

2025 AGENDA
ALABAMA GOVERNOR’S CONFERENCE ON TOURISM
August 23-26
#25AGCTTheLodge
Celebrating Local Heroes - Everyone Plays a Role in Tourism’s Success

Saturday, August 23

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM **Silent Auction Set-Up** **Ballroom III & IV**
Wine Pull Set-Up **The Burrow**

Sunday, August 24

9:00 AM **Set-Up for Trade Show/Silent Auction/ Wine Pull/Photo Booth, and Alabama Distillers Guild**
Ballroom III & IV and The Burrow

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM **Registration** **The Burrow**

Coffee, Tea, and Soft Drinks **Ballroom Foyer**

Sponsored by Robertsdale Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Inc. and Royal Cup Coffee and Tea

10:00 – 11:30 AM **Alabama Travel Council Annual Meeting & Alabama Tourism Partnership Update (open to all registrants)**
Ballroom I & II

11:30 AM - 12:15 PM **Grab and Go Boxed Light Lunch**
Sponsored by Huntsville/Madison County CVB
Ballroom Foyer and Ballroom II

Grab and Go will close at 12:20. The Opening General Session begins PROMPTLY at 12:30

12:30 – 2:45 PM **Opening General Session** **Ballroom I & II**
Welcome by Beth Gendler, President & CEO
Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism
Gulf Shores Mayor Robert Craft
Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon
Bill Bennett, General Manager, The Lodge at Gulf State Park

**Alabama Tourism Department Advisory Board Meeting
with Director's Report
Mindy Hanan, Chairman, ATD Advisory Board and
Lee Sentell, Director, Alabama Tourism Department**

12:45 PM

Alabama Tourism Department's Update

Luckie, ATD Ad Agency's Presentation by Jack Luckie

1:15 PM

***The Importance of Food in Tourism – Michelin – and
Domestic Programs***

**Speakers: Liz Bittner, President, Travel South USA and
Grey Brennan, Alabama Tourism Department**

1:30 PM

Tourism Economics – Latest Numbers and Meanings

**Speaker: Fidel Mitchell, Client Relationships, Senior
Manager, and Insights Manager, Tourism Economics**

1:45 PM

What's New In Alabama Tourism

Moderator: Grey Brennan, Alabama Tourism Department

Panelists

Pam Smith - Research

Mary Ella Cauthen - Social Media

Trisa Collier - Alabama Welcome Centers

Brooklyn Lundy - PR/Media

Andy Facer - UK Market

Janin Nachtweh - German Market

Pam Shaheen – Golf

Laura Hicks – International

What's New with Brand USA

Speaker: Allie May, Manager Strategic Partnership

2:30 PM

Grey Brennan will close the session PROMPTLY at 2:40

2:45 – 3:00 PM

Grab and Go Break

Ballroom Foyer

Snacks

Sponsored by TrueOmni

Beverages Sponsored by Robertsdale Coca-Cola

Bottling Company, Inc. and Royal Cup Coffee and Tea

3:00 – 3:45 PM

General Session

Ballroom I & II

Welcome to LuLu's! The Story Behind the Brand

Speaker: Lucy Buffett, Restaurateur, Chef, Author

This is the story of our nationally famous local hero Lucy Buffett. LuLu's began as a "local dive" at the mouth of Fish River and has grown to be one of the largest and most successful restaurants in Alabama. LuLu's also now has locations in Florida and South Carolina. In each location, LuLu's offers an experience beyond dining. The atmosphere, from the friendly, well-trained staff, to the carefully executed allergy-aware menus, to the children's activities and live music venues, is designed to make guests welcome, comfortable and happy! Hear the LuLu's story and the magic behind the success.

3:45 – 4:15 PM

America250AL: Celebrating America's Semiquincentennial Across Alabama
Presenter: Col. Alan B. Miller, USMCR
Director, America250AL

America250 Alabama is the state's official initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States. Through events, education, and community engagement, we will reflect on the enduring principles upon which our nation was founded and the unfolding story of liberty's advance through the generations. The initiative aims to inspire pride, reflection, and participation across all 67 counties. Join us as we honor the past and shape the future together.

4:20 – 4:30 PM

AGCT App Instructions
App Sponsored by:
Bobby Soder, My Community App

4:30 – 5:30 PM

Opening Reception in the Trade Show/Silent Auction
Sponsored by Advance Travel & Tourism
Ballroom III & IV

Alabama Distillers Guild Spirits Tasting
Ballroom Foyer

6:30-10:00 PM

Cash Bars will open on the Dunes Terrace and Ballroom Foyer at 6:30 PM. The bars will be closed during Awards and Miss America presentation- you may buy additional wine by the bottle at the bars
Dunes Terrace and Ballroom Foyer

7:00 PM

Alabama Tourism Department Awards Banquet

**Masters of Ceremonies, Lee Sentell and Senator Garlan
Gudger
Special Guest, Abbie Stockard, 2025 Miss America
Ballroom I & II**

9:15 PM **2025 Miss America Meet and Greet Ballroom Foyer
and
Rock & Roll Dessert and Coffee in the Trade Show
Ballroom III & IV
Sponsored by Visit the Shoals and Renaissance Shoals
Hotel & Spa**

Monday, August 25

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM **Registration The Burrow**

**Refreshments
Sponsored by Robertsdale Coca-Cola Bottling
Company, Inc. and Royal Cup Coffee and Tea**

8:00 – 9:00 AM **Breakfast in the Trade Show and Silent Auction
Sponsored by Poarch Band of Creek Indians
Ballroom III & IV**

9:15 – 10:30 AM **General Session Ballroom I & II
AI's Biggest Questions, Myths and Mysteries
Beth Z, Your Nerdy Best Friend**

Artificial Intelligence often feels like a blend of buzzwords and bewilderment. Will robots take our jobs? Does Chat GPT steal our data? Are AI tools big fat liars? Join Beth Z, Your Nerdy Best Friend, in a lively exploration of AI's most puzzling questions and common myths.

