



**San Antonio Council
FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS**

**20
20**

Annual Report & Newsletter



SAN ANTONIO COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS
www.sacivtx.org

A Message from the Executive Director

Dear SACIV members & friends,

Although this year has brought many challenges, we have enjoyed the opportunity to work with our local community and global network to expand our connections virtually. We are continuously striving to provide innovative ways of engaging internationally through our programs.

While early 2020 got off to a very busy start, things quickly came to a halt as State Department in-person programs, including the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), were postponed indefinitely due to the global pandemic. Despite this, we remained committed to continue cultivating valuable global relationships and provide opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue in the virtual world. I am very proud of the work our staff, Board, members, local resources, and national partners to quickly adapted to the virtual environment and bring citizen diplomacy to life through online platforms.

We have been very fortunate to have the support of Global Ties US, the umbrella organization of over 80 organizations like ours who facilitate the IVLP. This network has shown tremendous resiliency and strength as we have come together to collaborate and support each other during this challenging time, helping us to collectively adapt and creatively implement innovative initiatives, despite much uncertainty over the course of the past year.

There are many recent successes to celebrate. In 2020, we created new opportunities for our members to stay engaged. Through weekly e-blasts listing recommendations for virtual events addressing international topics, we provided ways to stay informed remotely. With our "Community Spotlight Series", we shared our gratitude and appreciation to the many local organizations who continuously meet with our international visitors by highlighting their important work and value to our city.

Through virtual events, we facilitated global connection building. For example, our "Member Global Engagement" event in the fall featured conversations with IVLP alumni from Saudi Arabia and Finland who visited San Antonio in February of 2020. We also found a way to replicate the "home hospitality" experience, a crucial component of our visitors' programs while in San Antonio and a wonderful opportunity enjoyed by our members, through our virtual "Coffee & Conversation" event this past February.

In October, we hosted our first ever virtual anniversary event. The "Annual Citizen Diplomacy Celebration" was a resounding success! We surpassed our fundraising goals, ensuring we are able to continue our important work, as well as fully fund next year's "Irma Reyes Citizen Diplomacy Scholarship" award. We were very pleased that over 100 attendees joined the event live, locally as well as from around the world. If you were unable to attend, you can view the event recording on our website.

In 2020, we hosted seven Virtual IVLP programs. We quickly saw that virtual international exchanges are still incredibly impactful and have hosted eight delegations so far this year, with many more to come. The learning process is ongoing as we continue to navigate these previously uncharted waters, but I am proud of our ability to embrace this new challenge.

During this period of particular international solidarity, we've been able to reflect on the shared human dynamic and experience of the time, which is a significant aspect of our mission and now as important as ever. We are grateful that you – our members and community partners – know the value of international connectivity and the importance of building connections to the people, ideas, and issues shaping our shared future. Understanding how international exchanges benefit the entire global community furthers our common goal of creating a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Thanks to the ongoing support from our valued community of citizen diplomats such as yourself, we are able to further our work to build international friendships, foster cultural understanding, and promote San Antonio as an international city – and we look forward to continuing doing so this year!

All my best,

Cecilia Cross
Executive Director

ABOUT SACIV

SACIV is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), founded in 1989, that facilitates short term professional exchanges for emerging distinguished international leaders, selected by the US Department of State for the purpose of advancing US foreign policy goals and increasing mutual understanding. Hundreds of these international visitors come to San Antonio each year, providing opportunities to the community for fostering economic development and cross-cultural understanding. In addition to meeting with area professionals in their fields and exploring the local culture of San Antonio, international visitors are invited into the homes of SACIV members or hosted for meals or special excursions, giving them invaluable first-hand experience with everyday Americans.

SACIV aims to build international friendships, facilitate the exchange of ideas, foster cultural understanding, and promote San Antonio as an international city.

