

Responsible Travel

Taking the HIGH ROAD

In May this year, seven Audley employees and 15 Audley clients trekked to the summit of 4,167 metre-high Jebel Toubkal in Morocco, raising over £8,000 for the Audley Charity Portfolio.

Nick Coates, one of our directors, gives you an insight into the pain and pleasure he experienced...



I couldn't remember who to blame for having had the original idea. I couldn't remember how I had been roped into this. But I can tell you I was cold, tired and grumpy at 4.30 in the morning in the Moroccan High Atlas Mountains. I had been forcibly separated from my warm sleeping bag by one of our energetic and good-humoured Berber guides (all seemingly named 'Mohammed'), as we were about to embark on the trek to the summit of Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa at 4,167 metres. I knew we needed to be at the top for 10am, if we were to leave enough time to retrace all our steps of the previous day, back down the valley to the small village of Imlil and our luxurious kasbah.

This was the final day of the first ever Audley Travel sponsored charity trek. Our group comprised seven of us from the office, 15 guests, quite a few Mohammeds, several mules and Alan Ward, award winning mountain leader and a great friend of

Audley's (Alan is also a hardy porter, medic, pace-setter and raconteur). A few days previously, after our short flight from London to Marrakech, we had set up camp at the wonderful Kasbah du Toubkal, breathtakingly situated at the foot of the mountains in the National Park. Over several pleasant acclimatisation treks passing over high mountain cols to discover pretty Berber villages, I nervously eyed up the others, attempting to ascertain if I would indeed be the slowest when it came to the ascent itself. Then it was time for the long trek up to the Neltner Refuge, a staging post two thirds of the way up the mountain, where we found tents already pitched for us (by a Mohammed) for our one night under canvas. And here we are, 4.30 in the morning and, in my case, a little grumpy.

I won't talk too much about the summit day. I think it's fair to say that we all found the final ascent challenging, and some of us suffered from headaches due to the altitude (but nothing more serious) and

we all would swear that the distance back down was double what we remembered coming up. But, we got to the top (see photo as proof) and, as a group, we bonded somewhere on that mountain.

As a footnote, throughout the trip Alan had sagely advised us to 'take our time', to 'respect the altitude' and, most importantly, that 'it's not a race'. Despite this, for the sake of posterity, I must tell you this; had it been a race, I won.



View towards Jebel Toubkal

Supporting Ecotourism in Laos

As a country rich in outstanding natural beauty and still largely unspoilt by commerce, the future of Laos is at a crossroads. Since the Laos government opened its borders to visitors nearly two decades ago, their numbers have steadily increased from 14,400 in 1990 to 1.2 million in 2006. Whilst this has undoubtedly been good for the economy of this tiny landlocked nation, bringing in a welcome US\$173million in 2006, the potential for negative impact has not gone unnoticed by the Communist regime. At the end of July it hosted the Laos Ecotourism Forum 2007 in its capital Vientiane,

inviting representatives from tour operators, non-governmental organisations, local government and suppliers to join in a discussion about its National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan.

We sent Mark Hotham, one of our Laos specialists, to help support this worthwhile initiative. Ecotourism in Laos is vital to help energise the markets for local agriculture and handicrafts, arts and traditions and to improve awareness and promote conservation of the natural environment and Laos' cultural heritage. For clients interested in doing their bit, we are able to build a variety of projects into an itinerary.



Asiatic black bear

One example is the Free the Bears Sanctuary outside Luang Prabang which rescues Asiatic black bears from poachers and provides them with a wonderful refuge. The bears are rehabilitated back into the wild where appropriate. Another is the Big Brother Mouse scheme which teaches children in Laos to read, through producing and distributing cartoon books. The organisers actively encourage visitors to

participate and it can be a great way to meet and help some of the poorest children in Laos in a truly constructive way.

For further information on responsible tourism projects in Laos see the following links: www.stay-another-day.org www.ecotourismlaos.com or contact our Laos specialists on 01993 838 125.

Travel Operators For Tigers



We have recently joined the Travel Operators For Tigers (TOFT) campaign. TOFT is a travel industry association and, in cooperation with Global Tiger Patrol, aims to advocate and support a more responsible and sustainable approach to tourism in South Asia's wildlife reserves, together with aiding specific conservation programmes which benefit the local communities and wildlife. Each year large numbers of travellers visit India's National Parks with one abiding mission, to see the king of the jungle in its natural environment and not in the sanitised surroundings of a zoo. Wild sightings are never certain but the possibility is thrilling and the realisation is a unique experience. Unfortunately, the increased pressure on the park boundaries by an expanding population combined with the dangerous rise in poaching threatens this mighty beast with extinction. Viable wild populations still exist and Audley and TOFT will be working in partnership to ensure the survival of this iconic animal for future generations. For details of wildlife travel to India please call Harsha on 01993 838 350.



Royal Bengal tiger