
Southern Virginia Regional Section

Introduction

As a supplement to the Virginia State Tourism Plan, this section is dedicated to the Southern Virginia region. ***It is strongly suggested that the Virginia State Tourism Plan be read in conjunction with this regional section.***

The key elements of this regional section include the following:

- A situational analysis of tourism in the region, which highlights the key tourism products, regional strengths and challenges, competitive considerations, and other relevant information, is presented to set the framework for the regional strategy.
- Key product themes of focus are identified and applicable objectives and strategies are presented for the five plan outcomes of Products, Pillars (infrastructure), Partnerships, Promotions, and Policies for the Southern Virginia tourism strategy.
- Action steps specific to the region, which are above and beyond the actions of the state level plan are outlined.
- Stakeholders proposed to be involved in implementing the plan are also identified.
- Key takeaways for Southern Virginia's tourism development in the next five years are outlined.

Process for Findings

Numerous factors formed the basis of Southern Virginia's tourism strategy, including the tourism industry's own vision for the region, an inventory and analysis of the tourism assets currently offered, input and analysis of visitor information, and an analysis of the competitive environment. These four key areas are further described below:

Industry Vision: The industry vision served as the foundation for the region's strategy, based on input from approximately 1,300 responses statewide, including stakeholders from Southern Virginia through workshops, surveys, and discussions. The desire among Southern Virginia stakeholders is to utilize the regions' natural assets and further develop outdoor recreation experiences, while building upon the region's towns and rural experiences to increase tourism.

Tourism Assets: Southern Virginia's tourism assets were analyzed by the study team. This included the current mix of tourism products such as attractions, visitor activities, hotel inventory, natural assets and topography, industry base, and socio-cultural character. The strengths and challenges of the region's current characteristics such as infrastructure, road/air accessibility, partnerships, policies, and promotions were also

discussed with numerous key stakeholders and assessed. In addition to the study team’s personal experience of Southern Virginia, other input contributed to an understanding of the existing tourism assets, including input from tourism stakeholders, VTC databases, local tourism marketing information/promotional information from organizations such as the chambers of commerce, existing tourism plan for Mecklenburg County, tourism industry associations, tourism industry resources, PwC resources, and others.

Consumer Perspective: Research was analyzed on a global, national, state, and regional level. This research included visitor trends, activities, perceptions/preferences, performance indications, and emerging elements. Macro trends impacting tourism such as population and demographic trends, GDP/GSP, unemployment rates, consumer prices, personal consumption spending, gas prices, and other factors impacting tourism in a broad sense were also analyzed.

Sources of research related to Virginia and Southern Virginia compiled by the VTC were analyzed, which included profiles of past visitors (by traveler type, geography, season, and activity), traveler attitude studies, and other data. Profiles of past visitors (statewide) showed activities engaged in which are offered in Southern Virginia, seasonality, party size, spending, demographics, income levels, travel distance and patterns, duration of trip, travel party origin, and other relevant information. Attitude studies of past and prospective travelers provided additional insight for Southern Virginia in terms of appeal, perceptions of tourism products, activities, and destination attributes as well as other relevant hub and spoke travel behavior and activities engaged in by past and prospective visitors to Virginia. Visitor data was also analyzed against existing tourism assets.

Visitor insights show that favorability ratings for Southern Virginia were strongest among Generation X travelers and families. Overall, though, Southern Virginia had less name recognition among past and prospective travelers to Virginia compared to other regions. Top of mind tourism assets for visitors included NASCAR and small towns/farms/rural areas. It was also recognized by most as being relaxing and good for families, while additional activities and entertainment were viewed as opportunities to improve its appeal.

Additional state/regional sources included data on visitor spending patterns based on economic impact data in the region, state parks attendance, welcome center statistics, the Economic Impact of Wine and Grapes on the State of Virginia, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and other sources. Examples of national and international sources include data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization, U.S. Travel Association, Office of Travel & Tourism Industries (OTTI), MMGY Global, Outdoor Industry Association, U.S. Culture and Heritage Travel Council, National Trust for Historic Preservation, World Food Travel Association, National Parks Service, Smith Travel Research (STR), America's Byways, Woods & Poole, other U.S. government sources, travel industry publications and articles, and other relevant sources.

