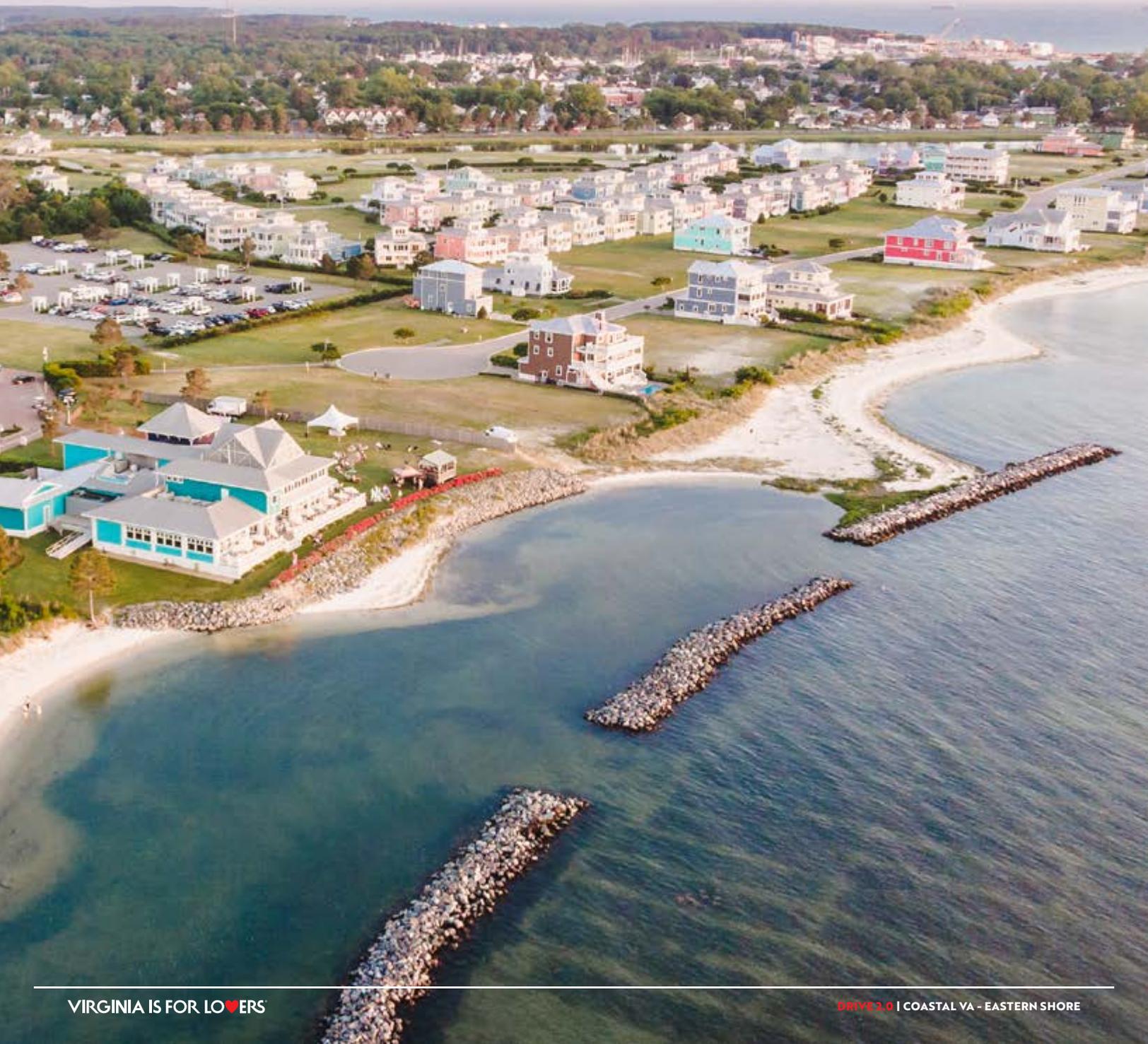


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DRIVE 2.0

2020-2025 STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN

REGIONAL PLAN: **COASTAL VA - EASTERN SHORE**

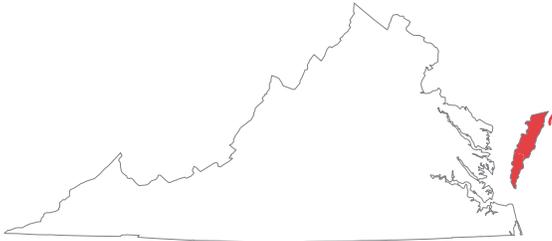


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EASTERN SHORE INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Shore regional plan builds upon the foundational insights established in the 2020-2025 statewide tourism plan, as well as the original 2013 DRIVE Eastern Shore regional plan. 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 Eastern Shore 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 for COVID-19: Industry Response Toolkit.**



The Eastern Shore region consists of the major municipalities of Chincoteague Island, Exmore, Onancock, Cape Charles, Parksley, Tangier Island, Accomac, Wachapreague as well as the counties of Accomack and Northampton.

QUICK FACTS

- Population: 39,656 (smallest of the 10 VA regions)
- Largest county: Accomack County (23,570)
- Interstates: no access to major interstates
- US-13 runs the length of the Eastern Shore, connecting Maryland to Virginia
- Bodies of water: Chesapeake Bay, Atlantic Ocean
- Border states: MD
- Commercial airports: None
- Proximity to urban hubs: Hampton Roads, DC. Metro, Richmond

TOURISM IMPACT

The Eastern Shore region accounted for \$292 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2018 (approximately 1% of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures). Year over year, the region experienced a 2.4% increase in expenditures (trailing the overall Virginia state expenditure growth of 4.4%).

