

WORKING WITH NC WELCOME CENTERS & CALL CENTER

Visit NC Monthly Partner Webinar
December 11, 2025

Working with NC Welcome Centers and Call Center

Wally Wazan- Visitor Service Administrator

Marie Amsdill - I-95S Welcome Center Manager

Pamela Jarrett – Tourism Inquiry Program Manager



NORTH CAROLINA
**DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE**

Background

- first conceived in 1965
- The committee recognized that informed visitors stay longer and explore more
- North Carolina's first two Welcome Centers opened along Interstates 85 and 95 near the Virginia border in 1968.



Background Cont'd

- In 1987, the packaging and fulfillment operation relocated to the N.C. Correctional Institution for Women (NCCIW).
- In December 1989, 1-800-VISIT-NC moved to NCCIW, centralizing statewide visitor information services at the facility.



Nine Welcome Centers

- Interstate 85 North (1968)
- Interstate 95 North (1968)
- Interstate 40 West (1970)
- Interstate 85 South (1972)
- Interstate 95 South (1973)
 - **New Construction (2024)**
- Interstate 77 North (1982)
- Interstate 26 East (1982)
- Interstate 77 South (1985)
- Interstate 26 West (2003)



North Carolina Welcome Center Managers

				
EAST Kathy West	WEST Samantha Sherrill	NORTH Jeff Mills	NORTH Brian Fletcher	NORTH Melvin Casper
kathy.west@commerce.nc.gov	samantha.sherrill@commerce.nc.gov	jmills@commerce.nc.gov	brian.fletcher@commerce.nc.gov	melvin.casper@commerce.nc.gov
828-894-2120	828-627-6206	336-320-2181	252-456-3236	252-537-3365
WEST Vickie Sealock		SOUTH Louie Comer	SOUTH Bradley Baker	SOUTH Marie Amsdill
vsealock@commerce.nc.gov		ccomer@commerce.nc.gov	bbaker@commerce.nc.gov	marie.amsdill@commerce.nc.gov
828-689-4257		704-588-2660	704-937-7861	910-422-8314

Brochure Policy

- Defines which brochures are eligible for display or distribution
- Ensures materials are tourism-related, accurate, and helpful
- Maintains consistent standards across all nine Welcome Centers
- Supports a clean, curated brochure environment
- Provides a fair statewide approval process

Please Scan the QR code for more information on the approval process



Display Policy

- Covers large-format items: banners, posters, display cases, specialty collateral
- Ensures displays are professional, safe, and tourism friendly
- Maintains visual consistency across Welcome Centers
- Uses a standard approval process for fairness and transparency
- Follows a 30–60 day rotating timeline to give all partners equal exposure

