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ECOTRAIL



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FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

How Green Was My Valley...

With the new government leaning towards increased effort to liberalise the economy, many a times the blame for limited and slow development is conveniently laid at the doorsteps of the Ministry of Environment. The parliament has enacted laws to safeguard the natural wealth of the nation. The laws enacted are stringent to ensure a sustainable India. With India soon becoming market driven, every quarter, profits must be showcased and it is this pressure that forces the country to compromise its environment laws. Why can't we just be law abiding?

How does one explain the shrinking of mangroves around the west coast of India despite every effort by citizens and the forest department to ensure otherwise. How come the forest cover in India is shockingly below 18%, when the IUCN and WWF scientists have indicated that every nation must have at least 33% of its land mass under tree cover? How come our rivers are all polluted? Why is the tiger population shrinking and why are there increased natural disasters. As I write this more than 100 are feared dead due to a landslide in the Malin village barely 90 km from my desk. How did this come about? Simple, deforestation. Come monsoon, the barren hill, now completely exposed, does what Newton had discovered. The pressure

of water from the top, loose mud and clay, excessive rain, wind and gravity all contribute to bringing it crashing down. Less than 200 meters from this site the scenario is different. The hill is completely



green, all the rocks, boulders still where they were. The forest there is ensuring nothing moves.

Many schools will be preparing for their monsoon trek and also their pooja or Diwali break school camps. I do hope all the schools are taking ample precautions to partner with organisations who have experience in handling emergencies, are equipped with safety knowledge and are trained outbound educators. I do hope schools understand that their outbound partner must be chosen with the care and thoroughness it so deserves. No point crying over spilt milk or bolting the door after the horses have fled.



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“The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth.”
 — **Attributed to Chief Seattle**

Safety First

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your overwhelming response. The effort now seems very rewarding!

This issue covers the key subjects of environment and outdoor learning. Almost all schools undertake trips, which go under the name of camps, picnics, study tours etc. Increasingly schools outsource this to an independent agency. Over the years there has been a mushrooming of players who claim to have abilities in undertaking the activity and this is a dangerous trend. Safety invariably goes out the window as most of these agencies are not qualified or are one man shows. Schools and colleges need to confirm the backgrounds of the individuals and their companies and whether they are registered under the Companies Act. Schools must also ascertain what kind of trained manpower working full time exists with these companies. What is their academic background? Have they been certified in first aid? Do they have any specialized outdoor skills?

The forthcoming issues will expand on this critical topic to spread awareness amongst institutions to seek out quality and safety which are paramount for holistic learning.

Ranjan Biswas
Editor

Leadership and Team building treks



Increasingly India Inc. is spending time in the outdoors and making it a part of employee engagement. Trekking, Rappelling, Rivercrossing, Caving, White water rafting are challenging activities that bring out leadership qualities and resilience to face the tough terrain in the corporate world.

Team building and bonding, goal orientation, decision making and self-awareness in the outdoors was the strategy adopted by Boehringer Ingelheim India Pvt. Ltd. and Spectrum Pharmatech Consultants Pvt. Ltd. when they tied-up with Trailblazers' team of outdoor experts for an inspirational trekking adventure in the beautiful landscapes of the Sahyadris. Fun filled yet challenging activities with integrated elements of nature motivated and inspired the team, created energy and enthusiasm and helped them enhance their inter-personal relationships in an innovative and refreshing way.

Ms. Meena Chitnis from Spectrum Pharmatech commented "It was a fun filled day, capturing the memories for life time. All of us had a great time. Thank you!!" The same sentiments were echoed by the staff of Boehringer Ingelheim who enjoyed the monsoon trek.

Such outdoor training leads to effective contribution to co-workers better understanding of one another and learning to be more cohesive as a team. Appropriate activities and high quality facilitation can add zest to their life and help management and staff think out of the box. Many a times the participants have achieved what they thought they could never even dream of. After all outdoors is your best teacher where you learn for life and the hard way! The thrill is in conquering fears and challenge oneself to achieve excellence in life.

