



HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON  
VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU

*South Carolina*

**bluffton**

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

2019 – 2020 BLUFFTON  
MARKETING PLAN & BUDGET



*Photo Credit: Meadors, Inc*

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2019-2020

## Bluffton Marketing Plan

### Chamber's Mission & Bluffton's Brand Commitment

#### Vision

Leading the Lowcountry, community and partners collaboratively in effective education, advocacy, and innovative programming ensuring tourism development and sustainable growth.

#### Mission

Envision and advocate the common interests of our partners and stimulate the regional economy while enhancing the quality of life for all.

#### Values

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to serving as a professional, accountable and innovative business-oriented organization. The Chamber is pragmatic in its approach while also being visionary, fair-minded and ethical in all of its dealings with the community and its partners.

#### Bluffton's Brand Commitment

Bluffton is the heart of the Lowcountry. It speaks to the town's central location, its lovable characteristics, and that Bluffton is the pumping, economic life force of the Lowcountry. Most importantly, it's a tone and a feeling. When you're in the Town of Bluffton, you can see and feel the love. It's real and authentic. It's the heart symbol in your logo, on a window, the pride residents have in their downtown or the warmth shared with strangers at an oyster roast. The Town of Bluffton is a well-kept secret. Nowhere else in the Lowcountry do you feel the love like you do when you are in Bluffton.

*Source: Rawle Murdy Associates 2013*

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce's Visitor & Convention Bureau continues to be the leader in promoting tourism within Southern Beaufort County. By strategizing on top travel trends, research, and understanding today's traveler, we are able to set forth a comprehensive marketing plan, furthering destination exposure and visitation.

The goal of the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) is to focus on personalization and customization when speaking to today's traveler. We believe in the visitor's travel journey and look to ensure our marketing inspires their decision to visit our destination.

## The Pulse of Travel

The travel journey is a continuum that begins with inspiration, which leads to purchase and sharing which inspires others and leads to repeat visitations. Throughout the process, today's consumers evaluate numerous sources of information and inspiration across multiple devices – from mobile to tablet to desktop – sometimes all within the same hour. The ability to be nimble, track the use through multiple paths and provide personalized content is key to connecting and influencing today's traveler.



### **Ideas and Inspiration**

The American traveler casts a wide net, looking to family, friends and media – including print, broadcast, search engines and social media posts for ideas and inspiration when starting their travel planning.

### **Option Envisioning**

Travel review websites top the list, followed by search engines and personal recommendations from family and friends. Social media plays a large role in distributing these recommendations. Offline media's role is primarily awareness building.

### **Research, Reviews and Comparisons**

The internet continues at the forefront as travelers explore a variety of online resources to shop for fares and rates. Hotel/resort promotions top the list, followed by search engines and online travel agents (OTAs). Rounding out the top five sources at this stage are airline promotions and travel service provider websites.

### **Purchase**

When travelers are ready to make reservations, travel service provider websites top the list, followed by OTAs and hotel/resort promotions. Search engine results and car rental promotions round out the top five purchase points.

### **Pre-trip Preparation**

The internet is top of mind as traveler's line up their itinerary prior to their trip. Tablets and smartphones are used at this stage to download boarding passes, check into hotels, read restaurant reviews, purchase attraction/event tickets and download destination guides.

### **In-Market Travel Experience**

Mobile internet access comes to the forefront as travelers explore a variety of opportunities while they are in-market. Taking photos, accessing social media,

looking up restaurants and finding directions top the list.

### **Post-trip Sharing**

Social media sharing starts when in-market and continues post-trip as photos are shared with family and friends. Since so many visitors will come back based on a good experience, destination communications play a role in keeping visitors updated on activities and events to draw repeat visits.

*Source: MMGY GLOBAL  
2018 Portrait of American Travelers*

## **The State of the Travel Industry**

Moving into 2019, the economy that relied on strong fundamentals in 2018 will start to face some uncertainty. A few items to note:

- Consumer spending and consumer confidence remain stellar
- The labor market remains strong, adding over 300,000 jobs in December of 2018
- Business investment has started to cool, reflecting growing uncertainty in oil prices and international trade conflicts
- The partial government shutdown will add to this uncertainty

Due to the volatility in the market, economists at Oxford Economics predict that the U.S. economy will find a “soft landing zone” in 2019, where “economic growth is slowing, but not recessionary.”

*Source: U.S. Travel Association Economic Overview*



### **Travel Trends Index**

**Domestic travel grew 3% year-over-year** with both business and leisure travel registering gains thanks to historically high levels of consumer confidence. Business travel is expected to outpace leisure travel through May 2019.

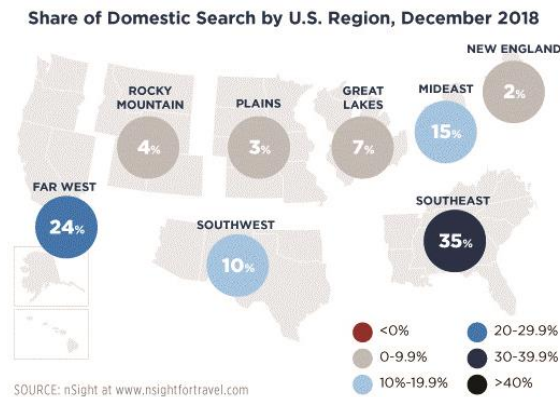
The Travel Trends Index (TTI) reported that international inbound travel is projected to fizzle in the first half of 2019, down to just one percent growth by May 2019.

Source: U.S. Travel Association



## Domestic Travel

Domestic travel is expected to continue to grow in 2019. For 2018, the share of resident searches within the U.S. rose to an average of 85% up from 76% in 2017. **Interest in travel to the Southeast remained strong capturing 35% of U.S. resident domestic searches.**



Source: U.S. Travel Association Economic Overview



## Business Travel

Experts remain bullish on business travel growth and “bleisure” travel is anticipated to increase in 2019. Viewing travel as a job perk, **89% of business travelers are likely to extend a work trip for leisure or “bleisure”.**

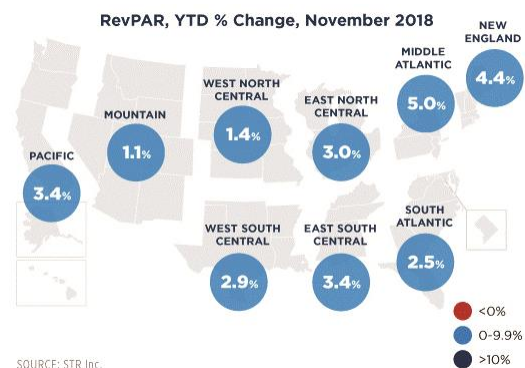
Source: U.S. Travel Association Economic Overview



## Lodging Industry

The hotel industry expects slow and steady revenue growth for 2019 driven by price increases. *Smith Travel Research (STR)* **expects revenue per available room (RevPAR) to increase by 2.4%.**

Source: U.S. Travel Association Economic Overview



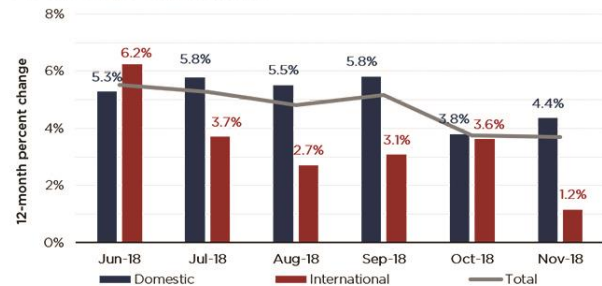


## Transportation

**U.S. domestic passenger kilometers increased 4.9% while available seat kilometers increased at a faster rate of 5.9%.** Global air passenger travel will cool down in 2019. Coming off a strong increase in commercial airline passengers in 2018 of 5.8%, forecasters believe that air travel will slow down with a slowing global economy.

*Source: U.S. Travel Association Economic Overview*

Air Passenger Enplanements



Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics

## CONSUMER SENTIMENT ON VACATION

**705 MILLION**

**VACATION DAYS UNUSED IN 2017**  
(up from 662M in 2016)

**52%**

**OF AMERICANS HAD UNUSED VACATION DAYS IN 2017**

*Source: U.S. Travel Association*

## Trends Shaping the Future of Travel

### Multi-generational Travel

While this trend grew tremendously several years ago, there are still ways in which this sector will continue to expand. Research has shown that there is a strong desire and enthusiasm when it comes to family travel - no matter how difficult it is to plan and execute. Families are most likely to take vacations up to one week, and they enjoy staying in hotels and resorts that offer several different amenities that are of value to the entire family. A recent survey by the Family Travel Association in conjunction with New York University indicated that 68% of respondents

have taken a beach vacation with children in the past. Of the same respondents, 71% indicated that they would like to take a beach vacation with their children in the future. Traveling with family allows for re-connecting and creating family traditions.

