

## **TRIP REPORT ON VISIT CALIFORNIA SALES MISSION TO AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND – AUGUST 2016.**

Visit California (VC) conducts sales missions to Australia and New Zealand every other year. The 2016 mission was the best attended of any VC sales mission anywhere ever. There were 41 attendees from all over the state, about 2/3<sup>rd</sup> in the trade track and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in the PR track.

I was part of the mission, representing both the North Coast Tourism Council and Shasta Cascade. The entire cost was paid by these two entities. The northern part of the state was also represented by Napa, Sonoma and San Francisco, though as usual the LA area had more than its share.

I will summarize the multiple events, the travel professionals impacted and end with some general comments and follow up plans.

### **AUCKLAND –**

Breakfast at 7 AM with 150 carefully chosen travel agents. We had a trivia challenge and each of us was able to give a brief overview of our areas in addition to networking.

Lunch and afternoon reception for 30 of New Zealand's top B2B trade partners. There was an opportunity to interact with everyone. There were also several airline representatives and I was able to discuss the creation of packages to our regions with them. I will follow up. Hawaiian Airlines seemed the most interested as they have just increased their service to the Bay Area.

### **MELBOURNE –**

There was an afternoon reception followed by dinner with 150 retail and wholesale agents. The dinner was a travel agent expo with a format similar to what you see on talk shows.

The MC was Larry Emdur, who is the star of the highest rated morning TV show in Australia. We were invited to the stage in groups of 4 and sat on a comfortable couch. Larry interviewed each of us based on the messages we submitted. We were encouraged to bring props and I brought a sample of redwood and a stuffed salmon. (Napa and Sonoma concentrated on wine). After all the presentations there were giveaways, including trips to CA. It was an informative and fun event

and the agents remained engaged throughout. All of us had an opportunity to be performers.

#### BRISBANE –

We had another travel agent expo in Brisbane. This was the same format as the Melbourne travel agent expo with even more attendees. Larry flew in to repeat his performance.

The next morning we went to the headquarters of the biggest player in the Australian market, Flight Centre. We sat through two hours of presentations from the heads of some of their various brands. This is a \$2 Billion Dollar company with over 1000 retail stores. Their brands include Escape Travel, Travel Associates, Flight Centre and they own Liberty Travel in the US. They cover everything from student travel to luxury.

Flight Centre also dominates in Canada and has stores in virtually every English speaking country and Mexico. To get an idea of their scope, their product development team alone has 800 people. 60 work on just media and internal communications. I was able to interact with the heads of both the product and the creative team. The creative team wants to send a group to our regions for three days of taping. They will then use this content to promote us within all their product lines.

#### SYDNEY –

There was a 7 AM breakfast bringing together Qantas Holiday retail agents who are the best sellers of California product. They expected 70 but 97 showed up.

The format was a shortened version of the Expos.

Next came a B2B event at a nearby National Park which lasted from 11 AM to after 10 PM. Attending were 25 key marketing and product staff from key travel businesses in Australia and New Zealand. Many were flown in by Visit California just for the event. We had scheduled appointments with each and there was plenty of bonding time over lunch, dinner and cocktails. I obtained many good leads.

The following day we invited the same group and many more to join us for the Cal v. Hawaii football game at the Olympic Stadium. There were actually two tailgate

parties, both hosted by Berkeley, Hawaii and Brand USA. The first was outside in a field and included food, beer trucks and games. The second was in the stadium. Most of the Australians had no idea of football rules so there was entertainment on many levels.

#### TAKEAWAYS –

Most of the business we get from Australia is FIT fly drives. About 570 travel professionals were exposed to regional branding during this sales mission and they are the ones advising clients where to go and stay. The professionals were all given redwood highway maps as well as maps of the two regions and my Mendocino contact information. I personally talked to over 200. We are a known area to most and many had actually been to northern California. At the least, we were able to remind them of our virtues – to put us in the travel destination conversation.

The approximately 55 tour operators and decision makers were very important. This is the group who will develop and enhance packages to the regions. Some relationships were developed which will hopefully translate into identifiable business.

#### FOLLOW UP –

Concerning the 570 travel professionals who attended the various events, I will obtain a list of all attendees from Visit California and follow up with appropriate thank yous.

The tour operators and decision makers all received our regional flash drive with suggested itineraries, maps, photos and visitor guides. I will follow up with each individually.

All my follow up will be from the Mendocino County Tourism Commission. Many asked for information about specific hotel product and had other questions or needs and I will tailor my responses accordingly. They will all be entered into our database.

I will share all my notes and contact information with my partners in the other counties and they will do their own follow ups.