

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | February 2025



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Florida Takes Over Toronto's Winter Village

Warm vibes and tasty treats were on hand in Toronto this past holiday season at a special VISIT FLORIDA section at the Toronto Distillery Winter Village. The super-popular annual holiday market draws tens of thousands of guests each year, and the 2024 holiday season was no different, providing a great opportunity for the Sunshine State to shine bright and remind our friends in the frigid north how much warmth and fun times are awaiting them in Florida.

The Greater Miami CVB, Visit Orlando, Visit Pensacola, and Visit St. Pete-Clearwater were featured in the Winter Village, each procuring a special setup to serve up local flavors from each location. Each destination also displayed a beautiful wall mural art, immersing the holiday shoppers in Florida's ambience through a multisensory experience (yes, there were fire pits and heat lamps) and inspiring them to plan trips to these iconic Florida destinations next year.

Representatives from each of the destinations were joined by VISIT FLORIDA staff for a special media and trade event on Dec. 17 at the Winter Village. In addition to soaking up the patented Sunshine State warmth and hospitality for a special

Thank You, Dana Young



We celebrate Dana Young's service as president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA. Throughout her tenure, Dana's

visionary leadership has propelled Florida's tourism industry to unprecedented heights.

A passionate supporter of tourism during her time in the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate, Dana carried that same zeal into her leadership of VISIT FLORIDA. Under her guidance, the organization not only reestablished trust



The Toronto Distillery Winter Village includes some Florida sunshine compliments of Greater Miami CVB, Visit Orlando, Visit Pensacola, and Visit St. Pete-Clearwater.

WINTER VILLAGE continues on pg. 3

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

Support from our partners makes Destinations Florida's industry & legislative representation possible

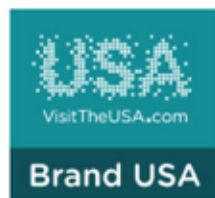
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HAPPY Birthday

Santiago Corrada
February 6



Florida tourism marketing professionals bring Florida's warmth to the Toronto Distillery Winter Village. Seated are Laura Kreutzer (Visit Orlando), Nicole Stacey (Visit Pensacola), and Jason Latimer (Visit St. Pete-Clearwater), and standing are Shahfreen Elavia (VoX), Kerry Sullivan (Visit Orlando), Kelli Godwin (VISIT FLORIDA), Lea-Ann Goltz (VoX), Gabriel Martinez (VISIT FLORIDA), Joanne Scalamogna (Greater Miami CVB), and Ashley Kotar (Greater Miami CVB).

night, attendees were reminded that Florida is more accessible than ever with many daily direct flights from a variety of locations across the country. The group

was able to preview what's to come in 2025 and also highlight all the incredible attributes that Canadian travelers love about the Florida communities.

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of
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Phone: 850/222-6000
www.DestinationsFlorida.org

Robert Skrob,
Executive Director
Suzanne Hurst, CAE,
Deputy Executive Director
MaryLu Winchester,
Member Database

On the Cover
Gulf County, Florida shines with its Chasing the Sun campaign, showcasing pet-friendly travel and advocacy, promoting responsible tourism, and supporting their local humane society. With pristine beaches and welcoming businesses, Gulf County invites visitors to create unforgettable memories with their furry family members.

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

with stakeholders but also demonstrated unmatched results. Her tireless efforts were recognized by the Florida Legislature, which increased VISIT FLORIDA's budget by an impressive 60%, from \$50 million to \$80 million.

Dana's commitment to ensuring every corner of Florida benefits from tourism growth has been especially impactful. She has championed rural communities, empowering smaller destinations to compete on the global stage. Her advocacy has made Florida not just a leader in tourism but a more inclusive one.

On behalf of Destinations Florida and our members, thank you, Dana, for your advocacy, vision, and steadfast leadership.



Robert Skrob welcomes Dana Young to her role as president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA on Jan. 9, 2019.

Your legacy is one of record-breaking success, resilience, and innovation. You've paved the way for an even brighter future for Florida's tourism industry.

We wish you all the best in your well-deserved retirement and look forward to continuing the remarkable momentum you've created.

Hillsborough County Tourism Hits Billion-Dollar Threshold for Third Consecutive Calendar Year

Hillsborough County's tourism and hospitality industry eclipsed the billion-dollar mark in hotel taxable revenue in 2024 for an unprecedented third-straight calendar year with December's collection still to be tallied, Visit Tampa Bay announced.

November hotel taxable revenue surpassed \$100 million for the first time and represented a 35.8% increase over the same period last year. That performance follows on the heels of record hotel revenue and collections in October and September 2024 as well.



Hotels in the Tampa Bay Area continue to bring in record-breaking taxable revenue.

Allegiant Air A320 Aircraft Sports Bradenton Area and Visit Sarasota Branding

In a shining example of regional tourism collaboration, the teams at the Bradenton Area CVB, Visit Sarasota County, and the Sarasota Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) came together to announce the airport's expansion in a unique way. A new terminal within SRQ, known as Concourse A, opened on Jan. 15 and features five new gates, additional security checkpoints, and popular local dining establishments for travelers to enjoy.



The newly unveiled Allegiant Airline plane wrap features branding from the Bradenton Area and Visit Sarasota. Photo: Visit Sarasota County

To announce SRQ as a new base for Allegiant, Visit Sarasota and Bradenton Area CVB partnered with the airline to brand one of the airline's A320 aircrafts, making it a first in the history of the airline. This co-branding will take both destinations to new heights as the plane travels the domestic U.S.

Both the Bradenton Area and Visit Sarasota teams are thrilled to have been able to collaborate with SRQ and Allegiant Air to continue to improve the traveler experience for visitors and promote their region's tourism.

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TDT for Beach Renourishment

by Steven M. Hogan

The TDT statute allows Tourist Development Tax funds to be used to finance "renourishment, restoration, and erosion control" on beaches, including construction of "beach groins and shoreline protection." § 125.0104(5)(a)5., Fla. Stat.