### **Culinary Travel**

Food tourism is a trend that emerged on a global scale a couple of years ago which allows visitors in the destination to become educated in the area's local cuisine. This type of tourism can motivate travelers to visit a specific destination to create a memorable and authentic travel experience. An important aspect of food tourism is keeping a region's cultural history in place and can be done through story-telling and cooking demonstrations. These types of immersive experiences help visitors to understand and appreciate the local culture of the destination.

### **"Bleisure Travel"**

A big trend within the last few years has been the idea of combining a business trip with leisure striking a balance between work and play. In today's time, it is not uncommon for travelers to spend some time working during dedicated leisure vacations. Including family on business trips is common as that type of travel often involves higher-end amenities in desirable locations. Forbes has reported that nearly 60% of companies are now starting to create policies that allow employees to combine vacation time and business travel. This type of travel allows employees to have the best of both worlds - they can be high achievers in their careers while also having the ability to travel and take mini-breaks in exciting destinations.



### **A Shift to Domestic Destinations**

As of December 2018, domestic travel demand increased 3.6% when compared to the previous year. This type of travel is expected to grow approximately 2.6% year over year with business and leisure both being contributing factors. Domestic business travel may outperform the leisure segment over the next six months. However, leisure travel growth is still expected to remain around 2.2% as wage growth continues and gasoline prices remain low.

*Source: U.S. Travel Association*

### **Wellness Travel**

The wellness travel sector continues to grow at a rapid pace. According to the Wellness Tourism Association, the wellness tourism sector is predicted to reach close to \$1 trillion on a global level by the year 2020. With today's lifestyle of juggling between work and personal responsibilities, it is easy to see why wellness travel and the ability to disconnect is top of mind for travelers.

Types of wellness travel:

- **Mindful Movement:** With increased awareness of the connection between the mind and body, there is a shift toward mindful experiences.
- **Happy Retreats:** Travel is inspired by the desire to experience something that will have positive psychological impacts. Activities like morning hikes, beach yoga and meditation will work their way onto more itineraries.
- **Community Wellness:** The wellness tourism industry places emphasis on social responsibility and takes steps to give back to communities. By utilizing locally made commodities, supporting local farmers and implementing sustainable practices, travel companies focus more and more on the overall well-being of communities around the world.

*Source: The Global Traveler*

### Attractions Influence Where Travelers Go

As these travelers increase their domestic vacations, attractions are becoming more relevant in influencing vacation decisions. **More than half of all vacations (53%) included at least one visit to an attraction last year.** And of those 41.5 million households surveyed, 68% say that they chose those attractions before their vacations began. This means that travelers are building attractions into their travel planning instead of making the decision to visit the attraction while in the destination.

With millennial families on the rise, one might assume that theme parks and amusement parks create the most interest among attractions. However, research indicates that the top-ranking attractions are more educational and culturally based.

## INVEST IN SEGMENTATION AND PERSONALIZATION

While all these insights are important considerations for travel marketers, there are very few travel brands with the reach to make marketing investments and changes based on broad-sweeping trends. Instead, MMGY Global recommends investing in tighter segmentation, personalized content and leveraging data and insights across multiple audience clusters to maximize marketing spend. Ultimately, this custom approach to segmentation will drive incremental growth with the proper messaging during this industry slowdown.

## Closer to Home

The Visitor & Convention Bureau will position the Town of Bluffton as the ultimate escape filled with genuine experiences of all kinds. For those looking to travel and immerse themselves in a new vacation experience, Bluffton is where they will find historical traditions, cultural experiences, natural beauty and culinary delights.

The Visitor & Convention Bureau has partnered closely with the Town of Bluffton's leadership team to identify these pillars of marketing for the 2019-2020 year:

- History
- Arts
- Cultural
- Culinary
- May River
- Natural Beauty

Marketing tactics and strategies will focus on the following markets:

- Consumers visiting Old Town Bluffton for cultural experiences, historic tours, shopping and culinary activities.
- Overnight stays in Bluffton for new visitors as well as repeat visitors to the region.
- Group Tour Planners and their customers with interest in Southeastern destinations, particularly as a central location for hub and spoke coastal, historic, shopping, cultural, heritage, cuisine, and environmental tours.
- Appealing to the Military Market, specifically those families visiting the area to celebrate a milestone or graduation from nearby Parris Island.

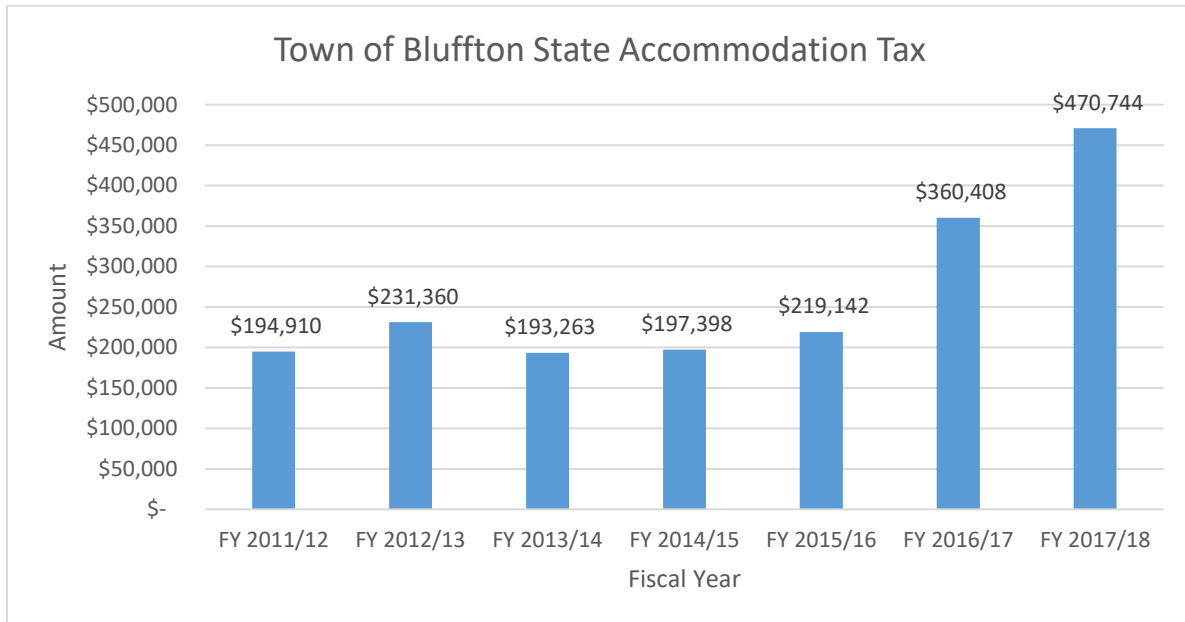
The Visitor & Convention Bureau invests in destination digital content management, qualified staff, content managers/editors and a professional, well executed public relations and digital promotions program. These investments are key to operating a robust destination marketing program in today's competitive and cluttered travel communications environment – particularly with limited funding available for the paid media space. This aspect of our work has become increasingly important as new communications channels emerge and evolve to give consumers more choices, more channels and more content.

As the Town of Bluffton's DMO we are committed to the following:

- Support the destination's brand position throughout all marketing programs.
- Increase overnight visitation in Southern Beaufort County.
- Increase visitor's expenditures within Southern Beaufort County attractions, retail and dining facilities, particularly in Bluffton. Thus, increase Bluffton and Beaufort County's attraction, hospitality, and sales taxes collected.

