

TravelSouth

All Y'all Are Welcome **USA**

Monthly Report – February - Benelux

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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 Rhythms of the South!

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:**

The Travel South region was featured in 11 social media posts throughout February. *Little America Nederland* shared a post about a musical roadtrip through the South, mentioning **Rhythms of the South, Louisiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, Mississippi**. *AmerikaNu.nl* shared 3 posts, highlighting **Rhythms of the South, Louisiana and Tennessee. Mississippi** was mentioned in 2 posts from *Visit USA Netherlands. Tioga Tours* highlighting **Missouri** in 4 social posts. Lastly, *Le Beau Reizen* mentioned **Kentucky** in a social post.

- **Publications:**

The Travel South Region received media attention through **3 Newsletter and 7 online articles**. 2 newsletters were published by *Visit USA Belgium*, featuring **Mississippi and Tennessee**. The other newsletter was distributed by *Brand USA Benelux*, highlighting **Missouri**. *Target Travel Marketing* published two articles mentioning **Missouri**, one about Vakantie Festival and another about Kansas City's sales mission. *De Zondag* shared an article about a roadtrip through **Mississippi** – and article derived from Peter van Oyen's attendance at Global Week 2025. Congaree National Park in **South Carolina** was highlighted in a blog about lesser-visited national parks by *Verkeersbureaus. Atlanta*, Rhythms of the South, was mentioned in an article by *Luchtvaartnieuws*. The **whole Travel South Region** was featured on the digital magazine page from *Wide Oyster* as part of our co-op, and in a blog post from *Manoeuvre* about free activities.

- **WideOyster**

The two-year **WideOyster campaign** has now concluded, generating a total combined reach of approximately **1.9 million** across all published content and channels. All GPP states are being covered across the five in-depth longread articles, as a part of the American South special. A detailed overview of the activities and results can be found in Chapter VII.



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International metrics FY25 - 26

	July	Aug	Sep	Q1 TOTAL	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q2 TOTAL	Jan	Feb
Benelux										
Trade										
Trade Meetings/Trainings	4	11	8	23	8	4	3	15	7	6
Number of Agents Trained	-	-	150	150	-	-	-	0	0	0
Travel Trade Newsletter Receptient	0	0	531	531	658	659	659	1,976	656	656
Trade Newsletter Open Rate	0	0	41	41	47	46	46	139	30	28
Managed Media										
Media Meetings	1	1	1	3	3	2	1	6	2	2
Total number of articles published	4	11	10	25	13	8	7	28	13	7
Impressions	11,100	15,739	57,225	84,064	24,724	28,226	23,384	76,334	1,804,576	507,076
PR Newsletter Receptient	0	0	354	354	350	345	344	1,039	342	339
PR Newsletter Open Rate	0	0	44	44	43	42	40	125	18	21
Social Posts										
Facebook Page										
Followers	1,760	1,780	1,780	1,780	1,780	1,781	1,780	1,780	1,775	1,774
Likes	1,760	1,780	1,780	1,780	1,780	1,781	1,780	1,780	1,775	1,774
Facebook Posts										
Reach	0	291	906	1,197	466	4,555	7,107	12,128	4,269	4,124
Views	0	1,390	1,122	2,512	662	6,007	8,105	14,774	7,034	7,022
Likes	0	23	22	45	14	554	43	611	622	490
Comments	0	5	1	6	0	0	1	1	19	12
Shares	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	8	7	2
Instagram										
Reach	0	61	236	297	245	3,865	7,228	11,338	8,215	9,166
Views	0	2,058	1,581	3,639	1,956	5,806	3,277	11,039	1,869	4,636
Followers	0	83	122	122	192	248	271	271	298	381
Likes	0	65	73	138	77	72	58	207	50	77
Comments	0	5	4	9	3	3	4	10	12	5
Shares	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1



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II. Communication & PR

Coverage book has been updated:

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

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'de zondag' magazine. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Lees De Zondag' and 'Lees DZ Magazine', the logo 'de zondag', and a 'Shop' button. Below the navigation is a menu with categories like 'Actua', 'Sport', 'Eropuit', 'Gezellig thuis', 'Lifestyle', 'Puzzels', 'Jobs in uw regio', 'Events', and 'Podcast'. The main content area features a large image of a riverboat on a river at sunset, with a caption: 'De Mississippi vormt de levensader van het landschap en belichaamt de ziel van het Amerikaanse Zuiden. (foto Getty)'. Below the image is the article title 'Blues, burgerrechten en beach vibes. Een roadtrip door Mississippi, in het zuiden van de VS' by 'De Redactie', dated '01-02-2026, 03:00' and '5 min leestijd'. A summary paragraph reads: 'Mississippi. De naam roept beelden op van een machtige rivier, katoenvelden, bluesmuziek en een beladen verleden. Tijdens een trip door deze zuidelijke staat ontdekten we een regio waar geschiedenis en cultuur diep verankerd zijn. Van Jackson en Vicksburg tot de kustplaatsen Gulfport en Biloxi: elke plek vertelt een eigen verhaal.' Below this is a paragraph: 'Wie Mississippi zegt, denkt meteen aan de katoenvelden die eertijds blanke plantagehouders heel rijk maakten en zwarten veroordeelden tot een leven van slavernij en onderdrukking. Tot op vandaag woont een groot deel van de minst welgestelde bevolking van de Verenigde Staten in Mississippi, dat nog steeds geldt als de armste staat van het land. Rassenspanningen zijn er nooit volledig verdwenen en blijven onderhuids voelbaar.' To the right of the article are three promotional banners: 'dz ontbijt babbel' (a podcast), 'de zondag' magazine cover, and 'De Zondag wekelijks in je inbox?' (a newsletter sign-up).





III. Sales Calls

Media contacts

Contacts	Interests / Status	Follow-up
Freelance Journalist - Sebastiaan Bedaux	Over the years we have worked with Sebastiaan multiple times in which he's written beautiful articles of USA destinations for e.g. National Geographic Traveler and De Zondag. He has let us know that it is becoming difficult to sell a USA story nowadays. He also feels some hesitation personally, with stricter rules about social media accounts that must be disclosed (and which show that he has a lot of photos from professional trips to the US). For years, he has had no fear of entering the country on an ESTA, but unfortunately that has changed. He is uncomfortable to cross the US border in his situation (with visits that fall somewhere in a gray area between tourism and professional activities). So for now, he is not planning any new trips.	
Amerika Only - Boy Tijbosch	<p>Already during IPW 2025 Boy has reached out to the host cities for the FIFA World Cup about a digital campaign that he is setting up, in which he wants to show what there is to do in the cities, during and beyond the World Cup. Partners in California, Texas and Kansas City have confirmed their participation, and he is still in talks with Discover Atlanta about how they might join in also.</p> <p>A colleague from Amerika Only is attending Global Week this year, which will be used as opportunity to gather the additional required video content for this digital campaign.</p>	

Trade contacts

Contacts	Interests / Status	Follow-up
Penta's USA - Pieter Demunck	Pieter let us know that there was an item in the Belgian press that mentioned that travel in the USA can be cost efficient now, -20% due to the EUR/USD currency. A large outlet sharing this information is positive news. He mentions that they still are receiving bookings, not as many as previous years, but they are still coming in. Canada bookings are strong, however they started selling Canada just last year so they do not have a good benchmark.	
ITG - Nathalie Mulder	After many years of experience with the USA and Canada, Nathalie decided to do an internal career change and will now focus on Africa. She is busy with her handover. Our new USA/Canada contact for ITG is Bennet Vels. He has visited Florida and New York and is becoming familiar with other USA destinations.	
USA Travel - Olivier vandenBroucke	He says that overall demand remains active, but not at the level needed to drive strong results. Conversion rates and incoming inquiries are low, which he attributes largely to perception rather than product quality. Ongoing global media coverage continues to create uncertainty and is clearly	