Scan QR code for full guidelines and display schedule details



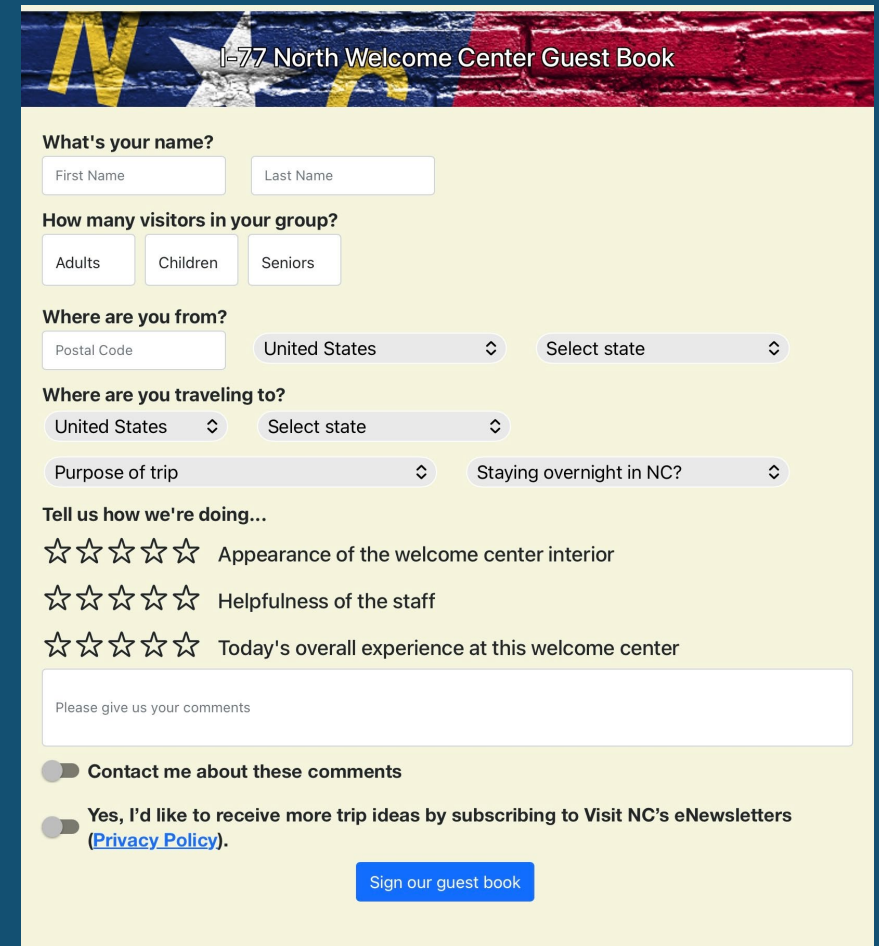
I-95 Welcome Center Manager



Marie Amsdill
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Welcome Centers iPad Registration

2025 Guest Registrations Jan - Oct	Average Per Center	Program Wide
Total Registered	15,474	123,792
Avg. Registered Per Day	43	343
iPad Sign-Ins	6,487	51,898

The form is titled "I-77 North Welcome Center Guest Book" and features a header with a large "N" and a star. It contains several sections: "What's your name?" with input fields for "First Name" and "Last Name"; "How many visitors in your group?" with buttons for "Adults", "Children", and "Seniors"; "Where are you from?" with a "Postal Code" field and dropdowns for "United States" and "Select state"; "Where are you traveling to?" with dropdowns for "United States" and "Select state"; "Purpose of trip" and "Staying overnight in NC?" with dropdowns; "Tell us how we're doing..." with three star-rating questions: "Appearance of the welcome center interior", "Helpfulness of the staff", and "Today's overall experience at this welcome center"; a "Please give us your comments" text area; and two toggle switches for "Contact me about these comments" and "Yes, I'd like to receive more trip ideas by subscribing to Visit NC's eNewsletters (Privacy Policy)". A blue "Sign our guest book" button is at the bottom.

Welcome Centers 'Top Five'

Top Five States of Origin



Visitors from these five states represent **40%** of overall domestic travelers this year.

Top Five International Travelers



Visitors from these five countries represent **81%** of overall international travelers this year.

Welcome Centers Reservations

Top 10 City Reservations (2025)	
Asheville	2,543
Wilmington	2,195
Charlotte	2,035
Emerald Isle	1,166
Fayetteville	1,113
Raleigh	865
Topsail Beach	852
Lumberton	661
New Bern	616
Carolina Beach	583

North Carolina Welcome Centers

Mission Statement: Promote the state's tourism and businesses by providing visitors with helpful information, travel planning assistance, and a positive first impression of the state.

More people, staying longer, spending more money



Welcome Center Operations

- Open daily from 8AM-5PM
- Closed only four days a year:
 - New Year's Day
 - Thanksgiving Day
 - Christmas Eve
 - Christmas Day

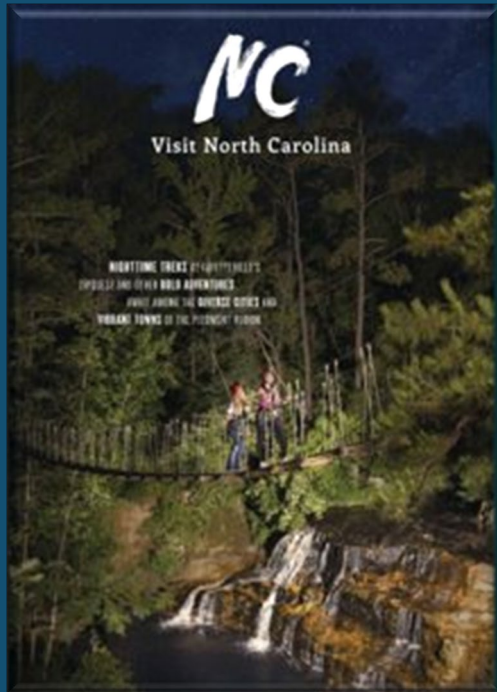


Travel Counselors: First Point of Contact

- Friendly and Engaging
 - Always greet travelers
 - Show genuine interest
 - Ask specific questions to provide better information
- Serve Visitors
 - Offer accurate information
 - Assist with trip planning
 - Provide routing guidance
 - Share travel literature
- Southern Hospitality



