

EXPLORE ASHEVILLE & BCTDA'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) and Explore Asheville adopted strategic imperatives that are informing and guiding the direction of Explore Asheville's program of work and community investments going forward.

<i>Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth</i>	<i>Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel</i>	<i>Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences</i>	<i>Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit</i>	<i>Running A Healthy & Effective Organization</i>
Balancing resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy. Focusing on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.	Engaging residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences. Collaborating with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.	Extending a genuine invitation to BIPOC travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses, and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win. Supporting product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.	Sharing stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more. Supporting product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.	Investing in people, policies, and practices to serve our community with integrity within the organization's legislative requirements.

Explore Asheville staff generates quarterly reports on progress made toward these strategic imperatives and relevant initiatives that support them.



QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

April 2026 – June 2026



MARKETING, CONTENT & PR Q4 INITIATIVES

Dodie Stephens
Vice President of Marketing



Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

EARNED MEDIA COVERAGE

Impact, Accolades & Significant Stories

GARDEN&GUN Best Chef: Southeast

Taylor Montgomery, Montgomery Sky Farm,
Leicester, North Carolina



PHOTO: GALDONES PHOTOGRAPHY FOR JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION

Taylor Montgomery.

Men's Health

The 2026 Men's Health Travel Awards

FOOD & WINE

The 210 Top Places to Eat, Drink, and Travel in
2026

All of Food & Wine's 2026 Global Tastemakers Award winners in one definitive list.

FOOD & WINE

FOOD DRINK RESTAURANTS NEWS EVENTS WHAT TO BUY TRAVEL ABOUT US

Newsletters Sweepstakes myrecipes

SUBSCRIBE

Join Us at the Food & Wine Classic in Charleston Nov 13-15

Asheville's Good Hot Fish Named North Carolina's Most Unique Experience

Travel + Leisure spotlighted Ashleigh Shant's seafood counter as North Carolina's standout experience for America's 250th birthday, recognizing the chef's deeply personal take on Southern seafood.

By Molly McArdle | Published on June 11, 2026



Credit: Photo by Reggie Tidwell for Good Hot Fish

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

These Are the Top Trending Domestic and
International Summer Travel Destinations for 2026,
According to Google

Google Flights data highlights these destinations to inspire travelers with diverse options for summer getaways.

By Michael Cappetta | Published on April 17, 2026

1 COMMENT



EatingWell

Our 2026 Best Wellness Town Is a Blue Ridge Mountain
Gem

With scenic hikes, a vibrant arts scene, standout local food and plenty of ways to unwind, Asheville has it all.

Q4 Earned coverage

1.71B

Potential media reach

\$14.7M

Publicity value

31

Site visits

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

The Essential Guide to Black
Mountain, North Carolina

Southern Living

This Tiny Mountain Town Feels
Like A Mini Asheville

meetings PEOPLE + PLACES TODAY

Asheville, North Carolina, Shines
on Meeting Planner Fam Tour

TRAVEL+NOIRE

3 Perfect Destinations To Enjoy
Farm-To-Table Culinary
Experiences in the US

FOOD & WINE

The Top 10 Small US Cities for Food and Drink,
According to the Experts



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM

ON TREND: EARNED STORYLINES

Proactive Pitching of Summer 2026 Travel Trends

- Wellness Travel
 - Eating Well – Our 2026 Best Wellness Town Is A Blue Ridge Mountain Gem
 - Southern Living | This North Carolina Gem Was Just Named The No. 1 'Wellness Town' In America
- Iconic American Road Trips & Family Travel
 - Food & Wine | The Ultimate Guide To Eating Along The 469 Miles Of The Blue Ridge Parkway
 - The Points Guy | The 12 Best Road Trips To Take With Your Family This Summer
 - Road Trips For Families | Kid-Centric Tours: How Asheville's Purple Bus Reveals A New Family Travel Trend
- America's 250th Birthday
 - The Points Guy | Celebrate America's 250th Birthday: Book These Hotels For Less Than \$250 This Summer
 - Forbes | 52 All-American Summer Getaways

PR Team on the Road

The PR Team pitched Asheville storylines to top travel publications at 2 media missions this quarter in Chicago, IL and Albuquerque, NM.



What a mission produces: Food & Wine's Blue Ridge Parkway guide, June 20, traced to a desk-side at our February NYC mission.

FOOD&WINE

The Ultimate Guide to Eating Along the 469 Miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway

Road trip through North Carolina's scenic Appalachian Mountains with a longtime local and all the snacks.

By [Kayleigh Ruller](#) | Published on June 20, 2026



PAID MEDIA: INVESTING IN INFLUENTIAL VOICES

Activating trusted platforms and cultural tastemakers who drive engagement

21.25M+ Estimated Reach*
Across editorial partnerships

Partnerships Outperformed
Benchmarks

- T+L engagement 225% above benchmark.
- Southern Living was 60% above benchmark.

Nearly a Minute of Reader
Attention

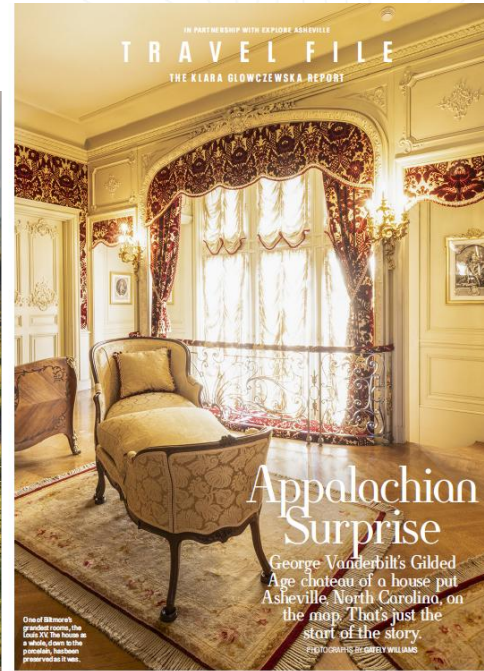
T+L native stories averaged
57–58 seconds

11K+ Clicks

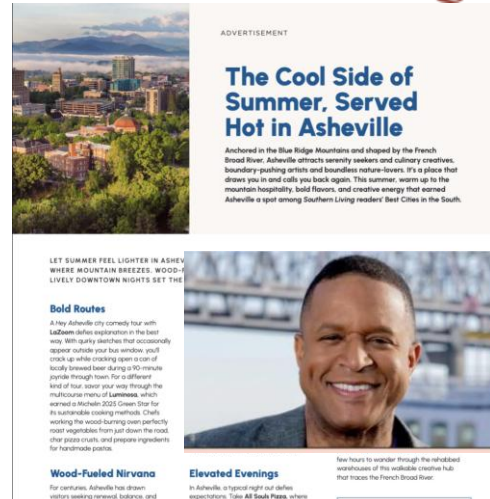
Southern Living + Town &
Country content drove further
exploration

*Reach blends impressions, print circulation
and magazine readership across partners;
full program is still delivering

TOWN&COUNTRY



Southern Living



The Esquire Guide to Asheville



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: GROWING REACH & ENGAGEMENT

Paid and earned efforts keep our profile high with meeting planners

Targeted B2B advertising helped extend Asheville's visibility with meeting planners while delivering more reach and engagement than projected for FY26.

