

## 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 septuagenarians. 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. Mornings and afternoons, too. In fact, clients are topic #1 out of our mouths. It's a therapeutic release after dealing with unreasonable 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 funniest—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 dangers 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 Network 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 imaginable. 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?