By the Numbers

2020 AT A GLANCE

HOSTED

12

In-Person Programs



**FOR
98**

Visitors

**FROM
53**

Countries



WHO MET WITH

71

Community Resources



**DURING
87**

Professional Meetings

HOSTED

7

Virtual Programs

**FOR
77**

Visitors

**FROM
13**

Countries

WHO MET WITH

15

Community Resources

**DURING
13**

Professional Meetings

85

MEMBERS

49

HOME HOSPITALITY MEALS

90

ATTENDEES AT IN-PERSON EVENTS

130

ATTENDEES AT VIRTUAL EVENTS



2020 Programs

In-Person

January 22-28: **Volunteerism & Civic Action**

Bangladesh, Dominica, Latvia, Nepal, Paraguay, South Africa, Turkey

February 2-8: **Police Professionalization Exchange Program**

Mexico

February 5-11: **Global Economic Cooperation**

Colombia, Morocco, Turkey, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, West Bank, Zimbabwe

February 6-11: **Empowering Youth through Workforce Development**

Chad, DRC, Djibouti, Haiti, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Sierra Leone

February 11-15: **NGO Management**

Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, Palestine, Saudi Arabia

February 20-25: **Interfaith Dialogue & Religious Freedom**

Belarus, Germany, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Greece, Norway

February 20-25: **Countering Violent Extremism: Community Strategies**

Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, United Kingdom

February 22-26: **Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists: Media Responsibility in the Age of Disinformation**

Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka

February 25-28: **Cancer Care, Prevention, & Public Health Education**

Russia

February 27-March 3: **US Trade Policy**

Armenia, Chile, Finland, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Malaysia

February 28-March 7: **Open World Program: Urban Development & City Planning**

Ukraine

March 7-11: **Small-Market Newspapers in the Digital Age**

Argentina

Virtual

October 21-22: **Women as Drivers of Social and Economic Change**

Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

November 2-6: **US Presidential Election Overview**

Argentina

November 4-5: **US Elections**

Israel

November 16-20: **US Higher Education and Opportunities for Future Partnerships**

Honduras

December 16: **Young Influencers**

Pakistan

December 16-17: **Development of Product Standards in the US**

Jordan

December 18: **Young Leaders: NGO & Civic Activism**

Pakistan

ABOUT IVLP

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) is an official U.S. government exchange program administered by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The objective of the program is to advance U.S. foreign policy goals by increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those of other countries. The IVLP is the U.S. Department of State's premier professional exchange program.

Through short-term visits to the United States, current and emerging foreign leaders in a variety of fields experience this country firsthand and cultivate lasting relationships with their American counterparts. Professional meetings reflect the participants' professional interests and support the foreign policy goals of the United States. Current and emerging leaders from across the world come to the United States on the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) to meet with professional counterparts and visit U.S. public and private sector organizations related to their field of interest. International Visitors also share their culture and offer insight on best practices and perspectives with their hosts in the United States.

The International Visitor Program brings almost 5,000 foreign visitors to the U.S. each year to meet and confer with their professional counterparts and to experience the United States firsthand. The visitors, who are current or potential leaders in government, politics, the media, education, and other fields, are carefully selected by American embassy officials overseas. Over 500 current and former heads of state, thousands of cabinet-level ministers, and many other distinguished world leaders in government and the private sector have participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program over the past 80 years.



International Visitor
Leadership Program
U.S. Department of State

2021 Programs

Past

February 3: Current US Social, Political, & Economic Issues for Young European Leaders

Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Malta, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom

February 10: Law Enforcement - Community Policing

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Panama, Uruguay

February 10-17: Youth & Civic Engagement

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Haiti, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe

February 17-18: Empowering Youth Through Workforce Development

Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo, Tanzania, Zimbabwe

February 19-23: Combating Trafficking in Persons

Belize, Brazil, Ecuador, Germany, Guyana, Ireland, Israel, Liberia, Lithuania, Malawi, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, UAE, Zambia, Zimbabwe

March 19-26: Women as Drivers of Social and Economic Change

Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Venezuela

March 31-April 1: Smart Ports Panama

March 31-April 6: NGO Management Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Niue, Thailand, Vietnam

Upcoming

April 29: NGO Management

Albania, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Nigeria, Panama, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Zimbabwe

April 29-May 3: Strengthening Educational Collaboration and Promotion of U.S. Higher Education Australia

May 11: Higher Education Cooperation Panama

May 25-June 4: Women Leaders - Promoting Equality in the Justice System Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan

May 31: Smart Cities - Building Sustainable Communities Across the Indo-Pacific Australia, Burma, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Tonga

FACES OF EXCHANGE

In 2020, the US Department of State celebrated the 80th anniversary of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) through their "Faces of Exchange" initiative. With over 225,000 IVLP alumni, the State Department's flagship professional exchange program continues to build vital linkages between citizens in the United States and emerging leaders throughout the world. As part of the #FacesofExchange anniversary celebration, SACIV helped to highlight the 80 years of the IVLP by showcasing many of the accomplished alumni, their lives and leadership, and the impact of their exchanges on the global community. Below are some of the inspirational global leaders whose stories we shared.

