



HILTON HEAD ISLAND-BLUFFTON
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

bluffton

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™

2018-2019

BLUFFTON MARKETING PLAN



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2018-2019

Bluffton Marketing Plan

Mission & Brand Commitment

Mission

Mutually lead our membership and travel and tourism industry by marketing and guiding the Hilton Head Island, Bluffton, Daufuskie Island and Southern Beaufort County destination brand experience to generate sustainable economic vitality.

Brand Commitment

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), in partnership with the Town of Bluffton, embarked on a year-long rebranding study with research partners from the University of South Carolina Beaufort and USC, as well as marketing firm Rawle Murdy Associates in May of 2013. In February 2014, the new brand revealed: *Bluffton Heart of the Lowcountry*, this phrase reflects the deep emotional connection shared by Bluffton residents and the burgeoning business community, and visitors.

Bluffton is the heart of the Lowcountry. It speaks to the town's central location, its lovable characteristics, and that Bluffton is the pumping, economic life force of the Lowcountry. Most importantly, it's a tone and a feeling. When you're in Town of Bluffton, you can see and feel the love. It's real and authentic. It's the heart symbol in your logo, on a window, the pride residents have in their downtown or the warmth shared with strangers at an oyster roast. The Town of Bluffton is a well-kept secret. Nowhere else in the Lowcountry do you feel the love like you do when you are in Bluffton.

Source: Rawle Murdy Associates 2013

Town of Bluffton's Core Distinctions:

- Old Town Charm
- Bluffton Attitude
 - Authentic/Realness
 - Eclectic/Expressive
 - Unique/Pride
 - Town on the Move/Progressive
- Nature
- May River
- Cultural District
- Historic District
- Location
- Experiential Events
- Art and Design
- Thriving Restaurant Scene
- Growing Artisan Community

Bluffton's Guiding Principles:

- Serve as a voice and advocate for the business community
- Maintain the highest ethical standards in all we do
- Work to preserve and enhance the prudent growth, quality of life and character of our region
- Develop collaborative partnerships only in areas where the partnership can accomplish that which our organization cannot do alone
- Develop and implement programs and services that benefit the economic well-being and common interests of our members
- Initiate programs for which there is funding and staffing resources
- Make decisions based on long-term perspective

Source: Rawle Murdy Associates 2013

Current State of Travel, 30,000-Foot View

Travel was on the rise in 2017, thanks to a rebound in domestic business travel.

After edging up at a seasonally-adjusted annual rate of 1.2 percent during the first quarter of the year, U.S. economic growth accelerated to 3.0 percent growth during the latter three quarters of 2017. As a result, U.S. real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 2.3 percent in 2017, which was faster than 2016's 1.5 percent growth. The improvement in 2017 was largely thanks to upticks in business investment and exports.

2017 Highlights

- Consumer spending increased 2.7 percent, the same rate as 2016
- Business investment increased 4.7 percent, compared to a 0.6 percent decrease in 2016
- Residential investment increased 1.7 percent, compared to a 5.5 percent increase in 2016
- Exports increased 3.4 percent, compared to a 0.3 percent decrease in 2016
- Government spending increased 0.1 percent, compared to a 0.8 percent increase in 2016

As the new Administration took office, America's share of domestic lodging searches declined, but also quickly recovered, peaking at 80.1 percent in September. For the full year, 76 percent of lodging searches from U.S. residents, on average, were for destinations within the United States. This share is nearly identical to 2016.

In 2017, Solid consumer spending provided sound footing for domestic leisure travel. Additionally, growth in business investment sparked an improvement in business travel. This set the stage for a solid travel forecast for 2018.

Lay of The Land

Outlook for 2018 - U.S. Travel Forecast

After the U.S. economy accelerated and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 2.3 in 2017, GDP is forecast to increase by 2.7 percent in 2018. Continued solid economic growth will tighten the labor market further, with unemployment expected to average 3.8 percent in 2018. High consumer confidence and sturdy income growth, coupled with reduced tax burdens thanks to the recently-passed tax legislation, will likely have positive effects on both business and leisure travel in 2018. Total travel volume is expected to grow at a healthy pace and travel expenditures are forecast to increase by 5.0 percent in 2018, to nearly \$1.1 trillion. However, running alongside the consumers ability to travel is the lack of consumer loyalty and resistance to use earned time off.

Leisure Travel

Strong economic growth and a tightening labor market are expected to sustain solid growth in domestic leisure travel in 2018, despite some downward pressure caused by rising travel prices (particularly motor fuel), which are expected to keep increasing for a second-consecutive year. With unemployment projected to fall to 3.8 percent (its lowest level since 2000) and consumer confidence on the rise and despite a forecasted Travel Price Index (TPI) growth of 2.8 percent (well above the overall Consumer Price Index (CPI) estimate of 1.8 percent) domestic leisure travel volume is expected to grow at a steady rate of 1.8 percent in 2018, followed by similar growth in subsequent years.

Domestic leisure travel is expected to remain steady in 2018 and beyond, thanks in part to strong consumer confidence and relatively low unemployment. In addition, domestic business travel is expected to retain its strong momentum from 2017, and grow even faster than leisure travel in 2018 and 2019, thanks to an increase in business optimism, higher fixed investment, and strong equity markets. The business community has reacted positively to the current administration, and is already enjoying the benefits of lower corporate taxes.

Business Travel

High business confidence, strong global demand, increasing stock prices and still-low interest rates together with the positive effects of a recently-reduced corporate tax rate bode well for increased business activity in 2018. Industrial production is estimated to grow by 3.6 percent in 2018, and business fixed investment is projected to grow by 6.5 percent.

After declining in 2016 and growing by 1.7 percent in 2017, domestic business travel volume is forecast to accelerate in 2018 and increase by 2.0 percent, outpacing the growth in leisure travel for the first time in over a decade.

International Travel

The U.S. Department of Commerce currently forecasts that total international inbound travel will increase by 3.9 percent in 2018. The opportunity to meet this forecast will be driven by the currency exchange rate and the competition between U.S. carriers and international low-cost carriers with airfare.

Travel Growth

Travel to and within the U.S. grew 2.2 percent in January 2018 compared to January 2017. Again, the U.S. Travel Association, Travel Trends Index (TTI) forecasts continued growth through the first half of 2018, as both domestic and international travel demand contribute to gains.

The Travel Journey

The travel experience journey is a continuum that begins with inspiration, which leads to purchase and sharing that inspires others and repeat visitations. Throughout the process, today's consumers evaluate numerous sources of information and inspiration across multiple devices - from mobile to tablet to desktop often all within the same day. The ability to be nimble as a brand, track the use through multiple paths, and provide personalized content is key to connecting and influencing savvy travelers.

