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## Five find their niche: Specialty travel agencies

### By Catherine Watson

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Before they founded Sacred Sites Tours in Minneapolis in 1997, Donna Niles and Linda Baker had traveled a lot in Britain, drawn by their own interests in spirituality and archaeology.

"We kept running into people who did not understand what they were looking at," Niles said. "There are about 900 standing stone circles in Britain. Most Americans know about Stonehenge."

Their tours are for women and girls. The focus is on "the great open air megalithic temples that were once the seat of goddess-based religions," Niles said. "It's a self-esteem tour. We're giving them their heritage."

But the tours also leave room for serendipity. "We are explorers ourselves," said Baker. "We want everyone to have that experience that we did when we discovered the site."

Clients also bring their own energy and expertise to the group, "so we're all learning from each other," she said. The result is "a goofy, laughing, spiritual, archaeological quest."

"We really try to be the anti-tour," Niles said. The pace is leisurely, with time for "the joy of clotted cream and scones," mingling with local people and rejuvenation.

On their last tour, for example, one participant had not been away from her husband and kids for 12 years. "She just needed some loving care," said Niles. "It gave her the strength to go back and do her life well."

Baker and Niles do two tours a year, for groups of six to 12. They also will customize private trips for individuals or smaller groups.

Their 2003 trips are "Realms of the Goddess," eight days in England in early May for \$2,300 per person, and "Temples of the Moon and Sun," 14 days in Scotland from June 24 to July 6 for \$2,600. Airfare is not included.



"Women are always putting themselves last," Baker said. "It's hard for women to decide they can put themselves ahead of other bills coming in - house repairs, a new car, the kids -- so we have a moderately inexpensive foray."

Information: Call 612-823-2442 or visit the Web site at <http://www.sacredsitetours.com>

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