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RIDING THE LUXURY WAVE

High-end operators continue to float above economic worries

BY DAVID COGSWELL

Luxury tour operators are headed into the 2009 product year with confidence. Despite economic troubles besetting the industry, these operators know their sector will be the last to be affected.

ABERCROMBIE & KENT (A&K) will increase its focus on adventure, including physically challenging expeditions and cruises in exotic destinations. The company's newest product line, "Extreme Adventures," is defined as "once-in-a-lifetime expeditions for today's high achievers." A&K is launching 15 "Extreme Adventures" for 2009, which will include experiences ranging from flying a fighter jet over South Africa to shark-cage diving in the Indian Ocean. The first of the new adventures will begin this fall.

A&K continues to see growth in demand for family travel and has incorporated the "Design Your Day" option into all its family programs, giving clients the power to control their own activities. A&K had five departures in 2008 and will increase the number to eight for 2009.

A&K has also seen a healthy demand for its "girlfriend getaways," picking up on the increasing trend of women traveling together. The operator is offering six of the trips for 2009, which will provide women with unusual opportunities to meet and interact with accomplished women. Tour participants will be able to learn the art of perfume-blending in Provence, France; henna painting in Jaipur, India and more.

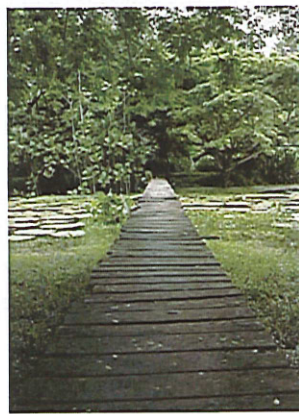
For more information, call 800-554-7016 or visit www.abercrombiekent.com.

INTERNATIONAL EXPEDITIONS, which concentrates on high-end sustainable travel programs with a conservation angle, is having a very good year as well, says President Maggie Hart, with 2008 almost completely sold out and sales for 2009 doing well. The company has started some new projects in the Amazon, where it donates to conservation education for the local people of the

rain forest areas. The company is looking into offering some voluntourism programs for 2010.

For more information, call 800-633-4734 or visit www.ictravel.com.

ISLAND DESTINATIONS, a luxury niche operator, reports continued growth in its business. According to Laurie Palumbo, the COO, the company is continuing to



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expand and grow its product line, and is seeing a strong trend toward more multi-generational travel. As a result, the company is adding resorts that offer premium villas to deliver the ultimate "home away from home," with access to a resort's amenities. Island Destinations' team is currently busy, Palumbo says, "traveling around the globe reviewing hundreds of resorts, seeking the few that will be invited into our 2009 program. Our new product offerings will be unveiled this fall with the release of the 2009 'Travelers Collection Brochure.'"

For more information, call 888-454-4422 or visit www.islanddestinations.com.

ISRAMWORLD is planning to offer a series of ultra-luxury individual tours under the banner of The Elite Travel Collection by Belder-Gray. Isram has started a new division called Elite Customized Tours and Travel and now has acquired private jet subsidiary called Belder-Gray. Isram introduced its Elite Series with a 12-night India program, that includes Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur and Jodhpur, using the top-end luxury accommodations of India. The package uses business class air between several of the cities on the itinerary, and includes private visits not available to the general public. The packages are completely customizable at the whim of the client, with support and pampering as it's needed. The programs are built with itineraries, but they are, Gelber says, "only a suggestion." The client can change or re-organize the trip "on a daily basis as the trip progresses." For now the Elite Tour series is Eastern Europe, Vietnam, China, Peru, Israel and Egypt. Also upcoming are programs for Russia and Cambodia. The average travel agent commission for an Elite Series booking is \$1,100.

Belder-Gray will offer a dozen individual itineraries in five countries. The itineraries will feature the top-end rooms or suites, with car and driver throughout and touring that includes private off-hour visits to many sites, and fine dining. Like the rest of Isram's Elite Traveler program, Belder-Gray will plan custom-tailored travel with whatever extra services a client requires. Full details of the Elite Travel Collection by Belder-Gray will be outlined in a 64-page brochure set to appear in October. The Belder-Gray website will launch at the same time.

For more information, call 800-223-7460 or visit www.IsramWorld.com.

TAUCK WORLD DISCOVERY is positioning itself to take advantage of trends in the marketplace, according to Rick Baron, director of worldwide accounts. Inclinations of particular interest to Tauck include the continued increase in demand