

## Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau Executive Director & Marketing Updates March 7, 2024

#### **Executive Director Update**

#### Tourism general outlook:

Feedback from lodging partners during the month of February indicated the Yosemite National Park Horsetail Fall reservation system had a larger than anticipated negative impact on lodging occupancy in the region, both inside of the park and outside the park. YMCTB added marketing investment where possible to stimulate lodging referrals, and increased efforts promoting Special Offers. YMCTB continues to drive early spring bookings through traditional media including radio spots running now in the SF Bay Area, in addition to our large digital spring and co-op programs. Concerns continue to be voiced by lodging partners. Overall, lodging booking windows are shrinking, and lodging room rate resistance is reported via "turn downs" during the reservation booking process. The new Yosemite pilot vehicle reservation system is causing concerns and concerns from our international partners and agencies with issues on <u>www.Recreation.gov</u>.

#### From January Notes-

Several major properties outside the park reported above-average business levels, whereas inside the park reported lower-than-expected outcomes. This is somewhat of a reversal from the typical scenario of in-park-first demand. YMCTB was made aware that occupancy rates for the holidays were pacing slower for some lodging partners, so YMCTB quickly added marketing investment promoting holiday stays via radio in the SF Bay Area and increased digital marketing. We believe this effort provided a needed and desired occupancy push for occupancy between December 22, 2023, and January 6, 2024.

#### Visitation:

Yosemite National Park visitation for 2023 stats have been posted at 3,897,069, an increase of 6% over 2022 3,667,548 and 2021 3,287,595. Each of these visitation years has been impacted

by the reservation systems, fires, and snowfall. 2019 visitation was 4,422,861. With the temporary vehicle reservation systems, we don't expect we'll see these historically stabilized visitation numbers again. You can find visitation reports at <a href="https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/YOSE">https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/YOSE</a>

#### Special notes:

YMCTB will be hosting a 28-person super FAM organized through Visit California after IPW, Wednesday, May 8th through Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup>. We are working on this in conjunction with Madera County. We are also receiving individual post-IPW FAM requests.

If your property is interested in hosting separate post-IPW FAMs, including travel trade company buyers, leaders or top media travel writers, let us know. We can refer them directly to you to host. Because YMCTB staff will be fully committed to these other FAM responsibilities, if you choose to host, the visit will need to be organized completely by you and your staff.

#### TOT and TBID collection payments:

Overall, YMCTB TBID collections mid-year are favorable to budget at \$1,962,028 vs. a conservative budget of \$1,680,000.

TBID Collections					
Month	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Jul	\$323,743	\$330,276	\$314,363	\$32,892	\$284,356
Aug	\$388,288	\$393,453	\$104,222	\$137,534	\$226,277
Sep	\$450,856	\$283,564	\$166,338	\$123,733	\$227,407
Oct	\$357,156	\$189,106	\$276,150	\$86,666	\$227,841
Nov	\$204,165	\$348,808	\$233,304	\$85,361	\$116,805
Dec	\$237,820	\$109,964	\$272,986	\$111,592	\$148,902
Jan	\$160,369	\$161,692	\$91,366	\$44,592	\$94,089
Feb	\$150,000	\$134,099	\$148,741	\$28,312	\$53,395
Mar	\$150,000	\$102,168	\$182,153	\$89,118	\$62,297
Apr	\$175,000	\$69,844	\$112,894	\$156,699	\$37,165
May	\$225,000	\$168,067	\$315,829	\$128,203	\$5,937
Jun	\$250,000	\$149,299	\$173,461	\$251,213	\$3,422
Total	\$3,072,397	\$2,440,340	\$2,391,807	\$ 1,275,915	\$1,487,891
PY Total	\$2,440,340	\$2,391,807	\$1,275,915	\$1,487,891	\$1,302,017
Diff	\$632,057	\$48,533	\$1,115,893	-\$211,976	\$185,874
Forecast					

