



Historical Moments

SPIEKERMANN TRAVEL SERVICE 2018-2019 CALENDAR

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"Traveling – it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller." – **Ibn Battuta**

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions." – **Oliver Wendell Holmes**

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Hello dear travelers:

Summer is at the door and we are so happy to have the calmer months of June-August ahead of us to start planning our 2018 fall and our 2019 trips. This spring travel season has proven to be one of the busiest for us and we are seeing a surge in bookings coming in for trips as far as fall 2018 and hence we are here including all our 2018 tours to help you plan ahead. Many of our successful journeys are going to be repeated again such as North Caucasus and North Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia as well as Libya. Even our North Caucasus as well as Chad & Cameroon of Fall 2018 are already almost sold out ☺. I am thrilled to be leading our pioneering North Caucasus tour of September 2017 and with such huge demand, we opened a new departure for May 2018 as well and hopefully this trip will become one of our regular departures from now onwards.

We are continuously striving to make adjustments to achieve more comfortable journeys for future trips to current destinations and offer our clientele new programs.

Trips sell out so fast so for example Iraq of March 2018 is full and hence we opened a new date for November 2018. Libya has opened up and I am proud to claim that we are the ONLY agency in the entire USA that knows how to handle travel there, get the visas and fly people in and out of Tripoli. We are opening many new dates for 2018 to keep up with the influx in demand. Saudi Arabia is also another place that has seen a stunning surge of interest, and now that President Trump just visited the Kingdom and signed all sorts of economic deals, the Saudi Government declared that they want to open up the country for "selective" tourism and granting "Tourist" visas starting in early 2018 (in lieu of the usual business visa that we always secured for our clients).

Those who want to see this destination should not wait any longer as I can assure you the prices will start climbing up and the joy of exploring a country "hidden behind a veil" will start dissipating, Join us in Nov 2017 or January 2018 or March 2018 or even November 2018, before it is too late. It was a lovely occasion for me to lead a group last February to the Horn of Africa. I shared with them part of Ethiopia and all of Djibouti and must admit, it was a delightful trip and we will keep repeating it every winter and fall. It is a tour for the intrepid of you who wants to explore something totally out of the norm. The trip also visits Eritrea and Somaliland.

We will begin offering Lebanon by itself a couple of times a year; our February 2018 trip is already sold out the next available date will be September 2018. We are also heading back to Kurdistan (Northern autonomous Iraq) especially that this area remained calm and safe despite the presence of ISIS to its south. Afghanistan remains one of the most successful tours and travelers come back raving about it so we are launching a new fall 2018 trip while we still have space on our April 2018 tour.

As usual, our Central Asia trips are very popular, and our next one in October 2018 will even include Western China (land of the suppressed Uyghurs), the Moslem Turkic group that looks more Central Asian than Chinese. As usual Iran remains very popular despite the tense relation between our current government and theirs, BUT the recent success of moderate President Rouhani in the last elections this month are a good sign that the 2 countries may work better at reaching a deal. Iran in the last few years has become a magnet for tourism and has seen a drastic increase in demand for travel to its various regions. We will soon launch the dates for fall 2018.

Our calendar features our usual repertoire of tours with departures scheduled for many other alluring destinations such as Oman and the Gulf States, Cyprus, Malta and Crete, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Sudan, Algeria, and a new destination that we are testing in September 2018 (North Korea), one that rarely other companies offer but also very intriguing to Americans who are curious to see behind the "Iron doors". No matter what your interest is you can find information on our completely **redesigned website** at www.mideasttrvl.com. Turn the page to see some of the new features that we are offering and enjoy the wonderful photographs and read the various trip reviews and watch some of the slide shows.

