



# *Tourism Strategy*

## *for the Eastern Shore of Virginia*



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# **Contributors**

## **Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission**

Carol Evans, Chair (Northampton)  
Mark Danes, Vice-Chair (Accomack)  
Paige Addison (Northampton)  
Andrew Barbour (Northampton)  
Dave Burden (Northampton)  
Therese Hamilton (Accomack)  
Lisa LaMontagne (Accomack)  
Robert Lentz (Accomack)

### **ESTC Staff**

Donna Bozza, Director  
Tracy Lovell, Office Manager

### **ESTC Branding Committee**

Andrew Barbour (Northampton)  
Donna Bozza (ESTC Staff)  
Mark Danes (Accomack)  
Therese Hamilton (Accomack)  
Lisa LaMontagne (Accomack)  
Mary Ann McDevitt (Northampton)

## **Eastern Shore Tourism Alliance**

### **Steering Committee**

Tom Anderson (Deputy Director, CBBT)  
Pam Barefoot (Blue Crab Bay Company)  
Donna Bozza (ESTC Director)  
Deborah Christie (Northampton Chamber of Commerce)  
Cherron Davis (New Church Welcome Center)  
Oral Lambert (Director of Resort Development, Bay Creek)  
Robie Marsh (Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce)  
Suzanne Taylor (Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce)

### **Agri-Tourism**

Al Picardi, Chair  
Paul & Barbara Clifford  
Janice & Rick Felker  
Joyce & George Foster  
Robert & Francesca Giardina  
Marian Huber  
Roger Mariner  
Butch Nottingham  
Mills Wehner

### **The Arts**

Lynne Rogers, Chair  
Bob Behr  
Mary Miller  
Carole Peirson  
Mary Ann Roehm  
Joan Sharp

**Beaches, Parks and Refuges**

Donna Mason, Chair  
 Tracy Ammerman  
 Dot Fields  
 Susan Rice

**Cape Charles (cont.)**

Mary Ann McDevitt  
 Virginia Savage  
 Larry Veber

**Chincoteague**

Tracy Ammerman  
 Bob Behr  
 Kim Halpin  
 Therese Hamilton  
 Donna Mason  
 Jerry Pruitt  
 Jerry Ryan  
 Jack Tarr  
 Suzanne Taylor

**Eco-Tourism**

Dave Burden, Chair  
 Scott Allen  
 Rick Kellam  
 Doug Kennedy  
 Robert Lentz  
 Steve Mallett  
 Steve Parker  
 Susan Rice  
 Stan Shedake  
 Buddy Vaughan

**Heritage Tourism**

Dr. Art Carter, Chair  
 Jan Neville  
 Laura Vaughn  
 John Verrill  
 Nancy Watson

**Hospitality**

Mike Carpenter, Chair  
 Gary Cochran  
 Mary Ann McDevitt  
 Thom & Linda Nolan  
 Jerry Pruitt  
 Robbin Smith  
 Shannon & Charles Thain

**Cape Charles**

Dave Burden, Co-Chair  
 Oral Lambert, Co-Chair  
 Deborah Christie

**Outside Consultants and Contractors****The Fox Graduate School of Business** (Temple University)

James Hutchin, Clinical Professor  
 Louise Slinger, Project Manager  
 Dominik Gerlach, Consultant  
 Jeremy Dupre, Contributing Editor  
 Anthony Pastor, Contributing Editor  
 Kelly Radar, Contributing Editor

**Ringer RG** (Brand Development)

Jeff Ringer, Creative Services  
 Richard Gearhart, Account Services

**Virginia Tourism Corporation**

Alisa Bailey, CEO  
 Chris Canfield, Vice President

## Introduction

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is unlike anywhere else on the entire East Coast. It's a reminder of a landscape and lifestyle that no longer exists elsewhere. Where else can you find historic farms sloping down to the Atlantic on one side and to the Chesapeake on the other? Where else can you find pristine barrier islands fronting salt marshes, lagoons, and channels? The Eastern Shore is one of the world's premier birding destinations; it offers some of the finest fishing in the United States. Our historic towns and homes date back to the earliest days of this country; we boast the most fertile agricultural land in the East. All this lies within a few hours' drive of some of the biggest markets in the country: Hampton Roads, Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, and New York.

### **Fast Facts: Nature- and Agri-Tourism**

In the United States, travel and tourism output was expected to grow 28 percent between 1997 and 2007. Nature and agricultural based tourism, the fastest growing segment, averaged a 30 percent **annual increase** during this period.

– Purdue Tourism Hospitality Research Center

The Eastern Shore is unique and therein lies our key advantage. In our increasingly homogenized world, being unique is a priceless commodity—something to be protected and treasured. It is the goose that will lay the golden egg. The Tourism Commission's task is to develop a vibrant tourist industry based on this very uniqueness. Nature tourism, agri-tourism, resort and heritage

tourism offer economic opportunities that mesh perfectly with the Eastern Shore's assets.

And as nature becomes an increasingly rare commodity, the economic advantage of preserving our natural heritage becomes more and more compelling. Historically, the Eastern Shore has lived and thrived on the bounty of nature: fishing, hunting, and agriculture have been the mainstays of the Eastern Shore for nearly 400 years. A continued reliance on nature can fuel the Eastern Shore's prosperity for the next 400 years. We need to take a different approach, of course, but the resource is the same. But if we turn our backs on our assets—on what makes this place unique—then we have nothing. Our success depends on our ability to differentiate ourselves.

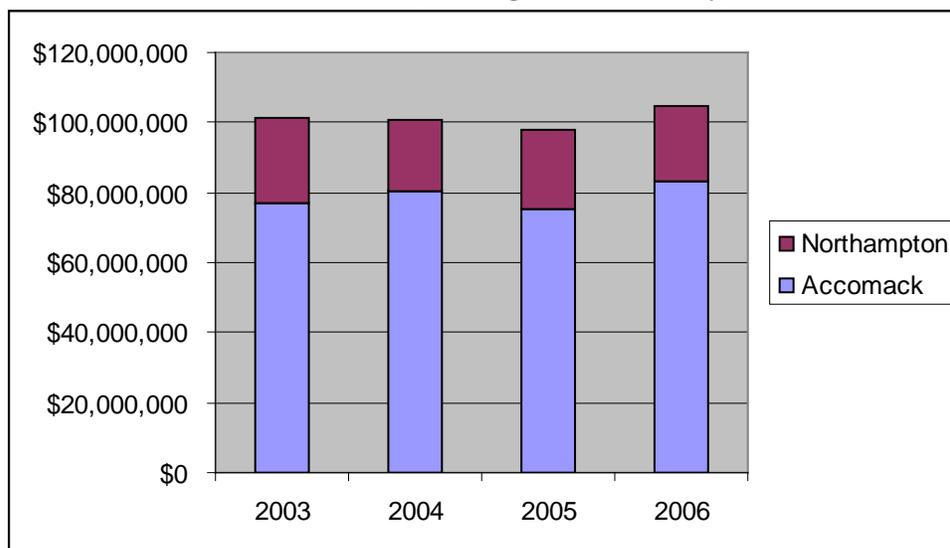
As we develop our tourism industry, though, it's vital that we don't make the mistake of thinking that every tourist activity is helpful. As an industry, tourism has many styles and faces. This document stems from the belief that you build on your strengths rather than pursue a pale imitation of another area's success. This is not the Caribbean; it's not Florida. The beauty and appeal of the Eastern Shore are far more delicate and subtle, ill suited to mass-market tourism or mega-development. Yet this delicate beauty is an asset, too. If we play to our strengths, the Eastern Shore has everything necessary to become a tourist destination of national renown.

**If we turn our backs on our assets—on what makes this place unique—then we have nothing.**

This document offers a vision for the development of a high-dollar, low-impact tourism industry. The strategy cannot succeed in a vacuum, however: Everything is interconnected. To work, the plan must have buy-in from ordinary citizens, farmers, watermen, legislators, highway planners, and the incorporated towns. It requires changes in how the counties operate and where we direct our resources. It requires forging a communality of purpose, of identity, and shared goals.

For that reason, it's imperative that we continue our work to establish the Eastern Shore brand as the unifying factor to which all these individual components contribute. This brand, which is being used to market everything from our tourism experience to our farm produce and shellfish, obviously serves a traditional marketing purpose. But it also serves a vital local function: to give our citizens a highly visible reminder of our shared sense of economic purpose and direction.

### **Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Revenues (estimated) (overnight visitors only)**



# **Marketing Plan**

# The Eastern Shore Brand

States, counties, and towns nationwide are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the packaging and marketing of their product, and the Eastern Shore must compete in this arena or lose out. Today, the ability to differentiate oneself and develop consumer awareness is key to winning tourist dollars. Instead of reacting to market forces as we have in the past, our two counties need to drive the market.

To do this, the Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission has created an Eastern Shore brand. The Eastern Shore has no single blockbuster attraction—no Grand Canyon, no towering mountain ranges. Instead, the Eastern Shore’s appeal is made up of smaller, more subtle elements. Alone, these elements cannot hope to spur significant growth in visitor numbers. Brought together as part of a single brand, however, they offer a compelling image of a nature-oriented lifestyle that will resonate strongly with the residents of the major urban markets ringing the Eastern Shore.

At the same time, it’s important to recognize that the Eastern Shore brand can—and must—extend far beyond the purview of tourism. The brand must represent a broad spectrum of high-quality products, produce, services, and experiences that can benefit from and contribute to the image we seek to project.

It is also important to understand that a brand is not synonymous with a logo and tagline. A brand refers to the impression that customers develop gradually from each and every contact they have with a particular destination. A contact might be an article in a paper; an advertisement; a telephone call to a B&B owner; a conversation with a Welcome Center representative; or even the act of purchasing Eastern Shore clams from a grocery store. From each contact a customer forms an image of the Eastern Shore—its people, landscape, experiences, values, and products. This image—or brand—is built up, layer upon layer, from numerous such contacts. If we are successful, whenever a customer encounters “Eastern Shore of Virginia,” the words will reflexively conjure up the image that we wish to project.

**From a branding perspective, clams and crabs play as important a role as kayaking trips to the barrier islands.**

What differentiates destination branding from product branding, however, is the issue of “externalities”; many factors that affect the Eastern Shore brand image will remain out of the direct control of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission. Moreover, the visitor’s perception of the brand will come from personal experiences and interactions with local hosts. Any favorable interactions will augment the brand image and any negative interactions will detract from brand development previously achieved. Accordingly, the Commission will continue to pursue its strategy for hospitality training for those involved with customer interaction.

## **Brand Mission**

*To attract visitors, stimulate economic development, and protect the region's unspoiled ecosystems and local communities.*

Specifically:

- A) Increase awareness among travelers, shape consumer perception, and influence travel and buying decisions.
- B) Responsibly leverage the Eastern Shore's unique assets—natural and cultural—as a means of preserving them.
- C) Facilitate premium pricing of Eastern Shore-branded produce, shellfish, and value-added products.
- D) Help local businesses reduce their marketing costs. By branding the region, we brand by extension all the elements within the region. Consider how successfully Vermont has managed to brand itself as a state that represents everything wholesome and natural. Vermont-based companies can now ride the coattails of that branding without the need to spend exorbitantly on their own branding initiatives. This built-in marketing advantage will attract additional companies whose goods and services stand to benefit from the Eastern Shore brand.
- E) Help to unify our community with a shared goal, the promise of opportunity, and sense of pride.
- F) Assist in the recruitment of off-shore employees and compatible new businesses.

