

Santa Cruz Sentinel

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County most LGBTQ-friendly travel destination, survey reports

Visit Santa Cruz County holds seminar and training to better welcome LGBTQ+ community

SANTA CRUZ — The county is considered the most LGBTQ-friendly destination of other tested tourist destinations in California, according to a recent Visit Santa Cruz County survey.

The survey came out of an initiative from the Visit Santa Cruz County Board of Directors to attract visitors of the LGBTQ+ community, according to Visit Santa Cruz County CEO and Executive Vice President Maggie Ivy. Part of the initiative is working with the Diversity Center of Santa Cruz County on how the hospitality industry can better welcome this community, she said. Ivy said the initiative focuses on the San Francisco Bay Area because there is a large LGBTQ+ community there and because the region falls within a three-hour drive of Santa Cruz — which is how far the majority of leisure visitors will travel to get to the county.

Survey results were released Thursday at an LGBTQ+ Hospitality Forum and Training Seminar in Santa Cruz. About 110 people in the hospitality and tourism industries attended the forum and seminar, including Beach Street Inn & Suites, Dream Inn Santa Cruz, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, Shadowbrook Restaurant and others. Hotel Paradox held the event and the Diversity Center co-hosted it.

Cornell Verdeja-Woodson, global head of diversity, equity and inclusion at Looker, spoke at the training. Verdeja-Woodson said he taught about proper language and terminology when speaking to the LGBTQ+ community. He said the forum was important because it gave members of the LGBTQ+ community an opportunity to speak about their needs and what is lacking, such as providing activities for all types of couples. The forum also helped hospitality and tourism staff recognize and better understand the diversity of this community, he said.

“I see us as being really poised to continue to bring in the hospitality industry,” Ivy said. “And I think also yesterday’s [Thursday’s] event indicated a strong interest and also helps highlight for us those businesses that really want to be in from the beginning and look to get feedback from them on next steps.”

The survey, conducted by LGBTQ+ research firm Community Marketing & Insights, gathered data from more than 1,000 self-identified members of the LGBTQ+ community living in California. These participants comprised of millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers, the latter being the majority.

While Santa Cruz County was found to be the most LGBTQ-friendly destination of other tourist destinations included in the study, other leading destinations were Sonoma, Napa, Monterey and Lake Tahoe.

The top three reasons that LGBTQ+ visitors from the San Francisco Bay Area visit Santa Cruz County were the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk (50%), the beach (47%) and to relax (43%), according to the survey

With results from the survey and the forum, Visit Santa Cruz County will look at how to market to the LGBTQ+ community and continue to train front-line staff of hospitality and tourism businesses. Some of these changes may include inclusive marketing and providing all-gender restrooms at hotels.

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