**Ihab Zaki
& the entire family of Spiekermann Travel**

WHERE IN THE WORLD...Come and join one of our exceptional adventures

Festivals of Ladakh & the mountains of Kashmir

Sep. 10 to 28, 2017 – Led by local guides

It's no wonder Ladakh is known as *Little Tibet*: its infinite landscape of the Himalayas or the colorful festival masks of the Tibetan Buddhist culture. The "roof of the world" holds an immense and rich treasure trove: colorful gompas in the rocky slopes, villages surrounded by snowcapped peaks and lush orchards, and bazaars whose mosaic of languages and cultures take on a melody all their own. On this unusual journey, you ramble through rural villages, getting well acquainted with this rugged region's striking scenery and its inhabitants' everyday lives. The Ladakh Festival is held annually every September in Leh and its villages. The inauguration ceremony of the festival takes place is massive with a procession of several cultural troupes from different regions traversing through Leh Market to the Polo Grounds. There is dancing, singing, traditional music, people wearing colorful traditional Ladakhi dresses. The festival duration is six days with archery, polo, and masked dances from the monasteries and dances by cultural troupes from the villages. (III / *-***)

Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia & Northern Greece ... Monasteries, Castles and Legends

Sep. 15 to Oct. 08, 2017 – Led by local guides

Sep. 14 to Oct. 07, 2018 – 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 rural Romania. This simple, agrarian way-of-life is a vestige of the culture that dominated all of Europe but has virtually disappeared elsewhere. Expect to be entertained by wonderful 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. Extend 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 country with a wide variety of attractions. In Northern Greece you'll discover grandiose archaeological sites, picturesquely labyrinthine villages and the great city of Thessaloniki, famous for its dazzling Byzantine heritage. (II-***-****)

Iran... Ancient Iran.

Sep. 30 to Oct. 22, 2017 - Led by Professor Denise Schmandt

Sep. 29 to Oct. 21, 2018 - Lecturer to be advised (TBA)

Iran ... Grand Tour of Persia,

April 04 to 21, 2018 – Led by Prof. Mehreen Razvi

Ancient Persia has been the seat of many civilizations and endless contributions in poetry, art, architecture, science and history. Many of Iran's achievements have contributed to our modern world. Most of the country's archaeological gems have been 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. Stop to visit local nomadic tribes when driving across the vast country. Come and discover Iran, a repository of grand relics, ruins and UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Isfahan, Persepolis and Pasargadae. (II-****)

Five Stans of Central Asia,

Oct. 06 to 29, 2017 - Led by Prof. Bruce Wannell

April 27 to May 20, 2018 – Lecturer to be advised (TBA)

Central Asia & Western China,

Oct. 14 to Nov. 08, 2018 – Led by Prof. Mehreen Razvi

The Central Asia region presents a colorful melting pot of people and cultures. It was the birthplace of the world's most powerful nomadic empires and Alexander the Great conquered them in his quest for world domination. At one time the territories of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were integrated into ancient Iran. Later the Silk Road connecting China with Europe was established through this region. Visit Samarkand, "The Pearl of the East", and the huge open air museums of Khiva and Bukhara. Your senses will be exhilarated by the extreme geography, from towering, snow-capped peaks to stark deserts and the wonderful souks...a melding of cultures and traditions. (II-III / ***)

North Africa (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria & Mauritania)

Oct. 15 to Nov. 10, 2017 – Led by Mohammed Halouani

Oct. 14 to Nov. 09, 2018 - Led by Mohammed Halouani

Libya: Oct 19 to 26, 2017 – Led by local guide

May 23 to June 01, 2018 – Led by Michel Behar

Tunisia: Few countries on earth match the historical, cultural, and natural splendor of Tunisia. Begin and end 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. Afterward, head south to the sacred Islamic site of Kairouan. (II-***-****)

Libya: a country of stark contrasts, offering visitors an opportunity to view, not only some of the greatest Roman and Greek cities in the world, but also the magnificent views of the Sahara desert. On Libya's western Mediterranean coast, stand the breathtaking Roman cities of Sabrata and Leptis Magna. Your adventure will take you to the ancient caravan city of Ghadames, a World Heritage Site. (II-***-****)

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 oases 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. (II-***-****)

