VISIT ST. MARY’S MD
MARKETING, SALES, AND MEDIA STRATEGY
FY2020
ABOUT THIS PLAN

As required by the Tourism Master Operating Agreement (MOA), approved by the Commissioners of St. Mary’s County in June 2018, and as amended by the Annual Supplement to the MOA on June 19, 2018, Visit St. Mary’s MD is submitting its formal marketing, sales, and media plan to the St. Mary’s County Administrator, Department of Economic Development, and Commissioners of St. Mary’s County.

This plan covers the fiscal year 2020 (FY2020) from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. Any addendums and changes to the plan will be re-submitted to the aforementioned parties by January 1, 2020.

The sections submitted to the County include:

- The annual objectives and goals of Visit St. Mary’s MD
- The FY2020 summary marketing plan in support of the achievement of these objectives.
- The FY2020 budget, including an explanation of expenditures provided for by the budget in excess of $25,000.
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About Visit St. Mary’s MD

As the destination marketing organization for St. Mary’s County, Visit St. Mary’s MD is responsible, in partnership with the County, for developing, promoting, and marketing the County of St. Mary’s as a premier visitor destination for leisure, meetings and sporting events for individual travelers and national and regional organizations.

Established by the Public-Private Sales and Marketing Services Master Operating Agreement of 2018, Visit St. Mary’s MD is the County’s first public-private partnership focused on spearheading a locally and regionally coordinated marketing effort to promote the County as a premier destination.

As one of the best levers for driving economic growth, tourism in Maryland is responsible for supporting 146,012 jobs (FY2017)* and benefits virtually every sector of the economy. Additionally, tourism generates close to $2.35 billion in state and local taxes, with visitors spending nearly $17.3 billion in Maryland each year – 95% of which is spent at small businesses. In FY2017, tourism to St. Mary’s County saw a total direct consumer tax impact of $6,609,713.

Visit St. Mary’s operations are supported by a portion of the County’s accommodations tax plus grant and co-op funding collected and distributed by the State of Maryland.

For industry and partner information about Visit St. Mary’s MD, please visit www.VisitStMarysMD.com/industry.

For information about the boundless travel experiences available in St. Mary’s, please visit the Visit St. Mary’s MD consumer website at www.VisitStMarysMD.com.

*Source: Maryland Office of Tourism Development
Visit St. Mary’s MD Mission and Vision

Visit St. Mary’s Mission

Visit St. Mary’s serves the community and economy of St. Mary’s County by designing, developing, and supporting the County’s tourism assets and by attracting overnight visitors for the economic benefit of the County.

Visit St. Mary’s Vision

The Visit St. Mary’s vision is to be the premier weekend destination for the mid-Atlantic region and the most attractive tourism destination in the Capital region. Visit St. Mary’s strives to help shape, promote, and champion a nationally renowned heritage and historic brand while complimenting the tourism experience with modern tourism attractions. The organization seeks to engage the community in developing a local culture that complements St. Mary’s County and welcomes visitors.

Visit St. Mary’s Brand Promise

Visit St. Mary’s is a passionate steward for the St. Mary’s County brand, its history, its heritage, and its future. The organization actively embraces the fun, active, and hospitable lifestyle the County represents and is a leader in adopting industry best practices for offering and providing programs that exemplify destination leadership.
Our Role in St. Mary’s County

Visit St. Mary’s MD plays a unique role as the first private non-profit destination marketing organization for St. Mary’s County.

We focus our efforts on delivering programs and platforms that increase awareness and enhance the image of St. Mary’s County among both domestic and international travelers, with a focus on the mid-Atlantic region. In addition to promoting the County as a premier travel destination through consumer and travel-trade marketing, advertising, events, and promotions, we work with the St. Mary’s County Government to ensure the best interests of the County are front-and-center of our operations.

The collective and successful efforts of Visit St. Mary’s, Visit Maryland, and St. Mary’s County will increase the desire and ability of overnight visitation to the County, creating jobs essential to the economy and providing opportunities for its citizens.
Situation Analysis

A Growing Destination Marketing Organization

New Ground to Cover

Visit St. Mary’s is in its first full-year of operations. While the Division of Tourism had a long and fruitful history with the County, the chance to develop and grow a new organization presents its own set of opportunities and challenges. Additionally, Visit St. Mary’s continues to follow the Commissioner-approved recommendations set out by the County’s Tourism and Hospitality Master Plan (THMP) to improve the tourism product of the County and enhance marketing activities.

