



AMERICANS LIKE MAKING THEIR OWN TRAVEL PLANS DESPITE PACKAGED TRAVEL SAVINGS

Baby Boomers Most Likely to Choose Independent Touring

More than 75% of Americans in a recent consumer poll said they like to make all their travel arrangements themselves. Only 10% said they mostly buy independent tours (an itinerary you can do on your own), and 5% said they buy vacation packages (separate elements bundled together). Yet the U.S. Tour Operators Association has found that travelers save an average 20 – 30% when buying the same arrangements in a vacation package or tour rather than on their own.

Age Differences

According to the survey, Baby Boomers were the most likely to choose packaged travel, with 30% of that age group saying they enjoyed Independent Touring. This echoes findings of a 2006 USTOA consumer survey, which found that 70% of those aged 55 – 64 were likely to buy a tour or vacation package because of the savings.

Education Correlates with Touring

The survey also found that attaining a higher level of education is associated with an increased preference for Independent Touring. Thirteen percent with college education selected independent touring, the survey reported.

Packaged Travel Misconceptions

“The survey points out that clearly there are tremendous prejudices and misconceptions to overcome about packaged travel vs. independent travel,” says Bob Whitley, USTOA president. Whitley points out that many people don’t realize they can buy the same independent arrangements directly from a tour operator or through a travel agent, and save money.

“When it comes to tours, people think it means being herded together in a large group and on the go all the time. However, this is not the case. Tours today run the gamut. You may be with a small group of people on a walking tour of Croatia or the Rocky Mountains. You can take a culinary tour or a river cruise tour in Europe. Even many standard motor coach tours today provide plenty of free time for people to do activities on their own, like shopping, more sightseeing, or just relaxing,” he says.

Whitley cites one couple in their mid-70’s who went on a heli-hiking tour in the Canadian Rockies. Their lodge was accessible only by helicopter. On the same tour, a woman in her mid-50s found a new circle of friends, crediting the small group size for making it easy to know everyone.

“Vacation packages provide all the elements for an independent traveler to do it all on their own, while an independent tour provides the framework of a pre-confirmed itinerary without the restraints of a group,” explains Whitley.

TNS Global conducted the telephone survey for USTOA in late May, 2008.

USTOA's 150 member companies send more than 11 million people on vacation annually to all corners of the globe. The USTOA web site contains a drop-down list where people can choose a tour operator by activity, destination, and even by their personality preference. To learn more about USTOA member tour operators and the types of tours and vacation packages available, consult the USTOA web site: www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel. Or see your travel agent.

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