TOTCollections	2023/2024	2022/2023	2022/2021	2020/2021
July	\$3,475,858	\$2,389,761	\$2,437,390	\$1,474,664
August	\$3,088,839	\$2,461,523	\$2,014,943	\$1,591,830
September	\$3,093,017	\$2,582,831	\$2,072,378	\$790,349
October		\$2,078,439	\$1,695,708	\$1,327,953
November		\$1,462,111	\$1,424,078	\$1,166,846
December		\$1,315,812	\$1,234,091	\$266,374
January		\$874,579	\$904,534	\$211,545
February		\$963,889	\$1,151,736	\$761,434
March		\$422,435	\$1,560,168	\$1,325,065
April		\$1,619,937	\$2,118,945	\$1,851,356
May		\$2,439,010	\$2,373,763	\$2,200,760
June		\$2,439,010	\$3,459,225	\$2,787,163
TOTAL	\$9,657,714	\$21,049,337	\$22,446,959	\$15,755,339
∆ Prior Year	(\$11,391,623)	(\$1,397,622)	\$6,691,620	

#### Immediate forecast of occupancy over the next three months via AirDnA:

- Occupancy rates YOY are pacing down in Mariposa County for February at 30% booking pace vs. the prior year's 35%. The YNP reservation system for Horsetail Fall over weekends and limited overall park access is negatively impacting demand in February. In general, travelers are booking shorter term, taking a "wait & see" approach to travel after the prior year's epic winter snowfalls. However, March pacing is 8% ahead of last year. April is down (-7%), but May (3%) and June (13%) and July (18%) are pacing ahead at this point.
- Mariposa County's occupancy rates are pacing ahead of Madera and Tuolumne Counties for March through July. Although that seems like good news on the surface, fewer STR's are listed as available in May and June, which is a curious trend. Possibly more STR owners plan to use the homes for their own vacation use.
- ADR and RevPAR for Mariposa County also continues to outpace that of Madera and Tuolumne Counties from February through July. As an example, ADR in March: Mariposa (\$396), Madera (\$339) and Tuolumne (\$306). RevPAR is similar in March: Mariposa (\$102), Madera (\$88) and Tuolumne (\$67).

#### International visitation:

Travel from outside the U.S. remains at just 80% of pre-pandemic levels. There are several reasons for this slow return of international guests.

- The U.S. and California specifically have become increasingly expensive. Hotel and food & beverage costs have increased astronomically along with increased taxes on rental cars and lodging. There are reasons for these supplier cost increases including minimum wage, insurance, and cost of products. The cost increases are impacting the tight and highly competitive long-haul travel market.
- Worldwide inflation is also having an impact. Some Nordic countries are seeing decreases, but Australia, Germany, and the UK have not yet seen needed fiscal relief. Holidays to Portugal, Greece, Maldives, and Asia are much less expensive and closer.
- The U.S. in-bound Visa Waiver programs are broken. The federal government requires visas for visitors from more than 140 countries wishing to visit the USA. Requests for visa appointments at U.S. Consulates are backlogged more than 400-500 days, significantly reducing tourism to the U.S. The U.S. Travel Association is working hard to push government officials to fix the problem with staffing and processing.

#### Executive Director public activities, events, conferences, and local:

- Short Term Rental policies are being reviewed by the county. Jonathan has been attending meetings and providing input and data where and when appropriate.
- Attended YNP and NPS reservations process and comments meetings. This includes a meeting with Senator Tom McClintock and local lodging/tourism leaders.
- Continues to provide volunteer and leadership work to Yosemite Gateway Partners as president of the organization. After 12 years of volunteering in YGP leadership roles. I will reduce my commitments to spend more time on YMCTB efforts and consider new volunteer opportunities.
- Attending and participating as a county-appointed member in various YARTS meetings as Vice Chair of the YARTS AAC.

#### **Other Progress:**

- Website awards
- Brand refresh update, including Travel for Good
- HMA data project
- Smith Travel Research CoStar project
- Completed Mariposa County grant obligation

• Sponsorships completed for 2023/2024

### Marketing Update

#### KPIs: Digital Performance Recap (data from Noble Studios)

Our **lodging partner referrals** are still slightly behind our goal We are at 60.79% for July 1, 2023 – February 29, 2024 (67% of the year). Note that <u>these numbers do not include referrals</u> <u>from Book>Direct</u>, our online booking system.



