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DRIVE 2.0

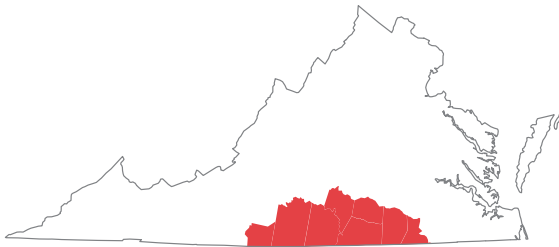
2020-2025 STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN
REGIONAL PLAN: **SOUTHERN VIRGINIA**

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SOUTHERN VIRGINIA INTRODUCTION

The Southern Virginia regional plan builds upon the foundational insights established in the 2020-2025 statewide plan, as well as the original 2013 DRIVE Southern Virginia regional plan. Developed for every locality within the region to use, this plan provides insights and recommendations on where to focus product development and promotional efforts over the next five years. The plan aims to help spur the growth and impact of travel and tourism for every locality in the Southern region by increasing tourism products, expenditures, employment and local and state tax receipts.

**All DRIVE 2.0 research was conducted in 2019 and compiled pre COVID-19 Crisis.
Please see vatc.org/coronavirus for COVID-19: Industry Response Toolkit.**



The Southern Virginia region consists of the municipalities of Danville, Martinsville, South Boston, Emporia, South Hill, Lawrenceville, Halifax, Kenbridge, Victoria, and Clarksville as well as the counties of Pittsylvania, Henry, Halifax, Mecklenburg, Brunswick, Greensville, Charlotte, and Lunenburg.

QUICK FACTS

- Population: 271,271 (7th largest of the 10 VA regions)
- Largest town/city: Danville (40,693)
- Interstates: I-85, I-95
- US-360, US-58, US-220, US29
- Border states: NC
- Commercial airports: none
- Proximity to urban hubs: Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Durham, Raleigh, Roanoke, Richmond, and Hampton Roads

TOURISM IMPACT

The Southern Virginia region accounted for \$551 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2018 (approximately 2% of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures). Year over year, the region experienced a 5% increase in expenditures (just ahead of the overall Virginia state expenditure growth of 4.4%).

- **Total expenditures:** \$551 million
- **Employment:** 5,301
- **Payroll:** \$111 million
- **Local tax receipts:** \$14 million
- **State tax receipts:** \$25 million

From a tourism industry perspective, in addition to tourism marketing at the destination level, Virginia's Crossroads represents the eastern portion of the region. While a regionwide organization is lacking to promote Southern Virginia, there are DMOs in Halifax County, Martinsville-Henry County, Brunswick County, and Mecklenburg County. In addition, the region has a number of existing and developing visitor centers, such as Brunswick Byways Visitor and Interpretive Center. With a limited number of DMOs, collaboration across the region on tourism is also somewhat limited.



LURES

Southern Virginia’s natural and outdoor assets continue to be strengths for the region. In addition, history and heritage, libations, and motorsports remain strong offerings as well.

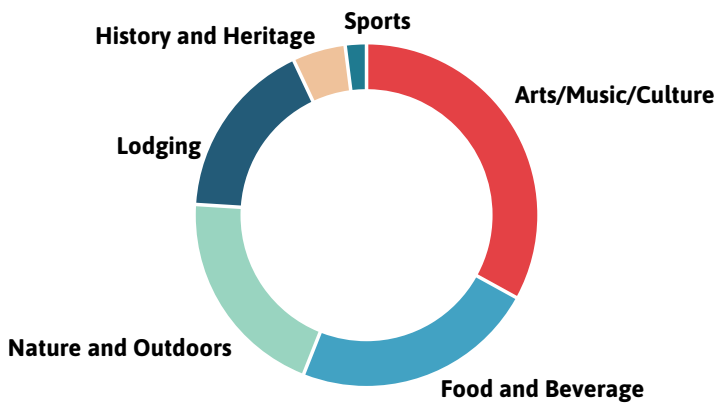
When asked to name a the primary lure for the region, industry leaders identify the following:



Nature and outdoor recreational opportunities, particularly in terms of water assets, are prevailing strengths for the region. For example, Bugg’s Island Lake — the largest lake in Virginia with 50,000 acres of water and 800 miles of shoreline — is home to one of the best largemouth bass fisheries in the country, and just east of Bugg’s Island Lake is Lake Gaston, which shares a border with North Carolina. Together, these natural assets make up the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway. Other notable outdoor assets include Occoneechee State Park, Staunton River Battlefield State Park, Staunton River State Park, and the Tobacco Heritage Trail, offering visitors numerous opportunities to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, hunt, fish, kayak, canoe, and camp.

