

THE STATE OF DARE COUNTY TOURISM



2023 AT A GLANCE

Traditionally, our job at the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau has been to attract visitors to Dare County and encourage travelers to spend their discretionary time and income at local businesses in our community. As we continue to find new and creative ways of sharing our breathtaking 100 miles of coastline with the world, we aim to do so with a greater sense of self-awareness and balance; ensuring that tourism works in harmony with the environment, culture and quality of life for our residents. We invite you to explore the State of Tourism in Dare County as we look back at our progress over the past year and ahead to the future with energy, excitement and a commitment to impacting "Tourism for Good" in this special place.

-Lee Nettles, Executive Director, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau

TOURISM SNAPSHOT

Visitor Spending

\$1.97 Billion

State Rank

#4

1. Mecklenberg, 2. Wake, 3. Buncombe

Tourism-Related Jobs

12,030

45.5% of Dare County Jobs

State Tax Revenue from Tourism

\$66 Million

Local Tax Revenue from Tourism

\$74.2 Million

Tax Savings/County Resident

\$3,696

Highest savings of any NC county

* Sources: *Tourism Economics, U.S. Travel Association, Visit NC*



"When residents benefit from a strong visitor economy, they become empowered to build stronger, more sustainable communities. Tourism creates a bond of identity, pride, promise and purpose between the people of a destination."

-MMGY NextFactor

ABOUT US



WELCOME CENTERS

AYCOCK BROWN WELCOME CENTER

5230 N Croatan Hwy, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949. (877) 629-4386

SARAH OWENS WELCOME CENTER

One Visitors Center Circle, Manteo, NC 27954. (877) 629-4386

WHALEBONE WELCOME CENTER

Cape Hatteras National Park Rd, Nags Head, NC 27959. (877) 629-4386

U.S. WEATHER BUREAU STATION/HATTERAS WELCOME CENTER

57190 Kohler Road, Hatteras Village, NC 27943. (877) 629-4386

DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD

The Dare County Tourism Board (DCTB), doing business as the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, is a 13-member governing board with the mission to increase overnight visitation of leisure, business, and other travel to Dare County's Outer Banks in the less-than-peak months. Tourism Board members represent various constituent groups throughout Dare County as set forth by the enabling legislation. Members are appointed by the Dare County Commissioners and serve two-year terms and are eligible for a 2nd two-year term.

Members

TIM CAFFERTY Chair, Member at Large

MONICA THIBODEAU Vice Chair, Town of Duck

DAVID HINES Secretary, Town of Kitty Hawk

ERVIN BATEMAN Treasurer, Dare County Commissioners

IVY INGRAM Asst. Treasurer, Town of Kill Devil Hills

DENNIS ROBINSON Personnel Committee Chair, Hatteras Island at Large

MARK BALLOG Outer Banks Restaurant Association

GRAY BERRYMAN Outer Banks Association of Realtors

TOD CLISSOLD Town of Manteo

TONIA COHEN Outer Banks Hotel/Motel Association

RICHARD HESS Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

LEO HOLLAND Town of Southern Shores

MIKE SIERS Town of Nags Head

THE OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU

The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau (OBVB) is the official Destination Marketing Organization for Dare County's Outer Banks. The OBVB is funded by a 1% tax on overnight accommodations and a 1% prepared meals tax. While the largest portion of the Bureau's annual budget goes toward marketing the destination, 25% of the funds received are dedicated to supporting programs and services needed due to the impact of tourism. These dollars have funded numerous projects throughout the County, including multi-use paths, beach accesses and improvements to key cultural and historic attractions.

