



— 2023 —
**TOURISM
UPDATE**



**WALTON
COUNTY
TOURISM**



Wow. How is 2024 winding down already? It feels as though the new year has just begun.

Yet, as I take time to reflect on what we've experienced in our destination and what we accomplished, I'm excited – from capital improvement projects to fresh new campaigns, there is an energy inside Walton County Tourism we can all feel.

Our community continues to grow and new businesses open their doors – entrepreneurship is alive and well, from the Gulf-side beaches northward to the state line. Should anyone be surprised that Walton is one of the fastest growing counties in the country?

Based on our performance in 2023, tourism is holding strong in Walton County. The destination continues to see steady growth and remain a key player in the tourism marketplace. While some of our metrics declined from the prior year, it's not reflective of the sustainability in visitation we enjoy. In fact, from what our research team is seeing across the state and throughout the tourism economy, we are merely experiencing a "normalization" in visitation.

With travel restrictions being a thing of the past, many destinations are experiencing dips in visitation as travelers are exploring Europe and other countries that had been off limits in years past.

What did we see in 2023? Here's an overview of some key metrics. Walton County hosted more than 5.1 million visitors. Their direct spending, which totaled more than \$4.7 billion, contributed to an economic impact of \$6.8 billion for Walton County. All told, more than \$60 million in Tourist Development Tax was collected in 2023.

These are incredibly strong numbers and while this injection of spending from our visitors helps lower our residents' taxes – on average \$2,082 per household – it also supported more than 41,000 jobs (direct and indirect), generating \$1.2 billion in wages and salaries.

Tourism continues to work for Walton County.

Looking to the future, we understand every destination goes through changes and challenges and our team is up to the task. We will continue to explore opportunities to secure beachfront for new accesses, expand parking opportunities in strategic locations, and enhance our amenities throughout the county – all while balancing the needs of our community and protecting our fragile ecosystems.

On behalf of the Walton County Tourism Department, our team looks forward to working with the community and county leadership to keep our destination strong, all while supporting our community through a thriving visitor economy.

Matt Algarin
Tourism Director

The Value of WALTON COUNTY VISITATION



41,600

Walton County jobs supported by tourism

VISITORS SPEND \$785 EVERY DAY OF THEIR TRIP

5.1 MILLION VISITORS SPEND \$4.7 BILLION

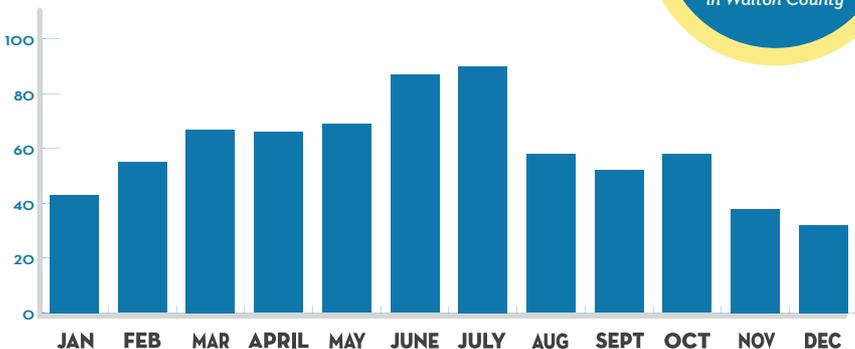
\$6.9 BILLION

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT



VISITORS SAVE WALTON COUNTY
HOUSEHOLDS AN AVERAGE OF
\$2,082 IN TAXES

2023 VISITATION TRENDS



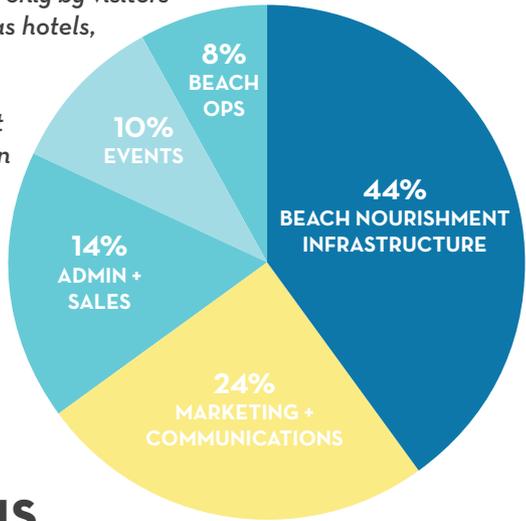
2023 VISITORS DIRECT SPENDING



FUNDED *by* TOURISM

The Tourist Development Tax is paid only by visitors staying in short-term rentals, such as hotels, condos and beach houses.

While the State of Florida has strict rules governing how those funds can be spent, many of the activities and amenities they support - such as bike trails, public beach accesses, lifeguards, and special events - enhance the lives of residents as well as visitors.