## **Brand Clients**

The brand must serve a broad constituency of Eastern Shore businesses and organizations including, but not limited to, the following:

- a) Tourism businesses (existing and new) that leverage, in some form, the Eastern Shore's core assets. These include (but are not limited to):
  - Restaurants, bars and cafes
  - Hotels, inns, B&Bs, vacation rentals, and campgrounds
  - Outfitters & guides
  - Agri-tourism businesses, including farm stands and wineries
  - Charter boats
  - Resorts & marinas
  - Existing festivals
  - Galleries and artist studios
  - Museums and cultural venues
  - Small retailers, including craft & gift shops.
- b) Non-tourism businesses (existing and new) that also leverage the Eastern Shore's core assets in some way. These include (but are not limited to):
  - Specialty-food companies (e.g., Blue Crab Bay Company)

- Antiques stores
- Realtors
- Boat builders
- c) Agriculture
  - Agri-tourism businesses
  - Specialty crops distributed independently or via co-op.
- d) Aquaculture
  - Clams, oysters, crabs, fish, and whelks distributed independently or via co-op.
- e) Existing brands and sub-brands
  - Chincoteague
  - Cherrystone clams
  - Blue Crab Bay Co.
- f) Chambers of Commerce
  - Recruitment of off-shore businesses
  - Promotion of existing festivals
  - Promotion of chamber members
- g) Major Eastern Shore employers
  - Recruitment of off-shore employees.
- h) Government
  - Accomack & Northampton counties
  - Incorporated towns
- i) Conservation and land-trust organizations
- j) The community at large.
  - Citizens must believe that they have an economic stake in building the brand—that their individual actions will ultimately affect how much money goes in their pockets (e.g., throwing litter in ditches undermines the image from which they make their living).

**NOTE: While the umbrella brand must be able to accommodate a wide range of businesses and purposes, it will not serve everyone. For example, a welding business or gas station will probably have no use for a regional brand.**

## **Brand Identity**

### **Key Differentiator**

Without a doubt, the Eastern Shore’s key differentiator is our undeveloped coastline—both on the Atlantic and Chesapeake—and our unspoiled natural environment. No other region in the mid-Atlantic can compete in this area—not now or in the future. Our branding message must constantly exploit this inherent advantage.

### **Core Assets**

Listed below is a more complete list of the Eastern Shore’s core assets—the building blocks of the Eastern Shore brand. The benefits that visitors reap from a trip here will, in

all likelihood, be based on their interaction with one or more of these core assets. The brand will be built on this foundation.

- The longest stretch of undeveloped coastline on the East Coast.
- An internationally acclaimed biosphere of pristine barrier islands, marshlands, bays, and forest.
- A narrow peninsula bordered by the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean (just a few minutes' drive from Bayside to Seaside), with water sunrises and sunsets.
- A countryside of patchwork family farms, historic hamlets, and waterside villages/towns.
- Miles of undeveloped beaches.
- An enduring community attuned to the rhythms of the land and water.
- World-class bird-watching.
- Producer of the finest shellfish.
- A rich historical heritage.
- A prominent artists' community.
- World-class fishing and hunting.
- Chincoteague Island, family beach resort and home of the famous wild ponies.
- Tangier Island, a village of working watermen with traditions dating back to the 1600s.
- The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel.
- Small-town America, Southern hospitality
- NASA Wallops and rocket launches.
- Championship-quality golf courses
- Award-winning marinas
- An easy drive from the mid-Atlantic's major cities.

## **Brand Attributes**

Branding is all about how people perceive a product or destination—how they react to the core assets (see above). In the case of destination branding, it is especially important that the brand be rooted in reality. Nothing will destroy a brand faster than the perception that you are peddling a lie. Listed below are adjectives that realistically characterize the Eastern Shore experience—our landscape, products, people, culture, and values. As part of any branding message, customers should be exposed to one or more of the **attributes** listed below, tailored to their specific market:

- Unspoiled
- Tranquil
- Natural
- Uncrowded
- Undiscovered
- Authentic
- Coastal
- Rural
- Environmentally aware
- Unique
- Unhurried
- Untamed
- Undeveloped
- Friendly
- Steeped in history

## **Brand Messages**

Identifying our core assets and attributes ([see above](#)) goes a long way toward establishing our brand. Using these elements, we can create our brand messages—calls to action that speak directly to our target audience and convince them of the benefits of a trip to the Eastern Shore.

A brand message is obviously going to vary depending on the target audience, the type of media used, and what aspect of the Shore we are promoting. A marketing campaign to attract visitors interested in history and art, for example, will differ significantly from a campaign to attract eco-tourists. But both messages must be based on our core assets and attributes. When a proposed brand message does not jibe closely with the identified assets and attributes, it means it is off-message and not appropriate.

Below are sample brand messages, tailored to specific industry sectors. These are not intended to be used verbatim in any marketing materials. Instead, they are designed to display the flexibility of the brand and to serve as a guide to help the Tourism Commission stay on message in its promotional efforts.

**Message 1 (General):** Escape from the everyday to the Eastern Shore of Virginia, an undiscovered peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay, where you can explore historic villages and family farms, revel in miles of deserted beaches, or disappear with a guide into a vast wilderness of marsh and barrier islands of global ecological significance—all within an easy drive of the mid-Atlantic’s major cities.

**Message 2 (Nature Tourism):** Explore the Eastern Shore of Virginia, an undiscovered peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. Revel in deserted beaches, enjoy the wonder of the annual bird migration, or disappear with a guide into the largest coastal preserve on the Eastern seaboard—a vast wilderness of marsh and barrier islands of global ecological significance—all within an easy drive of the mid-Atlantic’s major cities.

**Message 3 (Hospitality):** Unwind on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, a stunning peninsula of historic villages and family farms tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. Wander our deserted beaches, browse artist studios, tour a local winery, and savor the East Coast’s finest oysters and clams. At the end of the day, relax at a gracious B&B in an atmosphere of Southern hospitality—all within an easy drive of the mid-Atlantic’s major cities.

**Message 4 (Heritage Tourism):** Step back in time on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, a historic peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. Explore quaint villages dating back to the birth of our nation, browse museums and antique shops, meet nationally renowned artists in their studios, or savor Southern hospitality at an 18<sup>th</sup>-century inn—all within an easy drive of the mid-Atlantic’s major cities.

**Message 5 (Agri-Tourism):** Rediscover America’s rural roots on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, an unspoiled peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay where you and your family can enjoy hay rides on historic farms, pick your own fruit, sample local produce at farm stands, or rake clams at low tide.

**Message 6 (Beach & Recreational Resorts, couples):** Escape the everyday on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, a stunning peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. Take to the water for world-class fishing or hunt for one-of-a-kind antiques; play a round of championship golf or do the rounds of artist studios; at the end of the day, relax with a sunset stroll on a quiet beach—all within an easy drive of the mid-Atlantic’s major cities.

**Message 7 (Beach & Recreational Resorts, summer family):** This summer, escape the boardwalk frenzy for the quiet beaches of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Charming beach towns welcome the bucket-and-spade brigade with classic ice-cream parlors, safe streets, and old-fashioned family fun. Step out of your car onto calm Bayside beaches where kids can splash in the shallows or onto broad Seaside beaches that are home to Chincoteague's famous wild ponies.

**Message 8 (Business Development):** Let your business take wing on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, a stunning peninsula tucked between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay and

an easy drive from the mid-Atlantic's major cities. Escape constant gridlock for the unhurried rhythms of country living, where historic villages and family farms co-exist with championship golf courses, world-class fishing, and miles of empty beaches. It's your choice: Do you want you to get stuck into life or stuck in your car?

### **Hot-Button Terms**

In almost every case, the branding message will consist of a blend of the attributes and core assets listed above. In addition, the message should attempt to address the following hot-button elements:

- 1) **Where we are.** Anecdotal evidence suggests that few people—even those living within the mid-Atlantic region—know where the Eastern Shore of Virginia is located. Correcting this must be one of our highest priorities. All messaging should refer to our area as a **peninsula** and should locate us between the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. Whenever possible, printed and Web materials should include a small inset map showing the peninsula with respect to the surrounding region. Further, we should constantly position ourselves in terms of **driving time from major mid-Atlantic cities.**
- 2) The **Chesapeake Bay** is a very evocative term for many travelers, as is the **Atlantic Ocean.** The fact that we offer easy access to both gives us a significant marketing advantage. We should use both these terms whenever possible in our messaging.
- 3) **“Islands”** is another term that resonates well among travelers. Where appropriate, we should leverage the natural allure that islands possess by incorporating mention of Chincoteague Island, Tangier Island, or the barrier islands.

### **Brand Logo and Tagline**

The Eastern Shore Tourism Commission has developed the following logo and tagline for the promotion of the Eastern Shore. Guidelines and permission requirements for the logo are in a separate document, available from the Eastern Shore Tourism Commission.



# **Marketing Strategy: Phase I**

**Goal: Within 5 years develop an Eastern Shore brand that has broad consumer awareness at the regional level.**

The Tourism Commission is pursuing a two-phase marketing strategy to build the Eastern Shore of Virginia brand and increase visitation. Phase I focuses regionally within a 300-mile radius of the Eastern Shore; Phase II, which will possibly begin within 5-10 years, will expand the marketing effort nationally and internationally, if warranted.

The phased approach is necessary for the following reasons:

- a) The Eastern Shore of Virginia currently does not have the tourism infrastructure to be able to attract and support large numbers of tourists from outside the region for extended visits.
- b) The limited marketing budget of the Tourism Commission makes it difficult to extend our promotional campaign nationally.
- c) Besides the Commission's Website, the primary marketing mechanism for the Eastern Shore of Virginia will be the CBBT Welcome Center, which by its nature will reach a large regional audience at a very low cost-per-touch ratio.
- d) The size of the regional market is so large—and untapped—that it makes no sense to spend money on non-regional initiatives that offer a lower return on investment.

## **Geographic Market**

Promotional efforts will focus on the 8 major metropolitan areas with a 300-mile radius of the Eastern Shore. Total population is approx. 16.2 million. Major metropolitan areas:

- Baltimore
- Hampton Roads
- New York City
- Philadelphia
- Pittsburgh
- Raleigh
- Richmond
- Washington, D.C.

## **Vacation Type**

ESTC will focus its promotional efforts on three kinds of vacation:

- a) Weekend and long-weekend getaways (summer and shoulder seasons)
- b) Summer vacations (one-week average)
- c) Day-trippers and through traffic

## **Target Demographics**

The Tourism Commission had adopted a sustainable-tourism strategy that is intended to maximize tourism revenues while limiting tourism's impact on the Eastern Shore's environment, culture, and communities. Consequently, the Tourism Commission will focus on building a high-dollar, limited-volume tourism industry, with an emphasis on quality, "hosted" customer service.

