

Destination EVENTS

A Reason Travelers Visit and Return to Destinations



Pasadena CVB

Pasadena's dazzling Rose Parade ushers in the New Year.



The International Balloon Fiesta, a photographer's dream staged in early October, highlights Albuquerque's travel calendar.

Albuquerque CVB/Reynold Watt

Once two totally separate industries, the special events industry and the travel industry are working more closely together than ever before, leading to mutually successful business relationships, new and fresh tour itineraries, and destination events (as opposed to local events) putting “heads in beds.” The American Bus Association has realized this for the past 28 years and annually votes on the Top 100 Events in North America for tour operators. Similarly, Red Hot Celebrations is rapidly becoming the travel trade’s event connection.

Special events are often the reason first-time travelers select a destination. The economic impact of these first-time guests traveling to destinations for niche celebrations, fairs, festivals and anniversary commemorations can be felt for years to come.

On the other hand, tour operators who have a loyal customer base need reasons for repeat guests to return to a destination. Their itineraries need to be fresh and special events add novelty and excitement to existing itineraries and previously-visited destinations.

Creating special events during slow travel periods is another reason why destinations and tour operators are apt to offer them. The Annual Winter

Break in Primm, NV is conducted the second week of January each year. It is a slow time for the destination, and tour operators need revenue in January. Thus the creation of this successful event – now in its ninth year.

Some popular events, such as the Tournament of Roses Parade, Kentucky Derby, Super Bowl and Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta warrant a stand-alone package. These events are some of the most elite and recognized events in the world, and are not for all groups because of budget concerns and availability of tickets. In addition to tickets, hotel availability, price and deposit requirements are also factors. For the inexperienced, large events are not always the

itinerary becomes attractive for tour operators to offer.

These smaller events have different challenges for operators. Lead time can be an issue as schedules are not always available 9-12 months in advance. Also, special events rely heavily on sponsorship dollars, so they may be subject to cancellation in today's economic environment.

Experienced tour operators working with event promoters can offer added-value or behind-the-scenes components that the average guest would not be able to experience. Possibly a meet-and-greet with the feature entertainer, a special cooking demonstration, or a hands-on workshop can be customized.

repeat customers, they added a special event which allowed their guests to experience Louisville in a new way."

Your biggest event is the Kentucky Derby Festival. What opportunities are there for tour operators to plan packages around this event?

DB: "Louisville is the only city in the world that can take a two-minute horse race and turn it into a two-week celebration! The Festival starts off with the largest fireworks show in North America called Thunder Over Louisville. Other Derby Festival events include an air show featuring military aircraft demonstrations over the Ohio River, the Great Steamboat Race featuring the Belle of Louisville taking on a new contender each year and the Derby Festival Parade on the Thursday evening prior to the Run for the Roses - the Kentucky Derby. A limited number of guests will be able to attend the Derby itself. But the weeks preceding the Derby are equally as festive."

Are there any other motorcoach group-friendly events and festivals in your region you'd like to tell us about?

DB: "My favorite time of year in Louisville is always the holiday season and with so many new events to offer, we are excited to have groups visit at that time of year. For the 2010 holiday season, KaLightscope is coming to the U.S. for the first time at the Galt House Hotel. The event includes a dazzling display of fabulous holiday luminaries, towering 16 to 30 feet high. At the Derby Dinner Playhouse guests can enjoy *Plaid Tidings*. The Frasier International History Museum is presenting *O'Deadly Night* and the famous Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory is offering *Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown*."

Destinations around the world offer a multitude of events throughout the year. Plan a trip based on your group's favorite flavor. **LGT**



Lake Havasu City CVB

The Boat Parade of Lights brightens the season in Lake Havasu City, Arizona.

easiest to maneuver. So, for groups who have always dreamed of attending a world-class event, using an experienced operator can make or break their trip.

However, smaller events are perfect for any tour operator to add to existing programs. Or combining several events can link smaller communities using a common theme. Take, for instance, a holiday vacation to Arizona. Almost every community has activities taking place in December, and by combining several of the best, such as the Lake Havasu Boat Parade of Lights, Red Rock Fantasy in Sedona, and Zoo Lights in Phoenix, a statewide, five-day

Local CVBs are great contacts when considering adding special events to tour itineraries. Dineene Bradley, vice president of tourism development for the Louisville CVB, shares her experiences in the following interview:

Festivals and special events are becoming an important part of most tour planners' itineraries. Why do you think this has evolved?

DB: "Several years ago, we started noticing an increased interest from tour operators in promoting special events and festivals in our city. Those who had been to Louisville before knew it was great place for groups. But to attract