Competitive Perspective: To understand the offering and competitive positioning of Virginia and the Southern Virginia region, research and analysis was conducted which evaluated destinations, product offerings, market segments, and key strengths of competition on a regional basis and analysis of products, tourism spending, product rankings, and best practices and trends in tourism product areas on a statewide/national

basis. For Southern Virginia, North Carolina is viewed as a regional competitor. Its piedmont region was analyzed for key product strengths, including its motorsports assets, towns, history, and outdoor recreation. Southern Virginia is challenged competitively where some of its strengths lie in terms of its natural landscape, outdoor opportunities, motorsports, and tobacco heritage as North Carolina offers similar tourism experiences. North Carolina boasts a strong motorsports culture, including significantly more tracks. North Carolina also shares Buggs Island Lake as a tourism asset with similar opportunities for fishing, boating, biking, camping, and other outdoor recreation. North Carolina also has tobacco heritage, similar types of small town experiences, as well as wineries. In addition, although North Carolina also has small towns and rural appeal, its Piedmont region is also home to the well-known Research Triangle, major universities, Raleigh, Charlotte, and numerous golf courses, serving as draws for the region and diversifying its tourism base. Southern Virginia has an opportunity to compete in these areas and further differentiate itself with authentic experiences in a relaxing environment, offering its own unique history, culinary, and cultural experiences.

Sources of this competitive information included, but were not limited to, review of tourism marketing websites/promotional information, tourism marketing and strategic plans, tourism organization annual reports, tourism industry publications and articles, rankings, available consumer-oriented research (statewide) which addresses competition, and tourism companies (outfitters, tour guides, etc.).

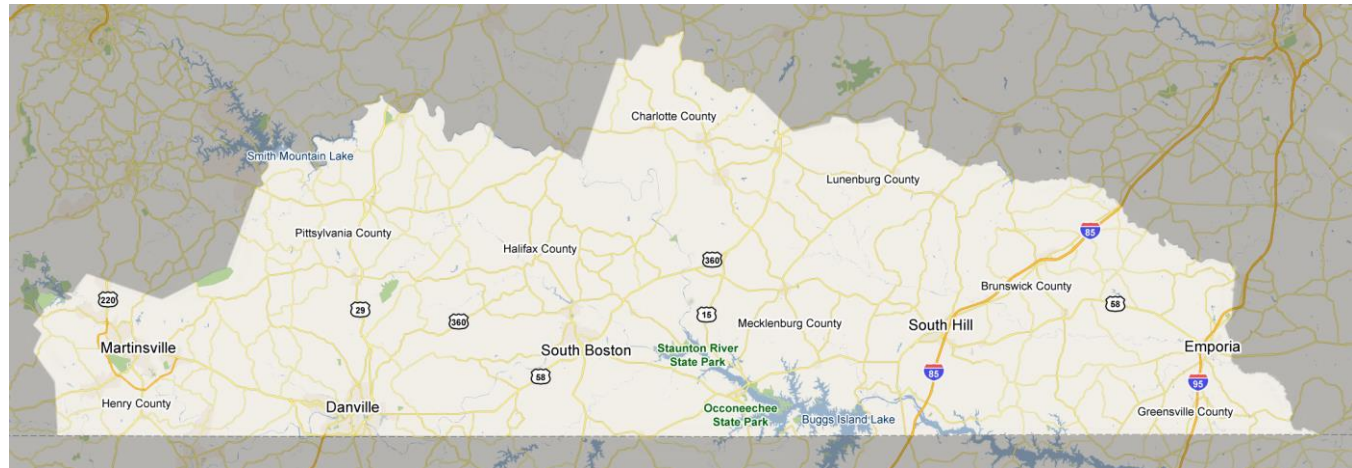
Tourism Situation

The Southern Virginia region is situated in south central Virginia, along the North Carolina border. Set within a rural and rolling landscape, the region is rich with natural beauty, motorsports opportunities, and tobacco heritage.

The region has over 300,000 residents where Danville is the most populous at 43,000 residents. Martinsville and South Boston are the next largest with 14,000 and 8,000 residents, respectively. With this limited population, the region's economic base remains a challenge.

Southern Virginia is a developing tourism region with considerable growth potential. It accounted for approximately \$448 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2011 (approximately two percent of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures), which is an increase of 11.1 percent since 2007. Despite this growth, the region is challenged in the level and size of its tourism marketing organizations. While Virginia's Retreat represents the eastern portion of the region, a region-wide organization is lacking to promote Southern Virginia. However, there are DMOs in Halifax County and Martinsville-Henry County. In addition, Mecklenburg County is in the process of developing a formal DMO with paid professional staffing. The region has a number of existing and developing visitor centers, such as Brunswick Byways Visitors and Interpretive Center. With a limited number of DMOs, collaboration across the region on tourism is also somewhat limited.

Overall, visitor insights show Southern Virginia has had less name recognition among past and prospective travelers to Virginia compared to other regions. Favorability ratings for Southern Virginia have been strongest among Generation X travelers and families. Top of mind tourism assets for visitors included NASCAR and small towns/farms/rural areas. It was also recognized by most as being relaxing and good for families, while additional activities and entertainment were viewed as opportunities to improve appeal.



