



Surfers' Sumatran pilgrimage



Iron Age tribal home



Super-shallow jade waters



Hollow tubes on coral reefs

Worlds AWAY

BY HILARY PRENDINI TOFFOLI

High fliers share their tales of travelling to unusual destinations. From sleeping in a luxury cave, to surfing the perfect wave. From hunting Goliath Tigerfish in the Congo, to biking to the source of the Ganges. From following Che Guevara's trail,

to finding Europe's forgotten country. Here's what they have to say...

Mentawai Islands: In Search of the Perfect Wave

Don Albert is a Durban-based architect who operates between South Africa, India and China. After 15 years of planning



and re-planning a surfing trip with schoolmates to the Mentawai islands off the coast of Sumatra, he finally got it

together. "Surfing in the Mentawais is a pilgrimage many surfers dream of. When these hollow tubes formed by coral reefs were 'discovered' by the international

Hilary Prendini Toffoli chats to people who have lived their dreams



'Cappadocia covers such a massive area you stumble on unexplored, breathtaking places in the middle of nowhere'



scene in the early 1990s, the Mentawais became a legendary destination. Surfers would hire boats and cruise from island to island. Since then several resorts have opened up.

"We went with Hideaway Resort, flying from Johannesburg to Kuala Lumpur, then to Padang in Western Sumatra. Cost was about R25 000 including flights and accommodation, and it far exceeded expectations.

"We had the island all to ourselves, with five-star accommodation and food. We never ate the same meal twice in 10 days. Staff members were friendly, entertaining, and excellent surf guides. Their calm guidance on the super-shallow reef take-offs was essential to calm the nerves.

"Besides the jaw-dropping beauty of the place, the indigenous people are one

of the last remaining Iron Age tribes, still existing on fish, fruit, coconuts and the pigs they raise on a palm-tree diet."

www.hideawaysresort.com

Among Cappadocia's Cave Dwellings



Alex Smith, award-winning author of *Four Drunk Beauties*, spent two weeks hiking in Turkey, visiting the 4th

century marvels of Cappadocia.

"Cappadocia is a World Heritage site covering such a massive area you stumble on unexplored, breathtaking places in the middle of nowhere. On one day, after four hours of walking,

we followed a couple into a hole in one of the many massive stone turrets, and landed in a cave of many storeys. A carved stairway took us up into an ancient abandoned church, triple volume, with arches and columns, the entire structure carved out of rock.

"We stayed in a luxury cave in Goreme that cost 55 Euro a night including breakfast. Extremely luxurious caves charge 300 Euro a night, but even the reasonable ones are utterly lovely. Food is delicious and a little cheaper than in South Africa.

"We flew Turkish Airlines to Istanbul, then took the night bus to Fethiye and hiked along the Lycian Way, following the coast above the Mediterranean. After a 12-hour night bus from Antalya to Goreme, we arrived at dawn to a blue sky full