- **Ideas and Inspiration:** The American traveler casts a wide net, looking to family and friends; offline media – including print, broadcast, and outdoor; and search engines and social media posts for ideas and inspiration when starting their travel planning.
- **Option Envisioning:** Travel review websites top the list, followed by search engines and personal recommendations from family and friends. Social media plays a large role in distributing these recommendations. The impact of offline media declines, revealing its role primarily as awareness building, rather than reviews and preference building.
- **Research, Reviews, and Comparisons:** The internet continues at the forefront as travelers explore a variety of online resources to shop for fares and rates. Hotel/resort promotions top the list, followed by search engines and OTAs. Rounding out the top five sources at this stage are airline promotions and travel service provider websites.
- **Purchase:** When travelers are ready to make reservations, travel service provider websites top the list, followed by OTAs and hotel/resort promotions. Search engine results and car rental promotions round out the top five purchase points.
- **Pre-trip Preparation:** The internet is top of mind as traveler's line up their itinerary prior to their trip. Tablets and smartphones are used at this stage to download boarding passes, check out from hotels, read restaurant ratings, purchase attraction/event tickets, and download destination guides.
- **In-Market Travel Experience:** Mobile internet access comes to the forefront as travelers explore a variety of opportunities while they are in-market. Taking photos, accessing social media, looking up restaurants, and finding directions top the list.
- **Post-trip Sharing:** Social media sharing starts when in-market and continues post-trip as photos are shared with family and friends.

Travel Trends, 2018

Generations on the Move – Multi generational Travel

By and large, Americans like to travel with family members—spouses, children, parents, or other family members are the preferred travel companions across generations. Gen Z, the youngest generation of travelers, is far more likely to travel with parents, with 54% saying they usually or always travel with their folks. Parents don't just make great travel companions; they also serve as good financial sponsors. The national study found that 58% of Gen Z respondents' parents paid for trip expenses when they traveled together over the past year.

The phenomenon of parental sponsorship isn't applicable only to Gen Z, with 24% of Millennials also stating parents pay for their travel costs when they go away together.

Culinary Travel

When it comes to travel it always comes down to food at some point, doesn't it? Food tourism has become an emerging trend among travelers everywhere and tourism experts have taken notice.

Culinary experiences are not limited to simply dining out. It includes cooking courses, farm tours and the classic food markets, which make up about 95% of these experiences. These experiences are closely tied to the culture of the location. Many travelers consider it to be one of the best ways to get to know the story of the place they're traveling to and it works as a valuable resource for tourism companies.

“Bleisure Travel”

This trend began a few years ago – the idea of combining a business trip with a leisure trip to strike a balance between work and play.

Business + Leisure = Bleisure.

With Millennials making up a majority of today's workforce, it is predicted that 2018 will be the year that this type of travel becomes the norm based upon the Millennial generations impact on how business is exchanged. Booking.com found that 49% of business travelers are already extending their corporate trips to have more time to enjoy the destination. According to a Chase Marriott Rewards study in 2016, 80% of millennials planned additional personal time around their travels while on a business trip. Forbes has also reported that nearly 60% of companies are now starting to create policies that allow employees to combine vacation time and business travel. Bleisure travel allows employees to have the best of both worlds. They can still be high achievers in their careers while also getting many chances to travel and take mini-breaks in exciting destinations.

Wellness Travel

The wellness travel sector continues to grow at a rapid pace. People's daily lives are consumed by emails, text messages, social media, and the strain of juggling work and personal responsibilities, leaving little time to focus on their well-being. They want a trip that allows them to return home feeling fresh, rested and rejuvenated. Many trips are now centered around spiritual, emotional or physical well-being.

Types of wellness travel:

Mindful Movement: With increased awareness of the connection between the mind and body, a shift toward mindful exercises is happening.

Happy Retreats: Travel is inspired by the desire to experience something that will have positive psychological impacts. Activities like morning hikes, beach yoga and meditation will work their way onto more itineraries.

Community Wellness: The wellness tourism industry places emphasis on social responsibility and takes steps to give back to communities. By utilizing locally made commodities, supporting local farmers and implementing sustainable practices, travel companies focus more and more on the overall well-being of communities around the world.

A Shift to Domestic Destinations

Domestic travel is on the rise. Domestic vacations now make up 85 percent of American vacations, up 7 points from last year. That means that 13.9 million more vacations were taken within the U.S. compared to outside the country.

Travelers anticipate that 40 percent of their domestic travel this year will be to a new destination, creating opportunity within the U.S. for travel suppliers to influence travel among new guests and visitors. And, those vacations are more likely to be a road trip, as 39 percent of U.S. leisure travel in the last 12 months included a road trip – up 17 points from the year prior.

Attractions Influence Where Travelers Go

As these travelers increase their domestic vacations, attractions are becoming more relevant in influencing where those vacations are taken. More than half of all vacations (53 percent) included at least one visit to an attraction last year. And of those 41.5 million households, 68 percent say that they chose those attractions before their vacations began. This means that travelers are building attractions into their travel planning instead of making the decision while in the destination.

And, with Millennial families on the rise, one might assume that theme parks and amusement parks create the most interest among attractions. However, this year's research indicates that the top-ranking attractions are more educational and culturally based, with art and history museums (65 percent), aquariums (59 percent) and science museums (56 percent) coming before theme parks (55 percent).

Invest in Segmentation and Personalization

Investing in tighter segmentation and personalized content, leveraging data and insights across multiple audience clusters to maximize marketing spend. Ultimately, this custom approach to segmentation will drive incremental growth with the proper messaging during this industry slowdown.

2018-2019 MARKETING PLAN SOURCES

*MMGY Global: 2018 Portrait of Affluent Traveler
The Global Traveler
United States Travel Association (USTA)*

Closer to Home

The Visitor & Convention Bureau will position The Town of Bluffton as the ultimate escape filled with genuine experiences of all kinds. For those looking to travel and immerse themselves in a new vacation experience, Bluffton is where they will find historical traditions, cultural experiences, natural beauty and culinary delights.

The Visitor & Convention Bureau has partnered closely with the Town of Bluffton's leadership team to identify these pillars of marketing for the 2018-2019 year:

- History
- Arts
- Cultural
- Culinary
- Natural Beauty

Marketing tactics and strategies will focus on the following markets:

- Affluent consumers visiting Old Town Bluffton for cultural experiences, historic tours, shopping and culinary activities.
- Overnight stays in Bluffton for new visitors as well as repeat visitors to the region.
- Group Tour Planners and their customers with interest in Southeastern destinations, particularly as a central location for hub and spoke coastal, historic, shopping, cultural, heritage, cuisine, and environmental tours.

The Visitor & Convention Bureau invests in destination digital content management, qualified staff, content managers/editors and a professional, well executed public relations and digital promotions program. These investments are key to operating a robust destination marketing program in today's competitive and cluttered travel communications environment – particularly with limited funding available for the paid media space. This aspect of our work has become increasingly important as new communications channels emerge and evolve to give consumers more choices, more channels and more content.

