

# Immersion travel

By Eileen Fischer  
 STAFF WRITER

**Z**ipping through city after city on a guided tour or lying on the beach getting a tan probably isn't Sheryl Kayne's idea of a perfect vacation. Instead of soaking rays, she'd rather be soaking up the local culture.

The Weston, writer, educator and former *Connecticut Post* columnist loves to travel, she said, but found that just visiting places was boring. When she traveled, she said, she wanted to become part of a community and get to know it from a local's point of view, not just as a visitor.

Her first true immersion vacation happened in 2003 when Kayne took a trip to Stehekin, Wash., a wilderness recreation area, and took a job she found on the Internet as a breakfast/lunch cook. Living in the remote region that could only be reached by ferry was her first big adventure, she said.

And, as it turned out, it became the precursor for her biggest dream of all — driving solo to Alaska and working as a park ranger at Denali National Park. While the park ranger gig didn't work out, she did drive to the 49th state in 2005 and worked as a historic interpreter at a hotel six miles from the park.

"It was great. I got to dress up," she said with a laugh about her job as a reenactor. But even more, that summer taught her that "Whenever you put yourself out there, you are living differently," Kayne said. "This is the way I wanted to travel and wanted to inspire other people to do it as well."

From her experiences and research, Kayne wrote "Immersion Travel USA" (Countryman Press, \$19.95), a guide that offers more than 200 immersion excursions in the United

States, from experiencing life as an astronaut (via Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center) to saving turtles (through Loggerhead Marine Life Center of Juno Beach, Fla.), just a few examples found in the book.

"Immersion travel has always applied to trips in Europe — people immersing themselves in a culture to learn language. I always felt I could do that here," said Kayne, who has visited 47 of the 50 states. "I wanted to apply

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that concept with connecting with people, and really understanding and enjoying cultural differences."

Kayne divides the trips in the book into five categories: helping, learning, working, caring and playing. The suggestions come from things she'd like to do and from ideas that came from networking with others, she said.

She has included 100 personal stories from people who have taken these types of vacations, such as a family from San Francisco who volunteered on an Indian reservation in Montana. (Kayne has another book coming out in June called "Volunteer Vacations Across America.")

The activities can be for a whole summer — like Kayne's trip to Alaska — or you can spend as little as an hour or two on something, such as Kayne did for the Wolf Recovery Project while visiting the Grand Canyon.

**Earthwatch**, an organization featured in the book, has amazing volunteer opportunities, Kayne writes. Kristen Kusek, spokeswoman for the 37-year-old group, said Earthwatch attracts about 3,500 volunteers a year who collect data for researchers in 100 projects in 35 countries. Volunteers pay to travel to a site, she said, then are taken care of from the time they get there.

"The idea is that everyday people are doing real work. People love it. They feel they are making a difference," she said, noting it's a one-to-two-week commitment. But that doesn't mean it's all work and no play. There is down time built in, she said.

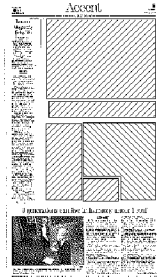
In her playing section — enjoying the great outdoors — Kayne interviewed Kristin Watson, 56, of Shelton, about her love of seeing America from the back of a motorcycle. She and her husband, Richard, have ridden cross-country twice on their Honda Goldwing.

"I think you see it better when you're not restricted by the car," Kristin Watson said. "You hear it; you feel it; you absorb much more sitting on the back of a bike.

"It's just a wonderful experience. I can't wait to do it again," she said.

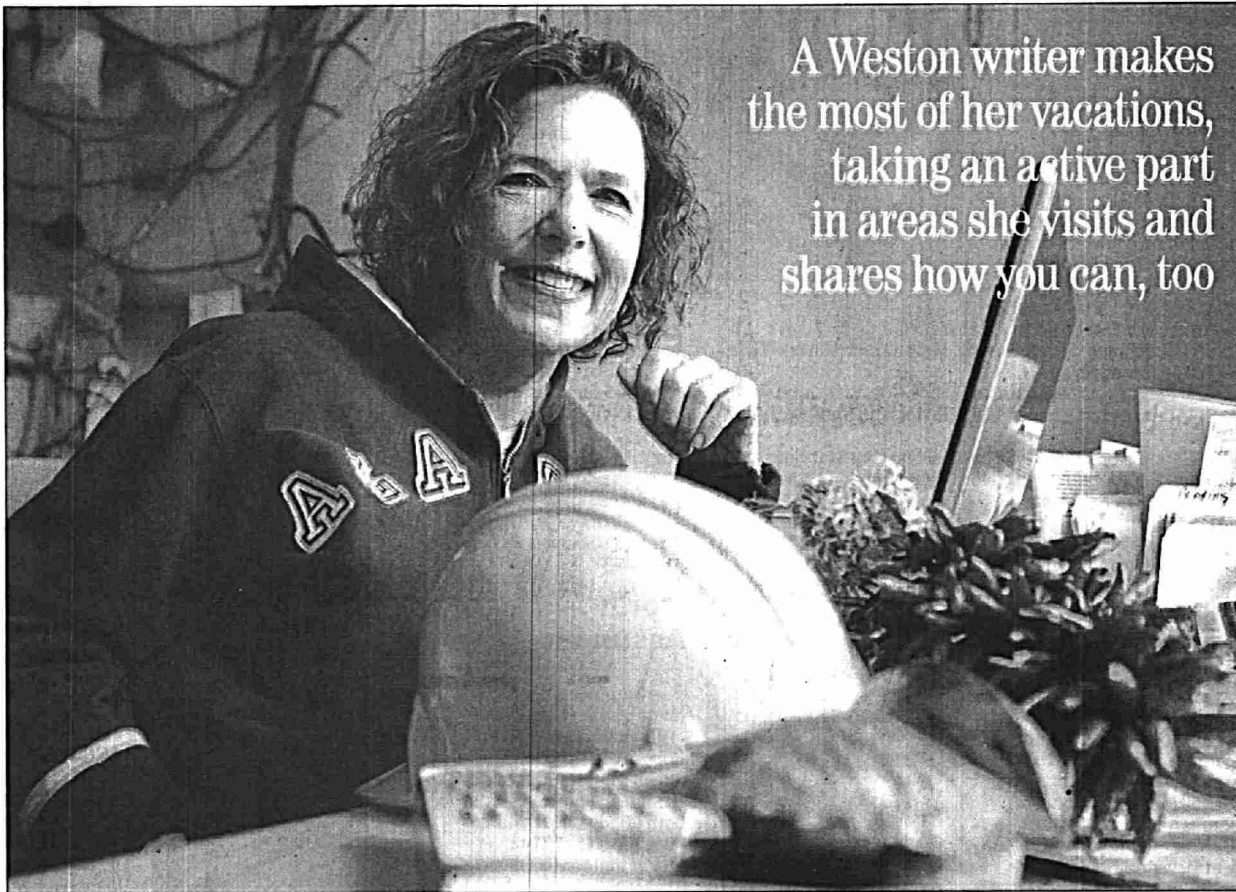
By the end of this year, Kayne plans to visit the last three states on her personal list — Oregon, Oklahoma and Arkansas. So what's left for this intrepid adventurer?