Inventory of Regional Assets

Source: VTC Research



LURES (cont'd)

Complementing these outdoor assets, are the region’s history and heritage attractions, including the Carolina Road spur of the Wilderness Road, Virginia’s Heritage Migration Route, as well as the region’s tobacco heritage, exemplified through Danville’s Millionaires’ Row and the Tobacco Warehouse Historic District. Also, Fayette Street Historic District, one of Martinsville’s oldest neighborhoods, which was a vibrant cultural center for the Black community from 1900 to the mid-20th century.

In addition to historic towns, the region has a broad history, featuring the Saponi and Occaneechee indigenous peoples, the home of Patrick Henry, and numerous Civil Rights sites, which visitors can experience through the Civil Rights in Education Trail. Furthermore, the region’s farming heritage and authentic agritourism represent culinary opportunities for visitors to experience the region’s culture.

Visitors can also experience a wide range of motorsports events, including NASCAR races, dirt track racing, and drag racing at one of the region’s eight motorsport tracks. Martinsville Speedway hosts two Sprint Cup Series and two Camping World Truck Series NASCAR races. The 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 visitor experiences well beyond the racing track for year-round use, as its campus includes three hotels, a spa, several dining options, and activities such as karting, skeet, and two golf courses.



LURES (cont'd)

South Boston is a designated main street by the Virginia Main Street Program, and other notable small towns like Danville, South Hill, Emporia, and Clarksville are 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, the region is home to 11 wineries, including award-winners such as Rosemont of Virginia, farm-to-table restaurants, and enjoys recognition as the home of the famous Brunswick Stew.

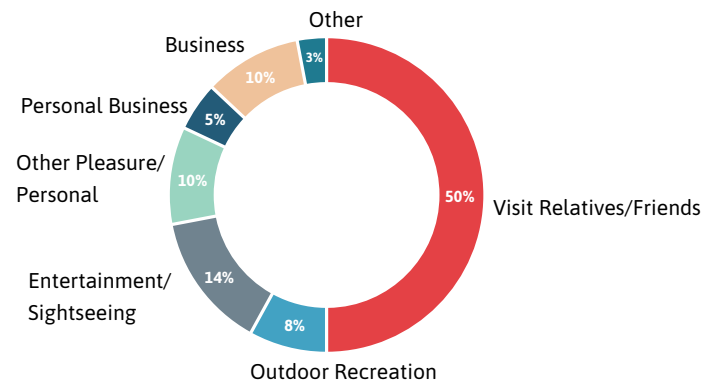
The historic Berry Hill Resort and Conference Center in South Boston is an early 1800s estate and (now) National Historic Landmark is a preferred venue for wedding celebrations.



HIGHLIGHTS OF REGIONAL LURES

- Scenic beauty and outdoor recreation
 - » **State parks:** Occoneechee State Park, Staunton River Battlefield State Park, Staunton River State Park
 - » Southern Virginia Wild Blueway
 - » Bugg’s Island Lake, Lake Gaston, Smith Mountain Lake
- **Motorsports:** Martinsville Speedway, Virginia International Raceway, South Boston Speedway
- Tobacco heritage and Civil Rights history
- **Notable main street:** South Boston, Danville
- **Notable cities and towns:** Danville, South Hill, Emporia, Clarksville, Martinsville, Halifax

Past visitors to the region cite the following as the primary purpose of their trip and top activities they participated in during their visit:



Top Activities

Visiting Relatives	35%
Shopping	32%
Historic sites/Churches	22%
Rural Sightseeing	20%
Museums	19%
Fine dining	19%
Urban Sightseeing	17%
Beach	15%
Visiting Friends	15%
State parks/Momuments	14%

CHANGES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Formerly known as Virginia's Retreat, the tourism group supporting the Eastern part of the region re-branded as Virginia's Crossroads and provides marketing and information for outdoor, adventure, culinary, historical, and leisure activities in the area.

In 2018, a nine-hole disc golf course was constructed and opened at North Bend Park on the John H. Kerr Reservoir/Bugg's Island Lake.

In 2019, Danville welcomed the opening of Grizzly's Hatchet House, Boydton held its first Bluegrass in Boydton summer bluegrass concert series on the front porch of The Boyd Tavern, and South Hill witnessed the opening of both The Dogwood meeting space and the Southern Virginia Maker's Market.

In the lakeside town of Clarksville, the Delicate Flower B&B opened in a newly restored Queen Anne Victoria house built in 1885. New lodging options are underway throughout the region and set to open in 2020, such as the Lily Pad Campground and RV Park in the Martinsville area, which will offer pads for RVs and tent camping. Built in phases, the site will eventually offer 191 spaces for RVs and 50 for tents. The park will also include a bathhouse, kayak/canoe rentals, walking trails and more. An on-site convenience store will offer camping supplies and basic equipment, as well as a short-order grill. Future plans also include a large meeting space.

