

THE STATE OF DARE COUNTY TOURISM

2025/2026



STORIES, STEWARDSHIP & STRATEGY

The Dare County Tourism Board's strategic vision is guided by a simple but powerful idea: tourism should strengthen the place it touches. We're shaping the future of travel in Dare County through a commitment to responsible growth, community stewardship and a deep awareness of tourism's impact — both its benefits and its challenges. In recent years, this commitment has inspired a series of initiatives that reach beyond tourism's traditional borders. These projects invite community stakeholders to share in something bigger — an authentic, lasting investment in the culture, character, and care of the Outer Banks.

-Lee Nettles, Executive Director, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau

TOURISM SNAPSHOT

Visitor Spending

\$2.1 Billion

State Rank

#4

1. Mecklenburg, 2. Wake, 3. Buncombe

Tourism-Related Jobs

12,260

45.5% of Dare County Jobs

State Tax Revenue from Tourism

\$68.2 Million

Local Tax Revenue from Tourism

\$78.9 Million

Tax Savings per Resident

\$3,860

Highest savings of any NC county

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



ABOUT US



WELCOME CENTERS

AYCOCK BROWN WELCOME CENTER

5230 N Croatan Hwy, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949. (252) 261-4644

SARAH OWENS WELCOME CENTER

One Visitors Center Circle, Manteo, NC 27954. (252) 473-2138

WHALEBONE WELCOME CENTER

Cape Hatteras National Park Rd, Nags Head, NC 27959. (252) 441-6644

U.S. WEATHER BUREAU STATION/HATTERAS WELCOME CENTER

57190 Kohler Road, Hatteras Village, NC 27943. (252) 986-2203

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

DENNIS ROBINSON, Chair, Hatteras Island at Large

DAVID HINES, Vice Chair, Town of Kitty Hawk

TONIA COHEN, Secretary, Outer Banks Hotel/Motel Association

TOD CLISSOLD, Treasurer, Town of Manteo

JOHN HEAD, Asst. Treasurer, OBAR

MIKE SIERS, Personnel Committee Chair, Town of Nags Head

WALLY OVERMAN, Dare County Commissioners

TERRY GRAY, Town of Kill Devil Hills

MARK BALLOG, Outer Banks Restaurant Association

MARK BATENIC, Town of Southern Shores

BRENDA CHASEN, Town of Duck

RICHARD HESS, Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

TESS JUDGE, Member at Large

The Dare County Tourism Board typically meets the 3rd Thursday of each month at 9:00 a.m. in the Curtis H. Creech Memorial Boardroom at the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Offices in Manteo. For meeting schedules, agendas, minutes and recaps, visit outerbanks.org/about-us/board-of-directors.

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 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, Media Manager

AUSTIN HORNER, Tourism Services Coordinator

ANNA LEIGH CHAPMAN, Public Relations Assistant

Social Media

Facebook: [theouterbanks](https://www.facebook.com/theouterbanks)

TikTok: [@theouterbanksnc](https://www.tiktok.com/@theouterbanksnc)

Pinterest: [theouterbanks](https://www.pinterest.com/theouterbanks)

Youtube: [TheOuterBanksNC](https://www.youtube.com/TheOuterBanksNC)

Instagram: [@theouterbanksnc](https://www.instagram.com/theouterbanksnc)

Vimeo: [Theouterbanksnc](https://www.vimeo.com/Theouterbanksnc)

X: [theouterbanks](https://twitter.com/theouterbanks)

