

The Outer Banks®

OF NORTH CAROLINA
outerbanks.org

A Travel Industry Publication From The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau

Spring 2012

Visitors Bureau Takes Action to Boost Hatteras Tourism

Despite an encouraging spring and positive early lodging projections for the upcoming summer, we face some extraordinary threats and uncertainties. The Tourism Board and Visitors Bureau are responding to these challenges. What originally began as an effort to address the impact of Hurricane Irene on tourism has evolved to also consider the effect of new ORV permit fees and regulations, and more broadly, the visitor's perception of access to the Seashore and Hatteras Island.

To gauge the nature and extent of these visitor perceptions, and then to develop an action plan, we contracted with Charlotte-based agency, LKM (Loeffler Ketchum Mountjoy). LKM represented

North Carolina's state tourism office for many years and also has extensive experience with crisis and image management.

They hit the ground running,

conducting a social media audit to look at visitor comments on several key social media sites both immediately after Irene and in the

Hatteras continues on Page 5



Message from the Chairman

I first came to the Outer Banks with friends as a young man in the early 70's enthused about hang gliding on Jockey's Ridge. That led to starting a business behind the old Nags Head Casino and then things "really took off". It was a dream come true to be able to make a living on the beautiful Outer Banks.

But like other Outer Banks entrepreneurs, we had great

business in the summer, and then struggled to get through the rest of the year. We often mused how nice it would be to have a longer tourist season, but we just couldn't figure out how to make the sun hang out longer.

In 1991, creation of the Dare County Tourism Board (a.k.a. Outer Banks Visitors Bureau) provided a means to fund tourism promotion and improvements

needed due to the impact of tourism in Dare County. It has had a positive effect. For instance, despite the Great Recession, occupancy receipts grew 8% for the four years from 2008 through 2011. But yes, our county wide unemployment rate is still much too high in the winter!

Recently, our Board of Directors

Chairman continues on Page 3

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Dare County Tourism Board, doing business as The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, is to market Dare County's Outer Banks as a premier travel destination. Emphasis is placed on growing visitation to the area during less-than-peak times, September through May, while sustaining our tourism-related economic base during peak visitation months. The Tourism Board's focus is driven by balancing the necessity of tourism revenue with preservation and protection of our natural, cultural and historic resources.

The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau is the lead marketing and promotional agency for the destination and is funded by 1% of the occupancy tax and 1% of the prepared meals tax collected in Dare County.

2012 DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD

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The Business of Tourism is published by the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, written and edited by Aaron Tuell. We welcome information pertaining to Dare County's tourism industry. Please send news or changes of address to:

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Chairman continued from Page 1



*Ralph Buxton, Chairman
Dare County Tourism Board*

has begun to develop a vision statement for the Bureau. The process has gotten us thinking about the future and the role of the Bureau in shaping good experiences for our visitors, economic success for our businesses, and a high quality of life of our residents. But in looking to the future, we need new avenues of growth in the off-season that are less dependent on the draw of the beach and the sun.

A Board goal this year is the evaluation of future alternatives for use of the Windmill Point property on the sound side in Nags Head. This 10 acres upland property presents the Bureau and its property partner, the Town of Nags Head, a unique opportunity to grow our shoulder business. We have retained consultants to help us explore several options including a conference center and a multi-use facility, among others. The Board considers it prudent to look at the potential short and long term uses of the valuable property in order to plan for short-term improvements and to begin to plan for the best possible long-term use.

Event promotion has become a very effective way to achieve our mission of promoting the off-season. Events such as the Marathon and the Taste of the Beach supported by scores of local volunteers attract many enthusiasts who might not otherwise have visited the area. Weddings have also become a booming business. Realizing the success that events have enjoyed, the Bureau has increased its support of new events by refocusing staff and providing more funding. Planning and funding for this fall's inaugural Outer Banks Seafood Festival at the Windmill Point site is well underway with support from the Bureau as well as Outer Banks Catch, the Chamber of Commerce, the Outer Banks Restaurant Association and many volunteers.

In summary, I'm happy to report that we are making good progress in growing the Outer Banks tourism economy and hence a better standard of living for our residents. Thanks for your support of the Bureau, and please let me know if you have any thoughts or ideas.