- **48% Above Impression Goal**
8.18M impressions delivered against a 5.5M annual goal
- **49% Above Engagement Goal**
65K+ engagements while meeting the annual inquiry goal

Experience-first content drove qualified engagement:

Northstar and SmartMeetings delivered planner engagement through email and newsletter placements. *This experiential meetings campaign saw 6x the average open rate. >>>*



Efficient LinkedIn Engagement:

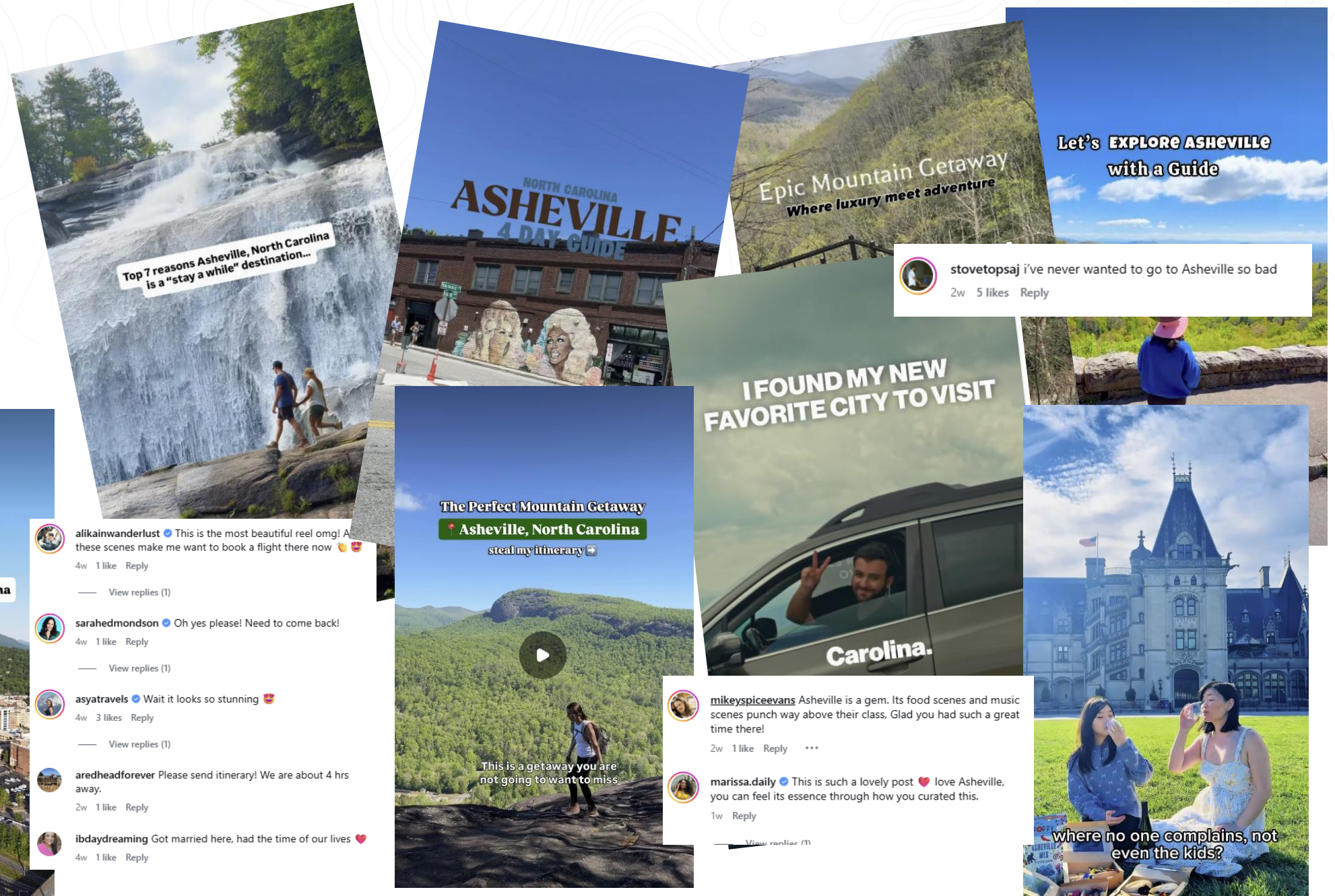
Paid + promoted organic posts generated nearly 9,963 engagements at \$0.45 per engagement. *This ad drove 770 web visits. >>>*



THEMES IN FOCUS:

- Campaign engagements so far at **721K**

Total Estimated Media Value – \$443K+



Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

THROUGH THEIR LENS: ASHEVILLE, FOUR WAYS

Influencer storytelling themes



@nashvillehiddengems



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM

CULINARY SPOTLIGHT: TOP CHEF CAROLINAS

Extending the reach of our celebrity chefs

Goal

Turn Asheville's Top Chef moment into momentum for the whole food scene, not just the featured chefs

