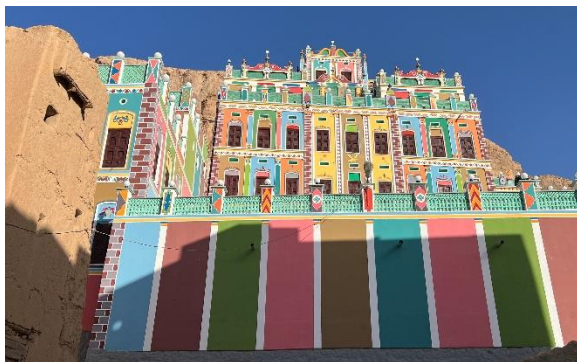


# SPIEKERMANN TRAVEL - HISTORICAL MOMENTS



## WHERE IN THE WORLD

*Come and join one of our exceptional adventures!*

### **Horn of Africa...Eritrea, Somaliland, Djibouti & Eastern Ethiopia**

**Oct 25 - Nov 09, 2024**

**Led by Elena Dak**

**Jan 04 - Jan 20, 2025**

**Led by Michel Behar**

*w/Timket Festival*

**Oct 24 - Nov 08, 2025**

**Led by STS Manager**

**Eritrea** is a state on the southern shores of the Red Sea whose history dates back to the Stone Age. Following a succession of wars with Ethiopia that spanned a thirty-year period, Eritreans under a United Nations' supervised referendum voted for independence in 1991 and gained international recognition in 1993. Asmara, the capital, proudly displays a shining collection of Art Deco and other architectural wonders. Massawa, a port city on the Red Sea, was heavily influenced by the Turks and the Europeans. This coastal city is the starting point for visits to the Dahlak Islands, one of the most unspoiled and least known reefs in the Red Sea. Eritrea's nine colorful ethnic groups are diverse and individual and are a major highlight. The latest peace agreement with Ethiopia has finally put an end to the utter isolation that Eritrea suffered for the last decades and carries a great future for development.

**Somaliland** should not be confused with Somalia. Westerners are welcome there... Somaliland is home to what is often considered one of the most interesting attractions in the Horn of Africa, the Laas Geel cave paintings. Untouched for nearly 10,000 years until discovered by a French archaeological team in November 2002, Laas Geel cave paintings have become a major tourist

attraction and a national treasure. Somaliland boasts many natural attractions including mountains, mangrove marshes and pristine beaches as well as opportunities for cultural interaction in its colorful markets.

**Djibouti** draws few tourists thanks to its reputation for being the hottest place in Africa (probably true) and being ridiculously overpriced (also probably true). However, with vistas that will take your breath away, and a culture caught halfway between 20th century France and modern Africa, the smallest country in the region is most definitely worth a visit. Despite the tensions that at least two of these neighbors often display, it remains somewhat removed from the hostility. Thanks largely to it being located at the entrance of the Red Sea. Djibouti has found itself in the enviable position of being a strategically important point with both global industry and the military. The country itself, outside of Djibouti City the capital of the Republic of Djibouti is largely composed of volcanic wasteland an apocalyptic looking terrain of naturally formed chimneys and beautiful lakes.

**Eastern Ethiopia** many of you may have joined us on the Ethiopia tours in the past years, but most likely, you have not visited this gem of a city. Harar, a well-preserved walled city that stands to the east of the Great Rift Valley and was founded between the 7th and the 11th centuries and emerged as the center of Islamic culture and religion in the Horn of Africa; it also served for a long time as an important trading center. Harar was a fiercely religious city

and was closed to visitors until 1887 when King Menelik restored central rule. With its 99 mosques, including the 16th century Grand Mosque with its beautiful twin towers and slender minaret, it is considered to be the fourth most holy city in Islam after Mecca, Medina, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Besides its many mosques, Harar is also home to 102 shrines and a very vibrant marketplace, regarded as one of the most colorful in all of Ethiopia. The surrounding Ahmar Mountains are where Ethiopia's best coffee grows. One of the most unique experiences in Harar is feeding at night the "friendly" Hyenas that come and congregate around the city at dark **(III - \*/\*\*\*)**

## **West Africa... Ghana, Togo & Benin**

**Jan 08 - Jan 22, 2025**      **Led by M. Halouani**

Thriving traditional cultures, renowned art forms, flamboyantly colorful festivals, mask dances, and a dazzling ethnic mosaic are the golden gems of tribal West Africa. Our fantastic cultural odyssey takes you to remote reaches of Ghana, Togo & Benin to discover lost tribal worlds guided by ancient spirits. Our journey witnesses a special festival, the Egun Mask Dances of the Yoruba villages of southern Benin. Along the way, you will meet unforgettable people including the Taberma, whose fairytale clay castles are spectacular examples of uniquely African architecture. End on the coast, the heart of voodoo country, visiting practitioners, watching trance-dances & learning about the awesome power that voodoo spirits still hold over people. **(III - \*/\*\*\*)**

## **South Sudan**

**Nov 16 - Nov 23, 2024**      **Led by Local Guide**

**Jan 23 - Jan 30, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

**Nov 08 - Nov 15, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

No doubt, that South Sudan is one of the most challenging destinations for the intrepid traveler like you but this country, which gained its independence in 2011 earning the title of the world newest country has apprehended the attention from all travelers around the world with their prehistoric cultural rituals, a countless colorful local tribes and untouched natural beauty.

Your expedition starts and ends in Juba, the capital of the young nation, where you will wander around the city and overnight to experience what the nightlife has to offer. Our extensive tour allows you to experience the genuine South Sudan by heading out of the very strictly controlled capital and visiting not one but four ethnic communities with the freedom to interact, photograph and learn directly from the locals. This is something that only a very few visitors experience. You will journey with us to the incredible Lotuko people, the main ethnic group living around Torit Town in villages nestled in the hills and hidden among the rocks. In addition, the Boya people, called "Larim people", who are centered on a small and rather ramshackle settlement in the shadow of the mountains and gigantic boulders and the Toposa people, known as fierce warriors and cattle stealers. They live in villages made of mud and sticks with thatched roofs often adorned with the skulls of cattle. You will end the tour with a visit to the Mundari tribes - herders who live in the wild in symbiosis with their cattle. They are unmistakable as they cover their whole body in chalk-like makeup, making them appear as ghosts. **(III-\*.-\*\*\*)**

## **Niger**

**Jan 23 - Feb 02, 2025**      **Led by Nancy Weber**

A landlocked country named after the Niger River, is home to a wide variety of ethnic groups. The largest of these groups are the Hausa, followed by the Zarma. There are many other nomadic tribes throughout Niger including the Tuareg and Fulani. Niger has stunning natural beauty, especially in the Mountain ranges in the north, but also houses a few old trading centers in the Sahara such as Agadez and Zinder that have a distinct mixture of Arab, Tuareg, and black African culture. The locals are also very friendly - do not be surprised if you are invited into someone's home! A wild giraffe herd lives near Koure, which is only around 37 miles from Niamey on a paved road. However, you will need a 4x4 vehicle and a guide to get you there. The giraffes live near many people and are rather curious and friendly. You can approach within 30 feet or so before they become more cautious. You'll also see other mammals such as elephants, lions, and hippos at the W Wildlife Reserve. **(II- \*\*)**

## Burundi

**Jan 30 - Feb 04, 2025**      **Led by Local Guides**

Travel to some of the least explored parts of East Africa on this two-week journey visiting three beautiful countries: Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Starting with **Uganda**, a country located on the East African Plateau, you will experience beautiful waterfalls, Lake Victoria, the world's largest lake, and the world's longest river, the Nile. You will also have the chance to see all kinds of wildlife, including the majestic and endangered mountain gorilla. Then cross into **Rwanda** to discover the beautiful Lake Kivu, one of the African Great Lakes. One of the highlights of your visit will be the chance to see the splendid Golden Monkey, one of the rarest primates in the world. Also, experience the Rwandan culture at a traditional village. Continue your journey to **Burundi**, which has two national parks - Kibira to the northwest, and Ruvubu to the northeast. Both were established in 1982 to conserve wildlife populations. Burundi's culture is based on local tradition and the influence of neighboring countries. **(III - \*\*\*)**