Caro Gibello and the trusty Royal Enfield

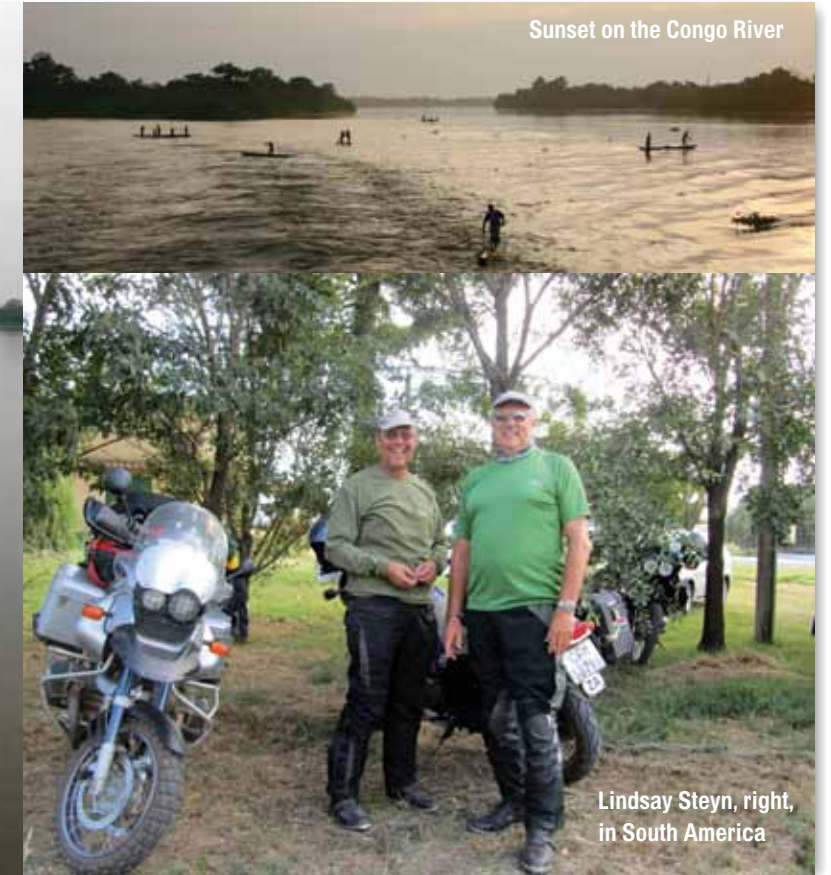


Caught behind cows

Crossing the Ganges



Tim Butcher on a life-changing expedition



Sunset on the Congo River

Lindsay Steyn, right, in South America

of multicoloured hot-air balloons floating over a landscape of fairy chimneys.”

Biking to the Source of the Ganges



Caroline Gibello is a photographer whose work has been exhibited in Italy, Germany and India. It was after the opening of her Mumbai show that she and her partner decided to do a motorbike trip through India.

“I had always wanted to visit India as a personal spiritual quest and I fancied myself cavorting about the Indian countryside on an old Royal

Enfield motorbike. The Ganges is India’s sacred river, so we decided to follow it to its source in the Himalayas at Gangotri. We flew from Mumbai to Delhi, picked up a bike in a downtown shop, and stayed mainly in very basic teahouses and hotels.

“I’m ashamed to say we never made it to Gangotri. We were almost there when we ran out of petrol and there was none available on that remote, rough road. Fortunately we happened upon some very generous Indian people who gave us their back-up petrol and got us out of the pickle.

“But the trip was an invigorating experience. The richness and textures of the countryside. The raw unadulterated vitality of the Indian people, whose disposition is so sunny

and steadfast. The reverence for spirituality, religion and culture, as well as the simplicity and humility of the folk we saw living in a bygone era. It was a feast for the eyes and food for the soul.”

In Search of the Goliath Tigerfish in the Congo



Tim Butcher, author of best-selling travel books *Blood River* and *Chasing the Devil*, went up the Congo River to catch the only African freshwater fish known to attack humans.

“I heard about the Goliath Tigerfish from a truly unhinged Englishman

called Jeremy Wade, who launched three life-changing expeditions up the Congo River in the 1980s in search of it. This Jurassic-looking monster grows to 60kg and is known to have taken out children. Some call it the Freshwater Great White.

“The journey alone through the Congo was epic, so much so that I wrote a book about it called *Blood River—A Journey to Africa’s Broken Heart*. Catching a Goliath on rod-and-line proved as challenging as Jeremy had warned. And the Congo is not for the faint-hearted. But imagine the bragging rights around the braai if you land a Goliath.

“When you get to Kinshasa, near the end of the Congo River, you enter a world where normal rules do not

apply. Best to outsource it. The only operator I know brave enough to take on the Congo is the Nwales Fly Fishing School. A 10-day package costs roughly R30 000. There is nothing to spend your money on when you are there. But getting there can cost a lot of money and even more patience.”

www.nwalesflyfishingschool.com/fishing_holidays_congo_africa.shtml.

