

**MEETING MINUTES
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)
REGULAR BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2026
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM – 2427 Main Street**

Call to Order: Treasurer Ginsberg called the meeting to order at 5:08 PM.

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

Present: Treasurer Karen Ginsberg, Member Neil Carrey, Member Darlene Evans, Member Jan Williamson, Member Simon Fricker, City Manager Oliver Chi, who arrived at 5:16 PM, and Vice Chair Charlie Lopez-Quintana, who arrived at 5:19 PM.

Also Present: SMTT CEO/President Misti Kerns, 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 Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus, and SMTT Executive Assistant Haylee Miller.

Absent: Secretary Jeff Klocke, Member Lauralee Asch, and Member Tim Defuria were absent.

Public Comment: Treasurer Ginsberg called for public comment. There were none.

SMTT Staff Updates: SMTT COO Edwards presented on Film Santa Monica. Since its September launch, the organization has garnered over \$150,000 in total revenue, with more than \$110,000 of that total generated for the City of Santa Monica.

SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwillo presented four brand new images of the destination, including sports on the beach. These images will be used to further promote the destination, especially as the destination prepares for more sports-based events.

Dowgwillo also updated the Board regarding our website, santamonica.com, and the new translation options into additional languages, including Arabic, Mandarin, Portuguese, French, and German. This will provide even more ease of access for international tourists to connect, explore, and plan their trips within the destination. Another website implementation includes a Natural Language Processing (NLP) filter which helps to sort searches by events, accommodations, restaurants, and more, to help drive traffic to our featured businesses.

SMTT has also started sentiment testing the brand through Scrunch to analyze how users are receiving information about the destination when using AI. It ranks the perception of results, how many times questions are being asked, and other useful tools to understand how the traffic is scored. This will be a useful tool to adapt content to adjust for more favorable AI utilization.

A campaign with TravelZoo will send out 1.7 million targeted e-mails, estimating results of 2 million impressions and nearly 100,000 organic impressions by the end of March. Another campaign with Booking.com will promote Santa Monica via 1 million targeted emails to users who have identified that they would like to travel to California. A paid media placement recently published in LA Magazine's Dodgers issue features the prominent Third Street Promenade in a premium placement on the inside back cover.

Looking ahead, event-driven marketing will play a larger role in SMTT's strategic approach. From February 19-22, 2026 The Genesis Invitational will be hosted adjacent to Santa Monica in Pacific Palisades, and Frieze Los Angeles will run from February 26 – March 1, 2026, at the Santa Monica Airport. Other notable upcoming events include the NBA All-Star Game at the Intuit Dome in February, and FIFA World Cup at Sofi Stadium in June and July.

SMTT Vice President of Communications Salisbury presented on the Communications department's successes. The year kicked off with a key Route 66 event that Salisbury supported on behalf at SMTT at the Pier and Mel's Drive-in. The Drive Home VII kicked off in Santa Monica and includes a group of nine vintage cars traveling along Route 66 all the way to Chicago and ending in Detroit for the Detroit Auto Show where the vehicles will be displayed. ABC 7, KTLA, Santa Monica Daily Press and Santa Monica Lookout all produced media coverage of the event.

SMTT's Communications team secured a Bronze Reputation Management win from the HSMAI Adrian Awards, which is a top travel industry organization, for best Crisis Communications and Recovery Campaign during the 2025 LA wildfires.

SMTT also participated in Santa Monica's 150th Anniversary, leading an event in December titled Travelling Through Time: Celebrating 150 Years of Santa Monica. Residents, visitors, and local business owners were invited to submit photos and videos to be sealed in the digital time capsule, and over 200 pieces of media were collected. The time capsule will be opened in 2040.

A group press trip hosted four top media outlets from France in the destination. They stayed at the Santa Monica Proper Hotel and experienced an itinerary centered on culinary, wellness, and cultural activities.

Salisbury shared highlights of Peter Greenberg's Hidden Gems episode starring Santa Monica. Salisbury and the Communications team spearheaded the project filmed in Santa Monica last spring, airing in December 2025. The episode highlights Santa Monica's beaches, weekly farmer's markets, restaurants, hotels, arts & culture scene, and the Route 66 Centennial. It is live on Peter Greenberg's website, and with rolling national and global distribution to come on PBS, Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, and more this year.

Salisbury also shared earned media highlights with international coverage secured in *Harper's Bazaar* (India) and *Mid-Day* (India), and *The Telegraph* (U.K.), as well as domestic coverage in *Travel Age West* (U.S.) and *KTLA 5* (U.S.).

Recently completed familiarization trips and media visits include *Harper's Bazaar* (India), *America Journal* (Germany), and *LUXE City Guide & Wine Enthusiasts* (U.S.). Upcoming press visits include Jim Benning of *Westways/CBS LA* (U.S.), Faye James of *HELLO! Magazine* (Australia), and the Visit California Global Influencer Advisory Board.

On social media, the Instagram channel @seesantamonica saw a 2.5% increase in engagement, which is 4.6% increase from the previous period. Across all platforms, there were 31,013 engagements, which is up 7.9% from the previous period.

SMTT Director of Global Business Development Sigalus provided a brief on recent and upcoming travel trade activities aimed at expanding international reach and driving high-value visitation. Sigalus attended ILTM Cannes in December, where he held over 65 pre-scheduled appointments alongside partners Shutters on the Beach, Hotel Casa del Mar, and On Location.

In December, SMTT hosted the Signature FAM, which invited top travel advisors to the destination to convert their curiosity for Santa Monica into confidence of the product resulting in future sales. They experienced Santa Monica through a luxury itinerary including multiple hotel site visits at world-class properties.

Sigalus also shared data from HotelBeds and the Visit California Campaign that ran from September through October. This data showed soft spots in the Canada, Germany and France markets and highlighted the strongest growth markets for bookings from Mexico, Japan, and the U.K.

SMTT will be present for New York Sales Calls in January with Fairmont Miramar & Bungalows, The Huntley Hotel and Regent Santa Monica Beach. Additionally, SmartFlyer CORE, an influential luxury advisor gathering, will be held in Santa Monica later this month. This will bring in approximately 100 top-producing advisors and 100 luxury suppliers for several days of relationship building and in-destination programming. SMTT will lead two hosted bike tours for 20 guests to create immediate itinerary confidence.

In February, SMTT will host German Tour Operators for a FAM, designed to turn top German sellers into confident advocates who actively include Santa Monica in luxury California itineraries for the long-haul market. SMTT will also attend the Virtuoso Forum in Canada in February, a regional tradeshow exclusive to travel business owners and managers from Canada. SMTT will sponsor the second day breakfast which includes a six-minute speaking engagement to the collective group of attendees.

Sigalus also presented on group sales efforts. In November and December of last year, SMTT attended four pivotal group sales events, including Visit California PME Roadshow, MPI San Diego WAVE, AMEX Interaction, and the SITE SoCal Holiday Event. SMTT also partnered with ETC Hotels in December to support two FAMs hosted by Shutters on the Beach and Hotel Casa del Mar. SMTT sponsored a private Pickle Pop session to showcase wellness and team-building options for entertainment and incentive groups in the destination.

This week, SMTT is hosting HelmsBriscoe FAM which includes seven meeting planners for three days of site inspections, destination activities, and a hotelier meeting focused on showing Santa Monica as a premier destination for meetings and events.

Approval of the November 12, 2025, BOD Meeting Minutes: Vice Chair Lopez-Quintana presented the November 12, 2025, meeting minutes. Member Carrey moved to approve the minutes, and Member Williamson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Secretary Klocke, Member Asch, and Member Defuria absent.

Acceptance of the September, October, November 2025 Financials: Treasurer Ginsberg presented the August 2025 financials. Member Carrey moved to accept the memo, and Member Fricker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Secretary Klocke, Member Asch, and Member Defuria absent.

Approval of the FYE 25/26 Budget & TMD Forecast (Updated): SMTT COO Edwards presented the mid-year budget reforecast and respread of the 25/26 budget. Member Carrey moved to accept the memo and Treasurer Ginsberg seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Secretary Klocke, Member Asch, and Member Defuria absent.

CEO Update: There are national-level challenges impacting international travel to the U.S., driven largely by negative messaging and policy signals. Currently, visa issuance is on hold for travelers from 43 countries, which does not convey a welcoming message to international visitors.

Despite these challenges, upcoming FIFA World Cup events this summer are expected to drive international visitation and leisure bookings. According to the U.S. Travel Association, international travel contributes approximately \$181 billion annually to the U.S. economy—spending that cannot be fully replaced by domestic travel.

U.S. Travel Association and the White House are also discussing an expanded media review process that would require international travelers to submit their social media accounts for assessment before visa approval. This proposal has raised concerns within the travel industry regarding additional barriers to entry. The government shutdown last year had a significant impact on the travel sector, resulting in an estimated \$6 billion in losses.

For upcoming opportunities, the Route 66 Centennial presents a strong platform to promote both international and domestic travel, with continued support for related programming and events throughout the year. Additionally, the recent opening of JSX service at Santa Monica Airport provides improved access for domestic travelers, making it easier to attend events in Santa Monica and the surrounding areas.

City Manager Update: City Manager Chi spoke on the continued focus of improving safety, cleanliness, and Downtown vitality. Sidewalk and concrete repairs in the Downtown area are currently underway. Parking structures will see expanded restroom hours, enhanced security, and increased cleaning, and the city has temporarily paused the planned parking rate increase in Downtown Santa Monica to evaluate impacts on local businesses and explore alternative parking models. Public safety bike patrols are now being deployed, and the city is coordinating with Metro to increase security presence on transit platforms. Efforts are also underway to expand shelter bed availability for unhoused individuals in Santa Monica, including options outside of the city. Additional city programming is planned to begin in March, and discussions are ongoing for potential, new large tenants for Santa Monica Place. While overall foot traffic remains down citywide, these initiatives aim to support recovery and increased activity.

Continuing Nominations & Voting EOC: The following EOC slate was presented: Vice Chair Lopez-Quintana for Chair, Secretary Klocke for Vice Chair, Member Fricker for Treasurer, and Treasurer Ginsberg for Secretary. There were no additional nominations. Member Carrey moved to approve the new EOC slate, and Member Evans seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Secretary Klocke, Member Asch, and Member Defuria absent.

For the Good of the Order: Vice Chair Lopez-Quintana called for Good of the Order comments. There were none.

Adjournment: Vice Chair Lopez-Quintana adjourned the meeting at 6:38 PM.