



BLOWING ROCK

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

# Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2022-2023





## A Message From the Executive Director

In fiscal year 2023, Blowing Rock again enjoyed a robust tourism economy. Though travel patterns have been showing signs of normalizing, it was a better-than-expected year. Most tourism-related businesses were concerned of recession and softening of leisure travel and spending going into the year. Neither happened. Travel across the globe continued to be strong and demand for leisure travel to Blowing Rock continues to follow suit.



Tracy Brown  
Executive Director, Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority

Visitor spending is essential to our town, and we know that overnight guests spend more. In general, lodging accounts for about a third of the money spent by overnight visitors. Each year, visitors spend millions of dollars at our local small businesses. The taxes they pay make their way to the Town’s budget. The TDA contributes to the Town of Blowing Rock as well, for projects benefitting both residents and visitors. Thus tourism reduces the tax burden on residents and property owners in addition to direct spending.

Challenges facing the tourism industry around the country are the same for businesses in Blowing Rock, from workforce shortages to housing issues. Additionally, parking in Blowing Rock must be addressed to ease frustrations of residents, employees, and guests. The TDA Board and staff continue to encourage Town Council to implement the recommendations in the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan with parking being a priority. The TDA Strategic Plan was updated to reflect the Management Plan and address the challenges of a changing leisure travel market. Staff continues to apply updated strategies to promotions and business support.

Looking ahead, leisure interest in Blowing Rock is well positioned to continue steady growth due to our proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway, continued interest in outdoor activities, and the exceptional experiences that visitors have come to know here.

“ Each year, visitors spend millions of dollars at our local small businesses.

**Contents:**

- 2 Fiscal Year Highlights
- 3 Value of Tourism
- 4 Our Visitor
- 5 Revenues & Budget
- 7 Funded by Tourism
- 8 Partners & Programs
- 9 Promotions & PR
- 11 Staff & Board



# 2022-23 Highlights

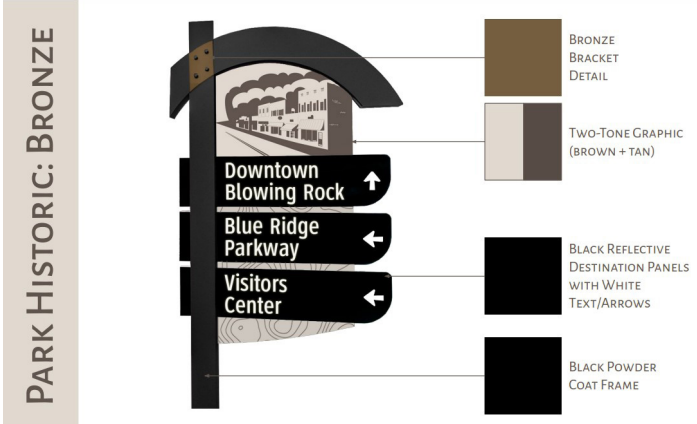


## Local Tourism Highlights

- \* FY 2023 is second-highest gross revenue on record
- \* More than 15.7 million people visited the Parkway in 2022 and over 500K vehicles were counted at the 321 exit in Blowing Rock
- \* Overnight visitors to Blowing Rock spent an estimated \$86 million
- \* NC Year of the Trail in 2023
- \* 100th Anniversary of the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show

## Broader Trends & Notables

- \* Post-pandemic demand for travel remained strong
- \* National shortages in service industry workforce impacted costs, service levels, and hours of operation
- \* Real Estate values continued to increase, further impacting affordable housing options
- \* US Travel Association predicts leisure travel will return to more normal or pre-pandemic patterns in 2024, but with continued high demand



In 2023, Wayfinding signage was designed and approved by both the TDA Board and Town Council. Production and installation of phase one of the project should begin in the Spring of 2024. Completion of the entire project should be by the end of summer 2025.

