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Tour Companies Wary as Trump Takes Office

Washington, D.C. – With President-elect Donald Trump set to enter the White House in January, some D.C. tour companies are wary of the effects a new and controversial administration might have on the city's thriving tourism industry.

Tour guides are now faced with the challenge of weaving captivating anecdotes about the 45th president that cater to a broad group of visitors – including those that didn't vote for Trump – while bracing for a potential loss in business.

“I have so many people that want to talk about Trump, whether they are pro-Trump or anti-Trump,” said Bo Stanton, founder, managing member and guide of D.C. Insider Tours. “I normally don't really talk about the president unless people bring it up, but I'll definitely be coming up with fun or quirky things to tell people about Trump during our stop at the White House.”

Stanton founded D.C. Insider Tours eight years ago with his signature “D.C. in a Day” six-hour tour, which ends in front of the White House with a few unique, must-hear facts about the current First Family.

“One thing I love to tell people is that there is a bee hive in the backyard of the White House, and they take the honey from the beehive and brew a honey lager beer right inside,”

Stanton said. "Obama is supposedly the only president that microbrews his own beer in the White House."

Stanton said that he tries to keep politics out of his discussions, but knows that with a president-elect as controversial as Trump, he won't be able to fully push politics aside.

"We'll still get the people who want to talk about politics and will bring it up," Stanton said. "But I've had people on tours say that with a Trump presidency they'd be a lot less likely to come to D.C."

According to Atmosphere Research Group, a travel industry research company, if Trump institutes policies that make travel to the United States more burdensome, such as stricter customs and border procedures or scrutiny of particular groups of people, many foreign visitors may be deterred from traveling to the U.S.

"We're hopeful that the new administration won't affect tourism in the city, but there is no way to know for sure," said Camden Schwantes Arciniega, manager and tour guide of D.C. by Foot.

A survey conducted by Travelzoo, a global company that offers deals on travel, predicts one million fewer British visitors to the U.S. following the election.

Visitors from the United Kingdom are the second largest group, behind China, of overseas visitors to D.C. According to a report from Destination D.C., an organization that manages and markets D.C. as a premier tourist destination, 201,000 visitors came to D.C. from the U.K. in 2015.

Arciniega said that the majority of D.C. by Foot's foreign visitors come from China and the U.K., and that a Trump presidency could translate into a loss in business.

Tour guides at D.C. by Foot, the original "name-your-own-price" tour company in the District, seek to remain as politically neutral as possible on tours to ensure an enjoyable experience for all visitors.

"As historians, we try not to talk about modern politics at all on our tours," said Arciniega. "And we try to only talk about the current First Family if we are asked a factual question."

As a rule of thumb, Arciniega chooses not to discuss politics on his tours or in passing with guests, and will continue that practice throughout the Trump presidency.

Since the Nov. 8 election results, foreigners aren't the only ones reconsidering vacation destinations.

Rebecca Joseph, 46, from Atlanta, Ga., strayed from her tour with USA Guided Tours on Saturday to take in the electrified scene in front of the White House, which was teeming with students and advocacy groups chanting and holding signs that read “Not My President” and “Love Trumps Hate.”

“It’s been a while since I’ve been on a tour in D.C.,” Joseph said. “I just wanted to come to D.C. after the election so I could see the White House one last time while Obama is still living there.”

All of the post-election coverage at the White House made Joseph want to see what was happening firsthand, so she booked her tour and drove to D.C. one week later.

“I don’t know that I’ll spend any time coming back to D.C. once Trump takes over the White House,” Joseph said. “That’s why I’m here now.”

All told, D.C. will continue to be a bustling center of arts, culture, and diversity regardless of the sitting president.

Stanton of D.C. Insider Tours has spent 12 years of his life researching everything there is to know about D.C., and prides himself and his tour guides on being storytellers of the District’s past and present.

“At the end of the day, D.C. is a tourist city. It’s a global destination for people, and it’s more of a commodity than anything else,” Stanton said. “I don’t think the presidency will affect that, unless Trump starts banning people and stuff like that. That might change things.”

Although Stanton will continue to tell his favorite stories when Trump enters office, he is uncertain about what the future of tourism will look like.

“I’m on the edge of my seat thinking about what a Trump presidency might do to tourism because I don’t know,” Stanton said. “I’m definitely nervous. I’m just hoping it doesn’t hurt.”