

Wayfarers Ranked High by National Geographic Adventure

For the second straight year, The Wayfarers' walks have earned it a place on National Geographic Adventure's list of the *Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth*.

In its February 2009 issue, the magazine ranks The Wayfarers among the top ten outfitters for hiking and trekking, noting the 26-year-old company's early inspiration (the English countryside) and present pursuits (Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia).

To create the comprehensive list of top-tier outfitters, Adventure's editors considered service, spirit of adventure, education, sustainability and client satisfaction.

This year The Wayfarers introduces eight new itineraries, representing 16 new walks. Wayfarers' founders Michael West and Christopher Hague and their experienced walk leaders will chart new paths across Greece, India, Slovakia, Northern Ireland, England, Alaska, France, Spain and Italy.

Every trek includes local walk leaders, adventure and luxe experiences like winery tours and stays in historic manors. In 2009, The Wayfarers will offer a total of 83 walks through 18 countries in four continents. Call 800-249-4620 or visit www.thewayfarers.com.

Editor's Note: The Wayfarers offers not only eco-aware walking holidays that include both culture and fitness, but they've added Women-only Walks. These include opportunities for shopping, museums, spa treatments, and more. Walks range from 5-12 days and are rated easy to challenging, with distances of 4-5 miles, 6-10 miles or 12-15 miles per day.

A Travel Guru's Picks for Where to Travel in 2009

Mike Thiel, President and Founder of Hideaways International, Inc., has one of the coolest jobs on the planet. He spends the better part of the year traveling the world checking out hotels, resorts, and cruise lines to vet the best spots to recommend to members of his Hideaways Aficionado Club.

Thiel has these recommendations for the best places to discover or rediscover this year:

Best Places to Discover:

► **SECRET MEXICO**—Riviera Nayarit is the new name given to the stretch of beautiful beaches, luxury resort developments, and yet-to-be developed fishing villages north of Puerto Vallarta. It offers many sporting attractions (fishing, diving, surfing, wildlife viewing) and a wide selection of settings and accommodations, from large luxury resorts and villas to boutique hotels nestled in impossibly romantic settings.

► **CROATIA**—While Europeans have long known the many appeals of Croatia, Americans are just starting to make the acquaintance of this land of captivating contrasts, from Greek ruins to castle towns and even a wine-growing region. Here, travelers can enjoy the Dalmatian Coast, with its as far as the eye can see beaches, chic and cultured cities like Zagreb (the city of museums), and the peninsula of Istria, with its well-earned reputation as the country's gastronomic capital.

► **GUATEMALA**—If Belize and Honduras make travelers think, been there and done that, they are going to love Guatemala. This Central American country is bordered by Mexico, El Salvador, Belize, and Honduras as well as the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean and is just starting to see the development of luxury lodgings.

► **WASHINGTON WINE COUNTRY**—California may be the best-known destination for U.S. wine and wine-country getaways, but Washington State has quite an impressive number of toast-worthy offerings, and is often much more affordable than Napa and Sonoma (both per bottle and per night). The town of Woodinville, less than 30 miles north of Seattle, is truly toast-worthy with its rugged Pacific Northwest backdrop, lovely Sammamish River, and nearly two dozen tempting vineyards.

► **CRUISING**—While not technically a place to discover, cruising is definitely a travel experience



worth having in 2009. With unheard-of specials and once-in-a-lifetime deals, those travelers who have been thinking about cruising should take the plunge this year. Current offers go well beyond a simple discount and, often, include substantial shipboard credits, free airfare, and even complimentary shore excursions.

Best Places to Rediscover:

■ **JAMAICA**—This is an island that is definitely worth rediscovering. You can horseback ride, play golf, hike to waterfalls on an eco-tour, or just relax on the beach. Travelers can even choose their own luxurious staffed villa, either a private vacation home or one that is part of a villa resort and has access to complete resort facilities, perfect for a family or group vacation.

■ **THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**—Once thought of as a budget traveler's destination, the Dominican Republic (also known as the DR) is now offering a very appealing side for the more discriminating traveler with new luxe resorts entering the scene. This up-and-coming beach vacation destination offers up some of the best golf in the Caribbean as well as horseback riding, water sports, and other fun-in-the-sun pursuits.

■ **BERMUDA**—Although it still has the rather staid and proper image of afternoon tea and businessmen in knee socks and Bermuda shorts, Bermuda continues to be a classic choice for honeymooners and romantics as well as the more mature, sophisticated traveler. It's an emerald-green, reef-fringed isle with a cheerful island attitude, lively Caribbean tunes, and a proper British accent.

