

Visit **HATTIESBURG** —
WHERE *Life*
HAPPENS.

FY25
ANNUAL REPORT
OCT. 1, 2024 - SEPT. 30, 2025



VISITHATTIESBURG

TABLE OF *Contents*

MEET THE TEAM	4
A NOTE FROM OUR CEO.....	5
ABOUT VISITHATTIESBURG.....	6
VISITOR PROFILE	
STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATES	8
STRATEGIC ECONOMIC GROWTH	
SHARING THE HBURG STORY	11
MARKETING HATTIESBURG	
CAMPAIGN SNAPSHOT	
GOVERNOR’S CONFERENCE	16
MUSIC MARKERS	18
ACTIVATIONS	19
GROUP SALES	20
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT UPDATES	22
HATTIESBURG ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC ART	
MISSISSIPPI MISS HOSPITALITY	
HATTIESBURG RESTAURANT WEEK	
NATIONAL TRAVEL & TOURISM WEEK	
TOURISM GRANT PROGRAM	
HATTIESBURG GEOTOUR	
1964 FREEDOM TRAIL	
DBB WORLD SERIES	
PARTNER SUPPORT	
FY25 BUDGET	33
TOURISM MILESTONES IN HBURG	34



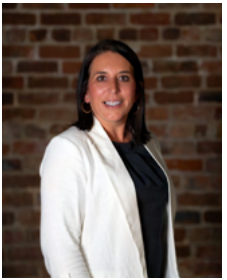
MEET THE *Team*

VISITHATTIESBURG STAFF



Marlo Dorsey, CEO

TOURISM SERVICE: Mississippi Tourism Association - Past President (2021), Mississippi Destination Marketing Association - Founding Member (2020), Visit Mississippi Dedicated Funding Advisory Board (2020), Mississippi Main Street Association - Past President (2024), Advocacy Co-Chair (2022), Downtown Hattiesburg Association - Executive Board (2017), Hattiesburg Concert Association Executive Board (2020), Southeast Tourism Society Board (2023), Destinations International Advocacy Committee (2022)



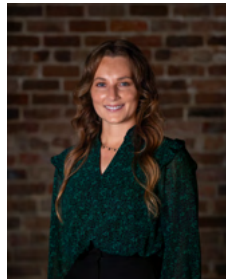
Kristen Brock, Vice President of Marketing and Programs

TOURISM SERVICE: Mississippi Society of Association Executives - Executive Board (2024-27), Mississippi Tourism Association - Silent Auction Chair (2023), DBB World Series Planning Committee - Co-Chair (2024-25), Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art - Director, Mississippi Miss Hospitality Competition - Director, Mississippi State University Excellence in Tourism Leadership Program - Mastery Graduate (2023)



Maddie Englese, Marketing Director

TOURISM SERVICE: Midtown Merchants Association - Board and Executive Director Search Committee Member (2025), Southeastern Tourism Society - Tourism Marketing Professional (TMP) Candidate (2024-27)



Megan Mallory, Sales & Visitor Services Manager

TOURISM SERVICE: Downtown Hattiesburg Association - Promotions Committee (2025), Hattiesburg Hotel and Hospitality Association - Manager, Mississippi Society of Association Executives - Industry Partner Member, Area Development Partnership - Ambassador

Besty M. Rowell, Special Projects Manager; **Michael Marks**, Mississippi Miss Hospitality Development Coordinator; **Ann Claire Kelly**, Mississippi Miss Hospitality Competition Manager

HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION

- **Chair: Frank James**, Hotel Industry Representative
- **Vice Chair: Anthony Harris**, P.E., Economic Development Representative
- **Melanie Archer**, Hotel Industry Representative
- **Joe Paul**, Ph.D., The University of Southern Mississippi Representative
- **Bonnie Warren**, At-Large
- **Shawn Lowrey**, At-Large

A *Note* FROM OUR CEO

As we reflect on Fiscal Year 2024, I'm proud to share that **Hattiesburg's tourism industry has reached unprecedented heights, achieving a total economic impact of \$881 million, fueled by \$582 million in direct visitor spending.** This remarkable growth underscores our city's appeal and the collective efforts that are positioning Hattiesburg as a premier destination in the Gulf South.



This success was **powered by bold marketing initiatives, expanded public art experiences, and an unwavering commitment to exceptional visitor engagement.** From exploring the HBURG Public Art Trail to participating in vibrant festivals like Live at Five and FestivalSouth, visitors connected with the spirit and creativity that define Hattiesburg. Our outdoor recreation offerings, including the Longleaf Trace and Pinebelt Blueways, continued to draw both new and repeat visitors, highlighting **our growing reputation for year-round outdoor experiences.**

Leadership development and capacity building within the VisitHATTIESBURG team remained a key focus this year. By investing in the growth, training, and professional development of our staff, we have built a powerhouse team capable of competing on a global stage. We may be small in number, but we are mighty in impact — and **it is because of this team's dedication and expertise that Hattiesburg has driven record-setting results and elevated its presence nationally and internationally.**

Our success is also strengthened through strong collaborations at the local, state, and national levels. Locally, we worked closely with community partners to deliver exceptional visitor experiences and strengthen Hattiesburg's brand. At the state level, we proudly supported and aligned our efforts with the Mississippi Tourism Association. Nationally, we followed best practices from leading organizations such as Southeast Tourism Society and Destinations International, ensuring our strategies meet the highest standards in destination marketing.

Tourism growth extended across the community, directly supporting nearly 7,000 jobs and generating \$49.6 million in state and local tax revenues. Hotels, restaurants, retailers, and attractions all experienced meaningful growth, demonstrating how tourism strengthens the fabric of our economy.

This **progress would not have been possible without the visionary leadership of our elected officials, the steadfast support of our partners, and the tireless contributions of our creative and entrepreneurial community.** I also want to extend special thanks to our seven faithful and dedicated Hattiesburg Tourism Commissioners, whose steady leadership and belief in Hattiesburg's potential continue to inspire and guide our work.

At VisitHATTIESBURG, we **remain committed to growing visitation, driving economic development, and sharing Hattiesburg's vibrant story with the world.** Thank you for being an integral part of this incredible year. Together, we've set a new standard for what Hattiesburg can achieve — and we are just getting started.

— *Marlo Dorsey*
CEO



About VISITHATTIESBURG

Hattiesburg has emerged as a premier visitor destination with an impressive sense of place for business and leisure travelers.

Created in 1990 by the Mississippi State Legislature, the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission (HTC), doing business as VisitHATTIESBURG™, serves as the official Destination Marketing Organization (Convention & Visitors Bureau) and local industry leader for tourism in the City of Hattiesburg. VisitHBURG is governed by a seven-member board representing the business community and local tourism industry.

With primary funding generated by a 2% hotel bed tax, the guiding mission of VisitHBURG is very specific: to introduce new dollars into the Hattiesburg economy through increased short-term visitation and overnight travel.

From the start, **local partnerships have played a critical role in the work of VisitHBURG**. VisitHBURG's vast partnerships are vital to its efforts to grow the area's tourism industry. Such partnerships include local hotels, restaurants, and attractions, entities such as the City of Hattiesburg, the Area Development Partnership, William Carey University, The University of Southern Mississippi, the Forrest County Board of Supervisors, the Downtown Hattiesburg Association, Midtown Merchants Association, Hattiesburg Convention Commission, and many others.

