

COURIER

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APRIL/MAY 2018

CONNECTING IN QUÉBEC

Québec's National Shrines
are part of the province's
allure for faith travelers

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BLOWN AWAY BY ATLANTIC CITY

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FEAST ON FIVE FOODIE DESTINATIONS

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CHURROS AND MINSTRELS AND SHAKES ... OH, MY!

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Ermitage Sainte-Antoine, one of Québec's National Shrines



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TIM CARL

A new take on street food: Each September, Napa Valley residents celebrate the California harvest by gathering for a meal and drinks around a 1,000-foot long table that is set up in the middle of Calistoga's Lincoln Avenue. Turn to page 24 to read about five notable food and drink destinations.

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► AUGUST/SEPTEMBER ISSUE

DESTINATIONS

Coastal California

Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco

Great Lakes

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

Southwest U.S.

Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Eastern Europe

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Space: June 1 | Material: June 11

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China and Vietnam

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City Spotlight: Durango, Colorado

SPECIAL COVERAGE

Travel Exchange '18 (Milwaukee)

Guide: Theaters and Broadway Shows

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Space: Aug. 3 | Material: Aug. 13

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AFTER A LONG, COLD WINTER, I intend to take full advantage of spring.

My first stop is in Florida for spring break. I know it sounds cliché, but my youngest son plays college baseball, and I'll be cheering for him. If I know baseball, I expect the coach has scheduled a game for every waking minute of the trip.

Thank goodness I will return to work in time to attend Contact in mid-April. Say, I have not verified this, but I've heard that not all of you are joining us in Charleston. This can't be true. Contact would be a fun and fulfilling event even if it were held in a remote warehouse, but in Charleston, South Carolina? In springtime? Shut my mouth! (written in my best Southern drawl) I hope you can find a way to make this trip.

Speaking of trips, I took a doozy.

You've surely heard of Tourism Cares with Jordan and the remarkable journey that 67 travel industry types took together. In this issue, I've got a Jordan-related business article on page 14, some photos from our adventures on page 47 and a couple of pics on this page. I will write more on what we saw and experienced in the next issue of *Courier*.

I want to guard against Jordan fatigue: inflicting too much of my experience on those of you who didn't go.

But let me say this about that: For me, the 10-day trip was about people—those who populate the places we visited ...

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Where in the World is COURIER?



As a reward for a hefty hike to view The Monastery, a remarkable monument in Petra, Jordan, these delegates with Tourism Cares with Jordan broke out copies of *Courier*. Pictured from left are Reagan Stulbaum, Pam Inman, Bob Rouse, Catherine Prather, Clayton Whitehead, Jay Smith, John Meyer, Kami Risk and Greg Takehara.

and those who traveled with me. I can't say this event would have been as enjoyable in that remote warehouse—because the physical environs were absolutely spectacular—but I can say that what powers my memories of Jordan are humans.

And humanity translates. You've got people at your place, too, I bet. And I hope you can not only put up with my ramblings about Jordan, but also gather ideas and inspiration from them that apply to your destination, to your organization ... to your people.

And how about *these* stories for ideas and inspiration? Pat Henderson shares more from his recent trip to Mexico in destination coverage of Latin America (starting on page 41), along with top-notch product ideas in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas (page 38).

Kendall Fletcher takes us on a trip through the U.S. Midwest states (page 34), and Gabe Webb reveals itinerary ideas in South Pacific destinations (page 44).

Feature-wise, we're loaded this month. Patti Nickell serves up a fivesome of food-friendly destinations (page 24), and FTA Coordinator Kay Saffari gives her blessing to faith-filled sites in Québec (page 19). And I've got details (lots) of another doozy of a trip I took: The City Spotlight, page 30, shines on Atlantic City.

And finally, don't miss an informative essay—with a killer photo—by Michael Weinberg, CTP, on page 56.

Read on,

On the cover:

Québec's National Shrines, including Ermitage Sainte-Antoine (pictured), are part of the reason that the province is a popular spot for faith-based tours.

Photo: Ermitage Sainte-Antoine



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EXPERIENTIAL AND SUSTAINABLE. Those are not only trends in tourism; they are also important ways to bridge the gap between cultures.

Running an association doesn't provide me with the same level of expertise as what you exhibit in managing and planning tour programs that explore new and exciting destinations—or in welcoming groups as a supplier or DMO. But I do travel a lot, mostly to meetings, and often those meetings are held in very nice places.

As a member of the Tourism Cares board of directors, representing NTA and FTA, I was part of a delegation of more than 60 people who witnessed the launch of the Meaningful Map of Jordan, which includes 12 incredible examples of experiential and sustainable tourism.

Visiting the social enterprise sites that are part of this new initiative made a huge impact on me. It is awe-inspiring to see the work that the Queen Noor Foundation has done to empower local women and to enable them to use their talents to earn an income and provide for their families. Of course, our visits enabled us to buy handmade souvenirs of jewelry, rugs and mosaics. I even learned a thing or two myself (see photo above).

We also savored the beautiful sites and flavors of Jordan—and sleeping in a Bedouin tent in the middle of the desert was certainly a highlight (see photo below). What stands out in my mind is the hospitality of the Jordanians; I always felt safe there.



Morning at our Bedouin camp in Wadi Rum

The experiences I had with Tourism Cares and the Jordan Tourism Board put travel in perspective. Certainly, though, fantastic journeys aren't limited to Jordan. All NTA members provide memorable experiences that maximize the expertise of qualified masters of travel and tourism.

You'll have the opportunity to meet many of them at



I'm stirring the pot at Beit Sitti, a cook-and-dine establishment in Amman that employs neighborhood women and imparts appreciation for Jordanian dishes.

Contact in Charleston, where you can build relationships and expand your programs. It's not too late to register for this premier tour operator retreat, which starts April 18.

In addition to Contact seminars that will help you improve your ROI, we'll also have themed educational outings—covering Agritourism, Historic/Heritage and Faith—that allow you to sightsee and gain product insight at the same time. In addition, our new DMO Network and Supplier Network—groups not offered anywhere else—will both meet to discuss timely issues that are pertinent to members.

On the advocacy front, we continue to have discussions with the U.S. Department of Interior and the National Park Service to share our concerns about their proposals for Commercial Use Authorizations and fee increases. We are also pursuing other avenues, such as requesting a meeting with the Office of Management and Budget and getting behind legislation that would require a federal rulemaking process for increasing fees and for revising the CUA process.

At the time of this writing, the NPS is still waiting for a compilation of the more than 100,000 comments the agency received regarding proposed pricing changes. And we have submitted names of members of our industry to represent you on the National Parks Advisory Board; we're waiting to hear back from NPS about their selections.

Be sure to note that registration has opened for Travel Exchange in Milwaukee. Our team and Visit Milwaukee are planning some exciting events for us.

I hope to see you all at Contact. Springtime in Charleston is awesome!

Pam

OUR BOARDWALK

There's a reason they call Atlantic City's Boardwalk world-famous. From shopping and dining to amusements and attractions, you'll find fun-filled treasures and wonders all along the wooden way. Atlantic City invites you to create memories and stories that will last a lifetime.

Your Story

Heather Colache is available at 609-449-7151 or hcolache@meetac.com to plan your stroll down the Boardwalk and discover all the entertaining ways to Experience Atlantic City.

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COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

Time for Tanzania

This June, NTA tour operators will have an opportunity to experience the wild side of Tanzania as part of the Tanzania Safari product development trip. This adventure will provide participating operators with an extraordinary opportunity to experience firsthand Tanzania's rich culture while networking with area suppliers.



PONGO SAFARIS & TOURS

From June 1–9, the trip will take participating members to a pair of UNESCO World Heritage sites: Serengeti National Park in Olduvai Gorge and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. They'll also interact with the locals in Arusha and visit Lake Manyara. Along the way, they will see the region's abundant wildlife, which includes everything from elephants and lions to rhinos and flamingos.

The trip, which is being organized by NTA-member Pongo Safaris & Tours in conjunction with other tour companies in Tanzania, is open to NTA tour operator members (one per company). The cost to participate is \$1,745 (does not include airfare), and applicants must be approved by the hosting partners. Space is extremely limited, and registrations must be submitted by May 1 to NTA's Dawn Pettus at dawn.pettus@ntastaff.com.

For more information, go to ntaonline.com/events/product-development-trips/tanzania-safari.

Canada's record-setting tourism year

2017 was a big year for Canada. During its 150th anniversary celebration last year, the North American nation welcomed a record-breaking number of visitors. According to preliminary data from Statistics Canada, 20.8 million visitors helped the country surpass the record set in 2002 by almost a million.

"This is great news for our tourism sector, and the more than 1.8 million jobs that depend on it," says the Honourable Bardish Chagger, minister of small business and tourism and leader of the government in the House of Commons.

Since the previous mark was set in 2002, the composition of tourists to Canada has changed significantly. Overnight arrivals in 2017 from countries other than the United States totaled an all-time high of over 31 percent, up 19 percent from 2002. Canada welcomed 14.3 million visitors from the U.S. last year, which was a 3 percent year-over-year increase.



Let's go to Charleston, y'all

NTA members will gather April 18–21 for Contact '18 in Charleston to partner, learn and explore coastal South Carolina. Tour operators and travel planners can visit NTAonline.com/contact to sign up. Tour suppliers, DMOs and associates can attend by sponsoring; contact Laura McFadden at sponsor@ntastaff.com to find out more.

What: Contact '18

When: April 18–21

Where: Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Airport Hotel

Web: NTAonline.com/contact; #NTAcontact



Who: NTA tour operators and travel planners. Tour suppliers and DMOs can attend this buyer-exclusive retreat through sponsorship.

Why: Contact's practical, hands-on education encompasses the topics and issues

you need to tackle to move your business forward. The event's intimate setting makes it easy for suppliers and DMOs to connect with key tour operator decision-makers.

Registration: Only \$245 at NTAonline.com/contact

RELATING TO GOVERNMENT

INSIGHTS ON U.S. LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND INDUSTRY TOPICS



The Visa Waiver Program opens doors, enhances safety

THE NATIONAL TOUR ASSOCIATION has long been a strong supporter of the Visa Waiver Program, a traveler-screening system administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in consultation with the U.S. Department of State.

The program allows for reciprocal visa-free travel for up to 90 days between participating partner countries. It is only applicable to specific countries where the United States has in-depth security and information-sharing agreements, and a coordination of law enforcement.

The VWP is funded through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization program, which was congressionally mandated by the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. ESTA is an automated system that determines the eligibility of international travelers wishing to enter the U.S. and charges successful applicants a \$10 fee.

The VWP provides great value to the United States' long-standing goals of attracting both business and leisure travelers, while also prioritizing national security. Through this program, the United States benefits from better

information-sharing systems among participating countries' intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

This includes screening all travelers against INTERPOL databases and an increased utilization of fraud-resistant e-passports containing biometric information. These facets of the VWP make the country safer while also keeping its doors open to international visitors.

When President Donald Trump released his budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2019 in mid-February, it included a travel-related provision that would divert some funds from ESTA. Currently, funding flows from ESTA to the Visa Waiver Program, the Corporation for Travel Promotion (known as Brand USA) and other recipient programs.

The Trump budget proposal would reallocate some funds from Brand USA and use them to support U.S. Customs and Border Protection passenger inspection activities. Last year, when the administration proposed a similar diversion of ESTA funds, the travel and tourism industry strongly opposed this. NTA and other tourism leaders are already deeply engaged with legislative allies and friends of the industry on this issue.

NTA aims to ensure that all federally funded facets of travel and tourism have sufficient resources to be able to fully function. NTA will continue to support the Visa Waiver Program and believes it will not only bolster tourism, but also strengthen the nation's security.

Furthermore, as information is shared between the U.S. and the VWP's partnering countries, the relationship between the countries is strengthened.

NTA understands that President Trump and the administration place the highest priority on maintaining secure travel systems, and the association remains poised to work with the administration and Congress to maintain the highest levels of safety.


But NTA believes Congress should ensure that any reforms to the Visa Waiver Program be crafted carefully and with the numerous security advantages in mind. NTA continues to engage with lawmakers and to monitor movement on this issue.

Signal Group is a Washington, D.C., lobbying firm retained by NTA to advise members about travel-related issues and legislation.

VWP partner countries

Citizens or nationals of the following countries are currently eligible to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program:

Andorra	Denmark	Iceland	Lithuania	Portugal	Switzerland
Australia	Estonia	Ireland	Luxembourg	San Marino	Taiwan
Austria	Finland	Italy	Malta	Singapore	United Kingdom
Belgium	France	Japan	Monaco	Slovakia	
Brunei	Germany	Republic of Korea	Netherlands	Slovenia	
Chile	Greece	Latvia	New Zealand	Spain	
Czech Republic	Hungary	Liechtenstein	Norway	Sweden	

For more information, visit the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website: cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/visa-waiver-program. 

A pair of golden anniversaries

2018 marks the 50th anniversary of two federal acts that preserve outdoor recreation

BY BONNIE LIPPITT

America's National Trails System



BEFORE THERE WERE RAILROADS, highways and airplanes to help people get from one place to another, travelers relied on trails, whether by foot, horseback or wagon. In the early 20th century, outdoor enthusiasts began constructing footpaths to provide access to scenic mountainous terrain. These trails helped the public pursue healthy outdoor recreation while enjoying spectacular natural beauty.

In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered a speech titled “Conservation and Preservation of Natural Beauty.” In it he stated, “The forgotten outdoorsmen

of today are those who like to walk, hike, ride horseback or bicycle. For them we must have trails as well as highways ... I am requesting, therefore, that the Secretary of the Interior work with his colleagues in the federal government and with state and local leaders and recommend to me a cooperative program to encourage a national system of trails.”

Three years later, on Oct. 2, 1968, the president signed into law the National Trails System Act, creating a system of national scenic, recreation, and connecting and side trails. The act designated the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails as the first two National Scenic Trails. A decade later, President Jimmy Carter signed an amendment to the act, creating an additional category:

National Historic Trails. While both types of trails must be designated by congress, the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture have the authority to designate National Recreation Trails.

This year, the U.S. National Trails System celebrates its 50th anniversary. Today there are 11 National Scenic Trails, 19 National Historic Trails and more than 1,300 National Recreation Trails, all comprising a network of more than 60,000 miles of trail across all 50 states; Washington, D.C.; and Puerto Rico.

Nationally, administration for these trails is coordinated by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. However, land ownership may be in public or private hands, and



Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, California

ALL PHOTOS: BOB WICK, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Emigrant National Historic Trail, Wyoming



Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, New Mexico

management of a particular route is often handled through a variety of public and private agencies and partners at the federal, state and local levels.

In honor of this anniversary year, trail managers are inviting you and your clients to **#FindYourTrail** along one of our National Scenic, Historic or Recreation Trails. If you would like a taste of what it must be like to tackle a long-distance National Scenic Trail, you can complete a short section on a day hike by yourself or with a guide. Many of these trails cross roads that provide trailhead parking and access.

Looking to travel in the footsteps of explorers and settlers—or to experience firsthand an important event in our nation’s history? Many highways and byways follow the routes of the National Historic Trails, which offer visitor centers, viewpoints and remnant sites and allow you to explore with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, emigrate west along the California and Oregon trails, ride with the Pony Express or relive the more difficult but compelling stories of our past along the Trail of Tears or the path from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

Ready to hit the trail? Visit nps.gov/nrt

to learn more about the National Trail System and locate a trail near your destination. Follow the links to the managing agency for specific information on features, seasons, access, visitor facilities and authorized commercial services. Then visit recreation.gov to plan your trip, make campground reservations and explore other opportunities available in the area.

