

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

JUNE 2023

EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE

POWERED BY

Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

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.

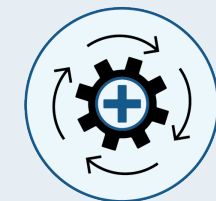
Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



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.

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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 & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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

- **Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) Grant Cycle:** TPDF Committee reviewed Phase I applications and invited seven applicants to participate in Phase II
 - **Major Works Pathway:** TPDF Committee reviewed the application for McCormick Field and presented a recommendation to the BCTDA
- **Event Grants and Sponsorships:** Supported the following events through funding and cross-promotion
 - **AVL Honey Fest:** Center for Honeybee Research event on June 4
 - **Music on Main:** Weaverville Business Association event on June 10
 - **Bonsai as Fine Art:** The Blue Ridge Bonsai Society event on June 10-11
 - **Asheville Ideas Fest:** UNC Asheville event on June 13-17
 - **2023 Annual Meeting:** Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce event on June 14
 - **Juneteenth Festival Celebration:** The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Asheville and Buncombe County event on June 17-18
 - **Pritchard Park Summer Series:** Asheville Downtown Association event series occurring weeknights May 30 through August 8
 - **Downtown After 5 Series:** Asheville Downtown Association event series occurring monthly April through September
- **Wayfinding and Kiosk Audit:** Updated 11 different vehicular wayfinding signs and 48 pedestrian panels (16 three-sided kiosks), including the area maps, interpretive content, and leave no trace panels throughout Asheville, Black Mountain, Weaverville, and Woodfin

Collaborating with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment

- **I-26/I-40 West Hotel Partner Meeting:** Met at the Hampton Inn & Suites Asheville Biltmore Area; hosted guest speaker Drake Fowler, Assistant Deputy Director for the North Carolina Arboretum, and discussed how to increase government, wedding, sports and tour groups

Protecting and evolving Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations

- **PRSA Travel & Tourism Sector Conference:** Networked with travel, M&C, F&B, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ editors, reporters and content creators; pitched stories and potential collaborations

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

- **Direct Flight Initiative:** Developed six customized landing pages for targeted direct flight markets (Boston, Austin, Denver, NYC, Chicago, and DC) with specialized messaging and links to flight planners to use as a test against our generalized direct flight landing page
- **Last-minute Itinerary:** Created [a blog post](#) to attract travelers trying to fit in a last-minute, easy domestic summer trip
- **Affordable Asheville:** Created a suite of budget-friendly Asheville content to attract visitors, including a piece about the benefits of a midweek stay
- **Black Mountain Neighborhood Spotlight:** Produced [new feature video](#) for Black Mountain

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

- **LamontCo 2023 Associate Xchange Summit:** Attended in Tempe, AZ, with over 50 third-party planners
- **SITE Southeast - Southern Supper:** Attended the sold-out event in Atlanta, GA, with 120 industry professionals from eight southern states
- **Meeting Professionals International World Education Conference:** Attended in Riviera Maya, Mexico; participated in educational sessions and the MPI Annual Membership meeting; had a one-on-one meeting with MPI's VP of Business Development
- **SC Society of Association Executives Annual Conference:** Attended in Greenville, SC and the networking and educational opportunities were invaluable; sponsored one of the event's breakfasts with 85 attendees
- **DIGIDECK:** Finalized template for sales team to utilize to create cloud-based presentations, giving them the ability reach more clients and receive valuable analytics on prospects
- **Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA):** In preparation for [AdventureELEVATE 2024](#), hosted ATTA's regional director and project manager for a site visit; toured Grove Arcade, The Mule, Salvage Station, New Belgium Brewing, the Orange Peel, Rabbit Rabbit, and more
- **Paid Media:** Promoted Asheville as a premiere destination for meetings and conferences via inclusion in planner-facing emails, editorial, and paid social



ENCOURAGING SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

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

- **Atlas Obscura:** Produced the following for a content partnership with Atlas Obscura
 - **How Community Makes Appalachian Cuisine Shine:** Highlighted Chef John Fleer, his sources of inspiration, Appalachia foodways, locally sourced ingredients, and his philanthropic work in a video
 - **No Taste Like Home:** Interviewed Alan Muskat, owner of No Taste Like Home tours; the podcast explored Asheville's unique biodiversity and why it's one of the best places in the world to get outside and bring home delicious, sustainable ingredients
- **Outside Magazine:** Partnered with the popular publication to produce the following content, which was shared on Outside's Instagram, Facebook and homepage:
 - **Best Things To Do in Asheville, From Local Experts:** An article featuring favorite picks from Katie Button (chef and TV host), Erin McGrady (trail runner and founder of Authentic Asheville), Pete Kennedy (mapmaker), Katie Cahn (jewelry maker and fishing guide), and Meherwan Irani (chef)



ENGAGING & INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Extending a genuine invitation to diverse audiences

