



TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY TOURISM

2019/2020 FISCAL YEAR
REPORT TO TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS





TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY TOURISM

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As Chair of the Transylvania County Tourism Board of Directors, in cooperation with the hard-working members of our board and staff, I am honored to bring you an update on tourism in our County. It has certainly been the most unusual year I have personally experienced in my 20+ years of being involved in tourism in Transylvania County. We ended 2019 with record numbers of visitors traveling to our beautiful area and started off strong in the first couple of months of 2020. The unexpected pandemic of COVID-19 changed the entire world, and travel and tourism were one of the most impacted industries, including in our region. Our board reacted immediately by making the safety of our community a top priority, by adapting our marketing strategies, and by instituting cost-saving methods with uncertain times ahead. We shifted our main messaging to safety, guidance for travelers, and sustainability efforts while awaiting the appropriate time to resume encouraging visitation. We had several hard conversations about the balance of our mission to contribute to a vibrant, sustainable economy by generating and enhancing tourism opportunities in Transylvania County, and prioritizing the safety and protection of our community during these unprecedented and challenging times. Looking back, I feel that our board and partners managed this balance well, and I believe we are prepared for the days ahead. I encourage you to look through this report to discover specific trends and see the competitive advantages and opportunities Brevard and Transylvania County have to continue to be a wonderful destination and blessed community for residents.



Layton Parker

TCT BOARD MEMBERS

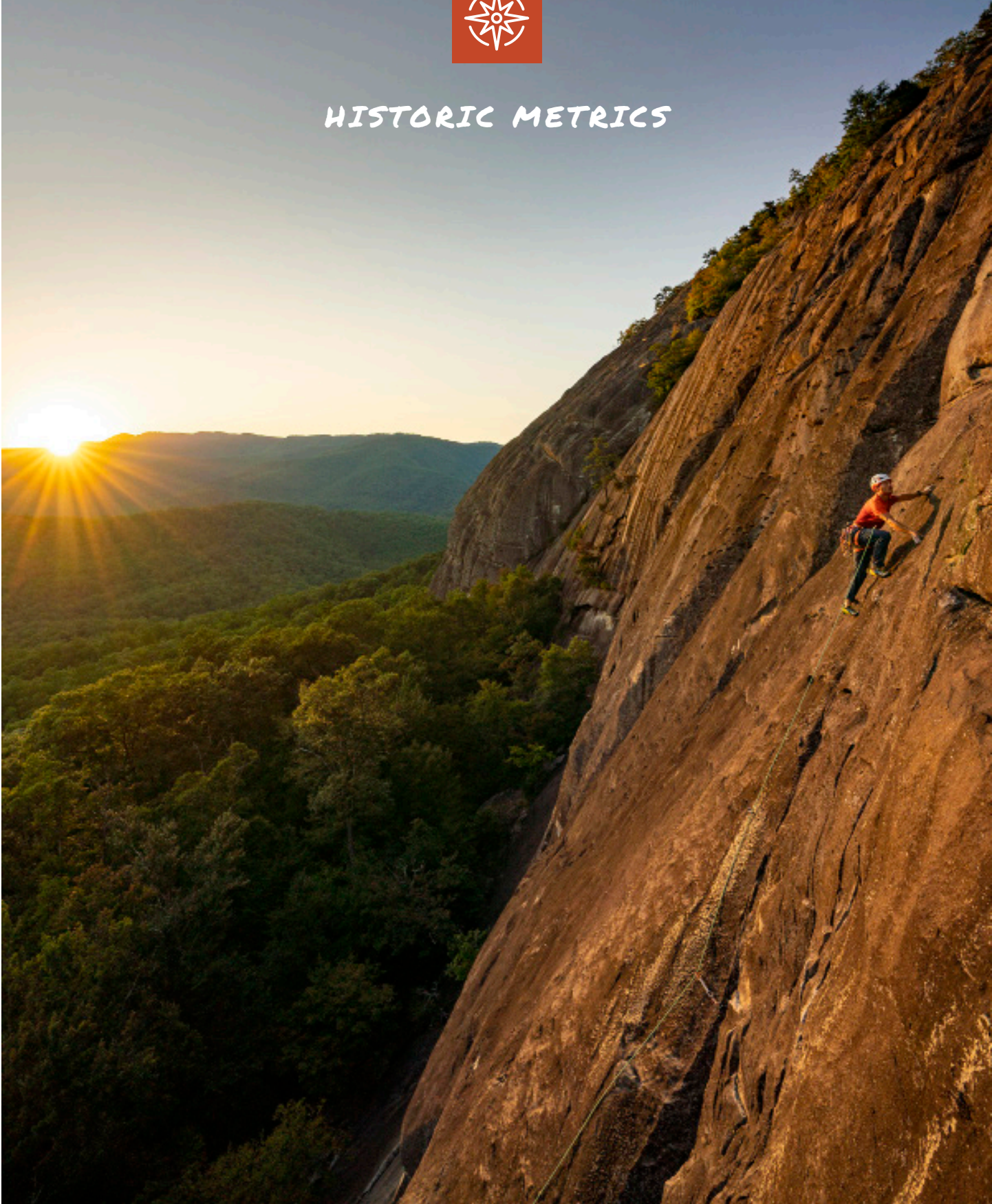
Layton Parker, Chair
Grant Bullard, Vice Chair
Aaron Baker
Dee Dee Perkins
Libby Freeman
Mac Morrow
Mike Hawkins
Tad Fogel
Tracie Trusler

