



# BLOWING ROCK

## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

# Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2024-2025



# A Message From the Executive Director

The fiscal year 2024–2025 presented both strong performance and significant challenges for Blowing Rock's tourism industry. Total lodging sales reached \$29,063,916, underscoring continued visitor demand. However, collections of the occupancy tax declined -5.26% compared to FY 2023–2024, largely due to disruptions caused by Hurricane Helene. Without the hurricane's impact, the year was poised to set another record in tourism revenue.



Tracy Brown  
Executive Director,  
Blowing Rock Tourism  
Development Authority

Hurricane Helene severely disrupted travel in the second quarter of the fiscal year, particularly in October, historically the most profitable month for Blowing Rock. Although the town itself was spared major damage, access routes into the region were devastated, prompting state leaders and NC DOT to urge travelers to avoid Western North Carolina except for emergency relief. As a result, commerce was halted for more than a month. The Blue Ridge Parkway, a critical tourism driver, was fully closed after the storm due to landslides, destroyed roadways, and damaged bridges, marking the worst storm-related impact in its history. While many sections have since reopened, some road segments and recreation areas remain inaccessible, limiting tourism recovery efforts.

The TDA coordinated closely with local, state, and regional officials to ensure accurate, timely communications with industry partners and the traveling public. A regional coalition was formed to manage media inquiries and align reopening messages once conditions stabilized. This collaborative approach safeguarded Blowing Rock's reputation and positioned the community for recovery. Despite the challenges posed by Hurricane Helene, Blowing Rock's tourism industry demonstrated resilience. Lodging sales remained strong, marketing investments advanced, and professional development strengthened industry leadership.

Looking ahead, the recovery of regional infrastructure, particularly the Blue Ridge Parkway, is vital. As visitor demand continues to grow, managing infrastructure and visitor flow in town has become increasingly important to sustaining Blowing Rock's reputation as a welcoming and accessible destination. Two areas require continued focus and attention: addressing parking and mobility solutions, and taking a more strategic approach to event timing and spacing to reduce congestion. By proactively addressing infrastructure challenges, Blowing Rock can ensure that visitation continues to benefit the community while preserving the charm and accessibility that help define the town's appeal. Attention to these needs, combined with refreshed branding and digital engagement strategies, will be critical to sustaining Blowing Rock's reputation as one of North Carolina's premier mountain destinations.

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# 2024-25 Highlights



## Local Tourism Highlights

- \* Helene disrupted leisure travel for the entire region during the most lucrative month of the year - roads were closed to tourist traffic.
- \* Visitor traffic rebounded quickly once routes into the region were opened for travel, and guests coming into the area were spending with intent - to stimulate and support this local economy.
- \* Downtown infrastructure work before the storm created challenges during the warm travel season.
- \* Blowing Rock continued partnership with Outdoor NC as a NC Trail Town.

## Broader Trends & Notables

- \* National travel trends included more immersive trips, a rise in workcations, and a return to road trips, with a renewed interest in small-town escapes over big cities.
- \* Multi-generational and family travel was a big focus, becoming a priority for nearly half of US travelers.
- \* Economic concerns like rising costs, inflation and cost of living pressures encouraged smarter planning, shorter trips and more domestic/regional travel.
- \* Inbound international travel started dropping in Q3 due to political strains.

## Notable Initiatives

**The TDA launched a revamped destination website** ([www.blowingrock.com](http://www.blowingrock.com)) in Q2, featuring updated design, richer visitor content, and optimized search performance features. This investment aims to enhance visitor engagement and position Blowing Rock competitively in the digital marketplace.

TDA staff achieved significant professional milestones this year. **Lindsay Garcia and Tyler Graves completed their certifications** as Travel Marketing Professional (TMP) and Festival and Event Planner (FEP) through Southeast Tourism Society. These advancements, supported by the TDA Board, strengthen Blowing Rock's industry leadership and ensure professional excellence in tourism marketing and event development.

