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## Perillo Adds Destinations, Prepares for Fourth Generation

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Perillo Tours has beat the proverbial Three Generation Rule, “Three generations shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves.” It’s based on fact that family businesses that get passed down generations don’t usually do well for long.

The standard principle, based on various sources, is that only 30 percent of family businesses survive to the second generation, only 13 percent to the third and a mere 3 percent to the fourth. Those are daunting odds.

The sources seem ambiguous about whether it’s “survive the third generation,” “survive TO the third generation” or “survive THROUGH the third generation.” In any case, Perillo has crushed the odds. Steve Perillo, heir and CEO, is the third generation of the family business, and he is now grooming his nephew Devin Buonanno, the fourth generation, to take command. I had a chance to visit with them both at the U.S. Tour Operators Association Annual Conference & Marketplace in December.

It’s not surprising that Perillo beat the odds. It’s never been an ordinary tour operator. It stood apart, cut its own path. It developed a mystique, and a strong public image that became almost legendary, through strong branding and marketing that was ahead of its time.

It started in 1945 when Steve’s grandfather opened Joseph Perillo and Sons, a travel agency in the Bronx. Soon it developed into a tour specialist for Italy. His son Mario joined the company after his military service, college and a law degree. He took it over and built it into a big name. Mario Perillo appeared in TV ads in the New York City area. He earned himself the name “Mr. Italy” and a level of celebrity few tour operators have ever achieved. Steve took over as president in 1997. Mario died in 2003. Steve has been in charge nearly 30 years, a generation.



Steve and Devin – photo Perillo Tours

Devin Buonanno has been working with the business for a few years now, but Steve Perillo is starting to get more serious about handing over the reins. Now 30, Devin got married in October. For Perillo Tours, he's been Hawaii regional director, director of new business development and has been working on trying to modernize the brand through social media marketing on TikTok and Instagram. He's also exploring the potentials of Perillo's virtual travel technology, Travel World VR. Now he seems to be ready to jump off to a higher level of involvement with the company.

At the conference, Steve told me, "We've confirmed we're having a fourth generation, I think. Unless he changes his mind."

I looked at Devin. He confirmed it.

"I'm learning a lot from him daily, you know," said Devin. "He has me more involved with the product than working with him on side stuff. I'm learning a lot from him, and from Keith as well."

"He [Keith] has a different perspective," said Steve. "He's the first outsider we ever had. He's got a whole different outlook on things."

Steve brought Keith Baron into the company in 2023. Mr. Baron does indeed bring a lot into the business. He's a serious pro with one of the most impressive resumes in the travel industry.

He was with Abercrombie & Kent for 12 years, seven of them as president. His experience in tour operation goes back to 1986 when he joined Tauck Tours as a tour director. He spent 24 years with Tauck before starting a consulting company with former Tauck compatriot Phil Otterson. During his time at Tauck, Keith designed itineraries and managed about a third of Tauck's international programs.

"He's much more formal and regimented, and disciplined," said Steve. "So, he brings that. We have meetings every two weeks. We've had that for two years now. And it's helped tremendously."

Inflation has put the squeeze on everyone.

"And Keith gave me strength on pricing," said Steve. "I was cautious about raising prices, but it's something that everyone has to deal with. You feel like you're going to lose customers. But you really don't if your product is still good."

"But all the prices went up. It was really crazy. The inflation we had between '22 and '25 had to be like 25 percent. A lot of money, \$4,000 worth went up to \$6,000 in four or five years."

Although Steve Perillo is intent on keeping the brand closely tied to Italy, the company is introducing new destinations in 2026, Ireland and Portugal.

"Actually, we've been in Ireland for years, back and forth," he said. "And Portugal's doing very well. In both we've had a lot of interest from our guests. They kept asking us, 'Can you go to Ireland? Can you go to Portugal?' And we listened to them, and it's going great so far. The tours are already out there. People are buying them already."

Perillo's Greece program, introduced in 2023, is a success.

"Greece is a surprise hit," said Steve, "and we're going to be in Greece for years to come. Just like Hawaii, we've been there for many years. And I see Portugal's a hit too."

In 2025 Perillo celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

"We had an event with a lot of people from our company that were across the country," he said. "Everybody met in Manhattan. We had our people from Italy come in, people from Hawaii, from Spain, from Greece, so everyone met in Manhattan, which was very cool."

It is a big deal, 80 years and coming into the fourth generation. It's big stuff, surviving the crazy, ever-changing travel industry for eight decades as a tour operator. Perillo is one survivor out of many that didn't last from that earlier time.

"Yeah there were hundreds of us, small family operations in the '70s, '80s and '90s," he said, "hundreds of them. In Italy, we had a dozen competitors, there were many of them. Some of them are still around."

But not many.

Here are the basics of the new tours:

#### The 10-day Heart of Ireland itinerary:

- **Dublin (2 Nights):** Visit St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Guinness Storehouse.
- **Galway (3 Nights):** Located on the west coast.
- **Killarney (2 Nights):** South-west region.
- **Barberstown (Closing):** Overnight stay at the 13th-century Barberstown Castle Hotel.

#### Key Excursions & Activities:

- **Inis Mór:** Visit to the largest Aran Island.
- **Connemara:** Tour of the local landscapes.
- **Ring of Kerry:** Full-day tour including sheepdog demonstrations and horse-drawn carriage rides.

#### Summary of New 10-Day Portugal Dreams Tour

- **Porto (2 Nights):** Includes walking tours, port wine tastings, winery visits, and a Douro River cruise on a Rabelo boat.
- **Praia D'El Rey (2 Nights):** Coastal resort stay with excursions to Óbidos and Quinta da Regaleira in Sintra.
- **Lisbon (3 Nights):** Conclusion of the tour featuring a live Fado performance.

#### Key Excursions & Activities:

- **Sintra:** Visit to the Quinta da Regaleira estate and gardens.
- **Évora:** Excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Cork Crafting:** Behind-the-scenes experience in Évora.

Perillo is also rolling out two new Italy tours for 2026, bringing the total of Italy tours to 13. Here are the basic components of the two new Italy tours.

#### Gems of Italy: Genoa & Florence

**Genoa (3 Nights):** Port city stay featuring the historic old town and harbor.

- **Florence (4 Nights):** Regional base for exploration of Tuscany and Venice.

#### Key Excursions & Activities:

- **Piemonte:** Truffle hunting with a local hunter and dog, followed by a winery tasting.
- **Cinque Terre:** Train travel to the villages of Vernazza and Monterosso.
- **Portofino:** Boat cruise from Santa Margherita Ligure to the village harbor.
- **Venice:** Full-day excursion via train or bus including St. Mark's Square and a Venetian seafood lunch.
- **Florence Sightseeing:** Guided tour of the Duomo, Piazza della Signoria, and the Accademia Gallery (Michelangelo's David).

#### La Dolce Vita: Rome & Sorrento

- **Rome (3 Nights):** Initial stay focused on historic and religious landmarks.
- **Sorrento (4 Nights):** Coastal base for exploring the Campania region.

#### Key Excursions & Activities:

- **Rome Sightseeing:** Guided tours of the Colosseum, Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter's Basilica.
- **Pompeii:** Guided tour of the Roman ruins en route to the coast.
- **Isle of Capri:** Private boat tour around the island, including the Faraglioni rocks and the Grotta Bianca.
- **Amalfi Coast:** Excursions to the towns of Positano and Amalfi.
- **Local Experiences:** Visit to the Trastevere district and regional culinary tours.

For more information on Perillo Tours, see [www.perillotours.com](http://www.perillotours.com).

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