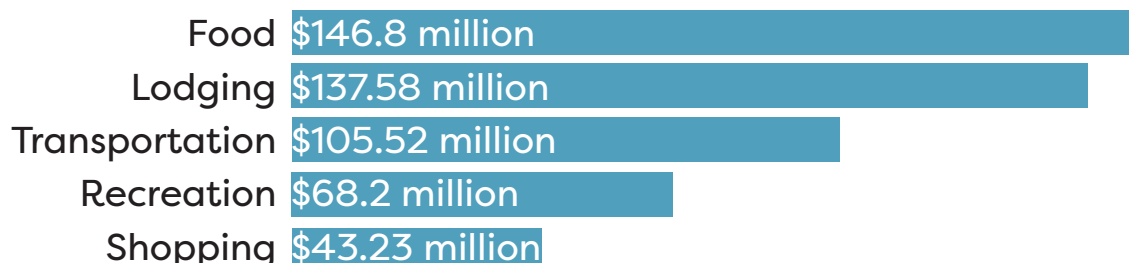
# Tourism helps drive our local economy!

## 2022 Tourism Economic Facts for Watauga County\*



Visitor spending leads to lower taxes for residents by offsetting the amount that would otherwise need to be collected.

### 2022 Visitor Spending by Category\*



Visitor spending in Watauga County increased 7.8% from 2021 to 2022.

Watauga County is ranked 15th in total visitor spending among NC's 100 counties.

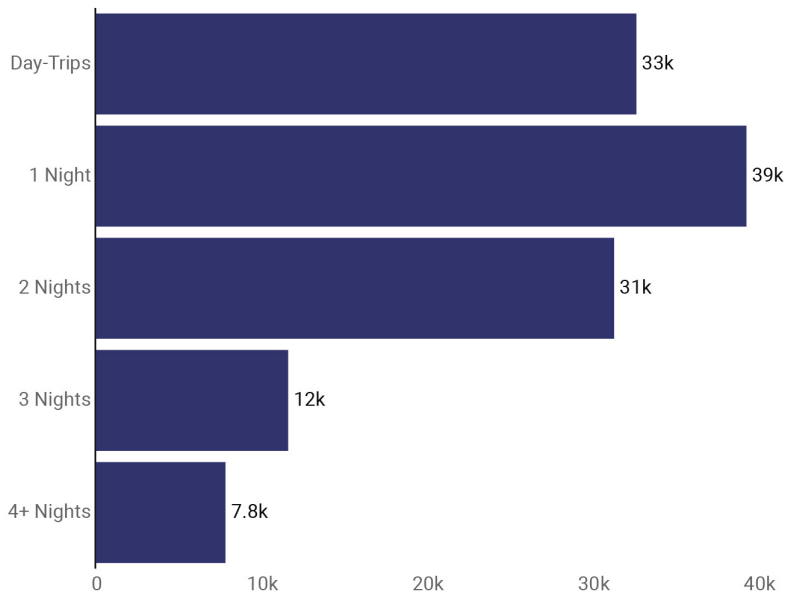
\*2022 visitor spending data from Visit NC / Tourism Economics



# Blowing Rock's Visitors

Travelers made a total of **120k trips** to Blowing Rock between July 2022 and June 2023. Of those trips, **73.4% were overnight** visits.

