

# SALES TEAM STATUS REPORT

PROJECT: Beneath the Sea  
DATE: March 29-30, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Yves Vrielynck, Dive Umbrella  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: Washington, DC Travel and Adventure Show  
DATE: March 29-30, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Joshua Cato, Chad Newman, Liana Pyne  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: Travel Agents Forum  
DATE: April 1-3, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Liana Pyne  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: WTM Latin America  
DATE: April 14-16, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sabie Chilton, Yves Vrielynck  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: GMITE  
DATE: May 6-9, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Joshua Cato  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: German Sales Mission  
DATE: May 19-23, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Yves Vrielynck, Get It Across  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: ATTA Elevate  
DATE: May 27-31, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sabine Chilton  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: The Scuba Show  
DATE: May 31-June 1, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Yves Vrielynck  
STATUS: Trip report attached

PROJECT: World Pride  
DATE: May 31-June 9, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Liana Pyne  
STATUS: Show in process at time of packet

PROJECT: Romance & Wedding Travel Forum  
DATE: June 4-7, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Tracy McClellan  
STATUS: Registration & arrangements complete

PROJECT: Girls in Wonderland  
DATE: June 5-9, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sponsorship only  
STATUS: Completed

PROJECT: Incentive Live  
DATE: June 8-10, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sabine Chilton  
STATUS: Registration & arrangements complete

PROJECT: IPW  
DATE: June 15-18, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sabine Chilton, Yves Vrielynck, Ed Simon, Axis, Get It Across  
STATUS: Registration & arrangements complete

PROJECT: UK / Ireland Sales Mission  
DATE: July 14-18, 2025  
ASSIGNED: Sabine Chilton, AXIS  
STATUS: Registration & arrangements in process

## **BENEATH THE SEA DIVE SHOW**

**Secaucus, NJ  
March 29–30, 2025  
Yves Vrielynck**

I represented the Florida Keys and Key West at the 46th annual Beneath the Sea Dive show, held at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, NJ from March 29 – 30, 2025.

Offering cooperative participation, the following delegates joined me in representing the destination: Horizon Divers, Key Largo Dive Center, Amoray Dive Resort, and Captain Hooks.

The exhibitor landscape has shifted significantly, with fewer equipment manufacturers and wholesalers participating as they increasingly pivot to online marketing strategies. However, dive travel destinations were present in greater numbers than ever before, preferring direct customer interaction.

This evolution benefits the Florida Keys, as we can highlight our unique advantages over international destinations:

- No passport requirements
- No currency exchange needed
- No language barriers

Beneath the Sea remains the only consumer scuba and dive travel show on the East Coast. Attendees were approximately:

- 50% from New Jersey/New York area
- 50% from Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Atlantic states, and New England

This Northeast market represents the country's wealthiest region with the highest concentration of consumers, making it crucial for both diving and leisure travel to the Florida Keys.

Our dive operators were well-prepared with targeted vacation packages that resonated with the audience:

- "Wreck Trek Safari" and "Heavy Metal Tour" packages appealed to the experienced wreck and technical divers
- Increased interest from families seeking learn-to-dive opportunities with online classroom components and in-person completion in the Keys' warm, clear, shallow waters

The show proved highly successful for our Florida Keys dive operators, who secured substantial bookings providing immediate return on investment. The event also facilitated valuable trade networking with local dive shops.

## **TRAVEL & ADVENTURE SHOW**

**Washington, DC**

**March 29-30, 2025**

**Liana Pyne, Joshua Cato**

The Florida Keys and Key West participated in The Travel & Adventure Show in Washington, D.C., with two booths: the main booth and the LGBT booth. The event attracted approximately 15,000 travel enthusiasts, industry professionals, and media representatives and showcased 250 exhibitors.

VFK hosted a **FAM TAS presentation** with 130 local travel advisors in attendance with presentations from Bright Wild and Flamingo Lodge Everglades. We also presented during a 30 min **Destination Theater session** on Saturday, March 29.

Our main booth featured vibrant visuals and promotional materials highlighting The Florida Keys and Key West's outdoor adventures, cultural experiences, and eco-tourism opportunities.

Visitors engaged in interactive experiences such as giveaways, destination guides, and personalized travel planning assistance. The booth collaborated with five hotel partners—Ocean Properties (Michelle Caceras), Bay Harbor & Coconut Palm (Jonathan Laron), Flamingo Lodge (Bradley Rowland-Aaron), Bright Wild (Cheyne Barroso), and Cheeca Lodge (Alicia Wells)—who provided key information about accommodations, attractions, and seasonal events.

Additionally, the Florida Pavilion showcased a variety of Florida destinations, including Visit St. Pete & Clearwater, Greater Miami CVB, Visit Central Florida, Okeechobee County, Visit Tampa Bay, Destin-Fort Walton, Gulf County Florida, Fort Myers, Crystal River, and Florida Treasure Coast, further promoting the state's diverse travel offerings.

The LGBTQ+ booth showcased The Florida Keys and Key West as an inclusive and welcoming destination for LGBTQ+ travelers. It featured specialized marketing materials highlighting LGBTQ+-friendly accommodations, key events such as Key West Pride and Womenfest, and community engagement initiatives. The booth fostered connections with LGBTQ+ travelers, travel agents, and influencers, reinforcing the destination's reputation as a top choice for LGBTQ+ tourism. Additionally, the LGBTQ+ Pavilion included representatives from Visit South Africa, South African Airways, and Espana, further expanding outreach and collaboration. Both booths attracted high foot traffic, with strong interest in outdoor activities, luxury travel, and sustainability initiatives. LGBTQ+ travelers were particularly enthusiastic, expressing interest in upcoming Pride events and The Keys' inclusive atmosphere. Additionally, the event facilitated valuable connections with travel professionals and media representatives, fostering potential partnerships for future promotions and press coverage.

To maximize future impact, The Florida Keys and Key West should maintain a strong presence at travel shows with a dual-booth approach, incorporating interactive elements like virtual reality and live Q&A sessions. Strengthening follow-up efforts will help convert leads into bookings, while expanding outreach to niche markets such as eco-tourism, adventure travel, and luxury experiences will further

The Florida Keys and Key West successfully promoted the destination at The Travel & Adventure Show in Washington, D.C., reaching a broad audience of travelers, industry professionals, and media. The enthusiastic engagement and positive feedback reaffirmed its appeal, particularly among adventure seekers and LGBTQ+ travelers. Moving forward, continued marketing efforts and strategic follow-ups will maximize the event's impact and drive increased visitation to the region.

## **TRAVEL AGENT FORUM**

**Las Vegas, NV**

**April 1-3, 2025**

**Liana Pyne**

The Florida Keys & Key West participated in the 2025 Travel Agent Forum, held at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas from April 1–3. This was our first time attending this event, produced by Travel Show Marketing Group, and it proved to be a highly productive and beneficial opportunity for promoting the destination.

Over the course of the event, I conducted 25 one-to-one appointments with highly vetted travel advisors. These meetings were pre-scheduled and provided ample time to present destination updates, discuss key travel logistics, and promote the wide range of accommodations and experiences available throughout the Florida Keys.

In addition to the individual meetings, we participated in two days of trade show sessions. These provided an open-floor format to engage with all attending advisors, further expanding our reach and visibility. Many advisors expressed a strong interest in the Florida Keys and shared that they have previously sent clients to the destination.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Interest in the Florida Keys remains high, with many advisors already familiar with the region.
- All-inclusive properties were the most frequently requested product type, though we provided clarity on the unique lodging options available in the Keys.
- Most conversations centered around destination education, including flight access, travel logistics, and the diversity of accommodations, from boutique inns to luxury resorts.
- Advisors also requested more information on activities available throughout the islands, particularly those catering to families and couples.