Through such partnerships, **VisitHBURG has been able to serve as a catalyst for significant moments in Hattiesburg**, including events like the Pre-Olympic Training in 1996, the Mississippi Miss Hospitality Competition for the last 28 years, Hattiesburg Craft Beer Festival, and Hattiesburg Restaurant Week, **as well as tourism development projects** like the creation of the Hatties[BURGER] culinary trail, new signage for the Longleaf Trace, 1964 Freedom Summer Trail, Pinebelt Blueways, Hattiesburg GeoTour, Tatum Sportsplex, and the facilitation of various art-related projects in the community through the Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art.

An innovative and artistic hub of the Gulf South, Hattiesburg has emerged as a premier visitor destination with an impressive sense of place. **The city is rapidly becoming an event, history, live music, outdoor, and culinary destination for millennials and baby boomers.**

OUR MISSION

To actively position Hattiesburg as a year-round premier leisure and business destination in the Gulf South.

OUR VISION

To ignite tourism economic growth in Hattiesburg through strategic vision and collaborative leadership while enhancing local quality of life.

VISITHATTIESBURG'S FOCUS AREAS

GROW TOURISM'S
ECONOMIC IMPACT IN HBURG

STRENGTHEN PARTNER
NETWORK & COLLABORATION

COMMUNICATE
& AMPLIFY THE HBURG STORY

PRIORITIZE PLACEMAKING
& ENHANCE THE HBURG EXPERIENCE

HATTIESBURG *Visitor Profile*

Visitors to Hattiesburg come from across the country and around the world, staying to explore our attractions, neighborhoods, and culture. Understanding where they come from and what interests them helps us grow as a destination and create meaningful, memorable experiences. Here's a glimpse of the overall visitor profile for FY25.

DOMESTIC VISITORS

1.5 DAYS
AVG. LENGTH OF STAY

70.8%
STAY OVERNIGHT

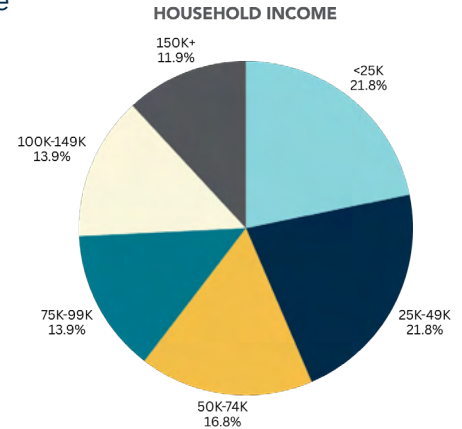
63.2%
RETURN / REPEAT
VISITORS

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

5.2 DAYS
AVG. LENGTH OF STAY

87.1%
STAY OVERNIGHT

825
UNIQUE DEVICES
COUNTED



**MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD
INCOME \$65.8K**

TOP VISITOR POINTS OF INTEREST*

- Southern Miss
 - Turtle Creek Mall
 - District at Midtown
 - New South Restaurant Group
 - Hattiesburg Zoo
 - Forrest General Hospital
 - William Carey University
 - Longleaf Trace
 - The Lucky Rabbit
- *EXCLUDES HOTELS

BEHAVIORAL INTEREST (WEBSITE)

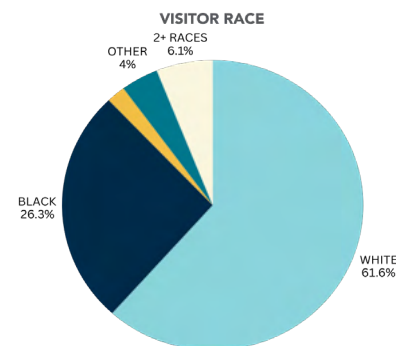
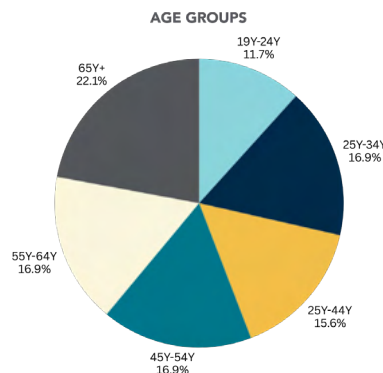
- Entertainment News
- Cooking
- Media and Entertainment
- Home Decor
- Shopping
- Photography
- Travel
- Sports/Fitness
- Fans of Football
- Music Lovers
- Bargain Hunters

TOP DOMESTIC MARKETS

- Jackson, MS (16.5%)
- Biloxi-Gulfport, MS (11.3%)
- New Orleans, LA (3.3%)
- Memphis, TN (2.6%)
- Meridian, MS (2.6%)
- Mobile, AL (2.5%)
- Baton Rouge, LA (2.3%)
- Dallas - Ft. Worth, TX (2.1%)
- Atlanta, GA (2.1%)
- Slidell, LA (1.9%)
- Picayune, MS (1.8%)
- McComb, MS (1.7%)
- Birmingham, AL (1.7%)
- Houston, TX (1.7%)

TOP INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

- Kuwait
- South Africa
- Sweden
- India
- France
- Japan
- Spain
- Australia
- Indonesia
- Germany
- New Zealand
- Canada



Strategic PLAN UPDATES (2020-25)

VisitHATTIESBURG's five-year strategic plan, **launched in 2020, concluded in FY25 and successfully positioned Hattiesburg as a premier year-round outdoor destination.** Over the life of the plan, key initiatives included expanding public art, enhancing outdoor recreation, growing sports tourism, and investing in workforce development, all driving record-breaking visitor spending.

Outdoor and sports tourism emerged as the fastest-growing sector of Hattiesburg's visitor economy, fueled by targeted marketing and sales efforts, intentional recruitment of large-scale tournaments, and continued investments in facilities and expanded sports offerings.

Over the past five years, VisitHATTIESBURG's marketing efforts expanded exponentially, reaching a broader range of travel segments while **sharpening focus on digital marketing and public relations strategies to elevate the city's profile regionally, nationally, and internationally.**

HIGHLIGHTS (FY25 and Strategic Plan Outcomes):

- **Leisure Marketing:** New campaign videos, photography, and focused buys highlighting Hattiesburg as a year-round outdoor destination, with an increased emphasis on digital platforms and targeted audience engagement.
- **Public Relations:** Worked with two agencies to focus on specific tourism sectors - leisure travel + meetings/conventions and sports - resulting in expanded media reach and national exposure.
- **Sports Tourism:** Aggressively recruited and hosted large-scale tournaments, further establishing sports as a key economic driver.
- **Entertainment / Arts & Culture:** Gathered local art groups and stakeholders to serve as a year-round connector and hub of information, helping elevate Hattiesburg's public art profile to more than 150 pieces and supporting growth across partner arts organizations to deliver a well-rounded portfolio of visual and performing arts offerings.
- **Expanded/Improved Facilities:** Supported collaborative efforts among local leagues, the City of Hattiesburg, and collegiate clubs to enhance sports infrastructure, resulting in improved venues, upgraded trails, and elevated experiences for annual tournaments and everyday recreation.
- **Outfitters:** Supported partners to expand blueways and green space infrastructure, enhancing access points, equipment availability, and user experience to make outdoor recreation more accessible and visitor-friendly.
- **Branding & Identity:** Completed a branding guide with an updated logo, brand identity, visual standards, and philosophical direction for long-term marketing effectiveness and organizational alignment.

