



FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

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# TOWN OF BLUFFTON

## DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN

bluffton

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™



CALHOUN STREET  
One thousand one hundred sixty one feet this way →

Hilton Head Island  
Seven Miles →

Edisto  
EIGHTY FIVE MILES →

MARINE CORP AIR STATION  
BEAUFORT-18 MILES

Beaufort  
Eighteen Miles →

Savannah-Hilton Head  
INTERNATIONAL  
← AIRPORT 21 MILES

PARRIS ISLAND-11 MILES

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# 2021 Year In Review

## Social Performance



+103%

Instagram Followers

+173.9%

Instagram Engagements



+99.9%

Facebook Followers

+69.1%

Facebook Engagements

## Website Performance

133,004

Visitors (Sessions)

45,345

Organic Search Traffic

13,274

Referral Traffic

The [VisitBluffton.org](https://VisitBluffton.org) website launched in March 2021.

## Digital Media Performance

+114.7%

Paid Media Sessions

+31.1%

Paid Social Sessions

+456%

Display Sessions

## Public Relations Performance

456

Total Mentions

2,553,960,053

Total Impressions

\$1,112,764.91

Total Ad Value

# Accolades



**Travel + Leisure Bluffton: Best Small Towns  
in the South**

**#2 Travel + Leisure World's Top 10 South Carolina  
Resort Hotels, Montage Palmetto Bluff, 2021**

**20 Small Towns that Leave an Impression,  
*Country Living*, 2021**

**Forbes Five Star, Montage Palmetto Bluff, 2021**



# Executive Summary

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce/Visitor & Convention Bureau continues to be the leader in promoting tourism within the Lowcountry. The organization as a whole utilizes national economic and tourism trends, consumer research, prior program performance, demographics and takes into consideration the needs of our community (residents and businesses) to be in the best position as the steward of the destination.

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce/Visitor & Convention Bureau implemented major actions aimed at maintaining its commitment to excellence and leadership in the marketplace this past fiscal year.

These included:

1. Expansion of air service and air carriers at both airports serving the region.
2. Collaboration with *Garden & Gun* and influencer Venita Aspen on digital campaign that reached an estimated audience of 5.2M+.
3. Deployment of the Exploring Bluffton Video series which garnered 18K+ impressions.
4. The launch of a new [VisitBluffton.org](https://www.visitbluffton.org) website, delivering high-quality referrals to partners and an increasingly powerful social presence.



# Vision

A welcoming world-class community embracing nature, culture, and economic vibrancy to residents and visitors.

# Mission

Stimulate the regional economy while enhancing the quality of life for all.

# Brand Commitment

Bluffton, Heart of the Lowcountry™, speaks to the town's central location, its loveable 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.

# 2022-2023 Goal, Strategies & Tactics

**Goal:** The overarching goal of the marketing plan is to drive visitation to the destination through a series of demand creation and demand caption activations.

## Strategies

1. Build brand awareness and support qualified visitation to the destination among target markets.
2. Drive the discovery and exploration of the destination with deeper storytelling of destinations key attributes.
3. Leverage a strategic mix of targeted methods to identify and reach the most qualified users.
4. Enhance Leisure and Group business through qualified visitation.
5. Create an understanding of, and respect for, the delicate ecosystem of the destination.

## Tactics

1. Digital display, programmatic advertising, traditional ad placements (print), social media, marketing (Facebook, Instagram), user generated content (UGC), public relations (media outreach, partnerships).
2. Lead generation ads, paid social media, local search optimization, social media videos/ reels/stories, user-generated content.
3. Strategically target audiences according to the demographic and persona profiles specific to Bluffton through paid, owned, and organic efforts.
4. Email marketing, social and display remarketing advertising, search engine marketing, search engine optimization and local search, virtual networking, digital media, trade marketing.
5. Develop additional, digital content (blogs, social posts, videos), designed to tell stories about the natural ecosystem in engaging and informative ways and include tips and advice for how each visitor can protect the ecosystem.



# Budget

## Bluffton/Southern Beaufort County Budget (FY 2022-2023)

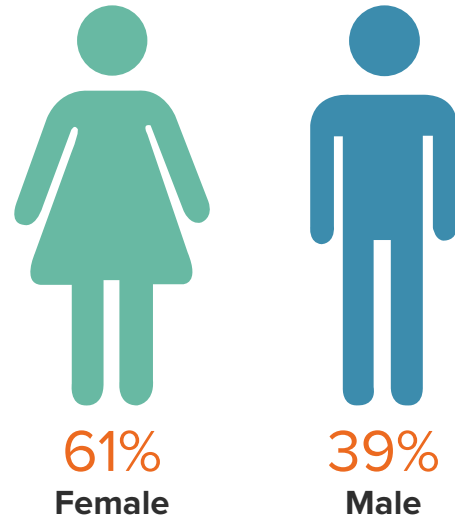
	FY 2023 VCB TOTALS	FY 2023 BLUFFTON	FY 2023 SBC	FY 2023 SBC (DAUFUSKIE)
<b>REVENUES</b>	Bluffton & SBC			
Town of Bluffton DMO	\$500,000	\$500,000		
Southern Beaufort County DMO	\$365,000		\$328,500	\$36,500
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$865,000</b>			
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
Research & Planning	\$20,000	\$11,560	\$8,420	-
Website Maintenance	\$60,000	\$34,680	\$25,260	-
Website Hosting	\$1,800	\$1,040	\$758	-
Social Marketing & Content Strategy	\$30,000	\$17,340	\$12,630	-
Paid Social	\$72,000	\$41,616	\$8,412	\$21,900
Digital Promotions / SEM	\$60,000	\$34,702	\$11,261	\$14,600
SEO	\$18,000	\$10,404	\$7,578	-
Bluffton Insiders (enews)	\$30,000	\$17,340	\$12,630	-
Bluffton Blog	\$15,000	\$8,670	\$6,315	-
Bluffton Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$85,000	\$49,130	\$35,785	-
Regional Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$65,000	\$37,570	\$27,365	-
Media Partnerships	\$100,000	\$57,800	\$42,100	-
Group Tour	\$5,000	\$2,890	\$2,105	-
Photography/Videography	\$50,000	\$28,900	\$21,050	-
Contingency	\$11,000	\$6,358	\$4,631	-
Ops & Management	\$242,200	\$140,000	\$102,200	-
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$865,000</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>\$328,500</b>	<b>\$36,500</b>

# Demographics & Personas

We use multiple primary and secondary data sources to understand who our visitors are and what motivates them to visit Bluffton. Our real-time data sources include Google Analytics, in addition to research, partnering with the Office of Tourism Analysis at the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina Beaufort. Using these insights we are able to extract visitor persona detail which allows us the ability to further refine our messaging to a more qualified potential consumer.

Today, as we continue to adjust to the traveler needs, we will keep our demographics and key personas at the forefront, adapting where necessary to address the consumers travel sentiment. We will expand our drive radius as travelers are willing to drive further distances post quarantine and continue to focus on our short-haul fly markets, supporting new air lift as it becomes available.

## Our Target Leisure Traveler for the Region



Source: Visitor Profile Study, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston



**\$150K+**  
Affluent Traveler



**52.8%**  
Undergraduate  
Degree or Higher



**2-4** Trips per Year  
**4** Nights Average Length of Stay

Source: Visitor Profile Study, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston



Persona	Tactic
<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital video/connected TV advertising</li> <li>Facebook /Instagram advertising</li> <li>Social and blog itineraries</li> <li>Search advertising</li> <li>Influencer family partnership</li> </ul>
<b>Weekenders</b>	<p>Social media partnerships with influencers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Couples</li> <li>Friend groups</li> <li>Paid search targeting branded and category terms such as “weekend getaway”</li> <li>Weekend itineraries for blog/site/social</li> <li>Social advertising</li> </ul>
<b>Snowbirds</b>	<p>Seasonal Campaign featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital video advertising</li> <li>Search advertising</li> <li>Social advertising</li> <li>Accommodations aggregated offers</li> </ul>
<b>Activities &amp; Recreation Enthusiasts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social advertising</li> <li>Digital video/connected TV advertising</li> <li>Maps and itineraries outlining convenience of staying in Town of Bluffton / proximity to nearby activities and experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Arts, Culture &amp; History Buffs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Google Display Network and social display</li> <li>Digital video/connected TV advertising</li> <li>Culture &amp; History itineraries</li> <li>Influencer partnership content</li> <li>Long-form content (blogs)</li> </ul>
<b>Culinary Travelers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital /connected TV advertising</li> <li>Restaurant listings</li> <li>Social advertising</li> <li>Organic social posts focused on food and drink</li> <li>Festival &amp; Event information and promotions</li> <li>Food itineraries and tour information</li> </ul>



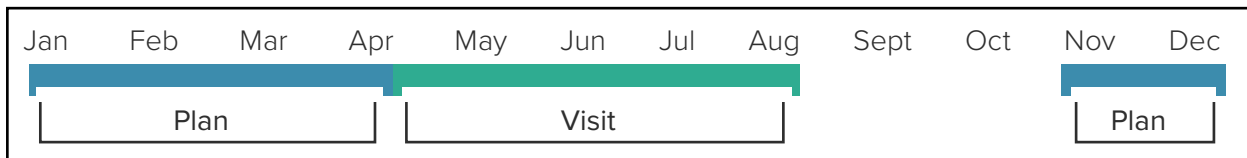
# Family



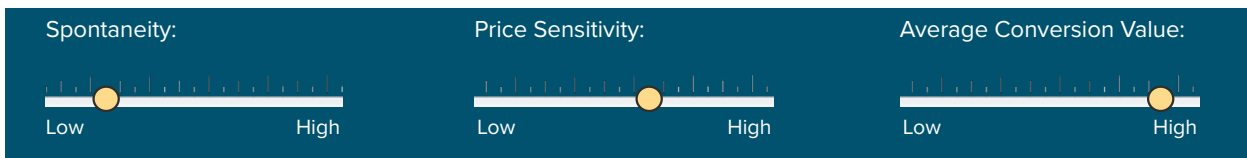


# Family Travel Objective

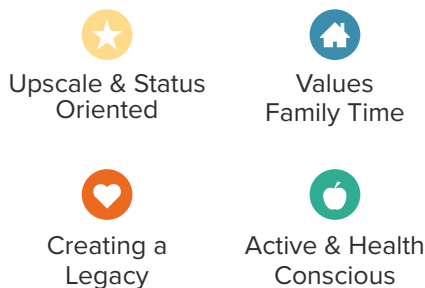
Find a vacation spot that will please everyone during the school holidays.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



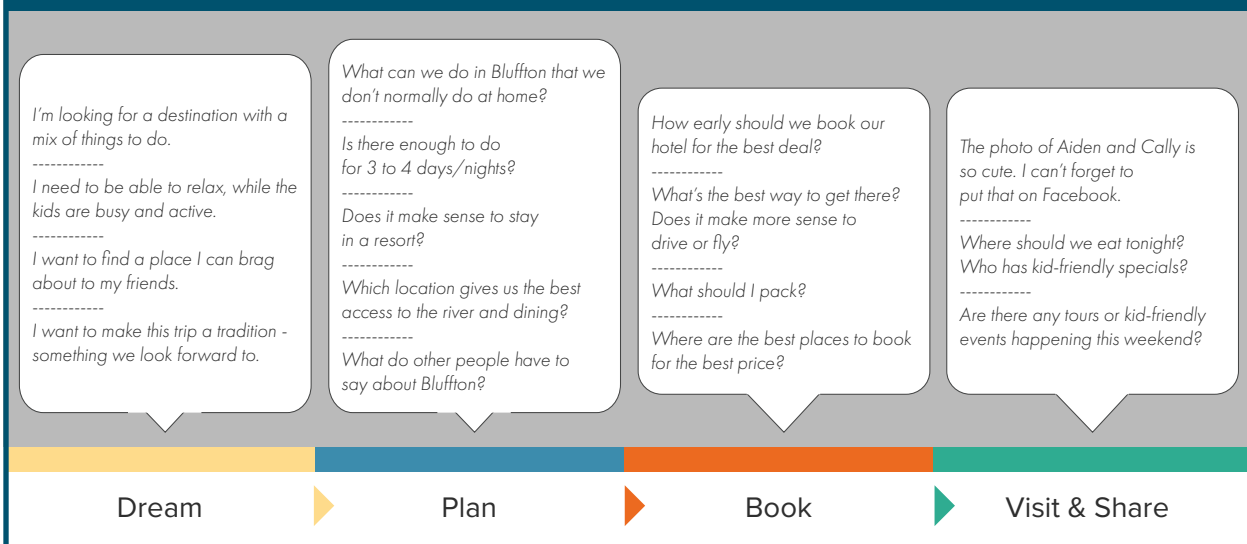
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Resorts/Hotels  
Water Activities  
Walking Parks  
Festivals & Events  
Kid-friendly Dining  
Museums & Tours

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
TripAdvisor  
TV  
Online Video  
Forums & Blogs  
Pinterest

