

2017-18

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



JOHNSTONCOUNTYNC.ORG

[DEFINITION]

"Strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over the long-term: which achieves advantage for the organization through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfill stakeholder expectations".

TRAVEL PROMOTION'S VIRTUOUS CYCLE



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TRAVEL TRENDS FOR 2017-2018

According to the March 2017 U.S. Travel Outlook prepared by the U.S. Travel Association (USTA): “The economy is anxiously waiting for a result on the consequences of comprehensive healthcare reform, a corporate tax overhaul, travel restrictions twice overturned in appellate court, the border adjustment tax and increases in infrastructure investment... [and] all eyes are on the White House and Congress to keep the ball moving whatever the direction.”

Nationally, the “Conference Board’s Consumer Confidence Survey reached a 15-year high in February.... ‘Overall, consumers expect the economy to continue expanding in the months ahead,’ said Lynn Franco, director of economic indicators at the Conference Board” (as cited by USTA).

Consumer spending finished 2016 on a very strong note, according to the U.S. Commerce Department, and consumer spending forecasts “suggest that customers are back in the shops again” (The Gallup Daily Spending Poll, as cited by USTA). USTA’s own Travel Trends Index showed improvement in January 2017, but “[looking forward over the first half of 2017, both domestic leisure and international travel within the U.S. are expected to slow, while business travel is expected to grow at a faster rate than it has during the past six months” (as cited by USTA).

“According to a recent AAA survey, more than one -third of Americans (35 percent) are planning to take a vacation of 50 miles or more away from home involving two or more immediate family members this year. The overall volume of travelers remains unchanged from last year, indicating that Americans continue to prioritize traveling as a family.... [T]here is a significant increase this year in the number of Americans who say they are planning to take three or more vacations. The 28 percent of family travelers who will take three or more trips this year is 13 percentage points higher than in 2016” (as cited by USTA). Based on USTA forecasts, domestic leisure travel will grow by 1.6 percent and domestic business travel will grow by 0.5 percent in 2017; combined, the total domestic person -trip volume is expected to grow 1.3 percent — a slower growth rate than that forecasted for 2016 nationwide. Total domestic travel spending in the U.S. will increase by 2.7 percent in 2017 (compared to 2.5 percent forecasted for 2016).

Other USTA forecasts for travel nationwide are:

- Total travel expenditures in the U.S.: up 2.8 percent in 2017
- Total international visitors to the U.S.: up 2.4 percent in 2017, up 4.1 percent in 2018
- Total domestic person -trips: up 1.4 percent in 2018
- Leisure domestic person -trips: up 1.6 percent in 2018
- Business domestic person -trips: up 0.8 percent in 2018

USTA has calculated that travel exports “accounted for 11.2 percent of total U.S. exports of goods and services” in 2016; “this was the highest share since 2000.” According to an “International Travel Trends Analysis” webinar conducted in March by USTA, while travel expenditures in the U.S. have been steadily increasing since 2009, there is a trifecta of international travel impediments currently affecting us: a weak global economy, the strong U.S. dollar and falling favorability (sentiment toward the U.S. is turning negative, and this is driving consumer behavior already). Across the country, two million fewer international visitors are expected by Tourism Economics in 2017 (as cited by USTA).

A Dec. 2016 M&C magazine “article on the 2017 outlook predicted some changes in the new year for the meetings industry, such as North America becoming a buyer’s market, with hotel supply expected to out-

pace demand in 2017 for the first time in eight years” (as cited by USTA). According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), North American airlines saw demand rise 2.6 percent in 2016. Some 11 million people traveled through RDU International Airport in 2016, passing this passenger mark for the first time in the airport’s history; arriving and departing passengers grew by 10.4 percent over 2015, and Dec. 2016 was the 34th consecutive month of passenger growth at RDU. New airline routes for 2017 include Delta Air Lines’ nonstop flights from Austin and Seattle and Allegiant’s New Orleans nonstop service twice weekly. Both Delta and American Airlines will upgrade planes utilized for Paris and London service, respectively. The Triangle area should be prepared to respond to the potential for more international air arrivals in 2017–2018.

New North Carolina Product:

Across the state, and in particular destinations in military communities are experiencing high growth in hotel rooms like Fayetteville and Onslow County. With reduction in military forces expected as the war(s) in the Middle East decline, what might the influx of hotel rooms have on the region? With the 2013 marketing audit suggests, Johnston County should continue to monitor competitor’s brands to compete with and stay abreast of new initiatives along the I-95 corridor. In 2016, Wilson County increased their occupancy tax to 6% and Cumberland County is facing some legislative issues concerning their occupancy tax that may have some impact on the CVB's operations.

Along this line, the state of North Carolina in October 2014, entered into a contract with a new public-private organization, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) which includes the VisitNC marketing team. There continues to be changes on the political front in Raleigh on how ED is handled in the regions, but the RTRP area seems very stable. The transition is now complete with the marketing team in new offices in Cary, and the NC Welcome Center program is still part of state government. The Sales and PR team at JCVB works directly with the Welcome Center Staff and works on building relationships with the VisitNC group as well.

Branding Johnston County

With the 2013 Marketing Audit recommendations in hand, the JCVB team has adopted a new JoCo centric graphic image to use on the new website and ad campaigns. The JCVB will continue to brand each town’s identity on the new website town pages. The branding question remains: What makes you feel something about Johnston County? Can we come together as the tourism authority behind an over-arching county brand? Work continues to have towns and county agencies to work together, not separately to achieve growth and tourism initiatives.

Regional events in the Triangle that may overlap our marketing efforts:

A variety of sporting events in Raleigh are scheduled that may impact hotels in the western part of the county. Additional work is needed by JCVB to be included in regional marketing efforts, however, in 2015 JoCo Arts have been included on the Arts in the Triangle Website and content has been updated in the new Triangle Grown website. The Muscadine Heritage Wine Trail has been extended into the Beer, Wine, and Shine Trail to include our two new breweries (Deep River and Double Barley) and Broadslab Distillery. Additional efforts now include connecting to the Craft Beer Trails, farm and food tours in the triangle.

CVB PRESIDENT MESSAGE

The Johnston County Tourism Authority was formed in 1987 as the vehicle for tourism economic development growth in Johnston County. In 1989, the first director was hired to market the county, and since that time the Visitors Bureau has been dedicated to tourism community development projects giving over \$1.3 million dollars to build the tourism product in the county. The Capital Grant Program has been re-designed in 2017 into (4) categories to reach more organizations. **First;** the traditional Bricks and Mortar Projects, **second;** conservation projects for area museums to protect, grow, and manage collections, **third;** small towns without hotel room taxes, and **fourth;** marketing support for the Johnston County Economic Development Office. This new approach reinforces the Tourism Authority's commitment to reach all corners of the county, giving back to all communities, and prospering growth in the county.



Donna Bailey-Taylor, President

This 2017-18 FY marketing plan will continue to focus on strong sales and marketing efforts targeted outside the county for leisure, sports and group markets. With the excellent highway system of I-95 and I-40 in Johnston County our vision of becoming the preferred destination for leisure travelers is our primary function to drive overnight stays. New advertising efforts are in place for more group tour, reunions, and wedding markets to promote our assets to these markets.

In 2017, the bureau will expand efforts to create two travel apps, one for the Beer, Wine and Shine Trail experience and another with Bentonville Battlefield and the Carolina Civil War Trail. Our goal is to continue to tell visitors, both military and family stories from this era in the county's history. Interactive and mobile experiences for visitors is a "must have" for innovative destinations. The county is just realizing the impact of new tourism assets like the new GALOT Motorsports Park and with The Barn at Broadslab and The Farm at 42, the county will continue to expand are meeting and wedding facilities in the county. The new Hampton Inn & Suites in Benson along with the potential for a new RV Resort in Smithfield, and new dog parks proposed in both Benson and Smithfield, visitors will find more services and accommodations to choose from, which is great for tourism growth in the county.

The new office for the JCVB team with our first official Visitor Center located in the outlet and hotel area off I-95 in Smithfield offers new creative ways for our staff to work with our tourism partners and interact with visitors. To say we are excited to open the next chapter of the book for visitor services is an understatement as we look to offer special events for our industry partners and unique experiences for visitors to the area. Stayed tuned in to see what's next for the JCVB team!

Summary Report Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna".

Donna Bailey-Taylor, CDME
President/CEO

MARKETING PLAN INTRODUCTION

A Marketing Prospectus is actually an “action plan” to accomplish the goals of an organization...the Johnston County Visitors Bureau’s mission is to attract and serve visitors to Johnston County. This marketing plan will have some research statistics on our community, trends in Destination Marketing, challenges and action steps, competitive analysis, and an outline of bureau projects. Many projects for FY 2017-2018 are described and time-lined with budgets in the 2017-2018 Work Plan provided as an attachment to this document. Any other projects added during the fiscal year will be incorporated into this Marketing Plan. The Bureau staff works from a program of work document and the annual budget in cooperation with each bureau committee.

GOALS OF THIS MARKETING PLAN

A sound business plan includes goals for development, whether it sells a product, a service or intangible good, these following key points should apply.

This marketing plan will be used to:

- Define goals, objectives, strategies and programs for tourism promotion for fiscal year 2015-2016 in Johnston County.
- Communicate our goals to the companies that make up the Visitor Industry in the county as to assist them in their marketing efforts.
- Partner with our elected officials, leadership of the county’s seven Chambers of Commerce, the VisitNC Group, partners in the RTP area, NC Welcome Centers, and the Destination Marketing Association of NC for better cooperation on joint projects for the development of tourism in Johnston County and throughout the state of North Carolina.
- Provide a tool for the Bureau and the various committees of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau to work from as the approved “plan of action” for the next year.
- Provide the foundation upon which each fiscal year’s operating budget will be based.

ELEMENTS OF THIS MARKETING PLAN

Organization - The Johnston County Visitors Bureau is governed by the Johnston County Tourism Authority, which approves the annual budget and monthly expenditures, sets policy and oversees the direction set forth by this marketing plan. Committees established to complete these tasks are the Marketing Committee, Special Projects Committee, and Executive Committee. The bureau staff is comprised of the President/CEO, Office/Visitor Center Manager, Communications Manager/Webmaster, Sports & Leisure Sales Manager and the Marketing/Public Relations Manager, who are charged with the execution of all aspects of running the bureau, administrative duties, sales, service, distribution, printing, publicity and advertising campaigns to attract visitors to Johnston County.

Distribution - Getting Johnston County visitor information to existing and potential visitors, meeting planners, group tour operators, travel agents, AAA and CAA office and NC Welcome Centers who facilitate travel decisions and interact with the traveling public. The bureau has a part-time contract agreement in place to assist in distribution to over 125 visitor rack locations in the county.

Personal Selling - Telemarketing, trade shows, visitor center visits, one-on-one sales missions to AAA & CAA offices to encourage visitors to come to Johnston County to see and do more, hopefully to stay longer and return on their travels back along Interstates 95 and 40.

Sales Promotions/Services - Includes familiarization tours, follow up with sales leads and providing meeting services to groups. In addition, the bureau will participate in sales missions with the NC Sports Association, the VisitNC Group, conduct site inspections with clients, and work with annual event publicity with local organizing groups and chambers of commerce.

Advertising/Direct Marketing - Includes maintaining the advertising campaign and branding through billboards, print media, Internet marketing, radio, TV, social media, direct mail campaigns, email marketing, media fairs with the VisitNC Group, directory listings, and public service announcements for leisure and group markets.

Web Marketing - To develop web presence for direct sales efforts to leisure, groups, meeting planners and media contacts with up-to-date visitor information on Johnston County. As the web has quickly become the way visitors and professionals search and buy travel, JCVB maintains and develops websites for the each municipality, the county, and micro sites for niche markets.

Merchandising/Marketing Tools - Includes all published materials such as the Official Visitors Guide, Group Tour Guide, Wedding Guide, Sports Facilities Guide, Meeting Facilities Guide, Presentation Book, tradeshow displays, Video, Ad Specialty Items (Ava Fans, Shirts, Sports items), Bags, Folders, Letterhead, Visitor Maps, all of which are used in personal selling and sales promotions.

Publicity - Includes production of online media kits, photo/video b-roll, news releases, local press interviews, national press release program through PR Newswire and community awareness programs including a speakers bureau to educate the community on who the bureau is and our marketing efforts to the traveling public promoting Johnston County as a destination.

Research/Measurement - Includes market research, occupancy reports, visitor conversion studies, festivals and events counting, tax collections by interstate exits, annual reports, competitive surveys, clippings, and complaints.

Education - To provide educational opportunities to the President/CEO and staff to insure all personnel are trained to conduct the duties assigned to them and to further motivate the staff to strive for professional excellence through DMANC and DMAI organizations.

Website Optimization - To expand the marketing efforts of the Visitors Bureau to the fast changing electronic marketing arena of email newsletters and promotions, blogging, on-line booking engines, website optimization, and Google Adword campaigns.

Branding – To expand the marketing efforts of the Visitors Bureau through current research to address the issue of branding, using the DMAI Brand Science methodology.

Hospitality Heroes – To continue the partnership with Johnston Community College to bring tourism hospitality training, awareness of the tourism industry in the state and Johnston County FREE to the visitor industry sector businesses in the county.

STRUCTURE OF THE TOURISM AUTHORITY

The Johnston County Tourism Authority was created by Authorization: Chapter 647; House Bill 893 in 1987 and does business as (D.B.A.) the Johnston County Visitors Bureau (JCVB). The ten member board of directors oversees the operations and is fiscally responsible for the public funds generated by the 3% county-wide occupancy tax. In addition, in 2002 the Towns of Smithfield and Selma created a separate town 1% occupancy tax to increase direct marketing efforts to promote tourism in each town. These funds are collected by the towns and remitted to the Johnston County Visitors Bureau for marketing purposes.

Again in 2006, the town occupancy taxes for Smithfield and Selma increased to 2% and the Towns of Kenly and Benson added the 2% tax. The Visitors Bureau is charged to manage four individual marketing campaigns for these towns, as well as, the county effort to promote tourism.

The Johnston County Tourism Authority operates using Rules for Small Boards and by-laws that provide policy and procedures for the President/CEO. The County of Johnston acts as the financial arm of the Visitors Bureau, as well as, all human resources services are provided by the county for which the county retains 5% of the gross collections. In addition, the Visitors Bureau has a separate audit run with the county and has the Finance Officer bonded to handle the finances of the authority.

The Johnston County Tourism Authority operates with three committees to handle the affairs of the Visitors Bureau; they are the Executive Committee, Marketing Committee and Special Projects Committee. A new advisory committee was created in 2012 to focus on sports marketing, the Johnston County Sports Council is a 15 member committee with JCTA and staff leadership charged with attracting sports tournaments to the county.

In addition, the Johnston County Hospitality Association was created in 2015, as the Visitors Bureau expands efforts to encourage tourism-industry businesses to work together. The JoCo Hospitality Association meets quarterly to address issues facing the county, to encourage participation with the bureau's marketing programs and to keep an open dialogue with community leaders on the importance of tourism.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Executive Committee

The Johnston County Tourism Authority's officers and committee chairs make up the Executive Committee which is charged with the oversight for giving each committee their goals, budget guidelines and specific activities to achieve the overall mission of the Visitors Bureau which is to attract and serve visitors to Johnston County.

The Executive Committee shall also implement procedures to measure productivity and accountability of the mission for the bureau, the program of work, staffing and administrative affairs of the Bureau.

The Executive Committee shall be responsible for review of the Bureau's By-laws, all financial issues, establishing the goals of the annual retreat, handling any personnel issues, legislative issues of concern to the tourism industry in Johnston County and the leadership development of the board.

Marketing Committee

The Marketing Committee shall consist of not more than (5) members of the Bureau. The mission of the Johnston County Tourism Authority is to attract and serve visitors to the county through direct marketing efforts including advertising in print and digital to consumer, trade, business travelers, sports tournaments, meetings and conventions.

The Marketing Committee oversees approximately 50% of the annual budget to achieve these marketing objectives to increase room revenues for hotels throughout the county. The Marketing Committee is responsible for the annual review of the JCVB Marketing Plan to set goals for the staff and strategies for long term development of the marketing efforts of the Visitors Bureau.

During budget planning, the Marketing Committee reviews the return on investment of existing marketing programs, and sets the budget for the next fiscal year. Marketing strategies should be based on research, therefore, the marketing committee is charged with reviewing by means of formal or informal research the effectiveness of the JCVB marketing plan every 3 years.

The Marketing Committee oversees the 2% tax for the Towns of Smithfield, Selma, Kenly, and Benson to coincide with the overall plan for the county. In 2013, the Marketing Committee conducted a marketing audit by Magellan Strategic Group of Asheville which provided a report being used to revise and rewrite several components of the Strategy Marketing Plan for the Visitors Bureau.

Special Projects Committee

The Special Projects Committee shall consist of not more than (5) members of the Bureau. The mission of the Johnston County Tourism Authority has long included support for projects that are tourism related and have been funded by the Capital Grants program. The Authority also has supported local festivals, sports, and community events to increase attendance for all community events around the county. The Special Projects Committee has been the oversight committee for the guidelines and budget for both the Capital Grants and Special Events Grants.

The President/CEO of the JCVB has been heavily involved in tourism development projects around the county to assist in the growth of the county's tourism product. Such projects have included serving on many boards around the county and running projects like the Ava Gardner Museum, Agri-tourism development with NC Cooperative Extension, Driving pull-offs for Bentonville Battleground, funding for the Neuse River Walk and Buffalo Creek Greenway, Canoe Landings on the Neuse at Howell Woods, Farm Tours for the Tobacco Farm Life Museum, the creation of the new Benson Museum of Local History, and many other projects.

The Capital Grants program introduced new guidelines in 2017-18 in four categories to expand the reach of tourism funds to build and support the tourism infrastructure in the county.

Johnston County Sports Council

As an advisory committee to the Johnston County Tourism Authority, the mission and objectives of this body are to position the Johnston County area as a tournament destination and further the development of sports venues and assets, as well as:



- Provide leadership to attract and support significant sports events and activities to the area thereby increasing revenues to the county's visitor industry businesses.
- Encourage positive regional name recognition, the promotion of existing sports facilities and attraction of sporting events.
- Lead the efforts to create synergy and cooperative sports development between all municipalities and free-standing sports organizations to build the sports infrastructure in the county.
- Serve as a clearing-house of information on local, regional and national sports for news media and the community at large.
- Collaborate with other civic organizations to coordinate efforts to promote Johnston County as a sports destination.
- Provide visitors services to sports participants and spectators and develop offers from area business partners eager to increase revenues through sports tournaments.

JoCo Hospitality Association

This advisory committee shall consist of not less than ten members with representatives from accommodations, attractions (museums, recreation, golf, performing arts, agritourism), shopping, restaurants, meeting/sports/wedding facilities, transportation services, event & festival planners and tourism related services (Caterers, Florists, Travel Agents)



The committee shall:

- Establish educational topics of value to the membership to bring in speakers for quarterly meetings;
- Work with the Johnston County Visitors Bureau to assist in promoting the destinations in Johnston County through programs, public relations, social media, area familiarization tours, and other marketing initiatives approved by the committee;
- Develop a program of "tourism ambassadors" to be vocal in their community and through social media to share what's happening in tourism in Johnston County;
- Design a committee web landing page and utilize Dropbox to share materials with members of the association to cross-market the county.
- Encourage utilization of the Johnston Community College Hospitality Heroes Program by recommending completion by all members and their employees.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau is marketing our destinations to visitors, thereby, encouraging utilization of accommodations, retail outlets, restaurants, heritage sites, museums, entertainment, and recreation venues for the community's economic benefit.

VISION STATEMENT

The Johnston County Visitors Bureau is the leading authority on travel and tourism in Johnston County and is fully engaged with local and state leaders to successfully promote and develop tourism venues to become the premiere destination on I-95/I-40 in North Carolina.

DESTINATION POSITIONING

Based on the 2009 I-95 Corridor Study funded by the Golden Leaf Foundation, the following top rated descriptive statements of the NC I-95 destination corridor by visitors reinforced the beautiful nature and scenery, richness in history and culture, peaceful and relaxed atmosphere, friendly people and easily accessible communities. As for unique and distinctive tourist attractions, visitors emphasized primarily outlet shopping, cultural heritage/military sites and museums and local eateries in Johnston County.

Given the above research findings, the following statements were prepared.

Destination Positioning

Johnston County, North Carolina along I-95 and I-40, offers a conveniently twinned, exit friendly and green transportation corridor for visitors traveling either north/south or east/west along the Atlantic seaboard. Known for its adjacent outlet shopping, cultural heritage attractions and overnight hospitality services, this travel route epitomizes the perfect stopover destination.

Destination Brand Promise

As a picturesque rural sightseeing destination, Johnston County, North Carolina travel corridors I-95/I-40, their exits and nearby quaint Southern towns provides a convenient en route rest area and overnight stay destination. Lined with trees, rivers, and wildflower medians, this regional 'main street' thoroughfare abounds in outlet and antique shopping, cultural heritage surprises, and friendly local hospitality.

JCVB CORE VALUES

We promise to exceed expectations in the delivery of public services for our stakeholders;

We are professionals, committed to serving with honesty and integrity;

We are committed to solving problems;

We are committed to achieving real results that earn the public's trust;

We are committed to working cooperatively with the visitor industry for the overall good of the county;

We encourage and value open and honest communication;

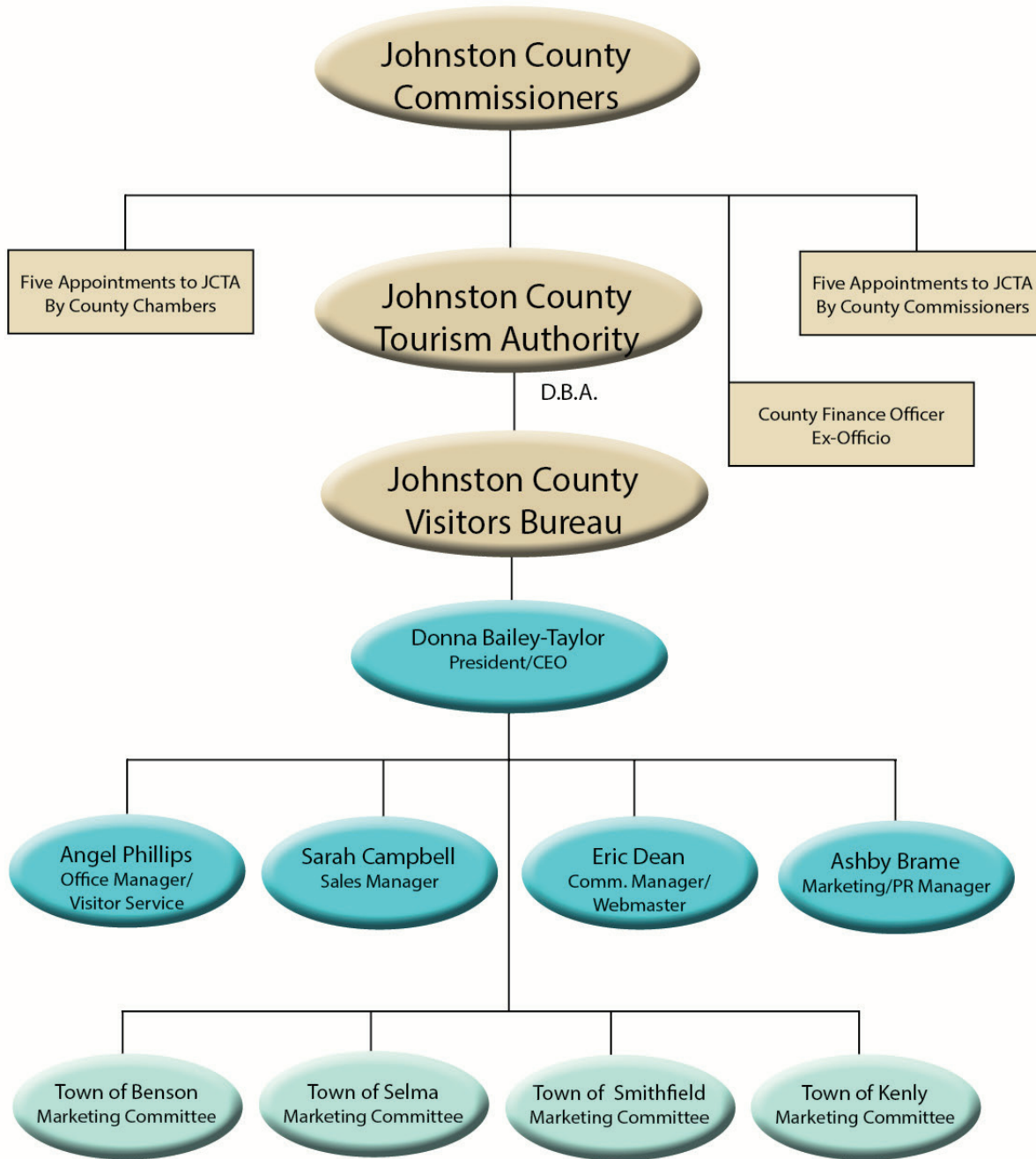
We are committed to continual learning and the pursuit of excellence;

We are committed to being active partners with all municipalities, county government and, the area Chambers of Commerce;

We are committed to being good stewards of our natural environment and the preservation of the county's cultural, agricultural, and civil war heritage;

We are committed to development of partnerships and alliances both in the county and statewide.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



STAKEHOLDER COMMITMENT BY THE JCTA

The JCVB will perform the duties established by its mission and vision with passion and effectively by adhering to the following values and guiding principles:

The Johnston County Visitors Bureau Staff and Board will:

- strive to achieve excellence in destination marketing, utilizing the highest industry standards set forth by the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI).
- collaborate with county-wide tourism industry partners, elected officials, and accept citizen input on tourism development initiatives.
- be customer-centric as it pertains to external visitors as well as internal partners in the tourism industry.
- engage the community through communication efforts, presentations, bureau speaker programs and annual reports.
- seek support from state tourism organizations such as Destination Marketing Association of NC, and NC Travel Industry Association as it pertains to legislative issues and take advantage of educational opportunities.
- be totally accountable and transparent to the community as it pertains to financial use of public funds to market and develop the tourism assets in the county.
- professionally operate in alignment with the by-laws, core values, strategies and goals approved by the Johnston County Tourism Authority.
- develop a long-range strategic plan for human resources.
- brand the Visitors Bureau as the “official destination marketing organization” for Johnston County and its destinations.
- strive to increase awareness of JCVB programs and open communication lines with chambers and town councils.
- retain a highly entrepreneurial spirit as a destination marketing organization by working with visitor industry partners to attract and serve visitors.
- show a high regard for the tax dollars entrusted to the JCVB and understand that the work of the bureau must produce results.

ELEMENTS OF EXECUTING THE MISSION STATEMENT

The JCVB is Johnston County’s official destination marketing organization. Its primary mission is to position the county as a year round visitor destination and increase travel spending through external marketing, thereby diversifying the local economy and stimulating economic development. JCTA’s role is to be an umbrella organization for marketing Johnston County.

JCVB serves as a communications link between numerous tourism marketing partners within the county building consensus, unifying the marketing message, and avoiding duplication of effort. JCVB provides assistance and information on industry issues, trends and product development, and acts as an advocate for the tourism industry. The mission of JCVB is also to provide superior customer service to visitors and stakeholders, thereby encouraging repeat and extended stays, demonstrating accountability, and a return on investment.

RESIDENT VIEWPOINT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

- Residents desire supplemental income sources and community-wide economic growth through increased tourism.
- Likewise, residents wish for expanded community development amenities to increase the quality of life with a variety of recreational activities, healthy living outlets, and expanded personal and community services.
- Residents are aware of the local urban markets in the Triangle and Interstate markets within their reach on I-95 and 40.
- They realize that the county is rapidly growing and how that has affected all aspects of life in the way of traffic, funding for schools, water/sewer, and other infrastructure needs.
- Visitors are recognized as beneficial to the economy, but second or third place behind demands of growth on county budgets for services, schools, and infrastructure.



HISTORICAL IMAGE OF JOHNSTON COUNTY

Johnston County is rich in southern agricultural heritage and American Civil War history. With the Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site and the NC Carolina's Campaign Civil War Trail, the Johnston County Heritage Center, the Tobacco Farm Life Museum, and the international appeal of the Ava Gardner Museum and the many other railroad towns, this county offers an extensive history lesson. These lessons are invaluable for tourism development in Johnston County and offers one of the most promising avenues for growth in the tourism industry.

The self-identity and self-esteem of a place is part of what makes up its image. Its assets, culture, location, and personality all play into how a destination wishes to be portrayed to the world. Specifically, a destination must focus on that which makes it unique. The main asset that distinguishes Johnston County from surrounding places is its Civil War historical offerings, farm experiences, and Ava Gardner, an international star known around the world.

Placing focus on the historical related assets around the county would give Johnston just the image present, past and future residents would proudly promote. Each offering in the county is facing the challenge of visitors wanting new experiences, delivered in more engaging ways like voice and video exhibits, hands-on and white-glove tours are what our attractions should offers visitors. Static display exhibits are finding it hard to compete in the very digital world we live in. Development of visitor Apps is becoming more affordable and when resources allow to do so, the JCVB will enter that arena.

JOHNSTON COUNTY TOURISM FACTS

The VisitNC Group commissions a study with TIA (Travel Industry Association of America), to estimate tourism spending in the 100 counties in the state. The model used to compute the figures used SIC codes with the NC Dept. of Revenue. Unfortunately, the SIC codes for Johnston County have some errors as it pertains to the visitor industry in the county. For example, the codes indicate that Johnston County has 17 hotels, when in fact there are 34 properties. The state office did address this problem in 2005, and although there are irregularities in hotels and attractions, adjustments were made based on tourism related employment in Johnston County. As long as the model is geared to urban areas, as data is provided by the US Travel Date Center's National Travel Survey, rural areas like Johnston County will have altered numbers.

However the data may be flawed, it does represent the best data available to us to measure tourism spending growth in the county.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE 2017-18 FISCAL YEAR

The **Novo Nordisk** construction project has the potential to create 100% occupancy for several national brand hotels in the next 24 months, creating great demand at the same time displacing leisure room nights in generally peak travel season. New hotel growth may spring up in 2017-18 due to the anticipated high demand.

At the same time that Novo Nordisk gears up construction, the **Natural Gas Pipe Line** will also take place as another high demand generator for rooms in the I-95 corridor area. The unknown impact of the **CSX** project in Edgecombe/Rocky Mount area may again push demand up for the next 24 months.

The announcement of the new **Hampton Inn & Suites** building in Benson has been in the making for two years with hard work from the leadership of the Town of Benson, Electricities of NC and Johnston County Economic Development. Having first class accommodations in Benson to service the leisure traveler, wedding guests of the Preston Woodall House, GALOT Motorsports and the emerging market of culinary travelers along the Beer, Wine and Shine Trail at Broadslab Distillery is a game changer for the town and county. Displaced rooms to Harnett County will decline and help the Town of Benson, as the hotel is slated to open in the Spring of 2018.

Selma Mixed-Used Development and changes at Exit 97 are starting to take hold with the purchase of the northwest corner. Meetings continue with developers on how to recapture market share and bring back that exit for travelers with new hotels, restaurants, gas stations, etc. Look for development to expand in the next 12-24 months, as the new Dixie Oil Shell station and push for new hotel and restaurants will continue with this developer.

The new **GALOT Motorsports Park** which opened in 2016 will bring national events and as it continues to market to this niche motorsports traveler, it will have a positive impact on tourism for the county.

The expand the **Carolina Campaign on-cell driving tour** beyond the Bentonville Battlefield was completed in 2017 and a partnership with the site to build a new App to include the sites around the county for visitors to enjoy will launch in January 2018.

Wilson's Mills park along with new rugby fields with the Clayton Rugby Association will bring new events and tournaments to the county. Howell Woods will be expanding the overnight cabins with some meeting space for hunt clubs and other groups visitors for bird watching and hiking/biking recreation. Clayton Parks and Rec is building a Disc Golf park and all inclusion park for children, as well as, Smithfield Park each will open in 2018.

The **Barn at Broadslab Distillery** will open in September, 2017 and **The Farm at 42** is now under construction and both facilities will bring more weddings and group meeting business to the county.

GOALS FOR THE 2017–2018 FISCAL YEAR

Expand direct sales efforts in the meetings market for small groups to discover Johnston County's convenient location, unique venues, and affordable meeting spaces.

Explore ways to increase or leverage JCVB's marketing and sales budget through partnerships, sponsorships or new streams of support.

Build on the relationship with the region's tourism organizations to include Johnston County in the Research Triangle's messaging and the destination's awareness that "we are just minutes away."

Work with organizers of key signature events for the county that have significant and trackable hotel room-nights to elevate the attendance and awareness of the county.

Work with county and community leaders to improve the infrastructure and allocation of resources important to tourism as it pertains to roads, grants for recreation, and hiring a County Parks & Recreation Director, as we continue to stress the ROI of tourism and how it has a positive impact on the quality of life for all residents.

Maintain the Hospitality Heroes customer-service training programming in partnership with Johnston Community College with the goal of making it part of all tourism new hires training packets.

Be a constant advocate for the development of a conference facility adjacent to a hotel product, for groups of 100-500ppl with multiple breakout rooms, to be the first of its kind in the county.

Continue to ensure that JCVB has a consistent presence on social media and with content marketing strategy, driving traffic to tourism partners and the bureau's various websites.

Continue to ensure that JCVB remains the official voice of tourism in Johnston County, a curator of destination content, and a trusted partner for tourism-related businesses providing value in sales and marketing programs.

Complete a data research project to "get to know" our visitors better to determine best methods to deliver marketing messages, crafting the right message and when to reach potential visitors as they make decisions to travel.

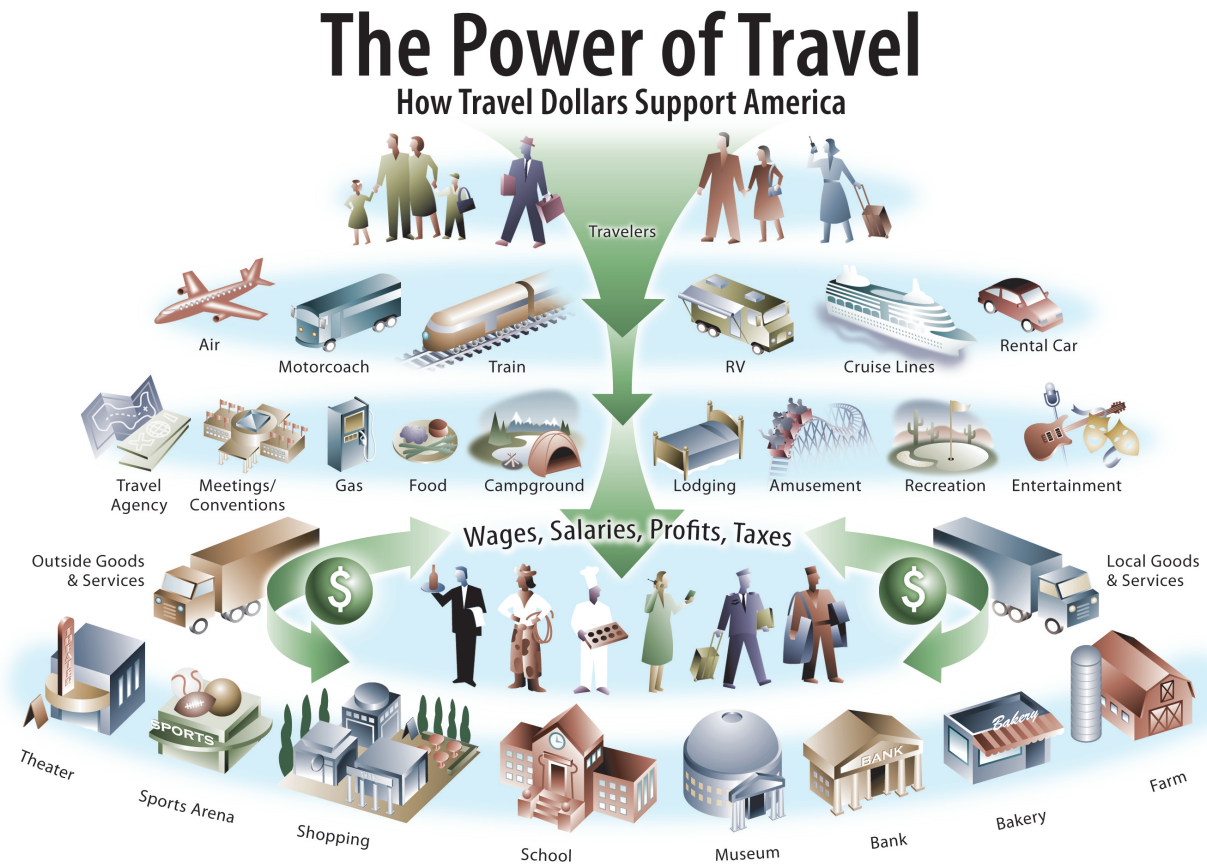
Become the central communication hub for the Novo Nordisk project during the construction phase and as new hires come on board in the next 3-4 years.

To create new visitor service experiences at the JCVB Visitor Center on Venture Drive, like Meet the Artist, Friday Farmer's Markets, Food Demos and more to engage our visitors with the county's tourism partners.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

The dollars that visitors spend in Johnston County are circulated back into the local economy. The money directly benefits other local related industries that rely on visitor business for survival and growth.

