

Plan your own outdoor European holiday

To most travellers perhaps, a summer holiday is a time to rest, relax and be entertained. But to a growing number, it's an opportunity for an active, outdoor adventure.

The choice of specialized holidays for such travellers is expanding season by season - hiking tours, dude-ranch vacations, bicycling or rafting trips and so on.

And while travel "packagers" are eager to sell you one of their many pre-planned itineraries, complete with reserved accommodation at the end of each day's adventure, it is of course possible to plan and carry out your own independent outdoor holiday.

In the Alpine regions of Europe, for example, the highly developed railway network makes it easy to get to the shores of a mountain lake or to a village in a valley. At most railway stations in such countries as Switzerland and Austria, bicycles are available for rent, and in some cases they can be returned at another station.

It's easier still to use two legs rather than two wheels. Well maintained paths are clearly marked in most of the Alpine regions, maps are readily obtainable and it's often possible to have luggage sent ahead from one village to the next.

IN BRITAIN

Britain, too, has a multitude of footpaths - some of them once used by Roman legions and medieval traders - passing through such picturesque regions as the Lake District, the Cotswolds, the West Country and the Cornish coasts.

The independently minded can travel alone at their own pace. On the other hand, walkers can sign up with one of several commercial tour organizers (British Coastal Tours Inc. is one example) and pre-pay the cost of overnight ac-

commodation in a country inn, meals and the services of a guide.

British Tourist Authority, 94 Cumberland St., Toronto, M5R 3N3, (416) 961-8124, can supply full details on walking holidays, both independent and group.

Each person's selection must be governed by decisions as to the degree of "roughing it." Old hands might choose to sleep under canvas, while first-time trekkers may well prefer inns or hotels and the sense of security that group-membership imparts.

Whatever the choice, a pre-vacation medical checkup is advisable, as is common sense: If you are accustomed to the sedentary life, don't plan a strenuous adventure in a remote area without plenty of preparation.

GET A HORSE

The popularity of holidays on horseback has been rising steadily in recent years, although riding trips are one of the oldest forms of sport and recreation.

For the 67th consecutive year, such holidays are being offered by Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies, Box 6742, Station D, Calgary, T2P 2E6, (403) 263-6963. Different itineraries are available for various levels of riding experience and skills: participants might, for example, be accommodated in tepees in the Panther River Valley, a remote section of Banff National Park.

The West abounds in vacation

spots specializing in horse-oriented holidays. One well known resort group is called Old West Dude Ranch Vacations, represented by American Wilderness Experience Inc., P.O. Box 1486, Boulder, Col., 80306. Most of the 29 ranches are in Colorado, with a few in Montana, Wyoming and Arizona.

But the West doesn't have a monopoly on dude ranches. A couple of years ago, touring Quebec's Temiscouata Valley on the south shore of the St. Lawrence not far from Quebec City, I was surprised to come across the Western-style Ranch des Montagnards.

Despite its name, there are no mountains nearby - just rolling hills, fragrant forests and a sparkling lake. Visiting dudes can sign up for wilderness rides ranging from half-day to five days, while non-riders staying at the ranch can enjoy such activities as swimming, canoeing, fishing and the like. Details from Arlene Thibault at (418) 899-2863.

FAR-AWAY PLACES

More and more "adventure" holidays combine healthy, outdoor activity with a close-up look at exotic destinations.

One example is an equestrian holiday in Australia scheduled for late November and early December by Adventure Trails of the West, P.O. Box 1494, Wickensburg, Ariz., 85358 (602) 684-3106. The down-under itinerary takes in a guest ranch, wildlife

preserve, tropical rain forest and an optional white-water raft trip.

Tokyo Tours, 67 Richmond St. W., Suite 205, Toronto, M5H 1Z5, (416) 363-6363, is operating two 14-day cycling tours of rural Japan, departing Oct. 14 and Nov. 4.

Cost is \$4,295, including airfare from Toronto to Osaka and return, accommodation in village inns (which usually means sleeping on mats on the floor), most meals, use of a mountain bike and the services of two guides. Groups range from seven to 16 participants.

Backroads Bicycle Touring, P.O. Box 1626, San Leandro, Calif. 94577, (415) 895-1783, organizes cycling tours for beginners, intermediate and advanced riders, in scenic regions from Alaska to New Zealand. Throughout July and August it is offering five-night itineraries of the Canadian Rockies, using Banff as the base, with accommodations in either tents or hotels and cabins.

The company describes Alberta's 230-km Highway 93 (Icefields Parkway) as one of the finest bicycling roads in the world.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Also based in Banff are the

Icefield tours organized by Timberline Bicycle Tours, 3261 South Oneida Way, Denver, Col. 80224, (303) 759-3804. Its tours, covering many of the popular points in the Canadian Rockies, depart July 9 and 22, Aug. 6 and 20.

Still other companies that coordinate such cycling tours are Ride the Rockies Bicycle Touring Ltd., Box 6866, Station D, Calgary, T2P 2E9, (403) 278-9823, and Rocky Mountain Cycle Tours Ltd., Box 1978, Canmore, Alta., T0L 0M0, (403) 678-6770.

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