

## **SURVEY REVEALS SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AITO SPECIALIST TOUR OPERATORS**

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A recent survey of members conducted by AITO, The Specialist Travel Association, unveiled significant shifts in the obstacles and challenges faced by specialist tour operators over the past 12 months. Operational challenges, fluctuating levels of demand, and recruitment issues, all continue to dominate, but the survey revealed notable changes in their rankings and predicted impact for the year ahead.

AITO's Executive Director, Martyn Sumners reports the key findings:

- **Operational challenges remain dominant**, however there has been an improvement, with 59% of operators citing this as an anticipated challenge for the next 12 months, down from 65% in the previous year. This reduction may reflect the continued collaboration between AITO members, and perhaps also the results of AITO's lobbying efforts.
- **Demand has shifted to become a primary challenge**, surpassing recruitment concerns. In the past 12 months, 29% of specialist operators reported consumer demand as a key obstacle to growth, a figure that increases to 37% when looking ahead to the next 12 months. Challenges may reflect additional demand for specific niches or destinations (e.g. Costa Rica) which are proving to be popular in 2024.
- **Recruitment & staff turnover have begun to stabilise**, and only 35% of businesses anticipate this being a continuing issue in the 12 months to come (down from 47%). While attracting talent remains a challenge, the survey highlights a positive trend in terms of retention, with a 6.2% improvement expected in staff turnover.

**A number of rising concerns** were also highlighted by the survey. As well as the projected increase in consumer demand-related issues over the next 12 months, anticipated **challenges around industrial action** are also on the rise. Smaller operators and travel agencies in particular reported that they felt industrial action was more likely to impact their business.

**Increased competition also poses a significant challenge for specialist tour operators** in the coming months. This may be driven by perceived increases in marketing and advertising costs, reflecting the interconnected nature of competition - and marketing - expenditure within the industry. AITO's tour operator members report a need to be more targeted in their approach to ensure strong return on investment, highlighting the interesting fact that digital advertising is generating much less 'bang for buck'.

Sumners notes, "As specialist tour operators and travel agents navigate the evolving challenges highlighted, **adaptability and strategic planning are key to sustaining**

**growth.** By addressing recruitment concerns, optimising operational efficiency, and staying attuned to shifting market dynamics, operators and agents can position themselves for success in the coming months”.

The data shared forms part of the AITO Business Confidence Tracker Survey, courtesy of Spike Insight, which serves as a vital resource for AITO tour operator and travel agent members, providing valuable insights into the trends shaping the specialist travel sector.

**Ends/Press:**

For more information on AITO ([www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com)), or for quotes or comments on industry issues, please contact Sue Ockwell or Gemma Minto at Travel PR – [s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk](mailto:s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk) / 07831 126 356 or [g.minto@travelpr.co.uk](mailto:g.minto@travelpr.co.uk) / 07833 760 047.