City of Isle of Palms South Carolina

OCTOBER 13, 2026

What we learned & where it leads.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OVERVIEW · RESEARCH & DIRECTIVES

Isle of Palms doesn't have a problem with what it stands for – The challenge is how many different ways it's being said and shown. Residents, visitors, businesses and City staff describe the same island: ***welcoming, relaxed, peaceful, natural, a home beach***. This research gives the City one clear direction for telling that story consistently.

HOW WE BUILT THE FOUNDATION

700+
COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES
From residents, visitors & businesses

9
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS
With community survey respondents & city staff

80+
SOURCES OF DATA REVIEWED
Across state, region, and city-level data

5
DATA-CENTRIC REPORTS
Across stakeholder input, brand, market & tourism

6 THINGS THE RESEARCH MAKES CLEAR:

#1 **One island, told five ways** – The City, Chamber, Explore Charleston, Wild Dunes & County Parks agree on the basics, but with no shared standards, each says it differently. ***The island needs one story.***

#2 **Family is the throughline** – "Family" & "home" were the words survey respondents used most. ***Family connects the people who live here with the people who return year after year.***

#3 **1 revenue base, 2 audiences** – About ⅓ of City revenue is visitor-linked and 38% of island dwellings hold short-term rental licenses. ***The brand can't pick one over the other. It has to work for both.***

#4 **Value is growing faster than volume** – The Charleston region is earning more per visitor with-out needing more visitors. ***Summers are full – its room to grow is in fall and winter.***

#5 **Found for the beach, not the stay** – People search for staying on the island about as often as for the beach, but Google mostly shows them the City's beach conditions page. ***City channels aren't yet part of the decision to stay.***

#6 **Consistency takes governance, not just design** – Staff make branded materials often, but it's rarely anyone's core job and there's no single place to find the right files. ***A new look without an owner and a shared library will fragment again.***

The Opportunity

A COMPLETE ISLAND VACATION THAT STILL FEELS LIKE COMING HOME.

Nearby & drive-market destinations have 1-2 lanes here: the beach-house stay, lived-in community, resort-level recreation, or Charleston proximity. IOP is the only one with all four. And it didn't even have to *try*.

Strategic Directive:

POSITION ISLE OF PALMS AS THE FAMILY BEACH ISLAND THAT STILL FEELS LIKE HOME.

This isn't a new identity. It's the one IOP already has, brought front and center and made consistent. It also advances the City's Strategic Plan: managing growth pressure, building trust through consistent communication, sustaining revenue, protecting quality of life and leading on the environment.

WHAT THIS DIRECTION IS

- **Resident *first*** – The brand has to ring true to the people who live here *before* it speaks to anyone else.
- ***Value* over volume** – Longer stays, repeat visits and the quiet season. Not *more* people at peak.
- **One *core* story** – Told *consistently* by everyone who represents the island.

WHAT IT'S NOT

- A party beach.
- A generic resort or luxury enclave.
- A push to bring in *more* visitors.
- A change to what IOP is.

WHO THE BRAND SPEAKS TO

First

ROOTED ISLANDERS

Full-time, part-time and second-home residents. They set the bar the brand must ring true to.

Deepen

RETURNING FAMILIES

Families who make IOP their annual beach week, for decades. Goal is longer stays & repeat visits.

Invite

QUIET-SEASON GATHERERS

Couples, empty-nesters, milestone trips not tied to school calendars, invited when the island has room.

How does it come to life?

MESSAGING

One core story, adjusted in tone for each audience rather than a new story on every channel. A voice that sounds like a neighbor – ***understated, plain, quietly confident.*** The feeling of the place first, practical details second.

VISUAL

One recognizable core built from what IOP *already has* – like heritage and sense of place – that departments can flex while keeping their sub-brands. Plus a shared library of flexible, easy templates and clear ownership so staff doesn't need a designer every time.

HOW WE'LL KNOW IT'S WORKING

Resident sentiment
Pride in the island and its identity

Engagement
Newsletter, website and social reach

Off-season stays
Longer, higher-value stays outside summer

Trip planning
IOP's own channels found when families plan

Staff adoption
The system actually used across departments & sustained over time

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

NOW – City sign-off
Findings & directives approved by October 16

NEXT – Alignment workshop
With City team, by October 21

THEN – Milestone 2 Kickoff
Strategy & Messaging, ETD early November

AFTER – Milestone 3 Kickoff
Creative concept selection, by November 20

GO DEEPER – Read the Full Report
Read the Executive Summary of Findings & its supporting reports by October 27

#1 FULL REPORT



Executive Summary of Findings – Consolidated findings of all supplemental reports.

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORTS



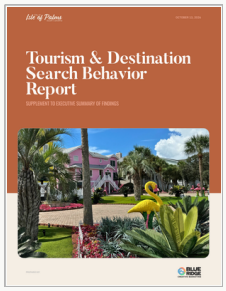
Interviews & Civic Survey Findings



Interdepartmental Survey Findings



Internal Brand & Asset Audit



IOP & Market Search Behavior



Tourism & Market Research

BLUE RIDGE CREATIVE MARKETING