

End of Year Report

June 2024 - July 2025



Prepared by:



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Introduction

We are grateful to have completed another year of representing the Travel South region. This report showcases all the projects that have been undertaken over the past year.

GPP program

In FY 2024–2025, we were very pleased to have a total of 10 GPP partners on board for the Benelux market: Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Rhythms of the South.

While continuing our overall role as Travel South ambassador – integrating Travel South into our day-to-day activities and keeping it top-of-mind among trade, media, and potential travelers – we also introduced new and exciting marketing initiatives.

All efforts were aligned with our overarching goals: creating new product offerings, increasing sales, and raising awareness of the travel possibilities in the Travel South region. The key themes remain: Food, Music, Culture, History, and the Outdoors.

The Benelux team

After working alongside Hanny for three years, this FY Rianne has taken full responsibility for the account. A familiar face also returned – Marjolein stepped back in as Senior Account Manager to collaborate on the account.

Over the past year, numerous opportunities have allowed Rianne to further connect with the Travel South partners and explore the region. Her participation in the Post-TSISC FAM and GMM Pre-FAM trips provided valuable insights into the region, helping her embrace the Ambassador role more fully.

Looking ahead

Even though one GPP partner will not be joining us for the next fiscal year, it won't stop our ambition to promote the region. We also look ahead positively to the new fiscal year, where we will continue with effective, established projects while also introducing new plans.

Activities

1. Product Survey

This year in May, we conducted another product survey to provide a detailed overview of the current state of the Benelux market – please refer to the full report for all results.

This year's report highlighted that 86% of all tour operators that offer USA-product, are offering product to the Travel South region (69 out of 80 tour operators) – which is an increase compared to last year.

Many of these tour operators are North America specialists, offering more than 15-20 different types of itineraries on their website. Several of them have added new itineraries, or expanded upon existing ones. The table below displays the combined number of overnights that are featured in the Benelux (The Netherlands + Belgium).

	Alabama **	Arkansas	Georgia	Kentucky **	Louisiana **	Mississippi **	Missouri **	North Carolina **	South Carolina **	Tennessee **	Virginia	West Virginia **	Total all States	Total ROTS **
Number of nights featured in The Benelux														
2025	164	11	423	59	702	409	123	235	193	1013	257	26	2902	1121
2024	138	10	425	56	669	362	109	193	174	928	245	32	2706	1074
2023	132	8	411	31	603	338	99	186	174	813	226	19	2504	977
2022*	95	6	305	23	463	308	64	120	113	687	131	7	2322	860
2021*	65	8	275	20	427	249	67	120	103	696	141	5	2176	739
2020	51	2	334	16	511	228	67	133	122	734	196	7	2113	812
2019	24	2	274	5	531	238	25	101	138	682	167	7	1760	n/a

* Only The Netherlands

** GPP 2025 states

Based on the results we can conclude a steady growth in the number of overnights, as well as in the number of tour operators offering product in the region. This points to a continued interest in authentic travel experiences, as well as unique events like the Route 66 centennial – shown by the significant increase in the number of operators that added product for Missouri. It is great to see these positive results, whilst also acknowledging the opportunities that still remain.

2. Trade & Media newsletter

Throughout the FY we have sent out 10 newsletters to our Trade and Media database. Each newsletter highlighted all of the GPP partners.

Newsletter	Audience	Subscribers	Open rate	CTR
September Sports – Professional and College	Trade	547	40%	0,9%
	Media	372	52%	0,8%
October Winter in the South	Trade	542	40%	4,6%
	Media	370	51%	13,2%
November Girls Getaway Ideas	Trade	538	32%	0,6%
	Media	369	44%	0,6%
December Music Concerts & Festivals	Trade	535	29%	0,2%
	Media	366	42%	0,3%
January Summer in the South	Trade	535	38%	0,4%
	Media	367	51%	0,6%
February Avoid the crowds	Trade	527	40%	1,0%
	Media	361	44%	0,6%
March Instagramable spots	Trade	536	35%	0,2%
	Media	359	45%	1,1%
April Eating your way through the South	Trade	536	34%	0,8%
	Media	359	45%	0,3%
May Luxury experiences under \$100	Trade	534	44%	0,6%
	Media	358	47%	0,3%
June Free things to do in the South	Trade	533	41%	0,8%
	Media	357	45%	0,6%

