

DELIVERING BUSINESS ESSENTIALS TO NTA MEMBERS

JUNE/JULY 2020

Courier

A moment, please

National parks offer themes both timeless and timely

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Emerald Lake in Canada's Yoho National Park





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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

Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Central Europe

Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia

South Pacific

Australia, Guam, Hawaii, New Zealand

Asia and India

City Spotlight: Washington, D.C.

SPECIAL COVERAGE

Museums

DEADLINES

Space: June 5 | Material: June 15

► OCTOBER/NOVEMBER ISSUE

DESTINATIONS

America's Historic East

Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, D.C.

New England

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

South Central U.S.

Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia

Atlantic Canada

New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island

Egypt, Israel, and Jordan

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PUBLISHED BY NTA SERVICES, INC. Email: kami.risk@ntaservicesinc.com

COURIER (USPS 602270, ISSN 0279-4489) (Vol. 47, Issue 5) published eight times a year by NTA Services, Inc., 101 Prosperous Place, Suite 350, Lexington, KY 40509. Periodicals Postage Paid at Lexington, Kentucky, and additional mailing offices. Subscription rate is \$60 per year.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Courier*, 101 Prosperous Place, Suite 350, Lexington, KY 40509.

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Advertising rates are available upon request. For a change of address, subscribers may notify *Courier* directly, by email or letter.

COURIER'S MISSION STATEMENT

Courier aims to facilitate member-to-member partnering by spotlighting member product and destinations worldwide, to provide information on current industry trends and issues, and to inform members about NTA initiatives, events and benefits.



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Meet AC received funding through a grant from the New Jersey Department of State, Division of Travel and Tourism.



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WHAT DO YOU MEAN, *new normal*?

This two-word phrase seems to come up in every TV report, each newspaper story, all opinion pieces, and most conversations. You'll also see and hear variations, like "new abnormal" and even "abnormal new normal."

After months of this COVID mess, I'd say the new has definitely worn off.

Researching the phrase "new normal," I found several claims to its origination: after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, during a 2003 financial boom/bust cycle, and following the 2008 recession. The earliest citation, though, was from an article in December 1918, in the aftermath of World War I.

Lots of newness. Not much normality.

This is the second issue of *Courier* that was constructed remotely. All of us on the magazine team collected and created stories from home. That's been new for us, but it's not normal. I expect us to return to our HQ offices before long, although each of us might work from home a few days a week. Again: new, but not so normal.

I didn't read the 1918 article, but any new normal our post-war world settled into didn't last. It can't. Technologies emerge, inventions appear, attitudes evolve, and disasters strike. "Normal" is a rolling standard, an ever-changing



BOB ROUSE

Each sunrise is new, but not normal. This daybreak at Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah was unique, with a never-before-seen interplay of clouds and colors shining light on a day of novel events and interactions.

acceptance of settled patterns, activities, and beliefs. It's only natural that we seek firm ground—and take comfort in a predictable future—but it's an ongoing search.

Natural, maybe, but not normal.

Reading through this issue, you'll likely yearn to hit the road again and explore other destinations. From her newly established home office, Kendall Fletcher spotlights NTA members throughout Mid-Atlantic and Deep South states, pages 25–33. And from his ever-changing WFH scenes (see one example on page 37), Pat Henderson shows us the new level of natural beauty that he experienced in Norway, starting on page 22, and a cool collection of historical and fascinating national park sites, pages 16–19. I give a quick look at a place I hope to visit ... soon: Rapid City, South Dakota, page 20.

Although travel business is stagnant, the minds of travel professionals are bursting with imaginative ideas and timely innovations. On the next few pages—and in Bob Hofmann's essay on page 40—you'll see what members and friends are cooking up for coming days.

And as soon as the *Courier* team sends this issue off to the printer, we'll set about posting many of these stories on NTAcourier.com. We'll do it from our home offices, because that's just where we are these days.

That's our normal ... for now.

Read on,

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On the cover:

A photographer at Canada's Yoho National Park captures canoers on Emerald Lake.
Photo by Pat Henderson

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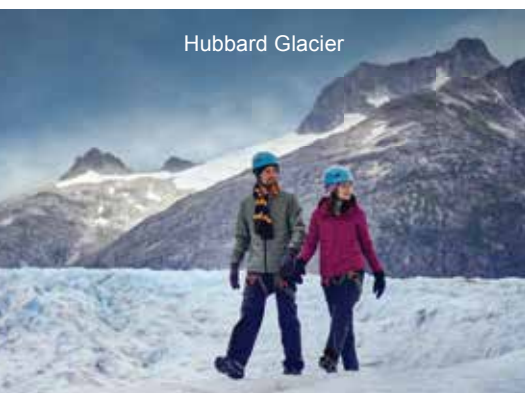
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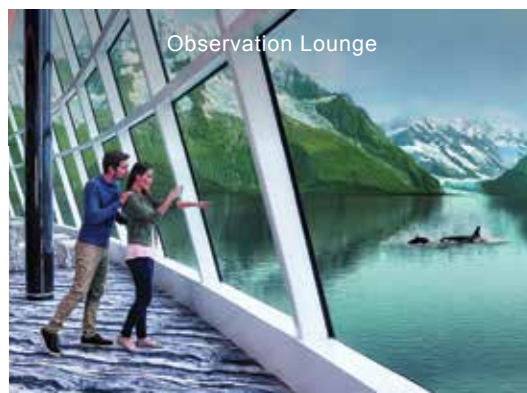
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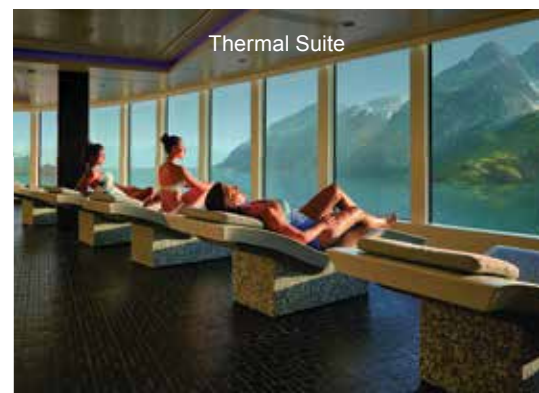
Hubbard Glacier



Observation Lounge



Thermal Suite





Jim Warren, CTP
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DURING THE FINAL luncheon at Travel Exchange in Fort Worth, I spoke about how my involvement with the NTA community had sculpted my 40-plus years in the travel industry. It was a personal testimony to the huge impact this association has had on my career. My speech was acknowledged with a standing ovation ... which turned out to be the rushed exit of delegates heading for their first afternoon appointment.

Still, I left the room excited to begin my role as Chair of the 2020 NTA board and thinking about the message of departing chair Paul Larson. He had talked about how NTA had adapted to the changing landscape of travel and was now in a great position to lead the industry into the future. I was pumped, motivated, and ready to charge into the new year!

Who could have imagined how quickly and dramatically our ability to adapt—and our very existence as a dynamic industry—would be so severely challenged? Here we are, only five months later, and reduced workweeks, furloughs, job loss, and a struggle to survive have become the norm. While many travel industry veterans have experienced major challenges before, none of us have ever faced a situation so unique and universal.

When dealing with past adversities, we have always relied on being part of an NTA community that pulled itself together and shared energy and resources to help each other survive and, ultimately, move forward. This crisis is no exception.

Catherine Prather has embraced her new role as association president and has led the NTA team into a variety of new strategic directions. They have focused on providing support and fact-driven information to members while at the same time preserving the integrity and leadership that have been the hallmark of NTA.

Many of you participated in the initial series of Zoom meetings that focused on

providing a platform for suppliers, DMOs, and tour operators to exchange information and ideas. These meetings were followed by a series of B2B and B2C sessions that enabled a more detailed sharing as government support packages were introduced. The NTA team has tapped our member resources to provide legal and financial information, and our Corporate Partners, like AON and VOX, have presented valuable Zoom sessions relating to insurance and to planning for the future.

In early May, Catherine hosted the first meeting of the Tour Operators COVID Task Force and has provided an NTA leadership in a multitude of industry sessions. And NTA was one of the key signatories of the recently released document titled “Travel in the New Normal,” an important first step toward reopening travel. It is the commitment of the NTA team to continue to provide innovative, timely, and valuable information and opportunities for our members.

There is more good news: The amazing wonders of the world that we package and promote will still be there when travel resumes. The castles of Europe, the wildlife of Africa, the Great Wall of China, and our national parks will be where they have been for centuries. What will be different is the manner in which we safely transport, accommodate, feed, and engage our guests.

I am confident that NTA will follow Paul’s prediction and lead the industry into the future with the creativity, partnership, and community support of our members. Christopher Reeve, the Superman of film, once said a hero is “a person who finds the strength to persevere and endure despite overwhelming obstacles.” Now is the time for the NTA community to be heroes for each other and our clients.

Be safe and be kind to each other. Together we go further ... as we create the future.

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Vivid lessons from history

Bonnie & Clyde's car, from the exhibition "FBI: From Al Capone to Al Qaeda"

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley is one of the most unique and beautiful tour destinations in Southern California. Where else in California can visitors walk onboard an actual Air Force One aircraft that flew seven U.S. presidents, touch an authentic piece of the Berlin Wall, and lay a hand on a real steel beam recovered from the World Trade Center after 9/11?

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Reagan Library has taken many steps to ensure our visitors are safe when our attraction reopens, from social distancing procedures and continuous cleaning of all highly touched surfaces to using top-of-the-line air conditioning ducts to ensure only clean air is filtered throughout the museum galleries.

At its heart, the Reagan Museum is dedicated to the life and times of Ronald Reagan, who served as the 40th president of the United States from 1981 to 1989. Tour groups immerse themselves in Reagan's path to the White House, learn about his eight years in office, and discover how he spent his post-presidential years. But the Reagan Library strives to be more than just a memorial to the late president. It is also a community resource with revolving world-class exhibitions, family-friendly events, and abundant public programming.

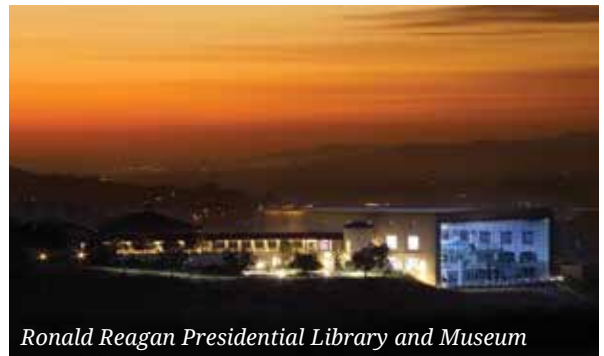
Later this year, visitors will be able to tour through our latest exhibition, "FBI: From Al Capone to Al Qaeda." (Check our website for opening dates.) In its worldwide premiere, "FBI" is a brand-new 11,000-square-foot exhibition that covers the history of the storied agency from inception to its modern-day efforts to fight domestic terrorism in the United States.

This is the first time that many of these remarkable, historical artifacts and pieces of criminal evidence have been on public display together, including the actual car Bonnie & Clyde were shot and killed in, a large piece of jet engine from one of the planes that struck the World Trade Centers on 9/11, and key artifacts from the Unabomber, Beltway Sniper, and Oklahoma City Bombing cases.

For more information on the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, including its upcoming exhibits and programming schedule, call 800.410.8354 or go to reaganlibrary.com.



