

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
Friday, May 9, 2025

Board Members Present Lesha Coltharp, Kaitlin Eskelson, Joan Hammer, Com. Victor Iverson, Jason Murray, Nathan Rafferty, Melva Sine, Jordan Smith, Kevin Smith, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer

Board Members Excused Jared Berrett, Kym Buttschardt, Graydon Pearson, CJ Wade

Tourism & Film Staff Tera Atwood, Jenica Barber, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Rachel Creer, Lorraine Daly, Michelle Evans, Kim Heys, Camille Johnson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Emma Kwanin, Carli Mahas, Ben Mangelsdorf, Christina Martin, Derek Mellus, Virginia Pearce, Liz Peck, Natalie Randall, Laici Shumway, Jasmine Simpson, Dave Williams, Heather Zang, Stacey Zoller

Public Stacey Boney, Raelene Davis, Machel Devin, Ben Fredregill, Colin Greenberg, Jordynn Hewitt, Todd K. Jenson, Ryan Lundstrom, Brittany McMichael, Marissa Mallory, Jessica Merrill, Amy Myers, Mike Roe, Kevin Rosen, Angie Rothen, Bridget Siebert, Celina Sinclair, Jonathan Smithgill, Mick Soleta, Sherry Stevens, Forest Turner, Matthew Watson, Allison Yamamoto-Sparks

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Board Vice Chair Nathan Rafferty welcomed everyone and asked everyone to update their display name and affiliation on Zoom.

MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Jason Murray motioned to approve the April 11, 2025, board meeting minutes. Shayne Wittwer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Natalie Randall, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Jefferson Moss named Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity. He is currently the house majority leader for Utah's House of Representatives. He will step down from that position at the end of May and join GOEO on June 2. We are excited to have him as he has been supportive of the tourism and film industries during his time in the legislature.
- New team members at Utah Office of Tourism – Jasmine Simpson, web content specialist; Josh Paluh, marketing manager; and Michelle Evans, grant specialist.
- Recently wrapped up the media buying RFP and it was one of the largest responses and interests. Love Communications was awarded the contract.
- International visitation has been top of mind to the Governor and our office. The situation continues to remain fluid. Continue to work closely with the governor's team to provide situational awareness. We continue the focus and importance of the economic impacts of tourism to communities throughout the state. Canada remains forecasted to be the top international market for Utah in 2025. Thank you to partners that have provided feedback, engagement and real time data.

- Remain hyper-focused on the work that we do and its ties to the economic outcomes for the state. Continue to be nimble during these times.

INTERNATIONAL TEAM UPDATE

Rachel Bremer, Global Markets Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Most recent data from the National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) shows an 11.4% drop in overseas visitors to the U.S. Canada saw a 26% annual decline of overnight land trips in March and air travel was down 14 percent, according to Statistics Canada (Statcan). The U.S. saw a 17% decline of visitors from Western Europe in March.
- Tourism economics forecasting, anticipated a 8.8% growth in international visitation and an increase of 16% in visitor spending. However, seeing a little more than 9% drop in international travel to the U.S. so far this year.
- Economists are taking into account political tensions, tariffs and trade war and the exchange rates. Exchange rates are one of the primary factors that drive international visitation to the U.S. Have had the strongest U.S. dollar in almost 15 years.
- Specific to the state, we are still expected to grow incrementally over the next few years.
- Previously forecasted to grow in visitor spending by 85% by 2029, but that has lowered to 43.5%. Decreased since the August forecast.
- International visits were forecasted to grow by almost 50% by 2029 but now it is 21.7%. Still expected to grow but just at slower rates.
- Anticipated to reach \$1B in international spending by 2027.
- Early 2024 data shows the top 10 countries that spend in Utah remain consistent with Canada, China, France and Germany back at pre-Covid top. Continue to focus on the same primary markets.
- Will watch growth in Brazil – it is a ski focused market – and whether we see a flight out of Latin America.
- China is back in the number two position of international spend which is faster post-Covid than anticipated. Seeing younger, more adventurous travelers from China. Flight access out of China is only at 30% of pre-covid levels.
- International visitors generally comprise 7-8% of annual visitor spending in Utah. They are high quality, impactful visitors. Average spend per international visitor is more than \$1K.
- Canada is consistently Utah's top international market and overnight visits. It is forecasted to stay as the top international market.
- Did see slight decrease in Canadian visitor spending from 2023 to 2024 and forecasted to be lower in 2025, however, with Canadian's market share it still remains very strong.
- WestJet is still planning the launch of SLC direct flight to Edmonton in May. They did cancel launches in other cities.
- Canada is not showing significant declines in weekly flight bookings although the growth rate is slower.
- Paused paid social media for two in February. Began again in March and adjusted our goal from engagement to awareness.
- Adjusted consumer marketing tactics to focus on inspiration and awareness instead of traditional advertising.
- Think about how important our storytelling is in international markets during this moment of tension and concern. It is valuable for us to stay engaged with target audiences in international markets and be good storytellers.
- International's strategic priorities are to increase Utah's share of focused global markets; increase awareness and consideration of Utah as an exceptional outdoor vacation destination; and, educate visitors on responsible and prepared travel practices.
- Fiscal goals (FY25) are increased length of stay and visitor spending, and maximize ROI and create avenues for international marketing for stakeholders.
- Public relations highlights include results of a U.K. group FAM hosted in September. It was focused on the Green River. France publication, Globe Rider Magazine, did a piece on motorcycle travel through Carbon County. New, unique ways to tell Utah's story.

