

New horizons



It has been an eventful year, with much to celebrate and also cause for reflection. We have been overwhelmed by your feedback over the past few months, mostly describing the very positive experiences you have had in the desert. Always the Bedouin feature in your stories, but perhaps this year more than ever the simplicity of life in the desert, the strength of family, the sense of fun and, perhaps most of all, the incredible hospitality in such a harsh environment, offer us all a lesson. As we question our own society values, your feedback confirms that this close experience

of a tribal culture is an especially important element of our school journeys.

While our lives here become increasingly cluttered with deadlines, gadgets and general noise, Sinai's wide open *wadis* offer a welcome antidote. Many groups leave mobiles, mp3s and even watches at home, in order to totally let go into 'desert time'. As we prepare for a busy autumn season, it is fitting that our first departure will be our third *Adventure into Silence* with Sara Maitland.

Reflections from a Leader

We are fortunate to have many talented and dedicated professional leaders who accompany our journeys and work in partnership with our Egyptian guides. Jim Lewis has led several school groups for Wind Sand & Stars:

"Not for nothing has the Sinai Peninsula drawn adventurers and scholars from across the world down through the centuries. For me, the allure of any journey there combines history with fantasy, lore with legend, laughter with silence, and community with solitude. The wind-sculpted rocks mimic the creased faces of our guides; the dazzling night skies offer cool, dark respite from the stark, bright sands of day. The Bedouin, undisputed masters of the ways of the desert, walk barefoot for miles across blazing terrain,

find curative herbs and edible plants hidden in rocky fissures, bake wonderful breads within the ashes of their fires, and invite us to sit amongst them, huddled sipping tea brewed in old tin-can kettles, all nods and smiles and with kindness in their eyes. Little wonder, then, that we too become so deeply captivated by this multi-faceted experience. We travel, but we are stilled. We gaze upon, yet find ourselves looking within. We come away, and yearn to go back again."

Thank you

As always, our heartfelt thanks go to Dr Rabia, his team at Abanoub and Bedouin colleagues and friends throughout South



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news

Issue 12 September 2011

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Looking further afield we are very excited to offer two new destinations in 2012. Carefully chosen and in keeping with our ethos, our first Ethiopia journey is scheduled for next April. By contrast, the Olympic Odyssey is a unique opportunity to explore this iconic sporting event's past and future. Further details are inside!

Fay Cox,
Director of Operations

Leader Jim Lewis with our Egyptian guide Hadi



Sinai. We are grateful to them all for their steadfast support and hospitality throughout the past few months. We look forward to sharing more desert experiences in the coming year.

A new Community Foundation for South Sinai

Wind Sand & Stars has established links with an exciting new initiative based at St Catherine. Dedicated to providing much-needed support to Bedouin tribes throughout South Sinai, it was founded by Hilary Gilbert, who shares with us the story of her introduction to Sinai, the inspiration for her research and aspirations for the new Community Foundation for South Sinai.

"No-one leaves Sinai untouched by the experience - but Sinai actually changed my life. For many years I was simply a summer visitor, accompanying my ecologist husband, Francis, whose research is focussed there. But once his work took us to Cairo for two years, Sinai took over.

Being Cairo-based allowed us to make longer visits to St Catherine. The Bedu

seized my attention from the first; their capacity for sharing gave a new meaning to generosity. But it was clear that as Sinai's tourist economy boomed, the Bedu were being left behind, experiencing real hardship despite the wealth pouring into their land. I felt drawn to unravel this paradox, and to see what might be done practically to address it. Five years on, I have completed my doctorate, researching the impacts of development and conservation on the South Sinai Bedu; and - together with Bedouin and Egyptian friends - we have established the Community Foundation for South Sinai. Our priorities reflect those identified by Bedu during my research: secure livelihoods (when work is scarce and insecure); education (many in the wadis have no school at all); healthcare (patchy, poorly-delivered and expensive); the environment,



Hilary Gilbert and Saleem, with goats funded by Marlborough College, loaded up ready for delivery.

especially water and safe, fresh food; and the erosion of bedouin tradition. In response - amongst other initiatives - we have commissioned a community olive oil press; we've bought a drill for free loan so people can improve wells and paths; we've piloted making felt from local wool (previously unknown in Sinai); provided flood relief; improved much-needed wells; paid school fees for dozens of children and numerous medical bills; and, thanks to the generosity of muslim donors, distributed free food and water to countless families. Our indispensable Co-ordinator, Mohammed Khedr, is grant-funded; but all other running costs are currently met by the Board."

