

MEETING MINUTES
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)
SPECIAL MEETING OF TOURISM MARKETING DISTRICT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2024
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM – 2427 Main Street

Call to Order: Chairman Atallah called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.

Roll Call & Self Introductions: Chairman Atallah called for self-introductions. TMD Committee Members and those present provided brief self-introductions. The following persons were recorded in attendance:

Tourism Marketing District Committee (TMD) Present: Chairman Younes Atallah, Secretary/Treasurer Aileen Carreon, Member Cameron Haseli, Member Diego Ruiz de Porras, Member Juan Viramontes.

Also Present: City of Santa Monica Chief Resilience Officer Lindsay Call, SMTT President & Chief Executive Officer Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero, SMTT Client Services Manager Alyssa Dorn, SMTT Administrative Assistant Bella Cifuentes, Ambrose Hotel General Manager Danielle Goller, Hilton Santa Monica Hotel & Suites General Manager Shahid Kayani, Ocean Lodge Hotel General Manager Marisela Herrera, Ocean Lodge Hotel Owner Daniel Gregory, Ocean View Hotel General Manager Bryan Lara, The Pierside Hotel Director of Marketing Csilla Martin-Arujo, Shutters on the Beach & Hotel Casa del Mar Senior Group Sales Manager Jenna Abrams.

Absent: Members Jessica Rincon, Karina Sedigh.

Public Comment: Chairman Atallah called for public comment; there was none.

Emergency Communications: Guest presenter Lindsay Call outlined initiatives related to the consolidated 911 dispatch center and emphasized the importance of streamlining emergency communications and enhancing response capabilities. Call then informed the committee about Santa Monica's emergency alerts policies, highlighting the expansion of SMVISIT emergency alerts.

The city's emergency alert system is divided into a three-tiered approach to emergency notifications, designed to ensure optimal community engagement and awareness. The first layer, SMAAlert, consists of public safety alerts that residents can subscribe to via the official website or through text messaging services. The second layer utilizes geo-based data from E911, which automatically sends alerts to phone numbers within a designated area, requiring no prior registration from recipients. The final tier is the Wireless Emergency Alert system, like AMBER Alerts and presidential alerts, which triggers notifications across all cell phones in the vicinity, ensuring that critical information reaches everyone.

SMVISIT is an initiative allowing visitors in the city to sign up for a 30-day subscription to the SMAAlert service. This feature is designed to enroll individuals by prompting them to respond to specific keywords. The tailored messages within the SMAAlert for visitors program focus on pertinent information relevant to tourists, such as alerts regarding weather events like lightning or earthquakes, ensuring that visitors receive useful and contextually significant updates. Call expressed her willingness to collaborate with public safety officials to enhance outreach efforts, including promoting the alert system to hotel guests to maximize its effectiveness and accessibility for those visiting the city. A tool kit of collateral and ways to advise hotel guests was sent to all hotels including TMD.

Approval of the July 17, 2024, TMD Meeting Minutes: Secretary/Treasurer Carreon presented the May 14, 2024 meeting minutes. Member Viramontes moved to approve the minutes and Member Ruiz de Porras seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Members Rincon and Sedigh absent.

Acceptance of the May 2024 Financials: Secretary/Treasurer Carreon presented the TMD Collections

Memo. Chairman Atallah called for a motion to accept the memo as presented. Member Ruiz de Porras made a motion to accept. Member Haseli seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Members Rincon and Sedigh absent.

SMTT Staff Updates:

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards provided the committee with an update that the Extra Bedroom program will return from November 11, 2024 to February 10, 2025 to help attract hotel business during the shoulder and holiday seasons with discounted rates for Santa Monica residents and their guests. This initiative aims to enhance community relations and promote local hotels.

Los Angeles Tech Week will take place from October 13 to October 20, 2024. The Santa Monica Innovation Hub will kick off the week with a technology street fair on Ocean Avenue October 14, anticipated to attract over 2,000 participants from the tech industry. Edwards additionally highlighted that Cirque du Soleil is returning to Santa Monica after a 10-year hiatus and SMTT is collecting specials, discounts and promotions from local businesses that will be featured on SMTT's Cirque du Soleil landing page.

Edwards also updated the committee on SMTT's fall media campaign led by Datafy. Initial key performance indicators from August 15 to September 15 show nearly two million impressions and over 4,000 clicks. Meanwhile, SMTT's Noble Studios campaign seeks to differentiate Santa Monica as the original and the premier luxury beach destination. Upcoming efforts include launching Connected TV tactics in September and new digital ads in October. Additionally, the Santa Monica Travel & Tourism Co-op campaign offers hotels a chance to partner with SMTT for \$10,000 to receive focused/targeted ads for their property and insights using Datafy's database from October 1 to November 15 aims to attract high-value leads.

