

FY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT




*Southern
Delaware*
TOURISM



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, sustain able 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 SDT staff is comprised of an 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

Come Be a Part of Us

Sussex County's \$2.7 billion tourism industry continues to be a major driver to the area's coastal economy.

As we expected, our fiscal 2024 saw a dip in revenue generated from the state's public accommodation tax (PAT), down 14.7% from the previous year's historic high of \$1.6 million. This is most likely attributed to long-range travel picking up again and a tightening of consumer travel budgets.

After decades of SDT advocacy, Delaware has now included short-term rentals (STRs) in its state PAT in the September signing of House Bill 168. This is a big deal as tax revenue generated from STRs will now be reinvested along with PAT revenue from hotels towards tourism promotion, beach replenishment and public services to support more visitors.

With more area accommodations coming on board, this expanded reinvestment will help SDT market to new audiences that will bolster occupancy year-round and introduce new visitors to all that our county has to offer.

2024 also marked another first for SDT as it launched its Sussex County Tourism Ambassador Program. This free, online course is designed to certify all front-line tourism and hospitality personnel as experts on tourism in the county to better direct and advise respective guests and clients. This course is also ideal for community volunteers who play a huge part in making Sussex County the desirable destination that it is.

As SDT works to expand its reach, I am extremely thankful to be part of the SDT team and for the support, talent and guidance from SDT's board as well as relationships we have with our county partners. We have a very special tourism community, and I look forward to another groundbreaking year ahead.

-Safe Travels!

FY 2024 Major Achievements

- **224,000** people visited SDT's website, [VisitSouthernDelaware.com](https://www.VisitSouthernDelaware.com).
- **16,051 hotel searches** and **\$320,143 in hotel bookings** were generated by SDT's advertising efforts. *Source: ADARA Impact.*
- **\$3,073,603** in publicity value for travel to Sussex County was generated by hosting and assisting travel journalists. *Source: Muckrack.*
- Advocated for **Delaware House Bill 168** that **passed the Delaware House and Senate and was signed by the Governor into law on September 30, 2024**. HB 168 amends the state's public accommodations tax to include short-term rentals.
- 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, enabled Sussex County to be an **Outstanding in the Field event location** and produced **21 Instagram Reels spotlighting chefs and producers** from the county.
- Created a **Sussex County Tourism Ambassador Program**. This free, online certification course caters to front-line hospitality personnel and community volunteers. **94 people have enrolled in the program with 88 certified**.
- Sponsored the 8th Annual Southern Delaware Tourism Photography Contest and **obtained 86 photo entries** which have been added to SDT's media galleries for use in promotions, marketing, and advertising.
- **\$764,747** in funding grants were distributed to chambers of commerce (located in Sussex County) for local tourism promotion.
- **Qualified 455 travelers** at the New York City Travel & Adventure Travel Show to entice their visit to Sussex County.



Travel and Tourism Impact

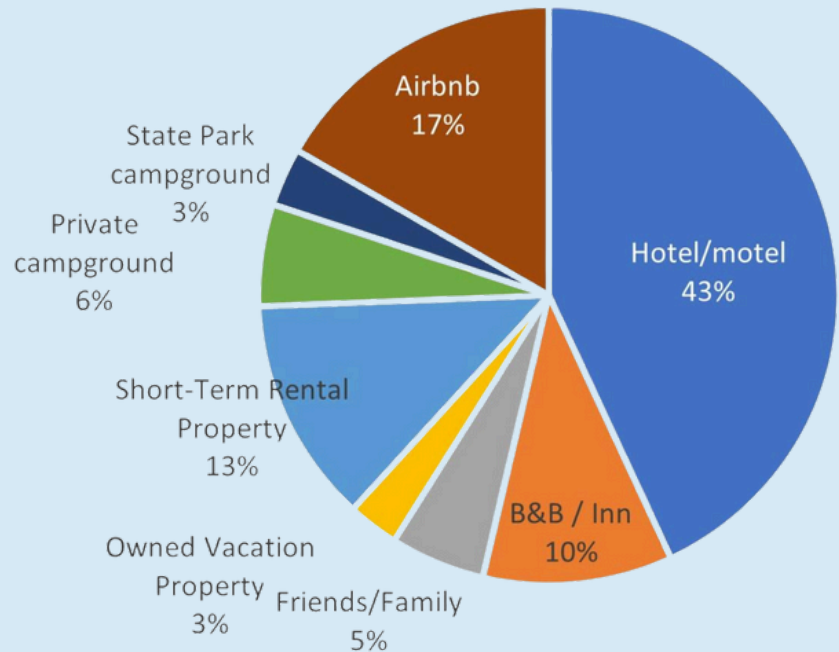
Sussex County

- 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 pay for a Delaware public school student for the year

Source: 2021 Delaware Tourism Office Value of Tourism Report



Where Visitors Are Staying



Source: 2024 Southern Delaware Tourism Visitor Survey Report

Top Ten Visitor Activities

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

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

Terry Carson, Executive Director of the Western Sussex Chamber of Commerce

Drew DiFonzo, Vice President of Operations, TKo Hospitality

Mike Dunmyer, US Wind

Kevin Evans, Evans Farms

Carol Everhart, President & CEO of the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce

Benjamin Gray, COO of MPI Processing

Kristin Miller, Forever Media, Inc.

Maggie Lingo, General Manager of the Beacon Motel

Fred Mast, Managing Shareholder of Jefferson, Urian, Doane & Sterner, P.A.

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

Alison Schuch, Fells Point Surf Company

Thomas Summers, Milford Museum

Fred Thompson, General Manager of the Hampton Inn – Rehoboth Beach

Kevin Thompson, Financial Advisor, Edward Jones

Nadine Timpanaro, Executive Director of the Greater Millsboro Chamber of Commerce

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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