Staff

LEE NETTLES, Executive Director

DIANE BOGNICH, Director of Administration

AARON TUELL, Public Relations & Social Media Manager

LORRIE LOVE, Tourism Sales & Events Manager

JEFF SCHWARTZENBERG, Community Engagement Manager

CHERYL HANNANT, Welcome Center Manager

AMY WOOD, Administrative Specialist & Board Clerk

MATT DUBEC, IT Manager

ALLISON WYANT, Website & Database Manager

STEPHANIE HALL, Senior Content Coordinator

JARROD RABATIN, Tourism Services Coordinator

Social Media

Facebook: theouterbanks

Pinterest: theouterbanks

Instagram @theouterbanksnc

Twitter: theouterbanks

TikTok: @theouterbanksnc

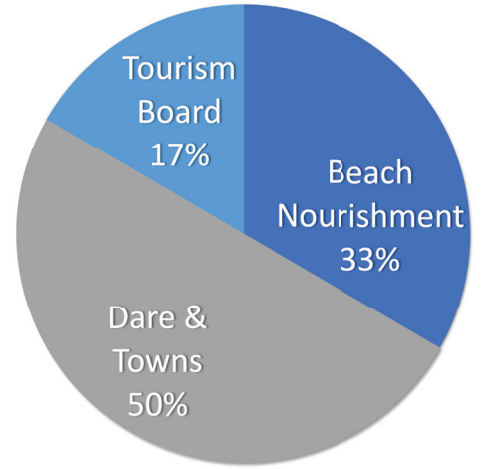
Youtube: TheOuterBanksNC

Vimeo: Theouterbanksnc

Blog: outerbanks.org/blog

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Tourism is critically important to the Dare County economy. Nearly half of all jobs in the county are in the leisure and hospitality sector, including positions at establishments in accommodations, arts and entertainment, food service, recreation, retail, transportation and other sectors. In 2022, Dare County retained its #4 position out of North Carolina's 100 counties in total visitor spending, with an all-time high of \$1.97 billion. Accommodations revenue grew to \$814 million in 2022, up 5.6% from \$771 million in 2021, a more sustainable rate of growth following a dramatic 33.8% increase from 2020 to 2021 during the height of the Covid pandemic.

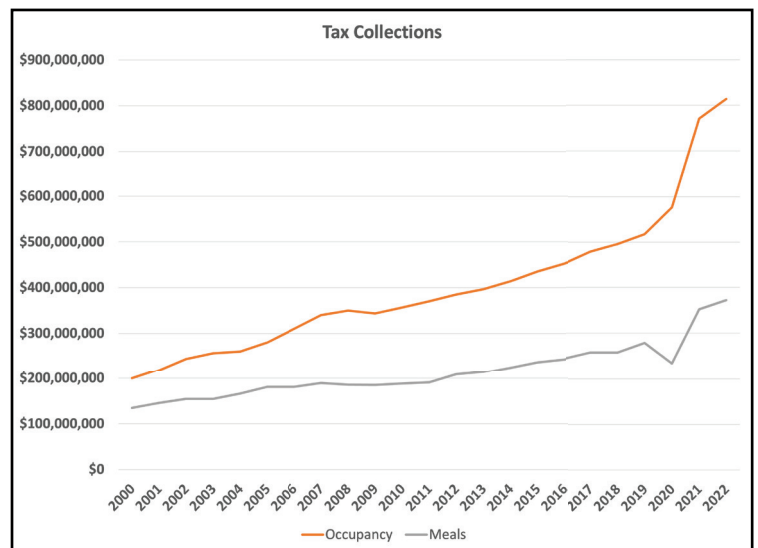
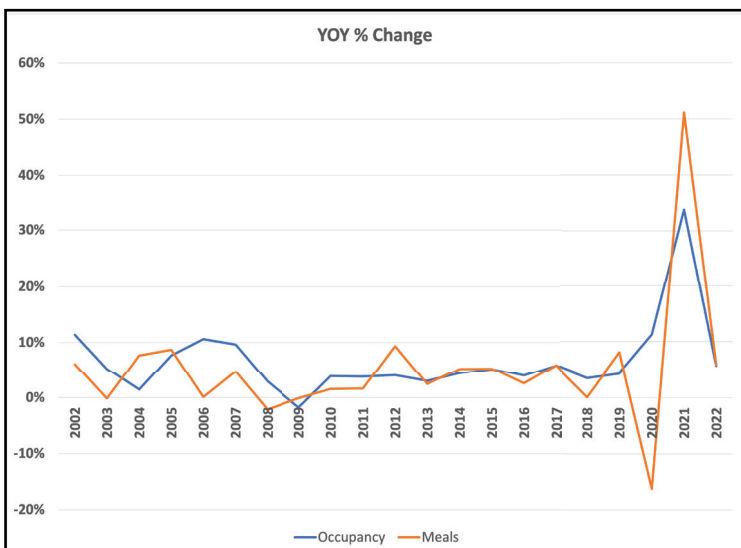
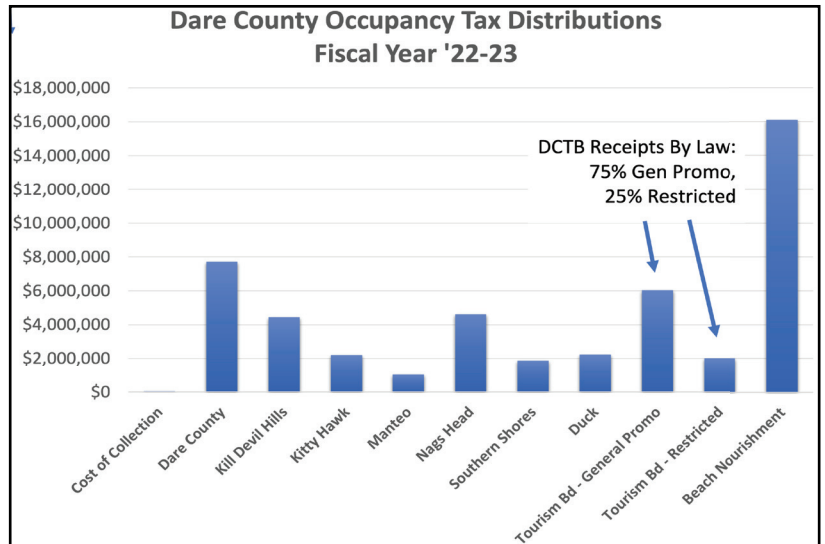


