

A Conversion with Nicole Amiel, Director - Eastern Canada, Beattie Tartan
Bringing Media into your Destination on a Fam Tour

1. What is the meaning/definition of FAM Trip in the Tourism industry?

The actual dictionary definition of a FAM trip or plural, fam trips, originating in Britain in the hospitality industry. It's a free or low-cost trip for media, travel agents or consultants provided by a travel operator or an airline as a means of promoting their service, AKA a Press Trip. The purpose of hosting a media FAM trip is really to garner positive editorial publicity about a destination or organization. And you will see that from all types of travel providers, whether it's a tour operator, a hotel chain, or a tourism board or individual DMOs that represent a destination, they use these types of trips to really educate about their products and services and promote them so that way they can reach a variety of different audiences. Usually, it's targeted towards the media, but you'll also see sometimes that you'll hear people using it in terms of bringing in travel agents and getting them familiarized with the product as well. When we talk about it being open to media there are traditional media but also encompasses social media, influencers and bloggers. Things have definitely changed in the last decade or so, and these new outlets have proven to be really useful for us in getting those messages out.

2. What do you look for when vetting media to come on a FAM Tour?

A FAM can be seen as a free vacation by some of the inexperienced influencers but we take a really hard look when we're vetting the potential delegate. You can make sure that you're looking at what types of outlets they work for, if it's their own, what is their engagement? What is their reach? Do they target the audience that you're hoping to attract? From a media standpoint, talking about traditional media, we really want to make sure that they have confirmed coverage. Those are two really key parts of the vetting process. If you're going to go outside of that and talk with travel agents, it's more for education purposes. So, making sure that the agency is accredited and is going to be moving forward with pushing that destination to their clients. So, with them, it's a little bit harder, but you just want to make sure that they're an accredited organization.

3. How do you determine which media outlets you want to work with?

It's really specific to the client. So, for us, with RTO 9 specifically, it's really important that we know the destination well and understand what there is to offer, what our targets are, what the audience is that you're trying to attract? Then we're going to decide on a theme and a topline itinerary based on the story that we want to be told? What do we want people to see and experience? And also taking it further and thinking, what ultimate story that we want to be written. We then determine what the key targets are. We're going to look at top tier media, national is always good, especially right now because of the shift towards domestic tourism – we want to attract people from across the country – but we'll also look at local media. Outlets based in the extended region and in neighbouring communities – what we call 'drive' – have become increasingly important as well as they influence the audience that can currently travel;

in fact, these are often great low-hanging fruit that wouldn't generally be considered so are thrilled for the opportunities to create more dynamic content these days. We do a lot of research when we're putting together our plans even prior to our outreach. We really like to take a dive deep. We use a platform called Cision, which is a media database, and it has all the current impressions and reach numbers, which is an important consideration for us to qualify an outlet's suitability. We also have to determine whether the story we want to tell is on brand and whether they've written about the region recently. In terms of writers, we will focus on travel or theme-specific beats but it doesn't always matter if they are a staff writer or a freelancer who writes for a number of different publications as long as they have a secured assignment. Finally, when we're talking to the media about participating in a FAM trip, we make sure that we set reasonable and achievable objectives. And while that goes for the media, it also applies to our clients. We work with them to understand that we might only end up getting 80% of the key results we were hoping to achieve and set an agreeable threshold for success that everyone is comfortable with. We never want to make promises to our clients, or to the media that we're hosting, that we can't hold up our end of the bargain on.

4. Is there a contract that needs to be signed? What are the deliverables?

We have a FAM Trip form so that we provide to media once they have accepted to participate in a trip; it includes all of the key information including the outlet that they're coming on behalf of, reach numbers, social handles, planned publication dates, coverage topics and confirmation of coverage expectation, dates of the trip, etc. They sign it and it becomes a contract of sorts and can therefore hold them sort of accountable.

5. What would a typical itinerary look like coming into our region? What would you want to ask the influencer to do?

It's a two-fold kind of thing. It's not only what they want to do, but it's also what we want them to do. When we're putting together that sort of communication with them, we start building out an itinerary and it's for us to decide what experiences, services, products that we want them to focus on. We'll go through all of it with them, to ensure they understand that this is why we're actually inviting them into the area, and then we'll talk with them about what they need to/can give us in return. Oftentimes we'll negotiate, like with a national newspaper, for example, that's coming in, we'll talk about whether that coverage is going to live online as well as in print. What are the deadlines and things like that? Of course, things may change. We will talk to them about when coverage is expected to drop because it's also important for us that we talk to them about when it would be the most useful for us. How it is going to target the right audience. We are very clear with all of the details right off the top; so whether it's a theme or what's going to be included, we're setting and managing expectations and making sure that there's a really clear line of communication.