Oval Office replica



Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum



Inauguration Address interactive exhibit

Crisis lessons learned

Connected California disasters show why tourism communities should have a plan

BY MICHELLE CARLEN



THE THOMAS FIRE, which began on Dec. 4, 2017, in the rural, mountainous area of Ventura County, ultimately burned nearly 281,000 acres. Through this wildfire and an ensuing disaster, I learned about the necessity to develop a mindset of preparation, planning, and adaptability—not only as it relates to crisis, but also to the business of tourism.

California had endured a drought for almost a decade back in 2017, and hot December temperatures, dangerous winds, and extreme dry conditions fueled relentless flames. Just a few days into the conflagration, the fire jumped the county line, spreading into Santa Barbara County. This region had seen fires before, but none quite like this. The flames raged for over a month.

At the time, I was working with a local tourism organization in the Santa Barbara region. The city hosted evacuees from Ventura County, where the fire began, and soon became home to local evacuees who filled the hotels and displaced tourists. Unhealthy air quality prompted others not located in evacuation zones to flee to neighboring counties to the north.

By the time Christmas came, the fire was still uncontained. Finally, in the first week of January, the fire was completely quenched. Many who had evacuated several times throughout the fire were now back in their homes. A credible sense of normalcy emerged, and residents of affected communities believed this terrible nightmare was finally over after the loss of many structures and a few lives.

But on Jan. 9, a new storm emerged and changed the course of events in ways that no one could have anticipated. Due to the forecasted rains, authorities issued a voluntary evacuation notice for people who lived near the Thomas Fire burn areas. Some residents evacuated, but some stayed.

A few miles south of downtown Santa Barbara is Montecito, an area that's home to celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres. Residents who disregarded the evacuation notice awoke at 2 a.m. to a torrential downpour that dropped several inches of rain in just under 15 minutes. The buckets of rain combined with previous drought conditions to send ash, debris from the Thomas Fire, boulders, and rocks tumbling down the mountains and through creek beds and ravines.

Devastating mudflows as tall as 10 to 12 feet tore toward the ocean, damaging or sweeping away structures in its path. Several miles of the 101 freeway, the area's primary traffic artery between Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo, were completely flooded at various points, impeding traffic in both directions. A more tragic outcome was the loss of lives.

When I went to work that morning and learned about the events from the internet and my colleagues, I heard helicopter after helicopter fly over, rescuing dozens of people who were trapped. Disbelief and deep sadness took over. During the Thomas Fire, our office had followed an existing crisis plan that enacted phone trees, a series of communications to locals and visitors, working with local authorities to ensure the accuracy of our information, and placing a pause on our regular advertising messages. We returned to that plan in the first days after the mudflow, and the media launched mass global coverage of the devastation.

When an emergency strikes, the basic process by which you conduct business changes, from your internal operations to your outward communications, as well as the loss of revenue due to cancellations.

Thomas Fire in California's Los Padres National Forest, Dec. 9, 2017



For weeks, sections of both the 101 freeway and the Amtrak railway were closed in south Santa Barbara County. Companies that were supplying goods to various areas in California faced a treacherous logistical nightmare. The California Department of Transportation relayed an alternate route that added hours extra to trips, causing severe disruptions of business.

The community was challenged by its grief over the loss of human life as well as homes, familiar buildings, and personal possessions. Balancing that grief with getting messages to the rest of the world, combating misinformation from the global media coverage, and maintaining an environment to support the local economy was a tall order.

Ongoing dangerous weather and possible flooding threatened for several weeks, and local authorities created evacuation maps and implemented reverse 911 calls to warn of new threats. Hotels offered special rates for displaced residents, and rooms filled up quickly. While many groups and leisure travelers canceled their commitments, others came anyway.

Through this twin disaster, I realized the complexity and critical necessity of developing a crisis plan. The five take-aways below outline my findings and best practices for tourism professionals, whether your job is with a destination, hotel, restaurant, attraction, or tour provider.

1. Always have a crisis plan in place, but remember to remain adaptable and flexible. Having a formal, well-thought-out crisis communications and operations plan is an absolute must. When (not if) an emergency strikes, the basic process by which you conduct business changes. From your internal operations with staff to your outward communications with potential customers—as well as the loss of revenue due to cancellations—changes are inevitable. But if you have a plan in place that everyone is familiar with, it will be easier to navigate through difficult times.

2. Never underestimate the importance of dealing with basic human needs during a tragedy. Even with a plan in place, you're not fully prepared to deal with all the traumatic circumstances and situations that present themselves in a crisis. Basic human needs of survival can become the currency. Business becomes a second priority. For example, you might manage a restaurant and need to feed groups of first responders—but most of your staff cannot get to work that day. The emotional ramifications of this type of stress are immeasurable, and you do whatever it takes to get through.

3. Ethical choices in business may not be what you think they are. During the twin tragedy I described, one of the common issues faced by hoteliers was continuing to host residents who were forced to evacuate and to not displace them for groups or travelers with reservations on the books. Each hotelier had to choose between honoring business commitments and being a family's only place to go. If you run a hotel, be prepared to rebook guests at a future date. If you are an operator, be prepared to renegotiate your contract and be fluent in what circumstances fall into your *force majeure* clause.

4. Communities grieve just as individuals do. What became evident during and following the Thomas Fire and the Montecito



Mudslide in Montecito, California, Jan. 10, 2018

Mudslide was that those outside of the community weren't clear when it was safe to start returning to the area. Several visitors I spoke with said they wanted to honor the community by staying away to allow time to heal from the tragic events. What was interesting was that this compassion was mostly shown by regional visitors and not so much from travelers arriving on long-haul flights. The farther away they came, the less of an impact the tragedy carried.

5. Honor a community dealing with tragedy by giving back. With the previous point in mind, it is important to start communicating to customers that they are welcome and encouraged to return for a visit. Bringing business back to a community not only helps healing, but it also supports the economy. In Santa Barbara, the impacted areas of both the fire and the mudslide were only in micro areas within a larger region, which was perhaps misrepresented by the media and led to the impression that the entire city of Santa Barbara had completely been lost.

A series of things—big and small—helped the community emerge from the crisis. Retail shops partnered to open their doors, offering special receptions and welcoming cash mobs to celebrate their businesses reopening. The AMGEN Tour of California, an annual cycling event, worked with the city and tourism officials to conclude a portion of its famous race, televised to millions of viewers globally, right through downtown Montecito, where much of the devastation had occurred. This was crucial from a media standpoint to show a positive image of the area and sign that Santa Barbara was once again open for business.

It's those lasting lessons of resiliency and collaboration that, in the wake of a crisis, encapsulate the power of community. 🌀

Michelle Carlen is the founder and president of Alignment Advising, a business and professional development consulting practice with an expertise in the tourism industry. Contact her at michelle@alignmentadvising.com or visit alignmentadvising.com.

Pivot to the pulse of your social peeps

BY CATHERINE HEEG



WHAT ARE your social fans thinking? Are they ready to travel again ... do they have confidence in our industry? Taking the pulse of your peeps may seem like a job for the crystal ball.

We don't want to appear tone deaf and risk losing clients, but there are a number of tools hiding in plain sight to help you understand the sentiment of your social fans so that you'll be able to do the following:

- Identify trends
- Pull together a staffing plan
- Identify influencers
- Learn more about your partners
- Identify marketing opportunities
- Assist with potential crisis
- Prioritize your engagement
- Respond quickly to concerns

Pulse of your peeps

Keeping up with what appeals to your fans is an ever-changing task, but you can do real-time testing in your next ad campaign. Split-testing your Facebook and Instagram ads (bit.ly/3aM6sD8) and using dynamic-ad testing (bit.ly/2wXRb4f) gives you the insight to understand the text, videos, graphics, and headlines that appeal to your fans.

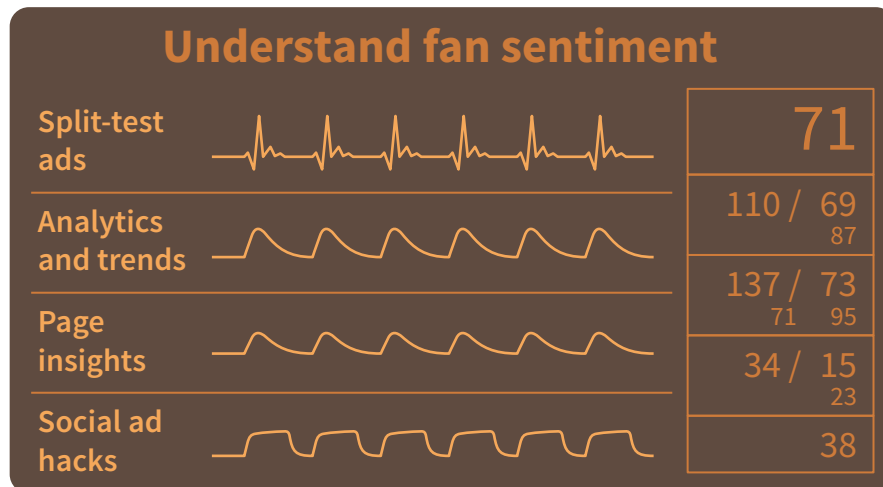
You can find out if aspirational wording appeals to your audience or if the timing is right to use some actionable wording in order to spur travel decisions.

In addition to ads, it's also worthwhile to send out short surveys by email to get a read on where and when your clients are considering traveling next.

Earn traction from trends

We all know that travel trends change constantly, and shifts in trends and consumer confidence are now easier to spot using the social analytics available right in our social channels:

Twitter trends are easy to find in your account under "Explore > Trending." Drill down and learn what your fans are



talking about now so that you can create relevant content with a travel slant. For example, if virtual potluck dinners are a trending topic, how about hosting a destination-themed virtual meal? While not everyone wants to travel just yet, creating mouth-watering experiences is a great way to tap into wanderlust.

Pinterest Analytics showcase the interests of your audience with surprising clarity. When you dial in to "travel interests," you'll find which regions are earning the most mind share. Getting more granular, you can tease out specific boards, pins, and pinners that are tops with your followers (bit.ly/2W4BXom). This opens up a playground of creativity for you.

Facebook Page Insights deliver a wealth of knowledge about your fan base. Examine your past posts to see which post style earns the most reactions (bit.ly/2vLRwWR). If you're posting about destinations, you'll have a better idea of which are most appealing to your audience.

Turn on "Pages to Watch" and add destinations, attractions, associations to your list to better understand their engagement. Then use that as a guide to help navigate and measure your own strategy.

Google Analytics is home to a wealth of knowledge about your website and social visitors. Get into the weeds and discover which blog posts command the most

traffic. Dive deeper to understand which keywords bring visitors to your website. Using these tools together to shape your travel itineraries, influence the tone of your posts, and guide marketing opportunities is a habit of savvy marketers.

Savvy social ad hacks

Did you know you can see what ads your suppliers, top destinations, and colleagues are running? That info is on every Facebook business page. Tapping into this key knowledge helps you understand what tone of voice, style of graphics, and content of video is earning eyeballs. Ad hacking is a great way to understand the pulse of the industry as well as study which hashtags are popular (bit.ly/2VeGPqF). You can then adapt your learnings to your own social strategy.

