

RIDGELAND TOURISM COMMISSION

# DESTINATION BUSINESS PLAN

FY 2024



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WHERE YOU'LL SEE  
RIDGELAND



# A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO



The destination vision of Visit Ridgeland has never been more focused or expansive than it has been this past fiscal year. Behind the scenes, plans were being created for a new office space, visitors center, and location as well as a new tourism brand, website, and imagery to maximize our position in the destination marketplace. Having the palette of Ridgeland's beauty to grow from is the key to our success & we do not take that for granted.

Together we can make a difference and Visit Ridgeland will always play a part in that story with you, our stakeholders, and partners to grow and sustain a viable tourism product. Your partnership is more valuable to us than ever!

Chris Chapman, CMP  
President & CEO

# MEET THE TEAM

## President & CEO

Chris Chapman

The President & CEO functions as the chief executive officer of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission; implements the Commission's policies; develops objectives, programs, & procedures; is responsible for budget & staff oversight; manages development & implementation of short-range & long-range advertising and marketing strategies, provides industry leadership & support to all travel and tourism related partners; & serves as the liaison with Commissioners & the City of Ridgeland.



## VP of Finance & Administration

Karen Vance

The VP of Finance & Administration organizes and supervises all the financial activities that facilitate the operation of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission office. The responsibilities include accounting/billing functions including budget documentation, grant management, and vendor supervision. This role is the liaison between all financial institutions and works with budget and financial strategies.



## Visitor Center & In Market Services Manager

Mary Byrd

This Visitor Center & In Market Services Manager provides the services related to the visitor center; responsible for phone/email inquiries and walk-in visitor related needs; compiles data from visitor inquiry and fulfillment and assists with administrative/operational needs of the Commission. This position coordinates various support services including facilities management and assisting in other program area functions of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission. This role implements activities to increase foot traffic into the center.



## Director of Sales & Events Partnerships

Kelly Durrett

The Director of Sales & Event Partnerships promotes Ridgeland as a tourism destination to all targeted market segments through sales efforts & affiliations with industry trade associations and organizations & their activities; develops a program of work and budget for the sales activities; maintains industry relations & provides leadership to industry partners on sales & partner initiatives and updates. As Director of Events, this position oversees all festivals, events, and cooperative projects for Ridgeland Tourism Commission.



### **Sales & Events Manager**

Crystal Pham

The Sales & Events Manager works with the Director of Sales & Event Partnerships to promote Ridgeland as a tourism destination to all group target market segments through sales efforts & affiliations with industry trade associations & organizations. Helps develop local industry relations & partner initiatives as well as assist in the management of all festivals, events, and cooperative projects for Ridgeland Tourism Commission.



### **Director of Marketing & Public Relations**

Katie Coats

The Director of Marketing and Public Relations oversees the messages and activities related to providing Ridgeland tourism information to potential visitors, media, and tourism partners; develops programming related to key marketing strategies such as advertising, media relations, RTC publications/collateral materials, electronic media (e-blasts/newsletters and the official tourism website – [www.visitridgeland.com](http://www.visitridgeland.com)) and social media; This position reports to the President/CEO. This position is the liaison to Visit Ridgeland's agency of record, Foster Relations, and marketing contractors.



### **Marketing & Design Specialist**

Amelia Dalton

The Marketing & Design Specialist provides marketing and design support in all internal and external marketing efforts for Visit Ridgeland. Works with the Director of Marketing & Public Relations in the implementation of communication strategy through partner newsletters, social media & community networking. This role serves as the in-house graphic designer for print and digital advertising and collateral as well as website maintenance. This position is the liaison to the Ridgeland Chamber of Commerce diplomats.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



## NAMES, LEFT TO RIGHT:

**Shane Aldridge**  
AC Marriott (Lodging)

**Carla Palmer**  
CPA Realty, LLC (At-Large)

**William Merchant, Vice Chairman**  
Soulshine Pizza Factory (Restaurant)

**Lesley Holleman, Chairman of the Board**  
Fleet Feet (At-Large)

**Todd Leach**  
Springhill Suites (Lodging)

**David Conn, Secretary/Treasurer**  
4 Top Hospitality (Restaurant)



# OUR MISSION

The mission of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission, hereafter Visit Ridgeland, is to advocate, elevate, and support Ridgeland’s hospitality industry for a positive impact on the local economy and quality of life by increasing travel related spending.

