





Currituck County
Department of Travel & Tourism
106 Caratoke Hwy.
Moyock, NC 27958

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*Currituck County
Department of Travel & Tourism*

State of Tourism Report to the Community 2011



CURRITUCK
OUTER BANKS, NC





Dear Friends of Tourism:

The economic climate over the past few years has been rocky for most individuals and businesses; however, tourism in Currituck County is better than ever!

A record number of visitors traveled to our county this year, and occupancy (lodging) tax collections increased 15 percent over the previous fiscal year. Although sales tax collections are still not where they were in years past, a successful tourist season resulted in increased visitor spending in 2011. Revenues from that spending, in turn, is benefiting Currituck County residents.

The Currituck County Travel & Tourism Department, Tourism Development Authority and Tourism Advisory Board have stayed true to our mission of working to strengthen the local economy through the promotion of Currituck as one of the East Coast's best family vacation destinations. By working in partnership with our local businesses, we intend to see tourism – the county's largest industry – continue to grow and citizens reap the benefits.

I hope you enjoy reading about the marketing programs and other tourism information highlighted in this report. If you'd like to learn how you can get more involved with our growing visitor industry, please contact me or any board member or staff person. And don't forget to thank our visitors for choosing to vacation in Currituck!

Diane S. Nordstrom, Director
Currituck County Department of Travel & Tourism



Travel & Tourism Department

(Seated, L-R:) Nancy Garris, Irina Coccetti; (Standing, L-R:) Judy Vassar, Stuart Chamberlain, Diane Nordstrom, Leeann Walton, Clayton Howard, Michele Ellis.





The Tourism Department - together with the Tourism Development Authority and Tourism Advisory Board - is continually working to strengthen and grow Currituck County's tourism industry. By supporting our local tourism-related businesses and encouraging visitors to patronize them, we can increase revenues while preserving and protecting the county's historic, natural and cultural resources.

*Tourism Development Authority/
Board of Commissioners*

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 252-453-9612



WHY TOURISM MAKES DOLLAR\$ AND SENSE

CURRITUCK COUNTY TOURISM INDUSTRY

1. CREATES & SUSTAINS JOBS

Currituck County's tourism industry sustains **1,380** jobs in the county – jobs that would not exist without tourism. These jobs provide over **\$21 MILLION** in wages to Currituck County workers and create a more prosperous job market for our community. Over 18 percent of Currituck's working population is employed by the Leisure & Hospitality Industry. This means that one out of every five people has a job because of tourism.



2. GENERATES MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN TAX REVENUES

That's right – visitors to Currituck County generate an economic impact of over **\$117 MILLION** annually, making tourism Currituck's largest industry. Without tourism, citizens and taxpayers would not be able to benefit from one of the lowest tax rates in North Carolina. The money used to promote tourism and support visitor services comes from occupancy tax, a lodging tax paid by guests who stay overnight in our hotels, motels, vacation rental homes, lodges, campgrounds, and bed and breakfasts. By state law, occupancy tax can only be used for tourism projects and services; however, when visitors shop and pay sales taxes, those funds can be used for projects such as building schools and operating local government.



3. IMPROVES OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

Our quality of life is enriched as visitor spending supports our community – creating a better county for all of us to enjoy. The occupancy (lodging) tax and sales tax paid by vacationers are cycled into our local economy, easing the tax burden for those of us who live here.

4. CONTRIBUTES TO A VITAL COMMUNITY

Because Currituck is a popular vacation destination, thousands of people come here each year. Businesses, residents, property owners and many local non-profit organizations benefit from the money spent by these out-of-town guests.

5. MARKETS AND PROMOTES OUR BEACHES AND MAINLAND

The county's Tourism Department, Tourism Development Authority, and Tourism Advisory Board work to promote the Currituck Outer Banks as a destination for leisure/family travel. Through a comprehensive marketing plan, Currituck is branded and advertised to potential vacationers across the country, as well as internationally.



WHY TOURISM MAKES DOLLAR\$ AND SENSE

6. BRINGS EVENTS TO CURRITUCK COUNTY

Tourism revenues support numerous events held in Currituck County. These events enhance vacationers' experiences and make Currituck even more attractive to the traveling public.