Capitalize on the analytics, metrics, and insights you can pull from your social platforms and websites so you can pivot during tricky times. Leverage this knowledge to pull together new tours that attract clients and feed their wanderlust. Only by understanding the pulse of your unique audience can you find the sweet spot for business success. 📍

Catherine Heeg, an international speaker and trainer, focuses on social media marketing strategies for the tourism and hospitality industry. Connect with her socially and at cmsspeaking.com.

We'll face COVID with cohesion

BY JONATHAN ELKOUBI



THE WORST is yet to come.

Only after the dust has settled can we truly assess the magnitude of the economic disaster of COVID-19: how many busi-

nesses couldn't make it out of forced hibernation; how many family members, friends, neighbors, and peers will have to cope with long-lasting changes to their work conditions; and how many within our industry simply won't have a paying job to return to.

This doesn't mean we should remain hopeless and helpless. Now is the best of times to dig deep, accept the new reality, and put our best foot forward to speed up the recovery of our fragmented industry.

Looking at my own skill set and the limited resources I had, I decided to tackle one major issue: the long-term impact of cyclical large crises on our industry jobs.

With the help of Marina Petrova, the owner of a competing business, we managed in less than a month to start HTTA.US and launch the U.S. Hospitality, Tourism, Travel and Activities Recovery Registry (www.htta.us) on April 16.

The nonprofit initiative and platform allows individuals within our industry who are unemployed or furloughed and have lost access to their work email and credentials to stay connected with associations, DMOs, and trade partners.

The HTTA database is completely confidential, and we hope to also use the anonymized data to better pinpoint which communities, which job categories, and which subsets of our sector will require the most help. Following our launch, the next phase is becoming a repository of educational resources; then will come gig boards, job boards, and volunteering/internship opportunity boards.

NTA provided us one of our very first endorsements along with strong words of encouragement: HTTA enables the

association to provide its leadership and guidance to our most vulnerable peers.

What led me to create HTTA? I kept asking myself what could give our industry a fighting chance, and I answered it with three words: cooperation, collaboration and innovation. Your competitors could become your strongest allies, your suppliers could become your first new clients, and your past clients could become your strongest advocates and talk about you in positive ways you never thought about.

Here are a few examples of how this approach could work for you:

Cooperate: Get in touch with local and regional peers and see if they're willing to form a pool for purchasing and storing face masks and sanitizer products. You can bet you will need a fair amount when you start accommodating guests and visitors again. With bulk ordering, you can mitigate the costs for your pool.

Collaborate: According to the National Sales Executives Association, 80% of sales happen between the fifth and twelfth interaction with a client. That's a lot of time and money spent before seeing some ROI. But imagine that you have created some new products that include the first markets to reappear—local and domestic—and it can be sold by some of your competitors with an even split

on margins generated. That could expedite the sales process, and you might get feedback from your competitor that helps you refine the product.

Innovate: Although our website is a technical platform, don't contemplate innovation only from the tech standpoint. Innovation is about looking at uncharted territories—and there are a lot right now—and testing something not attempted before. Perhaps you can talk to prospects you never approached before because they weren't in your typical client base. Or maybe you'll create tours you never considered before, everything from a local factory outing to a day at a local lake with socially distanced checkered picnic blankets.

For those of us in the travel community to support each other, we can embrace the three words that led to the creation of HTTA.US, and we can mention its existence to our colleagues and peers.

Although the worst is yet to come, what can the worst do to us if we are prepared for it and ready to show cohesion and resilience? 🍀

Jonathan Elkoubi, a former NTA Advisory Board member, is the managing founder of HTTA.US and a co-founder of VisitorTix.com, a B2B online activities marketplace. Reach him at jonathan@navew.com.



Piecing travel together

To resume tours, NTA professionals lean on science, resilience ... and each other

BY BOB ROUSE

WITH THE COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of travel came a clamor of questions—when and how, exactly, can trips come back? Although uncertainty remains, travel professionals are working together to find—and share—solutions.

An NTA survey of tour operators in mid-May showed that 60% of them don't expect travel to rebound in substantial numbers until 2021. Yet they foresee parts of the package—restaurants, retail, short motorcoach trips, and hotel stays—resuming between August and November.

NTA members are already working on how they can safely host guests again.

Phil Sheldon, president of Utah-based HE Travel, put together a comprehensive outline for deciding when to conduct tours to a destination. His considerations include government restrictions and the availability *and safety* of transportation, lodging, meals, and attractions—plus the things his company must do to prepare clients for travel and keep them safe once the tour begins.

“This started when a client asked how we were deciding whether to offer certain tours, and I developed a list of criteria with input from staff, tour directors, and clients,” Sheldon says. “I view it as a work in progress to be continually updated.”

Sheldon shared the outline with fellow operators and posted a summary of it in a blog on his company's website (bit.ly/2WxeBHS).

Laurie Lincoln, CTP, also consulted with clients. The president of Main Street Tours in Lakewood, California, Lincoln surveyed a cross section of her SoCal customers under stay-at-home orders. Consistent with the NTA survey, most of Lincoln's customers are comfortable with traveling again in the coming months—first by driving their own cars to meet at a venue and later, traveling by motorcoach, especially with all passengers wearing face coverings and with half the seats empty. Her customers also prefer limiting the number of hotels during a multi-day tour.



DEPOSITPHOTOS

“We asked if our travelers would feel safer not changing hotels night after night and instead, hubbing and spoking from one destination,” Lincoln says. “Nearly all prefer to stay at one hotel the entire tour.”

Ready for recovery

With their customers continually monitoring the risks and rewards of post-COVID travel, tour operators are counting on their DMO and supplier partners—hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc.—to create safe environments. And even before most restrictions are lifted, destinations and suppliers are spelling out how they'll prepare for guests.

Renee Eichelberger, CTP, of Explore St. Louis says her DMO is working with local partners to be ready for the recovery.

“Five task force groups were formed to develop operating protocols for the different tourism sectors: hotels, restaurants, attractions and venues, retail, and transportation,” she says. “Each group developed protocols in conjunction with public health and government officials, and they laid out operating procedures that include health screenings, sanitization, and cleaning mandates to keep employees and customers safe.”

Another NTA member moving forward with safety protocols is Maverick Helicopters, which runs sightseeing

tours of Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and the Hawaiian Islands. In an article on NTAcourier.com (bit.ly/2WxpucI), the company's Dan Flores shares both a flyer and a video that detail Maverick's procedures: temperature checks, minimized contact points, and thorough and frequent sanitization of flight terminals, helicopters, and equipment.

In the wake of the pandemic, tour operators are asking destinations and suppliers a big question: Who's open? Sheldon's rule of thumb is that if 20% of a program's tour components need to be changed—due to closure or an inability to safely handle groups—he'll need to explain those changes to his clients.

To address that same question, Eichelberger and her Explore St. Louis colleagues will place updated information on their website and social media platforms, and she advises operators to confirm with suppliers directly. NTA, too, is maintaining a spreadsheet of its member suppliers' reopening dates and operating hours as well as the steps they are taking to safeguard their guests.

Guiding tours

The trick for NTA members is to continue to provide top-level service and memorable experiences while operating within government guidelines and their

own organization's protocols. And members can help each other.

Whisper, an NTA associate member, provides radio systems that allow tour guides to communicate with group members while everyone is practicing social distancing, says Annette Morejon, president, whether they're distancing within the group or staying apart from other travelers.

"The guide can keep everyone engaged and connected and still allow participants to spread out and take pictures," she says. "And if the group is in an area that becomes crowded with other visitors, the guide can quickly instruct group members to move to a more open space."

The systems can be purchased or rented by attractions and operators, and the equipment can be sterilized so that travelers feel safe in using it.

Tour directors, too, are keeping

abreast of changes in the industry, says Ted Bravos, CEO and founder of the International Tour Management Institute, which trains and certifies tour directors and guides that work with many NTA members.

"ITMI is preparing for post-COVID tour operations," Bravos says. "With our partner NTA, we are collaborating with travel associations to create an online training program, and the ITMI certification will include CDC guidelines and recommendations."

Bravos says after ITMI directors and guides lost their entire spring tour schedule, they stayed connected and informed by taking online courses and storytelling classes, joining webinars and study halls, and even learning new languages.

"The initial shock has subsided, giving way to an eagerness to get back on the road," he says.

While operators are assembling the pieces of travel packages while staying abreast of each destination's regulations—and health experts' best practices—they

can take some solace from attorney Jeff Ment, an NTA Corporate Partner who specializes in travel-related issues.

"While some changes are likely to occur in the future, I do not think that we have to reinvent the tour operator model. Operators have *always* made the safety of guests a priority," Ment says. "But they do not have any greater knowledge about COVID than the general public does. Operators should work closely with suppliers and should, as a new standard, require guests to complete a pre-trip health questionnaire. This will create peace of mind for the travelers and protect the operator from liability."

Every member of the travel community seeks safety and security—for the health of their customers and staff, for tourism jobs, and for peace of mind. The hard part is figuring it all out.

"How we execute travel has changed forever," Eichelberger says. "But the reasons we travel and the benefits have not. It's just going to take all of us ... working together ... to adapt to the new way." 🌀

The formula for infection

A big piece of the protection puzzle is understanding how people get infected by a coronavirus. Erin S. Bromage, Ph.D., a comparative immunologist and biology professor at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, believes he can explain the risk of viral infection with an understandable formula: **Successful Infection = Exposure to Virus x Time**

In his blog (bit.ly/2zCfUvZ), Dr. Bromage writes that in order to get infected, you need to get exposed to an infectious dose of the virus, which he estimates to be 1,000 viral particles. With regular breathing, an infected person might put 20 viral particles per minute into the air, and if you were close enough to breathe in every one, you would accumulate the 1,000 particles needed for infection in about 50 minutes.

Speaking, though, increases the release of respiratory droplets about tenfold, to 200 virus particles per minute. Again assuming every virus is inhaled, it would take only five minutes of speaking face-to-face with an infected person to receive the required dose.

And for the really bad news: Respiratory droplets in a single cough or sneeze by an infected person can contain as many as 200 million virus particles, which would all be dispersed into the air around them.

It's enough to make you want to put on a mask.



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The London Eye

Lots to love in London

London is one of those places where it is hard to compile a must-do list because, well, there are so many must-dos.

Travelers who head back to England's capital once things clear up with COVID-19 need look no farther than the city center, which alone boasts bucket-list spots ranging from Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, and Parliament to Tower Bridge and the London Eye. That area is chock-full of top-flight museums, too.

Places such as the Tate Modern, which was the most visited attraction in the UK in 2018, and the British Museum lead the way. The latter is part of the city's Museum Mile—a group of more than a dozen museums and galleries found between the River Thames to the south and King's Cross on Euston Road to the north. Visitors touring these attractions get an in-depth look at myriad aspects of world culture, with an emphasis on both British and London history.

And, more intrepid travelers looking to blend sightseeing with a little adventure can get a unique perspective on central London by taking a guided paddling tour on the Thames. As they glide along the famous river, they will get excellent views of many of the top landmarks. A number of outfitters offer kayaking trips by day or night, and no experience is necessary.

For more information, contact Tara Barnes of VisitBritain at tara.barnes@visitbritain.org or go to visitbritain.com/trade.

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Kayaking near London's Tower Bridge



The Longfellow House

Boston's movers and shakers

The city of Boston has been a cradle to American democracy since the days before the United States even became a country. It has given birth or rise to thousands of influential men and women who helped shape history. The following four sites, managed by the U.S. National Park Service, offer a look at some presidents and creative types who lived in Boston.

