

2015

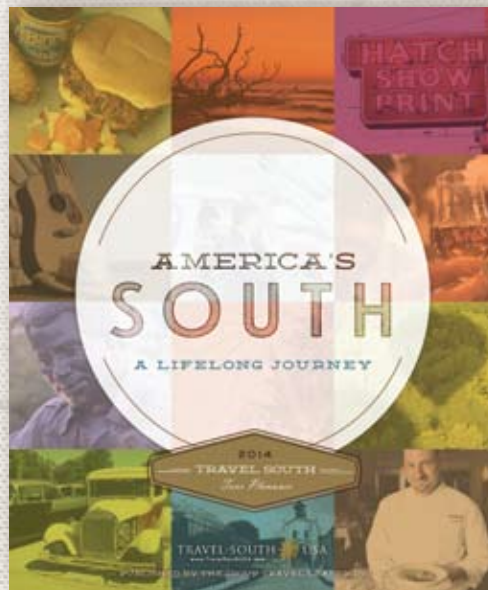
travel toolbox



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The world of travel is constantly evolving, and building great trips requires great tools. That's why we've compiled this 2015 Travel Toolbox — to give you insight into the new technologies, trends and possibilities that will shape the way your group travels over the coming year. Use these ideas to plan your most memorable trips ever.



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travel apps 101



If your smartphone hasn't made travel much, much easier, you're missing out on some of the best benefits of modern technology.

With full-time Internet connectivity, location-based services and millions of downloadable apps, smartphones have the potential to put any piece of information at your fingertips when you're traveling. That power can make a world of difference for a busy group leader on the road.

There are thousands of applications designed to help you when you travel; here are five blockbusters that we use regularly when we travel for business or pleasure.



GOOGLE MAPS

You'll never be lost in any new city as long as you have your smartphone and Google Maps. This app uses your phone's built-in GPS to see your exact location and generate turn-by-turn driving, walking or public transportation directions to any business or point of interest. This tool comes built in on Android phones; if you use an iPhone, downloading the Google Maps app will give you a more accurate navigation tool than Apple's still-buggy Maps program.



TRIPIT

Perhaps the most useful all-around travel app, TripIt creates and stores itineraries based on your travel purchase receipts and makes all of the data accessible on your phone. When you book a car, flight or hotel, simply email the receipt to the TripIt team, and the app automatically groups your information into detailed itineraries. You can then share those itineraries with your friends or fellow travelers so that everyone in your group has all of their travel details within reach.



EXPENSIFY

If your company reimburses your travel expenses, you know the routine of saving receipts as you travel and then submitting them for approval after you get back. Expensify eliminates the paperwork: When you make a purchase, you take a picture of your receipt on your phone's camera, and then the app automatically pulls info from the photo to create an expense report. At the end of your trip, one tap on your phone sends your completed expense report off for approval and reimbursement.



YELP

Yelp harnesses the power of digital mapping and social media to help you find great restaurants, bars and other businesses as you travel. When you open the app, Yelp detects your location anywhere in the world and then calls up a map of your area that shows businesses around you. Each restaurant is rated and reviewed by Yelp's community of users, so you have a great idea of the menu, price and quality before you even walk through the door. You can even make restaurant reservations using the in-app system.



SKYPE

Gone are the days of sky-high fees for international phone calls: Skype allows you to have a voice or video conversation from virtually anywhere in the world in real time. As long as the person you want to talk to is also a Skype user, and you have access to high-speed Internet service, you can video chat with them free of charge on your tablet or smartphone. You can also use Skype to make calls to international phone numbers for pennies per minute, with excellent call quality.

cruise trends



SPECIALTY DINING

The days of everyone eating together in the formal dining room each night of a cruise are behind us. Specialty restaurant and a la carte menus have begun popping up on large cruise ships over the past 10 years, and flexible dining has all but replaced the cattle-call meal plan. Cruise lines are doubling down on this strategy, now installing restaurants overseen by celebrity chefs to capitalize on the surging popularity of high cuisine in American culture. Some lines are also incorporating hands-on culinary experiences into their programming for guests.

The cruise industry is continuing to push into new territory, offering a wider-than-ever range of options and experiences for groups.

