

FY 2026–2027

TOWN OF BLUFFTON

DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN

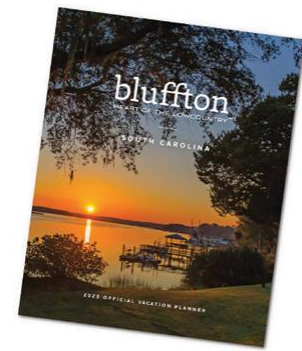
Agenda

- 2025 Year in Review
- Executive Summary
- FY 2026-2027 Destination Marketing Plan



Year in Review

Vacation Planner



Mail Fulfillment:
27,505

Website

Pageviews:
325K+

Ad Impressions:
40K+

Referrals:
38K



Average Time on Site:
(0.43 industry average)
21.95

Paid Media Partnerships

Condé Nast
Traveler

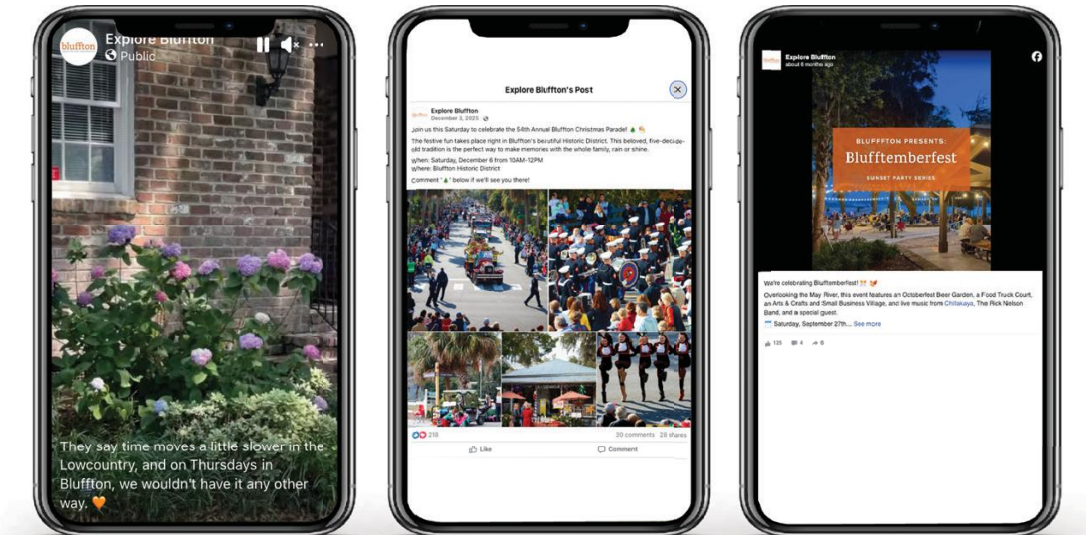
SPONSORED CONTENT BY
bluffton
Heart of the Lowcountry



Social

New Followers:
8,629

Impressions:
9,992,661



Occupancy Metrics

Occupancy:
66.4%
(-13%)

ADR:
\$129
(flat)

REVPAR:
\$85
(-13%)

Public Relations

Mentions:
190

Impressions:
6,681,345,171

Ad Value:
\$1,981,363

Accolades

- **Southern Living**
10 Best Fall Getaways in The South
- **Country Living**
15 Under-the-Radar Small Towns Worth Checking Out This Spring
- **Ebony**
The Best in Black-Owned Dining
- **Travel & Leisure**
11 Best Places to Live in South Carolina
- **Country Living**
These Are America's 10 Best Small Towns for 2025



Executive Summary

FY 2026-2027 Bluffton Marketing Plan Executive Summary

The Hilton Head Island & Bluffton Chamber of Commerce/Visitor & Convention Bureau continues to be the leader in promoting tourism for Bluffton. The organization as a whole utilizes national economic and tourism trends, consumer research, prior program performance and demographics and takes into consideration the needs of our community (residents and businesses) to be in the best position as the steward of the destination.

We have partnered closely with the Town of Bluffton to identify these pillars of marketing:

- May River Coastal Lifestyle
- Montage + Luxury Experiences
- Culinary + Dining
- Culture + Heritage
- Events + Community



Vision

A welcoming world-class community embracing nature, culture and economic vibrancy to residents and visitors.

Mission

Stimulate the regional economy while enhancing the quality of life for all.

Brand Commitment

Bluffton, Heart of the Lowcountry™, speaks to more than geography—it reflects the Town’s spirit, charm, and role as a driving economic force in the region. But most importantly, it’s a feeling. In Bluffton, you don’t just visit—you feel the love. It’s genuine and unmistakably authentic. You see it in the heart symbol on a storefront window, in the pride residents take in historic Old Town Bluffton and in the warmth shared with friends and strangers alike at an oyster roast. Bluffton is a place that captures hearts through its people, traditions and unmistakable Lowcountry character, creating a sense of connection and community unlike anywhere else.

FY 2026-2027 Goals, Strategies & Tactics

Goals:

- Destination alignment and community engagement.
- Sustainable tourism and infrastructure preservation and development.
- Rejuvenation and elevation of the destination with a focus on quality over quantity.
- Priority sales and marketing initiatives.

