

# VISIT ELIZABETH CITY

## 2025-2026 MARKETING PLAN



Adopted by the EC-PC TDA  
March 27, 2025

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# INTRODUCTION

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is a public authority in North Carolina, operating under the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. Officially named the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority, it conducts business as Visit Elizabeth City. In North Carolina, a TDA is also referred to as a region's Destination Management Organization (DMO).

As a Destination Management Organization (DMO), Visit Elizabeth City plays a key role in managing tourism at the local level, working to attract visitors and support businesses throughout Pasquotank County. We promote the city and county through branding campaigns, media outreach, and the development of high-quality products, all while maintaining strong communication with stakeholders to ensure a solid return on investment for projects that align with our goals. Beyond our daily efforts to draw more visitors, Visit Elizabeth City is also dedicated to creating a sustainable and enjoyable travel experience that benefits both visitors and the local economy for years to come.

Since May 25, 2021 Visit Elizabeth City has been accredited by the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) of Destinations International. This prestigious recognition reflects our commitment to excellence, meeting rigorous industry standards across various performance areas to enhance our destination success.

The 2025-2026 marketing plan serves as a roadmap for promoting Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County to attract visitors in the next fiscal year. It outlines specific goals, identifies target audiences, and details the strategies and tactics we intend to employ to boost tourism.



# 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 establish Elizabeth City as a nationally recognized, model historic riverfront destination. We aim to drive significant economic impact for both the city and Pasquotank County, while offering visitors world-class hospitality and unforgettable experiences.



# STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS

## Visit Elizabeth City Staff

Angela Welsh - Executive Director  
Jenna Kerr - Marketing & Communications Specialist  
Susan Hartley - Administrative Assistant

## Marketing Committee

Kelly Boyd- Committee Chair  
Donnie Markham  
James Dubose  
Claudia Twiford

## TDA Board of Directors

Holly Audette - Chair  
Donnie Markham - Vice-Chair  
Dean Schaan - Treasurer  
Johnnie Walton  
Clifford Shaw  
James Dubose  
Kelly Boyd  
Sy Davis  
Claudia Twiford  
Sparty Hammett - Ex Officio

# STRENGTHS

**Location:** Elizabeth City offers easy access to key destinations like the Outer Banks, Virginia Beach, Hampton Roads, and Norfolk International Airport, making it a convenient stop for travelers.

**Small Town Charm:** Known as the “Harbor of Hospitality,” Elizabeth City boasts a rich history and a tradition of welcoming visitors with warmth and friendliness.

**Downtown Revitalization:** The walkable downtown area has been revitalized, with restored alleyways, historic buildings, and an expanding array of businesses, positioning it as the social hub of the community.

**Natural Resources:** With its waterfront setting, Elizabeth City offers a variety of outdoor activities, including fishing and water sports, making it a perfect destination for nature enthusiasts.

# CHALLENGES

**Resources:** With limited resources and a small-scale tourism infrastructure, the TDA must be strategic in utilizing existing resources and staffing to maximize impact and ensure sustainable growth.

**Partnerships:** Building strong relationships with local business partners is essential for us to successfully curate and market their events that enhance the visitor experience and benefit the local economy.

**Lodging Accommodations:** While Bed and Breakfasts and Airbnbs have seen improvements in recent years, the availability of larger accommodations remains a challenge, which may limit the ability to host larger groups and events.



# OPPORTUNITIES

**Expand on Successful Campaigns:** Campaigns like Christmas in Elizabeth City and the Hot Cocoa Crawl have proven highly effective in raising awareness, generating media exposure, and bringing national recognition to the city. These initiatives help establish Elizabeth City as a must-visit destination with a unique, community-oriented atmosphere.

**Destination Development:** Over the years, the variety of experiences in Elizabeth City has steadily improved, but there remains plenty of potential for new and exciting attractions to be developed. Opportunities exist for unique cultural, recreational, and entertainment offerings that can further diversify the visitor experience and create lasting memories for travelers.

**Leverage the Waterfront:** The Pasquotank River is an untapped asset with even greater potential. Currently, access to the waterfront is limited, with few opportunities for locals or visitors to enjoy the water. By improving access and creating more opportunities for water-based activities, the river could become a central feature of the city's tourism, attracting more visitors and providing locals with an enhanced recreational space.

