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Craving an adrenaline rush

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By Laura Baginski, Special to Travel Watch (March 19, 2002)

(Orbitz) -- An escape from the ordinary

If participants in the Great Escape 2002 are indicators for upcoming travel trends, then Americans are in for some big adventures.

Unaware of their first destination until they're 35,000 feet above the international dateline, competitors in this race must cross four continents in three weeks, using only their wits and clues derived from cryptic messages while visiting world-famous monuments and participating in sacred festivals.

The Great Escape is billed as a global scavenger hunt, and 25 teams of two are competing for \$100,000 in cash and prizes, plus the distinction of being crowned "The World's Greatest Travelers."

The trip costs \$9,900 per person, and each team is required to raise \$40,000 in pledges, the bulk of which goes to various charities.

Set to kick off April 12, the Great Escape was originally scheduled for October 2001. "We decided to pull the plug because [the contestants] were all worried about the people back home worrying about them while they traveled," says William Chalmers, the event's organizer.

"But they were all ready to go. The average person on our trip has been to 24 to 35 countries, so they're pretty well experienced. They have a sense of what the world is."

Now that terrorist threats have lessened, all of the original teams except one (who is expecting a baby any minute) are back on board, and only one of the original destinations -- India--has been nixed due to the country's tenuous political situation.