



## **CURRITUCK COUNTY TOURISM ACTION PLAN**

**Developed December 10, 2007**

**By the Currituck County Tourism Advisory Board**

The Currituck County Tourism Action Plan is a list of potential measures that may be taken to enhance tourism in Currituck County. The goals stated in this plan are in response to the recommended strategies made by Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. (presented October 2007).

It is important to note the Currituck County Department of Travel & Tourism's Mission Statement:

The mission of the Currituck County Department of Travel & Tourism (CCDTT) is to strengthen the local economy through the promotion of Currituck County as a vacation destination, therefore enhancing the quality of life for local citizens. The Department's seven main objectives are:

1. Increase the number of visitors to Currituck County which will increase occupancy tax and sales tax revenues.
2. Increase exposure of the County's brand image.
3. Enhance and aggressively market the tourism website.
4. Develop and maintain strategic alliances with tourism-related businesses, attractions and other groups.
5. Utilize the available reporting data in directing the Department's resources to enhance the County's marketing position.
6. Analyze the effectiveness of ad campaigns in State, National and International publications/media outlets.
7. Convert day-trip travelers to overnight stays.

Excerpt from the Comprehensive Tourism Research and Strategic Plan  
Randall Travel Marketing, Inc.:

### Section 9-1

*It is now time to refine the organization for the long-term, track and grow visitor expenditures, and put into place solid strategies for the future. In addition, it is now time to refine the marketing efforts to support a long-term positioning that will sustain this economic engine. This especially includes protecting and preserving the unique aspects that make Currituck County distinct and desirable as a destination. Simply put, the "rocket" has been launched and it is now time to put into play strategies that will keep it aloft for the long term.*

## ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

- **Utilize occupancy tax as the “fuel” to increase sales tax.** Define the actions that should be taken to increase visitor spending.
- **Open a gateway visitor center on the Currituck Mainland.** Nearly 90 percent of visitors surveyed by Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. indicated that having a visitor center at or near the North Carolina state line would be beneficial. This reflects a clear and present need for additional visitor information in Currituck County. The center should be conveniently located, have highly visible signage, ample parking, and be open seven days per week (in season). In addition, the center should showcase county dining, shopping, lodging, and attractions through visual and interactive displays. *(See sections 9-7 & 9-8)*
- **Establish adequate office space for the CCDTT staff.** This can be accomplished by moving staff to the Mainland visitor center. *(See section 9-33)*
- **Track and grow the per-visitor expenditures and the resulting tax relief for Currituck County taxpayers;** focus on the mission of “putting heads in beds.”
- **Establish a positioning statement such as “Coastal Carolina’s serene beach, wild horses, lighthouse, and historic village.”** Randall Travel Marketing, Inc., strongly recommends the CCDTT adopt this statement – which promotes the Currituck Outer Banks’ uniqueness – and use it in all marketing materials.
- **Refine the tourism images and marketing messages based on top attractors.** Consider visitor suggestions before finalizing these images. Copyright the County’s tourism logo.
- **Create additional niche market publications (sportsman’s guide, group planning guide, etc.) and other marketing campaigns that will promote local businesses and activities.** These should also encourage shoulder season travel.
- **Increase the funding level for the CCDTT.** Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. states: “RTM recommends Currituck County investigate past funding for the CCDTT and ensure that adequate funds are allocated relative to the legislated statutes and expectations for growth of the industry.” *(See sections 9-34 & 9-35)*
- **Refine advertisement design and continue to develop a consistent image for the Currituck Outer Banks.** This can be accomplished by contracting with one professional ad agency to handle all of the CCDTT’s ads. *(See section 9-18)*
- **Develop a media kit and public relations program to obtain editorials.** Contract with a professional public relations firm to create a comprehensive media kit and assist staff with identifying appropriate media, writing press

releases, and conducting press tours. This will lead to additional editorials and articles being written about the Currituck Outer Banks.

- **Work with lodging properties to have visitor information placed in check-in packets.** This could include visitor guides, niche marketing materials, maps, and other brochures.
- **Better utilize Charter Media's channel 19 for visitor information and the promotion of attractions, businesses and events.** This must be done within the FCC guidelines of a Public Education Government (PEG) channel.
- **Expand electronic and visual marketing campaigns (including videos at the visitor centers).** These videos would promote shopping, dining, lodging, and attractions.
- **Increase professional training for staff.** This should include attending seminars, conferences, and other educational opportunities.
- **Increase e-marketing and social networking.** Travel blogs and social networks such as *myspace.com* and *facebook.com* are popular with travelers. This technology provides consumer-to-consumer recommendations, which is considered far more compelling than advertising. The appropriate CCDTT staff should receive the necessary training to develop the skill sets required for additional e-marketing and social networking. *(See section 9-18)*
- **Simplify the landing page of the website and strive to attain a higher ranking on search engines.** Make the landing page less wordy with more emotional impact. Include more photographs on the website that show families having fun and enjoying their vacation. Include visitor testimonials scattered throughout the website. Continue investigation into what may be needed to ensure effective search engine placement. *(See section 9-20)*

