



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Annapolis Hosts International Travel Industry Leaders at
Capital Region USA Global Travel Exchange**

September 21, 2023, Annapolis, Maryland – Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County (VAAAC) and Capital Region USA (CRUSA) proudly joined forces in Maryland’s Capital City for the Second Annual Global Travel Exchange (GTE) from September 17 to 20, 2023. The annual marketplace served as a vital link, connecting the Mid-Atlantic region’s travel suppliers, including VAAAC, with overseas buyers from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The conference featured face-to-face appointments, regional familiarization (FAM) tours, and engaging networking events in the Mid-Atlantic. The four-day event was attended by more than 100 travel and tourism professionals in Downtown Annapolis.

"We couldn't have been more excited to have the Capital Region USA Global Travel Exchange in Annapolis," said Scott Balyo, CRUSA's Executive Director. "The European tour operators and U.S.-based receptive tour operators who attended enjoyed the rich history, maritime heritage, and outstanding hospitality while expanding and enhancing the itineraries they currently offer."

During immersive FAM tours of Annapolis, tour operators’ itineraries included a Watermark tour of the Maryland State House, an afternoon sail on the Chesapeake Bay with Schooner Woodwind, a private tour of the United States Naval Academy, and a visit to the Banneker-Douglas Museum.

On Monday, September 18, the GTE Opening Event was held at the William Paca House & Gardens in downtown Annapolis. Guests included the European tour operators, members of the VAAAC Board of Directors and Trustees, Destination Marketing Organizations from the Mid-Atlantic, and VAAAC industry partners. Distinguished speakers included Kristen Pironis, Executive Director of Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County, Gavin Buckley, Mayor of Annapolis, Shannon Harcum, Senior Director of Finance & Administration at Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County, Karen Brown, President & CEO of Historic Annapolis, Julie Heizer, Deputy Director, National Travel and Tourism Office at the U.S. Department of Commerce, and Liz

Fitzsimmons, Managing Director of Tourism, Film and the Arts at the Maryland Department of Commerce and current Board Chair of CRUSA.

“The entire Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County team and I were thrilled to welcome the CRUSA GTE attendees and our partners,” said Pironis. “It was such a pleasure to introduce the international visitors to our community and our region and showcase all we have to offer. We expect the relationships we have developed this week will turn into great partnerships.”

Attendees were also treated to an authentic Eastern Shore crab feast at Fisherman’s Crab Deck, hosted by Visit Queen Anne’s County and the Maryland Office of Tourism Development. The event concluded Wednesday with the President’s Reception at the Annapolis Maritime Museum & Park.

VAAAC’s role as GTE host was made possible by a strategic partnership with the Maryland Office of Tourism Development and CRUSA.

Meetings and Conferences in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County

Annapolis and Anne Arundel County stand as a premier Mid-Atlantic destination for hosting conferences and meetings, seamlessly blending historic charm with modern amenities. The City of Annapolis, with its rich colonial heritage and vibrant waterfront, offers an array of unique venues, including Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, The Annapolis Maritime Museum & Park, and numerous downtown hotels with state-of-the-art meeting facilities. Meanwhile, Anne Arundel County boasts a diverse range of meeting spaces, including Live! Casino & Hotel Maryland in Hanover and Historic London Town & Gardens in Edgewater.

With easy access to both Baltimore and Washington, D.C., including three major airports, Annapolis & Anne Arundel County offer convenience for attendees and operators, making it an ideal location to combine business and leisure, ensuring memorable and successful conferences and meetings.

For organizations looking to host a unique conference or meeting experiences in Annapolis & Anne Arundel County, more information can be found at [VisitAnnapolis.org /meet](https://www.visitannapolis.org/meet) or by emailing VAAAC’s Director of Sales, Elizabeth Joyner at ejoyner@visitannapolis.org.

About Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County

Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County (VAAAC) is a nonprofit, partnership-focused Destination Marketing/Management Organization (DMO). VAAAC’s mission is to foster a welcoming destination and promote tourism on behalf of our visitors, partners, and community. VAAAC’s efforts are guided by four core priorities: to cultivate and lead a diverse and inclusive hospitality and tourism community, to collaborate with partners across the destination, to drive prosperity and sustainability, and to strengthen organizational capacity.

In 2021, Annapolis and Anne Arundel County boasted a \$3.1B tourism economy and welcomed more than 6 million visitors.