The Benelux newsletter consistently achieves a strong open rate of 36% among the Trade audience and an average of 47% among Media. The CTR is relatively low, which is expected – as all of the content is directly shared within the newsletter, rather than presented as a preview with a link to the full story (which would typically result in a higher CTR). We've received feedback from travel agents indicating that they save our newsletters in their inboxes and refer back to them when a particular theme becomes relevant.



3. Media Coverage

Media exposure has been generated as part of the proposed coops – which are elaborated on further in this document. In addition, several outlets have published both online and print articles – either through separate agreements or on their own initiative. Some noteworthy exposure includes:

- **Book by Bas van Oort:** Bas is a Dutch travel writer and journalist with a deep fascination for the United States. With a background in storytelling and a passion for exploring lesser-known places, he has traveled extensively across all 50 U.S. states, capturing the diversity, contradictions, and beauty of the country. His newest book includes 17 stories, six of which included the Travel South region:
 1. Soul Train – Illinois to Tennessee
 2. The soul of the South – Tennessee – Louisiana
 3. Gip's backyard – Alabama
 4. Enchanted by the bayou – Louisiana
 5. The final juke joint - Louisiana
 6. Through the Smoky Mountains – Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee
- **Het parool:** through an opportunity presented to us by Visit USA The Netherlands, we were able to participate in a print publication in Het Parool – one of the largest Dutch newspapers. A total of eight members participated, and Travel South had its own dedicated segment.
- **Dolly for President:** On October 11th the first episode of the television show Dolly for President aired. Two Dutch celebrities traveled to Nashville on a mission to explore the life and legacy of Dolly Parton. The series consisted of four episodes, generating on average 480,000 views per episode! Three major Dutch media outlets provided coverage on this new TV program.

The total outreach this FY year has been as follows:

	FY 24/25 Total
Total number of articles published	153
Impressions	2,672,047

4. Trade/media metrics

There is contact with key trade partners and media throughout the year, as part of our strategic goal to raise awareness and build long-lasting relationships.

While most interactions are in person at events or during a phone call, some occasions stand out, as further presented below:

- In March we partnered with Brand USA and Reisbizz (a B2B media platform) in hosting a webinar for the trade. The focus of the webinar was on the Brand USA itinerary '**At the movies – southern sights**', highlighting the states Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. In total **49 travel agents** participated.
- In April, Rianne visited the office of Doets Reizen to give an in-depth **training on the Travel South region** to 12 of their Product & Sales staff, the training day was concluded with a bourbon-tasting, where Rianne shared additional information on **Kentucky**, after having been there for the first time during Global Week.
- Following a sales mission through the UK and France, Doug Bourgeois from **Louisiana** Office of Tourism extended his trip by adding 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.

The total meetings and training this FY year has been as follows:

	FY 24/25 Total
Trade Meetings/Trainings	91
Number of Agents Trained	867
Media Meetings	75

5. WideOyster

This fiscal year, we began a two-year partnership with WideOyster, which will ultimately include a dedicated online magazine page and a total of five long-read articles.

Hans Avontuur used two opportunities to gather content and story ideas: an individual press trip to North Carolina and South Carolina, and participation in Global Week, where he joined the Louisiana FAM. All insights from these trips are being supplemented by the knowledge he already has about other states, based on previous visits to the region.

Three of the five long-reads have already been published, focusing on the following topics:

- [Nature Parks in the American South](#) – featuring New River Gorge in **West Virginia**, Horn Island in **Mississippi**, Congaree National Park in **South Carolina**, Little River Canyon in **Alabama** and the Mark Twain Cave Complex in **Missouri**.
- [The backroads and byways of the American South](#) – covering a road trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway, with stops through **West Virginia**, **North Carolina**, **Tennessee** and **Kentucky**.
- [Cajun Country](#) – offering a deep dive into **Louisiana**'s culture, nature and cuisine.