Despite some recent high-profile mishaps, cruising remains an extremely popular vacation mode for American travelers, and many affinity organizations use group cruising as a regular part of their travel menus. And while there is a lot of tradition involved in cruising, new developments in the industry are proving to make cruise travel attractive to a more diverse group of customers.

If your group enjoys cruises or if you're thinking of trying a cruise trip in the coming year, here are some of the most important trends in cruising to keep on your radar:

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY



The explosive growth of handheld mobile devices in popular culture has made its way onto cruise ships, where lines have invested millions of dollars to upgrade their technology offerings. Being at sea no longer means being out of touch, as most cruise lines are installing wireless Internet service on their ocean liners. In addition, smartphone applications allow guests to make dining reservations, check event schedules and find their way around the massive ships. Upcoming development in those apps will also allow guests to text each other over the ship's network.



TOP-NAME ENTERTAINMENT

Cruise lines have begun bringing nationally known entertainment brands on board their vessels to replace the tired musical revue shows of the past. Royal Caribbean has licensed Broadway hits "Mamma Mia," "Hairspray," "Chicago" and "Saturday Night Fever" for performance aboard its ships, and Norwegian Cruise Line has "Blue Man Group," "Rock of Ages," "Legally Blonde" and an outpost of the Second City improv comedy troupe. Holland America Line has added a B.B. King Blues Club to many of its ships.



**BLUE
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GROUP**

SHORTER ITINERARIES

Baby boomers, the target market for most luxury cruise lines, have shown a clear preference for shorter vacations, and cruise lines are accommodating them by shortening the durations of some of their most popular cruises. While short Caribbean sailings have traditionally been known for their party atmospheres and older vessels, lines such as Celebrity, Princess and Royal Caribbean have committed larger, newer ships to operate four- and five-night cruises from ports around Florida into the destinations of the Caribbean.



RIVER CRUISING

River cruising continues its dominance as the fastest-growing segment of the cruise industry, as discerning travelers turn from the large oceangoing ships to smaller vessels for intimate explorations of destinations around the world. There are dozens of new vessels scheduled to debut on the rivers of Asia, Europe and the United States this year, some with luxurious touches such as all-suite staterooms and floor-to-ceiling windows. Companies also continue to add to the list of included amenities with upgraded beverage selections and free Wi-Fi on board.

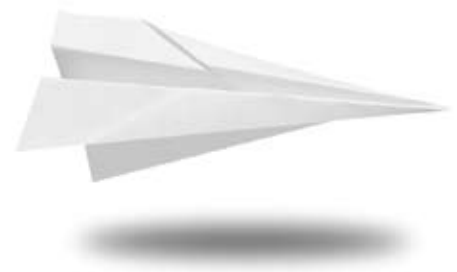
experiences of a lifetime



*S*ometimes it takes just one extraordinary experience to elevate a normal tour into a “trip of a lifetime.”

Some group tour activities, such as visits to famous landmarks, are standard practice, no matter where you go. But in many places in North America and around the world, special activities and inclusions can give your group travelers thrills that they have likely never before encountered.

If you take your travelers to some of the world’s greatest destinations, you should also offer them access to some of the world’s greatest experiences. Here are some exceptional “once in a lifetime” travel opportunities that we have discovered.



FLIGHTSEEING

Taking flight in a helicopter, private plane or hot-air balloon can give even the most jaded traveler the thrill of a lifetime. So-called “flightseeing” tours have long been popular in some of the world’s most scenic places and offer a perspective and experience that our ancestors never imagined. These excursions usually aren’t cheap — they often cost hundreds of dollars per person. But the chance to helicopter onto an Alaskan glacier, circle New Zealand mountaintops or get a bird’s-eye view of the Las Vegas strip is well worth the price.



UNDERWATER ADVENTURES

Some of the most exotic and beautiful sites on earth exist in reefs and protected areas below the surface of the ocean. Groups can explore those places without the hassle of scuba certification on Sea Trek or Sea Walker excursions. Those companies use special helmets attached to surface air supply tanks by long plastic tubes, allowing travelers to breathe naturally as they walk around on the ocean floor. The experience of breathing underwater and the thrill of seeing marine ecosystems up close are unlike anything available on land.



