

COURIER

DELIVERING BUSINESS ESSENTIALS TO NTA MEMBERS

MARCH 2018

MARVELS OF MEXICO

From mosaic masterpieces to mountainside monarchs

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ROOMS AND BLOOMS

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'IT'S ALL WORLD-CLASS'

PAGE 22

Estado de México

Cosmovital botanical garden in Toluca, Mexico





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A nice segway into red rock country: Guided segway tours at Garden of the Gods Park in Colorado Springs, Colorado, take riders to some of the attraction's orange-hued rock formations. Turn to page 30 to find out more about destinations in the U.S. Four Corners states: Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.

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It's a year-round kind of place

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► JUNE/JULY ISSUE

DESTINATIONS

Mid-Atlantic U.S.

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania

Pacific Northwest

British Columbia, Oregon, Washington

South Central U.S.

Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia

Germany and Switzerland

City Spotlight: Los Angeles

SPECIAL COVERAGE

North American National Parks

Travel Exchange '18 Preview (Milwaukee)

DEADLINES

Space: April 6 | Material: April 16

► AUGUST/SEPTEMBER ISSUE

DESTINATIONS

Coastal California

Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco

Great Lakes

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

Southwest U.S.

Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Eastern Europe

Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

SPECIAL COVERAGE

Museums

Guide: Museums

DEADLINES

Space: June 1 | Material: June 11

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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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I HATE MY BACKYARD.

I'm especially unhappy with it now—as we merge into springtime in Kentucky—because of a landscaping project that has created a muddy mess. But even when the project is complete, my backyard won't reach a level of beauty and sophistication worthy of a magazine. This magazine, for example.

Now, *your* backyard, I like.

In "Rooms and blooms," starting on page 24, travel writer Patti Nickell showcases several NTA attractions that boast extravagant, historical homes and grand, gorgeous gardens.

This issue takes you into the backyards of NTA members around the globe. Pat Henderson found loads of fabulous vistas (and activities, events and museums) in the Four Corners states, pages 30 to 36.

And Kendall Fletcher escorts you onto the property several of members in eastern Canada; see pages 38–42. Look out those back doors and see Montréal, an Ottawa museum and Niagara Falls. And on page 43, Kendall helps shine the spotlight on members in Greece, Italy and Turkey.

Speaking of spotlights, I took a different approach to our feature on New York City. Last year, I wrote about my own experience in the Big Apple. In this issue (pages 22–23), it's NTA tour operators who do the talking about the exceptional city—with a big backyard.

OK, so look out into your backyard right now. Do you see butterflies? One or two little yellow ones, maybe? Yeah, me, too (except mine are muddy).

To see a truly enviable backyard, take a trip to Mexico with Pat Henderson, who in late January ventured to the central part of the country with A Closer Look Tours' Monarch Butterflies of Mexico tour. Even if you don't have time to read the whole story just yet, go to page 18 and enjoy the images.

This month's cover features the glorious glass mosaic of Cosmovitral in Toluca, another image from Pat's fantastic voyage.

You also can take rail voyages with NTA members that give guests a relaxing ride through picturesque mountains and fields in their expansive, impressive backyards. Read details and perspectives on pages 44–46 and 56.

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you this spring. After a visit to Jordan with Tourism Cares, I'll be in Charleston, South Carolina, for Contact and in Washington state for a trip with Norwegian Cruise Line and a look-see in Seattle.

And maybe by June, after those trips, I can enjoy my own backyard—as I did last summer in the photo at right.

Read on,

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On the cover:
Cosmovitral in Toluca, Mexico,
includes beautiful botanical
gardens that are surrounded
by mosaic windows made from
more than a million pieces of
colorful glass.
Photo: Pat Henderson



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VOICES OF LEADERSHIP

THE NTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS comprises 17 members who represent tour operators, tour suppliers and destination marketing organizations. Chaired by Chris Babb, the board meets in person and via conference calls throughout the year. And Babb is a big believer in communication between NTA members and their elected representatives:

"I'm excited about working with this group of professionals, and I want to encourage you to work with us, too. Track us down at industry events, and feel free to send us an email anytime you have questions, suggestions or concerns. We're all working to make the NTA community more inviting—and more rewarding."

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"Contact is like pulling up to a juice bar and getting a protein shake with double scoops of extra protein! It fills my personal, professional and creative tanks to the max."

—Clayton Whitehead, CTP, Sports Leisure Vacations



Register for NTA's buyer retreat at NTAonline.com/contact.



Charleston, SC | April 18–21, 2018

DMOs and suppliers attend as sponsors. Email sponsor@ntastaff.com or visit NTAonline.com/contact to learn more.

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

Travel Exchange '18 reg opens March 12

Cheers to Milwaukee!

NTA's annual convention is heading to Brew City USA, Nov. 4-8. Mark your calendars for March 12 when registration for the event opens at noon (Eastern time).

Tour suppliers, DMOs and tour operators who register as sellers can save \$300 until June 12 with early-bird rates. Appointment-taking buyers attend for only \$99, and any additional appointment-takers from the same company can register at no cost.

Milwaukee is the birthplace of Harley-Davidson, and the motorcycle manufacturer's museum will be the site of the Icebreaker event at Travel Exchange. The city on the shores of Lake Michigan also is famous for its rich brewing tradition,

which ranges from legendary German brewers Blatz, Pabst, Schlitz and Miller to modern craft brew masters.

"We look forward to showcasing our city, with its exceptional blend of natural beauty, big city arts and entertainment, and our own brand of Midwest hospitality," said Paul Upchurch, president and CEO of VISIT Milwaukee.

Go to NTAonline.com/convention to register and learn more about NTA's signature event and use #Trex18 in your social posts.



Speaking of Travel Exchange ... Fort Worth tabbed to host 2019 event



Following a successful convention in San Antonio in December, NTA will return to Texas in 2019 and hold Travel Exchange in Fort Worth.

The dates for the event, NTA's first in the iconic Texas city, are Dec. 8-12, 2019. NTA's convention in San Antonio marked the association's return to fourth-quarter dates, a move championed by members. And while the timing and location were well-received, the convention itself proved to be enormously popular with members.

"We always collect detailed feedback from Travel Exchange, including an overall rating for the event," said NTA President Pam Inman. "And the number for San Antonio was a jump up the scale. That jibes with the many positive comments that members have shared in person, by handwritten notes and by email."

NTA tour operators love U.S. national parks

The U.S. national parks are some of the most-visited attractions by your association's tour operator members and their clients. Most NTA operators—74 percent—report that they currently include a national park in their itineraries. Here are some other stats from that NTA survey:

Top parks for NTA groups

1. Yellowstone
2. Grand Canyon
3. Arches
4. Bryce Canyon
5. Zion
6. Canyonlands
7. Acadia
8. Great Smoky Mountains
9. Denali
10. Grand Teton

Based on the number of individuals taken to parks by NTA tour operators

By the numbers

32,000 groups

Collectively, NTA tour operators take approximately 32,000 groups to the parks each year.


560,000 people

More than a half-million individuals annually visit the parks as part of a group tour they booked with an NTA tour operator.

\$85 million spend

In total, tour operators spend more than \$85 million each year in the national parks and at the surrounding concessionaires. The numbers don't take into account any additional spending by individuals.

Advocacy update on park fee increases

NTA has been working with the U.S. National Park Service recently regarding proposed fee increases and seasonal peak pricing at 17 of the top parks. The most significant takeaway from the Feb. 5 meeting NTA President Pam Inman had with senior officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior and National Park Service was that the agencies should release a final announcement in the next few weeks. Make sure to check NTA's Tuesday e-newsletter for updates. 

RELATING TO GOVERNMENT

INSIGHTS ON U.S. LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND INDUSTRY TOPICS



Infrastructure outlook

AFTER WHAT SOME MIGHT call a roller coaster first year in the White House, President Donald J. Trump delivered his first State of the Union address Jan. 30. The president took advantage of the national spotlight to highlight the accomplishments of his administration in his first year in office, and he took the opportunity to excite his base in the approach to the 2018 midterm elections.

President Trump has been touting a forthcoming infrastructure plan ever since his 2016 campaign, and many expected more details to be highlighted in the address. However, the president was rather short on specifics for an infrastructure proposal.

One of the only significant infrastructure-related details that emerged from the State of the Union address was the president's call for Congress to "produce a bill that generates at least \$1.5 trillion for the new infrastructure investment that our country so desperately needs." The president went on to state that every federal dollar should also be leveraged through partnerships with local

and state governments and with private sector investments.

While many industries, including travel and tourism, have been patiently waiting for the release of the administration's formal infrastructure package, the lack of time spent on the topic in the president's address left many wondering if it is still a priority for this administration.

Additionally, the path forward for any sort of infrastructure package remains unclear, as some believe that a plan is not possible without spending a large sum of federal dollars. However, coming together for an infrastructure plan could create a clear post-midterm election win for legislators on both sides of the aisle.

The White House, on the same day as the State of the Union address, released a fact sheet highlighting points from the president's address. This fact sheet proposed using half of new federal spending to motivate investment from the state and local levels, focusing a quarter of new federal funds on rural infrastructure, and reducing regulatory barriers as a way to streamline the permitting

process. Many in Washington are looking forward to the administration's release of a more detailed infrastructure proposal, but as continuing resolution stopgap spending bills take up the congressional schedule, timing remains unclear.

Even without an exact timeline, NTA remains optimistic that the administration and Congress can come together on an infrastructure proposal that will facilitate a more positive experience for travelers. NTA remains engaged with key offices on Capitol Hill to remind elected officials that the travel and tourism industry, a major section of the U.S. economy, relies on a safe and secure, fully funded, and modern infrastructure system.

NTA, when participating in Destination Capitol Hill March 21–22, will continue to advocate for improvements to the United States' infrastructure and transportation system. ☺

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



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4 easy steps to a solid social campaign

BY CATHERINE HEEG



DO YOU WANT to jumpstart bookings for your next tour? Is your email list a bit too skinny? Are your social sites in need of some new fans and followers?

No matter your goal, having a strategic plan can make your next project launch easier. You won't be scrambling to find the right images or words to make your marketing pop.

In today's world we rely on GPS to get us to our destination. And in the world of marketing, a roadmap guides the way and helps us market like a pro.

A social marketing roadmap can be used for so many projects:

- Marketing your next group tour
- Planning a foray into another marketing channel
- Beefing up your email list with prospective clients
- Promoting an upcoming event
- Launching a new attraction or feature in your destination
- Showcasing a special hotel benefit

We all like to keep things easy, so here's a four-step plan that's easy to remember; each step begins with the letter E.



Edit

This may be the hardest step of all, but it's the foundation for your strategic marketing plan.

To edit your collection of photos, graphics, articles and blogs, choose only those assets that showcase your style, brand and message. If you're like me, you have photos from years ago that you love, but they don't work on social sites because they're too grainy.

- Seek out and save images that are clear, crisp and colorful. bit.ly/2BJYsRu
- Save graphics and articles that speak to your audience and reflect your brand tone, style and voice.
- Select only assets that tell your unique story.



Embrace

Embrace the foundation of your business and your team. In his book "Good to Great," author Jim C. Collins wrote about having people on the bus and in the right seats. It's the same for your team.

- Do team members embrace their roles and goals?
- What social sites do your clients embrace?
- Which sites do you embrace?



Execute

This is where the magic starts! Now that you have your foundation set, you get to create and launch your new strategy.

An editorial calendar is an effective way to corral all your marketing tactics—both social and traditional—into one place. bit.ly/2E8zd0N

It's easy to create a calendar that focuses on your assets and your client needs when you already have your tone, style



Edit



Embrace



Execute



Evaluate

and voice down pat. You'll add content that supports your theme and begs to be shared by your fans.

When you launch an initiative, your new fans will come to recognize your tone, style and voice across a variety of channels. Organic reach combined with well-targeted advertising will propel your success. bit.ly/2nxjeyN



Evaluate

In this stage you'll be able to measure and tweak your strategy. bit.ly/2EvTr2a

You can track results and determine if a new strategy is worth the time and talent of you and your team.

- Are your fans giving you the "thumbs up"?
- Is your fan base sharing your great content?
- Are they signing up for your programs?

When you track and analyze your social efforts, there are some amazing tools to highlight what's resonating with your fans. Measure your success in terms of reach, engagement and web traffic.

Monitoring your own progress is grand, but looking further afield is an even better way to see what's popular on the pages of your suppliers, destinations and even your competitors. Many tourism pros are so focused that they forget the value of learning from others in order to better serve their own unique audiences.

People buy from individuals and organizations they know and like, and building relationships with your fans is the goal of both social and traditional marketing. Being successful at it takes a strategy that's filled with the four E's! 📌

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.

COURIER

JUNE/JULY

C'mon ... explore your options for advertising in the June/July issue. Look at all the good stuff we'll cover:

FEATURES

North American National Parks
Preview to Travel
Exchange Milwaukee

DESTINATIONS

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New York, Pennsylvania)*

Pacific Northwest
*(British Columbia,
Oregon, Washington)*

South Central U.S.
*(Kentucky, Tennessee,
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Celebratory cities

A trio of destinations salute significant anniversaries in 2018

BY BOB ROUSE

"A CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a city to make a bold statement about its past, present and future."

That summation by Casandra Matej, president and CEO of Visit San Antonio, describes what's taking place not only in San Antonio this year, but also in (at least) two other cities within the NTA community. New Orleans, like San Antonio, is celebrating its tricentennial anniversary, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has 350 candles on its cake.

"I can't tell you how proud we are to be celebrating the 350th anniversary of Sault Ste. Marie as the oldest permanent settlement in Michigan and one of the oldest communities in the interior of the United States," says Fred Huffman, group tour coordinator of Michigan's Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation Association. "There's a full slate of activities scheduled throughout the year."