THE TWO CHARTS SHOW HOW OCCUPANCY TAX COLLECTIONS ARE DISTRIBUTED, BY LAW, TO VARIOUS LOCAL ENTITIES AND EFFORTS. THE TOURISM BOARD ALSO RECEIVES A 1% PREPARED MEALS TAX.

The Outer Banks continues to experience strong seasonality, but there have been some important gains in shoulder season activity (April, May, September) in recent years. Between 2019 and 2022, paid accommodations revenue (gross occupancy) during shoulder season months increased 79.2%, while the three-month peak season showed an increase of 37.5% over the same period. In 2022, almost 60% of paid accommodations revenue (gross occupancy), including 45% of short-term rental revenue, was earned during the three-month peak season, with shoulder season paid occupancy accounting for nearly 23% of annual accommodations revenue (a 3% increase since 2019).

In 2022, peak season occupancy rates averaged 88.8% of capacity, while shoulder season rates averaged 56.8%.

Source: Key Data, Tourism Economics, The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau



IN THE COMMUNITY

GRANTS AT WORK

The Dare County Tourism Board sponsors several grant opportunities each year to help fund and support various Outer Banks projects and events organized by non-profits and government entities. Event Grants are designed to support events that drive overnight visitation to Dare County during less-than-peak months (September 7 to June 15). In addition, the Board offers other funding opportunities through its Restricted Fund Grants, including Tourism Impact Grants and Long-Term Unappropriated Grants, supporting programs or services needed due to the impact of tourism. For guidelines, applications and a list of past grant awards, please visit outerbanks.org/grants.

2023-2024 Event Grants		
Dare Arts	2024 Artrageous Kids Festival	\$ 5,000
Dare Arts	2024 Rock the Cape	\$ 6,000
Dare County Restaurant Assoc.	2024 Taste of the Beach	\$ 20,000
Eastern Surfing Assoc.	2024 Mid-Atlantic Regional Championships	\$ 12,500
Elizabethan Gardens	2023 WinterLights	\$ 22,000
First Flight Society	120th Anniversary of Wright Bros Flight	\$ 3,000
Garage Band Charities	2024 OBX Rod & Custom Festival	\$ 15,000
Hatteras Village Civic Assoc.	2024 Offshore Open	\$ 7,500
Manteo Preservation Trust	2023 Holiday Tour of Homes	\$ 4,000
NC Coastal Federation	2024 Hatteras Island Oyster Roast	\$ 4,000
Outer Banks Conservationists	Christmas on the North End	\$ 2,500
Outer Banks Relief Foundation	2024 Couture by the Shore	\$ 1,000
Outer Banks Sailing Assoc.	2024 OBX Multihull Sailfest	\$ 2,000
Outer Banks Sporting Events	2024 Flying Pirate Half Marathon	\$ 12,500
Outer Banks Sporting Events	2024 Running of the Leprechauns	\$ 2,000
Roanoke Island Historical Assoc.	Lost Colony Wine, Beer & Culinary Festival	\$ 4,000
Town of Nags Head	2024 St. Patrick's Day Parade	\$ 4,000

