



**4 GREAT**



**GETAWAYS**



**FOR**



**GROWNUPS**

OUTDOOR VACATIONS THAT MAKE ADVENTURE EASY

By CRAI S/BOWER



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Exploring the Grand Canyon without crowds or heat



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AUTUMN GRAND CANYON

# COOL-AIR HIKES AND RIDES

**I** WONDER IF ANY first-time visitor is ever quite prepared to behold the rim of the Grand Canyon. Widen your gaze and the canyon seems to go on forever. Narrow it and you discover fascinating details in every rock face.

I wanted to explore this Arizona landmark in myriad ways, and at a time when the air is cooler and crowds smaller, so I signed up for a six-day group tour in October with Austin Adventures, a Montana-based outfitter.

The trip is intended for people of average fitness (that's me), which makes it ideal for intergenerational groups of grownups. I'm joined by two of them: older couples with their adult children.



Descending the canyon on South Kaibab Trail

We've all been busy with just-tough-enough adventures by the time we get to the canyon, including kayaking on the Salt River and biking an easy, relatively flat 11 miles on the Peavine and Iron King trails near Prescott.

The Grand Canyon portion of the trip begins at the South Rim, where we are greeted by two Austin Adventures guides and enjoy a picnic lunch at the Abyss—a lookout point offering incredible views. That's followed by a mellow two-hour walk along the Rim Trail as vertical clouds toss lightning and drape heavy sheets of rain in the distance.

After a restful night in the Kachina Lodge at the rim, we descend into the canyon along the South Kaibab Trail for a four-hour hike. On the way, I note the park's botanical diversity—hardy cottonwoods and willows, plus lacy maidenhair ferns and other delicate flora.

On our last day, headed back to Phoenix, we stop to see the cliff dwellings of Montezuma Castle National Monument. These lofty limestone structures, built more than six centuries ago, are a spectacular reminder of the land's long history. It's just one more inspiring way to explore this extraordinary region.



Fat-tire biking in Mont-Tremblant

WINTER QUEBEC

# BIKES BUILT FOR SNOW

**C**ANADA'S LAURENTIAN Mountains in Quebec—about an hour's drive north of Montreal—remain my favorite winter destination, offering a range of snowy fun.

Downhill skiers know of the region

because of Mont-Tremblant, a premier alpine resort. Less well known is Parc national du Mont-Tremblant, a 583-square-mile winter paradise boasting more than 400 lakes. As a novice cross-country skier, I love its well-marked and -groomed trails, ranked by difficulty. Plus, the park offers accommodations from cabins to inns.

Of course, the Quebecois approach to recreation (and life!) is more about the rich experience than simple energy exertion, so as I ski, I enjoy each warming hut along the 3.5-mile Le Poète Trail. This is my kind of exercising.

But I also decide to try my hand at fat-tire biking—cycling that features bikes with bulbous wheels that allow pedaling over snow. I find that it takes more balance than a regular bike ride, especially on the downhills. Still, slipping through the paper birch sentries along the Diable River is a hoot. I ride for a bit, then return my two-wheeled steed to the shed and warm up by an outdoor fire with a hot toddy.

The area is a haven for ice-skating, too, thanks to its skating ribbons: meandering trails of smooth ice. You can lace up and glide into the forest at Parc régional Bois de Belle-Rivière, about an hour's drive from Mont-Tremblant. It's even better at night, when torches light the way for skaters.

Less active folks should know there are plenty of options for downtime here. Scandinave Spa in Mont-Tremblant has a campus of luscious hot pools, saunas and, yes, a napping room. Silence is encouraged, and with no Wi-Fi provided or cellphones allowed, you might feel transported back in time. →

SPRING BRITISH COLUMBIA

# WATCHING THE GRIZZLIES PLAY

**A** FEMALE GRIZZLY bear paddles from the shore across a wide swath of the Nekite River estuary to a small island, sniffs the air and retraces her swim. She shakes the water off her back, scampers onto a granite ledge and sniffs once more. We observe this ritual from our 16-foot aluminum boat about 100 feet away.

“She’s looking for someone,” observes our guide, Tom Rivest, the co-founder and head guide of Great Bear Lodge, the floating nature center that arranged this expedition.

As if on cue, the sow thrusts her snout in the air, then breaks into a lumbering sprint along the shoreline toward, we discover, a 450-pound male grizzly who’s nonchalantly sampling fresh



Relaxing at the remote Great Bear Lodge



shoots. Romance is in the air.

This lodge in the Vancouver Island region of British Columbia seeks to help visitors observe grizzlies in their native habitat with minimal intrusion. To that end, it books no more than 16 guests for three nights at a time for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. In spring, when I visit, visitors from all over the world arrive by floatplanes from Port Hardy. It’s a lovely setting,

with gorgeously prepared meals—from cedar-plank salmon to rack of lamb—and potted flowers brightening the wraparound deck.

All nice, but I’m here to stalk bears. So I’m thrilled that we embark on two three-hour boat outings per day, plus a daily land excursion. We borrow insulated suits, so staying warm is never a concern. I do learn that spending so long in a boat takes some stamina, though there’s no pressure to join every outing. The porch often beckons.

But evening outings can be magical. One night we find several grizzlies dining on sedge grass and grubs. When I take a burst of photos, the male is surprised. He turns, raises one paw, puffs once or twice, then returns to feeding before ambling down a log, out of sight.

SUMMER APPALACHIANS

# SCENIC MOUNTAIN WALKS

**I’M FINALLY** exploring a place I’ve wanted to see for years, the Appalachian Mountains, drawn by the rich natural tapestry that spreads across Tennessee and North Carolina and as

far north as Newfoundland. Yet, having reached a certain age, I’m not eager to lug a 60-pound-plus backpack full of equipment as I clamber up mountains.

Enter the Wildland Trekking Company, which offers a three-day porter-assisted backpacking trip in North Carolina’s Pisgah National Forest—exactly the help I need.

My group sets out upon the Art Loeb Trail, a beautiful 30.1-mile journey that ascends the rolling mountaintops through the Shining Rock Wilderness toward Black Balsam Knob and the

6,040-foot Tennent Mountain.

After a dinner of pasta puttanesca at our campsite (chairs and provisions are waiting for us there) with our guide, Kyle, we take a 20-minute walk to Shining Rock, a small quartz outcropping that had glimmered from the Blue Ridge Parkway in the morning. We climb on top and linger to watch the low clouds form the haze over the adjacent Great Smoky Mountains. There’s no evidence of civilization to be seen.

Tomorrow we’ll hike at a leisurely pace, enjoy views of Mount Mitchell—at 6,684 feet, the tallest peak in the entire range—and pause to photograph wild columbine, brilliantly lit orange fungus and waterfalls that, like their witnesses, flourish within the Pisgah forest. ■

*Crai S. Bower is an award-winning travel writer and photographer who favors adventures in his native Pacific Northwest and British Columbia.*



Hiking in North Carolina’s Pisgah National Forest

FROM TOP: COURTESY GREAT BEAR LODGE; CRAI S. BOWER (2)