TCT STAFF

Clark Lovelace
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Marketing & Communications
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Operations & Projects
Sally Burnett
Visitor Center
Market Connections
Marketing & Advertising



HISTORIC METRICS



A VIBRANT VISITOR ECONOMY EQUALS LOWER TAXES AND MORE JOBS IN FY20



\$115 MILLION
in tourism revenue



\$4.3 MILLION
in state tax revenue



900
jobs



\$22 MILLION
in payroll

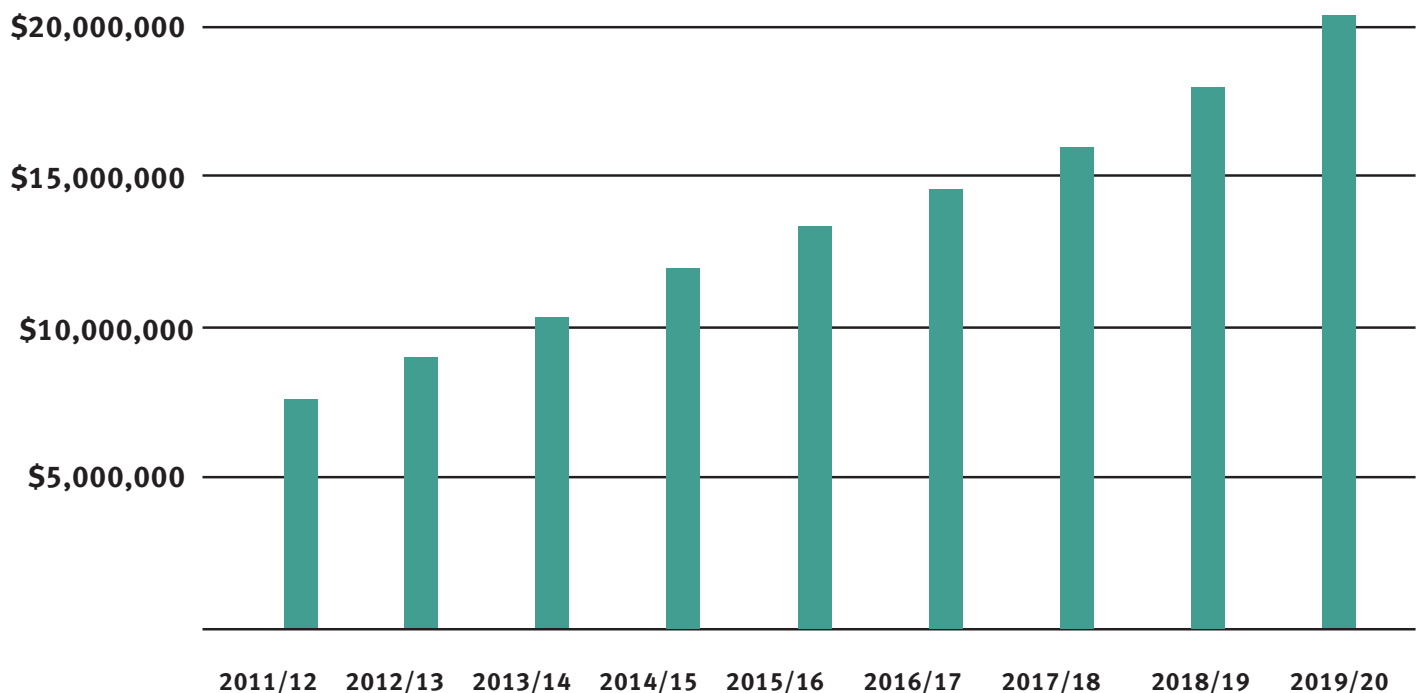


\$5.26 MILLION
in local tax revenue

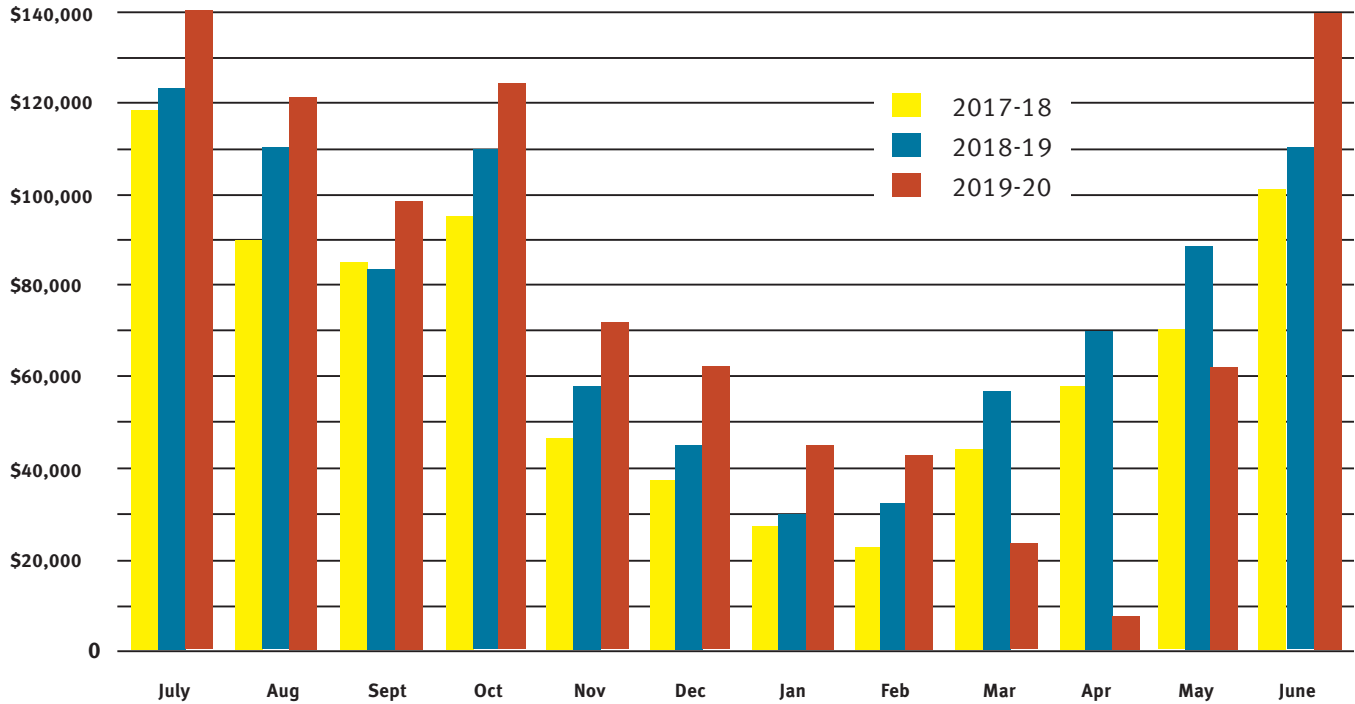


\$272
tax savings per
Transylvania County
resident

ANNUAL ACCOMMODATIONS REVENUE



OCCUPANCY TAX REVENUE FY18 - FY20 THREE-YEAR COMPARISON CHART



KEY 2019/20 OCCUPANCY STATS*

\$966,236
Total Occupancy
Revenue

UP
4.8%

\$248,515
Airbnb
Collections

UP
37.5%

62.7%
Hotel/Motel/Inn
Occupancy

DOWN
-9.8%

\$152
Average Daily Rate
(ADR)

UP
15.6%

*Occupancy and ADR figures are based on information supplied by what we call "traditional accommodations," which are hotels/motels/inns/B&Bs with five or more rooms, when they submit their monthly taxes. Airbnb is simply a lump sum payment that is made on a monthly basis and includes any revenues collected by Airbnb that month, whether a new booking or final deposit for an upcoming booking. It is intended to represent the short-term rental market in general, but it does not provide an accurate portrayal of monthly visitation.

OCCUPANCY INSIGHTS

Through the midway point of FY20, the local tourism economy was at an all-time high, with an average of 5% annual growth in total spending and 10% in occupancy tax revenue over the prior decade. Over the past few years, occupancy tax revenue growth has been at 15% with virtually every month each year at a record level. Accompanying this recent increase was a shift in both the supply and the demand in the short-term rental (STR) segment of the industry. Airbnb and VRBO have created tremendous growth in this realm with certain high-demand destinations like ours seeing exponential growth. Collections and payments by Airbnb began in 2016 and have quadrupled since that time with VRBO following suit in late 2019 with a subsequent steady increase.