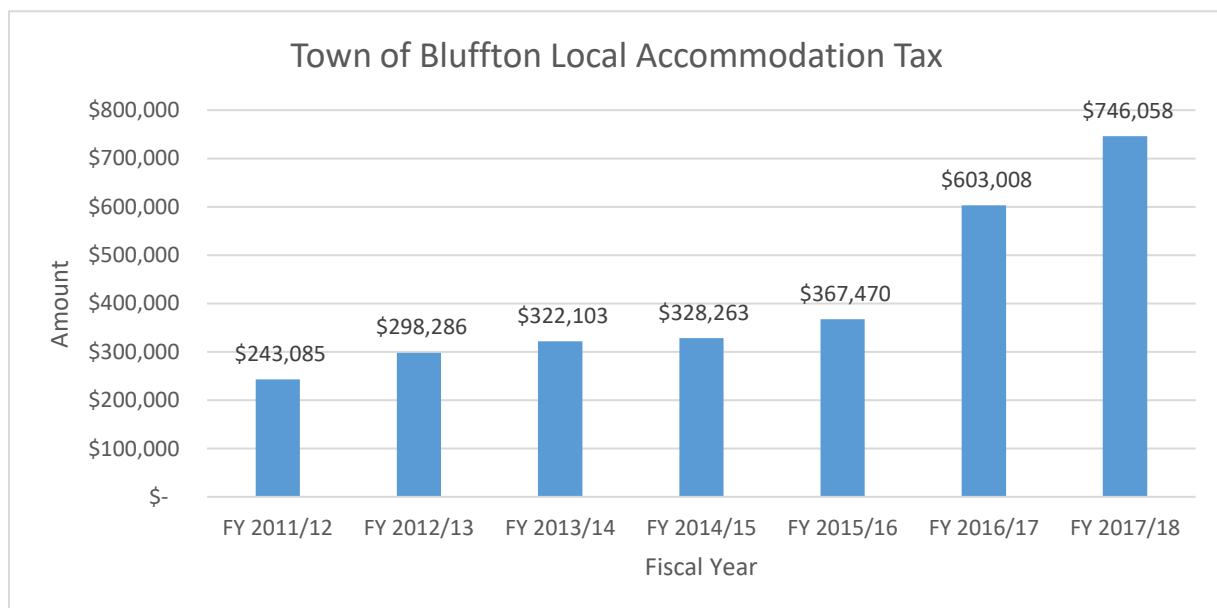
# Economic Health Check

## Town of Bluffton State Accommodations Tax



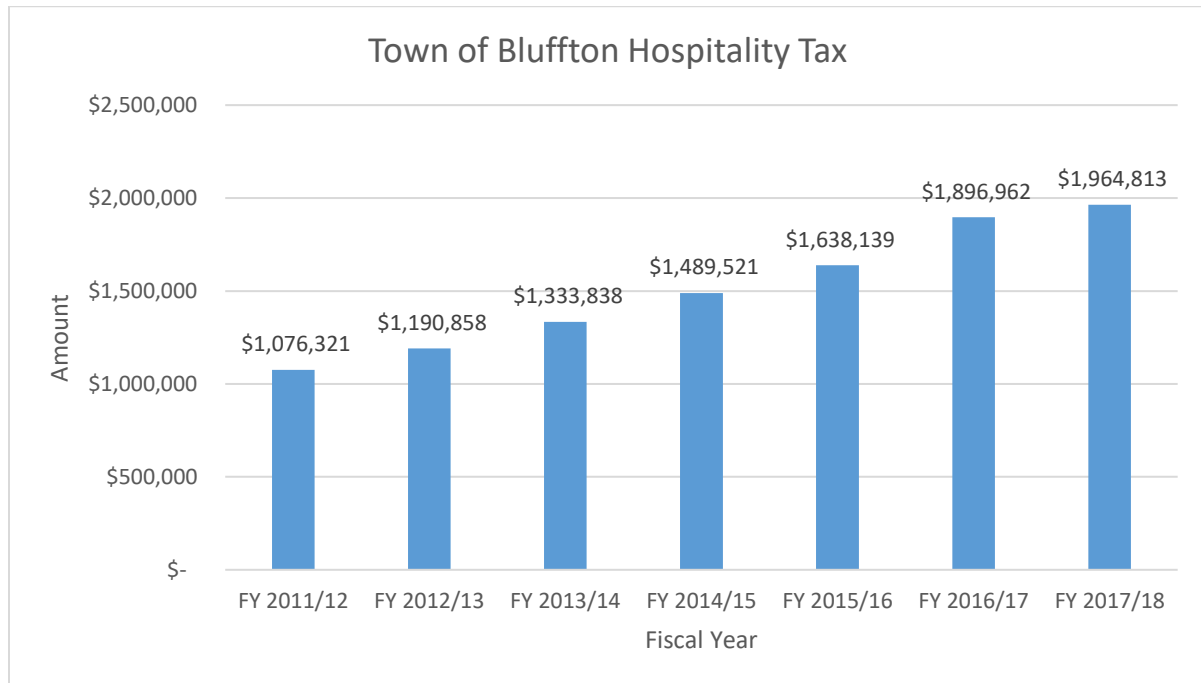
Source: Town of Bluffton

## Town of Bluffton Local Accommodation Tax



Source: Town of Bluffton

## Town of Bluffton Hospitality Tax



Source: Town of Bluffton

## Marketing Strategies and Programs

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**E-newsletter:** Utilizing a robust content calendar and email list growth strategy, we will focus on expanding the reach of the program to gain valuable “face time” with visitors via their inboxes. List sign up entry points will be placed throughout the Bluffton website to encourage visitors to engage. We will also continue to send emails that cross market the destination as a whole encouraging visitors to explore beyond their accommodation footprint once in-market.

Some of the themes include:

- Historical Travel
- Outdoor Adventures
- Culinary Travel and Events
- Cultural & Heritage Travel
- Marquee Events & Festivals

**Budget:**

Bluffton DMO: \$ 675

Beaufort County DMO: \$ 825

**Total Budget: \$1,500**

## Search Engine & Display Marketing

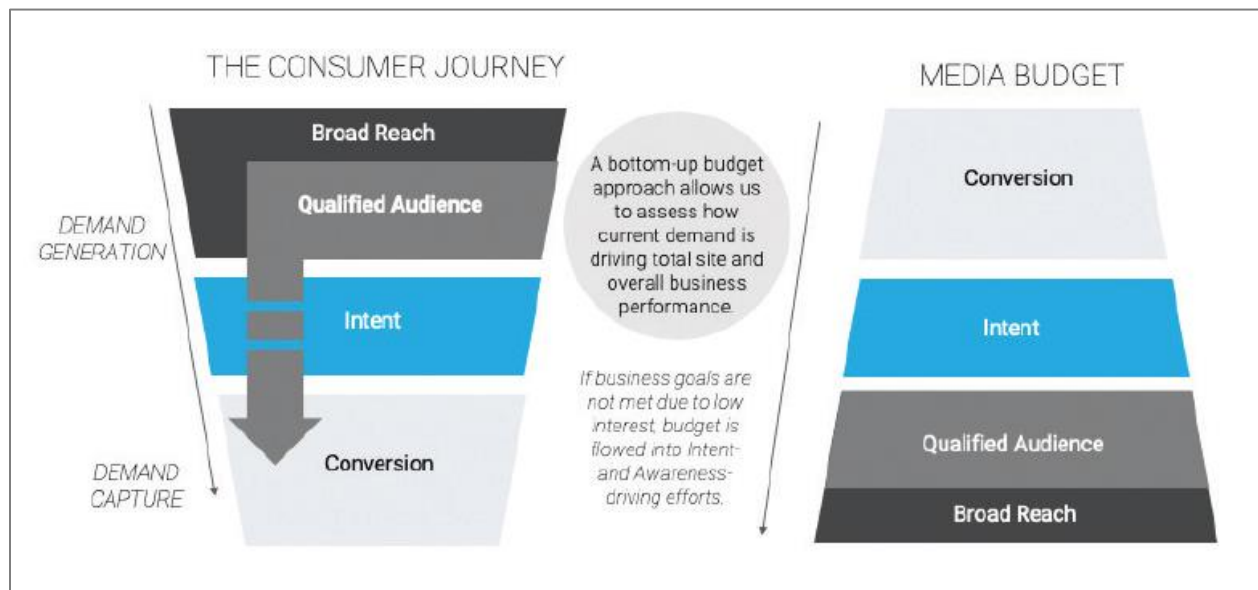
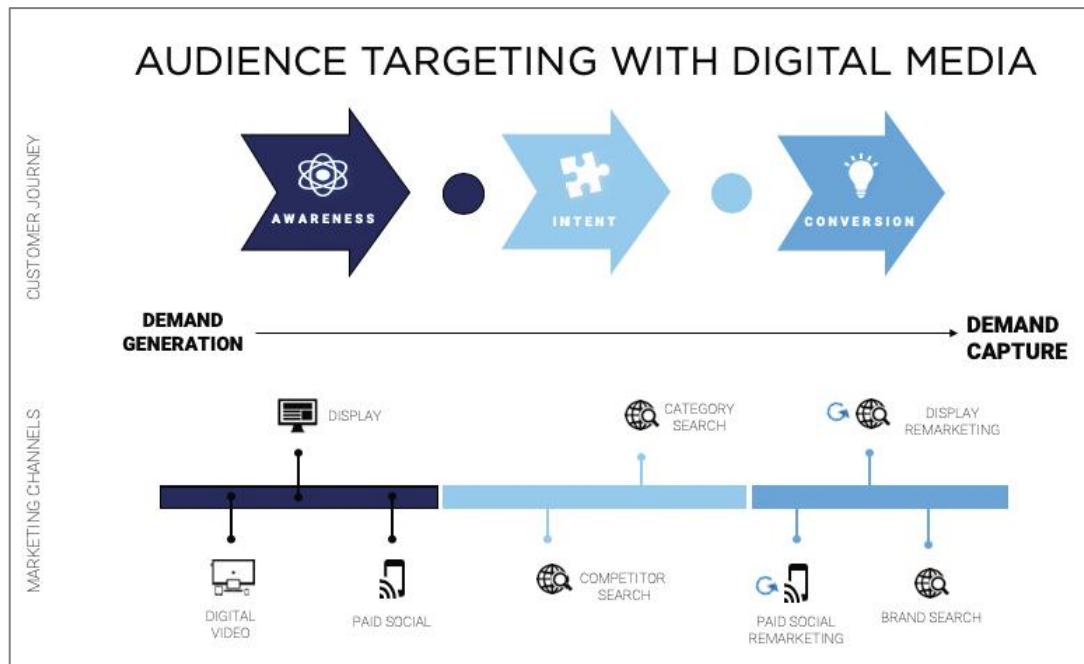
Search Engine Marketing (SEM):

The Visitor & Convention Bureau will execute an aggressive SEM program to expand and broaden our organic rankings on major search engines. We will utilize a targeted list of key search terms that best correlate with Bluffton’s target visitor experiences and affinities.

