



update | September 2008



**W**elcome to our autumn newsletter. With much talk of the deepening economic situation and rising fuel prices, it's a challenging time for us all. We are certainly seeing an increase in transport costs, fuel charges on ship voyages and of course on flights, however I am happy to tell you that at Far Frontiers Travel we remain upbeat and have had a busy summer, with many of you already looking to beat the winter blues by planning your getaway for 2009.

This edition features a fascinating trip I made in Chile in the late spring, as well as exciting news of a new development. I would like to introduce you to Arcturus, our new polar division. Arcturus is a niche travel company which currently offers a dynamic range of tailored holidays and a select few special interest group trips to the polar regions. With its integration into Far Frontiers Travel we look forward to bringing you a whole new world of exciting experiences in the Arctic and Antarctic – including South Georgia and the Falkland Islands, Kamchatka and Northern Russia, Greenland, Iceland and the Scottish Islands. Activities include voyages on icebreakers, cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing and dog-sledding, exploring volcanoes and gentle walking in summer. The Arcturus brochure is hot off the press so if you would like to receive a copy, please contact us or return the enclosed reply paid card.

*Fiona Brijnath*

Fiona Brijnath  
Far Frontiers Travel

## FAR FRONTIERS TRAVEL'S NEW POLAR DIVISION

Travel with us to a frozen wilderness – with a voyage through the sea ice or an expedition by dog-sledge, ski or snow shoe for the ultimate getaway

### CHILE – LAND OF CONTRASTS

Fiona's trip report uncovers a place of intrigue and colour – taking in the arid Atacama desert, hissing geysers and thermal springs, picturesque vineyards and cobalt blue glaciers

### HIKING IN BHUTAN

Our suggestions on how to complement sightseeing in Bhutan with short walks and hikes to delightful villages and monasteries



*"Icebergs floating in the world's largest fjord enhanced the beauty of the short Arctic summer. Our time on the boat was equally as fantastic as walking on colourful tundra. The Inuit guides were fascinating to travel with."*

Dr. Lorraine Craig

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brochure

Call us for a copy of our 'show-case' brochure

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## introducing ARCTURUS

*Imagine carving your way through the sea ice on an expedition or research vessel, travelling by dog sled, crossing snowy mountain ranges, eating reindeer meat with herders in their yurt, watching brown or polar bears, whales or penguins or swimming in a hot thermal river – a world far away from everyday life.*



Now owned by and run as the polar division of Far Frontiers Travel, **Arcturus** was among the pioneers of wildlife tours in the Arctic. Today we are one of the foremost operators to the polar regions with nearly 30 years of local research and experience. Many of our itineraries reflect the contributions made by early travellers to Arctic and Antarctic locations for scientific research, expeditions or simply pure pleasure!

We offer an unparalleled selection of extraordinary journeys: you can **voyage** with us on board small icebreaking expedition ships and research vessels along dramatic coastlines including Greenland, Spitsbergen and the Lofoten Islands, the Scottish Islands and the Canadian Arctic or the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. We also arrange our own **expeditions**, mostly camping, walking, dog-sledging and skiing, with an emphasis on enjoying wildlife and scenery in remote places such as Arctic Norway, Greenland and some of the remotest parts of Russia. To make your experience really unique, we can also **tailor make** a trip for your own needs.

Assisting us is **Dr. Lorraine Craig PhD**, previously Head of Research and Higher Education at the **Royal Geographical Society** and Director of the **Cambridge Arctic Shelf Programme**. As well as being past president of the **Arctic Club**, Lorraine has led walking and skiing expeditions for Arcturus in North East Greenland. She is currently based at the **Royal School of Mines, Imperial College London** and, when she is not lecturing, continues to advise on all polar matters, lead tours and develop new destinations.

A world of new experiences awaits: here are Lorraine's recommendations for expeditions for small groups in 2009.