We are now slightly ahead of pace (67%) with our **paid sessions**, including international paid



media. Since the beginning of January, our spend has increased to continue to drive traffic to the late winter and spring seasons.

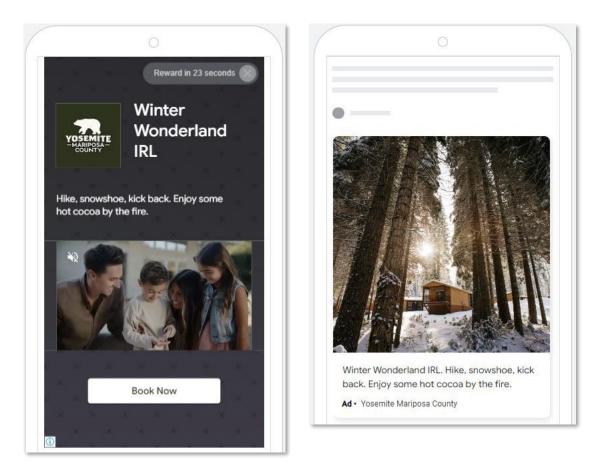
# Note: The following information for Paid Search and Paid Media is the most recent data from mid-year reporting (December 2024).

#### Paid Search:

- We have seen significant positive growth in conversions in December from paid search YOY. The CVR (conversion rate) grew from 33.42% to 56.62%.
- Lodging referrals in December from paid search also grew from 9,731 last year to 14,539 this year.

#### Paid Media:

- Domestic: Display and Google Demand Generation (formerly Discovery Network) this combination continues to outperform display on its own. Our YOY metrics for CTR (click through rate) have more than tripled from 0.20% to 0.78%. Conversions in December 2022 were 119; this past month conversions were 1,102.
- Noble is also utilizing Performance MAX campaigns to increase our performance.



 International (UK, Germany and Australia): Despite a 33% decrease in budget, our December YOY performance for international display (both standard and Google Demand Generation) has seen significant improvement. Our CTR has improved from 0.27% to 0.81%.





- YouTube Advertising: Our budget is down 50% YOY but our CTR has more than doubled from 0.21% to 0.52%. We had 545,652 impressions during the month and 2,818 clicks. This is a high funnel channel focused on brand awareness, but we are still seeing some conversions.
- Paid Social: While our winter creative on social continues to perform above benchmark, we are seeing a slight decrease in partner referrals coming from this channel in comparison to November 2023. This could be due to decreased interest in travel just before the holidays. We continue to see an increase in CTR and only a modest increase in CPC (cost per click).

Facebook, National	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Followers	1,320	149,223	150%
Link Clicks	385,877	1,595,713	109%
Facebook, Local	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Followers	39	2,916	855
Instagram	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Followers	4,051	85,857	105%
Engagement	179,457	613,122	56%
YouTube	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Subscribers	328	2,604	200%
Total Watch Time (hours)	1,724	3,997	57%
TikTok	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Followers	107	18,931	81%
Views	55,961	1,378,540	38%
Pinterest	Jan-Feb	Total	% to Goal
Impressions	74,380	423,470	877
Engagement	3,690	15,840	8755
Engaged Audience	2,180	8,850	1255
X		Total	% to Goal
Followers	-52	44,423	822

#### YMCTB Social Media:

Our social channels continue to grow, and our KPIs are on pace or far ahead of pace in almost all areas. This is a real achievement at a time when social media results are generally sluggish across industries.

Our Meta channels on Facebook and Instagram are doing extremely well, with only our Instagram engagement very close to projected results for this time of year. Meta marketing continues to be a moving target as the platform's algorithms continue to evolve almost invisibly. The changes to the platform have effectively put AI in the driver's seat for many aspects of the marketing tools available on the platform. This can be a powerful tool but requires knowledge of how to best leverage the strengths of the tools.

We saw exceptionally strong growth on our Instagram channel, with stronger growth than either of the previous two reporting periods – both of which were three months long compared to the current two-month period.

