



# OUR SHARED VISION OF TOURISM

2017-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau



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## DEAR PARTNERS,

It is my pleasure to present you with the Lee County Tourism 2017–2020 Strategic Plan.

In undertaking this project, we spoke to stakeholders throughout the community. While we sought and heard differing points of view, I can say with sincerity that passion for our destination was shared in equal measure. We collaborated closely with the county’s travel and tourism industry, along with business and civic leaders. We looked inward at the strategies and tactics we have applied to date and outward at the successes of other Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to identify the short- and long-term trends shaping tourism locally, nationally, and internationally.

We are ever mindful that the economic growth harnessed through tourism benefits not only the tourism industry, but our community at large. We are committed to this responsibility every day. Our strategy is based on what we collectively believe is best for our community and that means asking hard questions about the future. Our plan reflects a path to growth that capitalizes on our strengths as a means of seizing opportunities that lay ahead.

We are proud of our community and of the fact that it draws millions of visitors year after year. Lee County is a unique, beautiful place to visit, and we are honored by the opportunity to showcase it every day. Thank you for sharing our commitment to the continued growth, prosperity, and natural beauty of this world-renowned destination.

*Taupua Pigott*

Executive Director  
Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau



## MISSION

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To serve the broader social and economic interests of Lee County by marketing the destination, facilitating travel to the area, and showcasing its unique attributes for the continual benefit of residents and the travel and tourism industry.



## VISION

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To continue to build Lee County's reputation as one of the most naturally beautiful and sought-after tourism destinations in the world.

# STRATEGIC PLAN SNAPSHOT

## Strategic Imperative

## Key Actions

### Build the Tourism Pipeline

- Deepen research that further segments Lee County’s visitor profiles using psychographics or “life stages”
- Continue to provide collaborative support to stakeholder efforts to secure increased domestic and international air service

### Employ “Always On” Marketing

- Reallocate marketing spend and activities throughout the calendar year

### Promote Lee County’s Natural Assets

- Use “Islandology” messaging campaign to rally and inspire tourism industry to attract visitors to the destination
- Educate tourism stakeholders, potential visitors, and the wider community on how tourism protects and enhances the environment

### Help Our Community Spread Our Tourism Story

- Pilot a Lee County Rapid Response program
- Continue to amplify Lee County’s tourism story and reinforce how it connects to local communities

# CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

1

**Increase annual visitor spending to \$3.35B**

*Annual visitor spending in 2016—\$3.035*

2

**Grow revenue per available room (RevPAR) by 15%**

*RevPAR 2016—\$96.67*

*2020 Goal—\$111.17*

3

**Grow year-round occupancy by 5%**

*Annual Occupancy 2016—66.0%*

*2020 Goal—69.3%*

Source: DPA, 2016 Annual Visitor Profile and Occupancy Analysis, p.13 <https://www.leevcb.com/media/27125/2016-visitor-profile-and-occupancy-analysis.pdf>



## STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

We engaged in a robust process to ensure the best possible plan and drive growth:



### Landscape Analysis

- Identified trends via tourism industry analysis
- Evaluated Lee County tourism data to determine growth opportunities



### Stakeholder Interviews

- Interviewed public and private stakeholders, and VCB staff to identify barriers and opportunities for tourism growth



### Idea Refinement

- Led strategy sessions with Lee County tourism stakeholders, local government leaders, and VCB staff to refine overall strategies and fill in gaps
- Engaged in work sessions with VCB team to finalize content of the Lee County Tourism 2017–2020 Strategic Plan



### Commitment to Plan

- Plan approved by the Board of County Commissioners with regular monitoring by the Tourist Development Council



## STRENGTHS

- Unique natural assets, pristine beaches, gentle surf, world-famous shelling, abundant wildlife
- Cultural offerings including the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, galleries, and shopping
- Vibrant downtown, restaurants and evening entertainment
- Unique festivals such as the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest
- Amateur and professional sports facilities
- International arrivals in shoulder and off-peak seasons
- Low-key, laid-back, uncrowded island lifestyle

## WEAKNESSES

- Inter-island, inter-county transportation, seasonal traffic congestion\*
- On-island parking\*
- Inconsistent quality of lodging and a lack of high-end lodging options
- Limited air access from secondary markets
- Aging tourism base
- Limited conference and meeting facilities

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Use research to understand psychographic profile of next generation visitors and grow new markets
- Local businesses and community eager to use aligned messaging and story to promote the destination
- Develop more opportunities to grow year-round visitor spend by creating a sustainable cycle of marketing
- Expand number and role of community ambassadors
- Develop a Rapid Response action plan for situations requiring crisis communications

### THREATS

- Adverse human impact on natural assets
- Unforeseen natural, political, or economic events
- An inability to expand the tourism pipeline
- False information and misconceptions distributed by other parties

\*Any potential solutions to these challenges would be explored in conjunction with the impacted communities.



