



## **TRAVELERS FIND INSPIRATION, OUTDOOR CHALLENGES ON TOURS, PACKAGES From Mountain Heli-hikes to Diving with Sea Lions**

"I could do more than I thought. This is the beginning of a new life for me."  
– Trudy Thornton, early 70's, Bowie, Maryland.

"I had no idea what I was getting into."  
– Carol Marosovich, mid-50's, Darien, Illinois.

"The most incredible thing we did was swimming with sea lions."  
– Erica Weldon, mid-40's and kids, New York City.

Anyone who thinks that tours are all about sitting on a motorcoach is way behind the times, reports Bob Whitley, president of the U.S. Tour Operators Association. Nearly two out of three tour operators responding to a recent USTOA member survey said that adventure travel is on the rise. And in keeping with the trend, tour operators are increasingly incorporating adventure and active options in their itineraries.

USTOA interviewed a sampling of travelers who had selected tours and packages where nature, activity and soft adventure were all part of the trip.

### **Heli-hike the Canadian Rockies**

- **Ken and Trudy Thornton, mid 70's** of Bowie, Maryland, took a tour that included staying in a lodge in the Canadian Rockies reachable only by helicopter.. "I'm athletic and I like to get out in the fresh air and climb hills," Ken reports. "On this trip, I could get in a helicopter and fly to 10,000 feet and walk along the mountain ridges. It was one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. This is all the beginning of a new life for me now," he said. Trudy, on the other hand, who experienced her first helicopter experience ever, opted to spend her days at the lodge enjoying the hot tub, and other amenities.
- **Carol Marosovich, mid-50's, of Darien, Illinois**, decided to try a heli-hiking tour for a repeat trip to the Canadian Rockies. "I thought this is something different. I had no idea what I was getting into. The heli-hiking is phenomenal. They took us by helicopter into the mountains for two nights where there are no people, just a little lodge. The guides were big time glacial skiers, and really know these mountains. There are mountains and glaciers as far as you can see, with cascading water and waterfalls," Carol said. Cocktail hour entertainment was a bear and a porcupine in the wild, accompanied by the sound of waterfalls in the background, she added.

### **Families Explore Western Hemisphere Seas**

- **Swimming with Sea Lions on a Baja Expedition - Erica Weldon, mid-40's and her two children (aged 8 and 11 at the time) of New York City** took a tour operator-organized ship expedition around Baja California, visiting the Sea of Cortez. "Passengers were transported on Zodiacs to explore smaller islands. The adults went on longer hikes inland, to the desert area, and the kids on a shorter one, closer to the shore, where they

learned about nature and wildlife. “They will remember this forever. The most incredible thing we did was swimming with sea lions. We had our snorkeling stuff on and they were swimming all around us. I would never have seen these things without this adventure,” she said.

- **Diving and snorkeling with sea turtles and sea lions was a highlight for the Spallek family, (Gisella and Heiko, early 40s, children 5 and 8 at the time, of new Castle, PA) on a Galapagos Islands tour.** “It was our first time ever taking a trip like this. If you have any appreciation for nature, this is an incredible experience. The animals are not afraid. You can walk up to them and observe very closely. My little one, who was 5 at the time, couldn’t get her head out of the water. She was just fascinated with the sea lions, who come right up to your face,” said Mrs. Spallek. Last year the Spalleks followed up with a two week tour to Alaska.

#### Travelers of all ages enjoy adventure

“There are any number of adventures and activities open to travelers of all ages on tours and packages, from walking tours to yoga packages, raft excursions to safaris,” says USTOA’s Whitley. According to Whitley, people who would have never thought of a tour or vacation package find that it’s much easier to do something like helihiking or visiting the Galapagos through a tour or vacation package than to try to organize it independently. “The tour operator takes care of all the details so that you can enjoy the experience itself. And tour operators report there is a high return factor once people discover they can enjoy their adventures without the hassles of making all the arrangements,” Whitley says.

Travelers can search for a tour or vacation package geared to their activity of choice on the USTOA web site --[www.ustoa.com](http://www.ustoa.com) or [www.ustoa.travel](http://www.ustoa.travel) – where they can find a drop-down listing of tour operators by activity and interests, from archeology to winter sports.

USTOA’s 150 brand members are responsible for the vacations of 11 million people yearly. The organization’s corporate members have met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participating in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which, among other things, requires each member to set aside \$1 million to protect consumers in case the company goes out of business. For more information on tours and vacation packages and for a listing of USTOA members visit [www.ustoa.com](http://www.ustoa.com) or [www.ustoa.travel](http://www.ustoa.travel).

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