Our TikTok numbers were strangely low, which was initially alarming, especially given that our posts are getting better and better responses as time goes by. However, it turns out that this is a result of the viral nature of the platform. We occasionally get hugely successful organic/viral posts, with one earlier in the year receiving over 425 thousand views. We were lucky enough to get one or two of those posts in the previous 3-month reporting periods, but not in the last 2 months. Our yearly numbers will include all the viral posts in one place, but the nature of the occasional huge posts will likely continue to produce sporadic results due to the unpredictable nature of the platform. This will also need to be accounted for in our Marketing plans going forwards.

#### **Social Media Examples**



This is our top performing organic Facebook post. Dramatic stormy images often generate a lot of interest on social channels. 1,100 reactions, and 11,600 views.

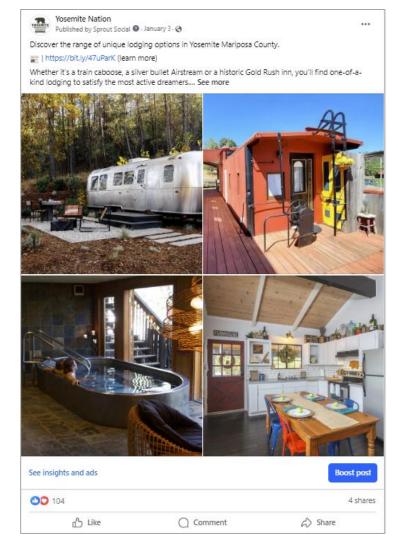


This is our highestperforming organic Instagram post. Beautiful shots of February's "firefall" event are always good at causing users to stop and interact with our post. 12,915 engagements, 11,928 likes, 749 shares.

...

 $\square$ 

 $\odot$ 

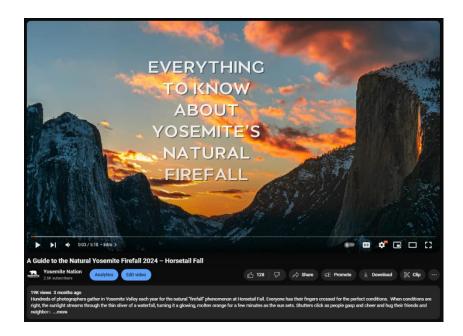


This is our top performing paid Meta ad for "Unique Sleeps" in Mariposa County. It reached 226,704 people and generated 40,758 link clicks at a cost of \$0.01 per click.

#### Video Production:

Some highlights for this reporting period:

- Our video for Mariposa County is in the final stages of review and should be completed shortly.
- All 8 regional videos in various stages production. Voice-over talent is recording lines, video assets are being gathered and assembled, and some early edits are in review.
- We posted 14 vertical videos to YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.
- Due to the evolving nature of vertical video content and the platforms it is shared on, we are engaged in ongoing efforts with Backstory Creative to hone our vertical video style and presentation.



This is our top performing YouTube video – again, Firefall generates a lot of interest with potential visitors. YouTube is a search engine for video, so this interest can result in a lot of views. 19,238 views.

#### **Special Offers:**

The Special Offers Page received over 87,000 views this past quarter. We were able to maintain over 20 specials throughout the quarter. The special offers program is even more essential during this slower part of the year. Our goal is to always have as many eyes as possible on constituent properties. The success of the special offers program is only possible as long as partners participate. Even if a visitor to the website does not redeem the offer, seeing the property on the special offers page gives the property attention that it would otherwise not have had when grouped with the other properties in the county.

Special Offer Hub Views	- /yosemite-hotel-deals/			OFFER VALID APRIL 25. 2023 – JULY 31, 2023 BIG CREEK INN BED AND BREAKFAST 10% off when bookied online VIEW OFFER →	
87,761	Click URL	View Off	%Δ	Enter stakeholder domain	
± 247.3%	https://www.yosemite.com/places-to-stay/hotels-and-motels/the-ahwahnee-hotel/	5,833			
Special Offer Hub Link Click	https://www.yosemite.com/places-to-stay/cabins/the-redwoods-in-yosemite/#offers	5,474	279.9% #	Click URL	
34,857	https://www.yosemite.com/places-to-stay/hotels-and-motels/wawona-hotel/#offers	4,492		Contains 🔻 Enter a val	
± 404.4%	https://www.yosemite.com/places-to-stay/hotels-and-motels/tenaya-at-yosemite/#	4,335	213.4% #		
	https://www.yosemite.com/places-to-stay/hotels-and-motels/yosemite-valley-lodge	3,396	-		
		1 - 29 / 29	< >		

#### **Constituent Property Audit:**

We undertook a comprehensive audit of the lodging properties on Yosemite.com. This began with our obtaining the county list of TOT payers. We found that the list had more properties on it than our internal constituent list and many of owners/operators had different names registered with the county than their public facing name.

