

DELIVERING BUSINESS ESSENTIALS TO NTA MEMBERS

MARCH 2019

# Courier

## *Beauty and the best*

Historical homes and gardens  
garner groups' attention PAGE 12

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The Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens (San Marino, California)





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## PLANNING AHEAD

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##### Mid-Atlantic U.S.

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##### Great Lakes

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

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**MARCH IS CONTACT MONTH.**

This is not to be confused with contact *last* month—Valentine’s Day, you know. I’m talking about Contact ’19, the NTA tour operator retreat in Tucson, Arizona, set for March 27–30.

I’ve never been to Tucson, and that’s ideal. Part of the reason I love this job is because it takes me to new destinations. And I always say—*always*—that every place has a story to tell.

Do I say that because I’m a writer? Maybe.

And maybe photographers say every town has an image to capture.

Wine lovers say every town has a Syrah to sip.

Rock climbers say every town has a—*whoa ... That was close!*

My point is: The beauty of a destination is in its discovery. But it’s best done *your* way: seen through your eyes, tasted by your buds and filtered through your experiences—current and past.

Your *Courier* writers visit only a fraction of the places we write about, but when we do hit the road and cover a destination, our challenge is to soak it up, let it swirl around, and then spit it out on a laptop or notepad. Or a cocktail napkin.

We try to get it right—both for ourselves and for you. We might be writing it, but it’s your place ... and your story to tell.

Pat Henderson tells about a few places he’s visited sprinkled through his coverage of Four Corners states (page 18–23) and Africa (pages 28 and 29). Kendall Fletcher covered members in Italy, Greece and Turkey (pages 30 and 31). And Kendall didn’t



VISIT TUCSON

Sonoran Desert, near Tucson

visit all the historical homes and gardens she wrote about in “Walk through history” (page 12–17), but she’d like to.

And I’d like to make another trip to Canada to make sure I got it right when I wrote about NTA members in Ontario, Québec and the Niagara region (starting on page 24).

I think you’ll enjoy a piece for travel planners about the unanticipated—when things go wrong ... or right. Written by Katie Thompson of The Group Company, “Contingency planning in an unpredictable industry” starts on page 8. Another contributor, Kevin Murphy of Open Roads Tour & Travel Solutions, shares good memories about a family trip that started in New Orleans (page 40).

His time there was unique. My time in New Orleans was also unique. And your memories there (if you haven’t been, you will) are totally, uniquely yours.

We all travel, but it’s never the same for any two of us. It can’t be. Not when you discover a place your way ... and I, mine.

Let’s talk about this in Tucson. Or Fort Worth. Or at your place.

Read on,

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**On the cover:**

A docent at the Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens has her group in the palm of her hand.  
Photo: Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens



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NORMAND HUBERDEAU

IT'S NOT EVEN SPRING YET, and I'm already looking forward to Fort Worth in December.

As you know, we made some changes to Travel Exchange in Milwaukee, the most prominent of which was a new Exchange floor. The vibrant colors of the tablecloths and destination banners were real mood-lifters. And the absence of curtained walls not only created easier passage between aisles, it also created easier interactions among delegates.

The new floor was a brighter, friendlier community.

I know there were some naysayers, at least when they first saw the floor. And I read every word of the evaluations you completed; that always brings me down to earth! Even *Courier's* guest writer Alyssa Keshel said she was resistant to the change—before she completely embraced it. (Read it here: [bit.ly/2Rgs7yD](http://bit.ly/2Rgs7yD).)

There were other suggestions that we took to heart, and we'll make the simple fixes: Our appointment-booth signage will be better in Fort Worth, and you won't see a happy hour in the middle of an appointment block! (You never know unless you try, right?)

As big a hit as the new Exchange floor was with members, though, we know we need to keep working to improve our annual convention. I can promise you we've already been busy discussing ideas.

Our next challenge is larger, though.

You come to Travel Exchange for business. We all recognize the value of building relationships during social events, at lunch and throughout the convention center, but most of you rely on appointments for doing business.

Minding Your Business, the consulting firm hired in 2017 by the NTA Board of Directors, conducted extensive surveys and interviews with members, and they handed us our challenge: Sellers want more appointments, yet buyers want relief from the heavy load of appointments.

Buyers also said that finding new product is their first priority, and they really want to

attend more educational sessions.

There are no simple solutions. But we're digging deeper.

As I write this, the staff is conducting separate conference calls with each member network: buyers, suppliers and DMOs. We're discussing how sellers and buyers can connect in substantive, significant—and different—ways at Travel Exchange. Members are providing fantastic feedback, which will guide our staff's innovative solutions. And then we'll take those proposals to the board.

We'll also discuss this during Contact, March 27–30 in Tucson, because that event seems to bring out the best ideas from everyone.

What I ask from you is an open mind. Decades ago, NTA pioneered the appointment-based meeting model—back before cell phones and the internet. It's the model most travel associations use today, but it's showing its age, and we need to re-imagine how you connect with partners to build business.

I predict that, like Alyssa's initial opposition to the new Exchange floor, our innovations will be met with some resistance. But I'm confident in our staff, our volunteers and the NTA board. And I have confidence in you to investigate the re-imagined Travel Exchange and maximize the connections you'll make with your colleagues.

That's why I'm really looking forward to Fort Worth.

*Pam*

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COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

## Faith Travel Association offering June trip to Portugal

The Faith Travel Association is proud to announce its upcoming product development trip to Portugal. The tour, which is scheduled for June—exact dates were not announced by press time—will mark the second consecutive year that FTA has taken members to Europe; the association's 2018 trip showcased sites in England.

This year's tour will take participants to the heart of the Fátima-Ourém area in Portugal's central region. The trip, hosted by ACISO—Associação Empresarial Ourém-Fátima, comes on the heels of the highly successful centennial celebration of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fátima in 2017.

The proposed itinerary includes a range of unique experiences. In Fátima, the group will pay a visit to the famous pilgrimage shrine, church and museum, then enjoy an evening Rosary and a candlelight procession. The following day will be spent in the countryside, with a tour at the Moeda Caves followed by afternoon visits to monasteries in the towns of Alcobaça and Batalha.

The next day, FTA members will head to Ourém, where they will do some sightseeing around the medieval village and tour the Covento de Cristo. On the final day before departure, the group will bus to

Lisbon, where they can explore Portugal's vibrant and historical capital city.

For more information about this trip, contact FTA Manager Kay Saffari at [kay.saffari@faithtravelassociation.com](mailto:kay.saffari@faithtravelassociation.com).



CATHOLIC CHURCH ENGLAND AND WALES

Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima

## NTA members find Engage engaging

We said to engage, and you did.

In the first three months of implementation, Engage—NTA's new virtual community—has exceeded member interaction benchmarks set by Higher Logic, which hosts the social platform.

"It's been a great tool to keep conversations with NTA members—buyers and sellers alike—connected outside of Travel Exchange and Contact," says Michael Weinberg, an NTA ambassador. "Plus, it's nice to see new members of NTA jump

onto Engage looking for guidance. In fact, I was able to provide a newer member some information on volunteering for our organization."

Since Engage was launched, members have made good use of the discussion section by posting on a range of topics, both professional and personal. Here are examples of some of the things that your peers are talking about on Engage:

### Operations

- Planning for Oberammergau 2020
- Ensuring that your company's website is secure
- New admission fees at an attraction in Philadelphia

### How-tos/Helpful Hints

- Things you wish you'd known when you started in the travel industry
- Doing business at NTA's Contact event

### Personal

- A discussion of effects of the recent government shutdown
- Volunteer opportunities for NTA members

### How do you Engage?

Glad you asked. To get in on the discussion, go to [engage.ntaonline.com](https://engage.ntaonline.com) and use the same login credentials that you have for [ntaonline.com](https://ntaonline.com). The most recent topic threads are listed on the homepage, and you can access prior posts if you go to BROWSE at the top and choose "Discussion Posts."

If you are just getting started, check out the recording from the Engage webinar at [ntaonline.com/education/seminars-webinars](https://ntaonline.com/education/seminars-webinars).

Got questions? Reach out to Morgan Maravich, NTA's director of partnerships and engagement at [morgan.maravich@ntastaff.com](mailto:morgan.maravich@ntastaff.com).

# Contingency planning in an unpredictable industry

A UK tour company has learned to look (and even cook) ahead.

BY KATIE THOMPSON



WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE. The event has been announced, the itinerary put together, the accommodations secured and the ground services finalized. A year

passes by without interruption. Then, without warning, disaster strikes.

As tour operators, we have to accept that there are occasional circumstances that are out of our control. One of my favorite travel-crisis anecdotes concerns a group walking tour in a remote English village. Despite making reservations 12 months in advance, the hotel we had chosen went into administration (bankruptcy) just three days before the group arrived.

Understandably, there were no vacancies at such short notice in this secluded village. The obvious answer was to cancel the reservation, but we didn't want to give up. After hours of searching, we managed to find a charming country house with space. There was just one problem: It was self-catered.

Rather than admit defeat, we sent our team out to cook, clean and entertain for the group. It was a little unconventional, but the group members were thrilled that they didn't have to cancel their plans. It was also a valuable lesson in contingency planning.

Knowledge of the industry teaches us how to mitigate the effects of such disasters. Experience, on the other hand, equips us with the foresight to plan for nearly all eventualities, be they

logistical, financial, geographical, cultural or even political.

When planning packages, tour operators need to consider all these factors. Ideally, it's prudent to think two or even three years ahead. Something as seemingly trivial as a new movie release can have monumental effects on tourism.

- "Slumdog Millionaire" turned a Dharavi slum into a tourist attraction in India that grows by 50 percent each year.
- Thousands flock to the Philadelphia Museum of Art just to climb the famous "Rocky steps."
- Even British guilty pleasure "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" put Scotland's Doune Castle on the map. (Long before "Game of Thrones," millennials.)

Doune Castle in Stirling, Scotland, was a filming location for "Monty Python and the Holy Grail."



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## Not-so-welcome developments

Of course, package planning is about more than just subscribing to “The Hollywood Reporter.” While it’s wise to expect an influx of requests for destinations based on popular culture, we should also plan for not-so-welcome developments. A common mistake for tour operators is to quote a package price years in advance without considering realistic inflation hikes. And new government levies may crop up suddenly.

A recent blow to inbound tourism in Europe was the Irish 2019 Budget Statement, released in October 2018. Starting Jan. 1, the value-added tax for activities in the tourism and hospitality sectors has risen by 50 percent, increasing from 9 percent to 13.5 percent.

On the face of this, tour operators could argue that they had little time to prepare for such an increase and the consequences that came with it. However, in July 2017, the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation published a paper that outlined the importance of the VAT, hinting at the potential increase in years to come. It’s also worth noting that the 9 percent rate was actually a reduction, introduced in 2011 as a “temporary measure” to boost tourism. Perhaps the shrewdest tour operators were planning for a change as far as eight years ago.