### Dog-sledging in Liverpool Land with Inuit hunters, North East Greenland

This is a unique experience travelling with the Inuit hunters of **Scoresby Sund**, taking us around most of the coast and between the mountains of **Liverpool Land**. We traverse mountains with peaks jutting up through the snow to 1,400m and see glaciers going down to the sea ice on the coast, covered in deep untouched snow. We may see seals, which the hunters may kill for dog food, arctic foxes and little auks and there is always the possibility of seeing a polar bear. At the end of each day the dogs may sing before they are given their food. Our hunters will cook for us and we will enjoy their friendship and kindness. We also spend two nights in **Ittoqqortoormiit**, the only village in North East Greenland, where some of its inhabitants still make their living by hunting seals.

- » dates « 10 - 19 April 2009
- » price « £3,990 per person
- » leader « Dr. Lorraine Craig
- » key info « Group size 6-10. Participants must be able to sleep in tents

### Fjords of Scoresby Sund, North East Greenland

The longest fjord system in the world, **Scoresby Sund** extends 350km inland and offers a perfect setting for exploring the region. Its enclosed waters are calm and navigable during the brief summer, which is remarkably warm with long periods of fine settled weather. This eight-day hiking trip, escorted by local Greenlanders, makes use of a local boat to cover a wide area and takes us around the island of **Milne Land** which dominates inner Scoresby Sund. We sail close to 1,000m high basalt cliffs interspersed with glaciers and visit the site of the winter quarters of Ryder's 1891-2 Danish Scientific Expedition on **Danmark Island**. With 24-hour daylight we can hike, boat or admire the view as we wish. Nights will be spent ashore in comfortable campsites with a large mess tent for dining.

- » dates « 4 - 16 August 2009
- » price « £4,990 per person
- » leader « Frank Ryding
- » key info « Group size 6-9. Hiking up to 6-8 hours a day, but those who prefer not to walk can stay with the boat







## CHILE 2008

The cool turquoise waters of the infinity pool danced and sparkled in the sunlight – a rather incongruous sight considering I had just arrived in the world's most arid desert. The **Atacama** is an extraordinary region of thermal activity; endless horizons and snow-topped volcanoes stretching over 1,000km from the Peruvian border.

*I was lucky to be staying at the newly-opened **Tierra Atacama**, a series of sublime low mud-walled rooms with outside showers, natural slate floors, four-poster beds and a scattering of local rugs, close to the desert town of **San Pedro de Atacama**. What a place to start my two week journey through Chile. The main focus of a stay here is the series of fascinating excursions deep into the heart of the desert. I loved the extraordinary crusted salt flats at **Laguna Chaxas** where the reflection of Chilean and Andean flamingos melded with the snow-capped peaks of long extinct volcanoes. I marvelled at the hissing steam geysers at **El Tatio** where bubbling craters suddenly erupt, shooting great jets of steam high into the sky. Then to the thermal springs where I sank into body-temperature natural pools, lined with abundant pampas grass, hoping that the thermal properties might work their magic and leave me looking ten years younger! At night, I sat out by open log fires to enjoy the extraordinary starlit skies and never had the Milky Way seemed so close. I left the earthy red tones of the Atacama with*



### Kamchatka in late summer 2009 – bears, volcanoes, native people, reindeer herders, autumn colours

The **Kamchatka Peninsula** in the Russian Far East is a place of towering snow-covered volcanoes of exquisite symmetry, lava fields, hot springs, geysers, lush valleys, tundra, fast flowing rivers and rugged coastline. It is the home of the Itelmen, Eveni and Koryaks, some of whom live by their traditional ways of hunting, fishing, reindeer herding and gathering wild plants. It is also home to the largest brown bear in Russia and Steller's sea eagle, which has a wingspan of three metres. With its position on the 'Pacific Ring of Fire' it has more than 30 active volcanoes including **Klyuchevskaya Sopka** which has been emitting steam and smoke for centuries.