Strategies:

- Build brand awareness and support qualified visitation to the destination among target out markets.
- Drive the discovery and exploration of the destination with deeper storytelling of the destination's key attributes.
- Leverage a strategic mix of targeted methods to identify and reach the most qualified users.
- Create an understanding of, and respect for, the delicate ecosystem of the destination.
- Enhance Leisure and Group business through qualified visitation.



Budget

Bluffton/Southern Beaufort County Budget (FY 2026-2027)

	FY 2027 VCB TOTALS	FY 2027 BLUFFTON (55%)	FY 2027 SBC (45%)
REVENUES	Bluffton & SBC		
Town of Bluffton DMO	\$340,000	\$340,000	
Southern Beaufort County DMO	\$260,000		\$260,000
TOTAL REVENUES	\$600,000		
EXPENSES			
Digital Promotions / SEM	\$70,000	\$39,665	\$30,334
Website Maintenance	\$30,000	\$16,999	\$13,000
Website Hosting	\$4,800	\$2,720	\$2,080
Social Marketing & Content Strategy	\$34,000	\$19,266	\$14,734
Paid Social	\$50,000	\$28,332	\$21,667
SEO	\$20,000	\$11,333	\$8,667
Bluffton Insiders (enews)	\$0	\$0	\$0
Public Relations	\$15,000	\$8,500	\$6,500
Bluffton Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$90,000	\$50,998	\$39,001
Regional Vacation Planner/Fulfillment	\$20,000	\$11,333	\$8,667
Media Partnerships	\$0	\$0	\$0
Group Tour	\$6,200	\$3,513	\$2,687
Photography/Videography	\$0	\$0	\$0
Research & Planning	\$20,000	\$11,333	\$8,667
Contingency	\$0	\$0	\$0
Ops & Management	\$240,000	\$136,007	\$103,998
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$600,000	\$340,000	\$260,000

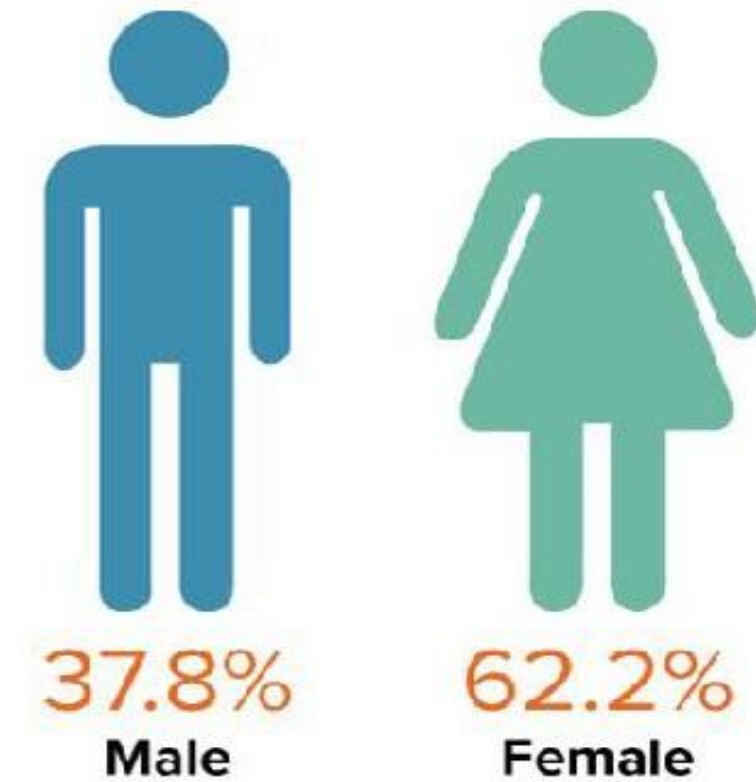
Demographics & Personas

We use multiple primary and secondary data sources to understand who our visitors are and what motivates them to visit Bluffton. Our real-time data sources include Google Analytics, Placer.ai, and Zartico. In addition, we partner with the Office of Tourism Analysis at the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

Using these insights we can extract visitor persona detail which allows us the ability to further refine our messaging to a more qualified potential consumer.

Today, as we continue to adjust to the traveler's needs, we will keep our demographics and key personas at the forefront, adapting where necessary to address consumer travel sentiment.

Our Target Leisure Traveler for the Region



Self-Identify

Source: 2025 Bluffton Visitor Profile Study, Office of Tourism Analysis, College of Charleston



\$100-\$199K+
Affluent Traveler



62%
Undergraduate Degree or Higher



2-4 Trips per Year

5 Nights Average Length of Stay

Persona	Tactic	
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital video/connected TV advertising • Facebook /Instagram advertising • Social and blog itineraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search advertising • Influencer family partnership
Weekenders	<p>Social media partnerships with influencers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couples • Paid search targeting branded and category terms such as “weekend getaway” • Friend groups • Weekend itineraries for blog/site/social • Social advertising 	
Arts, Culture & History Buffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Display Network and social display • Digital video/connected TV advertising • Culture & History itineraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencer partnership content • Long-form content (blogs)
Culinary Travelers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital /connected TV advertising • Restaurant listings • Social advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic social posts focused on food and drink • Festival & Event information and promotions • Food itineraries and tour information
Activities & Recreation Enthusiasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social advertising • Digital video/connected TV advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps and itineraries outlining convenience of staying / proximity to nearby activities and experiences
Snowbirds	<p>Seasonal campaign featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital video advertising • Search advertising • Social advertising • Accommodation aggregated offers 	