OVERNIGHT TRAINS

They're not the fastest way to travel anymore, but overnight trains may still be the most charming. Trains traverse every continent, offering relaxed transport and unparalleled views of the places they travel through. Many long-distance train trips feature overnight service with surprisingly luxurious sleeping compartments and dining cars. Whether it's traveling to the West Coast on an Amtrak train or indulging in the tradition of the Orient Express in Europe, a great overnight train trip will be a feather in the cap of any avid traveler.



INCREDIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

There are nice hotels, luxury hotels and then, once-in-a-lifetime hotels. Those are places that take advantage of incredible surroundings to give travelers an unforgettable overnight experience. Groups can stay in a Swedish hotel constructed entirely of ice, tree house rooms built into the canopy of a Central American rain forest or historic castles that once served the nobility of Europe. You may not be interested in spending a whole week there, but one or two nights at incredible accommodations like those can make any trip instantly memorable.

GLAMPING

You may not yet have heard of glamping — a portmanteau of “glamor” and “camping” — but you will probably hear more about it soon. Luxurious tented camps have long been popular in the world of African safaris and are growing in popularity in North America. Glamping uses tents built over permanent frames and foundations and allows travelers to be surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature while also enjoying full bathrooms, traditional beds and modern creature comforts. Many glamping facilities feature butler service to the tents and gourmet catered meals.

all about insurance



Travel is inherently expensive, and the better a trip is, the more expensive it will be. But travel is also inherently risky, as a host of factors from weather to health and politics can intervene unexpectedly to send a trip awry.

At the intersection of expense and risk, you'll always find insurance, and the tourism industry is no different. Myriad insurance products exist to cover travelers against events that might affect their experiences. Dozens of independent companies sell travel insurance policies of one type or another, and many tour operators offer insurance products when booking trips with them as well.

Like all insurance, travel insurance is complicated, and many different types of coverage are available to group travel leaders. It's a good idea to offer insurance to your travelers, and some group leaders even package insurance into the cost of the trip for every participant.

It's also a good idea to understand exactly what types of insurance are out there in the industry and which offer the most benefits. Some of those coverages can be packaged together, but it's always important to understand exactly what you're getting when you make an insurance purchase.



LIABILITY INSURANCE

Because travel always involves transportation and often also involves out-of-the-ordinary activities, reputable travel companies carry liability insurance. It protects the tour operator or the travel supplier in case something goes wrong and a customer makes a claim against them.

Though that insurance doesn't benefit you directly, you should always make sure that the companies you work with are fully insured. And if you plan travel for an established organization, it's worthwhile to check if your corporate liability insurance protects your institution against similar claims that might arise from a trip.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL INSURANCE

One of the scariest scenarios in tourism is the possibility of a traveler having an injury accident or developing a serious illness while on the road. That problem is compounded by the fact that many health insurance plans don't cover treatment outside of the United States and that some group travel destinations don't have the best medical care available.

To protect against that, many travel insurance companies offer emergency medical coverage that will pay for the customer's medical care in case of an incident abroad and transport the patient back to the United States for treatment, if necessary.



CANCELLATION, INTERRUPTION OR DELAY INSURANCE

After you've booked and paid for a trip, numerous occurrences outside of your control can still torpedo your plans. Natural disasters, weather emergencies, medical developments and even transportation strikes can get in the way of a vacation.

When you purchase trip cancellation, interruption or delay insurance, the insurance company will refund your costs if those factors disrupt your travels. It's important to check the fine print on those plans, though, because the insurers often have very specific rules about what kinds of events are and are not covered under those policies.



OTHER TRAVELER ASSISTANCE

On rare occasions, travel companies go bankrupt or become insolvent, and some have suddenly closed up shop while holding deposits for future travel, which leaves travelers and group leaders in a lurch. That isn't a common occurrence, but it's a nightmare for travel organizers when it does happen. Some travel insurance policies will cover you in the case of carrier insolvency, but not all do. If you're concerned about an operator's financial situation, it's best not to travel with them.

