



**Embrace Whidbey & Camano Islands
Board Meeting Minutes
December 7, 2023
Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce and Virtual Via Zoom**

Committee Members

Jackie Henderson, Town of Coupeville, Chair
Inge Morascini, Langley Chamber, Vice Chair
Lynda Eccles, Coupeville Chamber, Secretary
Chet Ross, Freeland Chamber
Bryan Stucky, Oak Harbor City Council
Sharon Sappington, EDC
Magi Aguilar, Oak Harbor Chamber
Katie Grindon, Clinton Chamber

Creative Team

Sherrye Wyatt, Embrace PR & Marketing Manager
Scott Rosenkranz, Embrace Graphic Design/Branding
Jack Penland, Embrace Digital Marketing/Website/Data/Content Creation
Vicki Graham, Embrace Regenerative Places Program
Laura Hilton, Film Liaison/Special Projects

Guests

Rainy Simpson
Emily Wandres
Marie Shimada
Jacqueline (no last name shown)

Call to Order

Chair Jackie Henderson called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. and established that there was a quorum.

Adoption of Agenda

Chair Jackie Henderson asked if there were any changes or additions to the Dec. 7 agenda. There were none, so the agenda was approved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chair Jackie Henderson asked if there were any changes to the Nov. 2 meeting minutes. There were none, so the meeting minutes were approved.

Public Comment

Chair Jackie Henderson asked if there was anyone from the public present who wished to make a comment. No one responded.

Approval of Two Batches of Invoices

Chair Jackie Henderson asked if there were any questions on the invoices as presented, which included two batches: Nov 17, 2023: \$3,375.00 (for 2024) and Nov. 21, 2023 for \$90,398. There being no questions. Chet Ross moved to approve the invoices and Inge Morascini seconded the motion. The board approved and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

There was no Treasurers Report.

Business Report

Chair Jackie Henderson provided updates on the following:

- Elections for new officers will take place at the February 2024 meeting. She encouraged everyone to consider serving as an officer. Under the current Interlocal Agreement only an elected official may serve as chair.
- The Interlocal Agreement will be reviewed early in 2024 and new recommendations for amendments will be shared with all of the signatory partners for their consideration (Island County, City of Oak Harbor, Town of Coupeville and City of Langley) Included in that will be Amendment No. 4 provided by the City of Oak Harbor to increase their annual contribution in 2024 from \$20,000 to \$50,000. Jackie asked committee members to take some time to review interlocal agreement for other changes and provide them to her.
- The RFP process (Request For Proposals) for all of the contracted Creative Team positions had been advertised. All qualified candidates will be interviewed on Dec. 13-15 virtually by the selection committee.

Creative Team

(full report included in Board Packet)

Sherrye reviewed content from the written Creative Team Report including news that the Port of Seattle which had approved the grant report and was sending the full \$10,000. Jack and Scott also explained how the Port project included a targeted animated digital advertising campaign "Keep it Real, Keep it Cool" utilizing Datafy to reach Arizona residents who matched a specific profile. Another component was work Erin did with a targeted media outreach to influencers and travel writers focused on regenerative and experiential storytelling. Writers traveled to the islands and provided tremendous national and international coverage. In both the data and media outreach, positive results will continue at least through 2024.

Sherrye also mentioned plans to renew the Cascade Loop membership/advertising package as well as a short contract with Certified Folder to keep momentum going. In early Spring, her replacement should be able to make recommendation to the committee for further distribution through Certified Folder of Embrace's current regenerative travel magazine and map. The Trails Guide and Cultural and Heritage guide are only distributed "by hand" through the visitor centers and other local partners (and not through Certified Folder).

Sherrye urged the committee to become much more engaged with the Island County LTAC committee as there are several vacancies and they have tremendous influence and are in need of education about the purpose of granting LTAC funds. The county and cities' four advisory committees serve a vital role in the combined distribution and overall impact of LTAC funds which are collected by lodgings throughout Island County. With a more coordinated effort led by

Embrace, there could be a deeper, richer and more impactful program in the future that would benefit everyone.

Jack and Diane Penland touched on the data provided in their monthly report and explained the variety of data reports they currently run and the access they have by utilizing a number of tools we currently purchase through Simpleview, AirDNA and Datafy. In the spirit of providing the most streamlined and valuable data, they proposed exploring new ways to share data that would be the most equitable and regenerative. They are looking into developing a plan to track the LTAC grant winners so this information could be shared with municipalities who award the grants as well as the grant recipients. This new priority aligns with the desire for high quality data by both local policymakers and nonprofit organizations. This would also help Jack and Diane determine how best to use their time and resources so the workload and results are the most efficient and manageable.

Scott Rosenkrantz reported on current graphic design projects including the Cultural and Heritage Guide and recent advertising.

Laura Hilton reported her work with several potential film projects and reworking content for the Cultural Heritage Guide.

Chamber Roundtable Reports

- Oak Harbor: Had over 10 ribbon cuttings for new businesses and are making plans for 2024 as well as holding holiday events and the New Year's Eve fireworks.
- Coupeville and Langley: They are working together on a new holiday gift guide which includes a printed piece and broadcast advertising to the Seattle area market.
- Freeland: Chet Ross announced this was his last meeting having served on the committee for nearly 20 years. He read a letter recapping some of the accomplishments and thanking various committee and Creative Team members. Angela Muniz will replace him full time as the committee member, and Freeland Chamber President.