A gift of goats from Marlborough College

Hilary continues: "This year we're delighted with the success of our new livestock bank. The rains that finally fell this year provided rich pasture - but families too poor to keep livestock were unable to benefit. Helped by a generous gift made by Marlborough College through Wind Sand & Stars we have bought five goats and five sheep to give to needy families. The animals are theirs to keep, but when they reproduce, the families will return the first offspring to us. We pass the offspring on to new families on the same terms, obtaining more animals to give year by year.... We are so grateful to the Wind Sand & Stars team and to Marlborough for their support, and look forward to similar ventures in future."



The team from Marlborough College in the sandstone desert, where they were guided by long-standing friends of Wind Sand & Stars from the Muzeina tribe. It has been a particularly tough year for the more remote communities.



If you would like to support the Foundation, gifts can be made through Wind Sand & Stars, or by sending a cheque payable to 'South Sinai Foundation' to 32 New Zealand Lane, Duffield, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 4BZ.

For other options, including tax-effective ones, please call us on 01332 841675. (Online giving is imminent and hotly-awaited!) Every penny goes to the Bedu and all gifts are greatly appreciated. The charity is registered in el-Tur, South Sinai #2006-02.

For further information visit www.southsinaifoundation.org

Running for the Bedu!

Wind Sand & Stars staff Richard Mayon-White and Jo Payne are training for the Sharm el Sheikh half marathon and raising funds for the Bedu! The Sharm Half takes place on 4th November following a spectacular route along South Sinai's coast through the beautiful Ras Mohammed National Park.

You can follow Jo's gruelling training diary on twitter. For further details on how you can support them by making a donation, or enter the race yourself, visit our website!



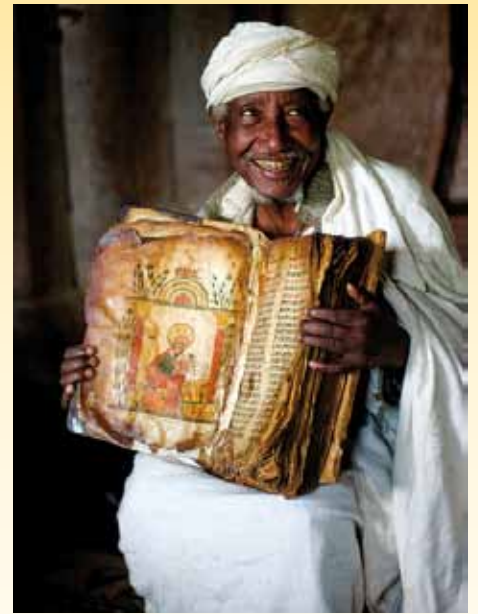


Ethiopia beckons!

"I was all set to share a pot of strong fresh coffee, reminiscent of Solomon's home in Ethiopia, but he smiled broadly and plumped instead for tea!" Expedition Manager Jo Payne recently met with Solomon, our guide and old friend of Wind Sand & Stars, while he was on a brief visit to the UK taking time out from the busy demands of his successful tour operations in Ethiopia. "Although this was my first meeting with Solomon, there was an immediate sense of ease. Solomon's enthusiasm and his ideas for our return to Ethiopia were infectious and enough to make

me want to jump on a plane bound for Addis Ababa that afternoon!"

Having organised journeys with Wind Sand & Stars some years before, Solomon has a great understanding of our clients, operations and ethos. Developed with care and attention, our itineraries are carefully planned together to enable our clients to absorb the diversity of Ethiopia's culture, landscape and history. Our focus will be primarily the northern province of Tigray, also Solomon's base. This is home to many ancient sites including the spectacular



rock-hewn churches at Lalibela, but also special and less-visited sites, including the 13th – 15th century churches of nearby Gheralta – the best kept secrets of Tigray!

We are delighted to announce our new Ethiopia itineraries for 2012, starting with a special 12-day journey open to individuals during April. Future itineraries will offer the added challenge of trekking in the splendid Simien Mountains; jagged, vast and home to a countless number of endemic species of wildlife including Ibex.



School journeys to Ethiopia

There is tremendous potential for school journeys through this country of ancient and breathtaking extremes. As Africa's oldest independent nation, it is rich in history and home to a myriad of ancient sites. Some date back to Old Testament times, when the city of Axum was home to the Queen of Sheba and is also said to be the where original

Ark of the Covenant is held, while many monasteries and rock-hewn churches reveal both early and contemporary Ethiopian Orthodoxy. Routes will offer glimpses of the astonishing variety of landscapes including the great African Rift Valley and the Danakil Depression. Throughout the journey the experience is embellished by the warm

Hidden Ethiopia

16-27 April 2012

Discover the hidden depths and extensive culture of rock-hewn churches and ancient ceremonies of the Tigray Region. Exquisitely designed, the contrast of architecture within the region is astounding. From the grand splendour of the geometrically designed Debre Selam Church through to the ancient ruins of Queen Sheba's palace, this impressive environment is matched only by the warm Ethiopian hospitality en-route.

