



Colleen Friesen and friends on their eastern spa adventure

BY COLLEEN FRIESEN

Reaching Nirvana

“There are two kinds of adventurers: those who go truly hoping to find adventure and those who go secretly hoping they won't.” – Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

It started with my girlfriend Karen and an ambitious New Year's resolution. We were going to get in shape. We started hiking one rain-sodden January morning. One and a half hours later we had managed to slop our way up – and down – a small West Coast mountain. We dubbed the activity Trail Therapy. It included laughing, sweating and swearing combined with the distinct possibility of hurling a lung or being stalked by a cougar. The once a week trek morphed to twice, and then to our current schedule of Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Two years ago, Dee Dee committed to one day, then two, and soon she too was in for the full three-day stint. As one drop-in friend said, “I thought we were going on a hike, not a forced march.”

We learned a few things. Life is better following a big fat sweat and after snorting tons of mossy mountain air. And what can a day possibly throw at you if you've already conquered a mountain? Problems are left behind in the salal growing by the trail.

Last year, Dee Dee started talking about her pending 50th birthday. “I want to do something different,” she remarked. This statement led to my hiking trio slapping down our credit cards for a three-week trip to India. We convinced two husbands and one ex that they would have a great time staying behind with the four hormonally charged boys we left in their care.

We booked a trip with Intrepid Tours, a company that proclaimed a philosophy of environmental and cultural sensitivity. After arriving on the sub-continent, we travelled on local transport that included boats, tuktuks, rickshaws, taxis, hired cars, buses and trains. We ate with Muslims, Hindus, Christians and people of no fixed belief.

Some of us threw up, had the runs, contracted weird coughs and displayed strange bites from insects we'd rather not think about. Through it all we were treated like visiting celebrities, though the cows seemed rather determined to ignore us. But then, they didn't seem to notice the incessant horn-blowing traffic either.

We dodged these cows while balancing in rickshaws pedalled by men whose waist measurements equalled one of our thighs. We paid strict attention to monster potholes, pieces of sidewalk that suddenly ended and all types of plastic crap and corruption.

Every meal was excellent, whether we munched steaming hot samosas in a fly-ridden shack by the side of a country road or sipped masala chai in a sari shop. It was never clear which meal might suddenly sideline us. However, including the near death experience with the oncoming truck on the way to the airport... we survived it all and loved every second.

My friend's mother used to call her and say, “Mary, let's go for lunch and create some memories.” Mary often related this conversation to me with a roll of her eyes. Now that her mom's gone and we're that much older, we no longer roll our eyes.

In fact, I firmly believe in that philosophy. Take the time to be with your friends. Go on a hike or take a yoga class together. Share a spa experience. Laugh and cry over a coffee. Do something out of the ordinary. Shake up your life for an evening or a weekend – or head out on a big adventure.

