



It's More Than Just Buying

I LOVE FEBRUARY. Why? Because that is when *Leisure Group Travel* focuses on shopping – not only my favorite activity but the favorite of many of your clients, too.

Your clients want to shop...that has been established. Now, what can your company do to make their shopping experience something special?

To remain competitive, shopping and dining venues are working hard to provide exclusive experiences to entice the group market. Your business is just as competitive, so to stay ahead of the curve, you should take advantage of special opportunities available.

First of all, understand what today's traveler wants...an "experience." They can shop at home, but they don't have time to seek out the fun experiences. That is why they rely on you. Also, today's shopper is seeking value, not just in their shopping trip but in their travel as well.

So, how can we combine all of this?

Make the research easy on yourself and work with a retail tourism specialist to assist you with your planning. Who are they? The shopping center and retailer representatives you meet at trade shows or through association memberships. They can help you create unique itineraries.

Once you have selected a destination, call the DMO. There are many city-wide shopping programs, such as the world-famous Shop Las Vegas offered by the LVCVA and Shop California offered by Visit California, that offer group discounts at a variety of centers.

Some shopping center companies and national retailers offer corporate

programs for group travel planning.

They include America's Premier Shopping Places, Premium Outlets, Macy's and Bloomingdale's. Are clients traveling to London for the Olympic Games this summer? Check out Shop & Dine London (shopanddinelondon.com) for a commissionable package offering hundreds of shopping and dining discounts in and around London.

Shop America Alliance represents hundreds of shopping centers nationwide. Check out ShopAmericaTours.com for new commissionable packages and group programs. It recently partnered with Outlet Marketing Alliance,

Historic Shopping & Dining Attractions, an alliance of Faneuil Hall Marketplace-Boston, South Street Seaport-NYC and Union Station DC, offers coupons, welcome packets and commissionable food court dining vouchers. Plus, they embrace the rich history of the properties by offering historic walking tours, such as "From Sails to Sales" at The Seaport.

Visitors to Gulfstream Park in South Florida can shop, dine, gamble and even catch a thoroughbred horse race (seasonal)—all in one day.

Provide information about the venue to your clients in advance. Let

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which soon will have a landing page on ShopAmericaTours.com.

Ask for activities your clients are not able to get at home, such as behind-the-scenes-tours, culinary demos, home decor seminars, and chocolate and wine tastings. Some department stores will open early for a private breakfast or fashion show.

Did you know that South Street Seaport is home to Little Airplane Productions, the studio where the popular cartoons *The Wonder Pets* and *The Small Potatoes* are produced? They offer hands-on group tours for children of all ages. Kids are even brought into the sound studio for a voice-over demonstration and emerge to see a cartoon character come to life with their own recorded voices.

them read about the history, activities, stores and restaurants and give them a map. The shopping time is maximized because your clients will be able to plot out their course. Ask for a welcome letter from the center with your group's logo to personalize their visit. Access the center's images, logo and text for your brochures and website.

In summary, use the many resources available to customize unique shopping experiences for your clients.

Carolyn J. Feimster, SCMD, is owner/president of CJF Marketing International. The company's primary focus is on developing results-oriented programs to enhance the tourism experience at shopping centers, retail districts, and other commercial properties and organizations. Feimster can be reached at 718-757-8489, carolyn@cjfmktgintl.com, or log on to cjfmktgintl.com.