The Travel Agent Forum exceeded expectations in terms of advisor quality and engagement. The format allowed for meaningful conversations and destination training that will likely lead to increased bookings. Based on the positive experience and the high level of advisor interest, we recommend continued participation in this show and other events produced by Travel Show Marketing Group. Their ability to attract well-qualified and motivated advisors makes these events a valuable platform for expanding our reach in the travel trade community

**WTM LATIN AMERICA**  
**Sao Paulo, Brazil**  
**April 14-16, 2025**  
**Sabine Chilton, Yves Vrielynck**

We represented Visit Florida Keys at WTM Latin America, Sao Paulo, Brazil, April 14-16, 2025. The fair was held at the Expo Centro Norte, and we exhibited in the USA Pavilion. Also present from Florida, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, St Petersburg / Clearwater, Orlando CVBs as well as hotels, attractions and receptives.

Following years of success at WTM in London, WTM Latin America positions itself as the premiere travel and tourism event in the ever expanding Brazilian and Latin American markets. This thirteenth edition of WTM which included 3 trade days was very successful and well attended with an incredible support from the South American travel and tourism industry and included an extensive hosted buyers' program.

Since 2023, Brazil was one of the top international markets for Florida tourism. Approximately 1.2 million Brazilian tourists visited Florida in 2023, representing a significant recovery from the pandemic-era lows. Brazil has historically been one of Florida's most important international tourism markets (besides Canada), particularly for destinations like Orlando, Miami, and Fort Lauderdale. Brazilian tourists are known for their shopping-focused visits and typically have higher-than-average spending per visitor compared to tourists from many other countries. It's worth noting that this number reflects a recovery trend after the significant drop during the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020-2021, though it may still have been below the pre-pandemic peak year of 2019 over when Brazilian visitation to Florida exceeded 1.5 million annually. One of the busiest U.S. Consulate in the world is Sao Paulo. Visas are processed daily for the United States with Orlando (over 40% of those visas), Miami, Las Vegas and New York as principal ports of entry. 80% of the applicants which are interviewed are in receipt of their visas within 3 weeks. The US Consulate is also working very closely with Tour Operators and Incentive Groups to facilitate visas procedures. Over 25 daily direct flights, mostly full, arrive in Florida from different cities in Brazil. The potential is tremendous. Despite global economic issues and ups and downs, this market remains very strong. Fly / drive is the preferred choice, Cruises are also very popular with pre-and-post extensions as well as a phenomenon called "sports tourism" or more specifically "futebol/soccer tourism," which has become a significant segment of the Florida tourism industry, particularly around major tournaments. Most Brazilian visitors are families and couples which comes mainly to Florida in Jan-Feb or during their winter June to August. The Brazilians are used to political turmoil and are not concerned with the current US political issues. Their main concern is the currency exchange.

Our goal is to reinforce relationships that we developed pre-Covid and establish new contacts. Our destination is recognized but not well known; the fact that we are once present again makes a big difference. Tour operators, travel agents and media are getting familiar with our destination, not only Key West but also the Upper Keys. Travel agents who are sending clients to Florida are getting more requests for our destination. After visiting Orlando, Miami and Fort Lauderdale multiple times, the Brazilians, yearly repeat visitors to Florida, are now interested to venture out to "other destinations". Couples and families will rent cars and will drive to the Keys spending 1 to 5 nights. Upscale and full-service hotels are usually their first choice. The tremendous number of activities and attractions as well as the endless choices of excellent restaurants and the great "safe" nightlife of Key West is a recipe for success and for attracting this growing market.

Our presence was very well received. We had a great list of 20 scheduled appointments and had many walk-ins. We presented our destination, distributed our Portuguese brochure and introduced our Portuguese e-learning program. Training, presentations, co-op marketing, and media visits were requested. Continuing pursuing and developing this market is crucial, as in most Latin countries, all business is based on long lasting relationships. Due to the success of the show and its incredible potential, we recommend attending WTM Latam next year.