Our expedition takes place in late August, one of the best times to appreciate the spectacular scenery and autumn colours. The itinerary includes the central valley with the **Kamchatka River**, **Tolbachik**, **Kzudach**, **Mutnovsky** and **Vachkazhets** volcanoes, **Kurilskoe Lake** and the hot **Khodukta River** in the southern tundra. Moving around by helicopter and truck we will watch bears feeding on berries and salmon spawning, swim in hot rivers, meet the local people in the tiny settlement of **Esso** and stay overnight with the nomadic reindeer herders in their summer mountain camp. Weather permitting, we may be able to land in the crater of the **Mutnovsky Volcano**. The trip ends in **Petropavlovsk** where we will learn its fascinating history and hear about life in Kamchatka today.

### Cross-country skiing in Southern Liverpool Land, Greenland

Very few people have visited this country in spring when the sea is frozen and the land is covered with snow. The combination of 1,000-1,400m peaks and long valleys leading from glaciers to the sea-ice of deep fjords makes **Southern Liverpool Land** a fascinating prospect for cross-country skiers who are seeking a true wilderness experience without being over-extended. Based in a simple house in **Scoresby Sund**, we will be doing our own cooking and travelling out each day with day-packs finding new routes. As a bonus we may see arctic hares, foxes and possibly a polar bear.

- » dates « 3 - 12 April 2009
- » price « £3,595 per person
- » leader « Dr. Lorraine Craig
- » key info « Group size 6-10



In addition to the above expeditions we offer a range of voyages to the Arctic and Antarctic (and even between the two), so do contact us for our full colour brochure of trips for 2009-2010.

There is also more information on [www.arcturusexpeditions.co.uk](http://www.arcturusexpeditions.co.uk). We are always ready to assist you with any aspect of your plans so please just pick up the phone – we will be happy to make suggestions.

- » dates « 28 August - 15 September 2009
- » price « £4,295 per person
- » leader « Dr. Lorraine Craig
- » key info « Based on a group size of 12-14.  
The pace will be leisurely. Walks are not difficult nor are they compulsory



## ARCTURUS

THE POLAR ARM OF FAR FRONTIERS TRAVEL





a memory of sunset at **Valle de La Luna**. Here the endless horizons are broken only by the distinctive silhouettes of volcanic craters. In this unforgettable moonscape, the massive sand dunes and rocky ridges afforded unimaginable views of the surrounding peaks as the sun dipped below the horizon to bring night to the desert.

I was soon to discover that this was to be a journey of contrasts and surprises. Some four hours after leaving Atacama, I found myself in the colourful UNESCO-protected city of **Valparaíso** in central Chile. I wandered up the steep narrow streets underneath majestic colonial houses and took the ancient funicular from hill to port where the solid grey warships of the Chilean Navy dominated the harbour. Here I found delightful boutique hotels, each with terraced gardens and pools overlooking the coast.

A short drive down the coast and I entered the wine region with its perfect climate and picturesque hillsides steeped in vines. Touring the wineries was fascinating, with the obligatory tasting sending you merrily on your way and nights spent on gorgeous family-owned estates in the opulent surroundings of their private 'casa' or guest house. I also had plenty of opportunities to indulge my love of riding, be it an early morning trot around the wineries before sun-up, or later further south in the wild remote surroundings of Southern Chile's **Patagonia National Park**. Here I enjoyed an exhilarating gallop rounding up the wild horses on the estancia where I stayed. The homestead's 90,000 hectares straddles both Argentina and Chile and made

a memorable base for my few days in the Park. I was lucky with the weather and the excitement was intense as I woke to clear skies and watched the sun rising over the famous towers of the **Torres del Paine Massif**.

