

Good evening. I'm very pleased to be here with you.

Like much of the Great Lakes of North America region, Minnesota has strong German roots. Almost half of our population has German ancestry. Today, there are many business and trade connections that tie Minnesota to Germany. And each year, more than 30,000 Germans visit Minnesota.

The travel companies here in Germany help make that happen, so thank you for sending those visitors to the Land of 10,000 Lakes. We hope that as Minnesota becomes better known in your country, that we may welcome even more German visitors in the years to come.

We're pleased to work with the Great Lakes of North America marketing association to invite German travelers to explore the exciting areas surrounding the Great Lakes.

Like many destinations in the United States, Minnesota has enjoyed a long relationship with AmericanTours International. I was pleased to meet Noel (*no el*) Irwin Hentschel (*hent shall*) and Michael Fitzpatrick of ATI during a visit to Los Angeles two years ago.

- At that time, we talked about Berlin and ITB and the importance of the German travel market. So it's good to be here with them.
- ATI has just announced its expanded tour programs to Minnesota. These tours explore the Mississippi River, the shoreline of Lake Superior, American Indian heritage, and the Twin Cities, including, of course, the Mall of America.
- Thank you, Noel and Michael, for your support of Minnesota as a destination for the German market.

ATI is always looking for the best American experiences to offer to travelers around the globe. In Minnesota, we're always looking to keep our travel experience fresh and interesting.

For example, here are some of this year's travel stories in Minnesota.

- The state is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the flight across the Atlantic by aviator Charles Lindbergh.
- And we're having a big birthday celebration in our state this summer. Mall of America, in suburban Bloomington, turns 10 years old this year. It's the largest shopping and entertainment complex in the U.S., and draws visitors from around the world.
- Also this summer, Minnesota is hosting the PGA Championship golf tournament, bringing the world's best players to our state.



- We know that our German visitors are very interested in our Dakota and Ojibwe Indian heritage. This year, two Indian heritage tours are being offered in the Twin Cities area. They are a good way for visitors to learn more about these Minnesota Native Americans.

The hilly forests of northeastern Minnesota border the north shore of Lake Superior, the greatest of the Great Lakes. The North Shore Drive along Lake Superior is one of only 15 nationally designated All-American Roads. It begins in the city of Duluth. Duluth has warmly received the hundreds of German visitors who arrive in port on the German cruise ship *Columbus*.

A great way to get around Minnesota is to drive the miles of designated scenic byways. They make it easy to find our most treasured areas, including the Mississippi River, Lake Superior, lakes and forests, and the beautiful chain of lakes right in the heart of Minneapolis.

Minnesota is here at ITB as a partner with the Great Lakes of North America marketing consortium. We thank our Great Lakes partners for this evening's event.

So, during ITB, I invite you to discover more about Minnesota and the Great Lakes of North America.

Travelers will find Minnesota's the perfect place to spend their vacation days. A place to step away from the pressures of everyday life and refresh yourself.

I'm enjoying my opportunity to visit with you here in Berlin, and I hope the next time I see you, you'll be exploring Minnesota.

Thanks so much for being with us this evening. Please enjoy yourselves.