

# COURIER

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# THE ADVENTURE ADVANTAGE

by Pat Henderson

**Y**ou'd be hard pressed to find a tour operator who doesn't have a passion for exploration. The desire for new experiences and a sense of adventure drives the way they see the world and plan their trips.

But, for some, that passion takes a more adventurous form. Just visiting an unexplored city or off-the-beaten path spot isn't enough. "Adventure travel connects you with the destination so much more than if you're just seeing it through a bus window," said Debra Asberry, president of Women Traveling Together. "On our Iceland trip, we cover some of the highlights but also do a glacier walk and take a kayak out among the puffins and icebergs. Things like this provide the travelers with a multilayer experience, and they come home not just with photos but also with the tactile sensation of having kayaked among icebergs."

According to the NTA members who offered perspectives for this article, one thing is clear: pushing people outside their comfort zones and helping them truly experience a destination are two keys to an adventurous and memorable vacation.

## Now That's Adventure

For Zachary Moses, the question isn't if you are going to include adventure components on tours, it's how adventurous those options will be. "[Vacation] is our chance to get wild while we are away from our desks," he said. "Rappelling down a waterfall is way more fun than standing in line with 60 other people at a museum, just waiting to use the bathroom."

Moses is the marketing director for Alyson Adventures and Hanns Ebensten Travel, a pair of Key West, Florida-based companies that cater predominately to gay and lesbian travelers. True to its name, Alyson Adventures incorporates an array of soft and hard adventure options throughout its more than 50 annual tours. Itineraries include biking trips to France, Italy and Portugal, hiking the Swiss Alps or along the Inca Trail in Peru, rafting in the American West and multisport tours in New Zealand, Tasmania and Iceland.

One of the most recent packages Moses has been working on is an adventure tour to Israel, which he categorized as "A far cry from your grandmother's church tour. Every day features a new

adventure, but we still visit major points of historical interest in the country. The activities include kayaking in the Mediterranean Sea, cycling, hiking, spelunking, canyoning, diving and much more. I am looking forward to riding a camel into the sunset, feasting and dancing around a roaring bonfire and being swept up in the rhythms of the desert drum circle at a Bedouin camp."

## Getting Active in the Parks

Asberry comes by her love for adventure, well, naturally. During a cross-country move when she was young, her family stopped at some national parks, and she caught the bug. "I so love the parks of the American West, and I really have a passion for taking clients to see iconic destinations within the United States."

Asberry founded Women Traveling Together in 1997 and is proud to be

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San Juan County Economic Development & Visitor Services **26**

## Destination Spotlight: Jackson, Wyoming

Being located in the shadow of one of the American West's great mountain ranges (the Tetons) and along one of its most famous bodies of water (the Snake River) has made Jackson, Wyoming, a popular spot for outdoor enthusiasts. But, beyond the area's natural beauty and abundant wildlife, it also is a starting point for tons of soft and hard adventure that ranges from whitewater rafting, heli-hiking and mountaineering to sled-dog rides, skiing and hiking. Kate Foster, the communications manager for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, offered some thoughts on why her destination is perfect for many types of adventure tours.

**Courier:** How has your area become such a popular spot for adventure sports?

**Foster:** Jackson Hole has been an adventure destination for more than 100 years when local ranchers began offering tourists a taste of the cowboy life through rodeos and dude ranch experiences. Jackson Hole now offers a wide variety of adventures that can give travelers a more exclusive look at what makes our corner of northwest Wyoming so special. Not many people have the opportunity to view the Tetons in the solitude of a winter day as sled dogs race through the untracked snow or view a bald eagle taking flight from the banks of the Snake River at dawn on a summer morning.



**Courier:** What are some newer adventure tour options that you are promoting in the Jackson area?

**Foster:** Dave Hansen Whitewater and Snake River Anglers offer a unique whitewater and fly-fishing experience. The Snake River winds through the scenic heart of the Jackson Hole valley making for a beautiful and convenient dual adventure. Groups can rent a Jackson Hole Packraft from Rendezvous River Sports. Packrafts are these amazing little watercrafts that can handle a rugged trip down the Snake River or a leisurely paddle on Jenny Lake. Also, High Mountain Heli-Skiing has partnered with Teton Springs Lodge and Spa to offer a unique heli-ski adventure package that includes time in idyllic Teton Valley, Idaho.

celebrating her 15th anniversary in business this year. The Edgewater, Maryland-based tour operator specializes in women's-only packages, and many of them include a little outdoor adventure in those same national parks she fell in love with as a child.