Trip Volume by Nights in Market



**3.0**  
Average party size

**66%**  
are Married

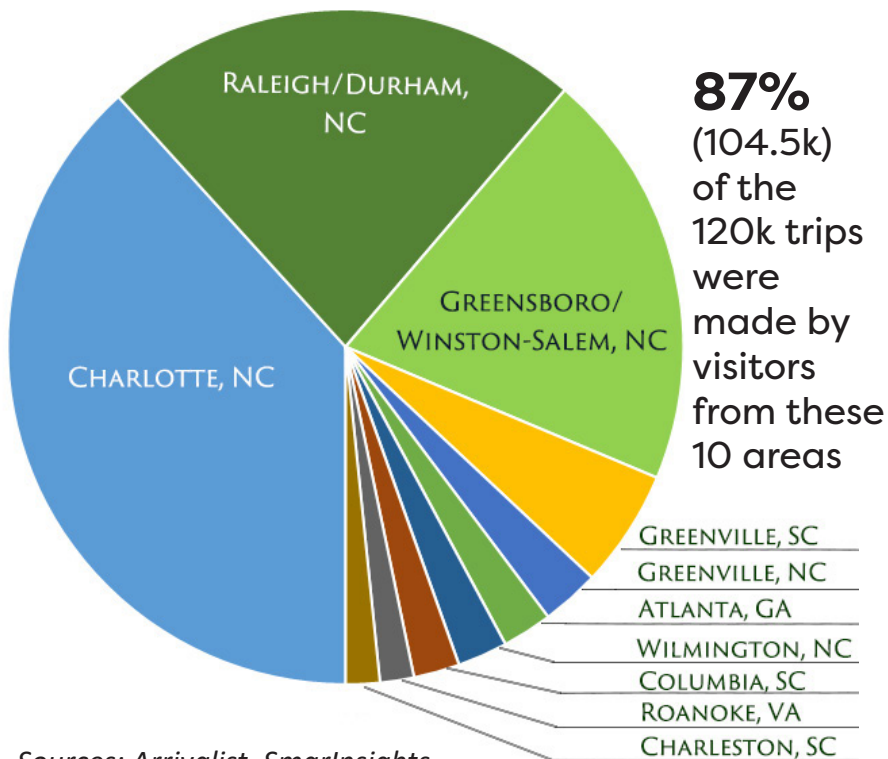
**34%**  
have children in household

**47**  
Average Age

35% Millennials (27-42)  
30% Boomers (59-77)  
23% Gen X (43-58)  
9% Gen Z (18-26), 3% Silent (78+)

**3/4 of Blowing Rock Visitors can be described as:**

- Variety Travelers:** like to do a little bit of everything during their leisure trip. 31%
- Discoverers:** prefer to be off the beaten path, active; find fulfillment thru travel. 28%
- Enrichers:** prefer to experience the culture of the destination thru educational experiences, local cuisine, and living like a local. 17%



North Carolina is the #1 origin market with over 93k trips to the destination, with visitors staying an average of 1.27 nights.

The top ten origin states for the period by volume are:

- |                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. North Carolina | The top 6 make up 98.6% of visits |
| 2. South Carolina |                                   |
| 3. Florida        |                                   |
| 4. Georgia        |                                   |
| 5. Virginia       |                                   |
| 6. Tennessee      |                                   |
| 7. Louisiana      |                                   |
| 8. Kentucky       |                                   |
| 9. Pennsylvania   |                                   |
| 10. Alabama       |                                   |

