

# FUEL YOUR RECOVERY

**YOUR QUICK START GUIDE TO:  
BUILDING GROUP BUSINESS**



# TIME TO GAS UP FOR 2021

**I**n early spring 2020, groups hit the pause button on travel plans due to strict social gathering limits that ultimately remained in place for much of the year.

Undoubtedly, group sales were the hardest hit element of the travel industry. Many travel marketers are left to wonder, “How will group travel come back?” It’s a fair question during this time of uncertainty and one that this guide seeks to answer.

One thing’s for certain—the recovery will not be equal across all sectors of the industry. Even the smallest meetings and conventions face an uncertain future from even the most eternal optimists. Corporations have adapted to a new way of doing business: eliminating travel and replacing face-to-face with Zoom calls and virtual conferences to help them get the job done.

On the other side of the equation, certain types of leisure group travel spiked during COVID-19. In particular, family travel groups “booked their bubble” to the mountains, lakes and beach destinations. This illustrates the power of “togetherness” even in a world plagued by a pandemic. Youth & amateur sports tournaments saw an elastic bounce back in areas of the country that reopened over the summer.

Compiled by the team at Premier Travel Media, this guide seeks to assist travel marketers in identifying those opportunities that make the most sense from a strategic and logistical standpoint for their business.

As you formulate your back-to-market strategy in 2021 and beyond, I hope you find this guide helpful.

Sincerely,



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## MARKET FOCUS:

# Family Group Travel

**T**he one bright spot during 2020 for travel marketers was family travel. Feeling safe to travel in their “bubble,” families hit the road like never before. Beaches, lakes and mountains were at the top of their list and saw a disproportionate share of business compared to their urban counterparts.

Expect this to continue well into 2021 as family travel expands out to wider circles encompassing multiple generations, friends and family traveling together and a strong return to reunions.

Another trend? While a good percentage of travel in 2020 was to places familiar, expect consumers to want to visit places they haven't been before, especially as the perceived risk of COVID subsides.

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

In a word, value. An overwhelming majority of Americans have been impacted financially in one way or another by the pandemic. So expect there to be a lot of shopping, especially in areas where supply outstrips demand. But more important than price is value. Parents and grandparents want to provide an enjoyable learning experience for their kids in an environment they too can enjoy. Anyone who can deliver that has appeal to the market.

Road trips will continue to dominate, as consumers are looking for destinations within a tank of gas away. However, as more air routes open back up, domestic carriers will be incentivized to keep fares low to attract families as long as business travel lags.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Any destination trying to drive weekend, holiday and summer business.
- ▶ Resorts and destination hotels with kids' programs, or nearby activities that are family-friendly.
- ▶ City-center properties that offer amenities and services with space for family reunion get-togethers.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ Content marketing that positions your business as family-friendly.
- ▶ Branding through the *Destination Reunions* print and digital guide.
- ▶ Digital advertising online at [DestinationReunions.com](https://DestinationReunions.com) and across the web using advanced programmatic tactics to specifically target family travelers in your radius.

A photograph of four people (three men and one woman) smiling and clapping their hands, suggesting a joyful group experience. They are outdoors, and the lighting is bright, possibly from the sun.

## MARKET FOCUS:

# Domestic Group Travel

**I**t may surprise you, but there was a semblance of the domestic group travel market in 2020. Most of this took the shape of bounce back tours from pre-formed groups who were eager to be traveling again after months of lockdown. This wasn't enough to sustain most operators, so many mothballed trips scheduled for this year, shifting travelers to 2021 departures.

In the past decade we've seen pre-formed group traffic shift to Europe and Asia, but in 2021 domestic travel will be king due to uncertainty about traveling long distances, and lack of air lift.

Because group customers are primarily boomers, they are less affected financially than other demographics. That's good news, but there's a counterbalance challenge that, because of their age, travelers have to feel safe before they travel again.

We've seen through two previous recessions that leisure group travel is more elastic in nature than other sectors. Expect that again in 2021.

