

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | November 2023



Would you like to distribute a PDF of this newsletter to your TDC, elected leaders, or industry members? Visit the Destinations Florida members-only website to get the PDF for distribution: <https://www.destinationsflorida.org/tourism-marketing-today>

Brightline High-Speed Rail Transforms Travel Between Orlando and South Florida

Brightline's Orlando to South Florida high-speed rail is now in full swing, reshaping travel for leisure and business alike. Offering service to Miami, Aventura, Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton, and West Palm Beach, Florida Brightline is the only active

high-speed rail system in the United States.

Visit Orlando is excited to welcome Brightline's new high-speed rail service connecting Orlando and South Florida with 30 train trips daily. In addition to attracting



Visit Orlando team members, board members, clients, and Orange County and City of Orlando commissioners enjoy an exclusive Brightline event; Visit Orlando creative on the Brightline train.



Our #1 Focus

by Robert Skrob



There's nothing more important to continuing the employment growth of the tourism industry than protecting

the current uses of the Tourist Development Tax.

While we haven't yet seen all of the bills that will be filed during the 2024 Legislative Session, we are preparing as if this will be the most challenging year we have faced.

Last year's bill would have destroyed Florida tourism marketing at the state and local levels. The only reason that legislation was stopped

BRIGHTLINE RAIL continues on pg. 4

E.D.'s MESSAGE... continues on pg. 3

Support from our partners makes Destinations Florida's industry & legislative representation possible

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HAPPY Birthday

DT Minich
November 22

Charlotte Bireley
November 26

**DESTINATIONS
FLORIDA**
TourismMarketing
Today

The Official Newsletter of
Destinations Florida
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Member Database

On the Cover

The Bay public park is "one park for all" and enjoyed by Sarasota's community along 53 acres of conserved land on the bayfront. The distinct purple Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall neighbors the park in the remarkable Sarasota County.

Destination Marketing Summit April 3-5, 2024

Sheraton Sand Key Resort • Clearwater Beach, Florida



DMO members are encouraged to submit presentations sharing their successes and challenges over the past year. Affiliate partners, advertising agencies, and other vendors interested in educating and networking with DMOs are also encouraged to submit presentations.

Submit your presentation online at:
DestinationsFlorida.org/2024SummitSpeakers

Deadline: Friday, November 10, 2023

E.D.'s MESSAGE... continued from pg. 1

was because of the immediate response to the bill together with the trusting relationships fostered with legislators before the session began.

The next two months will be busy with the holidays and a rush of end-of-year deadlines. Amidst all of that, make time to work with your industry to continue developing relationships with your elected officials.

Our PR team at CoreMessage has developed an extensive library of legislative advocacy

materials for your use. See page 5 to learn more.

Please carve out some time to meet with your industry colleagues, give them some of the legislative advocacy resources, and help them foster stronger relationships with their elected leaders.

I know it's a big ask. But it's the only thing stopping lawmakers from passing new laws that would devastate the jobs provided by Florida's tourism industry. Thank you for your help!

South Florida residents, the new service also unlocks greater potential for Orlando's international visitors. To celebrate Brightline's official launch, Visit Orlando has promoted the service through travel agent trainings, with publicity efforts, on social media channels, and on its website. Additionally, the team also hosted an exclusive Brightline train ride and lunch for Orange County and City of Orlando commissioners, Visit Orlando board members, and Visit Orlando clients to celebrate the official opening.

Brightline is a significant asset to The Palm Beaches with two stations located in the heart of its largest city centers—downtown West Palm Beach and downtown Boca Raton. The Palm Beaches sit between the new route from Central to South Florida, and the trains provide easy and efficient intercity travel for important market segments including Florida residents, theme park visitors, and international travelers.

"Brightline is a game-changer in Florida and a highly welcome addition to our destination," said Erika Constantine, VP of marketing for Discover The Palm

Beaches. "We have a strategic partnership with Brightline that allows us to create greater awareness for both entities and help increase visitation and travelers."

Farther south, upon arriving at Fort Lauderdale station, passengers find themselves

immersed in the vibrant downtown scene. Notable attractions, from the Broward Center for Performing Arts to the Museum of Discovery and Science, await exploration. With 30 daily trains offering stress-free travel, this efficient alternative surpasses the convenience of driving, presenting a journey that's not only faster but also an hour shorter than it takes by car on Florida's Turnpike or Interstate 95.

"Brightline serves as a global gateway, connecting travelers from around the world to Greater Fort Lauderdale," said Stacy Ritter, president and CEO of Visit Lauderdale. "With 15 daily roundtrips, we're welcoming visitors eager to explore our inclusive, accessible, and beautifully diverse attractions and beaches."

Brightline's launch of rail service between Miami and Orlando connects travelers to two of the world's most popular destinations. The convenient, seamless experience makes getting around Greater Miami and Miami Beach easier too. High-speed rail between downtown Miami's Central Station and the new Aventura station is less than 18 minutes with enhanced first and last mile mobility options including fixed-route shuttles between Miami International Airport, Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport, and three locations in Miami Beach.

"Nearly half of our visitors are international or Florida residents," noted the Greater Miami CVB's Rolando Aedo. "Connecting Greater Miami and Miami Beach to the rest of Central and South Florida gives them options we haven't had before."



The Brightline high-speed train connects Orlando with five destinations in South Florida.
Photo: Brightline



PARADISE
PARADISEADV.COM

It's Legislative Advocacy Season!

by Jennifer Fennell, CoreMessage



Jennifer Fennell

With the 2024 Legislative Session just around the corner, it is the time of the year for DMOs to get in front of their local delegation members to communicate the value that tourism and tourism promotion provides their districts and the residents of their districts.

