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Welcome to our Spring update. I'm not long back from a sensational trip to **Myanmar** – do read my report inside.

With the booking trend continuing towards last-minute decisions I frequently applaud technology – the speed of email and skype communications with our overseas partners means we can pull together even a quite complicated trip in just a day or so. If you are considering travelling over the next few months, we'd love to hear from you.

Last year the talk was all about Myanmar. This year it's **Kashmir**. The relaxing of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's travel advice means that after many years we can now return to explore Srinagar and its stunning scenery – for your stay there I recommend a gracious and traditional Kashmiri houseboat.

For **polar travellers** we've a range of last-minute offers and new trips for this summer, and it's already time to look ahead to the coming Antarctic season. You'll also receive the new Arcturus brochure in July.

If you've given us your email address, you'll hear from us more regularly with our E-Dispatches news and special offers.

Happy travels!

Fiona Brijnath

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creating ADVENTURES

See what we can tailor-make for you at www.farfrontiers.com and www.arcturusexpeditions.co.uk



MESSING ABOUT ON THE WATER

See inside for our latest Arctic and Antarctic offers – pages 4 and 6



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CULTURE AND NATURE

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MYANMAR

under the microscope



Macleod Island



The pro-democracy changes in Myanmar won't have escaped your notice. Fiona's journey through this enticing country had two aims – to see the latest developments and to head south to attempt to visit the Sea Gypsy communities highlighted in last October's edition...

“I'm in **Yangon**. The heat, the dust, the crowds and the must-see **Shwedagon Pagoda** back-lit at sundown. Here the chatter of children mixes with the chanting of nuns in the prayer halls, incense sticks waft exotic scents over smoky oil lamps and I pause to watch the crescent moon rise majestically behind the 98m golden spire. Crowds of colourfully clad locals mingle with silent monks; oil lamps cast shadows over golden pagodas; swifts swoop overhead; there are processions, worshippers and children having fun. The backdrop: This immense structure encrusted with Burmese jewels and enrobed in gold leaf.

The next day I head for **Khaitkyho**, some three hours' drive east of Yangon. At 3,600m this hill station is a hairy 20 minute drive up hairpin roads in a local truck packed with excited Burmese local visitors followed by a 45 minute uphill trek to the ridge above. But the reward is a unique sight – an enormous golden boulder perched precariously on the hillside.

Much later, leaving behind the markets, pagodas and majestic colonial buildings of a former era, I headed to **Mandalay**, the last capital of the third Myanmar Empire. Here the streets are lined with alabaster carvings, silk tapestries and gilded and woven products. I jumped aboard a wonderfully scruffy fishing vessel to chug 7km up the **Irrawaddy** to seek out the world's biggest bell at **Mingun**. My final stop was **Kuthodaw Pagoda** and its 729 marble slabs engraved with Buddhist scriptures over a site of several acres.

No visit to a former colony is complete without a hill station and **Pyin Oo Lwin**, some two hours from Mandalay, was no disappointment. The grandeur of its botanical gardens contrasted with what turned out to be the best lunch of my trip in a simple café suggested by my guide. We ended our meal with raw ginger slices, salty peanuts and sugar-soaked chestnuts



washed down with fresh lime soda – and a bill of five US dollars for the lot!