Mauritania: Mauritania boasts many wonders of nature as well as ancient cities. In the middle Ages, it was the seat of the Almoravid movement that spread Islam throughout North Africa. Today the seventh holiest city of Islam, Chinguitty, is located in the north of the country. Also in the north is Ouad Esne, an oasis settlement concealed by waves of golden sand dunes. It is home to an ancient mosque that contains 3,000 manuscripts, justifying its UNESCO World Heritage Site status. (II-***-****)

Treasures of the Arabian Gulf Sheikhdoms:

Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Bahrain & Kuwait

Oct. 24 to Nov. 05, 2017 – Led by local guides

Nov. 08 to 19, 2018 – Led by local guides

Best known for their wealth and abundance of oil, the Gulf States are also housing 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. You will also visit Qatar, where you saunter around the Old Souk (market), through the maze of alleyways 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. In the UAE, you will marvel at Abu Dhabi's unique architecture, which is an intriguing interpretation of Islamic designs crafted in modern materials, as well as one of the most futuristic cities in the world. When in Dubai, an emirate that transformed itself in the last few decades from an obscure pearl-fishing village into one of the worlds' most important trade hubs and a land of luxuries, you will also visit the Old town as well as the nearby Emirates of Sharjah and Al Ain, two places boasting world class historical buildings and ruins. (II-****)

Sudan & Eritrea – Nov. 03 to 17, 2017 - Led by local guides

Sudan – Ancient Nubia – Feb. 07 to 21, 2018

Led by Dr. Richard Lobban

Sudan has more than 500 ethnic groups, each with its own dialect, traditions, and dance making it the most diverse nation on the continent. The Nile flowing north from Khartoum towards Egypt is the link that runs through Sudan, influencing the lives of its people. Along the banks of the river and in the valley of the Sahara Desert are many interesting archaeological sites from the Egyptian and Meroitic civilizations that have seldom been seen by the public, including more pyramids than in Egypt! (III / *-****)

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 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. (III / *-****)

Oman... Land of Frankincense

Nov. 04 to 16, 2017 - Led by Local Omani Guide

Oct. 27 to Nov. 08, 2018 - Led by Local Omani Guide

Set on the Arabian Peninsula, Oman is a blend of the new and the old as evidenced in its architecture, its attitudes and customs. It is a land of majestic forts, imposing castles, historical tombs and palace ruins. As you travel through the country you will see Omanis in traditional dress, rustic villages, stark majestic mountain ranges, a vast expanse of desert and serene sandy beaches. 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 reputed to be that of the Queen of Sheba.

(II-****)

Saudi Arabia...The Forbidden Kingdom

Nov. 04 to 18, 2017 - Led by Professor Bruce Wannell

Jan. 20 to Feb 03, 2018 – Led by local guide.

Mar. 17 to 31, 2018 - Led by Professor Dorothy Keller

Nov. 03 to 17, 2018 - Led by Professor Denise Schmandt

Though people of various cultures have lived on the Arabian Peninsula over a span of more than 5,000 years, the harsh climate historically prevented much settlement, except for a few major cities

and oases. Most of the empires of the ancient world traded with the states that existed on the peninsula. Najran in the south, where mud-brick forts dot the palm oases is one of the ancient caravan stops that you will be visiting. The country's main attraction and hidden treasure is the UNESCO World Heritage site of Madain Saleh, which is considered second only to Petra in Jordan in terms of Nabatean architectural remains. You will explore colorful markets, desert landscapes, rock engravings and ancient monuments. (II / *-****)

Horn of Africa... Eritrea, Somaliland, Djibouti & Eastern Ethiopia, Nov. 10 to 26, 2017 - Led by Local Guides

Jan. 05 to 21, 2018 - Led by Dr. Emily O'Dell

East of Ethiopia, the walled city of Harar is ancient and rich with a colorful history. The most dominant feature is its strong encircling wall, which embraces the town, its exciting market places, and its 99 mosques. Harar is the fourth holiest Muslim city. Somaliland, the safe northern autonomous region of Somalia has scenic mountains and rich culture as well as one of the world's most famous rock-art caves. Djibouti, the smallest country in the region, will thrill you with its culture caught half way between 20th century France and modern Africa along with its moon-shaped volcanic wonderland of chimney formations and lakes. Eritrea's history dates as far back as the Stone Age and Asmara, the capital, boasts the most shining collection of Art Deco buildings in the world. On the Red Sea, the port city of Massawa abounds with Turkish and European influences. It is also the starting point for visits to the Dahlak Islands, one of the few remaining unspoiled reefs in the Red Sea. (III / *-****)

