

TourismMarketing Today

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DMOs Find Creative Ways to Keep Florida Top of Mind With Visitors

Everyone Needs Communication

by Robert Skrob, CAE



It's a difficult time.

I'm sorry for what you are going through.

For what

our industry is facing. We are experiencing the greatest disruption of our lifetimes.

Everyone needs communication. With all the stakeholders we have, two stakeholders often get overlooked, our team and our family.

With politicians, industry, agency, and the press, it's sometimes easy to overlook

COMMUNICATION continues on pg. 3

Florida's DMOs are in the good news business, and there is plenty of good news as DMOs are innovating and using their resources to remain top of mind with visitors as well as working within their communities to help dislocated industry workers find resources. It's a time of amazing creativity for DMOs as we all plan for the recovery period that will follow the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are uplifting stories to inspire you as well as tested ideas you can use to stay connected with potential visitors and locals alike.

Discover Crystal River

Many in the Crystal River destination have been sharing with the world through social media. There's a live river cam, an above water cam, and an underwater cam, where someone might catch a glimpse of the area's famous manatees. Individual tourism partners have been doing the same, sharing a variety of inspiring content and experiences with people at home.

Many outdoor options are still open for business, including golf courses, fishing charters, and boat ramps, so the destination continues to market those appropriately.



Virtual visitors to Crystal River might spot manatees via a live river cam.

One of the area's largest hotels, the Plantation on Crystal River, is offering day rates for area businesspeople who may not have an office or Wi-Fi in their homes, but still have to work.

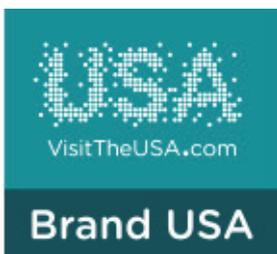
DMOs GET CREATIVE continues on pg. 3

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Tamara Pigott
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Adam Thomas
May 22

Elliott Falcione
May 25

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May 29

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA

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On the Cover

The early morning beach balcony views are still beautiful overlooking Greater Fort Lauderdale's beaches and the Intracoastal Waterway. While visits to these beaches and other sunny destinations are restricted due to the coronavirus, DMOs across the state are using creative strategies to keep Florida top of mind during stay-at-home orders. See the story on page one.

Photo: Visit Lauderdale

your staff. Some may be focused on old strategies, scared and/or overwhelmed. While you are moving 100 miles a minute, sometimes those around you will get left behind. Bring in your team for your strategy discussions. Help them catch up to where you are. Give them a pep talk. And help them focus on what's important right now.

And the most important, your family. "Safer at home" means we are spending more time than ever with our family; however, close proximity for extended periods doesn't necessarily equal good communication. Share where you

are, what you are reviewing, and the strategies you are using to navigate this crisis. It's never been more important than it is today.

At Destinations Florida we are here for you. Suzanne Hurst has pulled together an excellent virtual Destination Marketing Summit to bring you the marketing strategies you need today.

Let us know anything else we can do to support you during this difficult time. We exist to help you attract more customers to your community. When this crisis passes, we will have a lot of work to do.

DMOs GET CREATIVE ... continued from pg. 1

Restaurants have completely shifted their business models, sometimes more than once, with some closed completely and others doing takeout, delivery, or providing pantry items direct to consumers.

Through it all, it seems the community has come together and is working toward the greater good with efforts such as feeding first responders for free. Many of the area's businesses are small, but they are strong, caring, and resourceful, so each day it seems we see a new "best practice" emerge.

Discover Martin County

Martin County is inviting everyone to dream now, visit later! Resources on the special *ProtectOurParadise.com* website include something for everyone.

Children and adults alike are using printable coloring sheets to create their own Martin County masterpieces and posting pictures of their works of art with #DiscoverMartin. Love jigsaw puzzles? Martin County has online puzzles with beautiful scenes from the area.

The site also offers a virtual way to recreate a Martin County Vacation at home, complete with a fun itinerary and photos, and the arts community has a page with



A Zoom background from Martin County

DMOs GET CREATIVE continues on pg. 4

opportunities to enjoy the arts while at home.

Since more people are working from home, the site also offers a downloadable collection of beautiful background images to spruce up video calls.

The site's 10 Easy Ways to Spread Kindness (Not Germs) offers ways to keep everyone safe, to support local businesses, to encourage others, and to plan for the future.

Discover The Palm Beaches

In tandem with its efforts to inspire and educate "armchair travelers" around the world through virtual experiences and Pandora playlists, Discover The Palm Beaches (DTPB) put the destination front and center during Global Meetings Industry Day's (GMID) virtual summit. On April 14, DTPB joined forces with the Meetings Mean Business Coalition to showcase



Owner of West Palm Beach Food Tours, Kristl Story, orders takeout pizza as part of continued efforts to support local businesses.

Photo: Kristl Story

the importance of meetings to The Palm Beaches' tourism industry while uniting around the common goal of serving their communities.

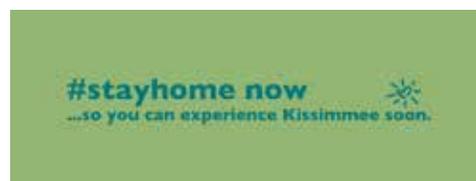
DTPB encouraged participants to share photos of how they've supported the industry for a chance to win a two-night stay at the Boca Raton Resort and Club; donate, if able, to Hospitality Helping Hands, a group that funds up to 3,000 hot meals per day for people in need; and show support by updating their social media profile pictures with one or two custom frames touting the messages "Tourism Strong" and "Postpone, Don't Cancel."

Experience Kissimmee

Support is an integral part of a strong community. That's why Experience Kissimmee is proud to promote its industry partners' initiatives to help the community during these challenging times. Not to mention, everything locals can do from home to continue spreading the love to the destination's businesses.

EK is continuing to work toward a recovery plan. Built on a five-phased recovery framework, this plan will serve as a guiding principle for the near future. The pivotal points of the framework are Respond, Engage, Rebound, Expand, and Resume. The organization is currently in between the responding and engaging phases, as each is crucial for a successful recovery.

Until it's safe to travel again, EK encourages its past and

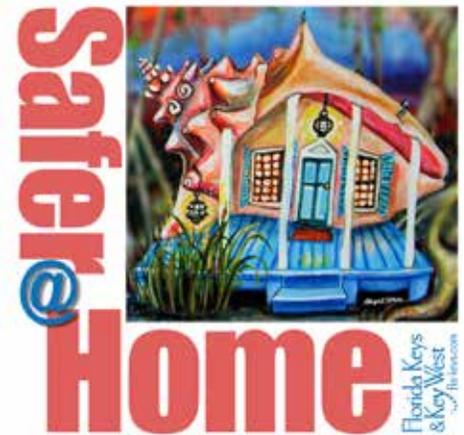


Experience Kissimmee invites virtual visitors to enjoy the destination from home, with an inspirational video and social media messaging.

future visitors to take a moment to experience the destination virtually, through its online blogs and other virtual vacation resources. The safety of Kissimmee's guests and residents is top priority.

Florida Keys & Key West

The Florida Keys Tourism Council has launched a Safer@Home initiative to promote stay-at-home directives to combat COVID-19, while also sensitively maintaining awareness of the Florida Keys as a destination.



The eye-catching Safer@Home logo is based on a whimsical conch house image created by Keys artist Abigail White.

The social media-based Safer@Home program encourages Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter fans and followers to tune in for livestream Keys content while staying safely sequestered in their own homes.

The program incorporates a weekly giveaway of Keys-related or locally crafted items. Each Friday, a post poses destination questions including one about a recent livestream, with the week's winner chosen at random from those who respond.

A second part of the promotion is hashtagged

#KeysAtHomeChallenge. Fans entering the challenge post one-minute videos recreating their favorite moments or activities in the Keys while staying safe at home. The winner, to be chosen at random, will receive a complimentary trip to the Keys that can be enjoyed after officials deem that the destination can resume receiving visitors.

Florida's Space Coast Office of Tourism

Since visitors aren't able to come to the Space Coast at the moment, the tourism office has partnered up with some of the area's best attractions like the Brevard Zoo, Kennedy Space Center, and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge to bring the Space Coast directly to fans. On social media, the DMO is posting fun facts about the Space Coast, from nature to NASA, adding #BlissBreaks videos to Facebook, and sharing content from tourism partners.



The Brevard Zoo streams educational videos from its Sea Turtle Healing Center every Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. on Facebook.

A Resource Blog is updated weekly with educational materials and videos about the Space Coast and some fun activities to keep the kids busy while they're cooped up inside. The blog also includes information from hotels that are offering discounted rates for health care providers, temporary remote office space, or self-isolation

accommodations, as well as information about local restaurants and breweries that have delivery or takeout options available.

Greater Miami CVB

To support local restaurants amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greater Miami CVB introduced Miami Eats, *Order Out, Help Out*, a program conceived to help stimulate business for local restaurants and—most important—for their owners, chefs, and employees.



According to William D. Talbert, III, CDME, GMCVB president & CEO, "The introduction of the Miami Eats, *Order Out, Help Out* campaign was inspired by the GMCVB's popular and locally beloved Miami Spice restaurant program. Though our tourism message has been paused, we are a valued resource for the tourism industry and local businesses. Miami Eats was an immediate response to overwhelming need at this critical time, encouraging Miamians to enjoy Greater Miami and the Beaches' vast dining options while at home."

Launched with 270 restaurants, there are now more than 900 participating in the program and a new partnership with Meals for Heroes Miami, delivering free meals to front-line and first responders from participating Miami Eats restaurants.

Lee County VCB

A Lee County government initiative to combat the spread of COVID-19, through its Take the Pledge social media campaign, is a collaborative effort with its departments, including the Lee County VCB.

More than 780 people, and a few pets, have signed up to do the following:

- Social distance when I need to leave my home for any reason.
- Stay home as much as possible.
- Practice proper handwashing techniques.
- Not gather in groups of more than 10.
- Stay calm, stay kind, and stay safe. For all of us.



A collection of Take the Pledge participants in Lee County

Participants receive an email with "I Took the Pledge" graphics to frame photos on social media. There have been more than 5,800 social media engagements with the campaign.

The VCB assisted in video production—in English and Spanish—for the campaign

that can be viewed at LeeGov.com/pledge; Facebook: LeeCountyFLBoCC; Twitter: LeeCountyFLBoCC; and YouTube: Lee County Government. #StayHomeSWFL #ITookthePledge

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB, with the support of Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda, is providing extended resources for small business owners impacted by the coronavirus pandemic on a microsite, BestSideYourSide.com. The site is part of the Charlotte County Tourism marketing campaign Our Best Side is by Your Side and highlights locally owned businesses and initiatives they're doing, like making sanitizer, converting new napkins into face masks, and making meals available for hospitality staff.

The microsite is designed to serve as a source of entertainment and inspiration for tourism partners, the local community, and future travelers, and offers virtual tourism experiences keeping the destination top of mind while



Limited-edition T-shirts are raising money to help Charlotte County residents and hospitality service workers. Modeling the shirts are Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB team members Wendie Vestfall, director of tourism; Sean Doherty, meetings and sports marketing manager; and Lena Applegate, administrative services coordinator.

offering outdoor enthusiasts the chance to travel without leaving their homes.

Using #BestSideYourSide, the campaign includes the sale of a limited-edition, retro-looking T-shirt. All profits benefit the nonprofit Community Organizations Active in a Disaster Florida, which provides financial support to Charlotte County hospitality service workers and Charlotte County residents in need.

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches VCB

St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra Beach is a fun place to learn about history and nature. As the health and safety of residents and visitors are paramount, Florida's Historic Coast is committed to providing travelers with accurate and timely information about traveling to the area safely. In this time of personal isolation, the DMO is encouraging potential visitors to visit virtually,



Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth Park is a place where legend meets history.

and they ask, "Why not let the kids do the planning for a future visit?"

With schools closed and children being taught at home, the VCB has come up with nine ways for school-age kids to learn from home about St. Augustine's fascinating history, and activities to plan for a future visit to learn

even more about things like the oldest schoolhouse in the United States, the Timucuan Indians who lived in the area 5,000 years ago, Ponce de Leon's discovery of La Florida, among other interesting glimpses into Florida's history.

Visit Gainesville/Alachua County

Looking for wide open spaces? Visitors and residents who love Gainesville and Alachua County are getting back to nature and outdoor open-air activities as a way to find balance.



Visit Gainesville focuses on "What's Good."

Visit Gainesville, Alachua County compiled a list of where people can go to catch sunrises and sunsets, walk, bike, or go birding while still adhering to the currently recommended social distancing practices. And for everyone sheltering in place, the area's award-winning restaurants and craft breweries are making creature comfort cravings available for pickup or delivery.

To support local businesses, the Delicious Dining section of VisitGainesville.com was revamped to provide searchable criteria for takeout and delivery from more than 150 restaurants.

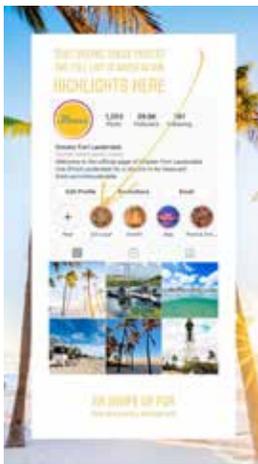
The bureau also pivoted the content of the weekly What's

Good guide, encouraging citizens to explore fresh digital experiences created by local art galleries, museums, music producers, local shops, and more from the comfort of home.

Visit Lauderdale

Visit Lauderdale's Eat Local social media campaign promotes the many restaurants throughout Greater Fort Lauderdale offering takeout, drive-through, curbside, delivery, and even community market services that residents and essential lodgers can use while practicing social distancing.

"Our local restaurants reflect who we are as a destination—diverse, eclectic, welcoming, and representing many cultures," says Stacy Ritter, president & CEO of Visit Lauderdale. "We jumped in to provide regular, timely exposure of what menus and services they are offering to help customers find them during this challenging time."



Instagram highlights show the latest intel on hours, menus, specials on family dinners and cocktails, and more offered by area restaurants. The full list with details is also displayed on the dining page at Sunny.org.

To date, a long list of 125+ participating restaurants have been highlighted and individually tagged on the @VisitLauderdale Instagram and Facebook social media channels, resulting in more than 110,000 views to an audience of 40,000 Instagram followers and 255,000 Facebook followers.

Visit Orlando

Now more than ever, restaurants and their employees need support—one takeout or delivery at a time. That's why Visit Orlando teamed up with Orange County to promote #407Day, a social campaign with a nod to the calendar date (4/07) and the county's longtime area code. Residents were encouraged to order takeout or delivery from one of the 280+ open restaurants, sorted by geography, on VisitOrlando.com/ToGo, and then post a selfie or a food shot using the hashtags #407Day and #OrlandoToGo. Images were shared on the Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook channels of @VisitOrlando and Orange County.



"Our restaurant community is a vital part of who we are as a region," says Mayor Jerry L. Demings of Orange County. "We are all facing challenges because of COVID-19, but we must continue to support our local restaurants."

"407 Day is a celebration of Orlando's incredibly diverse collection of restaurants, and the dedicated people who work there, who need us right now," says George Aguel, president & CEO of Visit Orlando.

Visit Panama City Beach

Following the implementation of travel restrictions and beach closures, Visit Panama City Beach immediately began working to

upload virtual videos and live beach cameras to deliver the sights and sounds of the destination's world-famous beach to the homes of visitors and locals alike.

"We have created a landing page on our website that includes everything people need to recreate a beach vacation in their home, from live web cams stationed all over the city to our own curated, beach-inspired Pandora radio station," says Dan Rowe, president & CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. "We invite anyone at home right now to experience a little sunshine during this difficult time."

In March alone, more than 31,000 listeners tuned into the Pandora radio station for over 12,000 hours. Visit Panama City Beach's Facebook post with the radio station link has also been shared almost 400 times and seen by more than 75,000 people.

Visit Pensacola

Visit Pensacola remains a trusted and inspiring resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media campaigns, resource pages, and live interactions were created to assist the community and guests during these unprecedented times. These initiatives also



Right now, safety and health remain the top priority during the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents and future visitors can enjoy virtual events, live tours, and views of Pensacola beaches from the comfort of home.

allow for daydreaming about the next vacation and adding daily reminders of the paradise that the people in Pensacola call home.

Help Out, Take Out is designed to assist restaurants, bars, and breweries offering curbside and to-go options. Virtual Pensacola invites everyone to share live events, experiences, and activities so all may enjoy the very best of Pensacola at [VisitPensacola.com/virtual-Pensacola](https://www.visitpensacola.com/virtual-pensacola). These experiences include fitness classes, happy hours, cooking demonstrations, and virtual tours throughout attractions and museums. Also created were fun backgrounds for virtual teleconferencing, along with everyone's favorite social media story games like "this or that" or "when quarantine is over." In times of uncertainty, we know that travel will prevail, and the Visit Pensacola team will be saving a spot in the sand.

Visit St. Lucie

Now, more than ever, is the time to support local restaurants that are struggling.

Together with its partners at Firefly Group and Tambone



St. Lucie County restaurants are offering delicious cuisine via takeout, curbside pickup, and delivery.

Companies, St. Lucie County Tourism has put together an online list of restaurants offering takeout, curbside pickup, and delivery in St. Lucie. This list is continually updated with new restaurants and information, so visitors to [OurStLucie.com/restaurants](https://www.ourstlucie.com/restaurants) are asked to bookmark it and check it frequently.

Visit St. Lucie distributed an email with this important message: "We encourage you to continue to #SupportStLucie and our local restaurant scene during these challenging times. Please forward this email to local friends and family or post the website link on your social media pages so we can come together to support our community!"

Visit St. Pete/Clearwater

In an effort to bring St. Pete/Clearwater together under one unified message during an uncertain time, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater developed and launched a bridge campaign, Brighter Days Ahead.



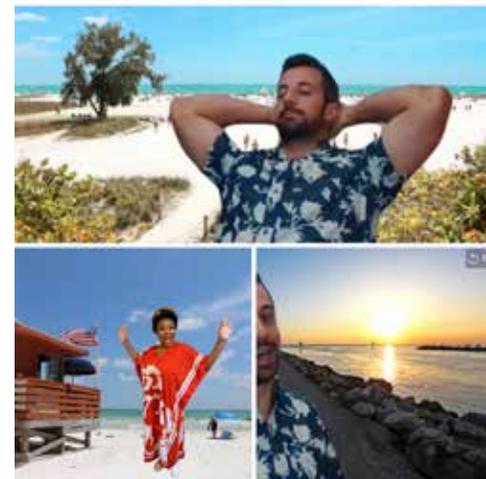
"At our core, we're about bringing people together," says Leroy Bridges, VSPC's vice president of digital and communications. "But right now, it's about protecting each other until the time is right to come back together, and Brighter Days Ahead captures that optimism and vibrancy of the destination while taking a pause."

For now, the message is being communicated through owned channels and creative social media content, like hour-plus-long beach scene videos that provide a peaceful soundtrack to a work-from-home day. In total, three ASMR-style beach videos have generated more than 250,000 views across social media.

Visit Sarasota County

When the staff at Visit Sarasota County realized they had been holding meetings on Zoom for a well over a week, they realized they needed to add a little spice to them.

"We quickly packaged up some of our beach images for folks to use as their own virtual backgrounds," Erin Duggan, VSC vice president, says. "We specifically talked about branding them with our logo, and decided against it, as we really wanted to make it about doing the right thing, more so than just promoting our brand. Also, we



Video chat backgrounds from Visit Sarasota County

worried if they were branded, it would keep some people from using them.”

Within 24 hours, 200 people had already downloaded images. The post announcing the backgrounds was seen by more than 10,000 people.

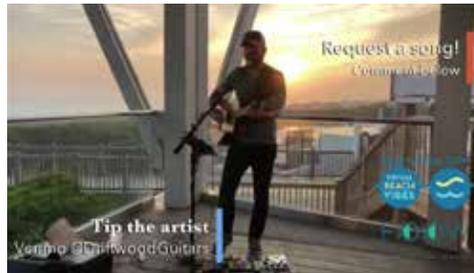
“We shared it on some of the COVID-19 resource pages, as we most certainly want other people to use the same idea,” Duggan says. “It’s a great way to put a smile on everyone’s faces during a stressful time.”

