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# DRIVE 2.0

2020-2025 STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN

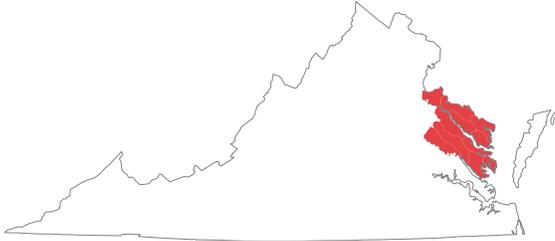
REGIONAL PLAN: **CHESAPEAKE BAY**

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# **CHESAPEAKE BAY INTRODUCTION**

The Chesapeake Bay regional plan builds upon the foundational insights established in the 2020-2025 statewide tourism plan, as well as the original 2013 DRIVE regional plan for Chesapeake Bay. Developed for every locality within the region to use, this plan provides insights and recommendations on where to focus product development and promotional efforts over the next five years. The plan aims to help spur the growth and impact of travel and tourism for every locality in Chesapeake Bay by increasing tourism products, expenditures, employment and local and state tax receipts.

**All DRIVE 2.0 research was conducted in 2019 and compiled pre COVID-19 Crisis.  
Please see [vatc.org/coronavirus](http://vatc.org/coronavirus) for COVID-19: Industry Response Toolkit.**



The Chesapeake Bay region includes the municipalities of Colonial Beach, West Point, Tappahannock, Warsaw, Kilmarnock, Urbanna, Irvington, and Gloucester, as well as the counties of King & Queen, Gloucester, King George, Westmoreland, King William, Northumberland, Middlesex, Mathews, Lancaster, Essex, and Richmond.

## QUICK FACTS

- Population: 236,924 (8th largest of the 10 VA regions)
- Largest town/city: Colonial Beach (3,587)
- Interstates: no access to major interstates
- US-360, US-17, US-301, VA-3, VA-33
- Bodies of water: Chesapeake Bay, Potomac, Rappahannock, Mattaponi, Pamunkey and York Rivers
- Commercial airports: none
- Proximity to urban hubs: Hampton Roads, D.C. metro, Richmond

## TOURISM IMPACT

The Chesapeake Bay region accounted for \$514 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2018 (approximately 2% of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures). Year over year the region experienced an average 3.7% increase in expenditures (lightly trailing the overall Virginia state expenditure growth of 4.4%).

- **Total expenditures:** \$514 million
- **Employment:** 5,349
- **Payroll:** \$115 million
- **Local tax receipts:** \$22 million
- **State tax receipts:** \$14 million

From a tourism industry perspective, in addition to tourism marketing at the destination level, the Northern Neck Tourism Commission serves as a regional organization focused on the northern part of the region. Since 2013, two new regional partnerships have formed. The River Realm initiative is a partnership between Lancaster and Middlesex counties, as well as the independent towns within the counties, and focuses on developing and promoting water-based tourism and oyster experiences. The Middle Peninsula Alliance works on both traditional economic development and tourism development in multiple locations.



## LURES

The Chesapeake Bay region's outdoor and water-related offerings continue to be its primary strengths, as the region boasts more than 1,800 miles of bay shoreline, perfect for boaters, paddlers, and water lovers of all kinds. In addition, its culinary and history and heritage experiences remain attractive draws.

Though the region boasts comparatively fewer attractions, as one of the smaller and less populated regions in the state, the number of attractions is proportionately similar to that of other regions.

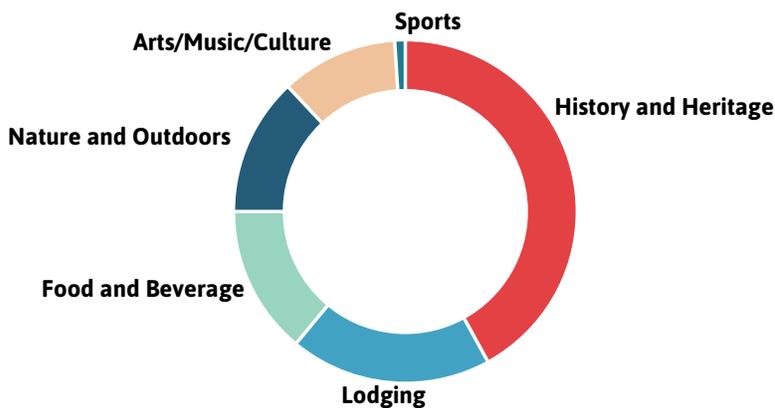
**When asked to name a the primary lure for the region, industry leaders identify the following:**



The Chesapeake Bay region offers an abundance of natural and outdoor recreational assets including Gwynn's Island, Beaverdam Park, Chesapeake Bay, Potomac River, Rappahannock River, Belle Isle State Park, Caledon State Park, Westmoreland State Park, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, the Captain John Smith Trail, Chilton Woods State Forest, Dragon Run State Forest, Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Sandy Point State Forest, and Zoar State Forest. And yet, as shown with the River Realm initiative, there is plenty of fuel to support the continued growth of outdoor recreation and water-based tourism.

**Inventory of Regional Assets**

Source: VTC Research



**LURES** (cont'd)

As a complement to these natural resources, rural and waterfront cottages, quaint villages, and expansive farmlands dot the landscape all along the Bay, with Colonial Beach, Irvington, Kilmarnock, and Urbanna serving as notable coastal towns.