Blog: outerbanks.org/blog

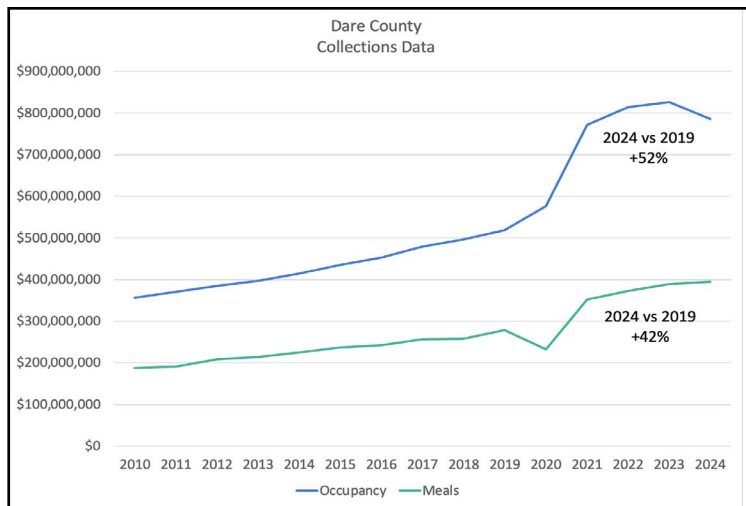
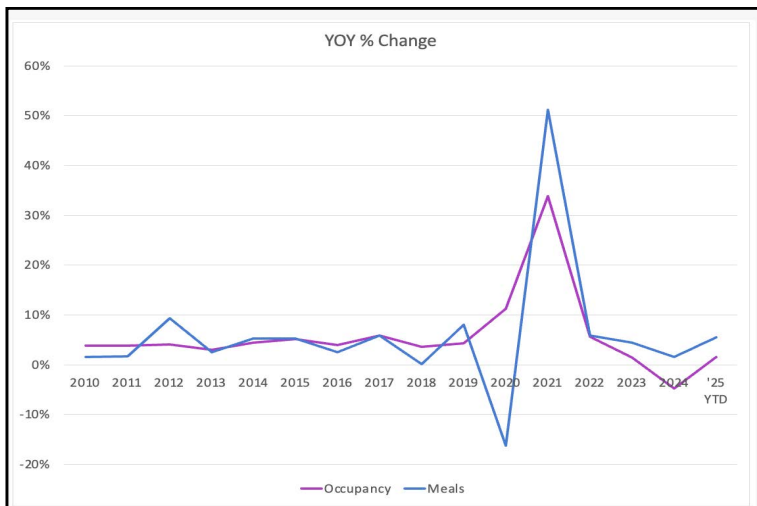
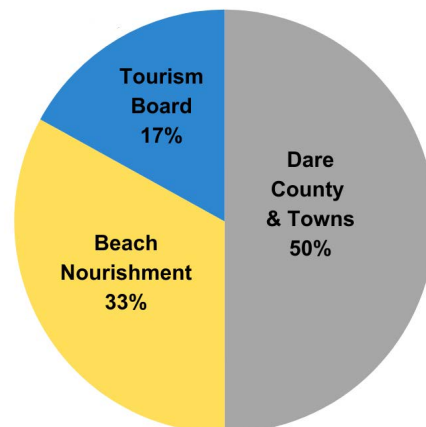
ECONOMIC IMPACT

Outer Banks visitors and their economic impact on the community remains critical to the vitality of our area. In 2024, visitor spending in Dare County totaled \$2.1 billion, retaining its #4 position out of North Carolina's 100 counties in total visitor spending, trailing only Mecklenburg, Wake and Buncombe.

HOW WE'RE FUNDED

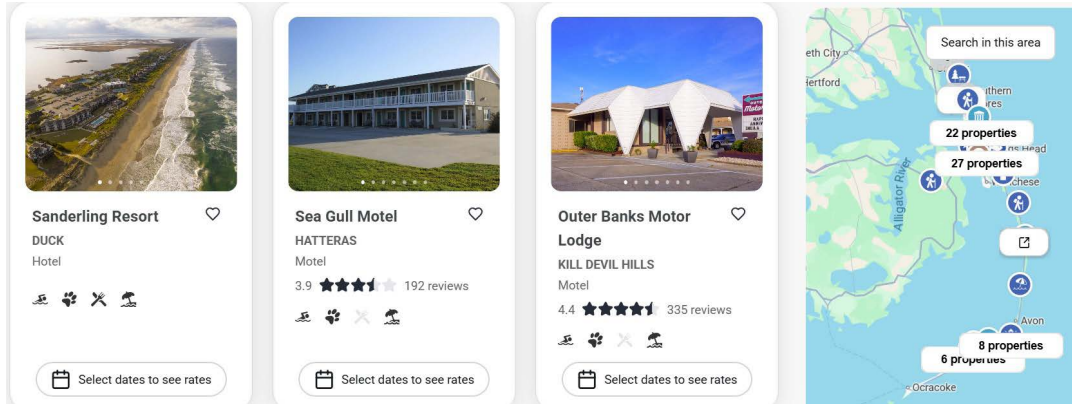
A 6% Occupancy Tax is collected when visitors rent short-term lodging in Dare County and is shared between the county and six municipalities, the Beach Nourishment Fund and the Dare County Tourism Board. In addition, the Tourism Board receives a 1% prepared meals tax. As directed by North Carolina law, 75% of these collections must be used to promote tourism and for the cost of administration. The remaining 25% is to be used for programs or services needed due to the impact of tourism, including Tourism Impact Grants and Long-Term Unappropriated Fund Grants for non-profits and governmental entities. Projects may include, but are not limited to, beach accesses, walkways and multi-use paths and attraction capital projects.