Finally, also in 2020, a new meeting space, the 313 Franklin restaurant, and a new Microtel Inn and Suites will open in South Hill.



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES

In terms of the lodging landscape, while there are a variety of options — punctuated by recent opening of South Hill’s Microtel Inn and Suites, opportunity exists for more, particularly in the upscale and luxury categories, where there are currently little to no offerings. In this vein, VTC continues to work with the town of South Boston to assist with implementation of its master plan for downtown redevelopment and economic restructuring. These plans involve renovations of the John Randolph into a boutique hotel, trail development to connect the Tobacco Heritage Trail to the downtown area, and the development of blueway, greenspace, and downtown businesses. This ambitious plan can serve as a model for how to develop city and town centers to compete with North Carolina border communities as part of the region’s overall economic development strategy.

When asked to name a potential game changer for the region, industry leaders identify the following:

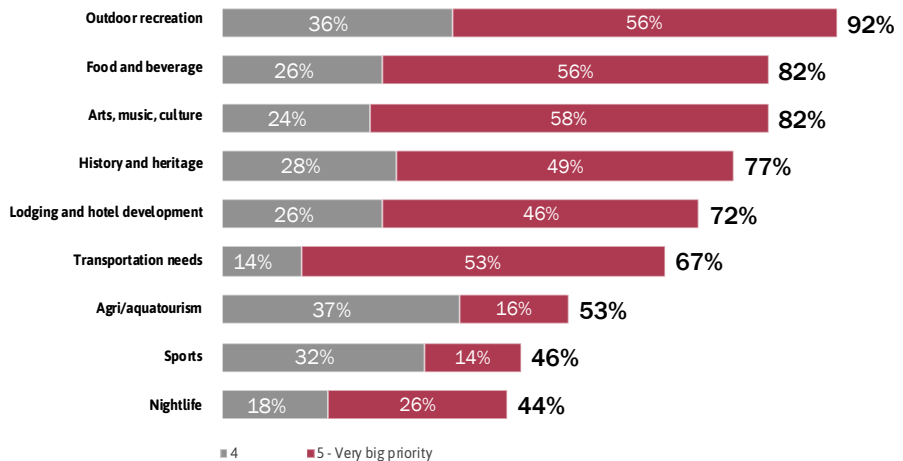


Following closely behind lodging in terms of importance, outdoor recreation also presents great potential. In fact, according to the Virginia Office of Outdoor Recreation, Virginia’s outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and supports the livelihood of more than 197,000 Virginians. In addition, one in four Virginia visitors cite outdoor recreation as one of their top trip purposes.

In recognition of this impact, in the DRIVE 2.0 strategic plan development survey, Southern Virginia’s travel and tourism industry leaders identify outdoor recreation as a priority need — particularly when it comes to better understanding how to develop and promote outdoor recreation product offerings and experiences.

In addition to three state parks, Southern Virginia’s outdoor recreation opportunities include Bugg’s Island Lake, Lake Gaston, and Smith Mountain Lake. As previously mentioned, Bugg’s Island Lake, in particular, is the largest lake in Virginia with 50,000 acres of water and 800 miles of shoreline and is home to one of the best largemouth bass fisheries in the country. All told, these assets and offer visitors the opportunity to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, hunt, fish, kayak, canoe, and camp.

When asked to what degree are the following a priority for your region, industry leaders responded:



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES (cont'd)

In terms of improving the outdoor recreation sector, three-quarters of stakeholders cite trail development as the top priority. Currently, the region only offers a handful of trails, and further trail development of various types would provide a significant opportunity to unite the region in a more coordinated effort. Already, there are numerous efforts in development that should be prioritized:

- Martinsville offers the Smith River Trail System — a local network of trails that is part of the larger Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Beaches- to- Bluegrass Trail, spanning from the Eastern Shore to Kentucky. Currently, this trail offers opportunities for hiking, bicycling, and geocaching. The area's longest public trail, to date, is the Dick and Willie Passage Rail Trail, which connects neighborhoods to opportunities for shopping, dining, and entertainment along a 4.5-mile paved path. Plans to continue developing this trail system should be encouraged.
- While motorsports are a major asset for the region, NASCAR continues to report struggles with event attendance — some of which may be attributed to generational dynamics with Millennials showing a less interest in the sport. To help curb this trend, the region is working to establish the Southern Virginia Racing Partnership, a collaboration of racetracks in Southern Virginia working to create itineraries to attract race fans to the region and entice them to stay overnight.
- Another trail in development is the Brunswick Stew Trail in Brunswick County. The goal of this trail is to connect all assets related to Brunswick Stew and have visitors move throughout the county. The trail is set to officially launch in February 2020.
- The Tobacco Heritage Trail, running through Halifax County (South Boston), Mecklenburg County (Boydton, Clarksville, South Hill, La Crosse, Chase City), Lunenburg County (Victoria), and Brunswick County (Brodnax, Lawrenceville, Alberta), focuses on the development of a 140-mile, multi-use, non-motorized linear park/trail, including some on-road segments for connectivity. The trail construction is being performed in phases around the towns so these towns can benefit from the economic impact of trail users. Several sections of the trail are now open, and the final phase of the trail will be developed and connected as funds become available.
- The Southern Virginia Wild Blueway in Halifax County and Mecklenburg County is also being developed, and the group is hoping to add more rivers and lakes in the surrounding areas to enhance visitors' paddling experience. The committee is in the exploratory phase of adding to their footprint by looking at other communities in Southern Virginia along the waterways. In addition, the strategy includes connecting to assets in nearby towns to help buoy economic development.

In addition to outdoor recreation, food and beverage is another category identified by stakeholders as a priority. While the region has worked hard to establish a handful of breweries and distilleries, efforts should be encouraged to create more options. Dining choices will be enriched with the opening of the 313 Franklin restaurant in South Hill and the Brunswick Stew Tour, both scheduled to occur in 2020. Additional dining and beverage alternatives should be encouraged to open as these are key elements that help define communities and make them attractive for visitors and locals alike.

AREAS OF FOCUS

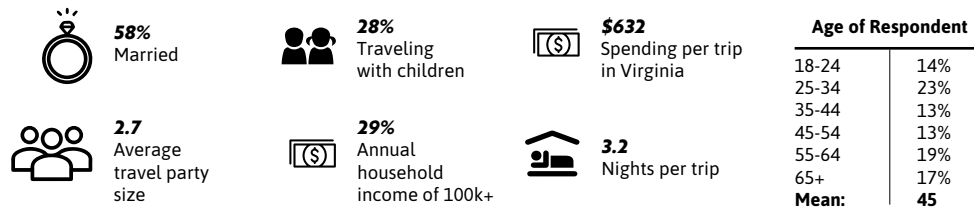
Based upon Drive 2.0 research and in consideration of the tourism situation, Central Virginia should focus on the following primary and secondary product opportunities.

- **Primary:**
Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Town/City Centers, Culinary (Libations, Dining, Agritourism) Sports (Motorsports), Lodging
- **Secondary:**
History & Heritage, Arts & Music, Events



CURRENT VISITORS

According to research collected by VTC and TravelTrakAmerica, the primary visitors are:



EMERGING NICHE MARKETS

As the region examines ways to broaden its customer base, keep in mind the key demographic reality facing Virginia and the country today and in the immediate future. Right now, minority children are being born at a higher rate than white children, and by 2044, the country’s combined minority populations will comprise the majority of the total population. The shift toward a more diverse, pluralistic society is already underway, and making everyone feel welcome can become a differentiating attribute and strategic advantage, appealing to a broader demographic base of potential visitors.

In 2017, 4.5% of the U.S. population identified as LGBTQ, and data suggests this segment travels more and spends more. The #LoveVA campaign authentically resonates with the values of this community and capturing this opportunity market hinges on destinations being inclusive — whether it be through hosting Pride events or simply promoting your region as open and welcoming to all.

In addition, operators across the board are showing significant increases in female visitation, especially in outdoor and active travel experiences, which represents another opportunity to increase the region’s customer base. So, whether promoting a girl’s trip or a solo adventure, a heightened focus on female travelers may also prove beneficial.

EMERGING NICHE MARKETS (cont'd)

Building equity in your region as a diverse and inclusive place to visit, as well as one with appeal for women travelers, will be greatly aided by finding and enlisting ambassadors who can speak to these values and attributes. And, since nearly half of visitors travel to spend time with family and friends, having residents know about local attractions will enhance the visitor experience and assist localities in realizing the value of tourism.

