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PEREGRINE  
SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

# WANDERER

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Alex Bescoby's

## Myanmar Fascination

One traveller's 10-year journey through a changing Myanmar

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of an exclusive offer



*On the spice road • Meet the people • A stay to remember*

TRAILFINDERS  
THE TRAVEL EXPERTS



*Dear Trailfinder,*

Welcome to Wanderer, a magazine brought to you by Peregrine Adventures and Trailfinders with inspirational and informative tales that are sure to influence your travels.

I founded Trailfinders in 1970, so more than 46 years ago, as an overland tour company and with a staff of just four. Whilst TF has changed beyond recognition over the years, adventure touring is still at our very heart and Peregrine is the perfect partner, offering premium adventures worldwide.

Service has always been key and I am proud that Trailfinders was named 'Most Trusted Travel Brand' by readers of the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers as well as 'Best Tour Operator' by *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Sunday Times Travel Magazine* in 2016.

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Mike Gooley CBE  
**Chairman – Trailfinders**

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# My Myanmar fascination



By Alex Bescoby



*I first arrived in Myanmar as a drifting Cambridge student almost a decade ago, to study its history. In 2008, this country was unrecognisable compared to the one we find today.*

My first encounter with its people was in neighbouring Thailand, among the community of Myanmar refugees fleeing decades of conflict and dictatorship. In the small Thai border town of Mae Sot I waited for my chance to pass through a rare border crossing into a country whose tragic story had fascinated me from afar.

Memories of the poorly named 'Saffron Revolution' of 2007 - the most recent deadly and failed attempt

by Myanmar's people to stand up to a brutal military regime in power for over five decades - were still fresh. To add to the injury, the death toll from a devastating cyclone in the south of the country was rising every day. The ruling generals were refusing offers of international aid at horrific human cost, ever suspicious of outside influence of any kind.

Against this backdrop of tragedy, my memories of those first encounters are still filled with joy. In a

wooden house built for 10 that now housed more than 50 Myanmar refugees, we laughed, traded stories, ate exotic Myanmar food and modelled my first man-skirt (or *longyi*) – the start of a love affair that's lasted until today. From there I made my first steps across the border and into Myanmar, and I haven't stopped exploring this incredible country ever since.

In those first days I was watched wherever I went. The internet was almost non-existent, and mobile phones the luxury of a privileged elite. Censorship was absolute – in newspapers and television, but even in the way people spoke.



Photo by: Alex Bescoby

Tourist movements were heavily limited to a well-trodden path and to pre-approved people, and visas were woefully short. It was a country as blessed with natural beauty and cultural treasures as it was cursed with the legacy of dictatorship and war.

Over the last decade, however, this country of 50 plus million people has transformed. The first credible

election in more than half a century was held in 2015, and a new government sworn in led by veteran activist Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Its new leaders and its people are still wrestling with enormous challenges, legacies of long years of oppression and neglect.

**“Even in the face of these enormous challenges, there's an undeniable sense of optimism in the air.**

They range from the practical - like how to provide even the most basic public services to communities spread throughout its bulging cities and into remote mountains and jungles, to the philosophical - such as how to design a political structure that can heal the wounds of decades of ethnic and religious division. Even in the face of these enormous challenges, there's an undeniable sense of optimism in the air.

For the tourist of 2017, the well-trodden tourist path is still to be found. Only now you can find yourself hopping between luxury hotels, treated to exquisite dining options, and ferried by boutique airline flights at a very reasonable price.

You might start by wandering the white sand beaches of Ngapali bay, lapped by clear waters teeming with seafood soon to be a very reasonably priced lunch. I'd wager it beats anything the Bahamas can offer up.

From there you could head onto the site of the ancient kingdom of Bagan, gliding around by E-Bike and marvelling at the stunning architecture - thousands

of now-crumbling stupas and temples carefully constructed while 5000 miles away William and Harold were knocking seven bells out of each other in a boggy Hastings field.

Next, perhaps catch a spine-curdling train through the heart of Myanmar's dry zone to stand awestruck at the formidable walls of Mandalay palace, former seat of the Burmese kings until the last King, Thibaw, was toppled by the British army in 1885.

Then come to a stop in the heart of the country's largest city, Yangon, and take the chance to be moved close to tears by the sheer beauty, warmth and cacophonous peace of the mighty Shwedagon Pagoda.

Wherever you find yourself on your own Myanmar odyssey, park a seat for sunset - after 10 years, I'm still blown away at the end of every day by the most spectacular skies on earth.

**“my most memorable encounters have always been in Myanmar's nooks and crannies, where curiosity - mixed with care and respect - can open doors you never expected.**

After all that, I've no doubt you will - like me - have fallen utterly in love with this beautiful and mysterious land. But if you've the time and the appetite, anyone brave enough to make their own way off the beaten track can watch in wonder as history unfolds around them. Over the last decade my most memorable encounters have always been in Myanmar's nooks and crannies, where

curiosity - mixed with care and respect - can open doors you never expected.