Occupancy Tax Distribution



RIPE FOR GROWTH: BOOKING PLATFORM DRIVES REVENUE FOR PARTNERS

In May 2025, the Visitors Bureau launched a new booking platform on OuterBanks.org through a partnership with RIPE, a reservation system built specifically for destination marketing organizations. The platform helps convert website traffic into direct, commission-free bookings for hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts and inns. It connects with most existing reservation systems, allowing properties to remain the merchant of record, while providing valuable first-party data to support future marketing and guest engagement and, ultimately, drive positive revenue impact for these partners.



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 nonprofits 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.



A Commitment to Accessibility, Inclusion and Enrichment

"The Sensory Garden was created to spark curiosity and awaken the senses. This garden would not be possible without the unwavering support of our partners and we are deeply grateful to the Dare County Tourism Board for their Tourism Impact Grant. The thoughtfully designed space was created to

engage visitors through touch, sound, sight, taste and fragrance. Features like the wheelchair accessible raised garden beds highlight the Gardens' ongoing commitment to accessibility, inclusion and the enrichment of all who visit."

-Brendan Medlin, Executive Director, The Elizabethan Gardens

Fostering Community Pride and Goodwill

"The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau has played an essential and transformative role in the continued development and success of the Good Guys vs. Cancer Showcase. What began as a meaningful community event has evolved into one of the most prestigious and well-respected basketball showcases on the East Coast. Through the strategic partnership and support of the Visitors Bureau, we have been able to elevate our marketing and promotional efforts, contribute substantially to Dare County's hospitality and service industries and create a meaningful opportunity for our residents to connect with visiting athletes, families and fans from across the country, fostering a shared sense of purpose in supporting an event that truly benefits the Outer Banks."

-Chad Williams, Founder/Director, Good Guys vs. Cancer Showcase



SUPPORTING NPOS & GOVERNMENT ENTITIES SINCE 1991

\$26M

in grant funding

925+

grants awarded

160+

grant recipients



Strengthening Infrastructure for the Future

"Our oceanfront boardwalks in Avon were originally installed back in the 1980s and over the years it has come to the point where they need to be replaced. The Tourism Impact Grant we received from the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau has been a huge help in this process. It's a big project, but this work will make Avon a better place for residents, homeowners and our visitors." **-George Hockenbury, Director, Avon Property Owners Association**

IN THE COMMUNITY

LONG-RANGE TOURISM MANAGEMENT PLAN



The Visitors Bureau is committed to a future where tourism works in \ harmony with our community's values. This commitment is embodied by the Outer Banks Long-Range Tourism Management Plan (LRTMP), a 10 year roadmap that aims to ensure that tourism improves quality of life for residents, protects the natural environment, preserves the rich history and culture and enhances visitor experiences. Explore the plan at outerbanks.org/lrtmp.

Making Your Outer Banks Promise: The Outer Banks Promise destination pledge aims to inspire responsible behavior, enhance stewardship and deepen respect for our local culture and natural surroundings. By showcasing the unique and special qualities of the Outer Banks, visitors, residents and local organizations are encouraged to take small but impactful steps to protect this area for future generations. Make your Promise at obxpromise.com.



Sparking Nonprofit Collaboration and Connection: In partnership with the Outer Banks Community Foundation, the Bureau co-hosted the Annual Nonprofit Mission Mixer (April) and Nonprofit Knowledge Series (September), bringing industry professionals, board members and fundraisers together in the spirit of social and educational collaboration.