# Tourism helps drive our local economy!

## 2024 Tourism Economic Facts for Watauga County\*

**\$515.85 Million**  
in Visitor Spending  
(-0.4% over 2023)

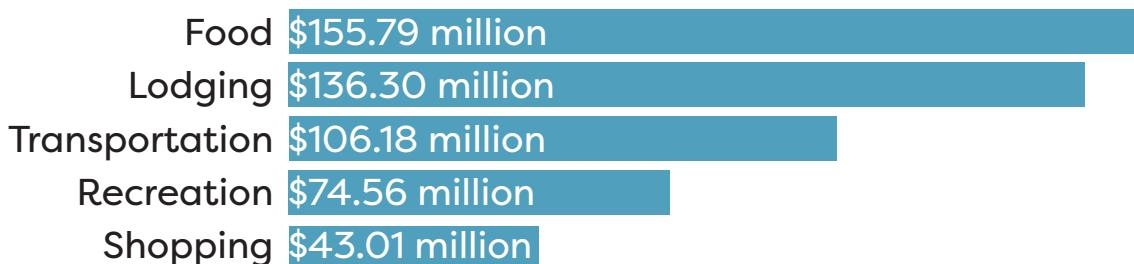
**3000+**  
Local jobs  
in Tourism &  
Hospitality

**\$ 18.95 Million**  
State & Local  
Taxes paid by  
visitors

**\$656.22**  
Tax Savings per  
Watauga resident

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

### Visitor Spending in 2024 by Category\*



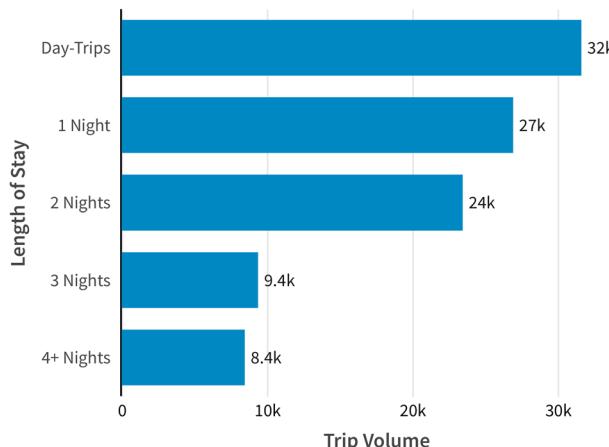
Despite the loss of the fall visitor season, visitor spending in Watauga County decreased less than half a percent from 2023 to 2024

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

# Blowing Rock's Visitors

Of about **100k observed trips** to Blowing Rock between July 2024 and June 2025, about **68% were overnight** visits.

Trip Volume by Nights in Market



Average Length of Stay

**1.5 nights**

+6.5% vs. previous year

Share of Day Trips

**31.6%**

-3.7% vs. previous year

Share of Overnights

**68.4%**

+1.8% vs. previous year

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

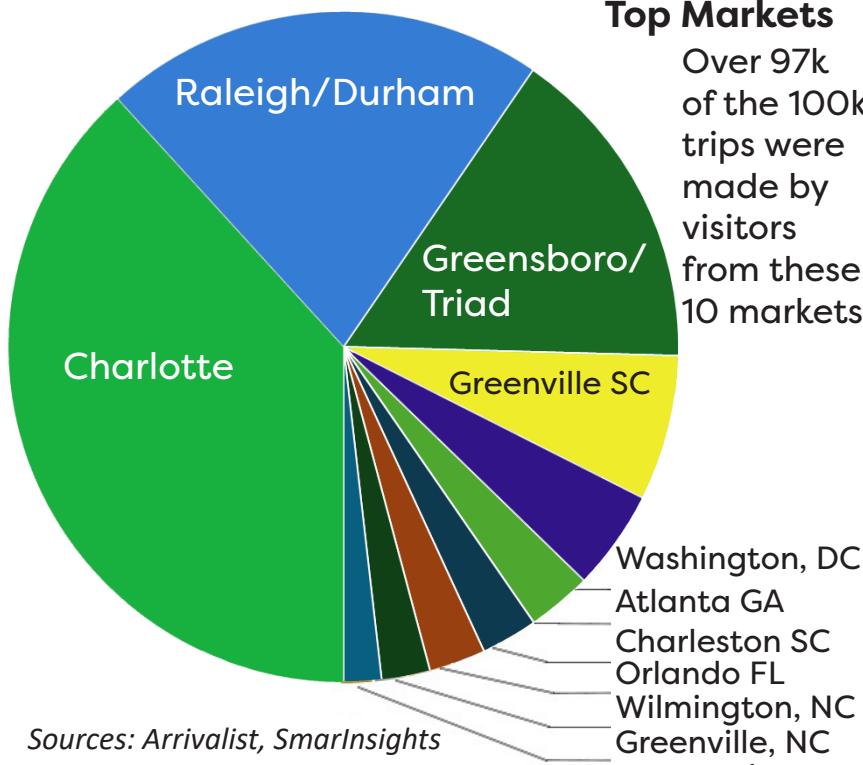
**Variety Travelers:** like to do a little bit of everything during their leisure trip. 31%

**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%

## Top Markets

Over 97k of the 100k trips were made by visitors from these 10 markets.