Now is a good time to remind lawmakers that it is thanks to tourism, and the tourism promotion that attracts visitors to our communities, that residents don't have to pay a state income tax, every Florida household saves more than \$1,500 a year on state and local taxes, and there is funding for critical services that residents rely on including education, public safety, and infrastructure.

Your best opportunities to meet with your area lawmakers are happening right now through local delegation meetings and interim committee meetings. Or you can always request an in-person meeting at their district office.

This is especially critical as we expect there will be some proposed legislation this upcoming session that will affect the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes (TDT).

To help you prepare for these meetings, and to ensure you have the tools you need to engage with legislators, your

communications team has been working to update our legislative advocacy materials. Updated documents include:

- **Tourism Promotion Legislative Action Plan and Toolkit**, which suggests a variety of tactics for connecting with and communicating with local and state elected officials along with template materials.
- **Local Delegation Guide**, a two-page document that outlines the benefits tourism provides the state and its residents, demonstrates the value of local tourism promotion, and explains how local tourism promotion is funded through TDT.
- **Elevator Speech Scripts**, a library of two-minute elevator speech scripts that address many aspects of TDT, and last year's proposed legislation.
- **Talking Points**, which address the statewide and local value of tourism and tourism promotion, TDT, and last year's proposed legislation.
- **Legislative Positions Document**, which outlines Destinations Florida's 2024 legislative priorities.

If you would like access to any or all of these documents, please reach out to Jennifer Fennell at jennifer@coremessage.com. And, if there are other materials you think we should create to aid you in your advocacy journey, please let us know.

Thank you for reaching out to your lawmakers and taking time to share with them how vital tourism and tourism promotion are to their communities.



LEGAL TIPS

Who Determines Permissible Uses?

by Steven M. Hogan

A common question Destinations Florida members ask is whether a particular proposed use of TDT funds falls within one of the permitted uses set forth in the statute. Though the permitted uses in section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, appear clear enough at first glance, every "bright line" drawn by a statute has a "fuzzy edge" where things may not be as black and white.

The resolution of these fuzzy-edge questions can sometimes come from opinions of the Florida attorney general (AGOs). There are many opinions that speak to specific issues, though as we have said in the past, these AGOs are not binding law for anyone and counties can choose to disagree.

A county's disagreement may come in the form of legislative findings made by the county's legislative body as to whether a particular use of TDT funds falls within the statutorily permitted uses. *See Op. Att'y Gen. Fla. 2015-14 (2015)* ("Ultimately, the county must make the appropriate legislative determination that the construction of a boat ramp and observation platform that serve as a part of a nature center... relates to and primarily promotes tourism.").

The Florida attorney general has made it clear that the AG office will not substitute its judgment for that of the county when such a determination has been made. In an informal opinion (issued with less authority than that of a formal AGO), the Florida attorney general stated "[t]his office may not supplant the

determination by a county's governing body that the expenditure of tourist development tax revenues primarily serves the purpose of directly promoting tourism." *Informal Op. Att'y Gen. Fla. (March 13, 2012)* (available at: <https://bit.ly/opinion-3-13-2012>).

Though this opinion was informal, it cites a formal AGO from 2000 that states "[w]hether a particular venue or event is tourist related and furthers the purpose of promoting tourism, however, is a decision that must be made by the governing body of the county and not by this office." *Op. Att'y Gen. Fla. 2000-25 (Apr. 26, 2000)*.

Ultimately, decisions like this must be made at the level of a county's legislative body. A challenge to the county's decision would need to come through the courts, where a judge would decide the issue.

Steven M. Hogan is a shareholder with the Ausley McMullen law firm in Tallahassee. Destinations Florida has retained Mr. Hogan to consult with our members on the Tourist Development Tax and related legal issues. You can contact Mr. Hogan at shogan@ausley.com. Nothing in this article constitutes legal advice. Please seek counsel of your own choosing before making decisions that impact yourself or your organization.



Steven M. Hogan

Destinations Florida Members Share Marketing Tips With Vacation Rental Operators

Three Destinations Florida DMO members presented a panel presentation entitled *Grow Your Business With Key Destination Marketing Tips & Tricks* on September 26 during the Florida Association of Vacation Rentals (FAVR) Xtravaganza Conference held in Orlando.

Jason Holic, senior vice president of operations and community engagement with Visit Kissimmee; Jennifer Adams, tourism director at Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida; and Erin Duggan, vice president (president and CEO as of October 1) of Visit Sarasota County educated vacation rental operators and managers on the role of local DMOs. They shared examples of how they promote this segment in their areas and the different types of partner programs that can benefit vacation rental operators.

"DMOs like Experience Kissimmee are eager to work with vacation rental management companies in providing visitors with additional unique accommodations throughout the destinations they serve," said Holic. "To get the most immediate impact from a DMO partnership, vacation rentals should have an updated, accessible website

with compelling imagery and thorough amenity and home descriptions."

Most vacation rental (VR) operators do not have a marketing budget, don't use real-time data to make decisions, and do not utilize VISIT FLORIDA as a resource. Typically they manually calculate their feeder markets and rental rates.

"Attending this conference was a great opportunity to remind those in the vacation rental space of our role as a DMO and the resources we offer them so we can work better together," said Duggan. "From the basic services such as listing in our guides, website, and collateral in our centers, they also can partner with us on cooperative marketing and hosting VIPs such as media and influencers. We were able to show them examples of videos, content, social media, and more. The conversations I had after the panel with individuals were eye-opening. These folks are excited to become more engaged with their DMOs."

Using what they learned from Holic, Adams, and Duggan, VR operators can make informed decisions to improve their marketing strategies, target their markets, and set optimal rental rates.



