

Executive Summary

Study Objective:

The objective of this study was to conduct a comprehensive visitor research and strategic marketing plan for the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism. The Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism (CCDTT) retained Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. (RTM) of Mooresville, North Carolina to conduct this study.

Study Methodology:

Research was conducted for Currituck County during June 2007 through September 2007. Many methods of data collection were used:

1. Initial Meeting and Materials Gathering:

Initial meetings were conducted between the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism and RTM to review questionnaires, gather input, collect materials, etc.

2. Reconnaissance and Mystery Shopping:

A professional reconnaissance team visited Currituck County area June 8 through June 14, 2007 and conducted a thorough mystery shopping site evaluation.

3. Performance Audit:

RTM conducted in-depth performance audit and analysis of the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism. This included documentation and analysis of the organization's governance, mission statement, funding and budget allocation, staffing and organizational structure, results measures, and program performance.

4. Lodging Property Interviews and Survey:

A survey was sent to every lodging property in Currituck County. Nine (9) rental agencies returned the survey for a response rate of 61.34%, four (4) hotel/motel lodging properties returned the survey for a response rate of 97.94%, and two (2) bed and breakfast inns returned the survey for a response rate of 100.00%. The combined response rate for all lodging properties Currituck county was 63.60% of the total available lodging units.

5. Visitor Intercept Interviews:

In addition to the mail survey of inquiries, intercept interviews were conducted with various visitor segments in Currituck. A total of fifteen (15) intercept interviews were conducted in Currituck County.

6. Visitor Profile and Conversion Survey – Random Sample of Inquiries:

Three thousand (3,000), four-page questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of people who had requested visitor information from the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism over the course of a one-year period. Three hundred eighteen (318) surveys were returned for a 10.60% response.

7. Rental Property Executive Interviews:

The CCDTT provided RTM with a list of twenty (20) rental company executives in Currituck County. In June 2007 RTM conducted a total of five (5) executive interviews.

8. State, Regional and National Data:

Travel research data from the State of North Carolina was obtained and analyzed as part of the study. Regional and national travel databases were also studied.

9. Marketing Materials Evaluation:

Marketing materials including brochures and advertising were obtained from CCDTT. Those materials were evaluated based on research findings and the marketing experience of the RTM team.

10. Executive Summary and Recommendations:

Based on the research findings, a comprehensive report was written and presented to the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism.

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Summary of Currituck County Lodging Report

In analysis of the lodging data collected in this report, RTM noted the following overall observations:

- **Approximately 3,300 lodging units:** The majority of the lodging properties in Currituck County are rental homes. The average party size renting a house is approximately seven (7) people.
- **Leisure visitors (including golfers) account for approximately 96.68% of Currituck County lodging. Groups, transient and other travelers represent 1.79%. The remaining 1.56% is comprised of individual business, convention/meeting and SMERF travelers.** It is very important for Currituck County community leaders to understand the customer mix that is visiting Currituck County. Clearly Currituck is a leisure destination!
- **Overall the vast majority (89%) of travel parties are families.** Currituck County is overwhelmingly considered a family destination.
- **Spring, summer and autumn are the busiest travel seasons. Winter is the least.** This is typical, although with more aggressive marketing, off-season lodging occupancy can be boosted.
- **Average length of stay is 5-6 nights.** This was reported by the lodging properties and was also confirmed in the responses from the mail survey.
- **Currituck Rental Agency Information:** The larger rental agencies responding to this survey and have been in business for an average of seventeen (17) years. The overall average of full time employees reported is twenty-six (26) full time and one hundred-eight (108) part time employees.
- **Currituck Rental Inventory Increase:** Rental units have doubled since the year 2000. With this growth rental property executives have noted an increase in customer demand for high end, larger homes with many amenities.
- **Currituck Rental Home Owners:** Less than five percent (4.2%) of the rental unit owners join or drop out annually (turn-over). The majority of the respondents indicated that 99.6% of the rental units were purchased as rental investment property. Concerns of the home owners are income versus expense, condition of property after renting, investment appreciation, and resale.
- **Currituck Renter statistics:** Rental property executives have noted that there are more multi-family renters. The typical party size ranged from 6-16 adults with 7+kids. Homes averaged between five (5) and six (6) bedrooms. About half are repeat annual renters.
- **Currituck versus Regional competition:** Visitors choose Currituck over other beach/destinations for the beautiful beaches, limited commercial and high rise development and larger nicer rental homes.
- **Marketing and Advertising:** The average amount spent by rental agencies in advertising and marketing ranged from \$85,000 to \$810,000.
- **Promotion of Currituck County:** Rental company managers identified the need to promote potential growth for both in season as well as off season.