Sources: Arrivalist, SmarInsights



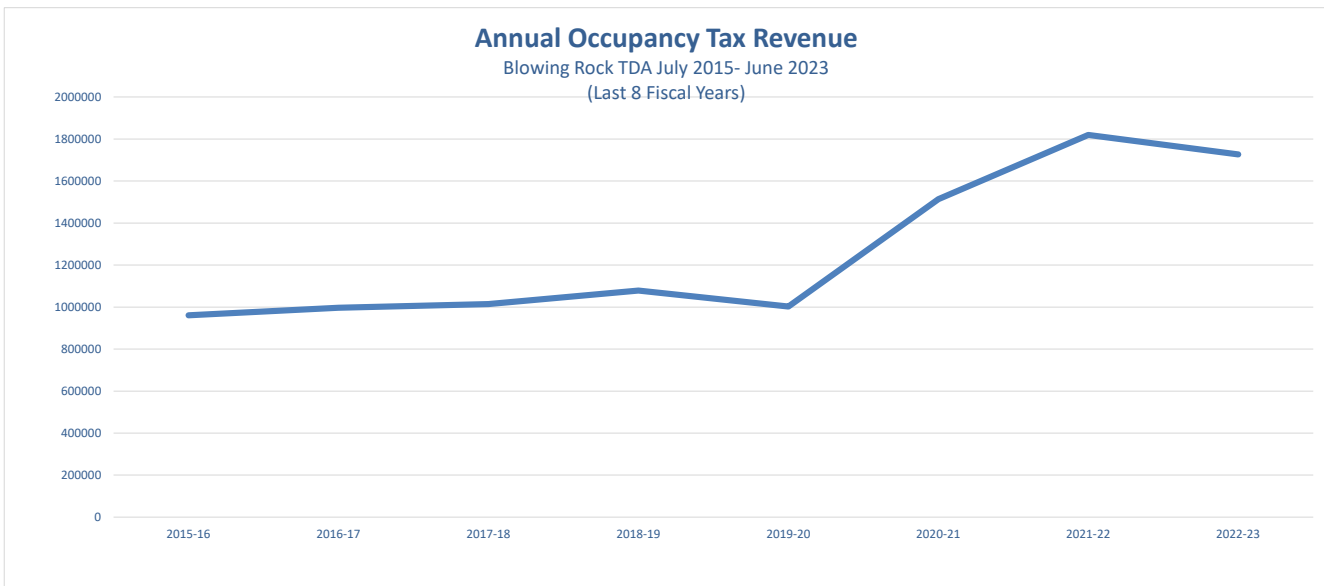
# Occupancy Tax Revenues

The Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is funded by a 6% occupancy tax **paid by overnight visitors** staying in hotels, inns, and other short-term rentals in Blowing Rock town limits. The Town of Blowing Rock collects this tax.

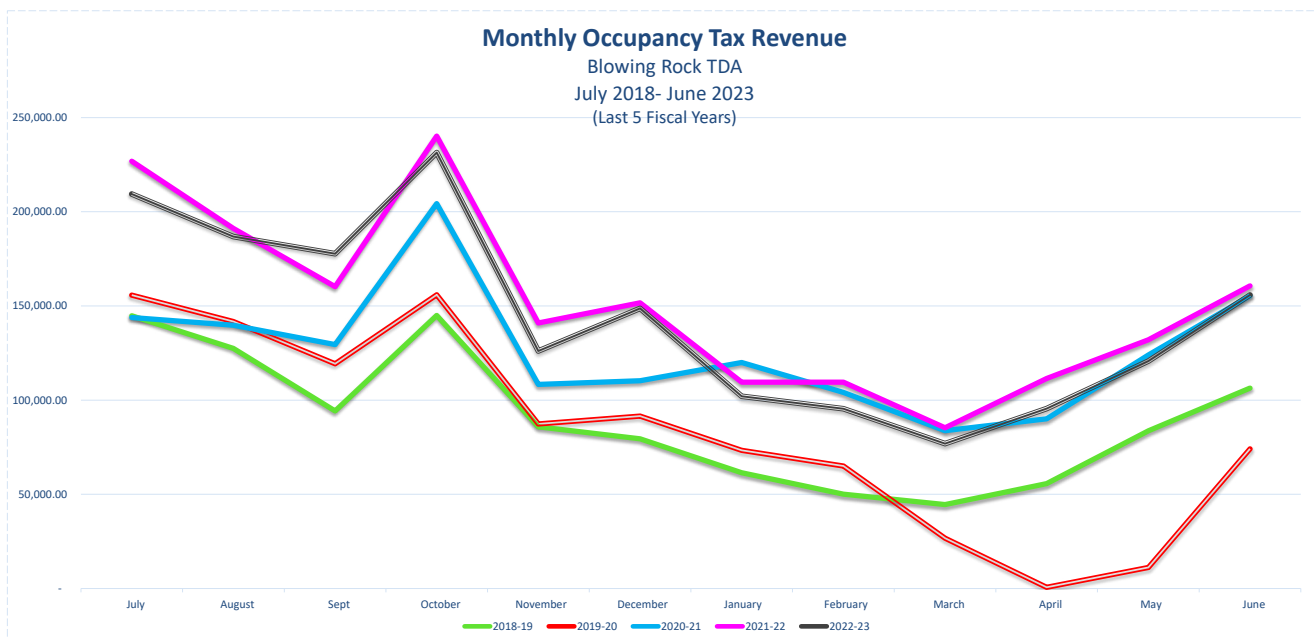
**\$1,726,629**  
Occupancy tax revenues in FY 22-23  
(-5% over 21-22)