2023-2024 Tourism Impact Grants (TIGs)		
Chicamacomico Historical Assoc.	1874 Life-Saving Station Restoration	\$ 115,000
Town of Duck	Town of Duck Performance Space Improvements	\$ 13,549
Elizabethan Gardens	Pathway to Discover	\$ 50,000
Frisco Native American Museum	Ecotourism: Destination Nature Trail	\$ 39,300
Town of Kitty Hawk	Hwy 158 Bypass Multi-Use Path	\$ 400,000
Town of Nags Head	East Epstein Street Sidewalk	\$ 49,500
Town of Nags Head	Governor Street Public Beach Access	\$ 60,477
Town of Nags Head	West Seachase Drive Sidewalk	\$ 45,150
N.E.S.T.	Education Signs	\$ 2,750
NC Aquarium Society	Fish, Filter, Food: The Human-Oyster Connection	\$ 121,845
OBX Community Foundation	Community Terrace: OB Center for Nonprofits	\$ 85,000
Outer Banks Forever	Accessible Public Restrooms & Showers at Lighthouse Beach	\$ 125,000
Roanoke Island Festival Park	Raised Concrete Loading Dock	\$ 75,000
Town of Southern Shores	Walking Path on Westside Highway 12	\$ 118,855
Surf Pediatrics Foundation	Everyone's Playground at KHES	\$ 282,963

SUPPORTING NPOS & GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

\$22M

in grant funding

700+

grants awarded

70+

grants recipients

(Cumulative totals since the onset of the grant programs.)



Enhancing Accessibility on our Beaches

A new handicap-accessible beach ramp at the Ocean Boulevard access in Southern Shores was made possible through a Tourism Impact Grant to Southern Shores Civic Association. This accessible ramp enhances inclusivity and accommodates individuals with mobility challenges, fostering a more equitable beach experience.

IN THE COMMUNITY

VOLUNTOURISM



VOLUNTEERS PLANTING SEA OATS,
PHOTO: OBX FOREVER

Part of what makes the Outer Banks special is the large number of non-profits (over 100!) and the fine work these organizations do to protect and preserve the area. It's a testament to the generosity of the locals and an expression of how much we all care for this special place. Last winter, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau launched its Voluntourism initiative to raise awareness for local organizations, the important work they are doing within our community and how visitors can become involved. In close collaboration with the Outer Banks Community Foundation, a non-profit section on the website – outerbanks.org/voluntourism – was launched, providing visitors with exposure to Outer Banks non-profit profiles, upcoming event listings, as well as the opportunity to volunteer for an organization or an event. By getting involved with local non-profits, the visitor comes away with a deeper appreciation for the community and a greater sense of responsibility.

"We are continually exploring ways to make visitors more aware of, and connected to, the causes of the Outer Banks. By doing so, we can encourage thoughtful visitation while also providing non-profit organizations with more resources to make an even greater impact." **-Lee Nettles, Executive Director, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau**

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHTS



Rock the Cape - Dare Arts

Rock the Cape is a two-day family-friendly initiative to celebrate the galleries, artists and artistic community on Hatteras Island. Rock the Cape, organized by Dare Arts, brings a full slate of artistic activities from Rodanthe to Hatteras Village.

"Dare Arts is closing in on 50 years of supporting the arts in our community and our relationship with the Dare County Tourism Board and Outer Banks Visitors Bureau is one of our most cherished partnerships. The grant support that we've received over the years not only helps us enhance the entertainment at our community events like Rock the Cape and Artrageous Kids Art Festival but also assists in expanding our marketing reach to out-of-town visitors in the shoulder season months for the Outer Banks Veterans Week, Surfalorus Film Festival and the Dare Arts Pride Project. We're truly grateful for this continued support." **- Jessica Sands, Executive Director, Dare Arts**



NPO Knowledge Series - Outer Banks Community Foundation

In September 2023, dozens of local non-profit leaders gathered at College of the Albemarle's Dare campus as part of a new Non-Profit Knowledge Series, presented in partnership with the Outer Banks Community Foundation, that will include educational and social events. Future sessions will be announced soon.