- **Black Travel Expo:** Attended the [Black Travel Expo](#), an annual conference that provides a professional, inclusive, diverse, and safe meeting space and platform for people of color who love to travel to learn about top destinations
- **Spanish-Speaking Traveler Content Initiative**
 - Published the Spanish version of "50 Things to Do in Asheville" blog post
 - Finished shooting a Latinx brand video geared towards welcoming Spanish-speaking travelers to Asheville" and began post-production
- **Diverse Paid Media**
 - **Black Enterprise:** Invested in editorial, video, and social media ads with Black Enterprise, the premiere business, investing, and wealth-building resource for African Americans
 - Tee George (@_asipoftee_) Partnership: Promoted influencer Tee George's [Instagram Story](#) (163K followers) via Undertone, following her visit to the area
 - **48 Hours Outdoors! How to Spend Summer in Asheville, NC:** Partnered with The Root, a popular Black news, opinion, politics and culture newsletter, to produce this feature
- **Top Events to Celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride Month in Asheville:** Created a full listing of Pride Month events for our Explore Asheville blog, and shared via organic social and email
- **Tony J Finds Balance in Things That Bring Him Joy in Asheville, North Carolina:** feature Asheville influencer Tony J in paid partnership with Latinx media site Remezcla
- **Everyone Welcome Partner Collaboration:** Hosted a roundtable discussion with LGBTQ+ community members and partners, discussed ways in which LGBTQ+ residents and travelers are welcomed to our city, and areas for improvement; the group plans to meet again at the end of August to create a mission, goals, and finalize a statement of inclusivity

Developing and investing in community projects that attract and engage diverse audiences

- **Black Cultural Heritage Trail:** Finalized a logo design in collaboration with Curve Theory and onboarded Visit Widget, which will allow the tour experience to be replicated online and for stops on the trail to be augmented with additional digital content and resources



PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

Elevating Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits

- **Summer Arts Initiative:** Created a ["Cultural and Performing Arts" landing page](#) to help market and promote those types of creative experiences to visitors
- **Asheville Ideas Fest:** Completed media visit from freelance reporter [Winston Ross](#) to attend Asheville Ideas Fest and pitch upcoming stories, including to Barron's Penta magazine with Good Company features on several destination partners
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in June.
 - **Travel + Leisure:** [Everyone to the Table](#) featured the dynamic culinary scene in Asheville in July food and adventure themed issue (result of Jasmine Ting's December visit)
 - **Men's Journal:** [20 Best Fall Beers of 2023: What to Crack Open This Season](#)
 - **Architectural Digest:** [The Vanderbilt Family Homes: Here's Your Guide](#) (secured based on relationship with reporter Jordi Lippe-Mcgraw)
- **TRIPADVISOR X ASHEVILLE:**
 - [Let the Music Move You](#)
 - [Blue Ridge Beats a Modern Spin on a Classic Tradition](#)
 - [From Busking to Breweries Discover a Music and Food Scene Unlike any Other](#)
 - [Asheville honoring the past while looking toward the future](#)

Creating opportunities for partners to learn about and support creative spirit

- **"Tourist in Your Own Town":** Participated in sold-out [AVL Revue event](#) at Story Parlor alongside four partner businesses; invited local singer Virtuous, who represented our organization with an original song based on the event's theme "Tourist in Your Own Town"
- **New Partner Spotlights:** Highlighted recently added partners in monthly e-newsletter to expose partners to other tourism-related businesses in our community, June's features included [Black Mountain Herbal](#), [Indulge Images](#), [Laurel Falls Weddings](#), and [Story Parlor](#)



RUNNING A HEALTHY & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

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

- **Visitor Guide Distribution:** Received and fulfilled 2,179 individual requests and 17 out-of-market orders, totaling 37 cases, or 1,850 guides; 25 local partners ordered 87 cases of visitor guides, or 4,350 guides
- **ExploreAsheville.com**
 - **New Partner Outreach:** Sent emails to 36 businesses
 - **Partner Meetings:** 7 in-person partner sessions/site visits
 - **Partner Listings:** Created 5 new free partner listings and updated 59 partner listings
 - **Partner One-on-Ones:** Held 5 partner support meetings
 - **Event Calendar:** 379 events created or reviewed and approved to our online calendar
 - **Package & Deals:** Added 5 package and deals

Prioritizing individual professional development, trainings and team benefits

- **Everyone Welcome Training:** Hosted [HospitableMe](#) for an internal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) staff training focusing on LGBTQ+ issues, language, and inclusivity

Focusing on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement

- **"Of the Community" Initiative:** Visited 105 partner businesses through spring/summer outreach
- **ExploreAsheville.com Redesign:** Launched a usability study with Destination Analysts, which will include a website survey of 400 participants, a heat mapping of several pages of the website, 20 in depth interviews with leisure travelers and 15 in depth interviews with meeting and sporting event planners.

Focusing on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement (continued)

- **E-Newsletters, E-Alerts:** Engaged partners through one partner alert, and two newsletters; partner communications in June resulted in just under 400 additional opens.
- **Local News & BCTDA / Explore Asheville Coverage:**
 - **General:**
 - Citizen Times | [Asheville workers call on TDA to put tourism tax dollars toward affordable housing](#)
 - Mountain Xpress | [Service industry workers petition for affordable housing funding from the BCTDA](#)
 - WLOS | [Group rallies for a better quality of life in Asheville, affordable housing](#)
 - Mountain Xpress | [Letter: Does tourism bureau have blinders on?](#)
 - AVL Watchdog | [Asheville, Buncombe leaders vow changes in wake of Down Town series. What are the next steps?](#)
 - Buncombe County | [Commissioners honor Pride Month, get update from TDA, approve West Asheville EMS base, and more](#)
 - **TPDF:**
 - Citizen Times | [City of Asheville requests \\$22.9M in tourism tax dollars for McCormick Field renovations](#)
 - **Sponsorships, Festivals & Cultural Events**
 - AVL Today | [Asheville's public golf course gets a major makeover](#)
 - WLOS | [Patrons buzz with excitement for Asheville's second Honey Festival](#)

