

The International Travel Writers Alliance
The Binational Tourism Alliance

The Annual Binational Tourism Summit in St. Catharine's, Ontario
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Presentation script by Ashley Gibbins, Director General of the
International Travel Writers Alliance

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

Can I begin by thanking Arlene and everyone at the Binational Tourism Alliance for giving me the chance to talk to you today.

Although I have been to the States many times, this is my first visit to Canada and indeed to this part of North America.

Having had a couple of days to look around I already know what a wonderful part of the world this is.

Tremendous potential

And what tremendous potential you have to exploit the Niagara region as a travel and tourism destination.

Exploiting the potential

I have also had the chance to meet with and speak to Arlene and representatives of a number of BTA member organisations.

And it is clear that your Alliance is in an excellent position to exploit this potential to the full.

Particularly with your binational approach, which I think must be unique.

There are many travel and tourism partnerships around the world that are all looking to co-ordinate a collective approach to the promotion of their particular parts of the world as travel destinations.

My alliance has worked with the Africa Travel & Tourism Association; the Caribbean Tourism Organisation; Branding Latin America and, in the States, Deep South USA and Capital Region USA.

But I have yet to come across an alliance that brings together travel and tourism activities across national borders.

This in itself must give the BTA the opportunity to mine a very valuable seam of interest and support.

The Niagara region

In making this presentation I have been asked to let you know what the outside world thinks about the Niagara region.

You may not be surprised to hear the answer to this is very little. The falls, of course, but little else.

And even then in a straw poll of 25 people, at a PR workshop I ran recently, only six delegates knew Niagara was in Canada and only one mentioned Ontario.

This need not be a bad thing however – and is certainly better than generating a negative perception among potential visitors.

What you do have is a great travel product and a relatively blank sheet of paper.

This is not a bad place to start from in creating and reinforcing an accurate awareness of the Niagara region among potential visitors.

I hope that my alliance will be in a position to help your alliance to achieve this in the weeks and months to come.

The International Travel Writers Alliance

The International Travel Writers Alliance represents over 7,400 professionals with a genuine and professional interest in travelling to write, edit, broadcast or create images.

Partners and agencies

We also work with a large number of travel industry partners, including CVB's, resort hotels and attractions, transport providers and tourist organizations and associations.

Finally we work with agencies who have travel related clients.

AllWays

The other side of our coin is *AllWays* - the new consumer travel service from the Alliance.

Key information in a no frills format

To support our members we provide key information in a no frills format about destinations and travel pursuits worldwide.

And back this up by working with travel industry partners and their agencies on a range of events, activities and initiatives.

Our emphasis in achieving this is on 'travelling to write, edit, broadcast or create images' not 'travel writing'.

And this is important.

For although travel writing from a tourist perspective provides the basis for much of what we do, there are many other ways to use the media to raise the profile of a destination.

We have, for example, a member who writes for a cat's magazine and wherever she goes she will try to tie in a feline angle – be it feral cats in Tunisia or cat embroidered silk gowns in Vietnam.

Another member, a teacher cum travel writer, produces features for an education magazine that focuses on a day in the life of teachers worldwide.

Others travel to write, broadcast or create images from a social, political, economic, sporting, food and wine, arts and culture and industrial perspective.

But they all manage to introduce a lifestyle element to what they produce – and to include a web link to the appropriate visitor website.

Making the most of the media

So for the nine or so minutes I have remaining I would like to give you my take on *Making the most of the media*.

Journalists are simple folk

This might seem a tall order but, let me stress from the outset, that journalists are simple folk.

All we need to keep us happy is that flow of key information in a no frills format.

Over elaboration is a sin

Because this is what enables us to sell our features, programmes and images to commissioning editors.

I must tell you that the one cardinal sin that is so often committed by the travel industry when looking to influence the media - is over elaboration.

The value of the media – independent third party endorsement

I may be stating the obvious but the genuine value in establishing and maintaining effective media relations – as well as it being relatively time and cost effective – is that we journalists can provide you with independent, third party endorsement of your destination.

However effective your public relations, advertising and marketing activity might be it, is direct communication, between you and your potential visitors and will, as such, be seen as partisan.

In this respect it comes with a ... *well they would say that wouldn't they* health warning.

Journalists are mercenaries

If you accept that there is value in making the most of the media, you also need to appreciate that we journalists are mercenaries.

Our sole objective is to produce features and images that our editors want to publish or broadcast and we are not generally too concerned where in the world we go to get these.

With the exception of news driven issues and events, we will be drawn to destinations that show they appreciate what we are looking for and make us feel welcome when we get an editorial go ahead.

Deliver this and you will have an influential friend for life.

What journalists want

I have also been asked to suggest what's 'hot' in the media world.

The answer is that what's hot is news. But from a travel perspective you probably don't want to be the focus of hot news coverage.

Because news journalists tend to be sent to a destination – with an agenda - when there is a crisis. A natural disaster, terrorist attack, bird flu, serious accident or industrial action or military coup.

News hacks will stay with you for only as long as the crisis lasts and, while leaving as quickly as they came, will leave behind a negative public perception of the destination.

Your objectives in working with travel writers should be to develop long-term relationships with professionals who will deliver positive features and images in the travel and lifestyle pages of publications.

So will these travel journalists want from you?

Having already said it's key information in a no frills format let me first concentrate on what we journalists definitely do not want.

Hyperbole, superlatives and flannel

We do not want hyperbole, superlatives and flannel.

Information from destinations littered with (and I quote) *uniquely one of a kind*, or *multi-award winning* (when there is no mention of the awards) or *you will not believe your eyes*.