Lodging Property Type	Total Lodging Properties/Agencies	Rooms/ Units	% of Lodging Inventory
Rental Agency	20	3,070	93.8%
Hotel/Motel	6	194	5.9%
Bed and Breakfast Inns	2	8	.24%

(Source: CCDTT)

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2006 Overall Lodging Market Segmentation

Rental Units	Hotel/Motel	Bed & Breakfast	Overall	Category
61.34%	97.94%	100.00%	63.60%	Lodging response Rate (by room count)
96.84%	79.82%	28.50%	94.98%	Leisure
82.09%	69.23%	3.50%	80.57%	Tourists visiting beach, attractions, shopping, etc
14.75%	10.59%	25.00%	14.41%	Visiting local friends and relatives (weddings, reunion, etc)
1.86%	.19%	.50%	1.70%	Golf package/ golf group
.83%	3.11%	8.00%	.91%	Corporate/business
0.00%	8.26%	0.00%	.82%	Other (Contract labor, trainees)
.18%	3.70%	22.50%	.58%	Pass through/part of longer trip
.13%	.23%	1.00%	.40%	Convention
.18%	1.01%	.50%	.25%	Sports Group
~	2.17%	21.50%	.22%	SMERF
~	1.52%	17.50%	.14%	Group tour

(Source: RTM Lodging Property Survey)

2006 Overall Top Feeder Markets

Combined Lodging Properties Feeder Markets	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Total
Virginia	9	3	2	0	14
Pennsylvania	1	3	1	2	7
District of Columbia	2	2	2	0	6
North Carolina	1	2	2	0	5
Maryland	0	1	3	0	4
New Jersey	0	1	1	2	4

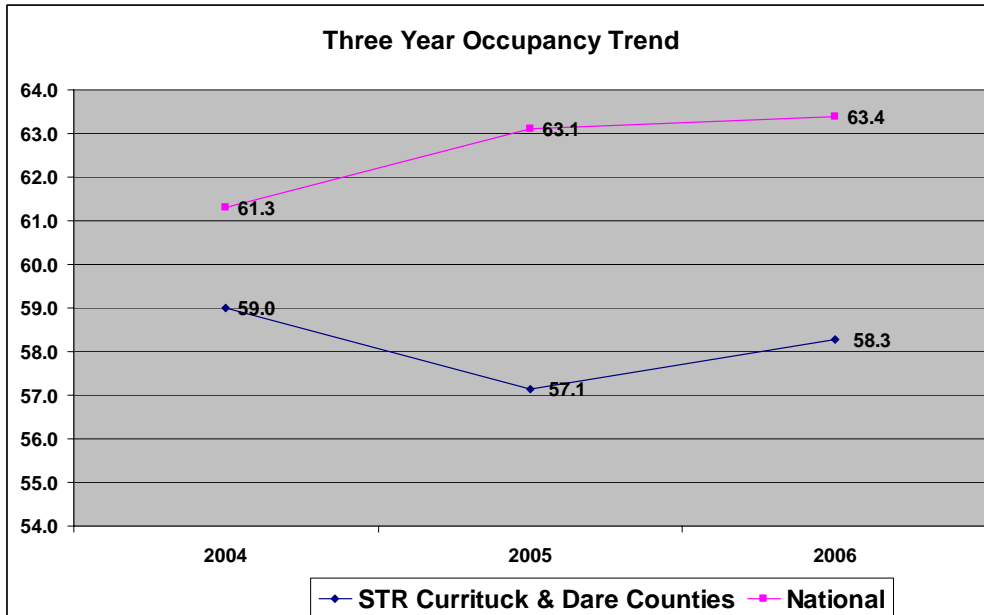
(Source: RTM Lodging Property Survey)

2006 Visitor Profile – Reported by Lodging Properties

	Rental Properties	Hotel/Motel Lodging Properties	Bed and Breakfast Inns	Overall
Average travel party size	10.2	2.5	2	6.8
Average length of stay	7	2	3.5	5.4
Adults traveling with children	87.26%	59.13%	20.00%	89.35%

(Source: RTM Lodging Property Survey)

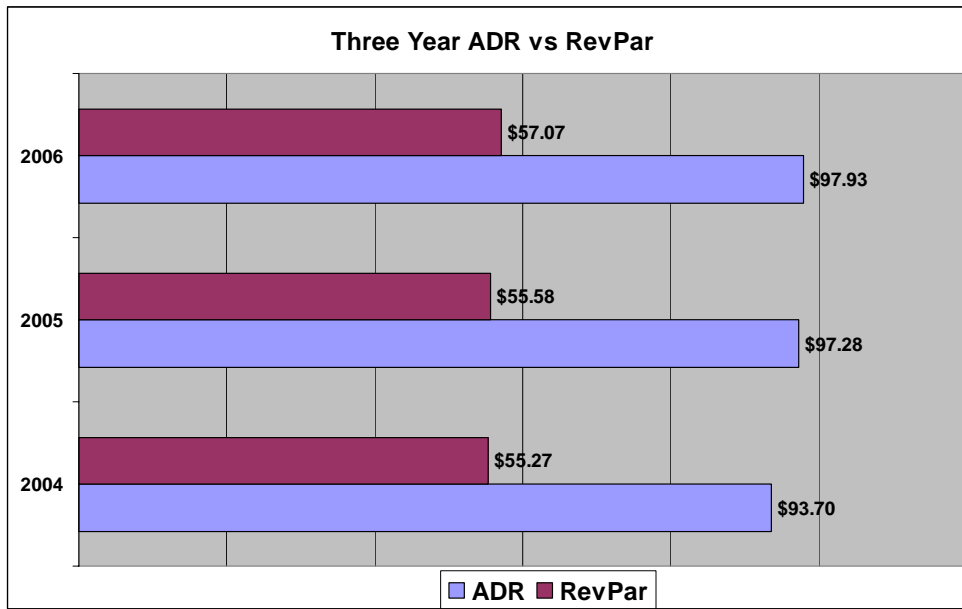
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Three Year Annual Occupancy Trends