For more information on the anniversary and related events, visit trails50.org. Help us celebrate this important anniversary and ensure the future of the incredible legacy we inherited.

America’s Wild and Scenic Rivers



As noted journalist Charles Kuralt once said, “We are a nation rich in rivers.” By the 1950s, however, many of those rivers had been irreversibly altered to accom-

modate the growing needs of modern civilization, including demands for hydropower, flood control, water supply and irrigation.

In the 1965 speech noted above, President Johnson gave a call to action: “The time has also come to identify and preserve free-flowing stretches of our great rivers before growth and development make the beauty of the unspoiled waterway a memory.”

At the same time he authorized the National Trails System Act, the



SNAKE Wild and Scenic River, Idaho

president signed into law the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, creating a national system of rivers to be forever

maintained as free flowing. Eight rivers received designation as part of the act’s passage, including Idaho’s Clearwater



Arkansas Recreational River, Colorado

and Salmon rivers, Missouri's Eleven Point River, California's Feather River, Oregon's Rogue River, Wisconsin's Wolf River, Minnesota's St. Croix River and the Rio Grande River, which flows through both New Mexico and Texas.

This year, our National Wild and Scenic River System joins the trails act in celebrating its 50th anniversary. Today there are 13,000 miles along 208 rivers—across 40 states and territories—with special designation that protects their wild and scenic character. The numbers sound impressive, but it is important to note that this constitutes just slightly more than one-third of one percent of all the nation's rivers. Many more miles of waterways remain eligible for this special designation.

These rivers named above are managed by four federal agencies: the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. River managers are charged with protecting river flow, water quality and the remarkably outstanding values associated with the

designated rivers, including recreation, fish, wildlife, history, culture, scenery and geology. These rivers are deeply entwined with the exploration, settlement and history of the United States. At the same time, they are an important part of our conservation legacy for present and future generations.

In honor of this anniversary year, river managers invite tour operators and travelers to **#MakeYourSplash** by experiencing one of the wild and scenic rivers. For those who would like to float or paddle down a river, there are numerous authorized companies that offer half-, full- and multi-day options depending on the river and its flow. "Soft" trips are suitable for a family adventure, while others offer challenging whitewater experiences, and still others provide the thrill of a jet boat ride.

Many visitors seek the world-class fly-fishing opportunities wild and scenic rivers provide. Experienced anglers can seek their own special fishing hole along the bank, while those new to the sport can hire the services of an authorized outfitter and guide.

Imagine fishing Oregon's internationally renowned McKenzie River from a famous drift boat with expert help from a long-time local. Some instead seek a quiet riverside picnic, a hike or a bike ride along a river corridor trail, and others want a chance to birdwatch or do some plein air painting.

How do you get started? Visit **rivers.gov** to learn more about the National Wild and Scenic River System and locate a river near you. Follow the links to the managing agency for specific information on features, seasons, access, visitor facilities and authorized commercial services.

Then visit **recreation.gov** to plan your trip, make campground reservations and explore other opportunities available in the area. You can celebrate this important anniversary while you help keep these wild and scenic rivers free-flowing forever! 🌿

Bonnie Lippitt is program manager for interpretation, tourism and visitor services for the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the Pacific Northwest region.



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The Interview

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS FROM NTA MEMBERS AND COLLEAGUES

Tourism really cares in Jordan

BY BOB ROUSE

As part of the Tourism Cares with Jordan delegation, some five dozen tourism professionals representing tour companies, associations, agencies, destinations, suppliers and media outlets discovered the country's natural and historical wonders. The group also explored—through site visits, panel discussions and workshops—the power and possibilities of corporate social responsibility within travel.

Four of the delegates shared their thoughts with *Courier* about CSR in the midst of the Feb. 23–28 trip. Each brought a different level of experience and focus with them to Jordan, and each had specific takeaways. And everyone connected with the event contributed their personal insights and interpretations, which produced an even greater learning experience for all participants.

Nan Marchand; U.S. Travel Association, senior vice president

Keith Sproule; Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy, executive director

Reagan Stulbaum; NYC & Company, vice president, membership, borough relations and Tourism Ready

Javier Valdez; Myght, founder

Courier: The idea of tourism-related organizations working to make a positive impact on local communities is not new. And there are many examples of good works, community engagement, social enterprise and sustainability. But why? Why should organizations make the effort?



Javier Valdez

Valdez: It's a responsibility. Companies have the resources to make a difference. And when they empower their communities, they empower themselves. Sustainability isn't just about the environment; it's also about the people.

Sproule: In so many instances, our industry is associated with pillaging a destination. All over the world, ancestral stewards have not benefited from more arrivals. And they are the real hosts. Our industry has not always reflected the best we can be when it comes to building bridges.

For example, in Namibia, those who live on the edge of civilization live with human-wildlife conflict. If we can't figure out a way not to fence that wildlife in—or if we're driving past communities that struggle to educate and feed their children, there's no equity. And no sustainability.

Our goal should be to improve the lives and livelihoods of the communities where we travel. And not just the employees of tourism, but everyone in the community.



Reagan Stulbaum

TRACEY GROSSBACH

Stulbaum: As a DMO, I know that people are interested in local, authentic experiences, and there's so much of that throughout all five boroughs of New York City. We can give people the *new* New York every time they come to visit. So much of what we show off is magical, but there's something so very integral to New York that we want people to experience as well. That's what we're made of.



Nan Marchand

Marchand: Making an impact in the communities a business serves or is located in is becoming an integral part of an organization's mission and culture. Why? Because these values are important to an organization's bottom line.

Courier: What did you learn in Jordan that added to your understanding of our industry's social responsibility?

Marchand: CSR was so tangible in Jordan. We saw it in action. It was more than just part of an organization's mission statement. To paraphrase Ms. Muna Haddad, managing director of Baraka in



Keith Sproule visits a Jordan Bike Enterprises site south of the Dead Sea. This Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy project provides bikes to several communities in Jordan, and residents use the bikes for transportation to jobs and to establish guided tour businesses.

Jordan, the benefits of an organization need to go into the right hands.

Valdez: Sustainability can be tailored to different types of travel and people. You don't have to go the homestay route. Someone who prefers luxury travel and wants to stay in a resort can also make a positive impact—even if you empower only one person.

Stulbaum: You wouldn't think there are a lot of similarities between Petra and New York City. But talking with Suleiman (Dr. Suleiman Farajat, commissioner for the Petra Archaeological Park and tourism affairs) about the

challenges he faces in building capacity within the local community reminded me of what I deal with in working with the boroughs. Bringing more tourists—and tourism business—into an existing community or neighborhood becomes a real balancing act. Whether it's ancient Jordan or big-city America, we're alike in so many ways.

Sproule: The promise of tourism is still alive and can be realized. During our time in Jordan, all the players have been involved: government representatives, private sector, agencies, community leaders, nonprofits and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). We had a

tremendous diversity of international operators and GMs and CEOs. Our sessions helped Jordanians figure out how to deliver what buyers want. And they offer the Jordan Trail and The Meaningful Travel Map of Jordan. They're serious. 📍

Meaningful Map

Tourism Cares with Jordan delegates joined a Feb. 25 news conference announcing the creation of The Meaningful Travel Map of Jordan, which promotes 12 social enterprises that provide jobs to locals and give tourists hands-on cultural insight. To learn more, go to bit.ly/2FmWYPI.



Left: At Mosaic House near Madaba, Jordan, local residents (many of them with physical handicaps) are employed as craftspeople. Center: NTA Chair Chris Babb at the Bani Hamida Women's Weaving Project. Right: Delegates dined on local fare at the Beit Khayrat Souf. The co-op near Jerash also creates jobs for women who grow, package and sell local products, such as jams, spices and oils.

A surprising approach to better customer experience

BY ADAM HOETTE



IN THE QUEST for building a better experience for your guests, why not use some strategic surprise?

With so much competition for customers in the

travel space, organizations are constantly seeking unique ways of creating meaningful bonds with those they serve. This challenge can often feel like a daunting and expensive one, but it doesn't have to be. Providing customers with something valuable—when they least expect it—is an extraordinarily simple and low-cost path to crafting great customer experiences.

We've all felt the effects of surprise. While we often think about them in the context of our personal lives—birthday parties, for example—many of us have also been the recipients of surprises in our role as consumers, from ticket upgrades to complimentary gifts and more. Regardless of where they come from, they almost always leave an impression.

Surprises, even small ones, resonate.

They also have a profound effect on the human brain. Research has shown that surprises activate neural reward centers, providing recipients with, literally, a rush of delight. One study even found that the unexpected nature of an event may prove more memorable than the event itself. As that study's co-author put it, "If you get a present for your birthday, that's nice. But you'll like it a lot more if you get a present and it's not your birthday."

This presents organizations with a big opportunity for creating impact with customers. Supplementing a brand's services with a few unexpected offerings gives customers a positive psychological boost. It puts them in a better mood. From a business perspective, it's pure value creation, adding to the overall experience without taking away from

any other part of it—a true win-win.

Companies in the travel and tour business can utilize this knowledge to provide more remarkable travel experiences for guests, while at the same time creating differentiation for their brands. While customers relish the opportunity to be immersed in their travels, much of what they encounter is, frankly, expected. When a company is able to disrupt those expectations—even slightly—it can create special moments that customers will remember.

The possibilities for companies to use this approach are endless. Maybe a hotel offers free laundry service for guests, or a tour operator provides cold bottled water and soft drinks at no charge. The beauty is that there is no map. It's not one-size-fits-all. Rather, it's limited only by the creativity of those involved. It can, and should, look a little different for every organization.

When a company is able to disrupt travelers' expectations—even slightly—it can create special moments that customers will remember.

When thinking about how to implement strategic surprise in your offerings, start by asking a few questions:

- Is there a theme in the feedback you receive from customers?
- Are there any lulls in the journey of your customers (literally and figuratively) that could benefit from a pop of surprise?
- What are the moments that would be a natural fit for this?



Engage your employees and customers to get a better sense of how and where this strategy would be of benefit. Front line employees often have the most significant amount of personal engagement with customers and therefore are a tremendous resource in both the planning and implementation of such a program.

The goal is to drive more satisfying encounters with guests, something that can only be achieved when the customer is at the center of the process. If this exercise begins to be seen as too planned and methodical—lacking a personal connection—customers will notice. So strive for sincerity.

Surprise is a valuable tool that travel brands can utilize to create more memorable moments for guests. It is a low-risk means for providing an even better and more unique travel experience. Implement one of your own and you may just find that—surprise!—your guests are more satisfied than ever. ☺

Adam Hoette is the founder of Cerulean Insights, an experiential marketing company. Reach out to him at adam@cerulean-insights.com or go to cerulean-insights.com.

Let's connect

Contact speakers focus on making meaningful connections in a digital world

One of the most popular components of Contact is its education program, which is tailored for a variety of roles in the packaged travel industry. A featured seminar topic at this popular NTA buyer retreat that relates to everyone—from a first-year sales director to a longtime company president—is creating and maintaining valuable relationships in today's fast-paced, need-it-now environment.

"Contact offers excellent speakers who challenge attendees with new information and techniques," says Misha Jovanovic, a San Diego-based tour operator and annual Contact goer. And Stephanie Dilling of British Columbia's Wells Gray Tours

says she "comes back to the office refreshed and flowing with new ideas" after attending NTA's buyer retreat.

Perhaps no place can get the creative juices flowing quite like Charleston, the coastal gem of South Carolina's Lowcountry. Join us there April 18–21 for Contact '18 and learn a thing or two; you can register today at NTAonline.com/contact.

Here are profiles of two of the educational sessions you can enjoy at Contact '18:



In Real Life: Connecting with People in a Gadget-crazed World

Thursday, April 19, 3:15–4:15 p.m.

Speaker: Thom Singer, The Conference Catalyst

There's more to creating business relationships than a like, link, share and follow. While popular social media tools can make it seem like we have countless friends and business associates, it's real human engagement that leads to opportunity. This keynote session will bring your focus back to the basics on establishing connections that will lead to more success in business, sales and life. Make this event a human laboratory for connecting.

Public Relations in the Digital Age

Friday, April 20, 8:30–9:30 a.m.

Speakers: Gina Stouffer, Lou Hammond Group
Melanie Mathos, Lou Hammond Group

Join Gina and Melanie from Lou Hammond Group, a New York-based, award-winning marketing communications firm, as they talk about how the internet has changed the travel public relations industry. They'll explore the traditional media landscape and discuss whether communication tools like press releases are still important, as well as outline the importance of working with bloggers and social media influencers. You'll leave with tools for creating content that drives awareness and business.

Todd's trifecta

Convention guru gives 3 tips to maximize your Travel Exchange experience

Todd Probus, NTA's member solutions manager, is the authority on appointment scheduling and helping you make the most of your business meetings at Travel Exchange '18. With registration now open for our Nov. 4–8 event in Milwaukee, Todd provides three things you should do to take full advantage of your business potential in Brew City USA. Visit NTAonline.com/convention to register and learn more.

1 Register early

Having an earlier registration date is a key factor in helping you receive better-matched appointments. You can still get a quality schedule later—and pick up more appointments on-site with our open floor—but the date you register determines the order in which your schedule is created. Being at the front of the line positions you better to get the appointments you want.

2 Update your profile

Your NTA Online profile is what potential partners see when they're determining who to add to their request list, so be sure that your profile is as accurate and informative as possible. Remember that you can add social media links, photos and a logo to your profile.

3 More is better

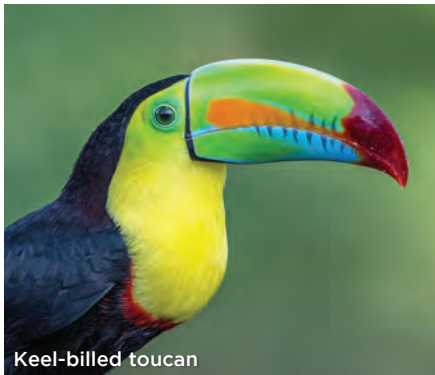
The more appointment requests you make, the higher the number of prescheduled appointments you're likely to get. So try and make the maximum number of requests. For tour operators, the max is 40 DMOs and 80 suppliers, while DMOs and suppliers should request the 60 tour operator maximum.

Having an earlier registration date is a key factor in helping you receive better-matched appointments.



What: Travel Exchange '18 | **Where:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin | **When:** Nov. 4–8
Who: Tour operators, travel planners, tour suppliers, DMOs and associates
Register: NTAonline.com/convention; early-bird rates until June 12

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON



Keel-billed toucan



Resplendent quetzal



Scarlet macaw

Follow your nose

Costa Rica has carved a reputation as an outdoor lover's paradise. The Central American nation, known as the birthplace of canopy tours/zip lining, is also a top destination for birdwatchers.

Visitors can see more than 900 species across the country at top birding spots, including the following five, which are part of a 13-day birdwatching tour offered by NTA tour operator member Costa Rica Travel Excellence.

Maquenque Eco Preserve

The preserve is home to more than 400 species, including scarlet macaws, the endangered great green macaws, toucans and a number of migratory birds.

