferns, fungi, mosses and orchids. Most of this unique flora and



fauna, together with some now extinct species, were here when the first humans arrived some 1500 to 2000 years ago. The first inhabitants were Malay-Polynesians who crossed the Indian Ocean in large canoes from Indonesia and South East Asia. These early settlers mixed with later arrivals, African, Arab, Indian and Portuguese traders and French colonials have formed the current 18 official tribes, which are collectively termed the Malagasy. French is the official language and is spoken in all but the remotest areas.

DEPARTS
JUL 2019

NEW
TOUR

ALASKA

Alaska – Must-See Wilderness

16 DAYS The biggest state of the US is a nature-lover's utopia. Ice-capped mountains, forests full of wildlife plus lakes & rivers full of fish. What's not to love? Separated from the mainland by Canada's British Columbia – Alaska also happens to be the most sparsely populated state of the US which makes it even more desirable for those who love the great outdoors. Various indigenous tribes roamed the region for thousands of years before the Russians established a settlement. The modern history of the region is fascinating. The US government purchased Alaska from the Russian government in 1867 for the sum of 2¢ an acre – about \$7 million dollars total! It became an official US territory in 1912 and an official state – the US's 49th, in 1959.

In the late 1960s, oil was discovered and an oil boom soon followed. Pipelines, refineries, roads, townships and other infrastructure soon followed. Today, agriculture, fishing and tourism make up the main industries.

Alaska's capital city, Anchorage, with a population of around 300,000, is 10 times the size of the nearest cities, Fairbanks and Juneau. The region is incredibly sparse with vast wilderness and some small towns dotting the state.

There's an abundance of wildlife to be spotted in Alaska. It's most famous for the brown and black bears which are found in healthy numbers. You are almost guaranteed of seeing the bears, depending on the regions you visit. Caribou, Moose and Bison (which were introduced from

Montana) are also fairly common to spot. The rivers are filled with trout and salmon and watching the bears feed during the spawning period is the classic Alaskan postcard. There are hundreds of birds species to be found also – including the country's national animal – the American Bald Eagle, which are no longer on the endangered species list but still not all that easy to spot. Orcas and various species of whales can also be spotted off the Alaskan coast and Bering Sea.

We will experience national parks, wildlife including bears, history, trekking, local culture and a whole lot more. Alaska is generally regarded as one of the most scenic places on the planet. Grab your trekking shoes and come and join us.

DEPARTS
JUL 2019



NEW
TOUR

SUMATRA

Sumatra & Rinca

21 DAYS Depending on which book or report you're reading, Indonesia comprises of somewhere between 17,000 and 18,000 islands. Heavily forested Sumatra is the largest and second most populous. For the traveller, it is also one of the most culturally rewarding places to visit in Indonesia.

There are over 50 languages spoken on Sumatra and dozens of tribes of mainly Malay and Polynesian origin. The island has a tumultuous history. Arab and Indian traders arrived in the 7th century and the population was converted to Islam at that time. The region eventually

became a Dutch colony and was accompanied with much violence – as is often the case with the colonising nations of the time. For the food-lover, you may feel you have arrived in Utopia. Much of the local cuisine is spicy. Chilli, coriander, lemongrass, ginger and garlic are used in many dishes, as is coconut milk. Beef rendang and nasi padang are probably the most popular curry dishes known to westerners.

For those who love spotting wildlife, Sumatra offers a plethora of opportunities including Sumatran tigers, rhinos, elephants, orangutans, clouded leopard, sun bears, proboscis monkeys

and a whole lot more. Not all are necessarily easy to find but you are assured of spotting certain wildlife. Our inaugural tour will provide you with a comprehensive understanding of the island including a deep understanding of how the locals go about their days. Jungle stays, amazing scenery, wildlife, boat trips, wonderful food and interaction with the locals all included! The tour finishes with a few glorious nights on a fully catered-for boat off the island of Rinca where we will stop to see the Komodo Dragons, visit pristine beaches and enjoy amazing sunsets & sunrises.