Year	Currituck and Dare Counties Occupancy	% of change	National Occupancy	% of Change
2004	59.0%	-2.1	61.3%	+3.5%
2005	57.1%	-3.1	63.1%	+1.8%
2006	58.3%	2.0	63.4%	+ .5%

(Source: Smith Travel Research (STR) Report)



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Summary of Currituck County Performance Review

Currituck County Tourism Development Authority

Currituck County began collecting a lodging tax to fund the promotion of travel and tourism in 1987. The North Carolina General Assembly requires counties that collect a lodging tax to establish a Tourism Development Authority (TDA) to provide oversight to the use of the lodging tax funds. A TDA serves in a similar capacity as an airport or development authority. The County Board of Commissioners in each county has the authority to appoint a TDA Board. The Currituck County Board of Commissioners was given legislative authority to serve as the TDA Board for Currituck County.

Prior to 2005, a portion of the lodging tax funding was allocated by Currituck County to the Currituck County Chamber of Commerce which served as the travel and tourism promotion agency for the County. The Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism (CCDTT) was established as the official tourism marketing agency for the County in July, 2005 and was set up as a division of County Government. The Currituck County TDA Board created a Tourism Advisory Board to provide regular oversight of the CCDTT. The CCTDA meets on an as needed basis while the Tourism Advisory Board meets at least quarterly.

CCDTT Mission Statement

The mission of the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism 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 Travel and Tourism Department's Seven Main Objectives:

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, www.visitcurrituck.com.
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.

Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism Staff

Diane Sawyer is the Director of the CCDTT and reports directly to Dan Scanlon, County Manager, and the Currituck County Commissioners who serve as the TDA Board. Diane Sawyer also serves as the Public Information Officer for Currituck County government.

Diane Sawyer	Director
Veronica Brown	Marketing Coordinator
Debra Embrey	Electronic Media Coordinator
Randall Edwards	Information & Communications Officer
Irina Coccetti	Public Relations Coordinator
Van Manson	Video Production Specialist
Diana Pittman	Visitor Relations Coordinator
LeeAnn Walton	Visitor Center Office Manager

In addition to the full-time staff outlined above, there are six part-time visitor relations associates who work at the Currituck Outer Banks Visitor's Center. These associates work the "front-line" providing concierge services to the traveling public as well as answering the toll free number and fulfilling information inquiries. The staff of CCDTT split their time between tourism promotion and other duties related to operating the Public Information Office for Currituck County.

Office and Visitor Center Facilities

The CCDTT is currently located at 145 Courthouse Road in a trailer adjacent to the County office complex. The full-time staff of five has a total of 521 square feet for their offices and storage space in this facility. RTM reviewed the office systems in place and found that the marketing team has adequate computers, software and telecommunications to perform their job tasks. In addition to the cramped offices the CCDTT has 145 square feet of storage for print materials and supplies located at the Judicial Center.

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The only Currituck visitor center operated by the CCDTT is located just north of Duck on the outer banks portion of the County. The visitor center is in a new, modern facility that is in an excellent gateway location with good directional signage and ample parking. The facility has approximately 1,642 square feet of space, is attractively designed and offers good information for the traveling public.

Lodging Taxes and CCDTT Funding

The CCDTT is funded through annual appropriations received from the Currituck County Board of Commissioners. Each spring, the CCDTT prepares a budget request that is submitted as part of the overall County budget to be reviewed by the five-member Currituck County Board of Commissioners who also serve as the TDA. Funding for the CCDTT budget comes directly from the occupancy tax collected on all short-term lodging (less than 30 days) in Currituck County. The legislation that enables Currituck County to levy the occupancy Tax was first passed in 1987 and amended in 1991 and 1999. Therefore, the current occupancy tax in Currituck is levied at 6% and was established for the following purposes in each of the three legislative amendments:

Year	Levy	Purpose
1987	3%	Tourism related expenditures
1991	1%	1/3 Tourism related expenditures 2/3 Promotion of travel and tourism
1999	2%	1/3 Tourism related expenditures 2/3 Promotion of travel and tourism

The distribution of the current 6% occupancy tax in Currituck County is as follows (based on the 1987 initial legislation authorizing the 3% occupancy tax and the two subsequent amendments raising the total occupancy levy to 6%):

Tourism Related Expenses = 4%

Currituck County defines this category as “expenditures that, in the judgment of the Currituck County Board of Commissioners, are designed to increase the use of lodging facilities, meeting facilities, recreational facilities and convention facilities in a county by attracting tourists and business travelers to the County. This term includes tourism related capital expenditures and beach nourishment.” Past and current appropriations from this fund have included the Wild Horse Fund, beach nourishment, beach ramps, law enforcement/public safety (fire, EMS), water/sewer.

