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NATIONAL TOUR ASSOCIATION (NTA)

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ABSTRACT

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

NATIONAL TOUR ASSOCIATION (NTA)

The National Tour Association (NTA), formerly NTBA, is the primary domestic group travel industry association in North America. Its membership currently consists of nearly 400 tour companies from the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and over 1900 supplier companies such as hotels, restaurants, attractions, bus companies, sightseeing services, publications and other travel-related businesses. NTA also has a large public service organization membership, those members representing the many state, provincial, regional and municipal tourism promotion agencies throughout the continent.

While NTA's purposes and programs are diverse, the primary objectives of this organization are to promote the vacation alternative of group travel to the public and to assure that public of standards of quality for the tour product. Consumer awareness and consumer protection--those are two of the major thrusts of NTA.

In the past year, NTA's emphasis on consumer protection has intensified due to the deregulation of the American bus industry in November, 1982. As the earlier deregulation of the airline industry has shown, there is an unsettling period of time that follows such action when an industry is confronted with new forms of competition, new modes of operation, and unfamiliar methods of business. New operations, both sound and unsound, enter the field. There follows a shakedown period that separates those who can compete from those who cannot.

NTA moved quickly to establish standards for the tour industry when federal regulations were removed. In place of an ICC license that was required, NTA now requires of its tour company applicants, as well as current members, the following membership criteria:

*Active membership is open to anyone who operates or arranges

motorcoach tours across state or provincial lines.

*Members must comply with any remaining government regulations.

*Members must have been in the motorcoach tour business for at least one year and must show evidence of their ability to package, promote and sell tour programs.

*Members must have in their employ a person who has at least two years of experience in the motorcoach tour business.

*References from at least three current NTA members must be supplied.

*A minimum of \$1 million of professional liability, errors and omissions insurance must be maintained.

Additionally, NTA provides an extensive educational program for its membership, which includes a spring schedule of professional development seminars, and a full complement of sessions at the annual NTA convention in November. These seminars assure NTA members of a continuing education that fosters professionalism of the highest caliber in the industry.

Perhaps most importantly, NTA has established and enforces a strict Code of Ethics that all members, both Active and Allied, agree to abide by in their business with one another and the public. This Code of Ethics works to assure proper business practices between members for the ultimate good of the traveling consumer. Its principles are designed so that "membership in the Association may be deemed a badge of ethical conduct; that the public may have continuing confidence in the integrity of the Association and its membership; and that the motorcoach tour industry may best serve the public interest."

The National Tour Association has established a strong reputation for promoting a unified travel industry. NTA was a primary force in the establishment of tourism caucuses in the United States Senate and House of Representatives. It was a leading proponent of the National Tourism Policy Act passed in 1981 which, among other points, created the United States Travel and Tourism Administration. NTA continues to work at present with other industry forces to gain adequate funding of USTTA in future years.

NTA is a member of the Travel and Tourism Government Affairs Council, the national organization created to present a unified travel industry viewpoint on legislative and regulatory issues of common concern. Through the Council, NTA works with 29 other major industry organizations to reach common objectives for the entire industry within the realm of governmental affairs.

NTA has forged a strong working relationship with the retail travel agency industry through its cooperative programs with the American Society of Travel Agents, the Association of Retail Travel Agents and other travel agent organizations. NTA is currently supporting the travel

agent industry in its quest to overturn the recent CAB decision to strip that industry of exclusivity in the sale of airline tickets. NTA has worked closely with ASTA following the deregulation of the bus industry to educate travel agents of the questions regarding whether they should sell tour companies' tours on a commissionable basis or package their own tours.

Other travel industry organizations with which NTA is working is working closely include the United Bus Owners of America, the American Bus Association, the United States Tour Operators Association, the American Hotel and Motel Association, the Travel Industry Association of America and others.