}

**\$28,777,160**  
in direct revenues at Blowing  
Rock lodging businesses



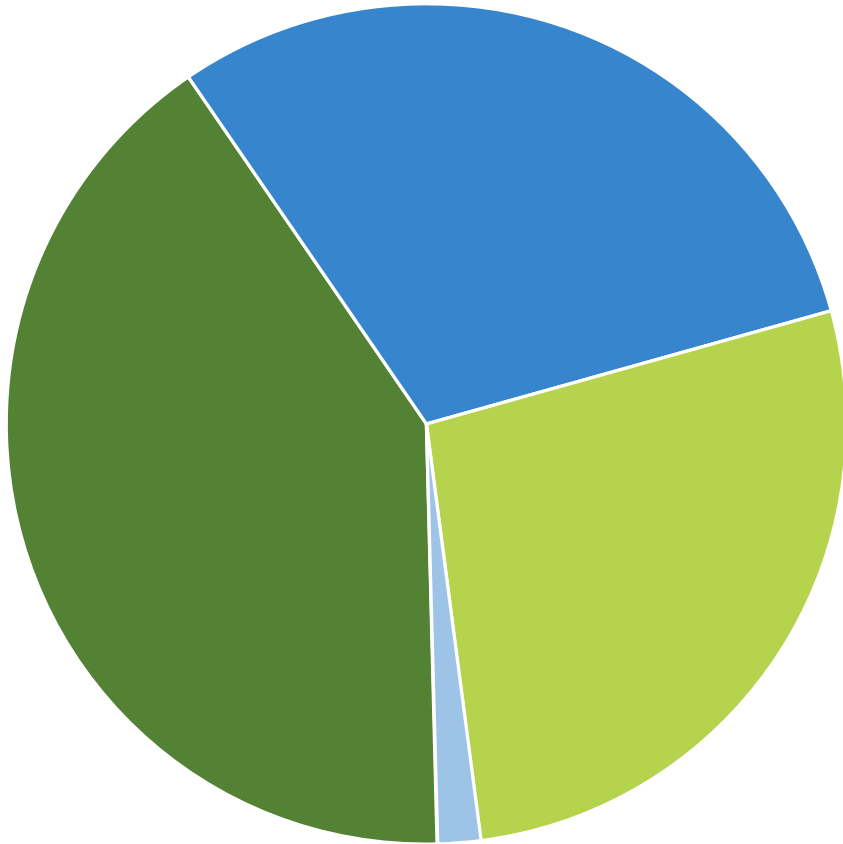
Occupancy tax revenues consistently follow an established pattern that illustrates changes in visitation volume throughout the year.





# Budgeted Expenditures

In TDA expenses in 2022-2023, a total of \$1,452,453 was spent in four main categories.



*2/3* of the budget funds the promotion of travel and tourism in Blowing Rock.

## Direct Tourism Promotion

includes advertising, website, public/media relations, Parks & Rec & BRAHM support, educational programs, printed materials, etc.

**\$439,313**

## Administrative

includes staff employment & development, insurance, etc.

**\$395,961**

## Central Services

items like audits and Town overhead

**\$24,000**

*1/3* of the budget is spent on tourism-related infrastructure.

## Tourism Infrastructure

includes expenditures like parking decks, Christmas decor, HWY 321 lighting, landscaping, etc. **\$593,191**



*A full audit of the Blowing Rock TDA budget is available as an addendum to this report.*





## Funded by Tourism

**Tourism-related infrastructure TDA expenditures totaled nearly \$600k in FY 2023 and included:**  
 American Legion Parking Structure  
 Street Lighting  
 Hwy. 321 Landscaping  
 Christmas Decorations  
 Parks & Recreation Event Support



Town Sidewalks  
 Town Street Maintenance  
 Town Center Beautification  
 Memorial Park Public Restroom  
 Construction



These contributions help keep taxes lower for residents by offsetting the investments needed for these projects.

**\$25k**

in support to Moses Cone Memorial Park restoration and improvements

**\$50k+**

in marketing sponsorships to BRAHM, WinterFest, and Horse Show.

**220+**

local businesses & parks received free promotion via Blowingrock.com & printed guides



Blowing Rock Community Calendar compiled, printed and distributed for free as a resident & business resource.