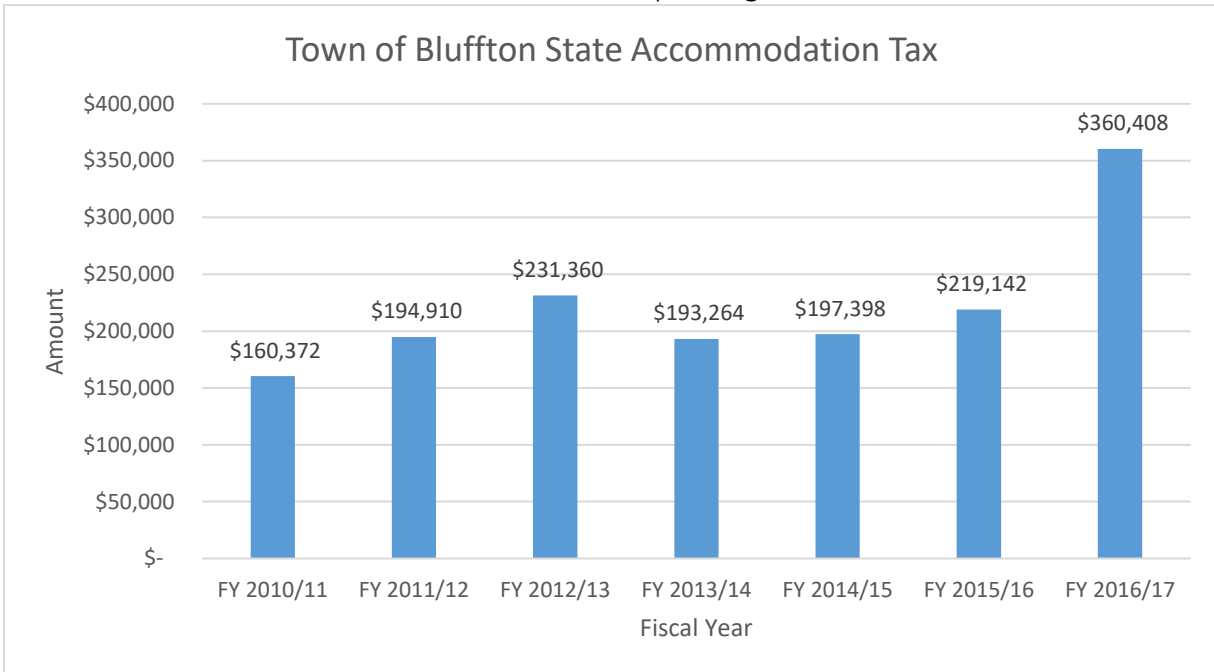
In managing the destination marketing program for the Town of Bluffton, the Visitor & Convention Bureau has expanded our branding efforts through buys in regional and national publications and digital platforms in key drive and fly markets targeting travel and cultural enthusiasts with a household income of \$150,000+.

As the Town of Bluffton's DMO we are committed to the following:

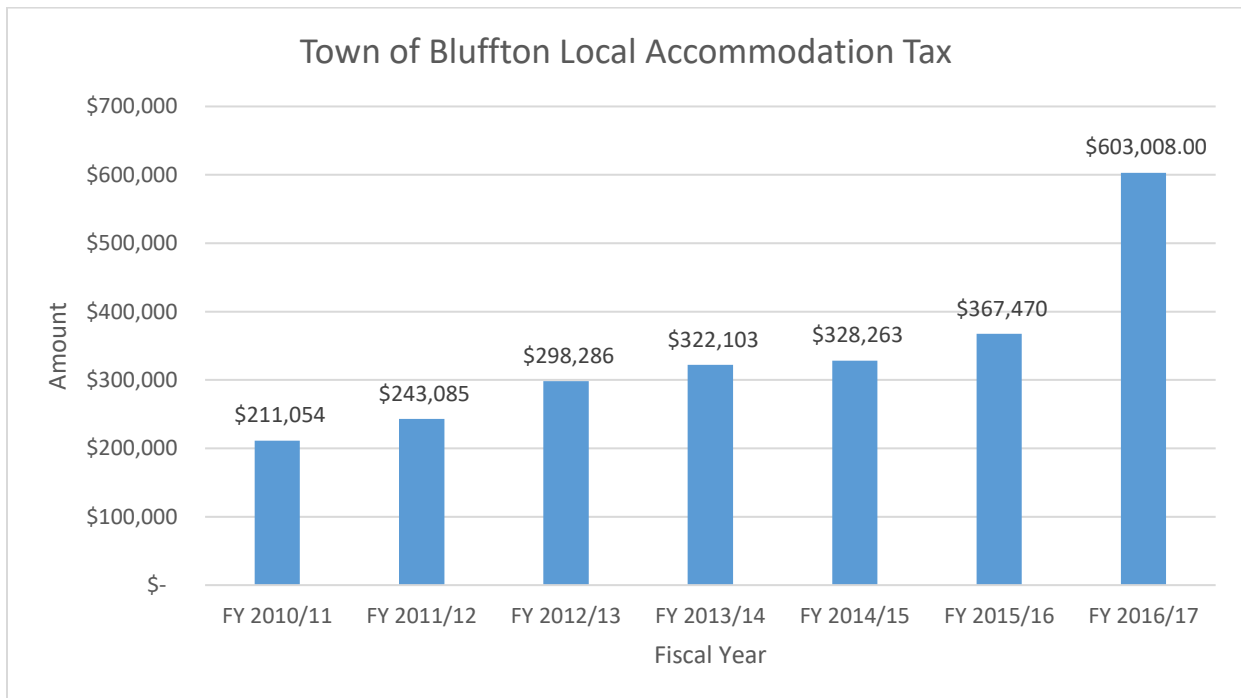
- Support the destination's brand position throughout all marketing programs.
- Increase overnight visitation in Southern Beaufort County.
- Increase visitor's expenditures at Beaufort County attractions, retail and dining facilities, particularly in Bluffton. Thus, increase Bluffton and Beaufort County's

attraction, hospitality, and sales taxes collected.