Another such trek was with a group of B.Ed. students who laced up their hiking boots and hit the summit of Mumbai. It was a day well spent at Sanjay Gandhi National Park, trekking up nearly 1500 ft to the highest point. The group was guided to the summit by a team of outdoor experts from Trailblazers. A few minutes into the trek, the group was amid nature, despite being in the centre of a bustling city. The flora of the forest with shades of red, green and orange foliage, laden with flowers were a refreshing experience for the group of young trekkers. It was not a trek solely for pleasure. The Trailblazers experts ensured that the group was informed about the uniqueness of the park and also introduced them to the flora and fauna of the region. The pagoda ant nest and the story of friendship between pagoda ants and Rufus woodpecker enthralled them. The breathtaking view of the Tulsi, Vihar and Powai Lakes from the summit is sure to live in everyone's mind forever.



On the Brink....

The Anamalai Flying frog (*Rhacophorous pseudo malabaricus*) is a frog species of the Rhacophoridae family. It is commonly known as 'Parachuting Frog' or 'False Malabar Gliding Frog'. This species is endemic to India.

This beautiful flying frog is confined to the rainforests of the Anamalai area of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It has an altitudinal range of 1000-1300 meters above sea level and prefers wet, moist habitats. It is a large sized green colored amphibian and is arboreal in nature. It is very similar to the Malabar Gliding Frog. However, the distinguishing characters of the Anamalai Flying frog are that it is smaller in size and has a distinct stripe-pattern on the back that resembles the veins of a leaf.

The Anamalai Flying Frog is listed as a Critically Endangered species by IUCN and a decreasing trend in its population is observed since last decade.

The main threat for this frog is its habitat loss. Conversion of forested areas to cultivated land and extraction of wood and timber are reasons for its dwindling population.



©Jachin Rai



Ski in Snowy Switzerland

It's Christmas eve. Standing on the piste in my ski gear, I breathe in the crisp mountain air and pause. The green world had transformed itself into a wonderland of beautiful white, powdery snow. All of a sudden Simran whizzes past me at over 50 miles an hour and Rehan too and then Sid, Priya, Saif, Arsh... 8 to 14 year olds who just 5 days ago, were falling all over themselves, were now skiing like a pro. I could not help but smile and felt thrilled with the group's progress.

As I set out to the Chocolate and Cheese factory outing, I could hear the excited banter of the children dreaming about gorging on all the chocolates. It is an amazing opportunity to see how chocolate and cheese are made after an exciting week of skiing! Shopping for the Swiss goodies is next on the list.

Now In our 15th year, of teaching Skiing and Snowboarding, we are happy to have been instrumental in developing a truly international skill amongst Indian children.

This Ski Certificate course is credited as part of Action in the CAS program of IB Schools. This is also a great value addition when the children apply to foreign Universities for

higher studies. What's more, they are able to mingle easily with their peer group of international students who ski themselves!

Along with our Swiss Partners Viamonde and their highly qualified and certified Instructors, high end mountain rescue team and Swiss emergency evacuation helicopters, the experience is indeed a memorable, safe and fun activity. The stay is enriching where the chalet turns into an exquisite games and theatre area every night. Furthermore, the delicious Indian, made to order food and special Jain menus add value. Swiss fondue and Raclette is on the menu too besides a 6 course meal. Every room in the chalet has a bedazzling view of the Swiss Alps. I pinch myself to get back to reality as young Riya brings me a glass of hot chocolate that's doing the rounds with exquisite Swiss cookies baked by the children as an activity. I thank her and gather the group to discuss the Christmas party. All excited and well rested we now move back to the Piste for another ski run along the Blue Level. Can't wait to take you all along! Write to me at kiran@trailblazersindia.com

Learn a new lingo

Hola! Bonjour! Ni hao! Learning a foreign language has awesome benefits. Apart from getting to know a foreign culture it has been shown to enhance children's cognitive development. Children who learn a foreign language in early childhood demonstrate certain cognitive advantages over children who do not. Studies have shown repeatedly that foreign language learning increases critical thinking skills, creativity and flexibility of mind in young children. Students who are learning a foreign language out-score their non-foreign language learning peers in the verbal and surprisingly to some, the math sections of standardized tests.

Research published in Psychological Science suggests that simply thinking in a foreign language helps students make quicker and better life decisions. Furthermore, a study by the College Entrance Examination Board reports a direct correlation between foreign language study and high SAT scores.

Why not start a language immersion program right away? Call us!

