

*Visit*  
**ITHACA**

2020 Annual Report



TOMPKINS  
CHAMBER

# Our Core Strengths

What began as a very productive year for the CVB took a dramatic turn in early March 2020. During NY Pause, we reminded our core guests of why they visit us: to connect with nature, to engage in outdoor activities while observing safe social distancing, and to reconnect with those who mean the most to them while enjoying the calming sights and sounds of our waterfalls and trails.

Your CVB and Chamber supported thousands of businesses in the county with information and resources through NY Pause into NY Forward; whether it required sharing the industry specific guidelines, helping to source PPE, or simply checking in to see how partners were doing. We also hosted dozens of webinars on topics that were most relevant to our stakeholders and had a dedicated team member providing assistance by phone, email, and virtual meetings to help partners navigate the crisis.

We messaged thoughtfully to protect our community. The Visitor Experience team guided visitors through trip planning to ensure a safe and enjoyable visit in our destination, resulting in direct spending for our local tourism business partners, and in economic impact for all of Tompkins County through the sales and room taxes paid by visitors.

Tourism Economics reports that in 2019 visitors spent \$229.8 Million in Tompkins County, generating \$16.9 Million in local taxes, sustaining 3,718 restaurant, museum, retailers, craft beverage, transportation, park, theater, hospitality, and event organizer jobs – each an important part of the tourism industry, and providing \$773 tax relief per household.

We know the numbers will not be so rosy once the 2020 data is gathered, but we are optimistic for our future as we work toward supporting the recovery of this “gorges” place together.

Safe travels,



Peggy Coleman VP, Tourism



Jennifer Tavares President & CEO

## Mission

To foster sustainable economic growth through service to our members, strategic advocacy, workforce development, destination marketing, and quality of life

## Vision

We are an inclusive community, where people thrive, businesses start and grow, non-profits effectively serve, and visitors experience our “gorges” place.

# Conference Center Project

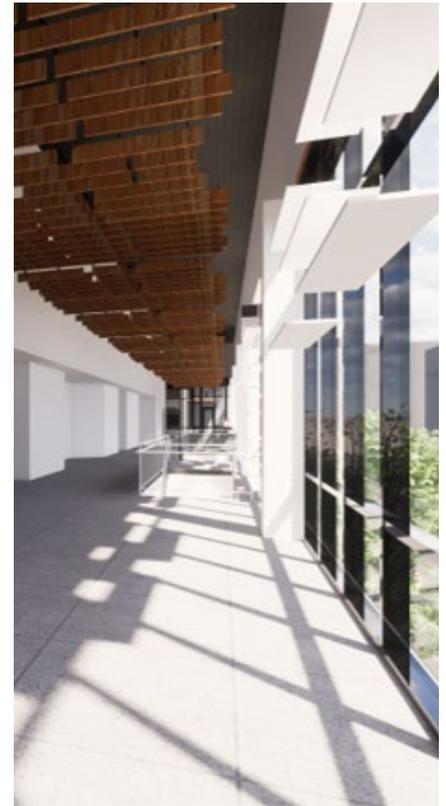
## Ithaca Downtown Community Conference Center

What started as an economic development project in 2018, transitioned into a critical shovel-ready economic recovery program for Ithaca and Tompkins County in 2020.



When fully operational, the Conference Center will generate approximately 22,000 new room nights annually and 50+ FTE Jobs.

Work continues in partnership with the City of Ithaca, Downtown Ithaca Alliance, Tompkins Chamber Foundation, Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation, and hotel partners.



