

GREEN TOURISM ARE RAW ADVENTURES REALLY THE MOST RESPONSIBLE FORM OF TRAVEL IN THE WORLD? JULIET COOMBE FINDS OUT

See the world differently

Dave Reynolds caught the travelling bug at a very young age. Born among the dark satanic mills around Blackpool, he made best use of a wonderful perk from his father's job on the railways: free train travel anywhere in England and across Europe.

'The world started at Preston railway station,' he says. 'From the age of 13, I would take my bike and jump on board, getting off wherever I fancied.'

And so Dave began his travels which would lead him further afield. He spent more than 20 years cycling his way through some 60 countries. He remembers being stalked by grizzlies as he hitch-hiked and kayaked around Alaska; mountain biking across China, and even gatecrashing the Oscars when Anthony Hopkins won best actor for *Silence Of The Lambs*.

Adventurous spirit

While on the road, he had a unique take on getting on to the next destination. 'I didn't care what it took to raise money for more adventures,' he says. 'Whether it was picking fruit, supervising the packing up of the house of the last Governor of Hong Kong's return to Britain, map making, book smuggling in Laos, working in dodgy night clubs in Japan... I even considered escort work.'

Dave, now 39, decided that his experiences were his greatest assets and last year he created Real Adventures Worldwide (RAW) in Australia because the country has a history of pushing adventure travel to the limit.

Dave designed the company's first trips to favour transport on foot, by bike or kayak, in an effort to minimise the effect on the local environment. He believes respect is key to travel. 'It's important we are responsible for the environment but we must also understand the host communities and respect their way of life,' he says. As a result, most of the company's trips also include a charity element.

Once the company was up and running, Dave found a like-minded business partner in Londoner Mike Howell.



Travelling on the Silk Road: It's not uncommon to see nomads living in yurts when you explore this old caravan route

A former fund manager, Mike, 46, believes talking green politics at a global level is not nearly enough. 'It all starts with the individual and I'm inspired by the Gandhi quote: "Be the change you want the world to be",' he says.



Co-owners: Dave Reynolds (above) and Mike Howell



Offsetting

'At RAW we practise what we preach. All flights are carbon offset and we are starting to offset the land aspect of our trips. We're also carbon-conscious in the office and our five staff only cycle or walk to work. We also pass on as much information as possible about being a responsible traveller pre-trip and then, on the trip itself, in terms of local rules and the importance of the value systems in the places we travel.'

Dave and Mike have also added flexibility into itineraries, so if a group wants to go in a different

direction that can be arranged.

Dave says: 'Our trips are designed to meet people on their own terms and not as Western, cosseted tourists.' It's a philosophy that has seen travellers on RAW trips take on visits to schools to teach English, or orphanages or clinics to donate materials. 'I want to encourage people to experience the real side of a country and there's no better way to do that than on a trip where you're trekking or cycling, meeting people and exchanging ideas over a cup of tea, rather than cocooned in an air-conditioned tour bus,' he says. 'We always try to show people the realities of a country, not just the postcard images.'

Not only do people challenge themselves, by trekking or riding through beautiful and remote places, but they also raise money for causes that will change someone else's life as well.

'Our philosophy on every trip is for a positive change and we do this by using specialised local operators and local staff as guides,' says Dave. 'They bring intimate knowledge and passion about their country and this allows travellers to discover places as they really are, making friendships along the route. It gives each trip a real sense of purpose.'

■ RAW's ground itineraries are bookable through the website www.rawtravel.com



The cycle of life: Making friends with the locals

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