A custom digital marketing plan will be deployed to align and influence consumers to visit the Bluffton website, ultimately directly increasing demand to visit partner pages by delivering on the following principles:



This plan will be executed by aligning the below tactics with the desired goals we want to accomplish with our core consumers. Once a strategic structure is established, we will further refine the plan to clarify messaging, channels, key metrics and consumer mindset against each phase of the consumer journey as seen below:



## Display Marketing

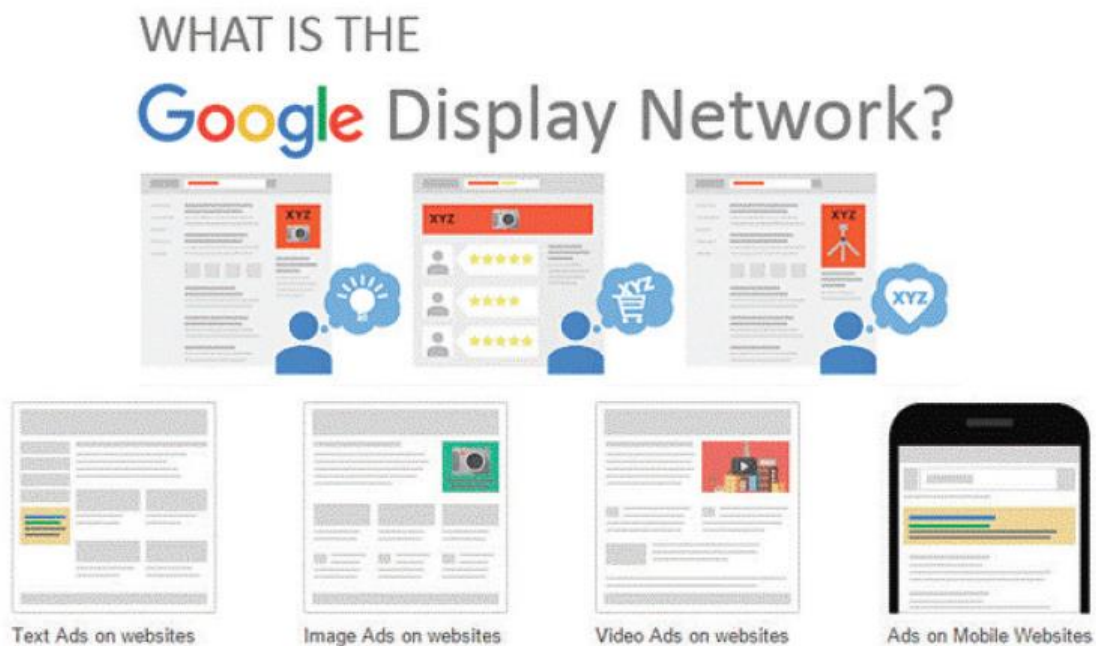
The primary goal of display marketing efforts for Bluffton in 2019-2020 is to cultivate consumers who have expressed an interest in visiting Bluffton as noted by their online behavior and then push them to visit Bluffton's website to explore, engage and ultimately book travel to the destination. Prospecting and native display banner partners will be:



The reach of audience targeting will be extended through paid social media within the Facebook and Instagram platforms. We only purchase media on a cost-per-click (CPC) basis to help mitigate against fraud and limited viewability often seen in the industry.

### Audience Targeting

- Affinity audiences
- Custom affinity
- Similar to / lookalike audiences
- In-Market audiences
- Custom intent
- Demographic



## Contextual Topic Targeting

This targeting distributes banners and responsive text ads through the Google Display Network to be placed contextually next to content related to Bluffton. Often consumers start their vacation destination research by reading travel-related content on websites and blogs. Our campaigns work to help associate Bluffton with this content to increase consumer intent to visit the destination website and ultimately Bluffton.

## Remarketing

Remarketing is used to reinforce Bluffton as the ideal vacation destination by serving ads to those who have visited VisitBluffton.org. By implementing multiple windows, we can adjust bids and messages depending on where the consumer is in the funnel. Potential remarketing partners include:



## Branded Search

Branded search is the most fundamental digital channel and provides a foundation for nearly all digital marketing initiatives. Our deep expertise and experience would be directly applied to drive the best results for Bluffton. Key benefits of branded search include ensuring consumers are exposed to the most current offerings. It also helps capture all demand and limits erosion to competitors.

Strategically, this means:

- Placing a higher value on the quality of the traffic we create for the Bluffton website, in addition to the quantity.
- Continuing a paid social strategy for Bluffton-specific posts driving traffic to the Bluffton website.
- Integrating our paid and organic social efforts, ensuring content boosting on Facebook when budget permits.

### **Budget:**

Bluffton DMO:	\$30,060
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$44,240</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$74,300</b>

## SEO, Content Marketing and Social Media

### Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The 2019-2020, SEO strategy is about ensuring relevant, valuable content continues to be indexed by search engines, that appropriate content and answers are retrieved and presented to searchers persuading users to engage with that content. Additionally, all SEO marketing initiatives will focus on ensuring the visibility of VisitBluffton.org in the search results of both search engines and social networks for branded searches, as well as a full spectrum of other relevant search queries, with the goal of increasing the overall awareness of Bluffton as a destination.

Bluffton-focused content will continue to be curated and promoted via our social media and #LowcountryLife content hub as an ongoing piece to the SEO strategy and destination awareness campaigns. Bluffton blog content will continue be directly accessible on the Bluffton website through native article placement on the homepage and other entry points, such as navigation, are to be discussed.

The SEO program will be broken down into five core areas:

1. Technical SEO
2. Content creation and optimization
3. Building a foundation of authoritative referrals
4. Local SEO
5. Identifying new opportunities

It is no secret that the popularity of Bluffton as a destination continues to increase. Recent accolades from *Southern Living* and *Coastal Living* are proof that Bluffton is now “on the map” with regards to visitors wishing to experience the Lowcountry. Visitors are looking to explore the cultural, historical, culinary and outdoors of the destination. For these reasons, now is the time to embrace the recent accolades obtained by the destination and expand our reach and grow our share into new markets which will further help to enhance the popularity of Bluffton as a “must-visit” destination.

### Content Marketing

Content priorities for 2019-2020 will include:

1. **Create content that is people-first:** Social media and digital content will be created with Bluffton-specific target segments in mind.
2. **Tell robust stories:** Focus on telling stories that are unique and niche to Bluffton and bring those stories to life across digital channels.

3. **Partner with new voices:** We will look for, and partner with, brands and influencers to grow brand awareness and presence on social media.
4. **Think and measure beyond the click:** Track measures of success beyond the website click to further understand each channel's role in a visitor's path to purchase.

Through optimizing the existing content on the Bluffton platforms, the brand will enhance the overall content strategy for the destination and the travel experience and each of our partners. As part of the ongoing strategy, it is critical that fresh, quality content is curated to drive increased engagement and more natural search traffic to the website as well as create a solid base for Bluffton's social media outlets. We will continue to conduct regular research to identify content marketing opportunities and enhancements that can be made to the website platform to build the overall communication strategy for the destination.

## Social Media

Bluffton will be experimenting in 2019-2020 with the development of a robust, new social media program promoting a unique-to-Bluffton identity using the @exploreblufftonsc handle for Instagram and Facebook and @LoveBlufftonSC for Twitter. A presence on Pinterest will also be developed specific for Bluffton with content specifically related to Bluffton including items such as culinary, history, culture, outdoors, etc.

User generated content will be of focus as we work to drive awareness of the new social media brand for Bluffton. Blog content will also be utilized throughout the social media channels mentioned below to further amplify the Bluffton message on social media and direct users back to Bluffton's website. Directing users back to the website through content promotion via both organic and paid efforts will complete the user's social journey with the intent to influence the user's decision to choose Bluffton as their travel destination of choice.

