

YBOR CITY TOURISM/MARKETING DISTRICT A FLORIDA FIRST

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YBOR CITY – A groundbreaking initiative between the Hillsborough County Hotel Motel Association, the city of Tampa and the Hillsborough County Tax Collector has established Florida’s first Tourism Marketing District.

The district encompasses hotels in South Tampa, downtown Tampa and Ybor City. It will generate new marketing funds through a self-imposed lodging industry assessment that is expected to total more than \$1 million within its first year.

Beginning May 1, occupied hotel rooms within the district will assess an additional \$1.50 per night on top of the room rates and other fees currently charged. In an agreement unanimously approved by the Tampa City Council, the [Hillsborough County Tax Collector](#) will oversee collections and remit the net to the city. The city will then disperse the money to [HCHMA](#).

A steering committee comprised of hotel general managers will determine how to allocate the marketing dollars to supplement existing destination marketing expenditures.

“For purposes of this district, assessments would not be used for capital items,” Bob Morrison, HCHMA executive director, explained. “We will focus on destination marketing that reaches audiences 75 miles or more beyond the Tampa Bay market to increase the likelihood of overnight stays. But we will make sure that the administration and proper accountability tools are in place before we start targeted expenditures.”

Increasing investments in marketing programs targeting out-of-market audiences could generate an additional 90,000 room nights per year at local hotels, according to research conducted by [Tourism Economics](#).

“We applaud our local hoteliers for stepping up and committing themselves to expand Tampa Bay’s presence in the incredibly competitive world of tourism,” said Visit Tampa Bay President and CEO Santiago Corrada. “Their voluntary action is an investment in this community that will produce enormous economic benefits.”

Tourism Marketing Districts are commonplace throughout California and other parts of the western U.S. A benefit assessment study by Tourism Economics indicated Tampa’s lodging industry should see a significant return on investment if a similar funding mechanism was adopted and implemented here. For every additional dollar invested in marketing, the local lodging industry could see a return of \$10.

“The basis of this assessment is to trigger a series of marketing initiatives, either through media buys, advertising campaigns or incentives designed to attract trade shows, conventions and meetings and leisure travelers to the market, that will help the district hotels grow their business,” Morrison said.

“Visit Tampa Bay’s dedication to evaluating the effectiveness of multiple marketing campaigns was invaluable in determining the potential return on this supplemental investment for our market. We could not have validated the benefit to participating hotels, or our community as a whole, without the marketing campaign metrics they compiled,” he added.

Morrison described the agreement as a classic public-private partnership. Hotels will underwrite costs associated with the implementation and administration of the district so there will be no new expenses for the public sector partners.

“But those city and county partners will experience concurrent growth in sales and other revenues paid by these additional visitors,” Morrison said.

HCHMA members supported establishing the first such district in the state as a means of off-setting cyclical downturns that periodically adversely impact hotel occupancies and revenues.

“This is an important step for our industry and we are pleased to be the first city in Florida to establish a Tourism Marketing District,” said Paul Joseph, president of the HCHMA board of directors and general manager of the Grand Hyatt Tampa. “These funds will be critical to keeping demand for this destination high and encouraging year-round travel to the Tampa Bay market.”

The Tourism Marketing District collections will not displace current allocations from the countywide room fees that are already levied on guests staying at local hotels. Having additional funds, and the flexibility to pursue opportunities that directly impact the Downtown/Historic Ybor City Tourism Marketing District, will benefit far more than the participating hotels, according to HCHMA. Restaurants, retailers and transportation companies will certainly see increased demand.

“Every seven years the market goes through a readjustment and there is an erosion of visitation and/or occupancy. The vision is to better prepare for those historical trends that the market has sustained over the years,” Morrison added. “This district is designed to reverse that trend.”

“It is not our intent to reinvent the wheel. Our vision is to supplement the groundwork laid by [Visit Tampa Bay](#) thus we anticipate a close working relationship with the Visit Tampa Bay staff. We want to support and strengthen the marketing platforms Visit Tampa Bay has successfully established to help broaden that reach and continue achieving record-breaking results.”

The new tax district will be closely monitored to determine if additional districts within the Westshore, East Hillsborough County/Brandon and University of South Florida/New Tampa areas will be established as well.

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