

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

March 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.

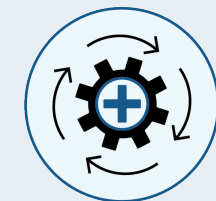
Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



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.

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

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

- **Resident Sentiment Survey:** Measured understanding and engagement of residents in the [2023 Resident Sentiment Survey](#); 84% believe tourism is beneficial to their community
- **Community Project Investment Parameters:** Created a [decision tree](#) to assist potential grant applicants in determining if a project is eligible for support from the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) or new Legacy Investment From Tourism (LIFT) Fund
- **Festival & Cultural Events Support Fund:** Sponsored the following local events in March
 - [Zelda Fitzgerald Week](#): Granted Aurora Studio & Gallery \$800 for event held March 6-11
 - [Taste of Asheville](#): Granted Asheville Independent Restaurant Association \$5,000 for March 9 event

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

- **Always, Asheville:** Aired new "Always, Asheville" commercials (:60, :30, :15 versions)
- **Event Partnerships:** Supported the following major events and serviced the visiting groups
 - **Southern Conference (SoCon):** Attracted regional college basketball fans for a three-day tournament held March 3-6 at Harrah's Cherokee Center – Asheville
 - **Visit NC 365:** Convened with tourism leaders from around the state during three-day conference held March 6-8 at Omni Grove Park Inn; there was record attendance of 560
 - Welcome Event: Hosted a reception that incorporated WAXON Studio, Noir Collective, Made x Mtns, and Eno; Billy Zanski opened with sound healing
 - "3 Laps of Luxury" Media FAM: During the conference, invited 17 media to participate in a Biltmore roof tour, downtown walking tour, and Neng Jr's dinner
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in March
 - **HuffPost:** [Mistakes Tourists Make While Visiting Asheville, North Carolina](#)

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

- **Spring/Summer Travel Pitches:** Developed a seasonal [press release](#) on spring and summer happenings

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

- **48-Hour FAM:** Hosted 15 meeting planners from across the country at Haywood Park Hotel on March 14-17; generated two leads
 - **Featured Venues and Activities:** Isa's French Bistro, Biltmore Estate, the Omni Grove Park Inn, Grand Bohemian, New Belgium Brewing, Asheville Adventure Center, Foundry Hotel, Flying Bike Tours, Asheville Art Experience in the RAD, and more
- **Group Sales:** Attended the following trade shows/conferences for lead generation
 - **SmartMeetings:** Attended three-day trade show in Palm Springs, CA; conducted 24 appointments
 - **Power of Purpose (PoP):** Met 70 planners in Washington, DC, during showcase event by Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) + Destinations International
 - **Pharma Forum:** Held 11 meetings during three-day trade show in New York, NY
 - **ConferenceDirect Annual Partner Meeting:** Had 18 appointments with new planners in Louisville, KY; processed one lead (305 room nights) and three tentative leads
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions and accolades in March
 - **Prevue Meetings & Incentives | March/April Issue:** [Experiential Southeast](#) (page 36)
 - **Northstar Meetings Group:** [Top Incentive Travel Destinations for 2023](#)

Collaborating with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment

- **Public Safety Meeting:** Co-hosted a listening session downtown with Asheville Chamber on March 1 in response to concerned partners



ENCOURAGING SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

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

- **Year of the Trail:** Launched new [custom landing page](#) highlighting state-wide Year of the Trail campaign, focused on responsible recreation, partner events, and trail guides
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in March
 - **Outdoor Wire USA Today:** [See spring wildflowers at these 16 gorgeous places in the US](#)

Increasing number of groups that support community projects

- **48-Hour FAM:** Demonstrated benefit of adding service projects to meeting agendas by having FAM attendees volunteer with United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County



ENGAGING & INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Extending a genuine invitation to diverse audiences

- **NOMADNESS Giveaway:** Partnered with NOMADNESS on a trip to Asheville giveaway, including a stay at The Foundry and Hood Huggers walking tour; 31K members were reached through email newsletter, while [Instagram post](#) reached 3.5K accounts and garnered 378 engagements
- **Latinx Content:** Translated the following blog posts to Spanish:
 - [7 Latin Experiences for a Multicultural Trip to Asheville](#)
 - [How to Find the Perfect Christmas Tree in Asheville](#)
 - [10 Family-Friendly Outdoor Adventures Close to Asheville, North Carolina](#)
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in March
 - **Turismo en USA**
 - [Festival Latino Hola Asheville](#)
 - [Lugares turísticos en Carolina del Norte para visitar en 2023](#)
 - [Turismo y Abejas en Carolina Del Norte](#)
- **Site Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists
 - **Northern Virginia Magazine:** Writer Erica Moody stayed at The Foundry in March and plans to include a feature on The Block for a May cover story on travel to the Carolinas



PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

Elevating Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits

- **Garden & Gun Record:** Collaborated with Garden & Gun to produce a [limited-edition record](#) pressed at Citizen Vinyl in Asheville
- **Music Webpage:** Refreshed the [Music](#) landing page on Explore Asheville.com
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in March
 - **USA Today:** [Authors share their top 10 favorite independent bookstores in the South](#)
 - **Travel + Leisure:** [This New Mirror Hotel in North Carolina Has 'Invisible' Cabins — Each With Private Hot Tubs, Pizza Ovens, and Pergolas](#)
 - **Forbes:** [Eating Around Asheville](#)
 - **Allegiant Nonstop Life Magazine | Spring 2023:** [Save the Date - Asheville Bread Festival](#)
- **Site Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists
 - **The Boston Globe:** Diane Blair from The Boston Globe stayed at the DoubleTree downtown and participated in a private baking class and visited the RAD Farmers Market
- **AVL Beer Week Microsite:** Launched microsite on ExploreAsheville.com in partnership with Asheville Brewer's Alliance to promote this year's event in May

Actively promoting creative community and resources to groups and events

- **PoP Amenities:** Provided French Broad Chocolate and Eagles Nest Outfitters (ENO) earth bags as amenity items during the Power of Purpose (PoP) Showcase



RUNNING A HEALTHY & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

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

- **Visitor Guide Distribution:** Received and fulfilled 2,907 individual requests and 30 out-of-market orders, totaling 145 cases, or 7,250 guides; 34 local partners ordered 89 cases of visitor guides, or 4,450 guides
- **ExploreAsheville.com**
 - **New Partner Outreach:** Sent emails to 48 businesses
 - **Partner Meetings:** 8 in-person partner sessions/site visits
 - **Partner Listings:** Created 18 new free partner listings and updated 92 partner listings
 - **Partner One-on-Ones:** Held 11 partner support meetings
 - **Event Calendar:** 430 events created or reviewed and approved to our online calendar
 - **Package & Deals:** Added 14 package and deals

Increasing team performance and effectiveness

- **Team Engagement:** Surveyed team with support of Fired-Up Culture! to evaluate strengths and opportunities
- **New Employees:** Welcomed Anna Harris, Office Assistant; David Thompson, Digital Communications Manager; and Kimberly Puryear, Destination Project Manager

Focusing on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement

- **Hospitality Outlook:** Hosted speaker Zeek Coleman of Tourism Economics at the Renaissance; 83 attendees lodging partners attended
- **E-Newsletters, E-Alerts:** 11 sent in March; delivered to a total of 14,416 subscribers with open rates as high as 62% (10% increase from February) and an average of 47% (no change from February)

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

- Local News & BCTDA / Explore Asheville Coverage:
 - **General**
 - Mountain Xpress: [BCTDA forecasts higher net income stream in 2024, to benefit county coffers](#)
 - Citizen Times: [Nearly \\$700M in Asheville, Buncombe hotel, Airbnb sales projected, up 50% from pre-COVID](#)
 - NCTIA: [Chris Cavanaugh in 'Winner's Circle'](#)
 - **McCormick Field**
 - Mountain Xpress: [Asheville Council to consider up to \\$20M for McCormick Field improvements](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [Local governments home in on McCormick Field deal](#)
 - Citizen Times: [Asheville backs McCormick Field funding plan, Tourist plans rejoice](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [Council approves up to \\$20M for McCormick Field](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [McCormick Field funding approaches Buncombe vote](#)
 - WLOS: [Residents near McCormick Field talk about future impacts following funding vote](#)
 - Citizen Times: [Buncombe County Commissioners support McCormick Field funding; What is taxpayer share?](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [Buncombe board backs up to \\$5M for McCormick Field upgrades](#)
 - **Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF)**
 - Citizen Times: [I-26 Connector project hits key point; activists want safer bike/walking paths](#)
 - **Public Safety**
 - AVL Watchdog: [More vagrants, fewer cops: Merchants describe downtown Asheville's decent into squalor and lawlessness](#)