# OUR VISION

The vision of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission is to ignite tourism economic growth while sustaining Ridgeland’s brand and position as a premier boutique destination through strategic vision, messaging, and collaborative leadership.

## **FY24 Tourism Development Objectives**

- Relocate the Ridgeland Visitors Center and Ridgeland Tourism Commission offices to a more visible location which serves as an attraction for visitors with modern amenities
- Increase lodging occupancy and restaurant revenues throughout the week by 4%
- Continue support for the expansion of sports, meeting facilities and trail system to draw new visitation and increase overnight visitors
- Announce and implement new branding across all mediums including visitors center, collateral, & online presence
- Launch extensive branding advertising campaign utilizing Ridgeland Tourism Commission & Tourism Recovery Fund marketing dollars
- Launch new website showcasing new imagery and brand identity
- Create & promote tourism development programs to support new events, attractions, & themed trails
- Support development of more weekend events and nightlife, as well as a permanent music venue
- Create a Ridgeland specific hospitality training program and present to all industry partners
- Implement new bikeshare program for locals and visitors

## **Diversity & Inclusion**

The Ridgeland Tourism Commission believes that celebrating and cultivating diversity, equity and inclusion are key to creating a vibrant economy. We support an environment that fosters and represents the unique backgrounds and perspectives of all visitors and members. The Ridgeland Tourism Commission is committed to demonstrating these values through our policies, practices, services, and community engagement.



# IMPACT OF TOURISM

## RIDGELAND

Visitor Spending - \$90.3 Million

Tourism Supports - 1,026 Direct Jobs

State & Local Taxes - \$14.3 Million

Tax Savings per Household - \$1,415

## MISSISSIPPI

Visitor Spending - \$7.1 Billion

Tourism Supports - 80,517 Jobs

State & Local Taxes - \$749 Million

Tax Savings per Household - \$678

*Source: Mississippi Development Authority FY 2021 Tourism Economic Contribution Report  
and Tourism Economic Impact of Visitors In Ridgeland 2021 Report*



# RECAP OF RTC SUCCESS

- Increased lodging and restaurant revenues by 8% overall
- Expanded staff and launched a new office space expansion in FY23
- Partnered with community stakeholders on a rebrand project and new creative direction
- Implemented an event sponsorship program to expand festival support and encourage more events in Ridgeland
- Created new videos and images to expand social media marketing, reach, and engagements
- Developed the Ridgeland Bikeshare Program to be located at the New Visitors Center & The Bike Crossing
- Procured vendors and began implementing development of new visitor kiosks, Customer Relationship Management system and Content Management System and Content Management System for new website
- Supported and developed objectives for the Ridgeland Historical Marker Trail
- Enhanced visitor center programming to increase walk up foot traffic
- Hosted 6 new fishing tournaments bringing in hundreds of anglers to the Ridgeland market
- Won Mississippi Governor's Conference on Tourism Advocacy Award on Tourism in FY23
- Partnered with Tourism Economics to provide essential research data for marketing & advertising direction
- Host to the first Capitol Area Tourism Association reception in partnership with Jackson, Vicksburg, and Canton
- Produced successful Art, Wine, and Wheels event with estimated attendance of 8,759 with 56% being visitors from more than 50 miles from Ridgeland. These visitors traveled from at least 12 states and 53 cities. The estimated direct spending from event attendees is \$4,871,750. Of this spending, \$2.9 million can be attributed to visitors to the area for the weekend's events. *Source: Mississippi State University Extension Center for Government and Community Development in cooperation with U.S. Department of Agriculture*



# SWOT ANALYSIS

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- New tourism offices and Visitors Center
- New AC by Marriott and Holiday Inn Express hotels
- Locally owned & big-name shopping and dining
- Central location, proximity to airport and interstate travel
- Outdoor offerings including miles of trails & parks
- Strong partnerships with stakeholders
- Natchez Trace Parkway
- Barnett Reservoir
- Bill Waller Craft Center & artistic community
- Local government support
- Diverse landscape
- Sports facilities
- 11 new restaurants and 4 new food trucks