A serene sunset scene over a large body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water's surface. In the foreground, a wooden dock with a covered pavilion structure extends into the water. A white boat is moored at the dock. The background shows a dark treeline under a sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

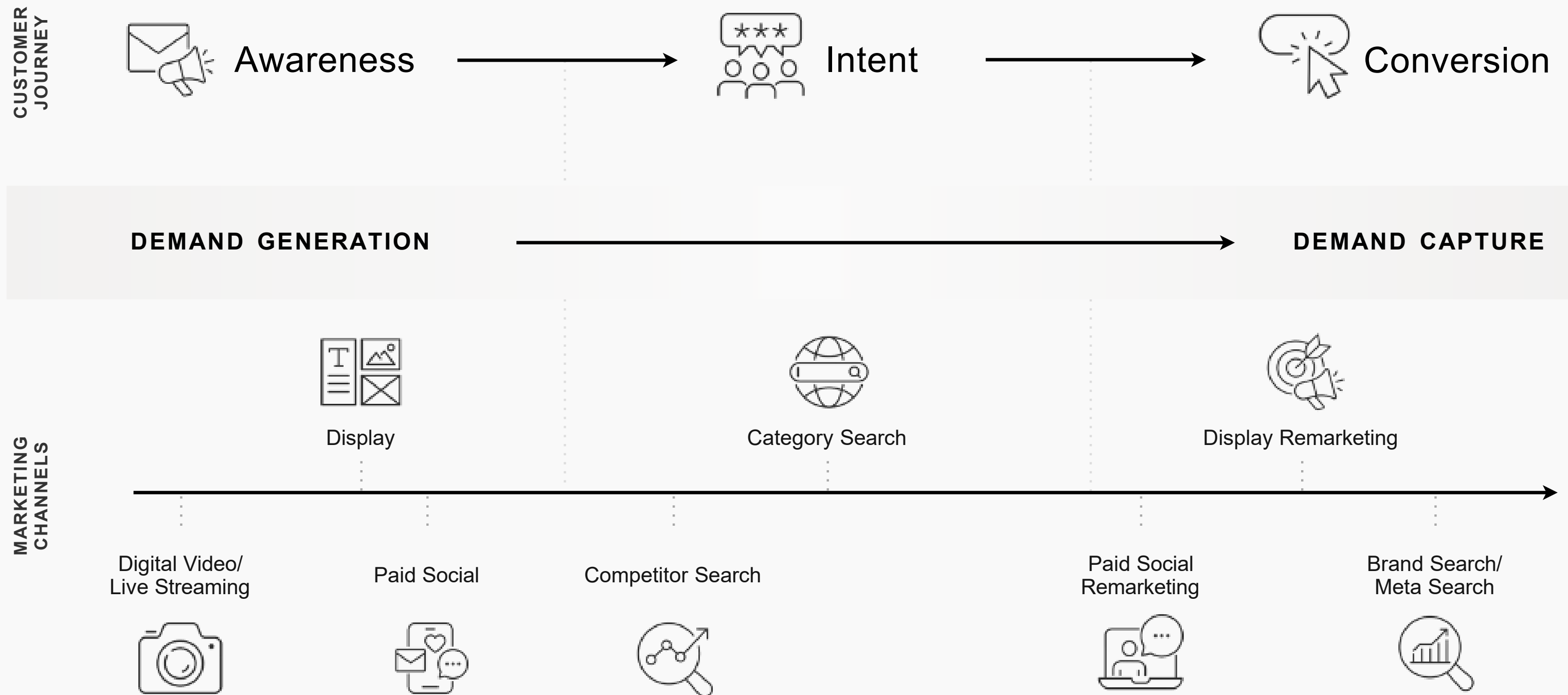
What's Ahead in FY 2026-2027

Digital Marketing

With the May River, a thriving arts and culture scene, diverse culinary experiences, outdoor recreation, and a vibrant local community, the Town of Bluffton is well positioned to meet the needs and interests of today's travelers. The marketing plan is designed to be highly personalized, flexible, and results-oriented. Each individual campaign that is implemented to drive exposure for the destination will be deployed based on a series of defined goals that align with each persona, and the overarching goal for the marketing plan.



