



FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025

# TOWN OF BLUFFTON

## DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN

SAVANNAH  
16 MILES

DAUFUSKIE  
6 miles

PALMETTO BLUFF 1 MILE

BLUFFTON  
OYSTER  
COMPANY

bluffton

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™

CHARLESTON  
<66 MILES







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# Year In Review

## VACATION PLANNER



MAIL FULFILLMENT  
**29,021**

## PAID MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS

**GARDEN & GUN**



## WEBSITE

VISITS  
**254K**

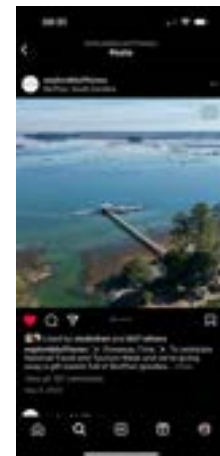
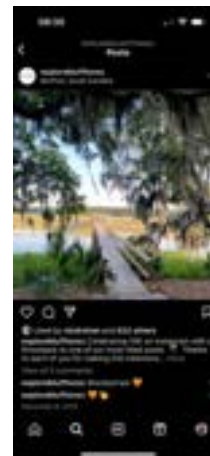
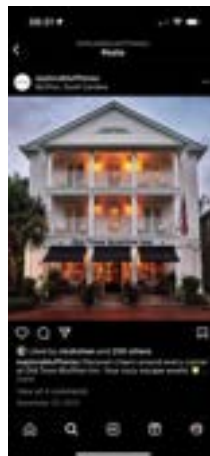
REFERRALS  
**56K**



## SOCIAL

TOTAL FOLLOWERS  
**48,351**

TOTAL IMPRESSIONS  
**10,448,163**



## OCCUPANCY METRICS

OCCUPANCY **69.3%**      ADR **\$264.95**

REVPAR **\$183.63**

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

MENTIONS **108**      IMPRESSIONS **1,029,532,390**

AD VALUE **\$421,920.04**



# Accolades

## **SOUTHERN LIVING**

Top 50 Best Small Towns  
in the South

## **TRAVEL + LEISURE**

Best Places to Visit  
on the East Coast

## **TRIPS TO DISCOVER**

Palmetto Bluff, Best  
Nature Resort in U.S.

## **SOUTHERN LIVING**

Best Small Towns

## **THE TRAVEL**

Truly Underrated Towns in  
South Carolina That Deserve  
to be Explored

# Executive Summary

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce/Visitor & Convention Bureau continues to be the leader in promoting tourism for Bluffton. The organization as a whole utilizes national economic and tourism trends, consumer research, prior program performance, and 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 Visitor & Convention Bureau has partnered closely with the Town of Bluffton's leadership team to identify these pillars of marketing:

1. Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor
2. History, Culture, and Arts
3. National Historic Register Designations
4. Natural Beauty, Waterways, Parks
5. Local Culinary and Local Market Experiences
6. Festival and Events





## 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 you do when you are in Bluffton.



# 2024-2025 Goal, Strategies & Tactics

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

## Strategies

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

## Tactics

1. Paid and organic social media strategy across all platforms with creation of new assets and content for videos/ reels/stories, and sourcing of user-generated content (UGC).
2. Email marketing, display remarketing advertising, search engine marketing, search engine optimization, and digital media.
3. Development and production of the Official Bluffton Vacation Planner.
4. Traditional ad placements in print and digital with partners, as an example, Garden & Gun and Southern Living.
5. Strategically target audiences according to the demographic and persona profiles specific to Bluffton through paid, owned, and organic efforts.
6. Develop additional content (blogs, social posts, videos), designed to tell stories about the destination, its history, culture, and beautiful scenic touchpoints, such as the May River, historical locations, and parks, in engaging and informative ways and include tips and itineraries to guide visitors through the destination for deeper experiences.
7. Public relations efforts with media outreach.



# Budget

## Bluffton/Southern Beaufort County Budget (FY 2024-2025)

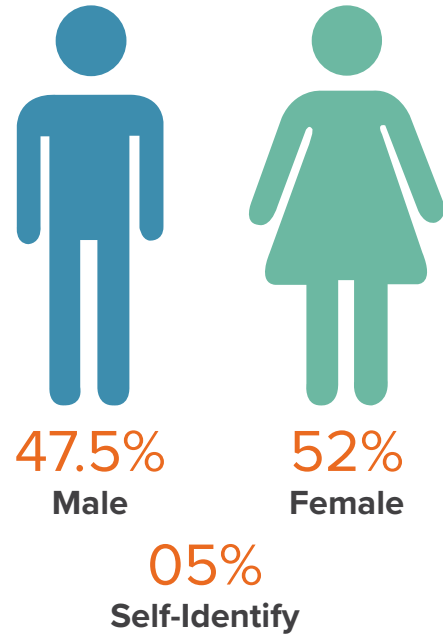
	FY 2025 VCB TOTALS	FY 2025 BLUFFTON (49%)	FY 2025 SBC (51%)
<b>REVENUES</b>	Bluffton & SBC		
Town of Bluffton DMO	\$350,000	\$350,000	
Southern Beaufort County DMO	\$365,000		\$365,000
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$715,000</b>		<b>\$365,000</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Digital Promotions / SEM	\$43,475	\$21,303	\$22,172
Website Maintenance	\$30,000	\$14,700	\$15,300
Website Hosting	\$2,400	\$1,176	\$1,224
Social Marketing & Content Strategy	\$30,000	\$14,700	\$15,300
Paid Social	\$72,000	\$35,280	\$36,720
SEO	\$20,000	\$9,800	\$10,200
Bluffton Insiders (enews)	\$20,000	\$9,800	\$10,200
Bluffton Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$125,000	\$61,250	\$63,750
Regional Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$44,000	\$21,560	\$22,440
Media Partnerships	\$25,000	\$12,250	\$12,750
Photography/Videography	\$10,000	\$4,900	\$5,100
Research & Planning	\$20,000	\$9,800	\$10,200
Contingency	\$5,000	\$2,231	\$2,769
Ops & Management	\$268,125	\$131,250	\$136,875
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$715,000</b>	<b>\$350,000</b>	<b>\$365,000</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 and Zartico, in addition, we partner with the Office of Tourism Analysis at the College of Charleston. Using these insights we can 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's needs, we will keep our demographics and key personas at the forefront, adapting where necessary to address consumer travel sentiment.

## Our Target Leisure Traveler for the Region



Source: 2023 Bluffton Visitor Profile Study, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston



**\$100-\$199K+**  
Affluent Traveler



**51.1%**  
Undergraduate Degree or Higher



**2-4** Trips per Year

**5** Nights Average Length of Stay

Source: 2023 Bluffton 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> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Search advertising</li> <li>Influencer family partnership</li> </ul>
<b>Weekenders</b>	Social media partnerships with influencers including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Couples</li> <li>Paid search targeting branded and category terms such as “weekend getaway”</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> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>
<b>Activities &amp; Recreation Enthusiasts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social advertising</li> <li>Digital video/connected TV advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maps and itineraries outlining convenience of staying in Town of Bluffton / proximity to nearby activities and experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Snowbirds</b>	Seasonal campaign featuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital video advertising</li> <li>Search advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social advertising</li> <li>Accommodation aggregated offers</li> </ul>



# Marketing Plan Strategies & Tactical Details

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





# 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, and 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.

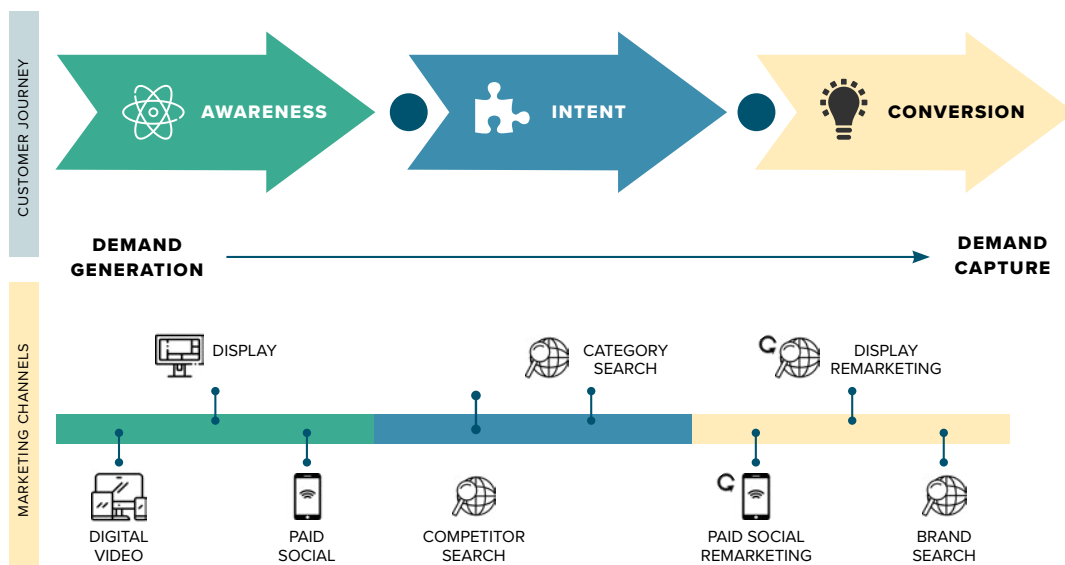
The marketing plan is designed to be highly personalized, flexible, and results-oriented. Each individual campaign that is implemented to drive exposure for the destination will be deployed based on a series of defined goals that align with each persona, and the overarching goal for the marketing plan.

## 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 feature locals and businesses throughout our efforts with authentic storytelling. 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 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, and 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.



## Content Commonwealth

The production of data-informed content that showcases the destination using our authentic lens is core to the ongoing integrated marketing strategy. The destination no longer operates in an environment where one-off artifacts of content are produced to serve a specific purpose in a particular channel. Instead, as content is produced to support the overall goal of the marketing plan, the strategies will focus on how content can live across the entire marketing ecosystem. This helps all content work harder for the destination while ensuring we connect with the right audience at the right time in their journey with the most relevant content based on their key travel motivators.

The website, digital marketing, and social media efforts will share a consistent creative tonality to ensure the brand tone and voice are effectively communicated through each medium.

## Search Engine Marketing

We will continue to execute a search engine marketing (SEM) strategy 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 and align with the key pillars mentioned in the executive summary.