*Second floor prefunction*

### ***The planned conference center will have:***

- 50,000+ SF of rental function space, including 12,000 SF ballroom
- Up to 7 breakout rooms
- Pre-function space on two levels
- Attached parking garage



*Ballroom*

### ***Work completed in 2020 included:***

- City of Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency site plan approval
- Tompkins County Legislature financial reserve partnership approval
- City of Ithaca Site Plan Review
- Operator RFP/Selection

# Marketing

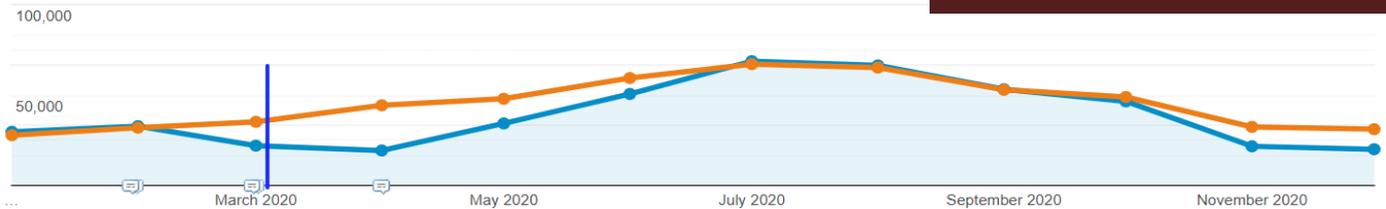
## Website Traffic Overview

A notable finding in reviewing 2020 website traffic is Visitithaca.com saw the highest percentage of new users in at least five years. Additional goals tracked include travel guide requests through website form (2,401), and new email subscribers through website sign-up (1,767).

	2020	2019	%Change
Total Sessions	465,286	544,337	-14.5
Users	361,009	404,777	-11
<b>New Users</b>	<b>77.7% of all traffic</b>	<b>73.6%</b>	

See pg. 8 for top Destination Market Area traffic comparison.

A month-to-month comparison, 2020 (blue) vs 2019 (orange) of website traffic shows a slight increase and on-par July through October; Paid Search campaigns ended in April and have not yet resumed. *Global pandemic declared March 11th.*



## Content Review

Traffic to content pages related to Waterfalls saw a slight increase in traffic from 2019, while Events and Dining pages saw a significant decrease.

Pageviews for a sample of new & updated content pages:

- COVID-19 Info for Visitors 24,675 (new)
- Fall Foliage Report 6,329 (up 600%)
- Things to Do in Winter 5,697 (up 390%)
- 5 Best Fall Hikes 5,082 (up 68%)
- Craft Cider 3,623 (up 15%)
- Things to Do with Kids 1,669 (new)



## Partners Referrals

Direct click-through to partner websites across all listings:

- Total Visit Website clicks = 30,227
- Attraction Book Online clicks = 592
- Lodging Book Online clicks = 3,422
- Check Availability clicks = 29,679

## Social Following

Facebook followers (Dec) 42,015 +1%  
Instagram followers (Dec) 12,900 +19%

Facebook /Visit Ithaca  
Reach 670,930

Instagram Top 9 posts  
Reach 80,397 up 25.6%  
Engagement 8,145 up 2.2%

## Growth in Organic

Organic Search brought in most of the site's overall sessions at 80.5% of overall traffic. Visitithaca.com's presence in Google Search Results also grew in 2020 compared to 2019 with Organic Clicks and Organic Impressions both being up substantially.

## Media hits and outreach

By leveraging the power of relationships, with a reduction in hosting and paid media budget, PR outreach resulted in significant exposure for the Visit Ithaca brand and the Tompkins County region to inspire travel.

### Forbes Online

*10 Great North American Cities You Probably Haven't Seen, But Should* (Feb)  
5,945 estimated views

### MetroSource Magazine (Print & Digital, Oct) LGBT-focused audience

*Autumn Is Calling: Some of our favorite fall destinations in NY*, 150,000+ impressions

### Bobo and ChiChi (June & late Sept) NYC-based travel influencers

28.7K Instagram followers and 175,000+ monthly pageviews: 6 Instagram static posts; Instagram stories; 2 blog posts mentioning multiple restaurants & attractions

### Mad Hatters NYC (Dec)

NYC-based travel, lifestyle, and food blog, 6.5K Instagram followers  
*Small Town, Big Heart: Why Ithaca Should Be Part of Your Finger Lakes Getaway*, included COVID-19 specific travel trips for overnight getaways

