City of Isle of Palms South Carolina

Executive Summary

RESEARCH & DISCOVERY FINDINGS



OCTOBER 2026

PREPARED BY BLUE RIDGE CREATIVE MARKETING

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PART A

The Research



SUMMARY OBJECTIVE

Translating a varied backstory into one cohesive system:

Timing

INCONSISTENCY IS THE IDENTITY

Inconsistent brand use has created a fragmented identity, making it harder for residents, visitors and partners to recognize a clear, unified IOP – or to tell what's official.

Opportunity

HOME BEFORE THE DESTINATION

Position Isle of Palms as a beach destination for families across generations – one that still feels like home in every season – distinct from the region's party- and resort-led beaches, without loosening its hold on resident livability.

Review

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT REALLY IS

A summary of the research initiative focused on understanding IOP – from the inside, out. This research informs the core and delivers outward.

The Ask

WHERE THE RESEARCH ULTIMATELY LEADS

Approval on these findings and directives so brand development can move into building one messaging system, a visual identity that matches it, and the governance to keep both consistent.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

How we built the research foundation:

Discovery

START WITH THE ISLAND ITSELF

We began with City plans, surveys, stakeholder interviews, onsite exploration and tourism partner conversations to understand Isle of Palms from the inside out.

Conversation

WEIGHT EACH AUDIENCE INTENTIONALLY

Residents, visitors, businesses, City teams and tourism partners informed the research – with resident input setting the standard for what's true about the island, and visitor input showing what draws people here and brings them back.

Research

VALIDATE PERCEPTION WITH EVIDENCE

We audited the brand, market, tourism and search behavior, owned data and competitive landscape – then tested findings against City goals, channel performance and audience data.

THE ISLE OF PALMS TODAY

A small residential island with destination-scale demand.

AND A STRONG SENSE OF WHAT MAKES IT HOME.

Isle of Palms occupies a distinctive position – a small, established residential community with a public beach, significant vacation-rental inventory and world-class resort amenities.

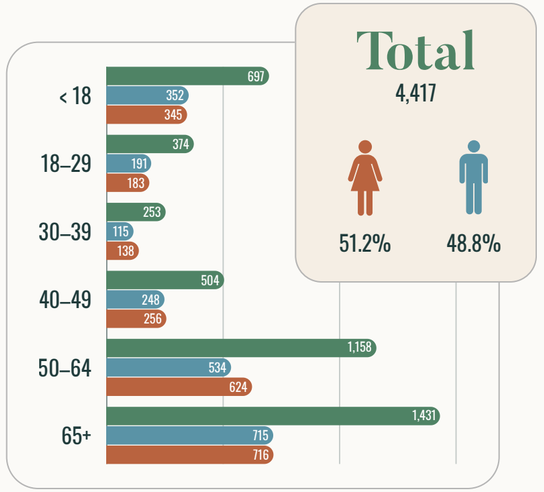
Its natural setting is both its greatest shared asset and a major economic driver. Yet the qualities people associate with the island extend well beyond tourism: ***family traditions, familiar routines, community, and a relaxed way of life.***

RESIDENT DEMOGRAPHIC AT A GLANCE

54.6
RESIDENT MEDIAN AGE (DOWN FROM 56.2 SINCE 2020)

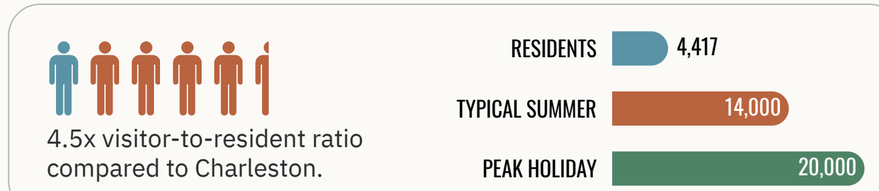
58.6%
OF RESIDENTS ARE 50+ (32.4% ARE 65+)

$128K
PER CAPITA INCOME – 2.3X MORE THAN COUNTY



TOURISM IMPACT

4.5x visitor-to-resident ratio compared to Charleston.



+353%
PEAK SEASON POPULATION GROWTH

38%
ISLAND DWELLINGS HOLD STR LICENSES

33%
OF REVENUE IS VISITOR LINKED

STAKEHOLDER FINDINGS

What are people saying?



PREVIEW

What did stakeholders actually tell us?

STAKEHOLDERS AGREE ON A FAMILY-FRIENDLY ISLAND WITH A STRONG RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY, BUT DISAGREE ON HOW MUCH TOURISM TO ENCOURAGE – AND WHEN.

Isle of Palms is home before it's a destination, and stakeholders are focused on maintaining that sentiment. While tourism is understood to be economically necessary, most would prefer to welcome families for longer stays and favor fall and winter visitation.