#FaceOfExchange
Ogontuya Badamgarav
MONGOLIA

Mohamed Amine Zariat
(Morocco)
Cities travelled:
Washington, Charleston, Lansing, Portland, Kalamazoo, Cleveland, Portland, Colorado Springs, New York, Denver, Akron

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim (Chad)
Cities travelling: Washington D.C., Raleigh, Albuquerque, New Orleans
Oumarou Ibrahim is a human rights champion who participated in @StateIVLP in 2012. As a climate activist, she has received recognition as a part of the BBC's 100 Women Project.

“
Chunlei Liu -
a forward-thinking environmentalist who is taking steps to bring cleaner air and healthier communities to China and the founder of Shanghai Qingyue Environmental Protection Center.
Cities Visited: New York, Cleveland, Corpus Christi, San Francisco (World Learning)
#FacesOfExchange

Verónica Espinoza
(Mexico)
Cities travelled:
Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia
Motivated by her @StateIVLP, she established a civil society organization to empower at-risk youth through education, sports, and the arts.

Nayla al-Khaja (UAE)
Cities travelled: Washington D.C., Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, Austin, New York
Nayla al-Khaja participated in @StateIVLP in 2010 and became a producer for documentary film producers. She said "my IVLP was fantastic and the most beautiful memory was visiting a family in Austin."

Pawan Ghimire
NEPAL

Stella Young
(Australia)
Cities travelled:
Washington, Eugene, Austin, Portland, New York
She was an Australian disability rights activist who enlightened others on the misconceptions of people with disabilities.

Annual Citizen Diplomacy Celebration

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



On October 28th, 2020, we hosted our first ever virtual "Annual Citizen Diplomacy Celebration" event. Over 100 attendees joined us live as we highlighted the importance of global citizenship, as well as how our city benefits from engaging internationally.

Keynote Speakers included Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Marie Royce and Dr. Katherine Brown, President & CEO of Global Ties US.

The event featured alumni of the US Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2020. These alumni shared how their programs through SACIV have positively impacted their work and life upon returning to their home countries, as well as their favorite memories from their visit to San Antonio in recent years.

The 2020 "International Leadership Award" was presented to Mr. Jorge Canavati for his many contributions to promoting citizen diplomacy in our community.

Marian Cedeño was announced as the first ever recipient of the newly created "Irma Reyes Citizen Diplomacy Scholarship". This award was established to honor the work, support and dedication of Ms. Irma Reyes to SACIV for over 30 years and aims to support the education of students pursuing an international related degree at a local university.

DR. KATHERINE BROWN
President & CEO, Global Ties U.S.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY MARIE ROYCE
Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State

SPONSORED BY





JORGE CANAVATI

*Recipient of the 2020
International Leadership Award*

Irma Reyes Citizen Diplomacy Scholarship
Awarded to

MARIAN CEDENO



Germany
Mr. Simon JACOB
CEO, Oannes Consulting GmbH
(Media and Communication)

Chile
Emilio Maldonado Quevedo
Founder of Pride Connection, a business network that seeks the inclusion of LGBT people in workplaces

Greece
Ms. Maria Markoudi
Program Officer & Thessaloniki Office Manager at Desmos Non Profit Foundation

ALUMNI
*of the US Department of State's
International Visitor
Leadership Program (IVLP)*

Community Spotlight Series

In 2020, we launched the “Community Spotlight Series” to recognize our valuable community partners and highlight their commitment to connecting with our international visitors, building lasting relationships and creating positive change around the world. We featured four community organizations who all play an important role in facilitating the exchange of ideas by sharing their expertise and knowledge with our many delegations, in turn further enriching our community by forging valuable connections. We believe the local impact of hosting international visitors is an indispensable aspect of the larger goal of creating mutual understanding through international exchanges are grateful for their continued support and significant contribution to citizen diplomacy!



