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## USTOA ADVISES: CHECK OUT YOUR CLIENT'S TRAVEL COMPANY Why Membership Matters

With the summer season fast approaching USTOA wants travel agents to know that booking a tour or vacation package with an association member means their clients are traveling with a company that has met the travel industry's highest standards.

### Rigorous Membership Standards

To qualify for USTOA Active Membership, a tour operator or vacation packager must have been in that business in the U.S. for not less than three years under the same ownership or management. The company must operate tours totaling a minimum annual passenger or sales volume (7,500 passengers or \$7.5 million land volume), and supply references from 18 industry organizations. Finally, the company must participate in USTOA's Travelers Assistance Program which among other things requires posting \$1 Million bond for consumer protection.

Membership in USTOA requires Active Members adhere to a strict code of ethics. One of the most important ethical requirements is truth in advertising, which mandates that members represent truthfully and accurately all facts, conditions and demands relating to tours and travel packages. Prices must always be clearly and accurately stated, including all accommodations and services used, and any changes or substitutions must be communicated in a timely manner to the travel agent and/or client.

"While nothing is 100% infallible," says USTOA President Bob Whitley, "as an organization, we have set the strictest financial requirements in the industry to ensure and demonstrate a high degree of stability and solvency for our members and consumer protection for our customers. This ensures that when travelers choose a USTOA member, they are selecting a company they can trust."

### USTOA'S Travelers Assistance Program: Protecting Your Clients' Cash & Peace of Mind

Protecting consumers has always been in the forefront of USTOA's goals. As a cornerstone, USTOA's Travelers Assistance Program requires each Active member to post a \$1 million bond with USTOA in case of bankruptcy or other insolvency. The bond

is just one part of an overall effort to help consumers in case of a USTOA member's insolvency. The plan also calls for USTOA to continue to inform consumers on their rights of recovery, and provide a consumer information center through its website ([www.ustoa.com](http://www.ustoa.com) or [www.ustoa.travel](http://www.ustoa.travel)). USTOA will also ask its member companies, on a voluntary basis, to provide assistance to affected travelers in whatever way they can. This can take the form of issuing credits for future planning, providing free travel, or honoring deposits already paid. In addition, USTOA will serve as a clearinghouse of information, apprising travelers and the press of options available.

“Some of our members have also chosen to carry their own additional coverage on top of the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program,” notes Whitley. Nevertheless, the plan should not be construed as a 100% guarantee,” he says, adding that for maximum protection travelers should pay for their vacation with a credit card, and purchase travel insurance that covers travel supplier bankruptcy.

### Commissionable Products

Whitley also wants travel agents to know that, as a condition of membership, every USTOA company must make its products commissionable to travel agents.

For more information on the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, as well as a listing of USTOA member companies consult the USTOA web site: [www.ustoa.com](http://www.ustoa.com) or [www.ustoa.travel](http://www.ustoa.travel).

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