

What NJ Is Doing to Bolster the L&E Sector

When I travel and tell people that I'm from New Jersey, their first words revolve around Atlantic City. This casino town is internationally known, but when you investigate further, leisure and entertainment in New Jersey is much more than just the famous seaside town.



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Places such as Six Flags, the many vineyards, ski slopes and the Meadowlands are just a few of the destinations that attract millions of visitors to the Garden State annually. With so many beautiful locations within our borders, government has worked hard to maximize the positive impact of tourism on the state's economy.

The Numbers Don't Lie

Increasing awareness of New Jersey's tourist destinations and enhancing the Garden State's overall image are two of the tasks assigned to the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism. Since 2009, there has been a steady increase in the state's tourism numbers, and the Trenton-based agency is working hard to ensure we don't lose any momentum. "Between 2009 and 2011, the amount of tourists traveling to NJ rose from 68 million to 80 million," notes Grace Hanlon, executive director of the NJ Division of Travel and Tourism. On the surface, this makes perfect sense.

Look at a map of the United States. New Jersey appears to be in the perfect location: coastline and beaches border the east, Philadelphia to the west and New York City to the north. Not only are these great cities close enough for New Jersey residents to enjoy, these locales provide a large traveler base from other states. This concept is documented in a 2011 study performed by Tourism Economics which explains that two-thirds of New Jersey's visitors come from the tri-state area.

That fact alone proves that the Travel and Tourism Division's marketing efforts are producing the desired results. In 2011, travel and tourism activities – which include hotel stays, admission to local attractions and retail purchases – infused more than \$38 billion into our economy. The current tourism demand has recovered the losses from the recession and is just shy of the all-time high reached in 2007.

Marketing Goes High Tech

Hanlon adds that the division has undertaken a very aggressive marketing campaign to enhance New Jersey's image and improve on the recent economic results. She notes that the agency has specifically pinpointed the surrounding states as an area where significant traveler potential can be cultivated. For example, the organization has some exciting

marketing programs currently running in the New York City area. Hanlon describes how the division has flooded the urban market with radio spots, television ads and roadside billboards. In addition, the division has utilized more tech-savvy methods, such as producing a 15-second video spot that airs in more than 3,000 New York City cabs. Even more impressive is the implementation of smart posters. Hanlon explains that the smart posters are part of a kiosk located in New York City; when pedestrians walk by the booth they are “pinged” by the device, which automatically sends a smart phone commercial to passersby without them even realizing they have it until the spot plays on their handheld devices.

These advertising strategies show that the division takes its marketing efforts very seriously. Managers constantly analyze the effectiveness of their efforts. A study conducted by an outside firm highlighted that the return on investment realized by the division’s recent campaigns was approximately \$314 for every dollar spent, an impressive accomplishment. This success has generated more than \$676 million in incremental spending throughout the state.

Strategic Partnerships

The division is also forging partnerships with other organizations, such as the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, to attract tourists to the state. As the name suggests, the tandem is focused on the Atlantic City area and the manner in which the casino industry contributes to the local and statewide economy. With new casinos, such as the Revel, and the massive reconstruction project completed at the Golden Nugget, the division is excited about the increased tourism possibilities. Hanlon also explains that the division is marketing the southern beaches as a high-quality golf destination. With courses such as Blue Heron Pines, Harbor Pines and the Atlantic City Country Club, the state is working diligently to capitalize on the Atlantic City region being voted as one of the “Top Ten Golf Cities in America” by ForbesTraveler.com.

Challenges

Even though the state has achieved much success with its marketing and partnerships, challenges still exist in achieving growth in our tourism industry. Many have a mental image of New Jersey being swampland, oil refineries and Snooki, and they simply don’t consider New Jersey when making travel plans. It is not considered a tourist destination in the vein of Florida, the Hamptons or Martha’s Vineyard. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, budget issues also limit the effectiveness of the state’s efforts. In recent years, the budget for tourism was cut by approximately \$2 million. This unfortunate trend may continue in the upcoming fiscal cycle as government austerity is at the center of political debates.

On the Horizon

The division looks forward to future events and the development of new travel destinations, such as WWE Wrestling, Formula 1 auto racing, upgraded horse racing facilities, Super Bowl XLVIII and, yes, even the Meadowlands American Dream complex. Super Bowl XLVIII alone is expected to inject more than \$500 million into the economy. Hanlon is committed to creating an event that will put New Jersey among the top places to visit for both leisure and business and is working with executives from previous Super Bowl cities to make the event all that it can be. But the New Jersey Division of Tourism and Travel is putting a spotlight on all that the state has to offer, because the Garden State truly has something for everyone. 🍷

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