

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | December 2024



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Resilient Florida: Tourism Industry Leads the Way

Florida's tourism industry partners across the state are working on recovery efforts after back-to-back hurricanes, and VISIT FLORIDA has launched its largest-ever tourism recovery campaign to show the world that Florida is open and ready to welcome visitors.

"A vast majority of Florida's destinations were not impacted at all by the hurricanes and are open now. Even the most impacted areas are on their way to welcoming visitors much sooner than anticipated," said Dana Young, president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA. "While we don't want to downplay the effects of the storms on several west coast destinations, the pace of recovery has been so fast—it's uncanny! The Florida spirit of resiliency is very strong, and the tourism industry in impacted destinations is hard at work to

reopen their restaurants and hotels for the busy holiday season."

Destinations all along the west coast of Florida have good news to share ...

Discover Crystal River Florida Launches National Recovery Marketing Campaign



Discover Crystal River Florida's hurricane recovery campaign is focused on Manatee Season.

Although Crystal River, Homosassa, and other areas along the west coast of Citrus County experienced

RESILIENT FLORIDA continues on pg. 4

10-Years, Off to a Great Start



Attending the 10-year anniversary celebration of Experience Kissimmee with my wife, Kory, was both

an honor and a profound reminder of the organization's transformative journey. Under the leadership of DT Minich, Experience Kissimmee has elevated Osceola County from a community grappling with economic challenges to a globally recognized destination.

In the years leading up to Experience Kissimmee's formation in 2014, Osceola County

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

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

FOUNDING PARTNER



DIAMOND PARTNERS



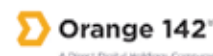
PLATINUM PARTNERS



GOLD PARTNERS



SILVER PARTNERS



HAPPY Birthday

Ben Earman
December 3

Nerissa Okiye
December 7

Darien Schaefer
December 17

Nicole Stacey
December 28

Gil Langley
January 22

DESTINATIONS
FLORIDA
TourismMarketing
Today

The Official Newsletter of
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Member Database

On the Cover

Paddling through the tranquil waters of Brooksville-Weeki Wachee with Get Up and Go Kayaking at sunset offers a serene escape, where the golden hues of the setting sun blend with the lush surroundings, creating an unforgettable, picturesque experience on Florida's Adventure Coast, Brooksville-Weeki Wachee.

U.S. Travel Recognizes Bill Talbert, Chris Thompson With Highest Honor

The visitor industry gathered in Washington, D.C., Nov. 20, to honor Greater Miami CVB's former President & CEO William D. "Bill" Talbert III, CDME, with the industry's highest honor, induction into the prestigious ranks of U.S. Travel's Hall of Leaders, alongside Brand USA's former President & CEO Chris Thompson. The award is presented by the U.S. Travel Association and is the single highest and most revered honor an individual in the travel and tourism industry can receive. Inductees into the Hall of Leaders are individuals who have made sustained, noteworthy contributions that have strengthened the broad travel and tourism industry. The exemplary vision and leadership demonstrated by these individuals have strengthened and unified the industry well beyond their own organizations, industry segments, or communities. Congratulations, Bill and Chris!



Bill Talbert



Chris Thompson

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

faced significant economic hurdles. The Great Recession had a profound impact on the local tourism industry, leading to the closure of several large properties and competition from new, value-priced hotel rooms added by Walt Disney World.

Despite these challenges, Experience Kissimmee has spearheaded a remarkable turnaround over the past decade. The organization's strategic initiatives have led to a 70% increase in visitation, with more than 10.4 million visitors in 2024 alone. Tourist Development Tax collections have doubled, reaching \$81.6 million in 2023.

Experience Kissimmee's efforts have not only revitalized the local economy but also positioned Osceola County on the global stage. The expansion of international representation from three countries in 2014 to 17 in 2024 underscores this achievement. Additionally, the organization's commitment to sustainability is evident through



DT Minich and Robert Skrob celebrate a decade of transformative success at Experience Kissimmee's 10-Year anniversary celebration.

partnerships like Trees4Travel, which has resulted in the planting of more than 60,000 trees to offset carbon emissions.

As we celebrate this milestone, it's clear that Experience Kissimmee's dedication to innovation, strategic partnerships, and community engagement has been instrumental in transforming Osceola County into a world-class destination. The evening's festivities were a testament to the resilience and vision that have driven this success, and I look forward to witnessing the continued growth and prosperity of this remarkable community.

significant impacts from Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the destination is quickly rebounding and open for business. To get the word out to visitors, Discover Crystal River Florida launched a national marketing campaign focusing on Manatee Season (Nov. 15 – Mar. 31). According to Auvis Cole, tourism director, with very few exceptions, visitor accommodations and offerings are back to normal and local businesses have resumed standard operations.

Florida's Adventure Coast Highlights Resilient Businesses, Restored Natural Wonders

As Florida's Adventure Coast bounces back from Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the destination is ready to welcome visitors. Recovery efforts have restored beloved spots like The Drunken Mullet and The Kayak Shack, with more businesses returning to normal each day. The marketing team is launching



The Drunken Mullet is one of the many businesses welcoming visitors to Florida's Adventure Coast.

a video series highlighting these community-driven recoveries, showcasing resilient local businesses and restored natural wonders. As high season approaches, Florida's Adventure Coast is inviting travelers to explore and support their vibrant, revitalized coast.

Snowcat Ridge Returns to Florida's Sports Coast

Florida's Sports Coast is excited to welcome visitors back! After weathering the challenges of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which caused



It's back! Snowcat Ridge in Dade City is the only Alpine snow park in Florida.

catastrophic flooding, historic storm surges up to 16 feet, and significant infrastructure damage, the region is steadily recovering. Despite these setbacks, the destination is thrilled to announce the return of Snowcat Ridge, Florida's only Alpine snow park. Visitors can enjoy unique winter activities like snow tubing and ice skating, all while enjoying the beautiful Florida sunshine!

FLORIDA MARKETERS

We can help drive inspiration for your destination.



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Contact us today!

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Ready to Play? Ready to Connect? Tampa Bay Is Ready for You

Visit Tampa Bay is investing \$6 million in sales and marketing efforts, including \$1.4 million into a November and December paid-media campaign, aimed at reminding



Thrill seekers, explorers, foodies, convention goers, and laid-back vacationers, rejoice! Tampa Bay is Ready to Play. That's the message of Visit Tampa Bay's November and December paid-media campaign.

discerning travelers now is the perfect time to plan their visit as the region's tourism industry was unaffected by recent storms. Potential domestic travelers in places like New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, and international travelers in countries like Germany, United Kingdom, and Canada will see a brighter spotlight on Tampa Bay, illuminating the region's unique offerings and readiness to welcome visitors.

St. Pete-Clearwater: Still Shining

St. Pete-Clearwater is Still Shining after a pair of historic hurricanes impacted the destination. With nearly 80% of the destination—including accommodations, restaurants, and attractions back online—VisitSPC is spreading the word that America's Favorite Beaches are ready to welcome residents and visitors to explore the beautiful beaches, amazing arts and experiences, and delicious coastal dining options. VisitSPC is distributing buttons throughout the community to remind the hospitality industry and their visitors that the area is Still Shining!



Still Shining! is the message in St. Pete-Clearwater.

RESILIENT FLORIDA continues on pg. 6

NEW MEMBER RESOURCE:

"Tourism Marketing in Florida: A Newcomer's Guide"

The roadmap to mastering destination marketing in the Sunshine State!

Designed for new team members, staff, board members, and industry leaders, this comprehensive collection of video trainings illuminates the path to success in the world of Florida tourism marketing..

With *Tourism Marketing in Florida: A Newcomer's Guide*, you'll:

- Train your team faster by giving them access actionable strategies to elevate your destination.
- Bring TDC and board members a broader understanding of their role through insider knowledge from Florida's tourism marketing veterans.
- Help members of your industry appreciate the full impact of your efforts by demonstrating how to leverage collaborations for maximum impact.

These first-draft videos were created by DMO expert volunteers to serve you. Please watch them and give us your feedback on how to improve them. We expect to incorporate feedback on another version in a few months.



Distribute this link and QR code to members of your team, board, and industry as a free benefit of Destinations Florida.

<https://bit.ly/NewFDM>

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Open for Business

While Punta Gorda and Englewood Beach were affected by the recent hurricanes with unprecedented storm surge, the community is resilient



Most tourism partners in Punta Gorda/Englewood, such as TT's Tiki Bar pictured here, are open and welcoming visitors and residents.

Photo: Courtesy of Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB

and has quickly bounced back from the initial interruption of business. With few exceptions, the area's accommodations, restaurants, and attractions partners are back to welcoming visitors and residents. "While we halted advertising for approximately a month giving our businesses time to recover, we are back to our normal cadence of attracting visitors for the upcoming season," said Sean Doherty, tourism director of the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB.

Fort Myers Area Is Still a Special Place

"Every day, every month, every few months, something new is opening in the Fort Myers area. New hotels are under construction,



ArtFest Fort Myers is set for Jan. 31-Feb. 2.

and it's going to be that way for a number of years going forward," said Tamara Pigott, executive director

of the Lee County VCB. In Lee County, more than 11,000 hotel rooms are open, the sand is still white, the water is still blue, and Southwest Florida is still a special place.

Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades CVB Launches 'Resilience' Campaign

Florida's Paradise Coast rebounded quickly from the impacts of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Once again, the resilience of the business community and the unanimous support



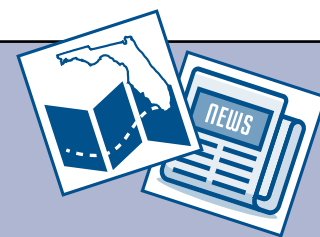
Florida's Paradise Coast is fully open for business and welcoming visitors to their resorts, hotels, attractions, and restaurants.

of the TDC and Board of County Commissioners for additional funding played a critical role in implementing recovery-focused marketing efforts for the destination. Immediate messaging and real-time content to mitigate negative media perceptions were driven through social media campaigns. A national "Resilience" marketing campaign this fall will lean heavily into expanding visibility within core markets and will target new markets that closely match the destination's key demographics.

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.



Visit Sarasota County Hosts Virtual Town Halls to Hear From Their Community After Back-to-Back Storms

In the face of two historic storms in rapid succession, Visit Sarasota County was thrilled to be able to pull together two virtual town halls for their community. The goal of the town halls was to share all that VSC had been doing in light of the recent storms and to aid in recovery efforts. The VSC team was able to hear business partners and local stakeholders' thoughts, ideas, suggestions, frustrations, resources needed, and more.

The team shared information on two new campaigns they started in the wake of the hurricanes as well. The #SupportThe941 campaign is a shift from the already established Funinthe941 initiative to encourage patronage of local businesses. Additionally, attendees got to hear about the brand-new campaign Florida's West Coast made possible by the collaboration with the Bradenton Area CVB. The team's plans to use the marketing dollar match from VISIT FLORIDA were also shared with the almost 100 attendees and allowed a space for thoughtful feedback.

