

TIPS AND TIDBITS

A fact sheet about your



Walking the AVA Convention 2009

Adventure

Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine conventional motorcoach touring with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage, and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most walkers find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect, in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the brochure flyer?

A: Yes, about three weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:

- Hotel Listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
- Traveler List
- Daily Schedule
- Adventure t-shirt
- Nametag
- Reusable luggage tags for first-time travelers

Q: Are there any activities scheduled for the first day?

A: Our first group activity is our Get Acquainted Reception. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 7:30 pm.

Q: What kind of identification do I need to get through security at the airports?

A: If you are a U.S. citizen, you will need a government-issued photo identification such as a driver's license. **IMPORTANT:** If you were born outside of the USA, it is recommended that you carry a passport or some other proof of citizenship.

Q: Which airport should we fly into?

A: The Adventure begins in Oklahoma City, OK so make your flight arrangements into Oklahoma City. Our first hotel is the Spring Hill Suites—Oklahoma City Airport West. When you arrive at the airport, just call (405) 604-0200 from baggage claim using the courtesy hotel phone and they will give you instructions on where to meet the shuttle.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for making my flight arrangements?

A: WAI is not a travel agent, and we don't have the authority to make bookings or print airline tickets. We do negotiate for group flights on trips that require that we fly as a group, but don't have any bargaining power when it comes to arranging individual flights.

Travel agents are still the simplest way to plan your flight. If you are a member, AAA is also a good option. If you have access to the Internet, we've discovered several web sites that may be helpful in finding the best fares. To start your planning, www.orbitz.com is a good site to find which flights are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the website of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. There are also sites that offer tour planning services and claim to find all the sales and specials. Other sites to check out include:

Airline sites:

www.continental.com
www.southwest.com
www.united.com
www.aa.com (American)
www.alaskaair.com
www.usairways.com
www.delta.com

Planning sites:

www.travelocity.com
www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.onetravel.com
www.bestfares.com
www.priceline.com
www.qjxo.com

Q: What type of hotels will we be in?

A: We use good quality, tourist class, 3-star accommodations. When making reservations, we request non-smoking rooms and as many rooms on the ground floor as possible. Many hotels will not have elevators. We recommend the strategy outlined on Page 3 under luggage restrictions.

Q: What kind of walks will we be doing?

A: The local clubs that host our walks are part of an international walking network known as "volksporting" or "volkswalking." They use a difficulty rating system ranging from 1 to 5. A walk rated 1 is flat and level throughout. A walk rated 5 is a pretty serious hike with lots of steep ups and downs and rough spots on the trail. We generally try to stay away from walks with a difficulty rating higher than 3, but because we will be traveling in summer, heat may be a factor on many of the walks. We normally allow between 3 and 3¼ hours for each walk, depending upon our itinerary for the day and the sight-seeing opportunities along the route. Of course, none of the walks are mandatory and we encourage travelers to

pace themselves. Take a day off or do a partial walk as necessary. Just let the guide know your needs, and we'll help you make adjustments.

Our itinerary is aggressive and designed to offer the traveler as much exposure to the areas we visit as possible. In order to maximize enjoyment of these rigorous and rewarding Adventures, we recommend that travelers be in good physical condition. If you have doubts about your ability to participate, please contact us for a more detailed description of what to expect from this experience.

Water bottles and hats are strongly recommended. Carrying bottled drinking water on the walks if the weather is as warm as expected is a must! If you normally use a walking stick, we suggest you bring it along as we are walking every day of the trip, with the exception of our two travel days.

Q: What is a volkswalk?

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is a steady walk through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). It is non-competitive and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

Q: What type of footwear should I bring?

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended. The first pair may get wet or muddy and need a day off. Plan to pack an extra pair of socks with your extra shoes in a plastic bag (good for wet gear), and have a spot for them right on the bus with you. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them a more practical and attractive option.

Q: Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: One of the realities of group travel is that we share a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy Adventure, including the following:

- Use Vitamin C and Echinacea beginning a week before the trip and during the trip to boost your immune system (Check with your doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea.).
- Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the trip.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.
- Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in trip activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

Q: How many people do you accept on an Adventure?