Promotion of travel and tourism = 2%

Currituck County defines this category as “to advertise or market and area or activity, publish and distribute pamphlets and other materials, conduct market research and engage in similar promotional activities that attract tourists or business travelers to the area. The term includes administrative expenses incurred in engaging in these activities.”

Currituck Lodging Tax Revenues

Year	6% Transient Occupancy Tax Actual Revenue	4.25% North Carolina Sales Tax	2.5% Currituck Sales Tax
2001/02	\$2,828,107	\$2,003,242	\$1,178,378
2002/03	\$3,130,910	\$2,217,728	\$1,304,545
2003/04	\$3,268,297	\$2,315,044	\$1,361,790
2004/05	\$4,667,481	\$3,306,132	\$1,944,784
2005/06	\$5,322,539	\$3,770,132	\$2,217,725

Source: www.co.currituck.nc.us/tax/Occupancy_Tax_Amounts_Collected.asp

Sales tax amounts calculated by RTM based on Occupancy Tax figures

The above table shows dramatic increases in tax revenues generated by short term rental of lodging in Currituck County. Tax revenues have nearly doubled since 2001/02 and this has occurred without increasing the tax rate (last increase was 1999). It is important to recognize the large amount of sales tax revenue that is generated by lodging in addition to the Occupancy Tax.

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CCDTT Budget Analysis

The CCDTT staff is to be commended for demonstrating solid fiscal responsibility when it comes to the appropriate use of the occupancy tax funding allocated to their department.

Percentage of Total Occupancy Tax Promotion Expenditures

Note: "Promo" non-shaded rows total 100% and "PIO" shaded rows total 100%

Budget Category	2005/06	%	2006/07	%	2007/08	%
Salaries & Benefits – Promo	\$154,706	21.1%	\$261,243	17.5%	\$159,556	11.4%
Office Expenses – Promo	\$67,849	9.3%	\$229,122	15.3%	\$86,820	6.2%
Outreach – Promo	\$470,813	64.3%	\$1,005,550	67.1%	\$1,111,500	79.2%
Capital Outlay - Promo	\$39,371	5.3%	\$2,000	0.1%	\$46,000	3.2%
TOTAL Promo	\$732,739	100%	\$1,497,915	100%	\$1,403,876	100%
Salaries & Benefits – PIO	\$81,720	64.1%	\$87,939	57.6%	\$219,454	77.8%
Office Expenses - PIO	\$4,782	3.8%	\$19,300	12.6%	\$9,900	3.5%
Outreach – PIO	\$40,897	32.1%	\$45,370	29.7%	\$47,550	16.9%
Capital Outlay - PIO	\$0	0%	\$0	0%	\$5,000	1.8%
Total – PIO	\$127,398	100%	\$152,609	100%	\$281,904	100%
TOTAL - Combined	\$860,137		\$1,650,524		\$1,685,780	

Source: Currituck County 2007/08 Budget

These figures compare favorably with the standards set by the DMAI (Destination Marketing Association International). According to DMAI, salaries and benefits should fall within a 25-40% range. Marketing and outreach should be approximately 40-50%. Staffing expenses total 22% of the combined budgets for PIO and Promotion in 2007/08 which is below the DMAI recommended range of 25% - 40%.

Currituck Inquiries Collection History

Type of Inquiry	2005/06	2006/07
Advertising Generated Inquiries	9,870	66,380
Website Inquiries	364	2,182
Total Inquiries	10,234	68,562
Unique Website Visitor Sessions	14,713	82,360
Total Inquires (includes unique website visitor sessions)	24,583	148,740
Outreach Expense	\$470,813	\$1,005,550
Cost Per Inquiry (generation & fulfillment)	\$19.15	\$6.76
Visitor Center Walk-ins	13,055	26,122

RTM is impressed by the statistics in the above chart. CCDTT ramped up its advertising efforts in 2005/06 and is therefore considered a start up program. All of the 2006/07 statistics show dramatic improvement over 2005/06. While the advertising expense doubled in 2006/07 the resulting inquiries increased over 600%! As a result, the cost per inquiry came down dramatically from \$19.15 in 2005/06 to \$6.76 in 2006/07. This is a dramatic improvement in the second year of the program and confirms that the CCDTT is doing an excellent and cost efficient job of generating interest in visiting Currituck County.

