

2024

# TOURISM WORKS

## Hamilton County, Indiana



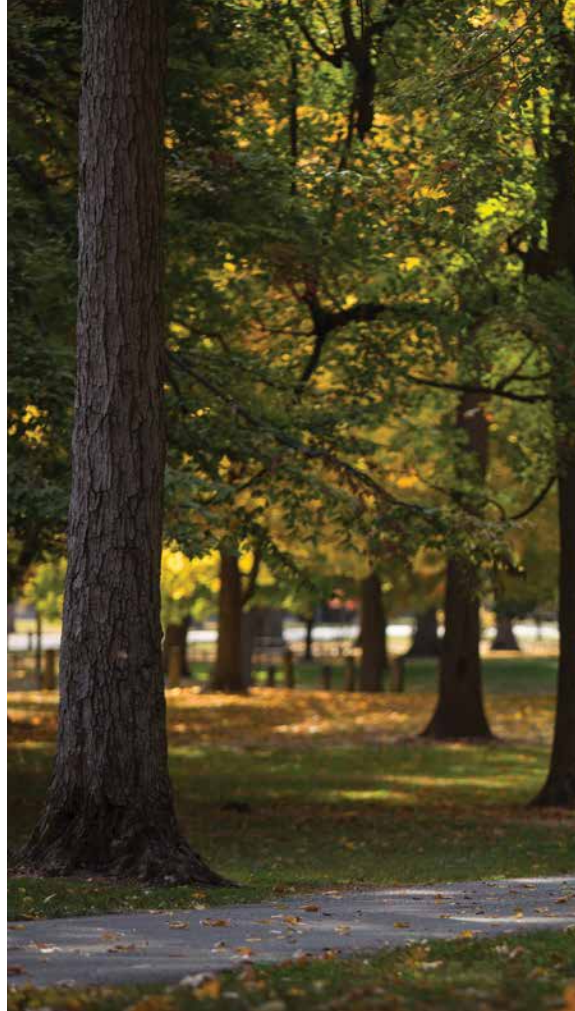
ARCADIA ATLANTA CARMEL CICERO FISHERS NOBLESVILLE SHERIDAN WESTFIELD



JUST NORTH  
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*HamiltonCountyTourism.com*





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## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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Our tourism team is often asked what it's like to serve a community as vibrant as Hamilton County.

The answer is ... we feel very fortunate to support visionary leaders in both the public and private sectors.

It is exhilarating. It is challenging. It is always rewarding.

While Hamilton County has grown exponentially in the past two decades, tourism economic output has grown even more during the same period. And we are very proud of the economic contributions that tourism provides to this community.

Creating great places to live has made our community a great place to visit. We thank you for your leadership, cities, county and towns.

Next year, Hamilton County Tourism (HCT) would have completed its Vision 2025 Plan, a community-led initiative adopted in 2016. But despite a pandemic that seriously rocked our local hospitality industry, we wrapped up all the elements of the plan earlier than expected and moved on to explore new ideas for the future. This time, we thought *really big*.

HCT and the Hamilton County Sports Authority (HCSA) are ready for their next chapter. Supported by great community and tourism leadership and a tremendously talented staff, and with the help of our partners at Invest Hamilton County, the next 10 years should be even more exhilarating, challenging and rewarding.

Thank you for all you've done and will continue to do to make this happen.

**Brenda Myers**  
President/CEO



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## 2024 IS A TURNING POINT FOR TOURISM

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A new master plan, a revitalized HCSA, the creation of a new capital development investment fund and a new toolbox of business intelligence resources together lay the groundwork for a truly transformative year of tourism in Hamilton County, Indiana, in 2024.

The key big ideas for 2024 are:

- ★ **Business Intelligence**
- ★ **Wise Investments**
- ★ **Maximized Smart Marketing**
- ★ **Strategic Sales & Sports Development**
- ★ **Events and the Visitor Experience**

More than 5 million visitors now come to Hamilton County each year and spend almost \$1 billion. This economic reliance on visitor spending makes thoughtful planning more important than ever.

