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Tap into the group tour market

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What will I learn in this session?

- ✓ The definition of a group tour
- ✓ Total economic impact of the group tour industry
- ✓ What group operators require when choosing a destination
- ✓ How to become “group ready”
- ✓ How to be more active in the state’s group tour industry
- ✓ National group tour associations and conferences



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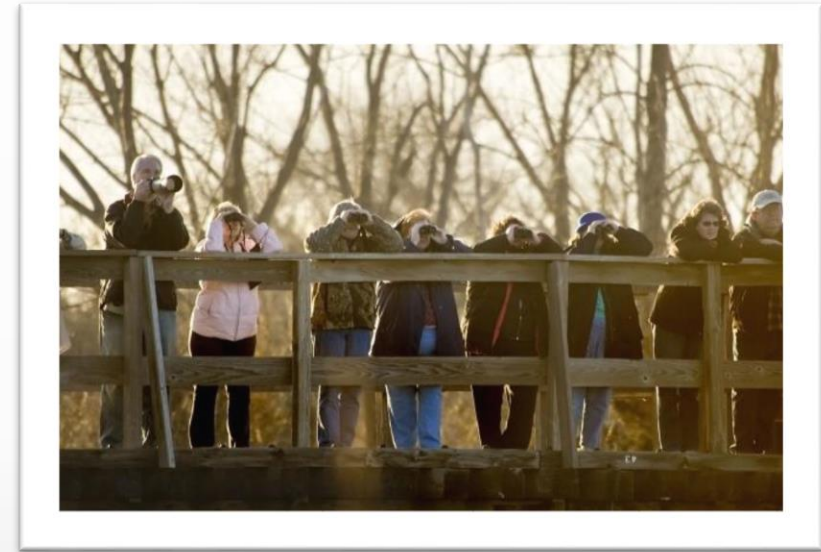
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Right! Let's get started!

First, what is a group tour?

Group tours are organized, packaged tours that build the costs for meals, transportation, lodging, admission fees/tickets, and other associated costs into the overall price charged for the tour.



Group sizes vary widely, ranging from as few as five or six people to as many as can be accommodated. Most large motorcoaches can seat 45-55 passengers.

Group tours let visitors explore and experience activities that normally are not available to the general traveler, but are offered exclusively to groups.

Total economic impact of the group tour industry in United States 2016*

Economic Impact: \$228.23 billion

Wages: \$84.47 billion

Jobs: 1,961,901

Federal & State Taxes Generated: \$33.60 billion

Passenger Trips in 2016: 258.29 million

*Source: ABA Foundation, <https://www.buses.org/aba-foundation/research-summary/economic-impact/motorcoach-economic-impact-study>

Total economic impact of the group tour industry in Nebraska 2016*

Economic Impact: \$1.38 billion

Wages: \$413.78 million

Jobs: 12,207

Federal and State Taxes Generated: \$165.01 billion

Passenger Trips in 2016: 1,779,500

**Source: ABA Foundation, <https://www.buses.org/aba-foundation/research-summary/economic-impact/motorcoach-economic-impact-study>*

What do group operators require when choosing a destination for their itineraries?

1. Location

Is the destination along one of their existing tour routes or within a short drive?

Is the destination easy for a motorcoach to drive to?

What type of surface road leads to the destination (paved, gravel, dirt, etc.)?

Are branches or other hazards hanging over the road that could hit the motorcoach?

2. Cleanliness

Is the destination clean, inviting and welcoming to visitors?

Are restrooms and/or onsite dining areas clean and well maintained? Are there enough restrooms available to accommodate large groups of people?

3. Group drop-off/pick-up points

Is there adequate room for a motorcoach to unload and load passengers?

Is the staging area close to the entrance? Important for handicapped and older clients.

Is there adequate space for the driver to park the motorcoach?

4. Interactive experiences and activities

Groups are no longer content with passively observing a destination.

The days of simply driving past an attraction or viewing artifacts from behind a rope or in a glass case are gone.

Instead, today's groups want to become involved, "get their hands dirty" and truly experience a destination.

Baby Boomer and younger generations (Millennials, Gen X) are requesting the group industry offer more interactive and educational experiences.

