



BLOWING ROCK

Tourism Development Authority

Year-End Report 2018

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The mission of the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is to develop and promote travel and tourism to and within the town of Blowing Rock by executing a strategic marketing plan with the goal of increasing the number of overnight guests and extending the traditional tourist season.

2018 In Review

Looking back on 2018, Blowing Rock can count itself very fortunate as a travel destination. Overall tourism business and visitor spending was strong. Occupancy tax revenue grew 9.7% in 2018 and was recorded as the highest ever collected. Total Occupancy Tax Collections were \$1,051,313, representing \$17.5 million in lodging sales and \$52.5 million in visitor spending. Despite challenges throughout the year, including two hurricanes heading into critical 4th quarter, Blue Ridge Parkway and US Highway 221 closures, less-than-optimum ski conditions in the first quarter, and inclement weather for nearly 25% of the entire year, visitors still made Blowing Rock a priority choice. Weather was noted as a key disruptor in business surveys conducted during the year. Results of the latest Blowing Rock tourism business survey is included later in this report.

In North Carolina, occupancy grew by 2.4% during 2018 according to Smith Travel Research. In the Northwest region of North Carolina, occupancy grew 2.8% and average daily rate (ADR) grew 2.4%. Room revenues were +4.4% in the region while statewide, revenues grew 7% due to the demand on Southeast properties after hurricanes in 3rd and 4th quarter.

With the continued growth of Short-Term Rentals (STR) through sites like Airbnb and VRBO, the TDA worked with Planning and Zoning in 2018 at the request of Town Council to better understand the landscape of this emerging segment. The TDA contracted STR Helper/Bear Cloud Software to provide an overview and tools to better facilitate communication with property owners. STRs represent 24% of the lodging inventory in Blowing Rock and just over 20% of occupancy tax revenue. We will continue to work with the Town and property owners/managers to position Blowing Rock as a premier vacation destination.

Marketing efforts were constant throughout 2018 and the Blowing Rock TDA placed more than \$200k in paid advertising. The TDA continues to focus on keeping up with current media trends and more attention was paid to mobile placement and acquisition. With the help of The Meridian Agency, Blowing Rock leveraged more digital media than ever before with outlets such as Google's ad network, Facebook, and Expedia. New opportunities like Geo-Fencing and retargeting campaigns are relatively new products that show great promise in driving visits to the website. Public and media relations efforts also proved successful with more than \$300k in "earned media" placement.

Looking ahead, the US Travel Association predicts steady but slower growth in 2019. The government shut down in the first quarter of 2019 along with the National Park Service deferred maintenance backlog will present challenges as we move into the traditional travel months of 2019. Progress and growth continues, however, and several lodging properties will see renovations this year. There is interest by investors in at least two existing hotels and new lodging product is being proposed. Blowing Rock is well positioned for a successful 2019 with exciting new events and new lodging inventory coming online within the next year.

Tracy Brown
Director, Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority

2018 in Review

Noteworthy in 2018

Named Best Small Town in NC
by Readers of Southern Living
Rated one of America's 25 Best
Small Towns by Expedia
Voted Best Main Street- Local Shopping
by Readers of Blue Ridge Country
New video production and content
New Visitor Guide design
+9.7% in occupancy tax collections over 2017
Continued \$25K support for Middle Fork Greenway
Continued \$25K support for Moses Cone Estate
Completed Visitor Profile Study with
Magellan Strategy Group
Public reaction to tree removal in Memorial Park
Implemented STR Helper-Short Term
Rental monitoring
New User Generated Content (UGC)
added to website
Two hurricanes impacting travel in 4th qtr
and 83 days of impactful weather
(22.7% of the year)
America in Bloom 5-Star Rating
Late and somewhat bland leaf season
Second season for Tweetsie Christmas
Earned Media in Southern Living,
Our State Magazine, Forbes Magazine,
UNC TV, Trip Advisor, Capital At Play,
Atlanta Journal Constitution,
Group Travel Leader,
WBTV, & more.