San Gerardo de Dota

The only spot in Costa Rica listed in "50 Places to Go Birding Before You Die," San Gerardo has more than 170 species, including many that are endemic to the zone near the cloud forest.

Selva Bananito Reserve

An early morning walk with one of Selva Bananito's experts takes birders to see orioles, kingfishers, toucans, trogons and many other species.

Selva Verde Rainforest Lodge and Reserve

This site is part of the recently created Costa Rican Bird Route, a group of 12 sites in the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor.

Turrialba and Irazu volcanoes

The higher altitudes in this area allow visitors to see a different species, ranging from the flame-throated warbler to volcano juncos and timberline wrens.

For more information, contact Costa Rica Travel Excellence's Carlos Blanco at mercadeo@te.cr or go to travelexcellence.com.

Fired up for fossils?

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in central Colorado is one of the state's top archaeological sites. Located 35 miles west of Colorado Springs, the 6,000-acre park includes a wide array of well-preserved plant and insect fossils that date back



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millions of years.

At the visitor center, groups can learn more about the role the nearby Thirtynine Mile volcanic field played in helping the area become a major fossil repository. They can see the 14-minute movie, "Shadows of the Past," and view hands-on exhibits and fossil displays.

A number of ranger-led activities are available, including the popular night sky programs. Offered monthly, these sessions start with a 30-minute presentation and then participants have 90 minutes for telescope use and stargazing. From the park, it is possible to see the Milky Way, other galaxies, planets, comets, star clusters and more.

The monument also is home to North America's largest collection of petrified redwood stumps. Several of the massive redwood stumps are behind the visitor center, while short loop trails lead to others.

Additional nature walks on the park's 14 miles of trails wind through pine-covered hills that are home to Douglas fir and aspen trees. The 3.8-mile Hornbek Wildlife Loop takes hikers through meadows and past Hornbek Homestead, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

To learn more, call +1.719.748.3253 or go to nps.gov/flfo.

FAITH IN QUÉBEC: 'THE PERFECT DESTINATION'

BY KAY SAFFARI
COORDINATOR, FAITH TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

QUÉBEC, ONE OF 13 Canadian provinces and territories, offers a virtual treasure trove of options for the religious traveler, from its collection of famous shrines to the breathtaking beauty of its pristine natural landscapes that encourage tranquility and meditation. Québec also offers a taste of Europe on this side of the pond, thanks to its French-speaking population, its food, history, culture and art. When you plan a trip to Québec, you get it all!

Valerie Massalaz of Voyages Inter-Missions describes Québec as the perfect destination for faith travelers. "For the religious traveler, Québec is where the Christian faith took root in North America, and it offers a rich Catholic heritage," explains Massalaz. "When the French settlers arrived here, they came with priests, nuns and missionaries who spread their Catholic faith via the great waterways and rivers of the region."

In 2014 Québec celebrated the 350th anniversary of the first Catholic parish in North America's first diocese. The Québec diocese was once the largest in the world, extending down the Mississippi River all the way to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. To commemorate this anniversary and to recognize the origin of the Catholic Church



in North America, Pope Francis opened a Holy Door at the Notre-Dame de Québec Basilica-Cathedral, one of only seven Holy Doors in the world and the only one in North America.

Notre-Dame de Québec is one of five famous shrines in Québec province visited by thousands of pilgrims annually. These shrines offer a glimpse into the history of the Catholic faith in Canada while also providing the faith traveler with the opportunity to observe and participate in religious services at any of these locations. Two of the shrines offer more than your typical church experience, with Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal offering stunning views of Montréal and Ermitage Sainte-Antoine located remotely in the midst of pristine natural surroundings.

POPULAR TOURS AND NEW OFFERINGS FOR 2018

Massalaz explains that Voyages Inter-Missions' custom tours are always

popular, but the most requested of their regularly offered tours is the nine-day journey that covers all the major points of interest in the Québec province, including Ermitage Sainte-Antoine. This shrine is about 250 miles north of Québec City and requires staying at least two nights.

Says Massalaz, "This is the ideal place to connect with the sacredness of nature to understand the true meaning of Pope Francis' call to action regarding the environment."

At the shrine, you can hike in the pristine environs, take part in workshops about the local fauna and flora, and revitalize yourself in harmony with nature.

In the summer of 2018, Ermitage Sainte-Antoine will begin offering a multimedia show that will reflect spirituality, Franciscan values and the natural beauty and history of the site. According to the shrine's rector, Father France Salesse, this innovative show will combine sacredness and the environment in order to help viewers and pilgrims reach God via nature and experience beauty in a new form.



ERMITAGE SAINTE-ANTOINE

Hiking at Ermitage Sainte-Antoine



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CC FLICKR/JOHN KARWOSKI: bit.ly/2o7ea7x



JEAN-FRANÇOIS FRENETTE

Notre-Dame de Québec Basilica-Cathedral

MORE THAN A RELIGIOUS DESTINATION

Do you want to visit a French-speaking city with a European feel? No need to board an overseas flight to France when you can take a quick trip to Montréal or Québec City and enjoy the eclectic architecture, boutiques and variety of food offerings that make these cities unique. Travel to Québec is especially convenient for visitors from the U.S. “Montréal is only a six-hour drive from New York City, or a two-hour flight from Chicago. By visiting us in Québec, you

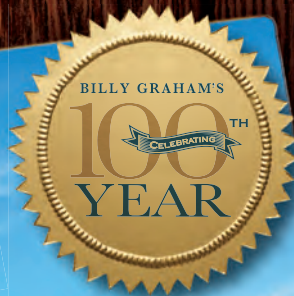
get all the advantages of the European culture without the long overseas flight or exhausting jetlag,” says Massalaz. “We are also a very affordable destination!”

In addition, she points to other Québec offerings:

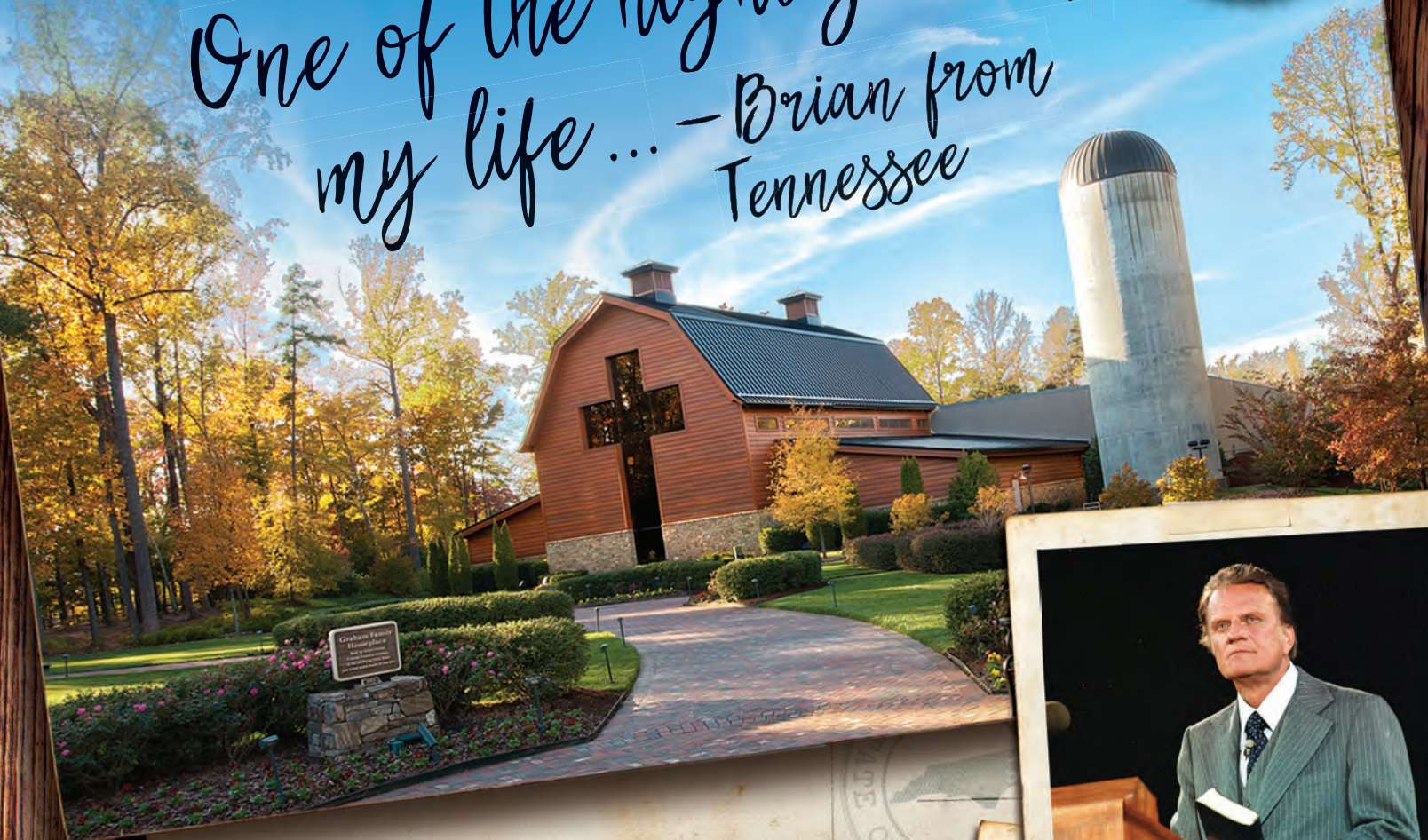
History and art You can travel back to the 17th century and walk the cobbled streets of Old Montréal, admire works of art, see the stained glass of the Gothic Revival architecture and visit the Notre Dame Basilica, which tells the story of the founders of the city. Another

must-see is Québec City, founded in 1608 and the only walled city in North America north of Mexico. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site that surrounds you with old-world charm as you stroll through the romantic Petit Champlain district, a quaint neighborhood filled with unique boutiques and bistros.

For a unique art experience, visit the Albert Gilles Copper Art Studio and Museum, a family-owned business located just 15 minutes from Québec City. Based on *repoussé*, the art of metal embossing, this studio and museum



One of the highlights of
my life ... - Brian from
Tennessee



"... The Billy Graham Library was very inspirational and encouraging. It was on my bucket list."

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"Come and see what God has done." —Psalm 66:5, ESV



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Reservations required for groups of 10 or more; email LibraryTours@bgea.org
or call 704-401-3270 • 4330 Westmont Drive • Charlotte, North Carolina
A ministry of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [c](#) [p](#)

The **BILLY GRAHAM**
Library

preserve the history of the founder and patriarch of the family, Albert Gilles.

Born in Paris in 1895, Gilles learned copper embossing from his aunt and brought his skills to the U.S. in the 1930s. He first created works of art for automotive executives in Detroit and for the rich and famous in California. When Pope Pius XII commissioned Gilles to create an ornate chalice of gold and silver to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Montréal, Gilles immigrated to Canada and turned his talent toward religious subjects. One of his most famous works is the main door of the Shrine of Sainte-Anne de Beaupré, an intricately embossed all-copper door that depicts Biblical scenes.

"We welcome 80,000-100,000 visitors of many faiths each year from all over the world," explains Palmyre Gilles of Copper Art Studio and Museum.

"Many faith travelers are inspired by Christorama, the museum exhibit of my father's 50 hand-embossed copper panels depicting the life of Christ. I have seen some even moved to tears."

Visitors can also see Albert Gilles' work in area churches. "Many tour groups visit our studio and museum before continuing on to the Basilica of Sainte-Anne de Beaupré just 10 minutes away. My father designed the massive and intricately decorated copper door of this basilica as well as some interior accent pieces."

When asked what visitors like the most about visiting her family's studio and museum, Gilles replied, "Maybe what they most enjoy ... and admire, is to see our family carrying on 91 years of tradition, from father to daughter to granddaughter."

Food Québec City offers more restaurants per capita than any other city in North America. It has its own culinary identity that combines formal French cuisine with rich, meat-heavy Québec staples. You can try local delicacies such as smoked meat or *tarte au sucre* (sugar pie) made with Québec's famous maple syrup. At Saint-Benoit Abbey in the

SHRINES OF QUÉBEC

Québec's National Shrines was founded in 2009 to promote awareness and tourism of the five Catholic shrines located in the Canadian province. Visited by more than four million pilgrims and tourists each year, the following sites offer a glimpse into the history of the Christian faith in Canada and North America.



MICHEL CATY

Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal

This shrine, founded in 1904, is the largest in the world dedicated to Saint Joseph. Visitors are treated to beautiful music, exhibits of more than 200 nativity scenes from 100 different countries, and unmatched views of Montréal from the shrine's mountainside location.

Our Lady of the Cape

This shrine is located in the Mauricie region on the shores of the Saint Lawrence River and is dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Welcoming more than a half million pilgrims every year, the site includes a chapel built in 1714 and a modern basilica, completed in 1964, with beautiful stained glass windows.

Notre-Dame de Québec Basilica-Cathedral

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Notre-Dame de Québec is located in Old Québec City and was founded in 1647. The first cathedral and Catholic place of worship founded north of Mexico, it was instrumental in the development of Québec, Canada and North America over the years and

stands as evidence of the perseverance and faith of the early pioneers and pilgrims who settled in Canada.

Shrine of Sainte-Anne de Beaupré

Founded in 1658, this shrine, the second-oldest pilgrimage site in North America, is dedicated to Saint Anne, the grandmother of Jesus. With more than 350 years of history, this cathedral welcomes almost 1 million visitors annually from all over the world, regardless of race or religion. It is located 20 minutes outside of Québec City.

Ermitage Sainte-Antoine de Lac-Bouchette

This shrine was founded in 1907 and is located 250 miles north of Québec City in the midst of a breathtaking landscape of evergreens and rolling hills. Visitors can take a guided tour, visit the museum, hike parts of the 130-mile Kapatakan Trail or simply enjoy the tranquility of nature surrounding this shrine.

For more information about the Shrines of Québec, contact Francois Jean Viel at francois@vielmarketing.com or visit sanctuairesquebec.com.



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Albert Gilles Copper Art Studio and Museum



Copper etching

idyllic town of Saint-Benoit-Du-Lac, you can observe the monks producing more than a dozen varieties of fresh cheese.

Nature Québec has 24 national parks, which include forests, mountains, lakes and fjords, caribou, moose, black bear and whales. Says Massalaz, “The Québec province has magnificent landscapes where you can experience the greatness and beauty of nature.”

FIRST-TIME VISITOR? SEE WHAT A TOUR EXPERT SUGGESTS.

As an introduction to the Québec province, Massalaz suggests a six-day tour including two nights in Montréal, one night in Trois-Rivières and the last two nights in Québec City. This itinerary will allow you to follow the path of the founders of the Catholic Church in North America while experiencing the history, art and

culture of the area. As an add-on, you can arrive via Toronto, which would allow you to also experience Niagara Falls and the 1000 Island area before heading to Québec.

To learn more, contact Massalaz at valerie@voyagesintermissions.com or visit voyagesintermissions.com. And reach out to Gilles at palmyre@cuivres-albertgilles.com or go to albertgilles.com. ☎

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Foodie cities and scenes

A culinary focus commands travelers' attention (and appetites)

BY PATTI NICKELL

Remember the days when travel was all about the destination and the sightseeing it offered? Do you recall when food was just something you partook of between museum visits ... or when travel was all about feeding your intellect and your craving for adventure—and not your stomach?