### Priorities for 2019-2020

These are the channels that best support Bluffton's goals, and will be our focus for 2019-2020:

1. **Facebook:** With the new social media approach to build the @ExploreBlufftonSC Facebook page, our approach to Facebook will be to incorporate a range of content and to focus on Bluffton-specific blog articles, user-generated content shared by our locals and guests, marquee events, and campaigns in the Bluffton area. We will be using the 2019-2020 fiscal year to drive followers and engagement on the platform to further solidify the Bluffton brand.
2. **Instagram:** Bluffton will also be represented socially on Instagram with the handle @ExploreBlufftonSC. Driving awareness for the "new" profile will be of utmost importance to support the overall social strategy for Bluffton and link the strongest channels, Facebook and Instagram, to the Bluffton brand. Instagram's primary focus will

to be curate user-generated content from talented guests and locals across Bluffton’s digital properties. Implementing strategic Instagram stories into the content calendar will also be a key driver of engagement for this platform.

3. **Pinterest:** With Pinterest playing a role mainly in the trip planning phase and being most heavily used by our target demographic, we will work to curate different boards related to Bluffton content. Example boards would represent: Dining in Bluffton, Explore Bluffton, Outdoors & Activities, Arts & Culture, History, etc.
4. **Twitter:** Although Twitter is not a key driver in the traveler’s path to destination selection, we will work to promote the destination lightly on Twitter via the @LoveBlufftonSC handle to remain relevant on this platform.

### Key Metrics

As this will be the first year for Bluffton to have a branded social media presence across social media platforms, we will be focusing on growth and awareness on each platform. When determining success, we will look at metrics indicating that demand and interest is increasing. Over time, we expect to see increases in likes, followers and engagement as we work to build the social aspect of the Bluffton brand. Performance will be determined by these high-level metrics:

- Reach / frequency
- View-influenced visits
- Social media platform growth
- Engagement rates

### Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$60,336
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$76,173</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$136,509</b>

## Leisure Media Campaign

*Southern Living's* mission is to bring enjoyment, fulfillment, and inspiration to readers by celebrating the best of the Southern lifestyle. This brand inspires creativity in homes, kitchens, gardens, and personal style. As relentless champions of the South, *Southern Living* sets the standard for excellence in Southern content regardless of platform or medium.



Southern Living reaches more than **21.6 million** people each month — connecting consumers to the region's rich culture through a variety of platforms.

### Southern Living Reaches and Engages Travel Enthusiasts

Nearly **3 in 5** agree that they'd rather take a few weekend vacations than one long vacation

**77%** love doing research on a location before going on a vacation

Nearly **7 in 10** agree that when they learn about a great vacation, they typically recommend it to people they know

**62%** intend to go on any domestic / foreign vacation in the next 12 months

#### Digital Reach:

UNIQUE USERS: 7,300,000  
M/F: 25/75 MEDIAN  
HHI: \$77,209  
MEDIAN AGE: 52

#### Social Channels:

FACEBOOK: 3MM  
INSTAGRAM: 1.3MM  
TWITTER: 707K  
PINTEREST: 497K  
YOUTUBE: 91K  
SNAPCHAT: SOUTHERN.LIVING

## Southern Living Partnership

### Strategy

*Southern Living* in partnership with the Visitor & Convention Bureau will continue to capitalize on earning future South's Best Awards. The Bluffton region has garnered various accolades and recognitions over the past few years. The power of an accolade, a third-party endorsement, presents the platform to tell our story to an engaged traveler and increase brand visibility and awareness.

Recent accolades garnered include:

*Coastal Living*, named Bluffton #5 Happiest Seaside Town 2018

*Southern Living*, named Bluffton #18 Friendliest Small Town 2018

*Southern Living*, named Bluffton #8 Best Small Town, 2019

These accolades elevate Bluffton on a global level, which further increases the power of the overall brand of the destination.

Bluffton's attributes compliment so many of the South's Best award categories.

Just to name a few:

- Best Friendliest Town
- Best Culinary Scene
- Best Small Town
- Best Inn – Montage, Palmetto Bluff
- Best Festival

The voting process for South's Best begins in August and runs through October – with the announcement in March of the following year. This campaign will launch within the voting timeframe, with a call to action for users to vote simultaneously showcasing Bluffton's attributes through messaging and imagery.



## Campaign Details

Through a rich digital media campaign, using *Southern Living's* on-line channels, the partnership will highlight the rich history, culture, culinary scene and all of the natural attributes Bluffton has to offer.

Keeping Bluffton's Historic Arts and Seafood Festival top of mind, to layer into messaging and drive fall travel and website visitation.

- *Southern Living* will create a Native Editorial Post, inspiring readers to long for this quaint, southern town. Showcasing the best Bluffton has to offer, both for a week or long weekend getaway. Package will include (2) posts, social distribution, and native promotional units.
- To further drive Bluffton awareness, banner ads will be distributed across Southernliving.com, as well as high-impact video halo unit on the homepage. Ad units will run against premium editorial content creating alignment for advertisers. The video halo unit is a responsive video-first solution that is full width and can be run across all screen sizes capturing the user's attention immediately. The video will auto-play, and then fade as the user scrolls the video out of view.

## Campaign Summary

- Creation & Distribution of Native Post
- Run of Site (ROS) High-Impact Display Media (Leaderboard, Medium Rectangle, Banners)
- High-impact video halo unit accompanied by banner ads

## Campaign Flight:

Executed within voting window: August 2019 – October 2019.

## Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$20,039
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$6,280</u>
<b>Total from DMO Budget</b>	<b>\$26,319</b>
*Bluffton Accolade Marketing Grant	<u>\$25,000 *</u>

**Total Budget: \$51,319**

\*Accolade Marketing Grant Awarded by Town of Bluffton December 11, 2018.

## Group Sales and Trade Shows

Bluffton continues to grow and position itself as a group destination more so now than any point in the last decade. The variety and quality of experiences for group visitors has never been more diverse, offering a robust arts, historical, arts and cultural scene, with growing culinary experiences. The Visitor & Convention Bureau will continue to promote Bluffton while attending numerous travel trade shows throughout the country.

Military continues to be a focus for the Bluffton region. With proximity to Parris Island, hosting out of town families and guests remains the ideal market for our focus service hotels. We will continue to build awareness of the Bluffton region inspiring these families to extend their visit or celebration, creating lasting, special memories.

### Group Tour: American Bus Association (ABA)



Group Tour remains an important market to maintain current and new relationships Bluffton continues to be an attractive destination for a hub and spoke opportunity. With Savannah 40 miles away, Beaufort 30 miles and Charleston just under 2 hours, the Bluffton region is ideal for groups to stay in one location for up to a week and focus on day trips from one central area.

We intend to draw group tour visitors by:

- Building relationships with tour operators through American Bus Association (ABA)
- Leverage group tour by hosting a FAM trip to potential group planners/operators
- Educate our partners on what it means to be a group friendly community
- Offer tiered pricing/packaging attractions with accommodations
- Expand promotion of group experiences on our website and special group ticket pricing

January kicks off one of the first travel conferences of the year, the industry's premier business event – the ABA Marketplace. More than 3,500 tour operators, suppliers and exhibitors come together to kick off a new year of business opportunity and growth. Marketplace is an active, vibrant forum of buyers and sellers where business gets done. With more than 140,000 pre-scheduled appointments and 900 pre-qualified operators, Marketplace offers a year's worth of

sales meetings in one week. And with legendary networking and social events, attendees turn conversations from the conference floor into long-term business relationships. Couple this with leading education seminars and the industry's largest exhibit hall and marketplace is unmatched as the best industry event each year.

### Full Service Resort/Hotels Initiatives

#### **Connect Marketplace**

Connect Marketplace, an annual education conference and appointment-only trade show, is a highly respected event that brings together the most active planners, suppliers and experts in corporate, association and specialty association meeting markets for three days of general sessions, roundtables, workshops, pre-set appointments and networking. The appointment-only trade show is the business marketplace, where RFPs are placed, dates are secured and relationships are developed for future business. The focus on education at Connect Marketplace allows you to brush up on your skills, learn about trending topics, get great business advice from speakers, and enjoy networking with other industry professionals.

#### **IMEX America**

Meet over 3,000 corporate, incentive, association and third-party planners experiencing IMEX America's refreshing new model for doing business.

#### *The Size and Scale of the Hosted Buyer Program*

The largest in the industry in North America, this Hosted Buyer Program qualifies and brings key buyers to the show, with IMEX America covering travel and accommodations. This program guarantees thousands of highly qualified buyers from the association, corporate sectors.

#### *Online Scheduling System*

This convenient system lets you reach out before the show and get business lined up with people you want to see at IMEX America. With tens of thousands of appointments made in advance, everyone comes to the show focused on serious business.

