

MEETING MINUTES
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)
SPECIAL TOURISM MARKETING DISTRICT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2025
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM – 2427 Main Street

Call to Order: Vice Chair Carreon called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

Roll Call & Self Introductions: Vice Chair Carreon called for self-introductions. Those present provided brief self-introductions. The following persons were recorded in attendance:

Present: Vice Chair Aileen Carreon, Treasurer/Secretary Cameron Haseli, Member Simon Fricker, Member Jessica Rincon, Member Juan Viramontes, Member Sonia Metz, and Member Inessa Udovchenko, who arrived at 10:08 AM.

Also Present: SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano, SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwillo, SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Executive Assistant Haylee Miller, The Eden Director of Revenue Management Kenny Murray, The Eden General Manager Danielle Delcambre, The Eden Senior Sales Manager Ari Brown, The Cottage Manager Juana Rosales.

Absent: Member Karina Sedigh was absent.

Public Comment: Vice Chair Carreon called for public comment. There were none.

Approval of the September 16, 2025, TMD Meeting Minutes: Vice Chair Carreon presented the September 16, 2025, meeting minutes. Member Fricker moved to approve the minutes, and Member Viramontes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Member Haseli abstaining, and Member Udovchenko and Member Sedigh absent.

Acceptance of the Year-to-Date Tourism Marketing District (TMD) Collections Memo: Vice Chair Carreon presented the Tourism Marketing District (TMD) collections memo. Member Carreon moved to accept the memo and Member Fricker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Member Sedigh absent.

SMTT Staff Updates: SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwillo provided a performance update on a recent Expedia Campaign beginning in June 2025 and running through September 2025, designed to drive hotel bookings. This campaign resulted in 11,869 total room nights, an average ADR of \$397, and 5.7 million impressions. Dowgwillo echoed that SMTT has verbally committed to running a similar campaign geared towards bookings surrounded by FIFA that is set to begin in December 2025 and run through July 2026.

Dowgwillo also shared results from a partner education webinar hosted by SMTT in partnership with Madden Media in October in which 29 partners registered to learn more about the topic "SEO 101". The next partner webinar is set for November 20th on the topic of "Leveraging Threshold 360" a service that can provide 360° imaging of your business to be utilized for digital tours via the santamonica.com, as well as pushed to Google business profiles.

LA Tech Week served as the launch of SMTT's digital passport, encouraging attendees to download the platform to access exclusive offers with partners in the destination, and thus encouraging users to explore Santa Monica. The Tech Week Passport was live from October 12 – October 19, 2025. The passport was also advertised via various e-mail newsletters, and a Holiday Shopping Passport is already in progress for the upcoming holiday season.

Dowgwillo highlighted upcoming winter booking campaigns including a "Q4 Booking Campaign" designed to drive winter getaways, long weekends, and 2026 stays to leisure regional, state and national travelers, as well as the "I Wish I Had an Extra Bedroom Campaign" targeting residents to encourage booking local stays for visiting friends and family during the holiday season.

Brand USA launched a new campaign, *American the Beautiful*, which includes a plethora of commercials targeting international audiences to drive US travel. Dowgwillo shared a commercial from the campaign that that aired in the UK, which highlighted Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier.

Looking ahead, event-driven marketing will play a larger role in SMTT's strategic approach. From February 19–22, 2026 The Genesis Invitation will be hosted adjacent to Santa Monica, as well as Frieze Los Angeles which will run from February 26 - March 1 and will be hosted at the Santa Monica Airport.

SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury shared three awards earned including the Sunset Travel "Where to Go: Superlative Cities", the Magellan Awards for Santa Monica Beach Volleyball Campaign, and World Travel's North America's Best Tourist Board.

Salisbury also shared earned media highlights from, with international coverage secured in *Best of Travel Trade* (India) and *Mid-Day* (India), as well as domestic coverage from *Travel + Luxury* (US) and *American Express* (US).

Completed familiarization trips and media visits included *HELLO! Magazine* (UK), *Connoisseur Circle* (Germany), and *Delicious* (Australia). Upcoming press visits include Sonia Ved of the *Harper's Bazaar & Cosmopolitan* (India), Aliko and Sascha Rettig representing *America Journal* (Germany), and Sophie Steiner from *LUXE City Guides & Wine Enthusiast* (US).

On social media, the Instagram channel saw a 0.3% increase in followers, with the account now surpass 60,000 followers. Engagement rose 1.6% over the previous period, even amongst news reports of a downturn in social media engagement.

