

NFTGA 2010 CONFERENCE

“Meeting the Needs of Tomorrow’s Tourist”

February 22- 26, 2010

The National Federation of Tourist Guides Association was created in 1998 in Washington D.C. when the local Guild of Professional Tour Guides invited representatives from other national tour guide associations to discuss the creation of a national organization. Representatives from interested guide associations across the United States held additional organizational meetings July 1999 in Chicago and July 2000 in San Francisco.

The initial aim of the new organization was to allow national guides to share their knowledge and experience from their section of the country to develop a better understanding of the ever changing trends and challenges of local,

Over the past 12 years, the NFTGA has developed into a well respected non-profit organization that promotes continuing education and effective training in all areas of tour guiding among their affiliate members. They are committed to increasing the national visibility and importance of using professional well trained guides to enhance their value as goodwill ambassadors working with domestic and international visitors to the United States.

Their initial national conference of tour guides was in San Antonio, Texas in 2002. Two years later, the second conference was held in Boston followed by a third conference in New Orleans in 2007. This year’s conference was organized in Miami, Florida in conjunction with Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines.

The SFTGG Board sent me to the conference specifically to determine the value of continuing our guild’s long standing membership in NFTGA. During the days and evenings I spent working and socializing with other guild delegates, I found a mutual respect and affinity with these fellow professional guides. They are dedicated volunteers who willing share their guild’s “best practices” with all the other NFTGA associations. Attending this important conference also convinced me that there are many direct benefits in continuing our NFTGA membership, not withstanding the current availability of Group Liability Insurance coverage.

It’s a win-win opportunity for SFTGG to remain an active member of NFTGA.

“Sea Change 2010: Meeting the Needs of Tomorrow’s Tourist.”

It was the first national conference held aboard a cruise ship with fellow NFTGA association officers, delegates and attendees working over an extensive agenda of topics directly related to the current state of the travel, cruise and tourism industry.

Our NFTGA conference opened on February 22nd with an informal orientation session after embarking from the Miami Cruise Terminal. During this social mixer, I made contact with Jean Feilmoser who is a founder for the NFTGA and currently their Director At Large. She warmly welcomed me to the event and introduced me to her contacts.

During this casual affair I met with NFTGA President, Esther Banike of Chicago and Treasurer, Kevin Doran of Miami who planned out the details for this “on board” conference. Esther in turn introduced me to the President of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, Rosalind Newlands of Scotland.

In addition, I also met with the NFTGA VP, Harvey Davidson of New York City and Secretary, Marie Pinho of Washington D.C. All these national officers are also officers within their own guilds or associations.

Other representative guides and their respective association Delegate guides from New Orleans, Denver, San Diego, Boston, New York City, Washington D.C. and San Francisco were in attendance. Everyone, I was either introduced to or whom I introduced myself to, openly greeted me with a smile and a warm hand and thanked me for attending. However, I must say that the contingent from New Orleans lived up to their reputation as the most convivial group and were the favorites among us all.

On the following day the NFTGA delegates met for a Panel Discussion entitled:

“Search & Rescue: Finding Tour Assignments in Any Economy.”

Beverley Livingston, a certified guide and former Receptive Operator from the ***Chicago Tour-Guide Professionals Association (CTPA)*** spoke about the importance of adapting your tour presentation to meet the expectations of all types of group travelers of all ages, whether national or international.

In addition, it pays to develop specialty tours with a narrowly defined theme that can produce steady clientele and revenue. Also broadening your skill sets to include docent work can expand your storytelling skills while gaining more knowledge of the key historical areas in you locale.

It is advisable to continue networking with your current business contacts by renewing your “face to face” time with your DMC employers, concierge partners, event planners and transportation companies. This proactive approach also refreshes their interest in offering you future work. Their perception of you as a dedicated front line employee is further reinforced by how you dress during your visit, including your body language.

It is also important to personalize your email contacts by thanking them for all the opportunities they offer you. Always remain “upbeat and adaptable.” Lastly, keep up with the latest technology changes that may directly affect the travel business. Being a little “tech savvy” is an asset, not a problem.

A prime example would be the new business opportunities in the mobile “smart” phone application market such as tours on GPS compatible phones.

NFTGA Speakers

The next speaker was Gene Reyes, the President of the **Tour Guides Association of Greater New Orleans (TGAGNOI)**. Gene has been a member of the National Toastmasters of America for many years. Gene emphasized the importance of improving your skills as a commentator while guiding a tour. Establish a bond with your guests, engage them to participate and keep them involved during their tour. All too often experienced guides will slip into a pattern of delivery that is both bland in tonality or do not include any key anecdotal tidbits within the story to keep it entertaining for the group.

He stated that the focus of the New Orleans organization is to bring educators and historical experts to their open Board meetings to share their unique knowledge or talents with member guides. Their continuing education programs strive to make their members more marketable and adaptable to the changing needs of the tourist industry. In summary, he said simply, "Improve your presentation skills to be more in demand so your clientele will ask, who dat guide anyway?" An unforgettable punch-line Gene!

