

St. Pete brings fresh message to Canada

MICHAEL BAGINSKI

St. Petersburg/Clearwater still has its sights set on Canada, even though its tourism ambassadors may be located a little further afield than in the past.

The Florida destination caused a stir in Canada in the spring when it cancelled its representation here due to budget cuts; however, tourism execs vowed to keep the spotlight on their number two international market (after Britain) with a particular emphasis on the trade.

"We're not missing a beat," Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater executive director D.T. Minich told Canadian Travel Press, noting that with excellent air service between St. Pete and Toronto, his team members are only three hours away.

Indeed, the Alberta-raised Minich was just one of several CVB reps in Canada for a lengthy trade mission that included Thomas Cook product launches in Toronto and Montreal, wholesaler meetings, and travel agent training sessions. More events are scheduled in the next couple of months.

Moreover, St. Pete has a number of large travel events on its local calendar (Florida Encounter for meeting planners in November; Florida Huddle

in January), or in its neighbourhood (PowWow in Orlando) in the next year, which will afford the organization the opportunity to showcase to the Canadian trade on home soil.

In both cases, Visit St. Pete has a clear message: it's a destination that is fresh and new and not the stodgy, retirement playground that many Canadians might think.



Minich

"We have new upscale properties [like a Hyatt opening later in the year], but we still have a wonderful combination of product, like 'mom and pop' hotels and affordable condos," says Minich.

Though clearly trying to forge a new image, Minich says St. Pete/Clearwater won't be undertaking the kind of transformation that Fort Lauderdale has, going from a Spring Break mecca to high-end haven.

"It's not like we're doing away with all the afford-

able accommodation," he says, adding, "We need to promote that it's three hours and you're on the beach."

Indeed, St. Pete/Clearwater has some of the best beaches in the continental US, with Caladesi Island and Fort de Soto Park, in particular, continually earning accolades.

However, the cities have also undergone a renaissance, with Clearwater's Beachwalk the latest to come onstream. Revitalized downtown St. Petersburg is also set to welcome an expanded Salvador Dali Museum in 2011, which will enable the renowned attraction to display fully 50% of its extraordinary collection, up from a third.

Neighbouring communities, such as the Greek enclave of Tarpon Springs, and Scottish – flavoured Dunedin – also the spring training home of the Toronto Blue Jays -- also add colour and flair to the destination.

It's a message that Minich intends to deliver through the full spectrum of marketing, including, increasingly, social media like Facebook.

And travel agents. "The travel agent," he says, "is so important to us in Canada; probably more so than in the US."

Minich also emphasizes that his county boasts the second youngest population in the state, lending further fuel to his assertion that shuffleboard is not the game of choice amongst locals, or visitors.

"People know us for the beaches," he concludes, "but, really, there is so much more."

And Minich intends to keep telling Canadians that, with an office here, or not.

Last week's lineup...



Japan Airlines – For the World Traveler – JAL Executive Class SEASONS



Country Inn by Carlson – Win a Trip for Two Anywhere in North America



Sunwing Vacations – Summer BLOW-OUT Sale on Canada Flights from \$39!



Taiwan Tourism – Win a Trip to Taiwan



Travel Weekly USA – Join Travel Weekly and PromPeru for a Special Webcast



Spoiled Agents – Ready to be Spoiled Rotten? www.spoiledagent.com



Scenic Tours – 2 for 1 Christmas River Cruise from Scenic



CITC – Get into the Zones: A Powerful New Way of Selling!



Partners Software Americas, Inc – Partners Software Americas Retail Solution



Aeroflot Russian Airlines – Aeroflot office in Toronto Will Cease Operations

Travelblast™ gives you the first look at special promotional offers and announcements for your clients. Subscribe NOW for FREE at www.travelpress.com/SUBSCRIBE/

Look for:
Delivered at your request by



The stamp of authenticity.

Where was that?

The following people identified the July 20 "Where in the World" as the Madrid's Avenue of Art (Prado): Brent Morris, Flight Centre Canada; Andrei Gere, TravelOnly; Eric Rodriguez, Transat Tours Canada; Diane Wilczynski, Travel Resources Ltd.; Jean Oliver, Marlin Travel; Fergus Egan, Egan Travel Ltd.; Gladis Flatt, Uniglobe Discovery Travel; and Jackey Lashmar, Alberta Motor Association.