Perception

A LIVED-IN BEACH COMMUNITY

Stakeholders value the island's relaxed, small-town character.

They described a place where children grow up, neighbors know one another and visitors build their own traditions through return trips.

Anchors

THIS IS WHAT HOME FEELS LIKE

Family continuity, nature and everyday freedom came up repeatedly – beach walks, biking, recreation, wildlife and time together across generations.

The Connector was a recognizable moment of arrival and return.

Polarity

TENSION OVER GROWTH

Interviewees valued public access and recognized tourism's role. They also raised concerns around traffic, parking, short-term rentals, large-home redevelopment and the loss of year-round neighbors.

Takeaways

PROTECT THE EXPERIENCE

The brand needs to help illustrate the feeling of home. It is not a party destination – it's a place to relax.

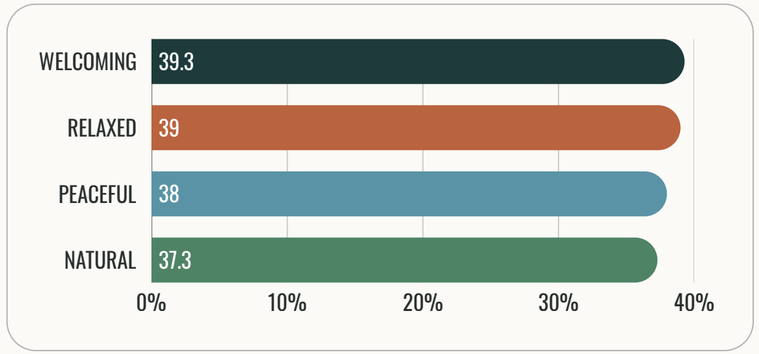
The community (and visitors) care for the neighborhoods, public spaces and natural resources.

PERCEPTION

Whose Isle of Palms is this?

Ask four different groups to deliver the Isle of Palms elevator pitch and you'll land on a different floor. Despite the different relationships to the island, they return to the same qualities – ***a natural, relaxed place where families build lasting memories.***

WORDS THAT WIN



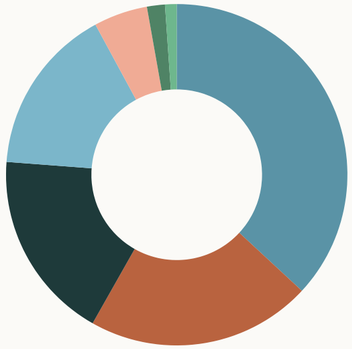
	CURRENT	INTENDED	BRAND	POSITION
RESIDENT	**Family roots** & neighborhood pressures	**Liveable, connected** community	**Home for generations** for kids & *their* kids	"Isle of Palms isn't just a destination. It's home."
VISITOR	**Repeat trips** building family memories	**Welcoming** as cared-for place	**Traditions** where we're ready to relax	
BUSINESS	**Tourism** with local character	**Thriving** as a local economy	**Local businesses** serve as core memories	
CITY	**Resort image** with a small-town reality	**Family-oriented** island life	**Community is the *magic*** made by those who love it here	
ALIGNMENT	PARTIAL	ALIGNED	ALIGNED	ALIGNED

PRESERVATION + POLARITY

What priorities are at play?

Respondents valued the beach, nature, family traditions, and a slower pace. The survey shows where priorities diverge – residents emphasize community and residential character while visitors emphasize ***public beach access.***

WHO RESPONDED?



FULL-TIME RESIDENT	36.9%
FREQUENT VISITOR	21.3%
NOT SPECIFIED	18%
PART-TIME RESIDENT	15.9%
VISITOR	5.1%
BUSINESS OWNER (NON-RESIDENT)	1.7%
BUSINESS OWNER (RESIDENT)	1.1%

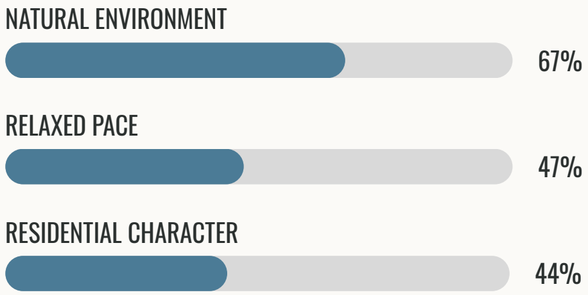
RESIDENTS 52.8%

VISITORS 26.4%

BUSINESSES 2.8%

Preservation

MOST IMPORTANT TO PRESERVE?



