



Holiday shopping programs bring value to your itineraries

by Carolyn J. Feimster, SCMD

With the holidays just around the corner, now is the time to gear up for what your clients are seeking — fun and festive shopping experiences. Why? Every year people say they want to buy “something different or something unique” for friends and family. But do they? Usually not. However, if you, the tour operator, plan holiday travel itineraries that combine destination exploration with unique gift-buying opportunities, not only do you stand to increase bookings, but you will be servicing your clients by helping them fulfill their biggest holiday wishes.

Planned shopping itinerary vs. shopping as an option

If your itineraries already allow free time and your client wants to go shopping — that’s great! You understand that shopping is the No. 1 activity for all travelers. However, the opportunity also exists to enhance the typical shopping experience by developing structured programs and amenities that increase commissions as well. In talking with a number of tour operators, group leaders, and travelers, shopping centers have found that the traveler appreciates having information to plan activities in advance of their trip. They want to know what the basic shopping center layout looks like, what stores are available — especially those unique to the destination, what discounts or sales are avail-

able, what the dining options are, and what special events or activities are scheduled. A planned program or package with shopping centers in a particular destination can provide this.

By working with the tourism or marketing department of the shopping center, tour operators can access complimentary graphics, a logo, images, and text for a brochure. This, along with the shopping center’s Web site, will help your clients plan their visit. Tour planners can also take it a step further and have the shopping center provide them with pre-packaged welcome packets. Some centers provide the tour group with pre-packaged envelopes that include a customized welcome letter, coupon book, directory, gift, such as a refrigerator magnet, and/or brochures of interest for special exhibitions, museums, etc. This Welcome Package is either given to the group leader or tour operator in advance for distribution or given when the group arrives at the shopping center.

Given this information in advance, the visitor has the ability to plot their shopping experience to maximize their day. They can select what stores they want to visit and in what order, where they want to eat, and what activities or events they want to experience. Make no mistake of the value of the coupon book or other visitor incentive programs. In today’s world, it is not only appreciated but expected. By working directly with the shopping cen-

Top 10 shopping tips

Here is a list of shopping tips that tour operators can provide to clients to make their experience more enjoyable.

1. Bring an empty suitcase or tote bag for your purchases, or better yet — buy a new one while you are there. If you forget comfortable shoes, you can also buy them.
2. Come prepared with a list for yourself, your friends, and your family.
3. Utilize the services available to visitors to save time, including personal shoppers, concierges, etc. Some centers even offer currency exchange and language assistance for international guests.
4. Bring a camera. Stop by a camera shop in the mall to burn your photos to a CD-ROM and free up space on your digital camera.
5. Get a directory of the shopping center in advance and prioritize your stops if you have limited time. Pick up a business card at unique shops to order future items online.
6. Many shopping centers offer complimentary shipping and/or hotel delivery during the holidays.
7. Visit the shopping center’s Web site to see what special events, concerts, exhibitions, etc. may be going on especially throughout the holiday season.
8. Visit the Food Court cafes for snacks to keep your energy level up. Ask the tour operator if meal vouchers are included in your package. Finish the day in a full-service restaurant to sample local cuisines.
9. Pamper yourself and schedule time to use the facilities at a beauty salon and have your hair and nails professionally done, or indulge in a mini-massage.
10. Enjoy shopping and the activities. You are on vacation and away from the time pressures at home. Happy holidays!

Travel Talk

ter, tour planners will be able to have vouchers, coupon books, or discount flyers available to clients before arrival.

Going a step further, many shopping centers will provide groups with coordinated programs that are flexible and include not just shopping and dining discounts but special activities and experiences available throughout the center and by individual merchants. For example, some stores offer beauty demonstrations or wardrobe seminars. Restaurants may offer chef demos or wine tastings. These activities really make the traveler feel special.

Value-added vs. commissionable

Value-added programs are great, but what about commissionable programs? Understanding both the needs of the tour operator and the traveler, many shopping centers are now offering commissionable products. For example, a very popular product is the pre-paid commissionable dining voucher. For one price, this gives the traveler the choice of eating in any one of a variety of food court cafes. In addition, dining vouchers and/or pre-fixed group menus for full-service restaurants are available at many centers.

The latest trend is VIP Shopping Packages that are targeted to specific niches. For example, there are Shop & Play, Shop & Dine, Shop & Spa, Shop & Golf, just to name a few. These can be viewed and purchased by visiting www.shopamericatours.com.

Most shopping centers will work one-on-one with tour operators and group planners to customize a program to fit the needs of the group. A package can be built by first arranging a meet and greet, selecting the restaurant of your choice, selecting from their group menu, and then including the coupon books or other incentives from the shopping center.

National group-friendly shopping programs

Whenever possible, look for shopping center companies with national programs. This will provide you access to dozens of locations and programs with a single contact. One example is America's Premier Shopping Places, a collection of more than 40 shopping centers owned by General Growth Properties Inc. across the United States.

Many of America's Premier Shopping Places are located in the heart of America's best-loved cities. Others are located along America's scenic highways and byways. All are conveniently close to major attractions, hotels, and convention centers. Many also host a variety of special events, concerts, and festivals throughout the year. Most offer customized group programs based on the needs of your clients.

All of America's Premier Shopping Places are part of a nationwide shopping and dining discount program, Premier Passport, which provides your clients with special savings programs at all GGP shopping centers. To find out more and to access the Premier Passport, log on to www.americasshoppingplaces.com, click on Premier Passport, download, and print.

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 marketing, tourism development, economic development, customer service, and retail productivity of shopping centers, retail districts, and other commercial properties and organizations. Present clients include General Growth Properties, among others. Feimster was awarded the Shopping Tourism Person of the Year Award for 2003 from Shop America Alliance.

Feimster can be reached at (305) 308-3068, Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com, or www.cjfmarketinginternational.com

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America's Premier Shopping Places Guide

What follows is a complete listing of all America's Premier Shopping Places in the western half of the United States. To find out more information on any one center, log on to www.americasshoppingplaces.com, click on Center Sites, and then click on the center you are interested in. That will take you right to its Web site.

- Ala Moana Center Honolulu, Hawaii
- Fashion Show Las Vegas, Nev.
- Galleria Dallas Dallas, Texas
- Glendale Galleria Los Angeles, Calif.
- North Star Mall San Antonio, Texas
- Park Meadows Denver, Colo.
- Park Place Tucson, Ariz.
- Pioneer Place Portland, Ore.
- Stonestown San Francisco, Calif.
- The Grand Canal Shoppes Las Vegas, Nev.
- The Shops at La Cantera San Antonio, Texas
- The Shoppes at The Palazzo Las Vegas, Nev. (opening fall 2007)
- Stonebriar Centre Dallas, Texas
- Tucson Mall Tucson, Ariz.
- Ward Centers Honolulu, Hawaii
- Westlake Center Seattle, Wash.
- Whalers Village Maui, Hawaii