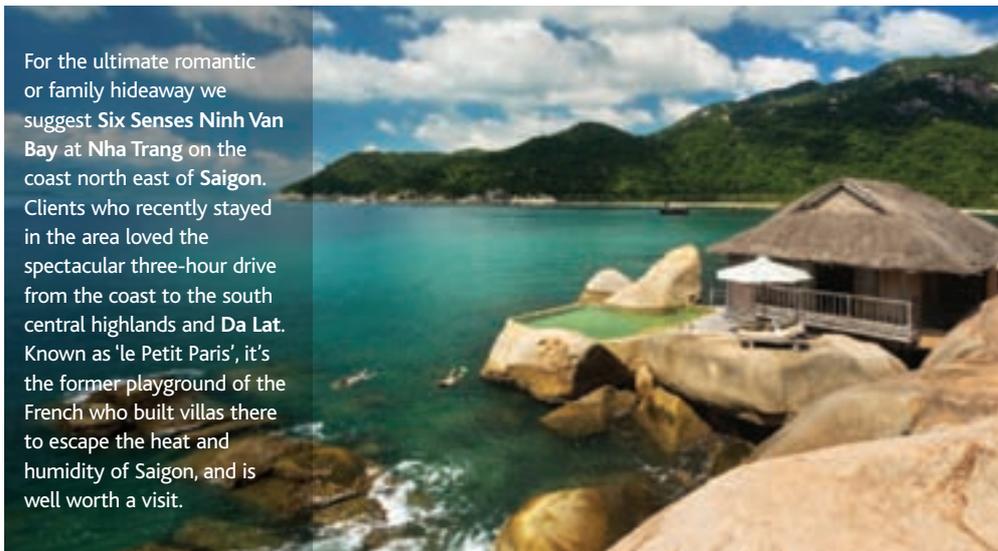
From Mandalay to **Bagan** on the river. An unforgettable 24 hour journey in a recently built copy of the old flotilla boats – all brass, teak and rattan chairs. On arrival, the dusty narrow tracks between temples are best experienced at dusk – through the ears of the pony pulling you along in a simple cart. I don't claim to have visited all 4,400 of the temples for which Bagan is so renowned but I've certainly made a start!

From here a flight to **Heho** and a drive to **Kalaw**. I loved the cool mountain air and mock Tudor holiday houses, neat flower gardens and quaint railway station. On the way to the morning market we chanced upon a colourful initiation ceremony – a column of prancing stallions decked out in brocade and silk, each with a child perched atop in a glittering robe. These are experiences no brochure can promise you.

The drive down to **Inle** was rural Burma at its best, with glorious fields of potatoes, peas, sunflowers, oranges, tea and rice – a patchwork that extended for miles. On the lake I embarked on a journey of indescribable beauty, skimming through water hyacinths then out into its shimmering expanse to the gentle plop of the

HEAVENLY VIETNAM – coast and hills

For the ultimate romantic or family hideaway we suggest **Six Senses Ninh Van Bay** at **Nha Trang** on the coast north east of **Saigon**. Clients who recently stayed in the area loved the spectacular three-hour drive from the coast to the south central highlands and **Da Lat**. Known as 'le Petit Paris', it's the former playground of the French who built villas there to escape the heat and humidity of Saigon, and is well worth a visit.



“It was an extremely well organised holiday and gave us a thorough insight into Myanmar. The visit was enhanced by an exceptionally good guide who had a good command of English.**”**

Mr and Mrs Chris Johnson, Myanmar, January 2013

“Thanks for the welcome home – but we wish we were still on holiday as we really enjoyed it. Everything went to plan and your local partners were a brilliant company to get us from A to B. The guides were very helpful and the drivers safe and secure.”

Steven and Ruth Parker-Davidson,
Myanmar, August 2012



Inle Lake

fisherman's nets and rhythmic motions of the native leg rowers to visit 16th century temples and floating farms.

How to end? I made for Macleod, a tiny island paradise some 40 miles off the coast of Myanmar's deep south and one of 800 heavenly teardrops in the Andaman Sea. Snorkeling with reef sharks, jungle trekking, kayaking at sunset and picnics on deserted beaches remind one of the coast of Thailand before tourism.

On my last day I had a chance meeting with a Sea Gypsy family – an elusive clan who live to the rhythm of the water. Taking a ride with them in their tiny boat is something I will remember for a long time.

Well, what of this extraordinary journey? My last word must go to the Burmese. Ever gracious and always ready with a smiling 'Mingalaba' (How are you?) they have endured so much, yet appear to have lost little of their inner peace. Myanmar is full of mineral wealth and priceless gems, but I believe the biggest and brightest of all are the Burmese themselves.