Special Farewell and Thank You

This was Sherrye Wyatt's last meeting who has served as PR/Marketing Manager contractor for the committee since 2010. Chambers of Commerce representatives, Board Members, the Creative Team and guests made presentations and provided a cake and gifts as a gesture of gratitude. She is leaving to begin a new position at Washington Filmworks as Rural Economic Development Manager.

Next Meeting

Next meeting is Jan. 4, 2024 at 11 a.m. with the location and virtual option to be determined.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 1 p.m. Special thank you to the Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce for providing the meeting room, virtual capability and lunch.

Minutes submitted by
Sherrye Wyatt

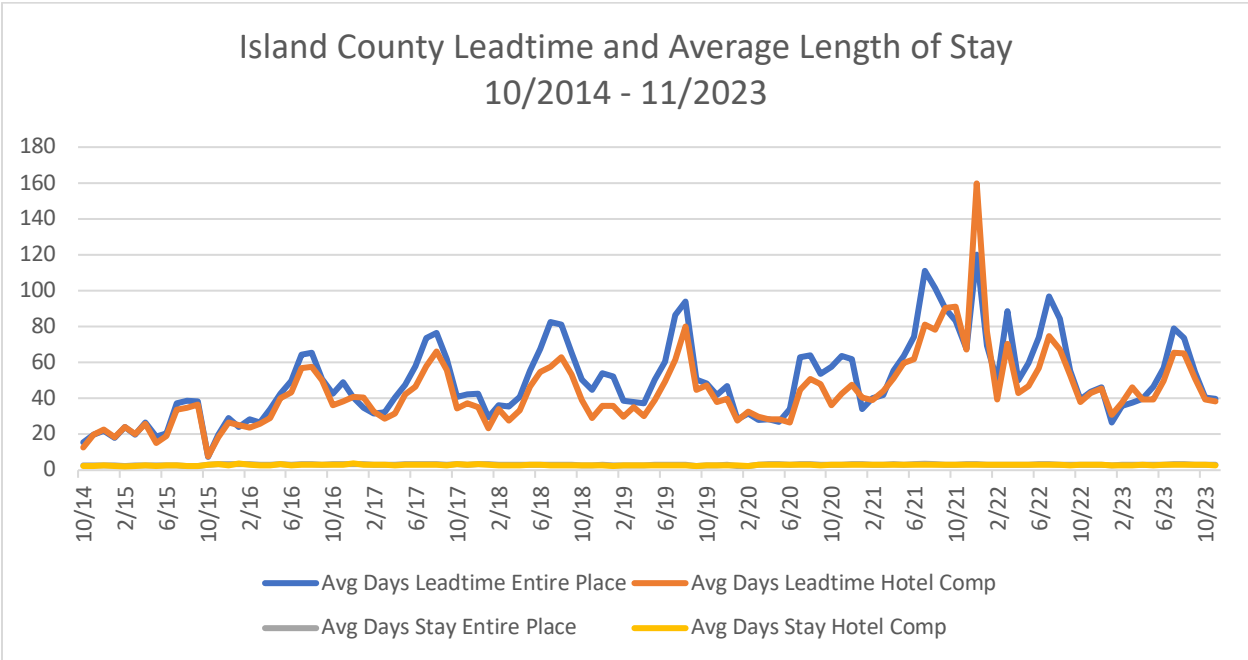
December Digital Report

Executive Summary

- Visitation has decreased over the past year for both entire home and hotel comparable rentals.
- The Transformational Travel Advertising Campaign shows mixed results.
- Datafy has added a feature that allows us to know the zip codes with the highest spending and the share of spending.
- We met with Magi and shared Oak Harbor specific data.

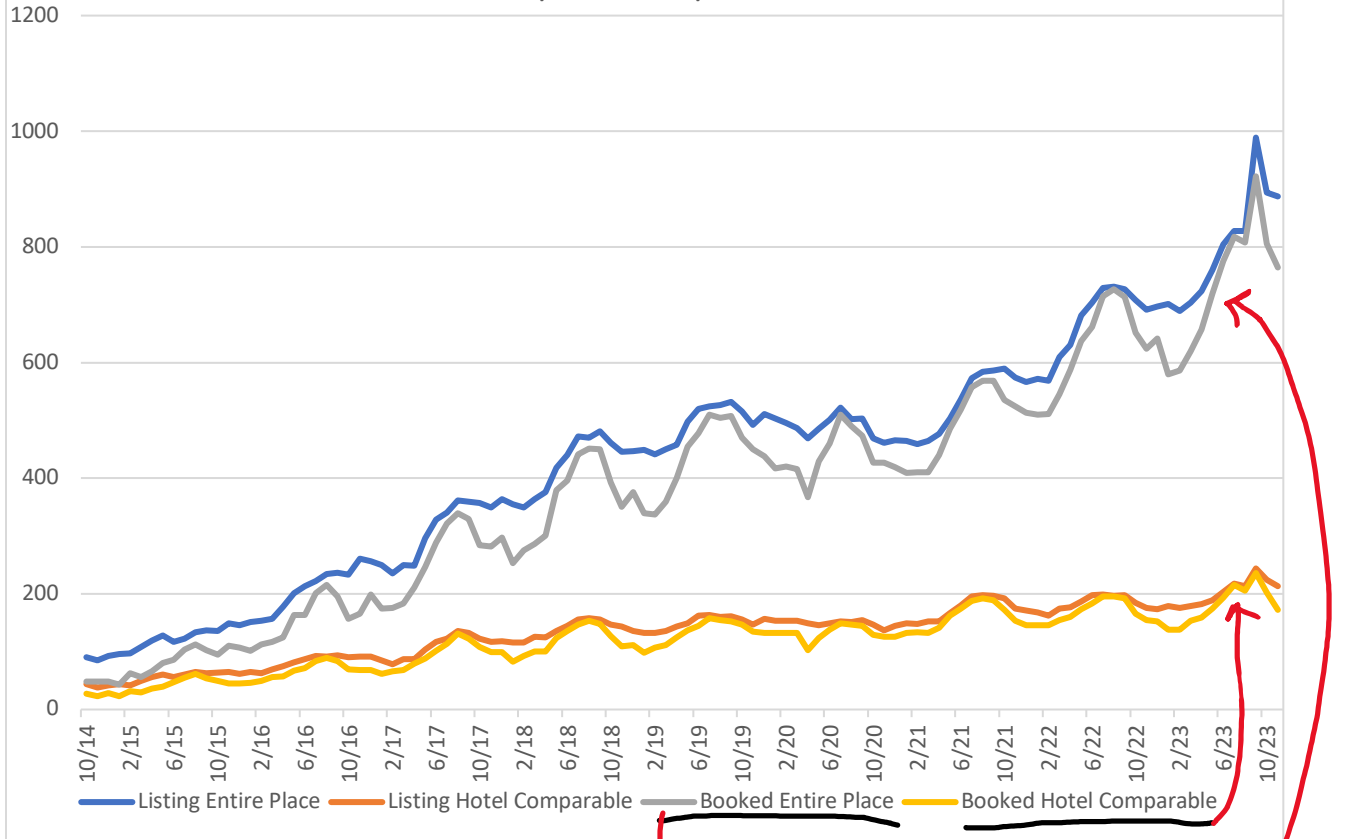
Visitation Update (Pace Report from AirDNA)

