



Town of Leland Tourism Development Strategic Plan
2025

Tourism can effectively serve as a foundation for economic development and play a central role in the prosperity of any community. Visitors choose places where people like to live, that offer a high quality of life, opportunity to prosper, pleasant weather, good food, and serene nature. What makes a place successful as a tourism destination is the same as what makes a successful community. As one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, the Town of Leland is already recognized as a great place to live, raise a family, and enjoy retirement.

In October 2024, the Town of Leland engaged National Travel Center, a Delaware B Corp, to develop a Tourism Development Strategic Plan to expand Leland's visitor economy to deliver additional economic development to the town. The task was to set out a five-year data-driven scenario to detail:

- Placemaking improvements to make the town more attractive to visitors and establish a unique identification for the Town of Leland within the area,
- Identification of key target markets that can effectively be attracted,
- Articulation of key marketing actions needed to attract these visitors, and
- Development of existing and additional tourism offerings to attract visitors while also contributing to community quality of life.

The result of that assignment, this plan, provides a roadmap to accomplish the above objectives, to enhance the Town of Leland as a visitor destination, promote local businesses and attract others, and develop new attractions which benefit both the residents and visitors. It presents a vision from a visitor standpoint, of what The Town of Leland can be in five years, and what is possible by working cooperatively with community partners toward the goals. The plan includes specific strategies and actions steps needed to strengthen the economy, invest in the expansion of existing tourism assets, and enable celebrating the area's timeless heritage.

Ultimately, the plan presents the opportunity to develop a unique, unified identification and brand for the Town of Leland featuring the unique qualities present in the town. The authentic brand that will appeal to visitors can also serve as a beacon for residents to unify around. At the same time, the new brand and positioning will enable the Town of Leland to stand out among the surrounding counties as a destination worthy of visiting and exploring on its own.

KEY PLAN INSIGHTS

- The Town of Leland has irreplaceable nature-based assets that can both serve as the unique identifier for the town and provide ongoing and diversified outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.
- This unique identifier and positioning will set the Town of Leland apart from New Hanover, Pender, and Brunswick Counties, enabling tourism leaders to effectively promote Leland as a distinct destination.
- The Town of Leland has already welcomed visitors from 49 states and group visitors from 33 states, a very strong foundation upon which to further increase visitor numbers and the economic development they deliver.
- Current visitors to the Town of Leland are primarily educated and affluent and can select to stay and explore anywhere they like.
- Tourism can serve as foundational economic development for the Town of Leland for the foreseeable future, diversify the tax base, and serve to attract new businesses to relocate.
- Maintaining the level of economic development available from visitors will require a consistent tourism promotional effort and prudent sustainable management to protect and preserve the natural environments.





THE TOWN OF LELAND LIES WITHIN A TIMELESS HISTORIC AREA

Even though the Town of Leland was not incorporated until 1989, the region has timeless heritage. The Cape Fear area has witnessed a long span of intriguing history since the Governor of Barbados established a new town in 1667 and rice began growing along the rivers in the 1720s. The area that is now Leland was initially settled at the same time as the earliest plantations were established along the rivers. Because it was located on the Brunswick River, the area also served as an early transportation hub. The first ferry over the river landed at Navassa in 1727, and the first causeway built from Wilmington across Eagle Island to Leland began in 1764. Revolutionary War troops occupied the area in 1781 and the first bridge crossed the Cape Fear River in 1890.

Leland's own roots as a settlement at the crossroads of Village Road and the Wilmington, Columbia, and Augusta Railroad, date back to the mid-1890s. The name was formalized in 1897 when Joseph W. Gay and other area citizens petitioned for a post office. Of the three names submitted, the name of Gay's nephew, Leland Adams, was chosen and the new post office opened in a corner of Gay's General Store in 1898. By 1923, the road from the Brunswick River through Leland was paved as North Carolina State Road 20. Early activity revolved around the post office, the school, two grocery stores, the railroad station, Leland Baptist Church, Leland Methodist Church, and numerous residences. For many years, the town remained one of the numerous small, unincorporated communities throughout Brunswick County that served as minor centers of trade and commerce. Even though there were periods when the town grew more slowly during the past 100 years, robust growth in more recent years boosted the population of the Town of Leland to just over 30,000 and is expected to grow significantly over the next several decades.

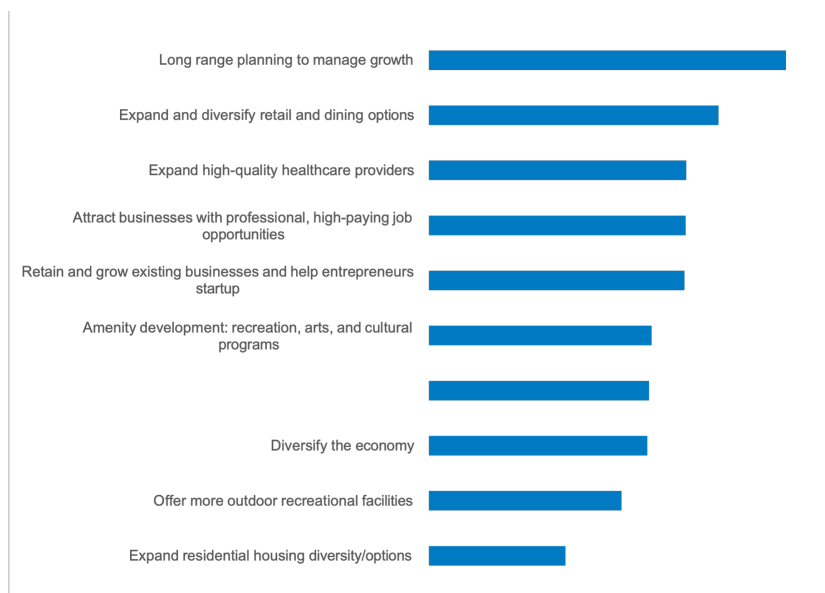
It appears that most recently the Town of Leland has prospered by responding to growth opportunities that included expanding town boundaries several times and building large Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) for active retirees. Because they included many amenities, these developments, along with Leland's lower cost of living made the town very attractive to retirees seeking more lifestyle choices, better weather, and reasonable housing costs. More recently, it has become apparent that the Town of Leland should also be made attractive to younger families to settle, and for visitors as a place to visit, explore, and enjoy.

Many believe that growth and visitors will just bring more traffic congestion, put more pressure on the natural environment, generate more demand for services, and a greater feeling of separation between residents that have historically lived in Leland and residents who are relatively new. Those issues have propelled the town to investigate developing a sense of place and character before accelerated growth overruns the opportunity to do so.

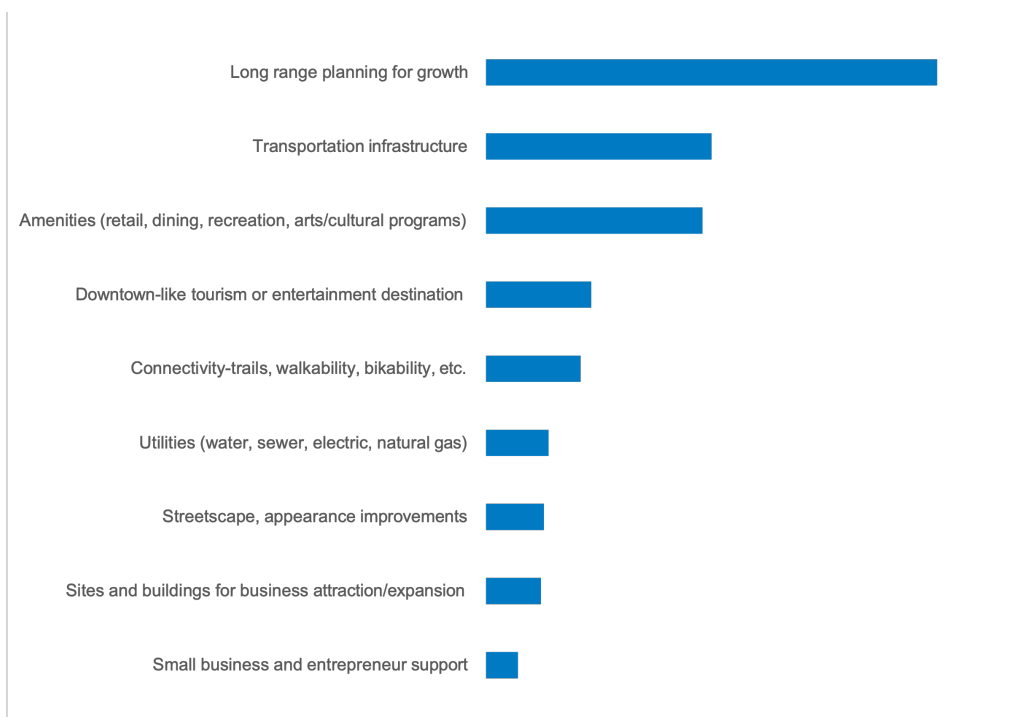
As a result, the Town of Leland 2045 Plan which serves as a roadmap to achieve the town's goals for the next 20 years, incorporated important goals directly related to tourism:

- Development of a resilient and stable economy for which tourism can serve as a foundational way to diversify and expand the tax base and stabilize vulnerability to economic cycles, and;
- Work to align with a more consistently recognizable sense of place and identity for the Town of Leland and individual communities and areas within in.

When residents were asked their priorities for economic development in the Town of Leland, they responded:



Further, residents responded that the most important investments the Town of Leland could make to ensure long-term sustainable economic growth are:



The most recent Town of Leland Strategic Plan also supports the development of a stronger visitor economy with Goals 2 and 3 calling for strategic public investment in placemaking and marketing and promotion of Leland.

Spring boarding from the governing documents, an updated Vision for the Town of Leland states “that two decades from now the Town is prosperous, inclusive, resilient, healthy, safe, equitable, and accessible, valuing the natural environment for walking and biking, with social, economic, and physical connectivity, quality neighborhoods, access to services, facilities, and places to gather, powered through a unique image and sense of place nurtured together as a community.”

The vision has been translated into a set of goals that clearly express the desired future state of a high quality environment attractive to today’s visitor and not just retirees, but residents in all age groups, with a variety of interests as they seek places to visit and live. Achieving a robust visitor economy will deliver additional tax revenues to the Town of Leland that can be invested to further accomplish the vision.

SECTION ONE: THE BIG PICTURE - TRENDS AFFECTING TOURISM IN THE TOWN OF LELAND

It has become quite apparent within the current situation in the United States, no one can be sure about what will occur in the tourism industry over the next few years. As this plan is being prepared, tourism is down across the board, due to fears of domestic inflation, budget cuts and layoffs, and international visitation down as much as 70% from some countries. Thus, the trends that will impact tourism in the Town of Leland outlined below were evolving before Covid, have strengthened since, and would likely continue under normal circumstances. And, even though tourism has been interrupted for some period of time over the last 175 years, it is very resilient and recovered after every setback. Very likely it will do so now as well.

Key Trend 1: Tourism Has Moved from External Promotion to Economic Development

Virtually since the start of tourism marketing the focus has been on external promotion, working to attract visitors, business travelers, and groups to a community rather than dealing internally with tourism suppliers in the community. Now that tourism has begun to be considered a vital component of economic development, that has changed. Interacting with visitor facing locations is now considered an important factors in successful tourism development, along with a recognition that tourism does not replace other sectors of the economic base, but does deliver a sustainable source of revenues for community businesses that serve both residents and visitors.

Key Trend 2: Changing Visitor Expectations

Today's visitors are no longer price driven and instead seeking interesting, engaging, drama free experiences that engage their minds as well as their bodies. This is the only way they can experience real relaxation, displace thoughts of work, and disconnect from technology even for a few hours. Nearly 75% of visitors aim for strictly work-free vacations and in fact, regular leisure breaks have become a "wellness" product.

- 76% prefer destinations they have never visited before, gravitating to smaller towns and rural communities with a slower pace, smaller crowds, and opportunities to connect with locals.
- 72% travel to reconnect with loved ones because leisure experiences are sometimes the only time there is for extended conversations.
- Today's visitors will not miss something because of budget.

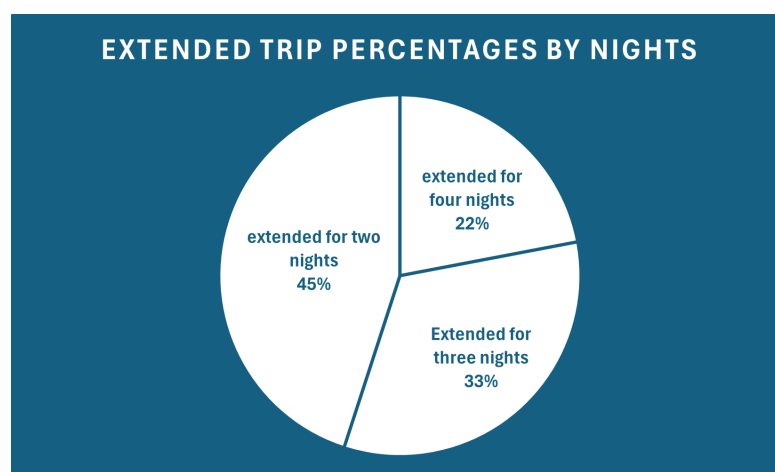
- Shorter more meaningful trips seek to maximize the experience within limited timeframes.
- Must-haves include internet access (100%), beautiful scenery (84%), time to relax (82%), a safe destination and local food, and culture.

Key Trend 3: New Leisure Travel Patterns

No matter what size the destination, 85% of visitors in the US travel by car to "drive" destinations, and according to Ford Motor Company, 54% take the scenic route. In general, 75% of all visitors arriving in a destination, come from within a surrounding radius of 4-6 hours. The majority of these trips are planned within a 60-day window or less. They take place over a weekend or long weekend, the only time working professionals and families with children in school can get away.

Key Trend 4: New Trends in Business, Leisure, Bleisure, and Meetings

Travel serves as support for business needs for business travelers, although business travel is still below 2019 levels and not expected to recover fully until 2028, if then. With the average cost of a business trip at an all time high of \$1,300 and an average daily spend of \$325, businesses have begun to question the value since they got along without it for several years during Covid. Approximately 60% of all business trips in the United States now include a leisure component and nearly 60% of companies have policies allowing staff to extend business trips with vacation days.