- **Total expenditures:** \$292 million
- **Employment:** 3,033
- **Payroll:** \$61 million
- **Local tax receipts:** \$7.8 million
- **State tax receipts:** \$13.7 million

From an industry player perspective, in addition to tourism marketing at the destination level, the Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission serves as a regional organization focused on tourism marketing and tourism development, along with county-level tourism marketing initiatives and broader regional participation in the Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance.



LURES

The Eastern Shore's natural and outdoor recreational opportunities continue to be strengths for the region, offering visitors scenic and relaxing getaways, as well as opportunities to hike, bike, horseback ride, observe wildlife, hunt, fish, kayak, camp, and canoe. The region's growing culinary scene offers authentic food festivals and oyster roasts. In addition, lodging and history and heritage remain strong offerings as well.

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.

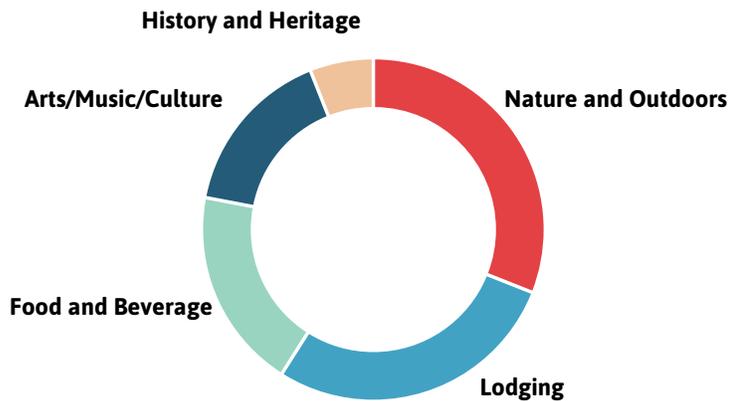
When asked to name a the primary lure for the region, industry leaders identify the following:



With so many notable outdoor assets — the Chesapeake Bay, Atlantic Ocean, Assateague Island National Seashore, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Eastern Shore of Virginia, Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge and Kiptopeke State Park, and the Birding and Wildlife Trail— nature-related opportunities dominate the region.

Inventory of Regional Assets

Source: VTC Research

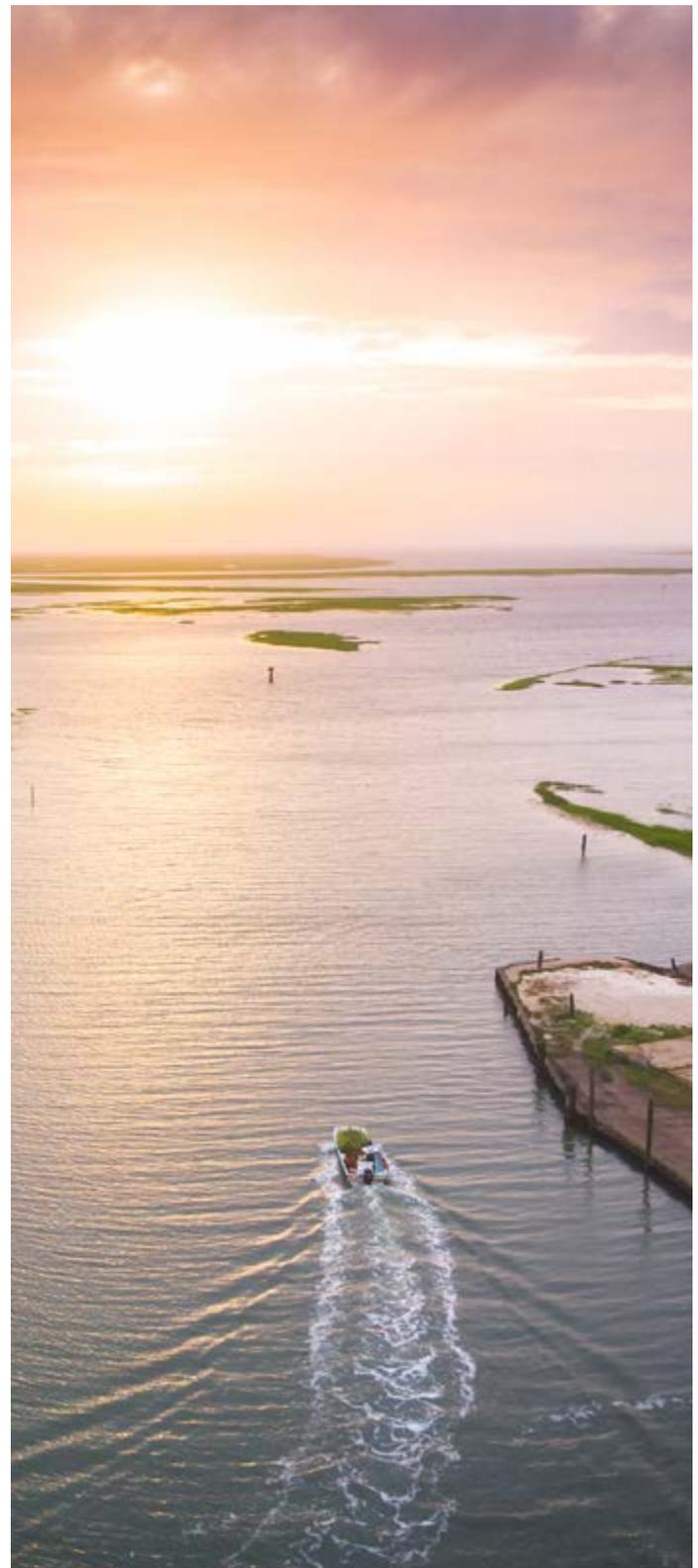


LURES (cont'd)

