

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | March 2025



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The MICHELIN Guide Florida Is Expanding

2025 Destinations Include Greater Fort Lauderdale, St. Pete-Clearwater, and The Palm Beaches

The MICHELIN Guide is expanding its selection in Florida with three new destinations. In addition to Greater Miami, Orlando, and Tampa, the 2025 selection will now include restaurants in Greater Fort Lauderdale, St. Pete-Clearwater, and The Palm Beaches. Beginning in 2026, the selection will grow further to become a statewide selection covering all of Florida.

Destination marketers welcome the attention their inclusion in the MICHELIN Guide Florida will bring.



Visit St. Pete-Clearwater cited a *Future Partners* report that 57% of American travelers find Foodie Trips appealing and stated that the inclusion of St. Pete-Clearwater to the Florida MICHELIN Guide provides a spotlight on the wide range of dining options in the destination from local fish shacks to fine dining.

"This inclusion now gives us the chance to change the perception of what beach cuisine can be," said Brian Lowack, president and CEO of Visit St. Pete-Clearwater. "With this new designation, St. Pete-Clearwater will reach a new audience of food-focused travelers who are in search of an extraordinary culinary experience and America's Favorite Beaches in one incredible destination."

MICHELIN GUIDE continues on pg. 3

Focused on Our Mission

by Robert Skrob



Like the ancient Trojan War—ignited by a golden apple tossed by the goddess of discord—Florida's current

political climate seems poised for a prolonged siege of its own. In myth, the gods clashed atop Mount Olympus while mortal warriors fought below and bore the brunt of divine quarrels. Today, Florida's Capitol has become the modern battlefield, with Governor DeSantis and Republican leaders in the House and Senate locking horns over contentious policies, recently about immigration.

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

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

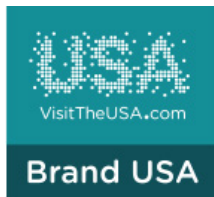
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DESTINATIONS FLORIDA

TourismMarketing
Today

The Official Newsletter of
Destinations Florida
1400 Village Sq. Blvd., Suite 3-250
Tallahassee, FL 32312
Phone: 850/222-6000
www.DestinationsFlorida.org

Robert Skrob,
Executive Director

Suzanne Hurst, CAE,
Deputy Executive Director

MaryLu Winchester,
Member Database

On the Cover

Mirada Lagoon in San Antonio, Florida, is the largest man-made lagoon in the United States, spanning 15 acres. Calling Florida's Sports Coast its home, this stunning oasis offers pristine turquoise waters, sandy beaches, and a range of activities for the entire family.

Farther south in the state, The Palm Beaches looks forward to sharing their culinary offerings with a wider audience.

"Recognition in the MICHELIN Guide is a well-deserved honor for our local restaurants and chefs, and we are proud to be included and to support them," said Milton Segarra, president and CEO of Discover The Palm Beaches. "Our culinary offerings have always been a key ingredient in a premier collection of vacation experiences available to visitors in The Palm Beaches. Inclusion of The Palm Beaches in the MICHELIN Guide not only cements our culinary excellence but also shares our dining scene and promotes our destination to a much broader audience."

And the excitement continues in Greater Fort Lauderdale, as area restaurants anticipate visits from MICHELIN Guide inspectors.

"The expansion of the MICHELIN Guide to Greater Fort Lauderdale is a game-changer for our destination, solidifying our place on the map as a must-visit culinary



Pinellas County Commission Chair and TDC Chair Brian Scott makes the announcement that St. Pete-Clearwater is now a destination partner of the MICHELIN Guide Florida.

hotspot. This recognition not only celebrates the incredible talent and diversity of our local chefs but also reinforces our commitment to offering world-class dining experiences to visitors and locals alike," said Stacy Ritter, president and CEO of Visit Lauderdale. "As we continue to elevate Greater Fort Lauderdale's reputation, the MICHELIN Guide's presence will shine a well-deserved spotlight on our thriving food scene, attracting even more travelers eager to indulge in our unique flavors."

The MICHELIN Guide's anonymous inspectors are already in the field, scouting for culinary gems in the new territories. Stay tuned for those Star announcements!

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

From calls to toughen immigration laws to disagreements over budget allocations, these "gods" of Florida politics appear set on proving whose vision for our state will prevail. Their debates, like the sword fights at Troy, have the potential to leave everyday Floridians caught in the crossfire—collateral damage of power struggles beyond our immediate control.

In times like these, it's critical for us to remain focused on our mission: showcasing Florida's incredible destinations, natural beauty, and diverse communities.

If history—mythic or otherwise—teaches us anything, it's that life goes on after the battles end. By staying united and continuing to do what we do best, we can ensure that, no matter the political storms, our state will keep shining as the world-class destination.

Your Local Engagement Makes a Difference

by Jennifer Fennell, APR, CPRC



Jennifer Fennell

Educating legislators about tourism promotion and dedicated funding for local tourism promotion is critical, especially with term limits and so many newly elected lawmakers. It was particularly important during the months of January and February when legislative committee meetings were taking place and bills were being filed.

We were able to engage our industry and be a part of the legislative process by participating in local delegation meetings, which provide constituents with an opportunity to meet with the state lawmakers representing their county.

In the months leading up to the 2025 Legislative Session, Destinations Florida members from across the state attended their local delegation meetings. These meetings enabled DMO members to provide legislators with information regarding the value of tourism and tourism promotion, including the need to maintain the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes, and also gain insight into lawmakers' positions on policies impacting the tourism industry.