## Nigeria

**Feb 03 - Feb 12, 2025**      **Led by Nancy Weber**

Discover one of Africa's most vibrant ancient kingdoms on a trip that will challenge any preconceived ideas about Nigeria. The nation has a recent reputation that discourages many travelers, but this tour shows the historic and appealing cultural legacy of the Oduduwa Kingdom that dates to the 1200s and encircles the globe. We begin from Lagos, one of the liveliest cities on Earth, to the central town of Ilorin, and then on to the coastal town of Badagry, which has secrets to uncover connected to the 17th century slave trade. See how Yoruba culture traveled worldwide from the old city of Abeokuta, with its grand Afro-Brazilian buildings, and climb the sacred Olumo Rock, a local holy site. From there, we head to the virtually unknown Idanre Hills, to discover a hidden civilization and, in Osogbo, we learn the intricacies of Yoruba religion from revered priestesses. Our last stop is Ilorin, the last site of the Oduduwa dynasty, conquered by Fulani Jihadists in the early 18th century, where Islamic life fused with Yoruba culture. **(II - \*\*/\*\*\*)**

## Ivory Coast

**Feb 12 - Feb 22, 2025**      **Led by Nancy Weber**

As one of Africa's most recent additions to tourism, the **Ivory Coast** was out of bounds for years due to political conflict. Situated on the Atlantic coast of West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire - or Ivory Coast as some may call it, provides a range of landscapes that are sure to please - from the beaches and inland lagoons in the south and dense tropical forests in the southwest, along savannas and grassy plains in the interior, to impressive montane forested mountains in the north. The country also has a fascinating cultural heritage. Spend time with different ethnic groups such as the Baulé, who are known for their fine craftsmanship, the Dan, Lobi, and Fulani, as well as the Senoufo, who are known for their handicrafts that feature their own cultural themes and religious beliefs. During village visits, you will witness colorful tribal festivals, rituals, initiations, and amazing mask dances. Each ethnic group has its own style of music, most showing a strong vocal polyphony. **(II - \*\*\*)**

## The Arabian Gulf... Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE & Oman

**Oct 23 - Nov 05, 2024**      **Led by Nancy Weber**

**Jan 29 - Feb 10, 2025**      **Led by Local Guides**

**Oct 22 - Nov 03, 2025**      **Led by Local Guides**

Known for their wealth and abundance of oil, the Gulf States also house some remarkable museums that display magnificent ancient Islamic art, calligraphy, pottery, embroideries, and jewelry. This unique tour will visit Bahrain, an archipelago located in the heart of the Gulf that boasts a unique blend of ancient and modern; a destination where glistening skyscrapers share the skyline with majestic, centuries-old mosques. In Qatar, you will saunter around the Old Souq (market) and down to the nearby Dhow Harbor to see some of the Gulf's traditional and distinctive trading vessels and the world-class Islamic Arts Museum. Kuwait, home to the oldest modern art movement in the Arabian Peninsula, contains an impressive number of art galleries. A quick stop in Kuwait City is just enough time to experience its diverse and liberal culture. In the UAE, you will marvel at Abu Dhabi's unique architecture as one of the most futuristic

cities in the world. When in Dubai, an emirate that has transformed itself in the last few decades from an obscure pearl-fishing village into one of the world's most important trading hubs and a land of luxuries, you will visit its Old town. Oman is one of Arabia's true gems - a land of rugged coastlines and vast deserts where tradition and progress go hand in hand. This wonderful adventure takes us from the heart of its picturesque capital, deep into its desert. (II - \*\*\*)

## **Gabon, CAR, Congo & DRC**

**Feb 04 - Feb 18, 2025** Led by **Yasser Iskander**

*Sao Tome extension (Jan 28 - Feb 03)*

*Eq. Guinea extension (Feb 18 - Feb 22)*

Travel to some of the least explored parts of Africa on this journey visiting these beautiful countries: Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo & Congo. Gabon features internationally celebrated masks, such as the n'goltang (Fang) and the reliquary figures of the Kota. Small populations, as well as oil and mineral reserves have helped Gabon become one of Africa's wealthier countries. The country has generally been able to maintain and conserve its pristine rain forest and rich biodiversity. The CAR consists of Sudano-Guinean savannas, but the country also includes a Sahelo-Sudanian zone in the north and an equatorial forest zone in the south. What is the Central African Republic today has been inhabited for millennia. However, the country's current borders were established by France, which ruled the country as a colony starting in the late 19th century. The DRC has a wonderful and vibrant city called Kinshasa, which you will get to experience. Once was a site of fishing and trading villages; Kinshasa is now a mega-city with an estimated population of more than 11 million. Kinshasa has a flourishing music scene which, since the 1960's, has operated under the patronage of the city's elite. The Congolese culture has been influenced by a wide variety of natural landscapes, stretching from the savannah plains in the North Niari flooded forests, to the great Congo River, to rugged mountains and forest of Mayombe, and including 106 miles of beaches along the Atlantic coast. The presence of numerous ethnic groups and various political

structures (the Kongo Empire, the Kingdom of Loango, the Kingdom Teke, and the Northern chiefdoms) once provided an enormous amount of diversity in the traditional cultures as well as in many ancient artistic expressions. Join us in discovering the magic of Central Africa. (III-\*\*-\*\*\*)

## **Chad and Cameroon**

**Feb 04 - Feb 16, 2025**

**Led by Local Guides**

**Oct 09 - Oct 25, 2025**

**Led by Local Guides**

Thriving traditional cultures, renowned art forms, flamboyantly colorful festivals, and a dazzling ethnic mosaic are the golden gems of tribal Africa. This fantastic cultural odyssey takes you to the remote and seldom visited countries of Chad and Cameroon.

**Chad** is one of the least visited of all the African countries by western tourists and therein lies its appeal. We are proud to offer a trip to this most pioneering of destinations - a land that is as wild as it is beautiful, as untamed as it is graceful. It is a land of rock arches, camel caravans traversing the sands, and where genuine encounters with local people are guaranteed. Each year, the semi-nomadic Wodaabe people gather for a week of incredible celebrations known as the Gerewol, a colorful ceremony that is one of Africa's most spectacular. Few westerners are privileged to see this fascinating event, but over the years, we have built up excellent local contacts, allowing you to travel to a remote part of Chad and stay with these intensely traditional people to join them in celebration. Camping in the Sahel, you will stay with the Wodaabe for several days, gaining more than just a fleeting glimpse into their lives and immerse yourself in a culture that lives very much outside of mainstream society. Few tourists venture this far into Chad, so you can expect to have a very intimate experience.

**Cameroon**, sometimes described as "Africa in one country" in reference to its variety of habitats and people, is a land that will steal your heart away. This virtually unexplored country is home to an astonishing 250 ethnic groups and a matching diversity of landscape - from the jungles of the south to the Sahel of the north. The southern

rainforest is home to communities of Ba'aka and Badgeli pygmies, existing in harmony with their environment. In-between lie ancient kingdoms, cattle herding nomads, stunning golden, palm-fringed beaches, glassy rivers, and volcanic mountain ridges. Forest canopies throb with the call of the rarest of species and colorful tiny markets and streets bustle with excitement. Photogenic waterfalls thunder down in a "white smoke" of spray to pristine rivers and lakes. A trip to Cameroon will allow you to see nature at its wildest and rarest to places where few outsiders have been fortunate to explore. **(III - \*\*-\*\*\*)**

## **Sultanate of Oman**

**Nov 05 - Nov 12, 2024**      **Led by Local Guide**

**Feb 10 - Feb 21, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

**Nov 03 - Nov 13, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

Oman is one of Arabia's true gems - a land of rugged coastlines and vast deserts where tradition and progress go hand in hand. This wonderful adventure takes us from the heart of its picturesque capital, deep into the mountains and deserts of the Bedu. We will take in the breathless landscapes of the Hajar Mountains, the shifting sands of Wahiba, and explore the old forts of Nizwa. It is a journey of incredible contrasts, following in the footsteps of the pioneering explorers of old and discovering some of the richest natural and cultural highlights that Arabia has to offer. Shopping for native crafts in vibrant markets provides the perfect opportunity to interact with the locals. Oman is also steeped in myths and legends as it is believed to be the home of Sinbad the Sailor and the site of the ruins of the palace are reputed to be that of the Queen of Sheba. **(II - \*\*\*\*)**

## **Atlantic Coast... Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau**

**Feb 23 - Mar 13, 2025**      **Led by David William**  
***Senegal & Gambia extension (Mar 13 - Mar 17)***

This once-in-a-lifetime overland journey travels to some of the best cultural, natural, and religious environments of West Africa's Atlantic Coast. Traverse across an incredible variety of landscapes - from beaches and inland lagoons and along savannas and grassy plains to dense tropical forests and lush green mountains. During this multifaceted

expedition, meet and interact with various ethnic groups, including the Dan, Fula, and Guéré, a tribe well known for their masks that are considered a masterpiece of African art by many.