You can also protect yourself and your group by having everyone book their trips using a credit card so they can dispute the charges if a carrier goes out of business or by traveling with companies that have posted a traveler protection bond, which would reimburse travelers in case of a financial disaster. The United States Tour Operators Association requires that member companies post a \$1 million traveler protection bond for such occurrences.



'CANCEL FOR ANY REASON' INSURANCE

Often considered the Cadillac of travel insurance, cancel-for-any-reason policies allow travelers to call off a trip, no questions asked, without losing their money. While standard cancellation or interruption insurance may not cover you if you cancel your trip for voluntary reasons, such as a friend's sudden illness or a grandchild's qualifying for the state tournament, cancel-for-any-reason insurance gives you the flexibility to change your mind about a trip whenever you want.

Some plans offer to refund a portion of your trip costs, and others will refund the whole amount. That insurance is sometimes sold as an add-on to other cancellation policies.



making the most of social media



BUILD YOUR GROUPS

It has become commonplace — almost passé — to talk about how social media has changed aspects of everyday life. The power of the Internet, mobile technology and the social platforms that connect us all is incredible and can influence almost everything you do, including the way you run your travel group.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest offer a lot of potential for improving group travel and tourism marketing, although much of that potential has gone untapped so far. But as baby boomers continue to adopt social technology as a lifestyle tool, a savvy use of new media can help travel planners organize and promote their trips.

Here are five ideas about how you can use existing social technology to organize, publicize and optimize group travel.

If you don't already have a Facebook group or fan page put together for your travel or loyalty program, you should start one right now. Those features give you a way to connect to and communicate with your members without having to fight for attention in their email inbox, physical mailbox or telephone voicemail box. And if your travelers are frequent Facebook users, you should also consider putting together smaller group pages for specific trips, which will allow you to build a sense of camaraderie among travelers even before the trip begins.

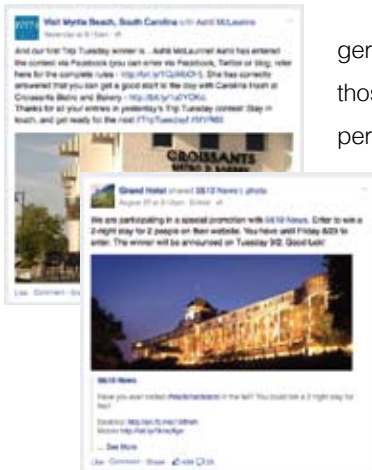
'BUZZ' YOUR MARKETING

Beautiful photos, witty remarks and exciting news make the rounds in social media with lightning speed. Smart salespeople use this to their advantage, using "buzz marketing" campaigns that are built around clever social media releases. You can do this same thing to build interest in your group or your trip: Publish a gorgeous travel photo or a preview of an upcoming trip to your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account, and you can quickly grab the interest of potential customers. And if you encourage those travelers to interact with you online during a tour, the buzz from your travel activities can spread through their friend networks as well.



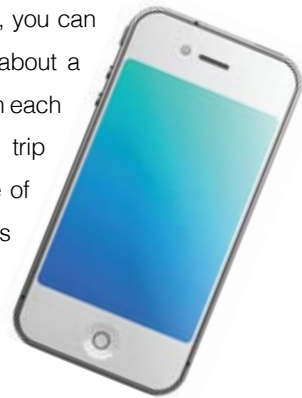
PLAY SOCIAL GAMES

Many group leaders use games to keep passengers entertained during long stretches of travel, and those games have traditionally involved pencil and paper. But smartphones and social apps have the potential to change all that. With some creativity, you can use social media to arrange photo contests, scavenger hunts and other social games to engage your travelers. Offer a prize to the first person on the trip who responds to your tweet or who correctly identifies a place you've photographed on the trip. In addition to entertaining your travelers, those games will also publicize your activities to your followers and theirs.



SHARE SEAMLESSLY

One of the greatest powers of social media is instant, on-the-go media sharing. You and your travelers can post photos and videos from the road with a swipe of a finger or a click of a button. If you've set up a group page for your trip, your travelers can share their favorite memories from the trip with all of the participants, eliminating the need for clumsy email exchanges and promises to trade pictures. And if you encourage an active culture of tagging, sharing and commenting on media that people share, you can keep people talking about a tour and engaged with each other long after the trip ends — which is one of the primary purposes of affinity travel.



