

French, Belgian operators join European buyers at initial 'Travel Week'

Two dozen tour operators from France and Belgium were among the European travel professionals who attended Brand USA's first-ever Travel Week, Sept. 9-13, in London.

The new event allowed nearly 100 U.S. suppliers to meet with 154 European travel companies during pre-scheduled business appointments.

Europe is the third-largest source market for inbound travel to the United States. During 2018, 14 million travelers arrived in the USA. Canada (21.2 million) and Mexico (18.5 million) continue to be the top-two markets. France in 2018, accounted for 1.8 million inbound travelers.

USA Discovery Program

Also in September, Brand USA launched a French-language version of its USA Discovery Program in France, Belgium and Luxembourg. The program is an interactive, online-training platform for international agents. Its modular format allows agents to become more familiar, a chunk at a time, with the diverse array of destinations and experiences available

throughout the United States, in, around, and beyond the traditional gateway destinations – in all 50 states, the five territories and the District of Columbia.

More than 210 travel agents from France and Belgium have registered for the Discovery Program. By using the program, the agents can earn badges that certify their demonstrated knowledge of different aspects of U.S. travel.

For the next month, until Dec. 15, the program is challenging agents to learn about the six major U.S. regions (Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, West, and Pacific) in order to attain a Regional Expert Badge.

Those who earn this badge are eligible to win one of eight "USA music boxes" for their travel agencies. Contents of these boxes include posters and other items that showcase the various types of U.S. music and the cities and towns that are associated with them.

At least 50 of the French and Belgian agents, at this time, have secured Regional Expert Badges.

In-market presentations

William Mondello, manager of Brand USA's operation in France, Belgium and Luxembourg, teamed with the Visit USA Committee in Belgium and TO Visiteurs in France to make presentations to 230 travel agents in the towns of Lille, Lyon

and Valence (France), and in Brussels (Belgium). Ronald J. Gidwitz, U.S. ambassador to Belgium, also spoke at the Brussels event.

The presentations addressed travel opportunities in the United States and the value of the USA Discovery Program as a resource for agents.

IFTM Top Resa

The Brand USA Pavilion was open for business at the 41st annual IFTM Top Resa, Oct. 1-4, at the Paris Expo Porte de Versailles. Brand USA staff and 40 Brand USA partners met with prospective travel buyers at the exposition.

As the leading B2B tourism event in France, Top Resa typically draws more than 34,000 travel professionals.

Representatives of the Visit USA Committee in France, U.S. Commercial Service (represented by Robert J. Donovan), and Brand USA hosted an opening event for 180 members of the French travel trade.

Halloween

Brand USA and American Airlines hosted a costumed Halloween event, Oct. 30, for 55 of the most prominent travel agents in Paris. For some of the agents, the evening was their introduction to Brand USA.

William Mondello, Brand USA's in-market manager for France, Belgium and

Luxembourg, said the event was the first of its kind in the French travel-trade, and it will likely become an annual happening.

He also said the evening showcased Brand USA programs and activities, with an emphasis on the monthly webinars and USA Discovery Program.

Monthly webinar

The October Brand USA webinar for travel agents in France, Belgium and Luxembourg spotlighted the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, in addition to North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. Thirty travel agents participated in the monthly event.

Highlights of the webinar included a feature on Minneapolis native Lady Lark, a soul-pop musical performer who is part of Brand USA's "Hear the Music" marketing campaign, and a video from the "United Stories" campaign that highlights South Dakota's picturesque landscape.

The South Dakota video – which includes footage of Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore, and Spearfish Canyon – was created for the January 2019 launch of "United Stories," a Brand USA storytelling campaign designed to focus on local and authentic U.S. travel experiences.

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Brand USA