

WANDERING WITH A CAMERA

Since becoming a photographer by accident, Spanish shutterbug Jordi Estape has captured the sights and colours of 109 countries

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Travel photographer Jordi Llorens Estape is speaking on the phone as we reach the lobby of the Corniche Hotel, the haunt of budget tourists in Muscat. "No, I don't want a booking in a five-star hotel but the cheapest accommodation in Sur," says Jordi, dressed in casual khaki trousers and a striped, short-sleeved shirt.

Five-star comforts do not figure high in Jordi's must-have list as he travels from one country to the next to capture their culture and beauty with his camera. "I have slept rough on the sidewalks in many places." On the last two days of his 12-day tour of Oman he's trying to pack in as many sights as possible.

Jordi is not your average laptop-

lugging, satellite-wielding, high-tech shutterbug. In fact, he has never owned a digital camera to date but uses a Nikon F-100. "I have been avoiding the digital camera because I thought one got better results on film," says the man who has never done a course on photography. "But yes, I am thinking of getting a digital camera before I go to my next destination, which could be Madagascar."

It is passion rather than technology or technical expertise that drives him and which explains why he has been to 109 countries in the last 20 years to take pictures. For instance, Jordi started 2008 with a visit to the Libyan desert in January.

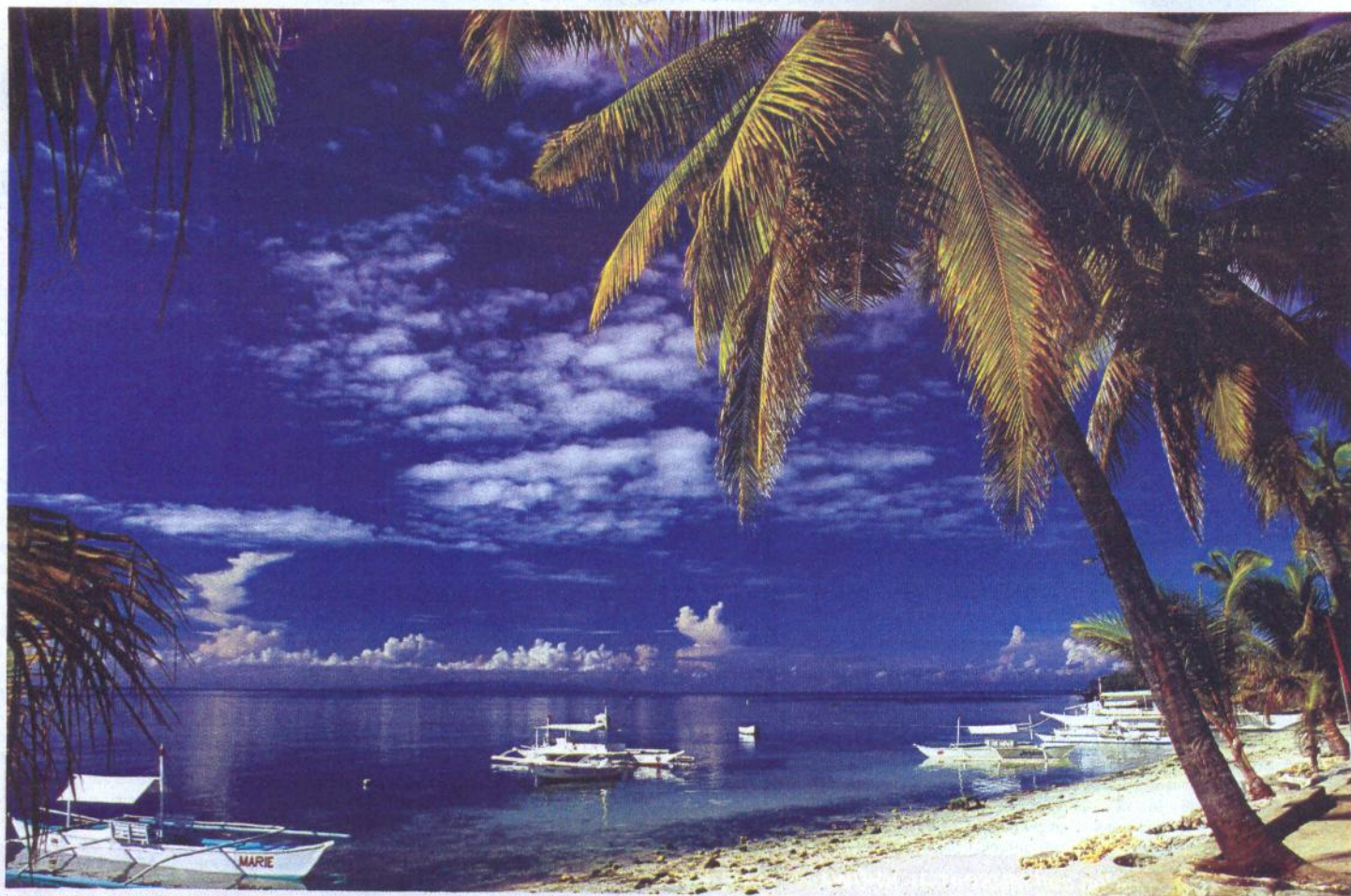
That was followed by a trip to Papua New Guinea where he documented some of the tribal ceremonies before travelling to the Solomon Islands where he stayed in a hut. He then went back to his hometown, Barcelona, for a month after which he went to Tasmania. And before coming to Oman he had a short stay in Rome with his girlfriend.