SMTT President & CEO Kerns highlighted the recent media coverage featuring Olympic volleyball player Kerri Walsh-Jennings that garnered significant attention during SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury's time in Paris. This coverage effectively promoted Santa Monica as a premier destination for beach volleyball that encapsulates the essence of the "ultimate California lifestyle." A strategic video capture approach was employed to pitch the story, which resulted in substantial earned media coverage, including features in major publications, achieving significant audience reach of 814,726,893 with an ad value of \$5,842,012.42. Furthermore, social media insights indicated record-breaking engagement levels on social media content, especially posts showcasing Santa Monica's sunsets and the iconic Pier, strengthening the destination's appeal.

SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero updated the committee on SMTT's recent attendance at missions and trade shows. At Virtuoso Travel Week in Las Vegas, SMTT connected with 64 domestic and international travel advisors, leading to several site inspections and FAM requests. September 10–12, the sales team and partners engaged with 40 Canadian trade clients during a successful Vancouver Sales Mission.

Otero also provided the committee with details regarding events including ILTM North America from September 23 to 26 where 46 appointments with luxury travel advisors were held. In addition, team members are currently at the Australia Sales & Media Mission, September 30 – October 4 in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney with participation from several hotel representatives. Brand USA Travel Week in London from October 21 to 24 will facilitate discussions on opportunities to increase U.S. visitation in collaboration with Greater Palm Springs. Meanwhile, SMTT's partnership with Cirque du Soleil Kooza features ten hotels as exclusive accommodation options for visitors to bundle accommodations with event tickets—the first time Cirque du Soleil has ever done hotel/ticket bundles. The platform Jampack offers tailored hotel and event ticket packages for a seamless travel experience.

Otero then shared updates on the group sales team activities. SMTT's sales team attended IBTM Americas from August 20 to 23 to showcase offerings in corporate meetings. Coming up October 8–10, IMEX America will allow our team to hold one-on-one meetings with MICE professionals from around the world. Additionally, SMTT will host a group of 15 travel advisors from Team Landers of ConferenceDirect from October 20 to 22 to showcase our product for potential group bookings in Santa Monica.

CEO Update: SMTT President & CEO Kerns shared a travel forecast from Visit California with the committee that indicated growth is normalizing. There are several headwinds facing the tourism industry, including the news cycle on the California wildfire season (and visitors' misconceptions of CA geography that causes them to be unsure whether wildfires are affecting Santa Monica), non-favorable exchange rates and more outbound than inbound travel. Kerns recommends that hotels' salespeople remain aware of concerns related to geographical factors.

Another obstacle is a long visa wait time; while there is significant demand for U.S. visas from India, for example, applicants are facing a wait time exceeding 400 days. Kerns highlights the urgent need for a federal tourism representative and ongoing education for congressional representatives.

Kerns also shared current national travel indicators from the U.S. Travel Association, comparing insights from the prior year. The national travel indicators show overall positive trends, with air passenger volume increasing by 5% year-over-year in July, following a 6% rise in June. Overseas arrivals grew by 9% in July after a 14% increase in June, recovering to 85% of 2019 levels year-to-date. Hotel room demand in July remained unchanged compared to last year, while group room demand in the top 25 markets rose by 6% year-over-year, rebounding from the previous month's flat growth. Although short-term rental demand experienced a modest increase of 9% in July, it was slightly down from June's 10% growth. Kerns observes that these indicators demonstrate a steady recovery in the travel industry, though concerns persist regarding occupancy levels, highlighting the significant disparity between ADR and occupancy rates.

Kerns provided key statistics from the Visit California Luxury Forum that highlighted significant trends in the luxury market. She reported that even budget-conscious travelers prioritize experiences, with 90% of Gen Z willing to spend more on discretionary travel. Baby Boomers are spending three times more than other demographics, mainly favoring familiar destinations while seeking original experiences. The luxury travel sector remains strong domestically, with a preference for sun and beach vacations, as well as specialized experiences like safaris and ski trips. Ultra-high net worth travelers, representing only 1% of this market, account for 15% of total spending, with an emphasis on privacy and seamless service. On the international front, China emerges as the fastest-growing luxury market, while popular U.S. travel destinations include New York City, Miami, and the Hamptons. The introduction of Ritz cruises is a notable trend, as the luxury sector begins to merge retail with travel, adapting to evolving consumer preferences.

Kerns discussed with the committee Santa Monica's potential as a venue for the LA28 Olympics, urging those present to review the details in the staff report of City Council's study session on the topic and carefully weigh the pros and cons before deciding whether or not to support Santa Monica hosting beach volleyball during the Games.

For the Good of the Order: Chairman Atallah called For the Good of the Order; there was none.

Adjournment: Chairman Atallah adjourned the meeting at 4:22 p.m.

Next Tourism Marketing District Committee Meeting

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

MISSION STATEMENT

Santa Monica Travel and Tourism (SMTT) works to strengthen our local economy by enhancing and promoting our community as a distinctive, compelling and welcoming travel destination.

BRAND PROMISE

Santa Monica...an unforgettable beach city experience filled with eye-catching people, cutting edge culture and bold innovations. It's the essence of the California lifestyle.

VISION STATEMENT

To ensure Santa Monica is recognized as the premier beach city destination in the world.

Wednesday, October 2, 2024