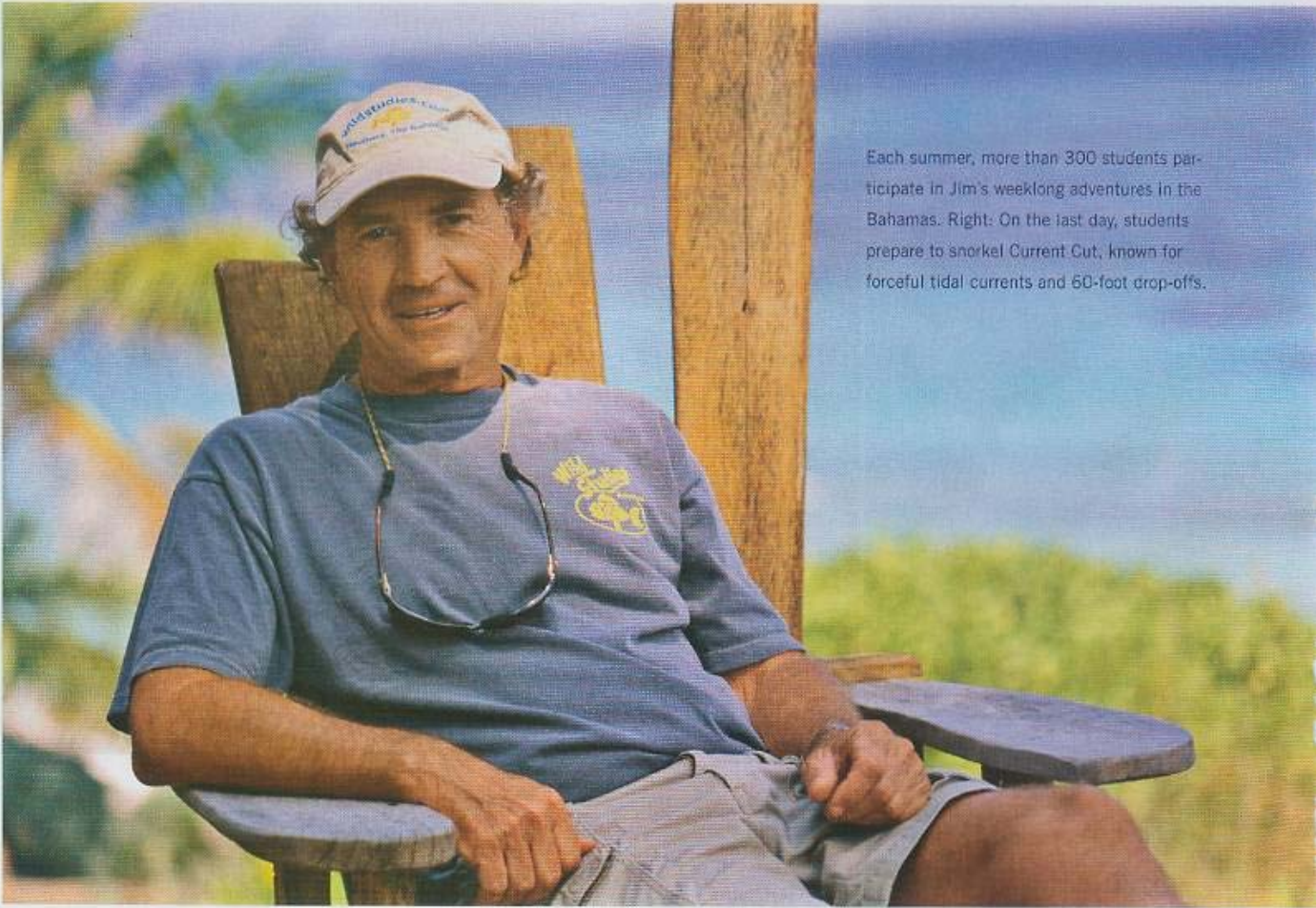


life lessons



Each summer, more than 300 students participate in Jim's weeklong adventures in the Bahamas. Right: On the last day, students prepare to snorkel Current Cut, known for forceful tidal currents and 60-foot drop-offs.

jim Jordan waits on the shore of Eleuthera Island as his students emerge from the Caribbean-blue water. Laughing and squealing, they chatter about their snorkeling experience. "I saw a stingray and a

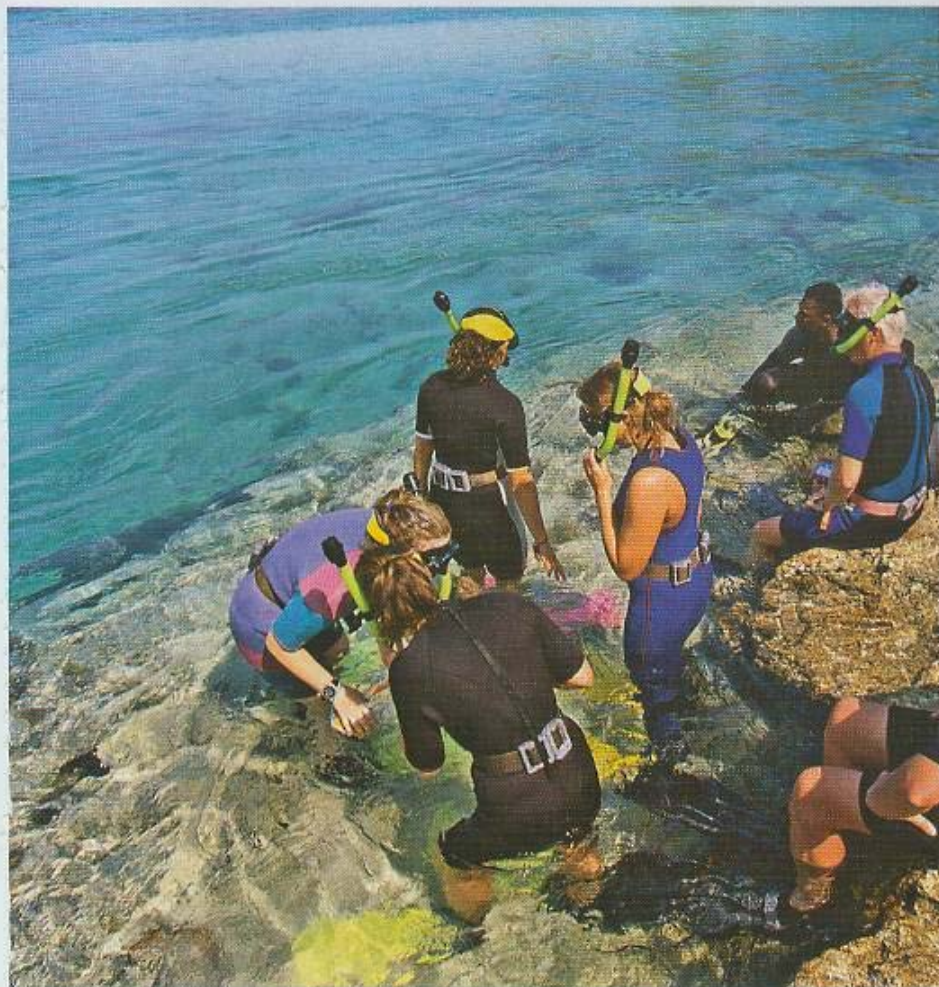
barracuda," one young lady says. Another, beaming as she shows off her treasure, says, "Look! I found this conch shell. This is so cool."

They're all attending Wild Studies, a marine-ecology adventure

that includes kayaking, caving, drift snorkeling, and island exploration. Today, the last of seven days in the Bahamas, the students have studied Current Cut, known for a 9-knot tidal flow and incredible marine life.

TEXT BY VICKI J. WEATHERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARA GRAY

After visiting the Bahamas, Wisconsin insurance broker Jim Jordan said, "I quit," and moved to the islands. His leap led to Wild Studies ecological school.



Jim smiles as he responds to their rapid questions. After 16 summers as owner/director of this ecoinstitute, his own enthusiasm about the program still matches the students'.