For a full itinerary and booking details, contact the office or visit our website.

embrace of the local communities that we will visit and work with.

We have also been renewing and developing contacts both in Ethiopia and within the UK that might offer potential links with local schools and charities.

Our school information pack is available from the Wind Sand & Stars office.

Forthcoming journeys during 2012



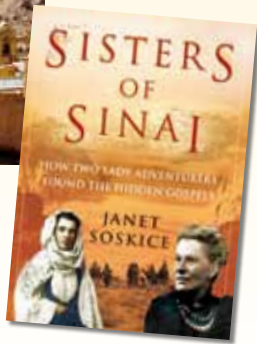
Sinai Discovery – A Desert Adventure 1 – 8 April 2012

We are so often asked by parents whether they can come too! This Easter journey offers the perfect introduction to the beauty of South Sinai and its Bedouin people. A delightful combination of adventure and discovery will appeal to family groups with children from 10 to teens, giving an insight into traditional Bedouin life, while travelling through stunning landscape encountering ancient sites, culminating in a visit to St Catherine's Monastery. The itinerary will involve riding on camels under the expert guidance of the local Bedouin, as well as gentle trekking on foot with daypacks, supported throughout by an experienced Wind Sand & Stars leader.



Historical Odyssey 26 April – 3 May 2012

Cambridge scholar Professor Janet Soskice, author of *Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Found the Hidden Gospels*, returns to Sinai to inspire us with her remarkable stories and insights, as we travel on this gentle adventure following ancient pilgrim routes through the desert exploring historical sites including St Catherine's Monastery.



A free copy of *Sisters of Sinai* will be included with each booking for this journey.

Janet adds "It was a pleasure earlier this year to introduce a great group of travellers - aged from 10 to 76 - to the history, legend and lore that saturate this elemental landscape. Sinai is home to some of the Bible's central stories, and at the same time a space made rich by hundreds of years of travellers' tales and pilgrim records. There is something in Sinai for everyone, and I am delighted to be accompanying the trip again this coming spring."

"Janet Soskice is an endlessly fascinating storyteller, whose skill in bringing the past into the present so meaningfully helped to make the journey unforgettable. Each day was even more thrilling than the preceding one, with the climax at Mt Sinai itself delivered beyond expectation."

Gabriel Somorjay, Historical Odyssey April 2011



Adventure into Silence 7 – 14 October 2012

Sara Maitland will return to guide us in exploring the desert silence, drawing from *A Book of Silence*, her highly acclaimed book on the subject. Sara will offer insights into silence in its many forms, including references to early Christian desert hermits and Buddhists, amongst many others. Based in a remote and beautiful area of the desert, with time for silence as well as optional walks and discussions around the campfire.



A free copy of *A Book of Silence* will be included with each booking for this journey.



Parish Pilgrimages Dates on demand

With its many Biblical associations, from the Exodus and Elijah to the Desert Fathers during the early centuries of Christianity, the Sinai Desert makes a wonderful setting for a parish pilgrimage. Our bespoke itineraries can be designed to suit, including time in the desert with the Bedu, gentle exploration of historical sites by vehicle, on foot or by camel, and a visit to St Catherine's Monastery and Mount Sinai. Groups travel in the care of an experienced Wind Sand & Stars leader, supported by our excellent local guides.



Olympic Odyssey 13 – 17 May 2012 & Dates on demand

London 2012 will soon take its place once again in the glittering history of Olympic host cities. An epic event spanning 1,500 years, the Olympic Games represents the pinnacle of sporting endeavour, inspiring legendary athletic performances that many of us can only dream of.

The Olympic Odyssey will take us on a fascinating journey through Olympic history, starting at the birthplace of the games in the heart of ancient Greece, founded by the Greek god Zeus and his son Heracles. From Greek mythology and ancient ruins to the modern arenas built for Athens 2004, we shall retrace stories of the Olympics through time; their religious significance, their use as a platform for propaganda, and the venue for so many extraordinary sporting achievements. We finish our journey with the familiar London skyline, poised for our very own games in 2012. This fascinating journey of Olympic discovery is quite simply a unique and wonderful prelude to the 30th Olympiad in London.

Wind Sand & Stars

For further information on these or any other journeys, please contact Fay or Jo:

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You can also follow us on facebook and twitter through our website.

