



PR/Media Tips for Hospitality Partners

Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow Anniversaries and Winter Storm Preparation

Internal Note: Please note that this document is intended for internal use and should NOT be shared with the news media.

Anticipated Media Coverage

With the anniversaries of the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow coming up in late December 2018 and early January 2019, and with global news coverage of recent wildfires throughout California, there is a strong possibility that media will create update stories on the Santa Barbara South Coast in late December or early January. To assist you, our partners, with this possibility, and to provide consistent and accurate messaging to media, Visit Santa Barbara has prepared the following PR toolkit.

Dos and Don'ts with Media

Should you be contacted, feel free to talk to media about your business. Below are a few tips to guide your engagement with journalists.

Dos:

- If asked about the Thomas Fire or 1/9 Debris Flow, focus on sending the message: "That was a challenging time, but it's behind us, and we've been excited to welcome visitors back since last spring."
- Do talk about improvements or new offerings since last year.
 - Example: "This gave us the opportunity for upgrades/improvements/to develop new offerings, etc. that we've been excited to introduce to guests."
 - In fact, *Travel + Leisure* named Montecito a [Best Place to Visit in 2019](#).
- Express sympathy for the challenges the community faced last year, should the subject arise. Feel free to briefly discuss how your business helped out the community.
- Should the topic of future storms come up, briefly discuss your preparations for future incidents.
- Do provide current photos that positively portray your business/attraction and the beauty of the Santa Barbara South Coast.
- Review the Media Frequently Asked Questions below, as well as the more extensive talking points for frontline staff and general Santa Barbara South Coast FAQs (the latter is shareable with the public) located in Visit Santa Barbara's Communications Toolkit.
- Do alert the Visit Santa Barbara PR team of any media engagement or expected media coverage. Our goal is to support businesses like yours by encouraging fair and accurate coverage of the destination.

Don'ts:

- Don't dwell too much on the negative. It may feel cathartic in the moment to go into the details about what happened with your business during the fire/mudslides. However, before you talk with media, consider what the impact will be on your business based on what you share. Keep in mind that the media like to explore angles of stories and a good emotional hook often can become the center of the story.
- Don't share harrowing stories about the fire/debris flow.
- Don't share photos of disaster or damage from that time either with media or on your social media channels.
- Don't speculate about future storms, debris flows or fires. But DO bridge to the specifics of how your business/attraction is prepared.
 - Example: "I'm not an expert, but we know that weather incidents can happen throughout the world at any time. In the rare event that the need arises, our hotel is prepared, by having XYZ in place."

Media Inquiries

For assistance with media inquiries, please reach out to the Visit Santa Barbara PR team.

Visit Santa Barbara PR Contacts, for tourism-related inquiries:

- Karna Hughes, Director of Communications: karna@SantaBarbaraCA.com (national, international and regional lifestyle, travel and trade media)
- Natalie Bovee, Communications Manager: natalie@SantaBarbaraCA.com (meetings, weddings media)
- You can also call the receptionist during business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Friday) at (805) 966-9222 and ask for the first available PR staff member.

For questions about the county or city, for inquiries NOT related to tourism:

- Contact Senior Assistant to the City Administrator Nina Johnson at njohnson@santabarbaraca.gov for comments from city officials, including Mayor Cathy Murrillo.
- Contact Santa Barbara County's Public Information Officer, Gina DePinto, at gdepinto@countyofsb.org for questions related to flood damage.

Additional Information:

- The Visit Santa Barbara PR team can help you vet and provide support for visiting media writing destination travel stories.
- We invite you to regularly submit news, events and packages for Visit Santa Barbara to promote on your behalf. This information will be incorporated into media pitches and press releases. Please send news and photos to Karna Hughes karna@SantaBarbaraCA.com and PR@SantaBarbaraCA.com

Media FAQ

QUESTION: Have the communities affected by the Thomas Fire and Montecito debris flow/mudslides recovered?

ANSWER: While businesses and properties in Santa Barbara, Goleta and Summerland fortunately were not affected, Montecito has recovered and in fact is welcoming a new hotel in 2019.

Most businesses along Coast Village Road reopened right away last spring. The only business that has remained closed is San Ysidro Ranch, which is expected to open in spring 2019.

A new luxury hotel, Rosewood Miramar Beach, will open along the beach in Montecito Feb. 11, 2019. Among the buzzy new restaurants that have opened on Coast Village Road are The Monarch, Chaplin's Martini Bar and Silver Bough at Montecito Inn (all from renowned chef Phillip Frankland Lee); Bettina; Khao Kaeng; and Oliver's.

Q.: How did the Thomas Fire and Montecito flooding/mudslide impact your business?

A.: We are happy to report that we resumed normal business operations early this year. We are so grateful to the Caltrans teams and emergency responders who helped reopen Highway 101 so that visitors could experience the beauty, great dining and shopping and diverse activities we have to offer.

[Note: if your business had major repairs, you could amend the first sentence above to something like, "Although we experienced some damage due to the storm, we were able to make repairs and reopen in ____ 2018."]

Q.: How did the flooding/fire impact tourism to the destination?

A.: For any specific inquiries regarding tourism to the destination and other area businesses, please email Karna Hughes, the director of communications for Visit Santa Barbara, at karna@SantaBarbaraCA.com or call (805) 966-9222.

For the most recent updates, Visit Santa Barbara's **travel advisory page** lists current conditions impacting travelers: <https://santabarbaraca.com/plan-your-trip/know-before-you-go/travel-advisory/>.

Key Messaging

On the Community:

The Montecito flood and mudslide were tragic, rare occurrences. (Experts have called the rain that caused the mudslide a “once in 200-year event” because it was so concentrated and precisely focused over the area where the fire had taken place.) But our community spirit became stronger and more resilient than ever. Businesses in Montecito have been open since last spring, and visitors have been enjoying the beauty and diverse attractions of the area.

On Tourism:

One of the best ways for visitors to continue to support the Santa Barbara South Coast is through their patronage of our local businesses, restaurants, and shops. Now is a wonderful time of year to visit, and we welcome you with open arms. Visitors from around the country can escape the cold, soak up the sunshine and enjoy all the things that make Santa Barbara the place we know and love.

On Working with Visit Santa Barbara:

Visit Santa Barbara is an advocate for local businesses, and has been supportive in destination recovery efforts, promoting the destination, hotels, attractions, retailers, restaurants, wineries and other points of interest.

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