Regional Facts:

- Region Population: 300,000
- Largest City: 43,000
- Border States: NC
- 2011 Tourism Expenditures: \$448 million
- 2007-11 Expenditure Growth: 11.1%

Nature and outdoor recreational opportunities are visitor strengths for the region. Notable outdoor assets include Occoneechee State Park, Staunton River Battlefield State Park, Staunton River State Park, the Carolina Road Spur of the Wilderness Road – Virginia’s Heritage Migration Route, and the Tobacco Heritage Trail. Additionally, Buggs Island Lake, the largest lake in Virginia with 50,000 acres of water and 800 miles of shoreline, is situated in the region and is home to one of the best largemouth bass fisheries in the country. These assets and trails offer visitors the opportunity to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, hunt, fish, kayak, and canoe.

While there are a number of natural assets and outdoor recreation opportunities, the region is challenged by limitations with respect to water access, the number of outdoor outfitters, and supply of eco-oriented lodging, such as cabins and camping. Despite the vast shoreline within the region, water access is limited and is an issue which can hinder outdoor recreation opportunities. These lodging segments appear to be underserved for the region in comparison to other areas of the state. Furthermore, traditional lodging is limited compared to other areas of the state with four percent of the state supply, according to STR. The region's economy and mid-scale chains comprise 98 percent of chain properties (excluding independent hotels), indicating limited supply of upscale (and higher-rated) chain properties, which are typically full-service hotels.

Motorsports are a strength for the region where visitors can experience all types of motorsports including NASCAR races, dirt track racing, and drag racing at one of the eight motorsports tracks. Martinsville Speedway hosts two Sprint Cup Series and two Camping World Truck Series NASCAR races. Virginia International Raceway (VIR) hosts events such as the Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series and the American Le Mans Series. It also hosts corporate events and serves as a test track to companies working on research, innovation, and development of motorsports equipment at the Virginia Motorsports Technology Park, an industrial park located adjacent to VIR. Furthermore, VIR has expanded visitors' experiences well beyond the racing track for year-round use. Its campus includes three hotels, a spa, several dining options, and activities such as karting, skeet, and two golf courses. While motorsports are a strength for the region, NASCAR has reported struggling event attendance in recent years, some of which has been attributed to the economy, highlighting the importance of strategic planning for investments related to tourism in this area.

Highlights of Regional Lures/Strengths:

- Scenic Beauty and Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
- State Parks: 3
- Buggs Island Lake, Lake Gaston, Smith Mountain Lake
- Motorsports
- Tobacco heritage, Civil Rights history
- National Main Streets: Martinsville, South Boston
- Notable Cities & Towns: Danville, South Hill, Emporia, Clarksville
- Meherrin River Blueway Trail

Regional Challenges:

- Limited regional attraction anchors
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Lack of tourism industry maturity
- Limited industry leadership and cooperation on tourism
- Differentiation from competition in nearby states - motorsports, outdoors, tobacco heritage
- Limited outdoor and traditional accommodations
- Limited outfitters
- Limited accessibility region-wide - interstate and airports
- Challenged economic base

In addition to motorsports, the region has the opportunity to establish distinctive destination features through its towns. Martinsville and South Boston are designated main streets by the National Main Street Program. Other notable small towns include Danville, South Hill, Emporia, and Clarksville. Many of these towns still have reminiscence of the tobacco heritage. For example, Danville has Millionaires' Row and the Tobacco Warehouse Historic District. These towns are also emerging in terms of the creative economy in arts and music, which are differentiated from other parts of the Commonwealth through their folk and Americana genres. In addition to historic towns, the region has a broad history, including Saponi and Occaneechee Indians, home of Patrick Henry, and Civil Rights, which visitors can experience through the Civil Rights Education Trail. Furthermore, the region's farming heritage and authentic agri-tourism represent culinary opportunities for visitors to experience the region's culture. The region has 11 wineries, including award winners such as the Rosemont of Virginia, unique recognition for Brunswick Stew, and farm-to-table restaurants.

Southern Virginia is challenged competitively where tourism experiences such as its natural landscape, outdoor opportunities, motorsports, and tobacco heritage are also offered by North Carolina. North Carolina boasts a strong motorsports culture, including significantly more tracks. North Carolina also shares Buggs Island Lake as a tourism asset with similar opportunities for fishing, boating, biking, camping, and other outdoor recreation. North Carolina also has tobacco heritage, similar types of small town experiences, as well as wineries. In addition, although North Carolina also has small towns and rural appeal, its Piedmont region is also home to the well-known Research Triangle, major universities, Raleigh, Charlotte, and numerous golf courses, serving as draws for the region and diversifying its tourism base. Southern Virginia has the opportunity to compete in these areas and further differentiate itself with authentic experiences in a relaxing environment, offering its own unique history, culinary, and cultural experiences.