Tangier Island, for example, offers visitors a unique step back in time in an isolated crabbing village in the Chesapeake Bay, and Cape Charles continues to evolve with a robust Main Street program and the Bay Creek Resort and Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus golf courses. Offering public beaches with calm, shallow waters, perfect for kayaks and paddleboards that are within walking distance to dining, shopping, B&Bs and fishing on the town pier, Cape Charles has seen a huge boom in small businesses, elevating the vibrant community-feel of the town. Similarly, the Sunset Beach Hotel and Beach Club provides a getaway that includes onsite campgrounds with deluxe cabins, safari tents, and room for deluxe RVs.

The region’s remote communities also offer unique opportunities to explore culture and wildlife. For example, Tangier Island is only accessible by boat, plane, or ferry, and the Victorian-era town of Wachapreague, populated by only 200 permanent residents, is surrounded by farmland, woods, water and some of the only undeveloped wetlands and barrier islands in the Mid-Atlantic. These conditions are ideal for low impact outdoor recreation, including birdwatching, clam digging, fishing, and kayaking.

Dining experiences, such as the Wachapreague Island House Restaurant, where visitors can find fresh seafood, award-winning crab cakes, and delicious burgers, all while overlooking a picturesque harbor, continue to expand as well. And, while the region boasts many establishments, continued emphasis on increasing the number of offerings and focusing on oysters and unique, authentic culinary experiences will remain important.



LURES (cont'd)

Wineries, cideries, breweries, distilleries, arts, agritourism, and aquatourism, including growing oyster farms, are also emerging in the region, and many notable towns, such as Cape Charles, Wachapreague, Onancock, and Chincoteague — home of the nationally known Chincoteague Pony Swim event — are being rediscovered and gaining appeal as well.

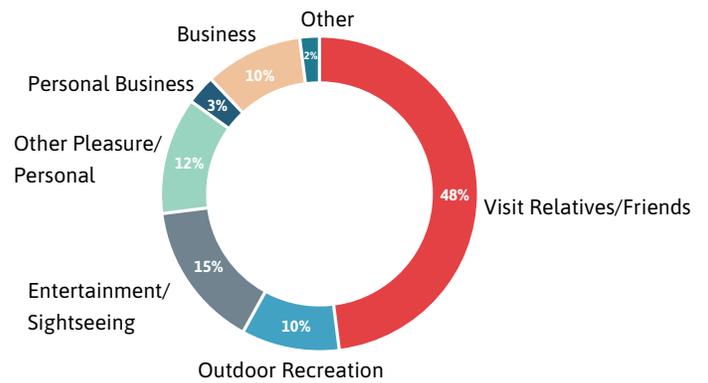
Following the need for more accommodations highlighted in the 2013 regional plan, the region has added several other lodging options as well, including the Hotel Cape Charles and the Northampton Hotel, both located in the Cape Charles downtown area, and the new Key West Cottage partnership with Comfort Suites and the newly and renovated KOA in Chincoteague.

The NASA Wallops Flight Facility and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport has been home to NASA rocket launches as well as private aerospace rocket and satellite launches viewable across the shore, since 1945. The NASA Visitor Center offers exhibits on the history of space programs, weather satellites, and more. The region also offers space camp every summer, dark sky experiences, full moon kayak tours and other night boat tours, which are unique and authentic to the region and are very on trend with the growing space tourism industry. RocketLab, a private aerospace company, recently built and opened a private launch pad on Wallops island.

HIGHLIGHTS OF REGIONAL LURES

- Scenic beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Atlantic Flyway Migratory Bird Route
- **Natural Assets:** Chesapeake Bay, Atlantic Ocean, Assateague Island National Seashore, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fishermans Island National Wildlife Refuge
- **Notable Cities & Towns:** Onancock, Cape Charles, Chincoteague, Wachapreague, Tangier Island
- **Notable Main Streets:** Cape Charles and Onancock
- **State Parks:** Kiptopeke
- Space-related tourism (Wallops Island, dark sky, full moon kayak tours)
- Culinary: Island House, Charlotte Hotel, Cape Charles Brewing, Don’s Seafood, Bill’s Seafood, Eastern Shore Coffee Roasters
- Barrier Island Center
- Aquaculture and waterman culture

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

Shopping	28%
Visiting Relatives	26%
Beach	21%
Historic sites/Churches	16%
Fine dining	15%
Museums	15%
Rural Sightseeing	15%
Urban Sightseeing	12%
Visiting Friends	10%
Art Galleries	10%

CHANGES OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

The 2013 regional plan identified water access as a major challenge, and the region is seeing significant progress in this area through the creation of programs like Virginia Water Trails, 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 regions, 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.

The town of Cape Charles has become a Virginia Downtown as part of the Main Street Program, and development is clustering around the downtown footprint, resulting in limited vacancies at local lodging establishments. In addition, several campground refreshes have also been completed, including Chincoteague KOA which includes improved water access and a new water slide park, as

well as the Sunset Beach KOA which offers handicapped/disability access to its beach.