The region’s deep roots in American history further help to distinguish it from other destinations. The Chesapeake Bay is the birthplace of Chief Powhatan, three presidents, including George Washington, as well as two signers of the Declaration of Independence, Governor John Page, and the Civil War general, Robert E. Lee. Visitors can experience history at George Washington’s birthplace, Stratford Hall, and Menokin, among others, and the region features the history of Virginia’s indigenous populations with the lands of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes.

The region’s coastal location, combined with its waterman culture, positions it to leverage aqua farms and enhance its emerging arts and culinary scene, providing opportunities for agritourism and aquatourism. For example, the annual oyster festival in Urbanna attracts nearly 75,000 visitors, and companies such as Rappahannock River Oysters has brought national attention to the region’s oysters, which forms the backbone of its culinary scene. The company harvests oysters in the Rappahannock River and has a “tasting room” style restaurant in Topping, called Merroir. The Virginia Oyster Academy offers opportunities to learn about Virginia’s oyster history, ecology, and tools of the harvest. And visitors can even go on waterman tours for a more hands-on experience.



**LURES** (cont'd)

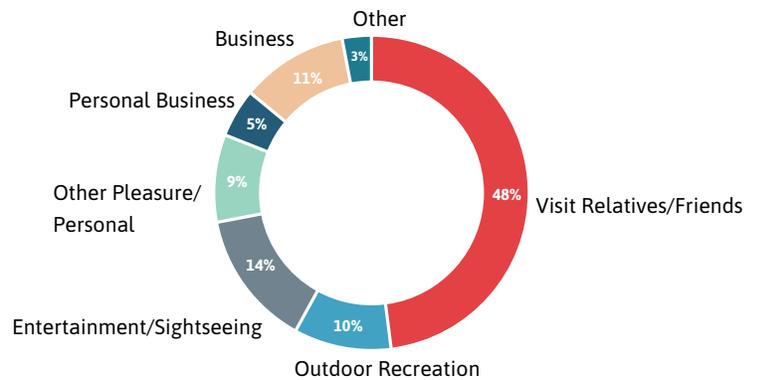
Complementing the oyster scene, the Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail highlights the nine premiere wineries throughout the region. Ingleside, for example, is one of Virginia’s most prestigious vineyards and is located in the Northern Neck. In 2019, Warsaw welcomed a variety of new businesses and has embraced development initiatives for its downtown corridor.

The region offers a variety of B&Bs such as Belle Grove Plantation, Kilmarnock Inn, or the stylish Hope & Glory Inn and Vineyard. Irvington offers the world-renowned Tides Inn resort. And for more rustic stays, the region also boasts locations like the Bethpage Camp-Resort, known as the best RV resort in the nation and voted National Park of the Year three times by the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF REGIONAL LURES**

- **Scenic beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities:**
  - **State Parks:** Caledon State Park, Westmoreland State Park, Belle Isle State Park
  - **Natural assets:** Browne State Forest, Chilton Woods State Forest, Dragon Run State Forest, Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Sandy Point State Forest, Zoar State Forest
- **Notable Cities & Towns:** Colonial Beach, Irvington, Kilmarnock, Urbanna, Tappahannock,
- **Notable Main Streets:** Gloucester, Tappahannock
- Presidential, Colonial, and indigenous history
- Proximity to Washington D.C.
- Resorts and unique lodging: Tides Inn, Hope & Glory B&B, Beth Page Camp Resort
- Aquaculture, waterman culture and oyster experiences including Urbanna Oyster Festival

**Past visitors to the region cite the following as the primary purpose of their trip and top activities they participated in during their visit:**



**Top Activities**

Visiting Relatives	28%
Shopping	26%
Historic sites/Churches	21%
Museums	20%
Beach	17%
Urban Sightseeing	15%
Art Galleries	14%
Rural Sightseeing	14%
Fine dining	14%
Visiting Friends	12%

## CHANGES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

The 2013 regional plan identified water access as a challenge, and the region is seeing significant progress in this area as a result of the recently established (and still growing) Virginia Water Trails program, which promotes ecotourism and paddling as a low environmental impact/high economic impact driver in the rural coastal region. The Rural Coastal Virginia Working Waterfronts program also helps promote the area as a place where the economy, recreation, and conservation come together. Serving the Eastern Shore, Middle Peninsula, and Northern Neck, these programs also promote stewardship ethics among the visiting public through eco-tour guide certification programs, interpretive programming, and interpretive materials and promote economic development through boat building, fishing gear manufacturing, and charter boat tours.

In addition to water access, Colonial Beach has developed a new public park for recreational activities, and the town of Kilmarnock has created a public park for music events, farmers markets, and other tourism-related activities. Cook's Corner redevelopment is also underway with a \$2.5 million grant for housing, brewery, restaurant, park, and wastewater improvements.

New oyster-focused marketing initiatives, such as Virginia Oyster Trail, Virginia is for Oyster Lovers, and Virginia's River Realm are helping strengthen oysters as a tourism driver for Virginia. The River Realm initiative — a partnership between Lancaster County, Middlesex County, and independent towns in those counties — has been incredibly successful in developing and promoting water-based tourism and oyster experiences.

In terms of history and heritage, Northern Neck Heritage Area and Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail signs have been installed in the region, and a feasibility study with the U.S. Park Service is in its final year to designate the Northern Neck of Virginia as a National Heritage Area.