## "Let's Make Memories." Their Path to Purchase



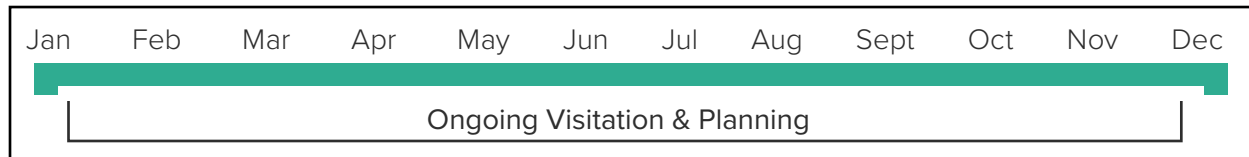
# The Weekender



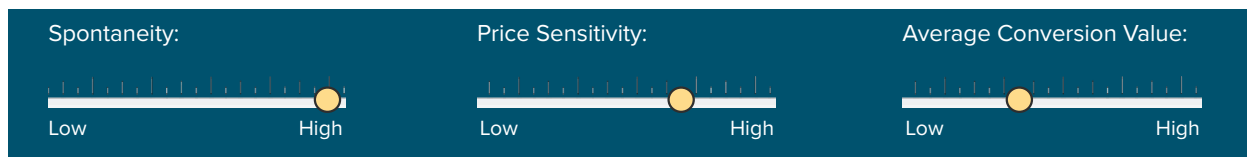


# The Weekender Travel Objective

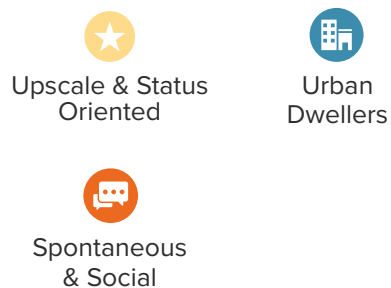
Find a fairweather weekend escape from work and city life.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



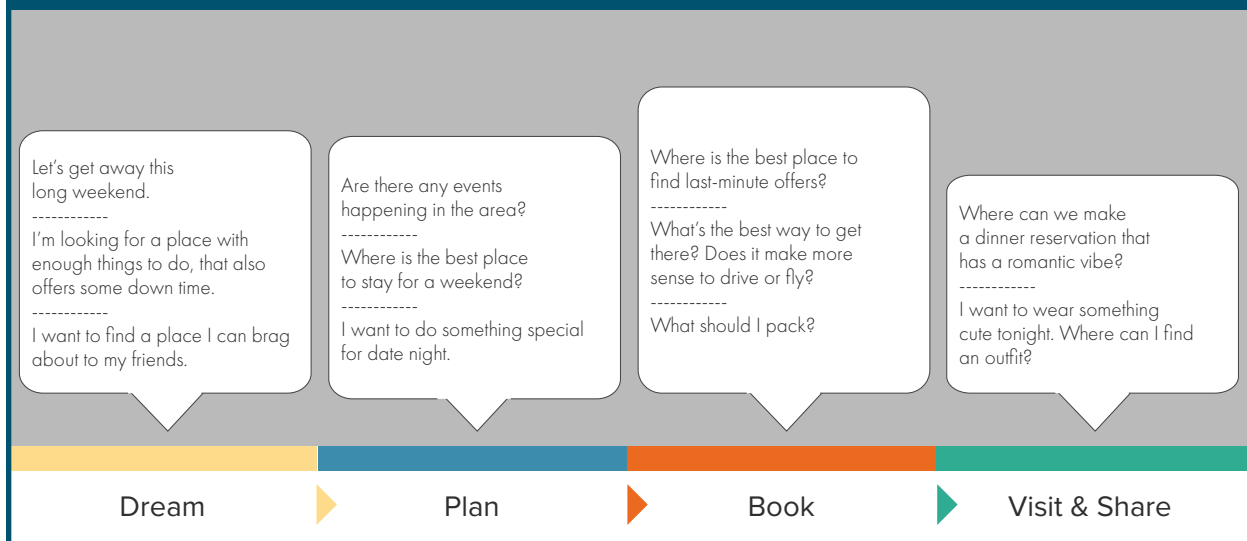
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Vacation Rentals & Resorts  
Water Activities  
Dining & Shopping  
Romantic Things to Do  
Festivals & Events  
Weddings

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
TripAdvisor  
TV  
Online Video  
Forums & Blogs  
Pinterest

## "Let's Get Away." Their Path to Purchase



# Snowbirds



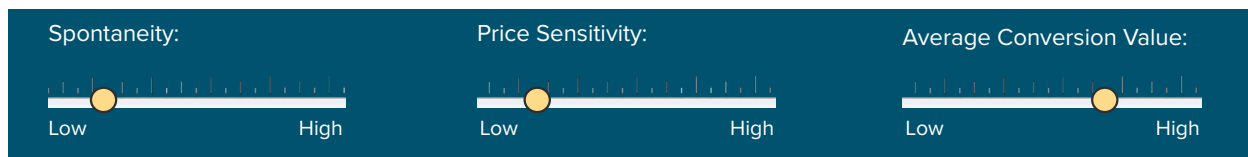


# Snowbirds Travel Objective

Find a warm destination that feels like home for the winter, where they can welcome family and friends for visits.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



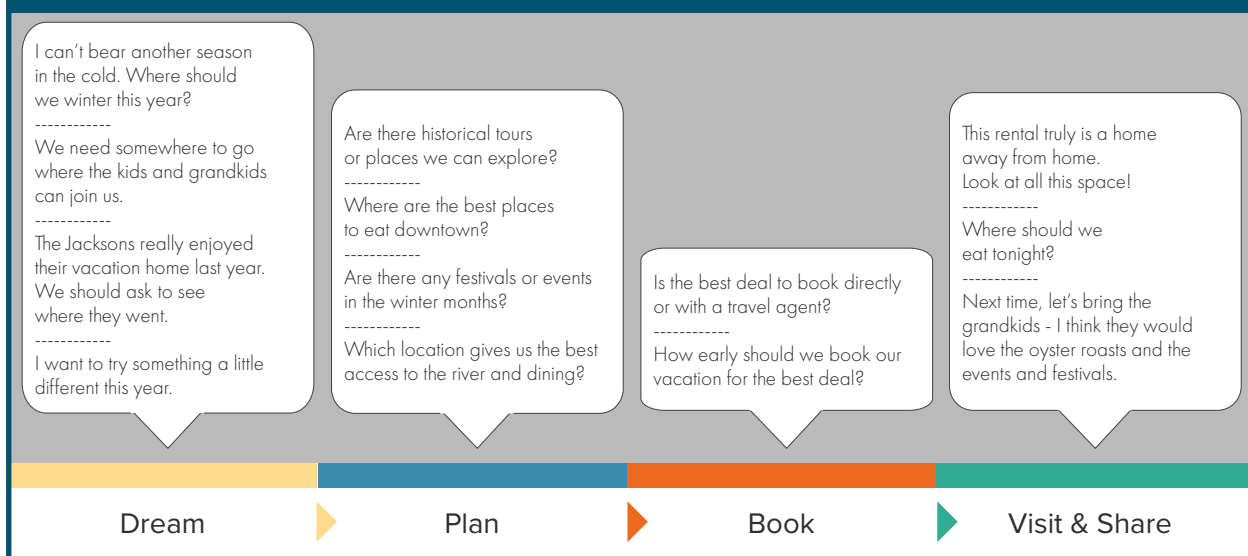
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Vacation Rentals  
Dining  
Golfing  
History / Cluture  
Excursion / Tour  
Walking

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook  
Print  
TripAdvisor  
Radio  
TV  
Online Video

## “Let’s Make this Feel like Home.” Their Path to Purchase



# Activities & Recreation Enthusiasts

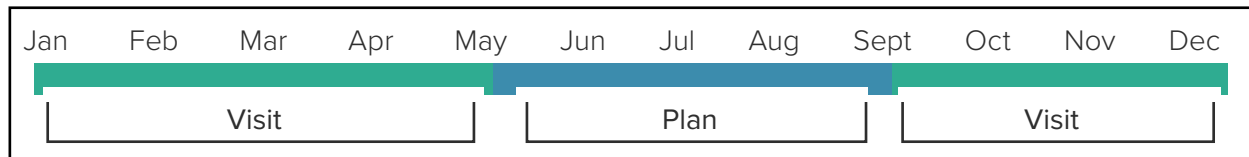




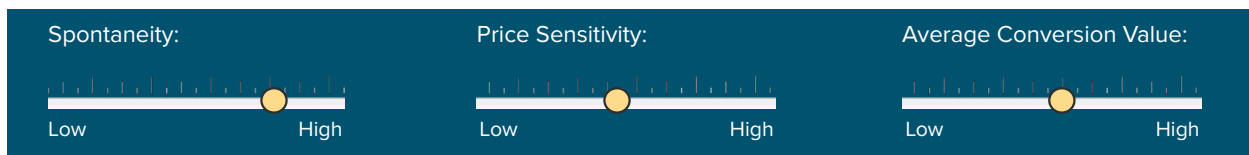
# Activities / Recreation Enthusiast

## Travel Objective

Find a destination where they can pursue their interests on their downtime.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



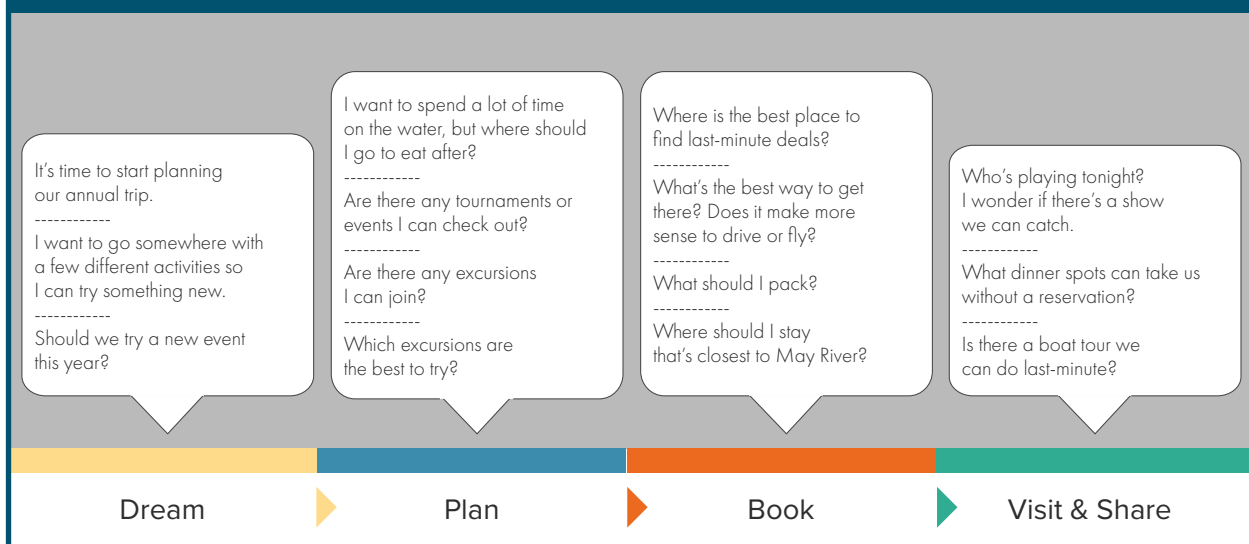
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Boating & Water Activities  
Hiking & Biking  
Live Music & Shows  
Golf

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
Twitter  
TripAdvisor  
TV  
Online Video  
Forums & Blogs

## "Let's Explore." Their Path to Purchase





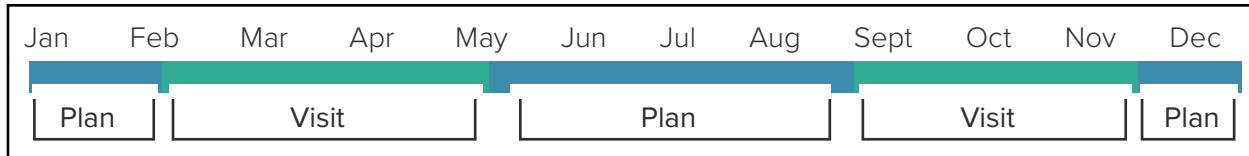
# Arts, Culture & History





# Arts, Culture & History Travel Objective

To explore cultural attractions, historical sites and the local arts scene.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are

  
Values  
Learning  
& Authenticity



  
Seeking an  
Immersive  
Experience

  
Image  
Conscious

  
Upscale  
& Status  
Oriented

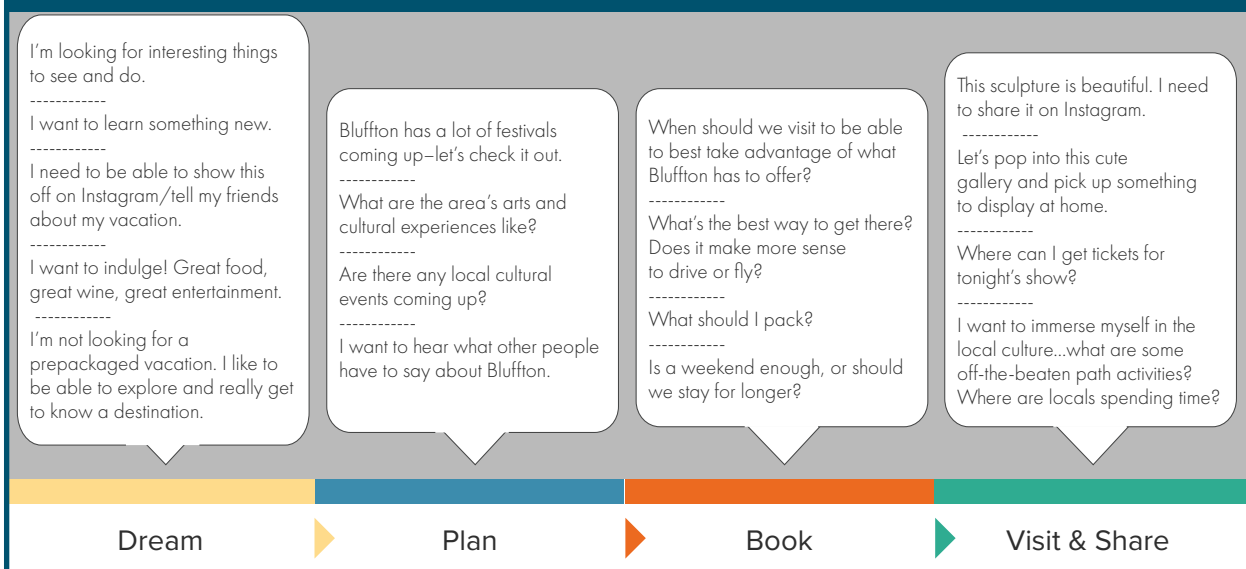
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Historical District & Attractions  
Art District & Galleries  
Cultural District  
Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage  
Festivals & Events  
Downtown

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
TripAdvisor  
Online Video  
Forums & Blogs  
Pinterest  
Earned Media  
(Print/Digital)

## “Experiences are Greater than Things.” Their Path to Purchase



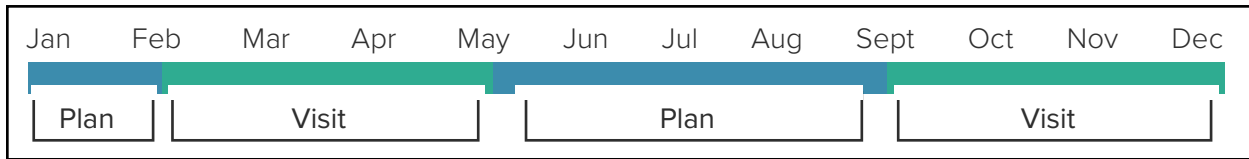
A close-up photograph of several oysters on ice with lemon wedges. The oysters are arranged on a bed of crushed ice, and several lemon wedges are scattered around them. The oysters are fresh, with their shells open, revealing the glistening meat inside. The lemon wedges are bright yellow and add a pop of color to the scene. The overall composition is appetizing and fresh.