"I most want to be a whale-watch naturalist with San Juan Safari Tours on their whale watching trips in Friday Harbor, Wash.," said Kayne, who has whale-watched off the coasts of



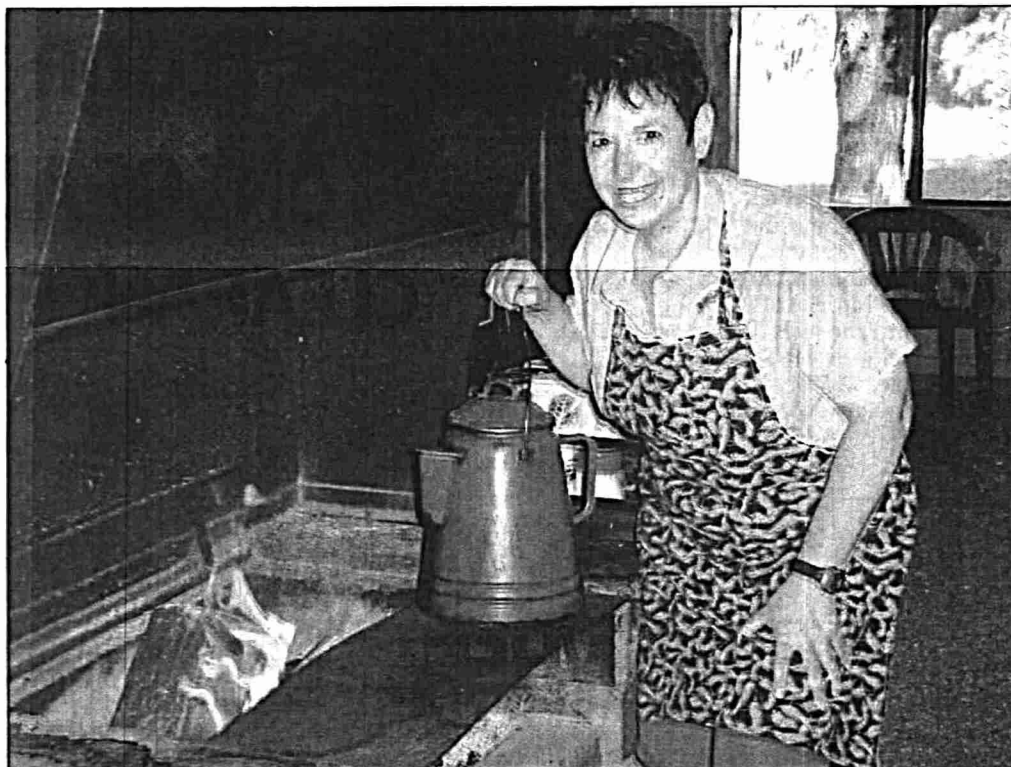
Massachusetts, Maine, Maui and California. "I love whales and whale watching."

*Kayne will sign books and give a reading at the Westport Barnes & Noble, 1076 Post Road East, Saturday at 2 p.m. and present a program at the Weston Public Library, 56 Norfield Road, on Jan. 14 at 7:30 p.m.*



A Weston writer makes the most of her vacations, taking an active part in areas she visits and shares how you can, too

AUTUMN DRISCOLL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Above: Sheryl Kayne puts on a pot of coffee at her job as a breakfast/lunch cook in Stehekin, Wash. She spent her summer vacation in 2003 there after finding the job on the Internet. Top: Kayne, the author of "Immersion Travel USA," sits at her writing desk in her Weston home. The book gives suggestions on trips that include volunteering, learning and helping others, as well as playing.**

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