



# THE IMPACT OF TOURISM



FY 2020-2021 Annual Report

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from the  
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## Message from the President

### To Our Richmond Region Tourism Partners,

The pages that follow tell the story of remarkable resilience.

#### Return of Travel

Even as the Richmond travel sector faced untold challenges over the past year, we never slowed down. Now, as we continue to navigate the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing the impact of that work: safely welcoming visitors back.

Despite the uncertainty around the pandemic, our team at Richmond Region Tourism remained steadfast in working to safely welcome back meeting, convention and sports events planners, tour operators and leisure travelers (see page 3). While the market for both sports and leisure tourism, as well as meetings and conventions business, remains strong, business travel will be slower to return, even as 68% of U.S. companies that are not currently traveling say they are planning to resume domestic business travel throughout the fall.

#### Workforce Development

Notwithstanding this forward momentum and the strong economic rebound this spring and summer, the hospitality sector still has not regained all the jobs it lost throughout the pandemic. In fact, the American Hotel & Lodging Association says that it expects the Virginia hotel industry will lose 23.7% of its jobs by the end of 2021, compared to the pre-pandemic 2019 baseline. If you know someone looking to reenter the job market in the tourism sector, our partner at Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association (VRLTA) has done a great job of compiling industry job opportunities via their job board at VRLTA.org.

#### Marketing

Such statistics can make it difficult to recall that not that long ago we were perennially breaking our own records for hotel occupancy and visitor spending. We now have begun to reengage the strategies that have worked so well for us in the past. This past spring, based on positive sentiment around travel safety, our marketing department resumed its full paid advertising campaign. At the same time, our public relations team continued to leverage national media, resulting in exposure in *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Reader's Digest* and more (see page 5). These accolades are invaluable marketing tools that not only create a sense of regional pride but



also remind community members of the important role they play in restoring local tourism.

#### Community Engagement

Likewise, we are putting renewed energy behind programs that promote our region in a positive and unique way. We continue to engage constituents through our I Am Tourism Ambassador Program with virtual classes throughout the last year (see page 6). We encourage you to sign-up for one of these free classes to gain a visitor's perspective of the region and learn about our many attractions. We also invite you to partner with us by inviting the groups you are involved with and care about to RVA – groups like family reunions, association meetings or sporting events.

#### Welcoming Diverse Travelers

We know that Richmond's diversity is an asset to both visitors and constituents alike and our Richmond Region Tourism Foundation has continued to grow BLK RVA, a community-driven initiative started in 2019 to support local, Black-owned businesses by increasing tourism and broadening our collective understanding of our past and future (see page 6). Our OutRVA program also has become a trusted resource to learn about the region's LGBTQ+ community.

This year we were proud to premier Richmond Region Tourism's latest advertising campaign, Find Your Moment, to highlight all the experiences and attractions that make the region one-of-a-kind. As we move into a new year, with new experiences, be sure to share your favorite RVA moment by using the **#MyRVAMoment** hashtag on social media and encouraging your friends to do the same.

Lastly, and most importantly, the health of the region's residents has always been our number one priority, and we wish everyone a safe and healthy year. Please take some time to read the results of our Fiscal Year 20-21 and as always, let us know if we can help you in any way.

Sincerely,

**Jack Berry**  
President and CEO

## TOURISM STIMULATES OUR ECONOMY

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

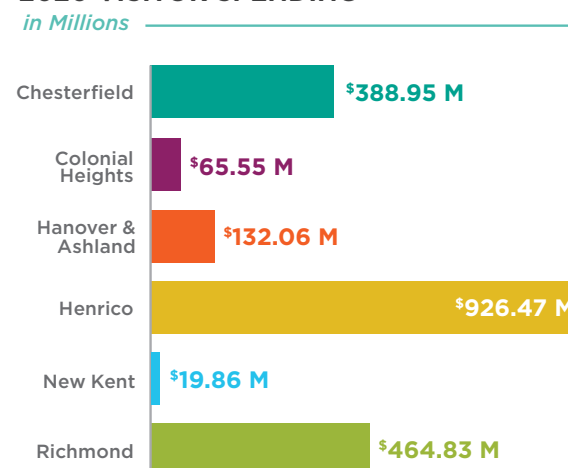
In 2020, the Richmond Region hosted  
**4.9 million visitors**

WHO SPENT **\$1.2 billion**

OR **\$3.3 million PER DAY\***

Source: Longwoods International, calendar year 2020

### 2020 VISITOR SPENDING



Note: 2020 locality data from Virginia Tourism Corporation is now reported through a new vendor, Tourism Economics. 2019 data has also been updated from Tourism Economics.