What we did

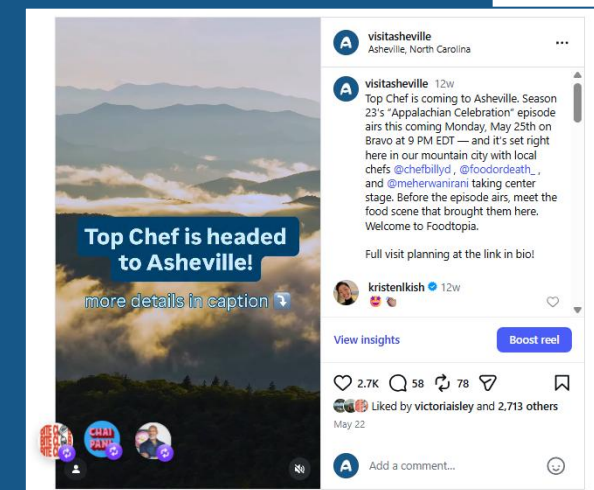
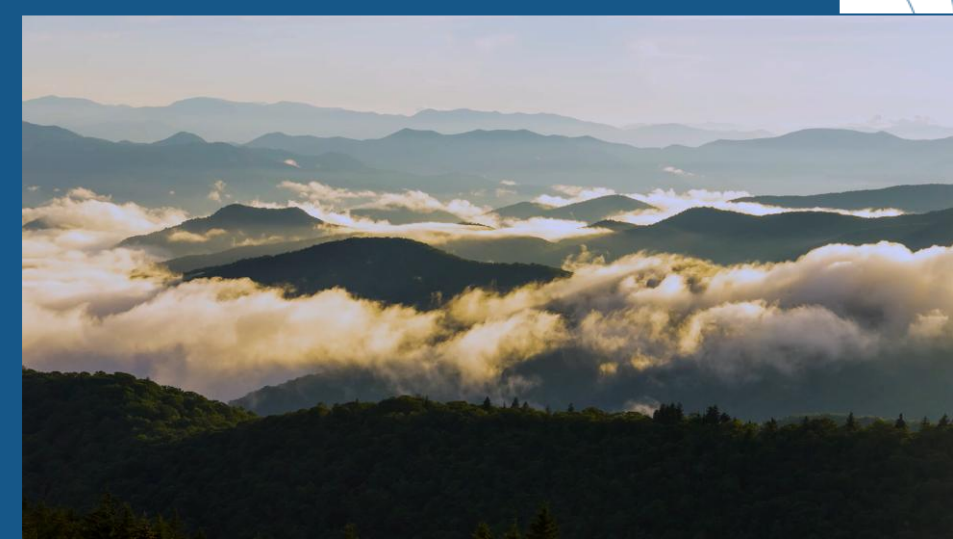
- Published [a chef favorites article](#) where our three Top Chef chefs spotlight their under-the-radar go-tos
- Cut a [30-second version of our Foodtopia video](#) for social to promote the spotlight (120k+ views, 5,400 engagements)
- TopChef ran as a limited-run 30-second video spot during Q4 via CTV on NBC generating nearly **1.8M engagements** and producing the strongest CTR at 0.08% and **excellent view completion of 98%** among video creative
- Production support:** delivered producers a destination brief covering eight restaurants, three relief nonprofits and infrastructure status, seeding the storylines that reached the screen
- Amplified it:** Release to 1,104 media contacts at a 53% open rate, then pitched the culinary story throughout. We were able to welcome a Food & Wine writer in June.

Why it matters

- Extends one national TV moment across owned, social, earned and paid
- Spreads attention across the whole food community, reinforcing the Foodtopia story
- Keeps Asheville in the national culinary conversation past the episode air date

James Beard Foundation Awards:

- Content partnership with nominated chefs for exclusive BTS access to the awards dinner, extending the Foodtopia spotlight even further*



Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

SPRING HIKES & BLUE GHOST FIREFLIES

Building excitement and assets for outdoor season

Goal

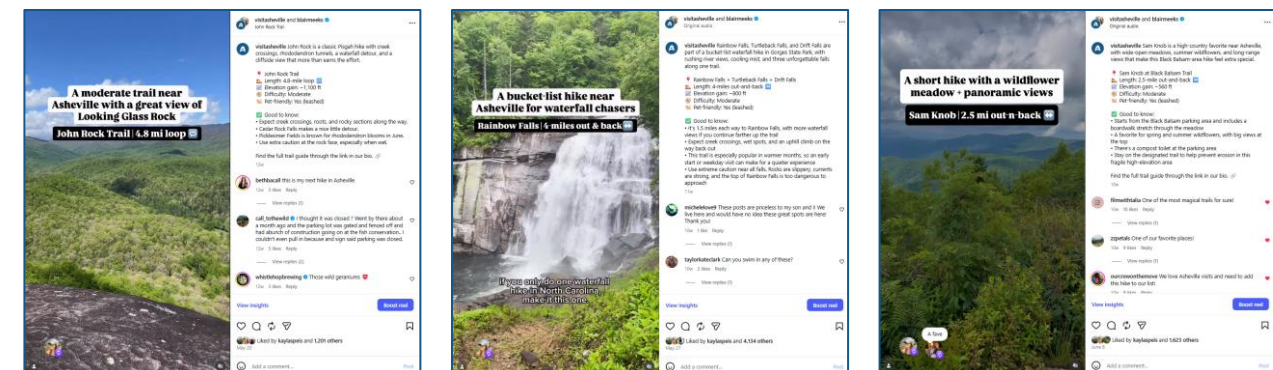
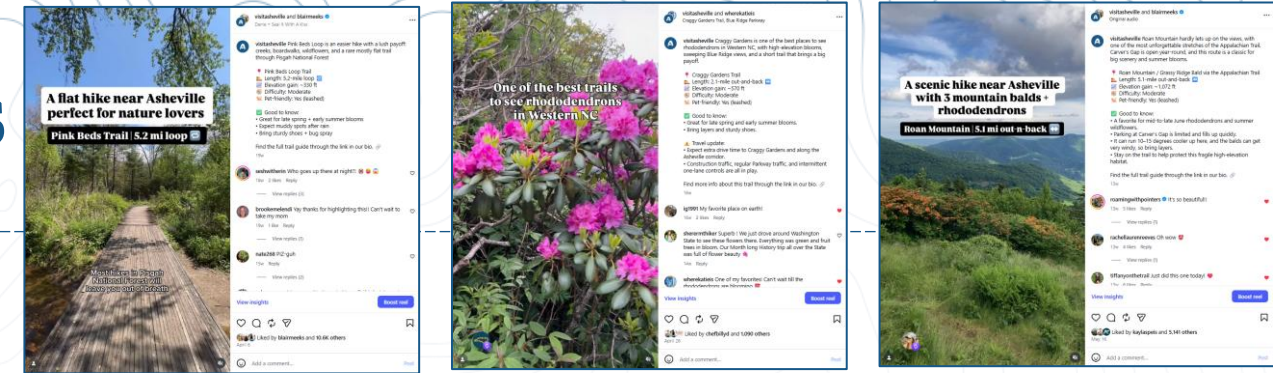
Build excitement for Asheville's spring outdoor season and strengthen our seasonal asset bank

What we did

- **Spring Hike Social Series:** sent local content creators to spring hikes to capture the start of outdoor season as a series of reels (1.6M views across platforms; 72,270 engagements)
- **Blue Ghost Fireflies:** hired local photographer and videographer Tim Reaves to capture original content of the blue ghost firefly display, filling a long-standing gap in our visual assets

Why it matters

- Uses trusted local voices and talent to drive seasonal, in-the-moment travel intent
- Positions Asheville as a spring and early-summer outdoor destination, not just a fall one
- Builds an owned library of Blue Ghost assets so we can pitch a signature experience with visuals to support



OUTDOORS LEADS ON SOCIAL

Competitive benchmarking

Using our analytics platform, we track performance against 20 curated competitors per platform, including other DMOs and high-performing content channels.