2018 Board Members:

Dean Bullis, Chair

(Tourism Representative)

Rob Dyer, Vice Chair

(Lodging Representative)

Lance Campbell

(Tourism Non-profit Representative)

Jim Steele

(Council Representative)

Lorry Mulhern

(Lodging Representative)

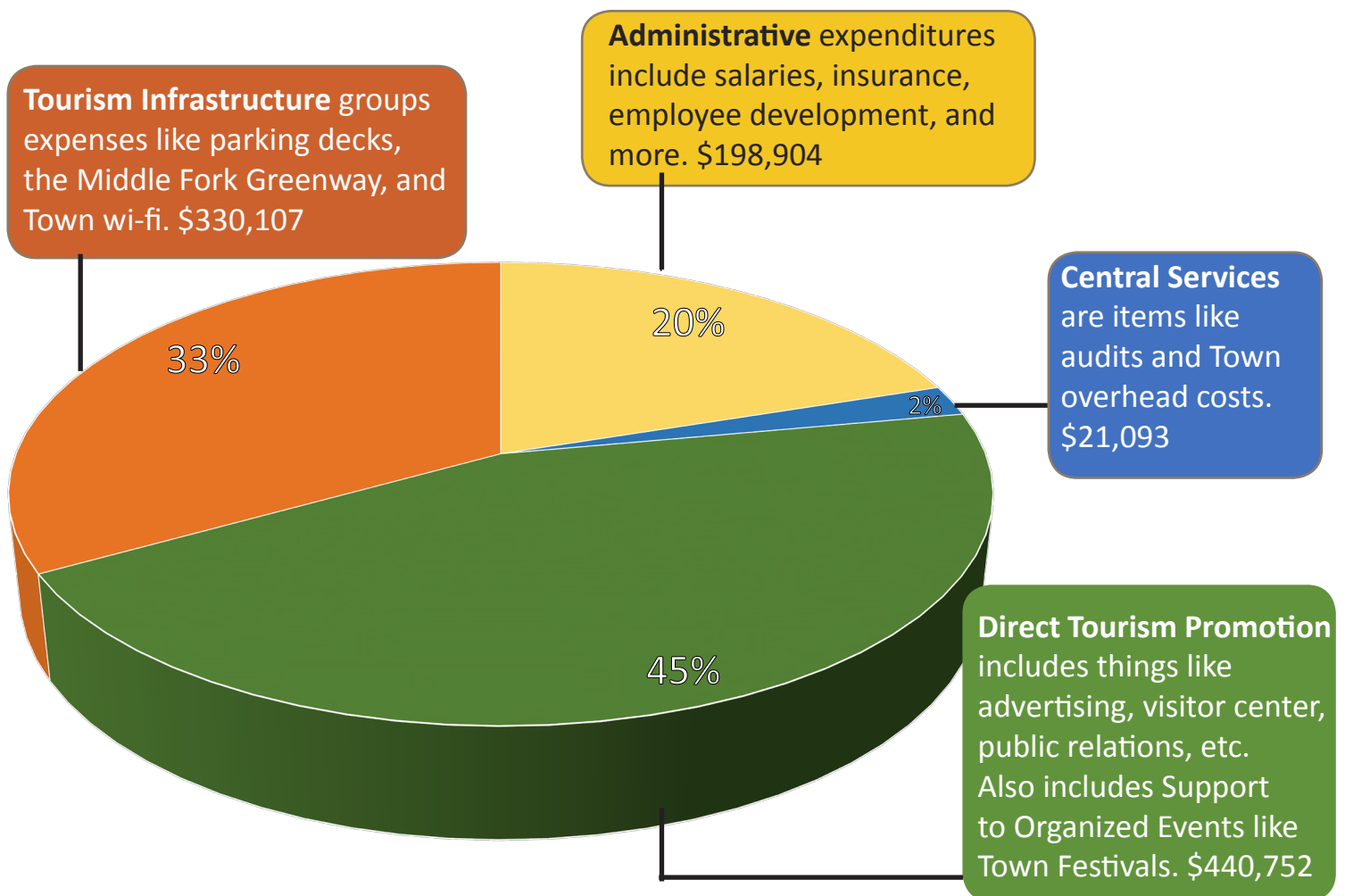
TDA staff provides a report to its board on a bi-weekly basis to keep members informed of activities.

Budget & Expenditures

According to TDA Bylaws, the Authority shall use two-thirds of the funds remitted to it by the Town Council to promote travel and tourism in Blowing Rock and shall use the remaining one-third of the funds remitted for tourism-related expenditures.

Expenditures Overview

The expenditure of revenues is budgeted with the TDA mission in mind. Expenses are assigned to four main categories.



