

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TORONTO: WHERE
THE LOCALS GO

TRAVELER

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MAY 2013

Tours of a Lifetime

2013
8th
Annual
GUIDE



50
of the
World's
Best
Guided
Trips



PLUS: HAMBURG | ATHENS | HONOLULU | AMSTERDAM

TIMOR-LESTE**Off the Radar**

Officially split from Indonesia in 2002, Timor-Leste (East Timor) is one of the world's newest, and least toured, countries. Visit this topographical and cultural wonderland with one of the few Western companies guiding trips there. Climb the 9,721-foot Mount Ramelau to take in the sunrise, hike through old-growth tropical forests looking for prehistoric rock paintings, and share *ikan sabuko* (fish cooked in banana leaves) with the villagers of Loi Huno. **Mountain Travel Sobek:** "Journey of Discovery in Timor-Leste," 12 days; \$3,495; www.mtsobek.com

CAMBODIA**Wild Mekong**

The monuments of the Khmer civilization are the star attraction of Cambodia, but its wildlife and bird sanctuaries shouldn't be missed. See it all on this compelling itinerary; highlights are a balloon ride over Angkor Wat and a stint helping staff at the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre prepare food for its more than 100 resident sun bears. The Asia expert's nonprofit partner, READ Global, has established 689 libraries throughout the continent. **Myths**

and Mountains: "Untamed Cambodia," 14 days; \$2,995; www.mythsandmountains.com

MONGOLIA**The Real Deal**

Based on the 1920s expeditions of Roy Chapman Andrews—American Museum of Natural History director and the alleged inspiration for Indiana Jones—this journey traces the Beijing-Kalgan-Urga trail, used for centuries by camel caravans between China and Mongolia. In Gobi, your own caravan passes dunes and the Flaming Cliffs, where Andrews famously discovered the first fossilized dinosaur eggs the modern world had ever seen. **Nomadic Expeditions:** "Across Mongolian Plains," 16 days; \$8,960; www.nomadicexpeditions.com

INDIA**Temples and Tea**

The cultural capital of India and onetime seat of the British Raj, Kolkata kicks off a quirky itinerary through the state of Orissa, home to numerous historic temples, notably Puri's 13th-century sandstone Sun Temple, which legend says was constructed by Lord Krishna's son, and the tea highlands, the summer stomping grounds of the raja. **Immersion Journeys:**

"East India: Temple Mythology and Mountain Peaks," 15 days; \$6,250; www.immersionjourneys.com

CHINA**Oriental Banquet**

Chinese food maven Fuchsia Dunlop guides chowhounds from Beijing to Shanghai to taste each region's specialties. There's Peking duck in the capital, Sichuan hot pot in Chengdu, and lamb skewers roasted over coals at Xi'an's Muslim Quarter market in the evening. Work up an appetite between meals with cooking demonstrations and visits to the regions' musts: the giant panda breeding center and the terra-cotta warriors. **WildChina:** "Gastronomic Tour of China," 13 days; \$6,880; www.wildchina.com

MYANMAR, BHUTAN**Festival Finder**

Here's the rare journey that pairs two of the world's best-preserved cultures. Tag along with Asia pro Denise Gogarty to experience traditional ceremonies of each: rites for novitiates at a Buddhist Burmese monastery, a lamp-lighting ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar (Burma), and the colorful masked dances of Bhutan's Thimphu Tshechu festival. **Cox and**

Kings: "Dream Trip—Burma and Bhutan," 14 days; \$8,520; www.coxandkingsusa.com

JAPAN**Ancient Way**

Once trod by feudal lords and their entourages, the Nakasendo trail linking Tokyo and Kyoto grounds 21st-century travelers in timeless, rural Japan. Walk by day, stopping in the evening at one of the route's 69 preserved "post" villages for a hot-springs soak and overnight at a *ryokan*. And repeat. **Oxalis Adventures:** "Nakasendo Trail," 12 days; \$4,150; www.oxalis-adventures.com

EUROPE**MALTA, ITALY****Ancient Sicily**

The 65-passenger *Sea Cloud II* sets sail from Malta for an in-depth exploration of Sicily's ancient treasures, including the archaeological zone in Syracuse and the Greek temple and theater in Segesta. Adding context are onboard lectures from Temple University art history professor Frank Dabell and National Trust for Historic Preservation horticulturalist Patrick Bowe. In Syracuse, the group will visit the baroque palazzo of Baron Beneventano



A woman picks tea leaves by hand in Darjeeling, India.