Begin in Monrovia, **Liberia**, founded in 1822 when it was settled by emancipated slaves from America and learn about the history of the slave trade. Drive west along Liberia's southern coast to the quiet fishing village of Robert sport, a small town situated on the Cape Mount Peninsula.

Cross the border into Sierra Leone and travel through stunning scenery to Bo, one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse cities in the country. The route continues back towards the coast for an exciting wooden boat ride to the Banana Islands. The inhabitants of today are descendants of freed slaves from the Americas that settled here in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Freetown, another settlement of freed slaves, acquire a deep understanding of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Traveling along the coast and along river deltas, cross into Guinea to the major port capital city of Conakry. From here, venture off the tourist path and travel along rolling grasslands and through the jungle, stopping to visit spectacular waterfalls to the Fouta Djallon region, home of the Fulani ethnic group. This is an excellent place to indulge in West African culture.

The journey continues across the Guinea border into Guinea Bissau, West Africa's only Portuguese-speaking country. Travel through tropical savannahs and pass interesting villages on the way to the Gabu region, home to a Fulani Muslim community. Navigate the Bijagos Archipelago, a stunning treasure comprising of 88 islands and inlets, and explore its lush tropical forests, coastal savannahs, pristine beaches, and turquoise waters. The ethnic groups that inhabit these islands have been shielded from outside influences and have managed to maintain their unique traditions. They are known for their fascinating Bijago tribal art used in ritual practices. End in bustling Bissau, the main port city for fishing in the country. See the strong Portuguese influence in the architecture and come together with the locals at the city's main market.

For those who would like to experience more Atlantic Coast culture, consider adding on the extension that continues overland into **Senegal** and **The Gambia**, ending in Dakar. **(III - \*/\*\*\*)**

## Socotra

**Nov 03 - Nov 12, 2024** Led by Yasser Iskander

**Feb 10 - Feb 19, 2025** Led by STS Manager

**Nov 03 - Nov 12, 2025** Led by Local Guide

Arab governments are in conflict over an island paradise in the Indian Ocean that few people have ever seen. Socotra, the largest island in the Middle East, is one of the most isolated places on Earth, home to an ancient culture and some of the world's strangest-looking plants. The island is part of Yemen, but the United Arab Emirates has been investing there, building infrastructure.

UNESCO has designated Socotra as World Heritage site in 2008 in recognition of its biodiversity. Hundreds of Socotra's species of plants, reptiles and land snails exist nowhere else on earth. Notable are the dragon's blood trees that look like flying saucers perched on trunks. Adenium socotranum are trees that look like elephants' legs with pink flowers on top. Birds such as the Socotra Starling, Socotra Sunbird, and Socotra Grosbeak are found nowhere else on the planet. Bats are the island's only native mammal. In 2010, a Russian archaeological team discovered the ruins of a city on Socotra dating to the second century AD. The island is also held by some to be the location of the original Garden of Eden, due to its isolation, biological diversity, and the fact that it is located on the edge of Yemen's Gulf of Aden, which many connect with the ancient Sumerian tales of a paradise called Dilmun. (III - \*\*)

## Yemen

**Nov 12 - Nov 20, 2024**

**Feb 19 - Feb 27, 2025** Led by Elena Dak

**Nov 12 - Nov 20, 2025** Led by Nancy Weber

Arabia Felix was the name bestowed on the region by the Romans. It merited its name due to its fertile lands, distinguishing from the barren north, the so-called Arabia Deserta. This enabled the people to prosper and grow into a dominant force that controlled trade between the east and west. Yemen has been at the crossroads of the Middle East, Asia and Africa for thousands of years thanks to its position on the spice routes. Living at the height of the area's dominance were the Sabaeans, subjects

of the Kingdom of Sheba. Little remains of this ancient civilization, but traces of this enterprising people and their culture can be seen in the descendants who populate this rich historical land. We cannot visit everything in Yemen those days due to unrest in many parts, but we are lucky to be able to explore the 2 safest parts: in/around Sana'a and the island of Socotra, a UNESCO World Heritage Natural site. Untouched and unique in its beauty, it is also home to an ancient culture of intact and very hospitable people. (II - \*\*)

## Pakistan

### South Only

**Apr 03 - Apr 17, 2025**

### Chitral Festival

**May 09 - May 24, 2024**

Led by Local Guide

**May 09 - May 24, 2025**

### North

**May 17 - Jun 02, 2024**

Led by Local Guide

**May 17 - Jun 02, 2025**

Led by STS Lecturer

### North and South

**Oct 20 - Nov 14, 2024**

Led by Iain Shearer

**Oct 13 - Nov 07, 2025**

Led by STS Lecturer

## Baluchistan

**Nov 26 - Dec 05, 2024**

Pakistan shares an eastern border with India and a northeastern border with China. Join us as we visit the various villages, local traditional houses, and historical monuments. Marvel at the breathtakingly beautiful scenery as you travel along the Karakorum Highway to the Hunza Valley and through Besham, Khoistan, Chilas and Gilgit. The high mountain valley of Hunza is located in the extreme north of Pakistan, fortified by the giant mountain ranges of Karakorum, the Himalayas, the Hindu-Kush, and Pamir through the Wakhan Corridor. The Indus Valley of south Pakistan is a repository of some of the most ancient sites of civilization and human history. From the Moghul city of Lahore to the cacophony of Karachi's markets on the Arabian Sea, you will pass through so many ruins and sites filled with Sufi shrines,

mausoleums, mosques, palaces, and ruins of fabled ancient cities. (III - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## **Afghanistan**

**May 22 - Jun 05, 2024** Led by Nancy Weber

**Nov 12 - Nov 26, 2024** Led by Ian Shearer

**Apr 15 - Apr 29, 2025** Led by Miklos Sarkozy

**May 22 - Jun 05, 2025** Led by Nidaullah Sehrai

**Sep 29 - Oct 13, 2025** Led by STS Manager

Located at the crossroads of China and Mediterranean Europe, Afghanistan is rich in culture and history. It is a melting pot of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. With its rich past and recent events, it still preserves various architecture, paintings, music, poetry, art, and relics of bygone civilizations. From ancient cities to spectacular nature and some of the highest mountains in the world, it remains unpredictable and continues to amaze visitors.

Afghanistan is home to some incredible treasures bound to leave you in awe. This journey will take you from bustling Kabul to the foothills of the Hindu Kush. Follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great as you explore the country's safest areas in the northern regions. Visit the fabulous city of Herat, which was once a great medieval center for Islamic learning and culture. Marvel at the legendary mountain caves of Bamyan and the spectacular lakes of Band-e-Amir. Join us to tour the historical town of Mazar-i-Sharif, famous for its blue-tiled mosque, and Balkh, the nearby ancient caravan town. (III - \*\*)

## **Saudi Arabia**

**Oct 05 - Oct 18, 2024** Led by David William

**Feb 10 - Feb 23, 2025** Led by Iain Shearer

**Oct 04 - Oct 17, 2025** Led by Miklos Sarkozy

As the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia has been shielding itself from the eyes of the west for a long time, but time has come now that the Kingdom is moving in huge steps towards modernization and openness. However, this is also a land with a vibrant cultural pedigree, aside from its glitzy oil-rich modern cities. Amongst the rock-hewn splendors of Madain Saleh and Madain Shoeb, you will explore Nabatean heritage equal to what Petra offers. Most of the great empires of the ancient

world traded with the Arabian Kingdoms that commanded the important spice trade routes in the peninsula. Colorful markets, desert landscapes, coral reefs, rock engravings, ancient monuments, traditional mud-brick cities, and imposing fortresses are abundant in a country that has so much to offer to those who choose to venture in it & explore its enigmatic and intriguing side. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## **Bangladesh**

**Nov 26 - Dec 09, 2024** Led by Norman Jones

**Feb 18 - Mar 03, 2025** Led by Michel Behar

Welcome to an unspoiled destination: Bangladesh. A fascinating country outside the radar of mass tourism. Within it are unseen relics of long-forgotten Buddhist kingdoms, lush tea plantations, primeval swamps with tigers, tribal clans in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area with indigenous tribes with hidden cultures and stretches of beautiful beaches, as well as freshwater dolphins, and most importantly, some of the most hospitable people you will ever meet. Being one of the world's least traveled destinations, you will be delighted at the absence of tourists, and locals are delighted to have you take their pictures and never ask for money. Our tour will be the perfect amalgam of highlights offered by this fascinating country.