With the conclusion of the FY20–FY25 strategic plan, VisitHATTIESBURG is entering its next chapter. A **new five-year strategic plan, to be unveiled in FY26, will leverage the city's fastest-growing tourism sectors**—particularly outdoor and sports tourism—while advancing innovative marketing, sales, and partnership strategies to **drive long-term economic vitality for Hattiesburg and the region.**



Strategic PLAN UPDATES (2020-25)

STRATEGY ONE DRIVE GROWTH IN GROUP & LEISURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION & GOALS



Leisure Marketing: Traditional/Digital

- Focus on generating new demand for rooms

Market to broad range of travel segments in contiguous states

Active empty nesters
Outdoors enthusiasts
Families with kids
Passing through

Develop strategies to fill need periods

High-quality destination brochures, guides, maps, and full digital portfolio-website, videos, blogs, e-news, social media



Public Relations: Travel & Local Media

- Domestic/Int'l markets earned media, civic buy-in

Direct Marketing: Groups

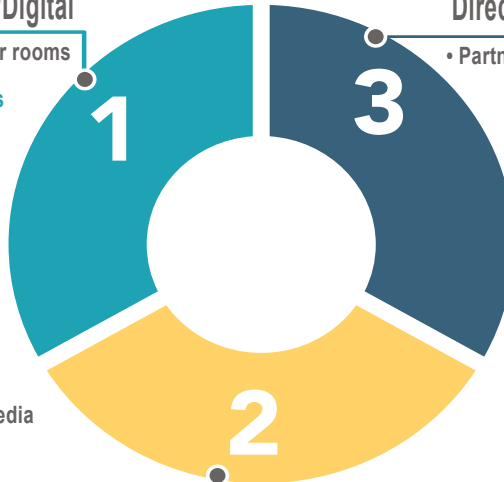


- Partnerships with hotels/event venues key

Small to medium size groups
Corporate meetings
Team sports
Associations
Events/recreation
Education
SMRF
Government

Develop strategies to fill need periods

Aggressive prospecting
Weekday nights focus
Market segment sales calls
Retain existing
Recruit new



STRATEGY TWO CREATING A DYNAMIC DESTINATION NEW & UPDATED EXPERIENCES



Gateways & Welcome Signage

- Wayfinding signage plan, visitor-focused

Pedestrian-friendly Focus



- Walkable districts: hotels, dining, fun



Curb Appeal & Beautification

- Landscaping upkeep, litter-free

Improved & New Paths / Trails



- Bicycle lanes & racks, enhance waterways



Enhanced Nightlife & Entertainment Districts

- Live music, walkable, rooftop/outdoor

Recruit Outfitters / Guides



- Access to rent bikes, kayaks, canoes, atvs



Host & Create Recreation Events

- Build recognition of HBURG as active lifestyle

Improved & Expanded Sports Facilities



- Outdoor fitness course, youth & adult team sports focus

YEAR
ROUND
ACTIVE
OUTDOORS
DESTINATION

STRATEGIC *Economic* GROWTH

Tourism in Hattiesburg continues to reach new heights. As Mississippi's third most visited city, the sector generated an average of **\$1.7 million in daily visitor spending, a 3.7% annual increase, with hotel revenue exceeding \$59 million. Supporting more than 7,000 jobs, Hattiesburg's tourism workforce has grown by over 50% in just five years**, underscoring the industry's expanding impact on the local economy.

\$604M
Visitor SPENDING
^ 3.7% from 2023

2.737
MILLION *Visitors*
^ 1.42% from 2023

\$914.3M
Economic Impact

7,123
Total JOBS

Visitors spent \$1.7 million per day, on average, in the Hattiesburg MSA.



**FOOD &
BEVERAGE**
\$177M
29%



REC/ENT
\$137M
23%



LODGING
\$123M
20%



RETAIL
\$101M
17%



TRANSPORTATION
\$65M 11%

STRATEGIC *Economic* GROWTH

HATTIESBURG MSA VISITOR SPENDING

Visitor spending in Hattiesburg has shown significant growth across all tourism sectors over the past five years, reflecting a consistently strengthening visitor economy. Each category experienced year-over-year increases, with 2024 marking the strongest performance to date.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024 Growth
Total visitor spending	\$380.9	\$484.1	\$548.1	\$582.4	\$604.0	3.7%
Food and beverage	\$110.3	\$145.7	\$161.4	\$170.2	\$177.3	4.2%
Recreation	\$84.1	\$102.1	\$116.6	\$127.4	\$136.6	7.3%
Lodging	\$75.6	\$102.2	\$115.8	\$123.0	\$123.4	0.4%
Retail	\$69.3	\$82.7	\$93.2	\$97.8	\$101.4	3.7%
Transportation	\$41.6	\$51.4	\$61.2	\$64.1	\$65.3	1.8%

Source: Tourism Economics

\$ MILLIONS

Note: Lodging includes all accommodation types, and transportation includes only ground transportation.

Recreation and entertainment sports represent the fastest-growing sector of tourism in Hattiesburg, reflecting the impact of targeted investments and collaborative partnerships. With additional enhancements planned and demand continuing to rise, this sector is expected to sustain its strong growth trajectory moving forward.

\$136M
Visitor SPENDING
^ 7.3% from 2023

\$53M
4-year GROWTH
OUTPACED STATE



SHARING THE HBURG *Story*

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, VisitHATTIESBURG has placed an increased emphasis on national public relations efforts to support the community's continued recovery and long-term tourism growth. Recognizing the importance of maintaining economic stability and increasing visitation, the destination marketing organization engaged Madden Media to lead and manage all public relations initiatives. This partnership has allowed VisitHATTIESBURG to strategically elevate the city's profile on a national scale and ensure that Hattiesburg remains competitive as a travel and meetings destination.

Tracking media coverage has become a critical tool in measuring the success of these efforts. By monitoring national exposure, VisitHATTIESBURG is able to quantify Hattiesburg's visibility, highlight the city's evolving narrative, and better inform future public relations strategies. Media outlets consistently showcased key themes such as public art, sports tourism, local initiatives, and strong community engagement. Understanding which stories resonate most with audiences allows VisitHATTIESBURG to more effectively amplify the voice of the community and align messaging with traveler and meeting planner interests.

In addition to earned media coverage, VisitHATTIESBURG supported direct media engagement opportunities through multiple press trips and activations. Over the reporting period, four press trips were hosted with a specific focus on meetings and group travel, helping position Hattiesburg as an attractive destination for conferences and events. The organization also participated in a leisure travel media activation hosted in Atlanta, which was attended by VisitHATTIESBURG staff and provided an additional platform to connect with travel writers and influencers in a key regional market.

Overall, VisitHATTIESBURG was mentioned in 40 national and regional publications, reaching more than 54 million people and generating an advertising value equivalent of \$36.9 million. Major media wins included features and mentions in prominent outlets such as Southern Living, TravelPulse, Corporate Incentive & Travel, SportsEvents, Special Events Magazine, Modern South, Sports Travel Magazine, The Knot, and Association Conventions & Facilities. These successes reflect the growing awareness of Hattiesburg as both a leisure and meetings destination and demonstrate the continued impact of strong, strategic public relations efforts.



