



**FY 2023  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**



## Our Vision

By collaborating with community stakeholders, SDT will position Sussex County, Delaware to thrive as a premier travel destination.



## OUR CORE VALUES (TRIP)

**Transparency:** Communicate honestly and respectfully by providing positive and consistent tourism messaging and be proactively open to stakeholder and community scrutiny; Uphold the highest standards of integrity and stewardship by demonstrating honesty, fairness and trustworthiness in action and intent.

**Relevancy:** Stay closely connected and involved in stakeholder and community shared values, by using data-driven evidence, to promote balanced economic development, sustainable tourism, and quality of life; Do great things together by challenging assumptions to foster innovation and to promote continuous improvement by seeking personal and professional growth.

**Inclusion:** Create a more diverse and inclusive SDT by respecting and valuing broad participation in stakeholder and community dialogue while embracing diversity of thought in decision-making; Build public support and engagement around the shared vision of making Southern Delaware a premier tourist destination by leveraging our collective genius.

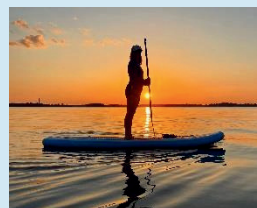
**Passion:** Generate excitement, nurture ideas, inspire excellence and find creative ways to eliminate obstacles for cultivating SDT's growth and prosperity.

## Who We Are

### Our Purpose and Mission

Southern Delaware Tourism (SDT) is the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Sussex County, Delaware. SDT is led by a Board of Directors representing chambers of commerce, local businesses, and county economic development. The CVB staff is comprised of the Executive Director, a Communications Manager, a Marketing Manager, and a Marketing Specialist.

Southern Delaware Tourism operates as a 501(c)6 non-profit business. Funding for the CVB is derived from the State of Delaware's Public Accommodations Tax. As the destination marketing organization for the county, SDT's mission is to support and encourage the identification, development, and promotion of sustainable, year-round tourism in Southern Delaware that contributes to economic growth and improves the quality of life.



## A Letter from the Executive Director



Scott Thomas  
Executive Director

### Destination Elevation

Tourism continues to be a major economic engine for Sussex County.

SDT had its best revenue year ever this past fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. Revenue generated by the state hotel tax eclipsed last year's high mark by 2%. However, the post-pandemic visitation boom to the county is cooling and hotel occupancy levels are leveling off as this past summer and fall have indicated. Although lower than the past two years, they remain higher than 2019. This is most likely attributed to long-range travel opening up again and a tightening of consumer travel budgets.

SDT continues to reach travelers in our drive-from markets through seasonal promotion and advertising. True to our brand, we are focusing on leisure travel as well as diving deeper to attract

small to medium-sized groups looking for their next retreat, meeting or celebration destination. With more area accommodations coming on board, it is imperative that we look to grow our resources to explore and market to new audiences that will bolster hotel occupancy year-round and introduce new visitors to all that our county has to offer.

I am excited to announce that SDT is embarking on establishing a Sussex County Tourism Ambassador Program that will be administered online. This course is designed to certify all front-line tourism and hospitality personnel as experts on tourism assets to better direct and advise respective guests and clients. This free course will be available by Spring 2024.

As our organization grows, I am extremely thankful for the support, resilience and perseverance of SDT's board and our community partners. We have a very special tourism community here in the county and I look forward to another successful year ahead.

*-Safe Travels!*

# FY 2023 Major Achievements

- **257,000** people visited SDT's website, [VisitSouthernDelaware.com](https://www.visitdelaware.com).
- **22,354 hotel searches** and **\$312,268 in hotel bookings** were generated by SDT's advertising efforts *Source: ADARA Impact*.
- **\$2.5 million** in publicity value for travel to Sussex County was generated by hosting and assisting travel journalists *Source: Muckrack*
- Increased exposure for highlighting **Southern Delaware's Culinary Coast™** as a major culinary destination. With the continued support of southern Delaware restaurants and state organizations, SDT has secured coverage in national and regional publications such as Travel & Leisure, Forbes, Eater, Philadelphia Magazine, Conde Nast, NBC Washington, Northern Virginia Magazine, and the Washingtonian.
- Created an **Online Marketing Toolkit** for county tourism partners, making it easier for partner businesses to participate in SDT cooperative advertising and promotion.
- Established and **Investment Policy and Plan**.
- Sponsored the 7th Annual Southern Delaware Tourism Photography Contest and **obtained 230 photo entries** which have been added to SDT's media galleries for use in promotions, marketing, and advertising.
- **\$891,200** in funding grants were distributed to chambers of commerce (located in Sussex County) for local tourism promotion.
- **Qualified 353 travelers** at the New York City Travel & Adventure Travel Show
- Attracted **17,000** followers on Facebook, **11,000** on Twitter/X, and **7,000** on Instagram; experiencing increases in followers across all media platforms.





