

So happy together

By Celia Shatzman for USA TODAY

Maybe you'd love to travel with friends but can't coordinate everyone's schedules, or maybe you want to take a trip without your family but still want the security of a group. Maybe it's a time thing: you love to travel but can't plan a full vacation.

That's where group travel comes in, and we're not talking just about snooze-worthy bus tours. Instead, it's a fully customizable way to see the world (and maybe make a few friends along the way). >>



▶ WALKING THE WORLD

WALKING WALKING THE WORLD

walkingtheworld.com, 970-498-0500

“We use walking as a way to experience as many unique destinations as we can,” says Ward Luthi, founder of Walking The World. “Walking allows us to intimately experience every place we go: to smell the lavender in Provence, to visually savor the beauty of a field of sunflowers in Italy, to safely view lava fields in Hawaii, and to stop and talk with the locals wherever we are.” Walking The World’s focus is to introduce travelers to local people and their culture as much as possible. That’s why every trip includes two guides: one from Walking The World and a local guide who has lived in the area for years and introduces travelers to authentic foods, drinks, customs, and celebrations, through trips to olive oil presses, vineyards, farms, and bakeries. Walking the World arranges visits from lobstermen and fishermen, shepherds, artisans, chefs, and historians, and even dinners in the homes of locals.

Between 25 to 40 trips are offered each year, with prices ranging from \$1,695 to \$4,895, which typically include guides, meals, activities, and lodging but not airfare. Popular destinations include Arizona’s Sonoran desert, Mt. Rainier and the Olympic peninsula in Washington state, Ireland’s southwest coast, and the fjords of Norway.

EDUCATIONAL ROAD SCHOLAR

roadscholar.org, 800-454-5768

Since 1975, when Road Scholar began under the name Elderhostel, its goal has been to make lifelong learning accessible to all adults. The not-for-profit organization offers 8,000 programs each year in all 50 states and more than 90 countries worldwide. Costs are relatively low.

Road Scholar has a global network of university professors, teachers, specialists, and local experts who share their insider knowledge through interactive learning. A wide range of subjects and program types are available, including expeditions just for grandparents and grandchildren to take together.

Each journey is graded with an activity level from one to seven (seven is the most active) so that travelers can judge which trips suit their desired activity level and ability. Prices range from about \$400 for a three- or four-day program in the U.S. to several thousand dollars for an international trip lasting several weeks. The cost includes all lectures, field trips, excursions, cultural events, accommodations, most meals, travel during the program, a group leader, and gratuities and taxes.

A few of Road Scholar’s most popular tours are An Insider’s Perspective of London Theatre Aboard the Queen Mary 2; Classic Icons of China and Yangtze River Cruise; and New Orleans: America’s City of History, Culture, and Celebration.

ADVENTURE ELDER EXPEDITIONS

elderexpeditions.com, 877-923-5337

Dea Hagues founded Elder Expeditions in 2009 when she realized Baby Boomers were reaching retirement age but were still interested in globetrotting. “As a lifelong adventure traveler, I felt some concern as I approached 60 and suddenly found that the other folks in the adventure travel venues in which I had participated for many years were suddenly becoming younger and younger,” Hagues says.

Aimed at active seniors “who want something other than the tour buses,” all of Elder Expeditions’ trips include a minimum of three sports—from the basics like hiking, biking, and kayaking to more adventuresome options like dog sledding, snowshoeing, and camel safaris—combined with cultural and educational activities like Irish dance lessons, learning bow and arrow techniques from Tanzanian bushmen, and exploring wild game habitats in Africa and Asia.

