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TRIP NOTES

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SAPA HILL TRIBE TREK  
VIETNAM

Thu 02 Sep - Sun 12 Sep 2010





## In aid of your choice of charity

02 Sep - 12 Sep 2010

### 11 DAYS | VIETNAM | MODERATE

Sapa is a rugged northern Vietnamese area, with terraces, rolling hills, deep valleys and vibrant paddy fields. Our challenge begins in Vietnam's capital city Hanoi, an eclectic mix of old colonial streets and traditional culture. We head north from here taking the overnight train to Lao Cai. Venturing into the hills, our challenge takes us along scenic trails and off the beaten path, through the remote villages of Nam Ket, Red Sin Chai, Nam Cum, Thanh Phu and Seo Mi Ty where we will meet local tribes along the way. You will spend two nights camping in the remote rainforest, a three-day jungle trek through seasonal trails which are only used for cardamom harvesting deep in the forest. Heading to the Topas Ecolodge where you will be amazed with breath-taking views of towering mountains, before heading back to Lao Cai for returning to Hanoi.

- Trek through Vietnam's mountainous north
- Visit indigenous hill tribes
- Stay in local home-stays, camps and an eco-lodge
- Travel on the overnight train from Hanoi
- Explore Vietnam's capital Hanoi and its old colonial quarter

## YOUR CHALLENGE DAY BY DAY

### DAY 1 Thu 02 Sep

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#### International departure from London Heathrow to Hanoi

Our journey begins at the airport where we'll meet our teammates and Charity Challenge representative. Any last minute nerves will turn to excitement as we touch down in Hanoi after the overnight flight.

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### DAY 2 Fri 03 Sep

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#### Hanoi walking tour. Overnight train to Lao Cai

After transferring to our hotel through the maze of Vietnam's capital city, we'll have the day to explore. Particularly enchanting is the Old Quarter, which has a rich history of more than a thousand years and many well-preserved ancient architectural works to prove it. This evening we take the overnight train to Lao Cai. Overnight on board the train.

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### DAY 3 Sat 04 Sep

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#### Lao Cai: trekking into the remote mountain area (approximately 4-5 hours)

We arrive in Lao Cai at around 6am. From here it's a transfer to Ta Thang, the starting point of our trek. The trek is mostly uphill, which means there's stunning views as we overlook the Red River and contrasting valley. After lunch we continue toward the Red Dao village of Sin Chai, in the most remote part of Sapa. Overnight in a basic home stay

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### DAY 4 Sun 05 Sep

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#### Trek hillside villages to Nam Ngan (approximately 5-6 hours)

We leave Red Dao and take the flat trail to Nam Nheu village, a small village inhabited by the Red Dao hill tribe. We will descend to Nam Cang Dam, from where we will trek among the rice fields. After an invigorating day's trek, we reach the campsite near of the Nam Ngan village.

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### DAY 5 Mon 06 Sep

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#### Trek to Den Thang (approximately 7-8 hours)rstone (approximately 6-7 hours)

Our trek today is steep and challenging, as we aim for the reach the hill top at 1,548m. From the top we are rewarded with phenomenal views of the cardamom and bamboo forest. On our gentle descent we'll pass by the small remote Black H'mong village of Ta Trung Ho, until we reach our campsite at Ta Thang tonight.

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### DAY 6 Tue 07 Sep

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#### Trek to Topas Ecolodge (approximately 6-7 hours)

After the three-day trek into the wilderness, we now commence our way to the Ecolodge. After meeting our guides, the day kicks off with a trek uphill to Seo Mi Ty, from where we'll have the opportunity to enjoy the valley views and the rural lifestyle of the tribes that we will meet along the trail. In the afternoon, we will be transferred to the Topas

Ecolodge, where you will enjoy of a well deserved shower and a team dinner.

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#### **DAY 7** *Wed 08 Sep*

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#### **Trekking through hillside villages to the Topas Eco Lodge (approximately 3-4 hours)**

After a challenging trekking days, today our day will be at a ease. We will be trekking around the Ecolodge. In the morning, we will be heading to the Lech Dao village enjoying of the mountain range, valleys and forest views. Your trekking will be along a trail and on a dirt road, on your way back to the Ecolodge in the early afternoon, where you will be enjoying of your lunch and some time to think about the big achievement you have made, or to get extra mileage discovering the eco lodge surroundings.