HCT supports destination development by serving as an eager partner with its cities, towns and county. It supports the hospitality industry by strategically marketing and promoting Hamilton County as a great place to visit. It supports residents through initiatives that focus on giving back. And finally, HCT serves its visitors by being a one-stop shop for information on places to visit and stay, shop and dine, and events to enjoy.

*This tourism organization is a complex ecosystem with a simple mission: To move, message and make things fun.*

# HAMILTON COUNTY TOURISM'S AREAS OF FOCUS IN 2024

## **CRITICAL DATA TO SUPPORT THOUGHTFUL PLANNING.**

HCT pledges to refine its business intelligence to provide real-time insights on market performance.

## **DEEP DIVE STUDIES TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT.**

HCT pledges to commit dollars to comprehensive research that will help our partners make informed decisions.

## **TARGETED SALES STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PARTNERS.**

The Visit Hamilton County meetings/sales department pledges to help partners navigate the competitive waters of the group travel and event industries through service-focused strategies.

## **REINVIGORATED SPORTS AUTHORITY SUPPORT TO KEEP HAMILTON COUNTY COMPETITIVE IN THE MARKETPLACE.**

The HCSA will develop a new brand and an event bid and investment strategy, and use the BEST Fund (page 7) to identify areas of potential growth to keep the community in the national spotlight.

## **RENEWED MARKETING TO INSPIRE VISITOR SPENDING.**

HCT's marketing team pledges to reinvigorate Visit Hamilton County messaging (out of and in market) to create the greatest return on investment.

## **ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND COLLABORATION IN ALL AREAS OF WORK.**

HCT's administration team promises to lead with integrity in all areas of its work and establish financial guidelines for the BEST Fund to support the Tourism Commission.

## **WARM AND WELCOMING VISITOR SERVICES TO INSPIRE VISITORS TO RETURN AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

Visit Hamilton County's experience and services team pledges to connect with visitors and event planners to ensure they have the best possible experience while in-market.

## **CREATE A REGENERATIVE TOURISM STRATEGY TO INSPIRE HAMILTON COUNTY.**

HCT staff and leadership pledge to develop a program of work to focus on People, Place, Planet & Prosperity and use HCT's talents as communications experts to support the important work being done by community partners.



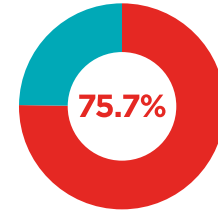
# THE STATE OF TOURISM IN HAMILTON COUNTY IN 2024



**Hotel Performance** continues to be strong with an increase of more than **15%** in lodging demand when compared to the previous record year of 2019, and confidence is high that the new inventory can be absorbed in relatively short order.



**Short-Term Stay Performance** continues to influence the hotel market with an increase of more than **150%** in lodging demand when compared to pre-pandemic 2019, which will impact new inventory absorption somewhat.



**Overnight Visitors** already make up **75.7%** of all visitors to the county, since Hamilton County serves as a destination for both Hoosiers and Midwesterners, as well as for others throughout the United States.



**Total Visitation** to the county continues to break down at about **one-third Indiana** and **two-thirds other states**, primarily from the Midwest.

★★★★★ **Leisure (98%)**

★★★★★ **Sport (97%)**

★★★★★ **Business (97%)**

**Visitor Satisfaction** is high, with **98% of leisure**, **97% of sport** and **97% of business** travelers rating their visits as good to excellent.

## BEST PLAN & INVESTMENT FUND IMPLEMENTATION

An additional 3% lodging tax in 2024 establishes perpetual funds for transformative investments for products to drive hotel stays in the county. Managed by the Hamilton County Visitor and Convention Commission, e.g. the Tourism Commission, HCT will work alongside the 15 government-appointed tourism commissioners to create a framework of distribution that will keep the county's tourism product fresh and competitive.

