

FAST LANE | TRENDS

First alert for travel news

Students: The Future of Travel

SYTA President Carylann Assante, CAE, shares student travel trends

An amazing 23 percent of all global travel is student travel, according to the Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA). Not surprisingly, this ABA member is a key player in the group travel industry. In the U.S., student travel is a \$5.6 billion industry. What's more, ABA's research says 25 to 50 percent of its members' passengers are students.

Destinations recently caught up with SYTA President Carylann Assante:

Destinations: What are SYTA's foremost goals?

Carylann Assante: Since 2010, SYTA's membership has doubled, as has attendance at our conferences. Tour operators are focusing on student travel more than ever. I see more and more motorcoach industry members learning how to serve this market.

One challenge we face is the perception that it is not safe for students to travel. We're more focused than ever on educating our members on safety, preparedness, and crisis management.

We also want to make sure a welcoming environment is provided for everyone. We must ensure that students with disabilities can travel with their classes and address the concerns of LGBT students.

We're focusing on working with destinations and CVBs so they can better respond to field trips and overnight and regional travel. We're focusing on how to connect CVBs with educators traveling within 50 to 100 miles of their destinations.



SYTA President Carylann Assante says more motorcoach industry members are getting involved in student travel.

ABA-MEMBER BUS AND TOUR OPERATORS FOCUS ON STUDENT TRAVEL

568 ABA-member bus and tour companies report that they conduct student business.

Of these 568 bus and tour companies, 128 report that more than 50 percent of their business is student/youth.

217 of the 568 attend ABA's Annual Meeting & Marketplace and book business for students/youth.

D: What are today's hot student group destinations?

CA: Williamsburg, Atlanta, Vancouver. This past year, Banff and Lake Louise broke into the top 10 student destinations. Other up-and-coming destinations are Cleveland, Nashville, Pigeon Forge, Branson, and the Huntsville and Houston space centers. Birmingham has also made big strides, thanks to recent civil rights anniversaries and a new national landmark there. And national parks are coming on strong.

We're also seeing a growth in college visit tours. These are itineraries a tour operator builds around visiting, say, five colleges, thanks to relationships cultivated with admissions officers.

D: How is student travel changing and evolving?

CA: The traditional student-funded trip may soon look very different. We'll see more schools focus on the equality of travel. For example, if only half a class can fundraise, maybe the class can't go.

We are seeing more schools with special requirements for travel, such as asking for defibrillators onboard motorcoaches.

More tour operators are accepting payments directly from parents and setting up payment plans.

We're focusing on the educator of the future. Today's college student is the customer five years from now. They're much more technology-focused than older generations. How millennials like to travel will impact how millennial teachers like to travel.

D: How does SYTA help students in need?

CA: The SYTA Youth Foundation (SYF) and the motorcoach industry have worked harder than ever together to help more kids through scholarships and programs. Fifteen years ago, we gave one scholarship. Since then, we've awarded more than 3,500 scholarships. Even so, we're only able to help 10 percent of students who apply for scholarships. To learn more, visit sytayouthfoundation.org. 