**STRENGTHS**

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- Lack of convention & meeting space
- Limited sports facility space
- Lack of nightlife
- Minimal Sunday offerings
- Landlocked for development
- Hospitality workforce limitations

**WEAKNESSES**

O

- Growing Railroad District development
- New Ridgeland Bikeshare program
- New business developments including Topgolf and Ridgeland Performing Arts Center
- Ridgeland Historical Markers trail
- Possible conference center development
- New and unique events
- New and strengthening local and regional partnerships

**OPPORTUNITIES**

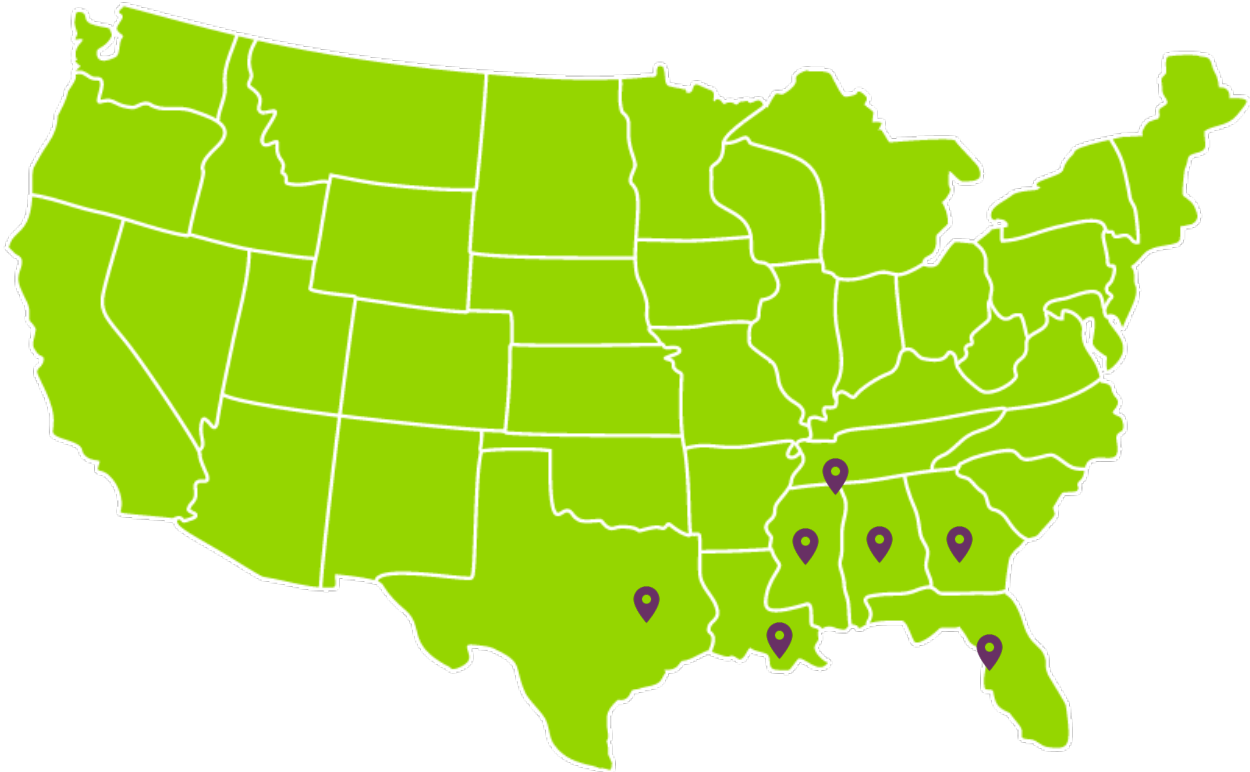
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- Growth of surrounding lodging properties
- Competitors financial resources in larger cities
- Tourism development in surrounding counties
- Increased blight/empty stores along County Line Road
- Economic challenges/gas prices/inflation