Provide Information



State Official Travel Guide



NCDOT Map



Brochures



Directions

Brochures: Providing North Carolina Travel Information

- Brochure Policy
 - Submit Brochures for approval to Visitor Services Administrator
 - After approval, mail to Welcome Centers
- Communication with Welcome Centers
 - Reordering
 - New printings vs New brochures
 - Outdated material



Basic Ways to Engage

- Provide your brochures, maps, and other promotional material
- Regularly visit/update Welcome Centers and their staff
- Host Familiarization (FAM) Tours
- Participate in Welcome Center events
- Provide giveaways, such as pickle stickers or coloring books / pages.
- Set-Up Displays



Displays: Capturing Visitor Interest

- Display Policy
 - Submit concept ideas and formal request to Program Administrator
 - Must be North Carolina related and relevant
 - Coordinate with Welcome Center Managers for setup, Maintenance, and removal
- Types of Displays
 - Display cases in various sizes
 - Murals
 - Smart TVs
 - Tabletop
 - Banners
 - Posters



Welcome Center Displays



Welcome Center Displays



Welcome Center Events

- Types of Events

- National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) celebrations
- Events such as National Peanut Day and National Pickle Day
- School visits Local celebrations

- Benefits of Participation

- Provides opportunities to promote your area or attraction
- Connects you with travelers



Welcome Center Events



Welcome Center Events



Welcome Center Events



National Travel & Tourism Week

Sunday, May 3, to Saturday, May 9, 2026

- Each year during National Travel and Tourism Week, North Carolina's nine Welcome Centers celebrate the occasion by inviting tourism partners to help thank visitors for traveling to and through our state.
- Tourism Week provides an excellent experience to bring your message directly to visitors in the state seeking travel and tourism information.
- An opportunity for our tourism partners to showcase their business specialty through nice marketing material and displays. Also, by distributing giveaways, and other complimentary items.



National Travel & Tourism Week

- Local Destination Marketing Organization's - DMO's: Visitors Bureau, Convention & Visitors Bureau, Tourism Development Authority, attractions, accommodations and other tourism-related businesses are invited to participate in Tourism Week Celebrations.
- To coordinate participation, local Destination Marketing Organizations – DMO's and or tourism-related businesses should contact the Welcome Center of their choice.
- There is no charge to participate, however space is limited, "first-come-first-serve," and reservations are required.



National Travel & Tourism Week

- Bring your own table and other items needed to setup.
- You are allowed to share food, beverage, and snacks during the event for promotional purposes.
- Selling other items during the event is not allowed. However, distributing coupons and promotional items is.
- Some Welcome Centers do have food and beverage (donated or prepared) to share with our tourism partners during the event.



Familiarization Tours

- Provide travel counselors with first-hand information to share with visitors
- Include all nine Welcome Centers, if possible, generally 1 -2 staff members from each center
- Coordination with Visitor Services Program Administrator and Welcome Center Managers
- Welcome Centers provide travel to and from location



Familiarization (FAM) Tours

- Recent FAM Tours have been hosted by the following:
 - High Country Host
 - Visit Charlotte
 - Visit Alamance County
 - Wilmington & Beaches CVB



Post-Helene Welcome Center Visits



Inquiry Program Manager



Pamela Jarrett
pamela.jarrett@commerce.nc.gov
984.920-8400

NC Tourism Call Center & Fulfillment Team



Tourism Call Center: Hours of Operation

- Normal Operating Hours
 - Monday through Friday: 8:00 am – 8:00 pm
 - Saturdays and Sundays: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm
 - Holidays: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm
 - Closed: Christmas Day
- Emergency Operating Hours
 - Open 24 hours
- During severe weather events or emergencies, the call center becomes a crucial 24-hour resource, providing critical, up-to-date information, travel advisories, and assistance to help ensure public safety.



Inquiry Program Overview

Location: North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women (NCCIW), Raleigh.

History:

- 1987: Packaging & fulfillment operations moved to NCCIW.
- 1989: NC Tourism Inquiry Program relocated from downtown Raleigh.