Adams National Historical Park

This site pays tribute to the significant Adams family, which included presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, as well as their wives. The park includes their farm at the foot of Penn's Hill and a country estate at Peace Field.

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

Travelers can tour the grounds and watch a film about America's leading landscape architect, who moved to this home in suburban Boston in 1883. Olmsted is famous for designing such renowned public spaces as Central Park in New York City.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site

Rose Kennedy re-created her family's first home to share her memories of her family, which include son John. As guests tour the mansion and grounds, they will see artifacts and hear stories related to the early life of the 35th American president.

Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site

Decades after the mansion was the headquarters for Gen. George Washington and his men in 1775 and 1776, it was the residence of Henry W. Longfellow, one of the world's foremost 19th-century poets.

NOTE: Please check with National Park Service officials regarding the reopening of these sites. 🗝️



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North American national parks herald both ancient beauty and historic events for modern travelers

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

The more than 600 sites managed by the U.S. National Park Service and Parks Canada weren't offering services at press time (Mid-May), and many were closed due to COVID-19. This story includes details about a few of those special places, but be sure to check the status of programming with parks officials before you plan a visit.

Night-sky viewing is a popular activity at Utah's Cedar Breaks National Monument.



Avoid the crowds at these 6 Western park sites

With regional travel expected to be the reentry point for most North Americans as travel gets going again, the wide-open spaces at national parks will offer great options. However, even before the pandemic, some of the major parks in the U.S. and Canada—or specific sites within them—were experiencing issues with overcrowding.

With that in mind, here are a few compelling sites to consider that receive fewer visitors than major neighboring parks. These six gems, managed by the U.S. National Parks Service or Parks Canada, deliver unique experiences and plenty of natural beauty, just without the crowds.



Aztec Ruins National Monument

Aztec, New Mexico

Located 65 miles southeast of Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park

The monument has a number of intact structures that were built by the ancestral Pueblo people in the 12th and 13th centuries. A half-mile trail goes to a site that includes a series of buildings that served as the center of life for the tribe. The main feature is the West Ruin site, which has more than 400 rooms and features the reconstructed Great Kiva.

The visitor center, which was originally the home of local archeologist Earl Morris, includes a museum where travelers can see 900-year-old artifacts. "Aztec Ruins: Footprints of the Past" is a 15-minute orientation film that offers perspectives from native people and researchers on the importance of the historical site.



Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area

Lovell, Wyoming

The area's South District in Lovell is 65 miles from Yellowstone National Park

This large recreational area is split into two sections: a South District in Wyoming and a North District in Montana. The Wyoming part includes the deep gorges of Bighorn Canyon and Devil's Canyon, and has multiple hiking trails. There are four historical ranches in the area, with both self-guided and ranger-led tour options. Boat rides on Bighorn Lake and seasonal horseback tours also are available.

At the park's North District in Fort Smith, Montana, guests can enjoy a number of water sports. The Yellowtail Dam Visitor Center and Ok-A-Beh Marina are open from late May to early September. The North District is located 95 miles southeast of Billings, and it isn't directly connected to the South District.



Cedar Breaks National Monument

Brian Head, Utah

Located 55 miles west of Bryce National Park and 90 miles northwest of Zion National Park

While Bryce and Zion are mainstays of typical itineraries in southwestern Utah, Cedar Breaks offers similar red-rock scenery—along with abundant wildlife—with a fraction of the visitors. (In 2019 it welcomed just over 575,000 people while the big two drew 7 million.)

Hiking is a popular activity at Cedar Breaks, with the easiest option being a 2-mile walk on the paved Sunset Trail. The moderate Alpine Pond Nature Trail is a 2-mile double-loop through forested meadows with some altitude gain, and the Spectra Point & Ramparts Overlook Trail, which at 10,500 feet can be a puffer, offers sweeping views.

Special events, such as star parties and the annual Wildflower Festival in July, highlight the summer schedule.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE/ROB WHITMORE

PHOTOS, TOP: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; BOTTOM LEFT: CC WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/RATIONALOBSERVER; btl/y/3Mg3R; BOTTOM CENTER: CC WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/VICTORIA STAUFFENBERG; btl/y/2zyd



Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve

Cave Junction, Oregon

Located 140 miles southwest of Crater Lake National Park

Miles of magical passageways wind through the Marble Halls of Oregon, which lie in the recesses of the Siskiyou Mountains in the southern part of the state. The varying rock formations and the history of the vast caverns are the focus of three ranger-led excursions into this fascinating underground world.

The main offering is the Discovery Cave Tour, which is a 90-minute option that hits the attraction's highlights. True to its name, the Candlelight Cave Tour, available to no more than a dozen people, finds participants carrying flickering lanterns. The Off-Trail Caving Tour is the most strenuous option, as it requires participants to squeeze through tight spaces.



Wupatki National Monument

Coconino County, Arizona

Located 40 miles south of the Desert View area (east edge) of Grand Canyon National Park

Nestled between the Painted Desert and ponderosa highlands of northern Arizona, Wupatki has six orange-hued pueblos that are open to the public. Each represents early dwellings of the native Sinaqua Tribe, who settled the land from roughly 1100 to 1250. Two of the most famous sites are the four-story Wupatki Pueblo, which includes more than 100 rooms, and the Wukoki Pueblo, which has well-preserved spaces and narrow interior passageways.

Those ruins sites are easily reachable via a short trail that leads from the visitor center out into the sprawling prairie. Travelers also can check out the Wupatki Interpretive Garden, hike to a volcanic cinder cone, and take part in ranger-led programs that vary by season.



Yoho National Park

Field, British Columbia

Located 50 miles northwest of Banff National Park

This park in the Canadian Rockies is found in British Columbia, just across the Alberta border and a short drive from Banff and Lake Louise. Visitors are drawn to its soaring mountains—more than 25 peaks rise above 9,700 feet—steep rock walls, abundant pine forests, and scenic waterfalls.

Yoho's water-based attractions offer postcard-worthy views and plenty of photo ops. The accurately named Emerald Lake is a blue-green wonder that can be explored on foot via a 3.4-mile loop trail or by renting a canoe from the activity center. A drive along the Yoho Valley Road goes to one of the tallest waterfalls in Canada, Takaakkaw Falls. Longer hikes in the area lead to other falls.



Trinidad History Museum



El Pueblo History Museum



Ute Indian Museum



Center for Colorado Women's History at the Byers-Evans House Museum



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Selma to Montgomery exhibit at the Lowndes County Interpretive Center



African-American history takes center stage in Alabama

The state of Alabama is home to a number of sites—including five that are managed by the U.S. National Park Service—that help tell the story of steady, but sometimes slow, progress on civil rights and equality issues for African Americans.

“The NPS sites are located right in the areas where the historical events took place,” says Rosemary Judkins, sales manager for the state DMO, Sweet Home Alabama. “These sites offer an opportunity for us to walk in the footsteps of people whose courage changed the world.”

One of the well-known attractions is the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, which details the series of famous marches, led by activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., that took place in February and March of 1965. The first two marches included violent confrontations with law enforcement officials, with the earlier one being dubbed Bloody Sunday.

The third was a three-day walk from Selma to Montgomery during which federal marshals and the Alabama National Guard were brought in to protect the marchers. This historic journey was seen as a turning point and led to the 1965 passage of the Voting Rights Act that granted protections for African Americans.

Along the 54-mile trail between the cities, there are interpretive centers and significant sites, including the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma.

“The guides don’t just take people on a cookie-cutter tour, but they provide them with a firsthand perspective of what it was really like,” says Judkins. “It is very meaningful and powerful for visitors to hear the stories from people who actually experienced these important events. We know this can be a very transforming experience.”

The state added two more NPS-managed sites in January 2017, when the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and the Freedom Riders National Monument were established by outgoing President Barack Obama.

The new monument in Birmingham sheds light on the gruesome incident in 1963, when protesters were attacked by police dogs and sprayed with water from powerful hoses. Travelers can see the A.G. Gaston Motel, where activist leaders took up residence in April and May to direct efforts such as Project C, which was the issue that sparked the 1963 confrontation.

The Freedom Riders National Monument in Anniston recalls the incident two years earlier, when activists that opposed discriminatory laws requiring separation of the races in interstate travel were attacked on a bus by segregationists. A typical visit includes seeing the Bus Burning Site and the Greyhound Bus Station.

Located 40 miles west of Montgomery, the town of Tuskegee is home to the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site. These attractions recall an earlier chapter in Alabama’s African-American history—the time between 1881, when the university was founded, and World War II, when the first group of black airmen gained acclaim for their aviation expertise. The Airmen Historic Site includes vintage planes, such as the famous P-51 Mustang.

Judkins adds: “We are proud that Alabama is the place that can give visitors these types of authentic experiences.”

To learn more, contact her at rosemary.judkins@tourism.alabama.gov or go to alabama.travel.



Martin Luther King Jr. statue at Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma



P-51 Mustang at the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site

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Logging time with Abraham Lincoln

Before he became the Great Emancipator and the president who led the United States through the

Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was a farm boy in Middle America. The National Park Service can help Lincoln lovers trace the roots of the 16th U.S. president at its three sites relating to his formative years in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois.

At the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Hodgenville, Kentucky, travelers can see the place where the future statesman was born and spent the first seven years of his life. The site includes a symbolic one-room log cabin like the one where Abe was born in 1809. The visitor center offers an orientation film, and other activities include walking up the 56 steps to the Memorial Building and seeing the Lincolns' home at Knob Creek.

The family moved to southern Indiana in 1816, and that period of young Abe's life is covered at the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Lincoln City, Indiana. During a visit to the memorial, travelers can watch period reenactors at work on the Living Historical Farm (ca. 1820); go to Pioneer Cemetery to see the gravesite of family matriarch, Nancy Hanks Lincoln; and hike along one of the four trails.



Replica of the cabin where Abraham Lincoln was born

The next phase of the future president's life took him to Illinois, where he made his home in Springfield while he launched his law practice and political career. The Lincoln Home National Historic Site offers tours of the 12-room Greek Revival house that was Abe and Mary's residence for 17 years. Visitors also can explore the four-block area around the house that includes a dozen historical buildings from Lincoln's time. 📍

Good news regarding U.S. park regulations

In late April, the National Tour Association received a very positive update regarding the U.S. National Park Service's proposed commercial use authorization requirements. NTA President Catherine Prather, CTP, posted the following information on the association's Engage social media platform:

"In the midst of this COVID madness, we have some good news: We are hearing that the U.S. National Park Service has withdrawn its plan to standardize commercial use authorization requirements for road-based commercial tours, and the NPS will not increase commercial tour entrance fees. While there has been no official announcement yet and we are working to confirm this for sure, we are encouraged by what we have heard.

"This is a huge win for NTA and all of the travel associations that lobbied against the proposed changes to the CUA program. While the word standardize sounds positive and efficient, the significant expense and extra paperwork for tour operators would have been anything but positive, and the twice-delayed roll-out of the plan reflects the confusion that surrounded it."

To learn more, contact Prather at catherine.prather@ntastaff.com.



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CITY SPOTLIGHT

Rapid City

BY BOB ROUSE

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL for groups to spend a day in and around Rapid City during a trek through the Dakotas. But it's OK to settle in for a few days, too, according to Lindsey Myers.