Tourism Economy Growth – Statewide Information

Slowing growth demands strong marketing plans

Each year, the Maryland Office of Tourism – in conjunction with the Maryland Tourism Development Board and the Maryland Department of Commerce – reports on the contributions that the travel and tourism industry has made to the state’s economy. While these reports paint our County’s economic picture with a broad brush, we can utilize the state’s official information to inform our own decisions moving forward.

The most recent economic data comes from Fiscal Year 2017. Statewide in year 2017 visitor spending reached $17.7 billion, growing for eight straight years and increasing by 2.5% in the lodging sector. While overall retail and recreation sales are down, lodging and restaurant/bar sales saw continued growth. Despite the growth in sales, overall visitor volume between 2016 and 2017 dropped roughly 3.48%.

For St. Mary’s County, the total direct consumer tax impact remained largely flat (0.01% growth), attributable to a decline in business visitation and a decline in overall state-wide visitation. In addition, the County’s accommodation tax collection saw a moderate drop over FY2017. Despite the drop in overall visitation numbers, spending by visitors remains a key revenue source for St. Mary’s County, generating $6,609,713 in the total direct consumer tax impact of tourism. Tourism remains a vital economic driver for St. Mary’s County.

The Competition

Regaining our share of the Maryland travel market

Despite the recent tourism gains within St. Mary’s County, our share of the overall travel market remains well below what it could be. Southern Maryland’s share of the travel market is lowest of the five regions in Maryland at 3.8% (FY2015). During FY2017, St. Mary’s County captured under 1% of the total direct consumer tax impact. Combined with Calvert and Charles Counties, the Southern Region saw under 5% of the total tourism activity throughout the state.

In this increasingly competitive environment, the work of Visit St. Mary’s is more critical than ever for the region to regain its share of the state’s travel market and accomplish the goals set by the Tourism and Hospitality Master Plan.
Visit St. Mary’s is focused on markets that supply overnight visitation. Throughout FY2020, a strong combination of consumer marketing and trade outreach will be active in each of the top 10 markets that have the potential to generate the majority of overnight visitation and spend in the County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>As the closest drive-market to St. Mary’s County, DC represents the largest portion of our day and overnight visitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>Maryland’s largest metropolitan area, and part of the Capital Region, is only 81 miles from Leonardtown, and sees significant in-state overnight visitation from its residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>At 95 miles away, Richmond is the 3rd closest metropolitan area. With a regional population of 1,263,617, there is significant potential for growth in overnight stays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Northern Virginia</td>
<td>This region of the United States, just over 60 miles away from Leonardtown, boasts 5 of the 10 richest counties in the United States with a diverse population eager to travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Philadelphia is the first of St. Mary’s “emerging” markets. Greater Philadelphia is the 6th largest metropolitan area in the United States, and under 200 miles from Leonardtown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>While Pittsburgh is roughly 100 miles further away from Leonardtown than Philadelphia, it boasts a below-average median age that could be captured with more adventurous and water-based activities that simply aren’t available in the immediate vicinity of the greater metropolitan area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>While the state has a population under 1 million, its close proximity to Maryland and burgeoning cities such as Dover and Wilmington represent a growing overnight visitation market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Southern PA</td>
<td>Southern Pennsylvania is unique in that it represents a significant amount of outdoors, hunting, fishing, and other related travel market. This is an important aspect of the St. Mary’s County tourism market, and a significant potential to drive overnight outdoor visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>The first of our “starter” markets, New York, with its high-population density, relatively young demographics, and significant spending cash represents great potential and has the ability to capture overnight and day-trips for those visiting Washington DC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>As one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country, and the largest in the southeast, Atlanta could be a key player in driving overnight visitation. Situated around 600 miles from Leonardtown, marketing strategies would play on long-haul travel and those who are coming to the Capital Region. As it is also home to the world’s busiest airport by volume (over 100 million passengers), there is potential to market and reach more visitors than ever before.</td>
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Marketing Plan

“We are in a unique position to greatly expand and develop new marketing programs that add value to the County, while strengthening the tourism product, in ways that will attract overnight visitation to the County like never before.”

