



# THE IMPACT OF TOURISM



FY 2019-2020 Annual Report



# RICHMOND REGION

Articles and accolades in trusted travel and lifestyle media outlets greatly influence travel plans.

By pitching news, hosting media visits, conducting editorial meetings and holding media events in target markets, Richmond Region Tourism makes sure information about our destination appears in the content that consumers follow

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

**100** articles produced about the Richmond Region as a travel destination

While the pandemic halted media events and visits in spring of 2020, it didn't stop us from sharing positive stories about Richmond. Ways to experience the region virtually, stories about acts of kindness, and articles about innovative business pivots featured our wonderful Richmond region partners.

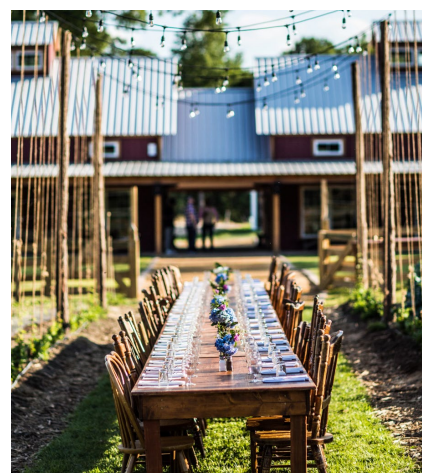


“Richmond is one of the nation's oldest cities, but you'd never know it. That's because red brick colonial buildings blend seamlessly with inspired street art, creative boutiques, and hip eateries.”

—AFAR

“Richmond, long known as a sleepy capital steeped in Confederate history, has morphed into a dynamic cultural center on the cutting edge of the arts, food and recreation.”

—The New York Times



“Richmond's BLK RVA initiative is making it easy to explore Black history all year round in this city.”

—Essence Magazine

“Richmond, Virginia is a city with a deep and complicated history, but lately it has gained a reputation as a hip landing spot for young professionals and young businesses.”

—Southern Living



“The Richmond Region has about a million stories, from 'Give me liberty or give me death' to 'Let's go check out GVAR Bar.’”

—Corporate and Incentive Travel

“52 Places To Go in 2020”

—The New York Times

“8 Awesomely Diverse US Cities”

—Matador Network

“10 of the Most Interesting Food Scenes Across the Country”

—USA Today's 10 Best

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: TOURISM'S COMEBACK

What a year 2020 has been. The hospitality industry in the Richmond Region hasn't escaped the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hotel occupancy in the region is down 30%, and many restaurants, attractions and small businesses continue to struggle. Across the country, data shows us that more than a quarter of all leisure and hospitality workers remain unemployed.

**Yet, there are signs of hope.**

We see positive moments in the tourism landscape. Locals are more open to welcoming visitors. Our regional leaders are working around the clock to stem the pandemic's economic blows. Grant programs, new policies and dining flexibilities have provided a needed boost to small businesses.

The Richmond Region Tourism team remains active and engaged, too. We are partnering with clients to reschedule events in the region and create new initiatives to showcase our assets to remind visitors and residents alike all that we offer. The work now will help accelerate the region's recovery.

We began safely welcoming sports events and tournaments back to the region this summer (see p. 4). Our team has a new skillset to add to their repertoire of services: COVID-19 safety best practices. We rolled out **Richmond Region 2030**, the Region's first comprehensive **Tourism Master Plan** (see p. 3). We continue to leverage BLK RVA and OutRVA to welcome all guests to our community, and we are examining our internal practices to advance **diversity, equity and inclusion** (see p. 6). And, we welcomed **Colonial Heights** to our tourism footprint July 1.

While we navigate the challenges of the pandemic, the Richmond Region still has a great deal to promote. We continue to compete successfully for convention, meeting and sports tourism business. We are a day's drive from half the nation's population – making us a convenient weekend destination. And finally, our true ace in the hole, the friends and family who regularly come for visits to whom we can showcase all that we love about RVA.

**We know the health of our community's economy depends on a strong travel economy. Working together, rest assured, we will be back.**

In the meantime, please find the results of Fiscal Year 19-20 in this report.

Jack Berry  
President and CEO



## TOURISM STIMULATES OUR ECONOMY

Destination promotion is an engine of economic development in our community.