Nearly 40% of business travelers in the South extended their trips, while only 17% in the West do so. 46% of business travelers say adding leisure makes the trip more fun, 44% use it to visit places they wouldn't otherwise see, and 44% say it helps conserve vacation time.

Similar to all other types of travel, meetings, conventions, and conferences have also changed.

- The size of these gatherings now span from 10-12 people to hundreds.
- 78% of attendees report that the destination has become the second most important factor in their decision to attend, and
- 78% of meetings and conferences are incorporating more technology.

Key Trend 5: The Changing Face of Group Travel

Instead of large groups of 50 or more traveling on large motor coaches, groups now range from 10 to 500. This represents a shift from retiree-focused tours to a mix of various age groups, multi-generational trips, and solo travelers of all ages. The shift has occurred because traditional motor coach visitors have aged out of the market and Boomers, who grew up on road trips, prefer more engaging, less low cost focused trips. Groups are planning and booking trips within much shorter timeframes, to lesser-known locations where tour guides are expected to know the community as well as providing comprehensive personal concierge services throughout the trip. There is also the expectation that the enhanced cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitation implemented during Covid will be standard practice. Groups also demand better quality food, accommodations, and amenities. Smaller groups of 20 or less also enable in-depth exploration of a specific theme and travel for special reasons such as destination weddings, destination family reunions, and attending a sports event as a group has expanded. New categories of group travel that have gained popularity include:

- Adventure Group Tours: Thrill seekers aged 30-50 attracted to dramatic outdoor activities and exhilarating experiences.
- Wellness Travel Groups: One of the fastest-growing tour types focuses on improving physical and mental health through activities like meditation, healthy eating, and fitness.
- Culinary and Beverage Tours: Specialized tours featuring food and drink such as wine trails, brewery hopping, and exploring local cuisine.
- Family and Friends Groups who explore interesting places to spend quality time together and create new memories.

Key Trend 6: Technology's Influence

Americans have access to online shopping, live-streamed video and TV, augmented reality, and all of the other technology bells and whistles that tech companies have invented to entertain and engage us. They now expect the same from other organizations including

tourism marketers which greatly raises the bar requiring that tourism adapt, in spite of the fact that most destination organizations are budget constrained.

Key Trend 7: Shift to Omni-Channel Marketing

Concurrently, marketing and promotion has become more challenging within the proliferation of bloggers, content aggregators, and influencers, an increased ability for individual suppliers to reach visitors directly, and tech-savvy visitors. Advances in marketing are facilitating an integrated approach delivering consistent messages across all channels and touch points spanning the entire visitor journey from the time a visitor becomes aware of a destination to their arrival back home. Once considered the proviso of destination suppliers, many destinations have adopted their own Customer Relationships Management (CRM) systems to organize information about visitors and nurture their journey toward a visit without depending solely on suppliers to do. Most platforms are also useful to collect visitor data to create personalized marketing strategies, and improve the overall visitor experience. There's also a growing focus on viewing the community as a brand with the visitor experience at its core, since the experience visitors have at the destination is the only point of reference they have. In their minds, that experience is the community's brand. There is also a shift from big-name celebrities or macro-influencers to micro-influencers, as they are perceived as more authentic.

Key Trend 8: Data Driven Marketing and Promotion

When tourism is viewed as economic development, it also presents the need to collect, analyze, and interpret marketing data to measure ROI and demonstrate clear links between marketing activities and tangible outcomes, customer acquisition costs, and so on. This is indeed possible, yet doing so accurately involves dealing with the entire community of visitor facing suppliers to track occupancy trends in accommodations, diners in restaurants, attendance at attractions and special events, and other factors that point to the impact of tourism on the ground.

Key Trend 9: The Need for DMMOs to Create Relationships

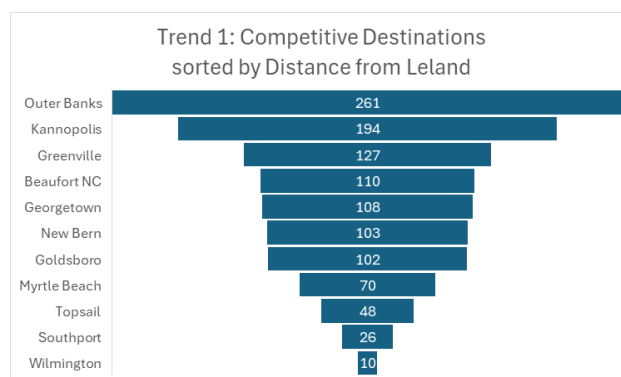
Within decreasing reliance on paid marketing channels, there is a focus on building and managing engaged communities of visitors to drive brand awareness and increase communications between DMO staff and visitors. Destinations will have to be prepared to invest more time in building/maintaining relationships and be less focused on quantitative metrics like follower count that only reflect macro-numbers and not the actual numbers that visit because of the marketing.



Leland Specific Key Trend 1: Competitive Destinations

The group of competitive destinations in the region surrounding the Town of Leland determine what Leland is up against when beginning to promote more actively. Refer to Appendix 1 for detailed descriptions of the destinations.

Location	Distance	Pop.	Hotels/BnB	Dining	ADR	Tax	SMPlatforms	Followers in thousands	Mktg MS	Staff	Website
Sorted Alphabetically											
Beaufort NC	110	4,804.00	2/9	33	\$ 100	13%	7	22.7	yes		multiple
Georgetown	108	8,714.00	10	52	\$ 148	10%	3	50	yes	4	multiple
Goldsboro	102	33,469.00	14	67	\$ 116	13%	4	20	yes	4	good
Greenville	127	90,053.00	33/2	225	\$ 167	13%	6	50	yes	4	good
Kannapolis	194	59,321.00	15	15	\$ 100	16%	3	110	yes	8	multiple
Myrtle Beach	70	39,697.00	425	2000	\$ 180	13%	8	385	yes	25	multiple
New Bern	103	32,226.00	8/6	117	na	13%	6	80	yes	3+	good
Outer Banks	261	57,755.00	57/86	314	\$ 175	13%	8	750	yes	11	multiple
Southport	26	4,377.00	8	24	na	8%	4	10	yes	3	multiple
Topsail	48	10,543.00	27	44	na	13%	5	10	no	3	no
Wilmington	10	122,698.00	97/10	395	\$ 129	13%	5	200	ves	15	multiple





Leland Specific Key Trend 2: Comparison with the Characteristics of Comparative Destinations

In order to determine the criteria and requirements needed to successfully manage a DMMO, eight locations with characteristics similar to Leland lying in the shadow of a larger city and working to make a name for themselves, were selected. See Appendix 2.

Location	Adjacent	Hotels/ <u>Bnb</u>	Dining	VC	Staff	Tax	Website	Tools	<u>SM</u> Plats	Reach in thousands	Budget
Sorted Alphabetically											
Beaverton	Portland	16	174	No		14.8%	no		8	475	\$1.6M
Brookhaven Council Bluffs	Atlanta	10	95	X	7	8%+\$5	yes		4	10	\$1.5M w/I fiscal
Golden CO	Denver	27	126	X	3	12.0%	yes	yes	5	25	538K
Oro Valley	Tucson	3		No	3	0.1%	no	no	5	12	w/I ED
Smyrna Beach	Daytona	18/5	201	No	4	12.5%	yes	yes	5	150	\$1.3M
Summerville	Charleston	15/8	79	X	3	14.0%	yes	yes	6	38	w/I CoC w/I fiscal
Wake Forest	Raleigh	5	21	X	3	17.4%	no		4	30	

Leland Specific Key Trend 3: Ability to Generate Transient Room Tax

The ability to generate and collect transient room hotel tax will be absolutely critical to the success of tourism in the Town of Leland. This revenue determines the level of promotion, plus competitive salaries to attract qualified and competent staff. Based on a review of the tax rates of the eight comparable destinations and 10 competitive destinations referenced above, only two have overall tax rates lower than the Town of Leland, and one of those locations charges an additional \$5.00 per room nightly fee.

Overall the tax rate being charged to hotel guests in Leland stand at 11% at some hotels and 11.75% at others. Leland's current hotels have a total of 112,055 available room nights (if every room was filled every night). A collection of 31 vacation rentals, Airbnb properties, and other private rentals can generate another 11,315 room nights for a total of 123,370 total available room nights in the Town of Leland. At an average rate of \$120/night, the total upside possible revenue is \$14,805,400. Based on the 3% allocated to the Town of Leland, that would generate \$444,162 in hotel tax per years. Yet hotels rarely average more than 65% occupancy which lowers the available tax revenue to \$288,705. The two additional hotel properties coming online will add to those totals.

The enabling legislation of the Leland Tourism Development Authority reads "gross proceeds less the cost to the town of administering and collecting the tax as determined by the finance officer not to exceed three percent (3%) of the first five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) of gross proceeds collected each year and one percent (1%) of remaining gross proceeds collected each year." These figures have only to do with administration, and have no impact on the actual revenue being collected. Currently, the contract between the Town of Leland and the Leland Tourism Development Authority provides for administrative functions at a predetermined flat rate rather than by a percentage of occupancy tax received.

Destination marketing organizations normally devote about 50% of overall revenues to marketing, a factor which drives the massive use of social media that only requires staff time if an outside contractor is not used. It will be very important to balance the available tax revenues, with staff needs and marketing reach in order to achieve a maximally effective operation that will enable the Town of Leland to reach its goals for tourism, while very efficiently achieving its marketing reach.

Leland Specific Key Trend 4: The Input and Opinions of Local Residents and Businesses

Members of the Leland community, a limited number of visitors, and tourism professionals in the Town of Leland were engaged in four different efforts to gain their opinions.

Listen to Learn Interviews

National Travel Center conducted nearly thirty, 30-minute telephone interviews with tourism professionals and local leaders who could influence the success of tourism in the future. The results of the interviews were very positive, with tourism professionals completely keyed in on current tourism efforts and willing to support additional efforts to attract more visitors. In addition, suggestions were made that would make it easier for businesses to relocate to the Town of Leland and be more successful. Refer to Appendix 3 to review the Listen to Learn Interview results.

On-Site Workshops

Senior National Travel Center staff visited the Town of Leland during the week of March 24 and facilitated two workshops, one with representatives of community organizations, and a second with Town of Leland staff. Discussion at the workshops focused primarily on the opportunity and offerings that could be developed for visitors, especially in the areas of arts and culture. Development of the Leland Cultural Arts Center as an attraction in itself presents the opportunity for greater engagement with the arts for both residents and visitors. An untapped pool of retired artists points to the possibility of strengthening arts offerings, fairs, shows, studio tours, and other activities that would be of great interest to visitors. The activities can be complemented with public art that will increase the attractiveness of the Town of Leland for visitors and deliver a more pleasant environment for residents.



Visit Leland Open House

The Visit Leland staff held an Open House that was attended by local residents who were able to express their opinions about what they would like to see developed in the Town of Leland. The top 10 rated requests included:

Placemaking: Downtown

Arts and Culture: Outdoor Concerts

Recreation: Hiking Biking Trails

Attractions: Festivals

Recreation: Water-Based

Recreation: Multi-Use Paths

Special Events: Fall Festival

Special Events: Markets

Placemaking: Enhanced Landscaping

Sustainable Tourism: Kayak Rentals

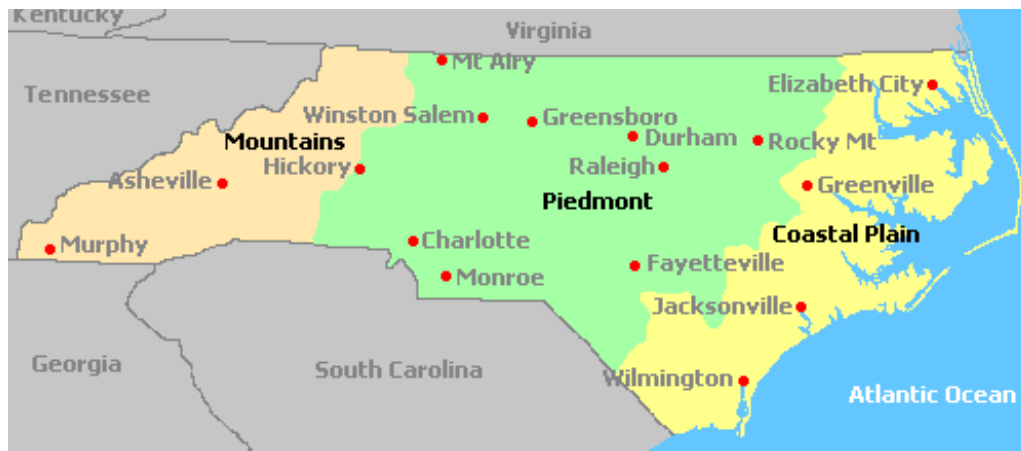
Refer to Appendix 4 for full results.

Online Visitor Survey

A survey was fielded on the Visit Leland website that rendered responses from 15 visitors, 49 residents under age 61, and 52 residents over age 61. Interestingly, the responses from all three groups was very consistent. The lack of amenities in the Town of Leland was considered the biggest barrier to attracting more visitors. Outdoor recreation, followed by dining, is what residents most enjoy. The Town of Leland's current public spaces, signage, and visitors amenities were overwhelmingly considered fair/poor and the desire for a visitor center was positive. Visitors who responded indicated they were only "somewhat likely" to visit again. See Appendix 5 for full results.