TOTAL 2023
TDT COLLECTIONS
FOR WALTON COUNTY
\$60 MILLION



SHORT-TERM VISITORS FUND
the Tourism Department through a
TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX

5% BED TAX IN SOUTH WALTON **2%** BED TAX NORTH OF THE BAY
Increased to 3% in October 2023

MARKETING

Targeted advertising keeps Walton County **top-of-mind** with our loyal visitors, **strengthens** our brand and reaches out to new markets to help create **balanced** and robust demand.

\$1 SPENT = **\$479**
on tourism marketing in visitor spending



SALES & VISITOR SERVICES

18,717 PEOPLE EXPLORED OUR
VISITOR CENTER IN 2023

13 MEETING TRADE SHOWS reaching 400 meeting planners

3 MEETING PLANNER EVENTS reaching 90 planners

5 MEETING PLANNER SPONSORSHIPS reaching 500 planners

PR + COMMUNICATIONS

Public Relations efforts resulted in Walton County's inclusion in media outlets such as: **Travel + Leisure, Forbes, Southern Living, Modern Luxury** and more - with total impressions exceeding **857,305,646!**



Communications works to inspire travel with stories of Walton County **and help connect our community partners with opportunities that strengthen their businesses.**

BEACH OPERATIONS

Regional Beach Access Updates

- **Seagrove Regional Beach Access:** Located in the heart of Seagrove. This project includes parking with dedicated spaces for standard vehicles, ADA and bicycles, a 1,011 square foot restroom facility, handicap-accessible dune walkover and connectivity to the multi-use path.
- **Walton Dunes Regional Beach Access:** Located at 258 Beachfront Trail. Improvements are expected to include 14 parallel ROW parking spaces with dedicated ADA, LSV and bicycle parking, restrooms and an ADA-accessible boardwalk.

Neighborhood Beach Access Renovations

The Walton County Tourism Department has been hard at work renovating and sometimes replacing entire neighborhood beach accesses, with the goal of keeping them in good condition and making upgrades before the integrity or appearance degrades from wear and tear.

South Walton Fire District

The Beach Safety Division, which is funded by the Walton County Tourism Department, had a budget of about \$2.5 million in 2023. In total, 55 beach safety staff were employed during 2023, the majority of whom worked to keep beaches safe during the busy spring and summer months. SWFD lifeguards performed 147 water rescues and responded to more than 400 medical calls in 2023, despite relatively calm surf conditions compared to years past. This demand for emergency services means beach safety is growing even more important in our coastal community. The SWFD Beach Safety program also enjoyed tremendous success in its 2023 Junior Lifeguard Program, enrolling a record number of participants for a summer of fun, education, and lifeguarding experience.





Grayton Beach Shuttle

Operated shuttle vehicles 7 days a week from 6 am to 10 pm. 182,801 guests were transported between Grayton Central Parking and Grayton Beach Public Beach Access in 2023.

Parking Projects

Grayton Beach Municipal Parking Facility: Located at 1505 S. Co. Hwy. 283. This 1,700 square foot multi-level transit facility will have 204 parking spaces with dedicated ADA, electric car, LSV and bicycle parking areas, as well as restrooms, public transportation facilities and connectivity to the multi-use path.

393 Municipal Parking Facility: Located at 1668 S. Co. Hwy. 393, approximately three quarters of a mile from Ed Walline Regional Beach Access. It will contain 83 parking spaces with dedicated parking for ADA, LSV, bicycles and a 1,300 square foot transit building with a restroom facility.

Other Projects

Camp Creek Lake Canoe & Kayak Launch: Located at 121 S. Camp Creek Road South just north of 30A. This coastal dune lake access park will include ADA and bicycle parking, landscape, an ADA-accessible pier with canoe/kayak launch, and stormwater systems.

Cessna Landing Park Improvements: Located at 1689 Co. Hwy. 393 N. in Santa Rosa Beach. Plans are to add two additional docks, replace the existing pavilions and reconfigure/repave existing driveways and parking areas. Additional work will include hardscape, landscape, site utilities, site grading/drainage and stormwater.

Grayton Beach Community Center: Located at 44 Hotz Avenue in Grayton Beach. Once completed, the 1,600 square foot building will house a local information station, restrooms, an observation deck, a boardwalk to the beach and access to the Beach Tram.

Kellogg Park Nature Center: Located at 855 Nursery Rd. in Santa Rosa Beach. This Nature Center will be an 1,800 square foot assembly-style building for nature watching and community gatherings, with access to the kayak launch.

Legion Park Improvement: Located at 119 Crest Drive. Proposed improvements include a splash pad, new playground equipment, two launch piers, additional pickleball courts, resurfacing of the basketball court, construction of shade pavilions and additional parking for cars, trucks and trailers.

