

## Ohio tourism returns to slogan first used in 1984

Ohio's new tourism slogan, unveiled last month, is its old tourism slogan – "the heart of it all."

The return to the state's old slogan, first used between 1984 and 2001, is part of Gov. Mike DeWine's attempt to expand Ohio's tourism efforts to attract not only visitors, but new workers, residents and students to increase the state's stagnant population.

Since 2015, Ohio's tourism slogan has been "Ohio. find it here."

The slogan "The heart of it all" is, among other things, a nod to Ohio's borders being roughly in the shape of a heart.

Lydia Mihalik, director of the Ohio Department of Development, told the Plain Dealer that state officials decided to revive the slogan after speaking with people in Ohio's tourism industry, business leaders, and marketing experts.

Melinda Huntley, executive director of the Ohio Travel Association, said, "The tourism budget in Ohio hasn't been changed for 15 years.

"We haven't even kept up with inflation. If we want to activate this brand effectively – plus expand our mission – we have to be realistic about what it will take to do that," Huntley said.

Mihalik said her department intends to ask state lawmakers for more money to attract workers to the state.

– *cleveland.com*



Cory Lee Photo / Explore Minnesota

Visit Minnesota worked with Cory Lee to highlight accessible places in the state.

## DMOs seek authentic social content

Cory Lee has traveled to seven continents and more than 40 countries with the goal of helping wheelchair users travel the world. He has 32,000 followers on Instagram.

So when Explore Minnesota was looking to show off the state's wheelchair-accessible tourist destinations, they partnered with Lee for a social media campaign.

Lee spent several days in Minnesota, visiting Legacy of the Lakes Museum and downtown shops in Alexandria, where he raved about the smooth curb cuts, as well as Westwood Hills Nature Center and the Minnesota Science Museum. Lee then posted about his experiences on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and wrote about it on his website and for a post on Explore Minnesota's website.

For Explore Minnesota, working with influencers on social media helps the tourism department reach diverse and younger audiences who are keen on seeing authenticity in posts.

"We asked (Cory) to visit some accessible sites in our state and share with his followers about how you can have an accessible vacation in Minnesota," Explore Minnesota Communications Director Amy Barrett said. "When it comes from Cory, who actually has to get around in a wheelchair, it has a lot more credibility. That really helps us reach a target audience."

Working with influencers isn't new for regional state tourism departments, but they say they are being more selective about who they choose to work with and what audiences they are trying to reach.

South Dakota teamed up with Irene Ogeto, who calls herself the Black Hiking Queen, and The Mom Trotter (Karen Akpan), who is the founder of the Black Kids Do Travel organization, in 2022 to showcase the state's tourism scenes to a diverse audience.

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## DMOs seek authentic content for their social media channels

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Ogeto posted photos and Instagram reels of her hiking in the Black Hills and Wind Cave National Park, and Akpan and her family visited the Crazy Horse Memorial and Dinosaur Park, among other experiences.

“We just introduced a new strategic plan to reach a more diverse group of audiences,” South Dakota Department of Tourism Secretary Jim Hagen said. “You will see us focus on influencers — Asian American, Latino American and others — to demonstrate that this is a destination that will be welcoming.”

Hagen said authenticity is key when it comes to their influencer partnerships. That means no super-polished video or photos. The tourism department wants to see influencers be themselves and experience the sites naturally.

“People want to see authenticity in your marketing,” he said. “They want to see, what can I experience, what can I see and do when I get to this state or region? What is authentic about (our state)? And reaching them in a transparent and real way — nothing that is overly produced.”

When Explore Minnesota aimed to promote the 50th anniversary of the Twin Cities LGBTQ+ festival, they called on Justine and Sam of the Wanderful Wives to chronicle their experience visiting the event, the city and the parade.

They then wrote an article that was used in the Explore Minnesota



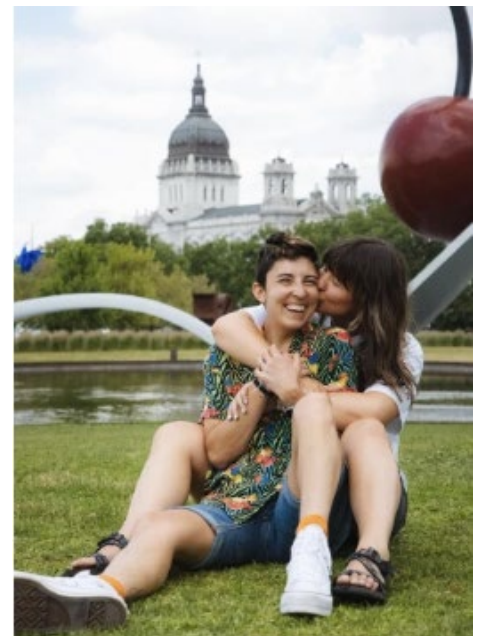
Karen Akpan Photo / The Mom Trotter

**Karen Akpan and her family at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota.**

North Dakota worked with LGBT advocate and travel blogger and journalist Mikah Meyer to showcase the state in 2022. He first visited the state in 2017 as part of his record-breaking national parks tour and returned in 2022 to work with Travel North Dakota.

Meyer, who has 67,000 followers on Instagram, “uses travel to advocate for others and to take audiences on journeys that inspire them to live ‘beyond convention,’” according to his website.

All three regional tourism departments said what they spend on influencer marketing varies depending on the person. Generally, states will pay all expenses associated with the travel and sometimes additional fees in exchange for a set amount of social media posts from the visitor.



WanderfulWives Photo / Instagram

**Justine and Sam Golden partnered with Explore Minnesota.**

Other times, tourism departments have the influencer contribute blog posts to their website.

Expedition Kristen has teamed up with Minnesota and North Dakota.

On her blog, she wrote about 10 dog-friendly things to do in Fargo, the 17 best museums to see in Minnesota and hidden gems in Duluth, among other posts.

Travel North Dakota says its 2022 influencer campaign reached an audience of 108,000 people and secured 725,000 impressions with 80,000 social media engagements. Sara Otte Coleman, director of tourism and marketing for North Dakota Department of Commerce, said the state operates on a biennial budget for its media trip and influencer expenses. The most recent budget is \$50,000.

— *grandforksherald.com*