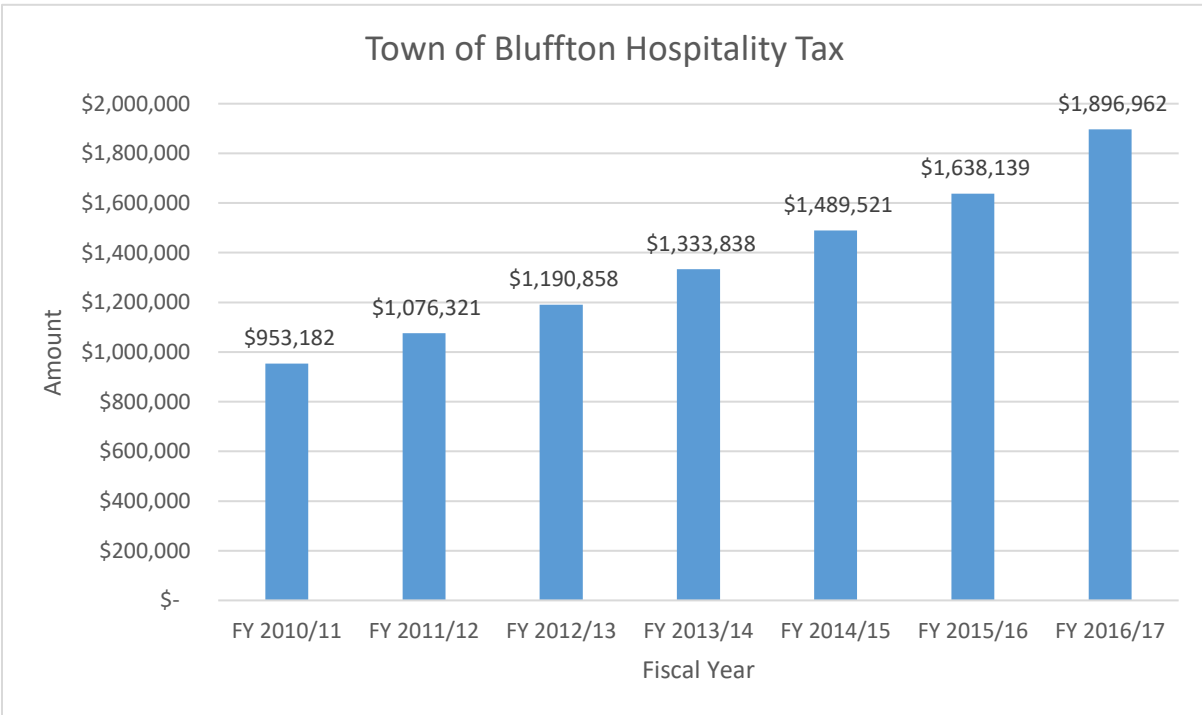
- Goal for 2018-2019 is 2% overall visitor spending increase and visitor tax base.



Source: Town of Bluffton



Source: Town of Bluffton



Source: Town of Bluffton

Marketing Strategies & Programs (1-8)

1. Bluffton Quarterly E-newsletter & Insider Program:

Bluffton Quarterly E-newsletter: Each year, we set a robust content calendar of monthly (and sometimes bi-monthly) e-newsletters around themes to highlight key seasonal events and promotion of our membership products/services. We also will continue to send emails/e-promos that cross market the whole destination to the entire *Insider* database.

Some of the themes include:

- Historical Travel
- Outdoor Adventures
- Culinary Travel and Events
- Cultural & Heritage Travel
- Marquee Events & Festivals

Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$1,969
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$3,031</u>
Total Budget:	\$5,000

Bluffton Blog

We will continue to grow our destination email marketing distribution list, by encouraging a strong call to action in our messaging on all platforms. Visitors will sign up to become an Insider and receive our bi-monthly blog posts, and e-newsletters.

Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$443
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$667</u>
Total Budget:	\$1,100

2. Media Partnerships: Coastal Living and Garden & Gun

The 2018-19 leisure media partners were chosen based upon their brand reach and ability to target different segments of interest within their subscriber base, offline and online. In addition to this effort the Visitor and Convention Bureau will support each media partnership by ensuring our media is placed to compliment and amplify the Bluffton brand reach during each specific in-market campaign timeframe (e.g. social, e-newsletter and digital ads).

Both Coastal Living and Garden & Gun compliment the Bluffton vibe and will work to reach that ultimate Bluffton visitor. Partnering with these publications will lead us to our goal of positioning Bluffton in a way that drives conversion and overnight visitation.



Coastal Living celebrates the best of Southern life sharing authentic experiences and Southern culture through core editorial pillars that include Home & Garden, Style & Beauty, Travel and Food. While the *Coastal Living* audience, stretches from the rugged rocky shores of Connecticut to the white sandy beaches of California, the reader is initially drawn to the brand for its beautiful view. They linger because the content, like the always sunny, soul-soothing coast itself, it is their happy place.

Their diverse brand loyalists agree: “coastal” is a state of mind. From inspiring design and decorating to gorgeous, blissful getaways to delicious, made-for-entertaining recipes, *Coastal Living* offers its audience an escape to the good life-to be enjoyed barefoot, of course. *Coastal Living* is the perfect platform for our heart of the Lowcountry – Bluffton.

Coastal Living Digital Audience

Website

Total Unique Visitors: 728,000

Total Unique Pageviews: 5,000,000

Mobile

Total Unique Visitors: 486,000

Mobile Exclusive Visitors: 469,000

Unique Pageviews: 3,000,000

Tablet

Total Unique Visitors: 145,000

Unique Pageviews: 827,000

Social Media

Total Audience: 2,217,833

Facebook, 1,791,578

Twitter, 62,276

Instagram, 262,000

Pinterest, 101,979

Digital User Profile

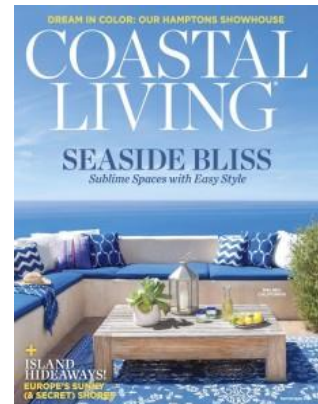
85% Female/ 15% Male

Median HHI

\$88,581

Median Age

49



October, Coastal Living's Annual Food Issue

Seafood is a growing component of the American diet. It's healthy, easy to prepare, and embodies the "locally sourced" culinary trend in an organic way. Furthermore, gathering around a large table with family and friends is an integral component of life at the coast. *Coastal Living* celebrates National Seafood Month with their second annual food issue. Highlights include: The Ultimate Sea-Foodie Road trip; the Best Coastal Restaurants; A Food Lover's Dream Escape and Foodie Faceoffs.