BEACH OPERATIONS

\$3.9 MILLION

IN DESTINATION IMPROVEMENTS

MAINTENANCE + CLEANUP



- 26 MILES OF BEACH
- 35 MILES OF MULTI-USE PATHS
- 15 REGIONAL BEACH ACCESS POINTS
Complete with parking, restrooms and lifeguard stations
- 47 NEIGHBORHOOD BEACH ACCESS POINTS
- 11 BAY & LAKE ACCESS POINTS

Garbage Collection

Beach maintenance crews removed 1,500 tons of garbage from approximately 736 garbage collection stations on the beach and bay in 2023. That's the equivalent of 102,420 individual bags of trash! An additional 21,886 Leave No Trace items were also removed from South Walton beaches. These items often include beach chairs, umbrellas, towels and other beach gear.



**WALTON
COUNTY
TOURISM**

BEACH OPERATIONS

2023-2024 BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

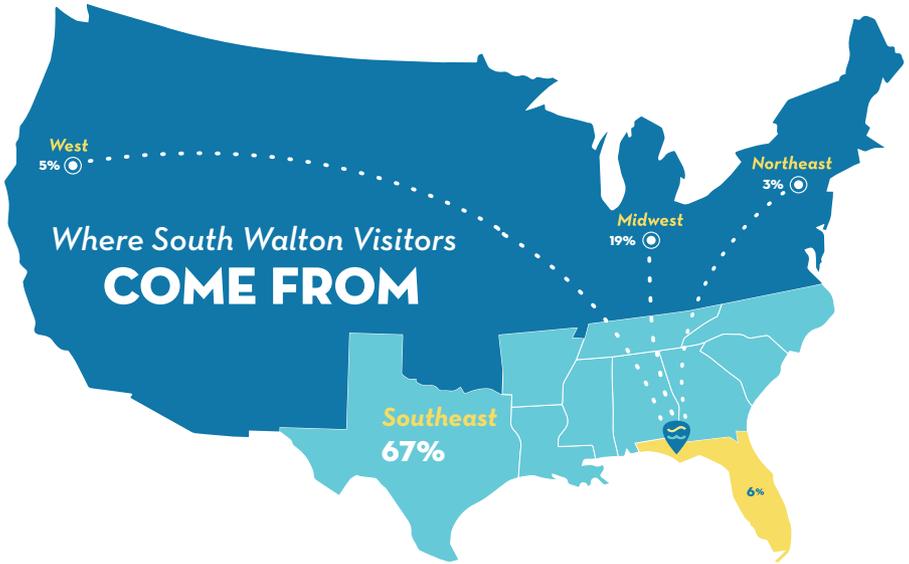
- Tony Anderson**, Chairman, District 5 Commissioner
- Donna Johns**, Vice Chair, District 4 Commissioner
- William "Boots" McCormick**, District 1 Commissioner
- Danny Glidewell**, District 2 Commissioner
- Brad Drake**, District 3 Commissioner

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- SWFD BEACH LIFEGUARD PROGRAM
- TURTLE NEST MONITORING
- VOLUNTEER BEACH AMBASSADORS
- INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP
- CULTURAL ARTS ALLIANCE OF WALTON COUNTY (CAA)
- LOCAL EVENTS & FESTIVALS
- SOUTH WALTON ARTIFICIAL REEF ASSOCIATION (SWARA)
- STATE PARKS PARKING PROGRAM

WALTONCOUNTYFLTOURISM.COM

South Walton 2023 VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS



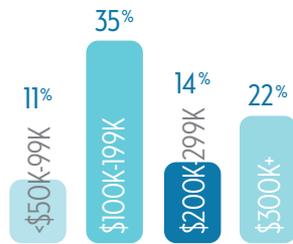
25%
FLY



75%
DRIVE



AGE OF VISITORS



HOUSEHOLD INCOME



5 PEOPLE
AVERAGE PARTY SIZE



AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY WAS
5.9 NIGHTS

WALTON COUNTY

WATERWAYS

CHOCTAWHATCHEE RIVER

LAKE JACKSON LAKE DEFUNIAK

MORRISON SPRINGS

INTERCOASTAL WATERWAY

CHOCTAWHATCHEE BAY

FULLER LAKE MORRIS LAKE

CAMPBELL LAKE STALLWORTH LAKE

ALLEN LAKE OYSTER LAKE DRAPER LAKE

BIG REDFISH LAKE

LITTLE REDFISH LAKE

ALLIGATOR LAKE

WESTERN LAKE EASTERN LAKE

DEER LAKE **CAMP CREEK**



AUTHENTIC WALTON
FLORIDA



SOUTH WALTON
FLORIDA