Do go, and go soon.

You can read a more detailed version of Fiona's trip, including her visit to Htauk Kyant War Memorial to find her great uncle's headstone under trip reports at www.farfrontiers.com

“If there is ever a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here...”

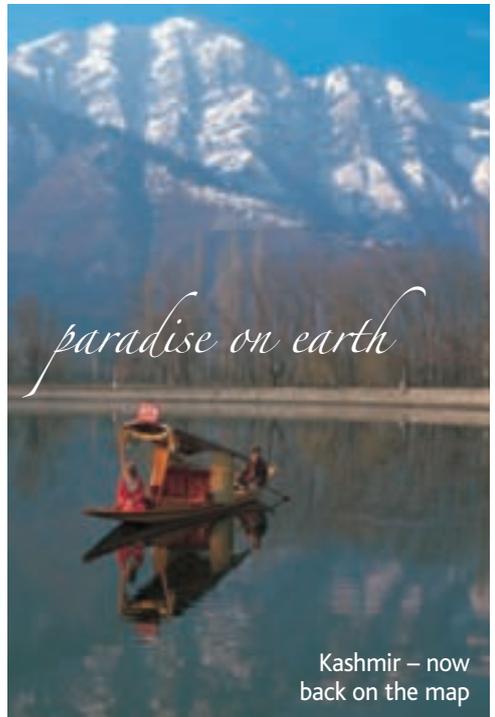
These words of Emperor Jehangir still hold true four centuries on. Kashmir has been off limits for tourists for around 25 years but at last we can offer this enchanting region.

KASHMIR

The oval-shaped Kashmir Valley is ringed by the towering peaks of the Shivaliks, Pir Panjal, Himalaya, Zaskar, Ladakh and Karakoram ranges. Srinagar, the capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, lies in the heart of the valley at an altitude of 1,730m. It's an ancient city that retains much of its grandeur.

Among many fascinating tours we suggest a visit to the Mughal Gardens and a tour of Srinagar with its bustling markets and architectural marvels. Take a boat ride on the River Jehlum for the best view of the heritage buildings or on the lake in a graceful Shikara. We can also arrange for you to share a meal at home with a Kashmiri family.

The Kashmir Valley offers everything from easy day walks in the wooded hillsides to more arduous 10-day programmes with qualified and experienced trek leaders and excellent overnight camping. The Dachigam National Park is perfect for wildlife and to see woodwork, papier-mâché, rugs, crewel work, leather, semi-precious stones, shawls and intricate silver being worked.



paradise on earth

Kashmir – now back on the map

- » **getting there** « Kashmir is accessed by direct flight from Delhi and the new airport at Srinagar. Hotels in Srinagar range from Heritage properties to the new five star Taj Hotel – or traditional houseboats for those who prefer a smaller, more intimate stay.
- » **when to go** « Good climate throughout the year with snow in December and January. It's busy with local tourists from May to July and spectacular between the end of March into April while the tulips are in bloom.

Call us for help in putting together your Kashmir itinerary.



INDIA

New tea bungalows in Tamil Nadu

Step back in time and live the life of a tea planter of the 1920s! As part of your tour of south India you'll love these tranquil British Colonial bungalows set among lush plantations of tea, pepper, cardamom and coffee at Valparai, Munnar and Meghamalai.

On offer are tea plantation and factory visits, heritage walks and wilderness treks and nature watching with resident experts. Watch elephants graze, play table tennis and sit around a fire listening to tales of a bygone era. Sharing some of your own knowledge with the estate workers is a much appreciated gesture of commitment to their welfare.

Stanmore Bungalows at Valparai has a long open verandah, endless terracotta flooring and gardens full of colour. Bask in the sun with a book,



Stanmore Bungalow



Cloud Mountain Bungalow

head for the Sholayar River with a picnic, see the bison in all their grandeur or just listen to the hummingbirds.