In analyzing potential markets for the Eastern Shore, the Tourism Commission has identified two primary demographics: Educated Mature Market and Educated Family Market. These primary markets are attractive for two reasons: (a) They have high income levels compared with other demographic groups; (b) Their travel preferences align with the Eastern Shore's assets and attributes, although it should be recognized that Chincoteague and Cape Charles will be the primary destinations for the Educated Family Market.

### **Primary Demographics**

#### ➤ **Educated Mature Market**

**Definition:** 36-65 years old, with university/college education; no children in household under 20.

**Market Share:** 19% of the U.S. tourism market

**Estimated size of market within 300-mile radius:** 3,089,352

**Visitation Profile:** Weekends/long weekends during shoulder seasons and summer.

**Demographic profile:** The Mature Market tends to be somewhat less active in outdoor pursuits while on vacation than either the Youth or Family Markets. Respondents are more likely than average travelers to go natural sight-seeing; visit gardens and natural attractions; visit agricultural and local fairs, museums, art galleries and historical sites; and shop and dine while traveling. The Mature Market is also more likely than others to stay at seaside resorts, tour using their personal vehicle, or to take a winery tour.

The Mature Market is also more likely than average to consult information from travel shows, auto clubs and newspaper or magazine articles, and to read specialised travel publications (e.g., travel sections of newspapers, travel magazines).

#### ➤ **Educated Family Market**

**Definition:** Families with children under the age of 20 living in the home; parent(s) with university/college education.

**Market Share:** 21.3% of the U.S. tourism market

**Estimated size of market within 300-mile radius:** 3,458,000

**Visitation Profile:** Summer weekends/long weekends; summer vacation (one week plus)

**Key Eastern Shore destinations:** Chincoteague, Cape Charles.

**Demographic profile:** Family Market vacation travel revolves around two needs: rest and recuperation, and keeping children entertained. Their preferred outdoor activities are consistent with their desire for recuperative vacation experiences (i.e., sunbathing and swimming, fishing). The priorities of children are reflected in the Family Market's above-average participation in team sports and visits to child-oriented attractions (e.g., zoos, aquariums and planetariums, theme and amusement parks). Family Market members are above-average users of the Internet as a source of information for planning brief trips.

### **Market Verticals**

Within these broad primary markets, the ESTC will tailor its promotions to five specific market verticals:

- Agri-Tourists
- Arts-Oriented Tourists
- Beach & Recreational Resort Tourists
- Heritage Tourists
- Nature Tourists

Information about these market verticals can be found under Tourism Strategy: By Sector and in the Branding Strategy Report (June 2006) prepared by the Fox Graduate School of Business.

### **Niche Markets**

The Eastern Shore of Virginia attracts a diverse group of visitors who are drawn to the region for a variety of reasons. It is vital that the Tourism Commission not overlook the economic importance of these niche markets in favor of the broader demographics. Direct marketing efforts aimed at niche groups can result in a much higher return on investment than broader-based marketing initiatives.

The Tourism Commission will endeavor to gather as much information as possible on these niche markets, including the creation of direct-market mailing and e-mailing lists. If necessary, the Commission will consider the purchase of targeted mailing lists, but only if the quality of the mailing-list data can be independently verified.

In addition, the Tourism Commission will work closely with the VTC to learn and understand more about emerging niche markets, and to coordinate local marketing efforts with similar statewide efforts.

Identified niche markets include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Birders.** According to the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), more than 18 million people nationwide make a trip annually for the primary purpose of bird-watching. Wildlife-watchers (including birders) spend an average of \$351 per spender on lodging.

- **Conventions/Business Retreats.** The Eastern Shore has a variety of small- to mid-size venues that are ideal for conventions, conferences, and business retreats. These venues, combined with the Eastern Shore’s outdoor attractions, also offer mid-Atlantic companies an excellent, centrally located site for team-building exercises and retreats.
- **Destination Weddings.** Destination weddings, which are defined as weddings that occur somewhere other than the bride or groom’s hometown, have become increasingly popular over the past 10 years. Honeymoon Solutions, a consulting company for honeymoon-focused businesses, estimates that 500,000 couples plan a destination wedding each year.
- **Girls-only getaways.** Weekend “girls-only” getaways have becoming increasingly popular, and the VTC is actively targeting this demographic. This niche market is attractive for its willingness to spend money on dining, shopping, and high-end experiences such as day spas.
- **Golfers.** Bay Creek’s Palmer and Nicklaus golf courses make it possible to target another affluent demographic segment. Average household income for this group is \$84,300 and 55% have bachelors or graduate degrees (Source: National Golf Foundation, 2002).
- **Hunters.** According to the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), migratory birds—doves, waterfowl, and woodcock—attract nearly 3 million hunters nationwide who spend nearly 10 days hunting each year. Hunters spend an average of \$1,581 per person on trips, equipment, licenses, and other items to support their hunting activities each year.
- **Recreational boaters.** With the Bay Creek marina named as the best in the Chesapeake Bay, the Tourism Commission has the opportunity to target an audience that possesses an enormous amount of discretionary income. According to *Motor Boating* magazine, whose readership might be considered typical of the demographic, 55% of its readers have a household income over \$100,000, 40% have a net worth over \$1 million, and 85% are college educated.
- **Religious groups.** A range of conservative-values religious groups choose Chincoteague as their preferred beach-vacation destination, due to its family focus and lack of undesirable beachfront activities.
- **Salt-water anglers.** According to the American Sport fishing Association, the average salt-water angler in this region has a household income over \$65,000 and is 44 years old. Thirty-three percent of these salt-water anglers completed four or more years of college.

## Strategies

The best travel experiences usually occur when locals take you under their wing. On the Eastern Shore, this truism is particularly appropriate. The appeal and riches of the Eastern Shore are not easily accessible to the ordinary traveler. In many cases, worthwhile attractions are difficult to find without help, and some attractions, such as the shallow Seaside lagoons and marshes, are most safely negotiated with an experienced guide. For the Eastern Shore to succeed in its goal of creating a high-dollar, low-impact tourism industry, the Tourism Commission must aggressively pursue the concept of “hosted” visits.

Just as a good host anticipates the needs of his guests, the Eastern Shore must anticipate the needs of its visitors. Hosting runs the gamut from personalized attention at the Welcome Center to informative signage, attentive innkeepers, and expert eco-guides. Superior customer service and a firm understanding of the Eastern Shore’s brand vision are keys to success. High-quality hosting not only raises the value proposition by giving visitors richer and more informative experience, but it also serves to protect our natural resources by providing local oversight. The Eastern Shore tagline, “You’ll love our nature,” dovetails beautifully with the concept of a welcoming host. In developing a marketing strategy for the Eastern Shore, the Tourism Commission recognizes the importance of the “hosted” concept and has endeavored to incorporate it wherever feasible.

The Eastern Shore Tourism Commission currently does not have the funding to pursue a traditional media campaign to promote the Eastern Shore and its brand. The price of advertising on television and radio or in newspapers and travel magazines is prohibitive and the cost per qualified lead is high.

To reach our target markets in the most cost-effective way—and to reinforce the concept of “hosting” that is so key to a visit—the Eastern Shore Tourism Commission will pursue the following strategies:

### **STRATEGY 1: Make U.S. 13 the flagship marketing mechanism for the Shore.**

#### Background

- a) Each year, more than 5 million travelers traverse the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and travel the U.S. 13 corridor. This number dwarfs the size of the audience that current funding would reach via traditional advertising media. U.S. 13 offers the quickest and most cost-effective way to build awareness.
- b) Aside from the views of farmland, the U.S. 13 corridor is unsightly, with a proliferation of billboards and other commercial signage, cookie-cutter franchise buildings, utility poles, and strip malls. Its current appearance is at odds with the branding image we need to project.
- c) Travelers currently view the Eastern Shore as something they have to get through, rather than a destination in its own right. Travelers can’t see the water and have

- no inkling of the treasures and businesses that often lie within a mile of the roadway.
- d) In addition to serving local needs, U.S. 13 must remain a rapid-transit corridor or travelers will select alternate routes. Continued growth on U.S. 13 will result in increased congestion, commercial blight, traffic lights, and accidents, while impairing the economic vitality of Eastern Shore towns.

**Action Item A: Develop and operate a Welcome Center at the CBBT Rest Area.**

- a) By the spring of 2009, construct and open a professionally staffed Eastern Shore of Virginia Welcome Center in the CBBT rest area, utilizing \$120,000 in T-21 grant money awarded to Northampton County.
- b) Erect north- and southbound signage directing travelers to the new Welcome Center.
- c) Work with USFWS and CBBT to develop promotional strategies to funnel visitors from the CBBT Welcome Center to the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (see Beaches, Parks & Refuges).
- d) Work with the CBBT to determine the feasibility of distributing an Eastern Shore visitor's brochure to drivers arriving at the southern toll booths.

**Action Item B: Develop a comprehensive tourism signage strategy for U.S. 13**

- a) Work with legislators and VDOT to establish a comprehensive signage program that combines the concepts of Williamsburg's Gateway Program with branded TODS (Tourism Oriented Directional Sign) signage.
  - Establish incentives for tourism businesses to install TODS signage on U.S. 13 that carries the Eastern Shore brand (see Strategy 7, below).
  - Create landscaped, brand-building gateway signs at the northern and southern ends of the Eastern Shore that convey to travelers that they have arrived at a tourist destination in its own right. Apply the same gateway concept to the entrances to the Shore's principal towns and primary junctions (e.g., Rte. 175 to Chincoteague and Rte. 184 to Cape Charles).

**Action Item C: Beautify U.S. 13 in accordance with the ESTC's branding goals.**

- a) Encourage county governments to maintain as much open space (farmland and forest) as possible flanking U.S. 13. Long views of forest and farm are a perfect reflection of the Eastern Shore brand.
- b) Encourage county governments to keep commercial development on U.S. 13 to a minimum and to require permitted development to follow strict design guidelines that capture the look and feel of the Eastern Shore.
- c) Encourage the Eastern Shore's nursery industry to adopt long stretches of U.S. 13 as landscaping zones in exchange for signs indicating their generosity. This will serve not only to beautify the highway, but also to advertise the high quality of Eastern Shore agricultural products.
- d) Encourage county governments to pursue infill of existing malls to create more of a village-square feel, replacing the current trend of building vast parking lots between the highway and the retail area. Require landscaping of parking areas.

- e) Encourage county governments to implement new signage ordinances regulating the size and style of commercial signs (see below).
- f) Encourage county governments to eliminate billboards. Five states and more than 200 communities whose economies rely heavily on their natural beauty have outlawed billboards. Such signs represent visual pollution and are consequently at odds with the Eastern Shore's desired image.
- g) Encourage county governments to require or provide incentives for vegetative screens in existing industrial zones.
- h) Encourage county governments to maintain funding for their staffed litter-control programs.
- i) Work with county governments and agencies such as the A-NPDC to develop a long-term strategy to place overhead power lines underground along U.S. 13.

