

Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance 2013 Annual Report



Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance
309 Lake Street, Penn Yan, NY 14527
315.536.7488, www.fingerlakes.org

MISSION:

Lead economic growth and development through exemplary promotion of the Finger Lakes region as a world class tourism destination.

VISION:

Be the recognized leader for destination marketing strategies and resources in the Finger Lakes region.

A Message from Our President and 2013 Chairman of the Board

In 2013, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (FLTA) successfully executed its Marketing Plan and provided programming to our partners that allowed them to customize their own marketing efforts through FLTA. FLTA was also successful in obtaining a line item in the New York State budget for the first time in the history of the organization! These funds will be used to augment FLTA's already existing marketing efforts.

The FLTA website posted a record number of visitors for the year, up 25% from the prior year! As FLTA focused on its Alexa score and worked to improve this score, it resulted in over 695,000 visits to FingerLakes.org. In looking at other regional tourism websites, FingerLakes.org was scoring higher than any of the regional competitive set and was close to the Alexa score for the I Love NY website.

FLTA thoughtfully invested marketing dollars to avoid duplication of efforts with other entities promoting the region. Investment in public relations was an example of this deliberate decision. Although FLTA invested little by way of funds into public relations due to the investment by others, FLTA did have multiple inquiries by writers for assistance with FAMS, photos and facts. Within the content of this Year in Review publication, you will find additional public relations results from FLTA.

The 2013 Oxford Economic tourism numbers are not yet published by region, but the state as a whole is reporting visitor spending at \$59.2 billion which shows growth from the 2012 year where visitor spent at a level of \$57.3 billion. It is hoped that the regional breakdown will be made available in the summer of 2014. Please note that the Oxford Economic research and other tourism related reports do reside on our website and are available for review/use. For 2012, the last completed Oxford report, tourism for the Finger Lakes region only expanded to \$2.8 billion for visitor spending over the prior year, representing 2% growth.

In addition, the Board's investment in the Book a Room Now (aka: JackRabbit) system again is posting results. With this accommodation booking widget, housed on the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance's website, a visitor can locate available partner accommodations from across the region. No fees are charged to partners or visitors and as of year-end, over 143,000 referrals were made to participating accommodation partner's websites resulting in an estimated 14,000 room nights that were booked in the Finger Lakes tourism region during 2013.

As we look forward to 2014, we are planning to deliver cooperative marketing programs that focus on electronic marketing media while still providing print collateral materials, trade and travel show participation, the AAA program, and manning of the Thruway (I-90) Information Centers. Investment will continue in the Book a Room Now reservation system and plans for 2014 include the addition of a ticket purchasing feature (aka widget) on the highly visited FingerLakes.org website. It will be through the efforts of the state, FLTA Board and private/public partners' investment and cooperation that we will continue to promote the region as a desired destination.



Cynthia Kimble
FLTA President



Susan Dove
FLTA Chairman of the Board

Our Staff and Board of Directors

2013 FLTA Staff

Cynthia Kimble, President – cindyk@fingerlakes.org
Mark Illig, Director of Sales – marki@fingerlakes.org
Karen Colizzi Noonan, Office Manager – karen@fingerlakes.org
Jack Carlson, IT/E-Marketing Administrator – jackc@fingerlakes.org
Barb Kolonoski, Sales Representative – barbk@fingerlakes.org
Kristy LaManche, FL-LOWPA Program Coordinator – kristyl@fingerlakes.org
Helan Bagley, FL-LOWPA Program Assistant

