

Good afternoon.

You know my own state of 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.

We hope that as Minnesota becomes better known in your country, even more German visitors will come.

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 shull*) 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.
- And Minnesota is excited that ATI has 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, ATI, 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.

We've been a vacation destination for about 150 years, about as long as we've been a state, and our beautiful lakes and woods are still part of our appeal.

But we've also been developing the resources that we know today's visitors are looking for. And we know that you are always looking for new ideas to promote to German travelers.

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. He's one of our native sons with German ancestry. His historic solo flight helped link our two continents.
- And we're having a big birthday celebration in our state this summer. Mall of America, in suburban Bloomington, will be 10 years old this year. It's the largest shopping and entertainment complex in the U.S.

- Also this summer, Minnesota is hosting the PGA Championship golf tournament, bringing the world's best players to our state. In September, the Solheim Cup will bring European and U.S. women's golf teams to Minneapolis.
- We know too that German visitors are very interested in our Dakota and Ojibwe Indian heritage.

Shopping, golfing, fishing, and our heritage are all draws for today's visitors. But what Minnesota is best known for is the beauty of its lakes and woods, vast areas of natural beauty for everyone to enjoy.

- Minnesota is here at ITB as a partner with the Great Lakes of North America marketing consortium. 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*.
- The wilderness lakes of Minnesota attract many German visitors. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is a vast network of clean, clear lakes, an escape from the distractions of today's world.
- You can find another wilderness experience on the lakes of Voyageurs National Park.
- And of course, the Mississippi River draws visitors from around the world. It begins its journey as a small stream in the northern forests of Minnesota, so small you can walk across it.

We have no majestic mountains in our state, but Minneapolis-St. Paul is a gateway city to the Rocky Mountain area. Minnesota is a member of Rocky Mountain International, another multi-state marketing group.

German travelers can fly to our airport and explore the Twin Cities before they head west.

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.

So, during ITB, I invite you to discover more about Minnesota, in the heartland of the United States.



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 themselves.

Thank you.