



Weaponization of Travel

Visit Orlando appreciates the opportunity to share more information about our organization, our diverse destination, and facts about travel-related boycotts. Orlando has always been and will continue to be a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive community. At Visit Orlando, we work closely with our local community to launch a new vision for our organization: **To be the most visited, welcoming, and inclusive travel destination in the world.** Our industry is all about hospitality and inclusion. In addition to the new vision, we launched a new three-year strategic plan with diversity, equity, and inclusion as a key pillar.

The travel industry is founded on hospitality and is made up of many of the community's most welcoming and inclusive individuals. Orlando is both a diverse residential community and an international destination that welcomes visitors from all backgrounds and beliefs to our destination.

When a destination is the target of a boycott, there is an assumption that every citizen feels the same way. It doesn't recognize that all destinations have communities with varied beliefs and opinions. According to U.S. Travel Association, the national nonprofit organization representing the travel industry, the damage of boycotts is "namely to the jobs of travel and tourism workers whose livelihoods depends on visitation to their region."

In Orlando, 392,000 jobs across Central Florida (31% of the workforce) are directly or indirectly supported by tourism. When travel and meetings are cancelled, people working in our industry are unfairly caught in the crosshairs. Frontline workers in our industry are some of the first to feel the impact, as their hours are cut due to lower occupancy rates. Local small businesses see fewer customers, struggle to maintain hours for hard-working men and women, and struggle to keep their doors open.

The clinical associate professor at New York University's Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality, Lynn Minnaert, recently shared that travel boycotts are not effective at achieving political change noting that "Turning away from something doesn't necessarily make it go away." (Source: *Travel Weekly*)

In Orlando, we are actively seeking opportunities to welcome all visitors to our community. There are more productive avenues to influence policy that are less harmful to innocent audiences and just as, if not more, effective, such as donating to advocacy groups or using your event as an opportunity to organize advocacy activities. When asked, 73% of respondents said that they view participation in discussions as a viable alternative to travel bans that avoid harming local businesses and employees. (Source: *U.S. Travel Association*) And 70% of travelers agree that travel boycotts harm business and the hospitality industry. (Source: *U.S. Travel Association*) Your event can bring people together, support an inclusive industry, and create an opportunity to impact your issue meaningfully. Holding your meeting here can help make a difference.

We hope you hold your event in Central Florida so that we can make a difference on this issue. Your investment in our community will help our hourly employees, small businesses, and community. Boycotts have enormous potential for collateral damage and harm to the jobs of workers whose livelihoods depend on events in our region.

We want the opportunity to welcome all visitors to Orlando. We invite you to come visit and allow us to show your attendees the true nature of this great destination.

