

# FY 2025 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*

As we conclude another year of progress, innovation, and collaboration, Southern Delaware Tourism (SDT) is proud to share the accomplishments that have strengthened our county's position as a desired travel destination.

Throughout the year, we continued to build on our core strengths—our beaches, culinary delights, outdoor recreation, arts and entertainment, and family-friendly attractions and events—while expanding our reach through strategic marketing, community partnerships, and targeted visitor engagement. As a result, we saw continued interest from new and returning travelers who value the authenticity, accessibility, and charm that define Sussex County.

Key initiatives this year included strengthening our digital presence,

enhancing destination storytelling, and deepening collaboration with local businesses, chambers, and municipalities. These efforts helped drive awareness, extend seasonal visitation, and support the economic vitality of the communities we serve. We also remained committed to data-driven decision-making, leveraging research and analytics to better understand visitor behavior and adapt to evolving travel trends.

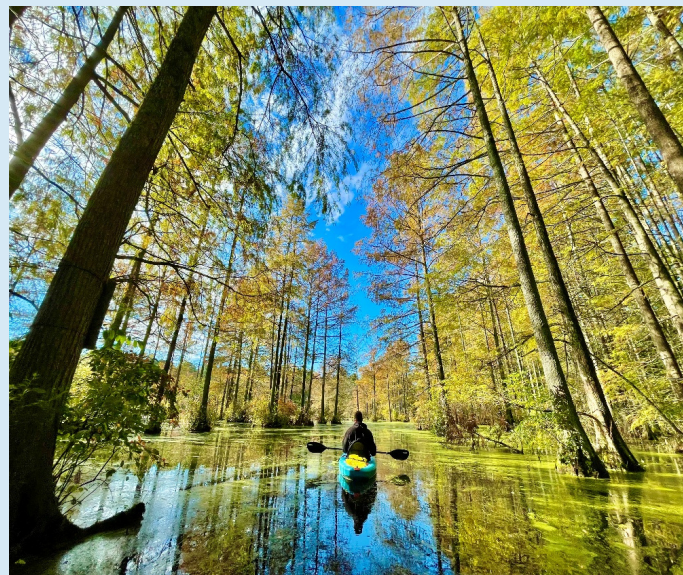
Sussex County's \$3 billion tourism industry continues to play a major role in the county's economic health. The positive impact on local businesses, jobs, and tax revenue underscores the importance of sustaining our momentum and investing in long-term destination stewardship.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on innovation, sustainable growth, and enhancing the visitor experience. By working together, we will continue to elevate Southern Delaware's brand and support our tourism partners. We at SDT look forward to building on this year's accomplishments and shaping a bright future for Southern Delaware.

*—Happy Holidays and Safe Travels!*

# FY 2025 Major Achievements

- **283,000** people visited SDT's website, [VisitSouthernDelaware.com](https://www.visitdelaware.com).
- **15,533 hotel searches** and **\$302,543 in hotel bookings** were generated by SDT's advertising efforts. *Source: ADARA Impact.*
- **\$2,391,947** 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™**, highlighting Sussex County's reputation as a Mid-Atlantic foodie mecca, with a concentration of restaurants, award-winning chefs, farms, wineries, distilleries, breweries, farmers markets, aquaculture (oysters, shellfish) and more — all leveraging the region's natural resources: farmland, Atlantic and bay waters, and coastal lifestyle.
- Our Certified Tourism Ambassador program has reached **220 Ambassadors** since the spring of 2025. The program won the 2024 Customer Support Award category in Learn Tourism's™ Learning Excellence Awards.
- Collaborated with regional tourism offices to create the **Cape-to-Cape Driving Tour highlighting 8 must stop locations** in Sussex County.
- Sponsored the 9th Annual Southern Delaware Tourism Photography Contest and **obtained 205 photo entries** which have been added to SDT's media galleries for use in promotions, marketing, and advertising.
- **\$888,858** in funding grants were distributed to chambers of commerce (located in Sussex County) for local tourism promotion.
- Hosted its **Spring Partner Expo, drawing 74 attendees and featuring 16 exhibitors**. The event served as a valuable opportunity for networking, collaboration, and showcasing regional tourism initiatives.



# Travel and Tourism Impact

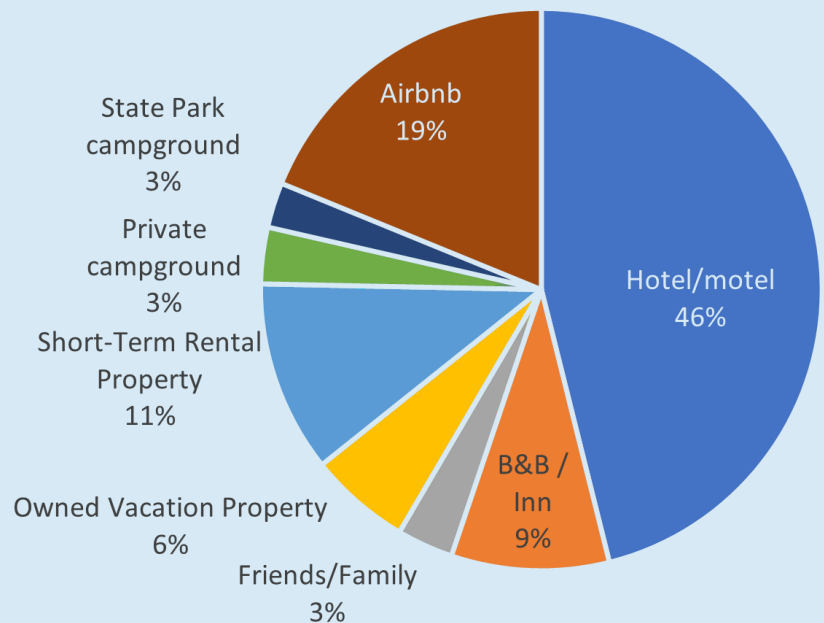
## Sussex County

- Generates \$3 billion in visitor spending.
- Tourism supports 26,900 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 \$1,826 in taxes annually.
- It would take only 150 more visitors to support a new Delaware job.
- Every 750 visitors pay for a Delaware public school student for the year.

Source: 2023 Delaware Tourism Office Value of Tourism Report



## Where Visitors Are Staying



Source: 2025 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. Visiting Museums & Historic Sites
6. Attending Special Events & Festivals
7. Engaging in Cultural Arts
8. Biking / Cycling
9. Antiquing
10. Guided Tours

## Southern Delaware Tourism Board of Directors

Scott Anthony, Money Mailer of Delaware and SDT Chairperson

Fred Thompson, General Manager of the Hampton Inn Rehoboth Beach and SDT Co-Chairperson

Matthew Parker, Rosemont Wealth Management and Past SDT Chairperson

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

Heather DeMarie, Heather's Home Works

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, Henlopen Hospitality Consulting

Bonnie Hall, Nanticoke Indian Association

Andrew Harton, Director of the Sussex County Economic Development Office

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

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

Jim Smith, Delmarva Power

Thomas Summers, Milford Museum

Kevin Thompson, Financial Advisor, Edward Jones

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

Kate VanVorst, Inbound President & CEO of the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach 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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