

Tours for All Seasons

Custom Tours strives to bring the New England's riches into focus for its customers.

(From left to right) Linda Edelman, president of Custom Tours, with Vermont guides Lilian Sheren, Mary Ann Schulze, Suzanne Butterfield, and Linda Gaidys

In 1981 Linda Edelman took a year off from her teaching job in Connecticut and headed to Vermont, freelancing as a step-on guide and skiing on her off hours. One day, while out on tour, she spoke to a tour leader/operator from Indiana who needed help putting together a New England tour. Edelman agreed to help, which led her to a new and unexpected career and home. "This client became my mentor, and she taught me about unsurpassed customer service, catering to the individual traveler's every need, and how important it is to make a tour not only educational but fun and different from everybody else's tour," says Edelman.

She launched Custom Tours in 1994 and continued to broaden her regional expertise, adding new tours. Today, she is president of Custom Tours, based in Montpelier, Vt., and she strives to provide travelers with a glimpse of the natural beauty of New England, its storied history, quaint towns, traditions, and its quirky and loveable inhabitants. Custom Tours specializes in both in-state and multi-state tours that travel throughout New England.

Edelman strives to provide the traditional *and* the unexpected. "We bring [our customers] to the well-known attractions like Ben and Jerry's ice cream fac-

tory, but we also bring them to see the hidden treasures, such as unique restaurants and inns that don't typically do motorcoach business," Edelman says. She also sees to it that the motorcoaches take mostly scenic roads, which offer stunning views of the regional landscape that visitors might not find on their own.

For the itineraries throughout New England, Custom Tours travels to various destinations in each state. And as the company name suggests, Edelman customizes each and every tour, working with customers throughout the planning process to ensure each package meets the needs of the client. Baby Boomers—her fastest-growing demographic—mandate options. For example, she may give Boomers the freedom to go on an early morning tour or stay at their hotel to relax or sleep in. She says that age group typically likes to have choices and doesn't necessarily want to be kept to a strict schedule. On the other hand, mature adults are accustomed to having a firmer schedule with more structured activities on their trips, and their itineraries reflect that.

One way Custom is combating the poor economy and trying to attract more customers is by creating innovative travel packages. For example, Custom began a joint venture with the Vermont Country Store earlier this year. They have coined them as their "nostalgic" tours, and they include seasonally themed three-night tour packages with stops at popular attractions featuring exclusive components not available with anyone else. These tours are aimed at attracting more visitors to the state year around, and Edelman will offer activities that fit the season, and can be marketed to all age groups. For example, in the winter, Edelman will include activities like snowshoeing, horse-drawn sleigh rides, and tours through snow-swept villages. With this variety, she is looking to not only entice potential customers but provide them with the essence of the region. "We strive to give our customers the ability to see and understand what makes Vermont and New England a truly special place." ■

For Edelman's Vermont favorites, see page 136.



PROSPECTUS

Founded: 1994

Motto: "Exceed the expectations of every client."

Web: www.customtours inc.com



Fall for Vermont

Linda Edelman of Custom Tours Inc. is the Vermont authority. Here are her signature Vermont favorites and the out-of-the way treasures she says you can't pass up.



● **THE SPECTACULAR** Camel's Hump State Park in the Green Mountains. Within the park, is a mountain with the same name—third highest in the state—and it provides beautiful panorama vistas of the area. On a clear day, visitors can see the highest mountains in Vermont, New York, and New Hampshire from the Camel's Hump peak.



● **THE MAJESTIC** Outside the Montpelier Capitol, the building has a majestic view in the summer and fall with its gold dome contrasted with a backdrop of the wooded hillside of Hubbard Park.

● **THE TRADITION** Visiting family-owned farms such as Morse, Sugarbush, or Dakin, where maple syrup is harvested.

● **THE DECADENT** Ben & Jerry's Phish Food—chocolate ice cream with gooey marshmallow with caramel swirls and fudge fish.

● **THE SIGNATURE** The Vermont Maple Creemee (which has its own Facebook page)—Vermont's version of soft serve ice cream, but infused with home-grown maple. ■