

TourismMarketing Today

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



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Columbia County TDC Welcomes Executive Director Cody A. Gray



Cody A. Gray

The Columbia County TDC welcomes Cody A. Gray as its new executive director. Gray begins his service to Columbia County on Mar. 4. He

returns to Lake City following his tenure as president and CEO of Louisiana's Cajun Bayou Tourism in Lafourche Parish, La. He brings extensive experience and a proven track record of leadership within the tourism industry. During his nearly six years in Lafourche Parish, Gray guided the organization and destination through significant tourism growth while navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of Hurricane Ida.

Gray serves in several leadership roles within the tourism industry, including treasurer of the Southeast Tourism Society and as a member of the Destinations International Small Destination Marketing Organization Task Force. He recently completed service on the Louisiana Travel Association Board of Directors and as chair of the Louisiana CVB Committee.

With more than a decade of experience in the tourism industry, Gray began his career at the Columbia County TDC. During his previous time in Lake City, he also worked for Lake City Hotels, Inc., and was actively involved in local events and nonprofit organizations throughout the community.

COLUMBIA COUNTY continues on pg. 3

Local Events Drive Visitation

by Robert Skrob



This year, Kory and I had the privilege of serving as race directors for the Bank of America Tallahassee Marathon and

Half Marathon that welcomed a record 2,572 runners from 34 states and 40 Florida counties. More than 300 volunteers and an outstanding group of partners made the weekend run smoothly, although our lives were crazy for several days before and after.

Tallahassee residents lined the course, cheered in neighborhoods, and created

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

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"I am thrilled to launch this new chapter in my career and return to my roots in Lake City," said Gray. "Columbia County has grown so much over the recent years and is poised for even greater expansion. My goals for my first 12 months are fairly straightforward. There will be a great deal of listening and learning throughout the coming year. This transition presents an excellent opportunity to assess the TDC's strengths and challenges while gaining deeper insight from our staff, council, county officials, and tourism partners."

Gray cites major projects, such as the 500-acre sports park, as critical to the expansion of Columbia County's tourism economy. "These projects reflect the dedication and hard work of many leaders who came before me and invested

significant time and effort into their development, Gray said. "I want to ensure that we continue moving these initiatives forward together."

Having lived and worked in Lake City, Gray is well acquainted with all the area has to offer visitors and residents. "I love the outdoors and enjoy kayaking, fishing, and exploring nature," he said. "Lake City also offers wonderful shopping and fun festivals and events. After six years in Lafourche Parish, deep in Cajun Country, I have developed a true appreciation for great food. Fortunately, Lake City is home to many outstanding locally owned restaurants, including Marion Street, Phish Tales, and Shirley's."

Gray says that living in New Orleans was a magical experience that shaped who he is today. "I am a



Cody A. Gray paddle boards down the Itchetucknee River in Columbia County, Florida.

member of the Krewe of Alla in New Orleans, one of the city's oldest Mardi Gras krewes," he said. "In 2024, I was honored to serve as a duke on the royal court. Riding in a Mardi Gras parade is an experience I encourage everyone to enjoy at least once in their lifetime."

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA

TourismMarketing Today

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Robert Skrob,
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 Member Database

On the Cover

Cody A. Gray, executive director of the Columbia County TDC as of Mar. 4, enjoys one of his favorite pastimes, kayaking. He's pictured here at Bayou Lafourche in Thibodaux, Louisiana. These days you're more likely to find him at one of the many beautiful water venues in Columbia County, Florida. Learn more about your new colleague on page 1.

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

an atmosphere many runners called the best they had ever experienced. Add in perfect running weather, and the day felt special from beginning to end.

The race expo at the Dunlap Champions Club set the tone. The space allowed us to welcome runners in a relaxed environment that felt more like a gathering place than a transaction.

Thank you to Visit Tallahassee Sports for the energy and the World Cross Country giveaways that participants loved.

Local events like this drive visitation. They support businesses. And they remind us that our residents are one of Florida's greatest strengths.



Race directors Kory and Robert Skrob at the Bank of America Tallahassee Marathon and Half Marathon
 Photo: Lorraine Ausley



KARSH HAGAN

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Pensacola & St. Augustine Unite for America's 250th, Launch From the 1500s, With Love Campaign

Visit Pensacola and Florida's Historic Coast (St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches) launched From the 1500s, With Love, a first-of-its-kind partnership connecting America's first multi-year European settlement (Pensacola, 1559) and the nation's oldest continuously occupied city (St. Augustine, 1565). Developed for America's 250th, the collaborative campaign includes co-branded landing pages, shared itineraries, digital storytelling, and cross-promotional content designed to drive regional road trips and strengthen statewide heritage tourism positioning. VisitPensacola.com; FloridasHistoricCoast.com



Pensacola (est. 1559) and St. Augustine (est. 1565) unite for the From the 1500s, With Love campaign in advance of America's 250th.



