

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2023 – DECEMBER 2023





# MARKETING, CONTENT, & PR

## Q2 INITIATIVES

Dodie Stephens  
Vice President of Marketing

EXPLORE  
**ASHEVILLE**  
POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority

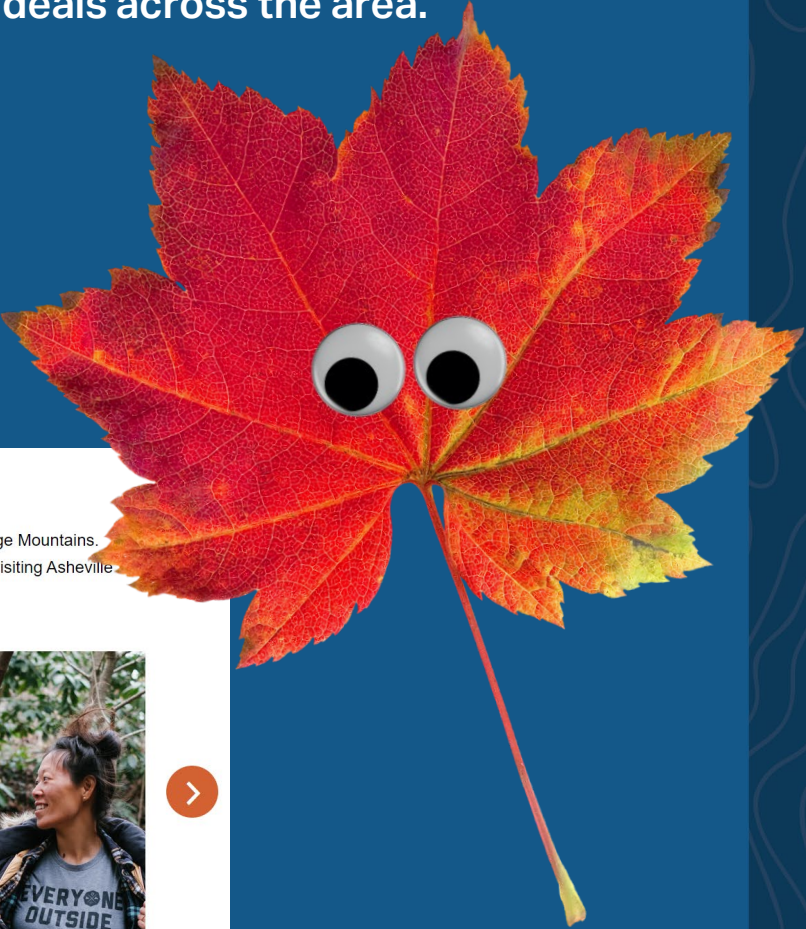


# HIGHLY ENGAGING FALL COLOR CONTENT

Refreshed content plan pushes visitor dispersal through local insiders (+LEAFY!)

Each week during the fall 2023, Explore Asheville sent out a fall color report—an email digest featuring dispatches from Fall Color Hunters—*our ambassador crew of local content creators*—plus the week's best hikes, drives, events and travel deals across the area.

- ↑ List Growth: 65% increase YOY (14k → 24k)
- ↑ Email Opens: 64% increase YOY (94k → 154k)
- ↑ Clicks: 90% increase YOY (9k → 17k)
- ↓ Opt-outs: 17% decrease YOY (1.5k → 1.2k)



## Meet Asheville's 2023 Fall Color Hunters

Meet Asheville's 2023 Fall Color Hunters -- a group of talented local photographers who have a passion for capturing the natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Each week, they'll share updates on when and where to catch the best and brightest fall color in the region, plus local insights on what to expect when visiting Asheville during the fall.



## ASHEVILLE



### See Asheville's Fall Color Progression

As November welcomes fall color to lower elevation areas like downtown Asheville, Biltmore Estate, and the North Carolina Arboretum, it's time to enjoy the final glorious weeks of autumn. From the peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the banks of the French Broad River, our Asheville Fall Color Hunters explored the full spectrum of autumn's beauty across the region. Discover the latest Fall Color Report for a look at some of the best and brightest the 2023 fall season had to offer—plus tips on where to find color now.

THE BEST OF FALL

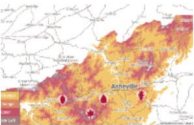


### Leafy Report

"It's not goodbye, it's leaf you later!"

Leafy, our 2023 fall foliage mascot, is still clinging on to his branch for another week in hopes he'll get to pose for a few more pictures. Yes, autumn fame has really gone to his stem. Leafy is also thankful for everyone who traveled to Asheville this fall, and for those who enjoyed his many color changes.

## Final Weeks of Fall + Holiday Look Ahead



### Fall Color Map

Track the best times and locations for beautiful fall foliage with our interactive color map.

TRACK FALL COLOR



### Holiday in Asheville

Here is a perfect five-day itinerary for your holiday trip to Asheville. 'Tis the season!

