

Behind the Business: TourGlides



Photo: Seth Freeman

They say that which does not kill you makes you stronger. Or, in the case of Jeff Hutman, points you to a whole new adventure. A graphic artist by trade, Jeff came up with the idea for TourGlides after a disastrous snowboarding trip necessitated major reconstructive surgery on the arm he used to earn a living. "I was always outdoors," says Jeff, "but after my accident, my whole lifestyle changed." He had left the urban jungle of northern Virginia for a home near the C&O Canal. But only two years into his Maryland residency, he found himself unable to rock climb, bike, kayak or enjoy his other favorite outdoor activities.

While out of athletic commission, Jeff was working on a freelance illustration incorporating a Segway. He was attempting to draw with his injured hand when he had a revelation: He would eventually recover and get back to his favorite activities, but there are many people with mobility issues who are unable to enjoy the outdoors. "The Segway is the great equalizer," Jeff says. Everyone has the same learning curve, and suddenly those who can't walk long distances or on trails are able to keep up with a group.

But TourGlides are not just for those with physical impairments. They provide extra value to traditional tours — allowing groups to cover more ground and providing a different vantage point. The pure "cool" factor and novelty is another big draw. "They help close the generation gap," says Jeff. Kids today are less interested in our national parks and being outside, but adding a Segway suddenly makes being outdoors and learning history a lot more appealing.

TourGlides started coasting in the spring of 2007 and soon scored a major coup by being the first Segway tours allowed in the national park system. Helped by an endorsement from the Leave No Trace organization — Segways are very green vehicles — Jeff is working to franchise TourGlides in national parks across the country.

His passion for his business is evident, yet he admits it's not altogether altruistic. Yes, he enjoys helping those with mobility issues and having an opportunity to support our natural national treasures, but the biggest perk is providing a service that allows him to do what he likes best: being outdoors with other enthusiasts, having a good time. ♥ —Ann Davis

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