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TRAVEL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (TIA)

BY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of TIA in the leisure industry.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (TIA)

You might say a funny thing happened to America's \$191 billion travel industry on its way to the bank with six percent of the country's gross national product: some people refused to take it seriously.

Travel and tourism's biggest drawing card, its capacity to relax, pamper and reward those who choose to steer their discretionary income its way, is also the industry's largest problem in some quarters, among folks who think anything that's so much fun can't be a serious industry.

Their economic blinders prevent them from focusing on a host of important and relevant facts. In the first place, not all travel is pleasure-oriented. The legions of business travelers in our skies and on our highways and rails every day would dispute the notion that travel equates with vacation. And anyone who has ever raced to the airport to catch a plane to a loved one's hospital bedside would be angered by such a suggestion.

Secondly, fun or not, the travel and tourism industry is a critical part of the economic backbone of the U.S., providing some six million jobs.

All of that leads us to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), the umbrella organization representing the common concerns of the entire travel industry in the U.S. and dedicated to ensuring that the country's second-largest retail industry (only retail food store sales surpass travel) is not only taken seriously but adequately represented, especially in formulating legislature and economic agendas that will impact the association's 1,700 members.

Who are those members? The diversity of TIA's membership (a national, nonprofit organization) is an impressive and instructive lesson in how deeply the travel and tourism industry is embedded into the economic infrastructure of America.

Among TIA's members are federal government agencies involved regional and local travel promotion organizations; the full spectrum of the transportation industry (airlines, bus companies, cruise lines, car rental firms and Amtrak, the national passenger rail corporation); sightseeing companies, attractions and cultural organizations.

Also, hotel and motel chains as well as individual lodging establishments and resorts; recreational facilities, such as campgrounds; food service chains and individual restaurants; tour operators; tour brokers and receptive operators and retail travel agencies.

Additionally, TIA's membership encompasses producers of travel-related goods and services; consultants and research firms; educational entities such as universities, colleges and libraries; advertising and public relations firms with travel industry clients; graphics, printing and distributing companies serving the travel industry; trade show producers; and both trade consumer media, including newspapers, magazines, travel directories and radio and television.

Despite the fact that the industry giants are active members and strong supporters of TIA activities, it's interesting to note that small businesses account for 80 percent of the association's membership, again underscoring the far-reaching economic importance of travel to communities all across the U.S.

Another category of membership in TIA is associations, and understanding their role is critical to understanding TIA's position in the industry. Many of the components previously listed have active and vital associations of their own, concerned with the specific problems, challenges and developments of their particular market and their member's professional development. A good example is the Air Transport Association, representing the country's scheduled airlines. Another is the American Hotel and Motel Association.

These groups recognize the importance, however, of having the diverse segments of the travel and tourism industry speak with a unified and powerful voice on common concerns and depend on TIA to perform that role. A current example is the industry's push, unprecedented in its intensity, to win Congressional approval of adequate funding for the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration to promote travel to the U.S. Led by TIA's affiliate, the Travel and Tourism Government Affairs Council, the travel industry is making an impact. The nation's elected officials and policymakers are now recognizing that inbound-U.S. tourism has a profound effect on our balance of payments accounts.

Promotion of travel to and within the U.S., and facilitating such travel, is another key TIA objective. Its annual Discover America International Pow Wow, the premiere U.S. showcase for our country's

travel products and services, attracts hundreds of international travel and tour producers, and is a highly successful cornerstone of this policy.

TIA also encourages reciprocal travel between nations and is always in the front lines of any battle against travel restrictions. The organization also initiates and cooperates with federal entities in developing programs, policies and legislation that are responsive to the needs of the industry. It develops and implements programs beneficial to the travel supplier as well as to travelers. And it is always striving to promote a wider understanding of travel as a major U.S. industry that contributes substantially to the economic and social well-being of the nation.

TIA has steadily evolved, since its establishment in 1941 as the National Association of Travel Officials (NATO), to promote travel in the U.S. and to secure legislation favorable to the travel industry. It was merged in 1969 with another group, Discover America, Inc. to become Discover America Travel Organizations (DATO). The Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) was adopted in 1980 as better reflecting the organization's breadth, purpose, and membership.