HOLIDAY ITINERARY



### Filmed in Asheville

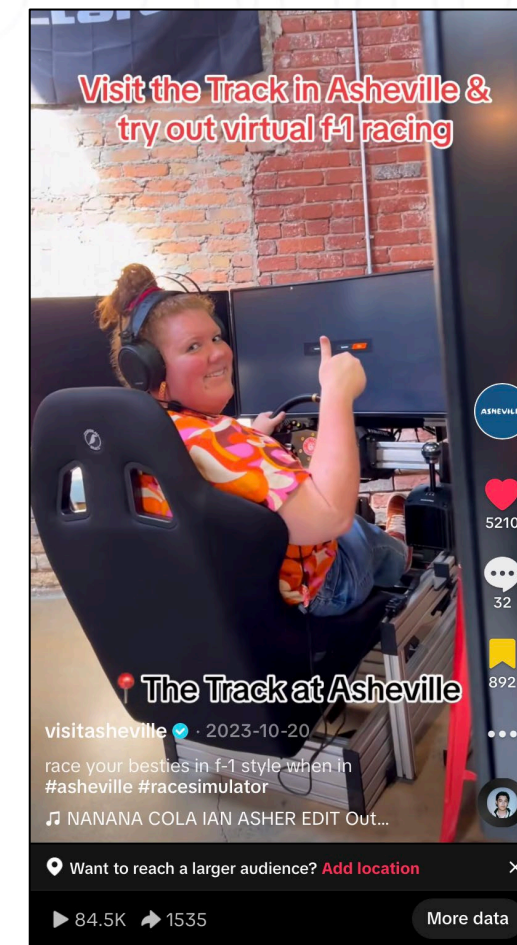
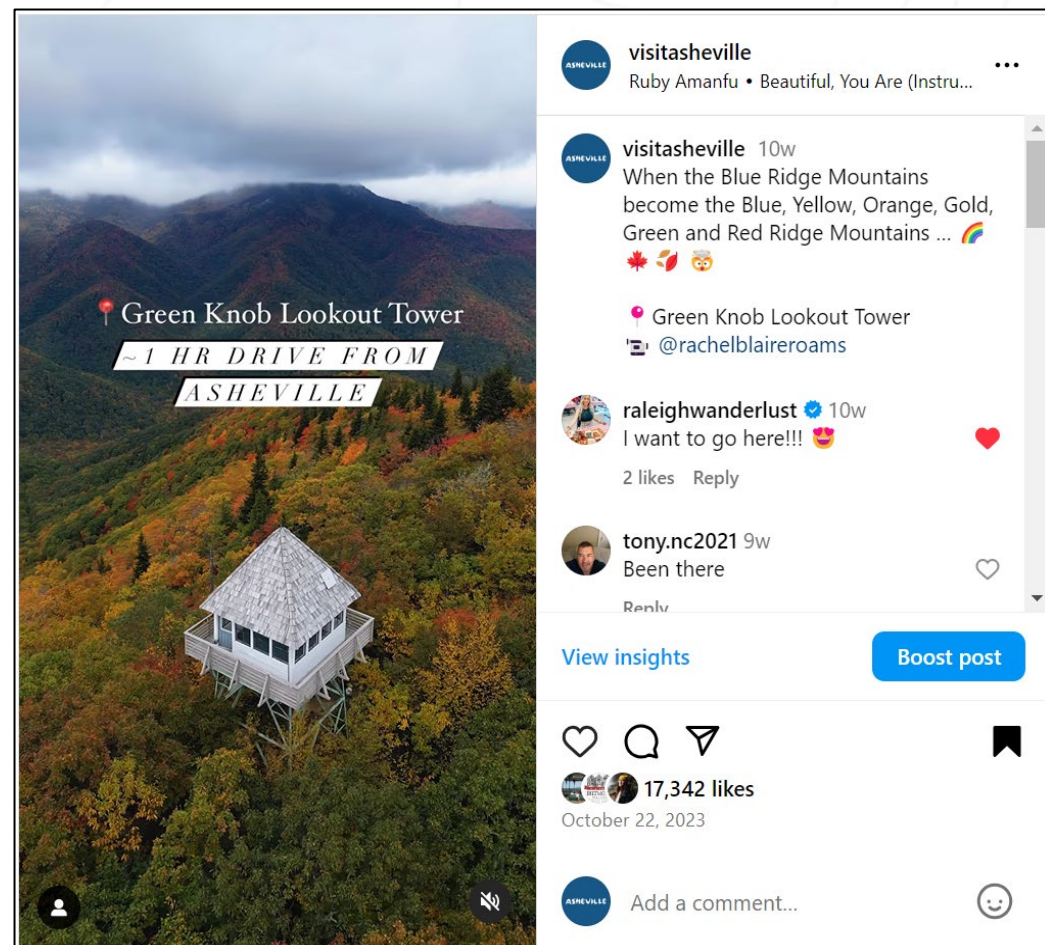
Hallmark Channel's upcoming holiday movie, "A Biltmore Christmas" will premier Sunday, Nov. 26

LEARN MORE HERE



# TOP PERFORMING POSTS

Most engaging content and format varies by social channel



## NOTEWORTHY SOCIAL STAT

In Oct 2023, we gained a record-breaking 7,338 new Facebook followers, exceeding the total growth from October to December of 2022 (6,402 followers).

