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Contacts: Wind River Visitors Council, Fremont County's Lodging Tax

Paula McCormick, 307-332-5546, info@mccormickmarketing.com

<http://www.wind-river.org>

Audrey Eaton 307-349-5509, audreyeaton@wyoming.com

Photo credit: Jennie Hutchinson

Wind River Country's Lodging Tax Board Hosts International Travel Professionals

Fremont County, WY - Ask most Europeans what they know about Wyoming and they'll probably tell you they've heard of Yellowstone and maybe the Tetons. Fremont County hasn't been on their radar. Until now.

On September 19, 45 international travel professionals, mostly from Western Europe, got their first taste of Fremont County on a bus tour that focused on some of the area's unique attractions. Local lodging tax revenues helped pay for their stop over in Wind River Country.

"Many Europeans have no real clue about what they'll find in Wyoming beyond the national parks," says Paula McCormick, the marketing director for the Wind River Visitors Council.

"Our goal with the tour was to show them all the incredible things we have to offer here—things that they'll never find in Europe. So the Wind River Casino hosted a Native American dance performance and folks at the South Pass City State Historic Site showed them how to pan for gold. They ate lunch at the Atlantic City Mercantile, and took pictures of wildlife, the view from



Beaver Rim, Red Canyon, Crowheart Butte, the Dubois Badlands, and Togwotee Pass. They stopped over in Dubois, where they were entertained by Dubois Main Street, a variety of businesses, restaurants and a saloon. Now we hope they'll go home and tell their clients about the experience."

The Wind River Visitors Council, which co-hosted the Fremont County portion of the tour with the Wyoming Travel and Tourism division, Dubois Main Street and the Wind River Casino, uses lodging tax revenues to help educate travelers about Fremont County, known as Wind River Country, and promote tourism to the area. The tax has been in place for 20 years and is up for renewal in the November election. McCormick believes the funds generated by the lodging tax are critical for sustaining and growing the county's

tourism industry, especially for the international travel market.

Tourists spent more than \$118 million in Fremont County last year. These dollars support local businesses and provide jobs. One reason to woo the international traveler is that they often travel in the shoulder seasons, late spring or fall, when Fremont County businesses could use the boost and have lodging available. They also take longer vacations and spend more money per trip.



"Many Europeans have grown up on a diet of American western movies," McCormick states, "They come to the United States looking for that kind of experience-cowboys, Indians, pioneers, antelope racing across the plains. Fremont County is one of the few places you can find all these cultural attractions, but very few people know about us, so we need to get out there and tell them."

The bus tour was part of a Familiarization Tour ("Fam" Tour) hosted by Wyoming's Travel and Tourism office. Most of the participants were international tour professionals who offer US leisure travel packages for customers in five primary target markets: Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg), France, Germany (which also covers marketing in Austria and Switzerland), Italy and the United Kingdom.

For most participants, the tour was their first exposure to Fremont County.

"The people on the bus were impressed by the unique cultural attractions found in Wind River Country. Combine these attributes with your spectacular scenery, diverse recreational opportunities and most of all, lack of crowds and you have just what many European travelers are looking for in their visit to the western United States," said Rita Greene Bellardo, Manager, Travel Trade Marketing for Wyoming Office of Tourism.



"The Fam Tour was about education," McCormick says. "People aren't going to come here if they don't even know we are on the map."

McCormick, who served as the group's tour guide for their Fremont County visit, says she is confident the event was a success.

"These travel professionals had fun. They tried new things, saw new sights, and were exposed to what a great place this is. I feel sure they will go home and tell their clients a visit to Wind River Country is a must if they are heading to Yellowstone next summer."

Tourist promotion of "off-the-beaten-track" New World destinations in Europe has been shown to be successful. Canada's Yukon Territory owes its annual influx of German tourists (second only to American visitors) to direct flights to Whitehorse from Frankfurt, and a concerted marketing campaign highlighting the area's attributes, many of which parallel Fremont County's: wide open spaces, lack of crowds, wilderness, wildlife, and a very different culture from the one they enjoy back home.

"Our biggest challenge in promoting tourism is the fact that Fremont County is relatively unknown to international travelers," McCormick says. "Once we get people here, our assets sell themselves. We just have to spread the word. The Fam Tour was all about that education process for international visitors."

To learn more about what Wind River Country has to offer, or to request a vacation packet, please visit us at <http://www.wind-river.org> call [800-645-6233](tel:800-645-6233) and **fan us on Facebook** at [Wyoming's Wind River Country](#) and **follow us on Twitter** under [WindRiverWY](#).

Your Fremont County Lodging Tax Dollars at Work!

Audrey Eaton, Public Relations Administrator

c/o Wind River Visitors Council

Paula McCormick

McCormick Marketing, Inc.

263 North 8th Street

Lander, WY 82520 USA

Phone: 307-332-5546

Fax: 307-332-5336

email: info@mccormickmarketing.com

Wind River Visitors Council - email: info@wind-river.org - web: <http://www.wind-river.org>

The mission of the Wind River Visitor's Council is to "Develop awareness of unique attractions in Fremont County, and to promote them as a tourist destination, in a manner that protects and preserves the resource for future generations."