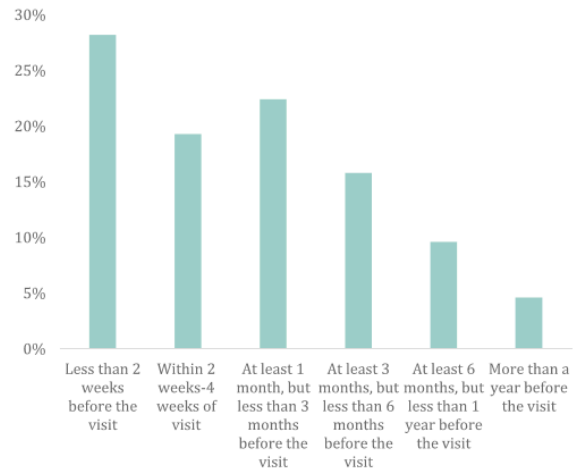
**Professional Partnerships:** To expand the reach of Visit Elizabeth City's marketing efforts, continuing to work with established partners such as MMGY NJF Public Relations and EVOK Advertising is crucial. These partnerships allow our small internal team to leverage external expertise, enabling a broader and more impactful marketing strategy that drives growth while maximizing resources.



# CONSUMER INSIGHTS

## ADVANCE DECISION FOR OVERNIGHT VISIT TO NORTH CAROLINA

- In 2023, 48% of overnight visitors made the decision to visit within 4 weeks of the visit.
- Nearly 70% of overnight visitors decided on a visit less than 3 months out.



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## TOP ACTIVITIES PARTICIPATED IN BY NC VISITORS IN 2023

- Top activities of overnighters and daytrippers were similar in 2023.
- The top activities for both were visiting friends/relatives and shopping.
- Visiting a beach, shopping, and rural sightseeing were also popular, as were many outdoor activities.

*\*Note that responses to this question are not mutually exclusive and percentages do not equal 100%. Therefore, proportions should not be aggregated to combine categories of activities. Also note that these activities do not imply purpose of trip.*

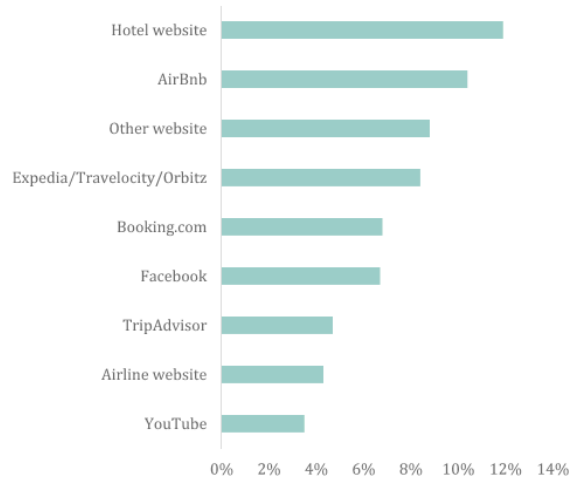
Overnight		Daytrippers	
Visiting friends/relatives	40%	Visiting friends/relatives	27%
Shopping	27%	Shopping	14%
Beach	20%	Historic sites	9%
Historic sites	16%	Rural sightseeing	9%
Rural sightseeing	14%	Beach	8%
Fine dining	14%	Fine dining	8%
Local/folk arts/crafts	12%	Hiking/Backpacking/Canyoneering	5%
Hiking/Backpacking/Canyoneering	11%	State park/Monuments/Recreation Areas	5%
Museums	11%	Museums	5%
Wildlife viewing	10%	Wildlife viewing	4%
State park/Monuments/Recreation Areas	10%	Swimming	4%
Unique local cuisine	10%	Sports Event- Youth/Amateur/Collegiate/Other	4%
Swimming	9%	Other nature (photography, rockhound, etc)	4%
National Park/ Monuments/Recreation Areas	9%	Local/folk arts/crafts	3%
Craft breweries	8%	Urban sightseeing	3%
Urban sightseeing	8%	Gardens	3%
Gardens	7%	Bird watching	3%
Fishing	7%	Zoo/Aquariums/Aviaries	3%
Other nature (photography, rockhound, etc)	6%	Unique local cuisine	3%
Zoo/Aquariums/Aviaries	5%	National Park/ Monuments/Recreation Areas	3%
Art galleries	5%	Theater/Drama	3%

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# CONSUMER INSIGHTS

## SOURCES USED TO RESEARCH AND SELECT DESTINATION FOR OVERNIGHT TRAVEL TO NORTH CAROLINA

- Hotel website, Airbnb and Expedia/Travelocity/Orbitz were the top methods traveler used to research and select destinations for travel in 2023.
- Booking.com and Facebook were also popular sources used by visitors for research and selecting a destination for travel in 2023.

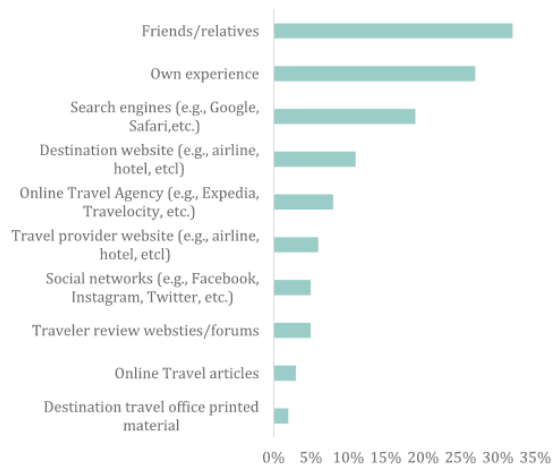


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## PLANNING SOURCES FOR OVERNIGHT TRAVEL TO NORTH CAROLINA

- Friends/relatives, own experience and search engines were the top sources of planning an overnight trip to NC in 2023.
- Visitors also used destination websites, online travel agencies and travel provider websites for planning.



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# TRAVEL TRENDS

90% of visitors to North Carolina arrive by vehicle. (Source: NC Moves 2050 plan)

As travelers seek meaningful experiences, emerging trends like slow tourism, wellbeing trips, and culinary tours are gaining popularity. (Source: North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Association, *2024 Holiday Barometer*)

87% of travelers state inflation remains a top concern. (Source: North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Association *2024 Holiday Barometer*)

While the tried-and-tested holiday spots will still pull in travelers, an extra stop before, after or during the break will become more common. (Source: *From stargazing to detours: Predicted top travel trends for 2025*)

In the wider wellness sphere, both Booking.com and Skyscanner suggest that health tourism will be on the up in 2025. (Source: *From stargazing to detours: Predicted top travel trends for 2025*)

This is a continuing trend from 2024, as passion for sport influences how people – especially younger ones – explore a destination. (Source: *From stargazing to detours: Predicted top travel trends for 2025*)

The desire to discover new and less-traveled locations is driving a significant trend in adventure travel. In January, 53% of respondents to an ATTA survey noted increased interest in exploring off-the-beaten-path destinations. (Source: Adventure Travel News, *Mid-Year Adventure Travel Trends Update*)

As awareness of animal welfare issues grows, there's an increasing emphasis on responsible wildlife tourism within the adventure travel sector. (Source: Adventure Travel News, *Mid-Year Adventure Travel Trends Update*)

It remains clear that adventure travelers are increasingly seeking deep, authentic cultural interactions as part of their journeys. This trend is characterized by, growing interest in community-based tourism initiatives and increased demand for experiences that provide genuine insights into local ways of life. (Source: Adventure Travel News, *Mid-Year Adventure Travel Trends Update*)

## TARGET MARKET & TARGET AUDIENCE

Based on 2021 reports from Zartico, below are location demographics where our Visitors reside.

### 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

The primary target audience for Visit Elizabeth City includes leisure travelers, with a focus on women aged 25-65. This group spans across three key generational segments:

**Millennials** (ages 25-40): Tech-savvy, experience-driven travelers looking for unique, Instagram-worthy destinations, local culture, and activities that offer both relaxation and adventure.

**Generation X** (ages 41-56): Often family-focused, this group seeks memorable vacations that provide a balance of relaxation, outdoor activities, and cultural experiences, while also appreciating quality dining and local history.

**Boomers** (ages 57-75): Typically looking for more laid-back and leisurely travel experiences, they prioritize comfort, scenic beauty, and accessible activities. Many in this group are also interested in heritage, relaxation, and reconnecting with nature.



## MARKETING GOALS

Visit Elizabeth City works to promote Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County across a variety of channels, including paid, owned, and earned media. This includes digital and print media, broadcast, social media, experiential marketing, content marketing, and more. Visit Elizabeth City's goals are to ensure that messaging is clear, consistent, and resonates with all audiences.

## Goal #1

Increase awareness and consideration of Elizabeth City as a leisure travel destination.

### Strategies:

- Develop a strategic ad campaign and targeted media plan via VEC's agencies of record, Evok and MMGY, to effectively and efficiently reach key audiences.
- Host at least 3 media visits in FY 25-26
- Partner with Visit NC, Outdoor NC, NC Coast Host and other strategic entities to extend reach.
- Create minimum of 1 travel itinerary per month with the intent to show visitors why they need to visit Elizabeth City
- Leverage paid media spending through earned public relations programs.
- Ensure consistent positioning and messaging across all communication channels – including social media and PR efforts.

### Success metrics:

- Advertising impressions.
- Increase unique website visitors
- Increase social media engagement/followers.
- Visitor Guide and e-newsletter conversions.
- Other key performance indicators as developed by Evok and MMGY.

## Goal #2

Utilize VisitElizabethCity.com to extend visitor stays (day trippers and those already planning to stay overnight in Elizabeth City).

### Strategies:

- Utilize “Next Month” in Elizabeth City to showcase upcoming area offerings. Publish content 4 weeks prior to the month mentioned so that it is seen by travelers during their planning cycle.
- Focus content on itinerary building and niche categories to ensure Elizabeth City appeals to diverse interests.
- Ensure that all signature and noteworthy events are added to the website Calendar of Events at least 4 weeks in advance.
- Utilize earned media to share stories through user generated content and proactive and reactive pitches

### Success metrics:

- Create minimum of 1 blog per month focused on what’s happening “Next Month” in Elizabeth City to give visitors inspiration to extend their stay.
- Create minimum of 1 itinerary per month with the intent to show visitors why they need to extend their stay in Elizabeth City.
- Increased traffic in unique visitors and unique pageviews on website.
- Increased number of referrals to partner websites for additional trip planning information.

### Goal #3

Drive occupancy during need periods (December - February)

#### Strategies:

- Create seasonally shifted content, work with partners for advertising and promotional campaigns dedicated to increasing visitation during key need periods.
- Create “value for experience” messaging that targets the price conscious consumer.
- Focus on local interest and events to attract visitors to make a weekend trip to Elizabeth City.
- Develop more user generated content to influence decision making
- Work with local tourism partners to create promotions in shoulder months
- Focus efforts on developing high quality, sharable website content

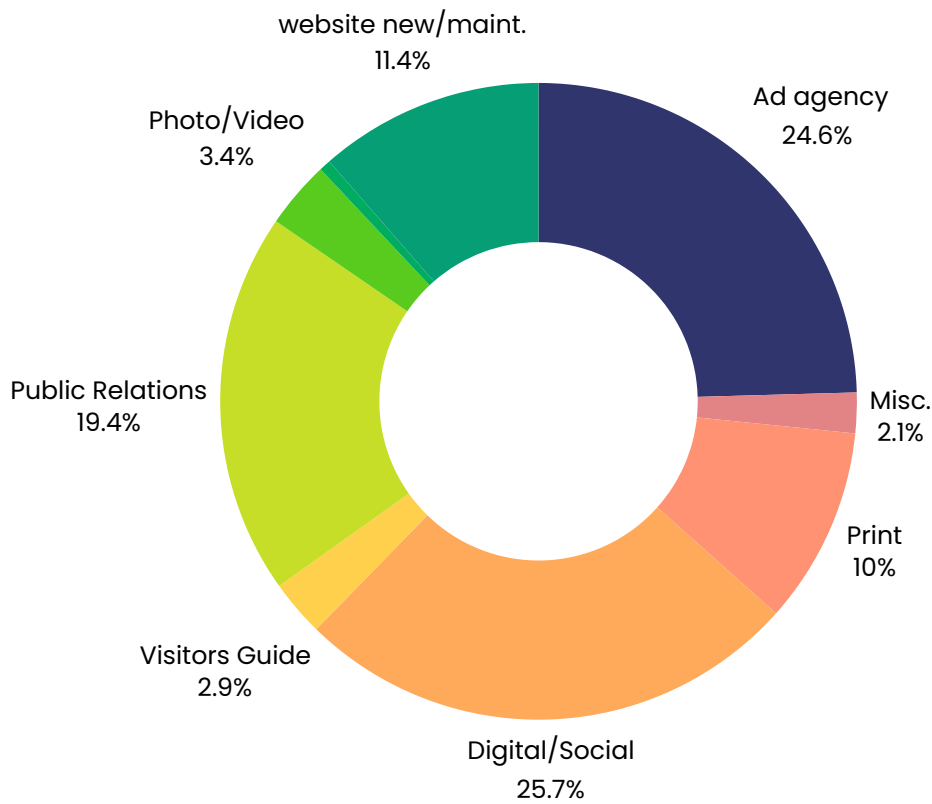
#### Success metrics:

- Creation of new content for real-time engagement to drive interest and awareness to target markets during need periods.
- Creation of custom content pieces to target niche audiences. Increased video views across all platforms.
- Additional success will be measured by the number of impressions from social platforms utilized within the campaign.



# MARKETING BUDGET

The FY 2025-2026 marketing budget of \$350,240.00 incorporates all aspects of marketing and will not necessarily align with the Marketing & Sales departmental budget in the adopted FY 2025-2026 Visit Elizabeth City budget.



<b>Category</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Ad agency	\$86000
Misc.	\$7200
Print	\$35000
Digital/Social	\$90000
Visitors Guide	\$10000
Public Relations	\$68000
Photo/Video	\$12000
Email	\$2040
Website new/ <u>maint.</u>	\$40000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$350,240</b>