Representatives of Visit Orlando addressed the Orange County legislative delegation during a meeting in January and were able to provide information about the local impact tourism



Visit Orlando Senior Legal Counsel & Vice President, External Affairs Stan Rubins addresses the Orange County delegation on Jan. 9.

has on the county and to learn valuable information about the direction several area lawmakers were headed regarding Tourist Development Taxes.

"We highlighted the critical role tourism plays as the cornerstone of Florida's economy, emphasizing that in Central Florida alone, tourism generates \$92.5 billion in economic impact, supports 464,000 jobs, and contributes over 50% of all sales tax revenue," said Kristin Westover, director, community relations & external affairs for Visit Orlando.

"State delegation meetings are a great opportunity to connect with our legislators before the session begins, gain insight into their priorities, and address any questions they may have. It was mentioned and evident during the meeting that Representative Eskamani and Senator Smith will be working together to draft a bill regarding Tourist Development Taxes," added Westover.

To assist with advocacy efforts, the Destinations Florida communications team created and updated a variety of communications tools for our members to use at local delegation meetings. Whether speaking at the meetings or providing collateral materials to legislators, Destinations Florida members were armed with the "Destination Promotion: Empowering Florida's Growth" publication, a customizable local delegation guide, talking points, speech scripts, and a legislative positions one-pager.

"The communication tools and advocacy resources provided helped us in preparing for the meeting. The key messaging was clear, concise, and aligned with Visit Orlando's priorities," said Westover.

Thank you to all the Destinations Florida members who participated in your local delegation meetings. Your engagement is appreciated and makes a difference.

Jennifer Fennell, APR, CPRC, is the vice president of CoreMessage, Inc., and a veteran communicator with more than 25 years of experience.

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Tallahassee, Florida
March 25-26, 2025



Accommodations

DoubleTree Hotel Tallahassee
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 224-5000

Schedule of Events

(All attendees are invited to all events)

March 25, 2025

2:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Board of Directors Meeting**
5:00 PM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 222-5000

5:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Welcome Reception**
6:30 PM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301



March 26, 2025

8:30 AM – **Destinations Florida Member Briefing**
9:30 AM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 222-5000

10:30 AM – **Tourism Day Rally & Partner Briefing**
12:00 Noon
FSU Dunlap Champions Club
Doak S. Campbell Stadium
225 Champions Way Building B
Tallahassee, FL 32304
(850) 644-8528

12:00 Noon – **Networking Luncheon**
1:00 PM
FSU Dunlap Champions Club
Doak S. Campbell Stadium
225 Champions Way Building B
Tallahassee, FL 32304

1:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Member Appointments at the Capitol**
5:00 PM
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

5:00 PM – **Tourism Day Value of Tourism Outdoor Expo**
8:00 PM
Adams Street and Florida
Restaurant & Lodging
Association

This meeting is being held in conjunction with the following organizations:



Register today at: DestinationsFlorida.org/25TourismDay



Blueways and Boat Ramps

by Steven M. Hogan

Can Tourist Development Tax funds be used to build boat ramps? The answer is usually "no," according to the Florida attorney general.



Boat ramps constructed as part of a Blueway nature center could be paid for with TDT funds if the county makes the proper "legislative determinations" that the construction is actually part of the nature center and that the construction "relates to and primarily promotes tourism."

Photo: VISIT FLORIDA

See Op. Att'y Gen. Fla. 91-62 (1991) (boat ramp was not an authorized use of TDT funds under section 125.0104(5)(a), Fla. Stat.); Op. Att'y Gen. 2015-14 (2015) ("[T]his office has consistently found that tourist development tax revenues may not be used for the construction of boat ramps.").

However, a limited exception to the general rule can be found in section 125.0104(5)(b), which allows counties with populations of under 950,000

to "acquire, construct, extend, enlarge, remodel, repair, improve, maintain, operate, or promote one or more zoological parks, fishing piers or nature centers which are publicly owned and operated or owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public." § 125.0104(5)(b), Fla. Stat. (emphasis added).

The Florida attorney general found in Opinion 2015-14 that the term "nature center" in subsection (5)(b) could include a "Blueway," defined as "a scenic waterway providing a water path or trail with launching points, camping and picnic locations, and points of interest for paddlers." Op. Att'y Gen. 2015-14 (2015).



Steven M. Hogan

The Opinion states that boat ramps constructed as part of a Blueway nature center could be paid for with TDT funds if the county makes the proper "legislative determinations" that the construction is actually part of the nature center and that the construction "relates to and primarily promotes tourism." *Id.*

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.

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DESTINATION MARKETING SUMMIT



May 14-16, 2025 | The Westin Cape Coral Resort | Cape Coral, Florida

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025

- 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM Board of Directors Meeting and Working Lunch
- 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM AI for Destination Marketers: Maximize Impact, Compete Globally & Attract More Visitors
- 3:45 PM – 5:30 PM Destination Marketing State of the State Report
- 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM Welcome Reception at The Westin Cape Coral Resort
- 6:30 PM Dinner on own

