

# TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | [www.DestinationsFlorida.org](http://www.DestinationsFlorida.org) | April 2025



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## Visit Tampa Bay President & CEO Named to USTA Executive Board

Visit Tampa Bay President & CEO Santiago C. Corrada has been named to the U.S. Travel



Visit Tampa Bay President & CEO Santiago C. Corrada was named to the U.S. Travel Association's Executive Board for a two-year term on Feb. 24. USTA represents the \$2.8 trillion travel industry—working to increase travel to and within the U.S.

Association's Executive Board for a two-year term. As a member of the executive board, Santiago will contribute to advancing the association's mission to shape, support, and advocate for the future of travel.

"It's a genuine privilege to be selected to serve on the USTA's Executive Board for the next two years," Corrada said. "Tourism and hospitality make a positive impact on the lives of individuals as well as the economic well-being of our communities across the nation. I look forward to working with USTA's leadership and other members of the executive board to advocate for this industry and its continued success, which means so much to so many."

*USTA EXECUTIVE BOARD continues on pg. 3*

## Standing Strong

*by Robert Skrob*



Spring brings with it a familiar challenge—the Florida Legislature considering legislation that could

undermine the very foundation of Florida's tourism success: the Tourist Development Tax. Looking at these proposals, it's natural to feel concerned about their potential impact. But let's take a step back and remember something important: this process is nothing new, and we are built for this fight.

Every law that establishes tourism funding today was once an idea, fought for by

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

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

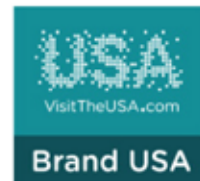
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## GOLD PARTNERS



## SILVER PARTNERS



# HAPPY Birthday

Misty Johantgen  
April 14

DESTINATIONS  
FLORIDA  
TourismMarketing  
Today

The Official Newsletter of  
Destinations Florida  
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Robert Skrob,  
Executive Director

Suzanne Hurst, CAE,  
Deputy Executive Director

MaryLu Winchester,  
Member Database

#### On the Cover

Photo: Nick Adams for Fort Myers – Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods

The Lady Chadwick, the flagship of the Captiva Cruises fleet, makes her way through Pine Island Sound to Useppa Island and Cabbage Key. These cruises from Captiva Island give visitors to Southwest Florida an introduction to breathtaking views and abundant wildlife.

Corrada has been the president & CEO of Visit Tampa Bay since May 2013. During his tenure, the hospitality industry in Hillsborough County has grown exponentially. Hotel revenues have increased from \$400 million to over \$1 billion per year for three consecutive years, including 2024's new benchmark of \$1.16 billion.

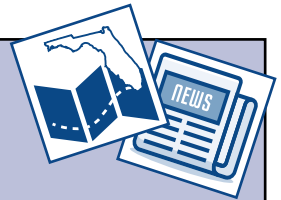
Along with continued revenue growth, Corrada's efforts have contributed to the addition of new hotel properties, bringing the MICHELIN Guide to Florida, securing high-profile sporting

events and entertainment, and overall destination management. Collectively, working with Visit Tampa Bay's more than 900 partners as well as county and city officials, these efforts support nearly 60,000 hospitality jobs and have generated nearly \$9 billion in total economic impact for Hillsborough County.

Before being named to the USTA's Executive Board, Corrada served on the USTA's Board of Delegates for the previous 11 years. Corrada also served as the chairman of Destinations Florida in 2024.

### 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](mailto:editor.trainor@gmail.com)), and she will add you to the mailing list.



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

leaders before us. They faced challenges, they built coalitions, and they stood strong. Now, it's our turn. Our mission, opportunity, and obligation is to protect and enhance these laws—not just for our organizations, but for residents within our communities and for the next generation of tourism leaders who will follow in our footsteps.

One of the most common criticisms we face is that tourism consists only of low-wage jobs. We now have the data to prove otherwise. Printed as an insert to this newsletter is CareerSource Central Florida's latest report

confirming that tourism wages in every region of the state are higher than the average regional wage. That means your work—your marketing, your visitor attraction efforts—is fueling high-paying jobs, career advancement, and economic mobility.

With this knowledge, we have a powerful new tool to bring to lawmakers, demonstrating that tourism is not just about visitors—it's about Floridians, their jobs, and their future. Your marketing efforts are more important than ever, and together, we will continue to defend, protect, and grow Florida's tourism industry.



# HSMIA Adrian Awards Recognize Excellence

## Visit Tampa Bay's Janette Carter Baker Named a Top 25 Extraordinary Mind

The Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIA) presented the 2024 Adrian Awards on Feb. 18 at the New York Marriott Marquis. This year, the 68<sup>th</sup> annual competition focused on "Wish You Were Here," celebrating the most memorable and effective travel marketing and public relations campaigns, advertising, earned media programs, and experiential and digital activations.

Of special note this year, Janette Carter Baker, vice president of marketing with Visit Tampa Bay, was named a Top 25 Extraordinary Mind for 2024. This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> year HSMIA has compiled the list, which annually recognizes exemplary achievement and leadership in hospitality sales, marketing, revenue optimization, and distribution.



HSMIA President & CEO Brian Hicks congratulates Janette Carter Baker on being named a Top 25 Extraordinary Mind for 2024.

Carter Baker joins an exclusive list of professionals, including Visit Tampa Bay's Santiago C. Corrada, president & CEO, who was recognized as one of HSMIA's Extraordinary Minds in 2013 and Patrick Harrison, CMO, who received the honor in 2018.

Since 2020, Carter Baker has overseen the destination's multi-channel campaigns in both domestic and overseas markets. Her leadership, vision, and marketing expertise contributed to four consecutive years of tourism growth and new benchmarks in hotel revenue, including more than \$400 million in revenue growth since 2021, culminating in an unprecedented \$1.16 billion in 2024.

"Janette's creativity and determination are only surpassed by her leadership and love for the Tampa Bay region," said Corrada. "She's dedicated to telling Tampa Bay's story, knowing her team's work has a direct impact on our hospitality professionals and the region's economic growth. This honor reflects her commitment and the excellence she brings to our industry."

## BEST OF CATEGORY WINNERS

One Best of Category award is given in each entry category for small, medium, and large budget ranges.

### Amelia Island Florida

**Entry:** PadSquad VidStream

**Category:** Digital



HSMIA presents the Adrian Awards annually to recognize outstanding work and to support the tourism industry's success.

### Destin-Fort Walton Beach

**Entry:** Little Adventures Enhance the Experience in Destin-Fort Walton Beach

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

### Discover The Palm Beaches

**Entry:** Breaking Barriers: The Palm Beaches' Commitment to Inclusive Travel

**Category:** Digital

### Discover The Palm Beaches

**Entry:** The Palm Beaches: A Pilot Influencer's Sky High Adventures

**Category:** Digital

### Martin County Tourism

**Entry:** Explore Natural Martin In-House PR Strategy

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

### Martin County Tourism

**Entry:** Explore Natural Martin Promotional Video

**Category:** Digital

### Visit Lauderdale

**Entry:** Rose Parade 2024

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

### Visit Lauderdale

**Entry:** Great Fort Lauderdale Accessibility Campaign

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

### Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

**Entry:** Celebrating 100 Years of Shuffleboard in St. Pete

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

### Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

**Entry:** Gulf to Bay Destination Magazine

**Category:** Advertising

### Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

**Entry:** From Visitors With Love/727 Day

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**GOLD AWARD WINNERS****Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Breaking Barriers: The Palm Beaches' Commitment to Inclusive Travel

**Category:** Digital

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** The Palm Beaches Collection

**Category:** Advertising

**Martin County Tourism**

**Entry:** Explore Natural Martin In-House PR Strategy

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Visit Lauderdale**

**Entry:** Rose Parade 2024

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**SILVER AWARD WINNERS****Amelia Island Florida**

**Entry:** PadSquad VidStream

**Category:** Digital

**Amelia Island Florida**

**Entry:** Amelia Island Inspired Weddings

**Category:** Advertising

**Destin-Fort Walton Beach**

**Entry:** Little Adventures Enhance the Experience in Destin-Fort Walton Beach

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** The Palm Beaches: A Pilot Influencer's Sky High Adventures