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Economic Impact and Tax Relief

An analysis of the 2006 economic impact of travel and tourism in Currituck County shows the financial impact that visitors leave in the County. The figures below show the amount of tax revenue that is generated by visitors to the area, thus relieving residents of some of the tax burden of maintaining the local infrastructure. The figures below are based on 2006 data, the most recent economic impact figures that are available from the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) and the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development. The final row of the chart below shows that the tax relief per household as a result of visitors coming to Currituck County and paying state and local taxes is \$1,503.91. The huge disparity in tourism generated tax relief between Currituck County (ranked 27th largest tourism economy of the 100 counties in North Carolina) and Camden County (ranked last of the 100 counties in North Carolina) shows the impact that a beach community can have on a local economy.

2006 North Carolina Travel and Tourism Economic Impact Data by County

	Statewide	Dare	Currituck
Rank of County tourism economy in North Carolina	n/a	4/100	27/100
Total domestic travel expenditures	\$15,400,000,000	\$702,250,000	\$120,250,000
Total travel related payroll	\$3,860,000,000	\$157,810,000	\$24,400,000
Total number of travel related jobs	187,200	10,910	1,600
Total LOCAL sales tax paid by travelers	\$496,400,000	\$33,560,000	\$5,940,000
Total STATE sales tax paid by travelers	\$797,200,000	\$34,880,000	\$5,340,000
Total STATE & LOCAL sales taxes paid by travelers	\$1,293,600,000	\$68,440,000	\$11,280,000
State or County Population	8,856,505	33,935	23,116
State or County Households	3,132,013	12,960	6,902
Tax relief per capita from sales taxes paid by travelers	\$146.06	\$2016.80	\$449.03
Tax relief per household from sales taxes paid by travelers	\$413.03	\$5,280.86	\$1,503.91

	Pasquotank	Camden
Rank of County tourism economy in North Carolina	54/100	100/100
Total domestic travel expenditures	\$43,930,000	\$1,630,000
Total travel related payroll	\$7,330,000	\$200,000
Total number of travel related jobs	460	10
Total LOCAL sales tax paid by travelers	\$1,040,000	\$150,000
Total STATE sales tax paid by travelers	\$2,440,000	\$90,000
Total STATE & LOCAL sales taxes paid by travelers	\$3,480,000	\$240,000
State or County Population	39,591	9,271
State or County Households	12,907	2,662
Tax relief per capita from sales taxes paid by travelers	\$87.89	\$25.89
Tax relief per household from sales taxes paid by travelers	\$269.62	\$90.16

Notes:

- Lodging taxes are NOT included in these tax figures, only sales taxes are included.
- TIA produced the data above using its proprietary Travel Economic Impact Model (TEIM) to measure the impact of travel on the U.S. Economy. The TEIM can also estimate the economic impact of travel at the county level. *Economic impact* is represented by measures of spending, employment, payroll, business receipts and tax revenues generated by traveler spending. *Travel expenditures* are assumed to take place whenever travelers exchange money for activities considered part of their trips. Travel expenditures are allocated among states by simulating where the exchange of money for goods or service actually took place. By their nature, some travel expenditures are assumed to occur at the traveler's origin, some at his/her destination and some enroute expenditures less the sales and excise taxes imposed on those expenditures.

Data Sources:

- *The 2006 Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties*, TIA for the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development.
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 population estimate for North Carolina, Currituck, Pasquotank and Camden Counties.

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Summary of Inquiry Mail Survey Responses for Currituck County

Respondent Profile and Responses	
Demographics:	
Average age	50.06
Gender: male/female	male = 33%, female = 67%
Occupation	retired/housewife, education, business, healthcare
Median income	\$70,000
Respondent point of origin	NC, NY, PA, VA, FL, OH, IL, NJ
Characteristics:	
Travel party size: adults/children(avg.)	62% adults only; average 2.11 adults/2.34 kids
Travel planning time	1 month=12.82% 3 months=51.28% 1 year prior=38.46%
Main trip purpose	vacation/getaway, visit friends/relatives
Average length of stay	3.97 nights
Stay over a Weekend?	70.89%
Leisure trip?	80.52% leisure
Lodging type	35%=rental unit, 47%=hotel/motel, 6.41%=friends/family
Auto trip or fly/drive?	90% auto
Stop at visitor centers when traveling?	79% frequently or fairly often
Conversion – first time visit/repeat visit	12.86%=first time conversion/43.75%= total program conversion
Overall trip satisfaction	4.34
Quality of beaches	4.36
Overall appeal of area attractions	4.00
Quality of the lodging rooms	4.00
Ease of finding visitor information	3.93
Level of service and employee training	3.89
Signage and wayfinding	3.82
Lodging value received for price paid	3.82
Variety of shopping and merchandise	3.69
Range of choices for dining	3.71
Ride Knott's Island Ferry	79% did not ride ferry
Participate in watersports	23%=yes 77%=no
Participate in non-water recreation	61%=yes 39%=no
Attend a cultural event	18%=yes 82%=no
Time spent on mainland	34%= drove through/24%= 1-2days/33%= majority or entire trip