- Have global paid social media accounts in the UK, France, German-speaking markets, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India. Recently launched social channels in Benelux.
- India influencers are a golden ticket in the Indian market and hosted a JourneyLabel FAM in January. Results have been very positive.
- Looking at positive international items ahead –
 - WestJet Edmonton to SLC direct flight launches May 15
 - Delta Incheon/Seoul to SLC direct flight launches June 12
 - Natalie and Global Markets team will be at IPW June 16-18
- Additional international opportunities to look ahead to include –
 - America's 250 Celebration in 2026
 - Route 66 Anniversary in 2026
 - FIFA World Cup in 2026
 - Temple Square Open House in 2027
 - 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics
 - 2034 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics
- Kaitlin Eskelson asked that all FIFA and Temple Square opening packages be coordinated through Visit Salt Lake. VSL has confirmed a friendly match in association with the FIFA World Cup 2026 as Herriman is hosting one and potentially the University of Utah.
- She noted that 33 states had a decrease in tourism funding and would like to have quantitative measurements that are benchmarked to economic impact. The industry talks in qualitative or big picture terms but needs to show what our input/output model is.
- Uncertainty when hearing still in China and Canada, Kaitlin noted the need to turn markets on and off. Recommend future proofing numbers and strategy.
- Rachel responded that internal conversations continue to watch markets closely and move marketing efforts from different international markets based on opportunity and federal movement.
- Kaitlin shared the importance of the industry being unified on metrics.
- Natalie Randall recommended additional conversations regarding international KPIs and metrics be discussed at TTIMAC meetings.
- Shayne Wittwer confirmed that they didn't see a ton of international cancellations right off the bat but are starting to see more – groups and individuals – specifically in Moab. Said both Canadians and other international markets.
- Jennifer Wesselhoff noted Park City had planned to have a 7-10% budget increase in international efforts but have pivoted to more of a flat budget and maintaining where they are.
- Jennifer asked Kaitlin, as a U.S. Travel board member, if she had any updates on international marketing efforts and travel on a federal level.
- Kaitlin responded that five board member seats were just cut from the Brand USA board by the Department of Commerce. The Travel Promotion Act could be under fire or redirected and fears that Brand USA's funding could be reduced. According to Kaitlin, Brand USA has turned off China and gone silent in Canada.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Kim Heys, Web Content Editor, Utah Office of Tourism

VisitUtah.com Update

Stacie Boney, President, Hanson Dodge

Angie Roth, Chief Technology & Security Officer, Hanson Dodge

Mike Roe, Chief Creative Officer, Hanson Dodge

Bridget Siebert, Senior Director, Digital Experiences, Hanson Dodge

- Hanson Dodge has been our web development agency since 2019, and launched the redesign in 2020. In the second, 5-year contract.
- Stacey Boney shared that they have made some changes and added talent to the team that works on our account.
- It takes a village to run a website and leverage it in the marketing of an industry. Bridget Siebert serves as the quarterback of the VisitUtah.com team and is surrounded by nine additional role players.