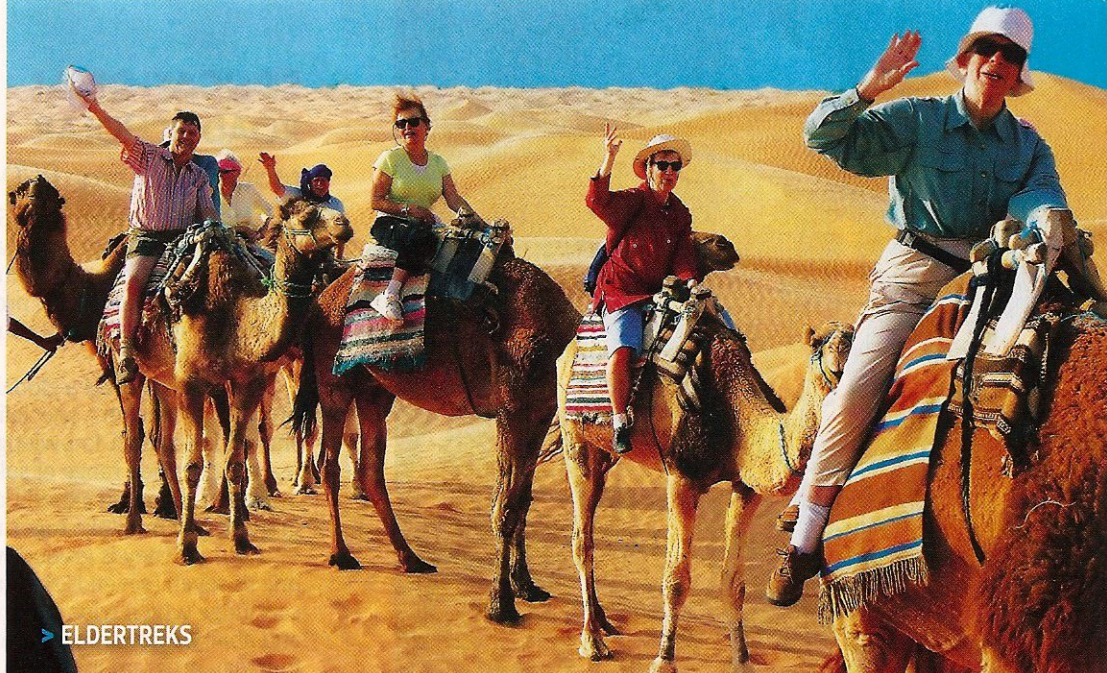
To prepare travelers for the journey, Elder Expeditions partners with Fit For Trips, a company that helps people maximize their fitness for their upcoming itinerary. Elder Expeditions offers between two to eight trips per year for all its destinations, and it has recently added Jordan, Poland, and Alaska to the roster. Prices range greatly depending on the location, activities, and type of lodging. Most meals are included in the price, but airfare is not.

