

Monthly report Benelux

May 2025



Prepared by:



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About TSUSA - Global Partner Programming

We appreciate the everlasting support of Travel South USA, and through this support we continue to be top-of-mind with the beautiful Travel South region, amongst trade, media and potential travelers. We have the pleasure to already be familiar with the region for several years, and look forward to yet another year where we can focus on promoting the GPP states. We are happy and grateful that for the coming budget year we can again count on 9 states, with a small change: Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia!

We are used to multiple state marketing, and we will make sure every state will get its own fair share of attention, highlighting each unique selling points, highlights, and must-sees, together with an overall promotion of the Southern region. We will make sure you will get a good ROI on every marketing dollar spent. And the assurance you spend it in a healthy mature market, ready and eager to travel.

The overall goal is a growth in numbers of sales, exposure, and awareness of the travel possibilities to the Travel South states. Both the Dutch and the Belgian market are mature and healthy, with experienced and professional key trade and media players. We will continue to create and initiate smart marketing opportunities, resulting in a growth in visitation from the Benelux to the region and maximizing visitor spending and impact. Storytelling will play an important part in achieving our goals. Food, Music Culture, History and Outdoors are the main themes.

On a monthly basis we will be providing updates on the various marketing projects that have been approved for this fiscal year, we will provide an insight into the Benelux market and include any other information/ topics that are of relevance to the Travel South region.

Why the Benelux market?

- 81% of the Dutch population (17.9 million) and 74% of the Belgium population (11,7 million) is vacationing at least once a year.
- A steady and stable market. Small, yet big in our number of travellers to the USA. 4 out of 100 people visit the USA yearly.
- High potential for 2nd and 3rd tier destinations and potential for the shoulder season
- Both the Dutch and the Belgians receive an 8% annual extra salary called “vacation payout”
- The Dutch have at least 25 vacation days and about 10 public holidays, the Belgians have at least 20 vacation days and also 10 public holidays.
- The average time spent in the USA is: 18 days

I. Executive summary

- **Social media:** This month, the Travel South region was mentioned in **12 social media posts**. *Amerika Only* published 4 posts highlighting Hilton Head, **South Carolina**. *Tioga Tours* promoted two online articles about the **Travel South region**. *VisitUSA Belgium* and *Joker.be* shared a giveaway for the **Blues Peer Festival**.
- **Publications:** Over the past month, the Travel South region received extensive media attention, with a total of **11 online articles** and **9 printed features**. **Kentucky** was highlighted on *Historia.net* in a story about Lexington's horse culture, while *RonReizen* published an article exploring the creative side of **Alabama**. *TravEcademy* contributed by republishing our newsletter, which featured **all Travel South states** along with **ROTS**. They also published a separate article about new travel experiences, mentioning several Southern states. *Blues Magazine* included **Louisiana** in an article about musician Rodney Crowell. While *Visit USA The Netherlands* featured **Tennessee** and **ROTS** in a blog post about city hopping in the United States. *UStravel.nl* offered tips for traveling on a budget in the USA, with several **Travel South states** among the recommendations. Print media also played a strong role. *Meridian Travel* published seven articles in their magazine, highlighting almost all **Travel South states**, including **ROTS**. Similarly, *Het Parool* covered **all states** in one of their print articles. *Travelpro* also mentioned **Tennessee** and **ROTS** in their magazine. Finally, we sent out our own newsletter this month, once again spotlighting **all Travel South states** and **ROTS**.

3 online articles are part of the 2-year partnership with WideOyster – covering **Louisiana** (food, music and swamps), 5 natureparks in the south (**WV, MI, SC, AL & MO**) and the backroads of the TS region, crusing through **WV, NC, TN & KY**.
- This month the **Product Survey** was completed, providing a detailed insight into the product offering of Dutch and Belgian tour operators. This year we saw again a steady increase as a result of the continued efforts that have been made in both markets.
- Following a sales mission through the UK and France, Doug Bourgeois from **Louisiana** Office of Tourism extended his trip with one day in The Netherlands. We hosted a media dinner party at Restaurant Tolhuistuin in Amsterdam Noord, to celebrate the 'Year of food 2025'. **Ten dutch travel media** joined us for an inspiring and tasty evening! Some of the dishes had a Louisiana twist - spiced up with some Cajun flavors.

International Metrics FY 24/25

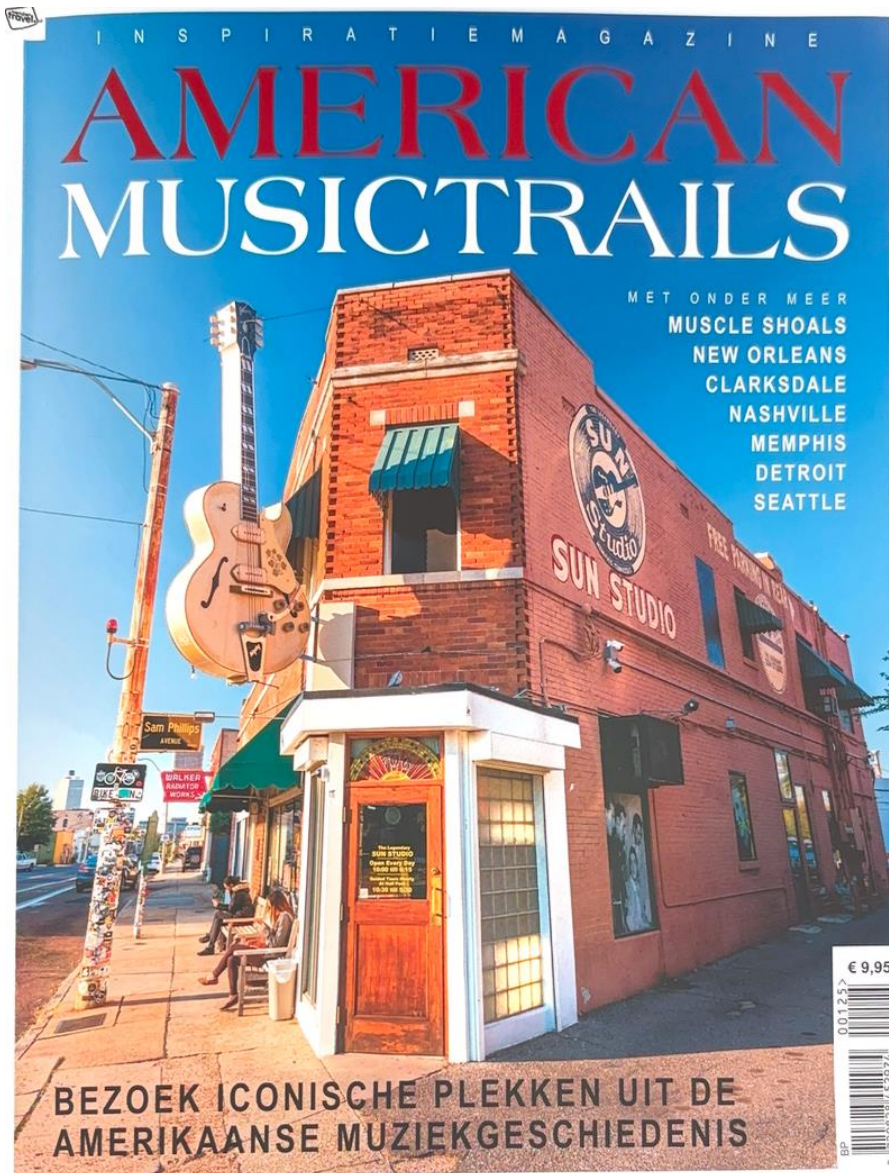
	July	Aug	Sept	Q1 TOTAL	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q2 TOTAL	Jan	Feb	March	Q3 TOTAL	April	May	June	Q4 TOTAL	FY24/25 TOTAL
Benelux																	
Trade Meetings/Trainings	5	8	6	19	6	10	7	23	7	4	6	17	13	11		24	83
Number of Agents Trained	5	41	149	195	133	87	70	290	86	97	79	262	65	25		90	837
PR																	
Media Meetings	5	3	4	12	29	3	5	37	5	3	2	10	3	11		14	73
Total number of articles published	18	5	5	28	13	20	12	45	8	14	15	37	11	20		31	141
Impressions	47,866	5,769	5,676	59,311	196,665	112,006	165,141	473,812	19,117	100,116	449,115	568,348	823,437	560,838		1,384,275	2,485,746
Newsletter																	
Open Rate	37%	-	45%	41%	43%	34%	35%	37%	43%	40%	-	42%	37%	44,5%		37%	39.94%

II. Communication & PR

News Releases

- Coverage book has been updated:

<https://app.coveragebook.com/29490/books/f8d792af8750ac9a>



III. Sales Calls

Media Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings)

Contacts	Interests / Status	Follow-up																				
Harald Kolkman – Meridian Travel	<p>This month Meridian Travel released a special themed guide ‘American Music Trails’ – covering various Travel South cities: Clarksdale, Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans. The magazine has partnerd with five U.S. specialist tour operators: GoAmerika, Le Beau Reizen, AmerikaNu.nl, Tioga Tours en UStravel.nl – who all have a sample itinerary through the region included in the magazine.</p> <p>Further Harald expressed that he submitted his story on West-Virginia, to win the media award during IPW. We will have to wait and see if he gets nominated</p>																					
	<p>Together with Louisiana office of tourism we hosted a media dinner to celebrate the ‘Year of Food 2025’. The following 10 media were present:</p> <table><tr><td>René Kok</td><td>Annonu Events/Travelbook</td></tr><tr><td>Boy Tijbosch</td><td>AmerikaOnly</td></tr><tr><td>Mila Jaipal</td><td>Your Travel Reporter</td></tr><tr><td>Jody Mijts</td><td>Ongewoonlekker</td></tr><tr><td>Erik klap</td><td>Klap Media</td></tr><tr><td>Xenia Kasper</td><td>Ron Reizen</td></tr><tr><td>Nico van Dijk</td><td>Reisprofs.nl</td></tr><tr><td>Corno van den Berg</td><td>Droomplekken.nl</td></tr><tr><td>Patrick Mulder</td><td>Verkeersbureaus.info</td></tr><tr><td>Annelies Rigte</td><td>Travel journalist/photographer</td></tr></table>	René Kok	Annonu Events/Travelbook	Boy Tijbosch	AmerikaOnly	Mila Jaipal	Your Travel Reporter	Jody Mijts	Ongewoonlekker	Erik klap	Klap Media	Xenia Kasper	Ron Reizen	Nico van Dijk	Reisprofs.nl	Corno van den Berg	Droomplekken.nl	Patrick Mulder	Verkeersbureaus.info	Annelies Rigte	Travel journalist/photographer	
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Contacts	Interests / Status	Follow-up
Django – Let’s Travel	<p>While bookings to the United States are still coming in steadily, the team has observed a shift in traveler sentiment.</p> <p>As a proactive response, the company decided earlier this year to expand its portfolio with new destinations. They remain optimistic that interest in the U.S. will rise again once media coverage becomes more favorable.</p>	
Jan Nijenhuis – Do-USA	<p>Jan reports they benefit from offering more than just the USA, which is currently underperforming. Although the initial results were promising, interest has significantly declined since January. Many clients now opt for alternatives such as Canada, Thailand, or South Africa—an understandable shift, though somewhat disappointing.</p> <p>Looking ahead, they do not expect a recovery in 2025, and if current trends continue, 2026 may also present challenges. Fortunately, they are still achieving strong results even without a robust U.S. market.</p>	
Wolfgang Hendrix – UStravel.nl	<p>They have launched a new label: Exploretravel.nl. The brand aims to offer customized, high-quality trips worldwide—including to South America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania—while maintaining the same personal service and expertise his clients know from North America trips. The new brand is both B2C and B2B focused. The idea of the new brand had already been</p>	

	<p>in development for some time. The pandemic highlighted the risk of relying on just one or two destinations. In addition, many past customers who traveled to the US or Canada wanted to book other destinations with the same team. Exploretravel now can meet that demand. They will now have three separate websites with different backends: ustravel.nl, canadatransel.nl, exploretavel.nl.</p> <p>We also spoke with Wolfgang about their US bookings, which haven't been great. They are pushing and pulling for bookings, and still see an effect of the negative travel sentiment. Customers that are returning from the US all report a great visit.</p>	
Gerda van 't Land – Buitengewoon Reizen	<p>We contacted Gerda to discuss the registration process for the Travel South activation concert during IPW, which all works now.</p> <p>Gerda expressed that things are improving and gradually falling into place following the acquisition of the booking operations of Buitengewoon Reizen by US Travel. However, she noted that the transition has been quite a challenging process.</p> <p>She also shared her ongoing ambition to enable more tour operators to offer accessible travel packages. She emphasized that travelers with special needs do not limit themselves to one company, and there is a growing need for broader product availability in this segment. To help achieve this, she is offering touroperators the opportunity for a training sessions that will equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to expand their accessible travel offerings. A few operators have already shown interest. In terms of the bookings – the confirmed a US booking right before we called. But it's not yet where they want to be.</p>	
Charonne in 't Veld – Brand USA Benelux	<p>Charonne let us know that one of the main PR Managers at Brand USA Benelux, Irene Lipper, is leaving the company. They are sad to see her go and are still looking for a replacement, but this will be hard to find someone with the same amount of experience. Our main point of contact will remain Charonne.</p>	
Frans Schoon – Indeleble Travel	<p>Frans let us know that, as he hasn't started their business so long ago he does not feel the effects of the travel sentiment towards the US so heavily. He is still orienting the course of the business that for now has a USA/Japan focus. He also receives requests for other destinations, which may have potential in the future. He is very active in the market with his research and building his network. In their first year they became a member of Visit USA, and he is also member of the board.</p>	
Sarah Vandermaesen – Connections	<p>Sarah let us know that they finally seeing an uplift again in booking numbers. This was from December till May it wasn't very positive, but from May onwards they are seeing good signs again for the USA.</p>	
Marcel Lekkerkerk – Airline Partnerships Director at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol	<p>We spoke with Marcel about th new Icelandair flight to Nashville, and the current strong connection Amsterdam has to the region – though Atlanta. We expressed the potention for a direct route AMS – MSY, as this is a poulair starting and ending point for travers. It is something they might consider in the future.</p>	
Birgitte Bosma – Visit USA The Netherlands	<p>Visit USA The Netherlands has distributed a survey to its tour operator, airline, and car/RV rental members, gathering insights on current traveler sentiment, booking performance, and future projections. The collected data will be used to create an open and transparent market overview, which will be shared with all members via a press release — all in preparation for IPW.</p>	
Marieke van der Weijden – Icelandair	<p>When asking Marieke about the current booking overview she expressed that their results at the start of the year were in fact much better than the</p>	

	<p>overall -20% which was recorded nationally. In a YTD comparison they were on a plus. She explained this to be a result of Covid. In that time Icelandair has lost a significant market share, as many of the other larger airlines were offering low prices, to fill the planes as much as possible – making Icelandairs’ tariffs much more expensive in comparison. At the start of the year Icelandair had lower prices – resulting in a boost of bookings. This is now slightly decreasing again – after other airlines have lowered their prices again and they are experiencing an audience who is still cautious and waiting to book.</p>	
<p>Andre van der Sluis – JetBlue</p>	<p>Andre is looking at their plans for 2025/2026. They did many different marketing activities last year, which now gives them a good idea of what they experienced as effective and valuable for 2025/2026. Amongst their plans are a bigger focus on consumers. They were surprised by the positive experience at Vakantiebeurs last year and plan a B2C stand for 2025. They’ve noticed that the bookings are coming in very short before departure. For this reason, they aren’t worried about the total tickets sold to the USA, even though they do have available seats still for this summer. He mentioned that the last two weeks of May specifically showed a high increase in bookings. Netherlands is doing well now, France and UK less.</p>	

IV. Newsletter

Newsletter to the trade and media

This month's newsletter focused on the theme “*Luxury Experiences for Under \$100*” in the Travel South region. We ensured equal representation of **all states**, including **ROTS**, throughout the content. The newsletter showcased a wide variety of luxury experiences—all at an affordable price point. From relaxing spa treatments and outdoor adventures to wine tastings, fine dining, and more, the emphasis was on experiences that feel luxurious but remain budget-friendly. The newsletter achieved a good open rate.

The next newsletter, scheduled for June, will focus on “*Free things to do while in the South*”.

Status	Topic	Subscribers	Open rate	Click-thru rate
Newsletter sent out on: May 26 th	<i>Luxury experiences for under \$100</i>	Trade		
		534	42.8%	0.4%
		Media		
		358	46.2%	0.3%

V. Market Update

Update on Dutch and Belgian travellers

Travel professionals in the Benelux are noticing that clients increasingly have questions about traveling to the United States. Topics such as the political climate, stricter border controls, rising costs, customs procedures, LGBTQAI+ friendliness, and the economic impact of current policies are causing uncertainty. This makes the role of the travel advisor more important than ever. Visit USA Belgium emphasizes that, with their expertise and experience, advisors are well-equipped to address these concerns and restore travelers' confidence. To support them, Visit USA highlights a recent webinar organized in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Brussels. The webinar offers clear explanations and practical answers to frequently asked questions, and serves as a valuable tool for advisors to use in conversations with clients who are hesitant about visiting the United States.

Airlift gaining popularity

According to research by ANVR and GfK/NIQ, air travel is once again on the rise among Dutch travellers: in 2025, 55% plan to fly to their holiday destination—an increase of 4% compared to 2024. Sun holidays and city trips remain the most popular travel choices. Schiphol continues to be the leading departure airport, used by 63% of travelers, although airports just across the border now serve 15% of Dutch passengers. Package holidays are also regaining ground: 36% of travelers book a fully organized trip, bringing the share close to pre-COVID levels. Additionally, more people are booking their holidays at the last minute—45% wait until their holiday allowance is paid before making plans. The average vacation spend has increased to €2,376 per person, partly due to inflation. Notably, 60% of Dutch travelers say inflation has no impact on their summer holiday plans.

The power of social media

Travelers are increasingly finding inspiration and planning their trips via social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Hashtags like #TravelTikTok and #TikTokTravel have millions of posts, and TikTok saw a 410% rise in travel content views between 2021 and 2024. According to research, 32% of users booked a trip they discovered on TikTok, and over half of Gen Z travelers use social platforms for travel inspiration. We know from

media platform Amerika Only that they are experimenting a lot with video content lately, and are also expanding to TikTok. Social Media remains an important travel planning tool.