2013 FLTA Board of Directors

Susan Dove – Chair – Skaneateles Chamber of Commerce – Onondaga County
Debbie Meritsky – Vice Chair – Black Sheep Inn – Steuben County
Sarah Wiles – Secretary – Mid-Lakes Navigation – At Large Representative
Gene Pierce – Treasurer – Glenora Wine Cellars – Yates County
Joe Gober – Past Chair – Americana Vineyards & Winery – Seneca County
Hilary Ford – Seward House – Cayuga County
Sheila Thomas – Holiday Inn Elmira – Chemung County
Sam Kryger – Greek Peak Mountain Resort – Cortland County
Mary Alice May – Beachcomber of Conesus Lake – Livingston County
Dave Bunnell – Annie Walker's, LLC – Ontario County
Eva Mae Musgrave – Edge of Thyme Inn – Tioga County
Laura Winter Falk – Experience! the Finger Lakes – Tompkins County
Bonnie Hays – Historic Palmyra – Wayne County
Ken McConnell – Barristers Bed & Breakfast – Seneca County
Barb Kolonoski – Hilton Garden Inn Horseheads – At Large Representative
Mike Bristol – Seaway Trail – At Large Representative
Tim Joseph – Finger Lakes State Parks – At Large Representative
Peter Arnold – Genesee Country Village & Museum – Monroe County
Coleen Fabrizi – Corning Gaffer District – Steuben County
Dennis Fagan – Schuyler County
Morgen McLaughlin – Finger Lakes Wine Country – Ex-Officio
Laury Ellen Poland – Finger Lakes Wine Country – Ex-Officio

2013 FL-LOWPA Board of Directors

Craig Schutt, Chair - Madison County
Scott Ingmire, Vice Chair - Tompkins County
Elizabeth Mangle, Secretary - Hamilton County
Russ Nemecek, Treasurer - Onondaga County
Brian Wohnsiedler, Eastern Regional Rep - Jefferson County
Jim Malyj, Central Regional Rep - Seneca County
Katie Sommerfeldt, Western Region Rep - Orleans County

What Our Partners Are Saying:

"The Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance is one of my best investments to date. You really work hard for your members! What you are doing has bumped up my standing on Bing.com (that means 1,000 more customers see my business name). If people don't join the Alliance they are losing money... I can prove it!"

-- William Boychuck, Seneca Wine Boat Tours



FLTA History

Founded in 1919, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (FLTA) is an association of private sector attractions, tourism related businesses and participating county tourism offices working together to enhance and promote visitor businesses for the 9,000 square mile, state designated tourism region. FLTA represents partners in all 14 counties of the region which include Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Livingston, Monroe, Onondaga, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne and Yates.

At 95 years of age, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance is one of the oldest destination marketing organizations in the nation.

New Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Partners in 2013

Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance was happy to welcome the following organizations as new partners in 2013:

1837 Cobblestone Cottage	Knapp & Schlappi
A Stone's Throw Bed & Breakfast	Manor House
Annie's Guest House	Oak Park Marina & Resort
Catharine Cottages Bed & Breakfast	Optima Benefits Group
CB Craft Brewers	The Pine Grove Bed & Breakfast
The Cellar on the River	Playin' Hookey Charters
The Cottage on Wyers Point	Pole Position Raceway at Destiny USA
Country Comforts Bed & Breakfast	School's Out Charters
Crush on Canandaigua	Seneca Springs Resort
Dryden Lake Festival	Smith Opera House
Fairfield Inn Horseheads	Strawberry Fields Hydroponic Farm
Ferris Hills at West Lake	Upstate Guide Service
Finger Lakes Lodging	VanCleaf Homestead Bed and Breakfast
Finger Lakes Realty	West Lake Kayak & Paddle
Finger Lakes Vacation Rentals	The Wilson Press
Gaffer Grille & Tap Room	Wine Trail Vacation Rentals on Seneca Lake
Lancellotti Dining Room at Geneva on the Lake	WonderWorks at Destiny USA
Geva Theatre Center	
Hangar Theatre Company	
Hazlitt's Red Cat Cellars	
Hobbit Hollow Bed & Breakfast	
Holiday Inn Express Canandaigua	
Inn at the Gaffer Grille	
The Inn at Varick Winery	

Visitors Now Able to Find Availability for the Finger Lakes Region at Area Accommodations

In January of 2012 the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance rolled out the Book a Room Now feature on FingerLakes.org. Book a Room Now is a program through Jack Rabbit Systems that ties into an accommodation partner's current reservation system and pulls availability to display on to FingerLakes.org for visitors to search quickly and easily for their accommodation needs.



