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Singles travel groups

Fighting the loneliness of the long-distance traveler

NETWORK. An interesting word. In television, it means a group of transmitting stations tied together into a single organization. In the women's move-

ment, it has come to mean many individual women working together as a support system. Travelers, especially single travelers, need just that kind of network to exchange both experiences

and information.

You have probably read about travel organizations for singles. Travel Companion Exchange, Singles/Savers. The problem is that you don't know how to evaluate such organizations, how to determine whether they are appropriate for you. You need an information-exchange network, and this column is as good a place as any to start.

I'm going to tell you about some of these organizations. I invite you to share any information you may have on these or other organizations, and on your own experience as single travelers.

Singleworld seems to be the oldest and most established travel organization for singles. It was started 25 years ago by a man called Richard Lowenstein, who offered bachelor parties and tours, primarily on weekends, for men.

Singleworld now offers dozens of tours on land and sea for men and women of all ages. In its 1983 catalog there were 13 land tours and 16 cruises.

The ages of Singleworld participants range from late teens to retirees. Trips are divided into "under 35" and "all ages." The "all ages" trips lean toward the 40-60-year-olds, according to Manager Peter Cardillo.

The most popular trips are cruises, where the group might number anywhere from 10 to 200 passengers. Only singles need apply. Singleworld finds you a roommate and guarantees you a single room if such a roommate is not found.

They work with many major cruise lines. You might save a little money over the regular cruise or air/cruise rates, but the main advantage is the instant companionship available through the Singleworld group. Women should know that the ratio of women to men is likely to be 85 percent women and 15 percent men, much as it is on any cruise, but sometimes the numbers are reversed.

Land tours are likely to be 75-25 percent. They go to Europe, Hawaii, California, Colorado and French Canada, with Europe topping the list. The tours include guides, side trips at extra cost



1-of-a-kind
traveler
Iris
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travel editor

etc., but the main advantage is meeting other singles. Singleworld is sold through travel agents, just like any other tour operation. Membership costs \$15 per year. It is definitely not set up to be a dating game.

The Travel Companion Exchange (TCE), however, run by Jens Jurgen of New York, has the earmarks, for better and for worse, of a dating system. The model for this new service is The Arts World, which Jurgen now owns: "devoted exclusively to matching interesting and cultured single, divorced and widowed females with males and vice versa."

Your membership fee in the TCE is \$18 for six months, \$30 a year, plus you into the network. You fill out a detailed personal profile about yourself, your travel habits and interests, whether you would like to host "travel pals" in your home town area, etc.

A 50-word mini-profile of all members goes to all other members, updated regularly. If you are interested in knowing more about one of the members profiled, you request the full, detailed profile from Jurgen, who charges \$1 each for the first five profiles, 50 cents thereafter. Some of the profiles have photos on them.

The rest is up to you. You can contact, or be contacted by any member in or out of your area. Jurgen recommends that you talk on the phone, and preferably meet, before you try to travel together.

To answer some of the most obvious questions: Yes, men ask for women, and women ask for men. People also ask for members of the same sex. If

you don't want your detailed profile sent to a member of the opposite sex, it won't be.

You are asked to indicate whether you will share a room, want separate rooms, are flexible, want connecting rooms, want a strictly platonic relationship, would like an intimate companionship, given the right person.

Jurgen started this Exchange in the fall of 1982, but didn't really get going until early 1983. By April he had "200 members and thousands of letters of interest." Ages range from 20s to retirees; most are in their 40s and 50s.

The Travel Companion Exchange is at Box 833, Armitville, N.Y. 11701. Singles/Saver, started by Compac Systems Inc. to help a single traveler find another single traveler with whom to share accommodations, has gone out of business.

The problem is that you don't know how to evaluate such singles travel organizations, how to determine whether they are appropriate for you. You need an information-exchange network, and this column is as good a place as any to start.



IRIS SANDERSON JONES

The sea, the sky, the ship — together they can make for romantic settings like this. Singles travel groups can fill in the missing element — someone of the opposite sex.

Adventurous trips await

The mail bag is full of adventurous trips for those of you who love to dive, do white water rafting and otherwise enjoy the great outdoors when you travel.

ViaRail Canada has a whitewater rafting trip scheduled for several different dates this spring and summer. Guides from Whitewater Rafting Limited will take 12 adventurers through the rapids with departures on May 14, 19, June 11, July 2, 12, 19, August 6, 15, 27.

The groups leave from Toronto and spend one and one-half days on the river. Fares from Windsor are \$250 during the week, or on weekends in May, \$278 on weekends the rest of the season.

The tours leave Toronto at 9 a.m., so you will probably have to overnight there. An alternative is to take a \$95 per person package, which gives you round trip rail to Toronto and a hotel in Toronto. You can then join the group in Toronto for \$220 weekdays or \$235 weekends.

ViaRail also offers canoeing trips into northern Ontario, with departures from Toronto July 8, 15, 22, August 5, 12, 19. Each group will travel 16 hours by train through the wilderness, and spend seven days on the water.

The train leaves Toronto on the transcontinental run at 11:59 p.m. on a Friday evening and returns to Toronto at 7 a.m. in the morning, so no overnight is required in this case. The fare from Windsor is \$555. For information, call 983-6037.

I have always been a little confused about SOBEK and the rafting organization OARS, but there is no doubt that they are among the top adventure travel groups in the country. Their 1983 schedule of rafting trips in Arizona, California, Idaho, Oregon, Wyoming and Utah is available from P.O. Box 67, Angel's Camp, California 95222 or by calling 209-736-4677.

Their trips cost roughly \$100 a day plus air fare. Apart from their regular 1-18 day rafting trips, they offer cave adventures in California, helicopter skiing in Utah and a 12-26 day trip called "Western Frontiers." They also do specialty trips on the middle and north forks of the American River in California.

Sobek has new pieces of information in the mail. They have published The Adventure Book, photos and copy of some of the best trips around the world, available for \$14.95 from bookstores or \$5 with a membership of \$30 in Sobek's International Explorer's Society.

Sobek is also looking for funding for films on the wildest and most interesting rivers around the world. The funding is solicited "through a limited partnership offering," which I take to mean that contributors can be involved in the filming. If you want to confirm that, write to Sobek Productions, Angels Camp, CA. 95222.

— Iris Sanderson Jones

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