Why not try tucking into rice wine and river snails in the sleepy town of Loikaw, capital of tiny Kayah State only very recently opened to foreigners. People here are eager to talk, and if the conversation flies you might find yourself invited for a spot of afternoon karaoke.

Or perhaps take a journey through the beautiful Karen hills on Myanmar's eastern border, for so long plagued by fighting but now largely at peace. The state capital, Hpa-An, is fast becoming a hip new tourist destination. Spell-binding views from hill-top pagodas await those who can bear the punishing two hour climb to the top of Mount Zwegabin, whose shadow looms over the town.

Or simply take the time to sit in one of Yangon's bustling tea shops, as Burmese dishes and cups of hot, sweet tea fly around you, punctuated by gossip and chatter. If you're feeling brave strike up a conversation (although you probably won't have to start it!) - you never know where it might take you. For me, a simple hello was the start of a life-changing film-making adventure\* - a three year journey with the country's little-known royal family to bring home the remains of the country's last King after a century in exile.



Photo by: Alex Bescoby

For the curious tourist of 2017, so many delights await in Myanmar. See this country's famous sites, relax into its wonderful (and luxurious) hospitality, but don't forget that its people - for so long screened from talking openly with outsiders - are the unmissable treasure. Approached with respect, these chance conversations can be your window into a unique culture and history, the beginning of lasting friendships, and a path to adventures you never expected, and will never forget. •

\**We Were Kings*, the story of the lost royal family of Burma which Alex began filming in 2014, will be premiered at the British Library on September 9th. After a worldwide competition, it was funded by the estate of documentary maker Alan Whicker in 2016.

**Experience the spirit of Myanmar for yourself on Peregrine Adventures's 14-day *Magical Myanmar* tour. Contact Trailfinders on 020 7408 9021 to secure your exclusive 20% discount today.**



# Why the best travels of my life started after 50



By Alison Armstrong

In November 2013, when I was 63 and my husband, Don, was 71, we went to Iguazu Falls in Argentina. At Iguazu you can go under the falls in an open boat. From a walkway at the top of the falls I pointed out the boat to Don. "There's no way I'm going in that!" he said.

Of course we went in it.

Afterwards I wrote this:

*What an experience! We knew we'd get wet, and were wearing only swimsuits, but wet is not the word. Drenched! Saturated! Soaked! Deluged! It was like heading into a torrent. So much water coming at me I couldn't breathe, and had to turn my face away, and for a second thought "I could drown here". All of us screaming with excitement. And me laughing so hard I thought I'd choke. It was a laugh that came from the gut, from the very core, and filled the entire body before escaping through the mouth as a roar, a veritable volcano of a laugh that went on and on. In a good way. In the best way. And what was so funny? The sheer ridiculous absurdity of what we were doing – sitting in an open boat heading straight into a waterfall. And the fact that we actually chose to do it.*

I doubt I have ever felt more alive.

It's 2011. Don is 68 and past his due-by date at work. He desperately needs to retire, so much so that he's starting to get sick, but we don't know how we can afford it. We have some retirement savings, and some pensions, but we also have debts and a mortgage. Through a lot of



Photo by: Alison Armstrong

soul searching the idea arises to sell the apartment and use the proceeds to pay off our debts and travel the world. Once the solution appears it seems obvious. It comes down to this: do we want a home or do we want a life? It takes four months to sell the apartment, its contents, and our car, and for Don to close his business. We've been nomadic ever since.

***“Like most people, in my twenties I felt invincible, and of course I assumed that I had all of my life ahead of me. Travelling at that age is about seeing the world and how others live, but it is also a grand party. Life sings and zings and flits all over the place.*”**

The idea of home has become very fluid. Home is with each other. In the past five and a half years “home” has been a hotel, hostel, apartment, tent, train, ship, plane, house-sitting, or staying with family. There's an enormous freedom in not owning property.

We began our journey in September of 2011 and since then have been to 31 countries on six continents. We have travelled in India and Southeast Asia, Australia and the South Pacific, South and Central America, Europe

and the Middle East. Over a million miles in all. The more I travel the more I want to travel.

William Blake said: *A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.* I travelled extensively in my twenties, motivated by a great curiosity. I found it enriching and exciting, but I did not see in the way that I see at this stage in my life. It's not that I was a fool so much as I was foolish, and young. There is a presence and confidence that comes with having lived a few years. Perspective on life is different. Like most people, in my twenties I felt invincible, and of course I assumed that I had all of my life ahead of me. Travelling at that age is about seeing the world and how others live, but it is also a grand party. Life sings and zings and flits all over the place.

***“The idea of home has become very fluid. Home is with each other.*”**

Now that I'm older, life is short, so short, and so precious, and each moment is to be savoured. Because of this I see and feel things differently. When I saw the Eiffel Tower in my twenties I thought it was pretty amazing, but I was more interested in talking with the handsome French man who struck up a conversation with me. Seeing it again in my fifties it was as if I really



Photo by: Alison Armstrong



Photo by: Alison Armstrong

saw it for the first time: its beauty and grandeur, its simplicity, its complexity, and its sheer elegance. I was stunned, and realised I'd never really seen it before.