Partnerships:

- North Carolina Department of Adult Corrections (DAC)
- Visit North Carolina
- North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT)



Tourism Call Center

Cost Efficiency:

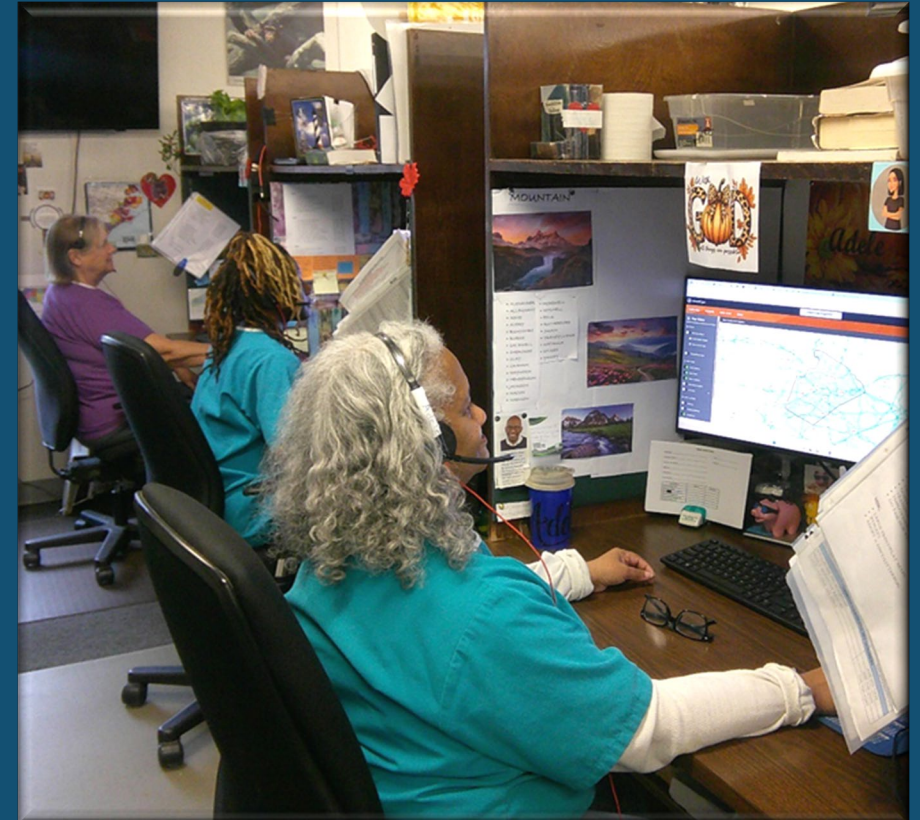
- Inmate workers earn \$1–\$3/day
- Significant savings for NC taxpayers

Our Goal

- Deliver accurate information to tourists and prospective residents through outstanding customer service.

Our Mission

- To elevate North Carolina as a premier destination, boost tourism-generated revenue, and support visitors in planning enjoyable, efficient, and extended stays across the state.



Tourism Call Center

Offender operators provide reliable support for a variety of public information lines, including:

- Visit North Carolina – 1-800-VISIT-NC
- North Carolina Wine – 1-877-3NC-WINE
- Fall Color Report – 1-866-6-LEAVES
- Amtrak Trains (N.C.-sponsored) – 1-800-BY-TRAIN
- N.C. DOT Customer Service – 1-877-368-4968
- N.C. DOT Information Line - 511



Strengthening North Carolina's Growth Through Partnership

Key Contributions:

Economic Driver:

- Supports a tourism industry that generated \$36+ billion in visitor spending (2024)

Accessible Information:

- Provides personalized assistance to travelers
- Critical for visitors with limited or no internet access

Comprehensive Support:

- Delivers current information on lodging, attractions, road conditions, and safety
- Serves as a reliable resource during daily operations and emergency events



Strategic Marketing Impact

Enhances North Carolina's image as a welcoming, visitor-friendly destination

Attends VisitNC conferences annually to gain valuable NC tourism insights and build important connections that helps us to further promote North Carolina

Strengthens economic growth by supporting small businesses and boosting local tax revenue

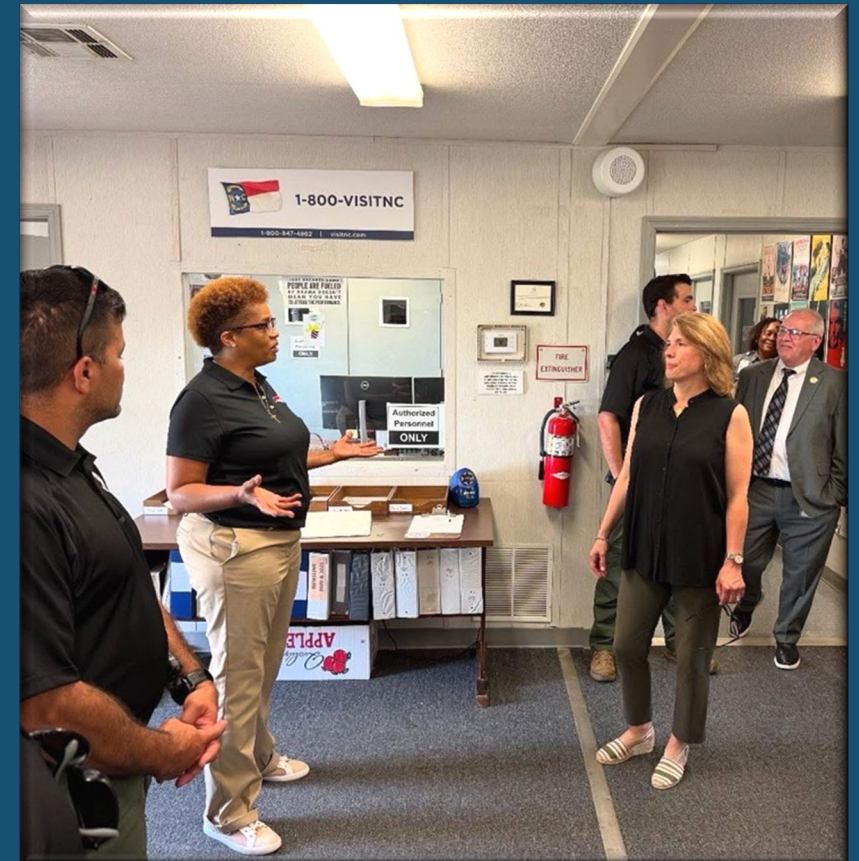
Works with Kathy Prickett to process VisitNC online orders and stay current with VisitNC updates via Newslink

Collaborates with Andre Nabors to process and distribute NC retirement and Civil War guides



Surprise Visit from the NC Executive Office

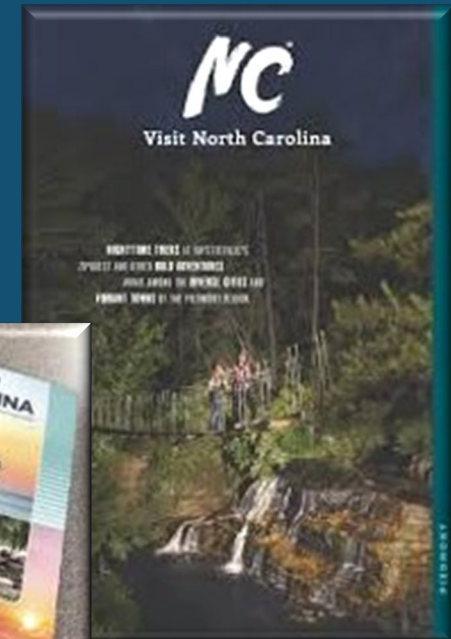
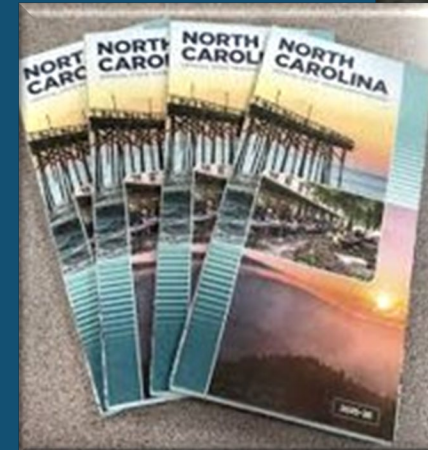
- A special visit from the First Lady of North Carolina, Anna Stein
- Accompanied by members of the NC Executive Office
- Recognized the dedication and impact of the Tourism Call Center team
- Shared appreciation for efforts in promoting North Carolina as a top travel destination
- Encouraged continued excellence in visitor engagement and support



North Carolina Inquiry Program Tourism Call Center Contributions

Inmate Operator & Bulk Mailer Contributions (2020–2025)

- Exceptional Call Handling During Hurricanes (Matthew, Florence, Michael, Dorian, and Helene)
 - Managed **3 times** normal call volume
 - Delivered efficient and effective customer service throughout
 - Nature of Incoming calls: Road conditions, lodging, reservations, if places were open during storms.