Meanwhile, regional leaders in the Middle Peninsula have formed the Middle Peninsula Alliance, which includes multiple localities, and supports both traditional economic development and tourism development. As such, the MPA has begun developing a regional "Discover Peninsula/Meet in the Middle" tourism economic development and visitation campaign.



**FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES**

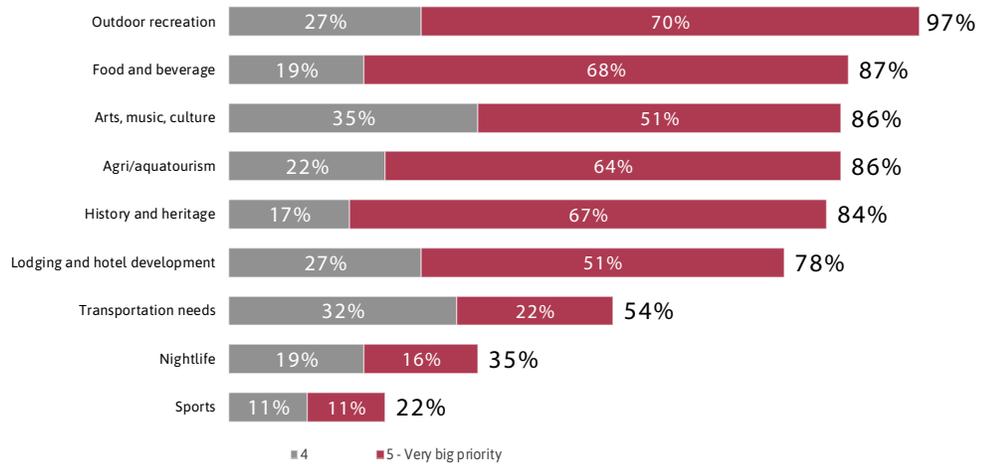
According to the Office of Outdoor Recreation, Virginia’s outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and employs more than 197,000 Virginians. In addition, outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their top trip purposes.

The Chesapeake Bay region’s tourism industry leaders recognize this opportunity, and in the DRIVE 2.0 strategic plan development survey, they identify outdoor recreation as the top priority need — particularly when it comes to better understanding how to develop and promote outdoor product offerings and experiences.

While there are a number of water-oriented natural assets, limited public water access continues to prohibit visitors from taking advantage of the region’s varied outdoor recreation opportunities. Marinas continue to have some of the best waterfront properties but are not improved or enhanced as tourist destinations. The opportunity for marinas to partner with entrepreneurs, outfitters, and tour guides to maximize the value and revenue at marina locations is worth exploring. Improving water access and focusing on outfitters and ecotourism must continue to be priorities, as these assets will help encourage visitors to get out on the water — to explore, kayak, canoe, observe wildlife, etc.

The Middle Peninsula PDC’s Public Access Authority model may be a boon for ecotourism. Access Authorities can accept land donations and open them up for public use as long as there are no capital improvements, which has led to ideas as varied as mobile outfitters, food truck rodeos, and pop-up ecotourism events. Encouraging

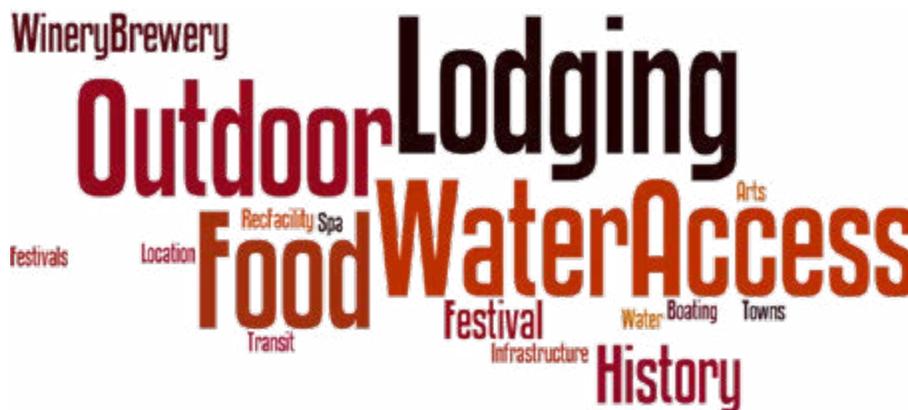
**When asked to what degree are the following a priority for your region, industry leaders responded:**



areas in the Northern Neck to model a similar initiative could prove worthwhile.

Middle Peninsula State Park, a 644-acre waterfront swatch near the former home of Pocahontas in Gloucester, is set to become a state park in the next two years. The park will include hiking trails, a campground, a nonmotorized boat launch, an open-air interpretive center, and picnic area. Meanwhile, just 12 miles down the road sits the village of Werowocomoco. The land is owned by the National Park Service, and in June 2020, the National Park Service released a feasibility study, which recommends designating the five-county area of the Northern Neck as a National Heritage Area. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation recently acquired an additional land parcel near Middle Peninsula State Park, tentatively called Machicomoco, that may focus on Virginia Indian culture and provide an important interpretive connector between National Park Service sites and Virginia State Park sites.