**INSTAGRAM**  
**VIDEOS WITH VIEWS**  
[Green Knob Lookout Tower Drone \(Reel\)](#)  
 30,168 Engagements

**FACEBOOK**  
**NATURE & BEAUTY**  
[Blue Ridge Parkway \(Photo\)](#)  
 52,356 Engagements

**TIKTOK**  
**NEW & NOTABLE**  
[F1 Racing Simulator \(Reel\)](#)  
 6,847 Engagements



# DIGITAL FOOTPRINT INNOVATION

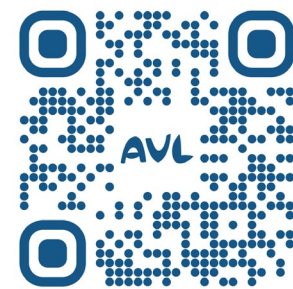
Tech Advancements Delivering Immersive User Experiences

## EXPLORE ASHEVILLE APP LAUNCH

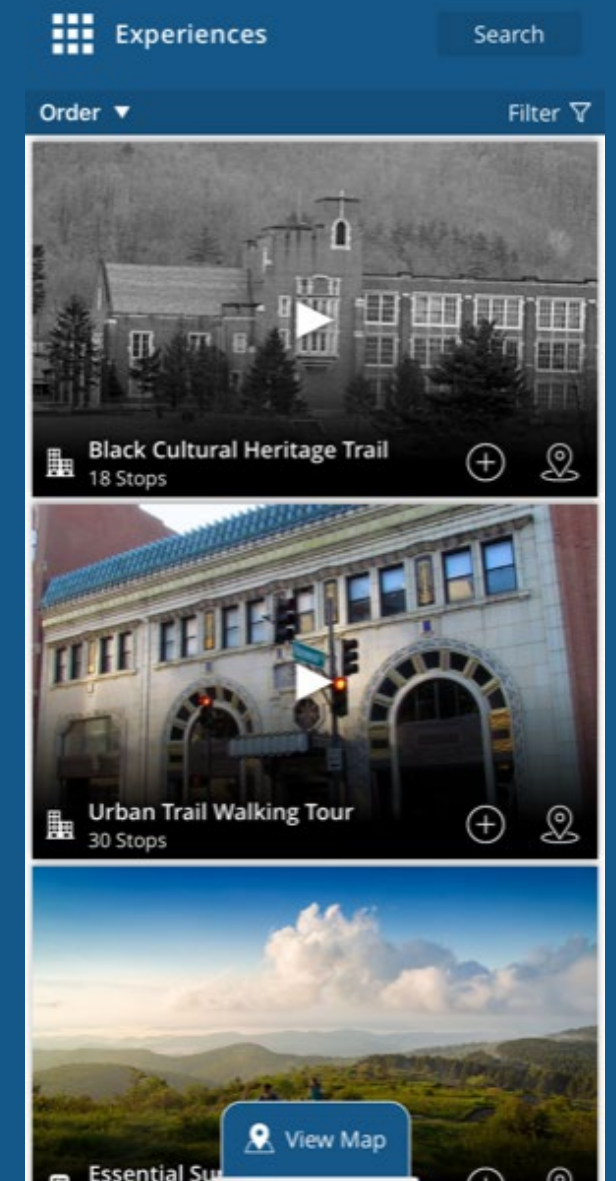
- Soft launched the new Explore Asheville app in October
- Designed with our partners at Visit Widget, this tool provides an exciting new way to digitally explore what our area has to offer. The app seamlessly compiles all pre-existing partner listings on ExploreAsheville.com across food & bev, lodging, events, walking tours and more
- **Up next:** Hard launch in January 2024 (New Year, new app) with promotion across social, web, newsletter and editorial  
*Early success: 500+ app downloads already with only one newsletter promotion!*

## KICKOFF: WEBSITE REDESIGN PROCESS

- Selected Miles Partnership LLC as our website redesign vendor after an extensive RFP process
- Kicked off discovery process with Miles, including in-depth site analysis, content and data audits, and design inspiration
- **Key date:** New website is estimated to go live late Summer 2024



SCAN TO  
DOWNLOAD





# LATINX AND LGBTQIA+ LANDING PAGES

Published new pages centered on welcoming and inviting new audiences

## Latinx Landing Page

The new ExploreAsheville.com [Latinx landing page](#) was created to connect with our Spanish-speaking audiences in a way that is relevant and makes them feel valued, while also showcasing and honoring Asheville's vibrant Latinx businesses and creatives.

The page includes:

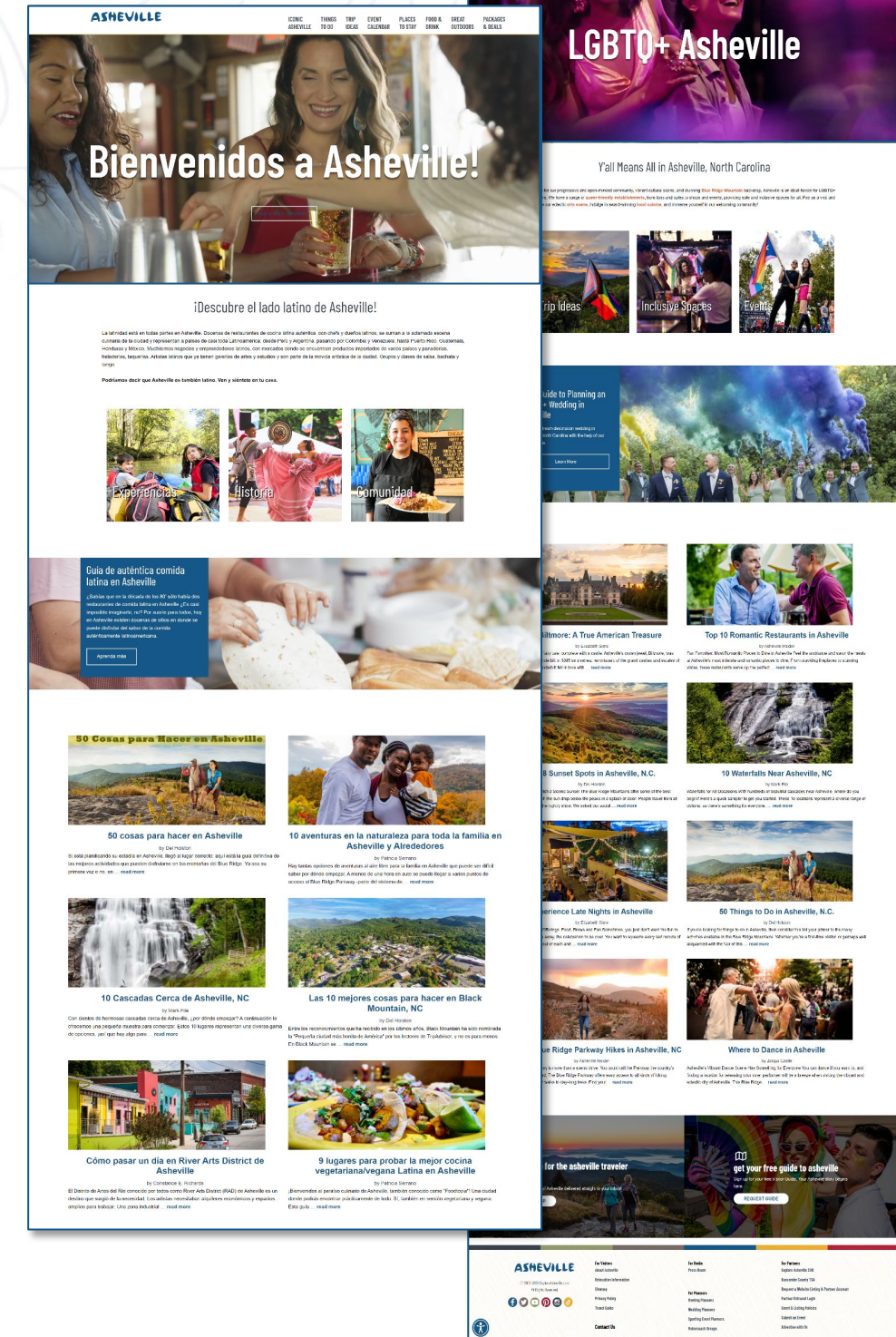
- [An introductory video](#) created by local Latinx production company Ground Level Media.
- 10 translated stories and blogs (all in Spanish) that speak to the local Latinx experience and/or offer a helpful guide to exploring the outdoors, surrounding towns, food and family adventures.

## LGBTQIA+ Landing Page

The [LGBTQIA+ landing page](#) on ExploreAsheville.com was given a refresh with updated photo/video assets, articles, and more.

## Alignment Across Marketing

- **PR:** These landing pages dovetail with efforts to pitch Spanish-language, Latinx, and LGBTQIA+ writers and outlets
- **PAID:** Driving to these landing pages via aligned paid advertising in Mitu, Edge, and Equal Pride





DELIVERING BALANCED & SUSTAINBLE GROWTH

ENGAGING AND INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

# STRATEGIC MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS

Spotlighting Sustainability, Diversity & Creativity

## MITÚ, ESSENCE, EDGE & EQUAL PRIDE

These partnerships allow us to meet new audiences where they are, highlighting partners within Asheville's vibrant Black, Latinx, and LGBTQIA+ communities through editorial, social and email content.

### MONOCLE 168,000+ Global readership

16-page editorial in the *Fall Forecast* issue. Featured interviews include Ashleigh Shanti, Charles Frazier, and Cody Smith of American Miso Company, alongside highlighted lodging and experiences.

### AFAR

"Always Asheville" workshop provided 100 area partners with a learning and networking opportunity led by members of AFAR Media's editorial team.

A cascade of digital and print content pieces also launched this fall and will continue throughout FY24 with an estimated **23,535,000 impressions worldwide.**

*Always Asheville Workshop Attendees:*

**93%** felt more inspired to craft their brand in new ways with tangible action items from AFAR to improve their marketing initiatives.



"All of the presenters did a wonderful job of keeping me engaged, and I left the workshop full of exciting ideas I feel confident in trying."

- Quote from a workshop attendee

### Total Impressions:

Mitú : 10,598,864  
Essence: 8,072,232  
Edge: 52,900,000  
Equal Pride: 5,856,666



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM



# HALLMARK PARTNERSHIP

Cinematic momentum with a focus on historic and iconic Blue Ridge holiday experiences