In the News

Lee County VCB Promotes Natalie Duran to Director of Sales

Lee County VCB is pleased to announce Natalie Duran as its new director of sales. She brings more than 10 years of sales experience, most recently serving as portfolio resource director of sales with Aimbridge Hospitality. She previously served as sales coordinator for the VCB, beginning in 2024. She brings a strong track record of building partnerships that drive group business and destination awareness. In her new role, she will lead the VCB's sales team, expanding meetings and group opportunities, strengthening relationships with planners, and advancing revenue-generating initiatives that support sustained tourism growth for Lee County. VisitFortMyers.com



Natalie Duran

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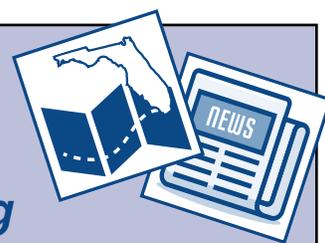
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Want to See Your DMO's News in *Tourism Marketing Today*?



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

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA

Destination Marketing Summit

May 13-15, 2026

Bradenton Area Convention Center – Palmetto, Florida



Meeting Location: The Bradenton Area Convention Center

1 Haben Blvd., Palmetto, FL 34221 | (941) 722-3244

Hotel Accommodations:

The Palmetto Marriott Resort & Spa is offering a special rate for Destinations Florida meeting participants of \$199 per night. Please visit <https://bit.ly/DF26SUMMIT> or call (941) 304-3115 and reference the Destinations Florida Marketing Summit. Reservations must be made by **Wednesday, April 29, 2026**. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room block will sell out.

Palmetto Marriott Resort & Spa

600 U.S. Hwy. 41
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SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM | Board of Directors Meeting and Working Lunch |
| 2:00 PM – 2:45 PM | The Delicate Dance of Destination Stewardship: Where Residents and Tourism Can Thrive Together |
| 2:45 PM – 3:30 PM | Evolution of the DMO: Advanced Destination Promotion and Sustainability |
| 3:45 PM – 5:30 PM | Destination Marketing State of the State Report |
| 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM | Welcome Reception |
| 6:30 PM | Dinner on own |

Thursday, May 14, 2026

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8:00 AM – 9:00 AM | Networking Breakfast | |
| 9:00 AM – 9:45 AM | On Your Mark, Get Set...! Accessibility Is Like a Race Without a Finish Line, But There Are Many Starting Lines | Proof and Performance: Turning Attributed Visitation Into Economic Value and Strategic Advantage |
| 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM | Data Sharing That Connects | Portrait of Family Travel: Autism, ADHD, and Neurodiversity |
| 11:00 AM – 11:45 AM | Work Smarter: How AI Automations Are Transforming Workflows for Small Team | How to Attract the Luxury Traveler (Even if You're Not a Luxury Destination) |
| 11:45 AM – 1:00 PM | Networking Luncheon Legislative Update With Mat Forrest | |
| 1:00 PM – 1:45 PM | Soul of Surf 2.0: Catching the Next Wave | Brand Storytelling in the Experience Economy |
| 2:00 PM – 2:45 PM | Evolving Partnership Models: Strengthening Community and Industry Success | Iron Chef: DMO Style: "Secret Ingredient Spotlight" |
| 3:00 PM – 3:45 PM | From Home Town Takeover to Destination Transformation: How a Culture of Collaboration Rebuilt a Tourism Ecosystem | 25 Irrefutable Truths About AI for Destination Marketing |
| 5:00 PM – 8:30 PM | Connect Evening Event | Connect |

Friday, May 15, 2026

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 8:00 AM – 9:00 AM | Networking Breakfast | |
| 9:00 AM – 9:45 AM | Building a Destination Research and Data Ecosystem: How Ocala/Marion County Turns Data Into Decisions | |
| 9:45 AM – 10:30 AM | Florida's Air-Mobility Future: What DMOs Need to Know to Attract Tomorrow's Travelers | |
| 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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“Two-Penny” Referendum?

by Steven M. Hogan

In 2023, the Legislature updated the Tourist Development Tax statute to generally require a referendum for imposing new “pennies” of TDT on hotel charges. By “penny,” we mean that each “penny” represents 1% of the TDT that can be levied under section 125.0104, Florida Statutes (the TDT statute).

We recently received a question about whether a separate referendum is required for each “penny” in the event that a county wants to impose more than one new penny in a given year.



A fair reading of the TDT statute is that the referendum provisions in section 125.0104(6) do not prohibit a referendum to approve an ordinance that raises the TDT by more than one “penny.”
Photo designed by Freepik.com

A fair reading of the TDT statute is that the referendum provisions in section 125.0104(6) do not prohibit a referendum to approve an ordinance that raises the TDT by more than one “penny” (for example, a 2% increase rather than a 1% increase), so long as the other statutory procedures are complied with.



Steven M. Hogan

Of course, your county should seek specific legal advice before making decisions on how to approach a referendum.

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

Discover Crystal River's *Discover* Magazine Showcases Citrus County Attractions

On Jan. 28, Auvis Cole, executive director of Discover Crystal River, unveiled—at a Hollywood-style, red-carpet Partners in Tourism extravaganza—the three covers for the destination's 2026 issues of *Discover* magazine. The 13th edition for the publication, the magazine showcases all there is to see, do, and experience in the area, and is distributed to visitors at Welcome Centers, consumer shows, special events, and more.