July is prime time for the city's celebrations, beginning with a Fourth of July parade and fireworks show and concluding with Rendezvous in the Sault, when re-enactors will set up displays and camps that depict military and civilian life from 1668 to 1840. The event is set for July 28-29.

In between is the 350th Anniversary Festival, a series of events and activities focused on the region's history, culture, food and military heritage. The downtown festival will take place July 21-27.



Kicking off San Antonio's tricentennial at the Travel Exchange Icebreaker

VISIT SAN ANTONIO

Sault Ste. Marie is at the nexus of two Great Lakes—Huron and Superior—and the Soo Locks, which connect the two lakes, have long been one of the world's busiest waterway traffic systems.

"Most groups visiting Sault Ste. Marie take a ride with Soo Locks Boat Tours, or they watch the freighters pass through the locks from the observation decks in Canal Park," Huffman says. "I really enjoy the dinner cruise, which takes you through both the American and Canadian lock systems."

The region's rich heritage extends beyond the locks. "A lot of groups do a hub-and-spoke day trip to the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point, which features the bell from the

Edmund Fitzgerald, says Huffman. "They'll also visit the Upper Tahquamenon Falls, which is the second-largest waterfall east of the Mississippi River and is on the river where Hiawatha launched a canoe to start his epic journey."

Celebrating a city's major anniversary is itself an epic journey, according to Matej. "In San Antonio, our tricentennial year is a community effort with every neighborhood, organization and company playing a role in the celebration."

The yearlong salute, which had a preview kickoff during Travel Exchange, is projected to have a \$120 million economic impact on the local economy, attract more than a quarter-million new visitors to the city and spur business development.



Soo Locks Boat Tours and Sunset Dinner Cruise



St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans

LEFT: UPPER PENINSULA TRAVEL & RECREATION ASSOCIATION
RIGHT: NEW ORLEANS CVB

"With incredible investments in our city's museums and cultural institutions, awesome new rides at our family-friendly theme parks, and hundreds of events celebrating cuisine and culture throughout the year, it's a great time to visit San Antonio," says Matej.

The pinnacle of the citywide celebration will be Commemorative Week, May 1-6. Each day carries a specific theme, including history and education, arts, the founding fathers and mothers, the city's five missions, and its past and current military heritage.

Events that follow include the Texas Folklife Festival, June 8-10, celebrating ethnic food, music, dance and crafts; the San Antonio Beer Festival (Oct. 20), featuring local and international beers from more than 150 breweries; and the Ford Holiday River Parade (Nov. 23), a nighttime procession of floats that kicks off the River Walk's display of holiday lights.

New Orleans is another celebratory city that is turning on the lights for its 300th anniversary in 2018. Luna Fete, running the entire month of December, will feature an unusual art installation and a festival of lights that will use the city's iconic architecture as the canvas for a large-scale video projection. It's one of many ways the Crescent City will commemorate its 1718 founding.

"New Orleans is rolling out the red carpet and creating many special experiences around its past," says Thu Tran, of the New Orleans CVB. "We have some great tricentennial events groups can plan visits around."

In conjunction with the anniversary, 45 landmarks across the city will highlight specific bits of history through a QR code reader app. At landmarks in the French Quarter, Mid City, Uptown and Downtown, visitors can scan the code to pull up a short video that details the site's history.

April 19 through 25 is NOLA Navy Week, when ships from the U.S., Canada and around the globe will be in New Orleans for a week-long festival, which includes free ship tours and a cook-off between the ships. During the first part of Navy Week, New Orleans will host a flotilla of tall ships near NTA-member Audubon Aquarium.

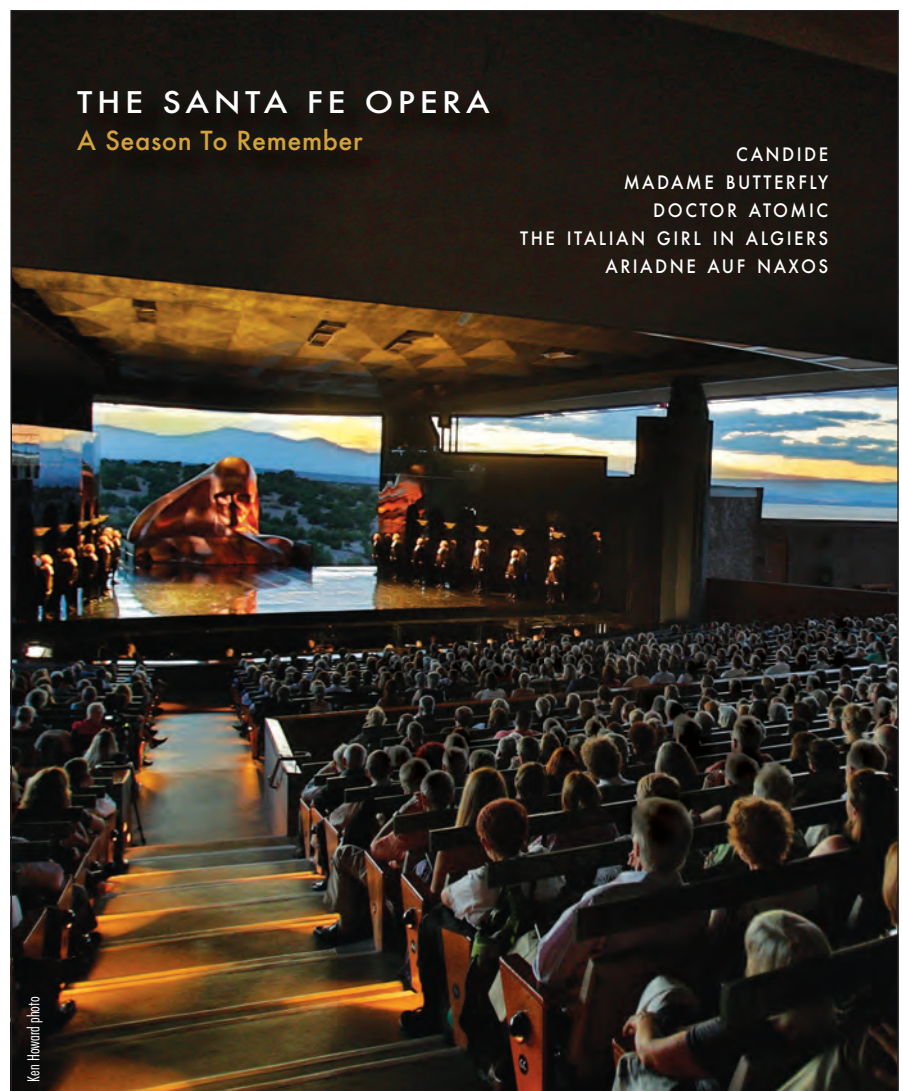
Through the end of June, visitors can catch *The Church in the Crescent: Three*

Hundred Years of Catholicism in New Orleans. The exhibit at Old Ursuline Convent Museum shares the story of the St. Louis Cathedral from its beginnings as a small wooden church to its present-day iconic edifice. Photographs, portraits, letters and incredibly preserved artifacts will allow guests to explore the rich history of the Catholic Church's three centuries in New Orleans.

And for three months, beginning Oct. 26, the New Orleans Museum of

Art will present *The Orléans Collection*, an exhibition of works of art from the magnificent collection of the city's namesake, Philippe II, Duke of Orléans (1689-1723).

For more information on these cities' 2018 celebrations, contact Huffman (Sault Ste. Marie) at groups@uptravel.com, Francisco Gallegos (San Antonio) at franciscogallegos@visitsanantonio.com, and Tran (New Orleans) at ttran@neworleanscvb.com. ☎



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Run to the Hill

NTA members will join hundreds of their tourism colleagues from across the United States when the industry makes its voice heard in Washington, D.C., at Destination Capitol Hill, March 21–22. NTA annually unites with U.S. Travel Association and Destinations International on the event, and we're pleased to welcome the Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB as a new partner in 2018.

DCH educates attendees on upcoming legislation that impacts travel, and there also is time to network with peers and meet with members of Congress to stress the



DESTINATION CAPITOL HILL

importance of travel as an economic driver. This year's keynote speaker is Bret Baier, FOX News Channel's chief political anchor and host of "Special Report with Bret Baier."

Registration is filling up quickly, so go to ustravel.org/events/DCH to check availability, view training webinars and see the schedule.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

BRET BAIER

FOX News Channel's chief political anchor, and anchor of "Special Report with Bret Baier"



"As a tour operator specializing in U.S. national park tours, it's very important to let them know how concerned I am about new rules they want to implement that would affect my groups. The possible reservation system at some of the parks, along with doubling entrance fees—and taking a piece of my profit on top of that—are some of the issues I plan on discussing. I encourage everyone to attend."

—Michele Michalewicz, CTP, Western Leisure, NTA Advocacy Advisory Group member, DCH attendee



"Just to walk down the hall of a congressional building and into the office of your elected official; to sit down with a staff person assigned to your topic or possibly the actual member and speak to the priorities of our association and the industry as a whole; then to also have the opportunity to discuss how these issues affect your own business and your livelihood, it's just an awesome experience!"

—John Shaffer, Luray Caverns, NTA Advocacy Advisory Group member, DCH attendee

Babb's best: NTA chair shares Contact, Charleston favs



NTA Chair Chris Babb is a regular Contact attendee and has family in Charleston, site

of next month's buyer retreat, so The Group Tour Company president is an ideal choice to share why he's gearing up for the April 18–21 event. Read on for his take on how the event benefits sellers, too, and what he's most looking forward to having on his plate in South Carolina's Lowcountry. To register for Contact and learn more visit NTAonline.com/contact.

Courier: Why is Contact valuable to you as a tour operator?

Babb: Contact allows me, as the decision maker for my company, to network with colleagues to discuss best practices and to share solutions to business challenges while exploring a destination.

C: Why does it make sense to sponsor and attend Contact?

B: It's a chance for our DMO and tour supplier partners to spend extended face time with the individuals who are making the decision on the product they offer their clients; it



Charleston, SC | April 18–21, 2018

allows us to really get to know one another in a casual, laid-back environment. Some of my company's strongest relationships grew from meetings at Contact.

C: How is Contact different than Travel Exchange for you?

B: Contact is a chance for me, as the owner, to focus on my continued education and to learn in depth about travel product. Travel Exchange is for my staff to meet our vendors, continue their education and develop the product that we'll be offering our clients.

C: Have you been to Charleston?

B: Yes, I have family there, and it's one of my favorite places to visit. Seriously there is nothing like the Lowcountry; you have to simply be there to experience it.

C: What food or drink will you indulge in while in the Lowcountry?

B: What will I not? There's shrimp and grits, oysters, barbecue! Charleston has one of the most unique food cultures in America—and don't get me started on the craft beverage scene. Deciding which of my favorite haunts I will hit first when I get into town always is a challenge. ☘

PAT HENDERSON

Commemorating the Nez Perce

Big Hole National Battlefield remembers the events of Aug. 9, 1877, when members of the Nez Perce tribe awoke to gunfire from U.S. Colonel John Gibbon's troops. By the time the smoke cleared the next day, 90 Nez Perce members were dead, along with more than 30 soldiers and volunteers.

A majority of group programs at the 655-acre site, which is located 60 miles southwest of Butte near Wisdom, Montana, start at the visitor center. Displays in the museum and an introductory movie provide an overview of the events that took place in 1877.

Many guided activities are offered during the summer months, including the popular battlefield hike. This ranger-led walk covers one to two miles and includes narration on the battle, the landscape and the tribe. Two other options are the 30-minute deck talks and the summer speaker series.

Groups also can time a visit to coincide with the Annual Commemoration of the Battle of the Big Hole, which this year will be held Aug. 11. This event honors both those who lost their lives and those who survived, and is a traditional day of remembrance for the Nez Perce people. It begins with a tribute service and includes a pipe ceremony, presentations, a drum circle and a performance by the Nez Perce Nation Drum band.



CC WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/ROGER M. PETERSON: bit.ly/2EGHPn

Each year in late May the battlefield also is the site of Coyote Camp, an educational program geared for school groups. As part of the camp, students rotate through activity stations and see cultural demonstrations.

For more information, call **+1.406.689.3155** or visit nps.gov/biho.

A very alive poets society

This October, North America's largest poetry event will return to Newark, New Jersey. The Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, which brings together a who's who of poets and spoken-word artists, as well as enthusiasts from around the world, is scheduled for Oct. 18–21.



CC FLICKR/MARTIN ALONSO: bit.ly/2DA1FJs

Throughout the four days of this biennial festival, readings, discussions and conversations with over 50 internationally and nationally renowned writers will take place at a variety of venues in Newark's Downtown Arts District. The signature Evening Main Stage Readings bring some of today's most celebrated poets to the stage at Prudential Hall.

There are a number of additional events, such as Poets on Poetry, Poetry Samplers and the Conversations series, which allow the general public to interact with and hear from the distinguished writers. Poets on Poetry includes a panel of writers who discuss poems and poets that have impacted their lives and work. As part of Poetry Samplers, more than 20 artists give brief readings of the works of other festival artists to introduce them to a broader audience.

The multi-faceted Conversations sessions give the public a chance to talk with featured artists about how topical issues are represented in poetry. There are presentations including two to four writers, who share about their lives and their art, and additional panel discussions with festival storytellers that have covered topics ranging from "Poetry and Jazz" to "The Dignity of the Ordinary."

To learn more, contact **+1.973.735.2135 (ext. 104)** or go to dodgepoetry.org/festival-events/2018-festival.

Stay glassy, New Hampshire

Terrapin Glassblowing Studio explores the history and artistry of glass works. Tucked away in the southwestern corner of New Hampshire in the town of Jaffrey, the studio welcomes guests with tours, demonstrations and programs.