Screen shot of the Book a Room Now search feature on FingerLakes.org.

In the event that an FLTA partner does not have a reservation system currently in place, Book a Room aka Jack Rabbit will provide them with one at no additional charge to the partner.

The Board of Directors took on the cost to implement this feature in 2012 and continued to provide this feature to partners completely free of additional charge in 2013. The Board decided to keep this feature at no additional cost to partner businesses to highlight the extreme value in visitor's ability to search for regional accommodations.

Partner businesses will show up randomly in a search query based on availability to ensure equality among businesses.

Book a Room resulted in 146,820 searches for accommodations in 2013 and 143,194 referrals to partner business websites to make reservations or collect more information. It is estimated that this system booked 14,000 room nights in the Finger Lakes region.



Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance By the Numbers

In 2013, FLTA...

- Received **1,793** toll free calls to the office.
- The attendants at the Thruway Information Centers in Warners and Pembroke greeted **46,642** visitors to the Finger Lakes and distributed a total of **160,498** pieces of literature.
- At both the Pembroke and Warners travel plazas on the NYS Thruway **16,950** Finger Lakes Regional Travel Guides were distributed and **14,170** Finger Lakes Map and Mini Guides were handed out.
- Recorded **526,673** first time visits and **694,566** total visits to FingerLakes.org increasing visitation 27% over 2012.
- 2013 saw **3,044,781** page views on FingerLakes.org. This is a 7% increase over 2012.
- Trained **155** AAA/CAA offices in 2013 in **11** states and provinces.
- Trained **681** AAA/CAA agents on the assets of the Finger Lakes representing a **11%** decrease over 2012 at 761 but webinars were also offered.
- A total of **43** new partners joined FLTA in 2013.

2013 Consumer Shows

In order to measure the pulse of visitors from key markets areas throughout the Northeast and showcase the many new attractions and events the Finger Lakes has to offer, FLTA attends multiple consumer shows each year. FLTA attended the following shows in 2013:

January - AAA Great Vacations Expo: Columbus - 1,051 booth visitors

January - Philadelphia Inquirer Travel Show: - 563 booth visitors

March - AAA Southern New England: Foxboro - 1,338 booth visitors

March - Travel & Vacation Show: Ottawa - 1,116 booth visitors

September - Connecticut Women's Show: Hartford - 984 booth visitors

November - Toronto Women's Show: Toronto - 750 booth visitors

Altogether an estimated 5,802 people visited the Finger Lakes booth at consumer shows where 2013 Finger Lakes Regional Travel Guides were distributed to all.

As explained later under email marketing, in 2013 all consumer show leads were segmented to track the interest of each show's audience in Finger Lakes messaging and thusly reinforcing FLTA's decision to attend the show in 2014.



Get Involved Today!