Leland Specific Key Trend 5: Visitation and Promotion within the North Carolina Coastal Region

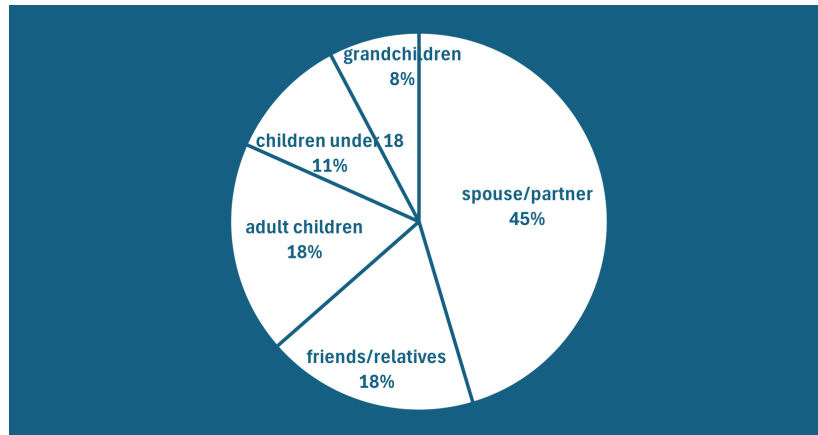


Because the Town of Leland is located in the North Carolina Coastal Region, detailed research was conducted to determine the level and types of promotion deployed by Visit NC (the state tourism office) on behalf of the region and other factors that could influence the success of tourism in the region. Although the visitor data obtained from Visit NC was not as robust as would have been preferred, there was a good deal of useful information and details regarding marketing actions that appear to directly impact the prospects for tourism in Leland.

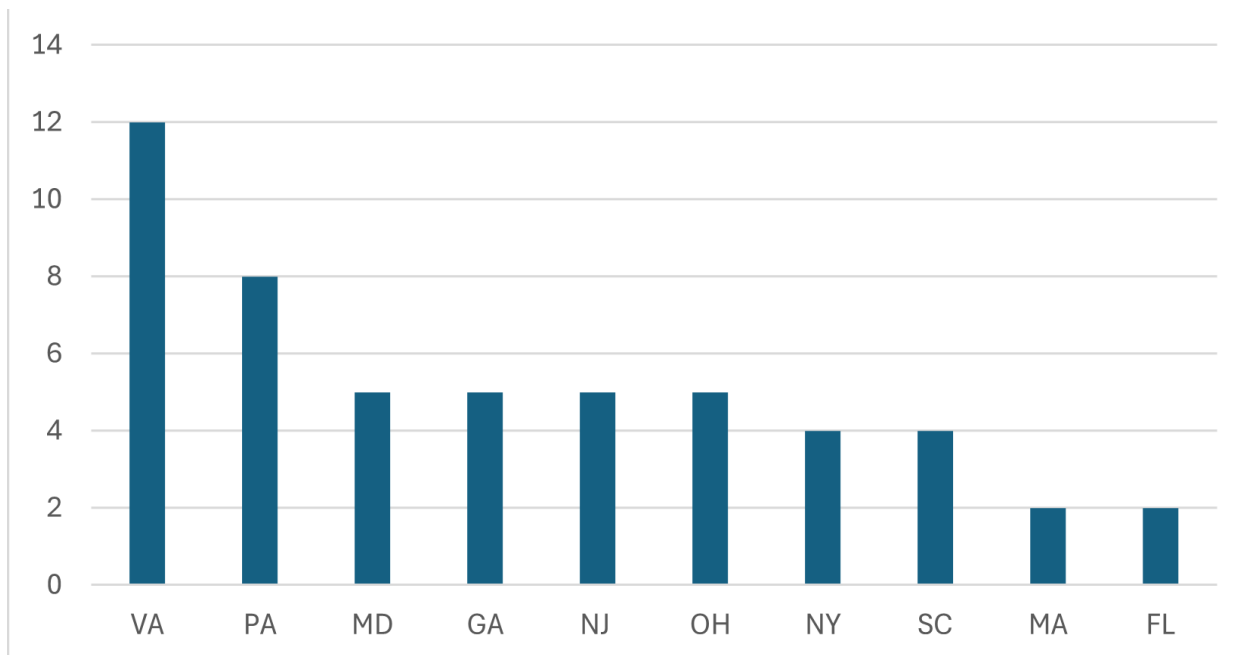
Leisure vs Business: As would be imagined for an area that includes beautiful coastline and beaches and a multitude of water based activities, 91% of Coastal Region overnight visitors traveled for leisure purposes, while 4% came to conduct business. 59% of business travelers extended for leisure. 86% were repeat visitors, indicating a huge affinity for travelers to return to the Coastal Region of North Carolina year after year.

Average Visitor Spending: In 2023, the average expenditure of a NC Coastal Region overnight traveling party was \$1,608 per trip that included lodging, food and beverage, groceries, transportation, entertainment, shopping, and other expenditures made during the trip. There was a huge difference between in-state visitors who only spent on average \$860 per trip and out-of-state overnight visitors who spent an average of \$2002 per trip. This fact could be influenced by the fact that in-state visitors likely have shorter stays over a weekend or long weekend, while out of state visitors who travel a longer distance, stay longer.

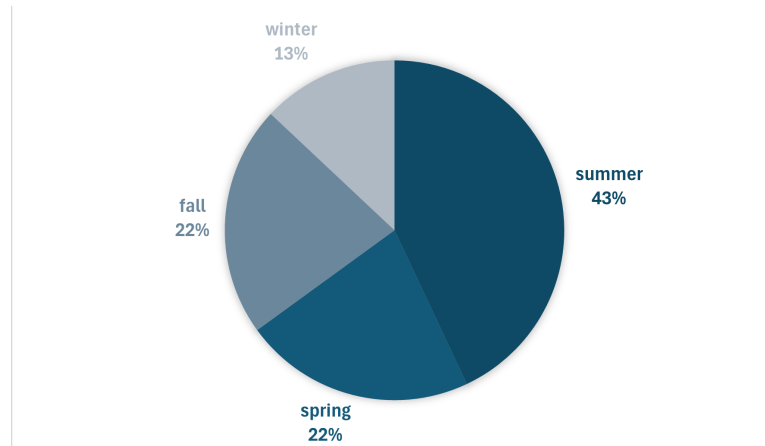
Size of Traveling Parties: Contrary to most other regions of the country where couples are the primary visitor segment, the party size for the average Coastal Region visitor as identified by Visit NC was 3.0 in 2023. This points to the presence of family visitors who consider the coast a great place for a vacation where parents and children can relax and enjoy quality family time without interruption.



Top States of Visitor Origin: 35% of visitors to North Carolina's Coastal Region were residents of the state, while the next 10 states illustrated below represent another 52% of total visitors. Only 13% of visitors arrived from the other 39 states.

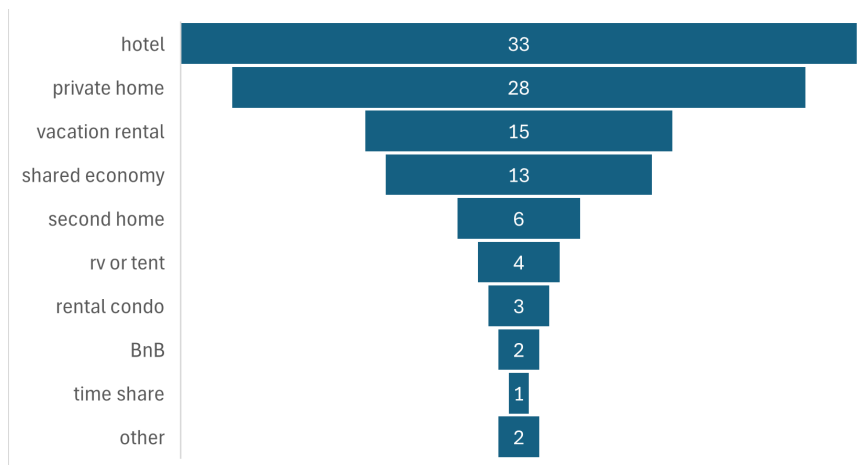


Seasonality: As would be imagined for a coastal and beach destination, the majority of overnight travelers visited during the summer, 43% visited in summer, with a fairly even split between spring and fall, at 22%, and 13% visiting in winter.



- Average stay in the Coastal Region was 4.3 nights, likely the result of week long stays in vacation rentals and private homes averaged in with stays in commercial hotels.
- 85% arrived in a personal vehicle, 10% by plane, 5% by rental car, 2% in a camper/RV and 2% other.
- 93% of overnight visitors were satisfied with their trip to the Coastal Region.

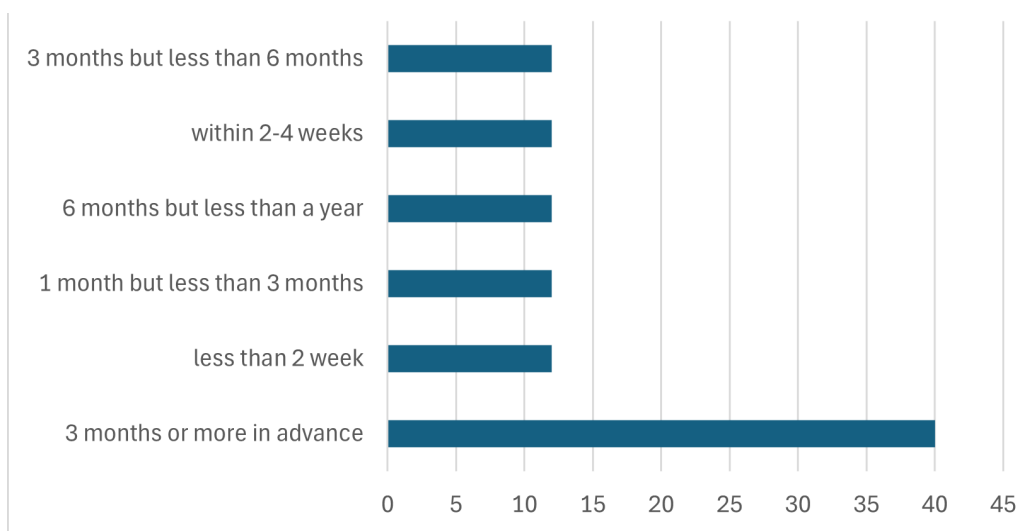
Accommodations: Visitors stayed in a variety of accommodations.



Primary Activities: Distribution of the activities participated in by overnight visitors to the Coastal Region included:



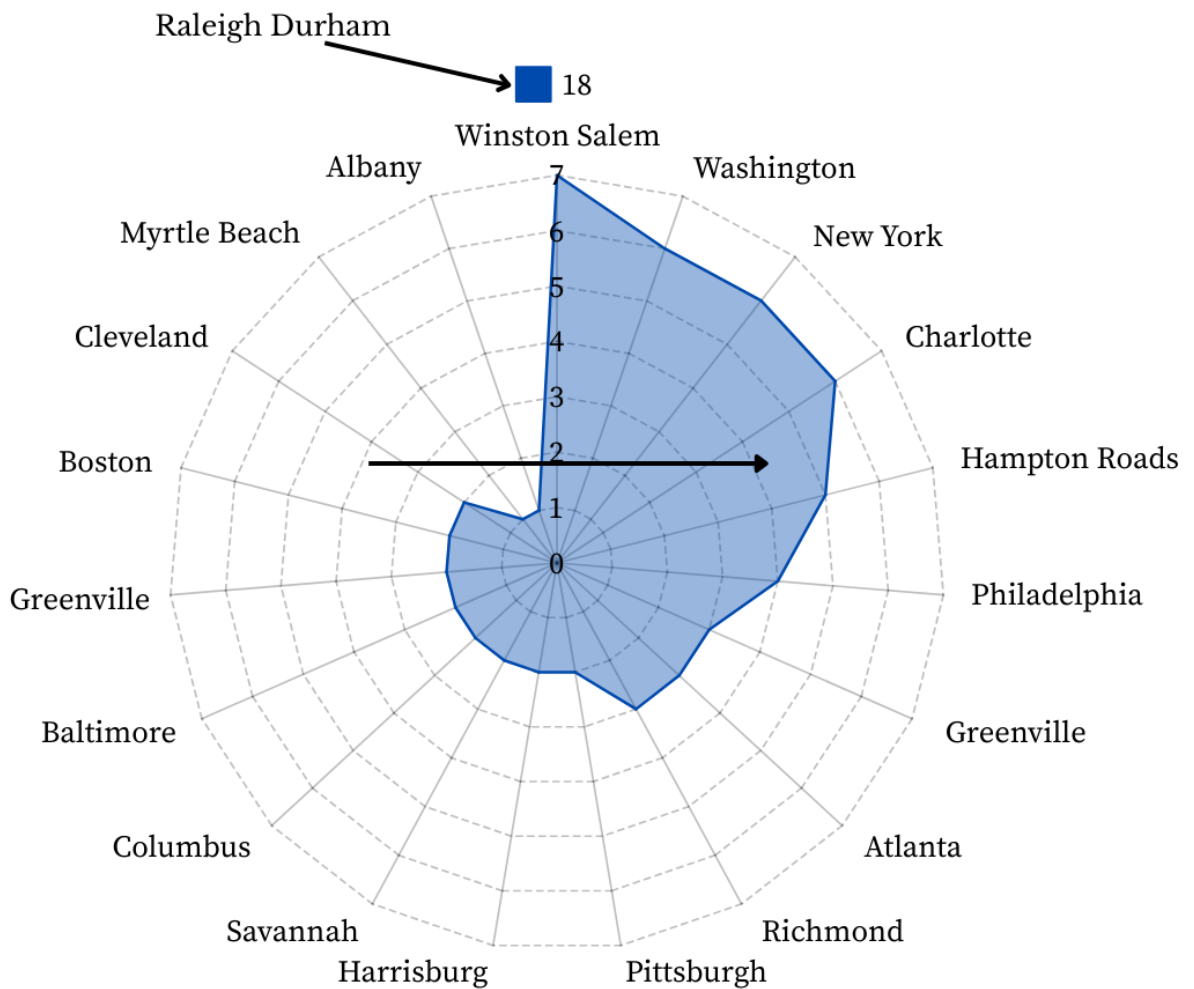
Booking Patterns: Booking patterns in North Carolina's Coastal Region are driven by the demand for vacation rentals and the need to book early to secure the desired property.



Planning Information Sources: In view of such a high percentage of repeat visitors, most visitors depend on their on experience in the area to plan their next vacation. In addition, they rely on advice from friends and relatives, general web searches, and destination websites. Top locations to search for accommodations include Airbnb, hotel websites, Facebook, and Trip Advisor.

Top Advertising Markets Currently Used by Visit NC to Attract Coastal Visitors

18% of all advertising by Visit NC is placed within North Carolina. The remainder is distributed within media markets along the East Coast and as far west as Ohio.