- Bridget Siebert explained that HD is the keeper of the site and responsible for delivering the richest and deepest experience for visitors and takes this responsibility very seriously.
- Looking at a rolling 12-month measure, visitors to the site are up 7.2% (8.17M). The engagement rate is up 29% and the guide downloads are down 5% but this is 16 months after the new guide was released and had previously caused a lot of excitement. Views to the itinerary pages have increased 45%.
- VisitUtah.com has quite a few mobile users (73% of all visitors to the site) and it increased by 7.8%. Design in a mobile-first mindset.
- Email program click rate goal is 1.5% and exceeded that goal by 14% which is remarkable. Email recipients are the most engaged users and they engage for more than 2 minutes.
- Email sign ups increased by a 6% growth.
- Angie Roth spoke about technology plus digital strategy delivers an elevated user experience while delivering results.
- Upgraded and modernized the Kentico platform from MVC5 to .NET Core. Notable performance improvements and better security systems in place.
- Site performance is very strong. The time it takes for a page to load went down by 60% on both desktop and mobile. Site accessibility improved by 16%.
- The industry standard for a content-based site uptime is 99.6%. Closely track the 30-day, 60-day and yearly uptime and visitutah.com site exceeds the industry standard.
- Site security is an important topic. A bot attack did hit the site in late January and was able to fast track installation of a Microsoft frontwall firewall. A very good investment as in 82 days, it has blocked 259 malicious attacks.
- Bridget Seibert continued campaign landing pages were developed to drive interest and intent, and increase the time spent on the website. The pages are rich in content.
- Using engagement data to drive excellence and optimization by using heatmapting. A tool available and opportunity to optimize digital experience. It reports back on where people are spending their focus on a webpage.
- See people are engaging most with the content cards created by the marketing team and secondly the search engine and travel guide request.
- Made improvements to the “things to do” navigation by consolidating. The view of all option activity increased by 28%.
- Email list size is 100K strong and implemented preferences so people can choose what content they want. An arts group developed that requested arts and entertainment information and not adventure. The personalized information increased the open and click rate significantly.
- Continue to increase the email engagement number as it is strong but flat so developing a new template.
- Looking ahead to plans for next fiscal year, investing FY26 in the Kintico platform. This platform enables very strategic, smart marketing.
- Customer Journey Optimization (CJO) uses technology and data to understand behavior and actions of specific sections. Able to deliver more relevant content.
- Want to deliver a level of personalization that our digital travel consumer is expecting from the website.
- Generative AI allows a high level of personalization and a stronger path to purchase travel.
- Angie Roth talked about digital strategy plans for FY26 - XbyK upgrade, audience segmentation and optimization and innovation.
- Mike Roe shared a website innovation plan for dark skies mode. Make it responsive to Utah sunset and enhance the homepage and the dark skies page. Opportunity to “look and hear” the dark skies with the peaceful background sounds.
- There will be a toggle on the main page so users can control between daylight and dark skies mode.

UTAH FILM COMMISSION

Virginia Pearce, Utah Film Commissioner
Incentive Program Allocation

- Recent projects include *California King*, which received an incentive a few years ago, was shot mostly in Utah county and it premieres April 25 in select theatres and video on demand (VOD).

- *Winter Spring Summer or Fall* was shot a number of years ago primarily in Tooele county starring Jenna Ortega. It premieres April 25 in select theatres and VOD.
- *The Wayfinders* received an incentive a few years ago. The pilot episode premieres on Angel Studio's own streaming network. Filmed in Juab, Wasatch, Washington, Iron and Utah counties. Currently filming the rest of the season.
- *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, they do not receive an incentive, but do help them on locations and permits. Season two starts on May 15 on Hulu.
- Film incentive program was allocated \$20M for FY25. The rural film program is \$12M, the motion picture program is \$6.79M in tax credit and \$1.5M in cash rebate.
- Have approved 30 projects so far in FY25 - 11 in the rural program, 11 in motion picture tax credit and 8 in motion picture cash rebate.
- Projects have been shot throughout the state including Davis, Grand, Iron, Juab, Millard, Salt Lake, San Juan, Sanpete, Summit, Tooele, Utah, Uintah, Wasatch and Washington counties.
- The incentive program has awarded almost \$17.7M this fiscal year which has resulted in more than \$76M in economic impact.
- Nathan Rafferty asked if funds roll over to next fiscal year. Virginia confirmed it does.
- He also asked Virginia if the President's administration talks on tariffs for films being shot outside the United States affects the office. UOF has received media requests as a result and lots of talk throughout the industry.

MOTION: Jennifer Wesselhoff motioned to approve \$3,448,274 for an incentive for the following productions which have met the criteria defined by statute. Joan Hammer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Production	Estimated Utah Spend	Incentive Amount Per Production	Locations (counties)
<i>The Dead of Night</i>	\$120,000	\$24,000 - 20%	Utah, Weber
<i>Homestead</i>	\$2,532,458	\$633,114 - 25%	Davis, Salt Lake
<i>The Edge of Normal</i> Amendment	\$795,816	\$198,954 - 25%	Salt Lake
	\$3,448,274 TOTAL Spend	\$856,068 TOTAL Incentives	

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

- Kevin Smith was intrigued to hear the arts interest by website users. It is the 30-year anniversary of Tuachan.
- Jason Murray shared that the American Society of Travel Agents conference is in Salt Lake City in June. A group at NTA said that the Faith Travel Association, would be a good contact for Visit Salt Lake to help promote group travel for the Temple Square open house. They are having a show in Ontario in November.
- Jason shared that international inbound tour operators are reporting a 30-50% fall off for summer and fall bookings. Believes 50% of that decrease is to the western United States.
- Nathan shared that skiing isn't over. Still have four areas open - Brian Head, Brighton, Solitude and Snowbird. Reporting a good ski year.
- Jonathan Smithgill reported on behalf of Love Communications they are excited for the next five years and are committed to delivering amazing results. Thanks to the RFP selection committee.

MEETING ADJOURNED