We began the process of contacting constituents via phone and email, and slowly were able to create a much more comprehensive list that we can use internally when contacting constituents. This process allowed us to ensure we were doing our due diligence notifying constituents about their right to a free property listing. We were also able to request updated materials for properties whose photography had not been updated previously. We have also done work to update amenities to reflect current offerings.

The last part of this audit has been going through each stakeholder page, updating the imagery, and enhancing photography with Topaz AI software. We have been able to take these updates and pass them onto BookDirect who a few weeks ago completed making their changes.

We had given a list of properties to BookDirect that needed their live rates connected via VRBO. Due to connectivity issues the process took longer than expected but was finally completed at the end of February.

#### Email Marketing:

Our newsletter signups are well beyond our annual goal of the year at 134% of goal. Another round of lead generation campaigns will occur in March and April to continue to grow the list. Our subscriber list is currently 59,792.

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024	Pace = 58% (Month 7 of 12)	FY23-24 Goal
New Subs FY YTD: 8,032   January: 789	134%	6,000

YTD we have sent 60 emails. The YTD average open rate for consumer emails is 42% with a click-through rate of 1.3%.

#### Traditional Print:

• We have continued to place print ads working with our new creative team at Noble, we started to use "stopover" creative while the refresh of our brand creative is being considered.

Condé Nast:	Lo

ocal Getaways Express:



#### Conde Nast:



This spring, Yosemite Mariposa is your ultimate homebase for exploring everything the season offers. Hile trails along meadows cappeted with vibrant wildflowers, chase a few spectacular waterfails, cycle along paths freshly awoken from a winter slumber op raddle your way dyown the Merced Welcome the return of longer days and cool nights as you rediscover the West's top vacation spot.

> Visit Yosemite.com The ultimate resource for planning your adventure to Yosemite National Park.



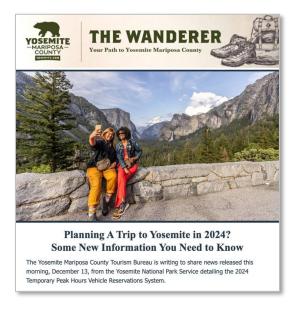
#### Alpinist:



#### Traditional Radio:

A new initiative with iHeart Radio is now in running to targeted audiences within the Bay Area and a small portion in Sacramento. The traditional radio spots are being accompanied by other digital media, including video ads, display, podcast, etc. including some targeting in Los Angeles and San Diego.

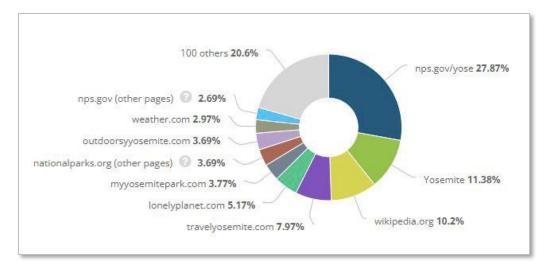
#### Communicating Reservation System:



- With the announcement of both the Firefall and summer reservations, YMCTB activated to communicate updates on the systems to local constituents, travel trade, consumers and media.
- YMCTB also created form letters to send to local lodging to share with guests, both on the books and for future reservations.
- YMCTB staff spoke with media outlets such as the San Jose Mercury News and Skift.
- Updated resources on Yosemite.com for visitors as well as local stakeholders.

#### SEO:

- Our share of voice for targeted search terms remains high and is growing, despite that organic traffic is falling behind our KPI's.
- We're working on leveraging our SEO strength as a way to bring in more organic traffic.
- We worked to update highly searched pages with commonly searched keywords, such as: Yosemite Reservations, Yosemite Firefall, Yosemite Firefall Reservations.