Ethiopia (Historic route and Hidar Tsion Festival)

Nov. 25 to Dec. 08, 2017 - Led by Professor Norman Jones

Ethiopia is culturally one of the richest countries in Africa and home to some remarkable architectural gems. A journey on the Historic Route provides a glimpse of life from the past that is still relevant. It is a country where religion plays a prominent role and the celebration of holy days is a way of life. The Virgin Mary is one of the most venerated of all religious figures in Ethiopia. The Feast of Hidar Tsion is associated with the presence of the Ark of the Covenant in Axum and the belief that the Ark itself is a symbol of her womb. This festival is attended by tens of thousands of people from all over Ethiopia, making it one of the most joyous annual pilgrimages in Axum, the "sacred city of the Ethiopians." You will be an observer at this remarkable event marked by processions of chanting priests and parishioners dressed in colorful robes with the ubiquitous umbrellas. Immerse yourself visiting 3 UNESCO World Heritage sites: Axum, Gondar, and Lalibela.

(III / *-****)

Ethiopia, Timket Festival (with Omo Extension)

Jan. 14 to 27, 2018 - Led by Ethiopian Expert Guide

Ethiopia is culturally one of the richest countries in Africa and home to some remarkable architectural gems. A journey on the Historic Route provides a glimpse of life from the past that is still relevant. It is a country where religion plays a prominent role and the celebration of holy days is a way of life. The Feast of TIMKET which celebrates the Epiphany and the presence of the Ark of the Covenant in Axum is attended by tens of thousands of people from all over Ethiopia, making it one of the most joyous and "authentic" annual pilgrimages in the world. An opportunity to visit afterwards the southern tribal region of the Omo Valley with its colorful villages and amazingly decorated people who were almost frozen in time. (II / *-****)

West Africa... Ghana, Togo & Benin,

Jan. 06 to 20, 2018 – Led by lecturer Mohamed Halouani

Jan. 05 to 19, 2019 – Led by lecturer Mohamed 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 / *-***)

Sri Lanka with Festival of Navam Perahara

Jan. 12 to 26, 2018 – Led by a local guide.

Sri Lanka is one of the most enchanting places on the planet, an island of serendipity. The island of Sri Lanka surprises you with its intense diversity. Its mix of culture, religions, people, landscapes, wildlife and cuisines offers an incredible range of experiences, which is expanding all the time in the now-peaceful climate. It is easy to get around too – even a short trip could encompass golden beaches, rainforests, tea plantations and mountain ranges. But Sri Lanka is not just naturally beautiful; there are ancient cities, shrines sacred to different faiths, granite-carved fortresses and delicious food. (II -***)

Kurdistan.. The other Iraq

March 04 to 10, 2018 – Led by local guide

Oct. 31 to Nov. 06, 2018 – Led by local guide

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 the stark opposite of 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 antique museums. 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. (III / *-***)

South Pakistan - March 01 to 17, 2018

Lecturer Prof. Mehreen Razvi

North Pakistan – April 27 to May 10, 2018

Led by local guide

Pakistan which got its independence from British-India on 14th August 1947, shares an eastern border with India and a northern-eastern border with China. Join us visiting the various villages, local traditional houses, historical moments and meet with local population of mountain. You will travel on Karakorum Highway to Hunza Valley, through Besham, Khoistan, Chilas and Gilgit and enjoy the various beautiful sceneries. HUNZA, the High Mountain Valley in the Karakorum, is located in the extreme north of Pakistan, fortified by the giant mountain ranges of

Karakorum, Himalayas, Hindu-Kush and Pamir through the Wakhan Corridor. The legendary land of Hunza is most majestically placed on the roof of the world. The Indus Valley of south Pakistan is repository of some of the most ancient sites of civilization and human history. The legendary Harrappans who inhabited the Indus have left some majestic sites and cities now in ruin but will fascinate any history buff. (III / ***-****)

Afghanistan...

