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Milestone Celebrations: Making Special Birthdays, Anniversaries, Life-Affirming Events and Memories...

Life is full events that mark milestones. From a birthday, anniversary, graduation or retirement to a new job, impending marriage or even divorce -- each is considered a rite of passage to be acknowledged and celebrated.

How we choose to mark these life-affirming events is changing and as the current movie blockbuster "Bridesmaids" suggests – women are definitely choosing to take their celebrations *on the road* with trips designated "**girls only.**"

For women these trips always include doing something really special and out of the ordinary – maybe even something particularly challenging or life-affirming – not just sightseeing but active participation in women-centric activities like spa days, shopping sprees, great food, superior accommodations and each supplemented with lots of laughter and conversation. From girlfriend getaways to bachelorette parties, mother/daughter excursions to high school and college reunions -- the depth and scope of options available for marking these milestone occasions remarkable and memorable is plentiful.

April Merenda, the founder of Gutsy Women Travel, the 10-year young forerunner in creating travel designed solely "for women by women," has some suggestions for planning these girls' only milestone memories.

"When women get together they want to be transported, leaving behind their daily worries and responsibilities but taking with them their cherished friends and supporters," said Merenda. "These shared experiences are often life changing as women partake in everything from cooking classes and wine tastings to art exploration, music appreciation and cultural exchange. Each trip is a milestone in itself as the participants return with more than just photographic memories, but with an impetus for self-empowerment and growth. It's as if the time spent in the company of other women they admire creates a sisterhood that reminds women

of their true potential and offers the opportunity that on their return they can continue to grow. I see more women opting for a journey that includes a focus on inner growth that is realized by immersion into cultures and places that are far different from their own - places they have only dreamed about and when in combination with a milestone event in their life pushes their own pre-conceived limits in a true celebration of their own unique life."

Merenda continued, "This is why 'women-only' travel is so successful – it's what I call the "eat, pray, love effect," when a woman gets out of her typical environment, bonds and is supported by other women, gains a new perspective on life and is able to focus on what she wants in her life. It's a renewal of body, mind, and spirit that goes beyond the exotic destination and foreign land she is visiting and resonates in her soul for a lifetime."

Gutsy Women Travel has experienced travel directors situated around the world that are able to offer customized travel itineraries to guests' specific interests. Gutsy Women Travel 2012 itineraries include more than 30 destinations on four continents to choose from or a group over ten can work with the company to custom tailor their own vacation to **ANY** destination.

Merenda recommends that groups start planning trips by talking in detail about everyone's expectations. This is especially true for groups consisting of several different age groups. It's important to make a 17-year-old as happy as someone who is 75 years old.

Here are Merenda's destination recommendations that will please a variety of females looking to forge their next milestone together:

HAWAII: Hawaii offers an ideal chance to bring multi-generations of women harmoniously together in a spectacularly beautiful and exotic setting. Best of all, there is something for everyone from surfing lessons and star glazing to luxurious spa treatments, yoga classes, every manner of outdoor beach and water activity and immersion in the local crafts and culture of the islands.

EGYPT: Inspired by Cleopatra and a host of gods and goddesses, Egypt offers some of the greatest wonders in the world and provides world-class accommodations, international food and entertainment, exclusive Nile cruises against the backdrop of one of the oldest civilizations and wonders of the world. Small groups are transported by boat, private vehicles and camels from one sacred site to the next at a slow, luxurious pace with plenty of time to soak in the local customs, sounds and tastes of the distinct Middle Eastern style. Shop the world-famous bazaars, design custom blended perfumes and indulge in beauty rituals fit for a queen as the body, mind and soul transports to an ancient time.

ITALY: Eat, pray and love the land and water of the Italy as you visit Tuscany, Cinque Terre and the Lake District. Drink in the chic sophistication of Rome, view the cliff hanging magnificence of Cinque Terre, partake in the spa indulgences of Montecatini and cruise famed Lake Como and shop fashionable Milan – what group of women couldn't find pleasure amongst the built in "la Dolce Vida" of Italy?

AFRICA: Up close and personal "tented" first-class accommodations bring the comforts of home to both the Nairobi and South African plains. Game viewing is spectacular and experienced from air conditioned privately chauffeured vehicles. Excursions include meals and cultural exchanges with local families, as well as wine tastings and gourmet dinners at some of the most coveted resorts and spas in the world. "If you get excited about wildlife and adventure there are fabulous safaris that will leave you mulling about the grand meaning of life," said Merenda. "Africa is where some of the world's most majestic animals habitat and where you are the guest in their home."

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