

BUNCOMBE COUNTY

EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY 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.

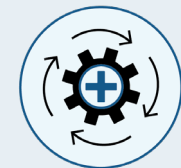
Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



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 (TPDF) Annual Reports: All active grantees submitted annual reports by January 15
- Legacy Investment From Tourism (LIFT) Fund: Held working group meetings to gather input on program guidelines

Protect and evolve Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations and inspire higher quality visits

- Visitor Guide: New 2023 guide was completed, printed, and delivered; the digital guide can be viewed [here](#)
- International Media Marketplace (IMM): Attended TravMedia's IMM in NYC, and conducted 24+ multi-pillar pitch appointments with top travel journalists, editors, and influencers
- Family Content: Highlighted kid-friendly restaurants and breweries in [blog](#) and [accompanying Reel](#) with help of local creators When in Asheville
- Earned Media Coverage:
 - *StyleBlueprint*: [10 Romantic Getaways in the South](#)
 - *We Dream of Travel*: [The 41 Most Romantic Getaways in the USA in 2023](#)

Improve quality of each visit by inspiring increased length of stay & dispersal

- Bucket List Campaign: Ran commercials during the Rose Bowl Parade and CNN New Year's Eve inviting people to add Asheville to their bucket lists; mailed 25 travel reporters a personalized journal and pitch to visit
- Plan for Vacation Day: Amplified [#PlanForVacationDay](#) and pointed prospective visitors to trip-planning resources
- Winter Travel Itinerary: Created a 3-day [ultimate winter vacation itinerary](#), encouraging people to visit during Asheville's undiscovered season

Collaborate with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment

- Hotel Partners Meeting: Convened several sales directors and general managers from Tunnel Road and East Buncombe County at the Holiday Inn East; received updates from Asheville Mall and discussed opportunities to attract more government, sports, wedding, reunion, and motorcoach groups

DELIVERING BALANCED RECOVERY & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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

- Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA): Attended Convening Leaders Conference in Columbus, OH, which included 80 educational sessions designed to provide attendees with leadership essentials, best practices, and new insights on trending topics to meet today's challenges. More than 3,300 industry professionals in attendance
- Independent Planners Education Conference (IPEC): Conducted 23 individual appointments with independent planners in Memphis, TN; attended boot camp, networking receptions, general sessions, and keynote industry speakers
- Sports Express in Fort Lauderdale, FL: Included 28 individual appointments with planners, a community service project, team-building activities, and pre-arranged networking dinners each night
- Wedding Festivals Bridal Expo: Attended at the WNC Agricultural Center and showcased Asheville's wedding services to more than 300 brides
- Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) Annual Conference: Attended in Pittsburg, PA, and met for 2.5 days of industry education, round-tables, speakers and networking activities with approximately 260 servicing professionals
- What's New in Meetings: Published [new blog](#) and press release focused on new offerings in Asheville that are relevant for meeting planners and groups

ENCOURAGING SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

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

- Year of the Trail Campaign Launch: Promoted [#FirstDayOutdoors](#) on January 1 in coordination with Year of the Trail NC
- Fodors: Supported reporter Stratton Lawrence who is updating the lengthy Asheville portion of Fodor's [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) guide
- Earned Media Coverage:
 - *USAToday.com*: [26 eco-lodges to visit for a once-in-a-lifetime experience](#)

ENGAGING & INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Increase diversity of partner network

- Latinx: Expanded [Latinx-owned Business Guide](#) to include four additional businesses; list is available in both English and Spanish

Increase outreach in recruiting diverse meetings and events

- [LGBTQ+ Wedding Planners Guide](#): Developed a 5-step guide that features some of Asheville's LGBTQ+ friendly venues and vendors

PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

Elevate Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits

- [Seasonal Events Guide](#): Published a roundup of festivals, events and exhibits happening in Asheville throughout every season in 2023
- Food Network Magazine: Hosted reporter Monica Michael Willis who is working on a feature about North Carolina barbecue and creative ways to walk it off, including by wandering at Biltmore Estate
- Earned Coverage:
 - *Eater*: [The Best Food Cities to Travel to in 2023](#)
 - *K1047.com*: [North Carolina City One of the Best Cheap Romantic Getaways](#)

RUNNING A HEALTHY & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

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

- Visitor Guide Distribution: Received and fulfilled 2,688 individual requests and 35 out-of-market orders, totaling 131 cases, or 6,550 guides; 16 local partners ordered 45 cases of visitor guides, or 2,250 guides
- ExploreAsheville.com
 - New Partner Outreach: Sent emails to 39 businesses
 - Partner Meetings: 6 in-person partner sessions
 - Partner Listings: Created 13 new free partner listings and updated 73 partner listings
 - Partner One-on-Ones: Held 0 partner support meetings
 - Event Calendar: Posted 275 events to our online calendar
 - Package & Deals: Added 25 packages and deals

Increase team performance and effectiveness

- New Hire: Welcomed Elizabeth White back as Web Manager

Focus on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement

- The Year Ahead: Gathered nearly 250 community leaders and tourism industry partners on January 19 for The Year Ahead partner event at The Venue
 - Program Recap: Highlighted Asheville Superstars, debuted of the TPDF legacy video, facilitated three rapid-fire industry panels, and shared a sneak peek at new aspects of Asheville's storytelling foundation
- E-Newsletters, E-Alerts: [5 sent in January](#); delivered to a total of 9,598 with open rates as high as 61% (9% increase from December) and an average of 49% (2% increase from December)
- Local News & BCTDA/ Explore Asheville Coverage
 - *Citizen Times*: [Buncombe County's lobbyists will push for McCormick Field, education funding from state](#)
 - *AVL Watchdog*: [Short-term vacation rental growth explodes in Buncombe County](#)
 - *WLOS*: ['We're at crisis:' Asheville service workers demand action on unaffordable rent prices](#)
 - *WLOS*: [Groups plan to ask tourism agency to use certain funds for affordable housing](#)