Protecting What We Love, Together: The Visitors Bureau continues to highlight the ongoing work that goes into caring for and sustaining the Outer Banks through various volunteer initiatives, including participation in the National Park Service 'Adopt-a-Beach' Program and hosting the inaugural Outer Banks Volunteer Week in October with the support of several local community partners. The Bureau also launched the new Volunteer OBX portal, a new online hub to easily search, find and sign up for local volunteer opportunities, while providing Dare County nonprofits and community organizations with free tools to recruit, engage and retain volunteers. Residents, visitors and second homeowners can explore year-round volunteer opportunities and discover the new portal at outerbanks.org/voluntourism.



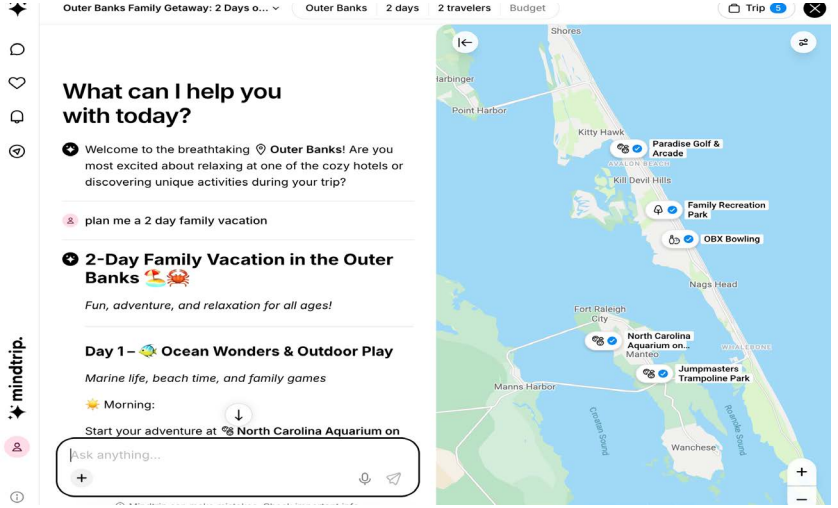
Community Connections on the Sound

The Soundside Event Site in Nags Head continues to host a mix of community favorites such as the Outer Banks Seafood Festival, OBX Brewtag and the Soundside Market Series, as well as new events including the Bronco Beach Bash and OBX Truckfest, reinforcing the site's role as a lively community hub on the Outer Banks. The Event Site will also be home to a new boardwalk, enhancing opportunities for visitors and locals to enjoy walking, birding, crabbing and boating, while offering a safe, scenic, and accessible path to experience the natural beauty of the area.

MARKETING THE OUTER BANKS

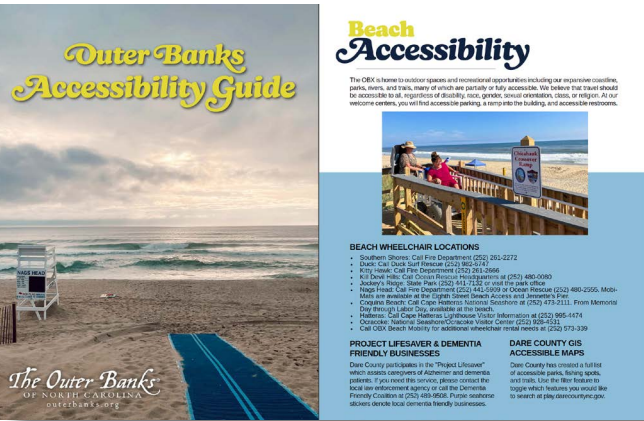
DIGITAL AND OUTREACH TOOLS

To support our three core marketing objectives—supporting a year-round tourism economy, cultivating conscientious visitation and destination stewardship, and utilizing tourism to build a stronger local community—we've enhanced our digital and outreach tools. Visitors can now experience the Outer Banks in a more personalized and sustainable way through the launch of the new MindTripAI tool on our website, offering customized trip planning. This initiative works in tandem with our new Accessibility Guide and Voluntourism Guide to encourage responsible, enriching visits for everyone. Further promoting these efforts, we're leveraging high-impact Social and Blog highlights, alongside coverage like Outside TV, to share authentic stories and amplify the importance of stewardship across all our channels.



SOCIAL IMPACT & PRINTED MATERIAL

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 are directed at using the power of tourism to do more good in our community. Specifically, we have created multiple mini guides and travel guides that strategically tie into our goals of stewardship, powerful storytelling, and overarching strategy, ensuring that tourism's influence is a positive force for the community and environment.



MARKETING THE OUTER BANKS

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Throughout the year, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau hosts 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 they're saying about the Outer Banks.

TRAVEL + LEISURE

OBX, NC #12: Travel + Leisure Readers' 15 Favorite Islands in the Continental U.S.

Southern Living

The Outer Banks Is The Vacation Of The Year 2025



Outer Banks, NC #1: Best Family Beach Vacations in the U.S. for 2025

Condé Nast Traveler

2025 "The Best Weekend Getaways in the US for a Quick Escape"

The Hampton Roads Show

The Visitors Bureau sponsored a week of the Hampton Roads Show on WAVY TV 10 from June 9 to June 13. Each day, one of The Outer Edge videos aired in two parts, followed by an interview with one of the Bureau staff members – including Aaron Tuell, Stephanie Hall, Jeff Schwartzberg and Lee Nettles – to discuss the videos in summary with hosts Chris Reckling and Tara Wheeler. The week featured local community members on location at Hatteras Island, Roanoke Island and the Northern Beaches, along with in-studio guests from area restaurants, attractions and businesses.

TOURISM SALES - TRADE SHOWS

In addition to hosting numerous in-market FAM tours throughout the year, the Visitors Bureau also attends several domestic trade shows to keep informed of industry dynamics, cultivate and grow partnerships and enhance opportunities to drive visitation to Dare County. Did You Know? According to the American Bus Association, a fully loaded motorcoach of 35 passengers making an overnight stay contributes an average of \$9,000-\$11,000 (USD) per day to the local economy in expenditures including meals, lodging, shopping, admission fees and local taxes.

- **August 12-15, 2025:** NC Motorcoach & VA Motorcoach, Winston Salem, NC
- **August 22-26, 2025:** Student Youth Travel Association, Savannah, GA
- **September 8-11, 2025:** S.P.O.R.T.S. Marketplace, Columbia, SC
- **November 9-12, 2025:** National Tour Assoc. Travel Exchange, Ottawa, ONT
- **December 1-5, 2025:** Travel South International Showcase, Kansas City, MO
- **December 9-10, 2025:** AENC Annual Trade Show, Raleigh, NC
- **January 10-13, 2026:** American Bus Assoc. Annual Marketplace, Reno, NV
- **March 16-18, 2026:** Visit NC Tourism Conference, Asheville, NC



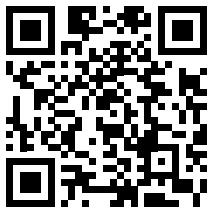
THE OUTER EDGE VIDEO SERIES

The Outer Banks from the insiders out.

One of the standout achievements of the past year was the creation of The Outer Edge, a six-part long-form video series capturing the true spirit of the Outer Banks. Through powerful storytelling and breathtaking cinematography, the series reveals both the rugged, windswept nature of our islands and the warmth of those who call them home. It's an invitation — to residents and visitors alike — to look deeper, connect more meaningfully and feel a genuine sense of belonging.

The impact of The Outer Edge reached far beyond metrics. It reignited community pride, inspired visitors to engage more thoughtfully, and reframed tourism as a shared journey of respect and responsibility. In doing so, it strengthened the bond between the Outer Banks and all who love it — reminding us that stories, stewardship and strategy are, together, the heart of what will continue to drive our success as a destination.

The campaign continues to find momentum, inspiring a locally curated art exhibition at Dare Arts in Manteo, where residents submitted Outer Edge-inspired pieces that reflected the series' themes and served as a community storytelling platform. Season 2 of The Outer Edge has been filmed and is scheduled to launch in January 2026.



**WATCH
THE
SERIES**



The Outer Banks[®]
VISITORS BUREAU
outerbanks.org