



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 challenge facing them in the coming year.

In an effort to encourage consumer travel, USTOA members said they are responding with incentives that include discounts, promotional pricing, flexibility in payments, value-added offerings and guaranteed rates.

One member, GoWay Travel of Toronto, Canada, said it will offer a new financing plan with three months of interest-free credit to help travelers find ways to continue to make travel affordable during the economic downturn.

Bob Whitley, president of USTOA, said 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,” Whitley said.

Tour operators say they will respond to the challenges with creative offerings such as flexible payment plans to ease consumer concerns over spending as tighter credit markets affect consumer lending. Nearly 20% of those responding to the survey said flexible payment programs are on their agenda. Some 36% of respondents indicated they are planning special deals and discounts, and a number of tour operators, slightly fewer than 15%, said they will offer early booking discounts.

Operators opting for early booking discounts include:

- ACIS
- Adventures By Disney

- Cruise West
- Insight Vacations
- Mayflower Tours
- SITA World Tours

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 seriously to consumer concerns, Whitley noted.

Relaxed cancellation waivers, value-added services are examples of promotional products travelers can anticipate from tour operators and vacation packagers in the year ahead, according to the survey. YMT Travel said it is planning to offer travelers who buy one tour package a second tour at a discounted rate.

Along with deeper discounts travelers can also look forward to value-added offerings such as free nights or meals. Australian Pacific Touring, for example, said it will offer a free two-night, three-day stopover in Fiji for travelers booking Australasian vacation packages before March 1, 2009.

The USTOA survey is based on responses from 50 brands, representing 80% of USTOA's corporate members selling vacation 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 member companies have met the travel industry's highest standards, including participation in the association's Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things protects consumer payments up to \$1 million in case the company goes out of business. USTOA is the premier association of companies providing vacation packages, tours, and custom travel itineraries for more than 11 million people yearly.

Contact:

Linda Kundell

Kundell Communications

212-877-2798

LRKPR@aol.com – or –

Kundellcom@nyc.rr.com