



Keep in Fresh in Michigan

By Paul Beachnau

We're going to "Keep it Fresh" in Michigan this summer, and does that ever sound great after a long and unpredictable winter here in Gaylord! National Travel and Tourism Week takes place from May 7-13 this year, and the dedicated staff at the Gaylord Area Convention and Tourism Bureau couldn't be more eager to promote our vibrant and unique community.

I had the honor and privilege to represent Gaylord at the annual pilgrimage to the Pure Michigan Tourism Conference in Grand Rapids this past April, along with our ace Marketing Director, Christy Walcott. The "Keep it Fresh" campaign is our state's new destination marketing concept recently launched that builds on the "Pure Michigan" brand established 17 years ago in 2006.

The campaign is as visually pleasing as it sounds. In my mind, the word "fresh" evokes images of sparkling rivers and lakes, shimmering sandy beaches, stands of cool forests with hiking and biking trails woven amidst them and the smell of fresh air. These are all the same type of images we use for our "All Outdoors" campaign here in Gaylord. We think this theme will be a hit this year, generating millions of trips to Michigan and thousands of trips to Gaylord.

During the conference, the Travel Michigan team shared the success of their 2022 tourism marketing efforts and the results were impressive. Of the \$17 million spent on marketing our 4 distinct travel seasons, over 2 million leisure trips to Michigan were generated. This resulted in visitor spending of \$3.1 billion – yes, that is billion with a "B." The \$3.1 billion spent on travel and tourism returned \$195 million in state taxes to Lansing's coffers. When you measure the return on investment (ROI), for every dollar spent on tourism marketing, it returned a whopping \$11.16 in taxes. This is a record ROI in the 8 years since they have been measuring it.

What other things did we learn at the conference? We learned that this year's Pure Michigan budget will be at a record high of nearly \$40 million. While 2022 was a great year, we still have not achieved the 2019 travel numbers recorded prior to the pandemic, so there's much work to be done. It was also

confirmed that travelers are continuing to seek outdoor adventures for the restorative, inspirational and mental health benefits that the outdoors provides, which fits perfectly with our Gaylord brand.

Along with gaining industry insights, we were also inspired by Travel Bureau Director Dave Lorenz, who reminded us that travel is the activity that bonds all citizens together regardless of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, creating understanding and peace in an often-divided world. There's no denying travel has a vital role in our lives for numerous reasons, but connecting people through shared experiences is by far the most impactful.

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