With nerdy humor mixed with practical tips, Beth Z makes the enigmatic world of AI a tad less intimidating and a lot more intriguing. The session will give participants a framework for a commonsense approach to creating the guardrails needed to make the most of AI.

10:30 – 11:30 AM **“Local Heroes” Panel Ballroom I & II
*How Local Heroes Create Tourism Success***

Moderator: Beth Gendler, President/CEO, Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

Panel:

Michelle Russ, Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

Steve Jones, Coastal Alabama Business Chamber

Phillip West, City of Orange Beach Coastal Resources

Lee Lawson, Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance

From volunteers to sponsors and from building on local assets to bringing in new fans, tourism takes a village! Packaging natural resources, creating sports tourism initiatives, growing annual events, and luring new businesses all depend on support from a wide range of people from a variety of local sectors. Hear how local involvement builds successful events, attractions, and businesses and what impact those tourism products have on local and regional economies.

Representatives from the Hugh Branyon Back Country Trail, Annual National Shrimp Festival, Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance and Alabama's Beaches, Sports, and Meetings share their insights on successfully growing tourism products.

11:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Trade Show Viewing

Ballroom III & IV

12:15 – 1:30 PM

Scholarship Luncheon

Ballroom I & II

Special Guest, The Honorable Governor Kay Ivey

Sponsored by: Alabama Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (AADMO) and Compass Media

Master of Ceremonies, David Clark, President AADMO, and Dustin Gontarski, President, Compass Media

Presentation of 2025 Tourism Industry Scholarships and the John Wild Memorial Endowed Scholarship by 2025 Chairwomen of the Scholarship Committee, Christy Baranovics and Pam Swanner

2:00 – 4:00 PM

AGCT Beach Games '25

Dunes Terrace

Sponsored by Alabama Living

Friendly competition is the theme during this afternoon of fun and rivalry on the beach. Whether you want to be in the heart of the competition or cheering on your team from the sidelines, there's a place for you here. This afternoon of beach fun is the perfect complement to our excellent slate of educational sessions, offering a chance to enjoy Alabama's number one tourism

attraction while networking – and fighting for bragging rights – with peers from around the state.

Sand Castle Demonstration by Sand Castle University
Sponsored by Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism
Beach Chairs and Umbrellas (First Come – First Served)
Sponsored by Ike’s Beach Service

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Reception in the Trade Show/Silent Auction (Cash Bar)

Sponsored by Wind Creek Hotels & Casino

Ballroom III & IV

Alabama Distillers Guild Spirits Tasting

Ballroom Foyer

7:00 PM

Celebrating the Luau’s of the Past!

Dunes Terrace

In this throw-back celebration, the Gulf State Park luaus of old will be made new again. Back in the day, The Lodge was home to weekly luaus enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. **Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism and The Lodge at Gulf State Park** are partnering to bring this special local event back with a new flair. Seafood, entertainment, and beautiful views will highlight this magical night on the coast

Tuesday, August 26

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Breakfast in the Trade Show and Final Bidding for the Silent Auction

Ballroom III & IV

Sponsored by Gray Destination Marketing

9:00 – 11:00 AM

Beverages Sponsored by Robertsdale Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Inc and Royal Cup Coffee and Tea

Ballroom Foyer

9:15 – 9:45 AM

General Session

Ballroom I & II

Navigating Tourism Funding: National Trends and Alabama's Path to Sustainability

Speaker: Tiffany Gallagher, Civitas

Securing stable and sufficient funding to market and manage destinations continues to be a significant challenge for many tourism communities.

We'll examine the unique challenges and opportunities in the state, specifically the growing role of Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs) in destinations like Montgomery, Florence, and Mobile, which have utilized these mechanisms to provide a steady funding for tourism promotion.

We will also delve into the current funding legislation landscape in Alabama and discuss next steps on how you can achieve **diversified revenue strategies for long-term sustainability.**

9:45 – 10:15 AM

HOTEL CHECK OUT and Silent Auction Payment!

The Burrow

10:15 – 11:30 AM

Education Finale

Ballroom I & II

Kristy Durso “Why Accessibility”

Sponsored in part by Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association

Kristy’s ultimate goal is to inspire change in the travel industry to make a more inclusive atmosphere, so that travel is accessible to all.

Kristy works directly with DMOs, tourist boards, attractions, events, hotels, resorts, etc. to increase awareness of disability travel, and to help them improve their accessibility

Her work aims to improve accessibility options for travelers with disabilities, and to also help travel advisors better communicate with potential clients and destinations so that the travelers’ needs are met, and expectations of the level of accessibility are accurate. As a member of the advisory board for Travelability,

Kristy is the owner of Incredible Memories Travel. As a full time, wheelchair user and mom to three kids with disabilities and food allergies, she understands the complexities of accessible travel on a personal level. She is passionate about helping others with disabilities travel. Over the last several years, Kristy has noticed a disconnect between what is labeled as accessible, and what is truly disability friendly. Accommodations are often labeled as accessible when, in fact, they meet the needs of very few people with disabilities.

11:30 AM

Silent Auction Payment at Convention Registration Desk

The Burrow

Revised 08/12/2025