**Category:** Digital

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Sea To Preserve

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** The Palm Beaches Welcomes Everyone

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** The Pink Retreat

**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Fort Myers Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods**

**Entry:** Fairways, Flavors and Cultural Delights

**Category:** Digital

**Greater Miami CVB**

**Entry:** Find Your Voice Miami Beach, Partnership With Sony Music Latin

**Category:** Digital

**Martin County Tourism**

**Entry:** Promoting Ecotourism Through Explore Natural Martin

**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB**

**Entry:** Collier County: Only Campaign

**Category:** Advertising

*HSMIA ADRIAN AWARDS continues on pg. 6*



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**DS** downs & st. germain  
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**Visit St. Pete-Clearwater**

**Entry:** Celebrating 100 Years of Shuffleboard in St. Pete  
**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** Walton County Tourism Feature – Modern Luxury  
**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**BRONZE AWARD WINNERS**

**Amelia Island Florida**

**Entry:** Amelia Island Dynamic Blog Campaign  
**Category:** Digital

**Amelia Island Florida**

**Entry:** Meeting Planner Quarterly Emails  
**Category:** Advertising

**Amelia Island Florida**

**Entry:** Ameliainland.com  
**Category:** Digital

**Columbia County TDC**

**Entry:** Columbia County: Your Kind of Place  
**Category:** Advertising

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Entertainment Tonight in The Palm Beaches  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Leisure Meets Luxury  
**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Love The Palm Beaches Contest  
**Category:** Digital

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Record-Breaking Video Series: Live Like a Local  
**Category:** Digital

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Fashion Week NYC  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Discover The Palm Beaches**

**Entry:** Conquering YouTube as the Nation's Most Followed Destination  
**Category:** Digital

**Florida's Space Coast**

**Entry:** Florida's Space Coast Countdown Campaign  
**Category:** Advertising (Television)

**Florida's Space Coast**

**Entry:** Florida's Space Coast Countdown Campaign  
**Category:** Advertising (Connected TV/Streaming/Linear)

**Florida's Space Coast**

**Entry:** Florida's Space Coast Countdown Campaign  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Fort Myers Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods**

**Entry:** A Bird's-Eye View of Fort Myers  
**Category:** Advertising

**Fort Myers Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods**

**Entry:** Eyes on Fort Myers  
**Category:** Digital

**Martin County Tourism**

**Entry:** Explore Natural Martin Promotional Video  
**Category:** Digital

**Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB**

**Entry:** Collier County: Only Paradise Will Do Winter Canada Campaign  
**Category:** Advertising

**Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Office**

**Entry:** Santa Rosa County: Atlanta Dogwood Festival  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Visit Lauderdale**

**Entry:** Laudy Dayo  
**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Visit Lauderdale**

**Entry:** Great Fort Lauderdale Accessibility Campaign  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Visit Orlando**

**Entry:** Winter Doesn't Exist  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

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**Visit St. Pete-Clearwater**

**Entry:** Gulf to Bay Destination Magazine  
**Category:** Advertising

**Visit St. Pete-Clearwater**

**Entry:** From Visitors With Love/727 Day  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Visit St. Pete-Clearwater**

**Entry:** Visit St. Pete-Clearwater SEM Performance Max Campaign  
**Category:** Digital

**Visit Tampa Bay**

**Entry:** Tampa Bay's Guide to Social Inclusion  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Visit Tampa Bay**

**Entry:** All Are Welcome in Tampa Bay  
**Category:** Digital

**Visit Tampa Bay**

**Entry:** From Stadium to Sunshine: Tampa Bay's Game-Changing Partnership With Brentford FC  
**Category:** Digital

**Visit Tampa Bay**

**Entry:** Tampa Bay Takes Over: A Matchday Adventure With Brentford FC  
**Category:** Public Relations/Communications

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** South Walton Cookbook  
**Category:** Advertising

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** South Walton Meetings Video Brochure  
**Category:** Advertising

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** Your Getaway. Your Homecoming. Your South Walton.  
**Category:** Integrated Campaign

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** Authentic Walton Branding  
**Category:** Advertising

**Walton County Tourism**

**Entry:** South Walton's 16 Beach Neighborhood Locator Videos  
**Category:** Digital

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## TDT for Travel Costs? A Refresher on AGO 2020-02

by Steven M. Hogan

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

In 2020, we provided an analysis of the opinion and what it might, and might not, mean for your operations. No court has reviewed or commented on Opinion 2020-02, so it is still “unchallenged” from a legal perspective.

We recently received some questions on this issue, so a refresher on Opinion 2020-02 appears warranted. As we cautioned in 2020, it’s up to you what to do in light of what the opinion says.



Whether or not TDT can be used for travel costs incurred by travel writers is still up for debate.

Image by Freepik

### What is AGO 2020-02?

Opinion 2020-02 specifically analyzes section 125.0104(9), Florida Statutes, to determine what kind of travel expenses TDT funds can be used to pay. Subsection (9)(a) contains this key provision:

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

*Id.* (emphasis added).

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

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

of the statute is “plausible.” The opinion states that “[u]nder that reading, tourist development tax funds could be used for ‘transportation and other incidental expenses’ of travel writers and tour brokers if compliant with the remainder of paragraph 9(a), regardless of whether the travelers were traveling pursuant to paragraph 9(c). This reading would permit the payment of [such] expenses[.]”



Steven M. Hogan

If that was the last word, then there would be nothing remarkable about this opinion. Indeed, this “plausible” reading of the statute has guided DMO operations for years.

However, the opinion goes on to engage in a tortured statutory analysis to support a different conclusion: that the expenses referred to in subparagraph (9)(a) only mean those incurred by travel writers or tour brokers who are traveling on County business pursuant to subparagraph (9)(c).

### How was this conclusion reached?

I will spare you the details of the attorney general’s analysis. I instead encourage you to read the opinion in its entirety. It can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/opinion2020-2>

Toward the last half of the opinion, the attorney general starts talking about “canons of statutory interpretation” as being the guides for how to read the statute. The attorney general uses these “canons” to conclude that the words “when traveling pursuant to paragraph (c)” apply to *everyone* listed in the part of subparagraph (9)(a) quoted above. Therefore, according to the attorney general, unless a travel writer or a tour broker is traveling on county business (via (9)(c)), then TDT funds cannot be used to pay for that travel.

### Is the attorney general right?

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

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

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

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

### Is AGO 2020-02 the last word?

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

## Florida Trails & Trail Towns Highlighted in New VISIT FLORIDA Campaign

When it comes to marketing Florida, VISIT FLORIDA supports every county and community in our state, large and small, to ensure that rural Florida tourism destinations and experiences are being highlighted while also elevating adventure travel and outdoor experiences.

As part of their Outdoor & Nature campaign, VISIT FLORIDA is collaborating with the Office of Greenways and Trails to increase the awareness and use of trails, trail systems, and trail towns.

Through the engaging content filmed in designated "Trail Towns," visitors are getting a taste of Florida's 15,000 miles of hiking, biking, equestrian, and paddling experiences as well as the unique heritage of these small towns. The Trail Town videos were distributed through a paid social media campaign and Flipboard ads in March.



You can find the VISIT FLORIDA promotional trail town videos on YouTube by searching "Florida Trails & Trail Towns."

### BEST PRACTICES

## Calling All DMOs – We Need Your Help

Over the past five years, VISIT FLORIDA has financially supported the promotion and development of the adventure travel market and has engaged the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) to help establish a Florida Adventure Travel Network (FATN). The network would be a resource for adventure operators across the state to network and cultivate relationships with peer businesses while strengthening Florida's identity as a top-of-mind destination for any and all adventure-seeking visitors.



We need support from DMOs across the state to grow this network and ask that you consider designating one of your team as the contact for the FATN. The commitment would be to attend calls and share information and opportunities within the network to your operators such as educational programming.

Tammy Heon of Florida's Adventure Coast, Kimberly Miller of Putnam County, Georgia Turner of West Volusia County, and Maureen Morgenthien of Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach will be attending the Destinations Florida Marketing Summit May 14–16 in Cape Coral. We encourage you to get involved and seek us out at the Summit to answer any questions you may have. Please join us in supporting the establishment of Florida as the "Adventure Travel State."