Our efforts will align with our target consumers and influence them to visit the Bluffton website, ultimately directly increasing partner referrals.

## 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.

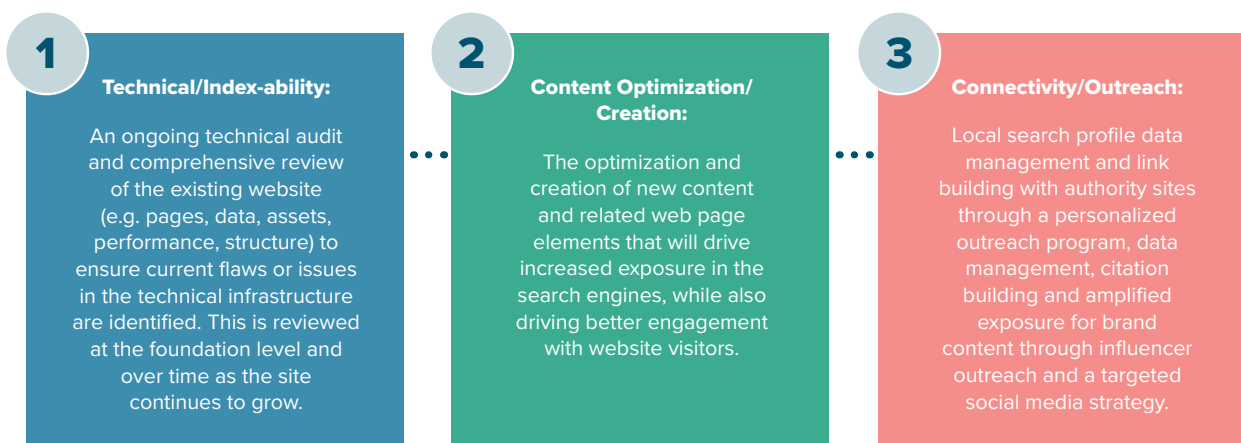


## Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing is about getting found for the right reasons by people who matter to our 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. Fresh, quality content must be 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 will 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 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.



# The Destination Website

The newly rebuilt and redesigned VisitBluffton.org is an integral part of the destination marketing efforts for the brand and serves as one of the first touchpoints for Bluffton. We will continue to 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 copy as needed and create new engaging content to keep the website updated and current. Ongoing optimizations of content and structure will be made based on SEO research, trends data, and referral insights.



## 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 a 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 lead to higher engagement with the destination and more outbound referrals to partners.

## Social Media

Social media continues to be a strong performing platform for the destination. In 2024-2025, 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%
- Increase web traffic via social by 10%
- Drive the discovery and exploration of the destination with deeper storytelling of destination's key attributes.

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



**YouTube:** Looking ahead to 2024, YouTube maintains its position as the second most engaging website globally, closely trailing behind Google. The recent introduction of YouTube Shorts underscores the importance of cultivating a library of short-form video assets. While we didn't share any new videos on YouTube in 2023, we're set to embrace the platform's evolution by introducing YouTube Shorts to our channel this year. Furthermore, we remain committed to promoting our videos across our Facebook, and Instagram channels to drive users to YouTube.



**Facebook:** Facebook has 3.03 billion monthly active users and is our most high-value social channel. Our approach to Facebook is to incorporate a range of content, user-generated content shared by locals and guests, co-ops, one-off and ongoing events and planned activities, tours, and partners.



**TikTok:** In 2023, TikTok solidified its position as a powerhouse in social media, boasting a staggering billion active users. Notably, it emerged as the go-to platform for travel enthusiasts seeking tips, hacks, and immersive experiences across diverse destinations. As TikTok evolves its features, it offers us unique storytelling opportunities to engage a broader audience. Our strategy will continue to involve repurposing our successful Reels from Instagram, resharing UGC videos and crafting TikTok carousels tailored to resonate with our followers.



**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. We will also focus on curating a more aesthetically consistent feed, using warm photo filters that portray the sunny, Southern vibe of the Lowcountry. Additionally, we’ll craft engaging reels featuring trending music to showcase the town’s charm. In our effort to expand our reach, we’ll continue hosting giveaways to attract new audiences and will introduce Bluffton-inspired gifts. Moreover, we have exciting plans for larger-scale campaigns during Art Month, and the Historic Arts & Seafood Festival.



**Pinterest:** We’re committed to further cultivating and sharing a diverse array of curated imagery on the platform, enriching Bluffton’s Pinterest channel with more pins. Our primary objective remains to expand our following and enhance overall engagement on the page. To achieve this, we’ll continue to curate and share captivating content centered around Bluffton, South Carolina, fostering connections between our pins and newly crafted blogs. Emphasizing strategic keyword integration, a tactic that has proven successful in driving users to our page for weekend escapes and getaways, will continue to be our focus. Additionally, we’ll undertake efforts to organize our pins into distinct boards, enhancing user experience, and will explore and test the incorporation of text on certain pins to enhance their appeal.

## Email Marketing

Enhanced customer journey personalization involves a focused email approach, accompanied by tailored drip campaigns aligned with updated segments. Utilizing a new email provider enables us to finely craft messages for our audiences. These campaigns will seamlessly integrate with essential touchpoints, offering users valuable destination-related content in exchange for email engagement. Bluffton’s email strategies remain guided by SEO research and will undergo continual testing and optimization throughout the year.

## LoveBlufftonSC Blog

Our Bluffton blog will drive qualified, engaged traffic to VisitBluffton.org. It’s a landing place to bring people in from our social feeds, and a

great jumping-off point to show users what is happening in Bluffton. Tied closely to search engine results, our goal with the Bluffton blog is to create a useful tool for fun, inspiration, informational, travel tips, news, and more. Content on this channel to be used cross-promotionally on other channels could include:

- Long-form, editorial pieces
- Recipes and “insider tips” from partner restaurants, hotels, and attractions
- Itineraries:
- For Different Demographics
- For Different Interests
- For Different Vacation Lengths
- Bluffton Local Features



# 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 and inclusion on top publication lists 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 inspires 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*, *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 award designations from these publications.

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.



# Destination Public Relations

In 2024-2025, the Hilton Head Island – Bluffton Chamber of Commerce will employ a forward-looking strategic public relations plan designed to distinguish Bluffton from competitors and convert first-time visitors to repeat guests.

Despite economic challenges, travel has returned to pre-pandemic levels, confirming consumers' priorities and importance on travel. However, new consumer behaviors have emerged, and the media landscape remains ever-changing. Travelers are looking to vacation where they can truly embrace the destination – both physically and culturally – through “slow travel.” Plus, consumers continue to prioritize affordability and accessibility via shoulder season opportunities. These preferences align with Bluffton's offerings, and we'll work to elevate its Lowcountry appeal to attract travelers.

Along with executing our tried-and-true PR tactics, we'll leverage our strong media relationships and trends to ensure Bluffton remains in consideration as a must-visit “hidden gem” destination.

## Media Landscape

We continuously monitor industry changes and trends that dictate the ever-evolving landscape to adapt accordingly. Key factors driving current changes across the industry include:

### **Media Layoffs:**

As of 2024, there have been multiple walkouts and rounds of media layoffs at national media publications, such as Conde

Nast Traveler, VOGUE, Forbes, National Geographic, Business Insider and more. As such, we anticipate that on-staff writers will endure more competition for stories and be strapped for time as they take on additional beats and assignments. We'll see an increased reliance on freelancers and contributors, as well as fewer original stories and more syndication.

### **Crowded Media Environment:**

Grabbing consumer attention is harder than it's ever been, with audiences overloaded with content, so much so that the average person scrolls through an average of 300 feet of digital content every day. We'll ensure Bluffton breaks through culturally across mediums by engaging print, digital, broadcast and social platforms, and focus on garnering stand-alone feature stories that differentiate the destination amongst competitors.

### **Booked and Traveling:**

Journalists are back on the road and their calendars are often booked up 6 months in advance. As such, we'll need to continue to look ahead to secure Individual Press Trips (IPT's) and additional media visits earlier than usual.

## Trends in Consideration

Shifts in consumer habits present opportunities for Bluffton to leverage existing assets and tap into current and anticipated trends, such as:

### **Slow Travel:**

Consumers are opting to slow down, enjoy the present and immerse themselves in a destination's daily rhythms instead of rushing from one tourist spot to the next.

### **Shoulder Season Popularity:**

Consumers are choosing to travel during shoulder seasons to avoid crowds and costs.



## Target Audiences

While our targets are familiar, we'll find new and engaging verticals to reach audiences that are most likely to travel and return to Bluffton:

### **Families and Groups:**

Family travel will remain top of mind, especially considering new travel trends such as skip-gen travel, where grandparents are taking their grandkids on vacation.

### **Regional Drive Markets:**

As consumers prioritize affordability and accessibility, we'll engage media in local drive markets such as Atlanta and Florida.

### **High Value Consumers:**

We'll connect with consumers with more disposable incomes by targeting luxury publications to promote Bluffton's unique experiences.

## Priority Focus Areas

We've aligned with Weber Shandwick on priority angles across key verticals that we believe provide potential for growth opportunities, high consumer interest and strong mediability, to highlight Bluffton's unique culture, allure and more:

### **History/Gullah Culture:**

Elevate the Gullah-Geechee community via compelling storytelling angles to encourage cultural travel such as the spotlighting the upcoming opening of the Bluffton Gullah Cultural Heritage Center and Open Air Market.

### **Arts and Culture:**

Encourage visitation to Bluffton for its quaint town offerings, driving visitors to local stores, markets and galleries, as well as historic sites.

### **Wellness and Recreation:**

Position Bluffton's variety of recreational offerings including outdoor experiences on

the May River and recreational activities in Palmetto Bluff. Highlight premier wellness experiences available to travelers such as Spa Montage.

### **Culinary:**

Spotlight offerings from Gullah to Lowcountry cuisine by promoting establishments such as Okan, Burnt Church Distillery and FARM Bluffton.

## 2024-2025 PR Tactics:

We'll employ a variety of PR tactics to seamlessly spread destination news far and wide throughout the year. Efforts will include:

### **Visiting Journalist/Influencer Program:**

Craft narratives that will meaningfully resonate with travelers by customizing media and influencer itineraries that highlight priority verticals and evergreen offerings.

### **Paid Influencer Program:**

Strategically identify influencers with dedicated audiences for paid influencer partnership opportunities that will inspire travel to Bluffton across Instagram and TikTok.

### **Always-On Media Relations:**

Develop a timely news bureau engine to pitch Bluffton's unique offerings as well news jack larger consumer moments and incentivize travel to the destination.

### **Strategic Partnerships and Special Projects:**

Encourage travel by partnering with like-minded brands that will engage new and existing audiences and elevate Bluffton in cultural conversations with multiple touchpoints and scalable executions.





## Photography/Videography

Asset collection will be done strategically to align with planned campaigns, including identifying gaps and analyzing performance to see what assets perform best for our target demographic. Working with our partners to capture event content will ensure we have up to date assets to promote our destination to our audiences across social media, the website, and digital media.



# Meetings & Group Sales

Bluffton continues to grow and position itself as a group destination. 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 tradeshow 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.

## Industry Partnerships and Tradeshow

In order to achieve our goal of increasing qualified leads, we will continue to foster our industry partnerships with conference or meeting attendance/activations and promotion on their platforms.

Our presence at industry tradeshow continues to reinforce our willingness to partner with meeting planners and increase visibility to decision-makers. This opportunity represents a large portion of our efforts and how we can grow our qualified leads throughout the year; ultimately turning into booked business for the destination partners, heads in beds in key timeframes and accommodations taxes to continue to fill the pipeline year after year.

# 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 tradeshow 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 "lookbook" destination discovery piece so visitors can imagine themselves experiencing all things Lowcountry.

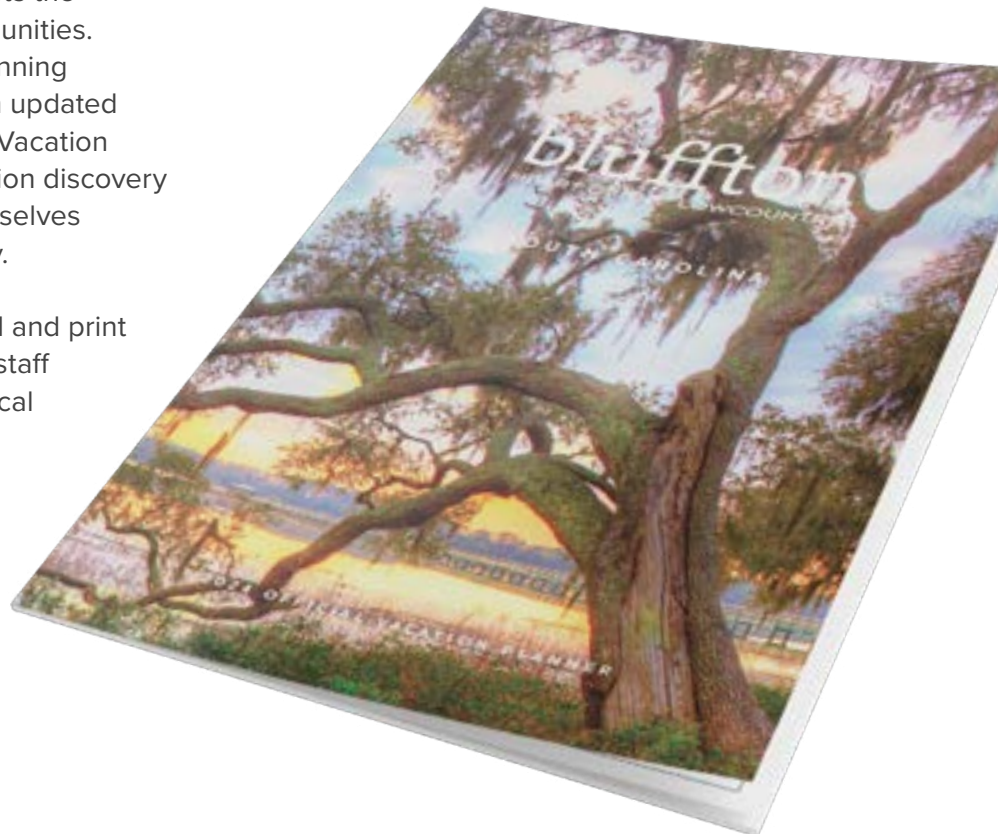
In addition to working with a digital and print publisher, our in-house marketing staff provides the business directory, local photography and editorial content management, editorial review and proofreading for this asset.

## Promotions and Brochure Distribution

Included in our budget is a dedicated campaign for the promotion of the Vacation Planner for visitors to request a guide as well as for fulfillment and distribution costs. The books are distributed through:

- Online requests
- Phone inquiries
- Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport
- Hilton Head Island Airport
- South Carolina Welcome Centers
- AAA offices nationwide
- Hotel partners
- Tradeshow
- Events
- Media

**Quantity: 30,000 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:

- Maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal.
- Smith Travel Research (STR) weekly and monthly reports which measure lodging occupancy, average room rates, room demand and RevPAR for hotels only. Includes monthly comparative report with competitive destinations.
- Keydata, monthly Home & Villa lodging reports on occupancy, average room rates.
- Collaborate with College of Charleston Office of Tourism Analysis and the University of South Carolina Beaufort.
- 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:

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

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

- Visitor Profile Study
- 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

- *Personas*
- *2023 Social Recap*
- *2023 Website and Digital Marketing Recap*
- *2023 Public Relations Recap*
- *2023 Economic Impact Report*
- *2023 Visitor Profile Study*





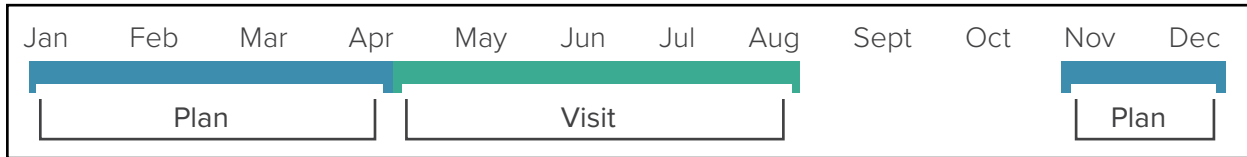
# Family



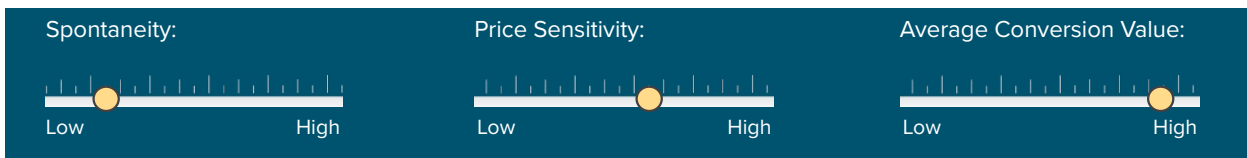


# Family Travel Objective

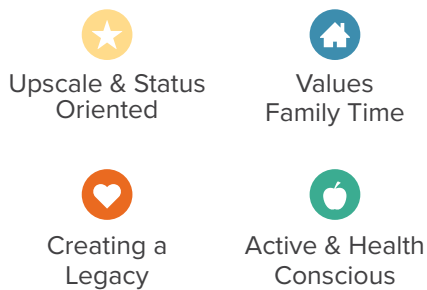
Find a vacation spot that will please everyone during the school holidays.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



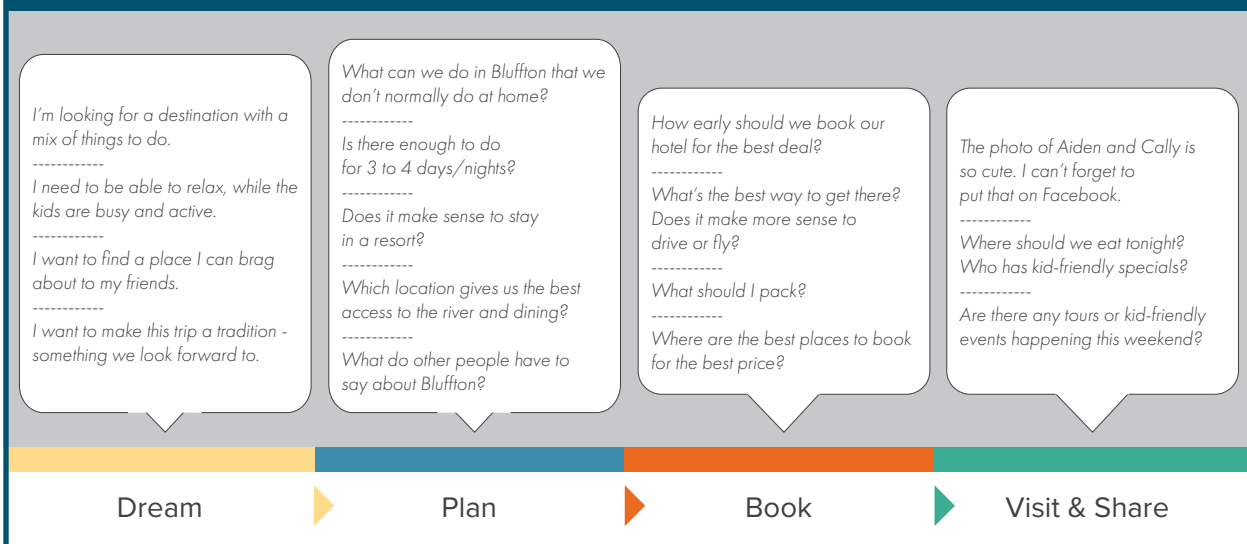
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

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

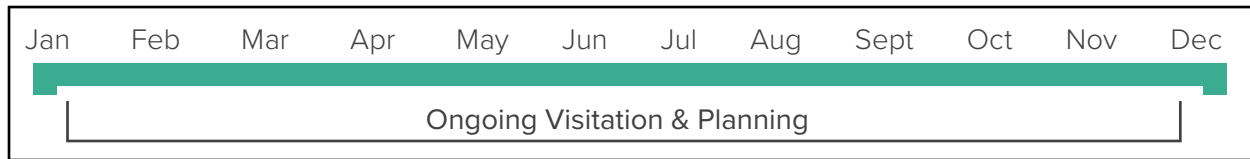


# The Weekender



# The Weekender Travel Objective

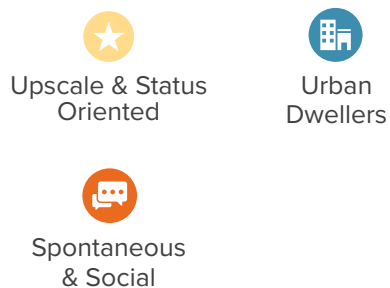
Find a fairweather weekend escape from work and city life.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



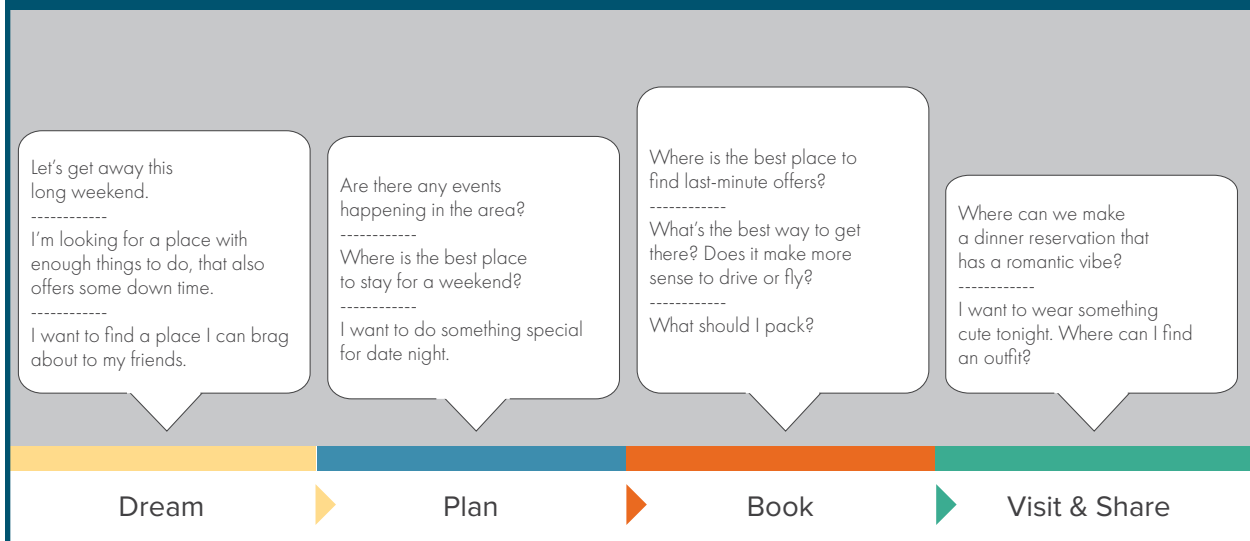
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

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





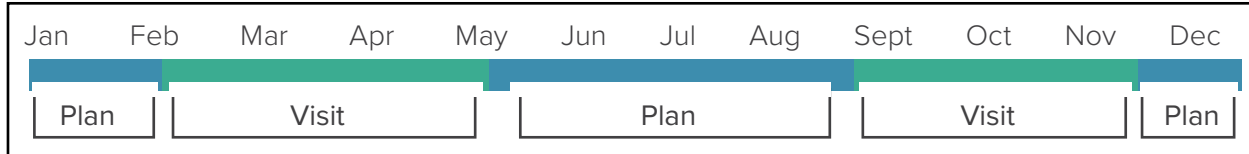
# Arts, Culture & History





# Arts, Culture & History Travel Objective

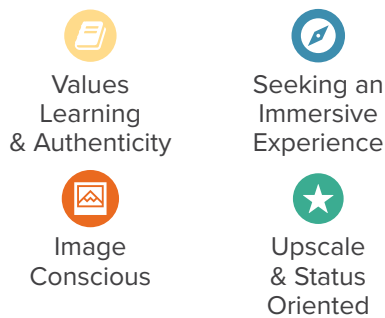
To explore cultural attractions, historical sites and the local arts scene.



## Travel Habits



## Who They Are



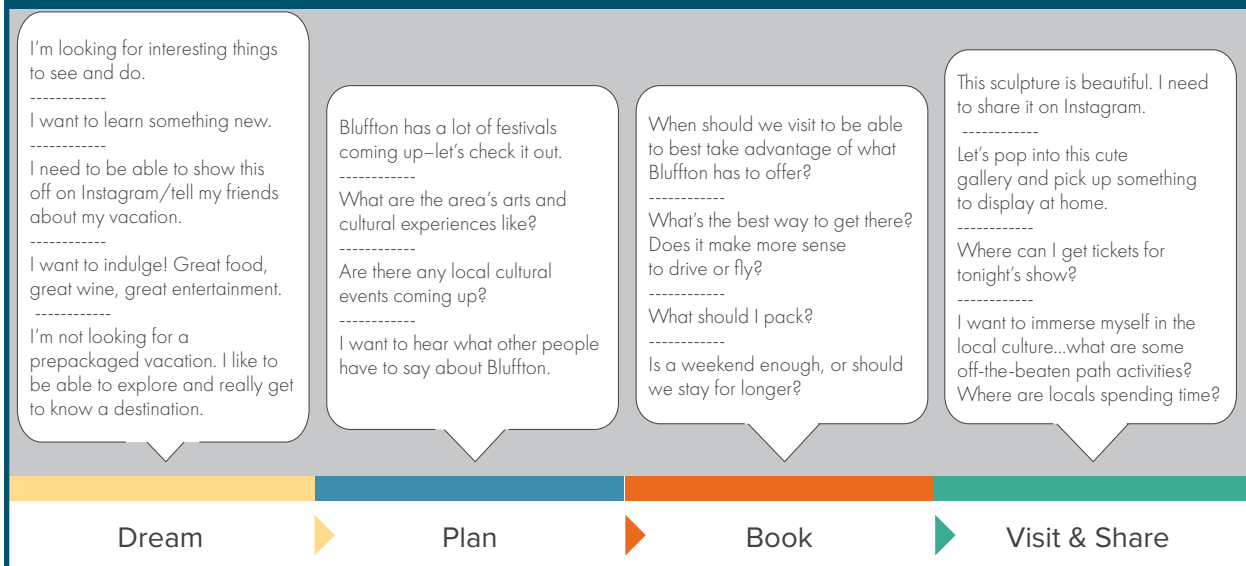
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

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



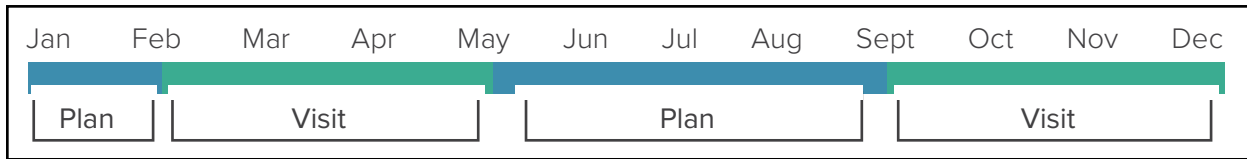


A close-up photograph of several oysters on ice with lemon wedges. The oysters are arranged on a bed of crushed ice, and several lemon wedges are scattered around them. The oysters are fresh, with their shells open, revealing the glistening meat inside. The lemon wedges are bright yellow and add a pop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

# 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



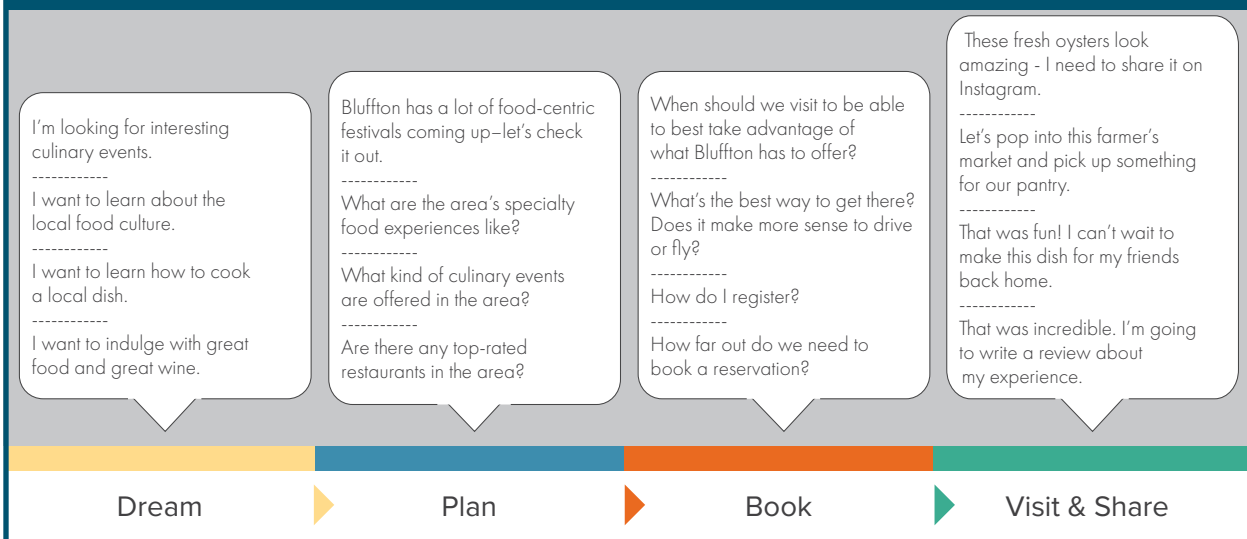
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

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

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook Videos  
Instagram  
TripAdvisor  
Forums & Blogs  
Pinterest

## “Experience Authentic, Local Cuisine.” Their Path to Purchase



# Activities & Recreation Enthusiasts

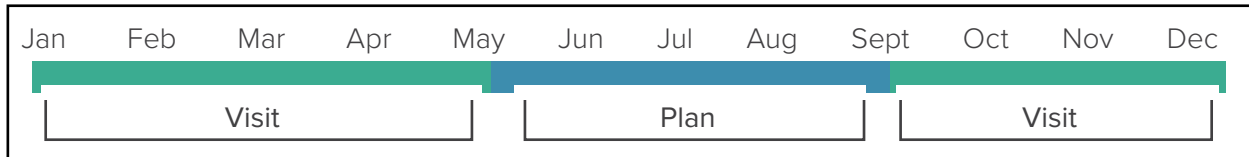




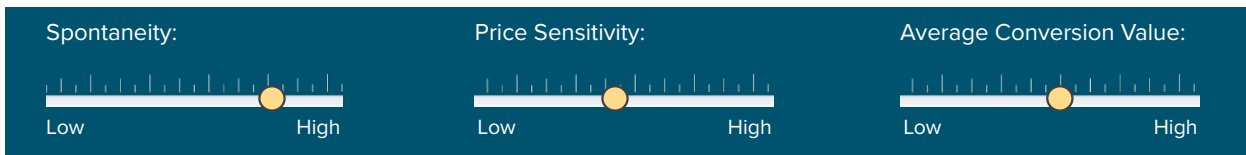
# Activities / Recreation Enthusiast

## 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



# 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



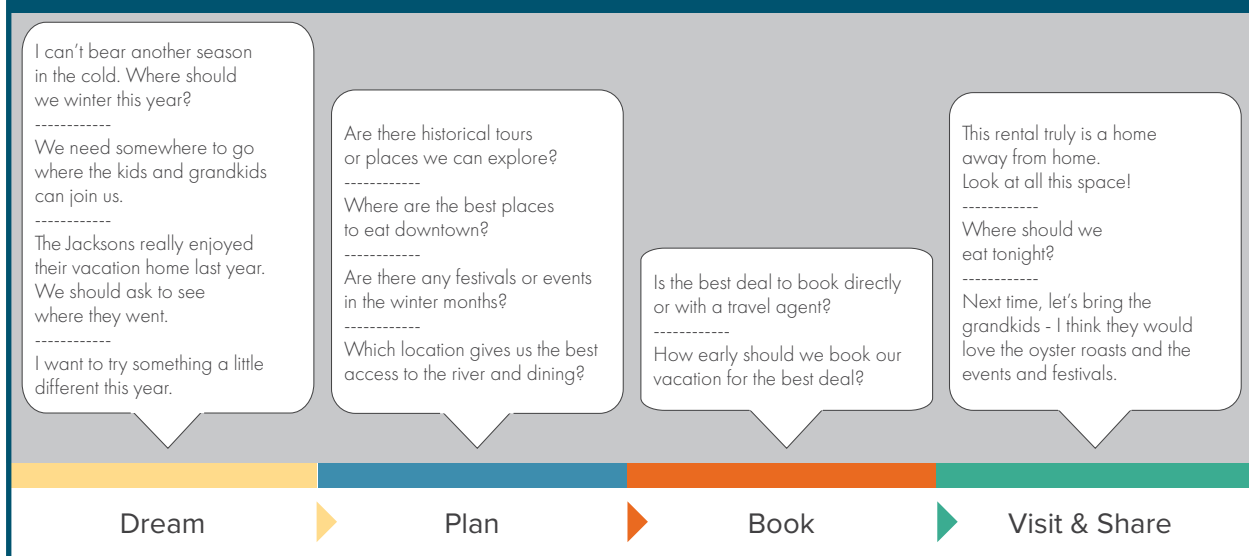
## Preferred Activities & Attractions

Vacation Rentals  
Dining  
Golfing  
History / Culture  
Excursion / Tour  
Walking

## Marketing Channels & Formats

Facebook  
Print  
TripAdvisor  
Radio  
TV  
Online Video

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





# 2023 Social Recap

# Bluffton

2023 RECAP

PREPARED BY: VERB

## Brand Personality

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 the 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.





Bluffton | Privileged and Confidential

## Content Pillars

Our content pillars focus on specific topics that align with Bluffton's personality and have been identified by the Town of Bluffton's Leadership Team:

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

4

VER3

Bluffton | Privileged and Confidential

## Our Audiences

4

VER3

## What We Implemented in 2023

VERB

### Collecting Assets

We invested significant effort in thorough research and curation of captivating User-Generated Content (UGC) from Instagram. These carefully selected photos contribute to cultivating a genuine awareness of the Lowcountry.

In collaboration with Bluffton, VERB actively collaborated to collect tailor-made images and video footage showcasing the essence of the town for use in reels and videos, providing additional spotlight to the valued partners.

We will consistently source assets through Crowdriff to ensure a continuous infusion of fresh content that breathes life into our pages.



VERB



## Social Media Giveaways

Throughout the year, we organized two Instagram giveaways to actively connect with our audience. The first giveaway coincided with National Travel & Tourism Week, while the second celebrated the Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival. Our approach for both giveaways was simple: participants were encouraged to follow our page, like the post, tag a friend, and share the content to their story.

The prize for each giveaway was a basket featuring Bluffton merchandise and gift certificates from our valued partners. The response exceeded our expectations, making both giveaways the top two posts of the year for Bluffton overall.

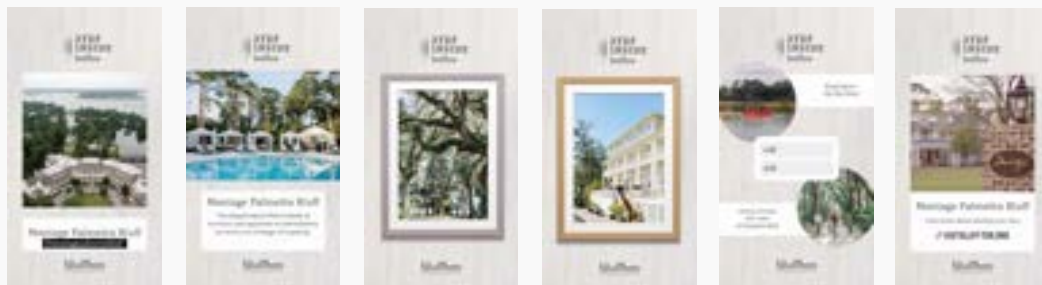
### Combined Giveaway KPI's

- 1,707 Engagements
- 15,808 Impressions
- 13,519 Reach



## Step Inside Campaign

In 2022, we started the Step Inside Campaign, an initiative designed to showcase partners in our community. This year, we reintroduced the campaign with a distinct visual identity. The focal point of this initiative was the monthly story series, strategically crafted to highlight local businesses with an engaging touch. The campaign proved to be highly successful, providing a platform to showcase and celebrate businesses in our community. Among the spotlights were the Burnt Church Distillery, Farm Bluffton, Soba Gallery, and more.



## Lowcountry Holidays

In 2023, we strategically embraced the celebration of specific holidays that align with Bluffton's brand pillars and distinctive personality. Notably, the following holidays stood out for their performance on social media and connection with Bluffton:

- National Dolphin Day
- National Art Day
- National Dog Day
- National Earth Day
- National Women's Day



VERB

## Blog Production

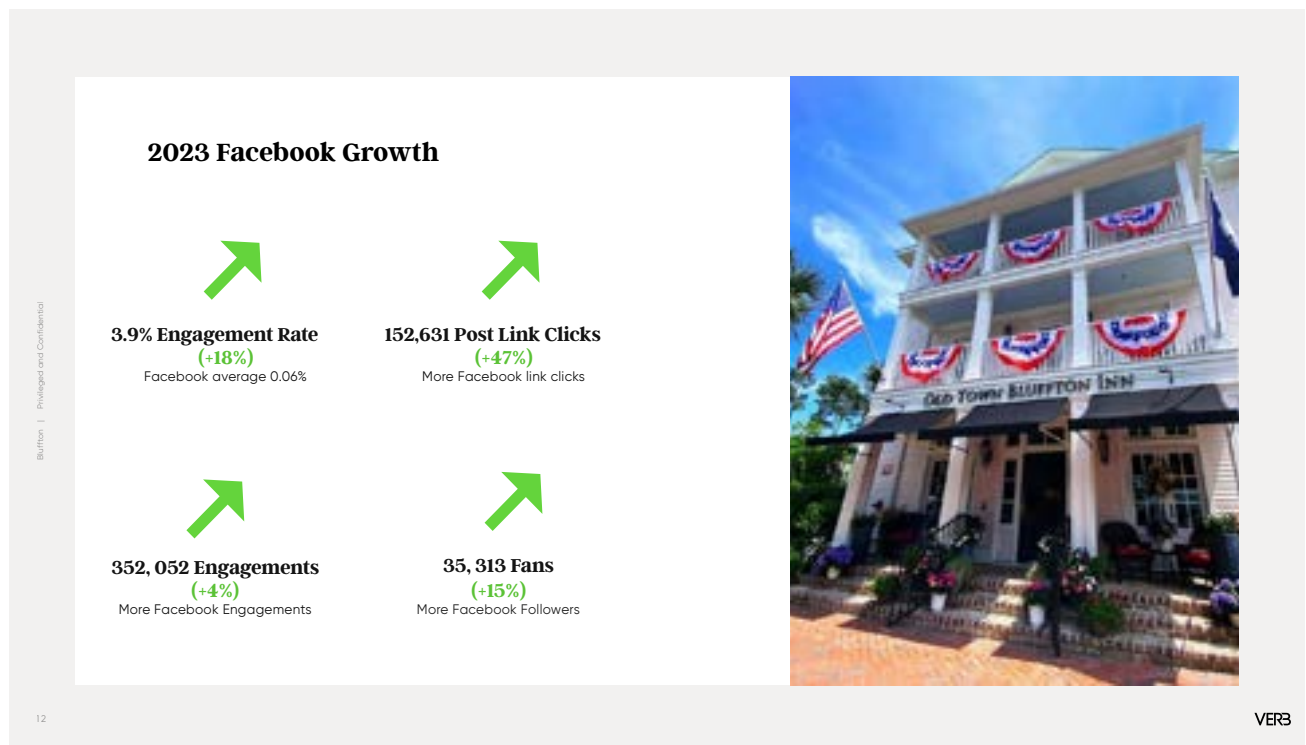
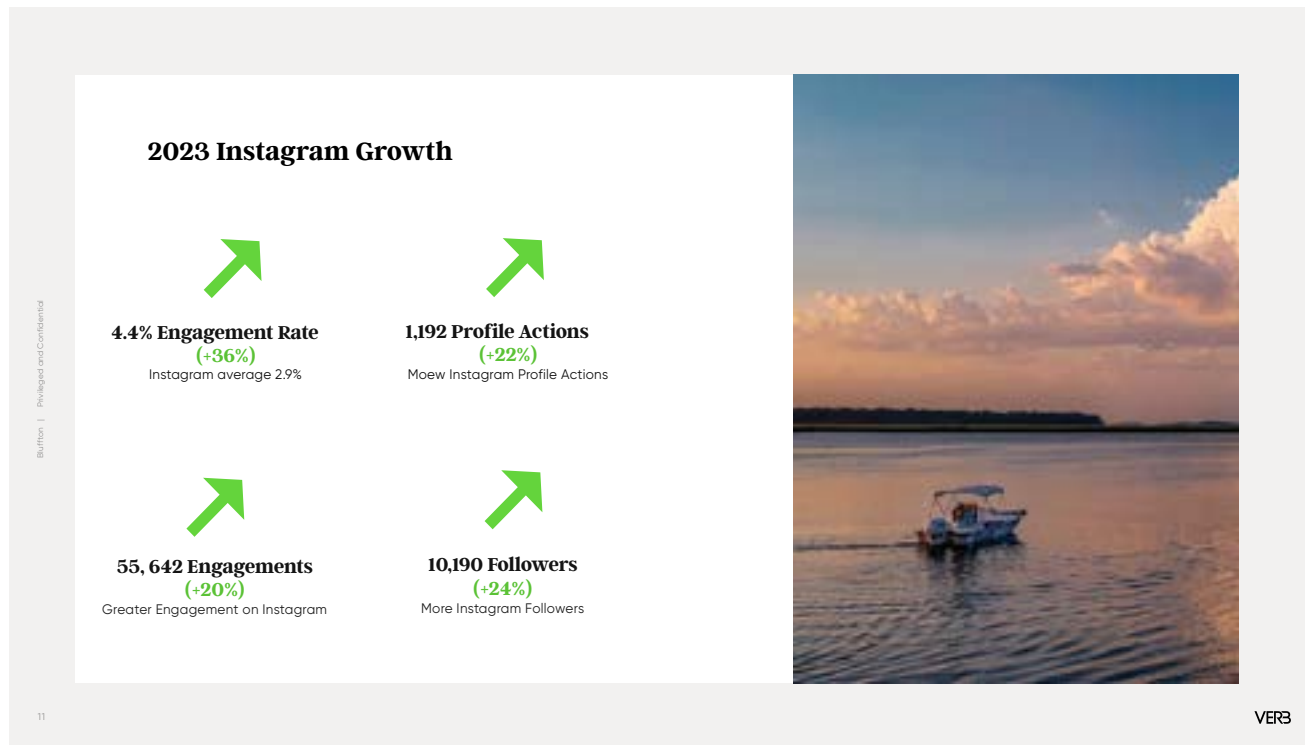
In 2023, we crafted five blogs that aligned with search trends, upcoming events, and themes outlined in our content calendar. As we anticipate the arrival of 2024, we are excited about sharing these blogs on our website. Our strategy includes amplifying the reach of these blogs by sharing them across our various social media channels. Through targeted posts and engaging content, we will encourage our audience to read the articles, fostering a sense of community and driving increased traffic to our website.

### Blogs:

- A Day in The Lowcountry: Plan Your Bluffton Getaway
- Say I do in Bluffton: Wedding Venues in The Lowcountry
- The Heart of The Lowcountry: Historical Facts
- Get Inspired: Art Galleries in Bluffton
- Lowcountry Cuisine: Top Five Seafood Stops

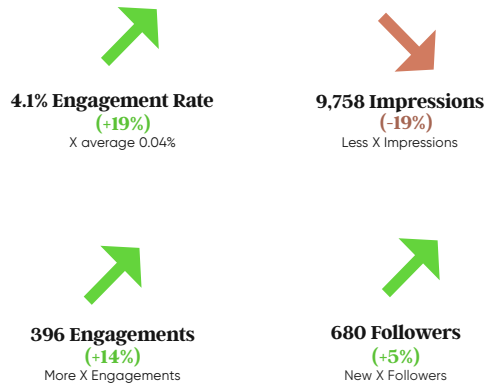


VERB





## 2023 X Growth



## 2023 Pinterest Growth

Organic Pins are currently categorized by format, be it image, video, or product, rather than Pin type. Notably, all organic Idea Pins created before 8/7/2023 follow a video Pin format. Consequently, we cannot compare performance across periods.

- 839 Engagements
- 82 Outbound Links
- 200 Saves
- 14,400 Total Audience



## 2023 TikTok Growth

In 2023, TikTok was integrated into Sprout Social. Due to the inability of Sprout to track past data, we are unable to compare performance across periods.

- 779 Engagements
- 38,856 Video Views
- 59 Published Posts



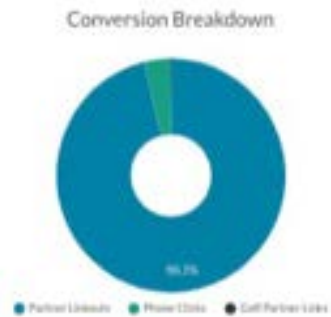
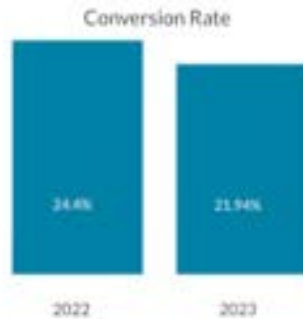
# 2023 Website & Digital Marketing Recap



## BLUFFTON

### CONVERSION RATE OVERVIEW

- In 2023, our conversion rate dropped slightly, correlating with the increased number in sessions YOY.
- In 2023, the majority of conversions were Outgoing Partner Links (96%).

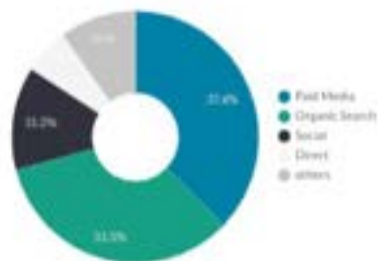


## VISIT BLUFFTON

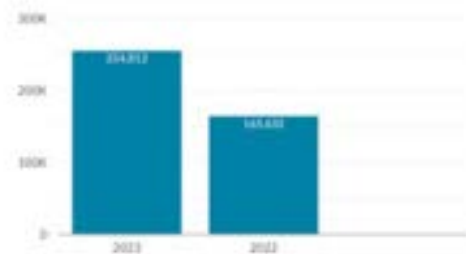
## TOTAL WEBSITE VISITATION

- Overall website visitation increased to 254K visits in 2023, a +53% increase YOY.
- Paid media and organic search drove the majority of traffic to the site, followed by organic social efforts.

Visitors by Channel

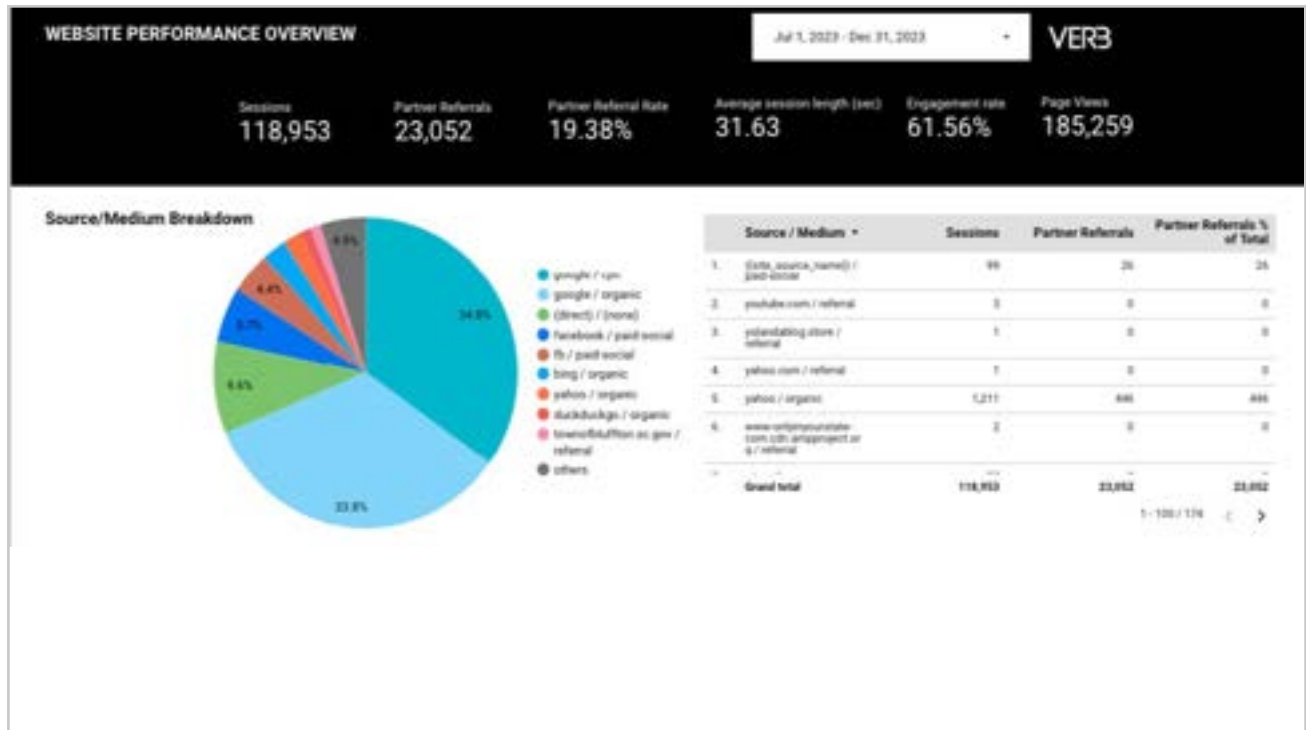


Website Visits



\*\*Metric is Users







# 2023 Public Relations Recap



COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS

2023 BLUFFTON RESULTS

*\*Results represent 2023 calendar year mentions*

108

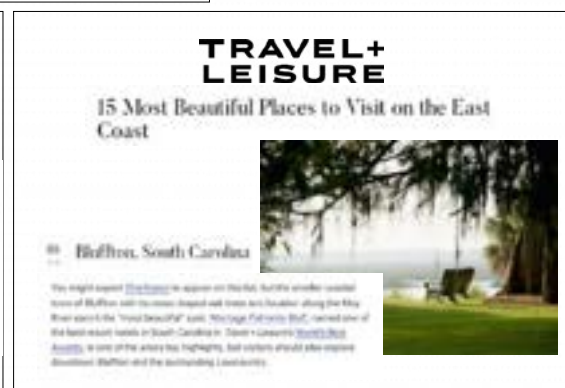
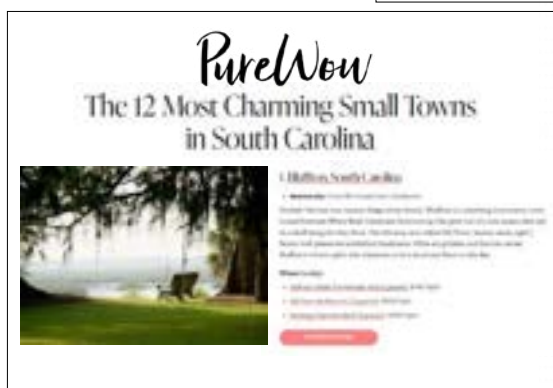
MENTIONS

1,029,532,390

IMPRESSIONS

\$421,920.04

AD VALUE



COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS

HISTORY/GULLAH



ECOTOURISM



ARTS & CULTURE



COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS

WELLNESS/RECREATION



WELLNESS/RECREATION



CULINARY





# 2023 Economic Impact Report

ESTIMATED TOTAL IMPACT OF TOURISM IN

# Bluffton

ON BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA 2023



MARCH 2024

CONDUCTED BY:  
MELINDA PATIENCE  
MARK WITTE, PH.D.