DEPARTS
SEP 2019



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KAMCHATKA

Kamchatka, Russia's Far East Wilderness

15 DAYS Kamchatka, one of Russia's least explored but most scenically spectacular regions, is one of the few places left in the world whose name is unknown to most travellers. A peninsula in North-East Asia, separated from the Russian mainland by the Okhotsk Sea on the West and bordered by the Bering Sea on the East, it is 1,200km long and at its widest about 450km.

The peninsula is traversed by two active volcanic ranges in which there are over 160 volcanoes in varying stages of activity, with 20 or more being amongst the world's most volatile. The most powerful volcanic blast recorded in Kamchatka was in 1907 whilst the most recent extraordinary eruption was Mount Mutnovsky in 1994. Other thermal activity deep below the surface produces numerous hot springs, heated rivers and geysers. We will visit the most impressive of these, the "Valley of the Geysers" in Kronotsky National Park, discovered in 1941. Here the variety of volcanic phenomena to be seen is exceptional. The largest geyser, "Velikan", is equal to Yellowstone's "Old Faithful" hurling a column of steam and boiling

water fifty metres into the air. Hundreds of others sporadically blast steam, mud and rainbow coloured water heavenwards.

The capital city and administrative headquarters of Petropavlovsk sprawls over the hills and sits in the valleys surrounding Avancha Bay, one of the largest and best-protected harbours in the world. Just 30km to the east the three "domestic" volcanic peaks of Koryaksky, Avachinsky and Kozelsky tower majestically above the city. Away from the volcanoes, Kamchatka is covered by large areas of mixed forests and plains of giant grasses, home to a vast array of wildlife, including brown bears and sable. The sable, a small dark-brown furred carnivorous mammal, has long been a valued currency in Russia. With the 18th century fur traders came religion, settlers and disease, which had disastrous results for the native populations, both animal and human.



Kamchatka came late to the Russian Empire. It was annexed by the Cossacks in 1697. In the following forty years the native inhabitants were reduced from some 150,000 to only 10,000. Today, the native people make up about 2% of the population. After WWII the peninsula took on new strategic importance. It became a base for military airfields and home to Soviet nuclear submarines. No foreigners were allowed anywhere near. Fortunately that all changed in 1990 and today tourists are being actively sought by a fledgling tourist industry.

DEPARTS
AUG 2019



JAPAN

Japan in Autumn

21 DAYS First time visitors are impressed by its green landscape and its mountains, which cover nearly three quarters of the country. The country, which is roughly the size of Germany consists of several thousands of islands, of which Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku are the four largest. Japan's rugged peaks, rocky coastlines, gorges, lakes, waterfalls and dense forests are breathtaking, but they put severe limits on liveable land. With seventy-five percent of the land unsuitable for habitation or cultivation the entire Japanese population of about 125,000,000 live in an area roughly the size of Tasmania. This makes Japan one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

From the hi-tech speed and efficiency of the bullet train which will whisk you to Osaka, to the serenity of Kyoto's zen gardens and temples; Japan offers a unique mix of the modern and the traditional.

Autumn is a wonderful time to visit Japan. The changing colours of the leaves throughout the landscape can be mesmerising. Blue Dot's engaged style of travel means that we will give you every opportunity to meet Japanese people and to do as the Japanese do. The first thing you'll notice about the locals is how polite they are. The second thing you'll notice is that English is not commonly spoken or understood and as a result, there is a lot of bowing and smiling without many words being spoken. Practice your "ohay gozaimasu" (good morning) and "konichiwa" (good afternoon) as it will go a long way. We'll start and finish in Tokyo giving you ample time to enjoy this modern metropolis, a city of pulsating energy. In between you'll have the chance to experience the many different aspects which make Japan such a unique and fascinating country.



DEPARTS
SEP 2019



MEDITERRANEAN

Malta, Sardinia & Corsica

DEPARTS
SEP 2019

27 DAYS If year-round sunshine and 7,000 years-worth of living history is your thing, the ex-British colony of Malta should be on your travel bucket list. This independent nation comprises three small Islands – Malta, Gozo and Comino which is uninhabited. It is a traveller's dream because you can take in everything within a small radius, sampling the architecture (both grand and quaint), a stunning fortified harbour, the rocky landscape, traditional hilltop towns, fishing villages, and an upbeat lively capital city, all against the languid backdrop of the magnificent Mediterranean.

Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean, presenting a rather rugged mountain scape, balanced by placid bays. In rural parts, stone-walled Neolithic fortresses call Nuraghes can still be seen in the fields. Sardinian towns and cities, especially those along the coast, have a rich tradition of shellfish and seafood while inland towns and cities are known for game and farm produce, most notably its capers, olives and pecorino sardo. The sea around this large

Mediterranean Island is among the most beautiful and transparent in all the world. The colour of the water on the Costa Smeralda has to be seen to be believed! You will love the pace, the sights, the people, the food and the culture of this very special destination. You will find Sardinia hard to leave.

The Island of Corsica is one of France's 13 regions. It lies directly north of Sardinia where it is easily reached by ferry. Its capital Ajaccio is the birth place of Napoleon Bonaparte and his ancestral home is today used as a museum. Like other Mediterranean islands, Corsica was visited, conquered and highly influenced by many people of the ancient world. The Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Phoenicians, Genovese and Northern Africans all left their mark. France invaded and occupied in the mid 1700s. Today it relies heavily on agriculture and tourism. It is far less developed than many islands in the Mediterranean. People come for the weather, the food and the glorious scenery. Come join us on this spectacular Mediterranean experience!



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IRAN

Iran – Gem of the Middle East

25 DAYS The people of Iran are famous for their hospitality and friendliness. They also have a sense of humour, similar to ours. Iranian culture is very old and considered one of the richest in the world. Religion, arts, pottery and weaving have been developed to a high degree. Ancient cultures and settlements have existed on the Iranian Plateau since the fourth millennium BCE. Formerly Persia until 1939, the country is now officially known as the Islamic Republic of Iran. The country

could also be called – the land of the picnic. Every Friday (their weekend day) sees the country-side dotted with family and friends picnicking on the side of the road or in a paddock.

Iran has beautiful scenery. It is mountainous (often snow-capped) and generally an arid country with the interior containing a vast salt wasteland. Its population is diverse and consists of many ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Today, Persians make up the bulk of the people with Kurds and Azerbaijanis making up the biggest ethnic groups. Iran can be very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter.

Best times to travel are spring and autumn. This country is not just for history buffs, but for those who appreciate different and varied cultures. Don't let politics sway your views about this great nation. Most travellers who have visited Iran, rave about it!

DEPARTS
OCT 2019



NAGALAND

Nagaland & North East India

DEPARTS
NOV 2019



22 DAYS Nagaland is one of the least explored regions of India. It's rustic and raw, English is barely spoken and the accommodation can at times be basic, but if experiencing unique culture first hand is your thing, few places left on the planet match this region of India. In fact, nowhere in the world will you experience anything like this. At the Hornbill Festival, (where in 2017, there were just over 200 foreigners), sixteen local tribes converge to showcase their culture and traditions. The colours, the sounds, the music and dance, the region's natural beauty and the food will blow your mind. Plus they're there for themselves, not the tourists!

