

AN EYE FOR THE LADIES

Here are 5 things to look for from suppliers when planning a women-only tour package. *By Matt Poe*



A women-only group experiences the Ohio Historical Center.
Photo: Experience Columbus

Women love to get together for some girls-only time. And they love to travel together as well. According to U.S. Travel, 24 percent of American women have taken a girlfriend getaway in the past three years while 39 percent plan to take one in the next three years.

So, it only makes sense for group travel planners like you to look into creating women-only tours. The question is: What do you need to look for when working with your suppliers?

From creativity to family time, the

following five ideas can help you start looking in the right direction.

1 Look for Creative Partnerships

As a group travel planner, you know that creating the best group experiences is all about relationships—the partnerships you form with destinations and suppliers. When creating specialty market trips, like women-only, it benefits you and your travelers to work with a place that knows how to partner.

One such destination is Dearborn County in Indiana. The Dearborn County CVTB offers visiting women-only groups an enjoyable travel experience and the opportunity to give back while they “Have Fun, Give Hope” on a Tour for the Cure. Tour for the Cure is a travel rewards program that helps raise funds for breast cancer research. Women on the tour enjoy the benefits of travel, while the local participating hotels, restaurants, attractions, and class providers included in the itineraries donate to Tour for the Cure.

Operators and group leaders booking overnight tours can also get involved. Their donations of \$1 per passenger are in turn matched by both the hotel receiving the overnight stay and the Dearborn County Visitors Center.

“It’s a win-win arrangement supporting the Vera Bradley Foundation for Breast Cancer,” says Sally McWilliams for the Dearborn County CVTB.

2 Look for Shopping, Spas, and Food

When you’re planning any kind of group trip, you know that you have to give the client what they want. In order to do that, you have to know your travelers. It’s the same with women-only groups. And what do many women enjoy doing? Shopping. Spa and pamper time. Sampling wine and foods.

So, it only makes sense that when you’re working with a destination on a women-only trip, you have to know where to find these essentials.

“Whether traveling with family or a group of friends, women of all ages appreciate the unique offerings peppered throughout Columbus,” says Thera Wright for Weirick Communications

and Experience Columbus.

Various neighborhoods throughout Columbus can make for perfect women-only visits. Red bricks, tidy gardens, and charming Old-World architecture line the streets of historic German Village, a downtown neighborhood ideal for strolling, shopping, and dining. The trendy Short North Arts District also boasts a myriad of fantastic restaurants and hip clubs dotted between miles and miles of independently owned art galleries and boutiques. At Short North’s Mukha Custom Cosmetics and Spa, girlfriends can blend their own makeup products for their very own custom color, hue, texture, pliability, coverage, sunscreen, and more. Spa treatments are also available. For the wine connoisseur, make sure to stop into Camelot Cellars for an unforgettable journey through the wine process from beginning to end.

In Corvallis, Oregon, there is great shopping in the downtown area, fun wine bars like Enoteca and Belle Vallee both located on the beautiful historic riverfront, and a world class spa Epic Day Spa also located downtown. Fine dining includes Cloud 9 Atmospheric Eatery and the newest restaurants Local Luna and LUC. All of this comes together with a beautiful small-town atmosphere to make the perfect low-key girlfriend getaway.

3 Look for Local Flair

While you have to have the basics for women-only tours, the trip is about the complete experience. And women want to experience the unique culture and flavor of a destination.

For example, if you take a group to Lake Erie Shore and Islands in Ohio, you don’t get more local flair than at Put-in-Bay. The village of Put-in-Bay



Ladies enjoy touring Hillforest in Dearborn County, Indiana. Photo: Dearborn County CVTB

GIRLFRIEND GETAWAYS

Yes, many women love to get away from it all to shop and be pampered, but when you're working with your group, you may find that they want an adventure.



is a unique adventure in island living and pampering. Adventure options on Put-in-Bay include parasailing and kayaking the bay. Or for a bit more speed, rent a jet-ski or jet boat. Then comes the pampering at the Isola Day Spa. For fine lodging, the Put-in-Bay Resort added thirteen luxury villas for 2010. The units each sleep eight to ten and include three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a full kitchen. The Put-in-Bay Resort features a Caribbean theme heated pool with swim up bar and the world's largest Jacuzzi.

But it's not just villages that have local flair women-only groups will appreciate. Cities like Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, have their own culture as well.

"From learning new cooking techniques, indulging in some quality 'you time' at the spa, shopping at the famous West Edmonton Mall—the world's largest shopping and entertainment center—or strolling down Whyte Ave—voted one of Canada's five best shopping neighborhoods, known for its boutiques, bars, and eateries, Edmonton is the perfect getaway for you and your friends," says Amy Wolski for the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation.

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Look for Something Out of the Ordinary

It's all too easy to stereotype the tour options a women-only group would

choose. Yes, many women love to get away from it all to shop and be pampered, but when you're working with your group, you may find that they want an adventure. Something out of the ordinary. Always keep your eyes open for something unique about a destination you're considering for a women-only trip.

In Kansas, the Moore Longhorn Ranch southwest of Dodge City offers "Cowgirl Weekends." The women can "leave their cowboys at home" and head out with the gals to the ranch. Ladies enjoy the ranching life by learning skills, riding horseback, moving longhorns, watching for wildlife, cooking with Dutch Ovens, and generally having a great time together.

Lake Erie Shore and Islands has an interesting adventure for women on Kelleys Island. It begins with a ride on a high-speed catamaran from the mainland to Kelleys Island, an unspoiled, tranquil getaway. The ladies spend the day on Kelleys hiking trails or renting a bicycle and explore the island's main roads. Visit the one hundred-foot-long sandy beach at the Kelleys Island State Park for a dip in the lake, or rent a kayak here to explore the coastline.

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Look for Mother-Daughter Options

Spending time away with "the girls" in the family offers a way for your

women-only travelers to bond in a way that doesn't occur when dads, brothers, and husbands are included.

"Whether you want to plan the perfect retreat to show an elderly mother how much you care, reconnect with a rebellious teenager, or just spend some quality time catching up on each other's busy lives, a girls' getaway could be the answer," says Todd Stallbaumer for Travel Oklahoma. The folks from Travel Oklahoma have put together several ideas that even the pickiest mothers and the most discriminating daughters will enjoy.

A unique experience that can be shared by moms and their grown up daughters is a wine tasting trip. Girls Gone Wine in Hochatown near Broken Bow provides a female-infused experience the owners provide. Everything from the names of their wines to the gifts in the gift shop has a girly theme.

Planning mother-daughter tours around a mutual love or hobby will ensure both parties have a pleasant experience. Shopping is a non-confrontational way to spend time together. Utica Square in Tulsa provides the shopping every mother and daughter wants—specialty shops and department stores in a quaint setting.

If you haven't planned a women-only trip, you should. The market potential is there. But, more importantly, it provides ladies with a way to reconnect and create some lasting memories. **FI**