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**Visit Santa Barbara Honors Local Travel Industry**

**at Annual Tourism Luncheon May 4**

***Celebration of National Travel & Tourism Week included presentation of annual “Rivvie” awards and screening of video recognizing the everyday contributions of locals***

**Santa Barbara, Calif. (May 5, 2016)** **—** **[Visit Santa Barbara](http://santabarbaraca.com/)** hosted its **Annual Tourism Luncheon Wed., May 4** at the **Coral Casino Beach & Cabana Club**. A crowd of more than 200 guests turned out for the luncheon, including city officials, hoteliers, tour operators, the staff of museums and attractions, and more. This year’s event focused on thanking the local hospitality industry’s workforce, partners and residents, acknowledging their vital importance to the impact of tourism on the region’s economy.

Annual spending by the South Coast’s 6.1 million travelers totals more than $1.5 billion, which supports more than 12,000 jobs and generates more than $45 million in yearly tax revenues, according to Destination Analysts, a tourism market research firm.

The luncheon coincided with [**National Travel & Tourism Week**](https://www.ustravel.org/events/national-travel-and-tourism-week), May 1 to 7, and featured a keynote speech by celebrated travel writer Pico Iyer titled, “Perspectives on Place: A New View of The American Riviera.”

Visit Santa Barbara presented its annual Destination Awards, the “Rivvies” (named after “The American Riviera”), to Morgen McLaughlin, executive director of Santa Barbara Vintners, and Susan Jang-Bardick, facilities and special events supervisor for the City of Santa Barbara’s Parks & Recreation department. The awards honor people whose work has changed the tourism landscape and who exemplify qualities of excellence.

The luncheon also featured the screening of a short, fun video (“Thank You, Santa Barbara”) thanking locals and industry partners whose everyday efforts contribute to the South Coast’s warmly welcoming environment for tourists. In the video, which was created by Visit Santa Barbara and social media agency Sparkloft, VSB staff surprise eight dedicated hospitality industry workers with gifts and flowers. The workers were nominated by their employers and represent just a small sampling of the many people whose work behind the scenes contributes to the success of the industry, ranging from the manager for Adventure Company of Santa Barbara to a cook for Courtyard Santa Barbara Goleta to Michael the giraffe from the Santa Barbara Zoo. (Click here to view the video: [Youtube.com/watch?v=mVHqZDnbscY&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVHqZDnbscY&feature=youtu.be).)

Outgoing Visit Santa Barbara Board of Directors members were thanked for their year of extraordinary service, including:

* Board Chair Gwen Stauffer, executive director of Lotusland
* Amanda Allen, director, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center
* Leslie Brickell, general manager, Courtyard by Marriott Santa Barbara/Goleta
* Theo Stephen, owner, Global Gardens
* Brent Sumner, filmmaker, Studio 8
* Tyler Tomblin, co-owner, Stagecoach Wine Tours

VSB also welcomed incoming board members. Matthew La Vine, general manager of Fess Parker’s A Doubletree by Hilton Resort, was introduced as board chair for 2016-2017. He will lead Visit Santa Barbara in the new fiscal year starting in July. Incoming board members include:

* Kristin Battaglia, general manager of The Wayfarer
* Richard Good, general manager of Classic Party Rentals
* Steve Hinckley, president and CEO of the Museum of Exploration + Innovation (MOXI)
* Tara Jones, owner of Eat This, Shoot That! Santa Barbara Food Tour
* Shaun O’Bryan, resort manager of the Belmond El Encanto
* Shashi Poudyal, general manager of Bacara Resort & Spa
* Luke Swetland, president and CEO of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Also coinciding with National Travel & Tourism Week, Visit California’s annual Economic Impact Report was released Mon., May 2, and forecasts a positive outlook for tourism throughout the state: [Industry.visitcalifornia.com/media/uploads/files/editor/CAImp15.pdf](http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/media/uploads/files/editor/CAImp15.pdf)

**ABOUT SANTA BARBARA**

Voted [“Best Beach Town”](http://www.sunset.com/travel/sunset-travel-awards-beach-town) by *Sunset* magazine in its inaugural travel awards in 2015 and one of *Condé Nast Traveler*’s [“30 Best Small Cities in America”](http://www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2015-07-29/the-30-best-small-cities-in-america-readers-choice-awards-2014?mbid=nl_072915_Daily&CNDID=27536286&spMailingID=7943581&spUserID=NDk0OTY2MTIyMDgS1&spJobID=723886198&spReportId=NzIzODg2MTk4S0) in its Readers’ Choice Awards, Santa Barbara is located just 92 miles north of Los Angeles and 332 miles south of San Francisco, on the Pacific coastline. Visitors can arrive via scenic Highway 101, train, bus or by flying into Santa Barbara Municipal Airport (SBA) or Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). For travel and accommodation information and to request a free copy of the official *Santa Barbara Visitors Magazine*, contact Visit Santa Barbara at (800) 676-1266 or (805) 966-9222, email tourism@santabarbaraca.com or visit [SantaBarbaraCA.com](http://www.santabarbaraca.com). Visitor information is also available at the Visitor Center, 1 Garden St. (at Cabrillo Boulevard).

**ABOUT VISIT SANTA BARBARA**

Visit Santa Barbara is a nonprofit 501(c)(6) organization jointly funded by the City of Santa Barbara, the County of Santa Barbara, the South Coast Tourism Business Improvement District and by a membership of hospitality-related busi­nesses. The primary mission of Visit Santa Barbara is to enhance the economies of the City of Santa Barbara, South Coast communities and Santa Barbara County areas through tourism marketing that increases business revenue, tax revenue and creates jobs.

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**FOR MEDIA ONLY**

**VIDEO**

Media: Please feel free to use Visit Santa Barbara’s local tourism industry video (“Thank You, Santa Barbara”) in broadcasts, links online or elsewhere for editorial coverage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVHqZDnbscY&feature=youtu.be>

Credit: Video courtesy of Visit Santa Barbara

**PHOTOS**

High-res photos available at: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/w6ncxr425vwjip6/AABbm9onImnwbYs7n0-NM7D6a?dl=0

Credits: Courtesy of Visit Santa Barbara/Danielle Methmann

Contact PR@santabarbaraca.com for additional images.