



**North American Travel Journalists Association**  
150 S. Arroyo Parkway Pasadena, CA 91105  
22 September 2008

To All NATJA Members:

It has been just over sixty days since I was handed the reigns of NATJA. What a great opportunity! And one to which I am really looking forward. Many thanks to Elizabeth and our Advisory Board for their efforts, both in building NATJA as an organization, and their gracious assistance in transition to a new management team.

It has been my experience that member based organizations function best when there is a robust, continuing dialog between members and their administrator. Please accept this as the first of my occasional member letters. These communications will allow me to share my thinking about NATJA with each of you just as I welcome you sharing your thoughts with me.

Our transition team is proceeding well – albeit not without a few glitches that have troubled me and inconvenienced a few for you. I expect to have these matters addressed in the next couple of weeks or so as we upgrade our membership service infrastructure, a necessary predicate to our future development plans. The transition has been more challenging than a simple baton pass from Elizabeth to me: It has involved a whole new administrative team, re-location to a new office and adjustment to new ownership. I'll have more to say on each of these matters, but suffice it to say that I am very excited about future opportunities and growth of NATJA as a function of all these developments. I hope you will indulge me a few transition pains; I'm confident the gains will be worth it.

So let me share a glimpse of the gains that are coming in our future. NATJA's members and other constituents are served by our three regular communication tools: *The Wayfarer*, *Travel World International Magazine* and our website. Plans to expand and upgrade all three of these tools are already underway and I expect you will be hearing from the editors of each of these publications in the months ahead. Our website, of course, is more than a communications medium. It helps us to do our work and develop our professionalism, too. In recognition of the important role a website with state-of-the art functional utility can play, we will be upgrading its functionality to strengthen our community of professionals as well as facilitate our work flow. We will be seeking member input at all stages of website's re-development with *beta* testing of our new "face" in the spring of 2009.

While launching these important initiatives, we have been working on this year's NATJA Award's and next year's Conference. The Awards are an important vehicle to recognize the truly excellent work of our members and other

contributors to our industry. The old process for handling the increasing number of entries and assuring professional and impartial judging in almost fifty categories needed attention. We have just completed revisions in that process. Our new *process* is being supervised by a professor of communications at a major university in Southern California while *judging* of entrants will be done by professionals in the field rather than academics. We believe these changes in process and judging will enhance our Awards program this year and in the future. I encourage you to enter the competition. See our website at the Award's link, for this year's entry forms, rules and deadlines, etc.

This year's annual Conference in Oklahoma City provided both enjoyment and professional development opportunities for attendees. See our page on the Conference section of our website for comments and pictures of the 2008 experience. Thank you to those of you who filled out the member questionnaire. Comments were especially strong regarding our continuing professional education, both for media and for our CVB and Travel Professional members. We are building on our 2008 success for our 2009 planning. We expect details to be released in October. Stay tuned for this – I am keeping the details under wraps for a few more weeks. I think you will be very pleased when we unveil them.

Our 2009 membership ID cards have been redesigned and will be available shortly (I know many of you have been waiting, mostly patiently). Member cards come in three categories: Media, CVBs and Travel Professionals. Beginning with August renewals, members will be receiving the new revised cards.

Additionally, a number of other ideas have come from our membership, all of which will be considered by our Advisory Board when we meet next month. They are:

- 1) A member benefits program which we will develop with the assistance of the Advisory Board and our membership
- 2) Expansion of the Advisory Board by 3 to include all geographic regions of the US and CVB's
- 3) Regional Meetings to begin in 2009 which will be mini-conferences and will include professional development
- 4) Membership drive that will include incentives for members sponsoring new members
- 5) Developing a NATJA Travel television or internet program to highlight NATJA members and provide a face to all of the wonderful stories that you write
- 6) Greater visibility for NATJA Award winners, and plaques and certificates for journalists and CVB's finalists commemorating their success in the annual NATJA Awards
- 7) Revised deadlines for the NATJA Awards (detailed in the official entry form). This year's deadline will be December 1st with announcement of the winners in mid-January, 2009.

Because I want this to be a letter, not a book, let me defer discussion of other pending matters until later in the year. Before closing, however, I want to return to some transition details.

Our new offices are located at 150 S. Arroyo Parkway, Pasadena, CA 91105, just south of Pasadena's bustling Old Town. Our new mailing address and telephones are in the contact section of the website: 3579 E. Foothill Boulevard, Box 744, Pasadena, CA 91107. Direct member telephone: (626) 376-9754. We've also added to our staff including a full-time office administrator who will be handling (and expediting) most day-to-day tasks, Michelle Ruedy, who will be handling our accounting and membership details and Ben Root, who will be handling operational and planning responsibilities. All are available to assist with matters in their area and, of course, I'm here for, well, whatever you need. Feel free to contact me.

Finally, NATJA ownership has also changed to Travel Professionals, Inc. Ownership by a company devoted exclusively to travel professionals and travel issues is expected to allow greater opportunities for NATJA development such as regional meetings and programs for members, increased publishing opportunities and expanded professional development opportunities. I know there has been a lot of rattling about ownership issues, but I think you'll find TPI's focus and commitment will be beneficial to all.

This letter is about twice as long as I had intended, but I wanted to share my thinking and our efforts on behalf of our membership. I hope you'll feel free to contact me regarding any of these matters, or any other ideas, suggestions or comments you may have.

We are thrilled and excited to be working with all of you. We will be open to suggestions or recommendations from each of you. We share a common goal to make NATJA the premier travel writers' association in the country.

Very truly yours,

*Helen*

Helen Hernandez  
Chief Executive Officer  
North American Travel Journalists Association