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

- 8:00 AM – 9:00 AM Networking Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 9:45 AM Thoughtful Tourism for Recovery & Beyond: Lessons Learned Along Florida's West Coast
Media Metrics Mapping: Aligning the Right Metrics to Drive Media Strategy
- 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM Ready to Play: Tampa Bay's Resilient Comeback Through Strategic Marketing
The Navigator – Trends Reshaping Travel
- 11:00 AM – 11:45 AM Transformational Events & The Palm Beaches Eudemonia – A Case Study on the Impact Transformational Events Can Have on a Destination
Code-Switching: The Secret to Modern Marketing
- 11:45 AM – 1:00 PM Networking Luncheon
- 1:00 PM – 1:45 PM Amplifying Authentic Voices: Building a Diverse Content Creator Network
Riding the Big Wave: How GoPro and Catch Surf Amplified Jacksonville's New "Soul of Surf" Campaign
- 2:00 PM – 2:45 PM The 10 Mistakes to Avoid When Starting a Destination Trail
Winning Big by Promoting Small: The Results
- 3:00 PM – 3:45 PM Energizing Your DMO Surveys With Effective Design Strategies
Shaping Tomorrow's Destinations: Leveraging the UN 17 SDGs to Redefine Tourism Success
- 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM Connect Evening Event **Connect**

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2025

- 8:00 AM – 9:00 AM Networking Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM Destination Marketing Legislative Update & Advocacy Initiatives
- 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM VISIT FLORIDA Marketing Update & "The Big Co-op Reveal" **VISIT FLORIDA**
- 12:00 Noon Adjourn

The support from the following partners makes our meetings possible:

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Hotel Accommodations:

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village is offering a special rate for Destinations Florida meeting participants of \$239 per night. Please call (239) 541-5000 and reference the Destinations Florida Marketing Summit group rate.

Reservations must be made by **Friday, April 18, 2025**. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room block will sell out.

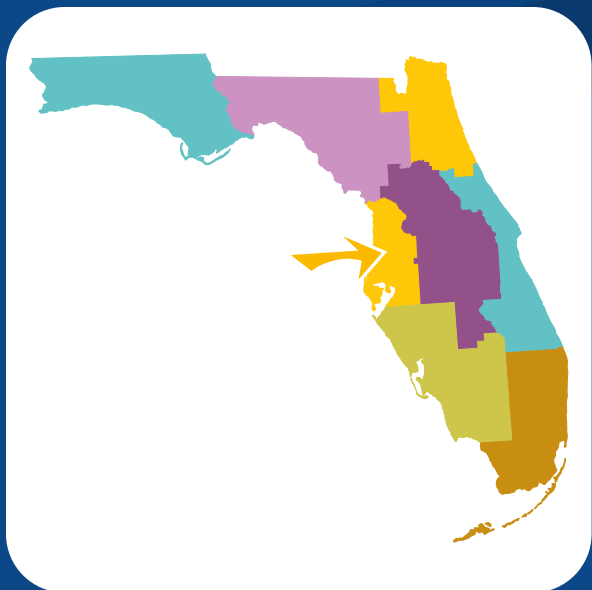
The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village

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- Discover Crystal River Florida
- Florida's Adventure Coast, Brooksville-Weeki Wachee
- Visit Sebring
- Visit Tampa Bay
- Florida's Sports Coast
- Visit St. Pete/Clearwater

Florida's Adventure Coast Launches Hurricane Recovery Program

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Florida's Adventure Coast Visitors Bureau launched a Hurricane Recovery Program to support local tourism businesses. Beginning with videos of each business as they re-opened, they encouraged residents and visitors alike to visit the Hernando Beach region; after Milton the messaging expanded to include those Brooksville businesses impacted in the second storm. Complementing efforts on social media, a campaign focused on driving awareness and encouraging the locals to visit and support local businesses was added to the mix. Messaging focused on dining out as well as encouraging holiday shopping with gift card sales during a time where outside visitation was low.

Since its launch, the program has generated high-impact results, successfully reconnecting locals and returning visitors with local restaurants and attractions.

Paid social campaigns reached 115,236 users, delivering 231,060 impressions and generating 26,784 clicks—a 11.59% click-through rate (CTR).

Search ads saw a 9.46% CTR, with 1,418 clicks from 14,987 impressions.

Display ads on NextDoor and mobile platforms reached nearly 400,000 combined impressions.

One of the standout success stories is Marina Rose Cruises, which led performance metrics with 13,935 clicks (11.26% CTR), 4,000+ post engagements, and 2,933 new visitors to the Florida's Adventure Coast website. The campaign really made a difference for them and has led to a greater online presence for them on FloridasAdventureCoast.com.



Pat and Cheryl Coggins, owners of The Marina Rose, pose in front of Island Rose.



Locals support The Silver Dolphin in Hernando Beach.



Ben & Erin Napier Take Their *Home Town Takeover* Talents to Sebring, Fla.



Home Town Takeover stars Ben and Erin Napier bring their talents to Sebring, Florida. Photo: Courtesy of HGTV

In February 2024, Ben and Erin Napier announced Sebring, Florida, would be getting their famous *Home Town* treatment. With the help of 13 HGTV and Food Network hosts, Ben and Erin are taking on more than a dozen renovation projects to reinvigorate the lakeside community.

Sebring's history of hurricane damage

and an excess of empty storefronts in the once bustling downtown shopping district have proven to be challenging obstacles, and despite being home to one of the nation's oldest raceways, spectators leave without patronizing local businesses.

To combat these headwinds, Ben, Erin, and their team are renovating the homes of key local leaders to help spark a wave of positive change and encourage community gatherings in public spaces by adding colorful murals and a cozy gazebo in Sebring's main park.

In the first episode, Ben and Erin surprise Sebring's residents with the news that they will make improvements to every business in the historic downtown circle. They team up with Dave and Jenny Marrs, hosts of *Fixer to Fabulous*, and start work on a soda shop in desperate need of a facelift and the historic home of a local kindergarten teacher (the unofficial landmark welcoming people to Sebring's circle).

