

Western Group Tour

FALL 2011

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RETAIL QUEST

From gift shops to mega malls,
shopping remains choice activity

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SENSATIONAL JEWELS

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gems in the West

Lone Star gem

Fredericksburg shines with German
heritage, vineyards, LBJ, Nimitz

RETAIL QUEST

**From gift shops to mega malls,
shopping remains choice activity**

*The architecture of the
Westfield Centre in San
Francisco enhances the
shopping experience.*



Photo: Edmonton.com

Style mavens visit the West Edmonton Mall for designer duds in Edmonton, Alberta.

Shopping is the engine that drives the economy, and it also drives tourism.

For some travelers, shopping is the main reason for a getaway.

For others, they might add a visit to a museum store to their busy itineraries or visit a downtown retail district on an afternoon.

Then there are those happy to pack shopping into their tours any way possible.

Tour planners can add retail options to the itinerary without increasing the bottom line. After all, no shopping center, outlet mall or gift shop charges admission.

Shopping also gives group members the independence so many travelers crave. The group doesn't need to stick together, even though they're spending time at the same location. They can choose the stores — and restaurants — they want to visit.

After the recession and sluggish economy since, shoppers are starting to return to their old ways.

The retail sector continues to support the economy, providing one in four U.S. jobs, both directly and indirectly.

"A solid year of growth in sales provides further evidence that retailers continue to lead the charge in the economic recovery," said Matthew Shay, president and CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based National Retail Federation (NRF).

"While spending continues to surpass expectations, sustained growth in the retail sector depends on a strong labor market."

Stores are reaching out to shoppers, enticing them with special deals, much to the delight of bargain hunters.

"Knowing that shoppers remain concerned about the economy, companies have already begun offering aggressive promotions to entice shoppers," said Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist for the NRF.

In the Western U.S. states and Canadian provinces, opportunities for shopping

are as abundant as the Rocky Mountains are tall. Here's a look at four different shopping arenas — a mega mall, outlet centers, department stores and museum stores — that provide perks beyond the standard retail experiences.

Like no other: West Edmonton Mall

Alberta's West Edmonton Mall, North America's largest shopping and entertainment center, is adding even more iconic shopping experiences to its lineup of tenants in Edmonton, Alberta.

Shoppers will find a mix of designer retailers and upscale shopping, along with traditional mall favorites and some innovative retailers at the Canadian retail giant, with 5.3 million square feet — the equivalent of 48 city blocks.

"The shopping experience at West Edmonton Mall is clearly unmatched; we offer the largest selection of fashion available anywhere in Canada," said Stacey Claffey, West Edmonton Mall general manager.

"We are pleased to be welcoming a number of exciting new tenants. They are dynamic, popular brands that will reaffirm our status as Canada's must-shop destination for both local shoppers and tourists alike."

Leading denim retailer 7 for All Mankind and Oro Gold Cosmetics have recently opened. A Disney Store redesign is slated for the fall, and the only Edmonton location of Rockport shoes will open soon thereafter. In the spring, shoppers can look forward to Edmonton's only



Photo: West Edmonton Mall

Galaxyland, the world's largest indoor amusement park, is in Alberta's West Edmonton Mall.

True Religion and Steve Madden stores.

Beyond its retail, the West Edmon- ton Mall is an entertainment and dining destination. It offers an accredited zoo and is home to the world's largest indoor amusement park.

The group sales department takes the guesswork out of planning a group visit to such a big place. Group perks include coupon books, flexible attractions pack- ages and customized special events.

► (708) 444-5308

www.wem.ca

Bargains, style:

Woodburn Stores; Outlets at Zion

Outlet shopping long has been a favor- ite destination of group tour travelers.

Today as more people are looking to save money without sacrificing style, outlet shopping is even more appealing.

The Woodburn Company Stores, open since 1999, draw more than 4.4 million visitors a year to Oregon's Wil- lamette Valley in Woodburn. Located off Interstate 5, the tax-free outlet center is 30 minutes south of Portland, 20 minutes north of Salem and is close to top vine- yards, breweries and outdoor adventure.

The rugged, Pacific Northwest-in- spired design of the open-air center of- fers an inviting backdrop for brands such as Coach, Columbia Sports- wear, Nike and Banana Re-

public. Ninety-five outlets are located at Woodburn, with a dozen joining the mix in 2010.

"We're a fantastic destination point for shoppers because of the tax-free shopping and large variety of name brands," said Kate Williams, Woodburn Company Stores' marketing manager. "However, we offer a unique experience because we make a point to greet each and every tour group. We want all of our shoppers to have a wonderful time, but we strive in making sure our tour groups feel welcomed, special and excited to re- turn again."

Williams has been delighted with the number of groups visiting lately.

"Over the Fourth of July holiday, we saw 16 buses on Saturday alone, much higher compared to the five we had last year," she said.

Also, there has been an increase in the number of Canadian shoppers, drawn by the favorable exchange rate of the dollar.

"Because of a rising sales tax in Cana- da, many are traveling in groups to Wood- burn in order to shop their favorite name brands, tax-free."

The Outlets at Zion, in St. George, Utah, draws groups looking to add shopping to

their tours of Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and Zion National Park. Others are drawn to the area's spas, golf courses and other options.

A visit to the outlet center fits nicely into any itinerary. With advance registra- tion with the management office, groups can connect with perks including a step- on greeting, coupon books and driver/ escort incentives.

► (888) 664-7467

(303) 981-1900

www.woodburncompanystores.com

► (435) 674-9800

www.theoutletsatzion.com

Department store gems: Nordstrom, Westfield

From its humble beginnings as a Se- attle shoe store 11 decades ago, Seattle- based Nordstrom has grown into one of North America's leading luxury retailers.

The same signature style, but not the same prices, are found at Nordstrom Rack, the company's outlet stores. Nearly 100 stores are located in 23 states, offering the same brands carried in Nordstrom stores

with most at savings of 30 to 70 per- cent.

Photo: Courtesy of Woodburn Company Stores





Photo: Courtesy of Woodburn Company Stores/Holland Studios

Shoppers can seek out bargains at the Woodburn Company Stores.

By year's end, new Nordstrom Rack locations are slated to open in Lenexa, Kan.; Sugar Land, Texas; Tucson, Ariz.; and National City, Calif.

Nordstrom's flagship store in downtown Seattle continues to draw the attention of Pacific Northwest shoppers, visitors and spa fans looking to relax.

The second-largest shop anchors the Westfield San Francisco Centre. Two blocks from Union Square, the mall fills the former Emporium Store site. This elegant space from 1896 was re-opened in 2006 as Westfield, preserving the landmark dome and beaux-arts facade as a showpiece.

Bloomington's flagship on the West Coast is located here, along with more than 200 designer boutiques and the Food Emporium, with a gourmet market and 15 upscale eateries.

As part of the network of America's Premier Shopping Places, Westfield offers a host of perks to visiting groups, including meet-and-greets, VIP coupon books and custom programs.

"Westfield San Francisco is very welcoming to groups," said Amy Benson, the center's marketing director. "We work

with groups to custom tailor experiences to make them feel special."

Both department stores offer group-dining options, which can be combined with special events and activities. The Nordstrom Café and Bloomingdale's private Mission View Room host meals and special events.

Customized fashion shows, wardrobe planning seminars, spa visits, fashion and beauty makeovers, home and seasonal decorating presentations and others can all be designed for a group by request.

"There are so many things we can do here," Benson said. "What's amazing about the property is everything that's great about San Francisco is under one roof."

► www.americaspremiershoppingplaces.com

► (415) 512-6776

www.westfield.com/sanfrancisco

Cultural commerce: Museum gift shops

Small but powerful, museum stores are shopping powerhouses.

According to the Denver-based Museum Store Association, 72 percent of cultural commerce stores generate at

least \$90,000 in revenue a year, with 29 percent generating at least \$500,000.

The income is a boon to cultural institutions — museums, zoos, botanic gardens, libraries and parks.

On the visitor side, a visit to a gift shop can provide a lasting memento of a visit and the opportunity to support a favorite cultural institution.

"Museum stores are directly tied to the mission of the museum," said Stuart Hata, director of retail operations for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

"It allows the visitor the chance to take their experience home with them and reflect on it."

Museum store staff provide direct contact with group visitors.

"The front-line staff is very customer focused," Hata said. "We're really focused on enhancing the visitor experience and conveying a positive experience."

► (303) 504-9223

www.museumdistrict.com

These suggestions are just a sampling of group shopping options in the West. Share your favorites with us at [facebook.com/GroupTourMagazine](https://www.facebook.com/GroupTourMagazine)