



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **DESTINATION CLEVELAND ANNOUNCES SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN MEETING PLANNER, POTENTIAL VISITOR AND LOCAL PERCEPTIONS**

ROI STUDY VALIDATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM'S EFFECT ON THE BROADER ECONOMY

**CLEVELAND** (March 23, 2017) – At its 2017 annual meeting today, [Destination Cleveland](#), the only organization in Cuyahoga County responsible for growing the travel and tourism industry, announced the outcomes of recently fielded research which show meaningful progress in the organization's efforts to change perceptions of Cleveland. The findings underscore Destination Cleveland's role as a vital contributor to the region's economy and provide an updated analysis of metrics first measured in 2012 and again in 2015 regarding the visitor experience, as well as the perceptions of potential and recent visitors, meeting planners and locals about Cleveland as a destination for leisure and meetings and conventions travel.

### **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF CLEVELAND**

#### *Meeting Planners*

Since the launch of its visitor-facing "This is Cleveland" destination brand in 2014, Destination Cleveland has focused on changing the perception of Cleveland among its target audiences through several initiatives. Meeting planners, whose primary job is to evaluate and select cities to host conventions and business-related events, were an important area of focus, particularly as the opening of a new, state-of-the-art convention center anchored Cleveland's re-emergence as a place to host large-scale events.

Research conducted in 2012 by the Watkins Research Group evaluated Cleveland as one of more than 40 meetings and conventions destinations in the U.S. and Canada and revealed that planners would hardly consider the city as a meeting host due to a lackluster destination narrative, concerns about cleanliness, safety and friendliness, and an inadequate number of hotel rooms.

The most recent Watkins Meeting Planner Research Study identified Cleveland as one of the top 15 most improved meetings destinations, as a result of its advances across the eight factors considered most important by meeting planners when choosing a meeting destination. Factors include safety and security, convention center facilities, accessibility within the city, etc. When evaluated by meeting planners who had previously hosted an event in the city (Destination Cleveland's clients), Cleveland secured a 12<sup>th</sup> place ranking (out of 40 cities) as a city that previous clients would recommend to their peers as a place to host a meeting. This data reinforces previous findings that visitor perceptions about Cleveland significantly improve after traveling to and experiencing the destination first-hand.

#### *Potential Visitors*

While first-hand experiences yield a more favorable perception of Cleveland as a destination for business and leisure travel, an outdated city narrative significantly impedes initial consideration of the destination as a place to visit.

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In 2015, a study conducted by [TNS Global](#) revealed that only 33 percent of potential visitors said they would definitely or probably consider a trip to Cleveland. While Cleveland contained many of the assets that would create a true visitor experience, potential visitors were unaware of the city's travel-related attractions and experiences.

Today, 38 percent of potential visitors would consider a leisure trip to Cleveland, which is on par with both Columbus and Pittsburgh. With the launch of the visitor brand and an integrated marketing effort aimed at improving Cleveland's narrative, Destination Cleveland has made significant strides in closing the communication gap. The organization's annual campaigns target millennials and Gen-Xers in drive markets and showcases Cleveland as irreverently fun, eclectic, passionate, bold and world-class.

#### *Residents*

While the crux of the destination brand effort is designed to change a potential visitor's consideration of Cleveland as a place to visit, a critical component of changing visitor perception is positive word of mouth by a destination's residents. Due in large part to the organization's launch of [#ThisisCLE](#), a platform created for Clevelanders to share their passion about their hometown, the TNS Global study also indicated that the number of residents who would recommend Cleveland as a visitor destination significantly increased from 54 percent in 2015 to 77 percent in 2016.

#### **IMPACT OF DESTINATION BRAND CAMPAIGN**

In addition to driving changed perceptions of Cleveland, the Destination Cleveland visitor brand has also proven successful with regard to its financial impact on the community. In partnership with [Longwoods International](#), a respected leader in brand strategy and ROI research who was contracted to evaluate Cleveland's travel and tourism campaign, Destination Cleveland announced that for every advertising dollar spent to execute the brand campaign, the return generates \$195 in visitor spending and \$5 in tax revenue. The study also cited that, in 2016 alone, Destination Cleveland's ad campaign helped drive 1.2 million visitors to Cleveland.

Moreover, the new ROI study validated that advertising Cleveland as a visitor destination creates a halo effect on every aspect of the local community's economic development. In addition to improving the city's image, promoting the visitor brand encourages people to consider Cleveland as a place to live, work and play as well as visit.

These findings build upon previous research conducted in 2014 by Oxford Economics, a world leader in global forecasting and quantitative research, which concluded that destination marketing improves a city's overall profile thereby creating growth in the broader economy. The Oxford Economics study also concluded that those cities that prioritize destination marketing efforts experience an increase in economic development through non-tourism channels while creating a lasting impression on visitors.

For more information about Destination Cleveland or visitor-related developments, attractions and activities, please visit [thisiscleveland.com](http://thisiscleveland.com), follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and subscribe to our channels on [YouTube](#) and [Pinterest](#).

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***ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND:*** Destination Cleveland is Cleveland's convention and visitors bureau. This private, non-profit organization's mission is to drive economic impact and stimulate community vitality for Greater Cleveland through leisure and business travel. Cleveland welcomes more than 17 million visitors annually. For more information, visit [www.thisiscleveland.com](http://www.thisiscleveland.com).