"I always encourage groups to do a hub and spoke, because Rapid City is a central spot for the Black Hills travel experience," says Myers, director of group sales for Visit Rapid City. "You can visit lots of places without rushing off to another hotel."

And in the wake of the COVID crisis, travelers will appreciate the area's open-air vibe.

"Our destination lends itself to outdoor activities: hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking, and camping," Myers says. "You can breathe in the fresh air and feel rejuvenated. And because we have so many trails, social distancing is easy."

Along with revealing the outdoor splendor of the Rapid City area, Myers can keep visitors busy exploring museums, cultural sites, shops, and restaurants.

"We have themed itineraries for one day and more, and a group can customize it to fit their interests," she says. Here's a sampling of those itinerary ideas:

Native American Discovery

The Black Hills of South Dakota are rich in Native American culture and history, and visitors can hike and explore sites that



Thomas Jefferson statue in the City of Presidents installation

VISIT RAPID CITY

have meaning to regional tribes: Badlands National Park, Crazy Horse Memorial, Devils Tower National Monument, Wind Cave National Park, and Bear Butte State Park. In town, groups can learn about local tribes and their art at several museums and galleries.

Wild for Wildlife

Travelers can visit Bear Country USA, a drive-through wildlife park where the deer and the buffalo roam (and bears, elk, cougars, and more), and nearby Reptile Gardens. At NTA-member Custer State Park, guests can drive the park's 18-mile Wildlife Loop Road and get close-up views of 1,500 buffalo along with bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and prairie dogs. Also in the park, Blue Bell Lodge Stables offers guided horseback tours.

One- to five-day itineraries

Myers can build five days' worth of exploring and sightseeing in the Rapid City region, one day at a time.

1 Downtown A day in town can include visits to museums and shops and a stroll through the City of Presidents, 44 life-size bronze statues of past U.S. presidents positioned along streets and sidewalks. The City View Trolley makes narrated stops throughout town and gives a fantastic view of Rapid City along Skyline Drive.

2 Central Black Hills The highlights of this day are Mount Rushmore National Memorial and its 60-foot-tall faces of four U.S. presidents and the colossal Crazy Horse Memorial, an NTA-member attraction focused on a gigantic carving of Lakota leader Crazy Horse that's being blasted from a mountain. Both sites offer in-season shows in the evening.

3 Northern Black Hills A departure heading west from Rapid City features stops at the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum and the Fort Meade Museum, a drive through Spearfish Canyon, and a visit to the Wild West city of Deadwood.

4 Southern Black Hills This day includes activities at Custer State Park, a visit to an archaeological dig site near Hot Springs that has yielded 59 mammoths, a herd tour at the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary, and a return to Custer State Park for a hayride supper.

5 The Badlands Before entering the moonscape terrain of Badlands National Park, groups can stop by Wall Drug for specialty shopping and famously free cups of ice water. Stops at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Red Cloud Indian School, and Oglala Lakota College Historical Center offer insightful looks at Native American history and culture.

During the summer, visitors can expect warm days and cool evenings. And if the weather turns gloomy, Myers has got you covered. Ask about her Rainy Day in Rapid City itinerary. ☔



Bison herd at Custer State Park

GREG VALLA/OLD

For more information, contact Visit Rapid City's Lindsey Myers at myers@visitrapidcity.com or go to visitrapidcity.com.

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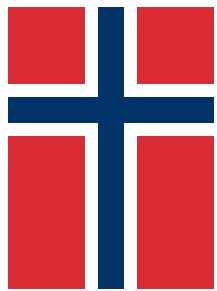
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Norway

Unnatural levels of natural beauty

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PAT HENDERSON

OK, LET'S GET ONE THING straight right away: Norway is a gorgeous place.

Thanks, Captain Obvious.

I was counting on plenty of oooh-and-aaaah scenery during my 10-day adventure—planned by Monique van Dijk-Seppola of longtime NTA-member Scandinavia Tours—but this beautiful country, with its rugged mountains, captivating fjords, and miles and miles of coastline, far exceeded my expectations.

The point was particularly brought home during a tour in Bergen at Trolldhaugen, the house museum of renowned composer Edvard Grieg. I saw period furnishings, personal artifacts, and other things typically found in a historical home, and a bonus was a piano concert featuring Grieg classics.

Somewhere during “Once Upon a Time,” my eyes drifted past pianist Rune Alver to the wall of windows behind the stage that offered a view of the wooded hillside and Nordås Lake. I was struck by the fact that, even inside this quaint concert hall, I was still able to experience the natural splendor.

You see, Norway's beauty is always right there.

Fjord country near the Gudvangen
Viking Village

A special thanks to Scandinavia Tours' Monique van Dijk-Seppola and her excellent network of local partners who made this unforgettable 10-day adventure possible. Contact her via email at monique@scandinaviatours.no or go to scandinaviatours.no to learn more.

Lillehammer and those majestic mountains

In Norway, if you draw breath, you get outside and enjoy winter. That idea is born of necessity—as the country knows its way around snowy winter days and chilly temperatures—but part of that is also just how Norwegians roll.

That ethos was on display right away, as Monique opened our action-packed and well-paced February tour with a showshoe trek and a dog sledding experience at the Spidsbergseter Resort Rondane. It was a crisp, sunny day when we put on our snowshoes, and the peaceful 90-minute journey on the mountain was magical.

After a break for lunch, it was time for dog sledding. While I am pretty scared of dogs—bad experience as a child—mushing across the tundra of the national park behind the skilled team of canines was a treat.

Next up was Lillehammer. Located in the mountains (are you noticing a theme yet?), this city seamlessly blends a quaint, ski-village vibe with an urban sensibility. Based on fond memories of watching the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, I had been looking forward to exploring it.

Lucky for me, one of the attractions we visited was the Norwegian Olympic Museum. It tells the story of the 1994 games, as well as when Oslo hosted the Winter Games in 1952, and is chock-full of exhibits with memorabilia and equipment pertaining to the country's many Olympic heroes.

The museum is located on the grounds of another of the city's top attractions, Maihaugen. This living-history park, which includes more than 200 relocated buildings, offers many snapshots of Norwegian life across the centuries.

I particularly enjoyed a re-enactor presentation about daily life in rural Norway in the late 1930s and seeing the Garmo stave church in the museum's open-air section. Originally constructed in the early 1200s, the church was carefully dismantled and later reassembled at Maihaugen in 1921.

We also visited Hunderfossen Winterpark and enjoyed a tasty farm-fresh meal in one of the group dining rooms. The



Nature looms just outside the Trolldhaugen concert hall

grounds were bustling on a Friday night with performances and activities (most were geared for pre-teens). The colors and craftsmanship at the ice castle, which included an altar, various sculptures, and four bedrooms that accommodated overnight guests, were amazing.

The next morning before we left Lillehammer, Monique had one more snowy adventure in store: tobogganing at the Olympic Center. Willing participants can head up the mountainside via tow rope and then zoom to the bottom at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour.

Just like the snowshoeing and dog sledding, the activity made me feel like a kid again, and I loved it!

Captivating coastal Bergen

I'd heard a lot about Bergen from two of my siblings, who had visited as part of cruises they'd taken over the past decade. I'm a sucker for any place that combines the mountains and ocean, and this charming spot along Norway's western coast did a fine job of delivering both.

We stayed in the waterfront district, Bryggen, which is part of a UNESCO World Heritage site. The colorful local guide for our walk around the historical area regaled us with tales of how the shipping industry allowed the city to become the nation's economic hub starting in the 14th century. The tour concluded with a ride up to Mount Fløyen, which offers panoramic views

of Bryggen, the more modern city center, the surrounding mountains, and the outlying islands.

We closed our brief but excellent 30 hours in Bergen with the aforementioned visit to Trolldhaugen. The concert was great, and equally enjoyable was being able to roam the grounds of this beautiful hilltop house museum.

A side note, but the staffers at the Clarion Hotel Havnekontoret were amazing. They were so hospitable and paid incredible attention to detail. They put us in two of their well-appointed suites, which spoke volumes about how much they value relationships with their tour operator partners like Monique.



Dog sledding at the Spidsbergseter Resort Rondane

MONIQUE VAN DIJK-SEPPOLA



NTA's Pat Henderson and Scandinavia Tours' Monique van Dijk-Seppola at Hunderfossen Winterpark



Garmo stave church at the Mauhaugen open-air museum in Lillehammer



The historical Bergen waterfront



The Oslo Opera House from across the harbor



Fantasticness in fjord-y Flåm

I won't say Monique saved the best for last, but the final stretch of the trip in the Flåm area was a real highlight. This UNESCO-recognized region includes picture-perfect fjords, colorful communities, and jagged peaks.

We began our exploration at the Gudvangen Viking Village. Our dry-witted, costumed guide delivered a thorough history lesson on the life and times of the marauding Vikings who settled here as far back as the 11th century.

Next, we boarded *Future of the Fjords*, the first all-electric vessel to be used for sightseeing boat tours, for the ride to Flåm. (You can read more about the cutting-edge, eco-friendly vessel at NTACourier.com.) The ship cut a winding path between the snow-capped peaks of Nærøfjord, and even the nip in the air couldn't keep me from taking more than 100 photos as the sun was going down in this fairy-tale setting.

The following morning was bittersweet, as Monique and I exchanged a few last laughs at breakfast before we parted ways. Spending more than a week showing me around Norway had put her a little behind on the regular tasks it takes to run a tour operator business, so I was on my own.

My day consisted of another snowshoeing tour—this one through the tree-laden Aurlandfjord area—and a ride on the famous Flåm Railway. Consistently ranked as one of the world's most scenic train excursions, the ride from Flåm to Myrdal was an hour of neck-craning goodness as I tried to catch each spectacular view along the way.

Oslo, and a fitting final act of hospitality

After catching a different train to Oslo, I spent my final full day on a self-guided walk around Norway's capital city that took me to Parliament, the Oslo Cathedral, the Royal Palace, the Nobel Peace Center, the Munch Museum, and Ekeberg Sculpture Park.

I'd tried to go on a tour of the Oslo Opera House, a stunning building set on the waterfront, but the tour in English was sold out. I noticed that "Madama Butterfly" was playing that night, but there were no tickets left for that, either.

All my years of going to sporting events and concerts led me to think someone might have an extra ticket nearer to show time, so after all my walking I headed to the stately Opera House a half hour before the first curtain.

When I inquired at the box office, they gave me a mobile number to text about a ticket. The woman who met me in the lobby said she had an extra seat by hers. I think my story of "first time in Norway, just hoping to see a show" struck a chord with her, and she gave me the ticket for free.

"Madama Butterfly" was brilliant, and after the cast took its bows, my new local friend and I exchanged goodbyes and hugs (still OK at that point). When I thanked her again for her generosity, she smiled broadly and said, "It was my pleasure; I'm glad you enjoyed the show."

