



WITH YAK AND BAG IN THE PAMIRS

Tajikistan is wild and wonderful, a blank spot on the tourist map.

A team from Globetrotter went on a tour to the Pamir Mountains and returned delighted.

In 2017, the Globetrotter Academy will organise another trip – and four GM readers can take part for free.

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“A terrific, almost pristine landscape and friendly, welcoming people – that is how I experienced Tajikistan”, explains Globetrotter manager Andreas Bartmann. Last summer, he travelled through the Central Asian mountain region with his friends Kay Rittmeister, Holger Moths and Thomas Lipke. Usually, they work together: Kay has supported Globetrotter for many years as a lawyer, Holger as an architect and Thomas was the CEO until recently. Every couple of years the old mates plan a special tour, and after a canoe trip through Canada and a dog sled expedition on Spitzbergen, they then wanted to go on a “journey into the unknown”. Leave the comfort zone, discover something new, broaden the horizon.

At this point, Matthias Poeschel entered the game as the “travel guide”. He lives in Tajikistan and acts as a consultant to the Aga-Khan foundation on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation. His goal is to boost tourism in the impoverished former Soviet Republic because tourism creates jobs. Many young Tajiks have no prospects in their own country and go to Russia as migrant workers. Matthias thought that a tour consisting of the well-travelled Globetrotters would provide a valuable boost to developments in the tourist industry. “Because people from the west know next to nothing about Tajikistan, just as the Tajiks know very little about the wishes and expectations of western travellers”, says Matthias. A win-win journey, so to say.

**LEGENDARY BUMPY RIDE
ALONG THE PAMIR HIGHWAY**

“Tajikistan is one of the last adventure playgrounds, still a blanc spot on the tourist landscape. Perfect for anybody who wants to be a curious explorer far away from mass tourism”, says Matthias, in a conversation with Globetrotter Magazine. And Andreas Bartmann, who is usually reserved as “Hanseats” (citizens of Hamburg) typically are, starts raving: “I have seldom been so positively surprised by a country. It exceeded all my expectations.”

But let's start the tale from the beginning. Starting point is the capital Duschanbe, the economic and cultural centre of Tajikistan with a population of 780,000. The legendary Pamir Highway starts there and leads along the course of the old Silk Road into the highlands. The word highway might cause some misunderstanding however, because it is more of a track than a highway, the asphalt surface full of potholes like holes in Swiss cheese. The Globetrotters are given a real good shake. The Pamir Highway leads through vast desert landscapes and green high plateaus and into a wild mountain world. The Pamirs are one of the mightiest and at the same time driest mountain areas in the world with peaks up to 7,500 metres above sea level. Fantastic views compensate the potholes, and a bath in the natural hot springs relaxes the muscles in the evening.

Excitement and reflection go hand in hand on this trip. “Tajikistan is a very pristine country. How much will be destroyed if more guests are going to come?”, asks Andreas Bartman. At the same time, a sustainable tourism industry opens up many opportunities, and the Globetrotters take their task as tourist aid workers seriously. They intend to convey to the three local guides how western outdoor tourists tick.



Epic nature, friendly people, traces of old cultures. Tajikistan is a beautiful travel country for curious explorers who are thirsty for adventure rather than well planned comfort trips.

Hiking in the Pamir Mountains – where the valleys are already up at an altitude of 3,000 metres – means knowledge about acclimatisation and altitude sickness is needed, things the guests from lowland Hamburg are aware of. The Globetrotter team feels fit for the planned one-day and multiple-day tours in the mountains. “Some of us have had proper altitude training before”, reassures Thomas Lipke. The destination is Engelswiese at an altitude of 4,000 metres, where you can set up base camp as starting point for the day tours. The Engelswiese did not get its name from the angel-like beauty, but from the 6,510 metre high Pik Friedrich Engels. The meadow is located on its south flank – it looks quite picturesque, maybe even a bit angelic. There is also Pik Karl Marx (6,723). “The bizarr names are left-overs from Soviet times”, explains Matthias, “they used to do international >>



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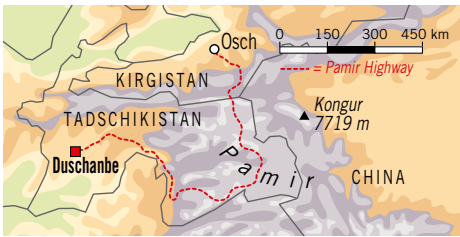
JOIN THE GLOBETROTTER ACADEMY IN THE PAMIR MOUNTAINS

The Globetrotter team's excursion is already bearing fruit and in early summer 2017, the Globetrotter Academy is offering a two-week expedition trip to Tajikistan. Four GM readers can join for free – read on to know how you can win the trip.



The small travel group from the Globetrotter Academy can expect the most impressive mountain range the planet has to offer.