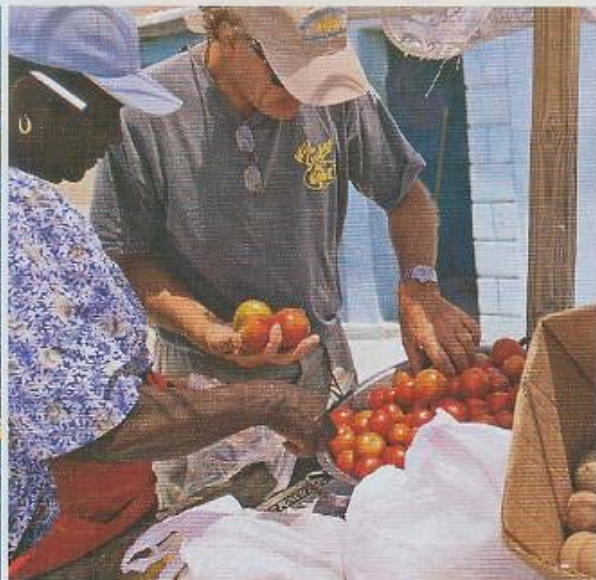
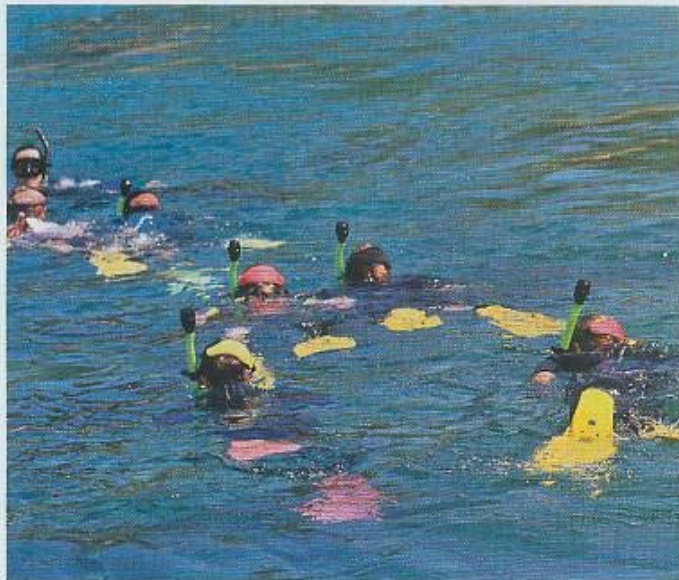
A former insurance broker in Waupaca, Wisconsin, Jim completely changed his life after a friend invited

him to visit Eleuthera. After a few days exploring the island, Jim began to map out a business plan for a new career. He wanted to offer people a travel destination they could experience as adventurers, not as tourists. Once back home, he shipped a 1977 pickup truck, 10 kayaks, and 10 sets

of scuba gear to start his ecological program. "That first year we did two one-week classes," Jim says. "Now we offer 10 to 11 weeklong sessions each summer."

He recruits participants by working with high school- and college-level science and biology

“I hope to encourage and teach others to get out there, have a life full of adventure, and become a traveler, not a tourist.” —Jim Jordan



teachers in the United States. “It’s more than a fun trip—this builds résumés and character,” Jim says. “These kids come to a strange environment and have a life-changing experience. I believe that learning goes far beyond the classroom and lectures.”

Visitors to the Wild Studies camp discover a modest hotel under the palm trees. Jim built the brightly

colored, hand-painted cottages, most of the furniture, and a main lodge used for meals and group lessons. A winding path with hand-painted signs leads to the outpost’s private shore. Swings, hammocks, and chairs nestle in shaded recesses along the trail for rest and reflection.

Jim says of his program, “Life experiences and world travel contribute much to our ability to

deal with the unexpected, function in a strange environment or culture, and learn new skills, all of which increase confidence and decision-making abilities. It’s my hope that the kids take these lessons home with them.”

Wild Studies Bahamas Blue and Outpost Eleuthera hotel (open to the public); call 866/658-1119 or visit wildstudies.com and outposthotel.com.

jim’s advice for taking the plunge

save up. Jim was able to make his transition because of a profitable insurance career and smart real estate investments. Today, he splits his time between Miami, Eleuthera, and an additional school in Costa Rica operated by his son, Reade.

adjust to island life. “You just can’t run down to the corner store and get it—it’s plan ahead, plan ahead, plan ahead,” Jim says. Most supplies are shipped or flown in from the United States, and orders often take weeks to arrive.

become a local. Learn all you can about the culture. Jim says, “I buy as much as possible from islanders.”

get involved. Jim founded a library on the island. He also recently bought fire extinguishers for every home in the James Cistern township.

attract clientele. Wild Studies Assistant Director Tara Short visits schools throughout the year, promoting enrollment. Her efforts have attracted students from Colorado, Texas, and the Midwest.