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US TOUR OPERATORS ASSOCIATION CALLS ON AMERICANS TO TRAVEL ABROAD

The U.S. Tour Operators Association is encouraging Americans to take advantage of lower-cost travel opportunities and to reinforce the international goodwill created in the wake of President Obama's successful meetings with world leaders.

"Despite the recession, Americans have a unique opportunity to travel this year," said USTOA president Bob Whitley. "There is a renewed sense of optimism on the world stage and a new spirit of openness and enthusiasm for the U.S. in many countries around the globe."

Whitley said Obama's willingness to ease restrictions on Cuba and his dialogues with other international leaders should serve as an impetus for Americans to travel abroad as "informal goodwill ambassadors" for the U.S.

"Since USTOA's founding more than 35 years ago, we have advocated open borders and freedom of travel between countries," Whitley said. "We continue to endorse the lifting of travel restrictions wherever possible, and we encourage Americans to use their ability to travel in order to promote understanding between nations."

According to Whitley, 2009 is an optimum year for international travel due to several factors:

- A stronger dollar and an abundance of good deals make foreign travel more affordable for Americans;
- travel plays a vital role in economic recovery by stimulating both the domestic travel industry and the world travel market; and
- international travel has become accessible to more Americans as greater numbers of U.S. citizens obtain passports under new homeland security requirements.
- Nearly 30 countries have no visa requirements for Americans.

An Open Letter on USTOA's web site(www.ustoa.com) titled, "It's America's Turn to Travel," encourages Americans to visit foreign destinations as individual ambassadors of American good will.

About USTOA:

Founded in 1972, the United States Tour Operators Association is a professional association representing the tour operator industry. Its members are made up of companies whose tours, packages, and custom arrangements encompass the entire globe but who conduct business in the U.S. As a voice for the tour operator industry, USTOA represents this sector in matters pertaining to the travel industry as a whole, both here and abroad. Among USTOA's goals are consumer protection, advocacy and education.

USTOA is the premier association of companies providing vacation packages, tours, and custom travel itineraries for more than 11 million people yearly. For more information on USTOA, visit www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel, or see your travel agent.

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