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# Girlfriends' getaways a booming trend in travel

## More women take a variety of vacations, and leave their men at home



Tricia Defossey / Go Eco Traveler / AP

Women-only travel itineraries include activities like yoga, hiking, surfing and cross-country skiing.

**AP** Associated Press

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NEW YORK - Girlfriends' getaways — where women [travel](#) with other women and leave the menfolk home — are booming. And the phenomenon is not just about bachelorette parties or 20-somethings on spring break.

Women are taking knitting trips, [adventure](#) trips and spa trips. The Fine Living Network is launching a series on April 24 called "All-Girl Getaways," hosted by Stephanie Oswald, editor-in-chief of travelgirl magazine. And Marybeth Bond, the author of "50 Best Girlfriends Getaways in North America," has just written a sequel — "50 Best Girlfriends Getaways Worldwide."

Bond, who has been tracking data since 1993, said there has been a 230 percent increase in the number of women-only travel companies in the past seven years. And many women who are taking girlfriends' getaways are married — but leaving their husbands at home.

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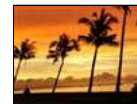
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Oswald said some women feel guilty about taking a vacation without their mates. But Bond said men often encourage their significant others to travel with other women to enjoy activities that husbands and boyfriends may not be interested in — whether it's shopping, cooking classes or visiting a botanical garden or museum.

April Merenda, co-founder of Gutsy Women Travel, sees more time-pressed career women in their 30s and 40s taking girlfriends' getaways. But not everybody goes with friends; about 60 percent of her business is from women booking a solo trip. She said that her business is up 25 percent from last year.

There is also more multigenerational travel — Baby Boomers traveling with their daughters or even their mothers. Marcia Walker, 57, of Taylorsville, S.C., went on a 10-day tour to China earlier this year with her daughter and noticed other groups where women were shopping while their spouses waiting outside for them to finish.


"You don't have that burden," she said, adding that her ex-husband never wanted to travel unless he could drive there. "I didn't have anybody breathing down my neck."

The phenomenon of girlfriends' getaways and women traveling alone represents a cultural shift. Thirty years ago, women didn't vacation without their families, said Susan Eckert, founder and president of AdventureWomen, a travel company for women ages 30 and over. A woman who did travel without her husband was asked whether there was something wrong in the marriage, she said.

Traditionally, women planned [family vacations](#) where they were the ones "making sure everyone is happy, everyone is safe, everyone is entertained," said Oswald.

Meanwhile, men went camping, fishing or golfing with the guys, and teenagers started traveling too, with school and youth groups — while their parents footed the bill.

Video



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Now women are saying, "'It's my turn,'" said Bond. Because so many women work these days, they can afford to travel. At the same time, they've moved away from childhood friends and college roommates and they see travel as a way to reconnect. Going away with other women is an opportunity for them to really "recharge their batteries," said Oswald.

"They have never been more independent than they are now," said Allison O'Sullivan, managing director of The Women's Travel Club, which offers 60 destinations. The club's founder was a married woman who wanted to travel to other parts of the world that her husband wasn't interested in.

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**[Bond like never before on these girl getaways](#)**

The travel industry has responded to the demand. Abercrombie & Kent announced last week new women's only trips to places like India, China, the Bordeaux region of France, and Argentina. Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, along with several other hotel chains, are catering to women with amenities and special vacation packages.

"The industry has rolled out the red carpet," said Oswald. "Everyone is coming up with girlfriend getaway programs. I think that's a great sign that this is a phenomenon and not a trend. It's here to stay."

Here are some of the types of trips women are taking.

**SPECIAL INTEREST:** Some women's travel companies offer niche trips focusing on wine-tasting, running or even knitting. Sally Black, founder of StitchAwayTours, has been organizing knitting trips for several years to places like Scotland and London. Knitters visit sheep farms, yarn shops and yarn factories. "Knitting has such a great history to it," said Black. "There's so many different techniques that come to us from all over the world."

**LEARNING TRIPS:** All of Gutsy Women Travel's trips include something instructional, said Merenda, such as learning to prepare authentic Moroccan cuisine, creating an individual fragrance in Provence or painting handicrafts with local artisans in Costa Rica.

**PAMPERING:** One of the most popular types of travel among women is a pampering escape, said Oswald, whether it's a spa resort or a cruise. "Spas certainly provide that amazing atmosphere that lends itself to girls being able to share stories, spend time together and get pampered along the way," she said.

**ADVENTURE:** The average age of women on trips with AdventureWomen, which has been in business for 27 years, is between 50 and 55. "We scuba dive, we snorkel," said Eckert. "We do a horseback trip in Yellowstone. We're bringing back our cattle ranch trip." Softer adventure excursions include sightseeing tours to places like India, China and Greece.

**BIG CITIES:** Big cities, such as New York, Las Vegas, Boston and San Francisco, are popular girlfriends' getaway destinations, said Oswald. The cities are accessible and there's lots to do — shopping, museums, nightlife.

**ECO-TRAVEL:** Go Eco Traveler offers "green" trips to destinations like Aspen, Colo., and Montauk, N.Y. The itineraries avoid mega-hotel chains, opting instead for historic inns, solar-paneled farmhouses and smaller, independent hotels. They include activities like yoga, hiking, surfing and cross-country skiing; trip participants carry non-disposable water bottles and buy food from farmers.

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