

**American Bus Association Annual Convention
Cleveland, OH January 14 – 17, 2017
Prepared by Michele Cota, Trade & Industry Relations Manager**

NH Division of Travel & Tourism Development (DTTD) attended the American Bus Association (ABA) from January 14 – 17, 2017 in Cleveland, OH with about 23 delegates from throughout New Hampshire. During ABA, DTTD conducted prescheduled one-on-one meetings, participated in networking events, coordinated a New England raffle contest, and managed a booth for the duration of the event.

DTTD participated in a full appointment schedule; however 2 cancelled the convention leaving a total of 52 meetings. There were many additional tour companies who came to DTTD's booth specifically to gather information for new tours. Of the 52 meetings that took place, 12 tour operators urgently want to launch new tours and series to New Hampshire. The majority serves preformed groups and about half have retail programs.

General observations about the 2017 group tour market include:

- An apparent growth trend in demand for New England.
- Tour planners are asking to spend more time in New Hampshire by covering only two states as opposed to all of New England in one tour.
- This is the first year in the past 10 years where several tour operators specifically requested southern New Hampshire and mostly early and late summer as opposed to peak foliage.
- Collaboration with neighboring states and with partners in state is an essential strategy.

Some highlights from the appointments are:

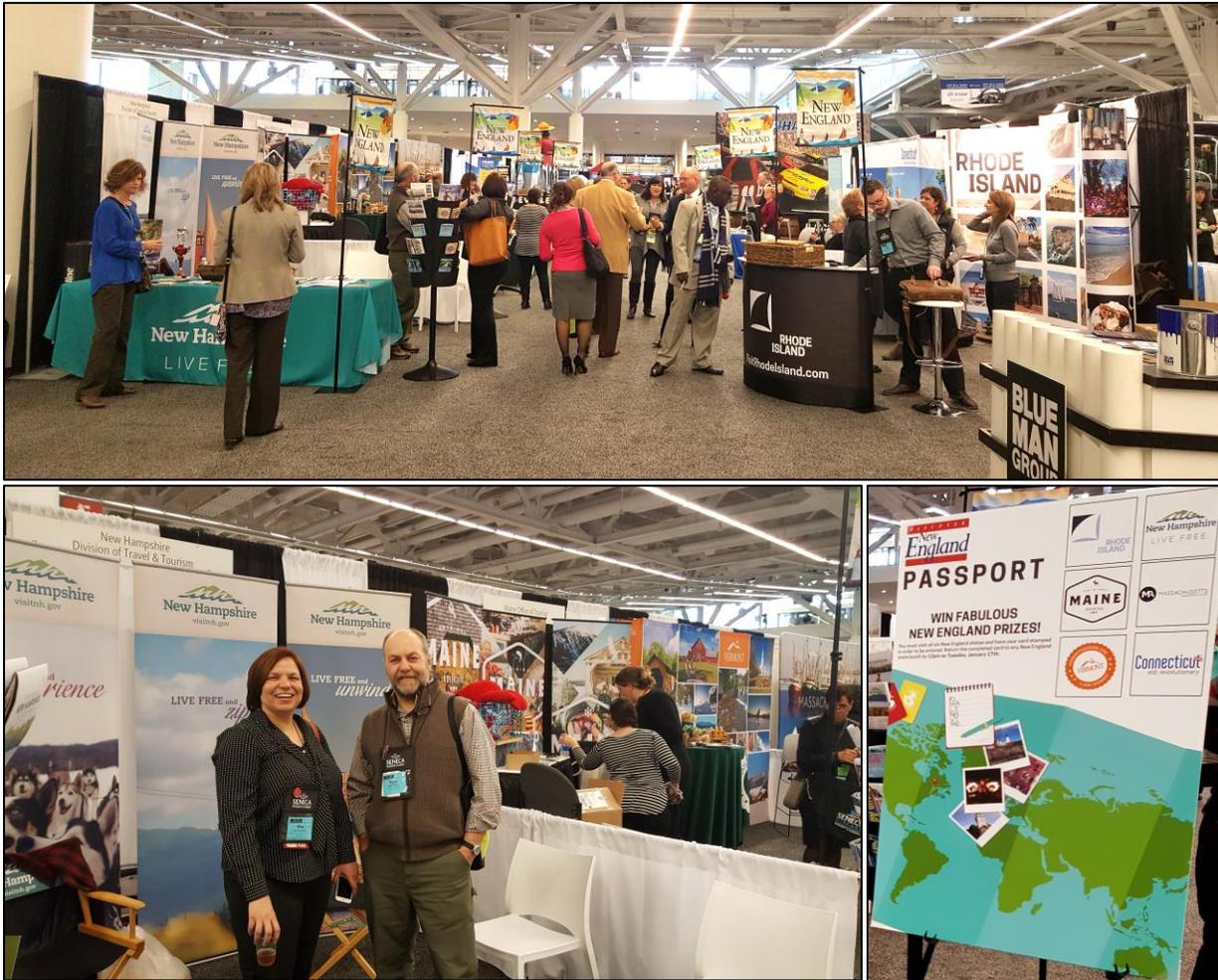
- Ontario based DeNure Tours wants to plan a 5 day hub and spoke hiking tour with a mix of guided outdoor adventure options.
- The following companies specifically inquired about building brand new Vermont/New Hampshire Tours about 5days, 4 nights: Lenzner Coach, Garden State Tours, Front Line Tours, AAA East Central, Significant Living Travel, Daytripping, Upstate Transit of Saratoga, Pioneer Trails, Trans-Bridge Lines, and Woodlawn.
- C.L. Tours wants to a build a unique tour for a small group that reserved run of house a quaint small inn or b&b in the countryside, preferably in the Monadnock region.
- Vacations by Rail expanded their New England portfolio by adding two brand new tour series that spend a significant amount of time in New Hampshire.