Tour operators can by no means be expected to be psychic, but they can formulate realistic solutions. Take, for example, the recently proposed visitor tax in Venice, which comes into effect in May. Tour operators can plan itineraries around this flexible fee, which will range from 65 cents to \$13 per person, depending on whether travellers arrive in low or high season. Note that this is for day travellers only, as those staying in hotels are subject to an overnight tax; however, there is talk of the hotel tax increasing from \$6.50 to \$13 per person. It’s better to allow for these increases when conducting pricing or contract reviews than to take the hit later on or, worse still, risk damaging your reputation with your clients.

At this point, we cannot overlook the value of our relationships with suppliers. In cases such as the above-mentioned reservation chaos, having reliable on-the-ground contacts is the difference between winning and losing a sale. You



Rijeka, Croatia, will be one of two European Capitals of Culture in 2020.

never know when your chosen hotel could be hit by a change: a refurbishment project, a burst pipe, a fire ... even a total shutdown. Knowing that you have a Plan B contact provides additional assurance to your groups. How you handle these changes—for example, arranging coach services for hotels slightly further out—can directly impact your customer feedback.

## Opportunities that arise

Being prepared doesn’t always mean preparing for the worst, though! Just as challenges can arise out of changing situations, so too can opportunities. Keeping your finger on the pulse for new hotel openings, new airline routes and special events or accolades will all help you better serve your groups.

For example, beginning in April, Pennsylvania groups can fly directly from Pittsburgh to London Heathrow with British Airways, while direct routes will also be available from Charleston, South Carolina. London is a great stop-over point for new routes into Europe, including Kiev and Bourgas, Bulgaria’s new up-and-coming destination.

Speaking of hot new destinations, look out for cities that have been chosen as European Capitals of Culture, a designation bestowed years in advance by

## Ones to watch

Take note of these changes in destinations around the world:

- Washington, D.C.’s Newseum (an NTA member), celebrating journalism and the First Amendment, will close on Dec. 31.
- Amsterdam’s Anne Frank House is now taking bookings only up to two months in advance.
- London’s Ultra Low Emission Zone will come into force April 8. Any motorcoaches not adhering to emissions standards may have to pay a \$130 daily charge.
- Florence’s Uffizi Gallery will no longer permit groups of more than 25. Groups of 15–25 visitors will be subject to an \$80 charge.
- Madrid’s four access-restricted zones (Areas de Prioridad Residencial) have been merged into one, although tour coaches will be permitted to enter until 2023.
- Edinburgh is among three U.K. cities considering a tourist tax, with a \$2.60 charge per hotel room per night (up to seven days). Bath and York are also considering similar levies.
- Japan’s tourist tax is now in operation, charging all travellers \$9 when departing by air.
- Croatia’s first Hard Rock Hotel is coming to Rijeka in 2020, just in time for the European Capital of Culture celebrations.

Continued on page 38



Senate of Canada Building

## Plenty to do on Parliament Hill

Ottawa's Parliament Hill is abuzz with activity any time of year, but the seat of Canadian government really comes alive each summer. In addition to Canada Day celebrations on July 1, the warmer months include the popular Changing of the Guard ceremony each morning (late June through August) and the Northern Lights Sound and Light Show (nightly at sundown, July to September).

Another major happening on Parliament Hill this year is the debut of new tours at the West Block and the Senate of Canada Building. These guided walks replace tours of the Centre Block, which were discontinued at that site because of the decade-long renovation of the historical structure that began in January.

Starting last month, new tours were offered at two sites: West Block, the interim home of the House of Commons, and the Senate of Canada Building, the temporary meeting spot for the Senate. They are available on days when Parliament isn't sitting, and guests check in at a new visitor center that's located between West Block and Centre Block.

During the 40-minute walks at West Block, guides offer narrative on the inner workings of the House of Commons and about

the history, art and architecture of the newly restored building. Tours at the Senate of Canada Building, which also served for many years as Ottawa's historical train station, last 30 minutes and detail the role and traditions of Canada's Upper Chamber.

To learn more, contact Ottawa Tourism's Kelly Dean at [kdean@ottawatourism.ca](mailto:kdean@ottawatourism.ca) or go to [visit.parl.ca](http://visit.parl.ca).



Northern Lights  
Sound and Light Show





Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site

## Philadelphia NPS sites showcase writers, freedom fighters and Swedes

Travel planners are very accustomed to visiting iconic sites such as Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell and Valley Forge when they head to the Philadelphia area. The U.S. National Park Service manages three other sites in the City of Brotherly Love that offer perspectives on other aspects of the area's rich history.

### Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site [nps.gov/edal](https://nps.gov/edal)

The writings of Edgar Allan Poe have fascinated readers for generations. At this national historic site, travelers can see the house where the author lived for six happy and productive years. Docent-led and self-guided tours of the home are available year-round, and guests also should save time to visit the reading room.

### Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial [nps.gov/thko](https://nps.gov/thko)

The house museum pays tribute to Polish freedom fighter Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a brilliant military engineer who designed fortifications that helped the Colonists during the American Revolution. NOTE: The site has a very limited operating season—April to October (weekends only).

### Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site [nps.gov/glde](https://nps.gov/glde)

Gloria Dei Church, which was built from 1698 to 1700 by Swedish settlers, is the oldest church in Pennsylvania. The main sites are the simple Colonial sanctuary, where the Lutheran congregation worshipped, and the grounds that feature a cemetery. Guests also can attend a service at Gloria Dei, which became an Episcopal church in 1845.

## SAM, I am

The Seattle Art Museum boasts a collection that includes nearly 25,000 works of art showcasing global cultures and offering historical perspectives. The attraction, which has been an NTA member since 2014, has three temporary exhibits that will debut later this year.

“Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement” will trace the group of artists—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt—who refused to embrace the typical artist methods of London's Royal Academy of Arts. The exhibit features more than 140 paintings, sculpture, decorative art pieces, drawings and textiles, many of which have never been on exhibit outside the U.K. *On display June 13–Sept. 8*

As part of “Flesh and Blood: Italian Masterpieces from the Capodimonte Museum,” guests can see the works of Italy's top artists that are part of the collection at the Naples-based museum. The exhibit shows how renowned Italian artists revealed human emotions such as love, devotion and suffering through paintings of the human form. *On display Oct. 17–Jan. 26, 2020*

Known for his large-scale sculpture pieces, Aaron Fowler will bring his first solo show to SAM late this year. “Aaron Fowler: 2019 Knight | Lawrence Prize Winner” will feature the artist's works, which are drawn from found materials and dive into themes related to black culture, American history and everyday life. *On display Dec. 12–June 14, 2020*



La Donna Della Finestra from the “Victorian Radicals” exhibit

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For more information email Lawrence Cenotto at [lawrencec@seattleartmuseum.org](mailto:lawrencec@seattleartmuseum.org) or go to [seattleartmuseum.org](https://seattleartmuseum.org).





# Walk through history

These famous homes and gardens let you step back in time and explore local roots—room by room and bed by bed.

COMPILED BY KENDALL FLETCHER

## Room by room

Brimming with history and beauty—and each one unique—historical homes hold a place in the hearts of people visiting a destination. Whether travelers relish stepping back in time, stepping into the lives of the rich and famous, or just stepping on old hardwood floors, the attractions are a top priority on group itineraries. These NTA-member historical homes have all that to offer and more, if only you'd come inside and explore them ... room by room.

### Hillwood Estate Museum & Gardens

Washington, D.C.

The spring and fall home of Marjorie Merriweather Post was Hillwood Estate Museum & Gardens, and it features the most comprehensive collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia, Post's collection of French art from the 1700s, and 25 acres of landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Post, who inherited General Foods, was a businesswoman and philanthropist among the wealthiest women of her time.

She took her less formal lunches and dinners in the estate's Breakfast Room, a charming

Hillwood Estate Museum & Gardens

HILLWOOD ESTATE MUSEUM & GARDENS





George Washington's Mount Vernon

space connected to the grand dining room. Meredith DeSantis, the attraction's special events and tourism manager in group sales, says the table was always set for four, and the room features some impressive elements.

"The bronze metalwork lining the room was repurposed from Marjorie's 1920s apartment in New York City. The Russian gilt-bronze and green-glass chandelier from the late 1700s came from the Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, one of the imperial estates outside St. Petersburg. The floral displays in the window make it difficult to tell where the garden ends and the room begins, an interaction of indoor and outdoor spaces notable throughout Hillwood," she says.

For more information, contact DeSantis at [grouptours@hillwoodmuseum.org](mailto:grouptours@hillwoodmuseum.org) or go to [hillwoodmuseum.org](http://hillwoodmuseum.org).

## George Washington's Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon, Virginia

George Washington dubbed the largest room in his mansion the New Room, and the space has recently taken on a new appearance and interpretation.

"It is by any standard one of the great interior spaces of early America, beautifully decorated and furnished to display his vision for the new country," says Susan Schoelwer, executive director for historic preservation and collections.

The New Room, once interpreted as the formal dining room, more clearly served as a show or statement room in the tradition of grand saloons in 18th-century British country houses. In Washington's time, this multi-purpose space was permanently installed as an art gallery, as sunlight streaming through the beautiful Palladian window provided ideal lighting for viewing his art collection.

Those visiting the mansion today will find the walls are heavily adorned with artwork, hung in gallery style. With the dining room table now removed, the room allows visitors to better admire the grand architectural details and height, its neoclassical design finishes and the art on display.

For more information, contact Melissa Wood at [mwood@mountvernon.org](mailto:mwood@mountvernon.org) or go to [mountvernon.org](http://mountvernon.org).

## Belle Meade Plantation

Nashville, Tennessee

Belle Meade Plantation was a home often bustling with people in the racehorse industry; it had more than 5,000 acres devoted to raising championship Thoroughbreds.

"Since horse racing was the most popular American sport in the 1800s, Belle Meade's extensive entertaining and hospitality legacy would rival any home in the South," says Director of Group Sales Mark James. "The kitchen was the heart of the mansion. It is at these well-worn hearths that the traditions of

outstanding Southern cooking were laid."

The kitchen staff won numerous awards for its blackberry wine and strawberry cordials in those times, and the traditional recipes are still made at Belle Meade. Guests can take culinary tours and taste those award-winning foods and wines and see the home's original kitchen space, where visiting presidents and Civil War generals once had their food prepared.

For more information, email James at [mark.james@bellemeadplantation.com](mailto:mark.james@bellemeadplantation.com) or go to [bellemeadplantation.com](http://bellemeadplantation.com).

## Oak Alley Plantation

Vacherie, Louisiana

"We have so much new going on at Oak Alley, with our ReDiscover Oak Alley initiative that is part of a larger master plan," says Director of Marketing Hillary Loeber.

With the completion of phase one in 2018 came the Artifact Room, which provides new opportunities to interpret the plantation's history.

"This room is a reminder that what we share is not just the South's history, Louisiana history or a plantation's history, but rather human history," Loeber says.

Visitors can study the monogrammed silver owned by Jacques Roman, the builder of Oak Alley, who operated a sugar plantation on the land.