AirDNA gathers and reports data on Short-Term Rentals (STRs). There has been a sense that visitation has declined over the past year. Looking at AirDNA’s data, the Leadtime visitors take to make reservations gives us the definitive answer that, “yes, Leadtime has declined”, especially for hotel comparable rentals. The end of 2021 and into early 2022 shows the greatest increase in Leadtime for both hotel comparable and entire house rentals. But, does this translate into less bookings and fewer visitors to Island County?

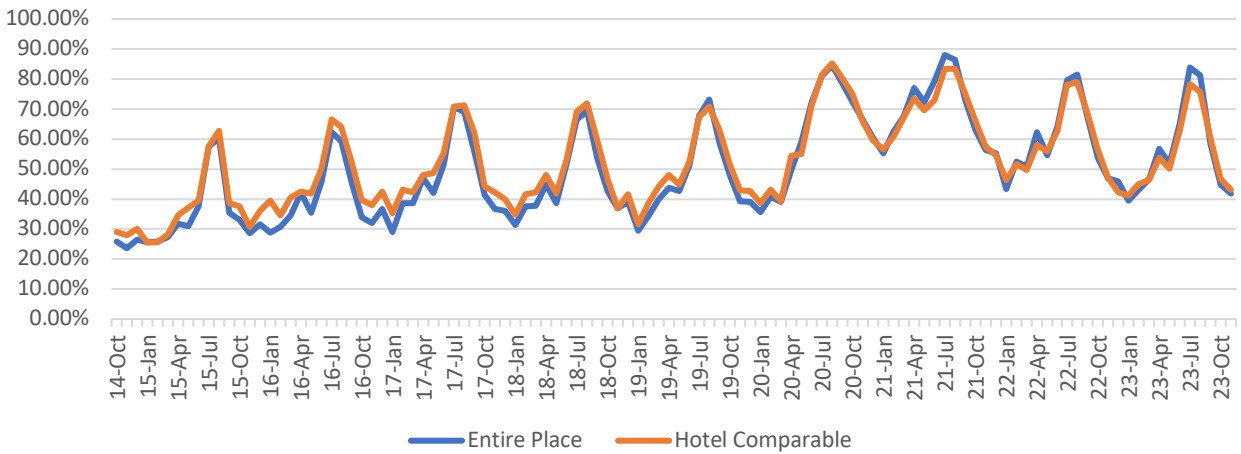


A review of the data for available rentals shows steady increases in the numbers for both entire homes and hotel comparable rentals. While the number of bookings has remained fairly even over the past 4 years, there was an increase in booking for Summer 2023 and Fall 2023. As per trend data, Fall begins to slow down with November showing a decided decrease in bookings. Interestingly, September has the greatest number of bookings to date (for as long as we have data to help track these data) for both entire homes and hotel comparable rentals.

Island County Available Listings and Bookings 10/2014 - 11/2023



Island County Occupancy Rate 10/2014 - 11/2023



When we view the Special Hotel/Motel Tax data from Washington State Department of Revenue, it tells us a different story.

Island County	
2023	\$912,974.84
2022	\$1,034,103.01
2021	\$973,321.27
2020	\$623,105.84
2019	\$670,043.69

Remembering we don't have data for December 2023, we see increases for every year except 2020, the year the pandemic started and we were required to shelter in place. Toward the end of 2020, people started to figure out how to travel and remain in their "bubbles"; renting entire homes increased and has stayed high since the end of 2020. December 2022 had revenue of \$71,105.44. If we make the assumption Island County will generate a similar amount for December 2023, that raises our yearly total to approximately \$984,080.28, a little less than 2022, which was a banner year for Island County tourism, and above 2021, which saw a sharp increase in tourism revenue.