All the campaigns and pushes aim to showcase the vitality of the region for locals and visitors alike as a united community.



Visit Sarasota County's virtual town halls on hurricane recovery efforts drew an audience of almost 100 community stakeholders.



"The momentum the Support the 941 campaign has generated is incredibly heartening, having tapped into an unexpected audience—the 'thoughtful tourist,' someone who thrives on supporting neighborhoods and businesses in times of need," said Visit Sarasota County President & CEO Erin Duggan, CDME.

Bradenton Area Voters Overwhelmingly Pass 1% Tourism Tax Referendum

In the November election, Bradenton Area residents passed a referendum to raise the Tourist Development Tax from 5% to 6%. This was made possible because last year the county collected more than \$30 million in revenue and exceeded \$600 million in sales, meeting the criteria to levy the additional 1% TDT. More than 68% of Bradenton Area voters supported the measure, a testament to the efforts made to educate residents on the benefits of passing it.

Asked to comment on the process of getting the referendum passed, Elliott Falcione, executive director of the Bradenton Area CVB said, "It is as simple as this. With the additional TDT, we will continue to build assets that not only serve our tourists but also enhance the quality of life for our residents who live here."

★ Tourist Development Tax Referendum

Participating Precincts Reporting: 71 / 71

🔍 Precinct Details Show Detailed View

Choice	Election Day	Early Votes	Vote By Mail	Provisional	Total Votes	Percentage
FOR the additional one percent TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX (NPA)	33,288	62,650	47,580	0	143,518	68.07%
AGAINST the additional one percent TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX (NPA)	19,396	31,291	16,038	0	67,325	31.93%

Bradenton Area voters understand the value of tourism to their area and say yes to the extra penny of Tourist Development Tax to help promote visitation to Manatee County.

The additional 1% TDT will generate approximately \$8 million annually and may be allocated for projects and initiatives including special events facilities; sports venues; pier and dock enhancements and improvements; arts, culture, and heritage amenities such as theaters and museums; public transportation programs that expand the counties' multi-modal transportation

options for both residents and visitors; public/private partnerships for tourism related assets; and incentive opportunities for new and expanded airline partnerships.

Many beloved Bradenton Area facilities and attractions have received support from the current tax, and the increased funding will enable the county to build assets.



High Tourism Impact Counties

by Steven M. Hogan

The TDT statute allows certain "high tourism impact" counties to impose an additional 1% tax in addition to any other TDT that has already been imposed within the county.

The criteria for this additional TDT percentage is found in section 125.0104(3)(m), Florida Statutes. The only counties that are prohibited from imposing the "high tourism impact" TDT percentage are those counties that are authorized to levy the convention development tax pursuant to section 212.0305, Florida Statutes.



The TDT statute allows certain "high tourism impact" counties to impose an additional 1% tax in addition to any other TDT that has already been imposed within the county.

Eligible counties interested in being designated as a "high tourism impact" county can request that the Florida Department of Revenue certify that the sales subject to Tourist Development Tax in the county exceeded \$600 million in the previous calendar year, or that such sales were at least \$200 million but also constituted at least 18% of the county's total taxable sales.



Steven M. Hogan

Once the Department of Revenue has provided that certification, the county may propose an ordinance levying and imposing the tax to be approved in a referendum held at a general election. § 125.0104(3)(m)1.-2., Fla. Stat.

A county that is designated as a "high tourism impact" county will retain that designation as long as the TDT percentage levied under subsection (3)(m) is in place. § 125.0104(3)(m)2., Fla. Stat.

As always, legal counsel should be sought on specific questions, as the facts can change the analysis.

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.

DO YOU WANT RESULTS OR IMPRESSIONS?

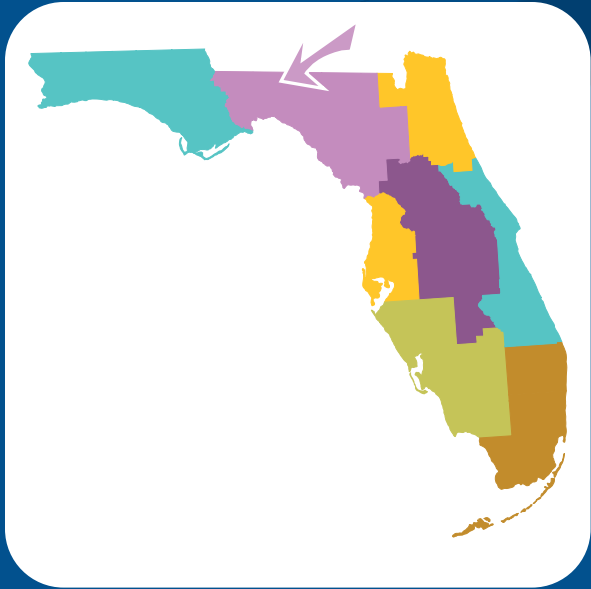
The MediaOne Digital Blueprint ensures that you'll generate measurable results, not just impressions, based on your identified goals and objectives. You get best in class measurements, analytics, and reporting with weekly campaign optimization to maximize results.



Collaboration Research Strategy Execution Optimization Results

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- Levy County Visitors Bureau
- Suwannee County Tourist Development
- Visit Gainesville, Alachua County
- Visit Lake City
- Visit Tallahassee
- Wakulla County Tourist Development Council

Levy County Unveils Public Art Clam Trail

The Levy County Visitors Bureau and the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association have worked to develop a public art Clam Trail. The Clam Trail consists of six fiberglass clam sculptures, each about four feet tall. The Cedar Key Arts Center painted the clamshells' exteriors with natural color tones. The inside of each clamshell was decorated by a local artist. Each of the clams has a unique theme: example natural wonders, Native Americans, shell middens (mounds) coastal environment, marine life, and work skiff with baskets of clams. Each clam has a fact plaque with information about the clam's ecological and economic benefits to Cedar Key's coastal waters and will recognize the theme of the clam, the artist, and the sponsors.