7. IS CRITICAL TO CURRITUCK'S FUTURE ECONOMIC VITALITY

In the 21st century, eight out of ten jobs are expected to be in the service industry, which is why we focus on creating a vibrant economic machine that will help support this dynamic industry.

8. IS SOMETHING WE CAN BE PROUD OF

Currituck County has become a major tourist destination and has recently celebrated many successes, including being chosen for a case study by Google and winning three top state awards for online and print advertising. Our county is a special place we can all be proud of!

TOURISM SAVES YOU TAXES

The tax relief benefit per household in 2010 was \$1,229.19. This means that due to the tourism industry, each household in Currituck County **SAVED \$1,229.19 IN TAXES** while maintaining quality public services and a high quality of life.

WHAT **CAN** BE FUNDED WITH OCCUPANCY TAX?

- Advertising and marketing to promote tourism
- Some law enforcement and emergency medical services that are needed to support tourism
- County parks
- Beach nourishment
- Welcome/Visitor centers
- Business travel
- Other tourism-related services

WHAT **CANNOT** BE FUNDED WITH OCCUPANCY TAX?

- General operation of local government
- School construction and school district general operations
- Most fire department, law enforcement and emergency medical services
- Any project or program that does not service or improve tourism/business travel

Occupancy tax collections increased by 15.5% over the 2009-2010 fiscal year; collections surpassed \$9 million.

Currituck County collected over \$6.8 million in sales tax during the 2010-2011 budget year, which represents a 8.7% increase over the 2009-2010 budget year.

TOURISM MARKETING

Print Advertising

The Currituck Tourism department placed ads in several magazines, including: *USA Today*, *USA Weekend*, *Woman's Day*, *Southern Living*, and others. The department received the following visitor guide requests from print ads (Top 10):

- *The Knot* - 19,927
- *Family Travel Inserts* - 19,514
- *O Magazine* - 16,411
- *Escape to the Southeast* - 11,997
- *AARP* - 8,248
- *Woman's Day* - 7,130
- *Good Housekeeping* - 6,837
- *Bridal Guide* - 5,485
- *Southern Living* - 5,009

Over 145,000 guide requests were received through print ads. Top states requesting vacation information were: North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Florida.



The Currituck Tourism Department annually produces and distributes the following publications:

- **Visitors Guide** - 200,000 copies are printed
- **Wedding Planner** - 30,000 copies are printed

- **Shopping & Dining Guide** - 20,000 copies are printed
- **Currituck Map** is distributed through County Visitor Information Centers.
- **Business rack cards** are offered to businesses through a co-op program.
- **Niche publications** are produced as needed.

Television

Television commercials produced by the Tourism Department air in target market states such as Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and New York. These commercials entice potential visitors to choose Currituck for their next vacation.



Eye Candy Digital Video in Moyock handles the Department's primary video production, as well as its media buys. Other television advertising includes the airing of commercials on local cable networks such as Charter Communications.

ADVERTISING

Online and mobile

The Currituck Tourism mobile site has seen an unprecedented growth of **727%** in the past year, reaching **25,987 PAGE VIEWS**. As more vacationers are using their smartphones and tablets to access information on the internet, the Tourism Department is expanding its mobile advertising campaign.



Facts

- 14,276 new facebook “likes” during the fiscal year (an increase of 329%)
- Over 8,000 visitor guides downloaded from the tourism website and VisitNC.com
- 3,452,959 video impressions on YouTube with 54,690 clicks for a click through rate of 1.58%
- Top referring sites: Google, VisitNC, Bing, Weather Underground, and Yahoo!

Research shows that over 75 percent of travelers make their decisions online. For this reason, **VisitCurrituck.com** is crucial to a successful marketing strategy.

Currently, the Tourism website has over 240,000 visits each year. It continues to serve visitors’ needs by making relevant content – including maps, event information, specials/discounts, and other visitor information – easy to find.

In addition, the Currituck Tourism Department is continuing to expand the county’s online presence in the area of social media. While social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have been used by the department in the past, staff is developing other platforms and improving its presence in the social media community.



Currituck’s Tourism Department recently **received the honor of being the subject of a Google case study** for its success in utilizing the Google TV Ads platform to attract new visitors to the area.

Faced with the challenge of reaching new visitor markets outside of Currituck’s traditional

East Coast audience, the Tourism Department and its web agency, Ciniva, tried the relatively new Google TV Ads platform as an affordable method of creating awareness for the destination on a national scale. The marketing strategy paid off, getting Currituck better than expected exposure to potential vacations.