# Culinary



# Culinary Travel Objective:

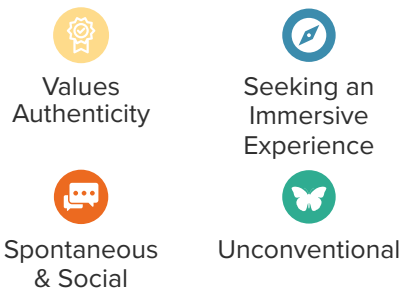
Be immersed in a new destination (or an old favorite) by exploring the pursuit of unique and memorable culinary experiences.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Food Events  
Food Tours  
Wine, Beer and Food Festivals  
Specialty Dining Experiences  
Oyster Roasts

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
TripAdvisor  
Forums & Blogs  
Pinterest





# 2022-2023 Destination Marketing Plan





# Digital Marketing

The proposed approach to the Town of Bluffton's marketing plan, outlined below, is meant to communicate how Bluffton, Heart of the Lowcountry™ - can best be experienced by a diverse group of target audiences.

From the May River, to arts and culture, culinary, outdoor activities, and a vibrant and authentic local community, the Town of Bluffton is perfectly positioned to meet the needs and interests of today's travelers.

The ultimate goal of the marketing strategy is to drive visitation to the destination through a series of demand creation and demand capture marketing activities. The strategy aims to drive qualified visitors to the destination and to support the discovery and exploration of new experiences that exist throughout the Town of Bluffton.

The marketing plan is designed to be highly personalized, flexible, and results-oriented. Each individual campaign that is implemented to drive exposure for the destination will be deployed

based on a series of defined goals that align with each persona, and the overarching goal for the marketing plan.

All tactics, creative, campaigns, and overall channel strategies will support the goal and will align with the specific area of the customer journey.

The plan focuses on website, social media, SEO, digital paid media, partnerships, and public relations tactics, and all corresponding streams of work.

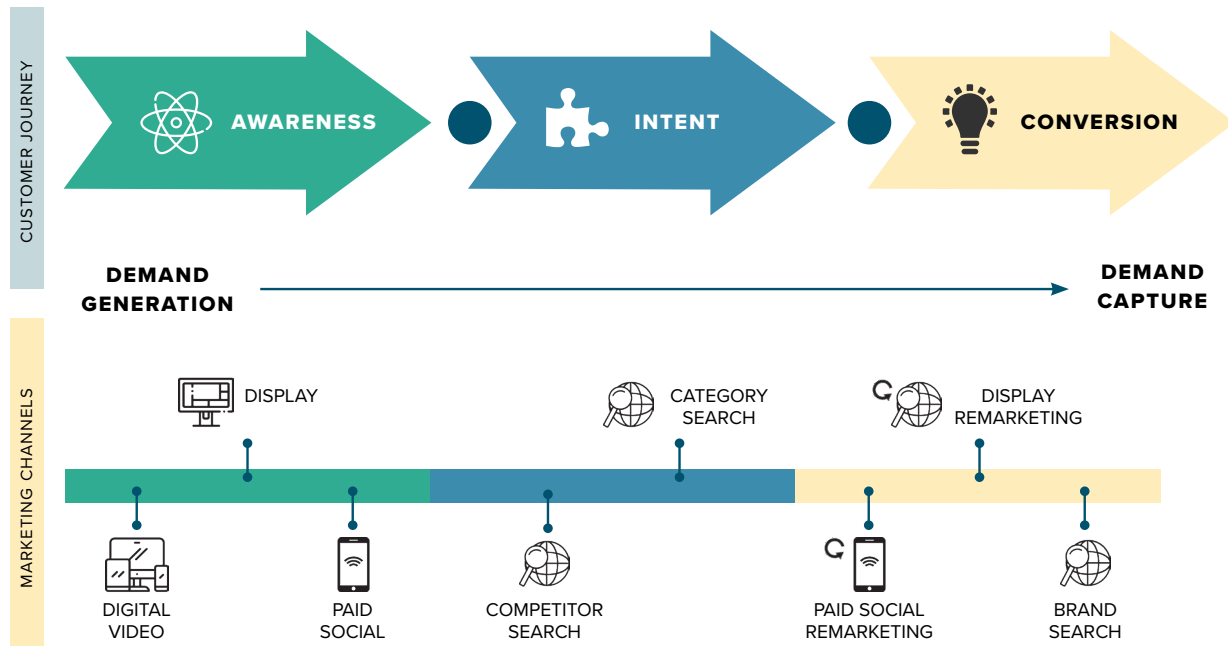
## The Customer Journey

Our role as a destination marketing organization is to captivate qualified travelers by creating an emotional connection to the destination through targeted communications and compelling brand storytelling. A full-funnel marketing strategy to drive increased optics and referrals to partners throughout the region is required. Our efforts will place a specific emphasis on more awareness-focused marketing channels, using immersive and authentic brand content to reach new, qualified prospects the brand can deliver for our partners. We will continue to nurture repeat visitors and brand loyalists with our mid-funnel tactics.



## Conversion Focused Digital Marketing

The digital strategy is simple in the context that regardless of the channel strategy, each campaign is continuously optimized to drive increased conversions for the Town of Bluffton. The strategy will remain nimble, scalable and all media purchased to drive exposure for the Town of Bluffton brand will be 100% measurable. As each phase is focused on a different goal and intent, measurements and benchmarks unique to Awareness, Intent and Conversion are established to provide a holistic view of success.



## Search Engine Marketing

We will execute an aggressive search engine marketing (SEM) program to expand and broaden our organic rankings on major search engines. We will use a targeted list of key search terms that best correlate with the Town of Bluffton's core audience segments.

A custom digital marketing plan will be deployed to align consumers and influence them to visit the Bluffton website, ultimately directly increasing demand to visit partner pages.

### Display & Remarketing

The primary goal of display marketing efforts for the Town of Bluffton is to cultivate consumers

who have expressed interest in visiting Bluffton as noted by their online behavior, and then push them to the VisitBluffton.org website to explore, engage and ultimately book travel to the destination. Prospecting and native display banner partners will be distributed via:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Google Display Network

Display remarketing is used to reinforce the Town of 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 process.

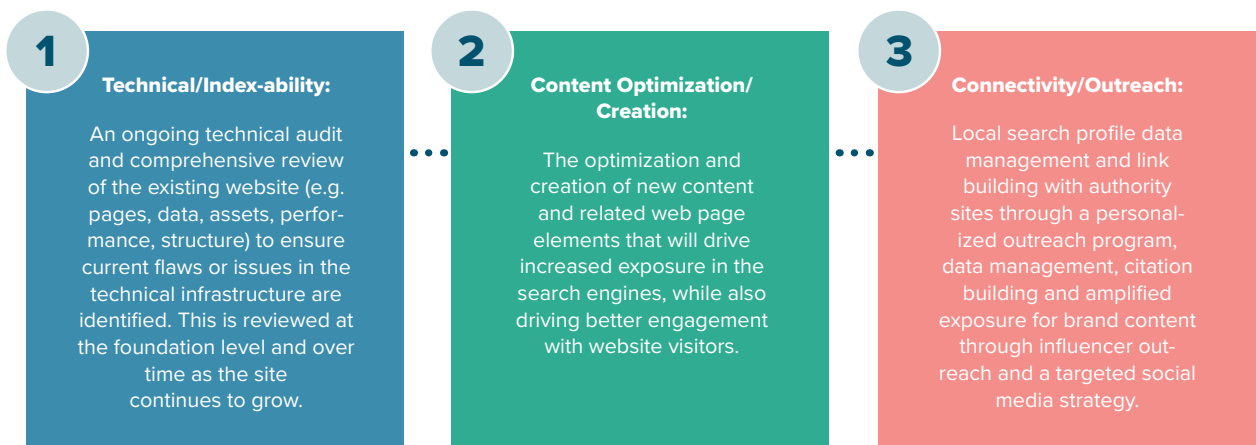


# Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing is about getting found for the right reasons by people who matter to your brand. Our approach to ongoing SEO marketing initiatives is multifaceted and comprehensive. SEO starts with the very basic concepts of accessibility and indexability—being discovered by the right people for the right types of content—and spans to site architecture, social

media engagement, and long-term content marketing programs and backlink strategies.

To put it simply: we assess, build a strong foundation, analyze the results, and continue to build on the strategy over time. The ongoing SEO program for the Town of Bluffton can be broken down into 3 core areas:



We will work with the Town of Bluffton to create and enhance the content strategy for the destination. It's critical that fresh, quality content is created to drive increased engagement and more natural search traffic to the website. This will be done with the publishing of regular blogs on the website, developed by the content team.

We will conduct research to identify content marketing opportunities to optimize blog content. This will open the site to new opportunities to build traffic from a natural search traffic perspective. Blog URLs should also be used in social media posts to help increase website traffic and engagement.

Specifically, we'll provide recommendations about optimizing current content and creating new content and related page elements that will drive increased search engine exposure, leading to better engagement with website visitors. Initially, optimization will be focused on identifying content areas on the website that require immediate attention, while identifying gaps for future content creation that will need to be addressed based on ongoing competitive analysis and the monitoring of search interest trends. We will also regularly monitor the site for duplicate content and reduce or remove where possible to avoid redundancies.

# Data Strategy & Personalization

Utilizing first-party and zero-party data, the brand will work to gain a clearer understanding of our prospective visitors' behaviors and implicit desires to build a personalized, one-to-one communication strategy. This starts at the VisitBluffton.org website and extends to our email communication and throughout our entire digital marketing strategy.

The Visitor & Convention Bureau will create data-driven, always-on, relevant, and compelling content strategy that matches the visitors' mindset and interests. As prospective visitors move through their journey the brand will continue to tailor messaging utilizing sequential storytelling to make the destination experience more relevant to each individual visitor. Ultimately, the ongoing analysis of audience data will provide us with insights to make informed choices about market opportunities and high-value audience segments, which will ultimately lead to higher engagement with the destination and more outbound referrals to partners.

## Effective Email Marketing

Increased efforts to personalize the customer journey will include a dedicated email strategy, along with new and relevant drip campaigns mapped to the refreshed segments. These drip campaigns will be integrated with all key customer touch points where users are provided with the opportunity to connect with the brand via email in exchange for invaluable content related to the destination.

## Social Media

Social media continues to be a strong performing platform for the destination. In 2022-2023, we will continue to strategically grow our following and engagement.

### Tangible Goals:

- Grow total social media following by 10%
- Grow total engagements across all social media platforms by 10%
- Grow total impressions across all social platforms by 10%
- Increase website traffic via social by 10%
- Work to rank 2nd across all social media metrics in our competitor set

### These are the channels that best support Bluffton's tangible goals:



**YouTube:** Our Explore Bluffton video series was released in 2021 and generated over 18k+ impressions. We will continue to promote the videos on our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram channels to bring user's to YouTube. This year we will also work to put together a list of additional businesses and community members to film more videos to further engage the community, promote the destination, and grow our YouTube channel.



**Facebook:** Facebook is our primary traffic source and we do not see this changing in the short-term. Our approach to Facebook is to incorporate a range of content, user-generated content shared by locals and guests, co-ops, one-off and on-going events and planned activities like tours, and the Farmers Market of Bluffton.





**Instagram:** Instagram's strategy will continue to focus on curating user-generated content from talented guests and locals to support Bluffton's messaging and the #LoveBlufftonSC hashtag. Our biggest push on this channel will be to engage in two way conversations with our followers, to encourage them to mention our channel in their owned content, and to promote the #LoveBlufftonSC hashtag. We will also focus on curating a more aesthetically-consistent feed, using warm photo filters that portray the sunny, Southern vibe of the Lowcountry. A heavy focus on weekly Instagram story series will get shared to further connect with followers in real time. We will develop engaging reels to promote the town with trending music and hashtags. One Instagram guide will get shared each month to live on the Instagram page. This blog type style post brings together various User Generated Content (UGC) posts and gives users an aesthetically pleasing article to help them plan their visit or weekend adventures.



**Twitter:** We will continue to focus on channel growth and raising the engagement rate. Although we pulled back from our Twitter efforts in 2021 to launch our Pinterest plan, we will re-engage with the platform with a goal to share two tweets a week with our audience. Content shared on this channel will be a mix of user-generated content, blog posts, links to the website, as well as local news, and events.



**Pinterest:** We will continue to develop and share a mix of highly designed imagery on the platform to build a bank of pins on Bluffton's Instagram channel. Our goal is to grow following and increase the overall engagements on the page. We will do this by sharing content related to Bluffton, South Carolina, and connecting the pins with the relevant blogs.