In March, everything changed. Tourism was among the hardest hit industries by the pandemic, with many businesses having to shut down per the Governor's Executive Order. The impact on visitation was felt dramatically in March, April, and May, with occupancy tax returns of 46%, 12%, and 73%, respectively, versus the prior year. As our state reopened, demand for visitation to rural areas with outdoor amenities was high, and by June, occupancy revenues were not just back to normal, but at an even higher rate than before. The numbers for June (and beyond) reflect Airbnb and VRBO payments of 2.5 to 3 times that of the prior year. One reason for these high numbers is how these third-party STR companies collect and pay the occupancy tax. Most accommodations collect and remit occupancy taxes at the time of a visit. These companies remit occupancy taxes as soon as they receive the revenue, which is 50% at the time of booking and 50% a few weeks prior to the visit. So, unlike most occupancy tax revenue that comes in during a given month, returns from these companies reflect how many bookings occurred during that month and how many are coming in a few weeks, not how many overnight visitors were here that month. In the end, it appears that the main negative financial impact of the pandemic on overall overnight visitation in Transylvania County was condensed to the months of March, April, and May. Certainly, the impact is being felt in other ways by other segments of the industry, restaurants and attractions in particular, and there is differentiation among various types of accommodations, but based on occupancy tax returns, the primary pandemic impact on overnight visitation appears to be tied to these three months.

