

1983

The Motor Coach Approach to the World's Fair

Francis Mikie Wall

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions>

Recommended Citation

Wall, Francis Mikie (1983) "The Motor Coach Approach to the World's Fair," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol1/iss4/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Human Movement, Sport and Leisure Studies at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visions in Leisure and Business by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

THE MOTOR COACH APPROACH TO THE WORLD'S FAIR

BY

FRANCES (MIKIE) WALL

MOORE TOURS
P.O. BOX 220713
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA 28222

ABSTRACT

The motor coach tourist aspect of the World's Fair was a success. The primary problem was with the information exchange process and the marketing approach utilized. The positive element was the scheduling and their handling of site operations.

THE MOTOR COACH APPROACH TO THE WORLD'S FAIR

INTRODUCTION

My comments today are based on my experience with the Moore Tours and the planning process used for the fair. The motor coach industry was important to the fair. When the final analysis is completed you will find that probably 30% to 40% of the business of the fair came from motor coach tours. Overall, the motor coach industry had a very successful fair.

Our customers were happy, so we have to give it an "A" rating. But we did have some problems, as everyone did, and learned from it. I think our industry and maybe the whole country had a hard time developing a perspective on the scope of the fair. Other brokers were in the same dilemma. We could not decide how many tours to plan, how long a tour should be, and whether we should include some of the other areas. It is just a five hour drive from Charlotte.

PLANNING AND RESEARCH

First was a site inspection in March of 1980. I toured the site and talked with land and hotel operators who were going to be working in the area. I came home even more confused. It was a tremendous help to have projections from the research done by the Fair Committee which said, "We expect 11,000,000 people and we think we will have 60,000 people a day." But I really had an unsteady feeling about the organization of the operations. At that point I felt like they should have been better organized. I was very insecure. They were doing mailers to us at that

point which were more reminders than concrete information.

Trade publications were another source of information, particularly our NTBA publications. I gave Dick an Office Courier this morning that has an excellent article on the World's Fair and an indepth study on what had happened and what has not happened that you may want to see. When we were not getting answers from the World's Fair offices, our NTBA members called NTBA and they did articles and got mailings out often much faster than the World's Fair people.

The promotional material from the World's Fair Office was part of our research in the beginning. But sometimes we had to get our information from other sources because we could not get our answers fast enough from the World's Fair offices. We ended up going to a wholesaler in Knoxville, to NTBA or to another broker who might have the information. The local ground operators were very helpful, and for future World's Fairs I highly recommend working through that group.

I was close enough to drive to the fair and see everything, but there are many, (50% of the people attending the fair came from outside that 400 mile radius) who cannot physically get to the site and inspect it and do all the things you should do. They need someone to depend on to handle that for them.

Probably the best activity which we were a part of before we actually started our tours was to go opening day. That was the most helpful in planning what our tours were going to be doing. I was concerned about food, where were we going to be able to feed people, if there were going to be enough restrooms, etc. I went and saw for myself. We had tours running the next week. We went home and fixed up our own information sheets on what to expect, our own maps, etc. Our tours came home happy, and I attribute much of that to that first day visit. I want to thank the World's Fair people for inviting us to come opening day.

TOUR OPERATIONS

There were many aspects of the fair that went extremely well. One was the handling of the motor coach tours and the buses that came in there everyday. Their original projections were perhaps two or three hundred buses a day. I was there one day when they had 793 buses and there was not the first hitch. That is incredible for the number of buses they had pulling in and out. I have been to many fairs and special events and the Knoxville World's Fair was the most organized. The World's Fair in New Orleans can take a big lesson from Knoxville,

Not only the motor coach tours which all entered from one gate but the shuttle services from each of the motels to the fair seemed to work well. They had shuttle services lined up to Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge and Asheville and all of the surrounding areas. We used Pigeon Forge as one of our overnights and we used two different properties in Knoxville for the others. None of them ever had any problems with transportation. They handled that very well. They needed a little more education sometimes, but basically they did fair well with it.

The greatest surprise (and the nicest thing) was the public transportation in Knoxville. Many people just rode the city bus, and it was 60 cents. If you were a senior citizen, which many were, it was only 25 cents. They also got a good sightseeing tour of the town as they rode the city buses.

I only ate junk food the first day of the fair because I was so busy doing a blitz that I did not stop to take time to go to the Sun Sphere or one of the nice restaurants, and I found that the food was expensive. Our people came back commenting on how good the restaurants were and how reasonably priced they were. Sun Sphere and Ruby Tuesdays and some of the others were priced just as reasonably as any other nice restaurant that you go to in any other town. Carroll and Bob mentioned the Stroh House. I was like many of you that had a hard time getting past the Stroh House to get to the rest of the fair because I am like the rats that followed the Pied Piper. I will follow the music. you are going to find me.

The restroom facilities were well planned. The fair people deserve a plus for handling their problems; adding more restaurants, adding more benches, and doing things as they went along. on site needs that they could not anticipate because of the number of travelers they may have in certain months. They did an excellent job of keeping up with emergencies such as long lines--they quickly got entertainment, mimes and jugglers and so forth so that people standing in line did not have such a boring wait. They had to be moving pretty fast to do those types of activities and it was a help.