That genuineness, and her gesture, was a fitting final example of the wonderful hospitality I'd experienced throughout my Norwegian adventure. 🇳🇴

Mid-Atlantic

COMPILED BY KENDALL FLETCHER

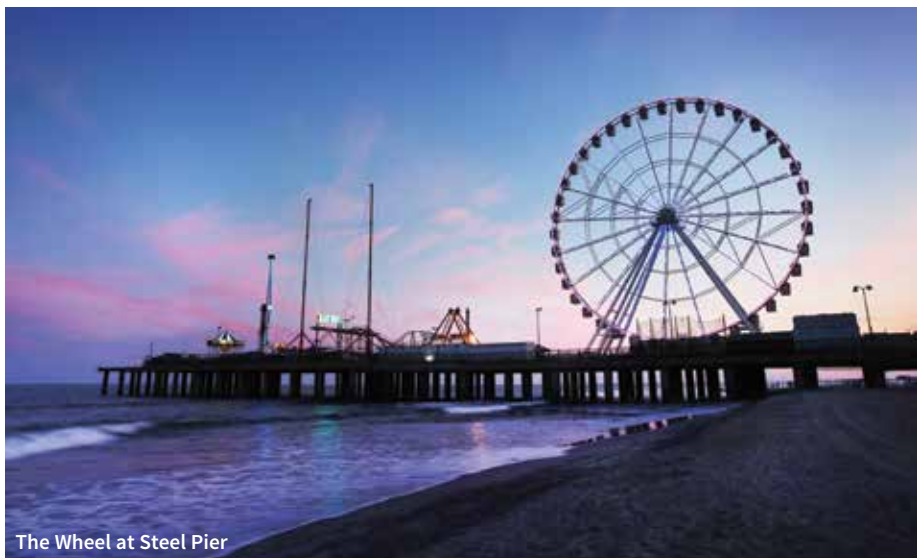
AC is easy

The seaside New Jersey community of Atlantic City is dotted with restaurants, casinos, shops, and other lively attractions, many connected by its famous boardwalk. Meet AC provides a variety of detailed itineraries for visitors, and its staff can help customize the perfect trip for groups.

Here are some highlights from those itineraries:

Life is Better at the Beach It's free to visit the beach in Atlantic City, so visitors can spend their summer vacation days strolling white sandy beaches searching for shells. They can grab drinks at the many beach bars, visit Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville entertainment complex, or find adventure while windsurfing, parasailing, or taking a surfing lesson.

Wine and Spirits The Wine Trail winds through rural South Jersey with 15 wineries to hit. Located in Hammonton just 45 minutes from Atlantic City on a horse farm, Sharrott Winery offers up cheese boards, wine flights, and a patio with exquisite views of the countryside vineyards. And Little Water Distillery is the area's first and only craft distillery to produce whiskey, rum, vodka, and gin.



MEET AC The Wheel at Steel Pier

Thrills and Chills Steel Pier is home to The Wheel, the city's newest attraction and the third-largest wheel in the U.S., with 40 temperature-controlled gondolas. Meet AC recommends boardwalkers take a sunset ride to see cotton candy skies. For a higher view, Steel Pier Helicopters offers shoreline flights, and the Reef Oasis Bar sits 1,000 feet over the ocean. Funnel cakes, ice cream, pizza, games, and amusement rides make Steel Pier a carefree experience by the sea.

For more information, contact Heather Colache at hcolache@meetac.com or go to touratlanticcity.com.

Hit the road in Hagerstown

Hagerstown and Washington County tout their very own "open-air museum" in the Maryland Historic National Road, which holds a significant place in America's transportation history.

"It covers a lot of ground and offers many group itinerary ideas," says Visit Hagerstown's Betsy DeVore. "When you use the National Road Scenic Byway, you'll see engineering marvels and historical landmarks, including original mile markers. You can dine and shop at businesses located at the sites of original taverns and inns that catered to travelers on the road in the 19th and early 20th century."

Here are some of the unique stops along the way:

Hagerstown visitors can travel the Hagerstown Cultural Trail in City Park and discover the public art displays. Schmankerl Stube Bavarian Restaurant serves up German-inspired fare, and the Meinelschmidt Distillery will be the newest watering hole, set to open in 2021. They can also catch a show at the Washington County Playhouse Dinner Theatre.

Boonsboro is the stomping grounds of romance novelist Nora Roberts, and she owns several businesses in town, from the group-friendly Vesta Pizzeria to the Turn the Page Bookstore, where she holds book signings throughout the year. Roberts' bed and breakfast, Inn Boonsboro, has nine literary-themed rooms. The National Road Museum, scheduled to open in 2021, will be Maryland's first museum dedicated to America's first federally funded highway.

C&O Canal National Historic Park highlights the passage created along the Potomac River to transport goods from Washington, D.C., to Western Maryland. In the towns on the canal's shores, travelers can visit attractions like the Antietam National Battlefield, the famous Blue Goose Bakery, and a restored aqueduct and working lock that can be seen on a 1900s era boat ride.

There are many more sites to see. For further information, contact Tiffany Ahalt at tiffany@visithagerstown.com or go to visithagerstown.com.



Antietam National Battlefield

Cruising Lake George

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, there’s still plenty to do in the Lake George Area while following social distancing guidelines. Walk around a beautiful Adirondack town, summit a mountain for a stunning view, or enjoy your favorite takeout food in front of the lake. Everything will be back to normal soon,” says an announcement on Lake George Area in New York’s Adirondacks’ website.

And even when there’s not a virus to consider, Lake George is a prime area to revel in the beautiful outdoors. Here are some suggested to-dos:

Take a scenic drive on the Dude Ranch Trail (and stay in one). The 40-mile journey lets travelers take in views of Lake George and the Hudson River from their car windows. One of the many horse ranches along the trail is the Painted Pony Ranch, an authentic Adirondacks dude ranch. Cabins on the property have full kitchens, cable TV, and Wi-Fi, and guests can enjoy outdoor fire pits, a private beach, horseback riding, and hiking to the state park.

In a typical summer, the Lake George Steamboat Company offers daily cruises aboard three different vessels. In addition to sightseeing excursions offering views of the sparkling lake



Lake George Steamboat Company sightseeing cruise

CC FLICKR/RON COGSWELL: bit.ly/zrDFX

waters, passengers can take cruises themed on fireworks, local music, and comedy. Groups can also get on the lake in the fall to view mountain foliage.

Usher Park is a notoriously quiet beach in Lake George Village, with two pavilions for group gatherings as well as picnic tables and tennis and basketball courts. Visitors can grill out, swim in the shallow waters, and bask on the sandy beach shores.

For more information, contact Lake George Area in New York’s Adirondacks’ Tanya Brand at brandt@warrencountyny.gov or go to visitlakegeorge.com.

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Photo: Pete Albert

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Source: Maryland Park Service Annual Report, 2017

York County delights

The south-central Pennsylvania county of York touts big-city conveniences with small-town charm—as well as local flavor.

“If farm fresh food is something you crave, you’ve come to the right place,” says the CVB’s Communications Specialist Chrissy Tobias. “From delicious ice cream made steps away at a full dairy operation to farmers markets and farm-to-table restaurants, you can get your fill of the best Mother Nature has to offer. You can even pick your own apples and other fruits if you come at the right time of the year.”

With the CVB’s two-day Sweet Treats & Salty Eats Tour, York County travelers can visit facilities with household names, like NTA-member Turkey Hill Experience, where they can create their own ice cream flavor (and take home a pint of it). Another local find is The Markets at Shrewsbury, an Amish farmers market where visitors can shop for items from more than 20 merchants—from baked goods to fresh meats and cheeses. They can also sit down for a meal in the market’s on-site Pennsylvania Dutch eateries.

For more information, contact Danielle Sanders at dsanders@yorkkpa.org or go to yorkkpa.org.



Taste Lab at Turkey Hill Experience



Hops and heritage

Lancaster, Pennsylvania’s newest experiential tours were launched late last year, and Discover Lancaster’s Joel Cliff says loKal Experiences crafted them with groups in mind.

The Authentic Amish Country Tour shows guests the oldest settlement in the county, an Amish creamery, and a farm where they can bottle-feed calves and milk cows. Lancaster is steeped in more than 250 years of Amish history, and NTA-members Amish Farm and House and Amish Experience are also teachers of that past.

The Lancaster History & Craft Beer Walk’s themes have roots that intertwine. The city history walk that winds through Lancaster’s charming streets includes the birthplace of the Conestoga wagon, Colonial churches, and the country’s oldest operating theater and farmers market. Groups will also stop at several craft beer establishments and learn how the libations were inspired by the city’s German history as well as by Prohibition.

For more information, contact Olivia Novak at onovak@discoverlancaster.com or go to discoverlancaster.com.

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Winterthur Museum & Gardens

Of florals and family homes

Though most of Wilmington's garden attractions have temporarily closed due to COVID-19, the flowers will still bloom. And the gardens will reopen, welcoming guests to take in their extraordinary color and design once again.

Here are some of those attractions near the northern Delaware city.

NTA-member Hagley Museum & Library is home to two restored, functional gardens—one that fed the du Pont family and the other that fed the company workers of the on-site du Pont gunpowder mills. The historical complex, which includes the du Pont ancestral home, sits on 235 acres along the Brandywine River. New this year is a pollinator garden that teems with a variety of butterflies and bees.

Winterthur Museum & Gardens, the childhood home of Henry Francis du Pont, boasts 1,000 beautiful acres of rolling hills, streams, meadows, and forests. On the grounds are a fairytale garden called Enchanted Woods as well as thousands of Kurume azaleas and wildflowers in the Azalea Woods. Afternoon tea is offered in the Cottage Tea House on the museum grounds.

Nemours Estate's exquisite French-style gardens were inspired by the Palace of Versailles, and they feature a one-acre reflecting pool, a boxwood maze, and woodland walking trails. The 77-room mansion was built by Alfred I. du Pont for his second wife, and its Chauffeur's Garage houses a collection of antique luxury motorcars from the 1920s.

For more information, contact Jennifer Arrigo of the Greater Wilmington CVB at jarrigo@visitwilmingtonde.com or go to visitwilmingtonde.com, or email Tina Madanat at the Delaware Tourism Office at tina.madanat@state.de.us or go to visitdelaware.com/groups.



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Deep South

COMPILED BY KENDALL FLETCHER

The water's fine in Charleston

Although travel is on a temporary halt, the beauty of the South Carolina coast remains, and Charleston's exciting offerings on the water—and its well-known charm—are awaiting eager travelers.

"When you get to Charleston, you'll want to find the hidden places in the Lowcountry that only locals know about. There's where we come in," says Jennifer Cecil, sales manager with Explore Charleston. "You can go on a paddle with dolphins breaching nearby or take a sunset boat cruise up a secluded waterway. You can explore with a naturalist guide or camp on an underdeveloped barrier island."

One local outfitter, Coastal Expeditions, offers adventures on the water with unique elements—like a search for shark teeth. The Morris Island Shark Tooth Boat Tour takes groups from Shem Creek dock into the Charleston Harbor to catch glimpses of bottlenose dolphins, manatees, and Eastern brown pelicans before docking. Participants are then led by a naturalist along the beach to hunt for shark teeth and other fossils.

Captain Sam's Spit Dolphin Kayak Tour takes Charleston visitors closer to the abundant coastal wildlife. Tours begin at the oak-shaded Farmhouse at Kiawah River and go through a salt marsh, where participants meet pods of friendly bottlenose dolphins and many species of birds on the 5-mile paddle. The kayakers then bank on an inlet (Captain Sam's Spit) for a seaside picnic and some beach wandering before heading back.

Cecil is excited about a new land-based attraction:



FIREFLY DISTILLERY

Firefly Distillery

Firefly Distillery.

"Nestled amongst live oaks and Spanish moss, and a stone's throw from the beautiful Noisette Creek, the newly built Firefly Distillery is located near Park Circle, just up the road from downtown Charleston. Groups can tour the distillery and learn about the distillation process from the fine folks who make the spirits, and all tours include a sample of your choice from any of the Firefly brands."

