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JOURNEYS; Tickets? Lifestyle Guru? All Set

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By Karen Robinovitz

WHEN Denise Rich was planning a recent trip to Aspen, she meticulously packed her essentials -- toiletries, ski gear, thermals, oh, and yoga instructor. That's right, yoga instructor. Ms. Rich, the songwriter and ex-wife of Marc Rich (the fugitive financier pardoned by Bill Clinton just before he left the presidency), takes her own personal guru when she hits the road.

It may seem like indulgence to the nth degree, but in some echelons of society, where a \$1,000 handbag is considered a bargain and conversations about Iraq are conducted over dinner at Jean Georges, it is a necessity. In today's stressful times, there is a belief that a trusted expert, someone whose job is to keep you centered (or well fed or coifed or thin), offers solace and a sense of equanimity.

"Because the world is in such an upset and such turmoil, it's so important to come inside yourself with something like meditation, rather than focus on what is going on around you," Ms. Rich said just before the war in Iraq began. She said that she considered what she paid her guru, Jules Paxton, "a gift to myself." (She must make up for what the contact yogi/healer/body worker would normally pull in during his normal five-clients-a-day schedule, not to mention air fare, hotels and meals.)

"It's anxiety-provoking to watch the news or even read the paper," Ms. Rich said. "When I go to yoga and find a meditative state, I embrace calm and have more strength to deal with what's going on."

"It's not easy to find good teachers," she continued, "which is why I bring Jules with me when I go to Aspen, Los Angeles or another part of the country. My work with him is elevating, spiritually and physically. It improves my body, mind and song writing."

While she has always traveled with a staff of experts, she said, she has noticed that a growing number of people in her social circle are doing the same. "I think it's because people are more aware of the importance of taking care of themselves nowadays, especially with the world being in the state that it's in," Ms. Rich said.

So it's no surprise that Mr. Paxton is earning frequent-flier miles right and left, with trips abroad with Sting, time in London with Annie Lennox and plans with a handful of other clients around the world.

"It's difficult to stick to a healthy routine when you're traveling, so many of my clients bring me with them when they go out of town," he said. "It keeps them centered, which is a vital part of having a harmonious existence, especially when you have a busy lifestyle and you still have work to do, which may be hard to focus on when the world is at war and terrorist threats are high."

One hotel mogul said, "It's important to travel with someone you can depend on and trust, someone who helps better your life, now more than ever." He said he did not want to be identified because "even though taking a chef, trainer, Pilates and sometimes yoga instructor with me to St. Barts, the Hamptons and Europe is a way I nurture myself and take care of my health, it may sound frivolous to people who don't understand."

The price tag of such opulence can run up to \$20,000 a week, according to Oz Garcia, a nutritionist who has been around the world with clients who take as many as 10 gurus or advisors along for the ride. "Typically, the client picks up all the bills: hotel, destination, food, service and the products we bring, which are top of the line," Mr. Garcia said. "It's worth it, though, because I embody a certain type of lifestyle. I help my clients to look good and stay fit."

Kenny Dichter, an owner of Marquis Jet Partners, a jet leasing company, said he recently began to travel with his trainer

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and massage therapist. "I have the tendency to get off my regular regimens when I am away," he said. "Before I started bringing people with me over the last year or so, I used to get lazy and not work out. Then, I'd come home from my trip not feeling very good about myself. The few thousand dollars is worth it because it keeps me healthy, hence, sane."

Think about it.

How many times have your diet and workout program gone to pot when you interrupted the daily ritual of going to the gym at a certain time and eating that special something from your local health food store? Travel is almost always taxing; even first-class seats on planes can lead to stiffness, tight muscles and other physical discomforts. You may be checking into the best hotel around, but there is no guarantee that you will find a great masseuse to revive your limbs just the way you like.

GARY MANSOUR, the owner of the Los Angeles-based Mansour Travel Company, which caters to celebrities, said that he had seen the trend grow exponentially, and not just among celebrities. "A 70-year-old couple, not in the film industry, always take their trainer on long cruises," he said.

"Sometimes the gurus are in charge of all of the plans. They have say in the hotel rooms and make sure the gym facilities are equipped with the right things. They ask me more questions about amenities than my actual clients."

Todd Rome, the president of Bluestar Jets, a private jet company, said that he had seen this type of thing for ages, but he was seeing it now "on a whole new level."

"It's no longer just limited to nutritionists and trainers and such," he said. "People are flying with their hair and makeup artists and manicurists. We've had yoga teachers give people in-flight classes and we've had chefs traveling with our big honcho clients on our jets, feeding their employers Alaskan king crab and caviar."

Jennifer Hutt, a 33-year-old lawyer, said she had taken her nutritionist abroad with her because "it's hard to travel to another country and stick to an eating plan that works for you."

"So having someone with me takes the work out of thinking about my diet," she said. "If someone is around to say, 'You need to have an apple, steamed chicken and broccoli,' you're going to have it. And if she says, 'It's O.K. to have the rigatoni,' it makes you feel safe enough to have it."

Why are food choices so difficult?

"People go to great lengths to eat well and have certain kinds of foods prepared for them," said Anne O'Hare, a chef who used to take weekly trips to Sun Valley, Idaho, with her former boss, the magazine publisher Jann Wenner. "It's one less thing to worry about because, no matter how tough times are, globally, if you don't nurture yourself, who is going to? Since last summer, the demand for services such as mine has grown 10-fold."

The 40-something fashion consultant and stylist Lori Goldstein, who is best known for her work on Madonna's videos, has taken her anusara yoga teacher to Europe for fashion week. "I am over not taking care of myself and draining myself while traveling," she said, referring to the first time, right after 9/11, that she traveled with her yogi, Elena Brower, and realized what a difference it made.

"It changed everything about my trip to do yoga daily, even if it was just standing on my head for a

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few minutes and chanting mantras when I'd come back from the day," she said. "You know how people say that they bring their candles and pillows? I brought one of my favorite people in the world, who happens to be my yoga teacher."

According to Jesse Itzler, Mr. Dichter's partner at Marquis Jet, their clients, "Wall Street guys and ex-dot-commers who have time on their hands," bring the spa -- and even a psychologist -- with them when they get away. "They're getting rubbed down and stretched from the minute they take off," he said. "One of my clients actually told me that he brings his masseuse when he goes to the Ritz-Carlton in Montego Bay because he can't get a massage appointment there, the place is so booked."

If you can afford to go over the top, there is nothing like having someone who understands your body and mind at your beck and call. "It's easier when you have a rapport with someone, especially if you fly private and can bring extra people on the plane," said Christina Gersten, a Los Angeles socialite who recently took her hair stylist, Laurent D, when she flew to Cannes, France.

Julie Brown, a former MTV video jockey and one of the stars of ABC's recent reality series "I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here," described traveling with a guru as "comfort." She said she went everywhere with Montgomery Frasier, whom she described as "a manager/personal assistant/stylist/confidant," and said that she liked to travel with him because "he lets you be you and he knows my true journey."

Mr. Frasier, who calls himself a lifestyle guru, said: "In the present climate of the world, my job is twice as important because travel is twice as stressful. No one is immune to security issues, and clients get upset when their bags, which may include medication, are searched. I'm there to ease tension." For this, Mr. Frasier charges up to \$1,000 a day.

Mr. Frasier said he believed his clients, "C.E.O.'s, politicians and power people," like to pack him along with their toiletries because "I make people feel good about themselves; I am their security blanket."

"If you take your briefcase on vacation," he asked, "why not take your guru?"