Conversion Focused Digital Media

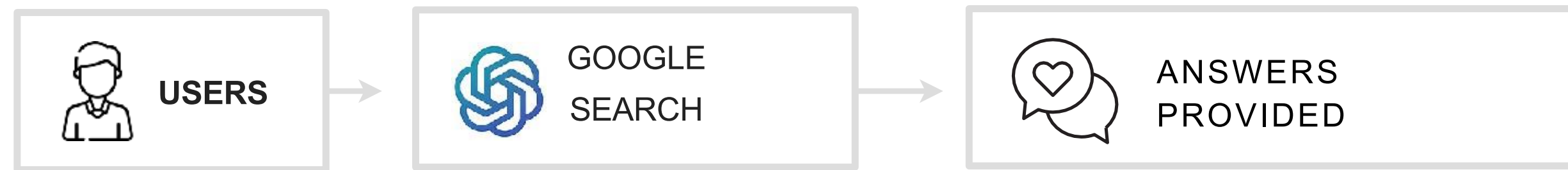


Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)

The Old Way

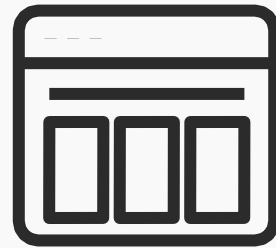


The New Way



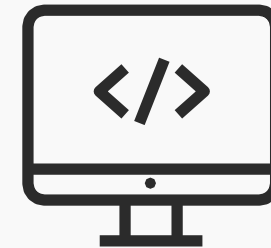
SEO & GEO - Laying the Groundwork

A successful data-informed content strategy that will grow the organic search footprint for your brand both on traditional SERPs (Search Engine Results Page) as well as within Generative AI applications can be focused on the following core pillars:



On Page

The optimization and data-informed creation of content will drive increased exposure in search engines leading to better engagement.



Technical

Ongoing technical audit and comprehensive review of the existing website to ensure current issues in the technical infrastructure are identified.



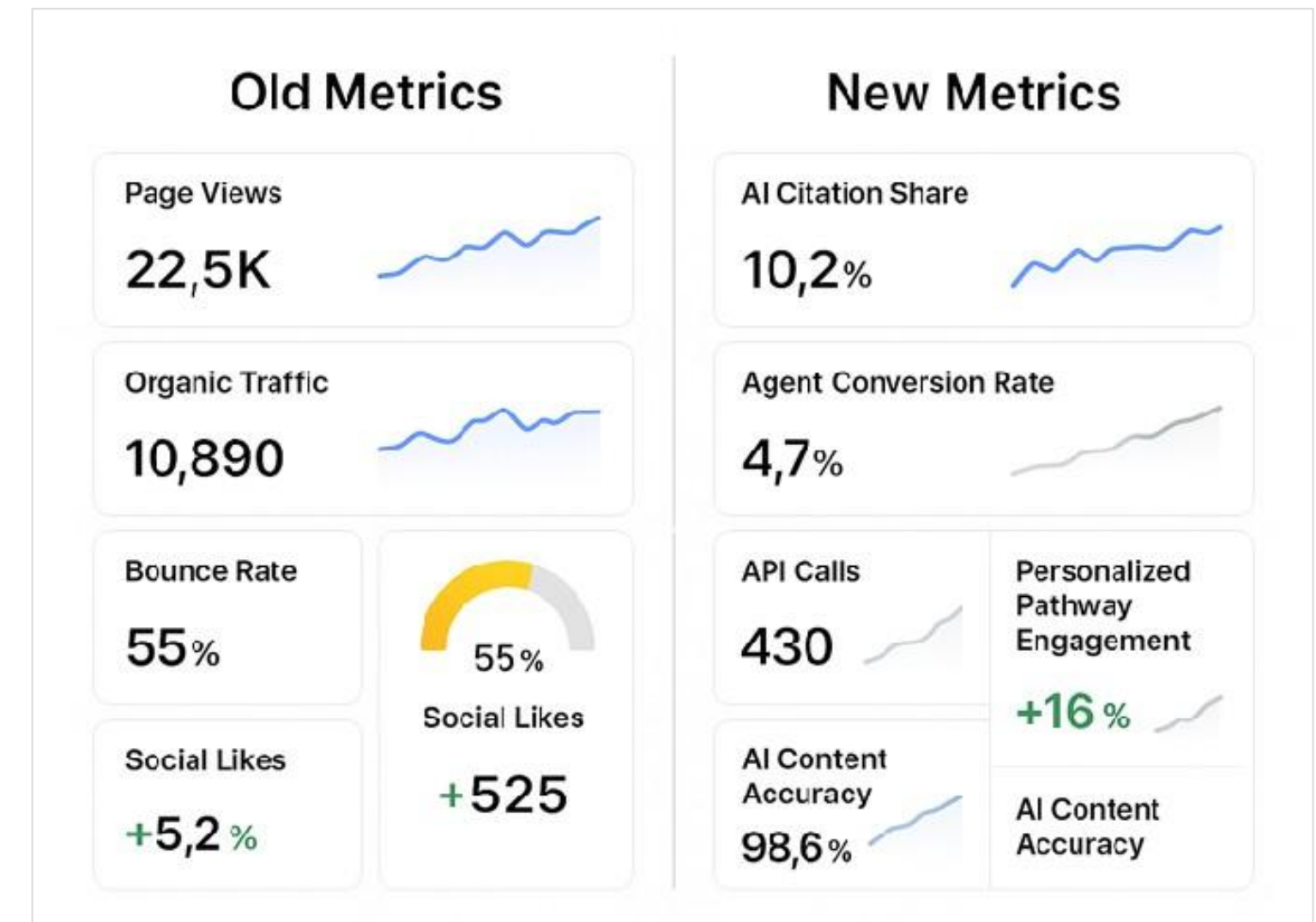
Off Page

Link building through a personalized outreach program, and amplified exposure through influencer outreach and a targeted social media strategy.

