



FAM shows how to make the impossible possible

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There's more to a destination than words and pictures on a page. That's why it's common for event planners to embark on familiarization tours (aka FAMs) for an up-close and personal look at all the need-to-see sites and sights.

“The whole idea behind a FAM is to help potential clients become acquainted with the diversity of the destination's tourism product – everything from its facilities and services to its attractions and cultural activities,” says Shannon Valeriotte, Account Director, Niagara Falls Business Events. Valeriotte is no stranger to FAMs, having led more than a few dozen in her career. It's most recent familiarization tour was held from January 25 – 27, 2018, and welcomed meeting planners, event producers, and other corporate influencers to a winter-themed excursion throughout Niagara Falls.

“We wanted to treat our guests to a 'chilled out' winter experience in which we could highlight seasonal activities and attractions unique to winter in Niagara Falls and show planners how we could take their big and seemingly impossible ideas and make them a reality,” she explains.

Sticking to the plan

An effective FAM requires careful planning and consideration. The tour itinerary, for one, should cater to guests' wants and introduce them to a destination's unique selling propositions. For NFBE's Winter FAM, that meant taking guests through a mix of Niagara Falls meeting facilities, scenic accommodations, gaming venues, entertainment spaces, and award-winning wineries.

“Itineraries will obviously vary depending on the group, but it's wise to balance the needs of the FAM attendees and the hosts accommodating them,” offers Valeriotte, noting, “The great thing about our FAM was that we achieved a balanced perspective of Niagara Falls: one being that it a good fit for hosting a wide variety of business events and the other being that it is well-equipped

to accommodate groups looking for off-site teambuilding and leisure activities.”

It's also important to ensure the FAM is respectful of guests' time in that the tour not only stays on course but that it also provides time for attendees to break away from the group and explore the location for themselves.

The personal touches

There's no such thing as a cookie-cutter FAM. Herein, including special touches that cater to each group's background and requests can make an impression. They can be as small as a location-specific “loot bag” at the end of the trip or as grandiose as a five-star meal at one of the destination's newest venues.

Special touches can also take the form of unique experiences. During NFBE's Winter FAM, for example, attendees were invited to partake in the Niagara Icewine Festival, enjoy a private concert, plant fresh herbs with a local horticultural school, take in an aerial dancing performance, and travel in class with luxury vehicles.

What made these and other FAM experiences even more memorable, adds Valeriote, was the fact attendees were invited to enjoy them with a guest: “This was a big plus in the sense that it swayed people's decision to give up their personal time to travel to Niagara Falls to participate in our FAM. Having that special person by their side made them feel comfortable and it eased the process of networking and connecting with other people.”

Taking the lead

Naturally, designing an impactful FAM requires a coordinated effort. That's why the NFBE team worked with an industry-leading management company who arranged everything from transportation to travel, menus and dining, budgeting and scheduling, to behind-the-scenes logistics.

“It's crucial that a FAM be well run, which means making sure the people coordinating it are experts in organizing details big and small from the tour's conception to its completion,” Valeriote insists.

Nurturing relationships

Websites and brochures are one way to browse the offerings of a business events destination, but nothing beats being there and doing it first-hand. After all, says Valeriote, “Seeing is believing. Clients become more confident and motivated to host an event in your destination once they can speak positively about it from their own personal experience”.

When done right, FAMs can also be a worthwhile way to nurture client relationships, leading to that emotional bond you just don't get without one-on-one contact. “We're in the relationship business. More than anything, we want to play our part by saying yes to the things that have never been done before to making the impossible possible.”

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