A question that sometimes arises is whether such beach renourishment activities can benefit privately owned beach property along with properties owned by a county or other government entity.

In 1986, the Florida attorney general issued Opinion 86-68 that touches on the issue. The key point for analysis is whether a beach renourishment project that benefits both private beaches and public-access beaches achieves a "paramount public purpose." This is a constitutional question rather than a simple analysis of the TDT statute.

The Florida attorney general summarized the issue by stating that "any benefit accruing to private uplands property owners as a result of county beach maintenance projects using tourist development tax revenues must be incidental to a paramount public purpose or benefit being served." Op. Fla. Att'y Gen. 86-68 (Aug. 14, 1986).

The section of the TDT statute that addresses beach renourishment includes the words "to which there is public access." § 125.0104(5)

(a)5., Fla. Stat. While there is some room for interpretation, a fair reading of the statute indicates that "public access" to the beach is required for a beach renourishment project that is paid for with TDT funds. This reading would square with the constitutional issue noted in Opinion 86-68.



Steven M. Hogan

There may be some practical leeway in implementing a beach renourishment project that impacts both private and public beach property, especially when such properties are interspersed among each other. If TDT funds are to be used for such projects, care must be taken to ensure that the "paramount public purpose" for any such project is for the benefit of public-access beach property.

As always, legal counsel should be sought on specific questions, as the facts can change the analysis.

Steven M. Hogan is a shareholder with the Ausley McMullen law firm in Tallahassee. Destinations Florida has retained Mr. Hogan to consult with our members on the Tourist Development Tax and related legal issues. You can contact Mr. Hogan at shogan@ausley.com. Nothing in this article constitutes legal advice. Please seek counsel of your own choosing before making decisions that impact yourself or your organization.

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JOIN US FOR

FLORIDA TOURISM DAY

at the Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida
March 25-26, 2025



Accommodations:

The Doubletree Hotel Tallahassee is offering a special rate of \$319 per night for Destinations Florida members attending Tourism Day. To make your reservation please call the (877) 800-2652 and reference the group name: Destinations Florida Tourism Day.

All reservations must be made before the cut-off date of Wednesday, February 26, 2025. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room blocks will sell out.

DoubleTree Hotel Tallahassee
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 224-5000



Schedule of Events

(All attendees are invited to all events)

March 25, 2025

2:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Board of Directors Meeting**
5:00 PM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 222-5000

5:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Welcome Reception**
6:30 PM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301



March 26, 2025

8:30 AM – **Destinations Florida Member Briefing**
9:30 AM
Doubletree Hotel
101 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 222-5000

10:30 AM – **Tourism Day Rally & Partner Briefing**
12:00 Noon
FSU Dunlap Champions Club
Doak S. Campbell Stadium
225 Champions Way Building B
Tallahassee, FL 32304
(850) 644-8528

12:00 Noon – **Networking Luncheon**
1:00 PM
FSU Dunlap Champions Club
Doak S. Campbell Stadium
225 Champions Way Building B
Tallahassee, FL 32304

1:00 PM – **Destinations Florida Member Appointments at the Capitol**
5:00 PM
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

5:00 PM – **Tourism Day Value of Tourism Outdoor Expo**
8:00 PM
Adams Street and Florida
Restaurant & Lodging
Association

This meeting is being held in conjunction with the following organizations:



Register today at: DestinationsFlorida.org/25TourismDay

DESTINATION MARKETING SUMMIT



May 14-16, 2025 | The Westin Cape Coral Resort | Cape Coral, Florida

Schedule at a Glance

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Board of Directors Meeting
2:00 PM – 2:45 PM	Opening Session
2:45 PM - 3:30 PM	Educational Programming
3:45 PM – 5:30 PM	Destination Marketing State of the State Report
5:30 PM – 6:30 PM	Welcome Reception
6:30 PM	Dinner on own

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast
9:00 AM – 11:45 AM	Two Tracks of Educational Programming
11:45 AM – 1:00 Noon	Networking Luncheon
1:00 PM – 3:45 PM	Two Tracks of Educational Programming
5:00 PM – 8:30 PM	Connect Evening Event Connect

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2025

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast
9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon	Legislative Update with Mat Forrest How DMOs and VISIT FLORIDA Can Work Together to Bring More Customers to Our Communities

Hotel Accommodations:

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village is offering a special rate for Destinations Florida meeting participants of \$239 per night. Please call (239) 541-5000 and reference the Destinations Florida Marketing Summit group rate.

Reservations must be made by **Friday, April 18, 2025**. Be sure to make your reservation as soon as possible because the room block will sell out.

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village
5951 Silver King Blvd.
Cape Coral, Florida 33914
(239) 541-5000



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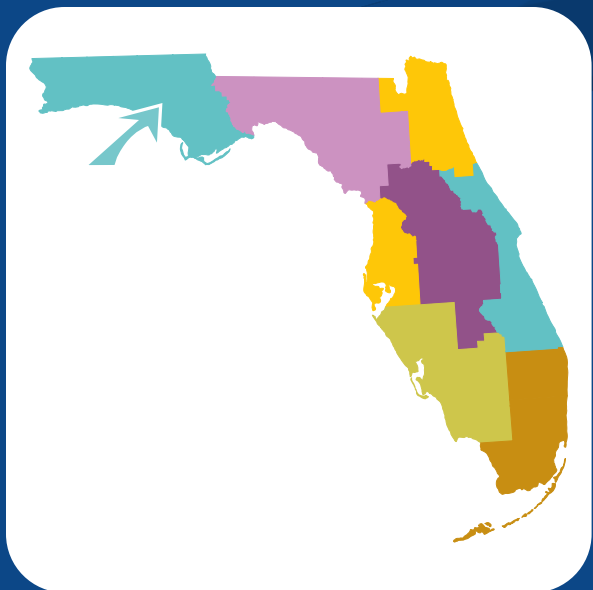


Gold Partners



Register Now at: DestinationsFlorida.org

BEST of NORTHWEST FLORIDA!



- Destin-Fort Walton Beach
- Destination Panama City Florida
- Franklin County Tourist Development Council
- Gulf County Tourist Development Council
- Jackson County Tourist Development Council
- Mexico Beach Community Development Council
- Navarre Beach Tourist Development Organization
- Visit Panama City Beach
- Visit Pensacola
- Visit Washington County
- Walton County Tourism

Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida Provides Vital Habitats for Marine Animals

Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida is home to a rich marine ecosystem, featuring an array of tropical fish, dolphins, and other exotic species. Its proximity to the 100-Fathom Curve offers excellent visibility for divers, providing unique opportunities to observe marine life. The area boasts more than 400 artificial reefs, one of the most active programs in the U.S., creating vital habitats for marine species.

Artificial reefs are man-made structures placed on the sea floor to foster marine life. Some replicate natural coral reefs while others create high-relief features to enhance the ecosystem. Strategically placed in areas with limited natural structures, these reefs support more than 150 species of fish and invertebrates.



A 3D interactive model of an artificial reef in Destin-Fort Walton Beach
Photo: Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida

In fall 2024, Destin-Fort Walton Beach and the SS United States Conservancy announced that the Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners approved a contract to acquire the *SS United States*. The plan is to convert the historic ship into the world's largest artificial reef, creating a unique diving spot and marine sanctuary.

Divers can explore these thriving reefs and experience the region's vibrant underwater world. Interactive 3D models highlight over a dozen reef sites offshore, offering an engaging way to discover this ecological treasure.



A diver explores the pristine waters of Destin-Fort Walton Beach and encounters a lionfish.
Photo: Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida



Panama City Boat Parade of Lights Shines Bright Once Again

The Panama City Boat Parade of Lights returned for its second year since its highly anticipated comeback, delighting spectators with another dazzling display. In December 2024, St. Andrews Bay sparkled with holiday magic as more than 20 festively decorated boats cruised the waters, captivating 12,000+ attendees at the Panama City Marina, St. Andrews Marina, and along the shorelines. This year's event built on its triumphant return, spreading even more holiday cheer and cementing its place as a beloved bayside tradition.



Boats dazzle as they line up during the Panama City Boat Parade of Lights.
Photo: Destination Panama City

The Boat Parade of Lights isn't just about holiday fun—it's a celebration of Panama City's enduring resilience and spirit. This cherished tradition continues to grow, showcasing the creativity of local boat owners and the vibrant energy of this coastal community.



Santa and his elves make waves at the Panama City Boat Parade of Lights.
Photo: Destination Panama City

With support from Destination Panama City and the City of Panama City, the parade featured creative designs, twinkling lights, and a festive atmosphere that brought the community together. Families and friends gathered at multiple venues along the bayside to celebrate, creating cherished memories and enjoying the unique charm of Panama City's waterfront.

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Tourism Nets Record-Breaking Revenues for Franklin County in 2024

The Franklin County TDC released 2023-24 collections numbers last month, and the news is very good for this small rural coastal county. Total collections for the 2023-24 fiscal year netted \$3,574,766—a 7.34% increase over the 2022-23 fiscal year.

“I could not be more pleased,” said John Solomon, FCTDC director. “This is what we work for, boosting the economy, supporting the jobs, and helping sustain businesses that rely on the area’s biggest economic engine.”

According to Solomon, the 2023-24 increase makes up for a slight decline in both local and statewide tourism numbers in 2022-23. According to state tourism leaders, last year’s decline followed the post-COVID period when travelers found less expensive travel options

outside of Florida that deeply discounted travel opportunities to lure travelers lost during the COVID scare in 2021-22.

“We knew it would rebound,” Solomon said. “We’ve been consistent in identifying our audience and targeting those markets. We know our audience, and the proof is in the numbers.”

Solomon, along with statewide tourism leaders, says the rebound in tourism numbers is felt beyond the lodging provider industry. VISIT FLORIDA data shows that for every dollar spent by a visitor, the local economy retains 97 cents, with about 58 cents supporting workers’ salaries and 13 cents collected as state and local taxes.

According to Solomon, the extra revenue generated in 2024 means more tourism infrastructure improvements across Franklin County, including beach park improvements, fishing piers, beach dune walkovers, and sport arena improvements.



Visitors are returning to Franklin County to enjoy the beauty of this rural coastal area.



An aerial view of Carrabelle Harbor in Franklin County

Gulf County Builds on Tourism Success With Overwhelming TDT Vote

2024 marked a historic achievement for Gulf County with the successful passing of the extension of a 1% Tourist Development Tax, underscoring the community’s recognition of tourism’s impact on the local economy and quality of life. This crucial measure ensures continued funding for tourism-driven initiatives that benefit the entire community.

“The overwhelming support for the Tourist Development Tax reflects our community’s dedication to preserving our way of life and enhancing Gulf County for both residents and visitors. This is about more than tourism. Together, we’re protecting what makes this place special while building a brighter future for everyone,” said Silvia Williams, TDC executive director.

Thanks to this funding, Gulf County can continue promoting their beautiful parks and recreation areas through creative marketing campaigns. Further, the funding will support improvements to the county’s beloved parks, ensuring they remain accessible and enjoyable for generations to come.

As Gulf County celebrates its centennial in 2025, the passage of the referendum signals a bright future ahead. With an emphasis on thoughtful growth and sustainability, Gulf County continues to shine as a premier destination for those seeking a natural, authentic Florida experience.

Choice	Percent	Votes
Yes (NON)	83.83%	7,129
No (NON)	16.17%	1,375
		8,504

Gulf County voters recognize the importance of tourism and overwhelmingly support the 1% Tourist Development Tax, ensuring continued investment in their community’s growth and preservation.



Beautiful outdoor spaces abound in Gulf County, Florida.



Jackson County Expands Offerings at Florida Caverns State Park

After nearly 30 years, the Florida Caverns State Park welcomed a new concessionaire to manage, promote, and run the cave tours of the underground caverns the park is renowned for.

In December, Cape Leisure Corporation took over the helm of management of the Visitor Center, gift shop, and various tours and excursions available at the state park. Cape Leisure is no stranger to Florida tourism, and currently offers services at Silver Springs, Ichetucknee Springs, Anastasia State Park, and more.

Dan LeBlanc with Cape Leisure shares that an estimated \$500,000 in upgrades to the cave tours are anticipated, along with expanded

tours and offerings. The cave tours will now be open seven days a week, whereas in previous years the caves were closed for two days a week from Labor Day to Memorial Day.

In 2025, the Florida Caverns Adventure Center is anticipated to open. This center will offer bike rentals, stand up paddleboards, canoes, kayaks, and trips down the Chipola River. Jackson County is excited to partner with Cape Leisure to help grow the state park and significantly boost the local tourism economy.



Cave tour tickets are now available for advanced purchase online. Previously tickets were only available in-person.



The caverns are Jackson County's top tourist attraction. With planned upgrades and expanded ticket availability, significant growth is anticipated over the next three years.

Mexico Beach Kicks Off 2025 With a Beach Restoration Project

Years in the making, Mexico Beach has officially commenced a comprehensive beach restoration project—the first of its kind for the area's three-mile coastline. Nearly one million cubic yards of sand will be placed to construct a dry sandy beach berm and protective dunes. This vital project will provide critical storm protection for infrastructure and habitat for species such as shorebirds and sea turtles as well as provide additional recreational beach for residents and visitors.



The first full-scale beach nourishment of the Mexico Beach shoreline began construction in January.

"We began the process of developing a beach restoration plan before Hurricane Michael; however, that storm sped up our process," stated Kimberly Shoaf, president of the Mexico Beach Community Development Council. "With the assistance from both state and federal grants, we are able financially to cover this project. We are very grateful for all the assistance we've received during this process and are elated for new sand to be placed along our shoreline in the coming months."

The restoration project is underway with completion by mid-April. Visitors and residents can expect to enjoy their enhanced shoreline just in time for summer. Stay tuned for updates as Mexico Beach continues to thrive—both in tourism and along its revitalized shores.



The beautiful shoreline in Mexico Beach will be enhanced with a beach berm, enhanced dunes, and additional beach vegetation.



Navarre Beach Celebrates Standout Events in 2024

Navarre Beach Tourism Development Organization (TDO) showcased its creativity and community spirit through standout events in 2024. At the 88th Atlanta Dogwood Festival in April, Navarre Beach captivated festivalgoers with an immersive beach experience featuring a light blue Moke electric vehicle. This

innovative activation transported attendees to a serene beach setting, reinforcing Navarre Beach as Atlanta's ultimate relaxation destination. The campaign's success earned Navarre Beach TDO a prestigious Bronze Adrian Award for Integrated Campaign/Experiential Marketing.



Navarre Beach tourism representatives welcome visitors to explore an immersive beach experience at the 88th Atlanta Dogwood Festival. Photo: Courtesy of Navarre Beach

Closer to home, Windjammers on the Pier rang in the new year with an unforgettable celebration on Dec. 31. The event brought visitors of all ages together to enjoy live music from Tribe Zion, a spectacular fireworks display, and the highly anticipated inaugural turtle drop at midnight. These initiatives highlight Navarre Beach's commitment to creating memorable experiences for both locals and visitors, cementing its reputation as a vibrant and welcoming destination.



Navarre Beach TDO rings in the new year with an exciting fireworks display. Photo: Courtesy of Navarre Beach

Gulf Coast Salute Air Show Returns to Panama City Beach

Visit Panama City Beach proudly partnered with local military installations to help bring back the highly anticipated Gulf Coast Salute Air Show, after a six-year hiatus. This premier event thrilled spectators with awe-inspiring aerobatic displays and highlighted the local base's importance to the region. The air show was made possible with the collaboration of Tyndall Air Force Base, the Bay County Chamber, the Panama City Beach Chamber, Panama City Beach Parks and Recreation, and Visit Panama City Beach.



One of the many exciting aerial maneuvers on display during the Gulf Coast Salute Air Show

One of the highlights of the Gulf Coast Salute Air Show was its impressive roster of aerial performers, including the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, showcasing skilled pilots renowned for their daring maneuvers and precision. Beyond the excitement of the air show itself, the Gulf Coast Salute holds special significance as a tribute to the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. The Visit Panama City Beach team plans to work with Tyndall Air Force Base to continue to bring back the event for years to come.



Ground crew members cheer a U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds pilot.

"We are honored to have had the opportunity to host the 2024 Gulf Coast Salute Air Show in Panama City Beach," said Dan Rowe, president and CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. "This event welcomed aviation enthusiasts, families, and anyone looking for a memorable, patriotic weekend along our 27 miles of turquoise waters and white sand beaches."



Visit Pensacola Shatters Tourism Records While Continuing to Share The Way to Beach™

Pensacola is the ultimate Way to Beach™ as the long-beloved destination continues to see a significant boom in tourism and destination development. This past year, the destination welcomed more than 2.5 million travelers, an increase of 2.3%, and collected a record high of over \$22 million in Tourist Development Tax dollars, an increase of 2.1%.

Visit Pensacola continues to grow in its partnerships, most recently being secured as the New Orleans Saints exclusive destination partner for the 2024-26 seasons, locking in the Sun Belt Basketball Championships to a five-year extension through 2030, and being named a second time to Condé Nast Traveler's Best Small Cities, jumping a spot up to number seven.



With visitation up 2.3% and Tourist Development Tax collections at a record high, Visit Pensacola is continuing to showcase the destination as a premier destination in Northwest Florida. This year, Visit Pensacola entered into agreement with the New Orleans Saints as its exclusive destination partner for the next three years.