Another challenge for the region is the general lack of major anchor attractions positioned and marketed to visitors and connectivity among the destinations/attractions. In addition, the region's attractions generally lack brand recognition. While the eastern portion of the region has two interstates connecting Virginia with North Carolina, the western part of the region may be at a disadvantage without the same level of interstate connectivity. With limited tourism anchors, the region faces a challenge for being perceived as a pass-through destination. In addition, the region also has no commercial airports within its boundaries. There are, however, several general aviation airports. A portion of Interstate 95 connecting to Central Virginia has also been proposed as a future toll road, which may impact tourism related to travelers on this route.

Southern Virginia Strategy

Product Focus Areas

Based upon research and analysis efforts described and in consideration of the tourism situation, the following are identified as the primary and secondary areas of product focus for Southern Virginia. The key definitions below describe these areas, which form the basis of the product objectives.

- **Primary theme focus:** Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Town/City Centers, Sports (Motorsports), History & Heritage, Culinary (Agri-tourism), Events
- **Secondary theme focus:** Culinary (Wineries, Dining), Arts & Music

Those product themes identified as "primary" can generally be characterized as existing or growing product areas that within the next five years should be further developed or enhanced in an effort to serve as (or support) primary draws for the area. Those categorized as "secondary" are areas that in the next five years may realistically need a longer time horizon to develop into a primary draw for the region. Secondary may also indicate areas that may be more niche focused, or those that are generally complementary/auxiliary product experiences to the primary draws in the next five years.

Key Definitions

Nature & Outdoor Recreation - Relaxing and active experiences to enjoy Virginia's scenic natural environment and outdoors, including but not limited to driving tours, hiking, biking, paddling, boating, fishing, hunting, observing wildlife, and others. Beach experiences are included.

Town/City Centers - Refers to the central area of a destination, generally a downtown or main street area

Sports - Refers primarily to facilities that host sports events and tournaments, including youth, amateur, college, professional, minor league, and motorsports

History & Heritage - Experiences, structures, and sites that show Virginia and U.S. history and heritage

Culinary - Includes wineries, breweries, distilleries, foodie/dining, and agri/aqua-tourism

Events - May include festivals, fairs, concerts, performances, tournaments/races (running, biking, swimming, kayaking, rowing, boating/sailing, fishing, etc.), and other events. These events serve to further enhance other product themes.

Arts & Music - Visual, performance, and craft arts experiences and music of various genres and musical heritage

In addition, it should be noted that **cultural heritage** refers to the cultural and social characteristics of a region that are fundamental to evaluating a tourism destination. Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. From a tourism perspective, visitors want to experience the local culture of a destination. This includes many components, such as art and music of the region, history, local crafts, traditions, style and types of local food, architecture, religion, and distinctive leisure activities. These are what make the cultural heritage of Virginia “authentic.” By its very nature, culture is interpreted by visitors in many ways. Each region will have the opportunity to further define the regional “cultural” lures, based on information in this plan.

Objectives and Strategies

Applicable objectives and strategies are presented for the five plan outcomes of Products, Pillars (infrastructure), Partnerships, Promotions, and Policies. Following the objectives and strategies are additional action steps specific to the region which are above and beyond the actions of the state level plan. Additional action steps should be read in conjunction with action steps of the state level plan.

Strategies in the plan are assigned a priority/timing as high or immediate action (denoted by red) and medium or mid-term action over the next five years (denoted by blue). The categorization of high or medium is both a function of priority and timing for the region. Those categorized as "high" can generally be characterized as existing or growing product areas that within the next five years should be further developed or enhanced in an effort to serve as (or support) primary draws. Those categorized as "medium" are areas that within the next five years may realistically need a longer time horizon to develop into a primary draw, those that may be more niche areas, or those that are generally complementary/auxiliary product experiences to the primary draws in the next five years.

Products

Nature & Outdoor Recreation

Nature & Outdoors Objective: Visitor experiences are further developed which highlight Virginia's natural beauty and natural assets			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Develop, maintain, and expand outdoor trails and water trails	●	Seek and maintain designations for National Scenic Byways and the Virginia Scenic Byways and Scenic Drives	●
Continue to develop and enhance outdoor experiences at parks, forests, recreation areas, nature areas, and preserves	●	Develop and enhance accommodations related to outdoor experiences	●
Leverage Virginia's waterfront areas	●		

Additional Regional Actions:

- Continue to develop portions of the Tobacco Heritage Trail
- Explore the development of the previously proposed Beaches to Bluegrass Trail
- Increase number of outfitters near trail access points
- Continue to enhance park and recreation areas for visitors, including water accessibility for fishing and water recreation
- Develop distinctive outdoor experiences from competitive states
- Increase the number of outfitters near park/recreation areas
- Leverage waterfront areas for recreation, such as those around Buggs Island Lake. Ensure water accessibility for fishing and water recreation as well as shore level access through lake side

- areas, boardwalks, and trails. Leverage the waterfront for more commercial developments, such as Clarksville, including accommodations (resort, B&B, cabins/cottages), restaurants, and entertainment such as arts and music venues (permanent or temporary).
- Continue support of Fish Virginia First initiative and explore the development of fishing trails around Buggs Island Lake
 - Increase number of outfitters near waterfront areas
 - Explore the development of additional outdoor-related accommodations, including cottages, cabins, and camping opportunities along waterfront areas and other locations in a concentrated manner

Towns/City Centers

Town/City Centers Objective: Visitor experiences in town/city centers are improved to create attractive destinations			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Develop and enhance outdoor experiences in the town or city center	●	Take steps to align with standards of the Virginia Main Street Program and National Main Street Program	●
Enhance town/city center areas through development of the arts	●	Encourage the development of enterprises that enhance and balance the town/city center's current offerings and increase vibrancy	●
Establish and uphold guidelines for town/city center enhancement and redevelopment	●	Develop transportation that allows for enhanced connectivity within and to the town/city center	●

Additional Regional Actions:

- Leverage natural environment and recreation opportunities in the area and tie in these opportunities to the town/city center area. This includes outfitter locations in the downtown area where activity/equipment is visible to visitors, availability of shuttle service from town to outdoor areas for one-way biking and hiking, and connecting outdoor trails to town locations.
- Continue to develop green spaces and town/urban trails, and include streetscaping and beautification, where appropriate
- Ensure works of regional artists are displayed, including those that showcase historical character, outdoors, and motorsports character of the region
- Seek to align with the guidelines and goals of the main street designation which can help to achieve mobilization, redevelopment, and economic development efforts to town areas
- Explore the development of business offerings to further support visitors, which may include the development of hotels, outfitters, entertainment offerings, and unique dining and retail to balance offerings in destinations

Products (continued)

Sports

Sports Objective: Facilities for participant and spectator sporting events are enhanced and developed			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Develop and enhance youth and amateur athletic facilities	●	Develop and enhance experiences related to motorsports	●

Additional Regional Actions:

- Explore the development of attractions and experiential activities for both race enthusiasts and visitors on non-race days throughout the year. Potential developments may include museums related to racing history, interactive entertainment or exhibitions, test tracks, the "NASCAR experience" on-track driving, and festivals and events held in addition to races. Kid-friendly elements could include a themed playground with racing cars/replicas and a remote control racing and car park. A motorsports history attraction near Martinsville may be considered.
- Ensure major races, including NASCAR and Le Mans Series are retained at Virginia motorsports facilities
- Further leverage the Virginia International Raceway and its complex as a distinctive racing experience from other motorsports tracks in the region and from competition in North Carolina
- Explore opportunities to further enhance the VIR complex, supporting elements, hotels, restaurants, etc. and additional signature racing events

Products (continued)

History & Heritage

History & Heritage Objective: History and heritage experiences are preserved, refreshed, and expanded			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Refresh history and heritage visitor experiences	●	Continue to connect history experiences	●
Invest in historic structures, sites, and attractions	●	Enhance historical experiences through accommodations	●

Additional Regional Actions:

- Ensure experiential and interactive elements are available at historic homes and sites in the region
- Explore the development of a motorsports history attraction
- Leverage Route 58 as a connector for the region's towns and attractions
- Complete the Tobacco Heritage trail and explore the development of other themed trails which connect history experiences throughout the region
- Utilize the historic character of the region, architecture, and historic homes, and explore the development of additional historic accommodations such as hotels, resorts, and B&Bs
- Continue to showcase the region's history and heritage through events and festivals as well as personifying the culture of the region through arts, music, and culinary experiences
- Continue to develop Fort Christiana

Products (continued)

Culinary

Culinary Objective: Culinary visitor experiences (wineries, agri-tourism, dining, etc.) are established and expanded			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Expand wine tourism experiences	●	Build reputation as a destination for dining and continue to develop unique restaurant experiences	●
Develop and enhance visitor experiences related to Virginia's agriculture and aquaculture products	●	Develop and expand trails to enhance culinary experiences	●

Additional Regional Actions:

- Continue to enhance winery experiences in the region, and leverage the prominent Rosemont Winery
- Tie in the arts with wineries