Come with us to explore ancient architecture, ruined medieval cities, religious sites, grand mosques and haunting Hindu temples, beautiful lakes and rivers and shrines of Muslim saints, colorful bazaars, mega shipyards, and soothing rolling green hills. This country is a photographer's paradise. (II - \*\*\*.\*\*\*\*)

## **Egypt**

**Feb 20 - Mar 08, 2024** Led by Michel Behar

**Oct 15 - Nov 01, 2024** Led by Mehreen Razvi

**Apr 01 - Apr 17, 2025** Led by Iman Abdulfattah

**Oct 21 - Nov 08, 2025** Led by Norman Jones

Whether it is your first visit or your tenth, this is the perfect time for you to see Egypt, with its incredible monuments, temples, artifacts, and history. Cruise along the eternal NILE River in the style of the "belle époque of the early 20th century" on a yacht



that was built for the King of Egypt. Witness time standing still evidenced by the rhythm of life along its banks. Visit all of the sites that one expects to see in an itinerary offering an overview of the history of the region. A highlight of this tour is the visit to the newly opened Museum of Antiquities, which is the largest in the world. Visit temples, tombs, pyramids, and markets and explore the Coptic Christian heritage of Egypt as well as its Islamic monuments. Explore Khan El Khalili bazaar in Cairo for a slice of life both past and present. Of course, no itinerary would be complete without a stop at some of the oldest attractions in the world, the colossal pyramids of Giza and the mysterious Sphinx. NO trip is complete in Egypt without flying to see the most majestic and monumental of its temples: Abu Simbel. Let this superbly crafted exploration of Egypt captivate you with the bountiful treasures of ancient times and the hospitality of modern natives. **(I - \*\*\*\*)**

## **Morocco and the Western Sahara**

**Feb 22 - Mar 07, 2024** Led by **M. Halouani**

***Mauritania ext. (Mar 07 - Mar 13)***

**Feb 09 - Feb 23, 2025** Led by **M. Halouani**

***Mauritania Ext. (Feb 23 - Mar 02)***

Few places on earth compared to the Sahara Desert, a natural wonder of vast plains and heated dunes that controls the south and east of Morocco. The world's largest hot desert, the Sahara stretches a staggering 5.6 million square miles (9 million square kilometers) over several countries. Hemmed in by the Atlas mountain range, the Saharan sands are one of Morocco's many highlights.

It is one of the most sporadically populated territories in the world, mainly including desert flatlands. It is a territory of northwestern Africa, bordered by Morocco to the north, Algeria in the northeast, Mauritania to the east and south, and the Atlantic Ocean on the west. The largest city is Laâyoune, which is home to a majority of the population of the territory. Join us on this amazing journey to a unique part of the world. **(II - \*\*\*)**

## **Morocco and the Spanish Enclaves**

**Mar 07 - Mar 17, 2024**

Led by **M. Halouani**

**Feb 23 - Mar 05, 2025**

Led by **M. Halouani**

Ceuta and Melilla are two small forbidden enclaves on the coast of Morocco. Despite seemingly being a part of Morocco, they actually belong to Spain. Coveted by Morocco, they have long been a flashpoint in diplomatic relations with Spain. Madrid asserts that both territories are integral parts of Spain and have the same status as the semi-autonomous regions on its mainland. Increasingly Ceuta and Melilla's heavily fortified borders have come under pressure from African migrants seeking a better life in Europe. Both cities date their original establishment to the Phoenicians, the sailors, & merchants of the ancient Mediterranean. Later Ceuta and Melilla became the site of a Carthaginian settlement, which was taken over eventually by the Romans. In the 5th century the cities were captured by the Vandals, who in time lost it to Byzantium. After that the Visigoths, Arabs, Portuguese, and finally the Spanish in 1580 seized control. Since that time, except for a period from 1694 to 1720 when the Moors gained control, the enclaves have remained under the jurisdiction of Spain. Separated from Spain by the Straits of Gibraltar and sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean lies Morocco on the northern shores of Africa. Discover the rich history and culture of the Imperial Cities and the north. This tour will capture the dramatic contrasts of the kingdom. Against a backdrop of breathtaking scenery, the footprints of history wind from antiquity through the pinnacle of Islamic achievement in a country determined to modernize on its own terms. Its culture is on display every day in its buzzing souks (marketplaces). Discover this glorious land in the enchanting city of Fes—a walled enclave suspended in a medieval dream. Be mesmerized by the truly stunning desert oasis where golden dunes stretch to the horizon. Morocco offers the opportunity to experience a rich Islamic culture in a safe and tourist-friendly environment. **(II - \*\*\*)**

## Libya

**May 09 - May 16, 2024** Led by **M. Halouani**

**Oct 12 - Oct 19, 2024** Led by **Barbara Porter**

**Apr 08 - Apr 18, 2025** Led by **Iain Shearer**

**Oct 31 - Nov 10, 2025** Led by **M. Halouani**

Libya is a country of stark contrasts, offering visitors an opportunity to see not only some of the greatest Roman and Greek cities in the world, but also the spectacular Libyan Desert. On Libya's western Mediterranean coast, explore the charming Old Town in the country's capital city of Tripoli and admire the breath-taking ancient Roman city of Leptis Magna. Travel to the heartland of the Berber people in the Nafusa Mountains to see one of the world's greatest treasures, the Granary of Qasr al-Haj. Explore the unique whitewashed houses designed to keep the homes cool during the hot days and warm during the cold nights. Get a fascinating glimpse into the Berber culture and see how they live in their traditional troglodyte caves. At the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Sabratha, you will discover Roman Ruins that date back to the second century AD. With Libya, now allowing US Citizens to enter the country, now is the time to visit this stunning treasure. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Iraq

**Oct 19 - Nov 02, 2024** Led by **Miklos Sarkozy**

**Mar 29 - Apr 12, 2025** Led by **Miklos Sarkozy**

**Oct 17 - Oct 31, 2025** Led by **Barbara Porter**

Mesopotamia-the land between the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates-was the home to the world's earliest civilization. To walk on such sites as Eridu, Uruk, Ur of the Chaldees and Babylon is to trace the history of the first cultures to build cities, invent writing, develop the wheel, and to rule the known world. Some have claimed that the Garden of Eden was located in Iraq, and biblical history touches this land too. When it became an independent country in 1932, Iraq had been home to ancient Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria, and had been conquered by Persians, the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great, the armies of the Islamic conquest, the Mongol hordes, and the Ottoman empire of Turkey. At many points in its history, Iraq could be said to have been at the center of the civilized world, and you will see elements of this ancient history along

with remnants of more recent times, including the regime of Saddam Hussein and the Coalition occupation. (III - \*\*/\*\*\*)

## Kurdistan

**Nov 01 - Nov 10, 2024** Led by **Local Guide**

**Apr 11 - Apr 20, 2025** Led by **Local Guide**

**Oct 09 - Nov 18, 2025** Led by **Barbara Porter**

Kurdistan, the autonomous northern region of Iraq predominantly inhabited by the Kurds, is amazingly different from the areas populated by the Arabs. The terrain is in stark contrast to the desert that characterizes middle and southern Iraq. It is an eclectic region that offers a multitude of experiences and chance encounters. Tour the world's oldest inhabited city with its famous museum of antiquities. Visit monasteries and churches dating from the 2nd to 4th century and the holiest sites of the Yezidis including the cave of the fire worshippers. Drive through breathtaking views of Kurdistan's mountains, rivers, and waterfalls. Explore former Jewish cities and other ancient locations such as Amadiya. Shop in the local bazaars for gold, silver, carpets, spices – you name it. From the great walled city of Erbil to nearly deserted but still-functioning monasteries to gushing rivers like the Greater Zab and Lesser Zab feeding into the Tigris, the region has much to offer the seasoned traveler. (II/III - \*\*\*\*)

## Central Asia

**Apr 06 - Apr 24, 2025** Led by **Nancy Weber**

Central Asia presents a colorful melting pot of people and cultures. Since the end of the 2nd millennium nomads from the north have periodically occupied these regions, settling, and mingling with the local population to create new cultures and civilizations. From the middle of the 1st millennium BC until the 10th century AD the territories of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were part of the Persian Empire. You will explore shimmering desert towns, UNESCO-listed palaces, stark soviet towers, bizarre oil-boom buildings, and the history of the ancient trading routes between east and west. Stretching all the way from China to the Mediterranean, the Silk Road is a historic and cultural marvel. Caravans laden

with, amongst many other things, gold, ivory, spices, furs, jade, exotic animals and of course, silk, trundled along the vast network of trade routes that made up the road for nearly two millennia. Not only were goods transported on the route, but it also acted as a bridge that brought cultures and ideas together; Islam and Buddhism reached China thanks to the Silk Road while it facilitated the spread of Persian, Greek, Roman, Indian, Arabian, and Chinese influences around the world. Central Asia was a major center for three great religions: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Islam. Mosques, mausoleums, madrasas, and traditional souks offer a glimpse of times past.