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	<p>influencing booking behavior. He notes limited positive impact from major events so far. Seattle-related travel for the World Cup has generated three to four bookings to date. Bookings for 2026 are currently down by around 30%, reinforcing a cautious outlook for the coming season. In contrast, he does report strong demand for Canada, with many departures nearly sold out. He isn't looking to expand their destination offer (USA/CAN only) because introducing a new destination into the market requires a long-term commitment, typically a minimum of three years to successfully build and establish the product and knowledge well enough to sell it.</p>	
<p>Style in Travel - Birgitte Bosma</p>	<p>GreatLakes is currently in the process of updating its website. A launch update is expected soon. Any new or revised products will be reflected accordingly in the product survey once finalized.</p>	
<p>Creating Stories - Elvira Westerveld</p>	<p>Elvira reports that overall bookings to the US are down compared to the previous year. She indicates that overall sentiment toward travel to the US is affecting booking behavior. Travelers are currently more hesitant to choose the US as a destination. She reports that demand for Canada is currently very strong. They have included information about the upcoming FIFA matches in their materials, but so far there has been little demand. The high-ticket prices are discouraging travelers from booking trips for the events.</p> <p>Despite the lower demand, she emphasizes that travelers who do visit the US still have positive experiences, noting that the hospitality of local people and the quality of the natural landscapes remain unchanged.</p>	
<p>Brand USA Benelux - Charonne in het Veld</p>	<p>Upon reaching out to Brand USA regarding the anticipated travel numbers from the Benelux specifically related to the FIFA World Cup, Charonne indicated that there is currently no official estimate of how many additional visitors from the region are expected to travel to the United States for the event. Travel trends are generally evaluated on a broader scale, based on overall arrivals and forward booking patterns.</p> <p>While additional upcoming milestones such as the Route 66 Centennial and America 250 would normally be expected to generate strong growth, current developments suggest that the market remains somewhat cautious. It is hoped that momentum will strengthen as these events approach.</p>	





IV. Newsletter

Newsletter to the trade & media

February's newsletter focused on the theme: **Soulfood & Civil Rights**, which had an outstanding Click-thru rate results from the Trade audience.

In early February, the expansion of the Civil Rights Trail was announced. The timing aligned perfectly with this month's newsletter theme, which is why we chose to highlight it in the introduction.

Status	Topic	Subscribers	Open rate	Click-thru rate
Newsletter sent out on: February 3rd	Soulfood & Civil Rights	Trade		
		656	27.7%	4 %
		Media		
		339	21.4%	0.6%

View the newsletter here: <https://mailchi.mp/cc248a77a096/nieuwsbrief-travel-south-usa-soul-food-civil-rights>





V. Social media

We have been posting all throughout February on our social media platforms. A total of **9 posts** were published on Facebook and **9** on Instagram. Each state being highlighted once, and the Rhythms of the South cities rotating every month. This month, Atlanta was featured. The content for the posts is based on this month's newsletter and is shared across both channels.

The Facebook post with the highest reach, generating **792 impressions** and **98 interactions**, highlighted South Carolina's barbecue. On Instagram, the strongest performance came from the post featuring comfort food in Atlanta in, reaching **767 people** and securing **12 interactions**. See the Facebook post below:



Among our regular Travel South posts, we also started sharing the **Michelin articles** on social media. These are posted once a week on Sunday, on Facebook (as we can include a link to the article) and will continue as long as the articles are getting published. The article is then also shared on Instagram in the stories (as can be seen above), which are put into a highlight on our profile – so it can always be viewed.





VI. Market Update

Netherland's new government

Four months on from an election in which the far-right lost a third of their seats, a liberal-center right coalition has been formed, led by new prime minister Rob Jetten. Jetten is the Netherlands' youngest ever, and first openly gay, Prime Minister and has brought a new energy to Dutch politics. In forming the new centrist minority government, the PVV (far right) and GroenLinks (far left) have less power.

This is an unusual move in Dutch politics, with broad majority coalitions the political norm. The new government has pledged to increase defense spending, funded by cuts to healthcare and higher in income tax. In a social media post before his investiture by the King, Jetten said that he was taking up his premiership “with great responsibility and above all a shared promise to commit ourselves to everyone in the Netherlands”.

