Charity Challenge launches portfolio of exclusive trips for the over 50s

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As veteran explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, 68, prepares to embark on a record-breaking trip to Antarctica, Britain's leading fundraising expedition company announces a portfolio of exclusive challenges for the over-50s market.

There are now more over-65s in Britain than there are children aged under 16. But while the population may be getting older, gone are the days when hitting 50 meant that you were past it. Recent headlines revealed that according to popular opinion middle age only starts at 55 and that age is just a state of mind.

So thinks Jeremy Gane, 64, who organised and led the incredibly successful 2009 BT Comic Relief climb of Kilimanjaro for Gary Barlow, Cheryl Cole and friends.

As a director of fundraising expedition company Charity Challenge and bespoke travel agency Gane & Marshall, Jeremy is championing the cause of the older traveller. He and fellow Charity Challenge director Simon Albert have launched a range of challenges around the globe that will invite their more mature adventurer to really stretch themselves and broaden their horizons.

The series of adventures has been cheekily dubbed Over The Hill, though participants will obviously not see themselves as such! To sign up you only need to be aged 50 or older and you should be in reasonably good health and prepared to do some training. Otherwise, all that is required is an adventurous frame of mind, a good sense of humour and of course a passport.

Participants can sign up to one of nine different challenges, all the while raising money for a cause close to their hearts. These are:

• Great Wall Discovery, China
• African Bush Trek with the Maasai, Tanzania
• Kilimanjaro Summit Climb, Tanzania
• Trek to Machu Picchu, Peru
• Saigon to Angkor Wat Bike Ride, Vietnam and Cambodia
• Everest Base Camp, Nepal
• Cuban Revolution Cycle, Cuba
• Trek to The Home of the Dalai Lama, India
• Rajasthan Tiger Cycle Challenge, India

Jeremy first climbed Kilimanjaro aged 42. Upon his return, he founded his first travel company, Gane & Marshall. He has since climbed Kilimanjaro a further 20 times, trekked to the North Pole and continues to lead truly adventurous expeditions.

He says: "Although the word adventure is so often applied to and for young people, I believe it is very relevant for the oldies. To me adventure really means setting out to a new place or experience. It is a most important part of getting old.

"Each day can be an adventure and indeed when our clients prepare for a climb or bike ride, they get out most days to train and finally they leave their comfort zones – the sofa, the TV, the take-aways and the centrally-heated home. They brave the elements and discover how much more they are capable of than they could possibly have imagined.

"And they see so much more of the world than they could have ever have dreamed. Adventure, when well managed by a good tour operator, can be very fulfilling and regenerative."

Jeremy, who lost a kidney to cancer in his early 50s, adds: "I have had a lot of pleasure from adventure travel as I've dealt with serious illness and as I've got older, apart from my hippy experiences in my youth, my big adventure experiences started in my mid-40s. I've been travelling ever since and I aim to keep on doing so!

"These adventures are great for people who have hit the age when their children might be leaving home or they feel that they might be reaching that point where they are over the hill. There are so many

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challenging adventures out there waiting for them.

“For those who want a varied geography there are fabulous mountain treks and climbs that will take the climbers far above the hectic, noisy everyday life and into the realm of the eagles and lammergeyers, and for the adventure walkers there is remote bush country, desert and jungle.

“If you don’t want to ski or walk – then get on your bike and cycle to Angkor Wat or across Cuba. It’s all possible and being over fifty is no excuse to stay in your armchair, it is a reason to get up and go places.”

You can join a challenge as an individual, a couple or even as part of a group. Challenges will not be any easier than other itineraries to the same destination, but will be run by Jeremy or one of his experienced colleagues and will go at a steady pace, to suit the group.

Participants should be prepared to train for several weeks or even months prior to the trip, in order to achieve a good level of fitness. They will also be encouraged to fundraise for their chosen charity, ahead of the departure date.

Jeremy adds: “I’m 64 and climbed Mt Stanley in Uganda in February, walked 100kms with the Maasai in July and am now using the training for the Bristol half marathon to get me up to fitness level for a Himalayan trek and climb in the new year.

“For people who haven’t travelled much, it will open up big, broad and wonderful horizons. They will feel physically fitter and much better about themselves and will hopefully come to realise that the second part of your life can be the best part of your life.”

This is certainly true for Don Cowper, 59, who has been on nineteen challenges since he first signed up with Charity Challenge in 2000. Don has developed an amazing level of fitness and mental fortitude that leaves younger challenge participants gasping with admiration.

“I have had the most amazing charity challenge experiences in the past 12 years,” says Don.

“My favourite moments are too many to list but it was a very special time when I walked up hand in hand with two friends to the top of Kala Pattar - the physical highpoint of the Everest Base Camp trek - each of them said at least 50 times, ‘that's enough I can't go any further’. Together we made it.

“In October I will be attempting to climb Mount Lobouche in the Nepalese Himalayas. What's next? Well after Mount Lobouche, I would like to go back to South America to climb Mount Chimbarazo and Mount Aconcagua - climbing Mount Everest is my Dream of Dreams and even if I don't get to do it, I can always say that I have been there with some lifelong friends.”

Carol Graves, 67, says: “During the past 12 years or so I have taken part in treks and cycle rides every year, all over the world, (and not forgetting a skydive too).

“I am now age nearly 68 and haven’t stopped yet. Am I middle-aged? Not sure, but life definitely begins after 50!”

You can see our whole range of Over the Hill challenges at this address www.charitychallenge.com/overthehill.html. If you would like to learn more about Charity Challenge and all the amazing challenges we offer, please visit our website at www.charitychallenge.com. You also can get in touch with us by sending an email to info@charitychallenge.com

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