Season 3 premieres Sunday, Mar. 9 at 8|7c. New episodes will be available to stream on Max beginning Mar. 10.



HGTV stars Ben and Erin Napier help renovate downtown Sebring. Series premieres Mar. 9. Photo: Courtesy of HGTV

Visit Tampa Bay Inspires UK Art Scene as Official Destination Sponsor of the London Art Fair

London in January was warmer and brighter than usual as Visit Tampa Bay served as the exclusive Destination Sponsor of the 2025 London Art Fair.

This high-profile partnership cemented Tampa Bay's reputation as a hub for vibrancy and creativity and is part of Visit Tampa Bay's extensive \$1 million-plus marketing campaign in London showcasing the region's artistic excellence while inspiring UK travelers to experience Tampa Bay's unique vitality and charm.



Local Tampa Bay artist Ya La'ford and her bold geometric creations were prominently featured at the 2025 London Art Fair.

At the heart of Tampa Bay's presence at the Fair was renowned local artist Ya La'ford, whose bold, geometric creations have captivated audiences worldwide. Her artwork was prominently featured at the Fair, reflecting Tampa Bay's dynamic cultural landscape.

La'ford and Santiago C. Corrada, president and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay, were featured in a panel discussion alongside

London-based artist Jason Bruges, exploring the transformative impact of public art on communities.

"One of Tampa Bay's most striking characteristics is the art that incorporates Tampa's eclectic history and culture, from sculptures to murals, into the landscape," said Corrada. "We've seen firsthand art's power to connect us to one another, transforming strangers into neighbors and turning neighborhoods into communities."

The London Art Fair partnership is one of several strategic initiatives under Visit Tampa Bay's London marketing campaign. High-impact, out-of-home advertising placements in iconic locations like Waterloo and Euston stations, as well as taxi wraps and digital billboards, are captivating the attention of millions of commuters.



Visit Tampa Bay digital signage welcomes travelers at London's Heathrow Airport during the 2025 London Art Fair, one of several strategic initiatives under Visit Tampa Bay's London marketing campaign.



Florida's Sports Coast Shares Their Destination With a Worldwide Audience

Florida's Sports Coast recently made a significant impact at the Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter trade shows, held at the World Equestrian Center in Ocala. At these events, the destination proudly displayed its vibrant tourism offerings in collaboration with valued hoteliers and attraction partners.

Florida's Sports Coast booths were alive with activity, showcasing their newly updated branding identity developed by Paradise Advertising. This new branding perfectly captures the adventurous spirit and diverse experiences that make the region unique. The trade shows provided invaluable networking opportunities with professionals from the meetings and sales industries, allowing the DMO to highlight the dynamic experiences available on Florida's

Sports Coast, such as year-round fishing, golf, thrilling water sports, and eco-adventures. The DMO's presence at these events underscored their commitment to fostering strong partnerships and driving tourism growth in Pasco County.

Building on this momentum, Florida's Sports Coast also participated in the International Media Marketplace (IMM) 2025 conference in New York City in January. This pivotal event served as a platform to elevate their brand visibility and engage with global media representatives. It offered an ideal opportunity to share the unique stories and rich history of Florida's Sports Coast and Pasco County with a worldwide audience.



At Florida Encounter, Florida's Sports Coast presents an array of thrilling destination opportunities to meetings professionals and organizers.



At Florida Huddle, Florida's Sports Coast speaks with tour operators and wholesalers from around the globe sharing engaging insights into the destination's exciting activities and accommodations.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Debuts Bold New Ampersand Campaign

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater started the year with a new campaign, Ampersand, unleashing the power of "and" while inviting travelers of all ages to discover the endless adventures awaiting them in Florida's ultimate destination. The campaign highlights a wide variety of experiences for every interest, redefining what it means to be home to America's Favorite Beaches.

"Over the years, visitors have discovered that St. Pete-Clearwater offers much more than its award-winning beaches," said Steve Grimes, CMO of Visit St. Pete-Clearwater. "Our recent surveys have shown us that increasingly people are enjoying the white

sand beaches and our inspired dining options, world-class museums, outdoor adventures, and vibrant nightlife. St. Pete-Clearwater is evolving and continues to distinguish itself from other beach destinations. The Ampersand campaign lets the visitor know they can find exactly what their looking for ... & so much more."



New Ampersand campaign invites visitors mired in snow to check out America's Best Beaches.



Visit St. Pete-Clearwater takes over the One Liberty Plaza subway station to launch their new Ampersand Campaign.

The comprehensive, multi-channel campaign stretches across traditional print, broadcast, digital placements, streaming networks, search and social buys, event sponsorships, and activations, along with selected travel platform partnerships. Ampersand will roll out in new markets Charlotte, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, as well as major U.S. and Canadian cities including New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and Toronto, as the destination aims to expand its focus on leisure travelers in key fly, drive, and international markets.

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St. Augustine Black History App Provides Real-Life Exploration

In 2024, Florida's Historic Coast partnered with Visit St. Augustine to develop the St. Augustine Black History App, which seamlessly blends historical content with real-life exploration. Rigorous research from credible sources provides an overview of Florida's Historic Coast spanning 450+ years. The app has 1,951 downloads, 65,844 screen views, and 4,011 engaged sessions, with an 80.5% engagement rate and an average session time of 5m 16s. Notably, 88% of users are outside St. Johns County. FloridasHistoricCoast.com



New app allows visitors to discover 450+ years of Black history in St. Augustine.

