



"Escape Surf Safaris for Women" in Western Australia. (HANDOUT / October 7, 2003)

## Where the girls are

Whether trying out the cowgirl lifestyle or being pampered in Paris, women are signing up in droves to vacation together

When Sheri Ryan, a 43-year-old mother of three from San Diego, decided to take a vacation from her hectic family life, no one would have blamed her for spending a week alone in the tropics. Instead, Ryan chose to rope cattle, fly-fish and barrel race on horseback with two girlfriends.

Cowgirl Bootcamp, which is held periodically at Alisal Guest Ranch and Resort outside Santa Barbara, Calif., is one of the diverse "girlfriend getaways" cropping up around the world for women who want to escape from it all — in the company of other women. At Alisal, cowgirls begin their three-night, four-day adventure (which is \$2,800 for two people) with saddle instruction before heading out on a two-hour morning horseback ride. Other activities include line-dancing instruction, boating and archery. The women stay in luxury studios with wood-burning fireplaces.

"It gave us a chance to relax, reconnect and bond with each other by trying something adventurous and new," Ryan said.

These trips have become so popular that interesting offerings are becoming available every day to meet demand.

"The girls getaway trip is one of our most sought-after requests," said Jim Strong, president of Strong Travel Services in Dallas. "Women are looking to take themselves out of the norm."

Harem, a women-only luxury resort and spa, opened in January on a private estate on the outskirts of Marrakech, Morocco. Founder Sandra Zwollo, a Dutch expat who has lived in Marrakech for 12 years, conceived Harem as a haven for women "to come and be pampered, rejuvenated and to recuperate from life's everyday stresses."

That might mean yoga, sunbathing or foot rubs by the pool. Every guest — with a maximum capacity of 14 — comes for a seven-day retreat, which includes indulgences such as body scrubs in a hammam (a traditional steam bath) and daily footbaths with scented salts.

Zwollo also designed the weekly itineraries to introduce women to Moroccan culture, with a guided tour of the shopping souks, a belly-dancing performance and three-course meals of Moroccan cuisine.