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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SLO CAL SUMMIT SELLS OUT AS 300+ TOURISM LEADERS LOOK BEYOND THE VISIT

Sessions covered visitor research, AI, brand loyalty and what FIFA and the LA28 Olympic Games mean for SLO CAL.



San Luis Obispo County, California, October 30, 2026 – Visit SLO CAL (VSC), the official destination marketing and management organization (DMMO) for San Luis Obispo County (SLO CAL), hosted its sold-out 2026 [SLO CAL Summit](#) on October 29 at the Alex Madonna Expo Center in San Luis Obispo, California. The annual event brought together more than 300 tourism leaders, industry partners and stakeholders to explore how the industry can create lasting value for visitors, businesses and communities.

Under the theme “Beyond the Visit: Building What Lasts,” the 2026 SLO CAL Summit focused on the long-term impact of tourism and the shared responsibility of the region’s tourism industry to shape memorable visitor experiences, strengthen demand and build a more resilient destination. Summit ticket sales outpaced previous years, reflecting strong industry engagement and interest in the future of tourism in SLO CAL.

“The strength of SLO CAL has always come from our ability to work together. Over the past decade, the Tourism Marketing District has helped bring our communities, businesses and destination partners to the same table, creating a strong foundation for long-term growth. As lodging supply evolves and competition for travelers continues, our opportunity is to drive demand responsibly while supporting local businesses and protecting the quality of life that makes this place so special,” said Cathy Cartier, President & CEO of VSC.

Key Speakers and Sessions:

The 2026 SLO CAL Summit featured destination marketing research, practical applications of artificial intelligence, brand loyalty strategies and insights into international tourism



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opportunities. Speakers and panelists explored how the industry can turn emerging trends and visitor interest into lasting economic and community benefits.

- **Beyond the Visit: Building What Lasts**

Cathy Cartier, President & CEO of VSC, delivered the keynote address, looking beyond the moment guests arrive to the lasting impact tourism creates. From driving demand in a growing destination to AI innovation and the renewal of the Tourism Marketing District, Cartier explored how to turn first impressions into enduring relationships and highlighted the role everyone plays in building what lasts.

- **Marketing That Builds Demand: From Insights to Impact**

Molly Cano, Chief Marketing Officer of VSC, shared how visitor research shaped VSC's marketing strategy, influenced the Turns Well Taken campaign and informed new opportunities to reach future visitors. Through campaign results, the debut of the new family brand spot and a first look at meetings research, Cano demonstrated how marketing is evolving to build demand for SLO CAL.

- **The AI Cheat Code: Start With Your Work, Not the Tool**

Matt Clement, Executive Vice President of Karsh Hagan Madden, led an in-depth session exploring how business professionals can use AI as a force multiplier by starting with the work that matters rather than chasing the latest tools. Clement shared a practical framework for integrating AI to save time, sharpen output and keep one's strategy at the center of the process.

- **Reaping the Benefits of Brand Devotion**

Chris Kneeland, Co-Founder of CULT Collective, examined the psychology of brand devotion and how to turn satisfied travelers into advocates. Drawing on loyalty leaders from around the world, he shared ideas for deepening the connections that bring visitors back and inspire word-of-mouth interest for SLO CAL.

- **Going Global: FIFA, the Olympics and What International Momentum Means for SLO CAL**

Tammy Haughey, Managing Partner of The Shipyard, moderated a panel with Angie Briggs, Senior Vice President of Industry Partnerships and Engagement and Chief Development Officer at Brand USA, and Leona Reed, Vice President of Global Marketing at Visit California. Panelists shared lessons from the FIFA World Cup and LA28 Olympic Games planning, and how Highway 1 can help SLO CAL turn global attention into visits.

"As traveler preferences evolve, we have an opportunity to build on what makes SLO CAL unique while reaching new audiences through more targeted storytelling, meaningful partnerships and campaigns that inspire people to experience the destination for themselves. The distinct character of our communities is one of our greatest strengths, and our marketing strategy is designed to bring those experiences to life and build lasting demand for SLO CAL," said Molly Cano, Chief Marketing Officer of VSC.



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Tourism's Economic Impact in San Luis Obispo County

SLO CAL's tourism economy generated \$112.5 million in local tax revenue in 2025 and supported 24,580 jobs countywide, according to Dean Runyan Associates. Tourism revenue helps fund local services and reduces the financial burden on residents. Without tourism-generated tax revenue, local households would need to contribute an estimated \$1,010 annually to provide the same economic benefit.

Celebrating SLO CAL's Local Businesses and Wine Industry

The 2026 SLO CAL Summit concluded with a reception where attendees continued conversations, strengthened industry connections and celebrated the region's tourism community. The reception featured wines generously donated by local partners representing the SLO Coast and Paso Robles AVAs, highlighting the diversity of SLO CAL's wine industry.

Attendees also had the opportunity to shop the SLO CAL Crafted Pop-Up Marketplace, featuring locally made products and goods from businesses throughout San Luis Obispo County.

2026 SLO CAL Summit Sponsors

The 2026 SLO CAL Summit was made possible with support from Madonna Inn, Kramer Events, Shell Beach Floral Design and All About Events, whose contributions helped bring the event and reception to life.

For more information about the SLO CAL Summit, visit slocal.com/summit or email Mayla Lohnes, mayla@slocal.com

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ABOUT VISIT SLO CAL:

Visit SLO CAL is the countywide nonprofit destination marketing and management organization (DMMO) for San Luis Obispo County, known as SLO CAL. Positioned midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, SLO CAL features more than 80 miles of breathtaking coastline, rolling vineyards covering over 40,000 acres and some of California's most scenic open roads, including the iconic Highway 1. Visit SLO CAL promotes the region as a premier West Coast destination, celebrated for its signature slower pace of life and diverse, immersive experiences. By enhancing the area's reputation as a dynamic place to live, work and visit, Visit SLO CAL strengthens the local economy and creates opportunities for the entire community. Built on research and a strategy of continuous improvement, the organization is committed to showcasing SLO CAL's unique charm to travelers from around the world. For more information, go to slocal.com.

ABOUT SLO CAL SUMMIT:

Visit SLO CAL's SLO CAL Summit is an annual celebration of the tourism industry. This event brings together multiple sectors throughout SLO CAL including lodging investors, tourism-facing businesses, elected officials and destination marketing organization (DMO) partners for an afternoon of education, updates from SLO CAL's President & CEO and networking. For more information, go to slocal.com/summit.