Q4 engagement highlights

- Facebook:** Total engagements: 53,436 vs. competitor average 11,280 (+373%)
Average per post: 763 vs. competitor average 135 (+465%)
- Instagram:** Total engagements: 70,410 vs. competitor average 40,160 (+75%)
Average per post: 1,173 vs. competitor average 649 (+81%)

Top posts

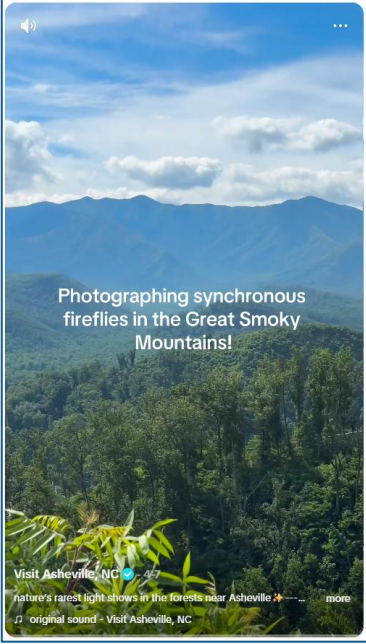
- Each platform saw different highest performers, with Sliding Rock leading on Facebook, spring hike series content resonating on Instagram, and synchronous fireflies taking TikTok



FACEBOOK
Sliding Rock
11,657 Engagements



INSTAGRAM
Pink Beds Trail Spring Hike
13,171 Engagements



TIKTOK
Synchronous Fireflies
43,986 engagements

Facebook Public Engagements		Total	Public Engagements per Post
Your Average		53,436.00	763.37
Competitor Average		11,280.65	135.18

Reactions Comments Shares

Instagram Public Engagements		Total	Public Engagements per Post
Your Average		70,410.00	1,173.50
Competitor Average		40,160.50	649.32

Likes Comments

Engagements = Likes, Comments, Saves, Shares

BILTMORE CHAMPIONSHIP ASHEVILLE PARTNER TOOLKIT

Helping local businesses plug into Asheville's PGA TOUR moment

Goal

Give local partners everything they need to participate in and benefit from the Biltmore Championship this September

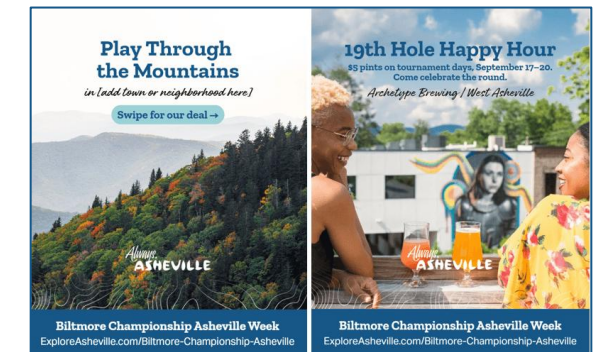
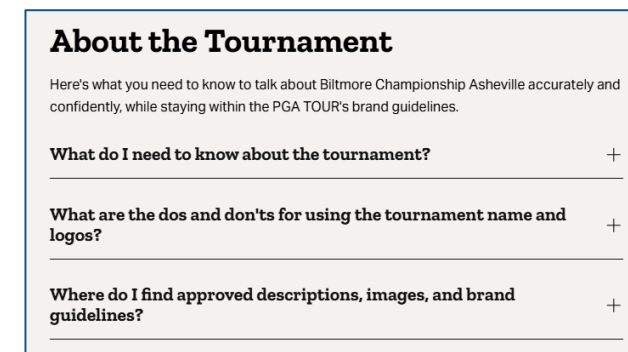
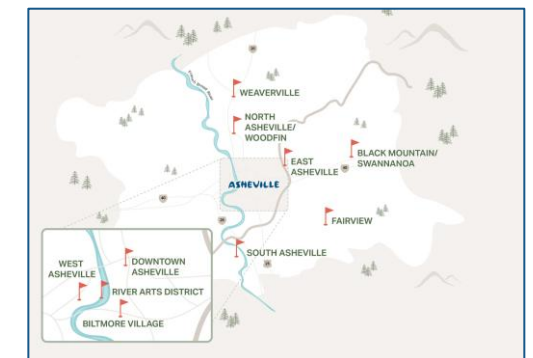
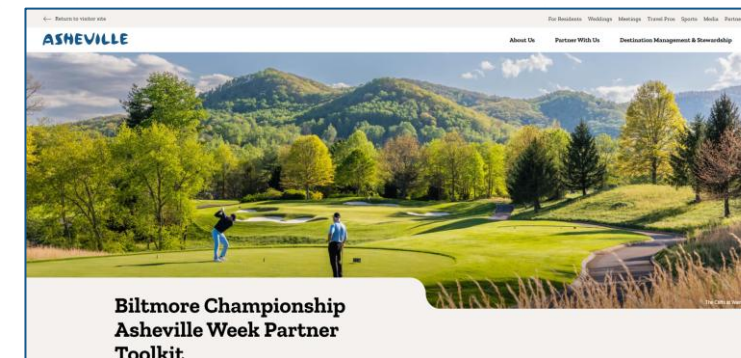
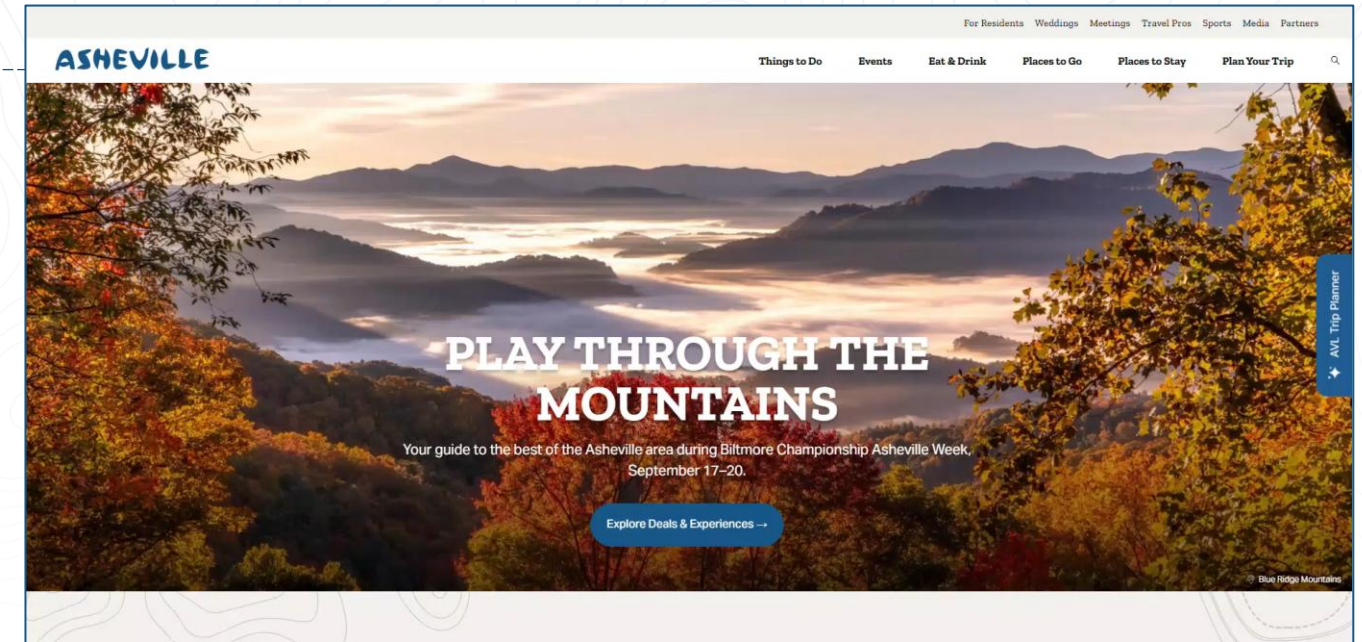
What we did