Revenues & Impact

Gross occupancy taxes in 2018:

\$1,051,313.70 (+9.7%)

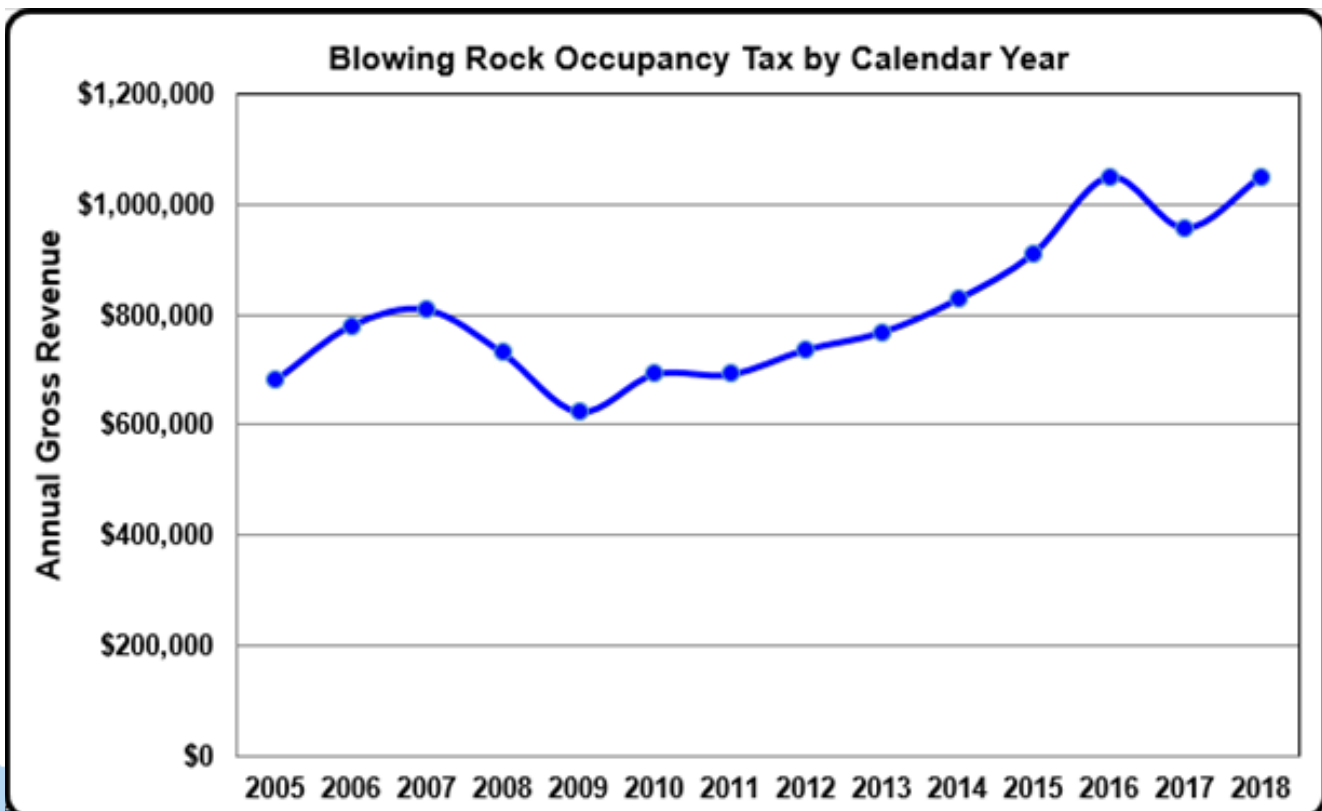
Direct sales at lodging businesses:

\$17,521,895

Visitor Spending in excess of:

\$52,565,685

The TDA is funded by a 6% occupancy tax that is paid by visitors that stay in overnight lodging in Blowing Rock.



Marketing & Advertising



9 specific ad campaigns: WinterFest, Art in the Park, General, Holiday, Small Meetings, Savor Blowing Rock, BRAHM Art and Antiques, Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show, Blowing Rock Music Festival

24 media outlets used for placement including Google, I-Heart Radio Network, Spectrum Cable, Charlotte Transit, Expedia, & VisitNC

14 billboard campaigns in Charlotte, Triangle, Triad and local markets

Digital campaigns in 2018 saw great results by combining content targeting, geo fencing and retargeting strategies.

Target audiences included Women aged 25+, Families aged 25-55, Couples aged 35+, Outdoor Enthusiasts, & Meeting Planners



Major advertising campaigns are one of the ways the TDA provides event support for events in town. New radio and television spots were produced for Savor Blowing Rock, WinterFest, & Art in the Park.



Marketing & Advertising

Media was placed across several platforms including radio, digital, television, print and billboards.



Media was placed in major geographic areas, with Charlotte, Triad, and Triangle being the top three.

Advertising locations are determined through research on travel patterns and demographics.

New video and b-roll was produced along with three new :30 television spots.



Email Marketing in 2018

Blowing Rock has over 8,300 active contacts in our email database. Contacts sign up on their own on www.BlowingRock.com. Seven email blasts were sent to subscribers in 2018, ranging across seasons, events, & topics. Average open rate for our travel marketing emails was 21%. Typical open rates for travel & tourism mailers are around 16%, according Constant Contact.

E-blasts were also sent across Charlotte, Raleigh, and the Triad with 50k-80k recipients per blast.

Leveraged media and trade are a couple ways that the TDA stretches the media budget for added value.

carolina calendar | NOVEMBER



OUR STATE | November 2018

1 BOONE Film Festival
NOV 1, 3 Regional filmmakers will compete for awards in the categories

3 Carolina Pottery Festival
SHELBY
NOV 3 This 19th annual festival will feature more than 100 potters selling their wares at the LeGrand Center. (704) 484-2787, facebook.com/carolinapotteryfestival.

3 Statesville Pumpkin Festival
STATESVILLE
NOV 3 Visit downtown Statesville for a variety of pumpkin-related activities, including a pie-eating contest and smashing, painting, and bowling with pumpkins. This 16th annual festival will offer food, music, arts and crafts

visits from Santa, and food vendors at this annual event to benefit the Caldwell County Rotary Club scholarship fund. (828) 381-7442, caldwellrotaryclub.org.
23 Christmas in the Park
BLOWING ROCK
NOV 23-24 Celebrate the holiday season with Santa, carols, hot chocolate, games and activities, and the lighting of Memorial Park. On Saturday, the annual Christmas parade will march down Main Street at 2 p.m. (828) 295-5222, blowingrock.com.

Blowing Rock is the ultimate holiday destination in North Carolina. Shop our storybook Christmas village, ski at App Ski Mtn, dine at award-winning restaurants, and enjoy the all new Tweetsie Christmas. We are also thrilled to partner with Appalachian State University to offer this giveaway and the gift of football!!! For more info, visit BlowingRock.com

ONE (1) GRAND PRIZE WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

- Two (2) night stay at the Green Park Inn
- Two (2) tickets to Tweetsie Christmas
- Two (2) lift tickets to Appalachian Ski Mtn
- \$25 Gift Card to Woodlands BBQ
- Two (2) tickets to the Appalachian State Game on 11/24
- Two (2) Appalachian State pre-game side line passes

No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Subject to Rules.

NC

THINGS TO DO CITIES & REGIONS EVENTS PLAN YOUR VISIT FIRSTS THAT LAST

Travel Guides E-News Local History

SWEETSTAKES

THE ULTIMATE BLOWING ROCK FAMILY VACATION SWEETSTAKES

Sweepstakes ends: Saturday June 30, 2018

ENTER NOW

Website & Social Media

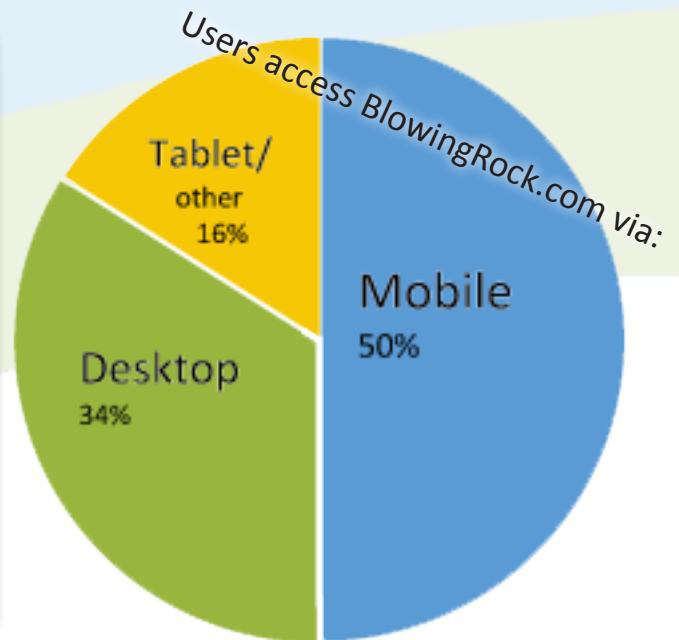
www.BlowingRock.com 2018 vs. 2017

13.59% increase in sessions

11.78% increase in New Users

18.79% increase in mobile acquisition

524,700 Sessions
384,127 Users
1,087,891 Pageviews
on BlowingRock.com in 2018



2018 Updates to BlowingRock.com



Website was brought up to new ADA compliance as suggested by the US Justice Department.