April 16 to 29, 2018 - Led by Prof. Bruce Wannell

Oct. 15 to 26, 2018 – Led by Professor Dorothy Keller

Afghanistan contains some incredible treasures. 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 travel through the country's safest areas in the northern regions. Visit the fabulous city of Herat, 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. Tour the historical town of Mazar E-Sharif, famous for its blue-tiled mosque, and Balkh the nearby ancient caravan town. (III / **)

Antique Algeria...Garden of the Sahara,

April 27 to May 12, 2018

Led by Mohamed Halouani, Roman History Expert

Our small group tours to Algeria offer the chance to explore a country that has for too long been ignored in favor of its better known neighbors. From the cities of the coast with their colonial architecture, Roman ruins and cosmopolitan atmosphere to the oases tucked away among mighty sand seas, we encompass the very best that the country has to offer. Algeria is a vast country of breathtaking scenery, well-preserved Roman ruins, pre-historic cave paintings and a safe destination. Djemila, Tingad, Tipasa - Algeria's triumvirate of Roman UNESCO World Heritage sites ranks amongst the finest in the ancient world. This fascinating tour offers the adventurous traveler an alluring blend of art, history, culture and scenery. (II -***)

Cultural Mosaic of the Balkans

(Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia & Serbia),

May 05 to 20, 2018 – Led by a local guide.

The amazing cultural mosaic of the Balkans' region and its diverse ethnic fabric, combined with its historical importance and natural beauty, will let you savor a Europe that is a hidden treasure. Our special tour goes in depth into Albania, the most undiscovered gem in Europe. Plus the journey through the former Yugoslavia which is home to a very eclectic mix of people, ethnically, geographically and religiously! This strikingly beautiful region is radiating in the early summer months, with all its mountains covered with green foliage and blooming flowers, as well as 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 very strict Communist regime and is filled with surprises, and it offers the visitor a glimpse into a unique culture heritage. Visit flavorful old Turkish Bazaars, Ottoman citadels, mosques and towns, mediaeval churches, fortresses and monasteries as well as ancient Roman ruins and many UNESCO World Heritage sites. (II -***)

Cyprus, Crete & Malta

May 08 to 27, 2018 - Led by Local Guides

Cyprus is an island with a unique archaeological legacy, from Neolithic times through Bronze and Iron Age, its inhabitants left extensive remains.

Afterwards, in classical times and Roman period the island has bountiful sanctuaries and monuments. Followed by Christian, Crusader, Venetian and Byzantine eras, Cyprus is dotted with marvels scattered along craggy mountains, verdant plains, sweeping beaches, rolling hills and vineyards. This island is at the crossroads of three continents and hence from ancient times has been invaded and occupied by civilization after another leaving behind layers of historical wealth. [Crete](#) is an island with an exquisite 700 mile-long coastline dotted with numerous coves, bays and peninsulas, and its historic importance in today's world is for being home of the Minoan civilization with its important archeological finds at Knossos, Phaistos and Gortys. [Malta](#) 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. [III-***](#)

Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova

May 11 to 28, 2018 – Led by local guides

Sep. 21 to Oct 08, 2018 - Lecturer to be advised (TBA)

Travel to some of the least explored parts of Europe on this two week journey visiting three beautiful countries: Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, which are considered some of the hidden gems of Europe. Starting with Belarus we discover the glorious and elegant capital: Minsk, representing a stunning amalgam of Soviet-style/Communist architecture and amazing medieval churches, then head to the historic town of Polotsk to explore its complex heritage. Experience the genuine Belarusian hospitality, and then travel to the fairytale castle at Mir and the 16th century town of Njasvizh. Ukraine is famous for the magical golden-domed monasteries and cathedrals dating back many centuries.