The Google TV Ads initiative not only attracted new visitors, but also improved the quality of these visits, with the average visitor from these TV ads spending three times the amount of time on the site and converting at almost double the rate of other advertising formats, including regional network TV buys.

As Currituck continued to see extremely positive results from the Google TV Ads campaign, **the Google TV Ads team took notice and decided to recognize Currituck’s experience in an official case study**, highlighting the county’s innovative usage of the Google TV Ads platform. “It is great to share with the industry how Currituck and Ciniva are leading the way in effective and accountable media,” shares Kallista Stephenson, Account Strategist with Google.

RECOGNITIONS/SPECIAL PROMOTIONS

And the Award Goes to...

Currituck County's Department of Travel & Tourism received three top awards from Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina (DMANC) during the association's 2011 annual awards ceremony. **The department received two first-place awards and one second-place award.**

The Destination Marketing Achievement Awards honor and showcase innovative, best practices, creativity and outstanding efforts in tourism marketing. The awards earned by Currituck's Tourism Department were presented in the Large Budget division, meaning that the Currituck bureau competed against other North Carolina destinations such as Charlotte, Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Durham.

Awards won by the Currituck staff include:

- **Platinum Award (first place) - Best Print Advertising (Group) for wedding ads;**
- **Platinum Award - Best Niche Marketing for the Currituck Outer Banks 2011 Wedding Planner;**
- **Gold Award (second place) - Destination Marketing Initiative for the visitcurrituck.com website and internet marketing campaign.**

The awards were presented at the DMANC annual awards banquet, held in September in Concord, NC. Award entries were submitted by tourism departments/visitors bureaus across North Carolina. The judges were national tourism professionals including advertising agency representatives and marketing specialists.

Visitor Centers Showcase Currituck Businesses

Over 91,000 people stopped by one of Currituck County's visitor information centers in 2011. The centers – located in Corolla and in Moyock at the state line – provide vacation information and brochures about Currituck County businesses such as restaurants, shops, activities and attractions.

Local tourism-related businesses can have their brochures on display free of charge. In addition, display cases highlight what businesses have to offer the travelling public.

The centers are operated by the Currituck Tourism Department and are totally funded by occupancy tax, the tax paid by vacationers who stay overnight in accommodations located in Currituck County.



PUBLIC RELATIONS

Read All About It

The Currituck Outer Banks has received significant media coverage during the 2010-2011 fiscal year. This free coverage is valued at \$658,826. Some examples of editorial exposure include:

- **AAA World** - "Get Lost in the Outer Banks," featuring Outer Banks vacation ideas.
- **Our State** - "Where the Road Ends," featuring the Corolla Wild Horses.
- **Southern Living** - "Inside the Outer Banks," covered a variety of Currituck's attractions and accommodations.



Additional publications writing about Currituck were: *Hampton Roads Magazine*, *Destination Weddings & Honeymoons*, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, *New York Times-Online*, *USA Today Online*, *Washington Post Online*, *Yahoo! News*, *MSNBC.com*, *Charlotte Observer* and *the Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

The department hosted several travel writers in the 2010-2011 budget year. Individual tours, and group press trips were organized.

Several local businesses were recently featured in a variety of TV programs. The Weeping Radish was highlighted on an episode of "Flavor NC" which aired on PBS, and Currituck was spotlighted on a Richmond, VA morning news show.

On Exhibit

Travel shows provide an opportunity for the Tourism Department to promote Currituck to potential vacationers in key market areas, including:

- Orlando, FL - AARP Conference
- Secaucus, NJ - New York Travel & Adventure Show
- Columbus, OH - AAA Great Vacations Expo
- Wilkes Barre, PA - AAA Show
- Philadelphia, PA - AAA Show
- Baltimore, MD - AAA Show
- Wilmington, DE - Vacations & Destinations Expo
- Washington, DC - Travel & Adventure Expo

A total of 8,727 leads were generated from these shows.



The Currituck Outer Banks was featured in USA Today's "NC's Outer Banks draws more destination weddings" article.