#### FAMs:

- Black Diamond Media FAM (media)
  - 4 total journalists attended, plus our Black Diamond Rep
  - 10/9 10/11
  - Coverage received
  - Marck Guttman (media)
  - Journalist with Mexican outlet ties.
  - 10/6 10/9
  - Coverage on social and one article received. Expecting more coverage.
  - Viva Holidays and United Airlines Ultimate Northern California Roadtrip (Trade)
  - 7 Australian based travel agents and two hosts
  - 10/7-10/9
  - Black Diamond Trade Fam (trade)
  - 5 travel agents plus BlackDiamond Rep
  - 10/9 10/11
- Audley Travel visit (Trade)
  - 4 Audley Travel representatives
  - 10/27 10/29
- Kilroy Jysk Rejsebureau FAM (trade)
  - 9 Travel Agents from Kilroy in Scandinavia
  - 10/28 10/29
- Jen on a Jet Plane (media)
  - Content Creator posting to Instagram, Tik Tok and her blog
  - 11/5 11/8
  - Coverage and reporting received
- Wellness Traveled
  - Content Creators from Canada posting to their own Instagram and Tik Tok
  - 11/8 11/11
  - Coverage received

#### Earned Media:





From Yosemite to Lake Tahoe and Sonoma County: How to exp Northern California's best spots in autumn





We earned 46 new pieces of published media between October 1 and January 1. These articles were mostly published in the U.S., but there was also coverage secured in the U.K., Australia and Germany. Below are selected articles from press trips hosted in between 10/1 and 1/1.

#### Selected articles:

Black Diamond U.K. Media Fam Coverage

- METRO: How to explore Northern California's best spots in autumn
- Women's Health: Why The Golden State is the Perfect Autumnal Bucket List Destination
- <u>Arcadia: Exploring Yosemite California</u>

Jen on a Jet Plane

- <u>Tenaya at Yosemite Review: All the Amenities Just 10 Minutes from the Park</u>
- How to Visit Mariposa Grove in Yosemite National Park, Home of the Giant Sequoia
  <u>Trees</u>

California Bountiful

• <u>Sierra Cider Farm and Cidery</u> All Earned Media from 10/1/23 – 1/1/24

#### Travel Trade and Media Events:



Since October, YMCTB has attended 4 media and travel trade events. They were:

- Brand USA Media Forum
  - October 16-18
  - Tony took 24 meetings with top travel journalists from across Europe.
- IMM North America
  - January 25-26
  - Tony met with 30 travel journalists and influencers.
  - Visit California Dallas Media Event
    - February 21-23
    - YMCTB was invited to a mixer-style dinner and cocktail event to meet with top journalists and travel writers from Texas.
- GO West Summit
  - February 26-28
  - Jonathan took 56 B2B meetings with top tour suppliers, buyers and media.
- IPW Los Angeles
  - May 4 8
  - Media Day + Trade Show Three appointment books and 120+ appointments

#### Travel Trade:

October and early November continued to be very busy with three large and one smaller International FAM (Familiarization Sales Tours). Viva Holiday's was a tour where United Airlines partnered with Hello World to bring 9 of Australia's top travel sales professionals to California.

Black Diamond United Kingdom FAM brought 7 top travel counselors to our region representing top companies such as Virgin Holidays, Travel Counsellors & Flight Centre. With 13 offices and over 100 agents, Kilroy is one of the largest youth and min-scale travel companies in the Nordic region. YMCTB hosted 9 top staff members during their California training trip.



(Via Holliday United FAM Australia)



(Black Diamond United Kingdom)

International Travel remains a key area of sales effort for YMCTB. International Travel represents nearly 25% of all visitation to Yosemite Mariposa County.

Jonathan attended Go West In Lake Tahoe in late February – pictured below.



If your hotel or lodging business has contracts for inventory sales internationally, be sure to keep Jonathan updated so he can best represent and sell your property. If you don't have international representation contracts and are interested in learning how to engage in international lodging inventory sales by travel agents, contact Jonathan at JonathanF@Yosemite.com