They are changing the face and future of the group tour industry.

5. VIP and Behind-the-Scenes Experiences

Groups like to feel special and do things not available to the general traveler.

Include guided tours of areas normally off-limits to the general visitor.

- Backstage tour at a theatre and maybe a chance to meet and talk with actors
- Behind-the-scenes tour at a zoo to interact with animals (assist with feeding)

Offer group only entertainment and activities.

- Entertainment during a themed dinner (Polish entertainment and meal)
- Historic character re-enactors and living history demonstrations (Buffalo Bill)
- Work of art created by group members to take home with them (Prairie Arts Center)

6. Special discounted group rate

Group tours represent volume business. And often repeat business!

If operators know you're willing to work with them, or to offer their clients something unexpected, the chance they'll use your destination or property in the future is higher than those who do the minimum for groups.

So always, always, always provide good, discounted rates for groups.

- Attraction entrance and admission fees
- Tickets for concerts, performances and other events
- Special group lodging and dining rates

Cost definitely is a major factor when operators plan their itineraries.

7. Good quality lodging and dining options

Meals and lodging often are two of the most expensive parts of a group tour itinerary so operators expect to “get their money’s worth.”

Group operators require lodging that is acceptable to their clients’ needs and wants.

Some require 3-5 star hotels or national chains while others might be more laid back and are looking for unique and out-of-the-ordinary lodging accommodations.

The more perks and add-ons you can offer operators, the better the chance they’ll include your destination or property.



Lodging Accommodations

Offer group rates, discounts and special deals.

Offer complimentary items.

- Breakfast or dinner (Drury Hotels 5:30 Kick Back)
- WiFi (requiring a password is fine)
- Happy hour (Embassy Suites Evening Reception)
- Lodging for motorcoach driver and group operator
- Laundry/dry cleaning services (especially for longer tour itineraries)

Give guests a small token of appreciation and thanks.

- Upon arrival, give guests a small gift bag of locally-made products
- Leave a cheese and fruit plate in guests' rooms

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The lodging property's general manager, sales manager, front desk manager or owner should be on hand to greet the tour upon arrival and to welcome them.

Treat the group, and the operator, as special VIPs.

A lodging property staff that goes out of its way to be accommodating to operators and their groups will be remembered for future tour itineraries!

**Group operators talk to each other and they share
“the good, the bad and the ugly.”**



Dining Establishments

How will groups order their meals at restaurants? Will they order from the restaurant's regular menu, be offered a limited selection of dishes to choose from, or dine buffet style? It depends on the size of the group.

Determining how groups will order meals is especially necessary when dealing with larger groups of 45-55 people. Smaller groups can be more easily accommodated using a restaurant's regular menu or a selection of dishes.

Offer a complimentary beverage (alcoholic/non-alcoholic), appetizer and/or dessert.

- If someone does not want a dessert after dinner, offer to box it up for them to enjoy later in their room.

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Treat groups as VIPs by seating them in a private dining area.

Appoint servers to wait exclusively on the group tour members.

Leave a locally made item as a small gift at each place setting.

Highlight any dishes the restaurant is known or famous for.

Provide after dinner entertainment (music, dancing, re-enactors, storytellers).

Bring the chef out for an introduction so groups can personally thank him or her.





8. Your Attitude

A positive attitude on the part of management, staff and anyone who comes into contact with groups is important to encourage repeat business from operators.

Go that extra mile when interacting with groups and operators.

- Greet groups at each stop on the itinerary.
- Give them a small token of appreciation or gift before they leave a stop.
- Offer light refreshments or snacks, especially if meal time is not soon.

If someone on the tour is having a special event, such as a birthday, anniversary or graduation, celebrate that event to make them feel special. You should be able to find out this information from the group operator.

What do I need to do to make sure I'm group ready?

This is fairly straight forward. Follow the guidelines outlined in the previous section highlighting what group operators want when selecting destinations. But first, ask yourself these three important questions.

- ☐ Am I even sure I want to enter the group tour market? It can be a big commitment and often takes a while to encourage group operators to include you on their itineraries.
- ☐ Do I enjoy working with large groups of people from different social and economic backgrounds? I realize that not everyone will agree with me.
- ☐ Do I have the financial ability, resources and innovation to enter the group tour market and be successful?