Well if so, then you're remembering travel before the advent of the slow food movement, the farm-to-table evolution or even the farm-to-fork renaissance. These days, destinations are often selected—at least in part—for their commitment to unique food and drink experiences as essential travel components.

These five NTA-member destinations have plenty to offer tour operators whose clients are a hungry and thirsty bunch.

Napa, California: **We'll take food with that wine**

It's no secret that, with 400 wineries, Napa Valley is one of the premier wine destinations in the world. But what some don't know is that the long, slender valley has more Michelin-starred restaurants per capita than any of the world's other wine regions.

Your group can eat and drink to their hearts' content on specialty tours such as True Taste of the Napa Valley. If tour operators book by May, they can work with a Napa food and wine expert who will curate an experience designed just for their group.

"Walk. Taste. Sip," is the slogan of the Napa Culinary Crawl, offered every other month starting in February. Groups can enjoy downtown Napa's wine tasting rooms and restaurants, with each stop featuring specially prepared bites paired with specialty drinks.

Two fall events showcase the best of the valley. Celebrate September harvest with Calistoga's Harvest Table. A 1,000-foot long table is set up in the center of Lincoln Avenue, offering bounty from 20 of the valley's top restaurants, and libations from 40 of its wineries and breweries.

After the grapes come the olives. Bring your group in November, and you can experience the olive harvest. One of the best places to do so is at Round Pond Winery, where guests can

taste the estate's hand-crafted olive oils paired with seasonal bites.

If you want an experience you can get nowhere else, book your group on the Napa Valley Wine Train, which offers a range of tours including a six-hour journey that features a four-course meal as well as tours and tastings at three wineries.

Finally, you can arrange a cooking class at the house conceived by two legends—Julia Child and Robert Mondavi. Greystone in St. Helena, once home to the Christian Brothers Winery, is now part of the Culinary Institute of America, and it offers classes for



Calistoga's
Harvest Table

TIM CARL

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Image from the LOVE ORCHARD close to the tasting room

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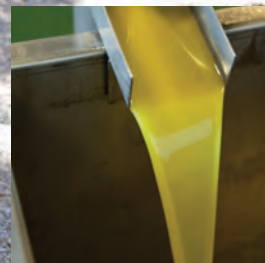
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Foodie cities and scenes

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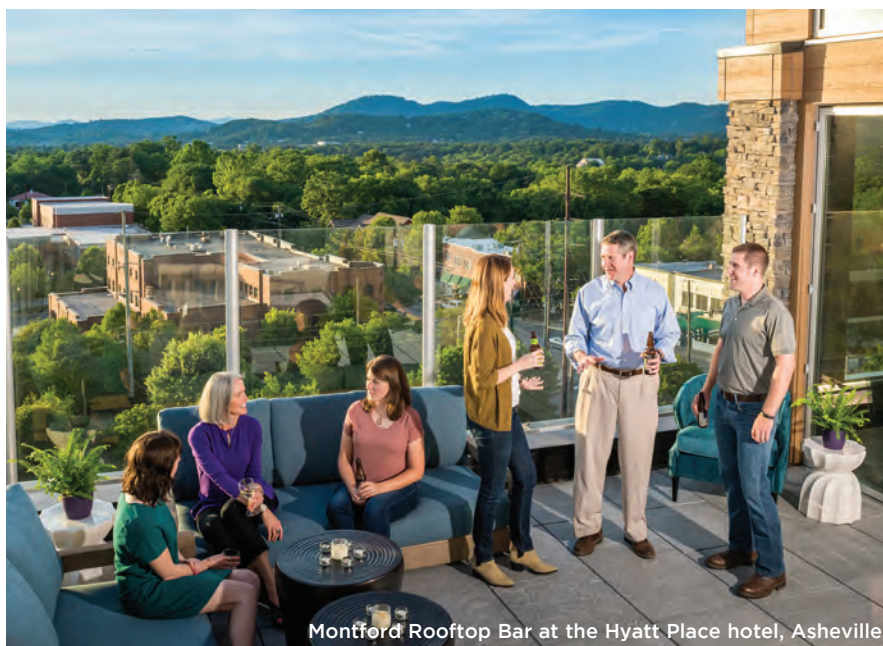
For more information, contact Visit Napa Valley's Corbie Smith at corbie@visitnapavalley.com or go to visitnapavalley.com.

Asheville, North Carolina: America's Foodtopia

What can you say about a smallish city in the Smokies that has more than 250 independent restaurants (six of them with James Beard-nominated chefs); 14 farmers markets, including the nation's first wild foods market; and 1,000 family farms in the surrounding area?

You can say that Asheville's vibrant and robust food scene makes it deserving of its moniker, Foodtopia. That is, when it's not being referred to as Beer City, the result of having the most breweries per capita (1 per 41 residents) in the United States.

Naturally, a city with this kind of food cred has a lot to offer groups. For starters, Eating Asheville offers walking tours to give foodies an inside look at Foodtopia. You can book your group on the High Roller Tour to sample the creations of the city's award-winning chefs, or the Classic Tour, where they can enjoy up to seven restaurants in a single afternoon. And if you prefer, the company



Montford Rooftop Bar at the Hyatt Place hotel, Asheville

C2 PHOTOGRAPHY

can tailor a private tour for your group.

Smaller groups (a maximum of 12 people, including the driver) can take advantage of a discounted farm-to-table van tour. These guided tours visit farms specializing in produce, cheese, chicken, beef, lamb and flowers, and they include an opportunity to meet the farmers. Most tours culminate with a farm-driven meal prepared by a local chef.

If farm-to-table is too tame for your group, book them on a forage-to-table adventure with No Taste Like Home, the only company of its kind in North America. These tours take guests "off the eaten" path into fields and forests to learn about wild foods. Groups can opt

to cook their own foraged foods or take them to one of the company's partner restaurants for a "find dining" experience. No Taste Like Home also offers private, customized tours for groups, with an option for a wild foods cooking class.

Foraging can be thirsty work, so you might want to include a guided walking tour that takes your group behind the scenes at some of those 41 breweries. Led by a certified beer expert, the walks focus on how brewers shape raw ingredients into their individual vision, and tours include a lot of tasting along the way.

For more information, go to exploreasheville.com or contact Beth McKinney at bmckinney@exploreasheville.com.



Cotton Row Restaurant,
Huntsville

Huntsville, Alabama:

A food scene that's out of this world

Huntsville may be better known as home to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center than for its reputation as a city for foodies, but according to Kristen Pepper, marketing manager for the Huntsville CVB, the culinary scene has taken off in recent years with ... well, the speed of a rocket.

With a number of excellent restaurants in the historical downtown area, your group will be spoiled for choice. A good way to maximize their experience is to book them for Dine and Dash. Held the second Wednesday of every month from April through October, this

event includes visits to four downtown establishments for exclusive, specially designed tastings. You can book a large group for a private experience, or if your group is smaller, you can join locals for a true taste of Huntsville.

Ashley Ryals, owner and founder of Homegrown Huntsville, which coordinates Dine and Dash, explains why this is the perfect group activity.

"It's an exciting opportunity to visit several restaurants and to interact with locals," she says. "However, if your group is 30 or more, we can host private tours and progressive dinners tailored to your specific needs."

If your (small) group wants to cook what they eat, you're in luck. Local chef and cookbook author C.C. Fridlin conducts classes throughout the year in various venues. If you're not exactly Rachael Ray or Gordon Ramsay and would prefer chatting instead of actually cooking, James Beard-nominated chef James Boyce holds special events and meet-ups at his three Huntsville restaurants: Cotton Row, Commerce Kitchen and Pane e Vino.

It's not just Huntsville's food scene that is on the upswing; the city has the largest number of breweries per capita of any city in Alabama. Your group can visit two of the breweries at Campus No. 805, a repurposed middle school that is now a major entertainment complex.

Another way for craft beer lovers to enjoy breweries, tap rooms and bottle shops is on the Downtown Huntsville Craft Beer Trail. Groups can get free trail cards, and once they visit all 10 stops on the trail, they will receive a special "Trail Boss" bottle opener.

Huntsville has a number of food festivals spread throughout the year, from the Whistlestop Weekend (celebrating the state's barbecue heritage) to the Big Spring Crush Wine Festival (Alabama's first winery competition). Perhaps most interesting is the annual Redstone Arsenal Oktoberfest, a traditional German celebration with an Alabama twist.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand why Huntsville's food scene has reached stratospheric heights.

For more information, email the CVB's Pam Williams at pam@huntsville.org or visit huntsville.org.

Tucson, Arizona: The first UNESCO City of Gastronomy in the U.S.

Raise your hand if you knew that in 2015, Tucson was named a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, joining cities in Brazil, China and Sweden and becoming the first in the U.S. to earn the designation.

Much of it no doubt stems from Tucson having what it calls "The Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food" this side of the border. It's not just the Mexican influence, however, as Anglo and Native American cuisines also factor into the area's rich culinary heritage.

The best way to experience all three is on one of the many food tours.

Tucson Food Tours, the city's original walking food tour, is included in the book "100 Things to do in Tucson Before You Die." Specializing in custom tours for small or large groups, the staff will handle all the planning for you.

Want a side of history with your huevos? Or tall tales dished out with your tamales? A Taste of Tucson Downtown is a guided culinary and cultural tour of the historical downtown area that combines regional food (tastings at five restaurants) with history, art and architecture.



VISIT TUCSON

Sonoran hot dog, Tucson



Foodie cities and scenes

Sonoran Tasting Tours provides a good way for your group to experience Southern Arizona's premier wineries. On the tour, you can sample the grapes, enjoy lunch, and bask in the beauty of the Sonoita Valley and Willcox Wine Country.

Want to say you've been in the kitchen with a James Beard Award-winning chef? Well, your group can earn bragging rights during a cooking class with Janos Wilder at his downtown outpost, Carriage House.

Other noteworthy experiences: See how local whiskey is made—from grain to glass—at Hamilton Distillers (the difference is in the desert flavor of mesquite); try Tucson's semi-official dish, the Sonoran hot dog (a James Beard America's Classic award winner); and visit Mission Gardens, a living museum of the Sonoran Desert's agricultural history, and the site of its first farm fields dating back 4,000 years.

For more information, go to visittucson.org or email Jackie Ludwig at jludwig@visittucson.org.

Viva España: Magnet for Michelin stars

There are few countries in the world with as rich a culinary history as Spain.

Dating back thousands of years, it blends local, Mediterranean and North African influences into a melting pot that is a magnet for Michelin stars.

Tour operators taking groups to Madrid should check out that city's gastronomic markets. Some of the centuries-old food markets in historical buildings have been re-imagined as authentic gourmet street markets, where there's a mixture of traditional and avant-garde. The most famous is Mercado San Miguel, an iron and glass structure housing 20 different vendors selling everything from fish and ham to olives, cheese, wine and the ever-popular tapas.

Platea, located in a converted cinema, has restaurants, bars and stalls overseen by three chefs who boast six Michelin stars among them. A hip new addition to the city's foodie scene is Mercado San Ildefonso, with 18 stalls and bars spread across three floors.

Tour operators should start planning ahead for next year's Madrid Fusion Summit, which will turn Spain's capital city into the world's gastronomic capital. It has been held every year in January since 2003.

If Barcelona is your group's destination, book them on the Barcelona Gourmet Food Tour. You can join an expert guide on a walking tour of the back streets and narrow alleys of

historical districts such as the Gothic Quarter, El Born and the Barceloneta, while tasting dishes ranging from a typical Catalan appetizer to a seafood-rich paella or prime beef from Spain's northern provinces.

With San Sebastian as its epicenter, the Basque Country in northern Spain is often referred to as "Michelin Star Heaven," the result of nearly 40 restaurants with the coveted stars. Couple that with the area's La Rioja wine region and you have what is often described as one of the world's best gastronomic destinations.

Food festivals naturally play an important role in Spain. This year's 20th annual Gastronomika will be held in San Sebastian from October 7 to 10 and will focus on all things culinary—from tastings to interactive presentations by top national and international chefs.

You won't want to miss introducing your group to Spain's national drink, sherry. From Seville, take a day trip to Jerez, famous for its fortified sherry wines. You can visit wineries where the old traditions have been maintained and production methods haven't changed for centuries.

For more information, contact Elisa Sainz of the Tourist Office of Spain at nuevayork@tourspain.es or go to spain.info. 🍷



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Find a foodie destination along the Monumental Route

By Terry Sjolin

It seems impossible to please everyone, but we may have figured it out: national monuments and incredible food.

As you take your tour group along the Monumental Route (I-90) to see Mount Rushmore and Devils Tower, you can stop in Gillette and Wright, Wyoming, and discover a secret foodie destination on your way to Yellowstone National Park. The food we'll serve you in Campbell County is the best way we can show how much we want you here, so whether your group is looking for handcrafted beers, wood-fired pizzas, locally raised meats or exotic flavors, prepare for a feast in Gillette and Wright.

Ingredients come first at Pizza Carrello, and you'll taste what a difference they make. The famed tomato sauce has no added sugar or salt, because the San Marzano tomatoes used to make it are robust and sweet. Everything on the Pizza Carrello menu comes from the gigantic wood-fired oven, from the crisped salads to the pita wraps and, of course, the pizza. Local favorites include homemade wood-fired meatballs, Dazzle Berry pizza and made-from-scratch cheesecake that's renowned worldwide (or at least should be).

At Big Lost Meadery, you can drink like the gods. Different than wine or beer, mead is an alcoholic drink made by fermenting honey with water. Known as the preferred elixir of Greek gods, mead was popular in Norse and Viking tradition, and Big Lost is the Wyoming version of this tale. The Meadery building is nothing short of magnificent, and the atmosphere is as memorable as your first taste of mead will be. Sip on different mead flavors (fused with assorted fruits, flowers, hops and grains) from oversized steer horns in front of a warm fire; you'll feel immortal.

Uncork and unwind at Prime Rib Restaurant and Wine Cellar with a state-of-the-art, glass-enclosed 10,000-bottle wine cellar. Whether you want a high-end label or something more

approachable, you'll find it in this collection that has earned *Wine Spectator* magazine's Best of Award of Excellence annually since 2006. Be sure to ask your server whether you should match your drink with mouth-watering USDA choice steak, juicy burgers or seafood. Most Prime Rib staffers have been with the restaurant 10 to 20 years, so consider them pairing experts.



CAMPBELL COUNTY CVB

If you're lucky enough to find The Coop, stop in and bring your appetite. The outside may look like an old-fashioned drive through, but inside you'll find Costa Rican-inspired rotisserie chicken dishes prepared freshly in-house with flavor, spice and love. The portions are huge, but the prices are small. While this is an outstanding option for health-conscious, macro-counting visitors, the hot honey wings with homemade ranch dressing are worth the splurge.

Have a taste of Gillette history and wash it down with an award-winning beer at Gillette Brewing Company & Gone Postal Pizzeria, home of Locomotive Brown Beer, which took second place in the 2015 U.S. Open Beer Championships. Located in the town's historical post office, Gillette's first microbrewery is a place that feels familiar, even for first-time visitors. All the pizza dough is made with Gillette Brewing Company Beer. In addition to the one-of-a-kind pizza, families love the restaurant's kid-friendly section with darts, pool and shuffleboard.