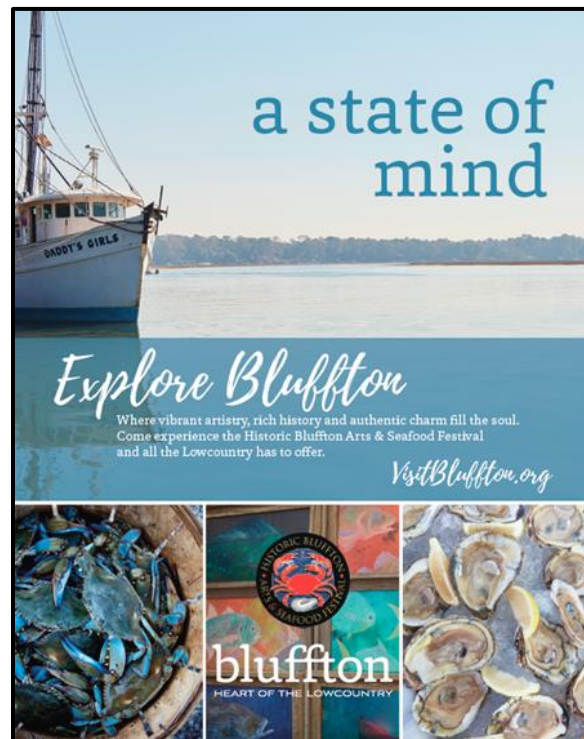
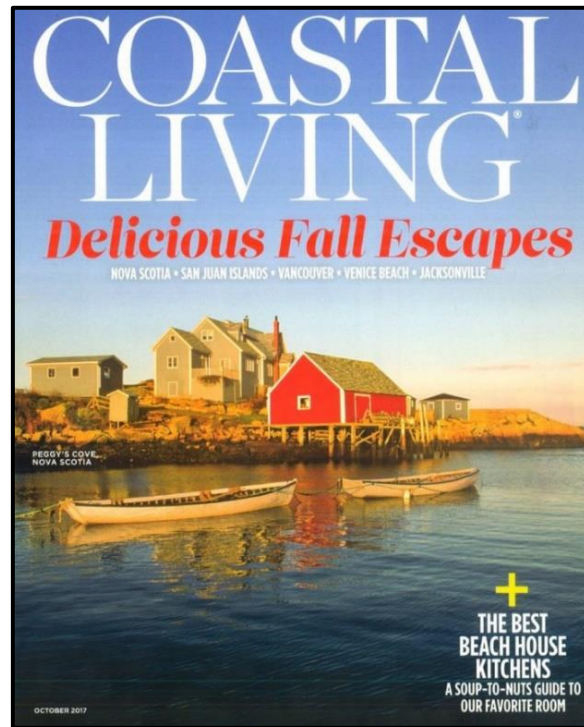
The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) will develop a multi-layer digital marketing campaign utilizing *Coastal Living's* on-line and social media assets. The partnership will highlight the Historic Arts and Seafood Festival and touch upon the unique-ness of Bluffton and its surrounding attributes. We will look to develop a campaign showcasing the Historic Arts and Seafood Festival, driving fall travel and website visitation.

Campaign Details:

- 100% Share of Voice (SOV)
- High-impact homepage roadblocks
- Sponsorship of Coastal Living e-newsletter
- Targeted media to relevant content on desktop, tablet and mobile platforms
- Run of Site on desktop, tablet and mobile platforms

2017 *Coastal Living* October Food Issue

Partnership with Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival



GARDEN & GUN

Garden & Gun is the only magazine that moves from the sporting life to lush land and gardens, from architectural pursuits to adventurous travel, from food and drink to visual splendor. Garden & Gun is an idea about how to live a life that is more engaged with the land, the literature, the music, the arts, the traditions, and the food of the South. It is about appreciating the richness of the South and knowing how that understanding can enrich one's life and translate beyond Southern geography. It is about a life well lived.

A rapidly growing community of readers look to Garden & Gun for the magic of the South - whether their passion is the sporting culture, protecting the land, gardening, travel, the arts, or food and drink. Readers hail from all fifty states and know that Garden & Gun is relevant no matter where they live.

Website

2 million+ page views/month
500,000+ unique visitors/month
3.52 average page views/visit
Monthly visits 700,000+

Mobile

Total Unique Visitors: 486,000
60% of users are through mobile
Mobile Exclusive Visitors: 475,000/month
Unique Pageviews: 2 million/month

Median HHI

\$370,800

Social Media

Total Audience: 786,000
Facebook, 381,000 fans
Twitter, 109,000
Instagram, 253,000
Pinterest, 43,000

Digital User Profile

54% Male / 46% Female

Median Age

35+

Garden and Gun Campaign: Discover Bluffton – Social Influencer Program

Strategy:

G&G in partnership with the Visitor & Convention Bureau and Town of Bluffton will produce a digital and social program featuring a weekend escape through the lens of a Southern influencer, positioning Bluffton, South Carolina, as the ultimate destination for family vacations or getaways with friends.

Details:

- G&G secures one (1) Southern influencer from a Bluffton target market who has a large following and strong photography skills with a focus on lifestyle and travel
- The influencer will plan a trip to Bluffton for two (2) nights and three (3) days to experience the town's wealth of culture, dining, and outdoor activities

- G&G collaborates with Bluffton to curate the trip itinerary supporting its 2018 efforts, highlighting their year-round activities and unique qualities that make it a top destination
- A G&G travel writer uses the influencer's recap to write a story about the trip, appealing to the G&G audience and focusing on the specified efforts
- One (1) sponsored online article featuring photos from the weekend and the custom narrative acts as a travel guide to Bluffton with suggestions and tips from the influencer and G&G
- The online article drives readers to Bluffton's website to read more details about the various destinations and activities highlighted in the story

Campaign Summary:

- One (1) sponsored article on GardenandGun.com written by G&G
- 100% SOV of display ad units surrounding sponsored content for up to two (2) months
- High visibility site promotion for up to two (2) months
- Sponsored Edition Talk of the South email newsletter
- Paid editorial social media plan
- Influencer creates one (1) blog post on their site about the trip (if applicable)
- Bluffton receives usage rights to hi-res assets from the influencer
- Timing: Fall 2018

Media Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$37,414
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$74,586</u>
Total Budget:	\$112,000

3. Destination Photo & Video Shoot

In today's world, imagery and video speak volumes to the consumer. Therefore, it is a priority to ensure the most current destination imagery and video content that showcases Historic Old Town Bluffton, Calhoun Street Promenade, the natural beauty of the May River, recent expansions at Montage Palmetto Bluff, cultural and historical sites that allow us to visually showcase the destination.

Some of the considerations in planning the photo shoot include:

- Capture Bluffton's new products and amenities, cultural district and new neighborhoods
- Include ethnic and age diversity
- Feature experienced, professional and natural looking models that portray our target demographics, and supplement with locals
- Shoot in a high-level DPI format to create high quality images that will translate well into a variety of formats

- 360° Video and drone footage

Time Frame: Bi-Annually – winter/spring & summer/fall to capture community growth and developments.

Photo and Video Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$5,000
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$5,000</u>
Total Budget:	\$10,000

4. Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Social Media & Content Hub

The Visitor & Convention Bureau plans to continue the program for expanding and broadening our organic keyword search engine rankings on Google, Yahoo, YouTube and Bing for a targeted list of key search terms that best correlate with Bluffton’s target visitor and visitor experiences. The VCB will also be implementing a custom outreach program to increase the overall authority for the web platform, which will influence search rankings.

Social Content Strategy

@VisitHiltonHead, the host handle that supports The Town of Bluffton destination social media efforts, continues to see growth year-over-year on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest.

In 2017, referrals from social media increased by 28% and our key goals (clicks through to member sites) did very well. Our Facebook following grew by 38%, our Twitter following grew by 13%, our Instagram following grew by 37%, and our Pinterest following grew by 5%.

Both Instagram and Pinterest platforms showed significant growth in 2017. This has led to a strategy shift of moving away from Twitter as a platform for travel and tourism, as it is now seen as an outlet for breaking news and political information. We will build on the growth of Pinterest and Instagram through paid media, as well, in order to ensure growth on these channels throughout 2018-19. Investing in paid tactics with the three best-serving social platforms, providing a holistic approach to social media through user generated content (UGC), the continued promotion of the use hashtag “#LowcountryLife, the publishing of evergreen blog posts and furthering the eNewsletter audience through calls to action focusing on email opt-ins and experiences will be key tactics for 2018-19 in the social space for the overarching @visithiltonhead brand.