## The Destination Website

In March 2021, VisitBluffton.org launched as a standalone website and services as the single-most important touch point for the brand next to the destination experience itself. In 2022-2023, we will dive deeper into identifying qualified visitors, ensuring a streamlined experience and ultimately sending relevant leads, in the form of qualified traffic, to partner sites. We will refresh existing copy and create new engaging content to keep the website updated and fresh. Ongoing optimizations of content and structure will be made based on SEO research, trends data, and referral insights.



# Leisure Media Campaigns

Bluffton is well positioned with the product travelers are looking to experience. They are looking for open spaces and deep connections with culture, history, cuisine and natural beauty. Accolades earned by the destination bring our brand top of mind for travelers as they look to plan their next vacation.

Our media strategy will focus on infusing local personality into our media efforts that allows the consumer to connect with the destination and inspire them to travel to Bluffton to discover more. We will further our reach with existing partners we have developed relationships with over the years as well as look to new partnerships to create a more diverse profile, ultimately expanding our visitor demographics. Examples could include but

not limited to: *Garden & Gun*, *Southern Living*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Essence Magazine* and *O Magazine (Oprah Magazine)*. We will also look to engage travel advisors as we have seen post pandemic that more people are engaging their efforts for travel planning.

By utilizing these platforms and endorsements to further amplify our voice, we are able to tell our brand story and leverage our overall marketing to help differentiate the destination from the competitive set and drive awareness and visitation to Bluffton. Growing these relationships with these media partners will also help with our accolades and awards designations from these publications for the destination.

As we look to build out these media partnerships, we will work closely with the Town of Bluffton to determine which publications are the best fit for the overall strategy and goal of our marketing plan efforts.



Condé Nast  
**Traveler**

**Southern Living®**

**GARDEN & GUN**



# Destination Public Relations

Earned media secured through public relations initiatives is a critical driver for destination awareness. As we look to the year ahead, it is important to note that the media landscape is shifting with more consumers getting their news and entertainment through mobile and digital platforms. We are also seeing influencers maintain their status as a trusted resource, inspiring purchase intent through their engaged following and curated content.

With this insight, we will employ a strategic public relations plan with a number of tactics designed to increase visibility and consideration among the next generation of travelers, while appealing to loyal, repeat guests who are important advocates for the destination.

Through public relations efforts, we will deliver a continuous drumbeat of media coverage, as well as social and digital chatter, allowing us to move the needle and maintain a competitive edge over like-minded destinations. Our goal is to inspire travelers to explore Bluffton and see for themselves why it is the heart of the Lowcountry.

## Target Audiences:

There is something for everyone in Bluffton, so we will take a surgical approach to telling the right stories, in the right places to appeal to the right audiences:

- **Historical/Cultural Traveler:** Allowing the rich history of Bluffton to take center stage, we will want to put public relations resources behind ensuring that message

- **Millennial/NextGen Traveler:** Millennials are ripe for becoming Bluffton's next generation of loyal visitors, and we need to capture their attention as they look to create their own unique experiences and share them with their network.
- **Regional:** While national top-tier coverage is always a priority, we will ensure key markets across the U.S. and Canada remain top of mind including:
  - **Tried and True Markets:** Seek out stories in priority drive/fly markets including Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, New York, Ohio, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Toronto
  - **Emerging Markets:** Leverage communications opportunities among emerging markets including Texas, Colorado, California and more, as new air service is announced

## Priority Focus Areas:

We have aligned on a number of priorities in partnership to ensure we are placing emphasis on the areas that are most important to the destination and our partners. We will work to land Bluffton stories in top-tier travel, lifestyle and news outlets across print, online, broadcast and social channels.

- **Hidden Gems:** There are many hidden gems for Bluffton. It is that mix of the old and the new that allows each visitor to craft a vacation experience that is all their own. Go off the beaten path this year to tell some of the destinations lesser known stories.
- **Culinary:** Uncover recipes, chef stories, signature dishes and untold foodie fodder to bring Bluffton's culinary experiences to life for consumers.
- **Culture:** The rich history of Bluffton will continue to be a focus and provides a platform to tap into the true culture and history of the destination.
- **Marquee Events:** The team will support signature events.

## Public Relations Tactics:

A number of public relations tactics will be employed to seamlessly spread destination news far and wide throughout the year. Public relations efforts will include:

- **Visiting Journalist/Influencer Program:**

Firsthand experiences spark meaningful feature stories for the destination.

Through both individual visits and themed group trips that marry back to the destination's priority pillars, we will help to customize itineraries that drive in-depth feature coverage and real-time social content.

- **Paid Influencer Program:** Engage top-tier influencers with strong followings and engagement to partner with the destination on a paid content program that maps back to our hidden gems pillars. Leverage the influencers' reach to infiltrate consumer feeds with Bluffton's visual posts and key messages that dive deep into priority themes such as history, arts, culinary and culture.

- **Exporting Bluffton:** For media and influencers unable to visit the destination firsthand, senior Visitor Convention Bureau staff will travel to New York to share news and build relationships through a series of deskmade meetings and intimate gatherings. These in-person opportunities prove fruitful in identifying and shaping story angles for future coverage.
- **Always on Media Relations:** In an effort to keep Bluffton top of mind throughout the year, the team will help to keep an "always on" News Bureau pipeline full through proactive and reactive media outreach. Story angles will be identified to satisfy both long lead and short lead story opportunities, and media will receive a steady flow of news to keep them apprised of new developments, new flight routes, marquee events, Lowcountry recipes and more.





# Photography/Videography

In 2022 we will continue the momentum established by the Town of Bluffton video series and build an up-to-date, engaging, and on-brand bank of image and video assets that can be used across marketing and Public Relations channels to promote the destination. Asset collection will be done strategically to align with planned campaigns, identified gaps, and metrics that indicate what topics and asset types perform best for the Town of Bluffton.



# Group Sales & Trade Shows

Bluffton continues to grow and position itself as a group destination more so now than at 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 and cultural scene, with growing culinary experiences. We will continue to promote Bluffton while attending travel trade shows throughout the country.

## Group Tour

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 the 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.

## Tradeshows

### SportsTravel Magazine's TEAMS '22 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 '22 will be held in October. Launched in 1998, TEAMS attracts more than 1000 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 22nd year, TEAMS has helped define the sports-event and appointment-based trade show industries.

### American Bus Association (ABA)

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.



## **Northstar IPEC (Independent Planner Education Conference)**

IPEC provides a conference program for independent planners that provides the perfect mix of education, networking and meetings, with options to participate for hosted and non-hosted buyers alike.

## **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.

## **Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE)**

GSAE's mission is to advance the profession of association management and to enhance the professionalism of association executives.







# Hilton Head Island – Bluffton Visitor & Convention Bureau *2022-2023 Trade Show Schedule*

TRADESHOW	MARKET	DATES
American Bus Assn.	Group Tour	January
Northstar IPEC	Corporate	March
SCSAE	State Assn	May
GSAE	State Assn	June
Sports Travel's TEAMS Conference	Sports	October



# Collateral and Fulfillment

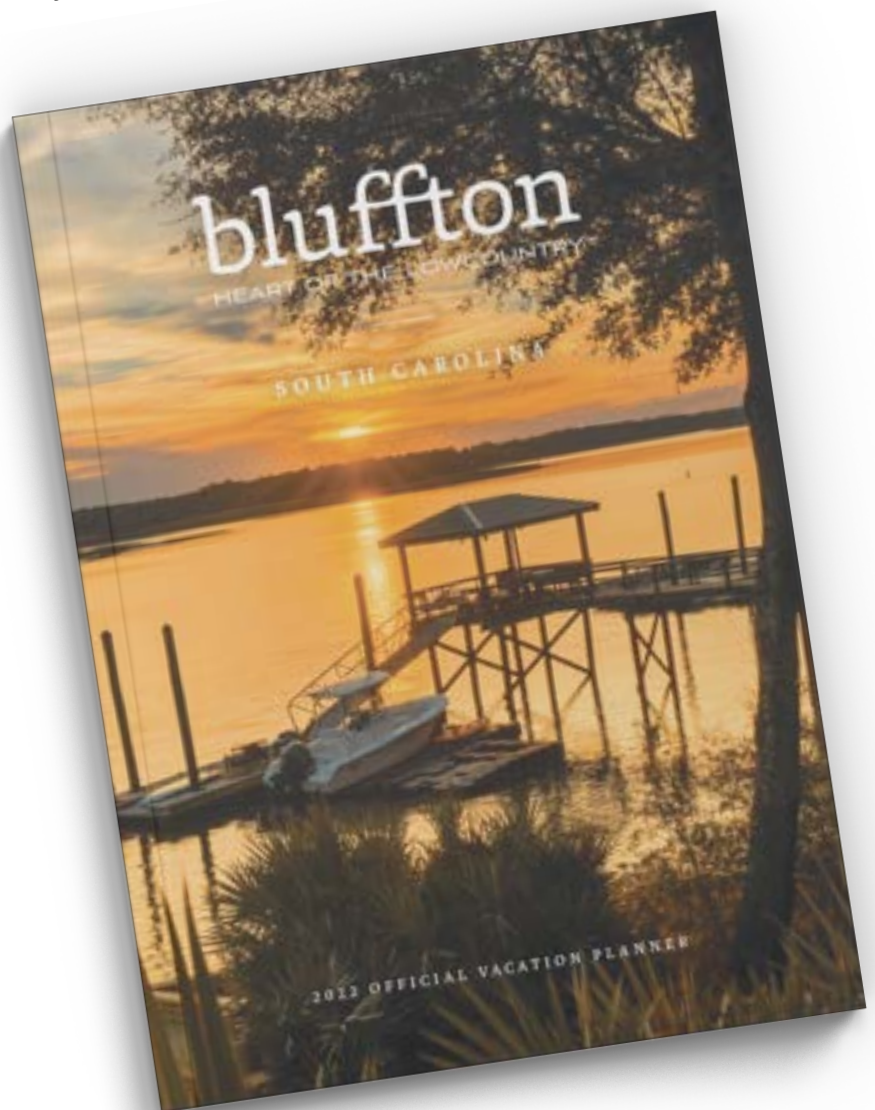
The Official Bluffton Vacation Planner, our comprehensive guide to what to see and do, is our primary print fulfillment piece for the destination. We receive many online, as well as media and phone inquiries, and distribute the planner to state and local welcome centers, airports, along with trade shows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

In today's more visual world, telling a story through pictures and graphics appeals more to our target demographic. To further entice these target markets, we have designed the Vacation Planner for visitors to better visualize their vacations and discover what the Town of Bluffton has to offer. This is an important element to the "Travel Planning Journey."

Bluffton's natural beauty is what sets the destination apart from other communities. By tapping into our portfolio of stunning photography and combining it with updated content, we have transformed the Vacation Planner into a "look book" destination discovery piece so visitors can imagine themselves experiencing all things Lowcountry.

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: 25,000 printed**



# Research & Analytics

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:

1. Maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal.
2. 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.
3. Keydata, monthly Home & Villa lodging reports on occupancy, average room rates.
4. Collaborate with College of Charleston Office of Tourism Analysis and the University of South Carolina Beaufort along with ensure details of our Google Analytics and social media metrics to provide regular performance updates.
5. Subscription to the U.S. Travel Association's (USTA) Travel Monitor Program and related reports.

These consistent research details will provide insights to produce quarterly and annual reports that provide a health check into tourism for the Town of Bluffton\*.

Based on the contract with the Town of Bluffton and the Chamber, on a quarterly basis the DMO will provide the Town with:

1. Number of website visits
2. Number of clicks throughs made to area businesses (conversions)
3. Occupancy rate
4. Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR)
5. Number related to mail fulfillment
6. Industry awards received for marketing and public relations
7. Events held and participation in events by Chamber members
8. Update on public relations efforts to include; number of media impressions/ dollar equivalent
9. Social Media Reports

On an annual basis, statistics and insights related to tourism provided through the following reports,

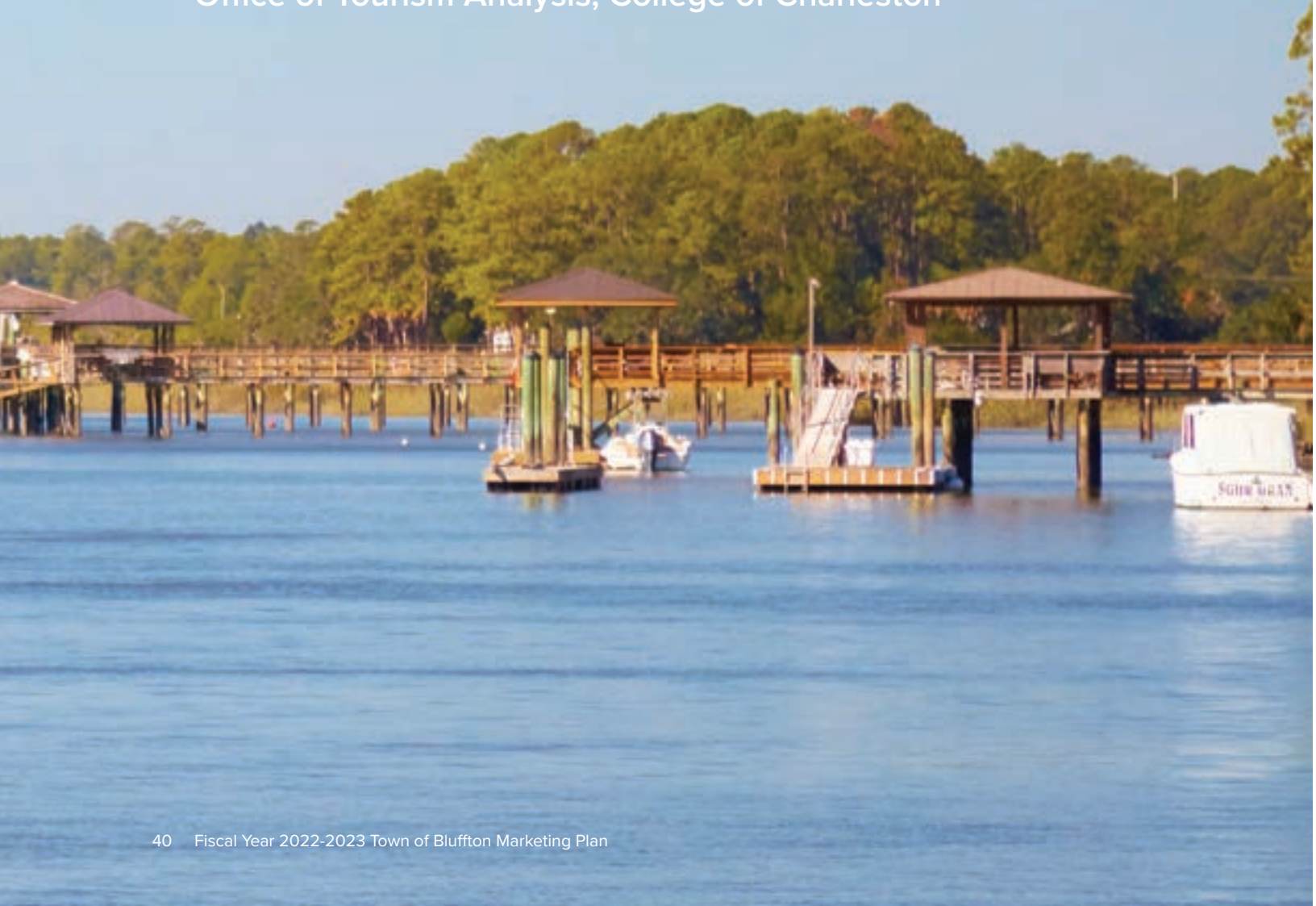
1. Visitor Profile Study
2. Economic Impact Study

\*All metrics and reports mentioned above are based upon information available. Reporting will flex and grow as more information is gathered and/ or becomes available.



