



**FISCAL 2023 BUSINESS PLAN**



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## **I. WHO WE ARE**

### **A. Organization and Guidance Principles**

The Natchez Convention Promotion Commission, doing business as Visit Natchez, has been the leader of tourism in Natchez as the official destination marketing organization since 1973. Visit Natchez is a state legislated organization, structured by Mississippi Senate Bill 3191. Senate Bill 3191 defines the purpose of Visit Natchez to fund a marketing/advertising promotion plan to effectively increase overnight visitation and tourism in the city of Natchez. To this purpose, Visit Natchez has defined the following organization guidance to steer the sales and marketing initiatives:

#### **Mission**

*The mission of the NCPC and Visit Natchez as the city's official destination marketing organization is to increase the economic impact of tourism in Natchez by developing and promoting the city to individual and group visitors.*

#### **Vision**

*To be the preeminent destination in the South for immersive cultural heritage, live music, social events, film tourism and exciting outdoor recreation.*

#### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement**

*At Visit Natchez, we continue to build a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion and are dedicated to creating opportunities for all in our community and our visitors to join in the Natchez experience.*

#### **Values**

*Visionary and Strategic*

*Innovative*

*Open and Transparent*

*Inclusive & Collaborative*

*Accountable*

## B. Leadership

### Board of Commissioners

President/Chairperson – Helen Moss Smith

Secretary/Treasurer – Robbie Cade Furdge

Barbara Bruce

Lance Harris

Katie McCabe

Dana Wilson

### Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee

Chairperson – Sarah Lindsey Laukhuff

Carter Burns

Willie Carter

Caitlin Goodman

Gail Guido

Valda Harveston

Lyn Jenkins

Charles Merritt

Pat Miller

Malan Parks

Ann Ward

### Staff

Administrative Assistant & Receptionist - Jawana Lowe

Director of Sales - Lynsey Gilbert, TMP, CTIS

Cultural Heritage Tourism Manager - Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D.

Community & Programs Manager - Sarah Sookraj

Marketing Manager – Jessica Cauthen

Executive Director - Devin Heath

## C. Destination Accolades

Natchez has been recognized regionally and nationally as a hidden gem and is frequently listed as a top choice for visitors from numerous publications and organizations. Below is a list of our recently recognized recognitions received in 2021/2022:

| Distinction   | Publisher                  |
|---|----------------------------|
| "The Most Beautiful Place in Every State" (Natchez Trace)                             | Conde Nast Traveler        |
| "The South's Best Small Towns 2022"   | Southern Living            |
| "11 Female Owned Hotels Around the World with Amazing Stories" (Peter Hunter House)   | Travel + Leisure           |
| "The Best Valentine's Day Getaway in Each State" (MS)                                 | Travel Pulse               |
| "Top 10 Most Visited National Parks" (Natchez Trace)                                  | National Park Service      |
| "10 Best Christmas Towns in America"  | Fox News                   |
| "10 Best Historic Small Town"   | USA Today                  |
| "The 27 Best Fall Festivals to Experience Across the U.S." (Natchez Balloon Festival) | PureWow                    |
| "The Most Haunted Spot in Every State" (King's Tavern)                                | Insider                    |
| "50 Underrated U.S. Cities [to add] to Your Must-Visit List"                          | MSN                        |
| Small Festival of the Year Award (Mudbug Festival)                                    | Mississippi Tourism Assoc. |
| Tourism Investment Award (Tate Taylor)  | Mississippi Tourism Assoc. |
| "The 15 Best Small Towns to Visit in 2021"  | Smithsonian Magazine       |
| "The Best Small Town in Each State" (MS)  | The Discover Blog          |
| "The Top Ten Places in American to Travel Right Now and Avoid the Pandemic"           | Forbes                     |
| "6 Romantic U.S. Getaways for a Valentine's Day Escape" (Monmouth Historic Inn)       | AAA Magazine               |
| Top Brewery in Each State (Natchez Brewing Company)                                   | Yelp                       |
| "Top 25 B&Bs and Inns in the World" (Oak Hill Inn, #9)                                | TripAdvisor                |

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2020, the world and the United States have been catastrophically impacted by COVID-19, a novel respiratory disease that can result in serious illness or death by a new strain of coronavirus not previously identified in humans and that can be easily spread from person to person. With the initial evoked stay-at-home and non-essential travel restrictions by state and local governments, the visitor industry has been dramatically affected world-wide.

In Mississippi, tourism has been dramatically affected, causing a downturn in overnight visitors in all segments of the community. During the pandemic, our international visitation was eliminated due to federal travel restrictions to address the pandemic. The overall decline in tourism travel expenditures in Natchez declined by 29.6% from 2020 compared to 2019.

However, the city of Natchez fared better than most destinations around the country through the pandemic due in large to a few factors. The majority of visitors coming to Natchez drive as opposed to fly and were less affected by the restrictions and reductions in air travel. While our corporate travel as well as meetings and conventions were severely affected, a high percentage of our visitors come to Natchez for leisure travel. Of all the segments, leisure travel, and specifically drive-in leisure travel returned the fastest.