If you are unable to attend the Summit, but want to hear more about it, email [floridaadventuretravelnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:floridaadventuretravelnetwork@gmail.com) or complete this form:

<https://bit.ly/fatn-interest-form>

We look forward to seeing you next month in Cape Coral.

### LEGAL TIPS *continued from pg. 9...*

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

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

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

#### What now?

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

**Steven M. Hogan** is a shareholder with the Ausley McMullen law firm in Tallahassee. Destinations Florida has retained Mr. Hogan to consult with our members on the Tourist Development Tax and related legal issues. You can contact Mr. Hogan at [shogan@ausley.com](mailto: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.



# 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

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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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# HOW FLORIDA HOSPITALITY JOBS STACK UP: A SURPRISING COMPARISON



DECEMBER 6, 2024



# Contributors



**NILDA BLANCO**  
Senior Vice President of  
Strategic Initiatives



**JAMIE SANTOS**  
Business  
Analyst

## INTRODUCTION

The economy is facing a major challenge: there are more jobs available than workers to fill them. This gap highlights the growing importance of workforce development in strengthening education, supporting communities, and driving Florida's economic growth.

Within this effort, one of the biggest challenges is reshaping perceptions about certain industries. Hospitality jobs, for example, are often dismissed as low paying and unimportant to the economy. These misconceptions not only undermine the industry but also ignore its critical role in driving growth. Data plays an important role in changing this narrative by providing a clearer picture of the value these jobs bring.

Organizations like CareerSource Central Florida are working to change this perspective. By applying an occupational mix approach, they are demonstrating that hospitality jobs not only pay competitively but also play a vital role in Florida's economic success.





## SUMMARY POINTS



Workforce development is essential for addressing talent gaps and supporting economic growth.



The hospitality industry is a major driver of Florida's economy.



By using data to challenge misconceptions, the hospitality sector is reshaping the narrative around wages and career opportunities.



Strategic partnerships and investments in training are helping create upward mobility and long-term career pathways.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In Florida, 21 workforce boards connect career seekers with businesses, strengthening the state's workforce. By relying on data, these boards can identify what is happening in the workforce and where interventions are needed to address gaps and meet employer demands. CareerSource Central Florida, one of these workforce boards, serves five counties: Osceola, Orange, Seminole, Lake,

and Sumter. In this region, hospitality is a major industry, and CareerSource Central Florida focuses on preparing both career seekers and employers for success. For career seekers, they provide career coaching, job training, and upskilling opportunities. For employers, they assist in finding qualified talent and provide training support to meet their workforce needs.

### WHAT WE DO

#### FOR CAREER SEEKERS

We put a focus on helping individuals from across the region during their career journey. This includes:

- **Career coaching, job training, upskilling, job readiness, employment connections and much more.**
- **We support a variety of programs, including Veterans, youth, individuals with disabilities, state support programs and much more.**





# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

CareerSource Central Florida is committed to reshaping how young people view career opportunities. Often, students are guided by outdated ideas about what careers are considered “good” or “bad,” overlooking high-demand industries. To address this, they run a High School Career Express program, a 10-week program that teaches soft skills, leadership, and financial literacy. Each week, students explore a different industry, with employers hosting them for real-world

experience. While participants earn a small stipend, the primary goal of the program is career awareness.

In their broader efforts, CareerSource Central Florida has identified sectors with significant talent gaps and employer demand, including construction, utilities, IT, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, hospitality, and education. These industries are now a central focus for workforce development in the region.

## WHAT WE DO

### FOR BUSINESSES

We work with businesses across the region to help them find valuable talent and offer training and support services, which helps their business grow.

- **Finding & Hiring Qualified Talent**
- **Workforce Intelligence**
- **New Hire Training**





# CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

CareerSource Central Florida is reshaping the way people view hospitality careers, offering a new perspective on the misconception that these jobs are low paying and not competitive enough. By providing workforce intelligence, connecting qualified talent with employers, and offering targeted support, they are addressing both employer and worker needs.

For example, when an employer identifies a candidate who is a great cultural fit but lacks certain technical skills, CareerSource Central Florida steps in to help. Through their on-the-job training programs, they partner with employers to offset wages while the candidate develops the required skills. They also facilitate internships for individuals transitioning between careers, especially those who have the necessary skills but lack direct experience.

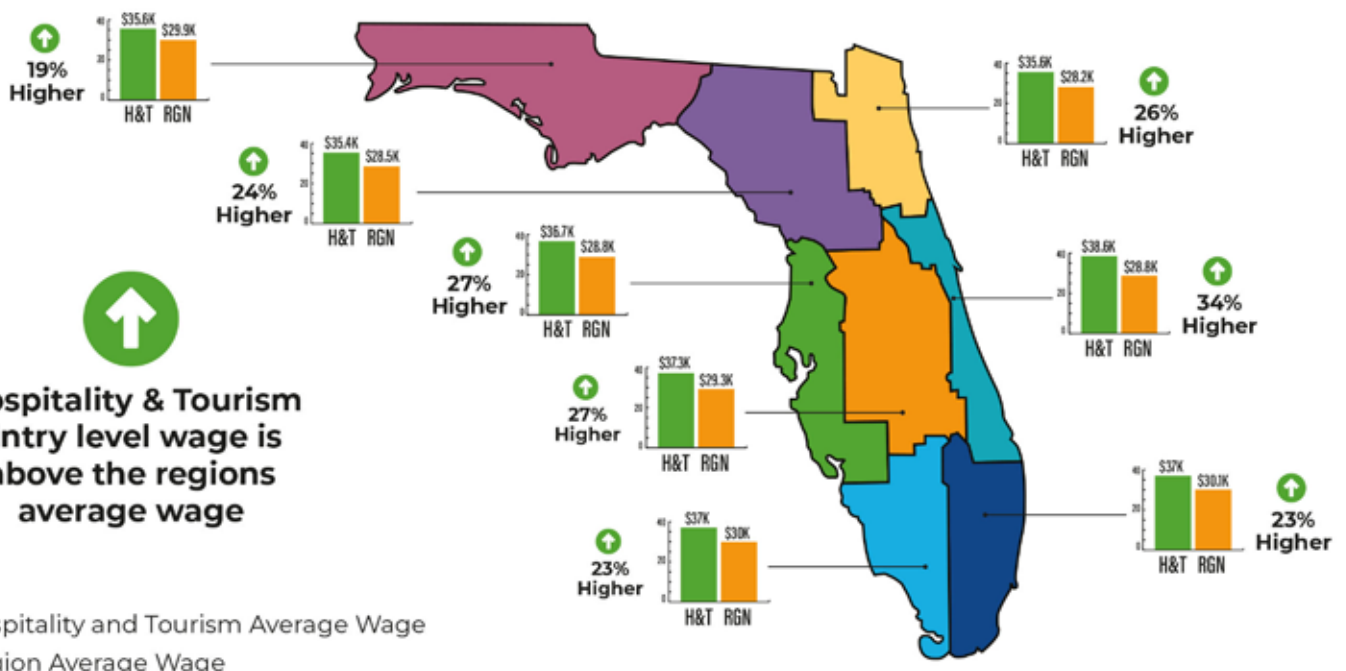
While employers do often seek candidates with both skill and experience, these don't

always happen in tandem, and programs like these help bridge that gap.

Data helps to tell a more accurate story about hospitality and tourism jobs. Partnering with the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association (CFHLA), CareerSource Central Florida looked beyond traditional Department of Labor data, which often focuses on positions like housekeepers and bellboys, which legislators tend to emphasize, to develop a more complete picture. By analyzing data through an occupational mix lens, they expanded data to include careers common to other industries as well as those unique to hospitality. This includes everything from accountants and payroll clerks to admins and food service workers. By reframing the data, they're able to challenge the perception that hospitality jobs are low-paying and reshape the story being told.

