

BUNCOMBE COUNTY

**EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE**

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

February 2023

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS OVERVIEW

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) has charted a new course for tourism aligned with broader community priorities. This includes the adoption of [strategic imperatives](#) (outlined below) that are informing and guiding the direction of Explore Asheville's program of work and community investments going forward.

The [Monthly Highlights](#) report, released at the BCTDA Board meetings, provides a brief update of our progress toward these strategic imperatives. You can also find information from the discussions and presentations at [Buncombe County TDA meetings](#), in our [newsletters](#), at [partner events](#), and via other communication channels.



Delivering Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth

Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.

Focus on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.



Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.

Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.



Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.

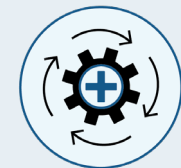
Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



Running a Healthy & Effective Organization

Invest in people, policies and practices to serve our community with integrity within the organization's legislative requirements.

DELIVERING BALANCED RECOVERY & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Balance quality of life for residents & experience for visitors through project investments

- Tourism Product Development Fund: Summarized annual reports of active projects and presented to the BCTDA board in the February board meeting
- Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund:
 - [Asheville Celtic Festival](#) – February 18
 - [Asheville Mardi Gras Parade and Queen's Ball](#) – February 19

Collaborate with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment

- Asheville Business Events Council (ABEC): Held strategy meeting with Asheville Chamber's Economic Development staff about the importance of establishing the group's collective mission; one-on-ones will be conducted to gain insight into members' needs then a path forward will be determined
- Sports Commission Assessment: Together with sports commission founding members, contracted Huddle Up Group to do an organizational assessment of ABRSC; initial takeaways were shared with stakeholders on February 28

Protect and evolve Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations

- DC Roadshow: Showcased Biltmore Winery, Chemist Spirits, Spicewalla, and French Broad Chocolates products to DC-based journalists, influencers, visitors, and meeting planner clients by teaming up with [What Does Music Taste Like](#)™ to execute two events in DC; 24 meeting planners and 30 media and industry influencers attended
 - Estimated Reach: 97 posts and Stories shared on Instagram to-date generated 48 million potential reach to influencers' combined followers
 - In-Market Promotion: Ran coordinated TV and outdoor advertising in the DC region to complement roadshow efforts and to promote nonstop air service to Asheville

Accelerate proactive sales efforts to increase net new business to the destination

- American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace: Attended the appointment-based show in Detroit for Motorcoach and Tour Operators and Travel Industry Suppliers who want to expand group tour and travel business
- Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Global: Attended SITE 50th Anniversary Event in New York; this professional association provides resources to 2,500 members at both global and local chapter level by networking, online resources, education, certification, and advocacy
- Meetings Webpages: Revamped section of ExploreAsheville.com geared at [Meetings Planners](#) to improve user experience and improve calls to action

ENCOURAGING SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Influence visitors to respect, protect and preserve natural, cultural and human resources

- Earned Media:
 - Travel + Leisure: [This Glamping Hotel in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains Has Stargazing Domes and an Epic Tree House](#)
 - Fodors: [14 Stunning Frozen Waterfalls Across North America](#)
 - Fishing Booker: [Top 9 Spring Break Fishing Destinations for 2023](#)

ENGAGING & INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Extend a genuine invitation to diverse audiences

- Paint 'n' Sip Brunch: Teamed up with NOMADNESS Travel Tribe to host an event in DC with 36 BIPOC travelers, content creators, and guests; Asheville artist Jenny Pickens led the painting activity and was accompanied with musical entertainment from local DJ/musician Mike Martinez
 - Estimated Reach: 123 posts and Stories on Instagram mentioning Asheville reached an approximate audience of 63 million diverse followers
- Site Visits: Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists
 - Atlanta Parent Magazine: Journalist Laura Powell visited with family for story on why families should make Asheville a must visit destination,
 - Northern Virginia Magazine: Writer Erica Moody stayed at The Foundry and dined at Benne on Eagle for May story about travel to the Carolinas, including Asheville reclaiming its Black history, openings and activities

Increase outreach in recruiting diverse meetings and events

- Earned Media:
 - Black Bride: [Unique Wedding Venues for the Non-Traditional Bride & Groom](#)

Increase diversity of partner network

- Entrepreneur Spotlights: Collaborated with six local Black entrepreneurs and creators, [It's Amira M](#), [Cooking with Comedy](#), [Queens Island Cuisine](#), [Show & Tell Creative](#), [Wintress Daughter Soaps](#), and [Versatilities Abstract Art](#), on a series of Instagram Story takeovers

PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

Elevate Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits

- Influencer Visit: Food content creator Gina Homolka of [@skinnytaste](#) with 1.9 million followers visited Asheville with family and friends, sharing content from their time at Biltmore, downtown, and in the outdoors
- Earned Media:
 - Fodors: [12 Small Towns That Inspired Some of the Most Popular American Novels](#)
 - Fifty Grande: [Best Things to do in Asheville, N.C.](#)

Actively promote creative community and resources to groups and events

- Welcome Bag Gift Guide: Introduced a new online [Welcome Bag Gift Guide](#) for meeting organizers to source from as they plan events in Asheville; the guide will highlight a curated list of locally crafted products

RUNNING A HEALTHY & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

Demonstrate organizational commitment to local, diverse creators, makers & vendors

- Visitor Guide Distribution: Received and fulfilled 2,960 individual requests and 37 out-of-market orders, totaling 128 cases, or 6,400 guides; 53 local partners ordered 130 cases of visitor guides, or 6,500 guides
- ExploreAsheville.com
 - New Partner Outreach: Sent emails to 38 businesses
 - Partner Meetings: 4 in-person partner sessions/site visits
 - Partner Listings: Created 11 new free partner listings and updated 93 partner listings
 - Partner One-on-Ones: Held 6 partner support meetings
 - Event Calendar: 346 events created or reviewed and approved to our online calendar
 - Package & Deals: Added 23 packages and deals

Focus on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement

- E-Newsletters, E-Alerts: [5 sent in January](#); delivered to a total of 9,189 subscribers with open rates as high as 52% (9% decrease from January) and an average of 47% (2% decrease from January)
- Local News & BCTDA/ Explore Asheville Coverage
 - General
 - WLOS: [From glamping to celebrating the 'Roaring 20's,' new hotels offer Asheville mystique](#)
 - Skift: [The Foundry Hotel helps engage with Asheville, NC's Black Community](#)
 - McCormick Field Coverage:
 - WLOS: [Discussion around funding for McCormick Field upgrades continues](#)
 - Citizen Times: [Asheville considers future of McCormick Field: could mean \\$950-\\$1M annual city commitment](#)
 - Citizen Times: [Buncombe County's lobbyists will push for McCormick Field, education funding from state](#)