#### TOURISM SUPPORTS

**22,312**

JOBS

WITH WAGES AND SALARIES TOTALING:

**\$779 million**



LOCAL TAXES COLLECTED:

**\$113 million**



HOTEL SALES & OCCUPANCY REVENUE:

**\$217 million**

▼ DOWN 32%

Source: Tourism Economics, calendar year 2020

RICHMOND REGION  
**2030**

A Strategic Direction for the Richmond Region's Visitor Economy



RICHMOND REGION TOURISM

## TOURISM MASTER PLAN

One year in, the Region's Tourism Master Plan, "Richmond Region 2030, A Strategic Direction for the Richmond Region's Visitor Economy," is making progress.

Launched in 2020, the plan continues to ensure that the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for our residents and that we grow our industry for the benefit of all in our community.

Over the last year, committees have been advancing the plan in four focus areas: experience development, infrastructure and investment, industry advancement and advocacy and place branding. A key deliverable from this work is an Image and Perception study led by the Place Branding Committee (see page 6).

RRT also completed an internal engagement with a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion specialist on a series of workshops, conversation cafes, assessments and managerial training. An internal task force drafted a plan to advance our efforts in education and training, responsible sourcing and advancement and retention. These efforts complement our deep commitment to our community-facing programs of OutRVA and BLK RVA (see page 6) and are designed to ensure we live up to our core value of inclusiveness.

With an eye toward economic recovery from COVID-19, staff has also advanced a targeted business development program called Meaningful Meetings. This program is designed to engage local business leaders to build actionable strategies that attract events aligned with key economic development priorities.

As we continue with the work of the plan, workforce development has emerged as a pressing priority. Moving forward, this will be a primary focus along with continued advocacy for investment in tourism product development.

Visit [RichmondRegion2030.com](https://RichmondRegion2030.com) to read through the plan and engage in this important work.



## Recruiting Events

**MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS AND TOURNAMENTS BOOKED BY RRT**  
held in the Region in FY20-21

**\$69,069,055** ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT

**208,525** ESTIMATED ATTENDEES

**119,790** ESTIMATED HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS

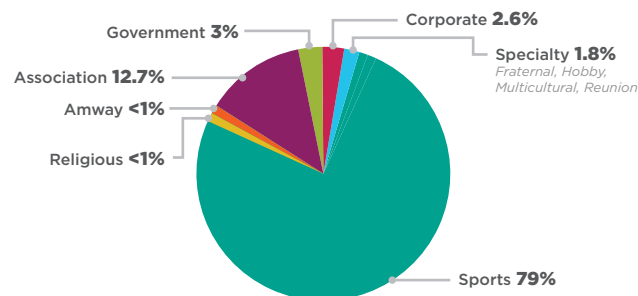
**NOTABLE MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS AND TOURNAMENTS<sup>1</sup>**  
held in FY20-21

Atlantic 10 Conference Men's and Women's Basketball Championships, FLW Bass Fishing League Regional Championship, U.S. Youth Soccer League Championship, USA Archery U.S. National Outdoor Collegiate Championships, USA Archery U.S. National Target Championships & U.S. Open, USA Fencing May & June North American Cup, USA Field Hockey National Indoor Tournament, USA Softball Mid-Atlantic National Championship, USA Swimming TYR Pro Swim Series, USA Triathlon Age Group Draft Legal World Qualifier

**MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS SALES EFFORTS**

Site Visits: 11 | Tradeshows Attended: 19  
Launched **Meaningful Meetings Program**

**HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS BY MARKET SEGMENT** booked in FY20-21



<sup>1</sup>In 20-21, meetings & conventions were not permitted under the Forward Virginia guidelines.

## Visitor Experience

**TOP 10 ATTRACTION ATTENDANCE<sup>2</sup>**

- James River Park System
- Virginia Capital Trail
- Maymont
- Henricus Historical Park
- Meadow Farm
- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
- Three Lakes Park & Nature Center
- Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens
- Science Museum of Virginia
- Children's Museum of Richmond



<sup>2</sup>Based on counts provided by local attractions.

