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'Girlfriend Getaways' Provide Needed Respite for Women, Says Auto Club

New AAA Survey Shows 39 Percent Plan a Women-Only Vacation Soon

LOS ANGELES, CA--(Marketwire - July 19, 2007) - A new survey of women travelers shows that girlfriend getaways are growing in popularity, in part because American women feel the need to escape their personal and professional responsibilities, according to the Automobile Club of Southern California. The report also shows that vacations including just girlfriends and female family members ease stress and have become an important part of women's lives.

The survey, conducted by AAA and Aspire, a hospitality training and marketing firm, is the most comprehensive study of the girlfriend getaways travel market. The report found that 24 percent of American women have taken a girlfriend getaway in the past three years, and 39 percent of American women plan on taking one in the next three years.

"Travel of all types is increasing among Southern Californians as people are seeking out getaways from their busy lives, and this trend also applies to girlfriends," said Diana Meinhold, the Auto Club's vice president for travel products and services. "Today's hectic lifestyle makes it hard to reconnect with friends regularly, so a vacation with girlfriends can help women both to recharge and spend quality time together."

For Southern California Auto Club members, the top "girlfriend destinations" include Las Vegas, spa resorts, Baja California cruises, Northern and Central California wine country tours, and Broadway show and shopping getaways to New York City.

"The experience of a girlfriend getaway has a deep effect on the lives and friendships of women who take these types of trips, and many believe that going away with their girlfriends is important, regardless of the destination," said Betsy Sell, managing director of AAA Travel. "In fact, 62 percent of women who plan on going on a girlfriend getaway in the next three years said that taking a future trip is as important today as it was when they took their last trip with girlfriends."

This comprehensive report included an online survey of 1,500 women, a telephone survey of 513 women and telephone focus groups of 16 women.

Aspire's Founder and CEO, Renie Cavallari, observes, "Hotels and resorts need to recognize the impact of the girlfriend getaway market. These women represent a significant amount of money -- four percent of all U.S. travel spending, which is almost \$200 million a year spent in hotels alone. The number of women going on girlfriend getaways is likely to keep growing, so it's important that properties are prepared to cater to this market."

Women participating in the survey said that while the most common destinations include the beach (66 percent), going to the spa (63 percent), taking a shopping trip (55 percent) or taking a cruise (51 percent), they were very clear that the destination and the accommodations are incidental to the primary purpose of a girlfriend getaway, spending time bonding with their female friends and family. The women in the focus groups talked about how important these trips are for them, saying they feel more self-confident, adventurous and relaxed as a result of their girlfriend getaway. It is a time for women to share common experiences, and get validation and acceptance from their female friends and family.

Husbands, significant others and children of these women, have no fear. The AAA/Aspire study shows that women are not going on girlfriend getaways just to get away from you. Only 34 percent of women gave "break from significant other" as the reason for a getaway, but they do talk about you when they're away. The vast majority (79 percent) admitted that men or their significant other are the most frequently talked about topics.

Interesting facts about girlfriend getaways

- Most girlfriend getaways consist of 2-3 women (51 percent).
- Girlfriend getaways account for approximately four percent of all US leisure travel spending. (Source: D.K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd. DIRECTIONS® DESTINATION PERFORMANCE/Monitor(SM).)
- The leading reasons women want to take the girlfriend getaways are to bond with friends or family (70 percent) and to escape from their daily responsibilities (65 percent).
- Women who participated in the focus groups highlighted the importance of spending time with girlfriends in general and taking these types of trips specifically. These women also felt that these types of trips provided an added intensity and importance to their connections with their women friends.
- The most popular activities while on a girlfriend getaway are dining out (86 percent), shopping (74 percent), spa (73 percent) and going to the beach or pool (70 percent).
- The most difficult aspects of planning a girlfriend getaway are finding a time that works for everyone (77 percent) and selecting a trip that fits everyone's budget (76 percent).
- Fifty-six percent of all women surveyed said they have yet to make plans for a future girlfriend getaway, but would like to plan one.
- Between 2004 and 2007 there has been an increase in taking girlfriend getaways for "no reason" - 30 percent vs. 40 percent, respectively.
- The largest portion of women who said they had been on a girlfriend getaway in the last three years were between the ages of 25-34 (40 percent).
- The greatest number of women who had gone on a girlfriend getaway in the past three years had no children (38 percent), and were not married (42 percent).