**When asked to name a potential game changer for the region, industry leaders identify the following:**



**FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES** (cont'd)

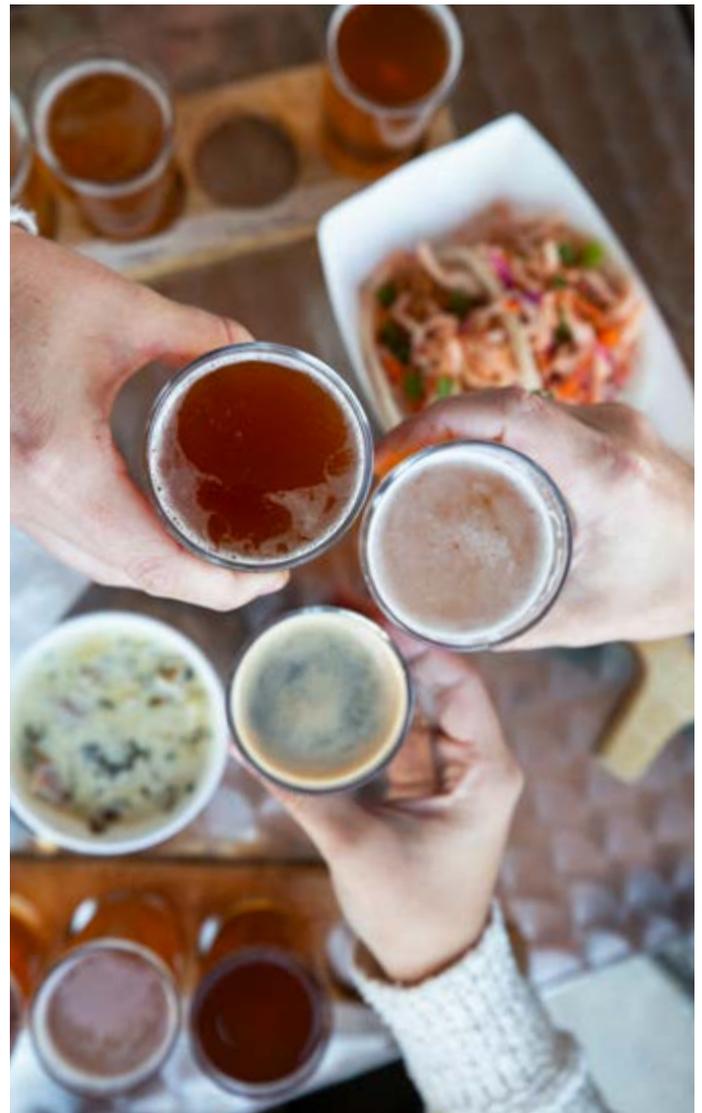
Even though the Bethpage Camp Resort is nationally recognized, the Tides Inn offers distinctive upscale resort experiences on the waterfront with a range of outdoor activities, and the Hope & Glory Inn has been ranked among the top coastal inns in the U.S., the region's hotel accommodations are a bit limited. The region offers 48 cabins and cottages, 32 B&Bs and Inns, 16 camping and RV Parks, and only 22 hotels. So, while not at the top of the list of priority areas, industry leaders list lodging as a game changer, and taking advantage of opportunities to add more options can help the region to grow as destination.

Efforts to enhance local arts, music, food, and beverage — the elements that lead to vibrant communities — should be leveraged to bring awareness to the great small towns and vibrant communities in the Chesapeake Bay region. These efforts should also be made in partnership and align with the Virginia Main Street Program and National Main Street Program. Callao in Northumberland County (Northern Neck), Town of Warsaw in Richmond County (Northern Neck), and the Town of Tappahannock in Essex County (Middle Peninsula), for example, are especially poised to achieve this designation, as they are currently undergoing revitalization in terms of events and product development and partners are working together to create tourism products in key downtowns and surrounding areas.

**AREAS OF FOCUS**

Based upon Drive 2.0 research and in consideration of the tourism situation, the Chesapeake Bay region should focus on the following primary and secondary product opportunities:

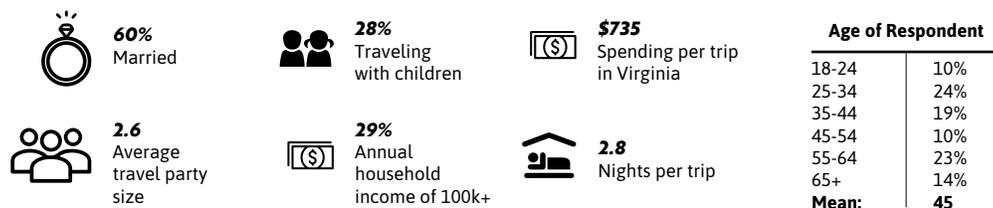
- **Primary:**  
Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Water Access, Lodging, Town/City Centers, Culinary (Agritourism/Aquatourism, Wineries, Breweries, Distilleries, Cideries, Oyster Experiences)
- **Secondary:**  
Arts & Music, History & Heritage, Events





## CURRENT VISITORS

According to research collected by VTC and TravelTrakAmerica, the primary visitors are:



## EMERGING NICHE MARKETS

As the region examines ways to broaden its customer base, keep in mind the key demographic reality facing Virginia and the country today and in the immediate future. Right now, minority children are being born at a higher rate than white children, and by 2044, the country's combined minority populations will comprise the majority of the total population. The shift toward a more diverse, pluralistic society is already underway, and making everyone feel welcome can become a differentiating attribute and strategic advantage, appealing to a broader demographic base of potential visitors.

