



For Immediate Release
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**Packaged Travel Opens Doors to Private Farms, Exclusive Wine Tastings,
Behind-the-Scenes Theater Tours and More**

There was a time when the word “tour” meant hopping on and off a bus, and doing the cookie-cutter drive through England or France; and when packaged travel meant a weekend in Las Vegas with airfare. Those days are now gone, according to the U.S. Tour Operators Association whose member companies send more than 11 million travelers on vacation yearly.

According to USTOA president Bob Whitley, today tour operators offer special visits and experiences that even the most sophisticated traveler would be unable to book privately.

Below is a sampling of offerings from USTOA members that include special-access, exclusive, and behind-the-scenes events. To find a tour or vacation package best geared to your favorite activities, visit USTOA’s web site -- www.ustoa.com. Drop-down menus allow you to select companies based on activities, destinations and even your vacation personality.

EUROPE

- Food and wine lovers can stay in private wine-producing villas in Tuscany, Veneto, and Piedmont, or attend private cooking classes in Provence, Tuscany, or Sicily. (Avanti Destinations, Inc.)
- Groups of young people meet their peers from all over the world, while bike riding, whitewater rafting, and hitting the clubs. (Contiki Holidays)
- Make your own itineraries with private car/driver tours, or choose tours that stay at family farms and small family-run hotels. (Image Tours)

AUSTRALIA

- An “inside” look at Aboriginal culture; home-hosted dinners; group farm experiences. (Collette Vacations)

EGYPT

- Private lectures on history and culture from university-trained Egyptologists in Egypt. (SITA World Tours Inc.)

GLOBAL

- After-hours museum visits, meals in private settings (perhaps a palace). (Tauck World Discovery).
- Very special “insider” access. Examples: A private opening of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, followed by a cruise on the Bosphorus. A traditional dance performance in Thailand, followed by dinner under the stars. A backstage tour of the Estates Theater in Prague, where Mozart first presented *Don Giovanni*. Dinner on a Maharana’s barge in Jaipur, followed by fireworks. (Abercrombie and Kent)

USTOA members have met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participation in the association’s Travelers Assistance Program. The program requires, among other things, that each company set aside \$1 Million security to protect consumers’ payments in the event the company goes out of business.

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