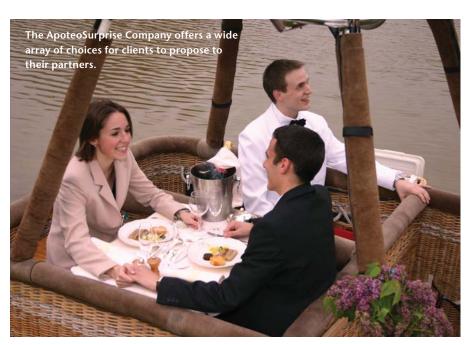
## IN FRANCE MAKE ROMANCE AN ADVENTURE

Paris is THE city of light and love—a destination where romance is as much a part of its fragrance as the heady perfumes that wasp from the dark corners of the intimate bistros and cafes that for centuries have famously hidden or revealed countless assignations.



RICK SHIVELY

his is also the city that's launched the passionate romantic legends of France itself all across the world, igniting the romantic interests of tens of thousands of couples like a benevolent plague spreading a promise of love and fulfillment.

And now, this is also a city where you can find some of the most unusual and over-the-top romantic experiences in the world for your clients, especially when you seek out and sell the services of a relatively new company—the **ApoteoSurprise Company**—that is combining tourism expertise, high-tech marketing and booking capabilities and most importantly, a positively unique and off-the-wall flair for creating the most memorable, one-of-a-kind (even a little bit wacky, in some cases) romantic adventures your clients could ever imagine.

How creative, you ask? They're about as far from the cookie-cutter rose petals on the bedspread and welcome bottle of champagne and chocolate strawberries as you can get and they're as much a professional entertainment extravaganza as they are a personalized travel experience. Each experience, explains Marketing Director Jean-Marie Doizi (at press time there were 40 programs online at apoteosurprise.com) is focused on what the company calls, "V.I.P., the Very Important Present, the surprise of one's life." Doizi says the company, "...designs and orchestrates original and sensational scenarios for couples who are staying in Paris," all of which, he adds, "...are based on the same idea—to surprise your client's partner." They order the experience and only your client will know its secrets. Their partner will discover the experience at the last minute and will not be able to tell that anyone else played a part in its organization.

Most start with a "surprise" pickup in a chauffeured limousine or car selected specifically for that themed program. All programs can be matched to a specified interest of the clients or specifically for its "over-the-

top" romantic value. They can, and do, run the gamut from the relatively tame—a side-by-side ultralight flight over the French countryside and a bird's-eye view of Disneyland Paris, culminating in the true purpose of the trip, still another ultralight towing a huge banner declaring your client's love for his or her partner—to the somewhat bizarre, with your client couple enjoying a colorful, surprise trip to the Parisian circus. For this program, a chauffeur arrives in a sporty red mustang for a day under the big top, where couples enjoy classic circus acts before the real drama begins. A seemingly drunken clown comes out and selects your client's partner as an assistant for his first-time knife throwing act. After being blindfolded and attached to a wooden board, the "assistant" will experience four knives thudding into the board alongside his or her body, which in reality are slammed into the board by other actors. When the mask is removed, your client will be standing there with a microphone to share the romantic message with the audience, providing, of course, the partner has a sense of humor and doesn't stab the imaginative suitor with one of the nearby knives.

Want a more genteel approach? How about a royal luncheon in a genuine 18th century castle where your clients will arrive in an elegant 1955 Bentley S1 limousine, enjoy a superb gourmet lunch and, while admiring the gardens from the balcony, a sky diver wearing a Louis XVI costume will land, walk up to your client's partner, get down on one knee and hand the surprised partner a piece of parchment with—you guessed it—your client's declaration of love.

Getting the picture here? Regardless of the setup, the message is the culmination of the setup. The more elaborate and complicated, the more pricey, but at the same time, the more effective. The message itself is up to the client: it can be anything from a marriage proposal (which most are) or an an-

60 June 2006 recommend.com

58-62 eu.indd 60 6/1/06 9:46:49 AM

niversary statement, a honeymoon or just a very creative way for your client to tell his or her lover how important they are to them.

The idea for "declarative travel" was formed in 2003 by Nicolas Garreau, an aeronautical engineer previously involved in Internet businesses who saw an opportunity in the destination romance business, particularly after learning that at least two million foreign couples traveled each year to Paris, and more importantly, a survey that indicated 80 percent of American women are disappointed by the way their partner asked them to wed. The company was founded in France in mid-2005, opening its online boutique in France one month before Valentine's Day in 2006 to take advantage of the obvious and timely press coverage.

"We opened our online boutique in the U.S. market and English-speaking countries in mid-February 2006. We started to initialize contacts with most of the top travel agencies involved in France destination activity, as well as service companies, inte-

grated networks," and other associations, Doizi explains. "At the end of May, we finalized discussions with U.S. and Canadian tour operators, such as FIL Franck Tours in New York, and travel agencies, such as Linden Travel Bureau and Mercator Tours in New York." The company is also under discussion with AAA Sojourns.

