

Six in the City: Carl Meadows



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Last October, Leisure Group Travel visited with Carl Meadows to learn about his company, Association of Group Travel Organizers International (AGTOI), and *Write Your Own Ticket*, his book introducing the industry to new or hopeful group travel organizers.

One year later, we are again visiting with Carl to talk about his new ventures, “Six in the City” and Freedom Tours, which take a “less is more” approach to planning group trips.

Carl explains, “Several years ago, I started to recognize that my incentive travel participant’s attitudes were changing, and about a year ago, I realized that there was a definite need for a basic “stay ‘n play” program. Add that idea to the needs of the growing group travel organizer population and we’ve got a new market of international tours.”

Keep it Simple, Silly!

Carl learned early on that the syndrome known as “If it’s Tuesday, it must be Belgium” is deadly to repeat business. “For the past 30 years, I have been operating incentive groups around the world. After only a few years of working these programs, a pattern started to develop which everyone really seemed to enjoy. So after awhile, I started to offer the same type of package to my clients year after year, except to a different destination. The ultimate ingredient to the program’s success has been six nights in one city – simple, but very effective. It has lots of free time for the participants to enjoy the destination on their own, at their own pace.”

Carl is the first to admit, though, that groups today are not the same as groups 30 years ago – and he’s embracing that. “As my group participants grow older, they become more and more interested in the culture and history of the destination. But they don’t necessarily want to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner with the group, like groups thirty years ago would have liked, nor do they want to follow a tour guide waving an umbrella for two weeks.”

What he’s done instead is this: offer six nights in one four- to five-star hotel, a half- or full-day tour of the city or area with professional tour guides, full breakfast everyday and some other group func-



tions. Depending on the destination, the tour could also include various passes for use on local transportation systems such as metros, trolleys or trains as well as passes to local attractions like museums, art galleries, historical sites, etc. “The destination determines what we add to the program,” he said.

Carl continued, “Six nights gives them ample time to really explore the city and surrounding areas, and include those activities that not everyone in the group is interested in.”

Sanctioned Mutiny?

Carl knows that this pattern of travel isn’t for everyone, and he’s not out to uproot the big dogs. “The established U.S. tour operators do a great job with their programs – they probably won’t even notice us. There are still millions of people who will book these fully loaded trips annually, will have a great time and will keep the tour operators ‘in the green,’ but there are also thousands of people who really want to have a special travel experience, one where they can control their own time and pursue their personal interests.” Carl noted, “I believe this group of travelers is where the market growth is.”

In the first year, Freedom Tours is developing 15 major European and five South Pacific/Asia destinations. As these twenty programs get up and running, the company plans to add more programs to the inventory. “All of the destinations that we are initially offering are outstanding places,” he comments, “but as we grow, our Six in the City programs will get more exotic and exciting.”

Carl notes that it’s not organizers like him who are changing the face of group travel – it’s the groups that are changing and, if the pros don’t jump ahead of the game, they’ll eventually be chasing the dust of a dying generation.