WOMEN'S SENIOR WOMEN'S TRAVEL

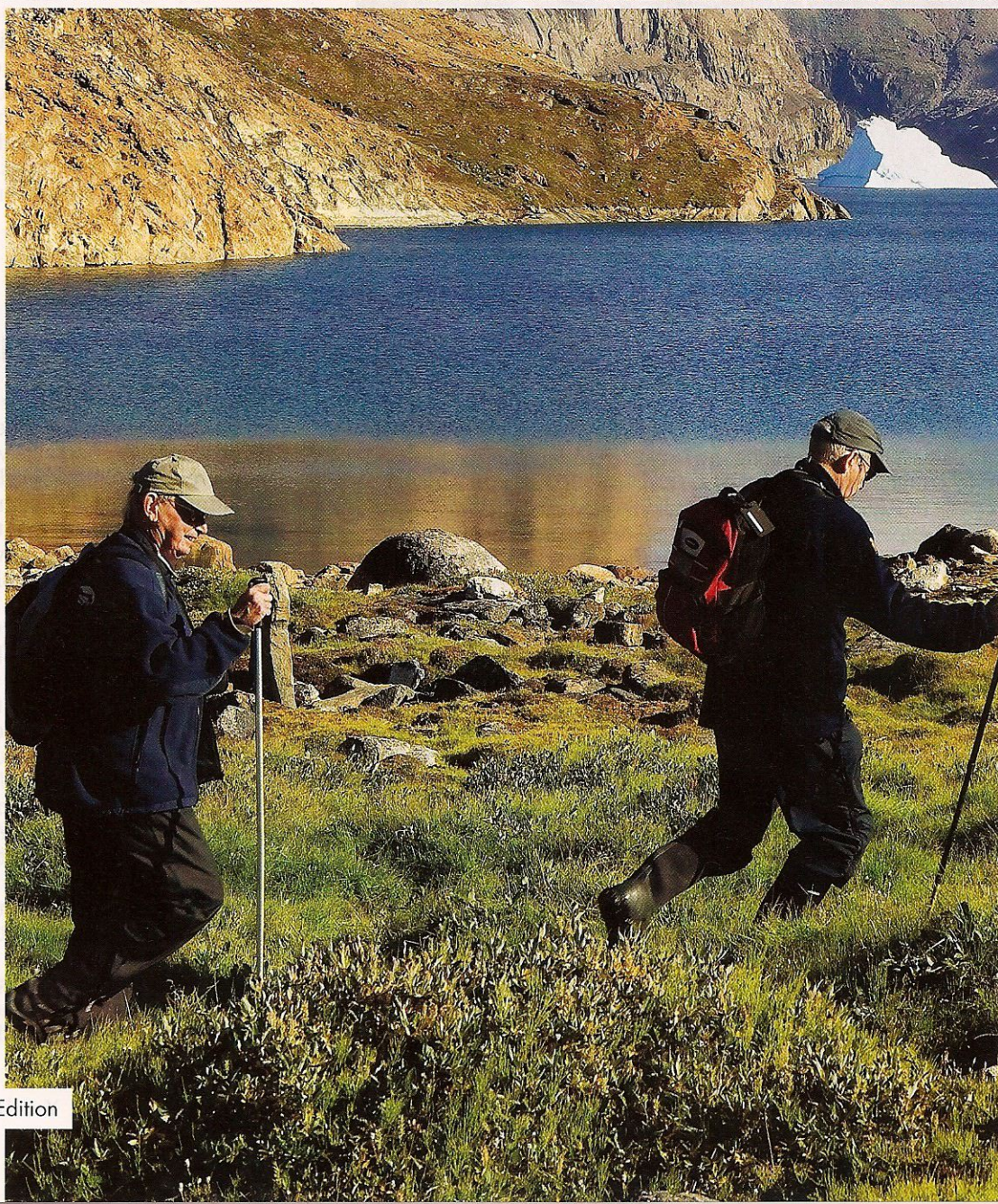
poshnosh.com,
917-880-6732

Sophistication and a sense of adventure are two qualities Mary Ann Zimmerman, president and founder of Senior Women's Travel, says her patrons possess. For 10 years, she's been catering to female travelers, some of whom are single and others whose husbands no longer want to travel. "My tours are upscale, for the senior woman who is still interested in fine food, fashion, cultural activities, music, art, and theatre," Zimmerman says. Senior Women's Travel offers about a dozen tours every year, with Paris, Venice, Berlin, and London topping the popularity list. "Each of those cities are exciting—there's always something new to see and learn even if you've been there dozens of times," Zimmerman says.

Other common destinations are theatre tours to New York City and London, literary trips to Paris and Venice, plus several culinary expeditions. She's also adding cruises. Tours typically run \$3,000 for a week, excluding airfare, and include expert local guides, most meals, and activities.



