



**T&T TRADE SHOWS: KEEPING INDUSTRY
LEADERS MOVING FORWARD**

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It happens every year, at the same time, in the same place. A pilgrimage to understand what has changed. World Travel Market, WTM London (<http://wtmlondon.com/>) more precisely, has become the global Travel & Tourism (T&T) industry's annual year-end coming together of travel industry leaders.

Come rain, fog or shine, transport system smoothness or strike, crisis of Mother Nature or man, leaders unite to share experiences, expertise, visions and views. This is where the meeting of minds takes place, both on high profile stages and in discreet quiet spaces, not to mention while breaking bread at formal events, or simply sharing a quiet coffee to talk things through around expo stands. Tens of thousands of visionaries, dignitaries, executives, and traders all dressed up with far too many places to go and people to see in the time allotted.

Marking the build-up to the end of the calendar year, with a last bump in tourism activity fast approaching for destinations across the globe as the holiday season nears, WTM has become an important collective look back to look forward.

So too is the case for ITB Berlin, the world's largest T&T show taking place each March. There is where leaders consolidate what has happened the year now just closed, and where their actions are focused on for the year ahead to open growth and opportunity for their sectors at home.

In so many ways, these events, and so many others across the globe and calendar year, with all of their intense programme scheduling from dawn into late evening dark, and all of the social times planned in sensational locations with even more sensational people, can be incorrectly seen by those outside the industry as play. The work aspect can become all too easily overlooked because of the overt celebration of the industry – its reach, its impact, its people and its purpose.

Which indeed they are – celebrations of incredible parts of the world to which travellers are being invited to explore, leaders are being blessed to purposefully work for, and industry partners are being inspired to support. However, the value of these events goes far beyond what the eye and globe can see.

GOING TO INSPIRE GOING

So importantly, T&T trade shows represent a powerful, penetrating, recalibrating source of inspiration for each and every one of the tens of thousands of participants taking part. Whatever part they may play in the industry experience chain, whatever angle of opportunity generation the trade show may possess, the need to be there is clear. These are the places where industry alignment takes place, creating connections that generate literally billions in industry ideas, decisions and deals.

WTM London alone, with its over 51,000 participants including over 31,000 visitors over 9,000 buyers, unlocks over GBP 2.5 billion (US\$ 3.7 billion) in deals in its 4 days of operation alone. But

even beyond the numbers, it is the ability of these trade shows to tap into what is at the heart of true success and sustainability in the sector: a deep love for travel.

To walk around the trade show's regional halls, travelling the world from booth to booth, is to receive a multi-sensory feed of all that makes the heart of the industry beat deeply, loudly. The sights, sounds, scents all come together as a rich, intoxicating cocktail that ignites one's passion for what they do every working day, and why.

As simple as this may sound, it is this recharging of internal energy that enables travel professionals from across the globe to keep thinking bolder, keep reaching higher and keep making a difference. And keep loving, absolutely loving, what they do.

This love of life's work becomes so inspired that it crosses borders in mind, not only maps, creating an excitement to not only work in tourism, but play tourist. This excitement is impossible to ignore, especially during WTM London that falls so close to the end of the work year when decreasing days left on the calendar are also a reflection of decreasing levels of one's own energy. The year has been long, times have been challenging. It's time for a holiday!

Embracing this need to take a break is not a natural phenomenon for all cultures. Some cultures, especially those within Europe, appreciate and embrace the health benefits of having time off. Playtime is taken seriously. As it should be.

Across the waters in North America, the stats tell a very different story, with 2014 seeing:

- 41% not taking paid vacation days
- nearly half of Americans not taking a single day off in summertime
- over 169 million paid vacation days being passed up

(Source: Skift)

Why? Roger Dow, President and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, quickly gets to the heart of the issue.

"Americans suffer from a work martyr complex. In part, it's because 'busyness' is something we wear as a badge of honor. But it's also because we're emerging from a tough economy and many feel less secure in their jobs. Unfortunately, workers do not seem to realize that forfeiting their vacation time comes at the expense of their overall health, well-being and relationships."

The ROI, return on investment, of travel trade shows? Incalculable, not only due to lack of firm metrics for clear, consistent measurement of governments, businesses and other entities, but also because of the invisible, immeasurable power of these events to (re)inspire tourism leaders to keep moving forward.

These events are where ROI needs to be understood, and enjoyed, as 'Return on Inspiration'. For those taking part, the benefit in the final analysis? Priceless.