

NOTHING SOOTHES THE HUMAN SPIRIT LIKE A GREAT ADVENTURE.

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# NEW

BEEN AS DIVERSE. HERE ARE SEVEN SIZZLING ITINERARIES

# WORLD

FOR THE BEEN-THERE-DONE-THAT CROWD.

BY JUDY ALEXANDRA DIEDWARDO

#### GET SMART: BIKING JAPAN

If you loved Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, you'll be primed to experience Japan from a unique perspective during this nine-day hiking and biking trek that will take you from modern Tokyo through rural Japan and into the imperial city of Kyoto.

This expedition contrasts the ancient feudal culture of the samurai and Shinto temples with the modernist spirit that has fueled Japan's rise as an industrial power. Starting in the mountains around Takayama, you'll bike the remote western coast, through fishing villages and rice paddies on the Noto peninsula, and finish in the very modern city of Kyoto with its stunning palaces, temples and shrines.

As you bike and walk from region to region, you'll sample the broadest range of Japanese cuisine—from sushi straight from the sea in Kanazawa, to homemade soba noodles in Kyoto. Accommodations range from world-famous Miyako in Kyoto to a traditional Japanese ryokan overlooking the Sea of Japan—including the famous Kagaya Hotel in Wakura with its three floors of indoor and outdoor tubs with stellar sea views.

You'll bike 15 to 20 miles a day on coastal roads and walk up to 10 miles a day on level city streets, rural roads and among the foothills of Kyoto. But thankfully, transportation is available for those who have overestimated their stamina—or had too much sake the night before.

(Butterfield & Robinson, 800/678-1147. Rates from \$5,750.)

#### TAKE A HIKE:

##### MOUNT EVEREST TREK

OK, so you read *Into Thin Air* and decided to extinguish that lifelong fantasy of scaling Everest with the *National Geographic* film crew. But don't be too hasty. The launch of several new trans-Himalayan treks to the flanks of Mount Everest will have you dusting off your thermal undies and sharpening your pick axe.

Only a very few have stood on Everest's summit, yet hiking to its base is a worthy and unforgettable adventure. Start with the Everest Escapade—a nine-day trek visiting all the major Sherpa villages, plus famed Tengboche Monastery, where you can get a

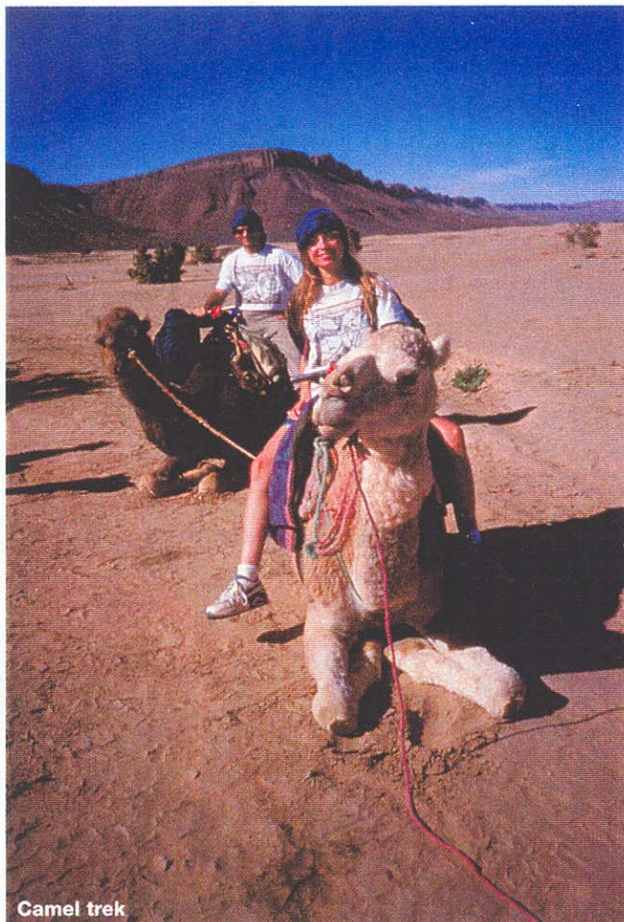
good look at Everest. You'll also view a stunning panorama of other Himalayan giants: Thamserku (22,208 feet), Kangtega (22,340 feet), and the obelisk of Ama Dablam (22,494 feet).

If this sounds too wimpy, seasoned climbers will want to check out the 16-day Everest Base Camp Trek where the hiking is more strenuous and the elevations higher at a

maximum of 18,192 feet. After a plunge into the exotic bazaars of Kathmandu, you'll take a mountain flight to Lukla at 9,300 feet, spend your first few days exploring the Sherpa villages and have a few rest days to acclimate for the days ahead. Then you'll take the most direct hiking route from Namche Bazaar to the stunning rocky outcrop of Kala Patar at 18,192 feet where you'll gaze at the face of Everest. Weather permitting, you'll also visit the actual Everest Base Camp.

But as those who've traveled to Nepal will tell you, there's more to this trip than the mountain scenery. The Sherpa people are captivating, as are the ancient Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and villages alive with the sounds of chanting that resonate from these mountain shrines.