- Continue to broaden on-site amenities at farms, including accommodations (B&Bs), family-friendly activities, food service, product tasting, educational/scientific experiences, tours, group and event facilities for group functions/tour groups, event facilities for meetings, concerts, social events, etc.
- Continue to enhance agri-tourism experiences, ensuring experiential, kid-friendly, and educational features
- Tie in the arts and outdoors where possible with agri-tourism experiences

- Continue to develop distinctive dining experiences, including those that include farm-to-table and build upon the region's Brunswick stew
- Maintain winery trail and develop culinary trails, which help to connect agri-tourism and dining experiences as well as destinations
- Continue to use events and festivals as a platform to enhance the culinary profile of the region tying in heritage, arts, music, and other visitor themes

Products (continued)

Events

Events Objective: Events which leverage Virginia's tourism assets are created and expanded	
Strategy	Priority/Timing
Enhance and develop events which promote the key visitor themes	●

Additional Regional Actions:

- Develop and enhance signature events for the region. These signature events should build upon, promote, and reinforce key visitor themes and showcase the authenticity and character of the region. Examples may include outdoor competitions, culinary events that feature wine, agriculture, and food of the region, arts events, motorsports, and other events.
- Tie in multiple visitor themes in events, where appropriate, which may include heritage, arts, music, wine, agriculture, etc.
- Use events to extend visitor seasons and attract visitors during the traditional off-season

Arts & Music

Arts & Music Objective: Visitor experiences related to music and arts (performance, visual, craft, etc.) are created and enriched			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Enhance and develop music and art trails	●	Develop and enhance concentrated arts experiences	●
Add art to public spaces	●		

Additional Regional Actions:

- Ensure works of regional artists are displayed, including those that showcase historical character, outdoors, and motorsports character of the region
- Explore enhancing experiential arts and music activities available to visitors, including participation in music and art events, classes, viewings, and other experiences
- Explore development of rural art gardens
- Develop arts and cultural districts
- Use events and festivals to raise the profile of arts and music for the region
- Develop arts and artisan trails which connect visual arts and craft experiences. These may be similar to the Round the Mountain artisan trails.
- Tie in wine and agri-tourism themes with the art trails

Pillars

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>
<i>Transportation Objective: Strategies to improve transportation are developed and executed</i>			
Initiate concerted strategy to improve road transportation for tourism	●	Explore increased air access, rail, and mass transit for strategic locations	●
<i>Wayfinding Objective: Visitor wayfinding is improved</i>			
Ensure signage and visitor information is visible and available through multiple points	●	Invest in technology infrastructure (Wi-Fi, cell reception, GPS, etc.)	●
Reinforce community sense of place	●		
<i>Education & Training Objective: Tourism education and training programs are continued and enhanced</i>			
Enhance training and education of tourism workforce	●	Ensure tourism education programs are continued for students	●
<i>Research Objective: Tourism research is available which supports tourism development and marketing initiatives</i>			
Continue to engage in or obtain research on visitors	●		

Additional Pillar Action Steps:

- As a region, ensure tourism stakeholders are involved with other regional leaders in transportation planning initiatives, including improvements or expansions of highways and toll road development. New developments and their impacts on tourism should be studied, such as the portion of Interstate 95 connecting Southern Virginia and Central Virginia that has been proposed as a toll road.
- Leverage Route 58 as a connector for the region's towns and attractions
- As a region, ensure tourism stakeholders come together to work with VDOT related to signage issues
- Continue to reinforce sense of place through further town redevelopment, economic development, and revitalization efforts

with the aim of vibrant towns with additional unique dining, retail, and entertainment available during visitor hours

Partnerships

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>
<i>Tourism Organizations Objective: Organizations to lead tourism initiatives are strengthened or formed</i>			
Create and strengthen tourism organizations	●		
<i>Government Objective: Collaboration among government organizations at the local, state, and federal levels for tourism initiatives is improved</i>			
Increase communication, planning, and coordination among government entities	●		
<i>Connectivity Objective: Connectivity among tourism attractions, businesses, and destinations is improved through partnering</i>			
Develop and enhance communication and partnering among Virginia tourism industry stakeholders	●	Increase coordination and collaboration among stakeholders that share interests in tourism assets outside of Virginia	●

Additional Partnership Action Steps:

- Build the capacity for DMOs in the region. This includes the creation of DMOs (whether they be government departments, parts of chambers of commerce, independent organizations or other forms) with professionals dedicated to tourism marketing and development. The limited number of DMOs and tourism professionals which are dedicated to the industry is a significant limiting factor for the region's tourism industry to further develop, mature, and grow.
- Explore the development of regional tourism organizations, which pools the resources of counties and towns for tourism marketing of the region enhancing regional collaboration and creating synergies
- Work with economic development corporations on tourism development initiatives and investment attraction for the region
- Continue to enhance Motorsports Alley partnerships
- Continue to improve intra-government coordination and collaboration among the multiple destinations as stakeholders work as a region to address signage issues with VDOT, major regional events, and other tourism initiatives
- Enhance collaboration among attractions through additional trail, package, and itinerary development
- In addition to relations with the Army Corp of Engineers, work with North Carolina organizations on issues concerning Buggs Island Lake, which may relate to tourism marketing, development, events, and environmental issues