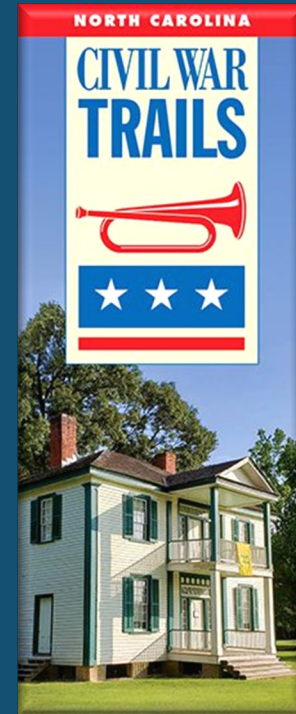
North Carolina Inquiry Program Tourism Call Center Contributions

Tourism Information Fulfillment (2020–September 2025)

- Over 1.9 million requests fulfilled by inmate bulk mailers:
 - NC DOT Maps: **1,059,207**
 - Travel Guides: **555,291**
 - Civil War Trail Guides: **111,620**
 - Retirement Packages: **2,205**
 - NC Wine Guides: **171,806**
 - Student Packages: **628**

Call Volume Handled (January 2020–September 2025)

- **534,573** calls answered including those to 1-800-VISIT-NC



Promoting North Carolina Through Visitor Engagement



Influencing Travel Decisions: Guide callers to explore areas of interest and new destinations , inspiring extended or return visits.



Advocating for North Carolina: Assist those considering relocation or retirement by highlighting unique attractions and lifestyle benefits across the state, often comparing North Carolina to other states.



Showcasing North Carolina's Unique Regions: Provide comprehensive, statewide information—visitor centers, attractions, hotels, restaurants, and more—for North Carolina's three regions:

Mountains
Piedmont
Coast



Our Partnership with Visit NC: Promote North Carolina's diverse attractions and hidden gems to a wide audience.



VisitNC.com: A Vital Tool: Used daily to share accurate travel information (e.g., ferry terminals), inspire exploration across NC, and offer a strong first impression to visitors and potential residents.

Why DMO Visits to the Tourism Call Center Matter

Value of DMO Visits: The more we know, the better we promote!

DMO visits give us valuable, first-hand insight into each region.
They allow us to confidently promote destinations we've personally experienced, connect callers with passionate local experts, and understand the unique vision each DMO brings.
These visits are far more impactful than relying solely on online research.

Why DMO Visits to the Tourism Call Center Matter

Key Benefits of DMO Visits: What We Gain	How You Can Help Us Assist Callers
Fresh Knowledge	Stay updated on local events, attractions, and insights.
Support Small Businesses	Learn about and promote local entrepreneurs.
Real-Time Area Updates	Discover new and changing businesses in each region.
Experience It First-Hand	See, taste, and feel what visitors experience- brochures, food, videos, and more.
Build Trust with Callers	Share authentic, personal recommendations based on real experiences.
Showcase NC’s Diversity	Highlight the unique character of each county and its offerings.
Stronger Community Connections	Connect callers with passionate local experts and resources.
More Impactful Than Online	In-person visits leave lasting impressions that web research can’t match.
See Through the DMO’s Eyes	Understand their vision and what makes their area special.

How to Get Involved with the Inquiry Program

Visit us at the Tourism Call Center - Interested in scheduling a visit?

To showcase your destination, please contact:

Pamela Jarrett
pamela.jarrett@commerce.nc.gov
984-920-8400



Important Information for Visitors:

- Please provide at least 30 days' notice so we can obtain administrative approval.
- All visitors are required to complete PREA and volunteer training, which can be conducted 30 minutes prior to your presentation at our location.
- A background check is also required. Please contact us for further details.

For More Information

Visitor Services Administrator:

**Wally Wazan
NC Department of Commerce
301 N. Wilmington Street, 27601**

**4324 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699
919-814-4649
wwazan@commerce.nc.gov**



ALL THINGS TRAVEL GUIDE

Next NC Monthly Partner Webinar

January 8, 2026

QUESTIONS?



NORTH CAROLINA
**DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE**