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[Adventure travel is on the move](#)

MEGAN K. SCOTT Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — Forget the tan, the Mickey Mouse photos and the cliché souvenirs.



A herd of elephants walk in front of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Amboseli game park in Kenya.

AP photo

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These days, travelers want to experience something more than the gated resort and the cruise ship buffet. They want to go on a walking tour, climb a mountain and kayak down a river — adventures that can make a vacation more meaningful.

“In travel, people are increasingly seeking the authentic unique experiences that stretch the imagination and create potent memories that last a lifetime,” says Chris Doyle, vice president of the Adventure Travel Trade Association. According to the organization, adventure travel is the fastest-growing segment of the leisure travel industry.

Of course, adventure is in the eye of the traveler, and ranges from a walking tour to whitewater rafting. But because of that, it remains relatively unaffected by the weak dollar and economic downturn, says David Larkin, managing director of AdventureUs.com, a social networking and directory for adventure travelers.

Here, according to the experts, are some of the latest trends in adventure travel.

GIRLFRIEND GETAWAYS: More women are leaving the men at home. More than 50 percent of adventure travelers are women and most fall between ages 41 and 60, according to a 2006 survey by the association. “We used to think of active holidays for 20-somethings,” says Evelyn Hannon, creator of [journeywoman.com](#), an online travel resource for women. “Now it’s not unheard of for 50- and 60-year-olds to be going kayaking, mountain climbing, surfing.”

VOLUNTEER VACATIONS: Combining volunteerism with vacation continues to be a growing trend; Global

Volunteers saw a 30 percent increase in participation last year, according to co-founder Michele Gran. Baby boomers still rule, she says, but the fastest-growing demographic in the last 18 months has been people under age 20.

EXPEDITIONARY TRAVEL: More people are helping researchers through the Earthwatch Institute, an international volunteer organization supporting science. Expeditions include surveying coral reefs on a remote Bahamian island or feeding and caring for cheetahs in Namibia. Most of the trips are two weeks, and no special training is required. (Exceptions may be trips that require scuba-diving certification or a high fitness level.) .

CHARITY TRAVEL: Think an extreme version of a walkathon. Venture Expeditions, a Christian-based organization, sponsors trips to raise awareness and funds for various organizations, such as biking through Thailand to raise money for an orphanage. Travelers pay for the trip and then make a minimum donation to the charity.

FAMILY ADVENTURE VACATIONS: Some families (including multigenerational) are forgoing theme parks and all-inclusive resorts for “more genuine nature-based, cultural, and education and learning excursions,” says Doyle. He attributes this in part to baby boomers who have the means to travel “coupled with a strong interest in bonding more deeply with families.” GordonsGuide.com, a Web site on adventure and active travel, says the top vacation requests are all family friendly.

AFRICAN TRAVEL: While the Kenya Tourist Board says the sporadic and isolated violence has calmed and tourists were never in danger (the situation was internal and occurred in places where tourists generally don't go), there has been a downturn in tourism in Kenya and some spillover to other countries in East Africa, says Wil Smith, director of Deeper Africa, a tour operator with trips to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

When the region recovers, look for more people to go gorilla tracking in Uganda and Rwanda, visit Ethiopia, an emerging destination, and climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

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