This year her customers can go kayaking in Washington's San Juan Islands, hiking in Denali National Park and in Glacier National Park, and rafting on the Snake River and in the Grand Canyon—the latter is one of Asberry's favorite places.

"When you go on a rafting trip on the Colorado in the Grand Canyon, you are doing the same thing the early pioneers did," she said. "The boats are much better these days than when John Wesley Powell paddled on the Colorado, but it is still the same basic experience. I love it that we can do things like that or go on a walk below the rim on the Bright Angel Trail, and that they give us a connection to the early days of America's history."

In addition to helping her travelers plug in with history, Asberry also likes providing experiences that stretch them. "We go ziplining in Costa Rica, and some of our clients are a little hesitant at first. But, once they give it a try, you see the smiles appearing on their faces. They find out how fun it is and once they've gotten past their fears, they get to enjoy it again and again as they go among the treetops from station to station."



## British Columbia's Coastal Majesty

May 20 of this year marks a special occasion for Roland Neave and the folks at Wells Gray Tours, as 40 years ago the company offered its first tour. "When I started Wells Gray Tours in 1972, a large wilderness area in British Columbia called Wells Gray Provincial Park was our only destination," said Neave, who serves as the Kamloops-based company's president. "That park fostered my love of wild places, nature and parks. Today, Wells Gray Tours travels all over the world, and I try to include a park in many itineraries."

Neave's passion for outdoor adventure definitely has its advantages for Wells Gray clients, who get to experience some pretty special and off-the-beaten-path destinations. The company showcases nearly every corner of its home province on its many itineraries from Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast and Wells Gray Park in the south to Prince Rupert and Haida Gwaii in the north.



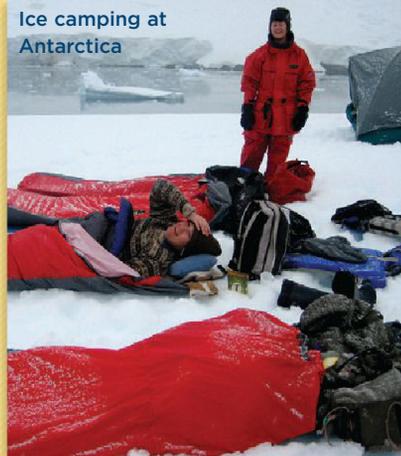
Totems at a Haida Gwaii village in British Columbia

TOURISM BC

Since 1978, Wells Gray Tours has offered several departures each summer to Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands). Many Wells Gray packages include nature walks to popular spots such as Tow Hill and the Blowhole, and beachcombing at North Beach and Agate Beach. For a little adventure, the group takes an all-day trip on Zodiac boats into Gwaii

Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site and flies to remote Ninstints. Both spots offer a look at well-preserved Haida villages.

This August, Wells Gray will debut a second Haida Gwaii excursion. The eight-day trip, which takes place primarily on board the sailing vessel, *Island Roamer*, will visit the wild areas of Moresby Island. 📍



ANDREW BROAN

Ice camping at Antarctica

## One-of-a-kind Adventures

Zachary Moses, the marketing director for Alyson Adventures and Hanns Ebensten Travel, provided information on five unique or adventurous experiences that are offered as part of the companies' tours.

**Antarctica:** On our Antarctica Adventure, we explore the amazing frozen continent. Our group gets to kayak among the icebergs and even camp on the ice. Plus, each day we view penguins in their natural habitat and more whales than you have ever dreamed of seeing.

**Arizona:** On our Splash! tour, we whitewater raft the entire length of the Grand Canyon. We hike up slot canyons, shower under waterfalls, and ride our roller coaster raft through 2 billion years of history.

**Curaçao:** On our Deep Blue tour, we spend the week diving at practically untouched coral reefs. Never dived before? No problem, you can be certified right at the dive lodge.

**France:** On our Valley of the Chateaux tour, we cycle through the fairytale villages of the French countryside. Our routes go through the most pristine and well-preserved parts of the country. The castles are amazing, but the food and wine are even more incredible.

**New Zealand:** On our Wild Kiwi tour, we ice hike on glaciers, bungee jump off bridges, and go tubing and/or hike through caves lit by glow worms.

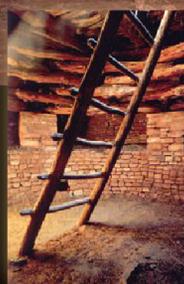




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