

# Tahoe travel company connects people to the world

By Jessie Marchesseau

Marching with penguins in Antarctica, swimming with sea turtles in the Galapagos, standing atop an active volcano in the South Pacific. These are the things dreams are made of.

Taking that into account, one could say Tahoe City-based AdventureSmith Explorations specializes in making dreams come true.

Todd Smith founded the company in 2003 to introduce people to a relatively new kind of travel. Having worked on a small cruise ship in Alaska, been a wilderness guide and worked in eco-tourism, Smith had a passion for adventure travel. AdventureSmith was his way of helping others discover that passion, too.



AdventureSmith is about providing unique experiences for travelers.

Photos/AdventureSmith

On the verge of its 10th anniversary, the adventure travel company served more than a thousand clients last year, with more than \$3.5 million in total sales. That is a pretty big

jump from just 56 bookings the first year.

AdventureSmith does not actually operate any tours or cruises. Instead, it acts as more of a wholesaler, booking small ship cruises and land tours with a variety of companies, offering expert advice and travel planning, and taking care of all the necessary paperwork along the way.

They will not book just any cruise, though. This is not a traditional travel agency where you call and ask for a cruise to the Bahamas. The company works almost exclusively with small-ship cruises, meaning generally between eight and 150 people per boat. Many of their destinations are not your usual cruise routes. Think Belize, Antarctica and Easter Island. Even then, trips are only added to the lineup upon personal approval from Smith or one of his staff.

“We won’t sell anything until we have experienced it firsthand,” he said. “Not every trip makes the grade.”

Small ship cruising is decidedly different from the major cruise lines that can fit upward of 3,500 passengers on their enormous oceanliners. The small ships AdventureSmith specializes in can go to more remote places compared to big ships and are almost always equipped with kayaks and canoes for guests, and a naturalist onboard to offer knowledge and guidance about the surrounding area.

“The quality of the education of these trips is the equivalent of going to school for a week,” Parky May said.

May and his wife have done numerous trips through AdventureSmith, including Alaska, Mexico and the Galapagos. He said they do all their traveling these days exclusively as small ship cruises. Like many of the company’s clients, the Mays possess a certain curiosity and desire to learn about the places they are visiting.

In its first decade, AdventureSmith has received recognition

for its expertise in expedition cruising and wilderness travel from *National Geographic Traveler*, *Outside* magazine, the Outdoor Channel and more. Smith has even been featured on television shows including “Lonely Planet” and “Jack Hanna’s Animal Adventures”.

However, the national recognition is not what keeps clients coming back again and again.



A small cruise ship plies the waters of Alaska

“We could do it ourselves, and have in the past, but it’s nice to know they will take care of every little thing,” said Mel Weiss who, along with his wife, Paula, has booked at least half a dozen trips through AdventureSmith.

Weiss said he likes the fact that Smith and his staff have been to the destinations before and done this kind of traveling themselves. It adds a layer of trust for him. The couple recently returned from an expedition in Vietnam and Cambodia, but Mel Weiss, an anthropologist and world-traveler, declared Antarctica his all-time favorite: “It’ll blow your mind.”

In addition to the uniqueness of their travel offerings, AdventureSmith does something else a little out of the ordinary for a travel company. They call it “carbon free cruising.” Based on the gas, oil, mileage and a host of other factors, AdventureSmith calculates the amount of carbon

emitted for each passenger on each trip they book. This is converted to a dollar figure which is then invested in climate-friendly projects around the world. The company is not required to do this, nor do they tack on an extra cost to their clients. Smith said it's "just something we believe in."

Though none of the company's tours includes Lake Tahoe, and few of their clients are local, Smith has no regrets on choosing Tahoe City for the AdventureSmith home base.

"Me and my staff are very lucky to do what we do and go all these places around the world, but there's nothing quite like coming home to Tahoe," Smith said, "... it puts a smile on your face."