Erin Duggan of Visit Sarasota County, Jason Holic of Experience Kissimmee, and Jennifer Adams of Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida

"I really enjoyed sharing tips and tricks with my fellow colleagues and participants of the conference. It absolutely reminds me that the Florida tourism industry is number one by far," said Adams.

The Rays Are HERE to STAY in St. Petersburg!

In September, Pinellas County joined the City of St. Petersburg and the Tampa Bay Rays in an impressive team effort to announce the Rays are HERE to STAY in St. Petersburg! The entire project includes a new state-of-the-art ballpark and a transformational development of the Historic Gas Plant District, the 86-acre site where the team's current stadium sits. The agreement advances a planned development project—the largest in Tampa Bay region history—that will include 8 million sq. ft. of mixed-use development and will invest more than \$6 billion in downtown St. Petersburg.

Pinellas County is investing Tourist Development Tax-generated funds into the construction of the new Rays Stadium to anchor community revitalization and a new destination concept, generating additional overnight visitors to St. Pete/Clearwater

and additional TDT in the county. Long term, the investment of visitor-generated funds will benefit the entire county by generating more than \$3.5 million in county sales tax and TDT with a total economic output of over \$460 million.

"Investing in projects like this new Rays Stadium has an impact throughout the entire county by creating jobs, new county sales tax, and additional hotel bed taxes," said Janet Long, Pinellas County Commission chair and TDC chair. "This is an unprecedented opportunity with huge economic, workforce, and quality of life potential for our residents. As a leader



Visitor-generated funds from Visit St. Pete/Clearwater will provide a major part of financing for the new state-of-the-art ballpark home of the Rays.

in tourism, we know visitors want a total experience. Baseball and beaches—we've got both! And we will make the investments to keep us world class, paid for from the hotel bed tax."

Visit Sarasota County's Long-Time President Retires, VSC Names New Leader

After serving at the helm of Visit Sarasota County for 24 years, Virginia Haley has officially retired.

"Being given the opportunity to promote Sarasota County as a tourism destination has been a dream position, and each week brought the delight of discovering new facets of this amazing community," said Haley. Haley began her career with VSC at a time when the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) generated \$5.4 million annually. Most recently, the TDT generated \$40 million annually. Haley oversaw strategic planning, launched



Virginia Haley, outgoing president of Visit Sarasota County, speaks at her retirement party.

promotional programs through partnership, and expanded sales and marketing initiatives into new markets of opportunity resulting in widespread awareness of and visitation to the destination. All of VSC as well as the county and surrounding areas will miss both the commitment and warmth from her, but look forward to continuing her successful legacy.

Importantly, VSC has now welcomed Erin Duggan as their new president and CEO. Duggan has been with VSC since 2005, serving most recently as vice president since 2016. She has developed award-winning marketing and public relations campaigns over the years in her various roles at the company.



Erin Duggan, new president and CEO of Visit Sarasota County

"It is a true honor to follow in the footsteps of our beloved president, Virginia Haley, after her retirement. She has been such a strong mentor to me personally and professionally and has guided this organization and community in such a transformative way," said Duggan. "It's an exciting time to step into this role with strategic planning slated for this fall. I look forward to leading our team in actively listening to our stakeholders—our board, elected officials, industry, and residents—to ensure we are building meaningful and impactful campaigns and programs that will continue the strong growth of Visit Sarasota County."

Visit St. Pete/Clearwater Names President/CEO



Brian Lowack, president/CEO Visit St. Pete/Clearwater

Brian Lowack has been named president/CEO of Visit St. Pete/Clearwater. Lowack had served as head of the tourism marketing and management organization in an interim capacity since June.

St. Pete/Clearwater is on pace for its best tourism year in Pinellas County history. Pinellas County is home to America's Best Beaches, a vibrant arts community, a growing culinary scene, and amazing outdoor experiences. The area was named among the top 100 most-loved travel destinations in the world, and Forbes recently named St. Pete

among its Best Places to Travel in the U.S. for 2023.

"Brian is the right person to continue to guide the Visit St. Pete/Clearwater team and deliver exceptional results for our industry partners while driving growth in visitation," said Pinellas County Administrator Barry Burton. "As a Pinellas County native, Brian has an incredible passion and commitment to our community and is the perfect person to promote our slice of paradise to visitors near and abroad."

"I could not be more pleased or excited for Brian," said Janet Long, Pinellas County Commission chair and TDC chair. "Not only is he bright and a quick learner, Brian is a walking, talking advertisement for Pinellas County and all it has to offer."

Lowack made two immediate hires:

Kylie Diaz has been hired as vice president of community engagement. Diaz will oversee the Visit St. Pete/Clearwater Community Relations, Brand Activations, and Funding programs. Diaz joins Visit St. Pete/Clearwater from the Clearwater Marine Aquarium where she served as the director of tourism since 2018, overseeing community and hospitality relations along with brand activations while also managing partnerships with local hotels, destination marketing organizations, sports teams, chambers of commerce, business leaders, and tour operators.

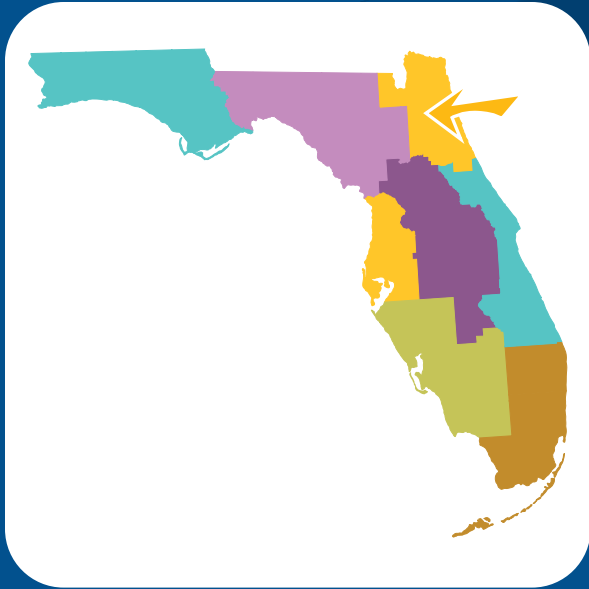


Kylie Diaz



Jason Latimer

Jason Latimer has joined Visit St. Pete/Clearwater as director of public relations. A native of the Tampa Bay area, Latimer has more than 20 years of communications experience in sports, entertainment, and government. He has worked for some of the most prominent brands in sports, including the Tampa Bay Rays, New York Yankees, Miami Marlins, and University of Florida football.