> ELDERTREKS



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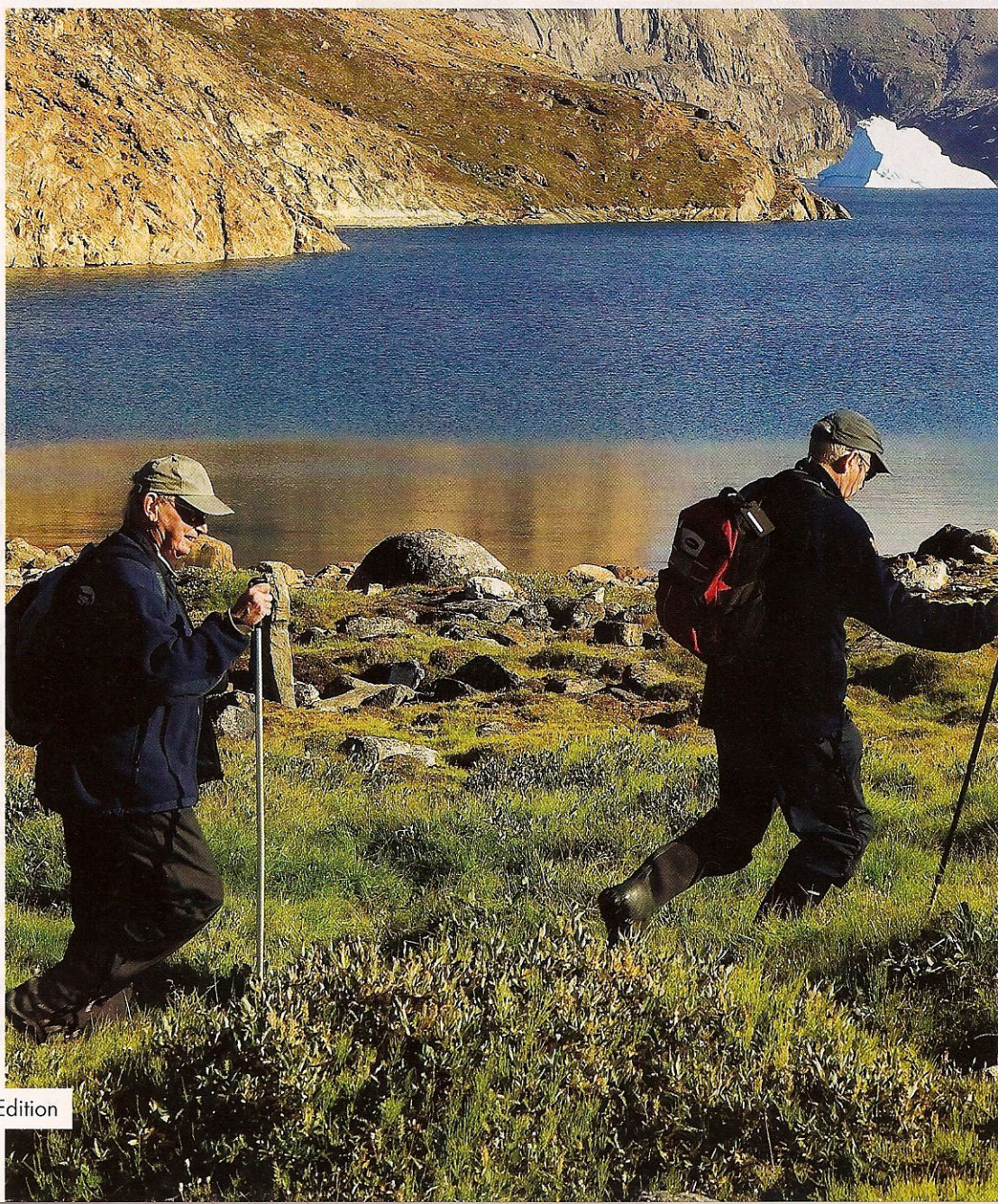
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EXOTIC ELDERTREKS

eldertreks.com, 800-741-7956

If you're looking for an Indiana Jones-esque getaway, ElderTreks can take you on a day hike through mountains or jungles to explore ancient ruins, a visit to local markets, a river journey by motorized longboat, a safari in Africa, or a local festival—all over the world.

“Even though we have great wildlife encounters on many of our adventures, we like to refer to our trips as cultural expeditions,” says Gary Murtagh, president of ElderTreks. “Our emphasis is not on any one aspect of a particular country but rather on the history, people, language, food, arts, and politics. The world is changing quickly but there are still exotic places to visit and to have an authentic experience.”

ElderTreks offers small-group travel, which allows more spontaneity. The trips are divided into different activity levels so patrons can choose the trip that best suits their lifestyle. ElderTreks offers over 500 departures to more than 100 countries and every continent. Destinations include Papua New Guinea, Iran, Mongolia, Peru, Tanzania, Burma, and Alaska, as well as expedition ships to both the Arctic and Antarctica. Trips average around \$300 per day, and include everything (accommodations, internal transportation, all meals, airport transfers, tour leaders, entrance fees, and activity fees) except for airfare.