Other Western North Carolina destinations are reporting similar numbers, while many larger cities are still well below normal levels of visitation. The key reason for this difference is the degree of dependency our destinations have on recreational travel. Those recreational travelers have returned relatively quickly, showing a desire to be outside and away from urban areas. Corporate travel, on the other hand, has not returned. Larger destinations depend on corporate travelers for a substantial amount of their overnight visitors. We do not. This dependency on the recreational traveler is a primary reason why our destination's economy is so seasonal. Our occupancy levels are very high when recreational travel is high and very low when it is not. We do not have much corporate business (either convention business or travel to our destination in conjunction with local businesses) that can fill up midweek and the recreational "off-season," which is primarily late fall through early spring. The end result has been a much quicker bounce back for many rural destinations.



2019/20 HIGHLIGHTS



MARKETING PRIORITIES & TACTICS

The FY20 Marketing Plan was designed to raise awareness of the Explore Brevard brand locally, regionally and nationally, while targeting regional and drive-time (150 - 200 mile radius) markets to play and stay in Transylvania County. Building occupancy and encouraging support of local businesses were key goals. With a marketing plan of more than \$600,000 in expenditures, monies were primarily utilized for digital, broadcast, and billboard advertising, while a host of varied, tactical promotions were implemented to trigger differing demographics and interest levels. These tactics included print advertising, social media marketing and web marketing, such as blogs and landing pages; a strong co-op and PR partnership with VisitNC; local co-op programs; promotional events, such as sponsorship of the Outdoor Project; four distinct sweepstakes promotions; updated video and photographic resources; and the Heart of Adventure Campaign.

Market Connections tapped Media One, our current digital advertising partner, to manage SEO services for Explore Brevard going forward. The continued focus was primarily on growing the reputability ranking of the new Explore Brevard website.

Our tactics shifted to digital advertising as we moved through the pandemic, allowing us to communicate regularly the most up-to-date information with integrity and thoughtfulness and maintain a flexible approach to marketing. Our goals were to urge responsible visitation, rebuild occupancy, encourage day trips, maintain brand awareness, and support the community and local economy. This was accomplished with a focus on maintaining and growing our audience through responsive content, utilizing virtual tours, blogs, and creative assets to communicate brand opportunities, leveraging e-newsletters, and expanding digital and social media content.

NEW BRAND ASSETS & CAMPAIGN

The Heart of Adventure campaign, launched in September 2019, transformed our marketing efforts. The digital campaign materials allowed us to revolutionize a micro-targeted approach to the online audience, and as a result, we have seen web traffic as well as social media presence and engagement increase through the last fiscal year. The core campaign video is our most viewed video of all time (over 100,000 views), outperforming other videos on our channel that have been live for over a decade. The content captured within this campaign will serve Transylvania County Tourism for many years to come.



Based on recommendations from the TCT Board, we acquired Brevard.com in January 2020. This allowed us to further capture ownership of the term “Brevard.”

MARKETING & ADVERTISING

Pre-COVID

Our 2019/20 marketing plan reached 77 million + potential visitors through targeted print and digital advertising, television, display marketing, and social media.

Print advertisements were included in *Our State*, *Blue Ridge Outdoors*, *AAA Go*, *Southern Living*, *Transylvania Autumn Explorer*, *WNC Magazine*, *Blue Ridge Parkway Directory*, *VisitNC Travel Guide*, and *Garden and Gun*.

Digital marketing included a range of digital display outlets, PPC (Pay Per Click), digital retargeting, pre-roll ads, and live streaming.

In 2019/20, cable advertising ran in Atlanta, GA; Charlotte, NC; Raleigh, NC; Greenville, SC; and Nashville, TN.

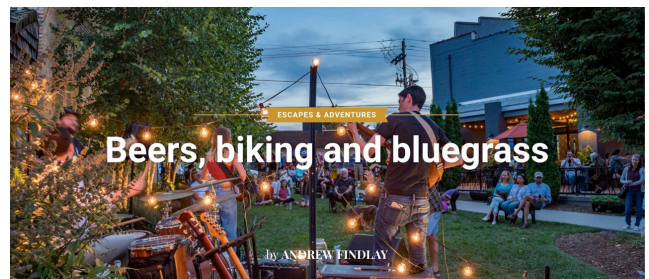
PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations continues to represent one of the best returns on investment, albeit there were many interruptions to what would have been a year full of familiarization (FAM) tours for Transylvania County Tourism.

Transylvania County Tourism was represented at the Canadian Media Mission pre-pandemic, participating in multiple press engagements over a series of four days in Montreal and Toronto. Representatives from national and regional media entities engaged directly with TCT to receive story pitch ideas for current and future use. Highlighted below are a few examples of stories that came out of our travels to Canada.

