



TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY
TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

FY25/26

Annual Report

Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority



Welcome

A Message From the Chair

As chair of the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority, I am honored to share with you the strides we have made over the past year. This work is personal to me. My family's roots here run generations deep, and this county isn't just where I live — it's where I've witnessed rivers, mountains, and small-town character shape who we are. That history is exactly why I care so much about the work we do here. Tourism is an important industry in Transylvania County, and it has been a sustaining force through challenging times in our county's history. It supports countless businesses and thousands of citizens, and it's crucial to our economic development. Strong leadership ensures that we are successful in this mission, and the Board and TDA staff take their roles seriously. I'm proud of their commitment and work for our county and its citizens, and I'm pleased with where we are, the ambitious projects we're undertaking, and the direction we're headed.

This past year continued to test our resilience in a very real way. While still recovering from Hurricane Helene, our community has also felt the weight of broader economic pressures reaching well beyond our county lines — the kind that touch household budgets, small businesses, and travel decisions everywhere. In times like these, a vibrant tourism economy matters more than ever. It's one of the sturdiest assets we have to help Transylvania County stay resilient and marketable to potential future industry and jobs, and I don't take that responsibility lightly.

The work of the TDA has grown considerably over the years as technology, visitation, community needs, and other factors have influenced the actions of the organization. It is more crucial than ever to identify the priorities that guide our work. Below are the core principles that have been developed through our strategic planning and will be reflected throughout this report.

- ***Foster a thriving and sustainable tourism economy***
- ***Support and promote tourism partners across all areas of Transylvania County***
- ***Lead as the community's destination manager***
- ***Protect and steward our natural resources***
- ***Promote responsible visitor behavior***
- ***Preserve and reflect our community's authentic character***
- ***Prioritize residents in destination marketing and management***
- ***Build strong awareness of our destination and its defining assets and character***

This report includes highlights of key activities and other information to reflect the efforts of the TCTDA this past fiscal year. I'm proud of the work we accomplished this year and honored to serve as chair for a community I care about so deeply.

Jessica Whitmire

Chair, Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority



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I. Executive Summary

Executive Summary

FY25/26 began with the TCTDA Board maintaining its commitment to strategic investments that strengthen the tourism economy, protect natural resources, and support the community. At the same time, lingering impacts from Hurricane Helene and cautious expectations for travel shaped a conservative budget, with revenues projected below pre-Helene levels and the planned use of the fund balance to help maintain important investments. The year also saw a leadership change with the addition of Jessica Whitmire as chair and Emrie Carlton-Jackson as a new Board member.

The primary purpose of the TCTDA is to support the local tourism economy by marketing and promoting the area. This work, under the Explore Brevard brand, is primarily coordinated by Market Connections, the organization’s marketing partner agency. Their efforts are guided by the Board-approved marketing plan, informed by monthly Marketing Committee meetings, and developed in close collaboration with TCTDA staff. In FY25/26, a wide range of marketing efforts, including advertising, social media, brochures, public relations, website content, and more, generated more than 78 million impressions.

Highlights included Explore Brevard being featured throughout the premiere episode of NC Weekend’s 23rd season and the launch of the new “FIND YOURSELF” campaign across video, digital, print, social media, and other channels. The campaign’s feature video received three Telly Awards. The Telly Awards are a prestigious international competition recognizing excellence in video and television across all screens and drawing more than 13,000 entries annually from around the world.

Destination management continues to be a top priority for the TCTDA as well, with visitor behavior messaging, stewardship initiatives, tourism infrastructure funding, in-market signage, and partner support among its primary efforts. The annual spring *Leave It Better* campaign placed additional emphasis on its “Plan Ahead” message, based on input from emergency services and public land leadership. The important Be Waterfall Wise safety messaging was similarly emphasized during the spring.

Thirty-seven organizations received more than \$250,000 in grant funding in support of local projects under the Transylvania Always, Destination Infrastructure, and Tourism Marketing funding paths. Approximately 700 local tourism partners received regular communications through the partner newsletter, while 100 participated in partner marketing opportunities, including co-op advertising, sweepstakes, travel writer experiences, and more.



Executive Summary

Seasonality patterns remained consistent, with summer and fall leaf season continuing as the most popular times for visitation. As a result, TCTDA marketing efforts focused on generating demand during shoulder and slower seasons. Lingering visitor hesitancy related to Helene was evident early in the year but dissipated as FY26 progressed.

Outdoor recreation remained the top driver of visitation, complemented by travelers' desire for an authentic, small-town experience, while waterfalls continued to stand out as the destination's most recognized attribute. One notable shift in visitor behavior was the growing use of AI in trip planning, requiring destination marketers to expand beyond traditional search strategies and ensure brand and destination content is accurately represented in AI-generated results.

Occupancy tax proceeds were better than anticipated, finishing 6% above budget and 9% above Helene-impacted FY25. Proceeds were still below the FY24 benchmark by 3%. Funding for the Ecusta Trail was not required in FY26 due to project timing, meaning the budgeted \$250,000 from the fund balance will instead be planned for a future year. Ultimately, revenues exceeded expenditures by \$71,637, allowing those funds to be added to the fund balance.

Together, these results reflect a year in which the tourism economy proved resilient, important investments continued, and the TCTDA remained well positioned to support the destination, its natural resources, and the community moving forward.





II. Leadership

Board Members

- Jessica Whitmire, Chair**
Town of Rosman Appointee
- Madeline Magin, Vice Chair**
Member-at-large
- Dana Antonuccio**
Accommodations Owner / Operator
- Emrie Carlton-Jackson**
Interested Individual
- Larry Chapman**
Transylvania County Appointee
- Dionne Hodgson**
Accommodations Owner / Operator
- Nory LeBrun**
Member-at-large
- Catherine Lemel**
Interested Individual
- Lauren Wise**
City of Brevard Appointee

Committees

- Marketing**
Dee Dee Perkins (Chair), Dana Antonuccio, Emrie Carlton-Jackson, Dionne Hodgson, Nory LeBrun
- Transylvania Always**
Jessica Whitmire (Chair), Madeline Magin, Lauren Wise, Mandi Bentley, Grant Bullard, Eric Caldwell
- Destination Infrastructure**
Madeline Magin (Chair), Catherine Lemel, Jessica Whitmire, Aaron Baker, Nicole Bentley
- Grant**
Dana Antonuccio (Chair), Larry Chapman, Catherine Lemel

Staff

- Clark Lovelace**
Executive Director
- Mollie Gordon**
Marketing & Communications
- Jody McNiel**
Operations & Outreach
- Caiti Klassovity**
Special Projects
- Market Connections**
Marketing Partner Agency

Board, Committees, & Staff



III. Occupancy & Visitor Highlights

Occupancy & Visitor Highlights

Overview

Perceptions, and often misconceptions, about visitation to Western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene dominated the mindset of visitors for much of the winter and spring leading into FY26, but thankfully dissipated as the year progressed. Typical characteristics that we've come to expect in our destination, including seasonality, high short-term rental use, reasons for visitation, visitor origins, and more, were reflected as the year played out.

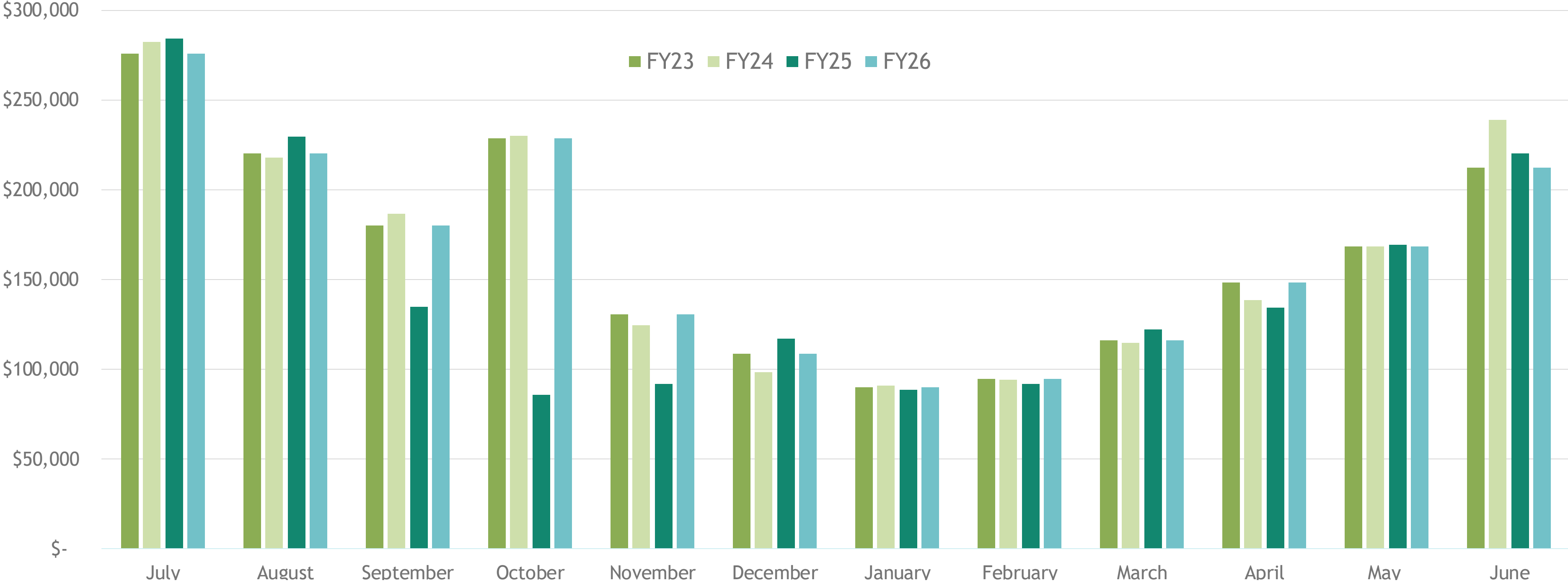
One new element was the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) across numerous areas of travel planning, from initial research to booking experiences. As a result, the traditional focus on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is expanding to include Generative Engine Optimization (GEO). As travelers increasingly turn to AI for trip planning, the goal is no longer simply to rank well in search results, but to ensure our destination is accurately represented and recommended in AI-generated answers.

Key Visitor Insights

- Daytrippers remain a large share, including both visitors and residents in neighboring counties.
- Visitor origins are concentrated in the Southeast, with 29% in-state and 53% from the top four out-of-state markets: South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee.
- Short-term rentals continue to capture a substantial share of occupancy tax collections, capturing 54% of the total in FY26.
- Outdoor recreation continues to be the top driver of travel to the area.
- Key differentiators versus competitors include waterfalls, opportunities for healthfulness and rejuvenation, and the reputation as an authentic, welcoming mountain community.
- Stewardship efforts to preserve public lands and promote responsible visitation align with the values of the core audience.
- AI has become a frequently used element of travel planning with 41% of travelers now using the technology when planning a trip.
- Social media continues to be a leading source of travel inspiration, with influencer-driven content playing an increasingly important role in shaping visitor choices.
- Video content is one of the most powerful decision drivers, offering immersive, engaging content that motivates travelers to act.

Taken together, these insights demonstrate that the fundamental strengths driving visitation to Transylvania County remain firmly in place, even as the ways travelers discover, plan, and experience destinations continue to evolve.

Monthly Occupancy Tax Proceeds vs. Prior Years



ANNUAL PROCEEDS VERSUS PRIOR YEAR

- ↑ Up 6% versus budget
- ↑ Up 9% versus prior year (Helene impacted year)
- ↓ Down 3% versus FY24 (considered our “normal” benchmark)

Short-Term Rental Data

Transylvania County Summary

Transylvania County

	FY25/26	vs. Prior Year
Available Units	1,176	Down 10%
Occupancy	49%	Up 7%
ADR	\$232	Down 8%
Length of Stay	4.1	Up 15%

Submarket Breakdown

	Brevard	Western TC	Eastern TC
Available Units	435 (37%)	435 (37%)	306 (26%)
Occupancy	54%	41%	49%
ADR	\$211	\$281	\$220
Length of Stay	4.2	4.1	3.8

Transylvania County vs. Competitive Markets

	Transylvania County	Buncombe County	Haywood County	Macon County	Jackson County	Henderson County
Available Units	1,176	4,373	1,628	1,326	1,219	1,098
Occupancy	49%	55%	49%	47%	48%	53%
ADR	\$232	\$220	\$215	\$275	\$244	\$208
Length of Stay	4.1	3.8	4.1	4.2	3.8	4.1

- Available units is based on the highest number of units reported as available in any month during the year.
- Occupancy and length of stay are based on units listed as available.
- ADR = average daily rate for available units.
- Data was calculated based on reports from AirDNA who obtains their information via data scraping.
- Certain assumptions had to be made when compiling this report to reflect accurate, informative, and comparative information.
- TC = Transylvania County; Western TC = Lake Toxaway / Rosman / Sapphire (TC portion); Eastern TC = Pisgah Forest / Penrose / Cedar Mountain

Occupancy & Visitor Highlights

Zartico Visitor Report

This report is produced by Zartico, who utilizes data from mobile devices based on defined points of interest and credit card receipts.

Report Information

Month

2026-06-30

Device Sample Size

28,632

Cardholder Sample Size

8,725

What was the resident and visitor share of devices observed in your destination last month?

