



USTOA MEMBERS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT 2012

Forecast Increase in Business, Jobs Growth and Key Trends Revealed

MARCO ISLAND, FL – December 12, 2011 – An annual survey of active members of the US Tour Operators Association (USTOA) reveal that the majority – 75% - are confident about 2012, anticipating growth in sales. More than 25% of that majority is forecasting a “boom year” with sales growing 10% or more, while more than half of the members surveyed are “optimistic” or “cautiously optimistic” about 2012, forecasting growth in sales from 4 to 6%.

On the jobs front, half the USTOA members surveyed reported that they increased staff in 2011; one in ten did so by 15% or more. Nearly all (90%) of the 43% of members who plan to increase staff in 2012 will do so as much as 10%; the remaining 10% of members will increase staff even more, as high as 10-15% in the coming year.

Results of the survey of members were released during USTOA’s Annual Conference & Marketplace, held in Marco Island, FL, December 10-13, 2011. “The findings are somewhat staggering,” said USTOA 2011 Chairman John Stachnik, president and co-owner of Mayflower Tours. “The fact that our members actually increased staff in 2011, some in the double digits and plan to do so again in 2012 is simply remarkable in the context of the current economic climate and speaks to the strength of the value of packaged tours to travelers.”

USTOA 2012 Chairman John Hanratty, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of Travel Impressions, Ltd., added that 64% of members surveyed saw an increase in passengers 2011 vs 2010; nearly half of those saw growth of 10% or higher in passengers. Average daily rate – or the average price per passenger paid per day – also increased in 2011 over 2010, according to 81.5% of members. “And, even more encouraging,” continued Hanratty, “Nine out of 10 members surveyed anticipate ADR increasing in 2012.”

2012 Travel Trends

“Experiential travel” – or the “E Factor,” as USTOA President Terry Dale called it – was rated important/extremely important by 85% of survey respondents to their overall growth and sales. Perhaps not surprisingly, Baby Boomers 46 to 65 years of age comprised the largest age group of travelers seeking “E Factor” vacations. Boomers are also the largest market in general for tour operator members responding to the survey, representing nearly 60% of their customers.

The region of the world with the most “E Factor” options for travelers is Europe, according to 37% of members, followed by South America (20%) Within Europe, Italy was named the most frequently as the destination offering the most experiential travel options. In responding why, members cited food, wine and culinary tours, historical and educational opportunities, art and culture in general. France followed closely behind, for similar reasons.

The thirst for learning experiences is driving member tour operators to increase “E Factor” itineraries next year. More than half (53%) of the survey respondents plan to offer new experiential programs in 2012, with culinary tours topping the list at 26%; culture tours at 22%, and nature, adventure, photography and golf also cited.

When asked to name the top “off-the-beaten-path” or emerging destination that will gain popularity in 2012, Vietnam was cited most frequently, followed by India, Ecuador and China.

“Europe provides such a wealth of cultural experiences it’s no wonder it continues to rank highly among our members’ customers,” said Dale. “At the same time, expanding programs to offer new and exciting experiences in more exotic destinations throughout the world will meet the growing demand for adventure from Baby Boomers and begin to attract the next generation of travelers.”

Encouragingly, more than half (53%) of the members surveyed anticipate increasing itineraries in 2012 to destinations recovering from events this past year that negatively impacted tourism. Egypt was named most frequently as the country operators plan to increase tours to, followed closely by Greece, Japan and New Zealand. In fact, nearly one third of respondents (28.6%) have already seen an increase in bookings to those destinations for 2012.

“Consumer demand for truly rich experiences will continue to attract experiential travelers to these hard-hit destinations, and they can return with confidence when they book with a USTOA member,” said Dale. “Our members understand how rewarding these destinations are to their clients, and at the same time, the importance of tourism in helping to rebuild.”

When asked, most USTOA members surveyed (86%) report utilizing Social Media, naming Facebook as the top channel, by 90% of respondents. Blogs, Twitter feeds and YouTube came in close second at 40%. Members unanimously (97%) said they use Social Media for consumer engagement. The next most frequently given reasons were tied at second: marketing/special offers and to drive traffic to company websites. Customer service ranked third, at 36%, with reservations/bookings a distant fourth at 4.5%.

For questions and more information on USTOA, visit www.ustoa.com, call 212-599-6599, or email information@ustoa.com

About USTOA:

The member companies of U.S. Tour Operators Association provide tours, packages and custom arrangements that allow travelers unparalleled access, insider knowledge, peace-of-mind, value and freedom to enjoy destinations and experiences across the entire globe. Each member company has met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participation in the USTOA’s Travelers Assistance Program, which protects consumer payments up to \$1 million if the company goes out of business.

As a voice for the tour operator industry for 40 years, USTOA also provides education and assistance for consumers and travel agents.

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