In our travels we've done things we never thought we would ever do. We went ice trekking on Perito Moreno glacier in Argentina. This time it was me who was afraid and Don who was determined to do it, to put on crampons and trek across the shifting crevices of a glacier. There is nothing quite like stepping out of your comfort zone. Every cell of the body sings. The heart rejoices, and life shouts YES!

“*William Blake said: A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.*”

We have been parasailing and zip-lining, waded our way through an underground river with only headlamps for light, climbed a volcano in the dark to see the sunrise, been up in a hot air balloon, snorkelled in several different places, hiked all over the world, and dissolved into tears in the ancient tombs of Egypt, in Hindu temples in India, and in Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia.

Some of the most extraordinary things we've seen and experienced include the *Temples Of Humankind* at Damanhur in Italy, Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona, a four-hour charismatic church service in Samoa, the ancient ruins of Petra in Jordan, and a two-week festival

of indigenous dance and music in Mexico. We feel more alive, more engaged with life than we ever have.

When I was young I saw things in black and white and thought I knew everything. Now that I'm older I realize that there are grey areas in everything and that the more I learn the less I know. It means that I have a greater compassion for all I encounter. I'm softer now, and have nothing to prove. This deeply affects how I experience the world and how I interact with people. If there's one thing we've learned it's that if you approach people with kindness and an open heart they will respond in kind and this has been true everywhere we've been. Language is not an issue. Smiles and kindness are universal. We've rarely felt unsafe.

The inner journey has been as enriching as the outer journey. At some point we stopped worrying so much about money. Our relationship has deepened; when you're together 24/7 you learn to resolve issues very quickly. And we have learned to trust, and surrender, in a way that we never had before we embarked on this journey.

We're now 66 and 74 and we still have a list of places we'd like to travel to. Even though we take quite long breaks, staying in one place for months at a time, we're not done yet. Age is just a number; and whatever number you are, don't let it stop you travelling. •

**Ready to begin your best travels? Peregrine Adventures offers premium holidays in over 80 destinations. Contact Trailfinders on 020 7408 9021 to secure your exclusive 20% discount today.**



Photo by: Alison Armstrong



Photo by Nassim Rotracker & Keith James

## On the spice road with Chetna Makan



*As a semi-finalist on the Great British Bake Off, Chetna Makan became known for her unique approach; adding Indian spice to traditional British baking. Since then, she's launched a popular YouTube channel, Food with Chetna, and has authored two books, The Cardamom Trail and Chai, Chaat, and Chutney, both celebrating cooking with Indian flavours.*

*We caught up with her to chat about life after the Bake Off tent, her cooking essentials, and how to track down the best food in India.*

### Tell us a bit about yourself!

I was born and brought up in India in a small town called Jabalpur in central India. From there I moved to

Mumbai to train as a fashion designer, where I stayed and worked for many years. It was a great time in my career. I worked with some great companies and brands, and even tried my hand at fashion styling for magazines. Living on my own I was always eating out and street food was where I found my meals most days. Slowly I found a place with a small kitchen and started cooking for my friends and myself.

When I moved to the U.K. around 13 years ago, I started cooking even more – I was missing the food from India and wanted to try and create those dishes in my kitchen.

### What do you enjoy most about cooking?

My mum is a great cook and from a very young age I always watched her cook for us, try new things and thoroughly enjoy feeding us. She is my inspiration and the reason I started cooking in the first place. I started by helping her out in the kitchen, doing bits of chopping and stirring, and then got into it myself.

The most amazing thing about cooking for me is feeding others. I love spending hours in the kitchen cooking for my family and friends. I find the whole process very relaxing and enjoyable. And it's even more rewarding when the people you have cooked for enjoy the food too.



Photo by: Nassim Rothacker & Keith James

**What was the experience of being on the Great British Bake Off like?**

The whole experience of being part of such an amazing show was just extraordinary. It was one of the best times I had in that tent baking with some lovely people who I proudly call my friends now. The whole process from starting with the application to the weeks spent in the tent was just amazing and one I would remember and cherish all my life.

**How is the relationship with food different in India compared to the UK?**

In India, people are obsessed with food. They start their days with a hearty breakfast and while they're eating it, they'll be planning the rest of their meals for the day. Street food is quite significant in all Indian households too. It doesn't matter what background you come from, everyone loves street food.

You will find stalls by the side of the roads with cars, scooters, cycles all parked around the stalls and everyone enjoying the food equally. Lots of people rely on street food for their daily meals; not only is it cheap but also provides fresh, hot meals for people living away from home, working outdoors, students and even people having lunch in their break. It's amazing how street food brings people together in their passion and love for food.

**Is that what inspired you to write your latest book, *Chai, Chaat, and Chutney*?**

My new book is my street food journey through India. I travelled the four major cities Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai and found great recipes and dishes. I then chose the best of that and put them in this book - the Kolkata chapter is my favourite! This book would be food joy for anyone looking for exciting and new things to try.