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#### **DAY 8** *Thu 09 Sep*

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#### **trek to Silver Mountain. Overnight train to Hanoi (approximately 4-5 hours)**

We will start our day with a short but steep uphill trek to summit the Mount Silverstone. The breathtaking views of the Ban Ho and Thanh Kim valley will worth the effort of todays challenge. By noon, rice terraces will appear on the horizon as we bid farewell to the jungle and we will descend passing by two small black H'mong villages . We continue to Hau Thao where our vehicle awaits us. Then it's back on the overnight train to Hanoi.

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#### **DAY 9** *Fri 10 Sep*

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#### **Sightseeing tour of Hanoi**

Arriving in Hanoi early in the morning, we transfer to a local hotel for breakfast before heading out to explore the city. Highlights will include a visit to the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh (from outside), as well as Temple of Literature and the Old quarter. From here we head for a celebratory lunch in Hanoi.

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#### **DAY 10** *Sat 11 Sep*

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#### **Free day in Hanoi- Flight back to UK**

Today you will have a free morning in Hanoi. After an early lunch, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight back to the UK.

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#### **DAY 11** *Sun 12 Sep*

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#### **Arrival in UK**

We touch down on home turf, full of pride over our achievements. Saying goodbye to your new-found friends will be hard, so make sure to exchange contact details.

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#### **NB**

The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, the strength of the group and so on.

We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary, however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your challenge leader will have the final say

## HOW TO FUND YOUR CHALLENGE

This page provides you details of the costs of your challenge.  
The costs below are per person.

### SELF FUNDER

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Pay a registration fee of £495.00 when you book

Then a balance of £1563.00 (8 weeks before your challenge)

Raise as much as you can for your charity.

### MINIMUM SPONSORSHIP

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Registration fee of £495.00 when you book

Raise a minimum of £3250.00 for your charity.

### FLEXI

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Registration fee of £495.00 when you book

Then £495.00 towards challenge costs (8 weeks before your challenge)

Raise a minimum of £2150.00 for your charity.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

### Before you go

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### On your challenge

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- International flights to and from the UK (including all known UK air taxes, and fuel surcharges, at the time of costing)
- Internal road and air transfers as per the itinerary
- Accommodation during the challenge (usually in twin share)
- Three meals a day (unless otherwise stated in the itinerary)
- Drinking water on challenge days
- Entrance fees to national parks or other places of interest visited on the itinerary
- All ground staff including English speaking guide, drivers, cooks, and porters
- Full back-up support including first-aid qualified staff and first-aid supplies
- Activity equipment such as bikes, tents and rafts as per the challenge activity
- A donation to a community project in one of the countries in which we operate
- A contribution towards funding the reduction of carbon emissions through Climate Care's portfolio of award winning projects
- A Charity Challenge T-Shirt
- All challenge management before, during and post event

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

**Before you go**

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- Travel to and from the UK airport of departure
- Visa
- Vaccinations (please check Trip Notes for requirements)
- Travel Insurance (you can buy at time of booking or in your Account Area, or provide your own policy details)
- Clothing and equipment listed on your Kit List

**THE DETAILS**

## Fundraising deadlines

You will need to send your sponsorship money to the charity as you raise it. At least 80% of the minimum sponsorship required must be sent to the charity 10 weeks before departure (by 24/06/2010), and the remaining 20% within 4 weeks of completing the challenge (by 10/10/2010). If you have raised the necessary funds, the charity will then pay the balance of your challenge costs. The charity benefits by keeping the remaining sponsorship money and every pound over and above that you raise.

## Prices include all known air taxes

We include ALL known air taxes (including fuel) at the time of costing. Many companies do not include air taxes at all, and clients are therefore hit with a surcharge of three or four hundreds of pounds just before departure. Our aim is to provide you with transparent pricing and clear instructions as to what is included in our prices and if applicable what isn't.

## Typical group size

The typical group size is 12 - 25 participants

## Travel insurance

Your safety when travelling with Charity Challenge is our main concern, which is why it is a booking condition that you have a suitable travel insurance policy, which covers you for the adventurous nature of your challenge, the activities you are undertaking, and the altitudes. Charity Challenge has chosen to partner with specialist travel insurance providers Campbell Irvine (for UK residents) and Rise & Shield\* (for non-UK residents). Both companies can arrange cover for an extensive number of activities, such as high-altitude trekking and cycling events, which include emergency medical treatment and repatriation expenses. Please note that Charity Challenge is not able to advise on matters relating to individual travel insurance policies and does not accept any liability for policy matters or claims.

Full details including costs may be found at <https://www.campbellirvine.com/charitychallenge> and <https://riseandshield.com/partners/charity-challenge/>

\* Rise and Shield do not provide cover to Cuba.

