



INSIDE + OUT

## MISSION

Advance the economic vitality of tourism in Ridgeland through the promotion and marketing of leisure and business travel, special events, and meetings providing support for the Ridgeland Tourism industry and fostering awareness of the industry's significance to enhance the image and recognition of the City of Ridgeland.

### Ridgeland Tourism Commission FY19 Marketing Plan

To fulfill its mission, the Ridgeland Tourism Commission will work from its FY19 Tourism Marketing Plan. The purpose of the plan is to guide the work of the RTC staff through the fiscal year and provide direction and a focus for all activities. The overall aim of the plan is to increase overnight visitation and tourism spend within Ridgeland. The RTC specific areas of focus to execute the marketing plan to generate overnight stays, generate day visits and support tourism businesses are: Communications & Digital Marketing, Advertising, Sales, Event Partnerships, Administration, and Visitor Services.

As part of its 2018-2019 overall marketing and business strategy, the Ridgeland Tourism Commission will continue to position its new brand "Ridgeland...Inside + Out" to further market Ridgeland Tourism as a destination for active travelers seeking style and substance, where the integration of an outdoor lifestyle with modern, upscale design means whatever you are doing, wherever you engage, a backdrop of beauty and possibility rewards you.

## EVENT PARTNERSHIP AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Assist in coordinating and providing strategy with public and private sector partners to develop, coordinate and enhance events, activities, and tourism projects that increase visitation to Ridgeland.

### **GOAL**

Leverage partners' assets and offerings to broaden Ridgeland Tourism Commission impact of marketing activities and promotions.

### **TACTICS**

- Produce and market the Ridgeland Fine Arts Festival (11<sup>th</sup> year) and produce an inclusive bike event for Art, Wine and Wheels Weekend.
- Collaborate with Visit Mississippi marketing & communications in ways that extend reach and impact in the market.
- Develop shared marketing efforts with the state tourism agency and local partners.
- Develop marketing partnerships focusing on culinary, outdoors, arts and shopping.
- Offer marketing, financial, strategic planning, public relations support and be the liaison to special events held in Ridgeland that have a significant economic impact to the lodging and restaurant industry.
- Work with city officials to encourage and identify potential tourism development opportunities.
- Continue working with the City on tourism product development projects.
- Identify and vet partnership opportunities.

## INDUSTRY RELATIONS and EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

### **GOALS**

- Establish greater awareness of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission and the Ridgeland Tourism Industry as a key economic contributor to the City of Ridgeland and State of Mississippi.
- Provide opportunities for enhancing the tourism educational knowledge of the tourism industry employees and nurturing networking among industry colleagues.
- Formalize educational opportunities as well as ongoing communications resources with partners and stakeholders.

## **TACTICS**

- Hold local tourism partners meetings that provide timely information on RTC marketing and offer opportunities for industry collaboration.
- Organize tourism development workshops to address specific niche sectors/marketing niches. Hotel Packaging, Reunion Seminar Hospitality Champion Program and FAM.
- Continue Ridgeland Hospitality Champions tourism ambassador program that specifically targets front line employees.
- Coordinate with other agencies, organizations and educational institutions on tourism education and training through workshops, Webinars or other methods.
- Coordinate activities with partners during National Travel and Tourism Week May 2018.
- Attend and encourage partner attendance at Mississippi Governor's Conference on Tourism, Southeast Tourism Society and other tourism educational conferences.
- Coordinate and implement the "I'm Visiting Ridgeland" card with hotel, restaurant and retail partners.

## **VISITOR SERVICES**

Provide personalized travel planning assistance to travelers at the Ridgeland Visitors Center six days a week and visitor support for groups. The area also manages the tourism inquiry and fulfillment services of RTC from telephone and electronic mechanisms. This unit provides personalized travel planning assistance to prospective travelers through our inquiry platforms. Visitor Services Specialists respond to consumer inquiries by phone, mail and e-mail. This area handles shipping and receiving functions, fulfillment of requests for travel information, and also coordination of distribution of bulk quantities of travel planning materials to industry partners as required.

## **GOALS**

- Increase visitation to the Ridgeland Visitors Center.
- Gain more exposure for the Visitors Center and Ridgeland.
- Provide a welcoming experience, exceptional service and well-kept visitor center appearance.
- Support overnight stays in Ridgeland and visitation to our attractions and patronage of our dining establishments and retail offerings.

## **TACTICS**

- Facilitate the "Get to Know Ridgeland" Postcard Project with Lodging Partners.
- Provide tourism information to travelers by staffing the Ridgeland Visitor Center.
- Distribute Ridgeland tourism information to local hotels, local partners and event/activity planners.
- Maintain inventory of travel publications and brochures in the center through a network of local tourism and hospitality industry partners.

- Provide customized travel planning information utilizing tourism database and collateral.
- Respond to visitor inquiries.
- Compile reports of visitor inquiries and visitor traffic to RVC.
- Supply Ridgeland information and visitor center information to the MS Welcome Centers.
- Facilitate National Travel and Tourism activities and special promotions' elements.
- Provide up to date information about Ridgeland offerings/products.
- Maintain and keep clean visitor center space.

## COMMUNICATIONS and DIGITAL MARKETING

This area includes communications directed to potential visitors, media and identified partners. Functions include working with the Executive Director, the Communications Director, and contracted Advertising Firm to assist with the overall advertising and marketing plan and developing communication partnerships to extend the reach of the Ridgeland Tourism Commission's advertising and marketing initiatives. The primary markets in the U.S. are in the Southeast including areas such as Monroe, LA; Memphis, TN; Birmingham, AL; Mobile, AL and farther reaching to areas such as St. Louis, MO; Chicago, IL; Dallas/Houston, TX; and Nashville, TN.

Media relations, publications, social media, electronic media including e-blast newsletters and the Visit Ridgeland website, are keys to Ridgeland Tourism Commission communication and marketing. Media relations programs generate positive media coverage of Ridgeland travel opportunities and of the local tourism industry. A series of collateral materials, developed with the assistance of our contracted Advertising/PR Firm, promote Ridgeland destinations and activities. This unit is also responsible for content and facilitation of [www.VisitRidgeland.com](http://www.VisitRidgeland.com) , [www.ridgleandartsfest.com](http://www.ridgleandartsfest.com), Ridgeland Tourism's blog and all social media platforms.

A roll of the Communication area is to maintain the extensive database of accommodations, attractions, and events information that is the foundation of the travel website.

### Advertising

Ridgeland Tourism will continue with traditional and digital advertising tactics as set by the Executive Director, with the Communications Director, and contracted Advertising Firm to promote awareness of Ridgeland, MS as a travel destination, taking advantage of media partnerships and industry cooperative opportunities to achieve the following marketing goals:

- Increase visitation
- Increase website traffic
- Increase inquiries
- Increase e-newsletter subscriptions and/or social media followers
- Increase partnership opportunities
- Increase destination awareness levels

## **TACTICS**

- All television, radio, print, digital and outdoor advertising and media relations will be planned and executed through the *Advertising Plan of Work* by the Executive Director, with the Communications Director, and contracted Advertising/PR Firm.
  - 2018-2019 will continue to focus on the newly adopted brand categorizing the messages into Reveal, Flavor, Adventure, and adding a call to action.

## **INTERACTIVE / ONLINE MARKETING**

Ridgeland Tourism's website, [www.VisitRidgeland.com](http://www.VisitRidgeland.com) is the primary online information source Ridgeland Tourism provides for consumers. All Ridgeland Tourism advertising and publications direct consumers to this site, and search engine optimization further drives consumers to the site for travel information. Increasingly, Ridgeland Tourism is also communicating through various social media sites.

Ridgeland Tourism marketing efforts rely heavily on comprehensive, detailed information on accommodations, attractions, destinations and events contained in electronic databases.

## **TACTICS**

Website: [www.VisitRidgeland.com](http://www.VisitRidgeland.com)

- Continue to upgrade [visitridgeland.com](http://visitridgeland.com) to promote and create awareness of the Ridgeland Tourism brand.
- Generate interest in the site through PR promotion with appropriate media and through digital marketing through social channels.
- Provide timely news, travel ideas, and appealing photography to generate interest in traveling in Ridgeland.
- Provide detailed information for planning trips, including lodging, events, attractions, and accommodation deals.
- Continue to offer e-newsletters and electronic versions of publications.
- Continue optimizing the website (content, tags, etc.) to raise rankings on search engines.
- Optimize the website (content, tags, etc.) to raise rankings on search engines.
- Increase consumer engagement.
- Engage local businesses to link to the [www.VisitRidgeland.com](http://www.VisitRidgeland.com) website to increase Web traffic.
- Maintain relationships to ensure lodging and attractions with links are updated and listed on our website.
- Increase consumer participation through social sharing features (upload video, pictures, "like" buttons, etc.).

- Enhance blog posts and relevant information in a timely manner.

## DIGITAL MARKETING

### GOALS

- Establish sizeable online databases of self-identified brand advocates who can authentically showcase Visit Ridgeland.
- Establish relationships with social media influencers to increase Visit Ridgeland's visibility, engagement and following.
- Increase interest and engagement by providing an online community where locals and visitors can interact with the brand and other advocates.
- Help followers gain a better understanding of the region by consistently posting blogs to a followers blog page on [www.visitridgeland.com](http://www.visitridgeland.com).
- Expand the reach of brand messages by capitalizing on the viral nature of social media.
- Collect information such as email and home addresses for e-newsletter and other marketing opportunities and demographic research.
- Drive traffic to [www.visitridgeland.com](http://www.visitridgeland.com) by including valuable links and calls to action in social media content.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

### TACTICS

- Use Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Google My Business, Snapchat and Instagram to distribute timely marketing messages. Integrate these formats to present consistent message, increase engagement and drive consumers to the website.
- Utilize social media platforms and digital marketing tools to target niche markets through various seasonal promotions.
- Create and maintain a social media posting schedule. Research platforms to assist in multiple-format posting.
- Boost and promote posts when applicable as part of the advertising schedule.
- Further explore marketing opportunities such as cross promotions on social sites with partners.
- Attend continuing education forums to learn about new trends in social media.

## FACEBOOK

- Live video
  - Cover live tourism related events.
- Post frequently
  - Consistently post to ensure that we stay top-of-mind in our followers' feed.
- Visually appealing content
  - Capture our own or partner with local photographers to share eye-catching content. Feature Ridgeland tourism partners to share more about what they do, which will assist them, but also gives visitors comfort in seeing everyone who makes it work.
- Paid social media
  - Continue investing in paid social media to increase engagement, following, visibility and traffic. Also incorporate more call to action items.
- Be responsive to questions and encourage engagement.
- Facebook exclusive offers
  - Offering Facebook only contests/giveaways to drive traffic.
  - Cross-promoting the contests across other channels to increase engagement.

## TWITTER

- Tweet, retweet frequently.
  - Tweet multiple times a week & retweet relevant content.
- Listen & respond to all relevant posts.
- Utilize hashtags.
  - Use trending and popular hashtags to engage in conversations with large audiences.
- Visually appealing content
  - Continue to partner with local photographers to share eye-catching content. Also encourage user generated photos.
- Share different aspects of website on Twitter, including blogs, itineraries and events.
- Paid social media
  - Test using paid social media will increase engagement, following, visibility and traffic to our website.
- Twitter exclusive offers
  - Consider Twitter only contests/giveaways to drive traffic to our webpage.
  - Cross-promote potential contests across other channels to increase engagement.

## **INSTAGRAM**

- Consistent aesthetics
  - Attract potential followers. High-quality photos garner the most engagement.
- Locations
  - Tag locations allowing users to easily find photos when searching a particular area.
- Hashtags
  - Great way to gain visibility by potential followers.
- User generated content
  - Posting images taken by others builds relationships and showcases Ridgeland authentically.
- Work with influencers.
  - Travel influencers will inform their audiences about Visit Ridgeland, and encourage them to follow us for more information.
- Paid social posts
  - Use paid social media to increase engagement, following, visibility and traffic to our website.
- Instagram exclusive offers
  - Offer Instagram only contests/giveaways will drive traffic to our page.
  - Cross-promote the contests across other channels will increase engagement.

## **SNAPCHAT**

- Create frame for events as identified.

## **PINTEREST**

- Cross-promote content.
  - Way to promote our website, blog and other social media sites.
- Place boards.
  - Boards tagged with locations, allowing users to view pins based on a specific location.

## **YOU TUBE**

- Post authentic videos.
  - Video can be used to showcase our destination.
  - This content can also be shared on our website.
- Content for other social platforms



- YouTube videos are easily shared across other social media platforms, such as Twitter and Pinterest.

## **INFLUENCERS**

- Cultivate and engage *Local brand advocates*– locals who talk favorably about Ridgeland and pass on positive messages about the region to other people.
  - Having locals contribute to our blog and social media sites will build an authentic relationship to showcase our destination from a unique point of view.
- Cultivate and engage *Travel influencers*– individuals with vast reach and power to inspire others in their network.
  - Travel influencers contributing to our blog and social media sites will greatly spread the word about the Visit Ridgeland.
- Cultivate and engage *Industry experts*.
  - Having industry experts write a blog or contribute to our social sites will increase visibility and credibility in niche markets. (i.e.—chefs, retailers, cyclists, etc.). Featuring them in videos is also helpful.

## **MEDIA / PUBLIC RELATIONS**

The media/public relations program is designed to position Ridgeland Tourism favorably in local, regional and national media. Ridgeland Tourism Commission works to generate coverage of Ridgeland, MS as a travel destination in print, electronic and broadcast media. Public relations and media relations efforts will focus on priority content segments – culinary, lifestyle and nature-based offerings. Pitching efforts will focus on general travel, shopping, dining, outdoors and a variety of other stories angles crafted for Ridgeland.

### **GOALS**

- Secure earned coverage in lifestyle, travel, culinary and outdoor publications through proactive pitching and reactive opportunities bringing greater awareness to Ridgeland as a point of travel.
- Generate positive travel, entertainment and news stories from key targeted media in the following categories: Culinary, Lifestyle and Outdoors.
- Continue to foster relationships with media representatives: local, regional and national.

### **TACTICS**

- Host 2-5 media visits in the fiscal year.

- Build relationships with influencers in the area.
- Actively pitch stories related to the region based on trends in the travel/lifestyle space.
- Continue to research appropriate writers and reporters before proactively pitching and vigorously vetting reactive opportunities.
- Expand coverage of tourism's importance to the local and state economy by regularly communicating to the news media about business developments, research and trends related to tourism.
- Provide timely, compelling editorial ideas and related information to travel writers and editors.
- Increase media access to information about Ridgeland travel topics through online resources on a media-focused Web site.
- Send regular broadcast e-mail press releases to established media contacts.
- Maintain already established database of media partners and opportunities.
- Craft monthly press releases based on a 6-12 month identified PR/editorial calendar.

## SALES PROGRAM

### OVERVIEW

The overall sales program goal is to establish and maintain new tourism opportunities for the Ridgeland hospitality industry and to service the existing activities with potential for growth.

The overall potential tourism market will be divided into the following segments:

1. Small Meetings/Associations
2. Leisure Group Travel
3. Leisure Consumer
4. Outdoor/Sports

As with any successful sales campaign, the product must meet the needs of the consumer. In order to market to these different segments, an appropriate travel package must be researched, developed and then promoted.

### GOALS

- Define our offerings to the different market segments.
- Design an appropriate and functional itinerary and informational piece for each segment.
- Educate the hospitality partners on RTC role in tourism and the economic impact on the community.

- Educate and engage the local community about RTC and the impact of tourism on the local economy.
- Communicate regularly with the Director of Communications to inform about upcoming opportunities and promote on the website.
- Increase the use of social media as a sales tool to these markets.
- Personal Education - participate in educational conferences.
- Networking through Rotary International and Professional Women’s Association
- Capitalize on community industry partnerships to generate “backyard” leads.
- Utilize Simpleview software to better monitor communications and sales activity.
- Advise and supervise Sales and Marketing Associate in group travel and meeting sales.

## LEISURE/CONSUMER DEVELOPMENT

Build upon the communication and marketing strategies to increase leisure consumer visitation to Ridgeland through its offerings of dining, shopping and outdoors.

### TACTICS

- Develop digital and printed correspondence to be sent periodically to prospective travelers in Mississippi and feeder cities. Utilize any acquired database.
- Promote the Retail Trail of Ridgeland through seasonal packages with hotels.
- Promote the Ridgeland Fine Arts Festival (Art, Wine and Wheels Weekend) through advertising and direct mail to target markets. Work with Ridgeland hotels and restaurants to develop a weekend packages.
- Engage partners to offer “packages” for the leisure traveler.
- Work with the Barnett Reservoir Foundation to attract visitors to local events hosted by the Foundation.
- Seek consumer trade show opportunities in target markets to promote Ridgeland to the leisure consumer traveler.
  - Attend the Southern Women’s Show-Memphis in March Participate with Visit Mississippi in the Travel Adventure Show.

## GROUP TRAVEL TRADE

The group travel segment includes Professional Tour Operators, Group Leaders, Sports Teams or any other special event or interest driven organizations that offer planned or special charter motor coach or fly/drive tours for groups.

### **GOAL**

To increase the number of Ridgeland overnight stays and stop-over group travel visits by promoting the use of Ridgeland hotels, restaurants, attractions and shopping outlets to all segments of the group travel industry.

### **TACTICS**

- Update and promote current suggested tour itineraries to appeal to a wide variety of groups. Drive group leader to the website for up-to-date calendar of events.
- Pursue the Professional Tour Operator segment through participation in the Travel South, Tennessee Motorcoach Association, South Central Motorcoach Association and Alabama Motorcoach Association. Research other group tour appointment-based opportunities.
- Pursue the group travel planner sector through participation in the Spotlight on the Southeast annual marketplace.
- Direct mail/email all potential appointments in above mentioned marketplace to maximize opportunities and better appointment schedule. A “gift”, letter and business card will be mailed to each contact prior to or following marketplace.
- Follow up on all appointments held during each marketplace and maintain database via Simpleview CRM program.
- Utilize opportunities for group travel FAM tours offered by the Mississippi Division of Tourism or any other organization when participation could result in future groups.
- Pursue all group tour leads from the Mississippi Division of Tourism/Visit Mississippi or any other qualified source including, but not limited to, Welcome Center Motorcoach Report.
- Participate in any “out of market” or local sales mission offered by Visit Mississippi, MS Tourism Association, Ridgeland hotels, or any other qualified MS travel promotion agency.
- Facilitate the leads system by vetting and forwarding all relevant leads received to Ridgeland hotels and restaurants.

- Co-op with VisitMississippi in hosting 2019 TMCA Conference in Biloxi.
- Co-op with VisitJackson to secure SCMA Conference in 2020.

## MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

Ridgeland has limited venues with the square footage necessary to conduct mid to large size conferences. Existing hotel meeting facilities in are in demand and conferences agreeable to off-site venues are few. Target market would be board meetings, educational meetings and small association meetings.

Build a strong target list for groups that fit the footprint for meetings and conferences in Ridgeland. Produce a semi-annual newsletter (e-blast) updating the database on Ridgeland activities and incentives.

### GOAL

To maximize the use and generate room/space demand of all available meeting space in hotels, restaurants, and non-traditional meeting sites by promoting Ridgeland as an affordable, convenient location for board meetings, seminars, training sessions, and other small meetings.

### TACTICS

- Maintain membership and actively participate in the MS Society of Association Executives.
- Send sales letter and coordinate regular meetings with state associations, educational institutions, and other qualified groups whose meeting criteria match what Ridgeland has to offer. Update Meeting Planners Guide as needed.
- Service the needs of event coordinators/meeting planners in search of a site in Ridgeland.
- Expand the local community's awareness of Ridgeland as a meeting site through various advertising mediums and involvement within the community.
- Maintain communication with meeting venues to discuss current needs of meeting planners.
- Produce an updated "lost business" report for future development activity strategy.

- Build a strong target list for groups that fit the footprint for meetings and conferences in Ridgeland. Produce a semi-annual newsletter (e-blast) updating the database on Ridgeland activities and incentives.

## OUTDOOR AND SPORTS

Ridgeland is fortunate to have the Natchez Trace Parkway, the Barnett Reservoir, a multi-use trail and excellent tennis, baseball and softball facilities available for outdoor recreation and sports.

### GOAL

Increase the number of sporting events and activities held in Ridgeland. Support new outdoor/sports events and competitions that drive visitors/participants to utilize the lodging and restaurants in Ridgeland.

### TACTICS

- Maintain a relationship with the Ridgeland Recreation and Parks, Ridgeland Tennis Center and Barnett Reservoir Foundation in support of events and encourage growth of these events to include more out of town participants.
- Continue sponsorships and tracking of room nights for successful sporting events/competitions in Ridgeland.
- Maintain and enhance the relationship with Mississippi High School Athletic Association and attend annual Athletic Director's Conference.
- Promote and support cycling/walking/fishing events on the Natchez Trace, multi-use trail, Mountain Bike Trails, BMX Track and Barnett Reservoir utilizing local resources for guides, rentals and information.
- Contact cycling organizations to promote the Natchez Trace and Multi-Use Trails. Develop itinerary for "cycling" tourist with access to hotels.
- Educate, identify and recognize bike friendly stakeholders.
- Support the City of Ridgeland's efforts towards Silver Certification by the American League of Cyclists.
- Continue to organize, promote, and increase participation in Cycling event at AW & W.

- Develop a direct mail piece to encourage the leisure traveler to utilize the outdoor resources available.
- Attend the National Bicycling Tourism Conference and Bicycle Tour and Travel Conference.
- Continue discussions with the City/Choctaw Nation/Natchez Trace Parkway to install detailed signage on the Multi-Purpose Trail.
- Identify those partners in outdoor/sports events and educate them on the services available to them from the RTC.
- Provide support for Magnolia Crappie Club Classic Championship in 2019.
- Research and attend a sports marketing conference that enhances Ridgeland's visibility as a sports destination.
- Build a more extensive target list for cycling groups and continue support to cycling tour groups such as Adventure Cycling.