L'viv is considered by many as one of the most elegant cities in Europe. In the nearby villages you will discover some imposing old castles before heading on to the beautiful Carpathian Mountains, a treasure chest of traditional Hustul culture, incredible scenery and fascinating wildlife. Finally you will visit the tiny nation of Moldova, with its vast underground wine cellars, ancient monasteries and the unique republic of Trans-Dniester, a country that doesn't officially exist. Our tour visits a truly intriguing region, full of surprises and imbued with a rich heritage that easily rivals better known parts of Europe, and best of all, it's well off the tourist map. [II-***](#)

Caucasus...Armenia, Georgia & Azerbaijan,

May 18 to June 01, 2018 - Led by Veronica Kallas

The small countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia are nestled in between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, and the countries of Iran, Turkey, and Russia. Their histories are varied but all bear the traces of the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian Empires, and most recently the Soviet Union. Visit these fascinating countries and see for yourself the diversity of the people, the excellent cuisine, and the wealth of historical monuments. It's a fascinating journey through modern and traditional landscapes, meeting people along the way who will show you hospitality and a vitality that will leave you wanting more. Journey through more than five millennia of history to visit monasteries precariously perched on mountains and ruins of once imposing castles and fortresses. [II-***](#)

North Caucasus.. Russia's Wild frontier

(Abkhazia, Ossetia, Chechnya, Dagestan & many more)

May 05 to 22, 2018 - Lecturer to be advised (TBA)

Sep. 08 to 24, 2018 - Led by Abdylla Geldiyev

The Northern Caucasus is northern part of the Caucasus region between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea and within European Russia. North Caucasus, historically one of the hottest spots of the world, the land of famous warriors and strange archaic traditions, is turning to peace now. And we are going to explore it in the most beautiful time, when summer turns to autumn. That is time of weddings, red-yellow-green forests and abundant tables. We'll visit Abkhazia, a partially recognized country, which was the pearl of Georgia in the Soviet period and also most of the other North Caucasian republics, including Chechnya and Dagestan. We'll move from developed West to wild East: from subtropical Abkhazia boasting treasures from so many historical periods (from Stone Age to Soviet era) to once again rising from the ashes, and the wine region of Anapa valley and further to Kabardian's, where the secrets of medieval martial arts are kept with Ossetia's pagans. And we'll finish our expedition in the Muslim republics of Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan - the true treasures of Caucasus, keeping their ancient ways of life even on the streets of their modern cities. So join us on this exploratory journey marveling at isolated villages, deserted orthodox monasteries, cultures that have survived centuries without outside influence and some majestic landscapes. [II-***](#)

North Korea.. Behind the Iron Curtain

Sep 06 to 20, 2018 – Led by STS Tour Manager

For decades North Korea has been one of the world's most secretive societies. It is one of the few countries still under nominally communist rule. North Korea occupies the northern half of a mountainous peninsula. The country's geographic area is approximately 46,540 square miles, slightly smaller than Mississippi. North Korea is bordered by the People's Republic of China and Russia on the north, on the east by the East Sea of Korea, on the west by the West Sea of Korea, and on the south by South Korea. Hills and mountains cover almost the entire country, with narrow valleys and small plains in between. The major mountain ranges are located in the north-central and northeastern sections of North Korea and along the eastern coast. We invite you to join us on this remarkable adventure to this "truly untraveled" place. Be among the first to peek into another world: the unchanged Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and experience this new destination before tourism's influence alters its character. Seasoned travelers know how thrilling it is to explore such places that have been closed to the outside world for more than a half century. It's a veritable time capsule that promises visitors a real glimpse into the past as well as a rare insight into the modern reality of this last intact remnant of the Cold War. And true to our heritage of exploring new and unknown lands, STS is privileged to offer this wonderful opportunity to learn about and engage with the people of North Korea. Enjoy the moment by interacting with locals at plazas, fairs, and other outings and go home feeling changed by the extraordinary experience of traveling to the DPRK. [II-***](#)

