



Trade Show Report

International Inbound Tour Association – San Diego, CA

February 12 –16, 2023

Montana Representation:

- Glacier Country – Debbie Picard

Overview:

- IITA gathers international inbound receptive tour and suppliers to meet at their association summit to discuss the state of international inbound visitation to the US. These tour operators specialize in group travel, FIT, and fly/drive programs and some have MICE groups as well.
- There were roughly 30 inbound tour operators in attendance and 90 suppliers and DMOs.
- Glacier Country met with 23 inbound receptive tour operators for 5-minute appointments. It was mainly a meet and greet and to exchange business cards. Not much in the way of business was discussed.

Trends:

- International travel is back and all the tour operators felt good about the future of international travel after a long and heavy couple of years. More rural destinations are again on the back burner and the known cities and urban destinations are back on the minds of international travelers. However, National Parks are still part of their itineraries and of course Yellowstone and Grand Canyon are best known.
- The US Deputy Secretaries of Commerce and State informed us of the progress being made in recent months to improve visa processing in vital inbound markets like Mexico, India, Brazil and Columbia.
- Geoff Freeman, President and CEO of US Travel emphasized the importance of inbound travel to the nation's economy and the overall health of the travel industry.
- The vehicle reservation system for four entrances and recreation.gov not working with US international inbound tour operators to purchase for their clients is hurting our rebound in the region. Along with the very high prices for hotels and the exchange rates making the US at least 30% higher than other destinations.
- International visitors are attracted to Montana for our National Parks, wildlife viewing, wide open spaces, scenic drives, soft adventure, our unique culture that includes cowboys and American Indians.

Recommendations for 2023 and beyond:

- Keep educating our GC partners on the international travel trade and working with international inbound (receptive) tour operators. There is pent up travel demand.
- We have talked about offering welcome pages on our website for our key international markets. Maybe revisit that if budget allows.

- Recognize the developing need for multi-lingual step on guides.
- Work with the state office on multi-lingual promotional materials, perhaps we can take their information on Glacier National Park and make it a one sheet we can use.
- I don't believe this is a show that I need to attend yearly. I will foster the relationships with the inbound tour operators already offering our region and enhance the number of hotels and attractions they contract.