



Explorer extraordinaire

With his expeditions in six continents spanning 40 years, Mandip Singh Soin embodies the spirit of adventure

WORDS KRISTEN GILL

“Exploration is the innate human quality of wanting to know what lies around the corner,” says Indian mountaineer and explorer Mandip “Mandy” Singh Soin. He should know; after all, he is the recipient of the prestigious Citation of Merit 2015 from the Explorers Club in New York. He helped develop the mountain rescue system in the Indian Himalayas, and is the founder of the Ecotourism Society of India. He and his wife also run Ibex Expeditions, one of the first companies to bring adventure travel to India.

How did you first get involved in mountaineering and exploration?

When I was 14, I was inspired by my school principal who was a

mountaineer who had attempted to summit Everest. Also, my dad was an army colonel who was a para-jumper. I’ve always loved the physical and mental challenges of expeditions – I’m now 58 years old, and I still think of the next big place to travel to!

What are some examples of your work that led to the Explorers Club citation?

I did a lot of first ascents and expeditions, however, the citation was not just for mountaineering. It was also for contributions to the cause of mountaineering in India, first by getting involved in pushing the technical levels of climbing, then by making the sport popular by having the first artificial climbing walls built in Delhi. I also kick-started the creation of a mountain rescue system under the Himalayan Evacuation and Lifesaving Project (HELP).

What is the biggest challenge in the tourism industry and how do you address it?

To get the industry to become more responsible, both in India and around the globe. I believe tourism is a very powerful tool to do good, which can help communities, the environment and cultures. As with every journey, it starts with a humble, single step. We took those steps and created the Ecotourism Society of India in 2008. Since then, it has conducted over 12 national workshops on Best Practices in Tourism, among other things.

How do you envision the future of tourism?

I would like to see a growing community of people who love the great outdoors and want to protect it. Through these experiences in nature, we can all become more balanced human beings. I believe tourism can be an agent of change.

INDIA'S BEST

Soin's top three places for great explorations:

1 Ladakh and Zaskar are great for trekking, climbing, rafting and jeep safaris through the dramatic landscapes and deep river gorges.



2 Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India have indigenous tribes and strong local cultures. Some places in these states are so rarely visited that you can easily imagine

yourself as a modern-day Indiana Jones with all of the mountains to climb, rivers to cruise, and forests to explore.

3 Kanha and Bandhavgarh national parks in

Madhya Pradesh provide amazing sightings of wild tigers from the back of a jeep or an elephant. Travellers can also stay in wildlife lodges and visit the local communities for ecotourism experiences.