Namibia...Dunes, Coasts & Wildlife

Oct. 13 to 28, 2018 - Led by Local Naturalist Guide

Join us for an amazing journey through Namibia, one of the most scenic countries in Africa. Enjoy game drives in Etosha National Park where we hope to see elephant, lion, leopard, Black and White Rhino, Cape buffalo,

giraffe, zebra and the majestic Oryx. Perched high above the plains of the Kalahari, the Waterberg Plateau is home to over 200 different species of birds. In the Namib-Naukluft National Park we will see some of the tallest sand dunes in the world. Spend time with the San Bushmen, the Himba and Damara tribes. This safari is a brilliant mixture of game viewing, culture and scenic landscapes. (II-***)

Wonderful Lebanon – Oct 23 to 31, 2018

Led by Local guide

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-reknown 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. Being led by Michel Behar, an expert professional tour manager and lecturer, you are guaranteed a fascinating learning adventure. (II / ***-****)

South Iraq (Mesopotamia) – Nov. 06 – 17, 2018

– Led by Emily O’Dell

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 / **)

Chad & Cameroon with an optional extension to Sao Tome – Nov. 29 to Dec. 13, 2018

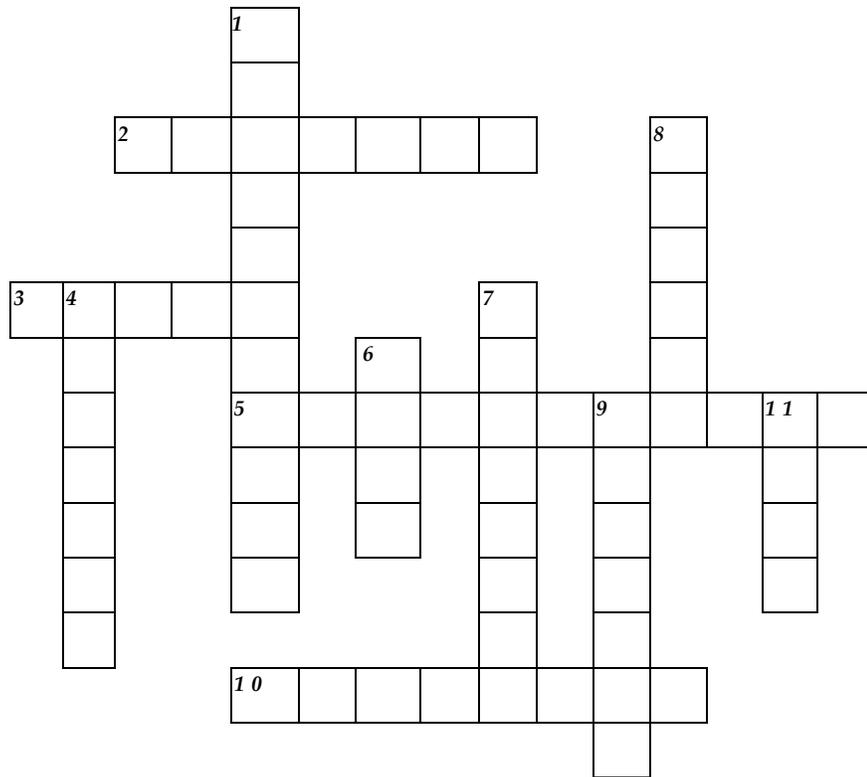
Thriving traditional cultures, renowned art forms, flamboyantly colorful festivals, mask dances, and a dazzling ethnic mosaic are the golden gems of tribal Africa. This fantastic cultural odyssey takes you to the remote and seldom visited countries of Chad and Cameroon. The enormous country of Chad has long been a blank on the map of Africa – but no more. 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. A land of rock arches, of surprising wildlife, and camel caravans traversing the sands, Chad’s allure is the fact that it is virtually unexplored and you are unlikely to see any other westerners outside of the capital. Chad is one of the least visited of all African countries, where genuine encounters with local people are guaranteed. (II-***-****)

Across:

- 2-Largest Country in Africa
- 3-Nighbor of Egypt
- 5-Mid-East Oil Kingdom
- 10-Sofia’s Country

Down:

- 1-Country between Pakistan and Iran
- 4-Former Soviet State
- 6-Country famous for its Cigars.
- 7-This country was Ceylon.
- 8-Where Belgrade is the Capital
- 9-Bucharest’s home
- 11-Was once Persia