## STAKEHOLDER INPUT & STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

We recognize that the VCB acting alone is not enough to drive and sustain a healthy base of tourism. We are only able to create outstanding experiences with the help of our community.

For that reason, we relied on input from our stakeholders and an analysis of broad industry trends to develop themes that would guide the creation of our plan. We interviewed tourism industry stakeholders, community leaders, and VCB staff to identify barriers and opportunities for tourism growth. That process resulted in three takeaways:



### Match Visitors to Our Destination

Destination marketing organizations and the travel industry are increasingly focusing on visitor segment psychographics – a visitor’s personality, values, opinions, interests, and lifestyle. Our stakeholders agreed with this approach and stressed that, as we segment potential visitors, we consider what our destination has to offer and match that to psychographic segments.



### Consider An “Always-On” Marketing Investment Throughout the Year

Our stakeholders emphasized that we should consider whether our previous strategies for peak, shoulder, and off-peak seasons made sense given current visitor patterns and booking windows. They stressed that we should weigh whether our visitation was sustainable throughout the year to minimize disruptions to residents and visitors.



### Help Our Community Get Engaged in the Tourism Story

We heard it repeatedly: Lee County’s natural assets are its number one attraction. Stakeholders stressed that the VCB had to keep touting our pristine beaches, opportunities for eco-tourism, and more. Our interviewees appreciated our island-focused strategy and focus on eco-tourism activities like shelling. However, they wanted to be more engaged and use our messaging to inspire and engage their own customers.

Our interviews reinforced what we already knew to be true: we are a community that deeply appreciates the value of tourism. We also heard that there is an opportunity to reimagine what engagement in tourism looks like in Lee County. Our small businesses, tourism professionals, and residents are invaluable resources for marketing our destination.

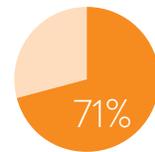
## BUILD THE TOURISM PIPELINE

As echoed by our stakeholders, we believe we must go beyond demographics to understand our next generation of visitors. To successfully enhance future visitation, we need to think about our visitors as individuals changing their preferences, spend, and travel behavior throughout their lives. Unlike demographics, psychographic segments focus on personality, values, opinions, interests, and life stages. While we know our destination and the customers it attracts, we must deepen our knowledge of the psychographic segments that are likely to visit.

We will use this information – along with geographic and demographic research – to drive our marketing decisions and create aggressive campaigns that better leverage our investments. A life-stage marketing approach concentrates our marketing to appeal to a more focused set of segments that research shows are most likely to visit.

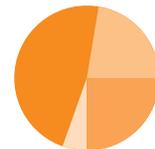
Beyond understanding the preferences of travelers according to life stage for our marketing, we must also focus on how visitors get to our destination. Because flying continues to be the primary means of transportation to Lee County, we will continue to work collaboratively with the Lee County Port Authority (LCPA) and the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau in pursuit of additional international air service.

Additionally, in partnership with the LCPA, we will analyze potential West Coast air service connections. Significantly fewer travelers from the West visit our community: of all U.S.-based Lee County visitors in 2016, only 5% came from the West.<sup>2</sup>



Among 2016 visitors, almost three-fourths flew to the area.<sup>1</sup>

Of all U.S.-based Lee County visitors in 2016:



- 46% from the Midwest;
- 25% from the South;
- 23% from the Northeast; and
- Only 5% from the West.<sup>3</sup>

### STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #1 KEY ACTIONS

Action	Short Term (6 months – 1 year)	Long Term (1 – 3 years)
Deepen research that further segments Lee County’s visitor profiles using psychographics or “life stages.”	Identify life stage “moments” used in industry research and align to destination offerings.	Develop marketing strategies to engage psychographic or life stage target markets.
Continue to provide collaborative support to stakeholder efforts to secure increased domestic and international air service.	Build upon existing partnerships in targeting air service markets.	Lead a regionalized effort to pursue targeted markets and increase attractiveness to airlines.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #2



## EMPLOY “ALWAYS-ON” MARKETING

Traditionally, we have focused on growing off-peak and shoulder visitation to grow tourism. However, given the nature of today’s booking cycle combined with the types of marketing messages we produce, we are shifting to a more streamlined, year-round approach. We will build a program that runs throughout the year – a continuous, “always on,” marketing cycle that ensures steady, yearly visitation.