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**HALONG BAY EXTENSION – £300.0**

- Registration fee £50.0
- Balance £250.0
- Single Room £60.0

### Level of Difficulty

The Sapa Hill Tribe Trek is graded as tough. This is the perfect challenge for participants who are of an adventurous spirit and an open mind, and who have previously done some trekking either within the UK or overseas. This trek will test your existing experience and push you out of your comfort zone both physically and culturally. You can tell your supporters that on your Sapa Hill tribe challenge you will be:

- Trekking for around 6-8 hours per day over 6 days.
- Battling the heat, humidity and tropical rain of the jungle.
- Trekking through remote villages, up jungle-covered mountains and trekking for 3 days on very slippery, muddy terrain.
- Enjoying nights spent sleeping all together (male and female) in one room during the homestay sections of your challenge.
- Attempting steep climbs and descents on muddy slopes.

### Money

**Currency:** The currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND). For up to date currency exchange, go to [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com). We recommend exchanging currency before you go; however there are ATM's and currency exchanges available at Hanoi airport to exchange.

**Credit Cards:** Visa and Mastercard are now accepted in many hotels and shops, but cash is still preferred. Visa and MasterCard credit-card holders can get cash advances in some banks. ATMs are available in provincial capitals; please check any charges with your bank. Many hotels, shops and restaurants will accept credit cards.

**ATMs:** You will only have access to ATMs in Hanoi and Lao Cai city.

**How much to bring:** All accommodation and meals are included within the price of the trip, as well as water during the days of your trek. You will not need to carry a lot of money with you during the challenge, but as there are daily opportunities to buy soft drinks, alcohol and snacks on the days before and after your jungle trek we would suggest a maximum amount of about £15 a day (in local currency). Bring more if you intend to buy souvenirs and take up the opportunity of the additional things you can do during your time in Vietnam. You may have the opportunity of enjoying a relaxing post-trek massage (about £30) in Hanoi at the end of your challenge. There are plenty of great tribal craft souvenirs, silk and cotton clothing, and silver jewellery in Vietnam. Keep this in mind!

**Tipping:** Tipping is at your sole discretion and all staff are paid a fair wage. However, tourism is a tipping culture, and Vietnamese and Cambodian guides will generally receive a tip at the end of a job well done. If you choose to tip, we would suggest an amount of £45 - £50 per participant for the duration of the challenge. For those on Charity Challenge organised extensions, we would suggest between £5 and £6 per person per day.

### Visa

UK Citizens do not require a visa to enter Vietnam for a period of less than 15 days. This visa exemption will benefit British passport holders until the 30th June 2016. If you plan to extend your stay in Vietnam over 15 days you will need to apply for a visa, and you can do this by visiting the embassy's website via [www.vietnamembassy.org.uk](http://www.vietnamembassy.org.uk).

This visa exemption is able to be applied for entries at all official international border checkpoints.

Your passport must be valid for an additional 6 months from the date of exiting Vietnam, and contain at least one blank page for your visa and entry/exit stamps.

### Vaccinations

For up to date vaccination information please check the NHS 'Fit for Travel' website:

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx>. Although the Charity Challenge team are travel professionals, they are not medical experts and we would encourage you to visit your GP or travel nurse to discuss vaccination requirements.

Your GP may ask questions about the specific locations that you are visiting in Vietnam, and as such it may be useful to take a copy of your itinerary with you.

### Flights

You will be flying from London Heathrow to Hanoi. The flying time is approx. 14-15 hours with one stop. Your flight tickets will be issued to you upon departure at the airport. If you choose to book your own flights please confirm with the Charity Challenge office first, otherwise you may be liable for your included group flights (please contact [flights@charitychallenge.com](mailto:flights@charitychallenge.com) for further assistance). For more general flights questions, please refer to our main [FAQs page](#).

### Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have a suitable travel insurance policy whilst participating on the challenge. We have a special policy which covers among other things, medical (emergency, evacuation and repatriation) arrangements, cancellation and curtailment of the challenge, and more specifically for the adventurous activities undertaken on this challenge. If you have your own travel insurance policy, you must ensure that it provides at least the same level of cover as our recommended policy, including protecting the charity in the event of your cancellation 56 days or less prior to departure. If you choose not to purchase our recommended policy when you book we will send you a disclaimer which you should complete and return.

For more general travel insurance questions, please refer to our main [FAQs page](#).

### Group Size

Each group is intended to be 16 people minimum in order to run and a maximum of approx. 30 people. We will be able to run this challenge for 10 to 15 people by charging a small group supplement of £75 which will be added to your final balance invoice (self funders) or charged to your charity (minimum sponsorship or flexi).