**STRATEGY 2: Develop a compelling Web presence to promote the Eastern Shore and its tourism businesses.**

**Action Item A: Re-design the ESTC Website.**

Develop a site powered by a relational database that generates web pages on the fly, allowing contextual integration of appropriate content, images, businesses, and advertising opportunities, and also enabling the development of personalization features that further the Tourism Commission's "hosting" concept.

- a) Develop a flexible navigational interface that permits informed drill-down navigation (geographic and theme-based), search queries (open end and search forms), and accommodation/vacation queries.
- b) Develop an editing tool to allow the ESTC staff and participating businesses to update information easily and to create and promote vacation packages.
- c) Develop a real-time online booking/query engine to allow visitors to book online (if appropriate) or send query letters to inn and B&B owners.
- d) Develop a vacation-package module that allows users to browse and purchase packaged vacations or create their own customized packages.
- e) Develop a lead-generation tool that allows the ESTC to develop targeted mailing lists for direct marketing initiatives and e-newsletters.
- f) Incorporate an ad server that allows customized ad-serving based on search queries, individually tagged pages, and (if feasible) customer profiles.
- g) Incorporate a tracking program to monitor traffic and click-through rates throughout the site and to monitor success of offline/online promotions.

**Action Item B: Raise the profile of the Eastern Shore across the Internet.**

- a) Use meta-tags and other programming techniques to raise the profile of the Eastern Shore and its attractions in search engines.
- b) Consider the purchase of preferred placements on major search engines, including Google.

- c) Test small advertising buys on Websites that appeal to the Eastern Shore’s target demographics.
- d) Enlist the Tourism Alliance to promote the Eastern Shore on travel/interest-oriented websites and blogs that encourage consumer input. The input of expert locals reinforces the “hosted” concept.

**STRATEGY 3: Develop innovative packages involving activities, lodging, and dining to make it easier for visitors to plan trips to the Eastern Shore.**

- a) Charge the Tourism Alliance Steering Committee with responsibility for the development of vacation packages including but not limited to: high-end “hosted” experiences; event and festival-based packages; seasonal packages; off-season discount packages.
- b) Investigate potential partnerships with companies for the promotion and fulfillment of vacation packages.
- c) Market vacation packages via the ESTC Website, the VTC website, Welcome Center, travel guide, and e-newsletters and emails.
- d) Investigate the feasibility of developing a module for the Eastern Shore Tourism Website to allow travelers to create a la carte vacation packages, involving a customized selection of accommodations, dining, and activities (see Strategy 2).

**STRATEGY 4: Pursue media placements as a more effective, cost-conscious alternative to media buys.**

- a) Identify key media outlets in the target region, categorize the core demographics of each, and pursue an ongoing, highly targeted campaign of press releases for events and attractions on the Eastern Shore.
- b) Conduct familiarization (FAM) tours for key personnel from media outlets (and tour companies) whose core demographics match the Eastern Shore’s target audience.
- c) Encourage ESTC staff to build personal relationships with key personnel at relevant media outlets.
- d) Build on the ESTC’s strong relationship with the Virginia Tourism Corporation to participate in statewide initiatives and to benefit from the VTC’s marketing expertise.

**STRATEGY 5: Use direct marketing as part of the Tourism Commission’s “hosting” initiative to create personalized marketing messages.**

- a) Develop a visitor database to assist in direct-marketing initiatives.
  - Use the ESTC Website to solicit customer data via search queries, booking requests, and raffles/sweepstakes.
  - Use Welcome Center surveys and special offers to gather data on visitors and potential visitors.
  - Consider the purchase of targeted mailing lists, but only if the quality of the mailing-list data can be independently verified.

- b) Create personalized e-newsletters and e-mails to target visitors based on their interests and preferences.
- c) Use visitor data to help create special events and vacation packages tailored to specific customer segments.

**STRATEGY 6: Create new festivals/events and support existing events that further the Eastern Shore brand among target markets.**

- a) Make the Lure of the Shore fundraiser an established part of the local calendar of events and festivals, emphasizing the Eastern Shore's core assets, including food, culture, recreation, and natural resources.
- b) Evaluate event data (demographics, audience size, geographic reach, etc.) and brand-building potential to determine the level of support to be provided by the Tourism Commission for existing events.
- c) Work with organizers of existing festivals and events to promote the Eastern Shore logo and tagline, and encourage festivals to highlight the Eastern Shore's core assets and brand attributes.

**STRATEGY 7: Create incentives for local businesses to use the Eastern Shore brand on their marketing materials and labels.**

- a) Explore the feasibility of subsidizing branded TODs signage on U.S. 13 for participating businesses.
- b) Provide preferential placement and/or discounted display rates to participating businesses in the Welcome Center at the CBBT.
- c) Provide preferential placement and/or discounted ad rates to participating businesses on the ESTC Website.
- d) Provide preferential placement and/or discounted display rates to participating businesses in the ESTC travel guide.
- f) Explore licensing of the Eastern Shore brand for placement on caps and t-shirts for sale at the Welcome Center, retail outlets, restaurants, and participating businesses.

**STRATEGY 8: Study the feasibility of conducting test marketing campaigns in target markets utilizing non-traditional advertising mechanisms.**

- a) Study the feasibility of conducting advertising campaigns on commuter trains and in railway stations.
- b) Study the feasibility of utilizing alternative, low-cost promotional tools such as coffee-cup sleeves.
- c) Study the feasibility of sponsoring events outside the region focusing on events associated with the Eastern Shore, including birding, fishing, etc.

## **TOURISM STRATEGY: BY SECTOR**

- **Agri-Tourism**
- **The Arts**
- **Beach & Recreational Resorts**
- **Heritage Tourism**
- **Hospitality Industry**
- **Nature Tourism**

## AGRI-TOURISM

### **Goal 1: Develop a robust agri-tourism industry on the Eastern Shore.**

#### **Strategy A:** Promote existing agri-tourism operations.

1. Encourage tourism outlets to disseminate RC&D brochure (with map) to guide visitors to participating agritourism businesses; publish the same information on the ESVTC Website.
2. Develop a variety of other promotional mechanisms to attract visitors to existing agri-tourism attractions: Solicit growers/vendors for inclusion in Virginia Grown Directory published every other year.
3. Develop customer e-mail lists for updates on harvest, crops and activities.
4. Support the establishment of a major weekly farmers' market on the Shore and another off the shore (in a city like Hampton Roads).
5. Promote seasonal opportunities such as U-pick to urban markets.
6. Assist businesses in developing internet-based ordering systems with option for customer pick-up.
7. Develop strategies to assist small growers wishing to sell to grocery stores, restaurants, farm stands and tourists.
8. Develop advertising strategies for specialty products purchased by ethnic groups.

#### **Strategy B:** Support efforts to enhance the value of products and services.

1. Apply Eastern Shore brand identity to organic or low-impact produce.
2. Identify agricultural products that appeal to tourists from urban areas.
3. Help identify new marketing and growing opportunities that extend sales beyond harvest times.
4. Assist growers in obtaining technical assistance with production of value-added product extensions such as cooked, baked, canned or dried items.
5. Encourage development of products with local market identity and appeal.
6. Identify and work to remove barriers to new products and services

#### **Strategy C:** Create linkages with other tourist draws that can boost sales of Eastern Shore agri-tourism businesses.

1. Create tie-ins of local businesses with existing events (such as wineries with seafood festivals or bike tours; flower farms and herbs with craft shows; nurseries with birding festival, etc.).
2. Create new festival(s) that can integrate diverse tourist activities, raise funds to implement marketing plan for agri-tourism, and promote local products.

**Strategy D:** Improve opportunities for established agri-tourism businesses and start-ups.

1. Help coordinate planning and partnerships among organizations that have a role in promoting agri-tourism.
2. Help business with highway signage and brochure development and placement.
3. Help develop effective web pages and integrate with ESVTC Website.
4. Identify useful links to business plans, insurance, local regulations and licenses for different operations.
5. Support creation of local seafood co-ops for selling of locally branded product.
6. Offer guidance in dealing with regulatory obstacles to value-added processing (health department and certifications for food quality).
7. Seek agri-tourism festival locations with water access or view.
8. Develop inventory of existing agri-tourism business or businesses that would like to expand in this area and post on ESVA portal or ES Tourism website.
9. Use the directory of agritourism businesses to produce updated maps and guides for print and download.
10. Coordinate web and print directories with road signage.
11. Work with aquaculture operations that wish to develop offerings (product or experience) for tourists.

### **Agri-Tourism Statistics: Vermont**

Income from Vermont agri-tourism totaled \$19.5 million in 2002, up from \$10.5 million during 2000, according to a state survey. One-third of all Vermont farms received income from agri-tourism in 2002. Average income received from agri-tourism for 2,200 farms was nearly \$8,900. The survey found that farms with fewer acres tended to be more involved in agri-tourism than larger farms. Thirty eight percent of farms with less than 50 acres in 2002 received income from agri-tourism compared to 29 percent of farms with 150 or more acres.

On-farm sales of commodities such as maple syrup and maple products, Christmas trees, fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, nursery products, cheese, and an assortment of other items produced on Vermont farms were the most common source of agri-tourism income. Other categories of agri-tourism included outdoor recreation, education, accommodations, and entertainment.

## THE ARTS

**Goal 1: Increase off-Shore awareness of the Eastern Shore of Virginia as a flourishing arts community and help local artists profit from the exposure.**

**Strategy A:** Develop an efficient mechanism for disseminating information about art events, artists, and art-centered businesses.

1. Create an annual calendar of arts events and arts venues for inclusion in tourism-marketing initiatives.
2. Work with the arts community to develop an annual and monthly calendar of art events for the tourism website and for dissemination to regional publications—listings should be sent eight weeks in advance of any event.
3. Develop an Arts component of the tourism website, including a hyperlinked directory of artists and arts organizations.
4. Develop an online software tool to allow artists, art organizations, and businesses to update their Website information remotely (see Marketing).
5. Publish a list of contact information and resource people, including every arts organization and venue; make this list available through the Tourism Office and online.
6. Create a monthly hard-copy handout of arts events, gleaned from the tourism website; distribute/display calendars at all hospitality and arts venues as well as at select high-traffic retail outlets (Rayfield's, ACE, OBS, et al.)

**Strategy B:** Coordinate visitor data-mining strategies with existing efforts already undertaken by artist groups.

1. Work with the arts community to identify off-Shore markets and compile zip code data for potential advertising/promotion (also see Marketing Strategy).
2. Work with the arts community to generate and maintain a central database of visitors interested in staying “in touch.”

**Strategy C:** Raise awareness of art and entertainment offerings that are located off Rt. 13.

1. As part of the strategy for the development of branded multi-panel signage on US Rt. 13 to promote local businesses (see Marketing Strategy), create an identifying sub-symbol for each tourism segment.

2. Work with VDOT and the TODS program to create small, branded, directional markers for use on secondary roads to direct visitors to working studios and arts venues (some of which are down scenic back roads).
3. Encourage small tourism businesses to maintain a stock of brochures from similar businesses including dining, lodging and entertainment. Confer with—the Artisans Guild, which already has this program in place.
4. Investigate the feasibility of developing bus “tours” of arts venues that could be marketed through regional museums and arts centers (e.g., Chrysler Museum, Winterthur, the Hand Workshop in Richmond).
5. Investigate transportation opportunities for moving visitors—especially tourists based at marinas—between art venues.