The International School of Americas (ISA) is a magnet school for grades 9–12, founded on research recommending a small, intimate school environment with high standards for student and faculty achievement, which has worked for over 20 years to provide students with a new, more personal take on education. In this pursuit, they have worked to encourage global citizenship and social agency among their students. These efforts have seen them win many awards including a Silver Medalist School for U.S. News & World Report’s “America’s Best High Schools” list.

ISA places a focus upon creating global citizens and educators take an innovative approach to learning with an emphasis on engaging students through a multicultural curriculum. Teachers and staff prioritize learning from a global perspective rather than a US-centric worldview, offering hands-on experiences such as travel excursions, internship opportunities, and community service activities.

The value the school places on cultivating students to become impactful global citizens has been a key component of the partnership between the International School of the Americas and the San Antonio Council for International Visitors (SACIV). Over the past few years, ISA has collaborated with SACIV to host dozens of educators, information technology leaders, journalists, and other professionals from around the globe, including Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. The faculty, staff, and students have warmly welcomed many International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) participants to their campus, providing them with countless meaningful opportunities to interact with American youth and discuss relevant issues such as civic mindedness, community engagement, and accountability in media.

In 2016, students found meeting with a delegation from Kazakhstan, who traveled to San Antonio as part of the IVLP initiative on “American Youth: Inspiring Leadership & Civic Participation”, particularly meaningful. ISA leadership welcomed these visitors to campus to share with them about the school’s unique curriculum, which heavily emphasizes social awareness, civic education, and student community service. The visitors found these efforts in myriad forms extremely impressive and especially valued the opportunity to meet with students to further discuss the impact these projects had had on them. In turn, the students also enjoyed being able to speak to these young leaders from Central Asia, a region of the world they were eager to learn more about.

More recently, in September of 2019, a group of information technology leaders from Europe, met with ISA representatives for another successful exchange. Both students and participants had profound conversations about four main topics: government, IT, journalism, and law enforcement. Students were divided into smaller groups and had a chance to rotate around the classroom, allowing them to speak with each visitor individually. ISA faculty, students, and IVLP participants cited that the opportunity was a truly fruitful learning experience.

The mutually beneficial nature of these two-way exchanges was noted by Mr. Steve Magadance, Principal of ISA, who stated that “Our experience with SACIV has been really fun and interesting because we have been able to provide our students with the opportunity to visit with international guests. We hope to continue to have international exchange experiences with SACIV!”

Similarly, Ruth Gonzalez, a visitor from Paraguay who visited ISA while in San Antonio during the summer of 2018, remarked that “the meeting with the International School of the Americas was something I’ll never forget . . . I am an educator and meeting with other teachers and hearing what works for them gave me a perspective on what I can do in my classroom. Furthermore, getting to know students and seeing what their passion was a beautiful experience as well.”

As the US Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program recognizes its 80th anniversary, it is clear that the global connections the program creates has a significant impact on our local community, as well as abroad. The San Antonio Council for International Visitors aims to create productive dialogues on a global scale, but this can only be achieved with help from our inspiring community resources such as the International School of Americas. As ISA continues to foster global citizens, we look forward to continuing our partnership!



MOVE Texas is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, grassroots organization that works to ensure youth voices are heard and considered in the policy-making process by building power in underrepresented youth communities through civic engagement, leadership development, and issue advocacy.

They operate under the belief that engaging young voters is crucial to the success and growth of the community and its constituents and that by making civic engagement fun and interesting for young people, they can positively and permanently improve the community. Additionally, they provide resources for eligible citizens to register to vote, enable young people to participate in grassroots activism and organizing, and lobby elected officials for the representation that young people deserve.

In 2013, MOVE was founded by a small group of dedicated students at The University of Texas at San Antonio to increase participation in local elections and since then has gone statewide to become one of the most effective voter registration and engagement groups in the state. MOVE Texas stands for *Mobilize. Organize. Vote. Empower.* It currently operates in San Antonio, Laredo, Seguin, San Marcos, Austin, Houston, and Dallas.

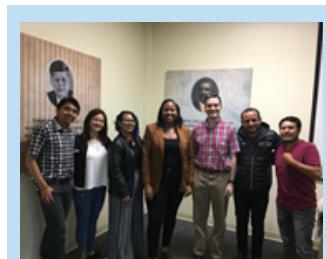
For over four years, MOVE Texas representatives have met with almost a dozen of our IVLP delegations, composed of NGO professionals and leaders in youth and civil society sectors, hailing from almost every continent around the world. They always enjoyed the opportunity to discuss MOVE’s efforts towards civic mobilization among youth through participating in roundtable and ‘panel’ discussions with the organization’s diverse staff and volunteers, including students at chapters of several local universities.

A recent delegation, who visited San Antonio to examine the impact of volunteerism in US communities and how volunteers are inspired to foster a culture of service, civic involvement, and responsibility, met with MOVE Texas representatives this past January. They shared their experience implementing various aspects of their work, focusing on strategies for mobilizing youth for civic action. The conversation also led to a discussion on how different countries address the shared challenges and obstacles surrounding civic engagement. Visitors and staff alike were keen to share their experiences encouraging youth leadership and participation around issues of social change.

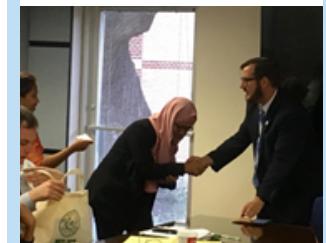
Development Manager, John Wingert, describes his experience meeting with IVLP delegations and his role as a valuable community partner: “Meeting with international visitors is always such a positive and enriching experience. The memory that sticks out most to me right now is when MOVE had the opportunity to speak with some European visitors who were utterly shocked by the statistics of democratic participation in the United States. It was a reminder to us that some of the things that we accept as normal can actually be significantly improved, including civic infrastructure. Our conversations with international visitors always help to provide invaluable perspective on the work we are doing.”

Mr. Wingert also shared how MOVE Texas rapidly adapted to the challenges created by the pandemic and has continued their important work: “Our first step was, of course, to pull our teams from the field and begin working remotely. We have been continuing to find new and innovative ways of having our field teams engage with young Texans and ensure they are registered to vote, informed about upcoming elections, and prepared to cast their ballot. Our staff members and volunteers have been phone banking tens of thousands of young people to get out the count for the census; we have been working with elected officials to let them know about the electoral reforms necessary for people to vote in a pandemic; and MOVE Texas is also preparing to launch an ambitious voter registration by mail program which will mail voter registration forms to 300,000 young Texans for them to return by mail to their county, and we will also be following up with every one of those young people over the phone and through text messages to ensure they are equipped to register to vote. Although we would be happier resuming in person work, we are very proud of our adaptations to the remote and digital space.”

International exchange programs, like IVLP, foster unique opportunities for meaningful dialogue on critical topics and encourage citizen diplomacy. Now more than ever, finding creative ways to connect, share ideas, and educate ourselves on the issues impacting both the local and the global communities is of vital importance. Therefore, we would like to express our sincere thanks to MOVE Texas, not only for the work they are doing in our local community, but for creating meaningful connections with our international visitors.



MOVE
TEXAS





Annually, SACIV welcomes between 200-400 international visitors to San Antonio through State Department professional exchange programs like IVLP, connecting these global movers and shakers with local leaders in and around the city. For almost a decade, LiftFund staff have regularly met with delegations interested in learning about innovative ways to support entrepreneurs, especially women and minorities. In 2019 alone, they graciously welcomed over 40 visitors from nearly every region of the world, providing countless opportunities to encourage and nurture entrepreneurial spirit globally. We are excited to recognize them in this week's Community Spotlight Series!

For over 25 years, LiftFund has helped individuals achieve the American Dream by providing small business lending to those who do not have access to capital from typical lenders, such as traditional banks. Along with vital small business loans, LiftFund provides educational services at no cost to borrowers, which are essential to foster self-sufficiency. You can watch a video here to learn more about their work.

Our international visitors, many of whom are successful entrepreneurs in their home countries, find LiftFund's work of providing credit and services to small businesses and entrepreneurs of great interest. They are always impressed and inspired by the leadership and innovation offered to the local micro lending industry.

