![Blowing Rock North Carolina logo with green maple leaf]

Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority

Organizational Mission
&
2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority (BRTDA) operates as the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the Town of Blowing Rock, and exists to increase and enhance Blowing Rock's visitor economy. Utilizing the 6% occupancy tax levied on short-term lodging stays in the Town of Blowing Rock, the TDA funds the promotion of tourism in Blowing Rock and provides a funding base for improvement and maintenance of the Town's tourism-related infrastructure.

Vision
Blowing Rock will be recognized as one of the premier travel destinations in the Southeastern USA.

Mission
Provide leadership and primary funding for marketing, developing, and supporting year-round travel and tourism to and within the Town of Blowing Rock to increase lodging sales, extend overnight stays, and boost visitor spending.

Values

- Recognizes tourism as a major economic driver in Blowing Rock and rejects a passive dependence on current market position.
- Promotes economic growth and stability in the local business community in tandem with the preservation of local charm, personality, and appeal.
- Encourages the appreciation and preservation of local recreational, cultural, and natural resources.
- Encourages the cultivation of arts and culture in Blowing Rock.
- Believes community involvement is integral to a stable tourism economy, and that education and communication facilitates constructive relationships between community groups.
- Dedicated to implementing and encouraging sustainable practices, regulations, and programming as related to tourism in Blowing Rock.
- Advocates for ongoing research in tourism marketing, market analysis, customer reach, and travel trends.

1. Market Blowing Rock as a premier destination with a highly skilled team. The BRTDA will represent the Town of Blowing Rock as a destination through state and regional advertising and promotion, and will meet the highest standards of performance as a research-based DMO.

- Utilize a research-supported mix of traditional, digital, and social media advertising to promote travel and tourism to and within Blowing Rock.
- Update research and marketing strategy continually as part of an annual plan that is supported by the local travel industry.
- Provide dynamic visitor information services to drive increased satisfaction & spending, including operation and maintenance of BlowingRock.com and downtown kiosks, and printing of various collateral pieces.
- Communicate the Blowing Rock brand and present the brand to appeal to new and varied audiences.
- Utilize events and/or activities to focus promotion efforts on "filling the gaps" of shoulder and off- seasons and mid-week.
- Provide focused tourism promotion to draw the targeted visitor segment, continually defining the "targeted visitor segment" using the results of surveys, commissioned studies, and other data to develop a comprehensive understanding of Blowing Rock's current tourism community.
- Support the staff in achieving the highest standards of excellence and performance through on-going education, certifications, measurement and accountability.
- Track and demonstrate measurable growth.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:

-Growth in occupancy tax collections	-Growth in event attendance	-Awards & recognition
-Increased visitor spending	-Positive tracking for ads	-Staff retention
-Growth in website activity	-Increased visitor satisfaction	

2. Maintain a strong public relations program to promote Blowing Rock in a cost effective way. Where marketing and advertising are paid media, public relations leverages time and relationships to tell the Blowing Rock story and increase awareness.

- Create and distribute press releases to local and regional media contacts, focusing on relevance and timely delivery of information on events and seasonal offerings.
- Respond to requests from travel writers and influencers, and create itineraries and arrange visits.
- Maintain communication with visitors through monthly email newsletters and create relevant content to keep them interested.
- Communicate with local businesses and partners through weekly newsletters and general tourism advocacy.
- Plan and excecute social media content, promoting the Blowing Rock lifestyle and experience.
- Create and maintain relevant content for pitches to writers and media partners, including regional event calendars and regional marketing organizations like VisitNC.
- Maintain relationships with local news stations and mitigate potentially negative coverage of weather events or other occurances that may affect visitor opinion.
- Curate user-generated-content and reach out to visitors that are creating images and content that exemplifies the Blowing Rock experience.
- Maintain regional advocacy efforts through work with elected officials and groups like the National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway Association, Appalachian State University, and others.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:
-Consistent earned media   - Continued interest from writers/publications   -Accolades for town
-Positive news coverage   -Positive growth in social media
                                   followers and engagement

3. Support tourism in Blowing Rock consistent with the Town of Blowing Rock's Comprehensive Plan and the Blowing Rock Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, funding improvements to the infrastructure that supports tourism with 1/3 of the net tax revenue, off-setting resident tax burden.

- Work with the Town to provide funding for infrastructure support
- Advocate for continued improvements (i.e. parking, traffic flow, information availability, etc.).
- Provide support for Town events.
- Enhance the visitor experience in Blowing Rock.
- Provide strategic oversight through the TDA Board, while relying on the Town government for direction and management of infrastructure support.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:
-Completed projects   -Improved appearance of Town   -Increased tax value to residents
-Improved crowd management at events

Blowing Rock
NORTH CAROLINA

4. Cultivate partnerships with like-minded and relevant organizations to increase awareness and leverage our local voice. Communication within the travel industry is critical to the sustainability of travel industry growth.