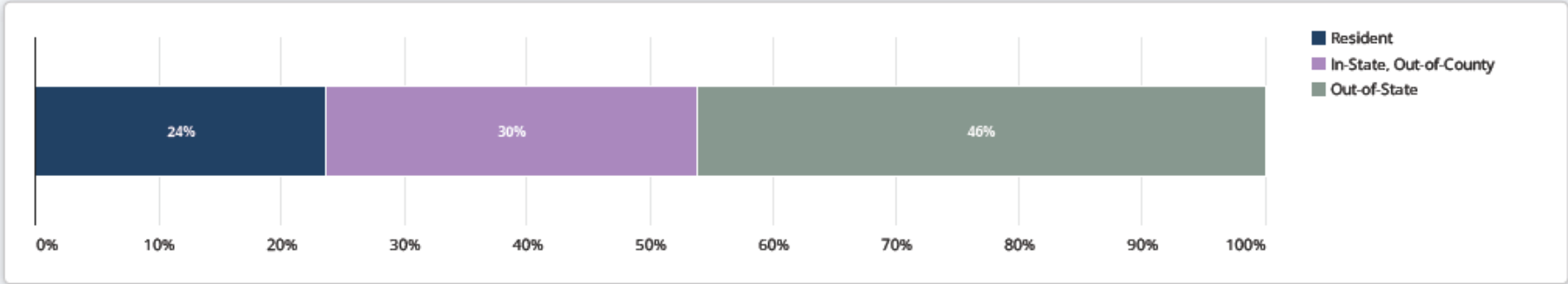
Source: Zartico Geolocation Data

Definitions:

Resident: Device common evening location or spend cardholder location is in your county

In-State, Out-of-County: Device common evening location or spend cardholder location is in North Carolina, but outside of your county

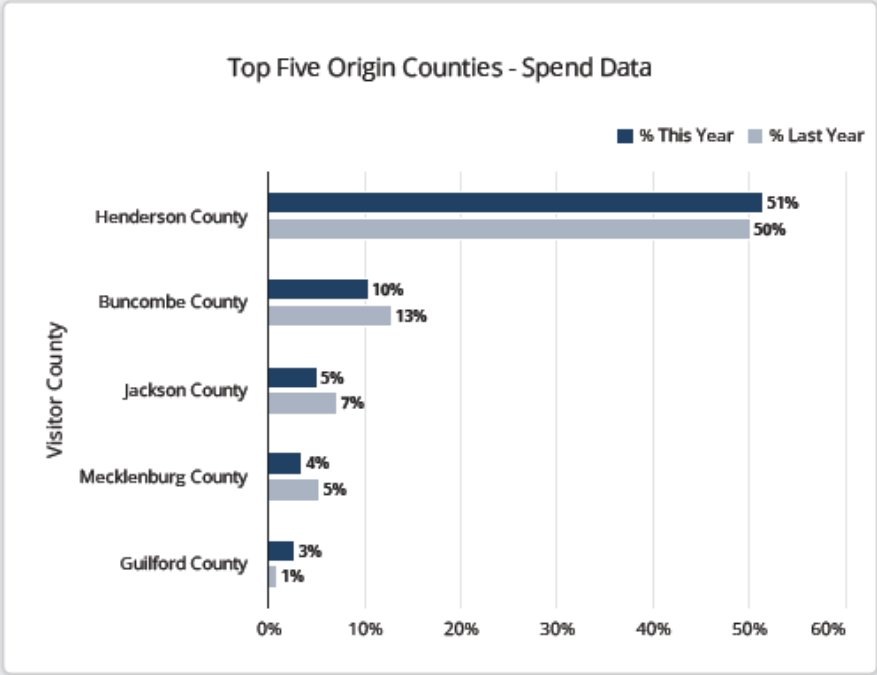
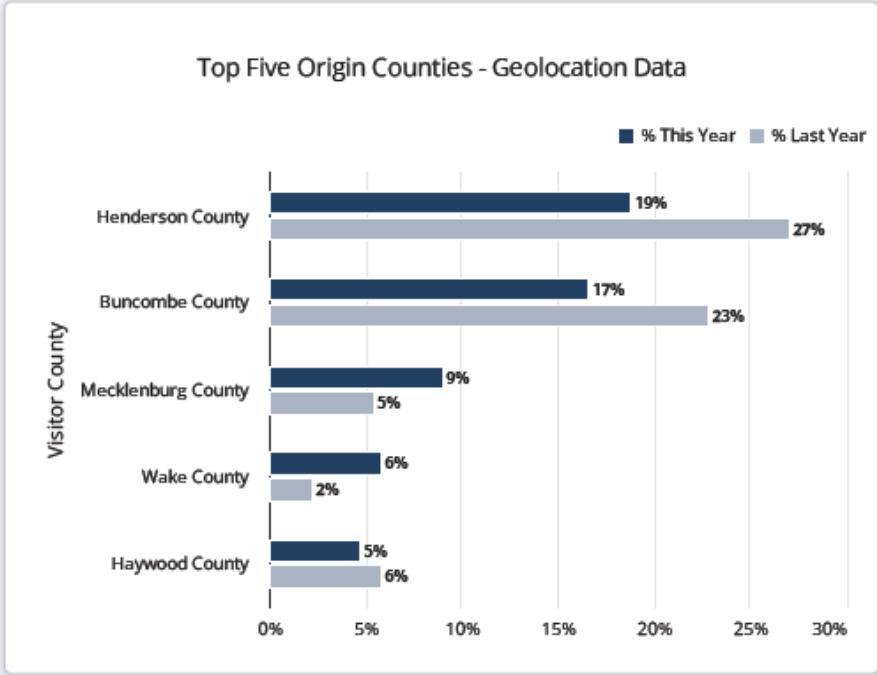
Out-of-State: Device common evening location or spend cardholder location is outside the state of North Carolina



What counties were in-state visitors from? How did it change from the previous year?

Source: Zartico Geolocation Data, Zartico Spend Data

This shows the origins of devices whose common evening location is in North Carolina, but outside of your county.



How does your visitation change by month and the year?

Source: Zartico Geolocation Data. This chart helps you identify seasonal trends among your top origin markets to understand when to flight campaigns and how to identity the right market mix to expand your visitor demand into the shoulder season.

Seasonality In Visitation By Origin Market Rolling 12 Months														
	Jun 2025	Jul 2025	Aug 2025	Sep 2025	Oct 2025	Nov 2025	Dec 2025	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Apr 2026	May 2026	Jun 2026	Visitors % of Total:
Atlanta GA	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	1.1%	1.4%	1.3%	0%
Charlotte NC	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	2.2%	2.9%	3.2%	1%
Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne FL	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%	1%
Raleigh-Durham (Fayetteville) NC	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%	1.7%	1.6%	2%
Tampa-St. Petersburg (Sarasota) FL	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.8%	1.4%	1.2%	2%



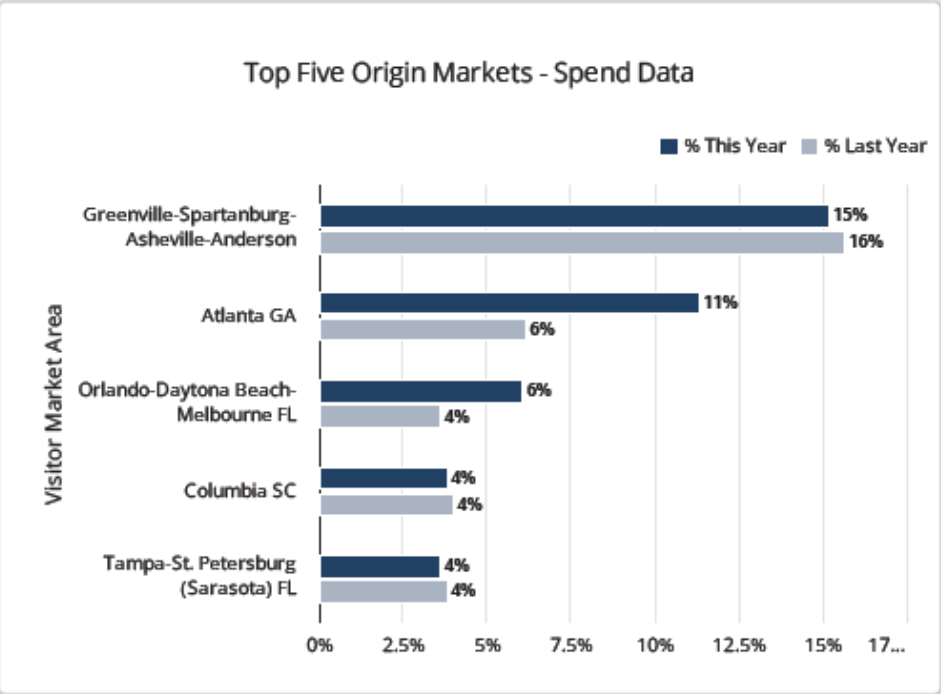
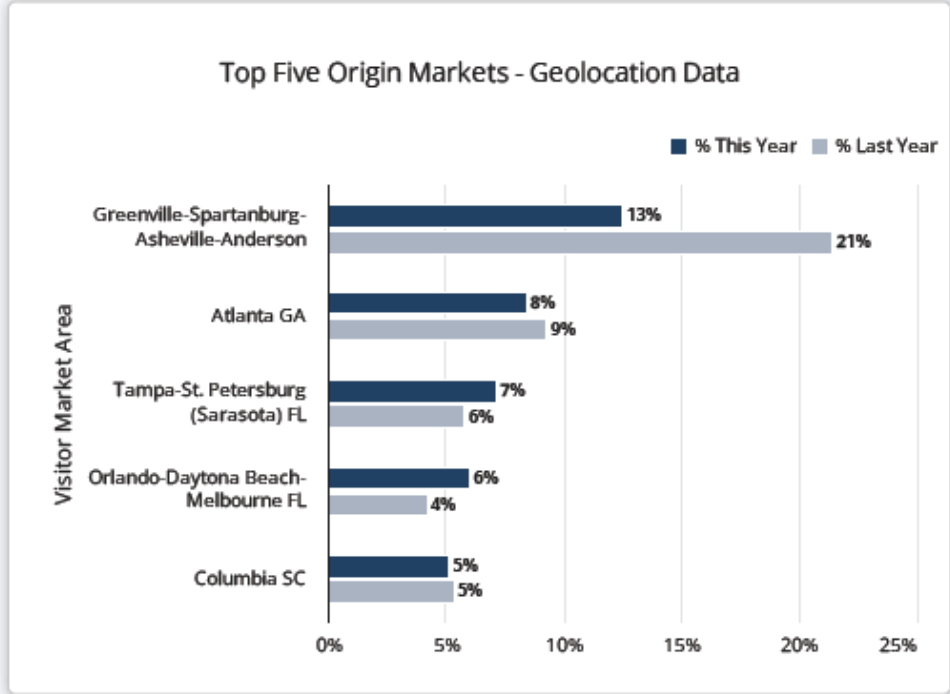
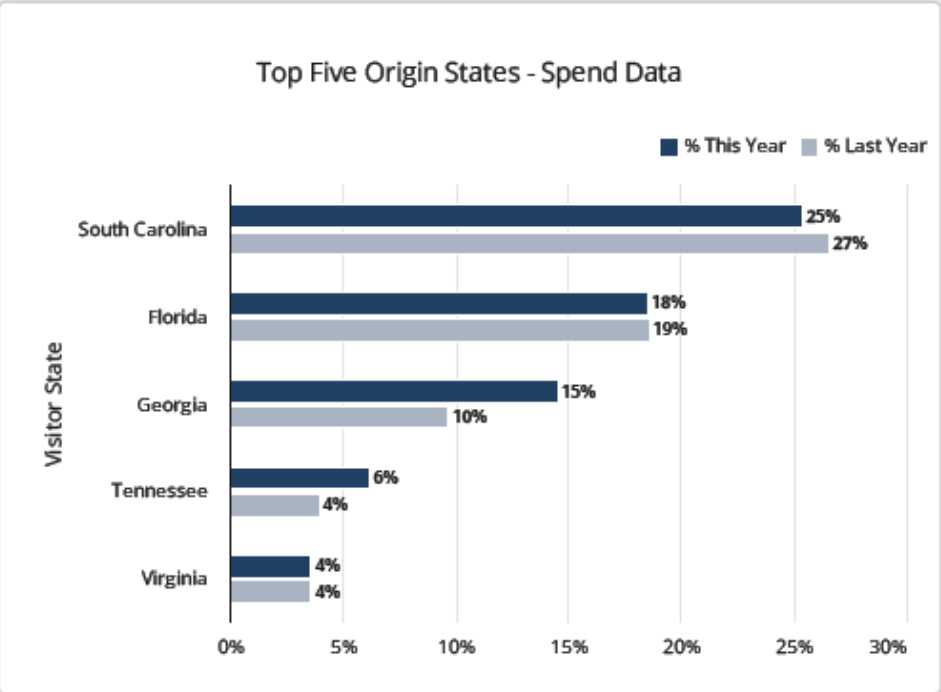
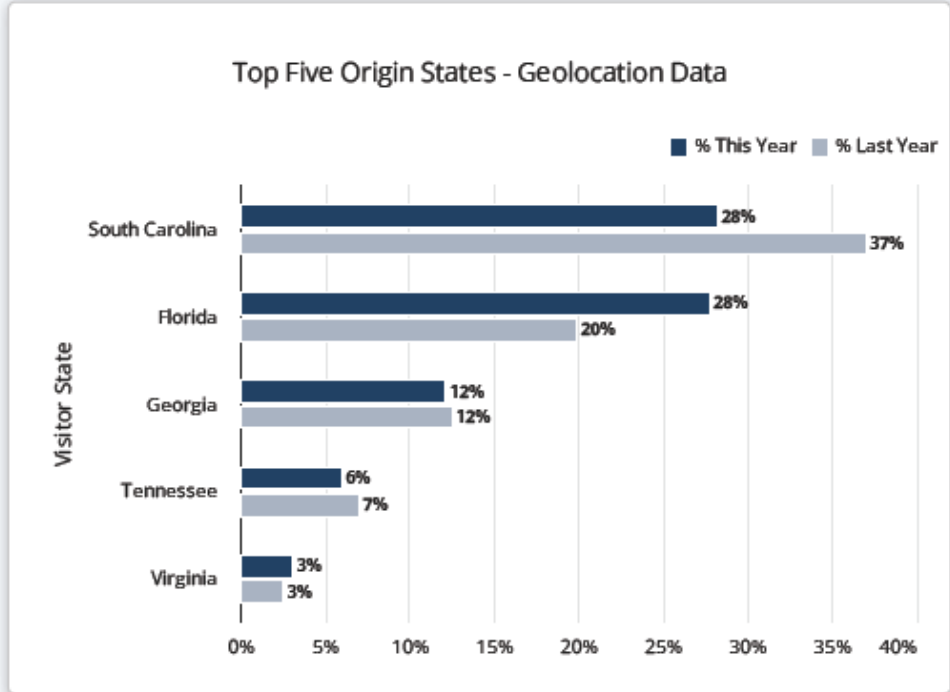
Occupancy & Visitor Highlights

Zartico Visitor Report

This report is produced by Zartico, who utilizes data from mobile devices based on defined points of interest and credit card receipts.

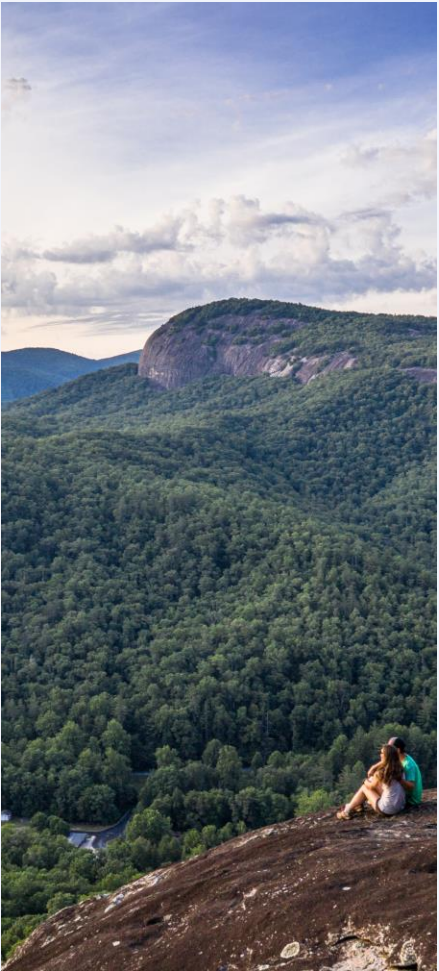
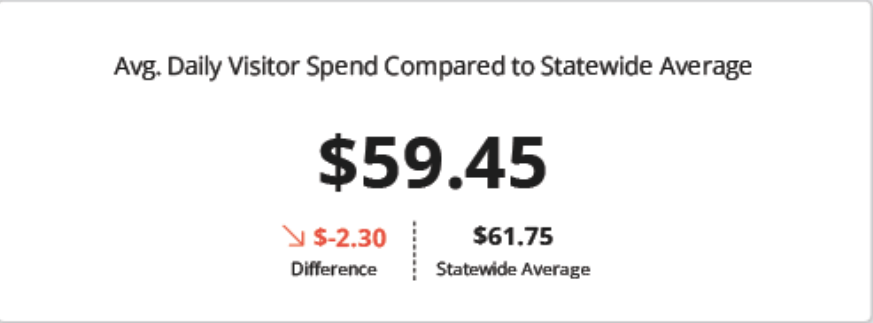
Where are your out-of-state visitors from?

Source: Zartico Geolocation Data, Zartico Spend Data
This shows the origins of devices whose common evening location is from outside of North Carolina as well as visitor cardholders with a billing zip code outside North Carolina. Note: Charlotte, Greenville-Spartanburg-Asheville-Anderson Raleigh-Durham, and Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem have counties outside of North Carolina as part of the defined Visitor Market Area.



How do visitors impact your destination?

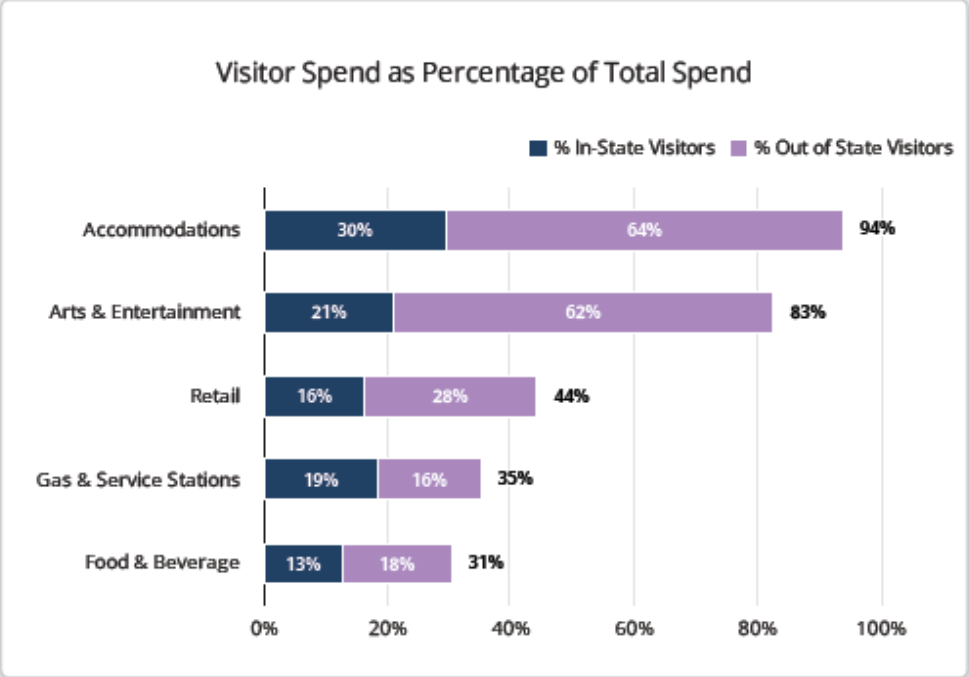
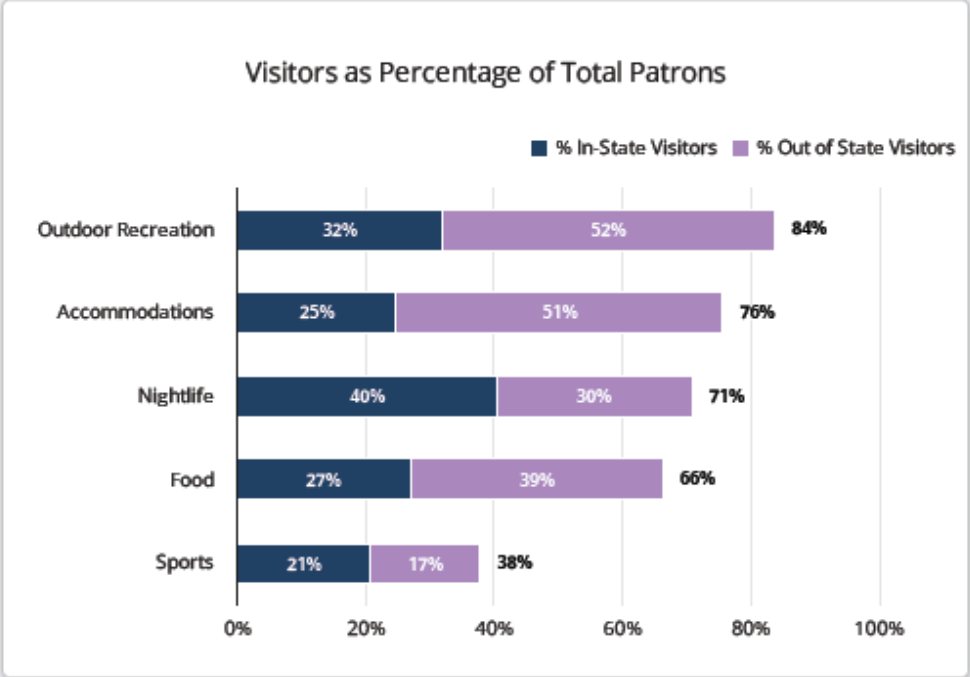
Source: Zartico Geolocation Data, Zartico Spend Data
Top level % Visitor Devices and % Spend from Visitors combine Out-of-State and In-State, Out of County metrics to show their percent of total. The charts below the top line show the share of visitors/visitor spend that make up your main categories of businesses to show the impact of visitors on your local economy by category



Occupancy & Visitor Highlights

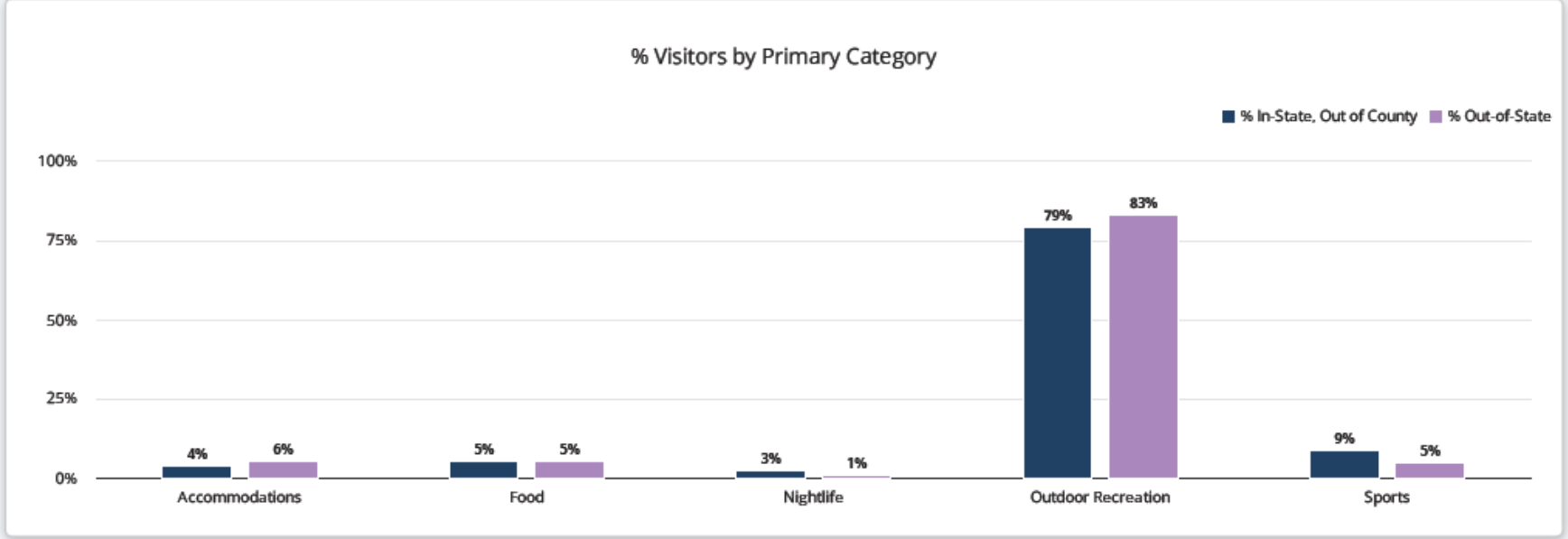
Zartico Visitor Report

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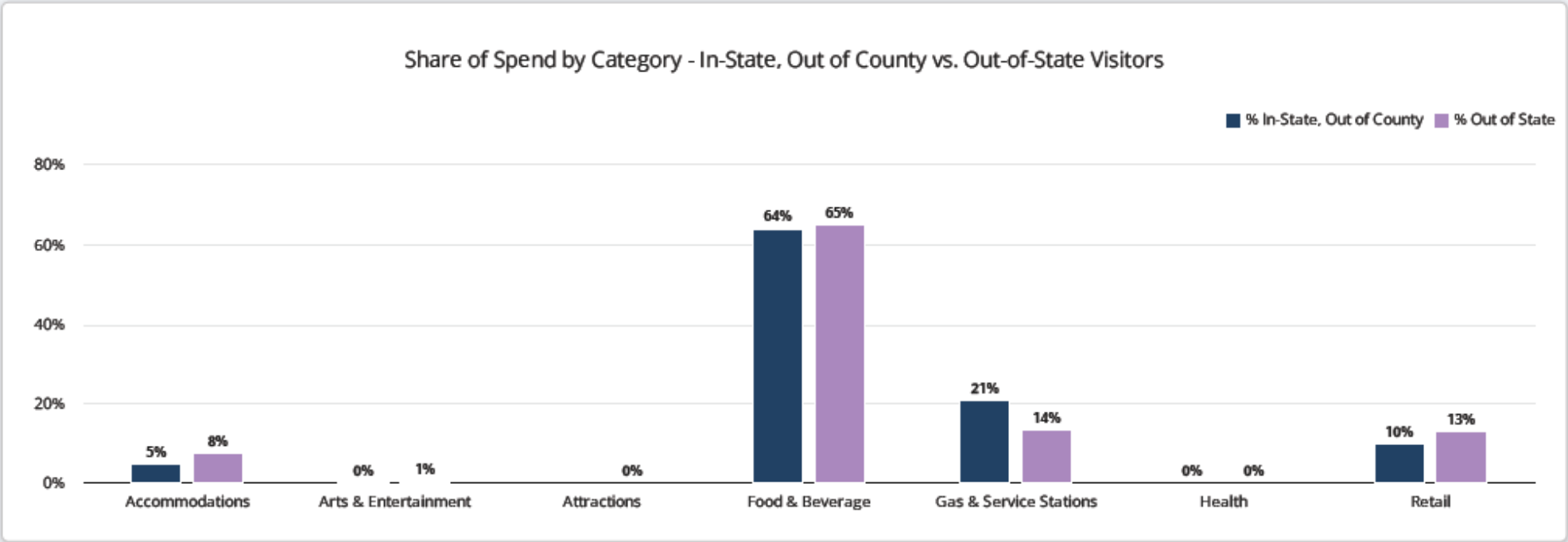
Where are visitors going in your destination?

Source: Zartico Geolocation Data
Differences between In-State, Out of County and Out-of-State share of visitation shows how your different visitor types move through your destination. Category Descriptions: Attractions include museums, theme parks, etc. , Nightlife includes includes bars, wineries, etc., Events include fairgrounds, concert halls/venues, etc.

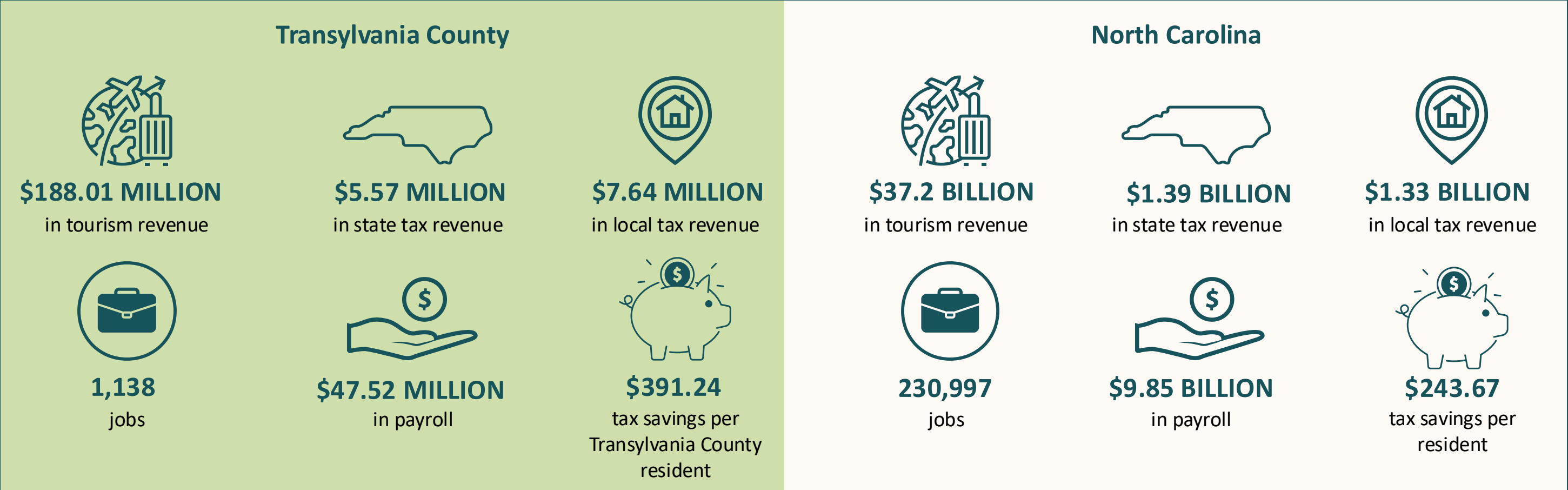


How do visitors spend in your destination?

Source: Zartico Spend Data
Differences between In-State, Out of County and Out-of-State share of spend shows how your different visitor types spend. This data does not include online transactions. Therefore the Accommodations category does not include short-term rentals where the card is not swiped in-market or pre-paid online bookings. Other Category Descriptions: Food - includes both restaurants and grocery stores, Nightlife - includes bars, wineries, etc., Transportation- Rental Cars.