Referrals from all social channels grew in 2017; a reverse of the declining trend that was seen among social channels in 2016. However, due to Facebook changing the algorithm in 2017 to serve less organic posts from business pages to followers' news feeds, organic engagement has seen a decline on this platform for the brand. That said, our approach to investing into paid posts on the platform have allowed for the brand to see continued year-over-year growth even with the set backs presented by the new algorithm. We will continue to invest in paid social on both Facebook and Instagram (now owned by Facebook) in order to ensure our brand relevance with these channels.

Content about Bluffton, SC, should focus on its charm as a quintessential Southern town, its convenient location to both Charleston and Savannah, its position as a place for great local cuisine, its appeal as a romantic wedding destination, a thriving arts and culture community rich in history. These content topics have been determined through routine tracking of the most successful content and will continue to be adjusted as we identify new trends in data.

We will work to further the Town of Bluffton's social platform and reach to visitors with an Instagram specific strategy of one post a week featuring destination images and copy that resonate best with the audience looking to discover or discover more Town of Bluffton. The Town of Bluffton's social media hashtag will also be used in these posts to further assist and help the Town "own" the hashtag "#LoveBluffton."

Content Hub: Lowcountry Life

The Lowcountry Life content hub provides the opportunity to publish original content specific to Bluffton, as well as to include mentions of Bluffton in blog posts about food, family travel, and other relevant categories. The Bluffton blog will feature authentic storytelling created by local writers, while the Lowcountry Life blog overall will feature well-written evergreen content that is optimized for SEO. This content will further engage users and help drive them deeper into the website. The main photo gallery of user-generated content will regularly feature photos and videos taken in Bluffton, which will be paired with calls to action driving users to the Bluffton website. Additionally, the Bluffton website will feature a smaller user-generated content gallery of strictly Bluffton-area photos and videos.

Other possible considerations:

- Targeting local residents who are passionate promoters of the destination
- Engaging with sentimental visitors who make a tradition of vacationing in the Lowcountry every year

Primary Campaigns

- Invite relevant bloggers and social media influencers to visit Bluffton and attend events

- Host a blogger in Bluffton and have him or her host a social media takeover of the @visithiltonhead Instagram channel
- Engage with Bluffton visitors and residents who share photos and videos of Bluffton on social media and cultivate relationships
- Create engaging Instagram ad campaigns centered around the unique appeal of Bluffton as a travel destination

Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$5,187
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$10,413</u>
Total Budget:	\$15,600

5. Search Engine Marketing (SEM) PPC Campaign

Paid Search is the most fundamental digital channel and provides a foundation for nearly all digital marketing initiatives. Our deep expertise and experience would be directly applied to drive outstanding results for the destination. The primary objective of the search strategy is to drive link-outs to partners by utilizing advances in Search Marketing. This is a flexible working media plan to be optimized over time based on performance, business needs, and seasonality.

Success is determined through two metrics, Cost Per Click (CPC) and website visits. The management of these key performance indicators (KPIs) is done regularly, adjusting and flexing as the business dictates.

Strategy

Leverage lower funnel, direct response tactics such as Branded Search and Remarketing to reach valued consumers and ultimately increase sales of local Bluffton businesses.

Location

- Drive and Fly Markets
- Domestic Travelers

Direct Response

Strategies will also be in place to capture searchers in the lower funnel who are closer to converting. Tactics used here will center around Branded Search and Display Remarketing.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs for direct response strategies will be:

- Conversions
- Website Visits
- Conversion Rate
- Cost Per Click
- Assisted Conversions

Search, Brand

- Bluffton + Things to Do
- Things to Do, Restaurants, Tours, Shopping, Events, Farmers Market, Biking, Arts and Culture, Spas, Health and Wellness, Catering, History and Museums
- Bluffton Brand
- Getting Here, Hotels/Resorts, Bluffton SC, Daufuskie

Remarketing Lists for Search Ads

Tailor bids to those who have previously visited the site or are in CRM audiences and are actively searching for relevant keywords on Google:

- Increase bids based on visit: 3 days > 5 days > 14 days > 30 days
- Increase bids to CRM audiences

Display Remarketing

- All visitors who have been to the site in the last 90 days
- Visitors of specific pages on the site

Military Marketing

Maintaining our presence in the military market by partnering with Military Media Inc. which has helped identify key bases within the criteria given as well as identified print and online advertising opportunities that will speak directly to the military personnel and their families while on base. Each base has their own print and online communication channels. The military consumer, both active duty and military families, stand apart from the traditional consumer we usually speak to. However, personnel and their families are a consumer segment that fit well against the consumer profile we look for when choosing our marketing programs.

Who is the military consumer:

- Receive 30 days of paid vacation every year
- 100% employed
- Discretionary income for travel-Benefits for military families include allowances for housing, food, free medical insurance, clothing, life insurance, moving expenses, education. With the bulk of their living expenses paid, they have funds available for leisure travel.
- 22.5% of active military personal are between 26-30 years of age
- 35% of active military personal are married and have children

Strategy

- To target market active military and military families
- Seek bases within a 10-hour drive from the destination
- Market to this consumer through their base communication platforms
- Use an online/ off-line approach to ensure tracking and R.O.I. is available
- Brand awareness focusing on fall and winter travel

Base Test Locations

- Ft. Gordon, Augusta GA
- Ft. Benning, Columbus, GA
- Robins AFB, Warner-Robins, GA
- Ft. Bragg, Fayetteville, NC

We will work to develop digital content to drive the visitor to the visitbluffton.org site over a three-month time period with a mix of digital banners over main pages and travel sections if available.

Budget:

Bluffton DMO: \$20,578

Beaufort County DMO: \$45,452

Total Budget: **\$66,030**

6. Group Sales & Trade Shows

Bluffton continues to grow and position itself as a group destination more so now than any point in the last decade. The variety and quality of experiences for group visitors has never been more diverse, offering a robust arts, historical, arts and cultural scene, with growing culinary experiences. The VCB will continue to promote Bluffton while attending numerous travel trade shows throughout the country.

Group Tour



Group Tour remains an important market to maintain current and new relationships Bluffton continues to be an attractive destination for a hub and spoke opportunity. With Savannah 40 miles away, Beaufort 30 miles and Charleston just under 2 hours, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton region is ideal for groups to stay

in one location for up to a week, and focus on day trips from one central area. We intend to draw group tour visitors by:

- Building relationships with tour operators through ABA
- Leverage group tour by hosting a FAM trip to potential group planners/operators
- Educate our partners on what it means to be a group friendly community
- Offer tiered pricing/packaging attractions with accommodations
- Expand promotion of group experiences on our website and special group ticket pricing

Every January, welcomes the travel and tourism community to the first conference of the year, the industry's premier business event – Marketplace. More than 3,500 tour operators, suppliers and exhibitors come together to kick off a new year of business opportunity and growth. Marketplace is an active, vibrant forum of buyers and sellers where business gets done. With more than 140,000 pre-scheduled appointments and 900 pre-qualified operators, Marketplace offers a year's worth of sales meetings in one week. And with legendary networking and social events, attendees turn conversations from the conference floor into long-term business relationships. Couple this with leading education seminars and the industry's largest exhibit hall and marketplace is unmatched as the best industry event each year.

