

Cover Story: Rolling into town

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CHARLOTTE, NC (WBTV) - Putting Charlotte on the map. The people who book bus tours in town this week for their annual meeting. More than 3,500 delegates gathering at the Charlotte Convention Center. And while it may not be a group you're familiar with as PrimeTime's Jeff Atkinson found, having the tour operators here will mean big bucks for the city down the road.

"It's always wow."

Pretty much sums up what people say when they board one of these big behemoths.

"Oh my gosh. This is not the bus I remember."

A dozen motorcoaches spread out in the exhibit hall of the Charlotte Convention Center. Part of the American Bus Association's annual meeting known as Marketplace.

Eron Shosteck is with the A.B.A. "You're really inviting family in when you have the hospitality industry here," he says.

Motorcoach builders like Prevost and BCI. And bus and tour operators, people like Sightline, hooking up with those who want their tour group business.

Destinations like Canada. Maryland. Virginia Beach.

Charlotte's hosting, but also hoping to score some future tour group business too.

"Every destination that has bus tours coming to it.. you're multiplying exponentially what you otherwise get trying to get every family to come," says Shosteck.

Consider this: a motorcoach group that stays just one night in a city spends as much as 14-thousand dollars in the local economy.

Which is why Charlotte scored a coup luring the convention here.

Local charters have been showing off the area as a tourist's destination, hoping they'll bring others back.

The American Bus Association studies found cities who host the convention see a 20-to-30 percent increase in bus tours years later.

It's also a time to check out the latest technology.

One company's offering a device know as "Geo genius." which works like a smart bus.

Triggered by GPS, it's an audio/video tour guide that tour operators use, giving every guest the same tour experience.

It's Charlotte's first time to host.

This tour operator believes it won't be the last.

"I don't think you're going to be a well kept secret after this week. I think everybody's going to see what Charlotte has to offer," says John Meier with Badger Coaches of Wisconsin.

What are convention-goers seeing while they're here?

Attractions in Center City, of course. They'll also visit SouthPark and SouthEnd and tour Lowe's Motor Speedway.

The American Bus Association convention runs through Monday.



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