## Top States

North Carolina is the #1 origin state, home of nearly 70% of visitors to Blowing Rock. NC visitors stay an average of 1.34 nights. The top 10 origin states for FY 24-25 by volume are:

1. North Carolina
2. South Carolina
3. Florida
4. Virginia
5. Georgia
6. Tennessee
7. Maryland
8. Pennsylvania
9. Rhode Island
10. Texas

The top 6 make up about 93% of visits

The last four are less stable markets, shifting from year to year.

# Occupancy Tax Revenues

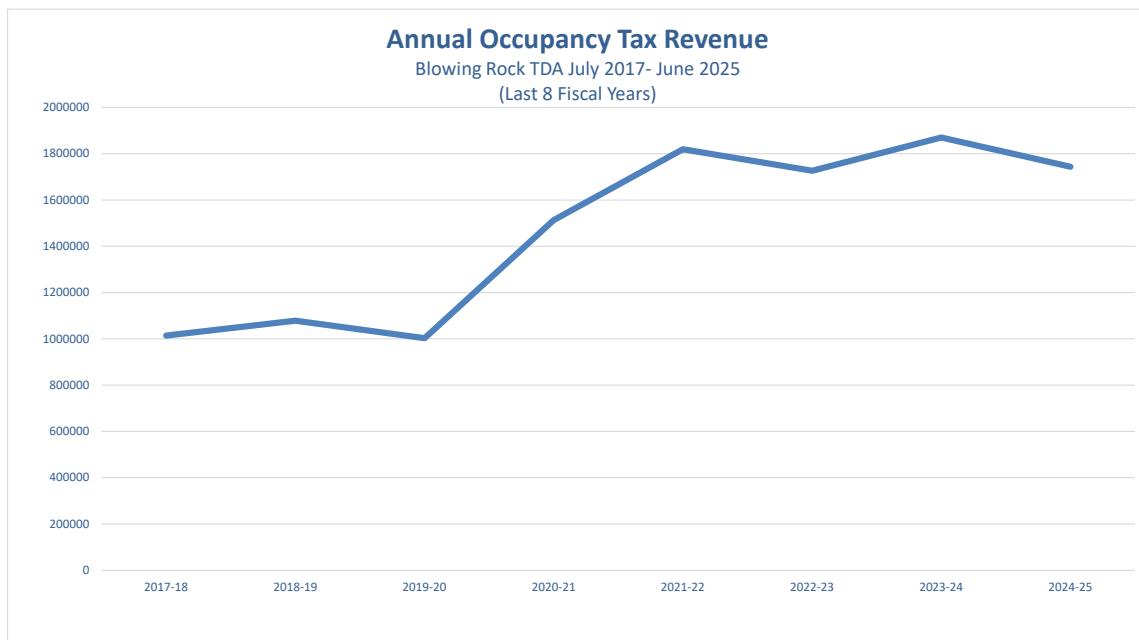
The Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is funded by a 6% occupancy tax paid by overnight visitors staying in hotels, inns, and other short-term rentals in Blowing Rock town limits. The Town of Blowing Rock collects this tax.