The Pamir journey being offered by the Globetrotter Academy takes place from 21.5. to 4.6.2017. A maximum of ten participants will explore the wild Pamir Mountains with jeeps, yaks, donkeys and Shanks's pony. The journey will start in Duschanbe and then cross spectacular mountain passes to Khorog, the lively capital of the Tajik Pamir. The Wakhan Corridor was already part of Marco Polo's route to the east. The Pamir Highway leads across Alichur and Murghab to the Kyrgyz Osh where one of the most beautiful bazaars of Central Asia is located. A knowledgeable travel guide will accompany the group. Overnight stays will be in simple guest houses and yurts at Pamiris, Wakhis and Kirgiz. Or in a tent during multiple day trekking tours to the Engelswiese or the Gunt Valley. Cost: € 2,500 euros per participant, excluding international flights. Find the extended travel description on www.globetrotter-akademie.de. Application deadline is 31.3.2017.



Do you want to go to the Pamir Mountains for free? Globetrotter will pay for the Pamir expedition 2017 for four customers. If you want to be one of them, send an e-mail to info@globetrotter-akademie.de, subject line: Pamir. In a few sentences, tell us why you want to take part. A jury will choose the four winners and inform them

of their luck in good time. Application deadline is 31.12.2016. Good luck!

Tajikistan at Globetrotter
In November 2016, the organisers of the described excursion will present Tajikistan in the Globetrotter stores. Find details about the presentation on each store's website. Dates: Berlin 9.11., Dresden 11.11., Munich 15.11., Stuttgart 17.11., Hamburg 18.11., Frankfurt 24.11. On the 2.12., there is also a winter meetup at the Globetrotter Academy on the Aschberg with a great presentation by Sebastian Falck, who knows the country well: with children through Tajikistan. Information: www.globetrotter-akademie.de/events/vortraege.

Background and project information

Tajikistan is a high plateau country, almost half of which is located above 3,000 metres. The highest mountain (7,495 m) is the Pik Ismoil Somoni (formerly Pik Kommunismus). Tajikistan borders on Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Afghanistan. The country is almost twice the size of Bavaria but only half as many people live there, and more than half of them are younger than 25. More: www.visitpamirs.com and www.visittajikistan.tj.

The Aga Khan foundation was founded in 1967 by Karim Aga Khan IV., the head of Ismailis, and is neither denominational nor state-linked. Each Aga Khan is known to be the direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad. The Ismailis are known to be a wealthy community. Believers usually pay 10 to 20 percent of their income to the Aga Khan foundation, one of the world's biggest private

aid organisations for development work. The foundation works for sustainable solutions to long-term problems which are caused by poverty, hunger, illiteracy and sickness. They especially focus on rural communities in mountain and desert regions with the emphasis on education, health, strengthening civil society, the environment, agriculture, cultural and economic development. The foundation is active in 30 countries, especially in Asia and East Africa. More info on www.akdn.org.

The **CIM** (Centre for International Migration and Development) acts on behalf of the German Federal Government and places professionals and executives – like Matthias Poeschel – from Germany and the European Union with employers in developing and advanced developing countries. As "integrated professionals" they pass on their knowledge from different occupations. They work at state institutions, private companies, organisations or NGOs. The goal is to improve life's prospects for the people in developing and advanced developing countries with sustainable international cooperation. The CIM was founded in 1980 and is a committee of the German Society for International Cooperation and the Central Foreign and Specialist Placement Agency of the Federal Employment Agency. More: www.cimonline.de.

Panthera is the only organisation that stands up worldwide for the protection of 38 different wild cats, especially for tigers, lions, jaguars, snow leopards, pumas and cheetahs as well as their ecosystems. Tanya Rosen is the coordinator for the snow leopard project in Tajikistan. More: www.panthera.org.

competitions for mountain climbers, so-called "Alpinaden" in the Pamir Mountains." During the ascent, it is the wild side of the Pamir Mountains which shows itself in the form of soft hail, rain and storm. Soon, the small path is icy. Even the donkeys refuse to take another step on the icy ground so the group is forced to cancel the tour and choose alternative areas. It turns out to be good training for the guides because such changes to plans require quick decisions and good explanations for the guests. The walking pace is another matter. "At the beginning, the boys wanted to do every tour as quickly as possible, just as they are used to doing. We explained to them that it was a once in a lifetime trip for us and that we wanted to enjoy the hike and the views", says Thomas Lipke.

BASIC WORK IN THE ART OF CAMPING

Another point of discussion was the fact that experienced outdoor enthusiasts prefer serious information in comparison to – albeit well-meant – reassurances. "Them saying it will only take another two kilometres when it actually takes another five hours it does not help anybody," opines Thomas. Another time, they were planning on pitching the tent amongst uneven gravel with the horses grazing on the adjacent meadow. "We did some basic work explaining why hikers like good areas to camp, with a nice view, morning sun, soft ground and water nearby," explains Andreas laughing. "Our guides were totally unaware of such little details but they listened attentively to our suggestions, understood and implemented them quickly." Conversely, the guides found the quirks of the long-serving Globetrotters amusing. Not only the endless search for the best camping spot is of great importance – a well-stocked camping bar is too. "At sun set, they unpacked bags and high-tech waterskins containing liquid delicacies", says Matthias, who was surprised at the time. Red wine is proffered in style in Lexan glasses. Good whisky also needs to be part of the luggage. "They were perfectly equipped." It is not only know-how which is passed on, but also products from the Globetrotter range: When the Globetrotters saw the rather simple equipment of the guides, they decided spontaneously to sponsor a few tents, sleeping bags and other items of equipment. Overnight stays are not only in a tent but also with local families. "Homestays" is also a tried and tested concept in other countries. Often, you sleep together in one room, everybody on their own mattress. Such homestays are not only a source of income for the locals. Here, cultures get together and can exchange stories. "The four men are professional travellers, you notice that because they took along souvenirs, postcards and photos from back home. In doing



Simple but intense: Homestay with locals.

"This is Pamir. It always works out, but not always the way you had it planned."

so, the hosts gain an insight into the world of their guests," explains Matthias. The hosts sometimes speak English, but often Tadjik, Russian, Wakhi or Bartangi. The guides and Matthias do the translating.

PROJECT PAMIR TOILET

The German guests gain deep insights. "Life in the Pamir Mountains is tough and full of deprivation. There is a lot of poverty, agriculture and livestock farming is not lucrative at an altitude of 3,000 metres. Transport routes for opium and heroin criss-cross the country, corrupt authorities earn money as a result. Nevertheless, the people radiate enjoyment of life, that is very special. Simplicity and minimalism are key features which rub off positively on a visitor," says Andreas Bartmann. Touristy problem areas such the cleanliness of the bed or the state of the toilet – all too well known from hiker hostels in Nepal – also exist in Tajikistan. Matthias and his colleagues from the organisation PEC-



No snow leopard in front of the lens but the world’s biggest wild sheep.

TA (Pamir Eco-Cultural Tourism Association) are starting to introduce appropriate standards at the homestays: simple but clean camps, hooks on the walls for clothes and clean sheets for every guest. A simple privy is not for everybody but architect Holger is already thinking about the “Pamir toilet” project. And until he has developed an effective solution, Matthias says that “In Tajikistan, you need to squat down.”

Tajikistan is a cool travel country for Thomas Lipke, a passionate photographer: “You are a tourist and you are exotic, but the people are very welcoming and interested, and very curious in a positive way. They are just happy we are visiting their country. So it is easy to take great portraits after nice conversations.”

There are photo motifs on each corner: rugged mountains with mighty glaciers, grazing yaks, turquoise mountain creeks with white sand-banks, old fortresses and yurts of Kirghiz nomads. Bubbly bazaars with bright yellow lemons, red pomegranates and green bunches of coriander. And in between, at the butchers, a proudly presented cow’s head.

FOLLOWING THE TRACES OF THE SNOW LEOPARD

Matthias is well-connected and pulls off a real highlight when the group meets the American researcher Tanya Rosen. Tanya is working for Panthera, an organisation which is fighting for worldwide protection of the big cat. There are still a few snow leopards in Tajikistan. Tanya and her team are trying to locate the shy – and still very unknown “mountain ghosts”. At the same time, they want to put an end to the illegal trade in the snow leopard’s fur. That is to be achieved by turning poachers into environmentalists and making the population aware of how endangered the snow leopard is. After all, the snow leopard’s habitat is declining in size due to humans.

The Globetrotters head off with Tanya and meet rare Marco Polo sheep. Such giant wild sheep can grow to a shoulder height of 1.30 metres, and their mighty horns form a circle. “They are beautiful”, says Tanya. “And prey for the snow leopard.” The predators stay out of sight, but a sighting would have been asking for too much luck. "We

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The journey is always about the country and the people.

can not seen the snow leopard but we are breathing the same air. That is already quite magical”, says Tanya happily.

The end of the trip is nothing but magical and totally down-to-earth: The street to Dushanbe was washed away by heavy rainfalls. There is no way through, and no way to the airport. So they need to come up with a backup plan.

Matthias is used to such situations: “There is always something unpredictable happening in Tajikistan. You always need to be prepared for a change of plans.” He talks on the phone and manages to organise for the Globetrotters to be brought to the end of the Pamir Highway, to Osh in Kyrgyzstan. It is a detour of 600 kilometres. But there is a flight going west from Osh. “That is Pamir,” proclaims Matthias laughing. “It always works out, but not always the way you had it planned.” <<