Transformational Travel (Phoenix) Campaign Update

The Transformational Travel advertising campaign occurred from July 7th through August 31st in the Phoenix/Prescott DMA. Data reported from Datafy are collected from devices that view the campaign in the DMA and show activity in the location indicated by the campaign. In this case, that means people who saw the ad in the Phoenix/Prescott DMA and came to Island County with that same device would show as an active visitor who is counted by Datafy as a positive indicator of the success of the campaign. As hypothesized, the campaign continues to show positive growth. The Return on Advertising Spend (ROAS) has increased from \$8.02 : \$1.00 as reported on 11/11/2023 to \$11.57 : \$1.00 through 12/2/2023.

Transformational Travel Campaign

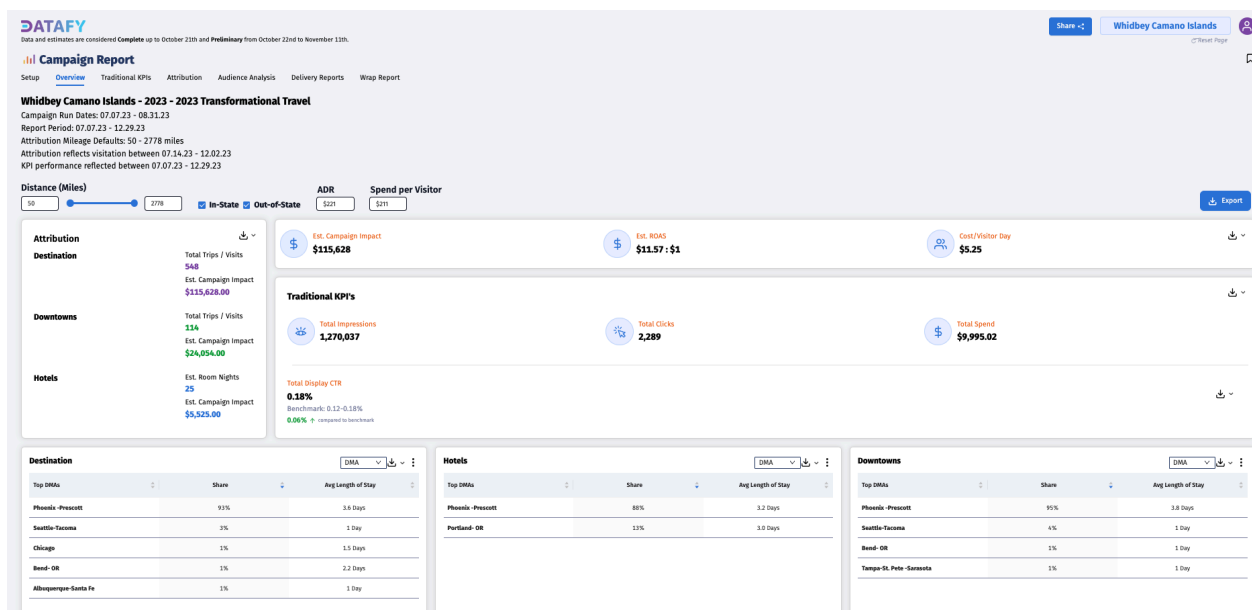
Campaign Dates: 7/7/2023 - 8/31/2023

- Spend = \$9664.57 (\$10,000 Budgeted)

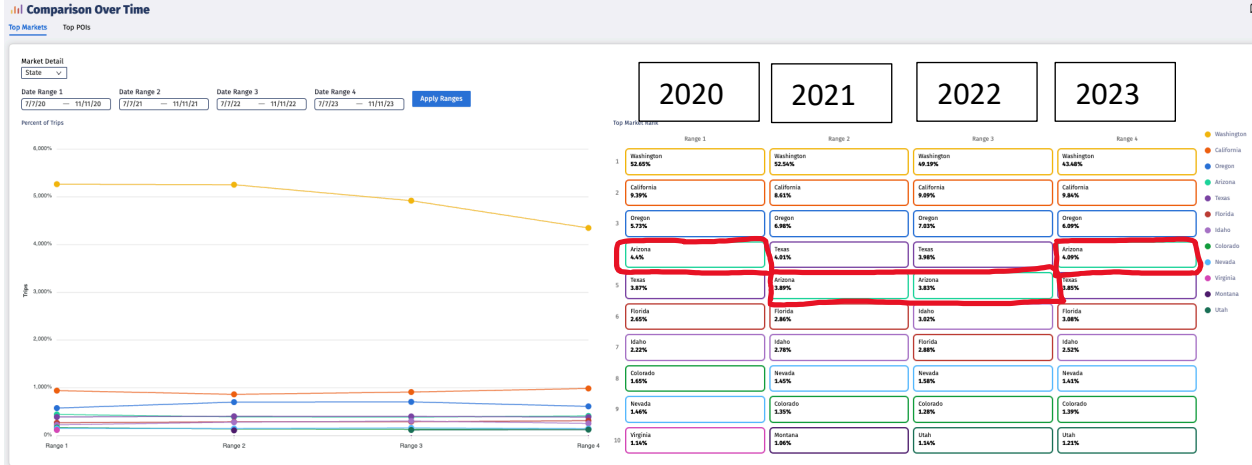
	8/12/2023	9/30/2023	11/11/2023	12/30/2023	Sept. Change	Oct. Change	Nov. Change
Estimated ad Impact	\$6,752.00	\$18,990.00	\$80,180.00	\$115,628.00	↑ \$12,238	↑ \$61,190.00	↑ \$35,448
Return on Ad Spend (ROAs)	\$0.70:\$1	\$1.90:\$1	\$8.02:\$1.00	\$11.57:\$1.00	↑ \$1.10:\$1	↑ \$6.12:\$1.00	↑ \$3.55:\$1.00
Travel Days	32	451	1,361	1,902	↑ 419 days	↑ 910 days	↑ 541 days

