



For Immediate Release
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**80% OF USTOA MEMBERS SEE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN
AS NUMBER ONE CHALLENGE**

Financial Incentives, Discounts, Flexible Arrangements
Offered To Encourage Travel Bookings

Eighty percent of members responding to a recent U.S. Tour Operators Association survey identified the economy as the number one issue facing them in the coming year.

In an effort to encourage consumer travel, USTOA members are responding with incentives such as discounts, promotional pricing, flexible payment plans, value-added offerings and guaranteed rates.

One member is even offering a financing plan with three months interest-free credit in cooperation with lenders, to help travelers find ways to continue to make travel affordable during the economic downturn.

According to USTOA President Bob Whitley, tour operators and vacation wholesalers are working hard to do all they can to continue to build their businesses in these challenging economic times. "We recognize that 2009 may be a tough year, but we also expect that the pent-up demand for travel will be there once people feel a little more confident about the economy," says Whitley.

Tour operators are responding to the challenges with creative offerings to ease consumer concerns over spending, as tighter credit markets affect consumer lending. For example, 20% of survey respondents said they are planning flexible payment programs.

Some 36% of respondents indicated they are offering special deals and discounts. A number of tour operators, slightly fewer than 15%, said they will promote early booking

discounts and others said they will be flexible, and extend the window during which travelers can book at discount rates.

Flexibility was identified by members as important to consumers in other ways as well, the survey showed. Re-booking assistance that makes it easier to change travel plans or dates, and less stringent cancellation policies, show that the industry is responding to consumer concerns, Whitley noted.

Relaxed cancellation waivers, value-added offers and discounts for a second tour are examples of promotional products travelers can anticipate from tour operators and vacation packagers in the year ahead, according to the survey.

Along with deeper discounts travelers can look forward to value-added offerings such as free nights or meals. For example, one USTOA company is offering a free two-night, three-day stopover in Fiji for travelers purchasing select Australasian vacations before March 31, 2009.

For travel agents, there is a silver lining, as at least one USTOA member said they are planning to offer higher commissions to travel agents as a booking incentive.

The USTOA survey is based on responses from 50 brands, representing 80% of USTOA's corporate members selling travel packages and tours to the U.S., Latin America, Europe, the UK, Asia and Australia.

For more information on USTOA and for a list of its member companies visit: www.USTOA.com, or www.USTOA.travel. USTOA may be reached by phone at 1-800-GO-USTOA (1-800-468-7862).

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