

Roots vacations among popular holidays today

NEW YORK

Forget the tan, the Mickey Mouse photos and the cliché souvenirs.

These days, travellers 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 traveller, 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 travellers.

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 per cent of adventure travellers are women and most fall between ages 41 and 60, according to a 2006 survey by the ATTA.

"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 per cent 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, more than likely baby boomers who bring their children with them.

EXPEDITIONARY TRAVEL

More people are helping researchers through the Earthwatch In-

stitute, 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.)

Other examples include conservation-minded tours to watch giant sea turtles lay their eggs in coastal areas of the southeastern U.S., Mexico and Costa Rica.

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. Travellers pay for the trip and then make a minimum donation to the charity.

ACTION-PACKED VACATIONS

Some people call action-packed vacations "The Bucket List," for the movie starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, two terminally ill patients who want to complete a list of things to do before they kick the bucket.

Ultimate 5 Lifetime Adventures packs five of what it calls the world's greatest adventures into one week: a military-developed Ropes Challenge Course, skydiving, Indy car racing, rappelling and piloting a primary combat trainer aircraft.

FAMILY ADVENTURES

Some families (including multi-generational) 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 website on adventure and active travel, says the top vacation requests are all family friendly — dude and guest ranches, houseboat rentals, whitewater rafting and horse pack trips and trail rides.

SOFT ADVENTURE VACATIONS

An increasing number of people are choosing a vacation that centres



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This photo released by Global Volunteers shows Kana Maeji as she volunteers with children on her vacation in Ghana.

around a theme, such as a culinary tour in Asia or wine vacation in Israel.

Yoga has also seeped into the mix. Best of Both Women's Adventures has yoga on all of its trips and a specific yoga and surf vacation in Puerto Rico. (Surfing is one of the top activities that women want to do, says Dez Bartelt, co-founder of Best of Both Women's Adventures.) Other combinations include yoga and snowboarding or yoga and wine tasting.

EXPEDITION CRUISING

Look for more people to take expedition cruises to Antarctica, the Galapagos and Alaska, says Carolyn Spencer

Brown, editor-in-chief of CruiseCritic.com, three places that are hard to see without sailing there. The cruises, while less glitzy than big ship cruise lines, include lectures and presentations about the place.

"On an expedition cruise, everything revolves really around what you see off the ship," says Brown.

"On the big ship cruises, everything revolves around what happens on board and the ports are sort of an addendum."

ROOTS VACATIONS

With an increasing number of people swabbing their cheek to find their

roots, some are taking it a step further and travelling to the places where their ancestors lived.

Discover Natural Ancestry (amazingdna.com) not only provides DNA analysis and genealogy services, it puts people in touch with tour operators who plan the trip for them.

"If they are breathing, then they have a genetic story hidden within them and we help them to discover and explore the unknown secrets about their heritage," says Yvonne Walker, marketing director for Discover Natural Ancestry.

• Associated Press

Frog exhibit a real crowd-pleaser

WASHINGTON

With all due respect to Kermit, we think he had it wrong: It may, after all, be pretty easy being green — or sapphire blue or sunshine yellow or burnt sienna.

Consider how the star attractions of "Frogs! A Chorus of Colors" at Washington's National Geographic Museum spend their days: in tropical habitats surrounded by lush bromeliads disturbed only by the squeals of delighted children or the gasps of marvelling adults.

The exhibit features 150 live frogs in a variety of environments and interactive stations that allow children of all ages to be mesmerized by the nature show. On a recent weekday morning, 16-month-old Emerson LaOrden toddled up to see the African clawed frogs diving — webbed feet pushing the water aside — in their pond. Emerson's older brother Oscar, 3, said his favourite frogs were "the one that swims and the silly ones." He also liked the game that encourages kids to see how far they can jump and compare themselves to a frog.

Although the carefully laid-out exhibit has much for little kids (the habitats are

low, allowing a frog's-eye view for those as young as Emerson), there is also much to delight, inform and, well, gross out older kids.

A video of how frogs eat features a particularly graphic scene involving an African bullfrog and a mouse. Let's put it this way: It doesn't end well for the mouse.

Parents who remember dissecting frogs in high school biology may get a kick out of a kiosk on "virtual" dissection. There's no smell of formaldehyde as the computerized frog is splayed on its back; visitors can pick the tools needed to pin it down, cut through muscle and expose internal organs. (We warned you about the gross-out factor.)

The "Create a Chorus" station encourages visitors to explore frog sounds. Simultaneously pushing random buttons creates a headache-inducing cacophony, but listening to each individual sound reveals delights, such as the carpenter frog's claptrap cadence and the songbirdlike chorus of the spring peeper. And surprise, surprise: The pig frog sounds like... a pig.

But as cool as the interactive stations are, the stars are definitely the frogs. Check out three black-, white- and grey-speckled Amazon milk frogs breathing in

a lazy yet synchronized fashion while resting single file on a branch.

The horned frog is aptly named. Its green back is lushly mottled. Too fat to go searching for food, it instead cleverly waits for unsuspecting prey to wander by. The sign next to the exhibit says the frogs are called "little green bulldogs" because they will take on any invader, including humans, biting and holding on until they are pried off.

Be sure to save time for centrepiece of the exhibit, "Find the Frogs." The largest terrarium of the show holds 75 vibrantly coloured poison dart frogs, representing 11 species. Cameras in the floor-to-ceiling habitat let visitors zoom in and pan around to see as many of the multi-hued creatures as possible. Some are hiding among the dense foliage, while others crawl up the glass seeking attention.

The exhibit ends with dazzling frog photography by Mark W. Moffett that suffers only by the comparison of having just seen the real thing.

"Frogs! A Chorus of Colors," runs through May 11 at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C.

• Washington Post News Service



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A White's Tree Frog from Australia sits in its exhibit last month at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's Rainforest.

FUN FROG FACTS

- A seven-pound goliath frog can jump 10 feet.
- A golden poison frog, appropriately named *terribilis*, has enough poison on its skin to kill 20,000 mice — or 10 people. That makes it one of the most poisonous animals on Earth.
- All toads are frogs, but not all frogs are toads.
- The smallest frog in the exhibit, the golden mantella, grows to be an inch long.

SOURCE: "FROGS! A CHORUS OF COLOURS" EXHIBIT

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