TOPICS COVERED

- Hattiesburg Attractions
- Dining
- Downtown Hattiesburg
- Sports Facility Improvements and Championships
- Meetings & Conventions
- Civil Rights History

\$3.69M
EARNED MEDIA

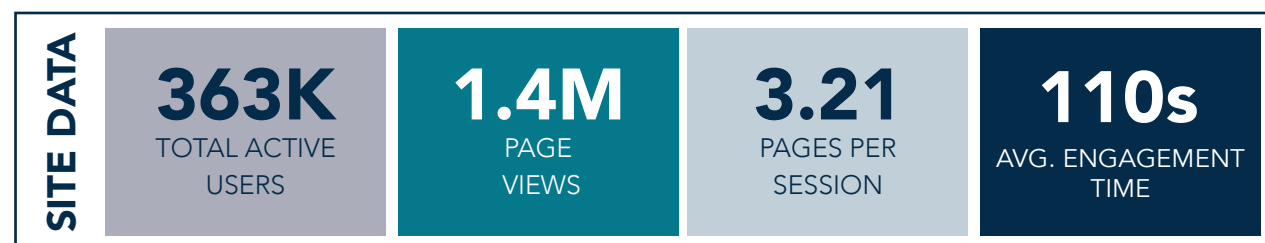
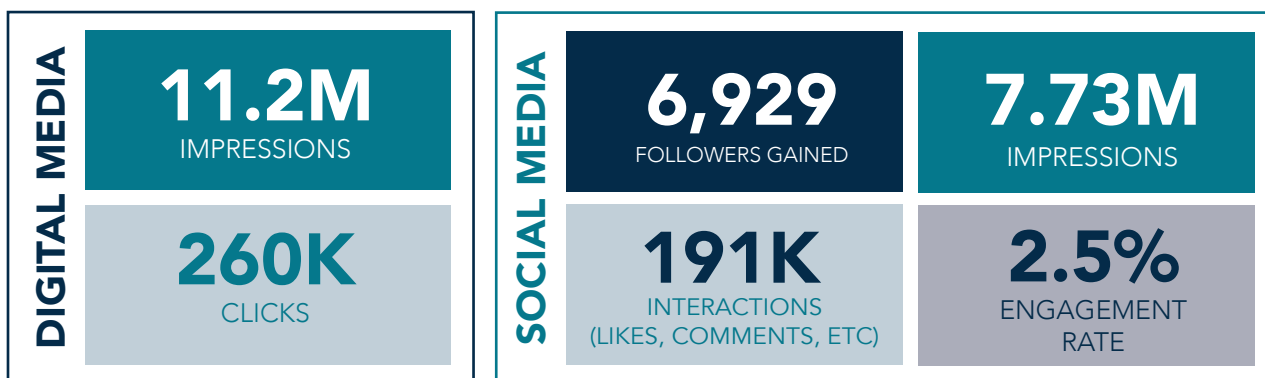
54M
PEOPLE REACHED

4
PRESS VISITS

Marketing HATTIESBURG

In FY25, VisitHATTIESBURG continued the “Where Life Happens” campaign to support the city’s strategic positioning as a year-round outdoor destination. **With themes of adventure, memories, and inspiration, the integrated marketing effort reached 20 million people, generated 363,000 new website visits, and cumulated in almost 7,000 gained followers.**

These **campaigns reinforced Hattiesburg’s appeal and helped support the region’s \$582 million in visitor spending**, further establishing the city as a vibrant, experience-driven destination for travelers seeking authentic connections and memorable experiences.



Campaign SNAPSHOT

GIRLS GETAWAY



Summer kicked off with the launch of an exciting new campaign centered around the theme of the **ultimate girls' getaway**. The campaign featured a vibrant promotional video filmed and produced by Maris, West, & Baker, highlighting the perfect mix of shopping, dining, and unforgettable experiences in Hattiesburg.

To expand the reach of the campaign, the video was **supported by a targeted digital advertising strategy and a dedicated landing page promoting a special getaway giveaway**. The giveaway generated strong engagement and encouraged audiences to envision their own weekend escape in the Hub City.

The winner of the promotion received an incredible prize package, including a multi-night stay at Hotel Indigo, along with gift cards to several popular Hattiesburg restaurants. This campaign not only celebrated summer travel but also **showcased Hattiesburg as an ideal destination for friends looking to relax, explore, and make lasting memories together**.

HATTIESBURG GETAWAY GIVEAWAY

Looking to make your escape? Look no further than Hattiesburg, MS. Where life happens. Enter our Weekend Experience Giveaway for a chance to win a two-night stay at Hotel Indigo, plus dining at two of our hottest spots! The package includes \$50 to Brass Hat and \$100 to Buschman Street Cafe. Visit our Instagram to enter.

PRIZE PACKAGE

- Two (2) night stay at Hotel Indigo Hattiesburg (standard room, double occupancy)
- One (1) \$50 gift card to Brass Hat
- One (1) \$100 gift card to Buschman Street Cafe



Campaign SNAPSHOT

ARTFUL ADVENTURE



Going into the fall season, VisitHATTIESBURG released a broader destination awareness campaign with the debut of a new video titled “Artful Adventure.” Designed to showcase the creative spirit of the Hub City, the video highlights Hattiesburg’s vibrant arts and culture scene through stunning visuals of local murals, live music, and galleries throughout the community.

In addition to featuring everyday experiences that make the city unique, the campaign also incorporates signature annual events such as the Hattiesburg Craft Beer Festival and Live at Five, emphasizing the energy and excitement visitors can find year-round.

The campaign has continued to extend its impact beyond the local and regional level, with imagery from the project being utilized in advertisements internationally. This wider exposure has helped position Hattiesburg as an inspiring and art-filled destination for travelers near and far.



Governor's CONFERENCE

In October 2024, Hattiesburg proudly hosted the **Mississippi Governor's Conference on Tourism** for the **first time in a decade**, welcoming more than **200 tourism industry professionals** from across the state. Presented by the Mississippi Tourism Association in partnership with Visit Mississippi, the annual conference serves as the state's **premier educational and professional development gathering** while celebrating the strength and impact of Mississippi's tourism industry.

Held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center, **VisitHATTIESBURG led local planning efforts**, helping deliver a seamless conference experience that showcased Hattiesburg's meeting capabilities and hospitality. Attendees **explored the city's tourism offerings through interactive breakout sessions** in downtown Hattiesburg, a reception at The Lucky Rabbit, and a special evening experience at the Hattiesburg Zoo - highlighting the city's attractions, creativity, and sense of place.

The VisitHATTIESBURG team and City of Hattiesburg were honored to accept multiple awards throughout the event.

- **DMO of the Year – \$1,000,000 to \$2.99 Million**
 - Honors a DMO with a budget of \$1,000,000 to \$2.99 Million, which is recognized for outstanding efforts in destination marketing and management through strategies and initiatives that generate visitation and contribute to the overall success of their destination. Entries should also demonstrate they are supportive of tourism endeavors, not only promoting their own area but also other partners and the industry as a whole.
- **Best Public Relations Strategy or Campaign of the Year**
 - Awarded to a strong public relations campaign or strategy. Projects may include, but are not limited to, development projects, advocacy campaigns, welcome center projects, socially/ environmentally responsible efforts, experiential, etc. Campaigns may be directed at niche markets or a general travel audience.