The culinary landscape has become a growing strength for the region — with such foodie staples as the Island House, Charlotte Hotel, Cape Charles Brewing, Don's Seafood, Bill's Seafood and Eastern Shore Coffee Roasters — and oyster roasts and holiday events continue to successfully extend tourism to November and December. 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.

Finally, the past five years have also seen growth in space tourism. In addition to viewing rocket launches across the shore from Wallops Island, the area now offers astronomy opportunities, full moon kayak tours, night boat tours, and some industry leaders are exploring dark sky designation opportunities.



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES

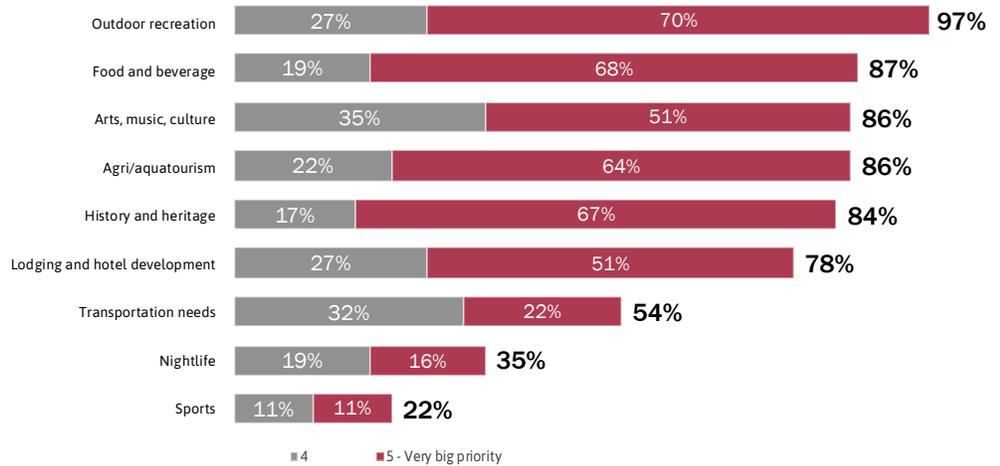
According to the Office of Outdoor Recreation, Virginia’s outdoor recreation industry contributes nearly \$22 billion annually to the Virginia economy and supports the livelihood of more than 197,000 Virginians. In addition, outdoor recreation is cited by one in four Virginia visitors as one of their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

The Eastern Shore’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.

The Eastern Shore has made strides in this area through bicycle tourism, as a record-setting 1,000+ riders participated in the 27th Annual Between the Waters Bike Tour in 2019. A potential 55-mile bike trail on the former Canonic rail bed is also under review, and while the project has its complications, the opportunity it presents for the region should make it a tourism and economic development priority. Once it is developed, local entrepreneurs should be encouraged to open food and beverage stops along the trail to enhance the experience for cyclists. In addition, side trails that allow cyclists to veer off the trail and toward the coastlines and town centers can also provide great opportunities to lengthen trips and allow visitors to experience all the region has to offer.

Additions of bike trails and water trails will increase the ability to provide ecotourism offerings. Since one of the Eastern Shore’s differentiating assets is its undeveloped wetlands, natural settings, and wildlife. Providing low impact ways to explore these areas will help expand the local visitor offering in an authentic way.

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



For example, though the Eastern Shore is literally surrounded by water, there remains limited water and beach access. Programs such as Virginia Water Trails have been able to take advantage of these limited launch points for paddleboards, kayaks, and canoes, while still providing ample opportunity to see and experience all the water has to offer. However, efforts to increase water access throughout the entire region so visitors and locals can better enjoy its natural assets should continue to be a priority.

Bringing to life the waterman culture and historic sites through interactive experiences, such as those created by the Rural Coastal Virginia Working Waterfronts partnership particularly those related to the oyster, heritage, and the arts, should also continue to be a point of emphasis as well. Similarly, leaning into the growing culinary scene — specifically building on oysters and focusing on expanding the area’s winery and brewery assets — will continue to enhance visitor experiences related to agricultural and aquacultural products.

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



FUTURE PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES (cont'd)

Enhancing vibrant community experiences will inherently build-in year-round opportunities for visitors. In a region with so many outdoor assets, warmer months become the primary time visitors come to the region. To help tourism become more sustainable year-round, having non-outdoor experiences that are still authentic to the community are necessary. This further highlights the importance of supporting projects that add to the vibrant community experience.

More specifically, efforts to enhance local arts, music, food, and beverage should be leveraged to bring awareness to the great small towns and vibrant communities in the Eastern Shore. These efforts should also be made in partnership and align with the Virginia Main Street Program. Onancock in Accomack County, for example, is working towards this designation. Its efforts include repurposing the Historic Onancock School as a space for artists, and entrepreneurial initiatives with office space for government and NGO's. The town is also focusing on enhancing initiatives that include a tourism marketplace, a farmers market, a community commercial kitchen, and art and outdoor recreation based summer camp programs. As a result, these initiatives have the potential to be a regional tourism driver.

Similarly, Chincoteague's historic firehouse located downtown on Main Street was recently acquired by the town for development. At 30,000 square feet with dorms, a commercial kitchen, three vehicle bays, parking, and adequate wastewater capacity, the site is prime to jumpstart redevelopment of Main Street Chincoteague.