## HOSPITALITY & TOURISM

### Hospitality & Tourism Entry Level Wage vs Region Entry Level Wage





## A New Way of Looking at Occupations

Occupational Mix = Careers that are common amongst all industries + Careers that are a part of Hospitality & Tourism that are not represented in the traditional list

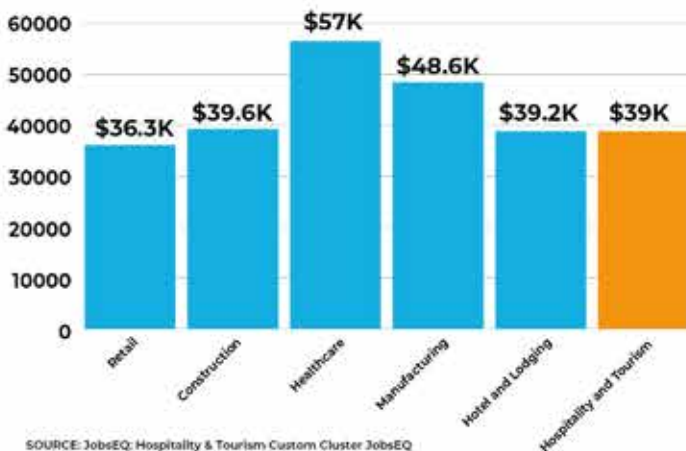
When analyzing data from a traditional perspective, only 13.5% of Florida jobs are tied to hospitality and tourism. However, using the occupational mix approach, that number jumps to 80%.

Data shows that, far from being a low-paying sector, hospitality is competitive. In fact, entry-level wages in hospitality often outpace those in other industries, with

wages in areas like Miami being up to 30% higher. Median wages in hospitality are also above the statewide average when compared across all industries.

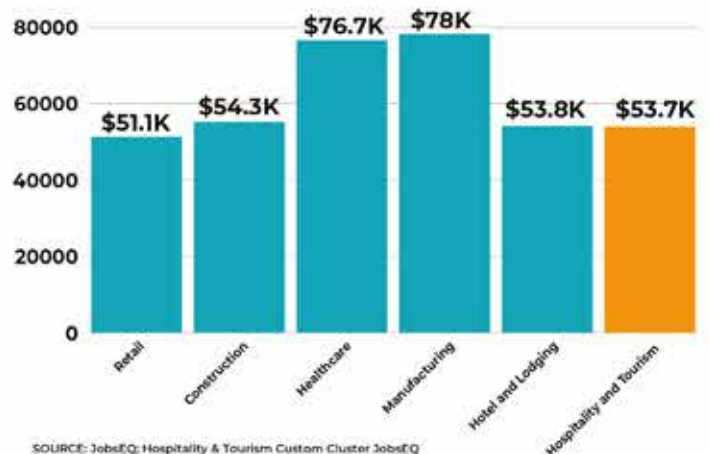
Without occupation mix, the data paints a good picture; with it, the picture looks even better. It's all about how data is used to tell the story of an industry that's vital to Florida's economy.

### Entry Level Wages



SOURCE: JobsEQ: Hospitality & Tourism Custom Cluster JobsEQ

### Median Level Wages



SOURCE: JobsEQ: Hospitality & Tourism Custom Cluster JobsEQ



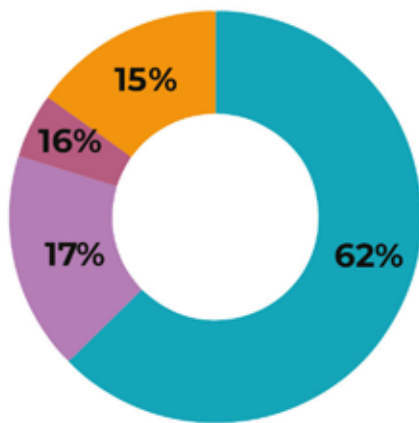
# CENTRAL FLORIDA'S WORKFORCE

Demographics in Central Florida's hospitality and tourism workforce reflect the diversity of the community. Younger workers often get their start in this industry, making it an important sector for recruitment and retention. For many, it's not just a job but the start of a long and prosperous career.

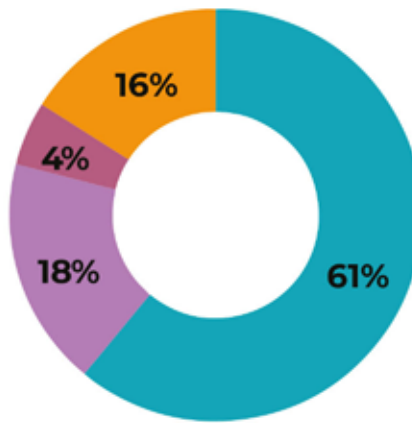
Within the hotel and lodging industry, the workforce also reflects the Central Florida community. This tells a strong story about how the industry successfully engages people from all backgrounds, creating opportunities for participation across the region. Age-wise, the workforce is also representative of the community.

## Race Demographics

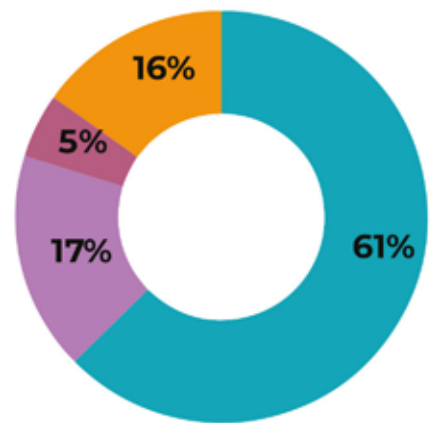
Central Florida Workforce



Hospitality & Tourism



Hotel and Lodging



White

Black or African American

Asian

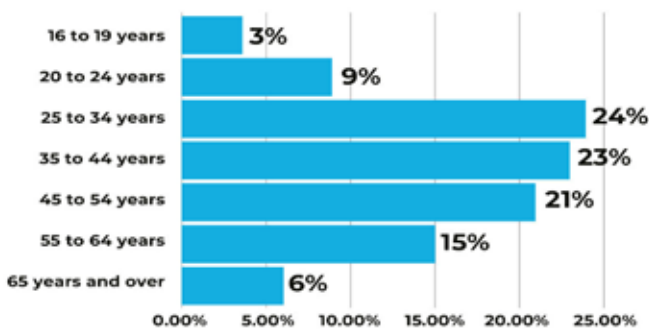
Two or More Races

SOURCE: JobsEQ; Hospitality & Tourism Custom Cluster JobsEQ

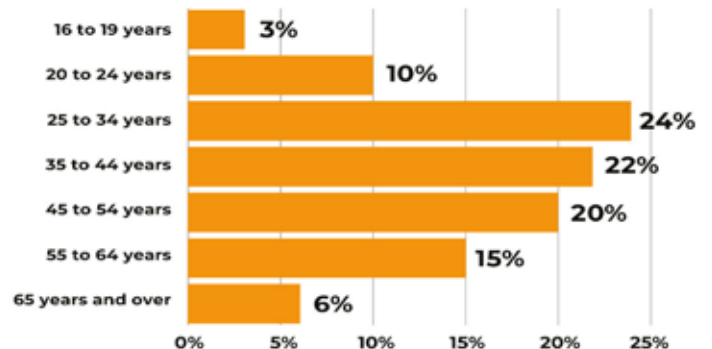
## Age Demographics

Hotel and Lodging

Central Florida Population



Hotel and Lodging



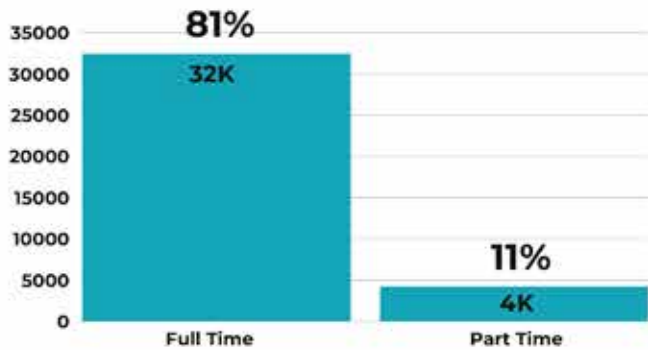
SOURCE: JobsEQ

Since younger workers often find their footing in this sector, there's a real opportunity to encourage them to consider long-term careers in hospitality. Which is why recruitment, retention, benefits, and compensation are so important—because it's not just about who can fill the role today but about building the workforce of tomorrow and supporting families within the community.

