

Trade Show Report
ABA Marketplace – Charlotte, NC
January 5-9, 2013

Montana Representation:

- Montana Office of Tourism – Marlee Iverson
- Glacier Country – Debbie Picard
- TownHouse Inns of MT – Paula Ruark
- Butte CVB – Maria Pochervina
- Helena TBID – Heidi O'Brien
- Red Lion – Chuck Carter

Overview:

- The American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace took place in Charlotte, NC where more than 3,500 attendees gathered for the packaged travel event.
- 800 tour operator companies were in attendance.
- Glacier Country was matched with 15 tour operators for pre-scheduled appointments. I was able to pick up 3 more meetings for a total of 18 appointments for our DMO appointment sessions.
- There were several networking events scheduled in the evenings that allowed for more interaction with the tour operators. I came away with at least 10 more contacts from the social events and sightseeing excursion.
- In addition to appointments, there were several educational opportunities to learn about tour trends, different tour markets and the health of the packaged travel industry.
- Next ABA Marketplace: Nashville, TN – January 11-15, 2014

Trends:

- Packaged Travel experienced an overall growth of 2%, however a shrinking decision window.
- International tourism is up 7%.
- Customers are looking for special treatment, unique experiences, smaller buses, fewer people.
- Boomers are a great target especially with airline travel rage being so high.
- Millennials (ages 18-32) are a group worth marketing to; willing to spend money on status, want to travel with friends and are desperate for peer approval. Some operators are changing up their buses to look like limos.
- These younger travelers are looking for adventure, more independence/variety in a tour (don't make everyone do the same thing at the same time).
- Top tours; Bucket List tours, celebration tours, culinary tours, educational tours, heritage tours, Love of Extremes (heli-tours/zip-line/dog sledding etc.), stay-cations, voluntourism, music tourism and Randomness or Mystery tours.
- Mobile will be bigger than desktop by 2015. Get mobile friendly websites/apps set up NOW.

Recommendations for 2013:

- Focus on Niche Markets and do them well. What do we have that they will not find anywhere else? With GNP, we are a Bucket List destination.
- Work with Glacier Country communities to find creative niche tour ideas to sell to tour operators. They need to be hands-on, innovative, specialty, experiential, behind the scenes.