

USTOA MEMBERS REVEAL TOP TRAVEL TRENDS FOR 2016

*Tour Operator Members Confident About Year Ahead;
Three Quarters Report Sales Growth in 2015*

NEW YORK – December 3, 2015 – The [United States Tour Operators Association](#) (USTOA) released today results of its annual travel trend and forecast survey of the association’s active tour operator members, affirming a positive outlook for the industry in the year ahead. Nine in 10 of tour operator members anticipate a growth in sales in 2016 with more than half of members (57%) “optimistic” and forecasting a “boom year” with growth anywhere from seven to 10% or higher.

In 2015, three quarters of members responding to the survey reported an increase in sales over 2014, forty percent of which cited an increase of 10% or higher. More than two thirds (70%) of members also saw an increase in passengers in 2015; 60% saw numbers grow between four and nine percent, while 36% of indicated growth of 10% or higher.

“The tour operator members of USTOA are showing strong growth for this year, with more than a third (39%) attributing growth to an improved economy and higher consumer confidence,” said Terry Dale, president and CEO of USTOA. “It’s also encouraging that a majority – 57% – are optimistic about continued growth in sales in the coming year, while nearly half plan to increase staff.”

On the jobs front, roughly half (53%) of members surveyed increased staffing levels in 2015 and nearly the same (47%) plan to increase staffing in 2016. Research from the new member survey was revealed at USTOA’s Annual Conference & Marketplace, December 3–5 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago in Chicago, IL.

Travel agents continue to contribute significantly to USTOA members’ business: 87% percent of responding members report the use of travel agents to sell product in 2015. Adding that more than half (55%) of USTOA member bookings in 2015 were made through a travel agency. Looking ahead, 91% of members anticipate business booked through travel agents to maintain the same or increase in 2016.

[Top Destinations and Trends](#)

When asked which “emerging” and “off-the-beaten path” destinations will gain popularity in 2016, members cited Cuba, followed by Myanmar, Iceland, Colombia, and Ethiopia and Japan (tied for fifth). “With Cuba making headlines this year, it’s no surprise that it took the first spot in the list of emerging destinations,” added Dale. “About thirty four percent of our members currently offer programs to Cuba, and of that number, more than half plan to increase offerings within the next few years.”

Italy, for the fourth consecutive year in a row, topped the list as most popular international destination for travelers in 2016, followed by the United Kingdom; China, France and South Africa (tied for third); Peru and India. On the home front, USTOA members forecast New York and California (tied for first), Arizona and Hawaii (tied for second), Nevada, Florida and Washington DC (tied for fourth) and Alaska as the most popular U.S. destinations for clients in 2016.

Participating tour operator members also named art and culture, honeymoon and romance, and family as the most popular travel categories for passengers.

Passenger Behavior

When asked who’s traveling, members responded that a little more than half (55%) of their customer base are baby boomers at 51 years of age and older. The next largest age group was 35 to 50 years old, representing about a quarter (23%) of customers. Roughly half (53%) of members saw a growth in the number of solo passengers in 2015.

On average, 55% of members reported that consumers and travel agents are booking international travel packages between six to 12 months in advance. For domestic travel, more than half (56%) of members cited that consumers and travel agents are booking less than six months prior.

Potential Threats

While USTOA members view 2016 with optimism, they cited terrorism as the biggest threat to US traveler confidence in 2016. The second potential threat named was global financial instability, followed by political instability.

For more information on USTOA, visit www.ustoa.com.

About USTOA:

Representing more than \$13.5 billion in revenue, the member companies of U.S. Tour Operators Association provide tours, packages and custom arrangements that allow nearly 8 million travelers annually unparalleled access, insider knowledge, peace-of-mind, value and freedom to enjoy destinations and experiences across the entire globe. Each member company has met the travel

industry's highest standards, including participation in the USTOA's Travelers Assistance Program, which protects consumer payments up to \$1 million if the company goes out of business.

As a voice for the tour operator industry for more than 40 years, USTOA also provides education and assistance for consumers and travel agents.

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