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Okay. You answered yes to the three questions.

Now what?



Now you become active in the state's group tour industry.

1. Make Contact (with the Nebraska Tourism Commission)

Contact the Tourism Commission's group tour manager to let him know your interest in attracting groups.

Invite him to your destination to demonstrate the kinds of activities you can offer groups. Show him any new or expanded group activities you've developed.

Work with him to brainstorm new ideas, concepts and features that you could offer to make your destination more attractive and memorable to operators when they plan their itineraries.

2. Make Contact (with other Nebraska group destinations)

Research which destinations across Nebraska are active, or want to become more active, in the group tour industry and meet with them.

Some of the major players in the state's group tour industry are Omaha CVB, Sarpy County Tourism, Lincoln CVB, Grand Island/Hall County CVB, Kearney Visitors Bureau, North Platte/Lincoln County Visitors Bureau, Golden Spike Tower & Visitor Center, and Gering CVB/Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition.

But there's always room for more!

The group tour specialists at the state and local levels actively pursue group operators and work to encourage them to include their destinations on their tour itineraries.

3. Create Partnerships

Selling Nebraska to national group operators works better when we in the industry work together.

Partner with the Tourism Commission and others in the state's group tour industry to create exciting tour itineraries.

Create a group tour section on your website and regularly update it with new activities, experiences, destinations, services and itineraries.

Attend national group tour conventions and marketplaces to promote your destination and itineraries directly to group operators.

4. Develop Sample Itineraries

Sample itineraries give group operators an idea of the type of attractions, businesses, and events you can put together to make a tour.

Theme and unique itineraries are what many operators are requesting.



How do you take something “ordinary” and make it extraordinary?

By being creative!

“EXIT STAGE LEFT”

The group arrives at the theatre entrance where a staff member greets them dressed in a director’s outfit or as a celebrity.

After a short presentation, the group is led on a personal guided **VIP tour** of the theatre, including especially backstage and other areas that normally are off-limits to non-actors or non-theatre staff.

After the tour, the group has an exclusive opportunity to meet one or two actors who tell them about their experiences and give them “inside information” about the theatre world.

Offer a short acting class where group members can learn from the experts and perfect their acting skills

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If space is available at the theatre, the group enjoys a private, catered dinner followed by entertainment to prepare them for the evening's production. Add an exclusive event where the group dines with actors from a recent or upcoming production, preferably with the actors in character.

After dinner, the group is treated with a performance where they are given complete VIP treatment.

- Priority check-in and entrance (private entrance)
- Private reserved seating near the stage
- Private bar/standing area during intermission
- Private VIP restroom access
- Autographed programs from the performance



The Point?
To make the group
feel like celebrities!

“ARTIST FOR A DAY”

Upon arrival at the museum, the group’s guide meets them at the entrance dressed in character of an artist who takes them into a private VIP room for a short presentation and introduction to the museum

The guide might portray Robert Henri (founder of Cozad, Nebraska and leading figure in the Ashcan School of American realism) who will talk about his life and art.

After the introductory presentation, the guide leads the group to the hands-on, interactive activities offered on the tour.



First Activity: Sit and Sketch

An artist (or museum staff person) meets the group and gives each member a bag of sketch pens, a sketch pad and a small folding seat to use throughout the tour

The artist leads the group to a sculpture inside the museum or outdoors and first tells them the story about the piece of art they're looking at.

After the presentation, group members are asked to draw the sculpture in their sketch pads.

First, they draw the sculpture with their eyes open. Next, they are asked to closely study the sculpture for a few minutes, then close their eyes and draw it from memory. Without looking at their sketch pad.

Second Activity: Copy Cats

The group is led to the second activity where a museum guide seats them in front of a painting and then starts talking to them about it and the artist.

Afterward, group members try to draw a copy of the painting in their sketch pads.

Third Activity: Draw What You Want

For this activity, the group is led into a room where different paintings are hanging on display. Group members are asked to select a painting, sit down in front of it and then choose a certain section of the painting to redraw in the sketch pads.

The Point? To give the group a true artistic experience!