**THREATS**



# FEEDER MARKETS



*Source: Symphony by Tourism Economics*

## TOP FEEDER STATES IN AMERICA

Mississippi

Louisiana

Texas

Alabama

Tennessee

Florida

Georgia



## VISIT RIDGELAND

Source: *Symphony by Tourism Economics*

# VISITOR PROFILE

- ★ Average Annual Household Income: \$70,700
- ★ Median Income: \$58,200
- ★ Median Age: 47 years old
- ★ Average Travel Party Size: 2.5
- ★ Average Travel Party Size of Leisure: 2.8
- ★ Average Travel Party Size for Business: 2.0
- ★ Average Length of Stay: 1.9 days
- ★ Overnight Visitors: 78.5%
- ★ Repeat Visitors: 49%

# WHAT BRINGS THEM TO RIDGELAND?



## OUTDOORS & SPORTS

From lake to trail, the options are plentiful in Ridgeland for those who enjoy an active lifestyle. The 33,000-acre Barnett Reservoir offers fishing and boating of all kinds. The historic Natchez Trace Parkway provides miles of scenic trails. Ridgeland's parks and fields are an outdoor enthusiast's dream. Check out Old Trace Park for ample space for group events. Friendship, Freedom Ridge and Wolcott are top-tier sporting facilities and excellent hosts of tournaments from all over the country.



## LEISURE TRAVEL

Whether it be vacation or a weekend getaway, travelers desire a destination that caters to all their needs. They thrive in a place where shopping, dining experiences, entertainment and outdoor options are plentiful! To attract the leisure traveler, Visit Ridgeland capitalizes on assets including the five upscale shopping and dining developments combined with 16 conveniently located hotel properties.



## MEETINGS & GATHERINGS

When planning a family reunion, business meeting, or wedding, Ridgeland offers small-town charm with big city amenities. Through resources like the Guide to Gatherings, meeting planners can find the perfect venue, lodging partners, and catering options for their unique gathering. Before the event, find the perfect booth or store to plan and shop ahead of the big event.



## EVENTS

Visit Ridgeland is a proud host and sponsor of a plethora of annual events that bring participants and attendees to town. We work to evaluate the economic impact and success of current events as well as identify new event opportunities based on Ridgeland's newest assets and venues. Through recruitment of diverse events, we aim to increase hotel and restaurant occupancy year-round.



## OUTDOORS & SPORTS

Ridgeland offers some of Mississippi's premier cycling, baseball, softball, tennis, pickleball, soccer, volleyball, disc golf, running/walking, hiking, fishing, and boating venues. Ridgeland is proud to host many state, regional and national competitions.

### Goal

Increase the number of sporting events and outdoor activities held in Ridgeland to drive participants and guests to stay overnight in a Ridgeland hotel.

### Tactics

- Maintain and grow working relationships with Ridgeland Recreation and Parks, Ridgeland Tennis Center, Barnett Reservoir Foundation, and other outdoor/sports partners and stakeholders
- Attend sports conferences that enhance Ridgeland's visibility as a sports destination such as Crappie Expo, Big Dam Bridge, TEAMS, Sports ETA, Atlanta Travel & Adventure Show among others
- Continue to support and work with MS High School Activities Association to promote Ridgeland as destination for high school sports
- Elevate the awareness of Ridgeland as a cycling destination with support toward gaining a Silver level Bicycle Friendly Community designation by The League of American Cyclists
- Develop and promote Ridgeland's new Bikeshare Program at the new location of the Ridgeland Visitor Center and The Bike Crossing. Initially, four bikes will be available at each location to explore the city's multi-use trails
- Continue memberships and participate in industry associations such as Adventure Cycling and the League of American Cyclists
- Sponsor and support local outdoor and sporting events such as Natchez Trace Century Ride, Fat Tire Festival, MS Cyclocross Project, Southern Bowling Congress, USTA Tennis, JUDGES Disc Golf, Bass Tactix, MS Golf Association, Magnolia Crappie Club, Snappy Sync Firefly Festival, Bike Your Park Day, among others
- Update Guide to Sports and Outdoors collateral piece for print and digital

# LEISURE TRAVEL

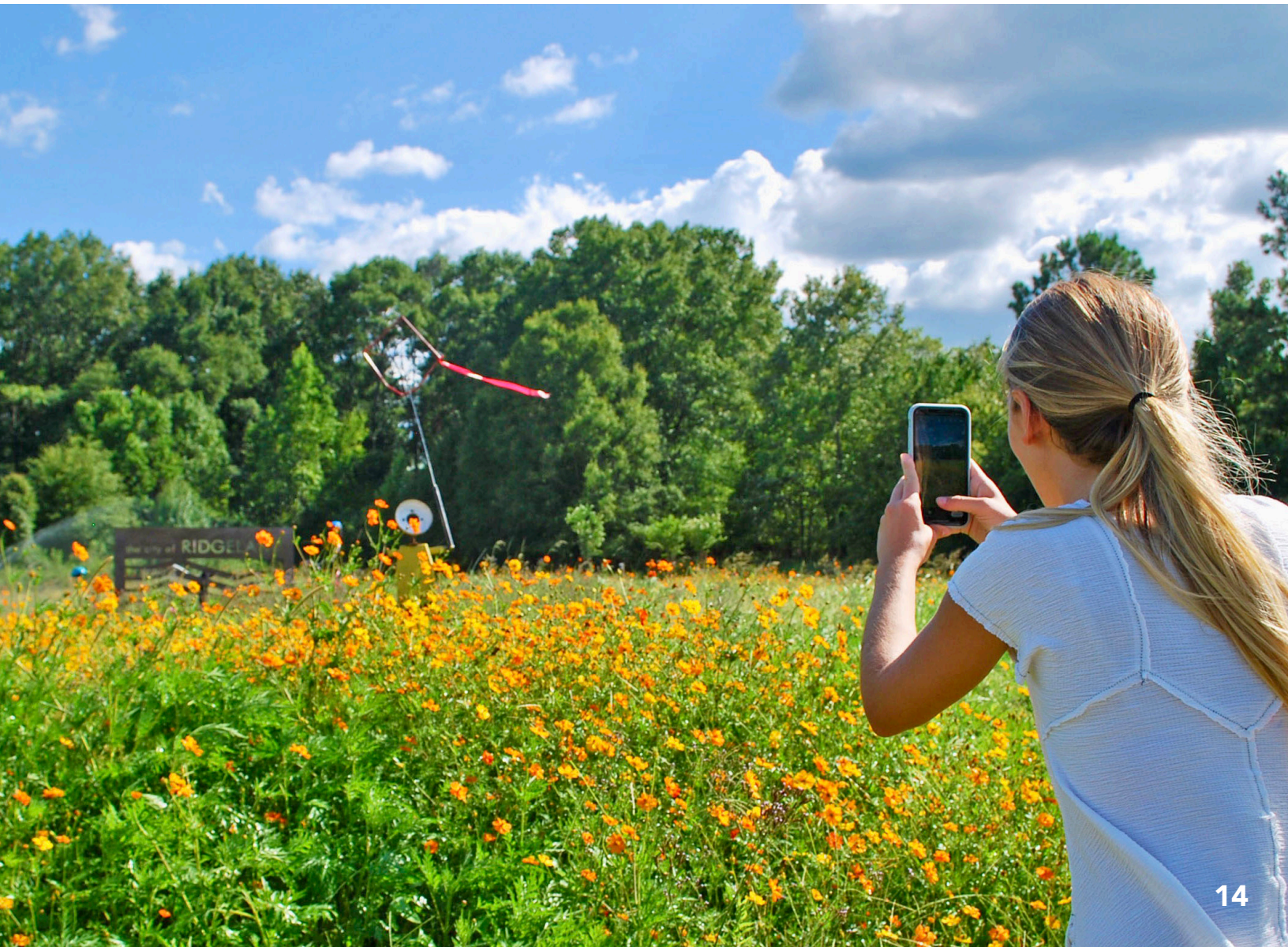
There's something for everyone in Ridgeland. With countless entertainment options, exciting events, outdoor adventure and local shopping and dining, Ridgeland makes the perfect destination no matter the getaway.

## Goal

Build upon the marketing and communications strategies to increase leisure/ consumer visitation to Ridgeland through its offerings of dining, shopping, and outdoor exploration.

## Tactics

- Create new "trails" and passport offerings for art, retail, culinary, nightlife, and other Ridgeland assets
- Work with partners and stakeholders to create new packages with themed itineraries and signature event weekends
- Attend consumer tradeshows with Visit Mississippi to promote Ridgeland: Atlanta Travel & Adventure Show, Atlanta Food & Wine Festival, Natchez Food & Wine Festival





# MEETINGS & GATHERINGS

Business and pleasure go together in Ridgeland. When planners are looking for the ideal destination for a small meeting, wedding, reunion, or any gathering, they can depend on any of our hotels and meeting venues to provide the perfect location. As a bonus, smart planners utilize the resources of Ridgeland Tourism Commission's visitor services to create a memorable experience.

## Goal

Continue to rebuild and receive the small meetings market in Ridgeland with a concentration on the SMERF markets (social, military, education, religious, and fraternal), corporate, tour & travel, and wedding markets.

## Tactics

- Continue memberships and participate in industry associations including Alabama Motor Coach Association, American Bus Association, MS Society of Association Executives, Ridgeland/Madison Rotary Club, Southeast Tourism Society, South Central Motor Coach Association, Tennessee Motor Coach Association
- Update itineraries for each target market
- Update the Guide to Gatherings collateral piece for print and digital
- Service the needs of event planners by providing welcome bags with Visitors Guide and maps, registration name badges, itinerary planning and spouse programs, room block and non-room block rebate programs
- Send thank you letters along with survey to meeting planners following their meeting/gathering
- Continue to track lost business due to lack of meeting and convention space to possible future development of a meeting/convention facility in Ridgeland



# EVENTS

Ridgeland Tourism Commission is a proud host and sponsor of a variety of events that bring visitors to enjoy our city. We work to evaluate the economic impact and success of events through our new Event Sponsorship Program. The Program includes an application and report for each sponsored event. We are always on the lookout for opportunities to bring new and exciting events to Ridgeland.

## 2024 Events

### SPRING

- Bass Tactix & Student Angler Association State Championship
- Law Enforcement Appreciation Week
- Leap4 the Lily Pad
- Natchez Trace Century Ride
- National Travel and Tourism Week
- Pepsi Pops
- Phoenix Bass Fishing League
- Providence Cup
- The Mind Center's Sante South Food and Wine Festival
- Plein Air Art Festival
- Snappy Sync Soiree
- Township Jazz Festival
- The Trace Ride

### SUMMER

- BMX Gold Cup Qualifier
- Celebrate America Balloon Glow
- Comic Con
- Father & Child Fishing Tournament
- JUDGES Rez Dawgs Disc Golf
- Southern Bowling Congress

### FALL

- Bike Your Park Day
- Cycle Out Kids Cancer Bike Ride
- Fat Tire Festival & McGee Lungbuster
- Mayor's Fun Walk
- Mississippi Moving Day
- Renaissance Euro Fest Automobile & Motorcycle Show
- Ridgeland Scarecrow Trail
- Sanderson Farms PGA Championship
- Spooky Cross Cyclocross
- Township Blues Festival
- Trunk or Treat
- Turtle Tricks and Treats
- Plein Air Art Festival
- Old Towne Chili Cookoff

### WINTER

- Chimneyville Arts Festival
- Christmas Tree Lighting
- Ridgeland Christmas Parade
- Ridgeland Cyclocross Festival
- Turkey Day 8K and ¼ mile Turkey Trot

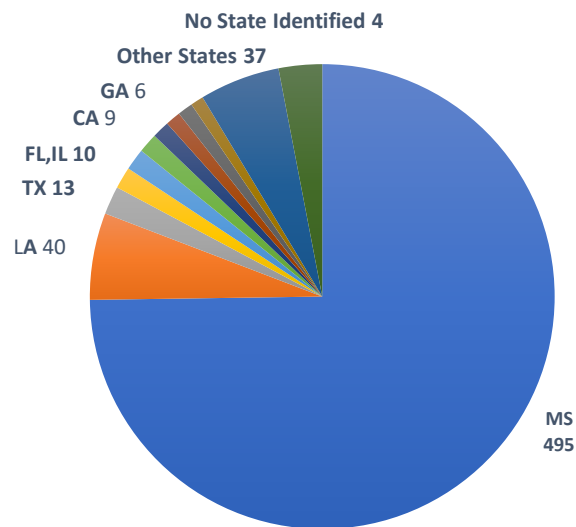


# VISITOR SERVICES

The Visitor Center here in Ridgeland supports our mission by providing personalized travel planning assistance and services for our guests. A Visitor Center Specialist facilitates fulfillment of the various provided services as well as managing tourism inquiries in person, phone, mail, and email. The satisfaction of our visitors and locals is very important to us. Visitors will receive a warm welcome and access information helping them plan their stay here in Ridgeland.

## 2022-2023 in Review

### Top Visitors by State



### Goals & Tactics FY 2024:

- Provide tourism information and maintain inventory for guests, travelers, and locals
- Provide personal planning assistance using interactive itineraries to engage visitors to stay and dine in Ridgeland
- Fulfill Visitor Center In-Market Services for meetings, events, weddings, and reunions
- Increase Visitor Center foot traffic and check in's using displays to invite guests inside
- Increase hometown ads promoting Ridgeland's Visitor Center Services
- Increase use and awareness of RTC's new location, the Ridgeland Bikeshare Program, and new digital kiosks
- Promote Ridgeland's new brand through selling branded items to travelers
- Assist in creative aspects of new Visitors Center lobby in our new location for 2024

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The marketing and communications team seeks to target specific audiences through print, digital and social media advertising efforts, as well as public relations initiatives, to encourage brand awareness and ultimately drive travel related spending in Ridgeland.

Ridgeland's diverse offerings allow for tremendous opportunities to connect to each unique audience. Beyond highlighting what to do and where to eat, we showcase the valued experiences Ridgeland can offer such as hospitable locals, outdoor activities, and unique attractions and events.

## 2022-2023 in Review

- Welcomed and onboarded new Marketing & Design Specialist Amelia Dalton
- Issued Tourism Recovery Fund II Request for Proposals for advertising agency services and website development and support services. Followed state and federal procurement guidelines award RFPs to four qualified vendors: Foster Relations (Ongoing Fulfillment and Public Relations Campaign), Mad Genius (Creative Services), Tempest (Website), and Godwin Group (Branding and Advertising Campaign)
- Began TRF II program of work through creative asset, CRM and CMS, kiosk, and collateral development. Worked with agencies to capture and develop new creative asset materials and build structure and provide content for new website.
- Oversaw branding elements for new Ridgeland Visitor Center signage as well as software and hardware development of kiosks
- Continued regular advertising placements and asset fulfillment for all Visit Ridgeland and Art, Wine & Wheels print, digital, and broadcast placements
- Successfully marketed website homepage to specific in-state and out-of-state audiences through our partnership with Bound360
- Continued partnership with Tourism Economics to enhance research efforts and better understand our visitors and opportunities for growth
- Implemented strategic marketing messaging to successfully promote city events (Euro Fest, Art, Wine & Wheels)
- Collaborated with Visit Mississippi to secure marketing grants and participate in co-ops with major media outlets and digital marketing agencies
- Continued newsletter communication to our local industry partners
- Hosted travel media and increased public relations strategic efforts



# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS CONTINUED...

## Goals & Tactics FY 2024:

- Launch new branding and reflect changes across all outreach including visitors center, collateral materials, website, advertising, and online presence; Launch extensive branding advertising campaign utilizing RTC and Tourism Recovery Fund marketing dollars
- Continue to populate website with up-to-date information and engaging content, including regular blog posts, current events, and themed itinerary trails
- Cross-promote with stakeholders, industry partners, and paid media
- Continue monthly partner e-newsletter and develop targeted email fulfillment to segmented leads
- Cultivate earned media by hosting travel writers and digital influencers in Ridgeland to create digital content and editorial features
- Host FAM tours for tour operators, travel writers, and content creators
- Continue to successfully allocate tourism recovery funds which will greatly expand our marketing reach; Utilize agencies of record, Visit Mississippi co-op's, Mississippi DMO partnerships, and more to further these funds



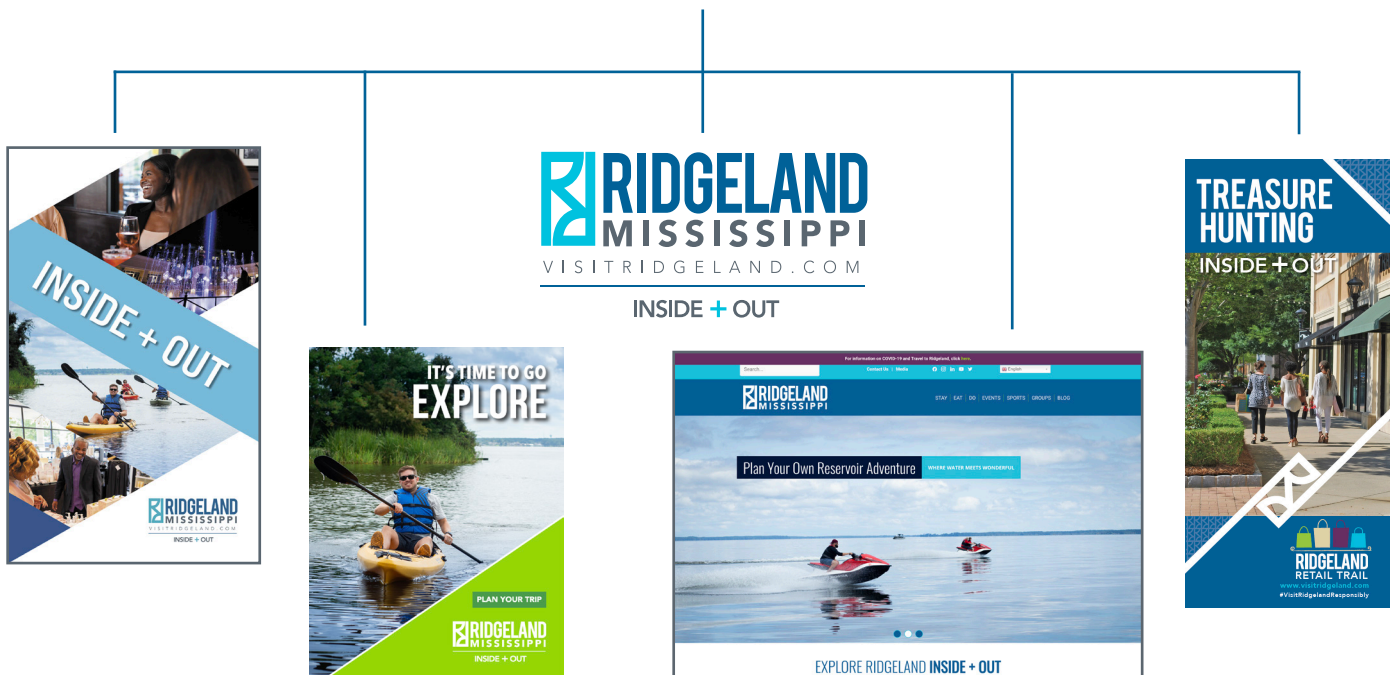
# NEW DEVELOPMENTS COMING SOON

After performing a formal search for a creative agency in spring and summer 2022, Visit Ridgeland contracted with local agency, Mad Genius, to facilitate a rebrand for the organization. Visit Ridgeland then partnered with Mad Genius to host a Brand Fusion workshop on August 15, 2022 to begin this exciting process. The workshop brought together a diverse group of Ridgeland stakeholders, as well as out of state planners, to brainstorm assets, audiences, and more to reveal Visit Ridgeland’s most promising brand opportunities.

The ideas and research gathered from the Brand Fusion workshop were considered to create a new look for Visit Ridgeland. The new brand elements including a logo, brand guidelines, campaign board, and collateral materials have been produced throughout FY23 and will be launched with the new website and advertising campaign in early 2024.

Visit Ridgeland looks forward to finalizing this process and rolling out a new look that represents Ridgeland’s current destination identity in 2024!

## CURRENT ASSETS THAT WILL BE UPDATED TO REFLECT NEW BRANDING



# WHERE YOU'LL SEE RIDGELAND



AT HOME  
MEMPHIS & MID SOUTH

BLUFFS & BAYOUS



Country Roads

COX  
MEDIA

DELTA  
MAGAZINE



GARDEN GUN

GOOD  
HOUSEKEEPING

Google



hm  
hoffmanmedia



Louisiana Life  
MAGAZINE

MADISON COUNTY  
JOURNAL

# WHERE YOU'LL SEE RIDGELAND



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTNERSHIP!



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**BRIDGELAND**  
MISSISSIPPI