Additional opportunity audiences based on growing trends include:

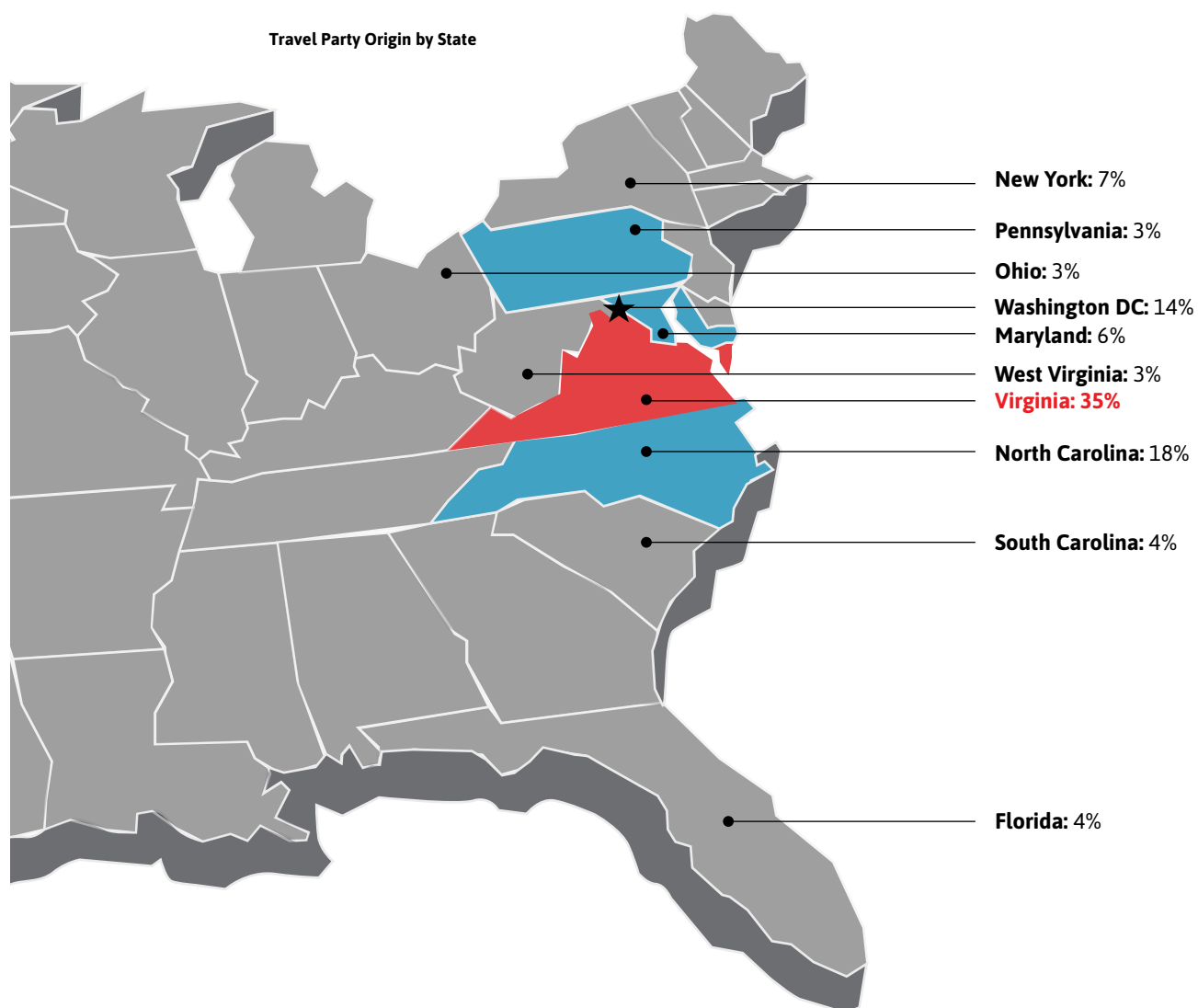
TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTHERN VA
<p>OUTDOOR RECREATION</p>	<p>The outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and supports the livelihoods of more than 197,000 Virginians. Outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their top trip purposes. And, this year Virginia established the Office of Outdoor Recreation, placing even more importance on this industry.</p>	<p>Virginia is experiencing a rising tide when it comes to outdoor recreation. It is overwhelmingly the biggest focus for industry leaders across the state. And with the new state office in place, we should strike while the iron is hot. The Southern region should pour resources into trail related development both land-based and water-based.</p>
<p>CULTURAL HERITAGE</p>	<p>History is one of Virginia’s biggest assets. But it is not just about names and dates, it’s about the cultural impact these historic events have on the community. Whether it is music, agriculture, crafts, or politics, Virginia is full of rich cultural heritage experiences.</p>	<p>Packaging historic assets as experiences that highlight the cultural impact on our lives today is key to keeping history relevant and authentic to today’s diverse tourism audience. Threading themes across localities can create an even more compelling and impactful story.</p>



GROWING OPPORTUNITY OF NEARBY DRIVE MARKETS

National tourism trends suggest leisure travel is now a year-round activity, with shorter, more frequent trips taking the place of traditional week-long summer vacations. This translates into the increasing value and impact of near versus far-away markets.