In January 2018, The Visitor & Convention Bureau staff attended the ABA Marketplace, and took advantage of up to 60 pre-scheduled appointments with pre-qualified operators to promoting the South Carolina Lowcountry Region.

Full Service Resort/Hotels Initiatives

Connect Marketplace

Connect Marketplace, an annual education conference and appointment-only trade show, is a highly respected event that brings together the most active planners, suppliers and experts in corporate, association and specialty association meeting markets for three days of general sessions, roundtables, workshops, pre-set appointments and networking. The appointment-only trade show is the business marketplace, where RFPs are placed, dates are secured and relationships are developed for future business. The focus on education at Connect Marketplace allows you to brush up on your skills, learn about trending topics, get great business advice from speakers, and enjoy networking with other industry professionals.

IMEX America

Meet over 3,000 corporate, incentive, association and third-party planners experiencing IMEX America's refreshing new model for doing business.

The Size and Scale of the Hosted Buyer Program

The largest in the industry in North America, this Hosted Buyer Program qualifies and brings key buyers to the show, with IMEX America covering travel and accommodations. This program guarantees thousands of highly qualified buyers from the association, corporate sectors.

Online Scheduling System

This convenient system lets you reach out before the show and get business lined up with people you want to see at IMEX America. With tens of thousands of appointments made in advance, everyone comes to the show focused on serious business.

The Number and Depth of Industry Partnerships

Industry associations have shown unprecedented confidence in IMEX America. Examples include a Strategic Partnership with MPI, (our Premier Education Provider) endorsement by DMAI, Site and ICCA, an Industry Partnership with PCMA and close ties with every major association including ASAE and the U.S. Travel Association.

The Scale and Quality of Education Programs

IMEX America hosts an unprecedented number of industry educational events. Participants can choose from hundreds of lively learning sessions and seminars throughout the trade show, all at no cost.

Dedicated Attention to Association and Corporate Buyers

Association Focus, a “conference within a conference” on Smart Monday, is dedicated to educating association executives and is followed by an Association Evening, a great event for socializing and networking.

ConferenceDirect Annual Partners Meeting

Being a preferred partner, it includes participation at their most important Associate Networking educational event. Involves a reverse tradeshow format where the attendee gets quality time with each ConferenceDirect Associate and attendance to training sessions on sales development.

HelmsBriscoe Annual Partners Meeting

HelmsBriscoe allows member participation at their most important Associate Networking educational event. Designed in a reverse tradeshow format where the attendee gets quality time with each HelmsBriscoe Associate and attendance to training sessions on sales development.

Association Executives of North Carolina (AENC)

The AENC Trade Show is your source for information and contacts on meeting venues, programs products and services. Spend time with over 200 exhibitors and learn how they can help you bring more value and be more efficient. Meet with others from a wide variety of organizations and share ideas as you go through the show.

South Carolina Society of Association Executives (SCSAE)

SCSAE's Trade Show is your ONE stop location for meeting and greeting with association CEOs/Executive Directors, Meeting Planners, Membership Directors, Communication Directors and Corporate Meeting Planners. Association professionals can meet with more than 70

exhibitors including hoteliers, convention centers, technology vendors and more.

SportsTravel Magazine's TEAMS '18 Tradeshow

TEAMS: TRAVEL, EVENTS AND MANAGEMENT IN SPORTS, is the world's leading conference and expo for the sports-event industry. Presented by SportsTravel magazine, TEAMS '18 will be held October 2018, in Louisville, KY. Launched in 1998, TEAMS attract more than one thousand attendees including CEOs, executive directors and event managers from sports organizations as well as representatives from sports commissions and convention bureaus, corporate sponsors, event suppliers and other hospitality industry opinion leaders. Now in its 18th year, TEAMS has helped define the sports-event and appointment-based trade show industries.

Hilton Head Island – Bluffton Visitor & Convention Bureau's 2018-2019 Trade Shows

<u>Tradeshow</u>	<u>Market</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Location</u>	
Connect Marketplace	Corp/Assn	Aug./2018	Salt Lake City, UT	
IMEX America	Corporate	Oct./2018	Las Vegas, NV	
Sports Travel's TEAMS Expo	Sports	Oct./2018	Louisville, KY	
AENC	State Assn	Dec./2018	Raleigh, NC	
SCSAE	State Assn	Jan./2019	Columbia, SC	
American Bus Assn.	Group Tour	Jan./ 2019	Louisville, KY	\$2,380
ConferenceDirect APM	Third Party	April/2019	TBD	
HelmsBriscoe APM	Third Party	May/2019	TBD	

Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$-0-
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$2,380</u>
Total Budget:	\$2,380

*Remainder of trade shows listed are funded by the Town of Hilton Head Island

7. Collateral and Fulfillment

2019 Vacation Planner

The 2019 Official Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Vacation Planner, our comprehensive guide to what to see and do, is our primary print fulfillment piece. We receive many online, as well as media and phone inquiries, and distribute the planner to state and local welcome centers, along with trade shows and promotional events with media.

In today's more visual world, telling a story through pictures and graphics appeals more to our target demographic. To further entice these target markets, we have redesigned the Vacation Planner so visitors can better visualize their vacations and discover what Hilton Head Island, Bluffton and Daufuskie Island all have to offer. This is an important element to the "Travel Planning Journey" experience mentioned earlier in the plan.

Our area's natural beauty is what sets the low country region apart from other communities. By tapping into our portfolio of stunning photography and combining it with updated content, we have transformed the Vacation Planner into a "look book" destination discovery piece so visitors can imagine themselves experiencing all things Lowcountry.

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

Quantity: 100,000 printed

Budget:

Bluffton DMO: \$10,275

Beaufort County DMO: \$15,815

Total Budget: \$26,090

2018 Vacation Planner- Examples of Bluffton Coverage

CHART YOUR COURSE • BLUFFTON

TEN THINGS TO DO IN BLUFFTON

Explore the heart of the Lowcountry.

By Linda Lanier



Church of the Cross

48 • 2018 OFFICIAL VACATION PLANNER



BLUFFTON is a charming village resting in its moss-draped fury on the banks of the May River. Many Blufftonians will tell you that "Bluffton is a state of mind" and indeed, it is — a state where the sun shines brightly, the streets are shaded by old oak trees, and locals and visitors alike enjoy passing the time in a rocking chair on a front porch with a pitcher of cold sweet tea (or maybe a stronger libation.) Here's what to see and do.