Visit South Walton

Visit South Walton has been partnering with local musicians to send out #VirtualBeachVibes while area beaches and amenities are closed to the public. These live concerts allow for fan interaction and song requests, and give the South Walton community of visitors a chance to connect virtually when they can’t be there in person. Additionally, the shows help support the local arts community

during a time when live concerts are otherwise cancelled.

The Virtual Beach Vibes hashtag is also used when promoting virtual tours of each of South Walton’s 16 beach neighborhoods on social media, and users are invited to kick back at home and enjoy a virtual tour when they can’t be there in person.



South Walton shares #VirtualBeachVibes.

Visit Tampa Bay

Visit Tampa Bay went from monitoring COVID-19 to actively leading an industry response with a new temporary logo and tagline. The logo was launched in an effort to advocate for social distancing and safer-at-home practices. The change is reflected in unlocking its iconic keys and changing the tagline to



Visit Tampa Bay’s new temporary logo promotes social distancing.

Unlock Tampa Bay. From a Distance. The new logo was released alongside two new videos, a 60-second *Stronger Together* spot, and a community crowdsourced social media video *We Are Tampa Bay*. Both videos are available at [YouTube.com/VisitTampaBay](https://www.youtube.com/VisitTampaBay).

“The fight for tourism is far from over,” says Santiago C. Corrada, president & CEO of Visit Tampa Bay. “The unprecedented effects on the industry have rippled into every corner of the global economy, but Tampa Bay will rebound and when the crisis is over, the tourism industry will be at the forefront of the recovery.”

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX LAWS EXPLAINED

Robert Skrob, executive director of Destinations Florida, has created a 27-minute video explaining Florida Tourist Development Tax laws for Destinations Florida members so you can understand the law and explain it to individuals within your community. Destinations Florida members can access the video here:

DestinationsFlorida.org/tdt-laws

Email Suzanne@DestinationsFlorida.org if you need assistance with a log-in.



DESTINATIONS
FLORIDA

Visit Pensacola Welcomes New President/CEO

Florida has a new resident and Destinations Florida a new tourism partner as Visit Pensacola welcomes President/CEO Darien Schaefer.

Schaefer joins the Visit Pensacola team from Visit Big Bear in Big Bear Lake, California, where he served as CEO for the past three years. Schaefer brings to the team over 20 years of destination marketing experience, including his most recent roles as CEO of Visit Lake Geneva and executive director at the Wausau/Central Wisconsin CVB/Sports Authority.



Darien Schaefer

"I'm very excited to be joining Visit Pensacola and working with its excellent staff to promote one of the best beach destinations in the nation," Darien says. "What I really like about Pensacola and Escambia County is the quality of the people I've met and how proud they are of their community. Promoting the history, culture, and sports of Pensacola will be a focus to extend our visitors' experience beyond the beach."

Schaefer has been active in state tourism bureaus and is ready to work with his peers in Florida.

"I'm looking forward to being actively involved with Destinations Florida and working with my peers across the state," he says. "I served on the board and as president of both the Wisconsin Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus and Circle Wisconsin. I know the critical role that this organization has on the ongoing success of Florida's tourism industry."

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AGO 2020-02 and You

The Florida attorney general has issued an opinion that may change the way you promote your destination.

In Opinion 2020-02, the Florida attorney general concluded that the TDT statute *does not allow* TDT funds to be used for travel costs “incurred by travel writers, tour brokers, or other persons connected with the tourist industry to attend promotional activities or events put on by the County’s tourist promotion agency.” Op. Att’y Gen. Fla. 2020-02 (2020).

Does that conclusion surprise you?

It should, because this result is contrary to how the statute has been read and used for years.

Opinion 2020-02 is not the last word on this issue, though. It’s up to you what you do in light of what it says.



Can a DMO use TDT for travel costs incurred by travel writers or tour brokers? Maybe, maybe not.

What is AGO 2020-02?

Opinion 2020-02 specifically analyzes section 125.0104(g), Florida Statutes, to determine what kind of travel expenses TDT funds can be used to pay. Subsection (g)(a) contains this key provision:

Transportation and other incidental expenses, other than those provided in s. 112.061, shall only be authorized for officers and employees of the agency, other authorized persons, *travel writers, tour brokers*, or other persons connected with the tourist industry when traveling pursuant to paragraph (c). Id. (emphasis added).

When a normal person reads that sentence, it’s clear enough that it says TDT funds can be used to pay for transportation and other incidental expenses for travel writers (bloggers, etc.) and tour brokers.

Though the attorney general ultimately comes to a different conclusion, the opinion admits that this straightforward reading

of the statute is “plausible.” The opinion states that “[u]nder that reading, tourist development tax funds could be used for ‘transportation and other incidental expenses’ of travel writers and tour brokers if compliant with the remainder of paragraph g(a), regardless of whether the travelers were traveling pursuant to paragraph g(c). This reading would permit the payment of [such] expenses[.]”



Steven M. Hogan

If that was the last word, then there would be nothing remarkable about this opinion. Indeed, this “plausible” reading of the statute has guided DMO operations for years; however, the opinion goes on to engage in a tortured statutory analysis to support a different conclusion: that the expenses referred to in subparagraph (g)(a) *only* mean those incurred by travel writers or tour brokers who are *traveling on county business* pursuant to subparagraph (g)(c).

How was this conclusion reached?

I will spare you the details of the attorney general’s analysis. I instead encourage you to read the opinion in its entirety. It’s right there on the internet—go to <http://myfloridalegal.com/ago.nsf/Opinions>; it’s near the top of the list.

Toward the last half of the opinion, the attorney general starts talking about “canons of statutory interpretation” as being the guides for how to read the statute. The attorney general uses these canons to conclude that the words “when traveling pursuant to paragraph (c)” apply to *everyone* listed in the part of subparagraph (g)(a) quoted above. Therefore, according to the attorney general, unless a travel writer or a tour broker is traveling on county business (via (g)(c)), then TDT funds cannot be used to pay for that travel.

Is the attorney general right?

So, is the attorney general’s analysis correct or not? The answer is maybe, maybe not.

When I was in law school, my Florida constitutional law class was taught by a judge from the First District Court of Appeal. One of the things he drilled into us was that you could find a “canon of statutory interpretation” to fit whatever argument you wanted to make. He gave us a list of common canons side-by-side to show how they conflicted with one another and made no coherent sense.

What this story is meant to show is that the two “canons of statutory interpretation” highlighted in AGO 2020-02 are not the whole story. They were selected to justify the ends the writer wanted to reach.

Practically though, this opinion now exists and must be grappled with. The question then becomes “what do we do now?”

Is AGO 2020-02 the last word?

It’s important to note that an opinion from the Florida attorney general is *not binding in court* and does not have the force of law.

The attorney general’s power to issue advisory opinions to subdivisions of state government is created by section 16.01,

Florida Statutes. The statute provides that the attorney general may, "upon the written requisition of a member of the Legislature, other state officer, or officer of a county, municipality, other unit of local government, or political subdivision, give an official opinion and legal advice in writing on any question of law relating to the official duties of the requesting officer." § 16.01(3), Fla. Stat. This is the statute that gave the attorney general the power to issue AGO 2020-02 upon the request of a county attorney.

It is well settled, however, that attorney general opinions issued under section 16.01 are not binding in court and do not have the force of law. *See, e.g., Leadership Housing, Inc. v. Dep't of Revenue*, 336 So. 2d 1239, 1241 (Fla. 4th DCA 1976) ("The opinions of the Attorney General are entitled to great weight in construing the law of this State, but are not binding on this Court. ... With all due respect for the Opinion of the Attorney General and interpretation of the Department of Revenue, we have reached a contrary conclusion." (emphasis added; citations omitted)); *Bunkley v. State*, 882 So. 2d 890, 897 (Fla. 2004) ("Bunkley's reliance on the Attorney General's opinion as a statement of 1989 law is misplaced because opinions of the Attorney General are not statements of law.").

This means that though AGO 2020-02 exists, it is not binding on anyone with the force of law.

What now?

Ultimately it is up to you what you do in light of AGO 2020-02. The opinion itself stated that the traditional reading of the statute was "plausible." Until a court decides this issue, the matter will be up for spirited debate.

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.



People in the News

Keith Farlow Appointed to Charlotte County TDC



Keith Farlow

The Charlotte County TDC is pleased to announce the appointment of Keith Farlow, appointed by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners last month. With his wife, Laurie, Farlow opened Farlow's on the Water, a restaurant in Englewood, in 2003. During fiscal year 2018-19, Charlotte County welcomed an estimated 656,200 visitors. Tourism generated an estimated \$427 million in direct expenditures and made an estimated \$619.6 million in economic impact. *PureFlorida.com*

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National Travel and Tourism Week 2020 Celebrates Spirit of Travel

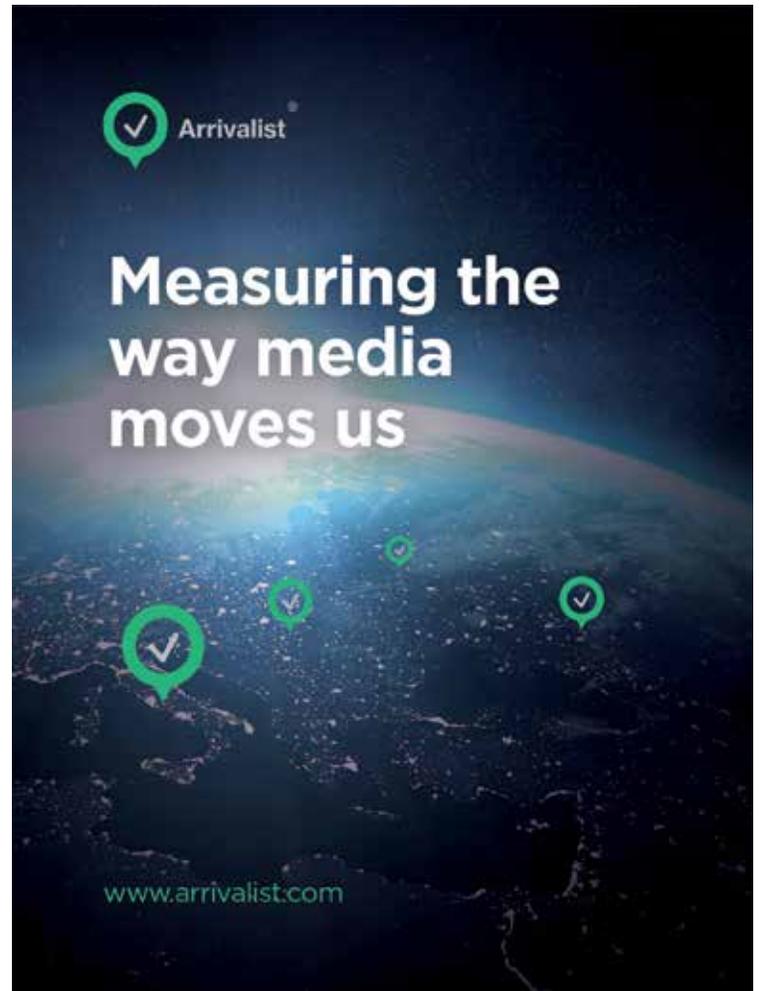
National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW), the annual celebration of the contributions and accomplishments of the U.S. travel industry, will spotlight resilience and hope in the face of the coronavirus pandemic with this year's theme, the Spirit of Travel.



While rallies and face-to-face advocacy that have been hallmarks of NTTW in years past are not an option this year, U.S. Travel is encouraging engagement in a number of virtual and digital ways.

U.S. Travel has built a resource toolkit with alternative options to promote the spirit of travel during NTTW. These resources have a heavy emphasis on social media engagement, and encourage optimism, preparation for the future, and how to support coronavirus relief efforts.

Destinations Florida will include reports from Florida's DMOs on how they celebrated NTTW in the June edition of *Tourism Marketing Today*.



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Sojern's digital marketing solutions for travel are built on more than a decade of expertise analyzing the complete traveler path to purchase. The company drives travelers from dream to destination by activating multi-channel branding and performance solutions on the Sojern Traveler Platform for more than 10,000 customers around the world.

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With Open Palms ...

For the first time ever, Discover The Palm Beaches (DTPB) hosted a virtual industry update as part of its continued efforts to keep hospitality partners and community leaders informed during the COVID-19 crisis. Topics included tourism forecasts and strategic marketing updates. In addition, DTPB launched three digital resources for virtual experiences, to-go restaurant services, and essential lodging options—all of which showcase ways the destination is banding together to support those in need. ThePalmBeaches.com



The Florida Keys & Key West Promote Solace & Serenity

The Florida Keys & Key West—promoting solace and serenity through social media platforms—showcases natural beauty and indigenous wildlife, allowing 467,000 Facebook fans and future visitors to unwind. Stories highlight unique destination aspects—its history with wreckers and seagoing railroad, signature Key lime pie, literary and angling greats, and Keys-crafted wares to order. A recent Keys Voices blog highlights “the man who protected Key deer,” and you can visit the Keys on Facebook (@floridakeysandkeywest) and on Instagram and Twitter (@thefloridakeys). Fla-Keys.com



Learn more about Key deer at Fla-Keys.com/keysvoices/.

Leon County Is a Southern Living South's Best City

For the second year in a row, Leon County earned a coveted travel distinction from national magazine *Southern Living*. Tallahassee was named the No. 10 South's Best City, No. 9 South's Best College Town, and home to the No. 1 South's Best Garden Shop—Tallahassee Nurseries—as part of the magazine's fourth annual South's Best Awards recognizing readers' favorite Southern destinations and experiences. Tallahassee was the only Florida city listed on the South's Best College Town and was the top-ranked Florida city in the South's Best. VisitTallahassee.com



Southern Living recognizes Leon County for its history and natural beauty along with numerous wildlife preserves, animal refuges, state parks, and history museums. Pictured here is Piney Z Lake.

Three Lee County VCB Staff Earn Beer Tourism Certification

With a dozen craft breweries to promote in the destination, it's only natural that the Lee County VCB realized the benefits of beer tourism. Three VCB staff—Annie Banion, Nancy MacPhee, and Jackie Parker—recently attended the Beer Marketing & Tourism Conference in St. Petersburg, Florida, and took the Beer Tourism and Beer Marketing Certificate courses. They will be sharing best practices on how to attract beer tourists with partners in a workshop later this year. FortMyers-Sanibel.com



Jackie Parker and Annie Banion show off their beer tourism certificates.



GMCVB Hosts Ribbon-Cutting Event for the New Coconut Grove Visitor Center

The Greater Miami CVB welcomed stakeholders, media, and visitors to a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the 25th and Greater Miami's newest visitor center on March 5. The Coconut Grove Visitor Center is a resource for tourists and the local community to learn more about local activities, restaurants, and accommodations, and is part of an expansion effort by the GMCVB to provide visitors and the local community with access to information throughout Greater Miami's multicultural neighborhoods. *MiamiAndBeaches.com*



Pictured at the Coconut Grove Visitor Center's opening are Jennifer Noll, Sam Noddle, Abigail Mahony, Gene Prescott, William D. Talbert, III, CDME, Wendy Zane, Monty Trainer, Rolando Aedo, and Connie Kinnard.