**What are the five essential ingredients that you couldn't live without?**

This is a tough question as my kitchen is packed full of ingredients I can't do without. But the five ingredients



Photo by: Nassim Rothacker & Keith James



Photo by: Nassim Rothacker & Keith James

I would need for my daily cooking would be flour, salt, lentils, onions and cardamom. There are a lot of things I could make with just these 5 ingredients.

**Do you have any go-to dishes?**

My go to food is lentils like *tadka dal* or *dal makhani*. I usually start my week by making a fresh *tadka dal* to eat with rice or *roti*. It's healthy, quick to make, delicious and a family favourite. It starts the week on a healthy note and is great comfort food, whatever the season. I also like making light vegetable dishes like potato with cauliflower or okra or paneer. Dishes that tick all the boxes!

**Where is the best local market you've found in India?**

Every town and centre has a small food market with the best food stalls. But I do love the local food market of Mumbai, particularly the Colaba and Fort area.

**Do you have any tips for tracking down the best food you travel (particularly in India)?**

If you're looking for the best food markets or freshest ingredients, always ask the locals. They are the people to send you in the right direction! •

Feeling hungry for adventure? Book your *Colours of India* tour with Peregrine. Contact Trailfinders on 020 7408 9021 to secure your exclusive 20% discount today.

Which South American destination  
is right for you?



*South America is big. It runs from 10 degrees north of the equator all the way to Cape Horn, just across the pond from the Antarctica Peninsula.*

There are 12 different countries to explore, the world's driest desert, its biggest rainforest, highest waterfall and best BBQ (that one's a bit subjective, but we'll count it). How do you know where to start?

Do you go from North to South? Start in Patagonia and work your way up the east coast? To stop in Chile or not? You have the questions, we have the answers.

**1** *If you want to feel small, go to Patagonia*

Sprawled across two countries (Chile and Argentina), Patagonia is one of nature's last frontiers. A haven for trekkers and adventure seekers, this remarkable landscape of snow-capped mountain peaks, imposing glaciers, gushing waterfalls, and beautiful national parks is the very definition of 'epic'. It's also one of the most isolated territories in the world, with roughly two people per square kilometre. Travel to the end of the world, and witness our planet at its most wild and spectacular.

**2** *If you want to try something a bit different, try Ecuador*

What Ecuador lacks in size compared to its heavyweight neighbours Colombia and Peru, it was doubly blessed with an abundance of perfect beaches, steaming active volcanoes, sky-blue lagoons, and the rich biodiversity of the Galapagos Islands. Surrounded by green mountains high in the Andes, Quito is a good place to start your explorations, and also provides easy access to other highlights like Lake Quilatoa and Mount Pinicinha. Some of the most beautiful churches in Latin America can also be found here, and the golden interior of The Church of the Society of Jesus makes for a truly mesmerising sight. Don't miss the Ecuadorian Sierra culture either, where warm hospitality, shaman healers, bustling markets, and a vibrant nightlife all wait to greet you.

**3** *If you want ancient history, go to Peru*

If you're flying into Peru, chances are you're making a bee-line for the Sun Gate at Machu Picchu. And it is an amazing experience; no matter which trail you choose, you'll be rewarded with the sight of awe-inspiring ancient civilisations and one of the most famous sunrises in the world. But beyond the Sacred Valley, Peru offers up plenty of other experiences too; the mysterious desert glyphs of the Nazca Lines that are visible from space, wildlife-laden Islas Ballestos (Peru's answer to the Galapagos Islands), the cosmopolitan capital Lima and a dash of local Quechua culture in Cusco. Hike Laguna 69 past Artesonraju, rumoured to be the inspiration for Paramount Pictures famous snow-topped mountain logo.

**4** *For a David Attenborough experience, visit the Galapagos Islands*

Spectacular, isolated, and richly biodiverse, Ecuador's Galapagos Islands are like stepping into an entirely different world. Here, in the place where Charles Darwin first theorised natural selection, thousands of creatures of the sky and sea call this remote region home. Galapagos and hammerhead sharks, spotted eagle rays, and inquisitive sea lions play in the crystal clear waters, while black marine iguanas bask in the sun on the shore. For curious travellers, nature enthusiasts and wildlife lovers alike, there's no better way to experience the islands than by boat, relaxing on the deck as blue-footed boobies and frigate birds arch through the sky overhead.

**5** *If you like your steaks rare and your wine strong, head to Argentina*

No matter where you travel in Argentina, from Bariloche's chocolate shops right through to the wine lands of Mendoza, you'll probably pass through Buenos Aires. By far the most cosmopolitan place in South America, it boasts the stunning architecture of Casa Rosada, famous cafes (Café Tortoni) and the colourful suburb of La Boca. Avenida 9 De Julio and Avenida De Corrientes are creative and bustling but retain their charm at the same time.

And of course, Argentina is internationally famed for its great beef steaks, mighty Malbec reds, and playful tango. Head to Don Julio and La Cabrera and taste some of, if not the best, meat you've ever encountered, before dancing the night away at a local *milonga*.

