



**Tourism Advisory Council Meeting**

Monday, November 16, 2020


11:00am – 12:30pm

Virtual Meeting

**AGENDA**

- |      |   |                                   |
|------|---|-----------------------------------|
| I.   | Approval of Minutes                       | Cristyne Nicholas                 |
| II.  | Chair's Report                            | Cristyne Nicholas                 |
|      | A. New York Forward Reopening Status      |                                   |
|      | B. Tourism Related Governor Announcements |                                   |
| III. | I LOVE NY Report                          | Ross Levi                         |
|      | A. Industry Events                        |                                   |
|      | B. Recent ILNY Projects                   |                                   |
| IV.  | Winter Tourism Update: SANY & ORDA        | Scott Brandi & Scott Christiansen |
| V.   | TAC Ideas for Low Cost Tourism Promotion  |                                   |
| VI.  | New Business                              |                                   |

**Next meeting:** Monday, January 25, 2021



# New York State Tourism Advisory Council

*November 16, 2020*



New York State Division of Tourism



**Empire State  
Development**



# CHAIR'S REPORT



**Empire State  
Development**



## NEW TRAVEL ADVISORY GUIDELINES

- Travelers can “test out” of mandatory 14-day quarantine
- Contiguous states and essential workers exempt from quarantine protocol
- Balances movement between states and prioritizes health and safety
- More information on NY Forward website: <https://forward.ny.gov/>





# NEW YORK FORWARD REOPENING UPDATE

- Ski Resorts
  - ❑ Limit capacity to ensure social distancing
  - ❑ 50% indoor capacity
  - ❑ Masks required when not eating, drinking or skiing
  - ❑ Social distancing while waiting for/riding lifts
  - ❑ Cleaning and disinfection of rented equipment
- Bars & restaurants
  - ❑ Limited to curbside pick-up and food delivery after 10:00 p.m.





# TOURISM-RELATED ANNOUNCEMENTS



Empire State Trail



Minnewaska Visitor Center



Lake Placid Coaster



## 2021 MEETING DATES

- Monday, January 25 (virtual)
- Monday, March 22
- Monday, May 24
- Monday, September 27
- Monday, November 15





# I LOVE NY REPORT



**Empire State  
Development**





## INDUSTRY EVENTS

### **Travel Unity Virtual Summit**

October 19-23: "Reset & Rebuild: Advancing Travel Together"



### **NYSH&TA Virtual Conference**

November 4: "What Tourism Will Look Like in 2021 & Beyond"



### **NYSTIA Virtual Conference**

November 16-18: "Navigating the Road to Recovery: Strategies & Tactics for Success in 2021"





## BRAND USA TRAVEL WEEK

- Virtual meeting from October 26-29
- Attended by 150+ buyers from 20 countries
- 24 appointments with industry members
- Assist in planning visit to New York when safe
- Attended presentations by industry experts



I ♥ NY

## DIGITAL PROMOTIONS: HALLOWEEN SPOOKTACULAR





# DIGITAL PROMOTIONS: RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

## Discover New York!

Expand your horizons by exploring ours. Find what you



### Travel the World Without Leaving New York

Indulge your wanderlust with trips to globally-influenced New York State destinations. [more](#)



### Farm-to-Table Dining

Here are 11 of the best farm-to-table dining experiences in New York State! [more](#)



### Responsible Outdoor Recreation

Heading out into nature? Follow these responsible recreation tips in New York State. [more](#)

## Tourism Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

*"Draft – Subject to Board Approval"*

**Date:** Thursday, October 8, 2020

**Location:** Virtual Meeting (due to COVID-19 public health concerns and as authorized by Executive Order of the Governor)

### **Attendance:**

#### TAC Members

**Phone:** Cristyne Nicholas, Elinor Tatum, Dan Fuller, Katherine Nicholls, Thurman Thomas, Thomas Mulroy, Gabriel Lenenstein (on behalf of Senator Serrano)

#### ESD / NYS Staff

Ross Levi, Executive Director of Tourism; Richard Gagliano, SVP of Marketing; Kelly Garofalo-Wilkins, Senior Manager Tourism Projects

**Meeting called to order: 11:04 AM**

### **I. Approval of minutes – Cristyne Nicholas**

- Motion to approve by Elinor Tatum
- Minutes approved with a second by Dan Fuller

### **II. Chair's Report – Cristyne Nicholas**

- Welcome. I hope everyone and their families are healthy and safe.
- When we met back in May, we didn't know if we were going to be able to meet in person for this meeting, but we are still adhering to guidelines to keep us safe and limit the spread of COVID-19.