In addition, operators across the board are showing significant increases in female visitation, especially in outdoor and active travel experiences, which represents another opportunity to increase the region's customer base. So, whether promoting a girl's trip or a solo adventure, a heightened focus on female travelers may also prove beneficial.

Building equity in your region as a diverse and inclusive place to visit, as well as one with appeal for women travelers, will be greatly aided by finding and enlisting ambassadors who can speak to these values and attributes. And, since nearly half of visitors come to spend time with friends and family, helping them understand all there is to see and do, and where to take their friends and family when they come to visit, can enhance the visitor experience and help residents see the value of tourism in their community.

**EMERGING NICHE MARKETS** (cont'd)

Additional opportunity audiences based on growing trends include:

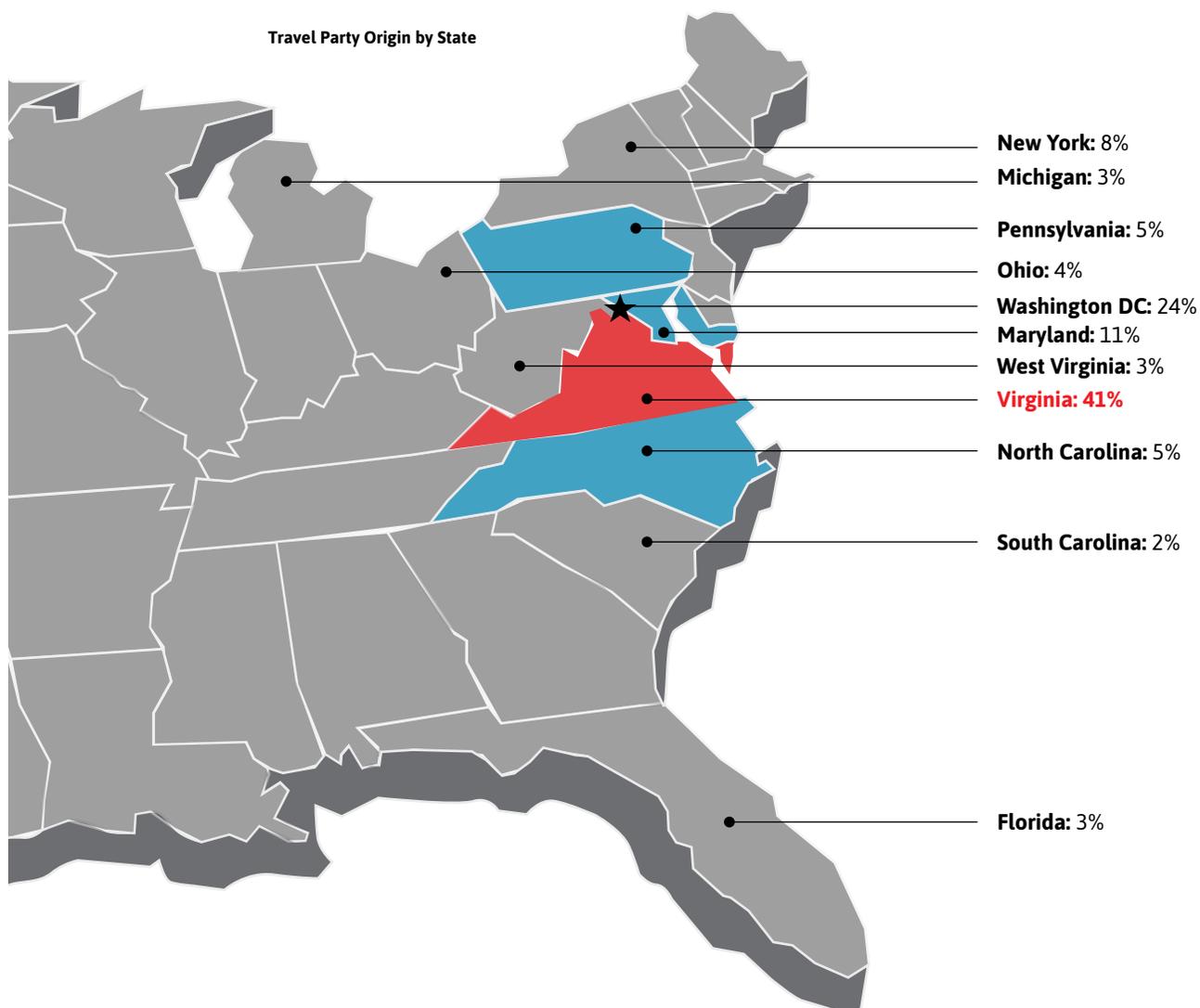
TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY
<b>OUTDOOR RECREATION</b>	<p>The outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and employs more than 197,000 Virginians. Outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their top trip purposes. And, this year Virginia established the Office of Outdoor Recreation, placing even more importance on this industry.</p>	<p>Virginia is experiencing a rising tide when it comes to outdoor recreation. It is overwhelmingly the biggest focus for industry leaders across the state. And with the new state office in place, we should strike while the iron is hot. The Chesapeake Bay region should pour resources into experiences related to water with a particular focus on water access, oysters, and wine.</p>
<b>CULTURAL HERITAGE</b>	<p>History is one of Virginia's biggest assets. But it is not just about names and dates, it's about the cultural impact these historic events have on the community. Whether it is music, agriculture, crafts, or politics, Virginia is full of rich cultural heritage experiences.</p>	<p>Packaging historic assets as experiences that highlight the cultural impact on our lives today is key to keeping history relevant and authentic to today's diverse tourism audience. Threading themes across regions can create an even more compelling and impactful story. The Chesapeake Bay region has a unique story to tell from indigenous populations, to the revolutionary war, to the civil war. These are still core assets, it's just about telling the story in a more relevant way.</p>
<b>MINI-CATIONS</b>	<p>According to Allianz, over half of Americans last year did not take a vacation longer than 4 nights. Millennials are leading this movement.</p>	<p>Campaigns like the recent Crush Friday can take advantage of this trend. Consider other marketing campaigns and packages that encourage younger generations to take their vacation for a long weekend trip. With the average trip length at 2.8 nights, mini vacations should be a natural opportunity for the region to pursue.</p>