- Jason Aul
  Executive Director, Visit St. Mary’s MD

Objectives

- Change perceptions and drive positive awareness of St. Mary’s County as a travel destination in order to increase overnight visitation.
- Focus FY2020 and FY2021 consumer campaign activity in the markets that have the greatest potential to generate the strongest return on investment for our marketing efforts.
- Create and add value for the St. Mary’s tourism industry (hotels, attractions, restaurants, etc) by developing and executing programs and campaigns that support the objectives of the Tourism and Hospitality Master Plan.
- Expand marketing reach to key markets that have the potential to drive overnight visitation.
- Alight efforts with the State of Maryland / Visit Maryland to amplify Visit St. Mary’s presence in tradeshows, sales missions, workshops/seminars, and other trade outreach and consumer marketing programs.
- Build engagement, trust, and advocacy for Visit St. Mary’s through strategic communications and industry relations.
- Collaborate with St. Mary’s County Government to ensure strategies benefit the County.
Goals
Visit St. Mary’s will track and measure success based on improvements and increases related to:
Awareness and perception of St. Mary’s County as a mid-Atlantic overnight destination, intent to travel, and actual visitation and spend.

1. Achieve increased campaign awareness levels in consumer media target markets.
2. Improve image and perceptions of St. Mary’s County as an easily accessible destination and weekend vacation.
3. Increase the intent to travel to St. Mary’s County.
4. Increase the collection of the accommodations tax to further improve Visit St. Mary’s marketing efforts.
5. Initiate and expand Visit St. Mary’s presence at tradeshows for weddings, sports, group travel, and consumer travel.
6. Maintain positive sentiment across social and digital marketing channels.
7. Increase active “fan” community year-over-year through targeted promotions, advertising, and related content with a heavy focus on social media.
8. Increase overall impressions of marketing activity.
9. Maximize the organization’s return-on-investment for all marketing and sales strategies.

Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Supports These Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invest in marketing programs that will maximize results in our 10 key markets</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new co-op marketing opportunities that add, create, or amplify value to County tourism industry</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase awareness and perceptions of Visit St. Mary’s.</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance the content, functionality, and user experience on all digital platforms</td>
<td>1, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire content (online and print) that inspires engagement and promotes travel to the County</td>
<td>2, 3, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With County and State partners, increase collaboration to maximize reach and exposure</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
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Challenges and Opportunities

*Getting on the Map*

One of the largest barriers to increased visitation is the perception that St. Mary’s County is inaccessible, that it is far away, and that there is not enough to keep visitors here for more than a day. As champions and residents of St. Mary’s County, we know far too well that the area is bursting with opportunity, and that there truly is something for everyone.

An additional challenge is competition we have throughout the region. Whether it be wine country in Virginia, the big cities of DC and Baltimore, or the coastal charm of the Eastern Shore, Visit St. Mary’s has a lot of work ahead.

Our message would need to resonate not just with those who love traveling to new places, but also to inspire the travel trade to consider St. Mary’s County as the next great adventure.

Get it right, and we would be presenting a “new” and unique destination that exemplifies the best of the United States and boasts unique experiences for everyone. Get it wrong, and the criticism would be deafening and hard to return from.

*What People Look For*

*What the global traveler can tell us about our strategies*

The U.S. Travel Association and Brand USA have conducted numerous studies on the sentiments that travelers feel when discussing future travel. Over the years, travel sentiments fall into four distinct central themes:

- **Freedom** – The ability to find boundless possibilities.
- **Diversity** – Travelers look to the diversity of a destination to find unity in its experiences.
- **Experiential** – The modern traveler looks to see themselves in the destination being marketed. They are looking for memories of experiences to bring home with them.
- **Welcoming** – As the nation continues to diversify, and as inbound travelers continue to diversify, it is important to be warm, friendly, and welcoming. The smiles must be the same from North County to South County.
The Campaign

*Our marketing strategy – evolved.*

Our overall marketing strategy will seek to communicate to new travelers and old friends alike. We must demonstrate a breadth of possibilities beyond what they believe is possible within the County. More importantly, we need to welcome our friends back while we welcome new guests to explore our home.