- Built a partner toolkit covering tournament info, brand guidelines, ticketing, lodging, and group dining
- Created "Play Through the Mountains," an online hub connecting visitors to partner packages, deals, and curated neighborhood itineraries beyond the course; 140 partner deals submitted and featured so far
- Provided customizable promotional creative, approved language, and sample social/email content so partners can market accurately and on-brand

Why it matters

- Extends the tournament's economic impact across the whole community, not just the course
- Keeps partner messaging consistent and within PGA TOUR brand guidelines

ON THE HORIZON | Paid Amplification: Added layer of exposure and golf fan targeting rolling out ESPN, SiriusXM and Golf.com



LOCAL COMMS: HOMETRUST PARK

Telling the story of how tourism dollars renovated a community asset

Goal

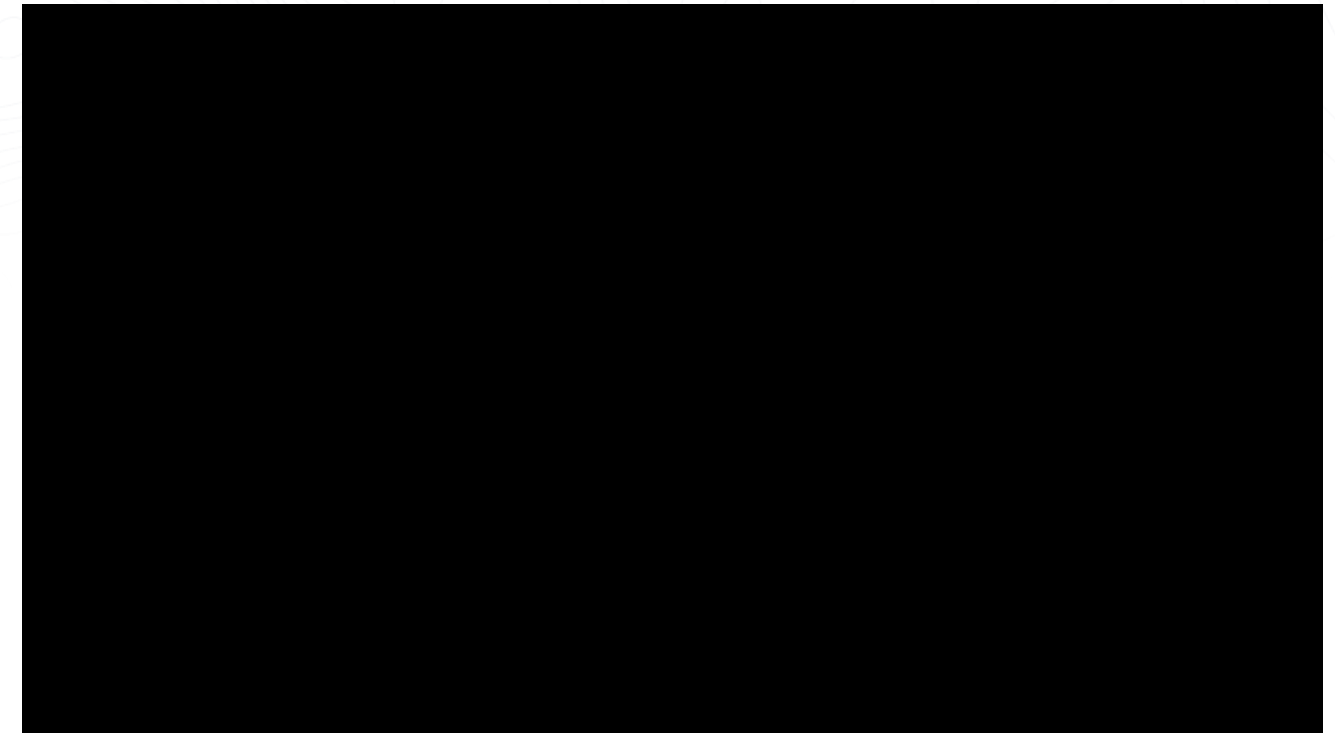
Show local residents how tourism investment through the TPDF delivers lasting community benefit, using HomeTrust Park's renovation as the example

What we did

- Partnered with Bclip Productions on a 90-second video on the HomeTrust Park renovation, its scope, and its community impact
- Ran the video on WLOS as part of our local communications and information initiative

Why it matters

- Highlights the BCTDA's \$23 million, 15-year commitment as a driving force behind the project
- Shows the payoff beyond baseball: a year-round, 12-month events facility that draws events and direct spending to local businesses
- Frames tourism investment as quality-of-life investment for residents, not just visitors, and keeps the Asheville Tourists in town





BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Q4 INITIATIVES

Ed Silver
Vice President of Business Development

EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE
POWERED BY
Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Strengthening Brand Visibility, Generating Leads, and Advancing Storytelling Alignment

Attended Key Events:

- Smart Meetings Innovation April 19 – 21 Boise, ID
- Sports ETA Symposium April 20-23 Las Vegas, NV
- Helmsbriscoe Annual Business Conference April 27 – 29 Los Angeles, CA
- Meetings Today Live! National May 3 – 6 Milwaukee, WI
- Prevue Event Intelligence Summit May 12 – 14 Atlantic City, NJ
- Conference Direct Annual Partner Meeting May 17 – 20 Houston, TX
- US Travel's IPW May 17 – 21 Fort Lauderdale, FL
- Northstar Incentive Live May 31 – June 3 Boca Raton, FL
- MPI World Education Congress June 1 – 4 San Antonio, TX