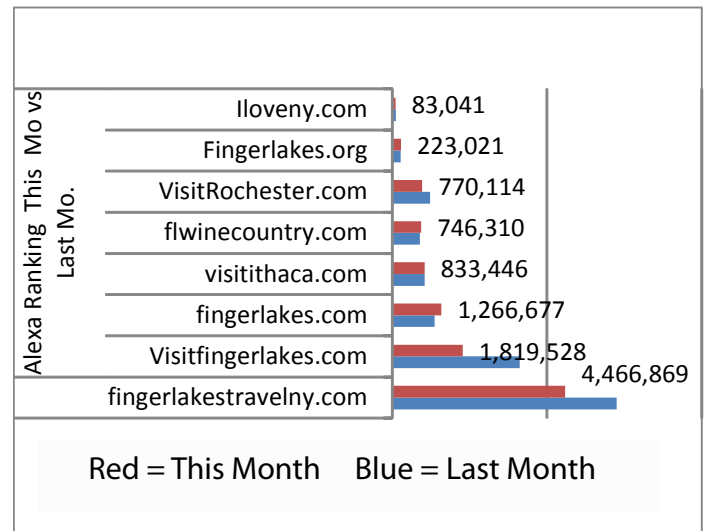
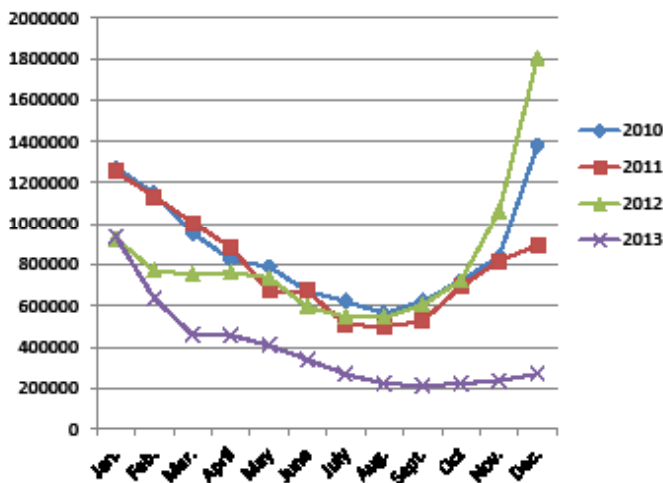
If you or someone you know might be interested in joining FLTA as a partner, contact Director of Sales Barb Kolonoski at 607-425-0134 for more information today!

2013 Digital Media Statistics

FLTA's website FingerLakes.org is the internet's premier source for Finger Lakes travel information. In 2013, there were 694,566 visits to FingerLakes.org, representing a 27% increase in first time visitors to the site over 2012. FingerLakes.org saw 3,044,781 page views. The average time on site hovered around the 4 minutes and 7 second mark.

In 2013, FLTA saw large improvements in website performance. This performance was tracked through Alexa.com which is a website ranking system that grades the overall health and performance of a website. FingerLakes.org's Alexa ranking reached an average of 231,403 and the closer the ranking number to zero, the better the grade. FingerLakes.org was outranked only by ILoveNY.com in 2013. SEO efforts and improvements to FingerLakes.org are ongoing as a way to drive Finger Lakes search relevancy to allow visitors to find FLTA as the #1 resource for Finger Lakes information.

Alexa Monthly Rankings



Social Media

Facebook

In mid-July 2013, FLTA's administrative Facebook page, 'Finger Lakes Tourism' maximized the number of friends that the page could have at 5,000. Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance staff made efforts to migrate the followers of this personal page over to 'Like' the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance business page. The business page also is the preferred method for businesses and organizations to keep in touch with customers. At the end of the 2013 year, 5,422 people had "liked" the FLTA fan page and were receiving daily updates. FLTA will work on efforts to migrate personal page followers over to 'like' the business page to reach the goal of ultimately discontinue use of the personal page.

Twitter

On Twitter, followers of @TourFingerLakes reached a total of 4,416 followers at the end of the year representing a whopping 87% increase over 2012. Twitter was used for one-to-one interaction with potential Finger Lakes visitors, residents, travel writers, travel agents, Finger Lakes business partners and other industry professionals.

Pinterest

FLTA stays engaged with Pinterest, which allows users to post images to digital corkboards that they can organize by topic. These images link back to a website for a full article or more information on the image. In 2013, roughly 750 people were following FLTA pinboards that fell in line with headings similar to those on the website including 'Finger Lakes Places to Stay' 'Finger Lakes Wineries, Breweries & More' 'Finger Lakes Attractions' and so on. FLTA encourages and invites partners to post pins to our Pinterest account pinboards to further promote engagement.

2013 Winemaker for a Week Promotion



In 2013 Greek Peak Mountain Resort, the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail, and the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance came together to for a fourth year offering and promoting a unique Finger Lakes experiential vacation. Winemaker for a Week gave entrants the opportunity to work side by side with Finger Lakes winemakers to learn the winemaking process from vine to bottle. Cayuga Lake Wine Trail wineries that offered a hands on experience included Long Point Winery, Six Mile Creek Vineyard, King Ferry Winery, Americana Vineyards & Winery, and Knapp Winery. During their stay in the Finger Lakes, week long accommodations were provided by Greek Peak Mountain Resort.

Entrants were required to complete a form with their contact information as the first point of entry for possible winner selection. Winemaker for a Week 2013 had 2,038 individuals enter their contact information to qualify into the second qualifying selection level. From these 2,038 entrants, five semi finalists were randomly selected to submit a 150 word essay explaining why they felt they were the ideal candidate to be selected as the 2013 Winemaker for a Week. After reading through the essay submissions, the committee voted Janelle Toner Drach as the 2013 Winemaker for a Week.

This fourth year promotion was a success with an the Winemaker for a Week committee being extremely pleased by goals that were set, met and exceeded for 2013.

Email Marketing

FLTA has puts out a monthly partner newsletter to keep partners informed of the most up to date regional happenings. Email marketing has proven to be an effective way to keep in touch with partners as well as the general public seeking information on the Finger Lakes region. The public e-newsletter allows the marketing department and FLTA partners to take advantage of the 38,000+ contacts that have been collected from travel guide requests, lead generation campaigns, and at consumer shows and other events. It features a variety of Finger Lakes related articles, upcoming events, and the latest partner promotions. Open rates and click rates for FLTA newsletters are well above travel industry standards at 20% open rate and 2.7% click rate for links included in these emails.

Partner E-Newsletter

Time Frame	Bounce Rate	Open Rate	Click Rate
Q1	1.18%	32.83%	23.4%
Q2	1.5%	26.75%	10.62%
Q3	1.7%	27.3%	13.5%
Q4	2%	29.3%	10.7%
2013 Average	2%	29%	15%

Consumer Public E-Newsletter

Time Frame	Bounce Rate	Open Rate	Click Rate
Q1	1.4%	17.9%	14.1%
Q2	.95%	21.7%	23%
Q3	2.2%	23.1%	21.7%
Q4	1.1%	15.9%	6.5%
2013 Average	1%	20%	16%



The November 2013 consumer 'public' e-newsletter

*NOTE: Email marketing efforts have been broken down by segmented lists of consumer show attendee leads in order to track effectiveness of each show and determine if FLTA was receiving qualified leads. Numbers listed here are based on FingerLakes.org information request database of over 38,000 opted in email subscribers.

2013 Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Achievements

January 2013

- FLTA's Jessica Robideau met with 40 motorcoach operators and decision makers in the group travel industry in Charlotte, North Carolina at the American Bus Association Marketplace and discussed group travel opportunities throughout the Finger Lakes region.
- The Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance was featured in an article about the Finger Lakes region in TribLive, a subset of the Pittsburgh Tribune.
- Away.com, which is associated with the travel site Orbitz, published an article highlighting the Finger Lakes region as one of the best four day vacations destinations and www.FingerLakes.org was mentioned.

February 2013

- I Love New York featured Finger Lakes partners on their website promoting travel from Canada and to support awareness within the Canadian market of the diverse offering of activities the Finger Lakes hosts.
- FLTA's Jessica Robideau attended the Heartland Travel Showcase in Toledo, Ohio February 15-17th and met with 33 operators for one on one appointments discussing Finger Lakes group travel opportunities.
- Canadian media personality, Rania Walker was hosted by FLTA in mid-February and visited family friendly locations throughout the Finger Lakes for her upcoming article in the Oakville Voice and various other outlets such as the Huffington Post.

March 2013

- FLTA was able to meet with 9 separate Senators and Assemblymen (or their key staff members) on March 5th as part of Legislative Action Days to discuss the economic importance of tourism and present views on key tourism issues.
- As a result of attendance at Legislative Action Days and communication with area legislators, FLTA was awarded \$75,000 as a line item in the NYS budget for use in television and radio advertising efforts.