Discover Martin Wins Best Marketing Design Award

Discover Martin's Explore Natural Martin promotional campaign recently won Best Marketing Design in the Video, Visual & Virtual Awards organized by Ragan Communications and PR Daily. The integrated campaign included print and digital ads to promote the innovative ecotourism program (developed in partnership with Leave No Trace), which offers free guided eco-tours to visitors and residents. Other winners in this year's awards include iconic brands like NASA, Disney, Southwest Airlines, AARP, 3M, and more. DiscoverMartin.com



The annual award program recognizes the most captivating and engaging videos, visual designs, and virtual events across industries from the past year.

Lee County VCB Touts National Plan for Vacation Day on Satellite Media Tour

Lee County VCB shared a flurry of warm weather ideas with people braving much colder weather on National Plan for Vacation Day. The satellite media tour reached more than 20 million viewers in more than 1,000 TV and radio airings. The VCB strategically used the Jan. 28 holiday—shot on Fort Myers Beach with the sparkling Gulf of Mexico as a backdrop—as an opportunity to encourage everyone to plan their vacation days for 2025. VisitFortMyers.com



In a recent satellite media tour, Fort Myers Mayor Kevin Anderson and Lee County VCB Communications Director Ray Sarracino talk about the destination as part of National Plan for Vacation Day.

Visit Sarasota County's Visitor Services on the Road

The newest team member at Visit Sarasota County (VSC) has four wheels and aims to engage with tourists where they are—at attractions, events, and accommodations—rather than waiting for them at a brick-and-mortar center. AVA, the 18-foot "Area Visitor Assistant" RV, has a dedicated team of volunteers who ensure AVA is present at events throughout the entire county. The vehicle's exterior displays a comprehensive list Sarasota's neighborhoods and barrier islands, visuals of popular attractions, and other key branding elements. VisitSarasota.com



The RV affectionately named AVA—Area Visitor Assistant—that serves as an extension of Visit Sarasota County

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Destination Panama City Expands Historical Tourism With Glenwood Historical Marker Trail

Destination Panama City has launched its third historic walking trail, the Glenwood Historical Marker Trail, further enhancing the city's cultural tourism offerings. This new audio-guided experience, available on the Otocast app, features 15 historical markers, each highlighting key moments in the Glenwood neighborhood's rich history and cultural heritage. The addition of this trail strengthens Destination Panama City's commitment to preserving and promoting the city's diverse history while creating new opportunities for visitor engagement. DestinationPanamaCity.com



The Glenwood Historical Marker Trail adds to Destination Panama City's expanding collection of historic walking tours.

Clay County Tourism Hosts Trail Itinerary Workshop

The Clay County Tourism Department collaborated with the Northeast Florida Regional Council to host a workshop about crafting trail itineraries for the region. This event invited stakeholders and citizens to contribute to developing detailed plans for local trails, enhancing their appeal to residents, visitors, and outdoor enthusiasts. Each itinerary will provide essential information on trail access, amenities, safety tips, and highlights like historical landmarks, unique plants and animals, and environmental features. By fostering community input, Clay County aims to promote its trails as exciting, educational, and accessible destinations. ExploreClay.com



Clay County's Trail Itinerary Workshop invites citizens to contribute to plans for the area's local trails.

Health Care Partnership Gives Visitors Peace of Mind

Experience Kissimmee's newest partnership with AdventHealth as the official health care provider highlights the importance of health and wellness in tourism. The Experience Kissimmee team attended the groundbreaking of the new eight-story patient tower at AdventHealth Celebration, marking a significant milestone. This expansion supports visitors by ensuring access to top-tier medical care, allowing them to enjoy their vacations with peace of mind. ExperienceKissimmee.com



Experience Kissimmee's Industry Partner Relations Manager Jax Alberto, Executive Director of Strategic Partnerships Jessica Beers, CMO Casey Leppenan, Senior Director of Industry Partner Relations Emily Shorrock, Chief of Destination Stewardship Jason Holic, and CEO DT Minich join AdventHealth Community Engagement Manager Samantha Giel and AdventHealth Celebration CEO Amanda Maggard in front of AdventHealth Celebration.

Exploring Florida's Adventure Coast With Influencer Kendra Tustin

Florida's Adventure Coast Visitors Bureau partnered with adventure traveler Kendra Tustin and VISIT FLORIDA to showcase the area's breathtaking outdoor experiences. Kendra e-biked the scenic Good Neighbor Trail, capturing its natural beauty, and kayaked the crystal-clear Weeki Wachee River, where she encountered gentle manatees up close. Her journey, shared with thousands of followers, highlights why Florida's Adventure Coast is a must-visit for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Follow her travels for inspiration! [#FLAdventureCoast](https://www.instagram.com/FLAdventureCoast) FloridasAdventureCoast.com



Kendra encounters manatees on the Weeki Wachee River.



The Palm Beaches Announce #1 Tripadvisor Trending Destination City

West Palm Beach is the top winner in the prestigious 2025 Tripadvisor Traveler's Choice® Best of the Best Awards for Destinations, ranking #1 in the Trending Destinations in the United States. This prestigious award is the highest honor Tripadvisor bestows, recognizing the best places to travel based on the reviews and opinions collected from millions of travelers on Tripadvisor over 12 months. Tripadvisor is the world's largest travel guidance platform, with 1 billion+ reviews. ThePalmBeaches.com



Discover The Palm Beaches President & CEO Milton Segarra (pictured far right) and Carol Johnson with Tripadvisor present the award to West Palm Beach Mayor Keith James, along with Chamber of Commerce of The Palm Beaches President Michael Zeff (pictured far left).

