

## An Arkansas Odyssey with TTN-NYC Travel Mates

**By Marticia Moore Madory**

They were five brave TTNers, all members of the Travel Mates SIG and "passionate travelers" with extensive personal travel repertoires.

"I have never met a group of people who are so well-traveled as TTN members," observes Livia Yanowicz, one of the Intrepid Five.

[Travel Mates](#) is TTN-NYC's second-largest SIG (Special Interest Group); it boasts more than 115 members, and maintains its own Facebook page. All-SIG meetings are held about 6 weeks apart, attendance is limited to about 30 because of space requirements.



Livia Yanowicz & The Travel Mates Coach

### ***Livia's personal impetus for the trip?***

"I wanted to travel more in America," she recalls. "I had just returned from Southeast Asia." But an expedition to northwest Arkansas was a concept that she had to defend to her friends and colleagues. Members of her peer group were in stitches over the idea of deliberately traveling to Arkansas to seek culture.

It was the Travel Mates SIG that planted the seeds of ambition. "The idea of going to



## The Transition Network

### TTN-NYC Newsletter July/August 2017

Bentonville grew from a presentation made by a fellow Travel Mate at the first meeting I attended," Livia recalls.

Excited by the novelty of the idea, several members started talking about what such a trip would entail. They think they've come up with a good template – a kind of "recipe for success," as Livia calls it, that other small groups of members can follow when planning their own trips. The key factors seemed to be preparation, agreement on key expectations, and shared responsibilities.

As a start, one member researched airline schedules, costs, and preferences and shared the results for everyone's consideration. To accommodate individual needs, the group flew on two different flights, but they were astounded to learn that New Yorkers can fly nonstop to Bentonville! As the world headquarters of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., the world's largest retailer, the town receives important business and cultural visitors every day of the year, Livia points out.



Phyllis Meissel, Livia Yanowicz & Sandy Merrill

Arrival was on a Thursday afternoon, and a detailed itinerary was already set. Planning for the four days in Bentonville had been facilitated by the local visitors' center. Thanks to shrewd negotiating by a Travel Mate, individual hotel rooms for the five were secured at a reasonable group rate. Another member worked out an arrangement with a local Uber driver, who was willing to follow the tight schedule they had set for themselves.

A "transportation kitty," to which each person contributed, was established to cover local travel costs. After brunch on Sunday, Livia's contingent enjoyed the only sunshine of the trip before returning to New York; while Phyllis Meissel, Sandy Merrill, and a third TTNER rented a car and drove on to Little Rock for their visit to the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum. That trip involved three and a half hours of scenic driving through the Ozark National Forest, an overnight in Little Rock, and a quick tour, mostly self-guided, of the museum that depicted events of the political careers of both Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Phyllis had visited the JFK and FDR museums, but she found that this one captured her interest from the standpoint that she had experienced the Clinton administration as an



## The Transition Network

### TTN-NYC Newsletter July/August 2017

adult and was curious to see how the displays would depict it. "I was old enough to have my own memories of those events," she pointed out. "I was curious to see how the museum explained them." She found the reproduction of the President's Cabinet Room to be particularly interesting. She said the exhibits also included a focus on science and technology initiatives that Bill Clinton and his Vice President, Al Gore, had promoted, as well as a reproduction of the Oval Office in the White House as it was decorated and furnished during the eight years he worked there.



The 1957 effort to integrate Little Rock High School, a watershed moment in the nation's history of race relations, was also depicted in an exhibit that featured the nine African American students who attempted to enroll in the school that year. With their tour completed, it was back to the Little Rock airport and another direct flight back to New York.

Airline and hotel reservations were not the only arrangements the group planned in advance. Restaurants were also researched, and there were reservations for every dinner; no stowing over room service or carryout menus from the hotel desk drawer. As a result, the food -- even the lunch they enjoyed at the Clinton library -- commanded excellent reviews. At one point, the group treated staff members from the Bentonville visitor's center; at another excellent meal, the chef made a personal appearance to greet his patrons from New York.

"This trip was so much fun," Livia recalls. "The companions made all the difference." Phyllis seconded that; the group laughed a lot, even when the weather was dreary.

It included a private one-hour tour of the famous Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art established by Alice Walton, the daughter of the late retail magnate Sam Walton. Situated on a 40-acre campus, the exhibits represent Alice's determination to display the best of American art, produced in various eras from colonial times to the present day. Supported by the Walton Family Foundation, museum admission was free. Livia notes that she and her fellow Travel Mates had visited many museums in their lifetimes, and they found the Moshe Safdie-designed Crystal Bridges facility, and the collections it houses, to be top notch.

One of the structures the group toured on the Crystal Bridges property was a reconstructed "Usonian" house based on designs by the iconic American architect Frank



## The Transition Network

### TTN-NYC Newsletter July/August 2017

Lloyd Wright. Originally built in New Jersey, the house represents a distinctly-American style of residential architecture that Wright developed during the Great Depression for homes that would be within financial reach of the average middle-class American family. Input from a local historian also enhanced the Bentonville experience. Besides Crystal Bridges, the group visited the picturesque little city of Bentonville with its lovely shops and its residents' fierce determination to hold onto its charm: No big box or chain stores allowed downtown! ("The locals recognize that they live in a bubble within their home state," recalls Livia.) A farmers market was underway on Friday, and a Confederate statue was a prominent feature in the town square. The Walton Museum, also located in "downtown" Bentonville, celebrates the Walton family history. Our Travel Mates saw Sam's truck, his office, and a lot of other memorabilia illustrating the growth of his retail empire. The man is deeply revered in the town of 40,000.

One unique "first" for Sandy and Phyllis was a visit to an actual Walmart store. Having never shopped in one before, they verified stories they had heard about: the pink guns marketed specifically for girls.

The Peel Mansion, an Italianate villa-style home built in 1875 by Colonel Samuel West Peel, was also part of the local history experience. Furnished with period antiquities and surrounded by gardens beautifully-cultivated by television host P. Allen Smith, the house provides a popular venue for weddings and other events.

**Another rule of sound trip-planning:** Allow some room for discovery. During their scheduled free time, Livia, Phyllis, and another Mate toured a Museum of Native American History, which turned out to be a surprise highlight. Instead of the one hour budgeted for that visit, they spent two hours in utter fascination.



**One final factor in the trip's success:** Nobody griped that it rained EVERY SINGLE DAY in Bentonville. Any TTN member who would like to learn techniques used in planning this successful trip is welcome to approach Livia or Phyllis and join Travel Mates. Members of the group have already planned another American trip adventure in September. (Sorry: It's already a full car.) But you could organize your own. Just apply the Travel Mates formula!