Four of the clam sculptures are being displayed at city properties: City Hall (new location), the Chamber of Commerce, the City Park, and Cemetery Point Park. Two other clam sculptures are being installed at the UF Nature Coast Biological Station and the Cedar Key School. In the future, local businesses may have the opportunity to sponsor additional clams.

The clams were unveiled at the Cedar Key Arts Center at a celebratory event on Nov. 30, including a reception, activities, and refreshments. The clams are being installed at their permanent locations early this month.



These two Cedar Key clam sculptures feature the paintings "A Boatload of Clams" and "Before Us."



"Glimpse inside Cedar Key" and "Living on the Edge" adorn these clam sculptures on the new Clam Trail in Levy County.



Arts and Culture: The Heart of Alachua County's Thriving Visitor Economy

In Alachua County, arts and culture are not just a local asset—they are a driving force behind the visitor economy. In fact, 57% of attendees at cultural events come from outside the region, and more than half of these visitors specifically travel to the county for cultural experiences. The impact goes beyond dollars and cents: 87% of attendees report that arts and culture inspire a sense of pride in their communities, creating a powerful connection between visitors and residents.



Named after a local treasure and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Bo Diddley Plaza in Historic Downtown Gainesville is home of the Free Fridays Concert Series and a center of cultural activity throughout the year.

To support this vibrant sector, Visit Gainesville, Alachua County invests heavily in local arts and culture with more than 60 local nonprofits and tourism-related businesses receiving grants and sponsorships in the last year. Looking ahead, Visit Gainesville, Alachua County allocated \$1.6 million for its Nature and Culture Destination Enhancement grant program, with additional funding earmarked for special events and the county's 200th anniversary celebration.

This commitment is paying off. Alachua County recently celebrated a record-breaking tourism year, with \$174 million in lodging revenue and \$8.7 million in Tourist Development Tax collections. Visitors spent \$474 million directly, generating a \$738 million total economic impact, supporting 6,300 local jobs and contributing nearly \$237 million in wages. One out of every four dollars spent in the county came from visitors.

Alachua County remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering arts, culture, and nature as essential pillars of Alachua County's dynamic economy, enhancing both the local quality of life and the visitor experience.



Branded arts and culture banners can be seen throughout county events funded in part by Visit Gainesville, Alachua County, communicating that the VCB values community enrichment and is an active supporter of cultural growth and diversity.

Build destination loyalty.

Start creating personalized experiences for past visitors.

With third-party cookies on the way out, your brand's future actually looks brighter than the Florida sun. Say hello to the sunny first-party data world—connect with real past visitors, foster relationships and bring them back for another Sunshine State adventure!

Cookies are history. Time to refresh.



Another trip to Florida to flaunt your new sunglasses? !!

Yesss!!

These would be perfect to wear back to the amazing beaches!



Visit Lake City Marks Growth With National Recognition and New Hotels

Visit Lake City enjoyed a very successful year. Its positioning as a natural wonderland featuring an array of parks and forests, beautiful lakes, and the iconic natural springs that make the destination Florida's Springlands have led to continued recognition. The team was awarded a Bronze Adrian Award from the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) for its 2023 efforts in Revitalizing the Columbia County Tourism Brand. In addition, recent features in *Garden & Gun* and *Travel + Leisure* have furthered brand recognition.

As Lake City continues to grow and attract visitors from around the world, it is excited to welcome two new hotel properties that will enhance the hospitality landscape. With the addition of the Courtyard by Marriott and the TownePlace Suites by Marriott, an extended stay hotel, the hotels not only address different needs and visitor preferences but increase lodging inventory with an additional 242 rooms.

Looking ahead, Lake City, Florida's Springlands is committed to building on its momentum by expanding partnerships, enhancing visitor experiences, and promoting the area's unique attractions. Through continued collaboration with local businesses and community organizations, it aims to continue to create a welcoming environment for both new and returning guests.



Barbara and Tony Karasek of Paradise Advertising & Marketing present the Adrian Award to staff and members of the Columbia County TDC.



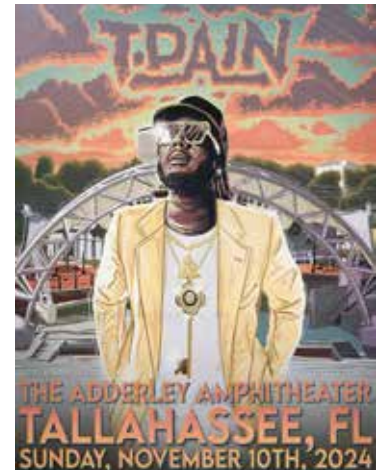
Ichetucknee Springs State Park continues to be a popular destination in Columbia County. Marketing efforts continue to position the destination as a place where nature inspires art.

Tallahassee: A Year of Celebration and Global Aspirations

Visit Tallahassee has plenty to celebrate during its Bicentennial in 2024, including another year of growth in visitation, occupancy, ADR, Rev Par, TDT collections, and a record-breaking \$1.3 billion in economic impact.

The Bicentennial festivities kicked off on Jan. 11 at the Florida Capitol Complex and has continued throughout the year with more

than 200 events so far. One of the highlights of the year was the Bicentennial Weekend Spectacular on Nov. 9-10, full of major events, activities, and the unveiling of a permanent historic marker. The weekend culminated in an unforgettable evening with the highly anticipated, sold-out T-Pain concert at Cascades Park, his very first performance in his home town, followed by a dazzling firework display.



