



Heartland Travel Showcase

March 1 - 3, 2024 • South Bend, IN

WHAT IS HEARTLAND TRAVEL SHOWCASE?

Heartland Travel Showcase is a group tour trade show focused on the Heartland region of the United States. The show provides the opportunity for tour operators from across the country to meet via scheduled appointments with suppliers. Without a doubt, it's the best place to generate group sales leads focused on this area of the country.

WHY SHOULD WE TARGET GROUPS?

While the pandemic slowed group travel, it is rebounding quickly. Many travelers are seeking the comfort of knowing the planning details are being handled by a professional tour company. Plus, group tours offer experiences one can't find traveling on their own. There's a transformation happening, as the focus on group tours shifts to this exclusivity. We should be at the front of the bus as new markets emerge.

Groups come in all shapes and sizes, but the commonality is that they are booked and promoted by professional tour companies. One booking can result in an average of 35-38 individual travelers coming to our door. Research by the ABA Foundation shows that the average group tour generate \$4,000 in economic impact during a day trip and more than \$8,000 for an overnight tour. If a group tour sells well, we may also find that one buyer may bring multiple trips each year. This multiplies the return on investment.

WHY SHOULD WE ATTEND HEARTLAND TRAVEL SHOWCASE?

Attending Heartland Travel Showcase is a smart business investment. If we want groups, then we need to attend. Professional tour operators are actively looking for new group experiences and suppliers, even more so during the pandemic, as contacts have changed. This is the perfect time to attend!

When professional tour operators book business, they are trusting us to take care of their customers. Their reputation depends on it. That's why it's so important to have face-to-face contact with these buyers, and why establishing and maintaining relationships is key. Attending Heartland is a way to not only generate new leads, but to continue to build relationships with all buyers.

Unlike many other shows, Heartland Travel Showcase is compact, meaning less time out of the office and less overnight costs. The show is laser-focused on what matters most – helping us generate future sales. That also makes the show more affordable.

Heartland Travel Showcase is also the exclusive provider of the EPIC Group Experience designation program. This training program is something we may want to explore further, as tour operators and suppliers from across the country have created standards, best practices and educational materials for marketing to and servicing groups. Those participating in Heartland Travel Showcase get a special rate.

WHO ATTENDS?

Group tour operators attending the show are pre-qualified as buyers. In addition, Heartland Travel Showcase verifies that tour operators either do business in the Heartland region currently, or they are actively planning to bring tours to the region. This means every contact made at the show is a qualified and potential buyer. Those we meet at meals, networking events or walking down the hall are viable sales leads, increasing our ability to book business.

These buyers represents all types of group tours, including student tours, leisure tours, adventure tours, sports tours and special interest tours. Buyers come from all states and the province of Ontario.

Suppliers represent DMOs, attractions, museums, hotels, restaurants and others looking to book future groups. Heartland Travel Showcase is a regional show, so suppliers come from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia and the province of Ontario.

HOW DOES HEARTLAND TRAVEL SHOWCASE WORK?

The goal of the show is to provide us with networking opportunities and sales leads. Prior to the show, we complete a dedicated online profile so buyers can see who we are and what we offer. They will do something similar, so we have access to information on the types of tours they're seeking and the products of most interest to them.

A matchmaking process occurs, and appointments during the show are set. Throughout the show, we meet one-on-one with potential buyers for six minutes. We can distribute information and brand our table to best reflect our group experiences. There are also Open Trade Show times where buyers can stop by our table to chat.

In addition, Heartland Travel Showcase offers the trademarked 4-Minute Meet, which is a great opportunity to pick up more appointments and leads. Buyers are seated around a large room, and we can chat briefly with them, exchange business cards, and confirm a show appointment or future follow-up.

Meal functions and a Friday night social event require attendees to wear nametags. This makes it easy to identify buyers from sellers. My strategy will be to mix and mingle with buyers at these events, expanding my lead generation even more.

Saturday night features a Dine-Around event so we can coordinate dinner off-site with a few of the buyers we are most interested in booking. We'll try to confirm these dinner partners before the show even begins.

Kicking off this year's show is also a sales training session that is included in registration.

WHEN AND WHERE IS HEARTLAND TRAVEL SHOWCASE?

Heartland Travel Showcase takes place in South Bend, IN March 1 - 3, 2024. Most events will take place in the Century Center in South Bend.