(Mountain Travel•Sobek, 888/687-6235. Rates from \$2,050.)



In princely style,  
you'll stay in maharajas'  
palaces that  
have been  
converted into  
luxurious hotels.

#### GO FOR A RIDE: RAJASTHAN

##### CAMEL SAFARI

The turbaned rajas and maharajas have a long tradition of martial valor, and Rajasthan, a region in northeastern India, is still dotted with palaces and fortresses that are reminders of that romantic, turbulent era.

This Rajasthan exploration begins in the medieval desert

strongholds like Jaisalmer, an ancient trading center carved entirely from amber-colored stone, and Jaipur, with its famous Amber Palace, which you'll reach by elephant. You'll also visit the bazaars, temples and palaces of Jodhpur, and Agra, the city of the Taj Mahal. In princely style, you'll stay in maharajas' palaces that have been converted into luxurious hotels.

But the most memorable part of this trip will be your few days spent on a camel safari in the Great Indian Desert, riding (or walking) from village to village, meeting the region's colorful camel-riding nomadic families and staying in deluxe carpeted

# The devaluation of the ruble has made luxury travel to this country more affordable than ever, making this the best time to visit Russia's capital city.

wildlife, awe-inspiring volcanos and towering mountains. Russia is the largest country on earth, with enormous tracts of land that have been opened to travelers only in the last few years. And the devaluation of the ruble has made luxury travel to this country more affordable than ever, making this the best time to visit

tent camps along the way.

Some camel safari itineraries include a visit to the colorful Pushkar Camel Fair, an annual festival celebration for desert tribes who come from all over Rajasthan to buy and sell livestock, including some 50,000 camels, and to swap stories and compete in camel races. It's a sight not to be missed.

Winter itineraries include a visit to the Nagaur Fair, with a livestock market as impressive as Pushkar's.

(Mountain Travel•Sobek, 888/687-6235. Rates from \$3,290.)

## LIVE LIKE A CZAR: MOSCOW

To most Westerners, images of Russia are limited to the major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. But there is much more to this country, which spans 11 time zones and two continents, its easternmost border less than 50 miles from North America. Within this vast expanse is the largest freshwater lake in the world, rivers and forests teeming with fish and

Russia's capital city and glimpse a civilization that was once off-limits to the Western world.

From the impressive dimensions of Red Square and the fortress-like Kremlin, which spans four city blocks, to the massive marble columns of the world-famous Bolshoi Theater where Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" debuted in 1877, to the vibrantly colored cupolas atop the city's 16th-century cathedrals, Moscow's rich history is alive at every turn.

Among my favorites is the 16th-century St. Basil's Cathedral shaped like an eight-pointed star linking eight individual chapels to the central church by mazes of corridors, vestibules and twisting staircases. According to Russian lore, Ivan the Terrible had architects blinded after St. Basil's construction was completed to prevent them from building anything to surpass its beauty. While the validity of this tale is doubtful, it exemplifies this culture's penchant for the mystical.

Though the last Russian czar has been laid to rest, interest in





Serengeti, Tanzania

the Romanov dynasty has never been more alive, as documentaries, books and museum exhibits trace the splendor and sorrow of Nicholas II's star-crossed reign.

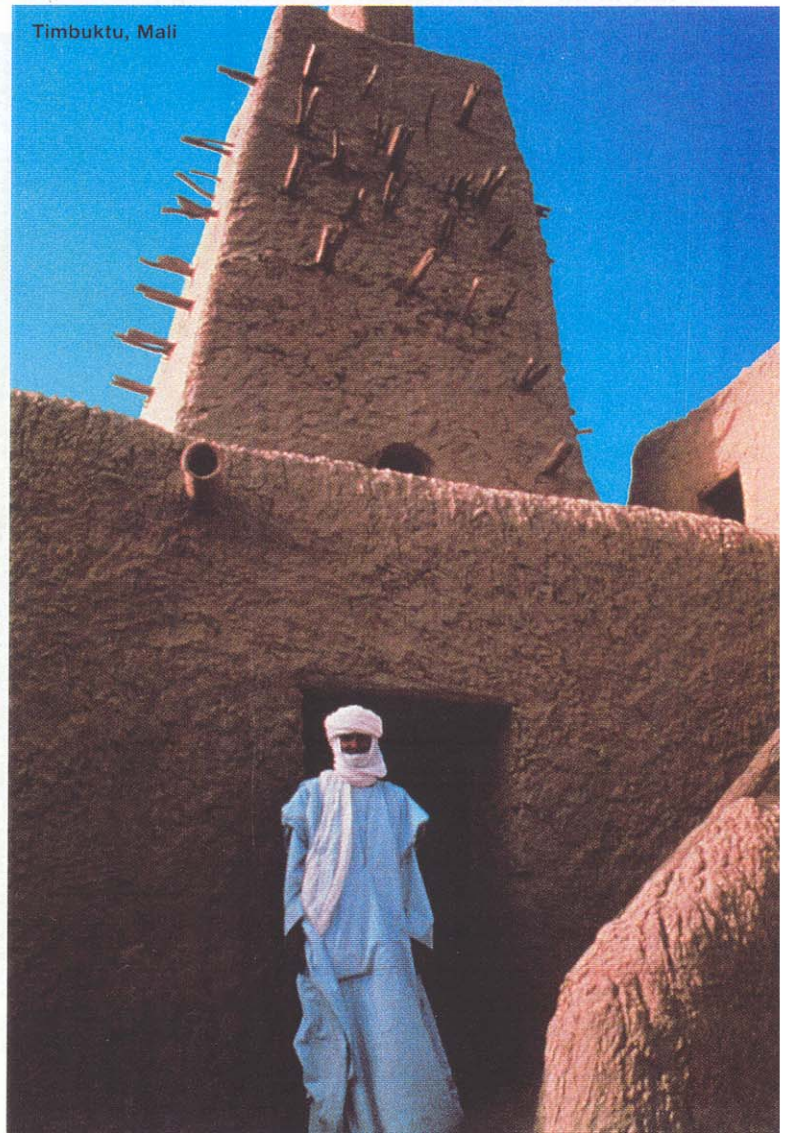
But a comforting reminder that Western civilization isn't that far removed can be found in several five-star hotels nestled in the heart of the city. These exquisite renovated buildings are as much a part of Moscow's cultural revitalization as its landmarks. The newest is the centrally located five-star Marriott Royal Hotel, which features a level of luxury harkening to the days of the czars, with everything from butler service to a state-of-the-art fitness and business center. It even has the city's first prime beef restaurant.