- **Currituck trip planning sources** – CCDTT Visitor Guide & website, NC Tourism website, state travel guide
- **Likes** – serene beautiful beaches, dining, shopping, visiting historic sites, wild horses
- **Dislikes** – traffic, crowds, travel distance, expense, not enough pet-friendly accommodations
- **Most visited attractions** – Currituck Beach Lighthouse, Historic Corolla Village
- **Most popular activities** – dining out, shopping, driving/sightseeing, beach/swimming
- **New products desired** – Trolley from Corolla to Manteo, dining variety
- **Desired retail shopping** – Made in NC items, T-shirts/beach souvenirs
- **Primary desired activities** – beach, shopping, sightseeing, swimming, relaxing, fishing, walking/hiking, historic sites, golf

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What kind of lodging would you like to see added in Currituck County?

More budget lodging	25.16%
Mid-price hotels such as Hilton Garden Inn, Holiday Inn Express, etc.	24.84%
Full service resort with specialty pools, kid programs, adult-only activities, etc.	19.50%
Hotels with family-size suites	15.72%
More bed & breakfast inns	15.09%
Modern full-service hotel with restaurant	11.01%
RV parks/camping	9.43%
Survey Sample (N) =	318

Average Daily and Total Trip Spending Per Travel Party

Spending Category	Rental Visitors	Hotel/Motel/ Other Visitors	Overall
<i>Lodging</i>	\$210.45	\$121.21	\$162.59
<i>Food/meals</i>	\$67.00	\$62.81	\$63.78
<i>Transportation, fuel, etc.</i>	\$43.26	\$47.82	\$50.53
<i>Shopping</i>	\$33.10	\$63.85	\$46.86
<i>Attractions/amusements</i>	\$29.48	\$41.87	\$37.34
Average Daily Expense	\$383.29	\$337.56	\$361.10

Other destinations chosen for vacations/getaways:

- Did not travel/None yet (46)
- Future visit planned (6)
- Avon (4)
- Emerald Isle, NC (3)
- Hawaii (3)
- Myrtle Beach, SC (3)
- Orlando, FL (3)
- Wilmington, NC (3)
- Corolla, NC (2)
- Kill Devil Hills (2)
- Kitty Hawk (2)
- Nags Head (2)
- Ocean City, MD (2)
- Tennessee (2)
- Virginia Beach (2)
- Williamsburg, VA (2)

In reviewing the full list of other destinations chosen, the only pattern RTM detected was a proclivity of those who live in the drive markets to Currituck County to visit other popular destinations within the same region. There does not appear to be any particular threat to travel to Currituck County.

Summary of Attraction Manager Survey Report:

In analysis of the lodging data collected in this report, RTM noted the following overall observations:

- **Age of attractions:** Of the respondents who answered, we found most of the attractions to be quite new, most opening within the last few years.
- **Attractions attendance:** Two of the respondents were too new to have records. Of those that did have records, attendance has remained steady.
- **Visitor/Guest Mix:** The respondents to this question did list out-of-towners as the bulk of their visitors. General tourists, education groups, group tours, and wedding parties made up the majority of those visiting the attractions.
- **Visitation patterns:** The summer, spring and fall months seem to be the busiest. The average time spent at the attractions was from 1-2 hours. The top feeder markets for the attractions were Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina.
- **Admission fees:** Most attractions that responded do not require admission fees.
- **Staff/budget:** Most of the attractions that responded have full-time staff with an average of 5 full-time staff members as well as volunteer staff that range from 1 to 12 members. Purchased advertising budgets for the attractions ranged from no budget at all to \$19,000.

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Study Summary and Strategic Direction

The most salient points to emerge from the 2007 travel and tourism research for Currituck County includes:

- Although the Currituck County Department of Travel and Tourism program is new (began in 2005) it has achieved outstanding success in generating inquiries and interest. It is also clear that the CCDTT drives the first-time visit and that approximately half of all visitors will return to Currituck County. Those returning do not necessarily come through the CCDTT program and are more likely to make contact directly with the rental companies. Thus the continued partnership between the CCDTT and the rental companies is critically important.
- Leisure tourism makes up the vast majority (approximately 95%) of travel to Currituck County. There is also a small amount of corporate/commercial/business travel. It is a family leisure destination where visitors appreciate the laid-back, scenic, serene Carolina Coast beaches. It is not as commercial as Nags Head, Manteo and other Outer Banks sites. It is a slower pace, quiet beach setting where time-impooverished families can reconnect and relax together.
- There are approximately 3,200 lodging units (95% are rental houses – there are approximately 200 hotel/motel rooms) in Currituck County. The later spring and summer seasons are the peak, earning approximately 30% of the total annual revenues. The remaining 70% of the revenues are spread out over the shoulder and off-season periods.
- Point of origin for visitors is Virginia, the Mid-Atlantic and the east coast primarily, with Ohio and the Mid-West and southern U.S. making up the remainder. Approximately 90% of the visitors to Currituck County drive to the destination.
- The average trip length is 3.97 nights. The average trip expenditure is \$1,521.
- Tax relief is the primary benefit to Currituck County residents from tourism. Currently the annual per-household tax relief is approximately \$1,504.
- 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.

