

Founder Christopher Hagedorn grew up in the southern Appalachian Mountains of eastern Tennessee. From his earliest memory he had a great passion and love for exploring the outdoors. Through his early explorations he discovered another important quality that has served him to this day—the equally great passion for teaching others and leading them on fascinating outdoor adventures.

Following 20 years of exploration, adventure and outdoor education in the southeastern United States, Christopher set out with his family on his first journey westward. In planning the journey he spent countless hours studying maps, route descriptions and trip reports in order to assemble the most exciting westward trip imaginable. His itinerary followed the least travelled routes he could find and brought him and his family through the vast and open plains of the Midwest to the serene landscapes encompassing the headwaters of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. He travelled on visiting the badlands of South Dakota, the striking granite monoliths of the Black Hills finally reaching the grandest mountain range he had ever seen--the Bighorn Mountains of north central Wyoming. The journey continued westward through one of the most inconceivable and fascinating thermal basins on Earth—the Yellowstone Caldera--past the great Teton mountain range and the magnificent expanse of the Snake River Plain. Upon reaching the largest river in the contiguous United States--the Columbia River--he sighted his first Cascade Volcano—Mount Rainier—one of the most impressive sights he had ever witnessed, complete with a shimmering saucer-like covering, which he later learned to be a lenticular cloud. His trip to Washington State was life altering in nature. Following visits to the North Cascade Mountains, Mount Baker, Mount Rainier, and the verdant treasures of the Olympic National Park, his new destiny was now manifest—once completing his Bachelor of Science degree in Geological Science from the University of Tennessee he would begin the next chapter in his journey of adventure and wilderness exploration—a move to the most amazing mountain range he had ever seen—the Cascade Mountains of the Pacific Northwest.

After some 30 distinct adventure trips driving across the U.S., Christopher now resides in the awe-inspiring shadows of the greatest alpine playground and wilderness training area in the lower 48—the North Cascade mountains. In the early days of this experience he worked in several adventure based jobs as a hydrologist for the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest where he once stated, “this is the first job of my life where I can actually hike and explore the wonders of the outdoors for a living—what a concept!”. He went on to take an engineering consulting job for an oceanography company that conducted seafloor surveys for companies laying fiber optic cable and oil pipeline. This was yet another great adventure that allowed him to travel around the world while continuing to lay a new foundation in building his alpine climbing and technical leadership skills in the Pacific Northwest.

For the next 10 years while pursuing the greatest adventure of his life—his dream to become a United States Astronaut—Christopher earned his Master of Science degree in Geotechnical Engineering and worked in leadership roles for municipal government organizations. Most recently he served as Director of Public Works and Interim City Manager for a small city agency. In addition to his ongoing education in outdoor leadership education, public leadership roles provided him another means of sharpening his carefully honed planning, organizational, project management, communication and leadership skills that are essential in teaching others how to safely travel and enjoy North America's most beautiful and amazing wilderness areas.

In beginning his formal alpine mountaineering training, Christopher experimented with courses offered by the Seattle Mountaineers, Bellevue Community College Outdoor Recreation Program, Mountain Madness and American Alpine Institute. It didn't take long for him to discover which training methodology worked best for him. The Bellevue Community College program was taught by a well-established Pacific Northwest instructor that had been teaching students about alpine mountaineering for over 25 years. Christopher was immediately taken to the program's core focus on outdoor leadership education, safety and well-rounded technical skills. Unlike other programs that focused primarily on leading groups up mountains without teaching them essential wilderness skills, or teaching overly large groups that made one-on-one instruction exceedingly challenging and difficult—this methodology seemed to make the most sense. The program also offered another important quality that was unmatched amongst any of the competition—an unblemished safety record with no fatalities. This was impressive. Chris concluded that these folks must be doing something right. He set out to take every course offered by the program including its Basic Glacier Climbing Class, Advanced Glacier Climbing Class, Wilderness Leadership Class and Winter Mountaineering Class. During this time he also established himself as an assistant instructor for these classes where he gained invaluable experience helping to lead others on their first wilderness adventure.

With the U.S. space program in decline and the realization that becoming an astronaut was getting further from his reach, Chris made the monumental decision to bring his lifelong adventure goals closer to Earth and start his own outdoor adventure company. Development of the company mission statement was quite simple. He would utilize his wealth of knowledge and professional experience in wilderness adventure planning, leadership, safety, technical climbing and science and engineering expertise to build a company focused on sharing this knowledge and passion for adventure and exploration of wild places with others. In doing so, he developed a company that is unique from typical U.S. guide services. He focused his endeavors exclusively in the wilds of North America—the land that he loves most and knows best. He created programs that are designed not only to lead others to spectacular wilderness settings, but to teach them essential outdoor safety and leadership skills along the way.

For years, Chris had heard stories from less than satisfied clients about being led up a mountain

like I herd of cattle without learning very much along the way. It appeared the primary goal for some guide services was to get as many clients up and down a mountain as quickly as possible which left little time for learning and practices essential skills. Any experienced guide can lead a group of clients up a mountain like a herd of cattle, but doing so in a way that focuses on building awareness of ones surroundings so that he can travel more safely on his own, provide him with the basic technical knowledge that is essential for travelling safely and competently in wilderness environments and learning basic skills to minimize impacts in wilderness environments is both extremely important and unique in the industry. There are surprisingly few programs that teach basic wilderness education techniques such as trip planning and proper gear selection, hazard recognition and avoidance, wilderness navigation and basic safety skills. Offering programs that are well rounded in the fundamentals of exploring wilderness landscapes, learning basic safety skills and safe travel techniques provides the core foundation for what is GITW.