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**VISIT VISALIA BECOMES CALIFORNIA'S FIRST AUTISM CERTIFIED
DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION**

International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards Awards Certification

Visalia, CA (Sept. 10, 2021) Visit Visalia announced today it is the first California destination marketing organization designated a “Certified Autism Center” by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This new distinction is a result of the organization’s staff and governing board of directors completing specialized training in common behaviors and sensory considerations associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD.) This training expands the team’s readiness to assist families and individuals with special needs to prepare for and to enjoy inclusive and accessible travel to Visalia and the nearby Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

The Visalia Convention & Visitors Bureau board chair Anil Chagan and Visit Visalia executive director Nellie Freeborn made the announcement of the designation and the programs now in place that support this initiative. Also on hand were Clay Jordan, superintendent of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and Amber Rich, director of engagement at Visit California, who spoke about the positive impact this initiative will have to travelers with special needs. The parks recently released an accessibility video series demonstrating how travelers with special needs can experience the parks. Visit California shared their “What if” campaign that lets travelers know “all dreams are welcome” in the golden state.

“As the first destination marketing organization in California to complete the IBCCES training and be designated a Certified Autism Center, Visit Visalia is proud to provide memorable experiences to all families visiting Visalia and our adjacent National Parks,” said Nellie Freeborn, Visit Visalia executive director. “As a mother of a child with autism, and a tourism and hospitality professional, I personally relate to the challenges families experience when traveling. This autism certification provides a deeper understanding and compassion - it is part of our mission to show families that Visalia is dedicated to serving people with Autism.”

Autism affects a significant number of people, with diagnoses each year on the rise with about 1 in 54 children identified as having ASD according to estimates from CDC’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. With this training, Visit Visalia can better serve this growing, yet underserved community that represents 32 million trip each year and provide its visitors a “spectrum of travel possibilities.”

“Visit Visalia and its Board of Directors are pleased to partner with IBCCES to become an autism certified destination marketing organization. This important designation will let individuals with special needs travel with confidence knowing we have completed this specialized training and can provide a positive vacation experience,” said Anil Chagan, Visalia Convention & Visitors Bureau board chair.

As the first destination marketing organization in California to achieve this designation, Visit Visalia is taking the lead requesting partner hospitality businesses invest in this specialized training. To date, the local hospitality partner businesses that have signed on to complete autism sensitivity training and awareness include the Comfort Suites Visalia Hotel, Hampton Inn



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Visalia, Visalia Marriott at the Convention Center, Valley Oaks Golf Course, Visalia Wyndham, Lamp Litter Inn, Naturally Nuts, and Visalia Adventure Park.

Visit Visalia is also initiating a movement with the help of IBCCES to become a Certified Autism Destination (CAD.) The CAD designation is awarded to destinations where key community areas, including hotels, museums, attractions, entertainment venues, and other tourism organizations are trained and certified to better serve autistic individuals and those with other sensory disorders. Visit Visalia's team is taking the first steps to help build a more inclusive community.

IBCCES has been the industry leader in autism training for licensed healthcare professionals and educators around the globe for 20 years. Florida-based IBCCES created training and certification programs after recognizing that many families with children who have special needs have limited travel options.

"IBCCES is excited to be a part of Visit Visalia's initiative to better serve autistic individuals and their families. Organizations like Visit Visalia are vital to creating more inclusive communities for residents and visitors alike," said Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman.

For more information on inclusive and accessible travel to our city and including the nearby Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, go to [visitvisalia.com/accessible-travel](https://www.visitvisalia.com/accessible-travel)

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ABOUT VISIT VISALIA:

[Visit Visalia](#) is a collaboration of the Visalia Tourism and Marketing District and the Visalia Convention and Visitors Bureau (VCVB) dedicated to marketing, advertising, public relations and other promotional efforts that inspire travel to the City of Visalia. Visit Visalia works closely with local lodging properties, restaurants and attractions to foster interest in Visalia as a year-round destination for leisure, family, and meeting and convention travelers. For more information about Visit Visalia go to www.VisitVisalia.com and follow Visit Visalia on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [You Tube](#) and [Pinterest](#).

ABOUT IBCCES:

Delivering the Global Standard for Training and Certification in the Field of Cognitive Disorders – IBCCES provides a series of certifications that empower professionals to be leaders in their field and improve the outcomes for the individuals they serve. These programs are the only training and certification programs endorsed by the largest grassroots autism organization in the world, The Autism Society of America, and recognized around the world as the leading benchmark for training and certification in the areas of autism and other cognitive disorders.