The Citrus County Partners in Tourism (PIT) Magazine Release Affair was an evening that celebrated far more than the return of a publication; it highlighted the importance of tourism and the vital role it plays in Citrus County's economy, community, and identity.

The event marked the official relaunch of *Discover* magazine, a beloved tourism publication that was discontinued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its return is the result of months of hard work,

collaboration, and dedication by the Discover Crystal River and Citrus County Tourism team, who were determined to bring the magazine back stronger and more representative than ever before.

More than 125 attendees gathered for the celebration, including elected officials, tourism stakeholders, community leaders, business partners, and local residents. The evening served as both a celebration of progress and a renewed commitment to promoting everything Citrus County has to offer.

This year's relaunch debuted in a bold and innovative way with the unveiling of three distinct magazine covers. Together, the three covers reflect the depth, variety, and character of Citrus County, showcasing its wildlife, waterways, historic towns, and outdoor experiences.



Discover Crystal River Executive Director Auvis Cole addresses attendees of the Citrus County Partners in Tourism Magazine Release Affair.



The 13th edition covers of *Discover* magazine



Florida's Adventure Coast Builds Momentum, Reporting Strong, Sustainable Tourism Growth

Florida's Adventure Coast continues to build strong momentum, driven by impactful marketing, strategic partnerships, and a shared commitment to responsible destination growth. This year, the Tourism Department achieved record Tourist Development Tax collections, increasing 32.3% to more than \$3.1M, reflecting sustained traveler demand and growing confidence in the destination. Lodging performance remained strong, with hotel ADR reaching \$149 and revenue climbing to \$18.1M, while vacation rental revenue surged 24% to \$39M with ADR reaching \$258, highlighting a diverse and sustainable visitor base.



WFLA meteorologist Zuleika Soler reports from Weeki Wachee Springs State Park.

Storytelling remains central to marketing efforts. The team produced 98 promotional videos, generated more than 5M social media views, and supported numerous live broadcasts with local affiliate media partners to showcase experiences and promote visitation. Website sessions and views increased by approximately 46%, demonstrating how integrated digital and broadcast campaigns continue to inspire travelers to explore the destination.

Strategic partnerships elevated visibility on national and international stages through media collaborations, influencer

engagement, and expanded coverage that strengthened brand awareness among key travel audiences. Authentic, place-based experiences, signature events, and trail expansions continue creating memorable moments for visitors and residents.

"Florida's Adventure Coast is committed to sustainable tourism growth that benefits our communities, visitors, and local businesses," said Tammy Heon, tourism manager. "We are proud to share authentic experiences while preserving the natural beauty that defines our destination."



Harley Belcher participates in a live broadcast with FOX 13 Good Day Tampa Bay.

New Sand, Who Dis?

This past fall, Pinellas County set forth on the largest beach nourishment project in county history, placing more than 2.5M cubic yards of sugar-white sand—enough to fill The Dali Museum more than 40 times—on beaches that span eight municipalities, including Clearwater's Sand Key, Belleair Beach, Indian Rocks Beach, Indian Shores, Redington Shores, North Redington Beach,



The largest beach nourishment in Pinellas County history was funded through the Tourist Development Tax.

Treasure Island, and St. Pete Beach. In most areas, the beach size doubled, and in some areas the beaches now span more than 100 yards in depth.

Elected officials, chambers of commerce, and local leaders celebrated the completion of the project this February by placing the final grains of sand the only way they know how—with some good old-fashioned beach

buckets! The nourishment wrapped up just in time for St. Pete-Clearwater to welcome millions of visitors for the spring and summer seasons, who now get to experience the bigger, brighter and wider version of America's Favorite Beaches. It's also a win for the residents of Pinellas County who get to experience award-winning beaches in their backyard and benefit from the direct spend and tax dollars associated with the millions of visitors who come from around the world to experience this slice of paradise.



Pinellas County officials commemorate the completion of the county's largest beach nourishment project by placing the final bit of sand onto Treasure Island's Sunset Beach.



Global Fans, Local Impact: Visit Tampa Bay Leverages the Beautiful Game to Inspire Travel

Visit Tampa Bay continues leveraging the global passion for sports to inspire visitation to Hillsborough County through strategic, values-driven partnerships at home and abroad. These sponsorships connect Tampa Bay with passionate fan bases while showcasing the destination's culture, accessibility, and year-round experiences.

Internationally, Visit Tampa Bay is the North American Destination Partner of Brentford FC for a third consecutive English Premier League season and a Kapitän-level partner of German Bundesliga club FC St. Pauli, aligning with organizations that

share their commitment to community and authenticity. These partnerships feature match-day takeovers, fan sweepstakes, creative content, and charitable initiatives that spotlight Tampa Bay's sunshine, swashbuckling heritage, and vibrant neighborhoods.