## Jordan

**Apr 06 - Apr 23, 2025** Led by **Barbara Porter**

Spiekermann Travel, Inc. is hosting the following study program in Jordan in 2025 to be led by Barbara A. Porter, who was director of ACOR (American Center of Research) in Jordan from 2006 to 2020. ACOR will be your base in Amman. Group discussions will be fostered on a regular basis and bus time will allow for sharing of information. Lectures will take place in the evening at ACOR. Spiekermann Travel can arrange trips in the region both before and after the Jordan sojourn and assist with travel arrangements when you book for this study tour through them. You might consider hiking on the Jordan Trail before.

ACOR was founded in 1968 and has grown with Amman through the decades. Its permanent headquarters were completed in 1986 and encompass offices, a major research library, conservation labs, and storage space for archaeological material, and a hostel which will be your home away from home. The library of some 40,000 volumes concerned with Jordan and the region from ancient to modern times is available to all residents at all times and a reading shelf for the tour will be set up with recommended books. Evening meals in Amman will be at ACOR where the program of the day can be discussed and plans for the next day reviewed.

The local guide will accompany us on all excursions and provide many insights into the country and its

people. We will ensure that you have the chance to meet with individuals involved in preserving Jordan's past as well as those involved in current issues. (III - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Lebanon

**Oct 01 - Oct 09, 2024** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

**Apr 11 - Apr 19, 2025** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

**Oct 01 - Oct 09, 2025** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

Lebanon has always been a well-traveled bridge between East and West, sea and desert that is dense with history. Above the layers of antiquity lies a land of mesmerizing beauty and contrast from the modernity of Beirut, once known as the Paris of the Middle East to the lush Cedars. Experience the warmth of its people, the tastes of its world-renown cuisine, the aromas of its souks, the majesty of its past and explore some of the best-preserved Roman and Byzantine cities in the Near East as well as some of the most stunning Byzantine gems as well as many of the Islamic architecture jewels! Explore the Phoenician cities of Sidon & Tyre and the well-preserved Roman city of Baalbek, and the town of Byblos with its multiple layers of civilizations. (I - \*\*\*\*)

## Iran

**Oct 14 - Nov 03, 2024** Led by **Local Guide**

**Apr 03 - Apr 20, 2025** Led by **Local Guide**

**Oct 13 - Nov 02, 2025** Led by **Nancy Weber**

Iran is home to a breathless mix of spectacular madrasas, exquisite mosques, and some of the most wonderful examples of Islamic architecture in the world. Everywhere you look, the magnificence of 2,500 years of history lies all around you. Ancient Persia has been the seat of many civilizations and unique contributions in poetry, art, architecture, science, and history. Many of Iran's achievers have contributed to our modern world. Most of the country's archaeological gems are very well preserved and portray a rich historical heritage. Your tour will not only explore ancient ruins and colorful cities but also exotic bazaars and old baths. Marvel at ancient monuments and beautifully tiled mosques. Stroll through medieval bazaars that remain much as they were centuries ago. Stop to visit local nomadic tribes when driving across the

vast country. Your journey will take you to Yazd the center of Zoroastrian culture, to Shiraz city of poets, which has had major Jewish and Christian communities, and the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Isfahan, and Persepolis. Come and discover Iran, a repository of grand relics and ruins. (II-\*\*\*/\*\*)

## North Africa...Mauritania, Tunisia, and Algeria

**Oct 04 - Oct 30, 2024** Led by **M. Halouani**

**Apr 04 - May 02, 2025** Led by **M. Halouani**

**Oct 04 - Oct 31, 2025** Led by **M. Halouani**

Few countries on earth match the historical, cultural, and natural splendor of **Tunisia**. Begin and ends in the capital city of Tunis with its wondrous medina (ancient city) and fascinating souqs (markets). Travel onward to ancient Carthage, one of the most important cities in the ancient Roman Empire. Other important historical sites include Dougga, Sousse, Oudna, and Kerkouane, as well as the sacred Islamic site of Kairouan.

**Algeria** is a vast country of breathtaking scenery, well-preserved Roman ruins, pre-historic cave paintings and a strong Berber culture. Your journey will take you from the sweeping shoreline to the majestic mountains, through the huge wilderness of the Sahara Desert into the palm-fringed oases. Some of the highlights include the Roman ruins of Timgad, the former Roman port of Caesarea, the oasis town of Bou Saada and the Kasbah of Algiers. This fascinating tour offers the adventurous traveler an alluring blend of art, history, culture, and scenery, including the marvelous city of Constantine, the city of gorges and bridges.

**Mauritania** boasts many natural wonders, as well as ancient cities. In the Middle Ages, Mauritania was the seat of the Almoravid movement that spread Islam throughout North Africa. Highlights include two of its four "ksour" (villages) - Chinguitty and Ouadane - located in northern Mauritania. Chinguitty is a medieval Berber trading center, with stark, unadorned buildings that reflect the strict religious beliefs of the Almoravids. Ouadane is an oasis settlement concealed by waves of golden sand dunes and home to an ancient mosque (and

UNESCO World Heritage Site). So, come and join us spanning three countries, or select the segments that are most intriguing to you. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Syria

**Oct 09 - Oct 17, 2024** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

**Apr 18 - Apr 27, 2025** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

**Oct 08 - Oct 17, 2025** Led by **Ghiath Abdallah**

Above the layers of antiquity lies a land of mesmerizing beauty and contrasts from the desert surroundings of the ancient city of Palmyra to the green meadows near the castle of Krak des-Chevaliers. Begin your tour in Lebanon, a country well deserving the title of "Switzerland of the East" then cross into Syria to Damascus, regarded as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Head west as you leave Damascus for the oasis city of Palmyra, home of Queen Zenobia and north to Syria's second largest city: Aleppo and complete your circular route with stops in Hama and Maaloula as you make your way back to Damascus. Experience the warmth of the people, the tastes of the cuisine, the aromas of the souks, and the majesty of the past and explore some of the best-preserved Roman cities in the Near East as well as Byzantine gems and Islamic jewels! (I - \*\*\*\*)

## Eastern Turkey

**Sep 16 - Oct 01, 2024** Led by **Local Guide**

**Apr 20 - May 05, 2025** Led by **Local Guide**

**Sep 16 - Oct 01, 2025** Led by **Local Guide**

Eastern Turkey is the true cradle of civilization, encompassing the earliest farmers, the great Hittite and Urartian empires of antiquity, the conquering Romans, early Christian churches, and medieval fortresses. Bordering Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, this seldom-visited region offers travelers simply incredible sights. See the earliest "temple" at Göbekli Tepe with its 12,000-year-old carvings. Visit Hittite sites with carved reliefs, and cuneiform inscriptions on the Urartian capital at Tushpa. Explore the Biblical connections of Urfa and Harran (where Abraham once lived), and Mount Ararat, claimed to be the final resting place of Noah's Ark. Eastern Turkey

is a fantastic repository of ancient Roman, biblical, Seljuk, Armenian and Crusader relics. See the magnificent carvings in the Armenian Church on Akdamar Island in Lake Van, and an entire ghostly ruined Armenian city at Ani. In addition, you will not forget the stunningly situated sculptured heads of Nemrut Dag, or Ishak Pasha Palace, the Taj Mahal of Turkey. (II - \*\*\*\*)

## Albania

**Apr 28 - May 06, 2025** Led by Local guide

Albania is a fascinating, little known Mediterranean country situated just north of mainland Greece with an incredible history set impressively against a wild and rugged landscape. Past civilizations have each left their mark, mainly the Romans and Greek, which we see in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Butrint and the famous Berat Fortress, but the real highlight is the warm hospitality received all over this wonderfully undiscovered country. From the green pastures of Permet to the narrow-cobbled streets of Gjirokastra, situated high on a mountain slope, we enjoy a warm welcome in each unique village. Albania also boasts outstanding natural beauty with jagged mountains, golden sand beaches, and lush meadows. This itinerary shows the best of this little country in just ten days and includes breathtaking views driving through the mountains, entry to incredible fortresses, and free time on a truly stunning beach. (III- \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Tajikistan... Pamir Highway