COLLEGE of  
CHARLESTON

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

OFFICE OF TOURISM ANALYSIS

66 GEORGE STREET | CHARLESTON, SC 29424  
OTA.COFC.EDU

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**METHODOLOGY ..... 1**

**RESULTS..... 2**

**APPENDIX ..... 4**



## *Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023*

### Introduction

This study estimates the economic impact generated by tourism to the Town of Bluffton in the year 2023. 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. Mark Witte and Melinda Patience of the Office of Tourism Analysis, which is part of 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 CoStar, combined with visitor behavior data that is collected via a Visitor Profile Survey. The total number of visitors in each segment for 2023 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 2023, 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 (I-O) 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 (i.e., indirect and induced impacts). The model further estimates labor impacts and tax revenues.

**Table 1. Number of Bluffton Visitors**

Segment	Visitors
Overnight	174,291
Day Trip	312,621
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>486,912</b>

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.

*Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023***Table 2. 2023 Estimated Total Expenditure by Spending Category**

Category	Totals
Transportation (around the destination)	\$10,263,276
Lodging	\$23,478,433
Food – Dining Out	\$21,682,286
Food – Groceries	\$12,072,149
Shopping	\$25,544,484
Spas	\$6,711,101
Golf	\$3,200,100
Biking	\$1,701,901
Performance/Visual Arts	\$7,813,323
Festivals	\$4,975,752
Museums/Historical Tours	\$7,582,174
Boating/Sailing/Fishing	\$9,931,741
Nature-based Activities	\$4,633,346
Dolphin Tours	\$5,966,064
Tennis	\$4,182,336
Other Expenses	\$3,692,401
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>\$153,430,866</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

Bluffton continues to grow its visitor numbers. This is especially notable given the decline in consumer sentiment throughout 2023. While many other U.S. tourist sites saw declines in the last year, Bluffton experienced a greater number of visitors than in 2021 or 2022; both in the number of overnight visitors and day trippers. As such, the total economic impact of these visitors also increased relative to either 2021 or 2022.

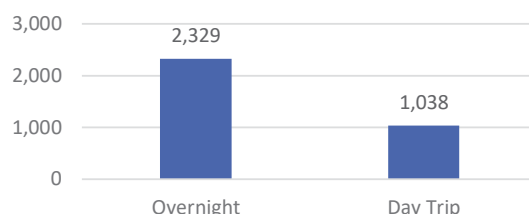
### Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023

A total of **487 thousand visitors** came to Bluffton in 2023, up 12.8% compared to 2022 and up 1.1% compared to 2021. The overall economic impact of this tourism on Beaufort County was **\$208.00 million**, up 0.6% compared to 2022 and up 11.0% compared to 2021. 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 **2,329 jobs**, which represent 1.9% 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.

The 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 **1.36**. This signifies that every dollar spent by tourists in

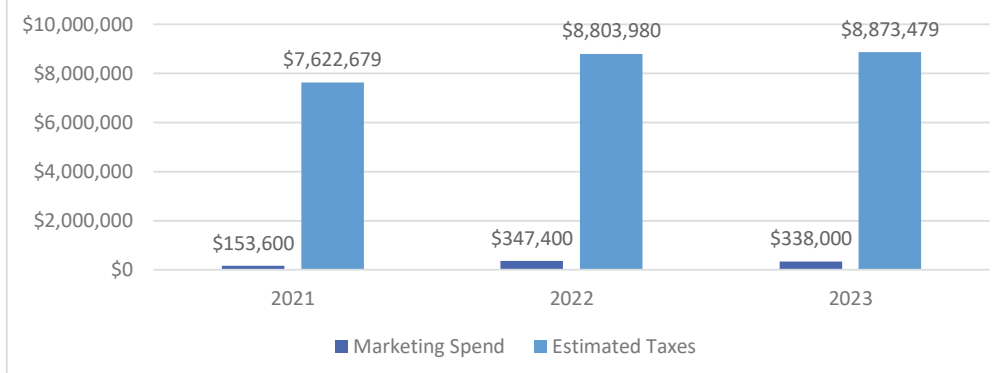
Bluffton increased output in the overall Beaufort County economy by a total of \$1.36.

Figure 1. Estimated Employment Impact by Visitor Segment



The tourist expenditures generated an estimated **\$2.39 million** in tax revenues for local Beaufort County governments. The Town of Bluffton earned an additional **\$6.48 million** in accommodations tax and hospitality tax, as reported by the Town of Bluffton Revenue Services. Together, this **\$8.87 million** in tax revenue represents an increase of just under \$70,000 (0.8%) over 2022 and increase of 16.4% over 2021. This tax revenue also corresponds with a Return on Tax Investment (ROTI) of 26.25, based on the \$338.00 thousand that was spent on destination marketing in 2023. In other words, each dollar spent by the Visitor & Convention Bureau yielded an estimated return of **\$26.25** in local tax revenue. The comparative relationship over the past three years between destination marketing expenditure and the estimated local tax revenues generated from tourism can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Marketing Spend and Estimated Local Tax Revenue





*Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023*

## Appendix

**Table A1. Overnight – Estimated Economic Impact on Beaufort County**

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
<b>Direct</b>	1,854	\$53,408,688	\$77,353,472
<b>Indirect</b>	286	\$12,915,829	\$25,178,944
<b>Induced</b>	189	\$8,788,704	\$17,295,815
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,329</b>	<b>\$75,113,221</b>	<b>\$119,828,231</b>

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

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
<b>Direct</b>	825	\$23,853,153	\$53,580,843
<b>Indirect</b>	128	\$5,658,700	\$20,598,531
<b>Induced</b>	85	\$3,930,258	\$13,991,986
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,038</b>	<b>\$33,442,111</b>	<b>\$88,171,360</b>

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

	Employment	Labor Income	Output
<b>Direct</b>	1,854	\$53,408,688	\$130,934,314
<b>Indirect</b>	286.39	\$12,915,829	\$45,777,475
<b>Induced</b>	189.48	\$8,788,704	\$31,287,802
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,329</b>	<b>\$75,113,221</b>	<b>\$207,999,591</b>
<b>Estimated Local Tax Revenue</b>			\$2,389,668
<b>Local Tourism Tax Revenue (ATax and HTax)</b>			\$6,483,811
<b>Total Estimated Local Tax Revenue</b>			<b>\$8,873,479</b>

*Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023***Table A4. Top 50 Industries Impacted by Bluffton Tourism**

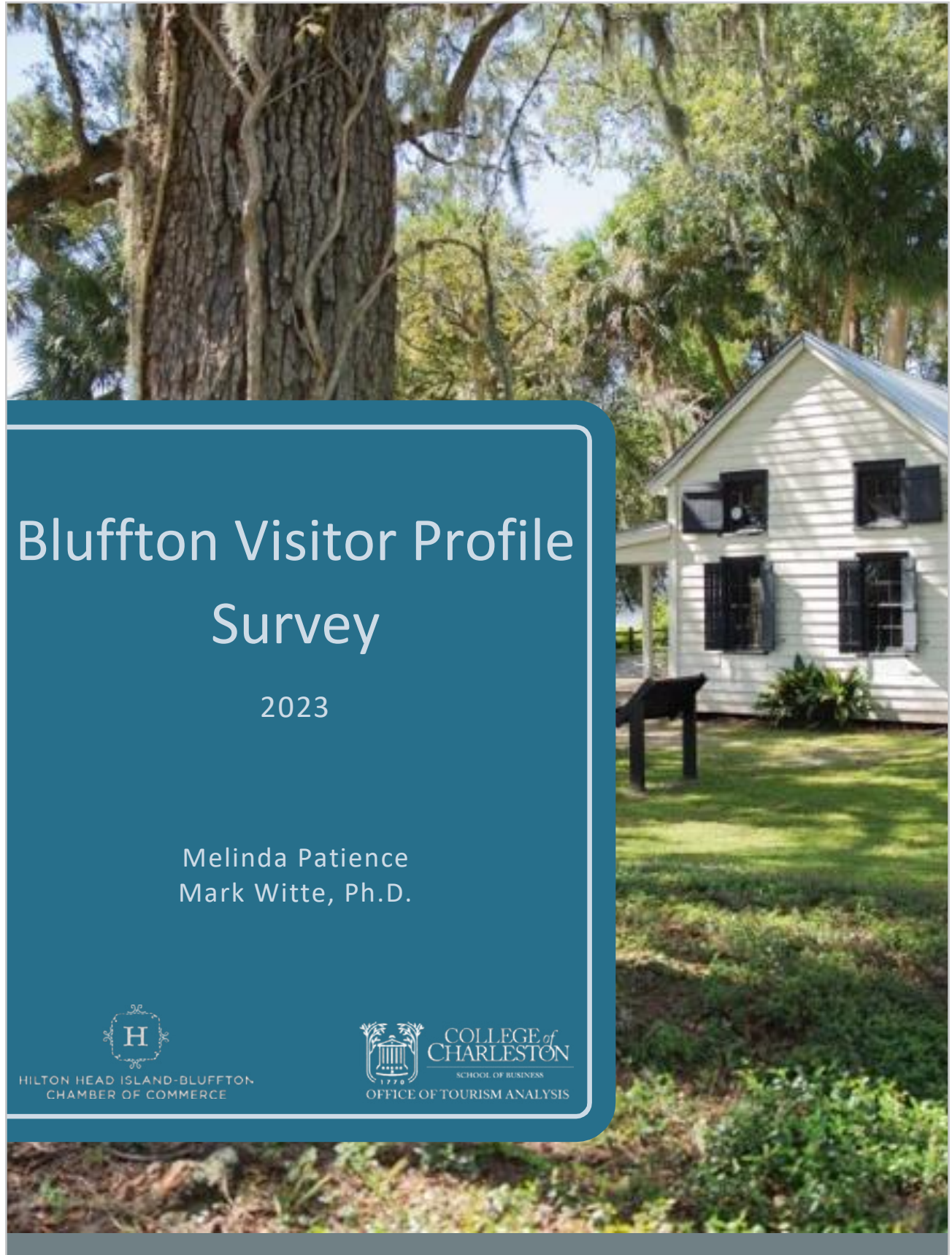
	Industry	Output
1	Full-service restaurants	\$23,532,521.90
2	Hotels and motels, including casino hotels	\$23,481,003.17
3	Miscellaneous store retailers	\$14,930,900.58
4	Other real estate	\$12,906,725.80
5	Museums, historical sites, zoos, and parks	\$12,228,823.64
6	Transit and ground passenger transportation	\$10,342,523.27
7	Water transportation	\$9,942,061.29
8	Fitness and recreational sports centers	\$9,166,822.27
9	Performing arts companies	\$7,991,241.91
10	Scenic and sightseeing transportation and support activities for transportation	\$7,178,852.67
11	Personal care services	\$6,787,242.57
12	Owner-occupied dwellings	\$5,996,716.07
13	Other amusement and recreation industries	\$5,110,371.22
14	Food and beverage stores	\$4,951,280.11
15	Monetary authorities and depository credit intermediation	\$2,277,309.78
16	Insurance agencies, brokerages, and related activities	\$2,174,165.82
17	Other local government enterprises	\$2,172,557.70
18	Management of companies and enterprises	\$1,922,401.26
19	Employment services	\$1,728,454.29
20	Legal services	\$1,702,230.26
21	Securities and commodity contracts intermediation and brokerage	\$1,557,872.79
22	Advertising, public relations, and related services	\$1,499,926.94
23	All other food and drinking places	\$1,459,185.19
24	Nonstore retailers	\$1,376,126.48
25	Services to buildings	\$1,370,836.70
26	Management consulting services	\$1,369,224.69
27	Limited-service restaurants	\$1,234,026.86
28	Offices of physicians	\$1,204,139.93
29	Other financial investment activities	\$1,048,267.72
30	Maintenance and repair construction of nonresidential structures	\$990,909.08
31	Promoters of performing arts and sports and agents for public figures	\$982,427.74
32	Nondepository credit intermediation and related activities	\$879,918.27
33	Accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping, and payroll services	\$846,136.08
34	Travel arrangement and reservation services	\$824,537.62
35	Internet publishing and broadcasting and web search portals	\$800,485.78
36	Postal service	\$733,448.58
37	Automotive repair and maintenance, except car washes	\$718,744.01
38	Landscape and horticultural services	\$683,542.03
39	General merchandise stores	\$662,335.85
40	Independent artists, writers, and performers	\$659,517.16