Orlando North, Seminole County Offers Nature-Based Exploration

Waterway exploration takes many routes; for instance, in the form of a 3.5-day and 30.5-mile Wekiva/St. John's River Ramble held prior to the social distancing guidelines put in place to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. This Paddle Florida partnership guided individuals of all paddle levels throughout areas of Orlando North's naturally undisturbed spaces and continued into the evenings with rustic cabin camping. During this trip, paddlers crossed paths with deer, turtles, gators, manatees, and many native bird species. *DoOrlandoNorth.com*



With 2,000+ waterways to explore and a vast array of nature-based activities to enjoy, Orlando North, Seminole County is an outdoor adventure hot-spot!

Visit Sarasota County Looks Ahead

VSC Visitor Centers were just hitting their peak! From January to March, visitor interactions were up YOY nearly 20%, and 2,500+ visitor guides had been requested via snail mail. VSC attributed some of this influx to two new centers in 2020 (SRQ Airport baggage claim and within the Venice Chamber) and increased Visitor Information Vehicle attendance at events. VSC believes in the effectiveness of in-person interactions and is eager to meet visitors again post-COVID-19. *VisitSarasota.com*



VSC Visitor Centers grow and thrive (pre-COVID-19), and look forward to busy days ahead.

Chasin' The Sun Showcases Panama City Beach

Visit Panama City Beach is proud to announce that the fifth season of its television series *Chasin' The Sun* premiered January 11 on Discovery Channel. The fishing and coastal lifestyle program airs weekly at 8:30 a.m. Eastern/Pacific and 7:30 a.m. Central. Season five will feature more of the fast-paced, heart-pounding saltwater action that viewers of the award-winning series have come to expect, as well as segments on the attractions, events, dining opportunities, and natural beauty that make Panama City Beach one of the world's most popular vacation destinations. *VisitPanamaCityBeach.com*



CTS hosts Capt. Justin Leake and Capt. Ed Zyak pose with a freshly caught red grouper. Photo: Visit Panama City Beach



Fort Lauderdale Breaks Ground on Pier Sixty-Six Hotel Expansion

Fort Lauderdale community and tourism officials joined the Pier Sixty-Six Hotel team March 12 for the official groundbreaking of the reimagined hotel set to open in 2022. The historic 17-story tower hotel with its rotating Pier Top Lounge will remain, joined by a separate new 10-story hotel building. Upon completion, the hotel will have 345 guest rooms and suites, a two-story pool experience with family and adult areas, lobby lounge, spa, fitness center, kids club, marina promenade, 40,000 sq. ft. of meeting and entertainment space, and residential offerings. *Sunny.org*



Visit Lauderdale President & CEO Stacy Ritter (second from right), City of Fort Lauderdale officials, and the Pier Sixty-Six Hotel team celebrate the groundbreaking for the reimagined hotel.

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Visit Central Florida Hosts Canadian Journalists

Visit Central Florida partnered with VISIT FLORIDA to conduct a press tour for Canadian media in late February. The tour, part of a larger itinerary encompassing three Florida destinations, featured unique family experiences in Polk County. The media also enjoyed accommodations in a luxury vacation home at Balmoral Florida Resort. *VisitCentralFlorida.org*



Journalists from Canada tour the Luxe Teepees at Westgate River Ranch Resort.

Visit Gainesville, Alachua County Attends Rendezvous South 2020

In early March, the Visit Gainesville, Alachua County conference sales team attended Rendezvous South 2020, a three-day meeting planner event hosted by Conventions South in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The VCB was proud to sponsor the luncheon speaker and to unveil the new Authentic Experiences look-book and capabilities brochure at the event. The team also unveiled promotional boxes featuring two-night stays provided by conference center partner, the Best Western Gateway Grand, to randomly selected planners. *VisitGainesville.com*



Signage from Visit Gainesville, Alachua County greets luncheon guests at Rendezvous South 2020.

FLORIDA TOURISM STRONG RECOVERY MARKETPLACE

Destinations Florida's Partners have put together the Florida Tourism Strong Recovery Marketplace booklet with resources that can help DMOs now and as we move forward into recovery from COVID-19. Our Partners will be updating their research, reports, and programs on an ongoing basis. Visit often for up-to-date support.



DestinationsFlorida.org/StrongRecoveryMarketplace

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Legal Resource for Your DMO

As a member benefit for you, Destinations Florida has retained Steven M. Hogan with the Ausley McMullen law firm to provide insight into the operation of the TDT and related issues to Destinations Florida.

There are several situations where it would be helpful for you to have a legal opinion for your community. As a member benefit, you can speak with Mr. Hogan about the facts and laws at a general level.

To take advantage of this program, feel free to reach out to Steve Hogan at the information below:



Steven M. Hogan
Ausley McMullen
850/224-9115
shogan@ausley.com

If you require specific advice on decisions that your DMO will make under the TDT or other law, you can hire Mr. Hogan to advise you separately as your lawyer.

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Enclosed is your copy of Tourism Marketing Today
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INSIDE: AGO 2020-02 may change the way you promote your destination.

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Destinations Florida, Inc.

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 55 official county DMOs that promote their communities throughout the world. These tourism promotion activities help to attract 118.8 million visitors to Florida, generating \$112 billion in spending and 1.4 million jobs. These activities are made possible by Tourist Development Taxes provided by Florida Statutes Section 125.0104. Statistics: VISIT FLORIDA Research



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