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A&K TOWNE CLUBS

by David M. Brown and Gayle Streichert
Photos courtesy of A&K Towne Clubs

WHERE can you find a state of the art business facility to use when you want – and only pay for it when you need it, book a world-class vacation experience with a dedicated professional assistant, and have the best ticket in the house to sports events and concerts waiting for you here, or when you travel? Join the club: A&K Towne Clubs. The club is one of a number of services offered by Southport, Connecticut-based Abercrombie & Kent Destinations, founded in 1998 by CEO Rob McGrath. These include A & K Destination Clubs, A&K Jets, and A&K Concierge Villas North America. All are strategically allied to the 40-year-old Abercrombie & Kent luxury adventure-travel company of London and the United States.

“We’re the ultimate entertainment, business and travel services club catering to the discerning business traveler or entrepreneur. Members receive custom tailored services with a dedicated club personal assistant,” says Mark Cain, who serves as vice president and director of marketing for the club. “Towne Clubs give our members on-demand access to all we have to offer, including our luxury suites and skyboxes at America West Arena and Bank One Ballpark without the obligations of ownership or the expense of purchasing season tickets.” He continues: “Towne Clubs are comfortable places to do business when traveling, or you can fully engage the world from the club facility rather than from a home library or executive suite. They’re also an excellent retreat for those who need to get away for a few hours. The club services also include booking and managing corporate travel or custom tailored luxury vacation experiences.”

Through a variety of services, members can book a wide range of destinations, from safaris to wind-surfing and alpine-skiing vacations. “We just accepted the membership of six individuals who joined for one major purpose: They wanted to travel together to unique destinations,” Cain says. The company’s Concierge Villas, for example, places members in hand-picked luxury homes throughout the United States and Mexico, where they reside in luxury without being seen at a resort.

The 20,000-square-foot Scottsdale facility next to Eddie V’s Edgewater Grill (Market Street at DC Ranch), at Thompson Peak Parkway and Pima Road, is the flagship location for the first of 26 clubs planned nationwide within the next three years. Locations scheduled to open in 2005 include San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Dallas, Denver, Chicago, Atlanta, New York and Miami; all clubs share reciprocity on services. Note that the first 100 Scottsdale charter members are already in place.

“A&K Towne Clubs are distinctively different from traditional venues,” Cain explained. “For one, they are multigenerational and cross gender; their members include retired executives, entrepreneurs and busy corporate travelers.” New York architect Campion Platt described the design process: “We first toured exclusive business clubs throughout Europe, and we found most of them dark, gloomy and crusted over. We’ve turned that on its head to create a contemporary environment that’s alive, bright, comfortable and sophisticated for both sexes.” He concluded: “We accept the premise of the traditional private club as a secure outpost, but we *don’t* accept the premise that it has to look a certain way.”

The club’s Business Success Centre provides all the services of an office suite – but without the leasing costs. Here, you can maintain a personal business locker, run a breakfast, lunch or dinner meeting (up to 120 participants), deliver a presentation, take part in a video-conference with associates anywhere in the world, or log in through secure super-fast Internet connections. Platt explained this highly versatile space: “We were inspired by London’s Institute of Directors, where the sound level, rather than interfering with people’s work, actually served as soothing background noise. This is a vibrant, fluid, multi-layered space where intimate conversations can co-exist with larger events.” Platt also designed some of the clubhouse interior, including its 18th-century military campaign-inspired furniture.

An innovative ‘action station’ with seating for 16 is planned where members will be presented cuisine designed by Chef Michael DeMaria, owner of the award-winning restaurant Michael’s at the Citadel (located a few miles north of the Towne Club facility). To spice their culinary enjoyment, DeMaria’s staff will describe each of the individually selected courses and answer any questions. DeMaria and staff will also cater exclusive parties in one of the club’s private meeting rooms, with menus selected by the host to suit his/her guests: “At even the best of the local resorts, your party is just one of many. Here, your party is *the* party,” Cain says.

Included in the club’s offerings is a dedicated personal assistant that caters to the requirements of each member on an individual basis. One assistant looks after just 20 members and their families. “They are one point of contact for everything you need,” Cain says. And those services are almost limitless, including procurement of the rare and almost unobtainable: “Say you want to buy an item at auction but want to maintain

anonymity; we will handle that – from finding what you're looking for, through the continuing bid process, to gavel-down and delivery to you."

This goes as well for locating private stock. Let's say you want a case of 1982 Chateau Margaux (previously put down by a Hollywood oenophile); they will locate and negotiate that purchase for you. If you're looking for a special collection, like a set of proof American coins for the last 50 years or rare Depression Glass from a New Hampshire estate, they will help you secure exactly what you desire.

Cain summarized the Towne Club's mission: "We're the answer to the question, 'Whom do I call?' We do all the homework for you, so you can spend time at business, at leisure, at enjoying life." Elaborating this point, Cain relayed a common scenario: "You are a CEO of a company that has transferred you to Scottsdale; you need the three best interior designers to bid a job. Well, you can spend your time looking on the Web and through the yellow pages, or you can solicit recommendations. But we do this all the time; our personal assistants handle situations like this every day. It's reassuring for our members to know, recommended companies must be approved by the club first."

For the home, recommended services can include domestic staffing, pet care, time management, chauffeuring or catering companies. Towne Clubs will locate everything from a car to own (want to be wrapped in a Dodge Viper?) or a car to rent (an important out-of-town client, however, prefers Porsches). Personal assistants will shop for you, or find what you're shopping for.

Club services are diverse, helping you acquire gifts like a Dürer etching from a private collection or the finest Egyptian-cotton bed set; they can also arrange for asset-protection and financial-management services. In addition, through the club's superlative networking, members have the opportunity to attend premier events such as the World Series, Kentucky Derby or Fashion Week LA/NY, as well as their respective behind-the-velvet rope-parties. As a member, you also have access to the best seats for local sporting and entertainment events (based on ticket availability) at local club suites at America West Arena and Bank One Ballpark; club members enjoy the same suite access and comforts at every club location across the nation.

If you're a jetsetter and don't want the expense of owning your own – or fulfilling the requirements of most "fractional" services – you have access to the Towne Club's innovative "on demand" jet service. The fleet of more than 1,100 jets includes the most recent business aircraft available through Sentient Jets. According to Cain, "Members make use of them on an on-demand schedule without the

traditional costs of deadhead time, overnight fees or a fractional card purchase that puts their investment at risk." As with all services, members are billed for jet time from a pre-paid member deposit account. The service requires no minimum flight time, yet offers the opportunity to get where you need to – quickly, safely and comfortably.



Club membership is "really quite a good value," Cain says. "For in one family vacation, one trip, you can make back the membership initiation fees. The fees are almost inconsequential to the services you receive." And the reception has been quite good. One charter member, developer Rob Flick, says: "It's absolutely a tremendous opportunity to develop my business and share good times with family and friends. What can I say," he adds, candidly, "I like to be pampered." ●

For further information on A&K Towne Clubs call 480.344.7222 or www.aktowneclubs.com.