As we enter the 2023 fiscal year, with the effects of the pandemic slowly fading away, we are poised to resurge. In 2021, Natchez tourism travel expenditures rebounded with an increase of 27.6% over 2020. Occupancies and visitation continued to grow in 2022. More events are occurring, and visitors are seeking opportunities to travel once again. Flight restrictions are beginning to loosen including for international travelers. Mask mandates are few and far in between and traveler sentiment with concerns to traveling due to the pandemic is declining to pre-pandemic levels. And the team at Visit Natchez is preparing to capitalize on the opportunities in front of us. In 2020, we invested in a Visitor Research Study providing insights into who our visitors are, what they are looking for and what demographics we are not enjoying a fair share of. With this information, we developed a three-year Strategic Plan outlining our opportunities and guides to move forward. With our new direction and plan, we are in the process of developing a new Visit Natchez brand, helping to better represent our destination to future potential visitors. Following the new brand, a new Visit Natchez website and new visitor guide will both be released this year helping those prospective visitors better appreciate Natchez and understand what we have to offer in alignment with the new brand.

Through the research study and strategic plan, we identified that Natchez is more often sought after and visited by specific demographics and significantly underperforming in other demographics. Families represent 75% of our visitation, while travelers coming with only friends or solo only represent a combined 16%. Females represent 63% of our travel while males only represent 37%. Caucasians represent 96% of visitors while African Americans represent only 1%. Visitors over the age of 55 represent 71% of our travelers with Millennials only representing 12%. There are opportunities for us to grow our visitation through expanding

our focus to less represented groups in our city. Natchez offers excellent experiences that would enrich visitors in each of the underrepresented demographics. We will continue to market to the visitors we have, utilizing the historic homes and architecture as our foundation. We will add new initiatives to better tell the story of Natchez and the variety of attractions to gain new visitors to our city. The launch of a new brand, website and visitor guide will be the first steps toward telling this narrative and expanding our visitor base.

The biggest threat to challenge tourism in Natchez is the state of the economy. The growing cost of fuel will cause travel expenses to rise for automobiles and airplanes. Additionally, costs of goods and services are also increasing significantly, causing a price hike in numerous consumer industries. To add to this, supply chain disruptions continue to present a challenge. On a national level, hotel room prices have increased by 25.1%, rental cars 23.4% and restaurants 6.9% over the last year. Following the May 3-4, 2022, meeting, the Fed announced it was raising interest rates by 0.50% after a previous increase of 0.25% in March. However, the tourism industry is continuing to maintain, if not climb up from pre-pandemic levels. Industry leaders believe that travelers may choose a shorter length of stay or destinations a little closer than previously thought. Demand continues to outpace prior levels and traveler sentiment still shows that travelers are still choosing to travel. As a result, inflation levels continue to be an area of concern, but the outlook still shows that travel will grow.

We are presented an opportunity to counterbalance the economic challenges and the residual effects of the pandemic. On May 5, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves signed House Bill 453 into law, providing more than \$30 Million in funding for DMO's in the state specifically for the purposes of marketing our destinations as we recover. The funding is a result of federal ARPA funding that has been provided to the state and developed into the Mississippi Tourism Recovery Fund – 2 (MTRF-2). This measure also provides grant opportunities for Main Street Associations, of which our Downtown Natchez Alliance is a member, as well as non-profit museums, of which we have several. Through these funding opportunities, we will establish an "MTRF – 2" budget to attract more and new visitors to Natchez.

Additionally, the city of Natchez has worked to attract a commercial air carrier to the Natchez/Adams County Airport. Southern Airways Express has expressed interest in providing regional service from in partnership with American Airlines. The connecting cities are anticipated to be New Orleans and Memphis with the potential for future service to Dallas/Ft. Worth and Atlanta in future years. Service could begin as early as Fall 2022.

The future is bright in Natchez, and we are positioned perfectly...at the right time to take Natchez to the next level.

Devin Heath  
Executive Director

### III. IMPACT OF TOURISM

As the charts below illustrate, the impact of tourism for our community on a state and local level has grown tremendously over the past year. However, we keep in perspective that in 2019 (before the pandemic), the Travel & Tourism Expenditures resulted in \$108.7 Million. Tourism is one of the top employers in the area, producing opportunities for 1,400 jobs. Tax revenue attributed to tourism generates exceeds \$1.5 million dollars in Natchez/Adams County and more than \$10 million for the state of Mississippi. Visit Mississippi have identified Natchez as one of the top visited destinations in the state.

What is not demonstrated is the impact that tourism has on the community. Tourism is economic development not only by generating significant tax dollars but also provides exposure to our city for future investment. Tourism presents opportunities for potential residents and organizations to experience Natchez and consider this destination where they may choose to live and work.



