



High-end hikes step up adventure

Posted: Sep 08, 2016 10:37 AM By Tara Donaldson for CNN

While the modern hiker may spend days trekking miles up mountains, over rivers and through the woods, many of today's trekkers opt to skip toting their own packs and setting up camp at day's end.

The more fabulous hikes often end with a gourmet meal and a trained massage therapist kneading out knots on a lodge's private terrace.

Hiking has gone high-end.

Adventure travel sales have climbed in the last year, according to a new study out by international luxury travel network Virtuoso, and hiking and trekking topped the list of preferred activities by adventure travelers.

"More and more, people of all ages are realizing the benefits of an active lifestyle," said Ange Wallace, a travel advisor at Wallace Pierson Travel, a Virtuoso agency in Amelia Island, Florida.

"The infrastructure of many of the world's more remote and beautifully untouched places has grown to support the desire for comfort after the physicality of the day."

Not every traveler who wants to hike is the rugged, tent-pitching type.

That's why high-end outdoor tour operator Gray & Co -- named world's best tour operator by Travel + Leisure this year -- started creating custom wellness-based vacations that don't have to end with campground sleepovers.

"People like the idea of sweating by day, but they still want to be really comfortable at night," Gray & Co founder Cari Gray said.

Some 45% of the company's planned trips include a hiking component, and interest in hiking is up 10 percent over last year, Gray said.

"People want to disconnect from their everyday world, and certainly luxury outdoor experiences allow that."

Here's a look at some of the hottest luxe hikes happening around the world.

Customized Icelandic hiking

Think of Gray & Co as a full-time concierge of sorts -- one that would coordinate the private copter pick-up at the end of a hike so seamlessly as to deliver the adventurer back to their lodge right in time to catch the sunset.

Travelers have been increasingly interested in Iceland, where trips can include a trek across lava fields, glacier climbing and bathing in natural hot springs.

Guests staying at Deplar Farm -- one of the most lavish lodges in Iceland -- can heli-ski to the 3,000-foot mountain summits right outside their door.

The day's fatigue can be quickly worked out at Deplar's spa, where six different treatment rooms are available to guests.

Prices start at \$2,000 per person per day, depending on trip details. Airfare to Iceland not included.

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