The remote and barren landscape of the Torres Del Paine National Park reminded me a little of my 'back yard' at home – an almost total absence of trees and the lowland vegetation and coarse grasses looked not dissimilar to Dartmoor, but there was no comparison to be found with the extraordinary bulk of the Paine Massif whose granite towers dominate the skyline. Time and again I found myself drawn to its immense beauty. I took a memorable half-day trip across **Lago Grey**, first by zodiac boat and then by a small expedition boat to the head of the glacier. It was a day of colour – the red of the life-jackets against the cobalt blue of the glacier snout and an ever present backdrop of the grey snow-topped 'cuernos' or horns of the Paine towers. I was glad to have brought my binoculars to indulge my love of birdlife – upland geese, the ostrich-like rheas, crested caracaras and black-necked swans – to name but a few of our sightings.

I am so drawn to wilderness areas that I had expected Torres Del Paine to be the highlight of the trip, but Chile had one final gem to uncover. After a three hour charter flight in a tiny twin prop aircraft which bucked and bounced over the jagged mountains of the **Andes**, parting clouds revealing the dots of ships far below in the **Beagle Channel**, I found myself in the Chilean Naval Base of **Puerto Williams**. There is a quite serious rivalry between the Chileans and Argentineans, as

**Ushuaia** is regularly 'sold' as the southernmost town of South America, but I'm afraid I had to side with Chile! **Puerto Williams** is a tiny island – the southernmost inhabited landmass, unless you count the family who man the lighthouse of Cape Horn. We drove for two hours along its length and saw two cars! At the far end we walked down to the jetty into a tranquil bay where a beautiful wooden-hulled schooner was at anchor awaiting our arrival. Heading along the Beagle Channel, our superb knowledgeable anthropologist on board (who studied for 27 years in the area) enthralled us with his stories of the indigenous Yamana Indians who were first exposed to the outside world by among others, Charles Darwin. They lived naked year-round and existed on a diet of sea-lions and mussels and covered themselves in blubber and seal fat to keep out the cold.

It was an extraordinary and fascinating day, topped off with a delicious barbeque on deck – great hunks of tender Chilean steak and the obligatory glass or two of Chilean red. In the gathering storm clouds we dashed down the short airstrip once more with just enough time for a figure of eight fly-past and to tip our hats to the **Cape Horn** lighthouse keeper.

My only regret – there wasn't time on this trip to head on down to the icy waters of the Antarctic. ...There is a legend here – if you kiss the toe of the Indian's statue in the main square of **Punta Arenas**, you will return – Let it be so!





## short treks in BHUTAN



» From Thimphu «

### Tango Monastery and Cheri Monastery

North of the valley following the **Thimphu Chhu** (river), the road leads east to a small car park and a trail to the **Tango Monastery**. It was founded in the 12th century and the existing structure was built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' Lama Drukpa Kuenley. The picturesque three-storey building and several surrounding buildings were built in the 18th century by the eighth Desi, or secular ruler.

» how long « An hour's climb of 280m

A short distance beyond the turn-off to the Tango Monastery, another walk leads to the 17th century **Cheri Monastery**. The trail crosses a covered bridge that spans the Thimphu Chhu, and then climbs steeply to the monastery where there are tame deer and soaring birds.

» how long « one hour

### Phajoding Goemba

This hike up through the forest of pine and dwarf shrubs takes you to **Phajoding Goemba**, a large monastic complex with 10 lhakhangs and 15 monastic residences, many of them used for extended meditation retreats. The monastery was founded in the 13th century by a Yogi from Tibet who was searching for a place for meditation. Most of the buildings were constructed in 1748 through the efforts of the 9th Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot.

» how long « Full day's hike of 14 - 16km

» From Punakha «

### Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten

Seven km north of Punakha, the **Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten** perches on a hill on the opposite bank of the river. The 30-metre high chorten took eight years to build and was consecrated in 1999 in a three-day ceremony. It is dedicated to the fifth King of Bhutan and serves to protect the country, being crammed with every form of protector deity. From the end of the road, a bridge gives access to a hike up to the chorten during which you will encounter wonderfully fragrant flowering pepper plants.