A: Generally, we close the trip at no more than 30 people. For this trip, we have 18 travelers and 2 guides. The motorcoach we use has 47 seats, so we'll have a good number available to move around.

Q: What will the motorcoach be like?

A: We are committed to finding quality buses and drivers. The bus will be air conditioned and will be equipped with a toilet. We employ a seat rotation system to assure everyone equal time in the best seats and a chance to get acquainted with all their fellow travelers. Rest stops are spaced every 1½ to 2 hours; the toilet is therefore limited to emergency use as finding dumping stations is difficult to impossible.

Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men; another is that they tend to outlive their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

Q: How much money should I take along?

A: This depends entirely upon your own preferences. However, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Lunch and dinner are generally not included.
- Gratuities for group meals, and tips for the coach driver and local guides, if any, are included in the trip price.

It is always a good idea to make photocopies of all debit and credit cards you're using while you're traveling. These photocopies should be kept separate from the cards themselves.

Debit cards and ATM's have become the most practical way to manage cash needs when traveling in most parts of the world. Most banks have protection on lost and stolen cards that limit your losses to a nominal amount should your card be lost or stolen. Ask your bank about its policy.

If hesitant, consider AAA's (Automobile Association of America) credit/debit card designed for travelers. You can load the card with a specific amount of cash in advance, further limiting your losses should the card get lost or stolen. Log on to www.aaa.com/prepaidcards or

call your local AAA branch for more information. We're coming out pretty strong in favor of using debit cards at ATM's. If you don't have one, consider getting one from your bank now. If you prefer not to use one, that's okay too, but you'll need to plan your cash needs more carefully and be willing to carry more cash on your person.

Q: What arrangements are made for meals other than breakfast?

A: Because we want to focus on as many fun and interesting activities as possible, we usually don't schedule a "hot-served-meal" lunch stop. When our travel time spans the lunch hour, we normally have a quick 30 to 45-minute stop someplace where travelers can get a bite of "fast food" or visit a grocery store deli. We recommend that you stash fruit and snacks on the bus (non-messy foods) to fill the gaps when necessary. Dinners are usually available at any number of restaurants within walking distance of our hotel. Occasionally, the tour guide may decide to make a special dinner run with the bus to a location where more choices for dinner are available.

Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: As usual, it is best to arrange your wardrobe so that you can layer clothing as needed. Always be prepared for rain. Two pairs of walking shoes are always a good idea. Walking attire is the standard for the entire trip. Most of the time, shorts and a t-shirt will be the "in-vogue" way to dress, though we suggest you bring along a set of casual pants and blouse or shirt for an occasional activity or more formal dinner (e.g. farewell dinner). Compact rain gear is always recommended.

Weather:

Oklahoma and the other southern states we will travel through are known for their summertime humidity, although we will just be entering into the season. Plan for temperatures to be in the 80-90+ degree range with nighttime lows in the mid to upper 40's. Thundershowers are more common later in the season—but possible—so bring your rain gear!

Q: What kind of laundry facilities should we expect?

A: Some of our hotels will have laundry facilities. Normally, however, these are limited to one washer and one dryer, creating quite a bottleneck for a walking tour group. Two other approaches to the laundry problem are 1) pack a few feet of clothesline and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home.

Q: Are there restrictions on the amount of luggage we can bring?

A: One suitcase is allowed per person, as well as carry-on type luggage. Remember that portage is not provided on this trip. Packing light has proven to be the best way to travel. Another idea is to bring along a collapsible piece of luggage. Every couple of nights, you can pack ahead and leave the large suitcase on the bus. You'll find that this greatly simplifies the check-in process at the hotel.

TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. Here are a few things you should be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your experience.
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our "Adventures," we still believe in providing a full day's opportunity for our travelers. On some days, we spend a significant amount of time on the bus.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves giving up a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we strive for added flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be "headed in the same direction."

We hope we've covered most of your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to Walking the AVA Texas Convention with you!

