

UTAH BOARD OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
2023 April Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2023
Rio Theatre, Helper, UT

Board Members Present Jared Berrett, Kym Buttschardt, Lesha Coltharp, Commissioner Victor Iverson, Brian Merrill, Greg Miller, Glen Overton, Nathan Rafferty, Jordan Smith, Mike Taylor, Sara Toliver, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer

Board Members Excused Lance Syrett

UOT Staff Tera Atwood, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Lorraine Daly, Zach Fyne, Kim Heys, Camille Johnson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Erin Smith, Vicki Varela, David Williams, Heather Zang

Public Des Barker, Stacie Boney, Elliott Clark, Julie Comstock, Samantha Browning, Megan DeAngelis, Kenny Driggs, Sydnie Furton, Tina Grange, Megan Griffin, Joan Hammer, Kaylin Jones, Kate Kilpatrick, Ethan Kohler, Nick Larson, Becky McRae, Lenise Peterman, Natalie Randall, Marianne Shiner, Jonathan Smithgall, Maria Twitchell, Shanny Wilson

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Vice Chair Nathan Rafferty called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone and asked the head table for introductions. Helper Mayor Lenise Peterman welcomed the group and shared a video about the art mural project in Price, UT.

MINUTES

MOTION: Mike Taylor motioned to approve the February 10, 2023, minutes from the meeting held in Salt Lake City. Jared Berrett seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT

Vicki Varela, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Welcomed Commissioner Iverson who was sworn in and added to the UOT board on April 12, 2023.
- Announced Camille Johnson joined UOT on March 13 as Director of Community & Partner Relations, and Tera Atwood started April 10 as the Marketing & Communications Manager. Web Content Editor Kim Heys joined the UOT team full time in January after two years as a part time employee. Two employees are leaving UOT this month - Sandra Salvias and part time employee Erin Smith.

- Many board seats are in transition as six members' terms are expiring at the end of June: Greg Miller, Brian Merrill, Glen Overton, Lance Syrett, Mike Taylor, and Sara Toliver. We are hoping Shayne Wittwer will continue for a third term and also looking to fill the Arts & Culture seat that was recently added.
- Continuing to work through the National Park Service's issues related to the Arches reservation system. Myself, Camille Johnson and Natalie Randall attended an industry meeting led by the Public Plans Policy Council in Moab, on Wednesday, April 12. A lot of thoughtful ideas have come forward, and the park has generally been responsive to improve it. However, there is still a lot more work to be done.
- Also at the very beginning of the Zion planning process as discussed with Commissioner Iverson. There is still a lot of work to be done to get that on a track that we can feel good about.
- Postponing the board retreat until the October meeting as we will have new board members in place.
- Also date changes for the October board meeting to October 20, due to the conflict with UEA/fall breaks. The November meeting will be held on November 17 so it does not conflict with Veteran's Day.
- Vicki is traveling to Washington, D.C., next week (April 16-20) for the U.S. Travel meetings, and traveling there again in May with UTIA and a Utah congressional delegation, combining with American Hotel and Lodging Association meetings.
- We are focusing on the \$1M that we received from the legislature that will go toward the operations budget and one more full time employee (FTE).
- Recent Major League Baseball news that is super exciting and led by Larry H. Miller companies. Beginning the process to secure a team in Salt Lake. The press conference was held at Rocky Mountain Power (1400 West/South Temple) as it could be the new stadium location. Press conference was very inspiring, and I felt privileged to participate. They have an amazing vision and it feels like those early days of our Olympic vision. This is going to happen, and I am pleased to be on the steering committee. We will keep you posted as we integrate the visitor economy into all of their thinking.

INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

Rachel Bremer, Tourism Global Markets Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Added a team member - Emma Checketts, Global Content & Tour Specialist. This gets International back to a full team.
- Forecasted growth through 2026 looks very good. International spending anticipated 25 percent growth and international visits forecasted at almost 15 percent.
- March social media continues to perform well in our key markets with powerful branding and improving social sentiment. Continuing to research what works best in India with video, and adding more articles and long-form content.
- Note that while we still have trade and public relations representatives in China due to the Governor's executive order, we have removed Tik Tok from all state devices and we have canceled our Douyin account (Tik Tok in China). This was extended to any state sponsored accounts and state social accounts so we have canceled our China Luxury Advisors contract. This opened up funds for China, and we are using that for research, translation costs and Brand USA projects.
- We have been working on the B2B agent platform for a few years and today we can show you the live platform that has been launched in India, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We are soon to launch it in our European markets as well.
- Our goal was to create a platform that is less tedious and less difficult to get through. Our platform serves as an all-inclusive resource for planning, product development, assets and education on how to book, sell and package Utah in a responsible way.

- Our distribution methods include newsletters, databases, associations, memberships and industry social media channels. Also distribute information about the platform at trade shows and sales missions where we can share the QR code and link.
- We will measure success through registration and completion rates, engagement, interaction and user feedback.
- We made sure to develop something that is visually appealing because we have this stunning, appealing product: Utah.
- UOT's Zach Fyne led on this project and worked with our travel representatives in many countries. Applaud his efforts and focus.
- Rachel thanked the board for allocating the funding and having patience as it has taken two RFP processes to get the best vendor to build this. We believe we have one of the best platforms out there, and we are excited to present this to the industry. It is going to help us be more efficient and successful.
- Our Tree Utah partnership where we work locally with a non-profit to provide donations as well as booking donations in Germany and France. Multi-year partnership that gives back to Utah's communities, and a way to connect international visitors while reinforcing responsible travel messaging.
- In May 2022, we were able to plant 20 trees in Torrey and upcoming this May, we will plant 30 trees in Hanksville and Torrey.
- The booking partnership with America Unlimited in Germany has resulted in many social media impressions, and almost 6,000 room nights so far this year.
- International department looking ahead to wrap up the 2023 fiscal year, Rachel is traveling to Canada for a media mission, and the team will travel to IPW at the end of May. Vicki and Rachel will also travel with the Governor's trade mission to Paris and UK, in conjunction with the Paris Air Show, for events there and to celebrate 15 years of the Paris to SLC direct flight.
- Board member Jared Berrett asked for an update on the travel visa challenges. Rachel communicated that it is still challenging and it is still a year out in India which is a major concern. Hearing from the embassies and U.S. Commercial Service offices that they are staffing up and budget increases are coming. Based on the most recent data, they are processing visas quicker than they were in 2019, they just have so many more requests. Telling us by 2024 Spring, they should be in a "caught up mode" and wait times will be closer to two months. China is still a backlog and it affects our recovery and growth opportunities in the markets. European markets are also waiting for visas longer than usual but much less than the Asian markets.

2022 DATA REVIEW

Denise Jordan, Marketing Analytics & Research Manager

- Looking at data sources that help us understand the health of our visitor economy by looking at 2022 reporting.
- National Parks visitation, following a record-setting year in 2021, dipped 6.7 percent for all Mighty Five[®] Parks. This most closely resembles 2017 data. In 2022 we saw 10.5 million visitors.
- Of the 10.5 million visitors, Zion National Park saw 44.6 percent of those visitors, followed by 22 percent by Bryce Canyon.
- In 2022, Bryce Canyon did see a 22 percent increase over visitor numbers in 2021. However, misleading as they were off 20 percent from 2019 numbers. Significant dips but starting a climb back.
- With the added timed entry system in Arches, data shows April-October was lower by almost 25 percent from normal visitation numbers. A lot of data is being captured by NPS about the timed entry system but we do not have access to it yet.

- Utah State Park visitation over the past three years has been record-setting with 2020 seeing 10.6 million visitors, 2021 marking 11.6 million and 2022 down slightly with 10 million.
- Over 70 percent of visitation occurs in 10 Utah State Parks. Sand Hollow is the most visited followed by Dead Horse Point, Antelope Island, Snow Canyon, Jordanelle, Deer Creek, Wasatch Mountain, Willard Bay, Bear Lake, and Goblin Valley.
- More than 80 percent (24) of Utah counties have a state park within their boundaries. Only five do not: Beaver, Daggett, Tooele, Wayne and Weber. Utah has 47 state parks total.
- Traditional lodging and short term rental information combined, the state wide metric reports 64.3 percent occupancy in 2022 with an average daily rate of \$149 (up 20 percent over 2021). At and above slightly from the 2019 levels.
- Short-term rental side, only 48.7 percent occupancy but ADR of \$281. Prices are varied due to size of short term rental - one bedroom studio to large, multiple room houses.
- Watching Utah and national lodging inventory increasing at a very rapid rate for short term rentals. See 10.5 percent annual growth over the past three years which is seven times the rate of traditional lodging growth.
- Short-term rental data is captured by a tool called Transparent, and it's collecting data from the platforms themselves making insights from what it finds but it is not a perfect system to capture all of the short term rental numbers out there. It is directionally giving us good information. Look to publish this data soon on our public dashboard and will see information by county.
- We are digging in to research to find out how many properties are owned by individuals versus corporations. Very small percentage of individual owners and many traditional lodging companies are participating in short-term rental space.
- Short term rental numbers data is intended to be separate from traditional housing in spite of traditional lodging companies owning short term rentals. Could still have short term rental units slipping under the radar because they are not listed on the VRBO, AirBNB, etc., platforms.
- County transient room tax is the biggest and most important tax for our industry. Significant growth in the past two years and 2022 for the first time surpassed \$100 million.
- It is a tax that the industry imposed on itself, for itself. It is intended to build and support the visitor economy. Lifeline for our partners and DMOs to build out the right sized visitor economy in their communities.
- Three counties - Salt Lake, Summit and Washington - make up 57 percent of the TRT collections.
- 2022 Spending information from VISA, domestically \$3.4 billion which is slightly above 2019 and 2020 levels. International spending is improving after very low dips during the 2020 and 2021 Covid recovery years.
- International visitation forecasting is expected to return to 2019 levels by 2025, and international spending in 2024 is forecasted to reach 2019 levels.
- A lot of information and data is available through the Utah Office of Tourism website, sentiment studies, Kem C. Gardner Policy Group or contacting Denise Jordan.

MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT

VisitUtah.com

Ben Cook, Director of Marketing & Communications, Utah Office of Tourism

Kim Heys, Web Content Editor, Utah Office of Tourism

Ethan Kohler, VP of Digital Experience & Technology, Hanson Dodge

Megan DeAngelis, Account Director, Hanson Dodge

- Our goal with VisitUtah.com is to create a powerful platform to inspire, plan and prepare tourists coming to our state.
- Hanson Dodge has a team of 12 that works to keep the award-winning site current and expanding.

- Part of Hanson Dodge’s work includes a steady, drumbeat of care and beating for the site. Spend time making sure the website is secure, available, performing well for users. In addition to technology, always looking at the analytics and planning strategy.
- Regularly releasing new features. Some are behind the scenes to help the office run efficiently and other things users can appreciate like the recent platform version upgrade to Kentico 13.
- Kentico does help manage content but it also is an experience platform. It is really leaning into marketing and visitor engagement.
- Continuing to look at engagement with itinerary content. It indicates that people reading it are moving from inspiration to a travel-planning mindset.
- Using features within the backend platform for personalization and to deliver relevant content to targeted geographies. Current for three neighboring states - Colorado, Nevada and Arizona.
- Also released photo essay templates, which are great storytelling mechanisms.
- Created a flexible banner system to cross-promote content, highlight key messages and these are used throughout the site.
- Increasingly great content is created, so a new space where these types of videos can extend their value and get exposed to broader audiences.
- We took a look at all the travel tips that were presented in long list form, so created a new widget where similar items can be grouped together. Easier for visitors to digest and learn more.
- We recently completed a call to action (CTA) A/B test during the ski campaign. Either A) plan your ski trip, or B) receive the travel guide. Did see an increase in clicking the plan for your ski trip after seeing a ski campaign ad. Working collaboratively with Love Communications to look at future opportunities with other campaigns and adding personalization.
- A key metric for success that we look at is time on the site. Goal is greater than 4 minutes on the site and since relaunching the site (November of 2020), 13 percent of users are spending more than 4 minutes.
- International sessions, seeing more than 113 percent increase from 2021 to 2022. Red Emerald sessions (+61 percent) and pageviews (+57 percent) are seeing a huge increase from 2021 to 2022.
- For the ski campaign, planning your ski trip was 61 percent of the page views during the campaign.
- Continued growth in mobile traffic, 72 percent of consumers are viewing the website on mobile devices. Thoughtful decisions going into the design for mobile interactions as they are quicker and less likely to scroll as far or read as much content.
- What is next? Big goals for 2024 fiscal year to keep the site inspiring, personalized and responsible. Also, transition from google analytics to GA4 with the Love team. Kim requested a tool to focus on content that needs to be reviewed and updated efficiently, so plan to develop a report to manage the 1,400 pages of content.
- Look at ways the website is operational for users with disabilities. Standards keep evolving while requirements are increasing.
- Newsletter audiences are highly-engaged and highly-reliable so still looking at ways to grow this email list.
- Invest in Red Emerald strategies - fun and educational – and reimagine landing page layouts.
- Want to underscore the importance of investment in the VisitUtah.com website. The dollars we spend on media campaigns drive significant traffic to the website. Which in turn, drives traffic to local DMO, partner, hotelier and industry websites. It is a power tool and a strong investment is necessary.

UTIA UPDATE

Natalie Randall, Executive Director, Utah Tourism Industry Association

- Utah Tourism Industry Association (UTIA) is the advocacy arm for the industry. The collective voice of the industry and we have two key pillars to advocate and educate.
- Just finished the legislative session and thanks to Des Barker, our legislative strategist. We've had a lot of grassroots engagement from the partners and that is where our strengths are as an industry. Look for the legislative wrap-up email that was recently sent.
- We are taking a delegation to D.C. in May. Meetings with Utah congressional delegates and senators; their land, work force and international managers as well.
- The high school hospitality program is now in 16 counties with more than 590 students participating. The curriculum is designed to educate the students in the industry with 15 courses.
- Annual conference is in St. George this year, September 26-29. A call for content through May.
- The Tourism Hall of Fame award nominations are open and close at the end of the month.

Board Vice Chair Nathan Rafferty thanked Carbon County and the Rio Theatre. All encouraged to do a walking tour of downtown Helper with Tina Grange.

MEETING ADJOURNED

The next board meeting will be held on Friday, May 12 at 10 a.m. It will be held at Homestead Resort in Midway, UT.