With the average trip length of 3.2 nights, the Southern Virginia region is no exception, and according to a TravelTrakAmerica survey, nearly two thirds of Southern Virginia travelers (59%) originate from Virginia, North Carolina and Washington DC. This concentrated primary feeder area gives all of Southern Virginia's destinations and industry leaders an opportunity to work closer together in promotional planning to target prospective visitors.





COMPETITION

While most of Southern Virginia's key destination competitive set is within the state, the region faces the challenge of differentiating its tourism experiences, as similar natural landscape, outdoor opportunities, motorsports, and tobacco heritage are also offered by North Carolina. In addition, North Carolina boasts a strong motorsports culture with significantly more tracks and also shares Bugg's Island Lake and Lake Gaston as tourism assets, with similar opportunities for fishing, boating, biking, camping, and other outdoor recreation. North Carolina has tobacco heritage, as well, and even offers similar types of small-town experiences and 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.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES (VOIDS)

Despite the abundance of shoreline within the region, awareness of water access is limited, holding back outdoor recreation opportunities. Similarly, the region is challenged by limitations with respect to the number of outdoor outfitters (only six), and supply of eco-oriented lodging, such as cabins and camping.

The region also struggles from having limited regional attraction anchors and recognition of assets and towns. 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 the challenge of being perceived as a pass-through destination.

Finally, the region lacks a number of assets that help build and grow vibrant communities. Whether it be designated main streets, arts and music offerings, libations, or unique lodging, there are significant opportunities for the region to improve in this regard.

Some additional challenges based on growing national trends, include:

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTHERN VA
SHIFTING FOOTPRINT	The country’s population growth over the past century has been concentrated in urban and suburban areas. Likewise, 80% of Virginia’s population growth is projected to occur in the “Golden Crescent” corridor that runs from D.C. through Northern Virginia, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Hampton Roads. This growth in urban areas is being accelerated by Millennials, who prefer downtowns, activity centers, and 15-minute “livable” communities close to everything.	Southern Virginia has already experienced a decline in its population by 30,000 people in just the past five years. To face the rising economic challenges of declining rural populations and accompanying tax revenue, the region must invest resources in tourism as an economic engine. Positioning the destination’s travel and tourism assets and identifying ways to expose potential new residents to the area is critical.
AGING POPULATION	The age wave is washing over Virginia. Over the next 14 years, America’s 65+ population will increase by roughly 60%, growing from 10 to 20% of the total population. Nationally, we will have 74 million people over the age of 65, compared to only 46 million today. Some counties of Virginia will experience a dramatic increase in seniors, where up to 40% of the population will be 65 or older.	Recognize Baby Boomers (today’s new seniors) as an increasingly important tourism segment; however, it is important to understand that they won’t be looking for the types of experiences their parents sought. The region should work to make attractions and destinations more appealing to Boomers and their desires to stay active and enhance their vitality. The region’s excellent outdoor and nature experiences, along with space, should be very appealing to this audience.

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Limited regional attraction anchors
- Limited awareness of direct access to water experiences
- 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 regionwide — interstate and airports
- Challenged economic base

REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Bundling or packaging experiences for potential visitors’ consideration continues to gain traction. According to TripAdvisor, “[they’re] seeing more travelers balancing their itineraries with a mix of classic sightseeing and more unique local experiences.” Southern Virginia travel and tourism efforts may be behind this trend, as existing assets appear to be siloed, with few regional cross promotions, connectivity or packaging of complementary experiences. This is especially true between towns and cities across the region.

Working together to create trails and experiences will be critical to helping elevate the entire region against competition from the north and south. Packaging experiences around outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and the tobacco heritage culture are authentic and, in many ways, differentiating for the region. With some new efforts in this realm underway, there is great opportunity to make an impact.

Another mounting challenge is the degree to which history is one of the region’s major draws. There is a growing body of travel research that suggests history and cultural heritage sites continue to become less appealing, especially to the younger generations of travelers — Gen X and Millennials. Southern Virginia has an opportunity to reposition many of its historical assets using a new lens on how the Black travel segment views its history. Localities throughout the region have a story to tell — from the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and Civil Rights movement, on through the impact Black culture has today in contributing to our vibrant communities.

