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Wendy Wu Tours rolls out 'six-star' upgrades to its itineraries

By Kenneth Kiesnoski



Wendy Wu

Wendy Wu Tours, long a purveyor of China tours in Australia and the U.K., is marking six months in the U.S. market by introducing "six-star" upgrades to its 29 China programs, stressing its value proposition and solidifying travel agent outreach.

Speaking from the operator's U.S. offices in New York, Chief Executive Wendy Wu said that "compared with our starts in Australia and the U.K., this [U.S. debut] has been better."

Wu said bookings of the operator's 29 itineraries for 2011 have been vigorous since they became available here in September. In addition, the vast majority of reservations have been made through travel agents.

"We love travel agents, and for our clients, they're the only way to go," Wu said.

Wendy Wu Tours pays 10% commission on land and visa fees and 5% on air, fuel surcharges and taxes, with volume-based increases for top producers. The operator also offers retail partners support with co-op advertising and destination training.

Wu said that her all-inclusive, "four-star" group tours have proved her most popular product in the U.S., although she also offers private and FIT products as well as pre- and postcruise extensions and five- and six-star upgrades.

Wendy Wu Tours does not market to the budget traveler, but Wu stressed that even her firm's standard, all-inclusive itineraries offer "excellent value." For example, the price of a 10-day, fully inclusive, introductory itinerary such as Beijing-Xian-Shanghai starts at about \$2,490.

"But that includes roundtrip airfare, four-star hotels, three meals every day, all tours and guides and even the Chinese visa fee," she said. "People just can't believe it."

A constellation of offers

For an additional \$800, clients can book a standard group itinerary to China as a private tour, including personal guide and private driver. For \$800 more, or \$1,600 total on top of standard group rates, accommodations can be upgraded from four stars to five, upgrading in Beijing from the Superhouse International Hotel to an InterContinental property and in Shanghai from a Ramada to the Four Seasons.

Newest to the operator's U.S. product lineup are "six-star" upgrades to five-star itineraries. For yet another \$3,000, or \$4,600 plus standard group tour rates, clients have, in effect, the run of China.

Wu said the six-star upgrades are for clients who "want only the best of the best and unique experiences, such as a helicopter ride over the Great Wall and private lectures in museums."

Yet, four-star experience or six, Wu said quality service levels remain the same. "The most important thing is our service, so we take very good care of our clients," she said.

"Our guides meet clients as soon as they arrive in China to look after them all the way through the country," Wu added. "They fly with them, dine with them, tour with them and stay in the same hotel as them."

Visit www.wendywuschina.com.

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