As part of tours, groups learn about the steps artists take—from gathering the glass and heating it in the kiln to shaping and molding it into a finished piece—when producing functional and decorative glass pieces. The studio offers a number of interactive sessions that cover both glassblowing and flameworking.

Participants in the Introduction to Glassblowing class learn the foundations of glassblowing and get to use the tools and equipment. As part of the two-hour session, they create four of their own pieces—a clear flower, a colorful flower, a paperweight and a clear blown ornament. The Blow Your Own Pumpkin and Blow Your Own Ornament classes allow guests to experience glassblowing firsthand in a shorter time frame by focusing on just one piece.

The craft of flameworking, which varies from glassblowing, is showcased through hands-on offerings such as introductory flameworking and basic beadmaking, advanced courses in both disciplines, and a marble making option. Participants get to use the heated torches to create different items they can take with them.

Beyond those sessions, private classes and special group programs can be booked with advanced notice.

To learn more, call +1.603.593.5073 or go to terrappinglass.com.



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JOCELYN BROWN/TERRAPINGGLASS.COM

Slow down, you move too fast

Turkey is home to 14 towns that are part of the slow city tourism effort that is spearheaded by Cittaslow. The organization, which was founded in Italy and has close ties to the slow food movement, grants membership to destinations that meet requirements and goals focused on improving the quality of life by slowing down the overall pace of things.

Here is a look at Akyaka, Halfeti and Göynük, three of Turkey's most popular Cittaslow towns, each of which offers a chance for travelers to discover historical attractions in a more relaxed atmosphere:

Akyaka One of Turkey's newest Cittaslow members, this village on the Gokova Bay in the southwestern corner of the country is known for its crystalline seas, wetlands, pine forests, green mountains and wooden houses that represent traditional Mugla architecture.

Halfeti Located in south-central Turkey, Halfeti was established by the Romans thousands of years ago. It is famous for its black roses, grown only in the region, as well as its unique caves and a thriving dining scene that includes restaurants overlooking the Euphrates.

Göynük This town in the Black Sea region of southwest Turkey pays homage to its Ottoman roots through its architecture—mosques, hammams and hundreds of houses from the early 20th century. The town's signature structure, the Victory Tower, overlooks the downtown area.



CC BY-WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/NIGHTSTALLION03: bit.ly/2DwvRFH

Halfeti

For more information, visit goturkeytourism.com or call +1.212.687.2194. 📞

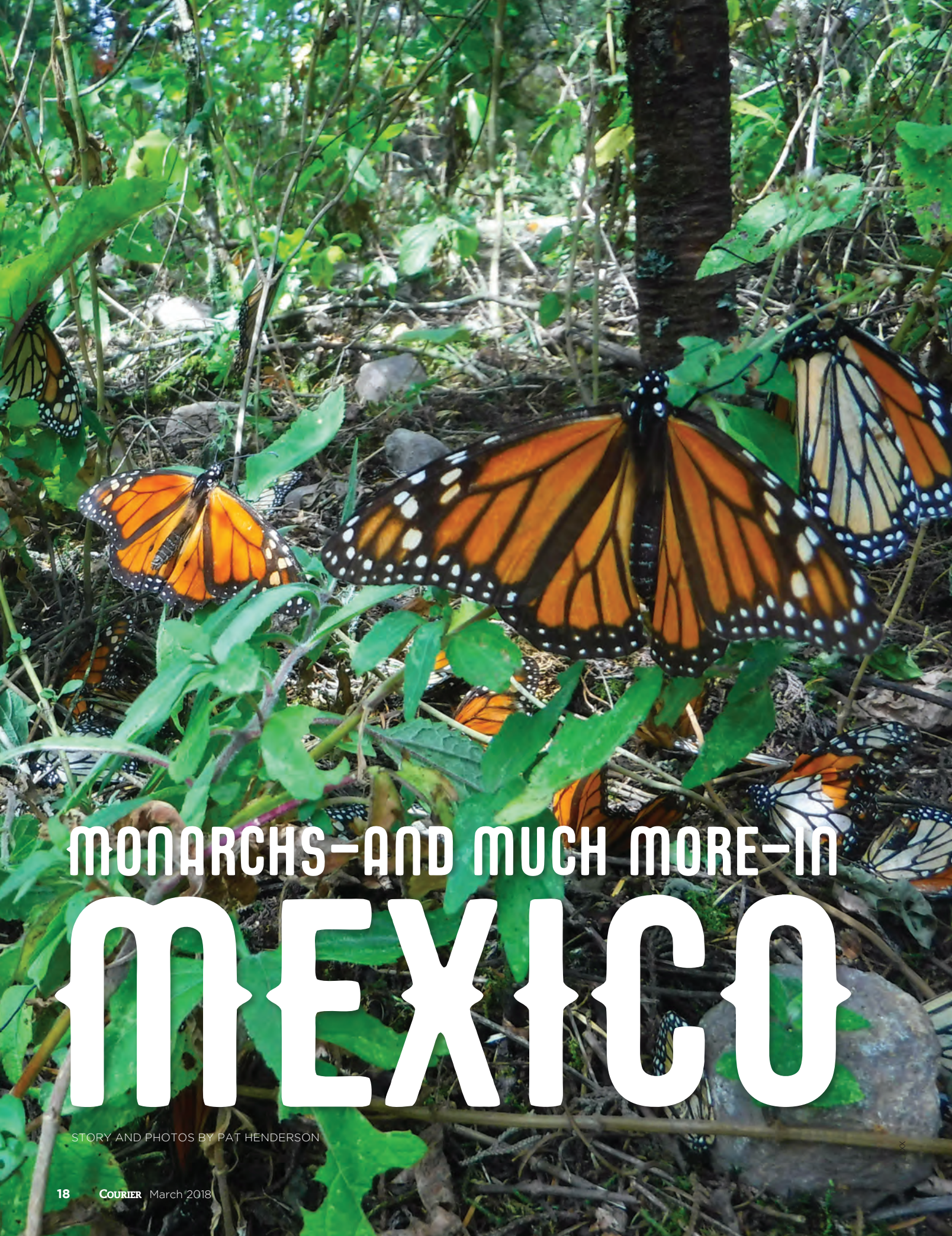
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MONARCHS—AND MUCH MORE—IN mexico

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PAT HENDERSON

As I headed to Mexico at the end of January to join the Monarch Butterflies of Mexico tour—offered by longtime NTA member A Closer Look Tours—one thought kept going through my head: Don't step on the butterflies, don't step on the butterflies.

About 15 years ago, my wife and I were in Mackinac Island, Michigan, for a long weekend, and one of our stops was at the Original Butterfly House and Insect World. Before we entered the enclosure to see the colorful butterflies, we'd been warned to pay close attention to where they were at all times.

I was fine for the first 15 minutes. Then, after taking a couple of photos, I let my guard down. When I backed up, I heard a delicate, disturbing crunch.

"You didn't!" my wife said.

After lifting my shoe, I replied, "Uh, oh."

MONARCHS DON'T LIKE MONDAYS, EITHER

A Closer Look's itinerary started and ended in Mexico City and featured three days in the high-altitude village of Tlalpujahua, Michoacán, near the monarch sanctuaries.

Our group of seven included another travel publisher and her photographer from Michigan, and four people from Phoenix—a father-son duo and a well-traveled couple. We were in the very capable hands of tour manager Sergio Garcia (not the golfer) and he was everything you'd want in a guide. It was an excellent and adventurous band, and I felt very fortunate to be traveling with such a hearty and humorous group. We enjoyed some wonderful hospitality and also got to experience the warmth and generosity of the Mexican people throughout our journey.

Unsurprising considering the tour's theme, the time we spent on the trail of the monarchs was the most memorable for me. I definitely consider myself a nature-lover, although admittedly I'm more of a hiking and sunsets guy. But this experience seemed like a chance to do and see something totally unique, and that is right in my traveling wheelhouse.

The monarchs journey from all across Canada to one very specific section of Mexico each winter, a fact that begged a lot of questions. There are reasons why the beautiful and delicate creatures choose the mountainous Michoacán terrain as their November-to-March home, but I'll spare you the fairly involved scientific explanation. The good news is that they do, and if you journey there to see them, it is spectacular (more in a minute).

Our touring included excursions on Monday and Tuesday



to two different sanctuaries. Both visits included a horseback ride from the welcome center up the mountain, followed by hiking on up to roughly 12,000 feet, to the specific areas where the monarchs hang out.

The first day was windy and about 43 degrees, and the monarchs reacted by huddling together to keep warm. While we could see large clumps of them high up in the trees, very few flew close to where we were standing. It was cool to see them from a distance, but not quite the experience we'd hoped for.

That night, I sent an email to a few of my friends and family that read, in part, "Apparently the monarchs don't like windy, overcast days. Hoping conditions aren't that way tomorrow, which is our only other chance to see them, but guess what's in the forecast?"

The good news: Tuesday brought sunny skies and temps in the early 50s, which brought the monarchs out en masse. The memory of turning the final corner and being welcomed by monarchs soaring freely through the trees as we arrived at our viewing spot is one that will stick with me forever. It still is hard to put into words what we experienced in our 30 to 40 minutes there, but it was awe-inspiring.

I was torn between snapping photo after photo of the majestic monarchs (occupational hazard) and just sitting and soaking in the moment. I balanced both, though the latter offered such a peaceful feeling and served as a great reminder of the one-of-a-kind experiences travel offers.

Most important, no butterflies were harmed/stepped on—that I know of—during our visit.



Pat Henderson makes a new friend at the El Rosario Sanctuary.



MOUNTAIN TOWNS OFFER GLIMPSES OF THE REAL MEXICO

The nice side benefit of heading to the mountains in search of the monarchs was that it put us in some of the country's rural areas. While previous Mexico trips had taken me to the Cabo and Cancun areas, this seemed like real Mexico, and it was very compelling.

Our first stop after we left Mexico City was Toluca, which is the capital of the state of Mexico. While by no means a small town, Toluca was an absolute gem. (If you don't believe me, maybe take another look at this magazine's cover). After we roamed the main plaza area that was anchored by two historical churches, we headed over to Cosmovitral, which is equal parts art palace and botanical garden.

The vision of artist Leopoldo Flores, the attraction opened to the public in 1980. It took Flores and his team three years to assemble the millions of pieces of glass from around the globe into a beautiful mosaic that represents the artist's elaborate vision of good and evil.

I'm a sucker for blown-glass art, and it was impossible for me to stop staring at the depictions on the windows. Many times I wandered away from the group and our guide to take in the intricate details of the mosaics (and, of course, to take more pictures). The hundreds of plants and beautifully landscaped gardens, while overshadowed by the surrounding walls, are also impressive. I don't know if Toluca is on the radar screen of many tour operators, but as home to a marvel like Cosmovitral, it should be.

After a lunch stop and another hour or so of riding, we reached our hotel in Tlalpujahua. In addition to being famous for its monarch sanctuaries, this village in the northeastern corner of Michoacán is known for its mining history and as the epicenter of the production of Christmas ornaments.

Working around our daytime visits to see the monarchs, we explored a number of places that offered excellent snapshots of local life. During our walking tour of Tlalpujahua, we encountered rows and rows of vendor booths where residents were selling (and buying) everything from fruits and meats for daily meals to crafts and home goods. I was



Cosmovitral botanical garden in Toluca

surprised at how the small town teemed with life, especially for a Sunday afternoon, and being up at the Sanctuary of Carmen just before sunset was a treat.

That day we also checked out Dos Estrellas Mine. The mine flourished after gold was discovered at the turn of the 20th century, and it became the country's top producer of gold from 1908 to 1913. A major landslide on May 27, 1937, left a portion of Tlalpujahua in shambles and ended its mining heyday.

The next afternoon we went to El Oro, a nearby town that traces its roots back to 538 A.D. In addition to walking the narrow streets and seeing the many brightly colored buildings and houses, we checked out its market. Seemingly every one of the town's roughly 5,700 residents turned out to shop—or run—one of the more than 200 booths that featured an even wider array of items than we'd seen in Tlalpujahua.

Our last stop was at one of the factories that is part of Tlalpujahua's bustling Christmas ornament trade. Area artisans annually produce millions of handcrafted ornaments, and Sergio estimated that accounts for around 70 percent of the town's economy.



Dos Estrellas Mine in Tlalpujahua



Tlalpujahua Christmas ornament factory



MEANWHILE, BACK IN MEXICO CITY ...

Sandwiched around the monarch-and-mountain-towns main course was some very tasty Mexico City touring. Saturday was our first full day of exploration, and the morning took us to the Angel of Independence monument, to the city's most famous bullfighting stadium and to the San Angel arts and crafts market in bustling San Jacinto Plaza.

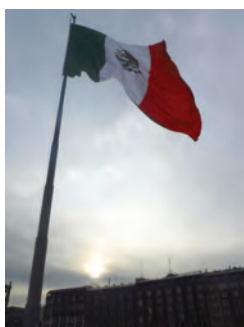
Next we headed to the one of the Mexico City's oldest areas, Coyoacán, to see the Museum of Frida Kahlo. The attraction, also known as Casa Azul (the Blue House), is where Kahlo lived for 25 years with her husband and fellow artist Diego Rivera. In addition to housing paintings and photographs of the influential artists, the complex includes hundreds of personal effects representing their lives together.

There also was plenty of local color to be had at the neighborhood's epicenter, Plaza Hidalgo, where residents and tourists mingled seamlessly on a sunny Saturday. Hacienda de Cortes, our lunch stop, served up one of my favorite combinations—chile rellenos and margaritas—with a side of history; the famous Spanish explorer had lived on the grounds during the early 16th century.