A recent meeting with an IVLP group, composed of representatives from Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, focused on their "Women's Business Center". Our guests appreciated learning about how the organization provides innovative business support services and strategic partnerships in the communities. They also were interested to hear about another successful program, "LaunchSA" (formerly Café Commerce), which provides a space for entrepreneurs to gain easy access to specialty programming, workshops, tailored support, advice, and resources in partnership with the City's Economic Development Department.

LiftFund representatives also value the questions asked by the participants. Senior Business Development, Alma Valdez Brown, shared her experience connecting with SACIV's delegations. "My favorite experience was meeting with an all-woman group supporting entrepreneurs in their countries. Many did not speak English and even though we used interpreters, we still managed to make a connection. I loved hearing about the places they were from and the impact they were making in their home country. I felt that connection as I also work with entrepreneurs here in San Antonio."

Our visitors often comment on how helpful it was to learn about local services and programs that support and encourage entrepreneurial activities through these meetings. Many also reflect on how valuable it was to hear from alumni of LiftFund's programs, who have established successful small businesses, on how their participation with LiftFund positively impacted their business growth and led them to mentor others.

In a time of uncertainty, which has greatly impacted the economy and left many small businesses struggling to survive, LiftFund has provided vital services and support to local business owners and entrepreneurs. "LiftFund has collaborated with Bexar County and the City of San Antonio to offer small business grants to businesses impacted by COVID-19. We shifted from making loans to quickly making grants. It was a learning process but we have now deployed grant programs in other cities we serve," says Alma Valdez Brown.

As we continue celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), we are grateful to our community partners, like LiftFund, who make us help us forge vital global connections.

Morgan's Wonderland is a nonprofit, 25-acre theme park that was designed with special-needs individuals in mind and built for everyone's enjoyment. It first opened in 2010, having been developed by Gordon and Maggie Hartman, whose daughter Morgan deals with cognitive and physical challenges and inspired the creation of the park, and is the first theme park of its kind in the world. Since then, Morgan's Wonderland has welcomed approximately 1.8 million guests from all 50 states and 76 other countries through park visitation and special events. This has included a great many international leaders from around the world, participating in the U.S. State Department's premier professional exchange program, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

The staff of Morgan's Wonderland has graciously welcomed almost a dozen of our delegations to tour the park and learn about their wide-ranging services and activities. More than just a theme park, Morgan's Wonderland includes Morgan's Inspiration Island, and Morgan's Wonderland Sports. It is also home of STRAPS (South Texas Regional Adaptive and Paralympic Sports), which provides sports competition for athletes with disabilities and special needs. The Morgan's Wonderland Family will soon expand with the addition of Morgan's Wonderland Camp and The Multi-Assistance Center at Morgan's Wonderland.

Visitors greatly value the opportunity to have discussions with their staff about the many considerations required to create a park accessible and safe for children with disabilities, as well as the programs designed to enhance their experience at the facility. They also enjoy exploring the park and love participating in the activities it has to offer.

In 2017, an IVLP program on "Integration and Advocacy for Socially Vulnerable Populations" composed of visitors from Ukraine, which focused largely on disability issues, visited Morgan's Wonderland. They were impressed with the mission and devotion of the staff at the park, especially how their leadership recognized that families with special-needs members have great demands on both their financial and emotional resources, leading to their commitment to admit anyone with a special need free of charge.

One of the participants, Ms. Svetlana Patra, a journalist who regularly writes about people with special needs, reflected on this inspirational visit, capturing the value the park brings to so many: "The most striking part of staying in San Antonio was the visit to the magical park at Morgan's Wonderland. It was nice to see how children can play, regardless of whether the child has a disability or not. It was very inspiring learning from the example of Gordon Hartman, who helped not only his daughter Morgan, but also other children with disabilities, by opening the park. This park really helps children and young people with disabilities participate at the level of their healthy peers in activities such as swinging, riding a carousel, and having all kinds of fun in the water. And all this is accessible and safe for people with disabilities. I have to admit that when I saw the swings and carousels at the park I panicked, as my disease of brittle bones causes a fear of falling and makes it psychologically hard for me to climb stairs or raise my arms at any height. And yet, I still decided to try the swing. And I liked it! I rocked on a swing for the first time in my life! How strange that to ride a swing, I had to cross a good half of the earth. But I was not just entertained, I was able to learn about a successful US experience and bring this back to Ukraine. To make education, play, work, and life accessible to all!"