STRATEGIC GROUPS THAT VISITED DURING Q4

Attracting groups and conferences as the front porch of economic development



**Living Proof
Ministries
Living Proof
Live**

April 22 - 25, 2026
\$893,680
150 roomnights
Religious



**North Carolina
Association of
Metropolitan Planning
Organizations Annual
Conference**

May 1 - 8, 2026
\$697,143
175 roomnights
Public Administration



**LeadingAge NC
Annual Conference**

May 4 - 8, 2026
\$695,186
670 roomnights
Healthcare/Wellness



**North Carolina Bar
Association
Environment, Energy,
Natural Resources Tri –
State CLE**

May 28 - 30, 2026
\$584,894
125 roomnights
Government/Public
Administration



**American
Homebrewer's
Association
Homebrew Con Final
Round**

June 15 - 22, 2026
\$994,580
1,185 roomnights
Agriculture/Commodities/
Food & Beverage

SPONSORSHIPS IN Q4

Investments made to bring groups to Asheville



Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail

April 9 - 12, 2026
Silver Sponsorship at
\$2,500
Economic Impact
\$326,386



Tourism Cares Meaningful Travel Summit

April 14 - 16, 2026
Sponsorship at \$15,000
Economic Impact \$157,009

MAY 2026 SPREAD IN MEETINGS TODAY MAGAZINE

On The Scene

Mentions of the Spa at Omni Grove Park Inn, The Biltmore House Library, Ed Silver, VP of Business Development, AVL Airport Expansion, hotels and their meeting spaces, and 48-Hour FAM attendee perspectives



at the Inn on a morning and transporting the group, potentially, over to Deerpark or Lioncrest, and passing by horses and deer or wild turkeys—just seeing the wildlife. Even a bear, if you're lucky enough."

It's all about authenticity and respecting the traditions that helped build Asheville.

"Gracious hospitality is the cornerstone of how this company was built from back in the George Vanderbilt and Edith Vanderbilt days, and it's continued to be relevant in how we approach everything," Hill said, adding that this graciousness was extended in the Covid era when the property let groups move without penalty. "We've been here 130 years, right? And to sustain that, we do what's right for people, and if you do that, they'll come back."

Guests also want to come back because of the many activity options available in its relatively sequestered environment, such as carriage rides, horseback riding, sporting clays, archery and private behind-the-scenes tours of the stunning Biltmore House, gloriously pre-



ArtPlay

the Biltmore Estate dining room, where the service standards, food quality and elegant, formal-but-not-stuffy atmosphere were the perfect appetizer to the 48 hours ahead.

A Diverse Selection of Meeting Hotels
An interesting aspect of Asheville is its meetings hotel lineup, ranging from ultraluxe and historical, such as the Inn on Biltmore Estate and The Omni Grove Park Inn & Spa, founded by pharmaceutical magnate Edwin Wiley Grove and opened in 1927, to the traditional meetings-focused Renaissance Asheville Downtown Hotel; the eclectic, in the Grand Bohemian Lodge Asheville; two Hilton properties; the luxury lifestyle yet meetings-friendly Kimpton Hotel Arras; and unique adaptive reuse properties such as the Flat Iron Hotel, The Radical, The Restoration Asheville and



Tyler Davidson (left) and Tim Hill, Biltmore Estate

Restaurant and Arts Scene

Those not familiar with Asheville's dining scene may have been shocked when Michelin bestowed the city with 15 recognitions in its November *The Michelin Guide American South*—more than any city in the state, including Charlotte and Raleigh.

Dining options range from old school and elegant at the Inn at Biltmore Estate to trendy Luminosa—"where modern Appalachian meets Italian Inspiration"—the contemporary American Posana, which boasts an entirely gluten-free menu, and the surprising Michelin-recognized Sopranos Rooftop Cucina on top of the Embassy Suites Asheville Downtown.

Planners should also consider adding arts activities to the agenda, as the destination is a hub for makers and arts and crafts of all stripes, especially in the River Arts District, where our group tried its hand at watercolors at ArtPlay and came away with framed souvenirs of our works. ■

connection

► Explore Asheville
exploreasheville.com



Private dining room, Grand Bohemian Lodge Asheville



Ashlee Nelson
Ashlee Nelson Curated Events; Chicago



Brian Glynn
All the Difference Travel Leland, MI



Jennifer Watson
HelmsBriscoe San Diego



Tya Bolton
EBS Universal Charlotte, NC



Michelle Taunton
HelmsBriscoe Lakeland, FL

Following are responses from five meeting planner attendees who participated in Asheville's 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience fam.

What were your general impressions?

"It feels like you get the best of everything at once. You've got the mountains wrapping around you, but then you're walking to coffee, then into a boutique, then onto a rooftop patio, then somehow into one of the BEST meals you've had in months...all within a few blocks." – Ashlee Nelson

"More upmarket than I would have thought. I enjoyed my time there." – Brian Glynn

"An artistic enclave with natural beauty, funky charm." – Jennifer Watson

"There is a diverse range of venues and offsite offerings for tourists. Customer service was consistent everywhere we went. It's an easy drive for those local to N.C. and the airport will be easier to navigate when construction is complete. There is a lot of history and transformed buildings. The gastronomy scene is divine with lots of great eats and locally harvested ingredients. It's easy to get around and I appreciate the intentionality of not having a bunch of chains so attendees can truly have unique experiences." – Tya Bolton

"I loved it! Gorgeous scenery; lots to do in the area; compact, easy-to-walk downtown area; easy to get to." – Michelle Taunton

What really stood out about Asheville?