## IV. STRATEGY

### A. Goals

Utilizing our strategic plan and new brand as guides and strategies, we will focus on target markets with the following goals in sight for 2023:

1. Create strong brand awareness for Visit Natchez/Natchez
2. Build on a strong foundation of historic homes & architecture with new programming and packaging opportunities
3. Demonstrate the diversity of experiences available in Natchez to a broader spectrum of visitors to increase visitation
4. Focus on refining our storytelling and programming of aligned cultural heritage attractions & events, outdoor experiences, arts and entertainment
5. Grow room nights and economic impact through converting day visitors to overnight guests and extending visitor length of stay
6. Our Strategic Plan is to grow our lodging room night production by 15% over 2019 levels by 2025. In 2023, we will grow room night production by 5% over 2019.



## B. SWOT Analysis

Through our 3-year Strategic Plan, the board and staff of Visit Natchez as well as community leaders identified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) for Natchez and the visitor experience through a community forum administered by our consultants with Destination Consultancy Group. By understanding and addressing these areas we will be better equipped and more prepared to move forward.

| Strengths  | Weaknesses   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High community brand profile nationally and internationally</li> <li>• On Mississippi River and Natchez Trace</li> <li>• Largest collection of historic homes and B &amp; Bs in the nation</li> <li>• Six National Park sites</li> <li>• Listing of major national “trails” are linked with Natchez</li> <li>• Three cruise lines dock in the city</li> <li>• Majority of hospitality offerings are local authentic restaurants and lodging establishments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No major highways connecting to Natchez</li> <li>• Perception of “Antebellum”/Old South place with crime</li> <li>• Limited hospitality workforce and declining visitor base</li> <li>• No significant family or sports tourism assets</li> <li>• No public restrooms downtown</li> </ul>                 |
| Opportunities  | Threats  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further development of cultural heritage assets</li> <li>• Potential Commercial Air Service</li> <li>• Arts community potential with attention to film, public art and entertainment</li> <li>• Improved wayfinding/signage system</li> <li>• Dinner cruises and leisure boating on Mississippi River</li> <li>• New community tourism programming to promote local events and tours</li> <li>• Film Industry productions</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Stagnation</li> <li>• Growing national anti-sentiment regarding “antebellum” South</li> <li>• Community resistance to progressive change</li> <li>• City regulations impeding smart growth</li> <li>• Declining population due to affordable housing availability and quality schools</li> </ul> |

## C. Key Annual Events

Natchez is blessed with events throughout the calendar year. Most events are planned with short lead times therefore there are a larger number of events that will occur than are on this list. Below is a list of annual events that we anticipate will draw significant visitation.

| Month     | Event   |
|-----------|---|
| January   | Mardi Gras Celebrations   |
|           | Grand Village of the Natchez Indians 11 Moon Storytelling & Bonfire |
| February  | Mardi Gras Celebrations   |
|           | Natchez Literary & Cinema Celebration                               |
| March     | Spring Pilgrimage   |
|           | Natchez Powwow  |
| April     | Spring Pilgrimage   |
|           | Euro Fest Auto Show   |
|           | Harmony in the Park   |
| May       | Natchez Festival of Music   |
|           | Mudbug Music Festival   |
|           | Natchez Bicycle Classic   |
| June      | Juneteenth Festival   |
|           | Crepe Myrtle Festival   |
| July      | Fourth of July Music Festival & Fireworks                           |
| September | Fall Pilgrimage   |
| October   | Biker Weekend on the Bluff  |
|           | Natchez Balloon Festival  |
|           | Y'all Means All - The Weekend                                       |
|           | Longwood Music Fest   |
|           | Fall Pilgrimage   |
| November  | Angels on the Bluff   |
|           | Lighting of the Christmas Tree                                      |
|           | Longwood Afternoon  |
| December  | Christmas Parade  |
|           | Natchez Festival of Music Christmas Cabaret                         |
|           | New Year's Eve Celebration  |

## D. Target Market Segments

As we went through the process of the Visitor Research Study, Strategic Plan and Branding projects this year, we identified eleven key vertical market segments that we will focus our sales and marketing efforts towards. These will be targeted through our sales and marketing initiatives. There are secondary markets such as Cuisine, LGBTQ+, Cruise Boat Visitors, Religious Tourism, and Visiting Friends and Relatives that we will include tactics throughout our sales and marketing initiatives.

