

Seattle Street Scene Concerns

***Names withheld due to the sensitive nature of meeting contracts and fair competition; please contact Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau to request communication with these subjects.**

International Trademark Association

May 15-21, 2009; 20,575 room nights

Economic impact - \$17,320,000

I just wanted to drop you a quick note and let you know my thoughts on our recent conference in Seattle. I thought the convention center was a great venue for the conference as were the surrounding hotels which were lovely, but I have to say I was a little perturbed and disappointed about the seediness of the city and some of the public who came through the convention center.

I was a little surprised with some of my encounters in the city, especially down by the Public Market, seeing numerous drug deals and even people using drugs right on the street. I also was alarmed to see that many of the restaurants and public restrooms had used needle receptacles mounted on the wall, although I do understand the value of them and the precaution the city is taking to protect their people, seeing them was a stark reality that Seattle definitely has some problems.

Being from New York I feel as though I am a lot less sheltered than other Americans, but I have to say that I was quite disturbed by many things I saw throughout the city of Seattle and overall, I felt unsafe while walking around the city, especially at night. As a New Yorker, I am always aware of my surroundings and can usually judge a neighborhood's safety and loosen my guard. I was not able to do this during my stay in Seattle and was surprised that such a beautiful city can have such an unsafe feel to it.

I thought it was important to share my experience in Seattle with you and hope that you might be able to pass this along to someone at the Seattle CVB just so they have an idea of how visitors are viewing their city.

Thanks.

[name withheld]
International Trademark Association

American College of Nurse-Midwives

May 22-28, 2009; 4,833 room nights

Economic impact - \$3,247,500

Happy to ...as you know Seattle is one of my most favorite cities (in the world) and always ready to do anything I can to be of assistance. A few points:

- *Prior to departure for Seattle and in some of my discussions with ACNM a couple of staff mentioned that some members had commented that they had heard that panhandlers were aggressive in downtown Seattle and should they be concerned. I bring this point up as this is obviously more than just a perception.*
- *Wild Ginger – I had been playing up the Wild Ginger to several attendees, Board Members, staff, etc. and therefore decided to go to dinner with staff one evening. As we approached the restaurant we saw 2 panhandlers – 1 gentleman was lying on the sidewalk and another was standing by the entrance. One of my guests asked if we were in a “dangerous” neighborhood. The panhandler that was lying on the sidewalk jumped up and followed us and grabbed my arm asking for money. The other panhandler opened the door to Wild Ginger and asked us for money. Not a great way to start a nice dinner!!*
- *After dinner, the staff member had not been to Seattle before and wanted to see Pike Market ...we walked over and on the way back to the Sheraton we were approached at least six times.*

We did hear of more instances from attendees and while Midwives is a very accepting and inclusive group...I could see where this could turn off another client. Good luck in your pursuit! On another note, the service, etc was amazing for our convention....as always very impressed!

*[name withheld]
Courtesy Associates*

Kiwanis International Site Visit

May 29-31, 2009.

Seattle bidding on convention for July 2012 or 2013; 13,950 room nights

Potential economic impact - \$14,190,000

Hi Tom,

I wanted you to be aware of some uncomfortable issues with the homeless problem in our city that I encountered while touring our Kiwanis clients around the city. We went out to Teatro Zinzanni on Friday night and as our car was dropping us off in front of the Sheraton we had a very disheveled gentleman immediately come up to all of us asking for money. He started to follow us across the drive into the Sheraton until we all ignored him and then he left us.

Then on Saturday night while we were waiting for our car to pick us up on 6th Avenue after the Sounders soccer game we were again accosted by a very aggressive panhandler that would not take no for an answer. He got right into my client's face and we finally had to walk to the other side of the street for him to leave us alone. When I mentioned that this can happen down here by the stadiums, my client Sarah said “Oh no, it happened to me quite a few times when I went down to the market this afternoon. One guy even bummed two cigarettes off of me, they are everywhere.”

I am not sure if this will completely cost us the business but I know it does not put us in a favorable light in comparison to Vancouver which has a better handle on this problem. We are up against Vancouver for this piece of business that will bring 14,000 room nights into the city either July 2012 or July 2013.

Please let us know if there is anything that we can do!

[SCVB staff member]

Sleep Societies

June 6-11, 2009; 10,990 room nights

Economic impact - \$10,825,000

I just got off the phone with [meeting planner name withheld] with the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, LLC. She said that everything ran very smoothly with the SLEEP 2009 conference and that they enjoyed their time here. When I asked about some feedback we received from the Sheraton regarding [association president – name withheld] and his experiences she provided me with the following information:

- *[name withheld] was shocked at the number of panhandlers around the convention center, hotels and off-site venues*
- *He was frustrated and appalled with the amount of skateboarders – riding on the sidewalks, shoving people out of the way, taking over the walkways*
- *He was frustrated at the amount of dogs sitting with the panhandlers and walking through the convention center at various points*
- *Had an overall concern for the safety of attendees and staff*
 - *[name withheld] stayed at the Westin and felt very unsafe and scared walking in the early morning from the hotel to the convention center alone*

Per [name withheld], when the conference was held in Denver in 2005 they had the same experience with the homeless issue. It escalated to a point where a motor coach was needed to shuttle staff to and from the convention center for safety purposes. In the end [name withheld] wrote the Mayor of Denver a letter that the SLEEP conference would never return – apparently he said that he felt the same way about Seattle.

[SCVB staff member]

Emailed from a recent guest – July 23, 2009

“Seattle, sadly, was a horrid experience. It wasn't last year. The sun going down at the Public Market after dinner at Etta's made me think of moving there. This time, the traffic was unreal, the highway construction was frustrating, the hotels were insanely over-priced (I had to search in Kirkland and Tukwilla, for goodness sake!), and I was approached constantly by panhandlers in the downtown area. A nice visit to your new public library off of 5th turned into an excuse for strange people to ask me strange questions. I did NOT feel comfortable there, to say the least.”

[name withheld]

Voice Message from a recent guest - Transcribed – August 27, 2009.

“This is [name withheld]. I visited Seattle about a week and a half ago with my 2 boys. We are from Austin, TX. I had always heard that Seattle was a nice place. But I am sorry to report from my experience I would never visit again. You have some very aggressive street people down near the fish mart. And they treat tourists very rudely. I was trying to pay for parking and I had a street person come up and give me a big lecture about the ‘white man’ and I was trying to cross the street and a vehicle went by with some black gentlemen in it that called me a ‘white M-Fer – what are you doing on the street’. I can just tell you that it was a very uncomfortable feeling that I had in that highly trafficked area.

Your taxes for rental cars are very high – it cost me almost as much in taxes as the rental fee itself. I found that the place was very hostile to tourists. And next time I come back to Seattle for a visit it will be when hell freezes over.

If you would like to discuss this with me you can call me at [number withheld].”

The Cicerone Group

(on behalf of the National Initiative for Service Excellence – September 16, 2009)

While I am very much interested in pursuing the potential for Seattle to be internationally recognized as a Service Leadership hub, I had one concern about the impressions visitors to our downtown core would have. I was quite distressed by the increased number of street people/panhandlers and their aggressive tactics. It was uncomfortable walking around the streets of downtown Seattle and being accosted at almost every red light, and throughout the Pike Place Market. I know it was a detractor from the Barbados' group experience, as well - they commented directly to me about it, and I also overheard conversation amongst themselves about this. Not good. Clearly, in this economic environment, there are increased pressures for social services, and there are fundamental issues surrounding homelessness that need to be addressed, but the current situation on Seattle streets is not pleasant.

[name withheld]

FAA - Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) Seminar

November 20-22, 2009; 560 room nights

Economic impact - \$285,000

Hi Susan,

It went very well. Seattle is lovely with lots of things to do. The Grand Hyatt was beautiful and the staff very helpful.

Just as non-critical feedback, the only thing that surprised me was the great number and relative ages of the street beggars. Every large (and small!) city has this, I realize, but the solicitations seemed different there from other places I have been. One guy that I saw every day asked for money for marijuana and/or bud light every time we passed. At least he's honest, I guess. Again, I'm not criticizing, just surprised.

We do these all over the country and I haven't seen quite as many of these people lined up on the streets as there in Seattle.

Oh well. We will definitely come back again.

[name withheld]

Guest Comments on Trip Advisor

“Washington state is a lovely place and the sights are beautiful. The hotel is okay for business meetings, conferences and basically staying in downtown Seattle, but not for a tourist. Downtown Seattle is full of

pot smokers, beggars and traffic. I would suggest going somewhere else if you are looking for a place you walk around from."

(Submitted by a Seattle hotel general manager)

"We stayed here for a few days a couple of weeks ago and found the service to be very prompt, the bed comfortable and room clean. The location was great but I was harassed one night by a persistent homeless man looking for a handout, while walking near the market after dark. When I did some internet research I learned that Seattle has lax laws toward panhandling, and that the panhandling is sometimes "aggressive". I also learned that some of Seattle's services for the homeless are located in the market area. That being known, we avoided walking back through that area in the evenings and were not harassed again there. This has nothing to do with the hotel but I think it's important to let people know to exercise caution in the market place after dark, especially since the hotel is adjacent to the Pike Market."

[Submitted by a Seattle hotel general manager]

"As for outside the hotel, be aware of your surroundings when you walk downtown. There are a lot of bums and peddlers everywhere. If you walk down to Pikes Place Market, stay on Pine street. On the backside of the hotel is Pikes street which has the convention center behind there. I wouldn't recommend going down that street to the Market because there seems to be more bums out there."

[Submitted by a Seattle hotel general manager]