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Stay-cation Trend? Or, Here to Stay? ... The Stay-cation

By Carolyn J. Feimster SCMD, President, CJF Marketing International, North Brunswick, NJ

WE STARTED WITH THE VACATION. THEN, AS AN ANSWER TO THE GIRLFRIEND GETAWAY, THE "MAN-CATION" WAS CREATED. And now it seems like all we hear about is the "Stay-cation." Nothing like an economic downturn to turn around the travel habits of the American consumer. Whether you feel the issues with the economy are more media hype or real, you cannot deny the increase in gas prices, which at the beginning of summer scared the travel and tourism industry. But Americans are resilient and no one is going to keep us from traveling!

If you were planning to drive for your vacation, you felt it at the pump. If you were planning to fly, you most certainly felt it either in air fares or reduced schedules — not to mention that besides the ticket price, you pay to check your bag, to have a bite to eat, maybe to use the restroom? According to a study done for *USA Today* by Travelocity, FareCompare.com and Harrell Associates, domestic fares this summer were up 12% to 15%, and on some routes, more than 200%! What this means for a family of four is an increase of about \$1,000 to fly cross-country. So what are we to do? Certainly we are not going to stop traveling. But we will modify our travel habits a bit.

Recently, an editorial in a travel trade publication talked about a family of four realizing they just may not be able to take their annual trip west to see the rest of the family. Instead, they choose to take a "stay-cation" in Lexington, KY. It turned out to be as relaxing as any trip — probably more so — without having to deal with flying or driving with both a toddler and

an infant! They enjoyed themselves as they lounged by the pool, cooked out, made homemade ice cream, went to the park, saw fireworks, visited an aquarium and never ventured more than an hour and a half away from home by car. An economical green vacation that boosts the local economy! And, no need to deal with packing! What could be better?

Become a Tourist at Home

The media has picked up on this trend. CNN recently covered the stay-cation by focusing on those who decided to take time off from work to enjoy life at home. One businessman said he felt he got more bang for the buck by staying home and enjoying his own lush garden, pool with a water-slide and area to entertain friends. But the true stay-cation is more than that. It means becoming a tourist in or near your own home. However, experts warn that with today's technology you run the risk of never truly getting away from the office if you are still daily checking email at home and carrying your Blackberry. It is

especially bad for a culture that takes the shortest vacations in the industrial world. Take a look at France, where 30 days of paid vacation is mandatory every year! But we are beginning to realize, as recently reported by Fox News Channel, the importance of travel for the health, well-being and productivity of Americans.

Even TIA (Travel Industry Association of America) is getting requests from media wanting to know more about this trend. TIA recently fielded a request for information from a journalist from *USA Today* working on a story called, Did Staycations Help Your Area Have a Better Summer?

However, Travelmole, the on-line community for the travel and tourism industry ran an article disputing the concept. According to the AAA President and CEO, more travelers are concerned about the economy, gasoline prices and rising airfares so they are opting to travel by train, bus, motorcycle and cruiseship to their holiday destination. In fact, in spite of all the talk of stay-cations, a recent survey revealed that 59% of US adults said they plan to take a trip at least 100 miles from their home in the next six months — only a slight dip from the 61% who said so in recent years. "Drive-to" destinations are some of the fastest growing in terms of hotel bookings on Expedia.

So what is all the hype about? According to Eric Gor-

don, owner of the tour company Beyond Times Square in NYC, "I think this concept of staying closer to home has always held an interest for people living in urban areas, but it is rather new for those in rural regions." In his business he is seeing a rise in the popularity of motorcoach day-trips to NYC, indicating that people are staying closer to home but still wanting to travel.

With the Olafur Eliasson Waterfalls public art fund exhibit in NYC, day tripper arrivals by motorcoach dramatically increased this summer and will continue to do so through mid-October when the exhibition closes. Contacting the motorcoach companies in advance for South Street Seaport to distribute the VIP Welcome Package of discounts and incentives to their clients has resulted in a quadrupling of the amount of vouchers being redeemed. That was just in the first six weeks of the exhibition.

We also developed Waterfalls packages with about a half dozen hotels in downtown that promoted seeing the Falls either from the Seaport or via the New York Water Taxi, which departs from the Seaport. Embassy Suites alone sold over 100 packages in the first six weeks. Many guests staying at the hotel or arriving via motorcoach were from the surrounding areas.

Circle Line Downtown, which also operates out of South Street Seaport, offers Fall Foliage Cruises to the Hudson Valley, furthering the notion of "stay-cation," because New Yorkers can discover a different environment within close prox-

imity to New York City. This also brings them down to the South Street Seaport shopping district.

