

# Passport to Enlightenment

ONE ADVENTURE DAD'S TRAVEL MANIFESTO

By Daniel Glick

**DRIVING NEAR MY HOME** in Colorado in early February, I gaze to the white peaks of the Continental Divide and listen to an incongruous radio announcement about a heightened "orange" alert for terrorist threats, both on U.S. soil and against Americans abroad. Like many of my countrymen, the warnings make me edgy, nervous, apprehensive. But even though our native soil is no longer sacrosanct, I feel safe here, at home. Looking toward the serene mountain vista, I understand how people might think that voluntarily traveling to foreign lands right now seems like willful ignorance, even folly.

But is the world as dangerous for Americans as we're being led to believe? A year and a half after the World Trade Center buildings collapsed into a pile of blood and rubble, Americans increasingly view foreign soil as unstable and threatening. The U.S. State Department issued a "Worldwide Caution" for Americans traveling abroad, and the drumbeats of an Iraqi war sound like an approaching thunderstorm warning us to seek shelter. As a result, international tourism is way down, and as *Outside Traveler's* survey shows, people who formerly would have set off to see the world are choosing to vacation closer to home.

To my mind, that's a dangerous response to these uncertain

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As my children and I continued on through Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Nepal, Western Europe, and Mexico in the months after September 11, being Americans abroad took on heightened significance. After the initial, universal sympathy toward the United States, ordinary people from Bangkok to Brussels began asking us pointed questions about how my country saw itself in relation to the world community. By reading English-language newspapers and conversing with locals, we discovered a growing rift between how President Bush sees the world and how the rest of the world sees America. I became petrified that a man who had spent less time overseas than my nine-year-old daughter was guiding America through uncharted international waters.

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times. I'm convinced that we should not address our fears by crawling deeper into our caves and waving torches at the darkening night. Here's why:

On September 11, 2001, I was in Singapore with my nine-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son, halfway through a five-month around-the-world adventure. As we awoke in a cheap, moldy hotel room in Singapore's Arab Quarter, we gaped at the television screen and wondered if we'd be safe to continue our journey. Since U.S. airports had closed to all commercial traffic, we didn't have the choice of heading straight home. We opted to take our scheduled flight to Ho Chi Minh City and decide what to do when we got there.

Soon enough, my instinct to return home to Colorado was supplanted by the sense that we might actually be safer abroad. After all, I live 35 miles from Columbine High School, where teenage psychopaths gunned down 13 people in 1999. My house sits seven miles from where six-year-old JonBenet Ram-

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He replied, "The poverty in Cambodia. I saw kids playing with rocks and sticks." More recently, I was driving him and a friend to a movie when the friend asked where we had gone in Indonesia and whether we had gone to Bali, too. "Dude," my son replied, "Bali's *in* Indonesia." My daughter regales her friends with tales of stalking rhinos in Nepal and spotting rare cassowaries in Australia. When she flew alone to visit her mother after our trip, I asked her if she was afraid. "Dad," she told me dismissively, "I've flown around the world. I'm just going on a two-hour flight."

Some of our concerns about overseas travel are reasonable: There are fanatics who target Americans for no other reason than because we carry U.S. passports. But much of our dread is born of ignorance and arrogance. We sow suspicion about Muslim Moroccans and Afghans and Iranians and Turks and Saudis in the same undifferentiated breath. I feel now, as I felt then, that as Americans it is not only our privilege but increasingly our duty to expand our horizons, to understand more about the world. It is incumbent upon all of us to learn, and to teach our children, the difference between a Sikh and a sheik, between a Sunni and a Shiite.

I don't take the world's madness lightly, especially when it comes to choosing a travel destination for my family. In these times, prudence isn't a bad thing. I wouldn't take my kids to Baghdad or Pyongyang without a better reason than I can dream up right now. I wouldn't walk through the streets of Tangier singing "The Star-Spangled Banner." Caution is different from paranoia.

Go forth into the world, I say. Take your kids. Show them this amazing planet; explain to them that they are part of it. Talk with them about the way their attitudes will affect how long, and how well, we might be able to coexist here with our fellow creatures—and our fellow humans. Break down the barriers of fear through the warmth of human contact. The world needs well-traveled Americans, and so does America. Now, more than ever.