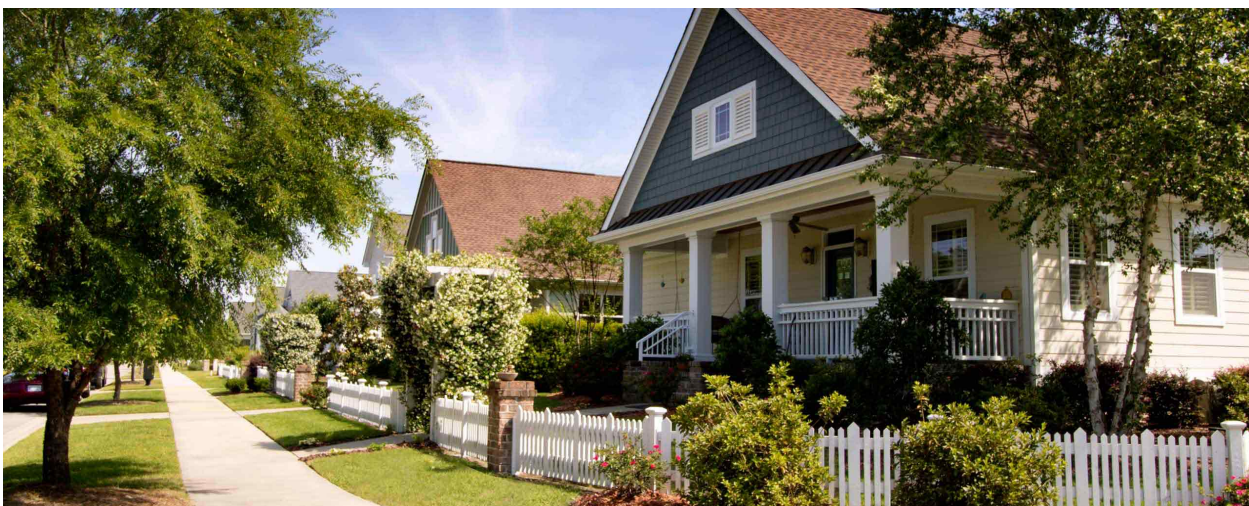
IT ALL STARTS WITH A VISIT TO THE TOWN OF LELAND

The statement “It All Starts with a Visit” has been bandied about in the tourism industry for at least two decades, with little proof of the viability of that claim. However, research for this plan revealed that migration from counties in the United States to Brunswick and New Hanover Counties directly paralleled the advertising placed by Visit NC. Very little migration occurred from locations where no advertising was placed.

The largest segment of individuals (45%) migrating to settle in the region in which the Town of Leland is located come from within North Carolina it where 34% of total Visit NC advertising is placed. The remaining top delivering states include:

- New York/New Jersey where 7% of Visit NC advertising was placed
- Virginia, where 8% of Visit NC advertising was placed
- Maryland, where 8% of Visit NC advertising was placed
- South Carolina, where 3% of Visit NC advertising was placed
- Pennsylvania, where 8% of Visit NC advertising was placed

This direct correlation illustrates that tourism does and will serve as the foundation of economic development, because no business owner relocates a business without first visiting to see what it is like to live in the location. Expanding the visitor economy also points to the opportunity to attract a steady stream of new businesses especially those that deliver the types of dining and retail residents are requesting. It will be very important for the tourism staff of Leland to liaison with Visit NC to influence the promotion that does occur and to promote the new developments in tourism and placemaking in the Town of Leland as they occur.



SECTION TWO: GENERATING INCREASED TOURISM IN THE TOWN OF LELAND

The following sections describe the opportunities that leverage the existing tourism assets and competitive advantages that the Town of Leland has to achieve success in to expand the visitor economy.

- (1) marketing and promotional strategy,
- (2) seasonal events,
- (3) placemaking, and
- (4) sustainable nature tourism.

Recommendations that springboard from the detailed visitor profile and clearly defined target visitor markets serve as a strategic guide for the Leland Tourism Development Authority outlining the Board's priorities for the next five years. Given that the LTDA has no staff of its own but rather uses the services of Town staff per contract, this plan ultimately provides strategies for the LTDA to consider funding in a way that can be implemented by staff, partnerships, contracted agencies, private businesses, community organizations and other tourism related stakeholders.

Each of the four sections of recommendations are formatted as follows:

Goal: the high-level vision that encompasses an ideal, specific to the category.

Opportunity: an achievable outcome that works in conjunction with others towards a higher goal.

Strategy: specific actions that can be planned and budgeted that have direct, tangible impacts.

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

Goal: Market Visit Leland as a serene, relaxing destination in the middle of it all, delivering nature, culture, and arts for every generation.

Opportunity 1: Reintroduce the Town of Leland to its visitors with an updated website that acts as an online visitor center and an engaging social media account that showcases the natural and urban amenities provided in Town.

Strategy 1: Support the development of an updated logo and tag line to be associated with Visit Leland and appear in all accompanying marketing materials.

Strategy 2: Develop new Visit Leland website to act as an online visitor center for visitors as well as a resource for locals to find activities and events in the Town of Leland.

Strategy 3: Utilize existing Visit Leland social media accounts enhanced with others to establish a comprehensive online presence to showcase the attractions and amenities in the Town of Leland.

Opportunity 2: Align the Town of Leland's marketing and promotion to align with Visit North Carolina.

Strategy 1: Create a relationship with Visit NC

Strategy 2: Create a relationship with NC Outdoors

Strategy 3: Establish communications with sports, retiree, film and EDP marketing of Visit NC

Opportunity 3: Develop marketing messages designed to resonate with the various target markets.

Strategy 1: Create messaging for residents

Strategy 2: Creates messaging for 50 Milers Repeaters

Strategy 3: Create messaging for 3-6 Hour Drivers

Strategy 4: Create messaging for Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts

Strategy 5: Create messaging for Heritage and Cultural Visitors

Strategy 6: Create messaging for Group Tours

Opportunity 4: Create marketing materials with a inspiring story, featuring the amenities, recreational opportunities, cultural programs and other special aspects of the Town of Leland.

Strategy 1: Develop videos

Strategy 2: Develop visitor guide and possible brochures

Opportunity 5: Group and Self-guided Tours

Strategy 1: Collaborate with local restaurants, breweries, and other businesses to create tasting trails and events throughout the year and in coordination with special holiday celebrations.

Strategy 2: Integrate the Gullah-Geechee culture and corridor into local tourism offerings to develop heritage and history trails that will deliver another dimension to distinct traditional culture.

Strategy 3: Partner with local arts groups to develop an arts trail that starts at the Leland Cultural Arts Center and connects to art studios, murals and private studios.

Strategy 4: Partner with local golf management groups to develop a Golf Pass that grants access to public and private courses in the off-season.

COMPREHENSIVE INVENTORY OF TOURISM ASSETS AND RESOURCES OF THE TOWN OF LELAND AND SURROUNDS

To begin to address prospects for tourism development in the Town of Leland, a comprehensive inventory of tourism assets and resources within the town and surrounding 30 mile radius (the distance visitors will travel from their accommodations home base to experience and explore something of interest) was developed. It took in all of the attractions in Wilmington, the beaches nearly to South Carolina, and the majority of Pender County. The inventory of accommodations, dining, and retail that deliver economic development through visitor spending was limited to Town of Leland, while the attractions in New Hanover County, Southport, Central Brunswick County, South Brunswick County, Wrightsville Beach, and South Pender County were included. See Appendix 6 for a complete inventory list.



Even though there are currently only three commercial hotel properties in the Town of Leland and a small handful of vacation rentals, the inventory also revealed 31 Airbnb properties. At least two additional commercial hotels are in the works to come online in 2025-2026. There are nearly 65 restaurants and food shops in Leland, and more than 30 boutique shops. In addition to tourism offerings within Leland itself, there are 104 attractions and activities (43 in Wilmington, 22 in South Brunswick County, 18 in South Pender County, 9 in Wrightsville

Beach, 7 in Central Brunswick County and 5 in Southport) that can be tapped to generate overnight stays in the centrally located Town of Leland while visitors explore the region. The Town of Leland has a full complement of the other services visitors may need such as fitness and sports facilities, urgent care, pharmacy, grocery markets, banking, and a medical center while they are in the area. Of special interest is the large complement of natural areas within and surrounding Leland that includes 23 parks and natural areas that have the potential to be leveraged into new tourism offerings. Three area golf courses are part of a collection of 30 golf courses in the surrounding area.

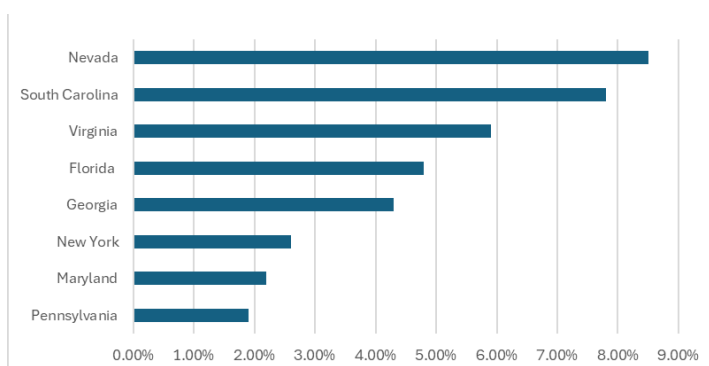
DETAILED PROFILE OF CURRENT VISITORS TO THE TOWN OF LELAND

National Travel Center received data covering 22,000 room night stays in the Town of Leland over the course of a year that enabled development of a very detailed portrait of current visitors, well beyond what is possible in most tourism planning projects. The data revealed some unexpected anomalies about current visitors to the Town of Leland, yet only positive news. Even though the profile and patterns of visitors do not follow traditional visitation patterns, that fact does present opportunities that would otherwise not be available to pursue.

Highlights include:

- The Town of Leland welcomed visitors from every state in America except North Dakota, and the District of Columbia.
- The largest proportion of visitors to Leland (42.3%) arrived from within North Carolina.
- At 8.5%, Nevada, the second largest originating destination to Leland does not fit either migration or tradition visitor originating patterns. The reason appears to be the 1698 group tour visitors originating from Las Vegas, since there are only 6 individual visitors that came from that state.

The next two largest originating states, South Carolina at 7.8% and Virginia 5.9% are adjacent to North Carolina, but at 4.8%, the fifth state, is not. The top ten originating states are rounded out with Georgia at 4.3%, New York at 2.6%, Maryland at 2.2%, and Pennsylvania at 1.9%.





Length of Stay

In order to determine a realistic average length of stay the United States was divided into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, West, and Southeast. Analysis revealed the length of stay depends on where the visitors are coming from.

East Coast: Visitors from the upper East Coast average just over one night. They are likely stopping in Leland enroute to another destination, likely Florida, since Leland is approximately a 10 hour drive from New England.

Midwest: Visitors from the Midwest are spending approximately 2 nights, which indicates their stay in Leland may be part of a longer trip.

West: Visitors from the West spend on average three nights likely due to longer travel distance. A number of these stays could also occur on the way to another destination.

Southeast: The length of stay of visitors from the Southeastern states differs greatly from other parts of the country. Considerably longer average stays of more than three nights, closer to the average of Brunswick County, Pender County, and the Coastal Region, indicates that these visitors regard Leland as an appropriate home base for a beach vacation that would typically otherwise be spent in a vacation rental.

Visitor Characteristics Originating from the Highest Delivering Counties

County	State	Median Age	largest age group	median family income	college	home ownership	median house value	under poverty level
Wake	NC	37.7	40 to 44	135K	87%	64%	\$ 385,700.00	7%
Mecklenburg	NC	35.6	25 to 29	109K	85%	55%	\$ 334,700.00	10%
Chesterfield	VA	39.5	15 to 19	120K	80%	78%	\$ 306,500.00	7%
Prince William	VA	36.7	10 to 14	150K	80%	74%	\$ 472,000.00	7%
Lancaster	PA	39.1	20 to 24	67K	68%	70%	\$ 263,600.00	9%
Montgomery	MD	40.6	35 to 39	158K	87%	66%	\$ 588,900.00	8%
Somerset	NJ	41.9	55 to 59	171K	82%	75%	\$ 489,500.00	5%
Licking	OH	40	60 to 64	98K	66%	74%	\$ 232,200.00	10%
Suffolk	NY	42.1	55 to 59	144K	76%	82%	\$ 490,800.00	7%
Dorchester	SC	38.2	10 to 14	87K	73%	70%	\$ 273,000.00	11%
Norfolk	MA	41.1	55 to 59	169K	85%	68%	\$ 612,100.00	7%
Collier	FL	53.3	65 to 69	101K	75%	75%	\$ 443,700.00	10%

The portrait of visitors illustrated above points out they are educated, affluent, can stay anywhere they select, and have discretionary income to explore the area. In selected counties, the average household income is twice Brunswick County while others average 1.5 times Brunswick County. The number of individuals who have some college or a college degree range from 68% to near 90%. Home ownership levels and home values are also high.

Average Age Varies Widely

Interestingly, the largest age segments of visitors to Leland originating from counties delivering the highest number of visitors varies widely, spanning from 10-14 year olds to 60-65 year olds. Within this wide spread, the "average" visitor age will appear very generic. With the exception of Collier County, Florida, the median age in these counties hovers right around 40, which means they are populated with families, couples, and individuals of all ages.

Use of Computer for Travel Search

It is fair to say that with more than 95% with computers in the home, that virtually every visitor will research their choice of destinations and accommodations online.

Group Travel to Leland

Quite amazingly, the Town of Leland has attracted groups from 33 states across the nation. If the numbers from Nevada are correct, the branding of the two hotels as Leland/Wilmington properties and the outreach by the hotel companies is causing group leaders to house their groups in Leland to explore Wilmington or compete in sports events across the region. It will be very important to continue to attract a wide range of groups because they fill rooms during periods of softer demand.

After having had a “taste” of the destination as part of a group, group travelers often become individual leisure visitors. The majority of group visitors to the Town of Leland come from North Carolina, with the remaining largest generating states, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are clustered in the Southeast. These visitors may already be aware of Wilmington or able to be attracted to explore a historic southern city. In addition, group tour operators are able to promote their offerings with Leland level hotel rates and dining cost options, coupled with the ability to explore historic attractions in Wilmington. This data illustrates two other things that have recently been in question in the tourism industry at large. (1) There is still demand for group travel. (2) Group travel no longer attracts just large motor coach groups since the number of travelers in group tours varied widely and their length of stay was varied as well.



