

# VISIT ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER CENTRAL EUROPEAN OFFICE

## Sales Plan FY 2009-2010

Prepared by: Marion S. Wolf  
Director Central Europe

### Background

The U.S. Department of Commerce announced that a record 58 million international visitors traveled to the United States during 2008, an increase of nearly 4% four percent over 2007. Thirteen of the top 25 arrivals markets broke records set in previous years.

Arrivals to the United States in 2008 reflected a shift between the first nine months of the year and the fourth quarter. For the first nine months, 17 of the top 20 arrivals markets posted increases in arrivals. During the fourth quarter of 2008, however, a shift took place in arrivals to the United States. During the last quarter of the year, only 12 of the top 20 countries posted growth.

While statistics relative to a country specific breakdown of visitation to our region 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 2008 shows the following:

Germany – 1.78 million visitors; up 17% over 2008  
Visitation growth in 2008 was phenomenal and broke records relative to growth forecasts of 5% a year ago.  
The visitation record was registered in 1996 at 1.996 million German visitors entering the United States.

Netherlands – 607,802 visitors; up 19.9% over 2007

Switzerland – 341,955 visitors; up 15.4% over 2007

Belgium – 216,579 visitors; up 7.2% over 2007

Austria – 158,764 visitors; up 5.9% over 2007

With an economic downturn abounding globally at the moment, forecasts for 2009 and 2010 visitation have not been officially published.

In 2008, visitation to Pinellas County from Western Europe increased 24.3% to 292,368 visitors.

Virtually all major tour operators (such as Dertour, FTI, Neckermann Reisen, Thomas Cook Reisen and Meier's Weltreisen from Germany, Kuoni and TUI from the Netherlands, Kuoni, Flex Travel and Skytours from Switzerland) reported double-digit increases U.S. bookings for 2008.

While the decreased value of the USD relative to the Euro and Swiss Franc contributed to this development, a revival of the U.S. image in the European media ("Obama Effect"), product expansions in tour operator catalogs as well as new flight routes / capacities proved equally strong factors related to increased travel to the U.S.

Florida remains among the top three states visited by top European origin markets. Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland are ranked among the top 20 origin markets for visitation to the U.S.

Economies across the world have recently suffered downturns resulting in considerable concern over the tourism future. Pursuant to a recent poll conducted in German-speaking Europe regarding what consumers would consider abstaining from, the clear message was that vacations were not among items considered "dispensable". The focus group study conducted by Research Data Services, Inc. last fall mirrors this finding, in that none of the respondents foresaw cancelling their main annual holiday. 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 aim to capitalize on the momentum achieved during the course of 2008 as follows:

## **GOAL**

**Increase visitation to the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area by approximately 2% over 2008, i.e. to approximately 297,000 visitors**

## **STRATEGIES**

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, 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), 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 relative to 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.

Plan participation 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 destination, 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 up to three familiarization trips to the County from central Europe reaching approximately 60 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

As a result of the recent focus group study ...

**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

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 resources in developing and implementing promotional campaigns with tour operators.

Join forces with Orlando in conducting travel agent training.

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

Include 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.).