A new RFP was added to the meetings page that helps to streamline meeting space requests.

New layout brought bigger and more engaging images that kept relevant information in front of users.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Your Name (required)

Business or Group Name (required)

Your Email (required)

Your Phone Number (required)

Number of Attendees

Start Date

mm / dd / yyyy

End Date

mm / dd / yyyy

Hotel Rooms Per Night

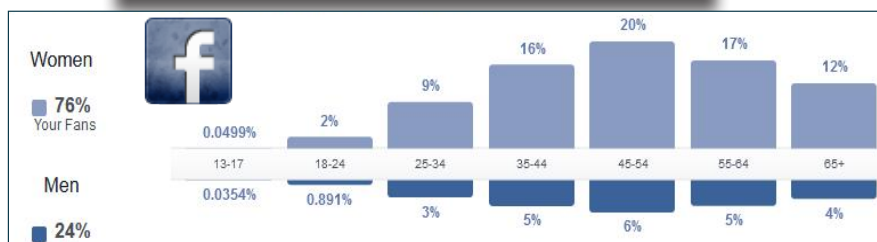
Details & Deadlines

[recaptcha]

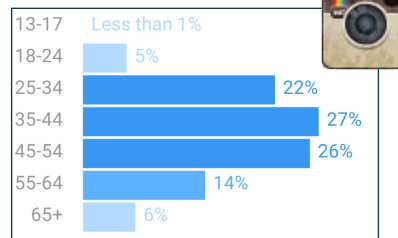
SEND

Website & Social Media

In 2018, Crowdriff was added to Blowingrock.com. This user-generated-content platform allows the TDA to curate images that reflect the true experience of visitors. To date, over 90,000 assets have been collected.



A note on 2018 Social Media Demographics



Social Media Mission: Engage our current visitors present on the platforms, and give them share-worthy material to attract new visitors.

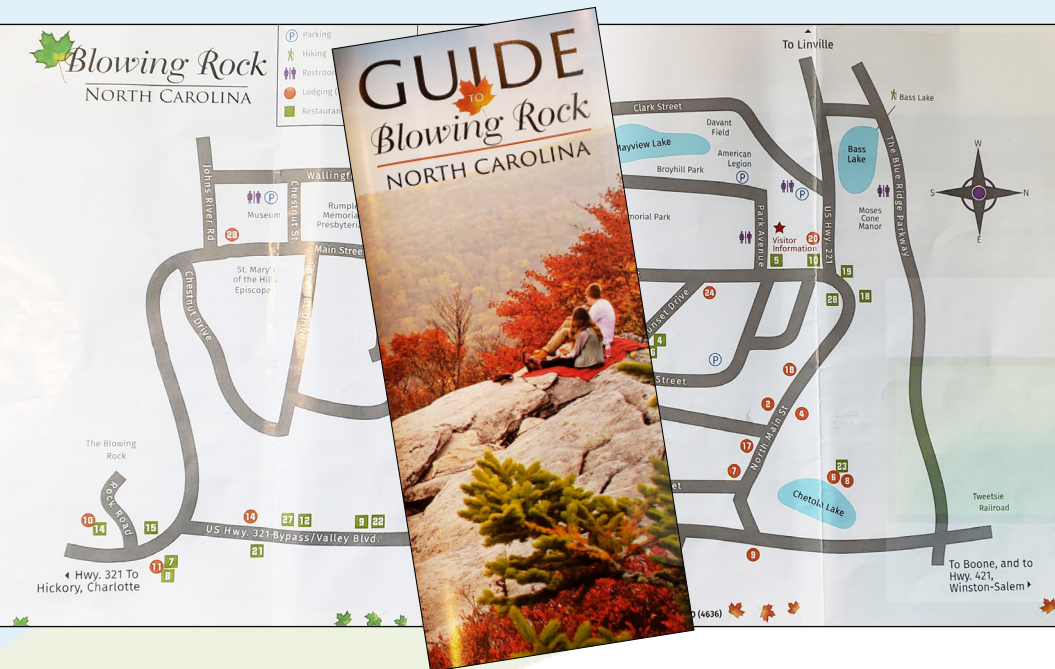


Facebook is our oldest social media platform. It continues to encourage high rates of engagement from people who love Blowing Rock.

