

# TravelAgent

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## America's SOUTHWEST

Girlfriend getaways heat up in the desert BY JENNIFER MERRITT

IT'S BEEN 24 YEARS SINCE CYNDI LAUPER sang about how girls just want to have fun. It seems that mantra still rings true among many women in 2007, as 40 percent of 2,029 females plan to take a girls-only vacation within the next three years, according to a survey by AAA ([www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)) and Aspire ([www.aspireinnovativelearning.com](http://www.aspireinnovativelearning.com)), a training and consulting company.

This was the first time that the two companies have collaborated to release a survey, which was conducted online and via telephone, as well as through telephone focus groups, but the concept of girlfriend getaways is nothing new. The report found that 24 percent of women have taken such a trip in the past three years, prompted by a desire to bond with friends or family or to escape

the pressures of day-to-day life.

"Girlfriend getaways have gone from a multi-million dollar trend three years ago to a \$6 billion business segment today," says Renie Cavallari, chief inspiration officer and CEO of Aspire. As more and more women juggle work and home life, spending quality time with friends and family offers a fun way to escape from these pressures. Here are some examples of such trips, centered on outdoor activities, spas and gambling, for inspiration.

### Fun in the Southwestern Sun

One of the best places to construct such a trip is the Southwest region of the U.S., as it provides the types of getaways and activities women are looking for, says Cavallari. "In

addition, airfare into many of the most popular Southwest destinations like Scottsdale and Las Vegas offer competitive pricing as compared to New York City or San Francisco," she says. "There are direct flights from many destinations, which makes travel easier."

**WomanTours** ([www.womantours.com](http://www.womantours.com)) offers inn-to-inn road bike tours for women. One of its most popular in 2008 is to Death Valley National Park in parts of southern California and Nevada—February tours already are sold out, only leaving the November 2-7, 2008 trip available. "Lots of women want to do a tour in the off season and there aren't a lot of places to bike in the winter," Jackie Marchand, president of WomanTours, says of the trip's popularity.

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The trip kicks into gear on its second day, when guests undergo a tour orientation and bike from Rhyolite into Death Valley. Other stops include Scotty's Castle, Mosaic Canyon and Badwater. The trip requires a moderate cycling level, due to terrain that is relatively easy with two optional climbs. The trip's price is \$1,690 and includes five nights of lodging, five breakfasts, four picnic or sack lunches, four dinners, park entrance fees, cue sheets, van support and trained guides. WomanTours pays a 10 percent commission and agents can contact Jackie Marchand at 800-247-1444 or info@womantours.com with questions.

**Gutsy Women Travel** ([www.gutsywomentravel.com](http://www.gutsywomentravel.com)) offers a five-day "Secrets of Sedona" tour. On day one, guests arrive in Phoenix and are greeted by a native Sedona resident who orients guests to the region by leading a "meditation moment," followed by a discussion on the spiritual history of the region. Guests take in views of Oak Creek Canyon, Airport



New Mexico's Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa

Mesa and the Boynton and Long Canyons. In addition to a tour of the Grand Canyon, the trip includes a Jeep tour of some of Sedona's most sacred spots, which ends with a sage-burning ceremony meant to cleanse the body and spirit.

Departure dates for 2008 are April 29, October 28 and November 18. Next year's pricing is not yet available, but 2007 rates, which are sold out, varied from \$1,899 in November to \$2,159 in October. The trip includes four nights at the **Amara Resort and Spa** ([www.amararesort.com](http://www.amararesort.com)) in Sedona, four breakfasts, two lunches, one reception, two dinners, roundtrip airport transfers and a tour director throughout. Gutsy Women Travel pays a 10 percent commission and agents can call any reservations specialist at

866-464-8879.

For clients looking for a quick getaway, try New Mexico's **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa** (<http://tamaya.hyatt.com>) in Santa Ana Pueblo, which offers a two-night "Tamaya Experience" package. Priced at about \$750 for a two-night stay in

a standard guest room with sunset view, the promotion includes one breakfast for two, valet parking, \$20 of free play at the nearby Santa Ana Star Casino and a 25 percent discount on such resort activities as golf, horseback riding, spa services and bowling, as well as resort fees and taxes. The offer is valid until November 17. For special requests, contact the hotel concierge. It is suggested that spa reservations be made at the time of booking. Call the Tamaya Mist Spa at 505-771-6134. ■

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