» how long « steep 45-minute hike

### Chimi Lhakhang

Visit the **Chimi Lhakhang** built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley, the 'Divine Madman' who subdued the demoness of the Dochu La with his 'Magic Thunderbolt of Wisdom'. A wooden effigy of the lama's thunderbolt is preserved in the lhakhang and childless women go to the temple to receive a wang (or blessing) from the saint. The hike crosses fields and passes through a small traditional village.

» how long « 20 minutes

» From Bumthang «

### Membartsho

**Membartsho** (Burning Lake) is actually a wide place in the **Tang Chhu** (river) area. Pema Lingpa, the Treasure Discoverer, found several of Guru Rimpoche's relics and hidden treasures here. A wooden bridge crosses the river and is a good vantage point to see if you can see the temple that is said to exist in the lake's depth. Under the carved rock is a cave that virtuous people and those free from defilement can crawl through, no matter how big they are.

» how long « Less than 10 minutes from the car park

Over the years we have sent numerous clients to the magical Kingdom of Bhutan on trips ranging from overland journeys to festival tours and combinations with Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet.

Fewer clients take on longer treks as days spent trekking in Bhutan's wilderness leave less time to see the country's unique culture and architecture so here we suggest some short day treks which enable you to see some of the countryside without missing out on other sights.

### Kunzangdra Goemba

A hike above the **Dranchel** valley in the Bumthang region to one of the most important sites related to the great treasure discoverer, Saint Pema Lingpa, who also built the Goemba in 1488.

» how long « Two hours

### Ura / Wangthang Goemba

Explore **Ura** village en route to **Wangthang Goemba**. The villages in Ura have clustered houses, which is quite unusual in Bhutan and during the past 25 years it has been transformed from a marginal community to a prosperous valley. From Ura you hike to Wangthankha Goemba at 3420m.

» how long « About two hours walk uphill from the road

» getting there « Drive to Ura, which is 51km from Chamkhar town

### Ngang Lhakhang

This walk takes you to the **Gang Yul** or 'Swan Land' and a temple 100m above the valley floor. Guru Rimpoche visited the site and Lama Namkha Samdrup, contemporary of Pemalingpa, built the present temple in the 15th century. A three-day festival is held here each winter with masked dances in honour of the temple's founder.

» how long « Three and a half hours

» getting there « Thangbi Goemba is a 45 minute drive from Bumthang

### Tashigang area

Spend one day in **Tashigang** with sightseeing (the small town and the Dzong ) and a short hike in the area.

You can also take a day excursion to **Trashiyangtse** to visit the Dzong and the Gorn Kora chorten.

» getting there « 53km by road from Tashigang

Hike halfway towards **Rangung** along the **Gamri River**. Meet the transport and drive to the Ranjung Monastery. Return drive back to Tashigang for the night.

» how long « Thirty minutes or the option to walk for longer depending on your interest





# SYRIA

*an ancient civilisation*



**S**yría is an increasingly popular destination, whether you want a long weekend or a one or two week holiday.

Syria's historical tapestry of Roman, Greek, Byzantine and French influences will both fascinate and intrigue you – **Damascus** is said to be the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth. There you will find the **Omayyade Mosque**, the most important monument of the Omayyade dynasty as it was used as a plan for all Mosque architecture all over the Omayyade world. **Maaloula** is a charming mountain village situated between Damascus and **Homs** where people still speak the ancient Aramaic language, the language of Jesus Christ.

The **Krak De Chevalier** Crusader castle is the best preserved in the world, whilst **Palmyra's Bell Temple** is a unique example of the oriental temples built in the Roman period, huge in scale and very beautifully decorated. A must-visit is **Aleppo's Grand Mosque**, built in the early Omayyade period, burnt down by the Ismailites and rebuilt in the 12th century in the style of the Omayyade Mosque in Damascus. Aleppo's **Museum Souks**, famous for their Oriental atmosphere must not be missed while you are there.