TRADE SHOW BOOTH

DTTD collaborated with the Rocks Estate to once again encourage group interest in building programs during off-seasons by making maple cotton candy right at the booth during the reception period and by donating jug of maple syrup for the New England raffle prize program. New Hampshire won 2nd for best small booth during the reception period on the opening Saturday of the convention.

In addition to conducting the maple demonstration, DTTD partnered with Kellerhaus to give samples of buttercrunch chocolates. This has been a strong partnership for a few years now and tour operators and suppliers alike now regular the booth each year for these chocolates specifically. The samples prompt inquiries as to the visitor programs offered by Kellerhaus which is the primary goal of the partnership.





DTTD collaborated with the other New England states to run a raffle giveaway in which tour operators collected stamps on a card from each New England state, completed a short three-question survey, and attached their business card to be entered to win one of six prizes.

Prizes included:

- Maple Syrup from New Hampshire: Celestial Travel & Tours, Mary Myers
- Stew Leonard's Gourmet Gift Basket from Connecticut: Conway Tours, Cindy Stepanian
- Plymouth Bay Winery Wine Basket from Massachusetts: MJ Tours, Mary Jean (MJ) Keating
- Gift Basket from Vermont with a VT Teddy Bear, maple syrup, wood-craft, Smoke & Cure Summer Sausage, subscription to Vermont Life Magazine
- Live Lobster and delivery sponsored by the Maine Motorcoach Association
- Rhode Island gift basket

It is recommended that DTTD continue aggressive efforts at next year's ABA Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, January 27 – 30, 2018. DTTD should continue to have a booth on the exhibitor floor, and, if the opportunity allows, encourage greater collaboration with the other New England states in regards to décor and multistate suggested itineraries.

Overall, the 2017 ABA Convention was very successful. Consecutive attendance at future ABA Conventions is essential for the continued growth of New Hampshire's share of group tours and to defend existing programs.