# Appendix

- *2021 Social Recap*, VERB Interactive
- *2021 Website & Digital Marketing Recap*, VERB Interactive
- *2021 Public Relations Recap*, Weber Shandwick
- *2021 Economic Impact Report*, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston
- *2021 Visitor Profile Study Executive Summary*, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston



# Bluffton

## 2021 Social Report



[exploreblufftonsc](https://www.facebook.com/exploreblufftonsc)



[@exploreblufftonsc](https://www.instagram.com/exploreblufftonsc)



[@VisitBlufftonSC](https://twitter.com/VisitBlufftonSC)

### 2021 Overview

Bluffton, SC launched its own social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in July of 2019. During the last two years we have built on the launch success by focusing on increasing engagement, impressions and growth with the goal of building brand awareness and positioning Bluffton, SC as a weekend destination for all.

In 2021 we launched Bluffton's YouTube channel with the #ExploringBluffton video series, and in the late part of Q4 we started Bluffton's Pinterest, and took a small step back from Twitter.

During 2021, we continued to feature user-generated content in our social media posts that aligned with our pillars, including History, Arts, Cultural, May River, Culinary, and Natural Beauty. We found scenic and animal photography performs best on our channels and resonates with our audience.

In 2021 we implemented weekly stories to engage further with our audience on Instagram and Facebook sharing local restaurants, weekly roundups, and trivia questions. We also took notice of Instagram's updates and started creating Reels and Guides to build on Bluffton's online presence.

2021 saw impressive growth for our channels, with Bluffton remaining #1 for audience growth throughout the year.





Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

## Executive Summary



### Wins

- Bluffton consistently maintains the fastest growing cross-channel audience in our competitor landscape
- Facebook is our fastest growing platform, bringing in 11,593 new followers in 2021, which is a 14% increase from 2020
- Bluffton's channels overall had 10,540,210 Impressions and 427,533 Engagements in 2021, which is a 33% and 76% increase from 2020



### Innovation

- We implemented Instagram Stories in 2020 using a combination of UGC and original, engagement-boosting content like polls and question boxes. These posts reaped positive engagement and we'll continue to work them into our strategy going into 2022
- Instagram as a platform is an opportunity for us to reach the Gen X and Millennial audience. We will integrate tools like Instagram Guides, Reels and Carousels to capitalize on this platform and audience.



### Challenges

- Twitter continues to be slow to grow, with our growth MoM remaining steady but much lower than our other channels
- Pinterest has been challenging to grow and resonate with users



### Key Learnings

- Consistent, frequent posting is key to capitalizing on our platform's algorithms from an organic perspective, and staying competitive with paid budgets is key for follower growth and engagement from a paid perspective.
- Posts that promote our partners and community perform well, and we can find more opportunities to share collaborative posts and grow

## Social Media Snapshot



### Followers

Total Fans  
**24,256**  
↑ 99.9%

Followers  
**6,177**  
↑ 103.0%

Followers  
**634**  
↑ 1.4%

Total Followers  
**31,067**  
↑ 96.6%

### Post Engagements

Engagements  
**377,004**  
↑ 69.1%

Engagements  
**49,738**  
↑ 173.9%

Engagements  
**677**  
↑ -62.5%

Total Engagements  
**427,419**  
↑ 76.0%

Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

## Top Posts

In 2021, Facebook saw the most engagement per post out of all active social channels. Below is an example of the types of content that performs best for us (all of which is user-generated), including sunset and sunrise shots, Spanish moss, Bluffton landmarks, and dog photos.

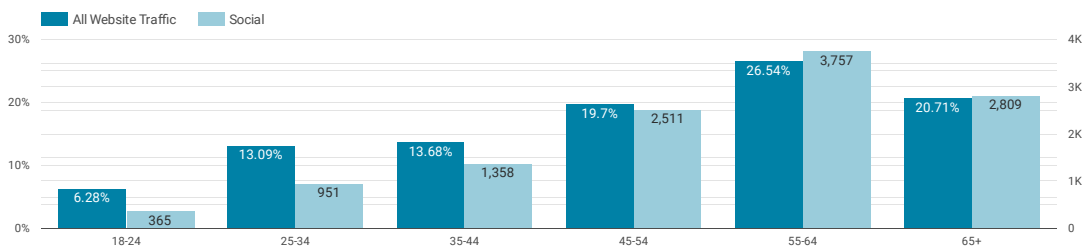


## Social Audience

Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

### Age

What are the ages of the users?

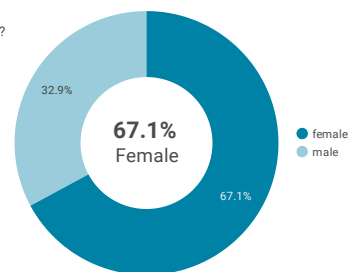


- In 2021, we saw a shift in Bluffton's web and social media followings, and we are seeing a mix of ages interact with our socials and website. In 2020, 67% of our audience was 55+, but in 2021, 67% of our audience is 45+.

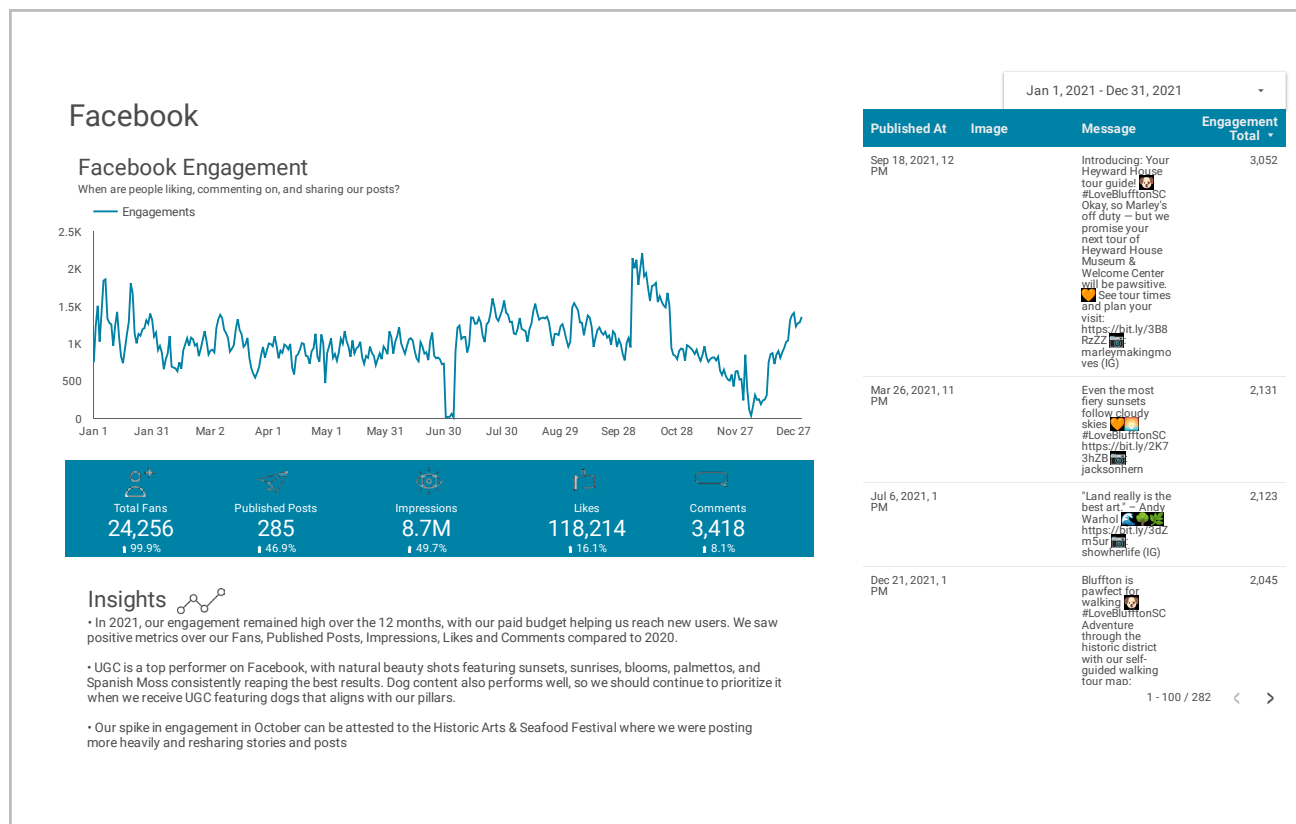
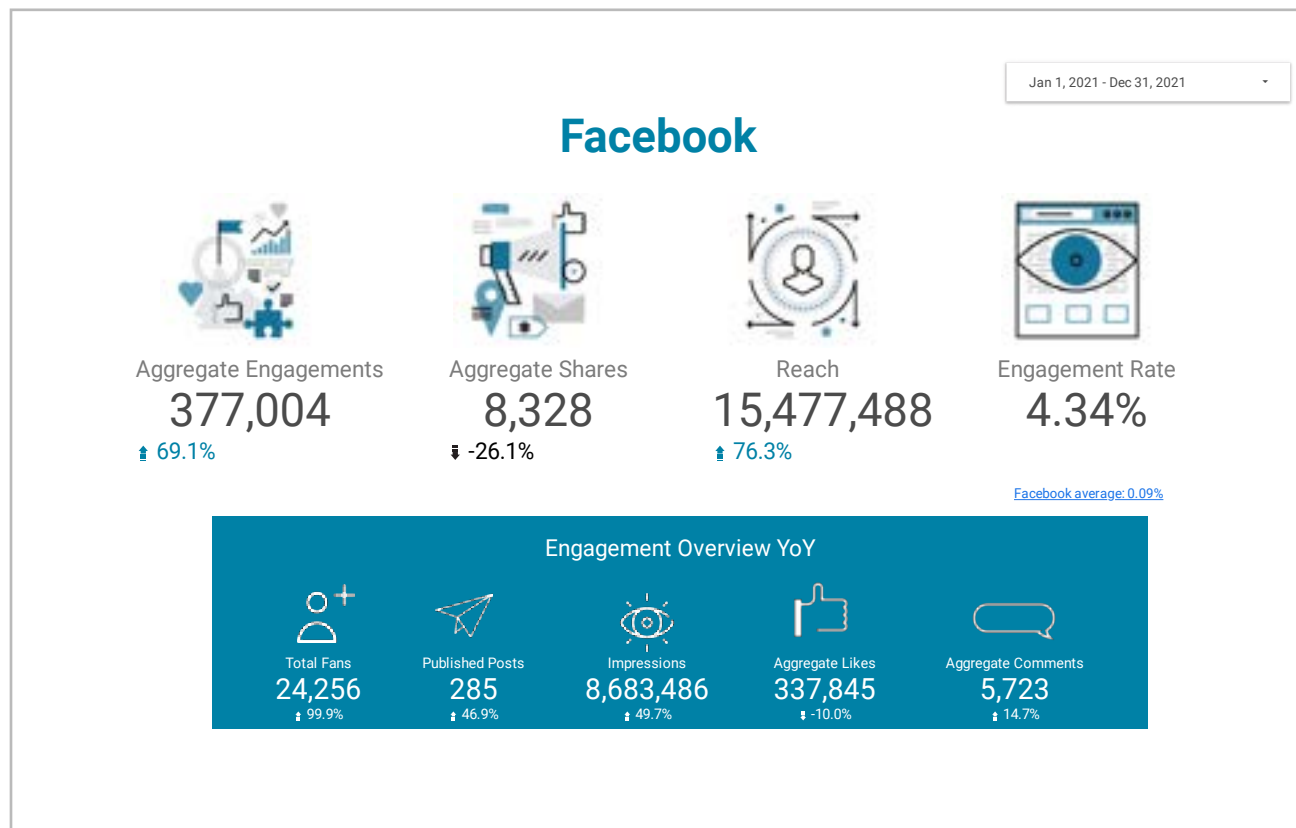
- Our audience leans female, with females making up 67.1% of our audience, in 2020, 70% of our audience was made up of females.

