

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | February 2026



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Tallahassee Recognized as World Capital of Cross Country

On Jan. 10, Tallahassee took its place on the global stage with the World Athletics Cross Country Championships at Apalachee Regional Park. Under crystal-clear blue skies and near-record warmth, the park came alive. More than 10,000 spectators—the largest crowd the park has ever hosted—lined the Florida-themed course, cheering on the world's elite distance runners as

the championship returned to the United States for the first time in 34 years.

The energy was palpable. World Athletics President Sebastian Coe captured the moment best, declaring, "It's probably safe to say that Tallahassee really is the cross country capital of the United States, if not the world." That sentiment was echoed throughout the weekend by World Athletics staff, who praised Tallahassee for elevating both the sport and its presentation, creating a championship experience that set a new global standard.

The championships delivered global reach, elite competition, and deep community pride. Nearly 500 athletes from 50



A competitor clears a custom wood carved alligator hurdle during the World Athletics Cross Country Championships Tallahassee 26.

Florida's Tourism Advantage

by Robert Skrob



Florida's Legislative Session is well underway, and this year it is unfolding alongside important

conversations about growth, infrastructure, and long-term planning. One of those conversations took place at the **2025 Florida Transportation, Growth & Infrastructure Summit**, hosted by the Florida Chamber Foundation. The focus was on growth: Florida is growing fast, with millions of new residents, more drivers on our roads, and tens of

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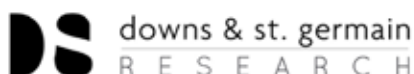
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HAPPY Birthday

Santiago Corrada
February 6



Executive Director Robert Skrob of Destinations Florida, President & CEO Carol Dover of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, and President & CEO Bryan Griffin of VISIT FLORIDA represent Florida's tourism industry at the 2025 Florida Transportation, Growth & Infrastructure Summit hosted by the Florida Chamber Foundation.

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA TourismMarketing Today

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On the Cover

Thousands of cross country fans watch the world's most elite runners tackling the first of four Florida-themed course features, the roller coaster, during the World Athletics Cross Country Championships Tallahassee 26. Learn more on page 1.

millions of additional visitors expected in the years ahead.

During the summit, tourism marketing leaders participated in a panel titled **Keeping Florida's Tourism Advantage: From Local Impact to Global Reach**. The discussion was moderated by Bryan Griffin, president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, and included Carol Dover, president and CEO of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, and me.

The panel focused on this message: Tourism remains one of Florida's most powerful economic engines, and it is deeply tied to infrastructure, planning, and global competitiveness. From preparing for major events like the FIFA World Cup and the American 250 to strengthening state and local partnerships with DMOs

and businesses, tourism strategy must align with Florida's broader growth strategy.

Infrastructure and growth forums shape long-term decisions. Showing up ensures tourism is understood as a system that connects marketing, transportation, workforce, and community readiness.

As the Legislative Session continues, that presence becomes even more important. Tourism marketing supports jobs, local businesses, and public services across every region of the state. The work being done today directly affects the livelihoods of Floridians who depend on a strong, competitive tourism economy to support their families.

countries competed as well as notable Florida State University cross country athletes representing their respective countries. Tickets were sold in all 50 states and more than 14 countries, drawing the world to Tallahassee. Preliminary projections estimate an economic impact of \$4.3M, benefiting businesses throughout Tallahassee.

"We welcomed the world, and this championship showed exactly what Tallahassee can deliver on the international stage. Its legacy will extend far beyond race day," said Kerri L. Post, executive director of Visit Tallahassee. "This event was an economic engine for local businesses, a global showcase for the community, and a catalyst for continued growth in sports tourism."

Since 2009, Leon County has hosted more than 75 cross country championship events and has invested more than \$3.3M to build a course to meet the rigorous standards required to host elite championship races. In 2022, Tallahassee secured the winning bid over several international contenders to host the World Athletics Cross Country Championships.

"Tallahassee was on display to a global audience," said Taylor Wheaton, senior sports sales director for Visit Tallahassee and co-chair of the World Cross Country Tallahassee 26 local organizing committee. "This event sets a new benchmark for our community's ability to host the highest level of international competition."

The championship opened with a powerful performance by the renowned Florida A & M University Marching 100 Band. Following the elite competition, more than 2,500 participants took to the same course for the World's Fun Run: Florida Edition, allowing recreational runners and walkers to experience the thrill of a world-class race firsthand.

Want to See Your DMO's News in *Tourism Marketing Today*?

We regularly publish brief news items from DMOs in *Tourism Marketing Today*. News about your staff will appear in our "In the News" section. We also publish "Quick Trips," and they are your opportunity to share your good news! Your story should be about *past* events, awards, or campaigns to serve as "best practices" for your fellow tourism professionals. Our deadlines typically fall on a Thursday around the middle of each month. If you aren't receiving an email reminder, reach out to Susan Trainor (editor.trainor@gmail.com), and she will add you to the mailing list.



A field of more than 1,000 runners sets off past a backdrop of Florida's Historic Capitol to begin the World's Fun Run: Florida Edition.

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In Memoriam

Newton Brewer Collinson III

Newton Brewer Collinson III, founder of Collinson Media & Events (now Connect), passed away on Nov. 20 after a long and courageous battle with Parkinson's disease. His son Chris, former CEO of Connect, shared these thoughts about his father:

Dad lived a remarkable life—full of adventure, curiosity, faith, and an unwavering love for others. He was the eldest of 12 siblings, a devoted husband to my mom for 59 years, a proud father and grandfather, a storyteller, a traveler, an encourager, a businessman, and a friend to so many. He lit up every room he entered, and he made everyone he met feel welcome.

Newt cared deeply about others and quietly helped people in need, supported missionary work overseas, contributed to numerous charitable organizations, and faithfully supported his local church congregation.

He was an entrepreneur and an amazing salesman, leaving the corporate world at age 28 to forge his own path by starting an advertising business in which he remained involved until his mid-70s. Over five and a half decades, he made many friends in business around the country, especially in his favorite industry of destination marketing, and he changed the lives of many employees with whom he had the opportunity to work.

Friends and Colleagues Remember Newt Collinson

"Newt was a one-of-a-kind man. A great conversationalist, he was interested in many things but always interested in what was most important to his clients—be that business or family. He believed every sale should serve the client's needs, not just help his company's quota, and for that he earned the respect of everyone who did business with him. It was a pleasure doing business with him." — Tamara Pigott, executive director, Lee County VCB

"Newt's loss will be felt across Florida's tourism industry. Newt and his team had visionary approaches to assist destinations reach their potential visitors and clients. As our visitors' planning processes changed over the years, Newt was at the forefront in creating for innovative strategies to reach our audiences. He will be deeply missed." — Virginia Haley, president (retired), Visit Sarasota County

"Sharing a similar worldview with someone, especially during your first meeting and interaction, usually makes for an enjoyable conversation. Such was the case with Newt Collinson III. However, what made Newt unique and special in my eyes was the manner in which he consistently upheld and lived out his faith. That was particularly evident in the way he treated people, regardless of an individual's likes, dislikes, or personal perspectives. My admiration, respect, and ultimately our friendship, were rooted in the way Newt lived his life. I will certainly miss his wit, wisdom, and the twinkle in his eye when we saw one another. I'm convinced that as he passed from this life into eternity, he heard the Lord say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" — Mark Jackson, director of tourism & sports, Visit Central Florida



"Gentleman, Family, Opinionated, Fair, Honest, Hardworking, Proud, Positive Competitor, Friend. Miss you, Newt!"
— Roger Miles, chairman, Miles Partnership

"Long before digital engagement was a click away, Newt set the standard for true client connection—road trips, in-person sales calls, handwritten notes with clipped articles, and authentic relationship-building. He was an exceptional salesman, a trailblazer for our industry, and someone who cared deeply about his work and the people around him. He will be greatly missed, but his legacy lives on in the countless destination marketers he mentored and inspired."
— Will Seccombe, president, Connect Travel

"The tourism industry has lost a true foundational pillar, a rare individual who transformed the media landscape for tourism and who walked his path with an unwavering moral compass. Newt didn't just share knowledge as a thought leader; he shared authentic wisdom and an altruistic mindset that together everyone could be more successful. In the end, Newt taught us that true leadership isn't about power, but about service—serving the industry honestly, serving the customer thoughtfully, and serving colleagues and constituents with unconditional kindness."
— Loretta Shaffer, executive director, Ocala/Marion County VCB

"Newt Collinson was not only an industry friend but an icon in the publishing business. His commitment to his craft, to his family, and to the military were and will continue to be the memories that will inspire us all. He will be missed, and I will especially miss him as a personal friend. My prayers go out to his entire family for their loss." — Jack Wert, FCDME, executive director (retired), Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB

Florida Stories That Make Waves.

From the Gulf Coast to the Atlantic, Madden supports Florida communities to create tourism marketing that moves more than travelers—it moves economics, pride, and possibilities.

We're the creative collaborators behind campaigns that make people feel something real about a place, and then book the trip to experience it. With over 200 tourism partners nationwide, we know how to craft strategies that cut through the noise and connect straight to the heart.

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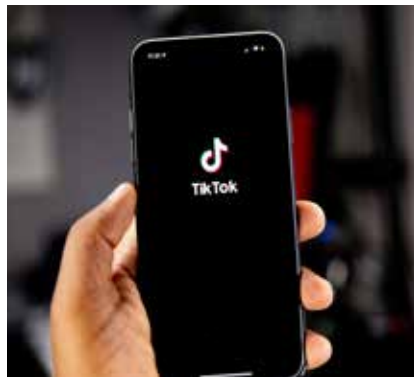
TikTok Rule Update: New List of Prohibited Applications

by Steven M. Hogan

In 2023-24, we tracked the progress of Florida's implementation of the "TikTok" ban under section 112.22, Florida Statutes. This statute went into effect on July 1, 2023, and bans "prohibited applications" on government-issued devices.

We referred to the statute and the rulemaking process as targeting TikTok because of the rhetoric around the passage of the law, but it goes beyond TikTok to impact other apps that the Department of Management Services (DMS) deems to be prohibited applications.

On Oct. 31, 2025, DMS updated the list of prohibited applications and published it here: <https://bit.ly/dms-tiktok>



The "TikTok" ban includes 24 prohibited applications on government-issued devices.

DMS has applied the ban to TikTok and other applications it has deemed "prohibited" on government-issued devices. The applications are:

- Kaspersky
- QQ
- TikTok
- VKontakte
- WeChat
- AliExpress
- AliPay
- CamScanner
- SHAREit
- Temu
- DeepSeek
- Baidu Maps
- Baidu Search
- CapCut
- Lemon8
- Moomoo
- Rednote
- Tiger Brokers
- UC Browser
- VMate
- WeBull
- WeChat Pay
- WPS Office
- Xender



Steven M. Hogan

Government employers can request waivers to use prohibited applications. The waiver request form created by DMS can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/dms-waiver>

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.

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Schedule at a Glance

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2026

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, MAY 14, 2026

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

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026

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

Hotel Accommodations:

The Palmetto Marriott Resort & Spa is offering a special rate for Destinations Florida meeting participants of \$199 per night. Please visit <https://bit.ly/DF26SUMMIT> to book your reservation.

Reservations must be made by **Wednesday, April 29, 2026**. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room block will sell out.

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- Destination Panama City
- Franklin County Tourist Development Council
- Gulf County Tourist Development Council
- Jackson County Tourist Development Council
- Mexico Beach Community Development Council
- Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Office
- Visit Panama City Beach
- Visit Pensacola
- Visit Washington County
- Walton County Tourism

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Expands Tourism Experiences and Year-Round Attractions

Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida expanded its tourism footprint north of the bay through strategic investments in outdoor recreation, community venues, and visitor infrastructure. To date, more than \$15.6M has been directed toward north-of-the-bay projects, supported by Tourist Development Tax collections, enhancing access to nature-based experiences and year-round attractions.

Key investments include the Crestview Welcome and Adventure Center, which has already welcomed more than 2,000 visitors

since opening in April 2024, and improvements at the Baker Recreation and Equestrian Center that are modernizing facilities and generating new event bookings.

Additional projects such as the Shoal River Trailhead, the Yellow River Footbridge, River/Bay Paddle Trails, the Shoal River Preserve, and Patriot Park are strengthening the region's appeal beyond the coastline, creating a more diverse, resilient tourism economy while connecting visitors and residents alike to the area's inland assets.



The Crestview Welcome and Adventure Center has undergone more than \$2.7M in investment for property acquisition, facility improvements, and interactive installations.



The Crestview Welcome and Adventure Center now features a Destin-Fort Walton Beach branded interactive installation where children can practice their fishing skills before heading out on the water.



39th Annual Boat Parade of Lights Sets New Records in Panama City

The 2025 Panama City Boat Parade of Lights delivered a record-breaking night of holiday celebration on St. Andrews Bay, drawing the largest crowd in event history. Festively decorated boats filled the waterways as spectators gathered at the Panama City Marina, St. Andrews Marina, and along the bayside shorelines to take in the annual tradition.

This year marked an exciting new chapter for the event with the addition of a first-ever drone show, lighting up the night sky and adding a new layer of spectacle to the beloved parade. The

combination of illuminated boats and synchronized aerial displays created an unforgettable experience for both locals and visitors.

Supported by Destination Panama City and the City of Panama City, the Boat Parade of Lights continues to grow as one of the region's most anticipated holiday events. With record turnout, expanded programming, and strong community participation, the parade remains a shining example of Panama City's waterfront spirit and enduring holiday tradition.



Festively decorated boats, including a Polar Express-themed entry, line up on St. Andrews Bay.

Photo: Destination Panama City



Santa makes a special appearance for photos with children in front of a train-themed float during the Panama City Boat Parade of Lights.

Photo: Destination Panama City

Mexico Beach Welcome Center's EV Charging Stations Service 600+ Vehicles in 2025

The Mexico Beach Welcome Center received two electric vehicle charging stations through Duke Energy's Park & Plug program in March 2025. Prior to these stations being available, the nearest charging station was over 40 miles away. At the end of 2025, the stations serviced more than 600 vehicles. This service has not only been of benefit to residents and visitors but also has had an

economic impact on the destination. On average, users spend 20 minutes charging their vehicles, thus allowing them to visit shops, restaurants, and other attractions. The chargers have transformed Mexico Beach from a pass-through into a discovery.

"It has been a great addition and has allowed travelers the benefit of visiting our area knowing we have the resources for their EV needs," stated Kimberly Shoaf, president & CEO. "With the beach less than a minute's walk from the stations, users can enjoy fresh air, a quick stretch, and a visit to our beaches while they wait," Shoaf said.

As more EV drivers discover this convenience, Mexico Beach looks forward to welcoming even more travelers in 2026. The charging stations are available 24 hours a day, with simple, direct payment through the station's mobile app, making travel planning easier for today's visitors.



Mexico Beach Welcome Center provides two electric vehicle charging stations for public use. Stations are available 24 hours a day.



Users can charge up and enjoy many perks that Mexico Beach has to offer while they wait, including visiting the Welcome Center.



BEST of NORTHWEST FLORIDA!

Navarre Beach Tourism Enters 2026 With Plenty to Celebrate

Navarre Beach Tourism is riding a wave of well-earned recognition, and there is plenty to celebrate as we kick off 2026. The destination captured two Silver HSMAI Adrian Awards, honoring its calming and creative approach to storytelling and engagement. Awards include Silver for the Meditation Video Series, recognizing Social Media Channel Growth using owned media, and Silver for Florida's Most Relaxing Place Steeplechase



An aerial view of Gulf Island National Seashore
Photo: Navarre Beach Tourism

Activation in Experiential Marketing. These honors will be celebrated at the Adrian Awards in New York City on Feb. 18.

Adding to the momentum, Navarre Beach was named the number two beach in America by readers of *Condé Nast Traveler*. It is a powerful nod from travelers who value wide-open beaches, sugar-white sand, and a rhythm that feels refreshingly unspoiled.



A family enjoys serene, uncrowded, and unspoiled natural beauty at Navarre Beach.
Photo: Navarre Beach Tourism

"These honors reflect what makes Navarre Beach so special, its ability to make people slow down, breathe, and truly connect with the coast. We're proud to see that spirit resonate with travelers across the country," said Julie White, director of the Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Office.

Pensacola Earns No. 1 Beach Ranking and Delivers Major Economic Returns

With sugar-white sand beaches, a thriving arts community, and a rich cultural legacy dating back to 1559, Pensacola continues to stand out as one of Florida's most compelling destinations. This year, Pensacola Beach earned national praise, clinching the No. 1 spot on *Condé Nast Traveler's* Best Beaches in the U.S. Readers' Choice Awards, boosting the region's profile and reaffirming what locals already know: Pensacola is unforgettable.



Pensacola took the spotlight as the featured grand prize on Monday, Oct. 13, as part of VISIT FLORIDA's "Floridays" promotion on *Wheel of Fortune*. "The Relaxed Way to Beach" invited viewers to experience America's First Settlement and discover the laidback pace of the Pensacola Bay Area.

Tourism's importance for the Pensacola Bay Area continues to grow, supporting small businesses and creating opportunities for residents. In FY2025, Visit Pensacola welcomed 2.5M visitors, generating \$1.3B in direct spending, 2.5M room nights, and \$22M in Tourist Development Tax collections.

VisitPensacola.com reached 3.3M+ users and generated more than \$1.08M in bookings while Visit Pensacola's social channels grew beyond 505,000 followers, delivering 82M impressions and 4M+ million engagements.

National media also took notice, with \$15.2M in earned media value, 125 placements, and 24 hosted press and creator trips, all of which boosted Pensacola's story. With a network of 340 partners, new interactive digital tools, and a stronger position in group travel and leisure, Pensacola truly is The Way to Beach™.



Visit Pensacola was recently named to *Condé Nast Traveler's* Bright Ideas in Travel 2025, an annual editorial list highlighting destinations and initiatives making meaningful impact in travel through innovation, community focus, and forward-thinking strategies.



Washington County Celebrates America 250 With Revolution Road Driving Tour

Visit Washington County is gearing up for the America 250 celebration in 2026 by launching the Revolution Road driving tour. The Revolution Road was first mapped by cartographer Joseph Purcell in 1778. It was described as a branch of the Pensacola-St. Augustine Road, the only east-west trail across East and West Florida during the war.

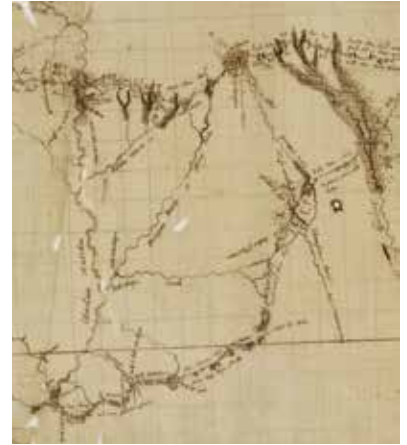
The goal of the project is to create a Revolutionary War driving loop in Washington County. It will begin and end at the Visitor Center in Downtown Chipley. The interpretive panels, along with existing markers, will introduce visitors to the Revolutionary War and its impact on West Florida. They will tell the story of the Revolution Road, with panels also reserved to explain events of the



Section of original Revolution Road crossing Hard Labor Creek

Revolutionary War in West Florida and the impact of the Declaration of Independence on modern generations. Wayfinding signage will also be placed to direct visitors along the path to the interpretive panel locations.

The driving tour will be featured on the TDC's website and be incorporated into its existing heritage story map that showcases driving and walking tours of historic sites and buildings around the county. The tour will stretch from one end of the county to the other, connecting communities, original Revolution Road segments, and landmarks described by travelers during the Revolutionary War.



The British map created by Joseph Purcell, 1778, denotes the Revolution Road through Washington County, Fla.

A trail launch event will be held on July 3 so visitors and residents can drive the tour on the day of America's 250th celebration.



In the News

Visit Panama City Beach Announces Key Hires

Visit Panama City Beach is pleased to welcome two new team members whose expertise will further strengthen the organization's marketing, environmental stewardship, destination development, and visitor experience efforts. **Rhett Miller** has joined as director of marketing services, and **Erin Graham** has been appointed artificial reef coordinator and coastal resources manager. "These talented professionals bring deep experience and fresh perspective to our team," said Dan Rowe, president and CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. "Rhett's creative background in multimedia storytelling and Erin's extensive fisheries and reef management expertise will enhance our organization's ability to serve residents, visitors, and partners while supporting the long-term sustainability of our destination." VisitPanamaCityBeach.com



Rhett Miller
Photo: Visit Panama City Beach



Erin Graham
Photo: Visit Panama City Beach

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Tis the Season for Holiday Magic in Mexico Beach

Magic filled this holiday season as Mexico Beach transformed into a winter wonderland for the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Festive golf carts paraded through town, arriving at Parker Park where families gathered to count down until the tree sparkled with lights. Santa made his grand entrance as attendees took photos, decorated cookies, and sipped hot cocoa. Toys were collected for area children, proving this coastal community's heart beats strong during the season of joy. MexicoBeach.com



A family enjoys the annual Christmas tree lighting while vacationing in Mexico Beach.

JetBlue Airways Makes Return to Daytona Beach

Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB), which was named the Commercial Service Airport of the Year for 2024 by the Florida Department of Transportation, continues to add new airlines and flights. JetBlue Airways returned to Daytona Beach in early December, offering two daily, nonstop routes to New York City (JFK) and Boston (BOS). Other air carriers that provide air service at DAB are American Airlines, Avelo Airlines, Breeze Airways, and Delta. DaytonaBeach.com



Visitors arrive in Daytona Beach courtesy of the new flights from JetBlue Airways, which has returned to Daytona Beach International Airport, offering daily, nonstop service to New York (JFK) and Boston (BOS).

Photo: Daytona Beach Area CVB

Martin County Tourism Earns MarCom Awards

The Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing earned top honors in the 2025 MarCom Awards, presented by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals. The team received two Platinum MarCom Awards for native advertising efforts and the *Explore Natural Martin* video series, along with two Gold MarCom Awards recognizing the "A.I. Means More Here" integrated marketing campaign and the "Sea Where Art Takes You" advertising campaign. DiscoverMartin.com



These accolades underscore Martin County's continued leadership in creative, high-impact destination marketing.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Makes Connections in Germany

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater took America's Favorite Beaches to Germany for a week of incredible connections with leading tour operators, Discover Airlines, influential media members, and so much more! Brian Scott, chair of the Pinellas County Commission, joined Visit St. Pete-Clearwater's Brian Lowack, president and CEO; Andrea Gabel, international sales director; and Jason Latimer, PR director, to share updates on the destination, showing off the beautiful sunshine, award-winning beaches, and more! VisitStPeteClearwater.com



Pinellas County Commission Chair Brian Scott (far left) and Visit St. Pete-Clearwater President/CEO Brian Lowack (far right)



Alachua County Strengthens Local Food Systems, Enriches Food-Focused Experiences

Tied to Alachua County's growing tourism and agritourism appeal, the Fresh Food Pathways Food Hub Feasibility Study is strengthening local food systems by connecting area farmers with new markets and expanding access to fresh, locally produced food. With outreach at more than 10 farmers markets countywide, the effort highlights the region's distinct food culture. By supporting growers, food entrepreneurs, and community markets, the initiative boosts economic development and enriches food-focused experiences for residents and visitors alike. VisitGainesville.com



Alachua County's Fresh Food Pathways Food Hub Feasibility Study is strengthening local food systems, enriching food-focused experiences for residents and visitors.

Boombah Sports Complex Scores Big With \$12M Turf Installation in Orlando North, Seminole County

Seminole County recently approved the single largest tourism reinvestment in its history with a \$12M re-turfing project at the Boombah Sports Complex. The investment will be upgrading 15 fields with state-of-the-art AstroTurf. The turf upgrades enhance field quality, reduce weather disruptions, and support elite-level competition. The new turf positions the Boombah Sports Complex to attract larger, more diverse tournaments. DoOrlandoNorth.com



Freshly installed AstroTurf fields at the Boombah Sports Complex provide a premier playing surface for elite tournaments, community leagues, and major sporting events in Orlando North, Seminole County.

'Art of the Plate' Showcases Culture and Culinary in The Palm Beaches

Discover The Palm Beaches, the Cultural Council for Palm Beach County, and Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens partnered for a mission themed "Art of the Plate" at Nobu Hotel Miami Beach on Dec. 3. More than 60 attendees, including journalists, influencers, travel agents, and more, experienced The Palm Beaches' cultural and culinary pillars ahead of Art Basel, featuring ceramic art by Palm Beaches-based artist Lani Goodrich. The event also paid homage to Nobu Manalapan's permanent home at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa. ThePalmBeaches.com



Discover The Palm Beaches hosts a mission in Miami during Art Basel.

Visit St. Lucie Sets New TDT Record, Welcomes New All-Inclusive Family-Friendly Resort

Visit St. Lucie celebrated record TDT for FY2025 bringing in \$6,763,262, 10.7% higher than the previous year and 1.5% higher than the last record year in FY2023. Throughout the year, the hotel industry experienced steady and/or growth in occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR as well as new hotel and vacation rental inventory. Visit St. Lucie also celebrated the Jan. 7 opening of Sandpiper Resort in Port St. Lucie. The property offers multiple pools, four dining venues, three bars, pickleball, tennis, watersports, and kids & teens programs. VisitStLucie.com



Sandpiper Resort in Port St. Lucie (SandPiperBayResort.com) underwent a nearly two-year renovation and is Florida's only true all-inclusive family-friendly resort in the United States.



Endurance Paddleboarding Comes to Highlands County

In December, Highlands County welcomed Last Paddler Standing to Lake June-in-Winter in Lake Placid, Fla. The endurance paddleboarding event featured a fully commentated livestream covering all 50 laps/hours and received enthusiastic feedback from locals, participants, and viewers. Attendees praised the destination's hospitality, natural setting, and community support, positioning the event as a strong new addition to the region's growing water-based and endurance racing portfolio. VisitSebring.com



John Batson from South Carolina is the Last Paddler Standing after paddleboards launched from H. L. Bishop Park in Lake Placid for the 50 laps/hours endurance event.

Captiva Landing Opens With a Big Splash on Captiva Island

South Seas Resort is making waves on Captiva Island with the debut of Captiva Landing, a brand-new aqua adventure built for family fun. The 2.5-acre freshwater playground features splash zones, water slides, a lazy river, an arcade, dining, and the Camp-tiva kids club. Every generation gets time to play, relax, and reconnect in island style. The addition marks a milestone in the 330-acre resort's revitalization, joining Beach House and Harborside restaurants on site. VisitFortMyers.com



Captiva Landing's Bottlenose Bay features a splash zone, six water slides, tipping buckets, and water cannons.

Farming Meets Tourism on Florida's Historic Coast

Agritourism is thriving on Florida's Historic Coast, where rich farming traditions meet modern visitor experiences. In rural areas of St. Johns County, historic farms now host vibrant events like farm mazes and the Hastings Potato, Cabbage & Bacon Festival. New offerings like country wedding venues, the Harvest Trail Tour and pop-up farm-to-table dining experiences enhance the connection between visitors and local agriculture, preserving a legacy born from the grand hotels of St. Augustine in the late 19th century. FloridasHistoricCoast.com



Sunday Suppers and Brunch at The Wilson Family Farm on Florida's Historic Coast are one of the pop-up farm dinners that are becoming popular experiences on Florida's Historic Coast.

Experience Kissimmee and Celebration Brewing Continue Annual Partnership, Doubling Donations for Local Charity

For the second year, Experience Kissimmee partnered with Celebration Brewing to release a limited-edition beer supporting a local charity. This year's new flavor, Hibiscus Hope, captured Florida's tropical essence with vibrant purple hues and refreshing hibiscus notes. The initiative raised \$2,000 for Help Now of Osceola County, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting survivors of domestic violence, doubling last year's donation and reflecting the community's growing commitment. Experience Kissimmee thanks everyone who made this possible. ExperienceKissimmee.com



Co-Owner Frank Lozito of Celebration Brewing, Executive Director Tammy Douglass of Help Now of Osceola County, and Chief of Destination Stewardship Jason Holc at Experience Kissimmee



Paradise Coast Sparks Instagram Buzz With Its 'Live Zestfully' Campaign

The Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB partnered with Southwest Florida travel influencer *@live_zestfully* to collaborate on a social media giveaway at a luxury tropical hideaway just steps from the Gulf. Paradise Coast's Instagram account was featured as a collaborator on the campaign, supporting marketing efforts for a valued destination partner while driving increased brand exposure and follower growth for the CVB. Engagement remained strong, generating more than 4,700 video views, 812 comments, and 200+ new followers as a direct result of the campaign. ParadiseCoast.com



@live_zestfully campaign

It's Easier Than Ever to Fly Into Indian River County

Visit Indian River County Tourism is thrilled to welcome JetBlue Airways to Vero Beach Regional Airport, now offering daily nonstop flights to New York City's JFK Airport and Boston Logan International Airport in Boston, Mass. Flights started in December, and the tourism team was on site greeting the passengers on this first flight. Looking ahead, American Airlines will launch flights to Charlotte, N.C., this month, also to and from Vero Beach, while Breeze Airways continues its regular service locations. VisitIndianRiverCounty.com



Air service additions give travelers more convenient options than ever before to explore Indian River County.

Pensacola Opens \$20.8M Center for Maritime Excellence as North American Base for American Magic and SailGP

Pensacola reinforces its reputation as a top sailing destination with the opening of the \$20.8M American Magic High Performance Center at the Port of Pensacola. Serving as American Magic's permanent base and the North American SailGP training hub starting in 2026, the facility promotes sport tourism, innovation, and strong community ties. VisitPensacola.com



The Visit Pensacola logo takes center stage on the American Magic racing sail, reflecting the city's rising profile as a premier destination for world-class sailing.

Key Largo Named #1 Best Place to Visit in USA

Town & Country magazine named Key Largo the #1 best place to visit in the USA and the best for oceanic exploration. Praise for the Florida Keys' northernmost island includes the spectacular undersea sights in John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park along with stays at Playa Largo Resort & Spa. Visitors can also cruise mangrove estuaries by kayak and enjoy world-class dining at restaurants like The Fish House, offering daily fresh catch specials. VisitFloridaKeys.com



Banana Patch Reef off Key Largo is known for its colorful undersea life including a wide variety of fish, sea turtles, and both hard and soft corals.

Photo: Stephen Frink



Destin-Fort Walton Beach Hosts Conversation About Plans for World's Largest Artificial Reef

To mark the upcoming deployment of the SS United States and the success of its expansive artificial reef program, Destin-Fort Walton Beach hosted a gathering at the DEMA Show in Orlando. Jennifer Adams, tourism director, and Alex Fogg, natural resources chief, welcomed media and industry stakeholders for an evening of conversation and collaboration. The event highlighted the destination's ambitious plans to transform the historic vessel into the world's largest artificial reef this spring as they continue to strive to blend conservation, research, and eco-tourism efforts. DestinFWB.com



Destin-Fort Walton Beach hosts media and industry partners at the DEMA Show to celebrate the upcoming deployment of the SS United States as the world's largest artificial reef.

Florida's Space Coast Sets New Record for TDT Collections

The Space Coast Office of Tourism reached a record Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collection of just under \$26M for FY2024-25—1.6% higher than the previous record set in FY2022-23. While some hotel indicators are showing mixed results, including slightly lower occupancy and softening average daily rates (ADR), there are many positive signs ahead. Hotel inventory continues to grow, with 11,438 rooms now available countywide, up from 10,857 last year. VisitSpaceCoast.com



This graph from the Space Coast Office of Tourism compares record-setting TDT collections for FY2023-24 and FY2024-25.

Visit Central Florida Participates in Swansea City Match Day Sponsorship and Activation

Visit Central Florida participated in a Swansea City AFC match day sponsorship and activation in Swansea, Wales, Oct. 23-25. VCF is the sleeve sponsor for Swansea and was the match sponsor for the Oct. 25 match against Norwich. A half-time on-pitch activation awarded a Polk County holiday to one fan selected from more than 15,000 in attendance. Additionally, VCF's "The Grove" BBQ rub was featured in hospitality suites, earning positive feedback from patrons. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Lee Merrells (Swansea City AFC), Kris Keprios (Visit Central Florida), Justin Laferriere (Visit Central Florida), Paul Smiley (Visit Central Florida), and Kelly Quigley (Swansea City AFC)

Visit Orlando's Magical Dining Celebrates 20 Years With Record-Breaking Impact

Visit Orlando's Magical Dining, presented by Orlando Health, marked its 20th anniversary by raising a record \$398,307 for Orange County charities—a 13% increase over last year. The program featured prix-fixe menus at an all-time high of more than 160 of the region's top restaurants, including MICHELIN Guide honorees, with up to \$2 from every meal going directly to local charities. Visit Orlando's Magical Dining has raised nearly \$3.3M for local charities since launching the charity fundraising component in 2009. VisitOrlando.com



Visit Orlando's Magical Dining, presented by Orlando Health, raises a record \$398,307 for Orange County charities that include REED Charitable Foundation, which focuses on ending the literacy crisis, and six district nonprofits, reinforcing Visit Orlando's commitment to community impact.