"The Louisiana shackle placed next to the metal wedding plate had very distinctive





Morning Room at The Breakers

## Chihuly Garden and Glass

Seattle, Washington

Artist Dale Chihuly said, "I want my work to appear like it came from nature, so that if someone found it on a beach or in the forest, they might think it belonged there."

During a visit to this Seattle attraction, groups can see Chihuly's first collaboration with landscape architect Richard Hartlage.

"The garden at Chihuly Garden and Glass provides a rich and colorful backdrop for Dale Chihuly's artwork," says Amanda Whitver, public relations manager. "Through careful planning and ongoing plant additions, the garden changes through the seasons, offering guests a new experience every time they visit."

This spring more than 5,000 daffodils will be the first blooms to appear in the garden. There are monthly tours with the attraction's Gardening Team, a ladybug release on Earth Day Weekend (April 20–21) and other gardening workshops that teach participants about the Pacific Northwest's spring plants.

Blooming in the summer are four unusual varieties of the garden's hydrangea collection, and in the winter, garden-goers can see ornamental kales and dusty millers as well as the primrose collection from a specialist grower in France.

For more information, contact Whitver at [amandaw@chihulygardenandglass.com](mailto:amandaw@chihulygardenandglass.com) or go to [chihulygardenandglass.com](http://chihulygardenandglass.com).

## The Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens

San Marino, California

The Huntington's colorful blooms appear in early spring, beginning in March with cherry

differences in meaning to its owner," Loeber says. "The plate, made of copper, was used to create Henri Roman's wedding invitation, an announcement of his union to his bride—a happy event. The shackle was used to make a different kind of announcement with its rattle, as it announced the presence of a slave, who, incidentally, was not allowed to marry."

For more information, contact Loeber at [hloeber@oakalleyplantation.org](mailto:hloeber@oakalleyplantation.org) or go to [oakalleyplantation.com](http://oakalleyplantation.com).

## Newport Mansions – The Preservation Society

Newport, Rhode Island

The Breakers, the grandest of Newport's collection of stately homes, is a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo and was the summer cottage of Cornelius Vanderbilt II, his wife Alice Claypoole Gwynne Vanderbilt and their seven children.

The interior of the house's Morning Room was designed by Richard Van Der Boijen in France, and reassembled at the mansion.

"The Morning Room at The Breakers faces east to catch the rising sun. Can you imagine a more picturesque setting to start your day?" asks Tourism Marketing and Creative Services Manager Barbara Shea. "The four seasons are depicted on the ceiling while the elements are detailed on the door paneling. Platinum-leaf wall panels feature muses from Greek mythology, and portraits in the room include ones of Cornelius Vanderbilt; Countess Gladys Vanderbilt Széchenyi, the Vanderbilts' youngest daughter; and her husband, Hungarian Count Laszlo Széchenyi."

For more information, contact Shea at [bshea@newportmansions.org](mailto:bshea@newportmansions.org) or go to [newportmansions.org](http://newportmansions.org).

## Bed by bed

There's something about strolling through a garden full of vibrant blooms, towering trees and peaceful waters that makes you feel so in tune with the earth. Whether it's a mixed-media garden of flower beds and art, acres of historical blooms or an event celebrating all things floral, the following popular spots help groups make colorful memories—bloom by bloom ... and bed by bed.

Chihuly Garden and Glass





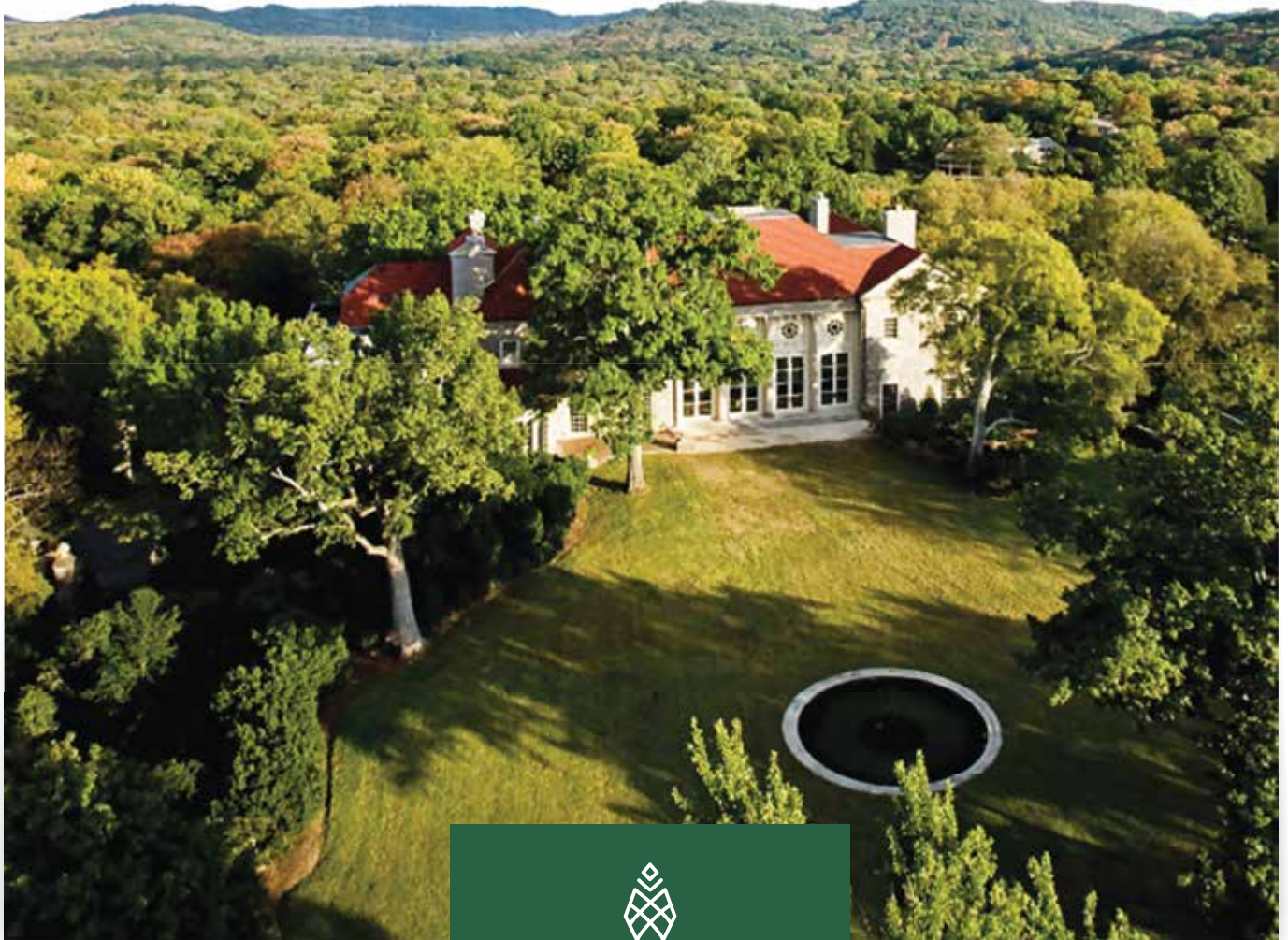
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Philadelphia Flower Show

blossoms in the Japanese Garden. This garden was created in 1912, and visitors can see the moon bridge over a lake, a traditional Japanese house and trellises of wisteria, which also appear in March. Tours highlight these features as well as bamboo, bonsai and a karesansui rock garden.

Many of the camellias, a winter flower, will still be in bloom. The Huntington's camellia collection has more than 80 species and grows in the Japanese and Chinese gardens.

The Desert Garden cacti blooms open in mid-April as do the nearly 1,200 varieties of roses in the Rose Garden. The Huntington's Tea

Room, which overlooks the Rose Garden, is a charming setting for guests to enjoy traditional English tea, finger sandwiches, scones and other treats in the afternoon.

For the Chinese Garden tour, groups are led by docents on a 90-minute walking tour with views of the traditional Suzhou-style garden, a lake, pavilions, a waterfall, and hand-carved stone bridges beneath oak and plum trees.

*Group tours are available during and before public hours. For more information, contact Jane Sandmeier at [jsandmeier@huntington.org](mailto:jsandmeier@huntington.org) or go to [huntington.org](http://huntington.org).*

## Philadelphia Flower Show

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Originating in 1829, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Philadelphia Flower Show features diverse and sustainable plant varieties and design concepts from the world's leading garden and floral designers. With more than 10 acres of show floor, it's the nation's largest and longest-running horticultural event, hosting gardening presentations, special events and competitions in floral arranging.

Michelle Ullman, associate director of sales with PHS, says the exhibits explore how flowers convey a wide range of emotions and messages in a universal language that transcend cultures and borders.

"Through imaginative exhibits, guests will see ideas like community, healing, peace, transformation and hope brought to life in surprising, vibrant ways," she says.

The 2020 Philadelphia Flower Show will have a Riviera Holiday theme with inspirations from Mediterranean gardens.

"Groves of citrus trees will lead the way, providing a lush dramatic promenade. Guests will breathe in fragrant waves of lavender inspired by the terraced gardens of Monaco and see drifts of purple and white spiked salvia, specimen succulents and an intoxicating variety of scented geraniums, roses, rosemary and sage that create a stunning mosaic," Ullman says.



## Discover The Huntington

Group Tours Available | Pasadena Adjacent | [huntington.org](http://huntington.org)



Groups of 25 or more are offered a 20 percent discount. There are two-hour tours at 8 a.m. each day before the general public arrives. Visitors can pair it with the show's Garden Tea, featuring light sandwiches, treats and an assortment of fine teas.

The next show is set to take place Feb. 29 through March 8, 2020, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

For more information, contact Ullman at [mullman@pennhort.org](mailto:mullman@pennhort.org) or go to [theflowershow.com](http://theflowershow.com).

## The Flower Fields at Carlsbad Ranch

Carlsbad, California

Known for its overabundance of colorful ranunculus, The Flower Fields at Carlsbad Ranch is home to more than 100 floral species that are on display from March through mid-May.

Visitors can view the attraction's famous giant Tecolote ranunculus blooming, across 50 acres, as well as the Mediterranean, Whimsical and Wedding gardens; the new pathways in the sweet pea maze; advanced water tolerant gardening systems; a water recycling system; and displays of historical poinsettias and cymbidium orchids. They can also take part in hands-on workshops featuring art, basket and gardening



THE FLOWER FIELDS AT CARLSBAD RANCH

### The Flower Fields at Carlsbad Ranch

classes in newly established greenhouses.

The fields have had more than 100 years of care and cultivation, beginning with Luther Gage, a 1920s horticulturist and Southern California settler, who was followed by Frank and Edwin Frazee in the 1930s. The ranunculus are native to Asia Minor and were once a different shape and color, but after many years of careful selection, they sprout each spring in their unique rainbow of color.