A Delegate member of **The Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington D.C.** spoke in depth about their organization's strong focus on continuing education for their membership. Their member directory includes a concise biography of each guide that includes their specialized talents and expertise. Their association is committed to an instructional program that builds on a guide's strengths to help them develop and eventually attain the status of Certified Master Guide.

In addition, they have a foreign language proficiency testing program that is conducted by the "Inlingua" an international language center who also tutors U.S. State Department employees. Their Guild strives to make sure all their foreign language speaking guides are truly proficient in conducting a quality tour in the language of their clients. Once a D.C. guide passes the language skills testing program they are listed in their organization's Member Directory.

This third party testing program is patterned after the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) in Europe. The standard test involves a face to face or phone interview with a native speaker/instructor.

Each guide is judged in language knowledge and vocabulary for 30 minutes. The guide must be able to give a “gist of” translation of a tour summary. They are also tested giving commentary on a coach and while conducting a walking tour.

I was very impressed with the practical application of this type of testing that could also be replicated in our SFTGG Certification Testing Program. Additionally it would truly qualify language proficiency among all those members who are listed with specific foreign language skills on our roster.

NFTGA-SFTGG Director At Large

Our own Jean Feilmoser, who is one of two current Directors at Large for the NFTGA, gave a presentation on different avenues that tour guides can directly develop into revenue streams. For example, travel writing and/or personal blogs on travel knowledge. Other examples included establishing relationships with the travel person at local or regional Senior Centers, or creating tours for groups of people who are involved in the craze known as GPS Geo Caching.

If this is of interest to any SFTGG member, you can follow up by checking their website at www.geocaching.com.

She also emphasized the value in volunteering to be a local city guide within a delegate’s city, similar to our own San Francisco City Guides.

Before the Panel Discussion concluded and prior Workshop Sessions that were scheduled later, the panel took up the topic of an organization’s Code of Ethics and the importance of promoting ethical behavior in our field as professional tourist guides. Needless to say, this is a hot button topic and a challenge for all organizations to maintain the highest of standards among its membership.

A delegate of The Guild of Professional Guides of Washington, D.C. told the audience how they manage ethics within their organization. At the beginning of each year when Membership fees are due or when new members apply, they send out a copy of the Code of Ethics to that individual. They require each member or member-elect to sign the document before their membership fee is processed.

On the NFTGA Board of Trustees, there is an Ethics Chairperson who works directly with the President (in strict confidentiality) whenever their guild receives an ethical complaint from a tour operator, DMC or transportation company.

Any complaints about a guide's alleged unethical behavior must be addressed in writing to the Board. The responsibility of the Ethics Chair, in counsel with the President, is to investigate the allegation before speaking diplomatically with the guide to hear their side of the story. They then work on methods to resolve the critical issue in the best possible way for all those concerned, but especially for the sake of the guide's reputation.

At the conclusion of the Panel Discussion, the meeting was adjourned for the Delegates and the Attendees to participate in the Workshop of their choice for the final hour of the conference day.

NFTGA Conference Workshops

A series of three workshops were developed for presentation to the attending delegates. Each workshop covered a specific area of the tour guide business in today's fast changing travel industry marketplace.

Workshop A – “A Tour Guide's Guide to the 21st Century”

The synopsis of this workshop defined how the tour guide's role will be affected by the social, technological and environmental forces in today's global economy. Trends in mobile communications and social networking marketing are changing how the younger generation of tourists will select their tour guide choices using social media outlets from other web-based sources such as My Tour Guide.com, GeoTrio or Tours By Locals.com.

Workshop B – “Talent for Talk + Power Point Presentations”

This was a “hands-on” style workshop that covered the new opportunities available to guides looking for work as cruise ship port lecturers. By utilizing your computer skills with Power Point software, tourist guides can learn how to develop a alternative market for their entertaining and informative “slide show” presentations.

Workshop C – “A Primer Course on Cruise Tours You Can Sell and Guide”

This workshop focused on how experienced guides can take advantage of opportunities to generate revenue by selling and escorting tour groups on board cruise ships. Cruise business is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry. A guide can produce their own tour group to guide and have their own travel costs and guiding fees including within the rate paid by the group.

Time limitations precluded all the delegates from attending all three workshops during the same time period. However, the organizers did video of all the workshops and will send out a video record for everyone attending the NFTGA conference.

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World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations

On Wednesday, February 24th, the President of the WFTGA, Rosalind Newlands opened the morning program with an important announcement to all the NFTGA members.

The World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year, 2010. Their slogan for this pivot moment is, “25 Years Guiding World Heritage & Culture.” (www.wftga.org)

WFTGA Mission Statement

“A tourist guide is a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area. That person normally possesses an area specific qualification usually issued and or recognized by the appropriate authority.”

