

CEO Update: The Next Generation

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Last week, as California's travel and tourism industry gathered for 2017 Outlook Forum in Santa Barbara, one thing was abundantly clear: We have never been more united.

That unity is fundamental to our continued success. As our industry celebrates a record seventh straight year of growth while dealing with some of the more pressing challenges in recent memory, the strength of our collective will ultimately define the next generation of California.

Last week's 2017 Outlook Forum, followed as always by Visit California's Winter Board Meeting, was the biggest yet, with more than 600 attendees and an expansive, star-studded lineup of speakers for the sold-out event. And thanks to the generous hospitality of our host destination, Visit Santa Barbara, this year's event was truly unforgettable.

Moreover, it was a fitting setting for our industry to celebrate historic milestones, pivot toward the goals ahead, and come together to address the challenges that we are facing as an industry, state and nation.

New leadership elected. This year's Winter Board Meeting was the first presided over by Visit California's first industry-elected Chair, Ridgemont Hospitality CEO Sima Patel. To fill the vacancy created by her election this past fall, the Board voted unanimously to elect Commissioner Gary Buffo, president of Pure Luxury Transportation, as Visit California's new Chief Fiscal Officer. I am thrilled to welcome such dedicated leaders to these important roles.

Record growth continues. In the 25 years since Visit California was conceived, the state's tourism industry has seen unprecedented success — and this past year was our biggest yet.

In 2016, California travelers spent \$125.9 billion — a 2.8 increase from 2015. That spending created 30,000 new tourism jobs, bringing the total to 1.1 million, and generated \$10.3 billion in state and local tax revenues. Nationally, the Golden State remains the gold standard for travel, continuing to outpace national trends across the board.

Industry responds to winter storm crises. This considerable foundation that we have built together has enabled us to respond to some of the most pressing issues across our state — with Mother Nature of course being No. 1.

While California's weather is one of our greatest assets, the state's historically wet winter has wrought devastating damage in many regions, including some of our most-visited destinations. Visit California remains engaged with our industry partners in the affected areas and throughout the state to do everything possible to help these communities while addressing long-term travel impacts to protect the individuals and businesses who depend on the dollars tourism generates.

Announcing 'All Dreams Welcome.' We are also focused outward. As we've long anticipated, there are headwinds creating some softening in key international markets. To shore up that softening as much as possible, the Board approved a mid-year budget revision to fund a new initiative that is an optimization on the Dream Big brand specifically targeting international travelers: All Dreams Welcome.

The campaign effectively rolls out the red carpet for international visitors with a welcoming message leveraging the perception of California as a distinct, inclusive destination with a long-term focus on continued engagement with these critically important travelers.

New content series highlight marketing program evolutions. The Visit California global marketing program continues to evolve, with activations of our luxury initiative along with the latest campaign against the family audience, Kidifornia, which was unveiled at Outlook Forum.

Additionally, three all-new content series launch this spring, each with a distinct focus: Hidden Gems, California 101 and Jonny Moseley's Wildest Dreams. The Olympic gold medalist even made an appearance in Santa Barbara and previewed some of his *extreme-ly* exciting adventures from the series.

Commemorating Visit California's Silver Anniversary in May. Finally, Visit California will commemorate 25 years serving the Golden State's travel and tourism industry with its Silver Anniversary on May 3 in Sacramento. For two and a half decades, our state's tourism sector has outperformed other industries, and it has been my privilege to work alongside incredible partners to build something that we never could have hoped to achieve separately.

That is what that first coalition of competitors understood when they joined forces all those years ago. And as we consider what the next 25 years hold for California, that same idea of unity is more important — and undoubtedly stronger — than ever.

As we forge this new future together, let's continue to show the world what it means to dream big.