■ **ARUBA**—This is a smart choice for those looking for a basic sun-and-fun place to get away and recharge. The beaches along Aruba's southern coast are magnificent, and the beachfront hotels offer a full range of water sports. Travelers can explore the island's historic ruins and rock formations with a four-wheel-drive tour, or get a soaking with a horseback ride beside the waves.

■ **RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO**—Riviera Maya refers to the coastal fringe of the State of Quintana Roo. Like the rest of the Yucatan Peninsula, the interior

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of this area is a vast limestone plain covered with dense low jungle, home to a labyrinth of underground caves and rivers, as well as relics of Mayan civilization. The coast is dotted with small bays, inlets and lagoons, and beautiful stretches of sugar-white sand, and provides some of the most fabulous snorkeling, diving, and fishing in the world.

Hideaways International is a luxury travel company in business for 30 years. For information, visit www.Hideaways.com

A Hidden Gem in Jamaica

For some guests, Mocking Bird Hill Hotel is a dreamy spot for quiet, carefree honeymoons. For others, it's ideal for bird-watching or hikes through tropical forests or trips to the beach.

But for most guests, the appeal of this 10-room hotel is often peace. This is a hideaway for simple pleasures like lounging in hammocks or cooling off in the pool surrounded by trees and flowers and birdsong.

Nestled into a hillside just outside Port Antonio, in the northeast corner of Jamaica, but just 2 hours from Kingston, Mocking Bird Hill is an owner-managed hideaway where hosts Barbara Walker and Shireen Aga welcome guests into an informal breeze-cooled lobby filled with Barbara's paintings and sculptures. No imposing reception desk here—guests simply sign in when and where it suits them, over their welcome drinks, say, or cooling off beside the pool.

The 10 guest rooms create have cool white tiles, locally handcrafted bamboo furniture and hand-printed tropical fabrics while decorative mosquito nets add a touch of romance. Forget designer trendy, this is just understated elegance with Caribbean flair. But the amenities add extra little welcomes like coffeemakers, chocolate tea balls and Jamaican body care products.

What eco-conscious guests will not find are gizmos like TVs and telephones that can disturb the peace or plastic bottles and air conditioners that can ruin the atmosphere.

The Mille Fleurs Restaurant overlooks the garden and the eponymous "thousand flowers," with views of the Caribbean in one direction and the Blue Mountains in the other. Every dish is prepared with locally grown food. Well, how often do you get to tuck into sweet potato and tomato soup or home-made cassava pastas?

Mocking Bird Hill may have only 10 rooms, but its owners have won 14 international awards for their dedication to sustainable tourism. Not the spartan kind of eco-tourism that calls for cold showers and toilets down the hall but the kind of responsible programs that match sustainability with affordable comforts (rates begin at \$255 a night double in winter).

For information and rates, visit www.hotelmockingbirdhill.com

Help with Planning Girlfriend Getaways

With girlfriend getaways accounting for approximately four percent of all American leisure travel spending, many women are seeking trips to relax, rejuvenate and bond with their closest friends. Where do they start?

A web site created by entrepreneur and motivational speaker Renie Cavallari, www.givetoyourself.com, provides women with details on the top girlfriend getaway packages around the country, including featured amenities, special girlfriend package components and pricing.

"Whether your idea of fun with the girls is a relaxing spa retreat, shop-til-you-drop in the big city or playing cowgirl at a dude ranch resort, there is a girlfriend getaway available to pamper you and your girlfriends," says Cavallari.

The site also sells Cavallari's book, *The Official Girlfriends' Getaway Guide*.

Givetoyourself.com also offers a variety of "giving to yourself" resources including information about stress busters, nutrition and soul thinking. The site also features interactive quizzes including the "Girlfriend Reality Check" and "Give Yourself Permission" designed to motivate women to take a break and put their own needs first.

"Women benefit immensely from escaping their everyday personal and professional responsibilities and bonding with female friends," says Cavallari. "The important first step is giving



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yourself permission to take that much-needed and well-deserved break."

A recent survey conducted by AAA and Cavallari's consulting company, Aspire, found that 24 percent of American women have taken a girlfriend getaway in the past three years, and 39 percent of American women plan on taking one in the next three years. The study revealed that girlfriend getaways are not just a trend but, a business segment bringing in approximately \$6 billion annually.

For information, visit www.aspiremarketing.com.