SRI LANKA

Christmas in Sri Lanka

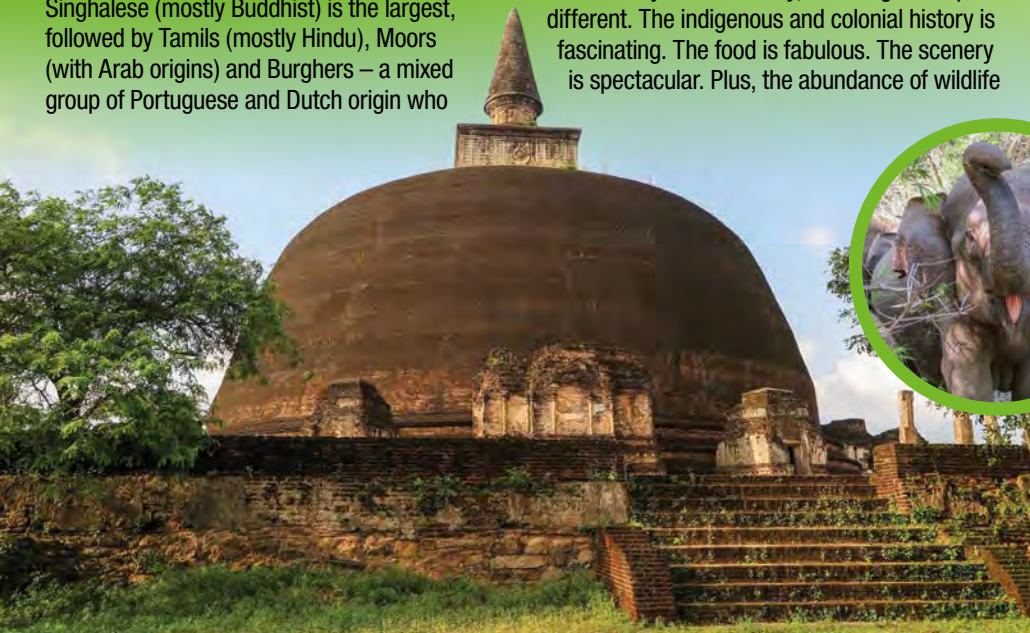
14 DAYS Sri Lanka is an island nation in the Indian Ocean separated from India by the Palk Strait. It is “almost” linked to India by a mostly underwater atoll called Adam’s Bridge. It is a very lush, tropical island sitting just north of the equator. For over 2,000 years the island was ruled by a monarchy which only ceased in 1972 with the appointment of a president. Sri Lanka’s population of around 21 million – similar to our own – is multi ethnic with four main groups. Singhalese (mostly Buddhist) is the largest, followed by Tamils (mostly Hindu), Moors (with Arab origins) and Burghers – a mixed group of Portuguese and Dutch origin who

are mainly Christians. Generally speaking, it is a poor country with around 25% of the population living below the poverty line. Its core source of income comes from tea exportations, spices, rubber, textiles and petroleum refining. About 30% of the island is covered by forest and about 10% of this is national park!

There are so many reasons to visit this country – there is so much to see and do. Even though it is a relatively small country, each region is quite different. The indigenous and colonial history is fascinating. The food is fabulous. The scenery is spectacular. Plus, the abundance of wildlife

– one of the drawcards for travellers – will take you by surprise. Visiting the national parks – and sometimes in the wild – you can spot sambar deer, Sri Lankan elephants, leopards, sloth bears, crocodiles, water buffalo and hundreds of birds species! It’s no wonder that in 2013, Lonely Planet rated this wonderful country as the “hottest travel destination on the planet”, and they didn’t mean the weather. Join us for Christmas on this gorgeous island.

DEPARTS
DEC 2019



On this tour you will see much of the surrounding countryside, villages, towns and cities. You will interact with people who have had limited contact with Europeans and look more Asian than what we consider typical Indian. We will taste their food, enjoy their music, see their amazing wares and come away with an experience that will stick with you for the rest of your life.

The region of Orissa is one of the most beautiful states in India to explore. It has a distinctive cultural heritage and is known for its architectural marvels and its unique art. The UNESCO World Heritage listed Sun Temple at Konark is one of the most impressive man-made monuments anywhere in the world. This medieval temple is a breathtaking sight, with its exquisitely preserved sculpture, including

some eyebrow-raising erotica. The ancient rock-cut caves and ornate temples of Bhubaneswar, the state capital, hark back to an era when the kingdom stretched from the Ganges delta to the mouth of the River Godavari. The Jagannath Temple at Puri is the site for one of the world’s



most spectacular devotional processions. Puri’s golden beaches are also known for the sand art which can only be found here. At Raghurajpur village we will discover Patachitra, a local art of painting stories from mythology – large scrolls of which were used to adorn the walls of palatial homes.

On this trip we will also spend two nights at Rajbari on the outskirts of Kolkata. Rajbari is a traditional Bengali Zamindari home. The Zamindars were feudal lords who commanded large tracts of land and built their palatial homes in the villages. The Rajbari is one such home that has been renovated and restored to a beautiful heritage hotel.

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