- Hosted top tier travel & sustainability writer for two-night FAM trip (Sept)
- Promoted voting for Experience! Finger Lakes as a 10 Best Wine Tour, USA TODAY
- Promoted Ithaca as a nominee for Best US Small Town, Conde Nast Traveler
- Responded to 12 requests for images from mid-tier publication and for regional promotional use including Albany Times Union, ITH airport, Johnson School at Cornell, I LOVE NY, and Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council



## #WEARAMASK Video

Made in collaboration with Ithaca Area Economic Development, Tompkins Chamber, and Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

YouTube Visit Ithaca channel:  
3,300+ views

Facebook /VisitIthaca,  
4,900 Reach;  
278 Reactions/Comment/Shares



## #IthacaWaterfalls campaign

Ten different waterfalls were highlighted each week from Oct-Dec with a focus on detailed information for new visitors. Posts included a nearby lodging and restaurant recommendation with each waterfall.

Instagram: 45,288 Reach; 2,250 Likes

Facebook: 15,185 Reach;  
439 Reactions/Comment/Shares



## I Love NY loves Ithaca

Ten I LOVE NY blog posts featured Tompkins County partners including: *Best Online Events, Virtual Tours, and Live Cams* (March)  
*Street Art You Need to See* (Aug)  
*Best Farm-to-Table Dining Experience* (Oct)  
*Fun Outdoor Winter Activities for All* (Dec)

Posts are shared on I LOVE NY's Facebook page with 1.4M+ followers

# Sales

Sales is always forward working, booking tours, conferences, and events into the future. The Sales team worked to better position our destination for future success when group travel barriers are lifted. They quickly assisted clients to rebook canceled 2020 events into the future, continued pursuing leads for future years, developed new ways to attract business, and strengthened client relationships to keep Tompkins County top of mind. In doing so, they have established your CVB team as a trusted resource.

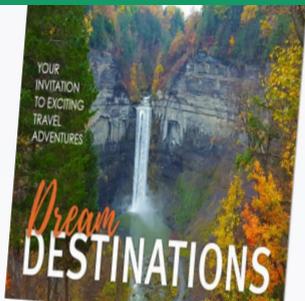
	2020	2019
Leads Sent	64	89
Leads Booked	25	54
Potential EIC	\$2,831,269	\$2,812,959
Booked EIC*	\$ 457,927	\$2,053,258

\*Economic Impact Calculation.



## 2020 Accomplishments

- Completed 74 one-on-one appointments with domestic tour planners at American Bus Association Annual Marketplace, Heartland Travel Showcase in Q1 and at virtual Travel Alliance Partners' TAP Dance in Q3.
- Created Virtual Site Tours to use as a sales tool for clients not able to visit in person.
- Participated as a panelist in a webinar with Twin Travel Concepts in September to promote Ithaca and the Finger Lakes Region to 100 travel agents.
- Distributed quarterly check-in emails to association clients and tour planners.
- Interviewed in December by JTB, an international receptive operator, for a YouTube video promoting Ithaca as a college town to Japanese clients.
- Participated in weekly meetings to support the Ithaca Downtown Community Conference Center development.



### Ithaca Scores 2020 Dream Destinations Cover

Travel Alliance Partners awarded the cover of the TAP Dream Destinations Guide to Visit Ithaca, a publication that the TAP members use throughout the year to market partner destinations to their clients.

"I gotta tell you I wanna jump in my car and come to Ithaca – your subject 'remember the places where you feel calm', well it worked. I'm going to build a couple of your itineraries for our fall series and then pray! You are a perfect rebound destination because of the "outdoor" theme and because you are as close to us as traveling to NYC for the day. Thank you for keeping the spirit alive as we wait our safe return!"

- Crystal De Lorenzo,  
Wade Tours, Inc.



### A Glimpse of Normalcy & Hope for the Future

Welcomed Perkiomen Tours from PA in October – our first motorcoach of 2020.

