

Exotic Will Remain a Hot Ticket in 2009

AGENTS TELL TRAVEL AGENT THAT EVEN IN THIS DIFFICULT ECONOMY, their luxury clients continue to seek out vacations that offer authenticity, special experiences and new ways to experience remote areas. In fact, at Luxury Travel Expo in Las Vegas in early December, travel agents packed into sessions focused on "the destination," and specifically, exotic locales.

In a solo presentation to a standing-room-only crowd, Ignacio Maza, executive vice president, Signature Travel Network, outlined his group's assessment of "The Next Great Places: In Search of Exotic Destinations." Several case studies focused on luxury small-ship cruise options.



Ignacio Maza

In one cruise case study, Maza spoke of a sale by Susan Reder, Classic Cruise & Travel/Altour, Woodland Hills, CA. She designed a vacation for a well-traveled, adventurous married couple in their 50s. These luxury clients, passionate about the environment, were interested in a learning vacation. But the couple also wanted creature comforts.

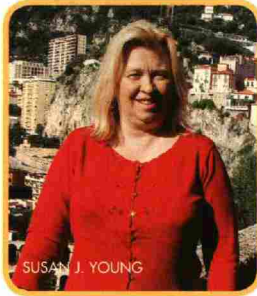
Matching the client with the right vacation for their needs, Reder selected a luxury Amazon

cruising adventure operated from Peru by **Aqua Expeditions** (www.aquaexpeditions.com), a new small-ship expedition operator. Covering two million square miles, the Amazon is the world's largest forest, exudes biodiversity and offers clients the chance to explore river and wilderness areas.

Aqua Expeditions' 24-passenger vessel, *Aqua*, sails unspoiled regions of the Amazon and its crew of 18 includes naturalists and offers a high level of service, according to Maza. The itineraries range from three to seven days, and all-inclusive rates are approximately \$700 per person daily, including transfers to/from the airport in Iquitos, Peru.

In another cruise case study, Maza cited the efforts of Gay Lewis, a travel specialist at the Travel 100 group in Chicago. She sought the perfect vacation choice for three generations of a family with travelers ages 12 to 67. The group had a keen interest in nature, was composed of outdoor enthusiasts, wanted to celebrate an anniversary and could take two weeks for a vacation. The agent also knew her clients enjoyed *Audubon* and *National Geographic* magazines.

So Lewis suggested an Antarctica cruise on **Lindblad Expeditions** (www.expeditions.com). Staffed by National Geographic experts, Lindblad operates the newly refurbished *Explorer*, a vessel with Zodiacs, kayaks and underwater cameras. The luxury vacation Lewis selected for her clients combined learning with exploration. Clients heard commentary from naturalists and enjoyed viewing such wildlife as whales, penguins, seals and birds.



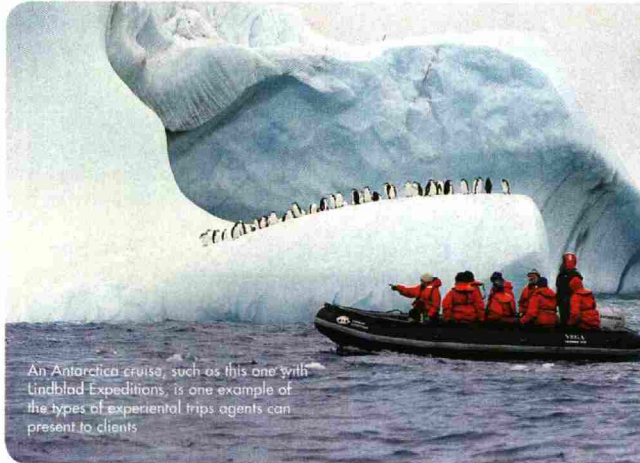
SUSAN J. YOUNG

Maza stressed that Antarctica delivers an unforgettable experi-

a travel patch.

Also detailing land-based case studies in such destinations as British Columbia and Patagonia, Maza said that luxury customers, whether traveling by land or sea, are sophisticated, savvy, adventurous, complex and demanding. But he also stressed that the definition of luxury has shifted.

Today's affluent customers want innovation, new experiences, an emotional connection, culture, and a sense of wonder in their travel experience, Maza said. In the past, luxury



An Antarctica cruise, such as this one with Lindblad Expeditions, is one example of the types of experiential trips agents can present to clients.

ence. While more than 20 vessels typically operate each year in the region, Maza told agents the best experience is exploration via a small ship. He explained that Antarctica is not as cold as people might think, with temperatures routinely ranging from 20 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit during the cruise season. He also said clients may put aside their fear of the Drake Passage, which can be a rough spot motion-wise, by using

was defined by how much money the client had, as well as ostentation and luxury goods. In contrast, Maza said today's luxury customers are smart buyers who seek out all the great experiences that their money can buy.

—SUSAN J. YOUNG

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