My first day there I was very disappointed that there was not more music and that there were not more strollers going through the park with music and whatever. The next week when I was back, I was bowled over at how fast they had added those attractions. They recognized what those needs were in the first few days and got on the ball. The information booths were well done. Even the first day when you could not expect people to know exactly what they were doing with all the questions they had, I thought those youngsters handled it extremely well. That first week they did not have information sheets on what was going on weekly as the entertainment changed, and they got those going. You could tell your group to stop at the information booth and find out all the events that were going on that week.

The entertainment was superlative. I mean the free entertainment. I spent the whole day sometimes going to the shows. The Baptist Church had a marvelous one and I just happened to stumble in there because the doors were open. I never saw the entertainment that cost extra, but I know it was beautiful. The only show I saw was the one that they put on TV with Victor Borga, because I was not willing to pay the additional fee. Nobody ordered the advanced entertainment tickets. There was so much good free entertainment.

MARKETING

When you think of the size of the city of Knoxville and what they accomplished you have to say they did a tremendous job. But I have to say marketing efforts generally were too late for the motor coach operator. When I visited in March of 1980 I was told that the marketing

for the public would begin in October of 1981. I thought that that was because the fair did not open until 1982. That would be good because our brochure for the next year would be going to the press and so forth, but it did not happen. They did not begin to tune the public in until too late. When they finally came out with their ads, they were tremendous. They just turned you on, you wanted to dance! Excellent ads which came too late! We had problems with the hotels because we had to pay before the ads came out trying to lure the public into the fair. We had to do our own marketing as we had planned. But the supplemental ads would have been a big help for us. I think the World's Fair people could have used all of the travel associations a little bit better to get information filtered out. The timing needs to be corrected for 1984. They need to have the travel industry alerted and have all their questions and answers ready before beginning a campaign to the public.

I will have to mention the press because I have always had a soft spot in my heart for it. I have to say that it published a number of articles about the fair that were unjustified. "You should handle the press with kid gloves" is not really what I should say, but it is what I mean. By handling them with kid gloves I mean two things. One is to remember that they are a tremendously important part of your marketing and if you do not court the press, you are not handling your own marketing right.

You can not sell something when people do not know what they are buying. It all means educating the hotel and motel people. I think they can be devastated if they let greed get in their eyes: nonrefundable deposits, cancellations, wanting room lists three months out. Thirty days advanced notice should be enough time for anyone. For the future special events, one of the main priorities (whether it is the World's Fair 1984, the opening of EPCOT, or whatever) is to educate the hotel and motel people. They have to know that for special events they will not get much walk-in traffic. That is what happened this year. They were holding off. Many of hotels booked about 25% of their space and held maybe 75% (those numbers are just hearsay, they are not bona fide quotable percentages), hoping that they would get a better rate with walk in traffic. That is not the way it usually happens during a special event. They have to learn that circumstances are different during a special event. They have to learn about motor coach and tour operators and some of the ways they can help to make their business better. If I could suggest one dimension about planning special events, it is: "Do not let greed get in your eyes." My personal feeling is that greed was one of the main factors that damaged the World's Fair. We tried not to get greedy, but it was hard to do! We priced our World's Fair tours exactly as we priced all of our other tours. We did not put in an extra margin of profit just because it was a World's Fair. As a result (even with the problems and the cancellations we had during July and August) we still came out well with the World's Fair.

SUMMARY

I would say the motor coach industry for the World's Fair in Knoxville had fewer problems than other travelers. It was good to us overall. The handling of the motor coaches, and getting our people in and out, was by far the best operational element. The housing was the worst. The widespread rumors about availability, the problems with the

rates and deposits, the problems between the housing bureau of the World's Fair and the local hotel and motel operators, and the cancellations that were caused by the press, were some of the major problems.

The marketing, in my opinion, fell apart in the middle. When the bad press started about the heat and people fainting, the fair people did nothing to counteract this quickly. They just did not do enough to counteract the bad press. So, in the future, you need to be prepared. The marketing has to continue through the whole fair. I do not remember in the last two or three months seeing an ad about the World's Fair. You compare it to Coke. Coke is a household name but they are always advertising not to introduce you to Coke, but to remind you to keep drinking it. That is what the fair is going to have to do, particularly in New Orleans where the heat is going to be a problem in the summer. They are going to have to continue that marketing program throughout the summer.

Again I mentioned the unfavorable press because you have to plan how to cope. The press can either make or break you. For my company, I have to honesty say that 99% of the people who came back were happy. Our escorts would ask our people, "How many people would go back to the fair?" Either 90% or 100% would raise their hands. I attribute that to the work that we did as a professional tour operator. Overall, the tour industry could say that 90% of the people who went to the fair came back happy. We have to rate the fair as being a success on that alone.

That is the name of the game and that is the business I am in. Whatever else went wrong, however we solved it, if we pulled it off, and people were happy, then we were successful.