Playing off successful strategies from Visit Maryland and our regional partners, Visit St. Mary’s has developed a singular phrase to guide our marketing in the year to come: **Boundless.** Boundlessness expresses what everyone desires in a destination such as St. Mary’s County – the ability to make the trip your own. More importantly, when considering that most of our target markets are metropolitan centers, the idea of openness and the ability to **design your own trip** will be incredibly important to attracting overnight visitors.

To help us focus our messaging about the range of experiences in St. Mary’s County, Visit St. Mary’s has created four distinct experience pillars to guide us as we craft our messaging across all of our marketing platforms.

### HERITAGE
- Farming and Aquaculture
- Watermen / Fishing
- State History and Religious Freedom
- Leonardtown

### SMALL TOWN CHARMS
- Leonardtown
- “Mom and Pop” Shops
- Local Art
- Local flavors
- Walking tours
- Unique Experiences

### OUTDOORS
- State Parks
- Fishing / Hunting
- Trails (Bike, Walk, etc.)
- Water Activities
- Beach / Coastal
- Camping
- Recreation & Sports

### HISTORY & CULTURE
- Historical Sites
- Cultural Sites
- Art Galleries
- Museums
- Landmarks
- Memorials / Monuments
- Leonardtown
PRINT & OUT OF HOME (OOH)

*Our current inspiration*

Our current guiding light conveys the sense of personal and experiential possibilities that are limitless, boundless, and endless. As travelers, we derive a sense of purpose in our trips with the ability to make them our own, that we aren’t bound to one specific activity or experience.
Limitless adventure awaits. Spring in St. Mary’s County is breathtaking. Outdoor adventure, history, food, culture, and everything in between awaits you where the Potomac and the Chesapeake meet. Come discover the mid-Atlantic’s best kept travel secret.

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE AT visitStMarysMD.com
The Visit St. Mary’s website will continue to evolve and convey a sense of limitlessness – the idea that new and old travelers can have experiences like never before.
Consumer Target and Media / Market Strategy

Visit St. Mary’s will build its marketing profile and seek to market to any and all demographics, interests, personalities, and ideals. There is truly something for everyone in St. Mary’s. However, Visit St. Mary’s will put specific emphasis on a key segment of the market in order to maximize the potential of overnight visitation.

Visit St. Mary’s Key Target: Ages 23 – 55

- The age group that represents the largest potential of overnight visitation
  - Core characteristics: affluent, educated travelers, established in their careers, disposable income, new and young families
- Age represents the upper-end of Generation Z, all Millennials, and all Generation X.

Key Target Characteristics

- Generation Z
  - Among most educated generation
  - Among best-behaved generation
  - More stressed and depressed than previous generations
  - More liberal
- Millennials
  - Characteristics vary by region, and more dependent on social / economic conditions
  - “Echo boomers” – often the children of baby boomers
  - Increased familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies
  - More of a tendency in delaying certain “rites of passage” into adulthood
  - Seek out experiences over anything else
- Generation X
  - Age 40 – 55 (Midlife)
  - Active, happy, and focused on achieving a proper work-life balance
  - More entrepreneurial amongst generations
  - Considered more independent and resourceful, adaptable
  - More cynical and pragmatic
- Baby Boomers
  - Outside of our “key” reach, yet represent great group-travel potential
  - More adverse to change, avoid discussions of planning and end-of-life activities
  - 25% still working or claim they will never retire
  - More prone to group travel, casual activities, seek out finer things and nicer accommodations
Media Market Strategy
The overall strategy of Visit St. Mary’s is to invest in all 10 key markets, and to remain in the market at an optimal maintenance-level budget consisting mainly of advertising, digital and social media, and some research. Factors that could change the media market strategy including campaign traction, major events, or other incidents, and we will re-evaluate the strategy and adjust accordingly.