Culinary Storytelling Video Series Positions South Walton as a Dining Destination

Walton County Tourism filmed two new additions to the *In the Kitchen with South Walton* video series, featuring local Chef David Cunningham, owner of Cinders & Salt, and Chef Jim Shirley, founder of South Walton favorites including Great Southern Café, Farm & Fire, and The Bay. These media campaign videos, also on YouTube, tell the story of South Walton's food scene, celebrating the ingredients, flavors, and chefs that make Walton County's slice of paradise a must-visit dining destination. WCFLTourism.com



Chef David Cunningham, owner of a premier personal chef and catering service, prepares a dish during filming for Walton County Tourism's *In the Kitchen with South Walton*.

Family Travels 2,936 Miles to See Florida International Airshow in Punta Gorda

From Panama City in the Republic of Panama to Punta Gorda—and everywhere in between—families traveled to experience 50 performers at the Florida International Airshow, bringing a significant positive economic impact to the small town of Punta Gorda in November. Visitors also traveled from Germany, Poland, Quebec, Switzerland, France, and New Zealand. Top U.S. markets included New York, Connecticut, Minnesota, Maine, and Wisconsin, generating an economic impact of more than \$4M during what is typically a slower time of year. PureFlorida.com



The Florida International Air Show (FIAS) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring aviation, inspiring future generations, and supporting local charities. Since its founding, FIAS has contributed \$3.5M to community causes while bringing world-class aerial entertainment to Southwest Florida.

Photo: "Veteran Airlift Command" by Twisted Classic Photography, Matt Butcosk

Visit Tampa Bay Exports Inspiration as 2026 London Art Fair's Official Destination Sponsor

Visit Tampa Bay reprised its role as exclusive Destination Sponsor of the 2026 London Art Fair, Jan. 21-26, for a second consecutive year. The partnership anchors Visit Tampa Bay's UK marketing strategy, reinforcing the destination's growing reputation for a vibrant arts scene in its top overseas market. UK artists Rose Electra Harris and Jason Bruges debuted Tampa Bay-inspired works, and Harris joined President & CEO Santiago C. Corrada on a panel exploring how travel shapes artistic practice. VisitTampaBay.com



UK artist Rose Electra Harris was selected by Visit Tampa Bay for its UK artist opportunity and traveled to Tampa, where the region's dynamic cultural landscape served as her muse for her Tampa Bay-inspired creation for the 2026 London Art Fair.

Battle of the Branches Flag Football Tournament Held in Clay County

The Jacksonville Jaguars and Veterans Benefits Guide hosted the 2025 Battle of the Branches, a large-scale flag football tournament on Nov. 15 at the Clay County Regional Sports Complex. The event brought together 22 teams and more than 250 active-duty service members and veterans from Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Fort Stewart claimed the Tug of War title while Fort Gordon won the championship and was recognized at the Jaguars Salute to Service game. ExploreClay.com



Active-duty service members and veterans compete in the Battle of the Branches flag football tournament.



Ocala/Marion County Celebrates Record Growth and Community Impact at Third Annual Tourism Meeting

The Ocala/Marion County VCB recently hosted its third annual Tourism Meeting at World Equestrian Center, drawing a record 500+ attendees to celebrate a nearly \$1B economic impact. Director Loretta Shaffer announced the "Made Possible By Visitors" campaign. Keynote speakers included Bryan Griffin, president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, and Lauren Pace, marketing VP of Destinations International. Their insights framed record visitor growth as a vital investment in local infrastructure and career stability, enhancing the quality of life for all residents. OcalaMarion.com



Attendees at Ocala/Marion County VCB's record-breaking annual Tourism Meeting

Visit Lauderdale Hosts Annual Food & Wine Festival

The seventh annual Visit Lauderdale Food & Wine Festival brought Food Network stars Richard Blais, Nancy Fuller, and Eddie Jackson to the beach Jan. 19-25. Michelin-recognized chefs and beachfront tastings brought the region's best flavors as festival-goers enjoyed chef-driven dinners, hands-on classes, barbecue throw-downs, and the iconic Grand Tasting at the LOOP. While indulging in fine food, they were also giving back as a portion of the proceeds benefited Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital. There was no better way to savor Greater Fort Lauderdale's culinary spirit. VisitLauderdale.com



Festival goers enjoy the Visit Lauderdale Food & Wine Festival.

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