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## Tourism boost: Tampa hosts travelers for Italian reality show

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Robert Yaniz Jr.



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Eight Italian travelers who are filming their adventures for a reality series paid a visit to Tampa Monday.

The show, entitled "Friends Tour 2009" will air on Italian music television channel Music Box on digital satellite TV platform SKY. It is the third year of the series.

The group is filming its own visit using equipment provided by Samsung, one of the show's sponsors.

The travelers arrived at the Renaissance Tampa Hotel International Plaza at 9 a.m. and visited the Florida Aquarium later that morning for a one-hour tour, said Lisa Humphrey, public relations specialist for Tampa Bay & Co.

The Friends Tour 2009 requested assistance from Tampa Bay & Co. in organizing the visit, and Humphrey accompanied the travelers throughout their stay in Tampa.

In the afternoon, the travelers went to The Italian Club in Ybor City where more than 10 club members greeted them. The group then walked down to the historic Columbia Restaurant for lunch and later spent two hours at Lowry Park Zoo.

The visitors had dinner at Italian eatery Pelagia Trattoria, where head chef Fabrizio Schendari provided a tour of the kitchen and was interviewed.

It is trips like these that bring value to tourism marketers.

The goal is that they help increase wider awareness of the Tampa Bay area as a tourist destination, said Travis Claytor, communications manager at Tampa Bay & Co.

International visitors currently comprise about 7.5 percent of the tourism market in Hillsborough County, Claytor said. That total has dropped steadily each year since 2005, when it was 11.1 percent.

Although Tampa Bay & Co. does not market to Italy directly, it has representatives in the United Kingdom and South America. These are its two biggest international markets, Claytor said.

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