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Women Are Becoming More Adventurous Travelers—and Doing It Alone

By: Jordi Lippe-McGraw
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Women are choosing mountaineering over pampering, and they don't mind going solo.

In the travel game, we hear words like staycation, [glamping](#), and the latest, bleisure (a combo of business and leisure travel that sounds a bit like a wound) a lot. But there's one far more interesting trend that's been flying under the radar: women's adventure travel. We're not talking about the now-tired tropes of soul-searching vacations; after all, *Eat, Pray, Love* did come out a decade ago. These getaways are the blood-sweat-and-tears types, and, most significantly, women want to do them alone.

Cynthia Dunbar, general manager of [REI Adventures](#)—the kind of backpacking/wilderness trips you might want to train for—told Condé Nast Traveler that “since 2010, women traveling with us has grown by 60 percent, and we continue to see this figure grow steadily each year. Last year alone, 58 percent of all our guests were women.” In light of these growing numbers, REI Adventures has designed a new series of trips targeted at women, where female guides will teach you how to, say, rock climb or mountain bike; you can also choose to go with a “ready-made

group of girlfriends" on hiking tours through New Zealand's Southern Alps, mountain biking in the [Grand Canyon](#), or up California's Mount Shasta.

REI isn't the only adventure tour company that's seen a spike in female travelers: [VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations](#), known for its six-hour-long bike rides through the French countryside, says 60 percent of its customers are women; [Country Walkers'](#) participants are 67 percent female, and are just as game to tackle a 14-mile hike in the Swiss mountains. Both brands have seen a 5 percent increase in female travelers, year over year.

"There is a focus on learning and self-discovery, on improvement, which appeals to women," says Chris Skilling, vice president of worldwide product for VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations. "An active vacation is less isolating than a vacation by motor-coach or at an all-inclusive resort. Participating in outdoor activities immediately bonds travelers, in a way that sitting on a bus and staring out the window cannot."

In just the first few months of 2017, small-group adventure travel company [Intrepid Travel](#) has already seen a 35 percent increase in women booking trips, like hikes up [Mt. Kilimanjaro](#) followed by a Serengeti safari. Meanwhile, [DuVine tours](#), a luxury cycling operator, had a 35 percent increase in female travelers over the past three years, with women booking six-night trips and covering 26-70 miles each day. "Women, and travelers in general, have minimal vacation days and are opting for experiences," says Leigh Barnes, Intrepid Travel's North America director. And these experiences are getting wilder by the day: Even Spartan Races, that obstacle course challenge where you run through mud and jump over fire, has seen a 30 percent spike in female competitors in the last 18 months.



Why the sudden interest? Well, speaking of wild...it could also have something to do with a little memoir turned movie called *Wild* about the author Cheryl Strayed, who set out to tackle the Pacific Crest Trail on her own after a year of personal hell. Within a year of the film's release, in 2014, traffic to the trail's website doubled, and nearly 2,000 people attempted a thru-hike—double the previous year.

Or perhaps the key to the trend is that more women are traveling solo. VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations says that 68 percent of their female travelers in 2016 took a trip without a companion, while Country Walkers says 87 percent of its female participants were single (that's about 3.3 single women to every male traveler).

"Women tend to be more adventurous than men in regards to international travel and perhaps even joining groups alone," says Jamen Yeaton-Masi, vice president of worldwide product for Country Walkers & CW Safaris. "Women are becoming more financially independent and thus more apt to travel; you could argue that this also gives women more confidence to pursue more adventurous travel."

But there's even an uptick in female guides. This May, Lentine Alexis, a well-known cyclist and pastry chef, will be leading DuVine's first-ever women-only Sonoma Wine Country tour. Snowmass Bike Park has five female bike pros on staff and [Big Five Tours and Expeditions](#) hires women guides for their Cairo, Egypt, and Delhi, India tours. "Women are beginning to enter the once-male domain," says Deborah Kilcollins, brand manager of Big Five Tours and Expeditions. "Women travelers tend to have an impact on women in the destinations visited and a subtle message of women's empowerment takes place."

"When women travel together, they tend to be a more cohesive and closer-knit group than mixed groups," adds Kilcollins. "They support each other and encourage each other to try something that they may have never done before. [It's] a win-win for all women."