Sports Car Racing Kicks Off Speed Season in Daytona Beach

Sports car fans flocked to Daytona Beach in January for back-to-back racing weekends at Daytona International Speedway. The first weekend featured the Roar Before the Rolex 24, a three-day test session. The second weekend brought the main event, the 63rd annual Rolex 24 At DAYTONA, North America's most prestigious sports race, where fans witnessed an international field of drivers battling the 3.56-mile road course. Visitors also enjoyed pre-race access, the Ferris Wheel and fireworks, autograph sessions, entertainment, and displays. DaytonaBeach.com



Sports car racing with the Rolex 24 At DAYTONA in January kicks off a busy three months of racing at the world-famous Daytona International Speedway. Photo: Daytona International Speedway

Panama City Beach Rings in the New Year in a Big Way

Panama City Beach's New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop welcomed the new year with its biggest celebration yet! Due to growing attendance, the event expanded into Aaron Bessant Park for the first time. The night featured live entertainment, family-friendly activities, and headliner Taylor Shines—A Laser Spectacular, a tribute show bringing Taylor Swift's hits to life with stunning visuals. As the clock counted down, 15,000 beach balls fell from the sky, including a giant LED beach ball, leading up to a spectacular firework display, making it a night to remember! VisitPanamaCityBeach.com



Taylor Shines—A Laser Spectacular headlines Panama City Beach's New Year's Eve Beach Ball Drop.

Walton County Tourism Honors Local Businesses at Perfect in Walton County Awards

The Walton County Tourism Department honored the winners of the 2025 Perfect in Walton County Awards at Hotel Effie Sandestin in January. More than 6,000 votes were cast across 30 categories to determine the best in dining, entertainment, shopping, and more throughout the county. In its 11th year, the tradition invites residents and visitors to nominate and vote for their favorite tourism-related businesses, services, and organizations, shining a spotlight on local establishments that support the destination. WaltonCountyFLTourism.com



Jared Herzog, second from right, poses after his win for Best Local Musician/Band at the 2025 Perfect in Walton County Awards.



Quick Trips!

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches Highlights Tourism Economic Impact, Industry Leaders at 2025 Annual Meeting

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches hosted its 2025 Annual Tourism Meeting in January. During the event, local attendees received updates on economic impact numbers, eco-tourism and marketing initiatives, and more. The DMO presented awards to nine local tourism businesses, organizations, and community members for their outstanding contributions to the industry. The meeting also included special guest speaker Chad Crawford of "How to Do Florida." Crawford spoke on the delicate balance between economic prosperity and protecting Flagler County's natural resources. VisitFlagler.com



Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches tourism representatives welcome local industry leaders and elected officials to its annual meeting.

ECNL Florida Brings Elite Competition and Tourism Boost to Orlando North, Seminole County

The ECNL Regional Florida Tournaments brought back-to-back elite youth girls and boys soccer events to Orlando North Seminole County, hosting 350 teams and attracting 300+ college scouts. Held in January, these two tournaments generated over \$7.4 million in direct economic impact. Players from across the nation competed at the highest level, gaining crucial exposure to college recruiters. Orlando North, Seminole County continues to be a premier destination for elite youth sports events. DoOrlandoNorth.com



Players showcase their skills at the ECNL Florida Tournament in Seminole County.

Lorelei Spa, Sunseeker Resort-Charlotte Harbor, Receives #2 Spot for Top 100 Spas in North America

Spas of America announced its annual Top 100 Spas of 2024 list, showcasing the most sought-after wellness destinations across North America, and the Lorelei Spa at the Sunseeker Resort-Charlotte Harbor was awarded the #2 spot. The Sunseeker Resort opened in December 2023 and has already gained high rankings for their simple elegance in an oasis where time stands still. The spa has 10 individual treatment rooms and a couples treatment room. Therapists are hand selected for their ability to create the perfect accompaniment to a Sunseeker Resort vacation. PureFlorida.com



Lorelei Spa at Sunseeker Resort-Charlotte Harbor allows guests to be pampered while the hustle of everyday life fades away like footprints in the sand.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Taps Into a Variety of Sports to Promote America's Favorite Beaches

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater is hitting the pitch and the ice to spread the word about America's Favorite Beaches. In 2025, VisitSPC takes on the role as the Official Beaches of the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning as well as the Philadelphia Union and Cincinnati FC in the MLS. The brand also will head overseas as a partner of the Betfred Rugby Super League, the top Rugby League competition in the Northern Hemisphere, bringing VisitSPC branding to more than 100 matches and broadcast in more than 50 countries worldwide. VisitStPeteClearwater.com



This season, rugby fans across the UK will see constant reminders about the award-winning sand and endless sunshine in St. Pete-Clearwater.