**Strategy D:** Coordinate the development of cross-promotional marketing initiatives and special art packages.

1. Work with the Tourism Alliance Steering Committee to create and organize cooperative advertising campaigns involving the arts community, the hospitality industry and compatible businesses. Encourage the development of special arts events focused on works created on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.
2. Create event packages such as shopping weekends, treasure hunts and themed mini-vacations that feature great lodging, fine dining, entertainment and experiential shopping.

**Strategy E:** Leverage the “Halo Effect” of the Eastern Shore brand.

1. Use hang-tags or other identifiers to help market segments of the brand. Include “Made on Virginia’s Eastern Shore” wherever possible.
2. Create sub-brands and identifying symbols for the various tourism segments (see Marketing) for use in conjunction with the Eastern Shore brand.

**Strategy F:** Help develop and market an artists’ retreat (Visiting Artist in Residence).

Explore the possibility of establishing an artists’ retreat similar to the one established at Hollins College or Yado in New England. This could be a private-sector enterprise or a foundation-endowed initiative that would ideally attract national attention.

## BEACH & RECREATIONAL RESORTS

### Cape Charles

**Goal 1: Establish Cape Charles as the “Gateway to the Chesapeake Bay” -- an historic small town with state-of-the-art recreational, cultural, beach and boating facilities.**

**Strategy A:** Preserve and promote Cape Charles’ Victorian charm, its distinct identity, and pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

1. Support efforts to concentrate commercial development in the center of Cape Charles and the planned harbor district (see below) to create a vibrant town center and focal point.
2. Work with the County and Town Council to create a gateway presence for Cape Charles at the intersection of Hwy. 13 and Rte. 184.
3. Encourage the county and Town Council to protect the Rte. 184 corridor into Cape Charles in order to preserve the view-shed and Cape Charles’ small-town character—and to manage anticipated traffic growth.
4. Encourage the Town Council to install a traffic circle at the corner of Randolph and Fig Streets to resolve traffic issues and create a dramatic entry point to the town.
5. Support the Town Council in its efforts to improve its Historic District.
6. Encourage Bay Creek to make the passenger railroad an integral part of downtown Cape Charles and the new Harbor District.
7. Support the creation of a visitor-transportation system to connect the marina, train station, beach, Bay Creek, downtown Cape Charles, and beyond.
8. Work with the town to promote and build on the July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival as a multi-day event celebrating old-fashioned summer fun in America.
9. Investigate the introduction of one-day excursion packages to Cape Charles via mini-bus from the nearby resort destinations of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, and Williamsburg.

**Strategy B:** Build on and promote Cape Charles’ maritime history and connection to the Chesapeake Bay.

1. Promote the redevelopment of the Cape Charles Harbor as a working waterfront with broad appeal to visitors:
  - a. Support and promote the development of a dock-side seafood and farmers’ market consistent with the ESTC branding initiative.
  - b. Support and promote local restaurants that specialize in locally harvested seafood (e.g., crab shacks, clam bars, etc).
  - c. Support the promotional efforts of the Cape Charles skipjack project.

2. Build on experiences offered by such ships as the schooner *Serenity* to make Cape Charles a major staging point for sunset cruises and tall-ship events.
3. Establish the Bay Creek Marina (and yacht club) as a premier boating destination for powerboats, yachts, and boat clubs.
4. Develop tri-leg boating events involving Cape Charles, Onancock (Cape Charles' sister city), and Tangier.
5. Emphasize Cape Charles' central location for a wide variety of boating and eco-tourism activities: fishing the CBBT and elsewhere; cruising the Bay; deep-sea excursions; and venturing out to the lagoons, channels, and barrier islands of the Virginia Coast Reserve.
6. Explore the feasibility of constructing a Cape Charles Crater Museum, focusing on the crater impact that formed the Chesapeake Bay.
7. Work with the Cape Charles Museum to develop or expand displays illustrating Cape Charles' role as a ferry, barge, and rail terminus.

**Strategy C:** Develop and promote a full range of recreational (and lodging) options aimed at the summer-vacation market.

1. Establish the Bay Creek marina, golf courses, and resort facilities as an integral part of the town's identity.
2. Work with Bay Creek to make resort and golf packages available (for a fee) to guests staying in Cape Charles's inns, B&Bs, and vacation rentals.
3. Work with Bay Creek to mesh its marketing message -- and plans for future resort development -- with that of Cape Charles and the Eastern Shore brand.
4. Help coordinate and promote vacation-home rentals in town and in Bay Creek as the accommodations of choice for the family market.
5. Help coordinate and promote inns and B&Bs as the accommodations of choice for the couples and senior market.
6. Highlight the family-friendly nature of Cape Charles' beach: Shallow water, wide and sandy beach, ample parking, bathroom and shower facilities, and incredible sunsets.
  - a. Support the town's beach-replenishment program.
  - b. Encourage the hiring of lifeguards during peak season.
  - c. Encourage the town to utilize part of the beach for water-sport lessons and rentals, including sailboards and kite boards.
  - d. Encourage the development of a series of child-oriented activities during the summer months (sand-castle competitions, beach volleyball, etc.)
7. Promote the Fishing and Walking Pier as a family attraction that allows easy access to the Bay:
  - a. Encourage the town to continue the free-fishing program on the pier.
  - b. Encourage the establishment of a pier-side concession stand offering all-in-one fishing-equipment rentals, bait, crab nets, etc.
  - c. Move the Applaud the Sun parties to the Bay front, and consider establishing a daily tradition of sunset gatherings in summer ("Best sunset east of the Pacific.")
8. Develop cultural events focused around the Bay front.

9. Study the feasibility of establishing a wide variety of day camps for children (ranging from art, music, and dance to swimming, golf, sailing, etc.), freeing their parents to pursue other resort and recreational activities.
10. Support development of a recreational trail system for bicycles and other non-motorized vehicles to link the town to the various attractions that surround it.
11. Work with Cherrystone Campground to promote Cape Charles' attractions to its campers using on-site brochure display racks and price-sensitive promotions.

**Strategy D:** Develop spring and fall shoulder seasons for Cape Charles built around cultural events and appropriate recreational activities.

1. Build on Cape Charles' vibrant cultural scene to stage a wide array of artistic and musical events:
  - a. Promote the Historic Palace Theater as a regionally significant performing-arts center and community theater.
  - b. Support the Cape Charles Consortium for the Arts & Humanities in making Cape Charles a permanent annual venue for the Virginia Arts Festival.
  - c. Work with the Cape Charles Consortium for the Arts & Humanities to develop events using the Gazebo as a stage for musical performances such as jazz concerts, classical-music performances, and Christmas carols.
2. Work with Bay Creek to promote fall golf weekends by developing innovative pricing strategies and packages.
3. Market the fall and spring as peak eco-tourism seasons, offering the best of the Shore's unique natural wonders without the summer heat or insects.
  - a. Promote Cape Charles as a base from which to enjoy the fall and spring bird migrations.
  - b. Work with the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce to popularize the Annual Birding and Wildlife Festival in Cape Charles.

## **Chincoteague**

**Goal 1: Differentiate Chincoteague from other East Coast beach resorts by emphasizing its wholesome family appeal, small-town atmosphere, outdoor recreational opportunities, and undeveloped island beauty.**

**Strategy A:** Work with Chincoteague stakeholders to strengthen the town's existing brand and highlight the island's key differentiators.

Core Assets of the Chincoteague brand (with an \* next to key differentiators):

- A traditional fishing village abounding with history and natural charm.
- Miles of undeveloped island beaches, marshes and forests.\*
- An old-fashioned beach resort, with multi-generational families returning each year.
- Safe, relaxed small-town atmosphere ("You're on Island time now")\*

- Community of outstanding craftsmen and artists, producing some of the world's finest duck decoys and paintings of nature, wildfowl and Chincoteague ponies.\*
- Authentic local flavor: family-owned businesses staffed by local residents.
- Wholesome family recreational opportunities, distinct from the boardwalk frenzy of other mid-Atlantic beach resorts.
- An outdoor recreational hub, offering fishing, birding, boating, hunting, sunbathing, picnicking, kite flying, dolphin watching, hiking, biking, etc.\*
- The famous story of Misty and the Chincoteague ponies.\*
- A wide array of lodging options ranging from B&Bs to hotels, vacation rentals, motels, and campgrounds.
- The lighthouse
- NASA Wallops and rocket launches.\*

**Strategy B:** Mine Chincoteague’s diverse visitor demographics to develop targeted promotional strategies for niche markets.

1. Work with Chincoteague stake-holders to analyze visitor demographics and undertake new research (as necessary) to identify potential and existing niche markets (e.g., Amish, church groups, couples, families, seniors, campers, etc.)
2. Tailor the Chincoteague brand message to appeal directly to each niche segment.
3. Continue to serve—and expand—existing market segments (school groups, bus tours, Elderhostel, 4-H groups, Boy and Girl Scout groups, etc.).

**Strategy C:** Help develop spring and fall shoulder seasons for Chincoteague built around cultural events, conferences, beach-combing, and appropriate recreational activities.

1. Promote Chincoteague’s cultural and historical legacy:
  - Publicize the new Downtown Park, with its brick pathways, kiosks, pavilion, boardwalk, and transient boat slips.
  - Work with the Chincoteague Cultural Alliance to promote The Second Saturday Art Strolls, held April through December.
  - Investigate promotional opportunities to highlight the work of island musicians, glass bead makers, basket weavers, painters, photographers, carvers, etc.
  - Work with local museums to develop special promotions and exhibits coordinated with other island or Eastern Shore events.
  - Investigate the development of new festivals and events that highlight local produce & seafood; the area’s cultural wealth; and seasonal holidays.
  - Investigate how to include the Town’s History Trolley Tour into packages and other promotional vehicles.
  - Help promote the efforts of the Island Library to compile “oral histories” of Chincoteague and its inhabitants.
2. Establish the spring and fall as Chincoteague’s peak season for eco-tourism (see Eco-Tourism section).
3. Market alternative beach experiences reflective of the changing seasons.
  - For September, develop innovative vacation packages that offer a summer-style vacation experience with none of the crowds and at a fraction of the price.

- For October-November, March-April, promote the island's empty beachscape to appeal to couples seeking romantic getaways and weekend escapes.
4. Investigate the feasibility of developing waterfowl-hunting packages in conjunction with existing decoy festivals and auctions.
  5. Study the feasibility of attracting off-season events (e.g., conferences) to Chincoteague to take advantage of lodging vacancies/lower prices.

**Strategy D:** Cross-market Chincoteague and the rest of the Eastern Shore to drive increased tourism numbers in both directions.