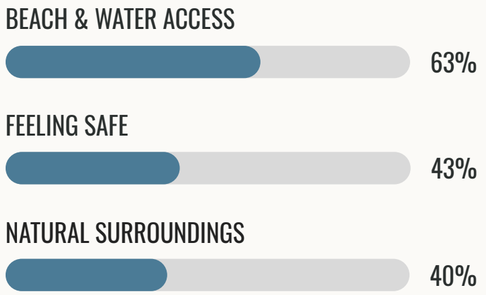
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	67%
RELAXED PACE	47%
RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER	44%

54%
OF RESIDENT RESPONDENTS
Preserve *residential character*

63%
OF VISITOR RESPONDENTS
Preserve *public beach access*

Alignment

WHAT DRIVES HAPPINESS?

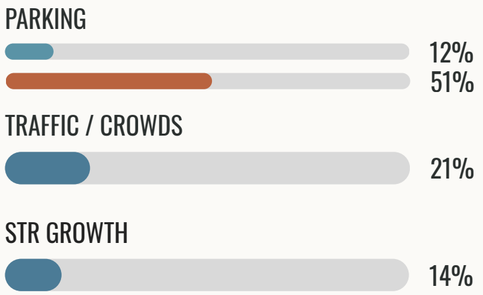


BEACH & WATER ACCESS	63%
FEELING SAFE	43%
NATURAL SURROUNDINGS	40%

Polarity

RESIDENT
VISITOR

THE NAMED PROBLEM?



PARKING	12% / 51%
TRAFFIC / CROWDS	21%
STR GROWTH	14%



COMPREHENSIVE BRAND AUDIT

Where does Isle of Palms stand today?

PREVIEW

How brand clarity can help Isle of Palms meet its goals:

Destination

A TINY ISLAND WITH A DISTINCT IDENTITY

Isle of Palms already owns a distinct sense of place rooted in home, heritage, environment, residential character and community – and it's strong.

Brand

ALIGNED IN MEANING, SPLIT IN USE

The City and its partners largely agree on what IOP represents, but without shared verbal or visual standards, each channel and resource expresses it differently.

Strength

THE CORE & HABITS ARE STRONG

The most valuable equity – home, environment, heritage, and belonging – is authentic, supported across the research, and already visible in parts of the existing brand.

Weakness

THE SYSTEM BREAKS AT APPLICATION

Without centralized standards, templates or governance, consistency depends on individual interpretation – leaving equity opportunity buried, skewed, or disconnected.

MESSAGING & VISUAL

Does the Isle of Palms feel like one place?

Key Findings • Visual

VARYING VISUALS, NO THROUGHLINE

Predominant colorways do exist in two key palettes: green and gold for civic applications and navy and teal for high-volume digital. However, the absence of a centralized visual story has created a collection of assets left to individual interpretation. The result is a disconnected brand system that causes identity confusion.

77%
OF BRAND COLORS IN CIRCULATION ARE ONLY USED ONCE

0
TYPEFACES ARE CARRIED ACROSS CHANNELS OR ASSETS

Key Findings • Messaging

FIVE VOICES, NO CENTER

The City, Chamber, Explore Charleston, Wild Dunes, and Charleston County Parks agree on 4 common threads, but nothing compels them to say it the same.

The Mission + Vision Opportunity

The mission sets a high bar that outward channels rarely show and the vision invites those who come to "live, work and play" – the brand can make that welcome *specific*.

MISSION

To be the most sustainable, family-friendly beach community in South Carolina.

VISION

To be a welcoming, environmentally conscious and resilient coastal community committed to enhancing the quality of life for those who come here to live, work and play.

5
INDEPENDENTLY GOVERNED VOICES SHAPING THE IMAGE

No shared guidelines governing them.

4
COMMON THREADS EVERY VOICE ALREADY SHARES

Location, value, identity, proximity.

DIGITAL CHANNEL AUDIT

What's working & where does the brand break down?

IoP has meaningful reach across high-volume priority channels, but performance is uneven and each channel plays a different role – with the clearest gap being a consistent connection between ***civic communication*** and ***destination storytelling***.

~9:1
NEW EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS VS. UNSUBSCRIBES ANNUALLY
Growing audience with relatively little attrition.

44%
OF ANNUAL SOCIAL VISIBILITY HAPPENED MAY 1 - AUG 1
Peak season is the window to drive awareness – specifically offseason.

34x
FACEBOOK'S VISIBILITY VS. INSTAGRAM YEAR-OVER-YEAR
Heavy & imbalanced concentration on Facebook.

5.5:1
NEW VS. RETURNING USERS VISITING WEBSITE ANNUALLY
Geographically far-reaching episodic behavior than any other channel.

Baseline
UTILITY IS CONSISTENT, EXPERIENCE ISN'T
Channels clearly communicate where IOP is, but civic notices and service information dominate. Beyond a general coastal feel, the brand lacks a consistent character across touchpoints that can speak to audiences alike.