Domestically, Visit Tampa Bay launched an Official Tourism Partnership with New York City FC in 2026, activating during the club's preseason in Tampa Bay and throughout the MLS season via digital, in-stadium, and fan-facing promotions. Visit Tampa Bay also supports Tampa Bay Sun FC, the Tampa Bay Rowdies, and all local major professional franchises, using sport as a powerful storytelling platform to inspire travel.

"Our domestic and international soccer partnerships have allowed Visit Tampa Bay to share our story and our treasure with passionate fans around the world in an authentic and meaningful way," said Santiago C. Corrada, president and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay.



Visit Tampa Bay signage can be seen throughout Brentford FC's Gtech Community Stadium, including on pitch-side boards and as part of a halftime Tampa Bay-themed Treasure Hunt, during the DMO's Tampa Takeover Game on Mar. 8, 2025.



New York City FC forward Talles Magno basks in the Tampa Bay sunshine as the team conducts its 2026 preseason training in Tampa at the Waters Sportsplex, the primary training facility of the Tampa Bay Rowdies.

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Key West Hosts Lilly Pulitzer Events for Media, Influencers

Lilly Pulitzer fashions arrived with a colorful splash in Key West where the designer first found inspiration in the 1960s. Events at Casa Marina Resort included a spring 2026 collection fashion show, influencers arriving by seaplane as Lilly often did, and the debut of “Stay Like Lilly” suites. Media experienced a dinner hosted by The Hemingway Home & Museum and area excursions hosted by Visit Florida Keys. VisitFloridaKeys.com



The Key West Lilly Pulitzer campaign reached 6.4M followers with 45.7K engagement actions.

Rolex 24 At Daytona Sets New Attendance Record

The 64th anniversary of the Rolex 24 At Daytona, the world-renowned sports car event at Daytona International Speedway that produces thrilling racing with an international field of drivers and cars, set a new attendance record. The massive crowd packed the infield and stands to witness the thrilling racing and enjoy all the activities surrounding the twice-around-the clock challenge that was won for the third straight year by the No. 7 Penske Porsche. DaytonaBeach.com



While an exact attendance total wasn't released, Daytona International Speedway announced that this year's Rolex 24 At Daytona set a new attendance record for the sports car race that was first held in 1962.

Photo: Daytona International Speedway

'Never Lose Your Splash' in Greater Fort Lauderdale

Visit Lauderdale unveiled Never Lose Your Splash, a bold global brand campaign celebrating Greater Fort Lauderdale's water-shaped identity, vibrant energy, and welcoming spirit. The campaign inspires travelers to reconnect with what makes them feel alive—sunshine, beaches, and 300 miles of inland waterways—through authentic experiences from waterfront dining to local culture. Debuting on CNN's New Year's Eve Live, this fresh storytelling push targets both new and returning visitors seeking spontaneous, joy-filled getaways. VisitLauderdale.com



Visitors enjoy an inland waterway in Greater Fort Lauderdale.

Florida's Adventure Coast Hosts Live TV Remote Broadcast

Florida's Adventure Coast, Brooksville-Weeki Wachee, recently hosted a live television remote with Good Day Tampa Bay's Charley Belcher of FOX 13, broadcasting from downtown Brooksville to spotlight the 2nd annual Tangerine Festival. The segment highlighted local culture, family-friendly activities, and seasonal citrus heritage. Tammy Heon, manager of tourism, shared, “This festival celebrates our agricultural roots while inviting visitors to experience our welcoming community and vibrant downtown.” The live feature expanded regional awareness and encouraged attendance across Florida. FloridasAdventureCoast.com



Charley Belcher interviews Ms. Teen Tangerine 2025, Snow Anna, along with Peggy Bell, owner of Main Street Eatery.



January Sports Events Draw Nearly 11,000 Attendees to Orlando North

Orlando North, Seminole County launched 2026 with four major youth and amateur sporting events in January alone, hosting ECNL Boys, ECNL Girls, NFHCA Field Hockey, and MLS NEXT. Across multiple weekends, 640 teams and nearly 11,000 attendees competed at Boombah Sports Complex, Sylvan Lake Park, and Seminole Soccer Complex during one of the destination's busiest months for sports tourism. DoOrlandoNorth.com



ECNL Girls competition gets underway during January 2026 youth soccer events at Boombah Sports Complex in Orlando North, Seminole County.

Spartan Race Draws 9,000+ Attendees to Lake Placid, Fla.

Spartan Race's Central Florida Trifecta Weekend marked its fifth year in Lake Placid, Fla., in December, welcoming 9,000+ attendees, 96% of whom traveled from out-of-market. In January, The Highlands County TDC approved an additional five years of grant funding to secure the race's return to the Sebring region through 2030. This long-term partnership builds on the area's endurance racing legacy while delivering consistent overnight stays and meaningful economic impact year after year. VisitSebring.com



Mud, marsh, and miles of rugged terrain define Spartan's Central Florida course in Lake Placid.

Greater Miami CVB Helps Meet Demand for Eco-Friendly Accommodations

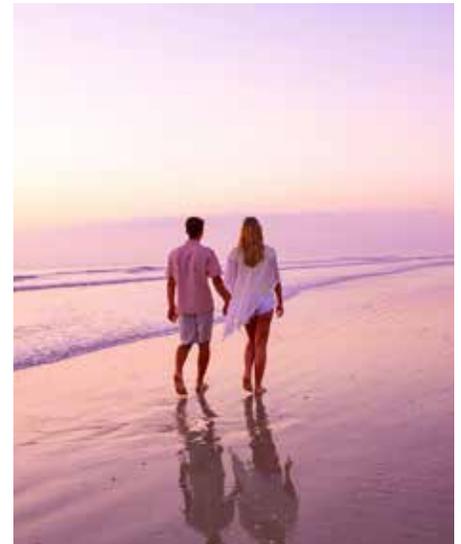
1 Hotel South Beach has earned a 5 Green Key rating from Green Key Global, making it one of only two properties in South Florida to achieve the program's highest distinction for environmental and social responsibility. As demand for eco-friendly accommodations grows, the Greater Miami CVB supports partners with a 50% rebate on Green Key certification fees, plus added visibility on major booking platforms, the GMCVB website, and through targeted sales outreach. MiamiandMiamiBeach.com



1 Hotel South Beach (GMCVBGreenKey.com)

New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau Wins Magellan Award

The New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau is a recipient of the esteemed Magellan Award, which honors excellence in travel industry design, marketing, and service. They are grateful for their partnership with TravelSpike, whose innovative digital advertising platform helped bring this vision to life. TravelSpike's deep understanding of the travel and hospitality industry—including booking behavior and seasonality—played a key role in the campaign's success. VisitNSBFL.com



New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau wins a Silver Magellan Award for their "Relax Already" 2024-25 Integrated Digital Marketing Campaign.



Experience Kissimmee Shines at Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter, Announces Hosting Plans for 2027

Experience Kissimmee participated in this year's Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter, completing three days of appointments and networking with partners and media. The organization also sponsored the Wednesday Networking Lunch, where it announced it will serve as the host destination for Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter 2027 at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center. This opportunity will bring the global travel trade together and showcase Kissimmee as a top meetings and events destination. ExperienceKissimmee.com



President & CEO DT Minich of Experience Kissimmee, President & CEO Bryan Griffin of VISIT FLORIDA, and Bryan's wife, Lindsay, at the Experience Kissimmee event hosted at Jaleo by José Andrés in Disney Springs

Everyone Loves Pie ...

Especially on National Pie Day! The Visit St. Pete-Clearwater team was on hand to congratulate the St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport on their sweet success in 2025 when they welcomed a record 2.7M passengers! The Visit St. Pete-Clearwater team appreciates the hard work of the entire airport staff in creating a great experience for the millions of visitors who fly to America's Favorite Beaches! VisitStPeteClearwater.com



VisitSPC President/CEO Brian Lowack and staff join PIE Airport Interim Director Mark Sprague and Clearwater Mayor Bruce Rector to celebrate a successful 2025.

How Visit Orlando Leveraged the NBA Global Games to Tell Orlando's Story

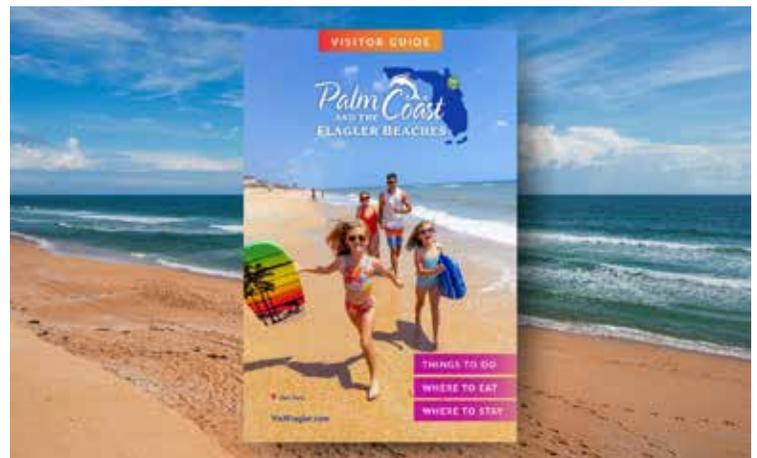
Visit Orlando and the Orlando Magic teamed up for a dynamic showing at the NBA Global Games in Berlin and London, spotlighting Orlando on one of basketball's largest international stages. As presenting sponsor of Magic Kiez in Berlin, Visit Orlando's SunGlobe experience welcomed more than 3,170 guests. The partnership also included a Berlin travel trade training for 50 industry representatives. Digital billboard and transit advertising around the Uber Arena and O2 Arena generated an estimated 1.4M impressions in Berlin and 1.67M in London, featuring market-relevant players with the headline "Come play where the Orlando Magic play." VisitOrlando.org



Visit Orlando's SunGlobe experience

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches Launches New Visitor Guide, Destination Brochures

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches recently launched a brand-new visitor guide as well as new dining and trailhead brochures. The 40-page visitor guide highlights the destination's unique attractions, beaches, and includes several "Meet a Local" features. The dining brochure spotlights locally owned eateries, categorized by key regions in the destination. Pocket-sized for cyclists and hikers, the trailhead guide provides information on the top access points, a map, trail illustrations, and includes details such as length and connectivity, rest rooms, and more. VisitFlagler.com



Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches launched its new destination collateral including a visitor guide and dining and trail brochures.