1. Help develop vacation packages and one-day excursion offerings that combine Chincoteague with other Eastern Shore attractions; explore the feasibility of a touring map for the Eastern Shore.
2. Promote Chincoteague's role as the northern gateway to the Seaside Water Trail.
3. Help Chincoteague tourism operators maximize their visibility and bookings via the ESVTC and VTC Websites and promotional materials.
4. Investigate transportation options that allow car-less tourists to visit Chincoteague from the mainland and vice-versa economically and easily.
5. Support efforts to upgrade the Chincoteague bridge and make access on and off the island easier.
6. Investigate the feasibility of bundling the Eastern Shore and Chincoteague visitor guides in certain mailings and promotional placements.
7. Stock the Chincoteague visitor guide at Eastern Shore tourism outlets, including the CBBT Welcome Center.
8. Help Chincoteague lodging owners participate in the Webervations product handling online bookings and queries for hotels, motels, vacation rentals, B&Bs, and campsites.

**Strategy E:** Support efforts to promote Chincoteague's beach experience as an unspoiled, unhurried alternative to the developed beachfronts of other East Coast resort towns.

1. Highlight the 14+ miles of unspoiled beaches that comprise the Assateague Island National Seashore in Virginia.
2. Promote the diverse recreational opportunities offered by Assateague Island National Seashore including surf fishing, sunbathing, shelling, picnicking, kite flying, dolphin watching, etc.
3. Work with Fish & Wildlife, National Park Service, and local eco-operators to develop and promote the area's abundant nature- and eco-tourism opportunities including guided walks, interpretive programs, canoeing, kayaking, birding, boating, hiking, biking, fishing, clamming, crabbing and bus tours.
4. Investigate promotional opportunities with the Charter boat Association.
5. Work with the Chincoteague Natural History Association to promote the bus tours on the Wildlife Refuge and the Assateague Lighthouse tours
6. Work with The Herbert H. Bateman Educational Center on Assateague Island to promote its exhibits and programs.

7. Spotlight local restaurants that offer fresh seafood, homemade ice-cream and Chincoteague specialty treats.

**Strategy F:** Increase the local economic impact of Chincoteague’s existing festivals and events.

1. Upon request, assist the Fire Department and Chamber of Commerce in analyzing visitor metrics for Pony Penning Week to determine optimal price points and package configurations for lodging, dining, and events.
2. Upon request, work with Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce (Oyster Festival) and Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce (Seafood Festival, Harvest Festival, and Birding & Wildlife Festival) to develop strategies to increase the number of festival visitors, the average length of stay, and dollars spent.
3. Upon request, assist in the marketing and planning of Island festivals that further the branding goals of Chincoteague and the Eastern Shore.

**Strategy G:** Work with Chincoteague Center to identify and book events (e.g., conferences, performances, exhibitions, etc.) that mesh with Chincoteague’s brand, and develop strategies to maximize the spill-over effect for Chincoteague overall.

1. Work with Chamber of Commerce to coordinate and promote flanker events in conjunction with conferences, performances, and exhibitions.
2. Investigate the feasibility of creating discounted accommodation and dining packages for event attendees who extend their stays by arriving early or staying afterwards.
3. Work with Chincoteague Center and Chamber of Commerce to develop highly targeted promotional materials and packages to persuade event attendees to turn an “obligation into a vacation.”

**Strategy H:** Work with NASA Wallops to extend its visitor-outreach programs with a view to creating a mid-Atlantic equivalent to the Space Coast.

1. Position the NASA Wallops experience as a flanker experience for the Chincoteague brand.
2. Work with NASA to discuss strategies for promoting future rocket launches as major regional events.
3. Work with NASA to discuss strategies to broaden the appeal and reach of the Summer Space Camp.
4. Work with NASA to discuss opportunities to expand the visitor center and experiential displays at the base.

# HERITAGE TOURISM

## Background

1. Few regions of the United States feature so many distinct villages and hamlets in close proximity to one another.
2. Many of the towns have retained a significant number of their historical buildings.
3. In many cases, the historic cores of the villages have not been girdled by suburban growth, creating an appealing immediacy in the transition between farm and village.
4. Harbor facilities significantly enhance the ability of Cape Charles, Chincoteague, Onancock, Quinby, Wachapreague, Willis Wharf, Oyster, and other waterfront villages to develop tourism-oriented businesses that complement their individual identities.
5. Tangier Island is a sociological and historical gem. Living in relative isolation over the past four centuries, its residents maintain a distinctive accent that can be traced back to Elizabethan English. The fact that the island has no cars— Islanders get around on bikes or golf carts—makes Tangier even more appealing.
6. The Eastern Shore has a large population of resident artists and craftsmen, whose galleries augment the towns' appeal.
7. The Eastern Shore has a rich history and cultural tradition (Algonquian American, European American, and African American), as well as some of the oldest records and artifacts in the nation. The Shore's historical museums house many of these records and artifacts.
8. The vitality of Eastern Shore villages is threatened by uncontrolled commercial growth along Hwy. 13.

### **Goal 1: Promote the charm and history of the Eastern Shore's small towns/villages and foster their revitalization.**

**Strategy A:** Pursue legislative solutions to help historic towns/villages prosper and retain their traditional look and atmosphere.

1. Encourage the counties to pursue land-use strategies that enhance and preserve the Eastern Shore's traditional pattern of rural development, with thriving towns and villages—each with their own distinct identity and architectural vernacular—separated by productive agricultural lands and woodland.
2. Encourage the counties and incorporated towns to create historic review boards, to preserve existing historic structures and require that new development (including franchises and big-box retailers) adhere to traditional styles.
3. Encourage municipal and county governments to develop incentive programs for businesses that renovate existing historic structures, as designated by local historic review boards (see above). Work with counties, municipalities, the A-NPDC, and not-for-profit organizations to identify enabling grants to fund such initiatives.
4. Create a museum/historic-site brochure for driving tours.

5. Develop packages that combine visits to heritage-tourism sites (museums, etc.) with accommodations and dining in historic inns, restaurants, and B&Bs.
6. Encourage incorporated towns to pursue the Main Street Revitalization program, intended to beautify the primary commercial areas of towns.
7. Develop a coordinated marketing campaign for area artists, including festivals, art trails, and Internet promotion. Provide attractive gateway signage to the Eastern Shore's historic towns and villages.

**Goal 2: Promote the area's rich historical and cultural legacy by capitalizing on the Eastern Shore's role as:**

- a. **One of the earliest European settlements.**
- b. **Arguably the first African settlement in North America.**
- c. **One of the most vibrant and lasting Algonquin settlements on the Atlantic Seaboard.**

**Strategy A:** Improve the dissemination of tourism information in each town

1. Create walking-tour brochures for each historic town.
2. Erect/restore historical plaques and markers with appealing, entertaining explanatory text. For most tourists, what they glean from displays at historical sites is their only source of information.
3. Establish a central tourism-information site (unmanned kiosk or in a restaurant/inn) where tourists can pick up brochures, and see a map of the town showing the various sights and attractions.
4. Use attractive signage, consistent with the Eastern Shore brand, to direct visitors to sights and attractions around town.
5. Provide placement at the CBBT and New Church Welcome Centers for towns and villages to advertise their attractions.
6. Support an expanded Eastern Shore of Virginia Heritage Trail program, intended to link the Shore's towns and museums via a series of driving tours that are inclusive of our three historic ethnic heritages.

**Strategy B:** Promote a vibrant cottage industry of artists and artisans (*also see* The Arts).

1. Support the development of a variety of brochures highlighting painters, furniture-makers, decoy artists, sculptors, etc.
2. Incorporate galleries and artist studios in walking and driving tours.
3. Include artist profiles and portfolios on the Eastern Shore tourism Website.
4. Encourage cross-marketing initiatives, with eco-lodges, restaurants, and hotels displaying (and selling) local artists' work.
5. Build on the Arts in the Parks festival to create a series of art-focused events throughout the year.

# HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

## Education

*Hospitality is more than operating a restaurant or bed-and-breakfast. Genuine and sincere hospitality is fashioning a gracious environment in which guests feel welcome and wanted. Our guests are our lifeblood--without them we could not and will not exist.*

**Goal 1: Instill in local residents an understanding of the economic importance of tourism, its potential to improve their lives, and their role as hosts and ambassadors for the Eastern Shore.**

**Strategy A:** Inform the public about developments: progress, programs, and opportunities.

1. Send news releases to local media to keep the public current on tourism activities.
2. Perform outreach in area high schools in coordination (where available) with school hospitality programs.
3. Coordinate regularly with all three Chambers of Commerce via the Tourism Alliance and address each Chamber's membership needs.
4. Provide bi-annual tourism updates to the Boards of Supervisors in each county.
5. Organize and conduct an annual Eastern Shore Tourism Forum.

**Strategy B:** Motivate the public to respect -- and improve -- our tourism product (i.e., the Eastern Shore) and act as welcoming hosts.

1. Establish quantifiable metrics of how tourism benefits the Eastern Shore (e.g., sales, jobs, tax income, etc.) and its residents; establish annual goals; share results with the public.
2. Study the feasibility of establishing a greenhouse program for new business ideas. Research grant programs/partnerships that might provide seed money and support for innovative tourism businesses that further the goals of the strategic plan and Eastern Shore brand.
3. On a regular basis, recognize and reward tourism-related ideas and actions that further the goals of the strategic plan and Eastern Shore brand. Use PR releases, e-mail newsletter, and other publicity avenues to profile contributors, whether they are business owners, students, or officials, and develop a workable rewards program.
4. Explore the feasibility of a "Secret Shopper"-type program that would reward businesses/citizens for being "Good Shore Ambassadors." Work in conjunction with Chambers of Commerce to develop selection criteria and rewards.

**Strategy C:** Involve the public in making tourism a success on the Eastern Shore.

1. Appoint individuals as Shore Ambassadors, tasked with promoting the Eastern Shore both internally to local residents and externally.

2. Conduct digital-photo competition (for schools and general public) for the best images of the Eastern Shore as a way to involve local residents and build a library of tourism-related images for use in marketing materials.
3. Conduct essay contest in schools about what makes the Eastern Shore so special and how we can attract visitors. Post the winning essay on the ESTC Website and issue a PR release to local media.

**Goal 2: Develop a skilled Hospitality Industry workforce (entry-level, managerial, and entrepreneurial) that understands the importance of customer service in low-impact tourism.**

**Strategy A:** Continue to work with the Eastern Shore Community College to offer programs to train local residents for work in a tourism economy.

1. Improve and refine the entry-level program for unskilled workers who want to transition to tourism-related jobs.
2. Improve and refine the managerial-level program to train managers of tourism businesses, including restaurants, lodgings, and service companies.
3. Develop an entrepreneur program designed to help self-starters understand the opportunities, risks, and how-to of running their own tourism businesses.
4. Develop a guide-certification program (see Eco-Tourism, above)

## **Lodging**

**Goal 1: Increase the number of overnight visitors, the number of nights they stay, and the amount of money they spend.**

### **Background**

1. Lodging on the Eastern Shore runs the gamut from campgrounds to vacation rentals, from roadside motels to B&Bs. Except for one boutique inn in Onancock, high-end hotels, major resort hotels, and eco-lodges do not currently have a presence.
2. Chincoteague remains the primary destination for overnight visitors).
3. An active B&B guild coordinates the activities of the B&Bs on the Eastern Shore.
4. In 2006, an eco-tourism operator received a DEQ grant to explore the feasibility of low-impact platform camping on Seaside.