A sold-out T-Pain concert on Nov. 10, part of Tallahassee's Bicentennial Weekend Spectacular, was the artist's first performance in his home town.

Visit Tallahassee is also proud to have received the distinction of being a verified destination by Wheel the World, a global leader in comprehensive guides for travelers of all abilities.



Visit Tallahassee will host the World Athletics Cross Country Championships in January 2026.

Looking ahead, Visit Tallahassee is gearing up to host the World Athletics Cross Country Championships in January 2026. This is the first world championship sports event ever to be hosted in Tallahassee. With more 60 countries anticipated to compete, this prestigious event will also bring international media attention and further solidify Tallahassee's Apalachee Regional Park as the Capital of Cross Country.



Florida Keys & Key West Celebrates Fantasy Fest

In the Florida Keys & Key West, the annual 10-day Fantasy Fest costuming and masking festival themed "It's a 90s Neon Cosmic Carnival!" showcased a parade with motorized floats and exotically costumed groups. Merrymakers attired in glittering masks and outlandish creations wowed scores of spirited spectators during events including a Zombie Bike Ride, pet masquerade, and Headdress Ball. Next year's theme for Fantasy Fest, slated for Oct. 17-26, 2025, is "Bedtime Stories & Magical Monsters." Fla-Keys.com



The Keys' annual Fantasy Fest parade attracts dozens of floats and exotically costumed groups, walking through the Key West's historic downtown before scores of spectators.

Photo: Florida Keys News Bureau

Martin County Tourism Wins Five Magellan Awards

The Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing was recently honored with five *Travel Weekly* Magellan Awards for their various campaigns and programs, including four Gold Magellans and one Silver Magellan. Organized annually by *Travel Weekly*, the Magellan Awards honor outstanding design, marketing, and services in the global travel industry across key segments, including Airlines and Airports, Cruise Lines, Travel Destinations, Hospitality, Travel Services, Travel Advisors/Agencies, Tour Operators, and Ground Transportation. DiscoverMartin.com



For a full list of this year's winners, visit TravelWeeklyAwards.com/winners/.

Latin GRAMMYs® Return to Miami

The 25th annual Latin GRAMMY Awards® returned to Miami in November, bringing with it a weeklong celebration of the industry's biggest stars, a global audience of 19 million viewers, and an opportunity for hundreds of press to enjoy the destination's arts, culture, and music scene. This is the third time the Latin GRAMMYs®, aired in 80 countries worldwide, was held in Miami-Dade, where the Latin Academy's journey began and its headquarters remain. MiamiandMiamiBeach.com



Miami-Dade County Commissioner Anthony Rodriguez, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, Latin Recording Academy CEO Manuel Abud, GMCVB President & CEO David Whitaker, and Univision Television Networks President Ignacio "Nacho" Meyer

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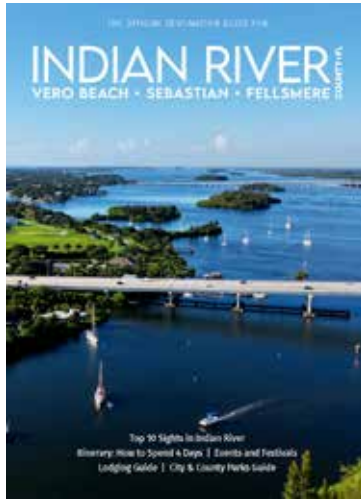
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Visit Indian River Releases Its New Destination Guide

Visit Indian River County is thrilled to release its redesigned and enhanced 2024-25 Destination Guide! The publication has gone through a complete redesign and enhancement, making it more engaging and visually appealing. This comprehensive annual guide, featuring an event calendar, lodging options for the county, and a full city and county park guide, is packed with user-generated photos and fresh content crafted by the tourism team. Perfect for locals and visitors alike, it's available in both print and digital formats. VisitIndianRiverCounty.com



Visitors to Indian River County are invited to view or request a mailed copy of the 2024-25 Destination Guide via VisitIndianRiverCounty.com.

St. Augustine Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

St. Augustine's vibrant Hispanic heritage took center stage in this year's promotion of Hispanic Heritage Month. Celebrations began with the 459th anniversary of the city's 1565 founding, followed by a series of musical performances and cultural events that continued through mid-October. Ten journalists and influencers were invited to experience and share St. Augustine's unique ways to honor Hispanic heritage, resulting in 24 published articles and social posts that garnered over 72 million impressions. FloridasHistoricCoast.com



Hispanic Heritage travel writers tour Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine during Hispanic Heritage Month.

Amelia Island Hosts Explorer's Table Dinner Event

Amelia Island recently hosted its first annual Explorer's Table dinner event with *Garden & Gun* magazine at Walker's Landing at Omni Amelia Island Resort, a scenic waterfront setting in Fernandina Beach. Five outstanding local chefs—Nathalie Wu of Wicked Bao, Omar Collazo and Verousche McKibbin of Omni Amelia Island Resort, Okan Kizilbayir of The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, and Chad Livingston of Burlingame—curated an international tasting menu featuring flavors inspired by Spanish, French, Mexican, and English cuisine. AmeliaIsland.com



Local chefs and staff who curated an international tasting menu for the *Garden & Gun* Explorer's Table dinner pose at Walker's Landing.

Ocala National Forest Makes National Geographic's Best of the World List

The Ocala National Forest is officially on National Geographic's Best of the World 2025, the brand's annual list of 25 awe-inspiring places. Following a robust nomination, researching, and reporting process, the Ocala National Forest was selected by National Geographic's team of travel experts and Nat Geo Traveller's international editorial teams. "It is an absolute honor to have the Ocala National Forest featured on this esteemed list of destinations, and we are beyond excited to share this beautiful forest with visitors from across the globe," said Loretta Shaffer, tourism development director for Marion County. OcalaMarion.com



Ocala National Forest is a National Geographic Best of the World destination.



Visit Tampa Bay Announces New Chair at Annual Meeting After Second Consecutive \$1 Billion Year

Evette Torres of Schulte Hospitality Group was approved as the new chair of Visit Tampa Bay's Board of Directors following back-to-back record years of over \$1 billion in Tourism Development Taxes. Torres, board members, and advisory board members were appointed to their positions during Visit Tampa Bay's annual meeting at The Motor Enclave in Tampa on Oct. 30. Torres takes over for outgoing chair, Ray Mathews of State Farm, who served in the position during Fiscal Year 2024-25. VisitTampaBay.com



Visit Tampa Bay's new board chair, Evette Torres, is welcomed by more than 500 partners and stakeholders during Visit Tampa Bay's annual meeting at The Motor Enclave in Tampa, Oct. 30.

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Protects Aquatic Ecosystem

Coastal Conservation Association Florida and partners deployed 40 tons of oyster shells into Turtle Bay to expand the oyster reef for the fourth time. At Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach, "Our best side is outside," and taking care of the area's waters is essential. Oysters are natural filters for the aquatic ecosystem and play a vital role in maintaining water quality for Florida's marine habitat. PureFlorida.com



Oyster shells are deployed into Turtle Bay where they serve as natural filters to help maintain healthy water quality for the aquatic ecosystem.

Experience Kissimmee Celebrates 10 Years of Promoting Tourism to Osceola County

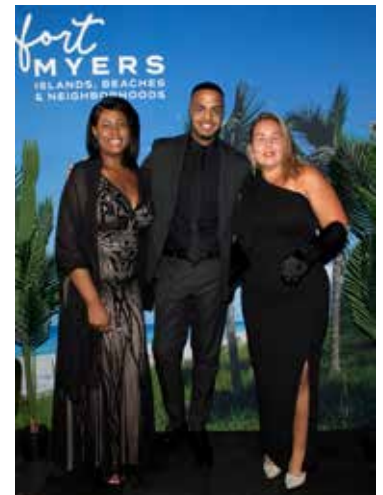
On Oct. 17, Experience Kissimmee celebrated a decade of excellence in promoting Osceola County as a premier destination, fueling significant growth and development. Experience Kissimmee is proud of their remarkable achievements, guided by core values of championing partners, embracing new ideas, taking risks, and maintaining positivity and enthusiasm, and they expressed a heartfelt thank you to event sponsors, domestic and international agencies, and more than 1,000 partners for their trust and support in promoting this beautiful destination to the world. ExperienceKissimmee.com



The Experience Kissimmee team stands united on stage at the 10-Year Anniversary Celebration, representing a decade of vision, innovation, and dedication. Together, they've transformed Osceola County into a world-class destination, driving 70% visitor growth, doubling tourism revenue, and building global partnerships that have redefined the region's future.

Fort Myers Rolls Out Red Carpet at Toronto Film Festival

As part of a kick-off event for the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), Fort Myers, Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods rolled out a red carpet full of glitz and glamour to travel professionals. The event welcomed more than 300 VIP guests. Canada is the destination's top international market, and this winter Air Canada will fly from Toronto to Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) three times daily, WestJet will have two flights daily, and Porter will fly to RSW from Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. VisitFortMyers.com



Charm Evans of the Lee County VCB with Jeanette Faria and Andrew Ricketts, both of VoX/Lee County, at the Toronto Film Festival



Visit Jacksonville Takes on the UK

In October, Visit Jacksonville team members traveled to London and Carlisle, England, to connect with locals and promote Jacksonville around the Jaguars NFL games and a Carlisle United soccer match. For both Jaguars game weekends, there was a colorful Visit Jacksonville booth at Waterloo Station, where passersby could stop to play games, win prizes, and enter to win a trip to Jacksonville. In Carlisle, there were meetings with soccer club reps and a game promotion, which is fitting as the team owners are from Jacksonville. VisitJacksonville.com



Jacksonville Jaguar fans play games at the Visit Jacksonville activation in Waterloo Station in London.

Walton County Tourism Celebrates Inlet Beach Underpass Opening

Members of Walton County Tourism, along with county officials and members of the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County, joined attendees for a ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of the Inlet Beach underpass in October. The underpass allows for safe pedestrian passage for visitors and residents under the intersection of Scenic Highway 30A and Highway 98, and it adds cultural richness to the destination's appeal with 10 murals by local artists and two new sculptures. WaltonCountyFLTourism.com



Attendees of the underpass opening enjoy a celebratory walk through the tunnel while viewing murals by local artists.

Florida's Sports Coast Wins National Awards

Florida's Sports Coast is garnering national recognition in 2024. The destination received two Telly Awards in the General Travel & Tourism and General Branding categories. Consuelo Sanchez, tourism deputy director, was recognized with multiple awards, including the Florida Sports Tourism Professional of the Year (State), International Person of the Year (Regional), and Compete Sports Diversity Person of the Year (National). Kayla Glazebrook, sports and special events program coordinator, was nominated for Florida's Emergent Leader of the Year (State). Additionally, the Tampa Bay Christmas Invitational earned Florida's Best Event of the Year for Small Markets (State). FLSportsCoast.com



Florida's Sports Coast's Consuelo Sanchez, Kayla Glazebrook, and Matthew Bogdanoff celebrate the Tampa Bay Christmas Invitational's win as Florida's Best Event of the Year for Small Markets.

