



Episode 147 – Kate Anderson and Colleen Pace

Intro: This is Brand USA Talks Travel, elevating the conversation about international travel to the United States. Here's your host, Mark Lapidus.

Mark Lapidus [0:09]: What does it mean to honor Native American heritage through travel?

Kate Anderson [0:12]: It's such a great question. We're so busy in our daily lives that sometimes it's hard for us to stop and just think about how we want to respect other people. And so a lot of it really comes down to taking the time to learn and listen and provide that opportunity for mutual respect.

Colleen Pace [0:35]: And for us, I would say it's about authentically sharing the stories of the culture and the history of the community, and doing that through the tribe's voice - not through our voice, but through the tribe's voice. And I think as our DMO partnership with the tribe and Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians in particular, we're really able to amplify their voice through our content and ways that we provide.

Mark Lapidus [1:01]: We're very excited to be marking Native American Heritage Month on this episode of Brand USA Talks Travel. My guests today are Kate Anderson, the Director of Public Relations for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Kate has more than 25 years' experience in public relations, marketing, and film. And Colleen Pace, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Visit Greater Palm Springs. Colleen also has 25 years' experience holding leadership positions in sales and marketing. I'd like to start by asking you, Kate, to tell us about Native American Heritage Month.

Kate Anderson [1:33]: Absolutely. This month is really an opportunity for people across the nation to recognize the original people of this land that we all now live on. It's an opportunity to learn about history and culture, but also a time to celebrate what modern life is today for Native Americans.

Mark Lapidus [1:54]: Let's talk about nomenclature for a moment. I've learned that there are several ways to refer to Native Americans, and that's just one. Another is First Peoples. Some seem to prefer Indians, and I hear the term 'tribe' being used. What advice can you offer?

Kate Anderson [2:08]: Depending on where you're at and what region you're in, there may be acceptable or unacceptable forms of reference. But probably the friendliest advice that I can give is if you just stick to 'Native American,' you're going to be okay.

Colleen Pace [2:23]: I would add to that, just ask the question. Ask the tribe how they would like to be referred to, and get it, again, in their voice, I think is important as well.

Mark Lapidus [2:33]: Kate, how did you become involved with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians? Give us the backstory.

Kate Anderson [2:38]: I am an enrolled tribal member of Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Shawnee, Oklahoma. My specialty is communications and marketing and film. Having an opportunity to work for another Federally-recognized tribe is a significant time to be able to bring all of that knowledge to a place where we can celebrate cultural heritage tourism, for example. Palm Springs is an international destination. It's a very, very special place where people from all over the world come. The Agua Caliente people have been here for thousands of years. To be able to have an opportunity to share the tribe's story with all of those visitors and all of the people that call Palm Springs home is an incredible pleasure. Working with a DMO such as Visit Greater Palm Springs has been an incredible partnership that has developed over many years. Today, we really enjoy this relationship that allows the tribe to tell its stories in its own voice and have a partnership with a DMO that clearly understands the tourism marketplace. With any good relationship, sometimes the relationship starts with a spark and you hit it off right away. Or sometimes it takes a few times to have lunch together, or find projects to work on. But all good relationships come because multiple parties work on it, and they respect each other, and they find their common grounds, and they find ways to celebrate the relationship. Here in Palm Springs, the relationship that we have between the tribe and Visit Greater Palm Springs is something that has continued to grow and blossom now for nearly a decade.

Mark Lapidus [4:29]: Colleen, how does Greater Palm Springs push out the content?

Colleen Pace [4:32]: There's a variety of ways that we push content out. Some are traditional, some untraditional. But we have a landing page on our website where we have created an archive of history of the tribe and the other tribes in our destination, as well as content, how people can experience Native American culture in our destination through events or gatherings or things that are happening in the destination. We also share it on social media through our PR and media efforts, through site visits with meetings and convention customers, really introducing them to the culture of the destination, as well as media visits that come into the destination so that they're aware of the history of our destination and the culture of our Native American friends.

Mark Lapidus [5:12]: As you both interact with more international tourists, what commonalities do you find in terms of questions and experiences that they're having there?

Kate Anderson [5:20]: We have hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Agua Caliente Indian reservation every year. We have many tourism destinations. In fact, the tribe was steward to the very first tourist attraction in Palm Springs. Although the tribe did not realize it, it has been doing tourism for more than 130 years right here in Palm Springs. What we're finding is that people are very interested in learning about Native Americans, Native American history, culture, traditions, and modern way of life. What better opportunity to be able to share that with people from around the world right here in a major global destination? In addition to having a relationship with the local DMO here, we also have relationships with the State Tourism Office. We have relationships with our American Indian Tourism Association, many other relationships that we work with all the time, Brand USA. Those relationships allow us to extend the opportunity of our storytelling, our narratives, and all of the incredible information, not just about the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, but about the Greater Palm Springs area as well.

Colleen Pace [6:34]: I would just agree completely with what Kate said. What we found what visitors are interested in is being connected to the destination. We find the best way to gain that connection or understand is by understanding the culture of the destination. And people are looking for fulfilling experiences, learning about the history of the different areas that they're visiting. And we know that visitors are really engaged and inspired by this. And so it's been a great synergy among our relationship as well as, as Kate referenced, the state organization and Brand USA and all the synergies that we create to create this really great content that is inspiring people, but also educating people on the destination.

Mark Lapidus [7:14]: Kate, any advice you would give to other tribes exploring cultural tourism? And I'm going to reverse this question for you, Colleen.

Kate Anderson [7:21]: I love that question because it really goes with a lot of the conversations that we have about Native American cultural tourism. What that is, is that only we can tell the stories. They have to come from the tribe's voice. So when you have an opportunity to cultivate the stories that you want to share, so as a tribal nation or as a tribal government, a tribal-owned business, what have you, begin to develop your narratives. So that would be the very, very first thing that needs to happen, is you need to begin to understand what your stories are, what your stories are that you want to share. You want to be able to determine or identify imagery and video and story content. For a tribe, that's the best place to begin is what's your story and how does that look and how do you share that story with other people, with people who are visiting? Then I want to mention with DMOs, allow the tribe to determine what those stories are. It's not anyone else's place but the tribe to decide what the stories are that should be told. There may be stories that are not for sharing, and that's okay. But there may be some really incredible narratives that can be identified, that can be shared. Then once you have the narratives for cultural heritage tourism, oftentimes you need a destination too. On a reservation or among a tribal community, what are the attractions that you might want to identify that the tribe or the tribal members would be okay with sharing? Because again, there's times and places that maybe not are appropriate to be shared. So you really need to do a little homework first, identify the places that can be shared, how you would share that with visitors or tourists. And then once you have those things established, then you can expand the awareness with the partnership with the DMOs.

Colleen Pace [9:17]: You have to decide and determine with the tribe what the topics are that want to be covered, that they would like to share in their own voice. And you have to come up with an agreement on what those are. You can't decide as the what you think is or isn't the story that should be told. And so it comes down to workflow, it comes down to a lot of candid conversations, which Kate and I have a great relationship - feedback where we maybe don't want to tell it this way or we don't want to tell this part of that because it's a little different than the way we would say it. And so I think it's just this constant open dialog and communication that's needed to foster the relationship. But the big thing is we share things even like our content calendar. We share that directly with Kate, I mean, write down to the workflow and ask for her direct feedback and input on that so that we're not sharing something or moving forward with something that maybe isn't the right thing.

Mark Lapidus [10:09]: Since we're discussing that, I should ask you, what's the balance between tourism and cultural preservation?

Kate Anderson [10:15]: Much of the balance is understanding what the assets are that need to be protected. And in addition to that, it's being able to create the awareness by your visitors in how to be on the land and how to pay respect to the and to ensure that the mechanisms of Leave No Trace are clearly understood.

Mark Lapidus [10:36]: I understand you've got a new spa opening. Please tell me about it.

Kate Anderson [10:39]: Yeah, I'd love to. So the spa is Séc-he.

Mark Lapidus [10:43]: She's showing me a brochure, by the way. It's cute.

Kate Anderson [10:47]: The spa at Séc-he is an incredible, beautiful, world-class spa that has been newly opened in downtown Palm Springs as of April 4th of 2023. It sits within the footprint of the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza. We're getting ready this month of November to open the beautiful new Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza, which also includes the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum. The spa at Séc-he, what everybody wants to do when they come to Palm Springs, is they want to be able to come and soak in the ancient mineral water.

Mark Lapidus [11:19]: I'm so there.

Kate Anderson [11:22]: Come tomorrow, fly in. We've got space for you. But you'll want to come and be able to soak in the hot mineral water at our new spa. The Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring bubbles up in the middle of downtown Palm Springs. And today, it bubbles up in 22 separate bathtubs at the new spa.

Mark Lapidus [11:39]: Wow, so cool. What's the temperature?

Kate Anderson [11:42]: The hot spring naturally comes up at about 105 degrees, and it comes up at about 24 to 26 gallons per minute. And this part, Mark, you're going to love: the water that's bubbling up in downtown Palm Springs today last saw the Earth's surface more than 12,000 years ago.

Mark Lapidus [12:01]: Wow, incredible. Looking ahead, are there some upcoming collaborations you'd like to tell me about?

Colleen Pace [12:07]: I think what Kate was just mentioning about the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza and Museum, that's one we're very excited about. It's opening next week, right in time for Native American History Month. And we are doing everything we can to share the news broadly, and we're getting so much interest and excitement about it. Again, people are so interested in learning more about the culture of the destination. And there are some very unique experiences and archeological artifacts that are there, that I know Kate is super excited - I'll let her share any details on that. But it's really been something in the making for the past few years, and it's something we've been talking about and excited about. And we just can't wait to get all of the components together with the spa, the plaza, and the cultural museum, and really sharing this with our visitors, but also with our local community because they will learn and grow and experience all of these things with us as well.

Kate Anderson [13:02]: I think what's timely is that we have not just the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza and the beautiful new spa that celebrates the Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring, but we have the Indian Canyons, Tahquitz Canyon, which are on the ancestral lands of the Agua Caliente people, and so we have more than 60 miles of hiking trails. If you look at Palm Springs as a global destination, and then within that global destination, you have the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation. Then within the Indian reservation, we have the Indian Canyons, we have Tahquitz Canyon, which has a 60-foot waterfall in the middle of the desert. We have the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza, we have the Spa at Séc-he, and we have

the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum. There's plenty to do right here, just even on the Indian reservation. But even grander than that, we have a whole playground here in Greater Palm Springs. What we love is the opportunity for people to travel here for a myriad of reasons and then having the opportunity to capture them to share the culture of the Agua Caliente people as well. Those partnerships just keep going and we find special moments and special projects along the way. It just so happens that this particular year, we're opening up the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza, which will really be a global destination.

Mark Lapidus [14:25]: We have a lot of tour operators and travel agents that work internationally helping sell the United States across the world. I hope they're paying attention to what these two are saying. If you want to get more information, I'm sure you can get in touch with either Colleen or Kate, right?

Colleen Pace [14:39]: Absolutely.

Kate Anderson [14:40]: We'd love to hear from everyone.

Mark Lapidus [14:41]: Ladies, thanks so much for joining me.

Colleen Pace [14:43]: It's so great to be here. Thank you, Mark.

Kate Anderson [14:45]: It's been a pleasure.

Mark Lapidus [14:47]: And that's Brand USA Talks Travel. I'm Mark Lapidus, thanks for listening.

Outro [14:51]: Your feedback is welcome. Email us at podcast@thebrandusa.com or call 202-793-6256. Brand USA Talks Travel is produced by Asher Meerovich, who also composes music and sound. Engineering by Brian Watkins. With extra help from Bernie Lucas, Nthanze Kariuki, and Casey D'Ambra. Please share this podcast with your friends in the travel industry. You may also enjoy many of our archived episodes, which you can find on your favorite podcast platform. Safe travels!