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Key Strategies:

RTM recommends the following key strategies for Currituck County:

1. **Acknowledge that the CCDTT has established a good initial foundation and the time is right for serious tourism strategic thinking.** The CCDTT has accomplished outstanding results for a new program and should be acknowledged for its success. RTM was impressed to see the level of support that community leaders have committed to the continued support of the local tourism industry. An accomplished tourism marketing agency, leadership and a willing community is a recipe for success. It should also be acknowledged that the time is right for serious future plans to be initiated that will sustain this economic engine long into the future.

2. **Tracking and growing the per-visitor expenditures and tax relief is the primary objective of the CCDTT.** Currituck County leaders need to clearly understand that it is growth in total *per-visitor expenditures* that creates success. They have measured lodging spending. But they have not mastered understanding the total spending and driving the most beneficial economic impact and tax relief for Currituck County residents. Visitors spend money and make a significant economic impact. "Tax relief" is created when visitors pay taxes and thus, relieve the local residents from generating that tax revenue. The current visitor generated tax relief is approximately **\$1,502 annually per household in Currituck County**. This is the frontier for continued growth and benefit to Currituck County.

Total Trip Spending for Rentals (Daily Expenditures x 3.97 nights)

Spending Category	Total	6% Occ. Tax	4.25% NC Tax	2.5% County Tax
<i>Lodging</i>	\$835.49	\$50.13	\$35.51	\$20.89
<i>Food/meals</i>	\$265.99		\$11.30	\$6.65
<i>Transportation, fuel, etc.</i>	\$171.74		\$7.30	\$4.29
<i>Shopping</i>	\$131.07		\$5.57	\$3.28
<i>Attractions/amusements</i>	\$117.04		\$4.97	\$2.93
Average Trip Total	\$1,521.33	\$50.13	\$64.65	\$38.04

Another way to look at this is to extrapolate total trip expenses based on lodging occupancy:

- 3,200 Approximate number of total lodging units in Currituck County
- X 365 (days) Available lodging unit nights per year =
- 1,168,000 Total available unit nights - divided by 38% avg. annual occupancy =
- 443,840 Sold units - divided by 3.97 nights
- 111,798 Total trips to Currituck County
- X \$1,521.33 Total average trip expense =
- \$170,081,651 Total visitor revenues generated in Currituck County

- \$835.49 total lodging per trip x 111,798 sold trips = \$93,406,111.02 x .06% occupancy tax = \$5,604,366

It is sometimes surprising for community leaders to realize that there is such a huge amount of daily spending from visitors. Especially when one computes dining, shopping and transportation expenses, it is easier to see the bigger picture of economic impact that is generated by travel and tourism.

Executive Summary

3. **Establish a clear mission statement for the CCDTT:**
RTM recommends: ***“Putting heads in beds and making cash registers ring.”***
4. **Commit to sustaining for the long-term the unique distinctions that make Currituck County desirable to visitors.** According to research, this includes:
 - Beautiful, serene, non-commercialized, family-oriented Carolina coastal beaches (very distinct from all beaches north of Currituck County)
 - Wild horses
 - Currituck Lighthouse and historic village in CorollaSimply put, the “personality” of Currituck County is the laid-back, serene, non-commercialized coastal and beach that is mentally pictured when one thinks the words “Carolina Coast”. Currituck is distinct from the other Outer Banks in that it is less congested, less commercialized, and more serene. It is the quieter, more remote family-beach part of the Outer Banks where wild horses can survive. It is the perfect personification of “Carolina Coast.” The leaders of Currituck County need to adopt this as a strategy that shapes actions in zoning, economic development, housing, transportation, and all other factors that serve to visually define Currituck County. ***This “Carolina Coast” personality is the essence that is Currituck County - it needs to be protected, preserved, and sustained for the long term.***
5. **Establish effective gateways and visitor information center/sources for those traveling from the north.** Currituck County, especially the mainland, is missing a huge opportunity in not providing visitor information near its northern border with Virginia. An effective gateway and visitor interpretive center is needed to create “a sense of place” for Currituck County and drive substantially increased expenditures on the mainland. This should be considered one of the top priorities.
6. **Establish effective offices for CCDTT and grow professional capability and skill sets of staff**
 - Establish sufficient and efficient offices in northern portion of Currituck County
 - Professional training recommended for staff to master tourism marketing skill sets
7. **Marketing priorities for CCDTT:**
 - Outsource fulfillment of inquiries
 - Refine logo, images, and marketing messages based on top “attractors” and distinctions of Currituck County (Carolina coastal beaches, wild horses, lighthouse, family-oriented). Primary objective of marketing materials is to drive visitation and increase per-visitor expenditures.
 - Continuously tracking expenditures, occupancy, and results
 - Cooperative marketing with other Outer Banks destinations
 - Priority marketing tools include:
 - Internet website (www.visitcurrituck.com)
 - Visitor guide
 - Advertising in State of North Carolina Internet website and state travel guide
 - Public relations efforts targeted at winning coverage of Currituck County distinctions in tourism media (newspapers, magazines, TV)
 - E-marketing, blogging and social media focused on the distinctions of Currituck County