**GMITE 2025**  
**Braselton, GA**  
**May 6-9, 2025**  
**Joshua Cato**

The Florida Keys and Key West had a highly successful showing at GMITE 2025 in Braselton, Georgia, positioning the destination as a premier choice for meetings, incentives, conferences, and events (MICE). Throughout the event, Josh conducted an extensive schedule of one-on-one appointments with a curated group of corporate incentive planners, association planners, and third-party intermediaries. These meetings generated strong interest in the destination's diverse offerings, including luxury resorts, boutique hotels, exclusive private island buyouts, and a wide variety of marine and eco-adventures. Many buyers expressed enthusiasm for the destination's accessibility via direct flights into Key West and surrounding airports, its relaxed and authentic "Come As You Are" culture, and its exceptional water-based experiences such as deep-sea fishing, diving, snorkeling, and sunset sailing. Additionally, the Keys' well-established sustainability initiatives—including marine conservation, coral reef restoration, and eco-friendly programming—resonated strongly with planners seeking destinations aligned with their clients' increasing focus on environmental and social responsibility.

Throughout the show, Josh distributed a range of collaterals, including destination guides, event planner toolkits, maps, and sustainability fact sheets, as well as branded giveaways like sunglasses, eco-friendly bottles, and luggage tags. Several promising leads were generated, with many planners requesting RFPs on-site for group programs scheduled for late 2025 and 2026, typically ranging from 20 to 150 attendees. There was also notable demand for unique team-building activities on the water, wellness retreats, and programs with CSR or local giveback components, underscoring the Keys' appeal for experiential and purpose-driven travel.

A key highlight of the show was attendance at the keynote presentation on the *Transformative Forces Reshaping Luxury Travel and Events*. This session provided timely and strategic insights into emerging trends that are redefining the luxury sector, including the growing importance of hyper-personalization, authentic local immersion, sustainability, wellness, and exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. The keynote also emphasized the increasing value clients place on meaningful connection and impact, rather than simply luxury for luxury's sake.

In addition, attendance at the *"From Gucci to Bougie: Understanding Today's Luxury Marketplace"* session offered valuable perspective on how perceptions of luxury are evolving across demographics, markets, and experience categories. Key takeaways from this session will help further refine the Florida Keys' sales approach, ensuring it speaks to the full spectrum of today's luxury travelers, from aspirational consumers to ultra-high-net-worth clients.

These insights are directly relevant to the Florida Keys' brand positioning and will be integrated into future sales messaging, proposals, and marketing materials to ensure alignment with the evolving expectations of high-end incentive and meeting clients.

Looking ahead, the team's follow-up strategy includes sending personalized thank-you emails, providing tailored destination proposals and sample itineraries, coordinating site inspections for qualified planners, and integrating leads into the CRM system for long-term nurturing. For future GMITE and similar shows, recommendations include co-hosting an experiential activation (such

as a Keys-themed cocktail reception or culinary tasting), bringing destination partners like hotels, DMCs, and attractions to deepen representation, and highlighting recent success stories and sustainability initiatives in pre-show outreach. Overall, GMITE 2025 proved to be a highly valuable platform for elevating the Florida Keys and Key West's profile, cultivating meaningful planner relationships, and generating high-quality leads that will help drive future MICE business to the destination.

**VFK SALES MISSION**  
**Germany**  
**May 18-23, 2025**  
**Yves Vrielynck & Marcel Sprenger (GIA)**

From Sunday, May 18 through Friday, May 23, GIA executed a sales mission through the German cities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Hannover and Hamburg to meet with some key tour operators and industry partners, as well as train reservation and sales staff at several important tour operators. We met with seven different tour operators including three of our top 5 performers, executed five staff trainings and attended the assembly of the German Visit USA Committee at the US Consulate General in Frankfurt, where we met with around 50 of the major US tourism industry players. Consensus feedback from all tour operators that we've met during the week was that the year started very strong with a flurry of early bookings but that the number of booking requests slowed down significantly by the end of January / early February. However, thanks to the strong volume of early bookings, most TOs expect only a small decrease compared to a strong 2024 (some predicted even a flat year). During the week, we also participated in a B2C Florida event with CANUSA in Hamburg, one of our top 3 tour operators, where we had 45 selected clients invited. The event included an activation station per destination. Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers and Sarasota were also in attendance. VFK held a 20-minute presentation on the destination.