TOWN OF LELAND'S TARGET VISITOR MARKETS

2025 is the first year that seven generations of Americans will be traveling, spanning from the Silent Generation born between 1925-1945 to the Beta Generation, within which the first births are occurring in 2025. With the most discretionary income of any demographic in the United States, Baby Boomers continue to be robust travelers. On the other end of the spectrum, young parents who have traveled all their lives, do not hesitate to take their infants on trips. In total, about 39% of family households in America have children under age 18, up from just over 25% in earlier decades. 80-84% of family households with parents in the 35-45 age group have children under 18 in the home, although a number of parents in the 55-64 age group who started families very late also still have children under 18 in the home.

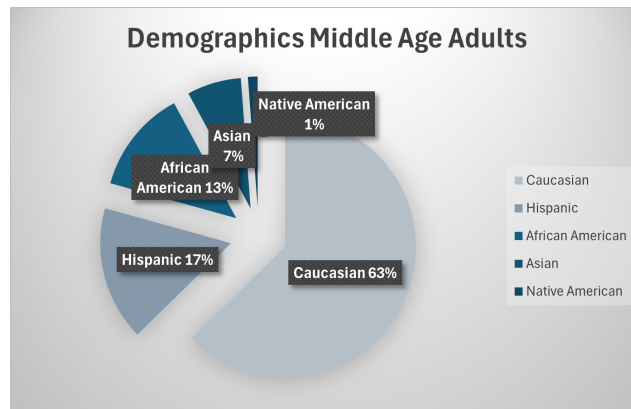
Normally, for a community the size of the Town of Leland with a location so near premier beaches and historic attractions, target markets would focus primarily on leisure visitors and that may continue to be the primary market for Leland. Yet, the results of the Listen to Learn interviews pointed to the need for other approaches and target markets to lessen the 30% difference in seasonality between summer and winter. Thus, a collection of markets each described in detailed below, can be used to balance the visitor population and expand the possibility of attracting visitors from all traveling age groups during all seasons of the year.

Starting at Home: Children and Grandchildren of Local Retirees

The residents of Leland who are 65+ are both Boomers, born between 1946 and 1960, and Silent Generation born prior to 1946. Since most Silent's had their children early, their children are now anywhere from age 50-60, with the oldest preparing for retirement themselves. Older Boomers who started their families early have children age 60 and younger, who now have their own children and grandchildren. In contrast, Boomers who started families near age 40 have Millennial children, some of whom also have their own children. In view of the fact that the 65+ population in the Town of Leland is near one-third, there is a great opportunity to promote tourism to the adult children and grandchildren who visit their parents and grandparents and promote to the residents that when family is in town the whole family can take advantage of new offerings that greatly extend beyond the beaches.

Generation X - Middle Aged Americans - Born 1965-1981 Ages 55-64

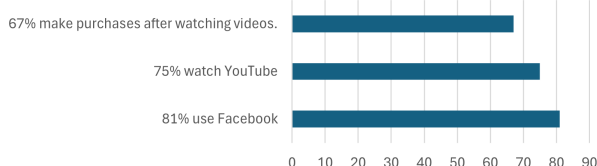
A portion of the retirees in the community will have children in this age group and many will also be friends of residents. Generation X'ers are the original "latch-key kids" left on their own when they came home from school when Moms when to work on a large scale in the 1970s. Those who had children in their 20s now have children who have graduated college. Later parents may still have young children in the home.



Employment and Lifestyle

90% of men and 75% of women are in the workforce.
Most live comfortably in suburban neighborhoods, with 65% owning their homes.

They are tech-savvy:

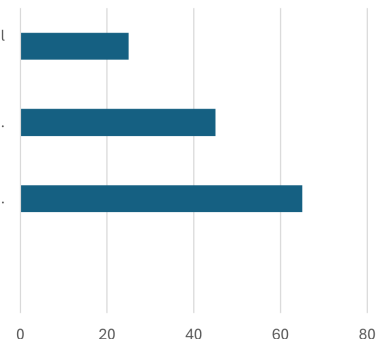


Education and Income of Middle Age Adults

Only 25% are satisfied with their financial situation, making them price-sensitive.

45% have investment income.

65% have some college or a college degree.



- 40% consider themselves middle class
- 50% consider themselves working class
- Majority have 17 vacation days a year
- Attend more musical events
- Want hotel stays predictable
- Enjoy resort stays
- Take 4-5 trips a year
- Most travel domestically

Vacation and Travel Preferences of Middle Age Adults

34% use flash sales

82% majority book travel online

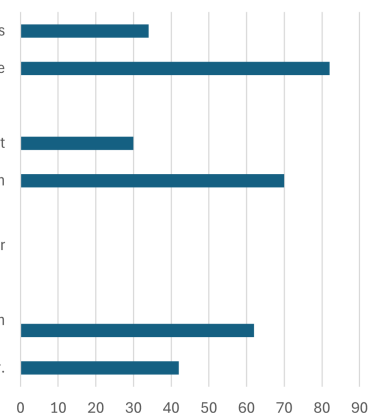
30% prefer excitement

70% seek relaxation

They take 4-5 trips per year, mostly domestic or regional.

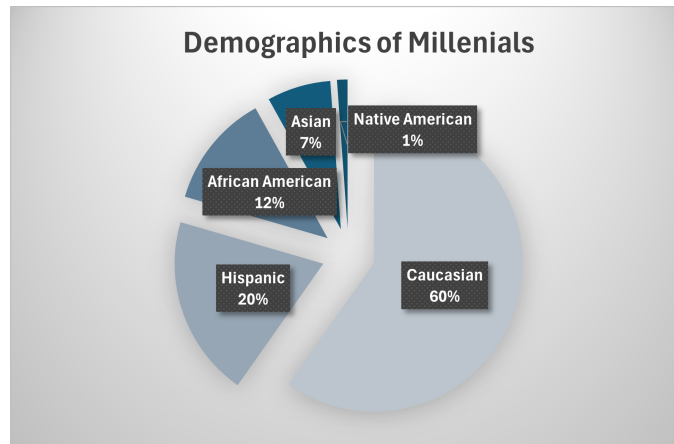
Cost is a significant barrier for 62%, making them more price-conscious.

42% have not taken a vacation in the past year.



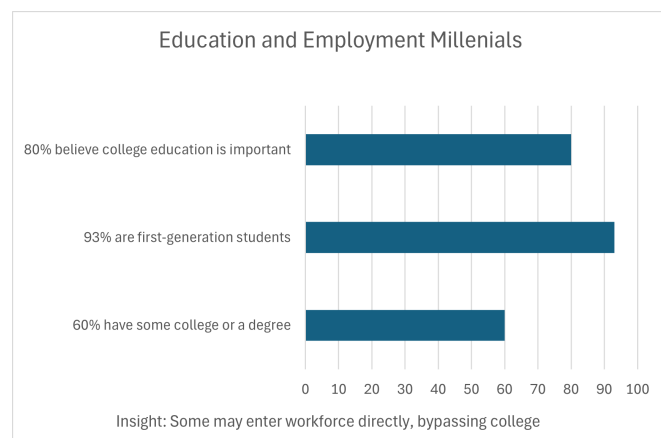
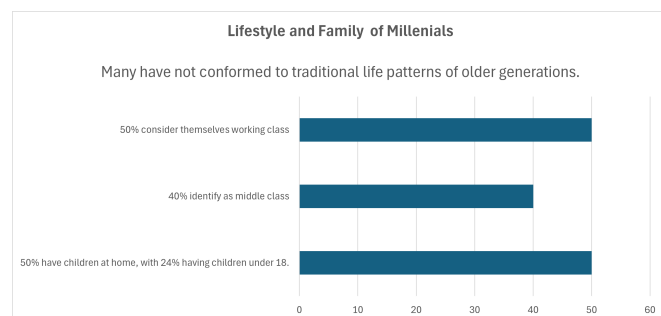
Millennials - The Largest Generation - Born 1981-1996 Ages 28-43

In view of the fact that 40% of Millennials are multi-racial, this generation is the most ethnically and diverse generation in America. With a combination of native born members and legal immigrants, they are also the largest.

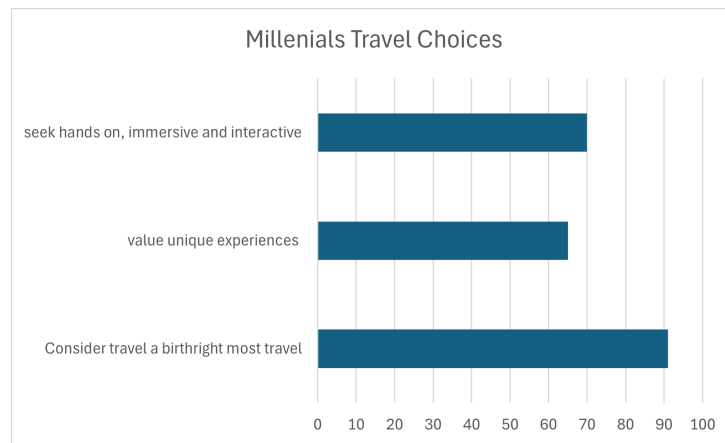
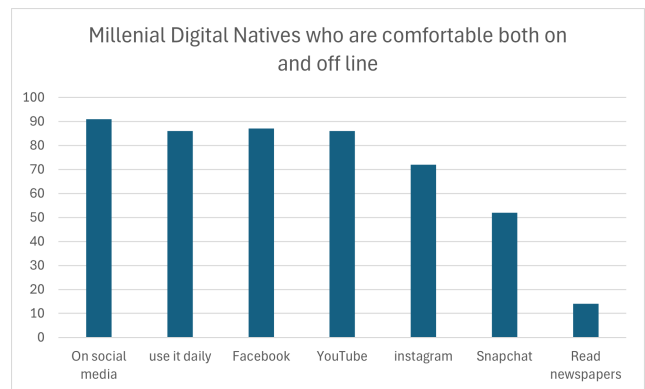
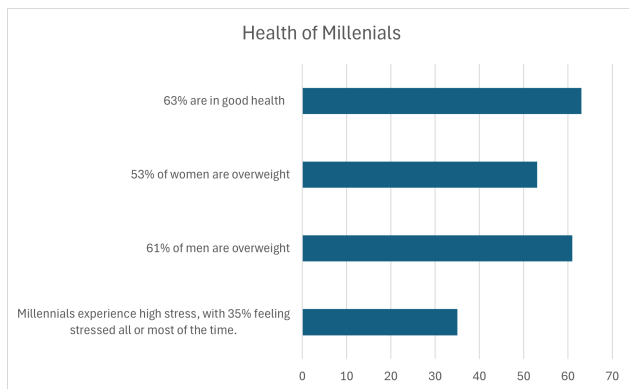


They are most effectively segmented into six distinct groupings and careful segmenting enables precise targeting of marketing messages because young professionals who are not looking to settle down live on a different planet than Millennials with young families.

- college educated professionals,
- Millennials with young and growing families,
- debt burdened past students and continuing students,
- students still living with parents,
- young and educated seeking a place to settle,
- young urbanites with no urge to settle down

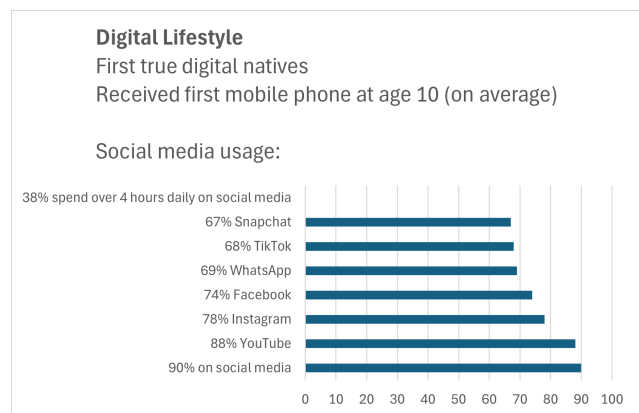
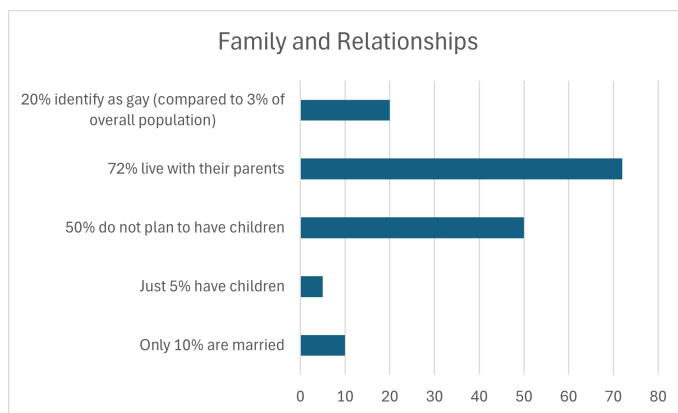
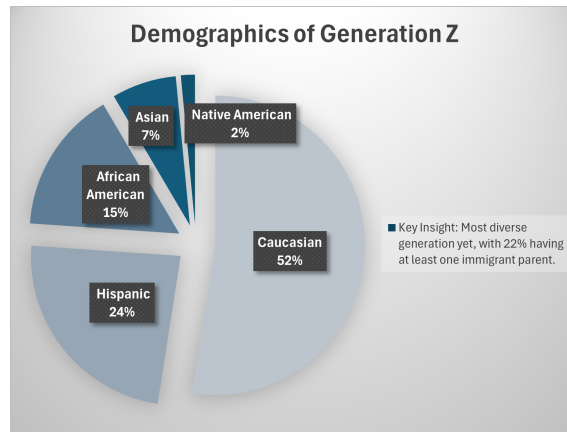


- 29% of families with children under 18 have a stay at home mom
- Just over 50% own their own homes, having paid 100% more on average for homes than their Boomer parents
- 34% very satisfied with their work/life balance, meaning 66% are not
- Cautiously optimistic about their finances and the economy, but uncertainty remains
- Environmental sustainability drives career decisions and consumer behavior
- 56% feel they have an influence over protecting the environment
- Value authenticity and personalization within the brands they deal with

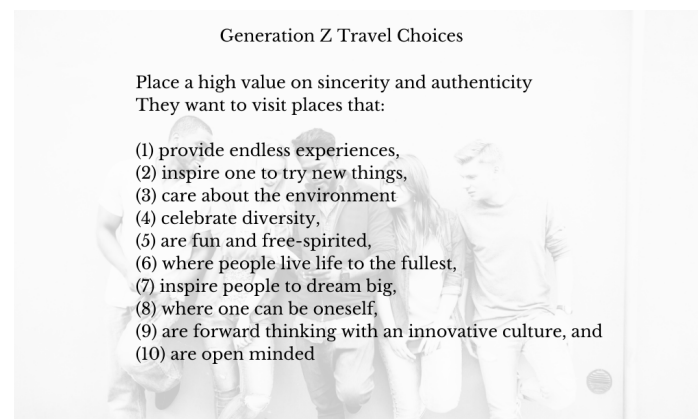


Generation Z - Both Adults and Children - Born 1997-2012 Ages 13-28

Proverbially viewed as “the youngsters,” the oldest Generation Z’s are now 28. They have lived through school shootings, increased family financial stress, recessions, and other social disruptions. In view of the average age of marriage now age 30, they are not marrying and starting families at the same rate as older generations.