Insights from a *2023 Business of Entertainment, Sport & Tourism (BEST) Master Plan* will guide these investments. This year-long comprehensive study conducted by Hunden Partners, completed in 2023, included input from dozens of community and tourism leaders and explored best practices for return on tourism investments.

*One-half of one percent of the tax remittances is directed to each of the four cities to support development of large-scale attractors. One percent of the tax remittances is to be distributed in a guided but competitive grant process. It is anticipated that these funds could introduce almost \$100 million in local investments over the next 15 years.*



## SALES + MARKETING = SMARKETING (AND VISITOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE)

*When HCT's marketing team and strategic partners launch an out-of-area promotional campaign, it anticipates more than \$300 will be spent locally by visitors for each \$1 invested.*

This long-standing track record for return on investment is attributed to quality creative messaging that performs well, strategic ad placements, calculated timing, ongoing testing and adaptation of the message and research to measure the effectiveness of the program.

Post-pandemic recovery, 2024 messaging focuses on a refreshed, evergreen brand strategy that gives a new spin to the perennially successful *Closer Than You Think* brand position. It explores travel types, which is a national trend: art and food lovers, adventurers and more.

It is time for a website refresh as well, which means a thorough review of an incredibly complex and robust machine that drives more than 2 million sessions each year. Working with partners at SimpleView, the website rework should allow HCT

to remain competitive in the always-changing digital world.

The digital, print, broadcast and social media platforms are also in constant turmoil and change, and HCT's marketing team meets the ongoing demands those changes bring. The 2024 campaign follows the traditional March launch, followed by a late summer/fall effort, wrapping up with a more targeted holiday promotion.

HCT's marketing professionals can be compared to stockbrokers on the exchange. They watch, learn, listen and attempt to respond to capture the best possible rate of return for HCT's clients—our hotel, restaurant, retail and attractions partners.

Sales is also testing strategies in 2024, with new messages in the meetings market delivered through layered advertising strategies. Additionally, they are exploring new meeting sales opportunities, always mining the small meetings market through layered face-to-face, digital and visual sales strategies.

And as always, Hamilton County provides the very best in welcome services for groups of all sizes that choose to meet, play or convene locally. It's hallmark, and the reviews always celebrate the comprehensive visitor experience provided.







## HAMILTON COUNTY SPORTS AUTHORITY

The HCSA has had many iterations in its more than 15 years of existence, but with a growing competitive marketplace, now is a critical time to roll out new strategies that connect opportunities to local venues and to explore ways to drive traffic year-round and not just in the warmer months. Sports literally plays a “long game,” often bidding on events many years in the future.

With two new arenas and other new facilities opening or expanding in the near future, that provides opportunities to bid on bigger events and events other than field and diamond sports. Pickleball, wrestling, golf and others continue to grow in popularity, and the county’s products are also growing to support those events.



Left: Gabe Amick, Sports Development Manager  
Right: Carl Daniels, HCSA Director



*The HCSA, armed with a new strategic plan, new leadership and a new vision, plans to launch a new brand strategy in 2024 to communicate these exciting changes in the landscape.*



# INSPIRE HAMILTON COUNTY

Working alongside partners such as Invest Hamilton County and the Hamilton County Community Foundation, Inspire Hamilton County is a program of work that strives to give back to the community that graciously welcomes so many visitors each year. Support will be in the form of marketing expertise through time, talent and treasure to help amplify identified community needs in the areas of:

## PLACES

HCT commits to supporting research to provide information that makes Hamilton County a great place to live as well as visit and direct support for placemaking.

## PEOPLE

HCT commits to supporting community service organizations as they seek solutions for residents in the areas of housing and education, and to carry messages of positivity and support through meaningful public programs.

## PROSPERITY

HCT commits to supporting prosperity for all residents no matter who they are, with special emphasis on providing opportunities for those in the hospitality industry.

## PLANET

HCT commits to seek ways for greener practices in an industry that struggles with managing volume, and to support the White River Vision Plan, a critical environmental source for the central Indiana economy.



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