

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VISITHATTIESBURG CELEBRATES NATIONAL  
TOURISM WEEK MAY 6-12**

**HATTIESBURG (May 4, 2017)** — VisitHATTIESBURG is hosting a variety of community events focusing on “Travel: Then and Now” May 6-12 in celebration of National Travel and Tourism Week 2018. The events will highlight Hattiesburg’s tourism economy growth over the last decade, while also recognizing individuals who exemplify excellent service in the hospitality industry.

This year’s national theme for the week serves to acknowledge how far the travel industry has come. VisitHBURG’s goal is to give event attendees a glimpse of the travel experiences of Hattiesburg visitors in its early years while also applauding the innovations and growth of today.

“Tourism is a major driver of Hattiesburg’s economic growth. We benefit greatly from visitors who come to watch sporting events, see world-class concerts or just to eat at any of our great restaurants,” said Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker. “National Travel and Tourism Week affords us an opportunity to celebrate the many businesses and individuals who make Hattiesburg a premier destination city in the Gulf South, and it calls us to refocus our efforts to further grow this important sector.”

National Travel and Tourism Week also provides the VisitHBURG team with the chance to identify those who make the industry successful and welcoming to all visitors. One such event is the Annual Tourism Partners Luncheon and Shining Star Awards ceremony held each year during National Tourism Week. The Shining Star Award is Hattiesburg’s only service award program, and recipients are nominated by industry partners in hotels, restaurants, attractions, and government.

“As a community, it takes all of us working together to create a positive visitor experience. National Tourism week gives us the opportunity to highlight the success of Hattiesburg’s tourism economy, thank community partners and engage with our visitors in a fun and memorable way,” Marlo Dorsey, executive director of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, said.

In 2017, approximately 1.8 million visitors spent more than \$278 million in the Hattiesburg area, an increase of 1.6% over the previous year. This spending supports more than 4,270 local jobs, 500 restaurants, 2,700 hotel rooms, and hundreds of retail locations and attractions.

**NATIONAL TOURISM WEEK EVENTS IN HATTIESBURG: MAY 6-12**

**Monday, May 7: Visitors Center Open House from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

VisitHBURG ambassadors will have complimentary donuts and coffee from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for guests. Visitors can also register to win a getaway trip to Hattiesburg, which includes a two-night stay, gift certificates to area attractions and restaurants, and more. Those who purchase items from the Visitors Center store on Monday will receive 20 percent off their order.

**Monday, May 7 and Tuesday, May 8: Partner Thank You Blitz**

VisitHBURG team members will stop by to say hello to community partners, including hotels, restaurants, and retailers, throughout the area to recognize them for their service.

**Wednesday, May 9: 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Tourism Partner's Luncheon and Shining Star Awards**

This event highlights local industry partners who have been nominated by their peers and supervisors for exceptional customer service. More than 30 local Shining Stars will be recognized at this year's annual luncheon.

**Thursday, May 10: Social Media Celebration of Travel**

#TBT has never been better. To celebrate "Travel: Then and Now," VisitHBURG will be posting throwback pictures on all of its social media channels of Hattiesburg during its early years.

**Friday, May 11: ADP First Friday Breakfast, VisitHBURG Sponsor and Speaker**

VisitHBURG is collaborating with the Area Development Partnership to share industry successes and the future tourism outlook with business leaders and area stakeholders.

**Friday, May 11: VisitHBURG presents Live at Five from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.**

The community is invited to this encore event of Live at Five, which is a free, outdoor music event held at Town Square Park. The first 100 guests to stop by the VisitHBURG booth will have the opportunity to spin the prize wheel for a chance to win.

*For more information on the events of the week, follow VisitHATTIESBURG online at VisitHBURG.org, Facebook or by signing up for the organization's weekly newsletter.*

*The Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, doing business as VisitHATTIESBURG, is the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the City of Hattiesburg. Created to promote the Greater Hattiesburg Area and its tourism industry to potential visitors, the mission of VisitHATTIESBURG is to increase overnight bookings for both leisure and corporate travel with the ultimate goal of growing the economic impact of these visitors on the local economy. By marketing Hattiesburg's local hotel, dining, attraction, and shopping options, VisitHBURG has successfully tripled the city's tourism industry since being established in 1990, making HBURG the third most visited city in Mississippi.*

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