| Vertical Markets                          | Key Assets   |
|---|--|
| Heritage & History Researchers            | Historic Homes, MS River, NPS, Museums, Monuments & Markers  |
| Cultural Heritage Seekers                 | Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, Forks of the Road, Proud to Take A Stand Monument, Dr. John Banks House, African American History and Culture Museum, First Presbyterian Church Gallery, Rhythm Night Club Museum, Temple B'nai Israel, Churches, Natchez City Cemetery, William Johnson House, Concord Quarters |
| Motorcyclists/Cyclists/Trails Enthusiasts | Natchez Trace, Bluff, Under the Hill, Natchez State Park, State and National Trails  |
| Nature Seekers & Outdoor Enthusiasts      | Bluff, MS River, St. Catherine Creek, Duncan Park, Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, Natchez Trace, Natchez State Park, Double C Ranch   |
| Arts & Entertainment                      | Live Music Venues, City Auditorium, Art Galleries, City Community Center   |
| Weddings & Special Celebrations           | All Assets   |
| On-Locationers (Movie, TV & Literature)   | Past Production Sites (Every Time a Bell Rings, New Orleans Noel, From Black, etc.), Future Movie Productions  |
| Leisure Travel (International & Domestic) | All Assets   |
| Group Tour & Travel                       | All Assets   |
| Association & SMERF Meetings              | All Assets   |
| Community Stakeholders                    | All Assets   |



### E. Target Designated Market Areas

Natchez has experienced strong shifts in production from several key designated market areas, or DMA’s. While some DMA’s have increased over the past few years, we have also seen declines in a few markets. We have defined our focus on two types, Primary Markets and Target Markets based on market visitation, website visitation and visitor guide requests. Primary Markets are those where we have experienced strong visitation and website traffic where we want to dedicate efforts to continue to see production. Target Markets define the DMA’s which may be underperforming and where we believe we can grow production significantly. There are secondary markets that we will target when the opportunities arise. International markets are not anticipated to have an impact this year as we do not anticipate a significant return of foreign travel until 2024. Additionally, if the Natchez-Adams County Airport secures commercial air service, we will evaluate and adjust our target markets in accordance with connecting markets.

Primary Markets

- Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX
- Jackson, MS
- New Orleans, LA
- Memphis, TX
- Mobile/Pensacola
- Baton Rouge, LA

Secondary Markets

- Houston, TX
- Birmingham, AL
- Little Rock-Pine Bluff, AR
- Nashville, TN
- Shreveport, LA

## V. Sales Strategies

### A. Groups & Convention Schedule

#### 2022 Natchez Convention Center

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| October  | Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA)- 10/11-10/13                     |
|          | MS Association of Governmental Purchasing & Property Agents (MAGPPA)- 10/16-10/19 |
|          | MS Society of Radiology Technology- 10/25-10/27                                   |
| December | MS Bandmasters Association- 12/6-12/10  |

#### 2023 Natchez Convention Center

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| January   | Episcopal Council of MS State Conference- 1/26-1/29                                     |
| March     | Gideons- 3/2-3/5  |
|           | Five District Rotary President-Elect Training- 3/17-3/18                                |
|           | National Guard State Conference- 3/24-3/26  |
|           | Spring Market- 4/1  |
| April     | LA-MS-West Tenn. District Key Club- 4/13-4/16   |
|           | National Association of Ministry Assistants (NAMA)- 4/26-4/28                           |
|           | Electric Lady Retreat- 4/29   |
| June      | MS Firefighters Association- 6/1-6/3  |
|           | MS International Order of Rainbow Girls- 6/12-6/16                                      |
| July      | Tumbler Palooza- 7/7-7/8  |
|           | Plumbing Heating Cooling Association- 7/13-7/16   |
|           | MS Headstart Association- 7/16-7/28   |
| September | MS Association of Broadcasters (tentative)- 9/19-9/21                                   |
| October   | MS Association of Governmental Purchasing & Property Agents (MAGPPA)- 10/15-10/18       |
|           | Mental Health/Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Joint Conference- 10/24-10/27 |
| December  | MS Bandmasters Association- 12/5-12/10  |

The Convention Sales Department promotes Natchez as a premier meetings and convention destination to regional and state meeting planners. The primary objective is to generate meetings and convention business for Natchez hotels and restaurants, the Natchez Convention Center and other meeting venues in the area.

The pandemic that started in March 2020 devastated the meetings industry and greatly affected the amount of business Natchez saw,



even as late as January 2022 with the cancelling of the 400+ attendee Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi conference. With efforts to restart our multi-faceted sales effort, which include face-to-face selling, client focused events, leveraging participation in regional and state associations and print and online advertising, we are continuing to see an increase in business as we approach FY' 23.