April 2013

- FLTA's Cindy Kimble and Jessica Robideau hosted Markly Wilson and Namisha Prajapati of I Love New York who hosted a group of European product managers from Germany as a part of an upstate New York familiarization tour.
- FLTA continued to gain support through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest and gained more views on their YouTube video advertising the region.

May 2013

- FLTA's Jessica Robideau attended the New York State Travel & Vacation Association Empire State Tourism Conference in Niagara Falls to network with other tourism representatives and learn about industry trends.
- Cindy Kimble attended Tourism Action Day in Albany to discuss key tourism issues with legislators and emphasize the importance of promoting the Finger Lakes at a regional level.
- The FLTA Literature Exchange took place with roughly 125 FLTA partners in attendance despite rainy, windy weather.
- Jessica Robideau wrote an article contributing content for the spring edition of Life in the Finger Lakes magazine showcasing businesses in the Finger Lakes that are seasonally appropriate.

June 2013

- FLTA and the Winemaker for a Week committee continued to promote and advertise the Winemaker for a Week experiential vacation program that is on its fourth year running.
- FLTA saw 44,975 referrals to partner business websites through the Book a Room Now feature found on FingerLakes.org where visitors are able to search for regional accommodation availability.

July 2013

- The Finger Lakes Vacation Fun Lead Generator program began delivering leads to participants of those individuals looking for more regional information.
- Planning and development for the 2014 Marketing Plan was reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors.

Continued on page 10

2013 Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Achievements



August 2013

- Finger Lakes Wine Country requested assistance from FLTA with the hosting of Canadian television personality, Kevin Cullen, who is the host of the show *The Motorhead Traveler*. Kevin visited and filmed in the Finger Lakes region at the end of August with FLTA's help in itinerary creation and touring the Finger Lakes.
- Bounce rates for Finger Lakes public newsletter reached the mark of 1% or lower while travel industry standard is around 1.12%
- Governor Cuomo announces that the Finger Lakes will host the Governor's Challenge, a Bassmasters Fishing Tournament, in 2014.
- 2014 programs were approved and published in the 2014 opportunities catalog.

September 2013

- FingerLakes.org shows very healthy Alexa rankings, a website benchmarking website, and FingerLakes.org is outranked only by ILoveNY.com in regards to performance.
- As a result of AAA promotion and the popularity of the Wine Trails, the AAA Southern New Jersey branch scheduled a wine tasting in the Finger Lakes region.
- Social media outlets grew at an exceptional rate with the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Facebook page growing with an increase of 23% in reach and a 23% increase in the number of Twitter followers over the year prior.

October 2013

- Finger Lakes partners were featured in AAA's publication, *Member Connections* with a half page ad and corresponding article highlighting the community of Seneca Falls.
- The *Winemaker for a Week* experiential vacation concluded with winner Janelle Drach working with Finger Lakes winemakers and learning the ins and outs of the winemaking process while staying at Greek Peak Mountain Resort.
- FLTA distributed their entire quantity of 125,000 Finger Lakes regional travel guides by the end of October.
- Views of the online version of the 2013 travel guide went up 811% over 2012 views as a result of the print copy being completely distributed.

November 2013

- Cindy Kimble was approached by Detroit News to contribute content for a Finger Lakes article that resulted in referral traffic to FingerLakes.org from the Detroit market.
- FLTA attended the Toronto Women's Show November 1st-3rd.
- FLTA continued work with out of town writers and media to emphasize public relations efforts and continue strong relationships currently in place.

December 2013

- 2014 Travel Guide was delivered to Brown Printing with preliminary files being uploaded in December, and the final completed version being delivered in very early January 2014.
- Twitter showed a total increase in followers by 57%.
- FLTA expands its coverage and communication of the FLTA mission through sales and marketing efforts, really maximizing coverage through the end of 2013.