#### **A. New York Forward Reopening Status**

- Clearly these are challenging times for the nation's tourism industry. International travel restrictions, necessary shutdowns and consumer wariness have all impacted the tourism industry like nothing before. Even here in New York, we continue to operate under travel advisories requiring a 14-day quarantine for people who come from states and territories with a significantly high community-wide spread of COVID-19.
- Even with the ongoing crisis, our infection rate remains low thanks to the hard work of the people of New York, and we are still among the best states in the nation when it comes to health & safety in combatting COVID-19.
- Our state's data-driven approach for a phased reopening is one of the reasons we have been successful in keeping that infection rate low.
- In terms of tourism, the governor announced guidelines for seasonal fall agri-tourism and recreation activities, including corn mazes, pick-your-own fruit and vegetable operations, hayrides and haunted houses. Various restrictions around things like capacity, social distancing, mask wearing are in place, and specific information is available on the New York Forward website.
- Bowling alleys were cleared to reopen in August at 50% capacity, with every other lane closed or with physical barriers between lanes, and groups required to stay in the lane in which they are bowling.
- Casinos reopened in September at 25% capacity.
- In NYC:
  - Low-risk indoor cultural activities including museums, aquariums, and other cultural arts were permitted to open starting August 24 at 25% maximum occupancy with pre-set staggered entries, mask requirements, and traffic flow controls in place.
  - Indoor malls reopened in September at 50% capacity.
  - NYC restaurants resumed indoor dining at 25% capacity on September 30 with temperature checks for all patrons and contact information required to facilitate contact tracing if needed. No service is allowed after midnight, bar service is prohibited, and masks must be worn when not seated at a table. Guidelines will be reassessed based on data by November 1; if infection rates do not increase, restaurants may be permitted to go up to 50% capacity.
- The caveat here is that businesses located in infection hot spots are subject to stricter guidelines that the governor announced earlier this week.
- The path to a full tourism recovery is long, but we are hopeful that if we can keep the state's infection rate low by being smart, disciplined and New York tough, we can keep moving in the right direction.

#### **B. Tourism Related Governor Announcements**

- Even with the shutdown and phased reopening of businesses, New York State has been able to complete several projects that will allow for an improved visitor experience at destinations across the state:



- Jones Beach State Park completed \$6.6 million in improvements, including a new mini-golf course, refurbished and new court games and new benches, tables, fencing and lighting.
- Letchworth State Park has a new \$2 million outdoor recreation center featuring table games, badminton and pickle ball courts, bocce and shuffleboard, as well as a fitness loop.
- The Welcome Plaza at Niagara Falls State Park was completed, which was important in creating a more seamless and welcoming connection between the park and the City of Niagara Falls business district, ultimately helping visitors better orient with the offerings both inside and outside of the park.
- The grand opening of the new Sky Flyer Zipline at Lake Placid is the Olympic Ski Jumping Complex's latest year-round attraction, offering a new way to experience the stunning beauty of the Adirondacks.
- The grand reopening of the historic Roosevelt II Bathhouse at Saratoga Spa State Park is part of a \$2.3 million transformational project that is restoring and improving upon the grandeur of the Roosevelt Baths.
- The completion of improvement projects at Southwick Beach State Park and Westcott Beach State Park. Upgrades at Southwick Beach feature a new bathhouse and concession building, as well as restored dunes and new "green" parking lots that enhance resiliency and protection of water quality. At Westcott Beach, eight new accessible cottages, with fully equipped kitchens and full bathrooms, were built on a bluff with a commanding view of the lake.
- The Empire State Trail continues to move toward completion, and has met a major milestone in Central NY, with completed construction on a pedestrian bridge and new trail connections in Onondaga County.
- The dedication of Marsha P. Johnson State Park along the East River in Brooklyn, making it the first state park in New York to honor a LGBTQ person and transgender woman of color. The State will improve park facilities and install public art celebrating Johnson's life and her role in the advancement of LGBTQ rights.
- I LOVE NY is already promoting these destinations and their improvements as opportunities for safe, local recreation, and they will certainly be great assets to promote with future visitors to New York State.

#### C. Industry Member Updates

- The New York State Tourism Industry Association held its annual meeting in September and a new board was elected. The new board consists of:
  - Chair: Josiah Brown of New York Welcomes You;
  - Vice Chairs: Ken Meifert of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and Heather Bagshaw of Greene County Tourism and Film Commission;
  - Treasurer: Ron Ofner of the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council, and;
  - Secretary: Dana Krueger of DanaEvents
  - Officer at Large: Kelly Ann Curtin, NYC & Company
- As an Ex-Officio NYSTIA board member, I want to personally thank those who served on the board this past year, especially outgoing Chair Natasha Caputo of Visit Westchester, for their hard work and dedication to our industry.
- Finally, I want to extend congratulations and a great big thank you to Rick Remsnyder from Ulster County, who recently retired. Rick was Ulster County's Tourism Director for 14 years and, in that time, he helped to increase visitor spending each year from 2011-2020. Rick was an integral member of our community – his service will be dearly missed, but we wish him the best in whatever comes next.

### III. I LOVE NY Report—Ross Levi & Rich Gagliano

#### A. Industry Support During COVID-19

- It's hard to remember how much was unknown when we last met in May, and how much we have gone through since then, certainly as an industry, but also more generally as a state, nation and planet. Throughout the crisis, our first responsibility at the Division of Tourism has always been the health & safety of our community.
- Within that priority, we realize an extremely important piece of our work has been supporting the New York State tourism industry. We continue to recognize the hardship that many tourism businesses face as we all navigate these unprecedented times and are working diligently to provide accurate and timely information on resources and relief available.

##### 1. Resources

- Over the course of the health crisis, I LOVE NY has maintained constant contact with our industry partners—from state tourism industry trade associations, to local tourism promotion agencies and individual attractions. We have provided regular COVID-19 updates, fielded countless questions and joined numerous industry conference calls on the state, national and local level.
- Primarily, we've performed outreach and communicated with our partners on three major issues:
  - Reopening policies: We have engaged with partners from across the state to ask for their informed input on what is happening in their region and what they see as unique circumstances that affect re-opening. Using this and other data, we have been working diligently to advise on the NY Forward plan from a tourism point of view, and our tourism partners across the state have been extremely helpful in gathering that frontline perspective. We have also worked to keep our partners informed with the latest and most accurate guidance, from the initial guidelines on essential businesses through the continuing information on industry and activity reopenings.

- Funding: Many of our attractions and destination management organizations require funding or relief packages to cope with severely decreased revenue caused by COVID-19. Our policy team was quick to provide information on available relief & funding programs—from the federal CARES Act to the New York Forward Loan Fund—to help struggling tourism businesses and organization. They continue to provide updates as they are available.
- Advocacy: Through our membership with the US Travel Association, we have been able to share opportunities for New York's tourism community to advocate on a national level for the tourism industry. We have, and continue, to encourage all our partners to take advantage of the grassroots advocacy opportunities and tools that USTA provides to have the voices of the tourism industry heard and the needs of our industry known by our representatives in federal government. Probably the most profound example of this is around federal relief to state and localities. New York State is facing a \$14 billion budget deficit entirely due to the pandemic, and Governor Cuomo has been calling on Washington to deliver the funding NYS needs to offset the revenue losses. So far, Washington has failed to do so. It may be the Federal government that ultimately determines the size of the State budget through whatever funding it provides, which in turn will impact everything the state funds, including tourism. So, getting a second relief bill passed is crucial, and we continue to stress the importance of having our voices heard.

## 2. International Communications

- With the current international travel bans in place, we are not actively promoting New York State to our international markets. However, many international tour operators now have down time they didn't have before, presenting the opportunity for education about New York State as a destination. Until our borders open back up again, we wanted to use our international offices as a resource for our TPAs to advise on the current attitudes towards traveling to New York, and to hear about what can be done now to keep New York State top of mind for future visits.
- The I LOVE NEW YORK team set up a series of webinars with four of our international offices to provide in-country updates.
- They have been very informative. For example, across the markets, there is a trend toward outdoor recreation as opposed to urban travel, and individual versus group travel.
- Additionally, everyone should be pleased to hear that New York State has a strong reputation regarding health & safety due to the Governor's worldwide exposure on his COVID-19 response. There is the sense that NYS did the right thing by putting safety first – even when the nation may not have been – and that we can be trusted that when we say it is safe to visit, it will be.

## 3. Tourism Funding Programs

- COVID-19 and the state spending restrictions it necessitated have required us to look at our tourism funding programs and adjust various policies and procedures.
- The Tourism Grants team has been processing first quarter Matching Funds reimbursements as they are received and completed and providing detailed information on submitted Q2 claims so we can get them processed as completely and smoothly as possible. Likewise, the team continues to process the Market New York awards granted in Round 9 of the REDC last December.
- We've had one-on-one conversations with dozens of grantees to ensure that their projects were still feasible and made sense in a COVID-19 environment. Many projects have been postponed until 2021. Still, as of today, 27 of the 40 marketing / working capital projects have been approved. We continue to work with the awardees as situations with COVID-19 change.

## B. Consumer Marketing During COVID-19

### 1. I LOVE NY Strategy During COVID-19

- When we last met, we were in the heart of the COVID-19 lockdown and still primarily focusing on messages of safety guidance and social distancing. While we have made significant progress since then in keeping the virus under control, we still need to be vigilant, particularly as the state reopens wider. With that understanding, we have been able to reimagine our consumer-facing communication strategy to keep New York State top of mind in relevant ways to coincide with the phased reopening process. We developed several programs that aimed to bring New York State to you, virtually, especially in situations where actual travel was not an option. When parks and outdoor attractions began to open, communications about safe and local recreation options were added. And most recently, we started to responsibly promote local travel & tourism within the state.
- The goal of our strategy overall is to continue to support New York State tourism as best as we can while first and foremost ensuring the health & safety of our community.

### 2. Do No Harm Messaging

- Everything we do is through the lens of 'do no harm', and that was particularly true at the onset of this health crisis. We quickly leveraged our digital tourism audience and travel media contacts to amplify the Governor's safety and travel related guidance:
  - Created a landing page on [iloveny.com](http://iloveny.com) with the most up to date COVID-19 information
  - Amplified safety messaging on our social platforms

- Shared the Governor's press releases on our own press page.
3. I LOVE NY Virtual Experience Page
    - One of the first trends we observed during the early weeks of lockdown were tourism attractions developing virtual content that brought unique experience into people's homes.
    - We began reaching out to our tourism partners including TPAs and attractions across the state to gather information on any virtual experiences they had, and even encourage some attractions to create new ones.
    - We curated a list of those virtual experience on a new I LOVE NY AT HOME page on [iloveny.com](http://iloveny.com), updated it daily, and promoted the offerings on our social channels and with press.
    - These activities included live animal cams, historic property walkthroughs, digital art and artifact collections, and streaming performances.
    - These virtual experiences not only allowed attractions to remain top of mind among their fans, but also allowed them to introduce themselves to new audiences, particularly at a time when people were starved for on-line content when at home with their families.
  4. New York State Themed Home Activities
    - I LOVE NY team also created and promoted our own interactive original content for people to do at home:
      - Since you couldn't travel to your favorite restaurant, we brought them to you by posting recipes of iconic dishes associated with each region.
      - We provided everything you need for a perfect stay-at-home date night, with regional food & drink ideas, New York State-themed movie ideas & digital background from some romantic spots in the state.
      - And for the kids, we created a downloadable coloring book featuring some of New York State's must-see attractions. The coloring book was specifically called out by the governor in one of his daily email updates, resulting in thousands of hits.
  5. I LOVE NY 360 & Live From New York Series
    - We also produced and promoted two in-depth virtual campaigns:
      - The first was I LOVE NY 360. Using previously shot footage, we were able to produce nine 360-degree virtual reality experiences that transported you across the state, from a boat ride down the Erie Canal, to a walk through a Long Island winery, to experiencing Niagara Falls from the deck of the Maid of the Mist. They were promoted on the I LOVE NY mobile app and across our social media platforms. You can use your mobile device and go the virtual reality section of the I LOVE NY app to get the full effect yourself.
      - The I LOVE NY team also partnered with attractions across the state to produce "Live From New York," a series of four Instagram Live events promoted in advance on our social media channels that drove consumers to log in on a specific date and time. From there, they might learn the history of the Twister game from the curator of the Strong Museum in Rochester, get a cooking lesson from the NY Kitchen in Canandaigua, or join a live comedy show from the National Comedy Center in Jamestown. These events drew thousands of live viewers and ever more when the replays were posted on social channels.
  6. Virtual Path Through History
    - We also adapted previously planned live activities to be executed virtually:
      - For our annual Spring Path Through History Weekend, we partnered with 125 event hosts to provide consumers with over 1200 virtual historical experiences to engage with across the state.
      - In honor of Women's Equality Day and the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the United States, we partnered with several attractions dedicated to those who changed history for women in New York State and beyond to create an Instagram Live "Leading Ladies" roundtable discussion. The panel included representatives from the Women's Rights National Historical Park, Harriet Tubman Home, National Comedy Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame, and Susan B. Anthony House.
  7. Media Coverage
    - This work had the added benefit of receiving positive press attention, thanks to the work of our PR team. New York State attractions were featured in top-tier national publications such as Forbes, Lonely Planet, Travel & Leisure, USA Today, Conde Nast Traveler and Wine Spectator, and scores of smaller, niche outlets.
  8. Safe and Local Recreation Opportunities
    - As the summer progressed and consumers began to venture into their neighborhoods, I LOVE NY collected and distributed information on safe opportunities for local recreation—from state and local parks, to sculpture parks and historic sites. With information on what was and wasn't open, hours of operation, and safety and health guidelines, we became a trusted source for consumers to discover safe and appropriate ways to get out and explore close to home.
    - We worked closely with our colleagues at State Parks and the Department of Environmental Conservation on the latest information and messaging, particularly to avoid unsafe crowding at popular locations.
  9. Accessible New York
    - While much of our work was specifically geared around tourism needs promoted by COVID-19, we were also able to move forward with some of our long-term programs. A great example of this is our Accessible New York Travel program, which was discussed at prior TAC meetings.

- We debuted the new Accessible New York hub on iloveny.com on the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- It features more than 100 attraction listings that can be sorted by category, location and accessible amenities including: Blind/Low Vision, Cognitive/Autism Spectrum, Deaf/Hearing Loss, Mobility/Wheelchair Access.
- It also contains new editorial content that highlights special programming for people with accessibility needs, and offers travel inspiration, including a first-hand account from Cory Lee, a travel blogger who offers his perspective from his experience in a wheelchair.
- We've been told by experts in the field that this is one of the most comprehensive statewide accessibility guides in the country to date, and we look forward to continuing to build on the progress we've made so far, adding additional attractions and curating additional experiences.

#### 10. Fall Campaigns

- Fall is the season for some of our most popular annual initiatives, and again we were able to adjust some of them to ensure safety as we responsibly promoted fall travel:
  - Launched ever-popular fall foliage campaign
    - In addition to creating a landing page with the weekly report and advising the press, this year the digital team recruited talented Instagrammers from around New York State to help capture and share photos of our unparalleled colorful landscapes.
    - To expand the reach of our leaf watching community, the digital team created a "meet the peepers" blog and are posting their content on our social channels.
  - To commemorate International Underground Railroad Month in September, which New York officially designated for the first time with a proclamation by the Governor, we launched a new Underground Railroad Month Campaign.
    - The campaign featured a new landing page to highlight the dozens of historical attractions in New York State connected to the Underground Railroad. We ran weekly social media posts spotlighting the attractions that tell the story of New York's nationally significant role in the operation of the railroad.
    - The commemoration culminated in a Facebook Watch on-line video event featuring a panel of experts from New York State Underground Railroad sites.
  - Fall Path Through History Weekend will be this weekend, October 10-12 and will feature a mix of virtual events and safe local site visitation.
    - In addition to the changes to the weekend format, able to migrate the PTH program entirely onto the iloveny.com site from the stand-alone platform it was on since its inception.
    - On the back end, this change will allow for greater functionality for the participating sites and our staff. For the consumer, it will allow for a more seamless experience between heritage tourism and other New York State visitation information, as well as increased exposure and engagement for the program.