Highlights of 2019/20:

- TCT hosted FAM tours and a number of individual journalists:
 - ◇ Dustin Woods, Auto Trader Canada, “Mustang GT Road Trip: Burnouts, Bourbon, and BBQ in North Carolina”
 - ◇ Jenn Rice, prominent food and travel writer
 - ◇ Brice Shirbach, Pinkbike, “Local Flavors Brevard”
 - ◇ Mark Gorman, Ohio Outside
- Five Transylvania County features in *Our State*
- *Southern Living*, “South’s Best Retirement Towns 2019”
- *Canadian National Geographic*, “Beers, Biking and Bluegrass in the Blueridge Mountains”
- VisitNC developed a Hunger Games feature on VisitNC.com



ELECTRONIC & DIGITAL

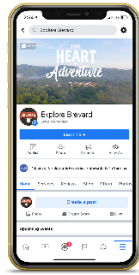


INSTAGRAM

14,334 FOLLOWERS



16.54%
OVER PRIOR YEAR

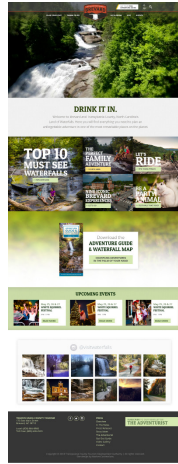


FACEBOOK

15,128 FOLLOWERS



9.87%
OVER PRIOR YEAR

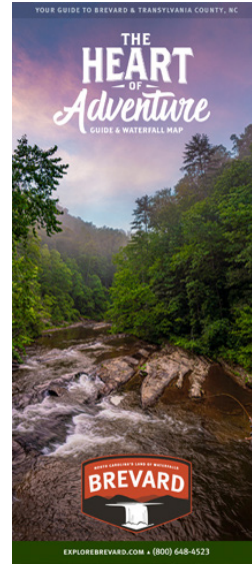


EXPLOREBREVARD.COM

113, 856 VISITORS



3.5%
OVER PRIOR YEAR



ADVENTURE GUIDE

115,000 COPIES

Field Notes



Five Fabulous Fall Hikes

For visitors to Brevard and Transylvania Counties, a walk is the surest way to enjoy the beauty of the mountains. There is a wealth of trails to choose from, and each offers a unique experience. In this issue, we feature five of the best trails in the area, each with its own set of challenges and rewards. Whether you're a seasoned hiker or a beginner, these trails are sure to provide a memorable experience.

Pink Shale Ledge, Pisgah National Forest

Located in the heart of the Pisgah National Forest, the Pink Shale Ledge is a beautiful and challenging hike. The trail is a mix of dirt and rock, and the views are spectacular. It's a great place to enjoy the beauty of the mountains and the tranquility of the forest.

*© 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134, 2135, 2136, 2137, 2138, 2139, 2140, 2141, 2142, 2143, 2144, 2145, 2146, 2147, 2148, 2149, 2150, 2151, 2152, 2153, 2154, 2155, 2156, 2157, 2158, 2159, 2160, 2161, 2162, 2163, 2164, 2165, 2166, 2167, 2168, 2169, 2170, 2171, 2172, 2173, 2174, 2175, 2176, 2177, 2178, 2179, 2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 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COVID Messaging

Our normal semi-monthly Adventurist and Field Notes e-blasts were paused with a shift to timely and appropriate information to our visitors. A COVID information landing page was created to provide up-to-date information on statewide and local mandates, as well as posted visitor information on the parks and forests. Partner e-blasts were delivered regularly as information constantly changed throughout April, May, and June.

The Get Out Guide, our event list traditionally distributed monthly to stores, restaurants, attractions, and accommodations, went digital on ExploreBrevard.com for the first time. Mainstay events like the Transylvania Farmer's Market were featured on the page, along with two updated lists on accommodations and restaurants that were operating under new guidelines. The focus of this new page was to act as a homepage with regularly evolving information.

PR efforts during the fourth quarter of FY20 shifted focus towards the promotion of our Explore Responsibly message. The message educated visitors and locals on the conditions in the county and how/when to enjoy our area safely. Two posters were created and shared digitally and/or in print form — one with a community focus and the other with an outdoor focus.

Explore Responsibly

- PLAN AHEAD**
Bring snacks, water, and first aid. Understand that some facilities, like restrooms, may not be available and cell phone service may be limited.
- HANDS OFF**
Avoid hugs, handshakes, and touching your face. Use caution touching surfaces, including door handles, benches, rails and even trees.
- KEEP YOUR DISTANCE**
Maintain a 6-foot distance from anyone not in your household at all times.
- LOOSEN UP**
Don't congregate in large crowds on or off the trail. If you see that a trailhead or particular outdoor area is crowded, consider exploring a new area.
- LATHER UP**
Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Wipe down all equipment and gear before and after use.
- BE WATERFALL SAVVY**
Practice good waterfall safety by following posted rules. To learn more visit waterfallsafety.com
- COVER UP**
Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Masks are recommended in dense places, including busy trails, parking lots and overlooks.
- BE AWARE**
Practice trail courtesy. Give way to passersby and share your space.
- LEAVE NO TRACE**
Clean up after yourself. Respect the outdoors as well as wildlife.
- STAY ON TRACK**
Explore with caution. Keep to the trails and keep moving.