### Leadership

There will be an English-speaking challenge leader who will be responsible for the logistics and co-ordination of your challenge. There will also be numerous local support staff to assist them. The challenge leader will be ultimately responsible for the running of the itinerary and the safety of your group.

## Climate

While hot and often humid, Vietnam has a tropical climate, and so you may experience tropical rain and very occasionally storms. During the wet season it can be very humid. Generally speaking, the hot and dry season is from December to April, with the rainy season from May to November. However, in the jungle there can be rain at any time, and you should be prepared for this with your clothing and equipment. Also be ready for the challenge leader to amend the itinerary at short notice if there are any safety concerns about the condition of the usual route.

## Terrain

You will be trekking in the Lao Cai province, a mountainous jungle region, famous for its rice plantations, where you will experience 6 days of which 2 will be in prime rainforest. You will encounter steep and slippery ascents and descents, for which you will need a lot of core strength. The trails can vary from well worn paths to barely visible breaks in the undergrowth, and you will be battling all of this in the humidity of the jungle. This trek should not be underestimated, and it will test you both mentally and physically.

## Luggage allowance and valuables

The luggage allowance will depend on the airline we are using for your challenge, but in general it will be one piece of checked baggage at around 23 kg. However, we suggest that for our Sapa Hill Tribe challenge you should only need around 15-17 kg. If you don't need it, don't bring it, is a good rule. For any valuables, a deposit box will be found at the hotel on your first and last night of the challenge. However, during the trekking section and your overnight train, keep valuables with you. It's also a good idea to use a padlock on your luggage when in transit to reduce any risks. Carry your passport with you and make sure you have a photocopy of your documents (travel insurance etc.) in case they get lost or damaged.

## Responsible Tourism

At Charity Challenge we are committed to sustainable and responsible tourism, and work closely with bodies such as the International Porter Protection Group and Climate Care to ensure that our challenges benefit the local environments and communities in which they take place. We ensure that all rubbish is disposed of responsibly, and following local guidelines on cultural and environmental protection and respect, we aim to limit our impact on the natural environment. In addition to taking these practical steps to ensure that our challenges are sustainable, we also make a contribution each year to a number of local community projects, so as to give something back directly to the communities that we visit. Since 2000 we have donated almost £200,000 to such projects, supporting a range of initiatives, including schooling for children in Africa, shelter for street children in Brazil, and Orang-utan conservation in Indonesia. We recommend that any gifts brought over for children are given to the UK challenge leader and distributed where needed by them and our local Ground Agent. If you wish to do more, you should consider buying drinks, postcards and souvenirs from the local vendors. For many, it is their sole source of income. For more information, please visit our [Responsible Tourism pages](#), where you will be able to view a list of the projects that we currently support.

## Typical day

During your trekking days, you will wake at around 7am, have breakfast, make your packed lunch and pack your daypack for the next section of the walk. You will be given enough water for the day and your packed lunch to carry. The rest of your luggage will be transported for you to the next destination. At around 8.30/9am we will begin the day's walk, stopping for lunch at a scenic spot around midday. You will be walking for 6-8 hours each day and arriving in the late afternoon at your next accommodation. Specific hours of activity for each day are given in the itinerary.

### Accommodation

Your accommodation will be a mix of overnight trains, homestays and camping. In your hotels at the start and end of your stay, you will be sharing in twin rooms, and the eco-lodge is a particular highlight. However, the overnight trains are 4-berth, and the home-stays will be around 4 people in one room with shared facilities. These may be mixed sex depending on the demographic of the group. If you are travelling with a friend or partner who you wish to share with, please let Charity Challenge know in advance when booking or email [challenges@charitychallenge.com](mailto:challenges@charitychallenge.com).

### Food & Drink

Food in Vietnam is a delight. It is a blend of Thai and Chinese food and is always freshly cooked with plenty of vegetables. Food is usually prepared with only a little oil and served with the ubiquitous fish sauce called nuoc mam. Typical Vietnamese dishes include pho, a type of rice noodle soup eaten for breakfast, cha gio, deep fried spring rolls and goi ngo sen, a delicious salad made with lotus stems, shrimps and peanuts. Hanoi Beer is the local brew. Wines are very expensive unless you want to sample locally made rice wine – 'Roau' (pronounced zeeo). Please let Charity Challenge know prior to departure if you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies.