**\$1,771,551**

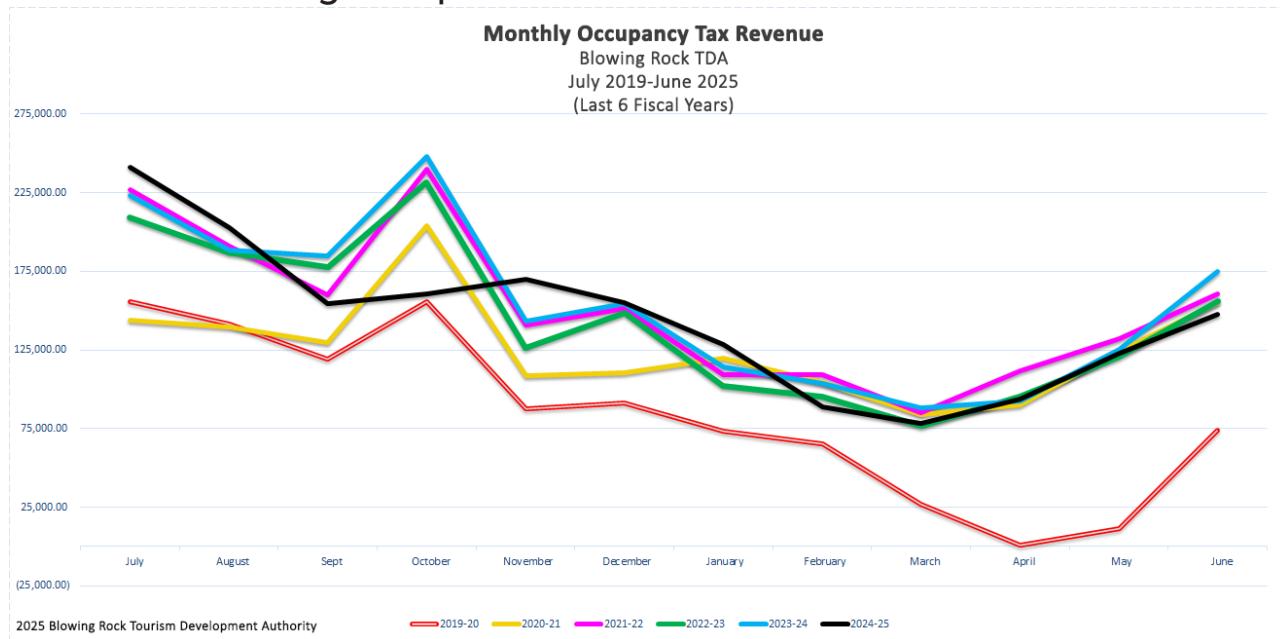
*Occupancy tax revenues in FY 24-25  
(-5.27% over 23-24)*

**\$29,525,850**

*in direct revenues at Blowing  
Rock lodging businesses*

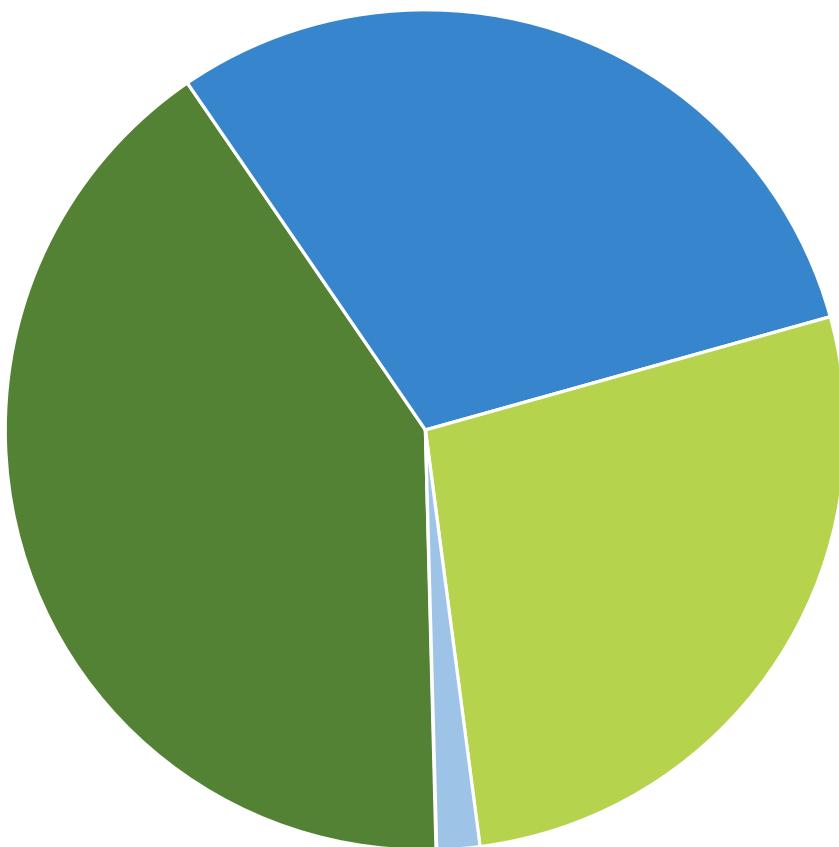


Occupancy tax revenues consistently follow an established pattern throughout the year. The abrupt drop in visitation following Hurricane Helene proceeded a lasting disruption in the trend and collections.



