

Minutes for NFTGA General Assembly
Ballroom, Wyndham Historic District
Philadelphia, PA
8:15am, Friday, February 23, 2018

The meeting convened at 8:15am. No official attendance was taken. Free attendance to all conference attendees was inferred.

Toni Levitt introduced Annette Morejon from Whisper Systems, who showed a video on her technology. They were founded in Rome in 1999 by tour guides and directors. Using such a system “shows people you care about their experience. It also prevents tagalongs – those who haven’t paid for the tour aren’t listening in.”

Fred Behnke spoke on the trends and challenges of technology and tour guiding. Map Social is his mobile app. It is a tappable content and context emoji app. It can be used by guides to better understand where they’re going. He stated that visitors, guides, and tourism partners can benefit from the app. You can amplify content, engage visitors, analyze interest.

Nick Cvetkovic discussed the state of guiding today. When he started, the APT complaint was “We all have college degrees but we get paid like waitstaff.” In five years, generic tour guides will be gone. A generic tour guide has a broad appeal to a wide audience – a lot of area but not much depth. Anyone can offer it in a competitive market. With technology, we see the rise of enhanced touring. To do well in tour guiding, have a specialized niche with a defined and reachable target audience. Be flexible, maintain a menu of tours, and avoid rigidity.

NFTGA is a national platform to track changes and keep local associations informed of technology developments that affect us.

Benjamin Altschuler, assistant professor of Sport, Tourism, and Hospitality Management at Temple University, spoke about his program and about the concept of cultural intelligence. It is far harder connecting with people from other cultures than our own. “When I’ve gone on tours,” he stated, “I always had the best time when I felt my guide understood me the best.”

Is the manner in which we lead a tour seen as disrespectful in a given culture? In Thailand, a smile can have 23 different potential meanings. In China, silence is good, rather than uncomfortable. Where is the “middle ground” for cultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence? Where does the guide’s responsibility end and the visitor’s begin?

Jim DePhillippo from the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau shared some insights on the Indian market. Median age is 27 years, internet usage is 375 million, etc. India is the 4th largest source market for overseas visitation to Philadelphia and spent \$70 million here in 2016.

Dr. Yang Yang of Temple University spoke about the lucrative and changing Chinese travel market to the US. Language barriers are shrinking. Hawaii, New York City, and Las Vegas are the three most popular destinations. Chinese travelers want to see something new and different, have fun and be entertained, and experience a different culture.

A Chinese passport still requires a visa to visit most countries. Most people get pissed off by their visa application experience. The visa to the US from China is easy.

The cheaply available luxury products are seen as making the trip to the US as being of high value.

Greg DeShields of PHLDiversity, Tami Sortman of the Philadelphia Gay Tourism Caucus, and Ibrahima Diallo of GANYC spoke about incorporating African American and other ethnic groups' perspectives on tour.

Greg DeShields presented a video on his organization and reported the demographic breakdown of Philadelphia. African American buying power is over \$1.3 trillion. In the travel and tourism industry, African Americans spend \$35 billion (\$886 per trip).

Tami Sortman spoke of the heretofore untapped 65-billion dollar market of gay tourism. 83% of gay people in the US have passports, as opposed to the 30% of the straight community. With gay marriage, new honeymoon statistics are emerging and the #1 honeymoon destination in the US is Hawaii.

Ibrahima Diallo did not provide statistics, but simply spoke from a tour guide's perspective as an immigrant from Senegal, speaking different languages, and now giving tours professionally in an American city. Guides are peace ambassadors and can help build a more tolerant world. We must not discriminate. We become responsible for representing the unrepresented. A language is the heart of a culture. The accent is the soul of the language. Hearing people's accents from around the world HELPS you relate to them on a tour. It is important to know who your clients are.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30.