



VISIT PANAMA CITY BEACH
VISION 2022



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bay County Tourist Development Council (TDC) has produced this strategic plan for Panama City Beach to provide vision for destination growth, development and marketing in the years leading up to 2020. This plan was originally developed in 2008, with participation from an array of Panama City Beach business, community and elected officials as well as citizens-at-large, utilizing online surveys, interviews and community input sessions; and has been updated in 2012, 2016, and again in 2018.

NOTE: *The 2018 update occurred 45 days prior to Hurricane Michael striking, which was followed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Until the destination stabilizes in the aftermath of these back-to-back crises and reaches a level of economic certainty to allow planning five years, the TDC will continue to execute the initiatives previously identified.*

For more than 80 years, Panama City Beach's sugar white sands, turquoise waters and temperate climate have been recognized as one of Northwest Florida's most popular vacation destinations.

In recent years, the destination faced some of the most challenging periods in its history with the Great Recession, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, Hurricane Michael, the COVID-19 pandemic and other changes in the market. Though its resiliency was tested, Panama City Beach demonstrated its strength as a tourist destination by posting record breaking numbers in each subsequent year.

These challenges highlighted the need for continued economic diversification within the local economy and within the tourism industry. The focus of this plan is to continue to build on the strength of Panama City Beach as a dynamic beach town and to drive incremental visitor demand through tourism marketing, encouraging repeat visitation throughout the year, maintaining an active voice in the development of the community as a tourist destination and developing new public venues.

To achieve its goals, the TDC needs to collaborate with other public, private and community partners. The TDC will continue to actively seek these partnerships to spur economic development and brand alignment and increase the public's positive perception of Panama City Beach and Bay County, Florida, as an esteemed destination.



OVERVIEW

The Bay County Tourist Development Council (TDC) has produced this strategic plan for Panama City Beach to provide a vision for destination growth, development and marketing in the years leading up to 2022. This plan was developed with participation from a wide array of Panama City Beach business, community and elected officials as well as citizens-at-large utilizing online surveys, interviews and community input sessions.

Workforce development issues were raised during the development of this plan. The TDC will collaborate with these organizations, including the Workforce Center, Gulf Coast State College, Florida State University– Panama City, the Economic Development Alliance and local chambers of commerce.

The facilitated planning process was conducted during Summer 2018. The plan updates and replaces the Strategic Plan that was adopted in September 2016.



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Panama City Beach, with its sugar white sands, turquoise waters, and temperate climate, has long been recognized as one of Northwest Florida's most popular vacation destinations. The strong demand comes from families, college students and families on spring break, sports enthusiasts and retirees from the upper Midwest and Canada.

In earlier days, the beach attracted visitors from regional markets to the local, small, family-owned and operated hotels, motels and cottages. During the 70s and 80s, the tourism industry continued to develop with newer, more modern hotels, motels and condominiums. The expanded product and demand of the industry to attract more visitors annually required a much more aggressive approach to tourism promotion.

In 1986, the Bed Tax Referendum passed, and the Bay County Tourist Development Council (TDC) was formed. In 1998, the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) was formed and contracted with the TDC to perform tourism promotion, and the contract remains the same today.

In 1998, Panama City Beach embarked on a highly successful beach renourishment program. The initial project, with subsequent projects in 2005, 2011 and 2015, significantly widened and raised the beach which not only helped protect the beach from storm events, but has increased the marketing value of the destination.

In the decade following 1998, the resort destination experienced overwhelming growth in new development of hotels, condominiums, restaurants and Pier Park. The opening of the new Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport in 2010 is symbolic of a destination that is forging a new destiny through forward thinking, planning and development.

Even though it had been a lucrative market segment, the community decided to pivot away from college spring break in 2015.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Bay County Tourist Development Council will promote a positive image for Panama City Beach, increase tourism and coordinate the marketing efforts of the total tourism community.

BRAND POSITION

The brand position for Panama City Beach is REAL. FUN. BEACH. This brand highlights the attributes that differentiate it from other destinations – the quintessential, all-American beach community that is built of fun and is home to the “World’s Most Beautiful Beaches” and demonstrates that Panama City Beach appeals to a wide variety of audiences that are looking to have fun on their beach vacation.

VISION STATEMENT

Panama City Beach is the Gulf Coast’s premier, year-round, fun beach destination whose future business success is centered on maintaining that leadership position.