As a result, visitor dollars benefit virtually everyone in Johnston County by generating tax revenues,



JOHNSTON COUNTY VISITOR SPENDING STATISTICS FOR YEAR 2015

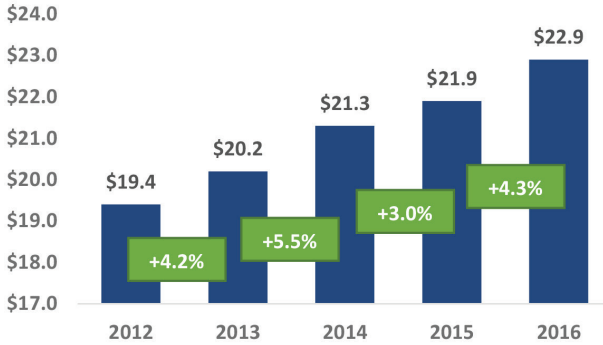
Year	Revenues\$(millions)	Change from previous year
2016	*Waiting on Visit NC research	
2015	\$221.72	3.2%
2014	\$214.94	5.10 %
2013	\$204.51	3.47 %
2012	\$197.66	3.42 %
2011	\$191.12	9.20 %
2010	\$175.02	6.25 %
2009	\$164.72	-8.11 %
2008	\$179.26	2.94 %
2007	\$174.14	8.32 %
2006	\$160.77	10.40 %
2005	\$145.63	8.30 %
2004	\$134.47	8.53 %
2003	\$72.48	2.62 %
2002	\$70.63	7.05 %
2001	\$65.98	0.05 %
2000	\$65.95	6.56 %
1999	\$61.89	3.88 %
1998	\$59.58	-2.69 %
1997	\$61.23	7.06 %
1996	\$57.19	4.94 %
1995	\$54.50	9.04 %
1994	\$49.98	7.58 %
1993	\$46.46	5.30 %
1992	\$44.12	7.01 %
1991	\$41.23	2.33 %



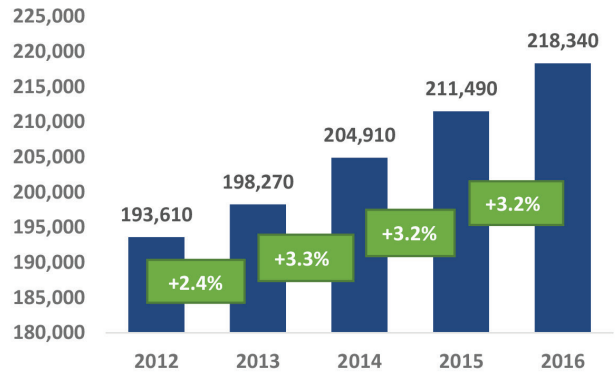
- Domestic tourism in Johnston County generated an economic impact of \$221.72 million in 2015. This was a 3.2 % change from 2014.
- In 2015, Johnston County ranked 22 in travel impact among North Carolina's 100 Counties.
- More than 1,770 jobs in Johnston County were directly attributable to travel and tourism.
- Travel generated a \$34.65 million in payroll in 2015.
- State and local tax revenues from travel to Johnston County amounted to \$18.01 million. This represents approximately \$297.00 tax saving to each county household.
- Popular attractions include American Music Jubilee, Atkinson's Mill, Ava Gardner Museum, Bentonville Battleground, Clemmons Educational State Forest, Howell Woods, Carolina Premium Outlets, Tobacco Farm Life Museum and colorful annual festivals.

TOURISM ECONOMIC FAST FACTS - 2016

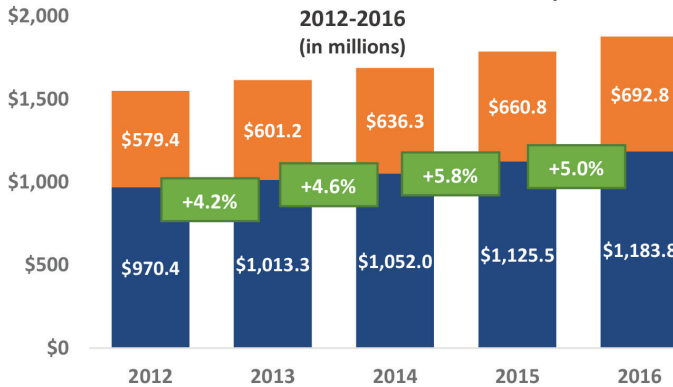
Direct Visitor Spending 2012-2016
(in billions)



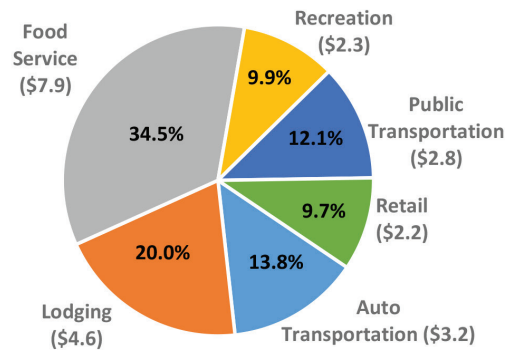
Direct Tourism Employment 2012-2016



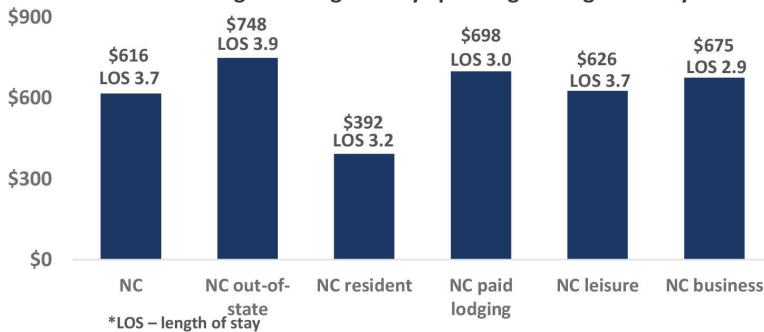
Tourism Generated State & Local Tax Receipts
2012-2016
(in millions)



Impact of Tourism by Sector
(in billions)



2016 Average Overnight Party Spending & Length of Stay*



\$63 million
Visitor spending per day

\$5.1 million
Visitor related taxes generated per day

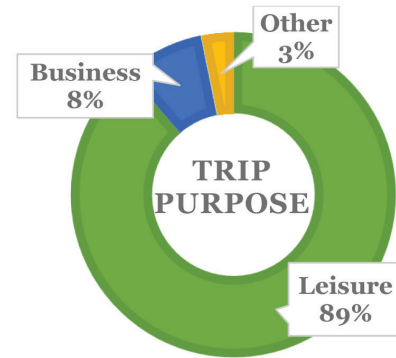
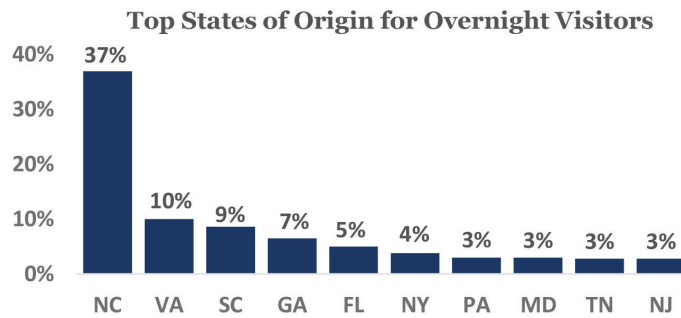
\$497
Annual household tax savings

1/46
NC residents directly employed by tourism

Sources: TNS TravelsAmerica, 2017
U.S. Travel Association, 2017



TOURISM VISITOR PROFILE FAST FACTS - 2016



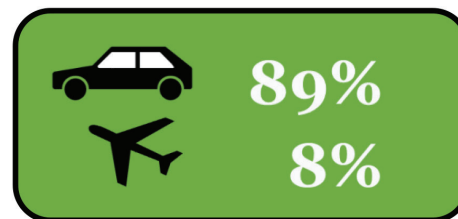
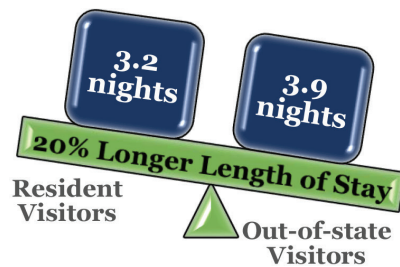
2.2
Average party size

47
Average Age

64%
are Married

36%
have children in household

- 43% stay in a hotel/motel/resort
- 39% stay in a private home
- 7% stay in a rental home
- 5% stay in a personal second home
- 3% stay at a campground
- 2% stay in a rental condo
- 2% stay in shared economy lodging
- 1% stay in a B&B
- 6% stay in other lodging



Sources: TNS TravelsAmerica, 2017
U.S. Travel Association, 2017



JOHNSTON COUNTY VISITOR INDUSTRY

Johnston County Visitor Industry is comprised of the following businesses:

- (33) Hotels and Motels (One hotel to open in 2018)
- (3) Bed & Breakfasts
- (5) RV Campgrounds
- (247) Table Service and Fast Food Restaurants
- (85) Outlet Shops
- (4) Art Galleries and Shops
- (21) Antique & Thrift Shops
- (32) Nature Places, parks, trails, and community centers
- (2) River Walks/Greenways along the Mountains to the Sea Trail
- (6) Public Golf Courses
- (1) Bowling Alley
- (2) Movie Theaters
- (30) Major Annual Events
- (5) Museums
- (7) Performing Arts Venues
- (20) Transportation Services Companies
- (39) Johnston County Farm, Produce Markets and Locally Food Products Companies
- (46) Meeting Facilities (hotels, auditoriums, conference rooms, restaurants, civic clubs, etc.)
- (2) Breweries, (2) Wineries, (2) Distilleries

TOP FEEDER STATES FOR INQUIRIES

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| (1) North Carolina | (6) South Carolina |
| (2) Florida | (7) Ohio |
| (3) Pennsylvania | (8) Texas |
| (4) New York | (9) Georgia |
| (5) Virginia | (10) New Jersey |

TOP FEEDER CITIES FOR INQUIRIES

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) Raleigh/Cary, NC | (7) Richmond, VA |
| (2) Charlotte, NC | (8) Hampton Roads Area, VA |
| (3) Greensboro, WS, Highpoint, NC | (9) Philadelphia, PA |
| (4) Durham, NC | (10) New York City, NY |
| (5) Jacksonville, FL | |
| (6) Fayetteville, NC | |

PURPOSE OF TRIP

Based on information provided through visitor inquiries, the top reasons given for purpose of trip are:

- (1) Vacation
- (2) Pleasure Visit
- (3) Bentonville Battlefield
- (4) Outlet Shopping
- (5) Girlfriends Getaway
- (6) Ava Gardner
- (7) American Music Jubilee

TOP PRINT AD SOURCES FOR INQUIRIES

- (1) Compass Marketing (Magazine Insert)
- (2) Hearst Magazine Coop
- (3) Southern Living
- (4) AAA Go Magazine
- (5) NC Civil War Traveler

NC TOURISM FACT SHEETS

The following research and fact sheets reflect the demographics and economic impact of tourism in North Carolina, as prepared by the VisitNC Group. The 2016 Fast Facts indicates the greatest impact on visitor spending for leisure and business travel have come from NC residents. This is greatly influenced by gas prices and marketing efforts of in-state DMOs to capture more homegrown tourists to see more of NC and explore our state's attractions.

STATE TRAVEL RESEARCH

A variety of research is available through the VisitNC team, like the monthly lodging reports, which can be found here to monitor and compare statewide reports. <https://partners.visitnc.com/lodging-reports>

ADDITIONAL TOURISM RESEARCH

Economic Impact of the Motorsports Industry on the North Carolina Economy 2004

Economic Impact Occupational Analysis of the NC Motorsports Industry for 2005

Pathways to Prosperity -- Economic Impact of Investing in Bicycle Facilities: A Case Study (2003 NC-DOT)

US Travel Association

US Department of Commerce. Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (OTTI)

North Carolina Wine Economic Impact Study 2015

2013 NC Resident Traveler Focus Groups

State of the American Traveler - Jan 2015

JOHNSTON COUNTY SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS (present advantages)

Interstate access with I-95, I-40, US 70, US 301
Proximity to major population base of Raleigh and RTP region.
Creation of the JCTA Sports Council & JoCo Hospitality Association
Creation of the culinary and beverage trail – Beer, Wine and Shine Trail
Recreational and potential development - completing the MST between Clayton and Smithfield
Extensive historical assets to promote
Inviting and attractive neighborhoods and downtown business district
Very accessible with visible exits and related services
Ongoing new attractions and lodging investments
Impact of Novo Nordisk expansion in 2016-19

WEAKNESS (present disadvantages)

Geographic size of the county with distance between tourism assets
Lack of directional signage and asset identification county-wide
Minimal research data on potential visitors
No billboards coming from Raleigh to Johnston County in our price range
Signage for tourism assets especially rural attractions
Few tourism partners to work with JCVB or create packages
Minimal hotel marketing/sales partnerships

OPPORTUNITY (potential advantages)

New wedding facilities at Broadslab, The Farm at 42, and Little Black Creek Farm
New visitor product development (entertainment, sport, retail/commercial, etc.)
Completion of the county-wide recreation plan.
Growth of recreation in the county
Completion of the 14 miles between the Clayton and Smithfield MTS Trail
Wayfinding initiatives in Smithfield and Selma
Continued co-branding with "triangle" area partners

THREATS (potential disadvantages)

I-95 Toll Road and need for road improvements, the Hwy 795 by-pass of Johnston County.
Town of Smithfield Tax increase or BID
Growth of hotels at Exit 121
Lack of funding for road improvements at Exit 95
Unsafe/security road perceptions as presented by DOT on traffic deaths
Poor image of some I-95 communities
No community/county support to DMO efforts
Minimal tourism industry participation with JCVB

CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Given the previous issues and SWOT analysis, the top challenges facing Johnston County Visitors Bureau are as follows:

- Need for further visitor experience depth and strong brand presence with an overarching cohesive plan and message. Embrace the “JoCo” brand name.
- Preparation and implementation of an integrated marketing strategy and plan. Buy-in from county-wide community leaders on the vision of tourism development and the benefits to all parties. Recommendation has been made that this strategic plan be presented and adopted by the county and all municipalities.
- Increased (new and reallocated) funding for tourism marketing and promotion by JCVB and future partners. Relationship building among all municipalities in Johnston County under a united goal for the betterment of the whole county, first as it pertains to tourism development and second as community cohesiveness. The 301 Yard Sale Event and the County-wide Parks and Recreation Master Plan project are two examples of how the towns may work together.
- Higher State Tourism recognition and enhanced marketing support for Johnston County’s tourism promotional programming.
- Continue to review and implement recommendations from the 2013 Marketing Audit.
- Take the improved Simpleview CRM Extranet to the JCVB tourism partners and create the Visit-NC API transition as well.
- Forge new relationships with county tourism partners by expanding membership the JoCo Hospitality Association.
- Take the initiative and “own” the title “preferred stopover destination on I-95”.
- The need for county-wide recreation/sports venues and a conference center to attract off-season meetings to support hotels which needs county-wide support through bond funding.
- Recognizing the real impact of development of tourism and its potential threat to the eco-system and river basin of the Neuse River. Working with the County Land Use Plan to recognize the critical areas for preservation and protection are important when discussing tourism development and the impact of visitation.
- JCVB is extremely committed to the goals and strategies outlined in this adopted Strategic Business Plan, however, without additional funding for research or staffing some projects will not be completed. The 3-5 Year Human Resource Plan should be addressed once this new Strategic Plan is adopted to see where resources are needed.
- Visitors and new residents gravitate toward Wake County where there are more amenities (retail, amusements, dining, and attractions). This affects local businesses and future development and is part of the revitalization efforts of the county. Tourism leaders need to be “at the table” as community leaders work with developers. The JCVB will continue to support Shop Local and partnering with Downtown Business Districts in local municipalities to encourage local support for small business owners.

COMPETITIVE SET ANALYSIS

Johnston County is primarily a drive destination, and because of this factor it is important to consider the competitors that also fall into this category, the other towns and attractions that are along the I-95 Corridor and the I-40 corridor. The competitors along the I-95 Corridor are Fayetteville, Dunn, Wilson, Rocky Mount, Lumberton, and Roanoke Rapids. Along the US 70/I-40 Corridor competitors may be Goldsboro, Raleigh and Garner.

Top Competitive Set Asset Review

Rocky Mount (Exit 138)

Rocky Mount has recently altered their brand statement to “Stay Here on Your Way There”, a clear statement that Rocky Mount expects and relies heavily on stop-over visits from tourist transversing the I-95 corridor. The charming small towns of Nash County offer an interesting blend of recreational opportunities, historical sites worth exploring, sports events, plus arts and cultural experiences. Nash County’s location is both convenient and easily accessible from all directions, making it convenient for sports tournaments, family reunions, business meetings, seminars, conferences, and all kinds of special events as well as a key stop for I-95 and US 64 travelers.



Rocky Mount’s marketing message along I-95 stresses the number of hotel rooms, restaurants and as the place to host your family reunion. The Rocky Mount area offers (31) hotels, with the newest properties located at US 64, Winstead Rd. Exit 138, just 2 miles off of I-95. These newer hotels surround the Gateway meeting complex where many top chain restaurants service the center. This cluster is convenient for I-95/US 64 leisure travelers as well as meetings, corporate travelers, and group tours.

The older exit known as Goldrock has (10) hotels with most all rooms built in the 60s and offers very discounted rooms in older condition. Dortches is located along I-95 with an older non-brand hotel formerly a Holiday Inn. Along US Hwy 301 South in Sharpsburg there are five older hotels, independent and low rated brands.

The true competition for hotels in Johnston County is the Gateway Center exit with newer hotels, restaurants, and meeting space conveniently located near major corporations and the hospital. The Imperial Centre for Arts and Sciences, a true cultural complex with a theatre, children’s museum and an arts center for activities in the community is featured throughout the website. The Rocky Mount area has a strong Parks & Recreation program with several new parks, a 143-acre Sports Complex, and the Neuse River Trail/Reservoir.

The Rocky Mount CVB represents several areas: Rocky Mount, Battleboro (Gold Rock), Dortches, Nashville, Sharpsburg, Bailey and Spring Hope. For more detail on attractions, visit the CVB website, www.rockymounttravel.com. The CVB has a new Director that has been stable for the last 12 months and is learning more about destination marketing.

Wilson (Exit 121)

Located north of Johnston County, along NC Hwy 301, Wilson competes with Johnston County's leisure activities, accommodations, and sports tournaments with a strong baseball market and the NC Baseball Museum. Wilson is recognized as having great antique shopping, historic homes, arts, gardens, and Eastern style BBQ. Their brand statement is "Simply Wonderful", charming but also vaguely applicable to almost every small southern town. Hotel accommodations along I-95, Exit 121 are all fairly new hotels built in the last 10 years; however, food service is limited at the exit. Visitors seeking things to do have to travel into the City of Wilson which is 15 miles east of I-95; the website touts the downtown area as revitalized though it offers no accommodation options. Wilson has a total of 1,405 hotel rooms with 500+ of these at I-95, Exit 121. The remainder of the room inventory tends to be older, non-brand hotels/motels, which offers little competition for Johnston County hotels.



Barton College, Buckhorn Lake, Wilson Arts Council, Whirligigs, Imagination Station, and the Botanical Gardens are major attractions in Wilson with antique shopping being a well-known brand for the county. The Oliver Nestus Freeman Round House is a museum featuring artifacts that depict the culture and contributions of African Americans as it relates to the history and development of Wilson.

The NC Baseball Museum is located at the Fleming Stadium, a sports complex where the Wilson Tobs All Stars team plays and is the central location for attracting tournaments. National baseball tournaments like the Babe Ruth World Series and Wilson's low hotel occupancy capacity offers opportunities for Johnston County hotels for overflow accommodations. Making contact with sports organizers in Wilson County would be a key step.

The Wilson Visitors Bureau has been established for over 20 years and operates a Visitor Center in a location in downtown Wilson. CVB raise room tax to 6% this year, past collection totals were \$484,000. The Visitors Bureau operates with one Executive Director and one visitor center staff person, and more information may be found on their website, www.wilson-nc.com

Roanoke Rapids (Exit 173)

Searching for the brand promise on the Roanoke Rapids website, under group tour services, this was found: "Do as the locals in Roanoke Rapids do: indulge, savor, and celebrate? Indulge your senses and enjoy Roanoke Rapids, savor Halifax County's rich cultural experience and celebrate everything that the county has to offer. Halifax County is one of North Carolina's most unique, authentic and enthralling destinations. Your exploration of Roanoke Rapids and the many sensory extravagances that endure in the unique county of Halifax, NC begins here – enjoy the journey!" There was great use of video, BLOGS, an online magazine, and social media resources. www.visithalifax.com



Roanoke Rapids has a rich heritage along the river and it known for the Halifax Resolves key role in North Carolina's pre-Revolutionary history. This is unique because very few towns in this region of I-95 have Colonial era history as many towns were formed with the development of the railroads in the 1850s-80s. The recreational opportunities with Lake Gaston and Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Park offer two strong visitor attractions for the area. According to the website, a public art campaign has been gaining momentum. The project not only highlights regional creativity and local businesses, but points out Weldon as the rockfish capital of the world. The area has (15) hotels and 83 area restaurants mostly in

Roanoke Rapids exits on I-95, Exit 171-173. Very few towns in this region of I-95 have Colonial era history as many towns were formed with the development of the railroads in the 1850s-80s. Tax collection reports for 2015-16, were \$689,000 for the destination.

Fayetteville (Exit 49)

By far the largest destination along I-95 with a population of 325,000 is Cumberland County with Fort Bragg area makes Fayetteville (pop. 200,000+) the fourth largest city in North Carolina. The brand promise adopted by the FACVB is one of American pride for the military as Fayetteville is home to Fort Bragg, the largest military base in the world.



FAYETTEVILLE AREA
CONVENTION AND
VISITORS BUREAU
CUMBERLAND COUNTY, NC

To official brand statement on the site reads "Freedom's Home". The destination offers history, recreation, arts venues, performing arts and meeting space to accommodate state and regional conventions.

Exit 49 along I-95 has the largest concentration of hotel rooms with over 3,000 at the exit. Things to do or places to eat are very limited at this exit and visitors have to drive into the Fayetteville area for shopping and dining options. Properties at this exit range from full service with meeting facilities to rooms only hotels being the norm.

The following describes the Fayetteville brand to possible visitors: A visit to Fort Bragg Communities will make you proud to be an American. There's a patriotic spirit running through Fayetteville, Spring Lake, Hope Mills and the other Cumberland County municipalities that unites everyone who lives here, as well as those just passing through. Here, we hold fast to the friendly feel of a true hometown, while providing the cultural and entertainment amenities of bigger cities. We are the nation's first Military Sanctuary Community, and we're proud of our military and its rich role in our nation's history.

With over 55,000 military personnel, Fort Bragg is home to more service members than any other Army installation in the country. It's also proud to be the home of the revered 82nd Airborne Division and the famed Golden Knights parachute team.

The FACVB website is somewhat complicated to navigate requiring Log In data mining to access "Plan Your Trip" information. The CVB operates a visitor center approximately 7 miles off I-95 near downtown and they have approximately 13 staff members. They have a partnership with the Mall to also distribute visitor information. Tax collection reports were \$5.0 million in 2015-16. See <http://www.visitfayettevil-lenc.com> for more information and all social media links.

Dunn (Exit 73)

The City of Dunn is the closest municipality to Johnston County, only 4 miles south of Benson along I-95. This Tourism Authority represents the City of Dunn only although the occupancy tax is a county tax. The destination represents Exit 71-73 along I-95 and has approximately 600 hotel rooms. 6% room tax generates \$430,000 in revenues.



Their website has a new brand promise, "We have what you are looking for", and their advertising campaign along the interstate using a cartoon face with big eyes – See Have it All in Dunn. Their destination site also uses similar phrases to other I-95 destinations, claiming to be the halfway point between NY and FL and inviting passing tourists to "stay for a moment".

The following is the destination description from their website: Dunn is located along Interstate 95, half-way between New York and Florida (just like all destination on the I-95 corridor can claim). The Dunn area offers many wonderful things to see, do, and eat! Great golf characterizes this region of North Carolina. There are two Civil War battlefields close to Dunn, dedicated to preserving the history of our great state. Dunn has great dining and shopping, too! Visit our downtown shops and restaurants to experience the friendly charm of Dunn. There are many other attractions, and we hope you will browse this website and see all that we have to offer (<http://www.dunntourism.org>).

Dunn Tourism has broken away from their Chamber of Commerce and opened a Visitor Center approximately 1 mile from I-95 at Exit 73. They have a budget of approximately \$430,000 with one full time staff and one part-time staff. Dunn benefits from events, festivals and weddings booked in Benson, as the town of Benson has only one older hotel the Days Inn and one Bed & Breakfast (Preston Woodall House). There are developers looking to expand hotel/retail space at Exit 79, but in today's economy they have not found a hotel brand looking to build in the smaller market.

Lumberton (Exit 22)

Lumberton is the last destination along I-95 before southbound visitors leave North Carolina, and like almost all the towns along the corridor, the selling point is "you are mid-way between NY and Florida". The following copy is from their visitors guide on the qualities and brand promises made to visitors:



Ideally situated on Interstate 95, Lumberton is known as the halfway point between New York and Florida. Just South of Lumberton's city limits at Exit 13, I-74, another major interstate, intersects I-95. In 2010, the NC Legislature designated Lumberton as THE FIRST Certified Retirement Community in NC. We offer all the assets that attract retirees – moderate climate, affordable housing, excellent medical care, natural beauty, entertainment, historic and cultural attractions, recreation, nearness to the beach and mountains and great golf. Our hotels and restaurants, conveniently located along the I-95 corridor, make traveling easy for visitors. Take any of our four exits – 17, 19, 20 or 22 – and you will have your choice of over 1,450 hotel rooms and suites. NC BBQ, local flavor, seafood, fine dining, Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, and fast food are available for your enjoyment. When you stop here, you're halfway there! www.lumberton-nc.com

The community has approximately 1,500 hotel rooms with several older hotels and rooms only properties. The CVB has legislation that gives a major portion of the occupancy tax to a Civic Center taking money away from marketing. They have successfully run direct mail campaigns to duel home owners from the North, offering \$20.00 off hotel rates, which includes a \$5.00 refund to the participating hotels from the CVB budget. They now also offer this right on their website. Several years ago the program was costing the bureau over \$75,000 in refunds.

The CVB runs a small visitor center in a retail strip mall location off of Exit 22, and they have tree full time staff member. Tax collection report states Lumberton collects, \$959,000 with 6% tax.

Beyond the borders of North Carolina, the competitive set includes Emporia, VA to Florence, SC.

Emporia, Virginia (Exit 11)

Emporia, Virginia is one of your last main stops headed south on I-95 and Hwy 301 before entering North Carolina. A very limited number of restaurants and (13) hotels are available for travelers to stop in at exits 11A and 11B. <http://www.virginia.org/cities/Emporia/>

There is not much in the way of attractions or services in the area. Upon searching, did not find any organized Visitors Bureau or Chamber website for the town. There is very little on TripAdvisor and no social media found to promote the town. Two events are listed on the Virginia State Tourism Office website, including performances booked by the Meherrin River Arts Council and the annual Virginia Pork Festival held in June. This is the world's largest outdoor barbecue, representing 32 states, marketed as something "for all to come and participate in to have a good ol' time." <http://www.vaporkfestival.com>

Florence, South Carolina (Exit 164)

Florence, South Carolina, previously marketed as "Flo" is a city located about 36 miles south of North Carolina. Its city center is located right next to the intersection of I-95 and I-20. Exits 157-170 along I-95 are considered to be a part of this "southern belle" city. With these many exits dedicated to the city of Florence, it is known for having the highest concentration of (37) hotels along I-95 in SC with around 5,000 rooms.



Review of the current website and visitors guide does not reference "Flo", but that Florence is a modern day Southern City. Located near the Pee Dee River and Darlington Raceway there are plenty of activities to dive into when visiting. This includes the list of 102 things to do; including "Follow the Cotton Trail, Learn to shag, Observe Wildlife, Relish culinary delights, Experience Darlington Raceway, Navigate scenic river ways, Cultivate southern culture, and Embrace living history." Many of these activities include Civil War history, dancing, and other museums. There is a more modern activity available for those who are into the outdoors, geocaching.

With major corporations like the Honda plant and growing population of 37,000+, the visitors guide promotes the hospital, relocation, schools, and more. Website was not functioning well when reviewed, and social media outlets were Facebook (2,662 fans), Pinterest (1,700 followers), Twitter (750 followers) and Youtube videos, but no channel. Links to social media weren't easy to find. <http://www.visitflo.com/>

NICHE MARKET COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Not only will Johnston County encounter competition from the geographic neighbors in surrounding counties, but also in niche markets. Understanding the competition in each market segment will help the marketing committee set strategies and identify possible partners. Not all competition is bad for a destination if partnerships can be formed to benefit both entities.

Leisure

The leisure market visitors traveling through North Carolina along I-95 and I-40 are mainly on their way to a final destination. The challenge for Johnston County continues to be the growth of new hotel rooms from Roanoke Rapids to Lumberton and the lower demand for older, tired motels built in the 1960s. The pass-through numbers equal around 66% of visitors to the area based on studies from 2007, 2009 and 2013. How to compete against the other destinations vying for the same overnight visitor “on their way” is the challenge. The county can utilize niche leisure offerings to hopefully attract visitors for shorter weekend stays. Based on the attractions and dining options in the county, leisure groups could include: foodies, art enthusiasts, and those interested in agritourism.

Fayetteville CVB has the most offerings for leisure travelers with many more resources to create trails, packages, and ways to advertise. All other destinations seem content to be “half-way between NY and Florida” and promoting themselves as the stop that has “everything”. In a market that general, it is important to use unique and creative advertising strategies to reach specific demographics. The creation of the Girlfriends Getaway and Sip and Stay packages, and plans for a Guys Getaway or Man-cation package allows the county to provide specific services to these groups.

Sports

Most all the destinations along the I-95 corridor are much farther along with sports marketing efforts than Johnston County, as they have county-wide or city-wide facilities available for sports tournaments. The majority of efforts in the region seem to be in traditional sports like baseball/softball and soccer. Wilson and Rocky Mount have strong facilities, marketing efforts, and recurring tournaments in baseball.

The newly formed Johnston County Sports Council has a way to go to compete with these established communities. As the sports council grows, the potential seems to be non-traditional sports including aquatics, 5K runs and obstacle course runs. Having a county-wide Recreation Plan to drive the future development of facilities is now completed and "next steps" is on the agenda and will be very important in the next 2-3 years.

Motor Coach

The Johnston County area continues to attract day trips and stops for shopping at Carolina Premium Outlets and JR Outlet, but not many overnight stays. The Rocky Mount and Fayetteville area hotels continue to offer very low rates for this business and traditionally the hotels in Johnston County will not bid that low or provide the services requested for this market, such as room blocks, pre-keying, welcome reception, and baggage handling.

After several years of motor coach tradeshow not generating overnight stays and the industry changes on long-haul retail tours, the CVB has partnered with the sales team at the outlet center to provide sales materials, gifts, and FAM assistance for any tradeshow. Shows like NC and VA Motor Coach are small with 22 to 25 operators and traditionally we hear “We know about you guys” or “We have your informa-

tion”. The challenge is offering something new to “re-attract” this market back to Johnston County. The CVB has seen more senior retirement homes and Parks & Recreation tours for seniors than traditional tour operators in the past three to four years. Johnston County growth communities like Flowers Plantation are actively seeking out-of-state retirees on their own in order to increase the population of seniors living in the county.

Group Meetings

The competition for small group meetings, like weddings and family reunions, along the I-95 Corridor comes again from Rocky Mount and Fayetteville, the two largest cities. They have the meeting facilities and full service hotels that appeal to meeting planners. The challenge for Johnston County lies in finding non-traditional groups with less demanding meeting needs willing to be in an off-site meeting hall, sometimes 2-5 miles from hotel accommodations.

An example of a non-traditional group is a small corporate retreat that would accept the county's meeting space limitations in exchange for the varied activities available. The draw of our agricultural heritage plus activities like outlet shopping, the Beer, Wine, and Shine Trail, and golf are key factors in enticing these groups.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE, TOURISM & BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Goal: To invest in Johnston County’s brand identity and develop the corporate marketing package to support attractions, festivals/events, hospitality services, improve the visitors ultimate experience and recruit related tourism businesses.

Tactics:

- build upon the natural assets of the Neuse River with additional boat ramps, camping platforms, river access and paddle trails for increased recreational tourism assets.
- identify potential agri-tourism entrepreneurs interested in creating visitor experiences on working farms, therefore, attracting visitors to the county.
- develop personal experience tours with retired locals for “white gloves” or back of the house tours.
- conduct an annual assets inventory mailing to update the tourism related industry contacts in the seven areas: accommodations, attractions, festivals, dining, shopping, meeting facilities, visitor services.
- take the county-wide Civil War trail to the next level with self-guided driving tour maps and create a On-cell Travel App that will take visitors from Bentonville to Smithfield on to Selma then Clayton.
- identify how the arts and cultural community can enhance the current festivals/events already in place to add additional elements to attract cultural travelers.
- seek artists to develop Quilt Farm Art trails to save and use abandoned tobacco barns
- increase promotion of the Johnston County Farmer’s Markets to area farmers and customers to increase farmer participation.
- connect the importance of healthy living with the new recreational facilities in Clayton, Smithfield, Benson, and Kenly for walk-able and bike-able communities. Promote the new Bike Routes brochure to drive-in markets and bid on 5K runs for the MTS trails in Clayton and Smithfield.
- pet friendly communities are important to travelers so continue to highlight those amenities along the corridors including the Dog Park in Clayton and Ranch at 40/42. Support Benson's efforts to build at Bark Park on I-95 at Exit 79. Have pet-friendly icons displayed with attractions and accommodations that allow pets.

DIRECT SALES AND MARKETING TO EXTERNAL MARKETS

Goal: The JCVB will position Johnston County as the preferred visitor, sports, group tour and meeting destination along the I-95 and I-40 corridors targeting select visitor markets along the East Coast and Canada.

Tactics:

- aggressively market Johnston County to all proven target audiences with the highest quality materials and methods in advertising, email marketing, social media, and publicity.
- study trends in travel and develop marketing strategies that will succeed in our local market.
- consider more than visitor demographics when marketing our destinations – also focus on the psycho-graphics of “why and how” our customers buy travel and how the ever-evolving use of social platforms effects the way consumers plan and share travel experiences.

- continue to improve relationships with each Town Marketing Committee utilizing the 2% room tax in Smithfield, Selma, Kenly and Benson.
- successfully integrate the towns' branding initiatives into the marketing campaigns established by JCVB to promote the visitor industry assets of Johnston County.

LEISURE MARKETING

Goal: Enhance Johnston County's economy by increasing the number of visitors and their financial impact on the local economy.

Tactics:

- prepare and execute a focused marketing and promotional strategy primarily to reach the unique leisure markets listed above in Niche Market Competitive Analysis: girls and guys getaways, foodies, art enthusiasts, and agritourism.
- develop a comprehensive plan for distribution of printed visitor marketing materials to all designated locations in order to promote tourism assets in the county.
- maintain a visually attractive and informational county-wide website highlighting community assets, events, and festivals.
- develop scripts for historic tours and ultimately self-guided and guided tour maps for visitors to historic sites, church history, agri-cultural trails, and ghost/historical stories.
- seek to expand the programs of annual festivals to include more interactive/storytelling activities for children and adults, and packages with local lodging to attract overnight visitors to the event.
- continue development and promotion of the Ava Gardner Museum helping to expand interpretation, increase awareness with signage, create programs for school groups, and overall marketing support to attract cultural and heritage travelers.
- continue to research national travel trends via the US Travel Association - <http://www.ustravel.org/research>
- utilize on-line booking capabilities on the Bureau's web site with links to leisure packages expanding the TripAdvisor Destination Pages.
- development of new Sales & Marketing ideas for leisure marketing: Man-cation package, Dinner and a Show Package, and Major Festival Packages. As well as continue to promote Girlfriend Getaway, Sip & Stay Package, and other deals.
- Connect more with VisitNC international sales staff including them in direct mail and email campaigns
- Use of Raleigh Oaks cabins was perfect location for birding at Howell Woods and Hunting Man-cation Packages near Four Oaks.



Sarah Campbell, Sports and Leisure Sales Manager

NICHE MARKETS

Formal marketing efforts should begin with direct contact to specialized groups. Niche markets that Johnston County can target immediately and certainly over the next ten years are featured below.

- History enthusiasts interested in Civil War and Bentonville Battlefield and genealogy research visitors
- Outdoor Recreation Participants: paddling, fishing, biking, birding, wildlife watching. Use recreation apps like Map my Ride to promote JoCo Bike Routes.
- Baby Boomers: this age group is doing much of the traveling and is more likely to stop and stay for a night or two to break up their trip. They are also starting to travel with their grandchildren more and are searching for activities to fit multiple interests and ages, called a generational trip
- Visiting Friends and Relatives Market (VFR): this is the largest visitor market in the nation
- Artists: the natural beauty and historical sites provide inspiration
- Competitive runners and bikers: the county has great spaces for training and new greenways, river walks, and planned bike trails offer off road options
- Geographical Markets: residents living in a 50, 100 or even 150-mile radius are all viable markets for one night stays, three-day getaways, meetings and retreats, and special events.
- Homecoming and reunion markets: churches, high schools, and families
- Destination Weddings are on the rise with the wineries, breweries, historic homes, and the new facility at The Farm at Exit 101.
- Small Meetings suitable for unique venues in Johnston County would be the SMERF Market: Social, Military, Educational, Religious, Fraternal special markets.



Engage in a number of direct marketing activities.

A multitude of recreational clubs and associations exist within a 100, 200 and even 400-mile radius that should be targeted through direct contact. Phone calls or emails, followed by sending collateral material about the area, would go a long way towards forging new relationships with organizations that might become long-term.

The goal here is to invite the groups to come to the area to hold a club event (a bike ride, a group paddle or to hold a meeting). Once groups have visited the region, they may continue to come back as a group for other events.

These are only a sample of agricultural and outdoor groups. Many other niche associations and clubs – meetings, groups, reunions, sports - can all be contacted directly. While this takes more time and you reach out to less volume than doing a mass mailing, the success rate is so much higher. Almost every interest or hobby has a club – railroads, forestry, disc golf, beer brewing, gospel singing; brainstorm as to what types of groups would “fit” the assets of Johnston County and contact them directly. Because Johnston County is established as a destination, every successful booking will make a large impact in long-term marketing.

SMALL MEETINGS MARKET

Goal: To attract small meetings in a variety of niche markets, family and military reunions, and weddings to Johnston County.

Tactics:

- Maintain a meeting planners section on the new Visit Johnston website with an inventory of meeting space, CVB services, and visitor-related businesses to serve business planners.
- Determine, by the inventory of meeting space, the target size group to bring to Johnston County.
- Direct mail a Meetings Facilities Guide to several niche markets introducing county assets for meeting planners.

Court the small meetings market

In recent years, the small meetings industry has evolved significantly—generally 150 attendees or fewer. Johnston Community College and The Clayton Center both have facilities to accommodate small meetings. Inventory the county for other potential hosting sites and partner with hoteliers to market the county as a desirable place for meeting planners in North Carolina and businesses within a 50-radius to hold their meetings. The new Farm Banquet Facility which opened in October 2013, will hold up to 450 people for a banquet. For more information, go to <http://www.meetingsfocus.com/Topics/tabid/64/Default.aspx>

Focus on the reunion travel niche – families, churches, and schools.