We continue to promote the key attributes of Natchez which remain critical factors in the decision-making process of meeting planners:

- A destination with its own original flavor that will provide a memorable experience for visitors
- Safe and walkable downtown with convenient dining options, attractions, and shops
- Affordable and diverse hotel accommodation options
- Unique and accessible venues
- Customized events and receptions



## B. Sales Calls & Business Development

### First Quarter: October – December 2022

| <b>Event</b>  | <b>Type</b>                     |
|---|---------------------------------|
| MS Tourism Association’s Governors<br>Conference on Tourism | Business Development/Networking |
| MS Society of Association Executives (MSAE)                 | Tradeshow                       |
| Travel South International                                  | Tradeshow                       |
| MS Welcome Center Blitz                                     | Sales Trip                      |

### Second Quarter: January – March 2023

| <b>Event</b>                         | <b>Type</b>                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| New Year Meeting Planner Sales Blitz | Sales Trip                      |
| American Bus Association             | Tradeshow                       |
| MSAE Lunch ‘n Learn x 2              | Business Development/Networking |
| Jackson Sales Calls                  | Sales Trip                      |
| Baton Rouge Sales Calls              | Sales Trip                      |

### Third Quarter: April – June 2023

| <b>Event</b>                       | <b>Type</b>                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| STS Domestic Showcase              | Tradeshow                       |
| MSAE Lunch ‘n Learn                | Business Development/Networking |
| Jackson Sales Calls                | Sales Trip                      |
| Baton Rouge Sales Calls            | Sales Trip                      |
| IPW                                | Tradeshow                       |
| African American Travel Conference | Tradeshow                       |

### Fourth Quarter: July – September 2023

| <b>Event</b>             | <b>Type</b>                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Meeting Planner Luncheon | Business Development/Networking |
| MSAE Lunch ‘N Learn      | Business Development/Networking |
| Jackson Sales Calls      | Sales Trip                      |
| Baton Rouge Sales Calls  | Sales Trip                      |

## B. International Markets

According to U.S. Travel Association's May 20, 2022, fact sheet, there were 79 million international visitors in 2019; 40 million of those from overseas (i.e. not including Mexico and Canada). Visitations plummeted by 76% in 2020 and remained at just 28% of 2019 levels in 2021, which is around 22 million visitors.

Visit Natchez, as well as Visit MS, are active members of Travel South International, the official regional destination marketing organization of the Southern USA. Travel South's Global Partner Program (GPP) is a collaborative promotional program to create a larger share of voice and have a wider expanse of global marketing efforts for the South. Participating states share expenses on in-country promotional efforts on a year-round basis. The primary objectives target trade and media and coordinating and leveraging consumer outreach with Brand USA co-op programs. It offers states a vehicle to have in-country representatives without having direct contracts and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars. Visit MS has chosen to pay-to-play in Australia/New Zealand, Brazil, Canada, Italy and most recently Spain.

Visit MS participates in the Mississippi River Country (MRC) program, a collection of states that border America's most famous river. The group focuses on sharing stories about culture, food, music, outdoors & recreation, and science & history with Japan and Canada. MRC is hoping to expand their representation to South Korea and eventually India.

We continue to have representation through the Memphis & Mississippi partnership in the United Kingdom, Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), Nordic regions, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and France well as through Deep South USA.

While projections continue to indicate international visitation may not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024, Natchez has seen an uptick throughout 2022 and will continue to work with regional partners to increase awareness and overnight visitation. Also, it was announced on June 10, 2022, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would no longer require travelers arriving at American airports from other countries to present a negative COVID-19 test, reducing confusion, inconvenience and expense.



## VI. Marketing Strategies

Visit Natchez shares the Natchez brand story with the world through the visitors' consideration, research, planning and purchase process. From inspiring visitors to take a trip to Natchez to creating a place to share memories, Visit Natchez engages with the visitor at all points in the journey.

- Brand Identity, Positioning, and Management

In the fiscal year 2022, Visit Natchez started developing a new brand identity. A new brand creative is in development for launch in FY 2023. Upon production of the new brand, a new library of assets will be developed and deployed across all channels.

- Visitor Services

Visit Natchez collaborates with our community partners to provide helpful information and enhance the visitors' experience. The Visit Natchez staff will provide the community with content-rich information through destination maps, visitor guides, and other collateral as needed while adhering to the new branding guidelines.

### A. Print Media

Visit Natchez will continue to develop integrated advertising and promotional media plans and media buy in key target markets that are placed in digital and terrestrial media channels and programming that are on-brand and integrated with the other marketing goals to increase year-round leisure travel from day-trippers and over-night visitors, extending visitor's length of stay, and encouraging repeat visitation. To stand out, and tell our destination story compellingly, Visit Natchez's campaigns will run year-round with seasonal highlights that change imagery, copy points messaging and media planning to ensure that Natchez is kept top of mind.

### B. Website

One of Visit Natchez's most valuable resources is Visitnatchez.org. With thousands of visitors annually, it provides the immediate visitor assistance on our destination. The website is key in the research, planning, and booking phases of the traveler cycle.

Visit Natchez has started a website re-design with Madden Media, pending the new brand creation. The new Visit Natchez website will provide flexibility to edit content that benefits both the visitor by providing up-to-date experiences and stakeholders to update their information as they elevate their offerings. The new website will provide elevated hotel, dining, and activity information from stakeholders, itineraries and experiences, niche market information such as pet travel, weddings and more, and partner offers and events. The website will be further leveraged with the introduction of micro-sites for major initiatives, such as the Cultural Heritage and Natchez Film Office initiatives.

