
Bus firm gives Triangle visitors a lift

By April Taylor
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WILLIAMSBURG -- On her first trip to the Historic Triangle last year, Aimee Thompson of Grand Lake, Colo., wanted an easy way to visit Jamestown from Williamsburg, where she was staying.

She had no car and very little time. Luckily, she was offered a ride.

Visitors like Thompson, unsure about how to get from Williamsburg to Jamestown and Yorktown, have few options available if they don't want to drive or wait for a taxi.

"The only option for tourists in Williamsburg wanting to get to Jamestown is to drive a car or catch a Yellow Cab," said Howard Smith, president of Oleta Coach Lines Inc. "There's never been public transportation to Jamestown and Yorktown."

The family-owned company is partnering with the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Inc. and the National Park Service to provide regular bus tours from the Williamsburg Transportation Center on Boundary Street to four sites: Jamestown Settlement, Historic Jamestowne, Yorktown Victory Center and the Yorktown Battlefield.

The Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation runs Jamestown Settlement and the Yorktown Victory Center. The National Park Service is in charge of the Yorktown Battlefield and Historic Jamestowne, the site of the nation's first English settlement.

By mid-May, the tours will be available up to six days a week, said Dave Smith, Oleta's marketing manager.

It's the first local company to offer the service, he said.

Jamestown and Yorktown are not on any of the transit bus routes.

"It's a disappointment to some of the visitors that have used us that we don't service Yorktown and Jamestown," said Richard Drumwright, transit director for James City County.

Drumwright hopes to work closely with Oleta to not only service tourists' needs but also to decrease traffic congestion, which is likely to rise in the coming years because of a variety of celebrations: In 2005, the National Park Service will celebrate its 75th anniversary. In 2006, Yorktown will mark its 225th victory anniversary, and the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown is the following year, 2007.

"What Oleta is offering is a great and good lead into Jamestown 2007," Drumwright said. "We're looking for ways to alleviate some of the stress on our limited network of roads."

Oleta will offer a morning tour to Jamestown and an evening tour to Yorktown.

One 55-passenger coach bus will leave Boundary Street at 8:30 a.m., stopping first at Historic Jamestowne and then at Jamestown Settlement. A bus to the two Yorktown sites will leave at 1:20 p.m. and return at 5:30 p.m.

But Dave Smith said Oleta, founded in 1986, has at least nine coach buses and plenty of drivers to handle more demand.

Adults will pay \$38 for one day of touring to the four sites. The same tour, split over two days, will cost \$50, he said. The tours include narration by the bus operator, and visitors will have at least one hour at each site to explore on their own.

Given that admission prices are included, the tour cost is cheaper than a taxi to the sites, he said. The cost by taxi one way from the transportation center to Jamestown is \$10; to Yorktown, it's roughly \$30, a Yellow Cab driver said.

Jeanne Gardner, activities director for Fairfield Williamsburg Inc., praised the new option.

Since January, Oleta has carried about 30 guests of Fairfield Kingsgate to Jamestown and Yorktown, as a tryout.

"We get a lot of people who tend to come in by Amtrak or fly in and don't want to rent a car to get around," Gardner said. "There's always been a market for getting people out to Jamestown and Yorktown."

Williamsburg Mayor Jeanne Zeidler also applauded Oleta's efforts. "To find better and different ways to move from one site to another is good for us," she said. "Easier ways to get from the downtown area to Jamestown and Yorktown will only make this area more appealing."

City manager Jack Tuttle joined the chorus praising Oleta's contributions to the community. But he said he hoped its new venture wouldn't turn into a parking problem for the center.

"We don't have enough parking there at the transportation center to develop this as a way to begin your tour at the transportation center and leave your car there."

Tuttle also questioned the impact of the tour on traffic congestion, at least in the beginning.

"You need to get a large number of people out of their cars to have that kind of impact, and we're a ways away from that."

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