The attraction is open March 1 through May 12, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Guided tours with a wagon ride for 20 or more are \$29, and group season passes can be purchased. Guided and self-guided walking tours are also available. The attraction has two free parking areas and is handicapped accessible.

For more information, contact Joni Miringoff at [joni@carltas.com](mailto:joni@carltas.com) or go to [theflowerfields.com](http://theflowerfields.com).



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## Four Corners U.S. COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

### Top places for authentic Arizona experiences

Arizona is top of mind for NTA this March, as members will gather in Tucson later in the month for the association's Contact event. Attendees would be wise to build in time to explore some of the state's other unique destinations, including Lake Havasu City, Flagstaff and Yuma.

Havasus Balloon Festival & Fair



GO LAKE HAVASU

#### Lake Havasu City

Responses provided by Jason Castellucci of the Lake Havasu City CVB

##### Why is Lake Havasu City a great place for groups?

With its London Bridge, pristine lake, friendly community, abundance of sunshine and ideal weather, Lake Havasu City is a natural draw for groups from around the world. America's Best Communities named the city, which offers welcoming hospitality and a laid-back vibe, as one of the top three rural communities in the country.

##### What are three local places for outdoor adventure?

Lake Havasu State Park, Topock Gorge, Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge

##### What some other can't-miss options?

The London Bridge Tour, Sunset Charter & Tour Company's Sunset Experience aboard *Serenity Now*, Lake Havasu's lighthouses

##### What are a couple of your top annual festivals?

Havasus Balloon Festival & Fair (January), Lake Havasu City Rockabilly Reunion (February), Bluegrass on the Beach Music Festival (March)

##### What advice would help a tour operator package your area?

Within about two to three hours of Lake Havasu City, visiting groups can enjoy a variety of experiences not available anywhere else in the country, including one of the longest continuous sections of Route 66 and the nearby Grand Canyon Skywalk.

To learn more, contact Jackie Leatherman at [jackie@golakehasvu.com](mailto:jackie@golakehasvu.com) or visit [golakehasvu.com](http://golakehasvu.com).

Hopi dancer at the Museum of Northern Arizona



FLAGSTAFF CVB

#### Flagstaff

Responses provided by Cherri Lamont of the Flagstaff CVB

##### Why is Flagstaff such a great place for groups?

Flagstaff is the heart of Northern Arizona, with endless outdoor adventures, four seasons of activities, restaurants with exceptional group dining options, Historic Route 66, a classic downtown, award-winning museums and Native American culture.

##### What are some of the most unique places in your area?

The Lowell Observatory, Sunset Crater National Monument and Flagstaff Extreme

##### What are a couple of popular attractions you recommend?

The Museum of Northern Arizona, the Riordan Mansion

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

The Lowell Observatory. Since 1894, it has been one of the most prestigious observatories in the U.S., and with Flagstaff designated as the first International Dark Sky City, there's no better place for stargazing.

##### What advice would help a tour operator package your area?

A three-night stay is ideal. Flagstaff offers dining/shopping/live music options and is great for a hub-and-spoke stay. Groups can seek out our 7 Wonders, a group of seven attractions within 80 minutes of downtown that includes Grand Canyon National Park.

To learn more, contact Lamont at [clamont@flagstaffaz.gov](mailto:clamont@flagstaffaz.gov) or go to [flagstaffarizona.org](http://flagstaffarizona.org).

Canoeing on the Colorado River



VISIT YUMA

#### Yuma

Responses provided by Leslie McClendon of Visit Yuma

##### What makes Yuma a great destination?

Located on the banks of the Colorado River and halfway between Phoenix and San Diego, Yuma has rich history, outdoor adventure on land and in the water, a multicultural flavor, vibrant nightlife and hands-on agritourism experiences. Plus, Yuma is a spectacular location for meetings, conferences and events.

##### What are three top adventure experiences in your area?

Colorado River kayak or canoe trips, off-road adventures at Imperial Sand Dunes National Recreation Area, biking along Yuma's riverfront

##### What is a can't-miss culinary experience?

Date Night Dinners. Named by *Fodors Travel* as one of the world's most unique dining experiences, this unforgettable feast is served under the stars with live music in a date grove. Executive Chef Alex Trujillo will please your palate with a gourmet menu featuring the "fruit of kings"—dates—in every course.

##### What advice would help a tour operator package your area?

Yuma has the variety of attractions and accommodations at the price travel planners need to fit the budget. We recommend staying four days and three nights to maximize your visit, and our organization is ready to guide you through the planning process.

To learn more, contact McClendon at [leslie@visityuma.com](mailto:leslie@visityuma.com) or go to [visityuma.com](http://visityuma.com).



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## Diversity on display in Colorado's national parks

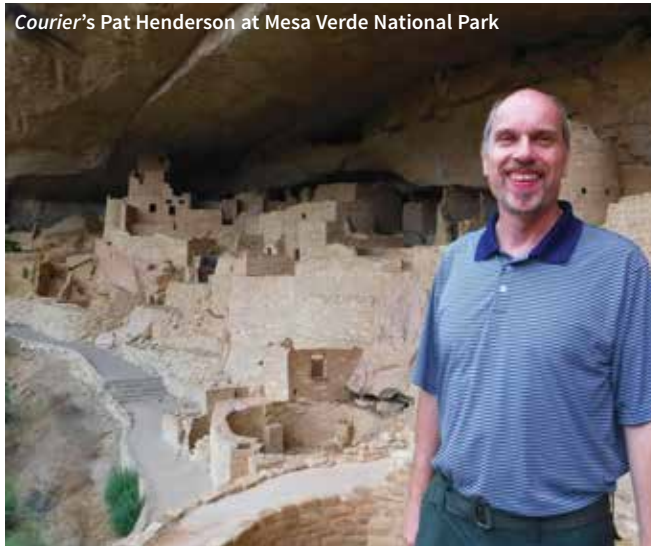
As part of a visit to Durango, Colorado, last year, I got to explore areas in the western and southern parts of the state. I'm a big national parks fan, and I managed to work in visits to Mesa Verde National Park (as part of my Durango itinerary), Colorado National Monument and Great Sand Dunes National Park, spots that showcased the state's diverse, beautiful terrain.

Mesa Verde, a UNESCO World Heritage site near Durango, is known for its well-preserved structures that represent life for the native people hundreds of years ago. It was amazing to contemplate how the Ancestral Puebloans built such detailed and intricate structures into the rocky walls under the rim and far above the canyon floor.

Colorado National Monument is home to sculpted gorges and craggy, brightly colored rock formations. Rim Rock Drive took me to a number of overlooks that offered some outstanding vistas out over the vast canyons, which reminded me of what I'd seen at Arches and Canyonlands parks in southwestern Utah. The park, which sits just west of Grand Junction, is home to a number of bighorn sheep, although none made an appearance during my visit.

Great Sand Dunes National Park in south-central Colorado lives up to its name, as it offers a desert-like oasis, where visitors can frolic among the acres of sandy mounds. I was short

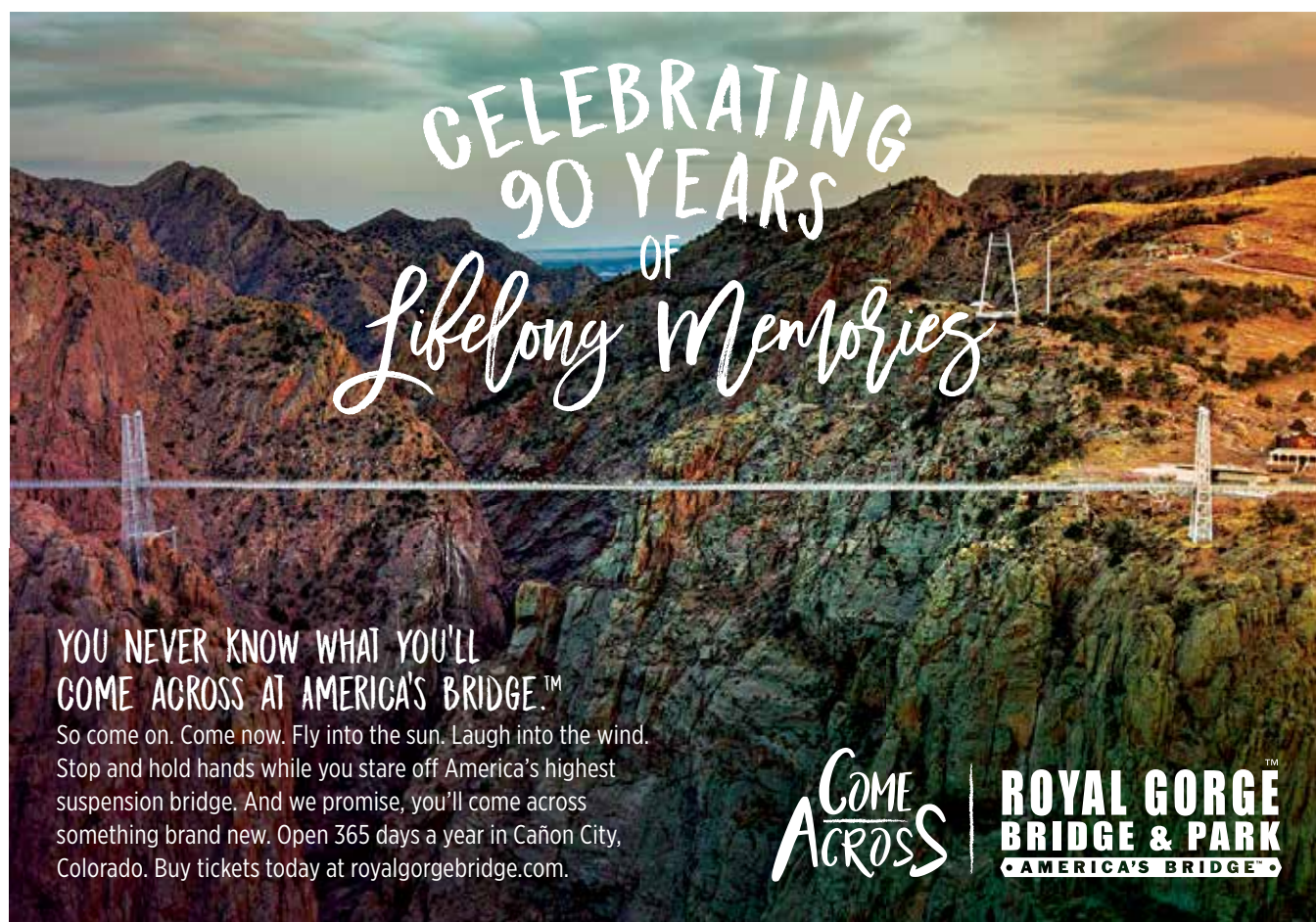
Courier's Pat Henderson at Mesa Verde National Park



PAT HENDERSON

on time, so I didn't get to do any surfing or tobogganing on the soaring dunes. Walking up and down the hilly mounds offered some excellent views, though, and it also reminded me that I wish I was in better shape.