Average Visitor Days	3.8 days	5.0	3.6	3.5	↑ 1.2 days	↓ 1.4 days	↓ 0.1 days
Total Impressions	1,225,508	1,270,037	1,270,037	1,270,037	↑ 44,529	No Change	No Change
Total Clicks	2,234	2,289	2,289	2,289	↑ 55	No Change	No Change

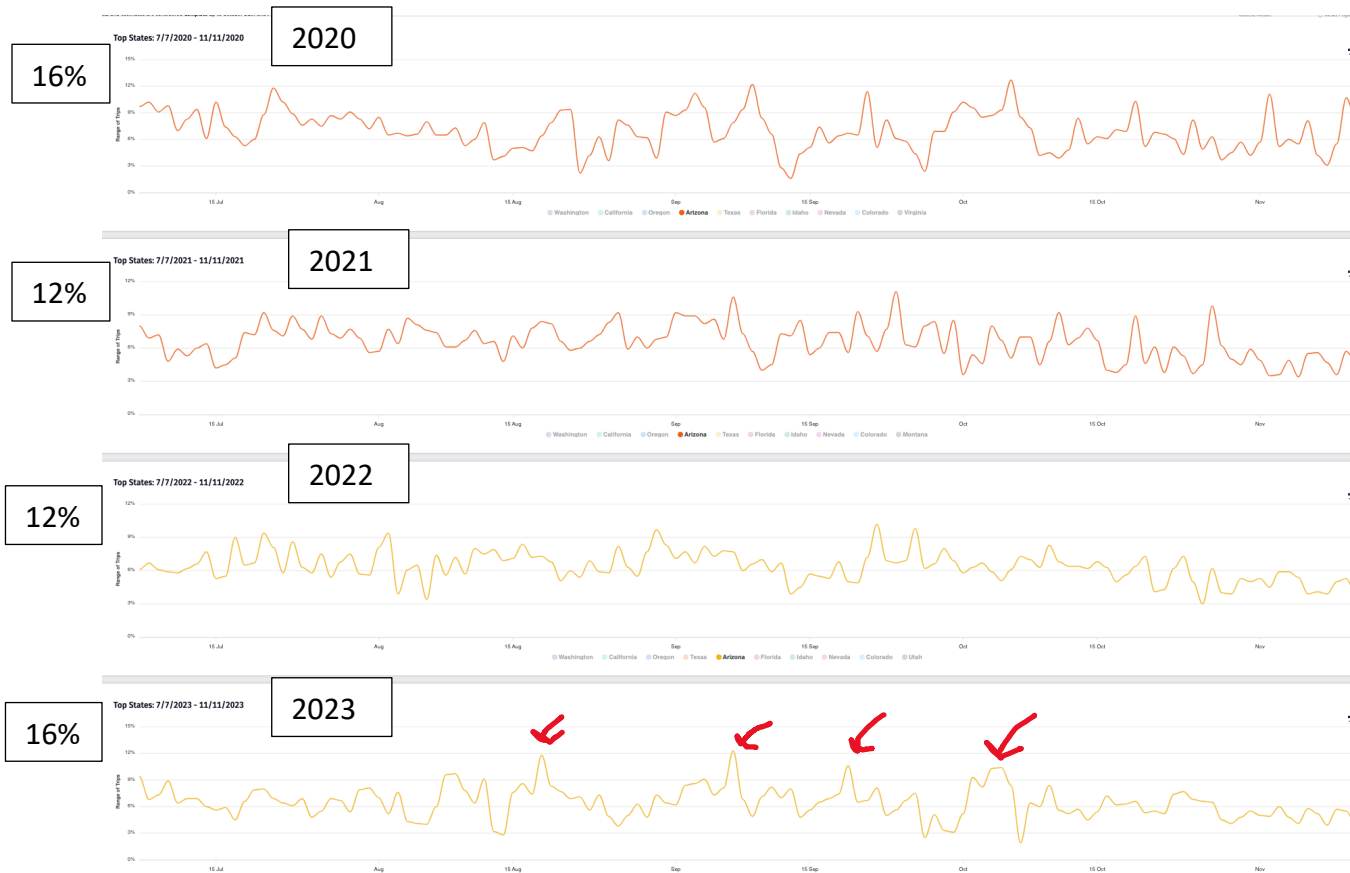
It is possible to assume travelers who go longer distances to a location need additional time to plan for those trips. If we look at this graph, this seems to be true.



However, when we compare the same dates over a 4-year period, there is no significant difference in the percentage of visitors coming from Arizona. I looked at 7/7 of each year as the starting date as that was the first day of our advertising campaign. Data were collected through 11/11 of each year as we only have data to 11/11 for 2023. If we take a deeper dive into the data, we see that July and August of 2023 had fewer visitors from Arizona than previous years. Where we start to see an increase is later in the Fall when visitation from Arizona goes up to into the 9% to 12% range. Previous years were more in the 6% to 9% range. Additionally, after two years of dropping to 5th place, Arizona rose to 4th place in 2023.