"Pensacola's growth and recognition as a premier destination are a testament to the collective efforts of our community, partners, and the dedicated team at Visit Pensacola," said Darien Schaefer, president and CEO. "From welcoming over 2.5 million visitors to forging impactful partnerships, we're showcasing what makes our destination truly unique. With initiatives highlighting our vibrant culture, natural beauty, and unmatched experiences, we're not just attracting more travelers but setting a standard for innovation and collaboration in the tourism industry."

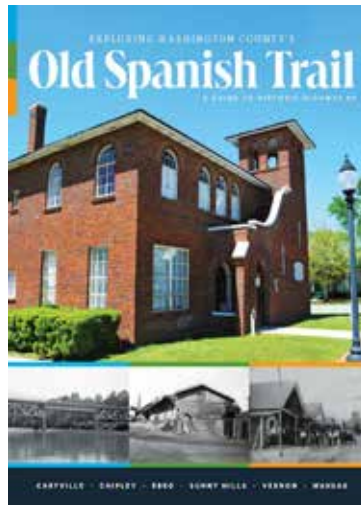


Visit Pensacola recently secured a five-year extension with the Sun Belt Conference Basketball Championship to host through 2030. This extension tops a five-year partnership that will continue to increase economic impact within Escambia County.

Washington County Celebrates Bicentennial in 2025

Visit Washington County is committed to enhancing heritage tourism within the community. Over the past three years, the Council has focused on developing marketing materials and supporting preservation projects to showcase the rich heritage of Washington County, which spans 200 years.

In June 2024, they completed a three-phase project for the Old Spanish Trail, culminating in the publication of a glossy 36-page guide. This guide features walking and driving tours of historic sites and districts throughout the county, highlighting the Old Spanish Trail, now designated as Historic Highway 90. This east-west corridor traverses the northern section of the county, including Chipley and Caryville. The Old Spanish Trail project includes 30 interpretive panels located at key historic sites across the county, a digital story map, and a printed guide.



The front cover of the Old Spanish Trail printed guide

The marketing materials developed from the Old Spanish Trail project will be utilized during Washington County's Bicentennial Celebration in 2025. At the end of 2024, they continued developing a bicentennial logo, website, rack card, and promotional items to commemorate this significant milestone. Visit Washington County has planned many events and special dedications that will be showcased on the bicentennial website, which will be archived after 2025.



The home page of the Washington County Bicentennial website



Walton County Tourism Unifies Collection of Destination Brands

In 2024, Walton County unified its collection of destination brands under umbrella brand Walton County Tourism, which is anchored by well-established brand South Walton and balanced by brands Authentic Walton and Keep Walton County Beautiful.

"The unification of Walton County Tourism brands expands the promotion of our beautiful county to visitors who can come and enjoy all the destination has to offer, from the Alabama state line south to the beaches," said Kelli Carter, director of marketing at Walton County Tourism. "These distinct brands help make visitors aware that there are more locations to visit within the county, giving them more things to do while they're here."

While the renowned South Walton brand is centered on its 26 miles of sugar-white sand beaches, turquoise water, and 16 acclaimed beach neighborhoods, the Authentic Walton brand promotes communities north of the Choctawhatchee Bay, bringing awareness to their natural wonders and small-town charm. The latest brand addition, Keep Walton County Beautiful, is dedicated to preserving the environment by empowering individuals to participate in the protection and enhancement of the local community.

Walton County Tourism is able to effectively expand its destination marketing and promotion efforts with these consolidated brand extensions.



Walton County Tourism leadership and staff celebrate a successful 2024.
Photo: Walton County Tourism



Walton County destination brands under the umbrella of Walton County Tourism
Photo: Walton County Tourism



In the News

Florida Keys Tourism Council Names New CFO/COO

Elizabeth "Liz" Marquardt, an attorney and certified public accountant, is the new chief financial officer/chief operating officer for Visit Florida Keys, the Monroe County TDC's operations organization. Marquardt is responsible for overseeing all financial aspects of the organization and managing legal, compliance, and administrative functions. Previously, she was a senior vice-president for Bayview Asset Management and Bayview Legacy in Coral Gables. Marquardt's career experience includes working as CFO for Volvo Treasury North America and Ferrell Law and as CFO and interim museum director for the Miami Art Museum. She has also been a senior director for Alvarez & Marsal Taxand, LLC and LNR Partners, LLC.



Liz Marquardt, CPA

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Visit Orlando's Magical Dining Generates Record \$352,218 to Support Orange County Charities

Visit Orlando raised a record-breaking donation of \$352,218 to Orange County charities through Visit Orlando's Magical Dining, presented by Orlando Health. This marks a 30% increase over 2023 and surpasses the program's previous record set in 2020. The program has raised over \$2.9 million for local charities since launching the charity fund-raising component in 2009. This year's beneficiary, The Mustard Seed of Central Florida, helps families recover from hardship while promoting environmental sustainability. VisitOrlando.com



Outgoing Visit Orlando Board Chair Terry Prather, Visit Orlando President & CEO Cassandra Matej, and Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings join representatives from The Mustard Seed of Central Florida, the Orlando Opera, and top-performing Visit Orlando Magical Dining restaurants at Visit Orlando's Year-End Celebration.

2024 Nights of Lights Honors Century-Long Bond With Avilés

The 2024 Nights of Lights celebration highlights a century of friendship between St. Augustine and its sister city, Avilés, Spain. Honoring this enduring bond, Light-Up! Night featured Consuelo Lippi, president of St. Augustine Sister Cities Association, and Len Weeks, chair of the 100th Anniversary Celebration Committee, illuminating the Plaza de la Constitución. This milestone underscores the success of Nights of Lights as a cherished tradition and a testament to international collaboration. The lighting ceremony exemplifies the unity and heritage that define Florida's Historic Coast. FloridasHistoricCoast.com



St. Augustine's Nights of Lights has elevated community relations through the years.