To learn more about Colorado's national park sites, go to [nps.gov/state/co](https://nps.gov/state/co).



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Food truck at the Las Cruces Farmers & Crafts Market



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## No lost calories in Las Cruces

“Las Cruces is a great place for groups because we offer a little bit of everything. I moved to Las Cruces 20 years ago and still haven’t seen and done it all,” says Rochelle Miller-Hernandez, senior tourism development manager for Visit Las Cruces. “If you’re a proud foodie like me, you can sample, snack or dine at one of our many restaurants,

food trucks, wineries or breweries.”

Groups heading to the city in far southern New Mexico can explore its rich and varied culinary offerings by visiting a number of places that highlight its agricultural heritage. Some of the area’s most well-known products are green chiles, pecans and wine.

Travelers can take a deep dive into

chile pepper culture at the city’s Chile Pepper Institute then head over to the Legacy Pecans, a family-owned pecan orchard with a store offering samples of sweet and savory pecan treats. Wine enthusiasts can book an excursion with Southwest Expeditions Winery Tours, which offers rides to four area vineyards on Fridays and Saturdays.

Miller-Hernandez also recommends the following four spots for the culinarily curious:

**Caliche’s** “This Las Cruces staple serves hot dogs, sandwiches and lemonade, but is known to all for the huge selection of custards. After eating a spicy meal, there is nothing better to counterbalance the heat than a cold treat at Caliche’s,” says Miller-Hernandez.

**La Posta de Mesilla** Spicy flavors, colorful food and fresh ingredients grown in the area can be found at La Posta de Mesilla, which was established in 1939. The Mexican restaurant is located in a historical building that was once a famous hotel.

**The Las Cruces Farmers & Crafts Market** Every Saturday, the market teems with life. Bites from a number of local food trucks and restaurants on Main Street are available and range from green chile steak quesadillas to mini-donuts.

**Paleria La Reyna Michoacana** “This great little Mexican ice cream shop is located right across the street from Apodaca Park. Stop by for an *horchata*, a *paleta de coco* or some *fresas con crema*, or pick out some Mexican candy to take home,” says Miller-Hernandez.

For more information, contact Miller-Hernandez at [rhernandez@las-cruces.org](mailto:rhernandez@las-cruces.org) or go to [visitlascruces.com](http://visitlascruces.com).

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## 5 top Utah lodging options

Whether they are looking for rooms in major cities or in towns near Utah's big five national parks, travelers heading to Utah have a range of options when it comes to lodging. They can choose between staying at major brand hotels operated by corporate members of NTA or opt for the following five individual properties that belong to the association:

### **Salt Lake Plaza Hotel at Temple Square** NTA contact: Richard Williams

Located in Temple Square, this 150-bed property offers luxury amenities and tons of meeting space, all in downtown Salt Lake City. The on-site JB's Family Restaurant offers tasty regional cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner. [plaza-hotel.com](http://plaza-hotel.com)

### **Moab Lodging & Adventure—Red Cliffs Lodge** Judy Bane

This lodge, which backs up to the Colorado River and is surrounded by orange-hued peaks, is a rustic retreat for groups visiting Moab. On-site attractions include the Film and Western Heritage Museum and Castle Creek Winery. [redcliffslodge.com](http://redcliffslodge.com)

### **Embassy Suites by Hilton South Jordan** Melissa Deveraux

Situated just off I-15, this all-suites hotel offers easy access to Salt Lake City's restaurants and shopping centers, as well as four major ski resorts. Groups can enjoy a made-to-order breakfast and the nightly Manager's Reception. [bit.ly/2kgJLPZ](http://bit.ly/2kgJLPZ)

### **Rockin' R Ranch & Lodge** Camille Ovard

This real working dude ranch in Antimony, Utah, has a true Western feel that is reflected in the rooms and the food. Visitors can take part in everything from traditional cow roping and horseback riding to hiking and swimming. [rockinrranch.com](http://rockinrranch.com)

### **Crystal Inn Downtown Salt Lake City** Matt Heim Mueller

This four-story hotel in the heart of Utah's capital city has 175 guest rooms and three oversized meeting rooms. A number of amenities are offered, including a complimentary hot breakfast buffet and free airport shuttle service. [crystalinns.com](http://crystalinns.com)



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# Ontario, Québec and the Niagara Region

COMPILED BY BOB ROUSE

## Niagara Falls on the Ontario side

The breadth of experiences in Niagara begins with the massive falls and expands from there. Christina Marcotte, travel trade manager for Niagara Falls Tourism in Ontario, offers several suggestions. (NTA members are in bold.)

Iconic experiences for groups include **Hornblower Niagara Cruises**, **Journey Behind the Falls**, the **Skylon Tower**, **WildPlay Zipline to the Falls**, and the Clifton Hill district with its **Niagara Skywheel**. “Beyond the waterfalls, groups take advantage of the impressive live theatre lineup, which includes Oh Canada Eh! Dinner Theatre, The Grand Champion of Magic at the **Greg Frewin Theatre** and the world-renowned Shaw Festival,” Marcotte says.

Visitors can also opt for a day trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake, which is home to more than 100 wineries and breweries, many fruit orchards, a quaint downtown and outlet shopping.

Niagara Falls has been a tourist destination since the early 1800s, yet its steady stream of new attractions means every visit can be different than the last.

“Returning visitors can get a bird’s-eye view of the falls on an epic tour with Niagara Helicopters, or they can go for a wet and wild ride through the Niagara River rapids with **Whirlpool Jet Boat Tours**,” Marcotte says. “For those visiting this summer, check out Night Lights: Journey Behind the Falls After Dark, an experience that give you a spectacular view of the illumination and fireworks show from the base of Horseshoe Falls.”

Niagara Falls during winter is a whole other experience, according to Marcotte.



NIAGARA FALLS TOURISM

Niagara Falls in winter

“It’s my favorite time of year to see the falls—truly breathtaking,” she says. “While the waterfalls themselves never freeze, icicles frame the bordering edges, and frozen mist blankets surrounding trees, creating a unique winter wonderland.”

Marcotte adds that hotels also have a bit more flexibility during the winter months, and there’s no need to worry about long lines at key attractions.

For more, contact Marcotte at [cmarcotte@niagarafalls.com](mailto:cmarcotte@niagarafalls.com) or visit [fallstraveltrade.com](http://fallstraveltrade.com).

Note: On the U.S. side, operators can work with Tina Mt. Pleasant of Destination Niagara USA ([tmtpleasant@niagarafallsusa.com](mailto:tmtpleasant@niagarafallsusa.com)) and Tim Ruddy of Maid of the Mist ([truddy@maidofthemist.com](mailto:truddy@maidofthemist.com)).

## Ontario overnight

Groups visiting Ontario will find a number of NTA members throughout the province that provide accommodations. Atlific Hotels alone has 14 properties in Ontario.

“Our multi-branded, tour-friendly hotels in Kingston, London, Ottawa, Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay offer great accommodation and excellent service,” says Chantal Cardinal, national sales director for the company. “Each property serves specific interests, and our Sudbury and Thunder Bay hotels are often used as stops for a trans-Canada tour.”

For more information, email Cardinal at [ccardinal@atlific.com](mailto:ccardinal@atlific.com) or visit [atlific.com](http://atlific.com).

Here are three other properties in Ontario that hold individual NTA memberships:

### Four Points by Sheraton

#### Niagara Falls/Fallsvue

Niagara Falls

Rosetta Armeni

[rarmeni@fourpointsniagarafallsvue.com](mailto:rarmeni@fourpointsniagarafallsvue.com)

[fourpointsniagarafallsvue.com](http://fourpointsniagarafallsvue.com)

### Holiday Inn by the Falls

Niagara Falls

Teresa Adams

[tadams@holidayinnniagarafalls.com](mailto:tadams@holidayinnniagarafalls.com)

[holidayinnniagarafalls.com](http://holidayinnniagarafalls.com)

### Lord Elgin Hotel

Ottawa

Amber Van Der Hoeven

[avanderhoeven@lordelgin.ca](mailto:avanderhoeven@lordelgin.ca)

[lordelgin.ca](http://lordelgin.ca)



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## Reasons and seasons to visit Outaouais

The Outaouais is a region in western Québec located next to Canada's capital, Ottawa. Within its 12,000 square miles are a number of activities and experiences that operators can add to an Ottawa or Montréal itinerary. *Courier* posed three questions to Emerson Velasco, sales manager for Tourisme Outaouais.

### 1. What can groups do when they come to your region?

**Velasco:** We are a four-season culture/nature destination. On the cultural side, the (NTA-member) Canadian Museum of

History, the most visited museum in Canada, is a must for groups to discover the people and events that shaped our country. On the nature side, Omega Park is a unique attraction, where you can interact with the authentic Canadian wildlife.

### 2. What do you recommend to returning visitors?

**Velasco:** For groups, Manoir Papineau National Historic Site (closed until 2020) is a great place to learn about 19th-century French-Canadian history through the lens of Louis-Joseph Papineau, a leading figure in Canadian politics. The manor is located in Montebello, halfway between Ottawa and Montréal. Or how about relaxing in North America's largest spa? Nordik Spa Nature is a paradise of thermotherapy and massage therapy, overlooking the region's natural scenery.

### 3. Is there a season when groups should visit?

**Velasco:** The beauty of our region is that there are things to do all year long. You can enjoy the Winterlude festival in February, one of the world's biggest tulip festivals in spring, summertime rafting on the Ottawa River or the beautiful fall foliage at Gatineau Park, only 15 minutes away from downtown Gatineau/Ottawa.

To ask your own questions, email Velasco at [evelasco@tourisme-outaouais.ca](mailto:evelasco@tourisme-outaouais.ca) or visit [outaouaisgroup.com](http://outaouaisgroup.com).



Nordik Spa Nature

NORDIK SPA NATURE

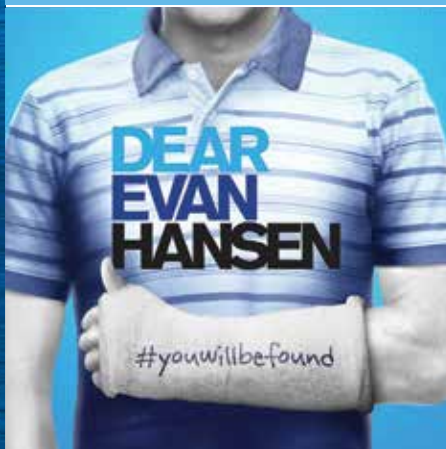
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## It's all fjords, *fromage* and *bleuets*

The Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region beckons visitors seeking a fantastic array of activities and an immersion in the French-Canadian culture of Québec. And Nancy Donnelly of Tourisme Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean knows just where to start.

“A cruise along our Saguenay Fjord is a must,” she says.

“Passengers enjoy the pristine landscape in the Saguenay Fjord National Park as well as a few little villages along the shores. This is the southernmost fjord in North America and one of the 10 longest in the world.”