**6** *If you want the lot, go to Brazil*

For a taste of everything, head to Rio de Janeiro to explore its incredible favelas, the beaches on Copacabana and Ipanema and its local nightlife in Lapa. The towering Christ the Redeemer is a must, but make time for Sugar Loaf Mountain and its incredible views over Rio too. To the north you'll find Salvador da Bahia, the old capital of Portugal's New World Colony. Salvador has an Afro-Brazilian soul and a well-preserved colonial vibe, which means it's not unusual to see Capoeira dancers doing backflips in 17th century plazas while the scent of *acarajé* (shrimp fritters) wafts from a nearby café.

**7** *If you're looking for warm hospitality, try Chile*

While most holidaymakers head straight for the sun-drenched sands of Ipanema or to retrace the steps of the Incas in Peru, Chile remains an underrated, somewhat undiscovered stop on the South American tourist trail. Wedged between the Pacific Ocean and the spine of the Andes, this unspoiled country flows across the parched Atacama Desert and glacial plains of Patagonia, thriving cosmopolitan hubs and world-class wineries and cafes, vibrant art scenes and the mysterious statue-studded landscape of the Easter Islands. This is a country that caters for travellers of all hues.

Chileans are renowned for their *Buena onda* - their good vibes and hospitality. Sharing is integral to the fabric of life here; friends reconnect over numerous rounds of *maté* tea, mealtimes are shared with smiling faces, and coffees are sipped lazily in cheerful cafes while the world goes by.

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*Discover the colour and diversity of South America for yourself on Peregrine Adventures' 31-day Rhythms of South America trip. Call Trailfinders on 020 7408 9021 to book your place with 20% OFF today.*

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# Meet the people: Jan Cunningham from Trailfinders



*When it comes to your precious travel plans, there's just no online match for the people who live and breathe them. We chat with Leeds-based travel consultant, Jan Cunningham, about what sets Trailfinders customer service apart, and what travel means to her personally.*

## How did your Trailfinders journey begin?

My journey to Trailfinders began in 1999, some sixteen years before I actually started working here, when I was lucky enough to be part of an expedition to Kenya. It more than whet my appetite for exposure to other cultures and countries. Not only did it become my first of many exciting trips, it was also the impetus in my decision to study Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews.

After graduating I continued to satisfy my intrigue by working with clients from over fifty different countries, as an Immigration and Asylum Lawyer. I also took every

opportunity I could to go exploring; spending as many days overseas as I had annual leave!

I also used to help out at my parents' jewellery business at weekends and in between legal positions and that gave me retail experience. After more than ten years in Law, when I fancied a change, it seemed like a natural and exciting choice for me to become a Travel Consultant. I really wanted to work for the best in the industry so had my sights set on Trailfinders and fortunately they found me to be a suitable candidate.

## What does a normal working day look like for you?

No two days are the same but one thing that remains a constant is answering calls and seeing clients in our Leeds Travel Centre to help them with their travel plans, whether that's making their holiday dreams come true, reuniting them with family across the world, or being on hand to assist with any other travel advice that our clients might need.

Today I've been arranging a Serengeti Safari, yesterday it was a motorhome holiday around New Zealand with a blissful little stopover in Tahiti en-route home, tomorrow might be a month-long US road trip, two weeks in a luxury Maldivian water bungalow, or bear-viewing in a Canadian lodge!

There's a lot of work that we do in the background to take care of any logistical or availability issues, so that our clients can just think about the fun stuff and look forward to their amazing holidays.

## What is the most rewarding part of your role?

There's nothing more rewarding than taking a seed of an idea from a client and growing it into a real and

exciting travel itinerary. It's a real pleasure to hear from clients when they return - everyone comes back with an anecdote or two - and to know that you've played a part in one of the most memorable experiences of their lives.

## What do you think sets Trailfinders apart from other travel agents?

I've been really struck by the resources and care that Trailfinders puts into recruiting and training the right people. I can also see how much care and attention my colleagues in other departments put into selecting the best suppliers around the world to ensure we only offer the very best hotels, tours, and unmissable experiences around the world and always at the best price possible.

I truly believe that our collective wealth of experience and expertise, together with the sophisticated systems and great supplier relationships we have, are the key to our award-winning formula. We're a pretty personable bunch at Trailfinders too, so that also helps!

## You travelled with Peregrine recently; where did you go, and what was the highlight?

I went on the Classic Sri Lanka tour, which follows a circular route around much of Sri Lanka. It takes in the Cultural Triangle with its many temples and rich history, the lovely lake-town of Kandy that is also home to the country's most significant temple, the stunning scenery of Sri Lanka's tea country, the thrill of leopard-spotting on safari game drives in Yala National Park (we saw three!), and finally, the relaxing lovely coastal towns and beaches.

I was really impressed by the standard of the tour; the hotels were great, a couple outstanding even, and the balance of included sightseeing against free time to soak up the atmosphere was spot on for me. Our tour guide,

Ajit, was exceptional in his enthusiasm, professionalism, and incredible amount of knowledge. If I can choose only one highlight from the trip, I would have to say our climb up Sigiriya Rock; it's not an overly challenging walk because you can take it at your own pace but it was good to get the blood pumping, the far-reaching views from the top are beautiful, and it was fascinating to see the remains of an ancient city up on top.

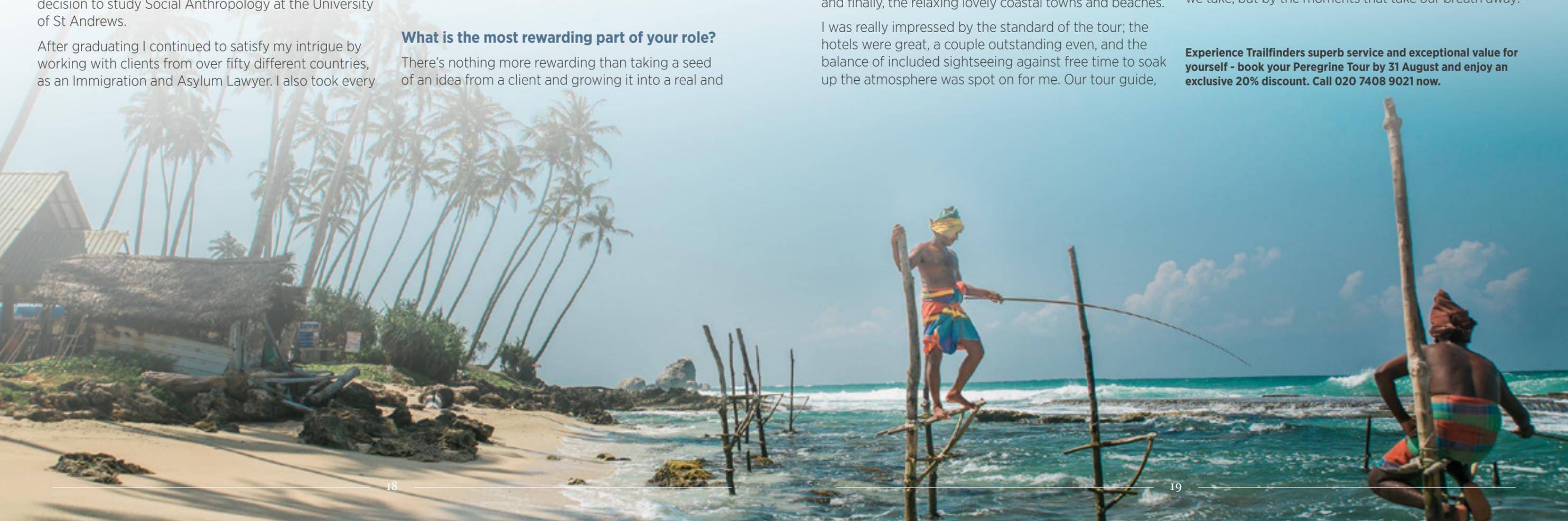
I'm in my thirties and did bring down the average age for my tour group, but really enjoyed being with like-minded people and the social aspect of it was great as I was otherwise travelling solo on that particular occasion.

## Why is travel important to you?

It sounds like such a cliché, but I feel truly alive when I'm travelling. As we get older it's harder to find new experiences and, for me, it's these that keep life really interesting. When I travel, I feel a bit child-like again because the unknown lies ahead of me, waiting to be discovered. I never tire of that feeling I get when I'm arriving at the airport to go away, it feels like Christmas Day did when I was eight.

The stand-out moments in life do happen when you're travelling, when you have precious time to yourself, or with your loved ones, to free your mind of the usual daily niggles and immerse yourselves in the sights, sounds, and smells of a different life for a while. My Manager, Emma, summed it up recently when she said to me that life should be measured not by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away! •

**Experience Trailfinders superb service and exceptional value for yourself - book your Peregrine Tour by 31 August and enjoy an exclusive 20% discount. Call 020 7408 9021 now.**



# A stay to remember



Here at Peregrine, we've always thought that travel should be more about the journey than where we rest our heads at night.

Adventure for us is an immersive, cultural experience - a local cooking class in Vietnam, campfire stories with Botswana's Ghanzi bushmen, wine tasting with vintners in Mendoza. Jacuzzi baths and a well-stocked minibar aren't usually what gets our wanderlust flowing.

But that's not to say we don't appreciate quality when it comes to finding accommodation, or that an authentic experience and a comfortable stay have to be two mutually exclusive ideas. In fact, we're all for the adventures that showcase an authentic slice of local life. That's why last year, we introduced our Peregrine Feature Stays, hand-picked accommodation that's just a little bit special.

Perhaps it's a Nonna-run guesthouse in the backstreets of Florence, a night spent in a bungalow on stilts in the

heart of the Amazonian rainforest, or a splash of luxury in a Moroccan riad.