Create packaged activities for visitors attending family reunions. Market a one to two-hour county self-guided tour for people attending reunions and family events. Showing people more about the place where their ancestors lived will encourage them to come back for another visit.

Target agricultural commodity groups, livestock shows, horticulture clubs and agricultural trade associations.

Work with Johnston County Cooperative Extension, NC Department of Agriculture and the 4-H to create a marketing brochure highlighting the County's desire and ability to host agricultural shows, exhibitions, and competitions.

Discover the SAVE market.

The SAVE market is a strong (but undervalued) market that is based on Science, Academics, Volunteerism, and Education. This market is interested in performing educational or community-based activities that align with their personal or professional pursuits. They might help build a boardwalk, monitor number of species in a certain area, maintain trails, clean up after a disaster, build or repair houses, conduct medical examinations, and document the quality of the local water supply. Courting the SAVE market would bring visitors who actually wish to help preserve the beauty of the area. Develop a list of SAVE projects that would enhance community quality of life, expand access to natural resources, or monitor and protect habitat. Through direct interaction with applicable groups outside the county, encourage their visit and a long-term relationship with Johnston County.

Examples in Johnston County include the Neuse Riverkeepers Association annual river clean up and Church groups in Benson traveling here from Ohio for community clean-up projects.

SPORTS AND RECREATION

Goal: To increase visitation to Johnston County by targeting sports tournaments, recreational activities, and hunting lodge groups.

Tactics:

- create sports inventory section on the new Johnston County website for tournament planners seeking facilities
- meet with the local Parks & Recreation Departments to connect to their strategic plan for promoting their facilities
- create an inventory list of sporting events and place on the Calendar of Events to help market local sporting events
- connect with regional sporting events in Wake, Nash, Wilson and Harnett Counties to introduce local facilities for any training or overflow needs for large tournaments
- continue membership in the NC Sports Association to establish Johnston County as a viable sports tournament destination. Maintain a list of facilities on www.sportsnc.com
- create special recreational assets section on the new Johnston County website for facilities available for group rentals
- develop a biking or hiking tour or trail to connect lodging, culinary experiences with historic sites in the county connecting Parks & Recreation rentals of bikes and canoes.

Target sports groups.

Athletic leagues draw a large number of visitors to the areas hosting their competitions or tournaments. These leagues can be comprised of athletes competing in traditional sports like baseball, soccer and softball, or non-traditional sports like billiards and Frisbee. People dedicated to hobbies and games like chess, dominos, and poker also enjoy gathering for friendly competition or exhibition. In fact, Clayton is the annual host of the NC Bocce Tournament in October. It would be beneficial to research additional sport/hobby groups that exist throughout the Southeast and encourage them to hold their competitions in Johnston County.

COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Goal: Influence visitor travel to Johnston County in key markets by reaching this audience with effective media and public relations messages.

Tactics:

- develop key stories about the destination’s tourism assets with background kits on history and heritage, recreation, arts and entertainment, shopping new and old and agri-tourism for promotion to travel writers. Update and add what’s missing to the media kit online.
- continue annual visits to both the NC Welcome Centers on I-95 in Roanoke Rapids and Rowland to promote the assets of Johnston County to the staff.
- annual visit to the VisitNC team offices in Cary to conduct an “arm-chair” presentation to promote the county to the staff, and to meet with key staff ensuring the county is included in all programs the division offers.
- work on media relations to achieve at least one print media story in local/regional news outlets and/or blogs per month.
- create and maintain an on-going social media content calendar accounting for a daily post on each of the Bureau's social network's: Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, YouTube video channel, Pinterest, and Instagram.
- increase Facebook likes to 15,000 on the Bureau page and continue to research, experiment with, and successfully adopt relevant social media advertising opportunities.
- host one media FAM per year with area bloggers on key niche markets.
- continue to invite UNC-TV producers to film in Johnston County for the “North Carolina Weekend” show.
- participate in all possible Media Missions with the NC Division of Tourism including New York, Washington DC, and Atlanta.
- continue to build blog content, at least one per week, in congruence with the county event calendar and the social media content calendar.
- provide quarterly publicity “how-to” video on emerging social media and PR concepts to members of the Hospitality Association. Post up on website for all tourism industry partners to utilize.
- continue to expand the food experience of what is authentically Southern through web pages, social media, 30 second videos, and BLOG posts.
- After the Beer, Wine and Shine promotional videos are complete, next featured video should be culinary in nature with local chefs, southern cooking, BBQ and red hot dogs.
- write about the up and coming music talent in Johnston County as they are performing more at local events and area breweries.
- Continue “Meet the Makers”, “Shop Local Videos” and “JoCo Has Talent” blogs to introduce the flavor, products and people of Johnston County.



**Ashby Brame,
Marketing and PR Manager**

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Goal: To expand the social media strategy to become a selling tool for key travel markets for leisure and group sales, and better understand the analytics of our social customers to reach them as they buy travel products.

Tactics:

- perform a social media audit from insights in Facebook, and compare how it relates to our customer demographics. Learn how they are similar and how they may be different, so we might adjust message and offers.
- used the JCVB company LinkedIn account to position the bureau as the leading authority on tourism in the county.
- continue to grow engagement through promotions, contests, and advertising on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube.
- reach out to CPO marketing team to develop Instagram photo stations for shoppers and in the Downtown Smithfield area to encourage visitor generated content.
- use Instagram for photo contest and other give-a-ways to increase engagement.

POSITIONING

Create a market “position” for county tourism.

Positioning by definition means creating a mental image of Johnston County pertinent to the market segment being promoted. Positioning is the promise made and message sent about the destination through advertising and other marketing methods to consumers. It is important to be honest and to avoid misleading visitors - to accurately describe what Johnston County is about and what it has to offer. The brand should encompass the county’s historic assets and friendliness as well as its qualities of being quaint, rural, and relaxing.

Destination Positioning Statement

Johnston County -- an eastern North Carolina county dedicated to preserving the heritage of farm families, small town charm and our people, centered along the rich banks of the Neuse River and abundant rural landscapes.

Market Segment – Positioning Statements

Leisure and Visiting Friends & Family

Johnston County offers rich heritage experiences for visitors that date back to colonial North Carolina. The county has unique opportunities to learn about the American Civil War, and recreational sites in unspoiled rural landscapes centered along the Neuse River with an abundance of outlet shopping, museums, and new sections of the Mountains to the Sea Trail to explore.

Sports and Group Marketing

Johnston County is a sportsman’s dream with recreational offerings for hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing, and abundant river activities along the Neuse River. For organized sports and group meet-

ings, the county offers venues for baseball, soccer and small group meetings in a variety of unique venues and recreational facilities.

Events and Festivals

Johnston County centers activities and events around the community's art venues, music, agriculture, heritage sites, and the unique charm of quaint Southern Towns where visitors may explore our main streets and indulge in authentic southern foods and emerging spirits industry.

Trails and Packaging

Johnston County has developed girlfriends getaway packages for outlet shopping short trips as well as the new Beer, Wine, and Shine Trail for foodies and beverage enthusiasts seeking these social experiences.

Business Travelers

Johnston County is conveniently located along I-95 and I-40 and just 30 minutes from the Research Triangle Park and RDU International Airport providing a more relaxed and affordable destination for business travelers.

GENERATIONAL MARKETING

Goal: To dig much deeper into generational marketing towards Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and Pre-Baby Boomers, to deliver the right marketing products for each, therefore, increasing the potential for travel to Johnston County.

Tactics:

- Research and develop a generational matrix with travel trends, travel habits, and methods to reach each group.
- Tailor unique marketing campaigns to each generational group using unique designs and call to actions based on research.
- Try in 2016-17 to gather data from visitor industry partners for a zip code or consumer behavior study.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Goal: Through media relations, public relations, Web site presence, and electronic and video communications, the JCVB increases public awareness of Johnston County's cultural, athletic, educational, entertainment activities and civic achievements and generates a favorable image for the county.

Tactics:

- place tourism facts on the local Peg Channel: Raise Awareness/Develop Methods of Communication
- Regarding Tourism news topics.

Through the Johnston Community College and placement of news articles in local papers, in interviews on education cable television, and radio interviews, several topics could be addressed

for community awareness of tourism in the county such as:

- Progress reports on local tourism developments
- Case studies/ examples of successful tourism development
- General tourism statistics
- Examples of successful ecotourism opportunities
- Explanations of rural tourism, agri-tourism, heritage tourism
- Community volunteer opportunities
- Events schedule
- Workshop and training opportunities
- How to guides
- Reiterate mission statement and goals
- Announcements of citizen awards for tourism service/ community project participation

- use PSAs with all media outlets in geotargeted areas to expose tourism assets to visitors in 50-150 mile radius
- partner with local media for extra coverage through My Carolina Today and TV interviews for special events
- use press releases on weekly basis to target media to share Johnston County stories

Track media impact, inquiries, and trip conversions

When Johnston County's assets are presented in media external to the county or region, keep a file of the exposure and note any impact it has on tourism. Over time, this will create a record of the county's media relations and the impact it makes.

There needs to be a record of phone numbers, web, and e-mail addresses on all marketing pieces and the inquiries from each campaign needs to be tracked. Conduct an inquiry conversion periodically to find out how many people who asked for information about the region actually made a trip to the area. Success can be evaluated by dollar amounts collected from occupancy tax, expenditure estimates given by visitors and/or visitor counts.

Host a familiarization tour for travel media and intermediaries

A familiarization tour is offered to travel media (such as magazines) and intermediaries (such as travel agents) so that they might experience the destination and get an idea of what it has to offer. Familiarizing these people with Johnston County will enable them to better promote the area, which will in turn bring more visitors to the county. This tour should only be offered after the visitor attractions are well-established and truly visitor-ready.

Aim for a NC Weekend TV feature

Continued features on NC Weekend TV would provide great exposure for Johnston County. This show is popular and has an established rapport with the NC Division of Tourism. It would be an opportunity to market to North Carolinians who desire to travel within their own state.

Participate in travel and sales missions

It can be helpful to visit travel agents, community groups and organizations representing other niche markets. Visiting them not only familiarizes them with your destination but establishes a personal rela-

tionship with their organization. Strong relationships established early will provide a strong foundation for repeat group travel and word of mouth recommendations.

BRANDING

Branding is an essential part of the marketing mix because it sets your product apart from competitors and focuses on our positioning choices. Some important considerations in branding are:

- It should identify the benefits and special characteristics of the county
- It should set Johnston County apart from other destinations
- It should be easy for visitors to understand and remember
- It should sum up the county in one fluid thought



Differentiate yourself from other counties/regions. Initiate and ingrain this mindset in the community and marketing messages from the outset.

Take into account what your competitors offer and then make sure you market things you have to offer that are different than your competitors' offerings. It is important to emphasize your uniqueness in order to draw visitors to Johnston County.

Some aspects of the Johnston County story to emphasize might be:

- JohnsTON County's got a ton! (Social/Blog brand)
- The largest Civil War battle fought on North Carolina soil.
- Specific agricultural crops and their importance to North Carolina
- Significant people in the county's history
- All of the activities, history and uses of the Neuse River
- Rich rural opportunities and hunting culture
- Less commercial feel and small town charm

Johnston County tourism logo and brand

The brand should be depicted in both a visual logo and messages, and used in all outlets of marketing including Internet, television, signage, pamphlets, official correspondence, and events. Branding decisions should not be made quickly or randomly. Before a brand is altered, the appropriate surveys, focus groups and interview need to be completed. Once a brand is established it should be revisited periodically for the purpose and evolution of the brand.

STAKEHOLDER EDUCATION

Goal: The JCVB will stress the importance of educational opportunities for the visitor industry with the purpose of encouraging quality visitor services for leisure, meeting, and group tour travelers to Johnston County.

Tactics:

- improve the visitor experience in Johnston County by the betterment of customer service in all areas of the visitor industry.
- commit to achieving excellent ratings for the “total visitor experience” in our destinations.
- revise the Hospitality Heroes program as needed with current data.
- work with the Johnston Community College on Leadership Johnston and Junior Leadership on educating the community leaders on the importance of tourism.
- host community stakeholder meetings multiple times a year to increase awareness of JCVB and gather marketing ideas and form relationships.
- work on developing a way to determine the value of completed JCVB projects and communicate that back to the tourism partners.



EXTERNAL COMMUNITY EFFORTS

Goal: The JCVB will work cooperatively with municipalities, chambers of commerce, and visitor industry partners both locally and statewide to achieve an effective and comprehensive marketing program. The JCVB has formed the JoCo Hospitality Association as the primary vehicle for all community efforts.