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

- ▶ Easy button. Group planners need to be able to package your destination efficiently. This requires sample itineraries that show what they can do in a few days in your market.
- ▶ Their travelers want variety and unique behind-the-scenes experiences that come with group travel.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Any destination that's trying to replace lagging convention and international inbound business should be chasing after leisure groups.
- ▶ Attractions, museums or restaurateurs needing shoulder-season business.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ Itinerary-creation services that package your group-friendly activities into a routed 3- to 4-day "signature" itinerary, or themed trip.
- ▶ Content marketing programs to drive home your top selling points on why groups should pay you a visit.
- ▶ Branding through the industry's leading periodical, *Leisure Group Travel*.
- ▶ Digital marketing online at [LeisureGroupTravel.com](http://LeisureGroupTravel.com), in our weekly e-newsletter and targeting tour & travel professionals across the web using targeted programmatic advertising.





## MARKET FOCUS:

# Religious Travel

**F**aith-based travel groups underscore the power of a strong affinity. Sponsored by a local church or religious affiliation, these folks are used to gathering in groups and use travel to enhance their fellowship and spirituality.

Important to note: faith-based travel is more than a spiritual retreat. These groups stay in nice hotels, visit touristy attractions and enjoy a good meal. They function just like any other travel group, though their bonds will bring them to tour historic churches and incorporate worship as part of their journey.

Also worth noting: spiritual travel crosses age boundaries. Senior ministry, women's or men's ministry, and youth ministry all take trips together.

Religious gatherings were postponed during COVID, so there will be pent-up demand as group members seek to reconnect spiritually and personally with each other.

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

- ▶ Religious groups are seeking destinations where they can combine spirituality and fellowship with fun activities.
- ▶ Retreats are always popular in this market and take place at a variety of venues from spiritual retreat centers to downtown hotels with meeting spaces.
- ▶ As with other group markets, value is important.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Religious-themed attractions and the businesses that surround them.
- ▶ Destinations with historic churches.
- ▶ Family-friendly hotels, resorts and attractions are favored. Hotel properties with meeting space for spiritual retreats.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ Annual *Religious Travel Planning Guide* connects suppliers with 20,000 faith travel groups across different denominations.
- ▶ Digital advertising in [ReligiousTravelPlanningGuide.com](https://www.ReligiousTravelPlanningGuide.com) and the monthly InSite on Religious Travel e-newsletter.
- ▶ Programmatic advertising that identifies faith-inspired travelers and delivers your message to them on the sites they visit most.



## MARKET FOCUS:

# Sports Event Travel

**I**n less restrictive states, outdoor organized sports events had a respectable 2020, all things considered. As one sports tourism executive put it, “We’re seeing sports tourism do what it does best, and that’s being the tip of the sphere in destination recovery.”

Never underestimate an athlete’s desire to compete, nor the willingness of a parent to provide experiences for their children. For these reasons, expect organized sports events and tournaments to come roaring back in 2021. We witnessed this market outperform during the last recession, and there’s no reason to believe that this time will be any different.

Interesting to watch will be how outdoor, socially distanced sports like golf and biking, which saw strong participation in 2020, fare in the future. Will there be a shift in the market landscape?

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

- ▶ The right facilities. Event planners need the right number of fields or square footage, set up in the correct configuration.
- ▶ Ease of access, especially with more regional events on the docket.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Any destination that has tournament-ready sports facilities. From traditional bat and ball sports to outdoor adventure courses, there’s a wide swath of sports you can compete in.
- ▶ Convention centers that are pivoting to replace lost meetings or sagging attendance at rescheduled events. We’ve seen convention centers turned into volleyball centers, basketball courts, gymnastic centers and wrestling venues.
- ▶ Destination hotels and resorts with golf courses and meeting venues. The “travel bubble” concept that originated with the NBA will continue as organizations want to keep guests confined to ensure safety.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ Identify and promote your tournament-ready facilities in front of the industry’s largest collection of sports tournament planners.
- ▶ Content marketing to drive home your top selling points on why sports tournaments should choose you.
- ▶ Branding through the industry’s leading periodical, *Sports Planning Guide*.
- ▶ Digital marketing online at SportsPlanningGuide.com, in our bi-weekly e-newsletter and to sports tournament professionals across the web using targeted programmatic advertising.





## MARKET FOCUS:

# Student Travel

**T**he student market was crushed in 2020 with annual rite-of-passage trips cancelled across the board, just prior to the heavy April/May travel season. Two large student tour operators filed for bankruptcy, and the short-term headwinds facing the student market are significant. School districts are trying to focus on getting kids back in school, so few are even considering sponsoring travel until COVID is resolved.

Short-term, look for student business coming from outside the school districts—scout groups, religious youth organizations, homeschoolers and clubs. It won't replace the traditional market, but there will be a trickle of activity.