Key West Celebrates the New Year in Its Own Quirky Style

Where else but Key West can you find a multitude of wacky New Year's Eve takeoffs on the traditional ball drop in New York City? In the heart of the southernmost island city, renowned female impersonator Randy Roberts dropped in a supersized red high heel shoe onto Duval Street. Sloppy Joe's Bar celebrated its annual "Dropping of the Conch Shell." The Schooner Wharf Bar held its "Lowering of the Pirate Wench." And a "Gatsby New Year's Eve" gala at the original home of Pan American World Airways featured the midnight "landing" of a replica Pan Am aircraft carrying a costumed flight attendant. Fla-Keys.com



The "Red Shoe Drop" is part of Key West's unique take on the traditional ball drop on New Year's Eve.

Celebrating Alachua County's Bicentennial With Discover 200: A Year of Reflection and Celebration

On Jan. 11, Alachua County kicked off its 200th anniversary with Discover 200: A Bicentennial Celebration. Thousands of residents and visitors gathered to enjoy live music from nationally recognized acts and beloved local bands, food trucks, family-friendly activities, historical exhibits, and informational booths highlighting county programs. The event was promoted through targeted digital, social media, radio, and traditional media campaigns. Throughout 2025, Alachua County will host events honoring the people and places that shaped its story. Learn more at Alachua200.org. VisitGainesville.com



Chuck Ragan and the Camaraderie light up the stage at the Alachua County Bicentennial Celebration, joined by headliner Kingfish Ingram and more, setting the tone for a day of music, history, and community pride.



Quick Trips!

Walton County Tourism Promotes Adventure Travel at DEMA Show

Walton County Tourism joined Northwest Florida Beaches coalition at the Diving Equipment & Marketing Association Show in Las Vegas in November. The coalition, extending from Apalachicola to Pensacola, promotes travel adventure along eight coastal destinations in Northwest Florida. Attendees explored the latest innovations in diving, travel, and action water sports, as well as unique Walton County attractions, including North America's first Underwater Museum of Art, diving hotspot Morrison Springs, and snorkel reefs shaped like marine life. WaltonCountyFLTourism.com



Walton County Tourism partners with Northwest Florida Beaches coalition at the Diving Equipment & Marketing Association Show in Las Vegas.

Martin County Tourism Is Leave No Trace Tourism Partner of the Year

The esteemed Leave No Trace organization recently unveiled the winners of the 2024 Leave No Trace Awards where they honored the Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing with the Tourism Partner of the Year award. This prestigious recognition highlights the continued success of their Explore Natural Martin eco-tourism program. The groundbreaking initiative was developed to promote sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship throughout Martin County through free, guided eco-tours and ongoing programming available for visitors and residents. DiscoverMartin.com



To learn more and register for upcoming eco-tours, visit ExploreNaturalMartin.com.

Indian River County Tourist Tax Increases Thanks to Voters

Voters in the Indian River County general election approved increasing the Tourist Development Tax, which will generate more money for beach restoration and other development affecting tourism. The tax on accommodations, such as hotel stays, will increase from 4% to 5%. The increase will generate an additional estimated \$1 million, possibly increasing the total tax revenue to nearly \$6 million for the county's next fiscal year. The addition took effect on Jan. 1. VisitIndianRiverCounty.com

Indian River County Tourist Development Tax For Beach Renourishment

100% of precinct reporting

Candidate	Total Votes	% Votes
FOR the Tourist Development Tax / EN FAVOR del Impuesto de Desarrollo Turístico	53,152	59.4%
AGAINST the Tourist Development Tax / EN CONTRA del Impuesto de Desarrollo Turístico	36,379	40.6%

The vote's final outcome was 53,152 in favor to 36,379 opposed, according to final, unofficial results from the Indian River County Supervisor of Elections Office.

Gulf County Empowers Local Businesses at Marketing Made Simple Lunch & Learn Workshop

Visit Gulf County partnered with Gulf Coast State College and the Gulf County Chamber of Commerce to host a Marketing Made Simple Lunch & Learn Workshop, attracting more than 25 local business owners. The free session delivered actionable strategies for leveraging social media and Google Business listings. Attendees enjoyed a dynamic presentation from GCSC's Brittany Weisensale and left with practical tools tailored for small businesses. "This workshop reflects our commitment to empowering local businesses and fostering community growth," said Silvia Williams, executive director of Gulf County TDC. VisitGulf.com



Gulf County business owners and community members gather at the Gulf Coast State College Gulf/Franklin Campus for the Marketing Made Simple Workshop.

Want to See Your DMO's News Here?

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





Inaugural Eudēmonia Summit Highlights The Palm Beaches in Wellness Space

The inaugural Eudēmonia Summit, which took place at the Palm Beach County Convention Center and Hilton West Palm Beach, was a huge success with 2,700+ attendees. The first-of-its-kind three-day wellness event was held in partnership with Discover The Palm Beaches. It featured educational keynotes, engaging sessions, and interactive tech demos and featured 100+ health experts including Dr. Andrew Huberman, Jillian Michaels, Dr. Mark Hyman, Timbaland, Dr. Gabrielle Lyon, and Dr. Darshan Shah. ThePalmBeaches.com



Dr. Andrew Huberman addresses the crowd at Eudēmonia.

Colombian Content Creators Visit Fort Myers Area

In early November, Fort Myers Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods welcomed five content creators from Colombia for a FAM tour organized through VISIT FLORIDA. They stayed on Fort Myers Beach and Captiva Island, where they experienced beautiful beaches and saw recent hurricane recovery efforts. Their itinerary focused on the destination's natural beauty, finding the perfect seashells along the coastlines, history, fresh seafood dining, and new experiences in downtown Fort Myers, like Bay Street Yard. VisitFortMyers.com



Colombian media have fun at the new Bay Street Yard in downtown Fort Myers.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Reports \$11.2 Billion in Economic Impact From Tourism

Tourism drove more than \$11.2 billion in economic impact to Pinellas County in fiscal year 2024, surpassing the last year total. America's Favorite Beaches welcomed more than 15.4 million visitors and accommodated 6.4 million room hotel room nights for the third straight year. The destination saw more than \$1.6 billion in overall destination accommodations revenue for the second straight year, recording more than \$95 million in TDT funds for the third consecutive year. VisitStPeteClearwater.com



St. Pete-Clearwater was Still Shining in 2024, highlighting the popularity of America's Favorite Beaches and beyond.

Space Coast Promotes Destination to Baseball Coaches at National Convention

Terry Parks, sports commissioner with Space Coast Office of Tourism, attended the 2025 American Baseball Coaches Association Convention to represent the Space Coast as a top location for everything from training camps to tournaments. The World's Largest Baseball Convention took place Jan. 2-5 in Washington, D.C. VisitSpaceCoast.com



Space Coast Sports Commissioner Terry Parks welcomes visitors to the Space Coast booth at the 2025 American Baseball Coaches Association Convention in Washington, D.C.



Sebring Named Top Wellness Destination by Time Out

Time Out named Sebring one of the best wellness retreats and destinations in the U.S. for nature enthusiasts, saying "Sebring is home to numerous lakes, with over 100 in the general area. The small rejuvenating town also has a historic downtown area, so much so that Sebring's entire downtown is a designated 1920s Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. Speaking of historic happenings, Sebring is also home to Highlands Hammock State Park, the oldest state park in the Sunshine State." VisitSebring.com



Paddle boarders enjoy a Lake Jackson sunrise.

Discover Lake County Showcases New Mural on Downtown Clermont Art Walk

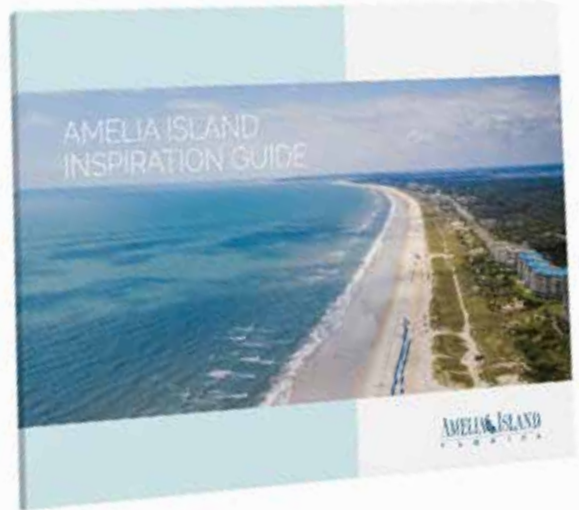
Lake County is home to a new mural, located in downtown Clermont. This mural is part of the Downtown Clermont Art Walk and captures the beauty of Lake County, featuring iconic attractions like seaplanes, native wildlife, and the beauty of the water. This mural is one of eight large wall murals in downtown Clermont and is expected to build awareness around tourism within Lake County. DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com



Mural in Downtown Clermont
Photo: Courtesy of Discover Lake County

Amelia Island Wins MarCom Platinum Awards

The Amelia Island CVB and its marketing partner, Starmark, have been recognized with two MarCom Platinum awards for the Amelia Island Inspiration Guide, which was judged to be among the most outstanding entries in the Brochure Writing and Viewbook categories. In addition to these top accolades, the CVB received an Honorable Mention for its website. MarCom honors excellence in marketing and communication while recognizing the creativity, hard work, and generosity of industry professionals. Amelia Island is proud to be recognized as one of the best worldwide brands. AmeliaIsland.com



The Amelia Island Inspiration Guide is the winner of two MarCom Platinum awards.

Jingle Bell Express Delivers Holiday Cheer in Panama City

Destination Panama City spread holiday magic with the Jingle Bell Express, a festive trolley ride connecting the historic neighborhoods of Downtown and St. Andrews. Riders enjoyed twinkling light displays and holiday shopping at local boutiques brimming with unique gifts. Between stops, the local A Capella Chorus filled the air with classic carols, adding to the joyous atmosphere. This cherished annual event was made possible through a partnership with Bayway, creating a memorable bayside experience for all who joined. DestinationPanamaCity.com



Riders enjoy the festive Jingle Bell Express while exploring the holiday magic of Panama City's historic neighborhoods.
Photo: Lori Ubowski

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Visit Tampa Bay to Inspire UK Art Scene as Official Destination Sponsor of London Art Fair

Visit Tampa Bay is the exclusive Destination Sponsor of the 2025 London Art Fair, the high-profile partnership cementing Tampa Bay's reputation as a hub for vibrancy and creativity and part of Visit Tampa Bay's extensive \$1 million+ marketing campaign in London showcasing the region's artistic excellence. The London Art Fair partnership is one of several strategic initiatives under Visit Tampa Bay's London marketing campaign, which includes high-impact, out-of-home advertising placements in iconic locations as well as taxi wraps and digital billboards. VisitTampaBay.com



Visit Tampa Bay branding adorns a London cab near the famous London Eye, part of the DMO's wide-ranging London marketing campaign that includes sponsorship of the prestigious 2025 London Art Fair.

Visit Jacksonville Launches Soul of Surf Campaign

In November, Visit Jacksonville launched the Soul of Surf campaign to highlight the city's beaches as ideal surf destinations. Through a partnership with Catch Surf and GoPro, five influencers and content creators spent a week immersed in Jacksonville's surf culture—from surfing at multiple beaches to meeting with local surf legends to visiting local surf shops. The content gathered during the week was posted on social media and will be used in Visit Jacksonville's upcoming digital ads. VisitJacksonville.com



Ben Gravy and Evan Rossell participate in the Soul of Surf FAM week at Jacksonville's beaches.

Visit Pensacola Showcases The Way to Beach™ at Toronto Winter Village

Visit Pensacola teamed up with VISIT FLORIDA and three other state destinations for a lively activation at Toronto's renowned Distillery Winter Village, a top global Christmas market. Drawing more than 1.25 million visitors, the event featured vibrant stations showcasing Florida's flavors with each destination sharing a dish or beverage from home. Visitors were transported to the Sunshine State with stunning visuals and given the opportunity to win a vacation to Florida. VisitPensacola.com



Visit Pensacola in Toronto! The famous winter village allowed for consumers to experience four Florida destinations with tasty treats, photo opportunities, and video.