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Discover Lake County Hosts Sunshine Sports Council – Innovation Think Tank

Discover Lake County hosted the Sunshine Sports Council – Innovation Think Tank, bringing together industry leaders to collaborate on the future of sports tourism in Florida. This event fostered innovation, strategic partnerships, and new opportunities to enhance sports events and economic impact. As a premier destination for sports tourism, Lake County is committed to supporting discussions that drive growth and excellence. They look forward to sharing their world-class facilities, beautiful landscapes, and community with professionals. DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com



A speaker at the Innovation Think Tank presents on the future of sports tourism in Florida. Photo: Courtesy of Discover Lake County

Unprecedented \$1.16B in 2024 Revenue Propels Hillsborough County to Fourth-Straight Year of Record Tourism

Fueled by new benchmarks in monthly revenue for seven months, including four-straight months to close out the year, Hillsborough County's tourism reached new heights in 2024 with an unprecedented \$1,161,124,833 in taxable hotel revenue. Achieved in partnership with Tampa Bay's 60,000 hospitality workers, this new benchmark is an \$80 million (7.4%) increase from the previous high set in 2023. Calendar year 2024 was the third straight billion-dollar revenue year in Hillsborough County history and the fourth consecutive year of new highs in revenue. VisitTampaBay.com



The city of Tampa downtown skyline shines brightly as a beacon to travelers who are increasingly flocking to the destination for blue skies, sparkling waterfronts, world-class chefs, award-winning cuisine, family fun, and a century of Cuban, Italian, and German culture—all with a dynamic yet relaxing vibe that's authentically Tampa Bay.

Visit Sebring Revenues Net Record High; Adds New Staff Member

Visit Sebring/Highlands County revenues for FY 2023-2024 were at a record high of \$2 million+, which included record high collections for 11 of the 12 months. The destination also saw overnight trips increase 1.2% YOY and visit nights increase 0.8% YOY. With the increase in funding and tourism development initiatives, Visit Sebring was able to hire a third staff member to their team, Sarah Maldonado, who started on Feb. 11. VisitSebring.com



Nature and outdoor enthusiasts flock to the Sebring area, and tourists enjoy the bike trails at Sun N Lake Preserve in Sebring. Photo: Courtesy of Visit Sebring

Greater Miami CVB's Rainbow Spring Returns With Global Expansion

Ahead of Pride Month 2025, the Greater Miami CVB launches Rainbow Spring, designed to provide LGBTQ+ visitors unique programming and promotions to enhance their visitor experience. Now in its third year, Rainbow Spring has seen record growth, generating 27,800 room nights, \$17.2 million in gross bookings, and an impressive 18.6% year-over-year growth. Key international markets this year include Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Milan, and Brussels, further cementing Miami and Miami Beach as a global hub for LGBTQ+ travelers. MiamiandMiamiBeach.com



Greater Miami CVB's Rainbow Spring provides LGBTQ+ visitors with unique programming and promotions.



Visit Central Florida Setting the Standard With Tourism Institute

Visit Central Florida recently launched the Visit Central Florida Tourism Institute destination education program for travel advisors. This incentivized training course for travel trade professionals takes approximately 90 minutes to complete and consists of two foundational chapters of destination information, partner directory, ready-made sales presentations, photo assets, and regular promotions. The program is also available for download in the Apple Store and Google Play and is available in three languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Visit Central Florida's Tourism Institute is a popular education program for travel advisors.

Bradenton Area Tourism Bureau Promotes Destination at International Media Marketplace

In January, two members of the Bradenton Area Tourism Bureau attended TravMedia's International Media Marketplace (IMM) in New York, a first for this destination. The team met with 22 travel journalists to discuss everything the Bradenton Area has to offer visitors and also had the opportunity to connect with additional media at networking events surrounding the marketplace. Through these connections, the Bradenton Area is already working to secure future press visits and coverage for their destination. BradentonGulfIslands.com



Kolby Gayson and Keenan Singleton represent the Bradenton Area Tourism Bureau at IMM. Photo: Courtesy of Bradenton Area Tourism Bureau

January's Flurry of Activity for Visit Tallahassee

The new year kicked off with the 28th annual DEMP Week, a celebration of life, culture, and music. As part of the event, Visit Tallahassee hosted major influencers, including Brooklyn Queen and Chy Marron, who explored the city's dynamic arts, culture, and music scene, sharing their experiences with a combined audience of more than 710 million followers on social media. In January, Visit Tallahassee also hosted a reception for short-term rental property owners, providing valuable insights on enhancing their properties to attract more visitors. VisitTallahassee.com



Visit Tallahassee Executive Director Kerri L. Post presents to short-term rental owners.

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Hosts Annual Meeting—With a Twist

Destin-Fort Walton Beach recently hosted its annual meeting, but this year with a twist—a gameshow theme. Held at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, the event welcomed 175 attendees participating in classic gameshows like Jeopardy and Family Feud. Tourism industry professionals and local businesses celebrated their achievements over the past year and learned about upcoming tourism initiatives and the wide array of ways the Tourist Development Tax benefits the community. DestinFWB.com



The destination's annual meeting offered an opportunity to connect, celebrate 2024 achievements, and inspire success for 2025.



How Citywide Events Impact Orlando's Community

Orlando is hosting a whopping 51 citywide events through April 2025, amounting to a 21% increase in citywide attendance over the same period in 2024. The estimated economic impact for these 51 events is a staggering \$1.87 billion—driven by Visit Orlando and the Orange County Convention Center's collaboration to bring new and continued business to Orlando. This also means more shifts for local workers—from wait staff and housekeeping to artists who help provide entertainment during many events in and around conventions. VisitOrlando.com



The 2025 PGA Merchandise Show is one of 51 citywide events to be held the first part of the year in Orlando, Florida.

Amelia Island CVB Targets High-Performing Midwest Markets

Amelia Island CVB recently traveled to Columbus and Cleveland, Ohio, for a media mission targeting high-performing Midwest markets. Leveraging sea, sun, and seasonings—during a snowstorm—they hosted two media dinners with 30+ guests, incorporating local ingredients and an island-inspired menu. Focusing on family-offerings, direct flights, and tasty cocktails, the CVB team also secured appearances on daytime television in each market, with a total of five segments airing. The cold-weather effort generated 5.4 million impressions, 353,899 views, and 1,292 engagements AmeliaIsland.com



Cleveland media enjoy Cordelia's island-inspired menu featuring local salt and honey.