Salisbury shared that SMTT Public Relation Manager Emily Ohara attended IMEX America 2025 in Las Vegas alongside the SMTT sales team. Ohara met with trade publications to share about Santa Monica and deliver MICE press kits, which resulted in a lead with Smart Meetings Magazine for a FIFA World Cup feature early next year.

Salisbury represented SMTT alongside SMTT Director of Global Business Develop Aleksandr Sigalus at the Visit Californian India Trade & Media Mission in Mumbai and New Delhi. The trip and the SMTT presence reaffirmed California's long-term commitment to India, as it remains one of California's fastest-growing visitor markets.

Salisbury provided a brief on recent and upcoming travel trade activities aimed at expanding international reach and driving high-value visitation.

In September and October, SMTT hosted multiple FAMs for top advisors from France, Germany, and Italy. Experiences included immersive site inspections, diverse culinary experiences, and signature Santa Monica moments.

SMTT represented the destination at the ILTM North America in the Bahamas, completing over 108 appointments with the region's most exclusive travel advisors from North America, in partnership with Shuttles on the Beach and Huntley Santa Monica.

SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano and Sigalus attended Brand USA Travel Week & CEO Summit in London, UK. The program provided valuable insights into European market trends and the travel outlook for the U.S. in 2026, while fostering high-level networking with key industry leaders and partners to keep Santa Monica top of mind among international markets.

Other travel trade events attended in October and November included Virtuoso Connects in Vancouver, a one-day networking event to learn about industry insights and remind Canada travel advisors that Santa Monica is ready to welcome back their clients to California, and Signature Travel Week in Las Vegas, a two-day networking event full of one-on-one meetings with top-producing luxury travel advisors.

Looking ahead, SMTT will be present at ILTM Cannes (Dec 1–4) for three days of 65+ pre-scheduled appointments with top global luxury travel advisors in partnership with Shuttles on the Beach and Hotel Casa del Mar and On Location Experiences. SMTT will also host three client lunches during the week to strengthen key relationships and drive future high-value business.

Looking ahead, SMTT will be present at the Visit California PME Roadshow in Chicago and Kansas (November 17-20), MPI San Diego WAVE (November 20), AMEX InterAction in Las Vegas (December 8-10), and SITE SoCal Holiday Event in La Quinta (December 10-12).

CEO Update: SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards provided an update on key national developments impacting the travel and tourism industry.

Edwards shared that SMTT President and CEO Misti Kerns attended the Visit California Board Meeting in October in Orange County. Kerns brought back key data shared at the board meeting including statistics on Canada air arrivals to California, International air arrivals to California, as well as California hotel room demand, and California lodging outperforming the US.

Edwards shared statistics from the Visit California Board meeting that have revised California visitation and travel spending forecast for 2025 to be slightly increased. Printed and visual materials regarding voting on the upcoming Visit California 2025 Renewal Campaign were also shared.

Other statistics from the Visit California Board meeting that were shared included that California news coverage domestically has been negative, stating top issues being cost, homelessness and safety perceptions, as well as California losing desirability to Florida.

Ways to improve this messaging are already being implemented, such as Visit California's SNL spoof storytelling strategy, expanding on the SNL skit *The Californians*, while also emphasizing new 2026 road trip guides, as well as a new podcast by Josh Meyers called *California Now*, which has shared behind the scenes images of production in Santa Monica.

Edwards highlighted how Route 66 has gained traction as preparations are made to celebrate the centennial next year, including over 54 million media impressions, 1.4 million social media impressions, 1000 publications distributed, and all 13 global markets reached.

Other notable information from the Visit California board meeting that was shared included the 2026 FIFA World Cup timeline, a successful media campaign called Freakier Friday, which included a city swap between San Francisco and Los Angeles, resulting in 12.4 million impressions, as well as the approval of the LA Convention center expansion, which will keep Los Angeles as a competing national convention destination.

Kerns will remain a board member for the U.S. Travel Association, which recently launched a campaign to capture the government's attention as the government shutdown costs the travel industry \$1 billion per week. Edwards shared an article from *Hotel Dive* confirming the difficulties of traveling during the government shutdown, as well as an article from the *Los Angeles Times* confirming how tourism has been affected in Los Angeles due to perceptions from the wildfires earlier this year, immigration crackdowns, as well as labor costs for hotels and small businesses.

Edwards concluded her update with positive performance highlights, noting a 55.3% increase in MICE events year over year, and a 6.6% increase in booked rooms.

For the Good of the Order: Vice Chair Carreon called for Good of the Order comments. There were none.

Adjournment: Vice Chair Carreon adjourned the meeting at 10:44 AM.