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Anne Block and her silver Cadillac can be hired to take visiting relatives on sightseeing trips of the "real" L.A. She'll plan the outing or they can call the shots.

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NEWS, TRENDS,
GOSSIP AND
STUFF TO DO

Former Southerner Anne Block has found herself a niche market. The tour guide shows **other people's relatives** around Los Angeles' "gloriously unusual" sights.



alling about with other people's mothers may not be every Angeleno's definition of a good time, but it is for Anne Block.

"People ask me, 'How could you spend the day with my mother?'" says Block, founder of Take My Mother*Please (*or any other V.I.P.), a service that will take visiting relatives off your hands—for a fee. I always tell them, 'Your mother fascinates me!'"

Since 1994, the Arkansas native with flaming red hair and a vibe that is significantly younger than her 50 years, has been packing perfect strangers into the back seat of her silver Cadillac and trekking them to the city's most "gloriously unusual" hide-outs. Whether it's visiting downtown's Bradbury Building or getting a soda at the drug store where Hugh Grant met his mistress, or taking a bathroom break at the Roosevelt Hotel, she's succeeded in

demytifying a city that most out-of-towers find intimidating.

"When I give tours not only am I showing off where I live," says Block, "but at the end of the day, my visitors have a feeling for the real L.A. and not just the fantasy. Of course, along the way, I'm pointing out every dive I've ever eaten a taco in."

When she says she is "absolutely crazy about Los Angeles," you can't help but believe her. Her enthusiasm for the city is unparalleled.

"I'm always snoopin' around, trying to find out what's really fun about L.A.," says the loquacious Block, with just a hint of a Southern accent. "I had been planning other people's trips for a really long time before it occurred to me that there was a business in this."

Block can take up to five people in her car on an eight-hour, customized adventure around the city (for larger groups, she hires a van or bus). She tailors each trip according to information she's received from the client. But plans are hardly set in stone.

"If I pick people up and they've completely changed their minds about what they want to do that day, I don't care. My job is to show them a good time."

Block's service isn't just for older people. It's for anyone with an interest in an alternate view of the city. She was once hired by a Parisian banker whose 16-year-old daughter "was very interested in seeing the Getty Museum," Block says. "And [the filming of] 'Baywatch.'"

Call Anne at 323-737-2200

—SUSAN CARPENTER
for the Los Angeles Times

HER WORLD

Women With Attitude Get Moving With Specialty Tour Companies

By SUSAN SPANO
TIMES TRAVEL WRITER

Martha Lindt's son and Carol Rivendell's daughter were high school sweethearts. The kids didn't get married, but their moms stayed together as business partners in Wild Women Adventures, a Northern California tour company for women that offers about 20 small, escorted trips a year to places such as Egypt and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Their Egypt trip is called "Queens of the Nile," and the one to San Miguel de Allende is "Red Hot Mamas." If you check out their Internet site, you see Lindt, a longtime travel agent, and Rivendell, a therapist, dressed as dancing Latin bombshells, wearing sunglasses and tropical fruit in their hair.

A sense of humor isn't the only thing these two women share. Both love to travel, and they believe that women don't always get to do what they want when they take trips with their families. "We're over being good girls," Riv-

endell says. "When you take a vacation apart from your loved ones, you don't have to take care of anyone but yourself."

Companies like theirs, travel clubs for women and specialty outfitters offering everything from women's mystery tours to group travel for senior women, have been springing up everywhere in the last few years, partly because of a growing realization in the travel industry that women are major decision-makers when it comes to spending vacation dollars. Most of these companies are small, Internet-driven start-ups, led by women with attitude and the belief that surprising things happen when women travel with women.

After Carole Latimer was fired from a Bay Area secretarial job, she started Call of the Wild, a Berkeley-based travel company that teaches women how to get along in the great outdoors. As the daughter of a fourth-generation El Dorado County outdoorsman ("I was my father's boy," she says), she wasn't without resources. From leading day trips for women into the Si-

erra, on foot, skis and snowshoes, she turned Call of the Wild into a full-fledged wilderness tour company, offering expeditions as far afield as Alaska and Hawaii.

Latimer takes a practical approach to helping women gain confidence in the wilderness. She shows them tricks her father taught her, such as how to find the best wood for starting a campfire. Once the fire is blazing, Latimer starts to cook, using recipes inspired by ethnic and gourmet restaurants in Berkeley and adapted for the wilderness. Her dinners are occasions for gathering, talking and bonding, and have become her trademark, featuring fresh salads, prosciutto and melon, hot brownies and polenta with *puttanesca* sauce. "Food makes women feel more comfortable in a strange environment," she says. "They may not know how to start a fire, but they know how to cut up vegetables."

Women also seem to know that there's more to travel than tickets and carry-on baggage, that trips have psychological components.



Illustration by NANCY OHANIAN

'When you take a vacation apart from your loved ones, you don't have to take care of anyone but yourself.'

Carol Rivendell
Wild Women Adventures

How else could Teresa DeLillo of San Leandro have come up with the idea for Menopausal Tours?

DeLillo's fledgling company, started last summer, offers about eight weeklong trips a year for women in their 40s to places such as Savannah, Ga., Charleston, S.C., New Orleans, San Antonio and the Napa Valley (a wine tour, of course, where no whining is allowed). All that's required is a good sense of humor, which, DeLillo says, is the best way to make it through a trip or a change in life.

She sees midlife as a time for women to reconnect and bond after years of competing with one another for men or jobs. A trip to Las Vegas with girlfriends two years ago inspired her to start Menopausal Tours, for which she chose this motto: "Is estrogen holding you back? Not anymore." Now she holds down a full-time secretarial job and waitresses on the side to support herself while launching the company.

Anne Block, a former actress who lives in L.A., also cast her fortunes with travel but in a different way. Her company, Take My Mother Please, is offering four European tours this year (to Belgium for chocolates and pastry, Tuscany for the harvest, Paris for shopping and the Umbrian town of Spello for the flower festival in June). Her specialty is showing people around L.A., especially mothers from out of town whose offspring don't have the time, inclination or expertise to do it themselves.

"How can you stand my mother?" a client once asked her.

Fortunately, Block, a gracious, outgoing Southerner by birth and breeding, is fascinated by other people's mothers. "They're not my mother," she says, laughing.

In 1992, when her friend Lily

Tomlin hired her to show her around Berlin during a film festival, Block realized she had a knack for ferreting out interesting places and fun things to do.

She never goes anywhere without snooping around, she says, which is how she found C&K Importing, a Greek grocery on Pico Boulevard where she takes mothers and others for souvlaki lunches.

Block gave up acting two years ago when she realized that going to auditions had become an annoyance. Like lots of other women, she'd rather hit the road and has found an ingenious way to do it.

Call of the Wild, 2519 Cedar St., Berkeley, CA 94708; telephone (510) 849-9292, fax (510) 644-3811, Internet www.callwild.com.

Menopausal Tours, P.O. Box 3157, San Leandro, CA 94578; tel. (510) 346-AWAY (346-2929), www.menopausaltraveltours.com.

Take My Mother Please, P.O. Box 35219, Los Angeles, CA 90035; tel. (323) 737-2200, fax (323) 737-2229, www.takemymotherplease.com.

Wild Women Adventures, 152 Bloomfield Road, Sebastopol, CA 95472; tel. (800) 992-1322 or (707) 829-3670, fax (707) 829-1999, www.wildwomenadv.com.