The other major misconception about the hospitality industry is that most hospitality jobs are part-time and fail to provide sustainable incomes or benefits. However, there are many full-time workers in the sector who have built lifelong careers. Just talking to managers and supervisors, many of which started in entry-level positions, it's easy to find stories that show the potential for upward mobility.

## Full Time & Part Time Workers

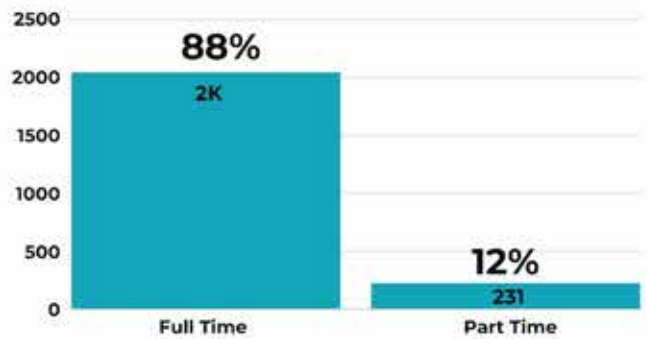
Hospitality & Tourism



SOURCE: Hospitality & Tourism Custom Cluster JobsEQ; Lightcast PT & FT Based on Available Job Postings

## Full Time & Part Time Workers

Hotel & Lodging



SOURCE: Lightcast PT & FT Based on Job Postings





# TALENT GAPS

Occupational gaps challenge the idea that the industry has an endless labor supply. These gaps are appearing across several fields, including business, installation and maintenance, and computers and math. Since this industry relies on skilled teams to ensure that critical facilities, like elevators and air conditioning systems, operate around the clock, without addressing the full occupational mix, the industry risks being excluded from talent gap conversations and strategic initiatives.

## Top 10 Occupational Gaps

- **Healthcare and Social Assistance**
- **Management Occupations**
- **Computer and Mathematical Occupations**
- **Installation and Maintenance Repair**
- **Business and Financial Occupation**
- **Construction and Extraction Occupations**
- **Architectural and Engineering**
- **Legal Occupations**
- **Healthcare Support**
- **Life, Physical, and Social Occupations**
- **Arts, Design, Entertainment, and Media**
- **Education Instruction and Library Occupations**







## THE FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

When thinking about the future of the workplace and how to best position the industry from a jobs and benefits perspective, it's important to recognize the many ways people view their workplace. For some, it's about feeling valued and taken care of—having trust in leadership and a great work culture. For others, it's about the physical and operational aspects: whether it's a nice place to work, a collaborative environment, or a space that values efficiency and uses the latest technology. Meaning and purpose also play a big role in how people perceive their workplace.

With these factors in mind, the industry must focus on how it communicates these priorities internally and externally, aligning recruitment and retention strategies with expectations.

1

### The Emotional Workplace

The emotional aspects of work: culture, wellbeing, social capital, trust.

2

### The Physical Workplace

The future of physical offices; evolving roles and purpose, and whether we will even need offices in the future.

3

### The Technological Workplace

How technology will foster new business models, ways to work and employee experiences.

4

### The Purposeful Workplace

Evolving ideas of leadership, organisational models, value(s) and employee engagement.



# TOP 10 SKILLS IN 2025

Not all skills are learned in the classroom; many are acquired through trial and error, past jobs, or life experiences. From a professional development perspective, it's worth considering how to tap into these skills and integrate them into mentorship programs. While more experienced staff can share their expertise with younger team members, there's also an opportunity for younger staff to share their perspectives and skills with more experienced colleagues.

## Type of skill

- Problem-solving
- Self-management
- Working with people
- Technology use and development



Analytical thinking and innovation



Active learning and learning strategies



Complex problem-solving



Critical thinking and analysis



Creativity, originality and initiative



Leadership and social influence



Technology use, monitoring and control



Technology design and programming



Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility



Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

## Reskilling needs

# 50%

of all employees  
will need  
reskilling  
by 2025.





## CONCLUSION

Having the right tools and data to tell the industry's story is crucial. In tourism marketing, there's a growing effort to position destinations as leaders—not just places to visit but places that actively shape their growth and future. Partnering with agencies across the state offers opportunities to supply the labor needed for the industry while addressing the fact that employment awareness begins early.

It's important to help middle and high school students, and their counselors, recognize that tourism jobs can lead to great-paying careers. Compared to industries like healthcare, the investment required to enter an entry-level job in hospitality is much lower, yet offers a much higher ceiling for career growth. Even though someone may be starting at \$39,000, after 10 years, they could be making \$80,000-\$100,000. The industry's career pathways and wage progression tell a great story.

Framing these opportunities through the lens of career pathways provides not only a clearer understanding of the industry's potential but also a strong justification

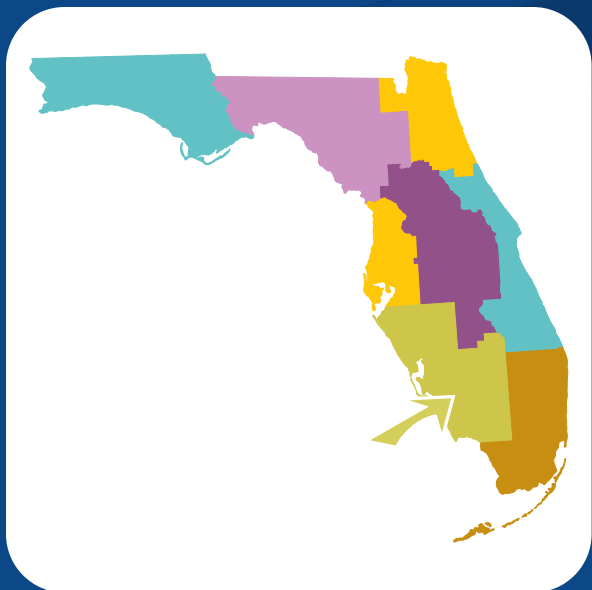
for continued investment in workforce development. From K-12 programs to university and beyond, these pathways are essential for building a stronger, more sustainable future for the industry and the communities it serves.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Show people that hospitality jobs can lead to higher pay and real career growth.
- ✓ Close talent gaps by investing in training programs and pairing experienced workers with younger staff.
- ✓ Start preparing the next generation for careers early by building career programs in schools.
- ✓ Include all types of jobs in the conversation about hospitality, from front desk roles to accountants and technicians.
- ✓ Help communities thrive.







- Bradenton Area CVB
- Discover Hendry County
- Fort Myers Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods
- Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB
- Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB
- Visit Sarasota County

## New Fort Myers Campaign 'Just Feels Right'

Launched in February, the Fort Myers – Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods new marketing campaign, *Just Feels Right*, is designed around the idea that people want to find moments when they can let go of everyday stressors and prioritize their well-being, with the underlying premise being that when you reclaim your sense of being present, you can follow what feels right.

"The Lee County VCB created a campaign with a strong emotional appeal," said Tamara Pigott, Lee County VCB executive director. "And, as research shows, ads that connect emotionally with consumers help audiences notice, remember, share, and ultimately, take action."

Humor is another tool that grabs attention and makes brands more relatable. The VCB combined those insights with the fact that attention spans are dwindling and created five 15-second videos built around these five feelings:

1. Relaxed (being fully present in the moment)
2. Adventurous (looking forward to whatever comes your way)
3. Connected (closer to nature and the ones you love)
4. Playful (letting loose and having fun)
5. Curious (eager to discover)

Each ad sets up a misdirect to surprise and delight in a way that's funny and memorable while showcasing different experiences that are available in the destination.



To watch these videos, go to the *Just Feels Right* playlist on the Visit Fort Myers channel on YouTube.



## Collier County Unveils 'All is Perfect' Campaign

Florida's Paradise Coast is redefining luxury travel with its All is Perfect campaign, designed to position Collier County as the top destination for upscale vacations, unforgettable weddings, world-class golf, and corporate meetings. The campaign highlights the region's stunning beaches, exclusive resorts, and vibrant outdoor experiences, offering an irresistible invitation to discover paradise.