UPDATE FRIENDS AND FAMILY

When people travel, especially internationally, their friends and family back home can be anxious to know how the trip is going and to be reassured that their loved ones are OK. Social tools allow you to update people back home in real time and keep them in the loop about what the group is doing. A quick tweet or Facebook post to say that the group arrived at the destination safely will go a long way to reassure nervous family members at home, and a steady stream of photo posts throughout the trip might even make those homebodies wish that they had gone along.



innovations in travel



Some things in travel will never change — people will always visit the Coliseum in Rome or stop to marvel at the Grand Canyon in Arizona. But advancements in technology are changing a lot of things on the periphery of travel, from the way we book transportation to how we keep in touch with people at home.

Innovation is happening all around us, and travel planners can benefit by taking advantage of some of the new ideas and technologies available today. Embracing innovation can help make tasks that were once tedious feel seamless and can open the door to new experiences that you may not have thought of before.

In the group tourism industry, embracing innovation could prove especially beneficial as travel planners work to attract a younger generation of travelers. Here are five innovations that you should watch.



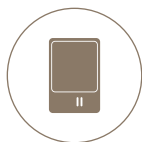
WI-FI EVERYWHERE

Though it was considered a high-tech perk a decade ago, wireless Internet connectivity has become commonplace around the globe, and travelers expect to find a Wi-Fi connection nearly everywhere they go. Hotels around the world offer this service, sometimes for a fee, and some tour operators and bus companies are even promoting Wi-Fi onboard their motorcoaches. Today's planners can ingratiate themselves to their Web-connected customers by ensuring that good wireless service is included free of charge all throughout a tour.



CHEAP DATA ROAMING

Long-distance telephone charges used to make it expensive to communicate with people back home, especially when traveling overseas. But with the prevalence of text messaging and social media, it's never been easier or cheaper for travelers to keep in touch. Mobile phone companies now offer international travel packages that give subscribers the ability to send and receive text messages and use mobile data in foreign countries for as little as \$30. With those "data roaming" features enabled, travelers can stay connected to loved ones at home and send text messages just as easily as they do at home.



DEVICE CONSOLIDATION

There's no more need to carry around myriad electronic devices when traveling. The little pocket computers that we still call "phones" have become so powerful that they have eliminated the need to pack a music player, a laptop, a GPS device and even a camera. The photographic capabilities of today's smartphones have come so far that they rival any stand-alone point-and-shoot camera. Unless you have photography enthusiasts in your group that enjoy shooting with fancy equipment, encourage your travelers to use their phones for their snapshots and save room in their suitcases for more souvenirs.



THE SHARING ECONOMY

At the fringes of the travel industry but poised to make a huge impact is a new business-and-technology movement known collectively as the sharing economy. That trend uses smartphone apps to help people find transportation, meals and even overnight accommodations without working through traditional providers or sales channels. Companies such as Uber, which is disrupting the taxi industry, and Airbnb, a challenger to the traditional hotel model, have gotten considerable press (as well as significant regulatory scrutiny), and others, such as EatWith and OpenTable, are on the verge of making waves in the restaurant world. Though these services aren't yet making an impact in group travel, it would be useful for travel planners to know how to use them in a bind and to keep an eye out for how they will change the travel landscape in the future.



CLASSY COACHES

The traditional 50-seat motorcoach has been the workhorse of group travel for decades, and it's often still the best transportation option for full-size, sold-out trips. But as group sizes trend toward smaller, more intimate excursions, a change in equipment can help make trips more enjoyable and affordable. Coach companies now offer a variety of smaller vehicles that can accommodate 15 to 20 passengers at lower prices, as well as full-size luxury coaches that include amenities such as leather seats, tables, flat-screen televisions, galleys and bars. These classy rides make an innovative way to treat your travelers to an upscale experience without busting your budget.



A close-up photograph of two hands, one darker-skinned and one lighter-skinned, holding a string of small, round, light-brown prayer beads. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers gently gripping the beads. The background is a deep red, textured fabric, possibly a robe, which is draped and folded around the hands. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the skin and the fabric.

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