Finally, I would like to thank my good friend John Bone, who is retiring from the Chamber of Commerce after 29 years of service. As Chamber President, John was instrumental in getting State legislation passed that authorized funding for the Outer Banks Visitor Bureau. Thanks John, and enjoy a well deserved retirement!

Ralph Buxton
Chairman of the Board
Dare County Tourism Board
ralphbuxton@gmail.com

Report from the Executive Director

As we get ready to welcome guests back for another summer season on the Outer Banks, I'm reminded of the importance of relationships. People are quick to mention the beautiful beaches as the main reason for coming here, but I'd suggest that the visitor's interactions and experiences with our local businesses, and the locals, are every bit as influential in determining whether a first-time visitor will become a lifelong visitor.

I recently went to a seminar sponsored by the Chamber. One of the speaker's exercises involved listing the things we do to prepare for friends or relatives as guests in our home. Then he asked what we do to prepare for visitors to our area.

He was making a larger point -- customer service is expected, it's the price of entry these days. Going the extra mile, relating to the visitor and providing experiences that distinguish the Outer Banks from other places create lasting impressions. Our visitors are our guests.

The Visitors Bureau has been active on several fronts, working to connect visitors with the Outer Banks' unique people and places. Certainly, Hatteras Island is a key part of what makes this destination special. We remain committed to ensuring a full and quick tourism recovery for the Island despite weather and access issues.

We've launched a new advertising campaign, "OBX Marks the Spot," with a nod to an adventurous spirit and the many treasures found on the Outer Banks. The campaign is running in magazine and online, and with a couple of other tie-ins through radio and outdoor.

Events continue to be an important tool for growing shoulder and off-season business. The inaugural

"OBXmas Weekends" holiday promotion let visitors know of the great activities happening Thanksgiving through Christmas and coincided with a more than 20% gain in December occupancy tax collections. We look forward to growing this program in the years to come.

Planning continues on the Outer Banks Seafood Festival, scheduled for October 20th, 2012. This event will celebrate our seafaring heritage and incredible local seafood. The website for this event should go live soon at outerbanksseafoodfestival.org. You'll receive materials to help you market the event to your guests, but in the meantime, please feel free to let your visitors know to save the date.

Speaking of websites, please be sure to visit the newly redesigned outerbanks.org to check your business information and take full advantage of the new opportunities to promote your business with additional space for photos, events and packages and specials. We're also pleased to announce the launch of the Visitors Bureau's first mobile website, expected to go live shortly.

The Visitors Bureau's success in promoting the Outer Banks is due in large part to the ongoing relationships we enjoy with each of you. I sincerely appreciate all that you do to make the Outer Banks a premier travel destination and a family tradition for so many of our guests. Please let me know how we can better assist you.

Lee Nettles
Executive Director
Outer Banks Visitors Bureau
nettles@outerbanks.org



Seminars Connect Locals to Event Development Resources

From a tourism and community development standpoint, local events offer a lot of possibilities. They attract overnight visitation, bring local residents and visitors together to celebrate the culture and beauty of the area, and they often serve as important fund-raisers for local non-profits at a time when such funding can be scarce.

The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, recognizing the value and potential of local events, hosted event development seminars earlier this spring in Nags Head and Avon.

Seminar attendees included several Dare County travel partners, local non-profits and the general public. The event seminars shared information about the services we offer, such as, grant funding, promotional assistance and consultative support. Just as importantly, the meetings connected people with the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau staff directly involved with each of these services. The discussion was energetic, as the group began to share ideas for new events and forge relationships with one another. The Visitors Bureau has recently

added staff, promotional funding and is in the process of creating a new grant category to expand its assistance of start-up and established events. If your group or non-profit is interested in developing a Dare County event, and that event is likely to generate overnight visitation, chances are we can help.

Please contact our Tourism Sales and Events Manager, Lorrie Love 473-2138 or love@outerbanks.org

2012-2013 School Schedules

District	Summer Break	New School Year
Alexandria, VA	June 20	Sept 04
Arlington, VA	June 21	Sept 04
Baltimore, MD	June 14	Aug 27
Chesapeake, VA	June 14	Sept 04
Chevy Chase, MD	June 13	Aug 27
Columbus, MD	May 31	Aug 22
Durham, NC	June 07	Aug 27
Fairfax, VA	June 19	Sept 04
Hampton, VA	June 15	Sept 04
Newark, NJ	June 20	Sept 06
Norfolk, VA	June 15	TBA
Philadelphia, PA	June 14	TBA
Pittsburgh, PA	June 13	TBA
Portsmouth, VA	June 15	TBA
Raleigh, NC	June 07	Sept 04
Richmond, VA	June 20	Sept 03
Trenton, NJ	June 20	Sept 05
VA Beach, VA	June 15	Sept 04
Washington, DC	June 14	Aug 27

eGuide Readers (formerly Downloads)

Month	11/12	10/11	09/10
July	6,617	9,526	5,758
August	5,151	8,727	4,804
September	2,225	6,023	2,752
October	1,600	2,859	4,069
November	1,201	1,792	1,735
December	1,320	1,475	3,459
January	3,976	4,222	2,149
February	5,652	4,312	2,154
March	6,215	5,163	3,232
April	6,778	4,334	6,536
May		4,983	11,053
June		6,224	11,298
<i>YTD Totals</i>	<i>40,735</i>	<i>48,433</i>	<i>36,648</i>
TOTALS	33,957	59,640	58,999

months that followed. Additionally, LKM has conducted interviews with representatives from Outer Banks and Hatteras Island businesses to better understand what you are hearing from customers.

One thing that is clear – we are all in this together. What the visitor perceives of Hatteras Island impacts the whole of the Outer Banks. The good news is visitors do not appear to have significant lingering negative perceptions related to the last two year’s hurricanes. If anything, the decision window for fall vacations may become shorter, but we believe this gap can be overcome by marketing, moving visitors from

“wait and see” into “let’s go!” Taking no chances on a sluggish spring, we produced and placed a radio campaign that ran during the month of April and into the first part of May in feeder markets of Richmond, Raleigh, Tidewater and Greenville NC. This was in addition to our typical spring advertising online, in magazines and on select outdoor billboards.

A fundamental part of LKM’s longer-term strategy involves public relations support. LKM staff will be working in concert with our already aggressive editorial efforts to double down and fill that “bucket” of positive stories, those articles that

appear in big name publications or news sites, and drill down to highlight the people and communities that make Hatteras Island and the Outer Banks so unique. Emphasize the great things visitors can do.

If you have a neat story idea or a suggestion for a good people story featuring an employee, friend or neighbor that embodies the spirit of what it means to be a true Outer Banker, contact Aaron Tuell, Public Relations Manager at 473-2138 or tuell@outerbanks.org.

OBX
marks the spot

It's no coincidence visitors call us OBX.
After all, isn't "X" where you find the treasure?

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outerbanks.org Internet Activity

outerbanks.org Internet Activity												
Inquiry Fulfillment			Unique Visitors (Absolute)			Visits (User Sessions)			Page Views			
MONTH	11/12	10/11	09/10	11/12	10/11	09/10	11/12	10/11	09/10	11/12	10/11	09/10
July	18,794	21,475	26,888	275,413	250,371	251,131	355,681	323,420	322,296	1,748,978	1,465,587	1,507,785
August	15,170	25,382	15,265	270,772	228,534	200,821	361,053	288,677	255,236	1,659,596	1,178,976	1,130,847
September	19,822	25,146	11,666	129,637	152,931	131,530	172,573	191,757	164,317	664,951	727,479	676,922
October	31,990	21,646	19,064	100,058	87,248	100,081	128,230	109,508	120,758	489,522	424,356	422,248
November	30,746	13,899	20,056	81,530	62,758	77,563	102,040	77,153	93,838	351,630	289,949	319,436
December	13,329	4,998	11,716	78,458	51,277	50,542	98,287	62,356	62,567	368,850	278,242	248,696
January	17,225	13,618	15,923	133,256	119,169	110,211	170,694	151,215	139,568	651,221	808,877	647,553
February	28,919	20,777	22,546	137,965	133,662	106,173	172,558	167,300	133,998	638,470	887,478	631,616
March	39,558	33,360	34,204	165,699	170,231	154,161	212,236	215,381	196,139	760,107	1,150,821	912,906
April	44,573	35,355	44,051	176,197	165,435	209,037	228,928	208,685	255,848	819,646	1,072,587	1,047,159
May		37,221	52,536		218,524	245,722		276,280	303,975		1,400,588	1,264,363
June		35,026	32,743		274,430	297,169		351,547	372,696		1,741,284	1,557,089
Year to Date	260,126	215,656	221,379	1,548,985	1,421,616	1,391,250	2,002,280	1,795,452	1,744,565	8,152,971	8,284,352	7,545,168
Total	260,126	287,903	306,658	1,548,985	1,914,570	1,934,141	2,002,280	2,423,279	2,421,236	8,152,971	11,426,224	10,366,620