RussMatt and Chain of Lakes Park Highlight Baseball's Return to Polk County in 2026

The smell of freshly cut grass and the crack of the bat signal one thing—it's baseball season. In Polk County, that means the nation's largest amateur Spring Training event, the RussMatt Collegiate Invitational, returns to Central Florida for its 16th year. More than 400 teams will compete at Lake Myrtle Sports Park, Northeast Regional Park, and other county venues, including newly renovated Chain of Lakes Park in Winter Haven, hosting RussMatt games for the first time. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Baseball programs from all over the United States—like these two shown from Greenville College in Illinois and Beloit College in Wisconsin—come to Central Florida's Polk County to take part in the RussMatt Collegiate Invitational, the largest event of its kind in America.

Florida's Paradise Coast Draws Car Lovers From Around the World

Florida's Paradise Coast is a place where a shared passion for automotive perfection meets the pavement. Where the car culture is like nothing you have seen before. Each February, Cars on 5th brings more than 700 rare and exotic vehicles to downtown Naples. The ultimate in luxury car experiences sparked a tourism campaign featuring auto collector interviews, state-of-the-art showrooms, photo-worthy routes to make every drive unforgettable, plus downloadable automotive paradise posters incentivizing consumer newsletter enrollment. ParadiseCoast.com



Cars on 5th draws 700+ luxury and exotic cars and crowds of enthusiasts to Naples.

Visit Jacksonville Introduces Two New Surfing Campaigns

Building on the successful Soul of Surf campaign, Visit Jacksonville introduces Sea Gals and Board Stories. Sea Gals highlights three influential female surfers fostering community and mentorship. Board Stories explores the personal narratives behind the gear, featuring the Sea Gals alongside championship-winning brothers and a world record holder. Together, these series celebrate the soul of Jacksonville, their surf community. VisitJacksonville.com



Sea Gals filming takes place on Jacksonville Beach.

Celebrating America on the Space Coast

Florida's Space Coast is commemorating America's 250th with a gamified trail highlighting the area's many historic sites. Participants who visit five or more locations will receive a limited-edition America250 mission patch (while supplies last). Additionally, the Space Coast Office of Tourism's America250 webpage showcases the Space Coast's role in American history, community stories, and their space legacy. The page serves as a central hub for America250-related content and connects residents and visitors to area events, programs, and celebrations throughout the region. VisitSpaceCoast.com



Space Coast Office of Tourism's America250 Trail patch



Gulf County Builds Loyalty With Annual Welcome Back Reception

Gulf County Tourism recently hosted its annual Welcome Back Reception, bringing together nearly 100 seasonal visitors and local partners along the Gulf of America. The event reconnects winter residents with area businesses, parks, and upcoming initiatives. "Our winter guests are part of our community," said Blake Rish, executive director of the Gulf County TDC. "Staying connected strengthens relationships, encourages repeat visitation, and supports local businesses year-round." The program serves as a simple, repeatable touch point that builds long-term loyalty. VisitGulf.com



Attendees gather for Gulf County's Welcome Back Reception, an annual winter event designed to reconnect seasonal visitors with local businesses, tourism partners, and community updates.

Premier League Mornings Live Fan Festival Brings International Soccer Spotlight to Tampa Bay

Visit Tampa Bay and the Tampa Bay Sports Commission are partnering with the English Premier League and NBC Sports to host the 12th Premier League Mornings Live Fan Festival at Tampa's Armature Works, Apr. 18–19. The free, two-day event will feature live match broadcasts, on-site studio programming, club legends, and the Premier League Trophy, drawing passionate fans from across the country. The collaboration further positions Tampa Bay as a world-class sports destination while leveraging global media exposure to drive visitation. VisitTampaBay.com



Downtown Tampa's Armature Works will be transformed into the epicenter of Premier League soccer Apr. 18–19 with the Premier League Mornings Live Fan Festival, where fans can experience live match-day excitement, cheer with fellow supporters, and celebrate the beautiful game like never before.

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>





Visit Sarasota County Talks Tourism With Local High School Students

Visit Sarasota County partnered with the Venice Area Chamber and a local high school to introduce more than 400 students to the jobs and careers available in the hospitality and tourism industries. During the “Real World” program, multiple representatives from VSC were able to share that a wide array of departments work together in the tourism space and they are each vital in the tourism field. VisitSarasota.com



Visit Sarasota County representatives speak to high school juniors and seniors about career paths in tourism and hospitality.

Culinary Campaign Spotlights Nine Independent Restaurants in Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach

Pure Florida Flavor Coast is a new culinary campaign spotlighting nine independently owned restaurants. Participants in the campaign will meet the chefs and founders, explore curated foodie itineraries, and go behind the scenes to discover what makes each restaurant special—from locally sourced ingredients to the unique stories and passion behind every plate. Additional restaurants will be featured over time, giving food lovers even more reasons to savor the Flavor Coast. PureFlorida.com/Flavor-Coast/



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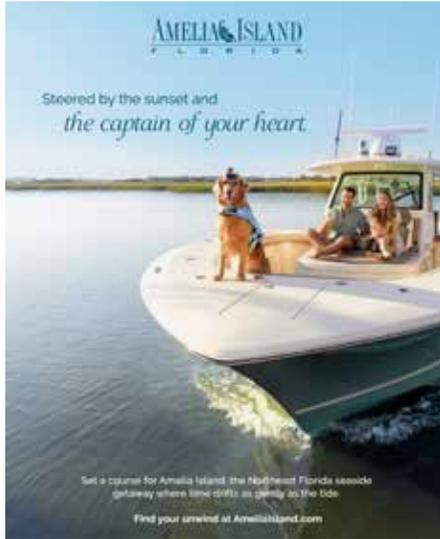
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Amelia Island Unveils Research-Driven Campaign: Find Your Unwind

Amelia Island CVB, in partnership with Starmark, unveiled Find Your Unwind, a research-driven campaign designed to differentiate the destination in Florida's competitive travel landscape. Built on stakeholder input and consumer insights, the initiative highlights Amelia Island's core promise: a genuine mental reset. Through editorial-style visuals, lyrical storytelling, and integrated, multichannel outreach, the campaign positions Amelia Island as a refined retreat where Southern elegance and restorative experiences define the journey. AmeliaIsland.com



Find Your Unwind – New Amelia Island campaign launches.

New Nonstop Flights to Destin-Fort Walton Beach Take Off Just in Time for Spring Break

Over the past few months, several new nonstop routes to Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) have made traveling to this Gulf Coast favorite easier and more affordable than ever, just in time for the busy spring break season. American Airlines launched daily nonstop service from Miami International Airport on Dec. 19. Beginning Mar. 5, JetBlue will offer seasonal service from New York's JFK and Boston's Logan airports, operating five days a week. *Allegiant* and *Southwest* are also adding new seasonal routes from Denver, Columbia, Missouri, and Pittsburgh. DestinFWB.com



Destin-Fort Walton Beach now offers more than 50 flights daily from leading airlines to cities across the nation.

Tourism Surges as The Palm Beaches Welcome 10.7M Visitors

Discover The Palm Beaches announced a historic tourism milestone, welcoming more than 10.7M visitors in 2025. This was the first time the destination has surpassed the 10M visitor mark. The record-breaking year represents an 8% increase over 2024, with visitor spending reaching a preliminary estimate of \$7.7B and generating an estimated \$11.7B in economic impact, reinforcing tourism's powerful role in supporting Palm Beach County's economy and quality of life. ThePalmBeaches.com



The Discover The Palm Beaches team gather during the 2025 annual State of the Tourism Industry event.

Walton County Tourism, Northwest Florida Beaches Interact at New York Travel and Adventure Show

Cecilia Canut, marketing specialist with Walton County Tourism, joined the Northwest Florida Beaches team at the New York Travel and Adventure Show, helping staff the destination booth and participating in an interactive panel. Representatives of the eight coastal counties showcased their destination's broad appeal, from state parks and outdoor adventures to hidden gems and local cuisine, giving attendees a well-rounded, engaging look at Northwest Florida Beaches and the unique experiences that define the region. WCFLTourism.com



WCT Marketing Specialist Cecilia Canut, who also coordinates Keep Walton County Beautiful, joins other tourism professionals from Northwest Florida Beaches in the Destination Theater panel to share the region's natural assets and visitor experiences.



Sunshine, Small-Town Charm Shine in National Spotlight for Bonita Springs

Bonita Springs is basking in the spotlight thanks to a recent feature by *Travel + Leisure* highlighting its nearly 300 days of sunshine, white-sand beaches, and welcoming community. The story showcases local favorites including Wonder Gardens and Trianon Bonita Bay, along with uncrowded shores, golf, and waterfront dining. Positioned between Naples and Fort Myers, Bonita Springs continues to earn recognition as a relaxed Gulf Coast gem perfect for visitors and retirees alike. VisitFortMyers.com



Sunset over Bonita Beach

Ocala/Marion County Hosts 3-Day Florida Encounter FAM

Following Florida Huddle and Encounter in Orlando, the Ocala/Marion County VCB hosted a post-event familiarization tour for nine qualified meeting planners. After hosting the events in Ocala last year, the destination again had the opportunity to showcase its meetings offerings. Over three days, attendees experienced 15 venues and attractions across Ocala/Marion County, highlighting diverse meeting spaces, distinctive off-site options, and signature natural beauty. The FAM reinforced the destination as an emerging, competitive meetings choice. OcalaMarion.com



The VCB team and FAM attendees gather at The Equestrian Manor, World Equestrian Center's newest meeting venue.

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Discover Lake County Sponsors 20th Annual Central Florida Film Festival

Discover Lake County was the presenting sponsor of the 20th annual Central Florida Film Festival, held Jan. 23–25. The festival was held at Epic Theater in Mount Dora and featured a variety of movie showings, short films, and panel sessions. The mission of the Central Florida Film Festival is to entertain, educate, and expose Florida residents and audiences to the cultural importance of independent film as an art. DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com



Award winners pose at the 20th annual Central Florida Film Festival.

