

OcalaMarion Travel Guide App By Local Explorers Helps Drive Half-Million-Dollar Increase In County's Tourism Tax Revenue

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Marion County, Florida, long known for its outdoors recreation opportunities as well as for being a global center for thoroughbred breeding and racing, has seen its proactive efforts to increase tourism pay off, bringing in a record \$5.3 million in tourism tax revenue in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. The Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau credits this growth



OcalaMarion Travel Guide App

to its recent initiatives, including the launch of the free [OcalaMarion Travel Guide App](#), built for the county by [Local Explorers](#), a Boca Raton-based developer of mobile loyalty apps for the hospitality and economic development sectors. With the app, users can quickly find

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Many prospective clients express frustration with Bandwango's awkward process to update events & promotions. Our goal was to simplify the process which allows instant updates with one secure login.”

*Rick Griswold, Business
Development*

accommodations, restaurants, attractions, and more, plan and map out trips and self-guided tours, see exclusive deals from local businesses and attractions, and learn about the region's history and culture.

The app has already been downloaded over 2000 times, and the Visitors and Convention Bureau is excited to promote it. “We have a new vacation guide that we rolled out the last few months. And on the last page of it, we do a call to action to download the app,” said Jessica Heller, the bureau's marketing and communications supervisor. “And we're disseminating all those vacation guides to our local partners and restaurants and hotels.” So far, app users are

equally split between locals and tourists, Heller said.

Local hospitality professionals are already using the app to better serve their guests, and love

how quickly it lets them offer detailed, accurate information to visitors. “If they work in a hotel, and a customer comes up to the front desk and says, ‘Hey, where’s the closest place to get this kind of food?’ or ‘how far away is the closest spring?’ they can go in there and just pull things up and say, ‘Oh, you’re only 4.2 miles from Rainbow Springs or whatever,’” said Sky Wheeler, the bureau’s tourism development manager. She added that this has been a boon to frontline workers in the area’s many small hotels, which typically don’t have dedicated concierges.

Staffers at the bureau’s visitor center also praised the app. “It’s easier to show somebody what they’re looking for in this format than to try to go find the brochure they might want or pull it up as a website—it’s all there and they can route them where they need to go and everything,” Wheeler said.

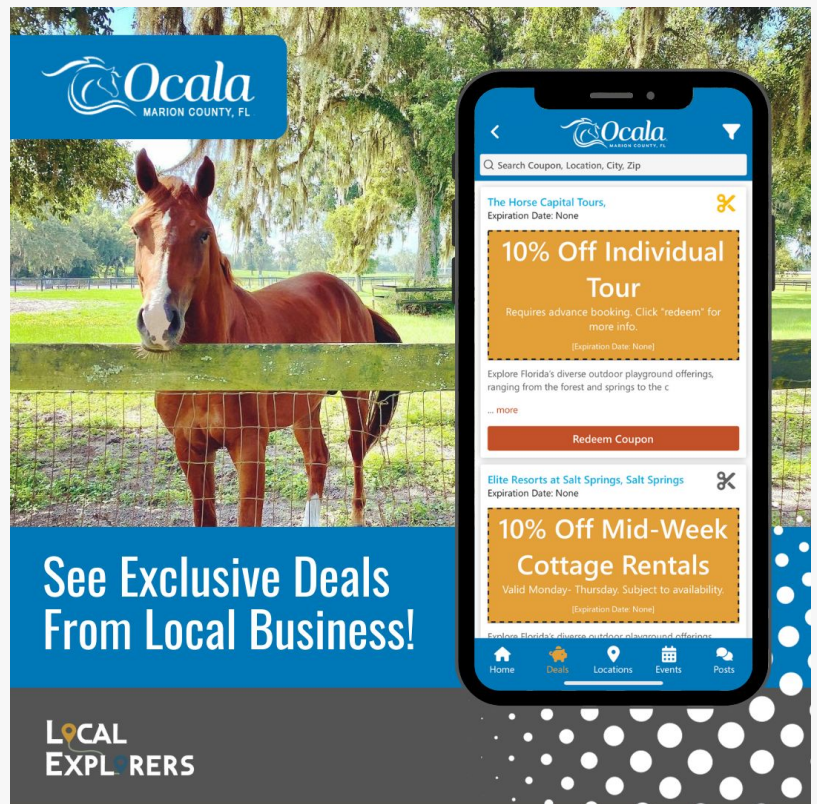
In addition, the app has made it faster and easier for businesses and attractions to share time-sensitive information, such as deals and promotions, with the bureau and with visitors. Before the app, local businesses wanting to share updates on the bureau’s website had to log into the website, then into the third-party web platform Bandwango to do so. This proved to be a frustrating experience. “It wasn’t a very intuitive user experience,” Wheeler said. “You couldn’t make changes to certain things as quickly as a tourism partner. They had to log into multiple places to do things.”



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But Local Explorers' new app and its custom-designed back-end web portal make updating deals and promotions easy and seamless for busy hospitality professionals and business owners. With a single, secure log-in, users can now add new info to both the app and the bureau's web page at the same time.

Wheeler praised the Local Explorers team for making this happen, noting that this required not only building the app and its supporting web platform, but working closely with the bureau's web developers to integrate the platform with the existing website. "They've never worked with the company that we have for our website, but there's been a lot of coordination between them, and I think that's cool," she said. She also appreciated the team's commitment to supporting their vision. "We liked their willingness to be flexible and truly customize the app to fit our needs. It wasn't a template – they were very open and willing upfront to make it a very custom app for exactly what we're doing."

"Every community has a different culture and vision, and the fact that we've got a lot of building blocks in place for hospitality apps makes it easy for us to customize features at a granular level without a lot of time or investment," said Susan Erickson of Local Explorers.

Local Explorers apps by software designers Daruma Tech are designed to help communities better connect with visitors and local consumers by making it easy for them to discover and patronize local businesses and attractions. Each app is custom-designed for the community it serves, and the Local Explorers team offers ongoing, proactive support, from development to training to regular maintenance and updates.

To learn more, visit <https://www.localexplorers.com/>

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