



## **Library of 2024 Legislative Advocacy Elevator Speech Scripts**

The following is a library of speech scripts that can be used by Destinations Florida members or other tourism industry stakeholders at meetings taking place with legislative members. The scripts cover a number of issues, including the value of local tourism promotion, the need to preserve the current uses of Tourist Development Taxes, the origins of Tourist Development Taxes, and last year's legislation that threatened to restrict and alter Visit Florida while extracting Tourist Development Tax revenue to Tallahassee to fund Visit Florida. Read aloud, each script is nearly two minutes long. Members can choose to use a speech script that best suits their particular need at the time and/or speech scripts can be spread among different speakers who are planning to address different subject matter at the same meeting or event.

## **SCRIPT 1: LOCAL TOURISM PROMOTION AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAXES**

While Visit Florida does an excellent job promoting the State of Florida in general as a travel destination, local communities must do their own travel promotion in order to attract visitors to their particular part of Florida. Each Florida community is unique and has its own unique travel assets. It is up to our local tourism promotion organization to tell our story to potential visitors and explain why this is where in Florida they should plan to come.

As our community's tourism ambassador, [INSERT DMO NAME], promotes our community as an attractive travel destination and packages information potential visitors are looking for about our destination – area sites and attractions, hotels, restaurants and shopping – into one place under one brand. Local tourism promotion organizations also have the know-how to effectively promote their communities. In [INSERT COUNTY NAME] County, [INSERT DMO NAME] has identified the types of visitors most likely to come here and the markets they are coming from so very targeted marketing and advertising campaigns can be deployed that will bring visitors to the area. And, they share their expertise, resources and connections with tourism-reliant businesses throughout our community.

Local tourism promotion is a function that funds itself. Tourist Development Taxes were established to ensure counties would always have a dedicated funding source for local tourism promotion. Residents do not pay these taxes. Instead, they are paid by visitors in order to attract more visitors. They are taxes added to visitors' overnight stays at hotels and vacation rentals.

The Florida Legislature passed a state law that would allow counties to levy Tourist Development Taxes and local voters then approved them through a countywide referendum. It is critical to maintain the current uses of these taxes for local tourism promotion efforts so we can continue to bring jobs and revenue into the county thanks to the visitors we attract here.

## **SCRIPT 2: PRESERVING TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAXES**

Tourist Development Taxes were established for one purpose – to ensure our county had dedicated funding set aside for the tourism promotion efforts necessary to create and sustain jobs in our community and to generate the revenue that pays for critical services residents rely on, such as public safety, education, infrastructure and environmental programs. These are taxes that are not paid by residents of our community, but instead by visitors to the area. It is essential that we preserve the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes so we can continue to attract the visitors who not only pay for this “seed” money to attract more visitors, but to also reap the benefits of the local sales tax revenue they generate and the jobs they create.

Funding for tourism promotion is critical to the vibrancy of our state and local economies. Florida's tourism industry was responsible for welcoming 137.6 million visitors in 2022, the highest number of visitors in the state's history. Each of those visitors brought jobs and revenue to our state and local community. In 2021, Florida visitors contributed \$101.9 billion to Florida's economy and supported more than 1.7 million Florida jobs.

To maintain these record-breaking results, it is crucial that we support Florida's and our community's tourism promotion efforts by preserving the uses of Tourist Development Taxes.

### **SCRIPT 3: PURPOSE/ORIGINS OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAXES**

Tourist Development Taxes were created so there would always be money earmarked for our county to engage in tourism promotion efforts that ultimately bring jobs and local revenue into the community. Sometimes referred to as “bed taxes,” Tourist Development Taxes are collected on any unit rented or leased for six months or less, including hotels and vacation rentals. Here in [INSERT COUNTY NAME] County, overnight guests at these properties pay a [INSERT LOCAL TDT TAX RATE] percent tax per night that is then reinvested into programs to attract more visitors to our community.

The hotel and lodging industry volunteered to have these taxes levied on themselves so there would be a dedicated revenue stream for local tourism promotion with the single purpose of maintaining and growing visitation levels to the area. At the request of Florida hoteliers, the Florida Legislature passed a state law that would allow counties to levy Tourist Development Taxes. Local voters then approved Tourist Development Taxes through a countywide referendum.

Tourist Development Taxes are primarily intended for use on local tourism promotion, construction of tourist-related facilities and beach and shoreline maintenance. None of the tax dollars are distributed to the lodging industry. Your local tourism promotion organization, [INSERT DMO NAME], oversees the use of Tourist Development Taxes with additional oversight from the Board of County Commissioners.

The structure of Tourist Development Taxes is a system that works for Florida. Maintaining the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes – for expenditures related to tourism promotion – stimulates the local economy by enabling us to share why our destination is the right destination for potential visitors around the world.

#### **SCRIPT 4: VALUE OF LOCAL TOURISM PROMOTION**

Local tourism promotion is critical to drawing visitors to our part of Florida. While some visitors, especially international visitors, may think of Florida as only Disney and beaches, our state is not homogenous and has so many different travel offerings. Because each part of Florida is unique, each community needs its own branded tourism promotion.

As our county's tourism promotion organization, it is our job to promote our community as an attractive travel destination and package all the important information potential visitors are looking for about a destination – area sites and attractions, hotels, restaurants and shopping – into one place under one brand. We know our market better than anyone else. We know what makes us unique and what might draw potential visitors to our community.

We also know our visitors. We know what interests them and where they most frequently come from. Our tourism promotion campaigns are targeted directly to the people most interested in our travel assets and to markets from which we typically draw the most visitors. Pulling together resources and ideas from within our own community enables us to target our feeder markets very specifically and attract more tourists to our area.

Local tourism promotion is also vital to local coordination. [INSERT DMO NAME] serves as our community's brand ambassador and we do the work to get everyone within the community on the same team in order to communicate with one voice and one message. Additionally, we offer the businesses in our community, especially our small businesses, promotion expertise, connections and resources they might not otherwise be able to tap into.

Significant jobs and revenue depend on the local tourism promotion we conduct. Without it, our county and our county's tourism-reliant businesses would be at a disadvantage to competing destinations.

## **SCRIPT 5: LAST YEAR'S LEGISLATION**

A bill proposed last year in the Florida House was the single largest attack ever on Florida's tourism industry and would have significantly harmed the state's tourism industry by stripping away Visit Florida's and local communities' ability to effectively promote tourist destinations across Florida.

This bill took aim at Visit Florida, as well as counties' locally generated Tourist Development Taxes, which help fund local tourism promotion efforts. We need Visit Florida and local tourism promotion organizations because they perform separate and necessary functions in order to keep our state's tourism industry healthy and our economy vibrant. Visit Florida promotes the State of Florida as a whole to potential visitors while local tourism promotion organizations promote their own communities' unique travel offerings.

The legislation proposed last year would have completely altered Visit Florida's funding mechanism and operations in a way that would have ultimately led to its demise. It would have eliminated state funding for Visit Florida and would have forced counties to send Visit Florida a portion of their Tourist Development Taxes in order to pay for the state entity.

Last year's bill would have stripped local governments' control by extracting \$75 million in locally generated Tourist Development Taxes and sending it to Tallahassee to fund Visit Florida. It also would have put every county that collects Tourist Development Taxes and every organization that relies on them in jeopardy of losing this revenue source permanently by putting those taxes up for a referendum every six years.

This was a bad bill that would have negatively impacted all of Florida's tourism industry, and the jobs and revenue generated by what is Florida's top industry. We are concerned similar legislation may be proposed in this upcoming legislative session and ask you to support Florida's tourism industry by voting down anything like last year's bill.