



TOMPKINS COUNTY

# Tourism

Promoting Economic  
Development & Enhancing  
Our Quality of Life

*Program*

**TOMPKINS COUNTY  
STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN  
2021-2027**



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We also thank the dozens of individuals who contributed to this plan through our stakeholder meetings, community surveys, and comments.

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PHOTO: Dirk Bakker/Johnson Museum of Art



# introduction

The Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan establishes our community's goals regarding tourism. This document lays out our mutual values and aspirations for the development of tourism over the next six years.

The preparation of this plan was guided by the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB). This board advises Tompkins County on matters of tourism policy and on the allocation of the hotel room occupancy tax.

This plan intends to guide future decisions and investments relating to tourism in our county. The goals and critical actions described in this plan are the result of many months of work by dedicated members of the STPB and other stakeholders in the tourism sector.

Constant effort is required to establish and maintain a destination's appeal for visitors. Tompkins County is fortunate to be home to institutions, landmarks, and natural features that attract a global audience.

Tourism presents a real opportunity for Tompkins County in terms of economic development and the enhancement of our residents' quality of life. Visitor spending supports local jobs and offsets household tax burdens for county residents. Over the past two decades, the Tourism Program has made lasting and meaningful investments in organizations and facilities that help make Tompkins County a great place to live, work, and visit.

This plan looks ahead to the future of travel and tourism in our region. Several emerging issues are currently affecting travel behaviors, such as the growth of short-term rentals, prevalence of smartphones, and increasing demand for locally sourced foods and beverages.





PHOTO: BRAN MALEY

This plan looks ahead to the **future** of travel and tourism in our region.

This plan also looks outward toward the visitors who decide to travel to Tompkins County. The recently completed Visitor Profile Study (appendix D) helped the STPB gain knowledge about the motivation for travel to our county and the sorts of activities visitors choose. This data has been critically important for the development of goals.

Finally, this plan was prepared with the help of people who live and work in Tompkins County. A community survey conducted in late 2018 and early 2019 gathered feedback from 309 individuals regarding their ideas for tourism development (appendix E). A facilitated stakeholder meeting with 21 representatives of local nonprofit organizations was held in April 2019 to determine how our community can advance tourism.

**The plan establishes the following overall goals:**

- 1 Increase average overnight trip length by one night from 2-3 nights to 3-4 nights
- 2 Increase average visitor spending by 5% from \$366 to \$384 per day in established downtowns and villages
- 3 Offer indoor and outdoor visitor programming year-round
- 4 Increase visual and physical access to Cayuga Lake through collaborative efforts with municipal and private stakeholders
- 5 Increase the share of new visitors from 24% to 30%
- 6 Provide accurate information to decision makers on legislation and policies that affect tourism
- 7 Continuously refine communication techniques and media to grow awareness of our destination and its assets
- 8 Foster collaboration among tourism partners to achieve common goals

**To implement this plan, the following actions are proposed:**

- 1 Review and revise the policies of the STPB
- 2 Update grant guidelines and related documents
- 3 Develop benchmarks for the measures associated with each focus area

# SUSTAINING THE **VALUE** of the Local Tourism Sector

**FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS**, the Tompkins County Tourism Program has supported a wide variety of community-led initiatives that enhance our local quality of life. These investments have been possible due to growing local revenues generated by the hotel room occupancy tax.

The room tax is paid by visitors who stay in hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and airbnbs in Tompkins County. The purpose of the room tax is defined in local law as follows:

“The revenue derived from the tax ... shall be allocated to enhance the general economy of Tompkins county, its cities, towns, and villages, through promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events, and other directly related and supporting activities.” (County L.L. No. 4-1989 Hotel Room Occupancy Tax §150-20: Disposition of revenues. <https://ecode360.com/8412617>)

The STPB is charged with the task of advising the County Legislature on the allocation of these funds. As such, the board has sought projects and investments that attract visitors and increase travel demand to our community. The intent is to create a virtuous cycle where growing visitation drives sustainable and resilient economic growth that supports the Tourism Program’s various initiatives.

Tompkins County is fortunate to have institutions, events, and natural features that consistently attract visitors. However, revenue from the room tax is never guaranteed. Economic conditions, fuel prices, weather, and other unpredictable external factors all influence travel decisions.

Through the development of this plan we have learned more about the importance of tourism to our local economy. A recent study by the Downtown Ithaca Alliance revealed that most downtown restaurants and retailers rely on out-of-county visitor spending (Claritas/EnviroNics, 2018). Revenue from visitors is also essential to supporting many of our local cultural institutions. Spending by visitors supports 3,718 local jobs throughout the county (Tourism Economics, 2018).

Success as a tourism destination requires constant vigilance to ensure that we maintain and increase our appeal to new visitors. Since its establishment, the STPB has supported a wide array of tourism projects and investments intended to build travel demand where capacity exists in our local market.

It is the intent of this plan to describe strategies that will allow Tompkins County to sustain the value of its local tourism sector for years to come.





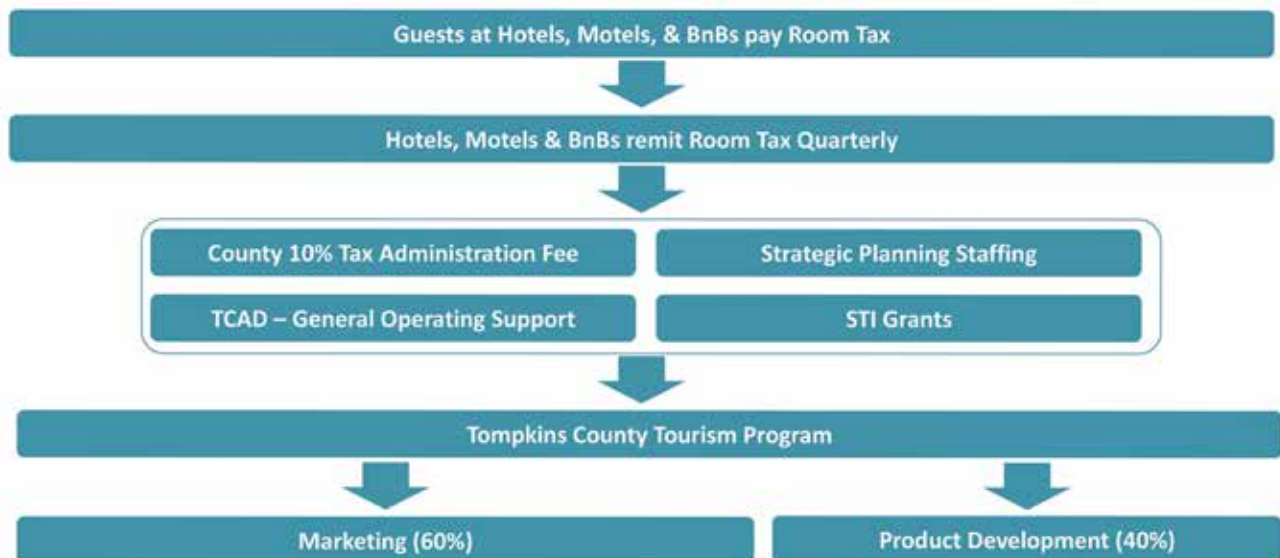
# Tompkins County Tourism Program

## HOTEL ROOM OCCUPANCY TAX

Tompkins County established a hotel room occupancy tax (room tax) in 1986 (appendix B). All Tourism Program activities conducted by the county are supported by this revenue source.

By law, room tax revenues are dedicated to local tourism development. Prior to 2001 nearly all revenues from the room tax were allocated to destination marketing. In 2001 the County Legislature approved an increase in the room tax from 3% to 5%.<sup>\*</sup> Since this time, the Tourism Program has allocated revenue from this tax as follows:

- 60% for Marketing (representing the historic 3% tax revenue)
- 40% for Product Development (representing the additional 2% tax revenue)



Over the past decade, online platforms for short-term rentals have gained in popularity for travelers. In 2016, Tompkins County became the first county in New York State to establish a tax collection agreement with Airbnb. Airbnb reports that 27 other counties in New York have established voluntary collection agreements.<sup>\*\*</sup> Since this time, some municipalities in Tompkins County have considered or adopted regulations on short-term rentals.

<sup>\*</sup> Bed and breakfasts with 10 rooms or fewer were exempted from the increased tax. The room tax for these properties remains at 3%.

<sup>\*\*</sup> <https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/2319/occupancy-tax-collection-and-remittance-by-airbnb-in-new-york>





PHOTO: CASEY MARTIN

**our area**  
offers a unique blend of rural and urban settings, spectacular natural features, and world-class academic institutions.

## STRATEGIC TOURISM PLANNING BOARD

In 1998 the Tompkins County Legislature reconfigured the Advisory Board on Tourism Development into the STPB. This board is charged with advising the County Legislature on tourism development, evaluating the activities of recipients of room tax funds, developing tourism policy, and advising the county on the allocation of room tax funds (STPB bylaws, article 2, section 1).

The STPB is composed of 18 voting members and seven non-voting representatives. The board typically holds 10 meetings per year. STPB currently has three standing committees, five grant review committees, and six other active committees.

Since 2005 Tompkins County has maintained a Strategic Tourism Plan to provide guidance to the Tourism Program and inform decisions regarding the allocation of room tax revenue. This plan was updated in 2013. Since this time five additional tourism topical plans have been prepared:

- Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage Plan – 2014
- Heritage Tourism Implementation Plan – 2015
- Beautification, Signage, and Public Art Strategic Plan – 2016
- Agriculinary Tourism Implementation Plan – 2016
- Outdoor Recreation Implementation Plan – 2018

These documents are available online at <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/tourism/plan>.

The Tourism Program coordinates its efforts with the county's Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategy. The Tourism Program Director participates in quarterly Economic Development Collaborative meetings held by Tompkins County Area Development. In addition, this plan is intended to be consistent with the principles and policies established in the 2015 Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan.



## CURRENT PROGRAMS

Tompkins County currently funds the following initiatives from the hotel room occupancy tax:

### MARKETING

#### Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)

- Provides destination marketing services. The Ithaca/Tompkins County CVB is our official Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA) and is authorized to access state resources from I♥NY. The CVB has three primary functional units:
  - Marketing & Public Relations, including staff support and microgrants to support agricutinary tourism
  - Visitor Experience
  - Group Sales

#### Market the Arts

- Promotes visual artists and writers collectively to visitors

#### Tourism Marketing & Advertising Grants

- Promote events and projects likely to attract visitors in a manner consistent with CVB strategy

### PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

#### Arts & Cultural Organizational Development Grants

- Enhance our brand as a cultural destination by supporting major arts and cultural assets

#### Beautification, Signage & Public Art

- Improves the visual beauty of communities with outdoor plantings and attractive signage to direct travelers to key destinations

#### Community Arts Partnership – General Operating Support

- Strengthens the visibility and viability of the county's arts community

#### Community Celebrations Grants

- Support local events that convey our unique culture and history

#### County Historian

- Provides historical connections to today's tourism events and projects

#### Hospitality Workforce Development

- Builds awareness and encourages interest in hospitality and tourism career pathways.

#### Public Art Grants

- Support the creation of public art and encourage additional funding from local, private foundations

#### Tompkins Festivals Program

- Provides event organizers with tools to make events successful, create positive visitor experiences, and establish significant attractions

#### Tourism Capital Grants

- Support the creation and expansion of major visitor attractions

#### Tourism Project Grants

- Support events and projects likely to attract overnight visitors or accomplish actions defined in the Strategic Tourism Plan

### OTHER / FLEXIBLE

#### Strategic Tourism Implementation Grants

- Support projects that substantially advance critical actions identified in the Strategic Tourism Plan or other tourism implementation plans

#### Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD)

- Supports the operation of TCAD as defined in a five-year agreement

#### County 10% Tax Administration Fee

- Per the local law, the county allocates 10% of room tax collections for tax administration purposes.

## EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM

	Total Funding 2013-2019	Years Funded	Annual Average
<b>MARKETING</b>			
Convention & Visitors Bureau	\$7,161,389	7	\$1,023,056
New Tourism Initiative Grants	\$463,980	6	\$77,330
Tourism Marketing & Advertising Grants	\$354,453	7	\$50,636
Discovery Trail	\$241,775	7	\$34,539
Market the Arts	\$73,850	7	\$10,550
Tompkins Tourism Partner Award	\$6,000	4	\$1,500
<b>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</b>			
Tourism Capital Grants	\$1,504,763	7	\$214,966
Arts & Cultural Organizational Development Grants	\$1,488,956	7	\$212,708
Beautification	\$970,217	7	\$138,602
Tourism Project Grants	\$626,240	7	\$89,463
Community Arts Partnership – General Operating Support	\$279,078	7	\$39,868
Community Celebration Grants	\$236,973	7	\$33,853
Hospitality Workforce Development	\$216,600	7	\$30,943
Festivals	\$180,434	7	\$25,776
Ticket Center Ithaca	\$46,099	1	\$46,099
County Historian	\$48,750	7	\$6,964
Public Art Grants	\$24,302	3	\$8,101
<b>OTHER / FLEXIBLE</b>			
County 10% Tax Administration Fee	\$1,759,290	7	\$251,327
Tompkins County Area Development – General Operating Support	\$927,808	7	\$132,544
Strategic Tourism Implementation Grants	\$627,396	5	\$125,479
Strategic Planning & Staffing	\$650,374	7	\$92,911

NOTE: New Tourism Initiative Grants were absorbed into Tourism Project Grants as of 2019.

### History of Grant Awards 2013-2019

Grant programs have represented a key way the Tourism Program has operated. Over the past seven years, the Tompkins County Tourism Program issued 604 grant awards across seven different grant programs. Grants were issued to more than 100 different organizations.

GRANT PROGRAM	Average Grant Award	Average # of Awards Per Year	Total Grants Issued 2013-19
Arts & Cultural Organizational Development	\$22,970	9	61
Tourism Capital	\$18,314	11	77
Tourism Project	\$8,240	11	76
New Tourism Initiative	\$7,606	9	61
Tourism Marketing & Advertising	\$2,836	18	125
Community Celebration	\$1,254	27	189
Strategic Tourism Implementation	\$41,826	2	15



# Achievements

## 2011-2019

- 1 **Completed topical Tourism Implementation Plans**
  - Beautification, Signage and Public Art Plan
  - Agriculinary Tourism Implementation Plan
  - Heritage Tourism Implementation Plan
  - Outdoor Recreation Tourism Implementation Plan
  - Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage Plan
- 2 **Supported annual Beautification program plantings at over 30 sites**
- 3 **Assisted dozens of event organizers through the Tompkins Festivals program**
- 4 **Installed eight works of public art with the Community Arts Partnership**
- 5 **Launched Visitor Journey Arrival to Departure (A2D) training program for hospitality workforce**
- 6 **Trained 229 people through Hospitality Star and 118 people through Visitor A2D training programs**
- 7 **Trained over 35 Heritage Ambassadors through a collaborative program of The History Center and Historic Ithaca**
- 8 **Established an Agriculinary Tourism Coordinator position at CVB**
- 9 **Supported renovation or construction of three Visitors Centers operated by the CVB**
- 10 **Launched or revamped websites**
  - [www.ithacatrails.org](http://www.ithacatrails.org)
  - [www.gofingerlakes.org](http://www.gofingerlakes.org)
  - [www.ithacaevents.com](http://www.ithacaevents.com)
- 11 **Supported marquee events such as:**
  - Downtown Ithaca Ice Festival / Winter Light Festival
  - Finger Lakes International Dragon Boat Festival
  - Ithaca Underground: Big Day In & Naked Noise
  - Spring Writes Literary Festival
  - Summer Shakespeare Festival
  - Wizarding Weekend
  - ... and many more!



continued

- 12 Supported new tour offerings through Discover Cayuga Lake (lake cruise) and the Ithaca Youth Bureau (bicycle)
- 13 Supported the revitalization of Stewart Park and the establishment of the Cayuga Waterfront Trail
- 14 Supported new exhibits at Sciencenter, Museum of the Earth and Cayuga Nature Center
- 15 Supported signage and site improvements to the Ithaca Children's Garden
- 16 Supported new performance spaces at Community School of Music and Arts and Running to Places Theatre Company
- 17 Supported visitor enhancements at natural sites such as Ithaca Falls and Lick Brook
- 18 Supported facilities improvements at the State Theatre and Ithaca Farmers Market
- 19 Supported the construction of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture
- 20 Advanced the development of a Downtown Ithaca Community Conference Center through feasibility studies leading to the award of \$5 million in state grant funding

**Tompkins County and Ithaca are regularly recognized in national media for excellence. Among our most recent and notable accolades are:**

- Ithaca named one of the "Top 10 American Cities for Family-Friendly Travel" by Forbes.com
- Ithaca named the prettiest town in New York by Architectural Digest
- Ithaca named one of the "Top 50 Most Underrated Cities to Visit in the US" by Thrillist.com
- Ithaca awarded the title of one of the "US Top Emerging Nature Destinations" at the Luxury Travel Guide Awards
- Ithaca recognized for being #2 on "The Best Small College Towns" by USA Today
- Robert H. Treman State Park selected as the "Best Swimming Spot in New York State" by the Weather Channel
- Ithaca named as the 10th "Best New York Art Spots that Aren't in NYC" by Huffington Post
- Ithaca designated as the "#1 Best College Town" in the 2013-2014 AIER College Destinations Index
- Ithaca Farmers Market selected as one of "8 Must-Visit Farmers Markets Around the US" by Zagat.com
- Ithaca mentioned in Travel and Leisure's list of "America's Most Romantic Towns"
- Ithaca named the "#1 Smartest City in America" by VentureBeat Online
- Ithaca named the "#1 Best College Town in America" by Business Insider

<https://www.visitithaca.com/awards-mentions>



# What we value most



The Tompkins County Tourism Program adheres to a set of core values to guide our decisions. All goals and critical actions described in this plan flow from the following eight values:

- **Leverage Local and Regional Assets**
- **Improve Connectivity within the County**
- **Create Multi Day and Off-Peak Travel Demand**
- **Develop Accountable and Transparent Programs**
- **Advocate for Policies that Affect Tourism**
- **Thoughtfully Support New Economic Growth**
- **Enhance Visitor Experience**
- **Present our Inclusive, Accessible, Vibrant and Sustainable Community**

# SETTING THE BASELINE

## THIS PLACE WE LOVE

Tompkins County offers a unique blend of rural and urban settings, spectacular natural features, and world-class academic institutions. At its center, the city of Ithaca sits at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake and serves as the county’s commercial and cultural hub.

Higher education is at the core of our county’s economy, as more than 31,000 students come to study at Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College annually. Nearly one-fifth of all jobs in the county are related to education. In addition, the manufacturing and high-tech sectors contribute substantially to the strong local economy.

Tompkins County offers a wide range of artistic and cultural experiences that appeal to residents and visitors alike. Our collection of theatres, museums, and heritage resources have defined our reputation as a cultural destination in the region.

Commercial wine production in the Finger Lakes began over 150 years ago. Since then the region has earned world-wide recognition for producing high-quality wines. In 1981, four Cayuga Lake wineries formed the first official wine trail in New York. Today, more than 460 acres of wine grapes are grown along Cayuga Lake.

Our community prides itself on fostering diversity and inclusion. Tompkins County seeks to honor the inherent value of every visitor’s unique story, perspective, and experience. We welcome visitors regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or socio-economic status.

Many people fall in love with our area for its natural wonders. Recreational options are plentiful on Cayuga Lake, at the county’s four state parks, and at dozens of gorges and waterfalls. It is easy to see why “Ithaca is Gorges.”

## VISITOR PROFILE

In 2018, the Ithaca/Tompkins County CVB engaged consulting firm JLL to conduct a study of visitors to Tompkins County. There were two components to the study:

1. Online survey of recent visitors and people planning to travel to the county
2. In-person surveys of visitors at major attractions in the county

The last Visitor Profile Study was conducted in 2009 (Chmura Economics & Analytics). The table below compares the findings from the two studies.

Comparison of Highlights	– Overall Results –	
	2019	2009
Repeat Visitation	76% repeat	69%
Overnight Percentage	78% staying overnight	63%
Spending	\$366 per party per day	\$331
Travel Party Size	3.3 people	3.0
Nights Spent	2-3 nights	2.4
Mode of Transportation	21% air	10%
Stays in Hotel/Motels/Inns	60%	50%
Same day Travel Planning	2%	15%
Primary Reason for Travel	Outdoor Leisure Activities	Gorges & State Parks
Visitor Satisfaction	80% will return	81%

*The study yielded several noteworthy findings (full results of this study are in appendix D).*

## TRAVELER PROFILE

- Repeat visitors – Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported that they had visited the area previously.
- Trip length – Over three-quarters (78%) of respondents stayed overnight. Most overnight visitors stayed for two to three nights. Very few visitors had trips lasting more than four nights.



# our community prides itself on fostering diversity and inclusion

- Travel party type – The average travel party size was just over three people with adults accounting for roughly two-thirds of the group (3.3 total, 2.4 adults). Most respondents stated they were traveling either as a family (with kids) or couple.
- Traveler Planning
  - Travel planning resources – Most respondents used either information from college/university websites or knowledge from a previous visit to the area to make their travel plans. Local or regional destination websites (i.e. VisitIthaca.com) were the third most used travel planning resource.
  - Travel decision timing – Most respondents began making travel plans between one and two months in advance. Very few visitors made travel plans a week or less in advance.
- Traveler origin and transportation
  - Driving – Most visitors arrive in Tompkins County by automobile. Three-fifths (60%) of respondents reported driving between three and six hours.
  - Flying – Nearly one-fifth (21%) of respondents traveled by air, with the majority arriving at Ithaca Tompkins International Airport.
  - Top home states – Visitors reported arriving from New York, Pennsylvania, California, and New Jersey among other places.
- Spending
  - While overall spending increased from 2009, when adjusted for inflation, this trend reverses.
  - Retail spending was notably lower than in comparable destinations.
- Demographics
  - Age – Most respondents were between 40-70 years in age.
  - Sexual orientation – 20% of respondents identified as LGBTQIA+. (This compares to approximately 4.5% of the adult population in New York State per a 2017 Gallup survey.)

- Travel Purpose
  - Leisure (38%) including the following reasons:
    - Sightseeing
    - Outdoor oriented experiences
    - Just to get away
  - College (32%) including the following reasons:
    - Visiting a student
    - College tours
    - On-campus events
    - Campus sightseeing tour (not related to college enrollment)
  - Business (16%)
  - Visiting Family and Friends (14%)
- Activities
  - The top responses included:
    - Dining at unique restaurants
    - Visiting gorges and waterfalls
    - Hiking on local trails
    - On-campus activities
    - Strolling through the Ithaca Commons
  - Additional notable responses included:
    - Visiting area wineries
    - Visiting state or local parks
    - Visiting locations on the Discovery Trail
    - Exploring Ithaca Farmers Market
    - Touring museums or galleries
    - Boating or other water-based excursions on Cayuga Lake

See appendix D for full Visitor Profile Study and appendix G for historic data on local hotel performance.

## OBJECTIVES

The Tompkins County Tourism Program seeks to achieve the following objectives by 2027:

- Annual Overnight Visitors: 900,000
- Annual Visitor Spending: \$300 million
- Annual Household Tax Benefit: \$950

## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The following performance indicators will assist the STPB and Tompkins County Tourism Program to understand the health of the tourism sector.

SOURCE	INDICATOR(S)	FREQUENCY	NOTES
Smith Travel Research	Hotel industry statistics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupancy</li> <li>• Average daily rate</li> <li>• Supply &amp; demand</li> </ul>	Monthly	Private market data
All The Rooms - Analytics	Short-term rental statistics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupancy</li> <li>• Average daily rate</li> <li>• Supply &amp; demand</li> </ul>	Monthly	Private market data for top short-term rental platforms
Tourism Economics	Economic impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor spending</li> <li>• Local tax benefits</li> </ul>	Annual	Provides comparison statistics to other counties in NYS
Tompkins County Finance Department	Room tax collections	Quarterly	Quarters are shifted one month from calendar (Q1 is Dec, Jan, Feb)
Cornell University & Ithaca College	Admissions & enrollment	Annual	Leading indicator of travel demand
Tompkins County Area Development	Local economic statistics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Gross product</li> <li>• Compensation</li> </ul>	Every 3-5 years	Private economic data (i.e. IMPLAN)
NYS Department of Labor	Detailed local statistics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Wages</li> </ul>	Quarterly	Quarterly census of employment and wages
Cornell Program on Applied Demographics	County statistics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population</li> <li>• Labor market</li> </ul>	Annual	
Consulting Firm (TBD)	Visitor profile	Once every 5 years	See "Policy & Evaluation Focus Area" (page 35)



## COMPETITION

### REGIONAL COMPARISON

Ithaca and Tompkins County hold competitive advantages compared to our neighboring communities in several categories. Our destination offers a high value for visitors with a bounty of affordable attractions.

**HOTELS & RESTAURANTS** – Tompkins County has over 2,100 hotel rooms and 500 restaurants\*, many of which are in the City of Ithaca. Among counties in the Finger Lakes region, Tompkins County ranks third in visitor spending on lodging and fourth for spending on food and beverage (Oxford Economics, 2018). The variety of accommodation and dining options available in our community allows our area to serve as a hub for travelers exploring the Finger Lakes region.

**HIGHER EDUCATION** – Our county has a large concentration of post-secondary students due to the presence of Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College. These institutions provide programming for students, researchers, and the public. In addition, these institutions routinely attract on-campus meetings, parents, athletic events, artistic performances, and prospective students. The presence of higher education institutions makes Ithaca a viable destination for private regional bus operators and commercial airlines. Furthermore, Cornell, Ithaca College and TC3, support the following facilities that attract tourism in our area:

- Cornell Botanic Gardens
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- H.F. Johnson Museum of Art
- Ithaca College Athletics & Events Center / Natatorium
- Coltivare

**OUTDOOR RECREATION** – Many destinations in the Finger Lakes region offer waterfalls, lake activities, and pristine natural areas. Tompkins County has distinguished itself through the continued development of a local trail network that connects major outdoor recreation sites to other parts of the community.

**THEATRES, MUSEUMS & CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS** – It is unusual for a place the size of Tompkins County to offer such a variety of cultural experiences for visitors.



PHOTO: SANDY RAPP

The cultural attractions in our community compete with establishments in larger metropolitan areas. In addition to our multiple local theatres, museums, and an independent cinema, our local institutions of higher education routinely offer high caliber performances that are open to the public.

**AGRITOURISM** – The emergence of the wine industry in the 1970s put the Finger Lakes on the map worldwide as an agritourism destination. While Tompkins County only has a few wineries, we are emerging as a craft beverage destination for beer and cider. Additionally, we are known for the Ithaca Farmers Market – the largest market in the region and the cornerstone of our local farm to fork movement. Another unique asset in Tompkins County is the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Cornell, which attracts a worldwide audience of academics and students to our community.

**DOWNTOWN ITHACA** – The Ithaca Commons is a truly unique destination unmatched by neighboring cities in our region. The Commons serves as an anchor of our community's identity and as a host for cultural events. This recently renovated pedestrian street has the capability to host festivals and connect visitors with local merchants.

\* TC Departments of Health (restaurants) and Finance (hotels). Restaurant figure includes all food service establishments including food trucks & caterers.



**FESTIVALS & MAJOR EVENTS** – Any given weekend in upstate New York one can find many events – especially during the summer and fall. Tompkins County hosts several popular festivals and major events including Grassroots Festival of Music & Dance, Apple Harvest Festival, and Ithaca Festival to name a few. If such events are to continue to flourish, they must offer unique experiences and be promoted to new audiences.

**AIR SERVICE** – The Ithaca Tompkins International Airport recently experienced a major expansion. The airport has a larger terminal and a new customs facility to allow international flights. This represents a major opportunity to attract new domestic leisure travelers and groups to our destination. In addition, the updated terminal represents a substantial marketing opportunity.

## COMPARABLE DESTINATIONS

Travelers have many choices – the first of which is deciding where to go. Several comparison destinations were identified for their similar attributes to Tompkins County. These destinations feature major educational institutions and comparable core urban areas. Research into these destinations revealed the following observations:

- Some destinations incorporate brand elements from local institutions of higher education into their destination marketing. For instance, Destination Ann Arbor (the Destination Marketing Organization for Ann Arbor, Michigan) incorporates the school colors for the University of Michigan into its website and printed material.
- Some destinations had established grant programs for tourism generating events and marketing campaigns. For instance, the Central Pennsylvania CVB grants funds to organizations in Centre County for projects that support significant economic impacts and strengthen the perception of the county.
- Some municipalities use hotel room tax funds to support convention centers. For instance, Saratoga County, NY allocates a portion of room tax revenue to support the Saratoga Springs City Center.
- Many municipalities had established some procedure to collect room taxes from short-term rentals (i.e. Airbnb and VRBO). For instance, the City of Berkeley, California, requires short-term rental operators to pay a \$220 application fee and a monthly enforcement fee of 2% of taxable receipts in addition to a 12% transient occupancy tax. The city allows online registration and payment of fees for short-term rentals.



## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES & LIMITATIONS

### CURRENT LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS

The STPB should consider how the following factors will affect the values and goals in this plan.

**SEASONALITY & ACADEMIC CALENDARS** – Visitation to Tompkins County is strongly influenced by season and academic calendars. There is capacity within the existing lodging establishments to increase overnight visitation from November to April. Even during peak season, local hotels often have spare capacity from Sunday to Thursday. This capacity represents an opportunity to expand tourism to Tompkins County without building additional hotel rooms.

**CONFERENCE CENTER** – The proposal to redevelop the Green Street Garage currently includes a conference center component. Recent feasibility studies indicate that a downtown conference center could provide economic benefits to the county but that such an operation would require a subsidy to operate.

**WAYFINDING SIGNAGE** – In 2014 the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce completed a Wayfinding & Interpretive Signage Plan for the county.

While funds have been set aside to advance this project, it has not yet been implemented. In addition, the expanded network of recreational trails throughout the County may require additional signage not considered in the 2014 plan. Considering changes in the use of GPS technology and results from the Visitor Profile Study (appendix D), the overall scope of this plan should be evaluated.

**TRANSPORTATION** – One of the most common frustrations for travelers to Tompkins County is the lack of convenient transportation options (appendix D). However, without substantial changes to federal and state transportation infrastructure policy, the highway and railroad service are unlikely to change any time soon. The City of Ithaca recently began a parking study to examine the availability and pricing of public structured and on-street vehicle parking. Work is

currently underway to expand terminal facilities at the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport and additional airline service is anticipated. Several inter-city bus operators provide direct and regular service from Ithaca to New York City and other major metropolitan areas, yet there are relatively few local attractions that are suitable for these vehicles. Limited options for motor coach and intercity bus parking have resulted in adverse impacts on tourism to Tompkins County.

**TOMPKINS CENTER FOR HISTORY & CULTURE** – In May 2019, Tompkins County opened the Center for History & Culture on the Ithaca Commons. This space includes the downtown visitors center, CAP Art Space gallery, and exhibit space for The History Center. The center has the potential to serve as a hub for regional tour operations and a visitor destination.

**RESOURCE ALLOCATION** – The Tourism Program relies on funding from the room tax to support a variety of programs. The STPB often faces difficult choices when preparing annual budgets as there are many compelling requests for funding.

**SHORT TRIP LENGTH** – Overnight visitors to Tompkins County typically stay two to three days even though they have often planned their trips months in advance. It may be possible to encourage visitors to extend their trips by one or more nights.

**RURAL COMMUNITIES** – A substantial portion of Tompkins County is rural in character. Over recent years the Tourism Program has invested in various approaches to developing tourism in rural areas including through the agricultural tourism initiative, rural beautification, outdoor recreation, and various grant awards. It is important to recognize that tourism development in rural areas must be done with attention to local character and capacity.



## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES & LIMITATIONS (continued)

### EMERGING TRENDS & CHALLENGES

While it is impossible to predict the future, there are several emerging trends and issues that may have substantial effects on tourism in Tompkins County and beyond.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT

- Most travel to Tompkins County is related to activity at Cornell University and Ithaca College (appendix D). Demographic shifts and changes to the perceived value of higher education will likely affect enrollment. In addition, potential legislation affecting college tuition and student loan debt could substantially impact demand for higher education. Changes to demand for higher education have the potential to fundamentally impact demand for travel to our county. Monitoring trends relating to higher education at the national, regional, and local levels will provide an important indicator for the local tourism economy.

#### SHORT-TERM RENTAL (STR) PLATFORMS

- Currently, the vast majority of STR listings in Tompkins County are on Airbnb, which has an established voluntary collection agreement for room tax (page 7). However, the market for STR listings is highly competitive and several other platforms may gain market share in coming years. Depending on changes in the market, the county may consider additional voluntary collection agreements with other platforms or other means of ensuring compliance with the room tax law.
- Where full housing units are permanently converted into STRs, our community's housing supply shrinks. The increased popularity and growth of STRs have reduced the availability of housing in Ithaca and Tompkins County. The permanent conversion of housing units to STRs conflicts with the county's efforts to support affordable housing.
- Municipal regulation of STRs may impact the supply of rooms in coming years. Currently only one municipality has regulated STRs (Village of Cayuga Heights).

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the growth of STR room inventory locally has reduced stays at established bed and breakfast businesses in Tompkins County.

#### VISITOR READINESS & TOURISM TRAINING

- Staff in many businesses and occupations encounter visitors who pose questions about our destination. As new businesses open and new people begin careers, the need for visitor readiness and tourism training will increase. The Tompkins County Workforce NY office has partnered with the CVB and DIA to establish the Visitor Arrival to Departure training program. This program will need to be promoted to area employers, and its content will need to be reviewed periodically to ensure accuracy. As training methods evolve, new tourism training programs may be appropriate.

#### CHINESE & ASIAN INBOUND TRAVELERS

- With economic gains over recent decades, the number of Chinese and Asian inbound travelers has increased. Travelers from China find few signs or instructions in their language and employees are often unfamiliar with cultural expectations of foreign travelers. It will be important to ensure hospitality staff can engage with Chinese and Asian travelers successfully.

#### CANNABIS LEGALIZATION

- In 2019, New York State Legislature considered the legalization of cannabis for adult recreational use. While this effort was unsuccessful, proponents of legalization are likely to continue their efforts. It is difficult to say how legalization efforts will impact tourism before the state law has been passed. Cannabis cultivation has the potential to impact our agritourism attractions and agricultural research priorities. In addition, it will be important for local officials to understand how legalization impacts retail and public consumption of cannabis.





PHOTO: CVB

It will be important to ensure hospitality staff can **engage** with Chinese and Asian travelers successfully.

#### MICRO-MOBILITY & RIDE HAILING

- The range of transportation options in Tompkins County has expanded substantially in recent years as services offered by Lime (pedal bikes, e-bikes, and e-scooters), Uber and Lyft (ride hailing apps) have become available. While these services may improve transportation options to some locations, visitors are not always aware of their availability and costs. It will be important to integrate new transportation options into visitor-facing resources and tourism training courses. Areas with constrained parking may benefit the most by shifting visitor trips away from private automobiles.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE & EXTREME WEATHER

- Climate change and related weather events are likely to have adverse consequences on many elements of Tompkins County, including tourism. Prolonged drought, flooding, and extreme temperatures all present unique challenges relating to tourism. Environmental changes could threaten the appeal of major attractors for visitors to Tompkins County. Some locations, such as the waterfront and Cayuga Inlet, are highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. The addition of indoor

venues for events and gatherings and communicating climate-related conditions to visitors will be increasingly important.

#### HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS (HAB) / CAYUGA LAKE HEALTH

- HABs on Cayuga Lake threaten human health, aquatic ecosystems, and the viability of lake activities enjoyed by residents and visitors. Efforts at the state and local levels are underway to prevent HABs and communicate risks. However, visitors to our county may be unaware of this phenomenon and may be upset by their inability to enjoy swimming or boating on the lake. The relatively small number of public beach access areas to Cayuga Lake in Tompkins County increases the impact of HABs related beach closures on our local tourism economy.

#### DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL RETAIL

- Over the past several years many traditional retail stores have lost business and closed as evidenced by emerging national trends. The growth of e-commerce, shifting consumer habits, and over-development of chain stores are among some of the major factors



## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES & LIMITATIONS (continued)

causing a prolonged decline of retail sales. Ithaca and Tompkins County are not immune to these trends and many retailers in our area have struggled to stay open. Historically, shopping had been a top activity for visitors to our area.

### MOBILE PAYMENTS / CASHLESS ECONOMY

- While cash is still used for many transactions, new payment technologies allow consumers to rely more heavily on debit cards, credit cards, and mobile devices. Not all service workers, entertainers, and retailers have the capability to accept non-cash payments for tips and purchases. Without the appropriate tools, these individuals and businesses may miss opportunities to make sales and earn income.

### SEARCH ENGINE ALGORITHMS & RESTRICTIONS

- Many visitors use online search engines (such as Google) for travel planning. The algorithms that determine the placement of search results often change without warning—this can affect the visibility of official tourism information in search results, which in turn impacts the way potential travelers retrieve online information. It is not safe to assume that official travel information from the CVB or other sources will be presented clearly to prospective visitors. It also presents a challenge to track how information about our destination is shared with internet users. Furthermore, censorship systems such as the “Great Firewall of China” limits access to many websites, including those promoting tourism.

### EVENT SAFETY AND SECURITY

#### COSTS / REQUIREMENTS

- State policies are driving increasing requirements for security at events. The costs of increased security may threaten the viability of some large community events. County-level action may be necessary to consider all alternatives relating to these changing requirements.

### LIVING WAGE

- Local and state legislation to define or require a living wage could have meaningful impacts on the tourism sector. As defined by the 2019 Living Wage Study conducted by Alternatives Federal Credit Union, a living wage is \$14.28 per hour for employers that provide health insurance. If a living wage were required by local or state law, employers in the hospitality sector may face difficult short-term choices regarding hours and personnel. Increasing operational costs for lodging establishments and restaurants may result in higher prices for customers.

### VIRTUAL / AUGMENTED REALITY

- Technological advancements continue to improve virtual and augmented reality capability. These emerging media may allow for some unique opportunities to promote our destination and enhance visitor experiences. In addition, improved virtual reality technology may provide a way to enhance accessibility to locations that cannot accommodate people with mobility impairments. Widespread use of augmented reality technology at destinations in Tompkins County may require enhancements to wireless networks – especially in non-urban locations.

### AERIAL DRONES

- As prices drop and technology improves, small, remote-controlled aircraft have grown in popularity recently. While aerial drones can capture photos and videos from unique perspectives at outdoor events, natural features, and other locations, their use may be perceived as a nuisance by visitors. Rules and norms regarding their operation remain unclear. Communicating and enforcing site-specific rules regarding aerial drones may become a growing issue for tourism destinations.



# GOALS

The following chapter identifies specific goals and actions for the Tompkins County Tourism Program to accomplish.

Goals in this document are classified into focus areas – these topical categories provide context on our local tourism development strategy. Our target is to accomplish the goals described in this section by 2027 or earlier.

Actions are the specific activities that the STPB, Tourism Program, or other partner organization can perform to advance the goals.

## OVERALL GOALS

The following goals broadly support tourism development and promotion. These goals cross over multiple focus areas.

- 1 Increase average overnight trip length by one night from 2-3 nights to 3-4 nights**
- 2 Increase average visitor spending by 5% from \$366 to \$384 per day in established downtowns and villages**
- 3 Offer indoor and outdoor visitor programming year-round**
- 4 Increase visual and physical access to Cayuga Lake through collaborative efforts with municipal and private stakeholders**
- 5 Increase the share of new visitors from 24% to 30%**
- 6 Provide accurate information to decision makers on legislation and policies that affect tourism**
- 7 Continuously refine communication techniques and media to grow awareness of our destination and its assets**
- 8 Foster collaboration among tourism partners to achieve common goals**

## FOCUS AREAS

This plan identifies 15 focus areas for tourism development in Tompkins County. Each is classified into one of four categories:



### **PRIORITY: primary tourism motivations and issues facing our destination**

- Diversity & Inclusion
- Higher Education
- Marketing & Sales
- Outdoor Recreation
- Transportation & Connectivity
- Waterfront



### **FOUNDATION: persistent and strong influences on the tourism sector**

- Agriculinary
- Arts & Cultural Heritage
- Downtown Ithaca
- Festivals
- Planning & Evaluation



### **EMERGING: long-range opportunity to increase travel demand**

- Sports



### **DESTINATION SERVICES: efforts to grow our local tourism economy**

- Beautification & Placemaking
- Conferences & Groups
- Visitor Experience



# PRIORITY

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Ithaca and Tompkins County have a reputation for welcoming people of all backgrounds. The city of Ithaca has affirmed its status as a Sanctuary City, and Tompkins County has adopted an official Diversity Statement. In 2018 the STPB adopted a Diversity Statement (appendix C) and reflected this policy through tourism grant guidelines. Our community has earned recognition as a place that is accepting and open to all people.

Data about our visitors and residents confirm the diversity within our community. The Visitor Profile Study (appendix D) revealed that 20% of respondents identified as LGBTQIA+. (This compares



to approximately 4.5% of the adult population in New York State per a 2017 Gallup survey.) Census data show that Tompkins County's racial and ethnic diversity compares closely to larger communities and ranks 11th among counties in upstate New York (2017, Simpson Diversity Index).

Moving forward, it will be important to ensure that Tompkins County intentionally includes all people and welcomes diverse audiences. We will strive to ensure that people of all races, colors, sexual orientations, gender identities, religions, ages, nationalities, and abilities feel welcome when visiting Tompkins County. Visitors to our community want to feel accepted and see themselves represented in our media.

We recognize that long-term effort will be required to ensure that our destination is inclusive to all people. We believe that supporting diverse visitor groups will enhance local appreciation for the value of diversity in our community and region.

## GOALS

- Maintain and enhance our destination's appeal to LGBTQIA+ audiences
- Actively promote our destination to diverse audiences
- Establish cultural awareness training opportunities for tourism sector

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Ensure that photography and video used for destination marketing represent our community's diversity
- Support local events and attractions that celebrate our diversity through marketing and promotion
- Identify and develop cultural awareness training programs for community ambassadors and hospitality workforce
- Recruit STPB board members from diverse backgrounds
- Identify accessibility barriers at major visitor attractions and support measures to improve accessibility
- Identify local tourism products which appeal to diverse audiences
- Gather appropriate information about visitor diversity in future Visitor Profile Studies



## HIGHER EDUCATION

Education is the primary economic engine of Tompkins County. Our three key academic institutions – Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) – have a combined student enrollment exceeding 31,000 in the county. Higher education was associated with many primary motivations for travel in the Visitor Profile Study (appendix D). The study identified 10 specific reasons associated with higher education tourism: visiting students, college tours, and on-campus activities were the top three.

The county’s high proportion of college students directly affects our tourism market. Annual events such as orientations, move-in days, parents’ weekends, reunions, and commencements attract large numbers of visitors to Tompkins County. The demand from these events regularly approaches or exceeds the county’s lodging room supply.

Our county’s higher education institutions offer bountiful options for visitors throughout the year. Cornell University is often cited among the most picturesque campuses in the nation. In addition to the gorges and waterfalls, the university includes unique visitor attractors such as the Cornell Botanic Gardens, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, and the Lab of Ornithology. The institutions also offer performance spaces such as Ithaca College’s Ford Hall, which was renovated in 2014 and seats over 600. Collegiate athletic events attract participants and spectators for a variety of competitions. Finally, the institutions attract a substantial amount of business travel for research, meetings, and campus-related activities.

Looking ahead, several generational and demographic trends relating to higher education should be considered as they will impact local tourism issues. The decline in the high school student population in upstate New York has caused college recruitment officials to expand their reach to find prospective students. While many families prioritize college visits, more families are waiting until a student is admitted before planning a college tour – this has shifted college visits from summer to the winter and spring.

Every new class of incoming students presents a remarkable tourism opportunity. These students (and their families) are bound to make trips to Tompkins County for decades to come. The Tourism Program and its partners will seek to improve visitor experience and leverage our local attractions for higher education visitors.

### GOALS

- Strengthen the partnership between higher education institutions and the Tompkins County Tourism Program
- Provide all campus visitors with accurate information about local events, establishments, and community resources
- Enhance local transportation connections between campuses and downtown Ithaca for visitors

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Integrate campus event calendars with CVB & IthacaEvents.com
- Hold quarterly meetings between Cornell University, Ithaca College, TC3, and the CVB to discuss upcoming events and coordinate visitor engagement efforts
- Promote CVB resources to on-campus event organizers through on-campus meetings and other communication channels and align event timing with academic calendars
- Integrate visitor information into on-campus digital signage at high traffic locations
- Encourage and incentivize event organizers to align event timing with academic calendars, where appropriate
- Assess current transportation options between campuses and downtown Ithaca and identify potential intervention points that would improve connectivity
- Identify unique large-scale events that can be hosted on-campus when classes are not in session (such as Science Olympiad)
- Review campus tours and student orientation programming to ensure current information about local tourism assets is accurate
- Identify off-campus community assets that are linked to higher education institutions to incorporate into tour itineraries
- Engage Cornell University, Ithaca College, and TC3 employees with tourism training opportunities such as Visitor Journey A2D
- Connect local hospitality staff with on-campus opportunities to learn from faculty and guest lecturers



## MARKETING & SALES

Destination marketing is essential to increasing awareness of Ithaca and Tompkins County as a vibrant and exciting place to visit year-round. Marketing and advertising are core functions of the CVB.

The CVB markets our county through the VisitIthaca.com website, an annual travel guide publication, social media, and advertisements in a variety of media (online, radio, print, etc.). The CVB works directly with travel writers and bloggers to showcase attractions in our county to new audiences. The CVB leverages the local investment in destination marketing with state matching funds from I ♥ NY.

The Visitor Profile Study findings have major significance for destination marketing efforts. The study revealed that many people make travel plans using information from college websites and knowledge from previous visits to Ithaca (appendix D). The study showed that most travel is planned between one and six months in advance. In addition, the study indicated a growing share of repeat visitation (76% compared to 69% in 2009). The study also provided detailed information about our county's most typical travel party types (families and couples). In the coming years, it will be increasingly important to develop communication strategies that reach these visitors.

One current limitation to our destination sales efforts is the lack of a community conference center. While some large meetings can be hosted at on-campus venues, these spaces are in high demand for campus-related events. Prior studies on the feasibility of a conference center in Tompkins County have confirmed the viability of this concept. The addition of a conference center would allow our community to attract new tourism business during off-peak periods.

## GOALS

- Build a conference center to host events beyond the capacity of our current meeting spaces
- Increase engagement with online destination marketing efforts and distribution of travel guides
- Maintain working partnerships with higher education institutions on destination marketing efforts
- Provide support to local tourism partners through marketing and advertising.
- Increase media impressions and social media engagement

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote Tompkins County as an accessible destination for outdoor recreation</li> <li>• Promote Ithaca and Tompkins County as a destination that is easy to get to by various modes of transportation</li> <li>• Promote Tompkins County to targeted and niche audiences such as LGBTQIA+ and agricutinary tourists</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus and refine marketing and advertising efforts for higher education-focused visitors.</li> <li>• Build and maintain a library of attractive imagery and video of Tompkins County's tourism assets</li> <li>• Offer annual marketing workshops and educational resources to local tourism partners.</li> <li>• Develop cooperative advertising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>opportunities to help local tourism partners reach out-of-county audiences</li> <li>• Develop a marketing strategy focused on connecting with repeat visitors</li> <li>• Identify and engage markets for potential new visitors, including new niche travel segments</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|





## OUTDOOR RECREATION

Gorges and waterfalls define the landscape of Tompkins County and attract the attention of travelers. Our county offers a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities from hiking and biking on local trails to paddling and windsurfing on Cayuga Lake. The Visitor Profile Study identified visits to gorges and hiking as two of the top seven most popular visitor activities (appendix D).

Tompkins County contains three state parks, 240 miles of recreational trails, four local parks along Cayuga Lake, and over 19,000 acres of state forest land. Several local organizations help people engage with the environment, such as the Cayuga Nature Center and Ithaca Children's Garden. Our county's unique outdoor environment is tightly integrated into our history and culture.

Yet, opportunities remain for our county to improve its appeal as an outdoor-focused destination. Critical links need to be filled in our trail network, and public lake access sites are in high demand. Several goals and actions were identified in the recently completed *Outdoor Recreation Tourism Implementation Plan*. Looking ahead, many questions remain about the maintenance and stewardship of local outdoor recreational resources.

### GOALS

- Maintain and enhance our status as a destination for outdoor recreation
- Complete the goals and actions in the *Outdoor Recreation Tourism Implementation Plan*
- Establish a grant to support capacity building and organizational development for outdoor recreation focused entities

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Leverage local and regional funding sources to address maintenance needs of recreational trails and other outdoor recreational assets
- Engage an external consultant to assess the potential value of the county's outdoor recreational assets (e.g. parks, trails, established events) relative to national trends for future tourism development
- Identify and engage out of region group tour operators who can offer destination biking, hiking, paddling, or other extended outdoor recreation trips in Tompkins County
- Update and implement the Priority Trails Strategy to reflect potential new trail segments and actions for land and water trails
- Assess the marketing needs for outdoor recreation tourism and develop a coordinated marketing plan





## TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY

Navigating between various destinations is an integral part of any trip, and visitors to Tompkins County have many options to consider. The Visitor Profile Study revealed that most of our visitors drive here and many visitors who fly in choose to rent a car upon arrival (appendix D). It also showed that some of our visitors have difficulty navigating our county's streets. Automobile traffic on peak visitation days can degrade visitor experience and create unpleasant barriers between parts of the county. This presents some unique circumstances for considering improvements to visitor transportation.

The Visitor Profile Study confirmed that some visitors believe that Tompkins County is not easy to get to. While Ithaca has several inter-city bus lines (ShortLine, OurBus, and the Cornell Campus to Campus services, for example) connecting to New York City and other metro areas, we aren't served by an interstate highway or passenger train service. Our strongest inter-city bus connections are to New York City. Improvements to regional and statewide transportation networks are beyond the scope of this six-year plan and generally beyond the funding capacity of the Tourism Program.

Tompkins County offers a wide range of transportation services and infrastructure available to visitors, commuters, and residents. In addition to TCAT bus service, Gadabout, taxis, and Ithaca CarShare, several new transportation options have recently emerged such as bike sharing (Lime) and app-based ride hailing (Uber and Lyft). The city of Ithaca offers public structured and on-street parking in downtown and Collegetown and is currently studying its overall parking strategy.

Looking ahead, the Tourism Program has the capability to leverage local investments to improve transportation for visitors to our county in alignment with the county's 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan and other local plans. Improvements to our community's wayfinding signage will help visitors find new attractions and navigate without using a smartphone. The Tourism Program has set aside substantial but partial funding for wayfinding. Enhanced transit links between core visitor destinations will help to relieve parking demands in downtown Ithaca and on college campuses.

**some**  
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get to

### GOALS

- Following an evaluation of the plan's scope, implement the 2014 Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage Plan
- Refine visitor communication regarding transportation options and parking
- Leverage local investments in infrastructure to improve visitor transportation options
- Advocate for parking policies that consider and support the needs of visitors

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Explore and support efforts to establish a downtown Ithaca intermodal transit center
- Evaluate ways to enhance visitor experience at key transportation terminals, including the airport, intercity bus depot, and downtown parking garages
- Support enhanced marketing and visitor experience efforts for the airport
- Research how mobility as a service options may align with visitor transportation needs
- Evaluate the creation of a fully accessible shuttle service between Cornell University and downtown Ithaca and other destinations
- Create a transportation communication strategy for visitors
- Coordinate with TCAT and partner municipalities to establish remote parking for downtown workers to improve availability of parking for visitors
- Connect existing multi-use trails to improve access to the urban area
- Promote active transportation (walking and biking) as an excellent way to explore downtown Ithaca, college campuses, and gorges





## WATERFRONT

Cayuga Lake is a signature landscape feature that contributes to the region's natural beauty and uniqueness of our county as a tourism destination. Ithaca's location as a southern gateway to the historic statewide Erie Canal has played a significant role in our waterfront as both an industrial, transportation, and recreational feature. The community is fortunate to have many public parks along its waterfront, including Stewart Park, the Newman Municipal Golf Course, Cass Park, and Allan H. Treman State Marine Park. Other amenities along the waterfront include the popular Ithaca Farmers Market; Cornell, Ithaca College and community boathouses; and, the Ithaca Children's Garden. The six-mile Cayuga Waterfront Trail connects these waterfront destinations for bicyclists, runners and walkers of all ages and abilities. The waterfront trail forms the heart of an emerging network of multi-use trails including the eight-mile Black Diamond Trail and the recently opened Treman Marina Trail.

The waterfront has benefited from an active group of non-profit organizations that work with the City to enhance the waterfront. These include the Friends of Stewart Park, Ithaca Children's Garden, Ithaca Youth Bureau, Ithaca Farmers Market, Discover Cayuga Lake, Wharton Studio Museum, Cascadilla Boat Club, and the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce.

Several waterfront development projects are now underway along the Cayuga Inlet, thanks, in large part, to the significant public investments in the Cayuga Waterfront Trail and other related projects. Even with these new facilities and activities, Ithaca's waterfront remains an underdeveloped tourism asset. Nearly four-fifths (80%) of respondents to the Visitor Profile Study reported that they did not participate in any lake activity. The opportunity to live, work, and enjoy dining and specialized retail activity will enhance the visitor experience and vitality of the waterfront area. At the same time, it is critical to further enhance public access to the lake and inlet, the Waterfront Trail and all the destinations and amenities along the waterfront while preserving a high standard of water quality.

## GOALS

- Improve public access for all types of waterfront experiences, including walking, gathering places, cafes/sitting areas, boating, running, biking, and pedestrian connections
- Complete the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail including facilities in Stewart Park, Cass Park and elsewhere in Tompkins County
- Support improvements to public facilities along the waterfront including Stewart Park, Cass Park, the Ithaca Children's Garden, and the Ithaca Farmers Market

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Review existing local waterfront plans and identify active development projects
- Invite development proposal teams to present draft plans to STPB members for consideration of issues that affect visitors
- Assess waterfront sites appropriate for open space, enhanced public access to Cayuga Lake, trail connections, and other amenities valued by visitors to Tompkins County
- Evaluate opportunities to create and expand year-round tourism destinations along the waterfront
- Support efforts to communicate water quality issues that affect Cayuga Lake to visitors and residents in a timely manner.
- Explore ways to collaboratively promote lake-oriented experiences for visitors.





# FOUNDATION

## AGRICULINARY

Tompkins County contains a mix of urban and rural places. Agriculinary tourism represents an opportunity for visitors to experience the best of our area's agricultural and culinary offerings. Development of agriculinary tourism provides people with a chance to experience working landscapes and learn about our community through its land and food. Tompkins County offers restaurants with a broad range of cuisines from Ethiopian to Korean and numerous others. TC3 offers hospitality students unique first-hand experiences through Coltivare – a farm to table restaurant in downtown Ithaca. The growth of agriculinary tourism increases opportunity for farmers, producers, and restaurants to sell locally sourced foods to new customers.

Our county has several key agriculinary tourism assets, including the Ithaca Farmers Market, Cayuga Lake Wine Trail, and the Farm to Fork brand. Following on the 2016 Agriculinary Tourism Implementation Plan, the Ithaca/Tompkins County CVB created a new position focused on the promotion of agriculinary tourism and a microgrant program for agriculinary destinations. The Finger Lakes are New York's most recognized and awarded cider region. Our county is home to a concentration of craft cider producers – a sector that we expect to grow in coming years.

Looking ahead, we want to expand the availability of locally produced foods and beverages and increase visitor opportunities to engage with our local agricultural community. Efforts from a wide range of private partners will be needed to ensure that Tompkins County maintains its reputation as a destination that offers high-quality, locally sourced foods and beverages.



## GOALS

- Increase visibility and sales of locally produced food and beverage for visitors
- Enhance our reputation as a destination for agriculinary tourism
- Build capacity for emerging agriculinary tourism districts and attractions through ongoing trainings, workshops, and networking events
- Integrate established agriculinary tourism attractions with outdoor recreation opportunities
- Increase traffic on Visit Ithaca - Farm to Fork website
- Connect the Ithaca Farmers Market to emerging waterfront development
- Seek media coverage and other opportunities to further position Ithaca/ Tompkins County as a top agriculinary tourism destination with a focus on assets such as the area's burgeoning craft cider industry, quality of craft cider, value added agriculture, and scientific research being led by Cornell

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Establish branding guidelines for "Farm to Fork" partner farms and restaurants
- Explore the expansion of agriculinary microgrants to support the agritourism sector
- Identify and engage out of region group tour operators who can offer destination culinary tours in Tompkins County
- Evaluate the potential for the development of new niche agriculinary tourism themes (such as establishing a fiber trail)
- Collaborate with partners to develop packages that integrate local chefs, farms, and rural lodging
- Explore improvements to the Ithaca Farmers Market to expand lake access and attract customers throughout the year



## ARTS & CULTURAL HERITAGE

Artistic and cultural attractions are a key element of many visitors’ experiences in Tompkins County. Indeed, many of our community’s largest cultural institutions rely on visitors to support a variety of performances, exhibits, and other artistic programming. A full calendar of cultural events allows us to offer unique and inspiring visitor experiences year-round.

In 2019 Tompkins County was recognized as the #6 medium-size metropolitan area for arts vibrancy by the National Center for Arts Research (SMU DataArts, 2019). We are home to a wide variety of theatres, museums, and creative institutions. Our community’s cultural offerings attract diverse audiences for live performances, exhibitions, and other events. As a cultural destination, we have been far more successful than most communities of our size.

Over the past five years, Tompkins County has made substantial progress toward advancing heritage tourism. Our county has a unique history which features early filmmaking and aviation - topics with the potential to attract the interest of visitors. The recently established Tompkins Center for History & Culture is the cornerstone of heritage tourism in our community and is the home of partner organizations that represent a broad spectrum of arts and cultural groups. This new institution will be an important source of collaborative cultural programming in coming years. Looking ahead, visitors appear to be interested in the development of a college or university related museum in Tompkins County (appendix D).

Tompkins County seeks to maintain and grow its reputation as a destination for cultural tourism. Our cultural institutions offer compelling reasons for travelers to discover new experiences and extend the length of their trip. However, these institutions rely on human talent, inspired marketing, and accessible physical venues to engage our visitors.

### GOALS

- Increase ticket sales and attendance at cultural attractions in Tompkins County
- Position cultural events and attractions to extend trip length
- Maintain our status as a cultural destination in upstate New York
- Increase marketing of arts and cultural heritage tourism assets
- Focus sales efforts on group tours that incorporate cultural heritage tourism assets
- Develop and implement a marketing plan for the Tompkins Center for History and Culture

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Identify and leverage collaborative marketing opportunities for cultural organizations
- Provide digital marketing assistance to local cultural organizations
- Capture and distribute media reflecting the range of cultural offerings available in Tompkins County on the CVB website, the annual visitor guide, and other destination promotional material
- Evaluate the feasibility of proposals that integrate natural areas and outdoor performance (i.e. waterfront performance venue)
- Develop a set of standard metrics for all local cultural organizations, including those affiliated with our higher education institutions, to report to the community on an annual basis (consider using Cultural Data Profile system)
- Assess IthacaEvents.com website’s ability to promote and distribute event information to target audiences
- Develop a clear communication channel for all local cultural events (including those affiliated with our higher education institutions)
- Support cultural programming and marketing geared toward LGBTQIA+ and other diverse audiences
- Develop visitor packages that combine local food and beverage offerings with artistic and cultural experiences
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing permanent museum exhibits focused on Cornell University and Ithaca College at the Tompkins Center for History & Culture
- Engage the County Historian to develop heritage tourism assets available for incorporation into exhibits and tours
- Identify group tour operators willing to include local arts and cultural heritage tourism attractions



PHOTO: CVB



## DOWNTOWN ITHACA

The shops, restaurants, offices, and services clustered around the Ithaca Commons comprise the primary commercial hub of our community. In addition to its local significance, the Commons is a primary destination for tourists: over one-third of visitors reported visiting the Ithaca Commons during their last trip (appendix D). In 2015, 40 years after its creation, the Commons was re-built with new features that made it more inviting as public gathering space. In addition to new residential and commercial development downtown, two new hotels have recently opened near the Commons.

The Downtown Ithaca Alliance is the area's business improvement district and as such provides supplemental services to preserve and develop the district. The Ithaca Commons is a one-of-a-kind venue for large-scale outdoor events such as Apple Harvest Festival. The presence of four hotels with a combined total of 575 rooms makes downtown Ithaca the core of our area's visitor market and a destination easily accessible to many tourists.

Yet, downtown Ithaca faces distinct challenges regarding tourism. Foot traffic downtown suffers due to the effects of academic calendars and seasonal slumps in visitor traffic. Data from the Visitor Profile Study suggest that tourist retail spending has decreased, and that store owners may need to find new and creative ways to engage with shoppers. Additional opportunities exist to establish a wayfinding program, enhance local transportation options, and upgrade parking facilities.

### GOALS

- Establish a downtown Ithaca community conference center
- Establish downtown Ithaca as the county's primary hub for group tours
- Strengthen the performance of retail in downtown Ithaca
- Increase the availability of family-centered entertainment options in downtown Ithaca
- Evaluate options to improve downtown transportation connections to benefit visitors, downtown employees, and residents

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Perform a downtown retail market study
- Explore policies and programs that encourage retail-focused events and unique or experiential retail
- Encourage the addition of banners and flags throughout downtown
- Develop a year-round calendar of tours focused on heritage, food, and culture
- Support City of Ithaca efforts to enhance the visitor experience at downtown parking garages
- Establish consistent wayfinding for pedestrians and motorists throughout downtown Ithaca
- Engage downtown businesses and employees with tourism training opportunities such as Visitor Journey A2D





PHOTO: MADDY WALSH



## FESTIVALS

Major events attract visitors, generate publicity, and create community excitement. Festivals help us present all aspects of our community and express our local cultures. Festivals can also provide economic benefits to vendors, food establishments, and hotels.

DIA operates the Tompkins Festivals program, which supports event organizers throughout the county. Program staff consult with organizers of large events, offer workshops for event organizers, and operate an equipment rental service. The Tourism Program has supported dozens of events and festivals through various grants.

The demands placed on event organizers change frequently. For instance, recent concerns about safety have led to increased security mandates for some organizers. In order to ensure that Tompkins County can offer a robust calendar of events and festivals, ongoing education of event organizers is needed.



PHOTO: SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY CENTER

## GOALS

- Support event organizers with accurate educational materials and equipment rental
- Increase visitor attendance at festivals
- Support the development of festivals that have the potential to extend trip length

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Annually evaluate the need to add or replace rental items in the Tompkins Festivals equipment rental inventory
- Annually review local regulatory issues affecting event organizers
- Provide annual workshops and educational materials for event organizers



PHOTO: © CASEY MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHY

CASEY MARTIN



## PLANNING & EVALUATION

Planning and evaluation is the foundation on which the Tompkins County Tourism Program is built and sustained.

Evaluation is ongoing work that tests aspects of the program for performance and continued relevance. Evaluation forms the basis from which we make improvements to the program whether through suggested discussions with a partner or by changing portions of the program. This may happen through tweaks, substantial changes, or even elimination of program elements.

Planning is ongoing as well. It responds to changes in the market landscape and in making predictive decisions about the direction of the program. In planning we support the health of our tourism industry as well as our community's assets for the betterment of the lives of our citizens as we work to align the two.

The STPB Planning & Evaluation Committee (P&E) does the formative work around the parts of the long-range plan, bringing them to implementation. Its recommendations are brought to the STPB for consideration as issues arise.

**we  
support  
the health of  
our tourism  
industry**

### GOALS

- Update the Visitor Profile Study every five years
- Provide consistent reporting guidance for partner organizations and grant recipients
- Annually identify local and state issues where education and advocacy may be appropriate based on the goals of this plan
- Periodically review how to balance support for legacy partners and new partners
- Review the STPB bylaws every three years

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Establish a line item in the Tourism Program budget to ensure regular funding is available to perform updated market evaluations
- Consider appropriate demographic questions to include in future Visitor Profile Studies, especially regarding diversity
- Determine annual priorities for evaluation at the first P&E Committee meeting of each year
- Review proposed local, state, and federal legislation, policies, and programs affecting tourism annually before July; where appropriate, the P&E Committee will recommend board action for advocacy
- Engage the STPB in education and advocacy efforts focused on local and state government as deemed necessary by the P&E Committee
- Develop a policy to balance the needs of legacy partners and new partners and offer guidance for organizations seeking Tourism Program support
- Establish and define key indicators to be included consistently in grant reports to STPB
- Establish and distribute guidance on measuring event attendance for partner organizations
- Establish guidance on positive environmental practices for tourism partners
- Provide a progress report on goals in the Strategic Tourism Plan to the STPB every two years





# EMERGING

## SPORTS

Sports tourism holds the potential to attract new audiences of athletes and spectators to Tompkins County. Except for college sporting events, this tourism market has been largely overlooked. Tompkins County has the fundamental elements necessary to host additional individual and team sporting events in all four seasons.

Currently, Cornell University and Ithaca College host a wide variety of college athletic events on their campuses. Our scenic state and local parks offer unique venues for outdoor events, such as the Cayuga Lake Triathlon. A recent grant was awarded to support improvements to the ice rink at Cass Park. However, many regional youth and adult athletic events secure facilities outside Tompkins County.

In order to unlock this potential, key investments are needed to enhance the quality and availability of playing fields. Improvements to local playing fields will benefit residents as well as visitors. The improvement of sports tourism should appeal to families with children – the largest travel party type identified by the Visitor Profile Study (appendix D). In addition, deeper partnerships between local event organizers and campus athletic departments will be necessary to increase the public benefits of the collegiate facilities in Tompkins County.

## GOALS

- Strengthen partnerships with colleges to host sporting events on campuses
- Attract new annual sporting events to Tompkins County

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Identify and engage sporting event organizers interested in hosting events in Tompkins County
- Evaluate the feasibility and costs of upgrading municipal sports fields to be capable of hosting larger events



PHOTO: JAMIE LOVE





# DESTINATION SERVICES

## BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Investments in the appearance and functionality of public spaces are vital to ensure that these locations attract visitors and residents. The aesthetic visual quality of our county's public spaces has a major influence on visitor experience and resident satisfaction. The presence of benches, lighting, public art, wastebaskets, and bollards can transform public spaces and lead to community-wide benefits.

The Tompkins County Tourism Program has supported a countywide Beautification program through a collaborative effort between the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, DIA, and the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce. This program has leveraged the efforts and enthusiasm of dozens of volunteers and sponsors since its establishment in 2002. The 2016 Beautification, Signage, and Public Art Strategic Plan defined goals and actions for this program. The plan also defined locations for plantings in the city of Ithaca and throughout the county. Recently, CAP identified the "Tompkins Giant" as the theme for a series of public art installations imagined for the area.



Looking ahead, it will be important to ensure that beautification and placemaking efforts supported through the Tourism Program align with destinations of interest to visitors. The long-term viability of this program depends on the strength of the partnerships that support its ongoing work.

New approaches may be necessary to enhance public spaces in different settings. (For instance, large planter boxes installed on the Ithaca Commons may not fit on narrower sidewalks in other neighborhoods.) In some situations, it may be appropriate to use low-cost, temporary measures to test the viability of enhancements to public spaces. This approach is sometimes called "tactical placemaking," and it has the potential to enhance our visitor experience.

## BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING (continued)

### GOALS

- Maintain attractive plantings and well-maintained public spaces at key visitor destinations, including the Ithaca Commons, Collegetown, the Waterfront, and along Route 13
- Build upon municipal partnerships to support beautification and placemaking efforts through financial and in-kind assistance to ensure long-term program sustainability
- Increase volunteer and sponsor engagement with the Beautification program
- Commission high-quality public art consistent with the Tompkins Giant theme in locations with high visibility to visitors
- Establish a process to support tactical placemaking efforts that have potential to enhance visitor experiences in communities throughout the county

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Annually review the planters and public spaces maintained by partner organizations and prioritize locations relevant to visitor experience and established development nodes
- Review and update the Beautification, Signage, and Public Art Strategic Plan
- Review and document beautification practices in comparable cities and counties to identify best practices
- Engage municipal partners considering modifications to public spaces to ensure that tourism-supportive features are incorporated
- Identify locations where tactical placemaking efforts could enhance visitor experience and engage municipalities regarding implementation
- Support the establishment and maintenance of public art in locations with heavy visitor traffic
- Promote public art installations in Tompkins County
- Support beautification improvements in rural communities
- Advocate for trimming of trees and shrubs that impair views of Cayuga Lake and local waterfalls

**promote  
public art  
installations**

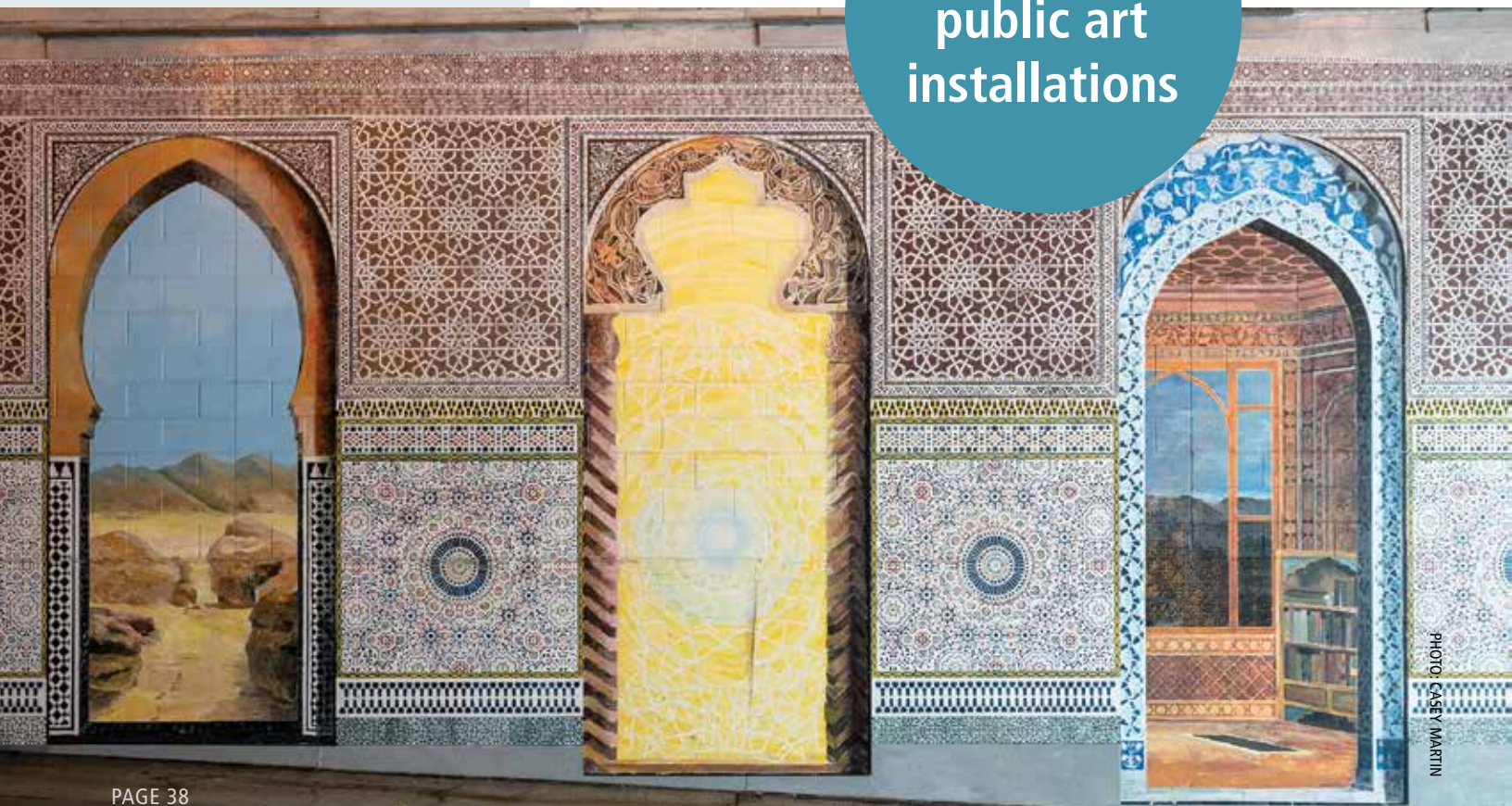


PHOTO: CASEY MARTIN





## CONFERENCES & GROUPS

As Tompkins County’s supply of accommodation options has expanded in recent years, the addition of new conferences and group tour bookings will be vital to ensure the stability of the hospitality sector. Visitors associated with conferences and groups often travel during off-peak days and seasons and bring business to hotels, restaurants, attractions, and retailers.

While our county currently lacks a conference center, we offer unique spaces for meeting planners, including locations on the campuses of Cornell University and Ithaca College. Efforts to explore the viability of a new community conference center in downtown Ithaca are underway. A conference center would allow our community to host events that currently conflict with academic schedules or don’t fit into our current meeting space inventory. In addition, Tompkins County can attract niche travel groups such as those focused on wellness and yoga.

The ongoing expansion of the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport will likely result in the establishment of new direct airline routes – and potentially lead to opportunities to attract new business meetings to our county. Enhanced partnerships between the CVB and our higher education institutions hold the potential to attract new conferences to our county. Continued engagement with tour operators will improve the desirability of Ithaca and Tompkins County as a destination for organized groups.



## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Sometimes, travel can be a confusing, frustrating, and stressful experience. Travelers often need access to accurate information, essential services, and personalized assistance to enjoy their journeys.

The CVB operates three visitor centers in the county. In addition, CVB staff answer visitor questions over the phone and via online chat. Through a partnership with the Tompkins County Workforce Development Board, the CVB offers Visitor Journey Arrival to Departure (A2D) ambassador training. This program supports tourism training for front-line hospitality staff and other community members who wish to engage more effectively with visitors.

The Visitor Profile Study indicated that our visitors are remarkably satisfied with their trips to Tompkins County (appendix D). However, it will be important to stay up to date with consumer technology, understand visitor preferences, and respond to new inquiries to maintain this level of satisfaction.

### GOALS

- Increase visitor satisfaction
- Increase total visitor engagement at visitors centers and online
- Increase the number of Visitor Journey A2D participants

### GOALS

- Increase conference and group tour business during mid-week and off-peak season
- Enhance the visibility of our destination to group tour operators

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Leverage airport connections to grow niche meeting and retreat business
- Build the association market (state, regional and national)
- Host an industry conference to gain exposure to domestic tour companies
- Grow international visitation to Tompkins County
- Leverage regional partners to create fresh tour product to increase overnight trips
- Identify and engage niche group travel opportunities

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Research and deploy integrated communication systems to share up-to-date information with visitors and front-line tourism staff (i.e. SMS or push notifications)
- Evaluate ways to enhance visitor experience at key transportation terminals, including the airport, intercity bus depot, and downtown parking garages
- Refine and expand tourism training programming offered through Visitor Journey A2D
- Research personal concierge service technology systems
- Continue to engage with visitors outside of visitor center facilities



# Tompkins County Tourism partners

(listed alphabetically)



## CORE TOURISM PROGRAM PARTNERS

- Community Arts Partnership
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
- Downtown Ithaca Alliance
- Tompkins Center for History and Culture
- Tompkins County Area Development
- Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce – Ithaca/  
Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Tompkins County Historian
- Tompkins County Workforce Development Board

## HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS

- Cornell University
- Ithaca College
- Tompkins Cortland Community College

## LOCAL, REGIONAL & STATE PARTNERS

- Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway
- Cayuga Lake Wine Trail
- City of Ithaca
- Discovery Trail
- Finger Lakes Beer Trail
- Finger Lakes Land Trust
- Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council
- Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance
- Hotels, Motels, Inns & B&Bs
- Ithaca Farmers Market
- Ithaca Tompkins International Airport
- I♥NY (Empire State Development)
- Local Restaurants
- Local Retailers
- Local Transportation Providers
- NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
- Past Tourism Program Grant Recipients
- Regional Media Outlets (TV, print, radio, online, etc.)
- Regional Tourism Promotion Agencies
- Tour Operators
- Tompkins County Area Transit
- Tompkins County Parks & Trails Network
- Towns & Villages in Tompkins County

# GLOSSARY

## **ACTION**

- Specific activities which will advance one or more goals
- See page 23

## **CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU (CVB)**

- AKA "Visit Ithaca"
- The Ithaca/Tompkins County CVB is a division of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce. It is the official Tourism Promotion Agency for Tompkins County. The CVB has three primary departments: marketing, group sales, and visitor experience. Visit Ithaca serves as the destination marketing organization for Tompkins County.

## **CORE TOURISM PROGRAM PARTNERS**

- Entities that participate in the annual room tax budget development. These organizations receive annual funding to assist the Tourism Program. Each entity prepares an annual work plan and budget request for review by the STPB Budget Committee.
- See page 40

## **DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION (DMO)**

- AKA "Convention & Visitors Bureau"
- A generic term for the organization responsible for the promotion and marketing of tourism activities for a specific location. For example, I♥NY is the DMO for New York State.

## **FOCUS AREAS**

- Thematic categories for goals and actions
- See page 24

## **GOAL**

- Results and outcomes sought by the Tourism Program. All goals in this plan are aligned with one or more values. Most goals are organized by focus area.
- See page 23

## **HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (HED) COMMITTEE**

- The HED Committee reports to the Tompkins County Legislature. The STPB reports to the HED Committee, which makes recommendations to the Legislature. Committee assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Legislature.

## **I♥NY**

- AKA "Empire State Development"
- Official New York State Destination Marketing Organization

## **HOTEL ROOM OCCUPANCY TAX**

- AKA "Room Tax," "Bed Tax," "Lodging Tax" etc.
- A tax paid by visitors to Tompkins County who stay in hotels, motels, and bed and breakfast establishments. The tax rate is 5% of the daily rate for all lodging properties with 11 or more rooms and 3% of the daily rate for all smaller lodging properties. The law describes specific exemptions for permanent residents and tax-exempt guests. Tompkins County first levied a hotel tax in 1986. The tax rate was increased in 1989 and 2001. The tax is remitted quarterly.
- See appendix B / County L.L. No. 4-1989 – <https://ecode360.com/8412617>

## **STRATEGIC TOURISM PLANNING BOARD (STPB)**

- Advisory board to the Tompkins County Legislature on all matters relating to tourism. The STPB is the formal advisory board charged by the Tompkins County Legislature with providing oversight and strategic direction for tourism initiatives that promote economic development and enhance the quality of life for residents in Tompkins County. The STPB was established in 1998.

## **TOMPKINS CENTER FOR HISTORY & CULTURE**

- Established in 2019, this facility serves as the home to The History Center in Tompkins County, Community Arts Partnership, the CVB’s downtown visitor center, Discovery Trail, Wharton Studio Museum, Dorothy Cotton Institute, Discover Cayuga Lake, and other nonprofit organizations.

## **TOMPKINS COUNTY TOURISM PROGRAM**

- The official name of the overall program funded by the hotel room occupancy tax.

## **TOURISM MARKETING**

- Activities that entice visitors to travel to Tompkins County. Marketing activities include identification of potential visitors, market research, advertising campaigns, public relations, social media campaigns, group sales, conference and meeting sales, and visitor center operations.
- The STPB has established a budget policy that allocates 60% of the available hotel room occupancy tax to marketing annually (appendix C).

## **TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

- Activities that enhance the attractions, amenities, services, venues, events, and other features that bring visitors to our community. Product development activities can include feasibility studies of potential improvements, grants to support festivals, capital improvements, and general operating support for local organizations.
- The STPB has established a policy that allocates 40% of the available hotel room occupancy tax toward product development annually (appendix C).

## **TOURISM PROMOTION AGENCY (TPA)**

- AKA “Destination Marketing Organization”
- County-designated organization eligible for matching funds from I♥NY

## **VALUE**

- Highest-level description of the STPB and Tourism Program’s mission
- See page 13

## **VISITOR**

- AKA Tourist
- A person whose home is located at least 50 miles from Tompkins County

## **VISITOR JOURNEY ARRIVAL TO DEPARTURE (A2D)**

- A tourism training program for front-line hospitality staff and community members operated by the CVB and the Workforce Development Board. The A2D training program launched in 2018 and replaced the Hospitality Star program.

## **VISITOR PROFILE STUDY**

- Research conducted in 2018 and 2019 to provide insight related to overnight visitors to our county. The study was performed by JLL on behalf of the CVB and the Tourism Program using online and in-person intercept surveys. The results of the study serve as a foundational element for the Strategic Tourism Plan. The previous study was completed in 2009.
- See appendix D and pages 14-15

## **VOLUNTARY COLLECTION AGREEMENT**

- An agreement between Tompkins County and Airbnb, Inc. for the collection of hotel room occupancy taxes. In July 2016, Tompkins County became the first county in New York State to enter into such an agreement.



# APPENDIX

- A. Proposed Actions and Measures
- B. Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law
- C. STPB Policies
- D. 2019 Visitor Profile Study
- E. Community Survey Results & Stakeholder Meeting
- F. Public Comments and Responses