Florida's Sports Coasts Hosts German Tour Operators

In February, Florida's Sports Coast proudly hosted a group of German tour operators to experience a FAM tour, welcoming international partners for an immersive destination experience. The guests stayed at the newly renovated Saddlebrook Resort and explored some of Pasco County's most unique attractions, including Giraffe Ranch in Dade City, Epperson Lagoon, and KRATE at the Grove in Wesley Chapel. From up-close wildlife encounters to vibrant local shopping and dining, the weekend highlighted the diversity of Pasco County. Experiences like these strengthen international partnerships, inspire future visitation, and position Florida's Sports Coast as a dynamic destination. FLSportsCoast.com



German tour operators gather at KRATE at the Grove in Wesley Chapel.

DPC Academy Sees Record Attendance at Latest Session

Destination Panama City hosted its most successful DPC Academy to date, welcoming record attendance from partners across the tourism, nonprofit, and business communities. The free educational program continues to grow as a valuable resource for those planning events, managing organizations, and launching new initiatives in Panama City. Designed to strengthen and support the local tourism ecosystem, DPC Academy provides practical tools, expert insight, and meaningful connections that help elevate ideas into impactful experiences. DestinationPanamaCity.com



Record attendance at the latest DPC Academy highlights growing engagement within Panama City's tourism and business community. Photo: Destination PC

Visit Gainesville, Alachua County's Meeting Advantage Program Generates \$8.21M Impact

For FY 2025, the Alachua County TDC awarded Meeting Advantage Program (MAP) support to 47 meetings and conferences, totaling \$182,120. The program reimburses eligible conferences up to \$15 per room night and is designed to attract meetings that generate overnight visitation. These meetings and conferences are projected to produce \$1.85M in direct lodging revenue and more than \$8.21M in total economic impact across Alachua County. VisitGainesville.com



Through the Meeting Advantage Program, associations and professional organizations return to Alachua County year after year, leveraging local incentives to strengthen programming and support sustainable conference growth.



Mardi Gras Barkus Parade and Festival February 27-28

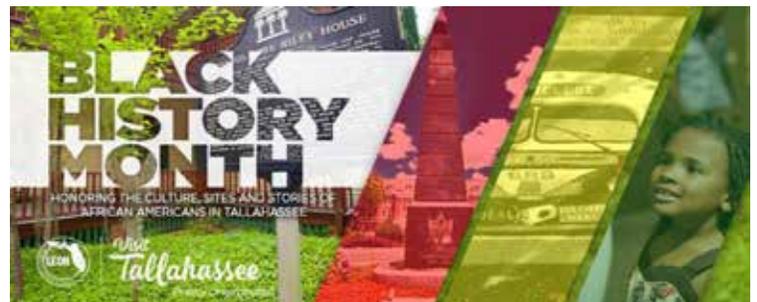
The Mystic Krewe of Salty Barkers celebrated Mardi Gras Apalach-style on Feb. 27-28 at Riverfront Park in Apalachicola. This beloved coastal tradition featured a lively street festival and the 15th annual Mardi Gras Barkus Parade, a parade of costumed dogs and their people. Guests were invited to dive into the fun in festive costumes, creative floats, wagging tails, and plenty of local flair. With the 2026 theme of "Under the Sea," pups and their people donned costumes inspired by the wonders of the deep blue sea, a magical ocean realm ruled by dogs. FloridasForgottenCoast.com



A pup and its person celebrate Mardi Gras Apalach-style during the 15th annual Mardi Gras Barkus Parade in Apalachicola.

Celebrating Black History Month in Florida's Capital City

In February and all year round, Tallahassee honors the resilience, culture, and significant contributions of the Black community in shaping the history of Florida's Capital City. Tallahassee holds a distinguished place in history. From being the first city in Florida to announce the Emancipation Proclamation to holding bus boycotts, Tallahassee's African American story weaves an inspiring narrative of struggles and triumphs. Throughout Black History Month, visitors and residents were invited to discover historical sites, trailblazing individuals, monuments, civil rights trails, and movements that reveal the profound impact of the African American community on both Tallahassee and the state of Florida. VisitTallahassee.com



Florida Huddle, Florida Encounter Draw International Audience

Two of VISIT FLORIDA'S signature shows, Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter, took place Feb. 2-4 in Orlando. Over three days, 730 delegates from 20 different countries met in more than 7,700 one-on-one appointments. 2026 was the most attended Florida Huddle ever, highlighting how beneficial the industry finds this show.



Attendees of Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter pose with the "Love FL" sign.

In addition to appointments, delegates got to network at Orlando's premier entertainment district Live! at the Pointe and experience world-class thrills at SeaWorld Orlando including their newest coaster, "Penguin Trek."

Save the date for next year's shows, Jan. 24-26, 2027, at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, Florida!



This year's shows included 7,700 one-on-one appointments.



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



**AUSLEY
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