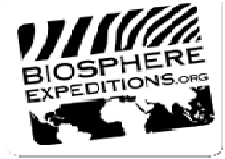


Backgrounder



BACKGROUND ON MATTHIAS HAMMER

Oman newspaper The Week accurately described Dr Matthias Hammer as being reminiscent of a comic book hero. When asked about his life, he claims it has been “nothing interesting” and “quite boring actually” – funny how often self-perception is a distortion of reality.

From a qualified wilderness medical officer, ski instructor, mountain leader, dive master and survival skills instructor, to an international rower, former member of the special German Parachute Regiment, amateur marathon runner and Ironman triathlete; it doesn't seem like there is a thing Matthias Hammer has not tried at least once in his lifetime.

Born with the dream to be a field biologist, Matthias studied Biology at Oxford and obtained his PhD in human evolution from Cambridge University, before realising he no longer wanted to be a part of the academic, “Ivory Tower” world.

“The ‘Ivory Tower’ mentality wasn't for me – I wasn't cut out to fit into that mold, to become an academic or professor,” said Dr Matthias Hammer, founder and managing director of Biosphere Expeditions. “The idea of being stuck in an office for the rest of my life really depressed me.”

“From the day my dad first took me to watch badgers, I knew I wanted to be something like Sielmann or Grzimek, Germany's own David Attenborough,” added Matthias.

Born in Germany in 1967, Matthias joined the army at the age of 18, where he served several years with the German Parachute Regiment before migrating to the UK to study at Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

“I spent a lot of time as a student organising or running conservation expeditions, and I loved it,” said Matthias. “I also did mountaineering and climbing expeditions.”

During his time at Cambridge, Matthias discovered his knack for entrepreneurship when he started up his own business.

“When I was on the rowing team, we used to make our own trophies for our teams whenever we won an event. I thought, why don't I professionalise this, and launched my business for custom-made trophies,” said Matthias.

“It was then that I discovered, on top of my passion for biology, I also had some entrepreneurial skills that complemented my biology background and the leadership and organisational skills I had acquired in the military,” added Matthias.

Matthias' moment of revelation came one day after he returned home from a rowing outing.

“I was talking to my girlfriend at the time about how dejected I was at the prospect of a career as a pure academic, when she said to me, ‘Matthias, why don't you take people on expeditions with you and get them to pay for it?’ ” said Matthias.

“It was brilliant; I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it myself. It was the perfect idea as it brought all of my skills together – my love for biology, leadership, logistics and organisation,” added Matthias.

In 1999, as soon as Matthias finished his PhD, he undertook a two-week course to educate himself on the other elements of running a business such as bookkeeping, marketing and developing a business plan. Immediately after Biosphere Expeditions was formed.

“While at university, I realised there were a lot of scientists out there with interesting projects, but without funds or people to help them. On the other hand, there are lots of people who want to do more than roast on a beach on their holiday. Biosphere Expeditions brings the two together,” said Matthias.

“When you come on an expedition with us, you’re part of a genuine research team doing genuine conservation work,” added Matthias.

Biosphere Expeditions offer two-week expeditions and one-week projects, as well as Taster Weekends. Expeditions include studying the snow leopards in the mountains of the Altai republic; an elephant research and conservation program in Sri Lanka; diving and safeguarding the coral reefs of Cayos Cochinos, Honduras; studying the jaguars and pumas in Brazil’s Atlantic rainforest; and examining whales, dolphins and turtles around the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean.

“In 2004, Cameron Diaz was asked by Glamour UK magazine for the top ten things she wanted to do in life, and one of her responses was to join our snow leopard expedition in the Altai mountains,” said Matthias.

“Needless to say, we had a massive influx of people contact us after that article,” added Matthias.

Already well established in the European and North American markets, Matthias’ next target is Australia, with the company’s first office opening in Melbourne on 3rd November 2008.

Biosphere Expeditions, which is now officially registered as a non-profit incorporated association in Australia, is currently researching locations around Australia, with the aim of bringing Taster Weekends to Australia by early 2009.

“Biosphere Expeditions is an award-winning, hands-on, non-profit conservation organisation that enables ordinary people to come with us and help with conservation work worldwide. On our expeditions you will explore fascinating parts of the world, have fun, a lifetime adventure and a real hands-on experience of working on wildlife conservation projects,” said Matthias.

“At least two-thirds of their expedition contribution goes directly into the conservation project. We meet the needs of those who genuinely want to go beyond just lying on a beach for their holiday and who want to give something back to the planet instead,” added Matthias.

For more information (photos, videos etc) on Matthias Hammer, visit www.biosphere-expeditions.org/matthiashammer

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For further media information contact:

Gillian Yeap

P: 0447 319 066

E: gillian@smartpr.com.au