## C. Digital Media

Through our partnership with Advance Travel & Tourism, Digital Media will continue to be a strong source of marketing for Natchez. We will utilize research and data to strategize our tactics for 2023. Our guide for 2023 will be to utilize our Marketing Budget to develop a foundational presence in our primary and close, drive markets to build brand awareness and achieve consistency. Utilizing funding through a Visit Mississippi Co-operative plan and through MTRF-2, we will build on the foundation and expand into secondary and tertiary markets as well as a focus on niche market segments.

With the financial challenges and rising costs facing the nation, travel sentiment is showing that travelers now have a new significant factor impacting plans. Although Covid-19 concerns influencing travel are at the lowest levels since surveys began March 11, 2020, new concerns are reaching their highest levels with one in three travelers indicating that transportation costs would greatly impact their decision to travel in the next six months<sup>1</sup>. The study shows that the cost concerns are causing more travelers to choose destinations closer to home, with 39% than canceling travel plans entirely with 9%.

We will adjust our foundational strategy through our Marketing Budget with a high percentage of tactics on closer, drive markets. We will not ignore our further primary and secondary markets, only shift more efforts towards the closer markets. We will utilize funding through our MTRF-2 funding to direct tactics towards more distant destinations.

## D. Social Media

Visit Natchez will continue to utilize social media platforms and contributed content to inspire and convert target audiences. Visit Natchez recognizes social media as vital in inspiring potential travelers, for travel research, and as a resource for in-market guests.

Visit Natchez plans to “turn up the volume” on our social content to build a community and be a leader in our industry. We plan to accomplish this by implementing the following approach:

The social media team is investing in curating an appealing aspirational feed to attract visitors by showcasing all destination differentiators such as scenery, neighborhoods, recreation, lifestyle, shopping, culinary, hotels and unique lodging. The team will build a curated image and video library utilizing user generated content, as well as in-housework to ensure a consistent look and feel. Video will be a priority, focusing on evergreen content that will educate and inspire visitation and highlight local attractions.

Building a community will build loyalty, enhance following and boosting engagement. We will implement community management protocols to engage with following, partner accounts, and other relevant accounts and brands.



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<sup>1</sup> Longwoods International Travel Sentiment Study – Wave 62 (June 14, 2022)

## E-Communications

Visit Natchez will keep visitors, partners, meeting planners and locals informed through a robust and comprehensive e-communications program. This fiscal year, Visit Natchez will be evaluating its current newsletter offerings for ways to improve, engage and grow lists. We will be focused on exploring ways to improve content and share multi-media assets through e-communications. The overall goal is to build community, present inspirational and information content and keep consumers and partners informed on the latest destination and organization happenings.

- **Visitor Newsletter:** Distributed to visitors, this e-newsletter consists of visitor focused information about Natchez events and news. The marketing team is also exploring facilitating automations targeting specific actions that are aimed at extending engagement and interest in our destination.
- **Partner Newsletter: Distributed** to local partners and stakeholders, this e-newsletter shares trends in the destination, economy and local markets, while providing updates relevant to community partners.
- **Industry Newsletter:** Distributed to target segments (i.e. tour operators, meeting planners, etc.) This communication will continue the strategic efforts of the Sales team and focus on specific targeting campaigns.

## E. Public Relations

Visit Natchez's media-relations efforts hinge on strong, ongoing relationships with targeted media, bloggers, travel writers and social influencers. Nurturing current relationships, growing our network, and increasing media visits to the area are top priorities. Sharing the Visit Natchez brand story through respected media outlets not only gives the destination credibility, but also allows the audiences to discover the destination in an enthusiastic manner.

In partnership with Lou Hammond Group, Visit Natchez will develop story angles centered around the brand and its defining-events. We will then utilize those angles to engage in proactive pitching to local, regional, and national media to secure stories that promote the destination and its assets.

### **Key action steps:**

- Facilitate in-bound media requests
- Create custom itineraries for visiting media
- Conduct one-on-one meetings (desk sides) with media in key U.S. markets
- Plan familiarization tours (FAM) around aficionado angles
- Participate in and attend key media networking events
- Update, refine and build on media distribution lists and contact databases
- Produce and distribute press releases and media advisories
- Develop a new, leading-edge online media hub on the Visit Natchez Website



## F. Community Relations

We value the engagement of our community partners in our journey towards growing visitation to Natchez. As part of our Strategic Plan, we specifically chose Open and Transparent and Inclusive and Collaborative among our key Values for our organization. We are dedicated to creating initiatives towards open and consistent communication with our community partners to share our initiatives, successes, and opportunities. By building strong partnerships with our community partners, we will generate innovative ideas as well as identify opportunities for more collaboration in sales and marketing initiatives and leverage relationships for future opportunities. We will also be able to educate the community in key areas that will enable business and organizations to grow in their respective organizations.