**GROWING OPPORTUNITY OF NEARBY DRIVE MARKETS**

National tourism trends suggest pleasure travel is now a year-round activity with shorter, more frequent trips taking the place of traditional week-long summer vacations. This translates into the increasing value and impact of near versus far-away markets.

With an average trip length of 2.8 nights, the Chesapeake Bay region is no exception, and according to a TravelTrakAmerica survey, the majority of Chesapeake Bay travelers (60%) originate from Virginia, New York and Maryland. This concentrated primary feeder area gives all of the region’s destinations an opportunity to work closer together in promotional planning and targeting prospective visitors, especially those in the neighboring states of Maryland and North Carolina.

In addition, the trend toward shorter, closer trips will be fueled by the next generation of travelers: Gen Zs. The oldest Gen Zs are 18 today, and over the next 20 years, they will become young professionals and young head of household parents. SIR’s research on Gen Zs’ generational wiring suggests they strongly consider safety and distance from home and loved ones when making travel plans.



## COMPETITION

Industry leaders in the Chesapeake Bay region mostly identify competitors within the state or their own region. When taking a look at all the region has to offer, the coastal areas of Maryland, North Carolina, and Delaware emerge as primary out-of-state competitors.

COMPETITOR	PRIMARY LURES
COASTAL MARYLAND	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. History</li> <li>2. Water (beaches, shores, rivers, activities)</li> <li>3. Small towns</li> </ol>
COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beaches</li> <li>2. History (light houses, Wright Bros.)</li> <li>3. Outdoor recreation</li> </ol>
COASTAL DELAWARE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beaches</li> <li>2. Small towns</li> <li>3. Shopping</li> </ol>

As noted in the 2013 regional plan, these competitors offer a number of similarly relaxing experiences such as outdoor recreation, coastal towns with arts and culture, beaches, water-oriented heritage, colonial history, and others. These destinations have a mixture of natural and commercial coastal features as well as greater beach presence, so while the Chesapeake Bay region's experiences may have the appeal of being less developed in some areas, it faces less name recognition and aggressive destination promotions.

In appealing to prospective visitors, Chesapeake Bay destinations and travel attractions must realize that competing head to head, from a siloed or individual experience perspective, is less effective than the hub and spoke method of bundling experiences together. The Chesapeake Bay's unique history and coastal towns offer an authentic combination of experiences, particularly in terms of the region's oyster heritage and culinary scene, as well as its wineries, agritourism, and other visitor experiences.

**REGIONAL CHALLENGES (VOIDS)**

Currently, the region lacks major anchor attractions that can be positioned and marketed to visitors. As a result, it enjoys less brand recognition than more prominent attractions in the state. Similarly, without major interstate access and only general aviation airports rather than commercial air presence, the region’s lack of accessibility compounds its lack of brand recognition. Plus, like many other coastal destinations, it faces seasonality challenges.

In terms of accommodations, the extensive AirBnB and VRBO options in the area make it difficult to assess the true need for lodging and to also identify the number of visitors to the area.

Finally, enhancing regional collaboration remains a challenge, and many areas in the region seem to operate more independently of the regional tourism commission. There are essentially three regions within the region — River Realm, Middle Peninsula, and the Northern Neck — and while the River Realm initiative has sparked greater connection between its two counties and eight towns, there seems to be little collaboration on a broader regional scale.

**REGIONAL CHALLENGES**

- Limited regional attraction anchors
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Lack of tourism industry maturity
- Differentiation from competition in nearby states — coastline and outdoors
- Limited outdoor and traditional accommodations
- Limited water access
- Limited accessibility — interstate and air
- Limited internet access
- Challenged economic base
- Limited regional cooperation
- Changes in recreational boating industry
- Coastal seasonality