On the Che Guevara Trail



Lindsay Steyn is the owner of Dennehof Guest House in Prince Albert’s oldest farmhouse. He turned 61 during his five-month motorcycle trip through South

America, which covered 42 000km.

“I had read numerous accounts of motorcyclists riding through South America, including Che Guevara’s *Motorcycle Diaries*, and having crossed Africa from south to north, and England from John O’Groats to Lands End, I wanted to do the Americas.

“We shipped the bikes in a container from Cape Town to Buenos Aires and then flew ourselves to Buenos Aires. Our rough route plan followed the famous Route 40, but we were happy to let the trip just take shape. Since there were three of us, we could tackle sections that would have been tricky alone.

“Highlights were watching the last two stages of the Dakar, visiting Machu Pichu, and cycling down the

Road of Death in Bolivia. Biggest challenges were the cold in the Andes, the bad roads of Route 40, and the hassles we had at some of the border crossings. But that's to be expected on a journey of this length.

"The few mechanical issues we had were sorted out by us or by local mechanics. I did spend four days waiting for parts outside Mexico City, but the people everywhere were hospitable, and the positive memories far outweigh the negative.

"South, Central and even North America can be surprisingly inexpensive, definitely cheaper than South Africa. We had a range of accommodation, from camping to cheap motels and guesthouses. It was the trip of a lifetime."

In Europe's Forgotten Country



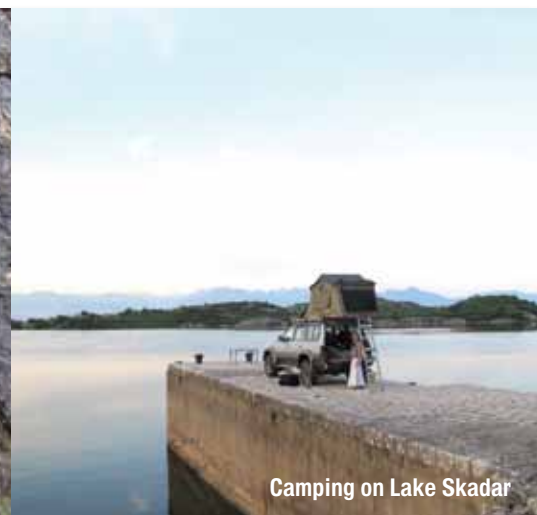
Jo Sinfield, owner of The Explorers Club guesthouse in Franschhoek, is himself an inveterate explorer. On one of his Balkan trips he visited the most remote part of Albania.

"I had lived in Zagreb during the Kosovo conflict and wanted to see more of this mysterious country locked in isolation by hard-line communism, and raised on a diet of hardship. A 'deeply weird place' is how *New York Times* travel columnist Seth Kugel describes it.

"We flew to London, collected an old Land Cruiser, and drove down through Europe. You can also fly to Tirana and



Majestically remote Albania



Camping on Lake Skadar



Theth: locked in isolation

connect with Outdoor Albania. They are helpful.

"The Albanians are not held in high esteem by their neighbours. Time and time again we were met with puzzled looks as to why we were going there. Undeterred, we pushed on south. In Montenegro we began to feel the shift in cultures. Signs began appearing in Albanian, and more mosques and swarthier people. Across the border, traffic became chaotic and roads disintegrated, but the people were friendly, plying us everywhere with *rakija*, the local drink.

"We reached majestically remote Theth after six hours' driving over a slippery mountain pass. In these

mountains the code of the Kanun—traditional Albanian laws—still rules, specifying how blood feuds should be handled. Days before we arrived, there was a killing in Boga, over the mountain. Luckily foreigners are exempt.

"We stayed at small local guesthouses and paid 20 Euro per person, full board. Be prepared for rather ripe cheese and meat, and *rakija* at all times of the day. At 6.30am it gets the heart pumping.

"It was a trip to be savoured, offering something rare in Europe these days—a glance into a culture all its own."

www.outdooralbania.com. GT