And speaking of food, the Russian food revolution extends to Moscow's grand boulevards and side streets. From hip cybercafes to the lavish restaurant where "Dr. Zhivago" was filmed, you'll experience history in the making as Moscow's innovative young chefs are writing a few new chapters of their own. Several U.S.-based tour operators offer exceptional travel programs within Moscow, and many leading airlines provide service, including Swissair with its newly opened Miami gateway.

(Moscow City Tourist Board, 888/966-7269; Marriott Hotels of Moscow, 800/228-9290. Rates from \$300; Union Tours 800/451-9511. Weekly rates from \$1,500.)

#### TOP OF THE WORLD: NORTH POLE

To stand on the top of Planet Earth in the footprints of some of history's greatest explorers is the adventure of a lifetime indeed. Just a century ago, no human **CONTINUED ON PAGE 262**



Timbuktu, Mali

# Embarrassed to Smile?

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(TCS Expeditions, 800/727-7477. Departs July 23, 2000. Rates from \$16,950.)

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Trip highlights include Egypt's Valley of the Kings and the temples of Karnak and Luxor, as well as vast herds of migrating animals on the Serengeti, the red colobus monkeys and other unique wildlife of Zanzibar, game viewing along Botswana's Chobe River and the coast of Namibia, the magnificent Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, South Africa's famous Blue Train to Cape Town, legendary Timbuktu on the edge of the Sahara and the colorful Dogon people of Mali, and the bustling bazaar of Marrakech.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 264

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(TCS Expeditions, 800/727-7477. Departs Nov. 27, 2000. Rates from \$29,950.)

### GET ORIENTED

Rail buffs and pleasure seekers alike revel in the extraordinary opportunity to journey back in time to 1883 when the Orient-Express set the standard for luxury trains and carved its place in travel history with its inaugural European passage from Paris to Istanbul. Now you can retrace this legendary train's original route—from Paris to Budapest, Bucharest and Istanbul—all in five-star luxury.

The train's original carriages date from the 1920s and have been restored to their former glory, complete with wooden marquetry and brass fittings, to transport passengers to a bygone era.

After an afternoon departure from Paris and tea in your compartment, you'll enjoy an evening of gourmet food and fine wines while watching the sun setting on the country landscape that speeds by your window. The following morning you'll awaken to breakfast served in your compartment as the Orient-Express shuttles past magnificent Alpine scenery and through the lovely Austrian city of Vienna.

Next stop is Budapest where you'll spend the day touring this magical city, followed by an unforgettable evening in one of its finest luxury hotels. The next day, you'll board the train again for travel through rural Hungary before crossing the Romanian border.

Breakfast is served in your compartment the following morning while rolling through Transylvania, followed by a coach transfer to Bucharest and a guided tour of the city. Rejoin the Orient-Express for dinner onboard before crossing the Danube River and the Bulgarian border.

After your final night onboard, breakfast is served while the train winds its way around the Sea of Marmara toward your final destination. You'll disembark in Istanbul for a tour of this ancient city as you bid farewell to the Orient-Express, but carry this unforgettable experience with you forever.

(Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, 800/524-2420. Departs Aug. 31, 2000. Rates from \$6,300.) ♦

## Beautiful Women Do Not Go To Singles Bars



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\*As featured on Good Morning America, ABC, CBS, NBC, FFX, Oprah, Today, New York Times, LA Times, Wall Street Journal, London Evening Standard • Author of bestseller "Have I Got A Match For You."