#### 11. Supporting Reopening

- I LOVE NY has been working to support our reopening attractions by informing consumers on where and how to safely experience New York State.
  - This was especially important in NYC, since they were behind other regions in reopening. As NYC indoor cultural activities were able to resume, we worked closely with the NYS Council for the Arts to develop and promote a NYC Cultural Institution Reopening Guide consisting of a blog post and social media content explaining what's going on at NYC's premiere cultural institutions as they reopen.
  - We also developed for all of New York State a Local Travel Guide, posted to iloveny.com and promoted on social media, with curated day & overnight trip ideas for each region of the state. This gave us the opportunity to start talking about traditional tourism again but in a limited and responsible way. The key message was that there are plenty of world class tourism attractions accessible in each region without having to travel long distances.

#### C. Moving Forward

- We understand that the overall COVID-19 and public health situation is constantly monitored due to its evolving nature. As various businesses and industries continue to reopen, keeping the virus under control remains the state's primary focus.
- To provide as much support for the tourism industry as possible during this period, the I LOVE NY team will continue to communicate to the public the latest regarding tourism related re-openings and restrictions as well as provide safe and local tourism opportunities that align with this guidance. And through our owned channels, continue to keep New York state tourism top of mind with relevant and seasonal communications
- How our consumer facing communication approach continues to evolve will be guided in part by the needs of the industry and overall statewide COVID-19 situation.
- Throughout the lockdown and re-opening process, we remained in close contact with the TPAs regarding their regionally specific insights and needs. We continue to monitor state & industry-wide tourism performance data and consumer insights/sentiment regarding New York State as a travel destination & overall travel insights.

- It's important with all public facing communications that we strike a balance between supporting the industry and keeping in mind the actual capacity that regions and attractions can safely handle.
- While we all continue to navigate this unprecedented situation, our goal is to set our state tourism partners up for as much success as possible and keep New York State in a position to maintain its place as world class travel destination.

#### IV. New Business

- The New York State Tourism Industry Association will be presenting the Destination of NYS Travel, Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary College Scholarship auction online for the first time in 30 years.
- Because the auction—which is normally done in person at the annual conference—will be online, destination offering auction packages will receive substantial consumer visibility while simultaneously provide financial resources to NYSTIA's workforce development initiatives.
- The funds raised from the auction will continue to benefit tuition and internship scholarships for New York State students, and the destination packages featured in this year's event will benefit from social media, newsletter and website support from many of the New York State Tourism Industry Association's members.
- As an added benefit, any destination providing a Getaway Package donation that is also bookable will receive three months free promotion courtesy of the New York State Tourism Association's Getaway Deals promotion program once the auction is over.
- Please contact Bob Provost directly with any questions or suggestions at [bob@nystia.org](mailto:bob@nystia.org).
- Maid of the Mist has launched their all-electric fleet, the first of their kind in the U.S. For more info, please see the press release.
- Ms. Tatum: Does I LOVE NY have a plan for addressing the issue of over-hiking in the Adirondacks?
- Ross Levi: We have been in close contact with our partners at the Department of Environmental Conservation and have been actively promoting lesser known hiking trails. We also have a blog up on our website dedicated on Responsible Outdoor Recreation.
- Thank you all for your time. Our next meeting is scheduled for November 16. Please keep an eye out for further information on that meeting.

**Meeting adjourned:** 11:48pm

**Next meeting:** Monday, November 16, 2020