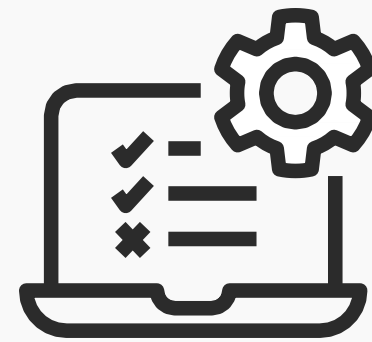
Traditional KPIs No Longer Tell the Full Story.

New KPIs Could Include:

- AI Search Visibility: Share of citations in generative AI results for target queries.
- Agent-Driven Conversions: Number and value of bookings completed through AI agents.
- API Engagement: Call volume, uptime, and usage by third-party platforms.
- Audience Engagement: Interaction with personalized pathways and tailored content.
- Content Performance in AI: Frequency and accuracy of brand mentions in AI responses.



What's Next? GEO Is the New Digital PR



Be Technically Impeccable

Keep your site fast, error-free, and structured so AI can read and trust it. Use emerging tools (like llms.txt) to give Large Language Models extra context about your brand.



Build Digital Credibility

Cultivate partnerships, manage your online reputation, and earn authoritative backlinks. Keep your brand details (NAP) consistent so LLMs see you as a trusted source.



Create AI-Ready Content

Publish high-value, relevant, and diverse content designed to be cited in AI answers—then test and refine for the new search landscape.

Destination Websites

The VisitBluffton.org website is a key component of the destination marketing strategy and often serves as one of the first touch points for potential visitors to Bluffton. We will continue refining our ability to identify qualified visitors, ensure a seamless user experience, and drive relevant, high-quality traffic to partner websites. Content will be refreshed regularly, with new and engaging material added to keep the site current and compelling. Ongoing optimizations to both content and site structure will be guided by search engine optimization (SEO) and generative engine optimization (GEO) research, as well as trends data and referral insights.



