
Itinerary Intelligence

— Smart Strategies for Group Tour
Development —

GROUP
THE
TRAVEL LEADER

What Group Tour Operators Look For in a Destination

Marketability

- Tour operators are asking themselves, “Can I sell this trip to my customers?”
- They must fill 25 or more seats on a motorcoach to make the trip profitable
- “Marketability” depends on the tour company, but usually it means:
 - Easy to describe
 - Appealing
 - Aligns with an audience
 - Few drawbacks

Good Logistics

- Is the location accessible?
 - Close to any airports, major highways, nearby major destinations?
- Is there group infrastructure in place?
 - Hotels with enough rooms to book a motorcoach group, motorcoach parking, restaurants with large capacities?

Good Value

- Are prices for your hotels, restaurants and attractions reasonable?
 - Think about factors like hotel taxes
 - Make sure hotels have good attrition clauses—many group leaders won't work with hotels that don't
- Are there any rebates or group discounts you as a DMO can provide?
- Are there any shoulder season price reductions?

Itinerary Balance

- Group travel planners are designing itineraries with some depth
 - Depth = multi-faceted, more than just one angle
- Do you have more than one attraction?
- Are there multiple niches you can market?
 - Agriculture + Art
 - Culinary + Museums
 - Outdoor attractions + wine

Destination Support

- How much of their work have you already done for them?
 - Group-friendly itineraries
 - Lists of group-friendly accommodations, restaurants and attractions
- Add-ons they can opt for
 - Special group programming options that can take their programs up a notch
- Driver/group leader comps
- Help them gather bids from multiple hotels
- Offer goodie bags, coupon books and step-on guides

Common Destination Pitfalls

Poor Accessibility

- Destinations that are further away from large airports or main interstates
- Narrow roads, difficult to access by motorcoach
 - Particularly relevant to agricultural communities

Limited Variety

- If a destination only has one main attraction it markets, that can deter group travel planners
 - Same with restaurants, hotels

Poor Group Infrastructure

- Lack of motorcoach parking
- Attractions poorly suited to groups (lack of organized tours)
- No group-friendly restaurants
- No hotels that can accommodate groups

Recognition

- It can be hard for lesser-known destinations to attract notice
 - Little name recognition
 - Nothing known about the area
- Alternatively, if a destination is known for anything unpleasant or negative stereotypes, that can affect desire to travel there
 - (But don't worry, there are solutions to this)

Solutions to Align Destinations with Group Travel Planner Needs

Embrace the Hub-and-Spoke Model

- For smaller, less accessible destinations, the hub-and-spoke model makes it more likely they will attract visitors
 - Day trips from bigger destinations to smaller
- Good for: destinations without many attractions
- Case study: Louisiana parishes
 - Lafayette (Big destination); St. Martinville (small destination)



Partner with other Nearby Destinations

- Don't always think of nearby destinations as competition, partner with them to sell a corridor rather than a single stop
 - Partner with a neighboring destination to pack an itinerary with stops in both places
- Good for: isolated destinations, small destinations without easy access, destinations that struggle with variety
- Case Study: Visit Cincy/MeetNKY (Cincinnati and Northern KY)

Own a Niche

- Adopt a niche that people can know you for
- Create itineraries with a theme
 - Agritourism → “From Field to Fork”
- Good for: destinations without name recognition
- Case Study: Hopkinsville - The Batter Capital of the World
 - Farm tour, factory tour, farm-to-table restaurant



Create Custom Only-for-Groups Experiences

- Groups want the VIP treatment
 - Extras on a tour
 - Dining in a unique place (like a covered bridge)
 - Special greetings and shout-outs from locals
- Make sure you have optional add-ons groups can take advantage of
- Case study: Ponchatoula, Louisiana Christmas Parade



Add Value for Operators

- Anything you can add to make operators' jobs easier will bring them back to your destination
 - Itinerary planning
 - Promotional assistance
 - Comps for operators
 - Free tickets for drivers
 - **FAMs — show these operators what you can do**
- Talk to your local attractions, restaurants and lodging about group pricing and add-ons
- Good for all destinations
- Case Study: Visit Savannah

Become Experts on Group Service

- Compile lists of capacities, group rates and promos to have on hand
- Think like a group leader
 - Where is motorcoach parking in your town?
 - What hidden gems can groups discover there?
 - What rates, discounts, etc. are available?
- Have a group tab on your website with this info
- Good for destinations without group infrastructure or poor accessibility
- Case study: Visit Myrtle Beach

Questions?

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