In January 2011, Google Analytics replaced Urchin for website tracking. User Sessions is now called Visits.

Gross Occupancy by Class 2011-2009									
Vacation Rental Homes			Hotel/Motel			Cottage Courts			
MONTH	2012	2011	2010	2012	2011	2010	2012	2011	2010
January	3,024,434	3,474,206	3,477,044	1,131,377	1,006,701	884,850	76,078	68,657	65,355
February	1,910,908	1,588,185	1,413,961	1,131,307	1,130,152	866,825	73,574	63,916	40,287
March	2,826,596	1,968,641	1,426,746	2,247,260	1,703,998	1,881,160	171,375	122,208	84,824
April		7,683,428	6,008,385		3,989,460	3,929,006		293,817	243,332
May		15,533,680	13,944,097		6,182,404	5,517,006		485,843	535,806
June		49,741,594	49,291,715		8,293,465	8,078,814		932,815	837,422
July		94,563,458	86,537,110		11,967,859	11,816,598		1,580,909	1,384,122
August		78,909,645	80,413,679		8,944,456	10,096,402		1,107,528	1,220,880
September		29,888,400	27,814,950		5,483,326	5,483,536		438,948	466,718
October		12,605,453	12,245,549		3,720,593	3,901,887		368,809	338,795
November		4,655,384	4,913,329		1,789,977	1,732,780		189,901	179,993
December		1,737,073	1,383,324		1,029,752	730,071		66,011	165,914
Year to Date	7,761,938	7,031,032	6,317,751	4,509,944	3,840,851	3,632,835	321,027	254,781	190,466
Totals	7,761,938	302,349,147	288,919,889	4,509,944	55,242,143	54,918,935	321,027	5,719,362	5,563,448

**NATIONAL
TRAVEL
& TOURISM
WEEK** MAY 5 - 13, 2012
ON THE OUTER BANKS



Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Gross Meals Summary 2011-2006

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
January	5,908,401	5,149,079	4,946,077	5,553,193	5,315,203	5,652,092
February	6,001,197	5,600,305	5,306,714	5,878,828	5,901,277	5,864,520
March	9,324,697	8,342,477	7,944,634	7,371,099	9,906,602	8,368,675
April		13,937,220	12,643,388	12,570,914	10,696,837	13,018,031
May		17,884,885	17,420,030	17,237,550	17,902,993	17,030,910
June		28,170,717	25,929,735	25,850,095	26,110,903	26,398,208
July		36,454,367	35,295,259	32,687,202	33,163,197	32,620,688
August		27,024,599	31,515,361	31,285,408	32,095,228	31,213,494
September		19,239,630	18,678,839	19,444,780	17,335,174	19,572,423
October		13,084,800	13,295,890	12,630,255	12,192,193	12,942,026
November		8,587,922	8,822,724	8,298,475	8,044,142	9,001,275
December		7,391,106	5,983,306	6,123,554	6,457,727	7,449,495
Year to Date	21,234,295	19,091,861	18,197,425	18,803,120	21,123,082	19,885,287
Total	21,234,295	190,867,107	187,781,957	184,931,353	185,121,476	189,131,837

