

For Immediate Release
On Newsstands Oct. 2

Contact: Heather Wyatt
(212) 610-5535
NGTraveler@HwyattPR.com

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER SECOND ANNUAL TOURS OF A LIFETIME SPECIAL ISSUE

TOURS OF A LIFETIME: 50 OF THE WORLD'S BEST TRIPS (PAGE 107)

In many ways, National Geographic Traveler has been calling the shots like it sees them for the last 23 years, telling you the best places to go in the world. But it wasn't until last year that we decided to compile a formal list of what we considered to be 50 of the world's best guided tours. There's a clear demand by travelers for truly authentic experiences, so we've scoured the field for trips that delve deep, provide uncommon access and, most importantly, pave the way for interaction with local people. Our second annual collection of the world's best tours reflects a new travel ethic: It's possible to have electric experiences while traveling with tour companies that truly know the ropes. We used to turn our nose up at organized tours. No more — not with offerings provided by this group.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 50 BEST TOURS OF A LIFETIME

The Classics—

- **Alaska** — Here, in one trip, are all the things you're supposed to do before you die — in Alaska, at least. Hike atop a glacier, spot brown bears, reel in a salmon, paddle a sea kayak, mush a dogsled, raft down the Copper River and listen to stories about native Alaskans over dinner at a remote lodge. (9 days; \$6,595; Alaska Wildland Adventures)
- **Egypt** — How did the ancient builders create such huge monuments? Find out from leading experts, such as Egyptologist Akram Allam and archaeologist Zahi Hawass, a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, who will accompany this classic itinerary from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo to the pyramids and up the Nile to Luxor and the tomb of King Tutankhamun. (11 days; \$6490; National Geographic Expeditions)

Active Adventures—

- **China** — Surrounded by karsts — towering limestone cones that rise up from paddy fields — Yangshuo is ground zero for adventurers in China. Explore this region by bike and on foot, winding up in Zhongdian, a city in Yunnan Province that Beijing officially renamed Shangri-La, for a taste of Tibetan culture. (14 days; \$3,399; REI Adventures)
- **Iceland** — Jules Verne found Iceland's Snaefellsnes Peninsula so intriguing with its glaciers, dramatic waterfalls, lava caves and thermal springs that he used it as the portal to the inner world in his novel "Journey to the Center of the Earth." Fittingly, your journey takes you here as you explore Iceland's otherworldly landscape by kayak, horseback and on foot. (10 days; \$3,650; H2 Outfitters)

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From the Water—

- **Myanmar** — Visit the far-flung Mergui Archipelago, with its thriving coral reef systems teeming with fish and limestone karst formations jutting from crystal clear waters. It's also home of the Moken people, who live on the sea in small boats for more than half of the year. You'll explore the region by snorkel, nature walks and Zodiac boats from your base aboard the cruising vessel *Mermaid 1*. (17 days; \$6,800; Asia Transpacific Journeys)
- **West Africa** — The first half of this West African odyssey takes you from Mali's capital, Bamako, with its bustling artisan market, to the ancient trans-Saharan city of Djenne, to the fabled town of Timbuktu and the villages of the Dogon, known for their mythology, mask dances and unique architecture built into the walls of an escarpment. Then cruise the Saloum and Gambia rivers aboard the 17-cabin yacht *Callisto*, stopping at traditional villages, where you'll get a taste of everyday life through visits to schools and community centers. (\$11,095; Geographic Expeditions)

Total Immersion—

- **Peru Cooking Class** — Enjoy a taste of Peru's rich culinary heritage as you travel from Lima to the Sacred Valley, meeting organic farmers, visiting area markets, and cooking and eating with local cooks and top chefs. Sample some of Lima's best *ceviche*, savor a coca-leaf-inspired lunch and learn how to cook with Andean staples such as *quinoa*. (8 days; \$2,590; Culture Xplorers)
- **Volunteer in the Amazon** — Travel to the heart of Brazil and lend a hand to the struggling communities along the Amazon, Tapajos and the Arupiu rivers. Work alongside local villagers in projects to generate income, such as opening interpretive trails, planting community gardens and assisting in craft workshops. Sail down the Amazon for stints in three different villages, where you'll lodge with local families. (21 days; \$1,695; i-to-i)

Natural Wonders—

- **Track Koalas Down Under** — While koalas on the Australian mainland are on the decline, the population on St. Bees Island off Queensland seems stable. Join koala experts Alistair Melzer and William Ellis on this quiet volcanic isle as they work to help find out why. Help track koalas and collect plant samples. You'll share a cottage with other volunteers (and the occasional koala) and take turns making meals. (13 days, \$2,849; Earthwatch Institute)
- **Panama Beyond the Canal** — Hike two to six hours a day through Soberania National Park in the Gamboa Rain Forest, home to some 525 species of birds and 105 species of mammals, including monkeys, agoutis and sloths. The ecosystem changes below the Baru Volcano, where you'll trek in the Chiriqui Highlands, visit a coffee plantation and snorkel among the mangroves in the Caribbean Sea. (8 days; \$3,098; Country Walkers)

*** National Geographic Traveler experts are available for interviews. Contact Heather Wyatt if you have questions, need additional information or would like to schedule an interview.**

National Geographic Traveler: All travel, all the time.

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