Also, of note is the Town of Parksley's revitalization efforts that include a \$700,000 Community Development Block Grant award for improvements to the downtown area and the Parksley Railroad Museum. With construction of a new regional library, including a robust genealogy archive collection, underway in 2019, Parksley is poised to become an emerging destination for cultural history, unique retail experiences, and railroad tourism.

With NASA's presence at Wallops Island and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, the Eastern Shore can continue to leverage space-related tourism. In 2017, the Virginia is for Space Lovers logo was approved as part of an important first phase in developing a space-related tourism product. The Virginia Space Loop partnership is planning for a comprehensive regional approach to promote and increase space tourism in the region. Ultimately the Space Loop will be a designated driving route around the "east of 95" coastal region.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Based upon Drive 2.0 research and in consideration of the tourism situation, the Eastern Shore should focus on the following primary and secondary product opportunities.

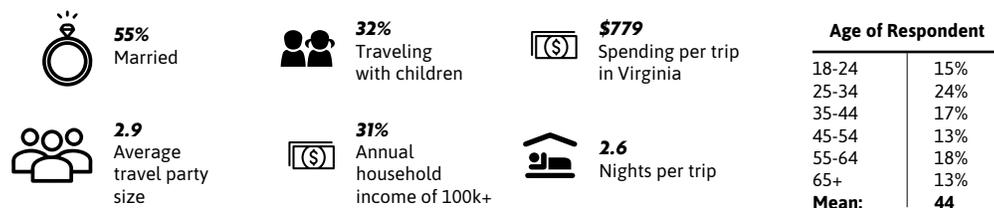
- **Primary:**
Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Town/City Centers, Industry (Aerospace), History & Heritage (Cultural Heritage), Culinary (Dining, Libations), Bicycle trails (adjacent amenities)
- **Secondary:**
Culinary (Aqua and Agritourism), Arts & Music, Commercial Attractions, Events, Lodging





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)

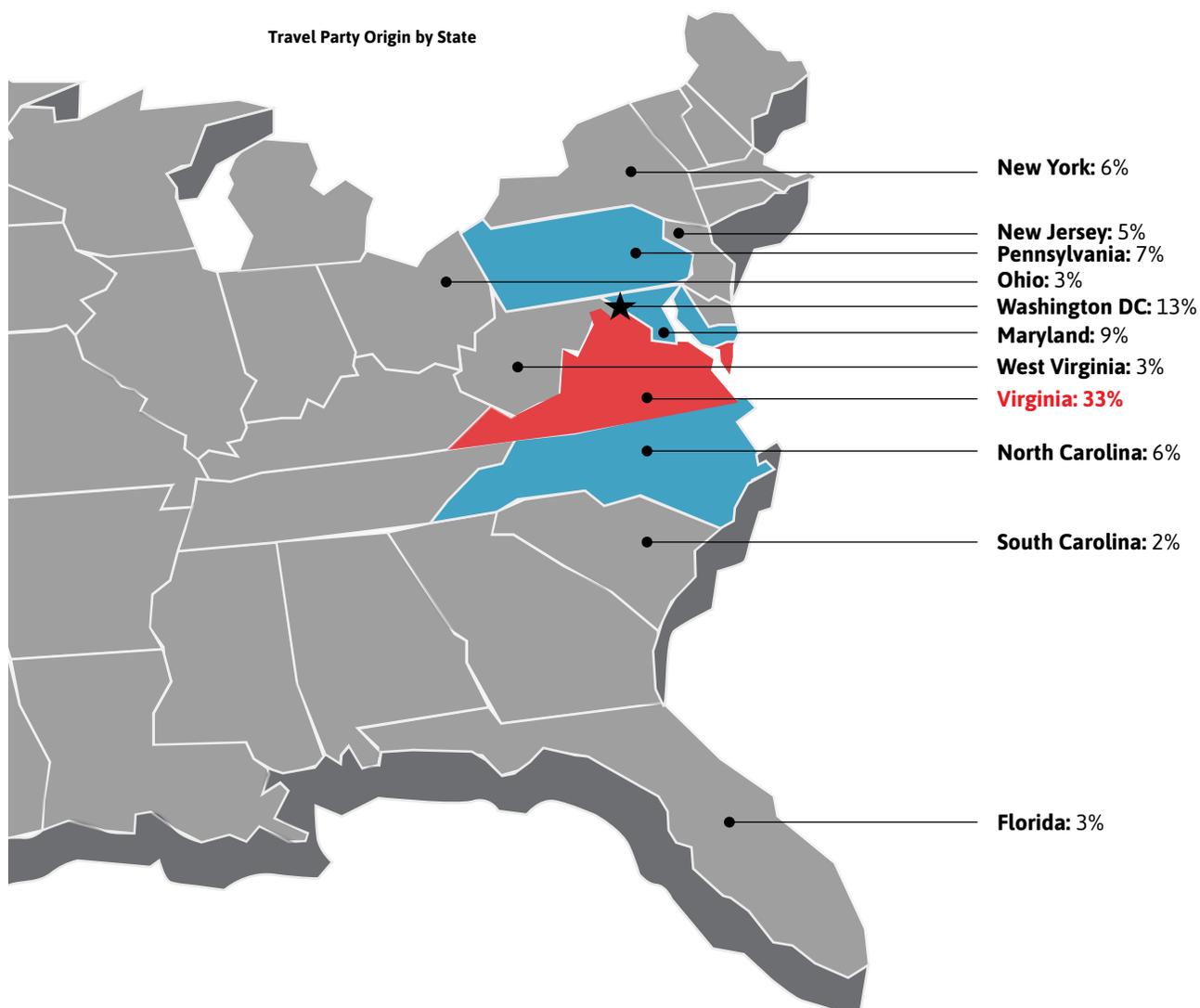
Additional opportunity audiences based on growing trends include:

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR COASTAL VA - EASTERN SHORE
OUTDOOR RECREATION	<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 Eastern Shore should pour resources into experiences related to water like the Virginia Water Trails, fishing tournaments, and birding experiences. The region also has a great opportunity to promote its accessible beaches – allowing all people to enjoy the beautiful water offerings.</p>
CAMPING	<p>Camping and glamping are 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 and campground lodging – cabins, yurts, tiny houses, and cottages of all kinds — the off-the-beaten path to a unique view, or the best of both worlds trips, with a kayak tour, a craft brew, and a campsite under the stars.</p>
SPACE	<p>While not everyone can afford a trip to space, interest in space is growing. Dark Sky locations, observatories, and even space stations are growing in popularity.</p>	<p>The Eastern Shore has immense opportunity to capitalize on this growing trend and interest. Whether it's the new Space Loop, full moon kayaking, or watching rocket launches, the Eastern Shore has an authentic and compelling story and experience to share.</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 the average trip length of 2.6 nights, the Eastern Shore region is no exception, and according to a TravelTrakAmerica survey, many Eastern Shore travelers (49%) originate from nearby drive markets — Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. This concentrated primary feeder area gives all of the Eastern Shore’s destinations and industry leaders an opportunity to work closer together in promotional planning to target prospective visitors.



COMPETITION

Given the Eastern Shore's primary coastal lure, the primary competitors identified through this effort include the coastal areas of North Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware.

COMPETITOR	PRIMARY LURES
COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beaches 2. History (light houses, Wright Bros.) 3. Fishing
COASTAL MARYLAND	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beaches 2. Fishing/crabbing 3. Assateague Island Ponies
COASTAL DELAWARE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beaches 2. Small towns 3. State parks

Many of these states offer similar relaxing experiences such as beaches, outdoor recreation, and coastal towns each with their own culture and heritage, including arts, water-oriented culture, and history ranging from Native American to aviation. These other destinations have a mixture of natural and commercial coastal features, whereas Eastern Shore has the appeal of being less developed. Maryland also claims Assateague Island with beaches, nature, and ponies as a tourism asset, and the Outer Banks aggressively promotes its natural beaches and coastal experiences.

In appealing to prospective visitors, Eastern Shore destinations and 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 Eastern Shore's unique history and towns, coupled with its craft beverage scene, its unique culinary landscape, ecotourism, space, and other visitor experiences, can help the entire region's offerings stand apart from the competition. This is the hub and spoke method in action, and aquatourism and space tourism represent two areas where the region can authentically differentiate itself from competitors.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES (VOIDS)

The region continues to be seen as a drive-through area, compounded by Route 13 cutting straight through the peninsula. So, the challenge continues to be getting people off of Route 13 and into the towns.

While there are a number of water-oriented natural assets, direct access to water experiences is somewhat limited and not readily available. For example, the Shore’s barrier islands must be accessed largely by guides. And, with construction underway for new tunnels, tolls continue to increase on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, which may impact travel time and driver discomfort with lane closures.

There is a rising concern for public safety in Chincoteague with rocket launches during the peak tourism season, and some localities are even considering raising the TOT tax — not for tourism reinvestment, but to cover public safety shortfalls. Developing rocket launch viewing experiences in adjacent towns and viewing sites, such as launch parties at high school stadiums, could help reduce public safety impacts on Chincoteague and Wallops islands.

Historical sites are struggling to identify the appropriate stories to tell, especially as it relates to the complicated history entwined with the Civil War. As a result, some are pushing to focus on the Revolutionary War instead. Putting a focus on individual quests for freedom may be a way to encompass Revolutionary War, Civil War, and Civil Rights history against the backdrop of America’s upcoming 250th commemoration.

(For ideas and tips to enhance historical experiences, see How to Guide #1: How to Tell and Sell Your Story.)

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

- Limited direct access to water experiences
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Lack of tourism industry maturity
- Differentiation from competition in nearby states — coastline and outdoors
- Limited accommodations
- Limited accessibility — toll bridge, entry points, air
- Limited regional collaboration
- Challenged economic base
- Coastal seasonality
- Image as pass-through destination — limited water visibility

TRENDS	OVERVIEW	IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR COASTAL VA - EASTERN SHORE
<p>AGING POPULATION</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>SHIFTING FOOTPRINT</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>The Eastern Shore has already experienced a decline in its population by 5,000 people in just the past five years. 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