DMOs in on the Action

Plus, if the media says it is a trend, it must be. So, of course, the DMOs (destination marketing organizations) are going to capitalize on any new trend that makes sense!

NYC & Company, the marketing, tourism and partnership organization for NYC, issued a late-summer press release encouraging New Yorkers who are working and vaca-

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tioning less to "Go Local." They put together a promotion called "Summer Fridays" that encouraged locals to explore their own back yard.

The head of the organization said they were encouraging residents who work hard all week to open their eyes to all the relaxing activities they still have time to enjoy before the winter, from the beaches, park pools and rooftops to shopping, dining, entertainment, and arts and cultural offerings throughout the city. Weekly itineraries posted on their website promot-

ed the top activities for that weekend. The campaign included print advertising, taxi advertising and promotional materials such as beach balls and Frisbees. Check out the website

www.nycvisit.com/golocal/ and you will see they say "Go Local" all year round!

Last spring, The Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) asked hotels in the area to offer a "Florida Resident Rate" that the CVB could promote on their website www.sunny.org. Ellen Serra, director of sales and marketing at the Comfort Suites Airport and Cruise Port, said, "The Florida Resident Rate was so successful it held our numbers up this summer because other markets' numbers dropped significantly. Even though it was a drastic discount, it kept the hotel's occupancy just slightly below 2007 and meant that we did not have to lay off any of our staff."

The *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* ran an article in the Sunday travel section suggesting that residents of Fort Lauderdale drive up the road to West Palm Beach for a one-night stay-cation in a bed and breakfast, and listed several B & Bs.

How Centers can Benefit

How can shopping centers take advantage of this trend? First of all, find out if your DMO is doing a stay-cation campaign. If so, discuss how you can partner with them to drive some of that traffic to your center. If they are not doing anything and you cannot convince them of the potential,

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Stay-cations

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consider the following ideas:

- Work with your key hotels. Hotels that focus on business travel during the week often look for ways to fill rooms over the weekend. Partner with them to create an “Experience Your City Like a Tourist” package which would include your shopping and dining incentives. Partner with your attractions to include tickets. Some attractions will run off-seasons promotion where they will offer discounted tickets to locals.
- When you develop a package, tie in specific merchants who will offer a complimentary cocktail or dessert with the purchase of an entrée.
- Include luxury items such as a personal shopper and limo service to and from the hotel.
- VFR. Develop a visiting friends and relatives program where the local receives the same incentives you would give the tourist when he brings friends and family to your center to shop.
- Google stay-cation and research what is happening in your own destination. For example, you will pull up the following website www.fodors.com/news/story_2932.html. Click on it and you will find hotels throughout the country promoting stay-cation packages. Any of these could include shopping incentives. Keep scroll-

ing down and you will find the “Shop, Then Drop” package in San Francisco at The Orchard Hotel. It includes a one-night stay, valet parking, a box of truffles and a thick packet of local shopping coupons. For more information on this package, go to www.theorchardhotel.com/html/sf-shopping-center-pkg.asp

What about you? Too busy this past summer to take a real vacation? Then get out and experience your own city! Just pick up one of those local tourist publications you advertise in and see what’s going on! Pauline Frommer of Pauline Frommer’s Travel Guide offers the following tips:

- Don’t stay at home; go to a nice hotel. Tell them you are a local and they may offer you a discount so you will recommend the hotel to your contacts.
- Use the guidebooks to find out about “hotspots.”
- Check out Chowhound.com or Roadfood.com to find out about your local eateries.
- Join your local museum to get on their list so you can keep up with what is going on.
- And while you are experiencing your own city, look for potential travel trade partners (attractions, museums, hotels, etc.) with whom you can partner.

We are continuing this series of articles on tourism every other month and would like to focus on some of the more innovative tourism programs. Please submit your pro-

grams to me, either via e-mail Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com, fax 732-545-3138 or mail. If possible, include samples of your graphics via e-mail. Full credit will be given to the person or team responsible for the program. Visit our new web site: www.cjfmarketinginternational.com. ■

CJF Marketing International offers a range of services for creating and implementing strategic tourism, economic development and marketing programs for shopping centers, urban entertainment projects, downtown retail districts, communities and commercial properties globally. The firm also offers educational programs and seminars for corporate meeting planners, shopping center developers, communities and re-development agencies. Feimster can be reached at 732/249-6080.

UR Votes Count

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voices can be. There’s no doubt the country will take notice when the results are announced at the end of the UR Votes Count campaign.”

To support UR Votes Count, GGP partnered with Envision EMI, LLC, the world’s largest creator of leadership and success programs for high achieving young people, as well as Declare Yourself, a national nonpartisan, non-profit campaign to empower and encourage every eligible 18-year-old in America to register and vote in the presidential primaries and 2008 election. ■