

Olson cont. from p. 7

and see how you're breathing. Most people under stress either alternate holding their breath with short breaths, or take rapid shallow breaths. After you become aware of your own breathing, consciously relax your belly and slow down the breathing. This works best if you focus on slowing down the exhalation rather than your inhalation. With each exhalation you can say to yourself "slow down". That is all there is to it- Simple but surprisingly effective!!!

Please give me your fat! I'd love to help you get rid of your unwanted belly fat for life. If you'd like the same, let's set up a consultation and get to work. Help me help You!

Committed to Your Fitness, Jim



Merrimack County Stamp Collectors

The Merrimack County Stamp Collectors will hold its monthly meeting at the Bow Mills United Methodist Church, 505 South St., Bow, on December 19, 2017 beginning at 1 pm.

All who are interested in stamp collecting are welcome to attend. Meet other collectors and learn more about their hobby and varied interests in Philatelic resources and issues.

For more information, call Dan Day at 603-228-1154.

Consider FIT — Foreign Independent Travel

By Chase Binder

If last month's column about traveling with tour companies made you shudder, relax! It is indeed possible to travel and get the amount of help you want or need without signing onto a group tour. It's called Foreign Independent Travel, or FIT, and involves creating a multi-destination itinerary abroad that is connected via air, car or even train and ship—but does not involve buses or travel with large groups.

How does it work? Let's say you want to do a dream trip to Australia, a vast country with compelling places to visit stretching from north to south, east to west—not to mention the interior as well as coastal destinations like the Great Barrier Reef. Let's say that you have a month to spend and a fair amount of flexibility, but that you also have some specific ideas about what you want to see (and don't want to bother with). And let's say you have a pile of reward miles and want to book your own air so you can snag first class seats for the grueling flights.

This is a perfect scenario for an FIT trip—and it's what Bud and I did for our trip to Australia a few years ago. A group tour wouldn't work for several reasons. First, we knew getting upgraded seats would be tough and availability most likely would not mesh with a pre-determined group tour. Second, we did a review of tours and discovered that most included a trip to iconic (but immensely expensive) Ayers Rock and a stay at a sheep "station," or farm. Bud grew up in Nebraska and didn't find farms captivating—and neither of us were keen on spending precious vacation time/dollars on a big red rock.

We did, however, want to visit Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef. We wanted to explore Melbourne and Brisbane and drive the Gold Coast—stopping to do some whale watching during the annual migration of mama humpbacks and their babies. We wanted to see Ad-



Chase Binder

elaide, visit some vineyards and spend a few days on remote Kangaroo Island, known for it's stunning wildlife—kangaroos, koalas, sea lions and more.

Once I found the flights and seats we wanted and had a list of what we wanted to do, I contacted several in-country travel companies (the internet is great for research and reviews) to settle on a company. After a bit of negotiating via email, we had a plan that involved five flights, several car rentals, a boat trip, and stays at several lovely B & B's, a few raucous Aussie casinos and a stunning Kangaroo Island wildlife resort. In the end, we had exactly what we wanted and paid about two thirds of a what a higher end group tour would have cost us. The opportunities to connect with other travelers as well as locals were varied and frequent, and we were in complete control of our vacation. It was perfect!

If this type of travel appeals to you, you have a few choices, beginning with deciding exactly how independent you want to be. Don't like self-driving—or just want to take a break, but still want to control your days? You'd be surprised how cost-effective having a local driver/guide can be. Think you'll be pining for some company? Build in a short

river cruise or other activity where you connect with other travelers. Worried that you won't like one of your planned stops? Ask your in-country planner to make sure you can drop a day here and pick up a day there if you'd like. Think you'll get tired of eating out? Build in a stay at an accommodation with a kitchen. These are all things that Bud and I have done in places like South Africa, Slovenia, Chile and Burma.

Of course, it's critical to find the best company—research, research, research—but even the best company won't work well if you can't articulate what kind of vacation you'd like to have. This takes thought, scrutinizing the options, and lots of discussions. Some international companies have broadened their offerings to include FIT (sometimes with their own branding, like Tailor Made at Abercrombie and Kent). Google can help you sift through those.

If dealing with unknown companies abroad unsettles you, contact Penny Pitou Travel (pennypitoutravel.com, 524-2500 in Laconia). Her agency is known for understanding its clientele and crafting superb FIT travel. Ask for Kim Terrio, who has been with Penny and designing FIT trips for 30+ years. She says that helping put together this kind of travel has always been fun, but is even more rewarding now that use of the internet has opened up her access to companies around the globe—some of which aren't available to the general public. Kim also cautions that some group tours can have grueling schedules (up at 7AM, quick breakfast and on the bus at 8, etc.), so if you need/want more help during travel, FIT is sometimes the best option.



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