

Ultimate EXPEDITION

How Sven-Olof Lindblad turned an innate passion into a modern exploration

BY DAVE G. HOUSER

SVEN-OLOF LINDBLAD, founder and president of Lindblad Expeditions, was born to explore.

Born in Switzerland in 1951, he was the only son of renowned adventure-travel pioneer Lars-Eric Lindblad, who also fathered eco-tourism and led the first non-scientific group tours to Antarctica (1966), Galapagos (1967), and many other exotic regions of the world, from Arctic Svalbard to the Easter Islands.

From an early age, Sven traveled extensively with his father, developing an inherent passion to discover the most remote and pristine places on the planet. As a young man, he spent six years in East Africa — largely in the Serengeti region — where he developed his skills as a wildlife photographer, worked as an expedition guide, and assisted filmmakers on a documentary about the destruction of African rainforests. This period of time was instrumental in molding the fundamentals of Sven's future in the travel industry — and his role as one of the world's most active and influential environmentalists.

"If I had to name one spot on earth that has most nourished my spirit and influ-

enced my destiny," says Sven, "it would be the Serengeti, which imbued me with the feeling of truly belonging to the natural world."

ROAD to SUCCESS

Lars was an explorer at heart and came to the United States from Sweden in 1958 intent on mounting his own expeditions. Lacking the resources to do so, he decided to get involved in the travel business and launched Lindblad Travel.

"My father was a staunch idealist, driven by the idea of bringing people, laymen, to places like Antarctica and Galapagos because he believed those were areas we needed to understand better in order to affect their destiny," says Sven. "He was gutsy and innovative and he developed an amazing business."

Sven worked with his father at Lindblad Travel for a time in the '70s but became increasingly concerned about the way the business

was being run. "Things were becoming dysfunctional and there was a serious lack of focus on the bottom line," he recalls. Anxious to be the first to offer group tours to China, Lars got caught up in a bad deal chartering riverboats for Yangtze River cruises and, as Sven puts it, "the company lost hundreds of thousands of dollars on something that should have made millions."

Lindblad Travel suffered the ultimate catastrophe in the late 1980s when Lars began offering tours to Vietnam and Cambodia in defiance of the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act.

"He thought it was unconscionable and unconstitutional to limit travel," says Sven, "but the Treasury Department didn't see it that way and they seized his records, froze his bank accounts, and fined him \$75,000. He eventually closed the business in 1987."

By then Sven had already acted on his own vision,

convincing his father in 1979 to help bankroll a subsidiary operation named Special Expeditions, a venture devoted to marine expeditions utilizing small, shallow-draft, highly maneuverable ships. His mission was to offer innovative, educational cruises to the most remote regions of Alaska, Baja California, and Costa Rica — going where big ships couldn't go.

"We started small, very small," says Sven, "with just \$20,000." However, thanks to careful management,

a devoted staff, loyal clients, and a fair bit of luck, Special Expeditions thrived. Expedition cruising and, in a greater sense, eco-tourism, was becoming one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel industry.

DEFINING MOMENTS

Sven's crowning moment came in 2004 when the company, now Lindblad Expeditions, formed an alliance with National Geographic that combined the strengths of two pioneers in

global exploration, as Sven says, "with the goal of inspiring people to explore and to care about the planet."

Today, Lindblad's fleet of 10 ships — including six National Geographic-branded small expedition vessels and four seasonal charters — offers up-close adventures on all seven continents. It also positions Lindblad as the largest and most diversified line in the expedition category, supported by offices in New York, Seattle, and Sydney.

Sven and his team continue to pioneer innovative means of connecting guests with places already "discovered." They were the first cruise company to offer kayaking in the Arctic, Antarctica, Galapagos, and the Upper Amazon; first to reveal the wonders below the ocean with an unparalleled undersea program; and the first to offer a photography initiative with a Lindblad-National Geographic certified photo instructor on each expedition.

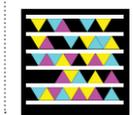
"We've become partners with National Geographic in a very meaningful way," says Sven, emphasizing that the two organizations bring travelers to the most remote and fascinating places on the planet and provide an unprecedented platform to understand and appreciate the geography they're exploring.

"Equally important," says Sven, "Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic have become a real force for preserving the most extraordinary environments."

The alliance's commitment to the environment is carried out in part through the Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic (LEX-NG) Joint Fund for Exploration and Conservation, which, in collaboration with guests, has raised over \$10 million to support environmental initiatives, largely in the fields of ocean and wildlife conservation.

Sven's pledge to environmentally responsible travel has earned him countless awards, most recently *Condé Nast Traveler's* World Savers "Doing it All" Award, and Virtuoso's Sustainable Tourism Leadership Award.

Twenty-first century explorers, the father and son duo of Lars-Eric and Sven-Olof Lindblad have exposed countless travelers to the wonders of the world, fostering generations of committed citizens who care deeply about the future of our planet. It must be in the genes. ●



SVEN LINDBLAD visits Lindblad Cove in Antarctica.



GLOBAL EXPLORER Sven-Olof Lindblad learned to love travel from his adventurous father.