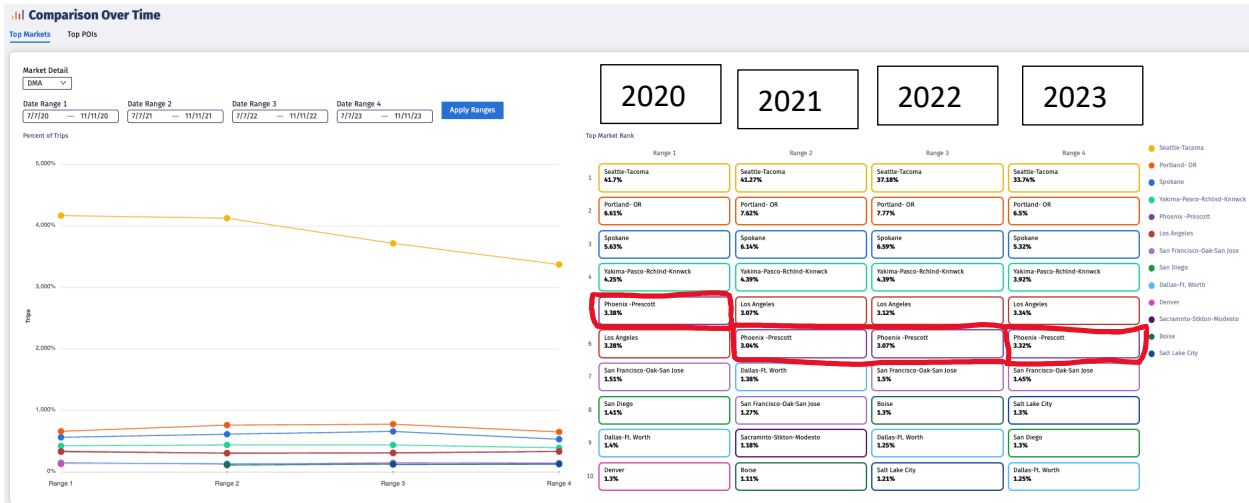


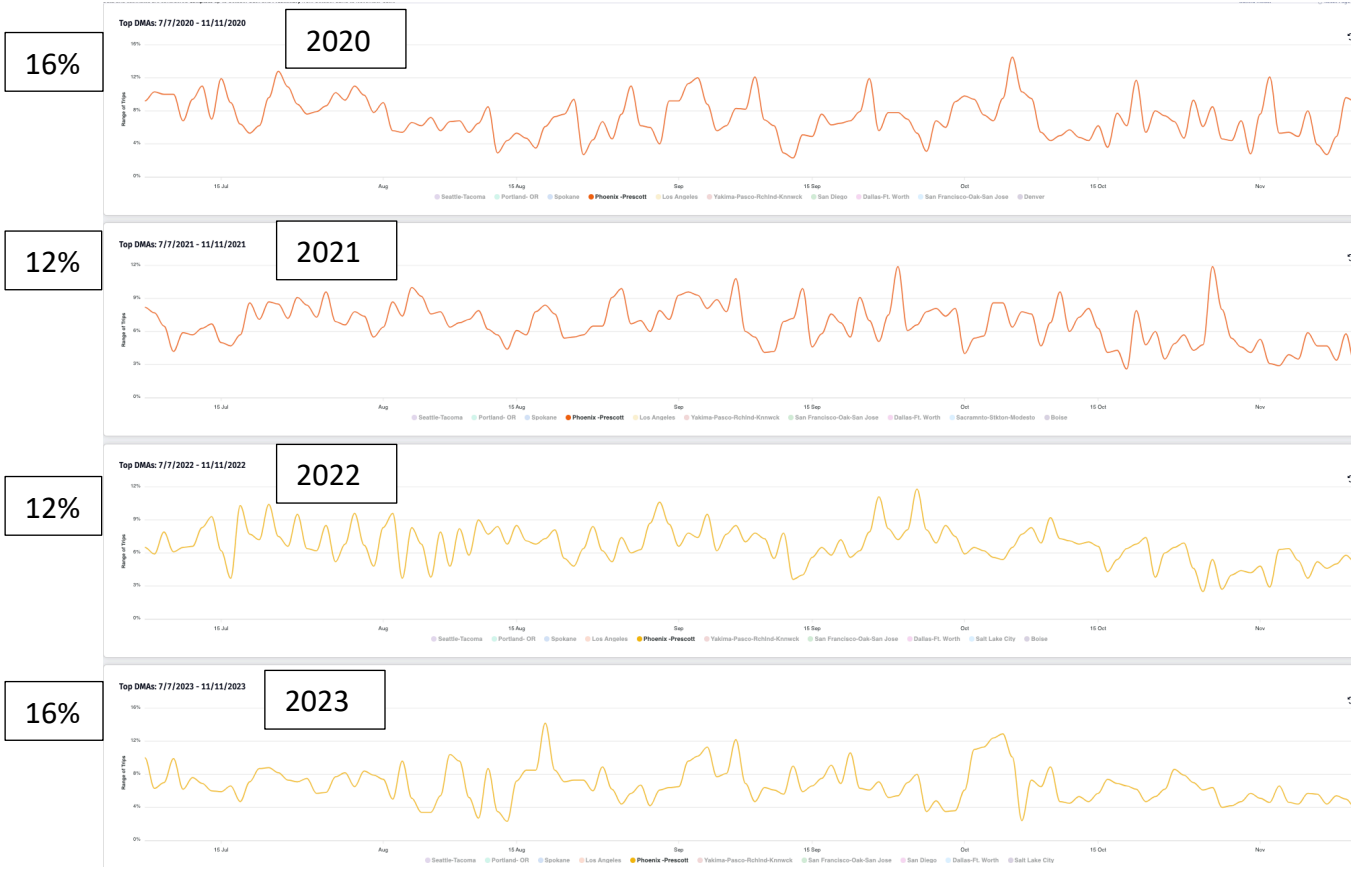
When you look at the graphs for each year, please note that each graph starts with different percentages depending on the percentage of visitors during that year. Some graphs have 16% as the highest level and some have 12% as the highest level. This can be deceptive and lead to misinterpretation of these data.



