



# Mid Atlantic Receptive Services Selling the South

## Mid Atlantic Receptive Services (MARS)

Kate Scopetti, President

### What parts of the country do you promote and sell?

We started in the mid-Atlantic region, as our name suggests. Now, we also offer product in Arkansas, Tennessee and Louisiana, and different parts of the world. We are much closer to a receptive than a tour operator. We are careful not to compete with tour operator clients.

An area we just expanded in is with students tours. "Go Students Tours now" is a service that takes us everywhere. We found student tour operators don't outsource as much as motorcoach operators, and it was difficult to expand in the student arena without starting our own company – so we started collaborating with Go Student Tours.

### What trends do you see?

People are asking for more unique off-the-beaten path destinations. It is now more about culture immersion. In addition, we find culinary programs to be gaining in popularity.

We've noticed that you must have a "key marquee" in your itinerary. "A Little Rock in Memphis Soul," is a tour that has done well for us. It incorporates Dyess, Arkansas, the newly opened boyhood home of Johnny Cash and it fits in well with the music scene. Ten minutes away from Dyess is where the filming for "A Painted House," a John Grisham novel, took place. From there, we added "The Southern Tenant Farmers Union Museum" which explores the cotton industry. It is a small museum that tells a story of the history of that area, has a tie in with the Cash family and demonstrates the importance of cotton to the region.

We also see country music tours continue to grow. Tennessee and Kentucky have an expanding music scene and connection. We have found that visitors are rebooking this every two years as the product and services are continuously evolving. All of these tours sell out. There is so much to offer in the area of Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia.

On a personal note, the south is near and dear to me. Going back to Memphis and Arkansas is a labor of love. The people and community are open, welcoming, wonderful, and helpful. Everyone



falls in love with the small communities in the South. The culture, food, music, farmers, difficult times – make for an amazing story.

### What words of advice do you have for CVBs?

We work closely with CVBs and remain in touch with them throughout the year; they educate me and my team on new things in their area that we can supplement to add more marketing muscle. The FAM tours of Travel South always help – they are fantastic ways of getting to know the South.

Suppliers need to understand that we need to have a margin on a rate and easy terms. If we have restrictive policies, the tours will not come to fruition.

Communication is key. Hotel front line communication is crucial; their knowing in advance the particular needs of that group is helpful and stress-relieving.

For CVBs, it is important that a tour operator experiences small snippets of the destination. FAMs need to be flexible; there are times we cannot leave the office mid-week. However, often times we don't have the time to leave the office and experience the destination. Webinars that help educate our team with maps, photos, directions and the best way to travel between point A and point B are extremely useful. They should be no longer than 30 minutes. In these webinars, do not only talk about their destination but what is also available along the route to make it attractive to the group. Anytime we can visualize it, we can sell it.

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