We recommend combining Syria and **Jordan** using the easy border crossing between the two countries. A number of our clients have also included **Egypt** and even **Morocco** in the one trip. On this truly cultural journey you will see awe-inspiring sights and meet very friendly people. British Midland operates an excellent service to Syria and Jordan allowing you to 'open jaw' your flights at good fares.

**T**hese newly-opened jungle lodges would make a perfect way to end an overland trip in Bhutan or a Brahmaputra River cruise.

## Your feedback

Here is a selection of comments we have received recently from clients about their trip.

*"A first class effort to get the booking arranged in the time frame. Very high satisfaction with the holiday overall."*

**Mr and Mrs Keith Vanner**, Baltics, May 2008

*"I was indeed satisfied with all the arrangements made by Far Frontiers Travel where my expectations were met and often exceeded. I would certainly use them again to help me plan an individually tailored trip"*

**Terry Crimmings**, Malaysia, May 2008

*"Given all the changes and worrying on my part everything was handled fantastically. The local offices in both countries really made it great. Five star plus!"*

**Ian Stubbs**, Bhutan, 2008

*"Excellent, it was beautifully organised (thank you) and everyone in Jordan was very friendly."*

**Michael Portman and family**, Jordan, April 2008

*"Got back from Amman yesterday after a wonderful 8/9 days in Jordan. We had a truly memorable trip from start to finish and cannot thank you enough for putting it together so professionally and in such a short space of time. One of the best holidays we have ever had."*

**Paul Crayford**, Jordan, March 2008



» Bansbari Lodge «



» Diphlu River Lodge «

## EASTERN INDIA'S NEWEST JUNGLE LODGES

» Manas «

### The Bansbari Lodge

**Bansbari Lodge** is situated at the entrance to Manas National Park, with tea gardens on one side and jungle and views of the Himalayan foothills on the other. Simply but comfortably furnished, the atmosphere is both welcoming and relaxing. Browse through books from the library or stroll in the lodge's spacious grounds. There are 16 large twin-bedded rooms with en-suite facilities. Among the smiling staff is an excellent chef who prepares not only delicious Assamese cuisine but north Indian, Chinese or Continental dishes.

» location « 176 km from Guwahati and takes four hours by road

» Kaziranga «

### Diphlu River Lodge

**Diphlu River Lodge's** position at **Kaziranga National Park**, a World Heritage Site, is second to none: only the boundary river separates the lodge's extensive grounds from the National Park itself, and the jungle views are exceptional. The lodge, which can accommodate 24 guests, is run to the same exacting standards of the river cruises on the Brahmaputra and the Hugli. There are four individual and four semi-detached cottages – all sleep two and have been beautifully designed to make full use of local

materials and artefacts and blend in with the stunning natural surroundings. Each has en-suite facilities and a comfortable seating area. The separate cottages have a wide folding glass door opening on to a thatched verandah with cane day bed and inviting chairs, and overlook the Diphlu River and National Park, while a deck at the rear with sun-loungers looks across farmland.

High above the river is the Machan or 'jungle platform' with air-conditioned sitting and dining areas opening onto a large verandah with a high thatch ceiling and bamboo floor. Guests can congregate here to swap the day's jungle stories over a drink or delicious meal, sink into sofas, relax by the fireplace on winter evenings, enjoy breakfast on the verandah after an early morning safari, bird-watch or scan the opposite bank for wildlife.

Along the river bank is a jetty from which to embark on river trips in dugout canoes and look out for otters and for buffalo, deer or rhino grazing on the far bank. It is also a perfect setting for the lodge's barbecues and camp fires or just an idyllic spot for a quiet sundowner while watching the vivid sun setting across the river.

» location « Approximately four hours by road from Guwahati, two and a half hours from Jorhat and one hour from Tezpur