# Budgeted Expenditures

In TDA expenses in 2024-2025, a total of \$1,576,185 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.

**\$493,706**

## Administrative

includes staff employment & development, insurance, etc.

**\$453,110**

## Central Services

items like audits and Town overhead

**\$39,303**

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

## Tourism Infrastructure

includes expenditures like parking decks, Christmas decor, HWY 321 lighting, landscaping, etc.

**\$590,066**



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 over  
\$590k in FY 2025 and included:**

American Legion Parking Structure  
Street Lighting  
Hwy. 321 Landscaping  
Parks & Recreation Event Support  
Memorial Park Directional Signage  
Christmas Lighting



Town Sidewalks  
Town Street Maintenance  
Memorial Park Restroom Attendant  
Town Center Beautification



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

**\$35k+**  
in marketing  
sponsorships to  
BRAHM, WinterFest  
& Horse Show.

**200+**  
local businesses &  
attractions received  
free promotion via  
BRTDA website,  
guide & social  
media.



Blowing Rock, North Carolina  
2025 Community Calendar

Memorial Park received a grant for improvements and the BRTDA is helping fund the additional costs: 100K in the 24-25 fiscal year.



The Blowing Rock TDA contributed 175K to the cost of landscaping and mowing services on Valley Blvd in FY 24-25.

# Partners & Programs

The Blowing Rock TDA maintains strong ties with many organizations, including:



Plus Appalachian State University, Blue Ridge Rising, Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, Boone Tourism Development Authority, Blue Ridge Conservancy, Grandfather Mountain, Tweetsie Railroad, Appalachian Ski Mountain, The Blowing Rock, and others.

## Advocacy



Blowing Rock was represented in the NC Delegation as part of the 2025 Southeast Tourism Society Congressional Summit on Travel and Tourism.

## Building Affinity

Blowing Rock is a continued partner in Visit NC's Outdoor NC program. This stewardship movement promotes and facilitates sustainable practices and accessibility. Blowing Rock was the inaugural sweepstakes partner for the NC Trail Towns initiative in 2024, increasing visibility as a destination that seeks to preserve and protect naturally beautiful places.



How do we partner?

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

We network with partners through:

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

## Partner Engagement

Blowing Rock TDA partners with local businesses regularly for hosting media, creating content, campaigns like Holiday Glow Time and Our Favorite Things, as well as promotions for themed getaways.

Partner information was greatly expanded in 2024 at [blowingrock.com/partner-resources](http://blowingrock.com/partner-resources)

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



The second annual **Blowing Rock Employee Field Trip** was well attended. This tour gives local hospitality staff a crash course on top attractions, activities, and visitor information. The TDA also hosts a **Student Tour** in collaboration with App State University.

## 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.

**12.28 million**  
Total Advertising Impressions

**106,144**  
Clicks to Blowing Rock Content

**796,477**  
Promotional Emails Sent

**500,000**  
Unique Website Users  
(+2% yoy)

**1.1 million**  
Webpage Views  
(-10% yoy)

**70,000**  
Blowing Rock Guides Printed

The year started off strong with outdoor messaging, but a pivot was needed post-Helene. Our approach was to let people know we were open while also helping spread the word on status of neighbors on social media and our website.



Later, we partnered with area chambers and tourism organizations to craft unified messages- "Bounce Back" for early spring and "Back and Blooming" for late spring & early summer. Coordinated ads and collective media alerts were part of these campaigns.