When we returned to Mexico City from the mountains three days later, we focused our efforts on the many historical attractions in the Zócalo area of downtown. We toured the amazing Templo Mayor, which is an Aztec ruins site that

dates back to the 1300s. We also saw Constitution Square, the iconic giant Mexican flag, the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral, which is the largest basilica in the Americas.

One of my favorite memories of the trip came after our tour and lunch at the Museum of Tequila and Mezcal. There was a group of mariachis tuning up in Plaza



Garibaldi, and, as we walked through, our guide Sergio huddled with them. Throughout the trip, he'd shown signs of being able to sing, but now it was showtime.

We were treated to a three-song set that featured his powerful vocals, as well as the musicianship of his impromptu bandmates. The enthusiasm with which he sang was captivating, and it mirrored the passion he'd displayed throughout the trip as he showed us his native country.

While I felt we got some good snapshots of Mexico during the tour, I left thinking there was a lot more to explore. And, based on what I experienced throughout the trip, I'd love to take a closer look at more of Mexico as part of another one of A Closer Look Tours' other well-crafted small-group journeys.

For more information on Phoenix-based A Closer Look Tours, contact Colin Caparros at ccaparros@acloserlooktours.com or go to acloserlooktours.com. 📍

To see additional photos from the Monarch Butterflies of Mexico tour, go to tinyurl.com/y7shhdbq.

CITY SPOTLIGHT: NEW YORK CITY

‘Like no other city’

BY BOB ROUSE



For more information, contact Peter Katz, senior sales manager of NYC & Company, at pkatz@nycgo.com or visit nycgo.com.

“IT’S THE DIVERSITY of experiences that make New York City such an attractive destination for tour operators,” says Nick Calderazzo, owner of Twin Travel Concepts. “No matter what the group makeup is—and no matter how many times they’ve been there—you can still create new, dynamic and exciting programs.”

A different type of diversity is a selling point for Pam Upton of Blue Grass Tours. The Lexington, Kentucky-based company takes seven or eight student groups to the Big Apple every year, and it’s always an eye-opening experience.

“The culture and the magnitude of the city are so different than what they’re exposed to in Kentucky,” Upton says. “You can walk a block and go from one cultural experience to a totally different one. It changes in an instant—like no other city.”

The two operators are of the same mind regarding partners in the city.

“NYC & Company is always helpful if we have a question about a particular restaurant or the safety of an area,” Upton says. They’re great to work with.”

Calderazzo extends that praise even wider. “The tourism community is very open to creating out-of-the-box experiences,” he says. “Contrary to the image of New Yorkers being cold, they are

amazingly receptive to working with us. That’s another component that makes this city so wonderful for tours.”

Collette’s Jim Edwards describes a 1964 trip to New York City by the company’s then-new owner, Dan Sullivan, as a game-changer for the Pawtucket, Rhode Island-based tour operator.

“Dan took his family to the New York World’s Fair of 1964, and it proved to be a turning point for the company,” says Edwards, vice president of the century-old company. “He could see that more people than ever wanted to travel, and it was the perfect time to introduce the concept of guided touring.”

Collette continues to package the city—“Our NYC programs are up 27 percent in 2018!” Edwards says—and many of the tours incorporate a powerful piece of history.

“At Ellis Island, our guests step back in time to learn the personal stories of the immigration boom of 1892–1924, when 12 million people passed through this station on their journey to America.”

Calderazzo holds that a journey to New York City is matchless.

“You can walk over the Brooklyn Bridge, enjoy Brooklyn pizza and Coney Island hot dog, take a carriage ride in Central Park, and see a Broadway show all in one day,” he says. “Really, everything is here, and it’s all world-class.”

AMY DREHER



"So many of our guests remember where they were on 9/11, and they reflect at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, a poignant tribute to the lives lost that day."

—Jim Edwards, Collette

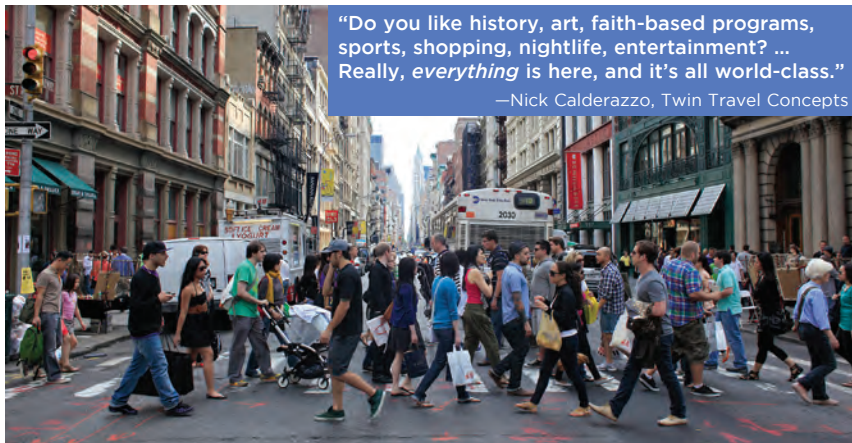
TAGGER YANCEY IV



"We take most all of our student groups either to the Empire State Building (center) or to One World Observatory."

—Pam Upton, Blue Grass Tours

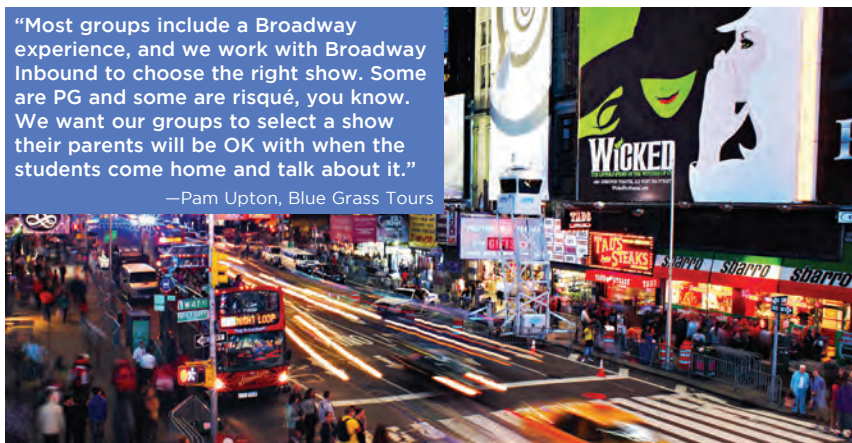
JOE BUGLEWICZ



"Do you like history, art, faith-based programs, sports, shopping, nightlife, entertainment? ... Really, *everything* is here, and it's all world-class."

—Nick Calderazzo, Twin Travel Concepts

JOE BUGLEWICZ



"Most groups include a Broadway experience, and we work with Broadway Inbound to choose the right show. Some are PG and some are risqué, you know. We want our groups to select a show their parents will be OK with when the students come home and talk about it."

—Pam Upton, Blue Grass Tours

Wheels and hulls

Groups visiting New York City can take in the sights via bus, boat or bike, and these NTA-member companies can get them on board.

Big Bus Tours

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Blazing Saddles Bike Rental & Tours

Lauren Sailor
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"We can get you rolling, whether you want to pedal together on a tandem bike, get a baby seat or trailer for the little ones, or go on your own bicycle. We also have guided tours for folks who want more history, information and insider tips."



Circle Line Sightseeing Cruises/New York Water Taxi

Taylor Spoelstra
tspoelstra@nycl.com
circleline42.com



Entertainment Cruises

Liz Gilbert
lgilbert@entertainmentcruises.com
entertainmentcruises.com

"Bateaux New York now offers a luxury sightseeing cruise with a three-course, plated lunch, and we can give NTA tour operators a very special rate for their groups."



Gray Line New York/CitySightseeing NY Cruises

Elaine Kellogg
elaine.kellogg@newyorksightseeing.com
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"In a city with endless options, where anything can happen, Gray Line CitySightseeing New York provides expert sightseeing and transportation logistics. And we've been doing it since 1926."

Hornblower Cruises & Events

Estelle Miller
emiller@hornblower.com
hornblower.com

The RIDE

Renee Wilson
rwilson@experiencetheride.com
experiencetheride.com

"The RIDE is the only sightseeing bus tour that includes live street entertainment and virtual reality. We're truly an 'only in New York' experience."

ROOMS ²AND BLOOMS

Historical homes and gorgeous gardens beckon groups

BY PATTI NICKELL

COUNTED AMONG THE MOST POPULAR SITES for both individual and group travelers are historical homes and landmark gardens. It seems we can't get enough of seeing where and how the rich and famous lived, and as for the gardens—well, what could be more beautiful in any season?

For tour operators and their house- and garden-loving clients, here are some of the top destinations in North America.

Homes fit for an aristocrat, a president, a titan and a king

Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina has often been called "America's castle," and with 250 rooms it's easy to see why.

The French Renaissance chateau was the vision of George W. Vanderbilt and is the perfect repository for the Vanderbilt family's collection of priceless art and antiques.

The estate is set within 8,000 acres of landscaped grounds designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed Central Park in New York City.

While Biltmore has always been popular with groups, tour operators will have something special to offer clients this year. An exhibition of glass sculptures by noted glass designer Dale Chihuly will be on display from May 17 to Oct. 7.

Sculptures will be exhibited in the house's Winter Garden and throughout the grounds. Visitors will also have a chance to see Chihuly pieces illuminated during evening experiences every Thursday through Sunday.

The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson in Nashville is one of the most-visited presidential homes in America. The Greek Revival mansion and historical site tell the story of the seventh U.S. president and his wife Rachel during some of the fledgling nation's most turbulent times.

Through a series of exhibits and displays, visitors learn the history of both Jackson and the house where he lived on and off from 1804 until his death in 1845.

In mid-March every year, to mark the anniversary of Jackson's birth, The



Chihuly's Water Drops, at Biltmore Estate May 17 to Oct. 7

CHIHULY STUDIO

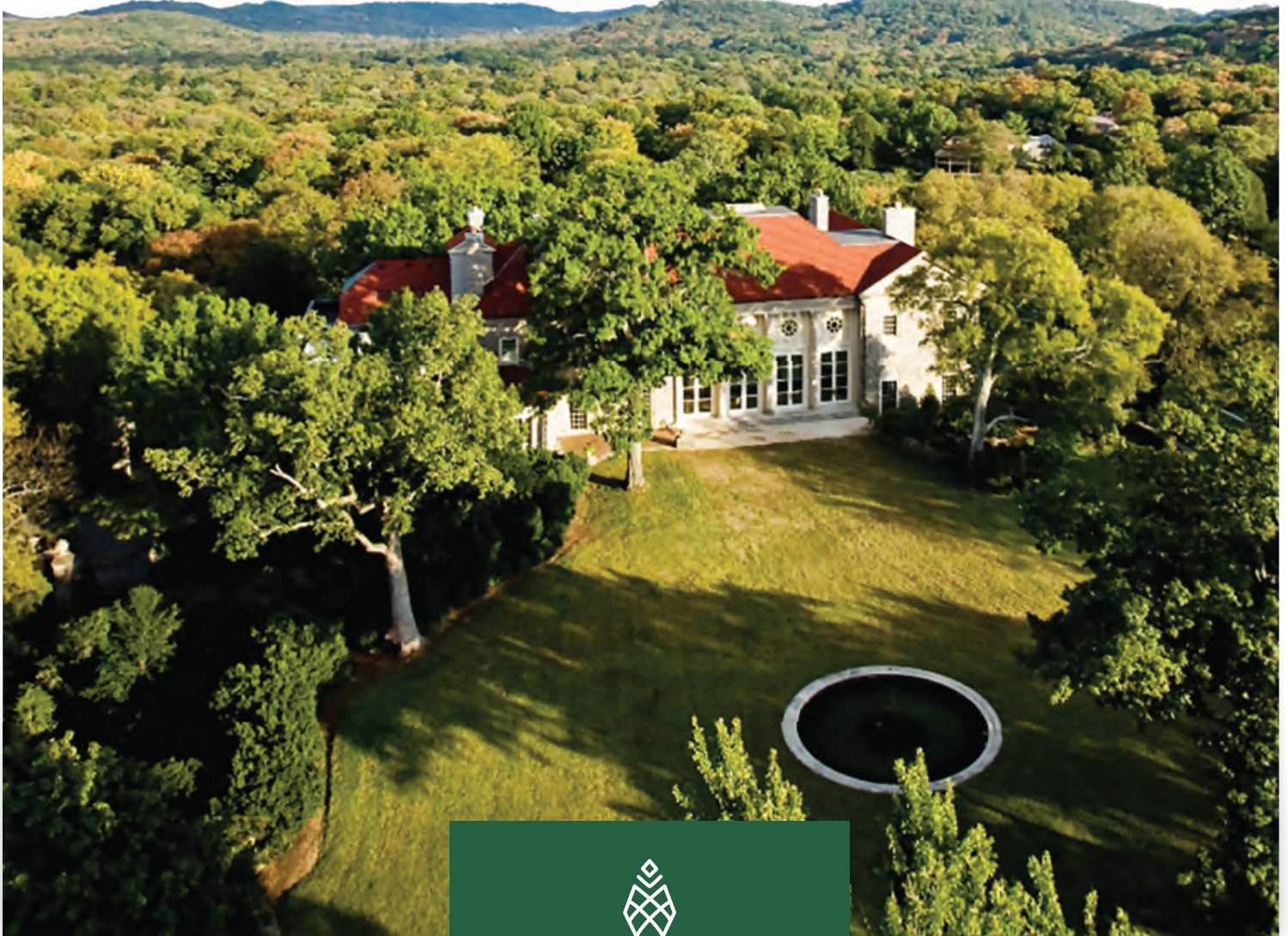
TOP: THE BILTMORE COMPANY

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Andrew Jackson's Hermitage

ANDREW JACKSON'S HERMITAGE



Hearst Castle

HEARST CASTLE



GRACELAND

The white baby-grand piano, recently reacquired by Graceland, is the first significant change to the mansion since it opened for tours in 1982.