### Gender

What is the gender of the users?





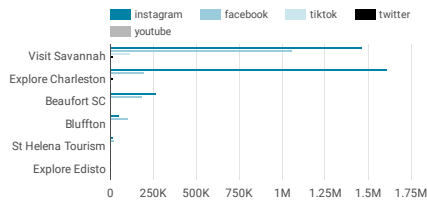


## Competitor Landscape

Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

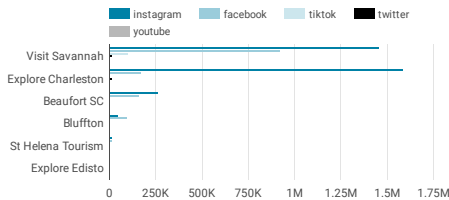
### Cross Channel Engagement Total

What were the total amplification, applause, and conversation across social channels?



### Amplification

What were the total shares across social channels?



### Insights



- Bluffton's total engagements increased by 25.5% in 2021 and saw the largest engagement increase on Instagram compared to competitors

- Bluffton saw the most audience growth on Facebook in 2021, where as the average competitor didn't grow

- Bluffton's Instagram's audience grew more than competitors and the rate of growth outpaced the average competitor

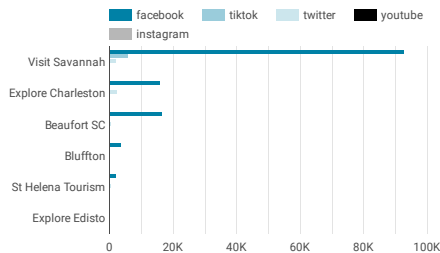
- Bluffton's Instagram published 250 posts in 2021, which is about five posts per week, right in line with the average competitors

- Bluffton's Instagram is above average compared to the competitors for Engagement Rate by Follower

- Bluffton's Twitter didn't see much audience growth in 2021, in line with the average competitor

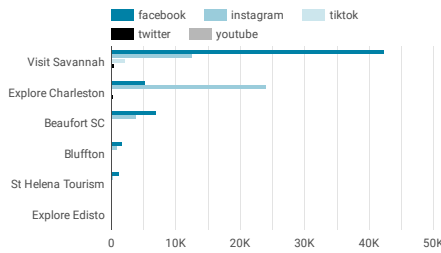
### Applause

What were the total reactions across social channels?



### Conversation

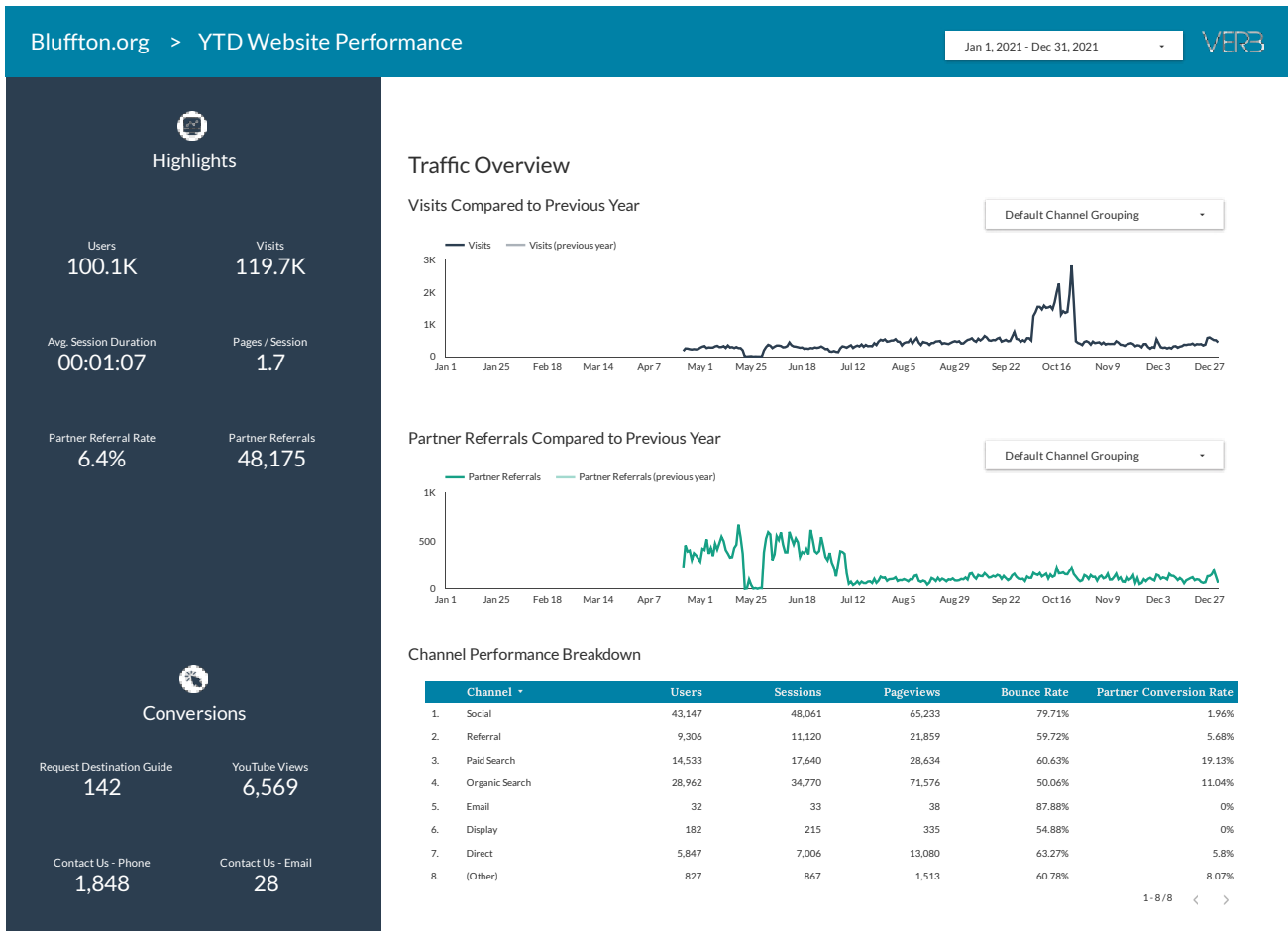
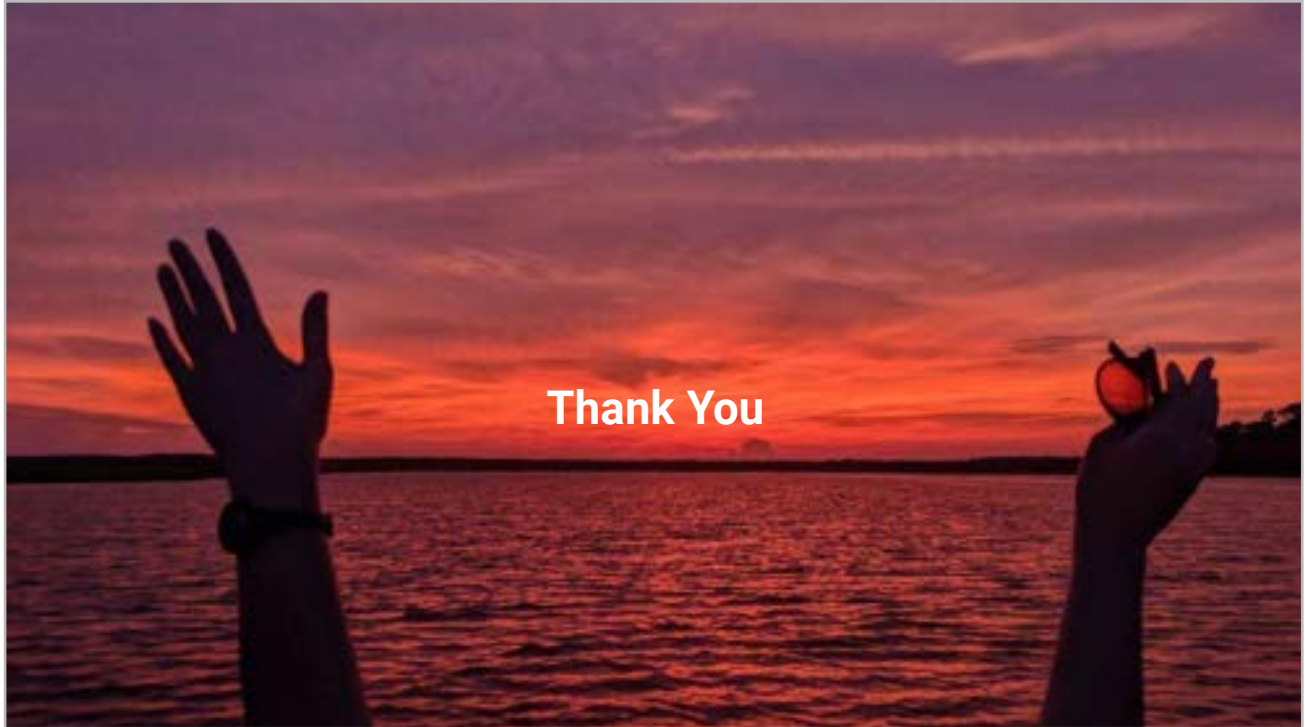
What were the total comments across social channels?



## Glossary

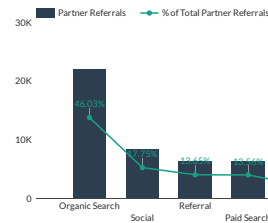
Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

Term	Definition	Number
Backlinks	Links from other domains pointing back to our own, ultimately improving SEO	1
Booking Funnel	Illustrates the customer journey towards the purchase of a good or service	2
Bounce	When a user leaves your website from the landing page without visiting any other pages	3
Bounce Rate	The percentage of sessions on your website with only one page view	4
Conversion	A measured and tracked pre-determined goal; for example, obtaining email newsletter subscribers	5
Conversion Rate %	The percentage of users who take a desired action, aligned with the conversion goal	6
CPC	Cost per click; the cost of the media spend divided by the number of clicks	7
CTR	Click-through rate; the percentage of impressions that resulted in a click	8
Direct Traffic	Users that come to your website via typing the URL directly in a browser	9
Display Ads	Graphic advertising on website media through banners or other advertising formats made of text,...	10
Domain Authority/Rank...	An estimate of how well any given domain will perform in search	11
Ecommerce Conversion ...	The ratio of transactions to sessions, expressed as a percentage	12
Engagement Rate	Measures the level of engagement that content is receiving from an audience; it shows how much ...	13
Exit %	Percentage of users who viewed the page and exited the site	14
Exit Page	The page where a user exits your website	15
Impressions	The number of times an ad, search result, or a social post is viewed	16
Key Performance Indica...	Used to evaluate the success of a brand or campaign in meeting the objectives for performance	17
Lead Time	The period between the order and the delivery	18

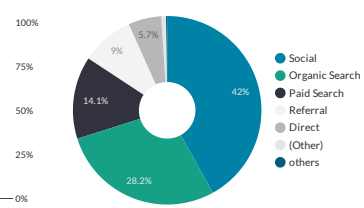




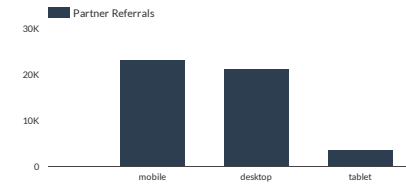
## Referrals by Channel



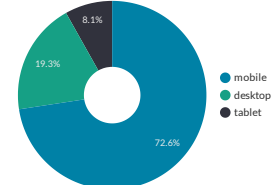
## Users by Channel



## Referrals by Device



## Users by Device



## Content Overview

	Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate
1.	/	58,460	51,367	00:00:55	62.12%
2.	/bluffton-arts-seafood-festival	26,740	23,999	00:02:52	84.05%
3.	/events	20,090	15,623	00:01:53	54.95%
4.	/see-do	14,828	11,765	00:00:50	48.26%
5.	/stay	8,457	6,968	00:02:31	44.93%
6.	/food-drink	8,097	6,717	00:02:27	62.97%
7.	/farmers-market	4,172	3,697	00:01:18	66.8%
8.	/see-do/shopping-antiques	3,898	3,380	00:02:14	61.88%
9.	/living-here	3,510	2,958	00:01:14	71.63%
10.	/map	2,364	2,116	00:03:26	56.48%
	Grand total	202,268	174,836	00:01:36	65.29%

1 - 10 / 22739 < >

## Referrals Overview

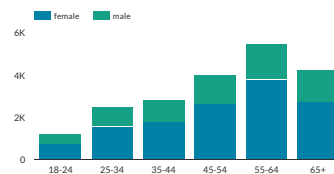
	Partner URL	Referrals
1.	https://blufftoninns.com/	1,777
2.	http://www.montagehotels.com/palmettobluff	1,290
3.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7k375PmPbY	930
4.	http://www.montagehotels.com/palmettobluffdining	908
5.	https://www.farmersmarketbluffton.org/	738
6.	https://www.facebook.com/groups/1917072798363288/	648
7.	http://www.blufftonoyster.com/	585
8.	https://cmade.com/markets-events/	513
9.	http://www.coastaldiscovery.org/	467
10.	http://www.thecottagebluffton.com/	465

1 - 10 / 1457 < >

## Demographics

	Region	Sessions	% Δ
1.	South Carolina	35,320	-
2.	Georgia	28,857	-
3.	North Carolina	17,266	-
4.	Florida	11,080	-
5.	New York	3,573	-
	Grand total	119,712	-

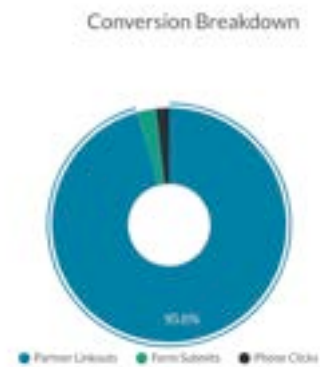
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## VISIT BLUFFTON

### TOTAL WEBSITE VISITATION

- Having a dedicated Bluffton Site has allowed us to begin to better quantify our Bluffton audience.
- Overall website visitation increased to 133,004 visits in 2021, a +104% increase YoY.
- Paid media and organic search drove the majority of traffic to the site, accounting for over 84% of traffic.