### Key Initiatives

1. The team of Visit Natchez will engage our community partners through regularly hosted events to allow partners to become more familiar with our organization's activities and results.
2. We will provide consistent communication to the community through local media including the Natchez Democrat, Bluff City Post, Listen Up Y'all, Midsouth Broadcasting. We will share information by authoring articles, speaking on radio shows and sponsoring advertisements demonstrating our support of the community. In addition to blogs, we will also promote Natchez via multiple internet/social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr.

We will assist various organizations in their efforts to secure grant funding. We will also provide training and guidance to our partners in the areas of storytelling, marketing, and public relations. We will strive to improve understanding and work through controversies via dialogue using the guidance of expert mediator/scholar.

3. We will participate in community organizations to provide regular access and to show our support of our community. This will include membership in organizations, speaking to groups and attendance at events.
4. We will continue to focus on high-level personalized service to our partners
5. The team will seek out topics of interest to provide educational opportunities for organization leaders and employees.
6. As opportunities arise for collaboration on community development initiatives, we will offer resources and support through information, guidance and input as well as participation on committees and boards. We will cultivate relationships with community leaders on local, state and national levels. We will partner with institutions of higher learning, as well as with institutions of faith and religion.

Below is a list of local organizations/committees the Visit Natchez team and board are currently engaged in:

- Christmas in Natchez Committee
- Historic Natchez Foundation
- Natchez-Adams County Airport Stakeholders
- Natchez-Adams County Community Alliance
- Natchez Chamber of Commerce
- Natchez Garden Club
- Natchez Civil Rights Trail Committee
- Natchez Rotary Club
- Natchez – Trace Kiwanis Club
- Pilgrimage Garden Club
- U.S. Colored Troops Monument Committee

Additionally, we are actively engaged in the following regional/national organizations:

- American Bus Association
- Association of Film Commissions International
- Destinations International
- Mississippi Historical Society
- Mississippi Society of Association Executives
- Mississippi Tourism Association
- Natchez Trace Compact
- Southeast Tourism Society
- TravelSouth USA

## IX. Marketing Assistance Funding Program

The Marketing Assistance Funding Program will be refurbished to ensure equitable opportunities for future events, opportunities for funding during off-peak periods while not exceeding the budget. The program is designed to assist organizations that attract overnight visitors to Natchez with funding support specifically for marketing initiatives. Over the past few years, the volume of requests has grown as more events are being planned. Having more events is wonderful for tourism, however we have a limited budget to provide for these events. To meet these goals, we will revise our program and educate the event organizers so they can prepare accordingly. The new, updated program is available at the [visitnatchez.org](http://visitnatchez.org) website.

## X. Other Programs

### Natchez Film Office

In our first year after reopening the Natchez Film Office (NFO), we were able to secure a film for the city, *From Black*. This was a horror film written to be set in the Midwest. However, filmmakers for the project were impressed with Natchez and appreciated the support provided by the NFO, that they chose to film in our city. *From Black* had 35 crew members, 12 cast members and 20 days of shooting in the city of Natchez. The film featured several recognizable actors including Anna Camp, notably of *The Help* and *Pitch Perfect* as well as Natchez's own Ritchie Montgomery.



We also secured a shoot for a new documentary airing on Discovery + called *Real Time Crime*. We also assisted in productions previously committed to Natchez, including *Every Time A Bell Rings*, *A New Orleans Noel*, *Christmas in the Quarter* and *Great Escapes Season 2*. After a successful first year of operating the Natchez Film Office, we will continue to develop our internal infrastructure and community resources available for future projects. We will build our database to better support future projects including photos for scouting, crew and services. We will add film crews and casts to our discount program, adding an incentive for the productions to spend money in town. We will work closely with the Mississippi Film Office to ensure we are presented as a location for future projects and we will support their efforts to build on the Mississippi Film Rebate program.

### Cultural Legacy Platform

In accordance with our DEI Statement to provide more opportunities for everyone to join in the Natchez experience, we will dedicate more efforts towards curating the stories of the various cultures of Natchez and telling that story. To date, Visit Natchez has been instrumental in curating and developing several cultural attractions including the Proud To Take A Stand Monument, Dr. John Banks House, Mississippi Freedom Trail Marker at the Dr. John Banks House, and the Natchez U.S. Colored Troops Monument.

