

Panelists Say Cannabis Tourism Begins with Education, Good Partnerships

For immediate release: with photos and link to video

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Galloway, N.J. - Education and good partnerships will be crucial as New Jersey's hospitality and tourism industry begins to integrate recreational cannabis and hemp into their operations, speakers said at a webinar Wednesday. But it will take time to provide safe, legal and profitable events and services.

"I really got the message that education is critical to getting this off the ground safely and responsibly," said Michael Chait, president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, which co-sponsored the webinar with the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism (LIGHT) at Stockton University.

Amanda Hoover, a reporter for nj.com and NJ Cannabis Insider moderated the webinar and presented questions. Panelists, representing a variety of operations in different states, were:

- Rob Mejia: Adjunct faculty in Cannabis Studies at Stockton University and president of Our Community Harvest: A Cannabis Education Company.
- Brian Applegarth: California Cannabis Tourism Association.
- Cintia Morales: Co-founder and Director of Education and Outreach, Higher Ed. Hemp Tours in Austin, Texas.
- David Yusefzadeh: Massachusetts-based chef and food designer and CEO/Founder of Cloud Creamery, a cannabis ice cream company.

Following is a synopsis of the conversation:

Q: Under the new law (recently signed by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy), where will people be able to consume cannabis in New Jersey?

Mejia: There are so many prohibitions about where you can't, that the short answer for now is in a private home. You can't do it on any state or federal-owned site, including housing. Things like consumption lounges are down the road.

Q; Who is the typical user?

Morales: For many people this is their first time. A great way to start is with a guide, education about the products. About 75% of our tours are new people and you want to introduce it in a safe space. The type of experience they have is important.

Applegarth: A survey we partnered on in 2019 showed 29% of the active leisure travel audience was cannabis motivated and wanted the ability to access cannabis-related services – education, spas, wellness. About 30% had never tried cannabis. Also, it is

not smokers – the first choices were edibles, drinkables and topicals. Smoking was last. They are foodies and into nature, wine.

Yusefzadeh: Most food offered now is sweets or candy. We want to create foods that fit into life. Our plan would be a resort B&B where you could stay with us and not have to drive home.

Mejia: The market for CBD has been popular and you don't get high. But education will be key so people know what to expect with food and how it can affect the body.

Morales: People react differently. You start with micro-doses. We had to learn how to control our samples.

Q: Is there any tourism that has not worked? What is working?

Applegarth: Party buses - there was very low interest.

Morales: Choosing the right partners is crucial. They have to know their product. You can't take guests to a place where they ask questions and the employees don't know about their products and what's in them.

Yusefzadeh: In Massachusetts we keep it to private events. People want to be outdoors, on the beach, in the woods.

Mejia: Consider linking it to something people may already do, like yoga, or a limo tour. Those are low entry points to start. For the casinos there will be challenges. But if you are creative, think how you can connect it to what you are already passionate about.

Q: Dispensaries are likely to be the first to start selling, but other stores may open. What do you see as the impact?

Mejia: In the beginning people are concerned about the location because they see the line out front. But that quickly normalizes and it's just another business.

Applegarth: Partnerships will be important for destination events. Having some hospitality training and knowing what visitors want will be important. You have to know your audience.

Yusefzadeh: Considering doing retail that showcases local products. That way you don't have to produce. Edibles are popular, but most of the people doing them have no food background. Trained chefs could do more. Delivery may also be an area – direct to consumer. But you have to have patience. You will be dealing with the government for permits and they are also learning.

Morales: But you need education. There is a big lack of education about the products. Partner with advocacy groups. And have a lawyer who knows cannabis law.

Mejia: You need a baseline of cannabis knowledge before you do anything. Cultivation labs may be an option for towns. They are very discreet and unobtrusive.

Jane Bokunewicz, coordinator of LIGHT in the Business School at Stockton, said Stockton offers both a [Minor in Cannabis Studies](#) for students and a [Cannabis Certificate](#) for the general public through the Office of Continuing Studies at <https://www.stockton.edu/continuing-studies/cannabis-cert.html>.

[A video of the hour-long event is on Facebook.](#)

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Contact:

Diane D'Amico

Director of News and Media Relations

Galloway, N.J. 08205

Diane.D'Amico@stockton.edu

609-652-4593

609-412-8069

stockton.edu/media

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