CORE VALUES

- Live up to the brands “REAL. FUN. BEACH.” and “World’s Most Beautiful Beaches”
- Promote a fun, yet safe place for visitors and residents to enjoy a Florida Gulf Coast experience
- Acknowledge that a great place to visit is conversely a great place to live and work
- Foster a healthy, sustainable and diverse travel and tourism economy within a livable community
- Protect the image of Panama City Beach as a family friendly, diverse destination
- Stimulate local understanding and appreciation for the direct and indirect impact and overall importance of tourism for the area



VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

- Maintain our place as the “World’s Most Beautiful Beaches”
- Maintain high visitor occupancy while not exceeding the destination’s carrying capacity
- Continued diversification of our tourism product to create additional demand
 - New sports and event venues designed to drive increased destination appeal in the shoulder and off-seasons while discouraging increased road traffic in peak visitation periods
 - Increased ecotourism and nature-based recreation access to St. Andrew Bay and the Gulf of Mexico
 - Development of additional attractions, cultural and heritage resources and other tourism amenities
- Enhance primary gateways that welcome visitors, create a sense of place, deliver the brand message, and direct first-time visitors to the Visitor Information Center (US-98 Phillips Inlet Bridge, US-98 Hathaway Bridge, FL-79 Buchanan West Bay Bridge)
- Consistent directional signage throughout the destination
- Continue CRA infrastructure improvements to move traffic efficiently; provide safety for pedestrians; encourage walking, cycling; reduce vehicular traffic; improved curb appeal for a more attractive destination. The installation of curbing, wide sidewalks, turning lanes, bike lanes, lighting, pedestrian bridges, signage and coastal landscaping will instill a sense of pride and safety among visitors and residents alike.
- Redevelopment of abandoned and dilapidated property in core visitor areas
- Consistent visitor occupancy in the 55 percent to 85 percent range year-round

VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

1. Operate the TDC/CVB as a trusted, innovative, industry-leading destination marketing organization that reflects the dynamic character of Panama City Beach
 - a. Provide value through cooperative marketing opportunities to Panama City Beach tourism businesses
 - b. Operate in an open, transparent manner to ensure the proper use of the tourist development dollars
 - c. Operate the TDC/CVB in a manner that clearly embodies the REAL. FUN. BEACH. brand
 - d. Regularly benchmark best practices from other resort destinations to ensure PCB remains an industry leader
 - e. Follow the Destination Marketing Association International Code of Ethics, implement the DestinationNext initiative and achieve DMAP certification
 - f. Encourage staff members to be active and seek professional certifications from industry associations
 - g. Collaborate with public and private sector partners on local, regional and state levels to create strategic alliances that drive incremental visitor demand to Panama City Beach, as well as extend the reach and influence of the organization
 - h. Develop, produce and implement innovative, non-traditional programs that showcase Panama City Beach as a quality, fun tourist destination
 - i. Chasin' the Sun TV
 - ii. Visit Panama City Beach Visitor Magazine
 - iii. Signature Special Events
 - i. Engage local residents and elected officials with compelling educational messages to advocate for greater understanding and appreciation of the tourism's beneficial impacts on building a better community

SUCCESS IN 2020:

- Increased partner participation in TDC/CVB programs
- Industry awards and accolades recognizing the TDC/CVB's initiatives
- Continued unqualified audits
- DMAP certification
- Increased partnerships with affinity brands
- Increased year-round visitor demand and tourist development tax collections

VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

2. Preserve and enhance the beach, the most important natural resource of Panama City Beach.

- a. Preserve and protect the water, sand, dunes and access paths
 - i. Ensure that all sand added to the beach through renourishment activities is similar in color and composition to the existing sand on the beach
 - ii. Maintain existing and conduct additional dune vegetation projects to encourage and enhance the development of sand dunes along the length of the beach
- b. Work with local, state and federal agencies to secure necessary permits to conduct future beach renourishment activities
- c. Increase awareness of the beach and near-shore areas as wildlife habitat for sea turtles, shorebirds, etc.
- d. Enhance and improve trash removal and beach maintenance activities
 - i. Continue to deploy trash receptacles that are more visually pleasing to replace the existing cans which provide the same function
 - ii. Discourage littering of all types, including glass bottles and cigarette butts on the beach and beach access points
 - iii. Continue to work with beach maintenance contractor on a post-disposal recycling program
 - iv. Continue the enhanced beach grooming and trash pickup programs
- e. Public Information – Beach & Surf Conditions
 - i. Create materials to educate travelers about beach and surf conditions, including surf conditions, Leave No Trace Ordinances (signs, maps, website, guides, in-room video)
 - ii. Enhance beach and surf patrol to increase public awareness of surf conditions, rip currents, Leave No Trace Ordinances and other issues of importance to beach goers
 - iii. Continue to fund lifeguard programs at the public beach parks - City Pier, County Pier and Rick Seltzer Park
- f. Pursue alternative funding sources - Triumph Gulf Coast, RESTORE Act, NRDA
 - i. Work with Bay County and local stakeholders on environmental enhancement and restoration projects that benefit Panama City Beach, St. Andrew Bay and the Gulf of Mexico

SUCCESS IN 2020:

- High visitor and resident satisfaction scores
- Continued awards and accolades
- Increased wildlife and natural areas
- Increased diving reefs accessible from beach
- Funding for RESTORE projects that benefit local environmental restoration



VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

3. Enhance the visitor experience.

- a. Deliver on the destination brand – “REAL. FUN. BEACH.” Most aspects of the Panama City Beach community should enhance a family vacation experience
- b. Collaborate with local governments and community leaders on policies that enhance the perception of Panama City Beach as a hospitable, safe, fun and beautiful vacation destination
- c. Collaborate with local governments on strategies to enhance the visitor arrival/departure experience and ease visitor travel throughout the destination
 - i. Gateways that deliver on the brand, welcome and direct travelers to information
 - ii. Directional signage – keep visitors moving efficiently through the community
 - iii. Road infrastructure and traffic enhancements – move traffic efficiently while protecting the safety of pedestrians and cyclists
 - iv. Landscaping and beautification – a well maintained coastal landscape will inspire pride and better visitor behavior
- d. Improve and expand on family attractions and outdoor experiences that complement the brand
- e. Leverage sponsor relationships by integrating brands/services into the visitor experience via promotions, special offers and unique activations
- f. Utilize new and emerging technologies (geocaching, augmented reality, on demand services) to create fun, family-friendly activities

SUCCESS IN 2020:

- High visitor and resident satisfaction scores
- New gateways & directional signage
- New streetscape with curbs, sidewalks and coastal landscaping throughout beachfront area
- New and improved attractions and activities
- Increased bicycle and non-vehicular usage
- Increased year-round visitation and improved traffic and parking

VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

4. Develop and market Panama City Beach as a year-round destination.

a. Expanded and targeted research-based marketing program.

- i. Establish marketing priorities by data-driven, personalized audience persona
- ii. Partner with airlines to drive increased fly-in visitation from target markets
- iii. Utilize new and emerging digital technology to target visitors and customize digital interactions during vacation planning

b. Programming of events during non-summer months

- i. Festivals and concert events.

c. Expanded team sports and group sales initiatives emphasizing events during slower occupancy periods

- i. Market the new PCB Sports Park to tournament organizers to increase non-summer visitor demand
- ii. With the expansion of meeting facilities along the beach, add additional meetings focused resources to the group sales department
- iii. Expand presence in international market through tradeshow and familiarization tours for both tour operators and media

d. Build on fun elements in brand by promoting celebrations of holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, reunions, etc., to attract families and groups

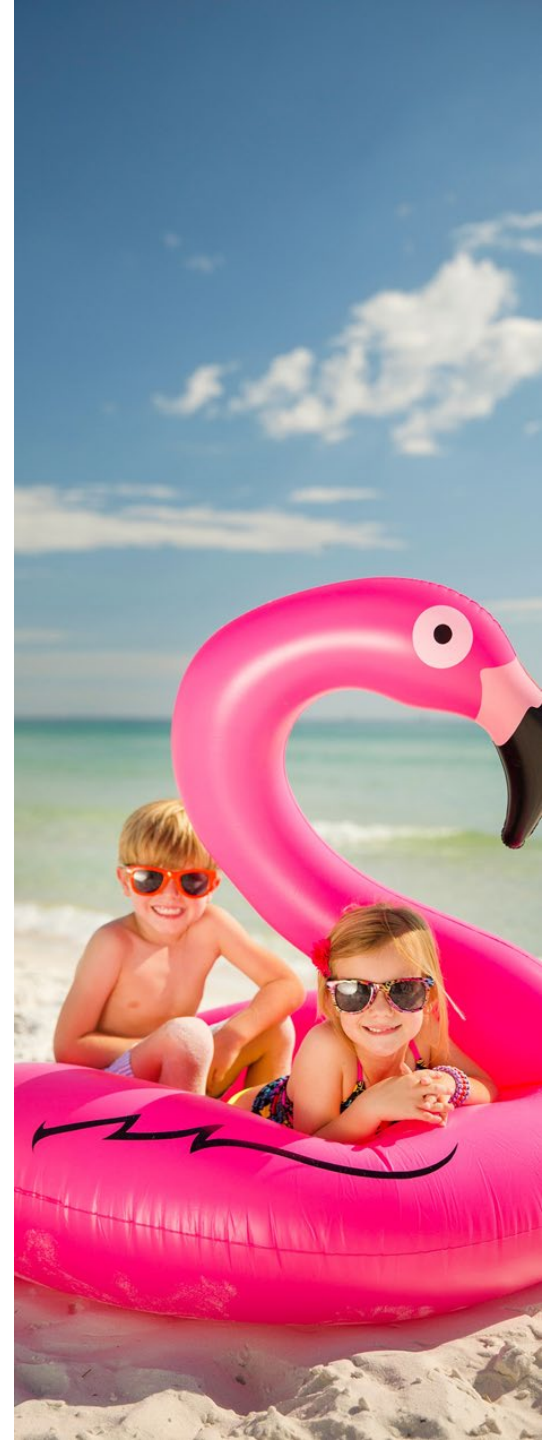
e. Feature adventure tourism opportunities, including kayaking, fishing, photography and snorkeling/diving as unique reasons to visit Panama City Beach that go beyond the traditional beach experience

f. Encourage the redevelopment of existing attractions and the addition of complementary attractions

g. Provide ongoing industry education and communication tools showcasing industry trends and programmatic results for the various market development investments of the TDC

SUCCESS IN 2020:

- Increased year-round visitation with less dependence on peak periods to level the monthly visitation trends
- Increased family and adult visitation
- Increased airport traffic
- PCB recognized as a top destination for celebrations





VISION OF PANAMA CITY BEACH IN 2022

5. Enhance and develop public venues to generate additional visitor demand

a. Sports Facilities

- i. Complete the development of the Panama City Beach Sports Park that expands amateur athletic fields for soccer, lacrosse, softball, baseball and other field sports
- ii. Coordinate the sales efforts for Frank Brown Park and the new sports park to ensure highest and best utilization of the venues
- iii. Develop multi-purpose facility to host sports tournaments, concert events, exhibitions, boat shows and social events

b. Utilization of Improvements to Aaron Bessant Park

- i. Work with the City and other stakeholders on events – concerts, festivals, theatrical performances, and athletic tournaments – in Aaron Bessant Park that will drive incremental visitation to Panama City Beach

c. Explore the feasibility of a potential multi-purpose facility capable of hosting a diverse range of events and the infrastructure and support amenities needed to ensure its success

d. Optimize utilization of TDC supported venues to ensure their successful impact on the community's destination stakeholders

e. Promote adventure tourism opportunities on West Bay, as well as the Gulf of Mexico:

- i. Boat ramps and accessible parking options
- ii. A series of artificial reef systems for snorkeling, diving
- iii. Availability and quality of fishing including opportunities to host tournaments

f. Work with local, state and regional stakeholders to encourage the further diversification of Panama City Beach's tourism economy in partnership with Triumph Gulf Coast and others where applicable

SUCCESS IN 2020:

- Outdoor concert facility hosting regular family-friendly entertainment events
- Outdoor sports fields hosting regular tournaments that bring large groups of overnight visitors
- Indoor multi-purpose facility hosting regular events that bring large numbers of overnight visitors
- New and revitalized attractions that make PCB the choice destination for families seeking a fun beach vacation/getaway

The background image shows a beautiful coastal scene. In the foreground, there are large, dark, jagged rocks. The water is very clear, showing a light turquoise color near the shore and a deeper blue further out. A person is swimming in the water near the rocks, wearing a blue life preserver and a blue cap. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

BAY COUNTY TDC AND PANAMA CITY BEACH CVB ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Marketing and managing a large destination requires a highly skilled team effort. In order to deliver upon the strategic initiatives outlined in this document the TDC/CVB staff will need to be expanded in order to achieve maximum efficiency and return on investment. The staff organizational structure will be reviewed each year as part of the annual planning process.