The region is located some two hours northeast of Québec City and has a unique destination, Val-Jalbert. “This historical village is an authentic 1920s ghost town with waterfalls higher than Niagara Falls,” Donnelly says. “Visits include a tour of the abandoned houses, old pulp mill, convent school and general store plus a cable car ride to the top of the falls. And FIT visitors can stay overnight in beautifully refurbished homes.”

Donnelly also has suggestions for local food and drink.

“This region has 15 microbreweries and over a dozen artisanal cheese makers,” she says. “There is Musée Vieille Fromagerie Perron (a cheddar cheese museum) that’s the last of its kind in Québec. It offers workshops, and groups can make their own cheese in an hour.”

The region also is famous for its wild blueberries. “In fact, the nickname for people here is *bleuets*, which is ‘blueberry’ in



Marine shuttle on the Saguenay Fjord

French,” Donnelly says.

To roll with the theme, visit Domaine Le Cageot, a vineyard that produces blueberry-based spirits and its own blueberry champagne.

To get more information, contact Donnelly at [ndonnelly@tourismesaglac.net](mailto:ndonnelly@tourismesaglac.net) or visit [saguenaylacsaintjean.ca](http://saguenaylacsaintjean.ca). ☎



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT  
[NIAGARAPARKS.COM/TRAVEL-TRADE](http://NIAGARAPARKS.COM/TRAVEL-TRADE)

# Africa

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON



Kisa Safaris' Moses Muwanguzi with a guest

## Gorilla watching with a purpose

The path to starting a travel business wasn't an easy one for Moses Muwanguzi. The Uganda native became an orphan at age 14 and didn't have the money to continue going to school.

At the church that took him in, Muwanguzi had a chance meeting with members of an American group touring the country, and when a missionary couple asked how they could help, he mentioned needing a scholarship. They helped with the funding, and he was able to get an education and earn a business degree. Muwanguzi's passion for helping others—and showing them his country—resulted in him starting Kisa Safaris.

The company's tours focus on the natural beauty and fascinating animals, such as gorillas, which can be found in Uganda.

"Uganda has almost half of the gorillas in the world, and tourists love to come and experience these gentle giants," he says. "We take people to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, which are set aside to protect these animals."

In addition to showcasing the gorillas, Kisa Safaris has packages that focus on Africa's Big Five animals, chimpanzees and bird watching.

The company also is heavily involved in faith-based travel and seeks to connect travelers with volunteer projects—similar to the ones that he benefited from—when possible.

"In my village there were many other children like me, without parents or living in absolute poverty, making it impossible for them to attend school. Because I know what that feels like, I decided to start The Emmaus School in my village to help the children who need an education," says Mugwanguzi, who donates 10 percent of tour package receipts to the school.

Contact Muwanguzi at [kisasafaris@gmail.com](mailto:kisasafaris@gmail.com) or go to [kisasafaris.com](http://kisasafaris.com) to learn more.



Gorillas at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

KISA SAFARIS  
CC FLICKR/LUDOVICH HIRLMANN: btl/y7DlM68J

## Go wild with Travel Wild

Although it's been said you can't judge a book by its cover, you can when it comes to new NTA member Travel Wild. True to its name, the Nairobi, Kenya-based tour company has been providing adventure itineraries in East Africa for the past two decades.

Kenya is the featured destination, and both adventure and luxury safaris cover the country's famous big game parks. As part of the 13-day Connoisseur Safari & Beach Holiday package, travelers enjoy game drives in Chyulu Hills National Park, the Lewa Conservancy and Olare Motorogi Conservancy before concluding the trip with a few days at the beach.

The highlight of the company's 11-day Best of Kenya Safari is wildlife viewing in the famous Masai Mara National Reserve. Guests spend three of their days in the park, which is home to elephants, rhinos, lions and many other animals.

Travel Wild also operates safaris and other nature-themed tours in nearby Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. Travelers seeking some rest and relaxation along the Indian Ocean are in luck, as the company also offers beach vacations along the Kenyan coast in Mombasa, Diani and Lamu.

To learn more, contact Anjali Devani at [anjali@travel-wild.com](mailto:anjali@travel-wild.com) or go to [travel-wild.com](http://travel-wild.com).





Embrace South Africa Tours offers opportunities for travelers to connect with locals as part of its tours.

## Embracing South Africa's many traditions

"Many people call South Africa a world in one country. We have such a diversity of scenery, cultures, history and foods, which give people from overseas a wide selection to choose from," says Deon Kitching of Embrace South Africa Tours.

Kitching has a passion for connecting travelers with the country's people and rich culture, and his tours are designed to do just that. Whether groups are taking part in one of the company's South African history tours, enjoying a safari-focused package or embarking on a voluntourism-centered vacation, there will be plenty of meaningful interaction with local people.

"South African people are very friendly, and we welcome strangers as family," adds Kitching. "Within a few hours in the country you feel that your life has been enriched by conversations, jokes and new information."

For first-time visitors, the company's South Africa—A Beautiful Mix tour is ideal. It takes travelers to Cape Town and Johannesburg and includes a safari.

"Another popular itinerary is Culture, Food and Traditions of South Africa," says Kitching. "South Africa is a melting pot of cultures—from Malay to Zulus, from English to Indians—and all of these groups brought their wonderful traditions with them."

These itineraries are sprinkled with cultural exchanges, such as taking a township tour near Cape Town, dining with people in their homes or attending a worship service. And, for high school or university groups, Kitching can arrange soccer matches with local teams.

For more information, reach out to Kitching at [deonkit@mweb.co.za](mailto:deonkit@mweb.co.za) or go to [embracesouthafricatours.com](http://embracesouthafricatours.com).

## Ponera on the parks

Scholastica Ponera, owner of Pongo Safaris & Tours, has spent countless hours exploring the national parks of her native Tanzania. Those adventures, which helped her become an avid conservationist and an expert on the country's animals and natural habitats, also led her to start her own tour company.

*Courier* asked Ponera to share details on some of Tanzania's top parks, since they form the backbone of many of her company's safaris, and here is what we learned:

- Serengeti National Park is renowned as the main viewing spot for the annual migration of more than a million zebra, wildebeest and Thomson's gazelle. Those animals are followed closely by predators, such as cheetahs and lions.
- Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the biggest intact volcanic caldera in the world, is home to an impressive array of species, including each of the Big Five—elephant, leopard, lion, Cape buffalo and rhinoceros.
- Gombe and Mahale national parks in the western part of the country offer great chances to see thousands of chimpanzees in their natural habitat.
- Ruaha National Park boasts the highest concentration of elephants of any East African park and, with over 571 bird species, is also a birders' paradise.
- Selous Game Reserve is home to the largest amount of amphibious animals—crocodiles, hippopotamus and water birds—and is the focus of many tours covering the southern part of the country.
- Udzungwa Mountains National Park earns the moniker of the African Galapagos for its blend of unique animals and plants.

To learn more on Pongo Safaris' tour offerings, contact Ponera at [info@pongosafaris.com](mailto:info@pongosafaris.com) or visit [pongosafaris.com](http://pongosafaris.com).



Scholastica Ponera at Ngorongoro Conservation Area



# Greece, Italy and Turkey

COMPILED BY KENDALL FLETCHER



Istanbul at sunset

## Faith and food in Turkey

Istanbul-based Magister Tours of Turkey plans highly customized itineraries for individuals, families and groups, as well as incentive programs, with needs, budgets and interests in mind.

Angela Miller, the company's U.S.-based director of marketing, says Turkey is ideal for faith-based travelers, as its Anatolia region is referenced many times in the Bible.

"Paul traveled extensively throughout the region, and when one follows in his footsteps, it brings Bible teachings to life. Magister Tours creates itineraries for Christian and

Jewish groups, adding a special experience to suit each spirituality," she says.

With 18 UNESCO World Heritage sites, Turkey is alive with history, from the underground cities in the Cappadocia area to the 12,000-year-old Gobekli Tepe, the oldest man-made place of worship. Visitors can also see the famous Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace, the Hippodrome and the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul.

"Turkey is arguably home to more ancient sites than most anywhere else on the planet," Miller says.

The company has also developed a culinary program for groups looking to get a taste of Turkish cuisine and can arrange cooking classes and demonstrations.

Some of Magister Tours' planned trips include Western Turkey and the Aegean with stops in Cappadocia and Pamukkale; Mediterranean Turkey, with a blue cruise aboard a wooden gulet; and Eastern Turkey and the Black Sea region. Each is 12 to 14 days long but can be tailored to group needs.

"Turkey can easily be visited many times before one can say that they have really seen it," Miller says.

Magister Tours' U.S.-based team is available to answer questions and help with bookings. For more information, contact Miller at [angela@rightchoicesolutions.com](mailto:angela@rightchoicesolutions.com) or go to [magistertours.com](http://magistertours.com).



Grand Bazaar in Istanbul

CC FLICKR/JORGE LASCAR/billy21fesi

TOP: FOTOLIA



## A Greek tour operator trio

Known for its rich history, sun-kissed islands, wonderful cuisine and more, Greece is an iconic destination for travelers. The following three NTA members specialize in itineraries showcasing the country:

**Amphitrión Prisma** The company provides travel and tourism-related services to any region of the country and specializes in cruise services. Groups can depend on shore excursions from all ports of call in Greece, with customized tours fitting specifications of each cruise line. Amphitrión also helps with ground handling and turn-around operations and pre- and post-cruise packages. For more information, go to [amphitriongroup.com](http://amphitriongroup.com).

**TOURGREECE S.A.** Packaging a variety of tours across Greece, the company offers tailor-made incoming services for wholesale tour operators, leisure group organizers, FIT agents, and luxury and MICE specialists. It provides a range of land tours, island-hopping packages, religious tours and land/cruise combos. For more information, go to [tourgreece.gr](http://tourgreece.gr).

**Travel Zone** Guests can book three- to seven-day Greek Islands cruise packages and see the breathtaking views of Mykonos, Patmos and Rhodes with Travel Zone. The company prides itself in offering faith-based travel, entertainment, transportation and VIP services, including luxury cars, private villas, and aircraft and yacht rentals. For more information, go to [travel-zone-greece.com](http://travel-zone-greece.com).



MSTYSLAV CHERNOV

Mykonos

## We want Amore of Italy

NTA's Italy-based members serve as receptive operators for North American partners and provide assistance in developing group itineraries. Those members include:



The Ferrari Museum, part of Tomorrow Travel's Car Lovers Tour

**Michelangelo International Travel** The company offers fully customizable group tours, incentive packages and event management. Some of its best-selling themed packages are an eight-day Italy by Rail tour and yoga tours such as Namaste Tuscany and Chakras of Sicily. For more information, go to [michelangelo.travel](http://michelangelo.travel).

**RS Travel Development** The Rome-based company began arranging spiritual tours in 2000 to showcase places of religious importance in Italy for many different faiths. Groups can take part in an 11-day tour from Rome to Oberammergau to see the Passion Play in 2020. For more information, go to [rstravel.it](http://rstravel.it).