Tactics:

- embrace the new emerging social culture by electronic marketing efforts for the destination.
- implement, engage, and be recognized as a destination in the Triangle Region.
- conduct meetings with the I-40, Exit 312 businesses to develop a place name with a postal designation and determine the visitor market for this exit.
- participate with the VisitNC team all tourism promotion projects that benefit Johnston County, including FAMS, coop advertising, Visitnc.com banner ads, attend the Listening Tours and the Governors Conference on Tourism.
- participate with Destination Marketing Association of NC (DMANC) educational programs.
- manage the Johnston County Visitor Information Center with Carolina Premium Outlets and continue county-wide distribution of materials.
- join all Chambers of Commerce in the county to better educate the business community the importance of tourism.

FILM MARKET

Goal: To develop a list of possible film locations in Johnston County and enter them into Reel Scout software for consideration.

Tactics:

- create a list of possible film locations based on the Reel Scout categories most often requested by film production companies.
- connect with the NC Film Office and present photograph slide show to educate them on the beautiful architecture of the area and historic homes suitable for projects.
- work with the Triangle Film Commission on any leads for locations in the 13 county area they cover. Complete the Production Ready Application for the Town of Smithfield.
- hire a photographer to shoot this list of sites and have them entered into Reel Scout.

Focus on film.

Contact the NC Film Office (<http://www.ncfilm.com/>) to establish a working relationship and learn how to tap into filming possibilities. Have more location shots placed on the state's website.

WORKING WITH VISITNC TEAM

Goal: To establish a new working relationship with the private VisitNC team as it pertains to their niche markets outlined in their strategic plan.

Tactics:

- visit the new offices in Cary and introduce our new staff members and build on that relationship.
- review how our niche markets align with theirs and ensure our information is promoted on Visitnc.com: Family Reunions, Generational Trips, Romantic Restaurants, Spas, man-cations, girlfriends getaways, destination weddings, food tourism agri-tourism, gardens and art.
- learn more and pitch again to our destinations the Retire in NC program.
- participate in sales and media missions, and request to be part of any FAMs that align with our target markets and press trips.

TOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal: The JCVB will pro-actively pursue economic development projects that benefit the tourism industry in Johnston County.

Tactics:

- Enhance the growth of the county through tourism development projects as determined by communities' planning departments. Actively recruit visitor related businesses to Johnston County based on the needs identified by research.
- expand traditional economic development scenarios to include and value tourism projects with incentives.
- encourage board members to serve on Economic Development Committees set up by Chambers

to represent the interests of tourism development for the county.

- place economic development research documents on the JCVB web site for project developers to download.
- develop a Tourism Economic Development Fact Sheet to send to potential visitor related businesses to locate in Johnston County.
- through private hotel developers, encourage the building of a meeting facility to accommodate 300-500 people in a multi-purpose facility.
- work closely with the Advisory Board for the Johnston County Economic Development Office and the RTP region's economic development organizations to ensure that Johnston County is represented.

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

CVB stakeholders are local partners in tourism development. Benefits for stakeholders include increased visibility to visitors to the city, industry information, trends and statistics, and involvement in the hospitality community.

Create a matrix of goals, partners, budget and steps to achieve stated strategic plan promises.

- promote Shop Local Campaigns which can raise awareness for local businesses, spark community pride, and focus on locally grown and agri-tourism venues.
- host special cooking events with chefs or at farmer's market
- hold entrepreneur workshops at local businesses for emerging businesses
- promote Johnston Community College informal lectures/open discussion on economic leakage and its relationship to a healthy economy.
- host a "Shop and Eat Local" week to raise awareness of supporting farmers and local businesses
- encourage membership in the JoCo Hospitality Association to more closely align with the local tourism industry.

LONG RANGE GOALS

After a 12-month period of working through the short-term goals in this plan, re-evaluate what goals were not achieved and set new steps to execute the remaining tactics. At that time, set new time-lines to achieve the remaining goals.

Improving Products, Services, and Visitor Experiences

Learning what improvements are needed for tourism products, services and visitor experiences should first be based on customer feedback. If possible, during the first 12-24 months of executing this plan, a simple exit survey for visitors may bring light on issues for long term improvements.

Sustainable Tourism

The work currently taking place at ECU on sustainable tourism is a model for many destinations and for the purposed of long term goals.

Visitor Research Projects

On a three year rotation, additional research should be conducted on Visitor Profiles, Conversation Studies, and Big Data Study on Consumer Behaviors

CRISIS PLAN

Safety and Emergency Preparedness/Crisis Communications Plan.

Public perceptions of contingency plans for communities have had negative reflection in the media over the past few years. When a crisis occurs, whether caused by natural or human forces, having a plan in place can save a destination's reputation and the public's trust in its government leaders.

The Johnston County Visitors Bureau has adopted an emergency plan to be prepared for events that may affect travel and tourism in the community. An excellent beginning reference to Crisis Communications can be found in Travel Industry Association of America's Travel Industry Public Relations Handbook.

EVALUATION METHODS

Evaluation refers to measuring efforts against a set of standards for the purpose of tracking success. The JCVB needs evaluation because essentially, what gets measured, gets done. Additionally, evaluation is important because if achievements can be demonstrated, organizations can gain public support. Each year, the tourism program should be evaluated to assess progress, celebrate successes, and note areas for improvement. The overall goals must be examined as well as the success or failure of individual strategies. Below are a few suggestions for evaluating each of the goals.

Evaluation of Goals

Goal 1: Enhance Johnston County's economy.

Document seasonal occupancy rates, occupancy tax and average daily rate.
Keep the Exit's Report for Occupancy Collections to monitor trends

Goal 2: Develop community infrastructure and tourism products.

Maintain assets inventory. Compare inventory from year to year.
Track tourism-related new businesses.
Compile existing annual reports such as from Johnston County Government, Johnston County Arts Council, Chamber Reports and to track county infrastructure improvements from year to year.

Goal 3: Involve and inspire community.

Track media attention to tourism issues.
Poll community on their understanding of and attitudes towards tourism.
Repeat resident survey every two to three years.
Record attendance at community special events.

Goal 4: Increase tourism partnerships within the county and the region.

Document the number of tourism related partnerships that have been formed and the role each plays.
Measure how these partnerships have contributed to tourism development by keeping a record of projects that have been initiated.
Monitor tourism impacts through partnerships with conservation organizations, such as the Neuse River Land Conservancy and the NC Department of Recreation.

Goal 5: Market and create demand.

Track media hits by keeping a file of local and regional coverage.

Maintain database of inquiries from people requesting information about Johnston County. Every two years, conduct an inquiry conversion study to determine how many “inquirers” actually “converted” to being a visitor.

Encourage tourism-related attractions to keep registration book that asks for town of origin and “how did you hear about us.”

Goal 6: Preserve the small town charm, arts and culture of Johnston County.

Work with historic and arts groups to document programs available throughout the year.

Record attendance at events and classes.

Maintain assets inventory. Compare cultural and heritage assets from year to year.

Work with preservation groups to keep track of progress on current projects as well as to identify and prioritize future projects.

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President & CEO
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(404) 231-1790

Additional resources and tourism partner websites:

- HomegrownHandmade.com: <http://www.homegrownhandmade.com/AboutHgHm.htm>
- NC Birding Trail: <http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org>
- North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) Agritourism Program <http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism/>
- NC Agritourism Networking Association: <http://www.nc-ana.org/>
- NC State Trails Program http://www.ncparks.gov/About/trails_main.php
- Carolina Farm Stewardship Association: <http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/>
- Cooperative Extension's Growing Small Farms Program: <http://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/>
- Value Added and Alternative Agricultures Program:
<http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/issues/mktg-rd/value-added-agriculture/>
- ePodunk, this organization has a list of America's Most Historic Small Towns. <http://www.epodunk.com/top10/historic/index.html>
- Budget Travel, has a "Ten Coolest Small Towns" feature each year <http://www.budgettravel.com/contest/vote-for-americas-coolest-small-town-2015,18/>.
- Short Escapes listings: <http://www.shortescapes.net/>
- Agricultural Associations and Commodity Groups: A list of associations can be found on the NCDA website (<http://www.ncagr.com/markets/assoc/index.htm>). Contact NCDA for commodity lists which have a connection to Johnston County.
- NC Genealogical Society <http://www.ncgenealogy.org/menu-resources>
- Cycle NC Carolina cycling association that host two rides a year
- OHV: Carolina Off Road Extremists
- Paddling: Carolina Canoe Club, North Carolina Paddle Trail Association
- Birding: Carolina Birding Club
- Marathons/Ultra-races: Road Runners Club of America
- Geocaching: <https://www.geocaching.com/play>
- Walkable Communities, Inc. (<http://www.walkable.org/>)
- Active Living Research (<http://activelivingresearch.org/>)
- The National Center for Bicycling and Walking (<http://www.bikewalk.org>)
- Smart Growth Resource Library (<http://smartgrowth.org/information-resources>)
- National Association for Interpreters, at <http://www.interpnet.com/> who offers instructional DVDs and other resources for interpreters.
- National Park Service Interpretation and Education (<http://www.nps.gov/index.htm>)
- NC Office of Environmental Education (<http://www.ee.enr.state.nc.us/>)
- NC Department of Commerce's Community Services, <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/community-services>
- NC Rural Center, <http://www.nccommerce.com/rd>
- North Carolina State University, entrepreneurship resources, <http://oe.ncsu.edu/>
- NCSU Extension Latino Program, <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/latino.html>
- National Trust for Historic Preservation Community Revitalization Programs, <http://www.preservationnation.org/>
- Projects for Public Spaces, <http://www.pps.org>
- UNC Greensboro, Center for New North Carolinians, <http://cnncc.uncg.edu/>
- William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, <http://winterinstitute.org>
- NC Wildlife Resources, <http://www.ncwildlife.org/>

Meetings, Advertising, Print, PR Sales Schedule

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<u>JCTA Committee Meetings</u>												
JCTA Board Meetings	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
JCTA Marketing Committee		X		X		X		X		X		X
JoCo Sports Council	X		X		X		X		X		X	
JCTA Special Projects Committee		X	X				X	X	X			
JoCo Hospitality Association	X			X			X			X		
301 Endless Yard Sale Organizing Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
<u>Town 2% Tax Tourism Committees</u>												
Town of Smithfield	X			X			X			X		
Town of Selma	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Town of Benson	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Town of Kenly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<u>Travel & Tradeshow Schedule</u>												
AENC Annual Mtg., Winston-Salem, VA							X					
NCTIA Tourism Leadership Conference, Charlotte									X			
AENC Tradeshow, Raleigh, NC												X
I-95 North/South Welcome Center Visits												X
North America Travel Journal Assoc.					X							
Travel Expo, Washington, DC.			X									
National Tourism Week					X							
365 Visit NC Conference			X									
NC Media Mission, Charlotte, NC										X		
NY Media Mission, New York, NY												
GA Media Mission, Atlanta, GA				X				X				
SGMP Regional Conference			X									
Visit NC Phil. Travel Show					X							
Visit NC New York Travel Show	X											
Washington DC Travel & Adventure Show			X									

Meetings, Advertising, Print, PR Sales Schedule

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Southeast Tourism Society Spring				X								
NC Motorcoach Association - SC				X								
<u>Advertising Placement Schedule</u>												
Visit NC Advertising Coop Placements												
VisitNC display ads	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Garden & Gun				X	X				X			
Social Media Spotlight										X		
E-Newsletters				X								
Travel Deals				X			X					
History.net							X					
Local Market Combo					X							
Hearst Travel Group									X	X		
Our State Magazine					X					X		
STS Escape to the Southeast		X										
Southern Living			X						X			
AAA Go Magazine			X		X	X			X	X	X	X
Carolina Heritage Guide				X								
Carolina Heritage Guide							X					
NC Field Trips Magazine									X			
OIG Coupon Book	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Travel Media Group - Coupon Book	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trip Advisor			X	X	X				X	X	X	
NC Civil War Traveler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
301 Endless Yard Sale Advertising Campaign	X	X	X	X	X	X						
News & Observer Campaign	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Google Adwords Campaign	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
WRAL and WNCN Campaigns			X	X	X					X	X	X
Group Tour Directory											X	
Reunions Magazine			X									
NC Business - Meetings Issue								X				
Antique Weekly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Antique Trader Magazine	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Annual Budget by Organization Report

Summary

	2018 Adopted/Board	2017 Actual Amount	2016 Actual Amount
Fund: 15 Tourism			
Revenue			
15.8400 - Tourism, Tourism	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,238,792.15	\$1,111,279.79
Revenue Totals	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,238,792.15	\$1,111,279.79
Expenditures			
15.8400 - Tourism, Tourism	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,205,112.59	\$937,477.87
Revenue Totals:	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,238,792.15	\$1,111,279.79
Expenditure Totals	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,205,112.59	\$937,477.87
Fund Total: Tourism	\$0.00	\$33,679.56	\$173,801.92
Revenue Grand Totals:	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,238,792.15	\$1,111,279.79
Expenditure Grand Totals:	\$1,519,800.00	\$1,205,112.59	\$937,477.87
Net Grand Totals:	\$0.00	\$33,679.56	\$173,801.92



Johnston County Visitors Bureau
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