Following the same planning and buying parameters as stated above, Visit St. Mary’s will utilize out-of-home, print, digital and social, while also exploring new forms of advertising to reach the widest possible audience of potential travelers.

Additionally, Visit St. Mary’s plan is to run brand media for our consumer campaign in key markets during peak travel planning times, and key travel times. During the course of the next year, Visit St. Mary’s will also begin exploring new markets to add to our portfolio.

The total marketing budget is included in the organization’s FY2020 budget and is not delineated by market. Visit St. Mary’s will make constant adjustments to its ongoing marketing strategy in each market based on the market and current market conditions. Visit St. Mary’s will seek out the highest ROI potential for its advertising dollars on a month-by-month basis.

Optimizing Market Activities and Expenditures
Visit St. Mary’s, to optimize investments in marketing and maximize reach, will disperse its activities across a multitude of tactics and channels. The mix will vary by market according to what is best suited to local and cultural and commercial conditions.

While the focus will be heavily on the brand campaign, Visit St. Mary’s will also engage in cooperative advertising opportunities with individual attractions, hotels, venues, event-based opportunities, and other travel-industry professionals to maximize reach.
Categories of Marketing Efforts

Consumer Brand Marketing and Content
These efforts will include the core consumer “Boundless” strategy of advertising (Print, Digital, Social Media, etc). The campaign will offer opportunities for partner integration (specifically to digital and social components). These strategies will be implemented throughout the primary 10 target markets.

Cooperative Marketing with Partners and Stakeholders
Visit St. Mary’s will review individual co-op marketing opportunities for each occasion, whether the partner or stakeholder is hosting an event or is part of the travel and tourism industry. These programs make up the smallest component of the Visit St. Mary’s marketing program, yet include opportunities to expand the marketing reach beyond what a partner/stakeholder is capable of. The program will also include opportunities to create direct call-to-actions, drive travelers to their event, attraction, or brand, and will measure the results of their efforts. Co-op opportunities enable partners to leverage www.VisitStMarysMD.com to drive traffic and referrals to their organizations.

Trade Show Marketing
The final marketing component is specifically focused on sales / B2B / trade shows, and is split into two categories. Visit St. Mary’s MD will support up to 30% of its marketing on group sales, wedding sales, small meetings, sports, and other trade related activity to bring overnight groups to St. Mary’s County.
Sales Strategy

Leads and Groups
Each month, the Visit St. Mary’s team will share all leads with our stakeholders and partners, primarily with hotel partners and venues. Leads forwarded will include information from corporate event planners, wedding planners and couples, sporting groups, and more.

Over the next 6 months, Visit St. Mary’s will attend four wedding shows, with more being considered during this time-frame. During this time, Visit St. Mary’s will generate new wedding prospects as well as increase awareness in four key markets: Washington DC, Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Baltimore. The goal through these four shows is to book $100,000 in revenue in St. Mary’s County for the first 3 shows, and $50,000 from the Baltimore show.

Throughout the year, our continued focus will be building relationships in the County, as well as with key event planners throughout the region and through our key markets.

Our sales goal also includes an emphasis on small business meetings. Visit St. Mary’s will sell St. Mary’s as a unique and innovative place to have small meetings and give attendees unique experiences while in the County. What we have found working with travel and event planners is that, while the meeting is important, there is a need for unique activities for groups to do in-between and outside of meetings.

We plan on creating digital brochures that showcase unique spaces in the County, specific to weddings, small business meetings, sports destinations, and more.

Key Shows
Visit St. Mary’s will continue exploring and attend key trade events, such as American Bus Association and state-focused bus association marketplaces. The focus here will be to generate leads and to follow-up with relevant information.
Visit St. Mary’s MD Team

Jason Aul
Executive Director

Gail Perry
Sales Manager

Board of Directors

CHAIR OF THE BOARD
Regina Faden
Historic St. Mary’s City

Nancy Easterling
Sotterley Plantation

Rich Fleming
St. Mary’s Chamber of Commerce

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Woodlawn Farm & Jubilee Farm

Kim Aus
The Cherry Cove Group

Phil Langley
Watermen Heritage Tours

Chris Kaselemis
St. Mary’s County Department of Economic Development