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ADVENTURE TRAVEL GAINS IN USTOA POLL

Americans are increasingly looking for action on vacation, according to a new informal poll of leading tour operators. Nearly two out of three tour operators responding to a recent member survey conducted by the US Tour Operators Association said that adventure travel is on the rise.

Results were mixed when it comes to “slow travel”—stay put vacations or tours taking more time to cover an area or visiting an area more in depth. More than 50% of respondents cited year over year growth; however another 36% reported no growth in this area.

Custom arrangements growing

The increased interest in active vacations was reflected in the types of packaged vacations being booked. FIT’s—or independent arrangements where a tour operator custom designs separate elements into an individual package—scored the greatest gain, with more than 80% of respondents saying this category has experienced growth in 2007 compared to 2006. Independent tours came in second with 73% of respondents reporting gains in this area, followed by escorted tours (60% reporting year over year growth). In what may reflect a slight maturing of the market, while more than 50% reported growth in independent packages (usually prepackaged hotel and other arrangements), a full third said there had been no change in this category over the previous year.

“Our previous research indicated that baby boomers are clearly fueling the growth in active vacations,” states Bob Whitley, USTOA president. “Today Americans—especially the baby boomer generation—are no longer content to simply sightsee; they want to ‘sight do,’ and experience a destination.

“And as Americans have grown more sophisticated and seen more of the world they are increasingly turning to tour operators to help them plan their own tailored and individual travel experiences. Because tour operators have intimate knowledge of the areas they serve they are able to arrange special experiences that travelers might have difficulty finding otherwise. For instance, if a couple wants a wedding ceremony in Tanzania or in Tahiti a tour operator can arrange that. If you want to stay in a yurt in Mongolia, practice yoga in India, or any number of experiences that would be hard to plan on your own, there is a USTOA tour operator who can put together almost any arrangements for you,” says Whitley.

The USTOA website—www.USTOA.com or www.USTOA.travel-- contains a drop-down list of member companies by type of activity, from heli-hiking to whale watching. All USTOA members have met the travel industry’s strictest requirements, including participating in the association’s Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things requires each USTOA corporate member to set aside \$1 million to protect consumer payments in the case of bankruptcy or insolvency. For more information by phone contact one 800-GO-USTOA (468-7862).

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