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. 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, involve hiking on rough terrain or in sand or at high altitudes. There may be very long drives on rough roads; weather conditions with high heat or humidity, 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, primitive, with shared bathroom facilities (1 or 2 stars)

★★ **Delightful**: Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but generally with private facilities. Some such lodges and motel-style are in need of 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 western standards. (3 or 4 stars)

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

Ladakh & Kashmir	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 10 - 28, 2017	Five Stans of Central Asia	<input type="checkbox"/> April 27 - May 20, 2018
Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Northern Greece	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 15 - Oct 08, 2017	Balkans	<input type="checkbox"/> May 05 - 20, 2018
Iran	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 30 - Oct 22, 2017	North Caucasus	<input type="checkbox"/> May 05 - 22, 2018
Five Stans of Central Asia	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 06 - 29, 2017	Cyprus, Crete & Malta	<input type="checkbox"/> May 08 - 27, 2018
North Africa (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Mauritania)	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 15 - Nov 10, 2017	Ukraine, Belarus & Moldova	<input type="checkbox"/> May 11 - 28, 2018
Libya	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 19 - 26, 2017	Caucasus	<input type="checkbox"/> May 18 - June 01, 2018
Gulf States (UAE, Qatar, Bahrain & Kuwait)	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 24 - Nov 05, 2017	Libya	<input type="checkbox"/> May 23 - June 01, 2018
Sudan & Eritrea	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 03 - 17, 2017	North Korea	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 06 - 20, 2018
Oman	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 04 - 16, 2017	North Caucasus	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 08 - 24, 2018
Saudi Arabia	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 04 - 18, 2017	Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Northern Greece	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 14 - Oct 07, 2018
Horn of Africa	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 10 - 26, 2017	Ukraine, Belarus & Moldova	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 21 - Oct 08, 2018
Ethiopia (Hidar Festival)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 25 - Dec 08, 2017	Iran	<input type="checkbox"/> Sep 29 - Oct 21, 2018
Horn of Africa	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 05 - 21, 2018	Namibia	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 13 - 28, 2018
Ghana, Togo & Benin	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 06 - 20, 2018	Central Asia & Western China	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 14 - Nov 08, 2018
Sri Lanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 12 - 26, 2018	North Africa (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Mauritania)	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 14 - Nov 09, 2018
Ethiopia.. Timket Festival	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 14 - 27, 2018	Afghanistan	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 15 - 26, 2018
Saudi Arabia	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 20 - Feb 03, 2018	Oman	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 27 - Nov 08, 2018
Sudan..	<input type="checkbox"/> Feb 07 - 21, 2018	Saudi Arabia	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 03 - 17, 2018
South Pakistan	<input type="checkbox"/> March 01 - 17, 2018	Lebanon	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 23 - 31, 2018
Kurdistan	<input type="checkbox"/> March 04 - 10, 2018	Kurdistan	<input type="checkbox"/> Oct 31 - Nov 06, 2018
Saudi Arabia	<input type="checkbox"/> March 17 - 31, 2018	South Iraq	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 06 - 17, 2018
Iran	<input type="checkbox"/> April 04 - 21, 2018	Gulf States	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 08 - 19, 2018
Afghanistan	<input type="checkbox"/> April 16 - 29, 2018	(UAE, Qatar, Bahrain & Kuwait)	
North Pakistan	<input type="checkbox"/> April 27 - May 10, 2018	Chad & Cameroon	<input type="checkbox"/> Nov 29 - Dec 13, 2018
Algeria	<input type="checkbox"/> April 27 - May 12, 2018	West Africa (Ghana, Togo & Benin)	<input type="checkbox"/> Jan 05 - 19, 2018

Please send me more information on the following tours:

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Crossword Answers: 1- Afghanistan. 2-Algeria. 3-Sudan. 4-Ukraine. 5-Saudi Arabia. 6- Cuba. 7-Sri Lanka. 8- Serbia. 9- Romania. 10- Bulgaria. 11-Iran



Iran



Pakistan



Iraq

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