"The people and hospitality—by far. I work with venues all over the country, and a lot of them feel transactional...even when they're nice. This was the complete opposite. Explore Asheville and every venue we stepped into care about the planner, the group and how the whole experience comes together. As an event planner, that level of trust and peace of mind is everything!" – Ashlee Nelson

"I was impressed with the quality of the hotels we visited. I was concerned that there would not be incentive-quality options, but I now know that is not the case." – Brian Glynn

"The variety of hotel product, the artistic community." – Jennifer Watson

"As a planner who has produced events there in

past years, what the clients enjoyed most, and still stands true today are: the connection to outdoors/nature; experiencing local culture; a diverse range of venue brands and price points; and the meaningful amenities Explore Asheville provides, such as connecting us to other resources, providing grants, VIP welcome amenities, pens, postcards, etc." – Tya Bolton

"A nice variety of properties, from high-end resorts like the Inn at Biltmore Estate and the Omni Grove Park Inn to mid-range properties like the Embassy Suites with the brand's new aesthetic. And the food! So much phenomenal food everywhere we ate. Who would expect an Embassy Suites to have a Michelin-recommended restaurant? And who knew the

"Touring the Biltmore House (mansion)." – Brian Glynn

"Seeing the hotel sales managers and CVB reps in person that I've worked with for years." – Jennifer Watson

"I've been wanting to go The Spa at Omni for years, and couldn't get in there even when I had a group in-house. To be able to finally see what the rave is all about and experience that was definitely something I was looking forward to, and it did not disappoint. I also genuinely enjoyed seeing properties I've not previously been exposed to." – Tya Bolton

"The massage at the Omni Grove Park Inn—a spa treatment there has always been on my bucket list—and the tour of the Biltmore Estate." – Michelle Taunton

Which offsite venues do you think would be a good fit?

"Posana was so good. It would be such an easy yes for one of my founder dinners. Intimate, elevated and everything is gluten-free! I also loved The Draftsman arcade below the Restoration Hotel. It's such a fun, unexpected option for a group of executives! Bowling, old-school arcade games and the coolest vibes? What more could you want?! And then the Omni Grove Park Inn Spa for a luxury team experience... I mean, come on!" – Ashlee Nelson

"Biltmore House. It's a must-see, and to have the chance to privatize a small part of it for a group event would be special." – Brian Glynn

"Fitz and the Wolfe is a really cool spot with unique setups and vibes in each room. It would give us an opportunity to create different experiences in each room: live band upstairs, chill vibe in one room downstairs and Instagrammable moments in the speakeasy room. Guests would also enjoy Biltmore House for the lavish history and aesthetics. For smaller groups, The Restoration's game room gives guests the opportunity to play while enjoying cocktails and light bites." – Tya Bolton

"I loved the venue at the Biltmore Estate that was in the converted barn. That space just felt so special. And I like the speakeasy at Fitz and the Wolfe for a really unique space. I loved the entrance through the coat closet." – Michelle Taunton



48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience fam members

THE HOTELS



Inn on Biltmore Estate
Rooms: 210
Meeting Space: 3,530
Largest Meeting Space: 1,750



The Omni Grove Park Inn & Spa
Guest Rooms: 513
Indoor Meeting Space: 86,852
Largest Meeting Space: 18,000



Renaissance Asheville Downtown Hotel
Guest Rooms: 278
Indoor Meeting Space: 22,000
Largest Meeting Space: 8,000



Kimpton Hotel Arras
Rooms: 128
Meeting Space: 3,000
Largest Meeting Space: 1,875



Flat Iron Hotel
Guest Rooms: 77
Indoor Meeting Space: 7,000
Largest Meeting Space: 1,410



Hilton Asheville Biltmore Park
Guest Rooms: 165
Indoor Meeting Space: 7,600
Largest Meeting Space: 2,476

Not Pictured:

Cambria Downtown Asheville
Guest Rooms: 136
Indoor Meeting Space: 9,769
Largest Meeting Space: 3,300

Grand Bohemian Lodge Asheville
Guest Rooms: 124
Indoor Meeting Space: 5,060
Largest Meeting Space: 2,200

DoubleTree by Hilton Downtown Asheville
Guest Rooms: 140
Indoor Meeting Space: 3,914
Largest Meeting Space: 2,002

Haywood Park Hotel
Guest Rooms: 48
Indoor Meeting Space: 18,363
Largest Meeting Space: 11,291

Embassy Suites Asheville Downtown
Guest Rooms: 188
Indoor Meeting Space: 6,438
Largest Meeting Space: 4,704

The Radical Asheville
Guest Rooms: 70
Indoor Meeting Space: 5,000
Largest Meeting Space: 1,200

The Foundry Hotel Asheville
Guest Rooms: 87
Indoor Meeting Space: 5,825
Largest Meeting Space: 1,800

The Restoration Asheville
Guest Rooms: 60
Indoor Meeting Space: 11,289
Largest Meeting Space: 4,039

Q4 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community

145

GROUPS/EVENTS
OCCURRED
IN OUR COMMUNITY



\$21M direct spending
29,796 roomnights
15% increase in events
over Q4 FY25

107

GROUPS/EVENTS
BOOKED
FOR FUTURE VISITS



\$11.5M in direct spending
17,197 roomnights
15% increase in roomnights booked
over Q4 FY25

318

LEADS GENERATED
FOR POTENTIAL
GROUPS/EVENTS;
93,071 ROOMNIGHTS
REQUESTED



43% increase in leads and 19%
increase in roomnights
over Q4 FY25



PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Q4 INITIATIVES

Tiffany Thacker
Partnership & Destination Management

**EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE**

POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

EARTH DAY CLEANUP RECAP

Travel & Hospitality Earth Day Cleanup | April 22, 2026

Hosted by Explore Asheville in partnership with MountainTrue, RiverLink, and Asheville GreenWorks.

Nearly **200 participants** collected **more than 2,500 pounds of trash and debris**.

4 locations:

- Swannanoa River – 1,100 lbs
- Biltmore Village - 820 lbs
- West Asheville – 400 lbs
- River Arts District – 240 lbs



NATIONAL TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY WEEK

Heroes of Hospitality Luncheon and Travel & Hospitality Night at HomeTrust Park

Heroes of Hospitality Awards Luncheon celebrated 41 frontline travel & hospitality members who were nominated for an award

2026 Heroes of Hospitality:

- ✦ **Al Larson**, Grand Bohemian Lodge Asheville, Autograph Collection
- ✦ **Benita Wynn**, Harrah's Cherokee Center - Asheville
- ✦ **David King**, Asheville Regional Airport
- ✦ **Eva Rodriguez-Cué**, Haywood Famous
- ✦ **Marie-Louise Ramsey**, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce-Asheville Visitor Center
- ✦ **Willy Meadows**, Vinnie's Neighborhood Italian

Travel & Hospitality Night at HomeTrust Park brought together over 400 industry partners at the newly renovated HomeTrust Park



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Concierge Working Group, Scholarships Awarded

Concierge Working Group: Outdoor Local Guides

- May's quarterly meeting focused on helping lodging partners connect guests with some of the most memorable ways to experience Asheville: through a local guide/outfitter.
- The group heard from **Made By Mountains** to learn about the *Go With A Guide* campaign and how it enhances the visitor experience as well as **Waypoint Adventures** to help guests discover accessible outdoor recreation options for all abilities.
- Attendees took part in the Go With a Guide campaign firsthand by joining Asheville Jeep Tours, Flying Bikes, and Foraging Home for a guided adventure!