Cloud Mountain Bungalow at Meghamalai is a two hour drive from Madurai. Meaning 'the mountain of the clouds', Meghamalai is home to some of the last untouched tropical forests in the world.

Call us to see how we can incorporate these superb destinations into your itinerary.



news from Arcturus

Fly/sail offer – a white Christmas in Antarctica

Don't miss this amazing offer – a free charter flight from Punta Arenas to King George Island worth £800 for all new bookings on 'Christmas in Antarctica' made before 30 May 2013!



NEW Antarctic voyages for 2013/2014 season

We're announcing two new adventures of a lifetime, both perfect for discovering the best of the Antarctic.

Crossing the Circle via Falklands and South Georgia: Epic Antarctica

This voyage on the all-suite 112-passenger ship *Sea Spirit* takes you across the Antarctic Circle and further south than traditional Antarctic cruises. You'll also visit the wildlife playgrounds of the Falklands and South Georgia, often referred to as 'the Galapagos of the poles'. Follow in the wake of Sir Ernest Shackleton, reflect for a moment at his graveside and explore the quaint, British town of Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands.

- » when « 15 December 2013 – 6 January 2014
- » price from « £15,295 per person in twin main deck suite including flights

Antarctic Explorer via Cape Horn

On board the 189-passenger *Ocean Diamond* you'll cross the infamous Drake Passage to view the penguins, seals and whales of the Antarctic Peninsula with a full range of adventure activities, excellent wildlife viewing and photography and daily zodiac cruising and landings. Combine this with a visit to Cape Horn National Park, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, a visit not normally included on Antarctic Peninsula voyages.

- » when « 12-24 February 2014
- » price from « £6,295 per person in twin cabin including flights

Wake up on Christmas morning surrounded by massive icebergs, whales, seals and penguins. You'll visit the South Shetland Islands tracing the world of glaciated mountains on the west coast of the Peninsula. Christmas day will include a festive feast of turkey and all the trimmings. You'll be able to sea kayak and, if conditions allow, enjoy the opportunity to spend a night camping on the ice.

This 10-day expedition is a fly/sail voyage flying from Punta Arenas to King George Island and returning to Ushuaia in Argentina and, with *Polar Pioneer* taking just 54 passengers, you'll venture into places well beyond the reach of bigger ships.

- » when « 18-30 December 2013
- » price from « £7,270 per person in twin cabin with shared facilities including flights

Northern lights – new voyage



We've a new voyage in September 2013 in East Greenland's Scoresby Sund, the longest fjord in the world, to experience the phenomenal *Aurora Borealis* light displays in the night sky.

- » when « 5-14 September 2013
- » price guide « £4,110 per person in twin cabin (with porthole and private facilities) including flights
- » ship « *Plancius* (110 passengers)

Arctic voyages 2013

It's still not too late to book a summer 2013 Spitsbergen or Greenland adventure. We're happy to check out the options and see if you can benefit from any last minute price reductions.



CHUKOTKA – where Russia's day begins

New for 2013 is this voyage starting and ending in *Anadyr* which aims to view both brown and polar bears in one trip. You'll also visit the Commander Islands and attend the annual *Beringia Regatta and Cultural Festival* with 'the locals' using their traditional *baydara* boats.

- » when « 11-24 July 2013
- » price « £7,965 per person in main deck (twin cabin, shared facilities) including flights.
- » ship « *Spirit of Enderby* (48 passengers)



Ribbon seals in the Sea of Okhotsk

Enjoy savings of £300 per person

Following her inaugural voyage last year, polar research vessel *Spirit of Enderby* is heading back to the Sea of Okhotsk in 2013. We're offering £300 per person off all new bookings.