## **ACTIONS FOR SIX MONTHS TO ONE YEAR**

- **Refine the Currituck Outer Banks Visitor's Guide.** This should include moving the dining and shopping sections to the front of the guide, including an easy-to-use map, and using text and photographs that make an emotional connection, placing readers in the experience of visiting Currituck County. *(See section 9-13)*
- **Expand shoulder / off-season promotions; promote seasonal savings.** Conduct pin-point research with rental management companies as well as guests. Develop an aggressive e-marketing campaign to promote seasonal and off-season events to visitors. Develop promotions that may attract visitors. *(See section 9-25)*

- **Hold a hospitality training / orientation workshop for visitor center staff and employees working at tourism-related businesses.** This will lead to increased visitor spending as those trained will be better aware of County businesses and attractions and can make recommendations. “Secret shop” employees and reward those who are doing an outstanding job of promoting Currituck County. In addition, CCDTT staff should develop a package of training materials that can be utilized by local area managers to provide on-going staff training. *(See section 9-40)*
- **Develop a “commitment to excellence” program recognizing businesses that excel in providing customer service / hospitality to visitors.** This program should also identify individual employees at tourism-related businesses who do extremely well in being friendly to visitors and directing them to Currituck County restaurants, shops, lodging, and attractions.
- **Secure additional billboards throughout Currituck County, as well as in target market locations, that promote the Currituck Outer Banks.** The billboards would feature shopping, dining, activities, etc.
- **Make recommendations to the NC Department of Transportation and county leaders on ways to improve signage on the mainland.** These signs would direct visitors to businesses and attractions, thus increasing visitor spending.
- **Split Tourism and Public Information into two separate departments.** As stated by Randall Travel Marketing, Inc., “The public information needs of the County are targeted primarily to residents. The tasks of monitoring and promoting tourism are geared primarily toward the travel industry constituents and the traveling public who live outside of Currituck County. Thus, this one agency is being asked to serve two completely different ‘masters’.” *(See section 9-33)*
- **Expand participation in trade shows.** CCDTT staff should take part in shows primarily in the target markets of Virginia, the Mid-Atlantic, Mid-West, and nearby southern states, including Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, and West Virginia. *(See section 9-24)*
- **Establish front-line information at rental companies.** Ensure that the front desk in every rental management company has a display for Currituck County area maps and other visitor information. Front-line personnel should be coached in using these materials to assist patrons with wayfinding and locating entertainment, dining and shopping options. *(See section 9-25)*
- **Identify pet-friendly accommodations.** Include this information in both the Visitor’s Guide and website.

- **Expand the distribution of annual reports to include all county residents.** This will help citizens to be more informed about the positive impact of tourism. *(See section 9-41)*
- **Increase television promotion to include the Currituck Outer Banks' target markets (Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, etc.).** The television advertising should focus on the identified positioning statement and those activities that attract visitors.

## **ACTIONS FOR ONE YEAR TO THREE YEARS**

- **Conduct on-going scientific research to monitor and track results.** These include: lodging surveys, visitors profiles, website user analysis, etc. The information collected will determine strategic planning by the CCDTT.
- **Monitor satisfaction levels with tourism products.** Develop an understanding of the activities preferred by visitors (dining out, shopping, beaches, etc.). This can be conducted by visitor surveys (mail and intercept). Survey results should be shared with tourism-related businesses and attractions.
- **Merchandise tourism logo items (t-shirts and other garments, beach towels, etc.).** Utilize the proceeds to expand services to visitors (e.g. sponsor training seminars for employees of tourism-related businesses).
- **Employ additional staff for the CCDTT.** Randall Travel Marketing, Inc., recommends that the following staff positions be considered when adding new staff for the Department: Technology Manager, Leisure & Small Group Sales Manager. *(See section 9-35)*
- **Set up online trip planning features on the tourism website.** Develop check lists and other tools to simplify the trip planning process and, as a result, increase visitor spending.
- **Collaborate with businesses to create "family fun packages."** These could include lodging, tickets to attractions, discount coupons to restaurants and shopping, etc. This will increase tourists to the County as well as promote visitor spending.
- **Support the construction of an additional bike path in Corolla.** A large number of visitors surveyed by Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. indicated that an additional bike path would be extensively used by tourists.
- **Develop a DVD with virtual tours of Currituck County.** This DVD would be a video version of the visitor's guide. It would be distributed to potential visitors,

shown at trade shows, streamed on the tourism website, as well as placed in rental homes.

**ACTIONS FOR THREE YEARS +**

**Construct a visitor information center at the base of the mid-county bridge.** This center would promote both Mainland and Outer Banks businesses.