



Thoughtful Tourism for Recovery & Beyond

*Lessons Learned Along
Florida's West Coast*

5/15/2025





THE LORE OF SARASOTA'S HURRICANE 'PROTECTION'



5:16



An aerial photograph of a coastal town. In the foreground, there's a sandy beach with gentle waves lapping at the shore. Behind the beach, several multi-story apartment buildings or hotels are visible. The town extends into a large, turquoise body of water, possibly a bay or lagoon, with many smaller islands and inlets. The background shows a dense line of trees and more distant land under a clear blue sky.

*The thing about crisis is:
it's not about if but when.*

Emergency Preparedness

Visit Sarasota County adopted emergency preparedness as a key focus area in its FY25 scope of services.

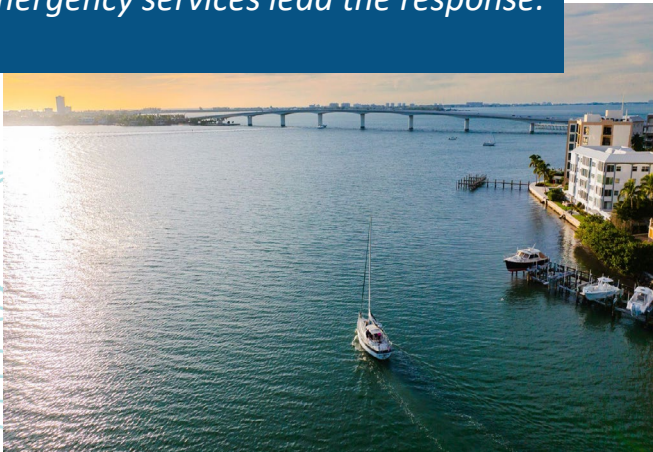


Your DMO's Behind-the-Scenes Role

Assessing the situation, adjusting messaging, and coordinating with local businesses and regional DMOs



Emergency services lead the response.



Responsibilities

- Share official communications through our Visitor Centers and digital channels to **keep the public informed**.
- Coordinate with local authorities and businesses to **provide emergency lodging** for displaced residents, visitors, and repair crews.
- Work with regional DMO offices to **determine the appropriate time to resume promotional marketing**, working with officials to ensure safety and readiness.
- Engage in **continuous disaster preparedness planning**, including local emergency planning, staff training, and developing crisis management plans tailored to the tourism sector.

Seeking Stakeholder Alignment

Late Spring through Early Hurricane Season (May-August)



- Directly following National Travel & Tourism Week, DMO leadership reviews and updates Crisis Communications Plan. **All staff is part of the process** and signs off on final plan.
 - **Pro Tip:** Get trusted outside eyes (consultant, partner task force) to assess vulnerabilities.
- Updated plan is shared with Sarasota County Government and **Emergency Operations Center (EOC)** for feedback and approval.
- Deploy a survey to **lodging partners** to assess inventory and point-of-contact. Establish lines of communication with EOC.
- Throughout the year, as various crises strike, our plan is adjusted with **key learnings** and updates made to our Weather Conditions / Recovery Efforts webpages.

May



June - July

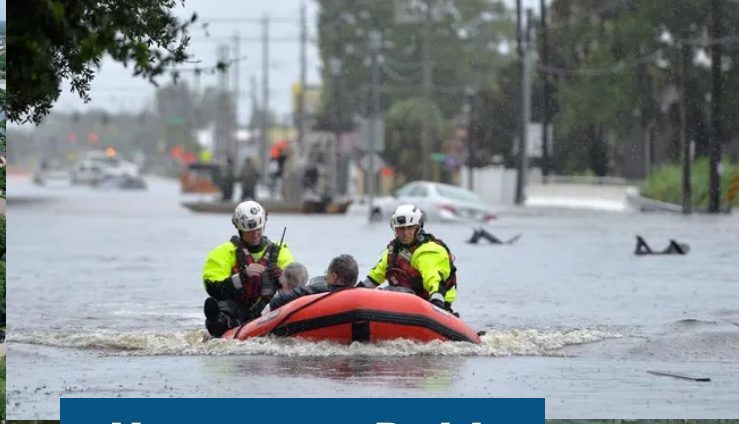


Pre-Crisis



Continuous

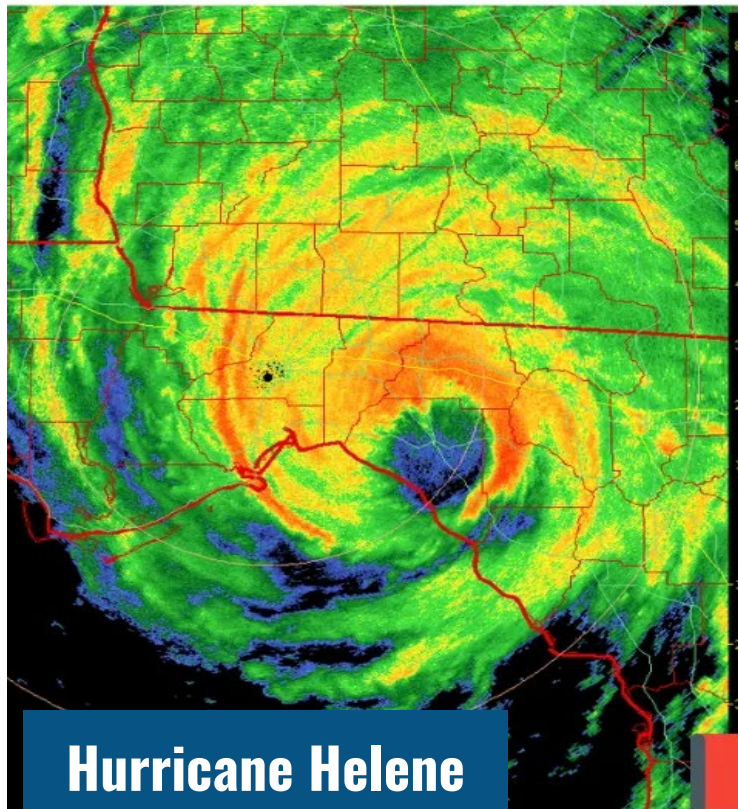




Hurricane Debby
August 8, 2024 as Trop. Storm
Estimated Damage: \$100 Million



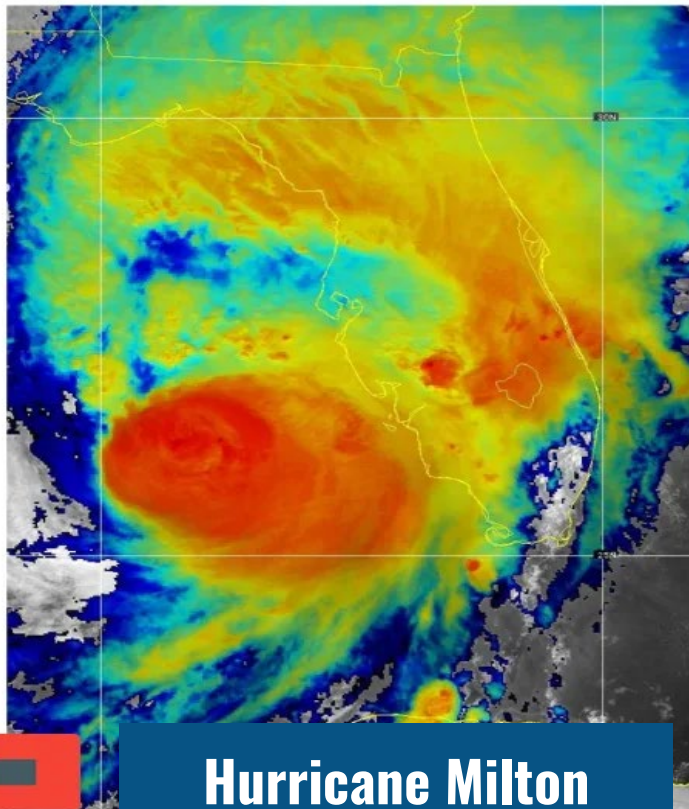
Hurricane Milton vs Hurricane Helene



Hurricane Helene

September 26, 2024

Estimated Damage: \$300 Million



Hurricane Milton

October 9, 2024 as Cat. 3

Estimated Damage: \$333-375 Million

**Herald
Tribune**

(October 9, 2024)

Hurricane Milton ravaged one of the most popular areas for ‘snowbirds’ on Florida’s Gulf Coast



Sarasota County devastated by Hurricane Milton

3 minutes left

FOX 13

HURRICANE MILTON

STORM ALERT

FOX 13 MILTON AFTERMATH: SARASOTA COUNTY

8:02AM 71°RY LAUNDRY FOX13 PORTABLE GENERATORS MUST NEVER BE OPERATED INDOOR WEATHER

Sarasota County devastated by Hurricane Milton

MSNBC

TOP STORIES RACHEL MADDOX MORNING JOE THE BRIEFING WITH JEN PSAKI DEADLINE: LEGAL BLOG

> BREAKING NEWS

HURRICANE MILTON HITS FLORIDA WITH FLOODING, HIGH WINDS

HURRICANE MILTON

LOCATION

59 MILE S OF DAYTONA BEACH

MOVEMENT

NE @ 18 MPH

MSNBC

LIVE > 5:08 PM

October 2024¹ Economic Impact²

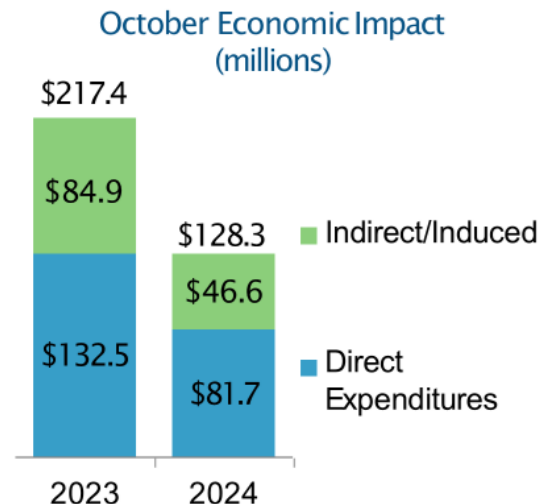
Visitor ³ Statistics	2023	2024	%Change
Visitors ³	122,100	86,600	-29.1%
Direct Expenditures ³	\$132,534,600	\$81,713,200	-38.3%
Total Economic Impact ⁴	\$217,356,700	\$128,289,700	-41.0%

¹ Hurricane Milton affected the ability to collect intercept surveys during October 2024. The results presented in the dashboard are based on fewer surveys and should be interpreted cautiously.

² Monthly visitation metrics for October 2024 were heavily influenced by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Not only did trips have to be cancelled and rescheduled, those who visited Sarasota in October may have included recovery workers, displaced residents, and those who came to check on properties. These visitors may stay longer and have different spending behaviors than a more typical mix of leisure and business travelers.

³Visitors staying in paid accommodations

⁴As of October 2024, the multiplier being used to calculate total economic impact is 1.57, in October 2023 the multiplier was 1.64





Post Storm Status

Visit Sarasota County cares about you and your local business. As our community recovers from the recent storm, we want to know how you're doing, what's the status of your business, and if you're in need of further resources or assistance.

Please fill out the below form to help us do so. Any questions, please reach out to partnership@visitsarasota.org. We're here for you.

Business Name *

Contact Name *

Contact Email *

Contact Phone *

Currently open for business? *

☐ Yes ☐ No

Did your business suffer physical damage? *

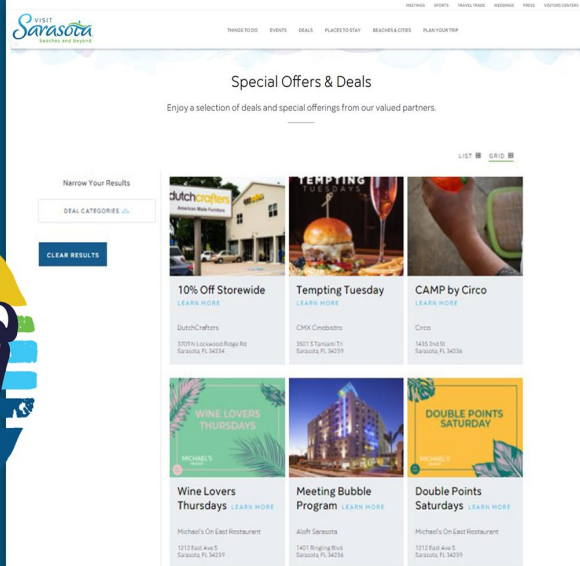
☐ Yes ☐ No

Post-Storm Assessments Survey and Visitor Center Outreach

*Results: 10-15% of businesses expected
extended closures due to storm damage.*



Transforming “Fun” into “Support”



Campaign Goals



1. **Supersede harmful regional and national perceptions** of storm damage with accurate, positive narratives repositioning Sarasota as safe and open for business and visitation.
2. **Restore trust among residents** and rally them to be tourists in their hometown to **sustain economic activity for reopen businesses**, in lieu of out-of-town visitors.
3. Spearhead a **unified, accessible approach to recovery** used by residents, businesses, government, and community stakeholders that instill pride and confidence in Sarasota County's vitality.
4. **Strengthen trust in tourism** as a driver of quality of life to ensure future promotional marketing campaigns to bring back visitors are welcome by residents and businesses alike.

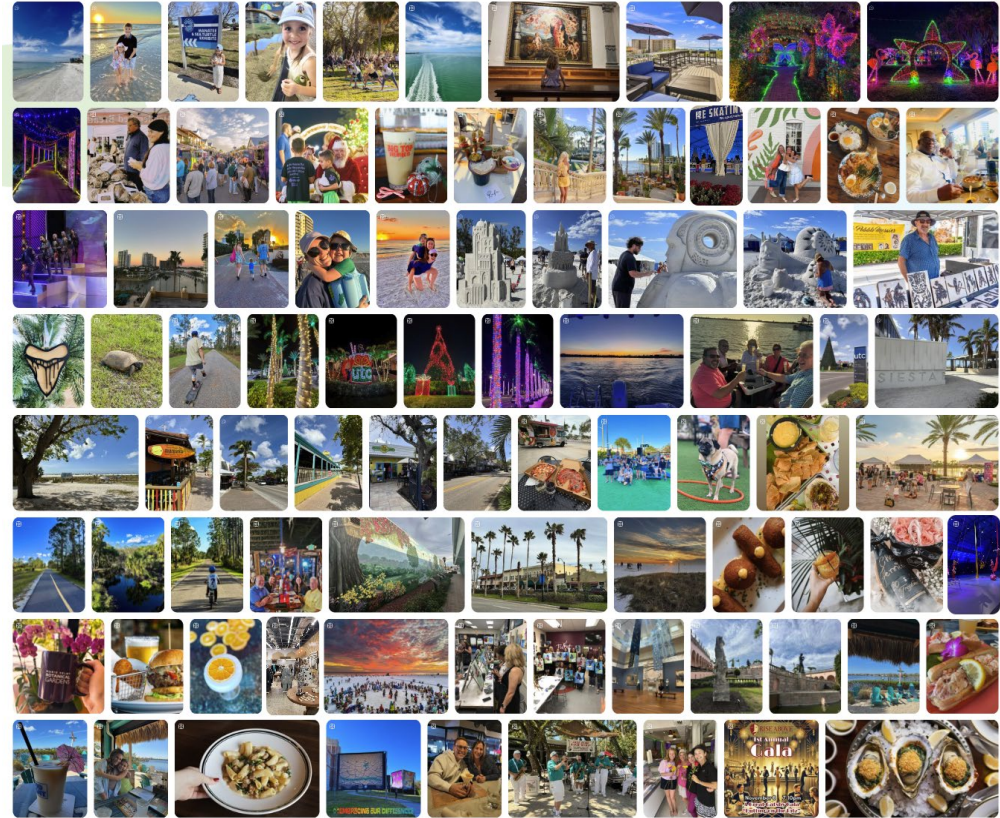


Support the 941

Campaign Essentials & How to Participate

- Landing page promoted **local events and deals** and drove users to the new Neighborhood Navigator Pass, encouraging them to **explore beyond the beaches**.
- Any business could participate – whether they were in a place to welcome visitors in a few days, weeks, or months – by adding events/deals at **SupportThe941.com** and using the hashtag **#SupportThe941**.

This campaign was a community effort – anyone was welcome to use the branding and messaging.



Post-Storm Recovery

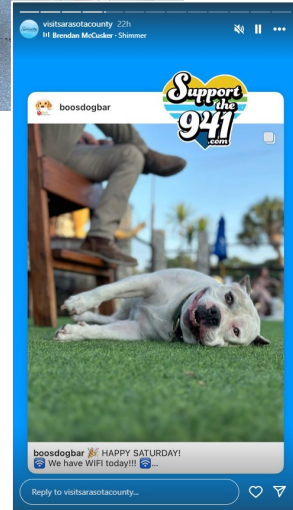
Support the 941

Community Activations & Promotions

- Social media campaign showed through UGC that much of Sarasota County was **open for business**.
- Held two **virtual Town Halls** with 95+ attendees collectively, representing partners, residents, and, critically, elected officials (TDC and U.S. Congress).
- Joined Chambers, public-private partnerships, and partners for **“walk and talks” with local business owners**.
 - In total: 15+ strategic relationships uplifted campaign content – 8 chambers, 4 municipalities, and two public-private partnerships.
- **Pop-up activation for Kindness Week** took place Nov 11-15 with Breeze Airways to promote Support the 941 in different neighborhoods throughout the county.



Locals helping locals
#SupportThe941



Post-Storm Recovery

Support the 941

Digital Marketing & PR Efforts

- 106 CrowdRiff images were submitted to VSC's website and **797 Instagram posts used #SupportThe941**.
- **Campaign webpage generated 10,733 unique visitors** with 3,100 interactions and 8,400 views of #SupportThe941 content, translating to a **37.1% engagement rate**.
- PR efforts earned **18 stories in 9 regional publications/broadcasts** and 1 national hit, 94% of which had positive or balanced sentiment, amounting to **27,278,403 impressions**.



BUSINESS

Visit Sarasota County inspires thoughtful tourism for recovery and beyond | Indicators

Erin Duggan Special to the Herald-Tribune
Nov. 11, 2024, 6:45 a.m. ET



Our road to normalcy from recent storms is a nuanced journey for us all, but especially for our hospitality industry. And what may be even more challenging to navigate beyond the immediate damage and debris is perception. From smartphones and social, people outside our community have been exposed to Sarasota County through images and videos capturing Hurricane Helene and Milton's impacts, yet these do



Erin Duggan is the president and CEO of Visit Sarasota County. Provided By Visit Sarasota County

The Comeback Coast: Florida's West Coast Reimagined

The Plan Begins *(After Hurricane Helene – Early Fall 2024)*

- Visit Sarasota County and Bradenton CVB begin discussions
- Concepting unified visitor messaging post-storm
- Goals: Clarify the coast is still here, still thriving
- Plan: Launch reassurance campaign across key markets



The Comeback Coast: Florida's West Coast Reimagined

The Pause (Hurricane Milton- Mid Fall 2024)

- 13 days Into planning, Milton strikes
- Direct hit worsens regional impact
- Tourism at a standstill
- Campaign paused out of respect and necessity
- DMO's regroup

The Comeback Coast: Florida's West Coast Reimagined

The Comeback Coast is Born (Late Fall 2024- November Launch)

- Campaign reignited, message reimagined
- Launched “**Florida's West Coast**” in unison
- New angle: Not just open—but *resilient*
- Shared messaging through a jointly promoted website FloridasWestCoast.com
- Independent 8-week executions by each DMO tailored to their audiences and linked through the central URL

FloridasWestCoast.com

REVISIT YOUR FAVORITES & FIND NEW ONES

We Can't Wait to See You VISITORS WELCOME!

Many of the places you know and love have already reopened. Be sure to stop by and show your support - plus, check out some of our region's other must-see spots. Unspoiled natural beauty. Vibrant arts and culture. Fresh culinary adventures. You'll find it all here on **Florida's West Coast!**

BRADENTON AREA
Well-Preserved (& Ready to Explore)

SARASOTA
Nightlife, Music & Entertainment

BRADENTON AREA
Conscious Cuisine:
Where to Eat!

SARASOTA
Free Outdoor Activities & Events

BRADENTON AREA
Art & Soul: Cultural Expressions

SARASOTA
North Port
Itineraries to Ploeb
Everyone

•••••

The Bay
Sarasota

EXPLORE

Florida's West Coast

FROM BRADENTON TO SARASOTA

Your beloved vacation destinations are ready to welcome you back! Discover the sun and fun waiting for you - from the laid-back charm of the Bradenton Area to the cultural attractions of Sarasota County. The possibilities are endless for your next getaway...

Click In To Z...

SOCIAL CRED

Content from both DMO's

Welcoming Imagery

Real-Time UGC

VSC Campaign



Sarasota County on Florida's Gulf Coast is more than award-winning beaches. It's home to historic neighborhoods, art districts and outdoor havens just waiting to be explored. Don't believe us? Read on to see what's on offer in each, then come see for yourself.

Burns Court

Colorful bungalows and cobblestone streets dot the back alleys of Burns Court, small in size but big in charm. Browse local artwork at Burns Gallery on Palm or 502 Gallery, soak up live music in the courtyard of Diver's Fish Camp, then see an independent film at Burns Court Cinema.



- Display Media that highlighted the region's beautiful beaches.
- Paid Social Ads that emphasized the area's natural beauty and must-do activities, from food to music to culture.
- Nativio article that showcased the range of activities available in the Sarasota Bradenton area, emphasizing hidden gems and local businesses.

RESULTS

DISPLAY:

8,468,796 impressions and
8,871 clicks with a 0.09% CTR.

CUSTOM LANDING PAGE:

34,025 visits and 5,468 engaged
sessions for an engagement
rate of 14.85%.

PAID SOCIAL:

2,768,753 impressions and
23,099 clicks with a 0.83% CTR.

NATIVO ARTICLE:

6,767,108 impressions and
10,594 pageviews, with an average
time on content of 35 seconds.

The Keys Are Calling

Visit Sarasota Spring/Summer 2025 Campaign



VISIT
Sarasota
beaches and beyond

Objectives & Tactics

- Showcase the Keys as a lively, welcoming destination, emphasizing the stunning scenery and unique experiences waiting for travelers
- Boost reach and impact by targeting travelers based on their locations and behaviors
- Strengthen brand awareness, showcasing Sarasota as a welcoming destination where visitors can truly *feel at ease*
- Leverage channels that both inspire the audience and lead to conversion



Audience

- Travel intenders
- Interests in Outdoors & Nature, Beaches, Foodies, Arts & Culture, Family, Weekend Getaways, Empty Nesters and Luxury
- Drive Markets: Atlanta, Tampa/St. Pete, Orlando/Daytona/Melbourne, Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Fort Myers/Naples
- Fly Markets: Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Columbus, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Hartford/New Haven



Display Media Performance

3/13 – 5/7

- Impressions: 6,158,637
- Clicks: 4,539
- Conversions: 28,100
- Conversion Rate: 0.46%

Conversions:

- 100% Pageview
- Scroll depth of over 50%
- Time on site of 30 seconds or more
- Outbound clicks to partner pages
- 2+ pageviews
- eNews Sign-Up
- Guide Request



VISIT
Sarasota
beaches and beyond

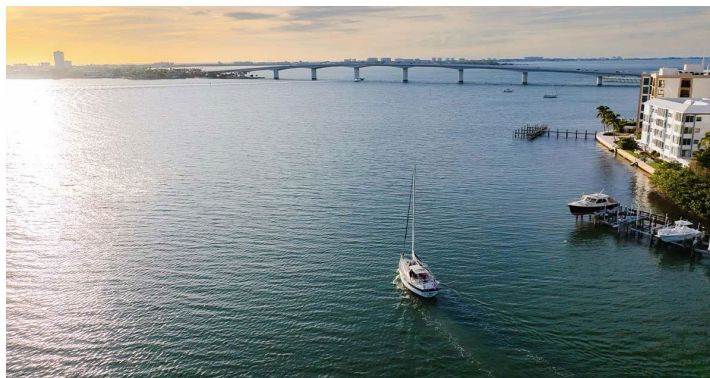
Native Media Performance

3/13 – 5/7

- Impressions: 5,339,607
- Clicks: 7,040
- Conversions: 38,084
- Conversion Rate: 0.71%

Conversions:

- 100% Pageview
- Scroll depth of over 50%
- Time on site of 30 seconds or more
- Outbound clicks to partner pages
- 2+ pageviews
- eNews Sign-Up
- Guide Request



Visit Sarasota's Keys

Explore Sarasota's many Gulf islands for unparalleled beaches, water sports and memories.

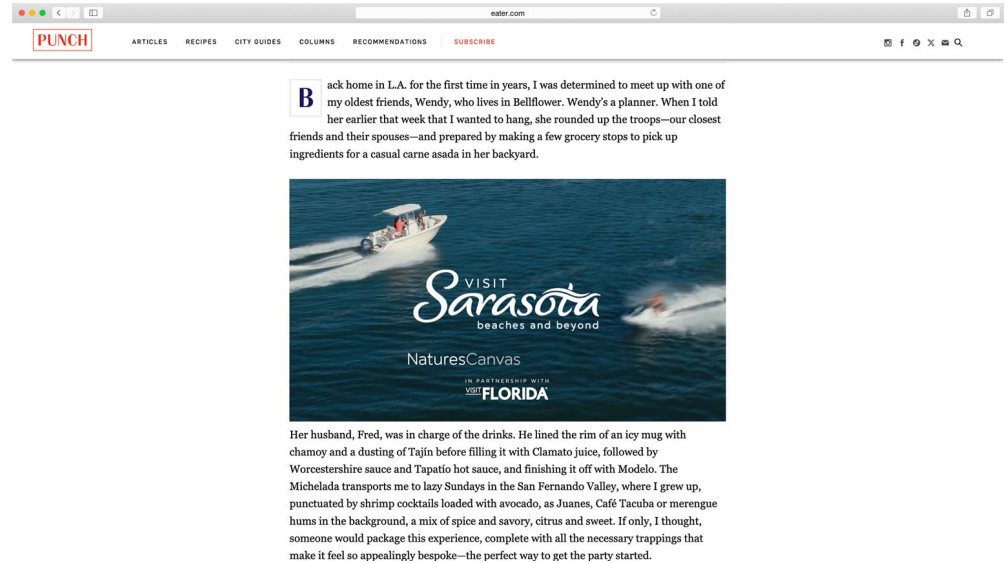
VISIT
Sarasota
beaches and beyond

Online Video Media Performance

3/7 – 5/7

- Impressions: 1,750,720
- Video Completions: 1,462,114
- Video Completion Rate: 84.17%

VCR Benchmark: 75%



PUNCH ARTICLES RECIPES CITY GUIDES COLUMNS RECOMMENDATIONS SUBSCRIBE

Back home in L.A. for the first time in years, I was determined to meet up with one of my oldest friends, Wendy, who lives in Bellflower. Wendy's a planner. When I told her earlier that week that I wanted to hang, she rounded up the troops—our closest friends and their spouses—and prepared by making a few grocery stops to pick up ingredients for a casual carne asada in her backyard.

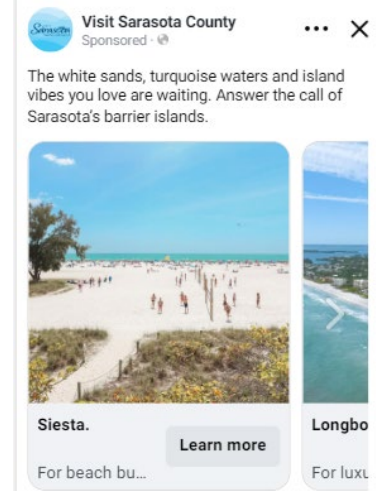
VISIT Sarasota
beaches and beyond
NaturesCanvas
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
VISIT FLORIDA

Her husband, Fred, was in charge of the drinks. He lined the rim of an icy mug with chamoy and a dusting of Tajín before filling it with Clamato juice, followed by Worcestershire sauce and Tapatio hot sauce, and finishing it off with Modelo. The Michelada transports me to lazy Sundays in the San Fernando Valley, where I grew up, punctuated by shrimp cocktails loaded with avocado, as Juanes, Café Tacuba or merengue hums in the background, a mix of spice and savory, citrus and sweet. If only, I thought, someone would package this experience, complete with all the necessary trappings that make it feel so appealingly bespoke—the perfect way to get the party started.

Social Media Performance

2/1 – 5/7

- Landing page views: 23,426
- Cost per LPV: \$0.35
- Landing rate: 2.00%
- Click-through rate: 2.16%



Key Takeaways

Get Ahead of Hurricane Season and Establish a Culture of Crisis Readiness



Start early, start now. If you wait for crisis to strike to make a plan, you're already behind.

Manage sensationalism and seize control of the narrative – or someone else will.

Balance resident sensitivities with needs of local businesses – be that trusted voice + guide.

Leverage strategic partnerships and establish a seat at the table, pre-crisis.

