

# VISIT ELIZABETH CITY

## 2022-2023 MARKETING PLAN



Visit  
**ELIZABETH CITY**  
NORTH CAROLINA

This 2022-2023 Marketing and Communications plan is designed to create awareness about Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County as a sought-after and unique destination for individual and group travelers through positive publicity, innovative advertising, outstanding marketing collateral and robust digital and social media campaigns. The adopted plan serves to direct the initiatives and spending for Visit Elizabeth City and inform and educate the Board of Directors, community stakeholders, City and County elected officials and tourism partners. This plan is funded solely by occupancy tax collections.



## WHO IS VEC?

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is a North Carolina Public Authority under the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. The official name of the Authority is the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority doing business as Visit Elizabeth City. A North Carolina TDA is also known as a region's Destination Management Organization.

## WHAT IS A DMO?

As a Destination Management Organization (DMO), Visit Elizabeth City plays an essential role in managing tourism at the local level to help attract tourists and support businesses within Pasquotank County. We're responsible for promoting the City & County through branding campaigns, media relations and high-quality product development through effective communication with stakeholders, all while ensuring strong ROI for money spent on projects that meet our overall objectives.

In addition to our daily efforts to bring more visitors to the destination, Visit Elizabeth City also works to make our travel economy more sustainable and enjoyable for visitors for years to come.



## OBJECTIVE

To increase destination awareness, economic impact and overnight visitation using paid and owned channels that generate brand awareness, promote destination assets and optimally engage defined market segments.

## OUR MISSION AND VISION

The mission of the TDA is to promote overnight visitation that drives economic impact through destination marketing and enhancement of the visitor experience in Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Through innovative destination marketing, our vision is to become a nationally-recognized, model historic riverfront destination that drives significant economic impact for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County and welcomes visitors with world class hospitality and experiences.



# STRENGTHS

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## 1. Location

Elizabeth City has a prime location with easy access to several key points of interest for visitors: the Outer Banks Beaches, Virginia Beach, Hampton Roads, and Norfolk International Airport. Each of these key locations are only an hour away allowing visitors to day-trip to and from Elizabeth City and enjoy the respite of our riverfront community without being too rural.

## 2. Culinary

The dining scene in Elizabeth City has been revolutionized in recent years with high-quality, locally-owned eateries and drinkeries with a multitude of options not typically found in smaller destinations. Visitors can enjoy each meal of the day from local establishments without resorting to chain restaurants that can be found in any other city.

## 3. Value for Money

In comparison to nearby cities, Elizabeth City is a budget-friendly option for travelers. Our proximity to the beach allows visitors to escape to the coast without paying sky-high daily rates, giving them the ability to spend their vacation dollars on more experiences, dining, and shopping in our local small businesses generating a greater value for money.

## 4. Small Town Charm

Rural Elizabeth city has the small-town charm of the south at its disposal. Past visitors have noted its small town feel as a welcoming and “homey” asset to the region.

## 5. Walkable Downtown

This historic, revitalized area is the heart of the city. Restored alleyways and buildings along with new and expanded businesses have made downtown a hub of socialization, entertainment, and dining.



# CHALLENGES

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## 1. Partnerships

Tapping into our local business partners is key in curating programs and leveraging opportunities available to us, but their bandwidth to respond to us in a timely manner and lack of understanding of the value of the programs poses a challenge to the successful execution of programs.

## 2. Resources

The DMO's resources are limited. The infrastructure of Elizabeth City's tourism is still small-scale which means the TDA must be very strategic with existing resources and staff.

## 3. Local Sentiment

Many residents are not familiar with the distinction between Tourism and the City and County, leading to a lack of understanding about who we are and what we do as a DMO. If the local sentiment improves, Elizabeth City locals could be our #1 marketing asset by encouraging and inviting their only family and friends to visit Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

## 4. Municipal Organization and Local Politics

The City and County dynamics along with local politics serve as a challenge to tourism for similar reasons as our challenges with the local sentiment. These dynamics can inhibit our ability to effectively partner with City or County entities as well as slow partnerships with other groups to create new events and attractions.

## 5. Quality of Larger Lodging Accommodations

While the quality of local Bed & Breakfasts and Air BnBs has greatly improved in recent years, the availability of high-quality, larger accommodations proves to be a challenge for visitors considering a stay in Elizabeth City.



# OPPORTUNITIES

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## 1. Destination Development

While the variety of experiences and things to do have improved in recent years, there are still a plethora of opportunities for new, exciting activities and attractions in Elizabeth City. Night life and cultural experiences are just two examples of opportunities that travelers consider when looking at a place to vacation.

## 2. Leveraging the Waterfront

Our gorgeous view of the Pasquotank River provides stunning scenes and would be an even larger asset to the destination if it were more easily accessible. As of right now, there are minimal opportunities for locals who do not own their own boat or kayak to get on the water and even less opportunities for travelers. Water activities provide a unique experience that embraces our coastal location and allow people to embrace the beauty and functionality of our charming city.

## 3. Professional Partnerships

Tourism is a never-ending mission; the great news is we don't have to do it alone! By partnering with experienced, knowledgeable professionals at our agencies of record, MMGY NJF Public Relations and Evok Advertising, we can take advantage of even greater opportunities and capitalize on our partnerships to expand the bandwidth of our small internal team.

## 4. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Elizabeth City has the potential to serve as a model for other destinations with complex histories such as ours. We are not satisfied with our city's current perceptions, and there is much work to be done. We remain committed to enriching the story of our city through more equitable, balanced, and welcoming experiences for all.

## 5. Expanding on Successful Campaigns

By building on campaigns that have proven to be successful, we avoid "reinventing the wheel" and capitalize on content and campaigns that are highly engaging. Some of these campaigns according to our 2021 Annual Report include Christmas in Elizabeth City with an even more engaging Hot Cocoa Crawl, Weddings in Elizabeth City, and content about new experiences and attractions in the destination.



## TARGET AUDIENCES

General Leisure Traveler Target Audience, Skewing towards women, adults ages 25-65

This encompasses Millennials (ages 25-40), Generation X (ages 41-56) and Boomers (ages 57-75)

Niche audiences will be adjusted appropriately for culinary, weddings, road trips.

## STRATEGIES

1. Leverage an “always-on” digital media, cross-platform strategy including both evergreen and seasonal messaging to position Elizabeth City as an overnight or day-trip destination, highlighting experiences and assets that align with visitor interest and lifestyle.
2. Build on the success of effective niche marketing campaigns in areas such as Weddings, Culinary and the seasonal Christmas theme with boosts to digital or in targeted regional publications including Coastland Times and Our State for additional advertising support.
3. Target earned media efforts to share positive stories about our community through curated content, themed events, and proactive and reactive pitches.
4. Build relationships with potential and in-market visitors as demonstrated through increased usage, engagements, and conversations on social media.
5. Produce significantly more content (photos, social, blogs) with an intentional focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to enhance our ability to showcase the rich diversity of our community and welcome diverse travelers.
6. Generate increased awareness among residents, elected officials, stakeholders and community partners about the importance of tourism in Pasquotank County. Additionally, raising resident awareness and participation in the diversity of regional culinary offerings, things to do and special events to elevate the local perception of Elizabeth City.



## TACTICS

### Streaming Radio

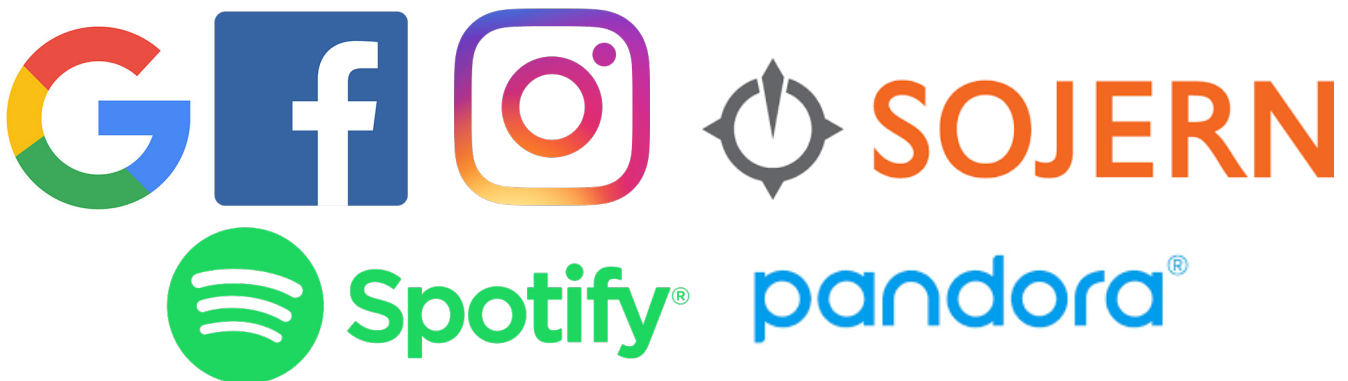
Streaming radio engages radio listeners in a hyper-targeted way, using demographic, psychographic and behavioral tactics to reach our audience, regardless of what stations or formats they are listening to, therefore maximizing our media dollars. Each ad is also accompanied by a digital banner ad that can lead directly to the Elizabeth City website and can be updated often so more relevant messages can play during the duration of the campaign.

### Sponsored Content/Native Ads

These ads are highly engaging, since they take on the look and feel of the website they appear on. With the ability to test different headlines, images, and body copy (with minimal creative costs), we can ascertain which are generating the most clicks to the site. We can also see what other actions or secondary activities a visitor is taking by using pixel tracking.

### Google Ads

With almost 60% of leisure travelers claiming that they start their travel booking and research with search, having a robust paid search strategy is beyond critical. In 2022, Google PPC (pay per click) will continue to be utilized to reach users who are interested and searching for Elizabeth City activities, venues, events, and other seasonal destination events. PPC will target people in our drive market who expressed an interest in coming to Elizabeth City, driven by their search intent. Based on the search volume, geo-targeting, and seasonality, PPC will be broken into Evergreen, Weddings, and Craft Beverage campaigns.





## TACTICS CONTINUED

### Paid Social

We will utilize paid social to increase visibility and awareness about recreational activities, events, lodging, and dining options as well as promote Elizabeth City as the perfect destination for weddings, holidays, and summer getaways. Social ads will focus on traffic objectives to increase website visits and views. Our paid social strategy will include Evergreen ads, Craft Beverages, Weddings, Road Trip, and Christmas/Holiday campaigns.

### Print Advertising

Print ads throughout the year to support our digital advertising allow for consistent branding and messaging through multiple channels to reach users who may not be on social media or streaming radio. By leveraging the audiences of NC-focused publications like Our State and the Coastland Times, we can reach more potential visitors with a specific interest in North Carolina travel and local happenings.

### Paid Placement in Third-Party Emails

Placements in emails from third-party partners with high open rates, click-through-rates and opt-in only contacts offer more opportunities for Elizabeth City to be seen by consumers who are in our target audience, but may not be familiar with the destination. These placements gain exposure for the destination and increase brand awareness among consumers.

**Our State**  
CELEBRATING NORTH CAROLINA

 **THE COASTLAND TIMES**

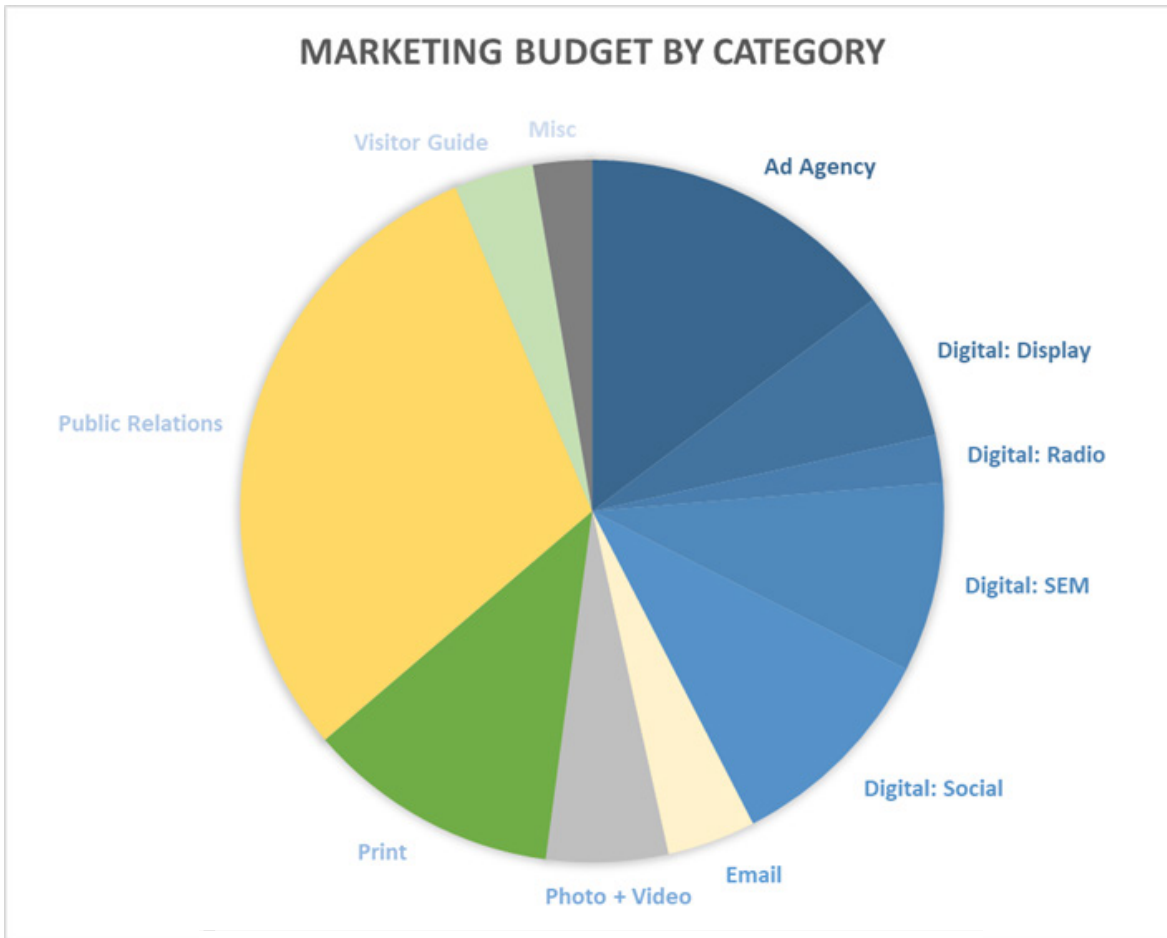


## MEASURABLE GOALS

- Generate website traffic of a minimum of 190,000 unique visitors
- Increase engagement of website users by increasing average pages per session to 3.75 (3.55 in 2021) and session duration to an average of 1:32 per visit. (1:26 in 2021)
- Increase printed visitor guide requests to 765 (665 in 2021)
- Increase consumer email database by 200 subscribers, up to 11,400
- Host at least four media visits to Elizabeth City in 2022-2023
- Generate at least 30 media placements in national or regional publications in 2022-2023, producing \$8 million in earned media impressions.
- Increase total social media engagement to at least 90,000 likes, comments, shares and/ or clicks.
- Grow our social network subscribers to at least 30,000 fans and followers across all accounts.
- Post a minimum of 1 post per month specific to inclusion
- Produce a photoshoot with an emphasis on inclusion beyond black and white ethnicities to include same-sex couples, various ages, multiracial families/friend groups, people with disabilities, etc.
- Write at least 3 blogs highlighting Diversity, Equity, and/or Inclusion in Elizabeth City.



# MARKETING BUDGET



Category	Amount
Ad Agency	\$40,496
Digital: Display	\$18,685
Digital: Radio	\$6,000
Digital: SEM	\$24,000
Digital: Social	\$27,555
Email	\$11,185
Photo + Video	\$15,384
Print	\$31,936
Public Relations	\$82,320
Visitor Guide	\$10,000
Misc	\$7,439
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$275,000</b>



# APPENDIX

## Visit Elizabeth City Research

1. Below are locations demographics for 2021 representing where our visitors came from by state and DMA. In both reports from Zartico, it's clear that it is in the best interest of the DMO to spend majority of our advertising dollars in North Carolina and Virginia markets.

### 2021 Actual Visitation Markets by DMA

34% Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News, VA  
13% Greenville-New Bern-Washington, NC  
9.7% Raleigh-Durham (Fayetteville), NC  
3.5% Washington, DC (Hagerstown, MD)  
3.0% Richmond-Petersburg, VA

### 2021 Actual Visitation by State

43.6% North Carolina  
27.9% Virginia  
2.8% Florida  
2.8% Pennsylvania  
2.6% Maryland

2. What three words come to mind when you think of Elizabeth City? (responses from residents, students, community stakeholders)



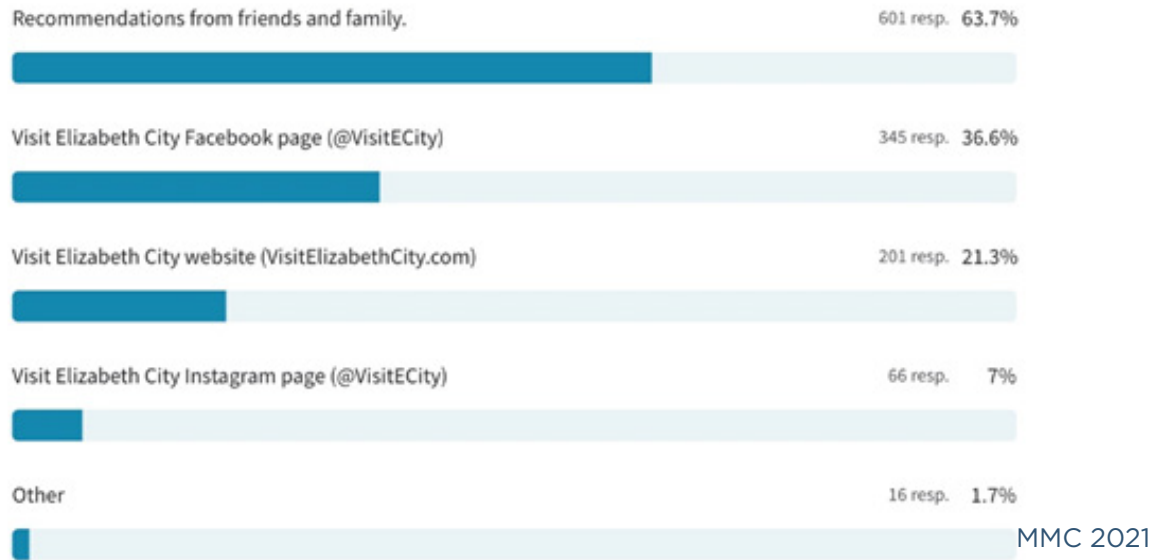
3. Top three words to describe Elizabeth City according to past visitors:



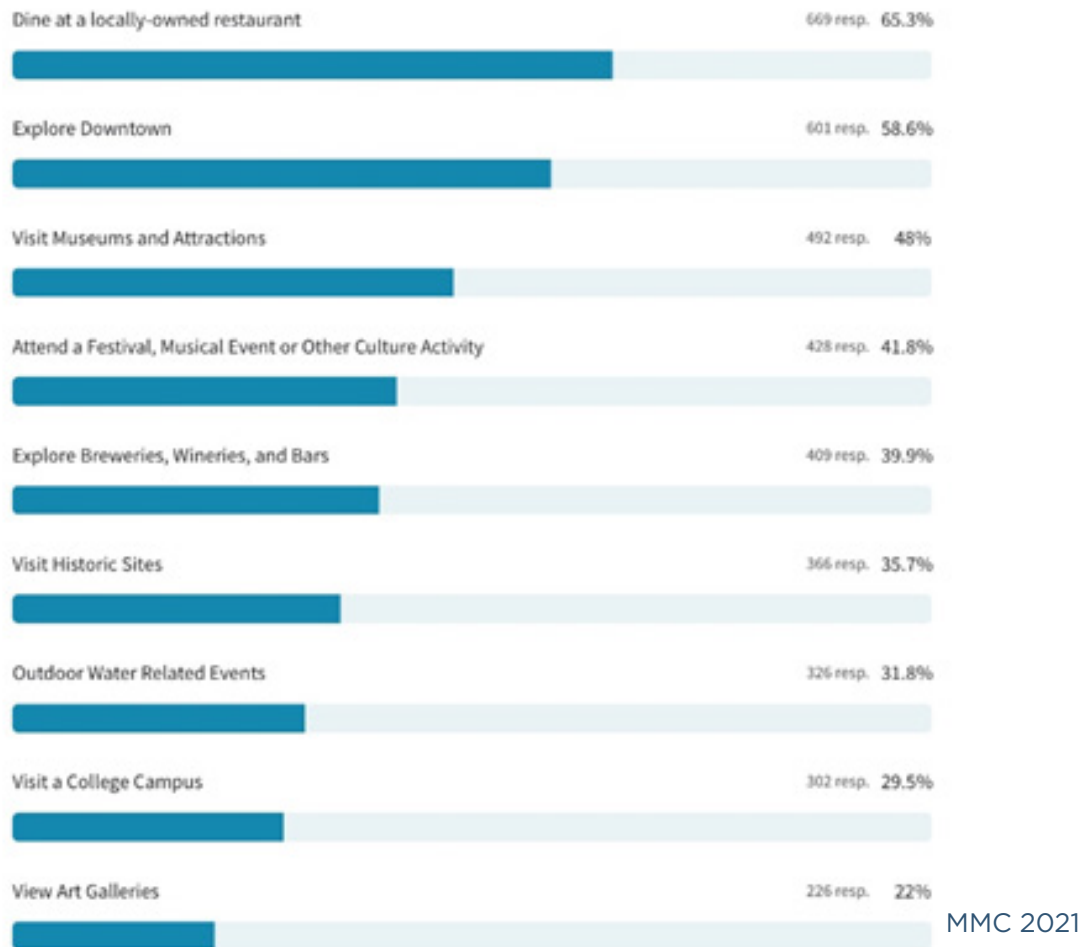
SIR 2019



#### 4. What is your go-to source for local events and things to do?



#### 5. Imagine you're a tour guide in Elizabeth City. What would you recommend visitors see and do while in town?



## 6. Elizabeth City's Net Promoter Score



### Net Promoter Score Benchmarks (MMC 2021)

Leisure, Travel, and Tourism Industry:	54
Similarly-Situated Destination:	33
<b>Elizabeth City:</b>	<b>-27</b>

## 7. How likely are you to recommend EC to people who look and think like you? \*10-Point Scale (MMC 2021)

Non-White	White
5.40%	6.11%

## 8. Elizabeth City is perceived as a welcoming and inclusive community in a believable and authentic way. \*10-Point Scale (MMC 2021)

Non-White	White
5.6%	6.12%



## General Travel Trends and Consumer Insights

1. 77% of Internet users are active on either Facebook or Instagram
2. 42% of Facebook users post travel-related content including photos, and 52% of all Facebook users draw travel inspiration directly from their friends' photos.
3. Almost 60% of leisure travelers start their travel booking and research with a Google search.
4. Nearly 85% of Americans are expecting to travel this summer with 80% planning to travel in their personal vehicles and 46% planning to fly.
5. When asked about lower satisfaction when visiting some attractions in the U.S, responses from surveyed people of color include: "Unfriendly treatment" "history of oppression at attraction" "availability of familiar food and services" and "they do not have diverse staff or attendants" (PGAV Destinationology, Voice of the Visitor 2022)
6. 80% of diverse leisure travelers chose destinations based on the "friendly factor" (Melissa Majors Consulting)
7. Despite rising gas prices and inflation, U.S. road trips have risen above pre-pandemic levels according to Arrivalist
8. There will be more weddings in the United States in 2022 than any other year since 1984, according to a new survey by The Knot with a rise in micro-weddings and "minimonies"
9. 81% of respondents agree they want to travel to destinations where they can immerse themselves into the local culture (American Express, 2022 Global Travel Trends)



## VISITOR DISSATISFACTION

RESPONSE FROM PEOPLE OF COLOR

PGAV Destinology 2022

"Unfriendly treatment."

"Availability of familiar food and services."

"They do not have diverse staff or attendants."

"History of oppression at attraction."

"We're treated differently."

"People assume we steal."

"Still feel segregated."



## Two Years Into Covid, Travel Inches Above 2019 Levels

