

# VISIT ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER CENTRAL EUROPEAN OFFICE

## Sales Plan FY 2010-2011

Prepared by: Marion S. Wolf  
Director Central Europe

### BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Commerce announced that 54.9 million international visitors traveled to the United States in 2009, a decrease of 5% from 2008. During the fourth quarter, however, total arrivals increased 2% which marked the first quarter to experience growth in 2009. Positive growth occurred in 15 of the top 20 arrival markets.

While statistics relative to a country-specific breakdown of visitation to our area are currently unavailable, an excerpt of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Tourism & Travel industries visitation statistics to the United States reported for 2009 shows the following:

Germany – 1.68 million visitors; down 5.4% over 2008  
As a reference: The visitation record was 1.996 million German visitors entering the United States (in 1996).

Netherlands – 547,790 visitors; down 9.9% over 2008

Switzerland – 355,727 visitors; up 4% over 2008

Belgium – 245,710 visitors; down 7.4% over 2008

Austria – 162,569 visitors; up 2.4% over 2008

In 2009, visitation to Pinellas County from Central Europe was down by 0.4% (291,188 visitors).

After two straight years of record international visitation to the United States, in 2009 visits dropped as the global economic downturn slowed travel around the world. While overseas travel was still down 9% percent from its peak in 2000, visitation from overseas markets is up 32% from its low in 2003.

For January 2010, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced that 3.4 million international visitors traveled to the United States, an increase of 10% over January 2009. January 2010 marks the fourth straight month of increases in U.S. arrivals.

Visitation from Western Europe increased 1% for the month. Visitation from 19 Western European markets was up for the month. Seven of the top 10 Western European markets registered increases in January with Germany +5%, Netherlands +3%, and Switzerland +14% among them.

## **OUTLOOK**

After its deep plunge during the financial crisis, the German economy is slowly recovering. Growth rates of 1.5% this year and 1.4% percent in 2011 along with a robust job market and low inflation rate are projected. The European Union as a whole is predicted to have only 0.9% growth this year and 1.4% next year. Economists predict the USD will weaken relative to the Euro continuously over the course of the next 18 months to a peak of over 1.50.

In the next six months, the top three factors motivating travel from Central Europe to the United States are airfares, accommodation rates and the EUR/USD exchange rate.

The primary barriers for travel to the United States are anticipated as being the entry requirements (e.g. the collection of 10 fingerprints for visitors), ESTA charges and procedural processing as well as the competitive promotion by other long-haul destinations.

Virtually all of our top Central European tour operators reported increases of between 5% and 20% for the 2009 summer season over 2008. Year-on-year, the winter 2009/10 season (ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010) saw double digit declines, driven primarily by the monetary strain experienced in the aftermath of the financial crisis. While many of our top Central European tour operators have reported a slow start for 2010, bookings for the summer season are currently picking up noticeably. The U.S. continues to be perceived as a 'good value for money destination', which is an advantageous attribute during times of price sensitivity.

We will effectively and efficiently focus our efforts on promoting St. Petersburg/Clearwater as a premier vacation destination, building on its strongly established reputation in the marketplace and capitalizing on the momentum achieved during the course of 2009.

## **GOAL**

### **Increase visitation to the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area**

## **STRATEGIES**

Effectively and efficiently focus our efforts on promoting St. Petersburg/Clearwater as a premier vacation destination, building on its strongly established reputation in the marketplace, by employing the following strategies:

Maintain active memberships in tourism organizations within Central Europe such as the Visit USA Committees, the German Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (DRV) as well as the American German Business Club (AGBC).

Continue the close liaison with tourism organizations such as the Willy Scharnow Foundation and the U.S. Consulates/Foreign Commercial Service in applicable market countries as well as nurture the strong relationship with industry partners such as the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Florida attractions and Visit Florida.

Conduct ongoing sales calls to tour operators focused on developing and maintaining close collaboration regarding the identification of synergies for trade and consumer promotions as well as ad hoc projects in cooperation with industry partners.

Cultivate close relationships with the airlines with primary focus on carriers strongest from central Europe into Florida (such as Delta Air Lines, Continental Airlines and Lufthansa).

Identify, initiate and develop cooperative advertising programs and marketing opportunities with the travel trade and trade/consumer press (e.g. but not limited to direct mail campaigns, sweepstakes promotions, increased usage of internet platforms and booking engines, etc.).

Optimize the increase of travel industry awareness for St. Petersburg/Clearwater by attending key travel trade shows, conferences and conventions in central Europe.

Participate in designated U.S. trade shows in conjunction with the CVB's leisure travel department.

Build and increase awareness for St. Petersburg/Clearwater to the retail travel industry by participating in/conducting travel agent trainings and roundtable seminars in cooperation with tour operators, industry destinations, attractions and hotel partners as well as airlines and car rental partners. In addition we will continue to participate in the Visit USA Committee Germany's ongoing online travel agent training program.

Initiate and coordinate familiarization trips to the County from Central Europe (Meier's Weltreisen's Go West 2010 event marking a highlight with 100 top selling travel agents).

Optimize the increase of consumer awareness for St. Petersburg/Clearwater with a presence at key consumer shows by means of brochure distribution.

Provide information and sales support to consumers and the travel trade by responding to inquiries in a timely and professional manner utilizing brochures and materials as designated, approved and/or provided by the CVB.

Cultivate a close relationship to the travel trade press and supply them with detailed information in local languages as available.

Assist with public relations efforts as appropriate in conjunction with the CVB's public relations department and German public relations firm related to marketing activities, special events and publicity opportunities in the print and electronic media arenas as applicable.

## **GOAL**

**Maximize travel trade activities and promotional efforts with the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau to extend the reach of the "joint product" message throughout Germany.**

## **STRATEGIES**

Given that May 2010 will see the opening of another major attraction in Orlando (Harry Potter), going forward into October 2010 through September 2011, we aim to ...

Develop marketing initiatives with the Orlando CVB which serve the above goal in focusing on an increased awareness of St. Petersburg/Clearwater's close proximity to Orlando.

Pool our resources with Orlando in identifying, initiating and developing cooperative advertising programs and marketing opportunities with the travel trade and trade/consumer press (e.g. but not limited to direct mail campaigns, sweepstakes promotions, increased usage of internet platforms and booking engines, etc.).

Join forces with Orlando in conducting travel agent training.

Partner with Orlando at applicable trade/consumer shows thereby "physically" emphasizing our close proximity.