



Kyle Edmiston Interjects About International

TSUSA caught up with Kyle Edmiston, TSUSA's new Board Chairman, to get his thoughts on international tourism.

Louisiana has exploded in its international arrivals as well as offerings. Speak to that.

1. Brand USA has been a tremendous help to us and the nation. Having a national travel office has had far greater impact than we ever imagined. It is much easier to sell our product and play to our specific strengths having an advocate in Brand USA.
2. The partnerships our DMOs have with the state (Louisiana) are crucial. We have 16 DMOs participate with the state at the international level. They really are on board with the goal and purpose and putting in the necessary resources to increase visitation. The success is in working together.

"Take your strengths and sell those."

Louisiana came off a very successful IPW. What made this year's show different?

IPW had not been to New Orleans since 2002; since that time the city has seen a renaissance. While the favorites of the city still abound, New Orleans is a markedly different city – there is a newness to it. In addition, we were able to showcase the many assets of our state with our food, music and culture.

For a tour operator what is the difference between an IPW and an International Showcase?

So many operators who come to International Showcase, don't come to IPW and vice-versa. I believe there is much value to going to both. For southern states, it is highly advantageous to be actively engaged in International Showcase. For IPW, the show draws 1,300 operators; there is an opportunity to explore and meet with operators you may have not done business with prior.

You come from a smaller CVB so you can see issues from their viewpoint. What would you say to those who don't believe they have the resources to engage in the international market? Smaller DMOs must connect with a larger DMO on a small piece/project. For example, Ruston, La. is located between Monroe and Shreveport. Ruston may not have the resources to go to an IPW. It may make more sense for them to go to International Showcase. They have two or three assets they can use to partner with a larger hub/DMO for stops on an international itinerary. My

Kyle Edmiston
TSUSA Board Chair
Assistant Secretary,
Louisiana Office of Tourism



advice is not to do it all at one time. Take one to three small steps. Another example is Minden in Webster Parish. It is a colony founded by Germans and has international appeal. The hook: what were Germans doing here 200 years ago? Webster Parish partners with Shreveport in selling the stop. Overnight visitation is small at this point but those that come into the community is very high, with travelers utilizing the shops and restaurants.

To tour operators, what would you say to them about the South and working with our suppliers?

There is great value in the South, and right now the demand from the consumer is at an all-time high. The suppliers in the South are willing to work with operators on price points; they possess that elasticity that some parts of our nation do not. For tour operators it is about selling product and if they cannot they will not do business with us.

Share an "a-ha" moment about international tourism and how it hit home.

In February 2014, we were on a sales mission to Frankfurt, Germany. Meiers Weltreisen pulled a couple of us aside and discussed the possibility of conducting a mega-fam for German travel agents. That was my "a-ha" moment: if you have the product and make the effort to see operators and agents at their place of employment, you can see enormous windfalls for your destination. That Go West FAM culminated in 95 German travel agents coming to Louisiana for a week. In addition, there were three days of training where they learned how to sell our product. Bottom line: Make the effort to see them in their country, at IPW, at International Showcase – it speaks to your efforts and willingness to work with them when you are coming to see them.

One Piece of Advice

When a destination tries to be everything to everyone, you lose the efficacy of selling your destination. Take your strengths and sell those. You'll see a much better ROI.

Kyle's priorities: God, family, work.