**Apr 18 - May 02, 2025** Led by David William

This journey will take you to explore exotic landscapes of snow-covered peaks, high-mountain lakes, and rivers, inhabited by mountain communities living in settlements preserving century-old traditions and customs. The history of Pamir Highway is over one hundred years, but the history of Pamir itself is over millennia. It was left largely untouched by the ravages of the Soviet occupation and the Taliban's invasion. Archaeological findings testify presence of Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Muslims in Pamir. The birth date of Pamir Highway can be considered March 14, 1981 when lieutenant colonel Bronislav

Grombchevskiy read a lecture on "Our interests in Pamir. Military-political outline" at the secret meeting of the General headquarter of the Russian army in Saint Petersburg. The aim of this secret bridgehead was to prepare for any possible invasion of the British Empire to Central Asia. (II/III- \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Angola

**Oct 05 - Oct 25, 2024** Led by Ihab Zaki  
*with Sao Tome ext. (Oct 25 - Oct 31)*

**May 30 - Jun 10, 2025** Led by Michel Behar

Located in southern Africa, Angola is the seventh largest country on the continent and one of the MOST EXPENSIVE countries in the world. The diverse ethnic communities, such as the Mumuila and Mucubal, maintain their own cultural traits, traditions, and languages to varying degrees. In the cities, where slightly more than half of the population now lives, you will find a mixed culture that has been emerging since colonial times. In this urban society, since its foundation in the 16th century, the Portuguese heritage has become more and more dominant. However, African roots are evident in music and dance, and are molding the way in which Portuguese is spoken. This process is well reflected in contemporary Angolan literature. On this tour, you will explore a land that the modern world has yet to discover. As you make your way inland, the landscape becomes almost endless plains. (II - \*\*/\*\*\*\*)

## Malta

**Apr 21 - Apr 27, 2025** Led by Local Guide

Megaliths, medieval dungeons, and Calypso's Cave - The Maltese Islands are positively mythic. The narrow meandering streets of their towns and villages lead to the main square, which is invariably dominated by the huge baroque church. As the countryside is dotted with medieval towers, wayside chapels and the oldest known human structures in the world, the Islands have rightly been described as an open-air museum. The Maltese archipelago lies virtually at the center of the Mediterranean, and

consists of three islands: Malta, Gozo, and Comino. (I - \*\*\*\*)

## Turkmenistan

**Apr 22 - May 02, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

Turkmenistan is an independent and neutral state located in Central Asia. The geographical position is more advantageous than its neighbors due to the outlet to the Caspian Sea. When traveling far inland, you can see sandy deserts with barchans, as it is a country of deserts, oases, and unique historical and cultural traditions.

The most ancient civilizations of the world prospered on its territory. Turkmenistan is a country of contrasts, especially today, as the cities have entirely changed and become more similar to European megacities. But despite all the changes, their Oriental character has been preserved in unique architecture, decoration of buildings, numerous mosques, and ancient monuments. It is the least explored country on the Silk Road, with a rich ethnic tradition, world-famous carpets, moon-like landscapes, newly discovered ancient civilizations, spectacular Islamic monuments, and deserted caravan cities - a lost world of Central Asia.

Four-fifths of the country is covered by the large and spectacular Kara Kum or Black Sands desert, where we will observe an industrial phenomenon known as "Fire Crater or Gate to Hell." The country is home to Turkmen, who trace their descent from nomadic tribes living in the Altai Mountains above Mongolia in the 5th century AD. The warm and friendly Turkmen people are some of the most appealing in Central Asia. The Turkmen's traditional clothes, with huge sheepskin hats, long coats, and boots, are true to their nomadic traditions. From the middle of the 1st millennium BCE until the 10th century CE the territories of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were part of the Persian Empire. Later the Silk Road connecting China with Europe ran through the region. (II - \*\*\*\*)

## Cyprus and the Greek Islands...Crete, Santorini & Rhodes

**Apr 27 - May 12, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

**Cyprus** is an island with a unique archaeological legacy - from its beautiful sanctuaries and monuments to the architectural marvels scattered along its craggy mountains, verdant plains, sweeping beaches, rolling hills and abundant vineyards. This Mediterranean island lies at the crossroads of three continents - where East meets West, and a new experience awaits you under the sun of Cyprus.

**Crete** is an island with an exquisite 700-mile-long coastline dotted with numerous coves, bays, and peninsulas, and a multitude of soft, sandy beaches that line the dazzling blue Mediterranean Sea. As the home of the Minoan civilization, the island is of historic importance in today's world with important archeological finds at Knossos, Phaistos, and Gortys. There are many jewels just waiting to be discovered by the more adventurous explorers. If you have not visited Crete yet, maybe now is the time to come and explore this fascinating Greek island.

**Santorini** is one of the Cyclades islands in the Aegean Sea. It was devastated by a volcanic eruption in the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC, forever shaping its rugged landscape. The whitewashed, cubiform houses of its two principal towns, Fira and Oia, cling to cliffs above an underwater caldera (crater). They overlook the sea, small islands to the west, and beaches made up of black, red, and white lava pebbles. Santorini boasts that it is one of the most romantic spots in the world.

**Rhodes**, the largest of Greece's Dodecanese islands, is known for its beach resorts, ancient ruins, and remnants of its occupation by the Knights of St. John during the Crusades. The city of Rhodes has an Old Town featuring the medieval Street of the Knights and the castle like Palace of the Grand Masters. Captured by the Ottomans and then held by the Italians, the palace is now a history museum. Displaying one of the most extensive collection of relics and treasures. (I - \*\*\*\*)

## Uzbekistan

**May 11 - May 23, 2024**      **Led by Local Guide**

**May 02 - May 14, 2025**      **Led by Local Guide**

Uzbekistan is a doubly noncoastal country located in Central Asia that borders the countries of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan has a speckled landscape that includes an undulating sandy desert, mountains along the border with Tajikistan, and the Aral Sea in the west. Journey back to the days of the Great Silk Road on a 10-day Premium adventure through Uzbekistan. Explore the cosmopolitan capital of Tashkent, marvel at glorious architecture in Samarkand, discover the holy sites of Bukhara and visit the ancient monuments of Khiva. Encounter a friendly welcome at every turn and get to know the ins and outs of a traditional Uzbek village. From medieval cities to charismatic communities, a lot is awaiting you.

## Malawi and Zimbabwe

**May 11 - May 25, 2025**      **Led by Michel Behar**

***Comoros extension (May 05 - May 10)***

**Malawi**, also affectionately known as "the warm heart of Africa," may be small in size but is large in diversity. Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa, offers remote islands, picturesque shorelines, and stunning sunrises and sunsets. The mountainous grasslands of Mulanje, Nyika, and Zomba plateaus afford spectacular photo options, and game-rich national parks and wildlife reserves provide exceptional wildlife viewing equal to those in East Africa. Malawi's greatest asset is her people – always ready for a laugh, a little chat, and an impromptu song and dance. Malawians' easy-going and warm nature makes this country one of the safest and most enjoyable places to travel in Africa.

**Zimbabwe** is well known for its amazing wildlife, but few know about its impressive ancient ruins or well-preserved cave art. This tour focuses on the historical and cultural side of Zimbabwe. Explore the Great Zimbabwe ruins, the largest and most significant stone archaeological complex in sub-Saharan Africa, thought to date back to the 11th century. It was built by the Karanga, ancestors of the Shona tribes, and for unknown reasons, the city

was abandoned when the Portuguese arrived in 1552. Another fascinating highlight is the ancient cave paintings at Matobo Hills, home to some of the world's most extraordinary prehistoric bushman artwork. The paintings, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, feature wildlife such as giraffes, lions, and rhinos as well as humans that date back to 13,000 years.

## South Caucasus...Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia

**Sep 18 - Oct 05, 2024**      **Led by Local Guides**

**May 15 - June 01, 2025**      **Led by Local Guides**

**Sep 18 - Oct 05, 2025**      **Led by Local Guides**

Journey through more than five millennia of history of the **Armenian** Plateau, the legendary landing place of Noah's Ark. Learn about one of the earliest civilizations in the world, referred to by many as one of the cradles of civilization. Visit monasteries precariously perched on mountains; ruins of once imposing castles and fortresses; the largest collection of khachkars (stone crosses), and vishaps (ancient megaliths) dating from 1500 BC unique to the Armenian Plateau. Traverse part of the ancient Silk Road and see the only surviving intact caravansary in Armenia. Explore archaeological excavation sites and watch as the past, undisturbed for thousands of years, emerges before your eyes.