Rosalind also gave a short history of this international organization and their current association with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). WFTGA has partnered with UNESCO who acts as their Patrons and Sponsors in promoting tourist guide education and instructional programs in key Third World nations. There is a lack of formal education and training programs in many countries and the WFTGA plays an important role in developing qualified guides within their own country.

WFTGA President Rosalind Newlands also announced that the 14th Annual WFTGA Convention will be held in Tallinn, Estonia. The week long event, in this beautiful 850 year old Nordic capital city, starts on January 29, 2011 and will attract delegates and members from around the globe.

Members of the NFTGA are invited to attend. Please check (The International World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations Convention) websites: <http://wftga2011.konverents.eu> or www.tgfsi.org for more information or to register online for the event sponsored by the Tallinn Guide Association.

Details of the convention presentations and the social programs will be listed for the review. Pre and Post tours will also be available for purchase by the delegates and attendees.

After our final free afternoon, the NFTGA Delegates met in a closed session. The full agenda included numerous key points to discuss and decide upon. There was agreement to dispense of the previous minutes of the 2007 Conference.

The NFTGA Treasurer's Report will be posted later in the mail to all association or guild.

NFTGA Statistics

The NFTGA has approximately 2200 members across the country along with some members living abroad. Because the SFTGG is a Delegate member of the NFTGA we are also affiliated with the World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations (WFTGA).

The deadline for payment of each association's annual NFTGA membership dues is March 15th. This date was established to support member organizations that are still collecting membership fees during the 1st Quarter of the year.

Member invoices have been sent to all organizations, based on the previous year's membership numbers that include their Business members. The \$2.00 per member fee is capped at \$500 per year for all guilds or associations.

The SFTGG 2009 dues were \$442 based on 221 members including Certified, Associate and Business members. This year, 2010 our NFTGA dues will be approximately the same. An exact figure based on this year's membership total will be available later this year.

NFTGA Group Liability Insurance

The next important topic was the NFTGA Group Liability Insurance coverage. This Group Liability Insurance was obtained from H.W. Phillips an insurance broker from Washington D.C. that acts as an agent for The Hartford Insurance Company. This group policy is becoming more important for many tour managers and guides who work as employees, both temporary part-time and full time. Many companies demand this coverage before hiring guides or tour managers.

Kevin Doran, the President of the Tour Guide Association of Florida and the Treasurer of the NFTGA explained this Group Liability Policy is capped at \$2 million per year. Each incident, against which a claim can be applied, has a total of \$1 million per incident. Last year there were no claims made.

The \$80 fee our members pay for this annual insurance is directly passed along to the NFTGA who passes it directly to the D. C. insurance agency H.W. Phillips. Both of our organizations act as monetary conduits to the insurance company.

Each of our insured members will receive a Certificate of Insurance and a document on NFTGA Letterhead stationery that lists the Policy# and the Telephone number to call to make a incident claim. The SFTGG receives one Copy of the Group Liability Insurance Policy. I suggest we post this in the Members Only Section of our web site for our members to review.

All members belonging to a NFTGA association or guild and buys liability insurance coverage through their organization are automatically enrolled once their payment is processed. Enrollment is on a quarterly basis.

Coverage for most associations begins on January 1st of any given year when most interested members enroll in the first quarter of the year. If a member does not enroll during that initial period, the next time they can get coverage is April 1st.

Those who purchase their insurance December 15th to March 15th the effective date of their policy coverage is April 1, 2010.

The Top 10 Reasons to Belong to the NFTGA

- NFTGA Member Associations without sufficient participants to purchase their own Tour Guide Liability Insurance are eligible through NFTGA.
- Representation. Since July 2007, the NFTGA has a Government Affairs Liaison in Washington, D. C. Our representative attends Congressional hearings, interacts with industry and government insiders on tourism industry related issues. They advise us when participation is to our benefit. A former federal civil servant, Marie Pinho, knows how the system works.
- Numbers. People are more impressed and pay closer attention to your requests when you say you are aligned with thousands of guides nationwide. As NFTGA members interact with industry partners and other key entities, they are similar to the guy in the Verizon commercial, with nearly 2,200 guides standing with them.
- Potential job references through networking.
- Availability of information from and about other guide associations and contact information.
- Access to membership in the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations and a reduced rate to attend their International Conferences. Delegates to the 2009 Bali, Indonesia Conference voted for Estonia's bid to host the 2011 Conference.
- Representation at the WFTGA's Delegates meetings. If the number 2,200 members of the NFTGA make people pay attention, try 100,000 tourist guides who make up the number of WFTGA members world-wide.
- A national voice and presence under the NFTGA umbrella organization.
- National Conferences. Continuing education and opportunities to travel and interact with other guide associations – all come with a tax advantage.
- A chance to help form the future of tourist guiding in America.