

Toll of Terror Threatens Tourism

Travel Businesses Hit Hard, Locals Just Beginning to See Affects

Paul Stalbaum says, "Since September 11, billions of travel dollars have been lost. Factor into this equation the loss of jobs at hotels, convention bureaus, amusement parks and dozens of other related fields, it is possible that over one million jobs have been lost."

The loss in travel dollars has been loudly touted in the media, many of whom have donated some of their own resources.

The Miami Herald newspaper has issued a special set of deals and discounts to travel advertisers during the month of October in an effort to help the travel industry recoup some of its losses.

Stalbaum says that travel agents have been significantly affected. Already suffering from the surge in online bookings and the elimination and/or decrease of commissions by the major airline carriers, the agents, who provide expert service and personal attention, are simply not being used. According to Erdman of Liberty, larger agencies like hers are not as affected as smaller, boutique operations with less clientele.

Despite the fallout felt by many travel businesses, the continuity of gay travel has seen at least one new business actually emerge. **Bluway.com** has announced its formation last week and plans to be online by December 1.

Billing itself as the "first and only online gay travel portal," the site plans to focus on gay tours, cruises and package deals, according to Bluway Marketing Manager, Andy Van Dyke.

Meanwhile, **Travelocity.com**, the largest Internet travel agency, has been downgraded on news that Continental Airlines has eliminated commissions on travel sold through the Web. **Expedia.com**, another online agency, has also reported a major decline in revenues.

Airlines Deal With Problems By Offering Lower Fares

Problems experienced by the major airlines have been well publicized. Even after mass layoffs and the trimming of flights to one third of the usual number, major airlines are still suffering.

American Airlines recently announced revenue losses of \$10 million to \$15 million each day, as opposed to last year at this time when it was generating \$4 million to \$5 million each day.

Two American jets were lost in the September 11 attacks, which has already cost the airline \$397 million in special charges out of the \$508 million they were given in emergency government aid.

United Airlines, which also lost a jet after it crashed into the World Trade Center, announced the resignation of its CEO, James Goodwin, on October 29.

Just two weeks before, Goodwin has issued an employee memo predicting that the airline would "perish" unless its business was recovered.

Meanwhile, lower priced carriers like

Spirit and JetBlue have actually reported increases. According to a Spirit Airlines flight attendant who declined to be named, "Spirit is doing much better now. There are much higher passenger loads due to the reduction in flights."



Paul Stalbaum

The flight attendant also says that while many new security measures have been taken, including an FAA order to disallow flight attendants to have cockpit door keys, he has not sensed any fear from passengers.

"I was never scared of a hijacking before because they always taught you what to do in order to land the plane safely," he says. "Now I know that 200 passengers will back me up to not let anything happen."

On United Flight 564 out of Denver on Saturday, September 15, just a few days after the attacks, many pilots and flight crews were already demonstrating such measures of safety informally.

"If someone were to stand up, brandish something such as a plastic knife and say 'This is a hijacking' or words to that effect, here is what you should do," advised the flight's captain. "Everyone should stand up and immediately throw things at the person...to throw him off balance and distract his attention. Most importantly: get a blanket over him, then wrestle him to the floor and keep him there. Remember: there will be one of him and maybe a few confederates, but there are 200 of you. You can overwhelm them."

Dieter says there is nothing to fear now, as the airlines are safer than ever. The September 11 after-effects have simply forced the airlines to raise their standards.

"What we are seeing in the U.S. is a level of security we have never thought was necessary because terrorism didn't occur here. Airport security employees are well-paid government agents in other countries. We are now on a steep learning curve. I have been traveling all over the world for the last 30 years and this new type of enforced security is everywhere. We lost our virginity on September 11."

According to Dieter, people should take advantage of the incredible deals the airlines are now offering but get used to the new security measures. "My advice is that people when they travel, forget to use the same precautions they would use in their own hometown. Be aware, be cautious, don't get angry at security, get there early and please remember that it is a federal offense to even joke about bombs or terrorism at this point."

GayTravel.com's Dieter says that the losses the Airlines are facing, and the fares and specials being offered accordingly, will spur major changes for the better.

"The airlines needed to cut fares anyway," Dieter comments. "One of the most perishable commodities is an airline seat.

They should have been encouraging people to fly by eliminating restrictions all along."

On domestic flights, fares have decreased considerably, though not as much as some might think. Availability is still scarce as there are less planes flying. Stalbaum says, "People see great deals and call up only to find out there is no availability. The deals are there but you still have to work with the airlines to get them."

