

SUMTER COUNTY

TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2025



INTRODUCTION

Sumter County is a beautiful natural landscape of lakes, rivers, forests, farms and preserves close to the corridors of Interstate 75, US Highway 301, SR 50, and Florida's Turnpike and an hour drive from either Orlando or Tampa. This geographic location, coupled with its features and activities, offers a market to draw visitors traveling in and through Central Florida. The Villages® community is the internationally recognized leader of an age-restricted development, predominantly in Sumter County but spanning two additional counties. Sumter County also hosts with pride and honor historic battlefields and features the second most visited veteran cemetery, the Florida National Cemetery. Complimentary to this history and places of honor, is the 62 mile long Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway and its relevance to the future Coast to Coast Trail and its spur to the historic and developing City of Webster.

BACKGROUND

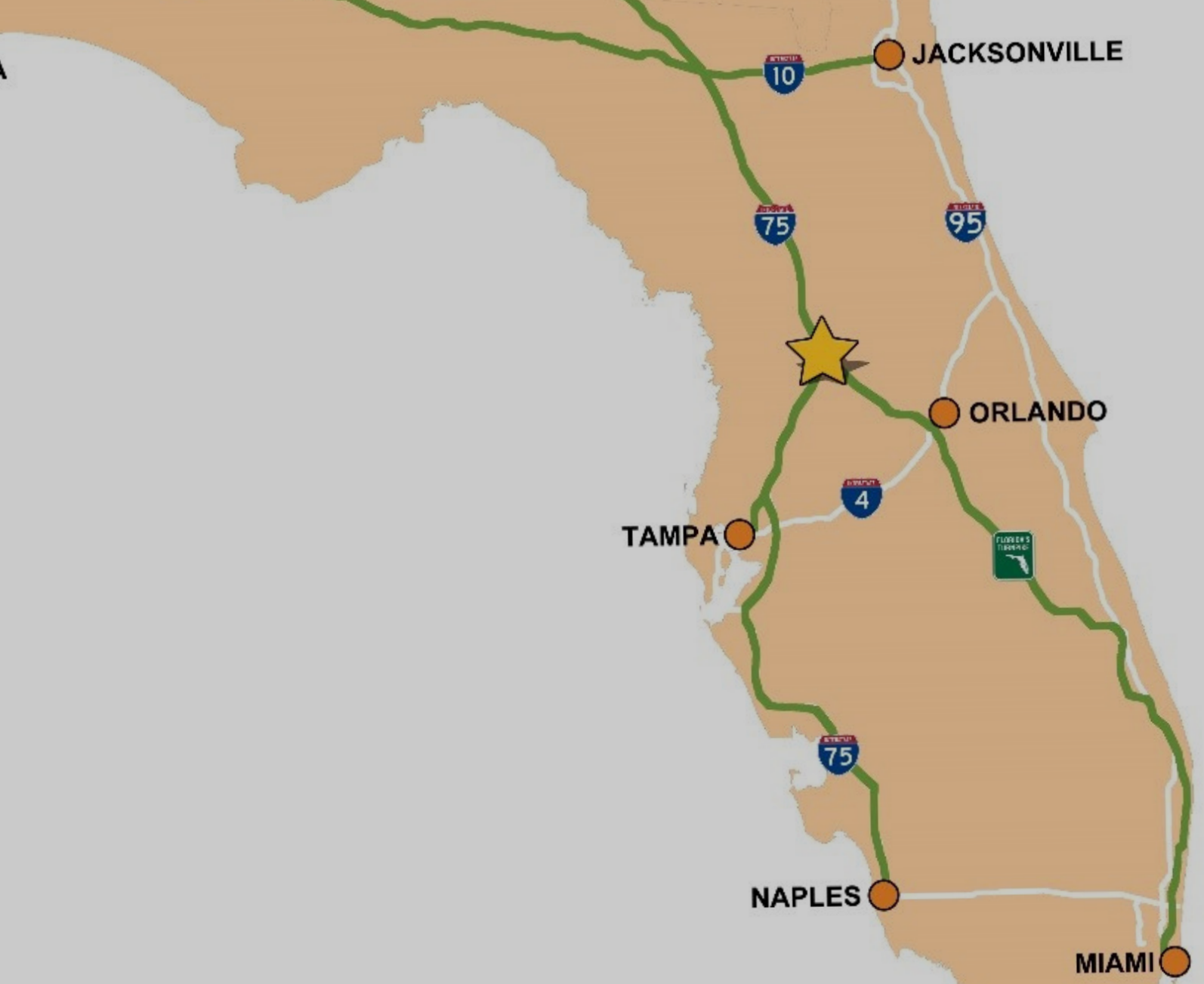
The Sumter County Tourism strategy focuses primarily on promoting existing events and facilities for their growth in attracting visitors. The Villages® community has a wide variety of excellent events and superbly maintained facilities that draw both in-state, national and international visitors.

Ecotourism and agritourism continue to be growing tourism segments of the Florida marketplace. Sumter County has a unique opportunity to recognize these segments with other facilities and attractions for a successful regional visitor program. The history, culture, festivals, special events and recreational facilities of the area, highlighted by ecotourism and agritourism programs, enhance the unique draw of The Villages® community.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Sumter County supports the private and non-profit investments in expanding and development of venues to improve its position as a recurring destination.

The support is concentrated on maintaining the tourism website and development of other promotional platforms to share the venues and events offered in Sumter County and to encourage visits to more than one venue or event, increasing the length of stay of the visitors.



LOCATION

Sumter County is a dynamic combination of assets. It is a beautiful landscape with lakes, rivers, numerous parks and preserves bisected by winding tree-shaded roads traversing farm and cattle raising properties. It is also a unique collection of communities including The Villages® community, Wildwood, Bushnell, Coleman, Webster, and Center Hill.

Sumter County is uniquely positioned at major intersections of roads and rail in Central Florida. Its long frontage on Interstate 75, U.S. Highway 301, and Florida's Turnpike bring thousands of potential visitors through the county each day. Sumter County is equidistant from Orlando and Tampa, about one hour's drive from each. Highway access within Sumter County is convenient and direct.



SUMTER COUNTY'S MAIN ATTRACTIONS

A GROUP OF UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

The Villages® development is one of the most successful planned retirement communities in the United States filled with premier golf courses, outstanding entertainment events, and diverse retail and restaurant offerings. The Villages® community already has a wide and effective marketing outreach that minimizes the need for broad tourism marketing expenditures by Sumter County. Identifying and promoting events and facilities in the other unique areas of the county can significantly increase “day trippers” and “overnight stay” visitors. Sumter County also offers rural charm in cities like Webster, home to one of the oldest cattle auction and largest continuous flea markets in the country.

A RICH NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WITH PROXIMITY TO MAJOR URBAN AREAS

Sumter County offers several potential ecotourism possibilities, from the mysteries of Green Swamp to the big bass of Lake Panasoffkee to long winding scenic roads. Fishing, kayaking/canoeing, biking, walking/hiking, camping, bird watching, sightseeing, hunting and other outdoor activities are all regional attractions located in Sumter County.

A SPECIAL PLACE IN AMERICAN REMEMBRANCE AND HISTORY

The Florida National Cemetery, Dade Battlefield Park, and sites along the Florida Seminole Wars Heritage Trail offer rich historic and cultural visitor attractions. Visitors can also find markers and monuments throughout the county memorializing historical locations and important figures.

AN ACTIVE COLLECTION OF WORKING FARMS AND CATTLE RANCHES

Sumter County offers urban visitors direct connections to agricultural experiences including a wide variety of homegrown and home-raised products.



SCENIC SUMTER HERITAGE BYWAY

The roads that comprise the Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway traverse pastoral farmlands, cattle ranches, and horse farms. The corridor passes through several of the most attractive small country towns in the region and travels through the lush hardwood hammock and floodplain parklands that are part of the Withlacoochee Watershed.

BYWAY ATTRACTIONS INCLUDE:

1. RUTLAND PARK
2. MARSH BEND OUTLET PARK
3. HISTORIC PANA VISTA LODGE
4. SHADY BROOK GREENWAY PARK
5. HISTORIC SUMTER COUNTY COURTHOUSE
6. DADE BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC STATE PARK
7. FLORIDA NATIONAL CEMETERY
8. SUMTER COUNTY FARMERS MARKET
9. RICHLOAM WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
10. FLORIDA BASS CONSERVATION CENTER
11. GENERAL JAMES VAN FLEET STATE TRAIL
12. SUMTER COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS



STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In 2015, Sumter County installed wayfinding signage on all main county roads to assist residents and visitors in finding tourism attractions and facilities. This has been a great addition to the overall visitor experience in the county. Additional signage and updates to the existing signage are being implemented in 2023 with coordination with The Villages® community to ensure accuracy of the naming and directions to these venues.



Activities

- Maintain the Sumter County tourism logo, branding and theme—Discover Sumter.
- Maintain a compelling, intuitive and interactive website containing very current information about events and activities, stakeholder facilities, lodging locations and unique visitation possibilities:
www.DiscoverSumterFL.com
- Maintain QR code maps with the main attractions in the county for tourists.
- Populate a calendar database with tourism-related events data.
- Coordinate the Coast-to-Coast Trail and Webster Spur into the tourism promotion upon the completion of their construction.