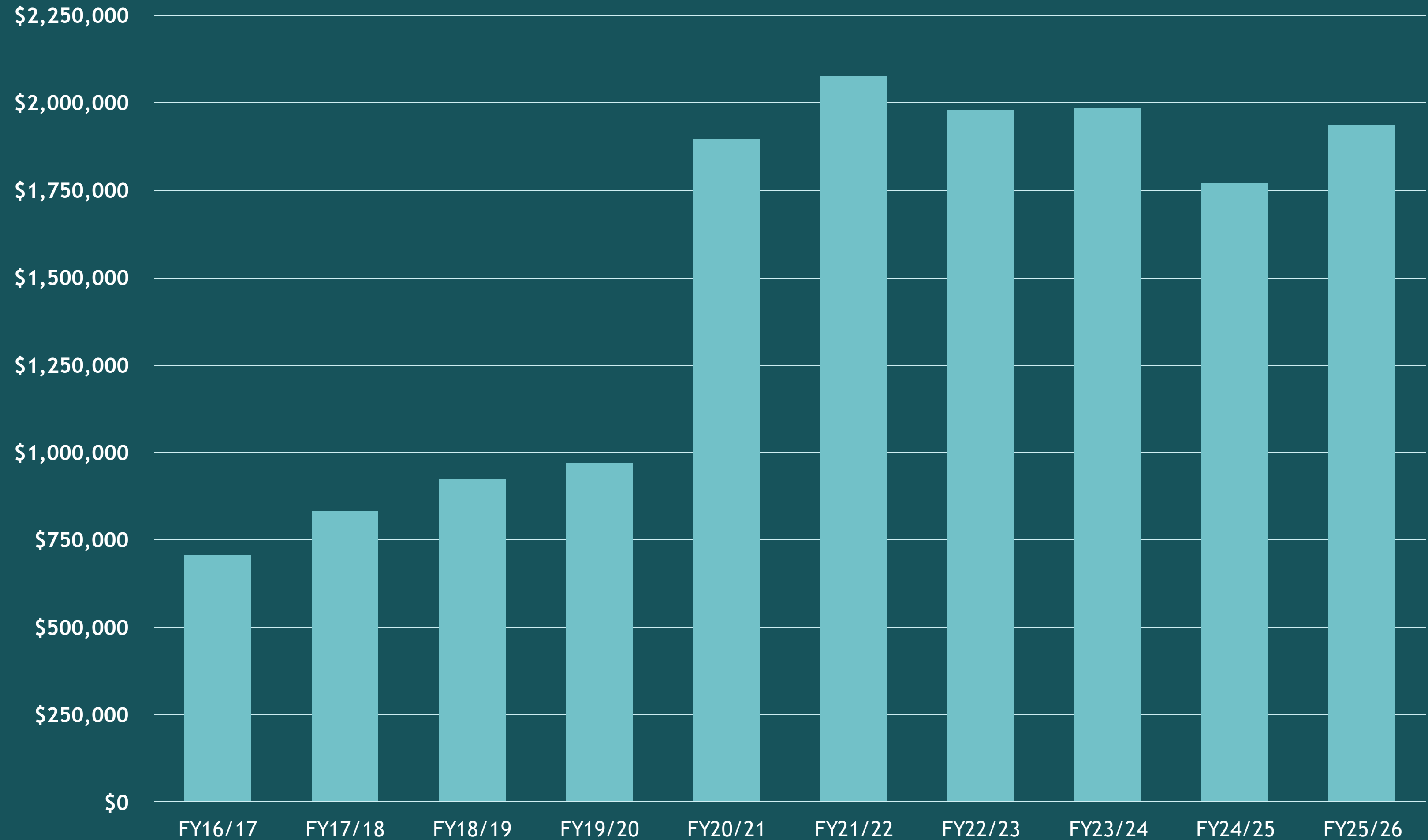
2025 Visitor Impact



Visitor Spend in Transylvania County (in millions)						
	Total Spend	Lodging	Food & Beverage	Recreation	Retail	Transport
2025	\$188.01	\$45.59	\$58.08	\$26.64	\$17.35	\$40.35
2024	\$187.02	\$44.44	\$58.38	\$26.79	\$16.82	\$40.58
% Change	0.53%	2.59%	-0.51%	-0.56%	3.15%	-0.57%

*Data sourced from Tourism Economics, who completed a study for all NC counties for Visit NC
**Information is for calendar years

Occupancy Tax Proceeds: 10-year view





IV. Marketing Highlights

Marketing Highlights

Overview

The TCTDA's Fiscal Year 2026 marketing and outreach activities began the year focused on highlighting the county's recovery from Hurricane Helene, sharing that our area was open and ready to welcome visitors. Efforts soon shifted to re-establishing our position as a premier destination. Throughout the year, travelers were invited to discover the unique landscapes, vibrant downtown, and diverse seasonal experiences that make Brevard and Transylvania County special.

Key Strategies & Campaigns

Geographic Expansion: Target markets continued in 150-mile drive markets (Raleigh, Atlanta, Charlotte, Nashville, and Knoxville), while outreach to direct-flight destinations, including Denver, Austin, Dallas, and NYC expanded during key seasons.

Integrated Creative Campaigns: The all-new "Find Yourself" integrated campaign was successfully launched, utilizing a 30-second television spot and short-form video assets across digital, social, and print media to engage audiences in our target markets.

Public Relations & Earned Media: Earned media initiatives were prioritized, including PBS's 30-minute North Carolina Weekend season opener, influencer experiences, live news segments, and a highly successful sweepstakes, all aimed at broadening reach and narrative impact.

Content & Digital Strategy: By leveraging ExploreBrevard.com, seasonal blog content, and frequent email newsletters, including The Adventurist and the local partner "Spotlight" features, audiences remained engaged and informed about local lodging, cultural events, and seasonal attractions, from fall foliage to spring festivals.

Quarterly Highlights

Q1: Focused efforts on post-Helene recovery and resilience, highlighting the "We're Back" message to niche adventurers and leisure travelers. PR efforts included securing an entire PBS North Carolina Weekend program exclusively focused on Transylvania County.

Q2: Transitioned from leaf season to winter holidays, promoting cozy mountain experiences and seasonal events like "Light Up The Night" and the Christmas Parade. We also finalized the new campaign video for a January launch.

Q3: Launched the "Find Yourself" campaign and utilized a successful sweepstakes to drive engagement. We implemented co-op partnerships with Visit North Carolina to amplify our storytelling during the winter season. Produced the annual Adventure Guide and new Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map.

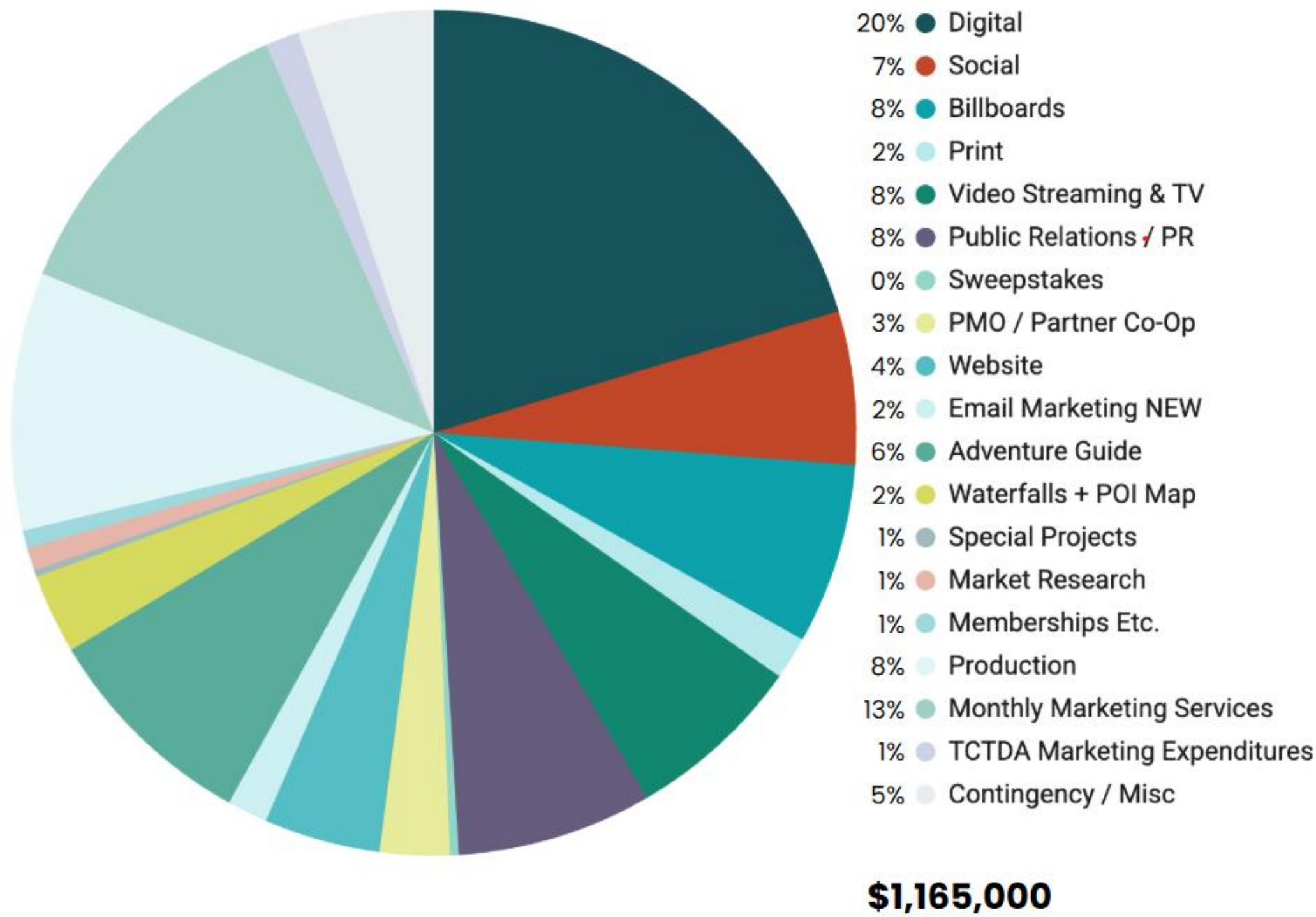
Q4: Celebrated the transition to spring and summer with campaigns promoting festivals and outdoor adventures. Enjoyed earned media through successful public relations missions and tours resulting in online and print stories, expanded news broadcasts, and on-air interviews. We developed the FY27 marketing plan while expanding regional geographic outreach to attract summer visitors.

Summary of Key Results

As Fiscal Year 2026 concluded, we successfully navigated the initial post-Helene challenges to drive significant visitation and community support. By launching the new "Find Yourself" campaign, continuing targeted messaging in regional drive markets, expanding into direct-flight corridors, and collaborating closely with local partners on seasonal content, a strong foundation for continued tourism growth was built. Marketing efforts generated an approximate reach of over 78 million views. The vast majority of this impact was driven by paid digital, broadcast, and print advertising, which accounted for 65.7 million views. The remaining views came from earned media coverage totaling 8.4 million views and 4 million organic views across Facebook and Instagram. This work throughout FY26 successfully positioned Transylvania County as a welcoming, year-round destination for culture, adventure, and relaxation.

Marketing Highlights

FY24/25 Marketing Plan Budget



Marketing Highlights

Digital

The TCTDA's digital advertising strategy played a vital role in promoting Transylvania County as a premier destination, with campaigns designed to reach key geographic markets, niche audiences, and travelers at different stages of the planning process. Digital efforts focused on driving traffic to the Explore Brevard website, showcasing the county's seasonal experiences, and increasing the visibility of local events and tourism partners.

Campaign Highlights

- **Seasonal Storytelling:** Campaign messaging evolved throughout the year to highlight summer adventures, fall color, holiday festivities, winter escapes, and spring experiences.
- **Platform Diversity:** Digital advertising included programmatic display, native, keyword search, YouTube, Meta, and retargeting, along with placements through Blue Ridge Outdoors, Pinkbike, Singletracks, Our State, Visit NC, and regional 6AM City newsletters.
- **Targeted Reach:** Campaigns focused on key geographic and niche markets, combining prospecting strategies to reach new audiences with retargeting efforts designed to re-engage travelers already familiar with the Explore Brevard brand.
- **High Impact Placements:** Custom articles, dedicated e-newsletters, featured event promotions, social media placements, and other premium opportunities helped extend the reach of seasonal campaigns and spotlight local events.

Quarterly Highlights

- **Q1:** Summer messaging featuring new photography transitioned to fall on September 2. Placements included Pinkbike, Meta, YouTube, Our State, Blue Ridge Outdoors, and Visit NC promotions for the Brevard Plein Air Festival and Halloweenfest.
- **Q2:** Fall advertising transitioned to holiday messaging in November and winter messaging in December. Campaigns ran across YouTube, Blue Ridge Outdoors, Our State, Singletracks, and Visit NC, which also featured local holiday events across its digital channels.
- **Q3:** Winter advertising continued through March 14 before transitioning to spring messaging. High-impact placements included YouTube, Blue Ridge Outdoors, Pinkbike, and Visit NC's website and e-newsletters.
- **Q4:** Spring advertising transitioned to summer messaging on May 26. Placements included YouTube, Visit NC's digital channels, and regional 6AM City newsletters in Raleigh, Charlotte, and Columbia.



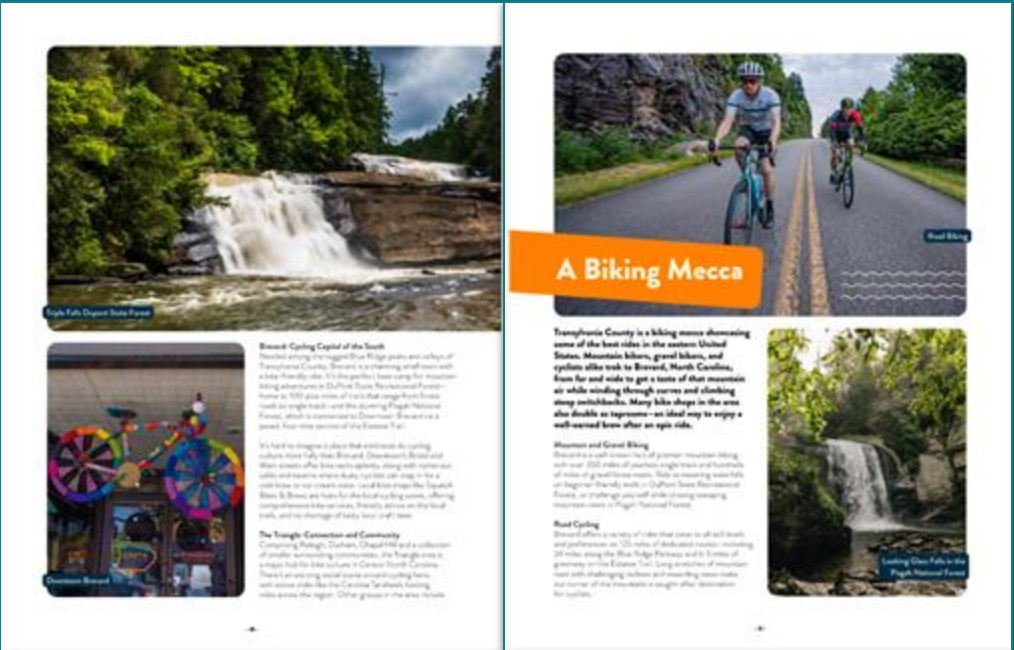
Marketing Highlights

Print

While digital marketing remained the primary focus in Fiscal Year 25/26, print advertising continued to play a strategic role in reaching targeted audiences and supporting seasonal campaigns and partner marketing initiatives. Placements in regional publications complemented broader digital efforts while maintaining Transylvania County's presence in key markets.

Campaign Highlights

- **Q1:** Full-page partner co-op ads appeared in the September issue of Blue Ridge Outdoors and the fall edition of WNC Magazine.
- **Q2:** A full-page ad in the November issue of Blue Ridge Outdoors celebrated Brevard being named a Top Adventure Town by the magazine's readers. An additional full-page ad appeared in the fall/holiday edition of Food and Travel.
- **Q3:** Winter placements included a full-page ad in Our State and a two-page feature in WNC Magazine. Spring partner co-op ads also appeared in Blue Ridge Outdoors and as a two-page spread in WNC Magazine.
- **Q4:** Targeted placements included an advertorial in the new Cycling NC E-Magazine, full-page ads in the Transylvania Times' Assault on the Carolinas special insert and Summer Explorer, and a partner co-op ad in the April issue of The Laurel of Asheville.



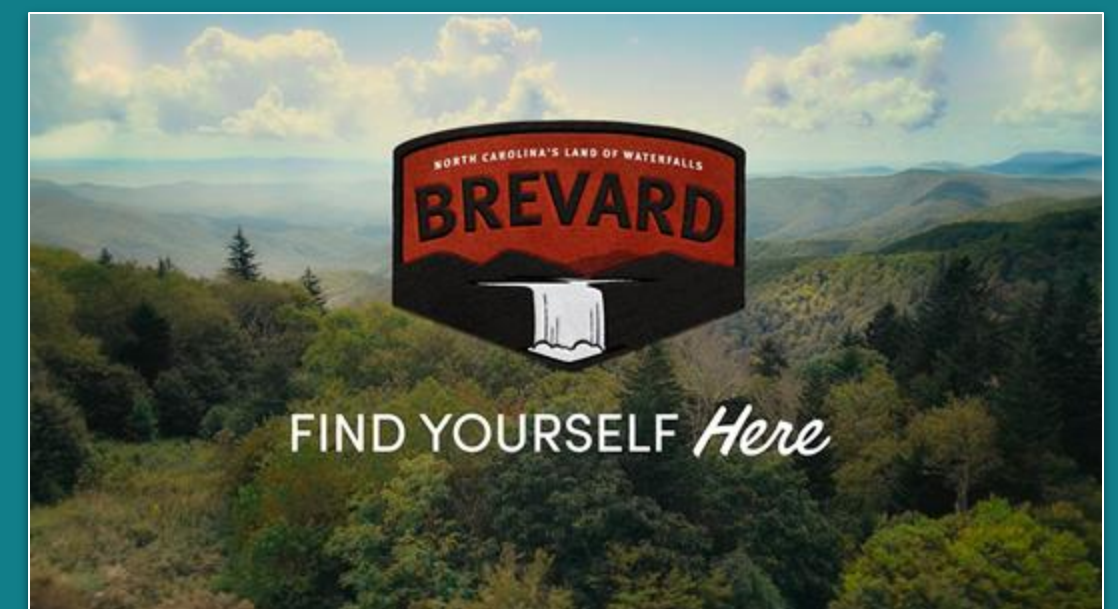
Marketing Highlights

Broadcast

Throughout FY25/26, the TCTDA strategically used television and streaming advertising to reach key regional markets. The year began with the 30-second “Be Cool” campaign before transitioning to the new “Find Yourself Here” campaign in January. Traditional cable and premium broadcast placements were supported by geo-targeted streaming, YouTube, pre-roll, digital, and social media video advertising.

Campaign Highlights

- **Q1:** The 30-second “Be Cool” TV spot aired in Atlanta, Nashville, and Raleigh. Geo-targeted streaming reached key audiences in Nashville, Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh, Columbia, and Greensboro, supported by video placements across YouTube, pre-roll, digital, and social media.
- **Q2:** “Be Cool” aired through November 12 in Charlotte, Raleigh, and Knoxville before transitioning to the “Holiday Be Cool” spot. Geo-targeted streaming continued in Charlotte, Raleigh, Atlanta, Nashville, Greensboro, and Columbia, alongside digital video placements.
- **Q3:** The new “Find Yourself Here” campaign launched January 1 with a 30-second TV spot airing across traditional cable and geo-targeted streaming platforms. Placements reached Atlanta, Nashville, Charlotte, Raleigh, Columbia, and Greensboro before expanding to Jacksonville and Orlando. Premium airtime also included CBS Sunday Morning in Charlotte and Upstate South Carolina.
- **Q4:** The “Find Yourself Here” TV campaign continued across cable and geo-targeted streaming platforms in Atlanta, Nashville, Charlotte, Raleigh, Columbia, and Greensboro. Premium airtime on CBS Sunday Morning continued in Charlotte through mid-April, supported by shorter campaign videos across YouTube, pre-roll, digital, and social media.



Marketing Highlights

Newsletters & Blogs

Newsletters

Twelve monthly Adventurist email newsletters were distributed throughout the year, with the opt-in subscriber audience growing from approximately 42,500 to more than 48,000. Each newsletter highlighted seasonal experiences, itineraries, and upcoming events while encouraging readers to explore more on ExploreBrevard.com.

Additional newsletters expanded reach and supported local partners. Five Partner Spotlights featured SylvanSport, Theophilus, Meraki Escape, Emerald Lake Retreat, and Brevard Music Center. A new semiannual Lodging Spotlight debuted, featuring four accommodations and promoting lodging specials.

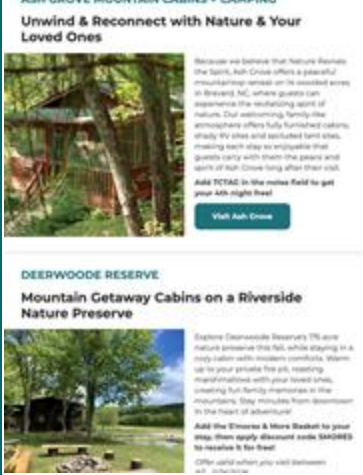
Two dedicated Blue Ridge Outdoors newsletters also highlighted Brevard as a Top Adventure Town and romantic getaway destination, reaching 42,000 subscribers each.

In March, a Spring/Summer press newsletter was distributed to 850 targeted media contacts.

Blogs

Twenty new blogs were published on ExploreBrevard.com throughout the year, offering timely inspiration and practical trip-planning resources. Featured topics included summer favorites, affordable getaways, holiday and pet-friendly itineraries, solo and girls' trips, hands-on experiences, waterfall chasing, backcountry adventures, and memorable live music experiences.

Additional content highlighted Transylvania County's mountain biking, arts community, Outdoor NC Trail Town designation, black bears, summer camp heritage, and iconic waterfalls. Select blogs were also adapted for Romantic Asheville, extending their reach to new audiences. This mix of seasonal, itinerary-based, and evergreen content kept ExploreBrevard.com fresh and provided visitors with inspiration for every stage of their trip.



Marketing Highlights

Billboards & Signage

In FY25/26, strategically placed billboards were used to welcome visitors, reinforce destination awareness, and highlight Transylvania County’s seasonal experiences. Two key placements, one along Highway 280 at the county gateway and another on Interstate 26 near Asheville Regional Airport, featured refreshed creative throughout the year. The Interstate 26 billboard reached approximately 253,000 motorists each week, while the Highway 280 billboard welcomed travelers with iconic imagery and timely seasonal messaging.



Marketing Highlights

Adventure Guide & Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map

During FY25/26, a comprehensive review of the TCTDA’s two primary visitor publications was conducted. Research included evaluating collateral from surrounding destinations, reviewing how each publication is used, gathering input from tourism partners, and conducting a discovery session with the Marketing Committee.

Based on this research, both publications retained their convenient 4-by-9-inch format. The waterfall guide and fold-out map were moved from the Adventure Guide into a redesigned standalone Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map. This allowed the Adventure Guide to introduce new content focused on seasons, annual events, communities, and outdoor adventures.

The completed publications arrived in February and were distributed to tourism partners throughout Transylvania County. Adventure Guides were also sent to visitor and welcome centers across North Carolina. A total of 80,000 Adventure Guides were printed for local, regional, and national distribution, along with a digital version on our website.

The new Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map combined a Downtown Brevard map, a countywide map of waterfalls and attractions, and the complete waterfall guide. A total of 75,000 copies were printed, primarily for local distribution.



Marketing Highlights

Special Promotions

Several campaigns and targeted promotions were implemented throughout FY25/26 to increase destination awareness, inspire travel, grow the subscriber audience, and connect visitors with local businesses and experiences.

The new “Find Yourself Here” campaign launched January 1 with a 30-second video featuring local voices, scenic imagery, outdoor adventure, and the authentic character of Transylvania County. The campaign was supported by television, streaming, print, digital, out-of-home, and social media placements.

The annual Romantic Mountain Getaway Sweepstakes generated 10,209 entries, an 18% increase from the previous year, and added 7,652 new email addresses, a 40% increase. The campaign also produced more than 61,000 website sessions and nearly 160,000 advertising impressions. The \$1,250 getaway featured contributions from Valley Bear Farms, The Blind Mule, and Audancity.

Additional targeted campaigns included a Summer Camper Parent Campaign that reached more than 34,000 potential visitors, encouraging parents to extend camp drop-off into a getaway. An Adventurist lead generation campaign produced more than 185,000 impressions and nearly 300 newsletter signups. A separate Adventure Guide request campaign reached 63,390 Meta accounts and generated 2,294 unique clicks to the request page.

An Adventurist subscriber survey also allowed readers to identify their interests and receive customized activity recommendations. The resulting audience data will help guide future content and campaign targeting.



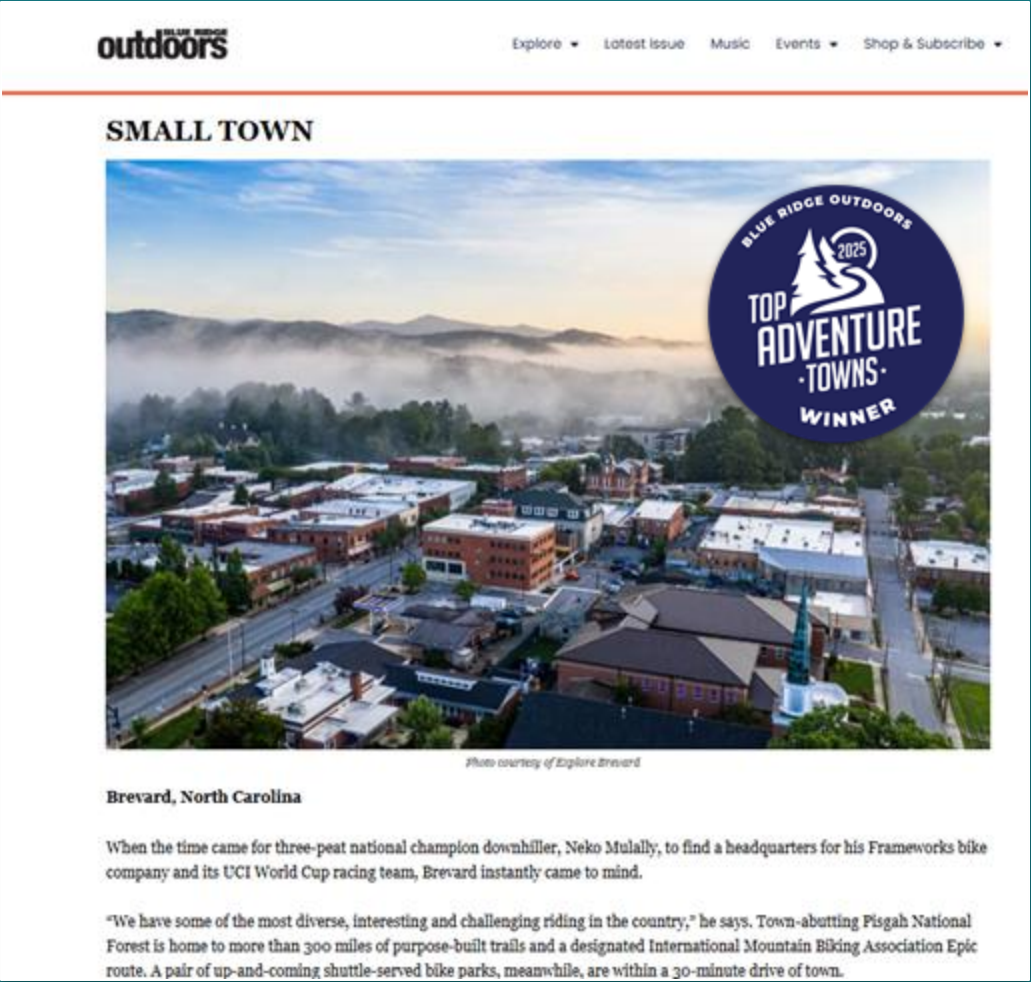
Marketing Highlights

Awards & Recognitions

Brevard received significant recognition during FY25/26, reinforcing its reputation as a leading destination for outdoor recreation and authentic mountain experiences.

In October, Brevard was named a Top Adventure Town in the Small Town category by readers of Blue Ridge Outdoors. After finishing as runner-up in 2024, Brevard earned the title for the first time, prevailing over destinations including Gatlinburg, Hendersonville, and Pigeon Forge. The three-round competition featured 100 destinations and generated nearly 20,000 votes.

The new “Find Yourself in Brevard” campaign video, produced by Market Connections, also received national recognition from the Telly Awards. The video earned Gold, Silver, and Bronze honors for its creative portrayal of Transylvania County’s natural beauty, local character, and visitor experiences.



Marketing Highlights

Public Relations

Public relations efforts focused on securing high-value destination features, building relationships with journalists and content creators, and generating coverage that introduced Transylvania County to regional and national audiences.

Media Features

After several years of outreach, a full episode of PBS NC's NC Weekend devoted exclusively to Transylvania County was secured. The production crew spent five and a half days filming more than 20 locations and conducting interviews throughout the county. The 26-minute season premiere aired October 2, 2025, and was celebrated with community watch parties at Grand Olde Station and The Trust Center. NC Weekend generates more than one million weekly impressions across broadcast, streaming, and social media.

On Halloween, WSPA-TV's Your Carolina broadcast live from Silvermont Mansion. The hour-long program highlighted Halloween in Transylvania County while also sharing fall and winter travel ideas with audiences in Upstate South Carolina and Western North Carolina. Featured segments included local attractions, organizations, businesses, and community traditions.

Familiarization (FAM) Tours, Influencer Visits, & Media Missions

Media relationships were strengthened through targeted missions, hosted visits, and collaborative FAM tours. At the Southeast Tourism Society Travel Media Meetup in Orlando, a TCTDA representative met individually with more than 20 journalists, creators, and influencers. A Visit NC media mission in Austin and Fort Worth provided opportunities to pitch Transylvania County experiences to 10 additional media representatives. The TCTDA team also had a chance to meet with media during the annual Visit NC Tourism Conference in Asheville in March.

In May, we participated in Visit NC's "Summer Camp, Reimagined" FAM Tour, hosting journalists representing outlets such as National Geographic, CNN Travel, House Beautiful, and SheBuys Travel. The itinerary featured a llama hike, waterfalls, Lake Toxaway, local dining, and overnight accommodations. The visit resulted in a SheBuys Travel feature positioning Western North Carolina as a destination for memorable group getaways.

The Texas media mission also led to a hosted visit by writer Annie B. Verdin. Her experience with Oxbow River Snorkeling resulted in an AFAR feature about river snorkeling in Transylvania County. Her itinerary also included a waterfall coffee hike, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Downtown Brevard's white squirrels.

Additional creator partnerships included a four-day visit with NC Tripping and a family travel collaboration with @RaleighThingsFamGuide. These partnerships highlighted local accommodations, dining, outdoor recreation, cultural attractions, and distinctive guided experiences through website, newsletter, and social media content.



Marketing Highlights

Public Relations

Earned Media Coverage

Over the past year, many of the stories highlighted below were the direct result of our media outreach and FAM tour efforts, which set the stage for broader coverage. Coordinated PR campaigns helped amplify Transylvania County’s story across multiple platforms, including articles, television segments, and newspaper features. While some coverage arose organically, much was the outcome of targeted pitches and collaborations. A sampling is included below:

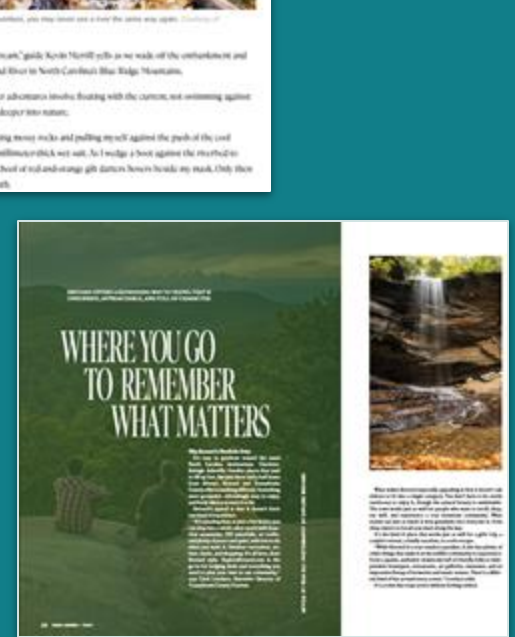
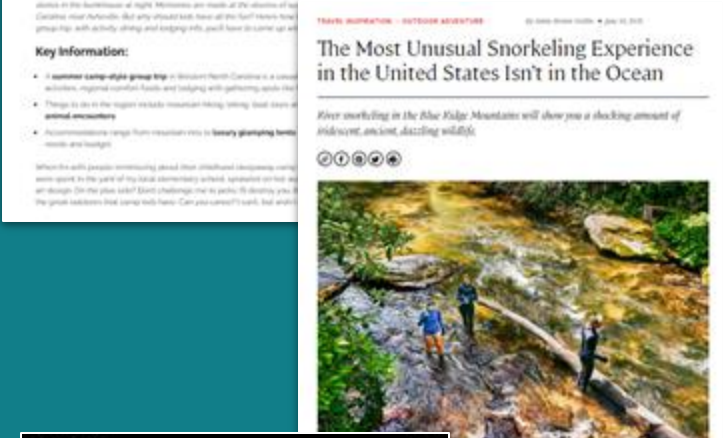
26
Print & Online Features

6
Newspaper Features

25
TV & Radio Features

- AFAR Media “[The Most Unusual Snorkeling Experience in the United States Isn’t in the Ocean](#)”
- She Buys Travel “[This Western North Carolina Group Getaway Feels Like a Luxurious Adult Summer Camp](#)”
- Cycling Weekly “[America's best bike riding might not be in Colorado or California — it's in the Carolinas](#)”
- Southern Living “[This Tiny Mountain Town Tucked In North Carolina's 'Land Of Waterfalls' Is A Hidden Gem Getaway](#)”
- Roswell City Lifestyle “[Where You Go To Remember What Matters](#)”
- WSPA-TV, Upstate, SC “[Brevard hosts ‘Patriot’s Pint’ initiative brewing beer in honor of NC history](#)”
- Southern Living “[This Little-Known Southern Music Center Hosts A World-Renowned Guitar Camp](#)”
- Travel & Leisure “[This Small Town in North Carolina’s ‘Land of Waterfalls’ Has Great Live Music and Art Scenes—and Famous White Squirrels](#)”
- WNC Business Magazine “[Brevard Named a 2025 Top Adventure Town by Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine](#)”
- Business Insider “[I've lived in the Carolinas for years. There's one small town I swear by visiting every fall](#)”
- Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine “[Top Adventure Towns](#)”
- WSPA-TV CBS, Upstate, SC Morning Newscast “[9th annual Pumpkin Fest returns to WNC after Helene](#)”
- NC Weekend PBS NC “[A Weekend in Brevard](#)”
- MAXIM Magazine “[The Best Luxury Getaways In North Carolina’s Smoky Mountains](#)”
- Backpack Magazine (Outside) “[Explore Deep Forest in the Shining Rock, Pisgah Forest Wilderness](#)”
- Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine “[Waterfall Wonders](#)”
- Transylvania Times “[Dunn's Rock News: Gov. and Mrs. Stein at Mud Dabber's](#)”

Explore a larger list of earned media coverage [here](#).

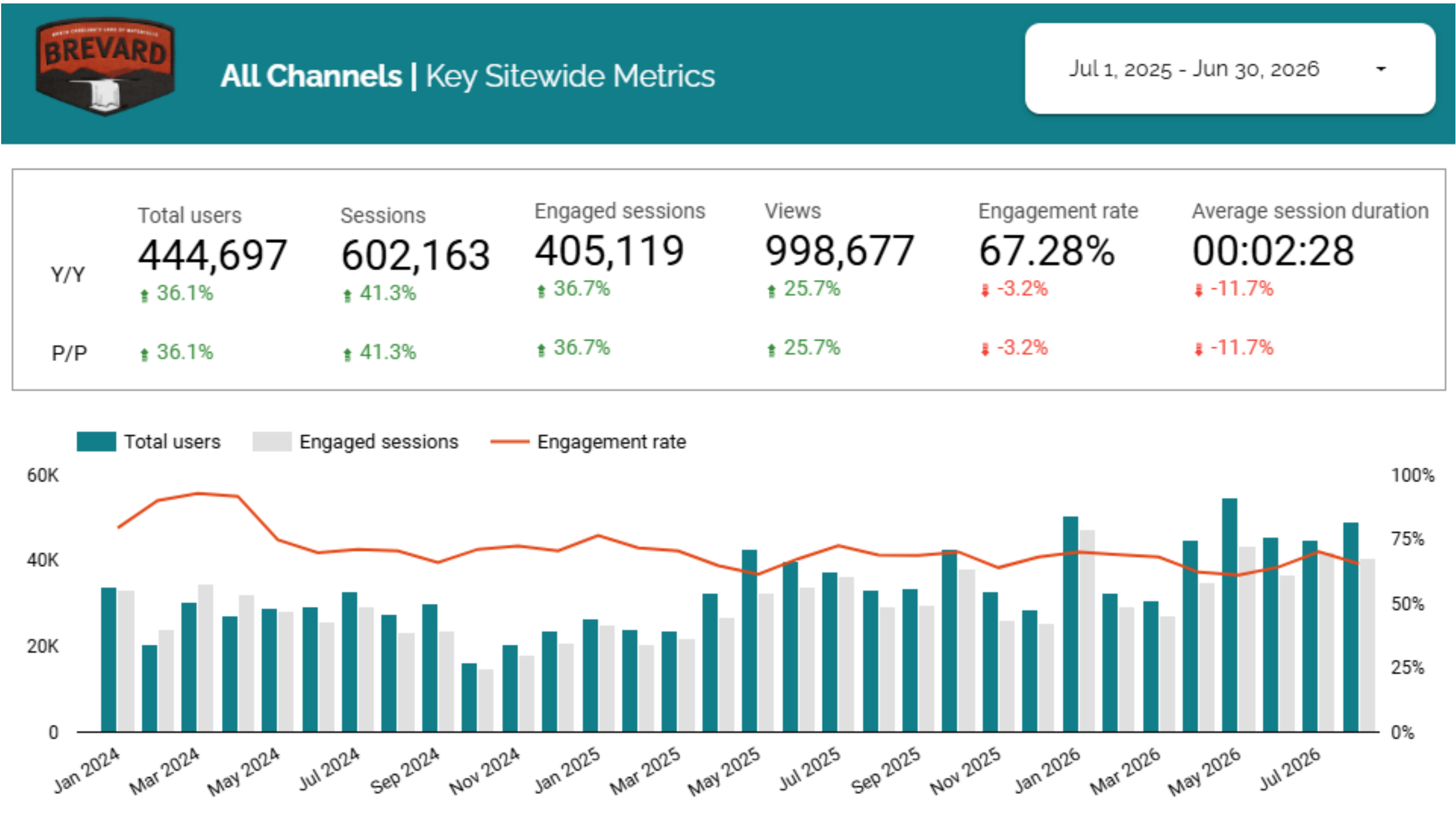


Marketing Highlights

Sitewide Website Metrics

ExploreBrevard.com experienced strong growth across all traffic channels in FY25/26, reaching 444,697 users and generating 602,163 sessions, year-over-year increases of 36% and 41%, respectively. The site recorded nearly one million views and more than 405,000 engaged sessions, both increasing significantly from the previous year.

This substantial increase in traffic brought a broader audience to the site, including more users making quick, task-focused visits to find specific information such as events, accommodations, maps, and trip-planning resources. Increased advertising traffic directed users to targeted landing pages and content, where they could quickly find what they needed without exploring additional pages. These factors likely contributed to a 3.2% year-over-year decrease in engagement rate and an 11.7% decrease in average session duration. Even with these declines, engagement remained strong at 67.28%, and visitors spent an average of 2 minutes and 28 seconds on the site. Overall, the continued growth in users, sessions, views, and engaged sessions demonstrates the website’s expanding reach and value as a destination-planning resource.



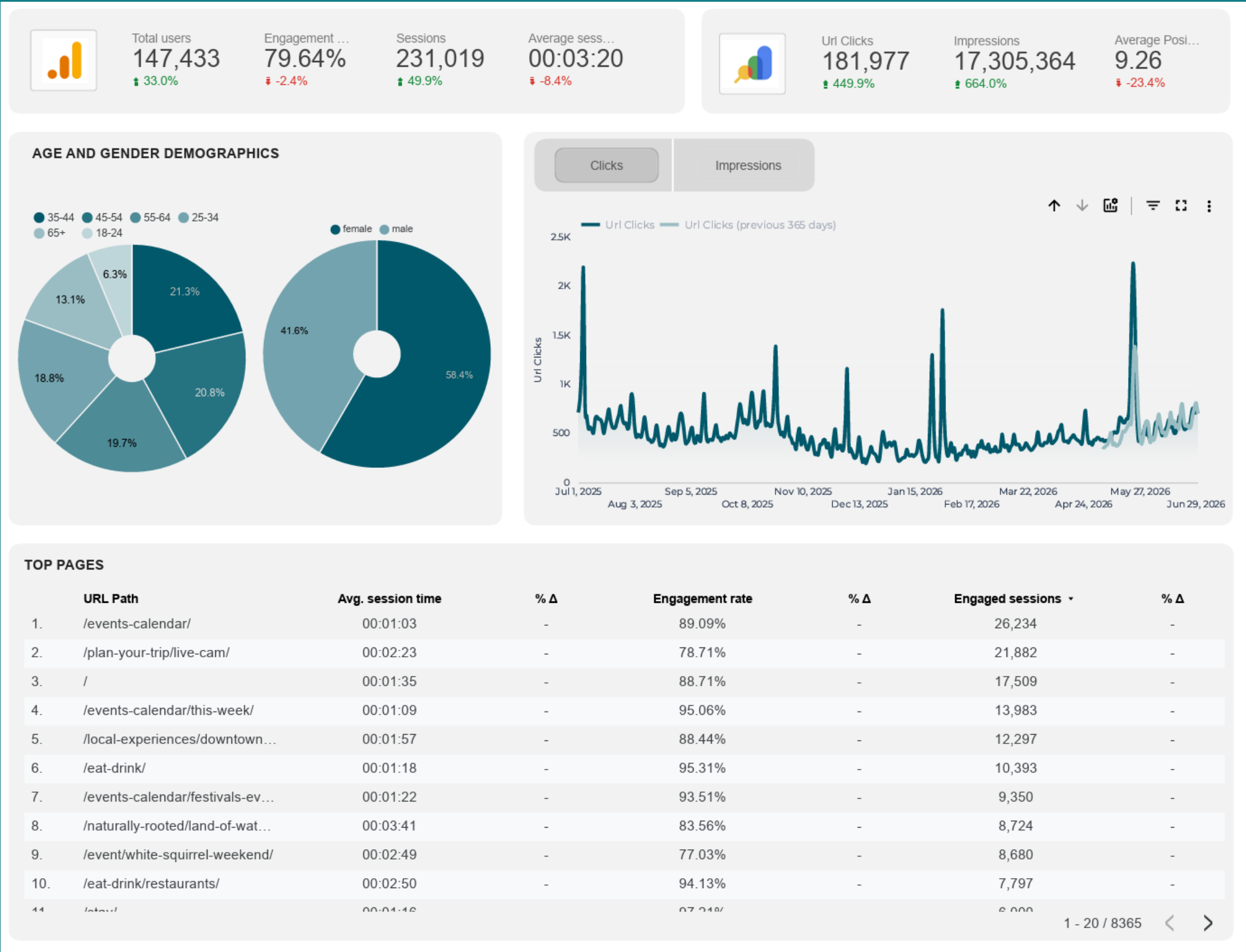
Marketing Highlights

Organic Website Metrics

Organic search performance grew substantially in FY25/26, generating 147,433 users and 231,019 website sessions, year-over-year increases of 33% and nearly 50%, respectively. ExploreBrevard.com appeared in Google search results more than 17.3 million times and received 181,977 organic search clicks, demonstrating significant growth in the site’s visibility.

Organic visitors remained highly engaged, with an engagement rate of 79.64% and an average session duration of three minutes and 20 seconds. Although these metrics decreased by 2.4% and 8.4%, respectively, they remain strong. The modest declines reflect the site’s broader reach and an increase in task-focused visitors who arrive through specific searches and locate the information they need more quickly.

The site’s average search position decreased by 23.4% to 9.6. This change is consistent with the significant expansion in search visibility, as ExploreBrevard.com appeared for a wider range of keywords, including broader and more competitive terms that rank lower than the site’s established searches. Increased competition within travel-related search results and ongoing changes to Google’s search-result features also affected average rankings. Despite this shift, the site continued to rank on the first page of results on average, while achieving substantial growth in organic users, sessions, impressions, and clicks.



AGE AND GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS

35-44

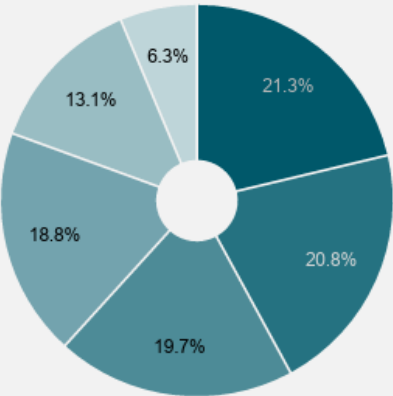
45-54

55-64

25-34

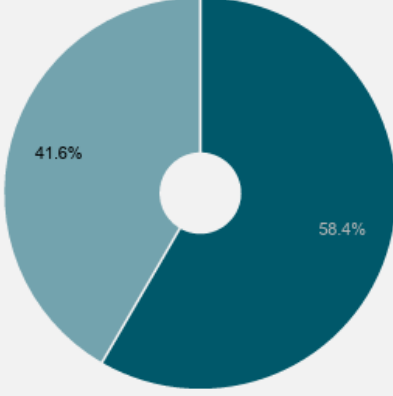
65+

18-24



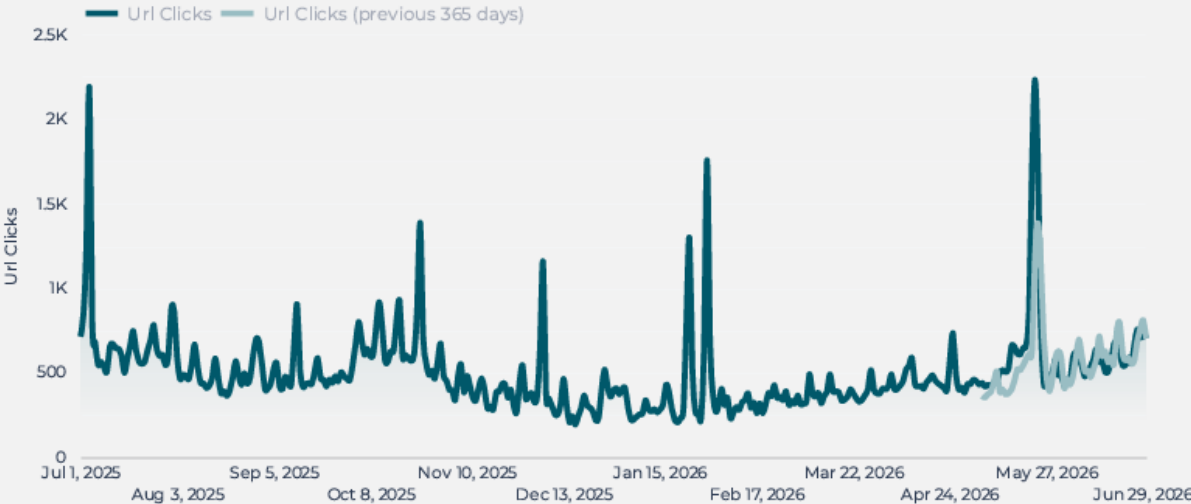
female

male



Clicks

Impressions



TOP PAGES

	URL Path	Avg. session time	% Δ	Engagement rate	% Δ	Engaged sessions ▾	% Δ
1.	/events-calendar/	00:01:03	-	89.09%	-	26,234	-
2.	/plan-your-trip/live-cam/	00:02:23	-	78.71%	-	21,882	-
3.	/	00:01:35	-	88.71%	-	17,509	-
4.	/events-calendar/this-week/	00:01:09	-	95.06%	-	13,983	-
5.	/local-experiences/downtown...	00:01:57	-	88.44%	-	12,297	-
6.	/eat-drink/	00:01:18	-	95.31%	-	10,393	-
7.	/events-calendar/festivals-ev...	00:01:22	-	93.51%	-	9,350	-
8.	/naturally-rooted/land-of-wat...	00:03:41	-	83.56%	-	8,724	-
9.	/event/white-squirrel-weekend/	00:02:49	-	77.03%	-	8,680	-
10.	/eat-drink/restaurants/	00:02:50	-	94.13%	-	7,797	-
11.	/...	00:01:16	-	87.21%	-	6,000	-

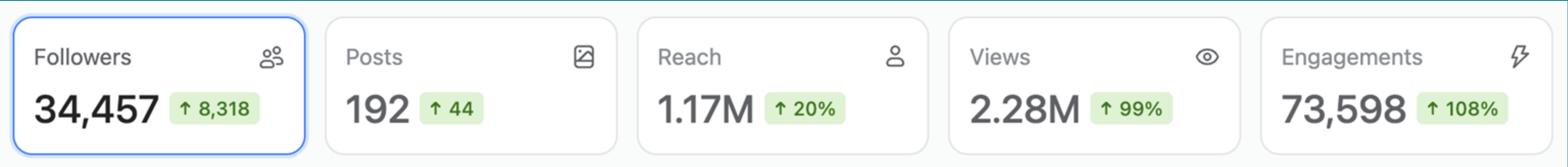
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Marketing Highlights

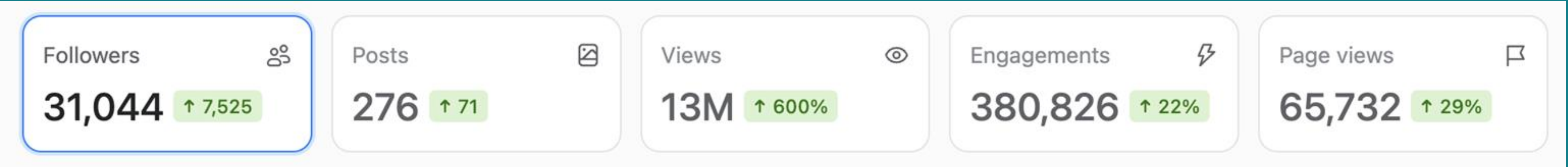
Social Media Metrics

This year, the TCTDA continued strengthening its social media presence through more consistent posting, short-form video, timely seasonal updates, user-generated content, and collaborations with tourism partners and content creators. Reels featuring fall color, waterfalls, Sliding Rock, events, outdoor dining, and other trip-planning ideas performed especially well, while strategic boosting helped extend the reach of high-quality content. Insights from this year will guide FY27 efforts, including more interactive stories, locally focused influencer partnerships, search-friendly captions, and expanded use of evergreen content across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest.

Instagram



Facebook



Marketing Highlights

Top-Performing Instagram Posts Based on Views

Boosted



0:00 / 0:15

explorebrevardnc Like a Hallmark movie. . . but better because it's in the Blue Ridge Mountains. And r... more

Boosted



0:00 / 0:31

explorebrevardnc POV: You finally worked up the courage to go down Sliding Rock. 🤪🌊... more

Boosted



0:00 / 1:24

explorebrevardnc If you're craving a laid-back lunch with a side of mountain views, Brevard has you cov... more



0:00 / 0:11

explorebrevardnc 🐟 What a weekend on the water! The annual Fly Fishing Festival brought anglers, out...

Influencer Collab



0:00 / 0:27

nctripping 6,000 square feet of unique toys for kids of all ages and the vouns at heart! @ontavlors is a...

- 1

152,314 Views

Filmed by: Paul Bonesteel

While heavily boosted, this content also showcased downtown as a picturesque mountain town.
- 2

138,105 Views

Filmed by: George Carlton

Sliding Rock is a high-performing topic. This reel was well produced and well timed, as well as heavily boosted.
- 3

122,356 Views

Filmed by: Katlyn Mobley

This reel was well engaged with and had a lot of “saves”. The listicle content performed well.
- 4

83,483 Views

Filmed by: Clark Lovelace

This reel tagged 3 additional partners and acted as a timely recap of a popular event.
- 5

73,440 Views

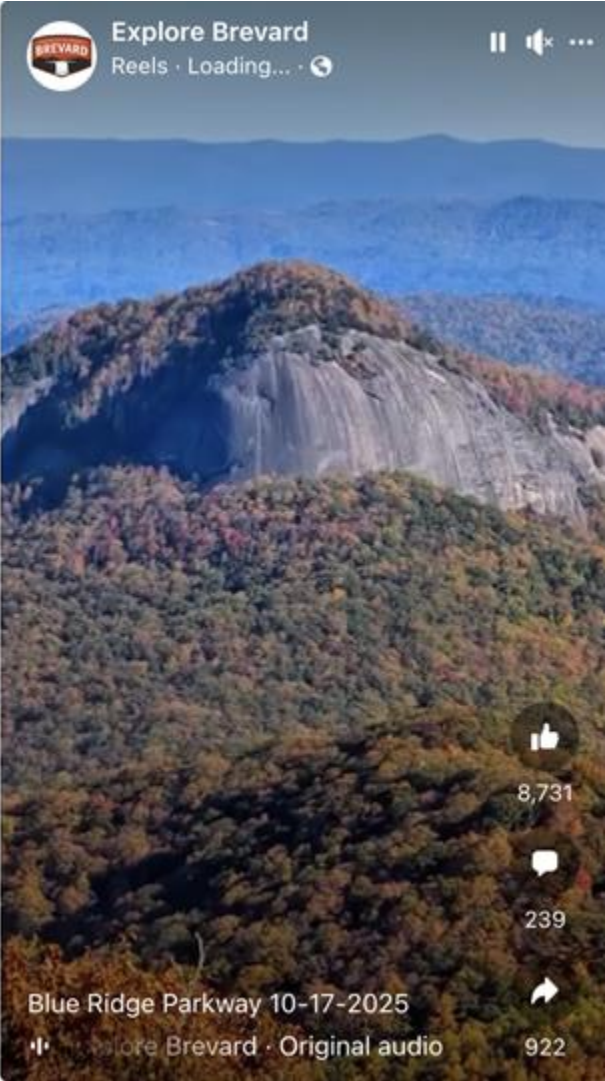
Filmed by: NC Tripping

Collab post w/NC Tripping. Family friendly and “saveable” content.. May have been boosted by OP (original poster).

Marketing Highlights

Top-Performing Facebook Posts Based on Views

Boosted



Boosted



1 231,261 Views

Filmed by: Mark Johnson
Live fall color update. High engagement rate

2 180,468 Views

Filmed by: Library Content
Saveable content, listicle format “Bucket List” content seems to perform well.

3 168,356 Views

Filmed by: Mark Johnson
Live fall color update. High engagement rate.

4 167,265 Views

Filmed by: Library Content
Post with high local interest, 50 comments, tagged local partner.

5 152,314 Views

Filmed by: Paul Bonesteel
While heavily boosted, this content also showcased downtown as a picturesque mountain town.



V. Destination Management Highlights

Destination Management Highlights

Transylvania Always

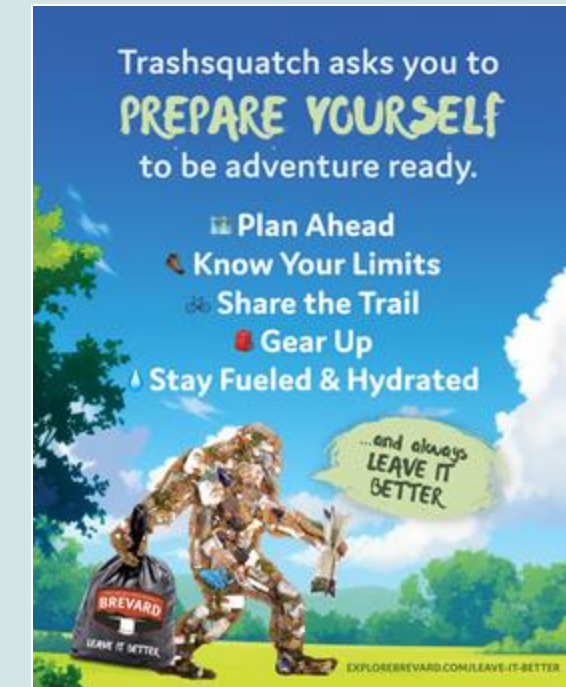
The Transylvania Always Committee, which is fully funded and operated by the TCTDA, met regularly throughout the year to advance destination stewardship, visitor education, and outdoor recreation initiatives. The committee reviewed grant requests, received quarterly updates from MountainTrue on the French Broad River Paddle Trail, and worked with public land managers, emergency services, and stewardship organizations to identify shared priorities.

The committee approved \$2,000 to support a collaborative effort with local outfitters to stock fish in the French Broad River. It also approved funding for the Town of Rosman's Champion Park project, a significant multi-year investment that will improve recreational access along the river. The year also marked the completion of improvements at Lyons Mountain River Access, a TCTDA-supported Blueway Master Plan project that expands safe and accessible river access in Rosman.

Leave It Better and Be Waterfall Wise continued to be an important part of the Transylvania Always initiative. This included the annual spring and summer push for both educational campaigns. This year's Leave It Better programming focused on the principle "Prepare Yourself." Based on input from public land managers and emergency services partners, the campaign provided visitors with safety and preparedness information before they explored Transylvania County's public lands and natural resources.

The Transylvania Always Committee continued supporting important stewardship partners and programs throughout the year. This included sponsoring The Pisgah Conservancy's 2026 Pisgah Project Day, which united 500 volunteers, 31 businesses, and 17 agencies and partner organizations to complete 29 projects across the Pisgah Ranger District.

The annual land managers meeting brought together representatives from public lands, emergency services, and local stewardship organizations to strengthen collaboration around safe and responsible outdoor recreation. A special banner thanking these local heroes was displayed at the Outdoor Economy Conference in Cherokee and SparkPoint's local Helene event.



Photos Courtesy of The Pisgah Conservancy – Callie Horwath

Destination Management Highlights

Transylvania Always Project Funding

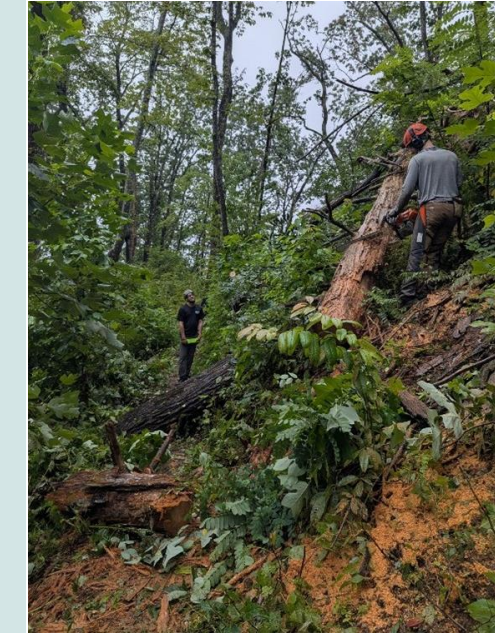
Projects that are aligned with the mission of the TCTDA's Transylvania Always initiative by either addressing the impact of users in public lands or creating safe and enjoyable use of natural recreational assets.

Q1

- **Southern Highlands Reserve: “Green-Light the Greenhouse” \$15,000**
Due to Helene’s prep work and access road delays, extra greenhouse funding was needed beyond TCTDA’s FY23 grant, supported by Transylvania Always and Destination Infrastructure.
- **Friends of Gorges State Park: “Park Ambassador” \$2,500**
Now in its second year, this Gorges program expands visitor awareness on waterfall safety, Leave It Better practices, and sustainability. The grant funds additional equipment, materials, and outreach.
- **Pisgah Area SORBA: “Trail Maintenance Tools and Resources” \$2,500**
With limited U.S. Forest Service resources threatening trail upkeep, this grant funds vital equipment to address Helene-related damage and ensure safe, sustainable trail access.
- **MountainTrue: “Lyons Mountain River Access – Construction” \$26,967**
Among the first French Broad River Blueway projects, this grant implements the FY24 TCTDA-funded plan to revitalize the Lyons Mountain Road river access in Rosman.

Q2

- **City of Brevard: “Davidson River Pedestrian Bridge Connector Path” \$5,000**
This project will create a safe, continuous pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Davidson River bridge and a future NCDOT sidewalk. Our funding on this project being provided via two sources.



Project Funding

Transylvania Always Project Funding (Continued)

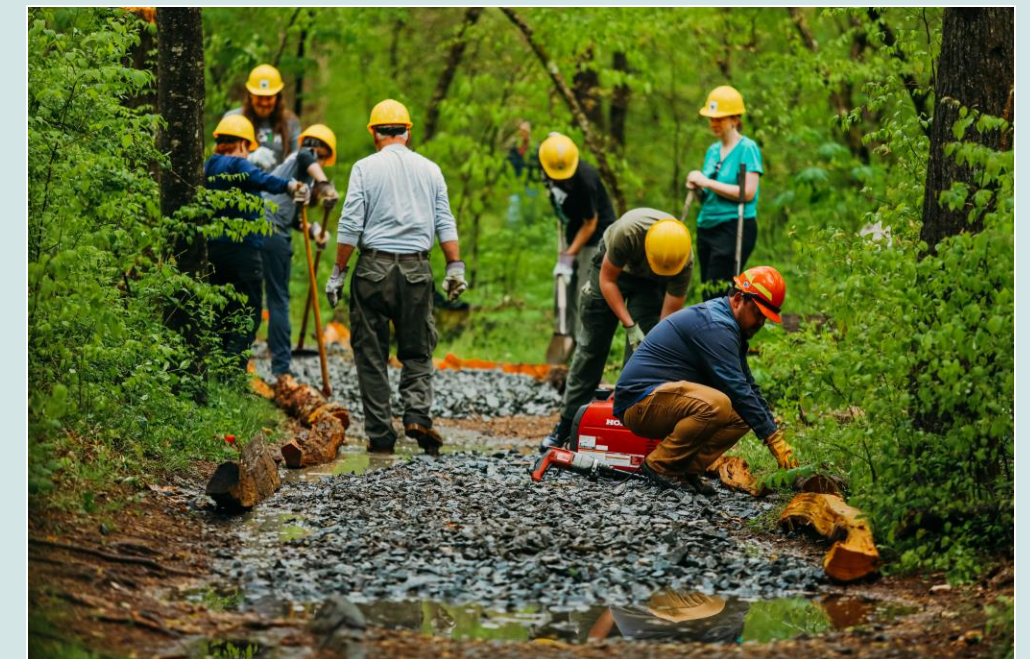
Q3

- **The Pisgah Conservancy: “Pisgah Project Day (PPD) and Pisgah River Rangers (PRR)” \$13,000**
\$10,000 for lead sponsorship of PPD, an incredible day of stewardship for Pisgah National Forest featuring 500+ volunteers, and \$3,000 for an expanded snorkel program for PRR.
- **Riverlink: “Adopt-a-Storm-Drain Project” \$3,000**
New project improving water quality in the French Broad River watershed in conjunction with the Brevard Sustainability Council.
- **DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) “Forest Health Display” \$9,000**
The first display in a series at DSRF’s visitor center to educate visitors about important forest management practices.