- Amelia Island Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Clay County Board of Commissioners
- Florida's Historic Coast
- Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches
- Visit Jacksonville

Amelia Island Sponsors Student Design Competition During Atlanta Sustainable Fashion Week

Throwing a spotlight on Amelia Island's sustainable tourism efforts, the Amelia Island CVB sponsored the Student Design Competition during Atlanta Sustainable Fashion Week (ATLSFW). The five-day ATLSFW featured the work of some groundbreaking, eco-friendly designers using unconventional methods to demonstrate the potential of sustainable fashion to an international audience.

Leading up to the Student Design Challenge, a team from ATLSFW visited the island for inspiration, including a luncheon with several

local organizations committed to sustainability. Student designers then used innovative design methods to integrate beach waste and other litter collected on Amelia Island into original sustainable fashion creations that took the runway on October 14. The winning design will be on display at Amelia Island's welcome center and will join the CVB team at select travel shows.

"As an eco-tourism paradise, Amelia Island is beloved by naturalists, conservationists, and outdoor adventure enthusiasts from all over the world," said Gil Langley, president of the Amelia Island CVB. "This collaboration allowed us to connect with an audience that wants to live—and travel—sustainably, and promote Amelia Island as one of the most pristine and well-kept islands in the U.S."

Amelia Island increased brand exposure through advertising at the event and via media coverage. The CVB was also positioned as an expert in the sustainable travel industry.



Amelia Island brings innovative inspiration to Atlanta Sustainable Fashion Week.



Student design challenge winner, Caroline Scott, accepts her check with the judges.
Photo: Cozy Capture Studios



Florida's Historic Coast Is Full of Hidden Gems: New and Old

When thinking of St. Augustine, iconic landmarks immediately come to mind—the Castillo de San Marcos, pristine beaches, Flagler College. And Ponte Vedra Beach brings thoughts of some of the country's best golf courses and luxurious seaside resorts. Adventure happens when visitors journey beyond the boundaries of the tourist areas of Florida's Historic Coast.

Created in the 1880s to accommodate the food needs of St. Augustine's grand hotels, the small farming town of Hastings has new events and experiences that reflect its rich agricultural roots. A new Main Street Festival; car shows; a Potato, Cabbage, and Bacon

Festival; and art show pop-ups are infusing the downtown area with heritage. And the new St. Johns Botanical Gardens and Nature Preserve is a refreshing celebration of nature and conservation.

Traveling north from Hastings, the William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway, a beautiful farmland/river drive is dotted with great parks like Alpine Groves, Beluthahatchee, and Trout Creek. Other gems to be discovered include airboat tours, kayak adventures, nature trails, and some of the best barbecue around at roadside stands. Exploring the roads less traveled on Florida's Historic Coast is a real treasure hunt.



Visitors can get out on the water to enjoy year-round paddling on Trout Creek or exciting airboat tours on the St. Johns River on Florida's Historic Coast.



With incredible sunsets and settings that are true "Old Florida," Alpines Grove is just one of the hidden treasures to be discovered on Florida's Historic Coast.

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches Continues on Ecotourism Path With New Amenities

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches continues to solidify itself as a destination for ecotourism, a key objective set forth in its ongoing strategic plan. The DMO has focused on increasing the exposure of ecotourism magnets by advocating for improvements and expansions to existing infrastructure, events, and programs.

Some recent key additions to ecotourism opportunities in Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches include:

- New paddleboard rental kiosks installed at four local parks as part of a partnership with PADL, a self-service paddleboard company. Each kiosk holds four boards, paddles, and life preservers, with rentals starting at \$25 per hour.
- A new 690-linear-foot pedestrian bridge that links a robust trail system, including two-plus miles of shared-used paths with three elevated boardwalks. The bridge, located on State Road 100, connects the Lehigh Trail system, Old Kings Road sidewalks, and swamp conservation lands, and provides outdoor enthusiasts with a safe crossing point. The elevated boardwalks minimize impacts



New self-serve paddleboard kiosks are available at multiple parks in Flagler County and start at \$25 per hour.

on the beautiful wetlands. The cost of the \$12.3 million bridge came largely from federal and state grant funding.

"We're delighted to add even more opportunities to experience the vast natural beauty that Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches has to offer," said Amy Lukasik, executive director for Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches. "Both the new pedestrian bridge and the self-serve kiosk rentals make outdoor recreation more accessible for visitors and locals."



Flagler County officials participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony in September for the new pedestrian bridge.



Visit Jacksonville Expands Business, Marketing Presence in the UK

Jacksonville took advantage of a second Jacksonville Jaguars game in London this year to expand both the city's business and marketing presence in the United Kingdom. Visit Jacksonville partnered with city officials, including new Mayor Donna Deegan and the region's economic development organization, JAXUSA, leading up to the two recent Jacksonville Jaguars football games in London.