**Georgia** will mesmerize you with its magnificent history and unparalleled natural beauty, from the shores of the Black Sea to the soaring peaks of the Caucasus Mountains, from the rich vineyards to the arid deserts. The Georgians have built a modern country on the foundation of their rich and ancient culture, a perfect blend. Georgia's world-famous wine, unique and tantalizing cuisine and legendary hospitality make this a favorite destination for the curious and sophisticated traveler.

**Azerbaijan** is a magnificent country with rich natural resources, ancient culture, and history. The lifestyle of the people represents a harmonious blending of the traditions of many different cultures and civilizations, with a very strong Persian influence. A visit to this fascinating country with its unique culture, history and traditions will

round out your journey to the land of the Trans-Caucasus. (II - \*\*\*)

## Atlantic Ocean Islands... Azores, Madeira, Canary, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome

**June 03 - Jun 20, 2025** Led by STS Manager

**Azores** boasts a mesmerizing blend of volcanic peaks, lush green valleys, and azure-blue lakes, making it a dream destination for nature enthusiasts. Take a leisurely hike along the scenic trails of Sao Miguel Island, where you will be enchanted by the vibrant beauty of Sete Cidades, a twin lake surrounded by emerald-green hills. Explore the Flores Island, known as the "Island of Flowers," where dramatic cliffs, cascading waterfalls, and picturesque lakes will steal your heart. And don't miss the chance to witness the awe-inspiring volcanic landscapes of Pico Island, home to the highest peak in Portugal.

**Madeira** is renowned for its striking natural beauty, earning it the nickname "The Floating Garden." As you explore the island, you will be captivated by its rugged mountains, volcanic peaks, and verdant valleys. The landscape is adorned with vibrant flora, including exotic and colorful flowers such as orchids and bird-of-paradise. The Laurisilva Forest, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a must-visit for those who appreciate pristine natural wonders.

**Canary Islands**, a mesmerizing archipelago located off the northwest coast of Africa, offers a unique blend of scenic beauty, diverse landscapes, and a vibrant cultural tapestry. Comprising seven main islands and several smaller ones, this Spanish territory is an enticing destination for travelers seeking an unforgettable and exotic vacation. Whether you crave pristine beaches, volcanic landscapes, breathtaking sunsets, or captivating historical sites, the Canary Islands have it all. A visit to the Canary Islands is incomplete without indulging in its delightful culinary offerings. With a blend of Spanish, African, and Latin American influences, the archipelago's cuisine is a fascinating fusion of flavors.

**Cape Verde** located off the coast of West Africa in the Atlantic Ocean, this collection of ten volcanic islands offers a unique blend of diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and warm hospitality. Whether you are a nature lover seeking breathtaking landscapes, a history buff curious about the country's fascinating past, or simply in search of a relaxing beach getaway, Cape Verde has something in store for everyone.

**Sao Tome**, located off the western coast of Africa, is the larger of the two islands that make up the nation of Sao Tome and Principe. This lush destination is a paradise for nature enthusiasts, adventure-seekers, and those in search of relaxation. Steeped in a history influenced by Portuguese colonization, Sao Tome exudes a unique blend of European and African cultures. The remnants of colonial architecture, such as Fort São Sebastião and São Nicolau Cathedral, still stand as proud reminders of the island's past. As you explore the bustling markets and interact with friendly locals, you will experience the warmth and hospitality that define the Sao Tomean people. (II-\*\*\*)

## Mozambique, Eswatini, & Lesotho

**May 25 - May 30, 2025** Led by Michel Behar

With cities of colonial splendor, a golden coast scattered with balmy beaches, and cuisine packed with sizzle and spice, **Mozambique** is a magical part of Mother Africa. It is endowed with rich and extensive natural resources. From the lodge at Machangulo, located on a beautiful and secluded peninsula, explore Inhaca Island, a subtropical island designated as a marine reserve.

**Eswatini**, officially the Kingdom of Eswatini and also known as Swaziland, is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. Bonding with nature is one of the primary pleasures of visiting Swaziland. Its varied landscape, many mountains, and rivers make it an ideal place for hikers and those wishing to escape urbanization and relax.

**Lesotho**, officially the "Kingdom of Lesotho," is an enclaved country within the border of South Africa. Known as the "Kingdom in the Sky" due to its lofty



altitude, it has the highest lowest point of any country (4,590 ft.) and is the only country to be entirely higher than 3,200 feet above sea level. (II - \*\*\*)

## **Mongolia**

**July 05 - Jul 15, 2024** Led by **Norman Jones**

Mongolia, a vast Asian nation, boasts a captivating blend of natural wonders and cultural riches. Ulaanbaatar, its capital, offers a dynamic mix of modernity and tradition, with bustling markets, monasteries, and museums. Beyond the city, the Gobi Desert unveils its stark beauty, featuring the Khongor Sand Dunes and the lush oasis of Yol Valley. Mongolia's culture shines through events like the Naadam Opening Ceremony, showcasing wrestling, archery, and the thrilling Naadam Horse Race. The Flaming Cliffs unveil the secrets of a prehistoric world with dinosaur fossils, while Terelj National Park invites exploration of pristine wilderness, forests, and the iconic Turtle Rock. Mongolia, where past meets present amidst breathtaking landscapes and captivating traditions, promises an unforgettable adventure in the heart of the Asian world. (II - \*\*\*)

## **Papua New Guinea**

**Jul 18 - Jul 27, 2024** Led by **Local Guides**

**Jul 17 - Jul 27, 2025** Led by **Local Guides**

### ***Palau Island extension***

Journey into the dense forests & Stone Age cultures in remote Papua New Guinea. Enjoy exclusive cultural experiences and stunning natural beauty on this adventurous exploration of a little-visited land. From your comfortable lodges, stopping at tiny villages, you will interact with the locals & understand their way of life. Savor a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the colorful Mt. Hagen Show where tribe's people from all over the country converge to compete in traditional dance. In addition, in the Highlands, attend a festive Tumbuna Show, which takes place every May. In this remote land, stay in comfortable accommodations and be escorted by veteran local guides who will introduce you to local people & customs. Make the most of your time with scenic chartered flights over the impenetrable rain forest that has kept tribes isolated for centuries. (II - \*\*\*)

## **Uganda, Rwanda & Burundi**

**Aug 14 - Aug 28, 2024** Led by **STS Manager**

Travel to some of the least explored parts of East Africa on this two-week journey visiting three beautiful countries: Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Starting with **Uganda**, a country located on the East African Plateau, you will experience beautiful waterfalls, Lake Victoria, the world's largest lake, and the world's longest river, the Nile. You will also have the chance to see all kinds of wildlife, including the majestic and endangered mountain gorilla. Then cross into **Rwanda** to discover the beautiful Lake Kivu, one of the African Great Lakes. One of the highlights of your visit will be the chance to see the splendid Golden Monkey, one of the rarest primates in the world. Also, experience the Rwandan culture at a traditional village. Continue your journey to **Burundi**, which has two national parks - Kibira to the northwest, and Ruvubu to the northeast. Both were established in 1982 to conserve wildlife populations. Burundi's culture is based on local tradition and the influence of neighboring countries. (III - \*\*\*)

## **Indian Ocean Islands... Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion and Comoros**

**Sep 09 - Oct 04, 2024** Led by **Local Guides**

**Sep 08 - Oct 03, 2025** Led by **STS Manager**

The Indian Ocean covers about one-fifth of the world's total ocean area, spanning from the Eastern shores of Africa to the western shores of Asia and Australia. It is the youngest of the three major oceans, with fewer islands when compared to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Many have explored it, from the Egyptians around the 18th century BC to the Arabs between the 9th and 15th centuries. European navigators began their explorations of the Ocean in the early 16th century, including the famous British navigator James Cook in 1772. This journey voyages to some of the Indian Ocean's most stunning islands, including the Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion, and Comoros.

The **Maldives**, an archipelagic state in South Asia of the South India shores, comprises 1,192 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls. The islands

are known for their attractive white sandy beaches, striking emerald waters, and beautiful over-the-water bungalows. Its people are master boatbuilders and skillful artisans. The Maldives is home to around 5% of the world's reefs that attract thousands of fish, making it an excellent destination for snorkeling.

The journey continues west towards the African coast to **Seychelles**, an island republic consisting of 115 islands, mostly uninhabited. It is a paradise for nature lovers who will find its lush, tropical vegetation, rocky mountains, and pristine sandy beaches worth exploring. Seychelles is among the world's leading countries that protect its threatened species, such as the Seychelles black parrot and the Aldabra giant tortoise.