BREVARD
800-648-4523
EXPLOREBREVARD.COM

Explore Responsibly

- PLAN AHEAD**
Bring snacks, water, and first aid. Understand some facilities like restrooms, may not be available.
- KEEP YOUR DISTANCE**
Maintain a 6-foot distance from anyone not in your household at all times.
- HANDS OFF**
Avoid hugs, handshakes, and touching your face. Use caution touching surfaces.
- LOOSEN UP**
Keep groups small. Don't congregate in large crowds.
- LATHER UP**
Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.
- COVER UP**
Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Masks are recommended when patronizing local stores and businesses.
- EXPLORE WELL**
The trails will outlast your sniffles. Stay home if you feel sick.
- BUY LOCAL**
Support local shops and restaurants when you're here. Respect rules and protocols to protect yourself and those serving you.
- BE ADVENTURE AWARE**
Explore with caution, keep to the trails. Practice good waterfall safety by following posted rules.
- STAY ON TRACK**
Practice good trail manners. Be courteous to others. Leave no trace.

BREVARD
800-648-4523
EXPLOREBREVARD.COM

Together, we can create a safe and healthy path forward.

Explore Responsibly in the outdoors.

Explore Responsibly in the community.

BREVARD/TRANSYLVANIA VISITOR CENTER

The Visitor Center continues to serve an important function for visitors and locals in our community. Understandably, annual numbers for traditional areas of support were down due to the pandemic.

From July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, staff and volunteers at the Visitor Center supported tourism in the following ways:

- welcoming 11,773 guests
- disseminating pandemic safety information
- reopening when allowed while implementing safety protocols for the protection of visitors, volunteers, and staff
- distributing 88, 680 Adventure Guide brochures*
 - ◇ 19, 510 shipped to visitor/welcome centers outside of our area
 - ◇ 18, 415 distributed to park/ forest visitor centers and tourism businesses in Transylvania
 - ◇ 28, 170 shipped or delivered to visitor/welcome centers in surrounding counties
 - ◇ 10, 585 mailed to individuals upon request
 - ◇ 12, 000 handed to individuals at the Visitor Center or TCT-staffed event booths



*As the pandemic took its toll throughout the country, demand for brochures decreased as a result of visitor center and tourism businesses being closed, marketing outreach efforts being stopped, and sweepstakes promotions being put on hold.

Due to COVID-19, the Visitor Center closed physical operations from March 17 to June 7. Operations continued virtually during this time, with a chat function added to the ExploreBrevard website, brochures and contact information placed outside of the building, and voicemail messages adapted to allow work-from-home support by staff.

During the closure and with an eye toward reopening, staff purchased necessary PPEs, made adjustments to the physical space and sought expert input to develop safety protocols for staff, volunteers, and visitors. Once state restrictions allowed, the Visitor Center opened to the public on June 7 with the COVID-safe protocols in place, including limited access and shortened hours.

White Squirrel Institute

Prior to the pandemic, the Visitor Center was on track to become the “home of the White Squirrel Institute (WSI).” The mission of the WSI is the preservation and conservation of Brevard’s white squirrel population and wildlife in Transylvania County. In order to increase visibility and support for WSI and to add one more layer of white-squirrel related value for destination marketing/promotion, the Visitor Center drafted an agreement with WSI to become the bricks and mortar presence for WSI, which would increase visitor traffic and enhance the experience of visitors to the Visitor Center by showcasing one of our unique attractions. While the agreement has not been fully realized due to safety precautions, steps have been taken to create a home for WSI at the Visitor Center.

PARTNER SERVICES

Transylvania County Tourism provides many unique offerings for local tourism-related businesses, often leveraging our reach, buying power, and relationships to create affordable opportunities that may not otherwise exist for these businesses. Below is a list of FY20 offerings.

Co-op Campaign

This popular campaign allows tourism-related businesses the opportunity to participate in Transylvania County Tourism's marketing efforts in a variety of high-profile publications, including *Our State*, *Blue Ridge Outdoors*, *WNC Magazine*, and *Southern Living*. Market Connections was able to leverage our relationships and buying power to secure these co-op spaces for our tourism-related businesses at substantial discounts.

Holiday Co-op Marketing Opportunities

As part of our holiday marketing campaign, we provided several excellent co-op advertising opportunities to our partners. Cooperative ads in 1/6 and 1/4 page sizes were part of full-page or spread placements that promote the holiday experience in Transylvania County.

Winter Co-op Marketing Opportunities

TCT offered three 1/6 page ad placements in both *The Laurel of Asheville* and *WNC Magazine*. Highlighting our winter sweepstakes, activities, romantic getaways, and unique culture, partners were invited to feature their offerings and warm the hearts of visitors in our chilly season.



Spring Co-op Marketing Opportunities

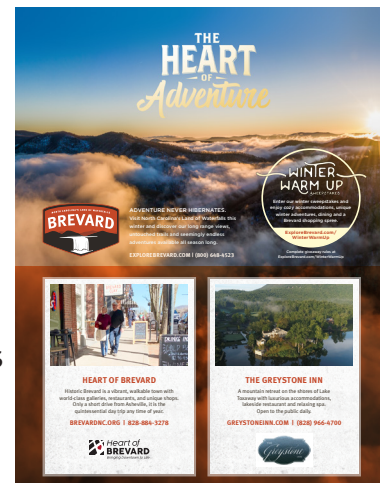
TCT offered special spring campaign placements to interested co-op participants. There were three 1/6 page placements offered in three publications.