5. Develop and offer FAM Tours and Personalized Site Visits

FAM tours

Familiarization tours highlight a destination's group opportunities to operators.

They should be no longer than four or five days if covering a large area or one to two days if within one city or a small area. Include a variety of group travel opportunities.

Give operators enough time to review their schedules to see if the tour is something they can fit into their calendar.

Everyone participating in the FAM tour must maintain the highest level of customer service and satisfaction.

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FAM tour marketing pieces should clearly state the activities included on the tour.

“Pay to Play”

Each tourism entity on the FAM tour must financially contribute so that everything for operators is comp’d.

- Lodging, meals, admission fees, transportation (while on the tour)

It’s up to the FAM tour hosts to decide if they want to cover transportation costs for operators to get to your destination (airfare, mileage).

Personalized site visits

Personalized site visits generally are planned using the same method as for FAM tours.

They generally are reserved for a smaller number of operators, usually only one or two.

A benefit of personalized site visits is that you can enjoy a more intimate and personal experience with operators.

Also, itinerary changes can be done more easily on personalized site visits.



Important!

When offering FAM tours and personalized site visits, remember that group operators are not average travelers you're showing around. These are people who potentially could bring your destination and area group tours for many years.

Always put your best foot forward!

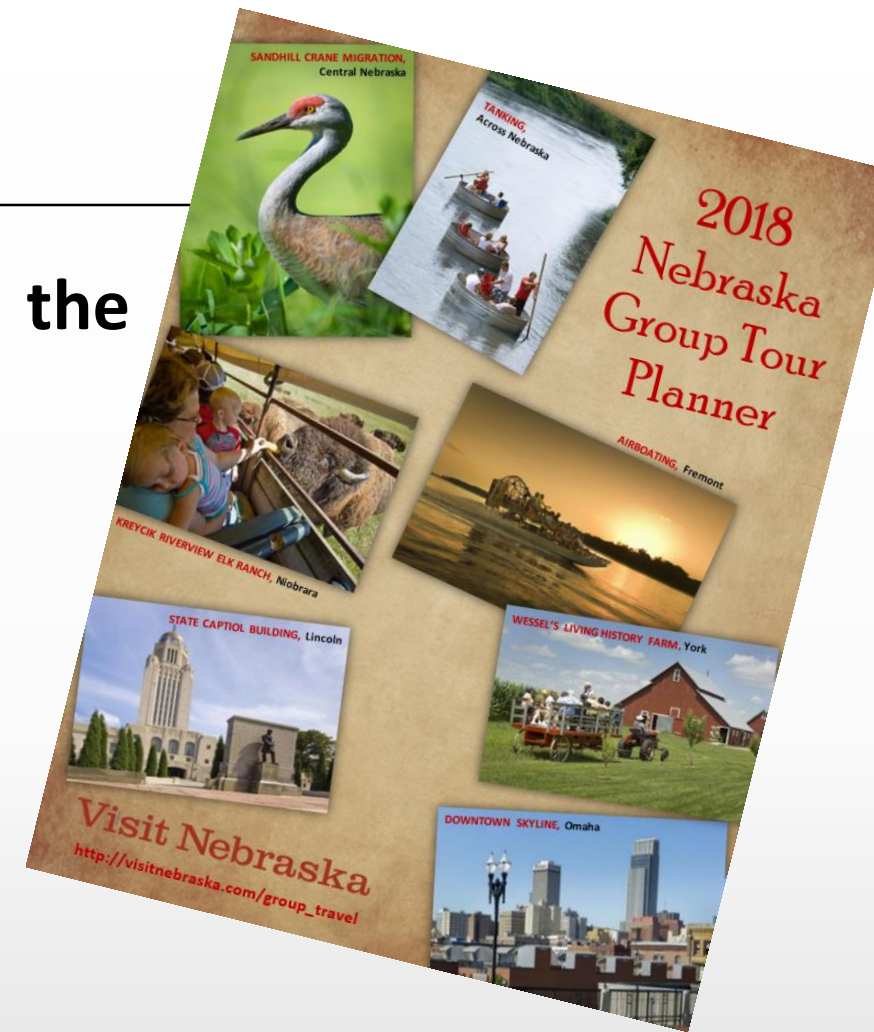
6. Apply for a state marketing grant through the Nebraska Tourism Commission

There is financial help available.