Additional opportunities for the region based on growing national trends, include:

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTHERN VA
<p>SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL</p>	<p>There is a growing economy and movement toward stewardship of the Earth and our cultures. Destinations and attractions are participating in this movement by promoting low impact and green experiences and practices.</p>	<p>In a region rich with natural assets, wildlife, and small towns, low-impact experiences are important. Think about ways to highlight the low impact visitors will have on nature, the wildlife, and the small towns. In visiting, they can contribute to the vibrancy of the local economy in a sustainable way so generations can continue to enjoy the beautiful region and its rich culture.</p>
<p>MINI-CATIONS</p>	<p>According to Allianz, over half of Americans last year did not take a vacation longer than four nights. Millennials are leading this movement.</p>	<p>Campaigns like the recent Crush Friday can take advantage of this trend. Consider other marketing campaigns and packages that encourage younger generations to take their vacation for a long weekend trip. With the average trip length at 3.2 nights, mini vacations should be a natural opportunity for the region to pursue.</p>
<p>CAMPING</p>	<p>Camping and glamping is increasingly popular, especially among Millennials. Moreover, they prefer these trips to be within 100 miles from where they live.</p>	<p>This is another trend that will fall in line with the growing outdoor recreation focus. Consider ways to highlight camping trips of all kinds – the off-the-beaten-path to a unique view, or the best of both worlds trip with a hike, a craft brew and a campsite under the stars.</p>

PROMOTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

Based on the situation and analysis of the Southern Virginia region, the following set of recommendations are offered:

1. **Connect and promote Southern Virginia's outdoor experiences.** While almost every town and city across the region are improving their outdoor products to appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, there is an opportunity to build an even greater set of experiences by connecting each submarket's offerings. Southern Virginia's outdoor attractions
 - **Bike Trails:** Statewide, bike trails are connecting sites and experiences across multiple jurisdictions. The 52-mile Virginia Capital Trail is the largest example, connecting the Commonwealth's past and present capitals. The New River Trail meanders 57 miles through four counties while paralleling the river for which it's named. The Heart of Appalachia Bike Route is 128 miles of roads and trails in Tazewell, Bland, Russell, and Wise counties. How can Southern Virginia tie the region together through bike trails? Also, leaders should think not only about more inter-jurisdictional trails, but the network for local feeder trails. The Tobacco Heritage Trail is a great place to start.
 - **Water Trails:** Southern Virginia is home to the state's largest lake. No wonder numerous stakeholders in Southern Virginia reference water as a future opportunity to create more outdoor experiences for the region's visitors. Working together, the DMOs of Southern Virginia can tie its lakes and rivers together into world-class water experiences. The Southern Virginia Wild Blueway is a great place to start.

To get inspired about how to formulate a nationwide product development plan, see DRIVE 2.0's How to Guide #2: Enhance Experiences.



RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES (cont'd)

2. **Collectively, breathe new life and meaning into history and heritage assets.** Given the number of major historical attractions in the Central Virginia region and the slow decline in the appeal of heritage tourism, the entire region's historical attractions should come together to create more cross promotions and shared guidelines on how to respectfully give our history more of an edge by presenting Virginia's history plus. This could include:

- Packaging relatable personal stories
- Making history more personal by connecting with and appealing to what's on travelers' minds and in their hearts today
- Building in suspense
- Keeping it fresh

Southern Virginia has strong competition when it comes to historic sites and attractions. However, using cooperation and collaboration, the region can enhance a more compelling narrative. One opportunity lies in the story of Black people in America. Imagine if the region were to create a trail that recognizes the complex history of Black people in America while also celebrating the exciting art, music, and entrepreneurial spirit of the local Black residents and how they are contributing to the building of vibrant communities. Starting with the Fayette Street Historic District and the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail, Southern Virginia has a unique, believable, and authentic story to tell in this regard, but it must come with everyone working together.

3. **Bundle and package experiences using the hub and spoke method to increase the overall appeal of individual attractions and offerings.** Overall, the region's primary lures should adopt a packaging perspective to increase average spending and room nights in Southern Virginia. Focusing on just one lure will make it more challenging for the region to compete against similar offerings in other states.

The region has the right lures that make up vibrant communities, but they remain relatively isolated. For example, potential exists in creating weekend itineraries that allow visitors to recreate on the lake, catch a festival, stay in a unique cabin, and go on a winery tour the next day. Or, the region could offer tours that combine a history-themed bike tour one day and a brewery tour the next. And, think about how to bundle these experiences across localities to increase the unique experience and drive people to turn their day trip or overnight into a two- or three-day trip.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES (cont'd)

4. **Cultivate local ambassadors.** Given the high percentage of visitors who are traveling to see friends and family, creating local ambassadors is critical. Helping local residents understand all there is to see and do can make the job of selling tourism easier in the end. What's more is this is a year-round opportunity, as friends and family come any time of the year. Create opportunities for locals to experience various activities and offerings the region provides so they know where to take their friends and family when they come to visit. Encouraging more residents to explore the abundant water assets and exposing them to the various access points is a natural place to start. In addition, creating local support and having them help champion the assets needed to develop vibrant communities is essential. Moreover, focusing on residents also means helping local businesses understand they are in the business of tourism and encouraging new business development to help contribute to the growth of vibrant communities.