The industry is hopeful for a return to normalcy in the fall of 2021 as school districts head back to class with the pandemic (hopefully) in their rearview mirror. This may lead to some short-term fall business with both smaller group sizes and shorter duration of trips to closer-to-home locations.

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

While some drop all student group travel into the same bucket, there are actually microsegments that have unique needs. History classes need educational enrichment that pertains to the lessons taught in school. STEM classrooms want to explore science museums, go to technology labs and perform math challenges. Bands and choirs need stages to perform. Graduation trips need roller coasters and water parks. They all need hotels with double-doubles and fun places to eat and blow off steam.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Cultural institutions, history-related attractions, STEM learning opportunities at labs and corporations.
- ▶ State and National Parks that offer educational opportunities.
- ▶ Tier one and two cities, particularly state capitals and centers of governments seeking to drive spring and fall business.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ Virtual Field Trips, a new platform on [StudentTravelPlanningGuide.com](https://StudentTravelPlanningGuide.com) until in-person field trips are a viable option. This includes content and video production around your virtual learning experiences coupled with promotion across our network.
- ▶ Digital marketing to promote your commitment to the market while travel rebounds.
- ▶ Regional field trip guides coming summer 2021 that focus on closer-to-home destinations.





## MARKET FOCUS:

# Film Production-related Travel

**L**ike much of the world, film production came to a grinding halt in the spring of 2020. It has been slow to recover, but the industry is already seeing exponential pent-up demand as competition for content heats up. Not only are there traditional production houses, but new streaming services are competing for eyeballs with heavy investments on the line.

Film studios have a backlog of production to fill an empty pipeline, and producers, directors and location scouts will be eager to find new locations to provide fresh scenery for their films. It will be a gold rush.

Film production is a huge boon to local economies. Crew can stay on-site for up to two months. There are local celebrity sightings and hiring of local talent. Goods and services purchased also contribute mightily to a local economy.

And on the off-chance that the production becomes a hit, the destination where it was shot can reap financial rewards for decades to come as tourists flock to that area to see where such-and-such was filmed. Think about what Field of Dreams did for Dyersville, Iowa!

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

The film production industry is heavily reliant on tax incentives. If your state has them in place, you're in the ball game. They also need a competent local crew, help with permits and negotiating any local regulations.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Any destination located in a state that provides some level of tax incentives can play in the film market.
- ▶ Convention centers that have an overabundance of space can quarantine part of their facility to film production.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ *Destination Film Guide*, a new publication, website and e-newsletter, is being launched in the first quarter of 2021.
- ▶ Digital marketing through an e-newsletter and website, to be launched in early 2021.





## MARKET FOCUS:

# International Inbound Travel

**O**h how we love foreign travelers! They stay longer and spend more than domestic travelers. They enjoy shopping and are culture vultures. We love them of course until the borders shut down and the spigot shuts off.

Gateway markets, especially on the coasts, have reaped the benefits of aggressive marketing to lure overseas travelers. Some of this spills over onto suburbs and feeder markets with travelers who hub & spoke out of major cities, or opt for a road trip sprinkling their vacation funds along the way.

Expect a slower-than-desired return to international inbound travel. This is due to three factors: diminished air capacity, geopolitical concerns and struggling economies in their home countries.

A good sign of a market return is the re-initiation of air service by foreign national carriers and legacy airlines here in the U.S. Traditionally, international routes are the most profitable by carriers and they will be quick to bring them back once they start seeing demand.

### WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

- ▶ Early arrivals back to the U.S. will be driven by deals, so if you're in a position to discount for market share, you should get the attention of overseas tour operators and the big inbound companies that belong to the International Inbound Travel Association (IITA).
- ▶ Anything genuinely America! From National Parks to music, food and our big cities.

### WHO IS THIS MARKET RIGHT FOR?

- ▶ Hotel properties located in gateway cities.
- ▶ Destination attractions.
- ▶ Shopping centers and outlet malls.
- ▶ Anyone along themed trails such as Route 66, Southern Music Trails.

### HOW WE HELP

- ▶ The IITA annual publication, *Inbound Insider*, comes out in the spring as a resource for international tour operators, travel agents and MICE planners.
- ▶ Enhanced digital marketing targeting overseas operators.
- ▶ We Chat promotion to Chinese travelers and the Chinese trade buyers.

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