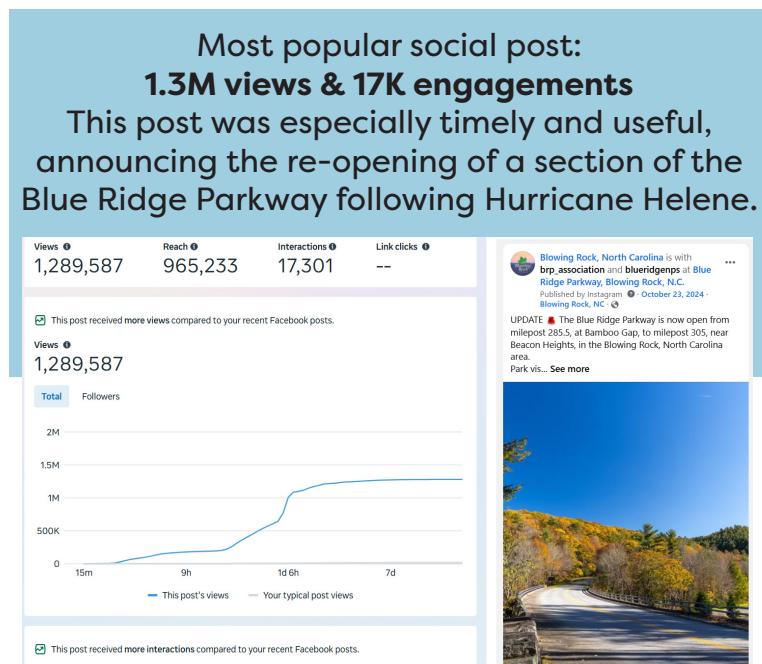
Other notable campaigns included our Jan/Feb Getaway Giveaway which saw great engagement online, the Tweetsie Christmas social media campaign with Our State, and Girls Getaways, Romantic Getaways, Finer Things, and Family campaigns continued to be popular.

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



## Public Relations Highlights

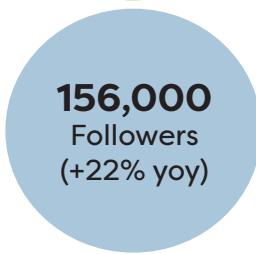
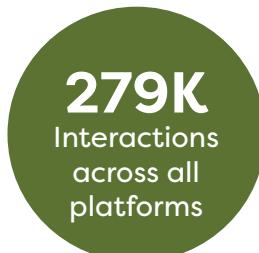
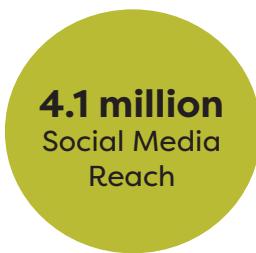
The Blowing Rock TDA prioritizes efficient and timely responses to all media inquiries. We also value authentic, timely, and original content on our social media platforms. This special attention leads to more engaging Blowing Rock stories and accuracy in current news reporting.



Voted First Runner Up as a Top Tiny Town for Adventure in **Top Adventure Towns** by readers of Blue Ridge Outdoors in Fall 2024!



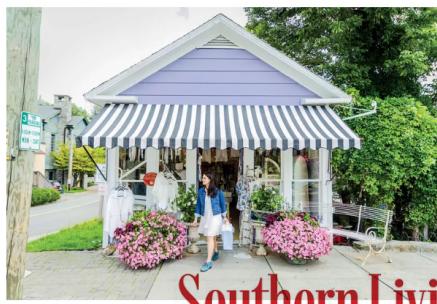
**BLUE RIDGE outdoors**  
go outside and play.



Fall social campaigns often boost our social media engagement, and Helene cut the season short in every way. Though this caused decreased engagement compared to the previous year, interest in all updates from WNC brought a lot of new followers.

Noted in Southern Living Magazine as one of 15 Charming Mountain Towns in NC for the Dreamiest Weekend Getaway

Blowing Rock



Boutique in Blowing Rock, North Carolina.  
Credit: Robbie Caponetto

**Southern Living**



**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 2024-25 Fiscal Year:**

**Dean Bullis** - Chairman, Tourism seat

**Zika Rea** - Vice Chair, At-large seat

**Kevin Walker** - Lodging seat

**Pete Gherini** - Town Council seat

**Ali Borchardt** - Lodging seat

#### **Ex-Officio Members:**

Tasha Brown- Finance Officer

Shane Fox- Town Manager

### **Blowing Rock TDA Staff:**



**Tracy Brown**  
Executive Director



**Amanda Lugenbell**  
Assistant Director



**Lindsay Garcia**  
Content Manager



**Tyler Graves**  
Digital Community  
Manager



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