Space Coast Spring Games Is an Economic Impact Champion

The Space Coast Spring Games has been named a 2024 Champion of Economic Impact by Sports Destination Management. Hosted at the USSSA Space Coast Complex, the Space Coast Spring Games feature NCAA DII, DIII, NAIA, and junior college teams from around the country. The Space Coast Spring Games staff is passionate about delivering a top-quality softball tournament experience in a fun and competitive environment and brought in a total economic impact of \$1.17 million. VisitSpaceCoast.com



Discover Crystal River Hosts Well-Known Mexican Journalist

VISIT FLORIDA presented Discover Crystal River with an irresistible offer to host esteemed Mexican journalist José Antonio from Grupo Fórmula (103.3 FM/970 AM, website, Telefórmula TV), as well as popular publications *Publimetro* and *Diario Imagen*. During his Citrus County tour, José snorkeled with manatees in Crystal River, explored the Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park, and biked the Withlacoochee Trail in downtown Inverness. DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com



José Antonio visits Three Sisters Springs in Crystal River.



Visit Gainesville, Alachua County Highlights Meeting Perks & Leisure Appeal at Florida Huddle and Encounter 2025

Visit Gainesville, Alachua County's group sales team showcased the region's meeting spaces and leisure travel opportunities at the prestigious Florida Huddle and Encounter 2025. Debuting an upgraded trade show booth and a fresh meetings prospectus, the team promoted the county's Meeting Advantage Program—offering a \$15 per room night incentive for approved conferences. They were joined by representatives from Gainesville Regional Airport and Sweetwater Branch Inn, reinforcing Alachua County's appeal as North Florida's hub for meetings and leisure travel. VisitGainesville.com



Visit Gainesville, Alachua County staff and local tourism partners showcase the county's premier meeting, event, and leisure travel opportunities at the 2025 Visit Florida Huddle and Encounter. Pictured are Tourism Development Director Liz Reyes, Sweetwater Branch Inn General Manager Ron Gromoll, Sweetwater Branch Inn Owner and TDC Member Cornelia Holbrook, Tourism and Economic Development Director Jessica Hurov, Tourism Program Coordinator Bailey McClellan, and Gainesville Regional Airport Marketing and Public Relations Manager Erin Porter.

Sharing Love From Jacksonville

To share some love from Jacksonville around Valentine's Day, the Visit Jacksonville team created and sent "With Love, From Jacksonville" boxes to select meeting planners and meeting and convention media. The box included items from local Jacksonville makers Anney Life Designs, Bold Bean Coffee, and Makenu Chocolate along with a postcard highlighting why Jacksonville is a city people love for meetings and conventions. A QR code to the award-winning *Love Letter From Jacksonville* video was also included. VisitJacksonville.com



The "With Love, From Jacksonville" box

Great Walks of the Florida Keys Offers a Variety of Adventures for Pedestrians

Visitors to the Florida Keys can discover several unique walking adventures via a new website section on *Fla-Keys.com*, the Keys' official visitor website. "Great Walks of the Florida Keys" guides visitors on nature trails in Key Largo and Everglades National Park; on an urban stroll with stops for art, shopping, and dining in Islamorada; across the pedestrian friendly Old Seven Mile Bridge in Marathon; and along historic Whitehead Street in Key West, among others. Fla-Keys.com



The renovated Old Seven Mile Bridge, now a linear park, takes walkers and bikers to the historic island of Pigeon Key.

Florida's Sports Coast Hosts Travel Writers at Dade City's Kumquat Festival

Florida's Sports Coast recently hosted two travel writers for an immersive experience at the annual Kumquat Festival in Dade City. From kumquat-infused dishes to historic downtown explorations, they enjoyed authentic Florida flavors and learned about the history of Downtown Dade City. Their visit included a stay at the charming Historic Hacienda Hotel, interviews with local historians, and conversations with restaurateurs about their most creative kumquat-inspired dishes. This visit highlighted the region's rich heritage, vibrant culinary scene, and the festival's role in celebrating Florida's unique agricultural traditions. FLSportsCoast.com



The annual Kumquat Festival in Dade City celebrates authentic Florida dishes featuring the kumquat.



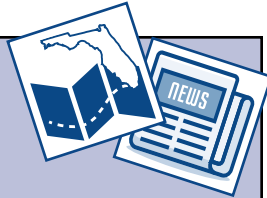
Visit St. Lucie Launches New Treasures Campaign

Visit St. Lucie recently launched their new Treasures ad campaign, which is designed to highlight the unique charm and rich history of St. Lucie, aptly referred to as the "Jewel of the Treasure Coast" in the campaign's taglines. The multimedia campaign showcases the treasures that have made St. Lucie a hidden gem. Named for the shipwrecks and treasures lost along the area's shores, the Treasure Coast has long been synonymous with adventure, discovery, and natural beauty. VisitStLucie.com



A digital ad for Visit St. Lucie's new Treasures campaign invites visitors to uncover not only the historic treasures of the past but also the abundant natural wonders, cultural experiences, and local gems that await today.

Want to See Your DMO's News Here?



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.

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>



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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1400 Village Sq. Blvd., Suite 3-250
Tallahassee, FL 32312

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