

TOURISM & THE BCTDA: FAST FACTS & FAQs

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 people who will come here and spend money with local businesses.
- The BCTDA's investment in tourism promotion:
 - Creates a customer base that sustains local businesses year-round.
 - Provides funding for community assets enjoyed by residents.
 - Generates awareness/reputation for Asheville that supports all economic development goals.

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 over 27,000 jobs, or 15% of employment in Buncombe County:
 - 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.

Do local taxpayers fund BCTDA's promotion of Asheville and Buncombe County?

- Absolutely not! Lodging businesses provide 100% of the funding to attract visitors to Buncombe County by collecting an occupancy tax from visitors, 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.
- This model is unique to Buncombe County and is being replicated in other communities. The TPDF is the largest grant program available to nonprofits for capital in Western North Carolina.

What is the Tourism Management & Investment Plan (TMIP)?

- Tourism is one source of growth that places demands on city services and infrastructure. Forty percent of downtown Asheville is occupied by uses that are not taxable. On a peak day in October, an estimated 25,000 overnight tourists visit Buncombe County while 45,000 non-resident workers commute into the city daily. Overnight visitors account for 9% of these daily population of Buncombe County.
- The BCTDA is currently leading a process known as the Tourism Management & Investment Plan to collaborate with municipal and public entities to create a 10-year strategy of investing Tourism Product Development Funds to address community needs, within the legislative mandate of the Fund, designed to help relieve some of the impacts of tourism on our growing, thriving community.

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. More than \$580,000 has been awarded since 2016.