She also noted the distillery has created its own hand sanitizer.

For more info, contact Cecil at jcecil@explorecharleston.com or go to charlestoncvb.com.

Mississippi movements and music

There are a couple things groups will always find in the Magnolia State: fascinating storytelling of well-known, Mississippi-bred musicians, and rich history covering the state's role in the civil rights movement.

Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo, and visitors can see his birthplace at the Elvis Presley Museum and Memorial Chapel along the Mississippi Country Music Trail. The little white house, where the Presley family resided about three years, was built in 1934.



Mississippi Civil Rights Museum

VISIT MISSISSIPPI

"A larger-than-life bronze statue of Elvis Presley is located in Fairpark, where he performed homecoming concerts in 1956 and 1957, and it's now a favorite photo op for Elvis fans from all over the world," says Karen Matlock, domestic group tour manager for Visit Mississippi. "Groups can also visit the Tupelo Hardware Store where he bought his first guitar."

Another stop along the trail is the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi in Cleveland. With 28,000 square feet of multimedia exhibits, the museum offers discounted group rates, VIP group add-ons, special gift shop discounts, and other benefits for operators.

"The museum is a powerful celebration of music that includes cutting-edge exhibits, rare artifacts, films, and interactives, which together provide a one-of-a-kind visitor experience," Matlock says.

When travelers get to the state's capital (and most populous) city of Jackson, they can visit the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, which focuses on the important years between 1945 and 1976, when events in Mississippi reshaped the nation. Eight interactive galleries provide an in-depth interpretation of the oppression of black citizens and the historic fight for equality. Groups of 10 or more receive discount pricing on admission, and the museum can accommodate groups up to 200 people.

For more information, contact Matlock at kmalock@mississippi.org or go to visitmississippi.org.

Take me to church in Alabama

The North Alabama Hallelujah Trail is a 16-county journey for groups to fill up on soulful experiences. The churches along the trail were selected during an intensive two-year research process, according to the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association website.

The trail's sites, which include a variety of building styles and congregations, can be places of inspiration for faith-based groups or spots to explore for lovers of Southern history and architecture. While some of the churches feature exquisite detail, others are simple in their design—and both evoke beauty and reflection. The churches along the trail include the following:

Temple B’Nai Shalom in NTA-member destination Huntsville was designed in Romanesque Revival style, and groups can take guided tours of the building by appointment.

Shiloh Methodist Church in Allgood is a lovely example of a traditional church building, with boards original to its 1878 construction.

St. John’s Episcopal Church originated in 1880 by New Decatur settlers. The building, erected in 1893, was turned from a north position to face the east. It’s the only true Gothic-style church in the city.

The Tabernacle’s cedar logs shelter its pews but there are no walls, allowing the sunshine and the Holy Spirit to pour in. Its heritage in Hartselle is traced to the holiness movement of the 19th century.

For more information, contact Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association’s president, Tami Reist, at tami@northalabama.org or go to northalabama.org.



Shiloh Methodist Church



The Tabernacle

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Beltlines and skylines

Full of history, arts, and adventure, Atlanta is bustling with activities that the CVB's PR Specialist Lindsey Ford says are great for groups—and they speak to the current climate, too.

"The Atlanta BeltLine is notable since it is perfect for physical and social distancing," she says. "It is a loop that will one

day connect 45 different neighborhoods and feature several trails, green spaces, and outdoor places to rest and eat."

Many parks and trails have been developed as a result of Atlanta's urban revitalization program. Lovely natural surroundings make the many trails ideal for biking, and visitors can take an Atlanta BeltLine Arboretum walking tour with a docent through the Eastside and Westside trails. Path 400, once complete, will add 5.2 miles of greenway through Buckhead that will connect to the BeltLine.

Seven miles of the BeltLine is dedicated to the arts—from sculptures and murals to performance art spaces. Art on the Atlanta BeltLine allows visitors to explore the permanent collection as well as changing exhibits.

About 15 miles east of Atlanta is Stone Mountain Park. The famous attraction has 3,200 acres of nature where visitors can camp, golf, and hike or bike along a 5-mile paved road or a 1-mile trail to the summit—or fish and canoe on a 363-acre lake. With each season comes festivals and holiday celebrations in the park, and groups can also take a scenic railroad tour aboard a 1940s open-air locomotive or see the top of Stone Mountain as well as the Atlanta skyline on the Summit Skyride.

For more information, contact Brandy Hudgins at bhudgins@atlanta.net or go to atlanta.net.

Atlanta BeltLine



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Tallahassee tales

Groups visiting the northern part of the Sunshine State can find intriguing history in Tallahassee's collection of attractions.

"Tallahassee's unique charm and style is derived from the undeniably pretty and often unexpected features found in Florida's capital," says Visit Tallahassee's Katie Gardocki.

The city was once at the forefront of the civil rights movement, and the downtown Tallahassee-Leon County Civil Rights Sidewalk is a special landmark memorializing important figures involved in history-altering events.

"Five months after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, two Florida A&M University students took action, leading to a seven-month standoff and bus boycott. There were several sit-ins in the early 1960s at a Woolworth lunch counter, which led to arrests and the first jail-in of the civil rights movement, when eight students opted for jail time rather than pay their fines," Gardocki says.

The Knott House Museum stores a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was first read to Floridians on May 20, 1865, and a re-enactment of the reading is part of an annual celebration on that day each year.

Inside the Carnegie Library on Florida A&M University's historical campus is the Meek-Eaton Black Archives Research Center & Museum. It is only one of 10 such museums in the country, and it acts to preserve and display information about Africans and African Americans and their contributions that shaped the U.S.

On the National Registry of Historic Places, The Grove Museum is one of the best-preserved Greek Revival residences in the state. Visitors can see the 10.5-acre grounds and hear

the stories of the beautiful Call-Collins House. Guided tours focus on slavery and civil rights and their relevance to the multi-generational home.

Cascades Park, also on the National Register of Historic Places, is a 24-acre redeveloped green space featuring miles of diverse, multi-use trails and an amphitheater. The Smokey Hollow Commemoration, Korean War Memorial, TLH Art Structure, and Florida Prime Meridian marker can also be found there.

For more information, contact Gardocki at katie.gardocki@visittallahassee.com or go to visittallahassee.com.



VISIT TALLAHASSEE

Part of the Tallahassee-Leon County Civil Rights Sidewalk

Happy trails!

Amid the pandemic, the Louisiana Office of Tourism's Charlie Whinham shared an insight on how the DMO is moving forward: They're promoting the outdoors, as it offers social distancing practices that fit well with smaller recommended group sizes.

"One overlooked gem is certainly the Kisatchie National Forest," he says.

Its 600,000 acres make it one of the largest protected lands in the state, with more than 100 miles of recreational trails.

"It's packed with outdoor activities, including hiking, camping, fishing, horseback riding, birding, swimming, boating, hunting, and road and mountain bicycle riding. It's located throughout portions of central and north Louisiana off Interstates 49 and 20," Whinham says.

The grounds of the Kisatchie National Forest are sanctuaries where people can reconnect with nature. It is home to many old longleaf national pines, nicknamed "super trees" (some more than 200 years old), and visitors can look out for armadillo, wild turkey, deer, and Louisiana black bears that are known to roam the land. The Catahoula Hummingbird and Butterfly Garden is a tranquil spot to watch the forest's fluttering residents.

The Wild Azalea Trail is nearly 24 miles of sectioned hiking, bursting with color in the spring. The Sugar Cane Trail, lined with wildflowers, winds around Caney Lake with varying terrain.

The Caroline Dormon Trail is popular among horseback riders, with designated horse trailer parking and easy access from the Longleaf Trail Byway that stretches 10.5 miles through the forest. The Hayes E. Daze Ranch's guided horseback riding tours last up to three hours and are for all skill levels.

For more information, contact Matthew Cope at mcope@crt.la.gov or go to louisianatravel.com. 📍



Scenic overlook at Kisatchie National Forest

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Germany and Switzerland

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

Appina Travel showcases Germany's hidden gems

With its romantic medieval villages, natural beauty, vibrant cities, and culinary heritage, Germany includes a mix of activities for first-time and 21st-time visitors. Headquartered in the large European nation, longtime NTA-member Appina Travel can help tour operators plan a well-rounded German adventure.

"Our team comes from different areas of Germany, so we know every region inside out," says Denise Buchanan, Appina Travel's sales manager, North America. "This allows us to choose the most authentic restaurants, offer the best guides, and take you to the hidden spots. We always make our travelers feel like locals!"

She says one of the country's lesser-known gems is Thuringia, a mountainous region that is home to medieval villages and museums highlighting its food: the Bratwurst Museum and Thuringian Dumpling Museum.

"You also find villages of historical importance like Weimar, a city of Bauhaus architecture and once the classical literature center of Germany, and Eisenach, where you can visit Wartburg Castle—an important place of Martin Luther's life and the Reformation."

Located an hour's drive from Dresden, the Ore Mountains in Saxony offer scenic beauty and an uncrowded atmosphere. The area is famous for outstanding woodworkers, and guests can see demonstrations by the talented craftsmen who create works of art, such as the Erzgebirge Christmas pyramid. It also is home to many nature-based touring options that range from hiking to skiing.

Even in bustling Berlin, Buchanan says travelers can find a peaceful oasis or two.



Denise Buchanan of Appina Travel checks out some Berlin street art.

APPINA TRAVEL

"You must check out the street art and urban gardening in Berlin," she adds. "You can discover a special kind of vegetable garden in the middle of Berlin's 'concrete desert' and marvel at the view of the city. This communal garden—located at a former airfield—also is a top spot for cultural and social exchanges."

"The Appina team is here to help, ready with lots of ideas to help you navigate the future of travel in Europe," Buchanan says. "We are offering the same rates for 2021 as 2020 as well as an incentive to help you with marketing."

To learn more, email Buchanan at denise.buchanan@appina-travel.com or go to appina-travel.com/en.html.

An update on Oberammergau



Christian Utpatel

As tens of thousands of visitors from around the world were preparing to head to Germany for the renowned Passion Play in Oberammergau this year, news broke that it would be postponed until 2022 because of COVID-19. To get an update on the event, *Courier* checked in with Germany-based faith-travel expert Christian Utpatel of Terra Lu Travel.

Courier: What has the response been from your clients to the two-year postponement?

Utpatel: Instead of finalizing the last details toward the group travel season for Oberammergau, everything had to be dismantled and worked backwards. All our clients had the chance to cancel and get a refund, or stay with what they have and postpone to 2022. Almost half postponed, and most of the rest said that they only want a refund now to reorganize and will start with new bookings as soon as possible.

On a personal note, I'm really thankful for the good partnerships with NTA members. Every one of our NTA clients was great to work with, and the mood was one of partnership and friendship.

Courier: How will things change with the event being held in 2022?

Utpatel: It moves me a lot to realize that the coronavirus pandemic hits the very roots of the Passion Play. It was in 1633, in the middle of the Thirty Years War, after months of suffering and death from the plague, that the Oberammergauers swore the oath to present the Passion every 10 years.

And now we are here in our modern world, and again realize the threat of a disease. Actors have already told me that their understanding has changed because of the current personal experiences, and I'm sure the Passion Play will be even more intense and meaningful when it premieres on May 14, 2022.

