



# Expert Tips to grow your group sales

By Group Tour Media, publisher of *Group Tour Magazine* & *Student Group Tour Magazine*

## Culinary means more than adding food

Interview with **Tiffany Gerber**, Tuscarawas County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Ohio  
by Mary Lu Laffey, Editor, Group Tour Media



**Tiffany Gerber**

When Tiffany Gerber talks about “a la carte” options for group tours, she does so with pun intended. Gerber is Tourism and Group Tour Manager for Tuscarawas County CVB in Ohio.

As co-founder of the membership-based, group tour marketing organization Ohio Has IT!, Gerber feels fortunate to be able to work with colleagues beyond the borders of her own county. “It gives me a bigger glimpse to what groups are looking for,” she said.

“We are the gateway to Ohio Amish Country,” Gerber continued. “So we see the traditional senior travelers, and in the last few years, we have started to see a shift toward younger travelers in slightly smaller groups.” One thing all age groups have in common is food-related travel experiences.

“Several of our attractions had already taken the initiative to add ‘a la carte’ [food] options to keep groups on site to enhance their experience,” Gerber said.

“We recognized that these experiences were selling well. That these trends at the national and international level attract younger travelers who want to do more than see, touch and hear about a destination. They want to ‘taste’ it,” she said. Tuscarawas County sought a consultant to help develop the experiential potential at attractions.

Gerber recently addressed a Focus on Tourism Workshop sponsored by Ohio Travel Association (OTA) about the impact of culinary tourism in Tuscarawas County. Information from OTA supports culinary tourism as one of the fastest growing segments in the travel industry. Gerber agrees and has examples to back up that posture.

“Warther Carvings and the JE Reeves Victorian Home are excellent examples of favorite group stops that added a food element to help resell returning groups,” she said.

The museum developed a new way to look at a group visit, the Warther Dinner Tour.

“By adding an elegant evening meal among the carvings at the [Warther Carving] museum, groups have a new experience,” she said. Warther, a well-respected knife maker, now partners with a local receptive operator and an upscale local restaurant to provide a meal with a “meet the chef” experience and Warther knife demos.

“This program provides a new way to look at a traditional museum,” Gerber said. Ditto with the JE Reeves Home.

“Every community has a Victorian home to show, but not all open the doors to the home and into the lives of the family and servants that lived there. That is how being served high tea with Mrs. Evans developed,” Gerber said.

“We are seeing a renewed interest in our area because of these experiences — especially for the day-trip market,” she said. “The JE Reeves home, specifically, has seen an increase in motorcoach business by over 50 percent.”

Gerber admits that she too was surprised by the success of an a la carte addition to a tour stop.

“Culinary is more than adding food,” she said. “It was surprisingly simple to take our existing wonderful tours and simply add good food and fine company to build a whole new experience.”

Food travelers spend  
**\$1,200**  
per trip, with 36  
percent spent on food-  
related activities.\*

\*Focus on Tourism Workshop, OTA

### Tiffany's 1-2-3:

- Incorporate food as the “flavor of a tour experience.”
- Highlight local food sources, locally made dishes, desserts and specialties.
- Add an appearance of a chef, an interpreter or historian to join the group for a meal or tour.

*P.S. Gerber chairs the Feb. 20-22, 2015, Heartland Travel Showcase in Chicago where she and 10 Tuscarawas County partners plan to roll out several new group travel experiences.*