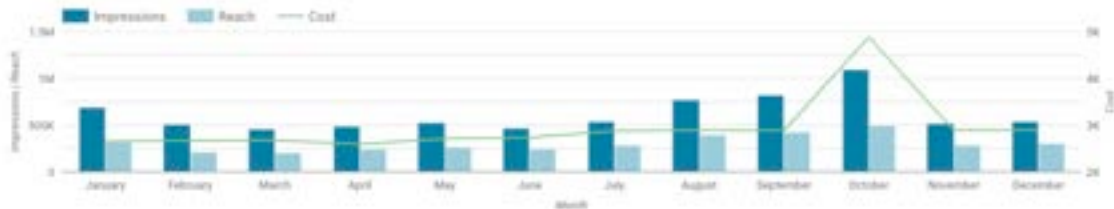


## Paid Facebook

Jan 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021

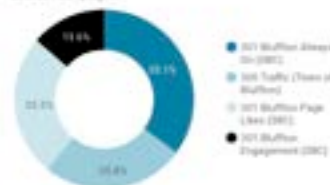
### Monthly Ad Spend

How did our paid campaigns perform in 2021?



### Spend

How was the actual spend split between campaigns?



### Insights

- In 2021, social campaigns were balanced across engagement and traffic driving objectives, allowing the account to drive a strong increase in overall engagement and attain strong sessions and referrals.

- Paid ads drove 11.7K new likes on the page, throughout the year, an increase of 193% over 2020.



## BY THE NUMBERS

In 2021, Bluffton inspired travel to the Lowcountry through a variety of top-tier media coverage which showcased the town's idyllic shoulder season, trendy culinary scene and luxe offerings that appealed to domestic vacation seekers.

### BLUFFTON ANNUAL REPORT 2021

**TOTAL MENTIONS:**

**456**

**TOTAL IMPRESSIONS:**

**2,553,960,053**

**TOTAL AD VALUE:**

**\$1,112,764.91**



## BLUFFTON COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS

## TOWN&amp;COUNTRY

## The Best Places to Travel for Christmas

Tempted to skip town for the holidays? Here are a few places we recommend.

Ellafra, South Carolina



The growing *Orange Blossom Ball* gets just the Christmas spirit only—creating an atmosphere of spring interest in the community, family, and school programs at various locations. The ball features information concerning better performance of parents from the University Institute research making choices and gathering out of the University park. The ball will also give guests a chance to meet with the school. There's a flag, more water, and better in their community. To make sure the team stays there, there's also a group in one of the University buildings, which will be fully decorated with a Christmas tree and holiday lights.

**Storage, Access, and Staff**

PureWow

## The 12 Most Charming Small Towns in South Carolina

[illegible][illegible]

Source: <http://www.fishbase.org>

+ [Johannes Wimmermann](#) (left) supports [Johannes](#)  
 + [Johannes Wimmermann](#) (left) supports [Johannes](#)  
 + [Johannes Wimmermann](#) (left) supports [Johannes](#)

## BLUFFTON COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS



## 10 best small town food scenes in the United States



**No. 100: Bluffton, South Carolina.** Hungry visitors to Bluffton will find locally caught seafood and traditional Southern comfort fare at the town's collection of restaurants. That includes local favorites such as Cahill's Market & Chicken Kitchen and Bluffton Family Seafood House. The culinary lineup also offers Southern barbecue (Chop Chop BBQ System) and a late bar (Ragdoll). [www.blufftonsc.com](http://www.blufftonsc.com)

**Forbes**

## South Carolina Distilleries Plan Growth With Passage Of New Liquor Laws



At first glance, the recently opened Burger Church Distillery seems out of place. Its impressive red brick facade towers over you as you approach it, a feeling only slightly softened upon entering it. A cathedral-like roof houses these studios overhead, drawing your eyes towards a three square foot ceiling room overlooked by a large stained glass window. It's the type of facility you would expect to find in the nearby metropolitan of Savannah or Charleston, not in tiny Bluffton, South Carolina. But, recent changes to decades-old liquor laws in the state could mean that more facilities like this will start appearing throughout the state.

## BLUFFTON COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS



**USA  
TODAY**

**ERICA LAMMERS** / SPECIAL TO USA TODAY  
 eric.lammers@usa.com

Each town offers a laid-back vibe, road-sides  
cafes, fun family activities and many have  
exciting foodie scenes. Plus, you can enjoy re-  
ally delicious food and breathe in fresh air.

The problem: Everyone else has the same idea in mind, leading to peak prices and crowds.



Excludes: any copy, all forms of records, correspondence or  
 drafts, notes, working  
 sketches, drawings, etc.

For a more relaxed experience and with apparent crowds, consider planning a getaway for Thanksgiving or early October. Once the summer crowd disperses, hotel and vacation rental prices dip. But you can still enjoy pleasant weather with less competition for a spot on the beach.

There are three important details to consider when the various values diverge:

## Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

It's a wonderful beachfront town. Bluffton is located along the May River and this charming area of five beautiful family friendly beaches and a coast line ideal for recreational water activities. Bluffton is ranked as one of the nation's best towns. Savannah, Georgia, and about 10 minutes drive to Hilton Head Island.

Storing leguminous and tubercle crops were used as stores the southernmost heat. After Gahon Day, major water-based activities without the warmest high temperatures. Enjoy possible swimming, fishing, kayaking, or play a boat ride to the beaches of *San Juan* island. In San Juan is beginning to emerge, visitors can take through the town's main Spanish name *San Juan* to buy food.

**4 beach towns to hit this fall once the crowds are gone: Carolinas, California, Oregon**



Available only by passenger ferry. Includes boat up to  
and up from the pier.

Within Bluffton is *Wassage Palace*, Bluff, a resort nestled on 20,000 acres of reclamation land that offers guests complimentary bikes to explore trails. The resort also has a "pooling" house at the top, where guests enjoy drinks and snacks while taking in the full view. The resort has several *on-site restaurants* but he sure try other dining spots like Bluffton BBQ, the Bluffton Tavern and the Bluffton Syrup Factory.

**ESTIMATED TOTAL IMPACT OF TOURISM  
IN BLUFFTON  
ON BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA  
2021**

MARCH 11, 2022

DANIEL GUTTENTAG, PH.D.

MELINDA PATIENCE



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## Introduction

This study estimates the economic impact generated by tourism to the Town of Bluffton in the year 2021. It examines the impact of such tourism on the broader economy of Beaufort County, South Carolina, and takes into account the direct spending of the visitors along with the positive secondary effects of such expenditures. The analysis entailed individually estimating the economic impacts associated with overnight visitors and day trip visitors, and then summing them together for an overall total.

This analysis was conducted by Dr. Daniel Guttentag and Melinda Patience of the Office of Tourism Analysis, which is part of the Hospitality and Tourism Management Department in the School of Business at the College of Charleston.

## Methodology

The economic impact estimations undertaken for this analysis involved various steps and diverse data. Initially, visitor volume estimates were produced using data on lodging demand provided by STR, combined with visitor behavior data that is collected via a Visitor Profile Survey. The estimated total number of visitors in each segment for 2021 can be observed in Table 1. These figures then were used to estimate the total direct visitor spending associated with each segment. Such spending estimates also relied upon visitor expenditure data collected as part of the previously mentioned Visitor Profile Survey, which asks respondents about their spending in

over a dozen categories (e.g., lodging, food, transportation, and activities). The list of expenditure categories, and the total estimated direct expenditure in each category for 2021, can be observed in Table 2.

The previously described data subsequently were used to determine average per-person expenditures. These figures were combined with the estimated visitor counts and used as inputs for a regional economic impact modelling tool, IMPLAN. IMPLAN is an input-output (IO) model that uses regionalized economic data and other information to determine economic output that accounts for direct expenditure and the secondary benefits of such expenditure (indirect and induced impacts). The model further estimates labor impacts and tax revenues.

Table 1. Number of Bluffton Visitors

Segment	Visitors
Overnight	172,349
Day Trip	309,137
Total Visitors	481,486

The following metrics, as estimated by the economic impact model, are covered within this report:

- **Employment:** The number of jobs in the region supported by the economic activity, which involves an industry-specific mix of full-time, part-time, and seasonal employment. Seasonal jobs are adjusted to annual equivalents.

Table 2. 2021 Estimated Total Spend by Spending Category

Category	Totals
Transportation (around the destination)	\$12,813,729
Lodging	\$18,060,040
Food – Dining Out	\$22,317,659
Food – Groceries	\$10,368,345
Shopping	\$31,699,550
Spas	\$9,634,647
Golf	\$4,556,621
Biking	\$2,119,502
Performance/Visual Arts	\$3,661,270
Festivals	\$3,546,999
Museums/Historical Tours	\$4,202,039
Boating/Sailing/Fishing	\$5,215,836
Nature-based Activities	\$3,310,566
Dolphin Tours	\$2,954,112
Tennis	\$2,884,225
Other Expenses	\$6,887,921
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>\$144,233,061</b>

- **Labor Income:** All forms of employment income, including employee compensation (wages and benefits) and proprietor income.
- **Output:** The total value of industry production, which for the service sector represents total sales, for the retail sector represents gross margins, and for the manufacturing sector represents sales minus inventory change.
- **Direct:** The initial effects to local industries that are directly receiving the expenditures of interest.
- **Indirect:** The secondary effects resulting from business-to-business purchases in the supply chain occurring throughout the region, as triggered by or in support of the direct expenditure activity.
- **Induced:** The ripple effects in the region resulting from household spending of

income, after the removal of taxes, savings, and commuters.

- **Taxes:** These revenues take into account a variety of taxes including sales tax, property tax, and income tax. These figures do not account for tourism taxes, such as accommodation taxes.

## Results

Compared to 2020, which was wholly defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2021 marked a significant shift back towards normalcy for the hospitality and tourism sector, and for society more broadly. This shift closely paralleled the rollout of widespread public vaccination early in the year. Nevertheless, the ongoing pandemic continued to influence travel behavior, with the rebound in tourism led by leisure travelers, who were largely attracted to non-urban destinations with opportunities for



### *Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2021*

outdoor recreation. Such trends were favorable for Bluffton.

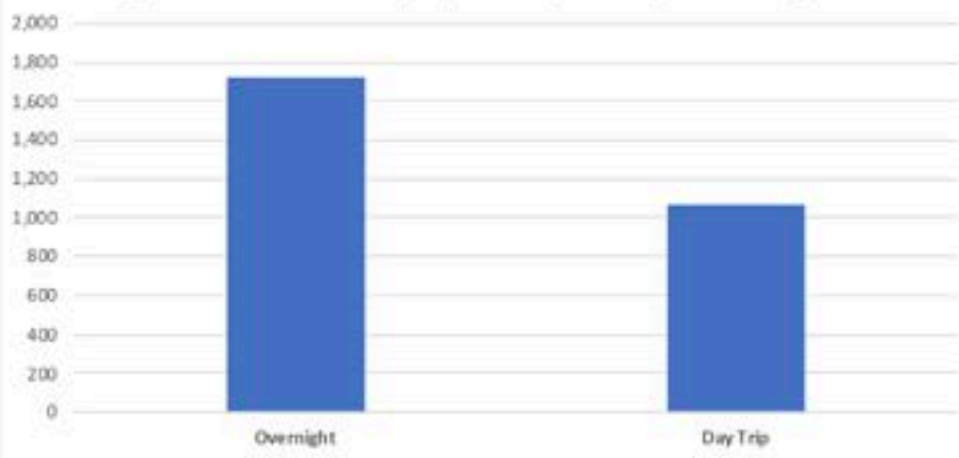
A total of **481 thousand visitors** came to Bluffton in 2021. The overall economic impact of this tourism for Beaufort County was **\$187.31 million**. This economic impact represents not just the direct expenditure by visitors, but also the secondary ripple effects of such economic activity that occur as tourism businesses spend operating funds and as tourism dollars are re-spent within the region. Bluffton tourism also (directly and indirectly) supported an estimated **2,782 jobs**, which represent 2.6% of all jobs in Beaufort County, as per employment data provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Similar to the economic impact figure, this employment figure does not refer solely to jobs within the tourism sector, but rather to a combination of full-time, part-time, and seasonal jobs that are both directly and indirectly supported by the broader tourism economy and its secondary effects on non-tourism industries and enterprises. Impact estimates for each of the visitor segments are presented in the Appendix

(Tables A1 - A3), and the employment impacts are presented in Figure 1.

A total output multiplier for tourist spending was calculated using the model estimates. This multiplier represents the ratio of total economic impact to direct spending. The estimated output multiplier for Bluffton tourism on Beaufort County was **1.30**. This signifies that every dollar spent by tourists in Bluffton increased output in the overall Beaufort County economy by a total of \$1.30.

The tourist expenditures generated an estimated **\$1.87 million** in tax revenues for local Beaufort County governments. The Town of Bluffton earned an additional **\$5.76 million** in accommodations tax and hospitality tax, as reported by the Town of Bluffton Revenue Services. Together, this **\$7.62 million** in tax revenue represents a Return on Tax Investment (ROTI) of 49.63, based on the \$153.6 thousand that was spent on destination marketing in 2021. In other words, each dollar spent by the Visitor & Convention Bureau yielded an estimated return of **\$49.63** in local tax revenue.