**29,398**

**PEOPLE UTILIZED VISITOR CENTERS IN FY20-21**

FY19-20 saw 31,075 visitors



**120 GROUPS SERVICED<sup>1</sup>**

**95 Sports**

- 8 meetings & conventions
- 6 group tours
- 6 community events
- 5 virtual events

## SPORTS

Launched the **Experience Pass** Presented by Airrosti and the **Visitor Information Booth** Presented by Riverside Outfitters at events

Debuted **PlayinRVA.com** as a visitor tool for sports families

## Attracting Leisure Travelers

### ADVERTISING & DIGITAL

Based on positive sentiment around travel safety and consumers returning to travel post-pandemic, RRT Marketing resumed its full budget dedicated to paid advertising beginning in March. Drive markets made sense as our initial target. Fly markets were gradually added as air travel resumed.

Some highlights of digital media performance since relaunching include:

**13,000,000+**  
COMPLETED VIDEO VIEWS

**1.88M** ON LIVING-ROOM QUALITY SCREENS

**271,000**

clicks on  
**Richmond Content**

**▲ INCREASING WITH TRAVELER SENTIMENT**

Measuring the real-world impact of our digital media campaigns is possible through attribution partners like Adara Impact and Arrivalist.

**39,869**  
HOTEL SEARCHES

**1,399**  
HOTEL BOOKINGS

**\$344,721**  
HOTEL REVENUE GENERATED

**6,436**  
FLIGHT SEARCHES

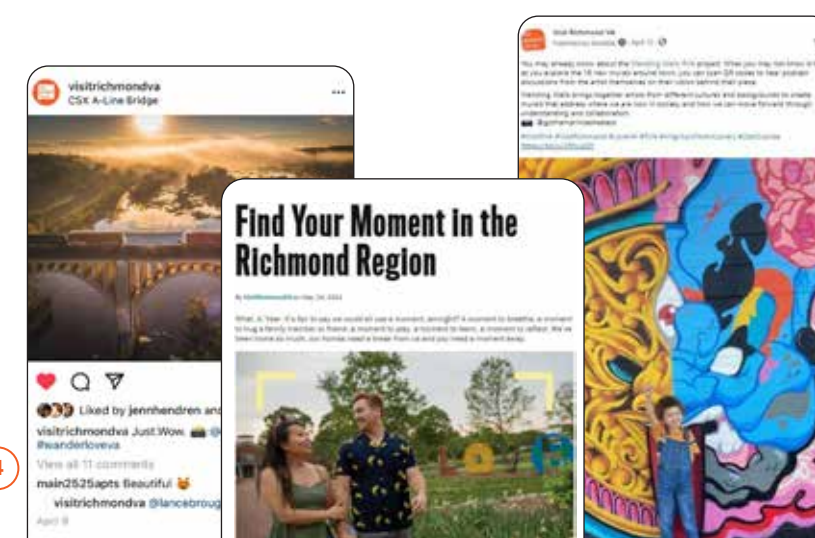
**363**  
FLIGHT BOOKINGS GENERATED

**1,719**  
ARRIVALS INTO THE REGION

59.4% arrival lift vs. similar control group of unexposed users

### CONTENT

Content shared through the Visit Richmond social media channels and RVA Blog kept Richmond Region experiences top of mind for visitors.



## VISITOR INSIGHTS

**5 TOP FIVE ORIGINATION MARKETS**

- D.C./Northern Virginia
- Hampton Roads
- Roanoke/Lynchburg
- Raleigh/Durham, NC
- Baltimore, MD

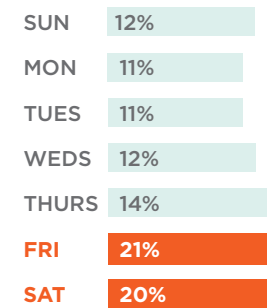
### LENGTH OF STAY

**DAYTRIP • 40%**

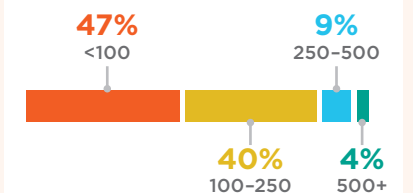
**1-2 NIGHTS • 32%**

**3+ NIGHTS • 13%**

### TRIPS BY DAY OF THE WEEK<sup>3</sup>



### TRIPS BY DISTANCE<sup>3</sup> (IN MILES)



**36%** of visitors are repeat visitors

Source: Arrivalist  
<sup>3</sup>Numbers rounded to the nearest whole number.