Promotions

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>
<i>Government, Business & Resident Objective:</i> Efforts to promote and educate government leaders, the business community, and residents on tourism initiatives and benefits are continued			
Communicate and inform local and state government officials on tourism benefits and initiatives	●	Communicate and inform tourism industry stakeholders, including partners, the business community, and residents on tourism initiatives and benefits	●
<i>Economic Development Objective:</i> Tourism promotion efforts for economic development are enhanced			
Enhance promotion of Virginia to potential tourism investors, businesses, and developers to generate economic development	●		
<i>Connectivity Objective:</i> Virginia is positioned based on the lures of tourism assets with a strategy to improve connectivity among destinations, attractions, and visitor themes			
Enhance and create visitor itineraries and packages	●	Enhance and develop themed trails	●
<i>High Impact Markets Objective:</i> Visitor markets with high impact continue to be targeted, while new markets are explored			
Continue to identify and evaluate key geographic and thematic target markets for promotions	●		

Additional Partnership Action Steps:

- Develop communication plans for government officials, tourism stakeholders, businesses, and residents and continue to educate and inform officials on tourism benefits (qualitative and quantitative based on research) as well as ongoing initiatives for economic development through various means. Education efforts are intended to help garner support for tourism investment in the creation and enhancement of DMOs and their activities
- Identify and engage key opinion leaders in the region, which may help to serve as ambassadors for the tourism industry and aid in the education and promotion of tourism to government leaders, funding efforts, and development initiatives
- Work with economic development corporations on tourism development initiatives and investment attraction for the region
- Complete the development of the Tobacco Heritage Trail and seek opportunities to tie trail to other attractions and visitor themes, which include other outdoors, arts, and culinary
- Enhance collaboration among attractions through additional trail, package, and itinerary development
- Leverage geographic position on the North Carolina border in proximity to cities such as Raleigh, Durham, Greensboro, and others for promotions
- Continue thematic market for motorsports enthusiasts as well as other major visitor themes

Policies

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Priority/Timing</i>
Funding Objective: Funding is available for tourism growth			
Enforce policy for use of tourism tax revenues collected by localities	●	Create sustainable funding policies for tourism marketing and development for communities	●
Tourism Policies and Programs for Assistance Objective: Tourism policies and programs which provide assistance for growth and development are enhanced			
Continue and enhance programs which support tourism marketing	●	Continue to evaluate policies which encourage an attractive tourism business environment	●
Continue and explore improvements for programs which support tourism product development	●	Educate public and private sector stakeholders on legislative policies and programs impacting tourism	●
Explore establishment of assistance program for tourism businesses	●		
Tourism Policy for Government Objective: Policy for government cooperation is created to assist and support the tourism industry			
Establish policy for cooperative guidelines and arrangements for cohesive government approach to the tourism industry	●		
Preservation Objective: Policies and programs designed to preserve historical, cultural, and natural assets are maintained			
Uphold policies and programs which promote sustainability and preservation of historical, cultural, and environmental assets	●		

Additional Policies Action Steps:

- Explore the development of a tourism council at the community level in localities where policy enforcement is recognized as an issue. The council should be comprised of public and private stakeholders that are responsible for overseeing the use of tourism tax revenue in the community.
- Identify local liaisons or advocates which can work to address policies and programs, including the creation of Tourism Zones, and national grant and assistance programs
- Continue to explore alternative creative funding solutions to achieve community solutions and work with local governments, where appropriate, to secure dedicated funding that could be reinvested for tourism marketing and development purposes. Garnering widespread support from tourism stakeholders and an

- advocacy effort of the industry will be important in influencing government leaders. For tourism development, the formation of a tourism development fund at the local level could be explored.
- Explore the development of tourism business assistance programs, such as incubators, through local governments, small business administrations, and economic development departments, as appropriate, to seek support and assistance for tourism businesses
 - Continue to evaluate business policies, ordinances, codes, etc. at the local level that may impact visitation and tourism business growth. Local policies and their enforcement may vary throughout the state and it is critical for local stakeholders to collaborate on efforts to create or amend policies which will positively impact tourism.