#### *The Number and Depth of Industry Partnerships*

Industry associations have shown unprecedented confidence in IMEX America. Examples include a Strategic Partnership with MPI, (our Premier Education Provider) endorsement by DMAI, Site and ICCA, an Industry Partnership with PCMA and close ties with every major association including ASAE and the U.S. Travel Association.

#### *The Scale and Quality of Education Programs*

IMEX America hosts an unprecedented number of industry educational events. Participants can choose from hundreds of lively learning sessions and seminars throughout the trade show, all at no cost.

### *Dedicated Attention to Association and Corporate Buyers*

Association Focus, a “conference within a conference” on Smart Monday, is dedicated to educating association executives and is followed by an Association Evening, a great event for socializing and networking.

#### **ConferenceDirect Annual Partners Meeting**

Being a preferred partner, it includes participation at their most important Associate Networking educational event. Involves a reverse tradeshow format where the attendee gets quality time with each ConferenceDirect Associate and attendance to training sessions on sales development.

#### **HelmsBriscoe Annual Partners Meeting**

HelmsBriscoe allows member participation at their most important Associate Networking educational event. Designed in a reverse tradeshow format where the attendee gets quality time with each HelmsBriscoe Associate and attendance to training sessions on sales development.

#### **Association Executives of North Carolina (AENC)**

The AENC Trade Show is your source for information and contacts on meeting venues, programs products and services. Spend time with over 200 exhibitors and learn how they can help you bring more value and be more efficient. Meet with others from a wide variety of organizations and share ideas as you go through the show.

#### **South Carolina Society of Association Executives (SCSAE)**

SCSAE's Trade Show is your ONE stop location for meeting and greeting with association CEOs/Executive Directors, Meeting Planners, Membership Directors, Communication Directors and Corporate Meeting Planners. Association professionals can meet with more than 70 exhibitors including hoteliers, convention centers, technology vendors and more.

#### **SportsTravel Magazine's TEAMS '19 Tradeshow**

TEAMS: TRAVEL, EVENTS AND MANAGEMENT IN SPORTS, is the world's leading conference and expo for the sports-event industry. Presented by SportsTravel magazine, TEAMS '18 will be held October 2018, in Louisville, KY. Launched in 1998, TEAMS attract more than one thousand attendees including CEOs, executive directors and event managers from sports organizations as well as representatives from sports commissions and convention bureaus, corporate sponsors, event suppliers and other hospitality industry opinion leaders. Now in its 19th year, TEAMS has helped define the sports-event and appointment-based trade show industries.

## Hilton Head Island – Bluffton Visitor & Convention Bureau

### 2019-2020 Trade Show Schedule

Tradeshow	Market	Dates	Location	\$
IMEX America	Corporate	Sept./2019	Las Vegas, NV	\$40,500
Sports Travel's TEAMS Expo	Sports	Oct./2019	Anaheim, CA	\$ 5,000
AENC	State Assn	Dec./2019	Raleigh, NC	\$ 2,500
SCSAE	State Assn	Jan./2020	Columbia, SC	\$ 2,500
American Bus Assn.*	Group Tour	Jan./ 2020	Omaha, NE	\$ 2,000

\* Only Trade Show Included in Beaufort County/Bluffton Budget

**Budget:**

Bluffton DMO: \$ 900

Beaufort County DMO: \$1,100

**Total Budget: \$2,000**

\*\*Remainder of trade shows listed are funded by the Town of Hilton Head Island

## Collateral and Fulfillment

### 2020 Vacation Planner

The Official Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Vacation Planner, our comprehensive guide to what to see and do, is our primary print fulfillment piece. We receive many online, as well as media and phone inquiries, and distribute the planner to state and local welcome centers, along with trade shows and promotional events with media.

In today's more visual world, telling a story through stunning photography and compelling content is an imperative component to the travel journey process. The "coffee table" piece allows our visitors to visualize their vacation and discover, through this first touch point, the reason for our many accolades, ultimately imagining themselves here on vacation.

In addition to working with a digital and print publisher, our in-house marketing staff provides the business directory, local photography and editorial content management, editorial review and proofreading for this asset.

*Quantity: 100,000 printed*

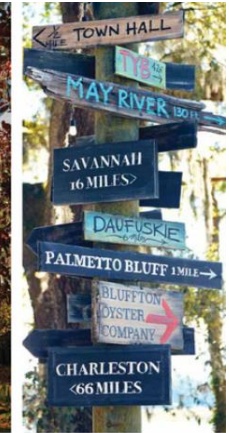
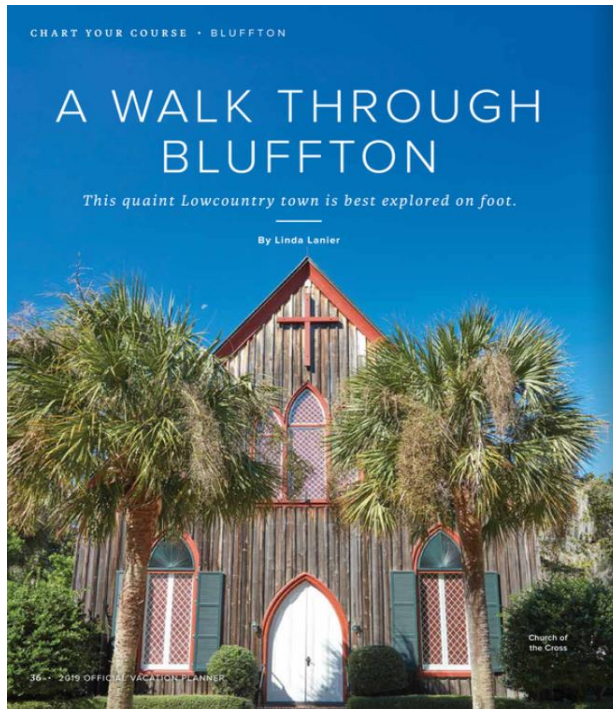
#### **Collateral:**

Bluffton DMO:	\$6,300
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$7,700</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$14,000</b>

#### **Fulfillment:**

Bluffton DMO:	\$5,441
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$6,650</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$12,090</b>

# 2019 Vacation Planner- Town of Bluffton Featured



There may be no better way to experience the Lowcountry's gentle allure than with a leisurely stroll down Bluffton's centuries old streets. Listed on the National Register of Historic places, the one square mile of **Old Town Bluffton** is lined with moss draped live oak trees, offering a delightful glimpse into the past. Boutiques, restaurants and galleries stand side by side with demure cottages and genteel homes, many dating to the early 1800s. The district also has the distinction of being

selected as an official Cultural District by the South Carolina Arts Commission due to its abundance of arts and cultural offerings. If a slow walk through a small Southern town is your idea of time well spent, then I recommend the **Bluffton Walking Tour**, which begins at the **Heyward House History Center**, an 1840s farmhouse-turned-museum that doubles as the town's welcome center. I spent a lovely morning with docent Anne Heyward, a native Blufftonian who regularly guides history and

architecture buffs on walking tours through her hometown. As we ambled along under the shade of lustrous palmettos, Ms. Heyward transported me back to her town's beginnings. Bluffton was a tiny village lounging on the banks of the May River, founded by folks eager to enjoy the breezes and escape the Lowcountry summer heat. Of Bluffton's 60 homes, churches, and businesses, just 15 remained after Union forces razed the town in 1863. Thankfully, all of the town's residents escaped before the Union gunboats

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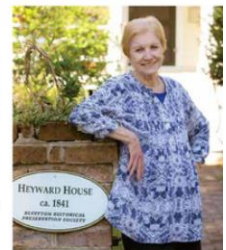


## Q&A

What are visitors most surprised by when they take your walking tour?

"My guests are always surprised by Bluffton's population growth. In 2000, only about 1,200 people lived here, and today we have almost 20,000. Newcomers are drawn here because of our natural beauty and history. It's a relaxed lifestyle that really appeals to people."

—Anne Heyward, a native Blufftonian who regularly guides walking tours through her hometown.



headed up the river. After the dust settled, eight antebellum homes and two churches stood unharmed. **The Church of the Cross** (ca. 1854), and the **Campbell Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church**, built in 1853. I was amazed at the sweeping river view from the imposing **Huger-Gordon House**, one of Bluffton's oldest homes, today a private residence. A section of the house dates back to 1795, and scars around the front door are permanent reminders of the shelling from Civil War guns.

My walking tour continued down Bridge Street to the three-story 1830s **Frapp House**, with its stately porch and white fence. Next stop, the **Card House**, where legend has it that the house changed hands in an 1840s high-stakes poker game.

"Losing houses in poker games is a long-standing Southern tradition," laughs Ms. Heyward.

Meandering down Calhoun Street, my mind took me back 150 years, and I imagined folks sipping sweet tea in rocking chairs on the **Seven Oaks**

verandah. (Not a bad way to spend a day in 2019, either.)

