

# Finding A Natural High

After facing down the kinds of adversity that would break weaker spirits, adventurer, traveller and guide **Julie Lewis** has embarked on a new journey, one that she hopes will reawaken wild-hearted souls, discovers **Natalie Hore**.

**E**ven after boarding almost 1,000 planes, 60-year old Julie Lewis knows that every time she gets on a flight her life is about to change. Most of the time it's in small ways, such as experiencing something new, or making a new friend during her travels. But it was a flight to Kuwait from the UK in the summer of 1989 that set her life on a trajectory that would include founding an adventure travel business, becoming an author and being the go-to resilience spokesperson and coach in the Middle East.

How Lewis got from Kuwait to where she is today, is what makes her so inspirational. She didn't realise it at the time, but by agreeing to be the first female recreational manager in the country, she would meet and fall in love with her colleague and professional squash coach, Hakim Amer, and almost a year later, they would be part of a convoy on a two-day mission to escape the Iraqi invasion.

After leaving her post, which had by then morphed into being put in charge of guest morale at the hotel while tanks drove past, they headed at midnight towards Saudi Arabia but before they could reach the border, the convoy was held at gunpoint in the middle of the desert by teenaged Iraqi soldiers, who advised them to turn back around. Due to the quick thinking of her colleagues, who offered the Iraqi soldiers water, sweets and soft drinks while pleading with them for mercy, they were waved on and able to reach the British Embassy in Riyadh, where they could finally get in contact with loved ones after three weeks of communication blackouts.

Back in the UK, Lewis noticed she was starting to lose strands of hair due to the stress of the ordeal, which included knowing that some of her colleagues were still stuck in Kuwait. But she was back on her feet a month later, working in a similar role at an exclusive country club in Cheshire.

Lewis believes that her sense of resilience was fostered when she went to boarding school aged 11, where she developed a love for sports. However,



despite her growing hardiness as she went from university to a career utilising her sports science degree, and eventually marrying Hakim, nothing prepared her for the sudden passing of her then husband from a heart aneurysm when he was 41 and Lewis was just 36.

"Sometimes we choose things or things choose us; I call these tsunamis or wake up calls," says Lewis. "It's very different when you choose to jump ship over whether you are hit by a rogue wave."

Without a compass point, Lewis took her savings and travelled to Australia to go "walk-about" for a year. During this time, she recalibrated, taking stock of her strengths and passions, and



Julie's trips have become popular with fellow female adventurers

realised she wanted to change career paths to combine her experiences and work in adventure travel.

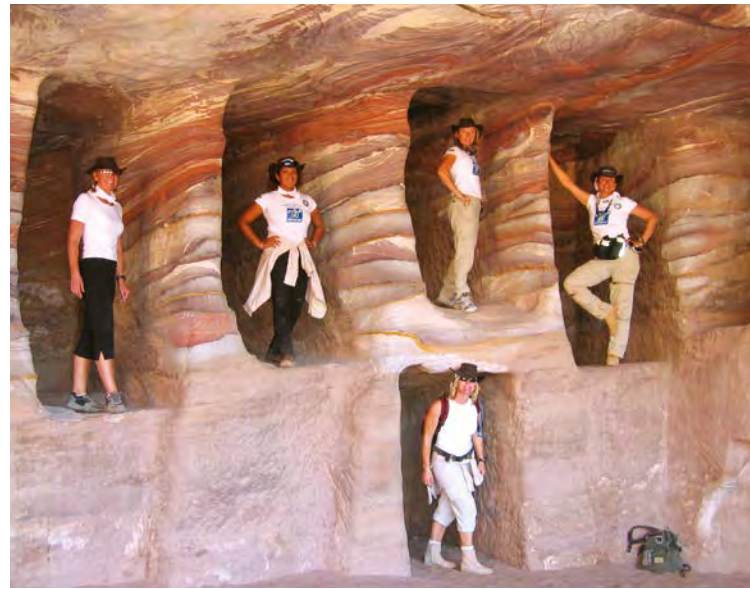
“When we lose the people we love, the best and most honourable thing we can do is to live the life they would have dreamed and wanted for us,” says Lewis. Landing a job as a business development manager for a travel company in Dubai, she was invited on an educational and research trip in Malaysia, when she saw Mount Kota Kinabalu and vowed to return to climb it, despite having never climbed a mountain before. On her 40th birthday in April 2002, Lewis summited her mountain, and while placing one foot in front of the other, she knew instinctively that she wanted to set up a business focused on outbound adventure travel.

“At the summit, arms open, tears running down my cheeks, knowing I was on a mountain and on a natural high, it was evident that the business name would be Mountain High, enabling others to know that whatever happens, you can get yourself up, look up, and start moving,” she says.

Mountain High is now in its 20th year of operations and Lewis has taken adventurers literally to the ends of the earth, enabling those with an adventurous spirit to undertake an internal exploration, as they face various challenges such as mountain climbs, white water rafting, dog sledding and week-long hikes.

Celebrating her 60th birthday last year, two decades after climbing her first mountain, Lewis decided that the occasion would begin with a trip to the Norwegian Arctic Circle – one of her favourite places – that had previously been postponed due to the pandemic and a year spent caring for her second husband through stage 4 brain cancer to complete recovery.

Returning for the 10th time with 10 female adventurers, this was the first of five trips she has held so far, with the other adventures including a climb up Mount Arafat in Turkey, trekking the Portuguese coastal Camino Di Santiago hike and an expedition to Antarctica through the dreaded Drake Passage. These “rewilding” adventures are



designed to push guests out of their comfort zones and build the kind of resilience at the core of Lewis’s success. Other itineraries include a “sea to summit” experience in Montenegro, which used a combination of paddle, peddle and foot power with the ultimate goal to summit Mount Orjen (1,894m) in the Dinaric Alps. Lewis also offers trips walking the sacred Kumano Kodo trail and hiking mounts Koya and Kurama in Japan.

As Lewis plans more overseas flights to countries she’s still yet to explore, she knows that it’s not only her own life that will change when boarding the plane, but also those of the people she will take with her. Adventure and change awaits: this includes the release of her second book later this year, *Uncharted Waters*, which suggests that plenty lies ahead for this intrepid traveller. [julie-lewis.com/adventure](http://julie-lewis.com/adventure) ■

Clockwise from bottom: Julie’s adventures have seen her scale famous peaks and explore Antarctica



FROM TOP  
MW LUXURY HALONG, HA LONG CITY, VIETNAM  
LA GREEN RESORT, PHUKET, THAILAND  
BAI HOTEL CEBU, MANDAUE CITY, PHILIPPINES



WORLDHOTELS™

# A World of Your Own

At WorldHotels, craftsmanship is celebrated, details are thoughtfully considered, and experiences are immersive. Culinary offerings are locally sourced, spa treatments are inspired by age-old traditions, and walls are adorned by the work of emerging artists.

Luxury blends seamlessly with authenticity, and the world outside inspires the one within. Never just a place to pass through, this is a place to truly connect with the soul of a city, the culture of a region and the wonders of nature.

## Four Collections. One World.

WorldHotels is comprised of four unique collections, each with its own personality and style to appeal to the needs of today’s hotelier and traveler:

- WorldHotels™ Luxury
- WorldHotels™ Elite
- WorldHotels™ Crafted
- WorldHotels™ Distinctive

## Welcome to Our World

For more information visit [WorldHotels.com](http://WorldHotels.com).