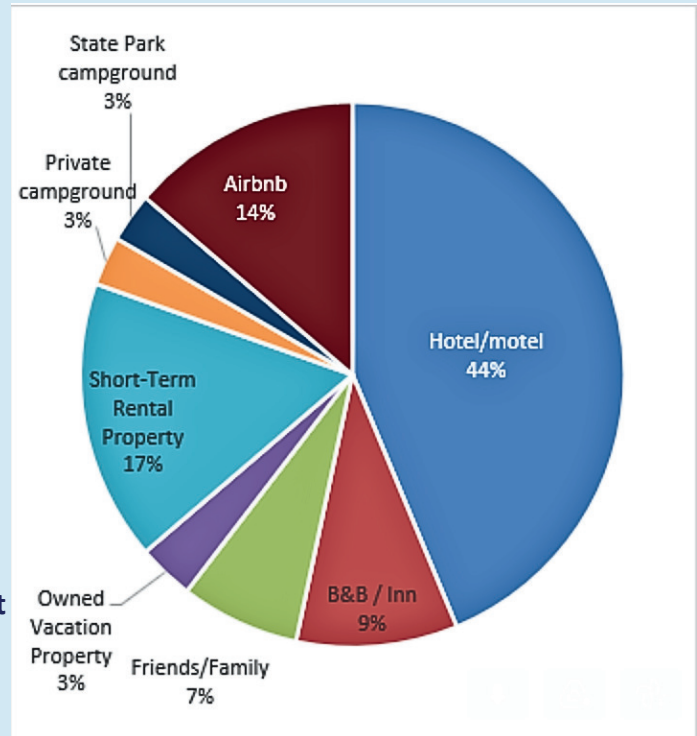
# Travel and Tourism Impact

## Sussex County

- Generates \$2.7 billion in visitor spending
- Tourism supports 23,550 jobs in the county
- Brings new money into the community
- For every \$1 spent directly by a visitor, another \$1.20 is generated in indirect sales to the local economy
- Helps diversify and stabilize the local economy
- Attracts additional businesses to our area (“It Starts With a Visit”)
- Contributes to the state and local tax base and saves each Delaware household approximately \$1,608 in taxes annually
- It would take only 160 more visitors to support a new Delaware job
- Every 776 visitors pays for a Delaware public school student for the year

Source: 2021 Delaware Tourism Office Value of Tourism Report

# Where Visitors Are Staying



Source: 2023 Southern Delaware Tourism Visitor Survey Report



## Top Ten Visitor Activities

1. Dining Out
2. Going to the Beach
3. Tax-Free Shopping
4. Visiting Breweries & Wineries
5. Visiting Museums & Historic Sites
6. Festivals & Special Events
7. Engaging in Cultural Arts
8. Antiquing
9. Biking / Cycling
10. Guided Tours

# Southern Delaware Tourism Board of Directors

Matthew Parker, Rosemont Wealth Management and Current SDT Chairperson  
Scott Anthony, Money Mailer of Delaware and Current SDT Co-Chairperson  
Bonnie Hall, Nanticoke Indian Association and Past SDT Chairperson  
Anne Angel, Executive Director of the Greater Millsboro Chamber of Commerce  
Terry Carson, Executive Director of the Western Sussex Chamber of Commerce  
Drew DiFonzo, Vice President of Operations, TKo Hospitality  
Mike Dunmyer, US Wind  
Morgan Edgar, Milford High School Hospitality & Tourism DECA Advisor  
Kevin Evans, Evans Farms  
Carol Everhart, President & CEO of the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce  
Karen Falk, Executive Director of the Milton Chamber of Commerce  
Benjamin Gray, MPI Processing  
Jamie Hayman, Hayman Creative Promotional Products Agency, Inc.  
Kristin Lang-Miller, Forever Media, Inc.  
Maggie Lingo, General Manager of the Beacon Motel  
Fred Mast, Managing Shareholder of Jefferson, Urian, Doane & Sterner, P.A.  
Nancy Pinera, WSFS Bank  
Linda Price, Executive Director of the Greater Georgetown Chamber of Commerce  
Bill Pfaff, Director of the Sussex County Economic Development Office  
Betsy Reamer, Executive Director of the Lewes Chamber of Commerce  
Patrick Ruhl, Dupont Nature Center  
Jo Schmeiser, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Milford  
Kevin Thompson, Financial Advisor, Edward Jones  
Lauren Weaver, Executive Director of the Bethany-Fenwick Area Chamber of Commerce  
Jessica Welch, Director of the Delaware Tourism Office

## Southern Delaware Tourism Staff

Scott Thomas, Executive Director  
Tina Coleman, Communications Manager  
Lana O'Hollaren, Marketing Manager  
Christopher Cazares, Marketing Specialist



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