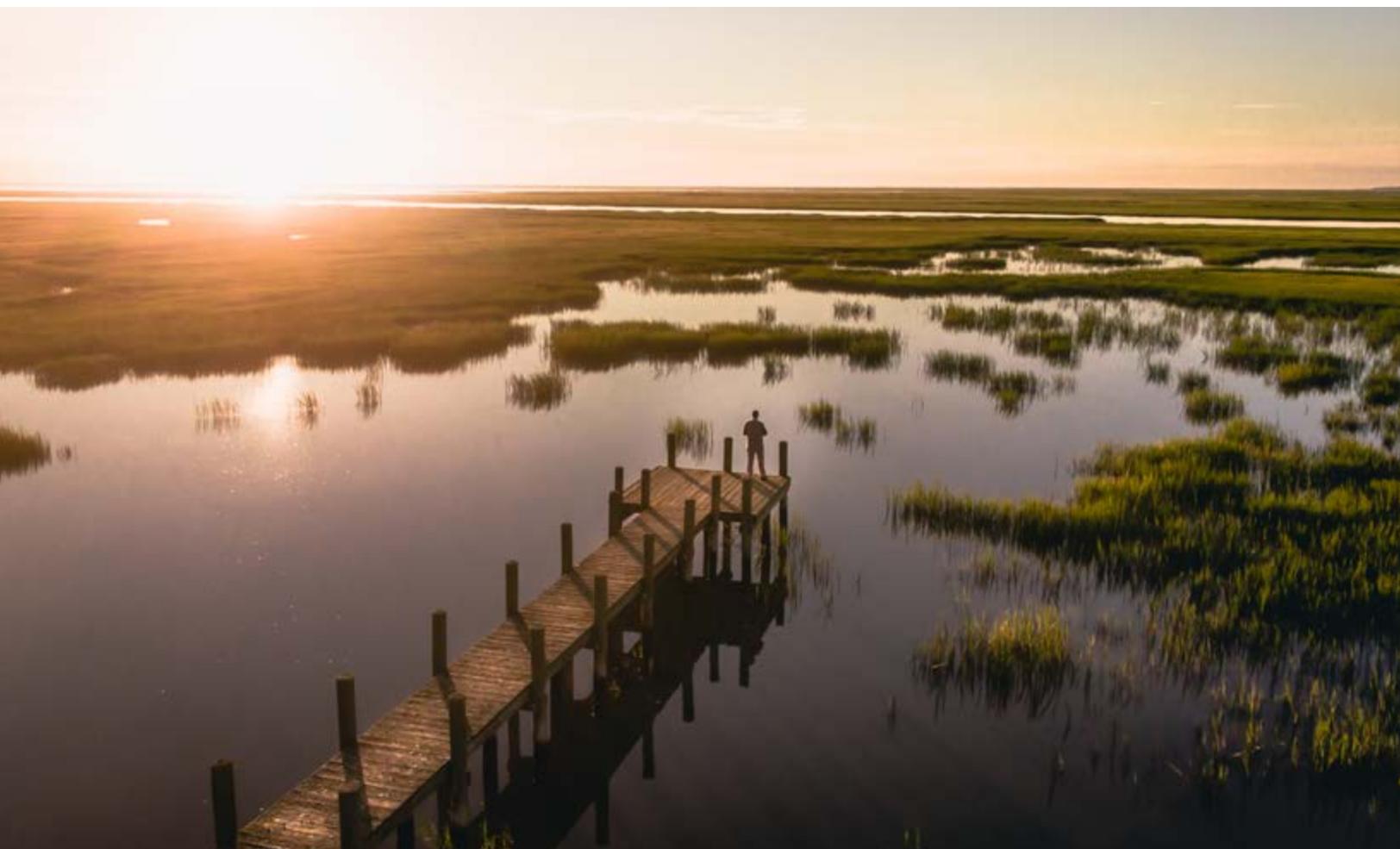
Bundling or packaging experiences for potential visitors' consideration continues to gain traction. According to TripAdvisor, "[they're] seeing more travelers balancing their itineraries with a mix of classic sightseeing and more unique local experiences." Eastern Shore travel and tourism efforts may be behind this trend, as existing assets appear to be siloed, with few regional cross promotions, connectivity or packaging of complementary experiences. This is especially true between towns and cities across the region.

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, cultural heritage, and the waterman culture are authentic and, in many ways, differentiating for the region. Space-themed trails, bike trails, cultural trails, and water trails are all great places 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 COASTAL VA - EASTERN SHORE
<p>SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL</p>	<p>There is a growing economy and movement toward stewardship of our 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>MINI-CATIONS</p>	<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 2.6 nights, mini vacations should be a natural opportunity for the region to pursue.</p>



PROMOTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

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

1. **Connect and promote Eastern Shores's outdoor experiences.** While almost every town and city across the region is improving its outdoor products, they remain relatively isolated. By banding together to build a greater set of interconnected experiences and a more cohesive regional identity around these experiences, the Eastern Shore can increase its appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, particularly through the following channels:
 - **Bike Trails:** Statewide, bike trails are connecting sites and experiences across multiple jurisdictions, and the 55-mile bike trail on the former Canonic rail bed is an excellent first step and could be coupled with maps showing the safest rural roads and routes for bicycles. Consider ways to make the Eastern Shore the coastal biking experience not to be missed. An unveiling with a festival and races may serve as a great way to build energy and allow people to explore all the Eastern Shore has to offer.
 - **Ecotourism:** One of the Eastern Shore's differentiating assets is its undeveloped wetlands, natural settings, and wildlife. Additions of bike trails and water trails will increase access to these resources and provide ecotourism offerings. Promoting these experiences and how they can be accessed by unique means (e.g., on a bike or on a kayak) should appeal to visitors in an authentic way.

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. **Celebrate space.** The Eastern Shore boasts unique space and astronomy related assets — whether watching a rocket launch, exploring a dark sky, or paddling on a full moon kayak tour, these are one-of-a-kind experiences on the East Coast. Lean into this offering and create packages that showcase an itinerary that allows for a full weekend experience for families. These packages can be designed to help mitigate some of the public safety concerns related to launch weeks.
3. **Cultivate local ambassadors.** Given the high percentage of visitors who are traveling 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. What's more, this is a year-round opportunity, as friends and family come any time of the year. Create opportunities for locals to experience various activities and offerings in the region so they know where to take friends and family when they come to visit. Tapping into the growing pride of the waterman culture is a natural place to start and rally the locals. In addition, creating local support and having them help champion the assets needed to develop vibrant communities is essential. Moreover, 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.