Governor's CONFERENCE



Music MARKERS

Hattiesburg's rich musical legacy was recognized during two Mississippi Country Music Trail marker unveilings in 2025. The trail features more than 40 stops and honors the state's boundless contributions to country music.

On February 25, the **Mississippi Country Music Trail honored Lloyd Green, one of the most influential pedal steel guitarists in country music history**, with a trail marker unveiling at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). This special event celebrated Green's legendary career and deep ties to Mississippi. Country music icon Marty Stuart joined Green, his family, university officials, and local leaders for the dedication ceremony.

On March 27, **Mississippi celebrated one of its most accomplished artists as GRAMMY Award-winning songwriter Craig Wiseman was honored with a Mississippi Country Music Trail Marker and a series of tributes recognizing his musical legacy and enduring connection to his hometown.** The Hattiesburg native was recognized during a special ceremony at Midtown Green Park, where a newly unveiled marker now stands in a record-style layout, featuring a concrete inlay with an iron replica of Wiseman's Big Loud logo—a nod to the Nashville-based music company he co-founded.



ACTIVATIONS: *Media*

ATLANTA MEDIA MISSION

Maddie and Megan traveled to Atlanta along with representatives from Madden Media, Chef Jeremy Noffke, and artist Andrea Koystal to promote Hattiesburg. The intimate dinner hosted 14 travel writers and resulted in multiple pieces of secured coverage. During this trip Maddie and Megan also met with two travel writers for deskside visits.

SOUTHERN TRAVELERS EXPLORE

A more intimate conference combining professional development, education, and relationship building opportunities, Maddie attended this show for the first year. She was able to **network closely with 40+ journalists** in attendance. Conversations held during the event resulted in close connections with multiple travel writers.



ACTIVATIONS: *Sales*

SPORTS MARKET

Kristen connected with rights holders from the TEAMS Sports Expo to continue the growth of Hattiesburg's sports and outdoor tourism market. The engagement focused on generating new leads, expanding the city's event pipeline, and reinforcing Hattiesburg's readiness to host large-scale tournaments and outdoor competitions.

MSAE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Megan and Kristen met with meeting planners and executives of more than 30 state associations in Oct. 2024 to propose Hattiesburg as their next group destination at the MS Society of Association Executives Annual Conference. While here, they also participated in professional development courses to further grow Hattiesburg as a meetings and convention destination.



TRAVEL SOUTH INTERNATIONAL

Hattiesburg partnered with Jackson to promote international visitation at the Travel South International Trade Show. Together, the cities highlighted their culinary, cultural, musical, and outdoor adventure assets while expanding their presence in key international markets as global travel demand continues to grow.



Group Sales: SERVICES

DESTINATION SERVICES

VisitHATTIESBURG's complimentary **Destination Services** help **maximize the success of meetings, conventions, and reunions** that meet requirements, including the usage of a minimum of 25 hotel rooms in Hattiesburg. **Some services include welcome bags, name badges, team-building activities, site inspections, and itinerary planning.**

GROUPS SERVED IN FY25

20th Anniversary Symposium Panelists & Mobile Street Festival Attendees

39th Annual New Medinah Retreat 2025

8th Annual Habitat "Fore" Humanity Golf Tournament

Anointed Word Fellowship International

Big Rip Classic

Cancer Survivors and Caregivers Conference

Daughters of the King Fall Assembly

Dementia Conference

Dickey-Rollins-Gayden Family Reunion 2025

Directions Tours

Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival

Forrest General Residency Program

HPN Global – 2025 National Convention

Iota Kappa Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. 50th Anniversary

Kappa Alpha Psi Conference

MAMFT Annual Conference

Military Group Training

Mississippi State Junior Amateur

MS Airports Association Conference

MS Association of School Business Officials

MS Broadcasters Association

MS Chancery Clerks Association

MS Chapter of the American Planning Association

MS Department of Child Protection Services

MS Library Association

MS Municipal League

... AND MORE



4,239
WELCOME
BAGS



598 NAME
BADGES



49 GROUPS
SERVED



8,127
ATTENDEES



Group Sales: SPORTS

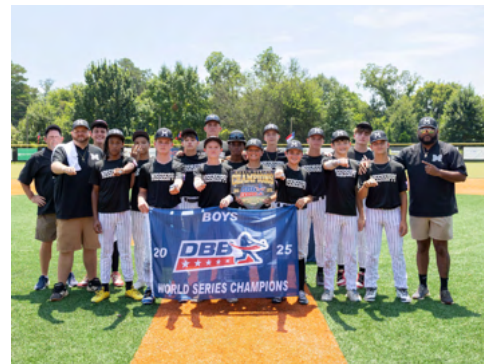
VisitHATTIESBURG supported many sporting events throughout FY25. **further solidifying sports tourism as one of the city's fastest-growing and most impactful sectors.** Team sports continue to thrive in Hattiesburg with the hosting of youth, high school, collegiate, and semi-professional competitions. Events spanned football, softball, soccer, baseball, archery, and e-sports, drawing participants and spectators from across the Southeast and beyond.

Outdoor and adventure sports also experienced continued growth, with cycling, running, disc golf, and water-based activities attracting both competitive athletes and recreational participants. Through intentional sales, marketing, and event recruitment efforts, paired with ongoing facility and infrastructure investments, Hattiesburg strengthened its reputation as a premier sports destination in the Southeast.

Collectively, these sporting events generate more than \$50 million in economic impact annually, reinforcing sports tourism as one of the city's most powerful economic drivers.

2024–25 SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

- Hosted the largest soccer tournament ever held in Mississippi, welcoming more than 200 teams from across the region over a two-day period
- Hosted the 2025 DBB 14U World Series, welcoming 12 teams from 10 states for elite-level youth competition
- Welcomed the Big Rip Classic / The Climo Open at Big Rip X, a PDGA A-Tier professional disc golf tournament that ranks among the Southeast's premier events and stands as Mississippi's largest disc golf tournament
- Hosted the MS High School Activities Association Football, Softball, and E-Sports State Championships
- Hosted the Hattiesburg Half Marathon · 10K · 5K
- Hosted the Farm 2 Fork Ride or Run
- Welcomed back another year of NCAA Baseball Regionals at The University of Southern Mississippi
- Hosted NAIA Baseball National Championship Opening Rounds at William Carey University
- Hattiesburg Futbol Club (HFC) Thunder returned for its second season of competition in 2025 as a member of the United Soccer League Two (USL2), one of the nation's leading pre-professional soccer leagues.



HATTIESBURG ALLIANCE FOR *Public Art*

Public art continued to play a vital role in shaping Hattiesburg's sense of place and visitor experience in 2025. Through umbrella program Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art (HAPA) and continued collaboration with community partners, Hattiesburg's identity as a creative and cultural destination was reinforced through an expanded and reinvigorated public art portfolio.

In 2025, HAPA partnered on 10 new large-scale murals, bringing the total number of murals found throughout the city to 68. Phase 4 of the HBURG Utility Box Project launched with 22 newly painted boxes, adding vibrant, art-forward elements to everyday infrastructure across the city.

Building on a year of expanded public art initiatives, the 2025–2027 Hattiesburg Sculpture Show was installed in early 2025, featuring 11 pieces throughout the community. These signature visual arts initiatives add to Hattiesburg's creative identity and sense of place.

