

Visit
ITHACA



**Ithaca/Tompkins County
Convention & Visitors Bureau**
2018 Annual Report





A Message from Peggy Coleman
VP, TOURISM/CVB DIRECTOR



Raising the Bar!

Each January, it is exciting to look back on the prior year, to celebrate the successes, to learn from the failures, and to formulate the goals for the coming year.

We are thrilled to report that unlike other destination marketing websites that are experiencing a decrease in sessions and users, VisitIthaca.com has seen nearly 5.2% increase in sessions and 4.5% increase in users over 2017. We will continue to fine tune our paid search strategy to continue bucking industry trends. The Sales Team was ignited with a new energy and their hard work paid off across all market segments. Targeted sales missions and aggressive tradeshow engagement resulted in increased leads distributed, with more leads converted to actual bookings, and an incremental economic impact of \$1.7 million to the community.

The Visitor Experience Team assisted over 78,000 visitors in 2018, helping to create meaningful memories of guests' visits to this stunning destination. While Mother Nature caused us to close the Taughannock Overlook early, the interest in Gorges Gear was strong through the holidays. Now people in all 50 states and in 33 countries are proudly showing that "Ithaca is Gorges."

Our focus is always to provide the best return on investment possible to the residents of Tompkins County. We are proud to report that recent statistics show that visitor spending in Tompkins County generated \$27.6 million in state and local taxes to Tompkins County, an increase of 5% year over year. Visitor spending sustained 3,728 tourism industry jobs and provided \$723 tax relief per household in Tompkins County. We are excited by the future, look forward to supporting our industry partners in this new year, and are grateful for the opportunity to work in this "gorges" place.

Safe travels,

Peggy Coleman
VP, Tourism & Community Relations/CVB Director

2018 Lodging Market Performance

	Tompkins	% Change YOY	NYS Excl. NYC	% Change YOY	USA	% Change YOY
Occupancy Rate	60.3%	+4.7%	54.7%	+3.0%	66.2%	+0.5%
Average Daily Rate	\$160.76	+0.2%	\$126.58	+1.4%	\$129.83	+2.4%
Revenue Per Available Room	\$96.93	+5.0%	\$69.23	+4.4%	\$85.96	+2.9%
Room Revenue	\$66,939,184	+6.4%		+5.4%		+5.0%

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- ✓ The Visitor Centers welcomed visitors from 83 countries in 2018.
- ✓ The Overlook at Taughannock saw visitor traffic increase 15% over 2017.
- ✓ Gorges Gear Goes Global expanding brand awareness to 33 countries and all 50 states thanks to retail operations at Taughannock and the East Shore Drive Visitor Center.
- ✓ Total retail sales are up 64% over 2017.

2018 By the Numbers

5 Top Domestic Feeder Markets by Travel Party:

NY: 6,826 (41.67%) PA: 2,106 (12.86%) NJ: 1,151 (7.03%) OH: 564 (3.44%) FL: 536 (3.27%)

5 Top Int'l Feeder Markets by Travel Party:

US: 16,382 (86.75%) Canada: 824 (4.36%) Israel: 352 (1.86%) Germany: 220 (1.17%) UK: 197 (1.04%)

How May We Help You?

The Chat feature on VisitIthaca.com has become a valuable and useful resource for visitors while planning their trip. A total of 3,635 chat sessions took place throughout 2018.

Hottest topics:

Events, Waterfalls, Hiking, State Parks, Lodging

"This is why I love Ithaca. People are a gem."

- Chat user from Denver, CO



Welcoming Our Guests:

The Visitor Experience Department operates three visitor centers across Tompkins County. Throughout 2018, at the visitor centers and at multiple off-site activations held across college campuses and major events, the visitor experience team supported 78,031 visitors from point of inquiry through visitation.

The Taughannock Overlook Visitor Center continues to be the busiest of the three sites welcoming nearly 37,000 visitors throughout 2018.

Visitor Touchpoints

	2018	2017	YOY% Change
Phone	1,686	1,744	-3.33
ESD Traffic	3,993	5,135	-22.24
DVC Traffic	6,043	7,332	-17.58
TFSP Traffic	36,738	31,801	+15.52
Chats	3,635	4,116	-11.69
TG Requests	3,904	3,771	+3.53
Offsite Events*	22,035	24,950	-11.68
Total	78,031	78,849	-1.04%

*Down due to influx seen in 2017 for multiple activation sites for Ithaca College's 125th Anniversary

MARKETING

- ✓ 40,489 Ithaca is Gorges Facebook Followers (up 1.2% YOY)
- ✓ 1,676,030 VisitIthaca.com pageviews (up .72% YOY)
- ✓ The Visit Ithaca Instagram account as a result of the #IthacaisPeople Instagram takeover is our social platform with the largest year over year growth at 44%

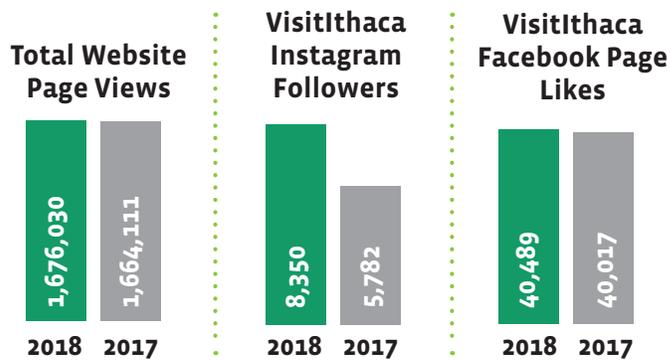
Landing pages and “Listicles” are paying off!

Roundup of 4th of July Fireworks events landing page: 13,586 pageviews

Top 5 Experiences to Warm Up Your Winter: 823 pageviews in 2018
499 pageviews in 2017

New Year’s Eve events: 2,274 pageviews, up 240% over 2017

Home for Holidays Winter Campaign: 696 pageviews



Unlike many other DMO sites, Visit Ithaca has seen a nearly 5.2% increase in sessions YOY. In addition, there has also been a 4.5% increase in users compared to 2017.

Niche Marketing – Agriculinary Tourism

The CVB now employs a full-time Agriculinary Tourism Marketing Coordinator!
Year over Year Farm to Fork Social Stats:

	2018	2017	
Farm to Fork Facebook Page Likes	3,067	2,174	+41.4%
Engagement	11,392	10,000	+14%
Farm to Fork VisitIthaca.com unique pageviews	4,902	4,270	+15%

Visit Ithaca – Crafting a Story

Rutabaga Curl Blog Post: Published on Nov 26th as an attribute of the Home for the Holidays winter campaign



Agri-Tourism Micro Grant Program a Success!

A total of 14 agritourism microgrants projects were approved throughout 2018. Ten projects were completed with total awards of \$4,978 to assist grant recipients in making their agri-tourism businesses more visitor ready.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

- ✓ Visit Ithaca hosted 30+ travel journalists, bloggers and social influencers resulting in media coverage to over 2.9 million followers.
- ✓ 2018 Finger Lakes Media Reach results in over 3 billion impressions for the region.
- ✓ Ithaca & Tompkins County is featured in media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Men's Journal*, *Lonely Planet*, and *Forbes* as a result of media hosting and pitching, reaching well over 82 million people.

Hello Drifter

Hosted social influencer @hello.drifter Kami Nelson and family resulting in a blog, Instagram posts and multiple stories garnering more than 1.5 million viewers.



Skinnytaste One and Done Cookbook Unveiled in Ithaca

We created a custom itinerary and hosted 14 social influencers/bloggers at Gina Homolka's @skinnytaste Finger Lakes retreat, a publicity campaign to launch her second Skinnytaste cook book. Participants at the retreat represent an audience of over 2.4 million followers across Instagram alone!



TBEX comes to the Finger Lakes

Hosted 6 travel bloggers on a Craft Beverage themed itinerary after they attended the North American Travel Bloggers Exchange (TBEX) Conference in Corning, NY. TBEX is the largest conference and networking event for travel bloggers, online travel journalists, new media content creators, travel brands and industry professionals. Travel articles continue to be generated!



SALES

- ✓ China Welcome Symposium kick-starts community readiness to host visitors from China.
- ✓ 4 Familiarization (FAM) tours were conducted throughout the year including the hosting of the TAP Board of Directors, made up of 7 tour company owners who feature guaranteed departure tours.
- ✓ Hosted an international Brand USA FAM for wholesalers and travel agents from the UK and Ireland.
- ✓ The CVB organized a successful meeting sales mission to the capital district, in partnership with five hotel properties, resulting in 30 appointments with meeting planners, a networking event featuring “Retreat to Ithaca” product, and immediate new bookings and site visits.

Meetings/Conferences/Athletic events:

	2018	2017	2018 Change
Leads Sent	53	31	+71%
Leads Booked	26	17	+53%
Potential Economic Impact	\$2,708,316	\$1,359,080	+1,349,236
BOOKED Economic Impact	\$1,185,176	\$490,160	+\$695,016

Group Tour/Leisure:

	2018	2017	2018 Change
Leads Sent	46	41	+12%
Leads Booked	36	27	+33%
Potential Economic Impact	\$646,638	\$728,802	-\$82,164
BOOKED Economic Impact	\$517,132	\$395,604	+\$121,528



Starr Tours shares tour book at American Bus Association featuring an Ithaca/Tompkins County Tour

“Thank you for the tour of the various conference facilities in Ithaca. It was well organized and provided a good overview of the event space available. We came away with lots of options for consideration including some ideas for off-site guest tours.”

- Thomas Markel,
Dept. of Transportation



Visitor Profile Study Launched

The update to the Profile of Visitors to Tompkins County launched in July 2018. The primary instrument is a digital survey of past visitors and individuals who have requested information from the CVB. More than 1400 people responded to the digital survey, exceeding the 2009 benchmark profile study by 300 responses. The secondary instrument is a randomized survey of visitors in the county between June 2018 and July 2019. This year-round intercept survey will capture visitor feedback across every month, especially providing important insight into motivators to travel in off-season and shoulder season periods.

Time for a Makeover

The East Shore Drive Visitor Center and main offices of the Tompkins Chamber/ Convention & Visitors Bureau received a facelift in 2018, making room for much needed office space, brochure storage, and better configured visitor experience space. In addition, through a grant made possible from the TRIAD Foundation, visitors can now experience a glimpse of other’s journeys to Tompkins County through a social wall. The wall is a mounted TV screen and displays images shared publicly on social media of attractions, events and points of interest throughout Tompkins County.



User Generated Content is Key

Crowdriff, a new platform introduced by the CVB this year now allows the CVB to source User Generated Content (UGC) from Facebook, Instagram and other social platforms. This has enabled the CVB to add a new stream of images to VisitIthaca.com. Galleries can currently be seen on the homepage and wedding pages on the website. This is also the platform that feeds images to our new social wall kiosk in the East Shore Drive Visitor Center and will feed content to the Kiosk in the new Downtown Visitor Center at the Tompkins Center for History and Culture.



Visitor Journey Arrival to Departure comes to Tompkins County

Partnering with Tompkins Workforce Development Board, we successfully launched the Ithaca/Tompkins County Visitor Journey A2D Champion program. This new tourism training will help everyone throughout our community create a more positive experience for visitors from their Arrival to Departure (A2D).



“I was very happy that the team went through the program, the results speak for themselves; the staff are more engaged, looking for more ways to connect the hotel with what’s going on in town, which helps our guests, and team overall become more involved. The online training makes it super easy, well worth the time.”

– Mohamed Abdelrehim, General Manager, CHA, Homewood Suites by Hilton Ithaca, NY





Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau Staff Contacts

Peggy Coleman

VP, TOURISM & COMMUNITY RELATIONS/CVB DIRECTOR
Peggy@VisitIthaca.com

SALES & MARKETING

Heather Hughes

DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING
Heather@VisitIthaca.com

Erin Rafalowski

DIGITAL MARKETING MANAGER
Erin@VisitIthaca.com

Kendall Blizzard

AGRICULTURAL TOURISM
MARKETING COORDINATOR
Kendall@VisitIthaca.com

Sarah Imes

TOUR & TRAVEL MANAGER
Sarah@VisitIthaca.com

Jonathan Froehlich

MEETING & CONFERENCE
SALES MANAGER
Jonathan@VisitIthaca.com

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Jodi LaPierre

DIRECTOR OF VISITOR EXPERIENCE
Jodi@VisitIthaca.com

Rachael Atkins-Walpole

SITE SUPERVISOR, TAUGHANNOCK
OVERLOOK/ONLINE STORE
COORDINATOR
Rachael@VisitIthaca.com

Diane Hemly

SITE SUPERVISOR, DOWNTOWN/
PROJECT COORDINATOR
Diane@VisitIthaca.com

Ryan Shehu

SITE SUPERVISOR, EAST SHORE
DRIVE/RETAIL COORDINATOR
Ryan@VisitIthaca.com

Maia Cooke

SENIOR VISITOR
EXPERIENCE SPECIALIST
Maia@VisitIthaca.com

VISITOR EXPERIENCE SPECIALISTS:

Josh Brooks | Cameron Coughlin | Danielle Hemly | Matthew Janson | Jessica Plue | Justin Scheidweiler | Leah Vaccaro

Ithaca/Tompkins County Makes the List:

Ithaca, NY was named the **Prettiest town in NY**, in Architectural Digest's list for The Prettiest Town in Every U.S. State, July 2018.

Ithaca – **#1 of the 2018 Ten Best College Towns**, Livability.com

Forbes listed the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway (with Tompkins County at its base) as **one of the most "overlooked U.S. routes that make for incredible road trips,"** August 14, 2018.

Ithaca among **Top 50 Most Underrated Cities to Visit in the US**, Thrillist Travel February 2018.



Forbes

Overlooked U.S. Routes That Make for Incredible Road Trips

 **Michele Herrmann** Contributor
Travel
I write about destinations, travel news/trends, dining and culture.



Tompkins County, Ithaca, one of the locations along the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway. [see more](#)

Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, New York

This 87-mile New York State byway forms one of the nation's few true loop byways, meaning that they're especially signposted in one direction. It runs from Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in the north, encompassing villages from Aurora to Ithaca in the south, and surrounds the shores of Cayuga Lake, the longest of the 11 Finger Lakes. The route offers a lot of natural splendor and cultural attractions including Ithaca Farmer's Market at Steamboat landing. Travel through rolling hills past multiple wineries, cideries, and craft beverage makers. However, be sure to drink responsibly or pick a designated driver.



Visit Ithaca is a division of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce