WITH MOST having put the dreadful exams behind them and now looking forward to a blissful vacation, this is the perfect time to strap on those travel boots. If you hate following an itinerary or boarding a busload of aunties with screaming babies in tow HT Horizons provides you with options that go beyond the tourist way. Here are four groups that help you do just that.

Phase 5

THIRTY-THREE-year old Vinod Sreedhar is on a quest. As a youngster interested in ecological living, he is on the lookout for alternative world views on the same. And travel, he believes, acts as a catalyst. “The idea is to meet new people, talk to them and work with them,” he says. “Though currently, this would be on an exposure level and a trip to jumpstart your thinking process, the idea is to eventually create more ideas for people to plug in.”

Sreedhar is also one of the founding members of Phase 5, a social entrepreneurial venture. Though other members of the group have now moved on, Sreedhar decided to continue the venture. He organised a trip to Kashmir last year to speak to the locals and know more about the political situation. “The point is not to offer any solution or say what’s right or wrong, but get a wider perspective of what’s happening,” says Sreedhar. Staying in houseboats, having meals with the locals and visiting smaller villages did the trick, leading to another trip to Kashmir, followed by Leh, Ladakh and Spiti in July. A group of fifteen people studied the ecological and political issues of the region. With other trips to Kashmir and South India coming up, Vinod is trying to get more people to chart trips such unusual trips.

MY PICK
Pooja Nayak who was a part of the 23-day trip to Kashmir this year recounts her experience:
Trips like these are so much more than pit stops to monuments, and they’re definitely not about itineraries. It’s about connecting with people who live in these beautiful places, living at their homes, cooking and sharing meals with them, using local transport, being responsible and attempting to understand nuances of a culture that is so different from your own. All this, without creating a hole in your pocket.

Average cost: Spent around Rs 23,000 for the trip
For more details you can write to Vinod on vinodsreedhar@gmail.com

The Backpacker Co

FOR MANY overseas students, taking a gap year and backpacking across the country is common. Yogesh Shah (or Yogi as he’s fondly called) set up The Backpacker Co, India’s first backpacking company which takes travellers on informal, low cost, independent trips.

SOMIT DOSHI, the founder of the company stresses on the importance of off-beat adventure travel. “We also try to arrange for village and homestays, which gives you a feel of the culture and

MY PICK
20-year old Shweta Goud (20), a psychology graduate from Jai Hind College, went river-rafting in the Himalayas:
We went river-rafting in Rishikesh and trekking to Har-ki-Dun. The best part about this trip was that the instructors were very friendly and mingled with the group. We stayed in tents in most of the places, unless it was too cold, and that added to the beauty of the entire trip.

Average cost: Spent around Rs 15,000 for the Himalayan getaway
For more details call, 2403 6305

MY PICK
23-year old Deepi Jhangiani is a student of FLAME University, Pune
I have travelled across Western Europe with The Backpacker Co and I can say that the best bit is the flexibility it offers. The entire experience of meeting new people and being on my own was amazing. You can alter your schedule a day in advance.

Average cost: Spent around Rs 1 lakh for the trip
For more details, log on to thebackpackerco.com

Strawberry Outbound

PREFER THE rush of adrenaline on your trip rather than going to the remains of an old monument? Check out Strawberry Outbound, which treats the outdoors as a vehicle for experiential learning. The company is into day trips, multi-day adventure trips, adventure shows and events, outdoor training modules for corporates, extreme stunts production and even spiritual empowerment programmes.

Sommait Doshi, the founder of the company stresses on the importance of off-beat adventure travel. “We also try to arrange for village and homestays, which gives you a feel of the culture and