NEW PUBLIC ART



"United in Purpose"

Artist: Kayla Worrel and
Sacred Heart Catholic School Students



**"Freedom Summer: Honoring History and
Hope in Palmers Crossing"**

Artists: Chris and Taryn Holzinger



"Jam Session II"

Artist: Reshonda Perryman



"Legacy in Service"

Artist: Registered Artist

HATTIESBURG ALLIANCE FOR *Public Art*



"Hub of Momentum"
Artist: GONZO247



"Stronger Together"
Artists: Chris and Taryn Holzinger



"The Hattiesburg Way"
Artist: Azha Sanders



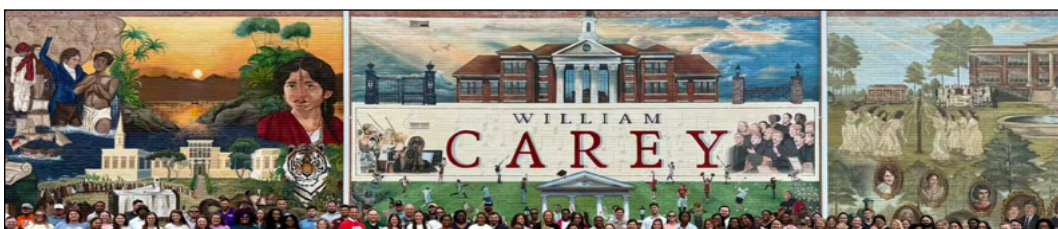
"Glass Ceiling: Phase 2"
Artist: Kym Garraway



"Grow Through What You Go Through"
Artist: Aubri Sparkman



"Lest We Forget"
Artist: Courtney Germany



"Vision of William Carey"
Artist: Sumer West

HATTIESBURG ALLIANCE FOR *Public Art*



"Spiranthes"
Artist: Nick Willett



"MOD TV Family Triptych"
Artist: Susana Hendrix



"Homespun"
Artist: Nathan Pierce



"Depth of Form"
Artist: Jacob Burmood



"Harbinger"
Artist: Chris Plaisted



"Balance"
Artist: David Fortenberry

HATTIESBURG ALLIANCE FOR *Public Art*



"Novel Idea"
Artist: Craig Gray



"Toro, Uncle Bull"
Artist: Earl Dismuke



"Everything"
Artist: Nathan Pierce



"Bound in Line"
Artist: Cecelia Moseley



"Boolean Still Life"
Artist: John E. Bannon

In January, HAPA expanded its public art offerings with the installation of a new outdoor sculpture show in downtown Hattiesburg. This marks the fourth sculpture show presented by HAPA and its first since 2021, with renewed focus on three-dimensional public art alongside well-established mural initiatives. Following a national call for artists, HAPA curated the dynamic exhibition featuring 11 large-scale sculptures created by artists from across the country, all to remain on display through 2027.

MISSISSIPPI MISS *Hospitality*

76 YEARS OF MISSISSIPPI MISS HOSPITALITY

Created in 1949 by Mississippi Governor Wright and the legislature, Mississippi Miss Hospitality champions the state's economic development and tourism sectors as its official Goodwill Ambassador. The scholarship program supports Mississippi's young women through **personal development, community service programming, and education**. It has been held in Hattiesburg for 28 years. In 2025, 47 local titleholders competed for the state title, the largest group in modern program history.

Taylor Garretson of Greene County was crowned Mississippi Miss Hospitality for 2025. She attends The University of Southern Mississippi, where she is pursuing a degree in digital journalism and serves as a Dixie Darling. Taylor also marked a historic milestone as the first returning contestant to win the state title under the program's updated eligibility rules, instituted in 2020.

2025 WINNERS

TOP FIVE CONTESTANTS:

- Winner: Taylor Garretson, Greene Co.
- 1st Alt: Malee Davidson, Ridgeland
- 2nd Alt: Harley Hobby, Neshoba Co.
- 3rd Alt: Molly Kate Carley, Sumrall
- 4th Alt: Allyson Beard, New Albany

MISSISSIPPI SPEECH:

- Taylor Griffin, Attala Co.
- Taylor Garretson, Greene Co.
- Malee Davidson, Ridgeland
- Molly Kate Carley, Sumrall.

PRELIMINARY COMPETITION:

- **Social Media Scholarship:**
Allyson Beard, New Albany
- **Felicia Manley Horton Community Service Scholarship:** Mariah Evans, Jeff Davis Co.
- **Most Photogenic:**
Charlsee Smith, Jones Co.
- **Top Ad Sales:** Ali Hargett, Greenwood
- **Lake Little Spirit of Hospitality:**
Christina Mogollon, Meridian

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Billye Jean Stroud and Chris Pugh, New Albany
Co-Directors



MISSISSIPPI MISS HOSPITALITY 2024 AMBASSADOR RECAP

Chloe Grace Weeks **received more than \$25,000 in scholarships and prizes** as 2024's Mississippi Miss Hospitality. In her role, Weeks **traveled the state and country to meet with elected officials and share the state's story at top events and attractions**. Weeks represented Winston Co. in the competition.

HATTIESBURG *Restaurant* WEEK

Known as Hattiesburg's leading culinary event, **Restaurant Week** supports local restaurants by **giving individuals incentives to enjoy the city one bite at a time**. Hattiesburg Restaurant Week has a proven history of boosting sales for participating restaurants and expanding menu offerings in local eateries. Held Oct. 13-19, **the 2024 theme was 'Turn Up the Heat.'** During the week-long celebration, **more than 40 of Hattiesburg's participating restaurants offered an exclusive dish featuring warm, spicy, or hot elements**. From gumbo and sizzling steaks to cheesy dips and delicious sips, these offerings made Hattiesburg a must-visit destination for food enthusiasts.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS:

- Provided branded aprons to restaurant staff to support the service industry of Hattiesburg.
- Placed promotional items, including bill inserts, yard signs, and posters, to increase participation by diners.
- Awarded early participants of Restaurant Week with branded pepper seed recipe cards at participating restaurants.
- Supported all districts of the community by defining participating eateries by their location in Downtown, Midtown, The Avenues, and West Hattiesburg.
- Promoted daily social media gift card giveaways using **#EatHBURG**.
- Created a video series promoting featured dishes.



NATIONAL *Tourism Week*

National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) is an annual recognition of the contributions of the U.S. travel industry. Celebrated May 4-10, 2025, the theme highlighted the **power of travel** and its overarching impact. **Travel enables success for all industries** by driving sales growth, innovation, education, and operations that power the economy.

To celebrate these successes, VisitHBURG **visited hotel and attraction partners with gifts of thanks** to recognize their dedication and resiliency in this essential industry, as well as treated partners to an appreciation meal from Ed's Burger Joint.

VisitHBURG also **sponsored the kickoff Live at Five concert series in Town Square Park for the community and visitors, hosted week-long gift-card giveaways** on social media to engage locals, and shared tourism's impact through various media outlets. VisitHBURG also hosted a **Tourism Gives Back community service day**, bringing partners together to pack bags of rice at Extra Table, a local organization dedicated to feeding those in need.