These and many more phrases like them are an annoying put off.

Ghost written copy

And we do not want ghost written copy, with an implied assumption that all we need do is add our by-line and file the feature.

Tell us the facts and we will create the environment.

So please avoid letting me know that a resort hotel (and again I quote) *strides majestically atop a truly awe inspiring mountain vista that is without question in a world of its own* and with accommodation that is *unparalleled luxury providing a pampering experience of a lifetime*.

Information of little interest

We do not want to receive information of little interest, like the appointment of new directors of marketing (unless it is to a marketing magazines new appointments section).

Or where we have to scroll down paragraph after paragraph of sterile and anodyne quotes from vice-presidents before getting to the interesting bit.

Over formatting

We do not want text that is plagued with formatting and has upper case mid-sentence, underlining and italics for no good reason and text of different fonts or point sizes.

You might think this adds impact. All it adds is workload as it all has to be stripped out.

Text that requires retyping

In our electronic world we don't want to receive information in a hard copy or emailed as a pdf attachment as both requires retyping.

Yesterdays news

And finally we don't want to be told about something that happened yesterday or today or is happening tomorrow or even next week.

The longer we have to work on the information the better.

What we do want

So let me concentrate on what we journalists do want from you.

Key information in a no frills format

Yet again key information in a no frills format with a web link and a media contact.

If you can hook us initially in 60 words you are far more likely to get 600 with three images in print.

And this does not need to be of 'hold the front page' relevance or all encompassing.

In today's world, the print and broadcast media will provide the introduction or teaser to the Niagara region that will begin to tempt potential visitors.

The internet, and your website in particular, will provide as much supporting information as those potential visitors could possibly need to decide if to make that visit.

People make places

Another thing to remember about the media is that it is personality led. People like to read about, listen to and watch people.

It is also true that *people make places*.

A feature on your wine routes will be far more interesting to an editor if it focuses on the families producing the wine.

The falls will be far more interesting if the profiles the crew of a tour boat.

Your local police or fire chiefs or city mayors will be good subject matter for police and fire service or local government magazines worldwide - and will often provide for a day in the life piece.

And in Niagara you have so many interesting people making for a tremendous place to visit.

To be made to feel welcome

If we do get in touch for more information and to suggest a possible visit we want to be made to feel welcome.

Once you have hooked the journalist it is important to provide them with all the information and support their particular status or commission deserves.

The easier you can make of for me to visit, stay and write about you Shaw or Canal festivals, for example, the more likely I am to cover these rather than the world duck calling championships in Arkansas or the wife carrying competitions in Iceland.

And that brings me onto another good angle.

Regular events

Festivals, fairs, shows, tournaments – anything that happens annually, or at least on a regular basis, will be of interest.

For a journalist an annual event is likely to provide good copy and great images and the chance to sell a feature year after year.

For the visitor a festival will be an added incentive to visit a destination – particularly for the first time.

To be kept in touch with

And finally, once you have made contact with a journalist - and particularly when they have made their visit and produced their coverage – keep in touch with them - personally.

Seek their advice and they will, usually, be happy to tell you what will or will not make a good feature or image.

And don't forget that journalists who have visited the Niagara region will have their notes saved on a hard drive and it will be relatively easy to top and tail this to produce future features.

Travel writers, photographers and broadcasters also live in a close knit community and are always discussing visits – good and bad.

Make sure when Niagara enters the conversation, we travel writers sing your praises.

The International Travel Writers Alliance and AllWays

And so, in the couple of minutes I have left let me explain how my Alliance can support your Alliance.

I have already arranged with Arlene to receive your travel and visitor related information.

The Alliance bulletin

I can then get this to my travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers through our bi-monthly bulletins.

Destination dossiers

Our Alliance's could also work together in producing *Destination Niagara*, a detailed media dossier on the region and its partners.

This would be emailed to our member, put online and referred to whenever we put items on you in the bulletin.

You and your partners would also be able to use the dossier as detailed press pack information. And once produced it can easily be updated and reissued annually.

The Alliance website

We can put your information on our website.

Press trips

And we could work with you in developing a time and cost effective programme of group and individual press trips to the Niagara region – which would also work for visiting travel agents.

One or more of the group press trips could be linked to a Niagara based travel writers symposium for US, Canadian or European writers.

Alliance members who made the trip could be encouraged to produce a feature and images for *AllWays*

A European presence

Finally my Alliance could give your Alliance a presence in Europe.

AllWays

And that brings me to *AllWays*

AllWays is the consumer travel service from the Alliance.

Our subscribers – or *AllWays travellers* – join because they know they are receiving information from the Alliance's professional travel writers and photographers.

AllWays traveller

They get this through regular and special issue *AllWays traveller* e-newsletter and the features, images and essential information on the *AllWays* website.

So the information and images I get from you can be considered for our *AllWays traveller* monthly newsletter.

We can also consider producing a special *AllWays traveller to Niagara*.

AllWaystraveller.com

And Alliance members who visit Niagara could be encouraged to produce feature and images for *AllWays online* (www.allwaystraveller.com).

This would build into quite an online archive of consumer travel features on Niagara.

Through the *AllWays* website we can also publish essential information guides to Niagara.

The way forward

These are just some of the ways I hope our two alliances can work together to mutual benefit in the weeks and months to come.

And so with my time up I would like to thank you once again.

I will of course be happy to answer any questions you might have and to talk to you in more detail during the day.

Thank you.

Ashley Gibbins

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