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Local Clay County Short-Term Rental Used as Picturesque Backdrop for Upcoming Bass Pro Shops Catalog

The 1920 Carriage House on Riverfront Estate, a picturesque short-term rental along the St. Johns River, recently served as a backdrop for Bass Pro's upcoming spring catalog. Drawn by Clay County's warm fall weather, relaxed atmosphere, and stunning river views, the Bass Pro team praised the area as a hidden gem for photo shoots. Clay County is home to other unique short-term rentals, like It's a Boatiful Life in Orange Park and The Tree House in Middleburg, making it a perfect spot for memorable events and stays. ExploreClay.com



Clay County's scenic charm has caught the eye of Bass Pro Shops as a backdrop for its spring catalog.

Visit Orlando Earns Meetings Today Recognition

Visit Orlando has been named a winner in the Best South CVBs/DMOs category for the 2024 Best of Meetings Today Awards by Meetings Today. This annual recognition highlights top meeting facilities and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) across North America and beyond. The winners were selected via voting by Meetings Today's audience and a review by its content team. This recognition reinforces Orlando's world-class meeting spaces and exceptional experiences, including theme parks and attractions, outdoor adventures, culinary dining scene, and more. VisitOrlando.com



Visit Orlando is a 2024 winner in the Best of Meetings Today Awards by Meetings Today.

Renaissance Daytona Beach Oceanfront Hotel Becomes Newest Upscale Hotel Property in Daytona Beach Area

The Daytona Beach area has a new upscale hotel—the 190-room Renaissance Daytona Beach Oceanfront Hotel—which officially opened in October. The property features guest rooms and suites angled to the ocean, and each room is beautifully designed and pays homage to the area, with hints of both ocean life and racing heritage. Located within the hotel is Cast & Crew, a tide-to-table seafood-centric restaurant operated by acclaimed Chef Olivier Koster and James Beard-nominated Concentrics Restaurants. DaytonaBeach.com



The recently opened Renaissance Daytona Beach Oceanfront Hotel is just a short walk to the Ocean Center Convention Center and only 15 minutes to Daytona International Speedway and Daytona Beach International Airport.

Orlando North, Seminole County City Receives Florida Trail Town Recognition

The City of Sanford was recently designated a Trail Town by Florida's Office of Greenways and Trails, highlighting its dedication to supporting regional trail networks. The Sanford RiverWalk connects users to local businesses, amenities, and major trail routes like the Cross Seminole Trail. This designation enhances Sanford's status as a trail-friendly destination, attracting visitors, supporting economic growth, and fostering a vibrant outdoor community with features like wayfinding signage and downtown passport stamps for trail enthusiasts. DoOrlandoNorth.com



In celebration of the City of Sanford's recent recognition as a Florida Trail Town, Seminole County Commissioner Andria Herr gathered with city officials to pose with the new Trail Town sign, which will be installed in Downtown Sanford along the Sanford RiverWalk trail.

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Visit Sarasota County Launches Brand New Podcast

Visit Sarasota County (VSC) recently launched a podcast entitled *Behind the Masterpiece on Florida's Cultural Coast®*, which spotlights a variety of special guests including dancers, painters, singers, or any individual who brings the arts to life. Now available wherever you get your podcasts, each week is a new journey through the diverse landscapes of performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, and more, all thriving in Sarasota County. VSC is excited to continue to explore and share the creative pulse that makes their community so special. VisitSarasota.com



Behind the Masterpiece podcast cover for Visit Sarasota County's brand new arts-focused podcast

Visit PC Beach Hosts Pirates of the High Seas & Renaissance Fest

Visit Panama City Beach hosted its annual Pirates of the High Seas & Renaissance Fest on Oct. 11-13. This year, the team worked to enhance the event by updating the parade route, allowing for eight additional floats, and welcoming new vendors and entertainers. One featured entertainer was Knights at the Beach, a group known for authentic medieval combat, where competitors dress in knights' armor and battle with swords and shields. These improvements contributed to a successful weekend, with an increase of 5,000 attendees compared to last year. VisitPanamaCityBeach.com



Knights at the Beach demonstrate authentic medieval combat during Visit Panama City Beach's annual Pirates of the High Seas & Renaissance Fest.

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS • DEADLINE: JANUARY 10, 2025



Destination Marketing Summit

May 14-16, 2025

The Westin Cape Coral Resort
at Marina Village

Cape Coral, Florida

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

Submit your presentation online by Friday, January 10, 2025, at:

DestinationsFlorida.org/2025SummitSpeakers



Avelo Continues Growth in Polk County; Adds Nashville to Nonstop Flights From LAL

On the heels of Avelo Airlines' largest expansion in its history, the airline continues to build upon its already tremendous success in Polk County. On Nov. 7, Avelo announced it was adding Nashville to its existing eight destinations, flying nonstop from Lakeland Linder International Airport. The flight to the Music City now joins service from LAL to Atlanta, Charlotte/Concord, N.C., Hartford, Conn., Manchester, N.H./Boston, New Haven, Conn., Philadelphia/Wilmington, Del., Rochester, N.Y., and San Juan, P.R. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Polk County Commissioner Martha Santiago, EdD (second from the right), joins Eva Luna Torres (far right) of the Puerto Rico Tourism Co., Theresa Martinez (center) of Viva Polk, and Joseph and Maritza (far left), Viva Polk contest winners, following Avelo's first flight to San Juan.

