

HOW

CONFESSIONS OF... AN ADVENTURE GUIDE

'We Talk About How You Look in Bike Shorts'

From 1990 to 2004, Jerry Soverinsky led cycling, hiking, and mountain biking tours in Europe for the company he founded (and recently sold), CBT Tours. He's now a freelance writer in Chicago. His first book, *Cycle Europe: 20 Tours, 12 Countries*, was published last summer.

"You've got the best job ever!" Guides

hear this constantly. And yes, it's nice to get paid to be outside

every day and see the

world. (The endless

supply of women

looking for one-night

encounters isn't half-

bad either.) But no

one thinks about

how guides wake at

4 A.M. to scrub cargo

vans. Or that part of the

job involves massaging

cramps out of the pallid

thighs of 220-pound septuagenar-

ians. Or that we're never off the clock,

and we hear comments such as "My bike

is making a funny noise" in our sleep. If

these issues disappeared—and the

salaries multiplied by 20—then sure,

I'd agree that it's the best gig going.

We talk about you. Every night. Morn-

ings and afternoons, too. In fact, clients

are topic #1 out of our mouths. It's a ther-

apeutic release after dealing with unrea-

sonable people. (I get chewed out

because it rains?!) At any given moment

we might be dwelling on how you look

in bike shorts, your morning breath, or

the way you chase a map carried away

by the wind. Wealthy clients are the fun-

niest—who taught these people to run?



Pack lightly, please. How do you think your bags magically get aboard the van every day and appear in your hotel room each night? Guides do the heavy lifting. When you arrive with a suitcase the size of a Buick, well, that immediately establishes you as a giant red flag. You wouldn't

believe what some people pack for active, outdoorsy trips:

Do you really need the blender? On the other

hand, clients who

pack lightly soar

to the top of our

favorites list. We'll

happily shoot the

breeze with them

and hook them up

with the best advice.

Guides are simple. Keep

this in mind the next time

you drone on about your M&A

merger (*Did he say M&M's? Plain or peanut?*),

the benefits of the Kyoto Protocol (*Wasn't*

he Inspector Clouseau's sidekick?), or the dan-

gers of greenhouse gases (*hee-hee*). All the

guides I know like exercise, fresh air, and

simple pleasures. Our cultural interests

don't go much beyond the Cartoon Net-

work and *American Idol*.

We love widows! Take a vibrant, naive

young woman with a head full of fancy

dreams. Add in an unfulfilling marriage

to a multi-millionaire who expects her to

spend the next 30 years doing mindless

errands, taking tennis lessons, and little

else. When she's 62 and with little sense

of personal identity, have her husband

die from a massive coronary. What do

you get? The happiest creature

on Planet Earth. The widow is

the most generous, thoughtful,

outgoing, and fun client imagi-

nable. When the trip ends, she

invariably presses a thick wad of

bills into your palm and says,

"You've been a wonderful

guide. I want you to have this."

It's enough to make you weep

and call her "Mommy." ■

PET PEEVES

ORBITZ upped its fee for booking airline tickets from \$6 to \$6.99, while competitors Travelocity and Expedia kept their service charges at \$5. (Remember: If you book through an airline's website, there's no fee.)

AMTRAK used to sell some tickets that were fully refundable, but now there's a 10 percent penalty on all refunds. They're capping the charge at \$100—but who buys a \$1,000 train ticket anyway?