Adventure Guide Advertising & Distribution

Explore Brevard's annual Adventure Guide, which includes a popular foldout waterfall map, publishes in early January and is distributed to 115,000 travelers regionally, nationally, and internationally throughout the year. The Adventure Guide is available through Explore Brevard web sign-ups, targeted NC distribution, at welcome and visitor centers regionally, and through downloadable brochure attachments on a myriad of related websites from VisitNC.com and SLVacations.com to major media outlets. The Adventure Guide is also mailed directly to leads received from a variety of major print publications and provided to interested major media near and far.

Sweepstakes

TCT conducted four sweepstakes in FY20, resulting in thousands of entries from all over the country, along with a bevy of requests for the Adventure Guide and Adventurist newsletter. While primarily marketed digitally through blogs and social media, sweepstakes are also marketed through very targeted print publications. A special sweepstakes landing page for each season lives on ExploreBrevard.com, which contains the entry form and provides exposure for local tourism partners who participate in each sweepstakes. Sponsors are provided the email addresses of all entries who opt-in.



Explore Brevard Events Calendar

ExploreBrevard.com provides a free events calendar to all community marketing partners. It is a great resource for generating awareness of local events with our online audience. Events posted on the calendar may also be included in additional marketing collateral like the Get Out Guide and the Adventurist e-newsletter. Organizations are invited to enter their event on our website by visiting ExploreBrevard.com/event-calendar and clicking the “add your own events” button.

Business Listings

ExploreBrevard.com includes comprehensive business listings for accommodations, attractions, businesses, and places to eat and drink. Each business listing includes a feature photo, business description, location information, and website link. Each listing is optimized with a filterable database, which allows website visitors to find a tourism partner easily. Linking a business website to Explore Brevard’s business listings is also a great way to improve the SEO of that tourism partner’s website.



Media Support

The Explore Brevard team helps tourism partners in many ways, including hosting media. Whether it’s providing FAM tours of the county, photography, or spreading word about the visit, our team is prepared to assist our partners.

Photo Resources

Explore Brevard maintains an extensive database of photography for use in marketing Transylvania County. A selection of public use photos are available to tourism partners for approved purposes and can be found at ExploreBrevard.com/public-use-photos. For additional photo requests, email mj@explorebrevard.com

Pandemic-Related Support of Tourism Partners

Beginning in mid-March, one of TCT's primary focuses was to support tourism partners as they dealt with the impact of the pandemic. TCT partnered with Transylvania Economic Alliance, Blue Ridge Community College Small Business Center, Heart of Brevard, and the Brevard/Transylvania Chamber of Commerce to create the Transylvania Business Support Task Force soon after the pandemic began impacting the local economy. Initial efforts of this task force included impact surveys, virtual Town Hall meetings, and provision of key information and collateral. As we entered into the NC Phased Reopening Plan, industry-specific "huddle-ups" were provided for retail, restaurants, manufacturers, accommodations, and the arts community.

The task force also created the Transylvania Tomorrow Small Business Emergency Relief Fund to provide much-needed assistance to small businesses during NC mandated closures and reopening. The intent was to provide small, but meaningful, grants to help small businesses cover basic needs like rent, utilities, and other essential payments as revenues were dramatically reduced or non-existent. Over the initial ninety-day period, the program awarded a total of \$166,500 to 93 small businesses throughout Transylvania County. Based on feedback from the business community, the decision was made to relaunch a second phase later in the year to support businesses as they entered the lean winter months with reduced savings from earlier in the year.



Decisions were made after mid-March to delay deadlines for Adventure Guide ads and co-op advertising payments. Operations that were normally dedicated to these partner services shifted to supporting the survival of businesses and nonprofits in the community.



GRANTS & PARTNERSHIP FUNDING

Tourism Grant Program

The goal of the Tourism Grant Program is to maximize the impact of TCT funds by supporting local individuals and organizations with events or initiatives that positively affect the local tourism economy. Grants of up to \$3,000 are awarded on a quarterly basis. The program was paused in late-March due to the pandemic. Prior to that time, \$17,250 in funding support was awarded to nine recipients in FY20.

Special Grants

Typically each year there are opportunities for meaningful support beyond the scope of the Tourism Grant Program, often for bigger projects with substantial impact on tourism in Transylvania County. This year was no exception, including the biggest one-time investment of \$100,000 to support due diligence and other related costs in the acquisition of the Ecusta Trail Corridor. The TCT Board feels this trail has the potential to be a substantial economic driver for tourism in Transylvania County and represents growing our destination in the “right way.” Special grants were also awarded to the Heart of Brevard and the Brevard Area Trail System hike/bike path.