Executive Summary

8. Monitor satisfaction levels with tourism products in Currituck County. All ratings below a 4.0 are considered a failure.

Amenity	Inquiry Survey Average
Quality of beaches	4.36
Quality of the lodging	4.00
Overall appeal of the attractions in the area	4.00
Ease of finding visitor information	3.93
Lodging value you received for the price paid	3.82
Level of service/employee training	3.89
Signage and wayfinding	3.82
Variety of shopping & merchandise	3.69
Range of choices for dining	3.71

9. Understand the activities preferred by visitors:

Activities	Inquiry Survey
<i>Dining out</i>	86.75%
<i>Shopping</i>	81.93%
<i>Driving/sightseeing</i>	72.29%
<i>Beach swimming</i>	71.08%
<i>Visit a historic site</i>	53.01%
<i>Sleep late/nap/rest</i>	50.60%
<i>Visit a park</i>	39.76%
<i>Looking for wild horses</i>	37.35%
<i>Birding/wildlife viewing</i>	28.92%
<i>Visit a museum</i>	27.71%
<i>Fishing/crabbing</i>	25.30%
<i>Biking</i>	22.89%

Activities	Inquiry Survey
<i>Antique shopping</i>	21.69%
<i>Boating</i>	16.87%
<i>Water sports</i>	16.87%
<i>4-wheel driving on beach</i>	15.66%
<i>Golf</i>	14.46%
<i>Attend a cultural performance</i>	13.25%
<i>Other (specify)</i>	9.64%
<i>Attend a festival</i>	8.43%
<i>Camping</i>	7.23%
<i>Business</i>	6.02%
<i>Visit a winery/vineyard</i>	6.02%
<i>Convention/meeting</i>	2.41%

10. Enhance existing products, attractions and activities to meet visitor expectations. Develop new products that fit the enhanced positioning.

- Enhance the visitor experience at the following:
 - More dynamic interpretation at Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge
 - More interpretation at Currituck County Historic Jail and Courthouse
 - Better “packaging” as well as improved signage and promotion for the tourism components at Corolla Village.....better connection with Currituck Heritage Park, the lighthouse and Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education
- New products that RTM recommends include:
 - A “Coastal Carolina” lifestyle commercial village on the mainland with lodging, shops, dining, entertainment
 - More dining options that feature “Coastal Carolina” unique foods
 - Merchandising of Currituck County tourism logo items including t-shirts and other garments, beach bags and a wide variety of other logo items. These should be sold in the visitor center as well as other retail outlets to continue building awareness of the distinctions of Currituck County.

Executive Summary

11. Conduct on-going scientific research to monitor and track results.

- Monthly lodging survey
- Annual visitor profile, conversion and expenditure survey
- Annual evaluation of inquiry point-of-origin
- Monthly website user analysis
- Monthly inquiry database “data mining” and continued partnership with rental companies for development of repeat visitor database
 - Look for shoulder and off-season potentials
 - Encourage repeat visitation

Recommended Positioning Strategy

- Most popular activities:
 - Dining out
 - Shopping
 - Driving/sightseeing
 - Beach/swimming
 - Visit a historic site
 - Sleep late/nap/rest
 - Visit a park
 - Looking for wild horses
- Likes:
 - Beaches/ocean/scenery/natural beauty
 - Lighthouse
 - Relaxing/peaceful/serene
- Dislikes:
 - Traffic/crowds
 - Desire more dining options

Beaches are among the most compelling destinations for leisure travelers. At the same time, it is important to identify the unique distinctions a destination offers. As we’ve learned in this study, visitors see Currituck County as distinct from the other Outer Banks areas, and quite differently from other eastern coast destinations. Currituck is seen as the serenely beautiful, non-commercialized ideal family-oriented beach where wild horses roam and one finds a lighthouse and historic village. Marketing messages and materials should help potential visitors identify the “must sees” and those activities that are highly unique and perhaps can only be found in Currituck County in order to compel visitation.

The positioning statement Randall Travel Marketing recommends for increasing tourism in Currituck County:

Currituck Outer Banks, NC

***Coastal Carolina’s serene beach, wild horses,
lighthouse, and historic village***

www.visitcurrituck.com