



The ADVENTURE Ratings: Best Outfitters on Earth

By Costas Christ and Claire Martin

When planning the adventure trip of a lifetime, the most important decision you'll make is not where to go, but who to go with. Think about the stakes: weeks of your time, thousands of your dollars, even, potentially, your own safety. If an outfitter fails to deliver on the dark side of the moon, you don't get a do-over. An expert tour company, on the other hand, can give you access to remote lands, introduce you to those who live there, and make sure you not only see the world, but also experience it.

Today there are outfitters running trips in just about every country on Earth. To help you pick the right one, we've conducted the world's first large-scale rating of adventure tour operators. It's extensive. It's user-friendly.

As part of the National Geographic Society, we have a unique take on travel. We appreciate fine meals and high thread counts, but we also want to know who's teaching their clients about the places they visit, who's pushing the frontiers of discovery and adventure, and who's giving back to the planet. So we surveyed over 200 outfitters and scored them on the criteria that matter to us most: education, sustainability, quality of service, and spirit of adventure. We evaluated gorilla-safari specialists and Grand Canyon rafters, Napa Valley cyclists and Himalaya trekkers. As expected, most of the top scorers excel in multiple areas. But we were pleasantly surprised to find that almost all of them consider their environmental impact a fundamental part of the trips they offer.

Each of the 155 companies featured here received an overall score of 80 or higher in our survey and, therefore, merits your consideration. Now it's up to you to decide which one is best for you.

The Methodology: How We Did It

With assistance from the Adventure Council, Adventures in Travel Expo, the Adventure Travel Trade Association, and other travel and tourism organizations, we reached out to hundreds of tour companies around the world. The outfitters were asked to complete a comprehensive 28-question survey and were scored from 1 to 100 in each of the following categories:

- **Education and Interpretation:** This score reflects how effectively a company provides educational and interpretative information to trip participants about the geology, history, wildlife, cultures, etc., for the places in which it operates.
- **Sustainability:** How a company runs its trips often means the difference between tourism that safeguards a region's cultural and natural heritage and tourism that serves as a threat to the chosen destination. This score indicates how engaged the company is with sustainable tourism practices.
- **Quality of Service:** This score represents the level of customer service that a company offers, from the nature of interactions with each client to the quality of gear provided for sport-specific trips and general amenities.
- **Spirit of Adventure:** From trying new food to visiting exotic locations, there are many ways for today's active traveler to experience adventure. This score reflects how effectively a company brings the "spirit of adventure" to each trip itinerary.
- **Client References:** Researchers contacted client references for every company and generated a fifth score, also between 1 and 100, based on their feedback.

Each outfitter's overall score represents the average of these five scores.

A team of *Adventure* editors, travel writers, and experts vetted those with overall scores of 80 and above and, from this pool of candidates, chose the "Best Outfitters on Earth," 55 of which were profiled in the November 2007 issue of *National Geographic Adventure*. The rest are listed online.

About the Authors:

Costas Christ serves as the Chairman of Judges for the World Travel and Tourism Council's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, which recognizes best practices within the global travel industry. He is a contributing editor and columnist with *National Geographic*

Adventure magazine and was a founding member and former Chairman of the Board of the International Ecotourism Society. He is on the advisory board of the Adventure Travel World Summit, is co-founder of the Adventure Council, and also serves on the board of directors of Sustainable Travel International. His travels and work have taken him to more than 120 countries across six continents, including expeditions to some of the world's most remote wilderness areas and archeological sites. In addition to National Geographic *Adventure*, Christ's articles and essays on travel and tourism have appeared in publications, including the *International Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, and *Sunday Times of London*. He is the lead author of, *Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism Global Footprint* and a contributing author in *Wilderness: Earth's Last Wild Places*.

Claire Martin is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and editor. She's the former travel editor of several consumer magazines and has written for the *New York Times*.

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