

Stand with Blacks in Travel & Tourism

The Travel & Tourism Industry Must do More!

If the civil unrest in our nation due to racial and social injustices is not a wake-up call for the travel and tourism industry, then I don't know what will be. Over the past week, several CEOs of major corporations have spoken out specifically against systemic racism endured by black people in our country. Many have taken swift action to try to justify their failure to address the lack of diversity and inclusion in their companies, or failure to support the advancement of worthy black leaders, founders and black-led organizations. They have been very clear in speaking out against racial injustices endured by black Americans. They have verbally acknowledged and said the name "George Floyd" in their statements to further iterate their support for protesters against inequality for the many black men and women who had their lives taken by racist police officers using excessive force when encountering blacks. Brand USA, where is your statement on racial injustice and support of blacks in the industry? How many destination marketing organizations' (DMOs) CEOs have issued a verbal or written statement on their websites about the civil unrest and racial injustices of blacks? Why are white people afraid to address the elephant in the room? Why have so many remained silent? Silence says a lot. No industry should be exempted from unequivocally acknowledging the pain of the racial injustices felt by blacks in their companies, organizations and industries.

We can count the number of black CEOs and VPs at DMOs on both hands and feet. BTT is certain many will beg to differ and boast about the diversity of the hospitality industry. Let's chat about that for a minute. We agree that there is plenty diversity in hospitality service jobs as most are filled with Blacks and Hispanics barely earning a livable wage. This diverse pool of hospitality employees is among the millions who have been laid off or furloughed and are now relying on unemployment (if they can get it) and the long lines to get food for their families. Where is the broad diversity in executive leadership at the more than 500 DMOs in the U.S.? Where are the black tourism businesses (tour operators, travel advisors, hotel and restaurant owners) prospering in the industry and benefiting from inbound travelers? Even before COVID-19 hit the industry hard, many black tourism businesses were not profiting in the industry. There are less than 30 black tour operators in the U.S. and less than 20% operate full-time businesses due to none or very little access to tourists' foot traffic and their dollars? Why? Because they cannot afford the "pay-to-play" that this industry thrives on in order to be marketed to domestic and international audiences. While few destinations do have multicultural tourism departments led by black VPs, most do not. Why is that the case?

The scales are not balanced in this industry when you look at the economic impact of those who truly benefit from public tax dollars (those hotel bed taxes travelers pay) versus the small black tourism businesses and attractions that do not receive support, visibility and access to the billions of tourism dollars that flowed into destinations prior to COVID-19. As the industry is developing recovery plans, this is the opportune time to ramp up their diversity and inclusion efforts to ensure that black businesses, attractions and neighborhoods benefit from their marketing efforts.

It's time to become uncomfortable, take risks to change the status quo, and create equality while diversifying the industry through broader support of black businesses and executive inclusion and promotion of blacks in travel and tourism. Join us at www.blacksintourism.org.



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BUILDING BETTER TOGETHER