We've delved into our Little Black Book, to showcase some of our favourite boutique overnight stays around the world. Each provides a chance to meet people, see things, and do things that you can't see, meet, or do at home: overnight stays that stick in the memory.

For more information about Peregrine's hand-picked Feature Stays, contact Trailfinders on 020 7408 9021

## 4 Posada Amazonas lodge, Peru

Fall asleep under your mosquito net canopy as the sounds of the Amazon Jungle come to life. Posada Lodge is community owned by the indigenous Ese-Eja community of Infierno, and offers perfect views over the surrounding rainforest. Keep an eye out for the Amazonian wildlife, including monkeys, toucans, caymans, macaws, and capybaras!

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## 1 Hupin Khuang Daing, Myanmar

This idyllic collection of still cottages is nestled on the western bank of Inle Lake in the eastern Shan mountains. Soak up the fresh air on the terrace and watch the distinctive one-legged rowing style of local fishermen as the sun rises and sets in the distance.

## 2 Riad Ritaj, Morocco

Beautiful and opulent, this hotel is a charming example of traditional Moroccan architecture both inside and out. Situated in the heart of the Meknes Medina and close to all the sights of the city, the Riad Tiaj is a tranquil heaven from the bustle and heat of the city outside.

## 3 Nata Lodge, Botswana

Spanning over 10,000 square miles, the ancient Makgadikgadi salt plain is one of the largest on the planet. Tucked right against its edge is the Nata Lodge; a perfect oasis in which to take a break after scanning the endless horizons for wildlife, and discover the area's rich geological history. Relax in the shaded canopy around the lodge with a book before turning in for the night in the comfort of your thatched chalet.

## 5 Heritage Palace, India

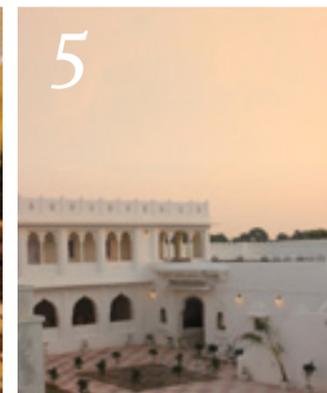
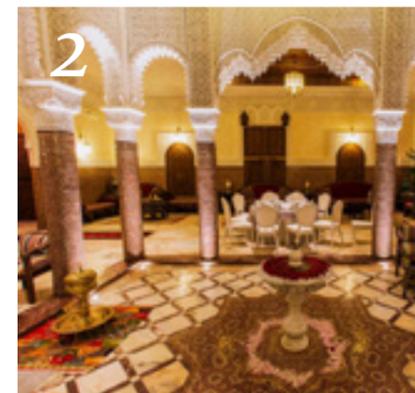
Imagine what it must have been like to be part of the ruling class in the India of yesteryear, as you sleep like a king or queen in this 15th century fortified palace. This unique, restored hotel is family-run by descendants of the royal family. They also reside here, so you can share a meal with them, and learn all about India's rich royal history.

## 6 Wadi Rum Night Camp, Jordan

Who needs a five-star rating when you can have a billion-star rating instead? Nestled in a protected area, the Wadi Rum Night Camp combines luxury tented accommodation, a dining tent serving delicious traditional meals and private terraces outside each tent - making it the perfect spot for some evening star-gazing.

## 7 Castello di Spaltenna, Tuscany

If your mind's eye had to summon the image of a 10th century Tuscan monastery, you'd probably get Castello di Spaltenna down to the last hand-chiselled limestone block. It oozes rustic Italian charm, with rolling hills and vineyards around every corner, and sculpted poplar trees dotted throughout the grounds. The rooms are provincial, roomy and charming - the perfect retreat after a gruelling day spent touring the cellar doors of the Chianti wine region.





# Meet Sana, the Peregrine leader defying gender stereotypes in India



By Rebecca Shapiro



*It took just one year of working in an office for Sana Jinah to realise it wasn't what she wanted. Born and raised in Mumbai, she longed for something more, something that'd take her out of her comfort zone and into the wider world. Something, more specifically, that'd let her travel and meet new people.*

The obstacles were numerous. On Skype she recounts them, "Coming from a Muslim family in India the story was 'look for a job you can do after you get married, one that lets you look after the house and kids'". Becoming a tour leader for Peregrine, something Sana grew to desperately want, was not your average nine-to-five. It simply wasn't seen as appropriate for a woman to be away from her family for long periods of time.

Money was another issue. After applying for the role, she was offered an interview in Delhi, a city she couldn't afford the short flight to. Overnight train was

the only option, which meant yet another difficulty: her mother. Worried about safety, Sana's mum didn't want her to go alone to a city she'd never visited. It took two weeks of persuading to get (very reluctant) permission to go. "My mum was always the highest authority in my house," she explains. "Her permission at every level is very important." Sana's dad, a doctor, passed away when she was just two years old.

