



Trade Show Report

ABA Marketplace – Grapevine, TX

January 8 - 11, 2022

Montana Representation:

- Glacier Country – Debbie Picard
- Glacier Country – Aerionna Skrutvold
- Montana Office of Tourism – Kim Birrell
- Destination Missoula – Kara Bartlett

Overview:

- The American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace took place in Grapevine where 1,600 attendees gathered for the packaged travel event.
- 447 motorcoach and tour operator companies were in attendance.
- Glacier Country was matched with 22 tour operators for pre-scheduled 7-minute appointments during our DMO appointment sessions. We had several new tour operators that were looking to expand their tours into Montana.
- There were networking events scheduled in the evenings that allowed for more interaction with the tour operators.
- In addition to appointments, there were several educational opportunities to learn about tour trends, different tour markets and the health of the packaged travel industry.
- Next ABA Marketplace: Detroit, MI – Feb 2 – 8, 2023

Trends:

- The talk this year was just about surviving the last 2 years of COVID. Many have altered the number of passengers on their busses, and have had to increase prices, but for most price increases have not deterred business.
- The demand is coming back, and people are ready to travel.
- Smaller motor coaches with fewer passengers for a more effective and relaxed tour is still on trend.
- Usually, my appointments with those tour operators that have multiple tours through GC are just fine-tuning itineraries. Not this year. The workforce shortage REALLY affected tour this year especially in the restaurant industry where reservations were cancelled last minute, and groups were left with no where to eat. Created a group friendly restaurants and contingency plan blog that I will share with these operators.
- Montana/Idaho tours seem to really be selling well.
- Many tour operators who worked mostly international before began advertising successfully in the U.S. and currently don't have room on their tours when the borders reopen.

Recommendations for 2023:

- Tour operators are still looking for authentic Montana. They are always looking for that unique experience to offer their clients that the client couldn't get if traveling on their own. Find creative niche tour ideas to sell to tour operators. They need to be hands-on, innovative, specialty, experiential, behind the scenes.
- I continued to focus and push shoulder seasons especially September for any group tours. Tying in how easy it is to include us on a larger itinerary is vital and shared our newest MT/ID itinerary along with Canadian Rockies, Yellowstone, Seattle and Washington wine country.