### Clothing and equipment

Good quality, durable kit could mean the difference between a fantastic challenge experience and an uncomfortable one. For this challenge, waterproof, well-worn in boots will be indispensable, particularly coupled with some really good quality walking socks. The benefits of a comfortable day sack cannot be underestimated, so make sure that you train with this. Other essentials are a high quality gore-tex waterproof jacket and technical/wicking t-shirts rather than cotton shirts. Walking poles are also highly recommended, as the steps on this challenge are very tough on even the fittest knees, and descents can be tricky. A full kit list for this challenge can be found [here](#), and once you book you will have access to kit discounts with our partners The Outdoor Shop, Outdoorhire and Cotswold Outdoor.

### Toilets

These range from very basic ('communing with nature' on the trek itself) to normal western standards in the accommodation. There will be en-suite toilet and washing facilities at the hotels; however, depending on the season hot water may be limited in the homestays. Remember to bring some tissue with you for both homestays and camping.

### Phone and WiFi

The accommodation you will use in Hanoi will have limited WiFi signal, but you will not have WiFi at all during your

trekking days and during you travelling to and from Lao Cai. You will have phone signal in almost all places on the challenge, with limitations while you are in the jungle area. You should look upon this trek as an opportunity to escape the grind of day-to-day life and enjoy the group dynamic!

### Safety

Charity Challenge considers the safety of all of our participants and staff to be a top priority, and as such we have set up Challenge Safe, one of the most advanced and thorough safety management systems in the industry. Challenge Safe formalises our ethos when it comes to safety, and brings together the procedures and risk management strategies that we use to audit all aspects of our challenges, from vehicles to accommodation to the challenge activity itself. Your welfare is absolutely paramount!

In terms of your Sapa Hill Tribe trek challenge, there are a couple of important points that you should be aware of:

- The trekking route is based in a mountainous jungle area, where, even when raining, the temperatures will be hot and humid. You should ideally be wearing a sun hat, sun cream, and hydrating constantly!
- Smoke alarms are not present in all the accommodation during your challenge, as you will occasionally be staying in basic homestays with the local community. Your leader will explain the emergency fire procedures to you.
- Vietnam is a region where still today, a high number of unexploded land mines are being found every day. Don't wander off well-trodden paths. Never touch a leftover grenade or mine, and alert your trek leader to anything that you are concerned about.
- You will be sleeping in camping and lodges, therefore you will be in contact with wildlife and open to the relevant risks. Make sure that you are well protected against insects bites, using repellents with minimum 50% Deet and wear long sleeved tops and trousers, particularly around sunset.
- There may not be vehicle access throughout the challenge, and as such evacuation procedures will take longer. Be aware of this if you have any medical conditions that may restrict your ability to do the entire trek.

### Emergencies

Throughout the challenge, your H'mong support team will be close by. When vehicle routes are accessible, the support staff will maintain close contact with the vehicles to ensure swift evacuation. The team carry water & snacks and the first aid kit at all times, as well as radios. If for any reason any injury should occur, or continuation is not possible, a relief vehicle will be made available. The relief vehicle will be a private air-conditioned bus, minibus or jeep that will support the trek. The support vehicle is there for clients who need to rest for medical reasons, and will often contain refreshments such as water, snacks and soft drinks to make trekking more enjoyable.

### Training

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's trekking abilities. We allow for this. There will always be a staff member at the back of the group to ensure you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace. However, due to the nature of the jungle trek and the remote nature of the location, if for any reason the trek leader feels that someone is unable to trek then their decision is final.

Training is definitely required. It is important that you work specifically on your stamina, leg and joint strength, and balance in order to get as much out of the challenge as possible. Don't forget that the temperature and climate is

different to the UK and that you will be exercising constantly for a number of days – the heat, humidity and distance will be your biggest challenge. You need to be able to sustain around 6-8 hours of trekking in slippery terrain in some cases for 5 continuous days.

### Challenge Training

If you would like to get a feel for our challenges ahead of your departure, why not consider booking on a 1 or 2 day UK Challenge?

We have a variety of challenges, covering all levels of difficulty, taking place in stunning National Parks across the UK that are led by highly qualified and experienced expedition and mountain leaders. These challenges will give you the perfect opportunity to monitor fitness levels, test out your kit, meet people in the great outdoors, share fundraising stories and gain valuable advice and support for the challenge ahead. We encourage participants to make use of our highly knowledgeable leaders and ask them any questions you may have about clothing and equipment, expedition health and wellbeing, trekking skills, walking techniques and teamwork!

We are offering all participants **50% off** the registration fee when you book on one of the UK challenges listed via the link below. Just use the code **TRAINING** when booking. T&C's – you must have an active booking on a challenge to avail of this offer. Discount cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Find out more [here](#)

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## Any more questions?

Contact us:

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