

TOMPKINS  
CHAMBER



Visit  
ITHACA



@vinyasa.khande

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

# LETTERS FROM LEADERSHIP

## MISSION

To foster a healthy economy, a vibrant destination, and improve quality of life in Tompkins County.

## VISION

To be an inclusive organization that supports thriving communities with successful businesses, inspiring nonprofits, and flourishing tourism economies.

## VALUES

Participation & Collaboration  
Free Enterprise & Commerce  
Entrepreneurial Spirit  
Involved Leadership  
Integrity & Accountability  
Environmental Stewardship  
Diversity & Inclusion  
Commitment to Community

2022 was quite a year for the Tompkins Chamber and CVB, as it was for so many of our members and partners.

Many aspects of our work program were finally able to resume their normal cadence. While sustaining our efforts to recover from the pandemic and mitigate its economic impacts to our organization and our stakeholders, we also took opportunities to celebrate our 125th Anniversary throughout the year and enjoyed being in so many spaces, in person and virtually, together.

We invested time and energy in charting our strategic direction for the next five years and moving to our new space on the West End – freshly dubbed the “West Beginning” at our ribbon cutting. Our team helped drive important initiatives forward, like the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center; enhanced our services and marketing support for members and tourism partners; and delivered hundreds of hours of technical assistance and over \$150,000 in grant funding to area businesses.

Throughout 2022, we consistently worked towards our mission to support sustainable economic growth, a vibrant destination, and enhance quality of life in Tompkins County. We are grateful to have numerous accomplishments to share with you in this report and look forward to continuing our good work together in the year ahead.



Jennifer Tavares,  
President & CEO



Peggy Coleman,  
VP of Tourism & CVB Director



## Top 6 advocacy priorities from our Strategic Plan:



## GOVERNMENT & Community Affairs

The Chamber and CVB engaged in local, state, and Federal strategic advocacy efforts throughout 2022.



The Chamber, CVB & DIA staff visited New Haven, CT for a peer community visit and learning session.

## Year at a Glance

### January

State of the State & NY Budget Address

### February

Cornell Economic Snapshot & Update

### March

Economic Summit

### March

Tourism Advocacy in Albany

### April

Chamber & CVB Policy updates from Albany trip

### May

J1 worker VISAs/ TC3 Updates

### June

A conversation with County Administrator Lisa Holmes

### October

DIA/Chamber/CVB community exchange to New Haven, CT

### November

Transportation Infrastructure TCAT/Airport focus

# RELAUNCH OF VISITITHACA.COM

**555,538**

Total Sessions  
-6%  
From 2021

**416,578**

Total Users  
-10%  
From 2021

**338,970**

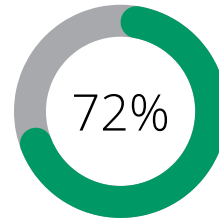
Total outbound  
clicks to partners

**3,581**

BookDirect  
reservation inquiries  
to lodging partners

In 2022, Visit Ithaca undertook a complete redesign of its website. Our team evaluated design options and website structure, with the goal of connecting visitors with content and information about the destination.

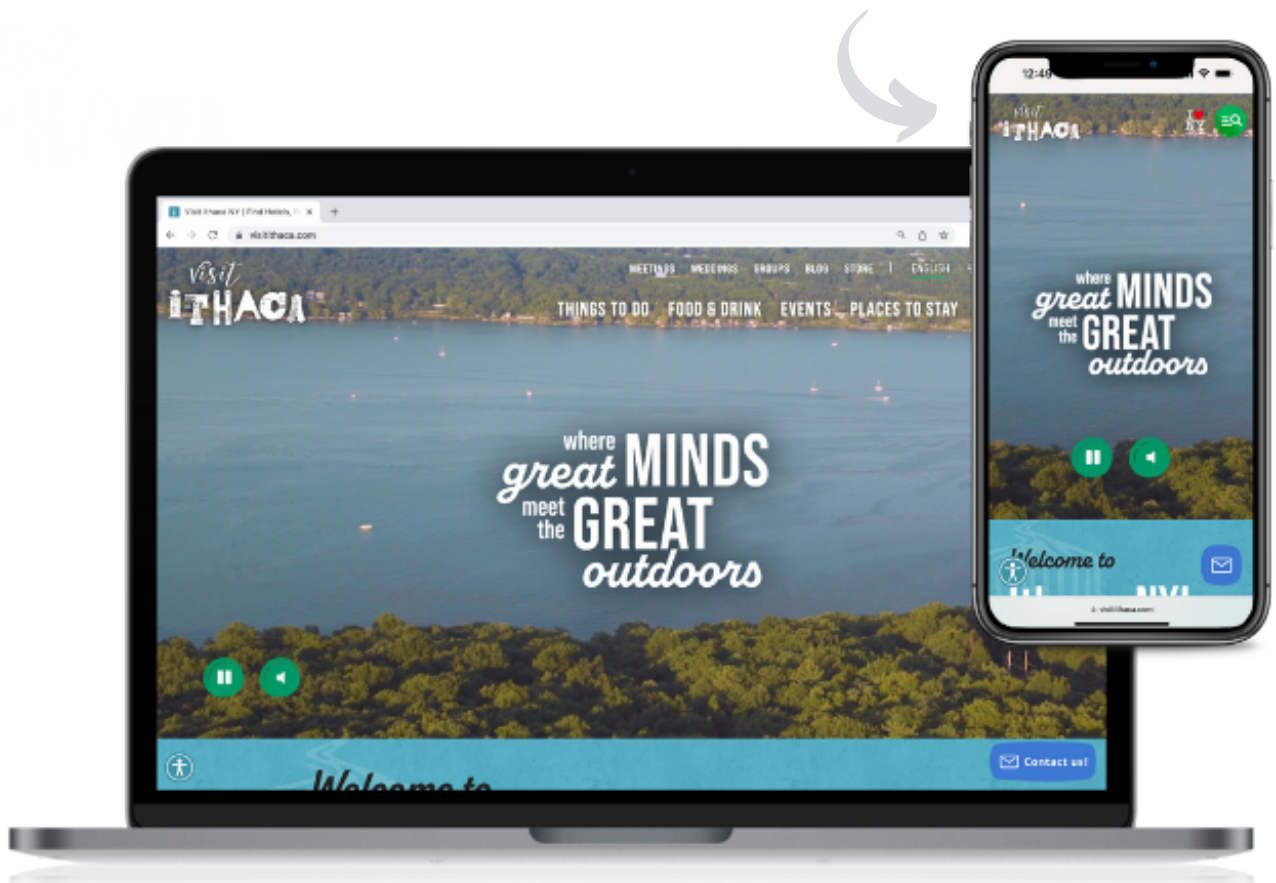
VisitIthaca.com



Organic search  
brought 72% of  
the website's  
overall traffic.

The website relaunch in late October, resulted in a 6% decrease in total website traffic year over year. During the two months following the relaunch, organic traffic to the Events landing page increased 61%. Despite the total traffic reduction, VisitIthaca.com continued to outperform destination marketing industry traffic average.

## 61% OF ALL TRAFFIC INITIATED ON MOBILE



## Connecting Content with Visitor Needs

Using website analytics, working with a search engine optimization (SEO) agency, and receiving input from our Visitor Experience team, we created and updated content relevant to people at different stages of their travel planning journey.

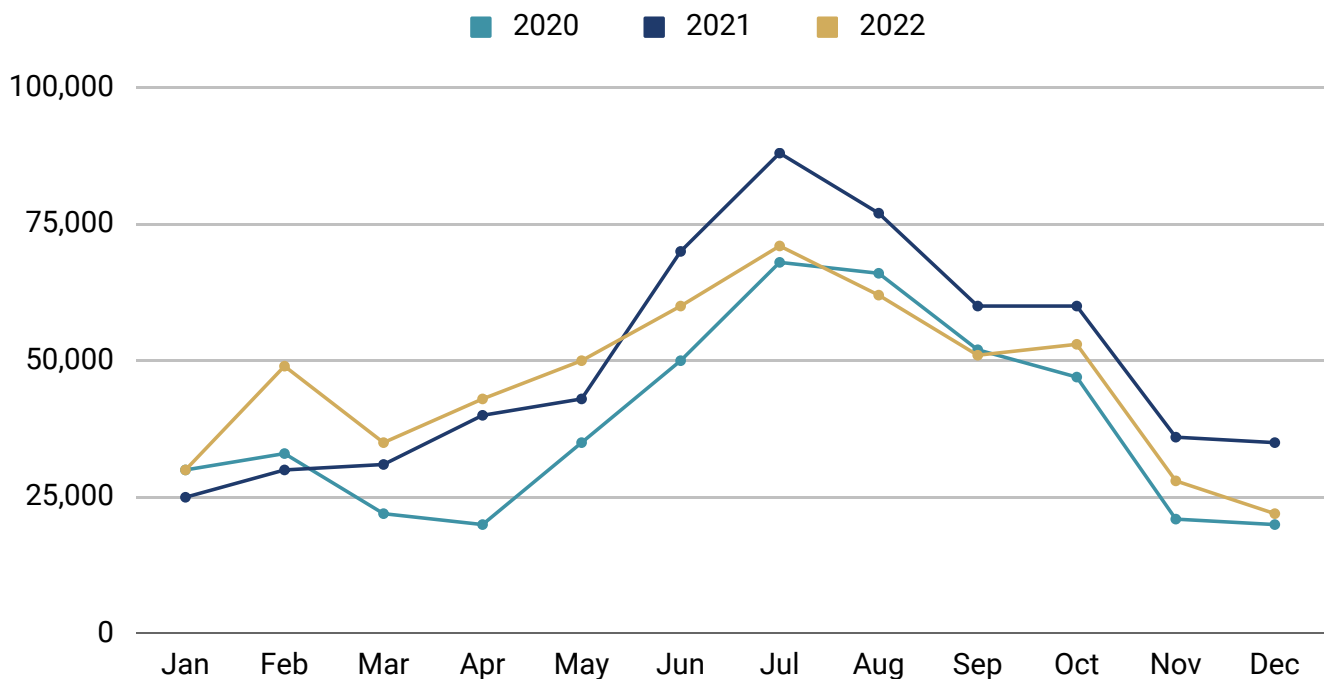
### TOP 5 BLOG POSTS BY SESSIONS:

- Pet-Friendly Guide 3,432
- 5 Waterfalls to Visit in Winter 2,474
- Things to do in Winter 2,042
- Brunch in Ithaca 2,000
- Welcome back to Fall in Ithaca 1,564



**2,138 Travel Guide Requests from VisitIthaca.com**

### VisitIthaca.com Sessions



# FEEDER MARKETS

## Website Users by Geographic Area

Nearly half of the 2022 website sessions came from people in New York State; this includes continued growth in traffic from New York City and Buffalo. Our top feeder destination markets continued to be NYC, Syracuse, Philadelphia, Rochester and Buffalo, with Boston, and Washington, D.C trending positively.

## Visitor Center Walk-in Traffic

The Visitor Experience team helped visitors from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. in 2022. New York remained the top state of origin for visitors to Tompkins County. After NY, the top states visitors cited as home were PA, NJ, OH, FL, MA.

### Website User Snapshot

**181K** NEW YORK STATE

**182K** OUTSIDE OF NY

**25K** PENNSYLVANIA

**94,760 WEBSITE SESSIONS FROM NEW YORK CITY AREA**



## Growing Social Engagement

In 2022, we posted consistently across our social media channels. We focused on engagement with partner accounts as well as actively collaborating with travel influencers. Our social media strategy included weekly postings of themes such as outdoor recreation, food and drink, and things to do with kids as well as resharing content across platforms.

### INSTAGRAM SNAPSHOT

-  **183 Posts**
-  **66.4K likes**
-  **908 comments**

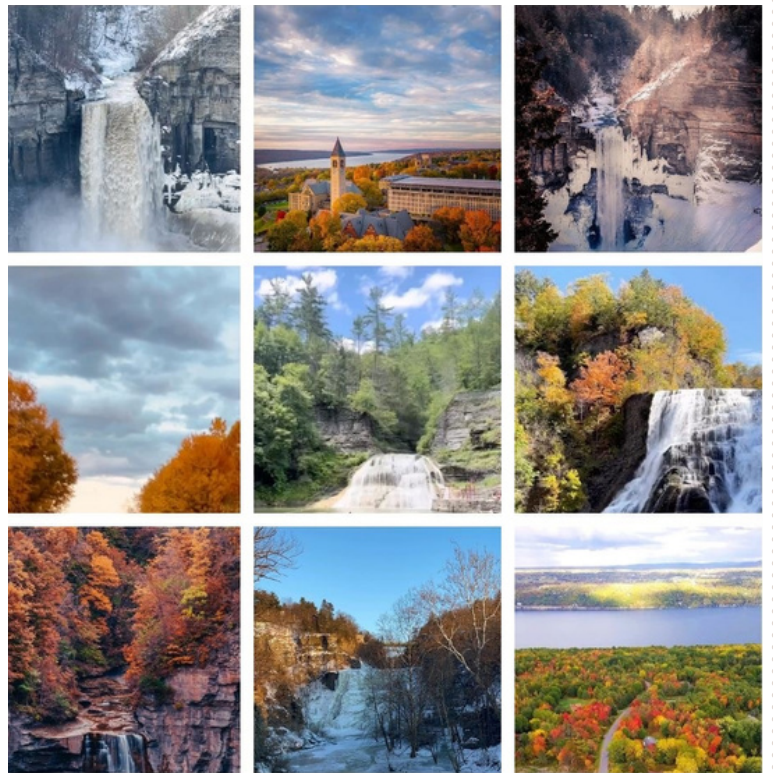
		
<b>17,500</b> FOLLOWERS +11%	<b>43,400</b> FOLLOWERS +8%	<b>2,142</b> NEW EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS
<b>144,868</b> +24.7% PAGE REACH	<b>328,649</b> +77% PAGE REACH	<b>37%</b> AVERAGE OPEN RATE

### Top 9 posts for 2022 on Instagram



#### Instagram Reels

- 20 reels
- 261K plays
- Short videos featured tourism attractions, accommodations, waterfalls & events
- A video of Taughannock Falls thawing in the spring was the most popular video with over 31 K views and 2,700 engagements

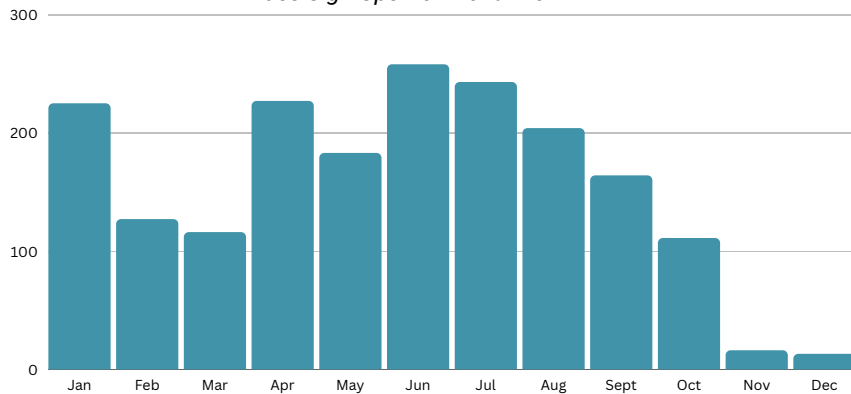


# MARKETING

## Visit Ithaca Waterfalls Challenge

The Visit Ithaca Waterfalls Challenge completed its first full year of being live. The digital pass encourages visitors to use their mobile device to check-in at more than 20 of Ithaca's natural areas to complete the challenge. Passholders originated from 45 different states.

Pass Sign-Ups Per Month 2022



## PASS STATISTICS 2022

1,887 sign-ups;  
1,601 outside of  
Tompkins County

6,201 location check-ins

### Benchmarks

10-location check-ins:  
305 people

18 or more locations:  
138 people

## #WATERFALLSCHALLENGE

" What a wonderful adventure we had in Ithaca! I am very competitive, and was excited when we went to our first falls and saw the posters for your challenge. We immediately all (4 of us) downloaded your program and changed plans for the next three days! We saw things we would never had seen...and were thrilled to find Crow shirts at the Bird Sanctuary! "

**-The Crow family  
from Kansas**





## Campaigns and Advertising

Beginning in winter, Visit Ithaca used the slogan "A Wonderland of Waterfalls" throughout paid media in 2022. Significant paid advertising included programmatic digital campaigns through Sojern targeting people with the intent to travel. The Sojern campaign tracked at least 180 room searches during non-peak leisure travel time and resulted in 5,585 referrals back to VisitIthaca.com

The Brand USA Canada Spring digital advertising combined Google display ads, Expedia display ads, and Carousel ads linked to an interactive travel guide and resulted in over 3 million impressions.



### Buffalo-area Public Media

Underwriting included:

- Spring and Early Winter Radio spots
- Banners on membership emails
- Visit Ithaca brand at in-person events, Ithaca waterfalls images used during Bob Ross painting class
- Visitor guides available at in-person events



### Flock Finger Lakes

117K YouTube subscribers;  
12.7K Instagram followers

2 sponsored episodes:

- Grow Your Food and Support Local Farmers– 49K views + 103 comments
- Snowshoeing at Lindsay Parsons Biodiversity Preserve– 5.3K views + 27 comments



### Sponsorships & Collaborations

- Event Sponsor for Downtown Ithaca Pride Week
- Visit Ithaca was a Core Sponsor for Cider Week New York
- Collaborated with Uplifted Ithaca to welcome LGBTQIA+ Travelers



*Referrals from paid campaigns back to VisitIthaca.com*

### Life in the Finger Lakes (print and digital)

- 30K subscribers/direct mail per issue
  - Ran 3 full-page ads inside front cover + linked banner in LIFL weekly emails

### Heritage Radio Network

- Underwriting for Food & Beverage podcasts, we specifically helped to develop cider themed shows

# PR AND EARNED MEDIA

## 2022 Media Hits

Continuing to build relationships with international, national and regional media, Visit Ithaca was able to tell the unique stories of things to do and places to visit that Tompkins County has to offer visitors. Outreach efforts garnered coverage in mainstream and travel niche outlets, across print, digital and audio platforms.

[Heritage Radio Network \(April, May, June; Hard Core cider podcast\) Showcasing a Season: Equity, History, and the Future of Cider on Hard Core](#)

[The New York Times \(May\) Go Here, Not There: Vacation Alternatives for the Budget-Conscious](#)

[Hemispheres \(Aug; United's in-flight magazine\) America's Best College Towns](#)

[AFAR \(Oct\) Little Cities That Think Big: 8 Forward-Thinking Destinations Across the U.S.](#)

## Media Outreach

48

responses to  
media requests

9

I LOVE NY blog  
post features

28

additional mentions  
in web & print

## ITHACA IN THE MEDIA

### Travel & Leisure (May)

"Ithaca is Gorges" is a well-known tourism motto and easy conversation starter when spotted outside of the town itself. This geologic feature is certainly worth bragging about and makes the surrounding area one of the most stunning destinations for hiking and swimming in naturally formed channels. Download the Ithaca Waterfalls Challenge digital passport to keep track of its 22 waterfalls and other natural attractions, from the more gentle slopes of Buttermilk Falls and Buttermilk Creek to the diving board perched over a deep swimming hole at Robert Treman State Park. The 215-foot waterfall drop at Taughannock Falls in Trumansburg is a perfect Kodak – OK, Instagram – moment."

## Media/Influencer FAM Visits

Media visits, both from traditional outlets and social content creators, were a highlight for Visit Ithaca in 2022.

### 11 individual trips booked throughout the year including:

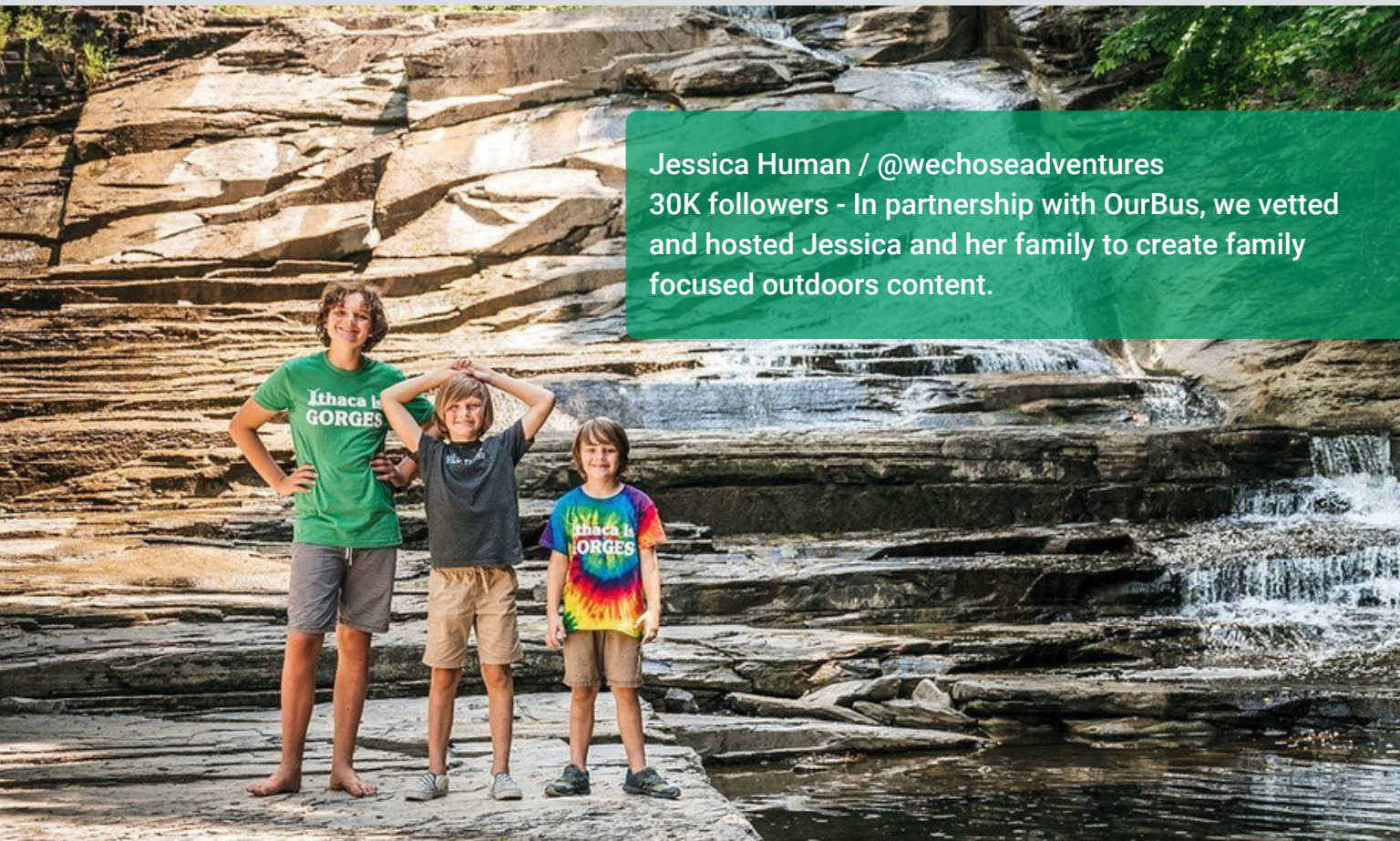
- **Crai Bower** (@travelcrais) on assignment for AARP. His article appeared online and in print in October.
- **Dennis Byron** (@realalesharpton, 14.7K followers), a beer influencer from Atlanta brought to the Finger Lakes region for food and beverage content.
- **Karina Benninger** (@kb.hikes, 25.8K followers) highlighted our natural attractions, food and drink, and lodging offerings.

## Public Relations Partners

Visit Ithaca leveraged its collaborations with I Love NY and the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council and their media relations firms, FINN Partners and Madden Media, respectively, to bring international and domestic content creators to Tompkins County. During the spring, media contingents from Germany and Ireland visited, with significant results. The visit from Ed Finn resulted in TV and radio coverage in Ireland, and inclusion in a 30-minute video on YouTube that has more than 32K views to date.

**“It’s a real hive of intellectual creativity here in this area.”**

*[The Travel Show with Ed Finn](#)*



Jessica Human / @wechosedventures  
30K followers - In partnership with OurBus, we vetted and hosted Jessica and her family to create family focused outdoors content.

# VISITOR EXPERIENCE

## ITHACA LOVES TEACHERS

Ithaca Loves Teachers celebrated its 17th year in 2022. Though events were still tempered due to COVID, use of the digital pass increased compared to 2021. The 2,000 teachers and their guests made 2,394 redemptions with an estimated economic impact of \$200K. 96% of attendees were from NYS and 80% called the Finger Lakes region home.

## International Growth

2022 demonstrated that people were ready to travel, and they did! The visitor centers served guests from 79 countries, with Canada, Israel, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Australia and France generating the most visitors.

## Visitor Journey A2D™

We held nine in-person hospitality training classes in 2022 with a total attendance of 42 people. Attendee employers included: Cornell Conference Services, Hospitality Employment Training Program, Tompkins Workforce Career Center, Tompkins Workforce Development Board, and Ithaca Area Economic Development.



## ITHACA IS GORGES GLOBALLY!

Ithaca is Gorges branded products made their way to 33 countries with visitors from Canada, Germany, & UK bringing home the most gorges gear.

## Off-Site Activations & Ithaca 101

The Visitor Experience Department had 69,297 touchpoints in 2022, up 10% over 2021.

Off-site activations and Ithaca 101 contributed to the overall increase in touchpoints with attendance at these programs jumping 275% to 17,924 compared to 2021. We attended 19 off-site activations and held 15 virtual and in-person Ithaca 101 sessions.

## Communicating Accessibility

The team has completed the I Love NY accessibility survey tool continued to make its way throughout our business community. Our team has completed 50 surveys. With the launch of the new website, we have incorporated most of this information into our branding and ILNY.com, reaching visitors with all abilities.

### WEB-CHAT SERVICE

The web chat service has proven to be a very useful tool in helping our website be responsive to visitor needs. In 2022, we had 1,007 website chats with the top areas of interest being waterfalls, lodging, events, and travel guide requests.



# SALES

In 2022, the Sales team worked to promote Ithaca and Tompkins County as a destination for groups while strengthening and building client relationships.

## SALES TEAM LEAD ACTIVITY



Year over Year	2021	2022
Leads Sent	42	66
Leads Booked	29	35
Potential Economic Impact Calculator (EIC)	\$1,221,487	\$3,308,198
Booked EIC	\$502,422	\$861,310

## 2022 Accomplishments

- ✔ Attendance at domestic and Canadian tour operator trade shows; engaged in 114 tour operator appointments and 60 international travel buyers.
- ✔ Participated in a Brand USA/I Love New York Fam Tour event hosting travel agents from New Zealand in cooperation with other NYS destinations. Building these relationships is important with the addition of a non-stop flight from New Zealand to JFK.
- ✔ Attendance at four meeting-focused trade shows promoting Ithaca and the Ithaca Downtown Community Conference Center; had 103 meeting planner appointments.
- ✔ Increased international buyer awareness of Tompkins County through representing Wine, Water & Wonders at IPW.
- ✔ Produced the Albany Spring Sales Mission branded as "Retreat to Ithaca" and leveraged our presence with post mission representation at the Meeting Professional International Upstate NY Gala.
- ✔ Produced and promoted Threshold 360 Virtual Tours, building a new virtual visitor experience and enhancing our efforts to reach a target audience across a wide array of online marketing and sales channels.

# CONFERENCE CENTER



Important collaborations with ASM Global, Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation, and the Imagine Ithaca Hotel Collaborative developed tools and processes in preparation for the 2024 opening of the Ithaca Downtown Community Conference Center.



## CONFERENCE CENTER SPECS:

- 15,000+ SF of rental function space, including a 12,000 SF ballroom
- 11 breakout rooms + boardroom
- Pre-function space on two levels
- Attached parking garage

While systems and tools to operate and sell the conference center were built, the physical construction of the project made significant progress in 2022. The attached Green Street Parking Garage was completed and reopened to the public on September 6, 2022. Elevator shafts were built in late summer and by year end the entire three floors of the conference center were visible! Booking software and room diagramming software were activated to support an aggressive sales and marketing plan implementation.



## 2022 MILESTONES

- Executive Director hired for Local Development Corporation
- ASM Global engaged as operator
- Website landing page launched
- Construction site cam live feed activated
- Marketing materials developed

# OUR TEAM

**Jennifer Tavares, CEcD**

President & CEO

**Rachael Atkins-Walpole**

Visitor Center Site Supervisor

**Sarah Barden**

Member Relationship Manager

**Lisa Conarton**

Conference Sales Manager

**Maia Consolo**

Senior Visitor Experience Specialist

**Shelby Green**

Administrative Assistant

**Carly Hansen**

Director of Operations & Human Resources

**Diane Hemly**

Office Manager & Bookkeeper

**Jordan Herson**

Marketing & Communications Specialist

**Mary Holland-Bavis**

Event & Program Manager

**Peggy Coleman**

Vice President, Tourism & CVB Director

**Sarah Imes, CTIS**

Tour & Travel Manager

**Cloud Kelley**

Business & Workforce Development Specialist

**Steen Kittredge**

Senior Visitor Experience Specialist

**Jodi LaPierre, PDM**

Director of Visitor Experience

**Pei Pei Liu**

Visitor Experience Specialist

**Rob Montana**

Communications Manager

**Nana Potenza**

Marketing & Communications Manager

**Erin Rafalowski**

Director of Marketing

*With assistance from: Hallie ArbitalJacoby, MaryBeth Bunge, Beth Duff, Isabella Glidden, Joseph Guidi, Abby Leonard, Ryan Shehu, and David Walton*