While this article features some heavy hitters in the Gillette foodie world, it's by no means exhaustive. Sample wild appetizers like python, ostrich and kangaroo at Pokey's Barbecue and Smokehouse. Tour the Durham Ranch in Wright to see how the bison that is served at Wright's Open Range Steakhouse, Pokey's and the Prime Rib are raised. Dine on authentic Vietnamese pho at Pho & Bakery 59, or try a surprising yet delectable combo at Armando's Taco & Pasta Shop. For more dining options, go to visitgillettewright.com/plan-your-stay/dining.

Good food is only made better by good company, so we can't wait to share a meal with you.

Terry Sjolin is the DMO sales manager of the Campbell County CVB in Gillette, Wyoming. Reach her at terry@visitgillettewright.com or go to visitgillettewright.com.



CAMPBELL COUNTY CVB



For information on all the hotels, attractions and experiences detailed here, contact Heather Colache, tourism account director for Visit AC, at +1.609.449.7151 or hcolache@meetac.com. Or go to meetac.com.

Atlantic City Boardwalk

CITY SPOTLIGHT

Atlantic City: Blown away

BY BOB ROUSE

LET'S START this out "Jeopardy"-style:

Answer: An elephant, a lighthouse and the world's loudest organ.

Question: What three things did you not see coming in Atlantic City? (see page 32)

I had been to Atlantic City a couple of times in my younger days, when I sought out the city's casinos and excitement. But I enjoyed a whole other view of Atlantic City at the invitation of Heather Colache, tourism account director for Visit AC.

To be clear, my view was not clear during my late January visit. Despite a steady breeze—sustained winds of 25 mph, gusting to 35 whenever I stepped outdoors—visibility was a foggy quarter-mile or less.

But just as a blind person relies on other senses to experience life, I put away the camera and binoculars and gathered a sense of the place through its people and (indoor) places.

Most prevalent of all is the sense of hometown loyalty and pride in place. I was amazed by the number of natives who work in the tourism industry there, including my guides: Heather and Jessica Kasunich, Visit AC's communications manager.

Their passion for the product sets an authentic tone to the town, and I appreciated that touch of Mayberry amid the jangly casinos and high-energy attractions.

That said, I like jangly casinos and high-energy attractions—along with great food, fun venues and unique experiences. Had I visited on a windless day, I still would have been blown away by the options and offerings along the AC stretch of the Jersey Shore.



HAVAS - AC ALLIANCE

TOP: MEET AC

A place to stay

Even the most ardent, all-night gambler needs a place to stay, and AC has seven casino hotels, plus a good number of non-casino properties, from small inns to large resorts.

I stayed at the Tropicana, and while I enjoyed a spacious room and the casino, what most impressed me about this NTA-member property was not the quarter slot machines, but The Quarter. This attractive complex has more than 50 dining, drinking and shopping options, and it's laid out in a cool homage to the streets of Old Havana. I did all my shopping there (which was mostly limited to take-home chocolates).

I dined with my Visit AC hosts at Carmine's, a family-style Italian restaurant located in The Quarter.

"We have the wow factor," said Lynn Manzi, Carmine's special events director. "That's the first word out of a guest's mouths when the food arrives on a platter."

Carmine's does extensive group business. "During the season I host as many as a thousand buses," Manzi said. "Our bus customers come in the spring and summer to see a show and have a good time. The groups come back in the fall, when the shows change, and then they come at Christmas. It's a different experience every time."

During the peak of a storm that dumped an inch of rain on AC, we visited another NTA-member property, Resorts Casino Hotel. Despite the winds and fog outside, we had a delightful breakfast with Meg Lewis, the hotel's executive director of marketing and bus

operations, and Donna Bell, bus market-ing tour and travel manager.

This place is ideal for groups.

"Our casino is 38 steps from where buses drop off passengers, and we have two theaters, which seat 300 and 1,200," Meg told me. "We partner with Mohegan Sun, and we have a single owner who continues to put money back into the property."

Groups that visit in August for the city's annual airshow can access Resorts' exclusive viewing area with covered seating, and the hotel provides lunch. Resorts accommodates groups throughout the year, of course.

"Tour operators can make their own packages here," she said. "The basic one is a show, a meal each day and slot plays, and they can add on a meet-and-greet with the entertainer."

A site inspection with Donna included a history lesson. "The room renovations are fantastic, elegant and comfortable, and I love the nostalgia with this place and with this city," she said. "Ocean Tower has lots of adjoining rooms because it was used by the military."

Near the end of World War II, the hotel was requisitioned by the federal government and became the Atlantic City Air Forces Training and Reception Center Hospital. Many of the rooms have unique configurations, some with huge closets.

Departing Resorts, we visited more hotels, and everywhere we went, the locals talked about the freakish weather—but more about groups visiting the destination.

"Ideally, tour operators would package

Atlantic City midweek and the major cities on weekends," advised Karen Tarnovski, tour and travel sales manager for Caesar's, Harrah's Resort and Bally's, all of which are connected. "Come stay with us on weekdays, when Philly is expensive. Then stay in Philly—or in New York City—on weekends, when it's cheaper there."

We returned to the Resorts complex for lunch with Debbie Gutjahr, sales manager at Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville and Landshark Bar and Grill.

Landshark is a beach bar that sits across the boardwalk from Margaritaville. It has a breezy atmosphere with indoor areas, a deck and seating right on the beach.

"We create a space for groups, depending on the group's size and the bar package," Debbie said. "I do a lot of full buy-outs, especially in the off-season."

Margaritaville, too, offers lots of options, including a buffet for up to 120 guests, with an interior wall and outside doors that can be open or closed. "When our doors are wide open, it's a whole different feel," Debbie said. "We want to do more with groups, and I'll customize something to make the most of any budget."

I recommend building a budget that includes the Caribbean chicken egg rolls. And key lime pie.

Another cool space we explored was The VÜE. Located in the Claridge Hotel, it's the only rooftop bar in Atlantic City. "It's great for the airshow and fireworks displays," said Jessica Jarvis, sales manager for hotel.

Rolling into town

The Wheel is opening this spring, and while 2018 visitors will be excited, the tourism community is ecstatic.

"We've been talking about The Wheel opening for a couple of years, and after some delays, the clouds have parted and it's really ready," says Heather Colache of Visit AC.

The 227-foot attraction, third tallest on the East Coast, is set to be open weekends through April, and then run every day starting in May.

"This view—there's nothing like it on the Jersey Shore. Our wheel is 300 feet out into the ocean, and you can see for miles up and down the coast,"

says Sharon Franz, sales and marketing director for Steel Pier, where The Wheel is located. "It's such a smooth ride; you don't even know you're moving."

Patrons will move, though. Seated in climate-controlled gondolas, they'll make five revolutions during the 15-minute ride. Franz says that tour operators will get a discount, and packages can include a grab-and-go lunch or a beverage in a souvenir cup.

"The Wheel means a lot to us, and we partner with Steel Pier on several projects," says Meg Lewis of Resorts Casino Hotel, which sits beside the pier and its many rides and activities.



Before the attraction's 14,000 LED lights illuminate the evening sky, visitors can take a late afternoon ride. "The view of the sunset on The Wheel is spectacular," Franz says. "You have to get up that high to see the western sky over the buildings."

A town to tour

After our hotel inspections, we embarked on a drive-about; Heather had lots more to show off in her hometown:

- Atlantic City offers tax-free shopping on clothing and shoes, and at the 100-plus stores in Tanger Outlets, you can say, “Let. There. Be. Clothes and shoes.” Situated on three streets, the NTA-member retail center includes Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Chico’s, H&M, DKNY and Bass Pro Shops. Tour operators can get coupons for their groups and vouchers for group leaders and coach drivers.
- Gardner’s Basin is a maritime park located in the city’s back-bay area. “This place is hopping during the spring and summer, and we enjoy what we call ‘local summer’ during the fall,” Heather said. In addition to shopping and dining, sightseeing boats and fishing excursions, there’s the three-story Atlantic City Aquarium.
- A tunnel connects the Boardwalk to the back bay and several large hotels, including Golden Nugget, Borgata and Harrah’s. “A lot of people like that vibe,” Heather said, “and they can connect to the rest of the city with 24-hour jitneys as well as Uber and Lyft.”
- The Sheraton Atlantic City is adjacent to the convention center, and it also houses the unofficial Miss America museum, which features gowns, crowns and other memorabilia.
- Boardwalk Hall is a multipurpose arena that hosts concerts, events and meetings. It has quite a history, including in August 1964, when the Democratic National Convention nominated Lyndon Johnson there. And a week later, with “All the Way with LBJ” banners still hanging from the rafters, The Beatles performed to a sold-out crowd of 18,000, including President Johnson’s two daughters, who stayed in town to catch The Fab Four.



Wine, please

I’m no oenologist, but I loved visiting Sharrott Winery in Hammonton, a 45-minute drive from AC. Upon our arrival, Heather discussed with owner Larry Sharrott Jr. the tasting party she hosted using only his wines. And then we had our own party. I sampled a dry Riesling, an unoaked Chardonnay, a couple of reds and Wicked, a port-style red that makes you sit up and pay attention.

The winery is adding a tasting room that will seat 80 and include two bars and several seating configurations. Scheduled to be completed by early April, the new space will have glass garage doors opening onto a patio and a wall of windows overlooking the vineyard.

Sharrott is formally educated, with a wine degree from University of California at Davis. “I like to think of myself as a jazz musician who is grounded in classical music—and then goes out and creates,” he said.

Answer: An elephant, a lighthouse and the world’s loudest organ.



Lucy the elephant has been an Atlantic City resident since the 1880s. Built as a 65-foot-tall eye-catcher for selling real estate in South Atlantic City, Lucy has served through the decades as a tea room, bar, private residence and, now, a museum. There are guided tours, and visitors can get a good view from the howdah.

At 171 feet, **Absecon Lighthouse** is New Jersey’s tallest lighthouse. Visitors can climb 228 of its 240 steps for a nice view of the city. (I could not have mounted those final 12 steps.) Decommissioned in 1933, the light still comes on at sundown—but for tourists, not ships. Open every day, July and August; Thursday through Monday the rest of the year.



The **Boardwalk Hall Auditorium Organ** is the largest organ in the world—with 33,112 pipes. It’s also the world’s loudest: One of the stops blows out 138 decibels. (A jet fighter engine registers 120 decibels.) From May through September, there’s a free 30-minute concert every day at noon. And on Wednesdays at 10 a.m., take a two-hour walking tour of the building and the organ, currently being restored. 📍



AMARILLO CVC

No shallow Palo: Hiking, biking and horseback riding are three popular ways to explore Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Located outside of Amarillo in the Texas Panhandle, the canyon is 120 miles long and more than 800 feet deep. To check out additional highlights at destinations across the Lone Star State, turn to page 38.

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Midwest U.S.

COMPILED BY KENDALL FLETCHER



Monument Rocks National Landmark

Follow the yellow brick road[s]

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism has taken the fame that's followed Kansas from "The Wizard of Oz" and turned it into a travel idea.

"Our Yellow Brick Road Trips are very popular," says Kelli Hilliard, PR and travel development manager. "Our sample itineraries are packed with attractions, events and experiences to help visitors chart plans for exploring specific regions of the Sunflower State, like the southern central plains and northern western plains. Itineraries cover our eight geographic regions as well as various themes."

Those themes include the following:

Historic — Learn about the Bleeding Kansas era and see places like Fort Scott National Historic Site and the Buffalo Soldier Monument.

Mancation — Plan a trip strictly for male bonding with some outdoor adventuring or visits to the Booth Hall of

Athletics and Historic Harley-Davidson.

Artisan — Visit local artisans and museums across the state, including the Grassroots Art Center in Lucas and the Wichita Art Museum.

Wanderlust — Explore a little bit of everything Kansas has to offer as part of the newest Yellow Brick Road Trip. Visit Monument Rocks National Landmark, the site of the Chalk Pyramids; experience the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Strong City; and grab dinner at Bon Bon Restaurant in Lawrence, voted the Greatest Food Town in Kansas by *Midwest Living* in 2017. Travelers can also camp, hike and visit breweries along the way.

For the full "The Wizard of Oz" experience, travelers can see the Oz Museum in Wamego.

For more information, contact Hilliard at kelli.hilliard@ks.gov or go to travelks.com. To create custom itineraries, visit travelks.com/tripbuilder.



Fort Scott National Historic Site



Oz Museum



Pioneer re-enactor program



Truman Library and Museum



Leila's Hair Museum

Pioneers, presidents and ... hair art?

Part of the Kansas City metropolitan area, Independence is, well, an independent city in Missouri with captivating history and unique places to visit.

"You can't talk about the city of Independence without what put it on the map in the first place. It was the jumping off point to the West," says Frank Buhro, historic site and volunteer manager for Independence Parks/Recreation/Tourism. "It was the last of civilization for the pioneers seeking a better life. They left Independence on the long journeys on the California, Santa Fe and Oregon trails. The story of each of these is told at the National Frontier Trails Museum and the Pioneer Trails Adventure, where they offer covered wagon rides."

Independence was home to Harry S. Truman and has many sites that tell of the former president's life, including the Truman Depot, the Truman Memorial Building and the

Truman Walking Trail.

"The sites show his connections growing up in the area and the impact it had on his later decisions. Visitors can explore Clinton's Soda Fountain, where he had his first job. And for the fuller experience, there are tours of the Truman home, the Truman Courthouse and the Truman Library and Museum," Buhro says.

One of the city's most unique finds is Leila's Hair Museum. With more than 600 wreaths and 2,000 pieces of jewelry made from human hair on display, the museum offers a tour that teaches the braiding techniques used to make Victorian hair art.

"This art was started as a way of remembering loved ones and paying tribute to them before there were photos. Leila has quite the collection," Buhro says. "There truly is nothing like it."

For more information, contact Buhro at fbuhro@indepmo.org or go to visitindependence.com.

Hop on the covered wagon

"To experience western Nebraska is to experience the Old West," says Micheal Collins, group travel manager with the Nebraska Tourism Commission. "This is a land filled with history and culture, from the Native American tribes who first settled this wild region to fur traders and trappers looking for fortune to early pioneers and ranchers searching for a better way of life out West."

For travelers seeking out the area's Old West history, the commission offers a four-day itinerary titled Western Nebraska's Buffalo Bill, Oregon Trail, Pioneer Experience. The tour covers sites like the Golden Spike Tower & Visitor Center, which boasts the world's largest railroad classification yard; Scotts Bluff National Monument; and the Buffalo Bill State Historical Park, once home to Col. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Visitors will take wagon rides to the Lincoln County Historical Museum, learn the story of the North Platte Canteen and dodge robbers while exploring a re-created Old West town. They'll see Native American artifacts and art at the Petrified Wood Gallery and visit the most recognized landmark on the Oregon Trail, Chimney Rock National Historic Site. They'll also discover wagon ruts that are still visible at the base of the summit near the North Platte River, hand feed



CC FLICKR/UP PHOTO ARCHIVE - NATIONAL PARK SERVICE: bit.ly/2FLLPom

bison at Monkey Ranch and experience some notable dining at places like Beehaven Farm Roadside Market.

For more information and the full itinerary, contact Collins at micheal.collins@nebraska.gov or go to visitnebraska.com/group_travel.



Cloie Creek Mountain Bike Park

TRISTATE MOUNTAIN BIKERS



Heritage Trail

TRAVEL DUBUQUE

What's not to bike in Iowa?

New biking experiences await in Dubuque, where the recently opened Cloie Creek Mountain Bike Park offers a 2.5-mile trail with banked turns, jumps, climbs and a creek crossing open to all skill levels and ages. The project's collaborative team will open trails at the Interstate Power Preserve this July with six miles of cross-country singletrack, a primary loop for beginners and three additional loops.

The 26-mile Heritage Trail—stretching from Dubuque to Dyersville—continues to be a popular option for bikers, says

Taylor Cummings, director of marketing with Travel Dubuque.

“Dubuque is really starting to embrace a diverse group of bikers, from nature enthusiasts to really avid mountain bikers,” Cummings says. “The offerings and the attractions, restaurants and support around biking make Dubuque a great biking destination.”

The city also has dozens of recreation trails for bikers. For more information, contact Cummings at tcummings@traveldubuque.com or visit traveldubuque.com.

Here's to you, Waterloo

For groups traveling to eastern Iowa, Waterloo offers many unique, group-friendly locations. A list of the CVB's must-see stops includes:



DEERE.COM



WATERLOO CVB



TRAVELWATERLOO.COM

John Deere Tractor & Engine Museum

Visitors learn about agriculture before and after the development of tractors and machines in the Cedar Valley. The city will hold a 100th celebration of John Deere's arrival in Waterloo with lots of community events June 15-16.

Galleria de Paco restaurant

Lunch and dinner are served beneath an impressive replica of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, created with (gasp!) spray paint by renowned artist Paco Rosic.

Sullivan Brothers Iowa Veterans Museum

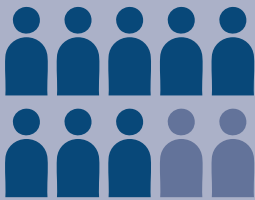
The museum honors veterans from the Civil War to the present, including the Sullivan brothers, five siblings from Waterloo who perished when the *USS Juneau* sank during World War II.

For more information, contact Beth Keeney with Waterloo CVB at beth@travelwaterloo.com or visit travelwaterloo.com. 

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West South Central U.S. COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

A Texas six-step

NTA has more than 25 DMO members across Texas, giving tour operators plenty of colleagues they can turn to for itinerary assistance. The following six Lone Star State destinations provide unique experiences, and representatives from the local DMOs offer advice on what groups should see and do.

Amarillo

Responses provided by Kashion Smith of the Amarillo CVC

Why is your Amarillo such a great place?

Amarillo has that one-of-a-kind West Texas hospitality! Not only is our service top-notch, groups also have many types of attractions, hotels and restaurants to choose from.



AMARILLO CVC

What are some of your top attractions?

The Big Texan Steak Ranch and Brewery and the Cadillac Ranch, both Route 66 icons; Palo Duro Canyon, which is home to "Texas," the outdoor musical; and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum

What are a couple of good annual festivals?

The Coors Cowboy Club Cattle Drive and Ranch Rodeo (first week of June) and the Route 66 Celebration (the Saturday before July 4)

What advice would you give a tour operator regarding packaging your area?

We are the perfect stop between Oklahoma City and Albuquerque. To really enjoy our area you need at least two nights.

To learn more, contact Smith at kashion@visitamarillo.com or go to visitamarillo.com.

Brewster County

Responses provided by Robert Alvarez of Visit Big Bend

What makes your area great?

The Big Bend region is like no other place in the state. Groups who visit enjoy the remoteness of the area, which allows them to unplug and get back to the simple things in life, like enjoying a spectacular sunset or seeing the Milky Way with the naked eye.

What are some top nature-based options?

First is Big Bend National Park and its Fossil Discovery Exhibit. Birders from across the world come to Big Bend and go to the national park and to Post Park in Marathon.

What advice would you give a tour operator about packaging your area?

The timing of a visit is important, because we are in the Chihuahuan Desert, so summers are hot. To see the entire area takes at least three full days, but shorter visits can be done.

To learn more, contact Alvarez at robert@visitbigbend.com or go to visitbigbend.com.



LEE McMULLEN

Kerrville

Responses provided by Charlie McIlvain, CTP, of the Kerrville CVB

Tell us why Kerrville is such a great destination.

Visitors to the Texas Hill Country experience an exceptional quality of life. The Guadalupe River flows through downtown Kerrville, and we have two live theaters, many art galleries, excellent dining opportunities and a mild climate.

What are some of your marquee attractions?

The Coming King Prayer Sculpture Garden, ideal for the religious market; the Y.O. Ranch, with its exotic game ranch tour; Riverside Nature Center; and art galleries, including the Kerr Arts & Cultural Center

What insider knowledge would help a tour operator package your area?

Spending 14 years as a receptive tour operator, I can answer that question. Groups can easily spend three days and two nights here and make visits to nearby Texas Hill Country spots—Bandera, Fredericksburg, Luckenbach, Hunt, Ingram—before they venture to San Antonio, Austin or Dallas/Fort Worth.

To learn more, contact McIlvain at charlie@kerrvilletexascvb.com or go to kerrvilletexascvb.com.



DEBBIE HAGEBUSCH

Laredo

Responses provided by Selina Villarreal of the Laredo CVB

Tell us why Laredo is such a great destination.

Laredo's sunny skies, friendly atmosphere and cultural offerings make for an interesting adventure. Visiting groups have the opportunity to soak up Laredo's history, enjoy traditional Mexican cuisine, and see arts and crafts.

What are three popular attractions?

San Agustin Cathedral, Fort McIntosh and the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum

What is a must-do nature experience in your area?

Make sure to pack your binoculars, because Laredo is home to some beautiful birds. You can try your luck at bird-watching at North Central Park.

What advice would you give a tour operator regarding packaging your area?

Laredo is a great weekend getaway, and the Laredo CVB staff is ready to welcome all groups and give them an unforgettable experience.

To learn more, contact Joel Vazquez of the Laredo CVB at jvazquez@ci.laredo.tx.us or go to visitlaredo.com.



LAREDO CVB

Pearland

Responses provided by Kim Sinistore of the Pearland CVB

Why is Pearland such a great place?

Pearland is a great destination for groups. We pair more affordable Pearland hotels and local charm with Houston's big-city attractions just minutes away.

PEARLAND CVB



Killen's BBQ

What is a can't-miss culinary experience?

Pearland is home to three concept restaurants—Killen's Steakhouse, Killen's BBQ and Killen's Burgers—created by executive chef and Pearland native, Ronnie Killen.

What are other must-visit local spots?

BAKFISH Brewing Company and King's Biergarten & Restaurant also are popular. Plus, you have the Sri Meenakshi temple in Pearland, which is the only Hindu temple dedicated to the Goddess Meenakshi off the shores of India.

What insider knowledge would help a tour operator package your area?

Plan for a three- to five-day stay in Pearland, which would allow enough time to experience our amenities and take day trips to nearby Houston attractions.

To learn more, contact Sinistore at ksinistore@pearlandtx.gov or go to visitpearland.com.

San Angelo

Responses provided by Suzanna Aguirre of the San Angelo CVB

What makes San Angelo a great destination?

San Angelo offers groups the opportunity to experience frontier history and to dive into a modern and vibrant city.

What are three popular history attractions?

Fort Concho National Historic Landmark, home to the famous 10th Cavalry Regiment of Buffalo Soldiers from the Indian Wars era; The Cactus Hotel, the fourth hotel built by Conrad Hilton; and Angelo Civic Theatre, the oldest continuous community theater in Texas.

If I have friends visiting from out of town, I always take them to ...

See the International Water Lily Collection

What insider knowledge would help a tour operator package your area?

San Angelo has diverse themed tours on history, arts, culture, religion and agriculture, and we also partner with surrounding cities. For example, we set up tours in Christoval (20 minutes away) at their winery, hummingbird habitat and monastery.

To learn more, contact Aguirre at suzanna@sanangelo.org or go to discoversanangelo.org.



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The Old West in western Arkansas

"Fort Smith, known as the Star of the Western Frontier, is an exciting destination where folks can bring a heart that loves history, and we'll show them ways to fill it," says Carolyn Joyce, tour and travel sales director for the Fort Smith CVB. "Arkansas' second-largest city can provide several types of activities, and many of our museums and attractions reflect our rich Old West heritage."

Miss Laura's Visitor Center is the typical starting place for a group visit to the western Arkansas city. The center is set in a century-old building that is the first former bordello to be listed on the National Register of History Places. With prior arrangements, Miss Laura—portrayed by Joyce—will greet the groups and recount the scandalous past of Miss Laura's Social Club and the city's red-light district, which thrived in the early 1900s.

One of the city's must-dos for groups is the Fort Smith National Historic Site. The attraction includes the courthouse, barracks, jail and restored gallows of the Federal Court of the Western District of Arkansas. During tours, groups can see the courtroom of Judge Isaac C. Parker, who sat on the bench for 21 years and sent 79 men to death by hanging.

Joyce says another popular option is a tour featuring The Unexpected Project, a group of more than 30 murals in the downtown area. And, in September 2019, the city will welcome the U.S. Marshals Museum, which will trace the 230-year history of the U.S. Marshals Service.

For more information, reach out to Joyce at cjoyce@fortsmith.org or visit fortsmith.org.



Fort Smith National Historic Site

FORT SMITH CVB

Checking in with Cherokee Nation Tourism

Travelers seeking to learn more about the Cherokee Nation should head to Catoosa, which is just outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma. *Courier* spoke with Cheryl Trask, senior manager of Cherokee Nation Cultural Tourism, about what groups can experience during a visit to the reservation.

Courier: Talk a little bit about the Cherokee Nation.


Trask: Nestled in 66,000 acres of beautiful countryside in northeast Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation is the largest tribal nation in the U.S. We offer a variety of activities to provide visitors with an authentic experience that not only entertains them but also gives them with a better understanding and appreciation for the history and culture of the Cherokee people.

Courier: What interactive programs and tours are available?

Trask: We do our best to provide an interactive and engaging experience at all of our locations. Our group tours are available year-round, and each is customizable and often includes hands-on cultural activities, such as basketry, pottery and moccasin making. Featured tours include the Cherokee History Tour, the Will Rogers Tour and the Civil War Tour.

Courier: What other benefits do you offer for groups?

Trask: What truly makes us stand out is our knowledgeable and friendly guides. Whether you meet them at one of our four museums or during a bus tour, they all have a love for the Cherokee Nation that runs deep and a passion for sharing it with others.

To learn more, contact Trask at cheryl.trask@cnent.com or go to visitcherokeemuseum.com. 



VISITCHEROKEEMUSEUM.COM

Latin America

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

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Machu Picchu

Peru's preeminent archaeological sites

While Machu Picchu remains Peru's tourism calling card, the fabled site is just one of many that showcase the country's amazing landscapes, according to Jessica Bergerie of Domiruth Travel.

"Archaeological sites in Peru are numerous and diverse, including temples and fortresses, and representing different aspects of the various cultures of ancient Peru, such as the Moche and Nazca," says Bergerie, who is Domiruth's head of sales. "They vary in importance and scale, from small locations to UNESCO World Heritage sites of global importance."

The 34-year-old company offers the Moche Archaeological and Historical Chachapoyas tours, a pair of six-day programs

that feature sacred sites dating back thousands of years. True to its name, the eight-day Trujillo and Cusco Tour covers both ancient cities and includes a visit to Machu Picchu.

"In Cusco, the archaeological sites and beauty of the colonial architecture merge as you explore each old street and neighborhood, where stunning shades of green are mixed with a bright range of red bromeliads and wild orchids," Bergerie adds.

Beyond the cultural-archaeological programs, Domiruth offers gastronomic, 4x4 adventure, MICE, luxury, agriculture and other tailored tours.

Reach out to Bergerie at jefedeventas-receptivo@domiruth.com or go to domiruth.com/perutrans to learn more.

Seeking sustainable—and memorable—experiences in Brazil



From its rugged mountain terrain and rainforests to vibrant cities and sun-kissed beaches, Brazil beckons visitors to its shores. *Courier* spoke with Terra Nova Turismo's Junior Ribeiro about the company's offerings that hit the highlights of South America's largest country.

Courier: Why is your company a great one for North American groups to work with?

Ribeiro: We have 49 years of experience organizing special interest tours in Brazil for clients from all over the world, which allows us to offer the memorable customer experiences.

Courier: What are some things that make Brazil such a great destination?

Ribeiro: Brazil's stunning natural beauty, diverse landscape, warm people and endless golden beaches are top reasons to explore this enchanting country.

Courier: Are there any recent trends that are impacting your company's tours?

Ribeiro: Sustainable tourism is on the rise. It goes without saying that one of the memorable things about Brazil is the abundant outdoor beauty, and the Brazilian government is taking measures to protect its natural resources by collaborating with tourism service providers to create more sustainable practices. A shining example of an eco-friendly project is the Uakari Floating Lodge in the Amazon rainforest. They employ biologists and local residents to serve as nature guides and to help preserve nature and culture.

Courier: How does your company highlight sustainable tourism?

Ribeiro: We have a bunch of options within our itineraries. Our tours go from the north to south in Brazil, and the most popular ones feature the Amazon and ecolodges. Another one I like is our Cocoa Farm Experience in the northeast region where travelers can "work" at a farm. That is a one-of-a-kind thing, as it puts people right there helping the locals and experiencing the real Brazil.

To learn more, contact Ribeiro at junior@tnt.tur.br or visit tnt.tur.br.

Three times the fun in Colombia's Golden Triangle

Metropolitan Touring is one of South America's most diverse and respected travel companies. Founded in Ecuador in 1953, the NTA member has its own ground operations in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and has a fleet of ships that is used for its Galapagos Islands itineraries.

According to Tom Pelizzaro, the company has seen an increase in interest in its Colombia itineraries over the past decade.

"Colombia is emerging because many are looking for a new

place to go," says Pelizzaro, who is Metropolitan Touring's North American representative. "The country was off limits for many years, but now everyone is discovering that this amazing, diverse destination has so much to offer: art, culture, nature and its very friendly people."

He says the company's Golden Triangle itinerary is a good one for first-time visitors. This seven-day tour covers the highlights of Bogota, Pereira and Cartagena.

In the Colombian capital, travelers see Plaza de Bolivar, the Gold Museum and the Fernando Botero Museum. They also visit nearby Zipaquirá, which is home to an underground salt cathedral that features the Stations of the Cross and a group of illuminated naves and sculptures.

During their two days in Pereira, which is situated in the shadow of the Andes Mountains, travelers visit the area's famous coffee plantations and see the world's tallest palm trees in the Valley of Cocora. The trip closes in coastal Cartagena. One of the best-preserved colonial cities in South America, Cartagena is known for its multiethnic heritage that represents African, Spanish and Caribbean influences.

To learn more, contact Pelizzaro at tomp@internationaldestinationmarketing.com or go to metropolitan-touring.com.



Salt Cathedral in Zipaquirá

CC FLOCKR/ALAN AND FLORA BOTTING: BH/2H4EJUN

Cazenave Argentina offers customized Argentina

"Argentina is one of the largest countries in the world—it is as long as the U.S. is wide—and it features some of the most famous regions in the world, like Patagonia, The Pampas and Tierra del Fuego," says Jorge Cazenave, president of Cazenave Argentina. "Plus, we have the high Andes, Iguazu Falls and vast majestic landscapes, all with very few inhabitants."

For first-time visitors, he recommends pairing a few days in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires—birthplace of the tango and home to A-list arts and cultural attractions, as well as a culinary scene that showcases the country's noteworthy beef and wine—with visits to other regions of the country. A popular choice is diverse Patagonia, where travelers can see marine wildlife and enjoy the beaches along Argentina's southern Atlantic Coast then head to the mountains of the interior for trekking, horseback tours and hiking to glacial lakes.

Cazenave says one of the advantages of working with his company is the high level of customization that's available.

"We know every corner of the country, and we will make sure you

get to see and experience what you want so that you will look forward to returning," he says. "We have been offering our services to the American traveler for over 25 years, not only for large groups, but also for families, fishermen, mountain climbers, nature photographers and foodies."

For more details, reach out to Cazenave at jorge@cazenaveargentina.com or visit cazenaveargentina.com.

Orcas along Patagonia's Valdes Peninsula



JORGE CAZENAVE

Guanajuato is GuanaWOWto

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PAT HENDERSON

When I booked two days in Guanajuato as an add-on to a Mexico trip I did with A Closer Look Tours at the end of January, I was excited to finally get to explore one of central Mexico's colonial cities. I'd seen the compelling photos, read the glowing reviews and even sung its praises on the pages of *Courier*.

I had high expectations, but ... wow. From its friendly locals and always-buzzing street life to its brightly painted houses dotting the hills overlooking the city center, Guanajuato delighted in so many ways.

The majority of my first day consisted of two things: having no real idea where I was going and loving every minute of it. As I walked along the serpentine pathways, I discovered a seemingly endless series of colorful buildings, ornate churches and bustling markets. Every new turn revealed another gem.

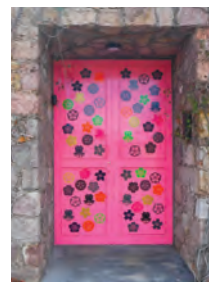
My roaming on the second day was punctuated by many stops for street cuisine. I started with a fresh-squeezed guava and watermelon shake, which paired better than you'd expect with my flaky apple pastry. Other finds included cheese quesadillas with a kicky verde sauce, roasted sunflower seeds, a spicy ear of corn and a chocolate-infused churro; clearly it was a good thing I walked 15-20 miles during my stay.

One of the most enduring memories came after a late-night meal on Jardin Union. During dinner on the large plaza, I had noticed a mixture of mariachis and costumed minstrels (think Elizabethan England) milling about, some strumming their instruments, others checking their cell phones.

As I was paying the bill, I could hear music and cheering in the distance. I followed the sounds and joined a group of 25 or so that had gathered around a fun-loving band of the minstrels. Their songs and banter had everyone laughing and clapping along, and they closed by marching out of the square.

As our pack followed them up a narrow alleyway, I was struck by how that moment pretty perfectly encapsulated the joyous feeling and carefree spirit I'd enjoyed throughout my all-too-brief time in Guanajuato. 📍

To see additional photos of Guanajuato, go to tinyurl.com/y8457zve.



To learn more about packages featuring Guanajuato and other colonial cities, contact the following NTA members who specialize in tours to Mexico:

A Closer Look Tours

Colin Caparrós
ccaparrros@acloserlooktours.com
acloserlooktours.com

Grupo Meca Mexico

Raynald Paquet
northamerica@grupomeca.com
grupomeca.com

S & S Tours

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South Pacific

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Safir Tours offers Australia for all

“What we do well is align the interests of the traveler to the things they wish to experience when they visit Australia,” says Nayaz Noor, CEO of Safir Tours. His company, based near Melbourne, creates wholly customized itineraries for groups and FITs.

Safir Tours often designs its packages based on a group’s point of origin, says Noor. “North American itineraries typically include a visit to Sydney—to see the iconic opera house and the Blue Mountains—besides Cairns or Port Douglas to see the Outer Great Barrier Reef and, time-permitting, the Daintree Rainforest.” Noor also highlights visits to Uluru and the extension of its popular Field of Lights installation, which will now run until 2020.

The company is promoting new itineraries that showcase Australia’s stunning scenery and luxury offerings. “The Top End, covering Kakadu National Park, Litchfield National Park, Arnhem Land and Katherine, is for those who really wish to see the Outback a little differently,” says Noor. Highlights of the tour include a Yellow Water cruise for travelers to see billabongs, waterfalls, sandstone escarpments and wildlife.

Safir Tours is finalizing a coast-to-coast tour between Perth and Sydney, with departures in both directions. Guests will travel on the Indian Pacific Train (a three-night journey), with offbeat excursions along the way. The itinerary also includes time to explore its coastal origin and destination points.



Three Sisters, the Blue Mountains

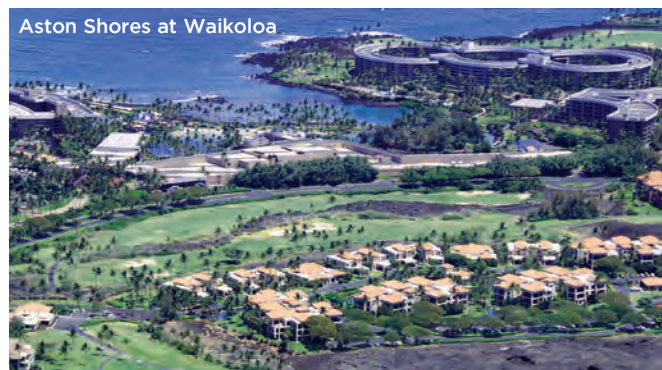
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“Because we are a family-owned company, [we] lay a lot of emphasis on the quality and delivery of service and go out of our way to make our guests feel comfortable,” says Noor. “Our personalized attention to the requirements of travelers and our versatility in handling all sorts of itineraries—from honeymoon couples to incentive and conference groups, families, women’s groups and seniors—sets us apart.”

For more information, go to safirtours.com.au or reach out to Noor at info@safirtours.com.au.

Find Hawaiian hospitality with NTA-member hotels

The NTA membership includes two Hawaii-headquartered lodging companies. Both provide a variety of accommodation types at multiple properties.



Aston Shores at Waikoloa

AQUA HOSPITALITY

Aqua Hospitality

NTA contact: Myna Eheler | meheler@aquahospitality.com
aquaresorts.com

Aqua’s 26 Hawaiian hotels and resorts are spread across Oahu, Maui, Kauai and Hawaii Island. The company’s Aqua, Instinct and Lite brands include luxury resorts, boutique hotels in serene settings and budget-conscious options.



Royal Lahaina Resort

HAWAIIAN HOTELS & RESORTS

Hawaiian Hotels & Resorts

NTA contact: June Pagdilao | june.pagdilao@hawaiianhotels.com
hawaiianhotels.com

The company’s oceanfront properties include the Royal Lahaina Resort (Maui) and the Royal Kona Resort (Hawaii), and both offer excellent backdrops for exploring the islands. The Royal Lahaina is situated on 27 square acres and includes a half-mile stretch of secluded beach. The Royal Kona Resort looks onto Kailua Bay and offers spectacular sunset views. ☺



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Go hog wild: NTA President Pam Inman and VISIT Milwaukee President Paul Upchurch invite you to the Icebreaker at Harley-Davidson Museum to kick off Travel Exchange '18.

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2 Attend Travel Exchange '18—reg is open! Join us in Brew City USA Nov. 4–8 as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, plays host to Travel Exchange '18. Visit NTAonline.com/convention to get all the details on NTA's annual convention. Use #TREX18 to join the conversation on social media.



3 Connect, create, collaborate at Contact. Travel buyers, this is your chance to gather in historical Charleston, South Carolina, April 18–21, for four days of partnering and education. Suppliers and DMOs can attend as sponsors. Registration is open, so sign up today at NTAonline.com/contact.

4 Join us on Capitol Hill. Join NTA, U.S. Travel Association, Destinations International and our sponsoring partners each March for Destination Capitol Hill. Meet your colleagues from across the U.S., visit with members of Congress and learn about key travel legislation.

5 Connect with NTA on social media. Tap into NTA's social media and watch your professional network grow. Follow NTA on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+ and YouTube.



6 Save money with Corporate Partners. The dollars saved with our Corporate Partners could pay for your membership! Get great rates on everything from insurance to office supplies.

7 Get educated. Earn your Certified Tour Professional credentials with NTA, and while you're at it, stay on top of industry trends with our education and research in *Courier* magazine, *Tuesday* e-newsletter and NTA Online.

8 Join FTA. NTA members can add a suite of Faith Travel Association benefits focused on the faith-based travel segment to their annual membership. You'll get access to exclusive content, programs and events.

9 Be an NTA leader. Leadership advisory groups give you the chance to shape NTA's future and make a difference. Current groups include: Member Solutions, Education, Advocacy, Hispanic Market, Young Professionals, Faith Travel and China Inbound.

10 Stand out from the crowd. Take advantage of your membership by advertising and sponsoring with NTA. We'll help you drive revenue by putting your message directly in the hands of qualified buyers. Get noticed at events and on NTA Online, as well as in print and digital pubs.

Questions? Reach out to NTA Member Solutions at headquarters@ntastaff.com or 800.682.8886 (U.S. & Canada) or +1.859.264.6540. ☎



COMMUNITY

NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE NTA FAMILY



KAMI RISK (TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM LEFT); BOB ROUSE (OTHERS)

Tourism Cares with Jordan—Feb. 24 to March 3—offered travel industry delegates an array of enlightening experiences and uplifting moments. Stay tuned for a more detailed account in the June/July issue.

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Meet the Members

PRESENTED BY **VISIT Clarksville**

Milne Travel

WEST LEBANON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

NTA contact: Emily Martel,
director, Milne Educational Tours

Office phone: +1.603.836.4699

Website: milnetravel.com

NTA member since: 2004

How long have you worked in tourism?

I started in the travel industry January 2, 2008, so 10 years! I've been at Milne Travel for over five of that, and I currently run our educational travel and tourism division.

How did the company get started?

Founded as a one-person, woman-owned business in central Vermont in 1975, Milne Travel has grown to be one of the largest travel businesses in New England. We have locations around the world as part of our equity partnership with ALTOUR.

What are a couple of your most requested destinations?

With our large network through NTA and American Express, we have the connections to deliver a unique, fully customized experience at a good value anywhere on our planet. Most of our educational tours go to Europe, and [we've had] a growing demand from customers around the world who want to visit New England, New York City and eastern Canada.

How does a group benefit by working with your company?

We work to make every itinerary a unique experience. In Italy it might be an itinerary with an agritourism and art/artist focus, or a lecture and conversation with local university professors. For school groups traveling to Boston, perhaps it's a tour of Fenway Park and a game, along with following the Freedom Trail and museum visits.



What is your favorite travel destination?

I fell in love with Italy while living in Orvieto—the people, the culture, the food, the language and its beauty—and, as the photo shows, I still visit. Regardless of how many times I go, Italy is always where I dream of returning to.

For more information, contact Martel at emily.martel@milnetravel.com.

Visit Tucson

TUCSON, ARIZONA

NTA contact: Jackie Ludwig,
director of tourism

Office phone: +1.520.770.2147

Website: visittucson.org

NTA member since: 1976

What's new and exciting in Tucson?

Tucson's food scene is exploding and so much fun right now. Tucson received the UNESCO designation as a City of Gastronomy in December 2015. Our farming techniques date back 4,000 years, and these techniques are still used today, along with natural food items like tepary beans and mesquite flour.

What are some of the must-see attractions in your area?

No. 1 is the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. This is an outdoor exploration of the flora and fauna of the Sonoran Desert. Sabino Canyon is my personal favorite. It's a riparian area and canyon where water flows about nine months

of the year. It's a spiritual place with calming energy.

Talk about The Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food travel idea you're promoting on your website.

With our Hispanic roots and proximity to Mexico, Tucson has the best Mexican food and celebrates mom and pop local Mexican restaurants, taco trucks, Sonoran hot dogs and El Charro, the oldest family-run Mexican restaurant in the U.S.—delicious!

What brought you to the area?

In 1982, Tucson was booming in the commercial real estate market. I was living in Atlanta, Georgia, and I was a Southern girl. My former husband asked me to marry him and move to Tucson. My response: "Tucson, where is that?" Thirty-six years later I am still here and love it!

What travel experience is at the top of your bucket list?



Rafting on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

What do you like to do on the weekend?

With 350 days of sunshine a year here, I enjoy golfing, gardening, hiking and outdoor barbecues with friends. I also love college basketball and watching our University of Arizona Wildcats! Go Cats!

For more information, contact Ludwig at jludwig@visittucson.org.

Zermatt Tourism

ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND

NTA contact: Amadé Perrig

Office phone: +1.623.388.3351

Website: zermatt.ch

NTA member since: 2007

What makes Zermatt such a special place?

The Matterhorn and the car-free village. Zermatt has been free of cars since anyone can remember. People get around on foot, by horse-drawn carriage and with electric cars. Zermatt is a mountain village with cosmopolitan charm, clean air and a unique atmosphere.

What are some must-see sites and attractions for travelers?

The Matterhorn glacier paradise (Klein Matterhorn); Kulmhotel Gornergrat, the highest hotel in the Swiss Alps; and the Gornergrat Bahn, the highest open-air cogwheel railway in Europe, which takes you in 45 minutes from Zermatt up to the 10,135-foot-high Gornergrat.

After going through aromatic stone pine and larch forests and across alpine meadows full of flowers, you arrive in the midst of 29 snow-covered mountains, including the Matterhorn.

What's your favorite season in Zermatt?

I prefer the summer season. The summer in Zermatt is colorful, and the weather is mostly wonderful. It's great for sightseeing and offers many sporting activities.

Is there anything new you're promoting in the area?

Zermatt Bergbahnen AG is planning to complete the world's highest 3S gondola lift by the 2018-19 winter season. The new lift to the Klein Matterhorn will be significantly quicker and more comfortable, and it will increase the carrying capacity to Europe's highest cable-car station by 2,000 passengers per hour.



What are your hobbies?

My hobbies are in sports, especially skiing, hiking, biking and golf.

Have you binged on a good TV series lately?

"Wheel of Fortune," because I know Pat and Vanna. Recently, the show featured Switzerland and Zermatt for an entire week and aired across the United States!

For more information, contact Perrig at amade.perrig@zermatt.ch.

Black Hills, Badlands & Lakes Association

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA

NTA contact: Michelle Thomson, CTP, president and CEO

Office phone: +1.605.355.3603

Website: blackhillsbadlands.com

NTA member since: 1980

What makes the Badlands so bad? (And by that we mean good.)

The Badlands are an incredible, other-worldly place—a harsh but amazing landscape that seems to go on and on, with colors changing depending on the time of day. The Lakota people were the first to call this area "bad." They called it "Mako Sica," which means "land bad." While the Badlands may seem bad, they are an experience I would recommend for any visitor to the region.

What are the top three types of groups that you work with?

We work with a lot of senior groups in the Black Hills and Badlands region. It's always fun to talk to our senior visitors,

who are either reliving a childhood vacation to the area or checking off a stop on a bucket list. Other top groups are international groups, and we are starting to get more groups with grandparents touring with their grandchildren.

How long have you been in the area?

I have lived in the Black Hills and Badlands region most of my life. I've been fortunate to travel to amazing destinations in my tour and travel career, and I'm always happy to return to this amazing place.

What's your favorite thing to do in your free time?

I enjoy experiencing the Black Hills—on four wheels, two wheels or on foot. It's incredible to me that after all of the years I have lived here and explored this destination, I've not come anywhere close to seeing it all. Whether it is experiencing our attractions, winding our scenic roads on motorcycle, or



four-wheeling and hiking the back roads, there is always something new to see.

Name a movie you have watched an embarrassing number of times.

"It's a Wonderful Life"

For more information, contact Thomson at michelle@blackhillsbadlands.com.

Visit Clarksville
Frances Manzitto
+1.931.245.4345 | 800.530.2487
frances@visitclarksvilletn.com
visitclarksvilletn.com

From our picturesque and historic downtown to our rolling countryside, Clarksville welcomes you with open arms. Bringing your group to Clarksville means a trip full of Southern hospitality, unique attractions and shopping, great food and memories that will last a lifetime. Find out more at visitclarksvilletn.com.

Introducing ... NTA's newest members

This page does exactly what the title says. These professionals represent organizations that recently joined NTA, and along with the other newbies listed on page 54, they give you new business opportunities and broaden your network of industry colleagues.



Marketing Manchester

NEW YORK CITY
DMO

Marketing Manchester is charged with promoting Greater Manchester (England) on the national and international stage to visitors, investors, conference organizers and students. The agency is the region's destination marketing organization and the tourist board for Greater Manchester.



Jeff Grillo
Route development
marketing manager
+1.212.850.0315
jeff.grillo@visitbritain.org
marketingmanchester.com

"In my spare time, I routinely traverse the globe, attend Nets games, cheer on my Portland Trail Blazers, seek out comedy shows, and play with new travel and tech apps."

Visit Galena Country

GALENA, ILLINOIS
DMO

With loads of small-town character, Galena offers visitors an educational tour through President U.S. Grant's home, a historical trolley tour and a haunted ghost adventure. Guests can also reconnect with nature, dine above the Mississippi River, and experience sensational wineries, breweries and a craft distillery.



Jay Allen
Director of sales and
marketing
+1.815.776.9200
jallen@visitgalena.org
visitgalena.org

"I have 10 years of experience in the tourism industry, and I am an avid sports fan (mostly baseball and football). I enjoy nature, craft beers and traveling."

Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG,
GERMANY
DMO

One of the most diverse areas in Germany, the Frankfurt Rhine-Main region offers visitors everything that is associated with Germany: great food and wine, half-timbered houses, and beautiful countryside with enchanting rivers, historical towns, friendly people and many opportunities for outdoor activities.



Charlotte Jakobsen
Project manager
+49.6201.60208.21
charlotte.jakobsen@
tourcomm-
germany.com
frankfurt-rhein-main.de

"I have worked for the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region since 2009. I look forward to meeting you in Milwaukee and taking you on a 15-minute journey to Germany."

The Logos Theatre



TAYLORS, SOUTH CAROLINA
Tour supplier

Audiences can attend the Logos Theatre with confidence that they will see an astounding professional production with an uplifting message. The facility functions year-round, offering live state-of-the-art productions in Upstate South Carolina with a 300-seat auditorium and a 20-foot diameter turntable.

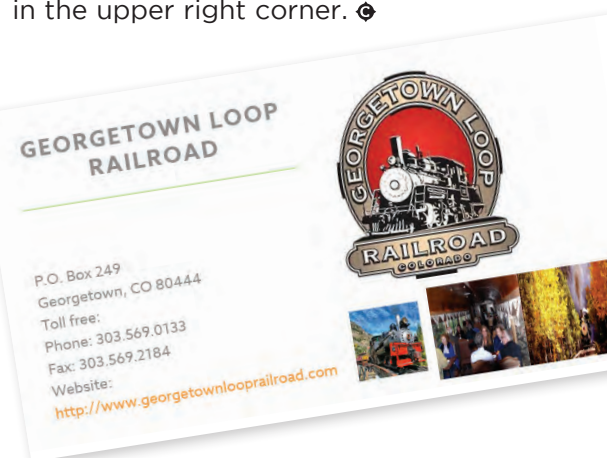


Becky Bourland
Tour director
bbourland@the
academyofarts.org
thelogostheatre.com

"I have always loved the thrill of live-performance theater, which is why I chose to make a career in it. I have two girls, ages 4 and 7, who keep me laughing at life!"

Profiles encouraged

Think of your member profile on NTA Online as a digital elevator pitch that other members rely on when making business appointments or conducting online searches. Is your profile up to date? To find out, log in and click the "welcome" words in the upper right corner. ☛





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—Blissful Buyer Ashley Landers

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COMMUNITY NEWS

NTA members are indicated in bold text. Do you have news you'd like to share with the NTA membership? Please send it to Gabe Webb, *Courier* writer, at gabe.webb@ntaservicesinc.com.



Vlamings named new Tourism Cares CEO

Tourism Cares appointed Paula Vlamings as its new CEO in March. Vlamings

has a history of launching successful social impact initiatives, and Tourism Cares Board Chairman **Derek Hydon** said the move matches Tourism Cares' mission.

"This transition reflects both our strong growth over the last several years and our commitment to harness the power of change through travel," said Hydon. "With new leadership and enhanced capacity in our social enterprise development, we'll deepen the impact of our initiatives and the value we provide our 200-plus members, our incredible partner network and the beneficiaries of our programs."

Vlamings is the former executive director of G Adventures' Planeterra Foundation, and she provided senior leadership to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy's Institute at the Golden Gate.

Previous CEO **Mike Rea** will aid in the transition and stay with the organization as its senior program advisor.

"Now more than ever, it's vital that travel and tourism providers integrate more closely with community-based organizations and conservation initiatives to create opportunities for the people and the places our industry cares about, while working to help distribute tourism more sustainably," said Vlamings.



Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB welcomes Simon

Ed Simon is the new senior vice president of convention sales and services for the **Greater**

Fort Lauderdale CVB. In this role, Simon works to grow the Broward County Convention Center's customer base and develop the DMO's sales teams.

"Ed's market expertise, industry connections and sales abilities fit perfectly with our goals to aggressively promote Greater Fort Lauderdale as a top-tier convention destination and drive greater

market share in quality meetings, group, convention and exhibition business," said **Stacy Ritter**, president and CEO of the CVB. "He is a great addition to the bureau in this leadership capacity."

Simon has more than 20 years of experience in tourism and hospitality. Prior to joining the CVB, he created the Association Meeting Buyers Collective, an organization for enhancing the buying power of associations. He also served as vice president of sales for Destination Hotels, where he oversaw brand-wide sales strategies for the company's 40 properties.

"With development at its peak and a growing international reputation for Greater Fort Lauderdale, the timing is ideal to launch a determined and fresh approach to group sales development," said Simon. "I'm excited to join the innovators at the bureau to help lead a new pathway to success."



Larry and Lorna Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays receive national honor

Larry and Lorna Hundt, founders of tour operator company **Great Canadian Holidays & Coaches**, were presented the Meritorious Service Medal by the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honorable Julie Payette, at a ceremony in February.

The medal was established to recognize exemplary Canadians, and the Hundts were selected for their commitment to promoting Canadian unity and pride. Since 1995, their company has used eye-catching graphics on its coaches to promote great Canadian women, Canadian sports achievements and other significant parts of the country's history.

Visit Oakland promotes Palma to VP of sales

Visit Oakland announced **Rhaneé Palma** as its new vice president of sales and

services. Palma was previously the DMO's director of sales, and her new role reflects increased responsibilities related to meetings and conventions business.

"We're extremely proud of Rhaneé and the success she has brought to the organization under her leadership," said **Mark Everton**, CEO of Visit Oakland. "The outreach, training and focus that the sales team has provided to our hotel partners has helped to build a solid relationship with the hotels' sales departments. Rhaneé has been able to leverage her experience with hotel sales to better promote Oakland through trade shows, familiarization tours and direct client contact."

Prior to joining Visit Oakland two years ago, Palma had been director of sales at the Hilton San Francisco Financial District.



Bardstown Tourist Commission hires new executive director

The Bardstown Tourist Commission hired **Mike Mangeot** as its execu-

tive director. Mangeot began his leadership of the Kentucky DMO in February.

Mangeot is a native of Frankfort, Kentucky, and served in the Kentucky Department of Travel and Tourism under Governors Paul Patton and Steve Beshear. In this role, he oversaw strategic planning, budget forecasting, and the creation of marketing plans for television, print, radio and the internet.

"I'm very excited to lead the tourism efforts for Bardstown and Nelson County," said Mangeot. "I know firsthand the assets that Bardstown has to offer, and my goal is to work with the distilleries, local attractions and businesses to expand upon the success and growth that you have seen over the past few years."

"Mike brings a very strong and diverse background in both tourism and economic development to the position of executive director," said Bardstown Mayor **Dick Heaton**. "Tourism is a major business for us, and I am confident Mike will help this industry grow and, at the same time, enhance the visitor experience here in Bardstown and Nelson County." 🍷

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NEW MEMBERS

The following list shows organizations that joined NTA recently. Companies that also joined the Faith Travel Association have an FTA logo by their name. To access complete information on each of these new members, log on to NTAonline.com and go to the member searches.

DMOs

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Kalynne Defever
Detroit, MI 48226-3240 USA
visitdetroit.com

Marketing Manchester

Jeff Grillo
New York, NY 10022 USA
marketingmanchester.com

South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Duane Parrish
Columbia, SC 29201-3756 USA
discoversouthcarolina.com

Tourism Victoria

Sarah Friesen
Victoria, BC V8W 1L6 Canada
tourismvictoria.com

Visit Galena Country

Jay Allen
Galena, IL 61036 USA
visitgalena.org

TOUR OPERATORS

BC Travel Inc.

Melody Hu
Monterey Park, CA 91775 USA

HTT

Chris Huang
Covina, CA 91724 USA

K K Travel Inc.

Kevin Le
Melville, NY 11747 USA
k-ktravel.com

Nepal Vision Treks and Expeditions Pvt. Ltd.

John Heather
Kathmandu, 44600 Nepal
nepalvisiontreks.com



RS Travel Development

Ruggero Scoma
Rome, 00199 Italy
rstravel.it



RV Tours Club

Lei Han
Ontario, CA 91761 USA
rvtoursclub.com

Tour Azores

Edward Demelo
Fall River, MA 02721 USA
tourazores.com

VTour USA LLC

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Las Vegas, NV 89102 USA
vtourusa.com

Ximeijia Travel Inc.

Fei Yang
Monterey Park, CA 91754 USA

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crowneplazamke.com

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doubletree3.hilton.com

DoubleTree by Hilton Grand Junction

Mandy Freese
Grand Junction, CO 81506-3906 USA
grandjunction.doubletree.com

DoubleTree by Hilton Times Square South

Evanthia Papadimitriou
New York, NY 10018 USA
nytimessquaresouth.doubletree.com

Driftwood Shores Resort & Conference Center

Tami Clark
Florence, OR 97439 USA
driftwoodshores.com

Glenn H. Curtiss Museum

Benjamin Johnson
Hammondsport, NY 14840 USA
glennhcurtissmuseum.org

Grand Canyon Destinations

Anthony Dobbs
Las Vegas, NV 89118 USA
grandcanyondestinations.com

Hampton Inn Manhattan 35th Street/Empire State Building

Darlene Kloris
New York, NY 10001 USA
manhattanempirestatebuilding.hamptoninn.com

Holiday Inn North Phoenix

James McCarthy
Phoenix, AZ 85029 USA
ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/phoenix/phxno/hoteldetail

Infinity Transportation Management

Liz Arnold
Des Plaines, IL 60018 USA
infinitytransportation.net

The Logos Theatre

Becky Bourland
Taylors, SC 29687 USA
thelogostheatre.com



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Anchorage, Alaska
March 18-21, 2020

Tales of Travel Exchange

Gaining business through brownies, Broadway and grit

BY MICHAEL WEINBERG, CTP



AS THE STORY GOES, Bertha Palmer, a well-to-do Chicago socialite and wife of Potter Palmer, who built Palmer House, needed an easy-to-carry dessert

to share at a planning meeting of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

Bertha summoned Palmer House's chef and charged him with creating something unique. The delicious brown confection—more dense than cake, topped with walnuts and an apricot glaze—was very well received.

And the brownie was born.

Bertha's brownie has remained a signature dessert at Palmer House Hilton, and adaptations and modifications to the original brownie are still enjoyed around the world.

Stories like this are great vehicles to engage the people with whom you interact at Travel Exchange. Here are a few examples of how this has worked for me.

During my appointment in San Antonio with Jenna Aukerman of Omanson Tour & Travel, I discovered that her clients love unique culinary tours. Jenna and I spoke in great detail about the brownie and its historical relevance to Chicago and the World's Columbian Exposition. Combining Jenna's clients love for unique culinary tours and accommodations, we uncovered one sweet experience for future clients.

Palmer House is the longest continuously operating hotel in North America and has created more than just the brownie, to be sure. So in order to give Jenna's tour some depth, we also talked about History is Hott—a lunch, lecture and behind-the-scenes tour of Palmer House Hilton, including a final stop in the pastry kitchen. Tour participants leave with a piece of edible history: a brownie baked from the original 1893 recipe.



LEIGH LOFTUS

As a result of our face-to-face appointment at Travel Exchange, Jenna has new ideas for a culinary tour to Chicago.

When you have the opportunity to meet intriguing people who share common interests, you create the foundation for natural partnerships with mutual benefits.

While mingling at a Travel Exchange evening event a few years back, I had the pleasure of meeting Michelle Hundt Tupman of Great Canadian Holidays, who loves Broadway. We were—and still are—huge fans of “Wicked.” In three hours—after “Who’s your favorite Elphaba?” and “What’s your favorite song?”—we had quietly sung tunes from the show, quoted lines as answers to questions and had a genuinely great time. Here’s the kicker: I hadn’t met Michelle until that night.

From that moment on, Great Canadian Holidays has selected Palmer House Hilton for their tour series in addition to other groups throughout the year, including when the Blue Jays play the Cubs at Wrigley Field. I’m always happy to hear from Michelle—and to sing her praises.

And talk about being in the right place at the right time.

“Hey Twingo!” someone shouted in the gate area of my Denver to Reno

flight back in 2009. It was a colleague of Globus’ Tracie Wingo, trying to get her attention. Reno was my first NTA convention, but I recognized Tracie’s name from my appointment requests and from doing research prior to the show. Within 10 minutes, I summoned the courage to find out if she was Tracie. Lucky for me, she was.

Each year, starting at Convention 2009, we had our usual seven-minute appointments, which included her saying, “We have a series to Chicago, but it’s not the right fit for your hotels.” But I kept at it and requested an appointment with her each year. And of course, I took the time to remind her of how we met and to find out what was new at Globus.

Then in 2016, my big break came. We won a new tour series for 2017, and we got the renewal for 2018. Sometimes it takes three years, and sometimes it takes longer. But the key is that you have to invest in Travel Exchange year in and year out.

Here’s one of the coolest part about the Globus series: Their final dinner includes a presentation about Palmer House Hilton by the hotel’s resident historian and the executive chef.

And what’s for dessert? Bertha’s brownie, of course. ☺

Michael Weinberg, CTP, is senior sales manager for Hiltons of Chicago. Reach him at michael.weinberg@hilton.com.



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