# Partners & Programs

Blowing Rock maintains strong ties with many organizations, including:



Plus: Blue Ridge Rising, Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, Boone Tourism Development Authority, Appalachian State University, Grandfather Mountain, Tweetsie Railroad, Appalachian Ski Mountain, The Blowing Rock, and Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show Foundation.

## 500+

B2B contacts receive **weekly** partner communications on tourism news, promotional opportunities, and local events in our Village Tattler newsletter.

Blowing Rock TDA partners with businesses regularly for hosting media, creating content, and for promotional campaigns like this!



## Inaugural Student Tour

New partnership program with Appalachian State University is designed to help **connect hospitality & tourism students to employers** while showing them around successful hospitality businesses.

*< Students hear from Hunter Womble, chef at Gideon Ridge and Hellbender*

How do we partner?

- \*board positions
- \*promoting events
- \*contributing time & skills
- \*funding special projects
- \*collaboration on programs
- \*hosting tours

We network with partners through events like:

- \*Organization meetings
- \*Educational programs
- \*Visit NC 365 Conference
- \*Outdoor Economy Conference
- \*Southeast Tourism Conference

## Promotions & Advertising

The Blowing Rock TDA touts Blowing Rock's top attractions & hidden gems and celebrates its small businesses. We promote our town's unhurried, adventurous, and creative personality so like-minded visitors can imagine themselves here. We tell Blowing Rock's stories across our website, email marketing, guides, social media, advertising, and public relations.

**8.6 million**

Total Advertising Impressions

**93,500**

Clicks to Blowing Rock Content

**171,165**

Promotional Emails Opened

**405,000**

New Website Users

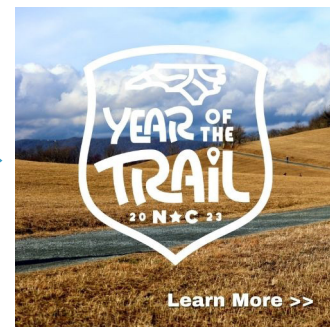
**1.1 million**

Webpage Views (+0.6% yoy)

**85,000**

Blowing Rock Guides Printed

Among 23 new content features on BlowingRock.com this year, our NC Year of the Trail landing page became the most visited page on our site in its first 6 months.



Media campaigns, primarily digital, included NC Year of the Trail, Outdoor NC and Leave No Trace features, Winter and Spring seasonals, and events like Art in the Park, WinterFest and Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show.

A detailed media plan is provided as an addendum to this report.





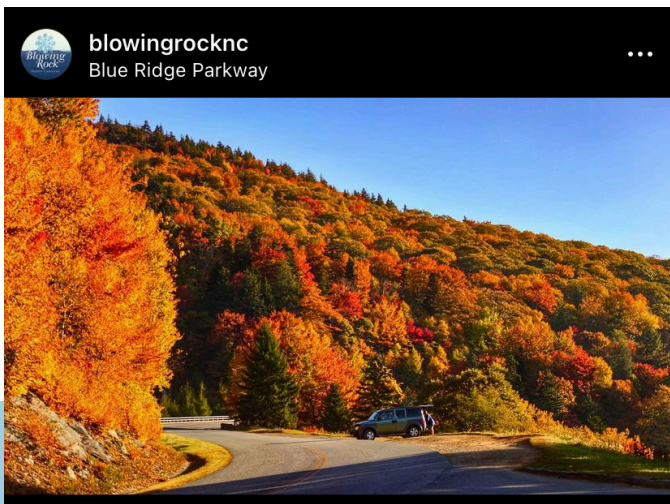
## Public Relations Highlights

The Blowing Rock TDA prioritizes efficient and timely responses to all media inquiries. We also value authentic, timely, and original content on our social media platforms. This special attention leads to more engaging Blowing Rock stories.

**1.84 million**  
Social Media  
Reach

**118,000**  
Followers  
(+9.3% yoy)

Voted Best Small Town in NC in  
**50 Best Small Towns in the South**  
by readers of Southern Living Magazine  
in Spring 2023!