**Target Travel** Target Travel provides experiential tours by customizing every service to offer creative, unique products. The tour operator has crafted a tour of 33 gardens all over Italy, and also offers educational journeys to colleges and alumni associations by arranging lectures and private visits with local experts. For more information, go to [targettravel.it](http://targettravel.it).

**Tomorrow Travel SRL** Though the company is new, the founding partners have more than 20 years of tour planning experience. It offers tours dedicated to Italian movie sets, where groups can see the sites from films like "Roman Holiday." Travelers can also drive a Ferrari for the day and visit the museum with the Car Lovers Tour. For more information, go to [tomorrowtravel.it](http://tomorrowtravel.it).

**Italy Group Services Travel** iGs Travel works exclusively with English-speaking trade clients all over the world. Its staff members have close relationships with thousands of Italian suppliers and can put together any kind of themed tour, with some focusing on sports and wine appreciation. For more information, go to [igstravel.it](http://igstravel.it).

NTA's final Italy-based member, Agenzia Genius SAS, is a destination management company located in Perugia. For information, email [agenziagenius@gmail.com](mailto:agenziagenius@gmail.com). 📧

# Courier's Sightseeing Rail Guide



The following list includes information on NTA members that organize and offer rail adventures in North America and around the world. That group includes companies offering everything from multi-day, multi-destination tours to those providing shorter sightseeing excursions showcasing natural beauty and historical sites.

The information for this guide was provided by the member contact and was current as of Jan. 23. With this and all other guides that appear in *Courier*, members can contact sales@ntaservicesinc.com to enhance their presence.

## CANADA

### Rocky Mountaineer

Josh Mahon  
1100-980 Howe St., Vancouver, BC V6Z 0G8  
877.460.3200  
jmahon@rockymountaineer.com  
rockymountaineer.com

### VIA Rail Canada Inc.

Ryan Robutka  
International Sales  
1150 Station St., Suite 300, Vancouver, BC V6A 4C7  
+1.604.640.3741  
ryan\_robutka@viarail.ca  
viarail.ca

## UNITED STATES

### ALASKA

#### Alaska Railroad Corporation

Heather Dudick  
431 W. 1st Ave., Anchorage, AK 99501-1635  
+1.907.265.2622  
dudickh@akrr.com  
alaskarailroad.com



#### White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad

Jacqueline Taylor-Rose  
231 Second Ave., Skagway, AK 99840-0435  
+1.907.983.9821  
jtaylor-rose@wpyr.com  
wpyr.com

Built in 1898 during the Klondike Gold Rush, the White Pass & Yukon Route was—and remains—an engineering marvel. Today, guests experience the breathtaking panorama of mountains, glaciers, trestles and tunnels from the comfort of vintage train cars. The White Pass & Yukon Route is Alaska's most popular shore excursion and a favorite on many Alaska/Yukon travelers' must-see lists.

## ARIZONA

### Grand Canyon Railway

Diane Murdock  
233 N. Grand Canyon Blvd., Williams, AZ 86046  
+1.928.213.3845 (2267)  
dmurdock@xanterra.com  
thetrain.com

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### Verde Canyon Railroad

Ellen Roberts  
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877.674.3835  
ellen@verdecanyonrr.net  
verdecanyonrr.com

### CALIFORNIA

#### Railcar Montana

Arlene Post  
3318 Jonquilfield Road, Westlake Village, CA 91361  
+1.805.338.8132  
breenpost162@att.net  
railcarmontana.com

#### Roaring Camp Railroads

Joanne Hirasaki  
5401 Graham Hill Road, Felton, CA 95018-0346  
+1.831.335.4484  
joanne@roaringcamp.com  
roaringcamp.com

#### Sierra Railroad

Chris Hart  
1222 Research Park Drive, Davis, CA 95618  
+1.530.554.2522  
chart@sierrarailroad.com  
sierrarailroad.com

### COLORADO

#### American Heritage Railroads

Carrie Whitley  
479 Main Ave., Durango, CO 81301-5421  
+1.970.259.0274  
cwhitley@durangotrain.com  
durangotrain.com



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groups@cumbrestoltec.com  
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### Georgetown Loop Railroad

Tom Hill  
1520 Argentine St., Georgetown, CO 80444  
+1.303.569.0133  
tom.hill@historicroadadventures.com  
georgetownlooprailroad.com

### NEW HAMPSHIRE



#### Conway Scenic Railroad

Susan Logan  
38 Norcross Circle, P.O. Box 1947  
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## The Mount Washington Cog Railway

Susan Presby  
3168 Base Road, Mt. Washington, NH 03589  
+1.603.278.2256  
sue@thecog.com  
thecog.com

The Mount Washington Cog Railway, the first mountain-climbing cog railway in the world, is celebrating 150 years of business this year in 2019. The Cog is located in the beautiful White Mountains of New Hampshire, six miles from the grand Mount Washington Hotel. The mountain train experience is a must-do New England adventure. Passengers experience views reaching from the Atlantic Ocean into Canada as they reach the summit on their journey by train.

## PENNSYLVANIA

### Strasburg Rail Road Co.

Steve Barrall  
Route 741 East, P.O. Box 96, Strasburg, PA 17579  
+1.717.687.8421  
steveb@strasburgrailroad.com  
strasburgrailroad.com

## TEXAS

### Texas State Railroad

Teresa Propeck  
535 Park Road 76, Rusk, TX 75785  
+1.623.374.3185  
teresa@texasstaterailroad.net  
texasstaterailroad.net

## TOUR OPERATORS

NTA also has a select group of tour operators that specialize in rail travel. Here is contact information on those partners, which take groups and FITs on rail journeys across the globe:

### America by Rail Inc.

H. Lawrence Swartz  
5000 Northwind Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823-5044  
+1.517.333.4223  
tswartz@americabyrail.com  
americabyrail.com

### Great Rail Journeys

Yung Mei Choi  
369 Lexington Ave., Suite 313, New York, NY 10017  
866.834.8382  
yungmeichoi@greatrail.com  
greatrail.com

## Mexico's Copper Canyon Tours/ Chihuahua al Pacifico Tours

Carlos Saenz  
Ave. Mirador #3325, Fracc. Sicomoros  
Chihuahua, 31205 Mexico  
+1.915.239.0651  
info@coppercanyontours.com.mx  
coppercanyontours.com.mx

### Rail Source International Inc.

Carmen Metcalf  
2485 Jennings Road, Olin, NC 28660-9432  
+1.704.876.9081  
info@rsiworld.com  
rsiworld.com

### VBR Tours LLC

Todd Powell  
309 W. Washington St., Suite 650, Chicago, IL 60606  
877.929.7245 (801)  
tpowell@vacationsbyrail.com  
vacationsbyrail.com

### Yankee Holidays/Amtrak Vacations

Andrew Channell  
500 Cummings Center, Suite 3100  
Beverly, MA 01915-6115  
+1.978.867.1135  
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Where in the world is *Courier*?

David Miller, Flying Saddle Resort in Alpine, Wyoming  
 Madhushika Ginige, NKAR Travels & Tours in Colombo, Sri Lanka  
 Grant MacRae, Tourism PEI in Prince Edward Island

Anjuli Derien, Visit Savannah  
 Luis Lintner, Appina Travel in Munich, Germany  
 Courtney Hawkins, Hotel Preston in Nashville

# Meet the Members

## Carnegie Hall

NEW YORK CITY

**NTA contact:** Rayna Bourke,  
senior manager, group sales and tourism

**Office phone:** +1.212.903.9705

**Website:** [carnegiehall.org](http://carnegiehall.org)

**NTA member since:** 2009

**How long have you worked in the industry?**

Almost eight years.

**What can groups expect to experience at Carnegie Hall when they come to see a performance?**

The first thing they will notice is how beautiful the Hall is. It was built in 1891 and has a splendor that never fades. They will also be greeted by ushers and staff in red uniforms escorting them to plush, velvet-covered seats. Groups can have it all musically: In our upcoming season, we have a Beethoven 250th anniversary celebration of over 35 concerts, performances by mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, an exploration of African music with Angélique Kidjo, and the Vienna Philharmonic. That's just scratching the surface.

**Tell me what your group tours cover.**

During the 60-minute tour, visitors will see the famous Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage—where Tchaikovsky conducted—from various parts of the Hall, hear the stories behind many of the historical moments and performances, and visit the Rose Museum, where more than 400 Carnegie Hall artifacts are on display.

**What's your favorite thing to do in NYC?**

Simply walking. Each neighborhood has such a distinct vibe, and I enjoy the day leading me to a local restaurant, a unique exhibit or to a park, rather than me planning a NYC adventure.

**What do you like to do on the weekends?**

My weekends are family-focused. We live



nearby in Jersey City and look for activities that will engage my 2-year-old daughter—family concerts, children museums, playgrounds and parks.

**Have you binged on any good TV shows lately?**

David Fincher's "Mindhunter" on Netflix. Can't wait for season two!

For more information, contact Bourke at [rbourke@carnegiehall.org](mailto:rbourke@carnegiehall.org).

## The Cody Cattle Company

CODY, WYOMING

**NTA contact:** Greg and Ann Pendley, owners

**Office phone:** +1.307.272.5770

**Website:** [thecodycattlecompany.com](http://thecodycattlecompany.com)

**NTA member since:** 2011

**How long have you worked in the industry?**

We have been in the travel industry for 10 years. We previously owned and operated Cody Trolley Tours, selling that business in 2017. We had been advocates for The Cody Cattle Company during that time and had recommended it to our tour riders. Now, as new owners, we are excited to be a part of this great attraction in Cody, Wyoming.

**How does spending an evening at your attraction offer visitors an authentic look at local culture?**

We love welcoming folks to The Cody Cattle Company because the high-quality performance and family-style dinner makes everyone feel like they've been entertained

in true Western style. We are also honored that our guests can wander throughout the venue and see enlarged historical photos telling the legacy of Buffalo Bill Cody and his founding of our great town.

**What are some of the special touches you offer for groups?**

We have great areas for photo memories, and we're happy to put your group front and center for the show. We can also announce any special dates or events within the group—birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

**If you have friends/family visiting from out of town, where do you take them?**

On a Cody Trolley Tour and to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. The museum is an amazing facility located right here in Cody, and it truly is a place you do not want to miss!



**What hobbies do you enjoy?**

We are both practicing musicians, but we also love to travel, which allows me to scuba dive and Ann to work on her photography.

For more information, contact the Pendleys at [pendleygreg@gmail.com](mailto:pendleygreg@gmail.com).



## Visit Muskegon

MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN

**NTA contact:** Bernadette Benkert,  
sales executive

**Office phone:** +1.231.724.1123

**Website:** visitmuskegon.org

**NTA member since:** 2018

### What are some must-see attractions in Muskegon?

The USS LST 393 Veterans Museum, USS Silversides Submarine Museum, the Hackley and Hume Historic Homes, the Muskegon Museum of Art, and we have three light-houses that are open for tours.