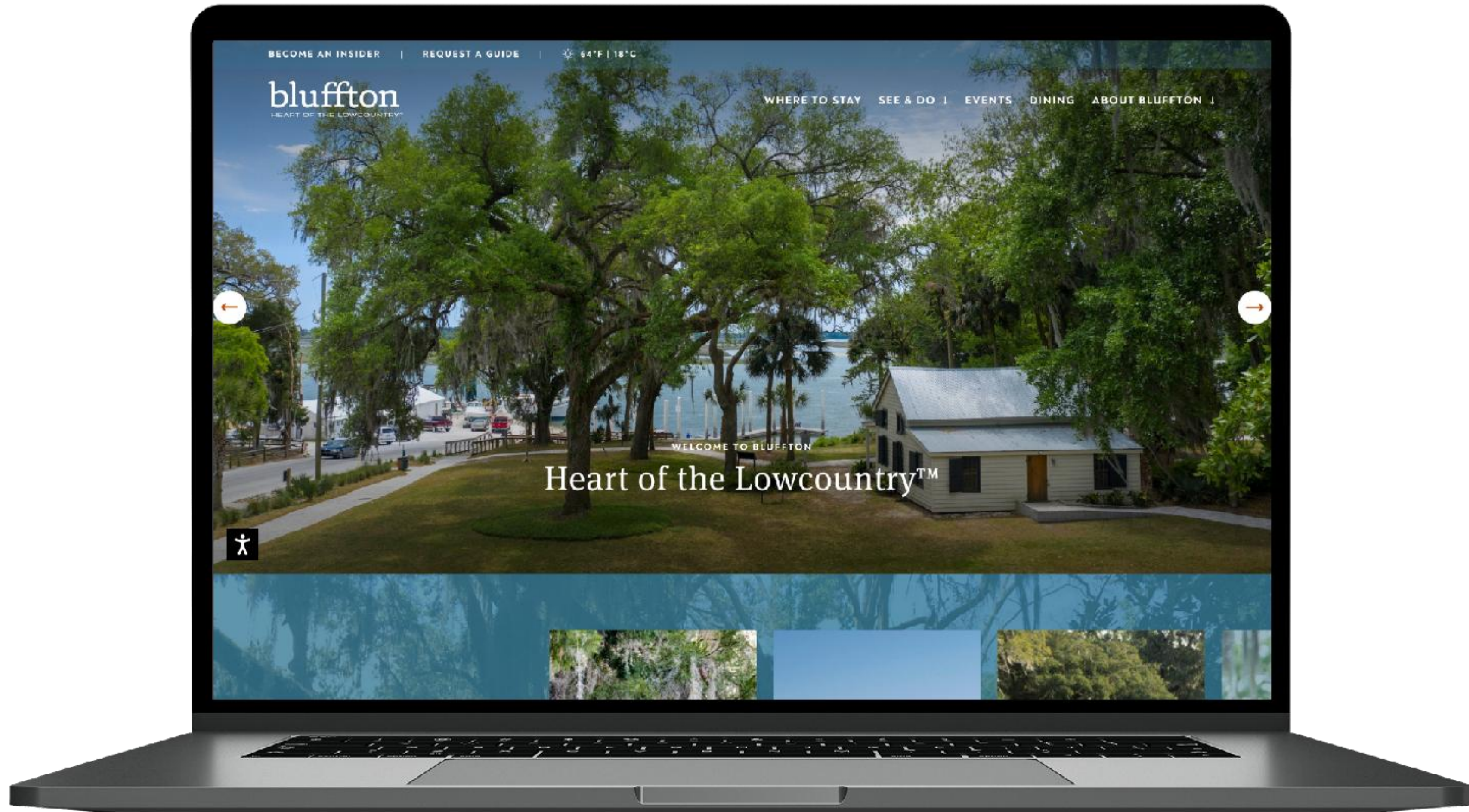
Destination Websites

Data Strategy & Personalization

Utilizing first-party and zero-party data, the brand will work to gain a clearer understanding of prospective visitors' behaviors and implicit desires to build a personalized, one-to-one communication strategy. This begins at the VisitBluffton.org website and extends across the brand's entire digital marketing ecosystem.

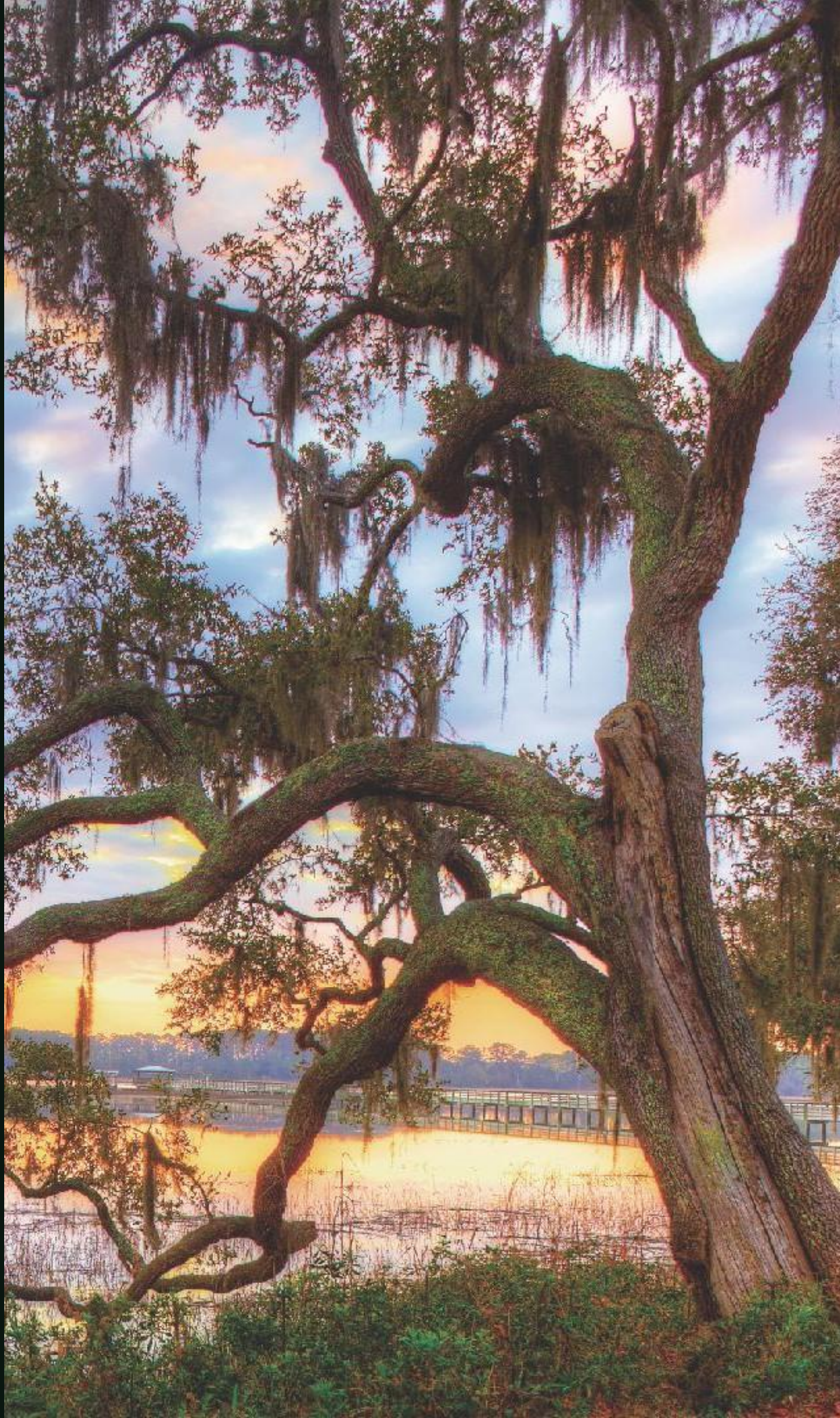
The Visitor & Convention Bureau will create a data-driven, always-on content strategy that is relevant and compelling, aligning with visitors' mindsets and interests. As prospective visitors move through their journey, the brand will continue to tailor messaging through sequential storytelling, making the destination experience more meaningful and relevant to each individual. Ongoing analysis of audience data will provide insights that inform decisions about market opportunities and high-value audience segments, ultimately leading to higher engagement with the destinations and more outbound referrals to partners.