"The partnership between the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau and the Outer Banks Community Foundation plays a pivotal role in fostering our region's sustainable development by channeling resources and expertise towards responsible community growth. This collaboration, which offers invaluable non-profit learning opportunities and support, exemplifies the vital synergy between local organizations in promoting the Outer Banks as a vibrant and resilient place to live, work and visit." **-Chris Sawin, Executive Director, Outer Banks Community Foundation**

VISITORS BUREAU INITIATIVES

LONG-RANGE TOURISM MANAGEMENT PLAN

The future success of a destination's visitor economy — and the growth of direct and indirect benefits it provides for the local economy — depend on the public, private and civic sectors collaborating to ensure the long-term viability of the destination. In May 2023, the Outer Banks Long-Range Tourism Management Plan (LRTMP) was published, following an extensive 18-month process begun by the Dare County Tourism Board and executed by the staff of the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau and partners at MMGY NextFactor and Tourism Economics. The comprehensive plan, which includes extensive feedback from throughout the community, provides a roadmap for the future to ensure that OBX tourism preserves — and even benefits — the environment, culture and quality of life for residents while enhancing the visitor experience. In the LRTMP final report, four strategic goals emerged as recommendations to move the plan forward into the future.



Strategy 1 – Strengthen resident and visitor engagement

Connecting visitors with area non-profits and expand voluntourism strategy • Lead a resident engagement program • Convene a Task Force to help implement the plan • Hire a Community Engagement Manager • Develop a Visitor Pledge to communicate the important values of responsible behavior.

Strategy 2 – Adopt an integrated approach to improving environmental stewardship

Lead investment in analytics for targeting and education • Continue to grow as a recognized leader in outdoor recreation and stewardship • Collaborate with leading environmentally-conscious partners • Advocate for increased investment in roads, sidewalks and clean mobility • Convene a sustainability committee to provide ongoing input on tourism strategies that minimize environmental impacts.

Strategy 3 – Support infrastructure development that supports the vitality of the community for residents and visitors

Partner with municipalities, counties, the region & state to ensure infrastructure and development initiatives consider sustainability, resident and visitor needs • Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to develop a diverse talent attraction campaign • Continue to pursue development of an Event Center • Improve accessibility for people of all age groups & abilities • Undertake a density study as part of a capacity management plan • Support a pedestrian safety plan to understand different mobility needs • Advocate for initiatives that help maintain and preserve the vitality of our shorelines.

Strategy 4 – Collaborate to advocate for an increase in residential housing diversity

Collaborate with Dare County and other partners to advocate for an increase in home ownership options • Develop an awareness and advocacy strategy to educate about needs for more housing diversity • Collaborate with Dare County and other partners to advocate for a balance in short- and long-term rental and homeownership opportunities • Collaborate with Dare County and other partners to advocate for the development of public transportation, other mobility options and workforce accessibility • Partner with other groups to explore public-private housing development opportunities.



THE NEXT STEPS

A collaborative, focused and original approach to the implementation of this plan will result in the growth of the visitor economy and its widespread benefits for the entire region. By capitalizing on this opportunity to effectively balance the significant benefits of Outer Banks tourism with the needs of our residents and the realities of our natural environment, we are starting a long-term process and commitment that will benefit our region for generations to come.

outerbanks.org/lrtmp

MARKETING THE OUTER BANKS

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Over the past year, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau has hosted many journalists to the area, providing them with an opportunity to explore the natural, historical, culinary, and experiential wonders that are unique to our area, with the goal of inspiring travel to Dare County. See what others are saying about the Outer Banks.



Worth Protecting - Voluntourism and the Preservation of a Valuable Coastline

"This trip reminded us that the Outer Banks are nothing less than a blessing to all who visit. The area is an amalgamation of wind-swept beaches, historic landmarks, wild creatures (land and sea), even pirate lore ... not to mention the sunsets are mind-boggling. But it's also fragile, deserves respect and needs constant work to maintain. Luckily, there are so many people, organizations and initiatives that share in the mission of protecting this wonderful place."

Cornucopia of Coastal Delights in Outer Banks, NC



"Away from the bustle of other beachy destinations, Outer Banks, North Carolina boasts a whole lot of charm and natural splendor. It's a place where all your coastal dreams are sure to come true."



Girl Camper Magazine

Girl Camper is the largest outdoor women's adventure group in the United States with chapters in over 30 states mentoring women into the great outdoors. In April 2023, more than 100 women campers converged on Cape Hatteras to explore the Outer Banks as part of their annual CAMPOREE event.