Moving forward, in addition to working with community partners to elaborate on the stories, we will work to bring those stories to life. We will conduct the following activities:

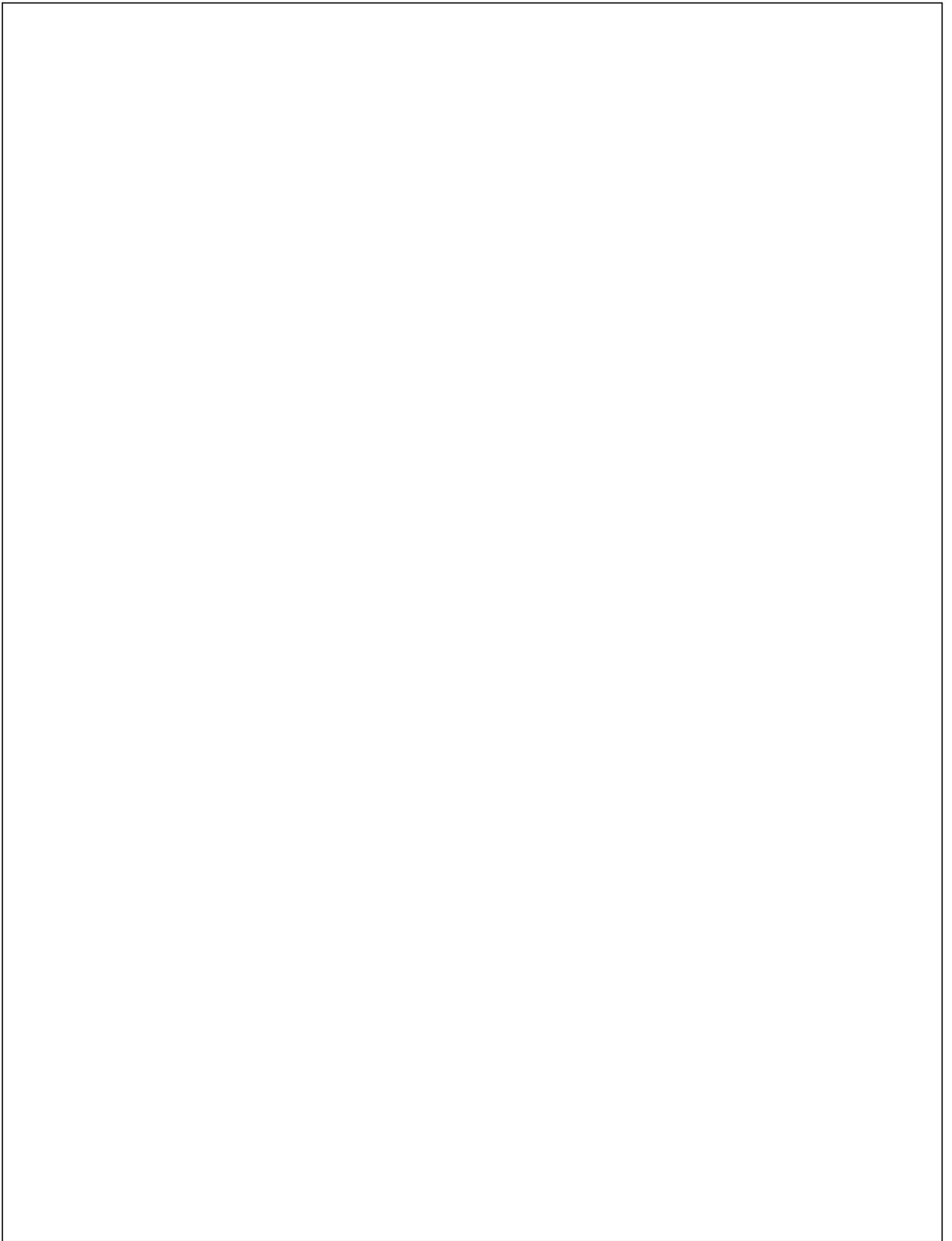
- Work with the community to develop new attractions
- Partner with the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians to support their efforts to communicate the heritage of the original inhabitants of Natchez
- Work with the garden clubs, NAACP and other community organizations to curate and tell the stories of the women of Natchez
- Develop new Cultural Legacy page on the new website designed to generate new interest in Natchez's cultural sites and stories including a map and list of more than 50 sites
- Identify the full list of trails that Natchez is a part of and market them to enthusiasts
- Work with historic homeowners to tell the whole story of the men and women who worked and built the homes
- Create annual training workshops to provide resources to partners
- Write and publish articles for news outlets that highlight the culture of Natchez
- Target cultural travel writers and influencers to visit and share with their audiences
- Educate students and the general public through partnerships with colleges and universities
- Identify grant funding opportunities related to cultural sites

### Group/Film Discount Program

Visit Natchez will reimplement the Group Discount Coupon Program. In the past, this program helped to enhance foot traffic to participating venues and provided added value to meetings and groups. We are expanding this discount coupon program to include not only meeting/conference attendees and tour groups, but also cast and crew for film productions being made in Natchez. This will be provided to qualifying visitors via a QR code, which will make it easy for them to access, eliminate additional paperwork and allow the program to be adjusted quickly and efficiently.

### Visitor Engagement Program

We will introduce a Visit Natchez Treasure Hunt. Tourists will be provided a map with clues for the city scavenger hunt to travel around the city in search for its treasures. The treasures can be anything from a historical home, landmark or even artwork. The visitor will take a picture of every treasure listed on the Map. They will then present it to a staff member at the Visit Natchez Office where they will get a prize.



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