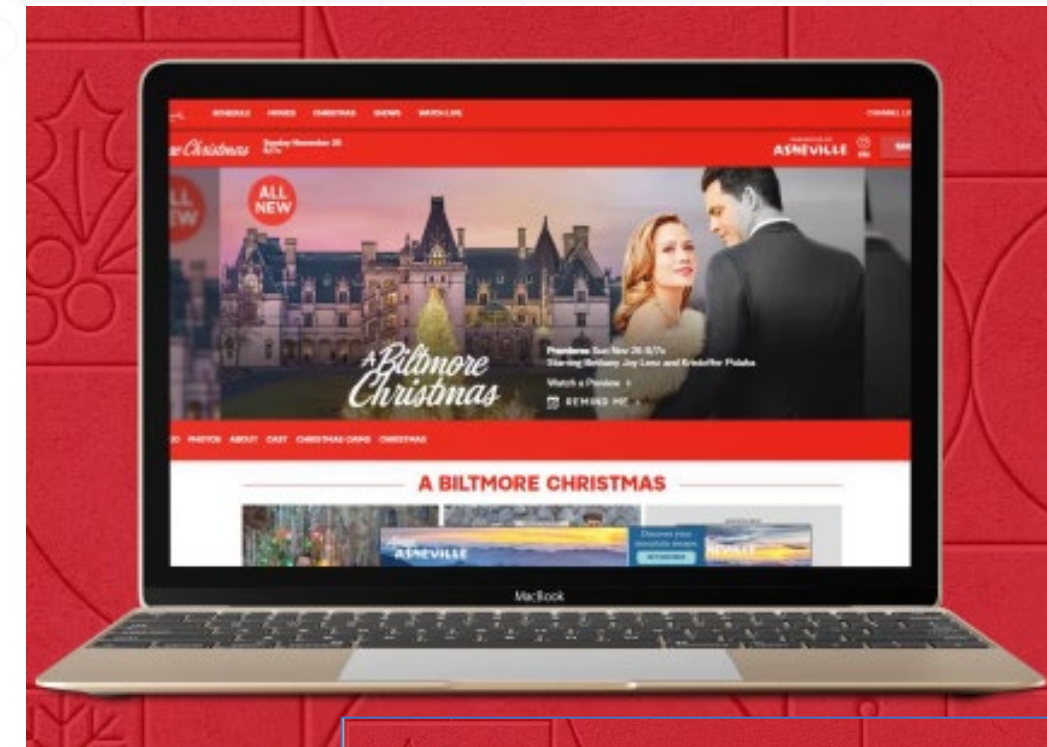
Explore Asheville & Hallmark partnered to amplify A Biltmore Christmas movie and create a strong association for the Blue Ridge Mountain region and Asheville.

Building on the "Christmas in July" teaser, the core campaign included a layered and engaging rich media leading up to and during the premiere event.

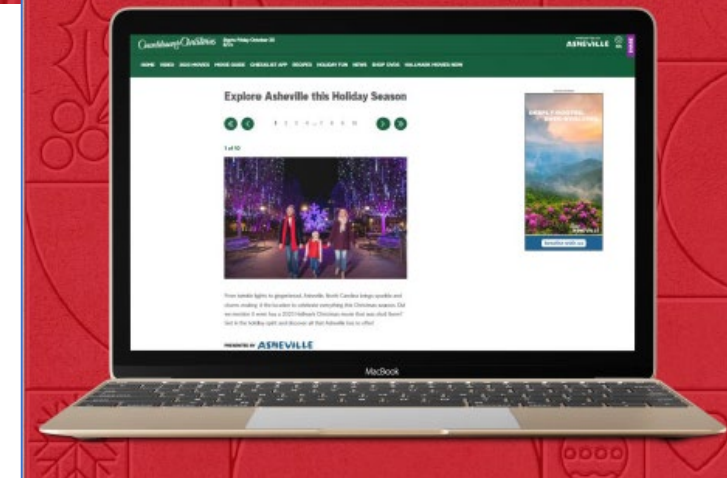
- Movie Premiere & Adjacency Promotional Schedule
- Movie Linear/TV Campaign
- Custom Trivia Podbuster
- Hallmark Homepage Takeover Impressions
- Destination Experiences Article
- Banner Ads 1.75% clickthrough

CAMPAIGN TOTAL:  
**51M** impressions

*Most successful Hallmark homepage takeover of 2023!*



**PODBUSTER:**  
Trivia format  
drove audiences to  
tune-in to Asheville  
spots during the  
movie breaks.





PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

# CBS MORNINGS IN ASHEVILLE

"Surprise Trip" for Correspondent David Begnaud Infused with Asheville's Creative Spirit



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM



# NOTEWORTHY NEWS CLIPS

Pitched stories that shine a spotlight on Asheville

@bashabroad  
Influencer Site Visit  
1M+views

**67.8M**

Earned Media  
Reach

**\$127K**

Publicity Value

**14**

Hosted Media

**12**

Significant Team  
Placements

**55**

Total Placements

## Southern Living

35 Best Things To Do In  
Asheville, North Carolina



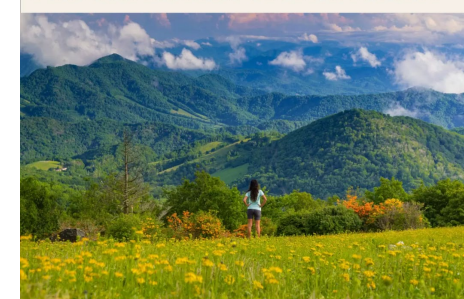
## TRAVEL+ LEISURE

This North Carolina City Is Called the  
'Sedona of the South' — Here's Why



## thrillist

Grab Your BFFs: These 8 Epic  
Fall Mountain Towns Await



## AFAR

Asheville, N.C.'s Best Festivals  
Celebrate Yoga, Pride, Black Culture,  
and Much More



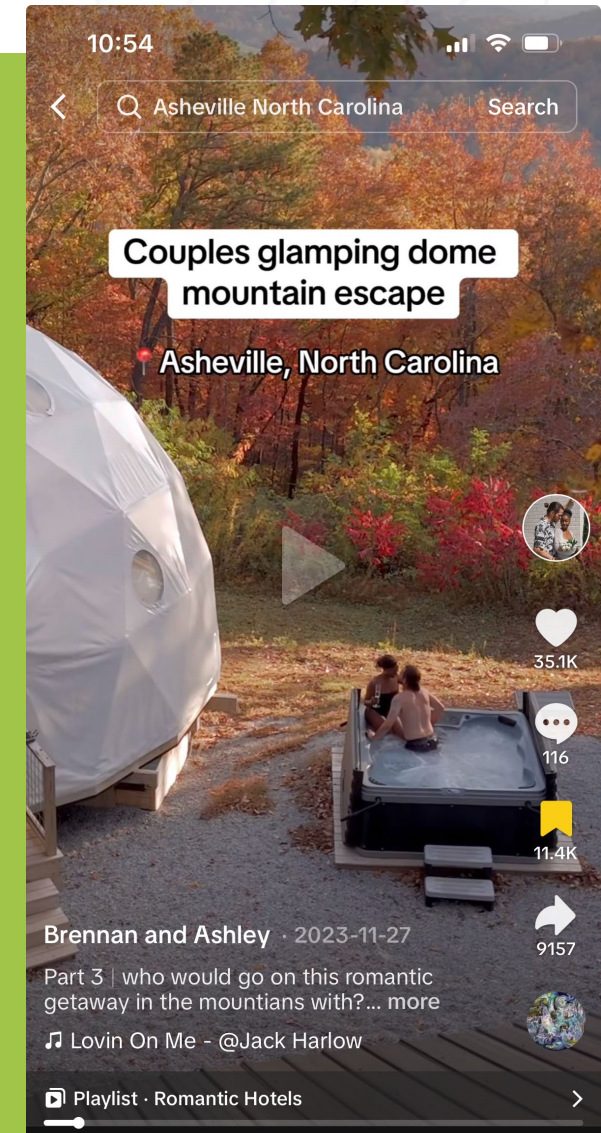
## U.S. News & WORLD REPORT

The 24 Best Girls Weekend  
Getaways for 2024



## People

Where Was *A Biltmore Christmas*  
Filmed? All About the Real Locations  
Behind the Hallmark Movie





# 2024 OFFICIAL ASHEVILLE VISITOR GUIDE

Increasing Distribution & Broadening Dispersal

## Official 2024 Asheville Visitor Guide is now in circulation

In partnership with Sagacity, Explore Asheville engaged a host of local photographers and writers to create content for the Official 2024 Asheville Visitor Guide.

- Employing a new strategy to front load orders and distribute more guides to more markets earlier in the year
- Orders received to date total 10,000+ individual guides, ahead of 6,000 guides ordered in February 2023

## Highlighting Communities

**5 Days 5 Ways** – encouraging midweek overnight visitation through robust itineraries highlighting fun things to see, do and eat throughout the Asheville area

**Lay of the Land** – features on Black Mountain and Weaverville to encourage dispersal

**Spotlighting BIPOC Partners** – Sharing businesses and cultural institutions from Asheville's vibrant Black and Latinx communities.

**PROJECTED READERSHIP: 1,100,000**

Print Copy Readership: 700,000 (200,000 copies x 3.5 pass-along rate)

Digital Copy Readership: 400,000 (emails sends + targeted displays)



The guides contents align with objectives of improving the quality of visits by lengthening stay and increasing dispersal and elevating creative experiences to differentiate the destination and inspire visits.





# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Q2 INITIATIVES

Michael Kryzanek  
Vice President Business Development

EXPLORE  
**ASHEVILLE**  
POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority



# TRADE SHOW EXHIBITING

Recruited group and event business to our community

- Represented Asheville and Buncombe County at 13 trade shows and conferences from October-December
- Made efforts to present Asheville's creative community and resources; gave lodging partners opportunities to participate in prospecting efforts

## Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive Travel, Meetings, and Events (IMEX)

- IMEX is the largest trade show in North America for the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry.
- Over 12,500 attendees from 65 countries.
- Appointment-based tradeshow attended by Connie Holliday, Shawn Boone, Kathryn Dewey, Michael Kryzanek, and Jamie Tudico with McKibbon Hospitality.
- Arrived in Las Vegas with 100+ pre-set appointments, met over 300 planners over the three-day conference.

### FEATURED LOCAL BRANDS AT IMEX BOOTH

ADORAtherapy®



Above: Explore Asheville staff and partner at IMEX booth



# 48-HOUR FAMILIARIZATION TOUR

Hosted meeting professionals in a "test drive" of Asheville

- "Fams" are one of our highest ROI initiatives - Historically, 75%+ of attendees book one or multiple events in Asheville
- In November, hosted 18 qualified meeting planners from North America
- Showcased potential venues and attendee experiences:
  - **TUESDAY** - Welcome reception at Kimpton Hotel Arras, downtown historical walking tour, and evening downtown dine-around
  - **WEDNESDAY** - Sound healing with Skinny Beats Sound Shop, tours of area hotels, tour/lunch, spa experience or golf at the Omni Grove Park Inn, and cocktail dinner at Benne on Eagle
  - **THURSDAY** - AVL Art Experience at Pleb, shopping at Marquee, afternoon tour and activities at Biltmore Estate and tour and dinner at the Grand Bohemian

## PARTNERS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE 48-HOUR FAM INCLUDED:

KIMPTON  
HOTEL ARRAS  
ASHEVILLE

OMNI  
GROVE PARK INN

BILTMORE®

GRAND BOHEMIAN HOTEL  
ASHEVILLE

THE  
FOUNDRY  
HOTEL  
ASHEVILLE

AA  
SHEVILLE ART  
experience

BENNE  
on eagle

pleb urban winery  
asheville, nc

SKINNY BEATS  
— SOUND SHOP —

MARQUEE



# Q2 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community

104

GROUPS/EVENTS  
OCCURRED  
IN OUR COMMUNITY



**\$9.0 M in direct spending**  
10,772 roomnights

79

GROUPS/EVENTS  
BOOKED  
FOR FUTURE VISITS



**\$10.9 M in direct spending**  
17,817 roomnights

211

LEADS GENERATED  
FOR POTENTIAL  
GROUPS/EVENTS



**3.8% increase in roomnights over Q2 FY23**  
64,639 roomnights





# PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Q2 INITIATIVES

Penelope Whitman  
Vice President of Partnership & Destination Management



# BLACK CULTURAL HERITAGE TRAIL

Exploring the rich heritage of Black communities in Asheville

## A long-awaited trail dedication event was held December 15, 2023

- Community members gathered at Black Wall Street to celebrate the trail's debut
- After remarks from leaders and a ribbon cutting, shuttles were available to transfer guests to trail sections (Downtown, Southside, or River Area)
- Guides for each area offered personal stories and demonstrated the interactive components of the interpretive panels to participants

## Digital content and augmented experiences invite people to learn more:

- QR codes at each trail marker can be scanned to hear voiceover narration by local performer Stephanie Hinkling Beckman
- [Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail Website](#) with 18 articles supplements the stories on the panel
- A [video of local musician Leeda "Lyric" Jones](#) singing the "Swannanoa Tunnel Song" in remembrance of the workers who lost their lives building the tunnel
- A video about Black church life in Asheville







Opening day of Black Cultural Heritage Trail



# TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FUND (TPDF)

Granted funding support to three major tourism projects that benefit visitors and residents

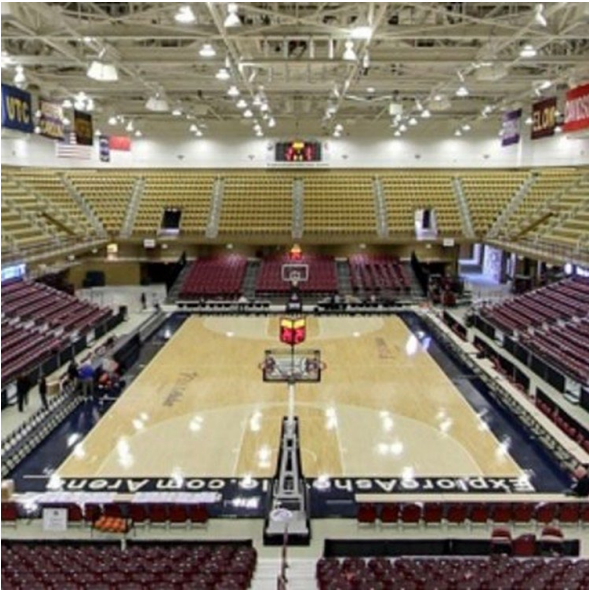
In October 2023, the BCTDA approved \$6.14 million of new investment in three major tourism projects to benefit visitors and residents.

Including the nearly \$23 million committed to McCormick Field in July, the BCTDA invested more than \$29 million in TPDF awards this year, marking the largest annual investment in the 20-year history of the fund.

With these investments, the BCTDA has invested over \$86 million in 61 projects over the lifetime of the fund.

## 2023 TPDF Investments

Grantee	Project	Award Amount
Buncombe County Parks & Recreation	Enka Recreation Destination - Phase II	\$4,054,415
City of Asheville	Harrah's Cherokee Center - Asheville Upgrades	\$1,586,000
Western NC Agricultural Center	Equine Facility Modernization	\$500,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$6,140,415</b>





# 2024 FESTIVALS & CULTURAL EVENTS INVESTMENTS

Invested \$100,000 in 25 local festivals & cultural events

\$100,000 invested in 25 events throughout Buncombe County

Launched in 2016, the support fund contributes to the financial viability and long-term sustainability of festivals and cultural events. The fund seeks to stimulate new events and expand on existing ones that are enjoyed by residents and visitors.

This is the first year the lodging tax paid by visitors will support local festivals and events, enabled by a change in state legislation, shifting how these funds can be spent.

## 2024 Festival & Cultural Event Support Fund Awards

- ASAP Farm Tour | \$5,000
- AVL Beer Week | \$5,000
- Asheville Celtic Fest | \$5,000
- 3rd Lovely Asheville Annual Fall Festival | \$5,000
- Asheville Holiday Parade | \$2,500
- Downtown After 5 | \$5,000
- Pritchard Park Summer Series | \$2,500
- 5th Annual Asheville FM Record Fair | \$1,500
- Taste of Asheville | \$5,000
- Maker Faire Asheville | \$1,500
- Asheville Mardi Gras Parade & Queen's Ball | \$5,000
- Big Ivy's Independence Day Celebration | \$2,500
- {Re}HAPPENING 11 | \$3,500
- GRINDfest | \$5,000
- Blue Ridge Pride Festival | \$5,000
- Festival of Lights at Lake Julian | \$4,500
- Asheville HoneyFest | \$5,000
- Connect Beyond Festival | \$5,000
- LEAF Festival | \$5,000
- Sow & Grow Fest | \$1,500
- Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands | \$2,500
- Groovin on Grovemont | \$2,500
- "Celebrating the History and Legacy of Juneteenth" | \$5,000
- Weaverville's Music on Main | \$5,000
- Goombay | \$5,000





## Q2 EVENT GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS

Support for local festival & cultural events through grants and sponsorships

Explore Asheville/BCTDA supported the following events in FY24 Q2:

- Beer City Comic Con
- Krafthaus
- A-B Tech Foundation's Autumn in Asheville
- Lovely Asheville Fall Festival
- LEAF Fall Festival
- Asheville Design Weekend
- Asheville Symphony's ALT ASO Series
- Winter Lights at The North Carolina Arboretum
- Asheville Holiday Parade
- Harvest & Healing Music Festival

**\$37K**

Grants &  
Sponsorships



**11**  
Events



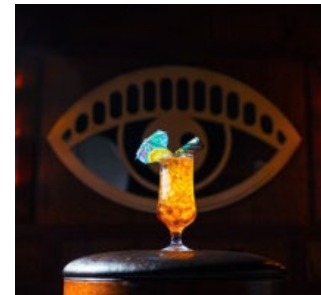
# NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Onboarded 19 local businesses as partners

- Explore Asheville onboarded 19 local businesses as new partners in Q2, ranging from cabins and cottages to spas and music venues.
- Through these partnerships, Explore Asheville staff can connect incoming visitors and group travelers to the variety of experiences in Asheville and Buncombe county.

## WHAT & WHERE

- Regions of new businesses:
  - River Arts District
  - Downtown
  - Fairview
  - Woodfin
  - West Asheville
  - Leicester
  - North Asheville
  - South Asheville
- Types of new businesses:
  - Wellness/Spa
  - Food & Drink
  - Retail
  - Music Venues
  - Event Facilities
  - Lodging
  - Catering
  - Outdoors
  - Transportation







# CULTURE & BUSINESS AFFAIRS

## Q2 INITIATIVES

Jennifer Kass-Green  
Vice President of Culture & Business Affairs

EXPLORE  
**ASHEVILLE**  
POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority



# ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

New/Returning Team Members

---

**Dodie Stephens**

Vice President of Marketing



**Shelby Pearsall**

Partnership Coordinator



**Nick Kepley**

Director of Marketing





# GIVINGTUESDAY SERVICE PROJECT

Helping the community through staff's volunteer efforts

- Explore Asheville completed a service project in recognition of GivingTuesday for the second year in a row
- Explore Asheville worked with United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County (UWABC) on a project to serve our community
  - Team members assembled 224 snack packs containing a variety of nutritional items
  - Snack packs decorated with words of encouragement and distributed to students in need at Asheville Middle School





# OFFICE SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

Composting is the first initiative spearheaded by the organization's internal sustainability task force

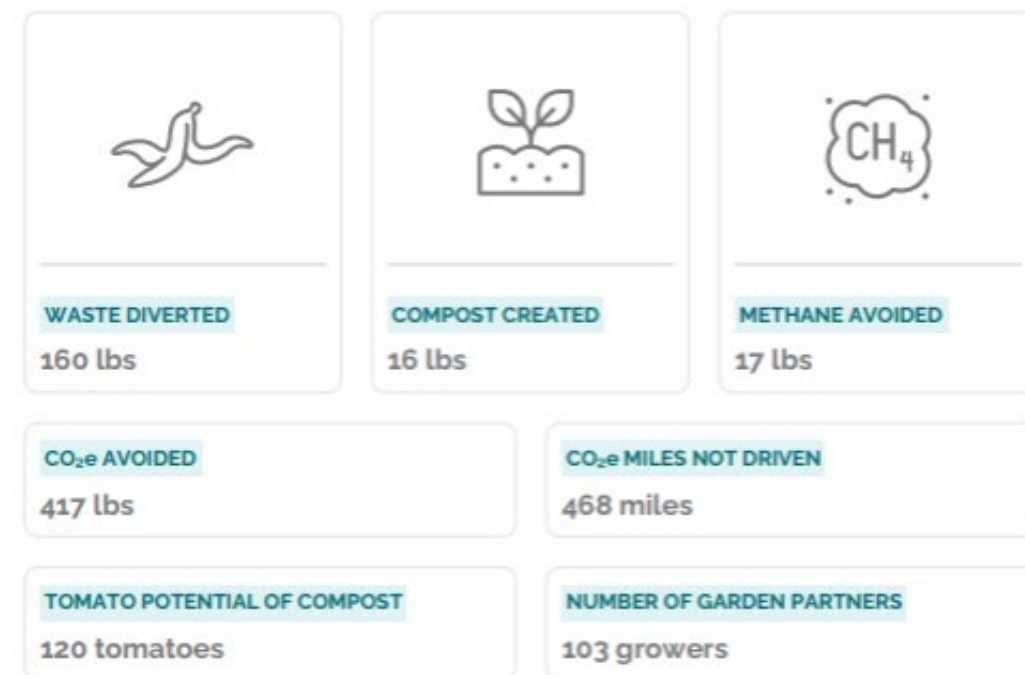


## COMPOSTNOW

Explore Asheville

### Impact Report

Thank you for your commitment to sustainable business practices.  
This report highlights the impact from your program.



Explore Asheville began composting with Compost Now to be more sustainable and to reduce waste

- By diverting food waste and compostables from the landfill we are helping to reduce the amount of methane emissions (25x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>) into the air
- **After four months of composting, Explore Asheville diverted 160lbs of waste from the landfill, equating to 16lbs of nutrient rich soil, 417lbs of avoided CO<sub>2</sub>, 468 offset miles, and 120 tomato plants**
- In the spring, Explore Asheville will be able to donate over 35lbs of nutrient rich soil to local community gardens and garden partners