

# Group Tour

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**Spring 2016**  
GroupTour.com

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# Bhada finds common-sense solutions for tourism clients

By David Hoekman

Neville Bhada's interest in travel — and dogged persistence — helped him find his place in the travel and tourism industry.

Although he did not get a job in tourism immediately after graduating from Clemson University with a master's degree in tourism, Bhada kept in contact with an individual who ran a travel association.

"I just kept on talking with him over the years and after 10 years, he hired me as director of communications," Bhada said. "Persistence paid off."

Bhada is the founder and CEO of Tourism Skills Group, a 4-year-old strategic planning organization dedicated to nonprofit associations and the travel industry.

From its base in Atlanta, Tourism Skills Group works with destination marketing organizations, attractions, hotels and tour operators throughout the United States. The majority of the company's work is done in the Southeast.

Tourism Skills Group provides strategic planning through research, focus forums and retreats. The goal is to deliver common-sense solutions.

## The future of group tours

Senior, religious and sports groups are all growing segments that have unlimited potential, Bhada said.

"We are especially heartened by what we see in the sports segment," Bhada said. "We call sports groups the recession-proof tourism. It doesn't matter how much things cost."

The uncertainty in group tours lies with millennials, people born from the early 1980s to the late 1990s.

"At this point, they are not excited about group tours," Bhada said. "They want flexibility and their perception is that group tours will not give them that individuality that they desire."



PHOTO: TOURISM SKILLS GROUP

*"The big question is will millennials follow travel behaviors and patterns set by baby boomers, and start taking group tours as they move into their 40s and 50s."*

- Neville Bhada

The big question is, he added, will millennials follow travel behaviors and patterns set by baby boomers, and start taking group tours as they move into their 40s and 50s.

"We have to wait and see if millennials are truly breaking the mold when it comes to travel," Bhada said.

Late baby boomers just turned 51, he said, and have a lot of disposable income. The key for operators is learn-

ing how to communicate with boomers about the conveniences of group tours.

Operators must be flexible, Bhada said, especially when it comes to marketing and communication.

## Don't neglect social media

"One thing we keep on hearing from a lot of tour operators is that they don't really do social media that well," he said. "That concerns us because anyone under the age of 40, much less 30, is using social media. Tour operators need to capture this group and let them start to see their brands out there."

Bhada counsels operators to do all they can to have some sort of social media presence with Facebook, Twitter, videos and blogs.

From its surveys of people who take group tours, Tourism Skills Group knows that free time is valuable. Group travelers like time to explore on their own.

"This could be especially meaningful for those millennials we are trying to touch," Bhada said. "They desire a little individuality and the ability to escape the crowd. Managed free time is what we call it. You give them options they can do on their own, but you give them limited options. At the same time, they feel they have control over their day or itinerary. You don't give them so much as to overwhelm them." 🚗

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