An ambitious out-of-home advertising strategy targets high-traffic markets such as Boston, New York City, and Chicago, with expansions into Columbus, Nashville, and Denver, to name a few. In Chicago, 54 strategically placed charging stations displayed stunning imagery of Florida's Paradise Coast for four weeks, generating an estimated one



The All is Perfect campaign showcases Florida's Paradise Coast's stunning beaches, enticing visitors in cold weather markets to start planning their next trip.

million impressions. Minneapolis saw immersive convention center takeovers, with skyway wraps and wallscapes near key event venues, maximizing visibility among business professionals and meeting attendees.

Powerful video content and digital banners amplified the campaign's reach, creating a cohesive experience across diverse platforms. Bold creative highlights both relaxation and upscale adventure, reinforcing Florida's Paradise Coast as the ultimate escape.

As fall and winter travel approaches, All is Perfect ensures Collier County remains top-of-mind. With captivating imagery, strategic market integration, and targeted media placements, Florida's Paradise Coast continues to stand out as the premier escape.



Florida's Paradise Coast's culinary scene takes center stage as part of the All is Perfect campaign's execution.

## Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Celebrates a Year of Winning!

2024 was a year of winning for Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach, which received numerous recognitions for its lifestyle, events, facilities, and natural setting throughout their hidden gem destination. Here is a list of accolades received in 2024:

- Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB won Silver Award for Pure Florida Advertising Campaign from North America Travel Journalists Association (NATJA).
- Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB won Bronze Award for best Destination Video from North America Travel Journalists Association (NATJA).
- Lorelei Spa & Salon, Sunseeker Resort-Charlotte Harbor ranked #2 spot for Top 100 Spas in North America.
- Signature Event of the Southeast awarded to Punta Gorda Air Show by Southeast Tourism Society.
- Signature Event of the Southeast awarded to Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens by Southeast Tourism Society.
- Aileron Golf Club, Sunseeker Resort's course, was named one of the Best Courses to Play in Southwest Florida by PGA of America.



The Lorelei Spa Room at Sunseeker Resort-Charlotte Harbor ranks #2 for the Top 100 Spas in North America.



Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Garden is a recipient of the STS Signature Event of the Southeast award and Bokun's Best Hidden Gem awards.

- Heritage Landing Golf & Country Club was named #11 of Top 50 U.S. Public Golf Courses in Golfers' Choice, by Golf Pass.
- Charlotte Sports Park won the USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice travel award contest for Best Spring Training Facility.
- Punta Gorda Airport was named the Best Local Airport in Florida by *Midwestern Traveler Magazine*.
- Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens named one of the World's Best Hidden Gems and The Best Hidden Gem in America by Bokun.
- National Register of Historic Places lists 17 Charlotte County properties.





## Visit Sarasota County Launches Transparency Webpage

Visit Sarasota County (VSC) strongly believes that transparency within the community is the foundation of trust, and by openly sharing operation, allocation of resources, and decision-making processes, relationships are strengthened with stakeholders, industry partners, and residents. In that spirit, VSC launched a new webpage, *VisitSarasotaCountyTransparency.com*, where information is housed to foster confidence and collaboration with all those the team serves.

On the landing page, visitors will find the organization's structure and core values as well as audits, financial accountability, and



Landing page for the new webpage launched on VSC's website promoting transparency

reports that dive deeper into the research collected throughout the most recent fiscal year.

"Our commitment to ethical practices and clear communication only further supports accountability in everything we do," said Erin Duggan, VSC president & CEO. "Illustrating responsible stewardship of funds and maintaining an open dialogue with the community only enhances the region's appeal to visitors. VSC is dedicated to the mission of promoting the community on the world stage and creating a vibrant Sarasota County through tourism. A mission that can be read about more in-depth on this new webpage."



A visual created of VSC's team values, which are represented and shared on the transparency webpage

# 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.



Lean more at [mediaone.digital](http://mediaone.digital)





## News Service of Florida Honors Three Discover Martin County Team Members

Over the past few months, The News Service of Florida recognized three of the Discover Martin team members. Nerissa Okiye was featured in the annual Above & Beyond Awards honoring trailblazing women in government and public service. Emily Dark was selected for the Florida Impact Awards highlighting her phenomenal work with the celebrated Explore Natural Martin ecotourism program. And Ian Centrone was recently named a 40 Under 40 honoree, spotlighting Florida's rising stars. [DiscoverMartin.com](http://DiscoverMartin.com)



The News Service of Florida is the state's most comprehensive and in-depth source of political and policy news and organizes a selection of recognition programs each year.

## Experience Kissimmee Hosts First Global Influencer FAM

The Experience Kissimmee public relations team hosted 14 content creators from six countries in their first Global Influencer FAM. The week-long itinerary featured a professional development day with industry experts, a thrilling day at Universal Orlando Resort, and a magical adventure at Walt Disney World Resort. The content creators stayed at the stunning Reunion Castle, a modern 15-bedroom retreat with Kissimmee's largest privately owned swimming pool. They also celebrated the Chinese New Year—the Year of the Snake—with special guests from Gatorland. [ExperienceKissimmee.com](http://ExperienceKissimmee.com)



Experience Kissimmee Public Relations team and content creators from around the world pose in the foyer of the Reunion Castle.

## Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Starts off Spring in the Driver's Seat!

Downtown St. Pete transitioned into a world-class speedway the first weekend of March as host to the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, the inaugural race of the 2025 NTT IndyCar Series. Cars zoomed along the Tampa Bay waterfront in front of more than 165,000 spectators, generating an estimated \$60 million in economic impact. The two-hour commercial for the Sunshine City aired internationally on Fox drawing 1.4 million viewers, making the race the most-watched non-Indy 500 IndyCar event in 15 years, since 2011. [VisitStPeteClearwater.com](http://VisitStPeteClearwater.com)



Visit St. Pete-Clearwater and America's Favorite Beaches were on display for the 2025 Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg.

## Driving Military Travel to Florida's Top Golf Destination

Florida's First Coast of Golf's recent military campaign promoting Northeast Florida golf destinations was a success, generating 17.3 million impressions. Featuring exclusive military deals from Amelia Island, Jacksonville, Clay County, St. Augustine, and Ponte Vedra, the campaign highlighted the region's experiences. A special Northeast Florida trip, hosted by VISIT FLORIDA, further showcased the area's offerings. This initiative reinforced their commitment to honoring military members while driving engagement and travel interest to these top golf destinations. [Florida-Golf.org](http://Florida-Golf.org)



Winners of the VISIT FLORIDA military promotion pose with their certificates.





## Black History on Florida's Historic Coast Gains National Recognition

Black history on Florida's Historic Coast is gaining national and international recognition, with media coverage reaching more than 215 million readers. Publications such as *MSN*, *Multicultural Travel News*, *My Africa News Online*, and *The London Free Press* have highlighted St. Augustine's deep African American heritage, including the first free Black settlement at Fort Mose. Through strategic outreach and visitor programs, the region continues to share its rich history with a global audience. [FloridasHistoricCoast.com](http://FloridasHistoricCoast.com)



Flight to Freedom at Fort Mose Historic State Park commemorates the legacy of the first free Black settlement in the U.S.

## Snowbirds Flock for Coffee and Donuts!

Mexico Beach Welcome Center hosted Coffee & Donuts, a snowbird appreciation event held every Friday in February, welcoming more than 160 visitors from places like Canada, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and beyond. Guests enjoyed fresh coffee, local donuts, and great company. "We wanted to thank those choosing Mexico Beach as their winter retreat," said Kimberly Shoaf, president of Mexico Beach CDC. "It was a wonderful way to connect with our visitors and help them plan their next trip back!" [MexicoBeach.com](http://MexicoBeach.com)



Mexico Beach Welcome Center hosts a snowbird appreciation Coffee & Donuts event.

## Clay County Tourism Promotes Scottish Games & Festival

Clay County Tourism partnered with the Northeast Florida Scottish Games & Festival to enhance visibility through a ticket giveaway, awarding 40 tickets with more than 2,200 entries. Celebrating 30 years of Scottish heritage, the festival featured thrilling athletic competitions, live music, and traditional food. The promotion boosted visitor turnout and strengthened community engagement, drawing attendees from across the region. With its success this year, organizers plan to expand the event, offering even more experiences next year. [ExploreClay.com](http://ExploreClay.com)

TICKET GIVEAWAY 🎟️ We're giving away 10 FOUR-PACKS of tickets to the 30th Annual Northeast Florida Scottish Games & Festival happening Saturday, February 22 at the Clay County Fairgrounds!... See more



Boost this post to get more reach for Clay County, FL Tourism. Boost You and 2.2K others 2.3K 143

Clay County Tourism offers free tickets to the 30<sup>th</sup> annual Northeast Florida Scottish Games & Festival.

## West Volusia Reels in Success With Tournament and TV Spotlight

West Volusia welcomed anglers from six states for the sixth annual Berkeley LaBaw Memorial Speckled Perch Tournament on the St. Johns River, Feb. 7-9. With 66 boats competing, locals Larry and Steve Durden clinched victory, hauling in 31.33 pounds. Top catches included 2.68- and 2.69-pound fish. A Kids Rodeo at Highland Park Fish Camp engaged 211 young anglers. Karl Kalonka of *Crappie Machine* filmed the action and fished with pros for his show's new season, airing April on The Sportsman Channel. [VisitWestVolusia.com](http://VisitWestVolusia.com)



Executive Director Georgia Turner and Marketing Manager Kristine Spence are pictured with the Durdens, Donnie McCormick, and Stephen LaBaw.



## Visit Lauderdale Invites Cold-Weather Travelers to 'Break Free'

Visit Lauderdale's new Break Free winter campaign invites cold-weather travelers to escape the chill and embrace the warmth of Greater Fort Lauderdale. Running across digital, social, and out-of-home platforms, the campaign concluded with a live activation Mar. 14-16 at Chicago's Pioneer Court, where visitors were immersed inside a tropical retreat. With stunning beaches, vibrant culture, and exciting new openings, Greater Fort Lauderdale is the ultimate destination to "Break Free" from winter and soak up the sun. [VisitLauderdale.com](http://VisitLauderdale.com)



Visit Lauderdale's winter campaign invites visitors in cold climates to visit sunny Greater Fort Lauderdale.

## Grapefruit League's First In-Ballpark Sensory Room Opens in Fort Myers

On the third base side of Lee Health Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium's main concourse, there's a new place for neurodivergent guests to the ballpark to find temporary respite. The Minnesota Twins, in partnership with Lee County, Lee Health's Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, and Family Initiative, Inc., created the Twins Sensory Room. This is the Grapefruit League's first in-ballpark sensory room. The room was open and staffed by a clinician for all 17 of the club's spring training home games. [VisitFortMyers.com](http://VisitFortMyers.com)



The new, state-of-the-art Twins Sensory Room provides a welcoming, compatible, and supportive environment for neurodivergent guests of all ages at each Minnesota Twins spring training home game in Fort Myers.

## Discover Crystal River Hosts FOX 35 Orlando's David Martin

Discover Crystal River (DCR) was thrilled to host FOX 35 Orlando's David Martin for two live segments. Highlighting the west side of Citrus County, including the fishing village of Homosassa, David visited Monkey Island Riverside Resort to dive into Manatee Season. On the east side in Inverness, David helped viewers discover the unique Elvis Presley history at the Historic Courthouse and explored the charming downtown area. FOX 35 helped reach a top drive market, and partners reported an immediate bump in visitation. [DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com](http://DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com)



FOX 35 Orlando segment on Elvis and the Historic Courthouse in Inverness

## Race Fans Descend Into Daytona Beach Area for Sold-Out DAYTONA 500

The eyes of sports world turned to the Daytona Beach area in mid-February as Daytona International Speedway hosted the 67<sup>th</sup> DAYTONA 500, the prestigious season-opening event for the NASCAR Cup Series and the pinnacle event to Speedweeks. The race played out in front of a sell-out crowd of more than 100,000 race fans, the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that the event has been sold out. The 2026 edition of the DAYTONA 500 is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 15. [DaytonaBeach.com](http://DaytonaBeach.com)



The world-renowned United States Air Force Thunderbirds fly over Daytona International Speedway as part of the National Anthem for the 67<sup>th</sup> DAYTONA 500 NASCAR Cup Series race. Photo: Daytona International Speedway





## Morning Show Host Celebrates Her Engagement on Amelia Island

Partnering with iHeartMedia and LiteFM New York, Amelia Island executed a multi-platform campaign featuring morning show host Christine Nagy to celebrate her recent engagement. The collab included pre-trip radio spots, building excitement among listeners. On island, Christine brought her audience along with real-time social updates. The campaign wrapped up with three weeks of on-air coverage highlighting her unforgettable experience. Christine's genuine enthusiasm gave LiteFM's audience a compelling reason to plan their own escape to her "bucket list" destination. [AmeliaIsland.com](http://AmeliaIsland.com)



Amelia Island Shines in LiteFM's Campaign with Christine Nagy.

## Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Goes to Washington D.C. for American Baseball Coaches Convention

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB partnered with DS Sports exhibiting at the American Baseball Coaches Convention in Washington, D.C. This annual event draws more than 8,000 baseball coaches from around the world to participate in continued education, industry networking, and a trade show. VCB representatives met with many amateur and college baseball coaches showcasing their Prospect Wire National Championship, Snowbird Baseball Classic, and the various assets the destination offers their teams and families. [PureFlorida.com](http://PureFlorida.com)



Justin Varitek, DS Sports; Brian Werner, Prospect Wire Baseball; Sean Walter, Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB; and Rob Sitz, DS Sports

## Visit Sarasota County Relaunches Professional Development Series

Visit Sarasota County's professional development program, Tourism U, has returned to help local hospitality leaders gain regional insights, grow their business, and strengthen connections around the county. VSC is committed to providing their partners with continuous value and opportunities for engagement, and the return of Tourism U is a direct result of feedback from local businesses. A semester's worth of content is already planned out, inviting experts for conversations covering a wide range of topics. [VisitSarasota.com](http://VisitSarasota.com)



Aaron Howard sets up for his Tourism U class on video storytelling and social media marketing.

## Visit Orlando Brings 'Orlando Sunshine' to NYC

Visit Orlando held its third annual Warm Up with Visit Orlando consumer activation at New York City's Winter Village at Bryant Park. The event attracted more than 32,000 New Yorkers to the Orlando Family Fun Day, where attendees captured memories in a "Sun Globe" and "Love Orlando" greenery wall and sipped hot chocolate. Participants also joined Visit Orlando for fun family games and a chance to win Orlando prizes and ice skate to an Orlando Playlist at the Orlando Skate Nights. [VisitOrlando.com](http://VisitOrlando.com)



Visit Orlando's third annual Warm Up with Visit Orlando consumer activation at New York City's Winter Village at Bryant Park



## Visit Florida Keys Presents Tourism Advocacy Summit

Visit Florida Keys presented its inaugural Tourism Advocacy Summit "Blossoming Possibilities" Feb. 25 at Tennessee Williams Theatre in Key West to more than 250 attendees including tourism professionals and community members, in support of The Keys' primary economic driver. It was hosted by Kara Franker, president/CEO of Visit Florida Keys, and included presentations from Destinations International's Don Welsh, CEO, and Jack Johnson, chief advocacy officer, and Brett Laiken, CMO of VISIT FLORIDA, as well as a lively discussion panel with Monroe County commissioners. [Fla-Keys.com](http://Fla-Keys.com)



The Visit Florida Keys team welcomed Destinations International executives Don Welsh and Jack Johnson, who provided inspiring presentations during the Tourism Advocacy Summit.

## Annual Tiger BBQ Kicks Off Spring Training for Visit Central Florida

Visit Central Florida hosted the 78<sup>th</sup> annual Tiger BBQ presented by Rodda Construction, Inc., on Feb. 20 at Publix Field at Joker Marchant Stadium, celebrating the return of Detroit Tigers Spring Training. More than 850 guests attended, including players across the Tigers system, coaches, front-office staff, corporate VIPs, and fans. The event connected the Lakeland and Polk County communities ahead of the Tigers' 89<sup>th</sup> Spring Training season in Lakeland, continuing a beloved local tradition. [VisitCentralFlorida.org](http://VisitCentralFlorida.org)



The annual Tiger BBQ is one of the signature events on the Visit Central Florida calendar each year. The event brings together players, coaches, and fans in a fun-filled environment before the beginning of Spring Training.