Instagram is a major influencer, particularly in travel. We focused on development in this platform in 2018.

Blowing Rock's activity on social media platforms supports our traditional marketing campaigns. Across all platforms, our audience is mostly female, and skews closer to middle- and retirement-age. An age graph for Facebook followers is on the left, and shows ages 45-54 as our largest group. Instagram, represented on the right, skews only slightly younger. These two platforms are our most prolific, with a combined 73K followers in 2018.

Operations & Internal Communications



The Blowing Rock Guide is our main printed informational piece. It was completely revamped and updated in 2018 with new layout, information, & images.

80,000 were printed and distributed.

4,331 guides were directly mailed and downloaded in 2018. 50,000 guides were distributed throughout the region by American Brochure Services & Print Distribution.



Each year, the Blowing Rock TDA creates several additional pieces in-house for display and print, including the Blowing Rock Community Calendar, brochures for visitors, the Restaurant Guide, and graphics for websites and signs.

The Village Tattler, in its 13th year of distribution in 2018, gives **weekly updates** to local employers and employees. It includes local happenings, news, and trends that affect tourism-related businesses in Blowing Rock. The newsletter is sent with an email management program and has an open rate consistently around 40%, higher than the government organization average of 26%.



Surveys

Surveys were conducted at various times throughout the year to gauge business sentiment. A 2018 year-end survey garnered 61 responses from local businesses:

*44.3% said sales were up.

*18% said sales were flat.

*34.4% said sales were down.

Weather was cited repeatedly in open-ended comments:

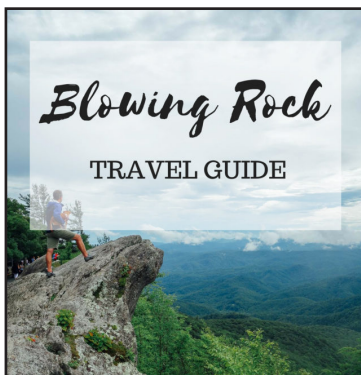
"I believe weather had a great impact on the amount of people visiting in 2018. It seemed that many weekends were hit hard with rain, wind and snow, not to mention the visitors east of us who couldn't come due to the hurricane." "Weather was directly responsible for every month we were down. First time we were down in 10 years."

Changing demographics were reported for most sectors as well, with "more families" being the most consistent.

Community & Media Relations

13 press releases produced
7 travel writers & digital influencers hosted
2 FAM tours: AAA travel counselors & NC Welcome Center Managers
76 confirmed media placements, representing an estimated “earned media” value of over **\$300,000**

In 2018, Blowing Rock was featured in **USA Today, Trip Advisor, Forbes, Our State Magazine, UNC TV, Southern Living, Fodor’s Travel, WBTV, WSOC, Insider Magazine, & Blue Ridge Country** among others.



Social Media “influencers” continue to grow in importance. In 2018, the

Blowing Rock TDA worked with the RhythmOne Influencer Program through VisitNC to host a prolific influencer. Sarah Rotavera of Making Thyme for Health was selected based on her ideal audience. She visited Blowing Rock in June and produced several posts and a travel guide. Sarah’s content about Blowing Rock reached about 750,000 people across several platforms, with over 123,000 engagements.

Media Alerts

Maintaining relationships with others in the media keeps Blowing Rock top of mind for potential updates and promotions!

Saturday: 39th Blowing Rock Trout Derby > Inbox X

6 Attachments



Thomas, Eric EThomas@wbtv.com via raycom.onmicrosoft.com to Amanda

Hi Amanda,

This is great, I've got something lined up for this heading into the weekend.

Eric

Eric Thomas

Chief Meteorologist



Local

Guides and Maps continue to be available at the kiosks, Chamber, Town Hall and participating businesses.



The digital kiosks allow for interactive displays and mapping to assist visitors. They are updated regularly.

Networking

The TDA Staff attended several conferences & meetings to stay current in the changing landscape of Destination Marketing.

- Visit NC 365 Tourism Conference in Winston-Salem, NC
- Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College
- Blue Ridge Parkway Association
- NC High Country Host
- Boone Chamber of Commerce
- Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce



Partnerships are key to being a successful destination in today's competitive environment. The Blowing Rock TDA continues to strengthen long lasting relationships while building new partnerships throughout the region. In 2018, participation on boards, hosting FAM tours, funding of special projects, collaboration on sweepstakes and giveaways, and promoting events all played a part in maintaining partnerships with these regional organizations:



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