

Texas seniors zip north to Alaska to enjoy true adventures

Written by From The Associated Press
Sunday, 02 September 2012 18:33



Zip-lining, hiking, fly fishing and float plane rides were just some of the activities 42 seniors enjoyed this summer, as they proved young or old, age never stands in the way when embarking on life's journeys.

The Extrasteps program enjoyed a trip to Alaska in July, where they embarked on a 12-day tour beginning in Fairbanks and concluding in Vancouver, with plenty of site-seeing and touring to be had.

"Group traveling is fun, and traveling with Extrasteps is the way to go," Extrasteps Director Liz Brooks said. "We take around 12 trips a year, including at least one international trip."

According to Ms. Brooks, the group began by flying out of Dallas Fort Worth airport to Fairbanks Alaska, where they boarded the Discovery riverboat and traveled along the Chena and Tanana Rivers.

After enjoying a day's worth of sightseeing at Mt. McKinley and Denali National Park, they stayed the night in the Mt. McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge and took a shuttle into Talkeetna.

The next few days were filled with glacier sightseeing and zip-line touring, before the group traveled to Alaska's capital, Juneau.

The group then landed in Ketchikan, the Salmon capital of the world, and then sailed along the Inside Passage, where they viewed Alaskan wildlife.

On the last day, the group spent the day in Vancouver, Stanley Park and Granville Island Public

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Market before heading back to Texas.

For the majority of the group members, the Alaska trip was considered to be one of the best experiences of their lives.

For Dana Harris, 64, salmon fishing in Ketchikan was the highlight of his trip — where he caught so many fish they had to turn in early.

“We left at noon and we were supposed to get back at 5 p.m. but we got back at 4 p.m. because of the amount of fish we caught,” Harris said.

He said they exceeded the limit of 30 fish, some of them they had to throw back and the rest they had for dinner, some of the best sea food he had “ever had.”

“I have never had smoked salmon, and it was so good,” he said. “But when everything is that fresh, it is bound to be good.”

He said living in Alaska should be considered a “lifestyle” considering the cold, frigid temperatures, rugged terrain, and odd hours of daylight.

“People stay up there year round, and you have to really want to do it, because it is cold up there,” he said. “It was pretty rugged out there, and it is hard to explain unless you have been to it.”

He said the sun would not go down until 11 p.m., which “messed with his mind” a bit.

Participant Kathy Bradshaw agreed the extra sunlight was something to get used to, but it did not bother her.

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She said for her and her husband, taking a trip to Alaska had always been on their bucket list.

“We celebrated my husband’s birthday on the cruise ship, and it was so much fun, because they actually called my husband up on stage and they put a coon skin cap on him and the girls sang to him,” she said.

She said she considered herself the “shopper of the bunch” and brought with her an extra carry on just for the goodies she knew she would bring home.

“My friends always laugh at my extra carry on, but that is what I always do,” she said.

Elaine Harris enjoyed the Alaskan scenery via zip-line in Skagway.

“The zip line was fun you had to hike to it you had rope bridges and things to get to it and it was a beautiful sunny day in Skagway and we were just zip lining, and it was good,” she said.

She said in order to get to the zip line, she had to hike up the mountain—a feat she was able to easily accomplish since she tries to remain active in her day to day life.

“We are just active,” she said. “And we do a lot to try and remain active.”

Betsy Boersma said she and her husband also enjoyed the scenery and the hiking aspect of the trip.

“There was a lot of hiking, and we tried to do as much as we possibly could,” she said.

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She said she is an avid orchid lover, and her favorite part of the trip was a tour guide led by a local botanist.

“The scenery, everything was just fabulous,” she said.

Close friends Ines Lancaster and Sue Lynch went on a different type of tour as they explored haunted ghost towns.

“We got to tour a brothel,” Ms. Lancaster said. “And we learned how hard it was for the women.”

They said on the cruise they were given the nickname “the spice girls” after walking in late to a dinner show.

“We had a really really fun time I recommend anybody go to Alaska,” Ms. Lynch said. “And we are good friends, and that is what makes it fun.”

Mary Lynne and Bob Bowles, both 85 years of age and one of the oldest couples on the tour, made the most of their trip by exploring glaciers, going on float plane tours, and even getting a true Iditarod experience.

She said the Iditarod dogs pulled her and her husband via cart, which is the way they continue their exercise during the summer months.

“It is absolutely amazing, all they want to do is run,” she said.

Ms. Bowles said getting to see the glaciers up close was to her, an “emotional experience.”

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“To have the privilege of seeing such a beautiful part of God’s creation,” she said. “You can see a picture but it is nothing like being there, and it is all around you. We are so grateful to live to see it.”