Social Media

In FY 2026-2027, our strategy evolves from broad visibility to Generative Engagement Optimization (GEO). By fostering deep local connection and quality community engagement, we will create the social proof required for platforms to position Bluffton as a premier destination for natural beauty, arts, culture and history.



Social Media

Goals:

- Showcase our brand pillars with a balanced content mix.
- Support local businesses and stakeholders.
- Capitalize on top-performing content types.
- Further generate destination awareness in key markets.
- Strengthen discoverability in search and AI-driven travel tools.



Destination Public Relations

As we move into the new fiscal year, our strategy focuses on leveraging earned media and influencer partnerships to navigate an increasingly digital landscape. By prioritizing mobile-friendly content and curated storytelling, we aim to drive destination awareness and capture the interest of travelers who rely on trusted digital voices to inform their purchase decisions.

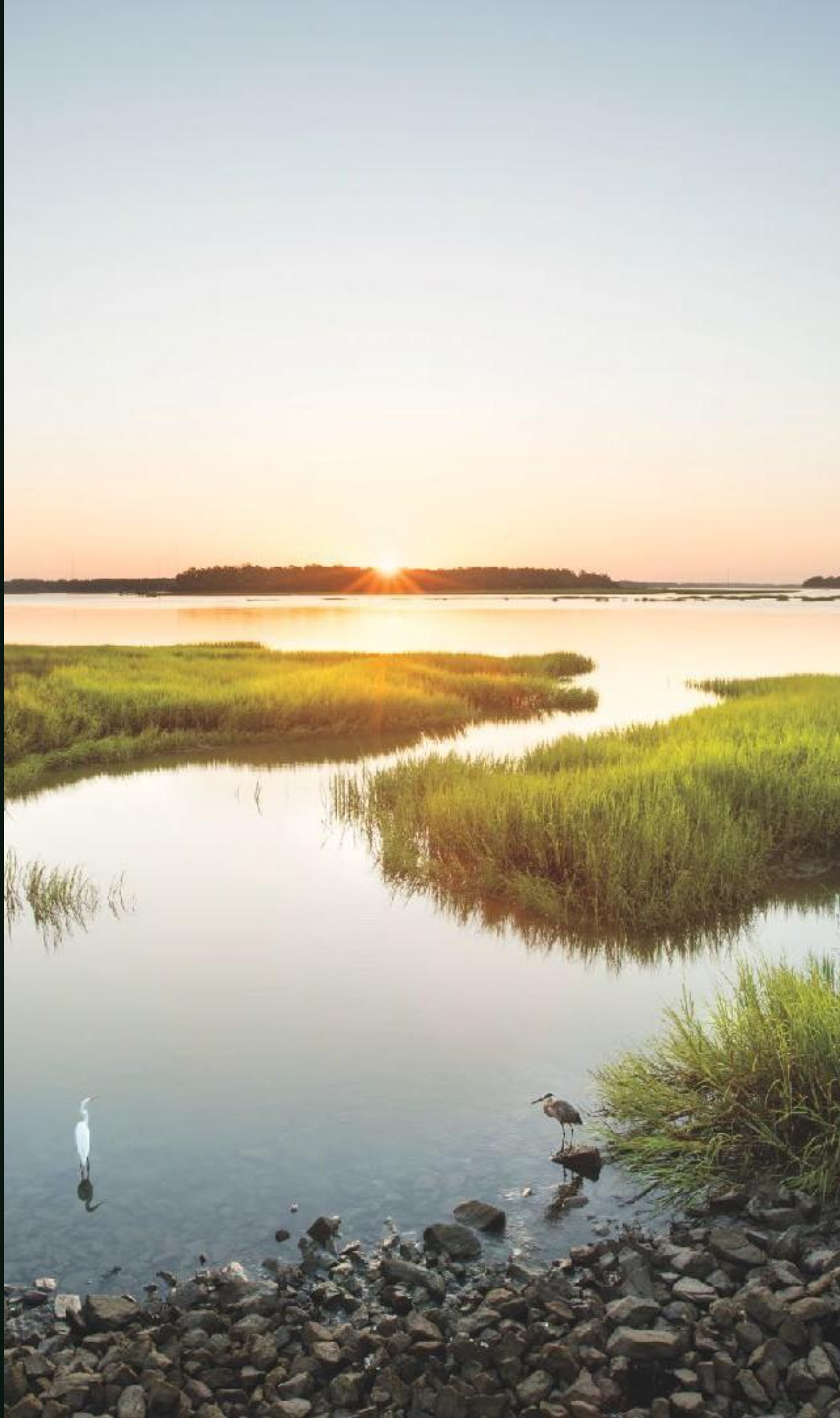
To keep Bluffton competitive, we will highlight authentic, sustainable, and culturally rich experiences that cater to the modern demand for "escapism." By maintaining strong media relationships and adapting to emerging trends, we will generate the consistent buzz necessary to position the Heart of the Lowcountry™ as a premier choice for meaningful, unforgettable getaways.



Leisure Media Partnerships

Select leisure media partnerships can complement earned media efforts by extending the destination story within travel and lifestyle media environments that inspire trip planning.

These opportunities allow Bluffton to reinforce their presence within trusted editorial platforms where travelers seek ideas, recommendations and destination inspiration.