The remaining two long-reads, likely to be published in fall 2025, will focus on small towns and one more theme which is yet to be determined.

The 2-year partnership has been extended with two other publications, namely: ProMotor and AD (the largest Dutch newspaper). Whilst the publication in ProMotor has already been completed, the publication date for AD magazine is still pending confirmation.



CAJUN TOUR LOUISIANA
'OH YEAH, WE LOVE TO FEED YOU!'

Cajun Louisiana is a world of food, music, and swamps. Travelling from Lake Charles to Lafayette, we discover the meaning of Cajun through gumbo stories, alligator encounters, zydeco beats and...



THE BACKROADS AND BYWAYS OF AMERICA'S SOUTHERN STATES
THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

A road trip through Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia becomes an ode to the unexpected. From black bear warnings and two-stepping granddads to gospel-worthy porches and ghost...



5 SURPRISING NATURE PARKS
UNEXPECTED, RAW SOUTHERN BEAUTY

Think you know American nature? Think again. Beyond the iconic landscapes of the Rockies and Grand Canyon, the Southern States hide a wilder, quieter beauty—ghost towns overgrown by forest, uninhabited...

6. Fairs/Events

Visit USA activities

On September 25 and 26, Visit USA The Netherlands organized their yearly B2B Roadshow. Marjolein participated on both days, taking part in speed dating sessions. A total of 130 travel agents got to learn about the ins and outs of the Travel South region. Most questions from the travel agents were about the musical route and the cities.



Shortly after the Visit USA The Netherlands Roadshow, Visit USA Belgium followed with their 1-day American Workshop, on October 17th. Over 100 travel agents were present, they attended presentations and visited the Travel South booth – questions were diverse and very specific. The afternoon ended with a prize ceremony, and one committed travel agent went home with a well-filled Travel South goodiebag.



The Visit USA events have always proven to be a very effective way to connect with the Benelux trade. The timing of the events is also great, as we are right before the booking season kick-off, giving the agents that final bit of insight that they may need to provide potential clients with the best advice possible.

Travel PRESSentation

On October 10th we represented Travel South at the Travel PRESSentation – a media event. With Travel South being the only American destination present this day the interest was very high. Rianne spoke with about 25 journalists/freelancers (more than half of all the media present), resulting in new connections and building on partnerships we already have. There was a great interest by the participants in attending Global Week. Information and data has been gathered of those outlets which are relevant for participation.



Joker Reisbeurs

The Joker Reisbeurs took place in Mechelen on October 20, and this year Travel South was again one of the official sponsors. Following one of the most successful editions in 2023, this year's fair was great again, with 1,600 people attending the event. Visitors of this fair always come very well-prepared asking specific questions. The day was concluded with a lively Bluegrass concert.

Connections AmeriCan Day

Travel South was once again present during the AmeriCan Day organized by Belgian tour operator Connections in Brussels. Travel South was present with a booth, positioned right at the entrance of the event space. During the event, Rianne gave three presentations – two times about the region as a whole and one presentation about Missouri and the Route 66 centennial. During the live recording of their radio show Rianne was also invited to share a bit more about the Travel South region. In total 1,200 people attended the event.



7. Out of Scope

Travel South International Showcase

In December Rianne traveled with a large Benelux delegation, consisting of nine people, to Atlanta for the Travel South International Showcase. The delegation was a good combination of people who were already familiar with the Showcase, but also some for whom it was their first introduction to the region. We've received only good feedback from



the delegation, who were very pleased with the way the event was organized, the effectiveness of the meetings and the inspiring FAM trips.

A more detailed summary of this event can be found in the separate **Travel South International Showcase Report**.

Global Media Marketplace

The Travel South Global Media Marketplace, was another great success. Louisville, Kentucky being the place it all happened. The Benelux market was represented with 5 media, working for both print and digital platforms. Participants were glad to have participated in this well-organized event, and have gathered a lot of inspiration for their



stories. While several publications have already been released, there are still more publications coming at the end of 2025, and/or early 2026.

A more detailed summary of this event can be found in the separate **Global Week Report**.