Q4

- **Town of Rosman: “Rosman Riverfront Park” \$57,000 (approx. \$24K in FY26)**
The project transforms Champion Park into a more accessible and visitor-ready destination along the French Broad River. Planned improvements include enhanced river access, pathways, restrooms, signage, landscaping, and recreational amenities. These investments will strengthen Rosman's role as a gateway to outdoor recreation and support tourism growth in southern Transylvania County. TAC approved \$57,000 in funding, utilizing available FY26 year-end funds, with the remaining balance to be funded in FY27.

Total FY25/26 funding: \$103,161.00 (9 grants)



Photos Courtesy of The Pisgah Conservancy – Callie Horwath

Destination Management Highlights

Destination Infrastructure

The Destination Infrastructure Committee continued its work to identify and support tourism-related projects that strengthen public amenities and enhance the visitor experience. Throughout the year, the committee reviewed grant requests, assessed future priorities, and conducted outreach to potential applicants whose projects align with the Destination Infrastructure Grant program.

The committee engaged with representatives from the City of Brevard, Transylvania County, Transylvania County Parks and Recreation, the Town of Rosman, Cedar Mountain, Heart of Brevard, and other community partners. These discussions helped identify infrastructure needs and potential projects that could qualify for future support.

City of Brevard Planning Director Paul Ray presented a grant request for a connector path at the Davidson River pedestrian bridge. The project was approved by both the committee and the TCTDA Board. The committee also received updates on the Rosman Riverfront Park from the Land of Sky Regional Council and discussed the intersection of destination infrastructure priorities with local parks and recreation needs.

Brevard City Manager Wilson Hooper provided an update on the Ecusta Trail. Based on his recommendation, the TCTDA Board determined that no pledged funds would be disbursed during FY25/26. The remaining \$750,000 of the TCTDA's commitment is planned for release in future years as the project progresses.

Later in the year, representatives from the Transylvania Historical Society attended a committee meeting to present on the Allison Deaver House restoration grant that was under review. The committee also continued discussions about ongoing projects and potential future proposals from the City of Brevard, Transylvania County, Heart of Brevard, and other community partners.



Destination Management Highlights

Destination Infrastructure Project Funding

Projects that make a substantial impact on the tourism infrastructure of the destination, with cycling, downtown Brevard, entryways to our public lands, arts, music, and outlying communities being identified as priorities. These are typically brick-and-mortar projects.

Q1

- **Southern Highlands Reserve: “Green-Light the Greenhouse” \$10,000**

Due to Helene’s prep work and access road delays, extra greenhouse funding was needed beyond TCTDA’s FY23 grant, supported by Transylvania Always and Destination Infrastructure.

- **SparkPoint: “Helene: One Year of Healing Event” \$2,500**

A free WNC community event celebrating post-Helene resilience, where TCTDA shared tourism’s local impact and thanked land managers and first responders.

Q2

- **City of Brevard: “Davidson River Pedestrian Bridge Connector Path” \$20,000**

This project will create a safe, continuous pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Davidson River bridge and a future NCDOT sidewalk. Our funding for this project is being provided via two sources.

- **DerGara: “Pisgah Bear Sculpture” \$9,613**

This project will install a black bear sculpture at the Pisgah National Forest entrance roundabout as an extension of the Brevard Sculpture Project.

Q3

No grant funds were awarded this quarter.



Project Funding

Destination Infrastructure Project Funding (Continued)

Q4

- **Town of Rosman: “Rosman Riverfront Park” \$30,000 (approx. \$15K in FY26)**
This project to transform Champion Park into a more accessible and visitor-ready destination met both TAC and DIC objectives, with funds ultimately pulled from both funding paths. The DIC approved \$30,000 in funding through available FY26 year-end funds, with the remaining amount to be funded in FY27.
- **FIND Outdoors: “Hurricane Helene Statue Walk” \$5,000**
This project will be an interactive exhibit along the Forest Discovery Trail at the Cradle of Forestry. It will use repurposed wood from trees felled during Hurricane Helene to create a series of sculptures depicting native species, providing a unique educational and interpretive experience for visitors.



Total FY25/26 funding: \$65,000 (7 grants)



Destination Management Highlights

Tourism Marketing Project Funding

Projects that are designed to generate overnight visitation and/or add significant value to the visitor experience. Strong preference is given to efforts that impact traditionally slower periods of visitation. These projects are often events but can also be programs or other initiatives.

Q1

- **Friends of Silvermont: “Silvermont's Pumpkin Fest 2025” \$4,000**
- **Pisgah Area SORBA: “FREEHUB presents A Mountain Bike Film Festival” \$500**
- **Cedar Mountain Music Project: “White Squirrel Artisans Market” \$3,600**
- **Transylvania Heritage Museum: “ATOM Exhibit” \$2,500**
- **Transylvania County Parks and Recreation: “Light Up the Night 2025” \$4,000**
- **Deerwoode Reserve: “Festival of Lights” \$3,000**

Q2

- **Heart of Brevard: “Annual Funding Request” \$30,000**

Q3

- **Arthritis Foundation: “Carolina Hills Classic Bike Tour” \$2,000**
- **Headwaters and Davidson River Outfitters: “Forks of the River Fly Fishing Festival” \$2,000**
- **Transylvania Heritage Museum: “Appalachian Folk Festival” \$1,250**
- **Mary C. Jenkins Center: “WNC African American Symposium” \$1,500**
- **Rotary Club of Pisgah Forest: “2026 Assault on the Carolinas” \$4,500**
- **Appalachian Region Porsche Club: “Luft Wasser Porsche Celebration” \$1,055**
- **Pisgah Area SORBA: “WNC Bike Fest” \$4,999**
- **Conserving Carolina: “Upper French Broad Riverfest” \$3,500**
- **FIND Outdoors: “TimberFest” \$2,500**



Photo Courtesy of Pisgah Area SORBA

Destination Management Highlights

Tourism Marketing Project Funding (Continued)

Q4

- **Blue Ridge Bicycle Club: “WNC Flyer 2026” \$2,000**
- **Mary C. Jenkins Community Center: “Juneteenth Celebration 2026” \$3,500**

Total FY25/26 funding: \$74,654.00 (18 grants)

America 250 Funding

The TCTDA budgeted \$10,000 to support local America 250 initiatives that enhance the visitor experience and encourage visitation. Funding was awarded to Heart of Brevard for an expanded July 4th celebration and to the Transylvania County America 250 Committee for the Patriot’s Pint initiative. The TCTDA also provided more than \$10,000 in new and enhanced promotion for these efforts.



Destination Management Highlights

Partner Support

In FY25/26, the TCTDA continued supporting tourism-related businesses and attractions throughout Transylvania County through co-op marketing, educational resources, targeted outreach, and opportunities to connect with visitors.

The 2026 Partner Marketing Opportunities Program at was launched at the annual Kickoff Social, sponsored by Weevil Gear & Beer and D.D. Bullwinkel’s. Free and paid opportunities included advertising in the Adventure Guide and Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map, co-op placements in publications such as Blue Ridge Outdoors and WNC Magazine, website advertising, and Partner Spotlight e-newsletters. A new Lodging Partner Spotlight was also introduced, reaching more than 42,500 opt-in subscribers.

The redesigned 2026 Adventure Guide and Waterfalls & Points of Interest Map were distributed locally, to welcome centers across North Carolina, and by request to travelers. The Romantic Mountain Getaway Sweepstakes also featured three local businesses, Valley Bear Farms, Audancity, and The Blind Mule, while encouraging winter visitation. The campaign generated 10,209 entries and 7,652 new email subscribers.

Support for the summer camp industry included the annual Camp Counselor Discount Card, the Camp & Big Events Calendar, and a new Summer Camp Toolkit for camp operators. Content and targeted marketing also encouraged camper parents to extend their stays around drop-off and pick-up, helping generate additional visitor spending throughout the county.

Partners received timely information and resources throughout the year, including legislative updates and the Responsible Exploration Toolkit, which provided materials supporting the Leave It Better and Be Waterfall Wise initiatives. Partner support also included welcoming new tourism businesses, attending grand openings and ribbon cuttings, and providing social media coverage for local partners and community initiatives.

Additional efforts included promoting the America 250 Patriot’s Pint initiative and helping participating breweries gain regional exposure through WSPA. 14 local businesses and attractions were celebrated for recognition in Blue Ridge Outdoors’ Best of the Blue Ridge awards, and the Tourism Trailblazer Award was presented to The Pisgah Conservancy.





VI. Financial Overview

Financial Overview

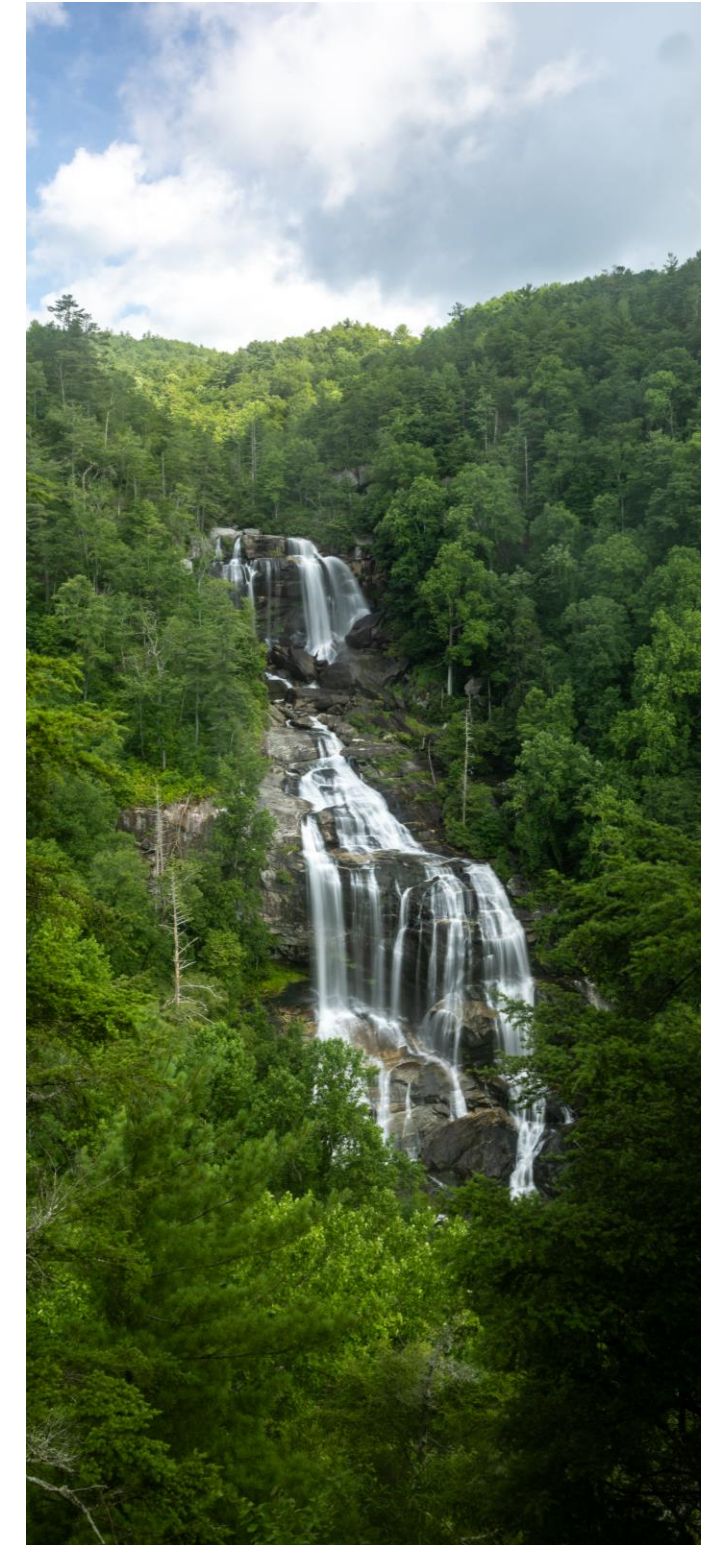
Expectations for FY26 were cautious due to broader economic conditions as well as lingering misconceptions about visitation to Western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene. Rather than substantially reducing certain expenditures to offset the anticipated shortfall, the TCTDA Board adopted a budget that called for the use of \$103,032 from the fund balance to support normal operating expenses. An additional \$250,000 from the fund balance was budgeted for The Ecusta Trail, which was based on a pledged \$1 million in funding for the trail to be distributed over multiple years based on need and approved by the Board annually. Due to various factors, including project delays, it was uncertain whether funding would be needed in FY26, but the Board felt it prudent to plan for the expense and include it in the budget.

Ultimately, occupancy tax proceeds were better than the cautious expectations reflected in the budget, finishing 6% above budget but remaining 3% below the pre-Helene benchmark level. Additionally, the two most significant secondary revenue categories, Advertising Sales and Interest on Investments (fund balance interest), also exceeded expectations, resulting in total revenues finishing 7% above budget.

Funding for The Ecusta Trail was ultimately not needed in FY26, entirely due to timing. With that expense excluded, expenditures were generally in line with the budget, coming in just 2% below expectations.

Looking ahead, while Helene-related impacts have subsided, broader economic uncertainty remains, leading the TCTDA Board to maintain a cautious approach. Prior to the close of FY26, the FY27 budget was approved with revenues projected at a similar level to the prior year's budget. Expenditures were set approximately \$50,000 below the prior year's budget, as continuing to draw more than \$100,000 annually from the fund balance was not considered sustainable. It was noted that if the final months of FY26 or early FY27 significantly outperform expectations, some of those additional funds could be allocated to impacted categories.

The long-term outlook for Brevard and Transylvania County as a tourism destination continues to be strong. The incredible natural resources, unique attractions, authentic community, and friendly people that make the destination special remain significant strengths and continue to position the area well for the future.



Financial Overview (Continued)

There are two important notes that provide context for understanding FY26 results and making meaningful comparisons. One, since the \$250,000 budgeted for The Ecusta Trail was not needed in FY25/26, it has been removed from the budget references below for comparison purposes. Two, FY24 was used for year-to-year comparison instead of the prior year (FY25) because FY25 was significantly impacted by Hurricane Helene, while FY24 is considered a benchmark “normal” year reflecting the stabilization of visitation following the pandemic-era peak.

Revenues

Total revenues: \$2,051,200 (up 7% vs budget, down 2% vs FY24)

- Occupancy Tax Proceeds: \$1,936,799 (up 6% vs budget)
- Advertising Sales: \$58,780 (up 31%)
- Interest on Investments: \$54,054 (up 35%)
- Retail Sales \$1,567 (down 45%)

Expenditures

Total expenditures: \$1,979,563 (down 2% vs budget, up 3% vs FY24)

- Marketing Plan: \$1,147,497 (down 2% vs budget)
- Administration/Operations: \$442,351 (down 3% vs budget)
- Grant Funding: \$251,403 (+/-0 vs budget)
- Visitor Center: \$116,473 (down 2% vs budget)
- Transylvania Always Messaging: \$21,839 (down 3% vs budget)
- Ecusta Trail: No immediate funding need, so \$250,000 that was budgeted was shifted to FY27

Fund Balance

Net revenues/expenditures: \$71,637 (vs. budgeted amount of -\$103,032)

Year-end fund balance: \$1,460,000 (approximately 7.7 months of operations)