A few blocks down Calhoun, we arrived at **The Store**, built in 1904 as a family home and store. Today, it's owned by Babbie Guscio, a Blufftonian for more than four decades. "When I first arrived, Bluffton to me was a blank canvas," says Ms. Guscio. "I, as many others, discovered we could paint a beautiful picture."

Nearby in another Calhoun Street cottage, the **Society of Bluffton Artists (SOBA)** gallery displays the

paintings, sculpture, mixed media, and photography of more than 100 local artists. I take time to linger over the beautiful landscape paintings, which grace many Lowcountry residences.

Ms. Heyward then points out the double-chimneyed **Seabrook House**, a quintessential Lowcountry home designed to catch the breezes. Built in 1840, this private residence reflects the meticulous care of Bluffton homeowners who've poured their hearts into diligent maintenance and restoration.

The restored **Garvin-Garvey House**,

a small Freedman-owned cottage built during Reconstruction, is maintained by the Beaufort County Land Trust and the Town of Bluffton. From its perch on the High Bluff at the hundred-year-old **Bluffton Oyster Factory**, the house is open to the public.

These docent-led tours are a history lover's delight. As I admired Bluffton's wide porches, white fences, and well-kept gardens, I was happy to celebrate a town deep in the heart of the South Carolina Lowcountry enriched with an enduring sense of place.



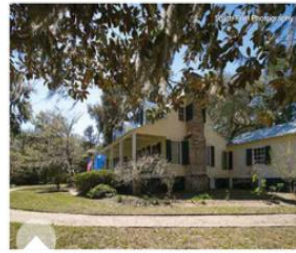
#### CLASSICS WITH A TWIST

For a sophisticated take on Lowcountry classic cuisine, reserve a table at FARM in Old Town Bluffton, where the service is stellar and the wine list exceptional. FARM's menu evolves seasonally but always features fresh-caught seafood and produce from local farms. Try the Frogmore stew, loaded with sweet shrimp and sausage; tomato tortellini; or grilled quail served with tomato conserve and polenta, butter bean, and corn succotash. The blueberry hand pie topped with sweet whipped cream is a perfect finish.



#### Inspired Elegance

Old Town Bluffton Inn promises to set a new standard for luxury and Southern hospitality. Newly opened, the picturesque luxury boutique inn overlooking May River Road is an upscale getaway in a storybook-like setting. Elegance is all around, from the grand foyer to the inn's 14 opulent, uniquely designed guest rooms, each with its own en suite and outfitted with modern amenities and personalized touches. There's nothing quite like it. [blufftoninn.com](http://blufftoninn.com) • 843.707.4045

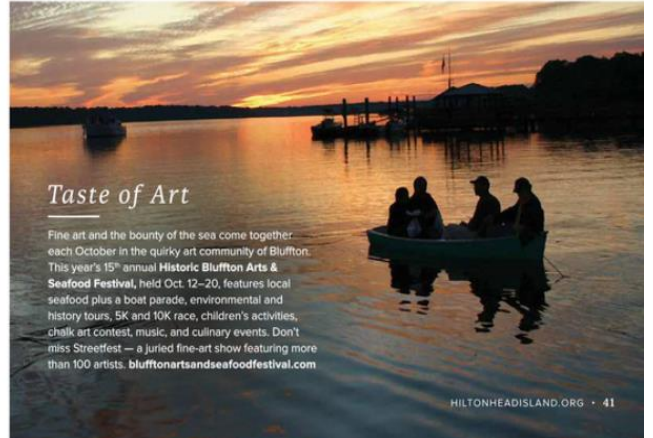


#### An Historic Welcome

The Heyward House, built in 1841, is the official welcome center for Bluffton. Take a guided tour of the historic house, find maps and brochures of the area, and learn more about the culture and history of Bluffton and its many charms. [heywardhouse.org](http://heywardhouse.org) • 843.757.6293

#### Bluffton Goodness

A unique juice bar in the heart of Bluffton Village, The Juice Hive features delicious cold-pressed juices, smoothies, and all-natural foods, including soups, salads, grains, wraps, and the 2018 Good Food Award-winning Kimchi. A retail portion offers a complete selection of vitamins, supplements, local honey, and superfoods, plus health, beauty, and fitness products. [thejuicehive.com](http://thejuicehive.com) • 843.757.2899



#### Taste of Art

Fine art and the bounty of the sea come together each October in the quirky art community of Bluffton. This year's 15th annual Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival, held Oct. 12–20, features local seafood plus a boat parade, environmental and history tours, 5K and 10K race, children's activities, chalk art contest, music, and culinary events. Don't miss Streetfest — a juried fine-art show featuring more than 100 artists. [blufftonartsandseafoodfestival.com](http://blufftonartsandseafoodfestival.com)

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## CHART YOUR COURSE • BLUFFTON



### *Polished Palate*

Savor a new approach to dining in Old Town Bluffton. **The Pearl Kitchen & Bar** is making a name for itself with their fresh take on coastal cuisine. Think quality ingredients, masterful preparation, and harmonious flavors. Dishes like delicate pan-seared scallops or Pearl Panzanella salad are pretty on the plate, delightful on the palate. Pick a glass or bottle from the wine list, or sip a cocktail from the boutique bar. The outdoor front patio is great for watching the Calhoun Street scene. Now serving lunch on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday; for dinner, reservations are recommended. [thepearlbluffton.com](http://thepearlbluffton.com) • 843.757.5511

### *Cozy Cuisine*

Savor scrumptious food with old-world Southern charm while dining indoors or out on the porch of this cozy, restored 1890 cottage. Featuring sophisticated cuisine with a Lowcountry flair, **The Cottage** offers breakfast, lunch, dinner, Sunday brunch, and tea, and serves up a variety of coastal favorites. The Cottage serves its own blends of May River Coffee Roasters along with delicious award-winning desserts. Catering is available. [thecottagebluffton.com](http://thecottagebluffton.com) • 843.757.0508



## Research

Research provides powerful information to evolve and perfect the Visitor & Convention Bureau's marketing strategy. Throughout the year we will continue to extract detailed reports and information that guides us in understanding our visitors. These research programs will lead to marketing and advertising initiatives aimed at growing the tourism industry for Bluffton. The following programs will be ongoing:

- Maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal
- Smith Travel Research (STR) weekly and monthly reports which measures lodging occupancy, average room rates, room demand and RevPAR for hotels only. Includes monthly comparative report with competitive destinations
- DestiMetrics monthly Home & Villa lodging reports on occupancy, average room rates, RevPAR and six month forward booking pace reports. Two-source DestiMetrics report crunches back end Smith Travel hotel data with DestiMetrics back end home and villa data to produce a monthly destination report on total destination accommodations tax paying occupancy, average room rates and RevPAR
- Monthly and YTD Visitor Traffic and Segmentation Reports by USCB
- Subscription to the U.S. Travel Association's (USTA) Travel Monitor Program and related reports

### **Budget:**

Bluffton DMO:	\$2,250
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$2,750</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>

## Marketing Plan Appendix

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➤ 2019-2020 Budget

➤ 2018 Website and Online Marketing Performance

# 2019-2020

## Bluffton and Southern Beaufort County

### Schedule of Functional Revenues & Expenditures

	VCB TOTALS	Paid by Bluffton DMO	Paid by Beaufort Co DMO	Paid by Beaufort Co DMO
Revenues	(Bluffton & BC)		(Bluffton & Southern BC)	(Daufuskie Isl. Programs)
Town of Bluffton DMO	200,000	200,000		
Southern Beaufort County DMO	250,000		230,000	20,000
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>450,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>	<b>230,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Research & Planning	5,000	2,250	2,750	
Sub-total	5,000	2,250	2,750	0
Social Media				
Social Media/SEO	133,800	60,210	73,590	
Landing Page Hosting	2,709	126	153	2,430
Sub-total	136,509	60,336	73,743	2,430
Digital Marketing				
SEM Marketing	74,300	30,060	36,740	7,500
Bluffton Insider Program	1,500	675	825	
Sub-total	75,800	30,735	37,565	7,500
Media Partnerships				
Garden & Gun (Daufuskie Campaign)	11,782		9,112	2,670
Southern Living (Bluffton Campaign)	26,319	20,039	6,280	0
Sub-total	38,101	20,039	15,392	2,670
Insiders/Collateral/Fulfillment				
Bluffton Collateral (Vacation Planner)	14,000	6,300	7,700	
Bluffton Fulfillment (shipping and mail)	12,090	5,441	6,650	
Sub-total	26,090	11,741	14,350	0
Group Sales & Marketing				
Group Tour	2,000	900	1,100	
Sub-total	2,000	900	1,100	0
<b>TOTAL MARKETING EXPENSES</b>	<b>283,500</b>	<b>126,000</b>	<b>144,900</b>	<b>12,600</b>
Destination Marketing Ops & Management	<b>166,500</b>	<b>74,000</b>	<b>85,100</b>	<b>7,400</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>450,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>	<b>230,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE MINUS EXPENSES</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 2018 Website and Online Marketing Performance