\$10,000 in scholarships awarded through the Explore Asheville Hospitality Scholarship Program to:

- Alaina Cender, Asheville Christian Academy (ACA)
- Chloe Douthit, Western Carolina University
- Jacob Francis, Western Carolina University
- Michaela Kanelos, Western Carolina University

Explore Asheville awards \$2,500 each year to recipients that maintain a 2.5 GPA.



BCHT PHASE II MURAL RIBBON CUTTING

Second of Three Black Cultural Heritage Trail Murals unveiled in the RAD

The unveiling of the second of three murals along the [Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail](#) was a powerful celebration of community.

Local artist Tommy Lee McGee's new mural in the River Arts District, "**Black Boy Joy**," centers a young boy in a garden of his own making, with watering can in hand, flowers rising around him, a tropical bird nearby, the sun forming a crown above his head.

The mural offers a powerful and joyful representation of Black childhood and identity. As Tommy describes it, the piece is a "permission slip" for young Black boys to experience joy and be unapologetic about it.

Find the mural at **372 Depot Street** in the River Arts District.



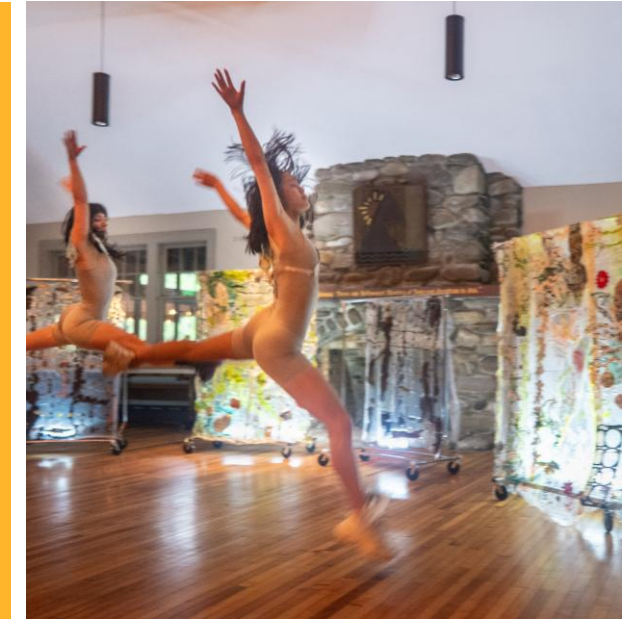
EVENT SUPPORT

\$66,125 Community Investment Across the County

Explore Asheville/BCTDA supported the following events in FY26 Q4

- {Re}HAPPENING 14
- 2026 State of the Arts Brunch
- Art in Bloom
- Asheville Buskerfest
- Asheville Honey Fest 2026
- Asheville Symphony ALT ASO Series
- Bearing Witness: The Arts and The Call to Justice – Wilma Dykeman Birthday Celebration
- Downtown After 5
- GRINDfest
- LEAF May 2026 "Rooted" Retreat
- Maker Faire Asheville
- Our Turn to Play
- Sketch Crawl and Sketch Club in the RAD
- Spring Fling! In the Peace Gardens
- The City of Asheville Celebrates Juneteenth
- Weaverville's Music on Main
- WNC Whiskey Festival

\$66K
Awarded



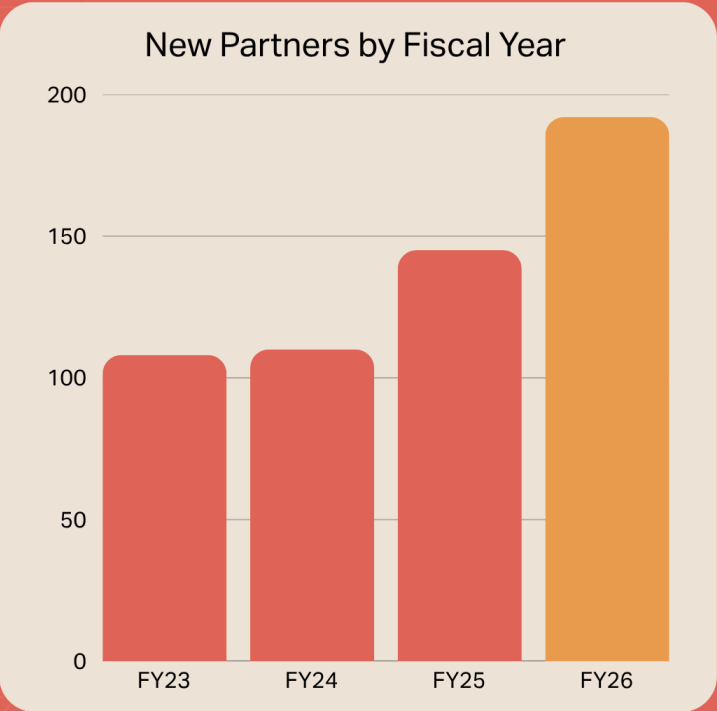
17
Events

NEW PARTNERS

FY26: A record year for new partner recruitment

192

New partner businesses onboarded in FY26, a record year for Explore Asheville, and up 32% over FY25's previous record of 145.



Top Partner Categories FY26

- Food & Drink: 57
- Attractions: 51
- Retail: 31
- Wedding Services: 28

Balancing Growth Across the County

- 13 regions represented in FY26
- RAD increased 14→23
- Weaverville grew 5x, 2→11
- Black Mtn. more than doubled, 6→13



10 of 55 new partners onboarded in Q4



EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Q4 INITIATIVES

Sarah Myers
Director of People, Culture & Strategy

EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE
POWERED BY Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

TEAM UPDATES

A Milestone and New Team Members



Carli Adams

Group Marketing Manager



David Setzer

Accounting Manager



Alayna Fleagle

Public Relations Coordinator

Q4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Explore Asheville Team Members Investing in the Community

Team Members about Town

- Rachel Dudasik was inducted into the Rotary, pictured with colleague and co-rotarian Kristen Childers and President Nominee Anthony Lynch
- Connie Holliday graduated from the 40th cohort of Leadership Asheville
- McKenzie Provost was selected to participate in Asheville Young Professionals' Get on Board Program, and has been placed on the Board of the Asheville Symphony Orchestra



COMPOSTING EFFORTS

FY26 Impact Report from CompostNow



WASTE DIVERTED

708 lbs.



COMPOST CREATED

497 lbs.



METHANE AVOIDED

53 lbs.

CO₂e AVOIDED

1,841 lbs.

CO₂e MILES NOT DRIVEN

2,067 miles

TOMATO POTENTIAL OF COMPOST

3,731 tomatoes

COMPOST SHARED

161 lbs. with 11 growers