Eventually she made it to Delhi for the interview, and through to the next round, but the difficulties were far from over. Training was in a far away town called Orchha, and coincided with Ramadan. Attending



it meant borrowing money from her mum, as well as confronting her fears. “I’d never even heard of the place,” Sana admits. “My train was about to leave and I started to cry. I didn’t know what I was doing alone or what the environment would be like.” Her mum, present in every part of this story’s narrative, offered reassurance: “Don’t worry, I know you will be very good. Be positive”.

**“As a 29-year old in India she knows that Indian society expects her to get married and settle down, but she’s focused on her job.”**

Sana made it through the rigorous training process, despite less experience and fewer contacts than many of her male counterparts. The year was 2013. She had become the only woman that year to get recruited as a tour leader in India.

An immense achievement. And yet, things weren’t as simple as getting to grips with a new job (which she did do, exceptionally). Society was patriarchal, her family’s attitudes traditional. “My cousins looked down on me,” explains Sana. “When I got into tourism, my aunt’s son didn’t talk to me for almost a year.” She was accused of putting the family’s name at risk, of acting disrespectfully, of doing a job that girls just shouldn’t.

But this is no sob story. As a 29-year old in India she knows that Indian society expects her to get married

and settle down, but she’s focused on her job. That, and exploring the world. She calls me from Thailand where she’s travelling with a friend; we giggle like normal twenty-somethings – gossiping about boys, complaining about parents. We discuss gender in India and the work that needs to be done. (Plenty – the country was rated 130th out of 188 countries in the UN’s Gender Equality Index; Sana’s anecdotes confirm this ranking.)

Sana is just one person. One female leader in one male-dominated society. But India is modernising, and her story is proof. Growing up, she wasn’t allowed to go to tutorials alone; now she not only travels the country as a tour guide, but inspires and assists those around her. “After my story was shared in The Guardian, my Facebook exploded,” she tells me. “I had so many friends messaging me – they asked what I was doing,



said how interesting my job sounded, wanted to know if Peregrine were hiring.” She’s modest about the impact she’s had, but it’s far from insignificant.

For Peregrine, Sana symbolises the company’s aim of gender-balancing its tour guide force. It’s committed to this aim, even in countries where female tour leaders are far from the norm. In India, 40 females applied to work at the company after its latest recruitment drive. The GM there, Pravin, believes Peregrine will soon have enough female leaders to make up 50% of the team.

**“Sana is just one person. One female leader in one male-dominated society. But India is modernising, and her story is proof.”**

And in case you’re wondering where Sana’s mother comes into all of this (I did say she’s a constant in the story), rest assured that Sana still talks to her every single day, even when on the road. I ask Sana what her mum thinks of her work. “The first year I worked for Peregrine, she was not happy”, Sana admits. “But a year in I found out that I’d been named the second best leader in India. It was the first time a female tour guide in India had won an award. I called from Jaipur to tell her and she was really happy.”

Sana was whisked off to Australia for an awards night at Peregrine’s headquarters. “I was representing Team

India,” she says, “It was my first ever trip abroad.” Importantly, it was also the trip that made her mother proud. “I arrived back home to Mumbai and mum was smiling. ‘You did something even your dad never did,’ she said. ‘You’re the first person in the family to make it to a Western country.’”

Sana calls her mum’s compliment “a big achievement”. She doesn’t get swept up in going on about her many other achievements, telling me instead that she’s looking forward to learning more and exploring more. And it’s fitting, therefore, that we end our conversation talking not about her, but about India. That’s what she’s more concerned with – showing others the country she’s so passionate about, working to get more females in her industry.

**“You’re the first person in the family to make it to a Western country.”**

“Take the challenge,” she instructs me to tell readers. “It’s beautiful. Do the right thing. Take the challenge.” She’s talking about bringing more tourists to India, but she could have just as easily been talking about gender equality there. After all, the two go hand-in-hand. Well, they do if Peregrine has anything to do with it. •

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# Tempting destinations



Looking for further destination inspiration?  
Here are four more of our current favourite places.



1 Halong Bay, Vietnam



3 Havana, Cuba



2 Okavango, Botswana



4 Bandarawela, Sri Lanka

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**1. Cuba** Step back in time amongst the charming cities, towns, and tobacco fields of this small Caribbean island. Explore the faded glory of Havana, the tobacco-growing region of Vinales, or sail your cares away on the Caribbean's perfect blue waters.

**2. Botswana** This untouched wilderness is a nature-lover's dream. Through the desert and savannah all the way to the delta's wetlands, Africa's greatest species flock to Botswana. Here, along the country's wild rivers and tranquil delta, spectacularly wild sights and sounds abound.

**3. Vietnam** Whether you go for the food, the colonial architecture, or the peace and beauty of the beaches – Vietnam has something for everybody. Imagine exploring the beautiful lakes and boulevards of Hanoi, experiencing historical temple, and enjoying delicious banquets in lively cities.

**4. Sri Lanka** The land of cinnamon and sand. From misty highland tea plantations to the palm-fringed beaches of the south, Sri Lanka's subtle spiritualism and unique natural beauty stick with you long after the journey is over.

## Contact us:

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