A new component to this year's celebration, VisitHBURG created and presented the **Heart of Hattiesburg** award to **22 outstanding hospitality employees in the community**. Each nominated by their organization, this recognition honors individuals who go above and beyond in their roles, embodying the spirit of hospitality and playing a critical role in Hattiesburg's tourism success. Each honoree received a commemorative certificate and lapel pin and was named a Heart of Hattiesburg Ambassador.



TOURISM *Grant Program*

Established in 2019, VisitHATTIESBURG's Tourism Grant Program (TGP) is **an annual allocation designed to enhance visitor and tourism promotion efforts in Hattiesburg**. TGP provides funds for marketing and other qualified expenses for projects and events that fulfill VisitHATTIESBURG'S mission and, ultimately, increase overnight travel to Hattiesburg. **Since its inception, TGP has awarded more than \$230,000 in funding. In FY25, nearly \$55,000 was awarded to qualifying programs and events.**

QUALIFYING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS:

Eligible applicants for funding include an organization, event, or project whose objective is to promote Hattiesburg's tourism industry to out-of-town visitors by generating overnight travel and economic stimulus to the city.

The target audience should be outside the immediate Hattiesburg area (over 50-mile radius or out-of-state).

Qualifying entities may be attractions, associations, organizations, or governmental agencies that promote their event, products and/ or services to visitors from outside the area.

Qualified grant projects should be classified in one of the following categories:

- Festival / Event
- Attraction / Public Use Facility: Museums, historical buildings, meeting space, sporting facilities, etc.
- Other organizations or associations with a primary objective of promoting tourism in Hattiesburg



FY25 GRANT RECIPIENTS
19th Historic Mobile Street Renaissance Fest
2024 Football State Championships
2024-2025 Parks and Recreation Marketing and Outreach
2025 DBB World Series
2025 Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival
2025 Krewe of St. Catherine Parade
2025 Mississippi Pinnacle Awards
39th Annual Southern Miss Coca-Cola Rodeo
4th Annual Food Truck Festival
74th Annual Hattiesburg Jaycees Christmas Parade
Christmas Downtown - A Street Market
Dog Days Run Walk
Farm to Fork: Run, Ride, Feed
HPSD Hall of Fame 2024
Hattiesburlesque
Hattiesburg Half Marathon/10k/5k
Hattiesburg Juneteenth Festival
Hattiesburg Pickleball Classic
HCA Meistersingers Civic Chorus 2024-25
HFC Labor Day and Spring Classic
Hobble Gobble 5 mile run and 2 mile walk
Holiday Expo and Christmas Market
HUBFEST
Laughs 4 Life 2025
Live Amateur Box Night - Part II
Live at Five
Midnight on Front Street
Molten Mohawk Niner (and 4 miler)
MUDDS Beach Volleyball Classic
... AND MORE



HATTIESBURG *GeoTour*

Launched Dec. 2022, the **Hattiesburg GeoTour** is a collection of **40 locations in the community**, each with its own hidden geocache containing information about the stop, a logbook, and promotional items. The game, began in 2000 in the U.S.; however, **the closest active GeoTour to Hattiesburg is in Homa, LA**, which makes Hattiesburg a desirable destination for players in surrounding states. At the time of launch, the Hattiesburg GeoTour was one of only 112 active geotours across the globe. **Hattiesburg Geotour has the 5th highest number of first time cachers out of all the geotours in the world**, with 206 new players discovering Hattiesburg this year.



573

ACCOUNTS VISITED
Each account typically represents 2.5 people.

INTL. CACHERS FROM
**UNITED KINGDOM
AND CANADA**

2,282

TOTAL LOGS

994

TOTAL DAYS SPENT

1964 *Freedom Summer* TRAIL

Summer 2025 marked the **61st anniversary of the 1964 Freedom Summer movement**, a voter registration drive and education initiative that took place all over the state. Hattiesburg served as one of the largest sites of Freedom Summer activations.

VisitHATTIESBURG assisted Visit Mississippi as they unveiled Mississippi Freedom Trail Markers to raise awareness of the movement. In FY25, **Hattiesburg received a Freedom Trail Marker honoring Victoria Jackson Gray Adams**. Many community members were in attendance of this significant event at Adams' former home in Palmer's Crossing.



DBB *World Series*

Known as BASEBURG to sports fans, Hattiesburg continues to set the bar for championship play in baseball, boasting upgraded facilities, abundant accommodations, and plenty of attractions and eateries to enjoy between games. In July 2025, the city hosted the DBB World Series for the first time in more than 50 years, welcoming 12 teams from 10 southeastern states for a five-day double-elimination tournament at the recently upgraded Jaycee Park. Hattiesburg was selected as the host city in 2023, after submitting a competitive bid to the national DBB Boys commissioner and board. Youth sports events continue to enhance the baseball culture and sports tourism growth in Hattiesburg



Partner Support

DOWNTOWN HATTIESBURG

VisitHATTIESBURG supports the Downtown Hattiesburg Association through active board participation and involvement in the Promotions and Design/Economic Vitality Committees. In addition to marketing campaign support, VisitHATTIESBURG works directly with many of downtown's unique merchants to promote events, enhance visibility, and drive foot traffic—strengthening the district's role as a vibrant hub for culture, shopping, dining, and community connection.



MIDTOWN HATTIESBURG

VisitHATTIESBURG partners with the Midtown Merchants Association to support the district's growth through events like Midtown Sounds and placemaking projects such as public murals and future streetscape enhancements. These efforts energize the area, spotlight local businesses, and elevate Midtown as a distinctive destination for live music, walkability, and creative expression.



ARTS & CULTURE

VisitHATTIESBURG proudly supports cultural partners like FestivalSouth, Nuestro Arte, and the Hattiesburg Arts Council. Through marketing support and engagement with travel writers and influencers, VisitHATTIESBURG helps showcase the city's thriving arts scene—amplifying events, exhibitions, and performances that celebrate Hattiesburg's creative identity and attract culturally curious travelers year-round.



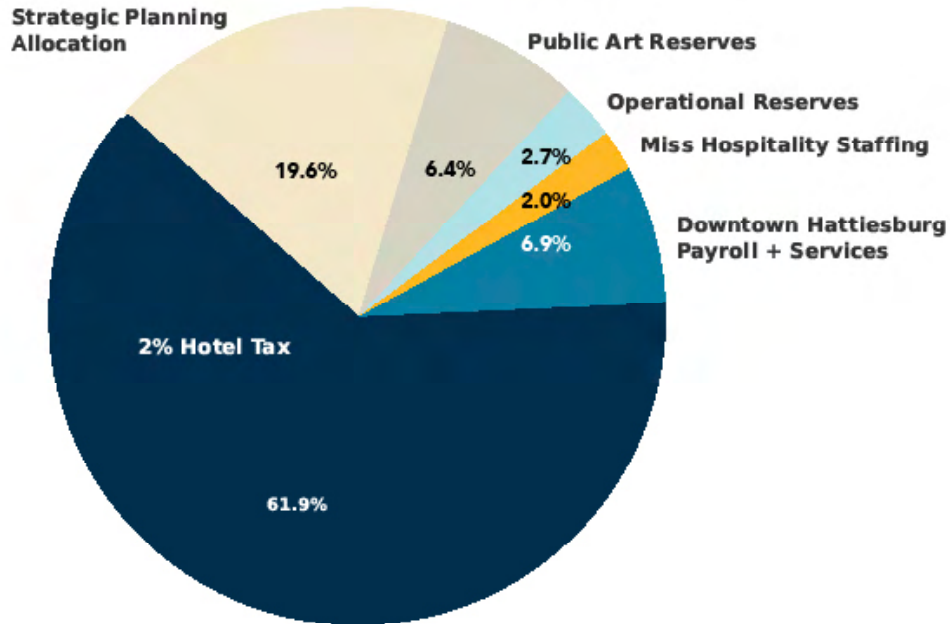
OUTDOOR RECREATION

VisitHATTIESBURG collaborates with local partners to expand outdoor and eco-tourism opportunities while improving access to recreational assets. A major enhancement in FY25 was the completion of the Sims Road boat ramp along the Pinebelt Blueways, featuring a new launch, improved lighting, and ADA-compliant amenities. This project was made possible through a Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund grant awarded to the City of Hattiesburg.

