MEDIA VIRTUAL DESKSIDE OVERVIEW

Goals:

• In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and civil unrest, hear directly from journalists about how the times have impacted travel stories

• Understand journalist and outlet plans for 2020-2021 coverage – topics and trends

• Share updates and story ideas on Minnesota

Execution:

• In August 2020, Explore Minnesota, in partnership with Bellmont Partners hosted productive Zoom discussions with seven top national and regional travel writers and editors representing:

• Media contacts received additional information and curated gift boxes to keep our state top of mind
MEDIA VIRTUAL DESKSIDES INCLUDED:

Liza Weisstuch, freelance writer
Boston Globe, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, etc.

Michele Herrmann, freelance writer
Forbes, Travelocity, Smithsonian Mag, BBC, Lonely Planet, etc.

Stephanie Pearson, freelance writer
Outside, National Geographic Traveler, Travel + Leisure, etc.

Elaine Glusac, freelance writer
New York Times, MSN, Wall Street Journal, National Geographic Traveler, AARP, etc.

Nina Hahn, freelance writer
Chicago Magazine, National Geographic Traveler, etc.

Matt Meltzer, freelance writer
Matador Network, Thrillist, etc.

Stephanie Reynolds, features editor
Chicago Tribune
• **Varied comfort levels.** The pandemic has of course impacted national and regional travel media in a variety of ways:
  • Some aren’t planning to travel until at least 2021 vs. others are taking close-to-home trips to research regional travel stories. One is traveling and writing content like pre-pandemic conditions.

• **Customization is key.** This varying degree of comfort with traveling during the pandemic means it’s more important than ever to customize pitches/outreach to each writer.

• **Outlet staffing cuts.** Some newsrooms have cut staff and freelance writers and aren’t covering travel unless staff are taking personal trips and want to write about it.

• **Media want to cover Minnesota.** All seven contacts were interested in Minnesota, and most expressed interest in visiting Minnesota when more regular travel resumes.
TOP TRENDS & TOPICS

*Trends and topics* national and regional travel media are interested in and/or covering include:

- Outdoor activities, nature
- Road trips and close-to-home travel
- Camping and RVs
- Small towns, isolated areas
- Resorts and cabins
- Midwest destinations feel exotic – rediscovering hidden gems closer to home
- Interesting personalities, character-driven tales, people behind a destination
- Fall activities – fall color drives, apple orchards, pumpkin patches
- Quick getaways and last-minute trips that don’t require a lot of planning
- How businesses are making the most of the pandemic – unique ways they’re weathering restrictions and welcoming guests
- How restaurants/bars are pivoting; or any new openings during pandemic
- Unique outdoor winter activities
- “Leave no trace” concept – for newcomers to outdoor recreation
- What’s new in 2021
INITIAL RESULTS & PIPELINE OPPORTUNITIES

Initial results and immediate pipeline opportunities include:

- **New York Times coverage (Elaine Glusac):** What Month Is It? Pandemic Scrambles the Travel Calendar
- **Smithsonian Magazine (Michele Herrmann):** Coordinating story elements for Halloween celebration coverage
- **National Geographic (Stephanie Pearson):** Potential for International Dark Sky Certification (BWCAW and VNP)
- **AAA, Matador Network (Matt Meltzer + Michele Herrmann):** shared requested information on fall road trips and activities
- **Chicago Magazine, New York Times (Nina Hahn and Elaine Glusac):** shared requested information on winter activities
We supplemented virtual deskside conversations with outreach to additional media contacts. **Initial results and pipeline opportunities include:**

- **NBC News Online:** Museums are opening slowly – and differently
- **Writer for Men’s Journal, Budget Travel, Fatherly:** Covering road trips, fall foliage, luxury resorts
- **Writer for AAA World & Wichita Eagle:** Covering major expansions and openings; plans to reschedule a trip to Minnesota post-pandemic
- **Travelgirl:** Would like to visit Minnesota when travel opens up

Many writers also noted:

- They have resumed writing travel stories and are seeking fresh story ideas.
- Their perception of Minnesota hasn’t changed and has remained positive after the civil unrest.
NEXT STEPS

To continue the conversation and drive positive coverage of Minnesota:

• Explore Minnesota has shared customized story ideas and resources based on upcoming assignments and interests.

• Continue sharing news and building relationships to drive regional and national media coverage of Minnesota.

How can the Minnesota tourism industry get involved?

• Share what’s new, success stories, travel trends, and unique things happening in your destination for media outreach consideration.

• **Send news tips to:** alyssa.hayes@state.mn.us
Thank you!