

Treks and Trails

Area man leads hiking vacations throughout world

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LEWISBURG — Seeking adventure, beauty and healthy exercise in the natural world is how Paul Shaw, co-founder of Treks and Trails International, a hiking vacation business describes the trips he plans.

Through Treks and Trails, Shaw leads the way on hiking vacations all over the world.

This year, he said, the schedule includes Iceland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Andorra, Italy, Morocco, Canada, Mexico and Chile.

The trips are for active families, couples, friends and single travelers who love hiking and traveling.

"We provide opportunities to experience some of the world's most spectacular, scenic and hidden places," he said.

The trips are called "adventures," Shaw said, because each trip so far removed from everyday lives.

"Whether it's traversing a volcano in Iceland, sharing accommodations and food with local tribesmen in Morocco, observing pods of humpback whales from a cliff-top vista in Newfoundland, or hiking alongside the River Wye in the beautiful Welsh and English countryside, each day is full of new experiences," he said.

Treks and Trails International chooses the places by looking for outstanding scenery, a good footpath, pleasant accommodations and unique attributes.

Shaw said the most popular hiking destinations — such as Machu Pichu or Switzerland — generally are avoided.

"There are dozens of other adventure travel companies that go to these areas," he said. "We are one of the very few organizations that leads trips to arctic Sweden, Newfoundland, Iceland and the Pyrenees."

Physically demanding

Shaw also is the outings coordinator for the Otzinachson Group of the Sierra Club.

When not leading overseas adventures, he lives in Snyderstown, Northumberland County.

Shaw said he always has loved hiking, backpacking and traveling and wanted to share those pursuits with others.

He and co-owner Todd Lange, of Kleinfeltersville, formed Trek and Trails in 2010.

"I am fortunate that, at this stage in my life and with the blessing of a tolerant wife, I am able to combine these passions to earn a living. I agree with those who say that if you do something you truly love, it isn't a job," Shaw said.

He also guides many of the trips. "It is a physically demanding profession but immensely rewarding," he said. "I hope to keep at it as long as my body allows."

Shaw is a former executive director of the Keystone Trails Association and has been the Sierra Club's outings coordinator for many years.

He has led many hikes in Lycoming County and the surrounding region.

Lange has guided extensively in Alaska and throughout the western U.S. He continues to guide hikes in the

Rocky Mountains, Sierra Nevada, Utah, and the Grand Canyon, Shaw said.

He also through-hiked the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail in 2002 and the 2,700-mile Pacific Crest Trail in 2005.

He is a graduate of the Rocky Mountain Guide School and the Kenai River Guide Academy.

Both are graduates of the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming.

No worries

All the planning is done by Treks and Trails International staff. The only thing a vacationer has to worry about is packing, which Shaw says allow them to fully enjoy their experiences.

"We take care of all arrangements, including transportation, permits, food and lodging. We have established local partnerships in other countries that help assure that we get the best pricing for accommodations and transportation," he said.

Shaw and his staff already have traveled to all the places offered, so they know good places to eat and the most interesting sights.

"Many of our trips are to places little-known to most Americans but offer some of the best hiking on the planet," he said.

"In fact, we have a new trip for 2013 that combines four days in the spectacular city of Barcelona with four days of

hiking in one of the world's tiniest countries, Andorra," he added. "Of course, another very important consideration is believing we can interest our clientele in a specific trip. There are lots of places in the world I personally would love to visit and hike, but the market is too limited to offer as a trip."

Three kinds of trips are offered and most are inn-to-inn. Shaw said that typically is a hike between four to six hours per day.

"A daypack containing lunch, water and rain gear is all that is required to carry," Shaw said, adding that the luggage is forwarded to its destination.

"Offa's Dyke is an example of this kind of trip," he said, referring to an earthwork between the England and Wales border.

"We also have two trips in the mountains where we stay in mountain huts, similar to dormitories. Clothing and other gear must be carried in a larger daypack or smaller backpack,

although we don't carry tents or cooking gear," he added.

The Kungsleden trip in northern Sweden is a hut-to-hut trip, Shaw said. There also are three backpacking trips where all the gear and food is carried.

"We sleep in tents and prepare our own food. The Iceland and Dientes trips are backpacking trips," he said.

Trips are graded from easy to very strenuous. Shaw can find a trip that suits any hiker's experience level.

"We assist our clients by helping them select a trip that best suits their expectations and their abilities. We pre-screen applicants to make sure they are capable of participating in a specific trip," he said.

When one is accepted, a checklist is provided of all items to bring, as well as an information packet with tips and advice related to specific destinations.

For information, see www.treksandtrailsinternational.com.



Hikers who have signed up for one of the hands-on — or rather "boots-on" — vacations with Treks and Trails International journey through various scenic destinations including, at bottom, Offa's Dyke, between the border of England and Wales, and, in middle, Iceland.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL SHAW