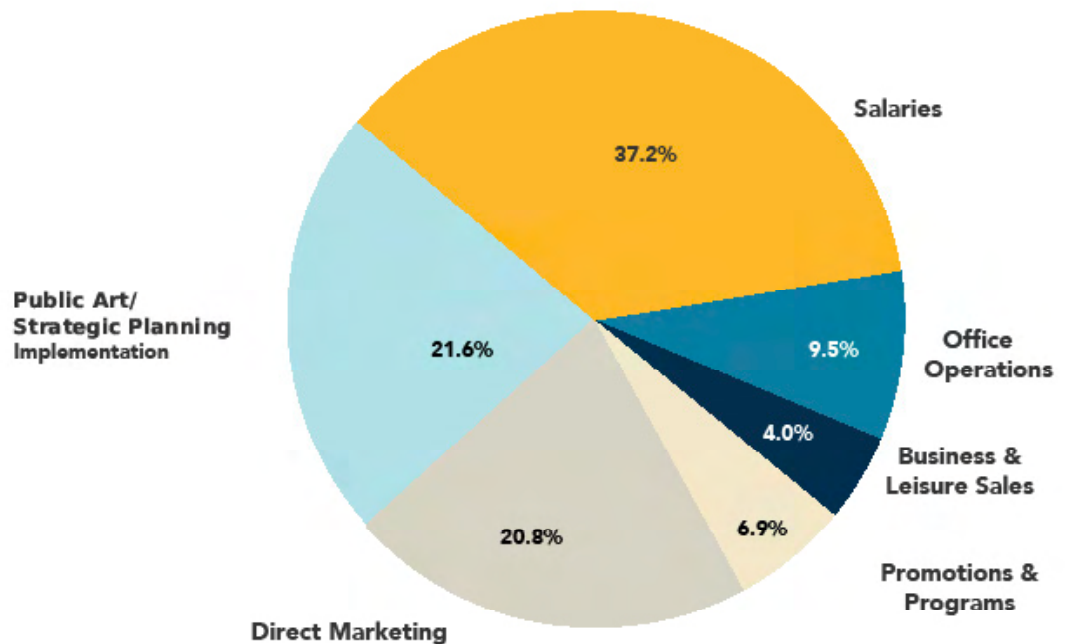


FY25 *Budget*

FY2024 Income Breakdown - VisitHATTIESBURG



FY2024 Expense Breakdown - VisitHATTIESBURG



TOURISM *Milestones* IN HBURG

2014

- HBURG visitors spent **\$255 million**

2015

- HBURG visitors spent **\$258 million**
- **Hattiesburg Association for Public Art founded**
- VisitHBURG received Tourism Office of the Year Award at the Governor's Conference on Tourism

2016

- HBURG visitors spent **\$274 million**
- Launched Ales to Trails campaign
- VisitHBURG partnered with Longleaf Trace on lighting project

2017

- HBURG visitors spent **\$278 million**
- **Marlo Dorsey named Executive Director of VisitHBURG**
- **Released new promotional campaign**, which included a website and video and larger social media presence, and won Best Overall Promotional Campaign at MS Governor's Conference on Tourism
- Hosted regional MSAE Conference
- Light pole banner project on Hwy 49 and in Downtown
- Marketing and Publicity Chair for Camp Shelby's Centennial Celebration

2018

- **HBURG visitors spent \$292 million**
- VisitHBURG supported the MS Bicentennial Project
- Hosted Travel South USA Showcase's pre-FAM tour
- **Named a top 25 holiday shopping destination by Expedia**

2019

- HBURG visitors spent **\$300 million**
- **VisitHBURG launched inaugural Hattiesburg Restaurant Week**
- Created HBURG Hotel & Hospitality Association
- Celebrated 70 years of the Mississippi Miss Hospitality Competition (22nd in HBURG)
- **Re-branded the Longleaf Trace** with updated signage, website, brochure and other assets
- **Relaunched the 1964 Freedom Summer Trail** with updated branding, audio tour, signage, map and website
- Provided **signage at Tatum Sportsplex**
- Designed map and signage for **Pinebelt Blueways**
- NTTW18 Campaign received Tourism Achievement Award at MS Governor's Conference on Tourism
- **Started longterm strategic planning process** with Young Strategies for VisitHBURG
- Continued cooperative agreement with Downtown Hattiesburg Association to promote destination building and visitor growth
- **Launched the Tourism Grant Program** for local events and organizations, providing \$25K in support

2020

- HBURG visitors spent **\$257 million**
- **HBURG received Tourism Recovery Funding from the CARES Act** to be used for marketing activities related to the business disruption effects of COVID-19
- HAPA unveiled nine new large-scale murals

2021

- HBURG visitors spent **\$484 million***
- Key Focus: Community re-engagement and destination visibility
- Hattiesburg Convention Commission opened Africa Expansion at the Hattiesburg Zoo & the Hattiesburg Pocket Museum

2022

- HBURG visitors spent **record \$548 million***
- Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art: **10 new installations completed** and received Outstanding Public Arts Project from Mississippi Main Street
- Launched Mississippi's first official GeoTour (40 stops)
- Marlo Dorsey named Main Street Revitalization Champion
- Kristen Brock and Paige Robertson each were named a Top 20 Under 40 Professional in the Pinebelt by Signature Magazine
- **Hattiesburg named a top 11 art destination in the world by Travel + Leisure magazine**

2023

- HBURG visitors spent **record \$582 million***
- Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art: 30+ new installations completed

2024

- *HBURG visitor spending for 2024 not available at the time of publication due to new model*
- Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art: **nine new installations completed**
- VisitHATTIESBURG completed a brand discovery in 2023 and launched the new brand in January 2024
- Hattiesburg Convention Commission opened Serengeti Springs water park
- **Announced as a host city of a USL League Two (USL2) pre-professional soccer team**, expanding the league's footprint in the south
- VisitHATTIESBURG **won "Best Sales Strategy or Campaign" for BASEBURG** from MTA

2025

- Awarded **DMO of the Year**, Best Public Relations Strategy or Campaign of the Year by MTA
- Hosted Governors Conference on Tourism
- Served as the **host city of the DBB World Series** for the first time in more than 2 decades
- Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art: ten new mural installations completed, relaunched the Hattiesburg Sculpture show, began Phase 4 of the HBURG Utility Box Project.
- Unveiled two new Mississippi **Country Music Trail markers** and a Freedom Trail Marker

A FEW MORE *Pictures*



WHERE

Life

HAPPENS.



VISITHATTIESBURG

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