



For Immediate Release  
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**SOFT ADVENTURE, WATER-ORIENTED  
AND SPECIAL INTEREST TRAVEL  
HOT PICKS FOR 2007  
Baby Boomers Fuel Growth According To USTOA Poll**

Water-oriented vacations – cruise tours, river touring or visiting inland waterways – and niche travel are the top picks for packaged travel in 2007, according to an informal member survey conducted by the United States Tour Operators Association. Attesting to the popularity of river and waterway cruises, 33% of USTOA survey respondents reported a plus 40% increase in their river touring programs for 2006 compared to 2005, and 40% saw increases of 10-15%.

As to how people will experience their travels, 27% of survey respondents said soft-adventure will be the way to go, followed closely by escorted touring (24%), and independent packages (20%).

When asked what type of special interest travel is hottest, culinary and wine tasting placed first, while outdoor experiences such as African safaris and luxury camping in the Australian Outback topped the soft adventure list. “People today are looking for more than just sightseeing. They want to indulge their passions, whether it be food, wine, or the outdoors. They want adventure and they want to learn. However they want comfort with their adventure. They want to go on safari or walking, but, at the end of the day they want to return to comfortable surroundings.” says Bob Whitley, USTOA President.

**Special Interest Travel and Small Groups to Grow this Year**

Indeed, special interest travel in small groups is expected to experience the highest growth in the coming year, followed by combination escorted tours with free time and flexibility built in.

**Escorted Tours to Experience Longer –Term Growth**

Looking longer term to the next five years, survey results predicted that the escorted tour with a modern twist -- free time and flexibility-- will experience the highest growth, followed respectively by special interest and small group travel. Independent packages came in as third most popular in both short and long-term growth projections.

“A few years ago we would have seen independent packages in first place. However, as tours have become more creative and specialized we are seeing growing interest in this area, and a possible maturing of the independent package market,” says Bob Whitley, USTOA president.

### Baby Boomers Fuel Packaged Travel Preferences

The shift in touring preferences is largely driven by the Baby Boomer population, observes Whitley. “Their demands are shifting. Baby boomers want group travel that matches their specific needs and interests; they love the idea of soft adventure; and they want to travel in smaller groups. They also want more free time, flexibility and some independence,” says Whitley.

Not surprisingly, Baby Boomers represent the single largest market for tours and packages. When asked for the average age of their travelers, 54% of USTOA respondents cited 50 – 65, while nearly 30% cited 35 – 50 year olds. Surprisingly, less than 10% said their average traveler was over 65.

This correlates with findings of a consumer survey conducted for USTOA in spring 2006, notes Whitley. “That survey found that 70% of those aged 55 – 64 were more likely to buy a tour or vacation package based on savings, compared to 38% of the 65+ age group. In fact, 40% of those over 65 said they were not at all likely to take a tour or package regardless of savings. This pretty much dispels the misconception that people who take tours and packages are mainly senior citizens,” says Whitley.

### **How they Travel & When They Book**

Other survey results include:

- Couples account for the majority of packaged vacation travelers according to 65% of operators polled, with families second (cited by nearly 30%).
- 67% of USTOA members said that travelers booked their vacations three to six months in advance; while 16% said travelers book more than six months ahead.

Survey respondents represented 65 of the top brand names in packaged travel, or 72% of USTOA’s Corporate members. USTOA member companies have met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participation in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things requires each USTOA Active member company to set aside \$1 million to reimburse consumers in case the company goes out of business. For more information and a listing of USTOA Member companies, visit [www.ustoa.com](http://www.ustoa.com).

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