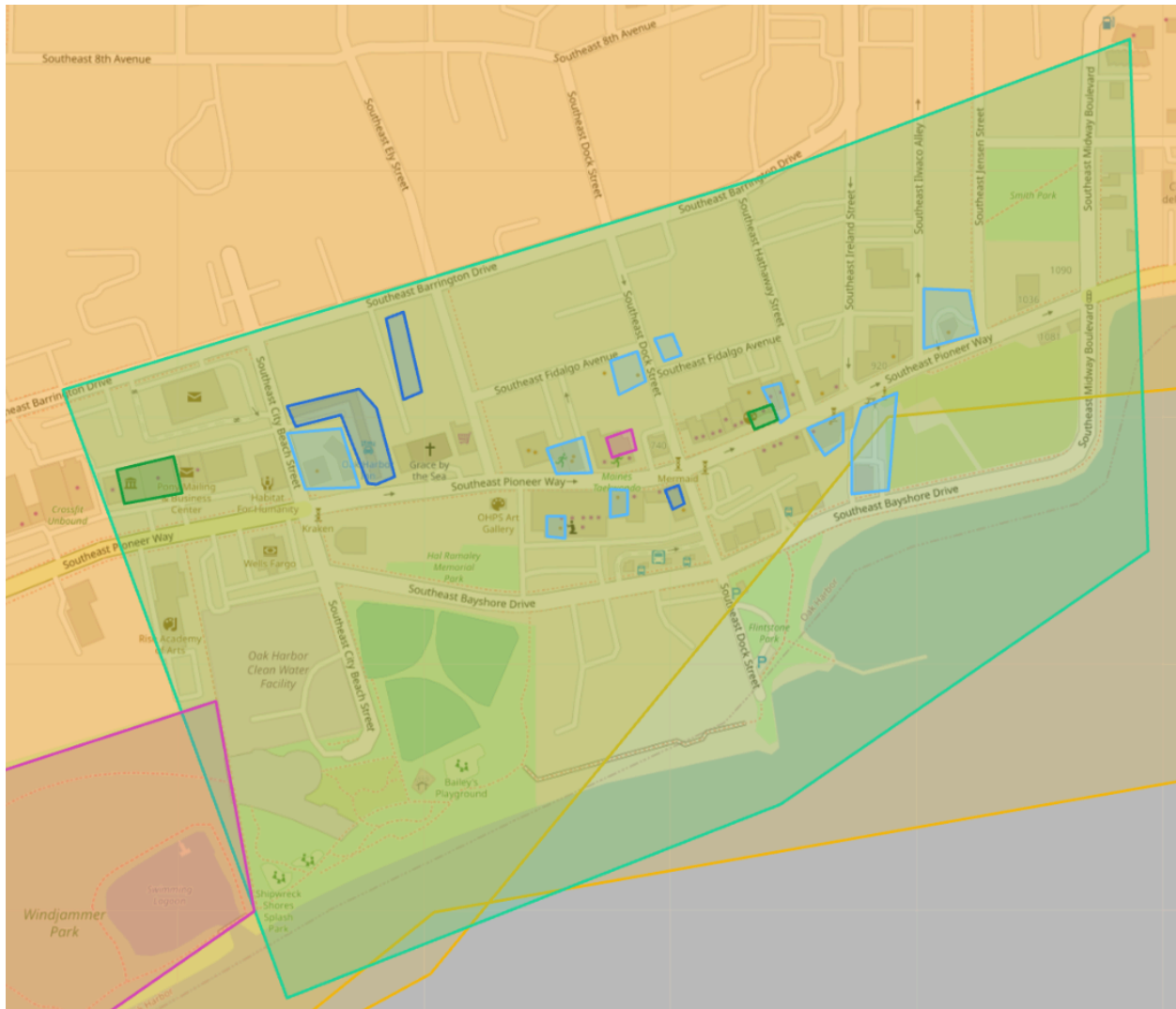
Another way to look at the data is to review the DMA data. Again, I used the same date ranges for the reasons explained above. If we look at the range of dates for the DMA, we don't see any statistical significance in terms of percentage of visitors from the Phoenix/Prescott DMA.

The change comes when we break down the months visitors came to Island County each year. Again, we see an increase in Fall visitation from the Phoenix/Prescott DMA. The outlier is 2020 when Island County saw a huge increase in visitation (possibly due to the ability of visitors to rent entire homes and maintain their “bubbles” as we experienced officials curbing national and international travel).





Additionally, we can now see exactly where within the DMA visitors live and the length of their visits to Island County. This gives us opportunities to target specific cities for future advertising campaigns.



Downtown Oak Harbor Polygon

The 4th of July Celebration had 1,752 unique visitors making 6,033 trips. There were significantly more visitors to downtown Oak Harbor in 2023 than 2022 (6.3k vs. 4.6k). The greatest number of visitors were in downtown Oak Harbor from 4 pm to Midnight. As Magi mentioned, this might make a difference in hours the downtown businesses decide to remain open during such events.

Fixes and Updates

The approximately 200 blog posts on the website have now been rewritten in Gutenberg. To recap, we have a couple of WordPress plugins that conflict with each other, and it's keeping us from updating the site and creating some wonky behavior.