Previously, our marketing allocations have been primarily weighted toward our slower need periods. As we employ a year-round marketing approach, the dollars spent will not decrease; however, the percentage of seasonal spend relative to the overall budget will change to accommodate a media presence throughout the year.

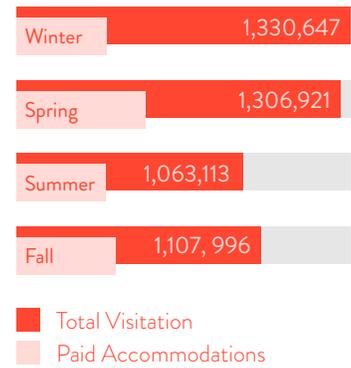
We are planning television pushes in top domestic markets and integrated campaigns during new parts of the year that align print, digital, and television advertisements for maximum exposure.

We are also committed to exploring new strategic partnerships to help leverage the brand in unique, creative, and unexpected ways.

Additionally, we will continue to:

- Execute our content-first marketing approach, with more resources dedicated to social media, native articles, videos, and creative website content.
- Formulate and refine our online content personalization efforts based on demographic, geographic, and psychographic audience profiles.
- Enhance our search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) efforts, both domestically and internationally.
- Align earned media opportunities with paid marketing spend for maximum impact.
- Discuss and promote renovations and new assets within the destination to stay relevant to current and future travelers.

### 2016 Lee County Visitors



Compared to 2016 winter season, Lee County hosted approximately 275,000 fewer visitors in the summer and 200,000 fewer visitors in the fall.

Between 9-12 % fewer visitors seeking paid accommodations came to Lee County in the summer/fall seasons as compared to winter/spring seasons of 2016.<sup>5</sup>

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #2 KEY ACTIONS

Action	Short Term (6 months – 1 year)	Long Term (1 – 3 years)
Reallocate marketing spend and activities throughout the seasonal calendar.	Assess current spend in specific seasons to ensure allocations throughout the year.  Identify new initiatives that align and support marketing activities by segment in key markets.	Set specific goals that align with the new year-round marketing strategy to enhance visitation.  Measure impact of new marketing reallocation and initiatives.



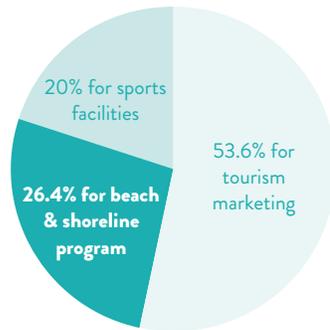
## PROMOTE LEE COUNTY'S NATURAL ASSETS

From breathtaking beaches to serene islands, lush estuaries to rich wildlife – our natural assets are the pride and hallmark of our destination.

We will continue to tell the unique story of our destination to market to current and future visitors. In turn, visitation and awareness of Lee County's natural assets will reinforce that we must protect those assets.

Tourism business leaders are eager to play a role in bringing visitors to Lee County and becoming champions for the county. We will build on our new brand creative, "Islandology," to create a narrative that draws visitors who are inspired by the destination's natural beauty and rallies the tourism industry to use that message in their own marketing initiatives.

Allocation of Tourist Development Tax



In 2016:

- 77% of visitors stated that Lee County's "white sandy beaches" strongly influenced their decision to visit.<sup>6</sup>
- 71% said the same for Lee County's "clean, unspoiled environment".<sup>7</sup>
- Almost all visitors (92%) said they enjoyed Lee County's beaches during their trip.<sup>8</sup>

### One Way Tourism Dollars Support Environmental Initiatives

The Tourist Development Council (TDC) allocates tourist tax dollars to protect and enhance Lee County's precious natural assets. Utilizing 26.4% of the five-cent bed tax, this program has provided more than \$115 million since 1988 to a variety of county-wide projects related to beach maintenance, beach nourishment, and beach park facility development. The maintenance of public beaches is funded by the tourist tax at no additional cost to the residents who also use the facilities.

### STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #3 KEY ACTIONS

Action	Short Term (6 months – 1 year)	Long Term (1 – 3 years)
Use "Islandology" campaign to rally and inspire the tourism industry.	Lead stakeholder sessions on the "Islandology" strategy and messaging as the campaign evolves.	Evolve and expand the "Islandology" campaign to reach new audiences.  Use natural assets as a central narrative for marketing activities.
Educate tourism stakeholders, potential visitors, and the wider community on how tourism to the county helps fund environmental initiatives.	Identify and develop messaging around leadership activities like Conservation 2020, water quality improvements, and other efforts that protect and enhance the local environment.  Use local communication outlets to highlight local assets and efforts (i.e. local, state, and national preserves; completed TDC beach and shoreline projects).	Develop a strategy for engaging tourism stakeholders, residents and visitors on the value of tourism to environmental protections.



STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #4

## HELP OUR COMMUNITY SPREAD OUR TOURISM STORY

Lee County’s tourism industry is its economic growth engine. Our community understands the role that tourism plays, and residents are valuable advocates or stakeholders in promoting our destination. Over the next three years, we will use the power of our community to help promote Lee County and improve overall visitor satisfaction.

Our successful Tourism Ambassador program supports visitors arriving at the Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), and our Guests First customer service training program enhances the visitor experience. Additionally, we will pilot a Lee County Rapid Response program for issues management.

This program will assemble a community Rapid Response team to educate and inform on emerging issues. Our response team will be comprised of local tourism stakeholders and elected county officials to ensure we promote a unified front in responding to issues. We will mobilize this team to clarify messages related to the issues at hand.

Led by our communications team with support from marketing, the Rapid Response program will:

- Tell Lee County’s story in personalized ways—straight from locals—to send unified messages about emerging issues.
- Provide ambassadors with clear guidelines to help respond to media messages where the voices of residents offer the most powerful counter-narrative.

A community Rapid Response team will spread positive messages about our destination, particularly during times when our community is in the news. The VCB and the county communications team will prepare talking points on issues that could impact our community. We’ll then work to coordinate efforts to release talking points to our response team.

We will also continue our outreach—especially to those outside of the tourism industry—to communicate the value tourism has for residents, local businesses, and the community at large. This will include messages that highlight tourism’s economic contributions. Our communications team will work on this initiative in collaboration with our data research firm.

### STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE #4 KEY ACTIONS

Action	Short Term (6 months – 1 year)	Long Term (1 – 3 years)
Pilot a Lee County Rapid Response team program.	Identify target individuals, businesses, neighborhoods, or groups within the destination for a pilot Rapid Response program.  Develop and/or assemble messages and resources that ambassadors can use to promote the brand and combat inaccurate media stories.	Expand the program to new volunteer groups.
Continue to amplify Lee County’s tourism story and reinforce how it connects to local communities.	Craft messages that highlight the economic contributions of tourism.	Develop and execute a strategy for connecting to members of the community outside of the tourism bubble.



## CONCLUSION

Our roadmap for the next three years is ambitious: it refocuses us on understanding our future visitor in a deeper way; reimagines the timeframe and pacing of our marketing strategy; and considers new ways of engaging our local business stakeholders and community. This in turn increases the economic impact of tourism — as a vital driver of our local economy — for the industry and the community at large.

This plan represents our consolidated interests and provides a platform for communication, education, advocacy and dialogue. We hope that as a result of this work, the industry can better speak with one voice and that our ongoing communications will create an understanding of the tourism imperative by all who reside here. By pursuing the initiatives set out in this plan, Lee County is paving a new pathway for growth. The increase to \$3.35B in total visitor expenditure will translate into significant economic impact for our destination.

- \$315 million of incremental revenue flowing into the Lee County economy
- 4,300 new jobs
- \$135 million in additional resident household income
- \$15 million more to fund local government and civic services
- \$29 million in incremental revenues to the state

This visitor expenditure will strengthen nearly every segment of our county's economy and help fill gaps in local and state government funding.

With newly developed strategies in hand, we are focused on reaching these objectives. We view the plan as a living document whose continual review provides the structure to guide long-term strategy while giving us the flexibility to pivot and respond to new, unforeseen challenges and opportunities. We are proud of our work and are committed to driving benefits for our industry, our environment, and our community.

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- 1 DPA, 2016 Annual Visitor Profile and Occupancy Analysis, p.10. <https://www.leevcb.com/media/27125/2016-visitor-profile-and-occupancy-analysis.pdf>
  - 2 *Ibid.*, p. 34
  - 3 *Ibid.*, p. 34
  - 4 *Ibid.*, p. 6
  - 5 *Ibid.*
  - 6 *Ibid.*, p. 18
  - 7 *Ibid.*, p. 18
  - 8 *Ibid.*, p. 10



**THE BEACHES OF  
FORT MYERS  
AND SANIBEL**

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## WITH THANKS

The development of this plan was a collaborative effort. We would like to thank everyone who offered a perspective throughout the process, including the following individuals:

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