### What's something you like showing off to people who visit?

The beach. If you can only see one thing, then explore our 26 miles of sugar-sand beaches.

### What's new in your city?

There is more than \$1 billion in new development or redevelopment happening in Muskegon, from new shops, breweries/distilleries and restaurants in the downtown area to a new convention center that will break

ground in spring 2019. There are three new hotels being built as well.

### What's your hidden (or not-so-hidden) talent?

I love baking cookies. I have actually mastered the chocolate chip cookie with caramel bites, which is requested as Christmas presents and often for family events.

### What tunes can we find on your iPod or in your CD collection?

My list shuffles music from Bob Dylan and The Stones to Limp Bizkit to country. As a Michigan girl, I listen to Madonna and Eminem. I can't forget Todd Rundgren, my crush from the 1970s that I still listen to when I need a boost. I'm currently listening to Beethoven. I guess I am all over the board!

### What do you like to do on the weekends?

I love to explore. I also restore items that I find at antique stores. I am currently working



on a rocking chair from the 1960s for my first grandbaby, due in September.

For more information, contact Benkert at [bernadette@visitmuskegon.org](mailto:bernadette@visitmuskegon.org).

## Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

**NTA contact:** Kaylie LeBlanc,  
tourism sales director

**Office phone:** +1.337.769.3809

**Website:** [lafayettetravel.com](http://lafayettetravel.com)

**NTA member since:** 1980

### What makes Lafayette such a great destination?

There are many reasons to visit Lafayette, which was named the Happiest City in America by *The Wall Street Journal's* MarketWatch.com. What makes this destination vibrant, colorful and full of *joie de vivre* is a great mix of festivals, culture and music, and its unique culinary scene.

### What are some popular things to do in your area?

Groups can learn about the history of our music at attractions such as Martin Accordions or Sola Violins, visit our historical Acadian villages and take a Cajun cooking class. They also can experience a swamp

tour via airboat, canoe, kayak or large or small boats.

### What band would you love to perform with?

I am a big fan of our local Cajun and zydeco music and have always thought it would be fun to jump on stage with one of the zydeco bands to play the scrub board. I'm sure it's more difficult than it looks.

### What is the most memorable sporting event you've ever attended?

LSU Tigers baseball, June 9, 2008. It was Game 3 of the Super Regional, and it was the final game played in the original Alex Box Stadium. The series was tied 1-1, and the Tigers got the win, which sent them to the College World Series. I have the photo framed of my father and me sitting in our seats for the final time in that stadium.



For more information, contact LeBlanc at [kaylie@lafayettetravel.com](mailto:kaylie@lafayettetravel.com). ☎

## Contingency planning

Continued from page 9

the European Union. In 2020, Croatian seaport Rijeka will welcome visitors to 17th-century cathedrals, and Galway, Ireland, also gets its year in the spotlight. In 2021, Timișoara, Romania, will give travellers a fresh look at the flamenco art form as one of three cultural capital cities.

Working with sports groups? Expect big changes in the next two years. In October, NFL London will host games at Tottenham Hotspur's new stadium. Former NFL star Osi Umenyiora has described the stadium as "incredible," and the games will follow what is sure to be show-stopping experience at baseball's inaugural MLB London Series this June. For golf fans, the 150th Open, in 2021, promises to deliver an extra-special outing over in St. Andrews, while NBA Europe is rumored to take pro basketball from London to Paris next year for the first time.

So, how do we plan two years in advance? By consulting our trusted



Timișoara, Romania, is designated as a European Capital of Culture in 2021.

sources, of course: travel insights from organizations such as NTA and Creative Europe, newsletters, trade shows, sports bulletins and even whispers from our partners and clients can all help us to plan ahead. This goes hand-in-hand with an efficient stream of communication. We cannot stress enough the importance of keeping clients and end users

informed. Take it from us: It will make all the difference if disaster strikes. ☘

Katie Thompson represents The Group Company, based in York, England; Boston; and Maastricht, Netherlands. The Group Company is an award-winning provider of accommodations, custom-made itineraries and ground services to tour operators.

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**FORT WORTH**

— DECEMBER 8-12, 2019 —



## NEW MEMBERS

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

### DMOs

#### Lake George Area in NY's Adirondacks

Tanya Brand  
Lake George, NY 12845-3434 USA  
visitlakegeorge.com

#### Visit Bastrop

Kathryn Lang  
Bastrop, TX 78602 USA  
visitbastrop.com

### TOUR OPERATORS

#### Bella Italia Tours Inc.

Brian Tomaine  
Selden, NY 11784 USA  
bellaitaliaescortedtours.com

#### Charlie's Travel Inc.

Vivian Chen  
Flushing, NY 11354-4418 USA  
gogogous.com

#### Expedition Tours SA

Ana Maria Cordova Vallejo  
Quito-Pichincha, 70509 Ecuador  
expeditionstours.com



#### Impression America Travel and Entertainment Group

Ning Lu  
San Gabriel, CA 91776 USA

#### Ozarks Kirkwood Tour & Travel

Angie Greeno  
Branson, MO 65615-1166 USA  
ozarkskirkwood.com

#### Paint Away Tours LLC

Beatrice Faivre Dunski  
New York, NY 10036 USA  
paintawaytours.com

#### Pleasurebent Tours

Brooke Hamlett  
Tucson, AZ 85701 USA  
pleasurebenttours.com

#### Spirited Tours and Event Solutions Inc.

Ning Liu  
El Monte, CA 91731-2533 USA

#### Thailand Tour Ways LLC

Jason Male  
Swampscott, MA 01907 USA  
thailandtourways.com

#### Travel Wild EA Ltd.

Anjali Devani  
Nairobi, 800 Kenya  
travel-wild.com

#### TUI China Travel Co. Ltd.

Tim Han  
Beijing, 100005 China  
tui.cn



### TOUR SUPPLIERS

#### Best Western Plus Fillmore Inn

Suzy Esposito  
Colorado Springs, CO 80907 USA  
bwfillmoreinn.com

#### Indo Asia Leisure Services Ltd.

Vinay Sharda  
Gurgaon, 122002 India

#### Island Adventures

Shane Aggergaard  
Anacortes, WA 98221 USA  
orcawhales.com

#### La Grande Roue de Montréal Inc.

Kathleen Plamondon  
Montréal, QC H2Y 0B4 Canada  
lgrdm.com

#### Main Event Entertainment

Phillip Wallace  
Plano, TX 75024 USA  
mainevent.com

#### Niagara Jet Adventures

Vanessa Groeneveld  
Youngstown, NY 14174 USA  
niagarajet.com

### ASSOCIATES

#### The Booking Ninja Inc.

Brent Ramirez  
Alameda, CA 94501 USA  
thebookingninja.com

#### Polymath LLC

Ingrid Edstrom  
Ashland, OR 97520 USA  
polymath.com

#### Travelex Insurance Services

Christine Buggy  
Omaha, NE 68114 USA  
travelexinsurance.com

## NTA EVENTS

Save these dates in 2019 and beyond to connect with new partners and destinations. For more information on these events, click the EVENTS tab on NTAonline.com.



VISIT FORT WORTH



Fort Worth  
Dec. 8-12, 2019



VISIT TUCSON



Tucson, Arizona  
March 27-30, 2019



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Washington, D.C.  
April 10-11, 2019



VISIT ANCHORAGE/ROY NEESE



Anchorage, Alaska  
March 18-21, 2020

# A big family in the Big Easy

BY KEVIN MURPHY, CTP

IT DIDN'T SEEM SIMPLE: Plan a cruise for 14 family members, ranging from twin 5-year-old boys to my mother, whose 70th birthday was the reason for the event. Mom had high expectations, and it was only natural she would turn to me to help create something memorable for her milestone. With 20 years of experience in planning group tours, I couldn't refuse.

Squeezing a cruise in between Christmas and the New Year, when the younger kids were on school break, seemed perfect. The small window of dates was a huge help, as it narrowed the hundreds of cruise ships and itineraries down to only a handful of choices.

We found a seven-night sailing from New Orleans, a wonderful departure city and one with which I was very familiar from my first visit, shortly after Hurricane Katrina, and several more visits, including for NTA's Travel Exchange in 2015. It's an ideal place for a multi-generational trip, one that screamed for a few extra days of sightseeing before we boarded the ship. And staying at the Crowne Plaza on Canal Street, at the entrance to the French Quarter, placed us within walking distance of everything.

After the cruise was booked and the airline tickets were purchased, I started the real work and got in touch with my friend Tico Soto, a colleague who had represented the city and region well at Travel Exchange. Wanting to keep the



The author, Kevin, pictured with his daughter Kendall and niece Devyn.

family together as much as possible, Tico started giving me referrals.

"I have a great company for the transfers," he told me confidently. "And there's an event called Celebration in the Oaks that would be perfect for the kids: holiday lights, carnival rides and plenty more. And you can ride the streetcar to get there from your hotel!"

I structured our time together in New Orleans just like a group tour. We started with dinner on arrival night at the wonderful Mulate's, which I remembered from my 2015 visit. We arrived at 7, just when the live Cajun music started. Combined with the great food, it was a great introduction to the city. Family members took turns on the dance floor, and one of my young nephews was invited on stage to play spoons with the band!

After tucking the little ones into bed, it was time for a decidedly adult tour of the French Quarter. A family member, now living in the quarter and providing walking tours as a licensed guide, met us for an abbreviated ghost tour. After imbibing several Hurricanes, the official drink of New Orleans, we returned to our hotel with a walk along Bourbon Street.

The next day we started with that important tradition of coffee and beignets at Café Du Monde. Tico met us, giving the kids a real, live resident of the city to chat with. We then split up. The younger kids went to the Audubon

Aquarium of the Americas. The older kids, myself included, headed toward the National World War II Museum. (Both attractions are NTA members.)

The afternoon was left for lunch, shopping, pralines and a few more Hurricanes. That night a trolley delivered us to the awe and wonder of Celebration in the Oaks. How wonderful it is to see the holidays through the eyes of children!

It was heartening to see the city emerge from years of rebuilding stronger than ever. Visitor numbers have finally exceeded their pre-Katrina levels. A much-needed new airport terminal is scheduled to open in May. A new riverboat, *The City of New Orleans*, will soon be plying the waters of the Mississippi providing sightseeing. Cruise lines are continuing to expand their offerings, including Royal Caribbean, which just resumed sailings from New Orleans, and Disney Cruise Lines, set to begin its first-ever sailings from the city in 2020.

I was happy to hear from my family that the Crescent City left everyone wanting more. Relying on friends from NTA and my experiences certainly made the trip that much better. With any luck, I'll be bringing back more groups soon—maybe for Mardi Gras or maybe again for the holidays. Whenever it happens, I know the city will be ready with open arms. ☺

Kevin Murphy, CTP, is the owner of Open Roads Tour & Travel Solutions in Fair Oaks, California.



Coffee and beignets at Café Du Monde

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