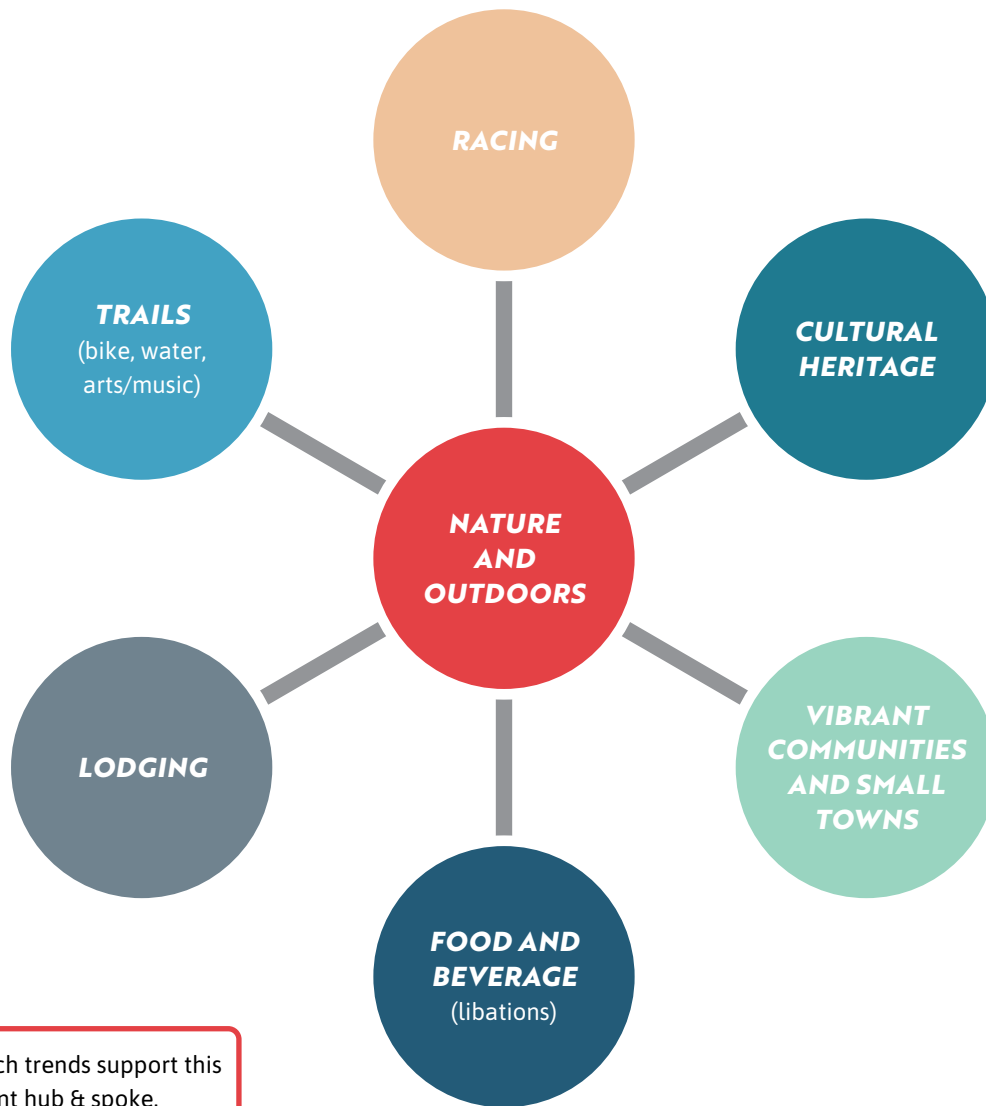
For inspiration on how to engage local ambassadors, see DRIVE 2.0's How to Guide #1: How to Tell and Sell Your Story.



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

HUB & SPOKE

In considering all of the research to date, the following hub and spoke approach is recommended for the Southern Virginia region as a whole:



Exercise: See which trends support this development hub & spoke.

TREND 1

TREND 2

TREND 3

VISION FOR SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

The vision for the Southern Virginia regional plan is to collaboratively build upon the natural assets in an authentic manner and to further develop outdoor recreation, food and beverage, and arts, music, and culture — the foundation of vibrant communities — to sustainably maximize the region’s tourism potential.

SUMMARY

The Southern Virginia region has incredible opportunity, and through increased collaboration, teamwork, and a common vision across jurisdictions, the region can be even more competitive with other destinations in North Carolina. The communities and assets are there, but regionalism is key to growth. Through better connectivity and cohesion, together we can take the entire region to the next level.





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