It gave us a chance to update the copy, eliminating references to closed businesses, mentioning new businesses, and so forth. A handful of posts were eliminated as being outdated. Many of

those were specific to the pandemic and social distancing. The topics are still valid, and new posts will appear soon.

The next part, rewriting the main pages, will be done both by Jack and our developer/super tech geek, Michael Bourne. Each page will be built on our development site, and then sometime in February, they'll be copied over to the live site.

Website Traffic as measured by Google Analytics

Year	December Users
2023	16,653
2022	15,111
2021	15,626
2020	20,780
2019	15,793

In 2023, Google started counting users differently and increased the amount of time someone was on a site before they counted as a user. Momentic marketing has a useful explanation here:

<https://momenticmarketing.com/blog/ga4-users-vs-ua-users>

The fact that we didn't see a major drop-off in our traffic is a good sign. In fact, as measured by Cloudflare, a service we use to speed up our website, we had 22.15K visits in December.

Website Operation

In the previous report, I said I'd include in this report a series of explanations behind how the "Embrace" website is run. In the first segment, I explained how it was necessary to make website content as complete and authoritative as possible, something in journalism that we call "own the story." That attitude has allowed us to fare well with Google searches and attract people to the site.

But what "story" do you own? Data can guide us.

First, it can tell us what on our site is popular with the audience. Using Google Analytics, we learned that our ten most popular pages in December were:

1. The Home Page
2. Things to Do
3. Jets on Whidbey
4. How to get to Whidbey Island
5. Holiday Events, Performances
6. Coupeville - The home of Practical Magic

7. Lodging
8. Greenbank Farm Holiday Market
9. Insider's Hints - Taking the ferry
10. Food and Drink

Google's Search Tool can tell us the top 5000 search terms that bring people to the site. The top 15 are:

1. Whidbey Island
2. Where was Practical Magic filmed
3. Coupeville
4. Greenbank farm
5. Deception Pass
6. Whidbey Island Washington
7. Double Bluff Beach
8. Coupeville WA
9. How to get to Whidbey Island
10. Whidbey Island
11. Camano island
12. Whidbey Island Bagel Factory
13. Whidbey Island ferry
14. Oak Harbor
15. Whidbey island events

But what about the competition? In this case, what about other websites offering information about Whidbey and/or Camano Islands? We're aware of other sites, but how strong are they, and what are they doing right?

Using a web service called Similarweb (free version), I entered our main website URL along with others that present information about Whidbey and/or Camano Islands.

Using that information, we'll be making some updates to the site that I'll report on in future reports.

Stories to Read


Is it Regenerative Tourism or just hype?

<https://www.frommers.com/trip-ideas/cultural-immersion/what-is-regenerative-travel-and-how-can-you-make-sure-its-not-hype>

Responsible Travel Tips.

<https://www.intrepidtravel.com/adventures/responsible-travel-tips/>

	Vendor	Date	Invoice#	Amount	2023 Bills Invoices on December 15, 2023
5007381	ComputerPIX LLC	12/15/23	23-23	\$7,784.50	Analytics, Content Creation, Newsletter, Research, Website Maintenance, Video, Calendar, Social Media
5007381	ComputerPIX LLC	12/15/23	23-24	\$495.06	Platforms, Subscriptions for Digital Marketing and Management of Content
	Langley Chamber of Commerce	12/14/23	2017-13494	\$1,000.00	Back Cover Advertising in Holiday Shopping Guide (w/Coupeville Chamber of Commerce too)
5007383	Laura Hilton	12/15/23	2312	\$5,600.00	Research, Film Requests, Writing, Regenerative Places Support, Photography
	Laura Hilton	12/15/23	1223	\$163.09	Mileage and Expenses
	Osborne Northwest PR	12/11/23	2601	\$1,500.00	Monthly Contract for Instagram
	Osborne Northwest PR	12/11/23	2600	\$4,500.00	Monthly Contract for Media Relations
5004220	Rosenkranz Productions	12/15/23	3253	\$2,600.00	Monthly Contract for Design Services
5005663	Sherrye Wyatt Public Relations & Writing	12/15/23	121523	\$9,000.00	Monthly Contract for Consulting Services
5005663	Sherrye Wyatt Public Relations & Writing	12/15/23	121523E	\$756.46	Expenses & Mileage
	SIP Publishing	12/11/23	12752-W	\$1,350.00	Special Discounted Advertising – Digital and Social
	Sound Publishing	11/30/23	80116040	\$1,141.20	Sound Edge Monthly Contract Advertising Special
	Sound Publishing	11/30/23	8122710	\$149.25	Classified Advertising for RFPs
	Vicki Graham	12/15/23	0007	\$1,400.00	Monthly Work on Embrace - Regenerative Support
	TOTAL			\$37,439.56	

 Whidbey and Camano ISLANDS Washington State - USA	Vendor	Date	Invoice#	Amount	2024 Bills Invoices on December 15, 2023
	A Ok Storage	12/14/23	2024	\$1,500.00	Premium Storage Unit at Discounted Price for 2024
	Cascade Loop	12/6/23	24-023	\$5,979.00	Media Rich Membership for 2024 - Gold Package including Full Page Ad, Online Listing, Social, Digital Newslette4
	Certified Folder				Jan-Mar 2024 Map and Magazine Distribution and Storage
	Pride Journeys	12/12/23	2023	\$395.00	Featured Listing on Website for 2024
	Transformational Travel Council	12/13/23	5B4C26 26-0008	\$750.00	TTC Ally Membership for 2024 for Embrace Whidbey and Camano Islands
	TOTAL			\$8,624.00	