

# ASK THE experts

What's it like to be a tour leader? **Laura French** joins Explore for its annual guides' training in Hampshire



PICTURES: Laura French

## 1 THE NEW TOUR LEADER

### BACKGROUND

Davide has been working as a travel agent for three years in Italy, and will start leading Explore cycling trips in Puglia this year. He's new to guiding and embarked on the six-day training programme to prepare himself for the challenges being a leader might involve.



**Davide Munari**  
Explore cycling tour leader in Italy



### WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO LEAD TOURS?

This is going to be my first year as a tour leader, guiding cycling trips in Puglia. I've worked with Explore for a couple of years as a travel agent, and decided I wanted to get out of the office, meet people and embark on some real adventures.

This is the first tour leader training I've done, and I've really enjoyed it. We had three days of classroom training – what to do in terms of briefing groups, how to deal with customers, how to respond to various situations, and so on. We then did three days of first-aid training.

It's been busy but meeting other tour leaders who've been working in the industry for years is inspiring, and it's interesting to see how they work in different regions around the world.

I definitely feel more prepared to start leading now. I'm sure there's still a lot to learn, but I think if you stay calm and positive then you can deal with pretty much any situation you're faced with.

I'm excited about taking on the responsibility as a tour leader, but the thing I'm most looking forward to is making people feel good while they're on tour. When I shadowed an Explore leader last year, a client thanked us and said it was the best holiday they'd ever had. That was the best feeling.

## 2 THE PRODUCT MANAGER

### BACKGROUND

Chris's role involves putting together trips in Asia and managing existing tours to ensure the best possible experiences. He attended the course to find out more about the training and gain an insight into the trips from a tour leader's perspective.



**Chris Ellis**  
Explore product manager for Asia



### WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A GUIDE?

For us, it's the guides that really make the difference on an Explore trip, so the idea behind doing the training is to try and select the right kind of guides and then train them to deliver a trip in the Explore way.

I think we're quite demanding on our leaders – they're more than just a guide. It's about personalising the experience, telling anecdotes, getting involved with customers and breaking down barriers.

It's also about things like food, which is a really important part of an Explore trip. So we train the guides to recognise the importance of going to local restaurants and getting customers to try different kinds of cuisine.

But it's also about their personality, about having enthusiasm and being passionate.

You can go to a country and see lots of things, but what I remember best from my favourite trips are leaders that really bring that trip to life, whether it's with a personal story or something that's affected them, or just a little insight into their daily lives. That, for me, is what makes an Explore leader.

## 3 THE EXPERIENCED GUIDE

### BACKGROUND

Mandy started working with Explore in 2010, and has since led tours in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. All Explore leaders are required to retake their first-aid training every three years, so she joined the three-day course to top up her skills.



**Mandy Angus**  
Explore leader



### WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE JOB?

The first destination I was sent to with Explore was Syria. It was fabulous – lovely people and a beautiful country. I led tours there and in Jordan for a couple of years, and I really enjoyed the Middle East – it was mysterious and different.

I've since led Explore tours in Israel, Swaziland [Eswatini], Ethiopia, Madagascar, Croatia, Bulgaria, Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan and beyond, and over the past few years I've been working in the Azores. But wherever I go, it's always the people that make the trip – either clients themselves who've got their own funny stories, or the people of the country, the language and so on.

It was in 2010 that I started working for Explore but I've always been in tourism. I started in 1979 as a rep, before going into resort management and then area management with Airtours. I've done the Explore training a few times now, and I always enjoy it. You're always faced with challenges while leading tours – different customers, different situations and the occasional emergency, when you've got to really have your wits about you and decide what's best for the group, so the training helps prepare you for that.