SUSTAINABILITY

Transylvania County Tourism launched a sustainability campaign in 2017 named Transylvania Always. Its mission is to be a leader in the effort to take care of Transylvania County's natural resources in order to create a safe and enjoyable user experience and ensure that these assets are here for future generations. Transylvania Always is fully funded by TCT with efforts coordinated by a committee including TCT board members, select outdoor recreation and public land experts/enthusiasts, and TCT staff. Key actions and supported projects prior to FY20 are below:

- **Waterfall Safety Campaign**
- **Cantrell Creek Trail Relocation**
- **Joel Branch/Horse Cove Connector**
- **French Broad River Strainer Removal**

Transylvania Always coordinated or supported the following projects in FY20:

Transylvania Always Symposium

A sustainability event was held in February 2020, with facilitated discussion among 75 key partners operating within conservation/sustainability, public land management, outdoor recreation businesses, and local government. The purpose of the event was to identify common issues and determine various ways entities can work together to address these issues and preserve our natural assets. The group planned to meet again in six to twelve months.

Green Destination Global Top 100

Members of the Transylvania Always Committee Brad Campbell and Lee McMinn completed a sustainability assesment, nominating Transylvania County for two Top 100 conservation stories. Brevard/Transylvania County was subsequently named a 2020 Global Top 100 Destination by Green Destinations, an international sustainable tourism organization. Brevard/Transylvania County was one of only five destinations in North America honored with the recognition in 2020.



Leave It Better

Videos, posters, a checklist, a social media campaign, and a landing page were produced to promote the new Leave It Better campaign, encouraging visitors to pack out trash and help reduce negative effects on the environment. The localized checklist was modeled after the Leave No Trace principles, but asked that visitors and locals go further in preparing, picking up trash, protecting habits, and more. Partnerships with ENO and REI were developed to help promote Leave It Better through a social media giveaway. After the postponement of the launch of this campaign in April, TCT and Market Connections planned an unveiling for the first quarter of FY21.



Sustainability Project Support

Funds were awarded to the following organizations/projects: Carolina Climbers Coalition Trail Repair, French Broad River Partnership, and Pisgah Pride Day (postponed).

OTHER STRATEGIC EFFORTS

The Ecusta Trail

In February, the TCT Board of Directors approved a grant of \$100,000 to Conserving Carolina for due diligence and other associated costs to finalize a deal with Watco Transportation Services to purchase the necessary property for the Ecusta Trail. These funds join \$363,700 provided by the Henderson County TDA for the same purpose. The \$100,000 marks the largest financial commitment to any single project in the history of Transylvania County Tourism. A \$6.4 million purchase money grant for Conserving Carolina from the North Carolina Department of Transportation was approved in August 2019. This investment was made based on the belief that the proposed greenway would make a positive impact in building communities and revitalizing the area through increased tourism and economic growth.

Destination Infrastructure Committee

Each priority in the organization's recent strategic plan was assigned to a specific committee for oversight and action. At that time, it was determined that a new committee was needed to cover priorities relating to the infrastructure of our destination. This committee, aptly named the Destination Infrastructure Committee, was formed in January 2020 and consists of TCT board members (including the City and County representatives on the board) and representatives from the Brevard/Transylvania Chamber of Commerce, Heart of Brevard, and Transylvania Economic Alliance, as well as TCT staff. Key priorities identified were cycling infrastructure, downtown Brevard enhancements, and functional/esthetic betterments to the roundabouts near the entrance to Pisgah National Forest.

New Hire

The marketing and promotional needs of the organization have grown tremendously over time, as have the offerings available in the marketplace. As a result, the expectations of TCT's marketing partner agency Market Connections and TCT staff members have grown as well. The strategic planning process identified the necessity for an additional employee to pull some of the basic marketing and promotional needs in-house, specifically, content generation, social media, and on-site project support. As a result, Mary Jo Gordon was hired in November 2019 as the Marketing and Communications Specialist.





LOOKING FORWARD

LOOKING FORWARD

As tourism has grown in Transylvania County, so has the role of Transylvania County Tourism. In the past, the focus was on simply getting visitors here. This shifted to getting visitors here at times when our tourism industry really needed it. Over the past few years, it has shifted again. The Board of Directors of Transylvania County Tourism considers creating a strong sustainable tourism economy that benefits our community to be its primary objective. Certainly, part of that objective means continuing to market and promote our destination to increase visitation during the off-season. However, it also means focusing on things like the impact that visitors have on our natural resources and working to find the balance between nature and commerce to ensure that these assets are here for years to come. Further, it means supporting the infrastructure of our destination and growing in the right way so we may continue to be a desirable location for locals and visitors. And finally, it means supporting our tourism businesses and other partners so that we all thrive together.

Recent efforts support this commitment. The growth of our Transylvania Always initiative in just four years has been substantial, as evidenced by the recent “Global Top 100 Sustainable Destination” award, and we plan to push it to new heights in the future. From the Brevard Area Trail System to wayfinding signs to the Ecusta Trail, we will remain dedicated to supporting our infrastructure. From using our resources to provide marketing and cooperative opportunities to supporting local projects/initiatives via our Tourism Grant Program to providing assistance during times of crisis through the Transylvania Tomorrow Small Business Emergency Relief Fund, we will focus on keeping our business community strong and providing opportunities for growth.

Tourism is key to the overall success of our community. We will continue to do our part to contribute to all that makes Transylvania County so special.

