

A Year-Round Destination

An Interview with Victoria Cimino, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Williamsburg

EDITORS' NOTE Victoria Cimino is Chief Executive Officer of the Williamsburg Tourism Council, providing expertise, leadership, and vision in all marketing efforts, as well as overall management of the destination marketing organization. Cimino has spent the majority of her professional career providing communication solutions, counsel, and creative direction to both government agencies and private sector organizations. Most recently, she served as Director of the New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism. Under Cimino's leadership, the Division experienced an increased ROI on brand advertising from 10:1 to 14:1, direct visitor spending increased by four percent, and Rooms and Meals tax revenue increased by 15 percent (FY2015-18). Cimino has served as the Director of International Marketing for the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism and her background includes work with New York City-based Redpoint Marketing PR and Boston-based Connelly Partners. Cimino earned her undergraduate degree from Keene State College.



Victoria Cimino

DESTINATION BRIEF Greater Williamsburg, Virginia (visitwilliamsburg.com) and its three distinct regions – Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown – are home to some of the most significant events in American history. Recognized as one of the world's top 52 Places to Go in 2019 by The New York Times, the region is home to attractions that include amusement parks, haunted house tours, golfing, and cycling across scenic landscapes. Many travelers visit for the unique opportunity to experience life as it was in the 18th century. Greater Williamsburg offers a variety of outdoor activities from biking, hiking, Segway tours and zip lining to golf, schooner sails, and paddle boarding and kayaking on the James and York Rivers. The destination also offers adult activities perfect for romance, relaxation and a girls-or-guys getaway. There's no shortage of things to do from fine dining, breweries, distilleries, wineries, museums, and relaxing spas. Being easily accessible by car from many East Coast cities, Greater Williamsburg is an ideal road trip destination.

Will you provide an overview of the Williamsburg Tourism Council and how you define its mission?

The Williamsburg Tourism Council, or Visit Williamsburg, was created by statute and went live on July 1, 2018. The destination marketing organization's primary objective is to increase overnight visitation to the Historic Triangle, a travel region comprised of three municipalities – City of Williamsburg, York County, and James City County.

How has Williamsburg adapted to the challenges caused by the pandemic and how is Williamsburg positioned for growth as you look to the future?

When COVID-19 was declared a national emergency, Visit Williamsburg quickly shifted its focus to serve as a hospitality industry information hub, sharing COVID-related information and resources. In June, Visit Williamsburg launched the \$7.6 million "Life. At Your Pace." advertising campaign to reignite the region's marketing presence, grow and enhance brand awareness, and facilitate consumer engagement.

The March 2021 Smith Travel Research Report shows the area achieved 35 percent hotel occupancy (versus 45 percent in 2019) with an average daily rate of \$114 (versus \$109 in 2019). Considering group, business, and international travel has yet to rebound, this is an incredibly positive indicator.

How do you describe the Williamsburg difference and what makes Williamsburg special?

Williamsburg is a year-round destination that caters to a host of individual tastes by providing a tailored vacation, with multiple museums, craft breweries, culinary offerings, shopping, amusement parks, cultural experiences, golf, sailing, and more for visitors of all ages.

Is Williamsburg well-understood from a tourism standpoint and how are you working to build awareness and visibility for Williamsburg?

In 2019, the region played host to 1.5 million overnight visitors. Through Adara, we're able to measure if someone has clicked on a digital display ad and then gone on to search or book lodging. The "Life. At Your Pace." campaign has driven more than 945,000 website sessions, 86,000 hotel searches, and 2,700 bookings resulting in \$840,000 in hotel revenue since January 1, 2021.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead the Williamsburg Tourism Council and made you feel it was the right fit?

The opportunity to call on my experience in both government and the private sector to build a brand new destination marketing organization from the ground up, coupled with the challenge of reinvigorating visitation to the region, is what drew me to the position.



A family at Historic Jamestowne

How critical has it been to build out the team at the Williamsburg Tourism Council?

Building out a team that drives the organization's business goals was crucial. When you compare Visit Williamsburg to DMOs with comparable budgets, we're a very lean team – partly due to COVID, but also by design. The Visit Williamsburg team is a competent, well-rounded group of professionals with diverse backgrounds, selected to play a key role in growing overnight visitation.

What are your key priorities for the Williamsburg Tourism Council to help Williamsburg recover and rebuild from the pandemic?

Tourism is a significant contributor to the region's economy and Visit Williamsburg will maintain an aggressive promotional strategy to increase overnight visitation to the area. ●