- Many of age do not drive and most don't own a car
- The value individual expression and spend based on their values
- Have never known life without digital technology
- Use different social media platforms for each stage of a buying journey



The 50 Mile Radius Surrounding Leland: Repeat Visitors and Event Attendees

The first market for any destination to pursue is the “local market” within a radius of 50 miles. The new amphitheater for concerts and events in Founders Park and the opportunity for smaller theatre presentations can be used to attract repeat visitors who travel to Leland on a regular basis.

Right from the outset, it will be very important to implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to collect contact information for these individuals to notify them of upcoming events, presentations, new restaurant openings, new art exhibits and other happenings a month or 6 weeks before they occur, so they can plan their return.



The 6 Hour Driving Radius: The Most Effective Wider Target Market



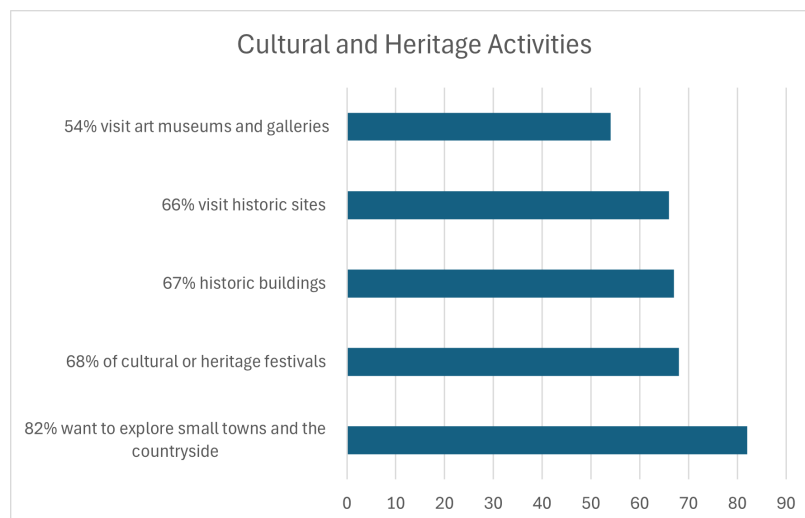
Promoting further afield is most effective when concentrating in a 6-hour radius, which for Leland stretches from Washington, DC to Jacksonville Florida. That roughly 300 mile radius includes the majority of visitors who will drive to Leland, except for the New Englanders who are traveling through on their way to somewhere else. They can likely be attracted to explore for a day and spend one additional night before moving on.

If possible, begin to build a CRM for visitors within the entire radius, to target them with selected emails and other communications throughout the year to encourage return visits or at least a stop on the way to their final destination. Social media marketing to attract these visitors can be tagged geographically and by interest in order to keep the Town of Leland front of mind during the year.

Heritage and Cultural Visitors

Heritage and cultural visitors are America's most affluent and educated visitors and the marketing plans of surrounding destinations do not appear to place any emphasis on reaching these people. That presents an opportunity for the Town of Leland to promote a stay in Leland while exploring historic resources in the region.

- 69 million Heritage and Cultural visitors span all age groups, although primarily older
- Average Household Income is \$118,000
- Average Per Trip Spending stands at \$2,497
- 92% want to create new memories
- 90% want to explore scenic beauty along with heritage and culture
- They spend more, stay longer, and explore more locations than other visitor markets
- 67% prefer to spend more on attractions, tours and dining rather than a nicer hotel room
Will not miss something they want to do due to budget
- Most do not set a trip budget
- More educated than general leisure visitors
- More well traveled than general leisure visitors
- Much more likely to stay overnight
- More likely to stay in unique accommodations and/or upscale lodging
- Taking more trips each year and more trips over long weekends
- Willing to travel an average of 842 miles round trip by car
- Seeking meaningful experiences that they can share with companions
- Unique dining is a very high priority
- Rarely seek big ticket entertainment, instead opting for behind the scenes offerings, docent led tours, smaller cultural events and venues, and distinctive culinary events



ABA and NTA for Group Travelers

Based on the fact that Leland hosted group visitors from 33 states, it makes sense to either partner with others who already attend the American Business Association and National Tour Association trade shows that attract group tour operators from all over the United States or have tourism staff attend. An effective message to this market will encompass the lower cost of hotel rooms in Leland coupled with adjacency to the historic resources of Wilmington.

Other Groups

In view of the large number of retirees living in Leland, the town could prove to be the perfect location for family reunions and other family celebrations. Family visitors can be encouraged to stay in local accommodations if there is no room for children and grandchildren to stay with parents, or prefer not to do so.

Small Meetings and Conferences

Based on the fact that the Cultural Arts Center has recently hosted small meetings and the new Hampton Inn coming online will include, although limited, meeting space, Leland will be in a good position to attract more and varied small meetings and conferences to the area. Many small companies with over 100 employees host off site meetings, executive retreats, planning sessions and so on, and could be attracted to lower cost venues than available in Wilmington, yet offering the same level of service.

Business/Bleisure Travelers

The presence of industry giants such as GE Hitachi, GE Aviation, Corning, Thermo Fisher Scientific, and MegaCorp Logistics all located in the area all represent the opportunity to attract to the new extended stay property and/or switch to a lower cost hotel in Leland to extend their trips with leisure. In addition, many smaller businesses with over 100 employees also have business associates come in from other areas that can be attracted to stay in Leland to lower business travel costs.

Laptop Luggers

The location of Leland near Wilmington will make it particularly attractive to "laptop luggers" who can stay in a Leland hotel or an Airbnb with all the conveniences of home while enjoying the historic attractions across the river and the beaches nearby. Most have no restrictions on where they work and prefer a destination they can enjoy.

Artisans

The Cultural Arts Center does have very limited provisions for working artisans, yet attracting these individuals to arts fairs and other arts events will serve as a significant draw for visitors and residents alike. Holding the events surrounding mealtime hours will increase the number of individuals who dine along with attending the event. Working artisans and artists will be a draw themselves as visitors enjoy watching them ply their craft.

IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL TOURISM MARKETING AND PROMOTION

There are several fundamental components of tourism marketing and promotion that the Town of Leland will need to establish to appear to be a viable destination in the eyes of visitors and others in destination marketing.

Since it was noted above that virtually every visitor research travel destinations online, a new website, organized in the sequence that visitors plan their trips, that includes all of the locations revealed in the comprehensive inventory will be imperative to operate effectively in today's tourism arena. The website should include a section on relocation to the Town of Leland so that visitors will understand what "life is like" in Leland and brief testimonials from new businesses that have relocated or been established in Leland, but information such as LTDA meeting minutes and other administrative matters should be displayed elsewhere. The website does not have to be expensive, just created appropriately to be appealing, attractive, and inspiring.

Based on competitive and comparative destinations, a minimum of 4-5 social media platforms must be established for consistent posting and a blog can be used to post more detailed information. Additional social media platforms should be considered once the basics are in place until comprehensive marketing reach is achieved. Inspiring visitors with content requires understanding the customer journey on an emotional level, using testimonials and case studies, avoiding formulaic writing and stock images, and moving away from 'perfect' posts to embrace content that is both personal and accessible. Because there is so much information online about destinations with a myriad of claims, some true, some not, some outsized and aggrandized, and others more subdued, it becomes a challenge for potential visitors to know what's what. The only way to have a destination stand out is to present tourism offerings unique to the location, coupled with messages that stand out and give visitors a particular reason to visit.

All but three of the comparative and competitive destinations have created supplementing marketing materials such as a visitors guide, brochures, podcasts, videos, and other materials to further illustrate what is available at their destination. Developing these materials is going to be challenging within the budget until the new hotels are generating additional tourism taxes, yet they should be planned and executed when feasible.

Aligning with Visit North Carolina

Since Visit North Carolina marketing, advertising, and promotion is so vital to attracting visitors, new residents, and new businesses it will be very important to align Leland's marketing and promotion with Visit NC and create a direct relationship with the state tourism office. It will be also be important to liaison with North Carolina Outdoors, a program that has been recognized by Leave No Trace as one of the best in the nation. In addition, there are opportunities to (1) attend the NC 365 Tourism Show, (2) participate in the North Carolina Coast Host organization, (3) deliver editorial to Our State Magazine, (4) participate in Visit NC's coop photography program, (5) contact the North Carolina Sports Association to discuss opportunities, (6) and contact Cycle NC to discuss the potential of hosting cycling events. In addition, inquiries should be made about particular programs which Leland can participate in on a co-op basis, to cost effectively extend the reach of promotion of Leland throughout the entire Visit NC advertising and marketing radius.

Operating Within the Region

The expanded tourism effort of Leland will be emerging amongst the existing efforts of New Hanover County, Brunswick County, and Pender County, a region that is being promoted as beaches, beaches, beaches. A review of the detailed marketing plans of Brunswick County and the Islands and Wilmington and the Beaches reveal images of white sand, blue water, and water sports. New Hanover County is also promoting itself as a beach destination, since now there are three other municipalities beyond Wilmington involved in the DMO. In fact, 40% of visitors to New Hanover County stay in Carolina Beach, which verifies that the beaches campaign is effective. This approach presents an opportunity as well as challenges, with large budgets and strong campaigns creating the impression that the whole area is a "beach destination." Even though it has great agri-tourism resources, Pender County also participates in the beaches mentality. The emphasis of Topsail and Surf City once again working to compete with other beach destinations in the area.

Even though the other destination marketing organizations in the area are not pursuing the same markets as Leland, their constant promotion of the region as a beach destination will detract from the experience the Town of Leland will offer. Emerging with distinction within these market realities will require constant vigilance to get Leland's messages out loud and clear.

Core Target Visitor Market Marketing Messages

Core target messages to the various target visitor markets will vary depending on the perspective and priorities of the particular visitor market:

- Residents: When your children and grandchildren are visiting, encourage them to enjoy Leland's restful relaxing urban nature that provides a great experience for both parents and children. In between visits, enjoy our Town's urban nature yourself.
- 50 Milers: Join us in Leland for music, theatre, Shakespeare, the arts, and more. Enjoy a relaxing meal before or after the event and stroll on one of our wonderful trails while in town.
- Driving Visitors: Enjoy your journey to Leland on beautiful scenic byways and exploring our relaxing destination while you are here.
- New Englanders: Break up your drive, stay with us for an extra day and explore the area.
- Heritage and Cultural Visitors: When you stay in the Town of Leland, history and culture are all around you. Explore far and wide.
- ABA and NTA targets: Even though the hotel rates will be less, the experience will be engaging and interesting for your clients.
- Business Travelers: Enjoy our serene nature between your busy meetings and events.
- Laptop Luggers: While you work, it's time to relax and enjoy yourself in our pleasant town where life is good.
- Gentle Outdoor Recreation Visitors: The Town of Leland is a one of a kind nature haven in the middle of it all. Stroll, walk, refresh and renew in our town.

Tourism Marketing and Promotion Support

The robust level of tourism development, marketing, and promotion that will be required to implement a viable tourism effort to increase visitors to the Town of Leland, will require competent, committed, dedicated staff to plan and execute the programs. The recent combination of Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, and Tourism into one department will go a long way to effectively implement a tourism marketing and promotion

effort but it is imperative that staff assigned to promote tourism and events are allowed the time to do their jobs, and not put on other work that may appear to have more urgency. To be most effective, it is recommended that the new department have at least one person dedicated to tourism marketing and promotion who does not have other duties. It is likely that funding for that position can be squeezed out of the increased tourism tax revenues.

Having an individual dedicated to the effort is critical since the only way that social media is successful in attracting visitors is that it is consistent, with posts generated day in and day out, week after week, to keep the destination in front of potential visitors. Even though this is a very cost effective way to promote, there is still the cost of staff time to do so. There will be times when it appears that no progress is being made and the fact that the promotion of Leland's new identity will be dropping into an already established marketing system, will increase the challenges. Yet with a consistent and strategically appropriate effort, the challenges can be overcome.

It will be critical to make the case that tourism is economic development and have the numbers to prove it when the time spent on promotion is questioned and suggestions made that staff should be focused on other things. The most important KPIs will include an increase in overnight stays, admissions to attractions, and increased dining receipts. Tracking these items will illustrate in hard dollars the effect that tourism promotion is having "on the ground." Only then will residents and visitor facing locations believe that the tourism marketing and promotional programs are successful and should continue into the future.

NEW TOURISM OFFERINGS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE PLACEMAKING

There is a collection of tourism offerings that can be created to attract visitors and facilitate their exploration that do not require placemaking. This type of pre-designed trail makes it easy for visitors to say yes to a visit since the research about what to see and do has been done for them.

Local Trails

The most effective way to establish the Town of Leland as a home base from which to explore the rest of the region is to create a collection of "driving" trails that connect resources in Leland with similar themed resources in other parts of the region. All of the trails should begin and end in Leland, to generate the economic development that accommodations, dining, and shopping deliver to the Town.

There is no governance or other restrictions on the development of this type of trail. It is all accomplished on paper and in communication with the other locations that are included. The effort does not have to be complicated with a common pass, financial contributions by other locations, or other actions that hold up completion of the trail.