Travel sentiment development

NTTO figures show that overall, 2025 was down across the Benelux region approx. -7,9%. In addition, a recent industry [survey](#) conducted by Visit USA Netherlands among its travel trade members shows that the overall image of the USA as a vacation destination has further declined over the past six months. All respondents reported lower bookings for 2025 compared to the previous year, with approximately 68% indicating a decline of 10–29%. At this stage, the trade expects that bookings for 2026 will further decline.

Ongoing geopolitical developments are further influencing travel behavior among Benelux travelers. Despite the uncertainty, the overall desire to travel remains strong. According to large-scale consumer research conducted by Trends & Tourism, 82% of Dutch consumers indicate they will definitely or probably travel this summer. Beach vacations remain the most popular type of outbound trip (40%), followed by road trips (14%) and nature-focused travel (12%). The continued popularity of road trips and nature travel is particularly relevant for the Travel South region.



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At the same time, travelers are becoming more cautious in their destination choices. Those who have not yet booked are more likely to stay closer to home. Travelers who have already planned trips to the Middle East or parts of Asia are responding in different ways: some are waiting to see how the situation develops, while others are choosing to rebook to alternative destinations. For long-haul travel, Caribbean destinations such as Bonaire and Curaçao are currently seeing increased interest from the Dutch market.





VII. Activities overview

This chapter provides updates when activities have been executed, when there is an update on the progress, or any action points.

WideOyster

In 2026, the two-year cooperation with WideOyster came to an end. The collaboration began in November 2024 with a FAM trip to the Carolinas, followed by Hans's participation in Global Week in Louisville, where he also joined a FAM trip to Louisiana. These experiences provided him with ample inspiration and content to produce five in-depth longread articles for the *American South WideOyster Special*. The articles were published in May 2025 and January 2026. Below you will find an overview of the results of this two-year project.

Online paid advertising campaign

Total reach: 345,861

Total impressions: 1,410,000

Dedicated newsletter

Total recipients: 74,621

Opening rate: 28,2%

Website reach

[American South Online Magazine](#): 283,443

[Longread 1](#) | Five nature parks in the American South: 36,973

[Longread 2](#) | Cajuntour Louisiana: 33,535

[Longread 3](#) | Backroads and byways: 31,446

[Longread 4](#) | The coast of the Carolina's: 34,728

[Longread 5](#) | Five lesser-known cities: 31,260

Total website reach: 451,385

Average time on website: 8 minutes and 36 seconds



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The Outdoors

We will be featured as a 'destination of the month', where the Travel South region will be prominently featured across their platforms (theoutdoors.nl, thehike.nl and/or thebike.nl) for a whole month. Currently the articles are being prepared, with publication in April/May. Publications are pushed by a dedicated newsletter, social media and advertising. The combined activities are expected to generate a reach of approximately 1 million.

The package includes 5 articles, that are shared on either of the three websites:

National Parks & State Parks – alle 8 GPP states – *the Outdoors*

The Gulf Shores – LA, MI & AL – *the Outdoors*

Water activities in the Carolina's – NC & SC – *the Outdoors*

Trails in Southeastern USA – alle 8 GPP states – *the Hike*

Cycling in the American South – MO, TN & KY – *the Bike*

Visit USA Associations

Trough the continued membership that Travel South has with Visit USA The Netherlands and Visit USA Belgium, they continue to generate frequent exposure through the newsletters, on social media and the various events that we attend.

Benelux Trade & Media newsletter

Every month, a newsletter is sent out to the Benelux Trade and Media database. Each month focusing on a different theme, highlighting all GPP states. Please view chapter IV for the monthly analyses.

Benelux social media

Content on Facebook & Instagram will be published throughout the month, using the newsletter as a source of inspiration. Please view chapter V for the monthly analyses.

Product Survey

This project will again be executed in spring 2026, reporting all tour operator data from 2025



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Out of Scope

Global Week: The media marketplace will take place in Mobile, Alabama in April 2025. All five journalists have now been confirmed:

AmerikA Magazine – Robert de Koning

Amerika Only – Michelle de Vos

Foodies – Bas Erkens

Hey!USA – Sebastiaan Klijnen

Your Travel Reporter – Mila Jaipal