**Figure 1. Estimated Employment Impacts by Visitor Segment**



## Appendix

Table A1. Overnight – Estimated Economic Impact on Beaufort County

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	1,397	\$29,338,420	\$78,921,386
Indirect	189	\$7,792,929	\$28,415,385
Induced	134	\$5,362,728	\$18,292,994
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,720</b>	<b>\$42,494,077</b>	<b>\$125,629,765</b>

Table A2. Day Trip – Estimated Economic Impact on Beaufort County

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	897	\$17,179,359	\$37,426,196
Indirect	89	\$3,676,884	\$13,904,250
Induced	76	\$3,034,404	\$10,349,610
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>\$23,890,647</b>	<b>\$61,680,055</b>

Table A3. Total, All Segments – Estimated Economic Impact on Beaufort County

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	2,294	\$46,517,779	\$116,347,582
Indirect	278	\$11,469,812	\$42,319,634
Induced	209	\$8,397,133	\$28,642,604
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,782</b>	<b>\$66,384,724</b>	<b>\$187,309,820</b>
Estimated Local Tax Revenue			\$1,866,301
Local Tourism Tax Revenue (ATax and HTax)			\$5,756,378
<b>Total Estimated Local Tax Revenue</b>			<b>\$7,622,679</b>

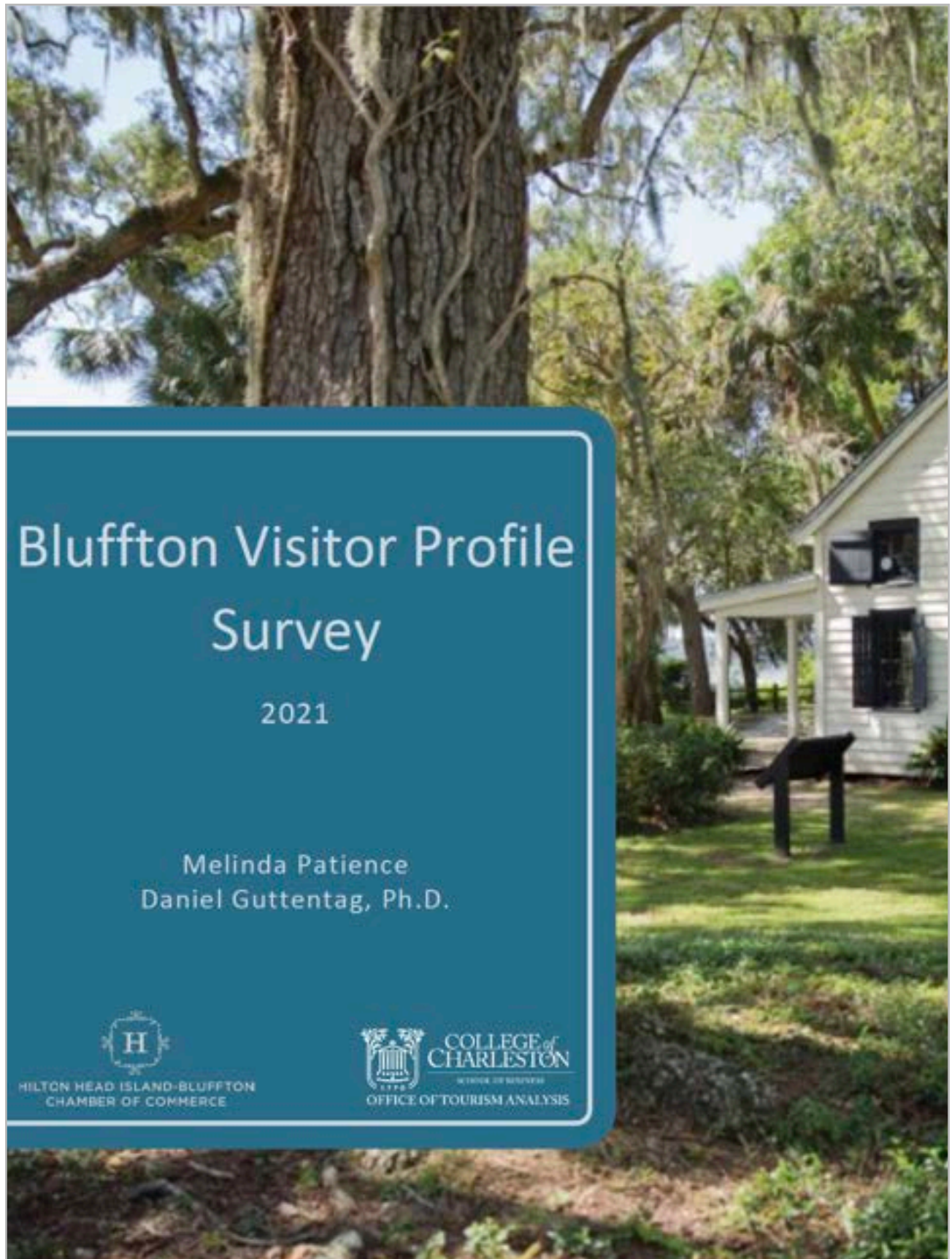
Table A4. Top 50 Industries Impacted by Bluffton Tourism

	Industry	Output
1	Full-service restaurants	\$23,802,957.87
2	Hotels and motels, including casino hotels	\$18,062,368.24
3	Miscellaneous store retailers	\$17,897,666.41
4	Other real estate	\$13,400,678.59
5	Transit and ground passenger transportation	\$12,851,635.58
6	Personal care services	\$9,809,683.57
7	Fitness and recreational sports centers	\$9,677,582.60
8	Museums, historical sites, zoos, and parks	\$7,527,411.16
9	Water transportation	\$5,250,257.46
10	Owner-occupied dwellings	\$4,657,838.93
11	Scenic and sightseeing transportation and support activities for transportation	\$4,332,740.93
12	Food and beverage stores	\$4,104,712.56
13	Performing arts companies	\$3,788,658.66
14	Other amusement and recreation industries	\$3,723,143.07
15	Management of companies and enterprises	\$3,256,839.14
16	Monetary authorities and depository credit intermediation	\$2,480,325.00
17	Insurance agencies, brokerages, and related activities	\$2,065,122.92
18	Offices of physicians	\$1,398,659.88
19	Other local government enterprises	\$1,346,865.91
20	Electric power transmission and distribution	\$1,277,348.33
21	Legal services	\$1,247,183.72
22	Services to buildings	\$1,241,391.69
23	Maintenance and repair construction of nonresidential structures	\$1,195,709.98
24	All other food and drinking places	\$1,192,375.71
25	Limited-service restaurants	\$1,182,121.49
26	Employment services	\$1,102,580.00
27	Securities and commodity contracts intermediation and brokerage	\$987,935.00
28	Hospitals	\$960,404.22
29	Other financial investment activities	\$944,662.03
30	Advertising, public relations, and related services	\$924,294.33
31	Management consulting services	\$857,918.10
32	Non-depository credit intermediation and related activities	\$787,347.92
33	Automotive repair and maintenance, except car washes	\$685,984.13
34	General merchandise stores	\$677,951.46
35	Postal service	\$635,470.57
36	Landscape and horticultural services	\$630,130.63
37	Tenant-occupied housing	\$626,162.43
38	Waste management and remediation services	\$581,885.09
39	Non-store retailers	\$577,626.18
40	Accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping, and payroll services	\$566,788.83



*Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2021*

	Industry	Output
41	Electric power generation - Fossil fuel	\$542,178.54
42	Radio and television broadcasting	\$502,061.78
43	Car washes	\$494,675.54
44	Gasoline stores	\$460,495.78
45	Wholesale - Petroleum and petroleum products	\$443,889.79
46	Nursing and community care facilities	\$424,816.94
47	Travel arrangement and reservation services	\$420,661.68
48	Commercial and industrial machinery and equipment rental and leasing	\$400,130.07
49	Building material and garden equipment and supplies stores	\$397,020.94
50	Clothing and clothing accessories stores	\$395,432.61



PREPARED FOR:

HILTON HEAD ISLAND-BLUFFTON  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BY:

OFFICE OF TOURISM ANALYSIS  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Baby Boomers represented 39.4% of the respondents, followed by Gen X (27.1%), and then Millennials (25.2%). Over 52% of those surveyed had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and more than 60% had an annual household income of \$75,000 or more per year. Also, just over 70% of the respondents were married.

### POINT OF ORIGIN

The respondents resided in 268 geographical areas / MSAs (Metropolitan Statistical Areas) throughout the US, stretching from east to west coast. More respondents resided in Ohio than any other state (8.7%). Second was New York (7.1%), followed then by Pennsylvania (5.9%), Georgia and California (5.8% each), Florida (4.8%), and then North Carolina and Michigan (4.7% each). In-state visitors did not make up a significantly large portion of the respondents (4.0%).

According to a market penetration analysis, the following MSAs were major markets amongst respondents: New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA; Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI; Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA; Pittsburgh, PA; Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV; Cleveland-Elyria, OH; Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI; and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA.

Canada was the top international origin market amongst respondents (50.0%), followed by Europe (33.8%).

### THOSE WHO TRAVELED TO BLUFFTON

The top reasons for choosing Bluffton as a destination included visiting beaches, visiting heritage attractions/museums/historic tours, and spending time with family. Other popular motivations included relaxation, boating/sailing/kayaking, and nature-based activities. The activities in which visitors actually participated are similar to the previously mentioned activities, and also include shopping, culinary, and health/wellness. Amongst Bluffton's overnight visitors, 75% were first-time visitors, suggesting that the destination continues to appeal to new visitors.

### TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

The average group size of those surveyed was 4.5 for overnight visitors and 3.8 for day trip visitors. The main mode of transportation to town was personal/family car (45.8% overnight; 67.9% day trip). About 40.9% of overnight visitors flew to Bluffton via commercial flights, with just over one-third of them (34.2%) landing at the Hilton Head Island Airport.

The average length of stay for those overnight visitors surveyed was approximately 4.0 nights. Hotels were the most popular choice of accommodation for overnight visitors (33.1%), followed by resorts (25.9%), staying with friends/relatives (20.5%), and home/villa rentals (18.1%).

### TRAVEL PLANNING

Airbnb was the most popular online booking platform for villas/homes (27.6%), followed by HomeAway (13.8%), local vacation rental companies (10.3%), and the local resorts' online booking platforms (10.3%). The top five other destinations visitors considered before choosing Bluffton were the Hawaiian Islands; the Alabama Golf Trail; Gulf Shores, AL; Isle of Palms, SC; and Orlando, FL.

Top reasons for choosing to visit Bluffton were wanting to visit a beach destination (32.6%), word-of-mouth recommendation (29.0%), previous visit experience (28.0%), and wanting to visit nature-based attractions (23.3%).

Of those surveyed, 85.8% indicated an intention to return to visit Bluffton.

### NON-VISITORS

Of those who indicated not to have traveled at all or not to have traveled to the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area in the past 12 months (N=860), just 38.6% had never visited the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area before, and 48.8% had visited 1-5 times before.

Of those non-visitors, 37.6% traveled elsewhere, 2.9% found it too expensive, 2.0% mentioned health reasons, 2.0% were hesitant because of unpredictable weather events, 1.5% did not travel at all, and 0.9% did not find what they were looking for. Over 26% stated the COVID-19 pandemic kept them from visiting the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area. Of those who did not visit the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area, alternative destinations in the Southeast (26.9%) and Midwest (10.5%) were the most popular. Nonetheless, 49% of the non-visitors indicated they had plans to visit the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area within one year.

### TRAVEL BEHAVIOR

Looking at the travel behavior of both visitors and non-visitors together, the majority (55.1%) take two to four leisure/vacation trips per year, and they are most likely to travel between May and October.

The top five most appealing experiences for leisure trips/vacation were: beaches (88.4%), relaxation & rejuvenation (85.4%), historical attractions (75.5%), passive outdoor adventures (72.6%), and cultural experience (70.7%).

The following attributes were most important in choosing a leisure vacation: natural beauty of the destination (88.4%), ease of access (85.4%), affordability (75.5%), environmental/ecological sensitivity (72.6%), travel distance (70.7%), diversity of dining options (70.0%), and low traffic congestion (60.9%).





## METHODOLOGY

### SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

The 2021 Visitor Profile Study (VPS) for the Hilton Head Island and Bluffton Area was conducted electronically. Between June 2021 and January 2022, emails were sent on a rolling basis to invite individuals to participate in the VPS. These individuals had previously visited [www.visitbluffton.org](http://www.visitbluffton.org) or [www.hiltonheadisland.org](http://www.hiltonheadisland.org) and submitted their email addresses, and they were generally contacted following their anticipated dates of visitation. In addition, invitations to complete the survey were posted in January 2022 on the social media channels of Explore Bluffton and the Hilton Head Island Visitor & Convention Bureau.

A total of 2,084 completed surveys were collected. This report is based largely on the 194 respondents who visited Bluffton as an overnight or day trip, along with individuals who did not travel at all or did not travel to Hilton Head Island / Bluffton.

The table below shows the visitor estimates for Bluffton by segment for 2021.

Visitor Segment	
Non-paying Guests	172,349
Daytrippers	309,137
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>481,486</b>

Table 1: Visitor Estimates 2021

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender	
Female	61.0%
Male	39.0%
Marital Status	
Married	70.2%
Single	11.9%
Divorced	8.9%
Widowed	7.4%
Separated	1.6%
Education (highest level completed)	
Grade School	1.4%
High School	8.0%
Some College	22.8%
Associates Degree (2 years)	15.1%
Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	32.1%
Graduate Degree (Post degree/MA)	20.7%
Age	
19 years or younger	0.1%
20 to 29 years	12.2%
30 to 39 years	19.1%
40 to 49 years	10.2%
50 to 59 years	16.7%
60 to 69 years	24.6%
70 years and over	14.8%
Prefer not to say	2.3%
Household Income	
Under \$24,999	2.7%
\$25,000-\$34,999	8.2%
\$35,000-\$49,999	9.6%
\$50,000-\$74,999	18.6%
\$75,000-\$99,999	18.6%
\$100,000-\$149,999	22.0%
\$150,000-\$199,999	11.5%
\$200,000-\$249,999	4.3%
\$250,000 or more	4.4%
N	975

Table 2: Demographics



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