- A Tasting Trail can connect the breweries in Leland with breweries, distilleries, and wineries throughout the area.
- A Heritage/History Trail can begin in Leland with a small exhibit at the Cultural Arts Center that focuses on the unique history of the area and serves as a trailhead, from which to explore historic sites in both Brunswick and New Hanover Counties.
- An Arts Trail can connect arts locations in Leland with art museums, art galleries and other related locations in Wilmington and southern Brunswick County.
- Gullah Geechee Corridor itineraries can be created to encompass 2, 3, and 4 Day experiences along the Corridor.

Regional Scenic Routes For Visitors Arriving in Leland

Since Leland is a “driving” destination from points in the surrounding 6 hour radius, a series of itineraries that incorporate Scenic Byways in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia will provide delightful routes for visitors arriving by car traveling through these states. This approach will let visitors enjoy the “journey” as well as the destination, instead of dashing on the interstate taking on more stress.

The Requested 2, 3, and 4 Day Itineraries

The Leland Economic Development Plan recommended that itineraries for visitors be developed to lay out 2, 3, and 4 Day experiences in the area. These itineraries, (different from the trails) should be developed for at least, a heritage theme, arts theme, and gentle nature theme, using Leland as the home base. The itineraries should include dining and retail options aligned with the themes, to make it as easy as possible for visitors to enjoy their experience.

SEASONAL EVENTS TO GENERATE VISITORS TO THE TOWN OF LELAND

Events aimed at the core market of potential repeat visitors will serve as an effective way to increase tourism in the immediate term.

Goal: Promote the Town of Leland as an area that offers year-round attractions to smooth out seasonality and appeal to repeat visitors from within the 50-mile radius surrounding Leland.

Opportunity 1: As the softest season for Leland, expand the reach and offerings for winter activities unique to the region.

Strategy 1: Support the development of a master plan for Leland in Lights to theme multiple sections of the park that encompasses string lights, displays and interactive elements.

Strategy 2: Create opportunities for businesses, community groups, and the greater community to sponsor Leland in Lights.

Strategy 3: Support the expansion of activities planned during Leland in Lights to enrich the event into a multi-faceted season-long attraction.

Opportunity 2: As a strong shoulder season, leverage spring weather to attract all visitor types to outdoor offerings.

Strategy 1: Explore opportunities to expand athletic and sporting events appropriate for the season by partnering with other organizations.

Strategy 2: Promote the presence of local artisans through the Spring Art Market which will serve as an attraction for visitors and offer more activities for residents.

Strategy 3: Leverage a 4-Day schedule for the NC Rice Festival by collaborating with local businesses and Town facilities to create Gullah-Geechee specific activities such as Gullah-Geechee inspired cuisine at local restaurants, art galleries, performances, tours, and instruction.

Strategy 4: Promote seasonal festivals such as a Festival of Flowers that takes place throughout public gardens and along Town roads that include artisan markets, food and music.

Opportunity 3: Capitalize on summer being the strongest season for tourism by programming around visitors already intending to stay in the area.

Strategy 1: Identify opportunities to promote the amphitheater in Founders Park as a regional musical venue for concerts, plays, and other outdoor performances.

Opportunity 4: As a strong shoulder-season, develop additional fall offerings to capture later visitors and residents seeking engaging entertainment.

Strategy 1: Promote intimate theater productions that provide a unique experience to catch well known shows and meet with professional actors.

Strategy 2: Explore dinner theater concepts with local restaurants and culinary entrepreneurs to provide unique dining experiences.

Strategy 3: Explore promoting a Fall Festival that embraces the traditional seasonal themes and fair activities.

Summer Events

Visitors to the whole of Brunswick County and the region in summer present a ready made market to attract event goers to the Town of Leland. 84% of these visitors occupy the vacation rentals in southern and coastal Brunswick County and at the other beaches, on a weekly basis. With nightlife in such short supply in these areas, Leland can take advantage of the situation by equipping each of the vacation rental offices with detailed information about upcoming events. Establish an email list to regularly contact the offices, deliver printed materials to their offices, and keep the events calendar on the new website up to date at all times. Encourage the rental agents to make the information available to their renters. Ultimately, form a relationship with each of the offices in order to find out from them what would make the information provided about events most helpful.

Because visitors are on vacation to get away from stress in their daily lives, summer events should be lighthearted. Possibilities include comedy shows, relaxing music concerts where guests can bring a blanket and sit on the ground, and tasting events where the food goes beyond the traditional seafood offerings. Evening and moonlight events, walks within the nature preserve, and other creative approaches can be used to get people out of their vacation rental and up to Leland to spend time and money.

A Fall "Theatre" Season

In fall, families have returned home to enroll the children in school and vacation rentals will be mostly filled with couples who wanted to avoid the traffic of the summer season. This should be an effective time to deliver a fall "THEATRE" season with all the hype, trimmings, and drama found in larger cities. Based on the three theater companies that have indicated interest, a full slate of very interesting performances should be generated. Since this is likely also a softer dining season, it will be advantageous to combine theater and dining to encourage visitors to consider staying overnight in town.

Spring Flings and Festivals

With the Rice Festival recurring every spring, the season can become a season of festivals featuring flowers and gardens, budding trees, and awakening of the most beautiful time in North Carolina. Once again, in the spring visitors will be couples because children are still in school, except for Easter break. An Arts Fair will encourage purchase of unique local arts and attract artisans to Leland who could be approached to become "artists-in-residence." A run or some other type of sporting event could be held on the first flowering paths. An event that includes pets could also be an interesting option. All of these approaches and more will focus on getting people out of the house and into the fresh spring air.

Local Culinary and Beverage Events

These events, put on by local restaurants, breweries, and other businesses can be distributed throughout the year. Consider a restaurant week during which there are special meals, new introductions, unique foods and so on, promoted to the 50 Milers. Or, special holiday celebrations for Valentines Day, St. Patricks Day, and/or Easter.

Get started with additional events by contacting all potential event providers in the area to determine if any are available to begin a festival in Leland. Plan to add no more than two new events the first year and build from there. Utilizing the CRM will make marketing of events easier and less costly.

PLACEMAKING TO RENDER THE TOWN OF LELAND A UNIQUE TOURISM DESTINATION

Goal: Enable Visit Leland to promote itself with a unique identity as a community integrated with preserved natural areas, heritage, arts, and culture.

Opportunity 1: Provide a strategically located Visitor Center.

Strategy 1: Support utilizing space to display Visit Leland materials as well as documentation for tourism assets within Leland and neighboring areas.

Strategy 2: Support the development of exhibits that illustrate the history of the Leland area dating back to the end of the 1600s.

Strategy 3: Leverage the traffic generated by visitors to book programs related to tourism such as boat tours and birding.

Strategy 4: Partner with the Brunswick County TDA to share resources between the County and the LCAC.

Opportunity 2: Announce the Town of Leland at each major entry point.

Strategy 1: Design impactful signage identifying the Town of Leland.

Strategy 2: Install the signage at each major point of ingress and egress.

Opportunity 3: Utilize landscaping as beautification to create community character, incentivize pedestrian activities and minimize urban heat areas.

Strategy 1: Support the installation of attractive gardens utilizing public spaces, stone pedestals and planters.

Strategy 2: Support planting native flowering streetscapes along Town owned right-of-ways, planted medians and pedestrian crossings.

Strategy 3: Partner with agencies such as the Brunswick Cooperative Extension to provide species placards along landscaped areas.

Opportunity 4: Install sculptures and murals to distinguish Leland from nearby suburbs and attract visitors with interest in unique, local art.

Strategy 1: Collaborate to attract the attention of artisans to create sculptures and other pieces to be displayed in Town owned parks and streetscapes.

Strategy 2: Work with local arts organizations and business owners to create murals on private buildings to provide distinguishing characteristics to supplement the lack of historic buildings.

Strategy 3: Develop a walkable public art trail to connect installations and murals along parks, businesses, neighborhoods and other areas.

A Strategically Located Accessible Visitor Center

A Visitor Center where visitors and residents can obtain information about things to see and do is foundational to a viable tourism program. It also presents the opportunity to tell the story of the Town of Leland starting from the late 1600s in visually attractive and intriguing exhibits to create a unique attraction that “anchors” the visitor experience in the Town of Leland.

Increasing the Visual Appeal of the Town of Leland

Visitors want to visit places that are attractive, especially younger visitors who regularly share “Instagrammable” moments with their friends. Community appeal is also important to business development since no business owner relocates without first visiting the location to determine what it will be like to live in the area and whether or not the community is attractive enough to attract customers and employees.

Because the majority of the Town of Leland is new housing with no historic building core, the town will need to incorporate murals, art installations, and other placemaking to increase the visual appeal. The approach of the Town of Oro Valley, a suburb of Tucson, Arizona is a good example of how incorporating of art into the city landscape can both provide visual appeal and a distinguishing characteristic that supports attracting visitors. Over the past decade, Oro Valley has installed art at 211 locations and a tour of these locations has become very popular with visitors and residents alike.

Another very important action the Town of Leland can take to increase the visual appeal encompasses the planting of trees and flowers throughout the community. This is especially important in the neighborhoods where potential new residents will be searching for new housing. The more pleasant the neighborhood, the more likely a young family will purchase a home in the location.



NATURE-BASED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TO DEVELOP AND SUPPORT THE TOWN OF LELAND'S UNIQUE IDENTIFICATION

Goal: Align Visit Leland with nature tourism while also achieving environmental sustainability through preservation and conservation of the irreplaceable natural areas in the Town of Leland.

Opportunity 1: Development of Greenways

Strategy 1: Support the development of paved trails for walking and biking that connect neighborhoods and hotels to parks, businesses and other points of interest to attract annual bicycle and pedestrian athletic events.

Strategy 2: Support the development of hard-packed natural trails with minimal improvements within a naturally preserved area to attract off-road cyclists and hikers.

Opportunity 2: Development of Blueways

Strategy 1: Develop a plan and process to connect the Blueways in the Town of Leland into a series of water trails that are navigable as a nature experience.

Strategy 2: Leverage the planned motorized boat launch at Sturgeon Creek Park as a regional asset to capitalize on recreational and tournament fishing.

Strategy 3: Partner with outdoor outfitters to develop a water-based annual festival such as a Paddle festival that proposed nature-based tourism for outdoor enthusiasts.

Opportunity 3: Further Development of Nature-Based Tourism

Strategy 1: Partner with local experts to develop material that describes local and migrating birds, illustrates where to view them in the Town of Leland and appropriate to be included in a brochure and local communications.

Strategy 2: Partner with local experts to develop material that describes fish likely to be found in specific waterways and regulations on catch, keep, and release approaches, appropriate to be included in a brochure and local communications.

Strategy 3: Partner with local businesses to promote a paddle tour along Sturgeon and Mill Creeks highlighting native flora and fauna, primary habitats of endangered species and other unique aspects of the waterways.

Strategy 4: Partner with local guides to develop birding tours from the Town of Leland's nature access points to view local and migrating birds found in the area.

Strategy 5: Partner with local businesses to promote a boat tour from Leland along Eagle Island.

Strategy 6: Promote the development of a campground that provides a range of campsites from primitive to glamping facilities such as cottages, cabins and recreational vehicle hook-ups.

Strategy 7: Partner with agencies to produce educational placards along trails and natural areas describing the flora and fauna of the site.

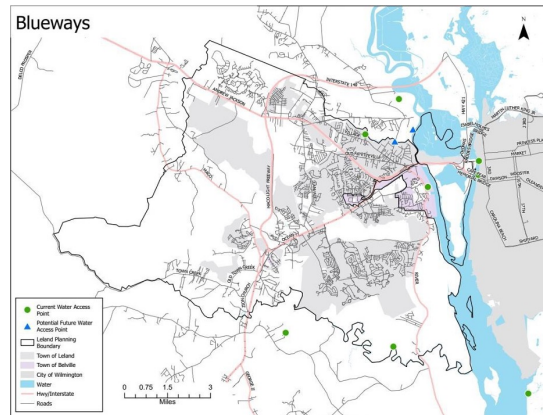
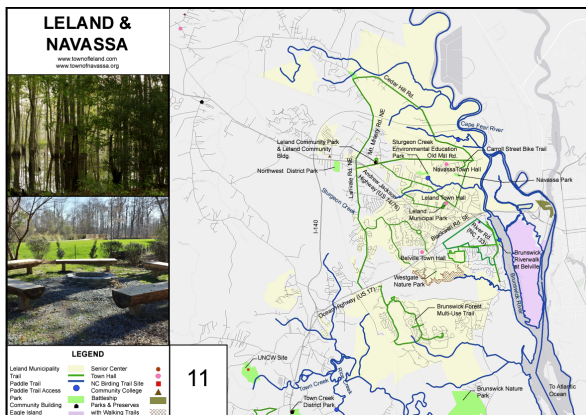
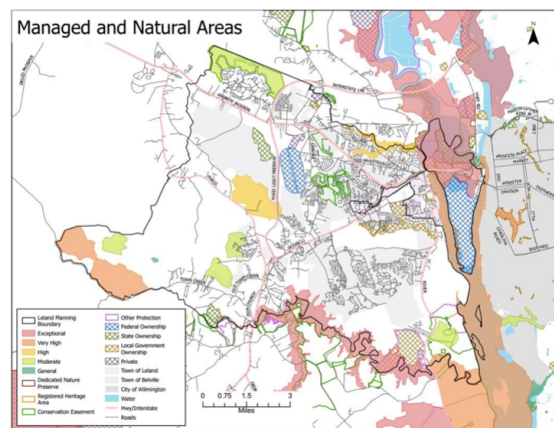
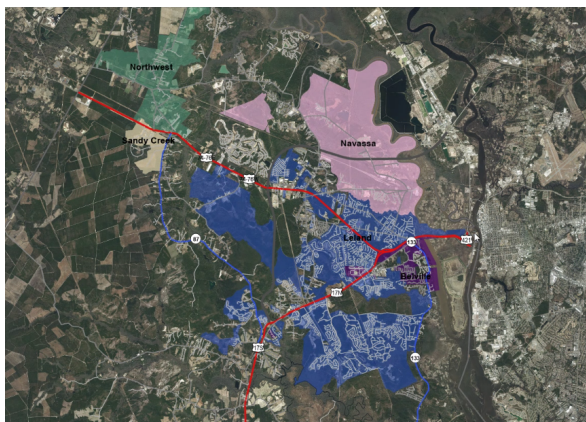
Strategy 8: Promote the development of trails for equestrian use and partner with local entities to provide horseback riding as an attraction within the location.