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Awarded Good Housekeeping Family Travel Award

For the second consecutive year, Destin-Fort Walton Beach was awarded the Good Housekeeping Family Travel Award. The award evaluates family-focused destinations and their local offerings, including the resorts and attractions available, sustainability efforts, accessibility, and more. Good Housekeeping's travel writers experience the destinations firsthand to assess these factors. During the destination's annual press trip, they familiarized a writer, alongside her two children, with Little Adventures and a number of local businesses that are committed to getting kids out on the water. DestinFWB.com



Destin-Fort Walton Beach offers families an opportunity to get out on the water and out of their comfort zone from planning on DestinFWB.com to free classes on the beach like snorkeling.

The Witches of St. Andrews Ride to Raise Money for Pancreatic Cancer

The Witches of St. Andrews, founded to raise money for pancreatic cancer patient care and research, hosted their eighth annual Charity Ride this October in Panama City. Participants donned spooky costumes and dusted off their bikes and brooms to spin through the streets of the Historic St. Andrews neighborhood. This year's event was a resounding success, raising over \$66,000 to support this important cause, while honoring cancer warriors in the local community. DestinationPanamaCity.com



Parade-goers lined the streets to watch the Witches of St. Andrews as they walked, danced, and rode their bikes, roller blades, and scooters to raise money for pancreatic cancer.

Brazilian Content Creators Tour Crystal River Florida

From Oct. 22-25, Discover Crystal River welcomed seven prominent Brazilian content creators for a FAM tour organized through VISIT FLORIDA. They experienced firsthand how well Crystal River has bounced back after Hurricanes Helene and Milton. With an itinerary focused on the fresh, clear springs, media experienced swimming with manatees and kayaking into Three Sisters Springs, the jewel of Crystal River. The content will help promote the start of Manatee Season (Nov. 15-Mar. 31). DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com



Brazilian media enjoy the clear springs of Crystal River.



Quick Trips!

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Brings the Flavors of America's Best Beaches to NYCWFF

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater delivered the beach vibes to the prestigious New York City Food and Wine Fest in October. It was a packed house each night, creating a great opportunity to show off America's Best Beaches, talk up the incredible dining scene, and remind the destination's #1 out-of-state market why this slice of paradise is the perfect place to take a trip. Special thanks to Food Network star Marc Murphy and tastemaker Scot Louie for stopping by soak in the beach vibes! VisitStPeteClearwater.com



Visit St. Pete-Clearwater's booth at the New York City Food and Wine Fest



In the News

Florida Keys and Key West Announces New VP Marketing & Communications

Heidi Barfels, a veteran tourism marketing executive, is the new vice president of marketing and communications for Visit Florida Keys, the Monroe County Tourist Development Council's operations organization. Barfels is overseeing the island chain's tourism marketing and communications strategy for advertising, branding, public relations, social media, website, and content marketing. Previously she was chief marketing officer of Colorado's Visit Estes Park for three years. Fla-Keys.com



Heidi Barfels

Discover More: Visit Gainesville, Alachua County Unveils New Trip Planning Website

This November, Visit Gainesville, Alachua County launched its new, user-friendly website designed to inspire and inform travelers. The site, created together with Madden Media, blends strategic insight and creativity, featuring an engaging design that is easy to navigate and embodies the spirit of the destination brand—Where Nature and Culture Meet. New features include better performance with a seamless and intuitive user experience, an improved event calendar, and more, helping visitors plan fun and enriching trips and more easily discover new areas within the destination. VisitGainesville.com



Check out the brand new VisitGainesville.com, filled with travel inspiration, timely planning resources, and welcoming visitors with a fresh take on Alachua County hospitality.

Discover Lake County, Florida Hosts Brazilian Content Creators

In October, Discover Lake County hosted seven content creators from Brazil in partnership with VISIT FLORIDA. Their itinerary included visiting Southern Hill Farms, wine tasting at Lakeridge Winery, and exploring Tavares Rocktober Fest. The creators got a glimpse of Lake County's natural beauty by snorkeling at Alexander Springs and setting sail on a sunset boat cruise in Mount Dora before unleashing their adventurous side with a Mucky Duck ATV excursion and seaplane rides at Jones Brothers. DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com



Brazilian content creators enjoy a Tavares Seaplane Excursion, courtesy of VISIT FLORIDA.

Know any college students Planning a Career in Hospitality?

Please send this notice to industry members/hospitality schools to encourage students to apply for a scholarship.



Since 1979, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County has awarded more than \$20 million in scholarships to students in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and Desoto counties.

To learn more about traditional, adult, special interest, and other scholarship programs, visit: www.cfsarasota.org/students/scholarship-opportunities.



**COMMUNITY
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Destinations Florida, through the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, is pleased to offer the **Destinations Florida Dave Warren Memorial Scholarship**.

This exciting scholarship opportunity is available to incoming juniors and seniors who plan to make a career in the hospitality industry within the State of Florida. Selection criteria includes the personal goals of the student, financial need, and community involvement.

Selected students will receive money for school and recognition of the award at the **Destination Marketing Summit at the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral, Florida, May 14-16, 2025**.

The application is currently open and students are encouraged to be prepared and submit their application early!

How to apply:

1. Go to: <https://bit.ly/DW25Scholarship>
2. Complete the application and submit the required documentation including: FAFSA Student Aid Report (SAR) and current college transcript. Incomplete and/or late applications will not be considered.

**Application Deadline:
February 16, 2025**

**For Assistance Contact:
Scholarships@cfsarasota.org or (941)556-7173**



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



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