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The Leader for Independent Travel



For immediate release

Avanti Destinations Expects Custom Groups Business to Grow 30% in 2024 with Many Repeat Groups; Launches Webpage for Advisors with Ten Inspirational Group Itineraries and Testimonials; Reports Trends in Group Travel

Portland, OR, April 2, 2024 – Wholesale custom tour operator Avanti Destinations expects 30% growth in its custom groups department in 2024, with a high level of repeat bookings.

To assist advisors in finding and creating more groups business, Avanti has added a new Groups webpage on the company’s advisor portal <https://book.avantidestinations.com> featuring ten sample group itineraries to countries around the world, representing different segments of group travel: special interest groups, educational groups, sports fans, corporate groups, spiritual and religious groups.

Avanti launched its custom groups department in the fall of 2018, handling groups of 10 plus passengers. The business unit is headquartered in the Seattle, WA area with other offices in Munich and Barcelona.

Repeat business from advisors booking groups

“We had a very successful year in 2023, and we expect continued growth over that this year,” said Ricarda Haeger, Director of Group Sales and Operations reporting to Avanti CEO Paul Barry. “One important measure of our success is the fact that almost all the advisors who have booked one group with us in the past come back for more group itineraries.

“This is one of the major reasons why advisors who have not yet expanded their business model to include groups should strongly consider it. Not only do advisors make more income on an itinerary for 10 or more passengers than they do for couples or individuals, without needing to do 10 times the work, but when a group has a wonderful experience, the same group is highly likely to return to that advisor, not only as a group, but also as independent travelers. As many advisors tell us, there is a growing trend towards people wanting to share their travel experiences with other people.”

Each group itinerary custom-crafted

Haeger pointed out that Avanti's Groups department does not offer regularly scheduled escorted group tours. "Each group that comes to us is unique and their itinerary is completely custom-crafted to suit the group's interests, budgets, timeframes and preferences for accommodations.

"There are two kinds of custom groups: one is **pre-formed**, where the members know each other, have a firm idea of where and when they want to travel and what they want to do – these pre-formed groups search for a travel advisor to make all the arrangements. The other kind of group, **affinity groups**, accounts for far more of the business and takes some work on the part of the advisor to find, inspire, attract and motivate group members. But getting to know your local community, schools, organizations, teams, and clubs will yield very worthwhile results," encouraged Haeger. "Some successful advisors alternatively find their groups through social media activity."

Special interest groups are varied, including interests such as crafts, gardens, music, history, food and drink. "Culinary tours, encompassing everything from wine tastings and cooking classes to cider mills and local breweries, are experiencing a surge in popularity among American travelers," said Haeger. "Golf too is another increasingly popular option for groups, offering a chance for friendly competition and relaxation in a beautiful setting."

Group Travel Trends

The **average size of groups** that Avanti handles is 18 passengers. "Since most advisors want to help foster connections within their groups, they tend to prefer to have a maximum of 32, which is what a typical tour bus accommodates; that way, people can mingle and get to know each other on the bus," noted Haeger.

The **average length of Avanti's group itineraries** is eight days. Most itineraries include two or more destinations, which is similar to Avanti's custom FIT multi-destination itineraries. The groups department draws from Avanti's wide selection of accommodations, such as boutique properties, spa resorts, castles, and others, as well as a vast array of sightseeing tours and experiences throughout Europe, Central and South America, North Africa and the Middle East, the South Pacific and Asia, as well as additional destinations, such as South Africa.

Haeger emphasized that **one of the keys to a satisfying group tour is providing a balance of free time, as well as organized activity**. Some groups such as corporate or sports-focused ones, most

notably **golf**, have different kinds of activities for the employees or sports fans, and other kinds for spouses and families.

Another trend Haeger noted is that **incentive travel** as a subset of corporate travel has changed since the pandemic. “Before the pandemic, incentive travel tended to be show-like, focused on gala events. Now it is more like leisure travel for the company’s top performers, where they and their spouses travel to amazing places, have tours and activities, and lots of free time. We recently arranged one incentive group tour to four destinations in Guatemala, where time was provided so that group members could help with community services, such as assisting a local school to help paint classrooms and deliver gifts the group had brought from the US, because that group was interested in ‘giving back’,” said Haeger.

Ten sample itineraries to spark ideas

The sample itineraries given in the “Explore” section of the new groups webpage include a 10-day trip to Tokyo, Kanazawa, and Osaka in **Japan**, 10-day golf and sightseeing trip to Barcelona, Valencia and Seville in **Spain**, nine-day wine tour to Santiago and Santa Cruz in **Chile**, nine-day cider tour of **Ireland**, a 10-day tour in **London** to view the works of a famous 17th century woodcarver, and a 11-day trip to **Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands** that traces the story of the Mennonites.

“To succeed at group travel planning, advisors really need to dig in and get to know their groups. Our team immerses ourselves in every aspect of each itinerary – we are the advisor’s co-pilot, and it’s essential to have a trusted partner. Members of our Groups department each have an average of 10-plus years of experience arranging group travel experiences. I think it is our attention to detail and genuine caring about the success of every itinerary that explains why we have so much repeat business. We also deliver the fastest turnaround on requests in the business – try to have a quote to the advisor within 72 hours of their first contact with us,” said Haeger.

For additional information on booking **custom-crafted Groups itineraries**, log on to www.avantidestinations.com/groups, call the Groups Department at 1-888-606-7260 or email groups@avantidestinations.com.

For information on booking unique experiences and custom-built, complex and multi-destination for FITs/independent travelers, log onto the travel agent portal

<https://book.avantidestinations.com> or call 1-800-422-5053 to speak with an expert travel specialist.

Since 1981, Avanti Destinations has been selling **independent travel** products and custom-crafted vacations in 57 countries in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the South Pacific, and Central and South America exclusively through travel advisors. The Portland, Oregon-based wholesale tour operator offers a wide range of FIT components **to travel advisors only**, including air, rail, rental cars, hotels, sightseeing/attractions, transfers and hard-to-find experiential travel options. Avanti specializes in hand-picked, locally-owned hotels in both large and small cities and in **connecting all the pieces of complex, multi-destination itineraries**. The company also creates complete custom packages for groups of 10-plus passengers.

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Electronic photo available at <https://1drv.ms/i/s!AjdZmJ2b7j-YqrR6qXusL-SMIm8Zfq?e=ZYaZFA>

Photo captions: *Avanti Destinations expects 30% growth for its custom groups business unit in 2024 and has just launched a new Groups webpage and e-brochure for advisors.*