Hermitage holds a number of special events. This year's range from an Evening with the First Ladies (Martha Washington, Abigail Adams and Dolly Madison will join Rachel) to a workshop designed to teach decorative arts that were popular during the Jackson era.

"Tour operators love bringing their clients to The Hermitage because of our flexibility," says Jason Nelson, vice president of marketing and sales. "Unlike many attractions, we can custom-fit their visit with a number of different activities: ghost tours, scavenger hunts—and even a dueling program."

In addition to being a slice of American history, this 1,140-acre estate seemingly has an array of options for any group.

The Hermitage may have evolved from a simple log cabin into a grand plantation

home, but **Hearst Castle** was intended as a palatial dwelling from the first stone laid.

It took 28 years to complete the home of newspaper magnate and art collector William Randolph Hearst in its stunning setting on California's central coast. Impressive Spanish-style architecture and lush grounds are complemented by more than 20,000 works of art from around the world.

The estate, open seven days a week year-round (excluding Christmas and New Year's Day), appeals to groups who are interested in learning about art—from classical antiquity to art deco—or to those who just want to revel in the glamour days of Hearst and his Hollywood friends.

Extra benefits for groups include free dedicated motorcoach parking and box lunches with advance notice.

While a former president, a newspaper tycoon and an American aristocrat attract numerous visitors to their homes, they can't match America's only king: the King of Rock 'n' Roll.

Elvis Presley's mansion, **Graceland**, in Memphis is the second most-visited house in the United States—behind only the White House—and a testament to the enduring popularity of the man whose soulful voice and swiveling hips redefined musical entertainment.

"Some half-million visitors from around the world come to Graceland annually because of the impact Elvis had, not only on music, but on society as well," explains Mark Riddell, director of public relations, who calls Elvis "the coolest boss I've ever had."

The mansion represents the King's personal and family side, while an entertainment and exhibit complex focuses on his career and the impact he had on other celebrities and on society in general.

The entertainment complex's 200,000 square-foot expansion, completed last year, offers 14 new exhibits, a 20,000 square-foot museum dedicated to Elvis' career, and a 464-seat theater.

Perks for tour operators include special rates for more than 15 visitors, one complimentary ticket for each 20 tickets purchased, free off-street motorcoach parking and group dining options. Operators may also want to book their clients into the 430-room Guest House at Graceland,



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The Butchart Gardens, illuminated



Portland Rose Parade

a AAA Four Diamond resort hotel located just steps from the mansion.

Everything's coming up roses (and tulips)

Who doesn't love a great garden? According to Scott Brodsky, president of **Country Heritage Tours**: no one. Brodsky, who has taken groups to blooming paradises from **Butchart Gardens** near Victoria, British Columbia, to Middleton Place and Gardens in Charleston, South

Carolina, says, "Including gardens on our trips is a wonderful way of incorporating the beauty and history of a region while providing a relaxing attraction that is universally appealing."

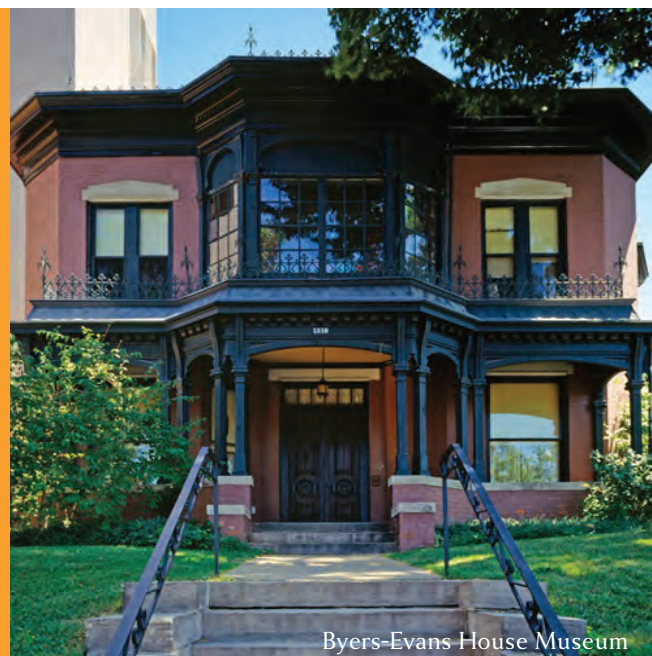
Butchart Gardens on Vancouver Island exemplifies the garden at its floral best. With 55 spectacular acres, it is a fairyland of color and design. From the Sunken Garden and its rock mound and fountain to the Japanese Garden with its Himalayan blue poppies and scarlet Japanese maples,

Butchart is a feast for the senses and will provide your group with a lifetime's worth of colorful photo memories.

Summer is an especially beautiful time to visit the gardens, with a number of special activities on tap from June 15 to September 15. Your group can take turns riding on one of the 30 hand-carved animals on the Rose Carousel or relax on a 45-minute boat tour exploring the history and wildlife of Tod Inlet and the waters of Brentwood Bay. If your



Trinidad History Museum



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ROOMS ^{AND} BLOOMS



Tulip Time Festival in Holland, Michigan



Palace Garden at Colonial Williamsburg

LEFT: TULIP TIME FESTIVAL, RIGHT: THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

tour includes an evening visit, there are nightly illuminations that give a magical glow to the shrubs, trees and flowers.

Finally, on Saturday nights from July through Labor Day weekend, groups can experience what has been called one of the finest fireworks shows in North America—a pyrotechnic display choreographed to music.

Portland, Oregon, is known as the City of Roses, and nothing says it quite as officially as the **Portland Rose Festival** held late May/early June, when the showy blooms are at their showiest. (This year's event runs from May 25 to June 9). The 16-day festival features a range of rose-related activities, from a rose show to a Grand Floral Float showcase.

Sandwiched in between are crowd-pleasers such as a waterfront City Fair and a Dragon Boat Race.

If your group prefers tulips to roses, you will have to take them to Holland—Holland, Michigan, that is. In early May (5–13 this year), that city's **Tulip Time Festival** is in full swing ... and full bloom.

Millions of colorful bulbs blossom along six miles of tulip lanes throughout the city, giving groups an understanding of why this has been called the “best flower festival in the U.S.” by *USA Today* and “one of America’s best spring flower festivals” by *Fodor’s Travel*.

This year will be the 89th for the festival, and while tulips are, of course, the stars of the show, they have plenty of co-stars in the form of traditional Dutch food and dancing, a Dutch market,

fireworks and headline performances by the Beach Boys, the Texas Tenors and the Liverpool Legends.

The event offers a full array of services for tour planners, such as special group discounts, itinerary assistance, one-stop shopping for tickets and group meals.

Perhaps no houses and gardens in America have as much history as do those at **Colonial Williamsburg**. Spanning four centuries and boasting more than 40 sites, the southeastern Virginia city is the world’s largest living history museum.

Tour operators can choose from a number of targeted experiences for their clients. Military history buffs can see the country’s largest collection of 18th-century British military firearms, foodies can follow their passion in Colonial kitchens and taverns, fashionistas can walk a red carpet of 18th-century fashion and style, and those with a flair for decorating can admire some of America’s first interior designs.

There are also tours geared to the African-American experience, revolutionaries and political junkies, families and, of course, those whose green thumbs just ache for a dig in the dirt. (Yes, your clients can actually get their hands dirty in the Colonial garden, which is filled with vegetables, heirloom roses and herbs.)

Winette Jeffery, manager of educational outreach and partnerships, explains Colonial Williamsburg’s appeal to groups.

“Experiences here give visitors a rare chance to absorb the daily joys, trials and passions of people living in

the days leading up to the American Revolution,” she says.

Jeffery says that interpreters provide customized and immersive experiences that tell the country’s unique story to both adult and student groups.

“With opportunities for authentic Colonial meals at a tavern and candlelit performances, Colonial Williamsburg’s 300 acres offer a setting unrivaled as a destination,” she says. “It truly makes for a one-of-a-kind trip for groups of all ages.”

Contact info

To learn more about the NTA members described above, visit the websites or email the NTA contacts listed below:

The Hermitage thehermitage.com;
Jason Nelson, jnelson@thehermitage.com

Hearst Castle hearstcastle.org;
Jim Allen, jim.allen@parks.ca.gov

Biltmore Estate biltmore.com;
Leslie Brewer, lbrewer@biltmore.com

Country Heritage Tours countryheritagetours.com; Scott Brodsky, scottbrodsky@countryheritagetours.com

Graceland graceland.com; Shirley Conner, sdconner@graceland.com

Butchart Gardens butchartgardens.com; Josh Bickerton, joshbickerton@butchartgardens.com

Portland Rose Festival rosefestival.org;
Carol Ross, carolr@rosefestival.org

Tulip Time Festival tuliptime.com;
Hannah Rogers, hannah@tuliptime.com

Colonial Williamsburg
colonialwilliamsburg.org;
Winette Jeffery, wjeffery@cwfb.org



MOMENT FACTORY

A path of enlightenment: The history and architecture of Montréal's Notre-Dame Basilica is illuminated as part of "Aura," a new immersive multimedia experience that includes special lighting treatments on the church's works of art. To check out more updates on Québec and Ontario, turn to page 38.

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Four Corners U.S.

COMPILED BY PAT HENDERSON

Gather up Gallup's Native American heritage

"Gallup is a great area for visitors because it offers an authentic, condensed version of the New Mexico experience," says Jennifer Lazarz, the tourism and marketing manager for the City of Gallup. "It's a one-stop-shop for unique outdoor adventures—there are over 30 miles of trails in the area—and immersion in Native American culture."

The city, which is located on Interstate 40 and the fabled Route 66 halfway between Flagstaff, Arizona, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, is home to a number of native groups. During a visit, travelers can learn more about how the Navajo/Diné, Apache, Zuni, Hopi and others tribes blend hundreds of years of traditions with everyday life.

"The unique Native American experiences offered in Gallup are a great way to see how native culture is alive and well," she says. "Events such as the Gallup Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial or the Nightly Indian Dances allow you to get up close and personal with the native tribes and dancers. The tribes explain the dances and traditions, and guests can ask questions about regalia and the dances themselves, and can often join in on the dances and take lots of pictures."

The Inter-tribal Ceremonial, which marks its 97th year in 2018, is the oldest Native American cultural celebration in the U.S. Taking place this Aug. 3–12, the event includes parades, a rodeo, a powwow, traditional dancing, and an arts and crafts area featuring hundreds of jewelry makers.

The Nightly Indian Dances are a series of free performances held each evening from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Guests gather in the heart of downtown at Gallup's historical courthouse to watch tribe members demonstrate ceremonial dances.

"Additionally, we have the finest in Native American arts, as over 70 percent of the world's authentic Native American jewelry comes from the Gallup region," Lazarz says. "The Gallup Native Arts Market allows guests to shop authentic Native American art, and [purchases] support over 1,000 people, as well as the soft-goods arts economy that is so important here."

The Native Arts Market features more than 75 authentic Native American artists from all the tribes in the region, who display and sell their handcrafted items. This is the second year for the event, and it will be held Aug. 9–11.

To learn more, email Lazarz at jlazarz@gallupnm.gov or go to galluprealtrue.com.



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A Colorado cornucopia

From its rugged Rocky Mountain peaks and vast canyons to its wide-open spaces and cowboy culture, Colorado offers an authentic look at the heritage of the American West. Among the state's many NTA supplier members are the following three attractions—Garden of the Gods Visitor and Nature Center, the Trinidad History Museum and the Old Town Museum—and each highlights different aspects of the state's rich history:

Trinidad History Museum Located in southern Colorado off Interstate 25, the attraction encompasses a number of different sites: the Bloom Mansion, the Baca House, the Santa Fe Trail Museum, the Barglow Building and the Baca-Bloom Heritage Gardens.

"In one city block you can see a million-dollar, two-story adobe home or a three-story Second French Empire Victorian, all surrounded by heritage roses and antique hollyhocks," says Kirby Stokes, director.

Stokes says groups can take part in cooking programs that feature the Horno oven. Additionally, the attraction will debut a summer concert series this year.

The Trinidad History Museum is part of NTA-member History Colorado, which manages eight additional attractions across the state.

Contact Stokes at kirby.stokes@state.co.us or go to historycolorado.org/museums.

Old Town Museum The 6.5-acre site celebrates the agriculture, history and heritage of Burlington, a town that's located just off Interstate 70 near the Kansas border. The attraction, which is open year-round, includes 21 restored buildings with authentic artifacts that represent life in eastern Colorado around the turn of the 20th century.

From Memorial Day thru Labor Day, travelers can enjoy the daily High Noon Can-Can Show and live gunfights in the saloon on Saturdays. The Wild West Dinner Theater, which includes a meal and melodrama stage show, is offered the fourth Saturday of the month.

Other popular options for groups are interactive demonstrations covering early pioneer life and the Emporium at Old Town shopping area that features handcrafted items.

Contact Nikki Wall at nikki.wall@burlingtoncolo.com or visit burlingtoncolo.com/old-town-museum.htm.

Garden of the Gods Visitor and Nature Center Set among oversized sandstone rock formations and the snow-capped peaks of the mountains around Colorado Springs, this award-winning center features a 20-minute film in the new Geo-Trekker theater and a number of interactive exhibits in its museum.

Groups can book hikes, biking excursions and guided nature walks, as well as jeep, Segway and open-air bus tours. These options allow visitors to see Cathedral Valley, Balanced Rock, the Kissing Camels and the other famous formations in the park.

New for 2018 is the Garden of the Gods Gateway Adventure Series. Led by top naturalists, interpreters and historians, this set of monthly presentations includes classes, lectures, guided hikes and interactive demonstrations.

The center also offers American Indian dance programs.

Contact Penny Whalen at pwhalen@gardenofgods.com or go to gardenofgods.com.



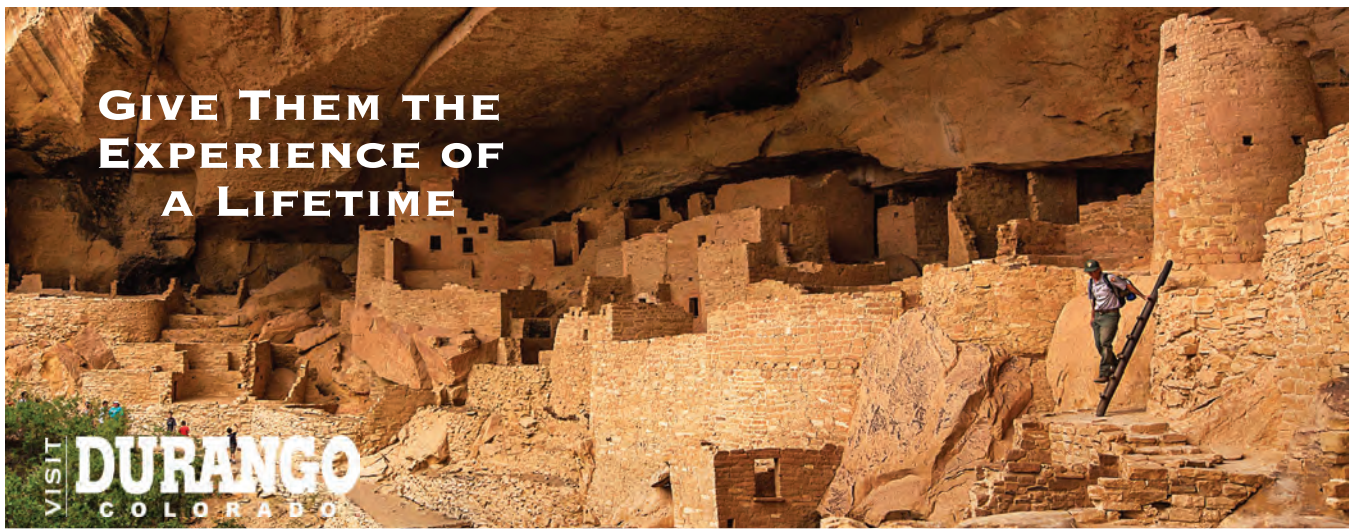
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Background photo by Bryan Burton

A grand group of Grand Canyon lodging options

If Grand Canyon National Park is on your radar for 2018 (and really, why *wouldn't* it be?), have we got some lodging options for you. Following a day of sightseeing and soaking in views of the orange- and red-hued canyon walls, your groups can get a good night's sleep at any of the following six NTA-member properties. Four are located at the South Rim, and the other two are in Williams and Flagstaff, still within easy driving distance of the park.

Best Western Premier Grand Canyon Squire Inn

NTA contact: Freda Rahnenfuehrer | freda@grandcanyonsquire.com
grandcanyonsquire.com

This resort-style Best Western property in Tusayan offers easy access to the South Rim. When guests stay at the AAA Three Diamond hotel, they can enjoy three on-site restaurants, two lounges, a pub, a bowling center, an arcade, and indoor and outdoor pools and hot tubs. There are 318 guest rooms, which range from traditional and deluxe rooms to suites.



GRANDCANYONSQUIRE.COM



MARRIOTT.COM

Fairfield Inn & Suites Flagstaff East

Kelcy Hambsch | kelcyh@swhm.com
marriott.com/hotels/travel/flgff

This new property is the first Fairfield-branded hotel in the Flagstaff area. Located just off the interstate, it has 71 rooms—with 28 suites—spread over four floors. In addition to a pool and a fitness center, guests can enjoy a free breakfast, which includes hot choices like oatmeal, sausage and scrambled eggs, as well as fresh fruit, cereal and yogurt.



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Grand Canyon National Park Lodges by Xanterra South Rim LLC

Bruce Brossman | bbrossman@xanterra.com
grandcanyonlodges.com

The company is the primary provider of in-park lodging at the Grand Canyon. Each of its five South Rim properties—El Tovar, Bright Angel Lodge, Kachina Lodge, Thunderbird Lodge and Maswik Lodge—has a distinct feel and puts guests right in the center of the action. The company also manages Phantom Ranch, which is located at the bottom of the canyon.



Grand Canyon Plaza Hotel

Rich Milliron | guestservices@cprgc.com
grandcanyonplaza.com

The hotel is located one mile from the south entrance of the national park and seven miles from the South Rim. That proximity allows travelers to enjoy a morning hike at the canyon, a restful afternoon of lounging by the hotel pool, a return trip to catch sunset in the park and an end-of-day drink at the Wagon Wheel Saloon, which just opened in late 2017.



Grand Canyon Railway & Hotel

Diane Murdock | dmurdock@xanterra.com
thetrain.com

Located in Williams, an hour south of the park, this stately hotel offers a range of amenities—luxurious rooms, an indoor saltwater pool, dining at the Grand Depot Café, the on-site Spenser's Pub and more. The property is closely tied to the Grand Canyon Railway, which offers a morning departure from the adjacent Williams Depot that takes passengers to the South Rim.

Red Feather Lodge

Sue Finley | sjfinley@aol.com
redfeatherlodge.com

The lodge, which has been owned and operated by the same family since 1964, is situated within a mile of the southern gates to Grand Canyon National Park. There are 229 well-appointed rooms in the property's two distinct buildings—a hotel and a motel. Groups can get discounted rates on sightseeing tours through the lodge's special combination packages.



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Goblin up the southern Utah scenery

Legend has it that when outlaw Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch were looking for a place to lay low, one of their outposts was the canyon country of south-central Utah. The area around Capitol Reef National Park remains a good choice for travelers seeking to lose the crowds but still experience the state's vast natural beauty.

This diverse region, known as Capitol Reef Country, is a place where groups can see steep mountains, jagged pinnacles, colorful rock formations, dense forests and remote desert landscapes. No matter which way they head after exploring the national park, they have plenty of options for outdoor adventure.

Goblin Valley State Park



CC FLICKR/KAI GRADERT: bit.ly/2H1SVH

To the east ... is Goblin Valley State Park. Located north of Hanksville, this attraction is home to a large group of mushroom-shaped rock formations and a few arches. Hiking trails lead to a number of well-preserved pictographs and petroglyphs thought to be the works of ancient tribes that inhabited the area.

To the west ... is Fishlake National Forest. Adorned by countless aspen trees, the 1.5-million-acre recreational area is a top spot for ATV tours, horseback rides, hiking and fishing. The nearby Henry Mountains and the Dixie National Forest offer additional nature experiences, ranging from buffalo viewing to rock climbing.

To the south ... is Anasazi State Park and Museum. This historical village was home to one of Utah's largest Anasazi Indian communities from roughly 1060 to 1235 A.D. Excavations over the years have revealed more than 100 buildings along with thousands of artifacts that visitors can see in the museum.

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To learn more, contact Wayne County/Capitol Reef Country's Nycole Durfey at info@capitolreef.org or go to capitolreef.travel. 

Horseback riding at
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Soaring 775 feet above the Niagara Gorge, Skylon Tower offers 360-degree views of the famous falls, the Niagara wine district and the Buffalo, New York, and Toronto skylines.

“Our glass-enclosed elevators glide to the top in just 52 seconds, offering groups a sneak peek at what is to unfold when they reach our observation decks,” says director of sales Anita Pang Hrepic. “Guests often comment that a visit to our observation decks gives them a great perspective of the power and majesty of Niagara Falls.”

With indoor and outdoor decks, Skylon Tower is also home to the only rotating restaurant in Niagara Falls, Canada.

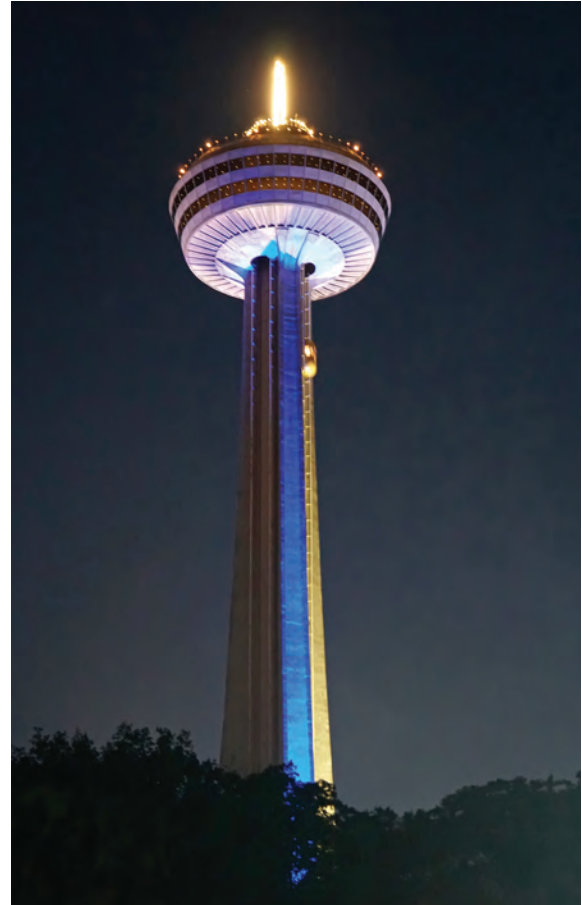
“It’s popular with groups, as they get to enjoy one revolution per hour while dining,” Hrepic says.

The attraction offers two dining experiences: a set menu with plated meals in the newly renovated Revolving Dining Room and a buffet-style meal in the Summit Suite Buffet restaurant. Groups receive complimentary passes for the observation decks when they dine.

At the base of the tower is a 4-D motion theater, the Family Fun Centre and several gift shops.

“Our destination is unique in that we offer not only a natural wonder, but also a multitude of different attractions and activities for any traveler. From families to senior groups and honeymooners to student groups, we have something for everyone’s enjoyment. Most hotels and attractions in the area welcome groups with competitive group rates, complimentary policies, and escort and driver benefits,” Hrepic says.

To learn more, contact Hrepic at apang-hrepic@skylon.com or visit skylon.com.



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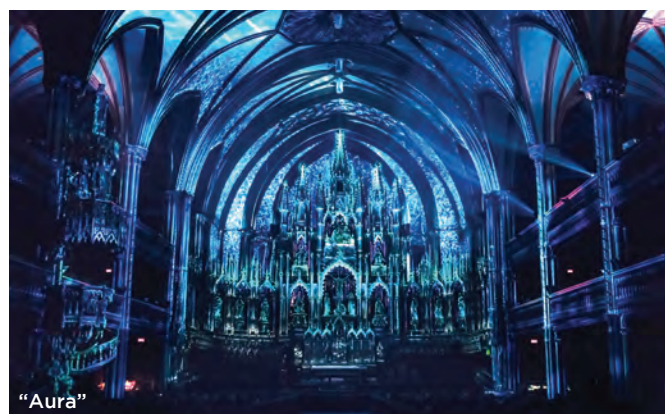
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MOMENT FACTORY

A new year, a new Montréal

Montréal is in the midst of a creative and cultural metamorphosis that is empowered by the celebrations of its history and a renewed vitality, says Tourisme Montréal's project manager David Fily.

"The city just turned 375 last year," he says. "Bursting with innovative ideas and major revitalization projects, entrepreneurs, chefs, artists and designers are all contributing to its transformation and making it ever more attractive and fun."

Here are a few of the new and major attractions and exhibitions to see this year:

"Aura" This grandiose, innovative project presented by the Notre-Dame Basilica sheds new light on its history and architecture. A path of lights illuminating the basilica's works of art, an immersive sensory experience in the heart of Notre-Dame and a three-act multimedia spectacle are part of the project.

The Montréal Observation Wheel Atop the wheel at more than 18 stories high, visitors have panoramic views of Bonsecours Island in Old Montréal. It's open every day from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. with cabins that are air conditioned in the summer and heated in winter. Group packages are available at a 10 percent discount.

Inauguration of Fort Ville-Marie The first French settlement was built to shelter Montréal's founder Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, nurse Jeanne Mance and 50 settlers who established Ville-Marie in 1642. The Pointe-à-Callière Museum is restoring the fort and making this unique piece of the city's history accessible once again.

"Living Connections: Illumination of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge" This interactive installation lights up the landmark bridge in simultaneous celebrations of last year's 150th anniversary of the Canadian Confederation and 375th anniversary of the city.

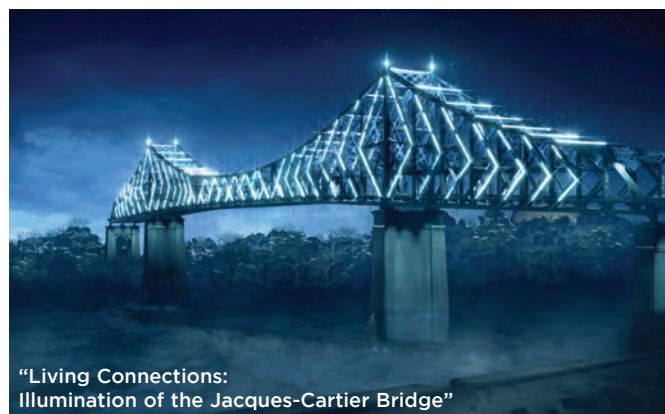
"Cité Mémoire: Travel Back in Time" Important historical moments are highlighted in 22 projections on Old Montréal's historical building walls, streets and trees. A free outdoor multimedia show is screened every night starting at dusk. Audio is available in four languages French, English, Mandarin and Spanish with the free app.

To learn more, contact Fily at dfily@mtl.org or visit mtl.org.

The Montréal Observation Wheel



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Explore Canadian heritage at the National Gallery of Canada

The National Gallery of Canada is home to the most important collections of historical and contemporary Canadian art, says tourism marketing officer Hélène Donaldson.

“At the National Gallery of Canada, we are proud to be a top destination for student and adult groups alike. Our outstanding guides and educators facilitate an experience of choice—guided tours, workshops and in-gallery drawing, to name a few,” she says.


The attraction, initially formed in 1880, features Canada’s premier collection of European art from the 14th through the 21st centuries, as well as collections of American, Asian and Indigenous art, prints, drawings and photographs.

From June through December this year, visitors can see “Canadian & Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967,” an exhibition featuring masterpieces ranging from 5,000 years ago to the 1960s.

“On view are thematic displays that explore the magnetic north, inhabited landscapes, Canadians abroad and the emergence of Inuit art. It’s a true testament to the rich and multifaceted Canadian experience,” Donaldson says of the exhibit.

In the fall, the Canadian Photography Institute of the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario will co-present “Anthropocene,” a major new contemporary art exhibition using film, photography and new technologies to explore the impact of humans on Earth. “Oscar G. Rejlander: Artist Photographer,” will also appear in the fall, and will be the first retrospective on “the father of art photography.”



The gallery also houses a bookstore, a restaurant with spectacular views of the city, and Café 7, a new tapas and wine bar.

For more information, contact Donaldson at hdonaldson@gallery.ca or visit gallery.ca. 

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 Lawren S. Harris, *North Shore, Baffin Island II*, c. 1931. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
 Gift of the artist, Vancouver, 1960. Photo © NGC

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iGs Travel offers tours based on themes such as pilgrimages, art and culture, culinary, garden and wine, the latter being the most popular among North American groups.

“But not any old wine tours—ours go to excellent off-the-beaten-track vineyards with presentations that share secrets about fermentation, aging and bottling, tastings—of course—and end with a lunch on rugs under the vines,” Smith says.

Wine-tasting experiences include Gambino Vineyards in eastern Sicily, located in the volcanic hills of Mount Etna, and Il Palagio Di Panzano, located about half a mile from the hilltop village of Panzano in Chianti, Tuscany. There, visitors can take the classic tour and learn the organic production of wine and oil, experience the culture, see the vineyards and winery, and sample the wine. The brunch option offers the classic tour program with Tuscan dishes to enhance the tasting experience.

To learn more, contact Smith at info@igstravel.it or visit igstravel.it.

‘Sites’ to behold

Karavan Travel, one of the oldest travel companies in Turkey, has been a leader in conducting religious tours and cruises since its inception in 1969.

“Turkey has been a rising star of tour destinations for decades, with the most impressive historical sites, natural beauty and friendly people,” says the company’s executive director Umit Baltazzi. “Besides the tours, we are also able to fulfill any specific requests, like private masses, visits to the churches and meetings with the ecclesiastical authorities.”

She says a large number of tour groups visit Turkey to see the House of Virgin Mary and Basilica of St. John in Ephesus, the church of St. Nicholas (Santa Claus) and his tomb, the great Hagia Sophia church and many more sites highlighting early Christianity. The three most popular packages for faith-based groups are The Footsteps of St. Paul, the Grand Christian Tour and the Seven Churches of the Revelation. Cappadocia, which has more than 4,000 rock-carved churches decorated with beautiful frescoes depicting the life and miracles of Jesus, is also a revered site.

“Faith-based tour groups enjoy Turkish hospitality and the vibrant local life while visiting the cultural sites,” Baltazzi says.

For more information, contact Baltazzi at umit.baltazzi@karavanturkey.com or visit karavanturkey.com.



It’s a year-round kind of place

The Greek National Tourism Organization operates from its New York City office to promote Greece and its tourist products worldwide.

“Greece is a land of unbelievable beauty and diversity. Smiling faces and hospitality, family warmth and peace, security, untouched nature and magnificent food give a unique combination, ranking Greece among the top travel destinations worldwide,” says digital marketing specialist Maria Mesnitsari.

This year, Mesnitsari’s office is focused on promoting Greece as a year-round destination.

“Our organization has been following a mixture of marketing actions, focusing on different types of travelers, such as families, multigenerational travelers, honeymooners, the LGBT community and others, presenting destinations and activities appropriate for each group visiting Greece in different seasons,” she says.

For more information, contact Mesnitsari at m.mesnitsari@greektourism.com or go to visitgreece.gr.

Courier's SIGHTSEEING RAIL GUIDE



The view's the thing

NTA-member rail companies take passengers on voyages that vary in duration and setting, but each trip shares a common benefit: magnificent, memorable views.

One of those companies, VIA Rail Canada, provides miles and miles of satisfying sights, says Ryan Robutka, senior manager for sales and marketing.

"Despite there being many things to do on board long-distance trains, passengers are still captivated by the scenery," he says. "Many sections of track pull away from highways and allow passengers to see a part of the landscape and scenery they would not have access to when traveling by car or coach."

And while enjoying those vistas can be a solitary exercise, the passing scenery can also serve as a backdrop to—or the focus of—lively conversation.

"Our long-haul trains provide a number of social areas: lounges, observation domes and dining cars," Robutka says. "This gives groups an opportunity to spend time together in settings

that encourage passengers to share the experience together."

Robutka just started his seventh year with VIA Rail, which provides coast-to-coast passenger train service in Canada.

"I think there's been a resurgence in rail travel," he says. "You're traveling between two points, but trains provide the space, comfort and amenities that make the travel experience special."

You can email Robutka at ryan_robutka@viarail.ca or visit viarail.ca to learn more.

The list on the following pages includes information on NTA members that organize and offer their own rail adventures, including those that offer multi-day tours and those specializing in shorter sightseeing excursions. This information for this list was provided by the member contact and was current as of Jan. 21.

With this and all other guides that appear in Courier, members can enhance their presence. Contact sales@ntaservicesinc.com for details.

TOP BAR: CONWAY SCENIC RAILWAY.
MIDDLE: VIA RAIL CANADA

CANADA**VIA Rail Canada**

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

Rocky Mountaineer

Josh Mahon
1100-980 Howe St.
Vancouver, BC V6Z 068
877.460.3200
jmahon@rockymountaineer.com
rockymountaineer.com

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
P.O. Box 435
Skagway, AK 99840-0435
+1.907.983.9821
jtaylor-rose@wpyr.com
wpyr.com

ARIZONA**Grand Canyon Railway**

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

Verde Canyon Railroad

Ellen Roberts
300 North Broadway
Clarkdale, AZ 86324-2302
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**Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad**

Corrine Williams
5234 B U.S. Highway 285
Antonito, CO 81120
877.890.2737
groups@cumbrestoltec.com
cumbrestoltec.com

**Durango & Silverton
Narrow Gauge Railroad**

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

Georgetown Loop Railroad

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



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RAILROAD

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Courier's Sightseeing Rail Guide

Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway Company

Whitney Hedgpeth
515 Ruxton Ave.
Manitou Springs, CO 80829-1921
+1.719.685.5401
whedgpeth@broadmoor.com
cograilway.com

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Amtrak

Brian Hart
10 G St. NE, Suite 3E-556
P.O. Box 351
Washington, DC 20002-4213
+1.562.427.2283
hartbr@amtrak.com
amtrak.com

MISSOURI

Branson Scenic Railway Inc.

Illa Kamp
206 E. Main St.
Branson, MO 65616-2716
+1.417.334.6110
ikamp@bransontrain.com
bransontrain.com

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Conway Scenic Railroad

Susan Logan
38 Norcross Circle, P.O. Box 1947
North Conway, NH 03860
+1.603.356.5251 (12)
susan@conwayscenic.com
conwayscenic.com

The Mount Washington Cog Railway

Susan Presby
Base Road
Mt. Washington, NH 03589
+1.603.278.2255
sue@thecog.com
thecog.com

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

WASHINGTON

Mt. Rainier Railroad and Logging Museum

Wayne Rankin
P.O. Box 250
Mineral, WA 98355
+1.253.495.7164
wayne@mtrainierrailroad.com
mtrainierrailroad.com 

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COMMUNITY

NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE NTA FAMILY



Where in the world is *Courier*? Well, as it turns out, a lot of places since the beginning of the year. Pictured above are NTA members from across the globe:

- 1 Hank Wiebe, Prudent Tours — pictured in front of Friesen Dutch Windmill in Hillsboro, Kansas
- 2 Deanne Cunningham, North Dakota Tourism — shown at the North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck
- 3 Stacy Thornton, Greater Boston CVB — shown by the "Ab Initio" sculpture in downtown Boston
- 4 Darrell Omanson, Omanson Tour & Travel Inc. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota — shown in Hilton Head, South Carolina
- 5 Sean Fenton, Enchanted Ireland Tours — with Kinsale Harbour in County Cork in the background
- 6 Nicole Graham, VisitScotland — pictured outside her office in the medieval settlement of Leith, Scotland

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Meet the Members

PRESENTED BY **VISIT Clarksville**™

Hilmar Cheese Company Visitor Center

HILMAR, CALIFORNIA

NTA contact: Kody Stevens, communications and tour specialist

Office phone: +1.209.656.1167

Website: hilmarcheese.com

NTA member since: 1999

Why is touring your attraction such a cool experience for travelers?

It is the only place in the world where you taste our famous Hilmar cheese chowder and can see the "big cheese," a 640-pound crate of cheese, being packaged. Free cheese samples and fresh cheese curds called Squeakers also make everyone smile.

What do your guests see when they visit?

They can step aboard our behind-the-scenes driving tour to see the world's largest cheese and whey factory and watch the milk trucks unload. Our guided tours in the visitor center go

past viewing windows, where guests can watch our employees package the big cheese. Meal options including Hilmar's famous cheese chowder with a cream cheese brownie or cheese pie, which is better than cheesecake, are available.

What other special programs and touches do you add for groups?

We have ice cream-making and cheese-making activities for student groups, though we have learned all ages enjoy these activities! We also have a fun gift basket-making activity. Plus, we recognize the tour directors and drivers with a special gift.

How long have you been in the travel industry?

I worked at the Hilmar Cheese Company as a tour guide during college and am excited to be back. I help Denise Skidmore book and manage the tours.



What travel destination do you most want to visit?

Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry

What is your favorite movie or TV show?

"This is Us"

For more information, contact Stevens at kstevens@hilmarcheese.com.

Moostash Joe Tours

FREMONT, NEBRASKA

NTA contact: Joey Spellerberg, president and CEO

Office phone: +1.402.721.7944

Website: mjtours.com

NTA member since: 2013

Moostash Joe Tours is a family-owned company. How did it get started?

In 1975, my father, "Moostash Joe" Spellerberg promoted a tour to Oktoberfest in Germany with his polka band. More than 300 people signed up for the tour. After that, a business was born. In 2018, we will operate more than 125 different motorcoach tours, cruises and international tours, serving customers in Nebraska and the Midwest. Throughout our 40-plus-year history, we have taken over 100,000 reservations and served over 35,000 customers.

What are a couple of your most popular tours?

Our 12-day Autumn in New England Tour and six-day Mackinac Island Tour.

Both are motorcoach tours that leave from Nebraska.

Tell us about your mystery tours.

Our mystery tours range from one to three days. Customers have no idea where they are going until we arrive. Our mystery tours are fun, spontaneous and include some very cool attractions, hotels and restaurants.

I like my job because ...

It allows me to help our customers experience the majesty and wonder of God's creation through travel. We have the most amazing tour directors, staff and customers. They are a pleasure to serve and be around.

What's your favorite vacation destination?

Destin, Florida. It's my family's favorite beach spot.

What do you like to do when you're not hard at work?

I love spending time with my wife and



daughters. I enjoy being outdoors and playing golf when time allows.

For more information, contact Spellerberg at joey@mjtours.com.

Witham Family Hotels

ELLSWORTH, MAINE

NTA contact: Dede Daigle, general manager, Atlantic Oceanside Hotel

Office phone: +1.207.288.8530 (ext. 1311)

Website: withamhotels.com

NTA member since: 2010

How many properties are part of your hotel group?

Witham Family Hotels owns and operates 13 hotels in Maine—nine on beautiful Mount Desert Island in Bar Harbor, three in Ellsworth and one in Saco.

What are two of your properties that work particularly well for groups?

The Bar Harbor Inn is a premier, historical and iconic hotel overlooking Frenchman Bay. Our guests experience traditional New England inn charm fused with modern amenities and fresh Maine cuisine.

The Atlantic Oceanside Hotel is our affordable oceanfront property in Bar

Harbor. Motorcoach groups love the ocean views from their private balcony and the exceptional service from our friendly staff. And tour operators love our property for the superb value.

Are you more of a city girl or a nature girl?

I'm definitely a nature girl. I live in Bar Harbor because I can enjoy all that Acadia National Park offers without ever leaving my backyard. I can hike a mountain, swim in a lake or kayak on the ocean—all in one day if I want to!

What was your dream job when you were growing up?

I wanted to be a dentist. I have no idea why, and I can't imagine anything more rewarding than what I do right now.

What is your favorite meal?

Lobster, of course! I like it pulled fresh from the waters of Frenchman Bay



(preferably out of my 11-year-old son's trap) and served with melted butter and a drop of vinegar.

For more information, contact Daigle at dede@aobarharbor.com.

Tourism Winnipeg

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

NTA contact: Sarah Robinson, business development manager

Office phone: +1.204.954.1995

Website: winnipeggroups.com

NTA member since: 1986

What do people experience when they visit your city?

First and foremost, travelers always mention our city's hospitality. The willingness of our partners to customize each experience and go the extra mile to make each itinerary unique is our greatest strength.

What are some of Winnipeg's can't-miss sites?

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights is the only museum in the world dedicated to human rights education and awareness. The award-winning Arctic exhibit "Journey to Churchill" at the Assiniboine Park Zoo allows visitors to not only see polar bears swimming overhead in an underwater viewing tunnel, but also to learn about climate change and conservation efforts.

What are a couple of local places that you like showing off to friends who visit?

I love showing them The Forks National Historic Site, which is a 54-acre public space that really highlights Winnipeg's eclectic mix of things to see and do. The Forks Market offers year-round shopping and The Common features a wine, beer and food hall that is always hopping.

What is your favorite vacation memory?

Japan. It was the first destination I travelled to where I didn't speak the language, and the experience of being "lost in translation" really showed me the beauty of human nature and people's willingness to help by using alternate forms of communication.

If you could get up on stage with any band/musician, who would it be?

Nina Simone. She was such an iconic figure, known not only for her unique voice, but also for her place as an African-American woman fighting for



civil rights. Her song "See-line Woman" is the ringtone on my phone!

For more information, contact Robinson at sarah@tourismwinnipeg.com.

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

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

Introducing ... NTA's newest members

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



Don't Forget the List

MEDINA, OHIO

Tour operator

This innovative company specializes in surprise travel as well as mystery and bucket list tours. Think of surprise travel as throwing a dart at a map and going where it lands, only with the peace of mind you'll end up on the perfectly tailored getaway.



Holly Becht
Co-owner
(on the right, shown
with Lisa Buie)
+1.330.421.3980
holly@dontforget
thelist.com
dontforgetthelist.com

"After taking a spontaneous road trip involving Mothman, a haunted hotel, a dead cave and epic mountain horse-back ride, we decided we had to plan trips like this for other people."

Travel Tacoma & Pierce County

TACOMA, WASHINGTON

DMO

Only 19 miles south of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Tacoma and Pierce County offer a unique combination of natural beauty and cultural attractions. Home to fabulous museums and majestic Mount Rainier, the area also wows visitors with spectacular glaciers and alpine meadows.



Lisa Barker
Senior tour and travel
marketing manager
+1.253.284.3270
lisa@traveltacoma.com
traveltacoma.com

"I'm an open-water diver who loves to dive every time I travel. I've dived with sharks multiple times, including great whites. It's a thrill!"

Tripsi

LONDON, ONTARIO

Associate

Tripsi is a new group travel platform that provides the latest online technologies to tour operators. The platform streamlines the management of group travel packages with easy-to-use tools, gives insight into group viability and provides a secure online payment portal.



John Galbraith
Co-founder
+1.647.712.0553
john@mytripsi.com
mytripsi.com

"I've worked in travel and technology for 20 years. In addition to helping tour operators work smarter, I love exploring nature with my wife, dog and an epic soundtrack."

En Route USA

FOLSOM, CALIFORNIA

Tour operator

En Route USA is a receptive tour operator for French-speaking guests. The company delivers personalized service and handcrafted programs that capture the authentic experiences of traveling in the United States.



Christophe Sarafian
Director
+1.916.208.1726
christophe@
enrouteusa.us
enrouteusa.us

"Born in Paris, I have lived most of my life in California and have worked in tourism for over 30 years. When not traveling, I can be found playing pétanque with Club Francais de Sacramento or walking along the American River with my wife, Michelle."

Profiles encouraged

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

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Kilgore, TX 75662
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Phone: 903.984.5022
Fax: 903.984.4975
Website: <http://www.visitkilgore.com>





Next stop ... Milwaukee!

But your next *step*—if you want instant access to new markets, fresh ideas and valuable business partners—is to renew your NTA membership. This could be your final *Courier*. As a member in good standing, you'll receive all issues and be eligible to attend Travel Exchange '18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Nov. 4–8.

To renew or check your membership status,
call Todd Probus at **800.682.8886**
or email headquarters@ntastaff.com.

Registration opens **March 12**
at **NTAonline.com/convention**.



COMMUNITY NEWS

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



Chicago welcomes 55 million visitors in 2017

Chicago set a visitation record last year—55 million—according to figures announced by Mayor Rahm Emanuel in January. The city saw a 2.5 percent increase in travelers from 2016, which represents an additional 1.5 million people.

In 2012, Chicago officials committed to attracting 55 million visitors by 2019.

“Our goal now will be to harness this momentum and continue to build upon it,” said **Desiree Rogers**, board chair for Choose Chicago.

Las Vegas CVA appoints top executives

The Las Vegas CVA announced in January that **Steven Hill** is its new president and chief operating officer, **Cathy Tull** is chief marketing officer and **Ed Finger** is chief financial officer. The hiring and promotions are part of an organizational restructuring of the CVA's executive offices.

“In our continuing effort to maintain the LVCVA's status as the premier destination marketing organization in the world, we established our new corporate structure to better reflect the resort industry and our hospitality partners in Southern Nevada,” said CEO **Rossi**

Ralenkotter. “With these final appointments to our executive suite, we are better positioned to move the organization forward and develop more of our key staff to further improve upon our efforts to attract more visitors to Las Vegas.”

Hill comes to the CVA from his position as executive director of the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development. He had held the position since 2011, when Governor Brian Sandoval created the agency.

Tull had been the CVA's senior vice president of marketing since 2009, and she has been with the CVA since 2005, originally hired as the vice president of strategic marketing.

Finger was promoted from his position as senior vice president of finance. His promotion comes after the departure of **Rana Lacer**, the organization's first CFO. Finger joined the CVA in 2016, following time as deputy county manager for Clark County, Nevada.



Portland Rose Festival promotes Ross

The Portland Rose Festival promoted **Carol Ross** to chief marketing and administrative officer. In her new position, Ross oversees brand management, advertising, promotions, media sponsorships and communications for the Oregon festival.

Ross has been with the Portland Rose Festival Foundation for more than 20 years. During her tenure, Ross' duties have included fundraising, sales, event management and business development. In that time, the event was recognized as the best festival in the world by the International Festivals and Events Association (2007 and 2011).

DuPage CVB hires sales manager

The DuPage CVB hired **Naomi Rolfe** as a new sales manager. Rolfe focuses on developing the Illinois-based CVB's corporate business and securing new and recurring meetings and conventions.

“Naomi is a solid complement to our

sales team and will bring innovative ideas to help our team achieve continued success in attracting more meetings and convention business,” said **Justin Roach**, the CVB's director of sales.

Rolfe has more than 13 years of marketing and sales experience in the hospitality industry. Previously she worked for the Chicago Marriott Naperville and the Candlewood Suites Aurora-Naperville.



Crabb joins Greater Palm Springs CVB

Mark Crabb has been named vice president of convention sales and services for the

Greater Palm Springs CVB. He joined the CVB from Sonoma County Tourism, where he served as chief sales officer.

“With more than 25 years of tourism industry experience, both domestically and internationally, Mark will be able to share his vast knowledge and skills with our convention sales team, as well as our hospitality partners,” said **Scott White**, president and CEO. “We are excited to welcome Mark to our CVB family.”

Crabb also served as deputy director of the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel Lee County VCB in Florida, and as the executive director of the Muncie/Delaware County CVB.

Poulter named CIO for Royal Caribbean

Royal Caribbean Cruises hired **Martha Poulter** as the company's new senior vice president and chief information officer. Poulter joins the cruise line after spending 13 years as the CIO of major corporations, such as Starwood Hotels.

“She'll bring that experience to bear on a full range of challenges here, including our plans to evolve the fleet's IT infrastructure,” said COO **Adam Goldstein**.

“I am looking forward to the opportunity to join Royal Caribbean, a company that stands for excellence and innovation in the travel industry,” said Poulter. “Working with the IT team, I will help Royal Caribbean develop and support the technologies necessary for running a global business in a digital world.”

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NEW MEMBERS

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

DMOs

Bermuda Tourism Authority

Christi Tucker
New York, NY 10017 USA
gotobermuda.com

Berkshire Tour Company

Nancy Hickey
Stoneham, MA 02180 USA
berkshiretourco.com

Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region

Charlotte Jakobsen
Weinheim, Baden-Wurttemberg, 69469
Germany
frankfurt-rhein-main.de

Travel Tacoma & Pierce County

Lisa Barker
Tacoma, WA 98402 USA
traveltacoma.com

Visit Beloit

Matt Bosen
Beloit, WI 53511-6339 USA
visitbeloit.com

TOUR OPERATORS

America Israel Tours

America Israel Tours
Noam Matas
Calabasas, CA 91302 USA
americaisrael.com

Carrie's Travel Adventures LLC

Carrie Guidry
Paulina, LA 70763 USA

Don't Forget the List LLC

Holly Becht
Medina, OH 44256 USA
dontforgetthelist.com

En Route USA LLC

Christophe Sarafian
Folsom, CA 95763 USA
enrouteusa.us

Heritage Travel LLC

Scott Gerloff
Washington, DC 20005 USA
nationaltrusttours.com

K L K Inc.

ZhengRong Liang
New York, NY 11385 USA

Xenia Events

Adam McDaniel
Austin, TX 78701 USA
xeniaevents.com

TOUR SUPPLIERS

ARAMARK Parks and Destinations

Robin Marquis
Page, AZ 86040 USA
lakepowell.com



Fairfield Inn & Suites Flagstaff East

Kelcy Hambsch
Flagstaff, AZ 86004 USA
marriott.com/hotels/travel/flgff

Hotel Engine

Delmarshae Walker
Denver, CO 80246 USA
hotelengine.com

Navy Pier

Mark Sharba
Chicago, IL 60611-3419 USA
navypier.org

New Sun International Travel LLC

Hong Shen
New York, NY 11355 USA
newsunus.com

Tachi Palace Hotel & Casino

Norma Schaefer
Lemoore, CA 93245-9760 USA
tachipalace.com

Yakama Nation Legends Casino Hotel

Trena Cloyd
Toppenish, WA 98948 USA
legendscasino.com

ASSOCIATES

Incentriq Canada Inc.

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Toronto, ON M6K 3J1 Canada
inspiretec.com

Travel Agency Tribes

Tom MacLean
London, ON N6A 5B5 Canada
travelagencytribes.com

Tripsi

Brock Rowlands
London, ON N6J 2H9 Canada
mytripsi.com

Vutags

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Pleasanton, CA 94566 USA
vutags.com



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New FTA members

The following is a list of NTA members that also have joined the Faith Travel Association since Dec. 14, 2017.

TOUR OPERATORS

French Incoming

Michelangelo International Travel

R.C.G. Tours

Select International Tours

Southwest Tours

Sports Travel and Tours

Warther Tours

TOUR SUPPLIERS

Museum of Science and Industry

Québec Copper Art Studio & Museum Albert Gilles

Temple Square Hospitality

AD INDEX

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travel exchange



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Anchorage, Alaska
March 18-21, 2020

Railroads tie scenery, nostalgia together

BY TERESA PROPECK



A HUNDRED YEARS ago, rail travel provided personal service that allowed passengers to relax and enjoy the ride. Today, people associate train travel with nostalgia or

romance, and a lot of tourist railroads want to deliver on that. Railroadng is an experience that can hit the right emotional button for anyone, regardless of age.

My railroad roots go back to Grand Canyon Railway. I started as their national marketing director back in 1994, and I fell in love with the idea of showing people diverse terrains, scenery and history—all without leaving a footprint behind.

When I met the owners of Verde Canyon Railroad in 2000, I knew I wanted to sell the experience they offer. I love this train and have a confidence in what we offer every day. Often, when I meet with NTA tour operators, they ask me if I own the company. I don't, but I feel like the railroad belongs to me.

We took over Texas State Railroad in May of 2017. Introducing this well-preserved piece of history to NTA operators was a thrill at Travel Exchange in San Antonio, and I was excited to help them tie our trip into their Texas itineraries.

We see a lot of families and couples, but group business is a little different.



Verde Canyon Railroad passengers get a second seat in an open-air car.

They are sometimes hesitant to take a train trip because they think they are trading one "bus-seating" arrangement for another. On our trains we try to dispel that notion by giving everyone a second seat—in an open-air car—so they can move around and not stay seated for the entire journey.

Members of a group expect to check off several experiences by the end of their train trip: history, scenery, service, education and good food. We put a lot of emphasis on service, and from an operator's first phone call until their guests get off our train, someone is attending to the group.

I tend to brag about our service. The level of personal attention, along with the quality of food and the condition of our train, has only changed to become better.

We have never—not even in the down years—taken away a single amenity, nor have we reduced the staff-to-passenger ratio we feel is necessary to give the groups the best experience possible.

Now that consumers can research and compare excursions and prices online, they aren't just leaving it up to the tour provider to make the trip as fulfilling as possible. They are making requests—demands, sometimes—on what they want from a tour.

I was impressed at Travel Exchange with the appointments I had because the operators were really thinking outside of their comfort zones. They are working to impress their potential clients with something those consumers might not have found on their own.

Travelers' expectations are high—as are tour operators'—but railroads deliver.

I see the wonder in the eyes of a 5-year-old. I hear the memories from a 70-year-old who grew up in Chicago. And I can almost feel the peace wash over every mom, standing on the open-air car with a glass of wine or iced tea in hand, knowing that she has four hours when everything is being done for her family.

She is able to relax ... and enjoy the ride. ☺

Teresa Propeck is vice president of passenger services for Texas State Railroad and Verde Canyon Railroad. Email her at teresa@texasstaterailroad.net.



Verde Canyon Railroad hosted group leaders on a Fam tour organized by NTA-member Premier World Discovery.



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