



SOLVING THE SINGLE TRAVELER DILEMMA Look for Guaranteed Shares, Group Travel Suggests USTOA

- Over 40% of Americans are single
- More than 60% of USTOA tour operators offer single shares for solo travelers
- 45% of women polled cited safety as a factor in opting for group tours
- Solo travelers can make up anywhere from 20% - 40% of a given tour departure.

Over 40% of American adults – or 90 million people – are single, according to US Census Bureau figures. Of these, nearly 35 million have taken a vacation by themselves in the past three years, reports the Travel Industry Association. Yet single travelers face a number of obstacles, both financial and emotional, ranging from single supplements to finding themselves the only solo diner in a restaurant.

According to the US Tour Operators Association a growing number of tour operators are responding to single travelers with features such as Guaranteed Shares, where a solo traveler can share a room with another single guest, thereby avoiding the single supplement. If no other willing singles are available, the solo traveler receives double accommodations while only paying for one.

A USTOA survey revealed that more than 60% of responding members offer guaranteed shares. Another 25% of USTOA tour operators report waiving single supplements for some tours, or offering single-room rates. On select cruise tours, too, some companies offer single travelers cabin accommodations with no single supplement on a space-available basis.

When searching for an appropriate vacation package or tour, USTOA advises travelers to:

- Ask the tour operator or vacation packager whether and/or what type of arrangements they have for solo travelers.
- Find out the typical age range for people taking a similar tour or package
- Know that tours and vacation packages are typically priced per person. However, when tour operators charge a single supplement they are usually passing on the rates charged by hotels for single occupancy of a double room.

The Group Travel Solution

Traveling on a group tour is a convenient solution for many single travelers. In a consumer poll conducted for USTOA, 45% of women cited “safety” as a consideration in opting for group travel. In fact, some companies report anywhere from 20% to 40% of their guests -- both men and women – as solo, either traveling on their own or meeting up with a friend or family member.

Group travel solves the loneliness dilemma faced by many single travelers. In fact, solo travelers join tours because of the built-in benefit of meeting other people, reports USTOA . Women in particular have found it easy to make lasting friendships on package tours. For example, Caroline Adams, a 45-year old pilot from the Virgin Islands, has met lifelong friends on tour. She advises: “On the first night, talk to everyone and see who is together and who is with who. Network and figure out where you might fit best for the remainder of the t

Carol Marasovich, 56, from Darien, Illinois, stays in touch with a core of 7 people she met on a heli-hiking tour of the Canadian Rockies. “If there is an open table or open seating I just jump in. That’s how we started talking,” she says of the friends she made on tour, with whom she now plans yearly reunions.

Underscoring this, John Stachnik, president, Mayflower Tours, and USTOA’s Vice Chairman says, “Our experience has shown that even more important than the cost savings is the companionship consideration. You cannot believe how many times we get calls from people we have paired up coming back to us and saying they are now traveling with the person we paired them up with. This is very fulfilling to us and shows we’re doing something right.”

Stachnik also points out another advantage to escorted travel for singles. “Our Tour Managers are very conversant with setting up dinner arrangements for our travelers, and make special efforts to get single travelers to dine together.”

Small ship travel provides another way for single travelers to get together. Jerrol Gordon of Cruise West reports that, “Our ships are small enough that the camaraderie amongst guests is an absolute highlight – Since dining is open seating, single guests dine with and mingle with other guests. Our guests are a mix of multi-generational, couples and singles, women or men, mother and daughters, traveling together or solo.

Some companies, such as African Travel, Inc. will plan itineraries for solo guests to singles-friendly areas and select lodging that is well suited to solo travelers.

Where to get more information

The USTOA web site provides a drop-down listing of members serving solo travelers. Visit www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel, and search for “Singles Travel,” under “Special Interest.” USTOA members have met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participating in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things, requires all USTOA members to provide \$1 Million worth of security to protect consumer payments or deposits in case the company goes out of business.

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