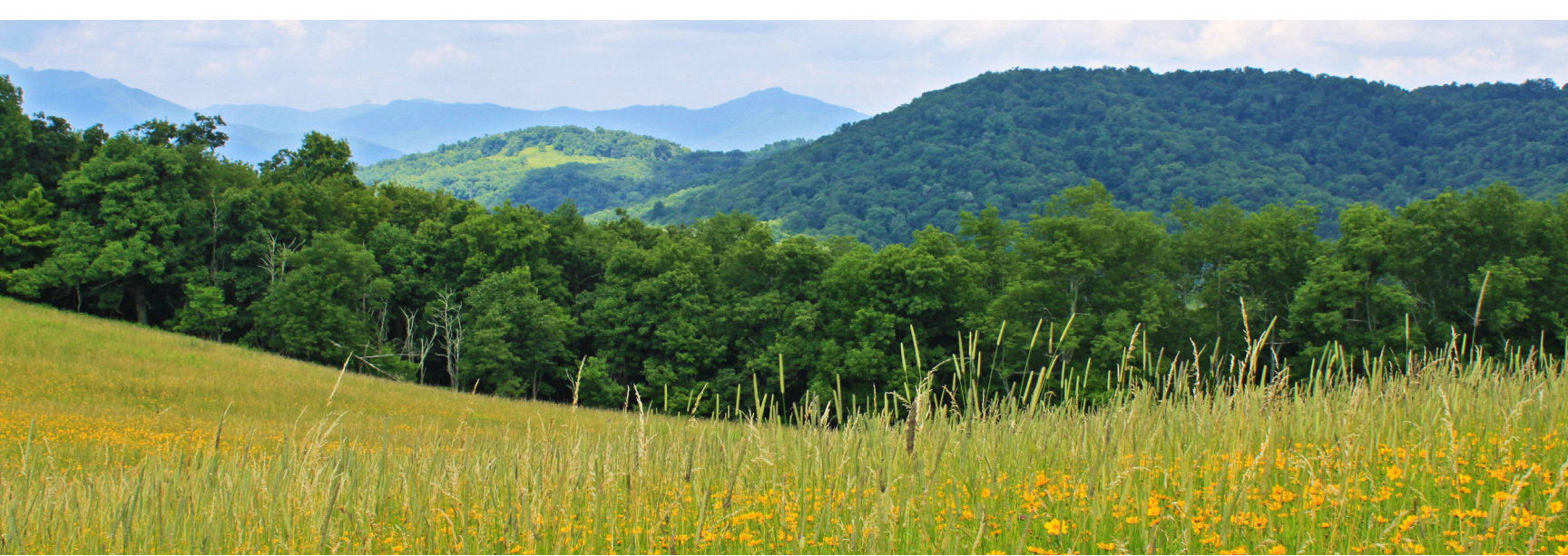


Most popular social post:  
**700K reach & 50K engagements**  
(Facebook & Instagram combined)

**10**  
Must-visit &  
Best-of Lists

**43**  
Media Assists  
& Direct Pitches









**The mission of the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is to provide leadership and primary funding for promoting, 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.**

**Blowing Rock TDA Board Members  
2022-23 Fiscal Year:**

- Dean Bullis** - Chairman, Tourism seat
- Kevin Walker** - Vice Chair, Lodging seat
- Pete Gherini** - Town Council seat
- Zika Rea** - At-large seat
- Greg Tarbutton** - Lodging seat

- Ex-Officio Members:
- Nicole Norman- Finance Officer
  - Shane Fox- Town Manager
  - Kevin Rothrock- (Interim Town Manager beginning June 2023)



-  [blowingrock.com](http://blowingrock.com)
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-  [info@visitblowingrock.com](mailto:info@visitblowingrock.com)
-  132 Park Ave., Blowing Rock, NC 28605

**Blowing Rock TDA Staff:**



Tracy Brown  
Executive Director



Amanda Lugenbell  
Assistant Director



Lindsay Garcia  
Content Manager



Tyler Graves  
Digital Community  
Manager

For more details on the information provided, please contact Tracy Brown or Amanda Lugenbell in the TDA office.