01 Eat at the **Farmers Market of Bluffton**. On Thursday afternoons on Calhoun Street, find locally grown produce, stewed tomatoes, gumbo, fried oysters and shrimp, barbecue, breads, cakes, cookies, ice cream, coffee, boiled peanuts — should we keep going? Music is also on the menu and the occasional dancing breaks out!

02 Admire the **Church of the Cross Anglican**. This graceful example of Southern Carpenter Gothic architecture was built in 1854 and escaped burning during the Civil War. The cypress-built church, listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, is at the end of Calhoun Street and boasts magnificent expansive views of the May River. There is a docent on staff to provide tours of the sanctuary and grounds.

03 Walk through history at **Heyward House**. Built in 1841, Heyward House is one of the few structures that escaped the federal gunboat attack on Bluffton during the Civil War, and it looks much as it did 170 years ago. Notice the "summer kitchen," used for cooking during the hot months. There is a daily, docent-led walking tour of this house and other historical sites in Old Town Bluffton.

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CHART YOUR COURSE • BLUFFTON

04 Collect art at **SOBA (Society of Bluffton Artists)**. This gallery at the corner of Church and Calhoun streets showcases more than 100 artists with pieces for every taste. The Bluffton galleries welcome art lovers for year-round Art Walks.

05 Throw a pot with **Jacob Preston**, who enjoys a much-deserved reputation as "Bluffton's tallest potter." Don't miss Bluffton's biggest rosemary bush, which grows right outside his studio at 10 Church Street. His works reflect the deep blues and marshy browns of the Lowcountry, and his bowls make especially lovely gifts.

06 Picnic in **Pritchard Pocket Park**. Bring a well-stocked cooler with pimento cheese, potato salad, and pulled pork to this river-side green space with lovely views of the May River.

07 Shop at **Calhoun Street boutiques**. A half-mile long stretch, ending at the May River, Calhoun Street is the center of Bluffton's shopping district with boutiques selling everything from designer women's and children's clothing to shoes, jewelry, wine, and books. **Spartina 449**, the chic handbag and accessories line, has its flagship store in the heart of Old Town.

08 Shuck an oyster at **Bluffton Oyster Co.**, which has been owned and operated by the Toomer family for more than 100 years. Toomer's oysters are all plucked from the banks of the May River and shucked by hand. Their shrimp, mussels, and blue crabs also make a tasty lunch or dinner.

09 Have breakfast at **Corner Perk**, loved by locals for its rich roasted coffees and enticing pastries and sandwiches. The upstairs **Roasting Room** is a popular venue for live music.

10 Sip afternoon tea at **The Cottage** for a restoring "pick-me-up" during a day of shopping, gallery hopping, and sightseeing. Its afternoon tea offers all the favorites — scones with clotted cream, sweets, and savories.

48 • 2018 OFFICIAL VACATION PLANNER

ASK A LOCAL

LARRY TOOMER
Owner, **Bluffton Oyster Company**
& **Toomer's Bluffton Seafood House**
blufftonoyster.com

Q: What makes the seafood in the Lowcountry second-to-none?

A: Anytime you can catch shrimp, oysters, or blue crabs from the pristine waters of the Lowcountry and eat it within 24 hours, it's undoubtedly the ultimate definition of freshness. We're fortunate here to be able to harvest **some of the finest seafood in the world** and have it for dinner the same night.

Clockwise from left: Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival; Larry Toomer; The Store; "Bluffton is a State of Mind" sign; Farmers Market of Bluffton; Local Farmers Market vendor







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8. Budgeted research programs for FY 2018-2019

Research provides powerful information to evolve and perfect the Visitor & Convention Bureau marketing strategy. Throughout the year we will continue to extract detailed reports and information that guides us in understanding our visitors. These research programs will lead to marketing and advertising initiatives aimed at growing the tourism industry for Bluffton. The following programs will be ongoing:

- Maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal.
- Smith Travel Research (STR) weekly and monthly reports which measures lodging occupancy, average room rates, room demand and RevPAR for hotels only. Includes monthly comparative report with competitive destinations.
- V-Trip Monthly Home & Villa lodging reports on occupancy, average room rates, RevPAR and six month forward booking pace reports. Two-source V-Trip report crunches back end Smith Travel hotel data with V-Trip back end home and villa data to produce a monthly destination report on total destination accommodations tax paying occupancy, average room rates and RevPAR.
- Monthly and YTD Visitor Traffic and Segmentation Reports by USCB's Dr. John Salazar, PH. D.
- Subscription to the U.S. Travel Association's (USTA) Travel Monitor Program and related reports.

Budget:

Bluffton DMO:	\$6,597
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$10,153</u>
Total Budget:	\$16,750

Marketing Plan Appendix

➤ 2018-2019 Budget

➤ 2017 Digital Performance Re-Cap

2018-2019 Budget

	VCB TOTALS	Paid by Bluffton DMO	Paid by Beaufort Co DMO	Paid by Beaufort Co DMO
	(Bluffton & BC)		(Bluffton & Southern BC)	(Daufuskie Isl. Programs)
Revenues				
Town of Bluffton DMO	135,000	135,000		
Southern Beaufort County DMO	260,000		234,000	26,000
Total Revenues	395,000	135,000	234,000	26,000
Expenses				
Research & Planning	16,750	6,597	10,153	
Sub-total	16,750	6,597	10,153	0
Social Media				
Twitter/Instagram/Influencers	10,600	4,175	6,425	
Content Hub / Low country Life	5,000	1,012	1,558	2,430
Sub-total	15,600	5,187	7,983	2,430
Digital Marketing				
SEM Marketing	46,250	15,261	23,489	7,500
Website SEO	7,400	2,914	4,486	
Quarterly Newsletter	5,000	1,969	3,031	
Insider Program	1,100	433	667	
Website Maintenance	6,280		2,830	3,450
Sub-total	66,030	20,578	34,502	10,950
Media Partnerships				
Garden & Gun	45,000	17,722	27,278	
Coastal Living	45,000	17,722	27,278	0
Smithsonian	17,000	0	17,000	0
Ad Production	5,000	1,969	3,031	
Sub-total	112,000	37,414	74,586	0
Destination Assets				
Photo and Video Shoots	10,000	5,000	2,000	3,000
Sub-total	10,000	5,000	2,000	3,000
Packaging Programs				
	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	0	0	0	0
Insiders/Collateral/Fulfillment				
Bluffton Collateral (Vacation Planner)	14,000	5,514	8,486	
Bluffton Fulfillment (shipping and mail)	12,090	4,761	7,329	
Sub-total	26,090	10,275	15,815	0
Group Sales & Marketing				
Group Tour	2,380	0	2,380	
Sub-total	2,380	0	2,380	0
TOTAL MARKETING EXPENSES	248,850	85,050	147,420	16,380
Destination Marketing Ops & Management	146,150	49,950	86,580	9,620
TOTAL EXPENSES	395,000	135,000	234,000	26,000
TOTAL REVENUE MINUS EXPENSES	0	0	0	0