

Travel



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Plan an adventurous travel year

By Victoria Diaz
special writer

Picture yourself sailing up, up, and away in a beautiful, rainbow-striped balloon over the Loire Valley in France — or maneuvering a rugged trail, on horseback, through Arizona's famed Superstition Wilderness — or searching out the exotic wildlife of Kenya by day, and taking in Nairobi's "wild life" of discos and casinos by night.

Sound intriguing?
— If you're a little tired of museums, monuments and ordinary, everyday guided tours, and you're thirsting for some real excitement on your next vacation, why not join the fast-growing numbers of Americans who are participating in adventure travel?

— To give you an idea of what some of these unique and usually off-the-beaten-path trips are like, we've compiled a list of 12 "adventures" below. Most are professionally guided, and all are available to travelers this spring and summer.

— Remember the romance of railroad travel? Find it all again and then some on the famed Patagonia Express. Leave your worries behind, relax and enjoy this weeklong odyssey from Santiago to the Argentine border. Besides the splendid scenery, expect to find some fabulous food. Sobek Expeditions; Angels Camp, Calif. 95222.

— On Etruscan roads, Roman roads, medieval roads, cart roads, dirt roads, mule paths, footpaths and through open fields, hike 140 miles from Italy's Monte Oliveto Maggiore to the Eternal City in about two weeks. You'll work up an appetite for picnics along the trail, and sleep like a baby at inns en route. The Alternative Travel Group; 1-3 George St., Oxford, England OX 12AZ.

— Visit primitive Tanzania in East Africa. From January through June, you can get a look at wildebeest herds and other wildlife on Tanzania's Serengeti Plains. Olduvai Gorge, where Louis and Mary Leakey discovered some of the earliest fossils of man, is also accessible, as is the 300-square-mile Ngongoro Crater, Africa's "Garden of Eden." African Classics; One East Wacker Dr., Chicago, Ill. 60601.

— If you're a woman over 30, explore Alaska's Denali National Park (formerly Mount McKinley National Park), and Prince William Sound on a week-long special group trip for women only. Fish, hike or search for bald eagles, seals, otters, kittiwakes and gold during the day. At night, eat that splendid salmon you caught and relax in a redwood hot-tub at base camp. Rainbow Adventures; 1308 Sherman Ave., Evanston, Ill. 60201.

— Week-long biking trips are available in many states, as are week-long trips in Vermont, for instance, you'll travel from country inn to

country inn, seeing some storybook, Grandma Moses scenery along the way, and dining on delectable New England cuisine at day's end. Bike Vermont, P.O. Box 207, Woodstock, VT 05091. Bicycle USA, 6707 White-stone Road, Baltimore, MD 21207.

For six days, participate in mountain sports. Ride horseback through Colorado's Wet Mountains, learn rock-climbing and, on 15-speed mountain bikes, explore the Sangre de Cristo range. Finally, hold onto your hat, and take a raft trip on the Arkansas River through Brown's Canyon. At night, sip yarns around the campfire. In the mornings, look forward to hearty, ranch-style breakfasts to get you going. American Western Experience, P.O. Box 1488, Boulder, Colorado 80306.

Aboard a spanking-new Royal River Barge, the Shannon Princess, cruise Ireland's River Shannon for six nights and seven days. See the glorious mountains of County Clare, take and excursion to Tipperary, and watch the sun go down on Galway Bay. Horizon Cruises Ltd., 16000 Ventura Blvd., Encino, Calif. 91436.

Fly over the biggest one of them all, Mount Everest, and spend three days in the rugged Annapurna range. While in the region, bask in the bustling atmosphere of Nepal's colorful and exotic capital city, Katmandu, located in a valley of the mysterious Himalayas. Sobek.

In the state of Rajasthan, check out the thousands of unusual mural designs inside and outside the mansions of the 18th- and 19th-century opium lords of India. Along with the expected depictions of Hindu gods, elephants, and camels, you'll also find elaborate paintings of Queen Victoria, Rolls Royces, bicycles, the Wright Brothers' airplane and Christ, smoking a cigar.

A photographer's and artist's paradise, the region of Shekhawati has not been "discovered" by tourist herds, and is not even mentioned in guidebooks. From October through June, visit Ranthambhor National Park and see if you can spot some of its resident tigers via game runs in an open jeep. Contact the India Government Tourist Office, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. or telephone (212) 566-4901.

Experience "The Baja Adventure," an eight-day bus tour starting out from San Diego and concluding at the southernmost tip of the peninsula, where the Pacific Ocean blends with the Sea of Cortez. You can also go whale-watching off Baja's seldom-visited islands along the Pacific coast, or take a wildlife cruise to the

wilderness waters of Mexico's west coast. Baja Adventures, 16000 Ventura Blvd., Encino, Calif. 91436.

If you're an angler, charter a boat and fish in the cold "Big-Sea-Water" of Lake Superior from May through September. Most charter boats carry four-six passengers, and prices range \$120-\$300, depending mainly on the number of hours you're out.

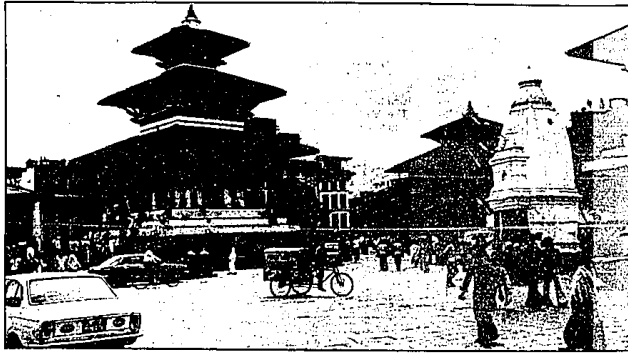
The captain of your charter provides equipment and bait, but will expect you to bring your own food and drink — and a portable cooler for those Chinook salmon and lake trout you'll be bringing in. Out of Duluth, Minn., the Captain's Association can help you plan fishing parties, arrange lodging discounts, and have your catch cooked to order at a local restaurant. Contact the Duluth Convention and Visitors' Bureau, 1-800-4-DULUTH.

If you've never tried white-water rafting, this might be the season you catch "rapid fever." This is an incurable malady manifested by an uncontrollable desire to quit your job and spend the rest of your life on whitewater trips.

If you win the lottery, and if you plan it just right, it's possible to follow the sun to year-around rafting, beginning in March in Texas' Big Bend country on the rolling Rio Grande. In April, get a taste of Arizona's Salt River, then spend until November on the northern Rio Grande in New Mexico, and the Dolores, Gunnison, and Arkansas River in Colorado.

Later, shoot the rapids in Mexico, where Veracruz' rocky Rio Antigua is at its best for whitewater rafters in November and December, and the unpredictable Rio Usumacinta, which forms a part of the Mexico-Guatemala border, is at its peak in February.

While traveling down the Usumacinta, you'll be serenaded by the cries of parrots, scarlet macaws and howler monkeys. You're also apt to find yourself face-to-face with an alligator now and then. Suburbia was never like this. Far Flung Adventures, P.O. Box 31, Terlingua, Texas 79852.



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... or you could stay closer to home and spend time playing cowboy on a dude ranch.

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