The Currituck Department of Travel & Tourism helps to promote numerous events through its Events Assistance Program. Promotional outlets include newspapers, websites, social media, and the visitor information centers. Events the Currituck Tourism Department has provided marketing assistance to include:

- CURRITUCK WILDLIFE FESTIVAL
- INTERNATIONAL WINE FESTIVAL
- WINGO DE MAYO FESTIVAL
- SILVER BELLS CRAFT SHOW
- CATFISH TOURNAMENT
- MUSTANG MUSIC FESTIVAL
- WRANGLER FARMS FALL FESTIVAL
- OUTER BANKS BIKE SHOW
- MOUNTAINS TO THE COAST (CYCLE NC) BICYCLE RIDE
- COROLLA WILD HORSE DAYS
- SURFSIDE SCUTE 5K
- MARSH GRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL
- CURRITUCK RURAL FARM FESTIVAL
- COROLLA PEDAL-FOOT-PADDLE
- CURRITUCK HOME, FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW
- CURRITUCK COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL ART EXTRAVAGANZA
- CHRISTMAS AT THE FARM
- THE MOVING WALL
- CURRITUCK HERITAGE DAY
- CURRITUCK-DARE FALL FAMILY FESTIVAL
- WHALEHEAD CLUB "ARTS IN THE PARK"

The Annual Independence Day Celebration, sponsored and coordinated by the Currituck Department of Travel & Tourism, was a big success. Visitors enjoyed live music, games, local vendors, and an extraordinary fireworks display.



Watermelon Eating Contest at the Annual Independence Day Celebration at Currituck Heritage Park

Events play a pivotal role in enticing visitors to plan their vacations to Currituck County.



One recent event that brought nearly 1,000 bicyclists to Corolla was the North Carolina Amateur Sports' 13th Annual Mountains to the Coast End-of-ride Celebration. The Currituck Tourism Department's event planning staff coordinated with NC Amateur Sports to bring this major event to our area.



The celebration was the culmination of a seven-day bicycle ride that started in the mountains of North Carolina and ended at Currituck Heritage Park in Corolla. Riders came from 33 states as well as Canada. The event had a positive economic impact to Currituck's businesses as many of the riders stayed overnight, ate in restaurants and shopped in stores.

"During the ride, participants often discover future vacation destinations for their family, a place to relocate their company, or a retirement location," said Chuck Hobgood, President of NC Amateur Sports. "We want our cyclists and the cycling community across the country to know that North Carolina is open for business and still the best place in the United States to visit," Hobgood said.



Finish line at the Cycle NC Mountains to the Coast bike ride at Currituck Heritage Park

BUY LOCAL CURRITUCK

COUNTY LAUNCHES BUY LOCAL CAMPAIGN

A new program aimed at connecting shoppers with local stores has launched.

Buy Local Currituck is a campaign being organized by the Currituck Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Department and Economic Development Department with support from county government leaders. The campaign's goal is to create awareness of the importance of buying from local merchants, as well as to help citizens realize that the dollars they spend support the local economy.

The BuyLocalCurrituck.com website, developed by VBL technologies, provides a database of businesses located in Currituck County. The site helps county citizens search for their favorite businesses, find new ones, and keep up with business news. In addition, visitors to the site will find specials, deals and events being offered by shops, stores and restaurants.

Merchants - Check to make certain your business is listed on the website. Contact Judy Vassar, Visitor Relations Coordinator with the Tourism Department, at 435-2947, and she'll make sure your business is added. Marketing materials, including window stickers and posters featuring the "Buy Local Currituck" logo, are available for merchants. Get your free materials by calling the Currituck Chamber at 453-9497.

Shop local and win chances for prizes!
Thanks to local merchant donations,

county residents can win prizes such as shopping sprees, free services, gift certificates, and more. Official rules can be found at buylocalcurrituck.com. Thus far, prizes valued at over \$2,000 will be awarded in the campaign's first quarterly prize drawing.



Reasons to buy local...

- It keeps dollars in the community and has a multiplier effect.
- It increases tax revenue for Currituck, which can help fund schools, emergency services, community recreation, law enforcement, and more.
- It keeps jobs in the county and residents living here.
- It makes Currituck a destination and boosts the tourism industry. Tourists enjoy visiting the area because it is unique. Local shops, restaurants, and service providers are a big part of what makes Currituck special.

For additional information on the Buy Local Currituck campaign, call the Currituck Chamber (453-9497), Tourism Department (435-2947) or Economic Development Department (232-6015).