# Visitor Experience

“I am in awe of this program! The variety of opportunities, the support of the merchants, the amount of activities/ discounts – OUTSTANDING! I’m so happy Visions is involved in such a quality event!”  
—Mandy DeHate, Visions Federal Credit Union

## Ithaca Loves Teachers Festival 2020

The Visitor Experience team serves as the frontline with guests to our destination. Extensive and ongoing product knowledge made the team an invaluable asset to visitors as well as to community and tourism partners. From a very successful Ithaca Love Teachers Festival through year-end, your CVB frontline helped visitors virtually by phone, web chat, and email, as well as in person with the safe reopening of both the Overlook at Taughannock Visitor Center and the Downtown Visitor Center.

The 2020 Ithaca Loves Teachers Festival welcomed 4,933 attendees from six states and produced an estimated economic impact of over \$319,000 during February, a traditionally slow period for the entire tourism industry. A post event survey of the 2020 Ithaca Loves Teachers Festival attendees revealed:

- 69% of survey respondents reported visiting a business for the first time
- 81% of respondents noted they liked the dining deals best
- 49% of respondents reported spending \$150
- 13% of those teachers reporting they spent more than \$500



The Visitor Center inside the Tompkins Center for History & Culture was utilized as a check-in location for the first time, and hosted a local food and beverage tasting event organized by the CVB.



The Opening Reception was held at The Hotel Ithaca with approximately 240 attendees.



The reach of the event continues to grow as partners offer new deals and experiences. Ithaca College added Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) classes.

# Visitor Experience

## 2020 A Tale of True Visitors

The Visitor Experience team pivoted from an extremely strong Q1 to serve our visitors and partner businesses remotely until the reopening of the Overlook at Taughannock Visitor Center in July and the Downtown Visitor Center in late September. Limited resources supported 67% fewer service hours in 2020, compared to 2019, yet overall visitor touchpoints were down 60% from 2019.

	2020	2019	%Change
Phone	1,208	2,152	-43.87
East Shore VC	286	3,958	-92.77
Downtown VC	957	4,892	-80.44
Taugh.VC	20,659	35,636	-42.03
Web Chat	2,449	2,972	-17.60
Travel Guide	4,262	5,462	-21.97
Off-Site Events	1,346	24,451	-94.50
Total	31,167	79,523	-60.81%

## Drive Markets

When comparing walk-in traffic at our visitor centers with website sessions by metro area, we discovered our traditional feeder markets of New York City and Northern NJ were out-performing local and regional visitation. New York City website sessions were up 22%, even without paid search, as Q1 and Q2 focused on inspirational travel messaging. We saw an increase in traffic to our visitor centers from NYC residents, expressing their desire to get out of the dense city and into socially distanced, mask wearing, nature-rich communities like Ithaca and Tompkins County.

	Walk-in Traffic	% Change YoY	% Change Web
New York City	6,788	+8	+22
Syracuse	2,556	-61	-61
Philadelphia	2,081	-39	-32
Rochester	2,027	-22	-22
Buffalo	1,440	-11	-2



“I just had the most amazing live chat with Steen from your office, who was incredibly helpful. I’m from NYC so the fact that I haven’t been to Ithaca is frankly embarrassing, and I can’t wait to explore. (By the way, that chat is a godsend – I wish more DMOs had it!)”  
—Jeff Lesser, Marketing Director, Travelzoo

## Web-Based Chat Impact

The Visitor Experience team did an excellent job staying abreast of the trails, restaurants, lodging properties and merchants statuses while adding COVID-19 safety parameters to their knowledge base. This proved to be incredibly valuable to exceeding visitor expectations through our webchat service.

## Higher Ed Program Pivot

To support the Higher Education goals of the Tompkins County Tourism Program Strategic Plan, we developed a virtual “Introduction to Ithaca” program to showcase area attractions, restaurants, events, and transportation contributing to the quality of life for a college student in Ithaca, with time for Q&A. The program was offered to groups at Ithaca College and at Cornell University. The program with Ithaca College was the highest attended webinar offered by the Admissions Department last fall for prospective students, with 428 students and their families in attendance.