A contingency from the Jacksonville business community spent a week meeting with different entities throughout London. During the trip, Visit Jacksonville hosted an event at the U.S. Embassy, participated in round table discussions with London investors

looking for opportunities in the States, met with leadership from Gatwick Airport to explore ideas and potential opportunities for direct flights to and from Jacksonville, and attended a lunch meeting with Jacksonville Jaguars leadership and London business leaders.

Surrounding the Jaguars games, Visit Jacksonville advertised around both Wembley and Tottenham Hotspur Stadiums during game weeks, running what is a season-long promotion to "Win a Trip" to Jacksonville. Visit Jacksonville also joined Brand USA's NFL efforts for all international games this year.



Leaders from Jacksonville, including Mayor Donna Deegan and Visit Jacksonville President & CEO Michael Corrigan, meet with business leaders in London.



Fans pass by one of Visit Jacksonville's ads outside of Wembley Stadium during the Jacksonville Jaguars football game in London.

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2024 DESTINATION MARKETING SUMMIT



April 3- 5, 2024 | Sheraton Sand Key Resort | Clearwater Beach, Florida

Schedule at a Glance

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2024

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Board of Directors Meeting
2:00 PM – 2:45 PM	Opening Session
2:45 PM - 3:30 PM	Educational Programming
3:45 PM – 5:30 PM	Destination Marketing State of the State Report
5:30 PM – 6:30 PM	Welcome Reception
6:30 PM	Dinner on own

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast
9:00 AM – 11:45 AM	Two Tracks of Educational Programing
11:45 AM – 1:00 Noon	Networking Luncheon
1:00 PM – 3:45 PM	Two Tracks of Educational Programing
5:00 PM – 8:30 PM	Connect Evening Event

Connect

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2024

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast
9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon	Legislative Update with Mat Forrest How DMOs and VISIT FLORIDA Can Work Together to Bring More Customers to Our Communities

Hotel Accommodations:

The Sheraton Sand Key Resort is offering a special rate for Destinations Florida meeting participants of \$299 per night. Please call (727) 595-1611 and reference the Destinations Florida group rate.

Reservations must be made by **Monday, March 2, 2024**. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room block will sell out.

Sheraton Sand Key Resort
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Clearwater Beach, FL 33767
(727) 595-1611



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Visit Tampa Bay and Brentford Football Club Announce Partnership

Visit Tampa Bay is now in a mutually beneficial partnership with Brentford Football Club (FC) that will highlight Tampa Bay through a number of engaging fan activities, including bringing Brentford FC to football fans in the USA. As part of the partnership, fans attending Brentford FC games will be able to partake in Visit Tampa Bay quizzes to win a trip to Tampa Bay. And back in Tampa Bay, fans can attend a Brentford FC watch party and will have the chance to engage with promotions and social media campaigns. [VisitTampaBay.com](https://www.visittampabay.com)



Tampa Bay becomes Brentford FC's Official North America Destination Partner.

Martin County Tourism Wins STS Shining Example Award

The Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing recently attended Connections 2023, the annual tourism conference organized by the Southeast Tourism Society (STS). During the Shining Example Awards ceremony, the Discover Martin team was honored with the top prize in the new Best Digital Marketing category for their Summer of Fun partnership with *Atlanta Magazine*. The campaign earned 2 million impressions and thousands of opt-ins to the Discover Martin email database. [DiscoverMartin.com](https://www.discovermartin.com)



The STS Shining Example Awards program, an industry fixture since 1985, highlights the best work in travel and tourism in the Southeast.

Highlands County Receives Recreation & Tourism Facility Study Recommendations

Through a state grant, the Highlands County TDC conducted a recreation and tourism facility study earlier this year. The study evaluated current facilities on the ability to host tourism events as well as serve the residents. It assisted in identifying strategic tourism and recreational opportunities and helped create a framework for recreational facility enhancements and developments that will increase tourism to Highlands County while also benefiting county residents with additional recreational opportunities. TDC staff is working with local stakeholders, consultants, and various county departments to address the study's recommendations. [VisitSebring.com](https://www.visitsebring.com)



Highlands County Sports Complex

Daytona Beach Celebrates Biketoberfest® and Introduces New MotoPassport

For the 31st annual Biketoberfest® motorcycle rally held October 19-22, the Daytona Beach Area CVB launched a new initiative—the MotoPassport scavenger hunt. The first 500 individuals who completed the MotoPassport on the official Biketoberfest® mobile app during the rally received an exclusive collectible coin. To participate, individuals created an account on the mobile app and checked in at nine different stops with the final stop being the Official Biketoberfest® Welcome Center presented by GEICO at Daytona International Speedway. [DaytonaBeach.com](https://www.daytonabeach.com)



Daytona Beach Area CVB hosted the 31st annual Biketoberfest® Oct. 19-22, the Southeast's best motorcycle rally, and launched a new initiative—the MotoPassport scavenger hunt.



Orlando North, Seminole County Brings the Heat

Orlando North, Seminole County is proud to showcase their latest endeavor in supporting local businesses and igniting visitor excitement. Teaming up with a local hot sauce brand, Hotter Than El, they've crafted two sensational hot sauces: River Otter's Revenge and Hot Shots – 24 Karat Gold Champion's Edition. This collaboration is the first of many that will bring visitors a taste of Orlando North in a new and exciting way. These sauces are being used as promotional items for visitors, and the bottles have QR codes that will direct visitors to their YouTube page. DoOrlandoNorth.com



Orlando North, Seminole County Tourism Director Karen Aplin with Hotter Than El owner Dino Ferri

Florida Keys Traveler Podcast Showcases 200 Years of Monroe County History

The 30-episode Florida Keys Traveler podcast (Fla-Keys.com/podcast), downloaded in 50 countries according to distributor Libsyn, showcases the continental United States' southernmost island chain from the early 1800s with Keys historians, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, and adventurers. In October, airline Cathay Pacific aired episodes in-flight about Islamorada's History of Diving Museum and the Florida Keys Oversea Railroad. Additionally, Singapore Airlines aired episodes about playwright Tennessee Williams in Key West, Key Largo's African Queen, and Marathon's Turtle Hospital. Fla-Keys.com



The Florida Keys Traveler podcast, launched in March to showcase 200 years of Monroe County history and the Keys' bicentennial, is available on multiple platforms including Apple and Google Podcasts and Spotify.

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Island Hopper Songwriter Fest Welcomes Fans, New Location

Lee County VCB's ninth Island Hopper Songwriter Fest gave visitors and locals the chance to experience more than 70 BMI songwriters in 122 performances in intimate settings. Attendance figures were strong with 13,586 people attending the 10-day festival on Captiva Island, downtown Fort Myers, and Fort Myers Beach. A new location, Cape Coral, was added this year, along with many ticketed experiences, like a sunset cruise. Next year's Island Hopper is set for September 20-29, 2024. [VisitFortMyers.com](https://www.visitfortmyers.com)



Headliner Chris Janson closes out the ninth Island Hopper Songwriter Fest at the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina pool party on Fort Myers Beach.

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches Sponsors Scarecrows of Flagler Beach

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches sponsored Scarecrows of Flagler Beach, a month-long event that featured 40 artfully designed scarecrows posing in front of businesses and buildings around Flagler Beach. The TDO's scarecrows, dressed as silly tourists and a mermaid, were located at the Flagler Beach Historical Museum in October. The event raised funds for Flagler Strong, a nonprofit dedicated to the betterment of the citizens, business owners, and public spaces of the City of Flagler Beach. [VisitFlagler.com](https://www.visitflagler.com)



Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches participates in Scarecrows of Flagler Beach by creating "silly tourist" scarecrows.

Florida's Sports Coasts Takes Home a Henry!

Florida's Sports Coast received its second Henry, this time earning the top Flagler Award in the Websites category for its website rebrand designed by Madden Media. This category specifically recognizes destination and partner websites developed for trade, consumer, or media use. Since the launch of the new site, new users are up almost 11%, sessions are up 10% and pages per session are up 17%, direct traffic is up 23%, and referrals are up 18%. This is the destination's fifth Flagler Award recognition overall. [FLSportsCoast.com](https://www.FLSportsCoast.com)



Florida's Sports Coast Tourism Director Adam Thomas, Marketing Manager Jennifer O'Connor, County Attorney Elizabeth Blair, and TDC Chairman Jack Mariano accept their Henry during the annual Chairman's Dinner at the Florida Governor's Conference on Tourism on Sept. 6 in Orlando.

Visit Orlando Launches 'Unbelievably Real' Campaign in Canada

To drive travel demand in Canada, Visit Orlando launched its second Canada campaign flight under the Central Florida region's Unbelievably Real brand. The multimedia campaign targets Toronto, Ontario, Montreal, and Quebec to include a Visit Orlando takeover in Toronto's famous Distillery District. Additionally, Visit Orlando welcomed hosts of Canada's No. 1 rated *The Morning Show* to experience Orlando and record six segments, airing nationally between October 5 and November 9 on Canada's Global News Network. Visit Orlando's campaign hits just as three major Canadian airports are implementing new service to Orlando. [VisitOrlando.com](https://www.VisitOrlando.com)



Visit Orlando creative in Toronto's Distillery District; Visit Orlando team members pictured with Canada's *The Morning Show* team members; hosts Jeff McArthur and Carolyn MacKenzie (and her family) in Orlando



Visit Jacksonville Taps Local Artist to Design Visitor Magazine Cover

Visit Jacksonville recently commissioned local artist Dustin Harewood to design the cover of the 2023-24 visitor magazine. The piece, titled "Still Un-folding," was revealed October 4 during the 20th anniversary of Downtown Jacksonville's First Wednesday Art Walk. It was made from acrylic, spray paint, watercolor, and paper collage mediums on canvas and now hangs in the Downtown Visitor Center. In addition to being the visitor magazine cover, the design is also a postcard, which is available at all of Visit Jacksonville's Visitor Centers for free. VisitJacksonville.com



Artist Dustin Harewood poses with the cover he designed for Visit Jacksonville's new visitor magazine.

Clay County Opens Outdoor Adventure Park

Clay County celebrated the opening of the new Clay County Outdoor Adventure Park on October 7. At 158-acres, the park is home to a 200-yard, 30-target-lane gun range. Located south of Middleburg on CR 215, this expansive new complex is near Camp Blanding with discussions for future expansion already in the works. Various daily rates and membership options are available, including Clay County and non-Clay County residents, retired law enforcement, and active and retired military personnel. ExploreClay.com



Clay County leaders and residents gather for the ribbon cutting of the new Clay County Outdoor Adventure Park.

Amelia Island Ranks No. 3 Top Island in Conde Nast Traveler's Readers Choice Awards

Amelia Island, Florida, was ranked the No. 3 Top Island in the U.S. in *Condé Nast Traveler's* annual Readers' Choice Awards. According to Gil Langley, president of the Amelia Island CVB, "This recognition from *Condé Nast Traveler* is consistent with research showing 98.7% of visitors are satisfied with their visit, 99.0% would recommend Amelia Island to friends and relatives, and 93.9% plan to return." The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island and Omni Amelia Island Resort were voted No. 6 and No. 9 respectively among the Best Resorts in Florida. AmeliaIsland.com



Amelia Island is the No. 3 Top Island in the U.S., as ranked by *CNT*. This is the second consecutive year Amelia Island has been voted to the No. 3 spot.

The Palm Beaches Unveils New Website

Discover The Palm Beaches unveiled a new website, ThePalmBeaches.com, giving users a more immersive platform to explore the unmatched array of offerings available throughout the destination. With stunning visuals including design elements commissioned from local artists, natural language processing to serve relevant content to users, real-time hotel rates, reviews, and more, the new website experience will provide travelers with everything they need to inspire or plan their visit to The Palm Beaches. ThePalmBeaches.com



The new website offers travelers everything they need to plan a visit to The Palm Beaches.



Visit Central Florida Sponsors Detroit Tigers Fan Appreciation Night

Visit Central Florida continued its partnership with the Detroit Tigers, through their in-market activation during the Tigers' final home series. VCF was the title sponsor for Fan Appreciation Night and Miguel Cabrera's retirement weekend. On September 30, during the Tigers' game, 15,000 fans got VCF-branded Hawaiian shirts. VCF staff connected with fans at Comerica Park's VCF booth, strengthening its partnership to reach Tigers fans and Michigan residents. Michigan is a top market for Polk County. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Visit Central Florida was the title sponsor of the Detroit Tigers' Fan Appreciation Night and of Miguel Cabrera's final weekend before his retirement, Sept. 29-Oct. 1. The Tigers have held Spring Training in Lakeland for nearly 90 years, the longest spring training partnership in Major League Baseball.

Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center Voted Best Renovated Sports Venue by SportsTravel Awards

The Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center, home to Florida's first Olympic-sized pool, earned Best Renovated Sports Venue at the SportsTravel Awards. Following a \$47 million upgrade, including a unique 27-meter dive platform, it stands as the sole Western Hemisphere facility with this feature—joining just two others globally in China and Russia. Positioned by the picturesque Intracoastal waterway and neighboring the renowned Fort Lauderdale Beach, this historic complex offers a world-class setting for aquatic excellence. VisitLauderdale.com



Gonzalo Rubio, Visit Lauderdale sports and entertainment sales manager; Glenn Allen, Visit Lauderdale sports and entertainment senior vice president; Anthony Cordo, Visit Lauderdale executive vice president; Laura Voet, Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center manager; Saskia Fisher, Visit Lauderdale sports and entertainment manager; and Dave Gibson, Swim Fort Lauderdale head coach

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Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach Volunteers Clean Up the Coast

Nearly 500 visitors and locals alike joined Visit Destin-Fort Walton Beach's Coastal Resources team on September 16 for International Coastal Cleanup Day. The volunteer teams spent the morning heading out to six locations stretching from The Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island to Henderson Beach State Park in Destin. As a result of their efforts, more than 700 pounds of trash and 5,000 cigarette butts were removed. DestinFWB.com



Volunteers of all ages participated in clean-up contests with fun prizes and were treated to a free post clean-up breakfast provided by three favorite local restaurants.

Panama City Beach Celebrates the Spirit of Pirates and the Renaissance Era

Visit Panama City Beach's Pirates of the High Seas & Renaissance Fest, held October 6-8 at Pier Park & Aaron Bessant Park, was a lively and immersive event celebrating the spirit of pirates and the Renaissance era. Attendees enjoyed an action-packed weekend filled with fireworks, live mermaid shows, a fire circus, parades, a treasure drop, live entertainment, and much more. VisitPanamaCityBeach.com



Pirates wave to the crowd during a High Seas & Renaissance Fest parade in Panama City Beach.

Bradenton Area Hosts Weasley Twins of *Harry Potter* Fame

In partnership with Visit Tampa Bay and Virgin Atlantic, the Bradenton Area CVB recently hosted the well-known *Harry Potter* Weasley twins, Oliver and James Phelps, as they filmed their *Fantastic Friends* television series. They experienced the full essence of the Bradenton Area, including stops at pristine beaches, the Village of the Arts, and batting practice at LECOM Park. The episode is streaming on Crave Canada and HBO Europe. BradentonGulfIslands.com



Behind the scenes of *Fantastic Friends* filming on Anna Maria Island

Pensacola Named One of *Conde Nast Traveler's* Top 10 Best Small Cities in 2023

Pensacola secured a coveted spot in *Conde Nast Traveler's* prestigious Top 10 Best Small Cities for 2023, unveiled during the 36th annual Readers' Choice Awards, following 500,000 reader submissions. This honor reaffirms what Pensacolians and visitors have always known—Pensacola is The Way to Beach™. President & CEO Darien Schaefer expressed gratitude, saying, "We're proud to showcase our sunny destination, from the iconic white sands and turquoise waters, vibrant culinary scene, and rich history to our warm Southern hospitality. We deeply appreciate the travelers and readers who voted for our destination." VisitPensacola.com



Visitors and residents enjoy a beautiful evening in Pensacola.



Where Eagles Nest: Birders Discover Kissimmee's Rich Avian Diversity

As fall arrives in Florida, migrating birds flock, drawing numerous enthusiasts. With birding's popularity soaring, the U.S. sees 45 million birders, 16 million traveling, contributing \$96 billion economically. Central to the Great Florida Birding Trail, Kissimmee boasts diverse habitats, year-round species, and the U.S.'s largest nesting bald eagle concentration.



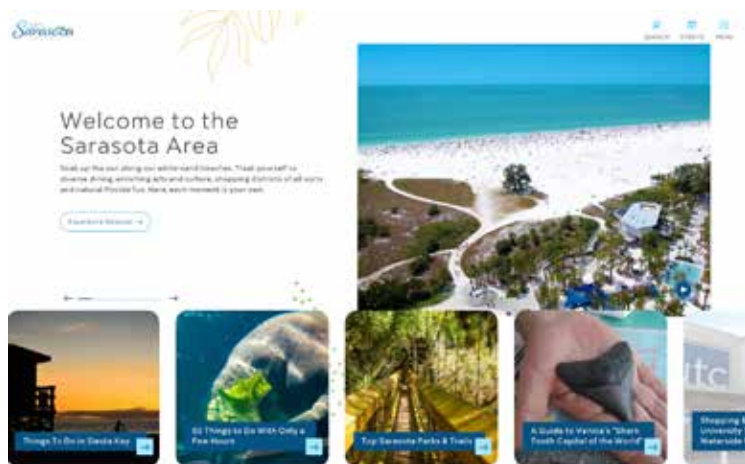
A Great Blue Heron wades through a Florida swamp.
Photo: Enrique Noriega

Experience

Kissimmee invites all, novice to expert, to appreciate the area's avian wonders. ExperienceKissimmee.com/kissimmeebirdingclub

New Website Launches for Visit Sarasota County

Visit Sarasota County is excited to announce the launch of their brand new website. This new site is mobile-friendly, making it easier for visitors to explore all the area has to offer. VisitSarasota.com now includes new content, better events listings, and a new version of the popular Beach Pass. There is also a new deals page, with even more improvements to come to the site overall. VisitSarasota.com



The landing page for the brand new Visit Sarasota County website

Greater Miami CVB and Sony Music Latin Join Forces

The Greater Miami CVB and Sony Music Latin have joined forces, paving the way for the launch of the Miami Beach Find Your Voice digital experiential campaign. The dynamic collaboration is set to resonate with music and travel enthusiasts alike and provides viewers with an immersive journey that brings together the iconic allure of Miami Beach with vibrant sounds from Sony's roster of artists. Follow the campaign and exclusive content @VisitMiami, @MiamiBeachNews, and @SonyMusicLatin. MiamiAndBeaches.com



Miami Beach at night

Space Coast Office of Tourism Hosts FAMs for Travel Agents

The Space Coast Office of Tourism worked with Royal Caribbean for two FAMs, one with AAA for more than 40 travel agents and another with the North Florida Chapter of ASTA, where they networked with local business partners, hotels, and learned about the area. They toured Royal Caribbean International's *Independence of the Seas* at Port Canaveral and visited the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. VisitSpaceCoast.com



ASTA agents aboard *Independence of the Seas*



Walton County Tourism Brings South Walton to Life in Chicago

The South Walton marketing team continues to make leisure shows a focus in 2023. During September, the Walton County Tourism Department sponsored Chicago Gourmet, a four-day foodie event in Millennium Park. South Walton came to life for attendees with a front porch-themed experiential area, fresh Gulf seafood dishes from Chef Drew Dzejak of Alys Beach and Chef Nikhil Abuvala of Roux 30a, Nanbu Noodle Bar, and The Daytrader Tiki Bar and Restaurant. VisitSouthWalton.com



The Walton County Tourism team (Rebekah Walden, Zehnder's Katherine Simon, Kelli Carter, and Ashlyn Temples) gathers at Chicago Gourmet, where potential future visitors received a piece of South Walton to take home; they especially loved fresh Gulf seafood from Chef Drew Dzejak and Chef Nikhil Abuvala.

Alachua County Releases Americans for the Arts Economic Impact Data

Alachua County's nonprofit cultural organizations and their 2.4 million audience members generated \$189.5 million in economic activity in 2022. Out of this total, \$49.6 million was spent by the organizations, and an additional \$139.9 million was spent by their audiences. This spending supported 2,992 jobs and generated \$33.1 million in tax revenue. Fifty-seven percent of cultural event attendees in Alachua County are non-local visitors who spent an average of \$76, providing crucial income for local businesses. VisitGainesville.com



Alachua County's cultural institutions participated in the American for the Arts national Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 study. AEP6 gauges the economic impact of spending by nonprofit arts and culture organizations and the event-related spending by their audiences.

Photo: Dance Alive National Ballet

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Meets With Outdoor Writers in Minnesota

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach attended the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers (AGLOW) conference in Bemidji, Minnesota in September. From Florida to Minnesota, Lois Croft, public relations manager, traveled to meet award-winning outdoor travel writers to gain valuable information and connections for potential writers to come explore and promote the Tarpon Fishing Capital of the World area for a different kind of fishing. PureFlorida.com



In the News

Visit Jacksonville Welcomes New Community Outreach Manager

Visit Jacksonville is pleased to welcome Joey Bell to the team in the newly created position of community outreach manager. He brings multiple years of experience in Florida's tourism industry to the position. Bell is responsible for managing outreach initiatives and growing relationships between Visit Jacksonville and the local community, including tourism partners, businesses, and local officials. Bell previously worked in public relations and marketing at Visit Tampa Bay as well as for the president and CEO at VISIT FLORIDA where he collaborated with the organization's leadership. Bell was recently selected to Destination International's 30 under 30 class of 2023. VisitJacksonville.com



Joey Bell



Lois Croft explores Paul Bunyan land of Bemidji, Minnesota.

Enclosed is your copy of Tourism Marketing Today
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INSIDE: Brightline, baseball, & new CEOs!

Destinations Florida
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Destinations Florida serves as the single unifying voice for all of Florida's DMOs, providing continuing insight and direction as we face an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace. Organized in 1996, Destinations Florida strives to increase the overall effectiveness of Florida DMOs' destination marketing efforts through industry education, legislative outreach, enhancing professionalism and facilitating communication.

Destinations Florida represents the 57 official county DMOs that promote their communities throughout the world. Tourism promotion activities help to attract 137.6 million visitors to Florida, adding \$101.9 billion to Florida's economy and supporting more than 1.7 million jobs. These activities are made possible by Tourist Development Taxes provided by Florida Statutes Section 125.0104. Statistics: VISIT FLORIDA Research