Explore Oman



As one meanders through the streets of Muscat, the aromatic fragrance of incense, the delightful sights of saffron flowers, dried spices and herbs are very emblematic. Sultanate of Oman is dotted with forts, palaces, mosques which exemplify a rich Islamic architecture. Oman not only boasts of beautiful shorelines with schools of dolphin swimming by, but also the endless undulating sand dunes - home for many camel rearing Bedouin families. Go away from coast and the colourful rocky mountains or Jebels jut out of the landscape and the deep valleys like 'Grand Canyons' make excellent trekking sites. A little further ahead the backdrop suddenly changes to serene green oasis or wadis where the temperature takes a dip and you enjoy the twittering of a different kind.

The tropical forests in Dhofar are blessed with plantations of fruits, vegetables and the thick boswellia sacra trees whose resin is world's best frankincense.

This rich ecosystem is a source of livelihood for locals through fishing, collection of honey and timber.

As you drive to the east Ras Al Jinz beach, you witness the nesting of endangered Green Turtle who find their way back to the beach after 30 years to lay eggs - a magical sight under the blanket of million stars. The birthplace of queen Sheba and the home of the adventurer Sindabad the Sailor, the rich culture, heritage and natural abundance makes Oman a unique ecotourism destination. Join us on this trip.

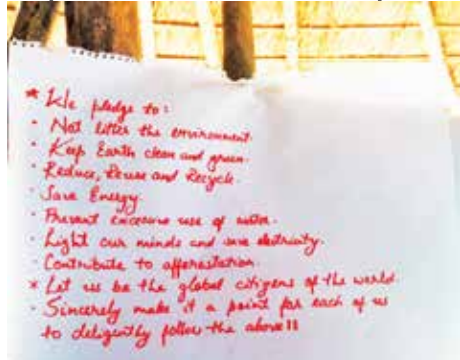


SPECIAL CAMPS CELEBRATING WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Camp Himalaya

On World Environment Day 2014, nestled amongst the clouds in the Himalayas, 45 students of the Bhaktivedanta Swami Mission School took a pledge.

They decided to consciously and



collectively work towards conservation and environmental protection. The students were sensitized towards burning environmental issues such as global warming, water shortage and many others. They committed themselves to initiatives such as leaving the forests cleaner than they found it, water conservation, recycling, waste reduction, throughout their outdoor experience. They were also encouraged to spread the message to friends and family, thereby working towards creating a network of responsible individuals who are part of an eco-friendly society.



Camp Corbett



6 a.m. in the morning. Our last jeep was speeding towards the park gate to begin an enchanting safari in the hilly forests of Corbett National Park when a surprise sighting of the illusive feline before the gate thrilled the children. The sight of blood dripping from canines sunk into freshly killed prey sent shivers down everyone's spines. It reinforced the lines from Sir William Blake's poem, where he masterfully describes the aura of this majestic creature.

On this high note the trip, with 100 students from Sushila Birla Girls School, began in earnest. Each day was different as they had many opportunity to seize like overcoming fears of heights by rappelling down a hillock, zipwire across a stream and abseiling which really tested their courage to conquer their inhibitions. The Nainital visit was to explore the hill station with the spectacular views. The ethereal view of the snow-capped Himalayas on the way, up the cable car, was mesmerizing. The concluding day at Jim Corbett's heritage village was a good sum up as student got familiar with his views on how to make the village eco-friendly and self-sufficient. The student headed back home with memories of rare sightings, delightful experiences and learning for life.



UNEP awards Trailblazers



Certificate of Appreciation

Thank you for your participation in
WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2014

- the day to celebrate the people's power to positively change our environment and the future.
Every action counts, and when multiplied by a global chorus, becomes exponential in its impact. With your contribution, we have succeeded in making WED 2014 the biggest event yet. Welcome to the worldwide WED community!

Raise your Voice, Not the Sea Level

Ecotrail launched at Corbett National Park by Mrs. S. Chatterjee, Sushila Birla Girls' School.



UNESCO World Heritage sites announced

The gorgeous Great Himalayan National National Park in Himachal Pradesh and an ancient 11th century stepwell in Patan, Gujarat the Rani-ki-Vav were tagged as World Heritage sites by UNESCO in June, this year.



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