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Bitten by the travel bug

Anushka Sivakumar, Sep 16, 2014, DHNS

Like-minded wanderers



If the lust to wander away from the City into nature's lap or a ravine is deep in you, 'F5 Escapes', a travel venture started by Malini, can help you. She has put travel writers, tourists, housewives and shutterbugs at ease through this venture.

The experiential travel company, specialising in all-women travel and customised travel planning, helps plan trips for women, be it daily getaways or 10-day programme for groups, who are complete strangers, to places like Andaman, Pondicherry or Gujarat.

Travelling mainly takes place as group tours which happen on specific dates where booking has to be done in advance on the website or as customised trips. "We mainly decide our destination based on the weather conditions at that time and other aspects like safety. As many as 10 to 12 ladies, who do not know each other, travel in a group with a member of our company. It is a great bonding experience.

Our trips are not just for sightseeing but we take them to a place to view it in a different light. During our trip to Pondicherry, the group visited an international pottery centre and interacted with the locals. For accommodation, we have different options like home-stay, guest houses and heritage houses. People have to book well in advance for their trips so that booking accommodation, flight tickets, etc becomes easier," says Malini.

Her group mainly attracts women from various groups like ladies' clubs, apartment complexes and teenagers as she caters to age groups from 5 to 70. "A group of 37 ladies of the age group of 50 to 70 travelled to Horsley Hills sometime back," she adds.

Though she is the founder, she says that she was the first customer of F5. The idea came about in July 2013, when she found out that the market for women wanting to travel could be tapped.

"A big chunk of women want to travel but can't due to family constraints and other circumstances. I wanted to go to Sikkim to see the Rohedendron flowers, which bloom seasonally, but my family didn't want to come. I then posted it on Facebook and two women joined me. Soon, the idea seemed viable as there was good market for this kind of a plan. I joined an entrepreneurship course in IIM-B during April and May and was helped by my professors to develop the idea."

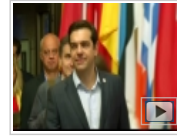
As F5 Escapes sells experiences and ideas, they pride themselves on the numerous repeat customers that they get due to their quality service. Malini says, "Our group has mainly spread through word-of-mouth and the feedback has been positive so far. Initially, the main challenge was to establish trust and create a brand but we have got through that. We mainly focus on responsible tourism than commercial profit."

F5 is busy planning their next trips to Pondicherry and Hampi and also the fourth edition of 'Just Go', which is a series of talks centred around travel. The theme for these talks is 'Travel on Two Wheels', where women bikers will discuss cycling and biking options to create travel experiences.

Malini says, "I feel every woman should travel because it always makes her wiser. A lot of people have shed tears after the tours. It's all about like-minded people coming together."

The group can be reached at contact@f5escapes.com or on their website, www.f5escapes.com

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