**Strategy A:** Improve highway visibility for lodgings that lie off Hwy. 13.

1. Work with VTC, VDOT and incorporated towns to obtain branded TODS signage for B&Bs and inns that do not currently qualify due to a variety of factors, such as lack of off-street parking or lack of right-of-way access for directional signage.
2. Stock brochures for area lodgings in the CBBT and New Church Welcome Centers.

**Strategy B:** Increase the number of overnight stays by stretching the traditional weekend visit to three days.

1. Work with Chambers of Commerce to evaluate new dates for major events such as Harvest and Seafood Festivals, perhaps switching from Wednesdays to Fridays or weekends.
2. Test whether packages, including combinations of event/activity tickets, dining & lodging, spur increased visitation.
3. Work with lodging providers to test the success of 3-night specials and 3-night packages compared with traditional two-night weekend reservations.
4. Work with Chambers of Commerce to test the concept of adding shoulders to major festivals and events (such as the Pony Swim or the Cape Charles July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebrations) to extend such events over multiple days.
5. Develop a series of additional festivals and events, including some during the off-season, based on the concepts of the Eastern Shore brand.

**Strategy C:** Use the Internet to increase the visibility of area lodgings, facilitate the reservations process, and improve conversion rates.

1. Work with VTC to help area lodging providers create online ads for placement on the Eastern Shore and VTC websites.
2. Help lodging providers (for a nominal fee) to maximize their visibility within major search engines and/or obtain placement in specialty lodging sites (e.g., bedandbreakfast.com).
3. Work with Webervations to develop an Eastern Shore online reservations and/or availability engine.

**Strategy D:** Work with Eastern Shore lodging owners to gather traveler demographics, trends, and statistics.

1. Identify the key statistics and metrics necessary to track and understand visitation trends to the Eastern Shore.
2. Develop visitor-survey cards for placement in hotels, B&Bs, and inns, and work with owners to encourage guest participation.
3. Develop an online survey tool that can be sent to guests as part of an email thank-you card from lodging operators.

**Strategy E:** Encourage the development of new and alternative lodging.

1. When appropriate, support applications (e.g., zoning, SUP, etc.) to local, state and federal agencies by entrepreneurs who wish to develop lodging (preferably in restored historic structures) that furthers the goals of the Eastern Shore brand.
2. See Eco-Tourism component, below.

## **Dining**

**Goal 1: Foster the development of a wide range of successful dining options that embody the drivers of the Eastern Shore brand.**

**Strategy A:** Encourage restaurants to embrace locally grown produce as a key component of their identity.

1. Investigate providing incentives (such as subsidized highway signage, free marketing, etc.) to local restaurants that highlight and promote the use of certified local produce, including fruits, vegetables, seafood, and wild game.
2. When appropriate, support special-use-permit or zoning applications by entrepreneurs who wish to open restaurants (ideally in renovated older structures) using local produce and local food themes, such as a crab shack, clam bar, etc.
3. Work with the Health Department to permit the sale (by certified operators) of wild game to local restaurants and specialty stores.

**Strategy B:** Increase the visibility of local restaurants through cross-marketing and food festivals.

1. Create and test a series of packages that combine dining with lodging and events/activities (see Lodging, above).
2. Encourage cross-marketing techniques to promote compatible businesses. For example, the Eastville Inn might promote Church Creek merlot on its menu, while Chatham Winery promotes the Eastville Inn to its winery visitors.
3. Build on the success of existing festivals (e.g., Harvest, Seafood) and develop additional festivals focused primarily around local specialty foods/lifestyles.

**Strategy C:** Encourage the development of businesses offering “lifestyle events” built around freshly harvested local produce.

*Many urban and suburban visitors will pay a premium to enjoy experiences Eastern Shore natives take for granted – to have an “insider’s” experience. There is a successful business model in packaging these experiences (combined with superb customer service).*

Concepts to consider:

1. Take a sunset cruise and pull your own pots for a beach crab boil.
2. Beach bonfire dinners complete with local fish, crabs, oysters, and clams, as well as fresh local produce.
3. Corporate team-building exercises.

# NATURE TOURISM

## ECO-TOURISM

**Goal 1: Establish the Eastern Shore as a premier East Coast destination for eco-tourism and responsible nature-oriented activities.**

### Background

- a) The Virginia Coast Reserve, 670 square miles of seaside marshes and barrier islands, is an ecological gem of international importance.
- b) Seaside and bayside waters provide excellent recreational opportunities for boaters.
- c) The Eastern Shore lies along one of the primary migratory paths for neo-tropical songbirds and raptors, as well as a winter home for dozens of species of waterfowl.
- d) Bird and deer hunting remain major recreational pursuits on the Eastern Shore due to the preservation of large tracts of farm and forest land, marsh and waterways.
- e) The waters surrounding the Eastern Shore offer some of the best fishing nationwide.

### **Eco-tourist Market Profile**

- Age: 35-54 years old.
- Gender: 50% female and 50% male.
- Education: 82% are college graduates.
- Party composition: A majority (60%) of experienced eco-tourists prefer to travel as a couple.
- Trip duration: The largest group of experienced eco-tourists (50%) prefers trips lasting 8-14 days.
- Expenditure: Experienced eco-tourists are willing to spend more than general tourists; the largest group (26%) is prepared to spend \$1,000-\$1,500 per trip.
- Important elements of trip: Top three responses:  
*(1) wilderness setting; (2) wildlife viewing; (3) hiking/trekking*

--Survey by HLA and APA Consulting firms

**Strategy A:** Task the Eco-Tourism Committee to develop and launch an Eco-Tourism Association on the Eastern Shore.

1. Establish the mission, goals, benefits, organizational structure, and operational processes of the new Association.

2. Take a complete inventory of eco-tourism-related businesses on the Shore and invite qualifying local businesses to join Association.
3. Reach out to businesses that have existing or potential interest in eco-tourism development.
4. Create a forum to facilitate communication between the various guides, land-use managers, and other Association members.
  - a) Create an on-line forum and information resource for Eco-Tourism Association members:
    - Event updates and opportunities.
    - Educational opportunities.
    - Significant wildlife sightings
    - Land-use management updates
    - Eco-tourism strategy discussions
5. Develop a tiered incentive program for Eco-tourism Association members based on their level of certification (see below) and participation in Eco-tourism Alliance activities.

**Strategy B:** Encourage responsible eco-tourism by instituting a rigorous operator/guide-certification process.

*Successful eco-tourism goes far beyond taking visitors into the natural environment. Because eco-tourism is a low-impact activity by its very nature, it demands that operators provide a high-dollar experience. In equal parts, it consists of customer service, entertainment, education, and safety. Nowhere is this truer than on the Eastern Shore because much of the Shore's appeal is inaccessible to the average visitor without a guide.*

1. Task the Eco-Tourism Committee to form a Certification Sub-Committee to work with the Eastern Shore Community College, universities with local ecological-research facilities, managers of major land holdings on the Eastern Shore, Chambers of Commerce, and relevant state and federal agencies to develop guidelines for a tiered certification program.
2. Build on the existing Virginia Eco-Tourism Certification program to develop an Eastern Shore-specific curriculum that includes Ecology, Cultural History, Leave-No-Trace Practices, Land-Use Management, Sediment Transport, Coastal Processes, and other topics as determined by the curriculum advisors. Other components of the curriculum should include Safety and Emergency Procedures and Customer Service.
3. Work with land managers to increase access to coastal lands and islands for certified guides. Encourage ongoing training by granting certified guides increased land access and privileges as they graduate to higher tiers within the certification system.
4. Operators/guides who receive certification should be eligible to receive benefits (varying according to their level of certification) that may include the following:
  - a. The right to use the Eastern Shore brand on their marketing materials.
  - b. The right to utilize eco-tourism easements and launch facilities provided by state and federal agencies, the CBBT, and participating landowners.
  - c. Inclusion in packaged vacations that include accommodations, meals, and activities provided by Eastern Shore-certified operators.

- d. Preferential placement in marketing materials and advertising.
  - e. Referrals from chambers of commerce, hotels and B&Bs, and visitor-information centers.
  - f. Preferential access to eco-tourism events, training, and development programs.
5. Transition control of the Guide Certification Program to the Eco-Tourism Association (when appropriate) on condition of the adoption of stringent quality and compliance safeguards.

**Strategy C:** Foster the development and growth of eco-tourism companies.

1. Encourage both counties to offer tax incentives to companies specializing in eco-tourism and related activities.
2. Assist in the development of an eco-tourism infrastructure and facilitate the ability of certified eco-tourism companies to operate on the Eastern Shore.
3. Identify opportunities for local entrepreneurs to expand the Shore's catalog of eco-tourism experiences such as aerial tours, horseback riding, SCUBA diving, sailing, hiking, biking, surfing, etc.
4. Encourage both counties to provide increased access to the Chesapeake Bay by acquiring coastal property for public use, with a focus on beach access.
5. Work with the counties to increase access to major land tracts by incorporating provisions for the creation of public-trail easements into zoning and proffer policies.

**Strategy D:** Develop awareness of the Eastern Shore as a major birding destination.

1. Support the growth and development of the Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival.
2. Increase visibility of the Eastern Shore loop of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail.
3. Create an Eastern Shore Birding website, linked to the Eastern Shore Tourism site, to educate birders of all skill levels regarding the opportunities available on the Eastern Shore.
  - a. Create a downloadable sighting chart including all bird species with verified sightings on the Shore (coordinate with Radar Ornithology?).
  - b. Provide links to eco-tourism operators who provide birding specific experiences.
  - c. Provide advice for birders interested in visiting the major birding locations on the Shore's
  - d. Install "Bird-cams" that allow Web-users to view real-time video of nesting ospreys, tern colonies, etc.
  - e. Post migration updates, similar to the fall-foliage sites used in the North-East, to provide information about peak bird-watching dates.
  - f. E-mail alerts to give birding enthusiasts information about significant sightings or opportunities.
  - g. Create and promote birding packages that include accommodations, a certified guide, boat tours, access to birding easements, bird-tagging operations, etc.

**Strategy E:** Develop a large-scale annual eco-tourism event on the Shore to highlight the unique natural, cultural, and recreational resources available.

1. Create a multi-day paddling event highlighting the new water trail systems on both the Seaside and the Bayside.
2. Coordinate events with museums, parks, and wildlife refuges.
3. Include the scientific community to encourage public understanding of the importance of the ongoing research on the Shore.
4. Include activities for children and adults of all ages.

**Strategy F:** Develop a Bike-Trail System on the Eastern Shore.

Background: Cyclists fit the demographic for the Eastern Shore brand: They are well educated; have plenty of disposable income; and generally support the philosophy behind geo-tourism and conservation.

1. Establish an Eastern Shore Bike Trail Steering committee. The steering committee will identify and involve stakeholders to coordinate planning efforts between the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Accomack Northampton Transportation District Commission (ANTDC), Accomack and Northampton Counties Parks and Recreation Departments and each county's Planning Commission to gather resource data and support community-level planning efforts.
2. Encourage the development of community stakeholder organizations to begin planning efforts that define potential community bike-trail routes, develop funding options and begin right-of-way acquisition.
3. Begin discussions with the Transportation District Commission and the new leaseholder for the railroad to obtain conceptual support for using portions of the railroad right of way for biking use. Concurrently, determine the status of the right of way between Eastern Shore Refuge and Cape Charles.
4. When community bike-trail routes are defined, incorporate detailed plans and associated funding requirements into County Capital Improvement Plans.
5. Encourage both Counties' Park and Recreation Departments to support bike tours on Virginia's Eastern Shore and inform bikers of all bike-trail planning efforts.
6. Encourage the growth and development of existing bicycle events on the Shore such as the MS 150 and the CBES Between the Waters Ride
7. Work with the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Commission to re-instate the "Fun Day on the Bay" family bike and walk event.

**Strategy G:** Establish the Eastern Shore as the premier paddling destination in the Mid-Atlantic.

1. Foster the growth of the existing sea kayak industry on the Shore.
2. Increase public awareness on a local, regional, and national level of the existing paddling trails that exist on both the Seaside and the Bayside.
3. Encourage development of an Eastern Shore kayak race circuit, building on existing events such as the Onancock Kayak Challenge and the Chincoteague Kayak Race.
4. Encourage the development of multi-day "Top-to-Tip" trips, running from

Chincoteague to the Wildlife Refuge, with clients staying at lodges and B&Bs in Seaside villages (e.g., Wachapreague, Quinby, Willis Wharf, and Oyster) to enjoy traditional oyster roasts, crab boils, clam bakes, etc.

5. Evaluate successfully branded paddling experiences such as the Maine Island Trail for additional means of establishing the natural and cultural uniqueness of the region, as well as creating user-friendly interfaces at access points up and down the Shore.
6. Increase the safety of the Seaside Water Trail by establishing a canoe and kayak launch between the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge and the harbor in Oyster.

**Strategy H:** Market the Shore’s thriving hunting and fishing industries as part of the eco-tourism experience.

*Hunting and recreational fishing can play a major role in conservation and eco-tourism efforts. Recreational anglers are often a community’s most vigilant guardians against commercial over-fishing, while responsible hunting maintains healthy animal populations, preserves land, and contributes large amounts of money to conservation efforts. Hunting also allows operators to maintain a steady revenue stream through the winter months.*

1. Consult with local guides and land-use managers to determine sustainable fishing and hunting practices for the various species on the Shore.
2. Encourage hunting and fishing guides to get involved in the guide-certification program (see above).
3. Encourage local businesses to package high-end hunting and fishing excursions with clients paying top dollar for certified guides, luxury accommodations, and superb cuisine based on wild game.
4. Work with hunting and fishing organizations such as Ducks Unlimited to preserve open spaces and create hunting preserves where indigenous species of wild game can develop sustainable populations that can absorb the impact of increased hunting pressure.
5. Encourage local restaurants to feature local fish and game on their menus.

**Strategy I:** Develop sailing and wind-sport events that build on the maritime history of the Eastern Shore.

1. Create a Tall Ships event to attract sailors, history buffs, and the general public to the harbors of Cape Charles and Onancock.
2. Encourage the growth and development of existing wind-sport events such as the Annual Mid-Atlantic Kite boarding Symposium in Cape Charles.
3. Increase access to the Chesapeake Bay by increasing public beach access.
4. Create a windsurfing, catamaran, and small-boat race on the Bay.

**Strategy J:** Encourage the development of high-end eco-lodges along both the Seaside and the Bayside to complement existing hotels, motels, and B&Bs.

1. Establish locations along existing and developing biking, paddling, and birding trails

where no lodging options are currently available.

2. Create a model for low-impact, luxury camping facilities utilizing yurts, tree-houses, large tents, or other wilderness-oriented structures.
3. Work with the counties to create incentives for local entrepreneurs to develop these eco-lodges.

## ***Eco-Tourism: The Lessons of Botswana***

With its wealth of big game, southern Africa is the world leader in eco-tourism. But the reasons for its success go far beyond the animals themselves. One of Africa's poorest nations in the 1960s, Botswana was the first country to outline a sustainable tourism strategy—built on the concept of high-dollar, low-impact wildlife experiences—that would benefit its people, its animals, and its environment. Today, wildlife and tourism employ about 45% of all the people who live in northern Botswana (where the safari lodges are located).

A visionary land-use plan has resulted in the division of Botswana's best wildlife land into massive private reserves that are leased out to safari companies or to rural communities. Well over 30% of the country has now been set aside for wildlife. The safari companies have to manage their operations within strict guidelines and with very strict carrying capacities to prevent overcrowding. These companies have to train and employ local people—and they have to pay large amounts to the communities or the Government for the privilege of being there.

Central to Botswana's safari experience are high-end game lodges, many of them utilizing luxury tents, which accommodate a low number of guests paying upwards of \$1,000 per night per couple. These lodges are designed to blend into nature, rather than to insulate guests from the outside elements. Aside from the spectacular natural settings, the hallmark of these lodges is unsurpassed customer service: trained rangers with expertise in all aspects of the region's flora and fauna; gourmet food; deluxe accommodations; and a fanatical attention to the small details.

While the Eastern Shore cannot offer the same kind of dramatic game-viewing as these safari lodges, it can duplicate their success. Indeed, more and more southern African lodges do not rely on the premise of big-game viewing. Rocktail Bay Lodge, on the rugged northeast coast of South Africa, offers no safari experiences. Instead, guests can choose among a variety of activities including beach walks, bird-watching, aerial tours, river rides, deep-sea fishing, and scuba-diving. A similar concept is employed by Lapa Rios, Costa Rica's most famous eco-lodge. Situated on the remote Osa Peninsula, Lapa Rios offers its guests a broad menu of activities including horse riding, bird walks, night walks, deep-sea fishing, swimming, and surfing.

With its expanse of pristine barrier islands and salt marshes, the Eastern Shore has all the ingredients needed to launch eco-lodges of the same style and quality—with one major difference. While it costs visitors nearly \$2,000 per person just to reach Botswana, the Eastern Shore lies within six hours by car of the country's largest market, New York. The idea of experiencing a luxury wilderness adventure over the weekend will have vast appeal to residents of the huge metropolitan areas ringing the Eastern Shore.

*(Compiled with the assistance of materials from Wilderness Safaris).*

## **BEACHES, PARKS & REFUGES**

**Goal 1: Protect and promote peninsula beaches, parks, and wildlife refuges as core elements of the Eastern Shore visitor experience.**

### **Assateague**

**Strategy A:** Work with government agencies and key stakeholders to analyze the need for—and impacts of—a beach-replenishment program.

1. If beach replenishment is deemed appropriate, work with Governor Kaine’s administration to identify and secure federal authorization and funding.
2. If beach replenishment is deemed appropriate, have ESTC staff participate in a steering committee to coordinate replenishment efforts with local businesses, elected officials, and government agencies.

**Strategy B:** Develop relationships with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and local residents who depend on Assateague Island beach for their livelihoods to foster a better understanding of their goals and challenges.

1. Investigate the possibility of creating additional access to the north end of Virginia’s Assateague beach.
2. Work to maintain current level of lifeguard services for Assateague beach.
3. Work to preserve or improve existing parking operations for Assateague beach.
4. Develop volunteer program to assist in beach operations (e.g., assist with parking).
5. Participate in the development of a crisis-management plan to maintain beach access in case of emergency, including transportation and parking alternatives.

**Strategy C:** Develop new uses for Assateague Island beach.

1. Analyze current beach and refuge activities to determine best features to promote.
2. Seek permission to use old Coast Guard Station for ecotours and other activities.
3. Seek permission to use existing Marine Consortium boats to land on Assateague Island in support of tours/overnight stays.
4. Support vendor initiatives to lead overnight fishing expeditions.
5. Explore development of history/walking tours that include the beach.
6. Investigate ways to partner with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the U.S. Coast Guard to promote the beach and other activities.

*\*Also see Beach & Recreational Resorts*

## **Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge**

**Strategy A:** Work with USFWS and CBBT to develop promotional strategies to funnel visitors from the CBBT Welcome Center to the Refuge.

1. Explore the possibility of widening the butterfly trail linking the CBBT Rest Area and the Refuge Visitor Center; developing a more imposing gateway for the path; and installing interpretive and directional signage along the way.
2. Explore the possibility of painting a trail across the parking area from the CBBT Welcome Center to the trailhead on the refuge.
3. Devote permanent exhibit space within the CBBT Welcome Center for the Wildlife Refuge.
4. Train CBBT Welcome Center staff to direct visitors to the Refuge as a regular part of their interaction with tourists.
5. Work with CBBT and USFWS to develop interpretive signage at the CBBT Overlook and CBBT restaurant/pier regarding the area's ecosystems and wildlife.

**Strategy B :** Participate in efforts to promote USFWS visitor programs, facilities, and nature-viewing opportunities.

1. Help promote seasonal bird-watching opportunities, including bird hide, osprey-nest cam, guided tours, annual Birding & Wildlife Festival, etc.
2. Help promote seasonal Fisherman Island walking tours.
3. Investigate the value of promoting the refuge's military history, including 16-inch gun emplacements, etc.
4. Facilitate a potential partnership between refuge and Barrier Island Center for sharing and coordination of exhibits.
5. Promote the Refuge Visitor Center as the starting point for Northampton County's bicycle-trail system.
6. Work with USFWS to study the feasibility of creating a Seaside trail connecting the Bull tract with state property.

## **Kiptopeke State Park**

**Strategy A:** Promote Kiptopeke's bayside beach experience to families and pet owners.

1. Help promote the family-friendly nature of the northern beach: no waves, shallow water, easy parking, and good rest-room facilities.
2. Use targeted promotions to market the southern end of the beach to dog owners.
3. Market the campground and group rental houses as a budget-conscious beach vacation.

**Strategy B:** Promote Kiptopeke as an ideal base for fishing and boating adventures in the Chesapeake Bay.

- 1.Highlight the proximity of Kiptopeke’s boat ramps to some of the Chesapeake Bay’s finest striper, flounder, cobia, and drum fishing.
2. Highlight the fishing pier as a low-cost alternative to boating.
- 3.Market the campground and group rental homes as ideal bases for families, groups, and budget-conscious anglers.

**Strategy C:** Assist efforts to promote Kiptopeke’s non-water recreational opportunities.

1. Assist in the development of bike loops connecting Kiptopeke’s bike trails with the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge via the old railway right-of-way and expanded shoulders on Rte. 600.
2. Assist in efforts to promote Kiptopeke as a haven for migratory neo-tropical and temperate songbirds and raptors.
  - a. Promote the park’s fall bird-banding initiative
  - b. Promote the park’s raptor observatory.
  - c. Highlight the park’s role in the annual Birding and Wildlife Festival.

### **Natural Area Preserves**

**Strategy A:** Work with DCR to promote responsible visitation of state Natural Area Preserves (NAPS).

1. Study the feasibility of promoting NAPs with public access (e.g., Magothy Bay, Cape Charles Coastal Habitat, and Savage Neck Dunes) in ESTC Visitor Guides, brochures, and on the ESTC Website.