- » when « 3-21 June 2013
- » price from « £7,640 per person (twin cabin, shared facilities) including flights

2014 voyages to the RUSSIAN FAR EAST

Hot off the press – we've early notice of planned Russian Far Eastern voyages aboard *Spirit of Enderby* in 2014:

18-29 May 2014	Commander Islands
27 May – 11 June	Russia's Ring of Fire
9-23 June 2014	Sea of Okhotsk
24 June – 10 July 2014	In the wake of Bering
10-26 July 2014	Chukotka – where Russia's day begins
July and August 2014	Across the top of the world – three 19-day voyages
3-16 September 2014	Jewels of the Russian Far East

- » prices range from « £4,450 - £9,695 per person including flights. Call for detailed itineraries



» hot news and offers «

River cruising in SOUTH EAST ASIA

The best way to see real life behind the scenes.

Magical MYANMAR

This magical country is becoming so popular that it's sometimes difficult to find the right hotel at short notice. Travelling by boat is an excellent alternative. Away from the main towns you'll find a Burma of tranquil villages and charming scenery, little-changed for centuries. With major airlines planning to start services direct to **Mandalay**, eventually you might even avoid taking any domestic flights. Prices below are per person and include flights. Ask us for detailed itineraries.

The Chindwin and Upper Irrawaddy

» when « 7 September 2013 for 20 nights
» price from « £6,105 per person

Pyay to Kalay

» when « 14 nights on the Irrawaddy and Chindwin from 17 and 20 August 2013
» price from « £3,835 per person

The Irrawaddy

» when « 14 nights from Rangoon to Mandalay twice a month
» price from « £4,500 per person

Middle Burma

» when « Seven nights to Mandalay (frequent departures)
» price from « £3,100 per person

Upper Irrawaddy

» when « Seven nights from Mandalay to Katha and back (frequent departures)
» price from « £3,100 per person

Turtle watching in Oman

Luxury camping at Ras Al Jinz Reserve

Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve has unveiled 12 luxury eco-tents close to the reserve – the first of their kind in Oman. A sojourn here enjoying the panoramic views of the Ras Al Jinz beaches from your tent is definitely one for the itinerary.

» when to go « You can see the turtles laying their eggs on the beach year-round, though the main season is July to September



MEKONG unexplored

We've a limited number of departures for longer expeditions on the **Mekong River**. This ten night cruise visits areas other vessels cannot reach and can only be attempted around the late monsoon season. You'll join the 16 cabin **Angkor Pandaw**, embarking in **Saigon** and cruising the delta area backwaters before heading through **Cambodia** to tour **Phnom Penh** by cyclo and watch the dolphins on the upper river. End with the amazing floating villages and bird sanctuaries whilst circumnavigating **Tonle Lake**.

Saigon to Siem Reap

» when « 1-11 July 2013
29 July – 8 August 2013
26 August – 5 September 2013
10-20 July 2014
7-17 August 2014

» price from « £3,230 per person with early bird discount including flights



MOSCOW for the weekend

We've a fantastic offer throughout 2013 for an unforgettable long weekend in **Moscow**. You choose the dates (Friday to Monday) and we'll organize the trip with a superb private English-speaking Russian guide.

» price « Three star hotels start at £1,295 per person including flights based on two travelling with upgrades available to four and five star hotels. Call us for an itinerary.



PERU AND CHILE in style

Lake Titicaca and the Atacama Desert

Here's an offer for culture and nature lovers combining southern **Peru** and northern **Chile**. Enjoy sunrise on **Lake Titicaca** at the stunning **Titilaka Hotel**, chill in Lima's first boutique hotel, **Hotel B**, in the bohemian area of **Barranco** and drink in the sunset of the **Atacama**, the driest desert in the world, at the award-winning **Awasi Hotel**.

Save over £500 for a nine night stay at these hotels between 1 May and 17 June 2013, 28 June and 15th December 2013 and 1 February to 31 March 2014. Call us for details.