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY
<p><b>AGING POPULATION</b></p>	<p>The age wave is washing over Virginia. Over the next 14 years, America’s 65+ population will increase by roughly 60%, growing from 10 to 20% of the total population. Nationally, we will have 74 million people over the age of 65, compared to only 46 million today. Some counties of Virginia will experience a dramatic increase in seniors, where up to 40% of the population will be 65 or older.</p>	<p>Recognize Baby Boomers (today’s new seniors) as an increasingly important tourism segment; however, it is important to understand that they won’t be looking for the types of experiences their parents sought. The region should work to make attractions and destinations more appealing to Boomers and their desires to stay active and enhance their vitality. The region’s excellent outdoor and nature experiences, along with space, should be very appealing to this audience.</p>
<p><b>SHIFTING FOOTPRINT</b></p>	<p>The country’s population growth over the past century has been concentrated in urban and suburban areas. Likewise, 80% of Virginia’s population growth is projected to occur in the “Golden Crescent” corridor that runs from D.C. through Northern Virginia, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Hampton Roads. This growth in urban areas is being accelerated by Millennials, who prefer downtowns, activity centers, and 15-minute “livable” communities close to everything.</p>	<p>Unlike some regions, the Chesapeake Bay has not experienced a decline in its population overall. Its close proximity to Hampton Roads, Richmond, and even Washington D.C. should allow it to benefit from Virginia’s shifting population footprint more than other rural areas in other parts of the state. Still, to face the rising economic challenges of declining rural populations and accompanying tax revenue, the region must invest resources in tourism as an economic engine. Positioning the destination’s travel and tourism assets and identifying ways to expose potential new residents to the area is critical. One area of focus could be promoting the region as ripe for future entrepreneurs and tourism-related small business owners. This could be especially effective with retiring Boomers looking for their second act.</p>



### **REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY**

Bundling or packaging experiences for potential visitors' consideration continues to gain traction. According to TripAdvisor, "[they're] seeing more travelers balancing their itineraries with a mix of classic sightseeing and more unique local experiences." The Chesapeake Bay's travel and tourism efforts may be behind on this trend. Apart from Virginia's River Realm, existing assets appear to be siloed, with few regional cross promotions, connectivity or packaging of complementary experiences.

Working together to create trails and experiences will be critical to helping elevate the entire region against competition from the north and south. Packaging experiences around outdoor recreation, history and heritage, wine, and aquatourism are authentic and differentiating opportunities for the region, and Virginia Water Trails may be a great place to start increasing access to and activities on the water.

**REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY** (cont'd)

Additional opportunities for the region based on growing national trends, include:

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY
<p><b>SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL</b></p>	<p>There is a growing economy and movement toward stewardship of the Earth and our cultures. Destinations and attractions are participating in this movement by promoting low impact and green experiences and practices.</p>	<p>In a region rich with natural assets, wildlife, and small towns, low impact experiences are important. Think about ways to highlight the low impact visitors will have on nature, the wildlife, and the small towns. In visiting, they can contribute to the vibrancy of the local economy in a sustainable way so generations can continue to enjoy the beautiful region and its rich culture.</p>
<p><b>CAMPING</b></p>	<p>Camping and glamping is increasingly popular, especially among Millennials. Moreover, they prefer these trips to be within 100 miles from where they live.</p>	<p>This is another trend that will fall in line with the growing outdoor recreation focus. Consider ways to highlight camping trips of all kinds – the off-the-beaten-path to a unique view, or the best of both worlds trip with a hike, a craft brew and a campsite under the stars.</p>



# PROMOTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



## **RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES**

Based on the situation and analysis of the Chesapeake Bay region, the following set of recommendations are offered in order of priority:

1. **Connect and promote Chesapeake Bay's outdoor experiences.** While almost every town and city across the region is improving its outdoor products to appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, they remain relatively isolated. By banding together to build a greater set of interconnected experiences, such as water trails or recreational trails that connect towns, and a more cohesive regional identity around these experiences, the Chesapeake Bay region can increase its appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, particularly through the following channel:
  - **Water Trails:** The Chesapeake Bay is home to 10 rivers and streams. No wonder numerous stakeholders in the area reference riverfront development and enhanced river experiences as a future opportunity to create more outdoor experiences for the region's visitors. Working together, the DMOs of the Chesapeake Bay can tie rivers together into world-class water experiences. Leveraging and continuing to invest in the Virginia Water Trails initiative is the perfect starting place.

**To get inspired about how to formulate a nationwide product development plan, see DRIVE 2.0's How To Guide #2: Enhance Experiences.**

**RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES** (cont'd)

2. **Bundle and package experiences using the hub and spoke method to increase the overall appeal of individual attractions and offerings.** Overall, the region's primary lures should adopt a packaging perspective to increase average spending and trip length in the Chesapeake Bay region. Focusing on just one lure will make it more challenging for the region to compete against similar offerings in other states.

The region is not starting at ground zero, as there are many exciting lures from which to start. Ideas could include a weekend that allows them to paddle board on the river, go on a waterman tour, taste oysters, and stay in a B&B with a wine tour the next day. Think about how to bundle these experiences across localities to increase the unique experience and drive people to turn their day trip or overnight into a two- or three-day trip because they recognize all they can see and do.

3. **Collectively, breathe new life and meaning into history and heritage assets.** Given the number of historical attractions in the Chesapeake Bay region and the slow decline in the appeal of heritage tourism, these attractions should partner to create more cross promotions and shared guidelines on how to respectfully give history more of an edge by presenting Virginia's history. This could include:

- Packaging relatable personal stories;
- Making history more personal by connecting with and appealing to what's on travelers' minds and in their hearts today;
- Building in suspense; and
- Keeping it fresh.

History and heritage assets are spread out across the region and also cover various times throughout history. As a result, finding relevant thematic ways to tie in the stories from Virginia's indigenous people, through the Civil War and up through waterman culture will be challenging but also critical. Visitors want to know what are the foundational cultural elements of the waterman's way of life and how has that shaped today's current culture? It's these types of themes and stories that tie together and cut across the typical narrative to create a unique experience and authentic story for visitors.

**For inspiration on how to package history with a twist, see DRIVE 2.0's How To Guide #1: How to Tell and Sell Your Story.**

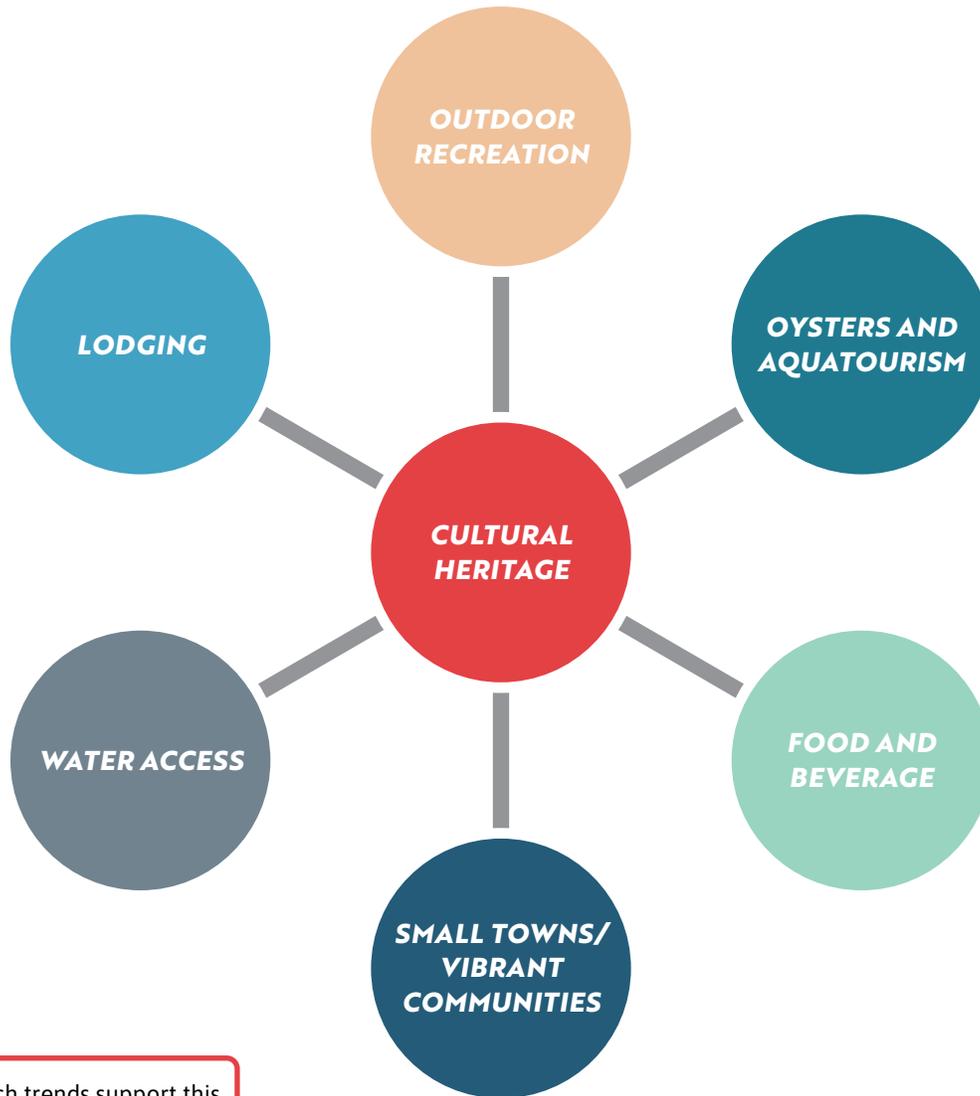
4. **Cultivate local ambassadors.** Given the high percentage of visitors who travel to see friends and family, creating local ambassadors is critical. Helping local residents understand all there is to see and do can make the job of selling tourism easier in the end. This is a year-round opportunity, as friends and family come any time of the year. Create opportunities for locals to experience activities and offerings the region provides so they know where to take friends and family when they come to visit. In addition, focusing on residents also means helping local entrepreneurs understand they are in the business of tourism and encouraging new business development to help contribute to the growth of vibrant communities.

**To get inspired about how to develop an ambassador program, see DRIVE 2.0's How To Guide #1: How to Tell and Sell Your Story.**

# PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## HUB & SPOKE

In considering all of the research to date, the following development hub and spoke approach is recommended for the Chesapeake Bay region as a whole:



**Exercise:** See which trends support this development hub & spoke.

### TREND 1

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### TREND 2

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### TREND 3

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## **VISION FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY**

The vision for the Chesapeake Bay regional plan is to collaboratively tap the region's natural assets and further develop outdoor recreation in an authentic and sustainable way, while also building on the region's rich history and cultural heritage and developing assets like food and beverage, arts, and music — the foundation of vibrant communities — to sustainably maximize its tourism potential.

## **SUMMARY**

The Chesapeake Bay region has incredible opportunity, and through increased collaboration, teamwork, and a common vision across jurisdictions, the region can be even more competitive with nearby destinations in North Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware. The communities and assets are there, but regionalism is key to growth. Through better connectivity and cohesion, together we can take the entire region to the next level.







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