

5 Questions for... Chris Baker

Founder, OneSeed Expeditions & Wayfinder Co-op



The adventure travel industry is thinking about the footprint it leaves behind. Beyond the tourism dollars outfitters bring to remote parts of the world, Chris Baker, a former Teach For America corps member and Yale University graduate (where he spent a semester in Nepal), wanted to do more to invest in the communities he visited. In 2011, he founded OneSeed Expeditions with a unique model that inspires and funds entrepreneurship in parts of the world where a little money could go a long way. Here, Baker opens up about what adventure travelers want, plus, his latest business plan and why Colorado and Outdoor Retailer are the perfect fit.

1. HOW DID ONESEED EXPEDITIONS GET STARTED, AND HOW DOES ITS FINANCIAL MODEL WORK?

→ OneSeed Expeditions was launched seven years ago with a simple mission: to use the power of adventure travel to invest in entrepreneurs around the world. At our core, we're a guiding outfitter made up of incredible local guides working in places like Patagonia, the Himalaya, and other remote

destinations. We got our start in Nepal but have since grown our operations across seven countries with our headquarters here in Denver.

When you travel with a OneSeed guide, 10 percent of your trip cost is invested in a local entrepreneur through the OneSeed Microfinance Fund. This loan program supports farmers, shopkeepers, and small ventures in need of capital to launch

or expand their businesses.

Our loan recipients are selected by our partner microfinance institutions (MFIs) within the local communities where they work. They qualify for loan access (for example, income level below the poverty line, location within a specific region, etc.) and then they pitch their business idea. This locally driven approval process ensures that local knowledge (rather than our perspective here in Denver) drives loan approvals and investment.

2. HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE THE LOANS BEEN?

→ To date, OneSeed has invested in more than 500 small businesses in some of the most remote corners of the world, and our repayments rates are more than 99 percent. Starting a business anywhere in the world is hard. As a small business ourselves, we know this. We also know that the barriers to capital can be even higher in many of the places where we work. Our mission is to provide that first bit of seed capital to fuel small businesses and local economies.

3. WHAT ARE TODAY'S ADVENTURE TRAVELERS EXPECTING FROM THEIR TRIPS? WHAT DESTINATIONS ARE GAINING IN POPULARITY?

→ I think people expect more than just fun from their travel. Today's mindful traveler wants to leave a positive impact. As a collective of local guides, we see our role as connectors. We bring curious and adventurous travelers to the communities where we work. We connect people across languages, cultures, and experiences.

We've also seen a real desire from travelers to build the backcountry skills needed to explore these remote destinations. Our guides work with travelers to build those skills so that they can push further in their own travel. Next time they book a trip, they might not even need us, and that's fine by us.

We've seen huge growth in South

America, with Patagonia being our top destination this year. For those looking to get off the beaten path, Colombia has been one of our fastest-growing, but still relatively untapped, destinations.

4. YOU'VE BEEN BASED IN DENVER FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT OUTDOOR RETAILER MOVING ITS SHOW HERE?

→ I think it really validates the great things happening in Colorado. There's a unique intersection of entrepreneurialism and the outdoor lifestyle here. We feel fortunate to be headquartered in a place where collaboration and openness are just the ways of doing business. The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office at the Colorado Office of Economic Development also has been so instrumental in driving growth around the industry here in the state.

5. THAT GROWING OUTDOOR MARKET LEADS US TO YOUR NEXT PROJECT, WAYFINDER CO-OP, LAUNCHING THIS WEEK WITH OUTDOOR RETAILER IN TOWN. WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT?

→ Wayfinder Co-op started out as a simple idea: a few Denver-based outdoor brands (Kokopelli Packraft, Desta, and Revolucion, among others) sharing a small office. We imagined a few dogs, probably a keg of beer—but most importantly, we wanted to create a space for like-minded companies and individuals to learn from each other, share resources, and take their work to the next level.

It has since grown to 20-plus brands and a 7,500-square-foot space right in Denver's Santa Fe Arts District. We offer a mix of private offices, dedicated desks, and flex passes for outdoor and active brands as well as anyone inspired by the outdoors. We're open and planning several afterparties [during the show]. Anyone is welcome to drop by. Check out wayfinder-coop.com for more details.

—David Lucas