Meanwhile, European flights are clamoring to fill seats as tickets are being priced at new lows. Stalbaum has routinely seen round-trip tickets to London quoted as low as \$250. According to Stalbaum, these are prices we might never see again.

Cruise Lines Offer Vacation Relief for Local Fearful Travelers

Stalbaum says that the cruise lines have been on a path to expansion that has made it

even more although cruise lines do not have a history of being terrorist targets.

In the wake of the new interest in cruise travel, **GayBay.net**, a popular online gay travel and entertainment portal, as announced a joint venture with National Discount Cruises, a worldwide cruise discounter. The alliance will enable GayBay users to book cruises at additional discounts. "If you have never cruised," says a recent Gaybay press release, "now is the time as prices have never been this low or could be offered at these prices without our venture with NDC."

Erdman quotes rock bottom prices on all of the cruise lines, claiming this is the perfect time for travelers to take advantage, particularly Floridians who are still afraid of flying. Four day Royal Caribbean cruises have been selling for as low as \$188/per person.

While the security measures for all cruise lines have always tight, Erdman says that security efforts have been raised



The Norwegian Sun

nearly impossible to fill the glut of cabins that has been created. The attacks of September 11 have made it even harder, and several lines, including Renaissance, Premiere, Commodore and American Classic, have already closed.

According to John Wadsworth, Independent Cruise Specialist at CruiseOne, an exclusive cruise travel agent, an upswing in cruise interest is starting to occur and there has never been a better time to sail.

"In the last week I have seen an upswing in calls for cruises in both 2001 and 2002. The problem is that a lot of people will cruise but will not fly. I have been working with other CruiseOne franchises and several cruise lines in trying to develop a 'drive down' program to get people within 1000 miles of Miami and Ft. Lauderdale interested in cruising."

Many cruise lines are changing itineraries or completely cutting out cruises that were booked for European, Mediterranean, or Far East travel, while rerouting them and creating new itineraries for the Caribbean.

Miami-based Norwegian Cruise Line has made numerous changes in response to current events and travel agent demands for year-round Caribbean itineraries. Norwegian's brand new Norwegian Sun ship was scheduled to sail in the Mediterranean from May through October of 2002, but will instead spend the summer in the Caribbean where it is already more than 75% full.

In a prepared statement, Norwegian President and CEO Colin Veitch says, "We have decided to build on our traditional Caribbean base rather than deploying this new ship on seven-day Mediterranean cruising, in such uncertain times."

Veitch further states, "The willingness of our North American passengers to travel overseas is something we will be watching

Want A Cheap Place to Stay? Look No Further Than Here

For South Floridians, all of the agents recommend local hotel advantages. Hotels are offering previously unheard of deals, particularly to Florida residents in an effort to boost capacity rates.

Dieter says that hotel prices have dropped dramatically as even the trendiest South Beach hotels, including the Delano and the National, have noted only around 30 percent capacity rates on some weekend nights. Rooms at such prominent local resorts as Breakers in West Palm Beach, and the Marriott Harbor Beach Resort in Ft. Lauderdale have featured rooms for as low as just \$60 a night.

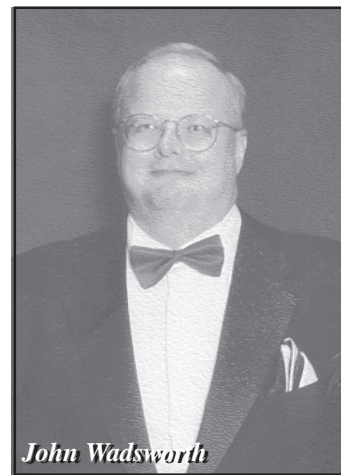
Richard Shindler, Manager of South Beach's Island House, a popular gay guesthouse, is now offering a Florida Resident Special of \$69 per night for New York and Florida residents to rent a King studio until December 20, excluding Thanksgiving. He has also announced a generous discount to the military. Similar specials are being offered at hotels throughout the state.

Shindler also says that the hotel is filling up on weekend due to the specials, although customers from Europe are now harder to come by. Shindler feels that business will pick up again as soon as the weather up north gets colder and the busy season kicks into full gear by next month.

According to Stalbaum, the greatest reductions in hotel prices are in big cities like New York and Las Vegas. Rooms at Las Vegas's usually packed Venetian have gone down from \$200-\$400 a night to as low as \$79 a night. European hotels are also at all-time lows, as travelers prefer to stay closer to home and avoid any long distance flying despite the new revisions in security.



Newt Dieter



John Wadsworth