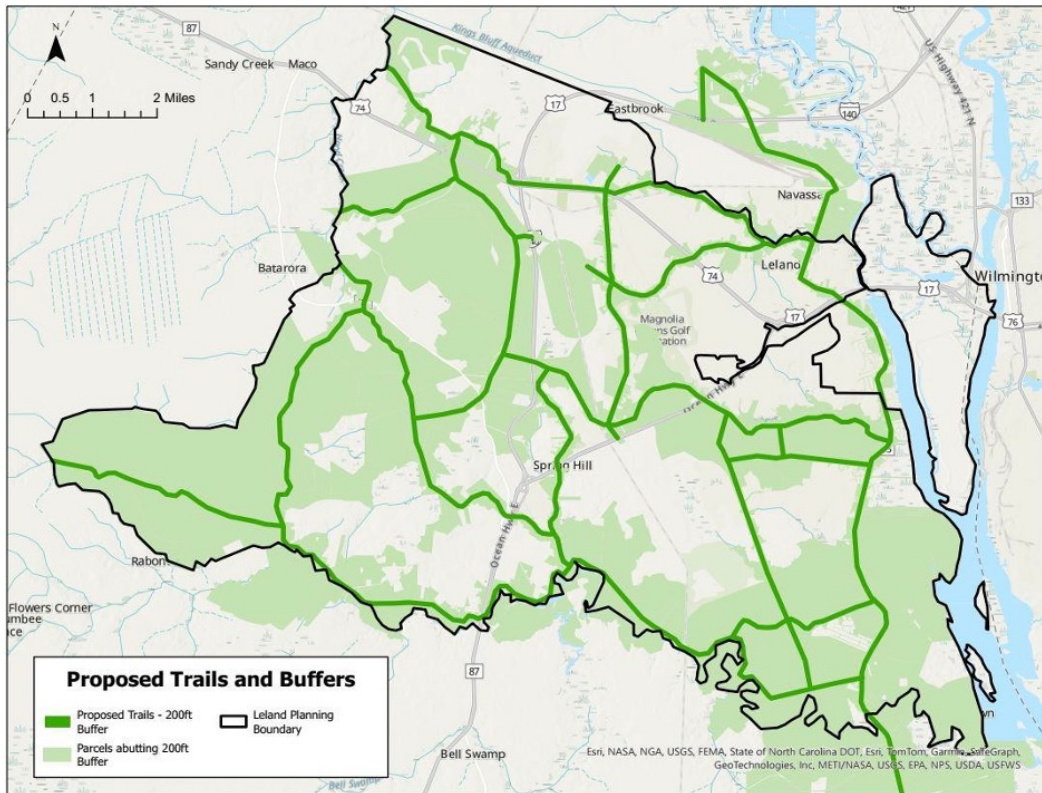
Strategy 9: Investigate the potential of creating a "live use" city farm with community gardens, demonstrations and other activities to connect visitors and residents with an agricultural environment.

DEVELOPMENT OF TOWN OF LELAND'S UNIQUE URBAN NATURE RESOURCES

The Town of Leland has a unique opportunity not available to other destinations in the area. The presence of Greenways, Blueways, natural environments, parks, lakes, and other nature areas can serve as the springboard for the Town of Leland to brand itself with a unique identification as an URBAN NATURE HAVEN located in the middle of all of the commercialization.

The Town of Leland has all of the components needed to develop the unique identity. Combining the Blueways that travel through the community into urban water trails, together with the trails and proposed trails identified in the Green Growth plan will enable Leland to deliver a substantial new tourism approach distinct from its neighbors. Not everybody wants to go to the beach or go every day, and Leland will present a conveniently located attractive alternative.





Accomplishing the positioning of the Town of Leland as an Urban Nature Haven may take a major effort, yet a portion can be activated through careful planning and promotion. The woodlands, clear running creeks, and ponds populated with birds and wildlife, traversed by an innovative trail system, thoughtfully planned activity areas and access points for exploring will serve as a great visitor draw for the Town of Leland and places for residents to regularly enjoy. Since the Town of Leland is located on the Atlantic Flyway, creating more bird-friendly habitats will increase the available enjoyment.

Pulling these resources and assets together will also fulfill the requests of local residents for connected walking and biking trails. In addition, water access and promoting water based activities, incorporating a new boat launch, design of additional recreational opportunities, attracting kayak outfitters and bike rentals, establishing a tour boat tour for visitors who do not want to kayak, connecting Blueways linking Sturgeon Creek, Brunswick Nature Park, and Brunswick Forest, and development of activities for the children and grandchildren of Leland residents will all add to the resources. An RV Park with “glamping” facilities, the high end camping now so popular, will incorporate completely unique accommodations.

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL NATURE BASED TOURISM

Promoting the Town of Leland as an Urban Nature Haven will require that all natural areas with the town are regularly maintained and kept in top notch quality at all times. Foundational activities to create and maintain a sustainable nature tourism environment include at a minimum:

- (1) keeping all public spaces clean and free of litter and other debris
- (2) regular trail maintenance
- (3) repair of amenities such as playground equipment, picnic tables, restrooms, and other facilities
- (4) maintaining the safety and security of nature visitors, and
- (5) performing additional maintenance as required, such as the removal of downed trees on trails, lighting repairs and clearing areas of storm damage.

Beyond maintenance, development of a conservation management plan and stewardship goals should include elements such as managing forest areas for invasive species, replacement of boardwalks and trail improvements, replacing plantings with native plants as required, regularly evaluating the health of forests, water management to control, or least contain saltwater flowing into estuaries that will impact fishing, and other action to preserve the ecosystems, will be needed. A program to balance public use of the environments should be implemented so as to not allow the natural environment to be degraded through overuse.

Visitors and residents using the natural areas should be instructed to respect the natural environment and tour guides and recreational activity suppliers asked to sign and adhere to a pledge to maintain the quality of the natural environments they use for profit making activities. Observation cameras can be strategically placed to provide a record of destructive incidences that do occur. Leave No Trace principles can be incorporated into strategically placed communications to instruct users that "this is an environment to be protected," pack out what you pack in, leave no trash around, stay on the trails and/or on specific water trail routes and in general consider the priorities of protecting the very special environment which they are enjoying.

To educate nature enthusiasts about the flora and fauna they encounter, it will be important to develop a botanical inventory, as well as information about the animal and bird species in order that educational documentation can be provided to visitors and experts engaged to prepare explanatory material. Trail cameras can be used to document species that are shy about appearing when trails are being used. When an educational signage program is implemented, it will be important to regularly survey all the signage to determine needed repairs and replacements.

ENHANCING THE URBAN NATURE HAVEN WITH A SIDE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

The Town of Leland will become even more enjoyable for visitors and residents, and deliver an additional means to promote Leland as distinct from its neighbors, by enhancing the Urban Nature Haven with a “side of arts and culture.”

This can most effectively be accomplished through increasing the ability to deliver “smaller scale” theatre, arts offerings, artisans, and public art, plus maximizing the possibilities that come with being located at the trailhead of the Gullah Geechee Corridor.

The fact that Leland has been approached by smaller theater companies which have not been able to reserve venues to perform in Wilmington is a good sign that there will be opportunities to offer a year round slate of performances and events utilizing regional less costly artists and performers. As soon as the completion date for the Amphitheater has been established, it, plus the Leland Cultural Arts Center, can begin being promoted as performance venues.



Even though the arts and cultural expansion may only initially include residents from the surrounding counties and southern Brunswick County where nightlife is scant, when they travel to Leland, they will inevitably dine before or after a performance or stay for any available nightlife, which can add substantially to the economic development delivered to the Town of Leland.

The Updated Grant Policy

The updated grant policy of the Leland Tourism Development Authority that was developed as an adjunct to this plan will serve well to support bringing more arts, culture, theater, and events to the Town of Leland.

RALLYING THE TOWN OF LELAND AROUND THE UNIQUE IDENTIFICATION

Even though developing the Town of Leland as an Urban Nature Haven will require considerable work, achieving this goal will deliver both unique resources for visitors and residents to enjoy. At the same time, the new identification can serve as a major effort to pull the various neighborhoods, housing developments and other sections of the Town of Leland together into a cohesive urban "community."

Unifying the Town of Leland under a banner that not only describes the unique qualities of the Town, but an approach the community can be proud of will do more for the town than any other tourism program that can be proposed. This type of collective activity can serve to create strong ties between the natural world, the people and the community, resulting in a stronger, more cohesive Town of Leland with a new vision of itself and its viability as a thriving unique place to visit, live, and establish a business.

TOURISM AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

When implementation of the above strategies has occurred, the Town of Leland can expect significant economic benefits, but those benefits are not always recognized or attributed to tourism.

Even though local officials in many locations are aware of, or even witnessing the economic activity generated by the small businesses in a community, there may still be many who have not grasped the concept that attracting visitors proactively contributes to exactly what they are trying to achieve in increasing quality of life in the community. They must be made aware

that it's possible to chart a path to generate economic development through tourism which touches upon virtually every primary goal of economic development.

Tourism does in fact, increase the number of jobs at both starter and higher levels. Plus, tourism often does spark needed revitalization. It delivers stronger support for the arts and diversifies the tax base, making economic development more inclusive. And it delivers these things in far less time than it takes to plan and build a major infrastructural project or recruit a large manufacturing corporation.

Perhaps the main advantage visitors deliver to communities is the spending they deliver to the small businesses that line the streets. Rather than in large corporations, in reality, economic development in America is grounded in the 99.9% or close to all of America's 34 million businesses. Eight out of 10 of these businesses have no employees, while 16% have between one and 20. Only 650,000 organizations in the entire US have more than 20 employees.

One of the questions most often posed when being asked to support expanding tourism is, "what level of job creation can we expect that spending to generate?" Conventional thinking has been that tourism jobs are only low paying and marginal, and some are only seasonal. In fact, these types of workers are needed to serve visitors, yet the tourism industry generates a wide range of job opportunities in hospitality, entertainment, transportation, and retail. Every new business, hotel, restaurant, shop, or service business has a manager and sometimes an assistant manager, in addition to front line staff. Because tourism jobs are both "starter" jobs that reduce local unemployment, and generate higher paying professional positions, research reveals that more individuals in starter jobs in the tourism industry successfully pursue college degrees than in any other industry. The jobs both pay the bills and allow the flexibility needed to pursue classes, serving as a springboard to greater things.

And thriving businesses also patronize other businesses in the community. For example, if these business do not have their own financial management personnel, they use the services of local providers, who can increase their own staff in response to more demand. Businesses can also use other local businesses as suppliers, especially for fresh local ingredients and other conveniently located products and services.

US Travel Association indicates every \$100,000 in visitor spending generates one new job. Research based on numbers analyzed from various US congressional districts summarized that 100 new traveling parties would create the equivalent of one new job and 1,000 new

parties the equivalent of 10 new jobs. Using a Travel Oregon number of \$249 per person per day visitor spending and an average traveling party size of 2.1 spending 3 days in a community, results in a total of \$156,870 in visitor spending from 100 parties. Comparing that figure to the US Travel number, 100 new traveling parties creates the equivalent of 1.5 new jobs and 1,000 new parties, the equivalent of 15 new jobs.

Hillsborough, NC calculated the economic results of arts and cultural events that attracted 109,743 non-resident attendees who spent an average of \$16.88 above the cost of event admissions, and determined they delivered a total of \$1,852,462 to the city. These expenditures were spent on meals and refreshments in local restaurants and bars, on gifts from local shops, ground transportation, filling up the gas tank, one night of overnight lodging, and other miscellaneous purchases. The \$5 admission fee for the event added another \$548,715 to the local economy, bringing the total up over \$2M added to the visitor economy just from arts events. Local restaurants received more than \$1M in revenue from the spending of these visitors from out of town they would not have enjoyed otherwise.

Tybee Island, Georgia indicates visitor spending supports 1,902 jobs on the island, and many more off-island. One of the clearest statements about the value of tourism was issued by New York State, where a side-by-side graph clearly illustrates that the unemployment rate in New York State was 5.3% in 2015 with jobs in tourism included. It would have been 13.2% if the tourism jobs were eliminated.

Research by Tourism Economics revealed that visitor spending also spurs faster growth in a region as a whole. According to their study, destinations with a higher concentration of visitor industries grew faster than other areas, and a 10% increase in travel and tourism employment tended to be followed by a 1.5% increase in broader employment.

As new businesses move in and others are started, tourism works to diversify the local economy which reduces the vulnerability to economic downturns or reliance on a sole industry. The increased tax revenues that visitors deliver can be reinvested to improve local services and/or add more amenities for residents. Or, they can be mandated to make the community a more attractive place to live, increase services and support of the disadvantaged, improve education, expand health care services and public safety, or all of the above, depending on community priorities.

Virtually everything developed and constructed for visitors also contributes to a higher quality of life for residents. Improved amenities, more entertainment options, more shops, and physical improvements to the community's downtown, are all byproducts of a thriving tourism program. A new or improved heritage museum presents the opportunity for local residents to learn more about their own heritage, and new entertainment venues provide higher levels of entertainment programming for visitors and locals alike. An upgraded trail provides exercise opportunities for both, as do other outdoor recreation improvements built on a community wide basis. Tourism also drives demand for local goods, produce, wines, brews, crafts, and more, supporting local artisans, and producers.

New residents moving into locations with high quality recreation assets generally have higher incomes, than new residents moving into locations without the resources. The presence of outdoor recreational assets and amenities such as trails are also related to higher property values, especially when the trails provide convenient opportunities for physical activity and safe corridors for walking or cycling. Adjacency to trails added an approximate 2% price premium in a San Antonio, Texas, neighborhood. Where the trails were surrounded with a larger green space, the premium went up to 5%.

In New Castle County, Delaware, homes near bike paths commanded a 4% price premium. And in Methow Valley, Washington, homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefit from a 10% price premium. Homes located along a trail in Austin, Texas, enjoy a price premium ranging from 6% to 20% depending on views of the green space surrounding the trail, and whether they had direct neighborhood access.