Jessica Lizardo, General Manager, shared with us her experience meeting with our many international visitors: "I always love hearing the different feedback from the different cultures that I tour with. Everyone who I've interacted with is so sweet, and excited to see what we have to offer."

It is gratifying to learn just how impactful the person-to-person interactions fostered by programs such as the IVLP have been in offering unique opportunities for our local community to connect with the rest of the world.

The connections built through these programs resonate on both sides and continue to normalize international exchange across the globe. We are incredibly grateful to the Morgan's Wonderland team for their willingness to engage with our visitors through such meaningful experiences. We thank you for your continued support of our exchange programs and we look forward to working with you again soon!





Visitor Quotes



January 2020: Volunteerism & Civic Action

My home hospitality engagement was excellent. The family and their friends who they invited to meet us were very accommodating and we shared a lot.

- Mr. Loftus Durand (Dominica)

February 2020: Global Economic Cooperation

Before I arrived in San Antonio, TX, my stereotype was “only cowboys!” there. It completely changed during our stay. I saw a very vibrant, growing and very beautiful state and city. There is great networking. I learned about good business ideas I want to take back home.

- Mr. Mohamed Armine Sdiri (Tunisia)

The home hospitality time was so amazing. I enjoyed it very much coz it give complete idea about American homes, hospitality and we discuss their ideas and thoughts. Thank you!

- Mr. Samir Dabit (Palestine)

The appointments with the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation, the Bexar County Economic Development, Port San Antonio and UTSA Institute for Economic Development were important for me because I had a chance to learn the business model of institutions and foundations which work on the development and growth of the city. I used to watch it on TV but seeing it in real life was an unforgettable experience.

- Mr. Halil Ibrahim (Turkey)

February 2020: Empowering Youth through Workforce Development

Thank you for putting together a strong program, MUCH APPRECIATED! The meeting with the UTSA was great (both speakers!)

- Ms. Salima Admi (Morocco)

During the home hospitality opportunity, I met Anna Maria, the name will always remain in my heart. I felt a lot of true love with Africa, friendly and humble. I loved all the fantastic food and all the attention she shared with us.

- Mr. Christian Ndonga (Chad)

February 2020: Interfaith Dialogue & Religious Freedom

I didn't know much about San Antonio; I was pleasantly surprised to see such a diverse community and openness of the organization to cooperate. I wish I could spend more time with the Community Faith-Based Liaison. She was an amazing speaker. Thank you!

- Simon Jacob (Germany)

February 2020: Countering Violent Extremism: Community Strategies

It was quite interesting and fascinating to meet with the family in San Antonio, TX. They could tell more about everyday life in America and provide a good perspective on American culture. Also, the dinner was very delicious!

- Roya Moore (Denmark)

February 2020: Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists: Media Responsibility in the Age of Disinformation

The appointments in San Antonio were very good for me. I saw a spirit of responsible community media which takes an important role to promote local knowledge and grassroots participation that appealed to do the same in my community. Thank you.

- Chhengpor Aun (Cambodia)

February 2020: US Trade Policy

I loved the meeting with representatives of Port San Antonio. They explained the new approaches and changes that are to be taken in today's trade procedures and promoting external trade which is my area of work. It was effective.

- Ms. Khaoula Gammoudi (Tunisia)

I didn't know much about Texas or San Antonio beforehand. The meetings and cultural activities have helped greatly in bridging the knowledge gap. THANKS!

- Ms. Michelle Chai Liting (Malaysia)

March 2020: Urban Development & City Planning

It was a pleasant experience in San Antonio. I was coming without any expectations, just really curious about Texas in general. I have heard about Mexican impact and feel in this city. I fell in love with this cozy and very vibrant place (despite the heat and a lot of cars). I would love to come back and will recommend it to all my friends.

- Katerina Yakovets (Ukraine)

March 2020: Small Market Newspapers in the Digital Age

I want to give you especially thank you and your team for all the attention that provided us, both in the logistics and in the content of the local program. It was a very profitable experience for me and my colleagues, with more important meetings than others, but in all cases they were very useful. In addition, we were able to get to know very different meetings, with many contrasts, but which were fascinating from the point of view of our professional and human interest. Once again, many thanks to you and your team for everything.

- Andrés D'Alessandro (Argentina)



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