



## **2026 SPRING TRAVEL FORUM**

May 14-15, 2026 | Hopkinsville, Kentucky

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**All events will take place at the Bruce Convention Center unless noted otherwise in the schedule. Hopkinsville is in the CENTRAL time zone.**

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### **WEDNESDAY, MAY 13**

- 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.      **CERTIFIED KENTUCKY TOURISM PROFESSIONAL (CKTP) PROGRAM SPRING FIELD VISIT – “BATTERCATION 101”**
- 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.      **“ON YOUR OWN” AREA ACTIVITIES**
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### **THURSDAY, MAY 14**

- 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.      **CERTIFIED KENTUCKY TOURISM PROFESSIONAL (CKTP) PROGRAM BREAKFAST**  
Peg Hayes – Co-owner, Casey Jones Distillery
- 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.      **“ON YOUR OWN” AREA ACTIVITIES**
- 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.      **EXHIBITOR SET UP**
- 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.      **BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**
- 11:00 a.m.      **REGISTRATION OPENS**
- 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.      **TRADESHOW OPENS**

12:45 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

### **WELCOME REMARKS**

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

### **LESSONS LEARNED FROM HERE AND THERE**

Three highly respected Kentucky tourism directors have extensive experience in other states. One now works in Virginia, another came to Kentucky with years of tourism experience in Missouri and the third, although leading a Kentucky DMO, has daily involvement with Ohio. All three will share insights from their out of state experience and offer perspectives about Kentucky tourism stemming from the combination of their Kentucky experiences and their work in other states.

#### **SPEAKERS:**

- **SAMANTHA JOHNSON** – *Tourism Director at Visit Staunton Virginia*
- **ALYSSA PHARES** – *President & CEO, Paducah Convention & Visitors Bureau*
- **MODERATOR: JULIE KIRKPATRICK** – *President & CEO, meetNKY*

2:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

### **KENTUCKY-EH! UNDERSTANDING THE CANADIAN TRAVELER AND DEALING WITH CURRENT CHALLENGES**

The Canadian market for Kentucky tourism is down but it is definitely not out. Despite current challenges, Canadians represent an import segment of Kentucky visitors and are still the largest of our international markets. This session will outline key characteristics of Canadian travelers and strategies for navigating today's challenges.

#### **SPEAKERS:**

- **CHENELLE MCGEE** – *International & Group Sales, Kentucky Department of Tourism*
- **KARLY MELO** – *Marketing & Public Relations Director, Reach Global Marketing*

3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

### **TRADESHOW BREAK**

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

**DON'T MISS THE BOAT: WHAT PAUSING FOR TRAVEL CAN REMIND US ABOUT GREAT SERVICE**

Service excellence is essential in every leadership role, especially those in tourism. In this high energy presentation Tim Richardson shares powerful lessons from the road -including insights from his recent adventure to Greenland – that connect directly to the everyday challenges and opportunities tourism leaders face. Through compelling stories, striking visuals, and real-life examples of both excellent and poor service, Tim will encourage attendees to “look for the yes” and find meaningful ways to lead with empathy, flexibility, resilience, and teamwork. You’ll gain a fresh perspective on your role as a leader. It’s a call to pause, reflect, and recommit to making every interaction count.

**SPEAKER: TIM RICHARDSON** – *Total Development Resources, Inc.*

6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

**EVENING EVENT**

*Casey Jones Distillery*

8:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

**AFTERGLOW**

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**FRIDAY, MAY 15**

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

**BREAKFAST**

8:45 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

**AI DISRUPTION: WELCOME TO THE NEW WORLD**

The travel industry is no stranger to disruption, but AI is elevating disruption to an entirely new level. This session explores how AI is transforming the way travelers access and use information when making travel decisions, and how these shifts are reshaping travel and tourism marketing. It will highlight current trends, emerging developments, and what the future may hold. The session will also examine the

implications for hotels and attractions, with a particular focus on destination information and marketing strategies.

**SPEAKER: RICH BRYANT** – *Senior Vice President, Destination Strategy, Tiki*

9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

**FESTIVALS: LEAD, COLLABORATE, OR...?**

Festivals can be powerful tourism drivers, but the role of a DMO—and its partners—in supporting them is often less defined. Faced with multiple paths, how should destinations decide whether to lead or collaborate, and are there other paths to consider in supporting a festival? This session brings together a panel of local tourism leaders to explore practical strategies, key considerations, and real-world approaches to festival support. Attendees will gain clarity on how DMOs can align resources, strengthen partnerships, and maximize the economic and community impact of festivals.

**SPEAKERS:**

- **MODERATOR: BRANDON PENNINGTON** – *Executive Director, Harlan Tourism*
- **TRACI CUNNINGHAM** – *Executive Director, Oak Grove Tourism & Convention Commission*
- **ABBY DIXON** – *Executive Director, Henderson Tourist Commission*

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

**TRADESHOW BREAK**

11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**KENTUCKY FILM OFFICE: PRIORITIES, PLANS & PROGRESS**

During the 2025 legislative session Kentucky's film and entertainment industry received a major boost with the passage Senate Bill 1 establishing the Kentucky Film Leadership Council and Kentucky Film Office. In January of this year another important step in that progress occurred with Meg Fister's appointment as the executive director of the office. During this session Meg will discuss her plans and priorities for establishing position Kentucky as a premier

destination for film and television production and the pivotal role to be played by the Kentucky tourism industry.

***SPEAKER: MEG FISTER*** – Executive Director, Kentucky Film Office

12:00 p.m. – 12:15 p.m.     **CONFERENCE WRAP UP**

12:15 p.m.                     **TRADESHOW CLOSES**