Maximum amount to request: \$25,000

Grant funds can be used to:

- Cover registration fees to attend one or more selected national group marketplaces.
- Produce and print a group profile sheet to be used at marketplaces.
- Develop a group tour website.
- Produce and print a group tour planner.



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2017-2018 Grant Schedule

October 18, 2017

Guidelines are available

December 15, 2017

Application deadline (**postmarked**)

January 31, 2018

Grant recipients are announced

May 31, 2019

Deadline for project reimbursement (upon completion of project with payments made)



National Group Tour Associations and Conferences

American Bus Association

National Tour Association

Travel Alliance Partners

Select Traveler Conference

American Bus Association

Founded in 1926, the American Bus Association (ABA) is the oldest, largest and most respected voice in the group travel industry.

ABA members include motorcoach operators, tour operators, tourism-related organizations and products and service suppliers.

Membership in ABA includes approximately 1,000 U.S. and Canadian motorcoach and tour companies and an additional 2,800 member organizations within the travel and tourism industry.

Sixty-five percent of all motorcoaches on the highway today are owned and operated by ABA member companies.

Website: www.buses.org



ABA Announces Omaha as Site for 2020 Annual Meeting & Marketplace

Today, ABA announced Omaha, Neb., as the site of its 2020 ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace. The dates of the 2020 Marketplace will be Jan. 10-14, 2020. This is the first time ABA has come to Omaha for its annual event.

"We look forward to bringing our ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace to Omaha in 2020," said ABA President & CEO Peter Pantuso, CTIS. "Omaha offers a lot for the travel and tourism industry and we look forward to showing our members a great city and encouraging them to add Omaha to their destination offerings."

American Bus Association's Annual Meeting & Marketplace is the number one group travel show in North America with the greatest ROI for its attendees. In 2017, ABA's meeting in Cleveland welcomed more than 3,400 tour operators, travel industry suppliers and exhibitors and generated approximately \$115.9 million dollars in booked business during the event and immediately afterward.

Noting all that Omaha has to offer and its proximity to all major cities in the Midwest, it was an easy decision to choose the city to host this gathering of motorcoach, tour and travel professionals from all over the United States and Canada.

For more information on ABA's Marketplace, visit <https://www.buses.org/events/event/marketplace-2018>

National Tour Association

National Tour Association (NTA) is the leading business association for professionals serving customers traveling to, from and within North America.

NTA's 700 buyer members consist of tour operators and travel planners who package travel product domestically and around the world.

NTA's seller members, 500 destinations and 1,100 tour suppliers, represent more travel product and more business-to-business networking than any other travel industry association.

NTA members have customers and products in the United States, Canada, Mexico and more than 40 other countries.

Website: www.ntaonline.com

Travel Alliance Partners

Established in 2001, Travel Alliance Partners is a member-owned organization of premier tour operators in the United States and Canada

It is a partnership of travel professionals who buy and sell products from each other, develop joint marketing opportunities and share business practices in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Each member operator is a regional expert offering new and unique itineraries, operating under the highest standards for business ethics and product quality

Website: www.tapintotravel.com



Select Traveler Conference

Select Traveler Conference is the nation's leading organization for Loyalty Program Directors including 3,000 banks and financial institutions nationwide.

These institutions have discovered that their efforts in developing senior deposit and travel clubs produce great results and loyal customers.

And this is great news for the travel industry. Loyalty Clubs are generating a new sales market and providing great opportunities for travel companies, destinations and suppliers that want new group sales.

At Select Traveler Conference – we promise to lead a new generation of group travelers to the forefront of the travel industry.

Website: www.selecttravelerconf.com



Annual group tour marketplaces and conferences

American Bus Association

Marketplace 2018

Charlotte NC

January 26-30, 2018

National Tour Association

Travel Exchange 2017

San Antonio TX

14-18 December, 2017



Select Traveler

2018 Select Traveler Conference

Louisville KY

February 4-6, 2018

Travel Alliance Partners

2018 TAP Dance

Atlantic City NJ

June 4-8 2018

Who is my group tour contact in the Nebraska Tourism Commission?

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