Audience
SOCIAL IS LOCAL BUT WEB TRAVELS FAR
Social audiences skew Charleston-area while the website reaches Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh, New York and beyond – making it important to both residents and visitors.

Engagement
NEED-BASED CONTENT DOES THE WORK
Strongest engagement centers on beach conditions, shoreline projects, video and local news. Destination content is limited, leaving too little data to assess its traction.

Application
IDENTITY FRACTURES AT POINT OF USE
Each channel serves its function, but the brand expression changes with the platform. Civic and destination content do not yet feel like parts of one *connected system*.

SYSTEM + GOVERNANCE

Consistency is a resourcing gap rather than effort.

58%
FIND MATCHING COLORS & FONTS THE HARDEST PART

42%
UNSURE THEIR MATERIALS LOOK CONSISTENT WITH THE CITY BRAND

67%
CREATE OR EDIT MATERIALS AT LEAST MONTHLY

Only 8% define it as core part of job.

75%
RELY ON A WORKAROUND WHEN BRAND IS UNCLEAR

Guess, use old files, or skip branding.

14+
DIFFERENT PLATFORMS USED FOR BRANDED MATERIAL CREATION

#1 Priority
THE STAFF WANTS A FINDABLE, FLEXIBLE SYSTEM

Alignment

PROFESSIONAL, NOT DISTINCTIVE

Teams agree that communications should feel professional and clear but are uncertain what makes them distinctly IOP.

Anchor

STRONG HABITS ALREADY EXIST

Teams know where to find and reuse existing assets but reference points vary by department.

Divergence

CONSISTENCY BREAKS AT APPLICATION

Without shared standards, consistency depends on individual interpretation – even when assets are reused.

Application

CREATION HAPPENS EVERYWHERE

Materials are created across departments and software familiar to the user rather than a centralized design function – mostly adapting current assets.

Takeaway

NO SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

Standards, approved assets and templates live in different places across departments so materials don't always look official. Staff named this their #1 fix.

DESTINATION AUDIT

What does the Isle of Palms really have to offer?

A genuine sense of place, resilient natural environment and locally-owned economy are already healthy and visible, but not always represented. Outward channels default to summer, beach and Wild Dunes – burying heritage, the Connector, marina, independent dining, shoulder seasons, premium lodging patterns, and undercutting environmental leadership.

How to read the table:

Healthy & visible	STRONG
Real, but under-shown	BURIED
Real, but weakened	UNDERCUT
Over-weighted externally	SKEWED

CORE ASSETS

CHARACTER & COMMUNITY	Home before destination	STRONG
	Small-town, anti-party identity	STRONG
	Neighborliness, community	STRONG
	The Connector (arrival as homecoming)	BURIED
	Multigenerational continuity	STRONG
PLACE & ENVIRONMENT	Barrier island (calm, kid-safe surf)	STRONG
	Marsh, tidal creek, pluff-mud	STRONG
	First SC single-use bag ban	UNDERCUT
	Heritage	BURIED
	CRS Class 7 flood rating	STRONG
LIVABILITY & ECONOMY	Lowest millage in the area	STRONG
	Exceptional Rec Department	STRONG
	75% STR / 25% hotel structure	STRONG
	Premium, price-over-volume	BURIED
SEASONALITY	Summer – Peak demand	STRONG
	Fall – "Serene respite" language exists	UNDERCUT
	Winter – Mild, off-season isn't bleak	BURIED
	Spring – Golf/nature; unused capacity	UNDERCUT
FOOD & LOCAL BUSINESS	Independent dining at real quality	BURIED
	Farmers Market	STRONG
	Locally-owned base, chain-resistant	STRONG
RECREATION & AMENITIES	Consistent, reliable beach	STRONG
	Rec Center outdoor gym	STRONG
	Marina (kayak/SUP, charters, eco-tours)	BURIED
	Wild Dunes golf, tennis, spa	SKEWED
	ADA Accommodations	BURIED

CARRY FORWARD

What does Isle of Palms own?

What makes the island *uniquely* IOP already exists – the gap is in how consistently it’s clearly represented.

The Gap

FINDING THE CORE

Outside content frames IOP's history as starting in the 1970s (with Wild Dunes) which inadvertently erases the residential-first heritage that's the stronger historical asset – and the Carolina Day heritage that precedes it.

Ungoverned voices and iterative identities have no shared guidelines – the core of nearly every inconsistency found. The equity is real (and rare). What’s missing is a system to carry it forward amidst a market of mixed audiences.



HERITAGE

A seal that carries history – with a palmetto represented *accurately*.



CONNECTOR

The crossing that turns nearly every arrival into a *homecoming*.



ENVIRONMENT

Upheld as the island’s *champion* asset – paramount to preserve.



HOME

A feeling of *belonging*, safety, and stewardship – echoed.

Email hello@weareblueridge.com to request access to the full report

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