Outer Banks Restaurants That You Need To Try

"The Outer Banks of North Carolina may be known for lighthouses, wild horses and stretching beaches, but the food-scene also deserves its share of the spotlight. If you find yourself frequenting familiar chains while on vacation, I'm here to rescue you."

TOURISM SALES - TRADE SHOWS

The Outer Banks is a perfect setting for group tours and outings, corporate meetings, sporting events and family reunions. Below is a list of 2023-24 domestic trade shows that the Visitors Bureau will be attending to keep informed of industry dynamics, cultivate and grow partnerships and enhance opportunities to drive visitation to Dare County.

- **August 22-25, 2023** – North Carolina Motorcoach Association Annual Trade Show, Cherokee, NC
- **September 11-14, 2023** – S.P.O.R.T.S. Marketplace, South Bend, IN
- **November 12-15, 2023** – National Tour Association, Travel Exchange Annual Conference, Shreveport, LA
- **December 14-15, 2023** – Association Executives of North Carolina Marketplace, Raleigh, NC
- **January 13-16, 2024** – American Bus Association Annual Marketplace, Nashville, TN
- **March 17-19, 2024** – Visit NC Tourism Conference, Greenville, NC
- **March 20-24, 2024** – Southeast Tourism Society Domestic Showcase, Little Rock, AR
- **May 3-7, 2024** – U.S. Travel Association IPW, Los Angeles, CA



AS PART OF A VOLUNTOURISM SERVICE PROJECT, STUDENTS VISITING FROM BURR & BURTON ACADEMY IN VERMONT PARTICIPATED IN A BEACH CLEAN-UP.

MARKETING THE OUTER BANKS

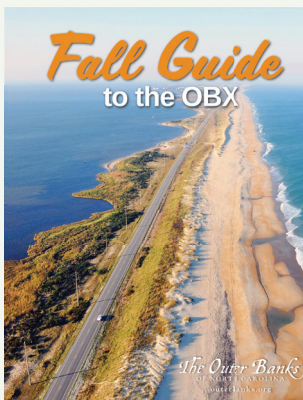
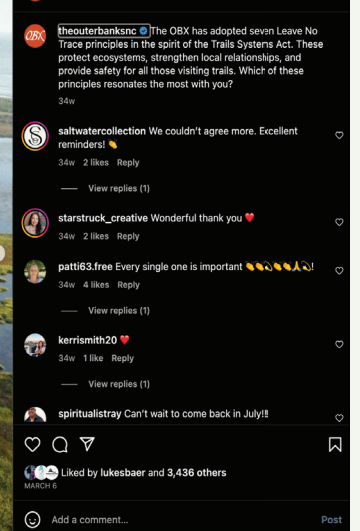
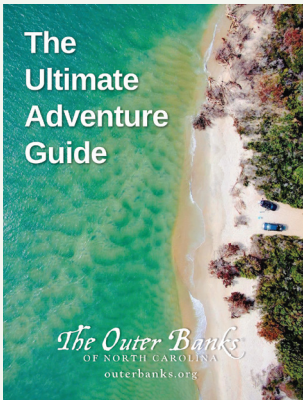
RAW OBX CAMPAIGN

Our "Raw OBX" campaign strategy was to tell the story of the OBX through the eyes of enthusiast audiences, like those who fish, surf or bird. These audiences are extremely passionate about what they do, and, not coincidentally, happens that peak times to follow those pursuits occur during non-summer months. Showing how people unlock their outdoor recreation passions on the Outer Banks allowed us to broaden the perspective of the beach and how it provides joy year-round.



SOCIAL IMPACT

By spotlighting the fine work that local community organizations are engaged in via our social media channels, we are elevating the importance of protecting and preserving our area, benefitting local businesses, enhancing resident and visitor engagement and promoting responsible stewardship on the Outer Banks. Each of the programs and initiatives described within this newsletter have a common thread – they all are directed at using the power of tourism to do more good in our community. The Dare County Tourism Board and Outer Banks Visitors Bureau are committed to these efforts and welcome your involvement and input.



Going Native on the Outer Banks - A Step Back in Time

By Frisco Native American Museum & Natural History Center Staff on Jun. 12, 2023

When visiting the Outer Banks, it is easy to be in awe of our beautiful beaches, great fishing, excellent restaurants, fun water sports, and stunning sunsets. But we are here to remind you of the...

[Read More](#)

The Outer Banks®
VISITORS BUREAU
outerbanks.org



OFFICIAL OBX TRAVEL GUIDE