“This was a wonderful experience. I came on this website with so many questions and uncertainties and this chat popped up and this person on the other end of it answered every single one of my questions. I am confident that I will be prepared for my trip! Thank you so much!”  
—Webchat User, Hauppauge, NY

“Thanks for tonight’s presentation on the town of Ithaca. When my dad and I drove up to see Ithaca College in October, I had no idea there were so many cool things to do. If I’m accepted, I would love to hike those waterfalls!”  
—Ithaca College prospective student



## Celebrating Success

Site Supervisor, Ryan Shehu, selected as one of Destinations International’s 30 under 30 Award Winners. Worldwide, only 30 people, 30 years of age and under, are recognized as talented, rising stars in the CVB industry.

## Lost International Spending

We welcomed guests from 83 countries to our visitor centers in 2019, compared to only 11 countries in 2020, resulting in \$1M+ deficit of international guest spending\* from visitor center walk-in traffic alone. Top feeder international countries in 2020 were Canada, Brazil, France, and Australia.

*\*source: US Dept. of Commerce 2020 data*

## A2D Training Program

Visitor Journey: Arrival to Departure (A2D) was launched in 2019. There are seven online learning modules, plus an in-person class. The live class was quickly transitioned to virtual and those who had started the program were encouraged to take the virtual class to complete the second portion of the training and become A2D Champions. We successfully trained 48 Champions from 14 businesses.

# Advocacy & Partner Engagement

Tourism is a shared value to our entire community, as was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your CVB team worked to gather information and shared it quickly to all tourism partner businesses.

- Worked to locate financial assistance programs during NY Pause.
- Communicated guidelines for each industry as we transitioned to NY Forward.
- Carried partner concerns forward to local, state, and federal officials.
- Advocated for the need to move forward with the conference center as an economic recovery tool.
- Communicated impacts of Higher Education major events to tourism businesses.
- Partnered with other local economic development agencies to gather accurate information on business openings and service protocols.
- Worked with NYSDMO and NYSHTA to advocate on behalf of event organizers and venues.
- Partnered with US Travel for inclusion of 501c6 non-profits in CARES Act funding.
- Gathered real time travel sentiment research from Longwoods International and Knowland meeting planner surveys.
- Served on the Tompkins County Economic Development Recovery Cabinet.



WHEN IT'S TIME FOR YOU, WE'LL BE READY



“I appreciate your total devotion to promoting the Finger Lakes region in general and Tompkins County in particular, and helping to make things happen. I look forward to doing more productive collaboration with you in the future.”  
—Ibe Ibeike-Jonah, Grassroots



“Thank you. You are doing a great job working miracles. I appreciate you.”  
—Barbara Raab, County Inn & Suites, Ithaca

## Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau

**Peggy Coleman**  
VP TOURISM & CVB DIRECTOR

### SALES & MARKETING

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TOUR & TRAVEL MANAGER

**Katie Kutz**  
MEETING & CONFERENCE SALES MANAGER

**Erin Rafalowski**  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

**Jordan Herson**  
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

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DIRECTOR OF VISITOR EXPERIENCE

**Rachael Atkins-Walpole**  
SITE SUPERVISOR

**Ryan Shehu**  
SITE SUPERVISOR

**Maia Cooke**  
SENIOR VISITOR EXPERIENCE SPECIALIST

**Steen Kittredge**  
SENIOR VISITOR EXPERIENCE SPECIALIST

### TEAM SUPPORT

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PRESIDENT & CEO

**Carly Hansen**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, HR

**Diane Hemly**  
BOOKKEEPER/OFFICE MANAGER

This work was accomplished with contributions from the following:

**Kendall Blizzard, Cameron Coughlin, Beth Duff, Danielle Hemly, Matt Janson, Pei Pei Liu, Jessica Plue, Justin Scheidweiler**

## VALUES

Reflected in the way we operate internally, and in the way we interact with stakeholders in the community.

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