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- Continue to engage in preservation and sustainability efforts at the local level, regarding historical, cultural, and environmental assets,

including seeking Virginia Green Certifications and LEED certifications for new development

Key Stakeholders

The below list of regional and universal stakeholders illustrates the types of stakeholder groups that may be involved in implementing the State Tourism Plan and the region's strategies and action steps. The lists are comprehensive, but not necessarily exhaustive. In addition, regional stakeholders include local and regional government offices, economic development offices and planning district commissions. The list of regional stakeholders highlights organizations specific to Southern Virginia, including those organizations identified as having tourism marketing representatives, while universal stakeholders includes a broader list comprised of key organization types, statewide organizations, state government entities, and federal organizations.

Regional

- Brunswick County Chamber of Commerce
- Brunswick County/Lake Gaston Tourism Association
- Chase City Chamber
- Clarksville Lake Country Chamber of Commerce
- Dan River Basin Association
- Danville/Pittsylvania Chamber of Commerce
- Danville Parks and Recreation
- Destination Downtown South Boston
- Halifax County Tourism Department
- Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation
- Martinsville Uptown Revitalization Association
- Roanoke River Rails to Trails, Inc.
- South Hill Chamber of Commerce
- Southern Virginia Regional Alliance
- Virginia's Retreat
- Virginia's Growth Alliance

Universal

- Art/Music Programs
- Artisan Center of Virginia
- Attraction Management
- Chambers of Commerce
- Colleges (including community)/Universities
- Council on Virginia's Future
- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Department of Business Assistance
- Department of Conservation & Recreation
- Department of Environmental Quality
- Department of Forestry
- Department of Gaming & Inland Fisheries
- Department of Historic Resources
- Department of Housing & Community Development
- Department of Rail and Public Transportation
- Department of Transportation
- Destination Marketing Organizations
- Downtown Development Associations
- Educational Institutions
- Environmental Organizations
- History Foundations/Non-Profit Organizations
- Horse Breed Associations
- Hospitality Associations
- Keep Virginia Beautiful
- Local Arts Organizations
- Local Downtown Development Associations
- Local Government (Town/City/County)
- Military Associations
- National Park Service
- National Refuge Service
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Non-Profit Arts & Music Organizations
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Planning District Commissions
- Preservation Virginia
- Private Businesses
- Sports Associations
- State Government Departments
- State Legislators
- Urban Forest Council

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- Virginia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus
 - Virginia Business Incubation Association
 - Virginia Chamber of Commerce
 - Virginia Commission for the Arts
 - Virginia Community Development Corporation
 - Virginia Downtown Development Association

- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Virginia Farm Bureau
- Virginia General Assembly
- Virginia Green
- Virginia Historical Society
- Virginia Horse Shows Association
- Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association
- Virginia Marine Resources Commission

- Virginia Music Associations
- Virginia Tech Community Design Assistance Center
- Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Virginia Wine Board
- Virginia Wine Marketing Office

Regional Strategy Takeaways

It is the combination of the tourism products which create a destination, and as such, these combined strategies are meant to build Southern Virginia as a destination in a sustainable manner and maintain the character and authenticity of the region. The strategies outlined are intended to build upon Southern Virginia's core strengths, enhance visitor experiences, and ultimately enable the region to increase tourism. When unique and genuine tourism experiences are connected or clustered in offering, destination appeal and strength is increased, allowing the region to compete more effectively against other destinations. Southern Virginia has the opportunity to do just this by growing its tourism asset base and connecting visitor experiences to increase tourism and enhance competitiveness.

Southern Virginia has the opportunity to lay the foundation for the future of tourism in the region and further define itself as a destination through outdoor recreation, unique heritage, motorsports, and rural experiences. With enhanced access to lakes and rivers and additional trail development, along with its state parks and natural landscape, the region offers opportunities to further develop outdoor recreation. The region's authentic agri-tourism with the opportunity for farm-to-table experiences, wineries, emerging dining scene, and the unique Brunswick stew, position the region to grow its culinary experiences offerings. Broad history and heritage of the area ranging from colonial to civil rights combined with small town culture and growing music and arts further add to the depth of visitor experiences. Connectivity of these assets and experiences will contribute to the destination appeal of Southern Virginia with the region's towns and motorsports as opportunities for distinction. While North Carolina's significant industry strength in motorsports poses competition, the Virginia International Raceway is a standout asset for the state.

High-Level Regional Takeaways:

- Leverage the outdoors as a unifying theme for the region, further developing active outdoor experiences and accessibility for scenic getaways and outdoor enthusiasts in combination with motorsports, towns, agriculture, and other assets
- Develop tourism anchors and signature experiences for the region
- Cluster product development and connect attractions and destinations for concentrated experiences
- Build recognition of tourism assets
- Improve destination infrastructure for visitors, including accommodations, outfitters, and tourism support businesses
- Enhance economic base
- Maintain character and authenticity as well as create new development in a sustainable manner
- Enhance leadership and collaboration for tourism development and marketing