6. What would you showcase on a FAM?

That really depends; we definitely want to showcase experiences that are unique to the region. Something that they can't get everywhere, something that's really going to grab the attention of their audience and bring them out to visit us. We wouldn't want to highlight something like a chain that exists everywhere; that's not really going to inspire someone's wanderlust, right? We want to show the best of the region and why somebody should want to come and visit and put it on their list of to-dos. We try to build out according to the type of journalist or influencer that they are. If somebody is very food-specific, then we're really going to focus on those F&B experiences showcasing the top restaurants and the culinary diversity of the region. If there are partnerships, especially in the RTO region, between the farms and local producers, with the local restaurants, those are the type of things that make the region really unique. Things you can't find in a lot of big cities; and by the same token, if you're bringing out somebody that's family-focused, we'll want to make sure that everything that they're doing on their trip is really family-friendly and enjoyable for all age groups so everyone can enjoy and participate. We will also, if it's a fashion person, take them on a tour of all of your top boutiques and local shops, where they're going to find something they can't find anywhere else. I think the key here is really knowing your audience, knowing what they - the media or the influencer - covers and then curating that itinerary. So, it's really specific, it has to speak to not only them but to their audience as well.

7. Can you talk a little bit about traditional journalists vs. social media influencers? When to bring in an influencer vs media journalist?

There is no clear rule here, so it depends upon the message that you want to get across, and who your target market is. They both have value. The reach of a newspaper or magazine is going to be a little bit broader, in the most general circumstances. But that's not always the case. There are some influencers in Canada with huge worldwide audiences. We try to do a balance at this point. It used to be strictly regular media only, and now we really try to do a balance. I tend personally to still lean a little bit to the traditional side, but influencers are so important nowadays, you can build really good and long-lasting relationships with them, you can trust them and know that they're going to give everything that they've promised to give. A lot of them, especially when you have a great relationship, will go above and beyond. Whereas, a media outlet is very contract bound and there are a lot of constraints built-in by the medium itself. With traditional outlets, you usually will only get one story/article but influencers can create all sorts of different content. You're getting photos and videos and blogs. Instagram Stories, for example, has proven to be really great and if you can get them to add them as a highlight as well so that content can live for a long time, that's a huge win. But I never rule one or the other out. The one thing I will say though is that media can't charge you. Unless you're doing like an advertorial campaign, that coverage is generally free. You are, of course, going to take care of and comp their stay and all of the experiences that they go through, including their or food and bev, so it can still take a substantial budget, but it's still definitely more cost

effective. For influencers, not only are you comping their trip, but there is always a pay-to-play aspect of it. It's very rare that you'll get sort of an in-kind trade.

8. What kind of take-aways should you provide your media personality?

It's so nice to be able to do something like that; it's not a must-do, but it's nice-to-do. If we decide to do it we always try to put together something that's unique to the region. If your region is really known for their wine, providing a few nice bottles that they can enjoy after their day out, but that they can also maybe take home and will sit in their wine rack so that every time they see it, they think of you is an easy gift. Is a great memory recall trick. And the other thing that we'll do is something with utility. IFor a FAM Trip a couple of years ago, we gave everybody selfie sticks. They were branded by the client and it was something that they were able to create their content with; so that was really useful on the trip. I've also done a luggage scale. Same thing, it was branded and something that they could use every time they've travelled since. And, again, it's a great recall tool. I don't think you need to go crazy. I've seen some beautiful gift baskets that have a huge slew of products but it is not expected. I think being thoughtful and considered is more important.

9. Do you have any last comments we should be aware of when bringing influencers into our Region?

I think as much as it's important for them to do their job, it's really important that if you are going to be a host, that you are a good host. I like to joke that you really need to plan out every detail. You are basically a tour guide, a travel expert, a nurse, a timekeeper, sometimes an interpreter, a mama, a hostess, bus keeper, peacekeeper, diplomat, flight attendant, baggage clerk. You really need to wear all of the hats because they are really in your care. Also, if you are going to bring them out, make sure to spend time with them and build a personal relationship. Share a meal with them. That's really a great time for you to connect and build a longer-term relationship that will endear you to them. And then you'll probably see more content come out of it than you expected.

A FAM trip is a huge investment for time, money and personnel. Make sure that you're giving it your all and you should definitely see results that match.