Visit Sarasota County Holds Half-Day Hospitality Summit

Visit Sarasota County (VSC) convened a task force to conduct a holistic assessment of its partner program, and this input inspired the DMO to rebrand its annual marketing meeting into a half-day summit. At the inaugural Indicators & Insights Summit, local hospitality partners and business leaders learned how to tap into the Suncoast's thriving tourism economy. The gathering covered how VSC's tourism marketing has served residents and local businesses over the past year and gave attendees a front-row seat to the unveiling of its new five-year strategic plan. VisitSarasota.com



Attendees of VSC's Indicators & Insights Summit jot down notes during an informational session

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Daytona International Speedway a Hub for the Holidays

The renowned Daytona International Speedway shifted gears into the holiday spirit with two major events—the Daytona Turkey Run and the Magic of Lights. On Thanksgiving weekend, the Speedway continued the tradition of the Daytona Turkey Run, considered the largest combined car show and swap meet in the America. Another holiday staple that returned was the Magic of Lights, the drive-through light display constructed with millions of individual LED lights to create a memorable holiday family experience. DaytonaBeach.com



The four-day 51st annual Daytona Turkey Run at Daytona International Speedway showcased more than 7,000 dazzling classic cars, swap meet vendors, car corral, and food and entertainment. Photo: Daytona Beach Area CVB

Experience Kissimmee and Celebration Brewing Team Up to Support Healthy Start Coalition

Experience Kissimmee and Celebration Brewing launched Citrus Kiss, a limited-edition orange sour beer inspired by Kissimmee and Osceola County. Proceeds from Citrus Kiss, sold through December, were donated to the Healthy Start Coalition of Osceola County, raising \$1,000. Thanks to strong community support and fantastic marketing and media efforts, the beer sold out in about a week. The organization is incredibly proud of this project and wants to thank everyone for their participation and support. ExperienceKissimmee.com



Celebration Brewing Co-Owner Frank Lozito, Experience Kissimmee CEO & President DT Minich, Healthy Start Coalition of Osceola County Executive Director Kerri Stephen, and Experience Kissimmee Chief of Destination Stewardship Jason Holic

Greater Miami CVB Incentivizes Hotel Partners to Create a More Sustainable Future

The Greater Miami CVB has become the first destination marketing organization in the U.S. to provide incentives for Green Key Global hotel certification, further positioning Miami-Dade County as a frontrunner in sustainable tourism. The groundbreaking initiative offers hotel partners a 50% discount on Green Key's Eco-Rating certification, providing them valuable resources to enhance their sustainability practices and gain a competitive edge by attracting environmentally conscious guests and expanding meeting and event opportunities. MiamiandMiamiBeach.com



Miami-Dade County is a frontrunner in sustainable tourism.

Clay County Hosts National Intramural Flag Football Championship

Clay County Regional Sports Complex, Northeast Florida's sole facility dedicated to tournament play, welcomed more than 15 collegiate teams from across the U.S. for the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) Flag Football Championship on Dec. 16-17. It was the first major tournament held at the new 250-acre facility since its April 2024 opening. The championship sports event showcased Clay County's premier venue for tournament play, featuring eight multipurpose fields. The games brought exciting competition and visitors to Middleburg. ExploreClay.com



Athletes compete at the NIRSA Flag Football Championship in Middleburg, Fla.



Record-Breaking Year for Asian Lantern Festival in Orlando North, Seminole County

The Asian Lantern Festival: Into the Wild at the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens welcomed more than 115,000 guests this season, breaking attendance records. Running Nov. 15 to Jan. 19, the event featured 10,000 LED lights and stunning handcrafted lanterns, including an updated dragon for the 2024 Year of the Dragon. The annual holiday festival continues to shine as a must-see Orlando North, Seminole County tradition. DoOrlandoNorth.com



Handcrafted lanterns light up the Central Florida Zoo during the Asian Lantern Festival.

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Enhances Website to Serve Visitors

Destin-Fort Walton Beach further enhanced their award-winning website with new, engaging features. The team focused on redesigning pages, adding newly captured imagery, and updated Little Adventures pages. The presence of the destination's team of locals, known as Scouts, was expanded to add extra tips, a new dedicated introduction page, and newly created videos assets. To further provide insight, influencer content was also added, alongside a geography and interest-based map to better serve the destination's valued visitors. DestinFWB.com



Destin-Fort Walton Beach's team of online and beach scouts are now more prominently featured on the website, providing local insights and tips to assist visitors in the planning process.

Photo: Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida

Visit Central Florida Has Another Strong Year

Polk County Tourism & Sports Marketing saw a break-even year in 2024 after three record-breaking years. Highlights included Avelo Airlines launching flights at Lakeland Linder Airport, boosting tourism. Website sessions doubled, with organic searches up 15%. Sports hosted 120 events across baseball, softball, and soccer, generating significant impact. Indoor sports contributed over \$39 million. Key partnerships and innovative programs position Polk County's tourism and sports sectors for sustained growth. VisitCentralFlorida.org



Avelo Airlines flights at Lakeland Linder Airport are boosting tourism to Polk County.

Travel Influencer Kelly Rizzo Visits Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach

Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach was honored to have travel influencer Kelly Rizzo, the widow of Hollywood star Bob Saget, visit the destination to promote the Sunseeker Resort and enjoy Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach's "Best Side Outside." Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor is a world-class resort in an unrivaled setting on the scenic shores of Florida's second largest harbor, located between Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte. The resort offers location, design, and technology along with open spaces and great views for a memorable meeting, conference, or incentive event. PureFlorida.com



Influencer Kelly Rizzo and Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Public Relations Manager Lois Croft enjoy a sunset cruise on King Fisher Fleet.

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