Meetings & Group Sales

Bluffton's meetings strategy focuses on high-value, experience-driven gatherings that align with the destination's luxury assets and authentic Lowcountry character. With world-class accommodations and natural riverfront landscapes, Bluffton offers planners a refined alternative to larger convention destinations.

Rather than competing for high-volume convention business, the region is best positioned to attract premium meetings, executive retreats, and incentive programs that prioritize setting, service, and meaningful experiences.

This approach ensures meetings generate strong economic impact while preserving the charm and scale that define Bluffton as the Heart of the Lowcountry.



Leverage Regional Drive Markets & Air Access

The strongest opportunities remain Southeastern drive markets, including:

- Atlanta
- Charlotte
- Charleston
- Jacksonville
- Raleigh-Durham
- Orlando / Tampa

In addition, convenient access through Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport provides connectivity from major domestic markets.

This combination supports both corporate retreats and national association meetings seeking an inspiring destination that remains easy to reach.



Build Meetings Around Authentic Experiences

Today's planners want experiences that reflect the destination. Bluffton delivers with:

- Private May River sunset receptions
- Historic district culinary tours
- Gullah cultural heritage experiences
- Chef-led Lowcountry dinners and oyster roasts
- Kayaking, boating, and eco-tours
- Art gallery and artisan studio events

These experiences create memorable programs and increase visitor spend.

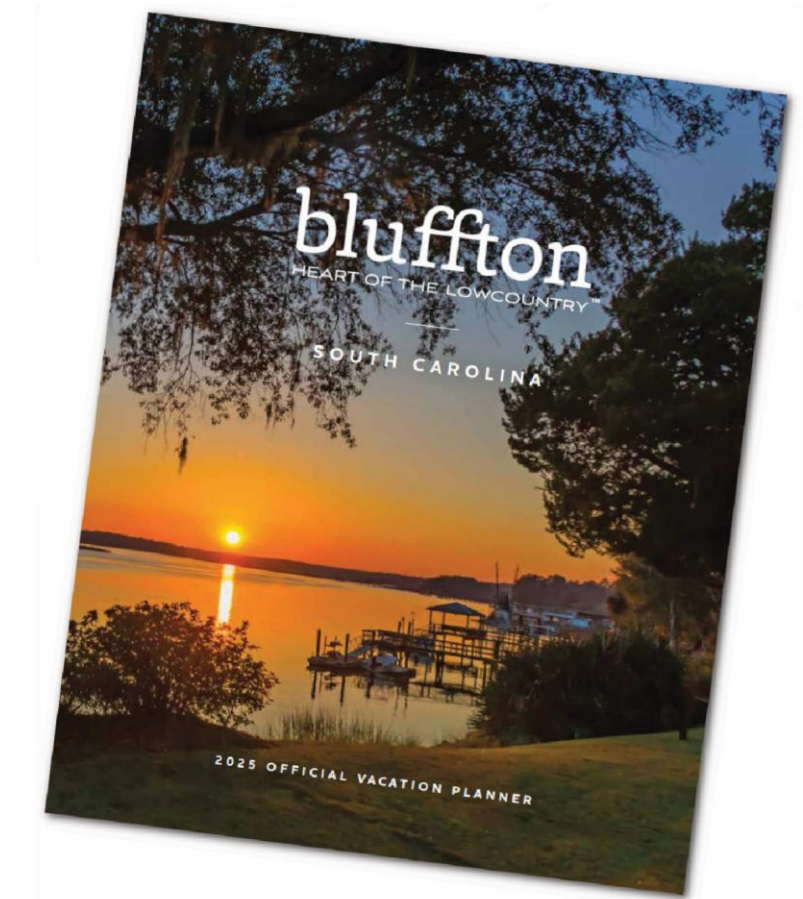


Collateral and Fulfillment Promotions and Brochure Distribution

The Bluffton Official Vacation Planner, our comprehensive guide to what to see and do, is our primary print fulfillment piece for the destination. We receive many online, as well as media and phone inquiries, and distribute the planner to state and local welcome centers, airports, along with tradeshow and promotional events with media.

Included in our budget is a dedicated campaign for the promotion of the Bluffton Official Vacation Planner for visitors to request a guide as well as for fulfillment and distribution costs. The books are distributed through:

- Online requests
- Phone inquiries
- Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport
- Hilton Head Island Airport
- South Carolina Welcome Centers
- AAA offices nationwide
- Hotel partners
- Tradeshow
- Events



Media Fulfillment: 27,505
(in 2025)

Research & Analytics

Throughout the year, we gather and analyze detailed data to better understand the region's visitors and their travel behaviors. These insights inform targeted marketing and advertising initiatives designed to grow and sustain Bluffton's tourism economy. The following programs will be ongoing:

1. Maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org
2. KeyData reporting, which tracks lodging occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), room demand, and RevPAR for hotels, including comparative analysis with competitive destinations.
3. Partnership with the College of Charleston Office of Tourism Analysis to produce annual economic impact reports.
4. Collaboration with the University of South Carolina Beaufort to conduct research on local events and their economic impact.
5. Analysis of Placer.ai and Zartico visitor tracking data to better understand who the region's visitors are, where they come from, and what they value most about the destination.



Thank You