In 2019, the Richmond Region hosted

**7.7 million visitors**

WHO SPENT **\$2.6 billion**

OR **\$7 million PER DAY**

### 2019 VISITOR SPENDING

*in Millions*

Chesterfield	\$543.59 M
Hanover & Ashland	\$256.76 M
Henrico	\$993.89 M
New Kent	\$37.57 M
Powhatan	\$10.27 M
City of Richmond	\$836.45 M

*Note: this represents the jurisdictions in our footprint in FY19-20*

### TOURISM SUPPORTS

**24,700**

**JOB**

WITH WAGES & SALARIES TOTALING:

**\$624 million**

LOCAL TAXES COLLECTED:

**\$76 million**

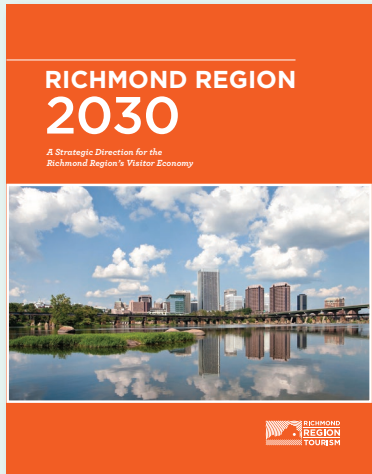
HOTEL SALES & OCCUPANCY REVENUE:

**\$330 million**

▼ DOWN 12%

Source: U.S. Travel Association, calendar year 2019





# TOURISM MASTER PLAN

Richmond Region Tourism spent 2019 working on a comprehensive 10-year Tourism Master Plan. The result is **Richmond Region 2030, A Strategic Direction for the Richmond Region's Visitor Economy**.

The process to create Richmond Region 2030 was designed to help residents and stakeholders articulate and share a clear vision for the future. Consultants asked important questions of key stakeholders in 115 interviews, surveyed 1,000 visitors and 2,100 residents, and hosted 50 people in visioning workshops.

The outcome is a thoughtful, research-based strategic plan that we know meets the needs and desires of our community. It establishes priorities that, when executed over the next decade, will ensure that the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for residents; that we attract the kinds of visitors who would most appreciate the region's character; and that we responsibly grow our tourism industry for the benefit of all in our community.

The work in creating this plan was completed pre-COVID. However, we believe as tourism rebounds over time, this plan will guide us toward success while supporting our community.

Richmond Region 2030 and the background research are available online at **RichmondRegion2030.com**. There are three areas of focus: Experience Development, Infrastructure Development and Industry Advancement and Advocacy.

Each of these focus areas will be led by a committee chaired by members of the Richmond Region Tourism board. We will actively seek participation on the committees from a variety of voices in our community. Look for more in 2021!

# Attracting Leisure Travelers

## ADVERTISING HIGHLIGHTS

Before paid campaigns were paused in March, VisitRichmondVA.com saw:



We also saw extremely efficient site traffic generated from both Facebook and display media.

## DIGITAL MARKETING

Following eight months of strong website traffic and visitor engagement, VisitRichmondVA.com drastically changed direction in response to COVID-19 and its impact on the travel space.

Richmond Region Tourism's Marketing Team developed new website content to provide local residents, businesses and visitors with useful and constantly evolving information concerning the pandemic.

### New online content and initiatives include:

- TAKEOUTRVA.COM**  
A comprehensive list of the Region's restaurants offering takeout and curbside pickup service.
- TRAVELSAFERVA.COM & MEETSAFERVA.COM**  
Information on safety and health protocols for hotel, restaurant, attraction and transportation partners.
- CALENDAR OF EVENTS**  
Daily updates providing residents with information on virtual events and activities offered by regional attractions.
- RICHMONDREGIONTOURISM.COM**  
Weekly updates for residents and businesses providing local, regional and statewide information on all aspects of the pandemic.

Additionally, we launched **trIViA**, a weekly contest highlighting local "silver lining" stories. The team also created **custom virtual backgrounds** and **digital puzzles** featuring scenic vistas from throughout the Region.



## CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS:

RVA Blog and Visit Richmond social media channels provide an avenue through which we can share real-time information about the destination and engage directly with past, present and future visitors. Because video continues to gain momentum as an optimal medium for showcasing a destination, we produced and shared an increased amount of video content with great success throughout the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

"Unique RVA," a video series specially designed for Instagram that launched in the spring of 2019, gained traction with tens of thousands of views by shining a spotlight on well-known RVA hot spots and under-the-radar hidden gems.

Up-to-the-minute engagement with followers through Visit Richmond content channels continues to prove essential during the pandemic. While projects like Unique RVA had to pause, RVA Blog and social media communications provide valuable details about the region consumed by would-be visitors and locals alike. When travel came to a grinding halt, we shared the many ways our destination could be experienced virtually. As attraction and business doors began their phased reopenings, we pointed followers to information about traveling to and experiencing Richmond safely. Content themes focused on what followers showed interest in: safety measures, virtual experiences, outdoor activities and educational opportunities.



### TOP VISITED PAGE ON OUR SITE

# RVA BLOG

# SPORTS TOURISM LEADING RECOVERY

In the Richmond Region, nine out of the top 10 nights of highest hotel occupancy in calendar year 2019 were related to sports tourism events. These events represented 60 percent of all event bookings through Richmond Region Tourism.

In 2020, COVID-19 immediately sidelined sporting events and tournaments. Fortunately, sports tourism returned at the start of Phase 2 under the Forward Virginia Guidelines set forth by the Office of the Governor and the Department of Health. It has proved to be vital to our economic recovery. From June 10 through Labor Day, 30 events took place with a direct impact of \$15.5 million on our community. Sixteen more tournaments are scheduled for the remainder of the year, and 2021 is already poised to be a record sports tourism year for the Region.

Sporting events operate differently during the pandemic. Regional partners and operators are working together to take every precaution to guarantee a safe environment for both players and fans by strictly adhering to the Forward Virginia guidance. Richmond Region Tourism's event management team works with tournament organizers to make events safe and successful. That includes everything from venue and vendor selection to know-before-you-go information to ensure visitors are prepared for their arrival to the Richmond Region. With the safety of participants a top priority, our team is helping facilitate communication with tournament organizers and venues regarding COVID-19 precautions such as temperature checks, signage to promote social distancing and mask reminders. The work of our region's sports tourism sector is paying off and has served as a model to responsibly welcome visitors back to our region.







## Recruiting Events

### MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS AND TOURNAMENTS BOOKED BY RRT

*held in the Region in FY19-20*

**\$64,688,626** ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT

**181,078** ASSOCIATED ATTENDEES

**90,515** ASSOCIATED HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS

### FUTURE MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS AND TOURNAMENTS BOOKED BY RRT

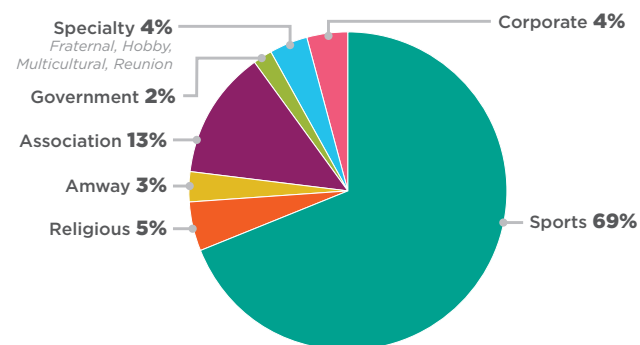
**Including events lost due to COVID**  
*Excluding events lost due to COVID*

**\$81,722,681** ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT  
*\$59,239,451*

**208,424** ASSOCIATED ATTENDEES  
*160,600*

**123,625** ASSOCIATED HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS  
*100,598*

### HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS BY MARKET SEGMENT *booked in FY19-20*



## Services: Leading the Convention Industry into the New Next

The convention industry is transforming, and the services team at RRT is embracing the change by leveraging our experience, engaging our community partners, and collaborating with meeting planners. The team is innovating how conventions and meetings are produced and programmed to ensure in-person events are safe and valuable to attendees. The team is redefining what a hybrid meeting is and positioning ourselves as a valuable resource for planners of all types and sizes of meetings and conventions. Meetings and conventions will still deliver robust economic impact throughout the destination because of the innovations our team is implementing.



## RVA Champions Program

The RVA Champions program recognizes citizens who help Richmond Region Tourism recruit their meeting, convention or tournament.

- **29 RVA Champions**
- Collective **Economic Impact** brought by the events produced by RVA Champions: **\$10.2 million**

## TOURISM FOSTERS COMMUNITY PRIDE

When the time is right, locals will boost visitation by inviting friends and family.

### I AM TOURISM AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

- **7 I Am Tourism Ambassador workshops**
- **353 Ambassadors trained** in representing hundreds of businesses, government and nonprofits. **2,594 total Ambassadors trained** since the program inception
- **55 graduates** of Ambassador Academy

### COMMUNITY AWARENESS

- **97 placements** in local media featuring tourism
- **33 community presentations**
- **13 Tourism Awards** presented

### RICHMOND REGION TOURISM FOUNDATION

- Awarded **four \$1,000 scholarships** to VSU Hospitality Management students, bringing **total scholarships** awarded to VSU students to **\$22,000** since 2011
- Funded part-time Foundation Coordinator, I Am Tourism Ambassador workshops and Ambassador Academy



## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Richmond Region Tourism's work in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is ongoing. Staff created a new Community Relations Manager role to continue building the OutRVA and BLK RVA campaigns, which promote the region's diversity. In June 2020, the board of directors voted to approve the organization's racial equity statement and position in favor of Confederate monument removal. Over the summer, Richmond Region Tourism began work with a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion specialist on a series of internal staff and board workshops, conversations, assessments and managerial training.

These efforts are designed to ensure Richmond Region Tourism lives up to its core value of inclusiveness. Following these programs, we will begin a diversity, equity, and inclusion visioning process that will involve stakeholder input as we examine the ways that Richmond Region Tourism can affect change and help move the region forward. A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategic plan will be created to provide a roadmap.

## TOURISM IS A REGIONAL EFFORT

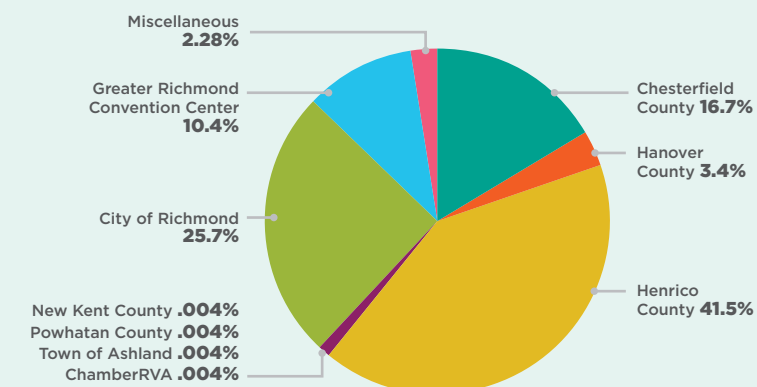
Regional investment in travel promotion leverages resources for great impact. Tourism is a leader in regional collaboration.

### RICHMOND REGION TOURISM INVESTORS

**FY20 Budget:** \$7.4 million

**Investment sources:** Counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent and Powhatan, City of Richmond, and the Town of Ashland, ChamberRVA and various sponsorships<sup>1</sup>

**Sponsorships:** Cash sponsorship up 13%  
In-kind sponsorship down 23%



<sup>1</sup> Note: this represents the jurisdictions in our footprint in FY19-20



401 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street,  
Richmond, VA 23219  
804.782.2777

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
RICHMOND, VA  
PERMIT NO. 2917



## TOP 10 ATTRACTION ATTENDANCE

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <b>JAMES RIVER PARK</b><br>1,992,028         | 6. <b>VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS</b><br>372,533         |
| 2. <b>VIRGINIA CAPITAL TRAIL</b><br>1,074,799   | 7. <b>LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN</b><br>330,718        |
| 3. <b>MAYMONT</b><br>935,543                    | 8. <b>THREE LAKES PARK &amp; NATURE CENTER</b><br>294,070 |
| 4. <b>HENRICUS HISTORICAL PARK</b><br>576,463   | 9. <b>MEADOW FARM</b><br>279,423                          |
| 5. <b>SCIENCE MUSEUM OF VIRGINIA</b><br>393,597 | 10. <b>CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF RICHMOND</b><br>237,833       |