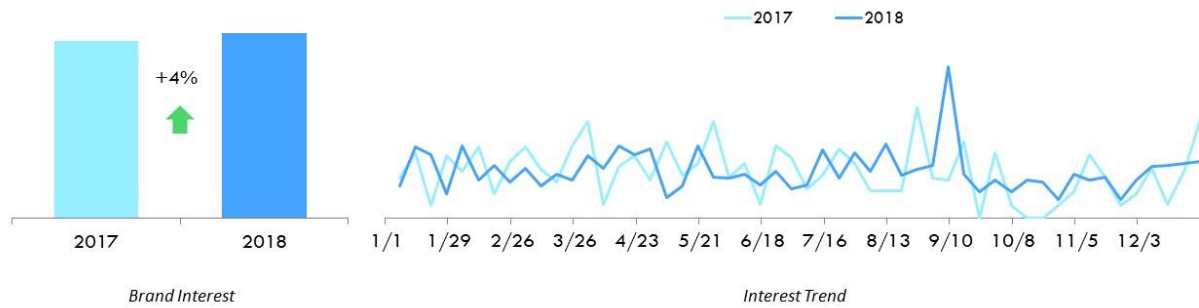
# BLUFFTON

## SEARCH INTEREST

POWERED BY  netconversion

In 2018 Search Interest was up +4% vs PY

- The highest volume of Brand Demand was driven from local interest in South Carolina. Other top interest states include Georgia, North Carolina, Indiana, and Ohio. These are the same top markets as we saw in 2017
- The top terms used to search for Bluffton are bluffton, bluffton sc, bluffton south carolina, and bluffton weather.



Based on Google Trends (Jan. 2017– Dec. 2018)

Net Conversion | Confidential



**bluffton**

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™

## WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

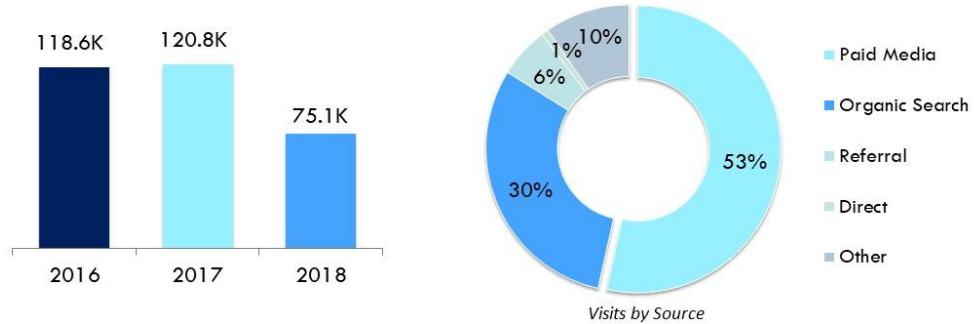
POWERED BY  netconversion

# BLUFFTON

## TOTAL WEBSITE VISITATION

POWERED BY  netconversion  
digital marketing | analytics | results

- YTD, nearly 75k Visits have been driven to the website, predominantly by search traffic (Organic and Paid). Site traffic is down - 38% vs PY, driven by all traffic sources, but mainly Direct and Organic
  - The share of traffic from Mobile devices is up +6pts vs PY, with Desktop and Tablet traffic down
  - Search traffic (Paid and Organic) makes up 84% of total site visits. Direct Traffic only makes up 1% of site visits, down from 4% in 2017

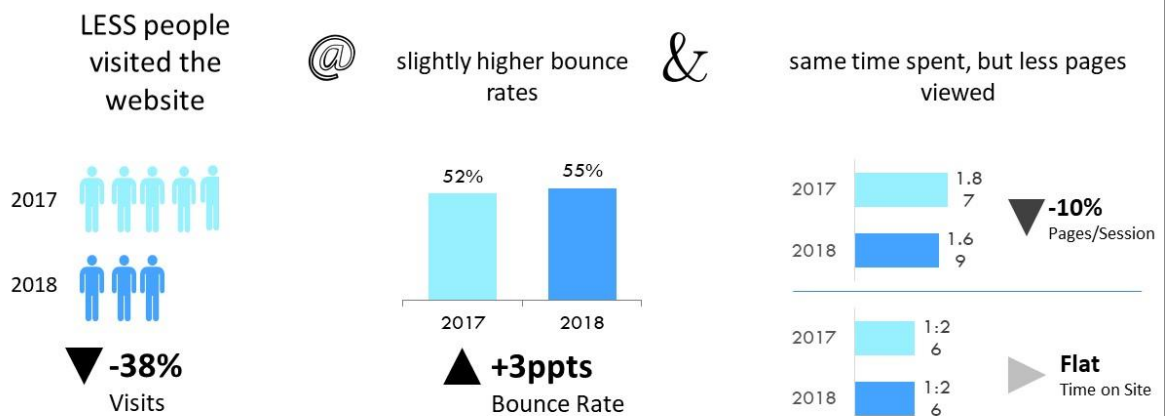


Net Conversion | Confidential

# BLUFFTON

## KEY ENGAGEMENT METRICS

POWERED BY  netconversion  
digital marketing | analytics | results



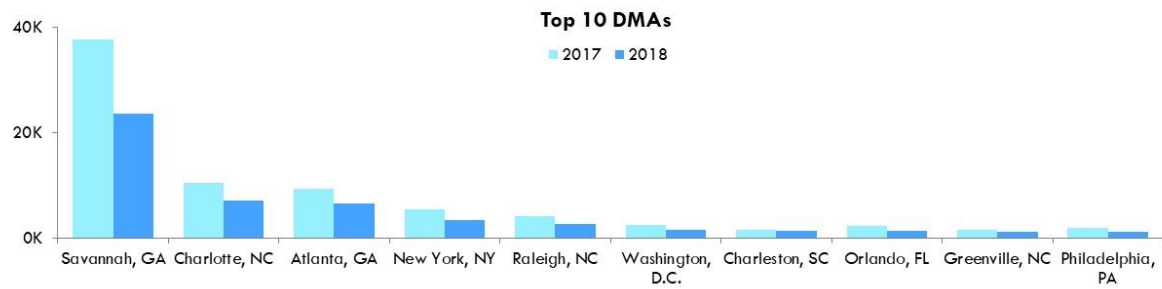
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# BLUFFTON

## DMA S

POWERED BY  **inetconversion**  
digital marketing | analytics | results

- In 2018, Top 10 DMAs saw a -35% decrease in visits vs the PY
- The Top 10 DMAs drive 66% of all traffic to the website
  - Traffic from all of the top 10 DMAs were down this year, though DC and Orlando had the largest decreases



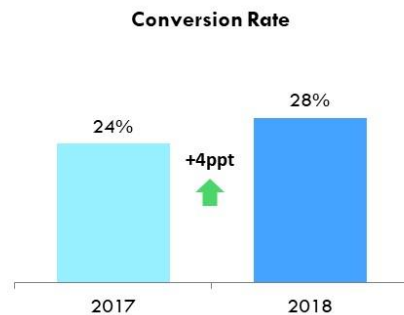
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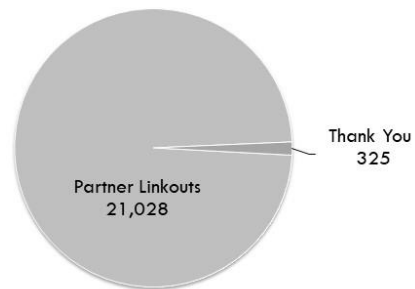
## CONVERSION OVERVIEW

POWERED BY  **inetconversion**  
digital marketing | analytics | results

- During 2018, Bluffton drove 21k Conversions for a Conversion Rate of 28%, up +4ppts vs PY
- The bulk of conversions are Outgoing Partner Links



### Conversions by Category



Net Conversion | Hilton Head Island | Confidential



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™

## ONLINE MARKETING PERFORMANCE

POWERED BY netconversion

### BLUFFTON

#### GOOGLE PAID METRICS

POWERED BY netconversion  
digital marketing | analytics | results

- Bluffton spend was up +14% vs PY, mainly due to adding a small video flight in 2018. CPCs did increase +25% Y/Y, but are still very low at just \$0.72 and Impression Share increased as well
- Conversions did decrease -17% vs PY, however, Conversion Rate remained flat to 2017, though site visits were almost -50% less than the PY

#### Spend



#### Efficiency



#### Effectiveness

**11K Conversions**

Down -17% vs 2017

**\$3.47 Cost/Conv**

Up +26% vs 2017

Net Conversion | Hilton Head Island | Confidential