**Mauritius** lies off the eastern coast of Madagascar and is known for its stunning beaches, lush national parks, towering mountains, and iridescent lagoons. Although settled by Portuguese sailors in the early 16th century, it was dominated by the French in the early 18th century contributing to its profound French presence.

Another French-influenced destination not far from Mauritius is **Réunion**, a volcanic island with substantial ethnic diversity. The country has a high rate of endemic species of plants and is home to many native bird species. Its waters teem with sea life, including eels, angelfish, sea urchins, sea turtles, and dolphins. Humpback whales migrate annually between June and September to breed.

**Comoros** is a group of islands on the northern end of the Mozambique Channel off the east coast of Africa that receives very few visitors. This tropical island paradise is a unique destination where one can escape the crowds and familiarity of the well-known tourist paths offering an exotic blend of rich history, strong culture, and magnificent landscapes. (II -\*\*\*\*)

## **Balkans...Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia & Slovenia**

**Sep 27 - Oct 11, 2024** Led By Local Guides

**Sep 19 - Oct 03, 2025** Led by Norman Jones

The Balkans' region is an amazing cultural mosaic of diverse ethnic fabric combined with historical

importance and natural beauty. Journey through the former Yugoslavia that is home to a very eclectic mix of people, ethnically, geographically, and religiously. This strikingly beautiful region is famous for its turquoise-colored coastline dotted with gorgeous villages. Its rugged interior mountains are home to a gamut of high perching monasteries and churches, spectacular lakes, and waterfalls. Albania is a former enclave of the Ottoman Empire, and today this nation is emerging from its medieval existence under a strict Communist regime. It offers the visitor a glimpse into a unique cultural heritage. Visit exotic bazaars, Ottoman citadels, mosques and towns, medieval churches, fortresses, and monasteries as well as ancient Roman ruins and many UNESCO World Heritage sites. (II - \*\*\*)

## **Northern Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania**

**Sep 28 - Oct 14, 2024**

Led by Local Guides

**Sep 27 - Oct 12, 2025**

Led by Local Guides

The focus of this tour will be the dramatic mountain scenery and exquisite jewel-like villages, farms, churches, and monasteries of the four countries visited. This simple, agrarian way of life is a vestige of the culture that once dominated the continent but has virtually disappeared in Western Europe. Expect to be entertained by craft traditions, folk music, and dance. The towns are equally impressive; most of the overnight stops are in medieval walled burghs built by Saxon settlers. Romania is noted for its vineyards and interesting cuisine, heavily influenced by Hungarian specialties. Continue on to Bulgaria, one of the smallest countries of the Old Continent but with a wealthy history in the Balkan region. From settlement on top of settlement Bulgaria is a repository of ancient sites from many civilizations that inhabited the region through millennia. Buffeted by Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman influences and dotted with beautiful lakes, threaded together by a network of rivers, Macedonia is a repository of history surrounded by beautiful scenery. In Northern Greece, you will discover grandiose archaeological sites, picturesquely labyrinthine villages, and the great

city of Thessaloniki, famous for its dazzling Byzantine heritage, outshone only by that of Constantinople (Istanbul) itself. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

### **Timor-Leste & Indonesia**

**Oct 06 - Oct 25, 2024** Led by Local Guides

*Tasmania extension (Sep 29 - Oct 04) and*

*Brunei ext. (Oct 25 - Oct 28)*

**Oct 05 - Oct 24, 2024** Led by Local Guides

*Tasmania extension (Sep 28 - Oct 03) and*

*Brunei ext. (Oct 24 - Oct 27)*

One of the more unique and remote programs in the Spiekermann portfolio, this itinerary will take you on a journey that covers all of the best this world has to offer. You will have the opportunity to experience many features of Indonesia unseen by those traveling from the western world: endangered animals like the Komodo Dragon, indigenous tribes with rich cultural traditions like the Dani Tribe of Papua, and unique burial traditions like those that dwell in the Toraja Highlands. There's even a bonus visit to Timor-Leste, which offers an incredible glimpse into a country if early infancy. From big cities like Makassar to small villages like Wamena, this expedition is meant to cater to those that prioritize exploring every inch of our dynamic planet. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

### **Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Montenegro**

**Oct 10 - Oct 23, 2025** Led by Local Guides

Since the early 1990s, sweeping changes have taken place in the Balkans. The word itself means, "To break apart," and that is exactly what has happened. The six regions of the former Yugoslavia are autonomous countries, each with a culture of their own. This tour of the Western Balkans combines the fabulous sunshine and warmth of Croatia; the more diverse parts of three cultures coming together in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the absolute charm of Slovenia with its wines and Alps. The Croatian coastline is one of the most beautiful in the world. Its cities with their architectural treasures offer an old-world European feeling while their exciting nightlife offers a glimpse of the modern. Croatia is indeed unique, not only for its clear, clean crystal blue

waters, but also for a thousand years of different cultures. Enjoy the native cuisine and wines as we travel around the country. we will also have opportunities to interact with the Croats, a warm and hospitable people that enjoy life and will make us feel at home in their beautiful country. (II - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

### **Chad & Camroon...Gerowol Festival**

**Oct 10 - Oct 25, 2024** Led by STS Manager

**Feb 04 - Feb 16, 2025** Led by Local Guides

**Oct 09 - Oct 25, 2025** Led by STS Manager

Chad is one of the least visited of all the African countries by western tourists and therein lies its appeal. We are proud to offer a trip to this most pioneering of destinations; a land that is as wild as it is beautiful, as untamed as it is graceful. It is a land of rock arches, surprising wildlife, camel caravans traversing the sands, where genuine encounters with local people are guaranteed

The particular Chad tour will take you to the spectacular Ennedi Massif; a remote, breath-taking, and otherworldly landscape. The Ennedi is a vast collection of Sandstone Mountains and rock formations sculpted by the wind and sand over millennia. Here we enter the land of the Tubu, one of Africa's most traditional and least known people, and our excellent local connections ensure rare opportunities to meet these shy and secretive people. We will see rock art dating back thousands of years and walk into the Guelta d'Archei where the Tubu bring huge herds of camels to drink at the only waterhole for miles around, in the company of one of the last populations of Saharan crocodiles, which we hope to see. (III - \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

### **Kurdistan...Yazidi Festival**

**Oct 10 - Oct 19, 2024** Led by Local Guide

**Oct 09 - Oct 18, 2025** Led by Barbara Porter

Kurdistan, the autonomous northern region of Iraq predominantly inhabited by the Kurds, is amazingly different from the areas populated by the Arabs. The terrain is in stark contrast to the desert that characterizes middle and southern Iraq. It is an eclectic region that offers a multitude of experiences and chance encounters. Tour the

world's oldest inhabited city with its famous museum of antiquities. Visit monasteries and churches dating from the 2nd to 4th century and the holiest sites of the Yezidis including the cave of the fire worshippers. Drive through breathtaking views of Kurdistan's mountains, rivers, and waterfalls. Explore former Jewish cities and other ancient locations such as Amadiya. Shop in the local bazaars for gold, silver, carpets, spices – you name it. From the great walled city of Erbil to nearly deserted but still-functioning monasteries to gushing rivers like the Greater Zab and Lesser Zab feeding into the Tigris, the region has much to offer the seasoned traveler. (II/III - \*\*\*\*)



# OUR TRIP GRADING CHART

*We have been using the following system to help you identify the tour that best matches your travel interests and your physical abilities by ranking activity grade levels and lodging standards. Not every trip fits the needs and the expectations of travelers or their tolerance levels. We hope that this new system will make it easier to find the program that is right for you.*

## **Trip Grade:**

**I Easy** - Reasonably paced sightseeing, easy walking, and leisurely days. **There are no particular physical challenges.**

**II Active** - Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule, and some long rides.

**III Challenging** - Parts of the trip are physically challenging and involve hiking on rough terrain in sand or at high altitudes. There may be very long drives on rough roads, weather conditions with high heat or humidity, and the presence of insects. You may have simple picnic lunches, primitive bathroom facilities along the road, and remoteness from modern towns or cities.

## **Lodging Level:**

★ **Simple:** One or more properties on the trip are very basic, rustic, and primitive, with shared bathroom facilities (1 or 2 stars).

★★ **Basic:** Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but generally with private facilities. Some such lodges and motel-style need repairs, added cleaning, and improvements, but they are suitable for one-night stays even if they lack western-style amenities (2 or 3 stars).

★★★ **Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to the Western standards. (3 or 4 stars).

★★★★ **Luxury:** Regular-style hotels are usually large and of typical Western standards, with ample venues and full amenities (4 or 5 stars).

Please send me more information on the following tours:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_

**State:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tours:** \_\_\_\_\_

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