In terms of how these programs are being received in the U.S. and Canadian markets, Doizi says, "The reactions are always spectacular for each experience," with clients describing the experience as, "...incredible, impossible, great, huge and crazy. It's mainly due to the scenario of each experience, which is organized in three steps and only known by one partner, and for the other, the 'sweetheart,' it's never 'possible' to imagine what will happen next."

The most popular surprises for U.S. and Canadian clients, Doizi says, are the *On the Wings of an Airplane* and *On the Banks of Notre Dame* programs. In the *On the Wings* program, the couple is picked up by a classic

1967 Fleetwood Cadillac and chauffeured to a nearby airport where they board a Cessna 172 and the pilot presents the partner with a bouquet of flowers. Once airborne, the couple flies above the Chevreuse Valley, the Chateau de Dampierre and the beautiful Rambouillet Forest before they rendezvous over the Etangs de Hollande where suddenly, the partner hears their favorite song coming in over the headphones and a second plane painted completely white appears beside them for a few minutes until suddenly, it descends several hundred feet revealing on its wings your client's declaration of love. Upon landing, they celebrate and are saluted with a special bottle of champagne.

So if the clients who have experienced these unique programs are so exuberant, what about the agents and agencies selling it? Like many new and unique programs, Doizi says, "The initial reaction is obviously enthusiastic," but the follow-up, especially if the agent hasn't been through this kind of unique destination romance planning



June 2006 **61** 

58-62 eu.indd 61 61/106 9:47:02 AM

## In France Make Romance an Adventure



before, can be less so. The reactions are always the same, he says, "It's great.... It sounds unusual, original and unique...." However, Doizi says, most agents think at the beginning, only a few of their clients will be interested in this offer because of its intimacy. The reality, Doizi explains, is that potential clients are everywhere. "For

One of the company's programs includes flying over the French countryside in an ultralight.

the most part," he says, "clients don't know that this type of offer exists, so agents should anticipate their clients' needs."

Booking, however, is easy. "We developed an extranet booking system, which allows agents to book and follow up with the pending orders. If an agent is interested in 'distributing' our services," Doizi says, "Send me an e-mail at jean-marie.doizi@apoteo surprise.com, with the name of the agency, mailing address, telephone, e-mail and name of the contact." Doizi then sends the agent a login and password to access their client information, with the corresponding user notice. "Also, I will join a 'Memorandum of Understanding,' which lists the precise commission (previously discussed) on the wholesale agreement the agency will apply, before paying us for the experiences they sold.... It's as simple as that...."



- Visit the famous and breathtakingly beautiful Blue Grotto in Capri, a great experience for a couple because the only way to get in is by a small rowboat that can only carry two or three people so that it can slip through the narrow opening as the passengers stretch flat out on the deck of the boat. Inside, they'll find an ornate cavern adorned with statuary put there by the Romans centuries ago, all illuminated by the brilliant blue of the sea.
- Enjoy a candlelit dinner for two at the Eiffel Tower in Paris and take in the romantic and awe-inspiring panorama of the "City of Light." But tell clients to make sure they make reservations ahead of time to avoid disappointment.
- Urge clients to take one of the more esoteric evening walking tours in Prague such as *The Ghost Trail Tour* or the *Mysteries and Ghosts of Prague Walking Tour*. Keep in mind, this is a centuries-old city that's seen more than its share of very often murderous secret societies and brotherhoods, not to mention scores of legendary ghosts. These tours would be a wonderful prelude to a "Just Us Two" late-night walk together across the Charles Bridge in Prague.

## Business class just got classier



TOLL-FREE: 800-228-0877 FAX: 212-581-7925 • www.amta.com 505 8AVE., NEW YORK NY 10018 As part of a major upgrade, LOT Polish Airlines is proud to introduce the latest ergonomically designed 'privacy shell' chair'. Its multiple controls allow you to stretch out horizontally and sleep comfortably, cocooned in your own private shell.

We also provide you with your own portable multi-media player, a new gourmet menu, and complimentary wines and champagne throughout your flight.

And remember what a blessing it is to be spared the inconvenience of transfer. LOT is, in fact, the only airline that offers this level of comfort on direct transatlantic flights to and from Poland.

**NEW YORK - WARSAW 2,400 USD\*\*** CHICAGO - WARSAW 96 USD additional 800-223-0593 (toll free) outside New York, 212-789-0970 in New York, www.lot.com

AMERICAN TRAVEL ABROAD

Since 1946, Travel Spoken Here

you're under our wing



62 June 2006 recommend.com

58-62 eu.indd 62 6/1/06 9:47:05 AM