- Develop and maintain strong ties and cooperative efforts with other local and regional tourism-based organizations.
- Establish the TDA as an essential partner and welcomed member of other area, regional, state and national organizations (Blue Ridge Parkway Association, Visit NC, NC High Country Host, Southeast Tourism Society, NC Restaurant & Lodging Association, etc.) through intentional engagement, steady communication, and a neighborly approach.
- Partner with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce to enhance support for tourism based businesses in town, and find synergies in local promotions and initiatives.
- Provide promotional support for organizations that create events for visitors.
- Participate on Boards and event committees where applicable.
- Partner with Appalachian State University and Hospitality Management educators and professionals for tourism education, employment initiatives, and internship facilitation.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:
-Proof of participation & engagement   -Invitations to participate in partner programs
-Marketing and special event support from partner programs & groups

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NORTH CAROLINA

Strengths

- Proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway and other major regional attractions
- Accessibility to outdoor recreation and natural beauty
- Charm and character of local structures
- Long history of hospitality and positive brand
- Easy travel conditions and distance from major markets
- Safe town with few incidents

Weaknesses

- Limited infrastructure for crowd management- parking, narrow streets and sidewalks, etc.
- Aging lodging properties vs. ROI for new projects
- Weather dependent destination
- Service industry workforce difficult to source in area where workforce housing is often located in other towns

Opportunities

- Major feeder markets still growing
- Recreational options expanding in the area, i.e. Middle Fork Greenway, additional trail connections, new attractions & outdoor guides
- Potential for growth in mid-week travel and shoulder seasons
- Increasing focus on unique/bucket-list travel experiences

Threats

- Overdevelopment compromising natural areas, recreational access, and views
- Splintering unity across local associations preventing beneficial decision-making
- Underfunding of nationally protected areas continuing to diminish the quality of visitor experience
- Potential strain on discretionary spending due to recessions or volatile economy

Current Areas of Focus

Goals & Action Items

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NORTH CAROLINA

Expand strategies for marketing Blowing Rock as a destination.

Goal: Increase emphasis on Blowing Rock as a destination of choice for business and focused activity groups,
in order to improve weekday bookings.
Action Items:
-Emphasize promotion of Blowing Rock directly to groups and meeting planners in target publications and digital marketing in upcoming marketing plans.
-Produce collateral for retreats and business travelers.

Goal: Increase awareness of important initiatives and establish Blowing Rock's values to visitors and community.
Action Items:
-Continue educational messaging in marketing and PR to new and repeat visitors
-Build marketing campaigns around Outdoor NC and Leave No Trace Principles
-Give prominence to educational messaging in printed collateral and on BlowingRock.com

Goal: Increase (then maintain) inclusivity in general marketing images and social media content in order to appeal to all segments of our target market.
Action Items:
-Source and use images that show a variety of ages, races, and particularly abilities and family dynamics.
-Increase use of images sourced through user generated content (UGC).

Increase integration of public relations initiatives and expand reach.

Goal: Manage visitor expectations regarding local construction and repairs, adequately informing and preparing visitors without creating alarm.

Action Items:
- Create and maintain information pages for Blue Ridge Parkway repairs and for utility work on Main Street
- Maintain open communication with Blue Ridge Parkway and Town of Blowing Rock project managers
- Create and implement social media strategy for sharing timely updates and information
- Work with PR firm on delivery, scale, and timing of details for visitors and public

Goal: Enhance social media engagement to grow conversations about and deepen awareness of Blowing Rock.

Action Items:
- Integrate social media content into website and other marketing.
- Track specific engagement with planned themes and edit plans as needed.
- Incorporate user generated content and leverage visitor experiences in content planning.

Goal: Increase video programming for web and social media to stay relevant in travel promotions.

Action Items:
- Identify opportunities for niche concepts for low-overhead themes and build content calendar.
- Engage with education opportunities to increase production skills

Goal: Shift travel writer/influencer communication to a pro-active focus to increase earned media value.

Action Items:
- Track produced pieces for each visit to build value frameworks
- Identify ideal writers/influencers/publications and foster relationships to create future tailored pitches
- Create framework for influencer/writer budget to prepare for pitches/invitations

Enhance the awareness of the role of the tourism industry in the local economy, and improve the visitor experience through advocacy (an area of public relations).

Goal: Increase visibility of hospitality employment opportunities in Blowing Rock to help strengthen stability of local tourism businesses.
Action Items:
- Grow student tour program in Blowing Rock, increasing student attendence and employment follow-up
- Build and facilitate internship connection program between Blowing Rock businesses and Appalachian State University

Goal: Improve communication with local lodging to improve relationships and build partnership strategies.
Action Items:
- Establish monthly in-person meetings between member of TDA staff and hotel owner or manager.

Goal: Increase community understanding and support of tourism as an economic driver to improve overall community perception of tourism.
Action Items:
- Connect with outlets like local newspapers for regular coverage of tourism economy.
- Assess & promote "traditional" impact statistics (e.g., jobs, taxes generated, spending totals)
- Create media releases that show the connections between visitor spending and resident quality of life
- Develop a series of videos to better explain the importance of the tourism economy and the BRTDA's role
- Increase Tattler distribution while maintaining open rate

Increase locally-focused data to track successes and areas that need improvement.

Goal: Determine brand awareness among travelers, and compare Blowing Rock to similar destinations
Action Items:
    -Contract with Smari Insights to conduct a study

Goal: Gain understanding of visitation to Blowing Rock, including visitor volume, visitor origin markets, local
    vs. non-local, movement in-market, and lodging choices.
Action Items:
    -Contract with Arrivalist to conduct a study

Goal: Track overall occupancy rates for lodging in Blowing Rock to compare occupancy tax collections to actual
    overnight visitation.
Action Items:
    -Emphasize success measurement and address concerns of private businesses.
    -Create efficient and trusted reporting process.

Goal: Improve understanding of economic climate and impacts for tourism-related businesses
Action Items:
    -Create and implement quarterly business surveys.
    -Identify and utilize more communication touchpoints between local tourism businesses and TDA staff