To learn more, contact Utpatel at utpatel@terra-lu-travel.com or go to passionplay.travel.



The Montreux Riviera

4 spots to experience Swiss charm

“Switzerland is known for unspoiled nature and breathtaking scenery in the heart of the Alps,” says Martin Oester, the sales and marketing manager–North America for Switzerland Tourism. “It is not exactly a mass tourism destination, with small places, short distances, and easy-to-reach destinations.”

He cites cities such as Basel, Montreux, Locarno, and St. Gallen as examples of the places that offer both rich culture and a quaint feel.

“Those cities are clean, modern, diverse, and full of history,” Oester says. “You’ll discover a wealth of museums, prime shopping, and entertainment—all within walking distance—once you arrive.”

Basel, Switzerland’s third-largest city, boasts the highest concentration of museums in the country with 40. Its Old Town area mixes ancient and modern architecture and is a popular spot for photographers. The northwestern Swiss city also is the most familiar of the group to river cruisers, who frequently stop as part of excursions on the Rhine.

The combination of mountains, vineyards, and lake views are all part of the allure of Montreux. The city on the Swiss Riviera, which Oester calls “an authentic little piece of paradise,” is a major draw for travelers seeking beauty, tranquility, and inspiration. While the renowned

Montreux Jazz Festival announced it won’t take place in 2020, this signature event will return next July for its 54th year.

Locarno is known to have the warmest climate in all of Switzerland. Palm trees and lemon trees flourish in the coastal southern city, and they give it a welcoming charm not seen elsewhere. Travelers can enjoy relaxing at Piazza Grande, checking out the restaurants and shops along Lake Maggiore, and watching art-house movies each August during the city’s renowned film festival (cancelled in 2020).

St. Gallen is a compact metropolis in eastern Switzerland that is known for its traffic-free old town area. The Abbey of St. Gall complex, which dates back



On the Rhine in Basel

to the 8th century, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its library contains some of the some of the oldest and most precious manuscripts in Europe.

To learn more, contact Oester at martin.oester@swisstravelsystem.com or go to corner.stnet.ch/trade-us. ☎

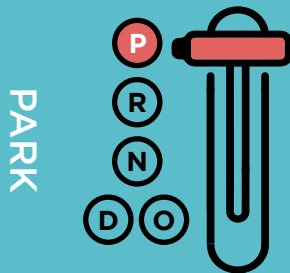
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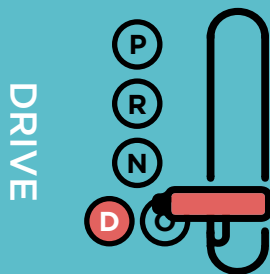
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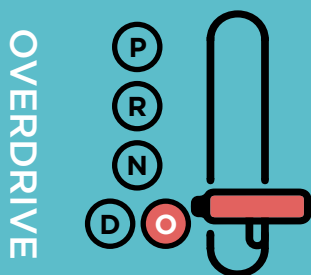
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COMMUNITY

NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE NTA FAMILY



KELLI HENDERSON



With many NTA'ers working from home these days, we invited a few to give us a look at their current setup.

1. *Courier's* Pat Henderson and his free-wheeling work space
2. Nancy Dacres of Québec City Tourism (and Napoleon)
3. Lorna Sierolawski of the Canadian Museum of Nature (and Phoenix)
4. George Herrera of Visit Phoenix (staying on brand with his "Together We Rise" apparel)

Meet the Members

Bedford Area Welcome Center

BEDFORD, VIRGINIA

NTA contact: Nicole Johnson

Office phone: 877.447.3257

Website: destinationbedfordva.com

NTA member since: 2007

What makes Bedford such a special place to visit?

Located in the Virginia Mountains Region, Bedford is full of natural beauty, with views of the iconic Blue Ridge Mountains at almost every vantage point. It has a small-town feel but offers big attractions. We're a great place to visit if you love the outdoors and enjoy supporting small, locally owned restaurants and shops.

What are some of the sites to see?

We're home to the nation's only D-Day monument, the National D-Day Memorial, which tells the story of the famous Bedford Boys. Just down the road is Thomas Jefferson's personal retreat, Poplar Forest, which offers guided tours and special events. And a visit to Bedford wouldn't be complete without

a boat ride on Smith Mountain Lake and its 500 miles of shoreline.

Have you ever visited a destination that surprised you?

I've always been a fan of staycations and exploring your hometown, as well as locations within a two- to three-hour drive. A place I fell in love with on my very first visit is The Omni Homestead Resort in Hot Springs (Bath County), Virginia. My first visit was for work, but return trips included my family. (I have two kids, ages 2 and 9.) The resort itself is historical and beautiful, and the mountain setting is breathtaking.

What's a hobby of yours?

I have always loved photography, which has served me well in my tourism job. Many of the photos we use on social media and elsewhere are photos I have taken!

For more information, contact Johnson at njohnson@bedfordcountyva.gov.



Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce & CVB

SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA

NTA contact: Jennifer Harrison

Office phone: +1.805.925.2403

Website: santamariavalley.com

NTA member since: 1988

What can travelers expect when they visit your area?

They'll find wide open natural spaces. The Santa Maria Valley offers a plethora of hiking and biking, as well as other outdoor activities that they love to explore.

What are you looking forward to for your area when travel reopens?

The Santa Maria Valley prides itself on being an affordable destination where we treat our guests like family. Pair that with our award-winning wines and world-famous Santa Maria-style barbecue, and it's a destination like no other. We are eager to welcome our visitors back so they can experience everything we love so much and what makes us unique.

What's on your travel bucket list?

I would love to see Italy one day! Living in a wine region has made me curious about other



wine regions, and what better way to get to know them than to visit them in person?

You get to pick dinner tonight, and it can be anywhere in the world. Where are you going?

Jamaica for sure! So many flavors and influences are incorporated into Jamaican cuisine that it would definitely be at the top of my list.

What do you like to do on the weekends?

We are fortunate to be surrounded by wine country and year-round beautiful weather, so being outdoors, wine tasting, and exploring is pretty typical for me.

For more information, contact Harrison at jennifer@santamaria.com. ☎

Introducing ... NTA's newest members

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Associate

U.S. Bank offers payment solutions to all companies and has a strong presence in the travel industry. The company's physical cards and virtual cards are efficient tools for the travel industry that will save NTA members time and earn revenue share on their spend.



Jacqueline Williams

Vice president, partnerships
& virtual payments
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usbank.com
usbank.com/index.html

"I have served on various NTA committees going back 25-plus years. I enjoy the people, the enthusiasm, and the heart of the hospitality industry. I look forward to sharing useful financial tools with NTA members as we strive to thrive during this difficult period. I am a proud mom. As a family, we enjoy traveling, and Japan has been our favorite country thus far."

Northern Vision Development

WHITEHORSE, YUKON

Tour supplier

The company owns and operates six of the Yukon's leading hotels, each with convenient downtown locations, exceptional hospitality, uniquely Yukon atmosphere, and modern, comfortable rooms. The properties include Best Western Gold Rush Inn and the Edgewater Hotel in Whitehorse and, in Dawson City, the Downtown Hotel, home of the world-famous Sourtoe cocktail.



Dylan Soo

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yukonhotels.com

"I fell into the industry 23 years ago from woodworking and trades to talking to people. I love road trips; Route 66 has been a highlight of my travels to date and Greece is a close second. I love Kentucky for the bourbon and Japan for the food. I would like to add the Nordic countries, Spain, and Brazil to the list!"

Travelwell LLC

DÜBENDORF, SWITZERLAND

Tour operator

Travelwell offers premium one-of-a-kind, exquisite, and off-the-beaten path tours in Switzerland away from the major tourist streams. From touchdown at the airport until takeoff for your flight home, all essential parts for unique memories are included in its vacation packages. The company's speciality is making arrangements for travelers who desire and deserve the difference.



Marc Nordmann

Owner and CEO
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"Since 1997, I've owned and run Travelwell. It is great fun to show guests our unique country of Switzerland! If I am not traveling, I am to be found on water—rowing or sailing." 🚣

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**Not all benefits/discounts are available for all members. These discounts are offered through NTA Corporate Partners, not NTA.*

What keeps me hopeful

BY BOB HOFMANN



Like the entries to most travel experiences, Broadway's doors are shut tight, and no one knows when the next curtain will rise. The uncertainty is scary ...

the way forward so clouded in debate ... and trying to keep it all straight is frustrating. I know those are feelings that we all share in this nightmare.

And yet, I know we can be hopeful.

The relationship between Broadway and travel is great: 65% of Broadway's audience comes from beyond the New York City metro area, and many of those dearly appreciated theater-goers make their way into their seats with a little help from a friend, who just happens to be a professional travel provider.

I was hired long ago to build a closer relationship between Broadway and the travel industry. Well-versed in the world of theater, I was clueless about how the tourism business functioned. The wonderful staff at what was then known as the

New York Convention and Visitors Bureau became my tutors, particularly Nancy Austin and Carolyn Flores. They pointed me in the right direction and I followed their lead, a remarkable journey that really started at my first NTA convention.

Seattle, 1991 (Maybe '92. I'm sure there's an "Old War Horse" out there to fact-check me.) ... I'm sitting in the resource center studying brochures—yup, print—in preparation for my appointments. Jane Buck and Shirley Richter (now Hughes) interrupted my progress.

"Hello," Jane said. "Looks like you are a first-timer. I'm Jane. This is Shirley. What's your name?"

"I'm Bob. Nice to meet you," I said, turning back to my brochures.

Jane continued, "Do you play golf?"

I looked up, a little confused, "I do, when I can."

Shirley chimed in: "Us, too. Do you like to dance?"

"Sure," I replied. "Sometimes."

"Great. Meet us in the lobby tonight for a drink. We're taking you to the icebreaker."

Icebreaker, what's that? I thought.

And meet them I did. They introduced

me around the room, in the lobby, on our way to the party, at the bar, on the dance floor, in the hospitality suite, and throughout the ensuing week and, truly, in the years to follow. (We finally played a round of golf in Birmingham a few years later, with Kevin Brewer as our fourth.)

I met so many people that week in Seattle, many of whom I still know, love, and work with today. Now, *that's* an icebreaker.

Research is critical, no question, but honest dialogue, collaboration, communication, understanding each other and our businesses, being there in both celebration and need ... that's what creates true connections.

What I loved about the people of the theater, I discovered in my travel friends as well: They're compassionate, creative, and caring individuals—motivated by a joy for life—who make the most of the opportunities and experiences that life presents, valuing human connections above all.

My business goal was to deepen the relationship between Broadway and travel. That happened, but the payback has greatly exceeded the goal, benefiting my travel and show partners alike, as well as our guests and, most important, myself personally.

Now I sit amidst the unknown, experiencing the unimaginable, feeling anxious about what's to come, and thinking about my friends and family in theater and travel. No one knows when the curtains will rise again from this extended intermission.

What I do know is that with creative collaboration, Broadway will thrive, along with travel, and what will get us there is the same as it always has been: good people who, through dialogue, will work together for mutual benefit, where we gain as much personally as we do professionally.

I look forward to seeing you soon on Broadway, and on the dance floor. And for now ... that's what keeps me hopeful. ☺

Bob Hofmann is vice president of Broadway Inbound. Reach him at bob@broadwayinbound.com.

Bob Hofmann talks with John Stachnik at Travel Exchange '17 in St. Louis.



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