## Visit Tampa Bay Takes Over European Soccer Through Partnerships With German Bundesliga and English Premier League Clubs

Visit Tampa Bay partnered with FC St. Pauli of the German Bundesliga and the English Premier League's Brentford Football Club to host stadium takeover games in March. Visit Tampa Bay invited German media and tour operators to its St. Pauli takeover, which included VTB field-side advertising boards and branded taxis swarming stadium exits. Visit Tampa Bay was visible throughout Gtech Community Stadium during its Brentford takeover. VTB hosted a competition to win a Tampa vacation, and Brentford players' artwork—created at London Art Fair 2025—was auctioned off for charity. [VisitTampaBay.com](http://VisitTampaBay.com)



A commemorative sticker highlighting Visit Tampa Bay's partnership with FC St. Pauli of the German Bundesliga can be seen on a railing inside Millerntor Stadium in Hamburg, Germany prior to St. Pauli's match Mar. 1 vs. Borussia Dortmund during VTB's Partner of the Day takeover game.

## Discover Lake County Attends Michigan Golf Show

Discover Lake County attended the Michigan Golf Show, promoting the region as a premier golf destination alongside Florida4Golf. The event provided an excellent opportunity to showcase Lake County's top-tier golf courses, year-round play, and scenic landscapes to northern golfers seeking a winter escape. [DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com](http://DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com)



Map of Florida at the Michigan Golf Show





## Jax Ale Trail 10-Year Anniversary Celebration Begins

Visit Jacksonville recently launched new branding for the Jax Ale Trail in celebration of its 10-year anniversary. The refreshed logo and color scheme also includes two beer-themed mascots. Shortly after the brand launch, a bracket style voting competition kicked off for the public to select Jacksonville's favorite brewery from the 26 that are currently on the trail. The results will be announced on Apr. 7, National Beer Day. [VisitJacksonville.com](http://VisitJacksonville.com)



## Bradenton Area Hosts British Journalist Simon Calder

In January, the Bradenton Area hosted esteemed British journalist Simon Calder as part of a campaign aimed to showcase the area's incredible post-hurricane resilience and highlight the destination to the UK and Ireland market through video and online editorial in partnership with *The Independent* newspaper. From The Bishop Museum's manatee rehabilitation to historic Cortez Fishing Village, wildlife encounters with dolphins to sunset dining on Anna Maria Island, the content captured the essence of the destination, and the campaign's performance exceeded all KPIs. [BradentonGulfIslands.com](http://BradentonGulfIslands.com)



Simon Calder enjoys time on the white, sandy beaches of Anna Maria Island. Photo: Courtesy of Bradenton Area Tourism Bureau

## MIA Announces Record Growth in 2024

Miami International Airport (MIA) celebrated a milestone 2024 with nearly 56 million passengers and record-breaking cargo growth, while making significant progress on MIA's \$9 billion Future-Ready Modernization in Action Plan that underscores operational efficiency and elevating the customer experience. MIA is America's second busiest airport for international passengers, and the leading economic engine for Miami-Dade County and the state, generating revenue of \$118 billion and approximately 60% of all international visitors to Florida annually. [MiamiandMiamiBeach.com](http://MiamiandMiamiBeach.com)



Miami International Airport celebrates record growth in 2024.

## Palm Beach Announces Record-Breaking 2024 Visitation Numbers

Discover The Palm Beaches (DTPB), the tourism marketing organization for Palm Beach County, announced record-breaking 2024 visitation numbers. With 9.9 million visitors to the destination, it was a 4.6% increase from 2023. "This achievement underscores the effectiveness of our strategic destination promotion efforts and the invaluable collaboration with our sister tourist development council agencies," said Milton Segarra, DTPB's president & CEO. [ThePalmBeaches.com](http://ThePalmBeaches.com)



The Palm Beaches' Coral Cove Park in Jupiter Photo: Captain Kimo



## Visit Panama City Beach Hosts 2025 Rendezvous South Conference

In February, Visit Panama City Beach had the honor of hosting the 2025 Rendezvous South Conference. As a premier destination for meetings and events, Panama City Beach offered a unique blend of business-friendly venues and breathtaking views. The world-class accommodations, versatile meeting spaces, and exceptional hospitality make Panama City Beach an ideal choice for small gatherings of any kind. Meeting planners and attendees enjoyed not only productive sessions, but also opportunities to dine on fresh seafood and explore 27 miles of stunning white sand beaches. [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com)



The 2025 Rendezvous South Conference comes to Panama City Beach.

## Destination Panama City Promotes Local Businesses With Spring Break Deals

Destination Panama City has launched a Spring Break Deals campaign to highlight local businesses. This initiative promotes exclusive offers from participating partners, including dining, shopping, and outdoor experiences, encouraging spring travelers to explore the city's unique offerings. By featuring these deals across digital platforms and visitor communications, the campaign aims to extend visitor stays and support local tourism partners during the busy spring season. [DestinationPanamaCity.com](http://DestinationPanamaCity.com)



The Spring Break Deals campaign encourages visitors to explore and support local businesses in Panama City.

## SS United States to Become World's Largest Artificial Reef

In early March, the historic SS United States arrived in Mobile, Alabama, preparing to be sunk off Destin-Fort Walton Beach to become the world's largest artificial reef. Over the next year, crews, in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Protection and EPA, will remove metal, wiring, and fuel, cut holes for it to land upright, and create passages for marine life. This will support species like grouper, snapper, mackerel, and tuna, benefiting divers and the fishing industry. [DestinFWB.com](http://DestinFWB.com)



The SS United States arrives in Mobile, Alabama, where preparations are underway for its eventual sinking off the coast of Destin-Fort Walton Beach in the near future.

## German Travel Agents Visit Florida's Space Coast

The Space Coast Office of Tourism recently hosted 14 travel agents from DERTOUR Group, the second-largest tour operator in Germany and one of Europe's leading travel groups. This FAM trip was part of their Campus Live agent training events. They enjoyed visiting the American Space Museum, US Space Walk of Fame, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Canaveral National Seashore, Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, and Brevard Zoo, and conducted site visits at three Space Coast hotels. [VisitSpaceCoast.com](http://VisitSpaceCoast.com)



DERTOUR travel agents at Canaveral National Seashore





## Franklin County TDC Launches Redesigned Interactive Mobile App

The Franklin County Tourism Development Council TDC recently unveiled the redesigned Forgotten Coast mobile app on [FloridasForgottenCoast.com](http://FloridasForgottenCoast.com) with upgrades including integrated mobile maps, an interactive way to plan out everything visitors don't want to miss in the area. Designed with partners at Visit Widget, this tool provides a new way to explore what Florida's Forgotten Coast has to offer, including hotels, popular restaurants, activities, shopping, events and more. App users can view it all at once or search by categories. [FloridasForgottenCoast.com](http://FloridasForgottenCoast.com)



The Forgotten Coast mobile app is available for download at the Apple and Google app stores.

## Diverse, Distinct, and Delicious – Alachua County Restaurants Receive National Attention on Food Network's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*

Alachua County restaurants will be featured on *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*, bringing national attention to the area's standout dining scene. Six local favorites, including Fehrenbacher's Meats & Eats and Uppercrust Bakery, began appearing Mar. 14 on Food Network and will air through April. As the official Film Commission of Alachua County, Visit Gainesville, Alachua County assisted with destination logistics. The exposure is expected to boost local businesses, attract visitors, and highlight Alachua County's growing reputation for culinary and film productions. [VisitGainesville.com](http://VisitGainesville.com)



Uppercrust Bakery, one of six Alachua County restaurants featured on *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*. Also featured: Bingo Deli & Pub, Fehrenbacher's Meats & Eats, Germain's Chicken Sandwiches, Humble Wood Fire Bagel Shop, and The Paper Bag Deli.  
Photo: Courtesy of Uppercrust Bakery

### 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>

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## Inside This Edition of Tourism Marketing Today

4



**Visit Tampa Bay's  
Janette Carter Baker Named a  
Top 25 Extraordinary Mind..... 4**

**Florida Trails & Trail Towns Highlighted  
in New VISIT FLORIDA Campaign ...10**

**Black History on Florida's Historic Coast  
Gains National Recognition ..... 17**

**Race Fans Descend Into Daytona Beach  
Area for Sold-Out DAYTONA 500....18**

18



10



17

