



A Great Adventure for Teens

By Alaya Vautier

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness...Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." Mark Twain

Teenagers today have an unprecedented variety of lifestyles to choose from. They can get caught up in their cell phones, iPods and video games, seek refuge in drugs and alcohol or chase happiness through external appearances. We want to offer teens something that is completely outside of their ordinary everyday experience. To that end we created a youth-specific travel program to Asia to expose young people to a whole new world of ideas and a different way of seeing things. The underlying motivation of our trips is to cultivate inner peace while engaging in activities that create outer peace.

The idea to travel with teenagers took hold in Croatia during a luxurious summer trip. Ironically, the more my friend Julia Hengst and I engaged in hedonistic travel, the more passionate we became about purposeful travel. Sitting in a café with a pen and notebook, we brainstormed excitedly about traveling with teenagers. "Let's include meditation, interfaith discussions, mini-retreats, meetings with other youths, conflict resolution and non-violence!"

Our enthusiasm eventually evolved into a partnership with Himalayan High Treks, organizers of the Chasing Buddha Tours and a fully insured and licensed travel company based in San Francisco.

Working with them, we will lead young people on trips that include service work, meditation and cross-cultural conflict resolution skills and training. Since conflict is a part of life, these tools can be applied not only globally, but also within our small travel group, our family and our community. Engaging in service work projects provides a meaningful way to learn about a culture, as well as the opportunity to offer kindness back to the communities we visit. Talking about this project, Ven. Robina Courtin said, "Teenagers, with their curious minds and enthusiasm for life, stand to benefit tremendously, especially considering they will learn about meditation and volunteer projects. I am delighted to recommend Julia and Alaya."

Some people question our sanity at the idea of traveling with teenagers, but our passion for this project comes out of the benefit we have received from our own extensive travels, our experience working with teenagers and our enthusiasm for making our lives meaningful. ☸

Julia Hengst and Alaya Vautier:
advocates of purposeful travel.



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Alaya Vautier holds a Masters Degree in International Policy Studies, teaches surfing in the summer and traveled solo from Moscow to Hanoi by train, among other adventures.