

FAST FACTS & FAQs: BUNCOMBE COUNTY TDA + TRAVEL, TOURISM & HOSPITALITY

What is the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority?

- The BCTDA is a public authority with the public purpose of strengthening the local economy by promoting Asheville and Buncombe County to visitors who support local businesses.
- The BCTDA's investment in travel, tourism and hospitality promotion:
 - Creates a customer base that sustains local businesses year-round.
 - Provides funding for community assets enjoyed by residents.
 - As the “front porch” of economic development, generates awareness/reputation for Asheville that supports all economic development goals, helping to diversify the local economy.

How does tourism contribute to the area's economic vitality?

- *Visitor spending*
 - People who come here spend \$2 billion at local businesses in Buncombe County annually – that's cash in the registers of local residents.
 - Those local businesses buy goods and services from more local businesses for total economic impact of \$3.1 billion.
 - Visitor spending in Buncombe County increased 167% between 2000 and 2018, compared to 110% statewide. Among the counties that ranked in the Top 10 for visitor spending, the average increase was 115%.
 - If Buncombe County had grown at the average rate of the Top 10 counties...local businesses would lose \$235 million of revenue per year.
- *Job creation*
 - Tourism-related businesses employ more than 18,000 people. In total, tourism supports nearly 28,000 jobs:
 - 6,142 restaurant workers (half of all restaurant workers)
 - 4,812 workers in lodging
 - 2,895 jobs in recreation and entertainment (half of recreation/entertainment workers)
 - 2,673 retail workers (16.5% of all retail workers)
 - More than 10,000 jobs in other categories including business services, finance, insurance and real estate
- *Generation of local taxes*
 - Tourism generated \$199.1 million in state and local revenues in 2017, providing programs and services the community needs.
 - In total, tourism generates \$53 million in property taxes – 16% of the total property tax for the Buncombe County and 33% of the total for the City of Asheville.

What funds BCTDA's promotion of Asheville and Buncombe County?

- Lodging businesses provide 100% of the funding to attract visitors to Buncombe County by collecting an occupancy tax from their overnight guests (in addition to sales tax).
- Every \$1 spent on advertising generates \$43 of spending at local businesses within just a few months of the campaign. Seventy-five percent of that spending is at non-lodging businesses including entertainment, recreation, attractions, retails, food and beverage, and the arts.

What Is the Occupancy Tax?

- The occupancy tax was established by state law in 1983, and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority was formed to invest the tax revenue in tourism promotion to attract people who stay overnight in commercial facilities in Buncombe County.
- The self-imposed 6% occupancy tax is a surcharge to the 7% sales tax for a total tax of 13% on paid accommodations in Buncombe County. So, the tax is paid strictly by overnight visitors who stay in commercial hotels, bed and breakfast establishments, and short-term rentals.
- By law, 75% of the proceeds must be used for promotion and the remainder is dedicated to the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF).

What is the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF)?

- 25% of the occupancy tax paid by people who stay overnight in commercial facilities in Buncombe County goes to the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) for capital projects.
- Since the fund's inception, the BCTDA has awarded \$44 million to 39 community projects, to include parks, greenways, sports facilities, performing and cultural arts organizations, museums, and more.

What Is the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau?

- Explore Asheville is the name of Asheville and Buncombe County's Convention & Visitors Bureau, or CVB. Explore Asheville carries out the program of work established by the BCTDA, to include advertising, public relations, and efforts to bring groups here, such as conferences and meetings.
- Explore Asheville also provides marketing support to local businesses like attractions, galleries, museums, music venues, restaurants, breweries, lodgers, outfitters, tour operators, local shops, and others. Currently, we serve more than 1,300 tourism partners. We also provide opportunities for networking and collaboration among our partners and offer free listings on our website, which attracts more than 5 million user sessions a year.

What are other ways the BCTDA supports our community?

- A program funded by revenue earned from paid advertising on the ExploreAsheville.com website provides grants for local festivals and cultural events, such as the Blue Ridge Pride Festival, Asheville Fringe Festival, CiderFest NC, Shindig on the Green, Asheville Holiday Parade, Hola Asheville, Goombay Festival, Sourwood Festival, and others.

Who leads the Explore Asheville CVB?

- **President & CEO** of Explore Asheville & the Buncombe County TDA: Victoria (Vic) Isley
- **Senior VP of Marketing:** Marla Tambellini
- **VP of Group Sales:** Marshall Hilliard
- **VP of Community Engagement:** Vacant
- **Director of Advertising:** Sarah Kilgore Abel
- **Director of Communications:** Dodie Stephens
- **Director of Content:** Whitney Smith
- **Director of Finance:** Jennifer (Jenn) Kass-Green
- **Director of Public Information:** Kathi Petersen
- **Executive Operations Manager:** Jonna Sampson
- *Other Explore Asheville team members include professionals who focus on sales and service, public relations, website development, social media, community project management, graphic design, and support services.*