For inspiration on how to engage local ambassadors, see DRIVE 2.0's How to Guide #1: How to Tell and Sell Your Story.

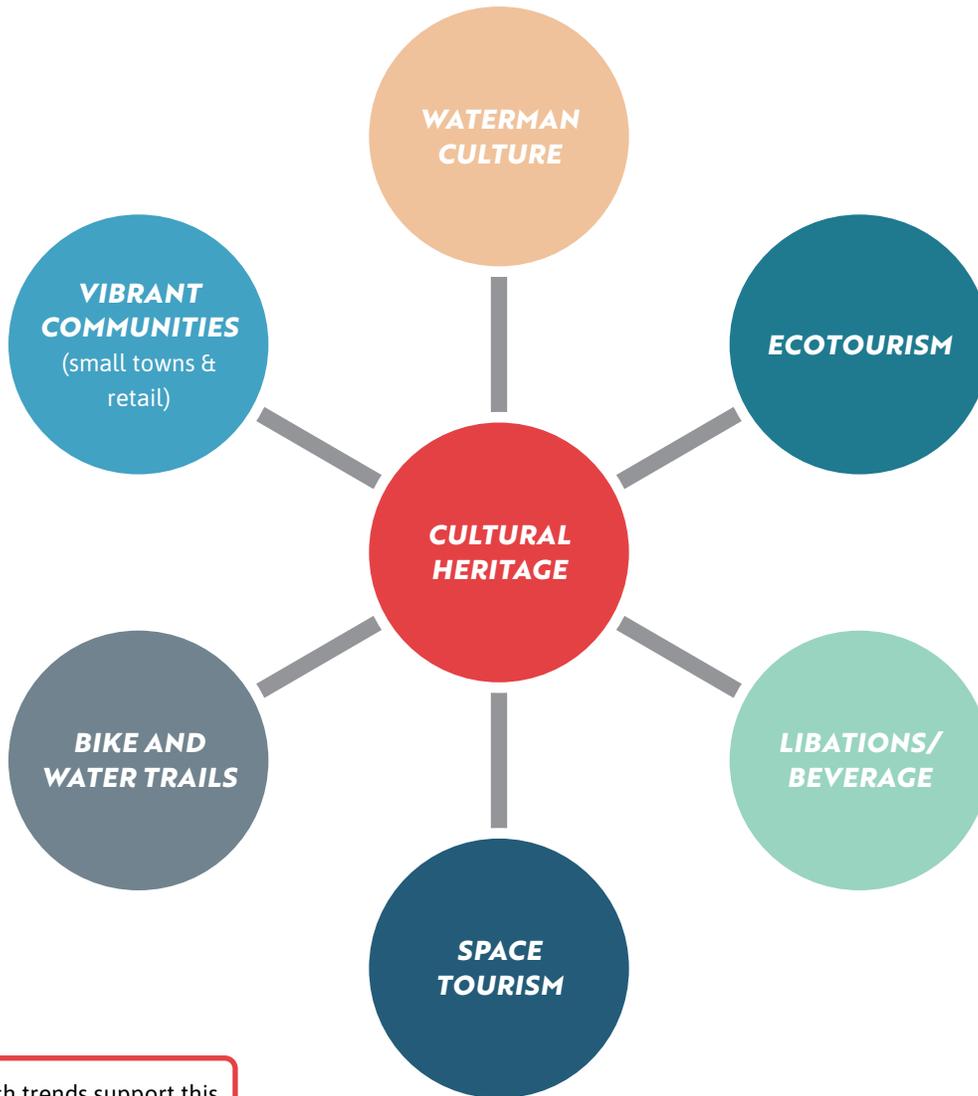
4. **Bundle and package experiences using the hub and spoke method to increase the overall appeal of individual attractions and offerings** Overall, the region's primary lures should adopt a packaging perspective to increase average spending and room nights in the Eastern Shore. Focusing on just one 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 begin. Ideas include a weekend that allows visitors to paddleboard on the Bay, go on a wetlands tour and taste oysters, stay in a B&B with a bike trip the next day. Think about how to bundle 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. Promote vibrant communities. Begin by promoting unique retail opportunities in small towns to increase visitation off Route 13. With the number of small independent business owners on the Eastern Shore, promoting the unique small-town retail experience will be key to revenue growth. Unique artisan made products such as those manufactured on site at Ten Good Sheep in Onancock, recreational fishing and boating equipment available at Chris' Bait & Tackle, and Virginia Eastern Shore made food products such as Barrier Island Salt offer an opportunity for visitors to take a piece of the Eastern Shore home and grow revenue in the region.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

HUB & SPOKE

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



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

TREND 1

TREND 2

TREND 3

VISION FOR EASTERN SHORE

The vision for the Eastern Shore regional plan is to collaboratively tap the region’s natural assets and further develop outdoor recreation in an authentic and sustainable way, while also further developing assets like cultural heritage, space, food and beverage, arts, and music — the foundation of vibrant communities — to sustainably maximize their tourism potential.

SUMMARY

The Eastern Shore 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 the key to growth. Through better connectivity and cohesion, together we can take the entire region to the next level.





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