# RICHMOND REGION

Accolades | In the News | Local Awareness



“ You'll have no problem navigating this city by the river and even falling in love with it. The city has seen a major boom not just in its culinary scene, but also in its craft beer and the arts. ”  
—TripSavvy

“ We're big fans of Richmond for its incredible public mural art, delicious and diverse dining, booming craft beer and distillery scene, and outdoor adventures and natural beauty with a location along the James River. ”  
—Reader's Digest



“ If you're two vaccines in—or craving a road trip with a suitcase of freshly laundered masks—Richmond, VA is an epicenter of Black history, with multiple sights and sounds around town. ”  
—Smart Meetings

“ Highlights of this destination, which likes to describe itself as a big, outdoor playground, include hiking trails, horseback riding, and biking the Capital Trail. ”  
—MSN



“ Richmond celebrates its strong connection to Black history in the United States year-round and highlighted virtual and in-person opportunities to learn more during Black History Month. ”  
—Convene Magazine

## 10 Reasons Why Richmond, Virginia is a Hidden Culinary Gem

Forbes

### LOCAL COMMUNITY AWARENESS

62 community presentations

12 tourism awards

111 placements in local media featuring tourism

THE ROOT

5 American Cities That Thrive on Black Culture

AFAR

9 of the Most Surprising Cities in the US

Best Urban Kayaking Spot 2021

10 USA TODAY 10Best

## IMAGE STUDY FINDINGS

From March to April 2021, Longwoods International conducted a survey designed to provide data and insights into leisure travelers' perceptions of the Richmond Region.

### TOP WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE RICHMOND:

beautiful Southern history nature inclusiveness



travelers in key markets have visited our destination in their lifetimes

### INTENT TO VISIT, RANKED:

- 1 • Charleston
- 2 • Raleigh
- 3 • Nashville
- 4 • Richmond
- 5 • Baltimore

45% of travelers rate the Richmond Region as a place I'd really enjoy visiting



firsthand experience moves the needle on perceptions of the Richmond Region



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)

BLK RVA, OutRVA and Mending Walls initiatives had strong incremental impact on the image of Richmond, where the agreement with “being a place I'd really enjoy visiting” nearly doubles for aware audiences.

### A PLACE I'D REALLY ENJOY VISITING



UNAWARE 46%  
AWARE OF INIATIVE 70%



UNAWARE 46%  
AWARE OF INIATIVE 69%

PERCENT WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE

## RICHMOND REGION TOURISM FOUNDATION

The Richmond Region Tourism Foundation's mission is to advance the impact and benefit of tourism on the Richmond Region by supporting and investing in local education, diversity and inclusion and sports tourism programs.

### LOCAL EDUCATION

- 8 I Am Tourism Ambassador workshops
- 257 Ambassadors trained representing hundreds of businesses, government and nonprofits. 2,851 total Ambassadors trained since the program inception
- \$4,000 in scholarships to students in Virginia State University's Hospitality Management Program.

### DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

- Created 7-member BLK RVA Advisory Committee
- Hosted 5 training sessions to support small LGBTQ+ friendly and Black-owned businesses
- Awarded 7 community events a combined \$12,300
- Drove 141,947 visitors to BLK RVA and OutRVA websites through business listings, digital marketing, and enhanced content creation

### LOCAL SPORTS GRANTS

Launched in February; Awarded 6 local organizations a combined \$8,750.

### PROGRAMMING EXPENSES



## THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Chairman, Daniel J. Schmitt

Henrico County Board of Supervisors

**Kathy Abbott**, Town of Ashland Council Member

**Neil Amin**, Shamin Hotels

**Brian Anderson**, ChamberRVA

**Dennis Bickmeier**, Richmond Raceway

**Bridgette C. Bywater**, Kings Dominion

**T. Patrick Collins**, TowneBank

**Rich Conti**, Science Museum of Virginia

**James Holland**, Chesterfield County  
Board of Supervisors

**Lester Johnson**, Mama J's Kitchen

**Scott Jones**, Richmond Region  
Hospitality Association

**Angela Kelly-Wiecek**, Hanover County  
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**Greg Kochuba**, Colonial Heights Mayor

**Jen Kostyniuk**, Dominion Energy

**Jon Lugbill**, Sports Backers

**Rita McClenny**, Virginia Tourism Corporation

**Perry J. Miller**, Richmond International Airport

**Patricia Page**, New Kent County Board of Supervisors

**Todd "Parney" Parnell**, Richmond Flying Squirrels

**Ellen Robertson**, City of Richmond City Council

**Thomas A. Silvestri**, Retired from Richmond Times-Dispatch

**Lisa Sims**, Venture Richmond

**Nancy C. Thomas**, Retail Merchants Association

**Christopher C. Tsui**, EAT Restaurant Partners

## 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

**Budget:** \$7.4 million

**Investment sources:** Counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, and New Kent, cities of Richmond and Colonial Heights, and the Town of Ashland, ChamberRVA and various sponsorship

