



THREE TIPS FOR SAVING BY TRAVELING SMART USTOA offers hints

Even in economically challenging times, people need to travel as a way to de-stress.. And one of the best ways to save money is with a tour or vacation package, says the [US Tour Operators Association](#), whose members are responsible for the vacations of 11 million people yearly.

“In today’s economic environment people need to travel smart, “says Bob Whitley, USTOA president. Accordingly, USTOA suggests the following three strategies:

- Save an average 20 – 30% by buying a vacation package or tour instead of making the same arrangements yourself.
- Travel during the low season, when you can reap an additional 20% or more savings.
- Choose destinations where the dollar goes further.

1. Save by buying your travel packaged

In many instances you can buy the same exact arrangements for less and have someone else do the planning by buying a vacation package or tour, suggests Whitley. First, decide where you want to go or what type of activity interests you. Then go to www.ustoa.com, where drop-down windows allow you to search for tour operators and vacation packagers by destination or activity – and even your personality preference.

Tour operators buy in futures and lock in prices a year ahead of time, which means you may actually be paying in last year’s more favorable dollars, especially abroad. In a recent USTOA member sampling tour operators reported two to one that travelers are also buying vacation packages and tours with airfare included as a way to save money on air fares, as some tour operators have contracts with airlines for more favorable rates.

As an example, a couple going to South America could reap the benefit of packaged travel savings with a “Peru Express” vacation, saving 25% over booking the same thing independently, notes Whitley. Through January 2009, they could explore the land of the Incas for \$999 per person including round-trip air from Miami, six nights hotel (two in Lima and four in Cusco), Lima/Cusco transfers and sightseeing.

2. Travel in the off season

When the weather cools down in Europe or heats up in places like the Caribbean, prices come down significantly. According to Whitley, “this is a great opportunity to fit a trip into your budget by saving an additional 20% - 30% over peak season prices with low season discounts.”

For instance, travelers can save up to 25% in low season and hedge against the high Euro with a 9-night escorted “Best of Italy” tour, priced in the peak summer season from \$2,660 land only. The price

includes stays at first class hotels, luxury motorcoach transportation, daily breakfast and selected dinners, plus in-depth sightseeing and the services of a professional tour escort.

Another way to enjoy Italy in low season is with an "Escape to Europe for Less" package which offers four nights in Rome in a deluxe double room with buffet breakfast daily. The discounted room price is already based on a more favorable Euro exchange rate of \$1.30 and low season rates reflect an additional 30% savings, or at least \$450 per person, over peak season prices which begin at \$1,529 per person, double.

3. Choose Destinations where the dollar goes further

To soothe wanderlust cravings look to destinations where the dollar goes further. Egypt placed first as best value for the dollar in USTOA's annual poll of hot destinations for 2008. Also mentioned as good values were Turkey, China, and the U.S.

USTOA members number 150 of the top names in tours and vacation packages. Each member must meet the travel industry's highest standards, including participating in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which, among other things, requires each member to set aside \$1 million to protect consumer payments in case the company goes out of business.

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