The Germany sales mission successfully achieved its primary objectives of relationship maintenance, market intelligence gathering, and brand presence reinforcement. The foundation of strong operator partnerships and early-year booking strength positions VFK well for continued success in the German market. The mission demonstrates the ongoing value of strategic international market development through direct engagement and partnership cultivation.

# **AdventureELEVATE**

**May 28-30, 2025**

**Denver, CO**

**Sabine Chilton**

I represented Visit Florida Keys at AdventureELEVATE, May 28-30, 2025, in Denver, Colorado. This annual gathering of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) offered valuable networking and learning opportunities for Florida Keys tourism representatives.

Established in 1990, the Adventure Travel Trade Association is the largest global network of adventure travel leaders. The community is made up of ~30,000 individual guides, tour operators, lodges, travel advisors, tourism boards, destination marketing and management organizations, outdoor educators, gear companies and travel media who share a belief and commitment to sustainable tourism.

The connections and creativity of this vibrant community come together in person at AdventureELEVATE once a year. Here they create and deliver the solutions that propel our businesses and our communities toward a responsible and profitable future. It is a three-day education and networking conference that brings together thought leaders and practitioners from the adventure travel community for inspiration and insights into the trends that shape our industry year-round. ELEVATE offers a perfect mix of high-value keynote speakers, actionable concurrent sessions on technology, marketing, and operations.

## **Key Takeaways:**

- **Industry Insights:** The three-day conference featured high-value keynote speakers and actionable sessions on technology, marketing, and operations in adventure travel.
- **We attended Interactive Workshops** such as: "Destinations Insights," "Trendspotting Labs," and "D.N.A. - Disruptive Networking Adventure" provided opportunities for engagement with travel and destination specialists in a more relaxed setting than typical appointment-based shows.
- **Business Development:** The "Marketplace" segment allows meetings with 15 global buyers, including outbound tour operators, wholesalers, and travel advisors, potentially opening new business channels for the Florida Keys.
- **Peer Networking:** AdventureELEVATE stands out as one of the premier events for connecting with industry peers, fostering relationships that can benefit the Florida Keys tourism sector.

Given the event's value for networking and industry insights, continued participation in the 2026 edition is recommended to strengthen the Florida Keys' position in the adventure travel market.

**SCUBA SHOW**  
**Los Angeles, CA**  
**May 31- June 1, 2025**  
**Yves Vrielynck**

The 38th annual Scuba Show in Long Beach proved to be a valuable opportunity to promote the Florida Keys as a premier diving destination. Held May 31-June 1 at the Long Beach Convention Center, the event drew high consumer traffic to the Florida Keys booth staffed by representatives from the Tourist Development Council (TDC) and local dive operators Amoray Dive Resort, Captain Hooks, Horizon Divers, and Key Largo Dive Center.

**Market Reception**

A recurring theme from attendees was their desire to dive the Florida Keys after experiencing other locations worldwide. Compared to Pacific Ocean conditions, the Keys' easily accessible dive sites, shallow reefs, minimal currents, clear waters, warmth, and abundance of wrecks resonated strongly with visitors, especially novice divers. Unlike many single-focus dive exhibitors, the Florida Keys team also highlighted the area's diverse non-diving activities, appealing to families with non-diving members.

**Geographic Reach and Results**

While the Scuba Show attracted attendees primarily from California, its draw extended into neighboring states like Arizona and Nevada, all of which have convenient flight connections to South Florida. Participating Keys dive operators reported brisk bookings at the event, providing a rapid return on their investment.

**Recommendation**

Based on the success of the 2025 Scuba Show, the TDC sales team highly recommends continued participation to promote the Florida Keys diving experience in 2026 and beyond. The event's diverse audience, including experienced divers seeking new destinations and novice divers enticed by the Keys' ideal conditions, represents a valuable opportunity to capture and grow the dive market.

