

# Taking Touring to the Next Level

Bespoke Experiences is “your friend in the city,” creating your customized, luxury private journey from Nashville and New Orleans to San Diego and San Francisco.

By Sarah Binder



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**I**t's vacation time, and you're heading to a city you have never been, but one of your friends lives there. What do you do? Chances are, you called that friend weeks ago to help you plan where to go and what to see, and they know exactly where to take you because they've known you for years.

Even if you don't know a soul in Nashville, New Orleans, San Diego or San Francisco, Bespoke Experiences is ready to fulfill that role for you. The New Orleans-based luxury travel company crafts private and completely customized journeys led by licensed local tour guides dubbed Experience Architects (EAs).

“We consider them more ‘your friend in the city’ who just happens to be exceptionally

knowledgeable and well-connected. They are our guests' local link to everything that is currently going on, as well as to the regional history, explaining the cultural narrative in a language and style that is compatible with the guests' interests, demographic and pace,” explains Jennifer Simpson, the company's founder and chief experience officer.

“Our EAs are first and foremost hospitable, always looking to make the guests' needs their first priority. They have a vast, broad and diverse regional knowledge of the city, the surrounding region and its people,” she adds. “They are charming and charismatic, can adapt on the fly and are exceptional problem-solvers.”

Experience Architects provide guests with an intimate look at their desired destination, but first, the Bespoke Experiences operations team estab-

## New Orleans



## New Orleans



lishes a personable, open and collaborative relationship with every client to learn their travel style, preferences, interests, budget and additional considerations. This process entails an extensive initial phone interview followed by many phone and email exchanges between the guest and the team.

"This one-on-one effort, and the attention to detail required to execute each diverse experience requires an inordinate amount of time and a Herculean effort," says Simpson.

Combining close attention to their guests' details with extensive local connections, Simpson's team creates multi-faceted activities that connect clients to a destination in the most personal ways. To call these experiences "tours" would be doing them a disservice.

"Recently, a guest celebrated a milestone birthday in New Orleans with a few of her closest family and friends after overcoming a major health crisis. We arranged for a personalized Second-Line parade through the French Quarter with her own brass band,

umbrella, police escort and courtyard lunch reservation at the conclusion. At the finale of her time in the city, we arranged for her birthday dinner in the private home of a local celebrity musician whom she happened to admire," Simpson says. "There, he and his band performed a private concert and served them a home-cooked meal that he and his wife prepared. Then, everyone relaxed and chatted like they'd all been long-lost friends. She, and all of the guests, wept with joy when she learned of the surprise."

Simpson draws on her previous professional experiences to cater to a well-traveled, well-educated and affluent clientele — she used to own and operate a pharmaceutical event/meeting planning business that served a similar audience. At one point while living in

New Orleans, she was attempting to convert her Canadian pilot's license to an American one at the Lakefront Airport. While talking with a fixed-base operator, she learned that more than 1,500 private aircraft were flying in for the impending Super Bowl, which led to an "aha moment."

"We realized there weren't any organizations in place to service this small, elite market once they were in town," she explains. "There really wasn't anyone catering to the luxury niche."

In many cases, the ultimate in luxury travel means gaining exclusive access to experience top landmarks in unique ways. Through connections with the Louisiana State Museum, Bespoke Experiences has been able to provide guests with unique

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## Nashville



opportunities to enjoy Jackson's Square, the city's most popular attraction.

"A local physician had a visiting Catholic colleague who'd never explored St. Louis Cathedral, and he wanted to go above and beyond for his guests. We coordinated to gain behind-the-scenes access with the Archdiocese. Unexpectedly, the timing of our visit corresponded with the burial of a recently deceased Archbishop, so the guests were also able to witness aspects of an in-church burial that no one typically sees," she says.

In addition to the birthplace of jazz, Bespoke Experiences launched services in Nashville — the Music City — in April 2017. The company has helped guests snag prime seats at the Grand Ole Opry (where, if you're lucky, a star like Blake Shelton might pop up). For those who are unsure what to do, but have a particular interest, Simpson can design an itinerary focusing on Nashville's influential history, visiting sites from the Civil and Revolutionary Wars, or its eclectic architecture, including the "Mother Church

of Country Music:" the Ryman Auditorium, constructed with flawless acoustics.

As Bespoke Experiences looks toward the future, it is focusing on both short- and long-term goals. The team has an ambitious "26 by 26" goal to be operational in 26 North American cities by 2026. In the near future, it will roll out its custom, luxury private tours in Chicago and Toronto this year.

Simpson and her team implement a strategic approach to selecting new destinations, asking several questions to evaluate the possibilities. "We look at several factors: What destinations are our clients requesting? What destinations are making the 'Top 10' North American travel lists domestically and internationally? What destinations align with our key guest offerings (history/culture/culinary/lifestyle/landscape/architecture)?" explains Simpson.



Regardless of location, she will continue to guide her team and ensure positive client experiences by emphasizing a simple principle: the Golden Rule.

"Bespoke Experiences is aspirational to me. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,'" she says. "Bespoke is how we wish to be treated while we travel: with kindness, courtesy and friendliness. With respect for my time, my money, my interests, my style of travel and my family dynamic. This honesty, integrity and sensibility influence our business acumen."

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