Gross Occupancy by Class 2011-2009

	Bed and Breakfasts			Campgrounds			Time Shares			Totals		
	2012	2011	2010	2012	2011	2010	2012	2011	2010	2012	2011	2010
Jan	25,893	21,014	42,657	22,069	55,780	20,954	9,383	2,407	3,446	4,289,234	4,628,765	4,494,306
Feb	55,881	30,638	38,729	29,432	60,029	23,072	12,721	5,197	3,128	3,213,823	2,878,117	2,386,002
Mar	76,104	156,535	88,309	106,917	125,528	89,272	22,429	13,246	1,978	5,450,681	4,090,156	3,572,289
Apr		209,481	161,884		282,296	229,152		30,639	21,965		12,489,121	10,593,724
May		286,926	262,983		486,979	479,237		35,183	29,983		23,011,015	20,819,112
June		320,837	231,505		871,358	867,967		81,561	79,207		60,241,630	59,386,630
July		413,944	399,950		1,493,221	1,500,079		188,338	145,606		110,207,729	101,783,465
Aug		244,708	330,402		693,221	879,107		143,828	144,211		90,043,386	93,084,681
Sept		174,824	161,958		<13,383>	321,440		51,113	33,674		36,023,228	34,282,276
Oct		171,544	219,863		41,776	261,792		26,733	32,233		16,934,908	17,000,119
Nov		79,856	87,059		61,416	136,529		18,720	12,355		6,795,253	7,062,045
Dec		91,818	53,707		9,927	41,169		12,079	7,163		2,946,610	2,381,348
YTD	157,878	208,187	169,695	158,418	241,337	133,298	44,533	20,850	8,552	12,953,738	11,597,038	10,452,597
Totals	157,878	2,202,125	2,079,006	158,418	4,168,147	4,849,770	44,533	608,994	514,949	12,953,738	370,289,918	356,845,997

Redesigned OuterBanks.org Goes Live

By now, many of you have probably noticed the new look of OuterBanks.org, the official tourism website of the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. Aside from the fresh new look and feel, there are some user-friendly functions, for both the visitor and for travel partner businesses. This was the first major roots-to-leaves redesign of OuterBanks.org since going live in the 90's.

The site is designed to connect visitors with Outer Banks experiences. You'll notice bold picture tabs right on the homepage to take you to some of our most popular activities, such as Lighthouses, First Flight, The OBX Top 10, Fishing, and Upcoming Events. The banner or "hero" images for each of these experiences will change periodically, particularly the

Upcoming Events title picture, which changes to promote fun things to do with approaching dates.

Speaking of events, you'll notice each page of the website has special call-out "ads" with visuals and descriptions for things we're trying to highlight at a given time, like upcoming events, or Travel Guide and Getaway Card requests, or the new NPS regulations for ORV use. Another way we've improved the visitor's ability to connect with experiences is by improving the site navigation. Now, they can sort businesses and service providers by category, sub-category, location and even alphabetically, thanks to our new built-in database. Also, you'll find promotions and specials noted alongside the business' listing with a Deals \$ icon directing to that deal within the website's Offers and Packages page.

On the back-end, Dare County business partners can now register for their own account and add things to the OBX events calendar, add photos and special deals, or edit business data. Partners can edit and upload into a preview "hopper" which will go live upon review by OBVB staff members. Or, you can just contact us and our web staff will help you as they've done in the past!

Please double check your listing on the new OuterBanks.org and make sure you're looking at the new site (you might need to clear cache or refresh your browser) and contact our web department if you see something that needs changing, or if you want to register for an account and access your listing information directly. For those of you tracking analytics, please make sure your reports are referencing the new OuterBanks.org page addresses instead of the old ones.

Remember that we can always use fresh pictures of your business and the experiences you provide. We're here to help the public see the best of what you have to offer when they're making those important travel decisions. You can reach webmaster Allison Wyant at 473-2138 or webmaster@outerbanks.org

One last note, the Visitors Bureau's first-ever mobile website is also scheduled to go live any day now. This platform will allow smartphone users to access business information, maps, directions and deals, hopefully getting these visitors to spend more and do more while on the OBX.