Two destinations, one amazing CHILE

Contrasting sister properties

Tierra Patagonia Hotel & Spa sits on a bluff where the South American pampa meets **Lake Sarmiento**. Its award-winning architecture makes the most of the magnificent views of the **Torres del Paine National Park**, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

At Chile's other end, the boutique hotel **Tierra Atacama**, on the edge of **San Pedro de Atacama**, offers outdoor adventure and sports with indoor comforts and excellent hospitality. Fiona stayed here while exploring the salt lakes, flamingo pools, geysirs and moon-like valleys of the **Atacama Desert**, so she can give you the low down!

» offer « 10 per cent off the price of a seven night package with Tierra Hotels (three or four nights in either hotel)



» snippets «



If you're keen to see **Antarctica** but are time-limited, you can join one of these unique voyages aboard **Ocean Nova**. You overfly the **Drake Passage** in both directions, saving precious days.

» when « Four to five departures per month from December 2013 to February 2014.

Call us for details

» price « **£8,435** per person based on twin private cabin with flights

A Herculean flight

Last December, ANTARCTICA XXI clients had an extra adventure on their air-cruise. Unusual runway conditions at **King George Island** affected their regular aircraft, but thanks to the resourceful ops team their travellers had the unique thrill of flying to and from the White Continent aboard a special-mission Hercules. Seated in rugged mesh seats and wearing big smiles they added another unforgettable memory to those of an extraordinary voyage!

Novice dog sledders – plan now for 2014

Here's advance notice our beginner's trip to **Dividalen in Arctic Norway** in 2014. You'll be based in a cosy cabin about two hours' drive from **Tromsø** and spend four days out with your dogs on an unforgettable adventure. No previous experience is required.

» when «

28 February – 5 March 2014

» price guide «

£1,750 per person

The air holiday packages in this brochure are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Our ATOL number is ATOL 9270. Please see our booking conditions for more information.



MONGOLIA



Hunting the Kazakh way

One of the oldest and most spectacular customs of **Mongolia's** Kazakh people is hunting with specially trained golden eagles. Their annual festival takes place at the end of September in the **Altai Mountains**. See the parade of 250 eagle hunters, the demonstrations to showcase their skills, take part in traditional Kazakh games and join in the traditional Kazakh feast in the evening.

It's expensive to get to, so the price is based on joining a group of at least nine clients.

» when « 26 September – 7 October 2013 excluding flying time

» price « **£2,065** per person excluding international flights. We'll add on your flights to and from **Mongolia** either via **Europe** or **Beijing** – or take the overland train from **Russia** or **China** for a truly spectacular journey

your feedback

See our websites for more client comments on trips that interest you – we are always adding new feedback.

"Thanks to Fiona and the crew of Plancius I was able in December 2012 to fulfil my dream of setting foot on Antarctica despite my age and disability. I had a bad fracture of my right femur in 2009 which necessitated three operations and left me needing the support of a cane when walking. Fiona encouraged me to 'go for it' and thanks to her meticulous planning and the resulting support of guides and crew at every step en-route and on the boat, I was able to travel there and back alone, and to enjoy shore landings and zodiac rides to see penguins, seals and whales, let alone the wonderful scenery. A truly stunning experience. I realise how blessed I was to have so much encouragement and help both from Fiona and the expedition team. I cannot thank them enough." **Dr Grete Gross**, Antarctic Peninsula voyage, December 2012



"Your paperwork and organisation were brilliant. It was a good trip, especially in October. Good for a week or a week and a half."

Kim Horwood and Margaret Barker, Uzbekistan, October 2012



"A brilliant holiday! Franz Josef Land must be the ultimate Arctic experience." **Barbara Forrai and Margaret Dykes**, Franz Josef Land, August 2012



"Wonderful that you can arrange for us to go wherever we want to go but with the confidence that your local partners will sort out any problems should they arise. The Savitsky Museum in Nukus was amazing and definitely worth a longer visit." **Rosemary Steele**, Wilderness botany tour to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, April 2012



"All went very swimmingly as usual. A fantastic experience and holiday." **Mr and Mrs Hugh Dampney**, India's national parks, January 2013