What effect does his nomadic life have on his family life, we wonder. "You have to make certain choices in life," says Jordi, 45, philosophically. "I live with my girlfriend whenever I am in Spain but we have decided not to have children."

Many years ago, what helped him make his career choice was a visit to Africa to hang out with a university mate. After stopping with his friend for a while in Ivory Coast, both of them went to Burkina Faso. "My visit

coincided with a military coup there. I was just 23 and the events left a powerful impression on me," Jordi says. "Someone stole my things including my first camera."

But he had some pictures from that trip with him and wrote a script, narrating his experiences. He put up a slide show for his friends and they appreciated his efforts. Altering his life as a computer engineer - he was then working in a big hospital - was another chance occurrence. A gallery owner saw some photos he had shot during his trips at a photo framing shop and invited Jordi to exhibit them. The accolades that he got during the exhibition coupled with the realisation that he enjoyed his travel photography more than anything else made him explore new lands whenever he could take time off from work. "Usually, I travel



► Jordi (top) is equally confident photographing people and landscapes. Among the latter is this picture-postcard frame shot in Malaysia (above)

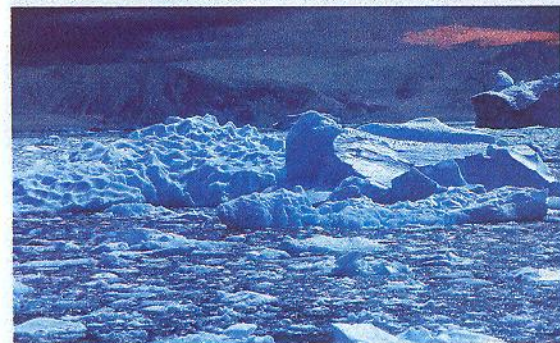
during the months from October to February and do another job the rest of the year," he says.

After giving up his job as a software engineer – "I never liked it" – he worked as a host manager for the Barcelona Olympics for two years and is now a project manager for the Catalan government.

But what he likes to do when he is in Spain is to make audio-visual presentations about the different countries he has visited at town halls, educational institutions and

cultural centres, or to produce calendars for banks in Barcelona or write travel articles for magazines. He also hosts a TV programme on his travels and has written two books, *Travel Around the World in 80 Moons* and *Markets of the World*.

We reserve the most predictable question for the last – which country does he like the best? "Vanuatu in the Pacific, New Zealand, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Argentina..." he goes on. "I would like to have a country that has the best of all these places."



► Photographs from Jordi's Antarctica collection (above) and the Philippines (below)



► Photos taken in Sarangani, the Philippines (above), and of a Mursi tribal in Ethiopia (below)



Ministry of Environment invites students to participate in Oman Environment Day by planting native trees

In conjunction with Muscat Municipality, the Ministry of Agriculture and The Art of Living Foundation (AOL), the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs is kicking off a series of green events on January 8 with Oman Environment Day. The activities will include tree planting, the cleaning of coral reefs and beaches, mangrove planting, educational visits to nature reserves, sports, painting and photographic competitions.

The main focus in 2009 is planting trees. This drive is being organised as part of the worldwide initiative called Mission Green Earth, Stand Up and Take Action (MGESUTA). This drive was launched jointly by the United

Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) and AOL with the objective of planting 100mn trees round the globe between July 2008 and July 2009. The initiative will go a long way towards achieving environmental sustainability, one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Since last October, almost 65mn saplings have been planted in 37 countries; in Oman, 5,500 saplings have been distributed for planting by AOL.

On Oman Environment Day, a patch of land near Al Sahwa roundabout will be planted with trees by some 200 students from various schools. Native species like the *tulh* (*Acacia gerard*), *ghaf*

(*Prosopis cineraria*), *simr* (*Acacia tortilis*) and *sedar* (*Ziziphus spina-christi*) are most suited to local conditions and have been identified for planting. An educational exhibition for children on the characteristics of these native plants and wider environmental issues will be set up.

The importance of planting trees today cannot be overstated. Trees can help to reduce pollution, improve the quality of soil and air and replenish ground water, providing succour in harsh, arid landscapes and for many people offering a means of sustenance.

For further details about tree planting on January 8, call 99012307 or email enviro2020@yahoo.com

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