

Louisiana auditors call for more transparency over tourism spending

The Louisiana Office of Tourism should do more to show the return on investment for the taxpayer dollars it spends, according to the Louisiana Legislative Auditor.

In a written response, Assistant Secretary of Tourism Doug Bourgeois largely agreed, saying his office would make its reports more accessible to the public, formalize currently informal processes and engage an independent vendor to measure the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.

The tourism office spends about \$9.5 million per year on advertising contracts, the LLA reports. The office also had more than \$3.7 million in grant spending from fiscal years 2016-2021 and almost \$12.6 million in sponsorships over that time.

LLA's recommendations include:

- Engaging an outside, independent vendor to measure the effectiveness of LOT's advertising campaigns.
- Listing on its website the entities and events it awards funding to from grants and sponsorships.
- Delineating the criteria for sponsorship funding.
- Developing a formal process to determine whether to grant sponsorship funding requests.
- Using a scoring committee for the office's competitive grant program.

— *businessreport.com*



Photo by Mike Walcher

Visitors are already returning to coastal amenities like this restaurant in Fort Myers, but other businesses along the gulf beaches will take longer to rebuild and open after damage caused by Hurricane Ian.

Beach tourism might take years to rebound

Some shops and restaurants have cleaned up and reopened, but others along the beaches will take longer to rebuild and open again. The biggest industry in Southwest Florida may be facing its toughest challenge ever: The re-opening after Hurricane Ian's catastrophic damage. Tourism before Ian generated more than \$3 billion a year in Lee County alone, according to the visitor and convention bureau.

Now people are struggling to salvage something of this visitor season.

"We've gone through every

emotion...anger, sadness," John Lai, president of the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce, said.

Lai predicted those islands should expect a limited visitor season this winter. He predicts maybe 50% of pre-Ian visitors by the winter of 2024, and 75% in winter of '25. Lai said he believes Sanibel and Captiva visitors will reach pre-Ian, and pre-pandemic, numbers by the winter of 2026.

The major problem, he said, is that there are few if any places to rent.

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OK lawmaker wants to bolster commission

A state senator wants to give the Oklahoma tourism commission more control over the agency, a move the lieutenant governor believes could prevent future misspending like what took place recently with restaurants at state parks.

Senate Bill 4, authored by Sen. Roger Thompson, R-Okemah, would give the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Commission the power to review agency contracts and fire the

agency director, who is currently hired by the governor.

The commission members, who currently serve only in an advisory role, would be appointed by the governor.

Last year, former agency director, Jerry Winchester, resigned after the media reported questionable spending on contracts with Swadley's to operate restaurants at state parks.

— *oklahoman.com*

Oshkosh, WI, drops 'event city' branding

Move over, "Event City." It's time to "Discover Oshkosh."

The Oshkosh Convention & Visitors Bureau recently announced a new brand identity of "Discover Oshkosh," which moves the focus away from just big events to illustrate a new tourism strategy and campaign to bring more visitors to the city.

The new brand identity and campaign will include a total rebrand starting in 2023, with an updated website, new logos, visitor guides, print and digital advertising, billboards and a new TV and digital video advertisement slated to debut during the spring and summer of 2023.

For almost 10 years, Oshkosh has billed itself as "Event City," focusing on events like the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture, which brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city each year, according to Amy Albright, executive director of the CVB.

But Albright said the COVID-19 pandemic, which put a stop to many big events in Oshkosh, led the visitors bureau's staff and board to push for a revamp of the city's image. She also said she felt that while events clearly were "catalysts" for tourism to Oshkosh, they didn't tell the whole story.

Albright said she thinks changing

from "Visit Oshkosh" to "Discover Oshkosh" also changes the idea of Oshkosh as a transitory destination to a place that has "ongoing" appeal and thinks this strategy will help the city long-term in bringing more people to the city — beyond just visitors.

"If we build a place people want to visit, you also build a place people want to live and work," Albright said.

David Spiegelberg, the southeast regional tourism specialist for Travel Wisconsin, gave his congratulations on the re-branding on behalf of the state's tourism board.

— *thenorthwestern.com*

Tourism might take years to rebound

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Rebuilding from Ian's storm surge will take a long time, he predicted.

Lai said another issue is that beaches are closed because they aren't safe.

"You've got roofing nails and aluminum that will have to be removed from our island beaches," he said. "And then some kind of renourishment of the beaches will have to take place."

Amy Sbarra said Ian took out her home and business on Sanibel. But she added that she hopes to re-open her Spatini Tea Bar on the island, sooner rather than later.

"I do see things moving faster than people had

anticipated," Sbarra said.

Some restaurants have come back on Fort Myers Beach, but many hotel rooms and condos won't re-open anytime soon.

One note of hope is coming from Boca Grande. Its beaches and state parks are open, and the Gasparilla Inn with 148 rooms reopened Dec. 15.

Downtown Fort Myers also is rebounding quickly from flooding, and even the free trolley carrying visitors is back. Some people are shopping, and dining on the sidewalk tables. Rod Pierson visited from Minnesota.

"I'm surprised at all the places that are open,"

Pierson said.

— *wusfnews.wusf.usf.edu*



Photo / OUTFRONT Media

Bermuda tests DOOH in Times Square

Bermuda Tourism Authority is testing 3D digital out-of-home (DOOH) technology in one of the busiest, brightest locations on the planet — Times Square — as part of its new campaign, "Lost Yet Found."

The 3D execution, developed by OUTFRONT Media, includes a few pop-out elements on the giant screen. Onlookers from the street are shown a billowy sailboat, daring cliff diver, floppy whale's tail and 3D-rendered lettering spelling out where shivering northerners can find these warm adventures — Bermuda. The video is accompanied by a QR code.

— *martech.org*