

Travel Age West

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ARIZONA

Arizona Off the Beaten Path

By Maxine Cass

JAMES CANYON, Arizona — Hands, arms, legs and feet — I'm rappelling down a rock face into a dark pool full of logs — the entree to the hidden depths of a green canyon 20 minutes from Flagstaff, Ariz. One more challenge lies ahead, a speedy swim across a frigid pool to a sunny rock where fellow adventurers are yelling encouragement.

Getting to this little-known canyon was a lot easier than the actual canyoneering. Detours of Arizona, based in Mesa, operates a small fleet of custom-designed luxury-comfort vans, and can tailor tours to clients' tastes, adventurous or not.

Detours vans are painted with "Off the Beaten Path" along the sides. Fifteen-passenger vans, redesigned with 10 leather captain-style chairs with tilt and lumbar support, offer clients more space to maneuver in and out.

OFFERINGS

Detours of Arizona's multi-day trips currently include the Grand Canyon/Sedona; Grand Canyon North Rim/Lake Powell, with slot canyons and floating the Colorado River; Bryce, Zion and Grand Three-Canyon; Monument Valley/Canyon de Chelly; and, in southeastern Arizona, Tombstone, Kartchner Caverns and Bisbee.

High clearance, special shock absorbers and 10-ply tires take the vans cross-country on dirt roads or rougher tracks, out where photographers can use topside luggage racks for vantage points.

'[Detours] guides can be designing the stops on the fly, as you go.'

Vans are equipped with a digital camera (for the guide) and a printer to produce on-the-spot photographs of the tour's activities. An in-van inverter offers electricity for clients needing connections for computers or other gadgets.

Detours has three vans in action, with twice that number planned by 2005.

Adventurers, shoppers and culture seekers will be taken to where each wants to go, says one of Detours owners, Jeff Slade. If one part of a tour group wants to shop and another wants to hike or mountain bike, all will be accommodated. On multi-day tours, every client, including each child, is given an "hour card," to be redeemed for one hour during the trip for an activity, a longer stay or a morning sleep-in opportunity, with the rest of the group forced to comply.

Slade considers it part of the company's flexibility factor — vans go anywhere and "clients do what is fun and spontaneous. Detours does not have set itineraries where we have places we have to be," he said. "Guides

stone and wood sacred hogan (house) on the Navajo Nation reservation. Clients booked on the Missions of the Southwest trip will join an artist painting the Zuni gods as he explains the interior of the usually restricted 1678 Zuni Mission church.

Multi-day tours include transportation, breakfast and lunch

Detours of Arizona co-owner Jeff Haflett shows off one of the company's luxury vans.



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Currently, most tours are day adventures, with 10 multi-day tours per year. Within the next year, the owners expect half the schedule to be multiple-day trips. Family groups and family reunions are target groups.

On a recent tour, clients met Navajo educator, elder and medicine man, James Peshlakai, who drummed and chanted near a

and scheduled stops. Detours vans transport clients to dinner spots, but pricing does not include dinner. Most national and state park and other attraction entrance fees are additional.

Pricing is on a per-day basis, with \$130 for adults and \$90 for children. Detours of Arizona pays travel agents a 10 percent commission.

866-438-6877

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