*Impact of Tourism in Bluffton on Beaufort County, 2023*

	Industry	Output
41	Tenant-occupied housing	\$640,343.02
42	Insurance carriers, except direct life	\$605,506.32
43	Gasoline stores	\$570,931.04
44	Truck transportation	\$556,093.84
45	Waste management and remediation services	\$553,024.36
46	Electric power transmission and distribution	\$544,043.32
47	Hospitals	\$524,283.04
48	Radio and television broadcasting	\$510,704.81
49	Car washes	\$495,770.66
50	Building material and garden equipment and supplies stores	\$482,768.28



# 2023 Visitor Profile Survey



# Bluffton Visitor Profile Survey

2023

Melinda Patience  
Mark Witte, Ph.D.



BLUFFTON VISITOR PROFILE SURVEY

2023

PREPARED FOR:

HILTON HEAD ISLAND-BLUFFTON  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BY:

OFFICE OF TOURISM ANALYSIS  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS  
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON

66 GEORGE STREET | CHARLESTON, SC 29424  
843.953.1996 | OTA.COFC.EDU | PATIENCEN@COFC.EDU



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Millennials and Gen Z represented a combined total of 63.1% of the respondents, followed by Gen X (19.1%), and then Boomers (17.4%). Over 55% of those surveyed had a bachelor's degree or higher, and more than 72% had an annual household income of \$75,000 or more per year. Also, just under 85% of the respondents were married.

### POINT OF ORIGIN

The respondents resided in 140 geographical areas / MSAs (Metropolitan Statistical Areas) throughout the U.S., stretching from east to west coast. More respondents resided in California than any other state (13.0%). Second was Texas (7.8%), followed then by Pennsylvania (7.1%), New York (6.5%), Ohio (5.5%), and Georgia (5.1%). In-state visitors did not make up a significantly large portion of the respondents (4.8%).

According to a market penetration analysis, the following MSAs were major markets amongst respondents: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA; New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ; Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA; Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD; San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA; Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV; and Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN.

Canada was the top international origin market amongst respondents (38.0%), followed by the Middle East (26.8%), and Europe (16.9%).

### THOSE WHO TRAVELED TO BLUFFTON

The top reasons for choosing Bluffton as a destination included visiting beaches, spending time with family, business, shopping, visiting heritage attractions/museums/historic tours, and nature-based activities. Other popular motivations included boating/sailing/kayaking, biking, and relaxation. The activities in which visitors actually participated are similar to the previously mentioned activities, and also include culinary, music or theatrical performances, and festivals. Amongst Bluffton's overnight visitors, 74.9% were first-time visitors, suggesting that the destination continues to appeal to new visitors.



## TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

The average group size of those surveyed was 3.5 for overnight visitors and 5.3 for day trip visitors. The main mode of transportation to town was non-stop commercial flights for overnight visitors (28.8%) and personal/family car for day trip visitors (47.1%). About 56% of overnight visitors flew to Bluffton via commercial flights, with just under one-third of them (32.8%) landing at the Hilton Head Island Airport.

The average length of stay for those overnight visitors surveyed was approximately 5.1 nights. Hotels were the most popular choice of accommodation for overnight visitors (35.8%), followed by resorts (22.8%), staying with friends/relatives (10.2%), and home/villa rentals (9.0%).

## TRAVEL PLANNING

Vacasa was the most popular online booking platform for villas/homes (19.4%), followed by local vacation rental companies (16.7%), Airbnb (13.9%), HomeAway (13.9%), and Booking.com (11.1%). The top five other destinations visitors considered before choosing Bluffton were the Alabama Golf Trail; Gulf Shores, AL; the Hawaiian Islands; Outer Banks, NC; and the Caribbean.

Top reasons for choosing to visit Bluffton were wanting to visit nature-based attractions (36.7%), word-of-mouth recommendation (34.7%), wanting to visit a beach destination (32.7%), and wanting to visit heritage attractions (25.7%).

Of those surveyed, 62.9% indicated an intention to return to visit Bluffton, which signals a high degree of trip satisfaction.

## 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=169), 33.7% had never visited the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area before, and 50.3% had visited one to five times before.

Of those non-visitors, 47.0% traveled elsewhere, 26.0% plan to visit in the future, 4.0% were hesitant because of unpredictable weather events, 3.0% mentioned health reason, 2.0% did not find what they were looking for, and 2.0% did not travel at all. Of those who did not visit the Hilton Head Island / Bluffton area, alternative destinations in the Southeast (42.0%) and South (27.0%) were the most popular. Nonetheless, 48.8% 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 (50.6%) 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/vacations were: relaxation & rejuvenation (72.2%), beaches (71.2%), passive outdoor adventures (63.7%), historic attractions (0.9%), and romantic couple getaways (60.8%).

The following attributes were most important in choosing a leisure vacation: natural beauty of the destination (76.9%), quality of dining options (74.6%), ease of access (73.3%), affordability (73.0%), quality of lodging options (72.6%), diversity of dining options (70.4%), and diversity of lodging options (65.9%).



## METHODOLOGY

### SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

The 2023 Visitor Profile Study (VPS) for the Hilton Head Island and Bluffton Area was conducted electronically. Between mid-January 2023 and January 2024, emails were sent on a rolling basis to invite individuals to participate in the VPS. These individuals had previously visited [www.hiltonheadisland.org](http://www.hiltonheadisland.org) or [www.visitbluffton.org](http://www.visitbluffton.org) and submitted their email addresses, and they were contacted following their anticipated dates of visitation. In addition, invitations to complete the survey were posted multiple times during the same time period on the social media channels of the Hilton Head Island Visitor & Convention Bureau and Explore Bluffton.

A total of 1,710 completed surveys were collected. This report is based largely on the 422 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.

This report presents the results of the present study, together with comparative results from the last time this study was completed, examining visitation in 2021 and 2022.

The table below shows the visitor estimates for Bluffton by segment for 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Visitor Segment	2021	2022	2023
<b>Non-paying Guests</b>	172,349	154,478	174,291
<b>Daytrippers</b>	309,137	277,083	312,621
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>481,486</b>	<b>431,561</b>	<b>486,912</b>

Table 1: Visitor Estimates 2022

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender	2022	2023
Female	38.1%	52.0%
Male	61.9%	47.5%
Self-identify		0.5%
Marital Status		
Married	69.1%	76.8%
Single	14.4%	12.4%
Divorced	7.7%	4.5%
Widowed	7.2%	4.8%
Separated	1.6%	1.5%
Education (highest level completed)		
Grade School	0.8%	0.5%
High School	3.6%	8.4%
Some College	26.7%	23.8%
Associates Degree (2 years)	15.8%	16.2%
Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	33.9%	32.5%
Graduate Degree (Post degree/MA)	19.1%	18.6%
Age		
19 years or younger	0.6%	0.3%
20 to 29 years	38.3%	23.8%
30 to 39 years	44.4%	36.8%
40 to 49 years	10.7%	12.2%
50 to 59 years	1.8%	10.9%
60 to 69 years	2.9%	9.8%
70 years and over	1.1%	6.0%
Prefer not to say	0.2%	0.3%
Household Income		
Under \$24,999	0.8%	1.4%
\$25,000-\$34,999	5.6%	5.4%
\$35,000-\$49,999	10.3%	11.0%
\$50,000-\$74,999	12.6%	14.7%
\$75,000-\$99,999	18.8%	20.1%
\$100,000-\$149,999	18.4%	18.1%
\$150,000-\$199,999	19.1%	14.7%
\$200,000-\$249,999	7.6%	10.8%
\$250,000 or more	6.8%	3.7%
N	1,005	422

Table 2: Demographics





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